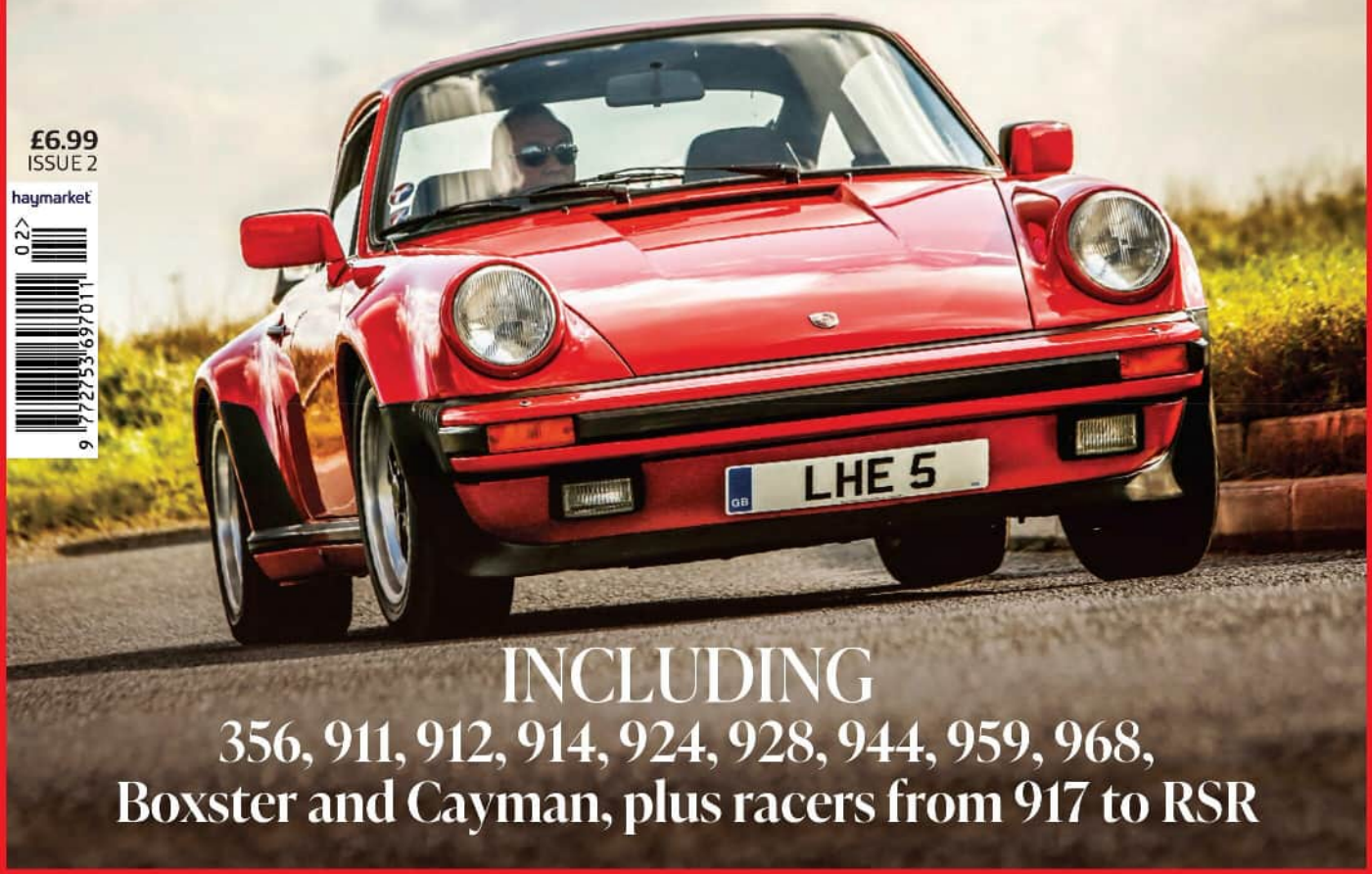
NEW SERIES – SECOND EDITION

CLASSIC & SPORTS CAR

PRESENTS

PORSCHE LEGENDS

STUTTGART'S FINEST ON ROAD AND TRACK



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PORSCHE

Welcome

There are very few brands to which the moniker *Legend* can truthfully be applied, but the choice was easy for the first single marque to feature in our new series. Its cars have only been around since 1948, yet Porsche's influence bests many far more long-lived manufacturers.

Its founder, Dr Ferdinand Porsche, consulted on arguably one of the world's most important roadgoing machines, the original 'people's car', as well as some of the most thrilling racers of all time. Yet here we have concentrated on the production output of his eponymous firm, and in particular its magnificent, long-lasting 911 in all its many forms, from the original 901 to some of its most recent incarnations.

But that's not all. In trawling the archives of *Classic & Sports Car* from the past 15 years (see the *Contents* page to find out when each of our stories was first published), we've also dug out tales of the marque's first-born, the 356, along with its front-engined diversions – the 928, and the more affordable 924, 944 and 968. Many of the mainstream models are compared with a selection of their key rivals in period, before we finish off with track tests of some truly significant race and rally machines, all of which share their purity of purpose and thoroughbred genes with their brilliant roadgoing brethren.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS
Editor in chief, *Classic & Sports Car*

CLASSIC & SPORTS CAR

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PRINTED BY William Gibbons & Sons Ltd

Classic & Sports Car (ISSN 0263318X, USPS 25178), is published monthly by Haymarket Media Group, Bridge House, 69 London Road, Twickenham TW1 3SP, United Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container INC 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Classic & Sports Car*, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container INC 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.

Subscription records are maintained at Haymarket Media Group, Bridge House, 69 London Road, Twickenham TW1 3SP. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent. Distributed in the UK by Frontline Ltd, 1st floor - Stuart House, St John's Street, Peterborough, Cambs PE1 5DD, 01733 555161

BACK NUMBERS
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Contents

OPEN SEASON

Everyone fancies themselves as James Dean in a Porsche Speedster, yet you can enjoy open-top 356 motoring for much less money

WORDS **MARTIN PORT** PHOTOGRAPHY **MALCOLM GRIFFITHS**

Low 'screen plus neat overrider tubes at both ends give custom look; minimalist detailing with simple hubcaps and neat dash binnacle; badge was tidied up because the original script was misread as 'Spoodsler'

'One potential purchaser would ensure the car's iconic status and his own. In March '55, James Dean walked into Competition Motors'

356 TIMELINE

1931 Porsche Type 12 created by Ferdinand Porsche to be built by Zündapp with rear-mounted, five-cylinder radial engine
1933 NSU Type 32 with rear-mounted, air-cooled flat-four
1938 Porsche Type 60 racer previews 356 Coupé style
1941 Volkswagen 'KdF-wagen' (Strength through Joy car) enters production
1948 Porsche Type 356 chassis 001 completed by Ferry Porsche: roadster with mid-mounted 1131cc Volkswagen engine; on sale as Coupé and Cabriolet, later with 40bhp 1086cc unit
1951 1286cc 356 1300 (44bhp) and 1488cc 1500 (60bhp) launched
1952 America Roadster has 70bhp motor shared with new 1500S; 1500 detuned to 55bhp
1953 60bhp 1300S added
1954 Speedster introduced (Sept); 1300 upped to 1290cc
1955 Revised 356A launched (October) as 1300/1300S and new 60bhp 1600 and 75bhp 1600S, both with 1582cc; 100bhp four-cam 1500GS Carrera arrives in November
1957 110bhp Carrera 1500GT
1958 1300 dropped; Convertible D replaces Speedster (August); 105bhp 1600GS and 115bhp 1600GT 1587cc Carreras launched
1959 356B (Sept) introduced: Coupé, Cabrio and new Roadster
1960 Uprated 90bhp 1600S-90 (March); Karmann hardtop (Aug); 356B Carrera 1600GT Coupé with 134bhp launched
1963 Revised 356C (July) as 1600C (75bhp) and 1600SC (90bhp), Coupé and Cabrio only
1965 356 phased out (April) in favour of 911/912 range; 10 Cabriolets assembled in 1966

Today's media is awash with celebrity endorsement. The 21st-century marketplace practically dictates that in order for a product to succeed and remain in the public eye, it must have an association (forced or otherwise) with someone of recognition. So when this support is suddenly volunteered instead of being on the payroll, imagine the impact and the delight of those pushing that product.

In the post-war 1950s boom the automobile market was expanding, and feedback from dealers to manufacturers was crucial in allowing them to create *and* keep up with demand. As the sole importer of Porsches and other European marques to the US West Coast, Max Hoffman often made suggestions based on what he felt he and the agents he supplied could sell. It was Hoffman who approached Mercedes-Benz with the idea for what became the 'Gullwing', and he appealed to Porsche for a "more elegant" 356 Cabriolet, which eventually resulted in the America Roadster. Hoffman's fondness for the Jaguar XK120 is clear to see in the car's profile, but 'Maxie' had grown disenchanted with Porsche, having received only a handful of the cars over a three-year period.

Following a meeting between Hoffman and Professor Albert Prinzing – a long-time friend and business associate of Ferry Porsche – plans were drawn up for a further modification of the Cabriolet. It was to be a stripped-down, lightweight incarnation that, according to Hoffman, would be a true competitor in style and performance to newer cars coming on to the market, such as the Alfa Romeo Giulietta and Chevrolet Corvette. And so, in 1954, the Porsche Speedster was finally launched.

Hoffman had guessed right that certain residents of the sun-kissed states would jump at something that looked distinctive against any other open-top but still wore the already respected Stuttgart crest. One such potential buyer was to provide a link that would act as more than a valuable endorsement: he would ensure both the car's iconic status and his own.

In March '55, fledgling film star James Dean walked into the Hollywood showroom of Porsche dealership Competition Motors and bought one of the first pre-A Speedsters: a white 1500 Super. His intention was clear from the outset. Like many other Speedster owners, Dean signed up to compete in events organised by the California Sports Car Club – a series for amateur drivers with road-based cars.

With the bulk of the grids made up of MG TFs and the like, the Speedster was immediately competitive. In his first run at Palm Springs, Dean won his qualifying race on the Saturday and came second in that weekend's final results. Just over a month later he was out again at Bakersfield, gaining a class win on the Saturday and finishing ninth in Sunday's feature race. A blown piston ended his ambitions at Santa Barbara in May, but Dean hadn't failed to notice that his previous race at Bakersfield had been dominated by John von Neumann (who owned Competition Motors) in the new Porsche 550. In September, following filming commitments, he revisited Neumann and traded in the Super Speedster against a brand new Spyder.

Odd, then, that Dean is so inextricably linked with the Speedster: less than six months of ownership and a handful of amateur races, but in the context of Dean's short life that sits right. Only 24 when he died, Dean made just three films – *Rebel Without a Cause* being released two weeks after his fatal accident. His enthusiasm for Porsche lasted less than a year, including his 550 Spyder. A short timescale but a big series of events which, from that day on, mean there is something about driving a Speedster that suggests a uniform of white T-shirt, red windcheater and faded denims is *de rigueur*.

Skip forward 50 years and the Speedster/Dean tag is as prominent as ever: popular myth means that the ill-informed still have him crashing in a Speedster rather than Spyder, and that has done little to quell the continual rise in values. But take celebrity out of the equation and it is the sheer purity of design and aesthetic brilliance that make the Speedster so sought-after.

The lack of concessions to luxury or practicality makes the car's purpose more obvious: this is the only open-top Porsche to have evaded any attempt to fit rear seats. As a result, the cockpit is shorter and the engine deck longer, providing a sportier, custom appearance compared with the Cabriolet or Roadster. The cropped front 'screen is just over a foot high – removable for racing, too – and, coupled with the optional slot-in sidescreens, doesn't offer much protection from the elements. Yet this didn't matter for the intended market: with temperatures hitting 20°C-plus practically all year round, and less than an inch of rain for at least seven months, you could afford to abandon thoughts of wet-weather gear and just how well a heater might perform.

And if you did put the hood up, well, the Speedster again displays a unique purity – just a single layer protects passengers before the inevitable leaks start to seep through. But that's missing the point again – like claiming that a Series 1 Land-Rover really isn't very pleasant around town. The Speedster was designed for a specific lifestyle, climate and environment, and in that aim it amply succeeds.

So with T-shirt freshly ironed, it's time to hit Sunset Strip. It takes some imagination because the Essex countryside has few similarities, yet from the moment you grab the chromed edge of

Top: Dean gets the 1488cc Super out of shape in his first race at Palm Springs. Below: Hoffman's dazzling Lloyd-Wright-designed showroom in New York

Building the brand

Long before making its own cars, Porsche enjoyed considerable success offering its expertise on everything from a family car to a Grand Prix titan

WORDS **JAMES PAGE** PHOTOGRAPHY **PORSCHE/VOLKSWAGEN**

While many people consider that the 1948 356 marks the beginning of the Porsche company, 'Ferry' himself looked instead to 1931, when his father formed Dr Ing hc F Porsche KG. Born in 1875, Ferdinand Snr was a gifted engineer who designed his first car – which used electric power – for the Austrian Jacob Lohner in 1900. He went on to enjoy a long association with Austro-Daimler, leaving in 1922 to join Daimler in Stuttgart. When that firm merged with Benz, Porsche designed the straight-six engines for the glorious Mercedes SS and SSK.

After a brief stint with Steyr, Ferdinand decided to set up a consultancy at Kronenstraße 24 in the centre of Stuttgart. The first Porsche design was the Wanderer Type 7, but he also developed small cars – both of which were cancelled before production began – for Zündapp and NSU. Germany was at the dawn of a motoring revolution, however. Road-building was booming and there was a desperate need for an affordable model, something quickly seized upon by the government.

Porsche therefore pressed on, and in January 1934 he published his initial thoughts on a compact four-seater with a flat-four engine. Mutual acquaintance Jakob Werlin arranged a meeting between Ferdinand Porsche and Adolf Hitler, and shortly after that the *Reichsverband der Automobilindustrie* signed a contract with Porsche to design and develop the car that would become the Volkswagen.

Getting it into production was not the work of a moment. Porsche tried various body and engine designs and struggled to produce anything that could be built for the low price required by the RdA. An extensive testing programme took place through 1937, and a new factory was prepared at Fallersleben (later known as Wolfsburg) – with Hitler laying the foundation stone on 26 May 1938. The car was finally launched at the 1939 Berlin motor show.

Throughout the decade, German teams also dominated Grand Prix racing. Auto Union adopted Porsche's P-Wagen design for the 750kg formula, and its rear-engined V16 contender battled for honours with the more conventional designs from Mercedes-Benz. Some of the early testing on the P-Wagen was done by Ferry, something on which the founder wasn't keen. "He used to say that he had many drivers," recalled Ferry to journalist Steve Cropley in 1985, "but only one son."

During WW2, the company relocated to Gmünd in Austria to avoid the Allied bombing of Stuttgart. It somehow survived the post-war period, during which Ferdinand and Ferry were incarcerated by the French, and began to prosper after the 1948 agreement with Volkswagen that it would receive a royalty on each car made. More than that, the deal stated that VW would supply parts to Porsche to help with the manufacture of its own models.

"During the war," Ferry told Cropley, "I drove a supercharged VW convertible with 50bhp, a lot of power then. It occurred to me that if we made a car that was lighter still but with 50bhp, then it would really be something."

Porsche was on its way.

Volkswagens being tested by the press during the 1939 Berlin Motor Show

the windscreen and plop into the basic but comfortable leather seat, it's hard not to come over a bit James Dean. Starting is familiar – a turn of the key induces a moment of good old Porsche whine before you stab at the throttle and the 1600 flat-four catches, its twin pipes reverberating gently with a promising burble.

The simplicity of the dash is pure magic. In an era when dials, switches and knobs were taking over rather than enhancing, the three readouts and just essential controls are beautifully positioned with clarity and thought. The large steering wheel, reminiscent of that on a Mercedes-Benz 300SL, responds to a light touch, and fingertip manoeuvres are all that is needed to position the car accurately on the road.

As revs build, you change up through the four-speed 'box before repeating, and as you let the clutch up once again the exhaust note resumes its role as entertainer. The low 'screen means wind in your hair at anything above walking pace, and a reminder that this could be California is in order to turn the battering into El Niño's warm embrace, fresh from the Pacific Ocean.

On a dull afternoon the illusion is tough to conjure, even for a dreamer. At the back of your mind there is the nagging thought that, at well over £100,000 for a prime specimen, it's just never going to work unless global warming advances at a horrifying rate, or you are prepared to relocate on a massive scale and exchange pounds sterling for greenbacks and dimes.

Yet you don't need a second mortgage to adopt the 356 lifestyle – there are much cheaper alternatives. When the Speedster was still a twinkle in Hoffman's suggestive eye, Porsche's pragmatic engineers were already producing a Cabriolet alongside the Coupé, with this version often making up half of 356 production numbers. The Cabriolet follows a more traditional approach and retains as much of the closed car's desirability as is possible with a soft-top.

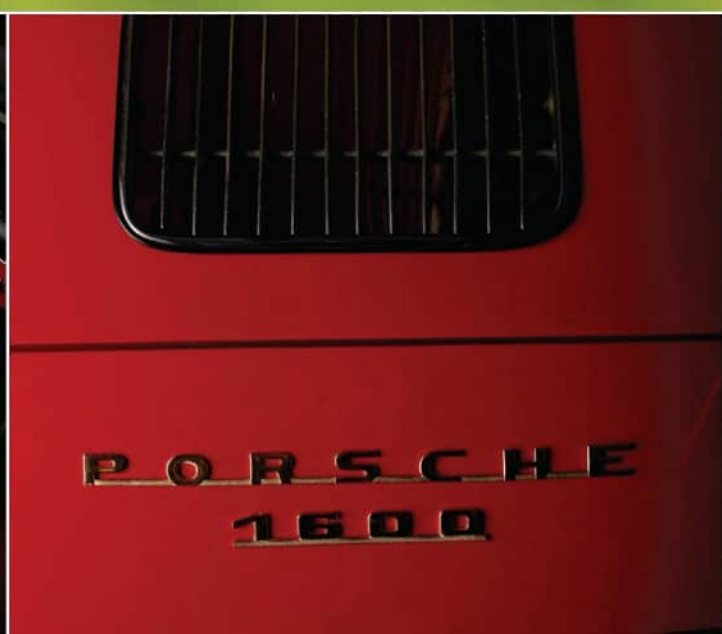
This is at the opposite end of the scale to the Speedster: well-padded seats provide comfort yet lack location compared to its sibling's low-slung buckets. A double-lined hood gives almost as much protection against the elements and road noise as the Coupé, and the quarterlights, plus the taller 'screen, give an enclosed feeling even with the roof down. So with heating, rear seats and a luxury hood, it's going to be obvious to Dean wannabes that the Cabriolet just doesn't cut the mustard. Isn't it?

Well, not quite. Out on testing country roads, and with a well-prepared engine, the 100lb or so (42kg) of extra bulk doesn't show. On a race track the Speedster's aerodynamic advantage is going to be obvious, yet the difference here

Left: a hardtop that aped the Coupé's cleaner roofline was available for the Cabrio and Roadster. Windscreen is structural on the Cabrio, which also features quarterlights and has a thicker hood

'With the Speedster still a twinkle in Hoffman's suggestive eye, Porsche's pragmatic engineers were already producing a Cabriolet'

'The Roadster is definitely more Cabriolet than Speedster, yet its semi-stripped-down nature goes some way to satisfying both camps'



Above: Buchet guns a Speedster on the 1960 Liège-Rome-Liège rally, won by Pat Moss in an Austin-Healey. Main: Roadster has something of the Speedster look, but is 220lb heavier. Below left: simple dash also echoes style of lightweight

is negligible. Indeed, the engine fitted to this example has been rebuilt and uprated. Now nicely run-in, it certainly challenges the lightweight. It is impossible to deny that the Super Cabriolet is a friendly vehicle – there's little buffeting and excellent visibility – but park it and the obligatory glance back doesn't quite set the heart racing in the same way as the Speedster. Which is rather a shame, because the sound, the feel and the way the car communicates with you while driving is pure Porsche – a given in so many of its models. While it's still a good-looking car, here the romance and film-star ideal becomes more Bavarian touring than cruising the strip.

And the halfway house? Introduced in '59, the 356B Roadster is definitely more Cabriolet than Speedster, yet its semi-stripped-down nature hits the pocket between the two and goes some way to satisfying both camps. Like the Speedster, it has a slot-in 'screen and, although similar in height and rake to the Cabriolet, its lack of quarterlights results in a cleaner appearance. The seats again take the middle ground – leather but not overly padded nor bucket-like – while wind-up side windows and a single-lined hood give adequate if not pampered protection. Yet the Roadster loses out on the road. It carries a further 130lb over the Cabrio, making it 220lb heavier than the Speedster – so a sorted engine is going to be essential to even stand a chance of challenging either car for thrills. But the handling is as superb as ever: the independent suspension whips the car around decent bends with a moderate amount of roll, nothing more.

Oddly, I raved about the Cabriolet on the day. It felt fantastic, sounded spot-on and offered everything that I wanted. Were I armed with a chequebook, the funds to honour my desire and the need for something to drive home, I would have had little hesitation in writing in the noughts. But a strange thing happened: that evening, while reflecting on the day, I had an attack of conscience. I suddenly felt guilty, that this was not the way I was supposed to feel and, more so, that I had it completely wrong.

You see, despite my dreamer's credentials (school reports can vouch for years of practice), I had failed to transport myself and the Speedster to sunnier climes. It was nothing to do with the car – the Porsche was perfect – but, on what became a wet, windswept day in rural Essex, I hadn't taken the time to reach one arm out, rest it on the door top, adjust the sunglasses and swap the dampening road for a coastal, sun-soaked evening drive. Unfortunately – and unfairly – there is only one of these cars that will always be the chosen steed with that ideal in mind. Best go out and buy another white T-shirt...

PORSCHE 356

Produced/built 1948-'66/76,313 (all 356s)
Construction steel monocoque
Engine iron-block, alloy cylinders and heads, air-cooled ohv 1582cc flat-four, with twin downdraught Zenith carburettors
Max power 90bhp @ 5500rpm ('62 B 1600S Cabriolet); 60bhp @ 4500rpm ('60 B Roadster); 75bhp @ 5000rpm ('57 A 1600S Speedster)
Max torque 89lb ft @ 4300rpm (Cabriolet and Roadster); 86lb ft @ 3700rpm (Speedster)
Transmission four-speed manual, RWD
Suspension: front trailing arms **rear** swing-axles; torsion bars, telescopic dampers f/r
Steering worm and peg
Brakes drums or discs/drums
0-60mph 11.5 secs (C), 13.5 (R), 10.3 (S)
Top speed 115mph (C), 103 (R), 104 (S)
Length 13ft 2in (4013mm)
Width 5ft 5½in (1664mm)
Height 4ft 4½in (1334mm, C), 4ft 3in (1295mm, R), 4ft ¼in (1226mm, S)
Weight 1883lb (854kg, C), 2010lb (912kg, R), 1790lb (812kg, S)
Price new £2926 (Cabriolet), $4375 (Roadster), $2995 (Speedster)

Trends & tech tips

"Every girlfriend or wife who accompanies their partner here eventually spies the Speedster and wants to know more about it," says Speedster specialist Lee Maxted-Page. "There is a kudos about it compared with the Roadster and Cabriolet, and that helps to make it so desirable." He admits that the 'Dean effect' plus racing heritage mean that the lightweight will always command a higher price, but reckons that it still represents remarkable value against rivals such as Merc 300SL. As genuine cars become harder to find, the market is changing: "We are seeing even more cars bought by collectors, but they are going for the complete range." So what's the going rate? "A decent Cabriolet will set you back £60,000, a similar Roadster £70,000 and a Speedster about £80-100,000*. Prices have increased since the 50th anniversary in 2004, but you can still buy a runner for £30-50,000."

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

What to look for

Porsche racer and technical guru Andy Prill is keen to point out the old adage: "You can't buy a bad car and make it into a good one for the difference that a good one would have cost you in the first place." But what about 356 specifics? "Strength. The roof on a Coupé comprises nearly 30% of the car's rigidity so it is vital that, whether it's a Cabriolet, Roadster or Speedster, you check that any structural work has been done well." Scuttle shake is a giveaway, as is chassis twist: "We've had cars that have flexed so badly when up on ramps that you then can't shut the doors – a sure sign that the strength just isn't there." Yet Andy is adamant that the obsession with matching numbers is not as important as history: "Evidence of a good rebuild is worth more and, with cars being modified continually at the production stage, having the correct engine for your year is an advantage."

LITTLE GEMS

In the 1950s, enthusiasts had a fine choice of gorgeous sporting coupés, but which was best: Porsche, Lotus, Alfa Romeo or MG?

WORDS **MALCOLM THORNE** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**


YWP 882

Featured 356 is a later B model, identifiable by the twin grilles on the engine cover. Below: 1582cc flat-four; Porsche covers ground effortlessly quickly; drum brakes are visible behind steels; coachbuilder's badge

How do you quantify a classic car's desirability? If the evolution of the sporting coupé could be reduced to a mathematical formula, where such intangibles as looks, charisma, usability and driving pleasure could be measured, multiplied and illustrated by means of a schematic, what we have here would surely represent the pinnacle of automotive achievement. Produced during a golden era at the tail end of the 1950s, these sublime fixed-heads from Alfa Romeo, Lotus, Porsche and MG represent a high-water mark.

A cut above the average, these are vehicles for which no concessions need to be made. They have none of the rough edges of pre-war cars, yet unlike later models remain unsullied in their appeal. Free from the constraints of safety and smog controls, unencumbered by an excess of power, electronic complexity and grip that prohibits interaction at anything below 'you're nicked' velocities, they get to the very heart of what a sporting coupé is all about.

All four offered the ability to exceed the ton thanks to some generously exotic engineering, but, although the overall concept of a junior GT might be a constant, their individual approaches vary wildly. Here we have an eclectic mix of pushrod, single- and twin-overhead cam engines (both front and rear-mounted); water and air cooling; all-round discs versus drums; separate chassis, steel monocoque and even futuristic composites.

First to hit the market was, of course, the Porsche. Launched in 1948, the initial handful of cars was built in Gmünd, Austria, but by 1950 the company had moved across the border to Stuttgart. The 356 was the first car to wear the now-famous crest and would remain in production until 1965 (when it was replaced by the 912) – and, as such, it enjoyed by far the longest career of our quartet. But while the 356 might have been long-lived, regular upgrades ensured the model remained relevant. Power increased from 40bhp to 130bhp in the four-cam Königsweller-equipped, disc-braked Carrera 2. The featured car is a 356B, boasting a 70bhp, 1582cc motor and drums all round.

Small, pert and bereft of all unnecessary frippery, the 356 provides you with everything you need and nothing that you don't. It's down to earth and sensible, but that's not a bad thing. The flowing curves of the Erwin Komenda-designed body blend seamlessly into one another, the careful use of lead creating the impression of a vast single pressing. It's a beautiful car, and continues to influence the firm's styling language today – and that alone surely vindicates its greatness, if such vindication were needed.

Next up comes the Alfa Romeo, which must rank among the most brilliant PR exercises of all time. The reality of post-war Italy had enforced a shift towards mass production for the Milanese firm and, as development began on its first series model, the 1290cc Giulietta saloon, a lottery was held to raise capital. In theory, prize winners would each receive one of the new four-doors, but, as time went by and the car remained no nearer to launch, the press and public turned against the company. As a damage-limitation exercise, a stopgap was conceived in late 1953. A refined fastback version of the existing development mules was hastily created by Bertone, to be launched at the Turin Salon the following spring.

ALFA ROMEO GIULIETTA SPRINT

Sold/no built 1954-'62/24,084 (Sprint and Sprint Veloce)
Construction steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, dohc 1290cc 'four', twin Weber carburettors
Max power 90bhp @ 6500rpm
Max torque 87lb ft @ 5300rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, trailing arms, central A-arm, coil springs, telescopic dampers
Steering worm and roller
Brakes drums
Length 13ft 2in (4013mm)
Width 5ft ½in (1536mm)
Height 4ft 4in (1321mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 9½in (2374mm)
Weight 2142lb (972kg)
0-60mph 13.2 secs (1600)
Top speed 112mph (1600)
Mpg 28
Price new £2480 (1960)

MGA TWIN-CAM COUPÉ

Sold/no built 1958-'60/2111
Construction steel box-section chassis, steel body
Engine iron-block, alloy-head, dohc 1588cc 'four', twin 1¾in SU carburettors
Max power 108bhp @ 6700rpm
Max torque 104lb ft @ 4500rpm
Transmission four-speed manual, RWD
Suspension: front indepdendent, by double wishbones, coil springs, lever-arm dampers **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, lever-arm dampers
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes discs
Length 13ft (3962mm)
Width 4ft 10in (1473mm)
Height 4ft 2in (1270mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 10in (2388mm)
Weight 2128lb (967kg)
0-60mph 9.1 secs
Top speed 114mph
Mpg 22
Price new £1196 (1960)

LOTUS ELITE (TYPE 14)

Sold/no built 1959-'63/988
Construction glassfibre monocoque
Engine all-alloy, ohc 1216cc Coventry Climax 'four', twin Weber carburettors
Max power 83bhp @ 6250rpm
Max torque 75lb ft @ 4750rpm
Transmission four-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers **rear** Chapman struts, telescopic dampers
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes discs (inboard at rear)
Length 12ft 4in (3759mm)
Width 4ft 10½in (1486mm)
Height 3ft 10in (1194mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 4in (2240mm)
Weight 1450lb (656kg)
0-60mph 11 secs
Top speed 118mph
Mpg 35
Price new £1949 (1960)

PORSCHE 356B COUPÉ

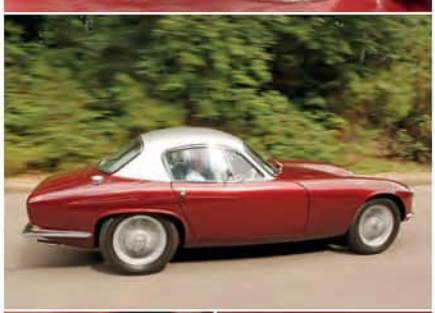
Sold/no built 1959-'63/30,963
Construction pressed-steel platform with steel panels
Engine all-alloy, air-cooled, ohv 1582cc flat-four, twin Solex, Zenith or Weber carburettors
Max power 70bhp @ 4500rpm
Max torque 82lb ft @ 2800rpm
Transmission four-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by trailing arms, torsion bars, telescopic dampers **rear** swing-axles; torsion bars, telescopic dampers
Steering worm and roller
Brakes drums
Length 12ft 11in (3937mm)
Width 5ft 5½in (1663mm)
Height 4ft 3½in (1302mm)
Wheelbase 6ft 11in (2108mm)
Weight 1883lb (854kg)
0-60mph 14.1 secs
Top speed 103mph
Mpg 32
Price new £2050 (1960)

Lotus offers sublime balance and sharp steering. Below, from top: all-alloy Coventry Climax engine; compact Elite is second only to MGA in terms of acceleration; painted wires; 'ACBC' badge; neat headlights

Alfa's Austrian development engineer, Rudolf Hruska (who, coincidentally, had close links with Ferdinand Porsche), insisted on a sporting character for the new model, and the result was one of the sweetest coupés of the day. It was unveiled with a slightly incongruous column change, but the 90bhp, 111mph Sprint Veloce (with floor change and twin Webers) would follow in 1956, with the engine stretched to 1570cc in '62 to become the visually identical Giulia. In spite of its saloon origins, this car looks and feels every inch the glamorous 1950s GT and, like the 356 did for Porsche, it defined what a post-war Alfa Romeo was all about.

The MG, in contrast, is something of an enigma and doesn't conform to stereotypes. Launched a year after the Giulietta Sprint, the MGA is one of the most recognisable shapes of the era. It was followed in 1956 by the fixed-head, then in 1958 the ultimate incarnation, the Twin-Cam, was revealed to the press at Longcross test track in Surrey – coincidentally the same location that is being used for today's photoshoot. Outwardly identifiable by its knock-off Dunlop wheels and discreet badging, there were also disc brakes all round plus, of course, a rather special powerplant.

Conceived by John Thornley to take on the 356 in the USA, the model featured a Gerald Palmer-designed 1588cc version of the BMC B-series unit fitted with a chain-driven double-overhead-cam head. The motor had made its debut in the 1955 TT at Dundrod but was forced to retire with a misfire. Alas, this was a bad omen for production versions; a propensity for the exotic engine to hole its pistons meant that just 2% of MGAs were Twin-Cams, of which a handful were fixed-heads. The engine was dropped after just two years, making this particular coupé a rare



beast – especially in this shade of Ash Green.

Alongside the Alfa, the MG appears to be a smaller car, but looks can be deceptive. Sitting on a 7ft 10in wheelbase and measuring 13ft from end to end, it is a scant 2in shorter than the Italian car and is actually longer between the axles, but compared with both the Alfa and Porsche it offers far less space for passengers and luggage – a corollary, in part at least, of its separate chassis. However, it is the Lotus, at 12ft 4in, that is the only car here to stray more than a fraction from 13ft. It also breaks the mould (if you'll excuse the pun) by being the most radical design of the four.

Even today a glassfibre monocoque sounds pretty far-fetched, so the Type 14 must have seemed like alien technology when it was first

'Powered by the Climax FWE, the elite soon earned a giant-killing reputation'

seen at Earls Court in 1957. If truth be told, Colin Chapman's fertile mind was a little too far ahead of the game. Maximar Mouldings struggled to produce the shells, and the task was soon handed over to the Bristol Aeroplane Company – but not before the car had gained a reputation for fragility. Powered by the all-alloy Coventry Climax FWE single-overhead-cam 'four', the Elite earnt a giant-killing reputation on the track thanks to its meagre weight, superb handling and excellent aerodynamics.

To climb down into the Lotus and fire up the engine is an evocative moment. Open the

Pretty Alfa was closely related to the Giulietta saloon. Below, from top: twin-cam 'four', here in 1290cc form; elegant fastback; 15in steels; Sprint Veloce means 90bhp; chic repeater with chromed surround

lightweight door and settle yourself into a firmly padded and surprisingly high-backed leather seat and the whole thing is noticeably compact, with a bulky transmission tunnel adding to rigidity but doing little for space. It's not cramped, but the Elite feels as much shrink-wrapped racer as GT. In keeping with its construction, the architecture is modern, and the rorty growl of the 1216cc 'four' leaves the hairs on the back of your neck standing to attention. As you slot the slightly notchy BMC-derived gearbox forward into first, your expectations are sky-high.

This is my first time in an Elite and it takes a few moments to recalibrate my senses to its steering. As we blast around the banking, the tiniest input through the wood-rim wheel really does have the Lotus eagerly changing direction, and until you adjust it's all too easy to have it darting this way and that. It's such an amazingly precise machine, with an uncannily good ride and exemplary handling, but it's probably not a car in which to have an 80mph sneeze.

With so little mass, it can get to such speeds in no time. The motor is wonderfully tractable and accelerates the car with remarkable alacrity, while the four-wheel discs (inboard at the rear) rein it back in with little fuss.

After the confines of the Lotus, the Porsche feels generously proportioned, almost saloon-car roomy – particularly in terms of width (it is the widest here). It's comfortable, too, with cossetting seats, but stepping from the Elite, the German doesn't feel anything like as quick or focused. It doesn't hang around, though, and if you give it plenty of revs before shifting up (with a typically VW, long-throw gearchange) it will bowl along very nicely indeed. Despite any misgivings about a rear engine and swing-

axles, I can find nothing intimidating about its handling balance – in the dry, at least.

It also has an effortless ability that's missing from the Lotus when it comes to undertaking long journeys. I have travelled hundreds of miles in 356s and can testify they are supremely relaxing over such distances. The layout means there is little mechanical noise at speed, while the suspension works with admirable ability – albeit with that familiar bobbing at the nose. At ten-tenths the Lotus is the quicker, but, to paraphrase a slogan used by Porsche's UK concessionaire in period, the 356 feels like the most effortless fast car in the world.

The Alfa, like the Porsche, is a surprisingly relaxing drive. From the outside it looks by far the biggest of our quartet (that's largely an optical illusion), but once ensconced you struggle to assimilate just how much room is on offer. You could almost squeeze a family of four inside, although the Giulietta was marketed in the UK as a two-seater (in left-hand drive): a set of cushions to make the parcel shelf into occasional seating was a £12 optional extra.

Up front, you sit on chairs bolted flat to the floorpan, legs outstretched towards the floor-hinged pedals and grasping a huge two-spoke steering wheel. The cabin is supremely stylish and, of the four, provides the greatest sense of occasion – as well as some intriguing details. Mysterious knobs on the fascia include one marked with what appears to be an exploding box, while another shows a flame emitting radio waves. Touch them at your peril.

The car is, of course, a cut-down saloon rather than a purpose-built coupé, but it's still a rewarding machine to punt along. The long gearstick leaning back at a good 45° might not look too purposeful, but it is a joy to use and

Alfa edges Porsche on performance. Clockwise, from below: 356's roomy, comfortable cabin; note the angle of the Alfa Romeo's gearlever; Lotus cockpit has the most overtly sporting feel; sprung wheel for traditional MGA

MGA Coupé retains the visual appeal of its open sibling. Below, from top: twin-cam head was added to modified B-series block; tiny boot makes luggage rack essential; knock-off steel wheels; identifying badge; slender doorhandle

by far the nicest here. It even has five ratios. Although you can keenly stir the Giulietta along, it encourages a more laid-back style. Above all, the Alfa feels grown-up; it can live with its rivals and the drum brakes offer admirable retardation, but it feels somehow more suited to a gentler pace.

As with the Lotus, the cabin of the MG is definitely on the cosy side. The ambience is far more traditional, too, with its black Rexine dash, no-nonsense white-on-black instruments and shallow, upright windscreen. The Bluemel's wheel is mounted very much in the vintage idiom, enhancing the old-school flavour, but when you fire up that much-maligned engine, it's not at all what you're expecting.

Where BMC's pushrod units were charming but unsophisticated sloggers, this is a jewel. "You're not pushing it hard enough," owner Edward Vandyke repeatedly tells me as we potter to and fro. Once the photographs are done, I begin to drive the Twin-Cam a little harder.

As the speeds build around our test track, the MG really starts to come into its own – even considering the lower-compression engine that has been fitted to the featured example in the name of reliability. If the Alfa feels a touch lazy in this rarefied company, the MG is seriously fast and handles beautifully.

As I embark upon lap after lap, I become increasingly ensnared by this magnificent little motor car. It really is the most inspiring thing that I've driven in a long time, which makes it all the more frustrating that its reliability problems were addressed too late to save it. If the engine had been properly sorted before the model had gone on sale, it would surely have sold in significant numbers, and who knows what else it could have led to?

It's not perfect, of course. Besides being a bit tight on space, it gets awfully hot inside and it's not exactly quiet. There really isn't much puff at low revs, either, but wind the rev counter around towards the red paint and the MG starts to come alive, goading you to push ever faster before double-declutching down through the slightly notchy 'box as the four-wheel discs rein you in for the next corner. The Lotus could probably run rings around it, but I don't care.

In their day, these junior thoroughbreds ranged from the relatively affordable (the MG) to somewhat extravagant (the Alfa Romeo), but today they are remarkably close in value. Three of our quartet recently changed hands for around £70,000, but you could probably bag yourself an MGA for quite a bit less, assuming

'Where the pushrod units were charming sloggers, BMC's twin-cam B-series engine is a real jewel'

that you could track an example down, that is.

All four are brilliantly tempting, and if I had the wherewithal I'd gladly take any one of them home. To single out a winner is an extremely tough call but, while I'm most naturally drawn to the Alfa and Porsche, I struggle to shake off the addictive charm of the MG.

Thanks to *Southwood Car Company for the Alfa Romeo (southwoodcarcompany.co.uk); Richard Norris (classicalfa.com); Percival Motor Company for the Lotus (percivalmotorco.co.uk); GE Classic Cars for the Porsche (geclassiccars.co.uk); Edward Vandyke*

California dream machines

Tracing the lineage of Stuttgart's sun-seekers, from the race-bred Porsche 356 through to the celebratory 911 and 964 run-out editions

WORDS **SIMON HUCKNALL** PHOTOGRAPHY **LUC LACEY**


G347 TYF

Less is more. It's a simple premise, and one that over the years the car industry has increasingly ignored to sate our appetite for ever more convenience, luxury and safety. But in the early 1950s, one inspired individual truly embraced the principle and gave what was then the fledgling Porsche brand a lasting foothold in a major market, as well as influencing a series of now rare and collectible models.

Max Hoffman was America's European-car import supremo, handling the likes of Jaguar, Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz through his Park Avenue showroom in New York. In 1950, Hoffman met Ferdinand Porsche at the Paris motor show and agreed to sell Porsche's recently launched 356 model in the United States. Porsche said that he'd be happy if five cars a year found American buyers, to which the ambitious Hoffman remarked: "If I can't sell five a week, I'm not interested."

By 1952, Hoffman's somewhat gushing claims that the 356 was 'one of the world's most exciting cars' had started to bear fruit, and sales numbers had begun to grow. Porsche's first production car had originally been launched in Europe in 1948, its streamlined two-seater body penned by company designer Erwin Komenda. Borrowing the basic engine design – and some of its trailing-arm front and swing-axle rear suspension architecture – from the humble Volkswagen, the 356 was built on a bespoke steel platform and initially powered by a 1.1-litre, horizontally opposed air-cooled 'four' mounted behind the rear axle. However, by adding its own design of cylinder heads, camshafts, crankshaft and intake/exhaust manifolds, as well as dual carburettors, Porsche liberated 35bhp from the engine, 40% up on the first Beetles.

The light and nimble package had also started to cause shockwaves among the West Coast's weekend racers, after John von Neumann – one of Hoffman's customers, and owner of North Hollywood's Competition Motors – purchased a car and started to campaign it at circuits around California. This led to Hoffman lobbying Porsche for a lightweight version of the 356, to which the manufacturer's reluctant response was the 356 America Roadster. But this model, with its handbuilt aluminium body, was far too rich for the impecunious weekend racers Hoffman and Neumann were targeting, adding a 20% premium to the already costly $4500 Cabriolet. In the end, just 16 examples were sold.

What was needed, Hoffman believed, was a sub-$3000 Porsche, shorn of all but essential equipment to keep the price and weight to an absolute minimum. The 356 Speedster was Porsche's answer, and it was an instant hit with the 'race on Sunday, commute on Monday' fraternity – as well as Hollywood stars such as Steve McQueen and James Dean. Costing $2995 when it was launched in 1954, the Speedster took the 356 Cabriolet's steel body but did without such niceties as sound-deadening, carpets and even window-winding mechanisms. Visually, the regular 356's windscreen was replaced by a removable cut-down item, with a steeper rake and rounded top corners, adding even more emphasis to the Porsche's already sleek and curvaceous shape. And in poor weather, a rudimentary single-skin hood could be deployed, along with separate sidescreens that plugged into the door-tops via small steel posts. While the latter arrangement did help achieve a c150lb (68kg) weight-saving versus the 356 Cabriolet, it also became known as 'the bathtub', not only because of its appearance but also for its propensity to leak when it rained.

Since the first Speedsters were based around the pre-A generation 356, power was initially from either a 54bhp 1.5-litre air-cooled unit or a mildly uprated version with 69bhp, known as

'The 356 was an instant hit with the "race on Sunday, commute on Monday" fraternity, and film stars Steve McQueen and James Dean'

Left-right: spartan cabin befits a roadster born for the track; luxurious 911 reveals a change of tack; RS-spec seats for 964

the Super Speedster. 'Our' car, belonging to Mark Sumpter from Porsche specialist Paragon, is a later 356A-generation Speedster from 1956 (356B and C models did not spawn Speedsters). Imported from California in 2015, Mark's matching-numbers car would have originally produced 59bhp from its raised-capacity 1.6-litre engine, which had become standard fare for the A model. However, when it was restored by Willhoit Auto Restoration in Long Beach, engine displacement was upped to 1.9 litres thanks to new barrels and pistons. Twin-plug heads were also added, along with electronic fuel injection and performance camshafts. As a result, today this 356 is producing some 140bhp, making it more representative of the 99bhp 1500 GS Carrera GT Speedster, which would probably have been the desired option if you were taking to the track back in the day.

We'll discover what this shiny, jewel-like black machine is like to drive later, but first we need to jump forward more than three decades to continue the Speedster lineage, represented by the Carrera 3.2 and 964-series models that are currently dwarfing the 356. So why did it take so long to bring back the Speedster name? The new-for-1963 Porsche 911 in effect replaced the 356, which soldiered on until 1965, although the Speedster variant had ceased seven years earlier. It's strange to think that the 911 – still on sale after nearly 60 years and 11 generations – was under threat by the 1970s, with some senior management seeing it as a dinosaur in light of technically more advanced front-engined models such as the 924 and 928. And, had it not been for a dramatic Speedster-inspired, Carrera 3.2-based concept created by Porsche's technical director, Helmuth Bott, and the foresight of a new CEO, Peter Schutz, the 911 might never have survived beyond the 1980s.

Unveiled at the 1987 Frankfurt motor show, the 911 Speedster Clubsport concept was based on the narrow-bodied Carrera Cabriolet and, the firm claimed, was intended: 'To represent

From top: handsome 911 is a caricature of the focused 356; losing the hubcaps adds to the sense of purpose; tight-fitting hoods are only suitable for showers

Three very different approaches, but all share a thoroughbred DNA and the unique driving sensations of a rear-engined Porsche

911 Speedster: the modern generation

It was another 17 years before the Speedster name resurfaced after the 964 model, this time based on the 997.2-series 911. Produced in 2010 by Porsche's Exclusive department, the 997 Speedster (above) had the requisite 77mm chopped from the height of its windscreen, with the rake unchanged. However, this was by no means a stripped-out racer for the track, and pound-for-pound it was almost the same weight as a Carrera 2S Cabriolet. It did, however, sport the 'Power Kit' 3.8-litre flat-six, producing 408bhp, and the PDK dual-clutch automatic transmission, meaning 0-60mph in 4.4 secs and a 189mph maximum speed. Just 356 (get it?) were built, with 14 reaching the UK at £144,100 each.

The most recent 991.2-based Speedster, though, made a welcome return to the model's 1950s roots. Developed by Porsche's famous GT division, the 2019 special's rear body-in-white was from the Carrera 4S Cabriolet, grafted to the front end of a GT3, complete with the carbonfibre wings and bonnet from the 911R. Power came from Porsche's epic, atmospheric 4-litre flat-six (redline: 9000rpm), delivering 503bhp to the rear wheels, only through a six-speed manual gearbox. The price? £211,599.

Porsche's pure pleasure in driving sporty and "topless".' Weighing 154lb (70kg) less than the Cabriolet, the Speedster concept was a two-seater with a basic, single-lined roof stowed beneath a double-humped cover, with wind-up windows and even a removable windscreen. As a statement of confidence in the 911 brand it was powerful, so no surprise that the following year the Speedster name once again entered Stuttgart lexicon.

