

The icons behind the icons

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Three of the Fantastic Four. From left, Wolfgang Möbius, Dick Söderberg, Tony Lapine and Hans Braun (Photo: Lapine Family)

Action figures ... that's it.

KISS had theirs, so did the A-Team; even a professor at the University of the Ozarks had a few of his academic

colleagues turned into chiseled plastic replicas. Porsche should have their version with a gang of four guys ripe for immortalization.

Autumn, 1971. Twirling pencils, naked vellum paper, fingernails chewed down to the pink parts; Dr. Ernst Fuhrmann had just come back to lead Porsche when he walked into the carnage. It was as if VW's new boss, Rudolf Leiding, burst into Porsche's studios, ripped up drawings, smashed models, and ordered every prototype crushed when he cancelled the Beetle's replacement, project EA266. With the inflation and OPEC thugs waiting just outside Zuffenhausen's gates, the timing seemed diabolical.

Then, from some faraway corner of the studio, the sound of T Rex's *Ride a White Swan* dueled with static inside a transistor radio. Something magical was about to happen. They didn't know it yet, but the designers and engineers inside Weissach's Development Studio were about start Porsche's second chapter. It'd be evolutionary, radical and innovative, promising to blast the company through the stratosphere.

Four superheroes were ready to pick up the snow globe and give it a good shake. Flakes of principles, theories, ideas and tradition needed to be woken up, momentarily suspended and settled back into new positions; it was the only way to go forward. Their job was to stir emotions, desire and lust, marrying the sculpted lines with the engineered. The form was to serve a far greater purpose than aesthetics; it redefined timelessness by way of purity.

Anatole "Tony" Lapine is *Kapitän Dynamo*, the lead superhero. Ferry Porsche and Ferdinand Piëch knew of his extraordinary powers when they spotted Tony threatening their Porsches at Hockenheimring with his Opel Rekord called "*Scwarze Witwe (Black Widow)*." They knew all about him, working under Bill Mitchell in GM's secret workshop called Studio X. This was their man who'd rejuvenate the 911 with the bellowed impact bumpered and blacked out chrome G-series, introduce Pascha to Porsche's interiors, and bring art into racing with the Gulf 908/3, Hippie and Pink Pig 917.



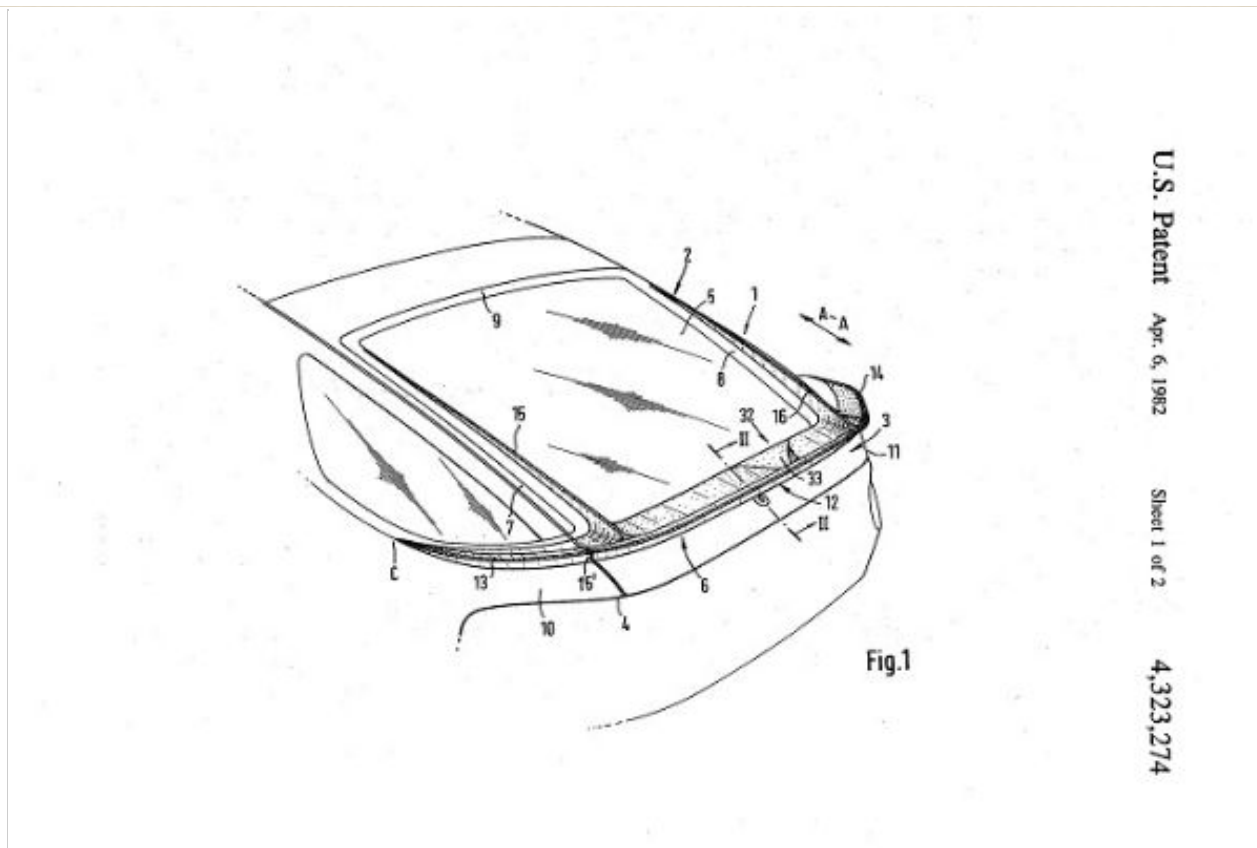
The Pink Pig, Tony Lapine's artwork for the 917. © (Image: Andrey Volkoff)

