

The Unknown Swiss Racer Enzmann 506 Spyder

By Joe Ruiz • Photos courtesy Shin Watanabe



Joe Ruiz' #28 with its removable fighter-plane-style hardtop in place. Right and below: The original body buck, prototype body and an early sales brochure. Bottom: at the 1957 Frankfurt Auto Show, the Enzmann was in booth 506.



In the beautiful Swiss valley of Entlebuch, the Enzmann family grew up running a local garage, mainly servicing Fiats and Citroens in the early 1950s. Their Adler Garage was located in the small village of Schupfheim between Lucern and Bern, Switzerland. There were seven sons in the Enzmann family. Some of them grew up and became doctors, scientists and car enthusiasts.

Early on, Dr. Emil Enzmann wanted to compete with Porsche in the 1.3 liter class but was unable to due to funds and the cost of building a race car. So in 1953, Emil Enzmann started drawing up sketches to build a small, modern looking, 2 seater car based on VW Beetle chassis. After some time experimenting with different designs, a body jig was made out of wood and slats and covered with hammered sheets of steel at the family garage in Schupfheim. There were several detail changes made from the original design until Emil Enzmann was convinced he had found a style that was best suited for racing purposes.

The main types of materials being used to construct vehicles at the time were steel, aluminum and a new innovation, fiberglass. Steel, very commonly used to build production series cars could not be used since Emil wanted to increase performance where ever possible and the only way to do that without minimal engine modifications was to reduce the weight of the vehicle. Aluminum was also a choice but in the end, fiberglass was chosen after much painstaking research. A quote from an original 1957 brochure: "The plastic is reinforced with glass fibers and built as a "monoblock", i.e., out of one single construction element giving an extremely strong, shell-shaped unit like that of a jet fighter." Fiberglass construction (520kg) resulted in more considerable weight savings than aluminum, its low center of gravity and its aerodynamic body gave performance of a big sports car.

The shape and design was very original but included several influences from contemporary manufacturers. The front end recalls somewhat the style of the early 550 Porsche Spyder with its vertical headlights and curving nose while the rear shape has its own uniqueness not found on any other car! The doors are replaced with a recess/cove for placing one's foot and a square pad located on the center tunnel between the seats to aid in entry/exit. The front hood hinges are that from a 356 deck lid, the later cars used a windshield and instruments from a VW Karmann Ghia and front turn signals from an early Peugeot. The fuel tank was specially constructed to hold 55 liters with internal baffles to prevent fuel starvation on hard cornering thus netting 750 km between fuel stops. Compiling all the elements together gave the Enzmann the feeling of light weight, and steering that reacted lightning fast. On mountain passes, it had an amazing climbing ability to keep up even with the 1.6 liter Porsche and Ferrari automobiles.

The first prototype was used to make the form for the later cars. The first Enzmann body was pressed by the firm Scholy with the later ones being produced by Stampfli. All the materials used were Swiss; the plastic coming from Olchemie in Brugg, and the glass fibers from Fibres de Verre SA in Lausanne.

Since Emil Enzmann already had the body design and builders, he still needed a consistent source where he would have an adequate supply of VW chassis with related components. Volkswagen was not in the business of supplying chassis to independent coachbuilders who were constructing their own automobile creations primarily because they had their own ideas of building a "sports" car - namely the Karmann Ghia which was being built in late 1955. There were enough sports car builders in Europe at the time and thus VW didn't need added competition from independent coach-

builders. So where did Enzmann get their chassis? Since Emil Enzmann decided from the very beginning that the chassis to be used for his creation was to be a straightforward Beetle platform, drastic measures had to be taken in order for the firm to stay in business. At first, they bought a couple of new chassis from the local nearby VW dealers but eventually ended up buying new VW Beetles and scrapping or storing the bodies for future use. There is also evidence that one customer opted to build an Enzmann with a 550 Carrera engine using a unique Carrera floor pan design.

Emil Enzmann debuted his car for the first time in 1957 at the Frankfurt Motor Show in Germany. The car was placed at stand #506 during the show and when a potential customer wanted more information about this unusual car, he wrote a letter addressed to Enzmann inquiring more info. To facilitate delivery of the letter, the postman wrote the stand number "506" next to the Enzmann name and the number was liked by Emil so much that it remained as part of the cars identity from that point on.

Motivating factors

A customer could specify one of several engine variations other than the typical 1200cc engines that were available by Volkswagen at the time. Okrasa was the choice by many enthusiasts as Gerhart Oettinger was in nearby Frankfurt, Germany. With Okrasa's forged stroker 69mm (1300cc) chromoly crankshaft, Okrasa big valve, twin dual port heads fed by dual SOLEX carbs gave more than enough performance required to propel this "modern day fighter" against some of Europe's challenging 1300 to 1500cc cars. Another power plant that was available came from Vienna, Austria. Wolfgang Denzel was also offering a similar kit that produced even more power. Dual SOLEX 32mm carbs on one of Denzel's spread twin port heads with huge valves, and a billet 67mm (1300cc) stroked crankshaft pushed the horsepower to around 75.

