1950-1965 356

We value the first production Porsche sports cars.

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1954 356 Cabriolet

Market Trends

The Porsche 356 was the company's first production sports car model, a machine that endures as a legitimate milestone in automotive history. The values of these models have appreciated strongly over the last two decades. But if you've been tracking values in the more recent past, you will have found that the 356 bidding fever seems to be breaking. The once aggressive buying has given way to a mild correction.

The climb in values we saw for 1952-1955 Pre-A and 1956-1959 356A models is finally hitting a plateau. Cabriolets and Speedsters, the darlings of the recent boom, have seen values retreat between 1.0 and 6.0 percent. The market for the Pre-A Cabriolet has specifically stabilized; while solid, driver-grade cars are holding firm around $135,000, the higher-end examples have settled back down toward the $260,000 mark.

While much of the range is flat, the 1962-1963 356B T6 coupe is a notable outlier. Values for Good and Excellent coupes have actually ticked up between 2.5 and 4.3 percent over the last year. Meanwhile, the final evolution of the line, the 1964-1965 356C, remains largely steady at the entry level, though high-quality coupes have dipped nearly 4.0 percent.

At the top of the food chain, the four-cam Carreras remain a blue-chip anomaly. With only about 700 units produced, these continue to command $500,000-plus regardless of what the broader market is doing. Similarly, the 1950-1951 models are so elusive that their value is determined solely by the hammer price at major auctions, rather than by any standard price guide.

If you're looking to restore a 356 today, you have to be realistic about what you're getting into before you sign a check. A "deal" on a car that needs extensive work can quickly become an expensive endeavor. Buying a car that's already finished and comes with a solid history is worth a strong look first.

1950-1955 Pre-A 356

Ferdinand Porsche, Sr. founded the company that still bears his name, but it

CURRENT VALUES AND % CHANGE OVER THE LAST YEAR

356 PRE-A

		AVERAGE		GOOD		EXCELLENT	
1952-1955	coupe	$90,000	0%	$170,000	-4.2%	$250,000	-5.7%
1952-1955	Cabriolet	$135,000	0%	$197,500	-1.3%	$260,000	-1.9%
1954-1955	Speedster	$225,000	0%	$312,500	-2.3%	$400,000	-3.6%

356A

		AVERAGE		GOOD		EXCELLENT	
1956-1959	coupe	$100,000	0%	$135,000	0%	$200,000	0%
1956-1959	Cabriolet	$125,000	0%	$182,500	-1.4%	$240,000	-2.0%
1956-1958	Speedster	$235,000	0%	$367,500	0%	$500,000	0%
1959	Convertible D	$145,000	0%	$185,000	-1.3%	$225,000	-2.2%

356B

		AVERAGE		GOOD		EXCELLENT	
1960-1961	coupe	$60,000	0%	$85,000	0%	$110,000	0%
1962-1963	coupe	$75,000	0%	$97,500	+2.5%	$120,000	+4.3%
1960-1961	Cabriolet	$90,000	0%	$135,000	0%	$210,000	0%
1962-1963	Cabriolet	$105,000	0%	$155,000	-3.1%	$205,000	-4.7%
1960-1961	Roadster	$140,000	0%	$185,000	-2.6%	$230,000	-4.2%
1962	Roadster	$155,000	0%	$220,000	0%	$340,000	0%

356C

		AVERAGE		GOOD		EXCELLENT	
1964-1965	coupe	$85,000	0%	$105,000	-2.3%	$125,000	-3.8%
1964-1965	Cabriolet	$115,000	0%	$167,500	-1.5%	$220,000	-2.2%

Note: 1950-1951 models are so rare that they can really only be valued based on auction results. Four-cam Carrera models are also rare (about 700 were built) and generally sell for $500,000 and up.

UNDERSTANDING CONDITION

Average: Running but needs some mechanical work (although nothing major). Paint may be faded, and body might have a few dents and dings but is rust-free.

Good: Running, driveable, and needs nothing, but is far from perfect. Paint and interior are in good condition.

Excellent: Very clean but not concours quality; could be well-maintained, older restoration or very good original condition. Matching numbers.

Note: Non-matching-numbers cars (e.g., those with replacement engines) sell for much lower prices; expect to pay 15-20 percent less. The very top of the market, for concours-winning and rare cars, can be much higher than our prices for excellent examples.

was his son Ferdinand, widely known as Ferry, who created the Porsche we know today. In the early years after World War II, Ferry designed the 356—the car that made Porsche famous.

Closely related to the Volkswagen Beetle, which Ferdinand Sr. had designed in the mid-1930s, the 356 utilized many VW components—primarily in its driveline and suspension—as well as its rear-engine, rear-wheel-drive configuration. But what began as a close cousin, or perhaps offspring, of The People's Car soon evolved into a world-class sports car, as well as a regular race winner.

