

# DREAM FACTORY

Mark Darby of Wales-based specialist RS 911 is a man well versed in delivering just what the customer wants, and his latest creation – a Carrera RSR-inspired hot-rod – stands as testimony to his skills

Words: Paul Davies  
Pictures: Michael Ward

Life is not always as it seems. Long gone is the time when you could be sure that the, apparently, genuine 1973 Carrera RS pulling in the crowd at the kerbside was the real thing. Ducktails and front bibs have been appearing on 911s of all ages for ages – and now things have moved on with 911R and 911 S/T look-alikes peppering the shows and circuits.

Replica, recreation, back-date, copy, fake (we'll leave out restoration, which to me implies the specific rebuilding of a car, matching chassis and engine numbers, to its totally original state) – the subject here is building a car to look like something it's not.

Bit by bit, if you stay with me, we're edging towards the car you see on these pages. Built by RS 911, almost visually a Carrera RSR of the 1973–75 era but something different under the skin, it's most definitely a recreation. But first I want to put the whole subject into perspective.

Money is what's driving things. A genuine and solid Carrera 2.7 RS currently sells at anything from £150,000 upwards, depending upon model (M472 Touring or M471 Lightweight) and history; prove a famous name won

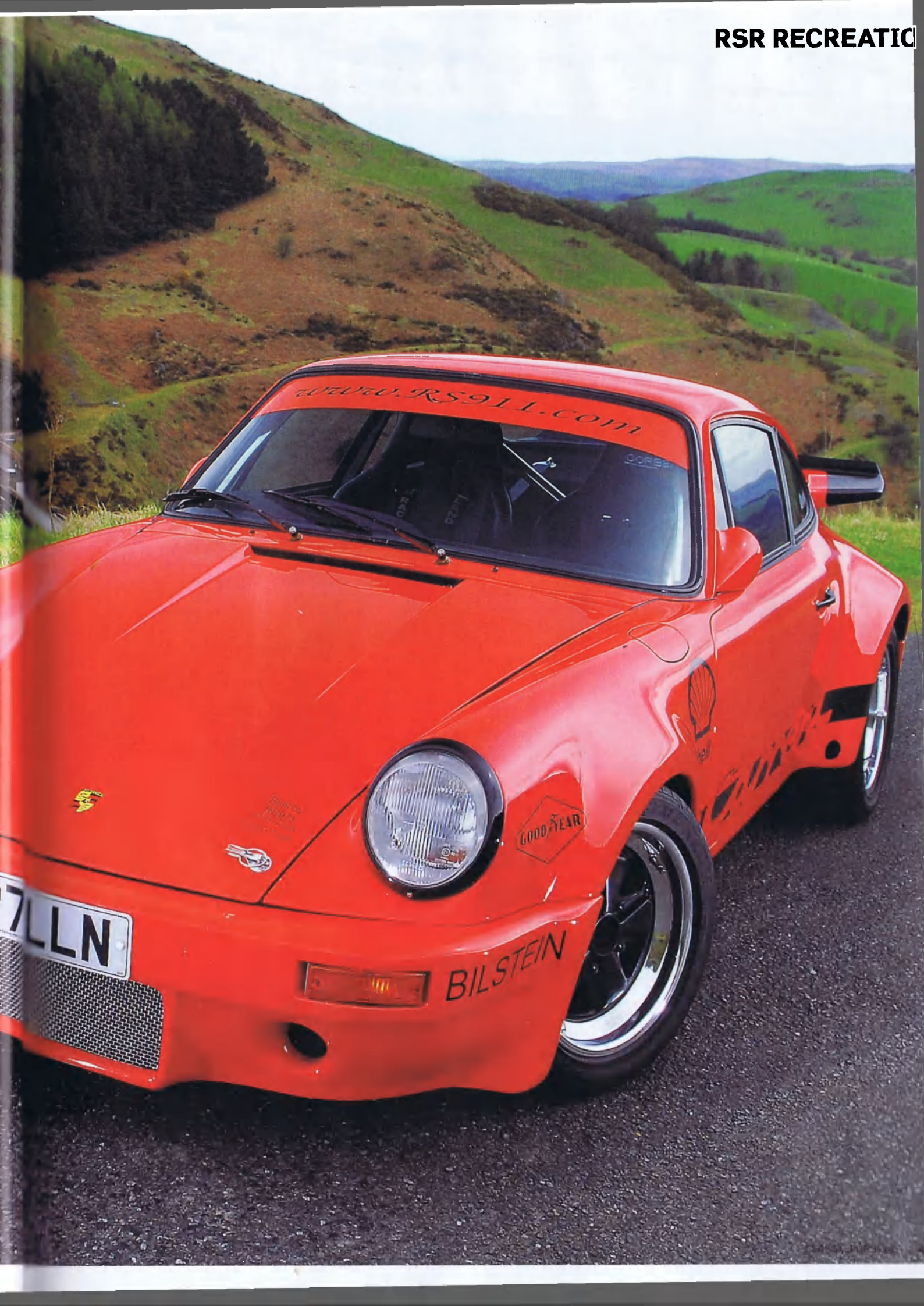
such and such with it and you can near double the figure. The same goes for evolution 2.8 and 3.0 RSR cars. The earlier 911R and 911 S/T competition models were made in fewer numbers and, ergo, command even higher figures. These can start at £300k and go ever skywards.

