

party CRASHER

Sometimes Running in the Pro Ranks Just Takes the Right Porsche, Some Creativity and a Bit of Determination

story by david s. wallens • photos as credited

The Pirelli World Challenge paddock contains all the trappings of a modern professional race series: factory-backed teams, well-heeled renters, and gentleman drivers looking to recapture their youth. Surprisingly, it's the guy campaigning the Porsche who's doing things on the cheap.

Meet Karl Poeltl, a former World Challenge competitor who has returned to the series on a relatively shoestring budget. His CCW wheels are borrowed. Same goes for the GT3 rear wing.

His crew is made up of just one friend. Their sole pit vehicle is a 20-year-old GT mountain bike. Where most teams roll an 18-wheeler into the paddock and work under a giant canopy, Karl has a dually pickup, a simple enclosed trailer, and a 10x10-foot pop-up tent.

Low-buck doesn't mean back-of-the-pack, however. At the St. Pete doubleheader opening weekend, Karl finished the first race sixth out of 20 starters. The next day he crossed the checker in ninth. Both days he beat the factory Kias. He's also running in the mid-level GTS class, meaning he's not exactly milling around with backmarkers.

"I'm here strictly for the challenge," he says. "There's a lot of big names out there—Andy Pilgrim and Johnny

O'Connell. These guys have run Le Mans." Karl's GTS class is just as stacked, featuring legends like Jack Baldwin and Peter Cunningham.

Karl founded Racer's Edge, a full-service prep shop, in 1998 in order to follow his passion of building and racing Porsches. "Being a degreed mechanical engineer, I started making suspension components for 944s in an effort to go faster," he explains. Since then, he has expanded his offerings to cover the 996- and 997-chassis Porsche 911.

"I eat, breathe and sleep racing but wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth," he adds. "But I can get the job done on a low budget because of what I know from my years of experience and what I can do myself to make the car work."

Boy Meets Car

For his return to the pro ranks, Karl looked at two popular options, the Pirelli World Challenge series and Grand-Am's Continental Tire Sports Car Challenge. Both feature similarly modified production cars as well as stiff competition.

Logistics dictated Karl's decision, though. In order to accommodate Grand-Am's endurance format, he'd need a crew—five bodies at least, he figures, to handle the mandatory pit stop.

It is possible to compete in World Challenge races on a relatively small budget. Karl Poeltl doesn't have a big rig to tow his car or an extensive fleet of pit vehicles to support his racing effort, but he's still in the fight. At the St. Pete season opener, he picked up a pair of top-10 finishes.





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Today's World Challenge scene is home to big rigs and big crews. Karl's effort is a bit more modest: one crewmember, an enclosed trailer and a 10x10-foot canopy. Where'd he put his budget? He opted for proven mods like his Moton suspension and LN Engineering deep sump kit.

World Challenge's sprint formula would simplify things. "I knew I could do it with one good crewmember," he says.

Karl also felt that the World Challenge rules would better allow him to prep to a budget rather than a rule book. For example, he notes, Grand-Am has a spec shock absorber rule while World Challenge does not.

Picking the right car was also an important part of the plan. Karl couldn't take on a complete reengineering project before taking the green flag; he needed a car with a proven track record in nearly stock form. Enter the ubiquitous Porsche 911.

World Challenge tends to favor the latest and greatest from the world's factories, but they have provisions for slightly older cars like Karl's 996-chassis Porsche 911: a partial eligibility clause. Teams can still run a body style that went out of production more than five years ago, but competitiveness is not guaranteed and the number of events run per year is limited.

That partial eligibility provision isn't a permanent solution, either, as it's only good for three years. After that time period, the model is officially retired.

Car Meets Upgrades

Porsche's amazing, factory-built GT3 Cup cars may be a staple in professional motorsports from all corners of the globe, but Karl's racer has somewhat humbler roots: It's just a Carrera, technically the base street model of the 911 lineup. His car still wears its original factory silver.

Karl's shop, Racer's Edge, originally prepared this particular car for a club racing client a few years back. When the client wrecked the car, Karl purchased it, made the needed repairs, and added a few personal touches.

Despite the seemingly pedestrian origins, the car came from the factory with components suitable for professional competition, Karl notes. The Carrera still runs the stock Porsche brakes minus Carbone Lorraine pads and DBA rotors, for example.

