



Original. Or Not.

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"For sale: 1988 911 Carrera cabriolet, perfect condition, no issues. All original."

Oh really? Can you be sure?

I'm sure most of us have been around the block a few times buying and selling cars knowing that "perfect condition" and "all original" have a consistency in meaning equal to a modern political promise. Does anyone really know what "all original" means anymore as it relates to cars? If you've watched Barrett Jackson or Mecum auctions you hear that term used exhaustively on cars that have shiny clearcoat paint and panel gaps akin to a Lexus, neither of which were remotely possible during the heyday of quality American automobile construction of the 50's, 60's, and 70's. How does this term apply to Porsche?

If you're reading this, then you are most likely a PCA member and a Porsche owner, who understands that the machine sitting in your garage has been crafted much differently than most anything else on the road. Is that machine you love to drive to Saturday breakfast and take to the track during our October DE original? Does it really matter? Actually, for a Porsche, yes it does. In my humble opinion, "all original" means that car carries the same exterior paint, trim, interior finishes, and mechanical items as delivered from the factory, aside from those items required by the factory guidelines to be replaced as part of regular maintenance. This article focuses on exterior paint and how to distinguish as original or not.

From the beginning, Porsches have been known and prized for their excellent build and finish quality both inside and out. Disturbing an original finish Porsche, especially one that has either few flaws or just the right amount of patina to prove it has lived an interesting life, will adversely affect both the provenance and value of that car. Think of it in this light, how happy would a collector be if they just paid \$20,000 for an "original finish" Gustav Stickley arts and crafts sideboard, only to find out it had been refinished with Minwax stain and polyurethane in the 1980's, therefore only worth \$5,000? The point of this article is not to ad-

monish those cars that have been partially or wholly repainted. The key is to have the knowledge to determine originality so the price you pay is a fair reflection of the car's condition.

One must determine from the beginning of their Porsche search just how important originality will be on their priority list, as that directly influences the price. While the chances of finding a nice all original example from the 1970's and prior may be slim, all original cars from the 1980's and newer commonly exist and can be found if you look hard and smart enough. There exists a full range of originality from truly all original, to salvage title rebuilds, to a car that's had a front bumper respray simply to fix a single rock chip. Determine your budget, check the market at that price point, and then decide if you can live with the condition and originality of cars available. If you want something nicer, then the budget will have to increase. If you could care less about original paint, then strike that from your list of questions to the seller and enjoy the fact that you should be paying 10% to 20% less. Once all of this has been sorted out in your mind and you've found a few Porsches to pursue, the real work begins. Are those candidates original or not?

Determining the originality of a car begins with interviewing the seller. Be efficient with your first call or email, asking immediately "is the paint all original". If the seller says no, first of



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all thank them for their honesty, and then determine if you want to continue with that car. If the seller says, "yes, it's all original", then do your best to act like you trust his word. But don't trust his word. Ask them how they would be able to tell if the car has paint work. If they pass that test by mentioning methods that will be explained later in this article, then continue to pursue that car. If their level of expertise is between zero and barely understanding the concept of overspray, thank them for their time and seriously consider passing on that car. If the seller thinks a repainted Porsche, especially one that is fairly new, is a good thing, then run away, quickly.

If a car has passed the initial test with an owner giving good reasons of why he or she thinks the car is original, prepare to visit the car and see for yourself. If the car is not local, there are a few options to initially vet a car. Have a repair shop check the paint with a paint gauge, or have a friend or colleague you trust who lives near the car take a look. Also, ask the seller to send high resolution photos of areas mentioned later in this article. With this information, you should be one step closer to deciding if the car is worth traveling to view in person.

Once you are able to view the car, first and foremost look at the texture and color of the paint itself. While factory Porsche paint is superior to most other makes, it does come delivered with small amounts of texture or "orange peel", especially on late model examples. Original paint should not be perfectly smooth or rough textured (Figure 1). Note that older cars may be smoother from polishing over the years. Become familiar with known examples of original and repainted cars in the era you're purchasing to help make comparisons. Look for sanding marks of linear or swirled recesses; if you see them, it has been repainted. Next, look for pieces of dust or debris in the paint, especially in clearcoat cars if applicable. Though Porsche occasionally lets a car out of the factory with dust in the paint,

this is very rare, especially on prominent topside areas. If you spot several area of dust and lint captured in the paint, that area is probably resprayed. Similarly, look for entire panels where rock chips have been painted over without proper preparation. While common on the hood, front nose and bumper areas, these blemishes can often be spotted on the front facing areas of the rear fender flares as well. Lastly, look at the overall color, especially in bright sunlight. Many Porsche colors typically turn several unique shades in the sun. Signs of mismatched colors between panels, or a lack of the chameleon-like transition in sunshine may indicate a poorly blended respray. Again, become familiar with original examples of the colors you're pursuing. Knowing that Ocean Blue turns greenish and Midnight Blue turns purplish in the sun make it easier to spot non-originality.

