

ANALOGUE LOVE

The attraction of a restomod 911? It has to be the chance to create something purely personal, as brilliantly demonstrated by Martyn Luke's 993-based Retro Works GTR 3.8...

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Another day, another 911-based restomod, hot rod, retromod or backdate. Call them what you will. Of course, Porsches aren't the only cars subjected to personalisation, but you could be forgiven for thinking so, such is the prevalence of altered air-cooled classics. Why, then, does the 911 lend itself so well? Well, think cult appeal, motorsport heritage, Porsche's own mix-and-match parts bin, not to mention a healthy aftermarket of tuning and styling components. Plus, of course, a ready supply of donor cars, thanks to the 911's sixty-year production run.

That said, the early, mainly pre-1974 cars are now considered sacrosanct when it comes to modifying. They are already uber-classic and carry financial value very likely wiped out if they went under the knife. The sweet spot is with the later impact bumper cars and beyond. The 964 model in particular has become a firm favourite, although more recently, the 993-generation 911 – which has the distinction of being the last of Porsche's air-cooled cars – has been gaining traction with the restomod crew. Think of the 993 as the ultimate development of the original 911 concept, with arguably the best air-cooled engine (including the VarioRam variant), a six-speed gearbox, multi-link rear suspension and power steering. Also, good examples are, so it seems, more abundant than decent 964s, primarily

because they've been better looked after, such is the cachet of the 993.

Representing the 964/993 restomod crew and concept is Yorkshire-based Retro Works, a company under the expert eye of founder, Rick Findlow. Not that we're in Yorkshire today. No, we've become southern softies – we've landed in Harpenden, just outside the M25, to meet and greet one of the latest Retro Works builds and its proud pilot, Martyn Luke. A serial Porsche owner, he has worked his way through a 981 Cayman S, 991 Carrera S and a PDK-equipped 991 GTS. He's currently using a second-generation 991 GTS with manual transmission as his daily, a car bolstered with modifications from Litchfield Motors, pushing power to near 530bhp. Martyn has also binged on a couple of Lotus Exiges (410 and LF1 special edition). Clearly, he's a discerning sports car enthusiast.

We encounter a relatively high number of Porsche owners who also have a Lotus in their garage. *911 & Porsche World* contributor, Nick Found, is a case in point – his 997 Carrera S is stablemates with an Elise. There's a definite connect between those who 'get' Porsche and those who 'get' Lotus. Indeed, it's hard to think of two more passionate tribes.

Regarding the Exige, Martyn drills into the appeal. "These cars have a very light, analogue feel. They're fantastic on track and inspire huge confidence in their drivers." *Analogue* is the operative word when explaining Martyn's restomod itch.

"Modern Porsches are excellent, but you definitely lose something in feel behind the wheel," he reasons. "This is why I was attracted to the idea of owning a backdated, restomodded, air-cooled 911."

Compared to Singer Vehicle Design, Gunther Werks and concerns of similar ilk reimagining classic Porsches, Retro Works flies very much under the radar. There's no secrecy surrounding Rick's work, you understand, but he's not one to shout about it. Even so, word spreads – Martyn's car is the clearly-not-unlucky build number thirteen. Want one? You should get in there quick because Rick's order book is full into 2025.

A bit of company background is in order. Rick didn't set out to build hot rod 911s, but then equally, it didn't just happen by accident. Back in the mid-2000s, when the Porsche market was a rather different place, he was a

Above Retro Works has forged an enviable reputation as the UK's go-to 964 and 993 customisation firm

Below Every aspect of a Retro Works GTR is treated with exquisite attention to detail





Above Interior is wonderfully executed and features PCCM

Below You'll hear it before you see it!

clock for an RSR-style look. Put simply, in terms of 993 backdating, Rick and his design partner, Dave Gawthorpe, are pioneers. Unlike the earlier G-series 911s, where panels are pretty interchangeable for the RS or RSR look, there are no off-the-shelf solutions for the 993. This obviously presents a challenge, but the Retro Works duo consider it worth tackling, given the mechanical benefits offered by the 993 platform.

Dave is a graduate of Automotive Design at Coventry University. For Retro Works, he redesigned the 993's bodywork, front and back. The obviously changed panels are the front wings, bonnet, front apron, the rear quarters and the sills, which are of composite

construction and structurally very rigid. Importantly, they attach per the original panels. In some respects, this is the easy bit – there are major differences between the front and rear of a 993,

From there, the redesigned front apron can be fitted.

