

Customer Service

Based on a 964 Carrera 4, this 9m64ST from Porsche specialist Ninemeister is a custom fabricated 911 that blends old with new in a unique way...

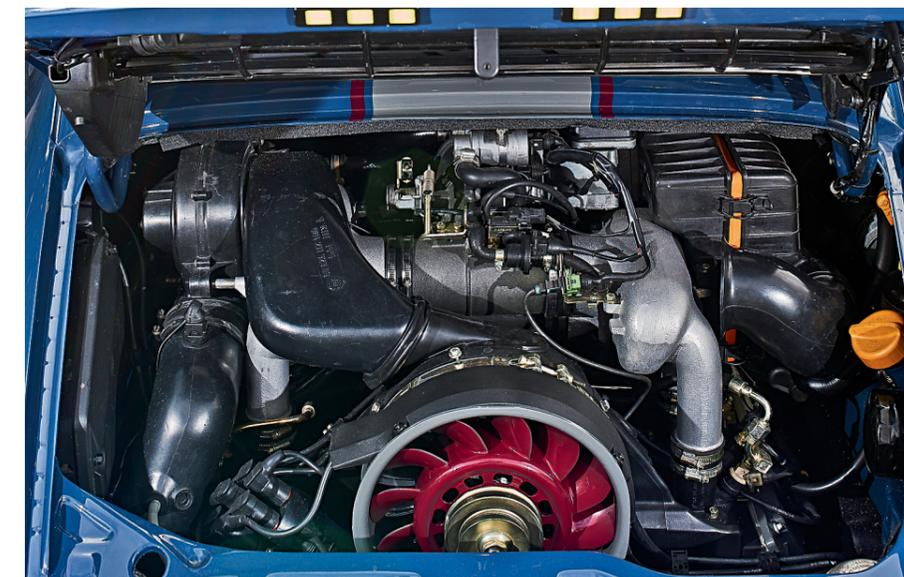
Story: Simon Jackson
Photography: Gus Gregory

In a roundabout sort of way we can thank a Porsche OPC and Aston Martin for the custom creation you see here. How so? Clearly it is not the work of the Porsche factory. Neither was it built and buffed by anyone employed by the firm. Likewise, it was not faithfully offered for sale at an Aston Martin dealership. Nor does it take any form of inspiration from the British brand's automotive offerings. However, had its owner not deemed the level of service he received from one particular Porsche Centre as unacceptable, he may never have walked across the street in disgust to spend his money on a brand-new Aston Martin DB9 instead of a new 911 as planned. Subsequently the said owner (who wishes to retain some anonymity so we'll not mention him by name) suffered eye-watering six-figure depreciation on his DB9 over just a handful of years. This led him in search of a car slightly more immune to such financially disastrous behaviour...

Fingers burnt from his Porsche main dealer experience, the chap had a pretty clear picture in his mind about what he wanted from his next car, and it wasn't something he could preview via any online model configurator hosted by either Porsche or Aston. The order of the day was a 'retro' 911 but with all the convenience of a contemporary car; read ABS, PAS, and a useable torquey modern engine. Naturally Singer's reimagined Porsche-based creations were on his radar but he did not have the budget to travel down that path. Rather his answer was to turn to Warrington-based Porsche specialist, Ninemeister, who he charged with the construction of a bespoke 911 unique to him. Ninemeister's MD



"The customer mainly wanted something that handled really well – his DB9 just couldn't give him that"



The engine and interior, though refreshed, remain largely standard 964 issue. They really are, however, the only parts of the car not to have been touched with Ninemeister's custom hand



Colin Belton picks up the story: "The customer's daily car is an Aston Martin DB9, and he only bought it because Porsche was being a bit funny with him about the trade-in value of his 997. But he realised that over the time he's owned the car it has depreciated something like £100,000. When it came to his next 911 he had a budget of around £120,000-£150,000."

The customer initiated the process of working closely with Ninemeister to develop and finesse his concept for a 911 that tipped a hat to Porsche history, determining the correct plan of attack. It quickly became apparent that his wishes precluded a 'run-of-the-mill' backdate project and outlawed Ninemeister from starting with a truly classic 911 as a basis for the project. In fact, the modern

advents that the customer required were already fitted to a classically styled 911 from the factory.

"We had to start with a 964," Colin recalls. "He wanted a standard car that he could get in and drive. He wanted it to look and feel like an early car. He wanted a six-speed gearbox, so we bought a 993 gearbox from America – an easy solution – and we converted the donor car he supplied to us, a 1991 964 Carrera 4, to Carrera 2 specification, which is also very easy."

