

PORSCHE

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ON THE GRID

PORSCHE OWNERS ARE a passionate lot, who know what they want. Not prepared to wait for the RS 2.7 in 1972, a German entrepreneur ordered a custom 1972 911S 2.6, the only one of its kind, proving that sometimes “Impatience is a Virtue” (p. 88). The Porsche Classic Center in Oslo, Norway also caters to those who know what they want with a very special retro-build called the Sooner (p. 54). Engineer Jim Earlbeck so appreciates the focused purpose of his 987 Porsche Boxster Spyder, it’s almost as if they are “Soul Mates” (page 76). Bob and Cam Ingram are mainstays on the concours circuit, but tragedy struck when an explosion destroyed many of their classic cars. Undeterred, they raced to restore a 1961 Carrera Abarth GTL, because “Pebble Can’t Wait” (p. 102). One of the bright spots on the annual calendar is Werks Reunion, and we went “Back to Werks” for the 10th anniversary, and a celebration of the 914 (p. 68). All that plus more intrigue in “The Spy Collector” (p. 114), and a remembrance of Sir Stirling Moss.

BRUCE SWEETMAN

Previously profiled on this page and a frequent contributor to *Panorama*, providing words and photos for two of our features this month, Bruce Sweetman had his first professional assignment in the mid 1990s, writing about vintage racing for *Autoweek*.

Improving his craft and upgrading his equipment, Bruce started covering sports car racing for *Road & Track*. “Watching Alan McNish race full bore into the Sebring darkness with one headlamp inspired my photography,”

he says, “and it informed my writing.”

He’s now focused on bringing that same level of detail to any other feature, whether it’s Parade, Werks Reunion, or a different type of story. “Whether it’s a concours or a feature, I’ve learned to keep my eyes wide open and let the owner tell the story,” he says.

Sweetman took a 4,200-mile blue highways tour in his 1964 Porsche 356C last October that called upon his mechanical skills—but that’s another story, for another day.



MARIUS VIKEN

New to the pages of this magazine, Marius Viken shot our story on the Sooner Porsche this month. Hailing from Haugesund, Norway, Marius started as a photo assistant at *Carl’s Cars* magazine, which led to work at *Norwegian Porsche* magazine. Previously he worked as an electrician, which he describes as “honest but dreadful.”

One of his more memorable assignments was working with Sigurd Wongraven of Norwegian metal band Satyricon. They drove 350 miles from

Oslo to Nordfjordeid in a 2018 911 GT2 RS Weissach, passing churches and glaciers, and driving through fjords.

A fan of the 911, Marius loves the nice clean lines and overall aesthetic of Porsche. “It has that ‘edge’ that just pulls you in,” he says.

Describing himself as “the type of guy who can’t sit still for five minutes,” Marius bakes bread, plays drums in a band, and is learning how to build furniture. His next goal is to build either a car or motorcycle from scratch.



