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Of Bumblebees and Creamsicles

A rapid restoration yields this delicious **914 Limited Edition** fit for a summer-time treat

BY TERRY SHEA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID LaCHANCE
AND TERRY SHEA

The Porsche 917/30 crushed all competition in the Can-Am series in 1973, so dominating the series, with Penske driver Mark Donohue winning the last six of eight total rounds, that the SCCA rewrote the rules to essentially outlaw the last of the truly unlimited road-racing cars.

Porsche celebrated its 1,000 plus-horsepower wrecking machine in 1974 by selling 1,000 special 914s, each a 2.0-liter model with a couple of specific options and each available with special badging and only on two separate color schemes.

Known officially as the 914 Limited

Edition, or LE, all 1,000 cars were shipped to North America for sales in the U.S. and Canada. Porsche selected the LE moniker because the SCCA simply asked too much for the rights to license the Can-Am name on the cars, though they agreed in principle to allow it.

Along with the regular Appearance Group option (fog lamps and center console with clock and additional gauges) at \$300, the LE package set buyers back another \$320. What they got for their money, however, were add-ons to make quite the slick-looking 914: a special interior, alloy wheels, a



spoiler below the front bumper, front and rear anti-roll bars and one of two unique paint combinations, highlighted by a “negative” stripe that spelled out “Porsche” just above the rocker panels.

Porsche imported 500 cars with black as the primary color and 500 in Light Ivory. The black cars all featured Sunflower Yellow rocker panels, bumpers, spoiler and wheels, earning the car the “Bumblebee” nickname. The white cars were accented in the same places with Phoenix Red, a nearly orange color, giving rise to the “Creamsicle” name.

Although Porsche made a 1.8-liter engine available as the base engine in the '74 914, all LE's came equipped with the 2.0-liter flat-four, a heavily revised version—by Porsche—of the Volkswagen powerplant and first offered in 1973. Small increases in bore and stroke yielded a 1,971-cc displacement against the base 1,795-cc engine, resulting in a robust 91 hp in U.S. trim, a considerable upgrade over the 72.5-hp Porsche listed for the smaller engine. Acceleration in the roughly 2,100-pound car improved from leisurely to brisk enough to face the rest of the competition

in the class—sports cars primarily from the U.K. and Italy.

Despite stumbling out of the blocks with it in 1970, by 1973, Porsche had fixed most of what ailed the four-cylinder 914, primarily with the more powerful 2.0-liter engine. But the engineers also fitted a new gearbox. Earlier 914s, with their notably balky shifting, used a linkage that connected at the far rear of the transmission. The new-for-'73 transaxle featured a connection closer to the front of the unit, allowing for a smoother-acting (if still far from perfect) shifter via a shorter linkage rod.

1974 Porsche 914 LE Owner's Story



Whenever I give anybody a ride who's never been in a 914, the first turn, you can see them, they've got their hands up on the side of the car and they just can't believe that wherever I point the car, it goes and the tires don't chirp or anything. The weight distribution, I think, is like 52/48 on the wheels. It's just such an inexpensive car that was very well designed. The handling is definitely the best. Out of the factory, I think it did like 119 MPH, which was pretty good for a little four-cylinder back then. But it's not, you know, push-you-back-into-your-seat speed, like a Porsche Turbo. It's just a regular-driving car until you hit the turns. —Jim Flanagan



Amidships in the 914 LE is a 2.0-liter version of Volkswagen's air-cooled flat-four, making 91 hp in U.S. trim.



The 914 LE's gauges should look familiar to any Seventies Porsche aficionado, though the 914's speedometer only registers to 120 MPH instead of the 911's 150 MPH.

Magazine reviewers of the day, who had been harsh in some reviews when the car debuted in 1970, began praising the car once the larger engine had been fitted. Handling prowess—truly the car's single most attractive attribute—remained strong, due to a fully independent suspension with torsion bars up front and coil springs at the rear. Unassisted power steering allowed for excellent feedback and control of the lightweight machine with near 50/50 weight distribution. Disc brakes at all four corners provided plenty of stopping power.

The LE's very Seventies color schemes apparently had a tough time with buyers, with some stories around that dealers resprayed cars they couldn't move with more palatable hues. Interestingly enough, neither color scheme had anything to do with the blue and yellow 917/30 that Donohue drove to such dominance in the Can-Am Challenge in 1973.

But, time being what it is, primarily a motivating force for all things old, a.k.a. nostalgia, even for fashions we'd never thought we'd want to relive, Bumblebees and Creamsicles have come back into fashion in recent years. Certainly, rising values and a strong appreciation for originality have helped their cause. Today, these truly limited-edition LE's have gained their own cult following. Just search the Internet for 914 Can-Am Registry to find those cult members. One source indicates roughly 25 percent of the original 1,000 imported cars remain extant.

