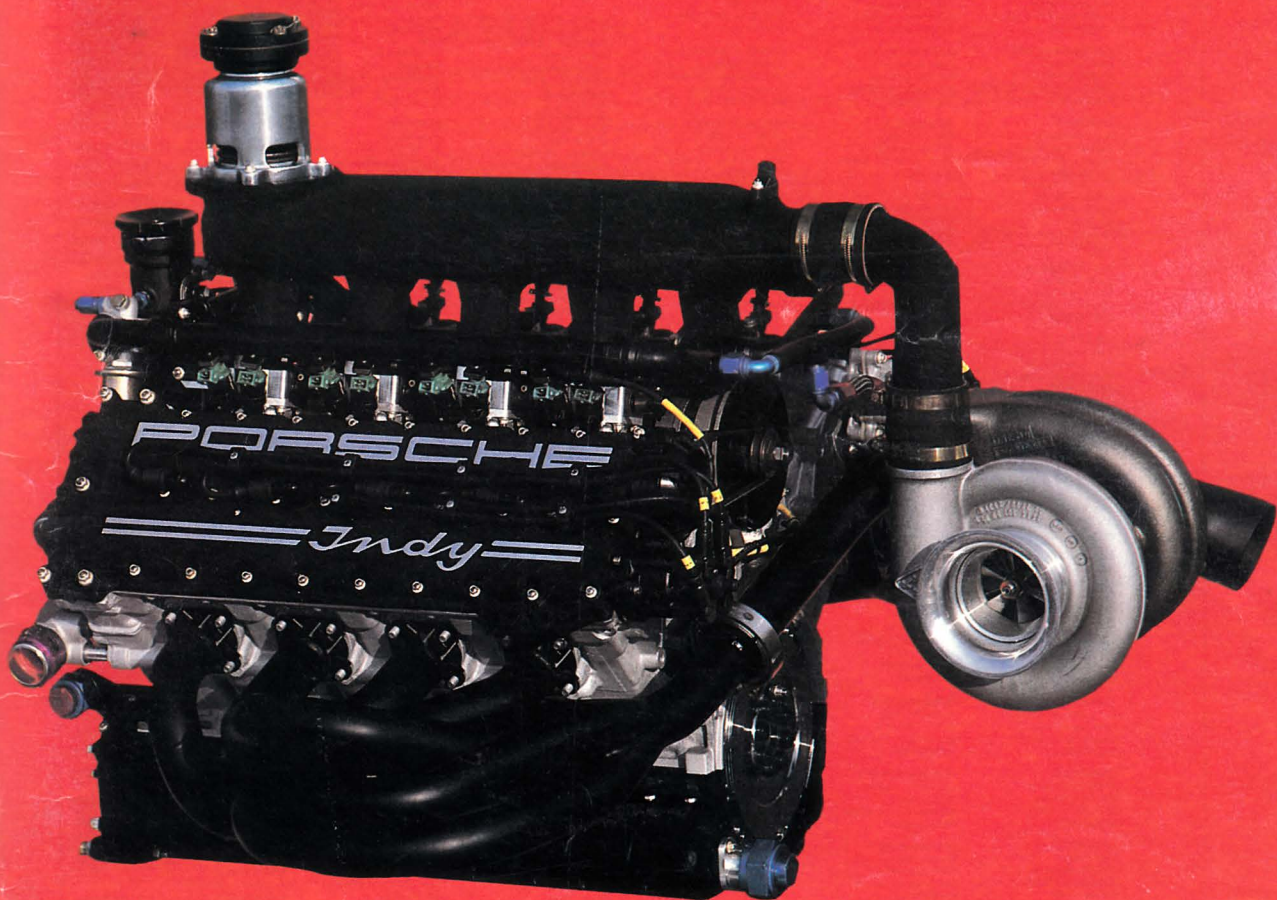


PORSCHE PANORAMA

MARCH 1987



Panorama Profile: Vic Skirmants

This extraordinary 356 man beat more than one surprised 962 driver in the Porsche Cup standings

**By Bill Oursler
Contributing Editor**

“Sometimes I think I’m just waiting.”

All too often we tend to generalize, to place a neatly ordered structure over chaos so that we can more easily label things and people. Such is the case with 42-year-old Vic Skirmants, a very unordinary man who many only see as the embodiment of those Porsche enthusiasts whose interests extend to the limit of the 356 era.