Porsche's second take on the Speedster was based on the standard 227bhp variant of the outgoing Carrera 3.2 model. It was available in the UK with a choice of either a narrow or wide body, the latter mirroring the design of the 930 turbo from which it also took its more focused chassis set-up. As with the original Speedster, there was no change to the mechanicals, the 3164cc flat-six having already been uprated when it replaced the 3-litre SC in 1984. Delivering drive through the then relatively new five-speed G50 manual gearbox, Porsche claimed a top speed of 152mph and 0-60mph acceleration of 6 secs – almost identical to the standard Cabriolet, which was hardly surprising since it weighed in at 1210kg, just 10kg less than that model.

If you were being cynical, you could argue that, despite preserving the back-to-basics essence of the original – manual windows, rudimentary rain cover (customers had to sign a disclaimer acknowledging that the car was not weatherproof!), a lowered 'screen raked by an extra 5° *et al* – this latter-day Speedster was never intended as a track-day warrior, but more of a low-volume collectors' model. That view was supported by its price when new: £52,850, when the regular Carrera Cabriolet started at £41,710. However, its value today (Paragon was offering

Left-right: 'bathtub' 356 has a delightful purity of line; double-humped hood cover first appeared on the 911; like the earlier cars, the 964 is a strict two-seater

the near-perfect 30,000-mile example pictured here for £184,995) suggests that it would not have been a poor investment in 1989. Unsurprisingly, wide-body cars such as this accounted for 1942 of the 2103 Speedsters sold, although the less dramatic narrow-body cars now command a premium due to their scarcity.

For our final 964 Speedster, you need to flip those numbers. Produced between 1992 and '93, just 15 cars were sold with the 'Turbolook' body and 930 with the narrow or 'lean' shape you see here. Purchased by current owner Bill Robinson 20 years ago, this ex-Texas car betrays its US roots with deeper bumpers, a high-level brake light, a steering-wheel airbag and options such as electric windows and air conditioning. It's also believed that only one right-hand-drive 964 Speedster was equipped with this car's four-speed Tiptronic gearbox. Other than that, all the Speedster cues are in place – including a 'screen carried over from the previous generation – with the addition of an easier-to-operate hood mechanism and rather lovely RS-spec bucket seats as standard, complete with body-coloured frames. Other than that, as with all 964s, this Speedster benefits from the larger, 3600cc flat-six and a small power increase to 247bhp, though an extra 287lb (130kg) of weight would have no doubt negated much of that advantage.

Our introduction to Speedster motoring starts with the 911 Carrera 3.2, and for once in my life being of below-average height (at 5ft 7in) puts me at an advantage, with my head just shy of the shortened windscreen's top edge. This being a traditional 911, it's easy to pick fault with the ergonomics: the long-travel, floor-mounted pedals are sharply offset to the left, and the haphazard layout of the dashboard controls will keep a new driver fumbling around on first acquaintance. You may also have to peer under the upper rim of the chunky but handsome three-spoke wheel to check when you're hitting three-figure speeds. Niggles aside, the 911's vibrant, red-trimmed interior is attractive and comfortable.

Until you venture off smooth A-roads, that is, when the compromises wrought by the fairly unyielding, turbo-spec torsion-bar suspension become more pronounced, while also causing awkward shimmies through the roofless body. The unassisted steering, while endlessly communicative and accurate, is heavy, when your expectation of a rear-engined car is that it's going to be lighter. The familiar overhead-cam, 3.2-litre flat-six engine is a delight, though, its aerated exhaust note bouncing off walls as we

pick up speed across the Sussex Weald. And the G50 gearbox is a joy to use: rather long of throw, but with the short lever moving around its gate with a well-oiled precision.

You expect the 964 Speedster to be simply a more finely honed version of what you've just experienced in the Carrera 3.2, but it couldn't be more different. The 964 marked the single biggest departure from classic 911 form to that point, with a move to coil springing all round. Purists may bemoan it as the beginning of the end, but here and now – setting aside the rather lacklustre nature of this car's Tiptronic 'box – the 964 outperforms the 3.2 in most respects. Its steering through the rather bland-looking wheel is lighter, yet just as rewarding when the pace increases, and the ride, while being generally more compliant, combines with superior high-speed body control and a less fidgety structure. The car I'd imagined to be a *boulevardier* is actually far more engaging to drive than expected, and with its chopped windscreen and Batmobile-style rear deck is quite something to behold.

Of course, this is British summertime, so the day wouldn't be complete without precipitation. All three 'rain covers' are hastily erected, and while each has elements of which Heath Robinson would be proud, they're manually in place (no electrics here) with all tonneaus – fabric on the 356, and large plastic covers on the 911 and 964 – secured in less than two minutes.

But honestly, if hood-up practicality concerns you, best opt for the Cabriolet versions. The essence of Speedster motoring was always about driving purity, not ease of use, and nothing comes closer to achieving that than the 356. Sit behind this car's exquisite, non-standard three-spoke wheel and you're faced with... well, not very much: three chrome-rimmed dials for revs, speed and various systems. Rubber matting extends across the floor, with a foot-operated dip-switch and a couple of pull-out knobs for lights. Each door is unfeasibly light and – like those on its modern brethren – the top edges neatly follow the line of the upper dashboard, wrapping around you in a continuous arc.

Spartan it might be, but there's an underlying quality about all the controls. As Mark admits, this car drives far better than it would have done nearly 70 years ago, and that's borne out as soon as we take to the road. It's the loudest of the trio by some margin, and the hard-edged, air-cooled bark from its exhaust is addictive as you change up at 5000rpm – still 1500rpm shy of the redline – through the notchy, rather wooden-feeling gearshift. Grip from its modern radials is probably a bit too tenacious for the available performance, especially on a car weighing just 1750lb. But the deliciously light, direct and uncorrupted steering is a thrill, as are the well-judged damping and overall structural tightness. In short, it gives you more confidence than is probably prudent in a car worth £400,000-plus.

And that's why the 356 Speedster is the only real keeper of our guiding 'less is more' mantra. Great cars though the 911 and 964 are, they feel more like tribute acts in comparison.

Thanks to *Porsche Club GB (01608 652911; porscheclubgb.com) and Paragon (01825 830424; paragongb.com)*

Nimble balance and exquisite steering make the 356 the driver's favourite. Left: original 1600 has been stretched to 1.9 litres and a heady 140bhp

Wider 'Turbolook' body style is by far the most common, but there were 171 narrow-body cars. Left: torquey, tuneful and flexible 3.2-litre flat-six

Speedster borrows styling cues from the potent 964 RS. Left: 3600cc motor is mated to a rare four-speed Tiptronic auto in this US-supplied car

PORSCHE 356A SPEEDSTER

Sold/number built 1955-'58/3676
Construction steel platform with unitary steel body
Engine all-alloy, ohv 1582cc flat four, with twin downdraught Solex/Zenith carburettors
Max power 59bhp @ 4500rpm
Max torque 81lb ft @ 2800rpm
Transmission four-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by trailing arms **rear** swing-axles; transverse torsion bars, telescopic dampers f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes drums
Length 12ft 11½in (3950mm)
Width 5ft 5¾in (1669mm)
Height 4ft 3¾in (1320mm)
Wheelbase 6ft 10¾in (2101mm)
Weight 1750lb (794kg)
0-60mph 13.9 secs
Top speed 99mph **Mpg** 37
Price new $2995 (pre-A 356 Speedster)

PORSCHE 911 CARRERA 3.2 SPEEDSTER

Sold/number built 1988-'89/2103
Construction steel unitary
Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 3164cc flat six, Bosch L-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 227bhp @ 5900rpm
Max torque 209lb ft @ 4800rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts **rear** semi-trailing arms; torsion bars, telecopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated discs, with servo
Length 14ft 1in (4291mm)
Width 5ft 10in (1775mm)
Height 4ft 2½in (1280mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 5½in (2273mm)
Weight 2667lb (1210kg)
0-60mph 6 secs
Top speed 152mph
Mpg 25.9
Price new £52,850

PORSCHE 911 (964) SPEEDSTER

Sold/number built 1992-'93/945
Construction steel unitary
Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 3600cc flat six, Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 247bhp @ 6100rpm
Max torque 228lb ft @ 4800rpm
Transmission five-speed manual or four-speed Tiptronic automatic, RWD
Suspension independent, by MacPherson struts, coil springs, telecopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated discs, with servo and ABS
Length 14ft 3in (4275mm)
Width 5ft 9¾in (1775mm)
Height 4ft 2½in (1280mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 5½in (2272mm)
Weight 3000lb (1360kg)
0-60mph 5.7 secs
Top speed 162mph **Mpg** 24.6
Price new DM131,500 (1992)

Not only the number has changed

Once lost to an East German barn in Brandenburg, this Porsche 901 has returned to claim its place in history as the last of its kind

WORDS **BEN BARRY** PHOTOGRAPHY **JORDAN BUTTERS**

Signal Red finish is a result of new methods and technology. Left, from top: as much as possible of the original engine was reused; understated dash trim

The way Porsche Museum boss Alexander Klein frames it, Peugeot didn't so much file a lawsuit against Porsche in 1964 as politely ask that the Stuttgart firm's new 2+2 rear-engined sports car be called something other than '901'.

The model had been displayed on Peugeot's home turf at the Paris Salon in October that year, and the French could quite reasonably point to a tradition of naming cars by inserting a zero between two digits that stretched back to the 201 of 1929 – and indeed it owned the rights in key markets. "It wasn't concerned about race cars – we'd produced the 904 and 906 previously – but Peugeot wanted to keep that system exclusive for road cars," explains Alexander.

The diplomatic German doesn't mention that it would have been more helpful had Peugeot raised its concerns a year or so earlier. The Porsche 901 had first been displayed at the September 1963 International Motor Show in Frankfurt as the successor to the 356; brochures had been printed displaying the new sports car with '901' badging on its rump, and series production had begun in September 1964.

But Peugeot's late intervention gives these early 901s even more significance in the 911 story, and this example is believed to be the final 901 produced. "On 22 October 1964 Ferry Porsche said, 'Call it 911', and this car was the last of three cars built that day, of 55 cars made in total," says Alexander when we meet at Sonoma Raceway, nestled in California wine country to the north of San Francisco.

It's not just the vehicle identification number that makes this car so special, because the tale of this particular late 901/early 911 and its extraordinary life is also the story of a divided post-war Germany. Today it is a concours car, but when Porsche learned of its existence the last 901 was a neglected barn-find basket case, with various parts gone AWOL, rust-eaten bodywork and bodged repairs.

Porsche might not have discovered it at all had an East German gentleman in his 70s named Bernd Ibold not got in touch with reality TV series *Der Trödeltrupp*. A kind of German version of *Cash in the Attic*, its name translates as 'The Junksquad'.

"When they said '300057' I asked them if they were sure, and they read it again: '300057.' We just had to take a closer look"

It was 2014, some 50 years since his 901 had been produced, and Bernd told the show's researchers that he had two tired old 911s in a barn – one red, one gold – and that he wanted to sell the pair. When the show contacted Alexander for an estimated value and read out the VIN of the red car, he stopped as though his lottery numbers had come up. "When they said '300057' I knew this was a very, very early car," he says, his eyes still lighting up at the memory. "I asked if they were sure, and they read it out again: '300057.' We had to take a closer look."

Just Eleven days later, two members of Alexander's team had arrived outside the barn in Brandenburg, near Berlin. The all-important red Porsche was sitting there covered in dust, with its front wings, front bumper and a door missing, and its bodywork riddled with rust.

"Both cars were in lousy condition, but we

Attractive steering wheel is thin and tactile – and, importantly, original. Left: seats had been swapped into the 911 accompanying the 901 in its barn

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confirmed the 901's identification, and that the gold car was a 1967 'L' model," he remembers. For the sake of transparency, Alexander asked two independent experts to value the cars: "We paid €107,000 for the 901, and €14,500 for the L. We knew the significance, especially of the 901, so we couldn't rip him off." The amount remains a record for any items sold via the TV show.

The 901 was, of course, the big win. Porsche's records showed this to be the 55th car built, despite the '57' in the chassis number, because cars with earlier VINs were still being built when 300057 was completed. It was produced for the home market and passed through two owners in the 1960s before being bought by Bernd, who took it to his home in East Germany. "He ran a garage and used the 901 as a service car to get to customers," explains Alexander. "He worked on it himself, but couldn't get all the parts in the East, so often had to improvise."

When Bernd married and had a family, the 901 gradually moved to the back of the barn, eventually joined by the L, which was bought as a restoration project but never completed; the intention now is that it never will be, instead remaining in barn-find condition.

The 901 restoration was led by master technician Kuno Werner, who oversees the care of around 600 historic road and race cars at the Porsche Museum and accompanied the car to California. For Kuno, it became a tricky balance of restoring a car that was in terrible condition to its former glory, while conserving its colourful past and period significance wherever possible.

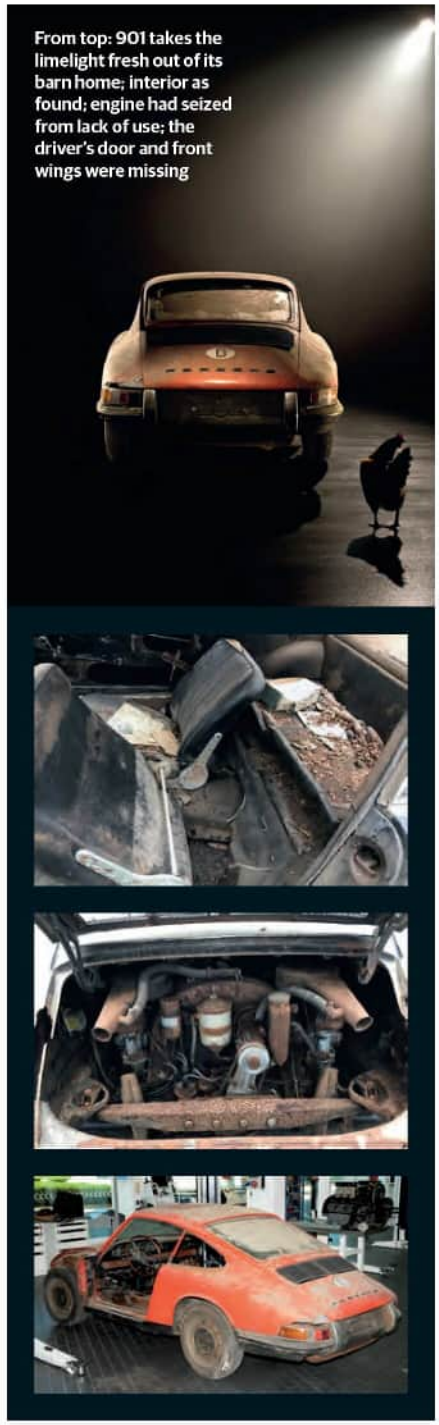
When the 901 and its crate of parts arrived at Porsche, it was fully inspected. Kuno's initial estimates that more than half of the body was beyond salvation turned out to be slightly pessimistic; instead, it was the opposite. The flat-six engine was seized, and both it and the transmission were discovered to be replacement units of the same era. Meanwhile, much of the suspension hardware was badly corroded, including the two longitudinal beams at the rear.

"We wanted this to be an empathetic restoration to reflect how Bernd had received it and his time with the car, and to maintain the unique 901 details," explains Alexander. "But in those days Porsche used to improve car by car; they were basically handbuilt. There is no period documentation of that, and we had a lot of missing parts – including the engine grille – so we looked at earlier cars and later cars and asked other experts for input because we realise that we are not the only ones who know."

A donor 1965 911 was purchased, allowing Porsche to use period parts wherever possible – traces of welding carried out by Bernd have even been preserved rather than eradicated, and original parts refurbished rather than replaced.

The 901 was carefully stripped to a bare shell (unusable parts have been retained for future reference), then wheeled into the Porsche Classic workshops on a dolly like a body into a morgue. Its factory paint was removed with a dip in a chemical bath, which revealed signs of original reworking to the roof from 1964. The tinworm was cut out of the bodywork and replaced with new metal, including inner and outer sills, and the missing wings and bumper were replaced by those from the 1965 car.

The originality didn't extend to painting



From top: 901 takes the limelight fresh out of its barn home; interior as found; engine had seized from lack of use; the driver's door and front wings were missing

PORSCHE 901

Sold/number built 1964/55
Construction steel monocoque
Engine alloy block and head, sohc 1991cc flat-six, two triple-choke Solex carburettors
Max power 130bhp @ 6200rpm
Max torque 128lb ft @ 4200rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent at **front** by MacPherson struts, longitudinal torsion bars; **rear** semi-trailing arms, transverse torsion bars; telescopic dampers f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes discs all round
Length 13ft 7in (4163mm)
Width 5ft 3in (1610mm)
Height 4ft 3in (1320mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 3in (2211mm)
Weight 2380lb (1080kg)
0-60mph 8.5 secs
Top speed 131mph
Mpg 19.2mpg
Price new £3750

"We wanted this to be an empathetic rebuild, to reflect the previous owner's time with the car and maintain its unique 901 details"

methods: the car was dipped in the same cathodic coating as new 911s. "It's best for rust protection, and for hard-to-reach cavities," says Alexander. Once everything was painstakingly aligned, the body was then sprayed in the original Signal Red, using water- rather than solvent-based paint. The body alone took a whole year of work.

Both the 2-litre flat-six engine and the five-speed gearbox were disassembled at Porsche Classic, with all parts cleaned and inspected before a full rebuild could begin. Seized pistons were freed and the crankshaft removed, then the crank was replaced with a new genuine part. The camshaft on the right bank was salvaged, the left cam replaced. Some 120 further hours were consumed.

Meanwhile, Porsche Classic began searching for the missing period-correct parts, including the grille, which protruded much higher than later, more flush versions. "You would hurt your hand washing it, which may be why they changed it," explains Alexander. "Eventually we found one being advertised privately online. We asked the guy to measure it and then we knew it was correct."

The elephant in the room is the lack of 901 badging on the engine cover to distinguish this final 901 from the first 911. A continuity error? Turns out not: the badging only appeared in brochures, not on production cars.

The painstaking process spanned three years, and as Alexander reveals the details his obvious passion bridges the gap between his faltering English and my terrible German. He draws attention to the raised engine cover and the slightly different doorhandles and release pop-ups, the slimmer bumper overriders, and the wheel-hub mountings. "The disc brakes were usually from a 904 racer, so the wheel hub is different, like a flower," he elaborates. Everything from the fixing screws to the heat exchangers and exhausts are unlike those parts found on the later cars.

During the restoration, improvements were ruled out in the name of authenticity – 300057 retains leatherette between the body and wing, even though it was later found to deteriorate and

cause rust, leading Porsche to switch to rubber. Pipes for the heating system remain routed below rather than above the rear axle, too.

The driver's seat is high-set, but the bolsters wilt like an old mattress as you settle into them. These are the original, if fully restored, chairs but they had been fitted to the gold 911 when Porsche bought both cars. The houndstooth trim on the seats is made of six strips, not the normal five, a quirk of the early cars that indicated the swap. Another quirk: Alexander opens the ashtray with its wider central hole for cigars, not cigarettes as per later models. Part of the ashtray and its chrome-plated support had disintegrated, leading to careful restoration work to even this seemingly insignificant part. It was apparently one of the trickiest elements to revive.

The headlining is not original but based on a surviving section on the car: it was unusually stamped with square-shaped perforations, not the diamond pattern adopted soon after. Incredibly, Porsche was able to locate the original spiked roller tool and make a new headlining to the period-correct design.

The large wooden steering wheel with its thin rim is original, as are the dials and all the glass (including the sticker from the Berlin police's sports association, added by the first owner and retained by Bernd so he could park wherever he wanted), while all the factory chrome has been refurbished. The leather gaiter is original and different from those on 911s produced only slightly later.

Twist the key and the flat-six settles into that classic, busy air-cooled chatter. Ease the dogleg 'box down and left for first, release the friendly clutch and we're chuntering down a private road on a wine estate, getting familiar with the floor-hinged pedals with a softish brake and perky throttle, the light but feelsome steering and the delicate little snick of the gearlever.

It quickly does that 911 – sorry, 901 – trick of setting you at ease thanks to its compactness and feathery 1080kg kerbweight, as well as excellent vision both ahead and behind. To this practicality is added an instinctively mechanical feel that brims with precision and response. The car feels approachable and usable as much as exciting, which is a big part of why a 911 remains the default sports car nearly 60 years on.

Almost unbelievably – given its significance, the time invested in its restoration and its undoubted value – we take a quick drive of Sonoma racetrack, which tumbles through the landscape with precious little run-off. It is greasy and laced with standing-water booby-traps, having just been drenched by a rainstorm. Given the conditions, the flat-six making a relatively modest 130bhp and the tall gearing (the 911 borrowed shorter ratios from the four-cylinder 912 from July 1965), the 901 is happiest in second gear climbing through Sonoma's first few corners. The steering bobs gently if chattily in hand as the nose glides effortlessly at each apex, and the rear tyres easily soak up the available performance. Revs have to be kept up – it fluffs and sputters at low engine speeds.

Treading the tricky waters and the challenge of Sonoma's undulations, it's hard to fathom how the 911 earned such a reputation for unpredictability, simply because it feels so planted and safe. Partly it's the modern 15in Pirelli tyres made in the style of the period originals, with a thin 165 width all round (911s didn't get staggered tyres until later) and deeply absorbent sidewalls. They're not only impressively grippy, but gently progressive when they finally let go, too, thank goodness.

Above, from left: pushbutton handles are slightly different to those on later cars; sharp engine-cover slats sent the designers back to the drawing board

The front feels strikingly light but, as you lean on it, there is also such purity to the communication filtering through the steering and the tyres. Taking it right to the edge of understeer seems completely natural, not the leap of faith it could be given that wet grass and walls lurk just beyond the track limits.

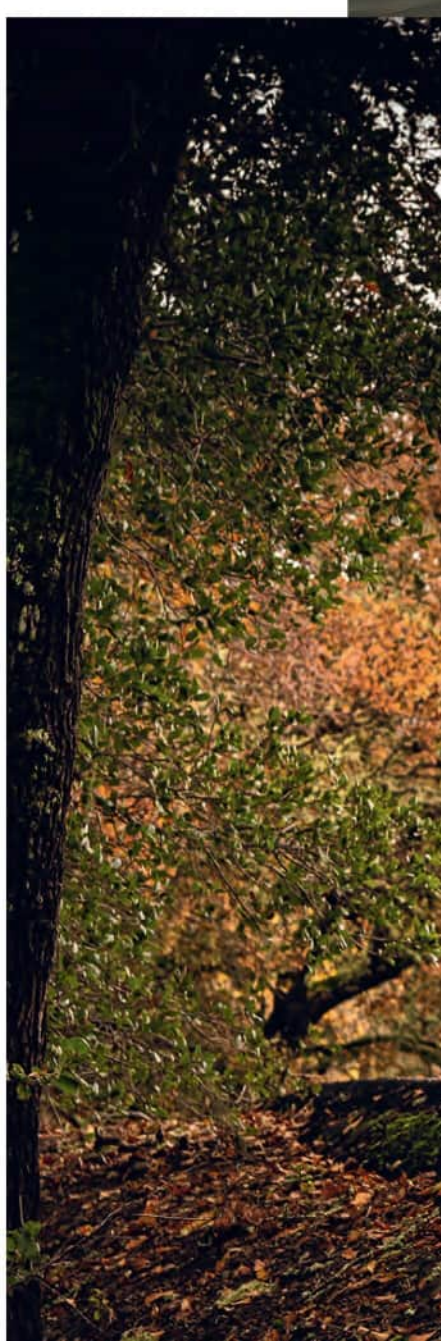
The sweetness of the turn-in is partly because there's so little mechanical baggage over the front end, but these early models also had a wheelbase 57mm (2.24in) shorter than those from '68. It feels incredibly agile as a result, which is why classic racers rave about them and have to have the shorter wheelbase. That same-size rubber all round no doubt helps reduce the natural understeer bias of a tail-heavy/nose-light sports car, too. This is a beautifully balanced car.

As confidence builds, the speed picks up and the dynamics are worked harder. The soft brake pedal is pressed with more conviction, settling the weight over the nose turning in to the corner while the light, progressive steering tremors a little as tread blocks tremble on the edge of grip. And yet just as it seems you've reached the limit, you can climb all over the throttle and power out of the corner with 184kg of engine squashing down the rear tyres, while the carb-fed flat-six rasps towards its 6200rpm power peak without so much as a hint of wheel scrabble.

It's so absorbing that you soon forget this car is essentially irreplaceable, as both the very earliest 911 in Porsche's collection and the last 901 to be built.

Former keeper Bernd was one of the first to see the finished car. "We invited him to lift the sheet off in our workshop," Alexander reveals. "We asked, 'Do you remember this car?' He remembered all the details and was close to tears. We're still in touch today."

It's a long way from the old red 911 left in a barn, and yet the quirks of its early specification and marks of a colourful life mean that it could be no other than the final 901.



Design tweaks to the overriders had yet to be penned, for the keen-eyed viewer. Below: higher engine cover is another 901 trait

'The glass includes a police sports association sticker – added by the first owner and retained by Bernd so he could park where he wanted'

ALPINE'S TRIAL

The A110 was a rally hero, but can it triumph against its rear-engined rival on the road, the mighty Porsche 911?

WORDS **GREG MACLEMAN** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**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It's a crisp autumn day in Bedfordshire and a quiet calm has returned to a scene that moments before was frantic with the squeal of tyres and the howl of flat-six battling highly strung 'four'. The leaves barely have time to settle before the silence is once again shattered by a sublime 1965 Porsche 911, swinging into frame behind it the squat streak of French Racing Blue worn by its great period rally foe, the Alpine-Renault A110. Astounding motorsport history is justification enough to pit these rear-engined masterpieces against one another, but their rivalry began long before the World Rally Championship, stretching back to the aftermath of the Second World War as two brilliant engineers simultaneously set about the same task: to create the world's greatest sports car.

For Prof Dr Ing Ferry Porsche, ambition was born of necessity as he took charge of the family business while his father, Ferdinand, languished in a French prison accused of war crimes. The war had been kind to the firm thanks to its involvement with Volkswagen, and the engineer – who had a hand in designing the People's Car – set about creating the company's first production sports car. Porsche undoubtedly had a head start thanks to three Type 64 Reutter-bodied racers built before the war, models that served as inspiration for the coupé that followed. Temporarily decamped to an old sawmill in Gmünd, Austria, the first production Porsches – lightweight, aluminium-bodied 356s that helped the firm foster a reputation in competition – began to roll out of the workshop in 1948; the first race in which the 356 was entered, in Innsbruck, it won.

While a young Ferry Porsche was heading for Gmünd to start work on the 356, over in France Jean Rédélé had become Renault's youngest-ever concessionaire at the tender age of 25. Based in Dieppe, he scratched together a living selling off war surplus while struggling to shift leftover stock of aged Juvaquatres, before the arrival of the 4CV in 1947. Rédélé, who had a passion for motorsport, immediately began modifying the diminutive rear-engined saloon, endowing his Type 1063 with a host of in-house upgrades including the five-speed gearbox to

which he owned the manufacturing rights. The gifted driver's faith in the 4CV was rewarded early on, as Rédélé and co-driver Louis Pons steered the car to a fourth-place finish on the 1951 Rallye Monte-Carlo, claiming a class win on the gruelling Mille Miglia the following year.

Though competitive, the 4CV was a far cry from Rédélé's idea of the perfect sports car. Following his success, the racer began to drum up interest in a new type of machine, based on Renault mechanicals but lighter, lower and more focused. His enthusiasm fell on deaf ears at Billancourt, so he took matters into his own hands and commissioned Giovanni Michelotti to pen a body to be built in Italy by Allemano. Incredibly, the 1063-engined, aluminium-alloy Rédélé Special won on its first outing, the 1953 Rallye de Dieppe. By 1954, a steel body had been built, which was used as a buck for three polyester-bodied versions that took a bow in Paris as the A106 the following year.

The biggest change to the line-up came in 1957, when Rédélé took the first steps towards doing away with the ageing 4CV platform on which all his previous efforts had been based, trialling an in-house steel-tube chassis that made its debut in the A108 Cabriolet and which became a key component of the A108 Berlinette Tour de France and all future Alpines. That car served as the basis for the firm's most successful model and the machine that would take the fight to Porsche on the special stages of Europe and Africa: the A110. Rédélé's recipe was finally perfected in 1962, when the beautiful glassfibre A108 body was mated to a single-tube backbone chassis and the advanced running gear of the brand-new R8, which brought four-wheel disc brakes, a sealed cooling system, and a reliable five-bearing engine bursting with potential.

While Rédélé was taking his early creations rallying, Porsche had returned to Germany and taken up residence in Stuttgart, where Karosserie Reutter began producing steel-bodied 356s. Unlike the French outfit, Porsche had the backing of a major manufacturer from the off, with Volkswagen agreeing to sell and service the new sports car. Very soon, Porsche components started to replace those from Wolfsburg, beginning with the firm's synchromesh system that edged out the VW crash gearbox in 1952; by the end of the decade, very little of the model's Volkswagen ancestry remained.

Development of the 356 continued, peaking with the four-cam Carrera powered by an all-new competition engine designed by Dr Ernst Fuhrmann and available in 1500, 1600 and 2-litre guises until 1963. Despite this, the 356 was outpaced and outdated, opening the door for a replacement with more room, a longer wheelbase and greater stability. Styling projects headed by Ferry's son 'Butzi' eventually led to the Type 7, from which the 901 (as it was known before Peugeot's objections) materialised, emerging to critical acclaim at Frankfurt in 1963.

Both Alpine A110 and Porsche 911 were the product of careful evolution, but it was the German coupé that took the furthest step from its predecessor. Still rear-engined and air-cooled, early 911s were fitted with a 2-litre, six-cylinder unit producing 130bhp at 6100rpm and fed by three single-choke 40PI Solex carburettors per bank, while MacPherson strut front suspension allowed for a decent-sized forward luggage compartment. A semi-trailing-link configuration was used at the rear, doing away with the swing-axles of the 356, with each wheel hub carried by a suspension arm that pivots on a bracket just behind the rear crossmember. As well as being cheap to produce, the compact set-up allowed for two small back seats.

Almost as important as the mechanical improvements were styling changes. The family resemblance is still clear to see, but the shapely silhouette of the 911 seems light-years ahead of the upturned bathtub 356. More pronounced front wings and an acute bonnet line brought the 911 bang up to date, as did the sharper rear end and well-integrated tail-lights – although the iconic Fuchs wheels were still a few years off. The slab sides and narrow track somehow bring to mind a smartly tailored suit, particularly when viewed alongside the more intricate Alpine. That impression is reinforced by the stunning condition of our early short-wheelbase example, which is finished in Signal Red and is not long out of restoration by Dennis Nachtigal in Germany. Open the long, vault-like doors and the interior more than lives up to expectations,

Clockwise from opposite: purity of the short-wheelbase original is a thrill; early cars had six single-choke Solex carbs, later changed to a pair of triple-choke Webers; little rear legroom; skinny back tyres contribute to lively handling; classy cabin offers comfort a level above that of the A110; pre-Fuchs steel wheels; gold badging for first 911s

the modern plastics of the new generation softened by wood accents that match the striking tan leatherette and Pepita seats – prim and proper rather than sporty in factory trim. Something of the 356's character does remain, however, in the large-diameter steering wheel, behind which you sit upright with a clear view of the low, swooping bonnet.

The promise of 0-60mph in just 8.3 secs and a top speed of 131mph makes you keen to fire up the Porsche's famed flat-six – a process that requires plenty of throttle and a bit of patience. When it does catch, the silence is broken by a wonderfully throaty bark that's instantly familiar, a deep and guttural sound that over-promises in the best way. Underlining the 911's sporting pretensions is a five-speed dogleg gearbox, which slots into first with ease, and you pull away with a hefty prod of the floor-mounted accelerator and a clatter of air-cooled engine noise. It picks up quickly, with a precise gearchange that belies its remote operation. Performance is instantly accessible and encourages you to push on, the low-down lumpiness disappearing with speed. The flat-six really comes alive as you wind up the revs, on a wave of top-end power.

Early cars were dogged by unpredictable handling, partly due to extra engine weight that its designers hadn't anticipated and also because of variations in production that threw out carefully planned suspension geometry. The car quickly gained a reputation for a lively rear end when driven hard; but as good-natured as a pit bull may be, you wouldn't poke one in the eye, and as long as you're not silly the 911 handles beautifully, erring on the side of understeer. In its purest form, the Porsche is a joy.

If the 911 is straight from Savile Row, the A110 is decidedly smart-casual. Unlike the immaculate Porsche, the Alpine wears its scars with pride, its low nose pockmarked with stone-chips and touch-ups from a lifetime of being driven as its designer intended. If anything, it looks better for it. The Alpine's design is unlike anything else, both beautiful and purposeful, muscular and delicate, and

'The A110 is addictive, the roadholding nothing short of remarkable for a car with a comparatively archaic swing-axle rear'

is undeniably the more striking of the two. Perfect proportions make its size difficult to judge in isolation, but parked next to the 911 – itself a small machine – the jewel-like Alpine seems even more of a toy.

My 5ft 11in frame is enough to give owner Geoff Simpson cause for concern, and there's talk of getting the spanners out to adjust the bucket seat. But with a bit of snake-hippery it's possible to slip behind the wheel, albeit backside-first, and once there the tiny cabin is remarkably comfortable. Ahead of the steering wheel, an enormous speedometer and tachometer fill the binnacle, while to the right a host of gauges, switches and a rally timer are later additions. The driving position is comfortable even though it has no right to be, with both wheel and pedals offset, the latter shunted towards the centre of the car to make room for the wheelarch.

Alpines were built under licence all over the world, with Dinalpins produced in Mexico, Bulgaralpines in Eastern Europe and FASA putting cars together in Spain. This particular car is one of the Spanish examples, and it left the factory with a standard 76bhp 1300 engine but, as with most A110s, has since been modified. The most notable – and most exciting – change is the engine, which has been replaced by a 1397cc crossflow unit built by renowned fettler Salv Sacco. Fed by twin 40DCOE Webers, it promises 100bhp-plus at the screaming end of the rev range, along with a more aggressive throttle response.

With the master switch on, the little Alpine starts readily, filling the glassfibre shell with a busy engine note before settling to a remarkably relaxed idle – but the hair-trigger accelerator is too tempting not to blip like a teenager waiting at the lights. Pull away and its slight 695kg weight is immediately apparent, with blistering acceleration that straight away puts it in a class above the torquey but 385kg heavier 911. Throttle response is instant and

Clockwise from opposite: distinctive transverse exhaust; Alpine name has recently been revived; Gotti competition alloys and snow tyres; rally-ready cabin is more spacious than it looks; handling is sublime; huge dials fill diminutive dash; modified engine bay has a Porsche 944 radiator paired with motorcycle electric fans

the four-speed gearbox slick, but its no real match for the hot engine that just wants to keep going and going – Geoff's next modification is a five-speed that is currently winging its way from Scotland and should transform the car. Even at the same speed the Alpine feels the quicker of the two, partly due to its size and low ride height but also because of the theatre that accompanies each blast up the rev range.

It's an addictive experience only enhanced by the A110's roadholding, which is nothing short of remarkable for a vehicle with a comparatively archaic swing-axle arrangement at the rear. It, too, carries its timber over the back wheels, but the lower centre of gravity and wide track help tame the tail, which offers bags of confidence-inspiring feedback. Feeding the tiny sports car along the country lanes of Newport Pagnell, it's easy to see how Alpine toppled the mighty 911 from its rallying perch, becoming the go-to loose-surface and Tarmac weapon before the arrival of the all-conquering Lancia Stratos.

Jean Rédélé and Ferry Porsche each took the thick end of 20 years to achieve their goals, with the final outcomes similar in some respects and very different in others – like twins with wildly differing personalities. Which is the evil one depends very much on your idea of the perfect sports car, whether that is the effortless chic and engineering prowess of the Porsche 911, or the Alpine's quest for total performance from the most humble of beginnings. Both triumphed for a time on the world's rally stages, but only the Porsche became a commercial success. Crucially, this allowed it to develop as a road car and, where the A110 remained true to Rédélé's vision, the pure '901' quickly gave way to bigger engines, swollen arches and supercar levels of performance.

By the time the detuned, last-of-the-line Alpine A110 1600 SX left the factory in 1977, the 911 had grown into a whale-tailed, turbocharged 3.3-litre road-burner putting out more than 300bhp. It might have been fleeting, but there was a time when Alpine was king.

Thanks to *Export 56 (export56.com); Stephen Dell; Tim Moores; Renault Alpine Owners' Club (renaultalpine.co.uk); Club Alpine Renault (clubalpinerenault.org.uk)*

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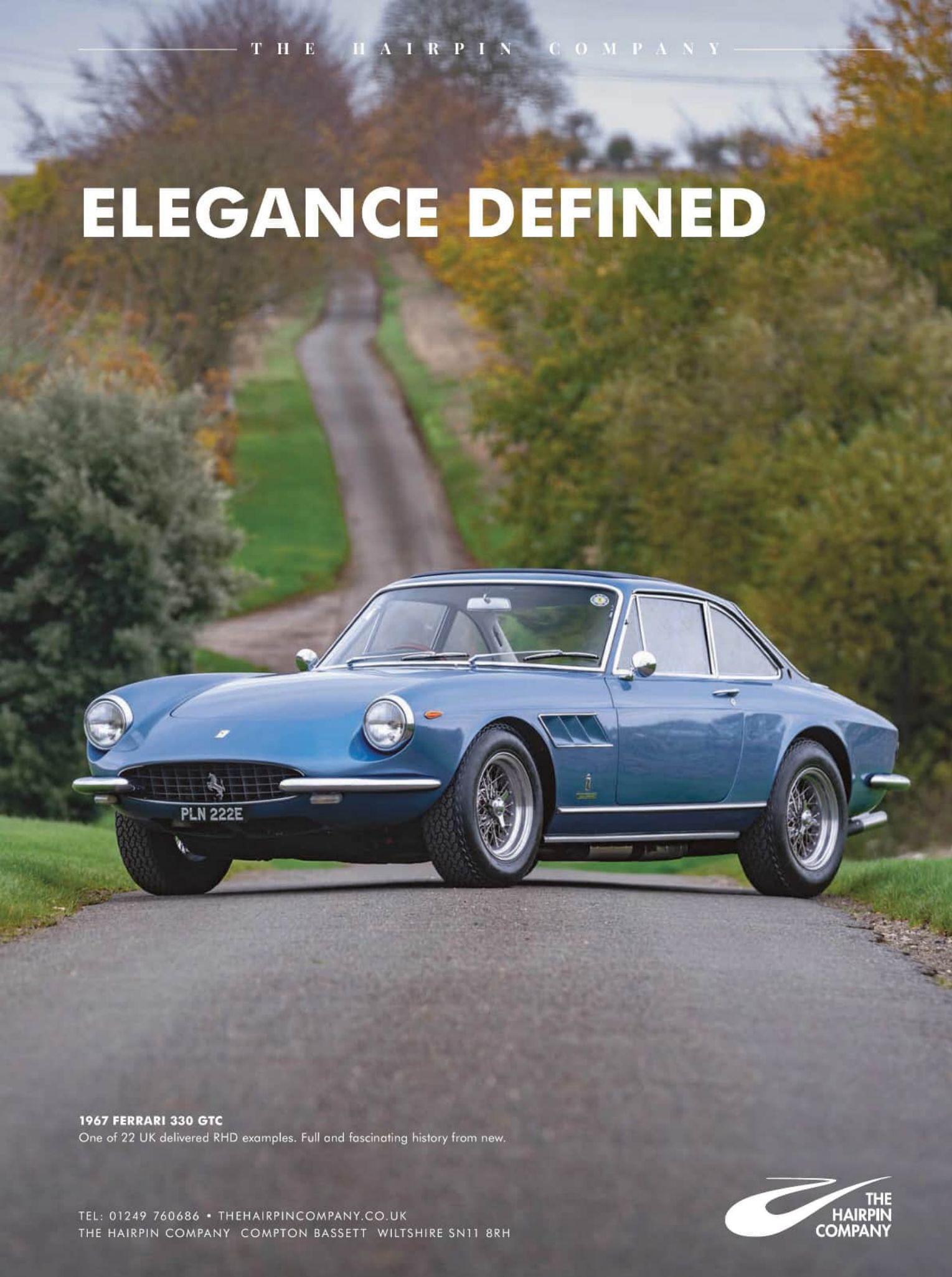

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ON THE LOOSE

Rear-engined traction helped these legends make their names on the rally stages

WORDS **GREG MACLEMAN** PHOTOGRAPHY **MOTORSPORT IMAGES**

Clockwise, from left: Thérier/Todt A110 retired from the 1971 RAC rally; Andruet/Biche head for a win on the 1973 Monte; Toivonen/Tiukkanen 911S was second on '68 Monte; Waldegård/Helmér took victory in Sweden, 1970

The Porsche 911 was unveiled to the public in 1964 and made its competition debut just a year later on the Rallye Monte-Carlo with Herbert Linge and Peter Falk. The pair quickly demonstrated the Porsche's suitability for the special stages by taking a relatively standard car (warmed-over to 160bhp) to fifth overall, with Günter Klass' 1967 German National Rally Championship title underlining the 911's untapped potential.

Peculiarities of homologation rules allowed Porsche to make an all-out assault on international rallying in 1967, entering the 912 in Group 1, the 911L in Group 2, the 911T in Group 3 and the 911S in Group 4. Vic Elford, who was recruited from Ford, proved dazzling, winning the Deutschland Rally, Tulip Rally, Tour de Corse and Geneva Rally, and finishing third on the Monte. The Brit won the headline event at the second time of asking, in 1968, in a season that the 2-litre German coupé dominated, with victory in no fewer than six other rallies; Pauli Toivonen won the European Championship and Porsche finished third in the International Championship for Makes.

The arrival of the 2.2- and 2.5-litre 911s on the international rallying scene in 1970 continued the success, building on four years of racing experience with ever-increasing performance. Waldegård and Helmér won the Monte, Swedish Rally and Austrian Alpine on their way to victory in the International Championship for Makes. Further success seemed likely, but Porsche's attention turned to the Safari Rally and its other competition obligations, and the factory eased back its involvement in rallying. By the early 1970s the 911's dominance was under threat, with the greatest challenge coming from the lightweight Alpine A110.

Jean Rédélé was no stranger to rallying, going so far as to name his firm after his favourite event as a driver, but the cutting-edge A110 had a slow start on the international scene. The model always seemed to be playing a game of catch-up between the engines that were available and what was required to win rallies; despite Gérard Larrousse leading the 1967 Coupe des Alpes and crashing out of the 1968 Monte in a promising position, big wins eluded the marque until Renault threw its weight behind the programme.

With the backing of *La Régie*, the renamed Alpine-Renault's fortunes began to turn. The 1500-engined cars took three wins in 1968 and '69, while the R16 TS-powered A110 1600's arrival was hampered by silly mistakes and poor reliability. The 1300 bowed out in 1970 with third for Jean-Pierre Nicolas on the Monte; following a disastrous showing against the 911 in that event, the 1600 finally demonstrated its potential thanks to Jean-Luc Thérier, who won the Sanremo and Acropolis. Outright victory on the Monte heralded the arrival of former Ford ace Ove Andersson in 1971, followed by International Championship for Makes and French National Championship wins the same year.

The A110's greatest success came in 1973, when it swept away all comers in the inaugural season of the World Rally Championship, with 1-2-3 finishes on both the Rallye Monte-Carlo and Tour de Corse. It proved to be a career high for the model, which was roundly beaten the following year as WRC laurels passed to Lancia with the first of three consecutive titles.

Dino 246 vs Porsche 911

A pair of six-cylinder baby supercar greats, one from Maranello and one from Stuttgart, do battle

WORDS **RUSS SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

Could there be a more natural subject for a back-to-back test? Two cars born in the same era, from the world's most revered sports car makers, originally priced to compete with each other, close in size and with the same number of cylinders, similar capacities, power outputs and performance. It's no wonder both have become motoring icons.

The Dino, built by Ferrari but only badged as such for the UK market, was the company's first mid-engined road car. A thing of great beauty, its profile defined a look for Ferrari that is still evident in recent mid-engined models. As with almost all 'modern-era' Ferraris it was styled by Pininfarina, but this is the one that history records as Sergio's favourite Ferrari design.

The 911's status is so deep-rooted that you could draw a sketch of its outline anywhere in the world and be understood. Perhaps only the Beetle and Mini have stood similar tests of time, yet the 911 is the only one still recognisably evolving from the origin of its species.

The 'S' was the sportiest 911 until Porsche took things even further and added Carrera badges. But until 1973 this was the ultimate 911, particularly in 2.4-litre form, so that's the car we've chosen to pitch against the Dino, in 2.4-litre guise. Steve Harker's 911S is one of those final 1973 cars and as good as they get; Pascal Maeter's Dino is at least a match in condition but comes from the first series of 246GTs, built from 1969-'70, none of which came in right-hand drive.

However close this pairing may sound, there are fundamental differences to explore: mid-engined vs rear-engined, air-cooled vs water-cooled, plus the inevitable quality issues that go with any automotive Italy vs Germany contest. Have you jumped to a conclusion yet?

Flashes of silver add a real classic Ferrari feel, while vinyl bucket seats embrace like a glove; pedals are offset towards the centre

INTERIOR ★★★★☆

Without practice, you tumble rather than climb into the low-slung Dino, but that's okay because the vinyl bucket seat is waiting to catch you like a giant baseball mitt. It's a proper bucket, too, with no backrest adjustment, but it is far from uncomfortable and, once you adapt to the laid-back position, it soon starts to make sense.

It's hard not to love the Dino interior's clean simplicity. There's nothing you don't need, and almost everything is beautifully executed, such as the almost invisible raised gap in the door card, surrounded by a delicate chrome strip, into which you slide two fingers to pull the door shut. A passenger's footrest bar is a nice touch.

Examine the ellipse of silver-painted instrument panel and you'll find it a bit crude, but it looks the part. From where you're sitting, it places all of the gauges for an unobstructed view through the stylish three-spoke wheel.

It does get quite hot in here, though, which became quite a talking point even on a cool day. An array of air vents is scattered around the dashboard, but little in the way of meaningful output issues forth from them. You will also find that there is absolutely nowhere to stow anything inside the car – but at least there's a good-sized boot behind the engine.

STYLING ★★★★★

So low, curvaceous and drop-dead gorgeous, it's impossible not to stare at the Dino. If you want to own one (if... hah!), get used to the idea of that, because you are never going to travel in it anonymously. You could park one on the moon and still draw a crowd.

Quite simply, this is a work of design genius, ranking alongside cars such as the Jaguar E-type in any automotive beauty contest. Yet it was the Dino that would have the greater influence on how sports cars would look over the following few generations. It was truly the shape of things to come.

