# Double O'Seven

RSK 718-007, WHICH LED A DOUBLE LIFE AS BOTH A TWO-SEAT AND CENTER-SEAT FACTORY TEAM CAR, HAS BEEN BROUGHT BACK TO ITS 1959 PORSCHE WERKES FORM. **STORY BY DAVID HAUETER. PHOTOS BY KLAUS SCHNITZER. HISTORIC PHOTOS COURTESY OF PORSCHE AG AND THE COLLIER COLLECTION.**

The decade of the 1950s marked the beginning of Porsche's efforts in motorsports. Success came quickly to the small Stuttgart company, but Porsche started another practice that would become routine procedure for decades to come. Its factory-backed "werkes" competition cars were raced for a season or two, then sold to privateer teams with the hope that they would bring the marque more victories.

Once out of the factory's care and conditioning, ex-werkes cars were usually modified to meet the rules of whatever series their new keepers intended to race in. And, with more racing came more development, more updates, and more modifications to keep the aging factory cars competitive against newer machinery. As a result, very few werkes cars remain similar to how they raced as factory entries. While many have been restored to capture the look, feel, or performance of the factory's setup, modern compromises often sneak in during the restoration. Metal that's a little thicker, newer, or covered by far better paint is not unusual in modern restorations — all for understandable reasons. But RSK chassis 718-007 — after 45 years and several owners — stands out from most RSK restorations because the edict for this job was to make the car identical to the way it was when Porsche raced it in 1959, "imperfections" and all.

Type 718 RSK was introduced as a replacement for the legendary 550/550A in 1958 and featured a more aerodynamic body, an improved suspension, and more power from its four-cylinder boxer engine. While the previous 550 Spyders used 1.5-liter engines, modifications to the RSK engine allowed it to be bumped up to 1.6 liters. Different pistons in the RSK engine also allowed the

compression ratio to be taken from 9.5:1 up to 10:1. Some other improvements that came as the four-cam engine had evolved included revised dual distributors and Weber carburetors.

Being a factory werkes car, 718-007 was used to test new parts, designs, and setups under racing conditions, so it has some unique features that never made it into customer RSKs. One example is an oil cooler built into the underside of the hood, the idea being that air rushing over the hood at high speed would cool the oil. It didn't. So Porsche reverted to a more conventional cooler setup. Even so, 007 retains its original experimental hood. This was also the first RSK to use Porsche's revised rear wishbone suspension and a modified rear frame that went into production on later RS60 Spyders. The dog-leg scoop on the driver-side rocker panel is rare among 718 RSKs, as well. It vents air to an additional oil cooler.

The car made its racing debut at Spa on May 3 in 1959, where it suffered a DNF with Paul Frère driving. But the most frustrating race of the season would come next, at the Targa Florio. Porsche entered four factory cars in the race, including 718-007. Set up with a 1.7-liter engine for the 2.0-liter class, 007 was assigned to Wolfgang von Trips and Jo Bonnier. Halfway through the 626-mile race, the pair had accumulated a 14-minute lead — with von Trips setting the fastest lap around the long circuit at an average speed of 63 mph. Von Trips was only 14.5 miles from the finish when the RSK's rear suspension failed, stranding him on the side of the road. While it was no great day for 007, Porsche still swept the race's top four positions.

In fact, a victory never came for 718-007 in 1959, though it did have some strong performances. It managed to collect a seventh-overall at the Nürburgring, a fourth-place finish at the Gaisberg Hillclimb, and a second-place podium spot at Goodwood. The car also competed at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, where it suffered a DNF. For Le Mans, Dr. Ferry Porsche authorized use of new, higher lift camshafts that hadn't been tested for a 24-hour enduro. The results were disastrous: All six factory cars in the race retired, either with broken camshafts or crankshaft failures. 718-007 was driven