Next, look at the door, trunk and engine openings or jambs. If you suspect the paint texture or color is wrong, taking a good look at the jambs may confirm your suspicions. Door openings are the place to start. Porsche door jambs both old and new match the exterior of the car in color and sheen so look for any indication of rough paint or overspray. Later model Porsches do not have the overlap seam of the rear fender over the door opening sheet metal (Figure 2) so it is very difficult to hide a blend line unless the entire door jamb is repainted. In



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2

that case, inspect the rubber gaskets closely for overspray. On the older models, check for paint ridges or mismatched color if they tried to locate the blend line at the edge of the fender seam (Figure 2). Also look for signs of overspray or a paint ridges at the perimeter of the VIN tag, emissions sticker, or paint code tag on earlier models (Figures 2 & 8). On the door itself look for rough paint or ridges along the outside edges of the door skin. On air-cooled 911's, look at the area inside the door near the mirror that runs nearly horizontal, as well as on the angled flat portion with the black plug covers (Figure 3). All of these areas should have shiny paint with no roughness.



FIGURE 3

Engine and trunk lid openings get a bit trickier. Older models have generally smooth paint all the way inside the opening, so any rough edges or dull paint may indicate respray. Inspect the various stickers and latch mechanisms for overspray or paint ridges at the along their edges (Figure 4). I will guarantee that Porsche never delivered a car with Guards Red paint all over the firing order sticker. On lighter colored cars, often times you can spot from a distance a shadow line at the opening; this may be from discoloration or dirt where the rough blend line was not fully wet sanded and polished (Figure 5). The undersides of the front and rear lids on older models should be consistently shiny. Look for rough paint or overspray. Newer models do not have the same shiny clearcoat finish under the lids and inside the trunk and jambs, or in the case of the

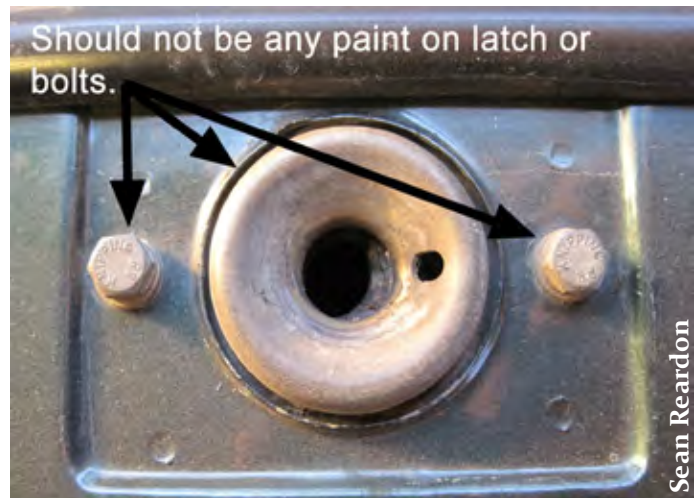


FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5

Boxster, the inside the opening of the convertible top clamshell. While this makes distinguishing overspray paint a bit more difficult to spot, any change in color or texture should still be apparent if you look closely enough. Conversely, look for paint that is too shiny in these locations. Lastly, many later models should have a small (approximately 3" square) paper sticker under the front lid with a dot matrix printout of various configuration and option codes. Should this be missing it may indicate repair work

or replacement may have been done to that panel. Incidentally, the companion sticker should be in the warranty booklet so check for that while you're inspecting the car. If nothing else, these stickers will give an accurate listing of all the options the car was delivered with.

Should the paint and openings look okay, start checking the details for overspray. Spotting extracurricular paint on trim, gaskets, glass, suspension pieces, or any other area not meant to be painted is a dead giveaway. Specifically check windshield wiper arm bases and washer nozzles, black trim welting on 911's at front fender to cowl (Figure 6), rubber trim strips between fender and bumpers (Figure 6), on the hidden rubber seals surrounding the convertible top under the canvas fabric at the rear fenders, on the rubber trim surrounding the semi-circle torsion bar cover on 911's (Figure 7), on black trim around the 944/968 roof pillars and panels, and on felt and rubber sunroof seals. Pull up the rubber edge of all the window trim and check for either paint on the rubber or glass and for paint ridges adjacent to the rubber trim. Check all lights, bezels,

and rubber trim for paint. Next, look at all black or clear stone guards (Figure 8). Check for paint ridges along the perimeter and be sure they have been installed over the paint (not under the paint, as one 993 seller tried to convince me). Look for a difference in paint color or texture where the paint goes under the clear guards, especially on late model cars. Also check for color of the clear guards; if one is significantly clearer than the other then it may indicate a replacement, possibly on a repainted panel. The bottom line is that paint only belongs on body panels.

So after all this, is the car original? Hopefully these tips will help you determine that next time you're face to face with a potential addition to your Porsche fleet. It does take time to gain experience by looking at known examples of both original and repainted cars. However, through the years of buying and selling Porsches, I've discovered how easy it has become to spot a repainted car. Unfortunately the number of sellers who have this skill is significantly lower than the number of Porsches for sale so one must take the initiative to make their own determination. Happy hunting!

- Sean



FIGURE 6

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FIGURE 7

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FIGURE 8

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