

De-Extinction

THE FAMOUS ITALIAN COACHBUILDER ZAGATO BRINGS STUNNING LOST PORSCHE DESIGNS BACK TO LIFE.

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Given the choice, few people would say “no” to a brand-new Porsche-authorized 356A Speedster or 911 Carrera 2.7 RS. With more attention being paid to brand heritage than ever before, several grand old British marques have actually started re-creating important models from their past. So-called “Sanction II” cars, such as Jaguar’s series of nine “new” XKSS models and Aston Martin’s upcoming 25 new DB4 GTs, occupy a nebulous part of the collector car world—in spite of factory provenance they aren’t the originals, and in many cases they can’t be registered for use on the street.

While Porsche has not disclosed any such plans, well-heeled car collectors can still relive a fascinating and little-known chapter of the company’s illustrious history via the venerable Italian design house of Zagato. The coachbuilder is planning to bring back from extinction a series of very special Zagato-bodied Porsches from the late 1950s to remind the world of the nearly forgotten but aesthetically stunning first collaboration between Zagato and Porsche.





Anyone who knows Porsche history is aware of a small series of 20 Zagato-bodied Porsche 356 Carrera Abarth GTL coupes built in the early 1960s. But the car previewed here pre-dates that effort and is scarcely remembered by anyone, yet it may be one of the most beautiful special-bodied Porsches of all time. It might have remained lost forever but for the efforts of Dr. Andrea Zagato, the family heir and current CEO of Zagato.

WELL BEFORE THE aforementioned Zagato/Porsche collaboration with Abarth that led to the construction of the Abarth Zagato GTL coupes in the early 1960s, the connection between Stuttgart and Milan began with a very special order by one of Porsche's factory drivers, a Frenchman named Claude Storez. The son of a French painter and a man who in 1950s France was considered one of the most talented drivers around,

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Storez had ordered a new Porsche 356A Speedster with a Carrera GT engine. According to factory documents, chassis number 84907 (with engine number 91009) was registered as manufactured without interior or paint on May 13, 1958. The engine was installed a week later, on May 20.

The unfinished Carrera Speedster was then brought to Zagato in Italy for the construction of a breathtakingly beautiful alloy body. In August, 84907 returned one last time to the Stuttgart factory for final technical checks before Storez took delivery in September 1958 at the famous Parisian Porsche dealer Sonauto, where he registered it with French plates.

That same year, Storez entered the Tour de France with his new Zagato Speedster and received starting number 158. Sadly, he never actually started the race—in February of 1959, Storez was killed in an accident at the Route du Nord Rallye in Reims, France, and the Zagato Speedster, arguably the most beautiful special-bodied 356 ever, was destroyed and seemingly lost forever.

But Dr. Zagato had other ideas: "In almost 100 years, Zagato has designed and built roughly 400 different car models—some very well-known



ones, others less so. And not all of them have survived. That's why we decided a few years ago to re-create some select models that have been essential for our brand's development throughout its history.

"These cars would have had to be important for the design development of our company," he continues. In contrast to Jaguar or Aston Martin, Dr. Zagato insists on only re-creating those models that are definitely lost to the world, which means there are no surviving original examples left. "A sanctioned re-creation allows the world to see and experience these cars which they otherwise would not be able to do," he says. It also ensures that there can never be any confusion between the original and the latter-day re-creation.

"For our Sanction II re-creations, we had nothing more than some bad black-and-white images as reference points," says Dr. Zagato. With the use

of CAD, the Italian firm developed a computer-aided measuring system that was laid as a grid over the original photographs. "We always used the same grid and applied it to every photograph we could find," Dr. Zagato explains proudly. "In the end, we arrived at a collection of measuring points which allowed us without a doubt to determine what the car looked like in the day and what the detailed dimensions were."

IN 2012, DR. ZAGATO considered this now-extinct Porsche 356 Carrera Speedster Zagato to be a fitting candidate for a re-creation, to be built in a series of nine examples. He says: "Here, too, all we had was black-and-white pictures, but luckily these were better than what we had for previous projects."

The photos were used to create the mathematical master. "It was immediately clear how different this Speedster was compared to the

It's all in the details: The rear quarter window is reminiscent of one of Zagato's most famous and most beautiful cars, the Aston Martin DB4 GT Zagato. Push-pull door handles scream 1950s coachbuilt Italian. The head-on view of the 356 Zagato coupe is reminiscent of the 718 RSK racer.

standard [Reutter-built] Porsche Speedsters," he says. "It was a lot lower, the front end was shallower, and at the rear it had little stabilizing fins." One photo also showed the unique door hinges that the company was able to reproduce. Says Dr. Zagato proudly: "During our research for the Speedster project, Porsche supported us and eventually sent us a congratulatory letter."