Few real-world people can afford these numbers, so who can blame them for opting for a look-alike at a fraction of the cost. Take a later 911SC or Carrera 3.2, back-date to pre-impact bumper style – new front panel, wings and luggage-compartment lid – add glassfibre bumpers at each end, along with wheel arch extensions, and you're almost there.

That's simplifying things, of course, but what you end up with is a passable copy of the real McCoy that is easier to drive, just as quick (more so if you started with the 3.2-litre engine), and most likely a darn sight more reliable. It'll have cost you considerably less, be cheaper to run and insure, and if you fancy making a few of your own modifications, you won't end up feeling as if you've just vandalised a work of art.

But there are times when an exact replica is necessary. A sporting collector I know had an





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impeccable history 911 S/T. He raced it, then got to thinking just how much the piece of metal he was hurling at the Armco was worth. So he went away and had a full, nut for nut, replica built that qualified to receive the FIA papers that allow it to run in historic events. He still paid six figures, but now he's got a car a third of the value of the original that he's not afraid to use as Porsche intended. He's a happy man.

So, relatively painlessly, I hope, we get to Mark Darby and RS 911. Mark has been in this recreating business for some time. I first visited his workshop in central Wales over two years ago, at that time on the side of a mountain. I remember it well; the rain was coming in sideways and even the sheep looked miserable.

Back then Mark had been re-clothing and re-engineering Porsches for some 15 years, during which

man. Nuts and bolts engineering – engines, gearboxes – he prefers to leave to the experts, or let the customers make their own arrangements.

Llanidloes has an engineering past. The small market town once boasted several foundries and engineering shops, supplying the once-mighty Midlands car industry with components. So perhaps it's appropriate that RS 911 is there, continuing an automotive tradition.

Actually I must make something clear at this point. While Mark Darby has spent most of the past 15 years grafting on his own, he's now been joined by an apprentice. Son, Lee, is on the staff and had considerable input into the orange RSR look-alike you see on these pages. That RSR is a fairly typical RS 911 car, and hopefully will give you a flavour of just what father and son can do.

*Interior has period-style lightweight panels, Corbeau sports seats, and a nice shiny alloy roll cage, for road use only*

“It started life as a Carrera 3.2 coupé, complete with steel sunroof. Rust was rampant..”

time he reckoned he'd built around 50 cars. Obviously a chap, who worked totally on his own in the workshop, can be excused for not knowing the exact number, but I have no doubt that his wife Angie, who provides part-time office support, could give us the exact figure.

Even then, in late 2007, Mark said he was seeing a shift away from the demand for Carrera 2.7 RS clones to the bigger-arched, more track-orientated, RSR versions, and also the essentially purer (and earlier in the Porsche timeline) 911R and 911 S/T competition models.

