

Words: Alex Grant Photos: Andy Tipping

# THE NEW OUTLAW

Tom Fitzsimmons has owned countless Porsches in a career spent closely working with the brand. But, ten years after it was imported from Canada, this characterful Pre-A still has a special place in his collection

Porsche was a fledgling carmaker when Scottish dealer Jock McBain launched Border Reivers onto the early-1950s motorsport stage. In the Middle Ages, the Reivers had been guerrilla clans, raiding towns along the war-torn Anglo-Scottish border.

McBain's racing syndicate proved just as capable of bringing home silverware as its namesake, launching the career of Jim Clark and racking up countless victories before disbanding in the 1960s. But the name lives on, and today's Reivers are an all-new breed of outlaw – of which this Pre-A is the first.

Nestled among pine trees not far from Loch Lomond, the Border Reivers workshop couldn't feel further from Southern California's sun-soaked landscape where the

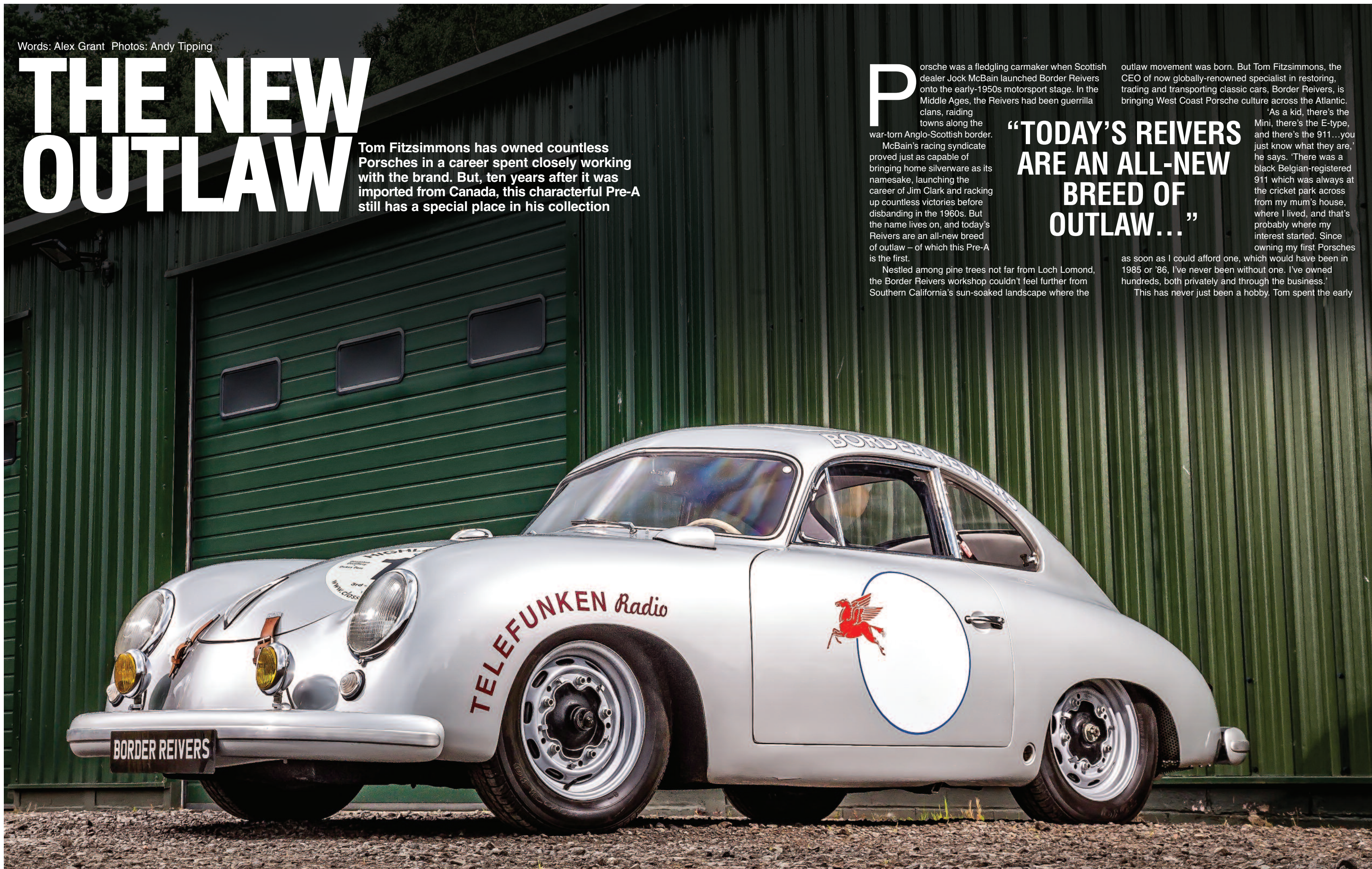
outlaw movement was born. But Tom Fitzsimmons, the CEO of now globally-renowned specialist in restoring, trading and transporting classic cars, Border Reivers, is bringing West Coast Porsche culture across the Atlantic.