There's not a styling hair out of place; every line flows naturally into the next, every vent and bulge is perfectly judged and the stance and proportions are spot-on. You could almost have forgiven Pininfarina for skimping on the detailing after creating the shape, but of course it didn't. From the delicate, curved window-level door latches to the radical reverse sweep of the rear 'screen, there are clever touches to marvel at wherever you look. And I should add that the rear window is more than pretty – it also provides clear and unhindered rear vision.

We don't give away our five-star ratings easily, but this is one case that fully deserves it.

Grabhandle for passenger; period Voxson Stereo 8

Delicate design of exquisite doorhandle and mirror

THE OWNER
Pascal Maeter

What inspired you to buy a Dino? I've wanted one since I was a kid in Brussels and watched *The Persuaders*.

How did you come by it? I saw this car in a magazine eight years ago and it looked just right: an early first-series car with wheel spinners and only two previous owners. It was in Brescia, Italy, but I had to have it.

Have you had to do much to it? Yes, it wasn't as good as promised and I like my cars to be just right. The V6 had to be rebuilt, and I had the body done where the aluminium bonnet had reacted with the steel wings. I've just bought a set of Michelin XWXs on ebay for a fifth of their new price. And it has taken eight years to get the clock to work.

How much use does it get? Quite a bit. It came second in a recent club concours, and went on the 'Swiss Raid' Basle-to-Paris run.

Any memorable moments? The first time I drove it to Brussels – where I was born – was special. It has only let me down once and that was when an oil pipe went.

Non-standard sports seats do little to lift the gloom inside the 911; ugly wheel sits ahead of familiar dials, with central rev counter

INTERIOR ★★★½☆

The 911 might be dressed similarly to the Dino in the era's usual Gothic festival of black vinyl, but Porsche served it up it in a more bland, functional, Germanic style. The steering wheel looks ugly and cheap enough to have come from a 1970s Škoda, but it only takes a few miles to realise that it's perfectly shaped and placed for high-performance driving – you simply get in and adjust the seat and it all feels right.

Vinyl gives way to cloth for the facings of the seats, which are comfortable and supportive. There's a gentle curve to the instrument panel that angles all of the gauges towards the driver in clear view through a wheel that looks surprisingly close to them, but you'd need to be seriously sausage-fingered for that to be a problem. A sportier dished item may help, but could ruin the perfect weighting of the original.

More practicality points are scored by all of the storage options in here. Pop-out door bins are a clever touch, and there are more cubbies in the footwell. There's a big boot up front, while behind you are plus-two seats for small people, or you can drop down the backs to create a large luggage area.

It's uninspiring to look at but does the job well, and you know that nothing's going to drop off.

STYLING ★★★★☆

The trouble is, it's a 911: that shape is almost *too* familiar. I accept that it's a very good – even iconic – sort of familiar, but you still know what you're getting without even opening your eyes. It has a slightly tainted image, too. If Porsche had stopped building the 911 in 1974, the survivors would have achieved almost deity status by now, but in the '80s the car started to dress badly, got fat and mixed with the wrong people.

This 911S remains close to the pure early incarnation, barring a small increase in the wheelbase and a subtle spoiler at the front, both of which are there to aid the car's stability. For me, this is how a 911 should look, not laden with the visual baggage of wide arches, 'whale tail' spoilers and blacked-out chrome under which later Porsches were buried.

Normally you think of a 911 as small and low-slung, but here it towers above the Dino, standing a full seven inches taller. It's a few inches longer, too. Seeing it like that does put the Porsche in a new light and explains some of its practicality as a sports car. That's why you can get in and out and see out so easily.

Being an 'S' means this Porsche wears the silver-and-black Fuchs alloy wheels that have always been the best icing on the 911 cake.

Elegantly functional window switches and door bins

Form follows function outside; it's undeniably pretty

THE OWNER
Steve Harker

What inspired you to buy a 911S? The unreliability of my Ferrari 330GT 2+2, along with the 911's reputation for being a driver's car that doesn't break down. I had a silver Carrera 3.2 and a 2.7 RS replica before this.

How did you come by it? I'd known the car for years, it was owned by a Porsche club official and had been raced and restored twice. I saw it in an advert in January 2008, checked its reputation with the restorer and bought it over the phone.

Have you had to do much to it? Only soften the suspension, which was set to race spec: I quickly tired of being bounced around. It's so good that I bought some carpets just to spend something on it.

How much use does it get? I am a regular at the Goodwood Breakfast Club and looking forward to a coast-to-coast rally and driving to the Le Mans Classic.

Has it changed your life? My classic life is now enjoyable rather than stressful, and I'm on the DDK forum a lot [ddk-online.com].

Charismatic iron-block, alloy-head V6 – or all-alloy for earlier 206 – sits just behind driver's ears. Below right: Cromodora alloys

ENGINE ★★★★☆

If you want to chuck a spanner in the works of the 246GT's heritage, mention the engine. It was – whisper it – built by Fiat. But before that character stain becomes too hard to shift, I should point out that in 1969 Fiat took control of Ferrari anyway, and the engine was a Maranello design, based on the Formula Two V6 designed by Franco Rocchi. That was all-alloy, as was its successor used in the Dino 206GT, but with the capacity increase came the cheaper use of an iron block – necessary because, with Fiat and Lancia using it as well, it had become a mass-production unit.

The unusual 65° vee was chosen over the usual 60° to make room for each bank's twin overhead camshafts, but there are no ill-effects to be felt in the engine's balance and ability to rev, which is quite prodigious. It will spin happily to 8000rpm, sounding better and more feral the higher it goes, creating the sort of noise that makes your heart beat a little faster.

From within the cabin the engine is always intrusive, loud enough not only to stop you listening to afternoon plays on Radio 4, but possibly Black Sabbath tapes, too. Sit back and enjoy V6 music instead: the owner of this Dino hasn't tired of it after eight years.

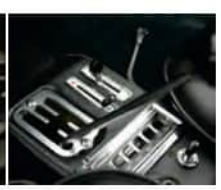
DRIVETRAIN ★★★½☆

Ferrari badges or not, the Dino still proudly sports the traditional shiny metal open gate with six fingers for the different ratios into which you clack the gearlever. That simple joy is one of the things that makes a Ferrari special.

The fairly long chrome lever is topped by a simple and small black ball. As befits a true performance car, the rarely used first gear is the one out on the dog-leg, leaving straight flicks between second and third, plus fourth and fifth. 'Flicks' is not quite the right word with this transmission, however. Perhaps dulled by the route from lever to rear transaxle – and maybe age, too – gearchanges need to be a rather more considered affair. You must be firm and assertive with the precise but mechanically heavy shift. If you don't rush it, the change feels good; otherwise it's crunchy, especially going down the 'box.

In this left-hand-drive example the clutch pedal is heavily offset to the right, bang in line with the steering column. I thought it felt quite heavy until I drove the Porsche, so we'll call it medium to well done. This one also had a rather annoying rubbery squeak, though I'm sure it could be easily cured. It does the job well enough, but gear-shifting can be better than this.

Access to the engine bay is hindered by rear buttresses



Dino motor thrives on revs, but the gearshift is slow

THE KNOWLEDGE

What to pay*

Dino prices have fallen back from their peak around a year ago, when they were commonly advertised for anything up to £120,000. These days specialist Nick Cartwright feels that £100,000 ought to be enough for the best restored cars – and this is also the level where most potential buyers are looking. A merely good but not concours 246GT would be nearer £80,000, while restoration projects sit at perhaps £50,000. With a full restoration by a specialist likely to cost £60-80,000 or more, that's no bargain.

What to look for

- Dinos started rusting from day one, so the condition of the body and the quality of past restoration work is paramount
- The best buys are cars that boast a well-documented restoration by a Dino specialist – not many are capable of doing one of these cars properly
- There's no escape mechanically, either, because an engine rebuild can cost £10k*
- Some gearbox parts are getting difficult to find, particularly for S1 and S2 Dinos

What to read

- *Ferrari Dino 166 206 246*, Casucci
- *Ferrari Dino 246, 308 and 328*, Henry
- *Ferrari Dino: The Complete Story*, Curtis

The clubs

- The Ferrari Owners' Club of Great Britain: ferrariownersclub.co.uk
- ferrarichat.com

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

THE SPECIALIST'S VIEW
Nick Cartwright

"The Dino was light-years ahead of anything else when it came out. It has such beautiful balance and is fabulous to drive. Even today a Dino is still capable of doing 145mph. The 911S is totally different: a great car in its own right, but nothing like the Dino. The only trouble is that there are very few really good ones about."

Access to the engine, slung out behind the rear axle, is good; listen for rattles and look for smoke. Below right: Fuchs rims, a 911 signature

ENGINE ★★★★☆

There's a real touch of the exotic to the 911's rear-mounted flat-six. To reduce the amount of weight playing games with the back of the car, this series of 911 got magnesium crankcases, crafted by piston specialist Mahle. At the time they were the largest pressure-diecast magnesium items ever made. Within this runs an intricate but tough eight-bearing crankshaft, and the rest of the engine is largely aluminium.

This car's 'S' designation refers to the Bosch mechanical fuel injection, hot cams, larger valves and ports, plus forged pistons, adding 60bhp to the standard 2.4-litre engine's output.

Being air-cooled, with less metal and coolant to dampen the engine noise, there's more of a mechanical cacophony from the Porsche, certainly from outside. It's all buzz, whine and clatter, with a harsher note than the Dino, and it gets quite frenetic as the revs rise.

From inside the car it's a different story. With the motor further from you, and better sound-proofing in the cabin, the faster you go, the further behind you seem to leave the sound.

Unlike the Dino's piece of sculpture, the 911's lump gives you little to look at, with all of the clever stuff buried beneath the intake trunking and large metal cooling fan.

DRIVETRAIN ★★★★☆

Once again, the Germans deliver substance over style. The gearlever's throw is quite long, but shifting between gears is much easier than in the Dino. It feels nicely clunky, if that makes any sense. No criticism is intended, there's just some small pleasure to be gained from your hand feeling every step of the mechanical operation.

In contrast to the 246, it's fifth gear that's out on the dog-leg in this 'box, saloon-car-style. Those last three words could also be used to damn the appearance of the whole assembly. After the chrome and engineering show of the Dino, the all-black lever, knob and concertina'd boot served up by Porsche are something of a disappointment. This is the sort of thing you expect to see in an old Volkswagen Polo 1.0L, not a cutting-edge sports car that cost substantially more than a V12 E-type when new. It's worth knowing that original gearknobs such as this car's are rare and prized, with reproduction items only of poor quality.

The clutch diaphragm spring was uprated to cope with the extra torque of the 2.4, and you feel every bit of that through the rather heavy pedal. It's offset towards the centre of the car, but not to anything like the extent as in the Dino, and you quickly get used to its position.

Fan cools motor; check oil level with engine running

Flat-six has addictive thrum, and changing gear is easy

THE KNOWLEDGE

What to pay*

The 2.4S is a surprisingly rare car. Specialists report seeing one for every 10 RSs, and they are beginning to get a cult following. Prices have increased steadily over recent years. An excellent 2.4S that was £25,000 10 years ago will fetch £55-60,000 today, and the very best make up to £70,000. Buy the best you can find because you certainly can't make a bad or average car into a good one for the difference in price.

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATEX OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

What to look for

- The 2.4S is not galvanised, so it rusts. Get a good buyer's guide or splash out on a competent inspector
- History: for a time these were relatively cheap old cars and treated as such
- Listen for timing-chain rattle and look for a smoky exhaust – both spell early expense
- Condition of the heat exchangers/ manifolds – replacements are four figures
- Beware of leaks from the gearbox casing: on this model in particular they can be difficult to stop

What to read

- *Porsche 911 Story*, Frère
- *Original Porsche 911*, Morgan
- *Haynes Great Cars: Porsche 911*, Scarlett

The clubs

- Porsche Club GB: 01608 652911; porscheclubgb.com
- The Independent Porsche Enthusiasts' Club: 08456 020052; tipec.net
- Die Deutschen Klassiker: ddk-online.com

THE SPECIALIST'S VIEW
Andy Prill

"When launched, the 2.4S was the fastest road car Porsche had built. Its best quality was the balance of weight and power wrapped up in a relatively understated package. With 190bhp, they were quick and also reliable. If you want a car to use and enjoy, the Porsche is it. That is the reason why it's a better car than the Dino."

Dino's chassis is divinely neutral, flattering the driver and proving the worth of the baby Ferrari's mid-engined layout

PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆

A 2.4-litre V6 might not sound like much, but this one has been sprinkled with Maranello dust and is like nothing you'd find in a Ford. For a start, it absolutely loves to be revved, and the rewards in extra push grow in line with the ever more intoxicating engine note. But don't get the idea that this is some peaky unit that has to be rowed along with the gearstick.

Despite having an extra 200lb to shift than the Porsche, the Dino pulls strongly from 2000rpm in any gear. Frantic is an option, but you can equally drive it in a quick but relaxed manner, never having to stray past 4000rpm and even slipping early into fifth gear as low as 40mph without feeling too short-changed in the performance department. That's because you sit so low and in such close proximity to the engine noise that the feeling of drama is enhanced at any speed.

Press on to what was once almost supercar pace and the Dino continues to deliver, with no noticeable tail-off in the urge available.

This car is a real thoroughbred, still on top of its game nearly 40 years after its introduction. Even under braking it impresses, with the four-disc system strong and perfectly balanced to prevent wheel lock-up.

HANDLING ★★★★½

One mile of winding road in the 246GT is about all it takes to realise why mid-mounted engines quickly became the way to go for serious performance cars. Other manufacturers might have beaten Modena to it, but Ferrari legitimised the layout, and others were bound to follow.

Hold the wheel lightly and you can feel every nuance of road surface and dynamic input fed back through steering that is precise and light, unencumbered by the burden of several hundred pounds of engine. Try a bit harder and you find a divine neutrality to the handling. With nothing outside the wheelbase to generate over- or understeer, the 246 simply changes direction. Even at speed there's no discernible roll, and the grip generated by those tall Michelins is impressive. You'd have to be completely stupid to throw one of these off the road in the dry. It really is that good.

Keep your inputs smooth and here is the perfect car to flatter your driving abilities, to bring out the Le Mans fantasist in you or simply to provide an excuse for a foreign holiday that takes in as many Alpine passes as you can get away with. And, somewhere along the way, you'll also start to appreciate how well the Dino's long-travel suspension rides.

No Ferrari badge, but the Modena experience remains

Body roll is minimal and grip good despite tall tyres

SPECIFICATIONS

Sold/number built 1969-'74/1868
Construction steel monocoque, steel and aluminium panels
Engine iron-block, alloy-head, dohc-per-bank 2418cc 65° V6, three Weber 40DCN carburettors
Max power 195bhp @ 7600rpm
Max torque 165lb ft @ 5500rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers and anti-roll bar
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes 10½in (269mm) vented discs, with servo
Wheels & tyres 14in alloys with 205/70 tyres
Length 13ft 9in (4201mm)
Width 5ft 7in (1702mm) **Height** 3ft 9in (1133mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 6in (2340mm)
Weight 2770lb (1258kg)
0-60mph 7.1 secs **Top speed** 149mph
Mpg 17 **Price new** £5486

EVOLUTION

1965 Pininfarina's Dino Berlinetta Speciale is shown at the Paris Salon, with mid-mounted V6
1966 Second prototype, the Dino Berlinetta GT, appears at Turin, still with longitudinal engine
1967 Dino 206GT is unveiled at Turin, with aluminium body and transverse, all-alloy V6
1968 206GT production begins; only 150 built
1969 Capacity increased to create the 246GT, with iron-block engine and mostly steel body
1970 Series 2/Tipo M version has bolt-on rather than centre-lock alloys, ATE brakes and can at last be bought with right-hand drive
1971 Series 3/Tipo E, with minor changes to items such as gear ratios and fuel system
1972 Open GTS version launched in March
1974 Production ends, replaced by 308GT4

'Floaty' feel from having no weight in the nose is disconcerting at first, but the 911 is an outstanding cross-country machine

PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆

Drive the 911S like a typical British sports car and you'll miss out. Power comes in three stages, so you have to use more revs than might normally feel comfortable before you find the Porsche's true nature – and what all the fuss is about.

The engine is happy to potter about in an efficient manner in traffic, without fluffing or fouling. Put your foot down and there's a kick in the back as it comes alive and takes you to the next level. It's good, but drive the car for a while and you cannot help but feel a creeping sense of disappointment: is that it? Don't worry. Find a piece of road that opens up and hang on to each gear until the engine passes 5000rpm. Wow! Where did that come from? The resulting energy boost is more like what happens after turbo lag than merely coming on cam. In that moment, the 911S takes on a completely different character: that of a racing car.

Somewhere along the road from the addictive adrenalin rush this produces is the realisation that here you have a really special car, one that operates well on all levels – one of which is marked 'Thrill'. The 911's performance might not be as linear and accessible as the Dino's, but when the hammers are down the Porsche has the edge.

'S' spec on a '73 911 means 190bhp and serious poke

HANDLING ★★★★½

You can genuinely say the 911's reputation follows it around, because the car's character is dictated by the location of its engine, which sits aft of the rear wheels. That does have its advantages, the greatest of which is superb traction when the going gets slippery, or to help catapult the car out of tight corners. The traction imparted to those skinny little 185 tyres is quite astounding.

Of course, at the other end of that legend's pendulum swing is the sure knowledge, handed down through generations of car enthusiasts, that a 911 will throw you into a hedge at the slightest excuse: "Son, now that you can walk, let me warn you about Porsches..."

Even a powerful early-'70s version such as this really isn't that scary, though. You just have to learn and accept that, when driving a 911, you should never, ever lift sharply off the throttle in a corner. That's it; now we can enjoy ourselves. Power on, the Porsche can be hustled down entertaining roads just as quickly as the Dino, and in the first instance it will feel easier and more natural to do. There isn't quite the same smoothness to the steering, but it's not far off. Similarly, the ride isn't quite as compliant, but nor is it stiff enough to grumble about.

Be aware of the sting in the 911's tail, but don't fear it

SPECIFICATIONS

Produced/built 1971-'73/5094
Construction steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank, 2341cc flat-six, Bosch fuel injection
Max power 190bhp @ 6500rpm
Max torque 159lb ft @ 5200rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts **rear** semi-trailing arms, telescopic dampers; torsion bars f/r
Steering rack and pinion **Brakes** vented discs
Wheels & tyres 6x15in forged alloys with 185/70 tyres **Length** 14ft (4277mm)
Width 5ft 3in (1610mm) **Height** 4ft 4in (1321mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 5in (2271mm)
Weight 2570lb (1167kg)
0-60mph 6.6 secs **Top speed** 144mph
Mpg 16 **Price new** £5402

EVOLUTION

1963 Porsche unveils successor to the ageing 356, the 901, at the autumn Frankfurt show
1964 Production of the renamed 911 (Peugeot had already registered all three-digit names with an '0' in the middle) begins in September. One model with a 130bhp 2-litre flat-six
1967 Sportier 911S joins the range, with a 160bhp version of the engine and Fuchs alloys
1969 Mechanical fuel injection replaces carbs on the 911S, boosting power to 170bhp
1970 Capacity for all 911s is increased to 2.2 litres, which brings the 'S' up to 180bhp
1972 Further boost to 2.4 litres (S 190bhp), plus wider alloys and a small front air dam
1974 Engines grow again, to 2.7 litres, but the 'S' power output falls to 175bhp
1976 'S' badge dropped in all markets except USA

Low-slung in any other company, the familiar 911 silhouette looks tall beside the Tarmac-hugging Dino, but both are iconic shapes

THE VERDICT

The clearest lesson from this comparison is not to trust theories based on numbers, at least where cars are concerned. This pairing looked a good match, but the more you drive each car, the further apart they feel. Not in ability – neither is vastly better than the other – but in character. There are good reasons for buying or avoiding both the 911 and the Dino, but they will say as much about who you are as they will about the cars.

The Porsche is the sensible choice. It's a car that you could just about scrape the money together for and, with wisdom and luck, run regularly without too great a fear that it will break you financially. If that's why you'd choose it, you'll appreciate the honesty of the no-frills ruggedness and practicality that manage to go hand in hand with electrifying performance.

Dinos are for those who enjoy life's luxuries and understand true value without worrying too much about the cost. As much mistress as car, the 246 delivers greater thrills to more of your senses and will make life more of an adventure. But somewhere in the back of your mind must always lurk the feeling that there will be a pound of flesh to pay for all this hedonism.

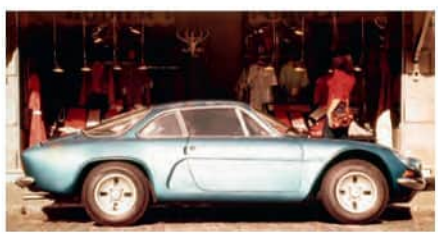
I drive a lesser Porsche than we have here, and as a struggling writer know just why that rather than a Jaguar is sitting in my garage. But if this grubby keyboard could be persuaded to crank out a best-seller or two, there would be a Dino behind the up-and-over before you could say 'royalty cheque'. The chance to see those sublime curves and listen to that V6 music whenever you like has to make it worth the risks involved.

Owners swap keys

911 OWNER STEVE HARKER ON THE DINO
"I like the lying-down thing, and all the controls feel light. It's hard to learn to come down the gearbox, and I'm hot in here, but it's not hard to see the appeal of such a fine-looking car. I don't think I'd like to take it anywhere near its handling limit for a few thousand miles, but the brakes are better than expected. They're very different cars... but still similar somehow."

DINO OWNER PASCAL MAETER ON THE 911
"It's great! You don't have to think about driving it, which is a real Porsche thing: they all feel alike, whatever age they are. This is a more practical touring car, too. There are different noises compared with the Dino: you hear the wind more than the engine at speed. It's easier to go up and down the gearbox, but I felt that the clutch was heavy. In performance they get to the same place, but in different ways."

THE ALTERNATIVES



ALPINE A110 1600S

Sold/number built 1969-'74/n/a
0-60mph 6.3 secs **Top speed** 132mph
Mpg 20 **Price new** n/a
Enchanting and tiny French car with the rock-solid provenance of two Monte wins. Choppy ride and short on space, but they go like rockets.

LANCIA STRATOS

Sold/number built 1973-'75/492
0-60mph 6.8 secs **Top speed** 143mph
Mpg 16 **Price new** £7000
Rally-winner with concept-car looks and the Dino's V6 engine. With a near-Ferrari price-tag, road versions proved hard to sell at the time, but are now highly coveted by collectors.

WHO'S THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL?

What do the experts reckon is the finest 911? Here, the engineers, designers, journalists, marque specialists and racers who know them best reveal their favourites

WORDS **ALASTAIR CLEMENTS** PHOTOGRAPHY **PORSCHE/*AUTOCAR*/MOTORSPORT IMAGES**

1967 911R

Vic Elford

PORSCHE RACE & RALLY LEGEND

"The best 911 of all time is one you may never have heard of, with a 2-litre twin-cam [per bank] engine. It had a short wheelbase, so it turned on a dime – I suppose for you that's a sixpence! I drove it with a normal engine at Mugello in '67 and finished third behind two factory 910s. It had colossal power and torque from about 3000rpm all the way to 8200rpm [1000 more than the normal engine]. I also have great affection for the 964 RS America, because I realised the need for it and wrote the original specification."

Josh Sadler

MARQUE SPECIALIST, AUTOFARM

"Porsche built just 20 of these special cars for competition. It has a light, short-wheelbase chassis with a cammy 906 engine. It was a real racer for the road and felt alive thanks to its skinny tyres and screaming engine. Don't ever get into one with a hangover!"

1975 930 TURBO

Vern Schuppan

LE MANS WINNER, 1983

"I raced the 936 and 956/962 so have always been a big turbo fan, and the 930 was the first turbocharged Porsche I ever drove. I bought one brand new in 1983 and it had remarkable performance: responsive and torquey. It was an amazing car for the time."

Karl Ludvigsen

AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIAN

"In my view, no 911 can be 'the best' because they're all excellent at what they are designed to do. The 'greatest' in relation to its era was the 911 turbo – or the 930 to anoraks. What a sensational automobile! It stood head and shoulders above all others, decisively marking the beginning of the 'supercar' era."

1968 911T/R

Alain de Cadenet

RACER AND FORMER TEAM OWNER

"The pivotal 911. Ts were lighter than Ss, so were chosen to be rodded-up. Slip in a magnesium-case 906 twin-plug lump with a mag gearbox, perform a few tweaks to torsion bars and suspension settings, add hard brake pads and you've got yourself a Group 3 racer. That's what I took on the '70 Targa: a faultless run to a decent finish and zero problems getting there. Makes a 2.7 RS look ordinary."

1978 935/78

Norbert Singer

PORSCHE RACE-CAR DESIGNER

"In its time, 'Moby Dick' was the ultimate 911. It was the first use of four-valve technology in a 911 and it was fast, too: 366kph at Le Mans!"

Klaus Bischof

DIRECTOR, PORSCHE ROLLING MUSEUM

"It was a brilliant result from a small team – and we worked with Jacky Ickx to develop it. The 935 was a great example of the huge breadth and flexibility of the 911 range; the 911 was – and still is – a car capable of racing in so many categories all around the world."

1967 911S 2.0

Walter Röhrl

MULTIPLE WORLD RALLY CHAMPION

"I drove this car in a European championship leg, the Bavaria Rallye, and was leading far ahead of all of the well-known works drivers. We retired with a broken front axle, but because of that performance I got my first contract as a works driver at Ford."

Richard Attwood

LE MANS WINNER, 1970

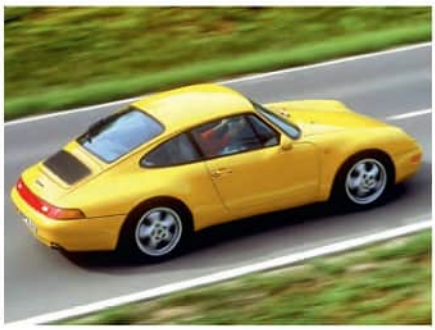
"Obviously the current 911 is the 'best' model so far, but my favourites are the early 2-litre cars because you had to know how to drive. This type of 911 is where the car's reputation came from: if you weren't a proper driver, you got into trouble. The first 911 that I became intimately acquainted with was an S supplied to the factory racers in 1969, which I went on to own for a further four years. The difference between now and then is that the modern cars are balanced, while in the early examples the driver had to balance them."

2013 991 GT3

Steve Sutcliffe

MOTORING JOURNALIST

"The 991 GT3 is my outright favourite, because it brings all of the involvement and excitement of the previous generation of models and adds a huge extra dose of civility to the breed. Which makes it pretty much the perfect sports car."



1994 993 CARRERA

Peter Robinson

MOTORING JOURNALIST

"An easy choice, because it combines the marvellous compactness of the earlier cars with more predictable handling, better brakes and modern performance. Only in left-hand drive, however, to avoid the clumsy, offset driving position of the right-hand-drive cars. Today's 911s – faster, safer *et al* – are fat in comparison."

1993 964 CARRERA RS

Wolfgang Hatz

HEAD OF R&D, PORSCHE CARS

"Not the 'standard' 3.6-litre RS, but the 3.8. Why? It's quite simple: because I developed it! This was the first 911 to use a 3.8-litre version of the flat-six – featuring six single throttles – so it was technically intriguing."

1996 993 CARRERA 4S

Nick Hine

PORSCHE CLUB GB CHAIRMAN

"Obviously the 2.7 RS is very near the top, but for me it's the C4S. It was the last air-cooled 911; it has the turbo body, suspension and running gear; it took much of the design-led excellence from the 959; it still has bulletproof reliability and granite build quality; and it's still (relatively) affordable."

1998 996 CARRERA

Tiff Needell

RACER AND BROADCASTER

"While not wishing to upset the traditionalists, I'm not bothered about whether the engine is air-cooled or water-cooled. This was the car that brought the 911 into the modern world. We finally got rid of VW pedals and got a chassis that handled in a far more progressive and controllable manner. Not a convert before, completely converted after!"

1974 CARRERA RS 3.0

Chris Harris

MOTORING JOURNALIST

"Public opinion always lauds the 1973 RS, but the car that followed it is far superior. It's the definitive fast 911 driving experience – truly stunning. Close runners-up are the 993 RS and the 997 GT3 RS 4.0."

1973 CARRERA RS 2.7

Lee Maxted-Page

MARQUE SPECIALIST

"The Carrera RS 2.7 is, and always will be, the greatest-ever 911 in its least-compromised and purest form. It's a car that feels totally at home on road or track, and it's an iconic Porsche that never fails to inspire and reward anyone lucky enough to drive it."

THE GREATEST

Alain de Cadenet gets behind the wheel of our winner from a poll of industry experts on what is the greatest-ever drivers' car

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

"It has been 36 years since I last drove one and after one lap I'm completely back in the swing of it," enthuses Alain de Cadenet as he climbs out of the mint RS. "For me, they didn't get better than this and the hilly Millbrook course brought back great memories of racing one in Sicily. The balance is wonderful and the steering super-responsive. Even in the wet they are on your side. There's a slight wash-out as it understeers into turns, but that is easily countered with a little right foot. In no time I felt comfortable sliding it. The back stepped out in the hairpin, but it wasn't a problem. Even on the Targa I never spun.

"I love that you can still feel the DNA of the original Porsche through this car, while all of the features – the instruments, the Fuchs wheels and the doorhandles – are close to what the 911 was born with. That purity was lost when they got fatter and more powerful. The minimalist feel of the basic cockpit with its comfortable race seats and essential instruments is all you need. One of the best things about the Carrera RS is that it will work for you, but also demands plenty of driver input. When I tested a group of high-performance modern cars at Goodwood I was impressed by the latest Aston, Jaguar and Audi R8, but it felt as if the car was doing most of the work, while the 911 GT2 had the same rewards as the RS. You really felt you were contributing to the lap. Involvement is what great sports cars are all about, and the Porsche has that in spades.

"The RS is just the most perfect thing to drive and I can see why there's such frenzy for them now. I hope they don't become so valuable that owners stop using them because they make excellent road cars. I'd have no hesitation jumping into this now and driving down to Sicily to do the Targa, just as we did in 1970. I shared a 911 with Mike Ogier and came home 15th. I used it to learn courses and also drove it to Le Mans. These early 911s always inspire me and driving this car I can see why it's a keeper for its owner Frank [Sytner]."

Even factory engineers have conceded – off the record, of course – that Porsche has never built a better 911 than the 2.7-litre Carrera RS. Legislation made the world a more safety-conscious place, and heavy bumpers and side-impact bars added weight to the 911, as did galvanising. In contrast, the ultra-desirable 210bhp *Rennsport* tipped the scales at 2150lb. With 0-60mph in just under 6 secs, the RS could match most so-called supercars for pace but no contemporary Ferrari or Lamborghini could equal the Porsche's combination of drivability, practicality and pure fun.

Suspension tweaks included stiffer Koni dampers, uprated anti-roll bars and stronger mounts. Brakes remained standard 911S fitment. Every great sports car should have a signature sound, and none is more distinctive than this mechanically injected flat-six. As you back off into corners the score mixes sucking air with a crackling overrun, then as you power out it develops that glorious yowling bark as the nose lifts. Thanks to the rear-mounted engine, the cockpit is amazingly spacious for a sports car, with big doors plus lots of leg and headroom for taller drivers.

The Carrera RS was developed for Group 3 homolgation, which required a production run of 500 units, but Porsche's marketing department was sceptical that enthusiasts would pay a premium for a back-to-basics 911. They couldn't have been more wrong, and the first run was sold out before the car's official launch in September '72. As a result, production continued until July 1973, with 1580 cars built. The weight-saving included thinner steel for the roof, wings and bonnet, while even the windscreen and rear quarter-windows used thinner glass. The 217 super-desirable 'Lightweight' versions even did without most of the creature comforts of the 'Touring' model.

Distinctive features included the signature 'ducktail' spoiler for downforce and flared rear arches to accommodate the wider 7in Fuchs alloys. To further distinguish the RS, bold Carrera side stripes were offered in red, black, blue or green, with matching wheel centres.

Bare performance data doesn't tell the full story: the Carrera's dazzling nimbleness and fabulous throttle response made it a dominant choice in motorsport. As the 911 grew, with more power, wider rubber and bigger brakes, it lost that purity. Get into the groove with an RS and you soon discover its ability to flow down the road in a neat, controlled style. As Alain concludes: "Any enthusiast can get into an RS and do a decent job. It's just the most inspiring, timeless drivers' car of all."

Lightweight is one of 21 right-hookers. Left, clockwise: flexible flat-six; iconic Fuchs rims; de Cadenet relives Targa Florio; spartan cabin

"How can you not fall in love with a car that has the engine at the back but is such a brilliant driving machine? They grip and handle so well: go-karty, pointy, and agile. And what an engine. I just love 'em!"

MIKE BREWER TV PRESENTER AND *WHEELER DEALER*

"Rocketship performance, superbly weighted, sensitive steering, nimble manoeuvrability, excellent brakes – plus the fact that I felt capable of exploiting all of its pace. The most memorable drivers' car I have had the pleasure of experiencing"

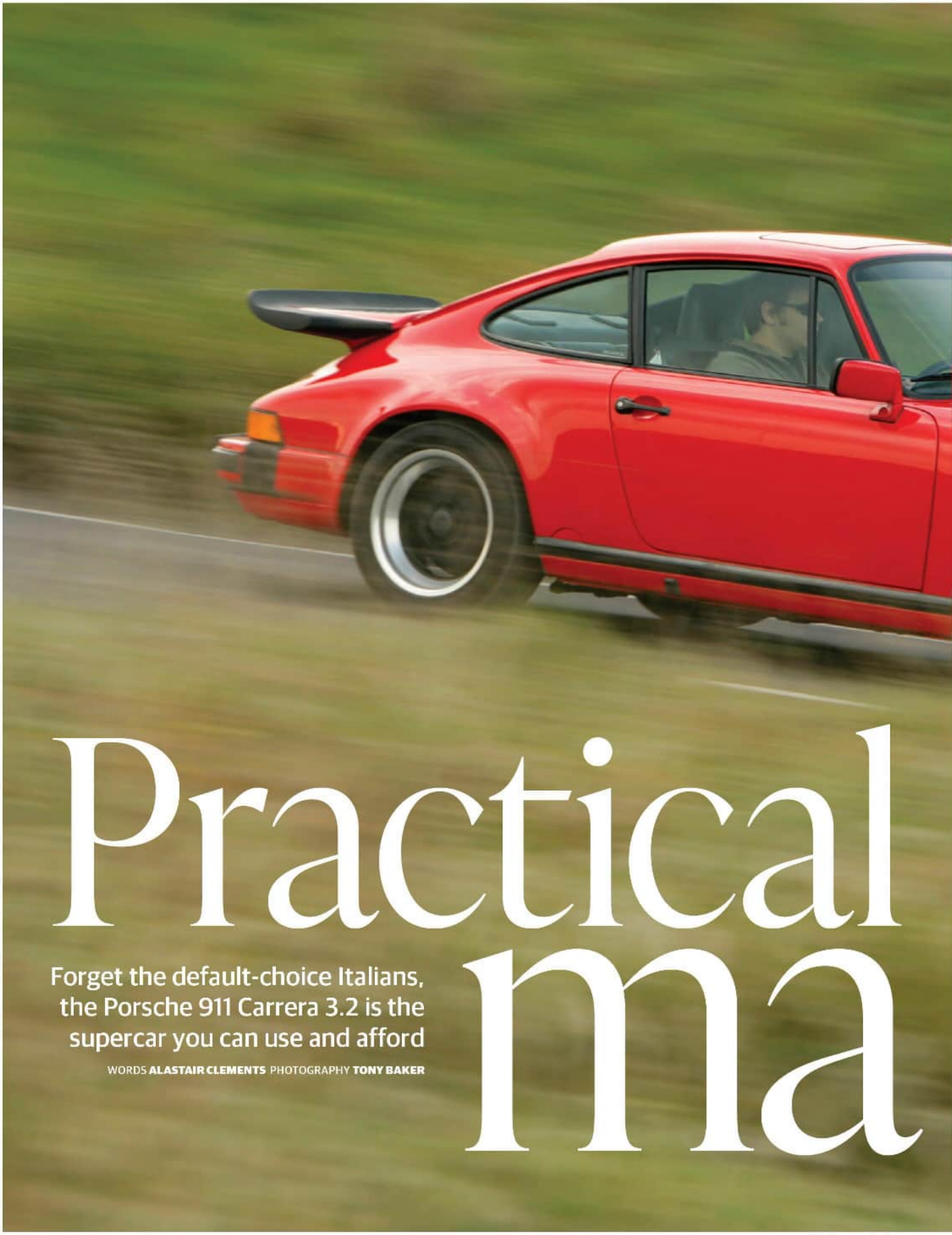
DOUG NYE AUTHOR, HISTORIAN AND MOTORSPORT AUTHORITY

"The first proper sports car I knew when it came down the family driveway early in 1973, and it has never left. High-revving but torquey engine, good brakes, rewarding handling and the best steering ever. Every time I drive it, I wonder why I need any other car"

SIMON KIDSTON MARKET EXPERT AND PRESTIGE CAR SPECIALIST

"The RS is the 911 at its most raw, mechanical-sounding and rewarding to drive. This is the 911 that everybody should aspire to own one day – or at least to drive"

LEE MAXTED-PAGE HISTORIC RACER AND PORSCHE SPECIALIST



Practical ma

Forget the default-choice Italians, the Porsche 911 Carrera 3.2 is the supercar you can use and afford

WORDS **ALASTAIR CLEMENTS** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

gic

It's all very well being a superhero. It must be pretty useful when a railway bridge collapses just as the evening express steams in, or if a stray nuke is four seconds away from Washington and about to cause of WW3. But the fame and notoriety – not to mention the constant battle with evil geniuses – must be a pain in the backside when you're trying to buy bread, milk and a Sunday paper. No wonder they need an alter ego.

It's the same story with supercars: brilliant when the rev counter and speedometer needles are doing a synchronised swim towards the top of the dial, but in a stop-start cross-town commute, most of us would rather be in a Micra. In a Countach or Testarossa, the constant need to check the temperature, wear a knee-brace to operate the clutch, fabricate *Blue Peter* periscopes from toilet rolls in order to see out and to phone a friend to help with the steering when you want to park all makes town use a nightmare. And although a little bit of attention is always nice, in a multi-vowelled exotic there's no escaping it: you'll always be the loudest car in the car park, both aurally and visually.

Fortunately, there is one supercar that does Clark Kent as well as it does Superman. The Porsche 911 Carrera 3.2 is just as comfortable commuting to the *Daily Planet* as it is taking the turns of the Nordschleife, doing a convincing impression of Stefan Roser's cult classic *Faszination Auf Dem Nürburgring*. And a good one can be yours for less than you think. What's that I hear you say, Mr Antiporsche? "Supercars must have their engines in the middle"? So it's not a supercar then? Oh really? Try nailing a Carrera 3.2 along a favourite road – one with a few tricky camber changes, crests and dips, hairpins and sweepers – and then see if you can berate Weissach's rear-engined masterpiece with a clear conscience.

Having that wondrous flat-six stuffed into the posterior doesn't destroy the handling. For a start, its 58% rearward weight bias is no worse

than that of a number of mid-engined handling benchmarks and better than many – Elise, anyone? And the hammerhead effect of heavy tail overtaking lightweight nose is only likely to appear if you treat the pedal box like a punch bag on a slippery bend. Not only that, but positioning the engine directly over the driven wheels gives the 911 epic traction – both off the line and out of corners. Even with the optional limited-slip diff, you won't be doing any tyre-smoking burn-outs or TVR-style opposite-lock heroics – instead, the real pleasure comes from exploring its precision and poise.

With clear skies above and dry Tarmac below, it's deeply impressive as the fat, low-profile tyres – a whopping 225mm wide on this late model – and relatively supple torsion-bar springing combine to make the 911 feel exceptionally surefooted. Unlike a lot of the so-called supercars, which are nigh-on unusable in the real world, the 911 is amazingly unintimidating, its tiny – at least in supercar terms – 5ft 5in width making it easy to thread along narrow, twisty lanes.

Turn in and there's the traditional 911 bob as the nose feels unnervingly light and you sense the weight behind you, but those bug-eyes turn into the apex eagerly and there's loads of bite from the front end. And then it just grips –and grips, with an attitude of mild understeer that can be neutralised with a squeeze of throttle. For the first few miles of familiarisation the steering seems less communicative than the chatterbox early 911s, a bit heavy when manoeuvring and over-damped within inner-city speed limits. But leave the metropolis, find a fast third-gear bend and the sensations come flooding back, filling the small leather rim with every intricate nuance of the surface below, and the tyres' grip on it.

It's as if the parameters have shifted in line with the step-change in performance. The 1983 launch of the Carrera 3.2 was a watershed moment for the normally aspirated 911, marking its transition from sophisticated sports car into junior supercar. Under the skin, the chassis and steering were refined but the headline change over the outgoing SC was the strengthened and enlarged all-alloy, dry-sump type 930/20 flat-six. The 95mm bore was retained, but the stroke was increased by 4mm to 74.4, raising capacity from 2994 to 3164cc, and the Bosch L-Jetronic fuel injection was controlled by a new Bosch Digital Motor Electronics ECU. The result was a less-than-startling extra 27bhp, taking the headline figure to 231bhp, but that's a healthy 73bhp per litre – which isn't bad for an engine that remained relatively simple, with the traditional two valves per cylinder and a single cam for each bank of three cylinders. *Motor* matched its own road-test figures for the 911 turbo to 60mph – hit in a spectacular 5.3 secs – and found the cheaper car lagging only just over a

Clockwise, from right: 3164cc flat-six offered 231bhp, or 207bhp in catalysed US cars; grip is huge, and the 911 feels nimble; tacho dominates dash; fuel tank helps counter weight of engine

'The hammerhead effect of heavy tail overtaking lightweight nose is only likely to appear if you treat the pedal box like a punch bag on a slippery road'

second behind at 100mph. It also romped past the psychologically crucial 150mph barrier that had remained out of reach to the SC. All of which means that, unlike so many ageing four-wheeled legends these days, the Carrera won't be shamed by an off-the-shelf hot hatch.

Figures aside, it remains one of the great engines. After 20 years in production it had matured, but only to fill in the gaps in its repertoire – namely the lack of torque in earlier, smaller-capacity incarnations. Not a criticism you can level at the 3.2: it'll quite happily amble along at 1500rpm in top, and if you short-shift it's a relaxing companion – once you get used to the trademark floor-hinged pedals. But let the tacho needle creep past 4000rpm and that old urgency returns, willing you to push to the 6300rpm redline and beyond, when the flat-six flutter that so dominated the cabins of formative 911s finally breaks the shackles of sound-deadening and starts to sing. If your budget can stretch to it, the 1987-on Getrag G50 gearbox with hydraulic clutch is a must. It could never be called slick, but shift quality is revolutionised with a new strength and positivity. Which means you can bang it intuitively across the gate with confidence, and without the need for constant glances at the shift pattern to combat the long-linkage vagueness of the type 915 it replaced.

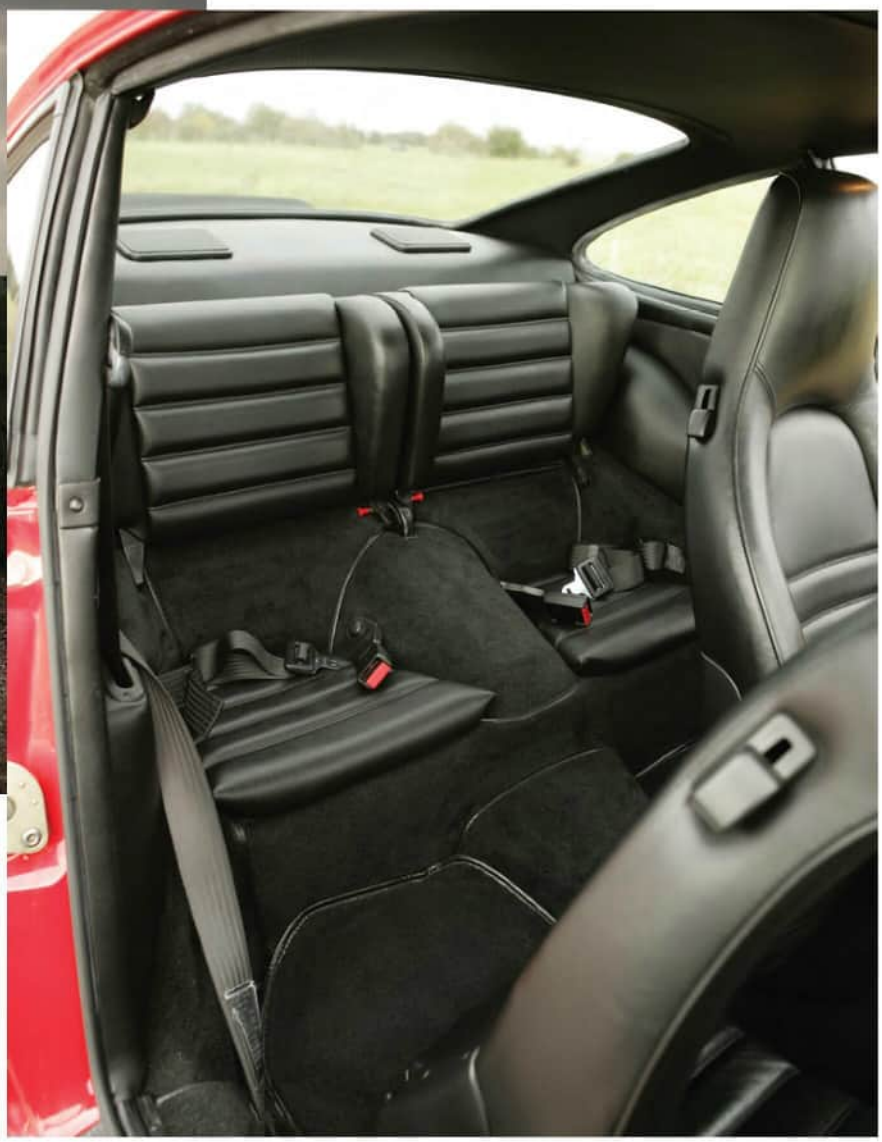
Still not convinced? Then find a strip of – derestricted, obviously, and preferably pock-marked – back-road and give that masterful engine its head. Unless you're willing to ignore the calming hand of mechanical sympathy and drop the clutch at 5000rpm-plus then off-the-line pace won't be scintillating, but past the legal limit things start to get deeply impressive. The ton, 110mph, 120mph, 130mph – all pass under the needle's inexorable climb and it's still pulling confidently. But far more striking than outright pace is the stability – no doubt aided by the front and rear spoilers that came with Sport trim. The twin-tube dampers and thick torsion bars at each corner simply soak up everything the road throws at them, keeping the bodyshell – and its occupants – remarkably composed, so that the only way to gauge your pace is ever-increasing wind and tyre roar.