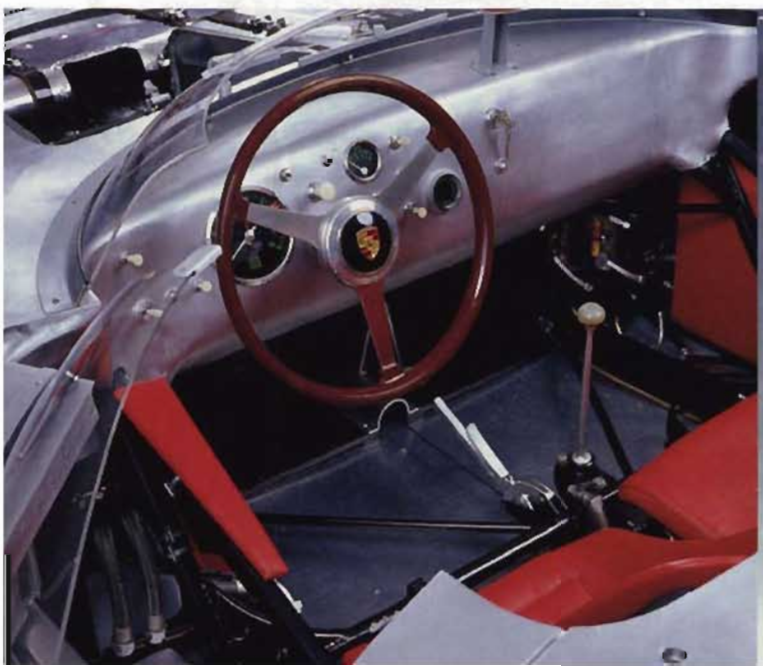
**Above, left—Le Mans, 1959: Herrmann and Maglioli drove 718-007 to an unfortunate DNF (photo courtesy of Porsche Archives).**

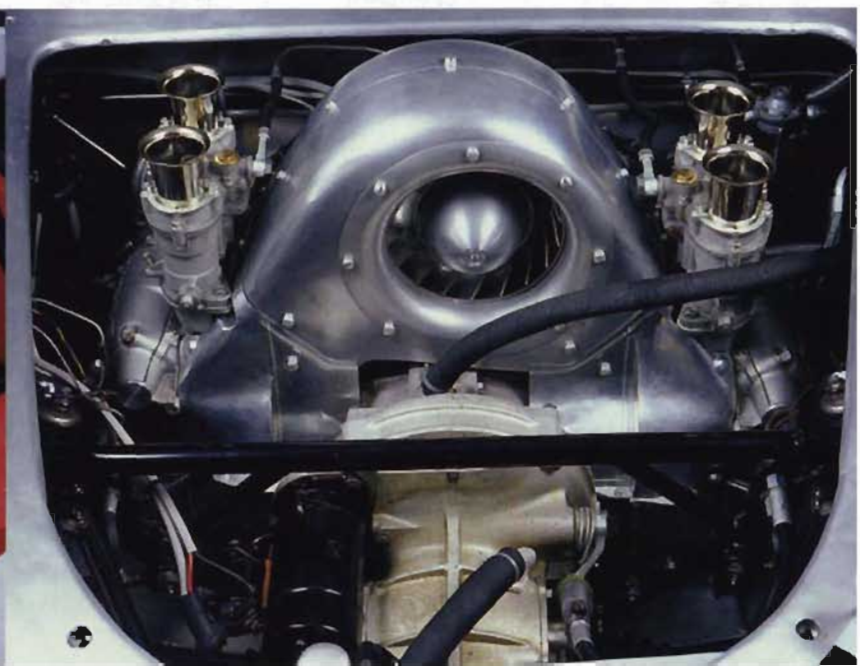
**Above—At the Targa Florio in 1959, RSK 718-007 fared better, taking seventh overall (photo courtesy of The Collier Collection).**

**As if working with thin, original aluminum isn't enough of a challenge, imagine having to leave it bare! Aluminum hood with trick, integrated oil cooler was a bust (far lower left); scoop that fed cockpit-mounted cooler proved far more effective (lower left). Interior is as Spartan as you'd expect and is ready to be converted to its center-seat configuration in just four hours (below). Four-cam engine was rebuilt by Bill Doyle and captures the vintage look perfectly (below, right).**

by Hans Herrmann and Umberto Maglioli and it was the first Porsche to retire after lasting only five hours.

Sports-car racing, however, was not the only arena 718-007 was entered in. It's one of just two RSKs that Porsche raced in Formula 2 officially. At the time, F2 did not require open-wheel bodywork, but it did call for a single-seat configuration. To make the car eligible for F2 competition, Porsche designed its RSK so the driver could be moved to the centerline of the car's chassis — a process that involved changes to the steering linkage, the shift linkage, and the seat position. Interestingly, the whole process took Porsche technicians only four hours to complete. An extra body panel with a plastic windscreen closed up the cockpit around the driver for improved aerodynamics. Porsche had entered an earlier RSK with driver Jean Behra in the 1958 Formula 2 race at Rheims — which had a high-speed layout that favored the closed bodywork of the RSK — and won. 718-007 was entered for the same race in 1959 with Wolfgang von Trips handling the driving, but it only managed a fifth-place finish.





