

FEBRUARY 2026

The Crankhandle Chronicle

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE CRANKHANDLE CLUB, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA



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AFTER A DECADE**

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DECEMBER NATTER**

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Unearthed and Reborn:

Pieter du Toit's 1973 Puma - A South African Racing Survivor

By Charel Olivier (AI assisted)

When Pieter du Toit took the stage to tell the story of his bright orange 1973 Puma, the audience quickly realised this was far more than a simple restoration tale. What he revealed was a slice of forgotten South African motoring history: a car hiding decades of racing secrets, fuel-crisis tragedy, Brazilian motorsport influence, and painstaking detective work that took nearly nine years to untangle.

A Puma with a past

When Pieter bought the car, he assumed it was a normal early-production Puma. But soon clues began surfacing: unusual modifications, racing-related scars, non-standard components, and structural reinforcements that no road car would have needed. It turned out to be body number 60, one of the first South African-built Pumas and almost certainly a former competition car raced briefly at Killarney in 1973.

That short competition life was cut off abruptly by the global 1973 fuel crisis, which banned production-car racing worldwide. Cars like this one were simply pushed into garages and forgotten, their histories fading into darkness.

Through conversations with the late Adrian Pfeiffer and racing elders like Dave Malan, Pieter pieced together what little evidence remains of that "lost period" in local motorsport - a time when big names like Sarel van der Merwe were recorded, but everything beneath them disappeared from the archives.

Clues in Fiberglass and Steel

Every section Pieter stripped back revealed more signs of a racing past:

- Lightweight bonnet and paper-thin inner arches
- Front and rear windscreen security tabs used to stop glass popping out during racing
- Type 3 (Variant) rear brakes, far bigger than standard Beetle units



The Puma definitely makes a statement when it appears



The rear view is as impressive as the front

- Solid steering coupling for sharper racing response
- Roll-bar mounts welded to the chassis
- H-beam stiffeners to reduce chassis flex
- Enlarged engine cooling gills and ducting
- Dry-sump preparation holes front and rear
- Racing-style dashboard lowered by 50 mm
- Track damage on the left rear wheel arch consistent with heavy cornering on a right-

hand-dominant circuit (exactly like Killarney)
Even the engine-lid holes revealed the car once carried a 2.1-litre factory Puma racing motor - one of only four fitted in South Africa.

Puma and the Lost Racing Projects

The presentation touched on broader fallout from the 1973 fuel crisis. Several South African and Brazilian projects were abandoned:

- The SA twin-engine Beetle,

- created to fight the Firenza
- The Brazilian Fittipaldi twin-engine Beetle (400+ hp, 400 kg)
- The Jamaro eight-cylinder Beetle
- Puma's own eight-cylinder experimental engines

Almost all were broken up, their pieces scattered now only recently rediscovered and restored.

Pieter's Puma carries faint fingerprints of this era: widened ducts, racing scoops, prototype components and modifications



Pieter's passion for the Puma was evident in the presentation that he gave to the members

mirroring Brazilian factory race cars like Sparta #48 and Sparta #60.

**A Mystery Solved:
The Brazilian Connection**

One of Pieter's biggest breakthroughs came from a modern Puma podcast featuring elderly ex-factory staff from Brazil. Milton Masteguín was a director of PUMA and owned the MM

dealership for performance tuning in Sao Paulo.

Newton Masteguín, son of former PUMA director Milton Masteguín, revealed that his parents spent a year in South Africa in 1973 helping set up the Bromer assembly plant.

Milton Masteguín was also Puma's head of racing development. Suddenly everything made sense.

All the unusual features on Pieter's car - the scoops, the ducts, the race prep, the roll bar, the dry-sump setup, the Spartan-style rear cutouts - aligned perfectly with Matequín's engineering style.

In all likelihood, Pieter's Puma was built under Masteguín's direct supervision as a race-prepared development car.

The Nine-Year Resurrection

Restoration was monumental:

- The chassis was rotten and had to be rebuilt.
- Rear and front sections were reconstructed from scratch.
- Magnesium wheels (under 5 kg each) needed new inserts.
- A 2.1-litre Puma racing motor had to be built using imported and rare parts: 78.4 mm crank,

P3 camshaft, Solex 40 carbs, mechanical-advance distributor, dual dry-sump oil pump.

- Pieter remade many components with no drawings, relying on old Brazilian photographs.
 - The wiring harness was rebuilt entirely with colour-coded lengths.
 - A dual air-intake system was recreated exactly to period specification.
 - A correct racing oil cooler was built and mounted inside the engine lid.
 - Interior seats were rebuilt from scratch (helped by his wife's electric carving knife).
 - Even the MM (Milton & Marino) racing stickers were researched, redrawn, and supplied back to Brazil.
- Every inch of the car was touched, studied, corrected, and restored.

A Historic Survivor

Today, Pieter's orange 1973 Puma isn't merely restored - it's resurrected. It stands as:

- one of the earliest South African-built Pumas,
- a probable ex-Killamey race car,
- a development vehicle touched by Puma's Brazilian racing mastermind, and
- one of the most meticulously researched Puma restorations in the world.

As Pieter concluded:

"This is pure South African forgotten motor history. And we must remember: this car is a thoroughbred, not a kit car."

His nine-year journey didn't just save a car; it rescued a chapter of local motorsport heritage that might otherwise have vanished forever.



The distinctive, cat-like headlights



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