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YOUNG AT HEART

When you're backdating a 911 you want to kick off with the most recent incarnation possible, right? So, Yorkshire's 911 Retro Works use 993s as their base cars for the transformation, and we get to drive a couple over the moors

'I look pretty good but I'm just backdated, yeah!' Thanks to arch mod rockers The Who, it was OK to go back in time, even in 1966. Does that make these 993-based super throwback 911s 'substitutes' for the real thing? Bear with.

Backdated 911s are usually based on early impact-bumper chassis or, for a higher-end job, on 964s. To turn a perfectly decent 993 into a 2.8 RSR lookalike, say, requires a deeper level of devotion. It's all about the imagery. The bulging wheelarches of the RSR set it apart from the slimline 2.7 RS, the one that most copycats aim for. In the case of our hosts, backdating specialists 911 Retro Works, it's equally about the underpinnings. And that explains why they've elected to go the whole hog and use the most up-to-date air-cooled chassis and running gear available: roll up the 993 GTR.

We're over on t'moors, me and snapper Fraser, having motored up Holme Moss from 911 Retro Works' base near Huddersfield with key operatives Rick and Dave in their very latest 993-based retro 911s. They certainly present the muscular and aggressive stance reminiscent of the 1972 RSR – the cars,

that is – though historical details such as Ducktail engine lid have not replaced the 993's electric rear wing. The grey car is their first 993 backdate and is the "show car", while the Signal Yellow one has been built for a customer – Graham Kershaw – who's owned a 993 Targa for some years but keen to see the concept reworked with period styling.

The question you're gagging to ask is, why the 993? We're familiar with people backdating 3.2 Carreras and SCs to resemble 2.7 RSs, and no 964 is safe from the global tentacles of the Singer acquisition offensive. 'It's simply the drivability of them,' says Graham (a *911&PW* reader), who's joined us for the shoot, as well as having a first go in his new car. 'They deliver the power better, and they're much more finished off than a 964.'

911 Retro Works have been down that road, too. The company was founded in 2008 by Rick Findlow, joined soon afterwards by Dave Gawthorpe. Formerly a world class athlete, Rick built his first backdated car in 2006. 'I fancied something a little bit more classic but retaining some usability and performance. At the time my daily driver was a 993 Turbo, so a relatively high-performance car. But there's something appealing about a more basic car, so I



backdated a 3.2 Carrera. Dave and I just bought panels like everyone else, bolted them on and it was fine, but quite quickly people were saying, “can you do one for me?” and it took off.’ They didn’t start off with the idea of creating a backdating business, but within a short time their order book was full and it became quite serious. ‘We quickly realised that all the parts we

tutor was Aerial Atom designer Simon Saunders, Dave was impeccably qualified to draw and create the flared wing panels from which he would fabricate the RSR-style bloated wings. His forte is shaping and building things. ‘Nowadays everyone uses computer design, but I’m a hands-on old-fashioned crafts person. Over the years we’ve done some narrow bodies and some

Meanwhile, their catalogue offered a range of 911 retrospectives, including the STR, an outlaw bearing hallmarks of the ST; the GTR and GTR Targa, similar in appearance to our subject duo, though built on 964 donor cars; and the 50th Anniversary Special, a particularly clean-cut take on the 964. The inventory is now augmented by the 993 GTR.

Rick had the 993 concept in mind from early on because he liked the way it drove, as well as its reliability and day-to-day practicality. ‘I looked at what other companies were doing, and I could see that Singer started with a 964 and they put on 993 wipers and 993 transmission, so I thought, “why don’t we just start with a 993 and have done with it?” The newer the technology we can use, the better the end result. Because what you’re getting at the end of the day is the very last of the aircooled 911s, but finished with the archetypal classic look. It’s the purest look, the one that’s most pleasing to the eye for the majority of enthusiasts. As far as we know we’re the only people in England

The influences are obvious, but what isn’t so obvious is the starting point. Most would say 964, but things like the placement of the windscreen wipers say 993

“ Nobody else has done this, so we’re pioneering a little bit ”

were buying in were more like track-day or motorsport quality; the panels weren’t even uniform, never mind straight, so we decided early on that we would make our own panels and parts and produce a quality car, rather than just bolt stuff on.’

A graduate of the Automotive Design course at Coventry University, where his

wide bodies, probably twelve 964s in total, before moving on to 993s. When we set out with the 993 project, we thought, “nobody else does this,” so we were pioneering a little bit. The 993 is the most difficult of the later 911s to backdate because all the panels are different, and the chassis gets in the way in certain areas.’

Certainly there are Singer influences here, and there’s only so many ways to skin a cat when it comes to a retro Porsche interior. Regardless of that, the quality is where it needs to be





using the 993 like this. Though why Singer didn't base their car on a 993 I'm not sure, because the suspension geometry is a lot better than the 964.'

