

The Second Coming of the 914-4

When you enter the 914 world, you step back in time to the 356 world of 30 years ago

Many SCMerS tell me they yearn for the good old days when you could pick up a fairly decent 356 for under \$10,000, get some miles under your belt without a major explosion, then make an easy sale when it was time to move on. Sure, the interior was tired, the heater wouldn't work, the car leaked some oil, and you'd occasionally smell gas. But those cheap 356s still looked neat, they were fun to drive, and at that price you could still find one in good enough shape that you wouldn't be afraid to be seen in it.



Today's barn find can still be tomorrow's investment

Well, I'm as sorry as you are that those days are long gone, but we've got a new 356 in the making today. If you're looking for a Porsche for under \$10,000 that's fun, reliable, inexpensive to maintain and will hold its value over a few years of driving, then the choice is simple: Buy a 914-4.

THE NEW 356

The 914 has slowly taken over the role the 356 used to play in the Porsche universe. Some enthusiasts may try and argue that the front-engine, water-cooled 944 or 968 is the new bargain Porsche, but I, along with the majority of the collector car market, beg to differ. These are still just used cars and losing value each year, while the 914 is starting to head the other way.

This upward price pressure is driven by a desire to have a rust-free car with serviceable drivetrain components, and decent, if not concours, cosmetics. As the prices of early-bumper 911s (1965-73) continue to go up, 914s are looking like better deals by comparison.

While there are still plenty of 914s available at cheap prices, many are not worth saving (at current values). So as a few more thoroughly rusty 914s are scrapped rather than restored each year, the cars get a bit scarcer.

With over 100,000 made, 914s are simply not rare and never will be. However, due to a design flaw that placed the battery directly over the right side rear suspension frame, cars in solid condition are in limited supply. This, along with the standard rust problems that plague all cars of the period, have begun to tip the balance of supply and demand toward the demand side at long last.

A 914 SUBCULTURE

When you enter the 914 world, you step back in time to the 356 world of about 30 years ago. Owning a 356 back then was as much about discovering the "secrets of the inner circle" as it was about driving a vintage Porsche on the cheap. (In fact, one of the original 356 experts, Harry Pellow, used that phrase as the title of one of his early "books" about 356s.) The same can be said about the 914 subculture today.

Original parts for 914s are getting hard to find, so a group of specialized vendors has sprung up to fill in the gaps, many of them based out of their home garages. One of my favorites of these entrepreneurs is Brad Mayeur at 914 Limited (309.694.1797), a guy who is always ready to sift through mechanical issues. Most of the members of the 914 cult are both knowledgeable and friendly, and make it fun to find the mysterious answers to your car.

The good news is that even as supplies of original 914 parts dwindle,

almost everything is still really cheap. For example, the most exotic road wheel made for the stock 914-4 is a four-lug Fuchs alloy. These run about \$100 each in decent used condition, about half the price of a five-lug 911 Fuchs from the same period. A brand new original-equipment Mahle 2.0-liter piston and cylinder set for a 914 runs only \$895, which is half (or less) than the cost of the 2.0-liter 911 six-cylinder set, and about half the 1.6-liter, four-cylinder 912 set.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When looking for a 914, simply ignore cars with rust, rotten interiors, smoky engines, or lousy paint. I refuse to consider any 914 without a 2.0-liter engine, as there are plenty of those still around (although insisting on one will eliminate about 80% of the cars you'll see for sale). The best year to buy is the first, 1973, before the smog controls sapped too much power from the engine, but any well-sorted 2.0-liter car built through 1976 is fun to drive.

Every 914 had Bosch fuel injection, and while this unit can be cranky to get functioning correctly, most experts agree that cars with Weber carb conversions never run as well. On a test drive of a good 914, you should be pleasantly surprised with the broad powerband. The steering and transmission should feel just like that of a vintage 911, taut and easily operated, and though the brakes on a 914 work well, they often don't have the firm pedal feel you find in an old 911.

The classic 356 and 911 colors of white, red, silver and black were less common in the swinging early '70s, so 914 colors include lots of oranges, yellows, golds, bright greens and similarly funky colors. On that note, most would agree that the 914's styling is no longer simply weird; it is now "period weird," which is more acceptable. In our current age of wildly complex, spoiler-bedecked cars, the stark simplicity of the 914 makes it stand out.

WHAT TO PAY

There is always a selection of 914s on eBay Motors, although in many cases this isn't the best place to find a good car. What was true in the 356 days remains true today—there are actually forgotten 914s hanging out in people's garages and barns that can often be your best deals.

I found my 1973 914 2.0 that way; I was tipped off by a friend who knew a friend with a car that hadn't been run in years. I paid \$1,000 for a solid Tangerine/black example that needed to be brought back from a near-death experience. It has about \$4,000 invested in it now, and it's great fun to drive.

The 2005 *SCM Price Guide* lists 2.0-liter 914s between \$6,000 and \$9,000, and I do think you can still find a good example in that price range.

Be prepared for some long stares from those who don't know what it is as you motor around in your 914, as well as long, friendly discussions with former owners, of whom there are plenty. The popularity of the 914 in its day has made for a wide group of nostalgic enthusiasts, just as the 356 did years before.

While the 356 has moved from daily-driver status to collectible and their prices have soared, the 914 has moved into position as the vintage car of choice, with a true period driving experience at an affordable price. ♦