Colin's definition of 'easy' might differ from yours or mine but one thing is certain: this man knows his Porsches inside-out and back-to-front. Hailing from an engineering background, Colin sees the world as an exploded diagram, taking an analytical approach to each and every situation in

his life. We had a 30-minute conversation with him about O-rings – it was more interesting and enlightening than it sounds. When it comes to working with a customer to build their dream machine Colin likes to take what he calls a 'top down' approach. This means looking at the project as a whole and working backwards in detail to end up with a complete end-to-end solution, turning the customer's concept into a reality with his vision and guidance. If it is possible to be the 'architect' of a car build then Colin most certainly comes RIBA endorsed.

Each and every Ninemeister car is unique but despite having various elements altered, the focus of this one is its bodywork. This car is so much more than a backdate and has a few tricks up its

sleeve which you may or may not have noticed. "The beauty of the early 911s is the delicacy and balance of their design," Colin explains. "Singer changes the look of its 911s by running 17-inch wheels with arches that are a little bigger than you'd expect. It deepens the sills and bumpers so that everything is in proportion. With all the other cars around people seem to cheat by fitting a bigger front bumper and it all looks out of proportion – that's where Singer has got it so right."

Far from creating copycat cars paying homage to the Californian specialist, though, Ninemeister does its own thing. And it does it very well without resorting to the almost cartoon aesthetics some backdates tend to sport. "The key with this car is its subtle front end," Colin continues.

"The front bumper is actually the correct depth for an early car. You can't usually do that on a 964 because the front panel is a lot deeper; it isn't on this one. We've actually raised the boot floor and refabricated the entire front end to fit the correct front panel. It was a labour of love."

This all-steel affair is more than just a labour of love, actually, it's a rolling piece of artistry. A sunroof delete, steel bonnet and new early steel rear quarter panels might be enough for some, but Ninemeister has gone further with flared steel arches grafted onto each corner, too. Fitting enlarged arches was always the plan with this car; quite which ones was the real question. The owner was undecided about which way to go, so Ninemeister mocked the car up with three

different options to physically show him how it would look. The customer was shown RS, 2.3 and 2.4 ST arches taped to the car's body and he opted for the 2.3-litre versions. "We ended up with the 2.3 ST arches because the customer didn't want to go bonkers on it in terms of width. But despite being good quality single pressing items they didn't really fit the car," Colin says. "The hardest job we've ever done in terms of bodywork is making those arches fit this car. Typically if we build an RS-style 911, seam welded with a sunroof delete, the fabrication time might be in the order of 100 hours. If we do a Clubsport 911, with a full weld-in roll-cage, you might be looking at 150 hours. This car took 300 hours..."

Of course, getting the car to look

9m64ST

ENGINE: 3.6-litre engine rebuilt with: new pistons, cylinders, valves, springs, retainers, camshafts, timing chains, new tinware, powdercoated, detailed fan, housing, shroud, replated fasteners, brackets, fixings, rebuilt distributor, new leads, caps, rotors, 9m Live remap, '88 930 Turbo front oil cooler, fan assisted

TRANSMISSION: 993 G50/20 six-speed gearbox, RS lightweight flywheel and clutch assembly, 964RS driveshafts

BRAKES: 993 front brake callipers and discs, 993 rear callipers with 964 RS discs

CHASSIS: 7x15 and 8x15-inch Group4 Campagnolo wheels with 205/55 and 225/50 Toyo Proxes tyres

SUSPENSION: 993 front uprights, steering arms, lower ball joints, KW Variant 3 coilovers, 9mRS front wishbone and rear trailing arm bushes, 964 Carrera 2 anti-roll bars. Seam welded and reinforced

EXTERIOR: Ninemeister all-steel body, sunroof delete, SC quarter panels, '73 front wings, 2.3 ST steel arches, '73 long bonnet, '73 front boot panel (964 chassis legs extended, boot floor raised, battery relocated), 2.3 ST Epoxy bumpers front and rear, 1972-1989 spec rear lights, '73 chrome headlights and front indicators, polished and anodised 964 door frames, '73 windscreen and rear screen, anodised trim, chrome door handles, chrome Talbot mirror

INTERIOR: 993-style Southbound black carpet set, '73 perforated vinyl cream headlining, full black leather retrim, RS lightweight door panels, 1973-style 964 instruments, Momo Prototipo steering wheel



