1 Is it the right car for you?

– marriage guidance

Tall and short drivers

Compared with similar era sports cars, 356 Porsches are surprisingly accommodating for taller drivers.

Weight of controls

Stated here for the first of many times: newer models are better than older ones in most of these areas due to constant upgrading of components. A 356C will require less steering effort and braking effort than earlier models, and have superior gear change.

Will it fit in the garage?

356s are small cars and fit in just about any garage. Perhaps, a better question is: Do you have a climate-controlled garage?

Interior space

For a sports car the front seat area is reasonably spacious, with a very low centre tunnel. The back seat area, though, is best used for small children only.

Compared to its contemporaries, the 356 had wide seats and loads of leg room.

The unloved Karmann Hardtop. (Courtesy Steve Moore)

in a very different looking car. The T 6 was the first 356 with an external gas filler, eliminating the chance of inflicting damage while filling the tank.

The front lid was squared off up front and the area below redesigned, yielding substantially more luggage space. The rear lid sprouted an extra rear grille, and the coupe lid and rear glass were substantially larger.

Both Roadster and Karmann Hardtop made the transition to the T 6, but just barely. Under 700 Hardtops were constructed and only 249 of the dual grille Roadsters rolled off the assembly line at d'Ieteren in Belgium, who took over from Drauz in mid-1961.

Karmann, on the other hand, happily transitioned to making standard shaped coupes, and continued to make them through the end of 356 production in 1965. 356 folks tend to prefer the Reutter ones.

The T 6 356B Carrera 2 had Porsche designed annular disc brakes, which gave way to conventional discs on the 356C. (Courtesy Jack Arct)

The exotic four-cam engine all but disappeared for a while, but returned during T 6 production as the sophisticated Carrera 2 model, so named for its two litre displacement. Some of these were fitted with the unusual Porsche-designed annular disc brakes.

356C 1964–1965: end of the line

Coupe and cabriolet models continued with coachbuilder Reutter being absorbed by Porsche in December of 1963. Reutter lived on as a spinoff company named Recaro that continues to manufacture seats.

The main improvement of the 356C was the adoption of disc brakes manufactured by Ate under license. These were also used on the 356C-based Carrera 2. There was little else new, as the folks in Zuffenhausen were gearing up for production of the 911.

A run of ten cabriolets was specially constructed in March of 1966 for the Dutch police, who wanted open cars. Some of these are still out there.

Probably the best choice, if you want a 356 to drive in nice climates: the 356C cabriolet. (Courtesy Dennis Frick)

The chassis number is under the mat stamped into the floor of the luggage compartment above the battery area.

A second ID plate with the chassis number was located to the right of the fuel tank through 1961, and down by the stamped chassis number on later cars.

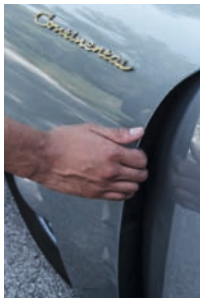
and find the stamped chassis number. It should match the one on the ownership documents and the one on a metal plate on the right side of the tank (in front of the tank after 1961). There's another one inside the driver's door, so let's go there next.

The number there is stamped on a silkscreened aluminium coachbuilder plate riveted on the aluminium panel that hides the door hinges. The plate may also include the exterior paint number. Does it match the exterior colour?

With the door completely open, run your fingers up and down inside the front fender through the door gap. You should only feel where the outer skin of the front fender uniformly wraps around the inner panel, not rust or evidence of casual rust repair.

Look also at the door jambs, striker plates and the condition of the threshold area. The bottoms of the doors, as well as the outer skins, are also subject to penetrating rust, so either use your mirror or lie down and take a good look – there should be shiny paint.

The interior of the rear lid should be painted body colour, and the latch mechanisms on all 356s are also painted in this manner. The latch on the lid always has paint



A third coachbuilder plate is riveted to the small aluminium panel that covers the left side door hinges. It also contains the stamped chassis number, and, on some cars, the paint number. On other cars a separate paint plate is below, which may or may not include the paint number.

