

Rebellious Purist: Michael Lesmana and his Porsche 356 A Coupé

01/03/2023 Michael Lesmana has given his 356 another chance at life amid volcanoes and mangrove swamps. Just like its owner, the classic car itself is polarizing.

A mere glance at his car is enough to see that Michael Lesmana is anything but conventional. Not just because of the dusty exterior, the stickers, or the scars that the car has collected over the past 66 years, but also as it's a Porsche 356 A Coupé – and a 1956 model at that, which is extraordinarily rare due to its V-shaped sunroof. An unmistakable, charismatic specimen – just like Lesmana himself.

Raised amid picturesque tea farms and towering volcanoes, the 49-year-old workshop and record store owner lives in Bandung in Indonesia's West Java province. While his community considers him to be entirely unconventional, his passion began in a way that was untypically conventional – at least for him.

"A father-son experience," Lesmana says, smiling. "My passion for cars began when I was just a boy." That passion evolved into something tangible: his workshop, which is a hot spot for modified Volkswagen and Porsche vehicles in Indonesia. And Lesmana's 356, which he discovered in skeletal

form in Jakarta, the capital city, 15 years ago, is a celebrity in its own right.

Design of the 356 expresses perfection

“It doesn’t matter which angle you look at it from. There’s no mistaking that the 356 is a Porsche,” says Lesmana, who claims that the design is an expression of perfection. Despite that – or possibly because of it – he sees no reason to restore the classic car to its original condition. He’s simply a rebellious purist who’s not afraid to break with tradition. “People either love or hate restomods,” says Lesmana, hinting at the 356, which was restored without original components. “But I like it the way it is. The car tells stories with its stickers, scratches, and marks.” Working with other enthusiasts and mechanics has taught him an important lesson in car culture: “Different opinions are a good thing. They should be respected, as they’re a form of art appreciation."

Art needs to be understood to be appreciated. Lesmana’s reasoning for the appearance of his 356 is simple – and profound. “This car has existed for 66 years; it was essentially brought back from the dead. Now it should roam free and unleashed, rather than just exist as a display piece.” Where others see imperfections, Lesmana sees journeys and memories.

“My first journey in it was around Java,” says Lesmana. “From Bandung to Yogyakarta – 558 kilometers through extreme terrain.” Jungle, mangrove swamps, savannas – the island is dominated by fascinating manifestations of nature. “A true trial by fire.” It’s an apt metaphor, as Java is home to 38volcanoes, some of which are currently active.

Love to cars and music

Of all the stickers that bear witness to the 356’s adventures, there’s one in particular that stands out. Like Lesmana’s T-shirt, it says “Keep Keep,” which is the name of the record store he’s owned since 2015. “In addition to cars, my family also loves music,” says Lesmana. “That’s where my appreciation of subcultures comes from.” Since opening its doors, his store has developed into a gathering place for creative minds in Bandung. “Keep Keep is a melting pot for the inspiring power of a very diverse group of people, be it car enthusiasts, artists, musicians, or passersby.”

Classic cars and vinyl records – retro plays a big role in Lesmana’s life, as a result of the renaissance of old-school and alternative culture in Bandung. “It all began in the 1990s, as information became more accessible via the Internet,” says Lesmana. “People were traveling, opening up their minds, and society developed an appreciation for other cultures.”

These days, the local community is proud of these achievements. Proud that locations like Lesmana’s workshop, his record store, and even the man himself have a home in Bandung. “I’d like to give back,” says Lesmana, whose life has been shaped by this cultural identity. “I hope I can inspire others. Have fun, play fair – and dream big.”

Info

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