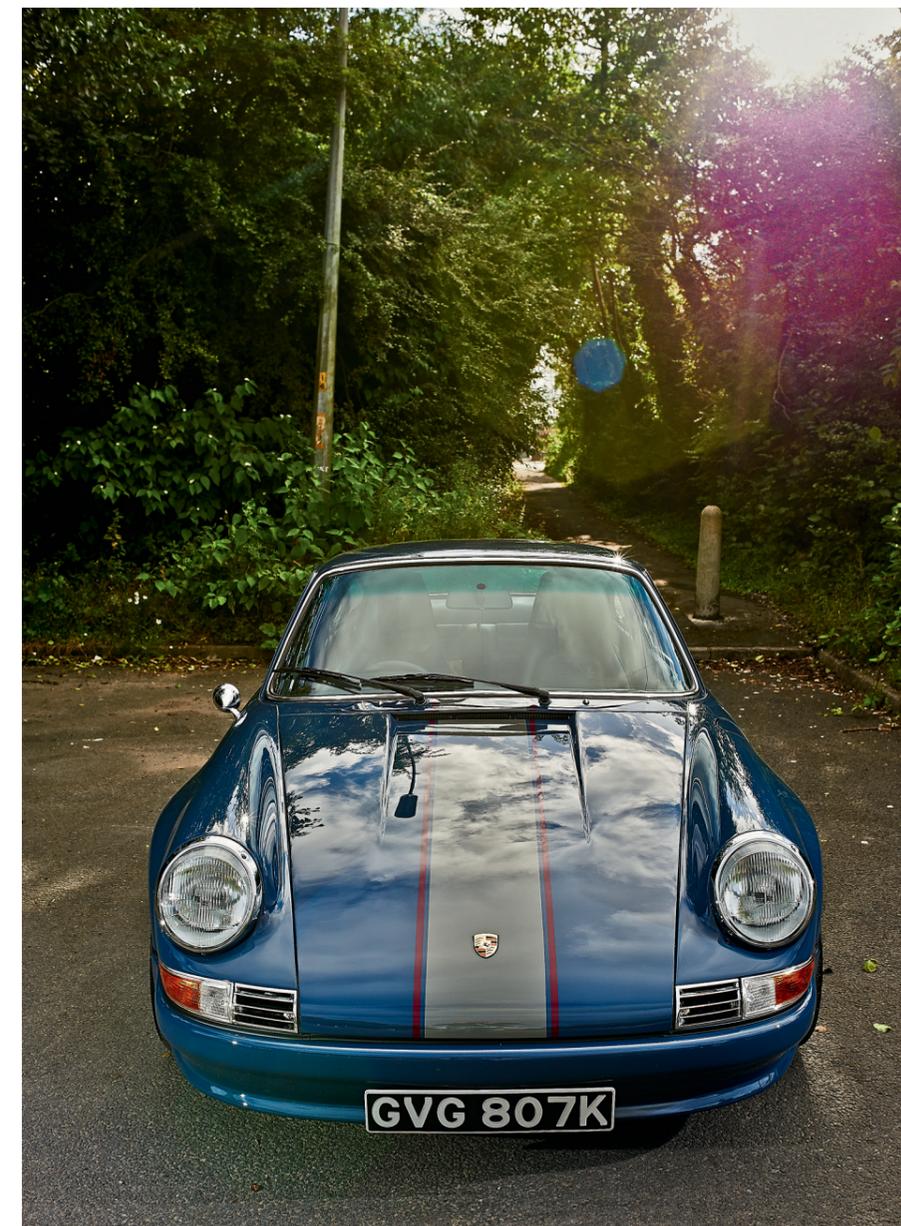
proportionally correct was not just reliant on its bodywork; the relationship between its body and the rolling stock was also critical. Ninemeister always knew the car would sit on 15-inch wheels, which helped shape its thinking, but the style and width of those wheels was open to debate. "Wheel choice was always going to be a bit of a problem because the customer wanted retro-style wheels," Colin says. "With it being a 964 it runs a hub offset 33mm wider than that of an early 911, both front and rear. So if you fit a Fuchs wheel to a 964 immediately it sits 33mm further out than a standard rim."

Fortunately previous experience with a Turbo-bodied 964 project and a set of period Fuchs wheels meant Ninemeister had a good idea of what would work on its customer's car. It shopped around for a set of aftermarket wheels that would fit over the standard brake callipers. The team ended up purchasing the beautiful 15-inch Group4 Campagnolo wheels you see here in varying widths (six, seven, eight and nine inches) to enable some experimentation in the workshop. It proved a fruitful approach.

But Ninemeister had another trick up its sleeve: fitting 993 front uprights, steering arms and lower ball joints to the car. "Converting the front hubs from 964 to 993 items is relatively easy as they're an aluminium hub with a radial bolt calliper rather than an axial bolt calliper. They have a larger calliper with similar sized discs [to the originals] so it's a nice upgrade for a 964," Colin explains. As well as ensuring great feel on turn-in, the modification has the added bonus of providing a nice braking upgrade package for a 964. The customer had always worked on the assumption that he didn't want any more than 300hp, so the swap provided suitable braking performance.

