

The 356 BBQ

Another August gathering of the faithful for a BBQ lunch at Kirk Stowers 356 shop. This affair was well attended by both the 356 Florida Owners Group (FOG) and the Space Coast Region—over 80 attendees with at least 8 arriving in their 356s. You see the FOG members love an excuse to drive their cars and what better destination than to visit Kirk's latest projects. The FOG holds an annual "Drive Those Cars Contest" and as of August 1st the contest leader had already driven 19,324 miles including a trip to the west coast. You can learn more about the FOG and their particular Porsche passion at www.356fog.org.

The idea of the 356 BBQ is an air conditioned space where we can soak in the Porsche Vibe while catching up with old friends and meeting new ones. There were a lot of stories shared over the delicious catered BBQ from Charlie and Jakes. Kirk had a near finished 356C cabriolet front and center for attendees to explore. He also had a video of the body taken after the paint had been stripped so we could appreciate how much body reconstruction had been necessary. There were coupes, speedsters, and cabriolets in various stages from bare body shell to concours ready. We also enjoyed the collection of 4 cylinder engines in horrid to hot-rod condition.

The BBQ event is full of opportunities for Porsche trivia. Did you know that Kirk is the person credited with naming the *Excellence* magazine? The magazine was called "Porsche" from the date it was founded. At the request of Porsche, the publisher was searching for a new name. Kirk submitted his idea which was chosen from among many. He received a thank-you letter, a copy of the original *Excellence* magazine, and an editorial thanks for his Excellent idea.



To cap off the experience, I thought it would good to offer up a brief road test of one of Kirk's 356 creations. Lucky for me, Kirk agreed and let me take a trip around the block in a 356SC coupe. The block in this case includes some nice sweeping curves known locally as the Pineda on/off ramps. The black sunroof coupe was nothing to look at in its prerestoric condition; but, the engine was a thing of beauty. Kirk had just installed a rebuilt engine with 1700cc cylinder kit and high performance cam. This little 4 cylinder was good for an estimated 120HP (note: the August 2008 Panorama has a nice primer on Porsche 4 cylinder air cooled engine tuning). I had driven several 356SC Super 90s (90HP) before so there is some limited basis for comparison. This car pulled strongly all the way to the top of the rev range. I admit I was quite caught up in the sound and pull running up through the gears. While not quite Boxster-like in acceleration, this car could easily keep up with your 2008 economy car. And the 356 is a gas sipper which can average an estimated 30MPG (actual mileage may vary depending on driving style).

The fun increases in the curves. Because the 356 at 2,000 pounds is such a light car by today's standards, you curve carrying more of the gathered speed—a momentum car. The lateral acceleration sensation is heightened by the fact that you are much closer to the road surface than in a contemporary Porsche. The extra power really helped explore the available grip. The

sensation reminded me of carving a turn on downhill skis. I used my 911 driving experience to not lift throttle in mid-curve. A sudden lift in a curve and you can watch your rear-end pass by—the rear-end in this case being Kirk's new engine. So, in the middle of the power-band sweeping through the curve carrying all the momentum, then powering out, it was very Porsche. The acceleration up the straight and over the causeway was not quite 930 Turbo but then again, I was pulling away from that hybrid. To be fair, the hybrid driver was enjoying an air conditioned space and engaged in a cell phone enabled conference call to fill the drive time and likely didn't realize the competition with my thrice recycled machine. The drive was over too quickly while the desire lingers. The 356 experience is the essence of Porsche driving and to gain that experience is a treasure. With my growing appreciation I can admire Kirk's handiwork and the 356 owners group that much more.