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Porsche sold 718-007 after the 1959 racing season to John von Neumann at Competition Motors in Los Angeles. By the late 1950s, Porsche's Spyders had become legendary in the SCCA's small-bore classes, so demand for the cars in the U.S. was high. Between 1960 and 1969, the car changed hands several times, but it raced consistently and primarily on the west coast. Steve Froines drove the car for owner Ralph Wood in several SCCA races in 1964 and has fond memories of the car.

"At Riverside, there was a 180° turn after you climbed to the top of the esses," he recalls. "You could bring the RSK in there, kick the back out before you got to the corner, then plant your foot in the firewall and keep the tail out three feet all the way around that corner! It was a comfortable car to drive once you got used to it. I've raced a lot of cars over the years, but I have to say the RSK is the greatest race car I've ever driven."

After several years of SCCA road racing, 718-007 ended up in the hands of Mike Rickman, who installed a pushrod engine and modified the car for hillclimb events. During this time, the original four-cam engine was put into storage. Rickman put the car up for sale in 1974. It ended up in the hands of Californians David and Mary-Hoe Love, who bought the car as a Christmas present to each other in 1974. When Love took delivery, the car was a rolling chassis with 28 boxes of parts. So it took a lot of elbow grease to get it back together. After a few seasons of historic racing, Love took on the task of rebuilding the engine with the help of Jim Wellington, who had owned the car in the 1960s.

"I found aluminum pieces in the oil filter and just knew the engine needed a rebuild," recalls Love. "Jim Wellington had the ex-Ken Miles RSK and didn't have a body for it, so I loaned him my car to make a copy and, in return, he showed me how to rebuild my motor. Taking the four-cam motor all the way down to the crankshaft and rebuilding it was a mechanically religious experience, though I wouldn't go through it again. The crankshaft had 396 pieces and the tolerance on the needle rollers was a tenth of a thousandth. It was like a 300-pound wristwatch."

The Loves owned 718-007 from 1974 through 1986 and spent a lot of time with the car at Laguna Seca, Sears Point, and Willow Springs — averaging around six races a year. Says Love: "Everybody was telling me how treacherous it was with terminal oversteer. But I got started in a Speedster, so I got used to bad habits early on. From what I remember, you weren't spending much time pointing straight when you were driving it. Driving it smoothly was a matter of getting the throttle balance and steering right, where you steer the rear with your foot and the front with your hands. The rev range on the car was between 4000 and 7000 rpm. Under 4000 rpm, you were lugging and, over 7000 rpm, you were in danger of taking out a piston or the crankshaft. But it was an absolute delight to drive — everything worked beautifully."

**Paul Russell and his resident metal master, Richard Docking, with 718-007 (top). Body pieces required to complete the center-seat conversion (surrounding car, opposite) and the forward bodywork (above) all reflect their attention to detail and period finishes.**

During the years he owned the RSK, Love was also racing a 1958 Ferrari Testa Rossa and realized that as he was getting older, he couldn't give both cars the attention they deserved. So Love decided to sell the RSK. His ad for the car in *Autoweek* didn't generate much interest in the United States, but Wessel Loringhoven in Dusseldorf, Germany noticed it and traveled all the way to California to buy it. It turned out that his uncle was a friend of Porsche's early racing PR man, Huschke von Hanstein. Loringhoven had also gone to school in Gaisberg — the site of the hillclimb where 718-007 had been raced in 1959. After purchasing the car, he took 007 back to its native country and used it in European vintage racing, including several races at the Nürburgring.

After spending roughly 12 years racing in Germany with Loringhoven, RSK 718-007 returned once again to California — after it had been acquired by Grand Prix Classics in La Jolla. The car was then sold to Bill Bauce, who was attracted to the car's racing history. At that point, the car had not been raced regularly in five years, so Bauce turned to Wayne Baker of Personalized Autohaus to get the car race-ready in time for 1998's Monterey Historics, which would celebrate 50 years of Porsche. The project involved a complete engine rebuild and gave Baker the opportunity to work with the camshafts and exhaust system to produce more torque and more usable power — without revving the engine up to 7000 rpm.

