

FEATURED VEHICLE

MODERN PERFORMANCE MEETS CLASSIC PORSCHE SPYDER STYLING

Builder Darin Irvine took the power of a Porsche Boxster and gave it an all-aluminum body to create the ultimate Porsche 550 Spyder tribute.

BY ASHLEY MAJESKI SMISSEN

DARIN IRVINE IS USED TO WORKING ON EVERYTHING FROM early antique vehicles to 1960s and 1970s European sports cars at his Northport, Michigan, restoration shop, but when his customer came to him with the idea of taking a modern Porsche Boxster and essentially turning it into a 1955 550 Spyder, he knew it would be no easy task.

The customer, **David Howard**, was already having Irvine's shop build him an '960 Porsche 356 Outlaw Roadster, so he knew that if anyone could make his dream car into a reality, it was Irvine and his team at **Darin Irvine Custom Automotive Restoration LLC**.

"When the Boxsters were new, they seemed to emulate the 550 Spyder, which David always had a fondness [for]," Irvine said. "[He asked,] why couldn't you take a Boxster and go the rest of the way with an all-aluminum body [and make] a tribute to the 550 Spyder design?"

Howard wanted a car that had the power of a modern Boxster, but the sleek retro looks of the 1955 Spyder. Howard and Irvine called in **JP Van Raalte** of **Van's Garage** in nearby Leland, Michigan, and, together with Irvine's son **McGuire** and friend **Steve Knoll**, began to discuss designs for the tribute car using original blueprint drawings of a 2003 Boxster S and the 1955 550 Spyder. The rendering Irvine came up with featured the best parts of both vehicles.

With the design finished, the team secured a clean Boxster S to work with. It was completely stripped down and reconstructed so that the hinge pillars resided in a new location and a new cowl was in place.

"The construction of the car was then engineered around

the doors," Irvine said. Hammer forms for the right and left door skins were milled from solid blocks of wood to aid in the forming of the door skins, as well as all adjacent panels. Afterward, the aluminum body was fit onto the modified Boxster chassis.

The team, particularly Van Raalte, made extensive mechanical modifications to accommodate the new body, including moving the steering column inboard 3 inches and relocating the clutch, brake master cylinder, fuel fill, pedal assembly and radiator. The electronics were pared down and the wiring harness redesigned and engineered to work around all of the deleted electronics. The team decreased the car's weight by over 650 pounds, which increased its performance.

"Designing and engineering the modifications required to make the new body a structurally sound and functional extension of the chassis was by far the biggest challenge," Irvine said. "Even though the Boxster and Spyder are both mid-engine cars, their body shapes are vastly different, which required the relocation of many structural, functional and mechanical elements."

To be sure their creation was safe, the team drove the car 500 test miles in the fall of 2010, before moving on to the construction of the interior and paint.

"The interior [is] the most visible example of where the modern car's chassis and the retro styling of the new body intersect," said Irvine. "The design required elements of both old and new."

The team at Irvine's shop, along with the crew at Van's Garage, custom-fabricated the car's interior, hand-forming the aluminum interior trim and then covering it in burgundy leather or painting it to match the car's body color.

Irvine custom-fabricated most of the car's interior and exterior details, including the head lamp lenses and trim, textured aluminum dash and console inserts, door and cockpit bolsters, seat frame cover and textured cockpit trim.





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STAT SHEET

- **CAR:** Porsche Boxster 550 Spyder concept car
- **OWNER:** David Howard, Lake Leelanau, Michigan
- **BUILDER:** Darin Irvine Custom Automotive Restoration LLC
- **LOCATION:** Northport, Michigan

- 1 INTERIOR:** Irvine joined the team at **Van's Garage Inc.** in Leland, Michigan, to create the Porsche's custom leather interior. All of the aluminum interior trim was hand-formed and then covered in leather or painted to match the interior and body colors.
 - 2 POWERTRAIN:** The Porsche is powered by a 2003 Porsche Boxster S "flat six" engine. It also features a stainless steel exhaust by Stebro.
 - 3 WHEELS & TIRES:** The car rolls on 18-inch Michelin Pilot Sport tires that feature two-piece BBS rims. Irvine designed the center section of each wheel (which were engineered by **Alan Meredith** of **Tribal Motorworks** of Traverse City, Michigan). The hub center cap mounts were created by **Sun Spec Billet** of Osage Beach, Missouri.
 - 4 PAINT:** Irvine used Porsche GT Silver and PPG's Global Clear on the car.
 - 5 BODY & FRAME:** The car's aluminum body was designed and hand-fabricated by Irvine. The 2003 Porsche Boxster S unibody chassis was modified extensively to accommodate the body. Modifications included shortening the nose by 11 inches, lowering and moving the upper cowl lateral support forward, and removing the original windshield frame.
- OTHER FEATURES:** **Steve Long Custom Radiators** of Indianapolis created the car's unique aluminum dual radiator. The twin radiators of the Boxster S were combined into one custom dual radiator. It was relocated to accommodate the new body work. **John Houdek** did all the additional custom machining for the car's custom wheels, steering column and interior pieces.

With the final custom touches completed, the silver Porsche Boxster 550 Spyder was delivered to Howard's home in February.

"With his dream of 10 years now a reality, we hope to see a lot of David in his new acquisition on the winding roads of northern Michigan this summer," Irvine said. "[This car] has been referred to as a '550 on steroids' on more than one occasion. I see it as the result of the fusion of German engineering and American creativity. I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to create something so unique." **HRR**