**“TODAY'S REIVERS ARE AN ALL-NEW BREED OF OUTLAW...”**

'As a kid, there's the Mini, there's the E-type, and there's the 911...you just know what they are,' he says. 'There was a black Belgian-registered 911 which was always at the cricket park across from my mum's house, where I lived, and that's probably where my interest started. Since owning my first Porsches

as soon as I could afford one, which would have been in 1985 or '86, I've never been without one. I've owned hundreds, both privately and through the business.'

This has never just been a hobby. Tom spent the early







years of his working life at high-end repairers in Glasgow and, for a year, repaired Porsches in Australia before returning to Scotland to establish his own bodyshop in 1988. With an eye for quality and a love of the brand, the business expanded rapidly and, by 1992, it had become a Porsche Approved repairer, employing 65 factory-trained staff – Europe's largest, other than the manufacturer's own sites.

That reputation opened doors and built some useful relationships. While the business flourished, Tom was putting in frequent trips to the United States, seeking out rot-free cars to bring back to Europe. So, at the start of the Millennium, when he parted ways with the business he'd started to pursue other interests, he had the contacts to get first call on some of North America's most desirable machinery. As a collector himself, it was also an opportunity to have his pick of what came up for sale.

'Ten years ago, a Canadian connection called saying he knew someone selling this Pre-A, because he needed the money to buy another Porsche,' he says. 'When he sent me the pictures, I knew it was one for me. So I committed to buy, then went over to Canada to touch it and have a closer look before organising transport back to the UK. It's never been for sale, as it wasn't bought to turn over.'

The 356 landed in Scotland shortly afterwards and, with the paperwork in hand, Tom set about tracing the history behind his new purchase. And, although most of its outlaw-style restoration had been carried out under its previous owner, Canadian collector Dario Calandra, it turns out he hadn't started from scratch.

'I managed to find a piece of paper with the name of the guy who sold it to him. He wanted an early Porsche, and his wife found this car a couple of blocks from their house. It was

*Above: Louvred engine lid and bumper deco are Carrera touches – what you can't see here are the Carrera GT drum brakes*

*Below: A famous name, not only in Scottish but also motor sport history – Formula One world champion Jim Clark began his racing career with the Border Reivers team*







just a shell, in black, and it needed to be fully restored. She bought it and, on Christmas Day, tied a ribbon to the key and had her husband follow it for two blocks to the car, which was wrapped up with a big bow. He started the restoration but was never going to get it done, so he sold it to Dario.'

Building an outlaw is open to interpretation, and this car had its own unique sense of style clearly inspired by Porsche's 1950s racers. The body, a '54 sunroof coupé, had been treated to the works; lowered over its bare factory steel wheels, a louvred decklid and a Carrera-style fuel filler cut into a bonnet firmly closed with leather straps. And Dario had stripped the interior back to the essentials, pairing a Speedster driver's seat with the meshed leather mechanic's seat for the passenger, and adding a half cage in the back.

Unfortunately it wasn't possible to uncover the entire build process and, if anything, the gaps pose some of the most interesting questions about its past. Within the 356's history file is a photograph of the car at Emory Motorsports in California, from which Dario might well recognise his former

project some ten years after signing over ownership. But current owner Tom bought this car to use, and the familiarity of spending plenty of time behind the wheel has highlighted further evolution over the last ten years. 'We've detailed it, and made it better, rather than altering the basics that made me want it in the first place. I didn't want to change that.'