The rest of the chassis work was tailored to fit with the customer's wish for a car with good steering feel yet one that also wasn't too stiff. Colin describes what Ninemeister did to achieve this as being a little counter intuitive. The entire car was seam welded to stiffen its shell even beyond the level typical of an RS 911. This allowed the team to run a softer suspension setup in the form of fully adjustable KW coilovers. In combination with those 15-inch single piece wheels with high profile tyres, the design was intended to ensure a sharp steering response without compromising the overall driveability of the car. "The customer wanted a compliant car but mainly he wanted something that handled really well – his DB9 just couldn't give him that," Colin says.

In order to exploit the reworked chassis you might presume that this car has come in for extensive engine work. You'd be wrong. While everything under the rear decklid has been renewed, it remains largely standard, and we really don't see a problem with that. Fully rebuilt pistons, cylinders, bearings, chains, guides, valves, springs, and cams all feature. Plus, of



course, there's that new 993 six-speed 'box grafted in with an RS gear lever set. Otherwise it's all pretty tame – just as the customer wanted.

What it is not, however, is quiet. We can thank the custom exhaust setup for that. "We wanted to achieve the look of a banana box across the back of the car," Colin explains, "but with that engine there wasn't enough room so the silencer is half the width it should be." The exhaust and silencer custom fabrication work cost £1500 alone and Colin admits he and the car's owner are still in the process of finessing the system; quietening its throaty roar currently remains on the 'to do' list.

Last, but by no means least, we have to mention the paintwork, for it is an incredible job and showcases the standard of work that Ninemeister's in-house paint shop can produce. For the colour the customer rattled through

hoards of Porsche and VW shades to find the right overall blue hue to shoot the car with. He performed the same process to track down a suitable contrasting grey and burgundy combination for the car's stripes, which are painted on, not created using vinyl as you might assume: "We did spray-out after spray-out and played with various tints to try and find the right colour combination," Colin recalls. "What's more, typically we would put two coats of primer on a car, bake it and then leave it for a month to fully harden off to allow for any shrinkage. Then we flat that off. This car had a third coat of primer and it was all blocked-out by hand each time." A labour intensive layering process was employed to build depth around the stripes allowing room for Ninemeister's talented paint professionals to flat it all back, eliminating the high spots for a

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deep yet fully flush finish. Run your finger across the stripe on this car and it feels like one fluid layer of paint, like highly polished glass. It's simply stunning workmanship.

All that was left to do after this were the electrics which for the most part are standard issue save for work to upgrade the 964's traditionally feeble headlight system and a few tweaks to the interior, which the customer looked after himself. Again, inside it's predominantly standard 964 fare as the customer wanted to use this car, chucking his kids in the back on weekends without a care and ensuring maximum levels of ease and comfort – so why change it? “The customer wasn't looking for the ultimate 911,” Colin explains. “He wanted something that was nice to drive.” There is, therefore, only question remaining: how does it drive?

We're always grateful when people allow us to drive their Porsches, it lends a feature a welcome

extra dimension. We're even more appreciative when those cars are entirely bespoke creations. So it's with a certain level of trepidation and excitement that we set off into the Cheshire countryside to test this 911 that Ninemeister calls a '9m64ST'. Our first impression is that it's impossible to escape the noise it makes; we can see why its owner is working with Colin to dampen the roar it creates from upwards of 2500rpm. But that aside, the overwhelming impression is just how easy this car is to drive. While its 964 roots remain apparent, moving through that slick six-speed 993 G50 gearbox is a delight, aiding positive and reassuring shifts. The acceleration from the rebuilt 3.6-litre motor out back feels far brisker than 300hp; in fact, we suspect Ninemeister's 'live remap' process delivers more power than its official dyno figures suggest. But the chassis setup is the real plus point here. It's exactly as Colin described: stable

with great turn-in feel and grip. While you're undoubtedly aware that the car is running coilovers, there's none of that crashing and banging you sometimes get on bump and rebound. The rest of the car's chassis, shell and rolling stock is clearly taking some of the strain and it promotes a smooth and enjoyable driving experience. You really feel like you could make some impressive progress in this car, and all the while you'd be doing so in a 911 that is entirely unique. It should not depreciate like a modern Aston Martin, either.

Typically we might be loath to report someone's bad experience with a Porsche main dealer as it's relative to them and therefore open to interpretation. In this instance, though, we're glad this car's owner was disgruntled by his OPC, as that set in motion a sequence of events that gave birth to this latest Ninemeister creation. Let's face it, how can that be a bad thing? ○