An evangelist of the LE, Jim Flanagan, of Mooresville, North Carolina, and owner of our feature car, is no stranger to Porsche 914s; this is his third, after all. "My first

one, I bought back in 1973 when I was reading meters in the Bronx for the electric company. I read the meters in the Porsche dealership and I saw that car there and it was like \$4,600, and the veterans were giving me on-the-job training, and I said, 'Maybe I can do this.' I had it for two years, because that's how long the money from the veterans was, and after that I had to sell it."

Later in life, having moved up the ladder at the utility company, including spending time as a truck mechanic servicing a large fleet and ultimately as a "shirt and tie guy," Jim bought another, this one a '76. He restored that car and had it for a time, along with the '74 LE, but has since sold it to a buyer from Germany.

Jim bought his LE around four years ago and immediately set about going through it. "It was in Kansas," he recalls. "I purchased it, went and picked it up, and the car was kind of a tired car, never having had anything done to it. Someone stuck on some body side molding. There was a little rust where the jack points are. It just needed a whole overhaul, and that's what I did."

Despite initially not calling it a restoration in our conversations, Jim "overhauled" the car in what certainly seems like record time to us. "It took three months to take it apart, have it painted, rebuild the engine and get it back together," says Jim. *Wait, what?* "I took the whole car apart except for the dashboard," he explains nonchalantly, but in greater detail. "I rebuilt the engine myself. And it was a labor of love where, every time I put something back on the car, I either sprayed it or cleaned it. It took a while, maybe three months, but I'm

retired." For those of us with stalled or very, very long-term projects measured in years or decades, Jim's efforts sound nothing short of remarkable. Do we need to call the Guinness World Records people?

When asked if any parts were particularly hard to come by, Jim pointed out that finding quality bearings at a reasonable price was a bit of a chore, but, then again, he got them within a couple of weeks and was able to rebuild the engine. The 2.0-liter four uses Bosch D-Jetronic fuel injection, a system that Jim, the experienced mechanic, swears by: "I am one of these stock guys. I like it just stock. It has the stock Bosch fuel injection in it and I think it's—if you understand the fuel injection—it's perfect. A lot of guys go to carbs and they have nothing but problems with these 2.0-liters. The fuel injection that came with it back in 1974 is just great."

Though the car was relatively clean, some metal work was needed underneath, most notably at a jacking point that had suffered extensive rust. Turning to a body shop in nearby Denver, North Carolina, Jim had the jacking point repaired and also had the car refinished. "The painting is something that I can't do, so that's probably the only thing that I had an outside person do," Jim says.

He also turned to outside help with one small task during the engine rebuild. "The valve guides were put in by John Forbes, who is from Black Forest Racing," recalls Jim. "That's probably the only thing done in the engine by someone else. But I did it in the shop with him. I replaced the valves as he was putting the valve guides in." Also based in Denver, Black Forest has built a reputation that includes lots of experience with 914s.

Today, with his wife, Carmela, Jim enjoys the 914, taking it to shows. (We first saw it a couple of years ago at the Euro Auto Fest in Spartanburg, South Carolina.) "I've driven it everywhere, to every show I've ever attended, but this year, it's a little over nine hours away to the Porsche Parade, and I think I am going to trailer it, because I'm gonna be 65 and it's a little tough sitting in that 914 for nine hours. I feel bad inside that I'm not going to drive it there, but me and the wife in there for over nine hours is a little rough."

At a previous Porsche Club of America Parade, Jim won an award for the best 914 restoration. So much for his rapid "overhaul." Though we may disagree that it's his only secret for getting so much done in such a short time, Jim does share one important aspect of his ability to work quickly: "I spoiled myself in retirement and got myself a little bit of a man cave. It's like a one-and-a-half-size garage. I designed it, had it built and I have a two-post lift in it. To do this stuff on a car you need to have your own lift. If you're popping engines in and out on your back, it gets a little tough. The lift really makes it much easier."

Another aspect making life easier for 914 owners is the more recent respect for the car, with fewer and fewer abject views that the car is merely a warmed-over Volkswagen. "We're slowly being accepted in the Porsche community," notes Jim, "where the 'real' Porsche guys always considered the 914 a Volkswagen until they go to the track and the 914s kill the 911s, because it's such an amazing-handling car. It's ridiculous!" Perhaps the 914 Limited Edition was the right car, after all, to celebrate Porsche's dominant performance in the Can-Am. 🌐

Specifications

Engine	OHV flat-four, air-cooled, magnesium alloy block with steel cylinder sleeves, aluminum heads
Displacement	1,971 cc (120-cu.in.)
Bore x stroke	94 mm x 71 mm
Compression ratio	7.6:1
Horsepower @ RPM	91 @ 4,900
Torque @ RPM	109-lb.ft. @ 3,000
Main bearings	Four
Fuel system	Bosch D-Jetronic electronic fuel injection
Transaxle	Five-speed manual
Steering	Rack-and-pinion
Brakes	Four-wheel discs; front: 11 inches; rear: 11.1 inches
Wheelbase	96.5 inches
Overall length	159.4 inches
Overall width	65 inches
Overall height	48.4 inches
Curb weight	2,160 pounds
0-62 MPH	10.5 seconds
Top speed	115 MPH

