



# The Magician

A PCA CLUB RACING FIXTURE, PETER DAWE HAS MADE PORSCHE RACING ENGINES HIS LIFE'S WORK.

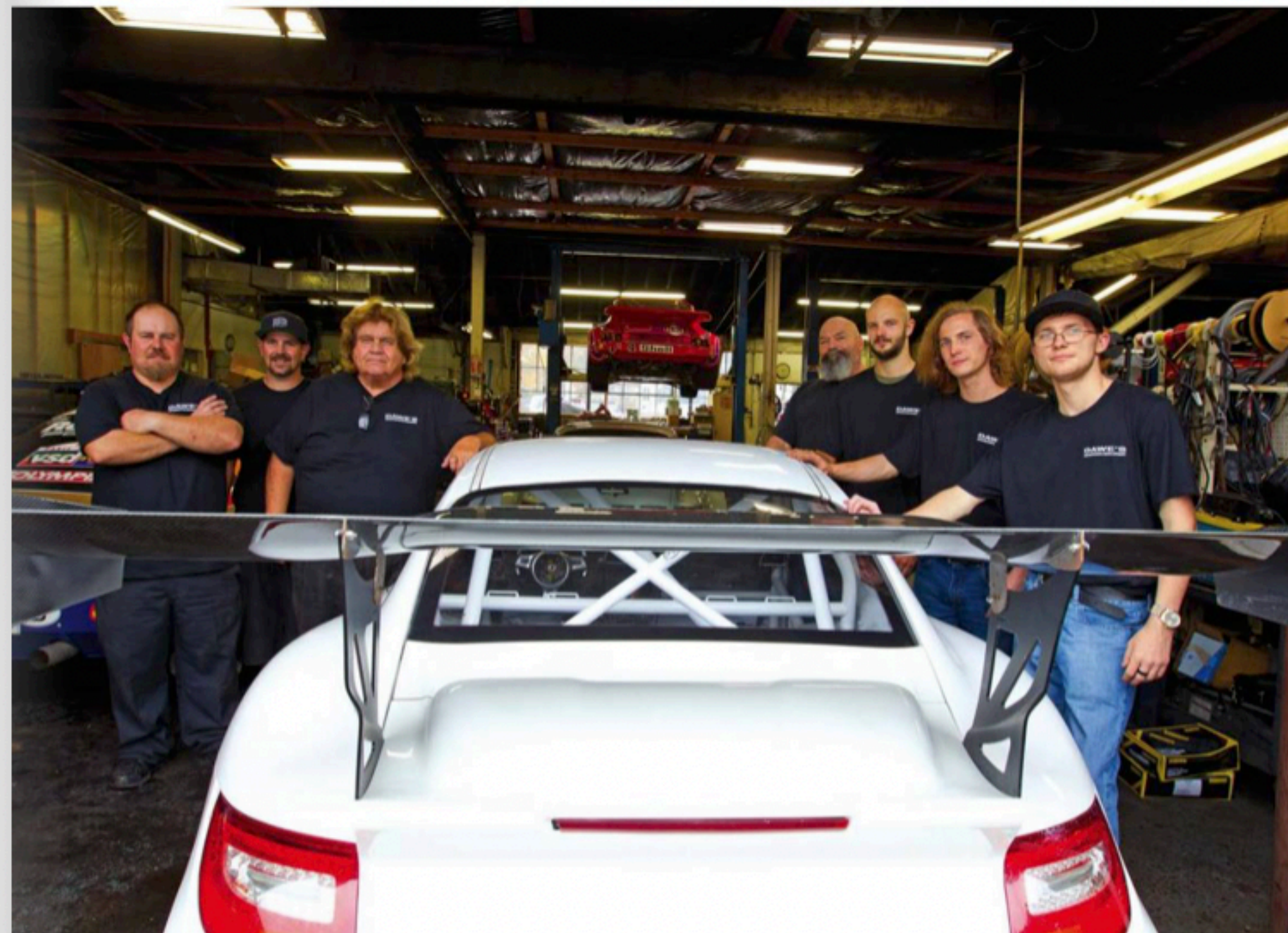
STORY BY RYAN CARIGNAN PHOTOS BY RICH CHENET





# What's in a name?

If you haven't spent time at a PCA Club Racing event (and as a member, you definitely should), the name doesn't paint the proper mental picture. The term "club racer" is technically appropriate, as no one is paid to race in these events and there is no prize money at stake. Everyone is an "amateur," even though more than a few former and current professional drivers are in the fold. What the name doesn't reflect are the résumés of the racers and the shops that build and support customer cars at these events. ♦ One of those résumés belongs to Dawe's Motorsports Development, which is well known in the PCA Club Racing world. The name Peter Dawe can be found in countless online forum discussions when anyone needs an engine rebuilt or a race car restored or built from scratch. In fact, if you own one of the greatest hits from Porsche's motorsport heyday, you should get to know his name.



**PETER DAWE WAS BORN** on a horse farm near Allentown, Pennsylvania, not far from the shop he has run for 20 years. His father was a foundry engineer for whom cars were simply a means to get from point A to point B. From a young age, Dawe was interested in anything mechanical. When he was nine years old, he begged his father to buy a discarded 1931 Chevy pickup littering a nearby farmer's field. His father relented, and two years later, Dawe had the truck running and on the road. "Dad was a fantastic engineer. He wasn't into cars, but I learned so much from him," he says.

Dawe's first exposure to motor-

sports was via local quarter-midget dirt track racing. Watching those machines race is where he had an epiphany that would define his life's work. He realized that to be successful, the quality of the device, its design, and technological advancement could mean as much or more than the driver's skill.

