Running Down A Dream

Today's 911 GT3s are a modern equivalent of the 1973 911 2.7 RS. But six years before there was the 2.7 RS, there was the 1967 911R. Here we look at a stunning R clone.

STORY AND **PHOTOS** BY **SEAN SMITH**

If you are master mechanic Gaspare Fasulo (a Sicilian with a fanatical love of Porsches) of Gaswerks Garage in New Jersey, nothing is impossible. He always wanted a 1967 911R but never had the opportunity to buy one. Relatively few of these machines exist, and the ones that do come up for sale trade for sky-high prices. But there was always the next best thing: He could build one for himself.

Original 911R Background

The Porsche 911 has had racing success from shortly after it was introduced. Herbert Linge took fifth place in the 1965 Monte Carlo Rally in a production 911. In 1966, a privately entered 160-hp 911S took a class win and 14th overall in the 24 Hours of Lemans. Vic Elford became a rally champion behind the wheel of a 911 in 1967. From there, Porsche decided to get even more serious about developing a competition 911.

Racing director Peter Falk and engine genius Hans Mezger got involved. The new head of R&D, Ferdinand Piëch, had a vision of a super 911 that would triumph in GT racing. Piëch enlisted racing mechanic Rolf Wütherich (perhaps best known for being the man riding shotgun in James Dean's 550 Spyder when that actor crashed fatally), and they took a 911S and put it on a strict diet.

Removing every bit of the 911's unnecessary weight, the car was disassembled down to its body shell. The hood, doors, and fenders were replaced with fiberglass versions. Four-millimeter (0.16 in.) thick glass was used for the windshield while Perspex acrylic glass took over where other heavy glass had been. Next, metal parts were copiously drilled. The cockpit was stripped bare. The stock door handles were replaced with plastic ones. Even the taillights were swapped out for smaller ones to 'add lightness.'

Four prototypes were built, and each one got lighter than the one before it. By the end, the team had taken a 2,271-lb 911S and turned it into a lean 1,764-lb 911R. But Piëch wasn't done yet. He specified wider and lighter wheels, a Monza steering wheel, and a tachometer that went to 10,000 rpm. Naturally, the R would need more power, so it got the 210-hp Type 901/22 six from the 906 race car.

Racing manager Huschke von Hanstein thought the 911R was spectacular and pushed for the new creation to be homologated so it could compete in the GT class. The sales department was not big on the idea, though. They felt there was no way in hell that customers would drop 45,000 Deutschmarks ($11,316 U.S. dollars then, or $90,464 when adjusted for inflation to today's money) for the 500 bare bones examples necessary for homologation into the GT racing class.

As the 911R was not built in sufficient numbers, it had to compete in the prototype class against purpose-built competition machines like the 906, 907, and 910. Still, the lightweight 911R showed it was a force to be reckoned with. It made its racing debut in July of 1967 at the Circuit de Mugello, taking third place behind two Porsche 910s.

It then pulled off a serious victory in the 1967 Marathon de la Route, a mind-numbing 84 hour non-stop race on the old Nürburgring Nordschleife and Südschleife circuits. For the event, engineer Helmuth Bott decided to showcase Porsches' new Sportomatic semi-automatic gearbox. The third of the four prototypes was converted especially for the race with a 175-hp 911S sport-kit engine linked up to the new transmission. With Vic Elford, Hans Herrmann, and Jochen Neepasch sharing the driving, they took the victory with a lengthy lead over the rest of the field. Afterward, the car was converted back to its original R specs.

The 911R went into the record books again in 1967. Jo Siffert and his Swiss teammates, Rico Steinemann, Dieter Spörry, and Charles Vögele, were at Monza planning to break some high-speed, long-distance records set by Toyota and Ford with a Porsche prototype. But they quickly discovered that the competition 906's suspension was not up to circling the rough track that was Monza. So, the factory delivered a 911R to the circuit. The slightly tired R gave the team five new long-distance records.

Before taking its final bow, the 911R had a few more good runs. Gérard Larrousse entered a 911R in the 1969 Tour de France that was now open to prototypes and scored the outright win. He did the same again that year in the Tour de Corse on the island of Corsica. He went back to the Tour de France in 1970, where he was up against two 12-cylinder Matra 650 prototypes and still took third place.