Trained as an engineer, Skirmants has made his living since 1976 working on 356s, becoming an expert about them in the process. “I guess it’s about a

fifty-fifty situation. In the winter I work mostly on street cars, while in the summer it’s almost all strictly racing.” Under the banner of his company, 356 Enterprises, the Warren, Michigan, resident found time in 1986 to maintain no fewer than eight 356 competition entries, win the Central Division’s E-Production category with his own 356 Roadster, and finish third in the North American Porsche Cup standings, beating out more than one surprised full-time professional 962 driver.

In addition, Skirmants and his wife of 19 years have successfully managed to raise two children, one of whom, Erik (the eldest at 18), started his own driving career in SCCA Regionals last summer. While Skirmants freely admits he probably won’t get rich doing what he’s doing, he isn’t apologizing for his life either. “Sure, I wish I had more money. But we make the house payments, we’ve always had enough to eat, and our kids never really wanted for anything. I can’t complain, especially since I like what I do.”



At Porsche's traditional Christmas party Skirmants accepts a citation from Professor Ferry Porsche for his third-place finish in the 1986 North American Porsche Cup standings.

JOHN ADAM



Vic Skirmari
O+

SCCA
SPORTS CAR CLUB OF AMERICA

RED LINE
SYNTHETIC OIL

Skirmants has owned two Gmünd coupes and two America Roadsters; this rare Gmünd car he recently sold to the Miles Collier collection.



Skirmants' is an independence forged from adversity. Born in the closing days of World War II, he never saw his Latvian father who was fighting with the Germans against the Russians. "My mother fled to Germany just before I was born, and in the confusion that followed the war we spent the next five years in displaced persons camps. We never heard from my father, and we assumed he was dead. We didn't find out that he was alive until 1955 when my mother's brothers were released from a Siberian prison camp. By that time not only had my mother, but also my father, remarried. Although we corresponded by letter, he eventually died in 1967 without my ever having met him."

In fact, Skirmants, who was born Viktors Kaupusz, faced a bleak future until his stepfather (from whom he took his name) sponsored passage for he and his mother to come to the United States in 1950. Later that same year his mother and stepfather, who had known each other in Latvia, were married. Despite a subsequent divorce (brought on largely because of the revelation that his natural father was still alive), Skirmants and his mother remained in Illinois where they had settled when they had arrived in America.

"I didn't move away until I went to the General Motors Institute in 1962. In those days you had to be sponsored by a GM plant, and mine was the Pontiac engineering group in Pontiac. The problem was that I just wasn't that interested in grades or the corporate life, so I eventually switched to Wayne State University in Detroit where I graduated in 1967 with a degree in mechanical engineering."

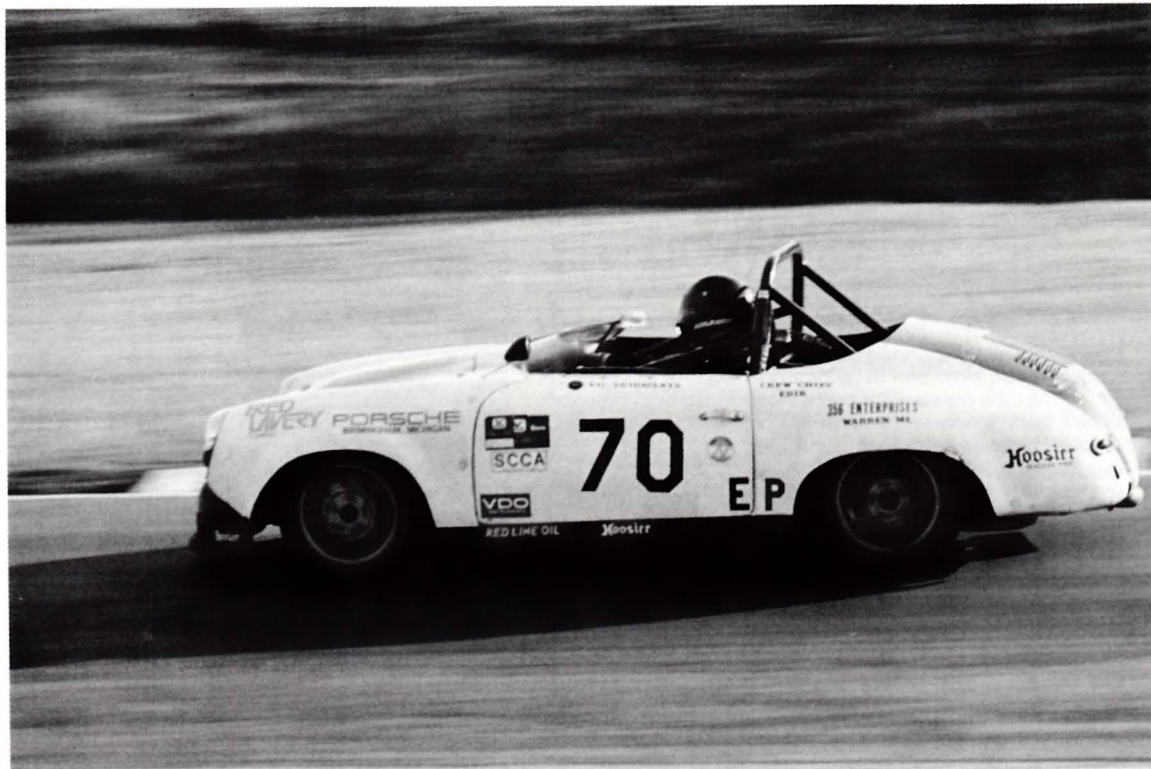
From college Skirmants went to work for the Army's Tank Command in Warren, about half a mile