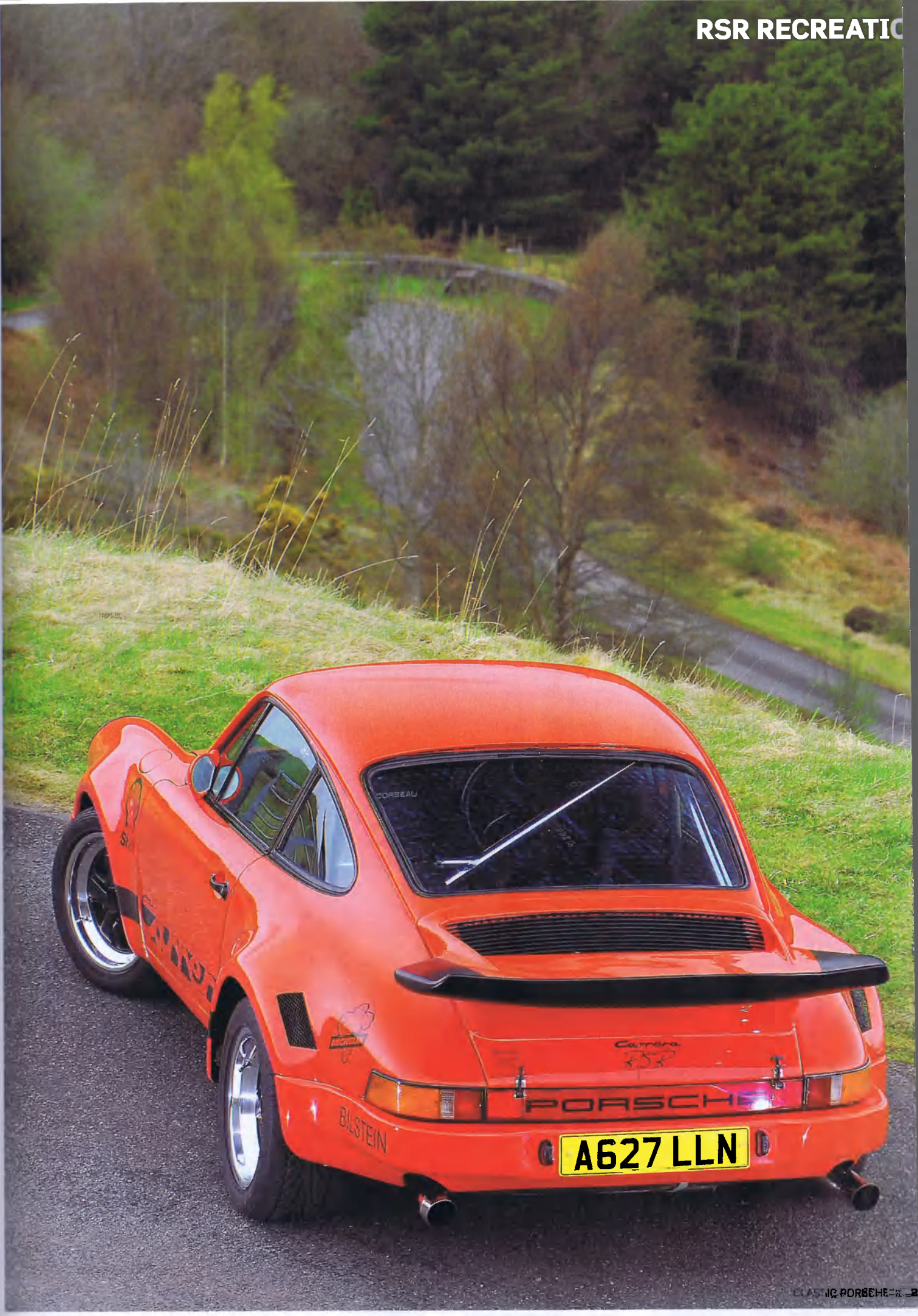
Now Mark has come down from the mountain. To be precise his business has re-located just a few miles down the road to a rather pleasant, parkland style, industrial estate on the outskirts of Llanidloes. He started as an apprentice in a main dealer body shop, moved to a company that restored and customised classics, then worked in engineering before setting up his own business. Although he will strip and re-build a classic Porsche, he regards himself as, primarily, a body

It started life as a Carrera 3.2 coupe, complete with sliding steel sunroof. Rust was rampant, requiring a strip-down to bare metal and replacement of all the usual 911 body parts that suffer the passage of time. New inner and outer sills, kidney bowls, and 'B' pillars were fitted, and the sunroof was eliminated by what Mark considers the only proper way: cutting away the whole roof panel from front to rear screen and welding another in place.

