

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a psychedelic Porsche?

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Published: Jan 1, 2016 6:09 a.m. ET

The Porsche 356 cabrio is a rare commodity in its own right — the market discovered that there is a finite supply of these machines a number of years ago when even the least-loved examples started moving out of used car territory. But this is more than just a rare Porsche with celebrity ownership: it wears the livery which Janis Joplin called “The History of the Universe.”



That's why the 1964 Porsche 356 C 1600 SC cabriolet once owned by the singer-songwriter just sold for \$1.76 million at RM Sotheby's "Driven by Disruption" sale in New York City. The highly anticipated sale featured many lots that were closely watched by the collector-car market, though few broke through their high estimates with such drama as this very psychedelic 356.

But what's the story behind the car?



Even though many rock stars of the 1960s weren't shy about spending money on cars, Joplin actually bought this 356, which was wearing gray paint at the time of purchase, as a 4-year-old used car from Beverly Hills dealer Estes-Zipper for just \$3,500. Joplin is said to have given the cabrio to her "roadie" Dave Richards along with \$500 to decorate the car. Richards obliged, putting down a base coat of Candy Apple Red, and then set about decorating the car with portraits of Big Brother and the Holding Company band members in addition to other motifs such as "The Eye of God" found on the hood, and a California valley on the right door.



The livery also features Joplin's astrological sign, Capricorn, with the entirety of the livery finished in clear coat to protect the artwork. The clear coat was a very wise move in hindsight, as the Porsche was at one point stolen, with the car thief realizing his mistake a little too late. The thief is said to have started repainting the car, though he didn't finish the job — the car was recovered and returned to Joplin quickly enough, with Richards being able to remove the paint from the clear coat with little damage to the artwork underneath.



Joplin used the Porsche as her daily driver rather than using it as a stage prop, becoming a familiar sight in San Francisco at the tail end of the 1960s, and she continued driving the car through the breakup of Big Brother and through her years in Kozmic Blues Band and Full Tilt Boogie band.



Immediately after Joplin's death in 1970, her manager Albert Grossman retained the car, eventually returning it to Joplin's brother and sister, who had continued to use it. Her brother Michael, living in Ohio at the time, rebuilt the original engine and later returned the car to its original dolphin gray finish. The auction description is silent as to how the car was used in the years after the restoration, though by the 1990s a decision was made to replicate Richards' artwork on the car. Luckily, there were plenty of photos of the artwork from the period, and artists Jana Mitchell and Amber Owen were able to re-create the artwork from photographs.



Since the re-creation of the artwork, the Porsche has been displayed in a number of museums, spending some time in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio, and making an appearance at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.



The most recent work performed on the car was a mechanical restoration done by RM Auto Restoration which brought the car back to running condition, with RM Sotheby’s publishing a \$400,000 to \$600,000 estimate range for the car. The \$1.76 million winning bid was a surprise, even though some were confident that the \$600,000 high estimate was conservative. Much hinged on the artwork, since the present coat of paint is arguably a reproduction, with much of the actual history of the car having been forever erased.



This sale represents an interesting case study both in celebrity cars and art cars. We’re confident that many readers would agree that had the car maintained its dolphin gray paintwork from the ‘70s, it would have been viewed differently at auction in the year 2015.



The question, then, is: Does the value of the car lie in Joplin’s original ownership rather than the artwork, or were bidders assigning a significant value to artwork reproduced decades by different artists with some degree of accuracy? It’s still Joplin’s car — that’s what

matters — and for bidders, the removal of the artwork in the 1970s and its return for museum display purposes perhaps only added to the car's story.

Something was certainly lost when the car was restored to its original color. But if there were higher degrees of originality to be wished for here, it certainly didn't seem to scare away bidders.

The article "Janis Joplin's Porsche 356 brings \$1.76 million at auction" first appeared on Autoweek.com.



<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/oh-lord-wont-you-buy-me-a-psychedelic-porsche-2016-01-01>