It's a similar story at the rear. The more modern 993 has a lot more going on and therefore more to accommodate than a 964 or older 911. Again, structural changes are required for the rear apron and engine lid. The inner wings also have to be re-worked in order

SPENT COMBUSTION ESCAPES VIA A CUSTOM-MADE CARGRAPHIC N/GT EXHAUST SYSTEM WITH SPORTS CATALYSTS

certainly in terms of height and structure. Additionally, the 'frunk' is a good deal shorter on a 993 than what came before. That said, whether you ask Retro Works to use a 964 or 993 as the starting point for your bespoke 911, either model will have to be reworked to accommodate the traditional long bonnet and slam panel required for the pre-1974 look.

to take the new panels. The result is suitably different to other reimagined 911s on the market, particularly in the way the Retro Works 993's wide arches integrate with the front and rear aprons, as well as the sills. It's all very pleasingly cohesive.

Naturally, before all this can happen, the donor 911 has to be stripped. Any parts to be re-used are refurbished, but in truth, not much makes it back into the build, particularly when it comes to brakes and suspension. Retro Works specifies H&R adjustable coilovers, suitably configured for UK road compliance. Wheels are seventeen-inch Fuchs replicas built with the correct offsets, rather than relying on the crude solution of spacers. The effect is stunning, giving the host 911 a period perfect, deep-dish look. All Retro Works cars are equipped with Michelin Pilot Sport 4 tyres (235/45 ZR17 at the front and special order 275/40 ZR17 at the rear). Meanwhile, new Brembo discs, rebuilt callipers and all new brake lines

world-class athlete and found himself training in mainland Europe, leading him to import interesting left-hookers into the UK. Think 968 Club Sports, BMW E30 M3s and Lancia Delta Integrales. Back then, of course, prices were within the grasp of the many, rather than the few.

PORSCHE PENCHANT

Of all the cars he was dealing in, Porsches were Rick's thing. By his own admission, he peaked with the acquisition of a couple of 993 Turbos. Again, these cars were once feasible for mere mortals, but even so, where do you go when you've effectively been to the top? "Backdating was very much the thing," he recalls. "I wanted a more basic 911. Classic, but with good usability. I built my first such Porsche in 2008. It was a Carrera RS 2.7 replica based on a Carrera 3.2. I sold it to a guy from New Zealand, who was working in London. He bought the car pretty much on specification alone." And so, the Retro Works story began. Further backdates were built, but very quickly, customers started demanding more in the way of specification. Consequently, each successive Retro Works 911 became more bespoke – stripped-out RS lookalikes became rather more usable, practical and desirable.

There was a donor car tipping point not exclusive to Singer Vehicle Design – impact bumper G-series cars were perfect for RS replicas because, essentially, they shared much with the iconic model. It should be noted, Retro Works is still very much involved in this end of the market. In terms of creating something altogether different and even more usable, practical and desirable, however, attention inevitably turned to the later 964- and 993-generation 911s and the advances they brought with them, such as improved engines, gearboxes, power steering and, in many cases, air-conditioning.

A pre-pandemic encounter with a Retro Works 930 demonstrator (and a blast to Goodwood in the turbocharged machine) was enough for Martyn to commission Rick to build him a bespoke 911. Unfortunately, when Martyn pulled the trigger in January 2021, he was told demand for Retro Works cars meant the firm wouldn't be unable to accommodate his request for the foreseeable future. Four months later, however, Rick got in touch with a solution. "I actually took on Rick's personal project," Martyn beams. "It had got to the point of completed bodywork and paint, and though you'd expect Retro Works customers to pick their preferred body colour, I was very

happy with Rick's selection of Starlight Blue, which is an old Volkswagen option."

Equally attractive was the 993 base. If you're going for an air-cooled 911, the 993 is the ultimate, after all. The donor was a Carrera, which is the most analogue (that word again) of the 993 range and best lends itself to a Retro Works conversion. And, despite the metalwork being already painted, Martyn still had a largely blank canvas to work with, taking into account the interior and many of the car's finer cosmetic points.

Before we look at Martyn's car in detail, it's worth examining how Retro Works takes a 993 and winds back the

Above Martyn was initially warned of Retro Works' long waiting list, but company founder, Rick, offered up his own 993 GTR build to soften the blow





Above Martyn is thrilled with his GTR which is finished in a seldom seen Volkswagen blue

Facing page Thoroughly rebuilt engine is now a 3.8 and makes use of FVD custom cams

Below Portrait by Jean-Yves Tabourot

ensure stopping power capable of keeping up with any amount of go.

This brings us neatly to the engine. Being 993-based, a Retro Works build of this nature (badged GTR) presents the option of the standard 272bhp 3.6-litre flat-six or the later 285bhp VarloRam unit (offering the same displacement). Like most of Rick's customers, however, Martyn decided to 'go large' with a bespoke 3.8-litre unit.