During our visit, we find two of those Speedsters, which have remained at the factory for some final touches. The series of nine is sold out. But the real reason we are here is a different car, the prototype of a new "Sanction II," a closed version of the Porsche 356 Carrera Zagato. Dr. Zagato explains: "During research in our own archives for the Speedster, we found drawings of a closed version which we knew next to nothing about. This coupe is very important, as it is the link between Storez' Speedster and the later



Porsche 356 Abarth GTL coupes.”

The Italian specialists scanned the coupe drawings using the same grid system as with previous models. After extensive computer calculations, a master buck was cut using CNC machines. Afterwards, body specialists created the new body out of light aluminum over this buck. Apart from the very aerodynamic form, the use of the light alloy had been an important element for the success of Zagato models. “In the 1950s and ’60s, the Monday papers were full of Zagato race wins from the previous weekend. Lightweight construction and aerodynamic design made even cars with less powerful engines into race winners,” says Dr. Zagato.

Before we are allowed a peek behind the doors with the words “Warning – No Entry,” the company CEO invites us into a little presentation room to show us the mathematical master for Zagato’s newest

“Sanction II” re-creation. Looking at a comparison of old Speedster photographs with and without the grid, as well as the only existing drawing of the coupe, we notice one thing right away. The softly flowing roofline at the rear and the visual center of gravity moved farther back make the design look even more settled, more conclusive. “It’s immediately clear that the roof makes an enormous difference,” agrees Dr. Zagato.

A FEW MINUTES LATER, we get to see the new Porsche 356 Carrera Coupe Zagato for the first time with our own eyes. It feels almost like a new car launch at an auto show. There are mechanics still fettling with the last details on the car, and not only are we the first U.S. magazine to see this car, Zagato has also invited two potential customers to have a first look at this wonderful relic from an earlier era. “We are again creating nine examples of this model, and al-

The Zagato Speedster (left) is a precise re-creation of the now-extinct car that would have raced in the 1959 Tour de France, had tragedy not intervened.

most all of them are spoken for. Well, almost,” smiles Dr. Zagato.

The silver coupe looks confident and convincing. It is significantly more slender and “visually lighter” than a standard 356B or even an Abarth Carrera GTL. “The front end was of particular importance for my father, Elio, when he designed this car,” says Dr. Zagato. “In order to create this particularly low front, we had to move the spare wheel, which is placed rather vertically in the standard car, and lay it almost flat, so the body could be even more shallow.”

The rounded front is dominated by only slightly protruding fenders with integrated headlights and fresh air inlets right below. The headlights behind their plastic covers are set back ever so slightly, which makes them stylistically more interesting. With the height reduced by 5.4 inches to only 46.9 inches, the short coupe looks slimmer and longer than it actually is. In reality, the 356

Zagato coupe is only 152.8 inches long, a full five inches shorter than a standard 356B.

In side view, both coupe and Speedster share a pronounced shoulder line that falls slightly toward the rear of the passenger doors, only to rise again and almost cover the rear wheels. The window area is longer and lower, and the rear window’s lower end echoes the rear fender line. The delicate door handles are an especially playful Zagato detail; they need to be pressed in first for the handle bar to pop out.

At the back, the body line almost resembles an American fastback as it slowly descends to the bumperless rear end. Two separate grilles clearly recall Porsche design cues, while the single center exhaust reminds us of the standard 1.5-liter Carrera engine mounted in the back. Only the rather bland-looking square rear lights indicate that in creating the original, the company occasionally

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had to make do with available items. Today one might wish for a less incongruous solution.

The interior is spartan, 356-style, but its reduction to the essential also makes it more appealing. Behind the wood three-spoke Nardi steering wheel is a dashboard made entirely out of metal showing three big dials with classic green Porsche lettering. To the left is a combination dial showing the fuel level and oil temperature; the speedometer is in the center; and the tachometer is all the way to the right. The ignition is placed to the right of the driver. The white piping on the black leather seats is the only frivolous styling element in the cabin.

WHAT’S LEFT TO ASK is the obvious and unpleasant question about pricing. Dr. Zagato replies with typical Italian nonchalance: “Getting a 356B from 1959 as a base today will put you back about €100,000 [\$116,000]

if you don’t want to invest too much into a restoration. The cost for the conversion into a Coupe Zagato is of course entirely dependent on the customer’s wishes, but given the time invested, you would have to expect to pay another €300,000 [\$350,000].” Because the car is based on an actual 356, it can be registered in most places for road use, where other new-from-the-ground-up Sanction II cars often cannot.

One could easily spend more on a 911-based Singer Porsche yet still run the risk of seeing another at Luftgekühlt or even at an L.A.-area Cars and Coffee. The Zagato 356 is in another exclusivity league altogether. Plus, its back story of Zagato bringing the car back from extinction is simply irresistible. ☺