The drivetrain is also surprisingly stock. Karl installed a replacement factory crate engine three seasons ago, and to date it has never been cracked open. Though 996-chassis gearboxes run notoriously hot, Karl has saved about 15 pounds worth



WORLD CHALLENGE

No carbon-fiber panels or sequential shifters here—just a cockpit that would be familiar to any club racer. Look closely, however, and you'll find low-buck details throughout the build. To fix the taillight, they spliced in a piece from a Honda Odyssey.

His crewmember, Brett Gowe, used rubber shelf liner as a stencil to produce the faux-carbon-fiber roof.

David S. Wallens photos



of oil cooler and lines by using Millers Oil. Using this oil, he reports never seeing gearbox temps higher than 233 degrees—that's 30-40 degrees cooler than with anything else he's tried.

Two off-the-shelf parts help with engine longevity. The first is a Porsche Motorsports oil separator, a \$650 device that de-foams the oil to help maximize its efficiency. The second component is a deep oil sump and windage tray kit from LN Engineering; it adds to the engine's oil capacity while keeping that precious fluid near the pickup, all for less than \$750.

The rest of the improvements can be classified as standard bolt-ons: Fabspeed exhaust header, Evolution Motorsports intake, six-puck Spec clutch, Behe Performance retuned ECU, and Moton suspension setup. Karl's firm made the suspension bushings.

The fact that this chassis has been highly developed by the factory also helps, as the front lower control arms are Porsche GT3 pieces. They permit increased negative camber and can be purchased through any Porsche dealer or authorized retail outlet.

To duplicate the car, including the cage and all safety equipment, Karl says to budget \$35,000 to \$50,000, plus the car itself.

Some of the prep work also involved a bit of creativity. Brett Gowe, Karl's sole crewmember, used nonslip rubber shelf liner as a stencil for the carbon-fiber look found on the roof and mirrors. (He notes that the harder you try, the worse it looks.)

Brett also got creative when repairing the body. In addition to much of the left-side bodywork, his client's wreck also damaged one of the taillights, a nearly \$600 piece through the dealer. Brett found that a section cut from a Honda Odyssey taillight



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could be spliced in place to create a nearly invisible repair. Total cost: \$35 at the local pick-and-pull.

Karl then made one last change to improve on-track performance: He lost 35 pounds in preparation for the St. Pete season opener.

Boy Meets World Challenge

While Karl had a solid showing at the season's first race weekend, this isn't going to be a fairy tale about a lone independent overcoming the odds to win the championship crown. Reality says otherwise: Karl figures he has the time and budget to run one or two more World Challenge weekends this year. The St. Pete opener, he admits, set him back about \$7000 total, the bulk of which went to entry fees and the spec Pirelli racing slicks.

Since Karl is based in Knoxville, he's looking at the series' remaining East Coast double events, Mosport and Mid-Ohio. These races help amortize travel time and costs, he points out. After this pro stint, the car will return to the Porsche Club of America racing scene.

Karl may not bring home this year's title, but he shows that it's still possible for privateers to fight against the factories. It doesn't always take cubic loads of money to run in the pro ranks; sometimes all that's required is a solid plan and a bit of creativity.



2002 Porsche 996

owner:	Karl Poeltl
layout:	rear engine, rear-wheel drive
engine:	3.6-liter DOHC flat 6, liquid-cooled, aluminum crankcase and heads, variable valve timing, Fabspeed headers, Evolution Motorsports cold-air intake, tuning by Behe Performance
horsepower:	312 @ 6900 rpm
torque:	275 lb.-ft. @ 4350-5200 rpm
weight:	2800 lbs. minimum race weight, including driver
drivetrain:	OEM 6-speed manual w/Elite Racing Transmissions clutch-type limited-slip differential
suspension:	strut front, multi-link rear w/Moton Club Sport shocks (upgrading to Moton triple-adjustable), Hyperco springs
brakes:	OEM 4-wheel disc w/Carbone Lorraine RC6E pads, GT3 cooling scoops
cooling:	additional center radiator from automatic transmission-equipped model
aerodynamics:	GT3 rear wing (upgrading to GT3 Cup rear wing, adding front splitter)
wheels:	CCW 1-piece forged, 18x9-in. front, 18x11-in. rear
tires:	Pirelli 245/645-18 front, 305/645-18 rear
safety:	chassis-integrated roll cage, Ultra-shield road race seat w/leg supports, Racetech 6-point harness