With the basic body in tip-top condition, work could start on backdating, and recreating the 'RSR'. The car has glass-fibre luggage compartment lid (bonnet if you like) along with RSR pattern front and rear bumpers in the same material. The accurate 3.0 RSR 'whale tail' replica is also in glass-fibre, bonded to a steel engine lid so the whole lot fits properly and rigidly.

Wheel arches – covering the gin- and 11in-wide Fuchs alloys – are RS 911's steel versions of the 2.8 RSR extensions. They're not cheap (£2500 a set, excluding VAT, compared to £340 for the glass-fibre variety) but

*The glass-fibre whale tail is bonded to a steel engine lid to ensure rigidity. It's a good replica of the RSR 3.0 fitment. Rear brake vents are also RSR 3.0*



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### EVOLUTION CARRERA: THE RSR OF 1973-75

While the production Carrera 2.7 RS of 1973 proved a formidable competition car, it was a mainstream vehicle, a run of 500 being necessary to qualify for the Group 4 (GT) category of motor sport. It was then possible to further modify the car for racing.

As is history, the model was such a success 1580\* were built, mainly in Touring (M472) trim and Sport (M471) guise. Of these, 55 were converted at the factory to Racing spec, with the build code M491 and the model name Carrera 2.8 RSR.

The RSR was an evolution of the stock Carrera RS. Increased engine capacity (from 2687cc to 2806cc) came with using 92mm diameter pistons (instead of 90mm) and in race tune - with race camshafts, twin spark plugs per cylinder, and a compression ratio of 10.3:1 (against 8.5:1) - the power output was 300bhp instead of the 210bhp of the 2.7 RS. Porsche's 915 transmission was used, with a limited-slip differential as standard.

While the RSR retained the lightweight steel, non-stressed, body panels and thin glass of the M471 Sport, along with a lightweight interior, steel wheel arch extensions were fitted to accommodate an increase in track of some 30mm. All-up weight was 917kg.

Although the RSR retained the torsion-bar suspension of the RS, this received assistance from coil 'helper' springs around the front struts and the rear shock absorbers. Harder suspension bushes were fitted, and gin front and 11in-wide rear wheels enclosed modified (ventilated and drilled) versions of the brakes fitted to the short-distance 917 sports racing car.

Visually, apart from the wider track, the RSR could be distinguished from the RS by its deep glass-fibre front bumper, which contained a centrally-placed oil radiator. The ducktail rear spoiler of the RS was retained.

For the 1974 model year, Porsche introduced its further evolution of the Carrera, with the 3.0 RS production model. This time a total of 110 cars was produced, just 50 being converted to

3.0 RSR specification - of these, 15 were purchased by Roger Penske for use in the IROC (International Roadrace of Champions) series.

The 3.0 RSR was very much a carry-on from the 2.8 RSR. With 2993cc (95mm bore) the 'road' car (3.0 RS) engine delivered 230bhp, the RSR some 340bhp, courtesy of a switch to throttle slides instead of flaps on the Bosch mechanical fuel-injection.

Suspension and running gear was similar (917 long-distance brakes were fitted) with different torsion-bar sizes, and the lightweight bodywork was further extended (glass-fibre wheel arches) to cover 10.5in-wide front and 14in-wide rear wheels. A 'whale tail' replaced the ducktail.

Much of the motorsport participation of the RSR was left to factory-endorsed private teams, Peter Gregg and Hurley Haywood marking the first major success for the 2.8 RSR with victory in the 1973 Daytona 24 Hours. In Europe, Martini and Kremer cars driven by the likes of Gijs van Lennep and John Fitzpatrick were consistent winners, with van Lennep and Herbert Muller winning the Targa Florio and taking fourth overall at Le Mans.

The 3.0 RSR maintained Porsche success in GT racing through 1974 and '75, with teams run by Erwin Kremer and Georg Loos leading the way. Hans Heyer, Toine Hezemans and Bob Wollek, are drivers who took class wins throughout Europe, while Gregg and Haywood continued their winning ways in the USA.

In 1975, the career of the Carrera RSR ended - Porsche produced the 934 Turbol And that, dear reader, is a story for another time...

(\*Note: Production figures for these cars may vary slightly depending upon sources. These are the most accurate we know.)