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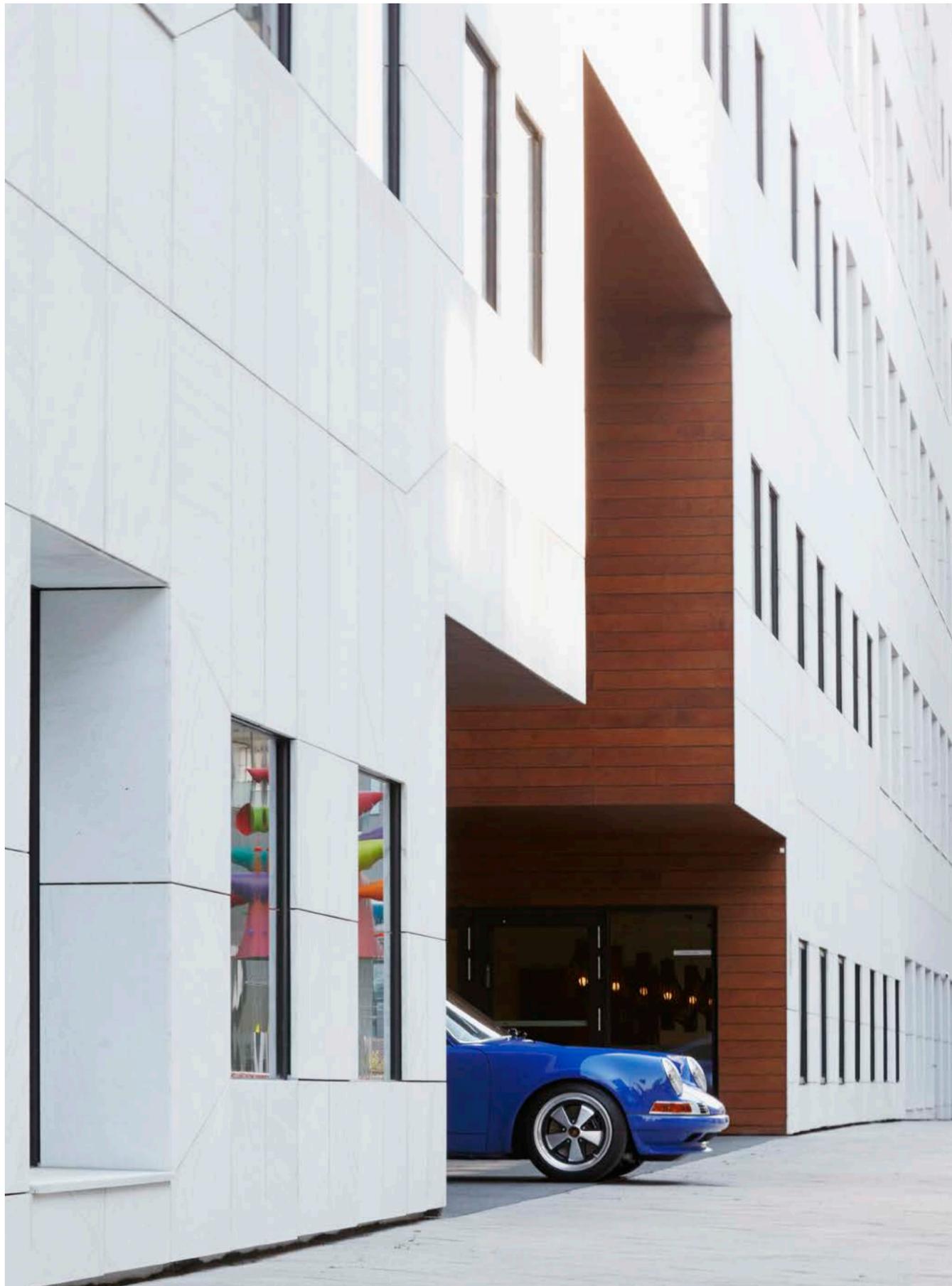
The SOONER The BETTER

A RETRO-BUILD PORSCHE FROM AN UNLIKELY LOCATION.

STORY BY **AXEL E. CATTON** PHOTOS BY **MARIUS VIKEN**



Everyone has a personal favorite when it comes to Porsches—F-model, G-model, 964, 993, etc. Along with those special feelings comes the goal to someday own and drive that favorite car. Unfortunately some Porsches, such as the early 911s, have become increasingly difficult to use as daily drivers. There are a couple of reasons for this. For one, the cars' rarity and associated value make them more risky to take out on the road. For another, we have become used to creature comforts that older cars just can't provide.



Enter stage left: the retro-builds. Hold on! We understand your trepidation, but don't walk away just yet. You might be thinking that these aren't "real" Porsches and are just pretenders (or other less printable comments). But hear us out. In the end, it's all about preserving the legacy of what makes a Porsche a Porsche. It's about the enjoyment we take from owning one and driving one, and—yes—it's also about the joy we get from sharing that fun with others. If a retro-build allows us to experience all of these things, why not? In recent years, a number of retro-builds have made a name for themselves, most notably those made by Singer Vehicle Design out of Los Angeles.

But what if Porsche made its own retro-build, using mostly Porsche parts? Specially made to your order? Now, to be fair, that's not the case here, but it's pretty darn close. There's a buzz in the community about a car called the Sooner, built by the Porsche Classic Center in Norway. Yes, you read that right. The Porsche Classic Center in Son, south of Oslo, is the official manufacturer behind one of the most exciting cars of this kind we've seen in a long time. In fact, it's so exciting, we went to Norway to see it being made and take one for a spin.

THE PORSCHE CLASSIC CENTER is one of three in Europe, and the most recent one built. Co-founders and co-owners Espen Olsen and Egil Haugen started selling used Porsches from this location 27 years ago and became official Porsche dealers in 2010. Today, the center

sells about 120 new Porsches annually and about twice that number of used cars. "Many of our clients have come to us from owning used Porsches in their younger years, and are now looking to find a car like the one they used to own, or to breathe new life into an old car they still own," explains Olsen.

Over the years, mechanical work on classic 356s and 911s evolved into full-edged restoration work. "We are able to restore a classic Porsche from the ground up here on our premises," says Olsen with pride.