The first production Porsche was also a sales success. Ferry had initially hoped to sell 500 examples and needed a couple of years to build the first 50, but in 1950 Porsche opened its factory in Stuttgart and produced 298 cars in a single year. By the time 356 production ended in 1965, Porsche had built more than 76,000 cars in four distinct series.

With Ferdinand Porsche's close connection to Volkswagen and the difficulty of obtaining new automotive components in post-war Germany, it's little surprise Ferry looked to the Beetle when designing the 356. On paper, the list of similarities between the two models is striking: unibody construction, rear-engine/rear-drive layout (and a VW-derived engine),

1956 356A

torsion-bar suspension, and so on. The reality was a bit different, however.

Where the Beetle had been developed as basic, reliable transportation, the 356 was designed as a sports car, so even components sourced directly from VW generally wouldn't be used without modification. This meant that while the 356's air-cooled four-cylinder engine was based on VW's engine case, for example, its heads featured larger valves and more aggressive cams to produce more power. And while the Beetle and 356 shared a distinctly rounded design and looked like very close relatives, Porsche designed its chassis and body from scratch.

As with its later models, Porsche steadily developed the 356 during its production run. The 1950 and 1951 models had a split windshield with a seam in the center. This was changed in 1952 to the "bent" windshield, which is curved in the center and at each edge. The Pre-As were rather primitive, but changes were implemented rapidly, and they had evolved considerably by the time the 356A was introduced as a 1956 model.

The Speedster was introduced in 1954 as a basic, low-cost roadster model. It had a rakish windshield and side curtains that plugged into the top of the doors. Speedsters were built from 1954 to 1959, although only a few were produced in that final year. There were 10,466 Pre-A models built between 1950 and late 1955 when production was changed to the "A" model. Pre-A production breaks down as 7,157 coupes, 1,409 Cabriolets, and 1,900 Speedsters.

1956-1959 356A

Many significant improvements were incorporated in the 356A in late 1955 and continued in subsequent models. For example, the chassis was changed, which made the cars easier to work on, the dash was modified to the three-instrument cluster that continued throughout 356 production, and the windshield was changed from the "bent" windshield to a curved one.

The suspension was greatly improved, making the 356A and later models handle and ride much better than the Pre-As. The 356A had softer torsion bars that increased the suspension's wheel travel, improving both handling and ride. During 1955, the engine had already been changed to the three-piece case design that was a true Porsche engine and not a modified VW engine. Improvements were made to this powerplant during each year of production.

In 1957, there were a few cosmetic changes. That was the first year of bumper overrider bars on cars exported to the United States. This bow-like piece was added to the front and rear bumpers for additional protection. The first 1957 models had single overrider bars front and rear with beehive taillights. Midyear, the taillights were changed to a teardrop design. Near the end of the year, the license plate light was moved from above the license plate to below it, and the rear bumper overriders were changed to two-piece units that accommodated the license plate between them.

The 1958 356A featured several subtle changes. The door-latch mechanism was changed, and the striker plate was moved down to the center of the doorjamb, where it stayed throughout 356 production. The inside door handle moved from the center of the door to the top front edge, which was out of the way yet easier to reach. The heater control traded places with the shifter, making the latter more accessible. External door handles, which had been squared off, were changed to a rounder design. The seats were also changed, from the "overstuffed chairs" of earlier years to the slimmer, more attrac-

1960 356B Roadster

tive seats, which continued for the rest of the 356 run.

The 1958 engines had Zenith twin-throat carburetors instead of the Solex single-barrels, which required substantial changes to the throttle linkage. The engines incorporated some changes and were the only ones with a thermostat for the oil cooler mounted in the third-piece casting of the engine crankcase. Unfortunately, the thermostat didn't work properly and was replaced in most of the cars. The exhaust pipes now exited through the rear vertical bumper guards. Steering feel was improved by a new worm-and-sector steering box made by ZF, which replaced the modified VW box that had been used.

The 1959 356A looked very much like the 1958 model. The most significant change was to the 716 transmission, which had Porsche-designed servo synchronizers. The front overrider bar was about an inch higher than on the 1957 and 1958 models. This was also the year that the Speedster was replaced with a new model called the Convertible D (the "D" stood for Drauz, the company that made the bodies). It had a taller windshield, a better top, and wind-up windows, making it a true convertible.

From late 1955 through the end of the 1959 model year, 13,007 coupes, 3,367 Cabriolets, 2,954 Speedsters, and 1,330 Convertible Ds were built, for a total of 20,658 cars.

Carrera

The Carrera model was introduced in 1955, just as the 356A was launched, and was built as a coupe, Cabriolet, and Speedster in 1500cc and 1600cc configurations until 1959. The Carrera was built as a GS model for street use and, from 1957, as a GS GT model for racing. The most significant aspect of this series was its unique four-cam engine, which produced exceptional output for its size but required lots of maintenance and tuning.