Race styling might have been a tempting start point for a track car, but the plan was to make an already addictive fast-road machine as reliable and usable as possible. The 356 benefits from a newly-rebuilt Super 90 engine, bored out to 1800cc and said to produce 125bhp, which is still paired with the original four-speed transmission. It's enough to keep pace with modern traffic, but doesn't make the car unruly when it's being used for commuting or taking Tom's son to football practice on the weekends.

Despite the low-slung stance, chassis upgrades are similarly compliant on Scottish roads. The suspension had been a hybrid of Volkswagen and Porsche parts to get it as low as possible, and today's setup took years of trying

*Above: Carrera bumper trim always looks good on an early 356, as do the period yellow-lensed Bosch lamps*

*Below, left to right: Interior may be minimalist in style but that doesn't mean it isn't trimmed to the highest standards. California road map might come in handy if you take a wrong turn crossing the border...*



*Above, left to right: Pegasus decals, long-range Carrera fuel tank and drilled bonnet hinges all smack of 'outlaw' – and we love it!*

*Below: The 'bored out' (1800cc) Super 90 engine now pumps out a reputed 125bhp, which is enough to allow the Pre-A to hold its head up in modern traffic*



different shocks and arms to get right – indeed, it's marginally higher than it once was. Brake upgrades comprise a set of 60mm Carrera GT-spec drums, rather than stepping up to later discs.

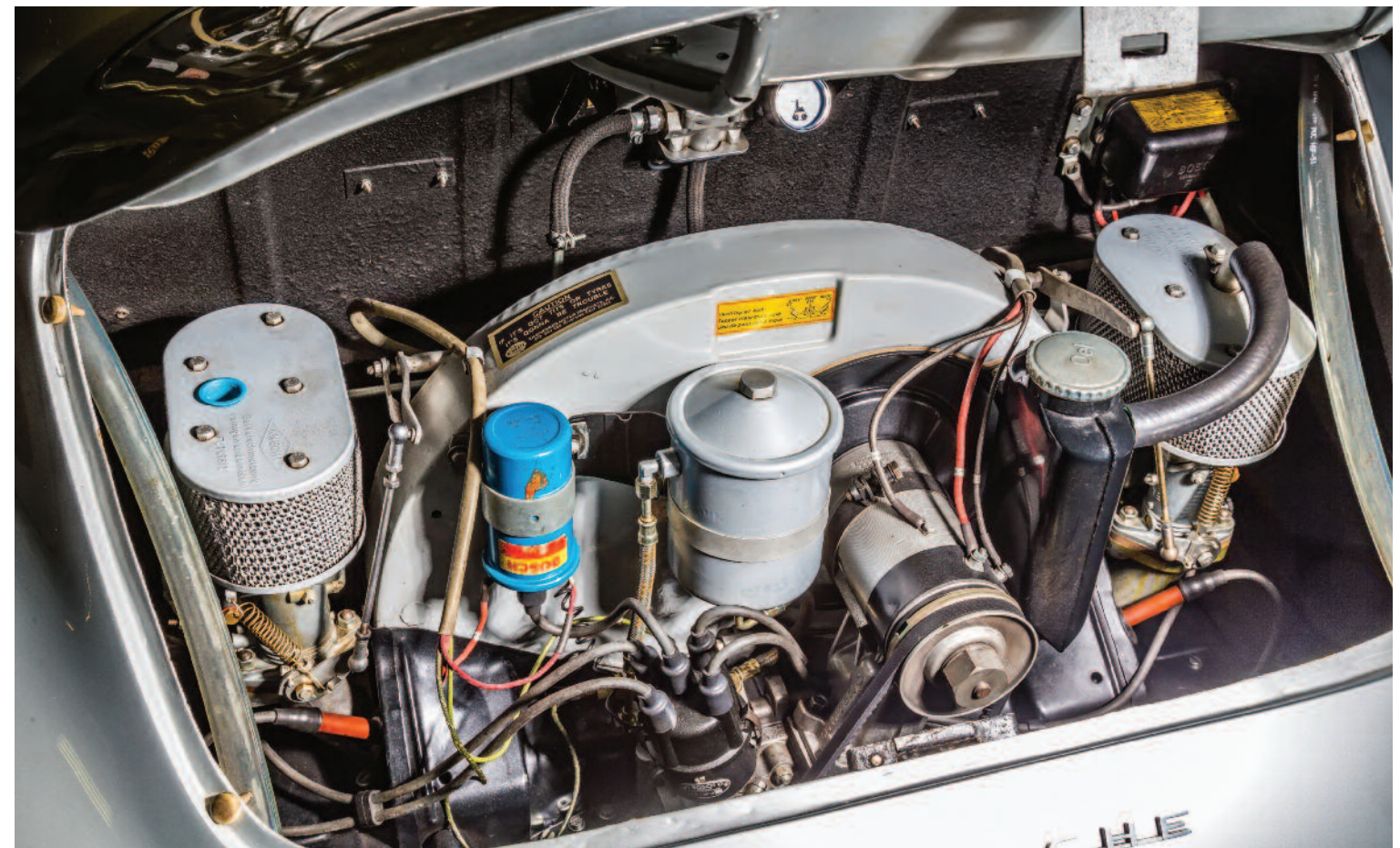
'It's nothing dramatic, we've just made changes over a period of time to suit me – that comes from driving it and using it. I've got a standard 356 and it's really comfortable, but this one is pretty stiff by comparison. With its stripped out interior, if you start pushing hard, you inevitably hit bumps and feel every one through the car. But it handles really well, with pinpoint accuracy – we didn't go

