

A 1964 356 RACE CAR BECOMES  
JAKE RABY'S BLANK CANVAS.

STORY & PHOTOS BY **BOB CHAPMAN**

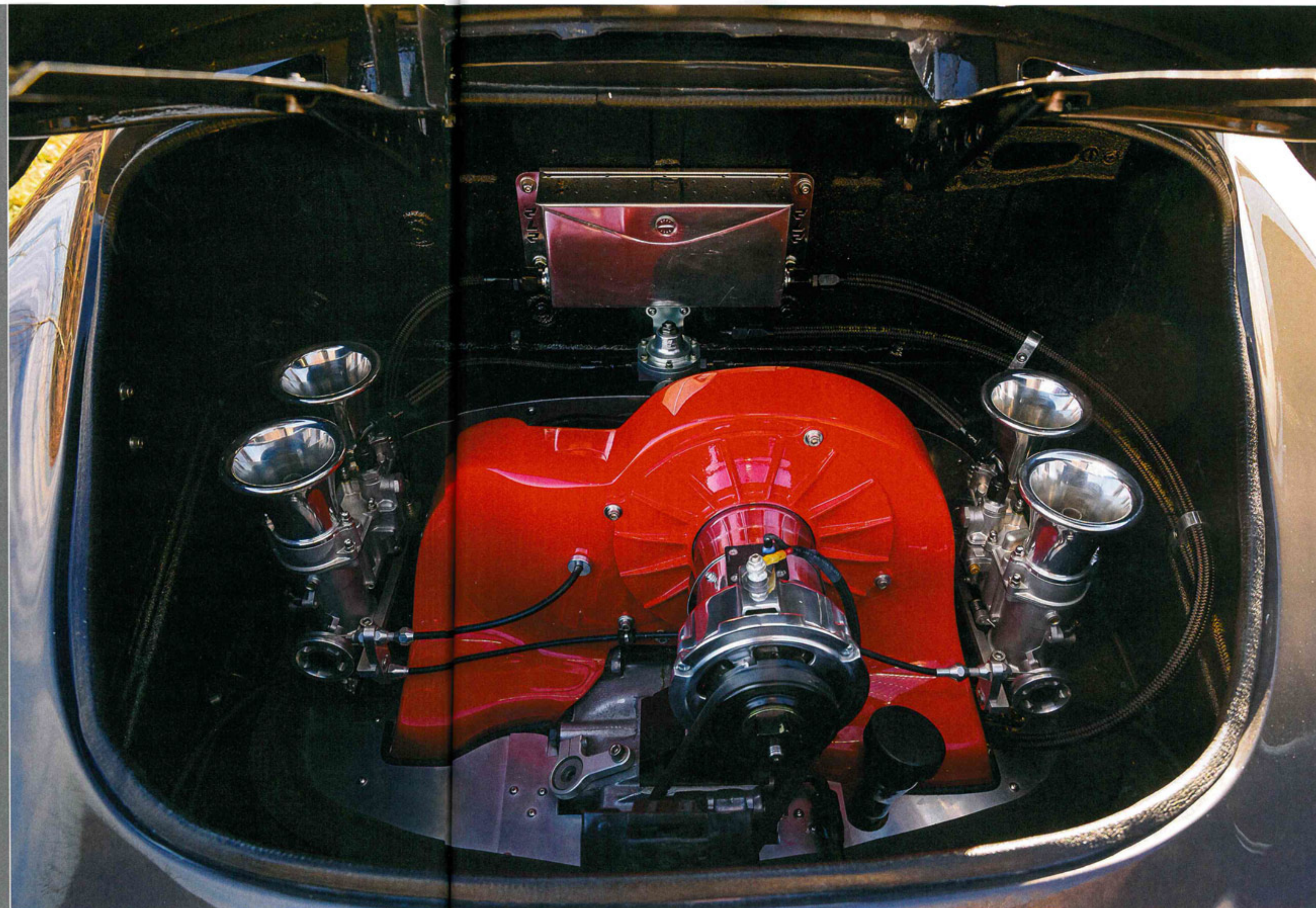
# GRAY AREAS





## All the leaves are down,

and the car is gray. It's a frosty afternoon in the North Georgia mountains, and I'm humming The Mamas & the Papas' "California Dreamin'" to modified lyrics while I stave off shivers, desperately trying to hold the camera still. Temps in the mid-20s on a blustery midweek day haven't dissuaded a steady stream of onlookers curious about what they're seeing on this remote GA 348 turnout. "That's really cool! What is it?" asks one passerby from the open window of his pickup. "Is that a Ferrari?" asks another. "It's a Porsche, actually. A 1964 356," answers Jake Raby, the car's smiling owner.