A job relocation for the senior Dawe to Morristown, New Jersey, was a crucial factor in Peter's future development. His high school bus route passed the local Porsche+Audi dealership, and one day he asked the driver to drop him off there. Dawe explained to the service manager that he had some experience with

engines and asked for a job; he was hired. What began as part-time work after school turned into five years of steady employment. By the time Dawe was a senior in high school, he was doing all of the dealership's engine work and rebuilding gearboxes. After work, he assisted a friend who campaigned a Porsche 914-6 in the SCCA C-Production class.

**THE RACING WORLD** is a small one, especially if you're racing a Porsche 914, and it wasn't long before Dawe met Jim Cook. The driver of the IMSA Altec-Lansing 914 was looking for an extra hand, and Dawe was eager to fill the role. This race

The experience within Dawe's Motorsports Development should be the envy of many a dealership service center. Sons Trevor and Kevin stand to Peter's right, highlighting the wealth of family knowledge.





Rebuilding the engine from a Porsche 935 would be a rare feat for many shops, but it's just another day for Dawe's crew.

team happened to run engines built by a new company based in California named Andial. Dawe's work on Cook's car did not go unnoticed by Andial's three founders: Arnold Wagner, Dieter Inzenhofer, and Alwin Springer. They soon introduced themselves at a race, and shortly after that, Springer made Dawe an offer he couldn't refuse: come to California and work for Andial.

"I thought, oh brother, I can't pass this up," laughs Dawe. "It was just such a great opportunity. I had to move to California, at least for a few months, to give it a try." The

move was not an easy one, as it meant leaving his wife and one-year-old son Trevor back east.

At the time, Andial was a small operation. Dawe and Mike Getzinger were the first non-founding employees of the company. Dawe worked on everything that came into the shop. Being a small operation, the founders were much more than the face of the company. "They worked hard and were building engines along with us for everything from road cars to 906s," says Dawe. "Dieter was really great with all race engines, and Alwin was such an in-