But today, we're here to learn about the Sooner. The name is a clever pun, as it references both an earlier (or sooner) model, as well as the location where it's built—and no, we don't mean Oklahoma. (In old times, Son was spelled Soon.) A Sooner 911 starts with a 964, which is completely stripped down and then built up entirely to the customer's specs.

Olsen grins from one ear to the other: "When we say entirely, we mean that. Most clients don't 'just' ask for a 964 to look like an early F-body, which is the most common look they are going for. The sky is the limit, and as we're using only Porsche original parts wherever possible, customers tend to try and fulfill their dreams in every aspect imaginable." But Olsen doesn't just want us to take his word for it. Outside of his 2,000-square-meter glass and steel temple, he has placed his latest build, a Maritime Blue Sooner 4.0, a customer car that has already been sold and is almost ready for delivery. "They're all customer cars," he confirms. "When we start



building a car, we have gone through a lengthy process of choices that the final customer has made.”

Because the shop is an official Porsche Classic Center, all of the work comes with a warranty. The vast majority of parts used to build a Sooner are original Porsche parts. However, the Viking builders are not averse to individual flourishes using other parts if they can be integrated neatly into the overall build. Any creation of a Sooner therefore starts with the donor car being stripped down to the bare bones, something Olsen’s team calls “nulling.” The donor body is returned to its original state, rectifying any changes that might have taken place over its lifetime. In the process, the body is also prepared for the alterations the customer has specified.

“We offer Sooners with 3.8- or 4.0-liter engines. Every new project brings new challenges but also ends up adding more customization options to our list. So, while we’re in the kitchen, the menu gets ever longer,” says the affable Porsche enthusiast.

THIS PARTICULAR CAR started life as a 964, as most Sooners do. The customer, a successful businessman from Oslo, was looking to combine a classic look with the everyday usability of his newer cars. The body conversion was made in all-steel, with front and rear bumpers as well as the spoiler being Porsche’s own design. “It is very important to us to point out that we are

Every Sooner is a highly individual car. This owner chose a white basketweave leather interior. From the rear, the spoiler and central exhaust give the custom build away.



not making 1-to-1 copies of original cars,” says Olsen. “We are realizing dreams that come together from years of passion and love for Porsche and 911s, and represent the commissioning customer’s personal dream.”

The unique 4.0 engine in this Sooner (102mm bore with an elongated 80.4mm stroke) delivers 382 horsepower at 7000 rpm and an even more impressive 420 Nm (310 lb-ft) of torque at 5500 rpm. The gearbox is a six-speed manual taken from a 993, the first 911 to feature a six-speed. The front wheels are 17x9-inch with 225/45R17 tires, while the rear end has 275/40R17 tires on 17x10-inch rims. The suspension uses Bilstein PSS10 dampers, and the brakes are 322mm (12.7 inches) at the front and 288mm (11.3 inches) in the rear with Porsche four-piston calipers.

“It’s one of those things that make customers choose a Sooner,” adds Olsen. “The look can be as loud or as quiet as you like, while the mechanics underneath are entirely up to spec for daily driving as well as track use.” Just as well, as the top speed of Porsche Son’s newest build is a claimed 309 kph (192 mph), something you can only do on closed tracks in Scandinavia.

But today we’re not aiming for high-speed runs. We can try the 4.3-second acceleration to 100 kph (62 mph), but what we really want is to drive it in its new natural habitat, so to speak. The owner has graciously allowed Olsen to hand his car to us even before he takes deliv-

Every element inside and out can be customized using Porsche original parts where possible. Power comes from a special 4.0-liter flat six serving 382 hp and 310 lb-ft of torque.



ery. So, we're aiming for the city to test Porsche Son's claim of everyday usability. It's where many of Norway's Sooner buyers make their money, and where their cars will be seen most often.

The inside of this latest build is a mix of familiar '70s styling and complete customer creativity. The seats are white basketweave leather with blue leather applications on the sides, door handles, and door caps. There is a neatly integrated roll cage covered in the same blue leather that makes it almost disappear. The instruments are classic Porsche, while the radio is the well-known classic Porsche Navi.

The auditory sensation is a tantalizing mix of familiar at-six rattle with an added, much deeper burble. This car isn't ready for delivery just yet, so it still needs more revs than first expected to come off the line without stalling. Once in motion, it is pleasingly easy to drive; the clutch and shifter are light and easy to use. In the city, our shooter, food and fashion photographer Marius Viken, sends us up and down, forward and back through

Oslo's early-morning traffic. Steering is light, and the brakes grip with expected force and precision.

