



Porsche patina: Rejuvenating a 928

By Pablo Deferrari

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I think it happened somewhere around 1983. I was bitten hard when a 911 Turbo whooshed by me, and from that moment I became an air-cooled 911 junkie. But something else infatuated me that, to this day, I can't quite figure out how it came to be — I secretly lusted after her younger, more Rubenesque sister.

You see, there was something about her lines, her eyes and especially her rump that was very different from the 911, but yet inexplicably similar. It took all of 30 years for this attraction to be re-ignited because she had aged so gracefully and looked better than ever. I had to have her.

This lust isn't for every variation of the 928 made from 1978 to 1995. I have a thing for the earliest versions from 1978 to 1979. The clean, spoiler-less look and their relative simplicity represent a purity and faithfulness to the original "clean-sheet" design that was sort of lost during its evolution. And I wasn't taking the recommendation of avoiding these early examples as they "have some undesirable features." No, I was dead-set on owning one with the intention to help preserve what few remain.

Now, finding a decent example as a basis for my project was going to be a little difficult as it turns out. The criteria was this: no serious previous crash damage; an engine that at least turned over and didn't exhibit any kind of serious mechanical wear; worn synchros in the gearbox were OK so long as I could shift without too much drama; and an interior that was intact but needed a bit of help.

Simple, right? Well not really, you see, because there was one piece of the equation I left out — the price had to be under \$3,000. This is where it gets a bit difficult because most early examples at this price point are pretty much in need of things that will surpass what the car is worth. But this concept is so interesting that I've decided to write a series in our local Porsche Club magazine of my adventures in search of such an example.

What intrigued me even more was that almost every OB I went to look at was already picked over by other enthusiasts and critiqued on Rennlist. I realized there was a good and bad side of this. Good if you valued your peer's critique of the thing and knew what to expect before you looked at it, and pretty lame if you ended up buying what others avoided like the plague because you just may end up looking like an idiot if you honestly care what people think. I don't, so I went with my gut and ended up buying one that had already been scorned — stay with me, it's bound to get entertaining.

I had never drove a 928 let alone sat in one, but I've been studying all things Porsche and read just about every book of every model for more than 30 years to qualify me for a job at the [Porsche Museum](#). I felt pretty smug. It turns out I didn't know a damn thing.

Like any other subject in the world, you can be book-smart about it but experience-stupid; I was the latter. To understand any Porsche completely, you have to have one and get dirty with it. The 928, however, is the kind of machine that carries with it such complexities that you pretty much have no choice but to submerge yourself into it — head first. I smartened up and tapped into every resource imaginable including Rennlist, Pelican and Porsche 928 Forums, old school Porsche techs — I even got a hold of the Factory Workshop Manuals. I was humbled, but I had a much better idea of what I was getting myself into.

The 928 I ended up with was a black 1979 with no sunroof, manual gearbox, black leather interior, no-rub strips; pretty much the standard issue for that year and exactly what I was looking for. The three-piece classic BBS RS wheels in gold were not only period-correct, but also propelled this car's beauty to another level that I just didn't see in all of the others.

INDUSTRY PULSE

Have you ever owned a 928?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

Answer Now



She was finally home, our new 1979 Porsche 928 #1887.

It had just about everything wrong with it: poor paint with some oxidation; a botched attempt at fixing the roof's rust in what resembled spackle painted over with a can of Krylon; a dash and steering wheel devoid of its leather; leaking radiator and gas tank; headlights that didn't pop up; missing rear passenger side seat; sagging front seats; oh, and it wouldn't stay running for more than two minutes. I should have walked away, but I threw out a ridiculously low number and not only was it accepted, the towing to our house was thrown in. I figured I had a 10-horse lead on this one.

She was already becoming a pain in the ass. Because my driveway is a long and narrow one with a tight dogleg to the garage, it was hell to push this heavy girl into her new berth. I had to leave her just outside the second bay because we had our 944S in there undergoing mechanical restoration, and only when that project was finished could I bring the OB inside.

Before getting started with the no-start problem, I took a day just to look at her every so often and admire what a beautiful piece of art she was. All of the doubt and anxiety vanished; like my wife, she is visual valium. I considered myself lucky to have this opportunity with a car that is not only a rare occurrence on the road, it drastically changed Porsche history as we knew it then — she was out to replace the venerable 911. This car, here, in our driveway.