The next step in the evolution was in 1973 with the mighty RS. The 911R was the first of many high-spec 911s. With four prototypes and 20 production cars built, it is truly one of the rarest Porsches around, never to be replicated. Well, we would have thought that if we hadn't found the car you see here...






The Build

Gaspare Fasulo's attention to detail is laser focused. He could have started with a cheaper 912, but he wanted a 911 VIN number. A solid original 1967 911 was found in Colorado, and it was even painted Light Ivory like all the original Rs.

The car arrived at Fasulo's shop and was inspected inside and out, from front to back, and then—like the factory Rs—stripped down to the unibody and built up again. He sourced all the body panels from Roth Sport in Oregon and EB Motorsport in the UK.

Every possible weight-saving piece was utilized, from aluminum door hinges to stainless reproductions of the hinges used on the rear deck lid. If Porsche made a modification to create the R, Fasulo did too. The only panels that weren't swapped out with fiberglass replacements were the doors. Fasulo felt the stock ones had survived that long without turning into a pile of rust, so he didn't have the heart to replace them with fiberglass copies. Another reason was that—since the car would see duty on the road—he liked the idea of something a bit more solid between the driver and the outside world. The door handles were also in perfect shape, so they stayed as well. The inside door panels also use the original door release and a hand crank for the window instead of an R-spec leather strap.

The next thing to address was the heart of the beast: the 2.0-liter flat-six powerplant. It would be built up to R specifications with a new crankshaft, connecting rods, crankcase modifications, and high compression pistons and cylinders. Fasulo

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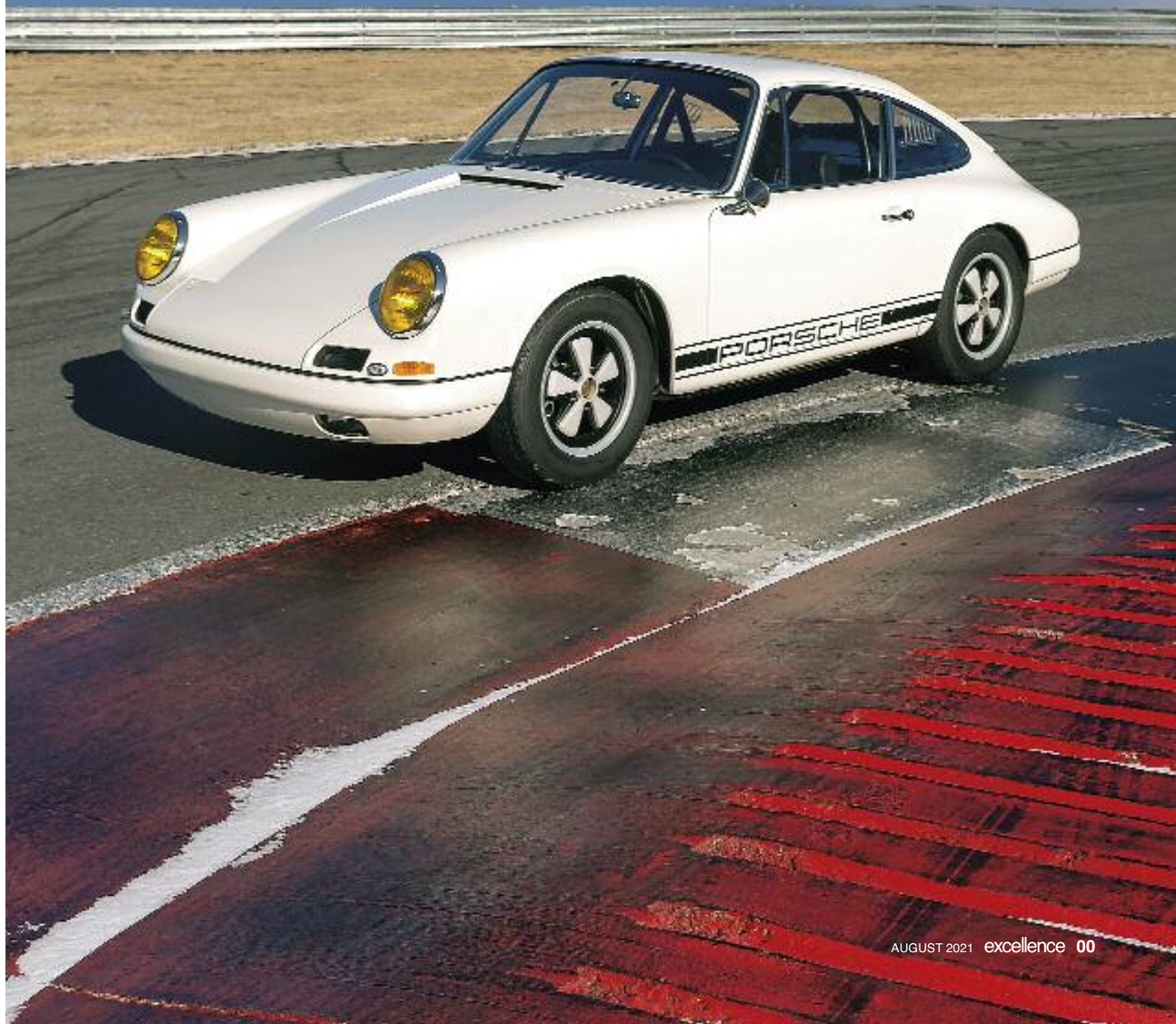

