

FROM FRANKFURT TO THE MOON

Author Martin Brusch/Bbb / Photography Ted Walker Archive





Following the demise of traditional coachbuilding, low volume bespoke car conversions began to appear during the 1960s when companies such as Harold Redford took production models and made them more luxurious. This laid the foundations for the business of taking ordinary cars and making them into something special or developing already expensive types by taking them to new levels of equipment and performance. During the 1970s and particularly the 1980s many Porsches found themselves on the receiving end of such treatment and this niche market has continued to this day, where the likes of TechArt, Gemballa, BfB, Topcar, and others make many Porsche models their own with a range of exterior, interior and mechanical modifications, some of quite an extreme nature.

In the earlier days of this field there were a number of Porsche modifiers making interesting (in all senses of the word) roadgoing variants of factory models such as DF, Strouak and Keimer but one of the most unusual, b-b, is perhaps also one of the least well known. Founded by Rainer and Dieter Buchmann in Frankfurt in 1974, the company did not work exclusively on Porsches but they were certainly the basis of some of its highest profile products. Although the company folded in 1986 it was revived by Rainer Buchmann in 2014, so it may become better known this time around. Incidentally, throughout this piece I have used the company name as Buchmann does today.

The thing that sets Rainer Buchmann apart from many others in the car modification business is his innovative approach to motor vehicle technology, so before considering his Porsche creations we should perhaps take a look at some of his other projects. Back in 1984 he applied for a patent on a steering wheel incorporating multi-function controls while in 1980 he had already come up with a highly informative electronic dashboard named *Orbis*, which used multiple displays and speech. In the 1970s he developed electronic parking sensors and later he also pioneered remote central locking, using something that looked rather like an elegant golden slim cigarette lighter! He even came up with prototypes for an engine with variable cubic capacity and, in 1981, the streamlined and



sophisticated BMW Futuro motorcycle, not to mention the 1984 Mercedes Magic Top which had a disappearing metal roof. As you can see from all this, his approach to car modification went way beyond those companies who thought that bigger spoilers and wider wheels were the ultimate in personal expression.

The most famous and eye-catching b-b Porsche is the 911 Turbo Targa Rainbow and although these multi-colour stripes can have something of a different connotation these days they were actually those used by Polaroid on their instant picture camera marketing material. In fact, the car was exhibited by Polaroid at the 1976 Photokina imaging trade fair, the world's largest event of its type. The stripes were applied in a particularly effective way, making a tremendous impact against the silver base colour and gaining the company press coverage in Europe, America and even in Australia, something which must have done them no harm as they strove to become established. Of course, in those early days there was only a production Turbo coupé from Porsche (who didn't think that there would

even be much demand for that) but as well as fitting that engine into a Targa and giving it 930-style body modifications the interior also came in for some original treatment. The rather austere and sporting appearance of the standard car gave way to plush seats in a bold colour and thick carpets, along with a high-end cassette player and options of radio telephone and even CD radio, all ultimate technological must-haves of the day.

A similar silver/rainbow combination was applied to the 924 and, in conjunction with some flowing wheelarch extensions over special BBS wheels, transformed the rather spindly appearance of the car at that time into something far more purposeful. Its interior, exterior and mechanical modifications tripled the price over the standard car though! However, for their next 911 Targa (which was now also available normally aspirated) the company went for a much more restrained look, with BBS wheels replacing the previous Fuchs, although this time a 930SE style 'blatnose' or 'slantnose' was the attention-grabbing factor.

BUCHMANN'S INTERIOR, EXTERIOR AND MECHANICAL MODIFICATIONS TRIPLED THE PRICE OVER THE STANDARD 924!



Unlike the standard version with its conventional covered pop-up headlamps, b-b used the 928 system where the lamp lens remained exposed and the inside of the car was again to a very high standard in sound (16 speakers) and comfort.

For their subsequent Targa b-b took an additional 930SE idea and reinterpreted it. This time, instead of the air intakes ahead of the rear wheels of the standard car, the door and rear wing width increased from front to rear and into them was let a long and deep NACA-type duct, reminiscent of the smaller ones seen on the 919SR Turbo racing car. Mechanically (up to 370bhp in turbo form) and inside (many, many options) things were much as before, although the three-piece-dished wheels with cooling slots were particularly effective.

All of b-b's modifications could also be applied to 911 coupés and the expensive options could soon add up to a sizable amount of money, b-b cars often running well into six-figure sums in the Deutschmarks of the day.

The two most unusual b-b projects were based on the 928, not a car that caught the attention of the Porsche customisers as often as the 911, although the model was the subject of one of the first (and rather restrained) TechArt projects when they started 30 years ago. As usual though, b-b took the no-holds-barred route into their work with two open versions of this coupe. One was their 928 Cabrio, a full convertible which certainly had the 'just right' look of a factory production model, while the other was the equally ambitious - but perhaps visually less successful - 928 Targa. For this variant the company replaced the sloping hatch with a notch-back booted rear and changed the roof to a T-bar arrangement with two removable panels. In conjunction with a front spoiler this radically reworked the appearance of this rounded car into something more angular and inside the rainbow stripes reappeared as the relief on the dark seats and panels.