Fuel, air, spark. One or all of those had to be the culprit, so I opted to start with number one, fuel. It could be anything — the infamous vacuum leaks, low or fluctuating fuel pressure, faulty injectors or warm-up regulator, fuel pumps trying to give up the ghost. The funny thing is, in the 34 years of this old thing's existence, it had one lousy receipt as the only evidence of "service history," and I couldn't even read it. What would've been the point if I had a full set anyway? Sure, it would be nice and all to reminisce and see what kind of care she received, but it wasn't worth a damn to me now in my current situation. So I decided the logical thing to do was start from the source: the fuel tank.

Here's where the Internet pays dividends. While searching Rennlist for some insight on the 928's CIS system, I stumbled onto a guy's website who not only had the same year OB but pretty much documented every job he performed on it with great detail. All I wanted to do is drop the tank and see what effect 34 years had on the matter and, incidentally, it's where this baby's story begins to unfold.

The first order of business was to take off the fuel-pump access cover to drain what little gas remained in the tank. With the cover off, it became clear that I was going to spend a lot of time undoing the previous amateur attempts to remedy this old girl.

I saw the fuel pump clamped to its cradle but no rubber isolators there to suspend the poor thing onto the cover — it was literally thrown in there. Right, then two stray wires began to poke their way from behind the pump with the ends wrapped in black

electrical tape. It didn't occur to me then that she had a second fuel pump screwed into the tank with two naked electrical prongs missing their mates. I've yet to understand the logic behind this move.



With the fuel pump cover off, we begin to see the reality of what sort of project this is going to be. Fuel pump on upper right with two wires taped off that should have been connected to the in-tank fuel pump. Below is the fuel pump cradle with broken rubber isolators.

Not only did the pumps look original, but the fuel hose I was about to detach looked like it was about to disintegrate the moment I breathed on it. I kept the fire extinguisher and tons of rags within arm's reach. As I carefully separated the hose from the pump and drain the tank, I thought about the \$500 or so I'd have to spend right here for two pumps and a fuel hose. And I hadn't even dropped the tank yet.

Moving on into the trunk, I unplugged the hacked-up and spliced-together fuel level sending unit connection and removed the fuel return line hose that looked like a party favor with frayed nylon ends and shredded rubber casing.



This sort of careless attention to detail is a pretty common site on cheap, older Porsches. Here is how a wiring issue was addressed on the fuel sender unit plug. Notice the frayed fuel return line on the upper right.

Then, after detaching the filler neck grommet, separating the vent hoses and undoing the four bolts on the cradle that hold the tank to the chassis, she came down after some finessing. As I inspected the tank, I discovered a few stress cracks where the tank cradle held it that caused the mysterious leakage. These amounted to what the previous owner described as a "pinhole leak."

Now, I could buy a used one for about \$450, but I rolled the dice and tried my hand with a plastic welding kit to mend it. It wasn't too difficult to see that we're potentially into this project for about a grand. It was a lot to take in following an afternoon's worth of work, but I expected this sort of outcome anyway.



The "ostrich" as it's known in Porsche tech parlance. Cracked fuel tanks seem to plague lots of these early 928s, so be aware of this should you be in the market for one.

My focus was to see what was causing this old girl to sputter and die when I tried to fire her up. But I gave up. There was no logic in trying to isolate the problem with what I had discovered so far just by dropping the tank.

I had a new approach though, I was going to disassemble the thing little by little and replace, fabricate or refurbish every component that was past its shelf life. I wasn't planning on doing it this way, but you know what? It's the kind of respect and care she deserves from now on because nobody really seemed to give a toss once she started changing hands and getting up in her years.

Those few owners before me probably realized, and very quickly, how fast she can drain your bank account. Then suddenly this sexy little number becomes a burden not worth the resources anymore. Too bad because these are fantastic cars worthy of preservation regardless of the challenges and frustrations one faces along the way.

So what's the point of all this tomfoolery? I'm inviting you, the reader, to join me on this crusade of 928 preservation and see what it takes to bring this old girl back from oblivion. It'll be one hell of a dirty, frustrating and downright insane journey with no light at the end of the tunnel for a little while, but at least you'll learn something and have a laugh at my expense.

A dyed-in-the wool, air-cooled 911 junkie, Pablo Deferrari doesn't discriminate against other Porsches. He is fascinated by the company, the people behind these great machines and how every model's existence had unmistakable DNA from the model before it. The stories behind each car and how they all in some way saved Porsche from the brink of extinction every time are inspiring.

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