opened up the ports on the intake and exhaust, changed the valves, added twin plug heads, and ported the manifolds. That all combined to bring the little engine up to 220 hp. Spec-wise, Fasulo's six is identical to a 906's powerplant right down to the cam profile, cam timing, and the compression ratio. At the moment it's set up with a conservative street tune, but Fasulo knows he can get more power with more aggressive settings.

The build went relatively smooth, taking just about 14 months. In the end, the car weighed in at just 1,846 lbs—just 82 lbs more than the original R.

On the Road

It isn't the perfect day to test the limits of this fresh build, but when I have all 4.1 miles of the Monticello Motor Club in Sullivan County, New York to myself, so who I'm I to argue?! Monticello is a private country club for automotive enthusiasts. It is frigid out—no one else seems foolish enough to be playing in 12 degrees Fahrenheit—but marketing manager Suzanne Forni Gonzalez said, "Be my guest," so game on!

There is no way I can get heat into the 185/70VR-15 Pirelli CN36 tires, so when getting on the throttle, the R gets sideways every now and then. Even so, it feels like a nicely set up short-wheelbase 911. But it's stiffer and a helluva lot faster with plenty more rpms on tap and a 7,800 redline. Even though this R is being pushed around by a 2.0-liter engine with high compression and 906 cams, you have a certain window where it makes power—somewhere between 3,700 and 7,800 rpm. So when it comes on cam, it's practically like flipping a switch from one engine to another. The result is a car with seriously impressive acceleration. Even with the old-school 901 gearbox, gear changes are super clean. The shift linkage was rebuilt and the rear coupler was replaced. And, to top it off, an R-style shifter was added.

Even in the cold, the R feels planted, and its steering is sharp. But as with any early 911, there is going to be some oversteer. You drive it the way it wants to be driven: Don't take your foot off the gas partway through a turn and go for broke! With a 100-liter (26.4-gallon) fuel tank up front that helps balance the car, the right tires, and a proper suspension setup, this R clone is far from treacherous to drive and is, in fact, an absolute blast!

Hours and hours of research went into this build, so it wasn't just a quick teardown and a parts-thrown-together rebuild. Fasulo took a magnifying glass to factory pictures and other Rs to make sure he was using the correct bolts on the steering wheel, how the wiring harness was run, and what kind of connectors were used. He agonized for hours over the placement of the decals on the rockers and the rear deck lid. He looked at photos of the factory cars, and they all varied slightly, so in the end, he put them where he felt they looked right, just like its hand-built predecessor.

Fasulo has been told that he overdoes his research, but that's just how his brain works. He wants to know everything about a build before he gets started. The outcome is a fitting tribute to Porsche's constant search for perfection and victory in motorsport. Mr. Fasulo's creation is one stellar machine. Now, if I can only get it back on a warm day! ■

SPECS 1967 911R "Clone"

Drive	Rear-wheel drive
Layout	Rear-engine
Wheelbase	87.05 inches
Engine	2.0-liter flat-six
Transmission	5-speed manual
Horsepower	220 hp
Torque	150 lb-ft
Weight	1,846 lbs
Power-to-Weight	8.4 lbs/hp
0-60 mph	6.0 sec. (est.)
Top Speed	145 mph