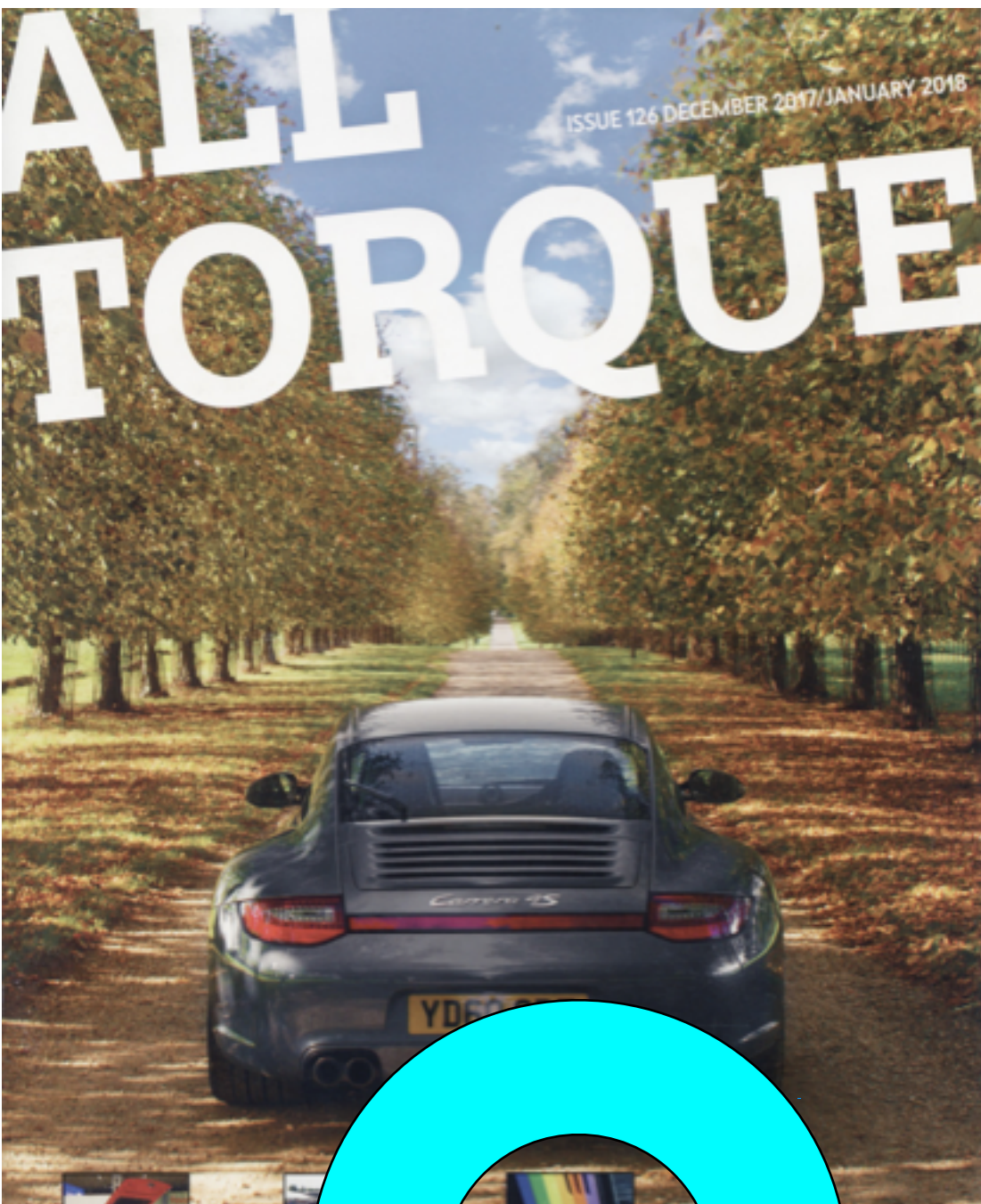
If you have ever cursed the position of the radio controls in a car, spare a thought for the 928 Targa owner. The entire sound system was

mounted on the drivers' side of the fixed central roof member, so operating it on the move would have been quite dangerous - although the passenger did have a graphic equaliser to play with on his side of the bar. Amazingly for such a rare car there were two contemporary scale models made, a rather caricatured radio-controlled version by Nikko and an accurate 1/25th Revell plastic kit. Both of these must be almost a rare as the real thing these days.

In the 1980s the company found its American and Eastern markets affected by unfavourable exchange rates and so withdrew from car making in 1986, but in 2014 Buchmann revived b-b with the introduction of the Woonracer. Based on a 1980s 911 Targa the recipe is much as before but with some contemporary touches updating the mix. The stripes are still applied in the same 'Polaroid' way, although now in grey/silver on a white car and with the popularity of backdating 911s these days this model represents a perhaps unique chance to step back in time with a modern twist in the hands of someone who was in the vanguard of such work all those years ago.

ALL TORQUE

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