Production Carrera 3.0 RS (Photo: Porsche AG)

Gijs van Lennep/Herbert Muller took the Carrera 3.0 RSR to outright victory on the 1973 Targa Florio (Photo: Porsche AG)

Peter Lovett 1974 Carrera 3.0 RSR (Photo: Courtesy of P Lovett)



*Yellow/red car is a recreation of the Gerard Larousse S/T that was and on the 1970 Tour de France - the lightest factory g11 ever at 789kg*

*Larousse look-alike has a 2.5-litre, twin plug, short-stroke, engine that will run on PMO carburettors. We'll show you more when it's finished!*



real quality and hand-made over a traditional English wheel by a Midlands craftsman.

Visually then, we have a Porsche Carrera RSR 2.8 of 1973, but with the tail used on the three-litre car of a year later. However, under the skin things are in some areas quite mundane, and elsewhere not so. The original Carrera 3.2 suspension and brakes are retained, albeit with uprated shock absorbers and pads, but the powerplant is different. It's also, unfortunately, something of a mystery.

model, hydraulic clutch, G50 type.

Interior-wise, when we saw the car it was very much a work in progress situation. Thin carpets are used, along with RSR-style card door panels and pulls. Sports seats are fitted along with a shiny – but as far as motor sport is concerned not acceptable – aluminium roll cage. Doubtless a customer could specify additional work at extra cost.

The RS911 RSR replica is priced £28,995 as it stands (or was priced if it's been sold by the time you read this),

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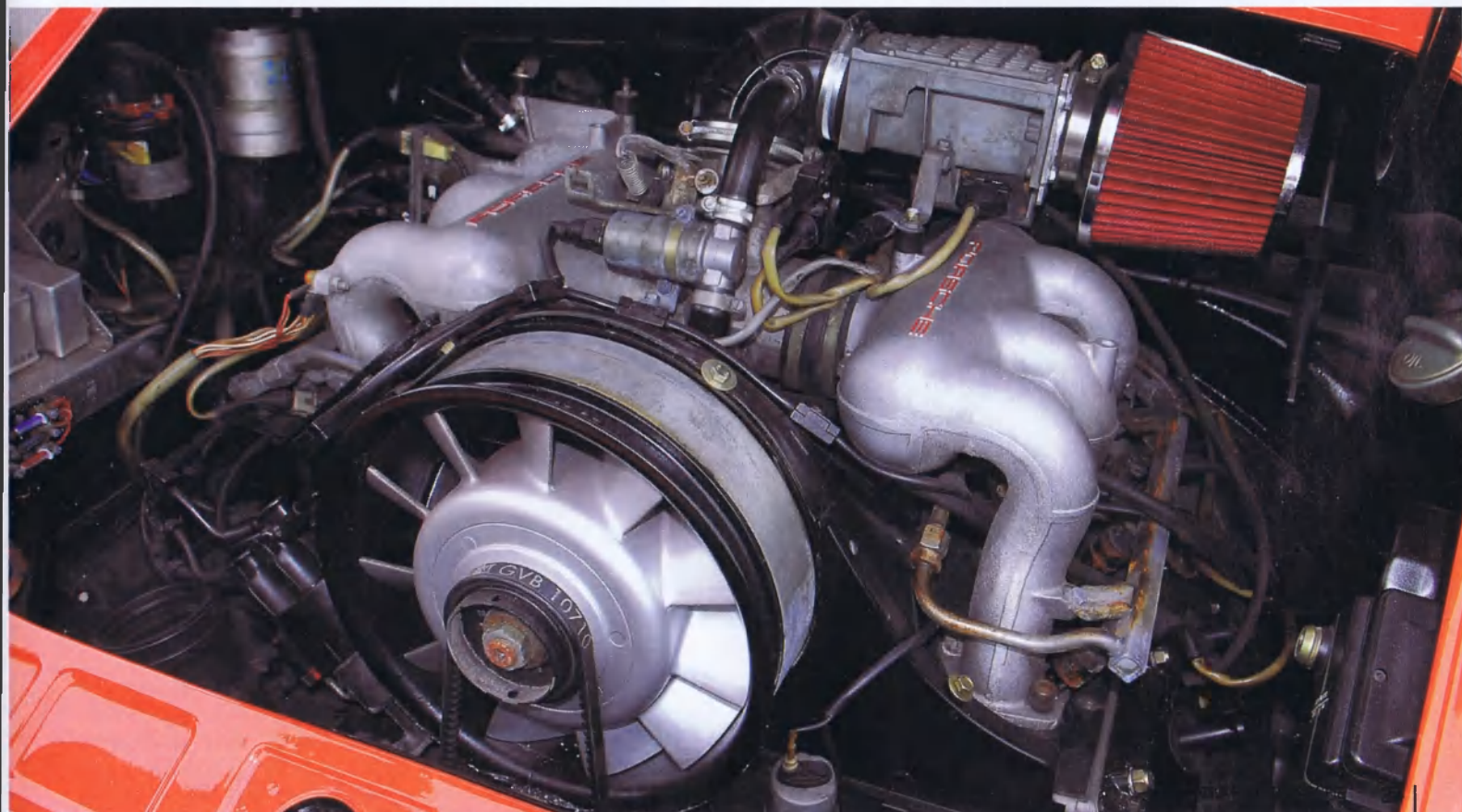
*RSR recreation engine started as a 3.2-litre unit. It's now got twin plugs per cylinder and a Dansk sports exhaust, but the capacity is unknown (see text)*