Touch the middle pedal and you'll discover the depth of this car's engineering integrity: few braking systems are so perfectly weighted, so easy to modulate, with mighty power yet remarkable resistance to grab or fade. With the end result that the Carrera covers ground – twisty or straight, bumpy or smooth – at an astounding rate, without ever really feeling stretched. Yes, the 3.2 might have lost a touch of the heart-to-heart conversation that was struck up between driver and car in earlier incarnations, but no 911 before the Carrera inspired such trust between man and machine when the numbers really start to get impressive. Come to mention it, few have bettered that relationship since: the arrival of the 964, the 3.2's replacement, in 1989 signalled the onset of the more anaesthetised 911 experience, with power-assisted steering, four-wheel drive and ever-increasing electrickery.

Try hard and it's just physical enough to make you feel as if you're getting a proper supercar experience – but without the need to carry a jump-pack. In fact, 911 ownership manages to skirt around much of the drama and most of the hissy fits that seem to be the supercar norm. Buy a good one and keep it serviced properly, and you should find that it'll start first turn more often than not, the Bosch fuel injection settling it to a docile tickover even when cold. All the controls – even the electric ones – work with monotonous precision; the doors shut with solidity that would give a Volkswagen development engineer sleepless nights; and everything you touch in the unremittingly black cabin feels as if it was machined from aluminium billet – even if at times it's as if you've dived into a plastic sea. Yep, inside and out, the Carrera 3.2 is very much a child of the '80s.

PORSCHE 911 CARRERA 3.2

Sold/number built 1983-'89/74,026 (plus 341 Club Sports and 2274 Speedsters)
Construction galvanised all-steel monocoque
Engine air-cooled, all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 3164cc flat-six, with Bosch L-Jetronic electronic fuel injection
Max power 231bhp @ 5900rpm
Max torque 209lb ft @ 4800rpm
Transmission Type 915 (G50 from 1987) five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, longitudinal torsion bars **rear** semi-trailing arms, transverse torsion bars; twin-tube telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r
Steering ZF rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated discs, 11in (282.5mm) front, 11½in (290mm) rear, with servo
Length 14ft 1in (4291mm)
Width 5ft 5in (1652mm)
Height 4ft 4in (1320mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 5½in (2272mm)
Track: front 4ft 6in (1372mm)
rear 4ft 6¼in (1380mm)
Weight 2557lb (1160kg)
0-60mph 5.3 secs
0-100mph 13.6 secs
Top speed 158mph
Mpg 16-25
Price new £21,464 (1984)



Buyer's guide*

Compared with earlier 911s, the Carrera 3.2 makes a very strong case for itself with its galvanised bodyshell – its 10-year anti-rust warranty was a first – plus a reinforced crankcase and oil cooler, and improved chain tensioners for engine longevity.

That's not to say the cars are immune to rot. Rust-prone and costly-to-fix areas include inner sills, beneath the windscreen, rear door shuts – particularly on targas – and behind the rear wing. The latter is caused by mud being trapped – look for a vertical line of bubbling beneath the rear side windows. Front wings corrode around the headligtht bowls, but replacements simply bolt on – albeit at £600 a pop.

"The worst thing about 911s is that rot can be covered up easily," says Paul Stephens. "A car can look shiny, but it'll all come through again." Club Sports need extra checking, because underseal was among the items left off to save weight.

Mechanically, 3.2s are tough. A puff of smoke on start-up is common, but if it continues it could be worn valve guides – you'll pay £3k for a top-end rebuild. G50 'boxes are strong and the hydraulic clutch should be light and springy – if it's heavy it needs to be replaced, a £1000 job. A 915 'box is weaker and prone to damage. First- and third-gear synchros are first to go and can be replaced individually, but worst-case scenario is a 'box rebuild at around £1500. Anti-roll-bar bushes wear – listen for clonks – and calipers stick, but neither is a scary bill. Make sure the heater works – a heat-exchanger rebuild is up to £1500.

"Regardless of what you think you know, get an purchase checked by an independent specialist," says Stephens. "At £150-200, it's money well spent."

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

Minimal body roll, yet supple ride. Above: rear seats are usable and fold to form a luggage shelf; leather was standard only on Cabrio

Quality build and quirky switchgear inside. Below, from top: standard coupé; targa; Cabriolet; Club Sport; Speedster

3.2's company

The Carrera 3.2 was introduced in 1983 for the '84 model year as a coupé, targa or Cabriolet in standard or Sport forms, the latter with spoilers, firmer suspension and Fuchs alloys. From 1985, the coupé was offered in SuperSport trim – apeing the 911 turbo with its larger rear wing and extra 123mm width hiding wider tracks, bigger brakes, four-pot calipers, stiffer suspension and bigger 16in rims. The option arrived on the targa and Cabriolet a year later, when their shells had been stiffened to cope with turbo suspension.

The most dramatic revisions came in '87. The only visual change was new foglights in the red plastic rear panel, but under the skin came the G50 gearbox. Even more significant for 911 fans – if not for the bean-counters – was the new Carrera Club Sport. Just 340 Coupés and a solitary targa were built to M637 spec, 53 of them with right-hand drive. There was no more power, though lighter valves, a higher rev limit – up from 6520 to 6840rpm – and a quick-shift gearlever made it feel livelier. Instead, it went on a diet, losing rear seats, sound deadening, rear wiper, central locking, electric windows, air-con, front fogs, radio – even the passenger visor and underseal. Simpler door panels and heater were fitted, plus thinner carpet, with official claims of around 50kg lost – although in reality it undercut a well-specified car by twice that. Most were

Grand Prix White with (optional) red 'Carrera CS' sill decals. In the US, buyers were lumbered with a catalysed 217bhp engine – but at least it had been boosted by 10bhp for 1987.

For the standard car, the telephone-dial rims made way for wider Fuchs items for the 1988 model year, enlarged to 16in a year later. When the 250,000th 911 rolled off the production line in 1987, its maker celebrated with a limited run of 875 special editions finished in Diamond Blue metallic with matching wheel-centres, plus a silver-blue leather interior with 'F Porsche' signature stitching for the headrests and a neat commemorative plaque on the glovebox.

The last hurrah for the 3.2 was the Speedster. Revered and sneered at in equal measure, this spartan roadster was a slightly cynical venture, with the focus on posing rather than performance in stark contrast with its illustrious 356 forebear. Most buyers opted for SuperSport specification, but there was no 'whale tail' rear spoiler to interrupt its simple lines. A cut-down 'screen lowered the roofline by 100mm (4in) and there was only a basic manual top – not that owners minded, because few would extract their Speedsters' hoods from beneath the plastic rear deck with its racy twin fairings.

'All the controls – even the electrics – work with monotonous precision, and doors shut with a solidity that would give a VW engineer sleepless nights'

Just look at it. This isn't the same little sports car that blew everything away in '64 – but then it's capable of a whole lot more. Yet a part of its appeal is that its soul remains the same: try to ignore the extra matt-black and body-coloured trim, forget the rear wing and shoebox-sized wing mirrors, squint a bit and you'll see that the same delicate profile and exquisite proportions remain beneath the 1980s addenda. Which means that you get the same compromises – or, if you're a Porschephile, advantages – within. The driving position will feel bizarre for any former Ferrari owner: there's headroom for a start, and you can see out of the back, but the upright – dare I say Beetle-esque? – stance behind the vertical, fixed wheel doesn't hint at the drama to come as effectively as the reclined cocoon of a Lamborghini.

Then look over your shoulder – there's an extra pair of chairs there and, yes, you really can get kids in them. Porsche even produced a bespoke baby seat. Leave the children behind, fold those back seats flat and there's a 175-litre (6cu ft) storage space – that's if the substantial 130-litre (4½cu ft) luggage bay in the nose isn't enough. To put that into perspective, you should be able to enjoy a two-up blast to Cannes for the film festival without feeling short on luggage, and you should still have room for a few cases of Château Margaux from the *hypermarché* on the drive home.

The damper sophistication that makes the Carrera so stable at speed is equally rewarding in town or on a scarred country lane: it's firm, but your spine is isolated from jarring ruts and speed-humps. And remember that less lively steering? You'll be glad of the reduced kick-back when you hold that rim day in, day out.

So it's the perfect supercar? For me, not quite – or at least not this one. Many would argue that Guards Red or Grand Prix White with Sports pack is the ideal spec for reviving their '80s yuppie fantasies, but I prefer my alter egos to be a bit more subtle: it's no good being Clark Kent if you still wear your red underpants outside your trousers. No, 'my' Carrera 3.2 would be a muted metallic hue, in standard – wing-free – coupé form, perhaps even on the factory 'telephone dial' alloys with half-leather trim. The perfect supercar? Maybe, and the fact that you could buy one – with a little bit of belt-tightening, a few compromises and a not-impossible monthly repayment – makes it all the more desirable.

Thanks to *The Hairpin Company (01249 760686; thehairpincompany.co.uk), and to Paul Stephens (01440 714884; paul-stephens.com)*

'Whale tail' part of Sport pack with stiff dampers and Fuchs

The Wild

Bunch

This motorsport-inspired trio of forced-induction pioneers brought the fledgling turbo into the mainstream. Braving the fearsome Saab 99, Porsche 911 and BMW 2002

WORDS **SIMON CHARLESWORTH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

BMW 2002 turbo

Today, the turbo is all grown up. It has now been rehabilitated and domesticated, exorcised of the wild ways of its youth. No longer is it just a crudely effective mechanical means with which to conjure mega-horsepower bragging rights. Swiss engineer Alfred Büchi's 'spinning top' is now a mild-mannered device that assists in ticking all of the right eco-efficient boxes.

Even in Formula One, the turbo assists the hybrid powerplant rather than offering seemingly unlimited power for a limited period before expiring in a cloud of smoke – as was the case with many of the 1980s incarnations.

The European trio you see here, however, represents the pioneering generation of turbocharging. Sired by motorsport, or at least conceived with it in mind, these now-classic roadgoing machines have a considerably different image. These were renowned in their day for being quick-tempered beasts with a sadistic predilection for spitting unwary drivers off the road in a frenzy of fishtailing tyre smoke. Cars to approach with caution and a degree of awe.

So, as the shortest straw is drawn and the office brown trousers are issued, will this reputation prove to be deserved? Or have the Porsche 911, Saab 99 and BMW 2002 all been misrepresented, their images unfairly tarnished by decades of Chinese whispers? Let's find out...

Approach the BMW 2002 turbo from head-on and you will experience a definite unease. The car brings to mind an ice-hockey player in full battledress who's intent on breaking bones. Those headlights stare coldly right through you with an intimidating 'did you spill my pint?' malevolence. You can see why this car's owner, Stuart Lawson, affectionately refers to his 1974 model as a "hooligan".

The turbo's origins lie in the 280bhp 2002TIK – 'K' for *kompressor* – with which Dieter Quester had won the Group 5 division of the 1969 European Touring Car Championship. The German driver had taken the 1968 title in his 2002ti, so running an Eberspächer turbocharger – even if it was comparatively new to the motor industry – was viewed as an effective way of retaining his 2-litre crown.

New ETCC regulations for 1970 stipulated that non-homologated turbocharged cars be excluded, which forced the 290bhp 2002TIK up into Group 7, where it was not competitive, but Quester's car did inspire BMW's Alex von Falkenhausen to develop a roadgoing version. After three years of development, the 2002 turbo was launched at the 1973 Frankfurt motor show. Not only would it further enhance BMW's image as a performance marque that was adept at dancing along technology's cutting edge, but its production run would also homologate the 2002 turbo engine.

Alas, reality failed to get the memo. No sooner had the press cars taken to the road – each one bearing that famous reverse-legend spoiler graphic – than West German politics intervened. The decal, it was claimed, would encourage fast and aggressive driving. BMW listened, sort of, and although dealers would supply the stickers, they were not permitted to apply them to the cars.

Then motorsport regulations changed (banning turbos) and the BMW was launched just in time to get a front-row seat for the 1973 Oil Crisis. A situation that made the price of a barrel of oil quadruple also made it hard to sell pricey performance cars with a 21mpg thirst – and it made the increasingly vociferous socks 'n' sandals brigade even more unhappy. Instead of 2000 turbos being built, in total just 1672 rolled out of the Munich factory.

Away from the pong of politics and circuit racing, the turbo lifted the 2002 out of its familiar market territory – where the tii locked horns with RS2000s, 2000 GTVs and Dolly Sprints – and put it bang into the stomping ground of the Porsche 911. Spooling out 170bhp at 5800rpm and 171lb ft at 4000rpm, the £4221 BMW could scorch to a maximum speed of 130mph, knocking 0-60mph on the head in a mere 7.3 secs. That made it faster than a 911 and more expensive than a Jaguar E-type V12.

Such welly did not come without criticism, as *Autocar* remarked: 'The only further point that might be made in the context of handling concerns the effects of the peakiness of the power output. In effect, this means that as one is accelerating through a long corner, one is getting a steadily increasing amount of power, tending to tighten the line more and more.'

Two optional extras make Stuart's ex-Italian-

Clockwise from top: red surround on instrument panel brightens up the 2002's sombre interior; badging and bodykit hint at performance; iconic BMW Motorsport stripes; hot 170bhp 'four' is a gem

market example a different animal from that tested by *Autocar*, however. While you could pedantically discuss the effect the FPS 'bottle-top' alloys have on the BMW's handling characteristics, its unusual five-speed manual gearbox tames its wicked ways. The closer, more numerous ratios ensure a less spiky output delivery, helping to calm the turbo's crazy horses at full gallop.

Provided, that is, your right hand can come to terms with the transmission's dogleg pattern and rather gristly change quality. "Once you've got second," advises Stuart, "the gearbox is easy. I don't think they're hard to drive. If you read the early reports on them, they sound like a nightmare – they're not. Although they can be in the wet..." A cursory glance at the bright baby-blue sky is followed by a sigh of relief.

The cabin is pure circa 1973 BMW, but with a dash-top boost gauge, a very red surround to the VDO instruments and compulsory left-hand-drive (the KKK turbo installation caused the quicker-ratio ZF-Gemmer steering box to overheat in right-hooker prototypes, although two were built). After being advised that "second gear is rarely bothered with" and "you can do anything between 1000rpm and 8000rpm", the 6500rpm redline is noted and the throttle squeezed.

At 3000rpm boost builds, and by 4000rpm you're left in no doubt: the turbo whistles away like a good 'un. Everything gets more manic: revs, acceleration and your pulse as the tacho needle throws itself toward the redline. The fuel-injected M10's gruff tone, the fruity exhaust note and the turbo's frenzy all make this a car in which a radio would be a crime.

In this particular 2002, the worm-and-roller steering is peachy. Slop is non-existent and straight-ahead vagueness is so minimal that it feels the equal to many a manual rack-and-pinion set-up. It is also perfectly weighted, positive, consistent from lock to lock and beautifully in-sync with the BMW's eager turn-in – not to mention constantly providing a forthcoming commentary about everything the road surface is doing.

The uprated suspension will roll when darting from left to right, with that wonderfully wayward semi-trailing-arm rear joining in the fun – or, in the wet, the terror. Yet the comfortable ride and deft damping don't compromise the grip levels of the 185/70 VR13 tyres in the slightest. Over today's winding, climbing, big-dipper Salisbury Plain roads, it's all so planted and approachable – and when the VDO boost gauge darts into life, the acceleration, even by today's standards, exhilarates. Your grin becomes a chuckle as the engine scurries up its rev range, and the blown single-overhead-cam 'four' just doesn't feel strained or breathless at the redline.

Far from being a sweaty-backed health-and-safety risk too far, the lithe, uncomplicated 2002 is as approachable as it is impressive. Indeed, so enjoyable is the experience that it feels like a tonic capable of rejuvenating the most tired, burnt-out and jaded of drivers. It is almost as if BMW has presented you with a time capsule containing your eerily preserved 17-year-old self, before mortgage rates, cholesterol monitoring and 'tossing ideas into the think-wok' had done their worst.

Thanks to *Stuart Lawson and Barney Halse at Classic Heroes (classicheroes.co.uk)*

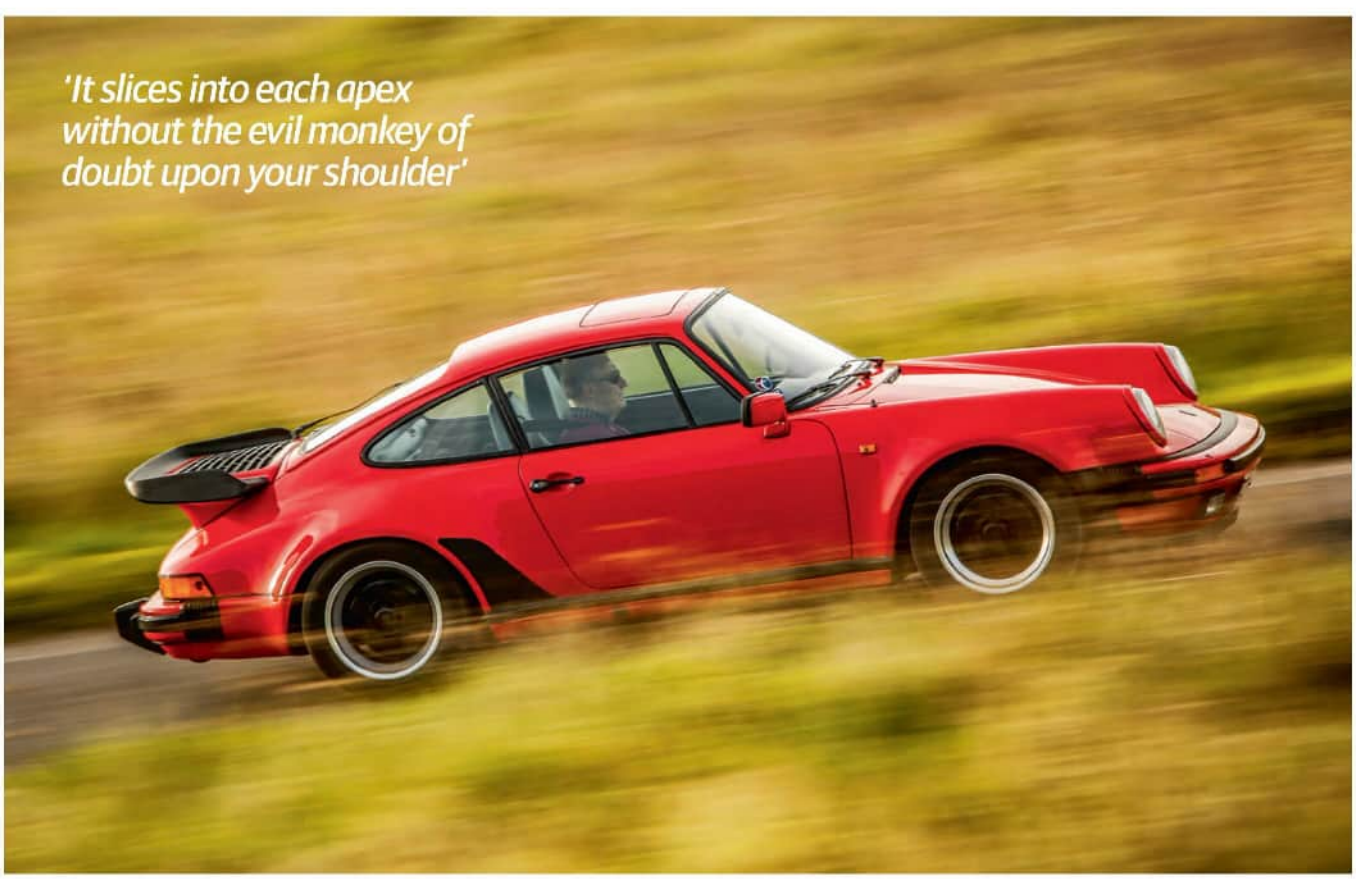
Porsche 911 turbo

Whether the passenger seat is occupied or not, you're never alone when driving a Porsche 911. Be it the simply appointed interior, floor-hinged pedals huddling stage left, five VDO dials stacked like plates on grandma's Victorian dresser or the mechanical shenanigans astern, lineage, reputation, plaudits and, perhaps, occasional criticism accompany every mile.

Porsche could have stolen a march on the turbocharged competition in 1969, when it was experimenting with blown 2-litre Type 901 engines for the 911 and 914/6, but these were shelved. Instead, it waited until 1975 to launch the 2994cc 911 turbo, after it had dominated the 1972 and '73 Can-Am championships with the mighty 917/10K and 917/30KL.

While the new model's wider track and front and rear arches similar to those of the Carrera RS 3.0 drew comments, the 911 turbo would be forever associated with that large 'whale-tail' rear wing. It also drew its basic 930/50 engine from the RS 3.0. The specification included electronic ignition, forged alloy 6.5:1 compression pistons, Bosch K-Jetronic ignition and a KKK turbocharger. All of this added up to 260bhp at 5500rpm and 253lb ft at 4000rpm, plus performance stats of 0-60mph in 6 secs and a supercar-bothering 156mph top speed.

Unlike the stripped-out RSR, the £24,449 turbo's interior came appointed ready for large servings of road mileage. Production was intended to run to 500 units, but that plan went the same way as the one to axe the 911 in 1981. Instead, the 3-litre (2819 built) was superseded



Clockwise from left: classic outline is an '80s icon, especially in Guards Red; businesslike interior; 911 turbo has superb traction; intercooler of 3.3-litre flat-six necessitated bulkier spoiler; fine high-speed stability; satin-black trim; Fuchs alloys – the 911 turbo was an early adopter of ultra-low-profile tyres

in 1977 by the 3299cc 930/60, which ran a 7:1 compression ratio along with an intercooler and a larger compressor plus a host of other improvements designed to boost both torque and reliability. It produced 300bhp at 5500rpm and 304lb ft at 4000rpm, meaning that the top speed rose to 160mph, while the 0-60mph time fell to 5.3 secs.

Outside, the 3.3-litre model adopted the bulkier, intercooler-friendly 'tea-tray' rear spoiler. Unfortunately, the larger engine and new clutch design necessitated a longer rear overhang, which did little for the turbo's weight distribution. On the plus side, these revisions made it the quickest-accelerating car of its era. *Motor* concluded: 'We said of the 3-litre turbo that "few, if any, cars have impressed us so much". That's a difficult act to follow, but the 3.3-litre version is an even better car, which fully lives up to Porsche's claim that it offers "Racing performance with saloon car comfort".'

The acceleration, top speed, handling and brakes were each singled out for praise, and the model would remain in production until 1989. For that final year it would finally be equipped with a five-speed 'box butch enough to cope with all that torque. By then, however, the ink had turned sour, with one *CAR* critique condemning the turbo's 'atrocious balance'.

Michael Eatough's 70,000-mile example dates from 1981. Sporting a quintessential young-and-upcoming Guards Red finish, the only thing missing from this 1980s microcosm is the Pet Shop Boys' *Opportunities* blaring from the stereo. "At 100mph," says Michael, "the turbo is not on – there's nil boost and it's just floating along. Then you can put your foot down and the whole thing just takes off. It's quite phenomenal. You need to get the car running, though, and all the ratios on the four-speed gearbox are high, but then it's got so much torque."

The front end of a 911 treads the perilously thin line between eager, dependable dissemination of information, and the questionable nervousness of a high-wire artist with L-plates. Depending on the car, this is either fantastic or it can feel like a supermarket trolley with a wonky wheel. Its unladen nose and excessive front spring rating cultivate a trust issue with what could almost be mistaken for wheel imbalance or bump-steer.

Not here, though. On bone-dry roads and steered with gentle hands, there is no sign of the Porsche's psychotic alter ego Mr Hyde and, to be blunt, only a loon would bin a classic 930 in this day and age. Weight distribution and transfer? Balance? None is an issue.

At speed, this 911 is stable and trustworthy on the straights, yet it wilfully slices into an apex without the evil monkey of doubt perched upon your shoulder. The steering – a powerful sermon against the over-indulgence of power assistance – is light, consistent and forthcoming. Roll is scarcely sniffed, while the turbo manages to ride the ups, downs and imperfections of these fast, undulating roads in a manner that shames many a modern car. Exiting bends, esses and corners, the Porsche's traction really is impeccable, which is just as well.

The gearchange might be a bit crotchety and occasionally crunchy on engagement, but you rarely have to bother with it. The engine dominates with its soundtrack and an output as mighty and seamless as Sizewell B. Compared with a 3-litre unit, the intercooled 3.3 (18,770 of which were built) does not shout its turbocharged intentions but, as Michael says: "When it's on boost, you know it!"

The air-cooled flat-six and turbo merrily cooperate and, despite the overriding position of the tacho, eyes remain stuck to the laminated view ahead. Crikey! This really has some muscle. We're not talking modern-day so-fast-it's-uncomfortable pace, but an enjoyable 0-100mph in 12 secs quick. And, thanks to its manageable width (at 5ft 10in, it is a scarcely believable 10½in narrower than a current Vauxhall Astra), the speed is easy to wield.

Select second gear and the right brogue goes deep. Past bass-rich resonance, escalating into a soulful, almost Motown V8 groove – accompanied by fluttering cam gear – and it all dissolves into a sensual guts 'n' glory bellow. What a performance, and surely worthy of another encore.

In the past, I've been resolute in my heathen disbelief of the flat-six Porsche, sitting in a bewildered minority as the world and its dog works itself into a frothing frenzy like critics at the Turner Prize. If, however, my avowed 911 atheism had started to creak, crack and crumble following a 3-litre encounter, this corking turbo has blown it apart and left it in smithereens.

***Thanks to** Michael Eatough and Porsche Club GB (01608 652911; porscheclubgb.com)*

Saab 99 turbo

Since 1968, Svenska Aeroplan Aktiebolaget had been offering a new, larger sister to its 96: the Sixten Sason-designed 99. Competing in the compact executive class, the latest son of Trollhättan continued the no-nonsense company's dissident, quirky ethos – an approach that shunned compromise on engineering integrity.

The 99 was powered by a unit based on Triumph's slant-four – later improved and built by Saab itself following BL quality woes (at which point it was renamed the Saab B engine). The route to more power initially involved a plan to use the Stag V8, but, while the prospect of a thoroughly debugged Saab-built V8 is actually quite tantalising, with that bullet dodged the Swedes turned to a device that had been used in aero engines since the 1920s: the turbocharger.

After thorough development – it ran 100 prototypes for a total of 2.9 million miles – the £7850 Saab 99 turbo was launched with the three-door Combi coupé body in 1978. This was joined the following year by a two-door version that would homologate the model for rallying. Toting a chain-driven, single-overhead-cam 1985cc engine with a 7.5:1 compression ratio, Bosch fuel injection, a Garrett turbo, altered cam timing, sodium-filled exhaust valves and an oil cooler, this 'four' packed a punch far beyond its cubic means. It gave 145bhp at 5000rpm with 174lb ft at 3000rpm, representing an increase in output over the normally aspirated car of 23% more power and 45% more torque. While the Combi managed 0-60mph in 8.9 secs and a top speed just short of 120mph, the lighter two-door was even quicker, nailing 0-60mph in 8.5 secs and going on to exceed two miles per minute.

Driven by Stig Blomqvist and Per Eklund, the 99 Turbo would be Saab's last works rally entrant, its career cut short by the arrival of the Audi quattro, ballooning budgets and Group B. But, while the model was denied a trophy haul to rival that of the 96, the 99 turbo would blow the motoring press off its feet.

'Having experienced turbo motoring first

Clockwise from left: Saab is the most subtle shape; wacky orange trim; front-wheel-drive chassis means that 99 is easy to punt alongat speed; blown engine is a development of Triumph's slant-four unit

hand, we can see why Saab has so much faith in the machine," *Motor* reportedIn period. 'It's exceptional.' On another occasion, the magazine said: 'Between 40 and 100mph, the Saab accelerates faster than just about any four-seater saloon in the world. And that means overtaking and cross-country ability of the sort hitherto the preserve of expensive exotica.' *Autocar*, meanwhile, candidly admitted: 'Occasionally a car comes along which shocks [our] seen-it-all, driven-them-all staff... Such a car is Saab's turbo.'

Owner David Dallimore bought his 99 new in 1980. It's one of the 600 homologation two-doors built (400 red cars were produced at Trollhättan, with another 200 black examples constructed by Saab-Valmet in Uusikaupunki, Finland). "I kept hold of it because it just kept going," he says. "It's only had one mechanical problem – the jackshaft that drives the water pump – and one electrical issue, which was a manufacturing fault in the Bosch alternator. It's the engineering on them; that's why I bought it originally. They're over-engineered and, as a family saloon, it can raise a smile when you feel the need."

The 99 turbo is the subtlest member of our trio. As our photographs are taken, the Saab has bided its time, while the German pair seem to competitively flex their go-faster stripes or brandish their spoilers for spotlight glory. The black paint conceals the 99's idiosyncratic prettiness, its performance apparel limited to discreet touches to the bumpers and tail-lights, a front air dam and 'Inca' turbine-blade alloys.

The interior fixtures and fittings owe a lot to lesser 99s; only the turbo's self-conscious boost gauge heralds this car as being a forced-induction model. The three main instruments have a whiff of the military about them, a ribbon of treen-effect Fablon flutters across the dash, while those bright velour seats appear to be trimmed in Jason King's dressing gown.

In the process of making yourself at home, you are unwittingly serenaded by Saab-ness. You notice compact window winders that are so effortless and high-geared they make electric ones a pointless gimmick. Then there are intuitive, easy-to-use adjusters on the side of the seat and, for the driver, a thermostatically controlled heated seat. There's also the upright windscreen, set into a slim-pillared glasshouse that even among classics sets a precedent for all-round visibility and primary safety.

Twist the ignition key – which, of course, is down between the front seats. The pedals and steering wheel are offset to the left, but the 99 more than compensates for this minor inconvenience with a four-speed gearbox that shames the Teutonic pair. It has a wonderfully oiled action with such a clear, positive gate and sensible throw that, within just a few yards, it feels as if the gearstick and your left hand have been chums for years.

Sometimes, single-minded engineering longevity comes at the expense of a driving experience that is as sparkling and titivating as a stale bun. Yet, with its promising specification of all-round coil springs, front double wishbones, rack-and-pinion steering and solidly located rear beam axle, the Saab delivers fun aplenty. Grip is plentiful and the ride is polished, yet it jubilantly scampers around corners with the appetite of a hot hatchback, seldom bothering its disc brakes. The steering's weight, gearing and feedback all earn high marks.

Build the revs to 3000rpm and from there you experience the turbo's solid, faultless shove all the way to 5000rpm. Only beyond peak power – heading towards the 5500rpm redline – does the unobtrusive motor begin to sound a little strained and unhappy, but just grab another cog and off you go again.

For someone reared on front-wheel drive, acclimatisation is more immediate than in the 911 or the 2002. The Saab is surprisingly unassuming; it owes a lot of its modern feel to its ease of use. Lacking a reputation for unexpected bouts of boardroom backstabbing, plus having easier controls with greater intuition – the gearchange, top-hinged pedals and rack and pinion steering – means that less concentration is required to gain second-nature familiarity. Its completeness conjures the impression that it is the only car here that you could fully exploit regardless of Mother Nature's meteorological mood.

Sheer speculation? Yes. What isn't, though, is that the 99 turbo was built by a company that cared enough about its customers to over-engineer reliability at the expense of bottom-line profitability, and that could not be illustrated more emphatically than by the fact that David has run this car for 35 years and more than 140,000 miles, during which time it has experienced only two minor faults.

If the BMW is the most fun car here and the Porsche the most impressive, then it's the Saab that has been the most surprising.

US pioneers

The first production turbocharged car was the F85 Cutlass-based Oldsmobile Jetfire, launched at New York's 1962 International Automobile Show. Running 10.25:1 compression and 5psi of boost, its 215bhp, 3.5-litre V8 gave a 16% power increase over the equivalent naturally aspirated unit. When specified with a four-speed manual, the Jetfire was could hit 60mph in 8.5 secs and go on to 107mph.

The model was criticised for its soft suspension, uncooperative transmission and slow steering, but its real problems revolved around driving style and maintenance. The engine suffered from detonation, which meant the single-barrel Rochester carburettor had to be cooled by Turbo-Rocket fluid injection – a mixture of

water, methanol and corrosion inhibitor. Ironically, this was envisaged to cope with hard driving, yet often they weren't driven hard enough. Another issue was keeping the one-gallon coolant-injection reservoir topped up. Depending on driving style, it could last either 2240 miles or just 224. When empty, it triggered a throttle bypass valve. Many owners, rather than obtaining correct Olds Turbo-Rocket fluid, resorted to tap water. Either oversight would result in the turbo's compressor shaft eventually seizing. When the model was axed in 1964, just over 9500 had been sold.

Only a month after the launch of the Jetfire, Olds' GM sister division, Chevrolet, came up with the turbocharged Corvair Monza Spyder. The Corvair was a rear-engined variation of the front-engined Olds Y-body compact and was a response to rising fuel prices and the popularity of European imports. Enhancing the 'poor man's Porsche' reputation of the sporting convertible and Club Coupe Monza models, the Spyder gave 150bhp from its 2.3-litre air-cooled flat-six: 0-60mph took 8.3 secs, while maximum speed was 103mph.

The Corvair's installation (above) lacked a wastegate and coolant injection, yet it ran to 11psi, twice that of the Olds' but with a lower 8:1 compression. Unsurprisingly, this affected low-down torque and meant obvious lag, while the carb took patience to set up and suffered from heat soak.

This unit was an option on the 1965 second-gen Corvair Corsa but was axed in '66 – the year it was rumoured GM had planned to discontinue all Corvairs when sales fell to less than half of 1965 levels.

Diverging fortunes

The GTS was the last hurrah for the 928, yet the car it was designed to replace, the 911, was just getting into its stride with the Carrera RS 3.8

WORDS **CHRIS CHILTON** PHOTOGRAPHY **LUC LACEY**


K739 JWC

'These two could have shared showroom space back in the 1990s, although they look generations apart – because fundamentally they are'

Don't sweat the small stuff, so the famous saying goes; it's the bigger picture that matters. But sometimes you have to understand the detail so you can truly appreciate the bigger picture. Sometimes those details *are* the bigger picture.

On the surface, the two cars we have here would seem to share little beyond the Porsche crests on their bonnets, teardrop 'Cup' mirrors, and the Guards Red warpaint they wear. One is the last gasp of Porsche's failed front-engined GT experiment to replace the 911 and recently sold at The Hairpin Company for around £70,000. The other, the former property of four-time IndyCar champ Dario Franchitti, is a thinly veiled racing car offered at the same time for a not-inconsequential £1.13m more.

But they each represent the pinnacle of their respective model lines. If many of us aspire to Porsche ownership, these specific models, the 928 GTS and 964 Carrera RS 3.8, are the cars to which many existing owners of 928s and late air-cooled 911s aspire. Very few will ever manage it because their desirability is matched by their rarity. They are the unicorns.

Coincidentally, these two machines are also contemporaries and could have shared showroom space back in the early 1990s, although they look generations apart because, of course, fundamentally they are. Mentally strip away the RS 3.8's swollen arches and giant rear wing, and the 911 looks delicate and so very narrow. But then its core shape can be traced to the 901 Porsche unveiled at the Frankfurt motor show in 1963, whereas the 928 – itself no spring chicken by the time this GTS was built – is almost 15 years younger.

The basic silhouette of this 1992 GTS is little different from that of the original 4.5-litre, spoiler-free 928 introduced at Geneva in 1977, but the GTS is a bigger car in every way. Porsche continued to evolve the 928 constantly throughout its 17-year life, even after it had realised that the front-engined car could never replace the 911 as originally envisaged. But the step-change that's most relevant to the GTS backstory occurred in the autumn of 1986 when Porsche introduced the 928 S4, stretching the aluminium V8 to 5 litres, adding twin-cam, four-valve heads and, most obviously, smoothing the bumpers and fitting flush lights.

The USA and Continental Europe received a 100kg (220lb) lighter, more driver-focused 928 Club Sport spin-off in 1987, while the UK got a similar, if slightly less extreme, SE; both were replaced in early 1989 by the 928 GT, which offered more of the same and subsequently morphed, finally, into the GTS in 1992. This then became the only 928 offered until the model line was axed three years later.

It takes a fairly eagle eye to tell an S4 from an SE or a GT, but not so the GTS, whose fat rear wheelarch flares make it the simplest of all 928 spots and build the excitement as you reach for the doorhandle. Swing open the long door, drop into an interior that's greyer than John Major's *Spitting Image* puppet and you're immediately struck by the vision afforded in every direction, particularly ahead. The dashboard falls away from the scuttle, creating an airy feel alien to Jaguar XJ-S drivers, and then wraps round and into the door panels in very modern fashion.

The V8 fires easily and settles to a purposeful rumble that can be subbed for a muted bark with a blip of gas that sets the car rocking on its springs like a garage-built hot rod. If that

Subtle cues confirm the positions of the GTS and Carrera RS 3.8 at the peak of their respective ranges, although discretion is not one of the strong suits of the loud and proud 911

showboating and the butch reputation of the GTS suggest you might want to put in a few 200lb barbell squats to limber up for pressing the clutch, it's a surprise to discover that the left-most of the three pedals – which are oddly mismatched for height – is actually as light as a supermini's. The gearlever, too, requires almost no physical effort, only a little of the mental kind as a consequence to make sure you're selecting the intended of its five ratios.

Far more rare and desirable than the four-speed automatic alternative, that transmission – a dogleg-shift Getrag five-speeder driving the rear wheels through Porsche's clever, electronically controlled PSD limited-slip differential – is mounted at the back of the car. It's connected via a torque tube to the V8 that's currently wafting the 928's considerable 1620kg heft along Oxfordshire's damp spring lanes on the merest whiff of throttle.

Tightening emissions regulations in the early 1990s forced Porsche to switch to milder cams for the GTS, but there was ample compensation from a longer stroke that stretched capacity from 5.0 to 5.4 litres and new pistons that hiked the compression up four points to 10.4:1. These changes lifted power from the GT's 326bhp to 345bhp, but they made a much bigger impression on the torque output, whose peak swelled by 51lb ft to a thick-set 369lb ft. That maximum doesn't arrive until 4250rpm, but there's enough fullness in the foothills of the torque curve to make wringing this V8 optional rather than essential.

An extra prod of right foot to dispatch a dawdler is met with a crisp response from the Bosch fuel-injected V8 at low revs, with a noticeably stronger lunge forward when you try the same trick with the red needles wrapped further round the clear but slightly bland dials. *Autocar* measured the GTS at 5.4 secs to 60mph and 168mph at the far end, numbers impressive enough to keep any modern honest.

With fat 225 front, 255 rear rubber wrapped around its 17in alloys and a claimed 50/50 weight distribution thanks to the transaxle layout, the GTS doesn't have anything to fear from those whippersnappers in the bends, either. You never quite escape the feeling that you're piloting a big car, but the light, surprisingly feelsome steering points the 928 keenly into every corner, and with the headlights raised to cut through the almost wintry gloom – making you feel as if you're driving a Caterham with a dining table draped over its bonnet – it's not hard to place the car exactly where you want it.

Familiarity has helped to prevent the shape of the 911 from dating; less so the 928, despite it being the younger silhouette by over a decade

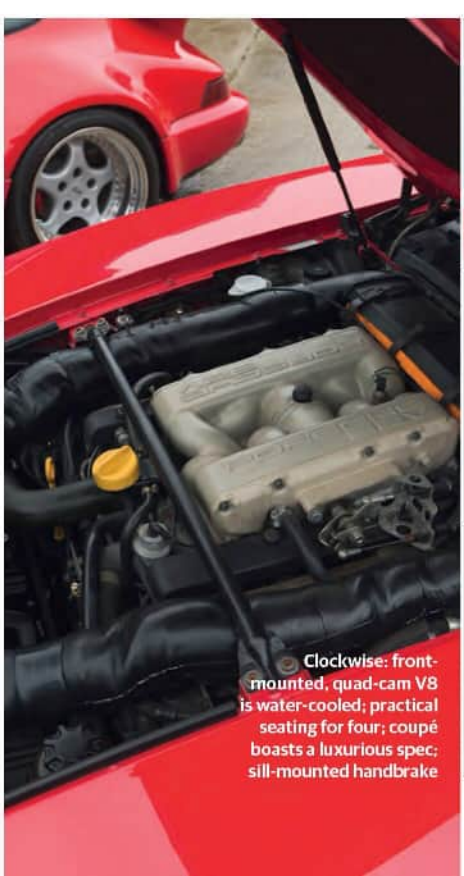
There's a touch of vertical movement along undulating B-roads, and some harshness over sharper intrusions, but body roll is kept smartly in check. Even in these damp conditions, and even with this much torque on hand, the GTS feels reassuringly tied down, only edging wide at the rear on the tightest of curves and with your most mischievous mode engaged.

It's clear that this is far more than a big, grand-touring cruiser. Yes, it's better suited to long-distance driving than a 911, but it delivers so much more of a sports car feel and invites you to up the pace more than a contemporary XJ-S or BMW 850i could, albeit at the expense of some of the refinement that the 928's classic GT proportions promise.

Contemporary testers regularly criticised the 928's tyre roar, particularly on the later cars, but today it's the steering kickback on uneven surfaces that quite literally jars. It makes you wonder exactly how bad the 964 Carrera RS, a machine with no *gran turismo* pretensions whatsoever, might feel on these roads.

From the looks on the faces of other road users, they're wondering the same. In fact, never mind whether the RS 3.8 works on these roads, they're probably wondering whether it's even allowed on them. The 928 is a striking-looking car,and might be less familiar than the 911, but the wings, the stance and the sound make it impossible not to stare open-mouthed at the RS, which looks as if it took a wrong turn out of *parc fermé* after the Nürburgring 24 Hours.

And that's no coincidence. This machine's




Clockwise: front-mounted, quad-cam V8 is water-cooled; practical seating for four; coupé boasts a luxurious spec; sill-mounted handbrake

'With headlights raised to cut through the gloom, it feels as if you're driving a Caterham with a dining table over its bonnet'

The 911's iconic air-cooled flat-six engine was stretched to a shade under 3.8 litres, providing a 296bhp sting in the tail of the RS

predecessor, the 964 Carrera RS, much like its 1973 and '74 namesakes and the little-known 911SC/RS, existed purely to homologate Porsche's racing machinery. It was unveiled to the world at the 1991 Geneva Salon and based on the 964-generation 911 that had arrived two years earlier. It was a model that retained most of the original 911's compact, air-cooled character (and abysmal ergonomics), but finally delivered anti-lock brakes, power-assisted steering, coil-sprung suspension and even the options of Tiptronic automatic transmission and four-wheel drive.

The RS, in effect a roadgoing version of Porsche's Carrera Cup racer, did without much of that extraneous stuff. The narrow-arched bodyshell retained the 964 Carrera 2 and 4 road cars' electrically operated rear wing, but was seam-welded, fitted with thinner glass, little soundproofing, aluminium front and rear panels and no underseal. Brake sizes grew and the ride height shrank, the handsome 17in Cup wheels hiding stiffer springs and lightweight aluminium hubs. The better-equipped Touring versions weighed around 1300kg (2866lb), but the more basic Sport model came in at 1230kg (2712lb), representing a 10% saving versus a Carrera and magnifying the effect of a modest 10bhp boost to 256bhp for the 3.6-litre flat-six.

Today those first RSs routinely change hands for more than £170,000 and are fêted as among the greatest Porsches ever built. But in period, before weekend track days had really taken off and made sense of this kind of car, not everyone was quite so enamoured. *Autocar* praised the responsive engine, crisp gearchange and brake feel, but was less effusive about the harsh ride and 'unbearable' tyre rumble, concluding: 'It isn't half the road car it could and should be.'

Stuttgart's next move was unlikely to do anything to mute those gripes. With an eye on GT racing, Porsche whacked the RS dial round to 11, creating a 964 RSR in 1993 and, once again, a series of road cars to homologate it. Where the earlier, narrow-body RS looked like a tougher Carrera, the 3.8 made even the turbo look tame. It pinched the turbo's fat rear arches, but filled them with even bigger Speedline wheels measuring 9in wide at the nose and an outrageous, almost Countach-sized 11in at the back. And squeezing them into the Tarmac was a giant, multi-adjustable rear wing whose end plates bore the legend 'RS 3.8' to let everyone know what was hiding under the rear lid.

When the door shuts with that satisfyingly solid 911 'clunk' you're struck by how slim, old-fashioned and upright the cockpit feels after the 928. The interior is black and bare, stripped of almost anything not useful in the pursuit of going quickly, and features the steering wheel on the right, making it one of three so-equipped and the only one supplied new to the UK. There are simple, flat door panels with the classic RS fabric latch pulls, a fabulous three-spoke steering wheel that obscures a big chunk of the speedo's arc, and a pair of the most perfect hard-shell bucket seats that anyone with a monk-like control of their beer and choccy urges could wish for.

Bar the very earliest cars, the standard 964 Carreras came fitted with big, heavy dual-mass flywheels. The RS cars didn't, to the benefit of engine response, but definitely not mechanical refinement. Fire up the 3.8 and the six-speed gearbox chunters noisily through the rear carpet and into the void reserved for rear seats in lesser 911s. Feeling scared yet? The floor-mounted pedals are skewed heavily to the left, but first gear slots home with the kind of precision that would shock owners of early 911s and sets the tone for everything that's to come.

There's no slop, no slack, no messing about with the RS 3.8. The ride is bearable, but the suspension, which comprises shorter, stiffer springs, tight Bilstein dampers and adjustable anti-roll bars, has clearly been set up with smoother surfaces in mind, and the brake pedal feels fantastically firm underfoot. Roll the fat wheel away from centre and the twin peaks of the 911's wings dart into the coming bend, weight building at your wrists, but never too strongly thanks to a rare power-steering option. It makes this Porsche a touch more welcoming without compromising on communication, and amplifying the feeling of a total lack of inertia in the way the RS changes pace and direction. But then this is a very light car; 20kg lighter again than the Carrera RS 3.6 despite the wide shell and wheels, with aluminium doors helping to bring the weight down to 1210kg (2668lb).