crazy with the engine because it's got such usable power.' Unsurprisingly, given Tom's background repairing

**“WE’VE JUST MADE CHANGES OVER A PERIOD OF TIME TO SUIT ME...”**

Porsches, the bodywork was also refreshed. The 356 was stripped and painted in the same silver picked out by Dario, and the period-style Mobil Pegasus and Tekefunken Radio graphics were all replaced as they had been when it left Canada. Of course, there was an opportunity here to add a little Border Reivers livery while they were working on it.

This is a sympathetic restoration. All of the original styling cues were retained, right down to the Carrera GT drop-down door glass and low-drag mirror on the wing, yellow-tinted Bosch spotlamps and







distinctive Pre-A bumpers. Tom made no changes to the mix-and-match interior, though he's added a fire extinguisher, and there's a set of Plexiglas quarter windows as a lightweight alternative to the glass ones.

'I used it more when I bought it than I do now, because it wasn't as valuable then as is now,' he says. 'I'm not over-careful with it – it's used regularly, and there are a couple of scratches on it now – but using it only occasionally makes it feel special. If you're out in it for a few hours, when you get back there's always a mega smile on your face.'

The upshot is, while Tom has no plans to part ways with his car, other owners are starting to benefit from the development work that's gone into it. Border Reivers has just delivered its first commission to Ireland, based on a matching-numbers right-hand drive 356, and you quickly get a sense that his factory-trained eye for detail is still just as sharp as it's always been. The factory engine was rebuilt

and, instead of junking the body-numbered decklid for a louvred one, the workshop fabricated a new skin to put over the original frame.

'We've got a responsibility, I think. We're custodians and where possible we've got to keep them matching numbers. This car has been great because you can see how people did things. In America, because early Porsches are readily available in left-hand drive and still reasonably cheap, they can take chances and cut them up whatever way they like. But if you get a UK RHD matching numbers car, you're very reluctant to do that.'

Quality talks, and there's already another build underway. The Reivers might once have been feared in the lawless border country, but this UK-honed slice of SoCal car culture is a very welcome kind of outlaw. One that's just as unforgettable as those Tom saw when car spotting as a child which first ignited his interest in the brand. **CP**

*Above: Border Reivers lettering and Mobil Pegasus logos spell out the true character of this outlaw Pre-A*

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*Below left to right: Race-inspired period touches abound, from the leather bonnet straps to the Carrera-style mirrors and fuel filler*