There were some racing Carreras built in 1960 and 1961. Then the Carrera 2 debuted in 1962; it was offered for the remaining years of 356 production. The Carrera 2 initially utilized drum brakes but soon became the first road-going Porsche to feature disc brakes when it was fitted with the Porsche-Dunlop ring disc brakes, or "annular disc brakes." The Carrera 2 was the only road car to use these annular discs, and when the 356C was introduced in 1964 with more conventional disc brakes, they were also installed on the Carrera 2.

About 700 Carreras were built in total from 1955 through 1965. Of these, 436 were the B/C model Carrera 2. Since so few of these cars change hands with any regularity, it isn't easy to estimate their market value—but don't expect to find one for less than $500,000.

1960-1963 356B

Introduced in the 1960 model year, the 356B featured several appearance changes. The bumpers were raised about four inches front and rear, with a different shape and large vertical bumper guards. The headlights were raised, so the fender line was almost horizontal from the cowl to the headlight rim. There was a horn grille above the bumper and a brake cooling grille below the bumper, adjacent to where fog lights could be mounted as an option. It was the first coupe to have a front vent window, previously used only on the Cabriolet.

The 356B brake drums had radial fins instead of the circumferential fins of the earlier models. The transmission was changed to a type 741 with a different shifter. The first 1960 356B models used a single front transmission mount, but this didn't locate the transmission well enough, so after 3,000 cars had been pro-

duced, Porsche reverted to the double mount system used on the 356A.

The new Super 90 model was intended to replace the costly and complex four-cam Carrera as the highest-performance 356. With a 90-hp version of the 356 engine, the Super 90 performed almost as well as the Carrera and had fewer engine problems. In the meantime, a new Roadster replaced the Convertible D. It was essentially the same car but updated to 356B specifications.

1963 356B

In 1961, Karmann began producing a hardtop version called the notchback. It looked similar to the Cabriolet with a detachable hardtop, which Porsche had offered as an option, starting with the 1958 models. Karmann hardtops were only offered as 1961 and 1962 models, with 1,048 built as 1961 T5s and 699 1962 T6s. There were 15,354 T5 356Bs built in 1960 and 1961. This is broken down as 8,559 coupes, 1,048 Karmann hardtops, 3,094 Cabriolets, and 2,653 Roadsters.

For 1962, the 356B was updated with a T6 body. The T6 had a squared-off front hood and a larger windshield and rear window, and the fuel filler was moved from under the hood to under a flap in the right front fender. Twin engine grilles improved cooling. The battery was moved to the right side of the trunk compartment, and space was made on the left side of the trunk floor for an optional gas heater. There was also an air intake vent on the cowl to provide better ventilation for the passengers. The heater was modified and could mix fresh air from the cowl with heated air from the engine compartment; you could direct fresh air, heated air, or a combination to the windshield and through a vent above the driver's and passenger's feet. The fuel tank was revised to a flat shape and became the bottom of the storage compartment.

The Roadster was produced in 1962, but only 200 were made before it was discontinued. Total production of T6 356Bs in 1962 and 1963 was 16,038, which was comprised of 12,039 coupes, 699 Karmann hardtops, 3,100 Cabriolets, and 200 Roadsters. The 1963 models remained very similar to the 1962 models. Both Karmann and Reutter built coupes, Reutter built Cabriolets, and Drauz and D'Ieteren built Roadsters. Early roadsters were built by Drauz and later ones by D'Ieteren, including 200 1962 dual-grille roadsters.

The Reutter body-manufacturing operation was sold to Porsche in 1963, so the bodies from this factory were considered Porsche bodies in subsequent years. Karmann continued to manufacture bodies as well. Reutter continued to manufacture seats under the Recaro name, which was derived from a combination of Reutter and Karrosserie.

1964-1965 356C

The 1964 356C model had only minor visual changes from the T6 356B model, but its new disc brakes brought different wheels and much-improved stopping capability. They were ATE (Alfred Teves) brakes made to a Dunlop design.

There were two C models available, a standard C and an SC, which replaced the Normal, Super, and Super 90 of the B series. The SC had Solex 40 PII carburetors and generated 90 hp, while the C still utilized Zenith carburetors and produced 75 hp. The SC engine achieved the highest power output in the 356 engine series. This series started with the 40-hp engines in the 1950 cars and included 1,100cc, 1,300cc, 1,500cc, and 1,600cc versions in both Normal and Super configurations.

The dash of the 356C models also incorporated some changes, including a magnetic catch for the glove box. The passenger grab handle to the right of the dash was larger, made of plastic, and angled so that it was easier to grab. A new panel under the ashtray accommodated the wiper switch and cigar lighter. One difference between the 1964 and 1965 models was the change from a mechanical tachometer to an electric unit.

There were 16,684 356C models built in 1964 and 1965, of which 13,509 were coupes and 3,175 Cabriolets.