By the time Monterey rolled around, Baker had the RSK back together. Initial testing at Willow Springs with a 6800-rpm redline returned lap times that were quicker than any known RSK times at that circuit. With extensive experience racing Porsches in IMSA — including a win at the 12 Hours of Sebring in a 934 — Baker was an obvious choice to drive the car at Monterey. Racing against 17 other Spyders, Baker put the car on the pole with a time of 1:50 flat and finished the race second behind Brian Redman. Baker went on to race the 718 RSK in additional historic events and remains impressed with 007 today.

"Driving the RSK at Laguna Seca was one of my greatest driving experiences," says Baker. "Even though I've driven 904s, 910s, and a variety of other Porsches, the RSK was very unique. Once you got used to drifting it, it was a great handling car. After you set the car to turn in, you had to

be very ginger with the steering wheel and could never lift. You could drive it through a high-speed right turn at 100 mph and have the right front wheel 3-4 inches off the ground! For the weight of the car and the speed it could reach, it was very well balanced and also had great brakes. It surprised me that the brakes held up so well at Laguna Seca."

It wasn't long after the 1998 Monterey Historics that RSK 718-007 was back at Grand Prix Classics, up for sale once again. The Collier Collection in Florida purchased it in 1999. Paul Russell and Company in Essex, Massachusetts was chosen to perform a complete preservation on the car. The instructions for a preservation as opposed to restoration was a key requirement for this car, as The Collier Collection wanted to return the car to its 1959 form and retain as much of the original metal and mechanical components as possible.

Preserving the RSK's original metal was one of the most difficult projects that Richard Docking has ever taken on. As the chief metalworker at Paul Russell and Co., it was Docking's job to take the 718's body back to 1959 — working against five decades of paint jobs, racing accidents, and owners. The first step was to remove all of the paint and disassemble 007 all the way down to its frame, a difficult job in itself because the RSK used thousands of rivets to hold many of its body panels together. Working with what was left of the original aluminum was also challenging.

"With the amount of paint work the car had over the years, people were very aggressive with the grinding pads that take the original metal away," says Docking. "There was only 50/1000th of an inch of aluminum to start with and, in some areas, the car had only half that. You have to really concentrate to manipulate a piece of metal that is that thin and has become brittle over time."

To get the RSK back to its original form, Docking also had to work against his instincts and what he had been trained to do over his career: "My motivation has always been to improve things, but — with this car — we needed to keep it as original as possible." This meant using a mallet and wooden blocks on the body panels instead of the metalworking machines available in Russell's shop. Explains Docking: "I couldn't use the machine because it would make the car look *too* nice. I had to hold back and restrain myself, but I loved doing it. I am very much against over-restoring and loved the thought that we were doing the right thing for this car." Docking's expertise is evident in the finished RSK, as the car has a fantastic old-world finish that makes it look like it just came off the track at Le Mans in 1959.

The Collier museum was just as careful on the mechanical preservation of its RSK. The four-cam engine sourced for the car was sent out to Bill Doyle in Jackson, Wyoming for a rebuild to 1959 specs, as was the gearbox. Doyle, one of the world's top four-cam experts, found a nice surprise when he began the task of rebuilding the engine.

"One of the most interesting things about the engine sourced for this car was that — sometime in the past, probably in the 1960s — someone had put the engine together out of totally new parts from Porsche," remarks Doyle. "Every moving part was brand new, and I just took it all apart, cleaned everything, and put it back together in running order." Doyle also remains impressed with Porsche's resolve to race in a truly challenging time period.

"One of the things that amazed me was that these guys were coming out of World War II and had all their plants destroyed," he continues. "They were trying to put a country back together, yet Porsche was finding a way to build these incredibly complicated engines." With the engine rebuilt and delivered back to Paul Russell, the restoration shop also made sure that items such as bolts and hoses used near the engine were the same as what would have been used back in 1959 — even if it meant fabricating new pieces to match the originals.

After a solid two years of painstaking research and preservation work, chassis number 718-007 is as close to original as it has been since competing as a werkes entry in 1959's racing season. At the present time, The Collier Collection plans to use its RSK for exhibition runs and display purposes, but it may consider running the car in vintage racing events in the future. Given the attention to detail and originality that made this car's return to original specifications possible, those who do get to see 007 — whether in action or sitting quietly at a car show — will get a chance to see what the factory's cars *really* looked like all those years ago. ■