DREAM TEAM

Retro Works used to build its own engines, but now an alliance with local air-cooled experts, Strasse, and not quite so down-the-road FVD Brombacher (located in Umkirch,

Germany), has created an even more robust powerplant. Built from the crank case up, the unit's capacity comes from Mahle 3.8 pistons and liners, while FVD sports camshafts spin up titanium valve springs and lightweight valves, with spent combustion escaping via a custom-made Cargraphic N/GT exhaust system with sports catalysis. Impressive AT Power 45mm individual throttle bodies topped with aluminium velocity stacks and trumpets work with a standalone Emerald 3D K6 ECU to manage fuelling, with mapping taken care of by Porsche tuning guru, Wayne Schofield, at Chipwizards in Bolton.

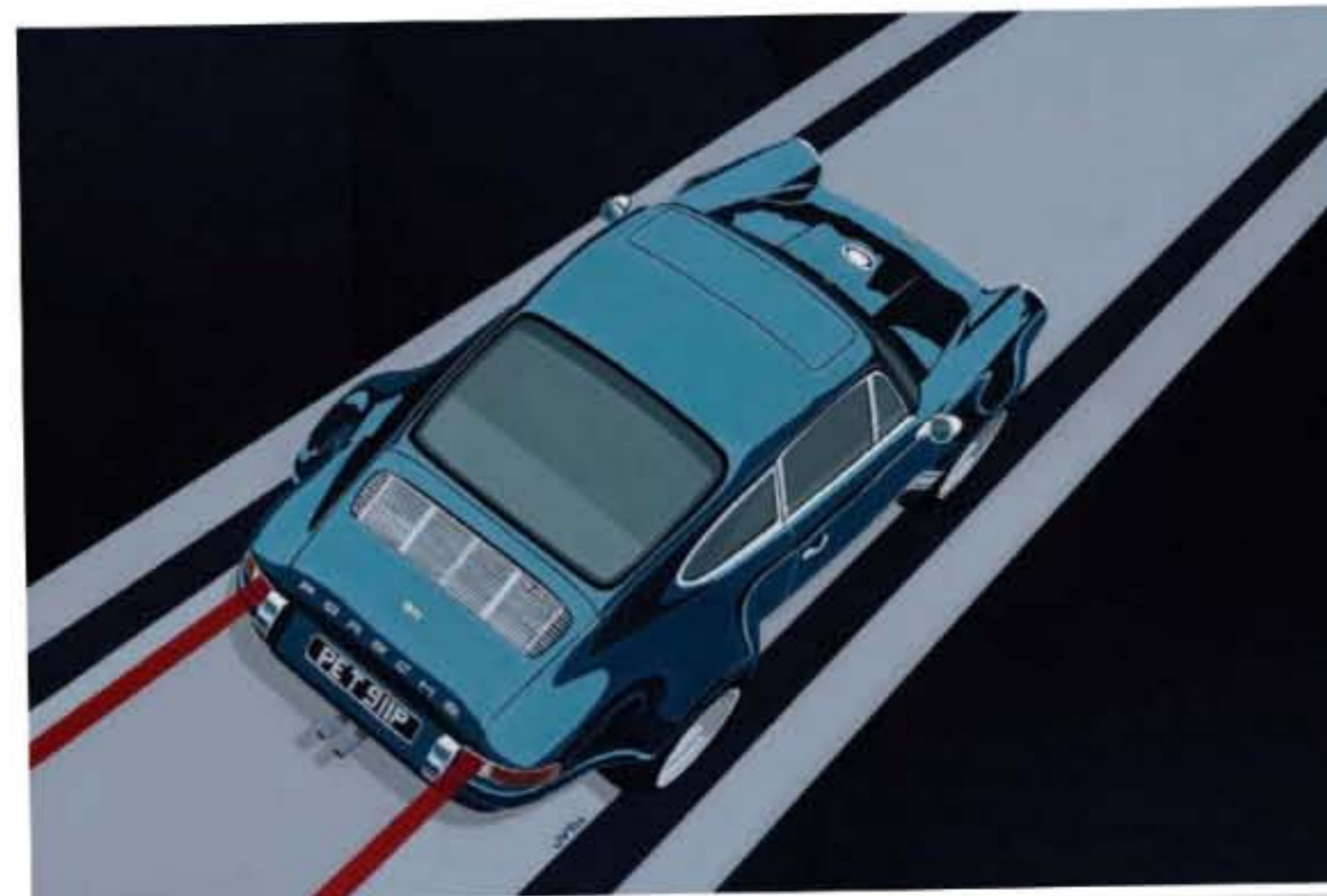
The result of all this careful build and matching of components is a

healthy 330bhp with a mix of revs and the promise of big-capacity torque. Another benefit of using the 993 as donor is the six-speed transaxle gearbox supplied as standard equipment.