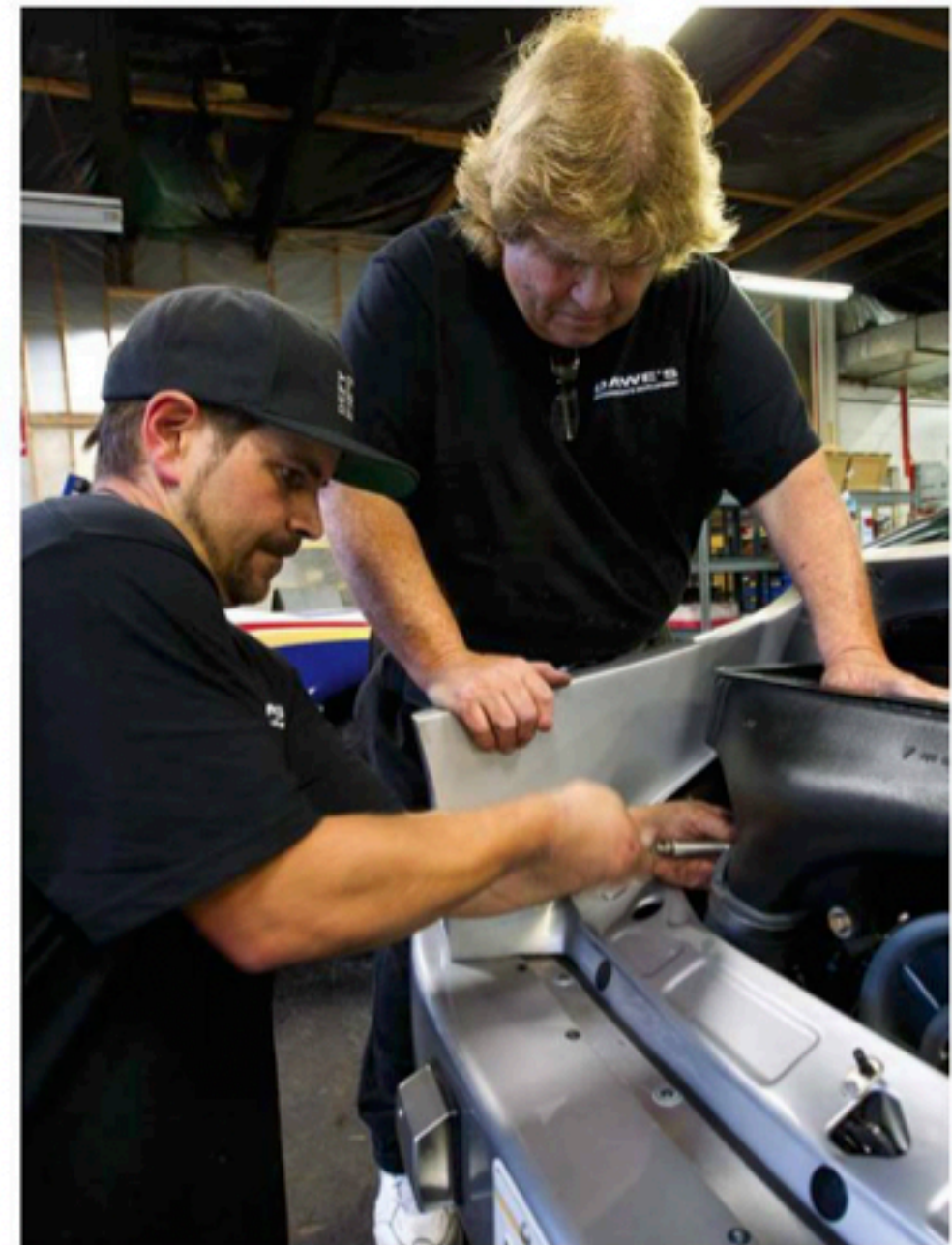
novator. In those days, if you took a race car to the track the same way twice, you weren't doing your job because the other teams were doing everything they could to beat you."

The constant search for an edge was something Dawe took seriously. "On the road, I would buy every non-racing magazine [*Popular Mechanics*, *Popular Science*, *Aviation Weekly*] I could find, and I would read them all," he says. "I was always looking for something I could use that other people in racing wouldn't know."

Dawe also understood that you

could learn something, good or bad, from other teams, regardless of the car's class. He would walk the paddock and pit lane to observe, hoping to find something others were doing that he could adapt to his customer or his team. "You can always learn something from your competitors," he says. "That's a philosophy I have never stopped following."

**AFTER SEVERAL YEARS** with Andial, Dawe opened his own shop in California. At the time, there were 20 Porsche shops in a ten-mile radius. "I knew I had to produce. The back-



Father and son put the finishing touches on another powerhouse Porsche engine. Projects live anywhere there is space in this busy shop.

Below: Each engine and car has a dedicated cart to organize the parts before reassembly.