We venture ever deeper into the city and park our Maritime Blue Sooner in front of iconic buildings in Oslo's hip "Barcode" district for more photos. What is most surprising is the public acceptance this Porsche receives. As we carefully roll along bike lanes to place the car right in front of onlookers at a café, we are not getting scolded for driving such an ostentatious display of wealth and power. Instead, people of all ages stop, pull out their iPhones, and engage us in conversation.

In the end, we come away from our day in this Maritime Blue Sooner with a deeper understanding of the people who want to own cars like it. Especially in Norway, the pleasure of seeing one, the public acceptance, and the fun of being able to enjoy classic looks and great usability is very appealing for those who can afford it. Whether it's worth the €350,000 plus tax (about \$380,000) is up to the buyer to decide. But as they say, if you have to ask about the price....

Porsche Classic Center Son

IN RECENT YEARS, Porsche AG has significantly ramped up its activities for owners of classic and more recent collectible Porsche models. With a whole sales range of OEM and repro parts, accessories, and automobilia, Porsche is keen to provide service to owners and collectors of

classic Porsches. In addition to Porsche dealerships around the world also working on classic Porsche models, we have seen the launch of dedicated Porsche Classic Centers, starting with the one in Gelderland, Netherlands, in 2006. Since then, two more dedicated Porsche Classic

Centers have been added, one in Rouen, France and the other in the unlikely location of Son, Norway, about an hour's drive from Oslo's Gardermoen airport and about 40 minutes from the city center.

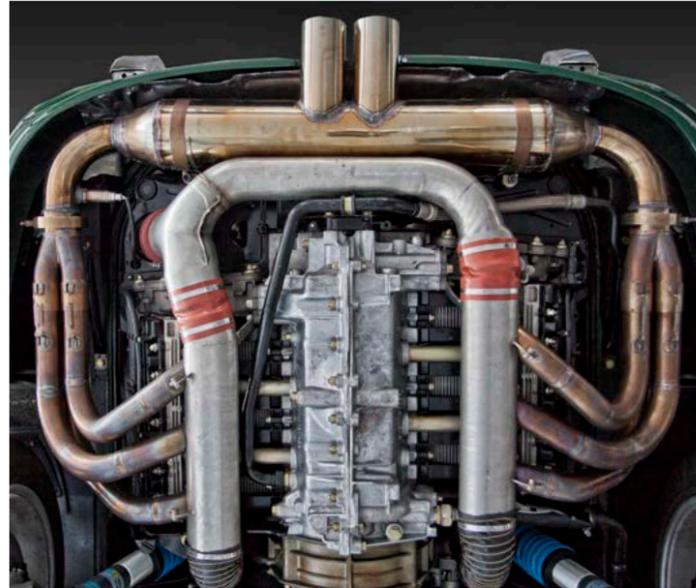
At first glance, Norway as an automotive market is tiny. Fewer than 160,000 passenger cars are sold there annually, with Tesla the unlikely market leader. Porsche Norway sells about 700 new cars every year, so you would expect that the overall market size would be too small to create such a stunning temple of classic car goodness. Espen Olsen and his co-founder Egil Haugen started buying and selling used Porsches at this very location 26 years ago, and they got the contract to become a Porsche new car dealership in 2010. Upon welcoming us, Olsen explains the location. "It isn't as remote as it may seem at first glance. Son is located close enough to Oslo that many business people commute from here. We are also on the E6, so the main traffic from Denmark and Sweden going to Oslo passes right outside our door."

Eventually, the amount of workshop space needed for their classic car activities meant that Olsen and Haugen had to look at expan-



sion. In 2017, the Porsche Classic Center Son was established. With 2,000 square meters of exhibition space and seven workshop bays, the people at Son can work on about six to eight cars simultaneously.

So, who picks a Sooner? "Our customers come not only from Norway or Scandinavia, but from Central Europe and the United States. However, they all have certain traits in common. They tend to be very knowledgeable about Porsches, and are either current or former owners," explains Olsen. "While they love the look and feel of that original 911 concept, they also demand functionality and reliability, as they use their cars to a great extent." What also happens is that customers get so excited about their first project that they would like to do it again and commission a new build. Sounds like a recipe for success. —AC



Sooners can look as wild or as restrained as the customer wants. After the 964 shell has been returned to series condition, buyers choose their unique colors and decide on suspension and wheel setups, as well as engine choices from a 3.8- or 4.0-liter flat six. Individual touches like non-standard mirrors or whale tails help express each buyer's own style. Interiors offer limitless choices, and Olsen confirms that every job can be done in-house and comes supplied with a full warranty.