As I said Mark is primarily a body man, so he – very sensibly – leaves engine and transmission work to the established experts, such as the excellent BS Motor Sport concern of Neil Bainbridge. But in the case of this recreation, the car came to Llanidloes complete with a gem of an engine. It's a 3.2-litre which has, allegedly, had a capacity increase to who knows what (3.6/3.8-litre?) and been fitted with twin-plug cylinder heads. With a full Dansk stainless-steel sports exhaust system (with no heat-exchangers) and twin tailpipes, the unit revs well, pulls well, and sounds just right. Gearbox is the later

which to anyone who's spent time trawling the magazine advertisements and websites will be considered a ridiculous bargain; I've seen similar cars of no better quality of workmanship a full ten grand more.

Mark says the car is (sales speak here) 'priced to sell'. But he does admit its tag has been influenced by the fact that he cannot tell anyone exactly what's inside that engine. If a budding customer would like Neil Bainbridge to have a look and come up with an accurate capacity and description then this will 'be reflected in the price'.

The price of the car underlines the fact that Mark





Lee Darby (on the left) had considerable input to this RSR build. Dad, Mark, had his feet up after a motorcycle accident most of the time! Mark Darby has been backdating Porsches for over 15 years

provides value for money. It's the sort of figure that's only possible if you're (almost) a one-man show based in a particularly low cost area of the country. And – important but this – you build in a fair profit rather than strive to raise the market for such cars ever higher and higher. Inevitably such plans crash at some point.

The remoteness of a workshop in the county of Powys does not seem to put off the customers, as the 50-plus

customer driven. People bring a car, often but not always something that's seen better days, to Mark Darby and tell him they'd like it to look like an RS or RSR, or whatever. He can then go through the practicalities of the operation and come up with a plan.

Usually the recreation takes place on an impact-bumper car, so backdating is part of the exercise. Earlier 911s, Mark agrees, are now too valuable for anything

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conversions completed to date demonstrate. They come from all places. When I visited in 2007 an RSR recreation for an owner in Hong Kong was well underway; this time a 911T from a Swiss enthusiast was being converted into a 911 S/T replica, complete with twin-plug, short-stroke, engine. But it's not all recreations, Mark tells us. He will work on accurate replicas and restorations and, with the move into the newer and bigger premises, he's also happy to carry out general servicing and repair work on modern Porsches.

There you have it – a man who will do more or less whatever you want to a Porsche. Most projects are

other than restoration, or that exact FIA replica we mentioned earlier. Also post-'74 shells are zinc-dipped and so should be less rusty – allegedly.

Summing up, Mark agrees he's in the dream business. He (and Lee and Angie of course) produce cars in the style of, in the spirit of, some of the greatest Porsches ever made.

The RSR recreation we see here is a good example of what RS 911 is all about. There never was an intention it would be a replica. It's just what you see – a useable, affordable, re-take on a classic Porsche that's likely to provide a great deal of fun for its owner. ●

#### CONTACTS

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RS 911 commissions RSR bumpers and arches in glassfibre. Excellent steel arches are correct for some models but cost considerably more

We often talk about 'kidney bowls'. Just in case you didn't know, these are the black bits behind the B-pillar on a Targa in for a complete body restoration