One of Dawe's latest builds gets a last look-over before hitting the track. The projects, tools, and parts that litter the garage would make most Porschephiles think they'd died and gone to Stuttgart heaven.

ground of being at Andial helped. I could never take anything away from that," he says. Little did he realize that even with stiff competition, he couldn't have put his new business in a better location.

Just as Carroll Shelby had benefited from the intense hot rod culture and expertise of the area over a decade earlier, Dawe would experience growth from those around him. Within four blocks of his new shop was Dan Gurney's All American Racing outfit, as well as a cou-

ple of operations any fan of the Indy 500 from the '60s through the '80s should know, Traco Engineering and Drake Engineering.

With a genius like John Drake available to bounce ideas off, Dawe had an enormous wealth of knowledge to tap. "John Drake was another key to my development," he remembers. "He was such a great guy, so smart but also quiet." Drake allowed Dawe to use his company's engine dyno to test his air-cooled builds. He showed a keen interest in

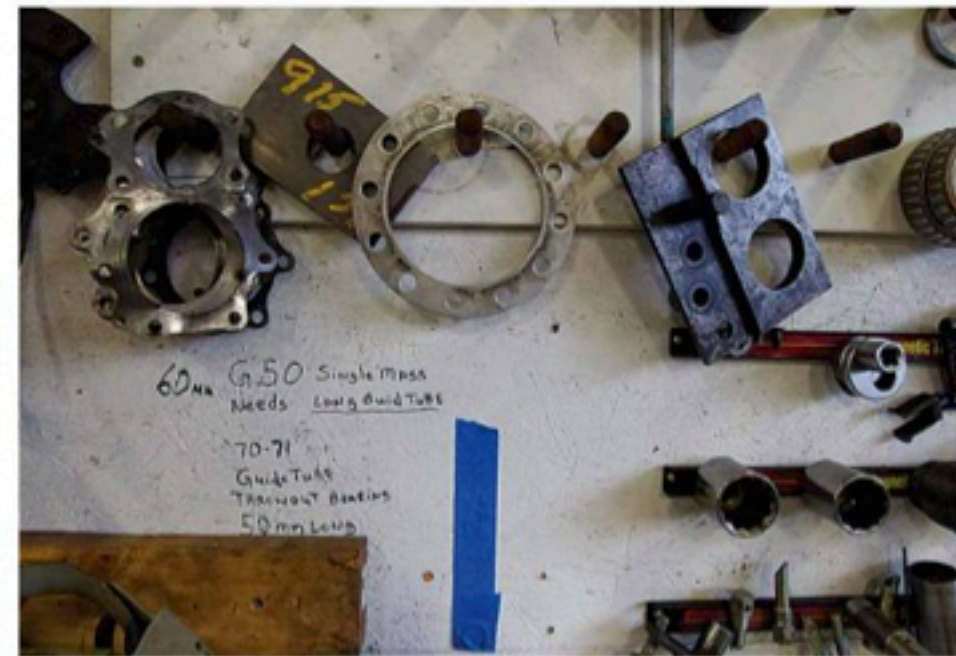
what Dawe was developing and how he was improving his race engines. "John would watch me test an engine on the dyno, and he would give me a comment; it always started with 'Have you ever thought about doing...'" laughs Dawe. "He would give me part of an idea or explanation and then just leave. That's the way he was."

As it often does, life intervened. His parents' declining health led Dawe to leave California and return to New Jersey. There he established a new shop, but he was still traveling so much to work with race teams that it was challenging to keep the shop going. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Dawe was doing everything in motorsport. He was a racer, a car builder, an engine mechanic, a suspension guru, a team manager, and a consultant.

Those were the days when teams could add a driver in the middle of an endurance race if someone was sick or just didn't want to go back on track. Because of his skill and friendly demeanor, Dawe found rides as a substitute driver for many teams at night or in the rain at the 24 Hours of Daytona and other endurance races. He frequently raced across North America, as well as at Le Mans and other European races throughout the 1980s.

Spending 200 nights a year in hotels was a strain for Dawe and his family. In the early '90s, he decided to close his New Jersey shop and transition to consulting for race teams. But another opportunity too good to pass up came along when David and Jeff Stone of Kelly Moss Racing offered him a contract to be the team's engine builder. While the family relocated to Pennsylvania, Dawe moved to Madison, Wisconsin, to work for Kelly Moss. A few years of successful work with that team gained the attention of other professional race teams and earned Dawe more offers he couldn't refuse.