Clockwise: spartan, upright RS cabin is all about purpose; huge wing leaves you in no doubt; rear seats have gone in a crash diet; Minimalist door pulls

PORSCHE 911 CARRERA RS 3.8

Sold/number built 1993/90
Construction steel monocoque with aluminium doors and engine lid
Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 3746cc flat-six, Bosch DME sequential fuel injection
Max power 296bhp @ 6500rpm
Max torque 266lb ft @ 5250rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD via a limited-slip differential
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, **rear** semi-trailing arms, struts; anti-roll bar f/r
Steering power-assisted rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated discs, with servo and anti-lock
Length 14ft ¼in (4275mm)
Width 5ft 10in (1775mm)
Height 4ft 2in (1270mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 5½in (2272mm)
Weight 2668lb (1210kg)
0-60mph 4.9 secs
Top speed 170mph **Mpg** 25.6
Price new DM225,000 (1993)

PORSCHE 928 GTS

Sold/number built 1992-'95/2831
Construction steel monocoque with aluminium doors, front wings and bonnet
Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 5397cc 90° V8, Bosch LH-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 345bhp @ 5700rpm
Max torque 369lb ft @ 4250rpm
Transmission five-speed manual or four-speed automatic, RWD via a limited-slip differential
Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar f/r; 'Weissach axle' control link to rear
Steering power-assisted rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated discs, with servo and anti-lock
Length 13ft 11¼in (4250mm)
Width 6ft 2½in (1890mm)
Height 4ft 2½in (1282mm)
Wheelbase 8ft 2½in (2500mm)
Weight 3571lb (1620kg)
0-60mph 5.4 secs
Top speed 168mph
Mpg 15
Price new £72,950 (1995)

'While the RS doesn't have the low-rev pull that makes the 928 feel so effortless, you're soon into the zone where things get exciting'

Disparate approaches, yet their outright performance figures are remarkably similar. Left: stickers celebrate past glories

Two flagship models from the same source and the same era, yet their characters – and their subsequent fortunes – couldn't be more different

That, however, wasn't enough for Porsche's Weissach motorsport department, which teased the flat-six up from 256 to 296bhp by extending the stroke to liberate another 200cc and fitting lightweight, higher-compression pistons and rockers. And it's not just the extra clout over a contemporary 248bhp Carrera 2 that you notice, but the incredible enthusiasm this engine shows for creating it. The throttle response is fantastic, the crisp bark of the intake and exhaust urging you to try harder, and while the RS doesn't have the same low-rev pull that makes the 928 feel so effortlessly rapid, it spins up so quickly that you're soon into the 4-5000rpm zone where things really start to get exciting, and on your way to the 7200rpm redline. Porsche quoted a 170mph top speed for the 3.8, 1mph less than it claimed for the 928 GTS, and hampered no doubt by that giant rear wing. But it also claimed 4.9 secs to 60mph, putting the rear-engined car half a second ahead to the yardstick.

But if there's a surprise, given its looks and its rawness, it's that the RS is far less intimidating, far easier to push than its swagger suggests. As with most 911s, particularly those running big back rubber, the handling is biased towards understeer, and while the RS 3.8 is a fast car in absolute terms, its performance is easily contained by the grip and traction those fat wheels and huge rear wing deliver.

Of course, it's only on a circuit and at much higher speeds than we're able to achieve today that the true benefit of much of the RS 3.8's specialised componentry and set-up can be experienced. The irony is that most of the best-driving 911s are now too valuable for all but the most masochistic owners to experience fully as Porsche intended. Even those with an abundance of talent such as Dario, previous owner of this 22,000-mile stunner, who told us that his RS never felt a handful thanks to its abundance of grip over power, but that: "It was too original to drive it how I wanted to. So I turned it into part of a Daytona Spider."

If you fancy your chances with either of these cars, it's predictably the GTS that's the more realistic ownership proposition. While 928 prices deservedly rose dramatically in the middle of the previous decade as this fantastic grand tourer underwent something of a rehabilitation, it's still possible to get into a standard car for £20k. And although this GTS sold for more than three times that thanks to its low mileage, fine condition and rare manual 'box, leggier, full-historied automatic examples of the 2831 GTSs built do crop up for less.

That seems like great value for one of the least numerous Porsches, particularly when you consider that you'll struggle to get into any kind of air-cooled 911 for similar money these days. But the 928 isn't a 911. It couldn't replace the 911 in Porsche fans' affections in the 1970s and '80s, and it certainly can't now. The 911 *is* Porsche, as far as most people are concerned, which is why, despite a slight softening in prices over the past couple of years, demand for 911s and, more pointedly, the most special 911s such as this RS 3.8, will always far outstrip supply.

Thanks to *The Hairpin Company (01249 760686; thehairpincompany.co.uk)*

1131bhp 10,602cc 22 cylinders Four turbos...

Let battle commence!

Lotus struggled against supercar big boys Ferrari and Porsche, but with V8 power the Esprit was a match for the F355 and 993 turbo

WORDS **STEVE SUTCLIFFE** PHOTOGRAPHY MALCOLM GRIFFITHS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P392 FEG

Back in 1996, when Lady Di was still alive and Tony Blair had yet to take office and promise us all that things would only get better – nice one, Tone, thanks for that sage prediction – Lotus was very much on a roll. The Elise had already been unveiled to deafening applause, and then came the Esprit V8, all 349bhp and 172mph of it. This was the Esprit that every Lotus fan had patiently and quietly been waiting for, ever since Julian Thomson had subtly redesigned Peter Stevens' 1987 facelift and 'The Beckers' (Roger and son Matt) had worked their magic on its chassis. Anyone who'd previously driven a four-cylinder Esprit Turbo knew full well that the car was crying out for a touch more energy. And when it arrived courtesy of Hethel's expensive but homegrown 3.5-litre 90° twin-turbo V8, the results were spectacular to say the least.

The price was a mite disturbing at £60,460, as was the car's claimed fuel consumption of just 16.5mpg, but the bottom line was that the latest Esprit had the firepower to deal with just about anything its rivals could throw at it. Considering that those rivals included the highly rated, not to mention brisk and beautiful, Ferrari F355 and the Porsche 911 turbo of the day – the devastatingly effective 993, the first four-wheel-drive turbo that the company had produced – the big-engined Esprit found itself in fierce company.

But, by and large, it could take the heat. Despite the F355 costing half as much again, it was actually a shade slower against the clock. And although the Ferrari was a knee-tremblingly handsome thing in its own right, it was no more dramatic in the metal than was the Esprit. The Porsche, on the other hand, was even more expensive than the Ferrari, costing a barely credible £93,950 (in 1995!) and was at best a misfit visually compared with the longer, lower, more exotic shapes of its mid-engined opponents.

And it was ever thus with the 49-year-old Porsche 911, a situation that remains resolutely unchanged to this day. Nowadays indeed, post-996, the earlier 993 is regarded as the last of the genuinely pretty 911s. It would be pushing things to call this particular version beautiful, what with its bulging wheelarches, 'whale tail' spoiler and, in this case, a disarmingly bright Riviera Blue paint scheme. But next to the 911s that followed it, the 993 looks daintier somehow. Even in *He-Man* turbo specification.

It looks curvaceous, sexy almost, compared with the curiously industrial models that have come since. Even so, the 402bhp 993 was also the first of the 'It's so fast I'm not sure I'm in control of it' 911 turbos. I remember strapping timing gear to this car for the *Autocar* road test of the day, and when the numbers began spewing out of the data machine I couldn't believe my eyes, even though my internal organs – which had been largely putrefied in the process – were aware that something weird was going on.

Zero to 60mph came and went in a majestically painful 3.7 secs, while 0-100mph took just 9.2 secs. That wasn't a great deal slower than the figures we'd generated with a Jaguar XJ220 the year before, and it put the 993 turbo in a league of one against the stopwatch in its day – even alongside machines as exalted as the Esprit V8 and Ferrari F355.

Clockwise from below: styling is much more elegant than earlier 348; V8 sounds gorgeous at high revs; chunky airbag wheel from '96-onwards; signature five-spoke wheel

Not much has changed since, assuming that these three unusually fine examples are in any way representative of their breeds (and they are; all three felt eerily similar to the original test cars that I drove in period). This means that, in any gear and seemingly at any revs, the Porsche rockets away from the other two. I'm not sure why, but that came as a genuine surprise to me, almost 20 years later.

Its low-rev (so theoretically off-boost) response is massively stronger than in the others. You'd perhaps expect that compared with the Esprit because the twin-turbo V8 always did take half a moment to gather its thoughts, but not the Ferrari – in which there are no turbos but, rather, 3.5 litres of high-revving, 380bhp flat-plane-crank Maranello V8, the throttle response of which is supposed to be legendary.

Oh, how the realities of time can dilute the romance contained within the memory banks. I'm fairly sure that in 1995 the 993 turbo felt every inch as fast as this one does now, but declaring it to be *that* much quicker than its equivalent Ferrari – or Lotus – may simply have been too awful to consider at the time. Either way, this particular 18-year-old Porsche absolutely murders the others when it comes to raw straight-line acceleration. Once its 3600cc twin-turbo, twin-intercooled flat-six is on-boost and fully stoked (so anything between 2500rpm and the redline) it feels easily the most potent – to a point where, on any road, it just tears away and leaves its rivals for dead.

It's not as if the Lotus or Ferrari are tired or high-mile examples and the Porsche is 'young' in comparison, either. The Lotus pictured has a shade over 41,000 miles on its odometer. It's a two-owner car that's been unsparingly maintained ever since rolling off the production lines at Hethel in 1996. Its paint, wheels, bodywork and even its *Thunderbirds*-style interior are all immaculate. The leather on its heavily sculpted front seats has the feel and smell of today, not yesteryear, which isn't always the case with Esprits. In this condition it's a near-perfect match for the immaculate and 100% standard, 48,000-mile 1995 Porsche we've lined it up with.

As for the Ferrari, it's a rare peach of a car. It's arguably the best of the F355s in that it's a red GTS with a proper roof. As with the others here it's in unfettled specification but with a mere 28,000 miles on the clock. Inside, it feels to all intents and purposes like a brand-new car, apart from a few tiny blemishes around

'The Ferrari is a knee-tremblingly handsome thing in its own right'

Sublime F355 signalled a return to form for the legendary Italian marque in terms of its mid-engined V8 offerings

FERRARI F355GTS

Sold/number built 1994-'99/11,206
Construction steel monocoque with flat undertray and rear-mounted venturis
Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank, 40-valve 3496cc V8, with Bosch Motronic fuel injection
Max power 380bhp @ 8250rpm
Max torque 268lb ft @ 6000rpm
Transmission six-speed manual or paddle-shift automated manual, RWD
Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bars and electronic damper control
Steering speed-sensitive power-assisted rack and pinion
Brakes 11¾in (300mm) ventilated front, 12¼in (310mm) solid rear discs, with servo and anti-lock
Wheels & tyres: front 7½Jx18in, 225/40 ZR18s **rear** 10Jx18in, 265/40 ZR18s
Length 13ft 11½in (4250mm)
Width 6ft 4½in (1944mm)
Height 3ft 10in (1170mm)
Wheelbase 8ft 4in (2450mm)
Weight 3142lb (1425kg)
0-60mph 4.6 secs **0-100mph** 10.6 secs
Top speed 173mph **Mpg** 18.3
Price new £90,980 (1995)

Giugiaro's original Esprit design had twice been facelifted by the time the dramatic V8 – wings, vents and all – came along

its chromed, open-gate six-speed gearlever.

And between them they are worth... Well, that's where it gets interesting – very interesting indeed, in fact, if your budget is relatively limited. Because if it is, you can strike the Ferrari and Porsche from your wish list immediately. The Lotus, on the other hand, is another story. With only a handful of Esprit V8s on sale in the UK at any one time (and fewer than 1500 made in total), you might expect the value of a top example such as this to be close to the original list price of £60k, but no. It actually sold for just a third of that figure. Like I said, interesting.

So why is it so cheap compared with the Porsche and Ferrari, both of which are still worth more than double that? Two reasons, really. One, it was cheaper than them to begin with, although depreciation has hit it far harder than the others since 1996. And that's because, two, the Esprit V8's reputation has fluctuated over the years – often, but not always, with good reason – to a point where it now looks like the bargain of the century.

We're all aware of the dreaded Lotus acronym, but with the Esprit V8 it seems, or for a time seemed, especially poignant. Developing a V8 engine in-house was, in hindsight, perhaps one of the worst decisions anyone at Hethel ever made. By all accounts,

Clockwise, from left: ventilated discs all round; dated but well-appointed interior would be replaced in 1998; Lotus handles beautifully; V8 also used by AC for Cobra 212 S/C

it cost Lotus more to make this engine than it did to make the entire Elise, and what confounded the problem – what very nearly did for Lotus, full-stop – was that, having funded the design and development of its expensive new powerplant, it then failed to find big-name buyers for it elsewhere.

There was a reason for this, too. To begin with, there were rumours – mutterings, but no more – that the engine had a cooling problem. This was enough to divert the interests of most potential corporate customers, and especially so when the problem turned out to be fact, not fiction, at which point Lotus exacted a small but significant redesign later on in the engine's life.

The other question mark beside the car was its Renault-derived five-speed transmission, which

LOTUS ESPRIT V8

Sold/number built 1996-2004/1489
Construction galvanised steel backbone chassis, glassfibre/Kevlar composite body
Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank, 32-valve 3506cc V8, twin Garrett T25 turbochargers and EFI Technology sequential fuel injection
Max power 349bhp @ 6500rpm
Max torque 295lb ft @ 4250rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones **rear** trailing arms, transverse links; coil springs, telescopics; anti-roll bar f/r
Steering power-assisted rack and pinion
Brakes 11½in (296mm) front, 11¾in (300mm) rear ventilated discs, with servo and anti-lock
Wheels & tyres: front 8½Jx17in, 235/40 ZR17s **rear** 10Jx18in, 285/35 ZR18s
Length 14ft 4in (4369mm)
Width 6ft 1in (1867mm)
Height 3ft 9in (1150mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 11in (2420mm)
Weight 3043lb (1380kg)
0-60mph 4.2 secs
0-100mph 10.3 secs
Top speed 172mph
Mpg 16.5
Price new £60,460 (1996)

'The 911 walks away with the contest, if all you seek is pure speed'

PORSCHE 911 (993) TURBO

Sold/number built 1995-'98/6314
Construction steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank, 12-valve 3600cc flat-six, with twin intercooled turbochargers and Bosch Motronic sequential fuel injection
Max power 402bhp @ 5750rpm
Max torque 398lb ft @ 4500rpm
Transmission six-speed manual, 4WD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts **rear** lateral links, lower wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r
Steering speed-sensitive power-assisted rack and pinion
Brakes 12¾in (322mm) ventilated discs, with servo and anti-lock
Wheels & tyres: front 8Jx18in, 225/40 ZR18s **rear** 10Jx18in, 285/30 ZR18s
Length 13ft 11in (4245mm)
Width 5ft 10¾in (1795mm)
Height 4ft 2½in (1285mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 5½in (2271mm)
Weight 3322lb (1507kg)
0-60mph 3.7 secs
0-100mph 9.2 secs
Top speed 180mph **Mpg** 15
Price new £93,950 (1995)

Clockwise from above: vast calipers peek from behind turbo alloys; rev counter is centre stage in retro dash; flat-six hides behind intercoolers; flagship 993 is a muscular shape

Supercar market*

The equivalent Lotus has always been less expensive than its Porsche and Ferrari rivals. A clean, sub-50,000-mile Esprit V8 from 1996 or '97 will be a minimum of £15k, but if you want the superior SE – or, better still, the GT – you'll spend almost double that. The Sport 350, of which only 50 were made, is the most desirable of the lot and can fetch up to £40,000.

You'll need to spend at least £30k even to put a left-hand-drive F355 on your drive. But for a truly decent example such as the one driven here, don't expect change from £50,000. The very best are the 1998-'99 manuals with fewer than 10,000 miles and a full Ferrari history. For those, you'll need to spend £60-65k.

The 993 turbo is the most interesting of the lot because, of late, values have begun to go through the roof. The car you see here is insured for £50,000 – although its owner Paul Jennings might need to adjust this figure given that similar cars are being advertised for anything between £55,000 and £80k, depending on condition and whether or not they have the official Power Pack fitted. Either way, 993 turbos are now worth approximately double the price of a 996 turbo – which is extraordinary given that Porsche threw the kitchen sink at the later car, having been criticised for making the 993 too big and cumbersome when it was new.

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

simply wasn't capable of dealing with what the engine could produce. Had it been so, Lotus could have gifted the Esprit V8 with far more than its 349bhp and mere 295lb ft – because the engine itself, featuring not one but two small Garret T25 turbochargers, could generate way more torque than that on a test bench.

Having said all that, it's so cheap! Or, to put it another way, no less but no more than you could spend on a brand-new, albeit well-specified, Ford Fiesta. Tempting is one word you could use. Insane is another, of course, although in this case the service record on our featured car is bulletproof and there have been no key issues worth mentioning over the years, so what you see is very much what you get. Which is to say, one of Britain's most stunning-looking sports cars from the past quarter of a century; a machine that, give or take a heavy gearchange here and there, and the occasional squeak from behind the walnut dashboard, drives every bit as good as it looks.

I remember going to collect a brand-new Esprit V8 press car from the factory once in 1996. I got up in the middle of the night and alighted at Hethel before the sun had come up. Five hours later, I met a colleague in the middle of Wales, eyes bulging, heart thumping, mind convinced that for £60,000 there wasn't a faster, better-looking, more exciting supercar in existence. Its steering and handling, in particular, were from another world. At the end of the day, however, and having compared the Esprit with a Ferrari F355 on some of the best roads in the UK, I drove home – in the Ferrari – feeling dazed and confused but delighted. The Lotus was faster and more exhilarating thanks to its torque (it still is), and had easily the sweeter steering of the two (it still does). But the Ferrari felt more special somehow, and was better built, far easier to drive and made a sound above 6000rpm that the Esprit driver could only dream about (it still does).

It's just as well, perhaps, that a 993 turbo wasn't invited to the party that day. In the cold light of day in which cars such as the 911 turbo tend to shine, it would have walked away with the contest. As it does today, quite frankly, if all you seek in a car is pure speed and composure – the ability to get from one location to another faster than just about anything else on earth.

In truth, though, even the Ferrari – which, shock-horror, turns out to be the slowest of the trio in reality – is way more than fast enough to be going on with. Especially so now on our increasingly congested public roads, on which there are speed cameras and countless other hazards that prevent you from using even half the performance that cars such as these are capable of producing.

To play the heretic, the raw speed of the Porsche is impressive, yes, but it's also indicative of a problem that too many of today's contemporary sports cars now suffer from: they are too quick, too clinical and too capable to be enjoyed on the public highway because their limits have simply become too high.

But the Lotus and Ferrari aren't like that. They give tactile delights back to their drivers at much, much lower speeds. And both of them will take your breath away, even when standing still. That's a crucial distinction to consider when it comes to the risk and reward of owning and enjoying an older supercar.

In this instance, the Esprit V8 looks like, and indeed is, the complete and utter bargain of the group. Experts reckon that prices of well-kept V8s will only go in one direction from now on, however, so perhaps now's the time to take the plunge. Assuming that you have the imagination and the courage to go with it.

As the chap in the Dr Pepper adverts once said, what's the worst that can happen?

Thanks to *Mortimers Prestige for the Lotus (mortimersprestige.co.uk); Darren Parker from James Paul for the Ferrari (jamespaul.co.uk); Paul Jennings and PistonHeads.com*

Lighter! Faster! Madder! Better!

Alois Ruf's legendary tuning business became a constructor in its own right in 1981. Here five of his monsters unite

WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

The sensation is exquisitely, queasily uncomfortable. Your pupils have dilated like a crazed cartoon character's and your chest is tightening more than is medically advisable. Try not to think about the 850bhp that is propelling you forward – hurling, more like – or the damp runway that clearly hasn't been swept since the last Cold War. Ignore the nutter on the superbike, pulling wheelies and trying to goad you into racing. He doesn't stand a chance: this is a Ruf Rt12R. No, just keep doing what you're doing and remember that at some point you'll want to brake. But not yet.

Okay, that sidewind came out of nowhere. How fast is fast enough? You don't want to look like a yellow-belly before handing over the reins to the hotshoes. Just how much is 300kph in old money, anyway? Divide by eight, multiply by five... Oh, right, yeah, 187.5mph is plenty. Time to breathe; time for a coffee before exercising the next four cars. Decaf, obviously.

There are not enough adjectives that can amply describe just how mind-bendingly fast this car is, but then Ruf is more than just another modifier of Porsches. Before re-engineering 911s, this tiny, family-run business doesn't so much strip them to the bone as to the marrow. It's a marque in its own right, one that is rooted in Alois Ruf and others' creation, his father having established the company in the small Bavarian town of Pfaffenhausen in 1939. What began as a general garage had by the 1950s taken on a BMW concession, but it was the arrival of a Porsche 356 in the workshop in 1963 that fired the second-generation Ruf's imagination.

Scroll forward to 1981, and Ruf made the leap from tuner and restorer to constructor, with the German Federal Vehicle Office certificating his firm's status as a car manufacturer even though its models conspicuously shared DNA with a somewhat better-known brand. In April 1987, Ruf

From top: window-hugging 935-style door mirror; Ruf-badged VDO dials – sticker on speedo warns you not to exceed 300kph; Speedline alloys (17in here) got bigger over the years while tyre profile shrank

Automobile entered supercar lore after *Road & Track* set about establishing what was the fastest production car in the world. The Ruf CTR beat all-comers in the test at Ehra-Lessien, with drivers Phil Hill and Paul Frère repeatedly breaching the 200mph barrier. The canary yellow demonstrator earned the nickname Yellow Bird and it stuck: CTRs have been referred to in aviary terms ever since. The car clocked a best overall top speed of 210.6mph, only for *Auto Motor und Sport* to up it to 212.5mph at Nardo a year later. It bested the likes of the Ferrari F40 and Porsche 959 along the way, also managing a 0-100mph time of just 7.6 secs.

Production cars were based on the 911 Carrera 3.2 rather than the regular turbo variant, due in part to it being marginally lighter and more aerodynamic. The Group C Turbo Ruf (CTR) boasted aluminium doors, bonnet and engine cover, which saved about 200kg over the donor car. Physical differences amounted to chunkier glassfibre bumpers front and rear, a pair of intake ducts above the slightly wider rear wheelarches to aid airflow to the intercoolers, shaved rain gutters and groovy 935-style door mirrors. Engine displacement was teased out to 3366cc (from 3164), while twin turbochargers were added along with a DME fuel-injection set-up similar to that found in the Porsche 962 sports-prototype. A bespoke five-speed gearbox completed the mechanical makeover.

Just 29 CTRs were purportedly made by 1990, the practice being halted by the combination of a dwindling supply of bodyshells and tougher emissions regulations. About 20-30 cars were later supplied by customers for what became an aftermarket conversion. Which brings us to today and Bruntinghthorpe Proving Ground on a monochrome morning. Fortunately, 'our' 1988 example is finished in the sort of eye-watering hue more redolent of the previous decade. As such, 'Kermit' endears itself in an instant, the Tupperware add-ons complementing the familiar outline rather than detracting from it. Inside, it's much as you remember any 911 from the era, the spindly A-pillars and dashboard layout being unmistakable, even if the figure-hugging seats and VDO-made instruments are pure Ruf. What's more, it's hard not to fall for any car that has a sticker warning you not to exceed 300kph.

Fire it up and the flat-six sounds grumpy, requiring a few blips in order to stop it from stalling. It eventually settles to what might euphemistically be described as a thrum. It sounds more competition tool than road car. As you cruise around off-boost while waiting for the temperature-gauge needle to rise, there are no histrionics. The gearchange is perhaps a little unyielding, but you soon acclimatise.

And then you wake the turbos from their slumber and a rather different picture emerges. There are faster cars than the CTR – some of them are grouped together here – but few batter the senses in quite the same way. It's hard to discern which revs in which gear equate to what speed because you're too busy trying to keep it in a straight line; watching the rev counter and boost gauge becomes somewhat secondary. While it notionally packs 469bhp at 5950rpm, you would swear that it was more. Power is delivered with a kick. And then a head-butt. Acceleration builds with brutal menace,

CTR

CTR

Alcantara-clad wheel in CTR, plus massive side bolsters on close-fitting Ruf sports seats; twin-turbocharged 3.3-litre engine is good for 469bhp, giving a top speed of more than 212mph at Nardo

3.8 BTR

Pared-down cabin of 3.8 BTR features lighter seats with slimmer backs, but they're just as supportive; single-turbo motor is more fuel-efficient thanks to Motronic management but still makes 370bhp

RCT EVO 2

Familiar five-instrument set in Evo 2, with similar seats to CTR and full race harnesses; still single-turbo but dual-ignition on 964-derived flat-six gives it 425bhp at 5800rpm – enough to nudge 200mph

CTR-2

Exquisite green leather in CTR-2, with slimmed-down seats and integral rollcage to stiffen the bodyshell; TAGtronic helps to push output of twin-turbo 3.6-litre boxer to 520bhp and top speed to match CTR

Rt12R

Ergonomics meet Ruf madness in the Rt12R, which benefits from the 997 cabin but with better seats; it's off the scale against its not-exactly-weedy ancestors, though, with an alleged 850bhp




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Olney
Oxford
Ripley
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the pop-off valves chirping for all their worth. It's utterly surreal and equally addictive.

Fortunately, the 300mm ventilated Brembo brake discs work effectively, but it is an understeerer. This isn't a car in which you should slacken your commitment, but it's hard not to back off a little. Do so and the nose tucks in, but ease off too quickly and it will rotate in an instant, as an experienced racer in our party discovers later. Spectacular oversteer is available on boost when exiting a bend. It isn't to be recommended, though – the sort of thing you try only the once unless you have poor impulse control.

Then you step aboard the '94 3.8 BTR, which is something else entirely. Powered by a 3.8-litre, single-turbo flat-six allied to a six-speed manual 'box, it's packing 370bhp at 5500rpm, which might lend the impression that it's a bit on the tame side. It isn't. As with the CTR, it is lighter-skinned than the car that bore it, although its aluminium content also includes the wings. There are revised springs and dampers and 18in lightweight alloy wheels, as well as cross-drilled and vented disc brakes front and rear.

Inside, it's more of the same, with leather-clad Recaros and a speedo that reads to 360kph (that's 225mph). It's comfortable, even if black-on-black is a bit funereal. Like the CTR, the BTR is utterly docile off-boost, the difference here being that it's forgiving when pressed hard – all things being relative. The rev-counter needle snaps around the dial in an instant, the front end rising ever so slightly under load. The transmission, with its short shift action, has a tiny amount of shunt at low revs but is beautifully precise at speed. The BTR is a joy to drive and not in the least bit intimidating so long as you concentrate.

Yes, it feels a little soft in comparison with its forerunner, but it is hardly alone in that. The BTR is still blisteringly quick. If the factory bumf is to be believed, it can sprint to 125mph in 12.9 secs and on to a top speed of 198mph. It's still pulling hard at 150mph but, tellingly, it doesn't wander. It hasn't been stiffened to the point that there's no suspension travel, either. The chassis isn't overwhelmed, nor does it feel twitchy in the slightest. Corners of all flavours can be negotiated *extremely* quickly as long as you don't lift your right foot suddenly. The uprated brakes also work well without any hint of fade – regardless of how many times you call upon them to save you at silly speeds.

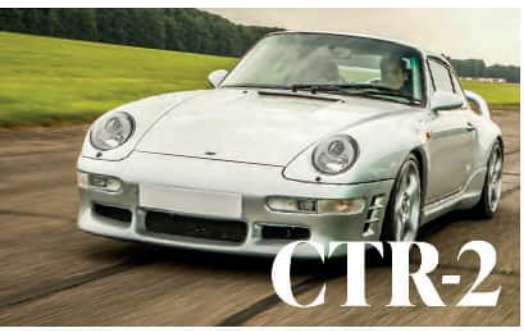
Such was the popularity of the 964-based car that it has never really gone away. Ruf will still make you one, as illustrated by the RCT Evo 2 pictured here. The difference these days, however, is that the base conversion is also available for a variety of bodystyles rather than just the coupé, with convertible and even Speedster models being offered in narrow- and wide-bodied configurations. 'Our' car is mechanically much the same as the BTR, the difference being that it packs 425bhp at 5800rpm – and those extra 55 horses certainly make their presence known. It feels faster but otherwise it remains benign, even when driving somewhere near your own – if not the car's – limits. There's little in the way of a safety net here – no get-out-of-jail-free electronic doodads to bail you out should you get into trouble – but you would have to do something stupid to get there in the first place.

Just when you think you have Ruf sussed, you

From top: single-turbo boxer isn't as brutal as the CTR; it's basically a 964 turbo in profile, but with bigger spoilers; stripped-out cabin with basic door pull helps keep weight down to 1260kg; tiny boost gauge

RCT EVO 2

Clockwise from main: telltales on RCTs include vents in polyurethane bumpers and Cup mirrors; turbo rear spoiler was a €2847 option; subtle badging on dials; 18in Speedline alloys (€3584 new!)



CTR-2

get into the CTR-2, which represents another evolutionary leap forward. Previous models had been relatively unadorned, having little in the way of styling trinkets relative to the donor cars. By the mid-1990s, however, it was clear that Ruf customers wanted greater differentiation between a stock Porsche and something that cost considerably more. When this car was built in 1997, it was priced at DM446,200 (c£172,000) against DM278,875 for a 'cooking' 183mph 911 GT2. This Ruf, today, is three times as much as a nice GT2.

Nevertheless, the CTR-2 followed the mantra that form should follow function, despite appearances to the contrary. For example, the air vents sunk into the sides of the rear valance have a small raised leading edge. At high speed this creates a partial vacuum, extracting air drawn through the intercoolers. Then there are the small details such as door mirrors that have the same glass area as standard 993-series items but whose cowlings are noticeably smaller and thus create less drag. Perhaps the most obvious change is the substantially larger engine cover, which in effect spans the entire width of the car.

Then there's the engine, which was based on the twin-plug 3.6-litre 993 unit, but boasting an extra 200cc and running an 8:1 compression ratio, twin KKK turbochargers, TAGtronic engine management and a lot more besides. Factory figures from the period claimed 520bhp at 5500rpm and 505lb ft at a relatively modest 4800rpm. The result is a car whose performance is incendiary, as in 0-60mph in 3.6 secs, traction permitting, and capable of an 11-second quarter-mile. As for the top speed, 'over 340kph' was quoted in the promotional literature.

Clever aerodynamic aids help 993-based CTR-2 to increase airflow through the intercoolers *and* grip the road better; five-spoke wheels are a constant – here with 245/35x19 tyres up front, 285/30 rears

Once inside, it's much like any other 993 of the era, although the 400kph speedo is no idle boast. At pottering speeds, it's not threatening. The six-speed transmission is a delight, the Ruf-calibrated spring and damper set-up soaks up the worse of the airfield's many bumps and it will pull from as low as 1000rpm in top at 30mph, with only the slightest caress of the throttle. When you do dig deep, suddenly you're much further down the road than you were a second ago – the four-wheel-drive set-up ensures that it just hooks up and bolts. It's like the CTR, only without the sense of impending doom.

Sadly, limited seat time ensures that handling impressions are slender. It turns in well and corners flat, for the most part, and the brakes – 360mm carbonfibre discs front and rear – are seriously powerful for their vintage. It's a car that you would love to spend time with, exploring its capabilities. Clearly it has many, but it shrinks into the background compared with the Rt12R.

While in essence this is a 997, that is merely a Rizla-thin veneer. From the deep gaping maw that passes for a front spoiler intake, to the carbonfibre rear aerofoil, this is a bespoke device. Beneath the skin, Ruf did away with

the active damping of the Carrera S and replaced it with its own 'passive' arrangement. It retains MacPherson struts up front and a multi-link rear set-up, but it's fully adjustable for stiffness – plus the ride height can be raised or lowered by up to 50mm. This is just a thumbnail sketch of the vast number of mods involved here, relative to the donor vehicle.

Then there's the engine, a handbuilt 3824cc flat-six that is only loosely rooted in the Carrera S unit. The two KKK turbos are similar to those found on a standard 911 turbo of the period, but boost pressures and revolution speeds are Ruf-specific. To date, 13 cars have been made, and this is one of only two that aren't all-wheel drive. Given that the base model packs 560bhp, and ours has almost 300 more, that's a lot to ask of what appear to be spray-painted-on rear tyres. In theory, this 'R' edition is capable of 219mph, but if rumour is anything to go by, it's a wee bit faster than that.

Once inside, the basic architecture is pure Porsche, as is to be expected, but with the obligatory Ruf logos just about everywhere, stylish green-on-black instruments and alloy pedals. Such familiarity does lend a false sense of security. This is nothing like any other 911 we have ever experienced. Not that we can tell you what it's like to drive under normal circumstances because we didn't really try. The six-speeder shifts with clarity and precision and the low-speed ride is impressively controlled, but this isn't really the place to drive slowly.

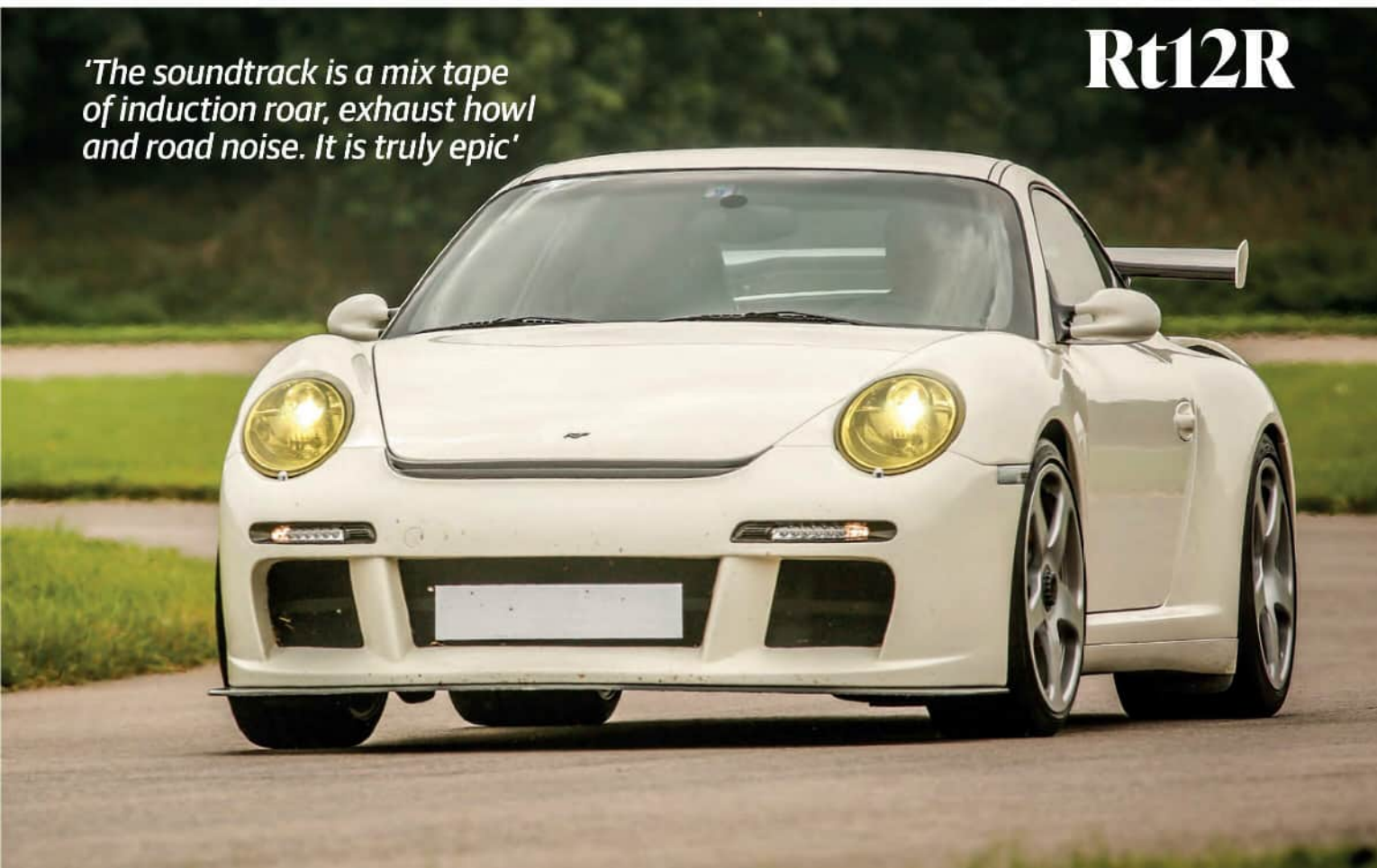
Acceleration in any gear is ballistic. There is a seemingly never-ending wave of turbocharged thrust. The soundtrack builds with the engine speed, too, a sort of mix tape of induction roar, exhaust howl and road noise. It is truly epic. Scroll back to 2012 and a less-powerful variant managed 0-125mph in 9.8 secs. This is faster, and how. The real issue for those experienced with such cars, but still some way off from being driving gods, is how to extract the best from the Rt12R. You can't. It's better than you.

As such, tyre-shredding Earl of Oversteer antics are out. Limited time spent on what passes for an infield circuit reveals that grip levels are virtually unbreakable under normal conditions. Even after you think you have pushed the envelope when it comes to front-end adhesion, the Rt12R nails the apex, and then it uses its molten rear-end traction to devastating effect on departing a corner. Then there are the brakes: 350mm cross-drilled and inner-ventilated discs with four-piston aluminium calipers. They're powerful enough to turn your ribs to dust, but with all the feel and progression of steel rotors.

But if push came to shove, it isn't the car that you would take away. No, that would be the CTR. It isn't the best car here. It isn't even the third-best car here, but it is by far the most exhilarating; the sort of weapon that makes you swear and laugh simultaneously, and exit talking 10 to the dozen. You ache for its continued company, even if the CTR does scare the bejesus out of you. Maybe even *because* it does. That's all you can ever ask of a supercar, and it is super both relatively and absolutely.

Thanks to *Jeremy Cottingham (01923 275500; jeremycottingham.co.uk)*

From top: beautifully crafted pedals; huge rear spoiler plus large front air dam lend the (loosely) 997-based Rt12R the look of a Porsche Cup racer to match its savage: sub-10 secs for 0-125mph

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PORSCHE

Porsches four all

Once the butt of the 'poor man's Porsche' jibes, the four-cylinder 912E, 912 and 914 are now rightly revered for their individual appeal

WORDS **JACK PHILLIPS** PHOTOGRAPHY **WILL WILLIAMS**

Set aside your preconceptions and there is a certain foresight to the Porsche 912. Consider that today Lamborghini, Alfa Romeo, Porsche, Maserati, Aston Martin and soon Ferrari are all making vast, money-spinning executive SUVs for the masses with the sole aim to bolster the bottom line, and indeed Stuttgart has once again introduced a four-pot baby Porsche, and the original 'entry-level 911' is a car that shouldn't be sniffed at.

That theme of broadening the customer base threads throughout the often-maligned four-cylinder Porsches gathered together on, as chance would have it, the best and brightest day between two name-worthy storms. Each one of the 912, 914 and 912E has its detractors because of an almost universal snobbery that declares these not to be 'proper' Porsches. But all are true enthusiasts' cars, and some of the best enthusiast examples you'll find in the UK.

Volkswagen is the inevitable elephant in the room, and at the root of why this trio was so overlooked for so long. But VW, its letters there but hidden away on some models and non-existent on others, has also been a bond that has united owners for the past half-century and offered a means into the Weissach marque.

The 912 – or 902 until Peugeot used its then-great might to claim ownership of such names soon after the model's unveiling at the 1964 Paris Salon – was a straightforward evolution. It combined the 356 and the 911, the car that first made Porsche's name and reputation and the car that would take the firm to unprecedented heights. It was always in the business plan, too, because development of the six-cylinder 901 and a four-cylinder for the 902 ran concurrently.

When it came to the production car, though, the new experimental 2-litre 'four' was shelved in favour of using the discontinued 356C's Type 616 because of the number of surplus engines. That meant a twin-Solex 1582cc and 90bhp, but it was ageing, having first been installed into the 356A 10 years earlier, in 1955. But it was still largely a Porsche unit. *Motor*'s 1964 review of the 365SC even opens with the assertion that: 'The Volkswagen ancestry is, if not obscure, at least not so apparent.' Barely a part hadn't been tweaked, changed or improved by the Stuttgart engineers.

The same cannot be said of its descendent – and replacement – the 914. This was a genuine collaboration between the two manufacturers that eventually soured. The 1.7-litre, 80bhp injected four-pot boxer engine bolted into the middle of Porsche's new chassis in 1969 was lifted straight out of the back of a Volkswagen Type 4. By the middle of the decade it had been slightly reworked by Porsche, with a bigger bore and a longer stroke to create the 1971cc powerplant that was used for the 914 2.0 in 1970 and the US-only, 1976-only 912E.

Where there can be no cries of "VW!" is on the exterior styling. Stationary, the 912 and 912E are barely distinguishable from their more celebrated marque brethren, the pre-'73 911 and the Carrera 3.0 respectively. "I took my 912 to the Sunday Scramble at Bicester," says owner John Macdonald, "and because I follow the hashtags on Instagram, I saw that people were tagging it as a 911...

"I have always been into VWs – my first car was a Beetle – and my first Porsche was a 914 because I thought that was my way in to an air-cooled Porsche. But the classic shape of the 911 and 912 never went from my mind, so I sold that and my split-screen van to get this."

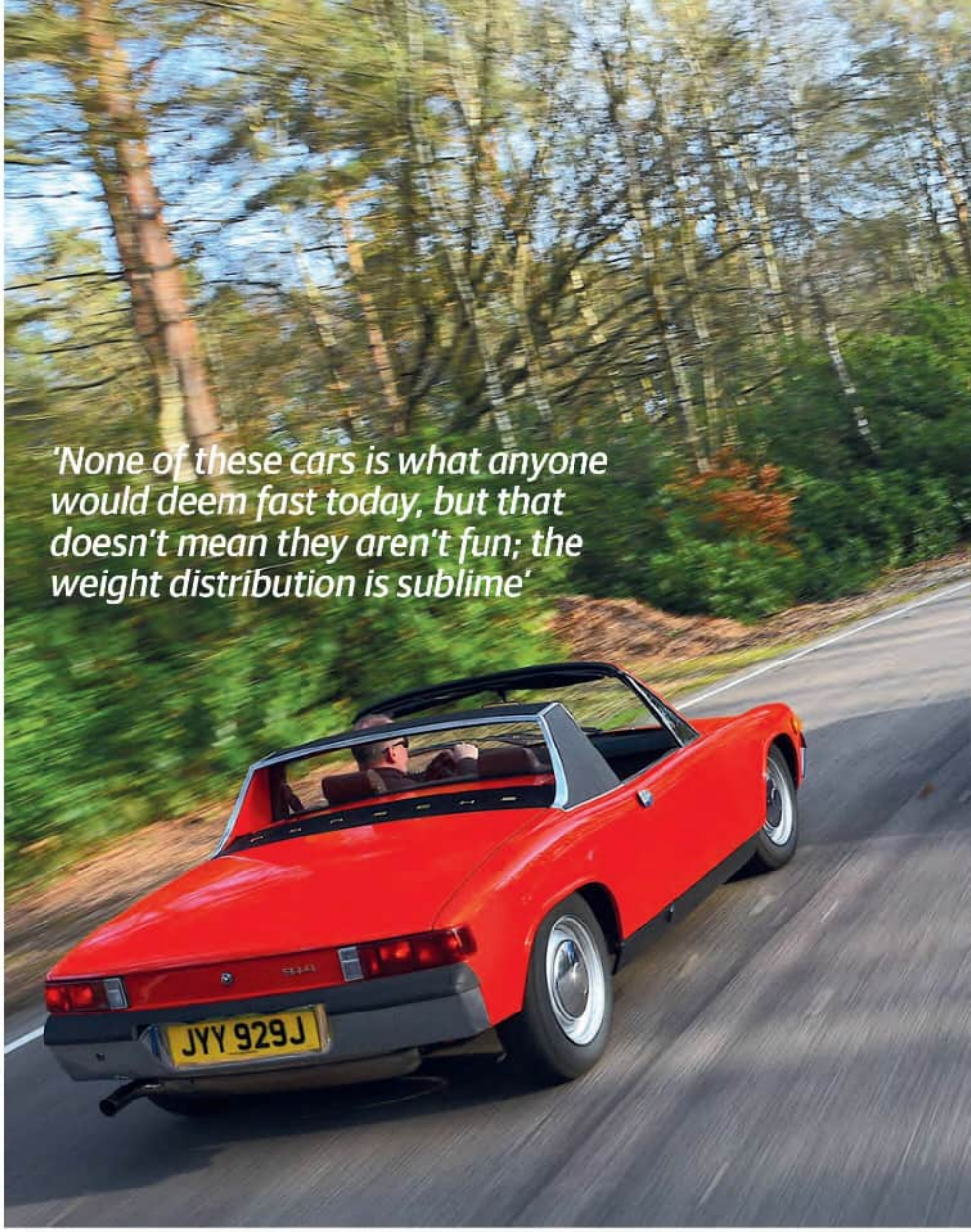
It was the shape that also drew Ian Lindsay-Watson to his 912E (E for *einspritzung*, denoting the fuel-injected engine). "I bought it after seeing *The Bridge*, the Scandinavian detective drama, because I loved the shape of the lead character's Olive Green 911," says Ian. "I got this, then decided I needed the bigger one, too, so I got a 3-litre. The 912E has better handling because of the lighter rear end: you can crash a 911; you'd do well to in this. The E is my car of choice: it conjures the '70s VW spirit."

Yet the 914 – which perfectly splits the 912s, having been launched in the final year of the original, 1969, and built until 1975, the year before the stopgap 912E was launched into America while the world awaited the 924, is more of a visual departure. "People don't know what this is," explains our 1971 example's owner, James Grayston. "That breeds curiosity, and I've had people ask me if it's a Fiat. The only Porsche badge is on the rear decklid – an American 914, such as this, was sold as a Porsche; the European version has the wolf and Wolfsburg castle on the steering wheel, and Volkswagen hubcaps. They also have a VW-Porsche badge on the back."

The only VW badge to slip through the net here is on the hazard-light switch on the dash.

The more time spent with these three cars, the more apparent the 914's place as the midpoint becomes. The 912 is loud inside – enough even for it to become intrusive and 'tiresome on a motorway' according to *Autocar* in 1965 – and the 914 is, too, in a seemingly more intentional manner. It's not helped here by its targa top, while the E is perfectly quiet.

The 912 and 914 both have tall and rangy gearsticks, which combine with their lengthy linkages to make them at times vague, and in line with them lies the stout, floor-mounted



Angular, mid-engined 914 stands out among the rears of the year. Right: 912's sweet-revving flat-four is sourced from the later 356 and is all Porsche

Attractive 912 cabin has the most classic appeal, with quartet of distinctive dials and aluminium dash strip

PORSCHE 912

Sold/number built 1965-'69/28,333
Construction steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, air-cooled, ohv 1582cc flat-four, with two Solex 40 PII-4 carbs
Max power 90bhp @ 5800rpm
Max torque 90lb ft @ 3500rpm
Transmission four-speed manual (optional five-speed), RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** semi-trailing arms; torsion bars, telescopic dampers f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes discs
Length 13ft 8in (4163mm)
Width 5ft 3in (1610mm)
Height 4ft 4in (1320mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 3in (2211mm)
Weight 2138lb (970kg)
0-60mph 13.5 secs
Top speed 115mph
Mpg 33
Price new £2467

heater lever. As contemporary road-testers found, it's easy to select fourth gear rather than second from the dogleg first in the 912, while the short slot into second in the 914 doesn't confidently feel in gear after the long-throw first. Both traits take some getting used to but, the owners assure us, get used to them you do. In the E, the excellent shorter throws engage with a very Porsche, very mechanical 'clunk' every time, the slightly more prominent transmission tunnel enabling a stubbier gearlever that encourages quicker and more precise changes. It is thoroughly satisfying where the others take care, its heavier, floor-mounted clutch full of feel. Part of that can be put down to the newly rebuilt gearbox in 'our' 912E. "Third gear was shot and oil was coming out at a rate of knots," explains Ian, "but it was away for just four days."