Trained as an engineer, Skirmants has made his living since 1976 working on street and track 356s, maintaining eight competition cars last season.

from where he now resides. As part of the Heavy Truck Design Group, he remained with the Tank Command for the next nine years. It was not, however, the most rewarding endeavor, and Skirmants soon found something to occupy his spare time.

"Just as I was going to college I bought my first sports car, an MGA. I don't think I have to say much about that experience, except that when I got the chance in 1963 to purchase a 1958 Porsche coupe and get rid of the MG, I took it. Two years later I acquired a '56 Speedster which I began to modify for racing. By 1965 not only was I running that car locally, but I was also beginning to work on other people's 356s as well."



LEONARD TURNER

With 11 victories in 11 starts, Skirmants handily won the SCCA's Central Division E-Production Championship in 1986 for the fourth time with his own 356B Roadster.

By May of 1976 Skirmants had enough of the Army system, and resigned to begin his present occupation. "There are times when I wonder what I'm going to do when I grow up, particularly when I'm lying on the cold concrete of my garage floor during the winter wrestling with some rusty part that doesn't want to come off. But I've been on my own too long to find a new path."

Perhaps there are those occasions when Skirmants does wonder. But not often, since he has thrown himself fully into his work, using not only his skills as an engineer in addition to those as a

mechanic, but also his historical curiosity. "The more I became involved with 356s, the more I started to learn about them; not only how they were put together, but how and why they came to be."

It was a process that led Skirmants to purchase four cars of considerable historical significance: two Gmünd coupes and two America Roadsters. "I found the first coupe, the one I recently sold to Miles Collier, through an ad in *Autoweek* in 1971. I kept it until early this year because I thought I might get around to restoring it." Unfortunately, this rare Porsche racer, like its three companions,

KRAFTWERK PARTS

911 Engine Parts Our Specialty

2.7 Euro P's & C's	\$825 (2 left)
2.7 Nikasil P's & C's	\$775 (2 left)
2.2 - 2.7, 3.0 Valve Sets	\$285
Gasket Sets	\$95. up
Rocker Arms	\$24.50

911 Engines 2.4 - 3.5 Built to Specs

(713) 328-1679

610 Diamondhead • Crosby, TX 77532



Wide Selection of Used Porsche Parts
at Reasonable Prices



Also Fine Pre-Owned Porsches



617/927-2734
617/927-2568

HOURS
MON-FRI
8-5

MICHAEL GAGNON
PARTS MANAGER



FORESIGHTEDNESS IS JUST PART OF THE SERVICE

When you bring your Porsche in for repair you may be concerned only about the immediate problems.

The professionals at **AutoTherity** care about a lot more. They try to spot other problems for you . . . before they happen.

Al Collins, the company's owner and founder, has been repairing Porsches professionally for 11 years now. He knows the signs of forthcoming difficulties. He keeps his mechanics on the lookout for foreseeable repairs.

Trouble shooting starts with a 75-point checklist that **AutoTherity** has developed over the years. Mechanics look for wear and rust, leaks and deterioration. They look at the whole car, not just the car's engine and are concerned about the car's overall performance. After work is done, your car is given a carefully planned test drive.