"That's what I love. This car makes people scratch their heads," Raby later explains, adding mention of his predilection for interloping at domestic hot rod shows, where even some "car people" have no idea what it is. And of Porsche purists, he admits, "Some of them look at it and ask, 'Why the heck did you do that?' The answer is, well, because I wanted to do that. I want this car to explore gray areas."

**RABY MAY ALREADY** be familiar to *Panorama* readers. In the late '90s, he founded Raby's Aircooled Technology, focused on building 914-based conversion engines for air-cooled Porsches and Volkswagens. Several years later, as the number of water-cooled Porsches grew, Raby added a second company, Flat 6 Innovations. Partnered with LN Engineering, Raby co-developed Nickies cylinders for air- and water-cooled boxers. In fact, the

914-based 2.6-liter four installed in this 356 was the test bed for the first LN Engineering Nikasil cylinders.

Raby built the engine in 1999, but it wasn't until 2010 that he acquired the car that now contains it. By then, the 356 had been sitting in a warehouse for several years, following more than 40 years of track competition. Yes, you read that correctly. More than 40 (!) years. The previous owner campaigned it in SCCA, PCA, and

(later) historic racing events from the time it was almost new. "In '65 or '66, he started racing it. I still have the roll bar that has a bunch of the entry decals on it, and it was in the very first Walter Mitty," says Raby, noting one of America's oldest vintage race weekends, an event that dates to 1977.

When Raby first collected the car, there were 101,600 miles on the odometer—and as far as is known, virtually





all of those miles came on the track. “No title had ever been registered to the vehicle when I first registered it for street use,” he says, explaining it was last raced three years before he acquired it. “There’s a final decal from ’07 on the roll cage.” Raby has added a scant 1,600 miles to the tally since the car has been in his possession, but that doesn’t mean the Porsche hasn’t kept him plenty busy.

The decades spent exclusively on the track had taken a significant toll. Even though it sat in a shop whenever away from the track and was therefore completely rust free, every corner of the car had been beaten up and

tampered with at some point. This, though, removed any pangs of guilt Raby might have experienced. Because the Porsche had been the subject of 40-plus years of tireless tinkering, beating, and rehab, he felt no need to fret about maintaining any fresh-from-the-factory authenticity. The canvas was his to paint. And paint is where he started. The car’s original Light Ivory color was ditched in favor of the shade of gray used on the then-newest iteration of the 997 GT3 RS, Porsche color code 7A1. With Raby eyeing his newest acquisition as a rolling testbed for his products and new technologies, this color choice symbolized a marriage of old to new.

It’s interesting to note that until he stripped the Light Ivory from the body, he wasn’t even aware that the original owner had widened the rear fenders one inch on each side. “He did it so well, you don’t even notice. If you compare it to a stock 356C, you can tell. But you have to park them next to each other,” Raby says. Given the car’s previous purpose, the necessity for such modification was more pronounced than its implementation; the wheel well’s stock dimensions simply wouldn’t permit sufficiently wide race rubber. Such form-follows-function remedies drove Raby’s desire to remain true to the car’s roots, to respect four decades of sweat invested.

“The previous owner had learned from his track experience and made a lot of mods and custom pieces that I decided to keep in place, in order to keep true to the spirit of the car,” Raby explains. Custom suspension pieces had been fashioned through the years for anti-sway and for camber control, so he left the suspension intact, even down to ride height, camber, and toe settings. Other details, owing to the car’s racing provenance, also remained. Among these, a Nardi steering wheel (“I even left the red tape on it, to show center line”), and an exterior master battery cutoff switch. Both these provide subtle clues to the 356’s competitive history.

**An aggressive stance from its racing days makes this 356 appear to fly, even when sitting still. The 227 hp and 235 lb-ft of torque make it impossible to keep it sitting still.**