Another version of the Denzel engine (Serien Super) offered a 74mm (1500) crankshaft with 80mm bore, dual "sandcast" SOLEX 40P-11 carbs propelled you to speeds upwards of 100mph. And if you were really serious about competing, one would order their Enzmann with Denzel's Serien Super International engines. Substituting 40mm Weber 40DCM "sandcast" carbs moved the horsepower needle to that of a Porsche 550 Spyder 4-cam engine at 110! As mentioned earlier, one customer even installed a Spyder engine. MAG and Judson Superchargers were also available at the time but were rarely used as most liked the dual carb design layout instead.

The "basic" price of an Enzmann assembled at the Adler Garage in Schupfheim, Switzerland was about 9,000 Swiss Francs. Of course, depending on what engine, trans and gauges one would choose, the price would be adjusted accordingly.

During the Enzmann's production years, 1957 to about 1964, only 67 examples were built. There is information in print saying that Emil Enzmann sold about 200 of his special-bodied cars but that number was just made up only in hopes of generating more people to take a second look at purchasing his "economical" modern day racer. Remember, in order to race/compete in any production class, a "new" automobile manufacture would have to build no less than 50 examples to sell to the open public in order to qualify. Of those 67 bodies built, only 34 were assembled by Enzmann and 33 bodies were sold as "kits" to the general public. A point of interest is that the identifiable bodies Enzmann assembled at Schupfheim had their wheels drilled with "cooling holes" to allow air to pass through onto the brake drums to avoid brake failure during competition.

Because the Enzmann was made out of fiberglass, they fared well against the elements, although today there are only 18 cars known to survive. Three are in the US, numbers 7, 26 and 28 while the rest are scattered throughout the world in various condition. From basic bodies to highly modified, they have kept their basic body design as Emil intended from the



Enzmans at their intended pursuits: hillclimbs in the mid-1960s. Left: #28 when new. Below: #26 when new. Bottom: #7 new with a unique paint scheme.



very beginning. On a side note, Emil Enzmann only built two cars with sliding retractable roofs similar to that of a jet fighter. The roof could be installed/removed in less than 2 minutes by two people should you want to take a leisurely drive on the mountainous roads of the Swiss Alps. Unfortunately, when Emil was delivering 1 of the 2 "specials" to his customer on a trailer, he had a terrible accident en route that completely destroyed one of his beloved cars. Only one of these cars survives, #28!



From top: Interior and window detail of #28. Rear of #26. #28 and #7 at Solvang, CA 2008. Below: A Euro Enzmann meet, and at the Sinsheim Museum in Germany.



My cars, #26 (red) and #28 (ivory) as well as my friend Shin Watanabe's #7 are all in Southern California. #28 is a factory-built car with all of its documentation including build sheet from new. It has an interesting story as the car was purchased by Lloyd Crump from West Lawn, Pennsylvania while traveling in Europe. He ordered it new with an Okrasa TSV-1300 engine kit installed. Upon delivery, he sold the car to his neighbor friend Frank Koch, who purchased the vehicle for his daughter so she could compete in the yearly hill climb event held at Mount Equinox near Manchester, Vermont. One year, she was climbing up the mountain when she had a "shunt" with a guardrail and was spooked so much by that incident that she never drove the car again in that event. She grew up and moved away and the car remained with Mr. Koch in the same garage for over 40 years! When I purchased #28, it still sported its original Michelin "X" ply tires, speedometer with only 5500 kms, brake shoes, Nardi flat steering wheel, Okrasa 1300cc engine, upholstery, glass, sliding roof, etc. Other than being repainted once in its original color after the guardrail incident, the car remained as original as the day it was first delivered! The only items that needed attention to make Enzmann #28 road worthy again were new tires and some brake parts. Of course, these items were replaced by NOS German pieces to keep everything as it was from the first day the car was manufactured.

Enzmann #26 is a project car with an interesting history also! It was purchased by Emil Enzmann's personal friend, Herr Hansuli Schiess of Zurich, Switzerland in October, 1959. Painted Persimmonrot (red) it was apparently ordered with NO engine nor transmission. Herr Schiess had his own ideas of what power train he would install in his newly acquired race car: PORSCHE power! I have handwritten letters going into great detail from Herr Schiess communicating with the Porsche factory on discussion about 356 engines and gearbox selections.

When Mr. Schiess migrated to Canada, he bought over his Enzmann where he enjoyed it for awhile until he traded it in at Spartan Motor Cars in Kitchener, Ontario for a new VW Beetle. Enzmann #26 remained at the VW dealership showroom for several years until the dealership decided they wanted to restore the car back to its original condition. During disassembly of the car, the dealership closed down and Enzmann #26 went into private hands. The car changed several owners around the local community of St. Marys, Ontario, Canada until it was purchased by a local auto repair shop, who put the car up for sale and I purchased it in December 2005. The car remains "on ice" until I have time to restore it and bring it back to its former days of glory when it roamed the backroads of Switzerland looking for its next unsuspecting challenger. 🏎️

