

CLASSIC DRIVER

Matt Hummel is the California king of Porsche patina

Lead

With Porsche 356s continuing to rise in value, most people are looking at these classics more as investments and are hiding them away in their garages. But not Matt Hummel — he's using his around the hillsides of California, and receiving major kudos from the social media world as a result...

Off hand, you may not be aware of the name Matt Hummel, but if you're a surveyor of social media, you must surely be aware of his weather-beaten, sun-faded, and thoroughly patinated Porsche 356 — to say it's become an Instagram sensation is a bit of an understatement. Who hasn't seen the Hummel 356? Once we saw this 356 being thrashed around mountain passes, overgrown woods, salt flats, and desert roads, we knew the person behind the wheel was definitely someone we wanted to meet. So, we sent Rémi Dargegen to California to meet the king of patinated Porsches and find out if he's the real deal or just another carefully curated social media star — suffice to say, we weren't disappointed with what we discovered.



What's your earliest automotive memory?

I must have been three or four years old when my parents first took me to the Harrah Auto Museum in Reno, Nevada, and let's just say I lost my mind with excitement. I can remember being there, seeing rows and rows of antique cars lined up, and yelling, 'look at that one' at every single car. From that moment on, I was a freak for old cars — thank you, Harrah.

As I got older, I would use my imagination to create a world with diecast cars. I'd take my small collection of cars and make them go fast, and sometimes crash and burn. I'd have my emergency crew, my tow truck, and then, my favourite place, the junkyard. I'd also spend time altering a car to make it look the part — using hammers and matches (without my parents' knowledge) to create a non-perfect world of little cars in which I was fully content. I still have a box of these cars — and yes, a bunch are Porsches covered in scratches.

What was your first car?

At a young age, I would sneak out and drive my mom's Volvo station wagon — and then subsequently get in trouble — but I learned how to drive a manual transmission in my dad's Porsche 914. Perhaps this is where my love of Porsche came from, hearing the distinct sound of a German air-cooled engine and knowing that it was my dad either driving up or down the driveway in that funny-looking car. I bought my first car at 16 — a 1964 VW Notchback.



How has your passion for Porsches changed your life?

Within me, there's this passion for old Porsches that's evolved my way of living. I've had to leave the city life behind and create a surrounding for myself in the country, where I could keep what I have and still have room to grow. This is the only way I could find a balance between making my life sustainable with what I want to do — surround myself

with old Porsches. Over the years, my passion for old cars, especially Porsches, has gone through some changes. I think I originally looked at them as objects and lost touch with the simple fact that they were cars, which were meant to be driven. Once I decided to focus less on visual perfection and more on the experience of driving, I found myself truly being a 356 owner.

Over the past couple of years, your Porsche 356 has become famous on Instagram - maybe more so than you, its owner. Has this been a positive thing?

With the 356 receiving all the attention, I've been able to make the car the focal point of its own story. It has its own agenda, and I'm only the shadow that pumps it full of premium fuel and changes its dirty oil. Through photos and a lot of adventurous driving, we've created a unique experience in which we've helped capture this 356's character and given it another life. I'm proud of this little 356 and we've had an amazing journey. I highly recommend everyone with a Porsche to create their own journey with it. What are you waiting for? Stop believing you're cool because you own one. You're not that cool, but your Porsche is.

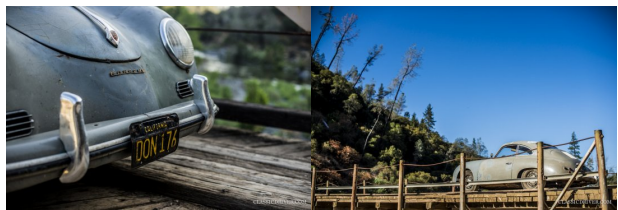


You don't just bring your 356 out for photo shoots - it's your daily driver. What's the reaction you get when people see it on the road?

While using this Porsche as a daily driver, everywhere I go becomes an adventure — people smile and wave and want to start up a conversation. I feel more connected to everything happening around me. Racing through mundane traffic, cutting people off, driving on the sidewalk — I can do whatever I want in a 356. Or at least it feels that way. This 356 is the perfect candidate for 'drive it like you stole it'. If you don't take advantage of the opportunity you've been given, you may never get it again.

What's your response to those people who think it's a shame to drive such valuable cars the way you do?