He had much success in professional racing over the decades, but victory at the Rolex 24 at Day-



tona eluded him even after dozens of attempts. "We had a half dozen second-place finishes, and we were leading in the 23rd hour one year when an axle broke. I was in tears," he recounts. Endurance racing didn't leave him entirely heartbro-

ken, as he was part of the class-winning Alex Job team at the 1995 12 Hours of Sebring.

**AFTER THE 2001 SEASON,** Dawe returned to Pennsylvania to focus on his shop, establishing Dawe's Motor-





Restoration, hot rod, built-from-scratch RSR-style racer, or a custom clone of a Porsche racing legend—it's all here in Dawe's workshop.

sports Development at its current location in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. He went to work trying to build a name for himself working on road cars. Fortunately for racers across the country, that didn't work out. "I just couldn't escape the race shop image, and people didn't want to bring their road car to a race shop," says Dawe. He finally gave in and went back to doing what he knows so well, building winning race engines and cars for customers.

The shop started small; two people became four as business picked up. The vast experience gained over his 30 years of racing taught Dawe not to be narrow-minded when it came to his work. Porsche race cars are already a niche within a niche, so he made sure customers knew he was equally adept at working on air- and water-cooled cars. But his initial success, and what kept customers calling, were the air-cooled monster 356s that terrorized Historic Sports-car Racing (HSR) events.

"I loved building crazy 'grenade' 356 motors for HSR racing," says

Dawe. These were not your typical flat fours. They were 1900cc, all-aluminum engines making 190 horsepower and spinning to 8500 rpm. The shop built about six of these powerplants in the first few years, and word spread fast that Dawe was the man you needed in your corner if you wanted to win races. Then came the 2.0-liter class HSR cars with mechanical injection making 258 hp at 9800 rpm. "That was a lot of power for a little tiny motor," says Dawe. "After ten hours of race conditions, they needed to come back for service."

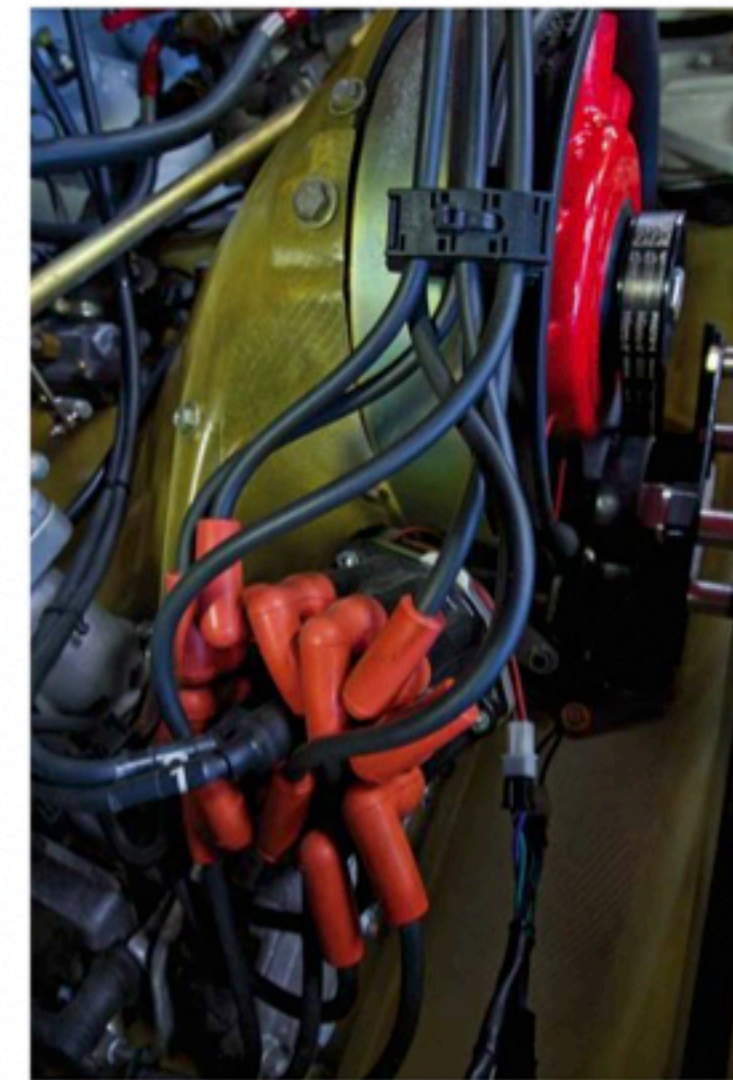
By that time, Peter's sons Trevor and Kevin had already established themselves as excellent mechanics and were no strangers to the racing world. Trevor worked with Alex Job Racing on their Daytona Prototype and Porsche 996 race cars. Meanwhile, Kevin found a successful home working for the legendary Brumos Racing team on their Daytona Prototype program.

