

Paint by the Numbers

BY PETER LINSKY

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White...gray...black... silver. When it comes to automotive paint colors – and with advance apologies to anyone who happens to own and love one of the preceding – why have they become so uninteresting? For the past decade or so, many domestic and foreign manufacturers have been feeding us a steady diet of blah from their paint cabinets. Drive past a new car showroom, look around in traffic, or a local shopping center parking lot and you'll find row after row of boring dark or neutral colors. What has brought us to this point, and how long will it persist?

Recently, I happened across an interesting item on the Business Insider website

discussing automotive colors. I've always been interested in that subject, and was working on a story about the history of Porsche paint. Rob Sass at Panorama took the wind out of my sails when he unveiled a similar project by introducing the Rennbow data base. Rennbow is far more comprehensive than what I had in mind, which was to try to identify the individuals employed by Porsche, and ask them how paint colors were and are chosen and

named. I was a day late and a *pfennig* short, as they say. The old-timers at Porsche are all gone and nobody else remembers or was willing to talk.

But let's go back to the point at hand: Business Insider's Mark Healy noted that as recently as the early 2000s, nearly half of all the new cars sold in the US were still offered in bright, eye-catching hues. Most Porsche-philes recall the wonderful "Jellybean" colors that Porsche applied to a special batch



of 1974 911 SCs for Roger Penske's inaugural IROC season to make track identification easier and many of those exciting colors remain popular today. A decade earlier, Chrysler Corporation seared our eyeballs with special bright colors and nutty names for its high-performance models. Continues Healey, "...But over the past quarter century, the range of hues has narrowed dramatically. Today, less than 20% of vehicles listed in our