Checking the area where the front fender sheet metal wraps around the inner structure for rust and/or poor quality repair.

found only on 356As. Headliners were the same perforated vinyl used on coupes. Removable hardtops on cars with soft tops were optional, though it was also optional to have one fitted without a soft top.

Aftermarket fibreglass Speedster tops were a fairly common period accessory. Factory made ones were exceedingly rare.

From 1958 through 1965, cabriolets could be fitted with hard tops. Either or both tops could have been ordered. (Courtesy Dave Derossett)

Fibreglass Speedster hardtops were made by a variety of aftermarket companies in the US, and Porsche apparently made a few metal ones. The latter would probably command a premium, but the fibreglass ones usually don't.

All cabriolets originally came with top boots, except 1958 and later cars ordered with only the hardtop. German-style Tenax studs were present on the body for mounting them. Cabriolet boots were made from the same cloth used for the tops. Speedsters featured a vinyl half tonneau rather than a boot, and optional vinyl boots were offered on Convertible D and Roadsters.

Optional full tonneaus in upholstery quality vinyl were available for all open cars, though first use is unknown. From 1958, cabriolet tonneaus were made from the same cloth used for tops. The only time optional items are expected is when they are listed on the CoA.

Rust areas

4 3 2 1

Rust areas on the body and chassis were mentioned in Chapter 7. Add to the list the fender braces. Cars with no other damage will potentially have rust in the battery area, due to the presence of the battery and its corrosive contents.

Perhaps worse than the rust itself is poor quality repair, and covering this up in an attempt to deceive buyers. In most cases this can be discovered by thoroughly examining the problem areas from both sides, where possible. Your magnet may help here, but your eyes and hands are key to determining actual condition.

If you find any significant rust or any poor quality repair, you really don't need to total up the points; just go home and find another car.

Battery compartment rust is common, even if no rust is present elsewhere. This 356A coupe has the added benefit of having a nose- full of pink polyester body filler.

Unusual contours around the rear of the front fender and non-uniform thickness of the fender arch are signs that you should find another car.

13 Do you really want to restore?

– it'll take longer and cost more than you think

First, go back to Chapter 2 and read the bit about structural repair and paint cost. Okay, now read on.

While there are probably some rust-free unrestored 356s out there, please be assured there aren't very many. Most were restored years ago and have now become second-generation projects. These are really scary, because you don't know how it was restored the first time, when the value of a 356 was much lower. You can price out the component pieces, and (if you have a famous television series) ignore the price of labour and you'll do just fine.

In reality the market price of the top quality finished car determines the value of those in lesser condition. This price nearly always is greater than can be justified for the work needing to be done. The only way of avoiding this is to buy the car before the market recognizes the potential value of the car. You'll need Mr Peabody for that, because the market is pretty good at anticipating these days.

Restoring a family owned car is a sentimental way to justify the same ill-advised decision. It will still cost the same, but it is Uncle Fred's car and you saved it. If you don't have to actually buy the car, it might actually work out better than expected. Isn't it a shame though, that Uncle Fred bought a Karmann Hardtop instead of a Carrera 2 cabriolet?

If you are planning to do the work yourself and the car has 'typical rust,' you'd better be a competent welder. Remember that this is a unit body car and open cars are prone to distortion due to their inherent weakness. Even with a rotisserie (yes, you can make one of those too), experts would still do it on a chassis jig. You might also want to pick up a copy of Jim Kellogg's DIY 356 restoration book before embarking. If you're still game, have at it. If not, that's okay, you can always resell it on eBay.

Accident damaged cars are generally beyond the scope of most and can be worth more in component parts. The latter is not often the case these days. If it was a sound car to start with, it could be easier and more economical to repair than a 'typical rust' car. It is a risky proposition though, if you aren't in the body repair business.

You've probably heard this before, but the only logical way to approach purchasing a 356 is to buy the best one you can afford. If you can only afford a 356 restoration project, then buy the best Pontiac Fiero you can afford. You'll be happier – especially if the market picks up on Fieros.