



A SPOT OF DETECTIVE WORK

Stephen Davies knew he had a car with rally history, but what was it? Paul Davies explains how the Rothmans 911 changed its colours

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR, STEPHEN DAVIES AND PAUL LAWRENCE



Apparently, according to a newspaper I read recently, Sherlock Holmes never said "Elementary, my dear Watson". Which is a pity; the great detective's words always come to mind when a particularly thorny problem has been solved. The sort of problem that presented itself to Stephen Davies when he thought his replica Rothmans Porsche 911 SC RS needed a tidy-up.

You'll probably be well acquainted with Stephen's car. For the past six years or so the Midlands accountant has driven the machine ahead of major rallies as part of the 'Slowly Sideways' group. In fact, Stephen was organiser of the UK arm of the association of Group B and Group 4 cars, founded in Germany by rally photographer Reinhard Klein, before he recently formed a new club, 'Rallying with Group B'.

It wasn't actually a Rothmans Rally Team car of the early 1980s, when top drivers would have included Henri Toivonen, Billy Coleman and Saeed Al Hajri. Stephen had every reason to believe it was really a car that had been driven by Belgian ace Marc Duez, but it was already in Rothmans' distinctive blue and white when he took possession in 2002, and Henri Toivonen was a bit of a hero in the Davies' house.

Then just a year ago, Stephen decided it was time the car had a bit of a refurbishment and packed it off to Sweep Motorsport who had been looking after it for him. That's when the detective bit really started.

First though, back a bit to how the car came into his hands. Cheshire-based preparation company KD Engineering had acquired it as an incomplete bodyshell in 1987 and rebuilt it, in Rothmans colours, complete with many parts obtained when Prodrive (who ran the Rothmans Rally Team) sold off its Porsche parts. KD's Keith Dickins described the car as a 911 SC RS replica with an engine thought to have been used as a practice engine in the Middle East.

Stephen tried to dig deeper into the car's history, but apart from

On arrival at Sweep Motorsport (proprietor Gareth Williams used to work for David Sutton, hence the name – Sooty and...) the strip-down to replace various rusting body panels revealed not only the original, petrol blue metallic finish, as substantiated by the production details, but also touches of sky blue lurking under the Rothmans livery.

The colour revelation had Stephen donning his deerstalker and stoking up his Meerscham pipe once again. This time he trawled through his rally photos of the late '70s and early '80s,

1, 2 Dieter Röscheisen and co-driver Klaus Hesse in action in the 1980 German Rally Championship
3 Stephen Davies has had the car returned to its original state by
4 Gareth Williams at Sweep Motorsport
5 Now restored to its former glory, the Heigo 911 SC joined the 'Rallying with Group B' demonstration on the Stoneleigh stage

"THE STRIP-DOWN REVEALED NOT ONLY THE ORIGINAL, PETROL BLUE METALLIC FINISH, BUT ALSO TOUCHES OF SKY BLUE LURKING UNDER THE ROTHMANS LIVRY"

discovering that it was certainly a competition-prepared bodyshell, and at some time had suffered front-end damage, he got nowhere. "In the end I decided to settle down with the car and enjoy what I had – simply a fine replica of a Rothmans rally car," he says.

After several years, Stephen did decide to take his investigation further. The uncovering of the production number, under the padded roll on the bottom edge of the fascia, and an enquiry to Porsche got things rolling. For the first time he had full specification, colour, original engine number, etc. He also knew it had been built in 1978, and then "taken off to use for the company's purposes."

looking for a wide-bodied, sky blue Porsche. His eyes lighted on the Doduco-sponsored entry of the 1981 Manx International Rally, driven by none less than Walter Röhr.

Sherlock, sorry Stephen, had met Walter some years previously so he was able to call up the German and ask what had happened to his mount of '81. Simple, said Walter, it had been sold to an Englishman but then crashed.

At this point Stephen probably needed to reach for his violin, Holmes-style, to calm his nerves.