If I were you, I'd never drive your 356 the way I do, because I don't want to take the blame for the scratches and dents it may receive. It's not easy having fun — I strongly suggest you leave that entirely up to me. Just sit back and watch while you leave your 356 parked safely in your garage. It would be a shame if you realised just how dynamic these little cars were designed to be! But sarcasm aside, I'm very confident driving my 356. And through driving it, I've begun to understand it a great deal. I was determined to learn what this car was about, and I've gradually — and cautiously — pushed it and myself further and further. Funnily enough, the second biggest dent I received was while parked in a parking lot. You can't ever completely protect your car from harm — unless maybe if it's locked up in a museum.



It would be easy for me to accuse a lot of people of turning driver-quality 356s into show-queen investments, giving some of us fewer and fewer opportunities to actually drive an old Porsche. Fix your rust, rebuild your engine, but give it a chance to live on as the factory intended. It's horrible when I see someone take apart a decently weathered old Porsche full of timeless character.

Would you ever consider selling it?

Yes, I'd sell it. I welcome the idea of change — especially if it'll fund new experiences. But as everyone is aware, the prices of old Porsches have risen drastically and, with that, availability has shrunk. The likelihood of some of my dreams coming true has now been compromised, but I'll never give up the search. So, if I find the right buyer, I'll sell it — just not yet. I've turned down some serious offers, which, in hindsight, maybe I shouldn't have done. But there's something happening here that's worth more to me than money. I started something with this 356 and I'm determined to finish it. I've got a plan and soon I hope to execute it. Maybe then I'll be ready to sell it. And when that day comes, hopefully the new owner will enjoy it as much as I have.



Your next project is a period-correct racing car from 1952 - could you tell us a little bit more about it?

It's a really interesting Porsche 356. It started life as a 1952 Cabriolet that was modified to be raced in the mid-1950s. Because of its new competition life, it was put away for many years with little to no use. I bought it about 10 years ago with the hope of restoring it. But then I decided to celebrate its fate and turn it into a period-correct vintage racer. For me, there's nothing cooler than vintage racing photos from the 1950s and I've spent a lot of time staring at them, wondering what it would have been like to be there. So this was my vessel to get there — what better way of exploring the past than with an old Porsche?

A good friend of mine, Tom Boutos, is a very talented metal fabricator and liked my vision, so he decided to help me with it. He hand-crafted the aluminium panels and we've done many subtle things to make the car look like it was from that period. I'm really excited that it's nearly finished, as there have been several complications. In fact, one exciting piece of the puzzle is the transmission, which is the actual transmission from the SL Gmünd racer that was raced by the late Chuck Forge. Its later owner, Cameron Healy, was having the car restored back to original Le Mans-winning specification, so he offered me the chance to carry on its history from one altered old Porsche to the next. It's great that these things happen in the Porsche community — I hope to shift every gear in the spirit of its late builder.



To drive your Porsche 356 like you do, you must need a lot of spare parts to keep it running - is your parts inventory a necessity or part of the passion?

Around 15 years ago, I realised I wanted to own and drive old 1950s Porsche 356s for the rest of my life. So, with that realisation, I knew that I had to create an environment for myself that could sustain this passion for the future. I had the inclination that these old parts wouldn't be lying around for much longer and I had better buy up as many of them as I can. This way, for years to come, if I need a 356 part, I already have it on the shelf, ready to go. Maybe I'll never need half of it, but it keeps me connected to something I love. When I found my 1956 coupé, it was missing a lot of original factory parts, but, luckily, I had plenty from that year, and I think it's a combination of those less-than-perfect parts on this less-than-perfect 356 that makes it so cool.

What other cars do you own?

Do you want me to tell you about my 1974 Chevy K5 Blazer or about my other Porsches? How can you own just one Porsche, or two, or five? Most people recognise me as the guy who drives off-road with his 356. But I love daily driving 911s from the 1980s just as much - I've been doing it for the past 10 years. Six years ago I bought a low-mileage 1986 Carrera and I plan to put a million miles on it. If I don't drive it for a long period of time, I turn into a grumpy person!

To you, what is the ultimate Porsche?

A 1950 Porsche 356 Coupé. I don't know what I would do if I had an early split windshield coupé — I think about it a lot. Or a 356A 4-Cam T1 Coupé. Or a T2. Then a 904. Can I have more than one?

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2018

Gallery

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