Here was their designer's mentor who'd nurture their talent while pushing them to think in the abstract despite the critics. He'd look out for his artists protecting them, ensuring they'd work in peace; he was their ambassador in the boardrooms. Lapine had it; put together with perfect portions of eccentricity, style, business savvy and bravado.

The boys at Porsche lured Tony into their studios in 1969, but he wouldn't come alone. Lapine brought five others with him from GM's Opel Studio the following year, three of them were superheroes.

Richard "Dick" Söderberg, *das Gespenst (the Ghost)*. Few knew of him, fewer still knew of the wizardry he performed. Elusive, mysterious, silent; Dick was the man behind the icons that defined Porsche.

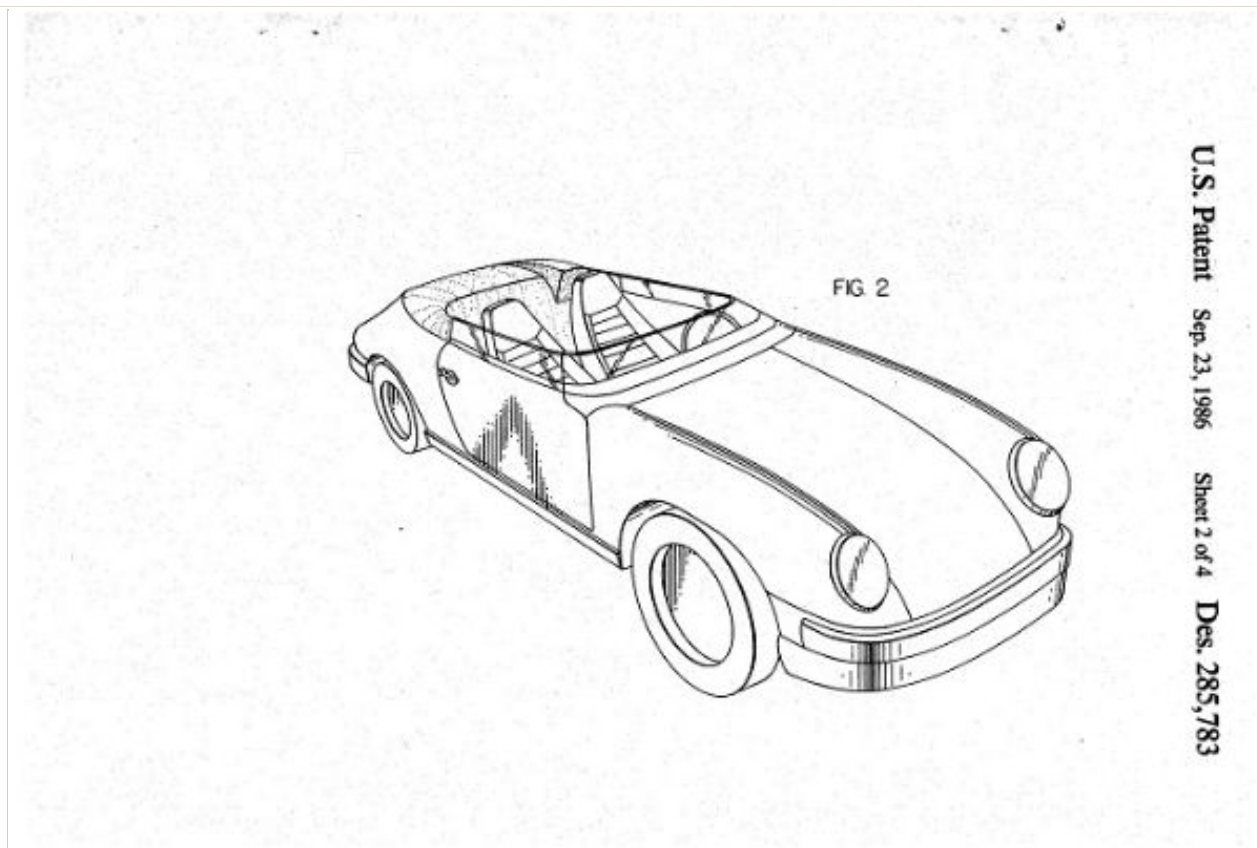
How could this be? Porsche icons on the race track, in museums and our garages without a clue of who their creator was? The legendary 935/78 *Moby Dick's* shape, the 959's swollen fenders, seamless rear spoiler and five-spoke wheels, and the 965 in collaboration with Tony Hatter were just a few examples of Dick's styling. His genius can be seen more commonly as a diffuser under the tails of 944 Turbos and S2s, taming the exiting air, and integrated 3-piece rear spoiler on the rumps of early 928 Ss; both of which he held patents on. He even helped the young Harm Lagaaij give his diamond-in-the-rough 924 some brilliant facets. Recognition he could do without, this quiet superhero believed that *Schweigen ist Gold*. Silence is golden.



