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NORTHWEST AUTHENTICITY

Porsche 906-140 had a busy racing career in the Pacific Northwest before returning to Europe, still with some scars.

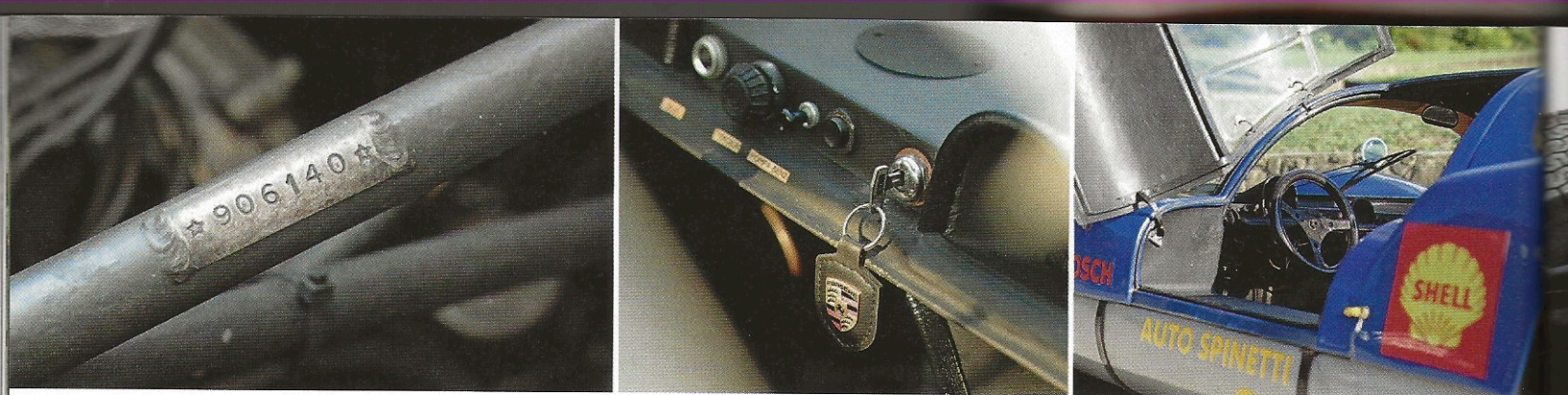
STORY BY ALEX BYLES
PHOTOS BY MARCO ANNUNZIATA



There have been many replicas, of course, but owning one of the original 50 out of Zuffenhausen is something special,” beams the current owner of this 906, chassis 140, as we look on in the sunshine.

Based in central Italy, Cristiano Spinetti has been the keeper of this 906, also known as a Carrera 6, since acquiring it in the 2000s. Born to race, it certainly looks authentic. It still carries cracks in its fiberglass bodywork, complete with crumpled sponsor decals, and shows the battle marks from the race track.

“We didn’t want to make the car look pristine,” says Spinetti, who is helped by his father, Alfredo, in maintaining the car. “906-140 was a competitive race car, and to us, it’s important that the blemishes it still carries today are retained, because they’re a reminder of what this car achieved and what it was designed to do.”



The development of the 906 itself drew heavily on the 1964-1965 904 Carrera GTS. After Porsche's withdrawal from Formula One following the 1962 campaign, its focus on GT racing began in earnest in 1964, with the 904 racking up results, including an overall win at the famous Targa Florio open road race. To build on this success, Porsche's racing division, then run by Ferdinand Porsche's grandson Ferdinand Piëch, focused on reducing weight and improving aerodynamic performance.

While the 904 utilized a mainly fiberglass body, the 906 pushed this further, replacing steel wherever possible. Instead of the less consistent bonded fiberglass technique, the 906 combined unstressed fiberglass with a tubular spaceframe chassis. Casing the engine in magnesium further contributed to the weight saving. All told, the new model was over 220 lbs lighter than its predecessor. Meanwhile, the car would cut through the air with even greater ease.

"You can see the influences of the wind tunnel," says Spinetti about the first Porsche to go through this process. "The low nose and curves are what you'd expect to see on an airplane."

Indeed, the 906's design shows that the influences of Piëch's aeronautical engineering education were never far away. Adding these advances to the new flat-six engine gave the 906 highly competitive performance. Its 2.0-liter six, based on the one found in the 911, could generate up to 210 hp.

On a global stage in 1966, the year of its debut, Porsche System Engineering-entered 906s came home in fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh at Le Mans. This included first in the P2.0 class with the pairing of Jo Siffert and Colin Davis, behind only the top three placings overall of that era's highly dominant and much more powerful Ford GT40s. In its very first race, the inaugural running of the 24 Hours of Daytona in 1966, the 906 had

already shown its class by coming in sixth overall and first in the P2.0 group.

Our feature car, 906-140, was the fortieth of 50 cars built. It rolled out of the factory in April 1966 and was delivered to Porsche distributor Pacific Cars Northwest in Beaverton, Oregon. The car was supplied directly to the Portland-based Earle Mayer-Chilles and his Rapido Inc. racing team, including local drivers Mike Fisher and Gary Wright, as explained by Jerry Pantis in his highly comprehensive book, "The Porsche 904, 906 & 910 in the Americas." Unlike today's livery, which you can see in the accompanying photographs, the car first competed in an all-white finish.