None of these cars is what anyone would deem fast today, but that doesn't mean they are not fun. The weight distribution is sublime in each, the tiny flat-four barely taking up half the rear bay of the 912. "It looks nicer than a 911 in there," says John. "A friend asked me once what the space in front of the engine is for!"

The 1.7-litre 914, meanwhile, is genuinely mid-engined and of the three feels the best through the bends, hinting at why it spawned six-cylinder racers, whereas the pin-sharp steering of the E makes you want corners to be ever longer and ever more sweeping. All are flat and docile in a very good way. Perhaps the real trick here is the lack of grunt; as the 911 became ever more powerful, more of its horsepower was being left unused.

As the revs rise, each car similarly awakens, sounding closer to sweet than their less-appealing low-down clamour. None can touch the 911's 'six' in that respect, not that it really bothers you when you're behind the wheel – each of which is different. The 912's feels of its age, bigger and slower; the 914's sits low in your lap, forcing your hands higher round the wheel, but it doesn't obscure the view ahead; and the E's non-standard Momo is small and the most comfortable, not least when pushing through corners. Feedback is felt most through the 914's, however.

The 914 is also the most spartan inside. Its super-'70s cabin, with brown seats and carpet,

From a standing start it's a close battle, but the earliest car makes up for being slowest to 60mph by offering the highest top speed

"I hate it when people say it needs more power. It wasn't meant to be fast and it's still quick enough – quicker than your average hatchback"

Flat dash and upright wheel in low-slung 914, which shares organ throttle and wand-like gearlever with the earlier 912

PORSCHE 914 1.7

Sold/number built 1969-'76/118,978
Construction steel monocoque
Engine iron-block, alloy-head, air-cooled, ohv 1679cc flat-four, Bosch D-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 85bhp @ 4900rpm
Max torque 109lb ft @ 2900rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by wishbones, damper struts, torsion bars **rear** semi-trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes discs
Length 13ft 1in (3985mm)
Width 5ft 5in (1650mm)
Height 4ft (1220mm)
Wheelbase 8ft 1in (2450mm)
Weight 1982lb (899kg)
0-60mph 11 secs
Top speed 110mph
Mpg 26
Price new £2261

feels short and wide, the thin seats touching the bulkhead behind. "On the fuel tank it says it's a 2+1," explains Grayston, "but there are no belts on that middle 'seat' and you wouldn't want to use it." There is a radio, though, unlike in the earlier car with its attractive blanking plate, but you wouldn't use that, either, owing to the clattering, raucous noise right behind your ears.

Whether any is ever found wanting for power is best answered by their owners. "The 914 is fast enough, but it's not a car to tear around in," concedes James. "The gearing is long, too: at 70mph it's turning at well under 3000rpm."

"I hate it when people say it needs more power," adds Ian of his 912E. "It wasn't meant to be fast. It's still quick enough – quicker than your average hatchback. You can probably push it to 125mph on the *autobahn*."

These keepers knew exactly what they were getting when they took the plunge into four-pot ownership, consciously deciding on these more leisurely Porsches. Coincidentally, the 912 and 914 might even have the exact same – and perhaps famous – starts in life, via Jacksonville, Florida. "They're potentially Brumos cars," reveals John, bringing instantly to mind the dealer team's iconic red, white and blue RSRs. "Jesse, the guy I bought my 912 from in Sweden – and whom I have to credit for all the work – sent me a screenshot of its 'birth certificate' and it's a 1965 build, so a first-year car but registered in America in '66." The 356 was still available Stateside in late '65, hence the 912 being held back to avoid cannibalising sales. There were no such problems in Europe.

"I always wanted an early 912 because of the design: the smaller doorhandles, the script on the back, the narrow body. It encapsulates everything that is early Porsche, with form following function. And it's a three-dial car." It's now four, because of the later addition of a matching VDO clock to the right of the speedo; later cars had the five-dial binnacle of the 911.

The padded dash, rather than body-colour metal, defines it as a late-year car, too. There were subtle tweaks in the restoration, such as a slight lowering, an uprated exhaust and the optional Fuchs wheels. "It's had a bare-metal respray back to its Golf Blau and a sympathetic restoration – even the lenses are original, and he polished everything up without rechroming," says John. "I fell in love with it as soon as I saw it on Instagram, and booked a £50 flight. Unbeknown to me, I'd actually seen and liked it on there before. Jesse paid me the ultimate compliment when he said: 'I'm not going to sleep tonight because I have mixed emotions. I love this car but I know I have to sell it. My biggest fear was that someone was going to come over with the money and I wasn't going to like the guy.' When I was back at the hotel I sent him a text saying, 'I hope you sleep well tonight,' as a joke, and he said, 'I'm really pleased that it's going to you'. It meant a lot that he was happy to sell it to me, and we're now friends. He's a lovely guy." Lovely enough to include in the deal the Heuer rally timer that is clipped to the dash.

While John is only starting life with his 912, James – who counts a 944 as his daily driver – is well accustomed to his 914, having bought it eight years ago: "I wanted orange, and didn't want to spend too much. Auto Atlanta in Georgia specialises in 914s and I saw this on their site. I was told it was a good car but needed paint. Within three months I'd got it, for $6000 when it was $2 to £1 – so it was cheap."

But for stainless-steel heat exchangers and a Scart exhaust, the 914 is very standard, even down to the wheels. "Fifty cars went to Brooklands last year for a 50th-anniversary event and 49 of them were on alloys," James says. "This came with the 5½J steelies on and it looks great. People want Fuchs alloys so the steel wheels have become really rare because they were just binned; I have two sets with

EXPERT'S VIEW*
Max Levell

Few know Porsche 912s quite like Max Levell, who not only owns specialist Revival Cars but also drove one all the way from from London to Saigon.

"Where the 911 has rocketed up and then fallen a bit, the 912 has been a slow burner," says Max. "Prices have been gradually appreciating, but they're still undervalued. I've had one for 20 years - I paid £3000 and drove it home. Now, a project would set you back £15-25,000 – anything less is really parts value. For a usable 912 you can spend between £25,000 and £40k, and up to around £60,000 for a top car.

"Servicing is really the same as a 911 – if the engine goes it's 911 expensive. But that doesn't seem to be putting anyone off: in fact, we have clients who have expensive collections that tell us they don't want a 911, they specifically want a 912.

"Steel wheels are becoming sought-after: when people were making their 912s look like 911s they put on Fuchs wheels; now people want their 912s to look like 912s."

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

VW 2-litre, a larger version of the 914 unit, sits low in the 912E's engine bay. Below: Momo wheel sets off vinyl cabin

PORSCHE 912E

Sold/number built 1975-'76/2099
Construction part-galvanised steel monocoque
Engine iron-block, alloy-head, air-cooled, ohv 1971cc flat-four, with Bosch L-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 86bhp @ 4900rpm
Max torque 93lb ft @ 4000rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** semi-trailing arms; torsion bars, telescopic dampers f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes discs
Length 14ft 1in (4291mm)
Width 5ft 3½in (1610mm)
Height 4ft 4¾ in (1340mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 5½in (2272mm)
Weight 2557lb (1160kg)
0-60mph 10.1 secs
Top speed 113mph
Mpg 33
Price new $11,940

Porsche trims. One might go on my 912 project, but I may sell that; I'll never part with this."

Naturally, the beautiful Sienna Metallic 912E has its own American backstory, too. "It started at a dealer in Augusta, Georgia, then moved two miles across the border to North Augusta in North Carolina and stayed there for years," explains Ian. "Then it was sent to a US Air Force base in Germany with an officer, before he sold it to Kansas, and I picked it up just after it had been imported to the UK.

"I looked at a few. One was gold with cookie-cutter wheels and a Jake Raby six-cylinder conversion, but I wanted it to be original. This one had blistered paint but no rust, and I lived with it like that for a few months until my mum had it resprayed for me as a 40th-birthday present. It had been sitting for 13 years and had done only five miles in that time, and it was completely static for the last 10. We literally just did the oil, the plugs, the usual stuff, and I didn't take it back for a service for 3000 miles – it didn't miss a beat. They're just so resilient. The most amazing thing about this particular car is the chassis number: it's 930 and, because this is the G-series, it's the 930 shape."

That figure also places it right in the middle of the 2099-car run. Oddly, despite the model being some way down the list when it comes to the most special Porsches, it is possibly among the rarest in the UK: one of fewer than 10. The American overriders remain and have proved their worth, according to its owner: "I was out once and a friend came running over to say someone had just hit my car. It had jumped maybe a metre out of its parking space but there wasn't a mark; the Audi A1 had a huge dent!"

Canny investors and enthusiasts have been making hay on the four-pot 911's values – *C&SC*, meanwhile, is now on its second art editor who regrets once letting one go for peanuts. Such was the reputation and the lack of enthusiasm for the cars. How we've all missed out, it appears. The 914 is perhaps the most attainable, but days of deals such as Grayston's are long gone. And for cars of this quality you're looking at 911 money.

Not one of our owners bought their car with plans for investment, but to use. The phrase "not a garage queen" came from each more than once, and the cars are all the better for it.

As for which has come away with the best deal, that depends on what you want from your everyday Porsche. For the purest looks it has to be the 912. For B-road bashing it's the 914. For an all-rounder with modern comforts the 912E wins hands down. But for me, someone who has always yearned for a 356 and dreams of an early 911, it has to be the missing-link 912.

Yet there will still be many for whom the choice is difficult for entirely opposite reasons. Prejudice can't be shaken off overnight, or with a few thousand pounds added to their values. Perhaps, though, those preconceptions might now be misconceptions for some.

Thanks to *Revival Cars (revival-cars.com); DDK Online (ddk-online.com); Kevin Clarke (914@porscheclubgb.com); Nick Trott*

EXPERT'S VIEW* KEVIN CLARKE

In the world of 914s, one man's name crops up more than anyone else's: Kevin Clarke, serial owner and 914 Register organiser for the Porsche Club of Great Britain. "People say 'I like your 914' now," he says. "Before, they would ask what it was. A few years ago, when the 911 had its jump in values, the 912 followed, and then the 914. The Karmann Ghia used to be maybe three times as expensive, but now they're about the same.

"A project is around £6-7000 and a usable one about £15,000, but might still need attention. One like James' is at least £20k now. The 1.8s are similar to the 1.7s, whereas the 2-litres are more desirable and about £26,000. Some 914/6s in Germany are well north of £100,000. Values have levelled out but will continue to rise, just maybe without another jump.

"Because it's a Volkswagen Type 4 engine the parts are available and servicing is pretty reasonable. It varies, though, because the suspension and parts of the gearbox are Porsche."

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

On the fringes?

Life as the owner of a four-pot Porsche can be one of battling against the tide, neither fully in the Volkswagen world nor a paid-up member of the Porsche scene. Until now, according to our three owners.

JM "My first car was a Beetle, but there was always that connection with the 356, because you'd often see kit cars at VW shows. There is a definite crossover now between the two scenes and these cars are welcome on both sides, which didn't used to be the case."

ILW "Well, the 912 is half Porsche and half VW, really; those two [912E and 914] are full VW engines. And collaborations happen everywhere now, at Aston Martin, Mercedes-Benz – even Renault and Nissan."

JG "You have to remember that Porsche wouldn't have used the engines for nothing. But the reception is definitely softening; it's mainly just ignorance."

ILW "People often say, 'Oh it's not a 911,' but I also have one of those and I use them differently. My 912E isn't for overtaking, it's for enjoyment."

JM "That's it! We have these cars because we wanted them and to enjoy them. It's no different in other scenes, though: VW in the '80s and '90s got really out of hand, with people damaging cars that had turned up that weren't VWs. You'd have people going round saying, 'Well that's not standard,' but that wasn't the point. If you look at the 'bike shows, all sorts of things are now accepted that weren't, such as kids doing up Cubs. The Porsche community is going the same way."

JG "I think there can be snobbery from the six-cylinder 914 owners – they wouldn't want a 'four'. But to me it's just a decent little car. It's still there online, too, among the keyboard warriors."

ILW "People that can't own them and never will, probably..."

Owners (l-r) Ian Lindsay-Watson (912E), James Grayston (914) and John Macdonald (912) swap stories of fighting the snobbery towards their four-pot Porsches

UNSUNG AIR-COOLED GREATS

The 914 and 914/6 have been overlooked for decades, but it's time to reassess and sing their praises – and start scanning the classifieds for Porsche's underrated gem

WORDS **MARTIN PORT** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

Mid-engined, targa-topped, two-seater. This hyphenated lust list really should have resulted in an instant icon, but when the Porsche 914 was introduced to the motoring press and the general public, the initial reception was far from enthusiastic. That it received a shrug of the shoulders rather than a passionate embrace, however, was more down to the state of the market at the time and the car's positioning, rather than the 914's engineering credentials.

The relationship between Volkswagen and Porsche was coming to a climax: the former's developmental work had for some time been outsourced to the latter, but this arrangement had just one project left under the original terms. Volkswagen decided that the 914 would be the catalyst for an amicable split and so handed over this final contract – one that would be overseen by Ferdinand Piëch.

On paper, the 914 should have worked well for both outfits: VW needed a replacement for the Karmann Ghia and Porsche was looking to fill the gap created by the demise of the entry-level 912. The 914 fitted with a flat-four, air-cooled engine would be marketed as a VW; the 914/6, boasting the flat-six unit, would be badged as a Porsche, but it soon got twitchy about this arrangement. Concerned about how the VW aspect might affect its lucrative sales in the USA, Porsche convinced Wolfsburg to let it market both models as its own.

So far, so straightforward, but following the

presentation of the prototype in early 1968, the situation took a turn for the worse with the death of Volkswagen's chairman, Heinz Nordhoff. Stepping into his shoes was Kurt Lotz, who had no connection whatsoever to Porsche, and the verbal agreement was left in tatters.

Lotz was of the opinion that Volkswagen owned the rights to the 914 project and began to make demands upon Porsche with regards to tooling and supply. After much negotiation, it was agreed that both firms would market the product – hence the VW-Porsche badging.

The real downfall of this arrangement came with the development of the six-cylinder variant. Lotz's insistence that Porsche would be financially responsible for the new car's Karmann-built bodies would prove to be a significant stumbling block: the 914 panels cost more than those for the flagship 911, also produced at the Osnabrück factory. When the 914/6 became available to the public in February 1970, it was only a couple of hundred pounds cheaper than a 2.2 911T – £3475 with Purchase Tax and seatbelts included.

The four-cylinder model was significantly cheaper at £2261. Although that was an increase over the cost of a 912, it was still comparable to other offerings in the UK sports car market.

The motoring press was indeed indifferent. *Autocar* was not convinced that the cost-versus-performance balance of the four-cylinder model was enough to get excited about, while in the USA, *Car & Driver* damningly stated that the car was 'about half the cost of a 911S, and about half as good as a 911S, but that isn't good enough'.

It wasn't all bad news – *Motor Trend* named it Import Car of the Year in 1970, beating other nominees such as the Datsun 240Z and Saab 99, and, with the launch of the six-cylinder model, *Autocar* was rather more committed, stating that 'no mid-engined car selling for less than £5000 begins to compare with it'.

Despite an annual sales target of 30,000 cars, in the first year of production 13,312 914s and 2658 914/6s ended up on the driveways of new owners. In the ensuing four decades, the 911 has been elevated to iconic status and values headed out of the reach of many, but the 914 remained the steed of choice for a select few.

Porsche's fears of the joint badging arguably came to fruition. Even until recently the model was considered by the uninitiated as the poor relation in the Porsche timeline, but that is a gross misunderstanding of just what the 914 has to offer – in any of its guises.

That it was generally overlooked also means that it is possibly the last air-cooled Porsche that is still attainable by those without huge budgets – certainly as going concerns in need of some attention, if not as concours examples.

Kevin Clarke is one such owner, and he bought into the 914 early on. "I got my first 914 in 1990," he says. "I wanted a sports car that was a bit different. I saw an ad in *Classic & Sports Car* – the trader had a dozen cars that he'd imported from the US and I bought one of those: a 1.7-litre 'four' that was pretty sorted from the off."

Kevin used it as his daily driver for the next 11 years but, inevitably, rust started to take hold. In 1997, he bought another – a 914/6 that had been brought to the UK from New York by a Canadian who'd used it for track outings.

That Forest Green example is the one you see here, but when Kevin got the car it looked rather different. For a start, it boasted a rollcage among other racy modifications, all of which he has removed, returning the car to pretty much standard specification in the process.

"The car looked messy," he says. "The battery had been relocated and the offside structure

Clockwise, from main: as a 1974 model, Darren's 914 has Federal 'bumper impact-protection guards'; 2-litre engine was the biggest 'four' offered; Fuchs alloys; stock injection has been replaced by carbs

'Autocar stated about the 914/6 that "no other mid-engined car selling for less than £5000 begins to compare with it"'

PORSCHE 914 2.0

Sold/number built 1969-'76/118,978 (all)
Construction steel monocoque
Engine magnesium-crankcase, alloy-head, air-cooled, overhead-cam, 1971cc flat-four, Bosch D-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 95bhp @ 4900rpm
Max torque 105lb ft @ 3500rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by wishbones, damper struts, torsion bars **rear** semi-trailing arms, coil springs; telescopic dampers f/r
Steering ZF rack and pinion
Brakes discs
Length 13ft 5in (4095mm) **Width** 5ft 5in (1650mm) **Height** 4ft ½in (1230mm)
Wheelbase 8ft 1in (2450mm)
Weight 2095lb (950kg)
0-60mph 11 secs
Top speed 115mph **Mpg** 36
Price new £2261

PORSCHE 914/6

(where different)
Engine 1991cc flat-six, twin Weber 40 IDT 3V carburettors
Max power 110bhp @ 5800rpm
Max torque 131lb ft @ 4200rpm
Brakes ventilated at front
Length 13ft 1in (3985mm)
Height 4ft 1in (1240mm)
Weight 2072lb (940kg)
0-60mph 9.9 secs
Top speed 125mph **Mpg** 31
Price new £3475

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needed some work. Although the previous owner had modified the flat-six to 2.2-litre spec, that too eventually needed attention: it got to the point where it was dripping oil so badly that no one wanted to drive behind me!"

That was rebuilt by Carrera Performance, but Kevin sorted the gearbox himself, along with refurbishing and replacing interior trim where necessary. "I've done about 30,000 miles since the engine rebuild," he confirms. "The bodywork now needs doing again, though, and this time it will go back to bare metal so it can be done properly."

Kevin's original four-cylinder car was destroyed in a fire some years ago, but his tally currently stands at eight – three of which are presently on the road. He still uses a 914 as his daily driver and is as passionate about the model as when he bought his first.

The owner of our four-cylinder car, Darren Collins, nods in agreement. He is equally as enthusiastic, and proof that you can still buy into Porsche ownership for an achievable price.

"I've owned more classic cars than I can remember," he says. "Before I even learnt to drive I had Volkswagen Beetles, and I later moved on to Porsche 356s, 911s and 924s, as well as everything from Rolls-Royces to a De Lorean. I knew about the 914 from the VW scene and a couple of years ago decided to revisit my 'comfort zone'. The time was right price-wise, too, and I decided to go straight to the US market, having had previous experience of dry-state imports."

Darren came across what is now his 2-litre 914 while browsing eBay: "The listing would have put off a lot of people. It only had a few thumbnail pictures and there wasn't a lot of information, but the car was located in somewhere called Desert Hot Springs, and that already sounded promising as far as rust was concerned!"

Based on what little detail he had, and a strong gut feeling, Darren took a gamble. The price was low enough to justify the risk – even when taking into account the shipping and import duty – and when it finally arrived in a container from the USA, he wasn't disappointed: "It was as good as I had hoped – the Achilles' heel is always the battery-tray area and that needed replacing, but structurally it was very reassuring."

The Alaska Blue paintwork had seen better days, though, thanks to a process of natural sandblasting in the Coachella Valley, and it was from this point that Darren's restoration plans really took hold. "I was originally going to just refurbish parts and drive the car," he recalls. "But as soon as I began taking bits off, it rapidly turned into a much bigger operation."

Darren isn't one to do a half-hearted job. As an ex-Royal Navy Engineer and someone who did a coachbuilder's apprenticeship, he set about creating a car of which he would be proud. He rented an ex-council lock-up with barely enough room to move around the car, no light or power, and carried out almost all of the work himself.

"The family of the previous owner had done a wonderful thing after he passed away," he explains. "They filled the engine to the brim with fresh oil, so there wasn't much for me to do mechanically as far as the block was concerned – just drain it, check it and replace the seals and gaskets where necessary. But I did overhaul the top end."

Darren did the body repairs and prep work in the lock-up before getting a friend to put down the topcoat. Many hours of flatting and polishing ensued, but he admits that wasn't really an issue thanks to his obsessive tendencies.

The real problem, however, was due to its life in the Californian sun. While that was a positive

Clockwise from main: handling soon inspires confidence; snug fit for Porsche flat-six; 914/6 has five-stud wheels; badge on US cars featured only numbers – European cars had 'VW-Porsche' script

From top: both cockpits feature optional central cushion; front stowage; targa panel doubles as luggage cover; Kevin (on right) and Darren

with regards to the state of the bodyshell, the trim, interior and wiring loom had suffered.

"As soon as you touched certain parts, they just disintegrated in your hands," says Darren. "Others had survived slightly better and so could be cleaned or overhauled, but there were lots that just had to be replaced."

Finding those replacement parts proved tricky at times: "There's no 'one-stop shop', and often you find yourself placing an order on a US website before finding out they're waiting to get enough orders to remanufacture the part. Or that only once they have an order will they go and try to find it in a scrapyard somewhere!"

Darren removed the Bosch fuel injection with which the car was originally fitted and replaced it with Weber 40 IDF carburettors. "I'm old-school," he explains. "The wiring and the injector components had been victims of the sun and, although it was cheaper to put a carburettor set-up on the car, it was also my preferred choice."

He finished the car in March 2016 and admits that the first time he'd ever driven a 914 was when the MoT certificate was issued.

"Having put in all that work, I felt compelled to like it when I finally drove it, but fortunately I was pleasantly surprised," he admits. "I've owned cars that are beautiful to look at but absolute dogs to drive, yet this isn't one of them. The looks epitomise the era: there is a real sharpness and balance to the design.

"On the road it's all about feedback; the car is always talking to you. Finally driving it has cemented my love for it."

I'll admit to having my own love affair with the 914, albeit from afar. Since the demise of my Porsche 912 – a car that I was fortunate enough to have owned while they still went through auctions for bargain prices – I've driven colleagues nutty with my misty-eyed gazing at various 914 projects.

Something has always stopped me, though, and standing between these two cars on a sun-drenched day, I'm wondering what exactly that thing was. Certainly the VW-Porsche badge no longer has anything to do with it, and the moment I lower myself into Darren's 914, my mind flits back to all of the examples of the breed that I could have bought.

The Volkswagen aspect of the partnership is almost instantly forgotten as soon as you grab the steering wheel – identical to that of the 911.

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

Ideal companions for a summer blast, but each has a distinct character of its own. Kevin's car has the chromed front and foglights that were offered as part of the Appearance Group option – contemporary 914/6s had them as standard

Looking down the bonnet is not a million miles away from the experience you get in that car, either, but the subtly rounded haunches of the wings rising up either side of the bonnet are replaced on the 914 by much sharper 'shoulders'. They're thinner, though, and instead of leading down to a pair of headlights, they incorporate the tall indicator and sidelight assemblies.

A little press of the pedal and turn of the key has the flat-four firing up with a reassuring air-cooled throb. The sound alone doesn't instantly shout 'Porsche', but there are plenty of other reminders, from the basketweave trim on the dash to the dog-leg first gear.

Enough daydreaming. Returning to that original 'lust list', this car is all about having fun and being on the receiving end of a truly rewarding driving experience. The sun is shining, the targa roof panel is safely stowed in the rear luggage compartment and within a quarter of a mile I'm grinning like an idiot. Get used to that gearing arrangement and the later, improved linkage on this car means that you are swiping your way through the five-speed 'box as often as twisty country roads will allow.

In truth, you'll spend much of your time going between second and third, but as

the revs rise you're treated to a beautifully balanced song from the 1971cc powerplant.

The steering is nothing short of excellent, as is the feedback through the wheel and from beneath. You know exactly what's going on where the wheels meet the Tarmac without that coming at the expense of a jarring or uncomfortable ride; this confidence urges you to push towards the redline before changing gear.

Step into the 914/6 straight afterwards and it's initially easy to notice the similarities rather than the differences. Even taking into account the occasional styling upgrade, it is, without wishing to state the obvious, only when you hear the flat-six burst into life that you remember exactly what you're sitting in.

That's not to say that the addition of two cylinders is an entirely positive thing. For starters, despite sharing an engine with the 911, the sound doesn't seem wholly familiar at first. This is most likely down to the physicalities of the set-up – the space in which the 2-litre 'six' sits seems rather more restricted than in the 911. Certainly, Porsche found that the engine ran around 10° hotter in the 914/6 thanks to reduced airflow, but it decided that the difference wasn't worthy of remedial attention.

Even when you first pull away and set off on your journey, the lack of fireworks is noticeable; it's easy to find yourself already yearning to be back in the 914. The 914/6 feels heavier and clumsier in comparison, and the engine somewhat less compliant.

It turns out that I'm not being unfair. As a serial owner of both four- and six-cylinder examples, Kevin agrees: "The 914 is much easier to live with. The steering feels lighter, the engine doesn't need as much jeering on, and it's much easier to have fun at lower speeds."

"But," he adds after a pause, "use the rev range and then you'll understand."

And he's right, too. After getting used to the gearshift on this example (the linkage is of the earlier type, which is certainly not as fluid) and with an empty road ahead, it's time to wind things up a little. Burying your right foot makes the rear dig down and the nose rise just a touch, and in doing so a little jolt of electricity runs down your spine and forces you to sit up and take notice.

The steering is still precise, the feedback exactly as on the 914, but it's a different ball-game: it's the difference between featherweight and heavyweight. One is nimble and quick on its feet; the other is patiently waiting to unleash a powerpunch from behind.

All this brings about a huge dilemma: which one would you have? Both are huge fun and rewarding to drive, and if your budget is really tight you could do worse than to find a 1.7-litre 914 complete with impact bumpers to keep the cost down. If you go to the States, you can buy a project for £5000; a similar one in the UK will be between £5000 and £10,000. Something ready to drive but in imminent need of work will be £15,000, with £20,000 getting you a really nice car and £30,000 a concours example.

Project 914/6s can be had for £6-10k, but they will need a lot of work at this level. The bottom end of the 'on the road' market is £20k, while £45k will get you something honest and worn-in. The best cars are £65-80,000*.

There's no doubt that the 914 is the bigger bargain in terms of fun offered against money spent. Prices aside, though, it's the six-cylinder car that leaves you feeling like a naughty child who's had too much Tizer at a party – particularly when it comes on song and all that ugly, low-rev spluttering awkwardness suddenly turns into an intoxicating howl behind your head. Yes, I still want one.


NOY 183V

Technical KNOCKOUT

Porsche's 928 was admired for its radical design and sophisticated road manners, but has always languished in the 911's shadow

WORDS **GRAEME HURST** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

Some cars will always defy their designers' intentions, no matter how well they perform or how brilliantly they were engineered. Take Porsche's 928. With a state-of-the-art all-alloy, 240bhp V8 engine, a clever rear-mounted transaxle and captivating styling, this late-'70s GT had all of the key attributes to be a truly great car. And plenty of people thought so at the time. It was even voted Car of the Year in 1978, the first time a 'sports car' had clinched the coveted award.

But the 928 seemed jinxed from day one – by nothing more than human irrationality. That lack of logic stemmed from three digits: 911. Serious Porsche fans never got over Stuttgart's decision to switch to front-engined power. Both the company's bacon-saving 924 and the avant-garde 928 might have made more technical sense than the (by then) ageing air-cooled 911, yet that still wasn't enough to sway marque enthusiasts who still coveted the idiosyncrasies of the 928's older, rear-engined sibling.

Ask anyone who was lucky enough to own a 928 when they were new, however, and they will tell you just how sensational it was. Perfect poise, tenacious grip and stonking performance are just some of the qualities that helped the model to stay in production for 18 years.

Early car has purest lines; cleverly integrated plastic bumpers conceal robust aluminium beams and could take 5mph impacts without deforming

Today, low prices and superb build quality make the 928 a tempting proposition and far less of a wallet risk than an equivalent Aston Martin or Jaguar. With eight variants – including rare Club Sport and SE – plus the option of manual or auto (except for the GT), the 928 caters for many tastes. To find out just how much of a bargain it really is, we brought together an early example – a 1980 4.4-litre manual – with one of the last 5.4-litre GTSs.

Although it was launched in '77, the seeds of the 928 story were sown nearly a decade earlier. Porsche's management became concerned over the 911's inability to meet strict safety and emissions regulations, particularly in the all-important US market. Water cooling gave better control over emissions, while placing the engine in the front was one way of improving crash protection. But that meant a serious rethink in Stuttgart. In 1971, Porsche's then newly appointed CEO, Dr Ernst Fuhrmann, kicked off a project to design an all-new front-engined two-plus-two. Its styling was led in-house by Anatole Lapine and this clean-shaped hatchback was the result. Underneath those revolutionary lines lay equally new mechanicals: an all-alloy, single-overhead-cam-per-bank, fuel-injected V8 mated via a torque tube to a rear-mounted transaxle. This was radical stuff for a firm that had built its reputation on an air-cooled rear-engined layout. To banish Porsche's reputation for tail-happy handling, the 928 featured clever multi-link rear suspension developed at its Weissach proving ground.

Few of its contemporaries enjoyed the luxury of such a clean-sheet approach – not even Jaguar's XJ-S V12 or Aston Martin's V8, both powered by engines seen in their predecessors. Those aspects led to the 928 scooping that prestigious Car of the Year gong when 51 motoring journalists unanimously voted for it. The award was a big boost to sales, albeit controversial at the time, and Porsche shifted more than 5000 cars in the first year alone.

Looking at the 928's shape today, it's easy to see how sensational it was more than 30 years ago. Integrated, body-coloured bumpers and a flush rear hatch were exciting and futuristic, as were the exposed, pop-up lights. These disguised the width needed to house the 90° V8.

Inside, the 928 boasted an ergonomic layout

PORSCHE 928

Sold/number built 1978-'82/17,669
Construction galvanised steel monocoque, with aluminium doors, front wings and bonnet
Engine all-alloy, sohc-per bank 4474cc V8, two valves per cylinder, with Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 240bhp @ 5000rpm
Max torque 257lb ft @ 3600rpm
Transmission five-speed manual transaxle, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones, coaxial coil springs, telescopic dampers **rear** lower wishbones, upper transverse links, coil springs, double-acting telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r
Steering power-assisted rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated discs, with servo
Length 14ft 7in (4442mm)
Width 6ft ¼in (1835mm)
Height 4ft 3¾in (1315mm)
Wheelbase 8ft 2½in (2500mm)
Weight 1468kg (3229lb)
0-60mph 7 secs
Top speed 140mph
Mpg 15.8
Price new £19,499

'The colossal torque of the GTS means that you can pootle about at low revs, but press the throttle sharply and any sense of lethargy is replaced with an urgent growl'

with clever features such as a combined adjustable steering wheel and instrument binnacle to optimise the driving position. There was plenty of space for 6ft-plus drivers, who could stretch out in comfort yet still reach of all the controls easily. The 928 felt impressive on the road, too, with near-50/50 weight distribution and a top speed of 140mph, while it could hit 60mph from rest in 7 secs. It was no sluggard, as *Motor* magazine pointed out in 1978, but not quite in the Jaguar, Aston Martin or Ferrari league.

Despite that criticism, those figures still sound and feel good when you get behind the wheel of a 928 today. From the moment the V8 fires up with its trademark muted burble, you're aware that the car packs serious grunt. It pulls away urgently and the low driving position amplifies the GT feel – as does the dog-leg first gear. It isn't the short, snappy change you expect, but it has a long, precise throw. The tall gearing means that you don't need to shift too often, given the V8's spread of torque. Press on and it gathers pace surprisingly rapidly, the car's wide track and comfort masking speed to a degree.

Porsche was keen to improve the 928's performance, and the 928S, added just two years later, was the start of an evolution to keep the model at the top of its game. The 'S' signalled an increase to 4.7 litres, giving 300bhp, with the 1983-on S2 boasting 310bhp and anti-lock brakes as standard. Three years later came the S4, which packed a 5-litre quad-cam V8 with four valves per cylinder and was good for 330bhp and 317lb ft of torque.

That development didn't come cheap: the S4 cost £48,935 – nearly £30k up on the launch price. It rose another £15,500 when the GT was added in 1989. That was replaced three years later with the GTS we have here, the final variant. With engine capacity up to 5.4 litres and a 5.4 secs 0-60mph time, the 928 had evolved into a serious supercar. Only the Ferrari Testarossa went faster around Millbrook's bowl, said *Motor*, and the 512TR cost twice as much.

It was an impressive run for a single model that looked largely unchanged, apart from a revised front end plus wraparound tail-lights and a downforce-inducing rear spoiler. The quality of the fittings is even more impressive. Joel Hopwood's early car is more than 40 years

THE OWNER
Joel Hopwood

The early car here is Joel's third. "My first was an S2 auto bought two and a half years ago," he says. Next came a manual S4, before this Helblau metallic car. "I love Porsches but wanted something different and loved the idea of a V8," says Joel. "I like the purity of the design, plus the 16-valve engines are easier to maintain. The fuel injection is mechanical so there's no ECU to go wrong, and the valves won't hit the pistons if the cambelt breaks." Joel says you need to buy carefully: "Mine came with an MoT, but there are plenty of bad ones around." He says web forums useful for advice and that the manual gearbox "makes a great car even better".

Ultra-quick GTS packed quad-cam, 5.4-litre V8; big rear spoiler came in with S4 of '87; lower-profile tyres give epic grip on 17in 'Porsche Cup' alloys, 2in wider than early 16in 'telephone dial' rims

old and hasn't been that pampered over its 110,000-mile life, yet the interior remains intact down to the soft Pasha fabric inlays, while the multitude of switches all still operate with a pleasing teutonic 'click'.

Step into the GTS and those controls haven't moved. The acres of soft, light-grey leather and expanses of wood – often specified on the GTS – make for a heavier, more opulent feel, as does the chunkier steering wheel, which packs an airbag. The refinement spreads to the eight-way electrically adjustable heated seats and the enhanced instrumentation that includes a trip computer. There's also full climate control as well as tinted windows to keep you cool, and extra sound deadening intended to cocoon you from road noise. Throw in the electronics for the automatic tyre-pressure monitor, ABS and the variable-ratio PSD limited-slip diff and it's easy to see how the GTS piled on a further 379lb.

The sense of cosseted refinement and extra weight is evident as you turn the key: the V8 has a subdued, understated rumble and there's a heft to the steering on your first turn. On the road, the combination of the automatic 'box (a popular option) and the engine's multi-valve tractability – not to mention a stonking 350bhp – gives it an almost schizophrenic character. The V8's colossal torque means you can pootle about at low revs without any inkling of its top-end ability. Even just limiting your right foot to 2500rpm will have you smartly up to the legal maximum. But press the throttle sharply and the 928 takes on a very different character. Any sense of lethargy is replaced by an urgent growl as the needle darts up. From 4000rpm, a change in the induction flow results in a proper V8 bellow as the 928 surges forward like a scalded cheetah across the Serengeti.

This is when you get a taste of the 928's *autobahn*-devouring reputation. Floor the throttle pedal and you'd engage the electronic kickdown before hitting 120mph in third. And even then you'll still be more than 2000rpm shy of its lofty 6250rpm redline. It's a truly potent performer that feels ever stronger the more you press on.

The trouble is, the chassis seems so capable and surefooted, the feedback so insulated, that you need three-figure speeds to feel as if you're having fun. Fortunately, the GTS is equally impressive if you need to rein in the horses

PORSCHE 928 GTS

Sold/number built 1992-'95/2831
Construction galvanised steel monocoque, with aluminium doors, front wings and bonnet
Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 5397cc V8, four valves per cylinder, Bosch LH-Jetronic injection
Max power 350bhp @ 5700rpm
Max torque 362lb ft @ 4250rpm
Transmission five-speed manual or four-speed automatic transaxle, RWD, with lock-up overdrive, Porsche active Slip Differential (PSD)
Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones, coaxial coil springs, telescopic dampers **rear** lower wishbones, upper transverse links, coil springs, double-acting telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r
Steering power-assisted rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated discs, with servo and anti-lock
Length 14ft 8in (4520mm)
Width 6ft ¾in (1848mm)
Height 4ft 2½in (1282mm)
Wheelbase 8ft 2½in (2500mm)
Weight 3608lb (1636kg)
0-60mph 5.4 secs
Top speed 168mph **Mpg** 15
Price new £72,950

From top: funky Pasha trim is more in keeping with the 928's character than leather. Below: quad cams from S4; cutaway shows transaxle layout

thanks to its massive 12.7in (323mm) ventilated front discs and four-pot calipers that came straight out of the 993 turbo's parts bin. And if you do lift off at speed in a corner, that nifty rear axle keeps the back end in check. Ah, yes, the Weissach axle. Its sophisticated variable geometry is governed by a control link that's designed to force the outer wheel in a corner to 'toe out' if you lift off. So it wards off the wheel's tendency to tuck in and cause a spin.

Get back behind the wheel of the early 928 and you discover that it's a lot more linear in the way it dishes up its power. The smaller engine's response isn't quite as fierce, but it's a lot more predictable and still plenty of fun. The 16-valve V8 has a healthy dose of mid-range torque, too, so you can revel in the surges between gearshifts. In the GTS those bursts are notably shorter, mainly because of the 32-valve engine's ability to rev and deliver massive urge.

In terms of performance, obviously the GTS has the edge, despite its weight, but when it comes to character, for me the original is best. The early 928 has a poise and an agility that's masked by the mass and sheer speed of the GTS and the buckets of grip from its 255/40ZR16 rear tyres. The manual gearbox also makes you feel more connected with its soul. You can sense the high-frequency activity of the transaxle pulsing like a heartbeat through the gearlever while the engine sounds more rooted with a deeper, more primal note to the V8 in place of the quad-cam version's sophisticated cacophony of valve gear and ancillary whine. Its performance is also more usable in a sense, because it feels faster than it is, whereas the GTS is so superbly refined that it disguises its true pace.

Such differences are to be expected given the 18 years of development that separate these two models. Yet the age gap merely highlights just how superb the original was back in 1977. The 928 might not have followed Porsche's intended 911-replacement role in the company script, but the 'all-new' design philosophy behind the car laid the groundwork for an accomplished GT that evolved in ability, with a range of models to broaden its appeal and accessibility. And, if anything, the 911's continued success has tempered 928 prices, making ownership today just as tempting as it will be rewarding.

THROTTLE'S 928 MEMORIES
Simon Taylor

"For more than a decade my everyday car was a Porsche 928. I owned three: an S4 [above], a GT and a GTS, all secondhand, all manuals, all wonderfully long-legged tourers. A 928 is a versatile car, equally happy cruising at 160mph on *autobahns*, hustling cross-country on B-roads or pottering unruffled through heavy traffic.

"I liked the rounded, chunky styling, which still looks quirky and timeless. I liked the hewn-from-solid feel, from the sharp steering and the surefootedness in wet weather to the heavy precision of the switchgear and the firm, hip-hugging, tall-backed seats. And I liked the torquey grunt – even today these are still quick cars.

"They were amazing value for money, and they still are. These cars are beautifully built and should be good for 250,000 miles. If something does go wrong – my only problem was a clutch that went on the S4 at 60,000 miles – they are expensive to repair. But if you're budgeting for a good late 928, buy the best one you can find for a few thousand less than your maximum and put £3000 in the bank. You probably won't need it, but it'll be there in case."

THE OWNER
George Layton

George opted out of a company-car scheme to buy this 1995 GTS auto in 1997: "I'd had a 205 GTI and a Clio, so this was a big step up, but I'd fancied one since the early '80s." The computer project manager paid £52k and did 16,000 miles in six months.

It's still his daily drive, and he's not afraid to use it: "I've had a few strange looks when I've loaded it up at Wickes," he says. It costs around £1000 a year to maintain, and it's important to find a specialist who knows 928s. "Dealers aren't that familiar with them now," says George, who has taken the car on a club trip to Stuttgart. "It's as easy in town as it is to blast along the *autobahn*."

Back to

Porsche's four-cylinder 924, 944 and 968 played vital roles in the firm's survival, and they now offer great value for money

WORDS **MALCOLM THORNE** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER/MOTORSPORT IMAGES**

Front

Way back in 1516, the Bavarians adopted a new statute – the *Reinheitsgebot* – that sought to control the ingredients of beer. Five centuries later the law might have evolved, but Germany still proudly regulates its brewing industry. Add anything unexpected and you can't call it *bier*. Much to the chagrin of 911 fans, such purity orders have never applied to Porsche. As a result, 41 years ago the marque released one of the most controversial models in its history: the 924.

The car was totally at odds with the company ethos, yet it deserves to be honoured. A worthy enough design in isolation, it went on to spawn two of the most capable sports cars of the 1980s and 1990s – the 944 and 968.

Unveiled in 1975, the 924 represented a new direction for Stuttgart. For the first time, Porsche had deviated from its stock-in-trade of air-cooled, horizontally opposed engines mounted behind the driver. As if that wasn't enough, up until a few months before its launch the intention had been for the new model to wear the Volkswagen roundel.

The 924's origins can be traced back to the early 1970s, when Volkswagen turned its attention to replacing the VW-Porsche 914. Development of the new model, codenamed *Entwicklungs-auftrag* 425, was subcontracted to Porsche's Weissach R&D department, the brief calling for a sporting coupé that, to contain production and development costs, would use the maximum number of components from the Volkswagen AG parts bin.

Early mules were constructed using a well-worn BMW 1600 and then an Opel Manta as a basis, but EA-425 would emerge as a slippery 2+2 fastback that was styled in-house by Dutchman Harm Lagaay. The 924 represents a defining moment in his career: "I was a self-taught 27-year-old, and this was my first complete car. We took a number of proposals to Wolfsburg, and Rudolf Leiding chose mine. It was a very exciting moment, but daunting, too.

"People often ask me how much I was influenced by the Ferrari Daytona, because some early sketches did resemble it. I'd always been a fan of Italian cars, but back then the Daytona wasn't held in the same regard as it is today. It was just one influence among many. It would have been nice to push the design further, but Volkswagen was happy with it as it was. If the client likes it, you don't change it."

Power came from a fuel-injected 1984cc engine that would also find a home in the Audi 100 and AMC Gremlin, plus – horror of horrors – the Volkswagen LT van. Truth be told, though, the Porsche unit was far from identical to that used in other, lesser applications.

The running gear was from Volkswagen, while the four-speed gearbox was pinched from Audi. In a bid to optimise weight distribution and avoid the expense of developing a bespoke transmission for a front-

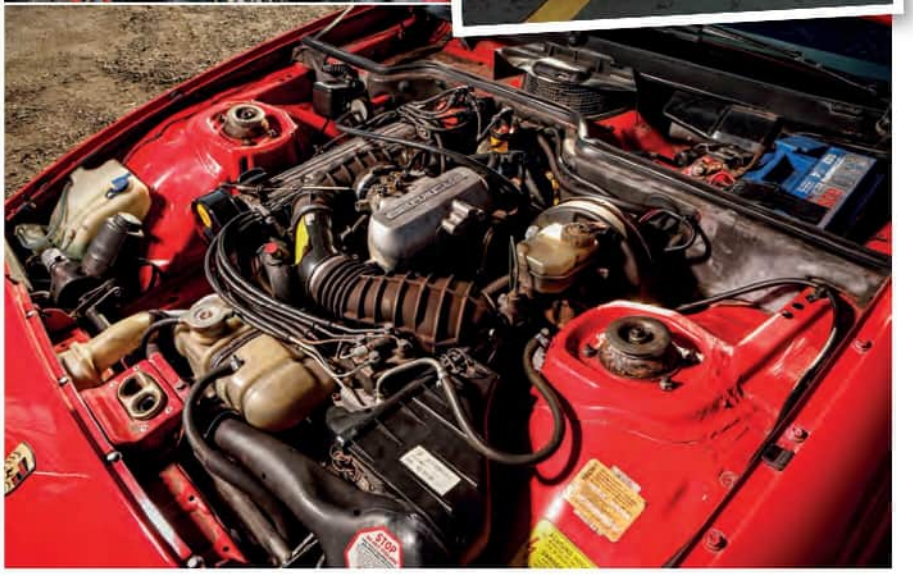
PORSCHE 924

Sold/number built 1976-'88/150,617 (all)
Construction steel monocoque, galvanised floorpan (fully galvanised from 1985)
Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc 1984cc 'four', Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 125bhp @ 5800rpm
Max torque 122lb ft @ 3500rpm
Transmission four- or five-speed manual, or three-speed automatic, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, lower wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** by semi-trailing arms, transverse torsion bars; hydraulic dampers f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo
Length 13ft 10in (4212mm)
Width 5ft 6in (1685mm)
Height 4ft 2in (1270mm)
Weight 2491lb (1130kg)
0-60mph 9.6 secs
Top speed 125mph **Mpg** 25
Price new £6999

'I was a self-taught 27-year-old, and the 924 was my first complete car design'

The 924's clean styling is ageing well. Above: Harm Lagaay (centre) pictured in 1973, with the design team and an early scale model

Straight-line performance is best described as brisk rather than quick. Below: well-built cabin with deeply dished gauges and signature Pasha trim; the 2-litre 'four' was canted well over in the engine bay



Stuttgart's other Le Mans racers

Porsche and the famous 24 Hours are inextricably linked, and a trio of factory-entered Carrera GTPs (left) – representing Germany, Great Britain and the USA – shone remarkably brightly in the 1980 race. The entry was intended to be a fairly low-key exercise and, with only 320bhp, the cars struggled in qualifying, but wet conditions during the race levelled the playing field considerably. The German crew of Jürgen Barth and Manfred Schurti came home an impressive sixth overall.

"We could have finished fourth," recalled Tony Dron, who was partnered with Andy Rouse in the British car, "but a burnt-out exhaust valve meant we were on three cylinders for the last six hours. In spite of that, the car was still good for 180mph on the Mulsanne."