As a result, almost all of the problems that might have occurred later are taken care of. Because **AutoTherity** looks for trouble, you benefit.

This is quality service that is not as expensive as you might think. You and your Porsche get the **AutoTherity** personal attention that includes consultation with the mechanic doing the work as well as someone on the advisory staff. Together, they discuss with you what must be and what should be done. You get accurate time and cost estimates that leave little room for surprise.

Experience, personal involvement, professional responsibility, accurate estimates, quality workmanship, foresightedness: It's this kind of service that distinguishes **AutoTherity** from other repair shops.

Experience the foresightedness of AutoTherity: We set the standards for Porsche maintenance.



A PORSCHE INDEPENDENT REPAIR SERVICE

3763 Pickett Road
Fairfax, VA 22031

703-323-7830

VDO

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

- * ALL VDO AND MOTO METER instruments and clocks can be restored or repaired.
- * We have been providing this service for over 35 years and guarantee our work.
- * Your speedometer can be converted accurately to a higher readout or converted from Km/h to mph.
- * Your instruments can be customized to match the color of your car and interior.
- * Quartz clocks, electronic speedometers and tachometers can be serviced.
- * We specialize in VDO, HELLA, and HALDA accessories.

NORTH HOLLYWOOD SPEEDOMETER

6111 Lankershim Boulevard
North Hollywood, CA 91606
(818) 761-5136

Over 35 years of Service and Satisfaction.

was a victim of the limitations of time. "There always seemed to be something more important, something more urgent that kept me from doing much more than storing these cars. I guess that's really why I sold them."

Perhaps. But at least one of the coupes, the second one, went to purchase Skirmants' present E-Production Roadster. "I had started racing more seriously in 1970, and I went to the Canadian National Runoffs two years later as a Divisional EP champion. Unhappily the car was totaled in a first lap accident, and even though I built another Speedster, I really was beginning to lose my enthusiasm until I found the 1960 Roadster Bill Schmid had driven to the EP title at Road Atlanta in 1974. Eventually I traded the second Gmünd coupe for it."

Although Skirmants felt badly about parting with the early Porsche, the four Divisional titles and countless individual victories he has scored since have made the trade appear to be a good one. "Despite all the years and all the changes, it's still the same basic body and chassis, which says something for its original engineering." In recent times, Skirmants has parlayed his successful use of

Although modeling is a secondary interest compared to racing, Skirmants has created his own kits and handbuilts for half a dozen historic Porsches.



that engineering into a position where he has been in contention for the North American Porsche Cup crown.

Still, Skirmants has no illusions about a full-time racing career. "I spend a tremendous amount of my income on the sport, and it has only been in the past few seasons where there's been any real payback. Racing is obviously a good way to advertise, but it is also a passion. Without someone else to help sponsor me, however, I'm not going to move up into the professional ranks. It isn't that I don't want to, or don't think I can succeed. No, the real reason is that like so many others I can't afford it."

If Skirmants knows where he's going to be on the track, he also, despite his occasional misgivings, knows what he is going to do with his off-track life as well. "I'll probably be working on 356s. Right now I've got a year-round two to three month backlog of work. Most of my customers come from within 150 miles of my home, but I also get people who send me components from throughout the world." One vintage racer in Australia recently had Skirmants redo his engine.

"It's not that I'm against what Porsche is doing now; I sure wouldn't mind a 911 for the street, but the 356 is comfortable for me. I have the tools and the knowledge. The cars have their flaws, but they're fairly straightforward and uncomplicated, and I like that."

For Skirmants, there are other interests in the automotive field to turn to if he ever tires of working on full-sized vehicles. "I've always been interested in models, and I started building model cars when I was about 15. Later in the 1970s I purchased an early white metal John Day 1/43rd scale

kit, which led me to get increasingly interested in the hobby, to the point where I started to make my own kits and handbuilts. Then as I got busier and busier with my real business, I ran out of time for modeling, but I hope to get back to it someday."

Whether he does or not, the complexities that constitute the man who is Vic Skirmants seem to ensure that he will never be type-cast. No matter where or how he fills his days, he will always remain an interesting part of the historic mosaic of Porsche's tradition. ☼

AUTOMOBILE ATLANTA
914/924
SPECIALISTS

Largest used parts inventory in the South.
All Accessories — Restoration Facilities.

914 or 924
CATALOGS \$3.00
48 page illustrated

AUTOMOBILE ATLANTA
504 Clay Street
Marietta, GA 30060
(404) 427-2844