It took Rick and Dave about 18-months to get the design right and the parts made. They recognised that the 993 offered even greater potential for a sophisticated

that we're working on the basis of a 993, rather than a 964, and that's how Graham (Kershaw) came to buy his car. We ended up changing his car mid-build because he wanted air-con and the grey car didn't have that. I sourced the donor car for all the 993s we've backdated, though it doesn't have to be that way round: sometimes a client

“ We don't use any wrecks. The car will be good quality to start with ”

retrospective, with its more modern suspension and running gear, though they were not oblivious to the inherent problems that would cause. Rick describes the process and methodology: 'If somebody came to see us and said they were interested in our GTR body style I'd hint

might have had a car five years and is thinking of transforming it into something a bit different.' Rick then spends a fortnight driving the base car around to get a good feel of it, to be sure they're not going to make any unwelcome discoveries at the end of the build. This procedure also

highlights mechanical aspects that need remedial action in the course of the build, such as fitting a new servo on the clutch. Apart from having the classic panels, the customer can choose to keep or delete the sunroof, whether to have a flat engine-lid, a Ducktail, or retain the 993's elevating spoiler system, as well as specifying details such as the drilled door handles and particular mirror style, colour-coded fan cover, calipers and rev-counter. 'There are lots of aspects of a 993 that are not like an early '70s 911, but I didn't want to get rid of things that are beneficial, so I kept the 993 wipers. But then we've gone back to old door frames which aren't too detrimental. The 993 headlights were poor by modern standards, let alone the '70s, so we've fitted LED headlights from the States, and we're using LED rear lights and indicator lights as well.'

The donor car has to be in excellent condition in the first place – which, happily, applies to the majority of 993s. 'We don't

The Retro Works team. On the left Dave Gawthorpe and on the right, Rick Findlow

Retro Works is leading the way when it comes to taking a 993 and giving it the retro look



This is what you want to see in the back of your backdated 911, a 993 motor, the ultimate evolution of the air-cooled engine. Retro Works use FVD 3.8-litre engine kits, to give 335bhp

use any wrecks,' affirms Dave. 'The car will be as good quality as possible, and preferably low mileage, so they'll be a lovely car before we get them.' I contend that it's still surprising that a customer would deign to cannibalise a 993, which is a valuable and desirable car in its own right. 'That's the strange thing about the classic market, isn't it, as to how valuable the cars are from 1972, even though in this case it's a replica. But still, the money follows them, and it's quite astounding really.'

There's no standing on ceremony. Once the donor 993 is in the workshop it is completely dismantled. 'We lift all the interior out, get the engine out, the suspension off; there's not a lot that we don't touch.' The front wing panels unbolt, and the rears are removed by cutting off the spot welds and gently easing them off. There are fundamental differences between the heights and contours of the front and rear slam panels, too: the front of a 993 is higher, as it is in the engine bay. And on a 993 the bonnet-line sits halfway between the headlights, whereas on a long-bonnet car the bonnet closure lies at the bottom of

the headlights. As for the welding and structural changes, the front inner wings, front panel and boot floor are all adjusted so they can fit the classic panels and original long bonnet. All the new wing panels are in epoxy resin with marine-grade gel coat construction so they don't flex. Not to put too fine a point on it, they are rigid. And thick. The rear quarter is integrated where the panels normally would be attached, and the original doors, roof and scuttle are all that's left of the donor 993. Then begins the laborious process of fabricating and fitting the new bodywork to achieve a perfect finish. Once that's done, the details can be taken care of – not forgetting the mechanical work as well, with engineer Dave Benson handling the lion's share.

Having previously rebuilt engines in-house, they now farm them out to air-cooled specialist Dave Sunderland at nearby Strasse in Leeds, so all three 993-based cars have had their engines done at Strasse. 'Spec wise, we've gone for a complete rebuild, right down to the bare crankcase and rebuilt from there upwards,

all new bearings, with 3.8 barrels and pistons. We use a package sourced from FVD in Germany, where they've got a wealth of experience and a package designed for our car with the 3.8-litre conversion, sports camshaft, springs and FVD software to match the engine modifications and the exhaust, fully optimised, though staying with the standard ECU.' To be precise, it is FVD's tuning kit 4, which lifts the power of a later Varioram 993 like our test cars to 335bhp.

The exhaust is supplied by Cargraphic in Landau, Germany. 'Thomas Schnarr put us in touch with his guys in the UK and we sent the grey car down and they made everything to fit, including 100-cell sports cat and silencer with the vacuum flap valve to open it up. The quality is really nice, it sounds good – it's expensive, but it's a no compromise car.'

Yep, no expense spared on the wheels and the trad imagery either. They're Fuchs replicas on both cars, each wearing Michelin Pilot Sport 4s, which are 235/45 ZR17 on the front and 275/40 ZR 17s on the back. 'They're made in Germany by a





firm who take the Fuchs centres and fit them to inner and outer rims to our offset, so they fit the body perfectly.'