1980-1985 928S rear spoiler design patent designed by Dick Söderberg. (Image: United States Patent and Trademark Office)

No. 3 of Porsche's Fantastic Four is Wolfgang Möbius; *Kommandant Kühl*. Möbius was Zuffenhausen's king of cool, the line between mystery and intrigue blurred by his cigarette smoke. He zapped 'em between the eyes with the 928's extraterrestrial shape ... and he was just getting warmed up.

Projector headlamps used on the the 1984 Porsche 942 (an extended 928 made for Ferry Porsche's 75th birthday) and the 984 (Porsche's PS roadster for the Spanish car company SEAT), the 911 Club Sport Speedster concept car, the Cup 2 wheel used on 993s, 968s, and 928GTSSs, co-designed the 996 GT3 and it's "taco" rear spoiler, a few 986 Boxster body panels and interior bits, all of which he holds/co-holds design patents for. A few of his touches are found on the 959, the 965 and 964 in collaboration with Söderberg, Anthony Hatter and Benjamin Dimson, respectively.



Wolfgang Möbius and Peter Reisinger's Porsche 911 Club Sport Speedster design patent. (Image: United States Patent and Trademark Office)

Peter Reisinger is the fourth superhero, he's known as *der Macher (the Maker)*. This man, Porsche's celebrity modeller, made things happen; the two-dimensional became three, the impossible, possible. Peter gave the sense of touch to Porsche's stylists when sight was all they had to go by.

The 924, 928, 911, 944, *Studies*, racers, concepts with no chance of ever pumping oil through their conceptual engines came to life in 1:4, 1:5, and 1:1 scale. Stylists like Möbius and Söderberg knew that a rendering could go no farther than to seduce the mind agitating the wickedness of hallucinations. Reisinger brought the idealists down to reality once the clay was sculpted over a buck proving what could be feasible to cheat the wind, correctly proportion and ultimately produce. When the bumpy bits were pounded out in full scale, the finished "mock-up" could go and drive enthusiasts to the edges of insanity at Frankfurt, Paris, and Earl's Court Auto Shows. Who could forget the debut of Porsche's 911 Turbo prototype in 1973 ... if they only knew how much of it was painted wood and trompe l'oeil.

Lapine, Möbius, Söderberg and Reisinger. They were the *Fantastic Four*, the icons of Porsche's Golden Age. Together, they created a new language for Porsche that has endured nearly half a century without a wrinkle to belie its age. Fanatics of the breed should know whose hand was behind the fender's crease on their 944, the 928's eyes, the tail of that GT3, and the colorful dresses that disarmed the lethality of the 917s. We've them thank for the shape that made us dream, lust for, and fall hard in love with.

Isn't time to finally put a name to the face staring at you from the garage?

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About the Author



A dyed-in-the wool, air-cooled 911 junkie, Pablo Deferrari doesn't discriminate against other Porsches. Want further proof? He's in love with Porsche's early water-cooled models and is dedicated to the celebration of the 924, 928, 944 and 968 series. Pablo is one car away from having all four of these models in his own collection: the 924.

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