



A Roadster Gets Racy

Jeff Gamble chops the top and changes the look.

Magazine articles like this one in the Porsche Speedster Club magazine inspired Jeff to pursue a racy look for his Roadster. The first step toward that dream was the sketch below.



My taste in rods, custom, and sports cars of the 1950s and 60s was influenced by such magazines as *Hot Rod* & *Popular Mechanics*. Like many young guys of the time I owned a VW. When my brother Bruce returned home for Christmas 1966 I was pretty excited when he let me drive his '58 Porsche Speedster. I was immediately hooked with the hunkered-down look of the racy low windshield, the funky top and side curtains which gave the feeling of being in a little tank. As luck would have it that Holiday week, Dad spotted a '55 Speedster in Safford, Arizona that became my first Porsche. After selling the last of three Speedsters in 1981, I purchased a one-owner Roadster from Tucson. For years we enjoyed touring in the Roadster with its tall windshield and convenient roll up windows. However, all the while I continued to eye Speedsters with thoughts of modifying the Roadster to get that racy look back.

Past magazine articles showed converted Roadsters with Speedster windshields and tops, so I knew it was possible. Over several years I proceeded to gather the necessary Speedster parts. While attempting to fit the parts to the Roadster, however, it became apparent that the conversion would require extensive body modifications. I preferred to retain the body in its original state.

Consulting with Dave Cummins, a friend and talented retired Chrysler designer, we discussed a lowered windshield and a custom-designed hard top to match. We considered the Speedster Glasspar and Cabriolet Factory optional hardtop designs with quarter windows, but ultimately decided to maintain the Roadster's 1960s-style wrap around back light. Dave then proceeded to lay out the new design

with tape on the stock windshield, top and back light. With tape in place I drove the car, making sure the vision would be acceptable. Dave then carefully measured the body plan view and dimensions, and created a full-size working drawing of the new top. The project utilized donor Roadster brass posts and a windshield frame which were found at the 356 Holiday swap meet in Durango, Colorado.

Next, Tucson Hot Rod fabricator Hugh Frazer cut a 2.25 inch section from the brass post. The windshield header frame also had to be widened with a splice welded in place. The splice section was molded from the original frame, then cast in bronze at the Fine Art foundry. The process included making a cardboard template demonstrating the roof height. This check was necessary to insure Patsy's head would have enough clearance. From the drawings, Hugh then proceeded to fabricate a wire buck to be used as the guide for the panel beater.

In August 2001 the much-anticipated appointment at Garth's Bowie's metal shop in Prescott, Arizona arrived where top fabrication began. After several inspection trips and approximately 230 hours of Garth's meticulous handy work, the new (.063 thick) aluminum top was almost finished. Once again, Dave used his heavy tape to design the final shape of the back light. This cutout section also became the working buck for the Lexan back light.

After the metal work is completed, custom car builders face the challenge of cutting the windshield glass without cracking it. I'm thankful for words of wisdom from noted custom 356 builder Gary Emory, who suggested we make use of Spektr's molded and hardened Lexan as an alternative windshield material.

The Roadster now sports its own artful, unique low profile top complete with roll up windows. Should we polish the aluminum, leave the aluminum natural or paint it body color? Only time will tell what the final finish will be.





Above: Masking tape gave a fairly accurate idea of what the "look" would be from the outside of the car. It also gave Jeff a chance to see just how much "look" he had from the inside through the smaller window areas.

Opposite page: A new custom windshield header is checked for fit.

Above right: The handwork on the top is now in the final stages; it is fitted to the body for final dimensional adjustment.

Right: The final (or is it?) product definitely evokes the feel of the Speedster.

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