Bodywork and mechanicals sorted, it's time for the jewellery. The centrally mounted aero fuel filler is an iconic racing touch – chrome and polished aluminium brightwork is a nod to the RSR era, as are the Durant mirrors, while drilled door handles shout 'lightweight'. We would count rear deck options as décor too, so choose between a full ducktail, an active wing with a slight kick to it, or no wing at all, leaving a plain or slatted grille, as seen here.

Turning night into day was never the standard 993's strong point, hence the Hella LED headlights on Martyn's car. They're a must and are complemented by LED indicators and sidelights. As you'd expect, none of this specification is set in stone, which is where a Retro Works customer can really introduce their personality to one of the firm's redeveloped Porsches, though it's true to say most of Rick's clients stick with traditional styling cues.

There is more room for expression with the interior, with endless combinations of trim and colour options available. Dashboards get the early 911 look, with leather weave insert. Door trims and furniture are bespoke, while seats are classic in style, but modern in terms of functionality. Air-conditioning – even if standard on the donor 911 – is served chilled via Classic Retrofit's very efficient electric cabin cooling system.





The MOMO Prototipo is the de facto steering wheel for 911 restomods, though in Martyn's car, the iconic drilled three-spoke is trimmed in Alcantara with red stitching, the latter a feature throughout the cabin. A Porsche Classic Communication Management (PCCM) head unit sits neatly in the centre of the dash, bringing twenty-first century functionality without the bling.

Meanwhile, under the front hood, leather padded trim covers the fuel tank. Carpet adds a touch of luxury. Not so at the rear, where the engine is prominently on display, dominated by the induction trumpets, which you can't fail to notice are silenced by nothing more than gauze filters. We're not going to be so rude as to ask Martyn what this build set him back, but we can quote Rick at Retro Works, who stands by an average cost of £150,000 per project, including donor car. Some will spit their coffee out at this sum, but if you're experienced in the world of the 911 resto-mod-rod, then you'll note that's a very agreeable sum, made possible by the Retro Works team's pragmatic approach to materials – carbon-fibre bodyshells are all well and good, and they might be reassuringly expensive, but they're best left to Singer and Gunther Werks projects commanding ten times the price. Oh, and if you're still of the opinion £150,000 is steep for a bespoke 911, then bear in mind much of the cost is attributed to

the sheer manhours invested in such an endeavour.

The proof of the Porsche is in the driving. Generously, Martyn has invited us to take his 911 for a spin. In terms of perceived image, what we have here is a homage (or evocation) of the wide-bodied 1973 911 RSR homologated road racer, also known as an animal, an assault on the senses, violently loud, heavy to helm, demanding to drive and only happy flat-out. The Retro Works GTR is not like this. Indeed, a large part of the restomod vibe is that it doesn't have to be like that. That's not to say Martyn's car is all show and no go. Quite the contrary. Its 330bhp does exactly what it says on the tin, and despite the open trumpets, the soundtrack is on the mellow side of wild, unlike a banshee RSR 2.8 on open pipes.

Modern mapping makes the car super-tractable, mixing mid-range pulling power with top-end bite. The best of both worlds, and exactly what you want from a road engine. Complementing this is the 993's Getrag G50 six-speed gearbox and hydraulic clutch, as opposed to the reluctant, old-school Type 915 and its springy cable.

You need forearms like Popeye for the real deal, while the 993's power steering makes light work of the fat fronts, but not at the expense of feel. And 'feel' is what Martyn's car has in abundance. It is, after all, an air-cooled 911, but one

with all the benefits of thirty-two years of development and the more sophisticated underpinnings of the 993 chassis, which you can really feel, particularly in the way the multi-link suspension has iron-fist control of the rear-engined mass, unlike the earlier 911 torsion bar setup. Martyn's car works with the road, rather than fighting back. You can settle in, relax at the wheel and guide, rather than fight and cajole. In short, this Retro Works chassis is just how a 911 should be.

So, then. Another day, another restomod? Yes, but let's be honest: they're all different in their own way. Each owner brings something new to the party, not least further inspiration to fuel the passion of others. And with that, Martyn appears to want his keys back... ●

Above Martyn's car blends the best of classic Porsche motorsport styling with all the sophistication the last air-cooled 911 offered