Much like their father before them, however, Kevin and Trevor grew tired of the travel required by

professional racing and were happy to come home and work in their father's shop. The skills they brought from their racing days further strengthened the shop's reputation within amateur racing circles.

The competition and financial commitment of modern amateur racing proved to be a valid business model. SCCA racing has long been popular, but the rise of historic racing groups like HSR and the Sports-car Vintage Racing Association (SVRA) provided a steady stream of customers, as did the relative newcomer of the group, the Porsche Club of America's Club Racing program.

**"PCA CLUB RACING** started very strong, which I didn't expect, honestly," says Dawe. "In the early 2000s, the program was less than ten years old, and we were bringing 13-17 cars to Sebring, which I never would've imagined." People not familiar with the PCA racing series may struggle to envision fleets of shop-prepared cars lining the paddock, but at most events, the Club



Racing paddock dwarfs the car count at IMSA's biggest races.

"I love seeing the variety at the track with PCA Club Racing," said Dawe. "We still see cars that are built and maintained by the racer, up to GT class cars with budgets deep into six figures." Dawe's Motorsports has seen even more work recently, as PCA Club Racing cultivated a Vintage Class beginning in 2016. The class offers a place for classic air-cooled Porsche race cars from 1989 and earlier to get on track without being gunned down by modern cars with more power and driver aids. "The Vintage Class is great because it gives a lot of these cars a place to race, to be where they belong," says Dawe.

Don Jacobs has been a customer of Peter's since before Dawe's Motorsports Development opened for business. He loves racing so much that his sons now race with him, and all three of them campaign Porsches with engines built or rebuilt by

With success comes a large workload, as attested to by the cars lined up for Dawe's staff to work their magic. How often have you seen a 962C and a 1962 356 convertible worked on at the same location? Probably the last time you walked into this Stroudsburg garage.





Peter's sons and staff have developed an incredible amount of skill and experience over the years, but the master is still hard at work every day, using his hard-won expertise on Porsches of every generation.



Dawe. When Peter told Jacobs they could rebuild the 2.2-liter engine in his 914 to a more sturdy spec to make it last longer, but it would lose a little potency, Jacobs told him he wasn't interested in competing for second place. That was the first in a long line of race-winning engines Peter would do for Jacobs. "He's just a magician," says Jacobs. "He

brings out the best and always delivers. It's like he's a step ahead of everyone else, figuring things out and making them work."

Racer and PCA national steward Pat Heptig commissioned a 911 RSR-style build with Dawe's Motorsports a few years back. His new car debuted at the 2020 Road America race, in the same run group with fac-

tory Porsche Cup cars. After getting the car sorted in practice, Heptig had one thing to say about it: "This is the best engine I have ever had in a race car!"

The known pedigree of a car built by Peter Dawe and his team carries weight in the paddock. Beyond the prodigious wealth of knowledge is his genuine warmth, trust, and willingness to help. Whether he built your engine or not, if you ask for help, Peter Dawe is going to do everything he can to assist you. Dawe is also the last person to tell his own story. Humble doesn't begin to describe his personality, especially for someone whose expertise is difficult to match. There are few people in the world with his hands-on knowledge and experience with Porsche engines.

One doesn't have to look for long to find a car brandishing the Dawe handiwork at an event. All you have to do is look at the front of the pack. 🏁

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