The following year the factory was back with another Carrera GTP, this time fitted with the still-secret 944 engine and an experimental 16-valve cylinder head. Producing 410bhp, it finished seventh overall in the hands of Barth and Walter Röhrl, as well as taking home a trophy for winning its class.

Ironically, although it was the fastest and most highly developed member of Porsche's transaxle family, the 968 was never entered by the factory at the Circuit de la Sarthe. Thomas Bscher, Lindsay Owen-Jones and John Nielsen did share a privately entered 968 turbo RS in 1994, but, unfortunately, the car was forced to retire after an accident on lap 84.

The 968 had a family resemblance to the 928, thanks to the exposed pop-up lights and revised nose. Below left: 924 handles brilliantly, with well-weighted steering. Below: elegant 944 Cabrio

Variations on a transaxle theme

924, 1975-'85 2-litre VW-Audi engine; 125bhp **924 turbo, 1979-'82** Cross-spoke alloys and cooling ducts in nose; 170bhp (177bhp '81-on) **924 Carrera GT, 1981** Aggressively styled 210bhp homologation special; only 406 built **924 S, 1986-'88** 2.5-litre 944 powerplant and running gear, plus Teledial alloy wheels

944, 1981-'89 Porsche-designed 8v 2.5-litre 'four' and wide body; 2.7-litre motor and 165bhp for '89 **944 turbo, 1985-'91** 220bhp, restyled nose, new rear valance. Power up to 250bhp for 1988-on turbo S **944 S, 1987-'88** 16v head boosts power to 190bhp @ 6000rpm **944 S2, 1989-'91** Increased bore and stroke give 211bhp and 207lb ft from 3-litre 16v unit; turbo-style nose **944 S2 Cabriolet, 1989-'91** Drop-top S2 by American Sunroof Company. Also with 3-litre turbo in '91 – only 528 built

968, 1992-'95 Restyled body; 3-litre, 16v engine with variable valve timing; six-speed manual or four-speed Tiptronic semi-auto **968 Cabriolet, 1992-'95, 968 Club Sport 1993-'95** Less weight, uprated suspension **968 turbo S, 1993-'95** Ultra-rare 8v, 174mph turbo variant based on Club Sport; 305bhp and 369lb ft; 14 built

engined, rear-wheel-drive layout (VW didn't have a suitable unit in its arsenal at the time), the usually front-drive gearbox was placed at the rear. Curiously, this left an empty bellhousing beneath the tail, EA-425's clutch being mounted at the front and separated from the transmission by a 2m propshaft.

The story took an 11th-hour twist during the winter of 1974-'75, when Toni Schmücker replaced Leiding as head of Volkswagen. The mid-'70s oil crisis and the ensuing recession had seriously knocked the firm's finances. Schmücker had more pressing concerns than EA-425, especially because the new Scirocco had already provided him with a coupé in the Wolfsburg company's line-up.

On the other hand, with 911 sales plunging, Stuttgart desperately needed a new money-earner. To both parties, there was a rational argument in favour of Porsche taking over EA-425. When the proposition was put to Schmücker, he was more than happy to oblige.

As part of the deal, Volkswagen would supply the componentry at a favourable price, while production would be subcontracted to Audi, thus saving its Neckarsulm factory. Rather than purchasing the rights to EA-425 outright, Porsche would pay a royalty to VW on each of the first 100,000 cars produced. As a bonus, EA-425 also tied in neatly with Stuttgart's plans to pension-off the 911 in favour of the front-engined, water-cooled 928, work on which was already well under way.

"The changes we made to turn it into the 924 were minimal," remembers Harm. "A bit more than just swapping the badge, but not by much. I think it still looks good today, though."

The deal was signed in February 1975, and nine months later EA-425 broke cover as a Porsche, the first cars reaching buyers in 1976. Had it been badged as a VW – and priced accordingly – it would surely have received the highest praise because it's well sorted, with sharp looks, fine road manners and an impressive level of comfort. But it's not a VW, and it certainly wasn't priced like one. Road-testers praised the handling and top speed but were unimpressed by the lack of refinement

Clockwise, from main: the wider-body 944 features an altogether more aggressive stance than the 924; fine balance gives secure handling; revised dashboard and pinstripe seat trim

in a car that cost 50% more than an Alfa GTV.

It was an inauspicious start, but for its manufacturer the 924 was very much the right product at the right time. As Michael Cotton, Porsche GB's former public relations officer, remembers: "911 owners gave it a cold reception, but dealers loved it because it gave them something else to sell. People would say to me that they had always wanted a Porsche, and that now they could afford one. It opened up a whole new market."

A 140mph turbo joined the line-up in 1979, offering vastly improved performance, but the naysayers were still quick to denounce the model's humble DNA. Time, then, to move up a gear. Unveiled at the Frankfurt motor show in 1981, the 944 was a muscular, wide-bodied evolution of the 924, its flared wheelarches aping the Carrera GT racers (see panel).

There was, though, much more to the revised car than a mere aesthetic reinterpretation. A host of subtle but useful modifications included a wheelbase that had been stretched by 1.8in, plus the adoption of disc brakes at the rear, but the real change lay beneath the bonnet – with a bespoke motor finally bestowing the 944 with the credibility that, for some, the 924 had always struggled to attain.

Various options had been considered during development, including a six-cylinder unit. At one stage, the PRV 'Douvrin' V6 had been shoehorned into a mule for trials, but – against a backdrop of increasing oil prices – a lighter, more efficient all-alloy 'four' was favoured. To facilitate manufacturing and reduce costs, the new oversquare lump was modelled around the 928's V8 (with which it shared a number of key dimensions). The result was a 30% increase in power as well as almost 25% more torque, plus massively improved refinement.

The secret behind such finesse was the use of counter-rotating balancer shafts. This exotic-sounding fix is actually little more than a pair of carefully positioned, belt-driven eccentric bob weights attached to either side of the block and spinning at twice engine speed. For a cost of just 3-4bhp (plus a royalty to Mitsubishi, which held the patents to Frederick

PORSCHE 944

Sold/number built 1982-'91/140,286 (all)
Construction galvanised steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, sohc 2479cc 'four', Bosch L-Jetronic fuel injection
Max power 163bhp @ 5800rpm
Max torque 151lb ft @ 3000rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, lower wishbones **rear** semi-trailing arms, torsion bars; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes discs, with servo
Length 13ft 9in (4200mm) **Width** 5ft 8in (1735mm) **Height** 4ft 2in (1275mm)
Weight 2632lb (1195kg)
0-60mph 7.4 secs
Top speed 137mph **Mpg** 29
Price new £12,999 (1982)

Lanchester's 1904 invention), Porsche permanently banished secondary vibration, and with it one of the greatest criticisms of the 924. Where the Volkswagen unit had been coarse and vocal, the new Porsche lump was some 20dB(A) quieter and played a tune more in keeping with its price-tag.

Progressive upgrades for the 944 included a 16-valve head and a turbo, as well as increases in capacity from 2.5 to 2.7 and then 3 litres. A new, more elegant fascia arrived in 1985, distancing the 944 from its cheaper sibling, while the firm also worked hard to improve perceived quality.

As soon as you climb inside, you notice the difference. The 944 feels more grown-up, more polished and a whole lot more modern. Some of the quirkiness of the 924 has gone – that car's deeply convex instruments, for example, are a curious yet endearing feature – but the newer model undeniably feels more expensive and more complete.

It's also noticeably quicker, and dynamically is a far better car. You can sense how the design has been carefully honed and evolved, feel the benefits of all that patient development. Much as I like the 924, after a few miles in the 944 you can understand why sales of the smaller-engined car took a nosedive in the mid-'80s. The later model is such a massive leap forward.

Throughout the 1980s, the 944 would play a key part in the Porsche line-up, but as the decade gave way to the '90s the car was looking ready for a revamp. Enter, stage left, the 968.

"I left Porsche in 1977 but returned in '89," says Harm. "The 944 had been selling very well, but then it had begun to tail off. The shape had been around for a long time – perhaps too long – so my first task was to redesign it to become the 968. We had a small budget and little time, but I am particularly pleased with the result. It gave the four-cylinder car a visual link to the 928 and the 964 that had been missing before."

Here, at last, was a model that looked like a Porsche, went like a Porsche and, lest anyone was left in any doubt, was also built by Porsche in its Zuffenhausen factory. Reputedly, just 20% of the new model was carried over from the 944, and the more you look at it, the fewer similarities you find. There would be no Volkswagen parts-bin stigma attached to this car.

Beneath the reprofiled nose, the 3-litre 'four' from the last-of-the-line 944 was updated with VarioCam variable valve timing, giving a useful boost to both power and torque. Considering the motor's tyre-shredding twist, it's something of a paradox that a six-speed gearbox was fitted as standard – this is a car in which you can be awfully lazy with your cog-swapping. But then, as Porsche engineer Paul Hensler once pointed out, Stuttgart's customers are people who like changing gear.

They are also people who like to press on and, with 240bhp and 225lb ft at its disposal, the 968 is certainly rapid. Yet in its road test, *Autocar* was not entirely convinced, one of the biggest criticisms being that, alongside increasingly competent Japanese models, the

PORSCHE 968

Sold/number built 1992-'95/11,242 (all)
Construction galvanised steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, dohc, 16-valve 2990cc 'four', VarioCam valve timing, Bosch fuel injection
Max power 240bhp @ 6200rpm
Max torque 225lb ft @ 4100rpm
Transmission six-speed manual or four-speed Tiptronic semi-automatic, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, alloy wishbones **rear** transverse torsion bars; dual-tube dampers, anti-roll bar f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated discs, with servo and anti-lock
Length 14ft 2in (4320mm)
Width 5ft 8in (1735mm)
Height 4ft 1in (1255mm)
Weight 2910lb (1320kg)
0-60mph 6.5 secs
Top speed 157mph
Mpg 30
Price new £28,750 (Club Sport, 1993)

On twisty B-roads, the 968 is fabulously rewarding. Above: Speedster variant sadly never reached production

'As the ultimate incarnation of the breed, the 968 is the most accomplished here'

Clockwise, from main: even in Club Sport spec, the profile harks back to the first 924; 3-litre engine gives impressive performance; interior layout is largely carried over from the 944

car was fiercely expensive. A recurring theme of these four-cylinder Porsches, it would seem.

In 1993, a stripped-out special – the Club Sport – addressed that particular gripe, its lack of embellishment stripping pounds from the list price as well as from the kerbweight. Today, it is the most sought-after of the 968 range, and when you drive one it's easy to understand why. Compared with its forebears, the way the Club Sport handles is a revelation. On twisty back-roads it is wonderfully rapid, but with never so much as a suggestion that it might bite back.

Owner Ken Coad agrees. Prior to the 968, he had a 911 Carrera 2.7 and then a 993 Carrera 4 but he now prefers the front-engined car, its performance being far more accessible and communicative. The chassis is beautifully balanced and continually urges you to press on faster, the steering is nicely weighted, the poise through corners is totally inspiring and the engine intoxicates with its formidable punch.

The difference between the 944 and 968 is less pronounced than that between the 924 and 944, but, as the ultimate incarnation of this trio, the 968 is the most accomplished. It is a wonderful plaything, yet – in spite of its stripped-for-speed spec – it is also comfortable, civilised and, I strongly suspect, a majestic long-haul tourer.

For all its dynamic qualities, though, I struggle to warm to the 968's styling. Say what you will about the 924, the shape is one thing you can't criticise. As time goes by, it just gets better and in today's world of super-sized sports-coupés it looks refreshingly lithe with its skinny hips and narrow wheels. It's difficult to ignore the vastly superior powerplant of the 944, but my inner aesthete says that an early 924 is the one I'd keep.

Ironically, given that they were condemned for being too pricey when new, they all now offer amazing value. To some, they may lack the cachet of a flat-six Porsche, but that just means a bargain for the rest of us. Buy now, before it's too late.

Thanks to *James Garrard, Shaun Greenham, Ken Coad; The Independent Porsche Enthusiasts Club (tipec.net); Porsche Club GB (porscheclubgb.com)*

Specialist's view*

"Values have more than doubled in the past two years," says Jon Mitchell (01202 488800; jmgporsche.co.uk). "The 944 turbo is now £15-25,000, but the 968 Club Sport [£20-30k] and 924 Carrera GT [£40-60k] are increasingly in demand. The 924 turbo [£5-12,000] is rare, so potentially a good investment.

"Porsches wear mileages well, so a car with 300,000 miles can drive as nicely as one with 30,000; anything with less than 100,000 is really low-mileage. Originality and history are important. Ensure the cam and balance-shaft belts are changed every four years, and the water pump, engine front oil seals and belt-tensioner rollers [c£1800] every eight. Clutches can be expensive and typically last 45,000 miles.

"The history should show the car has been serviced every year, regardless of miles, and turbos should be serviced twice yearly. Post-1980 models were galvanised and have only recently started suffering from corrosion, usually in the rear inner and outer sills. Correctly replaced sills should be seen as a definite plus point.

"As a daily driver I'd recommend the torquey 944 S2 or 968 [£10-15k], while the 924, 924 S or 944 Lux [£5-10k] make an ideal entry into classic motoring, with low running costs compared to turbos and 16v models. Avoid project cars: nothing is as expensive as a cheap Porsche!"

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

Blue sky thinking

Blending sporting pedigree with boulevard cruising appeal, Mazda's FC RX-7 and Porsche's 944 S2 offer plentiful posing power with a high-performance twist

WORDS **AARON MCKAY** PHOTOGRAPHY **WILL WILLIAMS**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Porsche's 3-litre, 208bhp 'four' uses 104mm bores with cast rather than forged pistons for less weight

Even on a chilly Monday morning, Southend-on-Sea's two-mile-long promenade is a place where attentions are snap-quick and show-offs wildly competitive. Palm trees meet chippies and quaint, multi-coloured beach huts sit next to the Modernist water features that represent the latest of this Essex seaside town's amusements. Vying for the attention of Southenders and off-season tourists, our two brightly-coloured convertibles join a surprising number of classics cruising down the strip.

A Guards Red Porsche cabriolet still might not yet be the sort of image a coin-pushing slot-gamer would appreciate. Its £39,000 list price back in 1989, some £5000 more than an already pricey 944 S2, has stubborn connotations of flashy wealth that, even with a decade behind it in the budget section of the classified ads, it hasn't shaken off entirely. Still, it glides along with utter self-assurance and, against the white SUVs and wheelieing 'bikers, carries an elegance that is increasingly endearing.

The Mazda RX-7 burbles along with an overt attitude, more ready to take on rivalling distractions. Its piercing white paintwork is difficult to miss, and, while some might be double-checking if the 944 is a Porsche, many others will be wondering what on earth this other 1980s whizz-bang is at all. Costing £24,000 in 1989, the RX-7 Turbo II convertible wasn't so eye-wateringly expensive, but today it's a much rarer sight than its German rival and carries with it a sort of prestige of curiosity – not to mention today's blossoming appeal of the Japanese modern classic.

They are both dressed for the part, with pop-up lights hidden in rounded nose cones, flared wheelarches showcasing neat alloys and interior detailing that rewards those who get close enough to peer in. The Porsche 944 hugs the road with athletic confidence, its wide rear haunches and subtly sculpted bonnet confirming its graduation from the original and rather more skinny 924. From its misfiring beginnings as a Volkswagen sports car, arranging an Audi 100 engine and gearbox into a neat transaxle 2+2, then through an awkward adolescence as an adopted Porsche, the 944 S2 of 1988 upon which this convertible is based is some distance from that 1970s Project EA-425.

The 944 replaced the 2-litre Audi 'four' with what was in effect one bank of the 928's V8, bored out to 2.5 litres. A curious work of Porsche engineering, this big 'four' calmed vibrations with an exceptionally strong bottom end cast in one piece and a counter-rotating balancer-shaft licenced from Mitsubishi, while the compression ratio rose ever higher with a knock-sensor and combustion turbulence resulting in the somewhat forgettably named 'Thermodynamically Optimised Porsche' engine. The 1987 944 S introduced a double-overhead-cam arrangement, and in 1989 displacement was up to 3 litres for the 944 S2, with a compression ratio of 10.9:1, making 208bhp. The 'S' package also brought with it the turbo's bodykit and suspension set-up.

The 944 S2 became available, for the first time, as a convertible. The conversion work was subcontracted to the Karosseriewerke Weinsberg coachbuilder, later bought by the American Sunroof Company, based close to Porsche's Neckarsulm facility near Stuttgart. The chassis was reinforced, with a new floorpan welded in and bracing added at crucial points, while the roofline was lowered slightly, with a shorter windscreen. The 944's glassback silhouette is traded for a long, flat rear deck and, to afford some boot space above the transaxle rear, the bootlid rises higher than the laws of elegance would prefer.

Lighter rotors, higher compression and sharper engine management upped Turbo II's output to 197bhp

But, with a small fabric roof ahead of it, the arrangement just avoids awkwardness and is instead simply distinctive, helped along the way to being a classic Porsche design with Teutonic details such as angular tail-lights and the S2's wavy rear splitter.

It's a similar story inside, where the post-1985 dashboard is a 911-echoing array of dials and scattered switchgear set horizontally into an austere roll of vinyl. The matching Guards Red seats, on the other hand, are a loud, unapologetic display of German prestige: like the period Motorola phone and complicated Blaupunkt Dresden RCR 45 stereo, they are nostalgic trappings of yuppie days past, juxtaposed against classic Porsche conservatism.

But it's not the digital radio displays or the electrically operated extras that define the 944 on the road. Like the switches that operate them, the 944's main controls are weighty, with a little initial imprecision suggestive of the major engineering behind them. At low speeds the car elicits a sense of dismissive impatience, its firm springs thumping ripples in the road through to the sports seats, and the big 'four' whirrs along with indifference to the gear you haven't been bothered to change. There is enough torque that, when you do clear the beach crowds and the holiday homes, not much more than a lean on the throttle sweeps the Porsche towards its preferred higher speeds. A heavier foot produces a determined, gravelly note from ahead and a proper shove in the seatback, and the gearbox, steering and pedals soon feel more wieldy.

The 944 flies over undulating topography with exceptional composure, unperturbed by humpback bridges or askew cambers. Hugged securely by the narrow seats, there's a true sense of the road underneath through that familiar, 'Porsche-branded' fine damping and tactile steering. Lining up its subtly flared bonnet and leaning the ever-so-slightly perceptible weight of the transaxle through corners is enjoyable in its accuracy, if not quite an inspiration of joy.

The Mazda is, in contrast, bursting with energy. Amplified by controls that are almost fingertip-light, the RX-7 darts from corner to corner, rolling on its chassis more freely than the more serious, more composed Porsche. It takes a brief moment for the turbocharged rotary to swell with urgency, but with a whine and an intake of breath it catapults you forwards on a multiplying surge of torque. Fizzing with free-revving enthusiasm, the little engine quickly abandons turbo lag and delivers a delightfully sharp throttle response at the top end. The 7000rpm redline seems ludicrously early, and conscious effort is needed to avoid the shrill little warning buzz emitted by the dashboard.

'They're both dressed for the part, with pop-up lights, flared wheelarches and neat detailing that rewards those who get close enough'

The steering and gearbox are as slick and free as the unfettered engine, although it lacks the mechanical feel of the Porsche's more work-for-it helm. Mazda's variable-rate steering only reveals a layer of feedback right at the edge of grip, but it is swift in response. The RX-7 feels smaller and more nimble than the Porsche, despite its slightly longer wheelbase, and invites playful use of the controls rather than careful and considered inputs.

This car, though, had ambitions beyond the light, effervescent spirit of the original RX-7. Longer, wider and heavier than that car, many suggest that this 'FC' generation was too much of an appeasement to the American *boulevardier* market, but the reality is probably more to do with it following the general shift of sports cars towards GTs. Inside, this means more buttons and more space, while emulating the same driver-centric shape of the original. It is formed from black plastic in the classic Japanese style, although the leather seats and wheel are joined by an attempt at a soft-touch dashboard top. The most exciting part is certainly the instrument binnacle, which houses a complete set of striking orange-on-black dials and incorporates a novel collection of switchgear, gathering controls for the lights, wipers, heated rear 'screen and even a switch to flip open and closed the pop-up headlights. It was probably once considered the height of ergonomic design... It's not, but, combined with the swept-round curvature of the dash top that includes neat, door-mounted air vents, it achieves a sporty cockpit feel and is miles ahead of the take-it-or-leave-it attitude of the Porsche's steadfast fascia.

The Germans ought also to have taken notice of the Mazda's bonnet scoop, underneath which is the air-to-air intercooler helping to maintain the 197bhp and 195lb ft that ensure the 944 is only ever a fluffed gearchange away from a Porsche-branded embarrassment.

Like the 944's 'four', the RX-7's turbocharged rotary is one step from its final evolution, but its development history stretches back still further. Having won a technical partnership with NSU in 1960 by a stroke of luck, Mazda had championed the novel Wankel rotary engine ever since. Its first was the 10a underneath the bonnet of the 1967 110S Cosmo, and by 1986 the derivative 13b had been developed into a far more robust, fuel-injected form for the latest RX-7. As well as a clever twin-plenum intake system, Mazda pursued turbocharging to further its rotary-powered ambitions – and in no small measure. Its determined engineers partnered with industrial giant Hitachi to pioneer a twin-scroll turbo, aiming for the dream combination of low-end response and high-end punch. It was achieved using computer-controlled pathways in the turbocharger to modulate pressure on its internal blades as the volume of exhaust gas increased, blending seamlessly with the rotary's inherently flat powerband while keeping lag to a minimum – at least by 1980s standards.

Mazda had also been at work on the RX-7's chassis for this second-

The 944 is firm but not jarring at low speeds, and gains in composure as the pace increases


Dash layout follows the lead set by the 911; its finish is austere, but red seats add brash contrast

Clockwise, from top left: Motorola phone is of the period; cassettes ditto; workmanlike dials; lights pop up from slightly drooping nose

PORSCHE 944 S2 CABRIOLET

Sold/number built 1989-'91/5656
Construction steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, dohc 2990cc 'four', Bosch Motronic 2 fuel injection
Max power 208bhp @ 5800rpm
Max torque 207lb ft @ 4000rpm
Transmission five-speed manual transaxle, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, **rear** torsion bars, telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r
Steering power-assisted rack and pinion
Brakes discs, with servo
Length 13ft 9½in (4200mm)
Width 5ft 8¼in (1735mm)
Height 4ft 2¼in (1275mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 10½in (2400mm)
Weight 2954lb (1340kg)
0-60mph 7.1 secs
Top speed 149mph
Mpg 28
Price new £39,713 (1989)

Chassis reinforcement lends a solidity to the convertible Mazda that mirrors that of the Porsche

Clockwise, from top left: headlight controls enhance RX-7's '80s button-fest; wheels are by BBS; orange was the new red; lights are of their time

RX-7's more cocooning cockpit is the sportier of the two, with a pleasing assemblage of switchgear

generation model. It developed an early form of multi-link rear suspension by adding a couple of locating links to floating hubs held by semi-trailing arms and marketing it as the Dynamic Tracing Suspension System.

It resulted in more benign responses than both earlier RX-7s and Porsche's torsion-bar-suspended rear, but purists complained about geometry tending towards understeer. The rack-and-pinion steering's computer-controlled variable assistance was perhaps a step too far into 1980s technological optimism, but its reported tendency to go light as grip falls away does at times manifest itself.

A convertible version was put into the RX-7 FB's planning from the beginning and was produced in-house. Comprising both a solid central targa-style panel and a folding rear fabric section with a heated glass window, this hybrid arrangement requires some boot space – for the targa panel – and willing hands to fold the rear section away, unlike the pushbutton Porsche hood. But there are speakers in the headrests and a neatly integrated windguard to regain an advantage over the 944's specification. Reinforcements were made to the RX-7's body including bracing behind the engine, rear seats and over the rear suspension struts, and the result is a car that feels just as solid over awkward surfaces as the impressively rigid Porsche.

As we line up on a quiet jetty at the old fishing port of Leigh-on-Sea, it's obvious from the RX-7's profile that Mazda deliberately targeted Porsche's 944 with the FC-generation car, and even with the altered proportions of the convertibles the resemblance is striking. The Mazda's fussy bodykit, BBS wheels and big tail-lights with smoked lenses look like an attempt to get one up on the Germans, despite it being a game the 944 just wasn't playing. It's easy to be captivated by it, though, particularly when your eyes have already been widened by the bright white paint. You can almost forget to spot the slightly slab-sided bodywork and chubby front wings that contrast with the Porsche's finely proportioned athleticism.

The 944 doesn't need showy details – its alloy wheels almost verge on the boring – but it looks and feels right. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly what it is about Porsche's transaxle convertible that so appeals, and then the driving experience reflects every carefully chosen line. It's clearly the more resolved sports car underneath, but, with the roof off, the Mazda has the sort of playful allure that promises fun and intrigue more than high culture. A bit like those old gaming machines, it's difficult to deny thoughts about finding a place for your own.

Thanks to *Mazda Motors UK (mazda.co.uk) and Porsche 944 owner Steven Ball*

MAZDA RX-7 CABRIOLET

Sold/number built 1985-'92/ 272,027 (all FC RX-7s)
Construction steel monocoque
Engine cast-iron rotors, alloy rotor housing with chrome-molybdenum plating, six-port 2616cc twin-rotor, two fuel injectors per chamber
Max power 197bhp @ 6500rpm
Max torque 195lb ft @ 3500rpm
Transmission five-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, **rear** multi-link, semi-trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r
Steering variable-rate power-assisted rack and pinion **Brakes** discs, with servo
Length 14ft 1¾in (4315mm)
Width 5ft 6½in (1690mm)
Height 4ft 1¾in (1265mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 11¾in (2430mm)
Weight 2976lb (1350kg)
0-60mph 6.7 secs
Top speed 149mph **Mpg** 24
Price new £25,544 (1989)

Group B for the road

Stuttgart's technologically pioneering 959 was the perfect fit for the 'excess all areas' 1980s, and represents the ultimate everyday supercar

WORDS **GREG MACLEMAN** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

Squat, purposeful styling offers more than a nod to the 911 – this car's owner reports that people often mistake it for a "tricked-up" version of that car

Out of a line-up of seminal supercars, it's the Bugatti Veyron that the wider public would recognise as the one that elevated engineering ideals above the concepts of profit and beauty to create a car that blew away the competition. And yet Porsche got there first, more than 20 years earlier.

In a decade when the supercar was king and the majority of manufacturers were focusing on horsepower, top speed and little else, the 959 bucked the trend by being a technological *tour de force*, an engineering marvel that instantly rendered the competition obsolete.

The 959's story begins in 1982, when the FIA introduced Group B – a no-holds-barred race and rally formula to replace Groups 4 and 5. There were no weight constraints, while the free use of special materials and unrestricted power outputs proved to be an irresistible lure for the engineers at Zuffenhausen.

It didn't take long to realise that four-wheel drive would be a prerequisite for success, as proven by the all-conquering Audi quattro. Unlike Audi, however, Porsche recognised the limitations of a front-engined layout, while a mid-engined set-up was considered unsuitable for conversion to road-car spec – 200 examples would have to be sold for homologation purposes. Not surprisingly, the firm turned to its longest-running and most successful competition car – the 911 – to serve as a starting point, launching the 959 project in January 1983 under the direction of Helmuth Bott.

When the first prototype was revealed at the 1983 Frankfurt show, it was clear the 959 shared heritage with the 911. Great care was taken to retain the same styling cues: as well as targeting Group B, the firm viewed the 959 as a testbed for future 911s, namely the 1989 964, which became the first to feature all-wheel drive.

Despite the similarities, the 959 was still an intriguing shape due to a longer tail, deep side skirts and a low rear spoiler, all designed to reduce drag and increase high-speed stability – vital for a car expected to touch 200mph.

The elongated silhouette was a storming success in the wind tunnel: its drag coefficient of 0.31Cd improved significantly on the contemporary 911's 0.40. It is more slippery, in fact, than a Ferrari 458 Italia – a supercar that was unveiled more than 25 years later.

It's remarkable that what was, in period, one of the most stylistically restrained and understated supercars is now, more than three decades later, such a striking vehicle, even when parked alongside an outlandish Miura or larger-than-life Veyron. But, unlike the Lamborghini, beauty remains in the eye of the beholder. Seeing the 959 emerge tail-first from its transporter, it's hard not to be struck by its stance, sitting on 17in hollow-spoke magnesium wheels that, from certain angles, appear to be drowning in cavernous arches.

Up close, strange reflections and ripples appear as light hits the doors – a product of their featherweight materials. Unlike the 911's steel door skins and bonnet, an aluminium alloy created with silicon and magnesium was used on the 959. The nose section is built in one piece from glass-reinforced polyurethane, while other panels use Kevlar and glassfibre.

While the materials were truly high-tech, it was the six-cylinder, twin-turbocharged beating heart of the 959 that drew the greatest interest when it was announced. The 2849cc flat-six began life in the 911, but underwent a drastic transformation – in part due to lessons learned from the Group C competition programme – to become capable of producing the 450bhp required by the design brief.

The biggest departure for Porsche involved cooling the engine: using air alone wouldn't remove enough heat, so each four-valve cylinder head incorporated an additional water-cooling system with its own pump driven from the inlet camshaft. You can hear it at work as soon as you fire up the engine, the kettle-like bubbling of circulating coolant coming from the engine bay proving to be an incongruous noise from a Porsche of this vintage. A crank-driven fan, meanwhile, was employed to cool the block, ensuring that the DNA remained unmistakably 911, and the underside of each cylinder was sprayed with a jet of oil.

Perhaps the most fascinating feature of the 959, however, is the sophisticated drivetrain and PSK electronically controlled clutch, which varies the pressure on the plates to increase the amount of torque transferred to the front wheels. Under normal driving conditions and a constant speed, the power is set at 40% front, 60% rear, in line with the 959's weight distribution, but up to 80% of the engine's power is sent to the rear wheels under hard acceleration. A simple four-way switch allows you a further degree of control depending on road conditions, and there's even the option of locking the differentials.

As if that wasn't enough, you're also given the ability to control the car's hydropneumatic ride height from inside the cabin, from a low 119mm to a tiptoeing 180mm, while the dampers can be set to soft, medium or hard.

As entertaining as it is to fiddle with ride height, damper firmness and torque distribution from the comfort of a leather-clad chair, the 959 makes up your mind for you when you're really pressing on. The faster you go, the lower and stiffer the car becomes, with the highest ride settings being overridden at 50mph, returning to its nominal 119mm height at 100mph. The dampers automatically move to hard as well, in order to reduce body roll – which is noticeable at lower speeds – as you enter corners.

Coupled with the four driven wheels, the result is astounding, with seemingly endless grip offered even during the sharpest turn-in, plus a settled and composed ride through long sweepers. There is a tendency to understeer when pushing on, typical of most four-wheel-drive cars, but with 575bhp on tap from our featured car's Stage 2 engine, you're soon thankful that it errs on the side of the forgiving.

That extra 125bhp from the uprated turbochargers is made evident when testing the 959's straight-line speed, too. The first turbo makes itself known low down in the rev range, launching the car from a standstill on a wave of torque that belies its 1351kg weight. But it's when the needle reaches 4000rpm and the second turbocharger starts spinning that you really feel the true performance of this supercar. The road ahead disappears in a blink and the 959 is sent hurtling forward as if in a horizontal freefall. You'll have passed 60mph in around 3.7 secs – quicker than a Ferrari F40 – and on to a top speed of 197mph.

Our featured car's current owner, who prefers to remain anonymous, appreciates its all-round abilities just as much as its outright performance. "When I first bought the 959, it was not too expensive and I used it a lot," he explains. "I did a few track days with it, took my kids to school, drove over to Europe and even went to Sainsbury's in it.

"The car is basically whatever you want it to be – if you want to mooch around slowly, it can do that. It's very well behaved, doesn't overheat

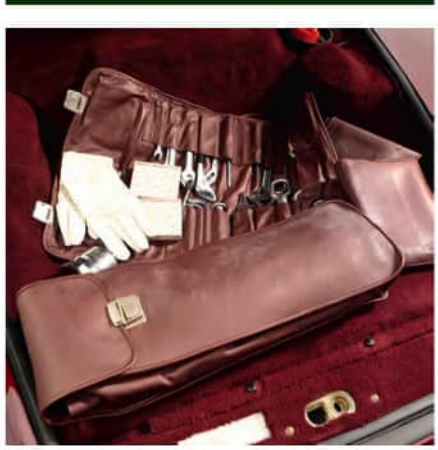
'As fun as it is to fiddle with the settings, the car makes up your mind for you when pressing on'

and is just as quick in the rain as in the dry. If you want to go quicker it's happy to oblige, and on full acceleration it spits generous flames out the back on the upshifts! The brakes are great, too, and have never shown any signs of fade – even after lapping Spa for half an hour.

"Maintenance is a concern and there are horror stories of huge service bills, but that's not something I've found. I don't think I've ever had to spend more than about £7500 in a given year. I know that sounds a lot, but considering what it is – and, of course, what it's now worth – it's actually very good value."

By the time that the first customers began to receive their cars in 1987, the furore surrounding the Porsche's arrival had begun to evaporate, compounded by the arrival of the thunder-stealing 201mph Ferrari F40 in the same year. To make matters worse, the promised exclusivity of Porsche's 200-car homologation special ballooned to nearly 300 by 1989, irritating those who had viewed their purchase as a sure-fire investment.

Time is a great healer, however, and the 959 has aged particularly well when compared with its contemporaries. Today it's rightly remembered as being a technological masterpiece, and the roadgoing racer that became the precursor to all of the modern hypercars. Like the Bugatti Veyron, Concorde and the Channel Tunnel, the 959 represented a rare occasion when the engineers triumphed over the bean-counters – and in today's economy, we're unlikely to see that happen again for a very long time.



Above: handling is impressive, with extreme levels of grip on offer. Right: featured car boasts an uprated 575bhp flat-six engine; second turbocharger kicks in when the needle reaches 4000rpm. Below, right to left: the luxuriously trimmed cabin is unmistakably Porsche – this car's first owner was Led Zeppelin manager Peter Grant; tiny, sculpted rear seats; original toolkit – note the white gloves!

PORSCHE 959

Sold/number built 1986-'88/292
Construction steel monocoque with composite bodyshell, aluminium and polyurethane panels
Engine all-alloy, dual-overhead-cam-per-bank, 24v, 2849cc flat-six, with air-cooled block and water-cooled heads, two sequential KKK turbochargers and Bosch fuel injection
Max power 450bhp @ 6500rpm
Max torque 369lb ft @ 5000rpm
Transmission six-speed manual transaxle, 4WD
Suspension independent all round by double wishbones, coil springs, dual telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r
Steering rack and pinion
Brakes ventilated, cross-drilled discs with servo and variable ABS
Length 13ft 11in (4242mm)
Width 6ft (1829mm) **Height** 4ft 2in (1270mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 6in (2300mm)
Weight 2980lb (1351kg)
0-60mph 3.7 secs
Top speed 197mph **Mpg** 16
Price new £140,000 (1987)

OR YOU COULD HAVE...

FERRARI F40

It might be considerably less practical, more expensive to run and impossible to navigate over speed bumps, but the F40 is undeniably the more exciting car to drive. After a period of being relatively 'affordable', however, prices have finally taken off in recent years.
Sold/number built 1987-'92/1311
0-60mph 3.8 secs **Top speed** 201mph
Price new £163,000

FORD RS200 EVOLUTION

If it's the 959's Group B heritage that excites you, what about the Ghia-styled Ford RS200? The Evolution can call upon 580bhp – more than double that of the 'standard' car – while a production run of just 24 ensures much greater exclusivity than the Porsche.
Sold/number built 1987/24
0-60mph 3 secs **Top speed** 140mph
Price new £50,000

Sale of the CENTURY

Porsche's roadster for the new millennium is not only a modern classic, but also the biggest bargain of the noughties

WORDS **ALASTAIR CLEMENTS** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

The 'Poor Man's Porsche' stigma has tarred the reputation of many an otherwise brilliant Weissach offering. Usually delivered by people who can't hope to own even the 'poverty' model they denigrate, it seems to suggest that, simply because the engine hasn't been mounted – er, a bit dangerously? – way out behind the rear axle line, it somehow doesn't deserve a place in the Porsche hall of fame.

The other common theme among these besmirched sports cars is, of course, a heavy Volkswagen content. But not only is the Boxster free from the influence of the Wolfsburg parts bin, it's also almost 50% 911 (996). It is no coincidence that the two-seater looks similar to its exalted 2+2 sibling from the doors forward, because much of their front-end panelwork is the same, plus the 'fried egg' headlights, doors and a significant portion of the floorpan.

From the seats back, however, there was a revolution: yes, the Boxster had a flat-six engine, but it was between the axles, just behind the driver. And, a year before the 911 followed suit, that engine was water- rather than air-cooled. Cue further brickbats...

That the 996 and 'Boxer-roadster' were so closely related was no happy accident. As the 1990s dawned, the once-mighty Porsche was on its knees. An ageing range and a weak dollar conspired to make selling cars in the key US market very difficult, and the balance sheets made uncomfortable reading for incoming boss Wendelin Wiedeking. His response was swift: new models, a lower entry point to the marque to attract younger buyers, and money-saving shared technology and componentry.

Appearing first as a stunning concept at the January 1993 Detroit motor show, the Boxster was a slightly diluted roadgoing reality three years later. As if to rub salt into an already painful wound, the new car commonly found itself grouped alongside the likes of the BMW Z3, Audi TT and Mercedes-Benz SLK from the 'hairdresser's sports car' brigade, rather than the more purist sporting offerings from Lotus (Elise), TVR (Chimaera) or Honda (S2000). Happily, the buyers couldn't give a damn and flocked to their local dealers in droves. Sweeter handling than a 911, for less cash, *and* with a roof that comes off? 'Yes please,' they said. And it was good news for those Porsche snobs that they did, because without the Boxster's success – nearly 165,000 of the first-generation Typ 986 were built before the 987 arrived in '04 – the all-conquering megalomaniac that is Porsche today would not exist.

That success means there are plenty of good secondhand cars out there to choose from, and a happy by-product of the collective sneering the model has endured is that they are very, *very* cheap. Confession time: I reckon that I know the market fairly well, but I had no inkling of how affordable Boxsters had become: the cheapest we found was just £3400! Be warned, however, that in such a lowly price band it'll be a fragile 2.5 with a high mileage and almost certainly a Tiptronic S auto, so you probably wouldn't be well advised to spend that little unless you're a trained Porsche mechanic who fancies a busman's holiday.

Yet there are plenty of bargains out there that wouldn't be daft buys: £5-6000 should secure a reasonable 2.5, and well under £9k would have

Clockwise from above: 17in five-spoke alloys are standard on S (2.5s and 2.7s had 16s), red-painted calipers an optional extra; white dials lift otherwise resolutely black cabin, but leather came in brighter hues, too; standard car had an oval exhaust, 3.2 S twin central pipes

'With 53% of the weight over the rear wheels, traction is superb'

bought this 60,000-mile 2001 Boxster S, with all the toys and a 3.2-litre flat-six producing a healthy 252bhp rather than the 220bhp of the 2.7s and lowly 204bhp of those early 2.5s. It is also finished in increasingly desirable Guards Red: as the Boxster moves from junior stockbroker's daily hack to enthusiast's weekend toy, the default-choice metallics begin to look less appealing than the more individual colours on the Porsche palette.

So where's the catch? Erm, we're struggling a bit here. The looks, maybe? It's nowhere near as dramatic as the original concept car – largely styled by American Grant Larson under Harm Lagaay – and not a conventional beauty. I've never much liked those headlights, either, or that 'fence' spoiler that automatically rises at speed to stabilise the car, but its push-me-pull-you style has aged better than the 996. The blend of contemporary and retro, with hints of the 550 Spyder and 718 rather than the angular modernity of the 914, still seems fresh, aided by the fact that the current (fourth) generation 718 looks broadly the same. Oddly, this pre-facelift 'amber indicator' car seems less dated than the 2003 model-year cars, which had a stopgap makeover to help the original offering last until the arrival of the much-revamped 987 of 2004. Oh, and to avoid it looking under-wheeled it really does need the 17in alloys standardised on the S from launch in autumn 1999, when the base model was also uprated from 2480 to 2687cc (spot an S by its grey air-intake grilles in the nose).

Undo the manual latch and, with a subdued electrical whirr, the simple, snug-fitting hood folds in 12 seconds to lie flush with the rear deck, opening to reveal a pair of classic, slim-backed Porsche chairs and a resolutely black expanse of dashboard. From within the sober cabin – unless your car has one of the lairier leather options – you have to rely on little touches to get your rewards. Details such as the oval theme that stretches from the vents to the vanity mirrors; or the aerofoil-style 'bridge' over the instruments, carried over from the concept car; or the shape of the rear-view mirror, which mimics that of the scene behind, as framed by the headrests and roll-hoops.

THE SPECIALIST'S VIEW*
Paul Noon

"I started with Porsches in 1985 before moving to BMWs," says Paul Noon, who is also a Veteran Car Club stalwart. "When I semi-retired a while ago, I decided to specialise in Boxsters because they are such fantastic value. The low prices have stimulated the market and that 'city boy' stigma is starting to fade as people realise what great cars they are. Just look at it: all that style and that driving experience for £8k, when you can pay £18k for a new Astra. It's amazing!

"Sub-£5000 cars exist, but you need to look hard at them. The difference between a £5000 2.5 and an £8000 3.2 is more than mileage and age, so buy the best you can afford and it'll be cheaper in the long run. Nearer £6000 is fair for a decent early non-S privately, and it will be at least £1000 more from a dealer because they are taking all of the risk. At this level people are buying their dream cars, so selling them is a real pleasure. As for running costs, there are pattern parts and lots of independent specialists, plus it'll do 30mpg all day long if you're careful.

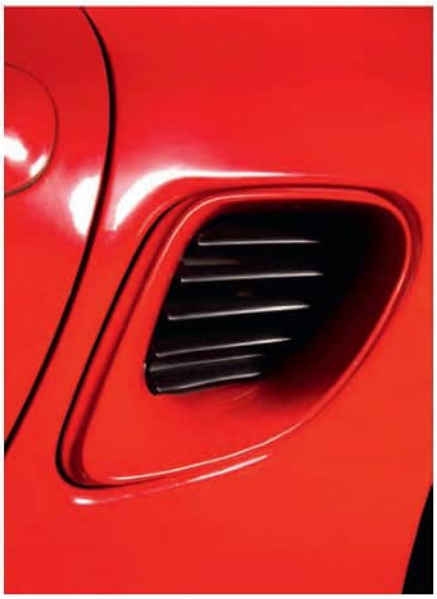
"Servicing is everything. It's unrealistic to expect a car in this range to have a full main-agent history, but make sure that any 'specialist' is just that. Engines will do 150,000 miles, but regular oil changes are key. And don't get too hung up about ownership history: five or six previous keepers is not uncommon."

*PRICES CORRECT AT DATE OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

There's also real pleasure to be had from something that's so beautifully finished: not ostentatious, but perfectly 'hewn' in that Germanic manner that makes a 40-year-old 911 still seem factory-fresh – and which means that this middle-aged, 60,000-mile Boxster makes swift progress with not a creak or a rattle.

Fire up and that slightly offbeat boxer rhythm soon settles to a quiet, unobtrusive idle. If you're after TVR-like aural thrills at posing speeds, you'll be disappointed. Likewise, if you're looking for dragster pace, a 2.5 and even a post-'99 2.7 can feel a bit wheezy alongside a Chimaera 500 or a BMW Z3M, and with that light, slick, cable-operated six-speed 'box (lowlier models got just five ratios) you don't get that sense of the gears meshing as you do in, say, a Honda S2000. But with the Boxster it's the complete package that is so compelling: the muscle roadsters founder in the wake of its cross-country balance, and the Japanese screamer can't match its sublime steering or sonorous six-cylinder howl.

In 3.2-litre, 252bhp Boxster S form at least, this car is plenty quick enough: with 53% of the weight sitting over the rear wheels, traction is superb, and it sprints off the line with a



chirrup from the rear wheels, yowling its way to 60mph in 5.7 secs. Carry on, and the speedometer needle will stop climbing just 14mph shy of the final 175mph mark.

The large central rev-counter – white-painted for the Boxster S, as are the two dials that flank it – is like a volume control for that dry-sump, quad-cam 'six'. Muted slightly by its water jackets and with a smoother, more turbine-like song than the fluttering of an air-cooled 911, it is nonetheless a gorgeous-sounding motor – tuned to perfection by the non-standard DesignTek twin exhausts fitted to this example. The VarioCam variable timing means that it's fairly happy to lug at lower revs, but this unit thrives in the upper reaches and really comes on cam past 4000rpm, developing a delicious flat-six wail as it spins willingly towards its 7200rpm redline.

The middle pedal operates all-disc brakes that are similarly impressive: strong, intuitive, with excellent pedal feel and light in operation compared with the well-oiled stiffness of the clutch and throttle. But all of these elements are really ancillary to the main event, provided by the Boxster's chassis and exquisite speed-variable steering. The light, stiff structure wears MacPherson struts at each corner rather than the 'race-derived' double wishbones that other makers seem so proud of, yet the first impression is an overwhelming sense of stability, surefootedness and immaculate balance. Now I must confess that I love the challenge of a 911, the smug knowledge that you need to learn it, to 'tame' it, to truly get the best from the car, but the Boxster is different: this was a roadster designed to appeal to

Buyer's checklist

- Correct, N-rated tyres are a good sign: cheap rubber suggests less fastidious past care
- Hood-well drainholes get blocked and the well fills with water, then under braking it can spill over the bulkhead and down on to the electrics, which in turn causes various problems; check under the passenger seat for damp
- Boxsters are two-side hot-dip galvanised so shouldn't rust – any corrosion suggests accident repair. Also look for the factory options paper sticker under the bonnet: if it's missing, the car may have had a whack
- Cracked cylinder heads – particularly on 2.5s – lead to water in the combustion chambers and they can 'hydraulic'; timing-chain tensioners also fail – listen for vibrations past 4000rpm that can indicate crank issues. Rear main seals leak, but fixing them isn't an engine-out job
- Front and rear drop-links and wishbones wear: listen out for rattling at low speeds and budget for replacements
- Worn gearboxes can lead to jumping out of second: get on and off the throttle and look out for excessive gearlever movement
- Pre-2003 facelift cars have Perspex rear windows that go milky and crack, particularly in very cold conditions – it's a £250 fix. A full replacement hood is nearer to £1000
- Look for leaves, muck and corrosion in the front offside grille below the headlight: moisture causes the air-conditioning condensers to rot out

Clockwise, from middle left: access isn't great for amateur grease monkeys, although you can top up the oil; vent grilles inset for pre-facelift cars; impeccable balance, grip and steering inspire huge confidence

all-comers and, even if you've never driven a mid-engined car before, within minutes you have the confidence to push it without the need to acclimatise. So grippy. So neutral. So viceless. Sure, there will be the inevitable bite-back if you don't respect the laws of physics mid-corner, but at sane road speeds the Boxster never feels anything other than on your side, when a 911 always gives that slight unease that it could be a turncoat.