But this was a red, or in this case sky blue, herring. Research further gleaned the information that a →

With a little help...

Dieter Röscheisen tells the early story of the Heigo car, and how he and some friends helped Walter Röhrl

I bought the car when it was a year old and with some friends converted it into a Group 4 rally car. We presented the car in Heigo colours at Stuttgart in January 1980, and then competed in German and European rallies.



We won three events, and had four or five second places. But I was a private, not factory, driver and had to pay for everything myself; just to buy one tyre then cost 500DM, and I needed five or six sets of tyres for one rally. I was without a big sponsor, and after the season I sold the car to an Englishman, Christopher Walken, at a party to celebrate Walter Röhrl's victory in the 1980 World Rally Championship.

Walter had a contract to drive for Mercedes in 1981, but the programme was cancelled. I said to Walter, it can't be that the world champion has no car, so I looked for a sponsor for him, which was very easy because he was the champion. I then asked my chief at Porsche if it was possible to stop work for some time, and with my friends built a replica of my car for Walter in six weeks.

We formed a private team with Walter to contest some rallies with this Doduco-sponsored car, and then a new Group 4 911 SC was built in the factory and entered on the San Remo Rally (retired, transmission failure. PD). At the same time Walter was also driving a factory 924 GTS in the German Championship.

Building the car for Walter was a good idea. He had a chance to drive a little bit – it's very bad if you are the world champion and you have no car.



1 Walter Röhrl and Christian Geistdörfer in the San Remo Rally in 1981 2 Dieter Röscheisen and Walter Röhrl autographed models of both the Heigo and Doduco cars at the Porsche Museum in 2006

"HE WAS TESTING FOR PORSCHE IN ROME, BUT WAS DELIGHTED TO HEAR I MIGHT HAVE HIS OLD CAR"

Doduco-sponsored Porsche had been driven by a Dr Ernst Ricken on a German historic rally in 2009. Using what Stephen describes as "a bit of forensic work", the doctor's telephone number was obtained. He was contacted, and was able to report that not only had he bought the car in 1981, it was sitting in his garage as they spoke!

At this stage Stephen felt the trail had gone cold. And Gareth at Sweep Motorsport (I love that name every time I write it) was asking whether they should respray the now refettled car in Rothmans colours.

Our man decided to call Röhrl again. This time they realised there had been confusion – Walter had actually been talking about a rally car driven during 1980 by a friend, Dieter Röscheisen, and painted in the colours of German

roll cage manufacturer Heigo. Holmes would have reached for his violin again, but here's Stephen's account:

"I asked Walter for Dieter's telephone number. He was testing for Porsche in Rome, but was delighted to hear that I might have his old car. The following weekend he emailed me details and, checking the chassis number, I was able to confirm that I did, indeed, have his car from 1980."

A final study at Sweep Motorsport of photographs supplied by Dieter – positions of cut-out switches, holes drilled in the fascia, the all-important production number – confirmed the Heigo car's identity. It was further confirmed that Christopher Walken, who bought the car from Dieter, had crashed in the 1981 Scottish Rally, hence the front-end damage.

Technically, being Group 4 of 1980, the Heigo car is now a 911 SC, not the SC RS (homologated into Group B in 1983) that the later Rothmans replica would have been. Even so, it is a stunning addition to the new club that Stephen has set up with MSA approval.

The car's first driver was reunited with his old car at this year's Race Retro show, when he took the co-driver's seat alongside Stephen around the Stoneleigh rally stage. And Dieter – who still works at Porsche as a test driver, just as he did in 1980 – presented Stephen with one of a limited-edition run of models of the car commissioned by the Porsche Museum in 2006.

A footnote to this remarkable story is that Stephen is considering a request from Porsche to loan the car to the Museum. There is also talk of putting those scale models back into production.

Now, both Stephen Davies and Dieter Röscheisen are happy men. Case solved, elementary my dear...

6 On the Stoneleigh stage
7 Stephen Davies (right) with Dieter Röscheisen, who was reunited with his old car at Race Retro this year