As Ant ponders the location, I contemplate the cabin of the grey car. The attention to detail and finish is pretty amazing, with retro aluminium gear-knob, aluminium handbrake lever, aluminium pedals and foot-rest, plus leather-rimmed

dashboard matches the seat upholstery, which also clads the doors and extends into the two rear chairs, so the weave goes right round the back of the cabin rear above the rear arm rests. They've installed a sophisticated audio system, but it's all hidden, with speakers mounted under the leather of the parcel shelf, sub in the footwell, and amplifier under the seats. The

to insert the hose into the orifice.

Yellow GTR owner Graham joins us on the shoot. He has a lifetime's history with Porsches: 'ever since I was a kid when I had a toy one, and as an adult I've driven a lot, and especially my 993 Targa which I drive to our place in the Alps. When I first spoke to Rick about doing a backdate he was using 964s, but I fancied doing a 993 because the suspension was that much more sophisticated. I love that early 911-912 nose, and that's what I wanted the front of it to look like.' It's a bespoke car, in fact. The upholstery is different in the yellow car, with carbon effects and no centre console to further the minimalist classic look. The leather upholstery also has the hand-woven effect with yellow stitching and yellow visible in the roundels inset in the squabs. The matching yellow rev-counter face is a nice touch, too. This is not to eschew modernity: 'It's got air-con, sat-nav and Bluetooth so I can use it as a daily driver,' says Graham.

It's time for a serious drive across the

Obviously the game is spot the donor. Clues? Not many, but the engine lid does sit higher up on a 993, meaning the rear panel has more depth than, say, with a 964 conversion

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All the looks of an RSR, but with Porsche's most modern and sophisticated engine and suspension set up. What's not to like?

moor. It's a fabulous sunny day, the A6024 Woodhead Road has a good surface, stretching way out across the valley, with bare hills and hairpins promised up ahead. And, praise be, astonishingly little traffic – though the number of lycra-clad cyclists evidences the location of Le Col de Moss, a stage on the Tour of Britain bike race. I'm in the yellow GTR, and it quickly reveals a fabulous amount of power and a fluent, notchy gear shift as I work through the 'box. It's perfect on the turn in and powering through the corners. It is a firm ride, and as we gel, me and the car, it really is very exciting, oodles of acceleration and grip. One of those cars that feels as if you can do exactly what you want with it, the whole thing is working with you. Later, in our quest for a stills location we motor along a potholed track leading up to Castle Hill (106ft) and it's a reminder of how amenable the 993's multi-link suspension is. The yellow car feels firmer than the grey one, though both are running H&R fully adjustable coilovers, but the yellow one is set up slightly harder. Both are quite compliant, stable, with a nice ride and perfectly suitable for touring.

I switch over to the grey GTR. I revel in

the liveliness of the chassis, the accuracy and power, and immediately I can tell it's subtly different to its stablemate in terms of the nature of the shift, the brakes and the clutch. But most obvious of all is the seating position: those in the grey car have me sitting slightly lower, and for me, it's a slightly more comfortable driving position. I'm giving it a bit more oomph for the

despite a modicum of suspension work. It's so poised and locked down, with none of the crazed brutishness that a competition car can dish up.

There's a paradox going on here, though. If 993s are the newest embodiment of the 911, aren't they being sold short? Old before their time? More like, 'Hope I die before I get old?' That's too simplistic,

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cornering shots, and it brings out the hero as I'm working at the wheel. It's an exhilarating experience. It may look like a 2.8 RSR, but does it go like one? Well, obviously it's not race-raw like the vehicle it seeks to resemble, though there is a psychological element at work that stirs you into thinking, well, perhaps it does, a bit. But the reality is, its behaviour is locked into the way more superior chassis and running gear of the 993, and that's your answer,

though, because as backdates, they're just part of the vintage zeitgeist. Styled in 1989 in a desperate quest for modernity, the 993 was, for some, a step too far, excessively compromising the 911's traditional looks. Pragmatically, then, 911 Retro Works have spectacularly recaptured that classic 911 charisma. And they do 'look pretty good together': like The Who's super throwback anthem, some things never really date, do they? **PW**

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Momo Prototipo steering wheel with Porsche centre. Upholsterer Steve George looks after the furnishings, using leather throughout. The old seats are reupholstered, with carbon backs if required, and with the electric adjusters in place. The plaited leather weave across the

yellow car has had a 993 RS rear screen fitted so the wiper mount is absent. The racing-style fuel filler in the centre of the front lid doesn't impact on the luggage space, and it means you can stop at petrol pumps on either right- or left-hand side, though you do have to stretch over the wing

Details... Drilled door handles are a nice touch. All builds are – essentially – a blank canvas