906-140's competitive career got underway in June 1966 at Portland International Raceway's Rose Cup. Sporting Gary Wright's number 356, the car was leading the race but was forced to abandon after its engine catastrophically failed. Strangely for its first-ever





Opposite: Carrera 6 chassis 906-140 enjoyed a variety of wins in the Northwest, notably at Westwood Pacific. The car is indeed streetable and even starts with the turn of a key. In original condition, 906-140 still includes sponsor stickers from the era—plus a few added later. “You can see the influences of wind tunnel testing,” says today’s owner of 906-140.

Above: This 906’s modified flat-six engine was originally fitted to a 911 and is good for 210 horsepower and 145 lb-ft of torque.

appearance and a car just three months old, the expiration was blamed on corrosion—not that the factory was likely to confirm this. Despite the weight-saving advantages of the lightweight magnesium engine case, the medium can’t have been chosen for its resistance to corrosion properties. Nevertheless, this was the beginning of the questions surrounding chassis #140’s engine.

By the end of that July, with today’s records unclear as to whether the flat-six had been repaired or entirely replaced at that stage, 906-140 came home eighth overall, third in the 2.0 class, at the Pacific Raceway’s leg of that year’s United States Road Racing Championship. This time the 906 was driven by part-time racer and full-time fighter pilot Mike Fisher, with the car wearing his number: 2.

Rapido Inc. gained further top 10 placings, primarily at other regional races, throughout that year and the next. Things went well until the car was wrecked in 1967, when Fisher crashed into a police car, of all things, at his home track in Portland. With heavy frontal damage, Mayer-Chilles decided on replacement rather than repair, opting to sell 906-140.

When Portland-based amateur racer Monte Shelton discovered 906-140 for sale in the days after, he realized the opportunity to acquire a cutting-edge race car at the relatively affordable price of \$5,000 (\$44,420 in 2022 dollars)—albeit with significant repair work required. Shelton was equipped for the task, running a dealership and repair shop, where he immediately set to work to get the car back on the track. The repair job included a respray in blue.

The earliest races gave success to Shelton, though creating damage anew in the process. Jerry Pantis explains that Shelton was encouraged to race at Westwood Pacific that September by Lew Florence. Florence, a fellow amateur racer and car dealer from Washington state, had also recently acquired a 906, serial #136, that had been brought into the region at the same time as 906-140. Shelton crashed in the first heat, taking much of the right front fender off with it, but he still managed to win the race overall.

That year and the next, Shelton enjoyed more success in 906-140, including another first place, again at Westwood, this time in the Pepsi Pro Invitational. He also competed a little further outside the



northwest region, taking 10th at Laguna Seca's inaugural Ken Miles Memorial. Miles himself had raced a 906 on America's West Coast in the car's first competitive year. The following year, Shelton also took the win at the 1968 Rose Cup, the same race in which the car had made its debut two years earlier, as well as first place at the Cotati SCCA National.

By 1969, however, Shelton had sold on 906-140. Over the next 15 years, it passed through the hands of several owners, moving from California to Florida. The car remained in its very functional but cosmetically worn state. In 1987, 906-140 was ready for its return to the European continent, as it was sold to collector Fabrizio Violati of Misano, Italy.

Returning to the mystery of the engine, during the later 1980s, while still in the U.S., Jerry Pantis says that the car was equipped with the engine from 906-128 (which subsequently went on to find a home in 906-158). Upon its arrival back on the European continent, #140 had its original transaxle, but it was connected to a modified engine that had originally left the factory in a 911. It was in this condition when purchased by Alfredo Spinetti.



1966 Carrea 6 (#906-140)

Drive	Rear-wheel drive
Layout	Mid-engine
Wheelbase	90.6 inches
Engine	2.0-liter flat-six
Transmission	5-speed manual
Horsepower	210 hp
Torque	145 lb-ft
Weight	1,433 lbs
Pounds Per HP	6.8 lbs/hp
0-60 mph	4.3 seconds
Top Speed	169 mph

What drew the father and son duo to 906-140 in the first place?

"It's a design that is highly evocative of the new era of GT racing cars that began to emerge in the mid-to-late '60s," says Cristiano Spinetti. "It was light, it was fast, it had superb aerodynamics, and it had a body shape so reminiscent of that generation; the curves, low height, and those high arches. The fact that it was road legal—though, in reality, it was a pure

race car—also meant an opportunity to use it on real roads!"

Today, the car retains the blue-grey color scheme that Monte Shelton adorned the car with back in 1968. Incredibly authentic, the car still even has the sponsor's stickers from the era, plus some added later, like the Tag Heuer decal. One other more significant alteration that remains was the modification to the gullwing door, reinforced to prevent them from flying open when cornering. That's especially important when the Spinettis take it to compete in events like the Castell' Arquato-Vernasca (the Vernasca Silver Flag) hill climb in Piacenza, Italy. The remainder of the car, save for the engine, remains original, even down to the plexiglass covering the engine bay.

"It was, and still is, a racing car," Spinetti enthuses. "We didn't want to change anything about it, even the minor imperfections, because these show its spirit. The fact that we have the privilege of being able to drive this real racing car on the street or the track," he concludes, "is something very special." ■