The Boxster dives in instantly, without that classic 911 'bob', and the super-light steering adds weight as the cornering forces build, incorporating that special Porsche genius that somehow manages to permit millimetre-perfect accuracy and transmit all of the feel and feedback you could wish for, without any wrist-jarring kickback from poorly surfaced Sussex roads. There's a hint of Lotus-like brilliance going on here, and the same is true of the ride, which is supple with just a touch of roll to let you know how hard you are pressing on, but with impeccable body control and superbly resolved damping that never crashes or sends shudders through the shell.

Maybe the only thing this car lacks is the hair-shirt sense of living with a classic that gives it added character. It's just too quick, too capable, too reliable – a bit too clinical. Perhaps you *should* go for a cheap 150,000-mile car in the hope that it might break down and bits may fall off now and again. Just don't expect to be doing much home maintenance: the only readily accessible engine components are fill points for oil and water in the boot. Buy well, however, and you shouldn't need to trouble the access hatches in the hood well and behind the seats. Affordable, usable and thrilling, a Boxster is the perfect all-rounder. Hell, it's even a comfortable and relaxing motorway cruiser, with 260 litres of boot space split evenly between the nose and tail. Never before did being poor bring such richness.

Thanks to *Paul Noon at Mortimers Prestige (01798 872373; mortimersprestige.co.uk) and Chris Cobley at Diablo Engineering (01444 400489; diabloengineering.net)*

PORSCHE BOXSTER S

Sold/number built 1996-2004/164,874 (all 986s, 48,943 of them Ss)
Construction steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 3179cc flat six with Bosch fuel injection
Max power 252bhp @ 6250rpm
Max torque 225lb ft @ 4500rpm
Transmission six-speed manual, RWD
Suspension MacPherson struts, anti-roll bars; longitudinal and transverse links (f), lateral and trailing links (r)
Steering rack and pinion, with variable power assistance
Brakes ventilated discs, with servo and ABS
Wheels & tyres 17in alloys with 205/50 front and 255/40 rear Michelin PilotSports
Length 14ft 3in (4315mm) **Width** 5ft 10in (1780mm) **Height** 4ft 2¾in (1290mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 11¼in (2415mm)
Weight 2840lb (1290kg)
0-60mph 5.7 secs
Top speed 161mph **Mpg** 21.4
Price new £38,150 (2000)

THREE HUNDRED THUNDERING

HORSES

Who says you need deep pockets for massive performance? These bargain sports coupés from BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Porsche beg to differ

WORDS **PAUL HARDIMAN** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

Do we all agree that at 200bhp cars by and large become interesting, that by 300bhp things are beginning to concentrate the mind, and that once you have around 400bhp propelling a long ton then everything starts to feel really quite rapid? Good. Now we're sitting comfortably.

Well, two of the cars you see here – Mercedes SLK55 and BMW Z4M – are slap in the middle of that 300-400bhp range, and the Porsche Cayman S isn't far behind, with a similar power-to-weight ratio. All three can currently be had for sensible money (less than half their price new), which, considering the performance on offer, looks like a bargain. Add rock-solid build quality, plus practicality sufficient to mean that they can be used as daily drivers, and we're on to something worth investigating.

Mercedes has been doing roadsters built and imbued with the same sense of solidity as its saloons since 1955, with an evolution of styles though various SLs, Pagoda and *Panzerwagen*, before arriving at the C-Class-derived R170 SLK of 1997. That was replaced in 2004 by the R171, with its 30mm-longer wheelbase and 'F1-inspired' nose designed by Steve Mattin. It was facelifted in 2007 and powered by everything from a 1.8-litre 160bhp supercharged 'four' to a 3.2-litre V6 and a 5.4 V8, with the most powerful version handbuilt by AMG. All had a folding hardtop marketed as the Vario-Roof.

Like the R107 and R129 before it, you get the feeling that the SLK doesn't want you to know too much about what's going on under the skin; it just gets on with it. The steering is light and a little dead, but the grip from the 225- and 245-section Contis is massive, and the V8, buried under all-cloaking beauty covers, is astonishingly free-revving for a big-capacity motor. Prod is, er, prodigious but, despite being the weightiest car here, it's not the heaviest carbon dioxide-emitter: that honour goes to the Z4. Surprisingly, the Merc is not the biggest, either, being only 8mm less stubby than the BMW, while the Cayman is almost a foot longer.

Aside from that marvellous motor, where you find endless amusement in the SLK is in its appointments. As well as the retracting roof – as long as the boot isn't too full – there are heated seats and a pair of 'air scarf' warm-air blowers fitted in the headrests, aimed at the back of your neck to ensure you stay nice and toasty with the top down.

Then there's the gearbox, a seven-speed auto offering endless permutations of confusion. There's the stick, for Park, Reverse, Neutral and Drive, as usual. Once the lever's in D, slapping it right or left gives you up or downchanges, and you can achieve the same with buttons on the back of the steering wheel. A further switch in front of the gearlever gate gives three modes: Sport, Comfort or Manual, with a digital readout between the main gauges to let you know where in all of this confusion you are. This is very definitely a driver aid, because the SLK doesn't seem to care which ratio it's in. It swaps cogs smoothly in all modes, holding the gears much longer in Sport, but it doesn't blip on downshifts like a Ferrari. Column-mounted paddles that apparently came attached to faster software were an option.

THE OWNER
John Cummings

This is John's fourth SLK in eight years: "As a civil servant I couldn't afford a car like this, but 20 years ago I took out a lot of insurance policies for when I retired. I got a 2-litre first, then another, and then traded that for a V6, but I had wanted a V8 since hiring an R107 a few years ago. This was £3000 more than my V6, although it was older." John joined the Mercedes-Benz Club and shows the car (in matching suit, shoes and tie): "I just love it – the best bit is the hand-built engine, but I always drive it within its limits."

Frontal styling of the second-generation SLK was heavily influenced by contemporary F1 designs. Top: broad hips allow roof to fold away into the tail

Stylised cockpit of the Mercedes has buttons galore; AMG-built 5439cc V8 boasts a monumental 375lb ft of torque for easy pace; elegant turbine rims

Workmanlike cockpit of the Porsche; flap in the mid-engined Cayman's luggage area gives access to fluid reservoirs; smaller 17in alloys fitted to this car

Light-coloured hide and piano-black fascia give BMW's cabin a lift; 338bhp straight-six has double-VANOS variable timing; 19in wheels are aftermarket items

MERCEDES-BENZ SLK55 AMG

Sold/number built 2005-'11/9541
Construction steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy 5439cc V8, Bosch ME 2.8 injection
Max power 355bhp @ 5750rpm
Max torque 375lb ft @ 4000rpm
Transmission seven-speed auto, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by struts with two lower links **rear** multi-link; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r
Length 13ft 5½in (4099mm)
Width 5ft 10½in (1794mm)
Height 4ft 2¾in (1287mm)
Wheelbase 8ft (2430mm)
Weight 3473lb (1575kg)
0-60mph 4.9 secs
Top speed 155mph (limited) **Mpg** 23.5
Price new £51,975

PORSCHE CAYMAN S

Sold/number built 2006-'09/n/a
Construction steel monocoque
Engine all-alloy, 3387cc 24v four-cam flat-six, Bosch ME injection
Max power 291bhp @ 6250rpm
Max torque 251lb ft @ 4400-6000rpm
Transmission six-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, by struts, wishbones coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r
Length 14ft 3in (4340mm)
Width 5ft 10¾in (1800mm)
Height 4ft 3½in (1305mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 11in (2416mm)
Weight 2955lb (1340kg)
0-60mph 5.4 secs
Top speed 171mph
Mpg 27
Price new £44,250

BMW Z4M

Sold 2006-'08/4275
Construction steel monocoque
Engine iron-block, alloy-head 3246cc 24v dohc 'six', BMW/Siemens MSS 54 management system
Max power 338bhp @ 7900rpm
Max torque 269lb ft @ 4900rpm
Transmission six-speed manual, RWD
Suspension independent, at **front** by struts **rear** multi-link Z-axle; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r
Length 13ft 5in (4091mm)
Width 5ft 10in (1781mm)
Height 4ft 2in (1268mm)
Wheelbase 8ft 2½in (2500mm)
Weight 3241lb (1470kg)
0-60mph 4.8 secs
Top speed 155mph **Mpg** 23
Price new £42,245

There's so much torque from the motor – as owner John Cummings says, "It likes hills" – that once you've got bored with playing tunes on the transmission it's just as quick to leave it in auto and watch the world spool by, as rapid as you like, in perfect smoothness. It might not talk to you very much, the Mercedes, but you feel you can trust it to make the decisions while you enjoy the scenery.

The Cayman was criticised at launch in 2005 for being a second-generation, Typ 987 Boxster with a roof instead of an expensive retractable soft-top, yet costing £4000 more. It's a more subtle device than that, though. The extra rigidity conferred by that handsome teardrop-shaped lid stiffens the chassis and makes for a very together-feeling car.

There are some similarities to the 911, of course – the motor is the same as a 997's, and the steering feels similar to a 997 or 964; it's not as talkative as an early 911, but better than the deadened all-wheel-drive 996s. No surprise, because the 987 platform shares a lot with the 997, itself a heavily updated 996, but with the engine ahead of the gearbox rather than behind it. The change of the six-speed Getrag is about on a par with a G50 Carrera 3.2, even though it has more linkage. It's slick for a Porsche, and the ratios are flatteringly closely stacked.

What is the same as a 911 is the linear power delivery from the water-cooled M97 powerplant. The turbine-like smoothness common to all flat-six Porsches appears devoid of dips or spikes, making it feel less powerful than it is, although with only 251lb ft – the same as a modern 2-litre turbodiesel – it's noticeably less torquey than its rivals. It's happy revving to 7000rpm, with the sweet spot past 5200, although it's a little softer, less urgent, once beyond the power peak at 6250. In 911 style, it feels unburstable and able to sustain those revs for longer than you can.

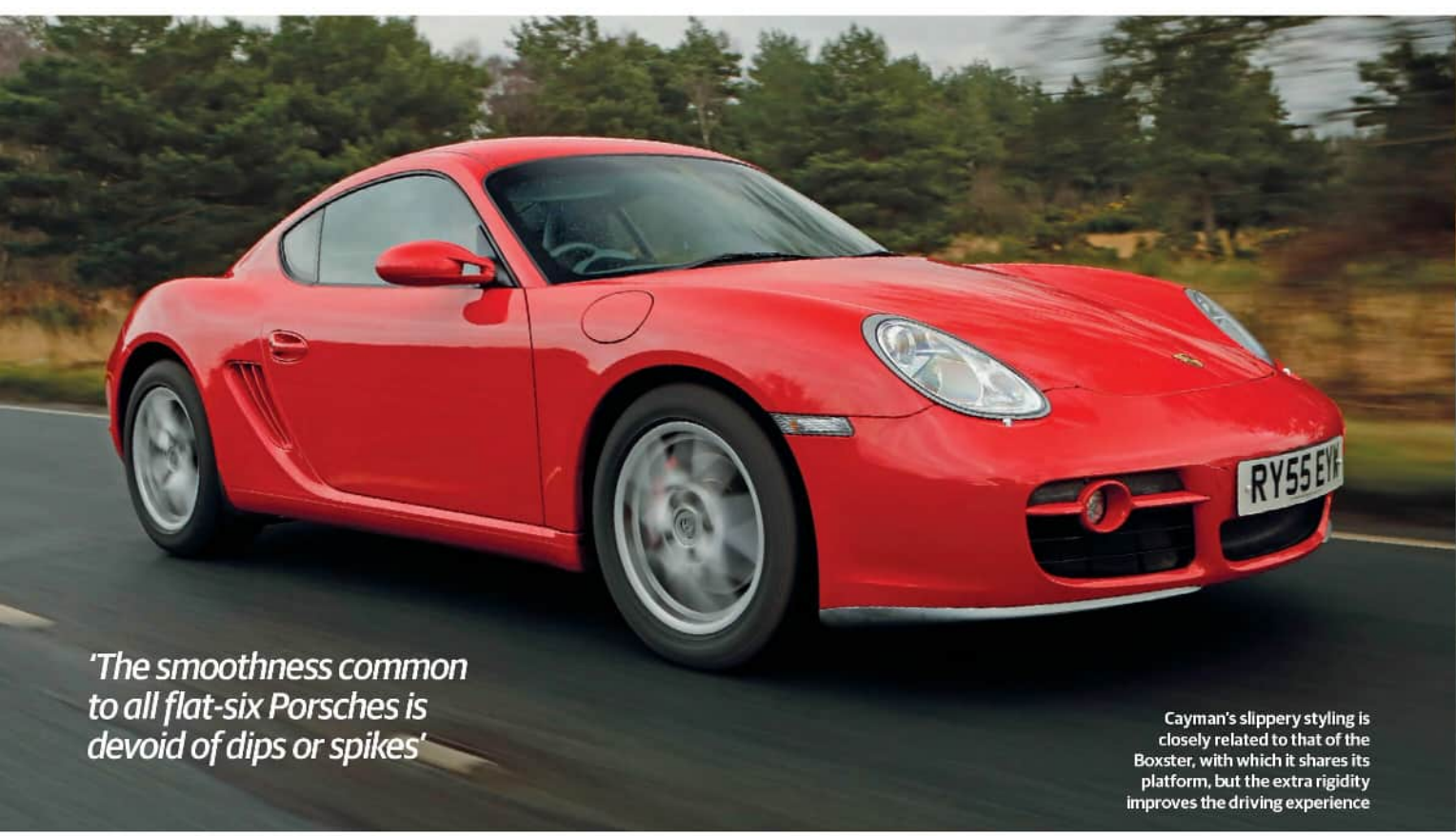
Where it's unlike a 911 is in its singular stability. There's none of the shoulder-writhing that you feel from behind you in the rear-engined car, and it appears less sensitive to throttle changes mid corner – although some of that might be down to Porsche's very benign stability control (benign as in, you don't notice it). Owner Jeremy Laird says that in track-day situations it responds well to a little brake trail on turn-in to bite the front and unsettle the rear, and that it gives much more feedback on 17in wheels with 205-section front tyres than on the standard 18s. He fitted 17s in order to run winter tyres and preferred the feel so kept them on, with taller rubber than standard.

The slightly plasticky feel to the cabin comes as a surprise, although that's mostly down to the cheap-looking leather wrapping the wheel. The rest of the cabin is much better quality and well screwed together (most of it by Valmet in Finland). In terms of practicality, as well as storage under the hatchback there's a decent front boot. Getting at the motor for anything more than topping up the oil and water (via a flap in the rear compartment) involves half an hour with some tools, though.

The Z4M coupé filled a gap left when the much-missed Z3M was retired in 2002. Jackknife yourself in (it's the lowest of our trio) and even with its slight HR Giger overtones there's no doubt that you're in a BMW even before you start it, thanks to the clearest instruments. Dark plastics – complemented

THE OWNER
Jeremy Laird

Jeremy has put 40,000 miles on his car in two years, most of that on a new engine fitted under warranty – intermediate shaft (IMS) bearing and cylinder liner failures are well documented, although they affect few cars. "A Cayman is a 997 with the engine turned around," he says. "The front two-thirds are basically shared. It's the modern-classic conundrum *du jour*, more a sartorial choice than a question of substance. Ultimately, the Cayman is a more compact and resolved driving tool than a 911 – and £10,000 cheaper."



'The smoothness common to all flat-six Porsches is devoid of dips or spikes'

Cayman's slippery styling is closely related to that of the Boxster, with which it shares its platform, but the extra rigidity improves the driving experience

on this example by a rare gloss-black 'piano dash' – contrast with light leather that doesn't look as if it will wear very well. But all that is irrelevant when you fire it up.

The B32 version of the legendary iron-block S54 unit has that deep-chested boom beloved of E9 CSL lovers. Unlike the old single-cam M30, though, it manages to combine this with astonishing revability, pulling hard and strong right round to the 8000rpm redline with a sonorous yowl. Apparently, BMW had to electronically replicate this for later M3s.

The Z4M is not the lightest here but feels it. It is the quickest – both subjectively and on paper – and, like the devil sitting on your shoulder, its slightly deviant tendencies are always inviting you to play. The proximity of your behind to the rear axle – Caterham-like – adds confidence, as does the chunky though communicative hydraulically assisted steering.

With its short wheelbase it is very tail-happy, but it does look after you when it decides to step out, rather like an M3. We didn't try turning off the Dynamic Stability Control on greasy January roads, but if you want the full one-armed paper-hanger effect, just press the Sport button. Throttle response sharpens noticeably, so when pushing on the driver always has something to do and can't quite relax.

Even with the clever variable-clinch M-differential helping as much as it can by optimising traction, this is one you need to be in front of, although you'll always have brakes, even when it's wet. When it senses rain the Z4M periodically kisses the discs with the pads to dry them, so there's no lag if you hit the middle pedal. Only the gearchange disappoints slightly if you are used to 2002-style slickness: the six-speeder is precise but notchy.

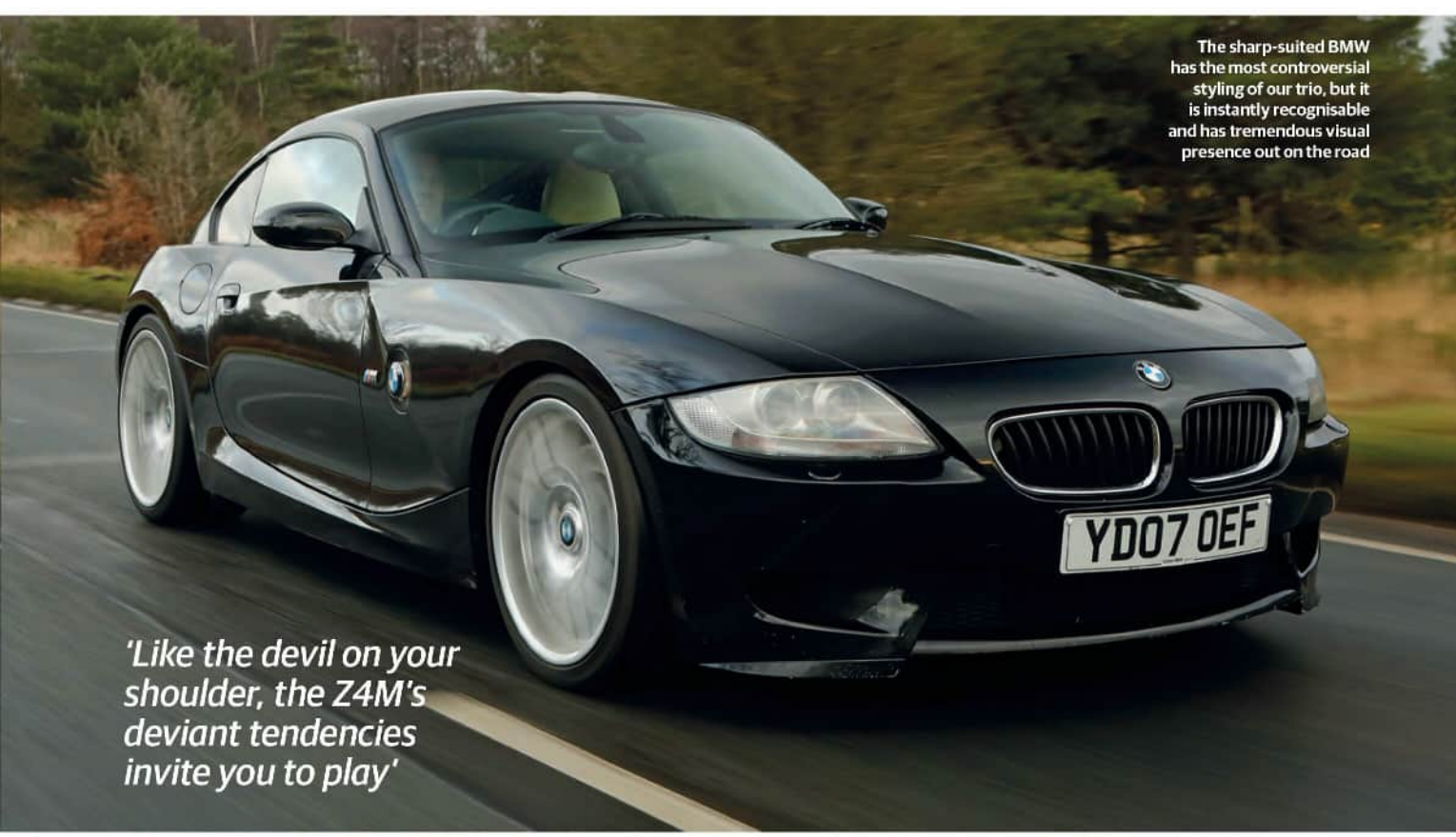
So which one? Depends what you want. They are all faster than you need and, thanks to competition raising the game, there's not a duffer. All can be had for roughly the same price: £20k for a decent one, or £5k less if you take a gamble. All return 25mpg in real life and much less if you boot them. The Porsche is the least painful to tax; the others are in the full-cholesterol top-guzzler band and will sting you as a result. The dual personality of the SLK means it is able to go full stonk and ripple the Tarmac or simply meander, and looks after itself whatever you do with the gears. The slightly nervy BMW wants to play all the time, although its constant demands could get wearing. The Porsche just packs in the miles as the super-sharp and rock-steady device that it is.

There's no 'best' until you decide which way your focus drops, although on paper the Benz has it for its performance and versatility. The BMW is basically a hooligan and, with its Manta-ray envelope packing plenty of muscle, looks as if it's drifting even when it's standing still. The no-frills and slippery Porsche is for getting places quickly and fairly discreetly, as the owner's several Alpine trips attest. And the deliberately detailed Mercedes is for being seen in, with the added option of dropping the roof without compromising comfort, but just doesn't involve you as deeply. Ultimately, it's all about how naughty and brave, focused or laid-back you feel.

Thanks to *the Red Lion at Chelwood Gate (redlionchelwood.co.uk)*

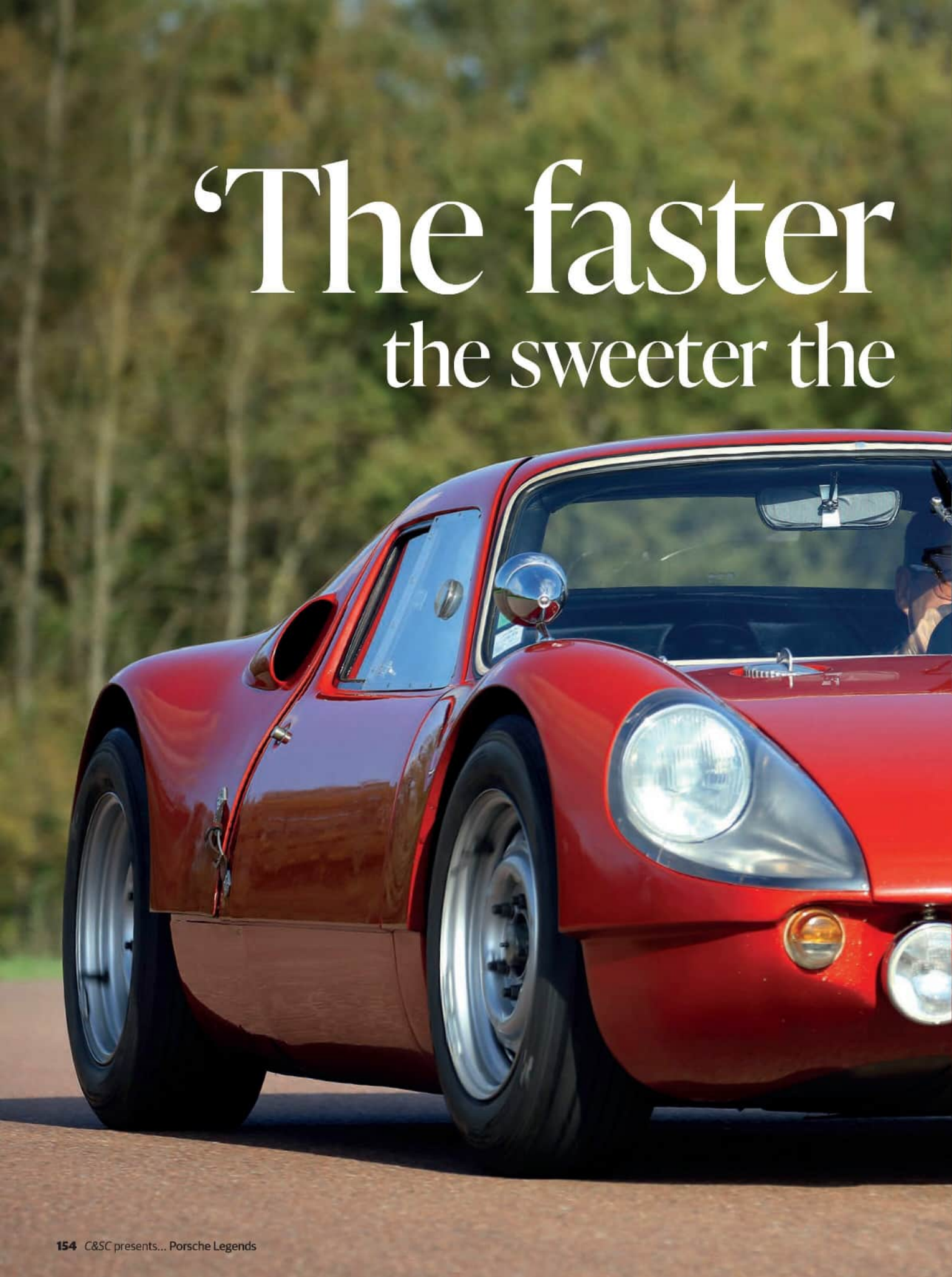
THE OWNER
Adrian Kitchin

Commercial pilot Adrian's car came as a result of an insurance payout: "I lost my medical certificate and the policy covered loss of earnings, so my wife suggested that I buy something nice to cheer myself up. The Z4M seemed the most fun. The rules changed and I got my licence back, so now I am flying again. My wife thinks that I should sell the BMW, but she can see how much I love the Z4. It's been my daily car, but is coming off the road soon for some minor cosmetics and then it'll be a second car just for fun."



The sharp-suited BMW has the most controversial styling of our trio, but it is instantly recognisable and has tremendous visual presence out on the road

'Like the devil on your shoulder, the Z4M's deviant tendencies invite you to play'



‘The faster the sweeter the

you charge, controls become'

To drive the Porsche 904 is to understand its place in the marque's racing heritage – but it takes quite some learning

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES MANN**

From right: Porsche's famous crest; high-mounted wing mirrors; uprated 911 power unit; wind-cheating headlight cowls helped give the 904 impressive aerodynamics

The 1964 Paris 1000km at Montlhéry, the legendary banked circuit south of Paris, has a special significance in Porsche history. Late in the season for the international endurance race, a flat-six-powered Porsche lined up on a windy, wet October weekend with Herbert Linge and Gerhard Mitter as co-drivers. To many, the car was just another 904, but under that distinctive sugar-scoop-style tail was a new Type 901 engine originally planned a year earlier for this sleek, glassfibre sensation.

In the marque's typically understated style, the motorsport lineage of six-cylinder Porsches began, a legacy that would stretch on through the 906, 910 and 907, not to mention the famous engine's dominance in powering 911s.

Yet the debut of that first 904/6 was disappointing. Although Linge turned in rapid laps, the car retired early with broken transaxle mountings, a common 904 weakness. That grim season finale is notable for the tragic death of five people, after Peter Lindner's Jaguar E-type smashed into a stationary Abarth in the unprotected pitlane. Not surprisingly, enthusiasm for racing faded fast on that dark day, but the new 904/6 would join the works competition arsenal for the 1965 season with a string of impressive results, including fourth at Le Mans in the hands of Linge and Peter Nöcker during the height of the Ford-Ferrari wars.

Porsche intended a long production run for the 904/6 and had even listed a new name – GTS6 – for the uprated model. But when the FIA announced revised regulations for 1966, requiring 50 rather than 100 cars, the planned 904/6 series was cancelled after just 10 were built, the focus switching to an all-new racer.

The short-lived 904 development is a frustrating chapter in Porsche history. With refinement, it could have been the first true Stuttgart supercar, a beautiful design to rival anything from across the Alps. Not for another two decades would the firm produce a similarly outrageous performance icon with the 959.

The red beauty pictured here remains one of the best-preserved 904s, with just four keepers from new, but its long-term French owner, a passionate marque enthusiast, couldn't resist sympathetically upgrading the car to the ultimate 2.7-litre specification for historic racing events, with spectacular results. On the Tour Auto Historique, the uprated six-cylinder 904 continued the design's giant-killing reputation, both on hillclimbs and circuits.

As a lover of early '60s sports-racers, for me the 904 is the best looking Porsche ever, a work of genius from the drawing board of 'Butzi' Porsche, Ferdinand's grandson. Aged just 28 and with a background in product design after graduating from the Ulm Institute, young Butzi brought a fresh aesthetic to the Zuffenhausen studio.

From Scooter Patrick hounding Ken Miles' Cobra roadster around Riverside to a sleek silver pack shadowing red exotica at Le Mans in 1963, the 904 always looked ahead of its time. It even pre-empted the glassfibre sports car revolution in rallying, finishing a storming second on the 1965 Rallye Monte-Carlo – eight years ahead of the first Stratos win.

Appropriately, the location of my much-anticipated test is in the heart of France's Grand Est, a region most famous for Champagne and the high-speed, five-mile Grand Prix course at Reims-Gueux. The Porsche 904 squad visited the track twice in 1964, first for the 12 Hours where Argentinians Andrea Vianni and Nasif Estéfano finished fifth in the 2-litre behind the Ferrari big guns; two other 904s were in the top seven. Two months later, the Stuttgart newcomers were back at Reims for the first stage of the Tour de France. They scored an impressive 3-4-5-6 overall placing behind the winning GTOs. This very car competed in that 10-day epic, driven to sixth by Edmond Meert and Wim de Jonghe.

It would have been lovely to take the 904 back to the Reims-Gueux pits, but a local private track at the Circuit des Ecuyers was safer overall with this valuable GT treasure. Located near Beuvardes, the 3.5km facility offers a wealth of challenges throughout its dizzy 18 corners. The track suits the 904 so much better than the remains of the old Reims road course.

The entrance to a 904 through the front-hinged door with its distinctive roof cutaway is always challenging, but it needs Houdini-style contortions with a four-point rollcage. Once you've dropped down into the deeply moulded bucket seat, it feels as snug and purposeful as a fighter jet. The seat is fixed but the pedals can be adjusted, with three leg-length options. The slightly offset pedals are perfect for heel-and-toeing. Like many racing Porsches, it's a functional affair with coarse and exposed glassfibre matting, textured vinyl wrapping the dash, and a clear, triple-VDO instrument cluster. The central rev counter is redlined at 6500rpm, while the speed is marked out to 280kph (173mph). Period road-test figures achieved 160mph with the 2-litre, four-cam motor, but with Type 901 six-cylinder punch this car would have no trouble topping that thanks to its longer Le Mans gearing. The 904's aerodynamics were sound yet, even so, later examples were fitted with a lip on the tail for better high-speed stability.

The original broad, wood-rimmed three-spoke steering wheel has been replaced in this example by a chunky, leather-trimmed item. The view all round is clear and panoramic, but split ahead by the tall pantograph windscreen wiper mounted in the centre of the 'screen. Between the seats, the upright black gearlever

From top: 904/6 was ideal for the twisty Targa Florio – here Umberto Maglioli roars to third; Huschke von Hanstein shows Jim Clark around the new 904 at the Geneva Salon in '65



Porsche 904 tales

• The last six-cylinder 904 made was regularly driven between Florida and Los Angeles in the late '60s by Captain Vern Covert, a Californian Porsche specialist. Covert bought the ex-works car, chassis 906-12, from Brumos Porsche and immediately converted it for road use. Modifications included a sunroof, Volkswagen heater, homemade padded seats, a new mahogany dashboard, a radio and a luggage rack. Covert also reduced the fuel tank size from 30 to 17 gallons to allow for some luggage space. He and his wife entered 'slalom' driving tests, and they regularly took the red-painted GTS on long road trips with their Doberman Pinscher snug in the passenger footwell.

• The shortest life of a 904/6 was chassis 005, which was dramatically tested by the factory to determine the body's strength in a front-end crash. The beautiful car was hauled by chain up a tall pole and unceremoniously dropped – nose first. The Porsche ended up 10in shorter after the unforgiving impact with the ground.

• Famous owners of 904s included film director George Lucas, who acquired chassis 094 in June 1966 through his company Advanced Production Service in Bakersfield, California. How much the future *Star Wars* creator drove the blue Porsche isn't known because he sold it after four months. In later years the car was used regularly on the road, its four-cam motor replaced by a 911 powerplant.

• American abstract painters have a tradition of driving quickly, none more so than Larry Poons. In 1966, Poons bought the ex-Daytona/Sebring race car 904-067 from a Yale student, the artist turning up with a huge wad of cash to buy it. After a few refinements, including silencers, the 904 was regularly street-parked around Greenwich Village, and was used for commutes from New York to Vermont where Poons taught. After clocking up some 10,000 miles, the artist spun off the road in 1970 and hit a telegraph pole.The Porsche was repaired but Poons never recovered his 904... due to a prison sentence for marijuana possession!

• One of the most original 904s is chassis 018, which was sold to Briggs Cunningham in early 1964. Original buyer Herb Wetanson had returned the car to Porsche of America because he felt it was too heavy to be competitive. After several seasons of being raced by Cunningham, John Fitch, Scooter Patrick and Dave Jordan, the 904 became part of the wealthy team owner's famous museum in Costa Mesa. Today it is displayed pretty much as it last competed, as a star of the Collier Collection.

Clockwise from main: rollbar means tight entry – leather-rimmed three-spoke steering wheel is non-original; flush fuel filler for tank in the front; one of Porsche's sleekest shapes; five-stud wheel

works a five-speed gate with dog-leg first.

Once the triple-choke Webers have primed the flat-six, the engine roars into life with a deep-chested growl and, after a lengthy warm-up, the challenge of the gearchange begins. Porsche 'boxes demand a firm hand, and this one really baulks until the oil is hot and revs increase. Thankfully, the meaty low-down torque and instant throttle response make it easier to learn the new circuit. With the wider Avon radials (6in up front, 7in to the rear), the super-sharp steering initially feels heavy and dead.

After a couple of laps, though, I start to get in the groove with the 904. Its performance is sensational. Out of the corners, the engine punches hard and, matched to the close-ratio transmission, the little sports-racer devours the straights with its aggressive pace. Around the multitude of tighter sections on this circuit the Porsche begs to go faster and faster, its impressive balance and firm set-up encouraging greater commitment. Fortunately, thanks to the uprated vented discs, the brakes are also mighty. The faster you charge, the sweeter all of the 904's controls become, with ever lighter steering and a more positive gearbox action.

Undoubtedly the fastest car I've tested in recent months, this 904/6 flatters its driver and I feel a mischievous streak build in me for more laps. Too soon, however, it's time to return this demon Porsche to its trusting owner.

Period hotshoes praised the 904's balance and high-speed stability. "I could do anything with that car," Milt Minter told 904 historian Jerry Pantis; I couldn't agree more. The drive brings back memories of witnessing the much-missed James Diffey storming around the old Nordschleife in Irvine Laidlaw's maroon 904/6 '012'. As he flashed by our Ford Falcon, his commitment and cornering speed chasing the front-runners was staggering. Later, in the pits, James reported that the 904 was one of the best-handling cars that he'd ever driven.

'Our' exquisite example, chassis 104, was among the last of a second batch of 904s built in 1964 to complete homologation type approval

PORSCHE 904 CARRERA GTS

Sold/number built 1963-'65/110
Construction steel box-girder frame, torsional glassfibre bodywork produced by Heinkel
Engine all-alloy, dry-sump, dohc 1966cc flat-four (904/6 flat-six), with two valves per cylinder and two twin-choke Weber 46 IDA 2/3 or Solex 44 PII-4 carburettors
Max power 180bhp @ 7200rpm (904/6 210bhp @ 8000rpm)
Max torque 144lb @ 5000rpm
Transmission five-speed ZF transaxle, RWD
Suspension independent, by wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r
Steering ZF rack and pinion **Brakes** discs
Length 13ft 5in (4090mm) **Width** 5ft ½in (1540mm) **Height** 3ft 6½in (1065mm)
Wheelbase 7ft 6in (2300mm)
Weight 1433lb (650kg)
0-60mph 5.6 secs
Top speed 160mph
Standing quarter-mile 13.7 secs
Price new $7425

Clockwise, from top left: distinctive insignia; Walsh relishes the extra power of the uprated 2.7 flat-six; rear body lip helped to reduce lift; responsive 904 is perfect for a tight circuit

for the FIA GT championship. That May it was delivered to D'Ieteren, the Belgian Porsche importer, which sold it to Eddy Meert, a successful privateer who had previously competed with a hot T6B 356 Carrera 2 GT, a lightweight coupé with a 2-litre four-cam. Meert entered his 904 on the Tour de France, where it finished an impressive sixth overall.

Later, the Belgian looked a favourite for victory on the 1965 Rallye des Deux Catalognes against a strong field of Alpine-Renault A110s, Alfa Zagatos and a Ferrari 250GTO, but having set fastest times a mystery problem forced retirement. His mechanic discovered afterwards that sugar had been poured into the fuel tank!

Meert kept this car until late 1966, when he sold it to French amateur racer Robert Dutoit. The 904 was successful in major French events including five outright wins and numerous class victories. After an accident at the Coupes du Salon at Montlhéry, Dutoit sold the 904 to Bernard Consten, the respected French rally champion, Le Mans regular and multiple Tour de France class winner. Maybe Consten had plans to rally the mid-engined beauty, but in the end he simply restored it, returning it to its original Rubinrot colour. Consten clearly had a thing for 904s; at one point there were two in his collection. Porsche fanatic Jean-Claude Miloé was a good friend of Consten and long coveted the 904. After many years and offers, Consten finally agreed to sell and Miloé became only the fourth owner. The car was prepared for the '96 Tour Auto Historique with Miloé initially running in the regularity, but from '99 he switched to the competition class, lining up with Ferraris, Cobras and Alpines for the centenary event. The car was competitive, winning special stages and finishing second overall in 2008 to Ludovic Caron's Cobra.

'Meert's mechanic discovered that sugar had been poured into the 904's fuel tank'

Miloé's son Jérôme is a highly experienced driver, with the 2003 GT3 Championship among his achievements, but in recent years he's preferred historic racing, especially at Spa and Val de Vienne, near Le Vigeant. But, for events, few match the Tour Auto, which he's entered 15 times, many with his father as co-driver.

"The early years were fantastic, with an amazing range of machinery and a wonderfully authentic route," enthuses Jérôme. "The 904 is ideal for the event, the perfect all-rounder for the races and hillclimbs. With a bigger motor and 650kg weight, the torquey performance is fantastic on the special stages. In 2008 we won all the hillclimbs. With the mid-engined layout, the handling has great balance with minimal weight transfer. The Porsche has given us enormous pleasure over the years."

Thanks to *Jean-Claude and Jérôme Miloé; Artcurial (www.artcurial.com)*

FLAT-OUT

Porsche's iconic 917 sports-racer laid the foundations for the marque's enduring Le Mans success – and its fearsome reputation precedes it

WORDS **BEN BARRY** PHOTOGRAPHY **MARC URBANO/GETTY**

FLAT-12

No car manufacturer has been more successful at Le Mans than Porsche, with its record 19 wins, and in 2023 the famous German marque will return to the Circuit de la Sarthe in a bid to add to that tally under new LMDh rules. But trace the marque's legacy back to its origins and you arrive at the 917, a fearsome racing car that made its debut in 1969 and went on to become the most iconic endurance racer of all time. Capable of a still-astonishing 246mph, at a time when aerodynamics was not yet fully understood, the 917 was a flat-12-powered brute that even the best struggled to tame.

The 917 won Le Mans twice, taking back-to-back victories in 1970 and 1971 before a rule change led to it departing for Can-Am in North America, a series it also dominated. That historic first Le Mans victory was taken on 14 June 1970 by Richard Attwood and Hans Herrmann. Jump forward to today and, like some surreal dream, the sprightly octogenarian racer is watching me climb into the cockpit of a 917 at a damp Sonoma Raceway some 30 miles north of San Francisco, California, calmly offering a few tips ahead of my first-ever drive of this legendary machine. 'Unbelievably privileged' barely covers it. Likewise 'unbelievably nervous'.

The 917's feathery glassfibre dihedral door hinges up and forwards (taking a chunk of roof with it), and you slot down into the driver's seat, with an improbably small second chair alongside to cheekily meet the two-seater regulations. I'm almost lying down, my legs stretching right out towards pedals that leave my feet alarmingly in line with the headlights, yet still it's a claustrophobic squeeze for my 6ft 1in frame due to the 917's wind-cheating, low-set shape. Even with the padding removed from the glassfibre seat (yes, it's uncomfortable and unsupportive) there is little more than one centimetre of headroom so for most of my laps I opt not to wear a helmet, otherwise it's like driving in a neck brace.

From top: gearknob is turned from balsa wood; glassfibre bucket seat's padding was removed to give a touch more room; dashboard switchgear's labels remain authentically of the period

The windscreen is goldfish-bowl domed, with the curves of the front wheelarches peaking above my shoulder height. The steering wheel is a perfect, small, black three-spoker, the warning lights seem to be marked with Tipp-Ex (Alt, Oil), there's a 'Wischer' label for the wipers and the rev counter is tilted to put the 8000rpm redline at the top, bang in a busy driver's line of sight. If it's incredibly evocative, it also feels a little improvised – not a word you necessarily want to associate with a 200mph-plus racing car.

Conceived for the FIA's then-new sports-prototype regulations that required only 25 examples to be produced, the 917 was a development of the eight-cylinder 908 competition machine, in which Richard had begun his relationship with Porsche. While the 917 was Ferdinand Piëch's baby, chief engineer Hans Mezger was in charge of development: his death aged 90 in June 2020 lent extra poignancy to the 50th anniversary of the 917's win that year.

"The 908 was probably good enough to win all the races through 1969," says Richard. "But Ferdinand Piëch wanted something bigger and faster, particularly with Le Mans in mind."

So while both 908 and 917 had lightweight

spaceframe chassis, the 917 was fitted with that flat-12 engine, Porsche's largest ever, with six throttles lined up on either side of a central cooling fan and exposed through the top of the rear bodywork like vertebrae.

Various configurations were available, from 4.5 to 4.9 and 5 litres, and with either four or five speeds. The one we're driving has the largest motor and produces around 620bhp in a car weighing only 800kg: 775bhp per tonne remains a terrifying figure even half a century on.

Conceived when aerodynamics in motorsport was still in its infancy, the 917 was capable of 235mph at first (and later 246mph). It wasn't fully sorted when the car made its debut in 1969 and Richard shared with Vic Elford – the former driving it for the first time in practice, having previously been highly reluctant to do so.

"Vic said he liked the 917. I don't know if it was bravado or something, but as soon as I drove the car it was wandering horrendously," says Richard. "The testing had been done on an airstrip, and I don't believe they were getting to the terminal velocity – maybe 185mph, but it would do 235mph. There was a clue something wasn't right: if you looked in the mirror in the pits you got a very good view behind, but on the Mulsanne Straight you couldn't see anything."

Confirming Richard's fears, 917 privateer John Woolfe was killed on the opening lap, and Richard remembers vividly his gruelling double stints: the continual corrections to steering that felt unnaturally light because the nose was lifting, the unbearable noise from the exhausts, and how he would rest his head against the bulkhead. "I was in a lot of pain after not even two hours," he grimaces. "Fortunately the race was dry, because in the wet I honestly believe we would have retired."

Somehow the two drivers wrestled the car through the night, finding themselves with a six-lap lead after 21 hours. Only gearbox failure forced retirement. "The factory thought I was disappointed at retiring, but I was just utterly drained and actually relieved," laughs Richard.

The 917 was tamed the following year, with the introduction of the 917K (for *Kurzheck*, or Short-tail) body, while new *Langheck* (Long-tail) bodywork was also developed. "The Short-tail wasn't as fast in a straight line, but you had the stability," recalls Richard. "It was like a completely different car: we had to slow for the kink at the end of the straight the year before; now it was flat, a piece of p*ss."

'Attwood remembers vividly his gruelling double stints and the continual corrections to steering that felt unnaturally light because the nose was lifting'

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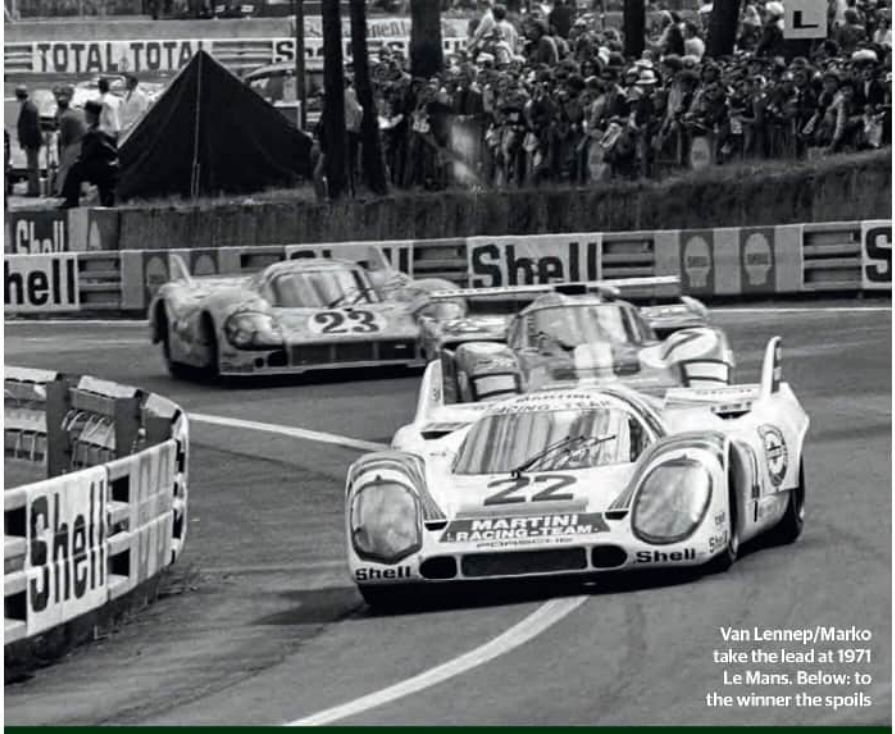


Van Lennep/Marko take the lead at 1971 Le Mans. Below: to the winner the spoils

A record Le Mans victory remembered

Gijs van Lennep took the second and final win for the Porsche 917 at Le Mans in 1971, driving a 4.9-litre Short-tail in Martini colours with teammate Helmut Marko.

"I did 22 races in the 917, more than anyone – Le Mans, Interserie, two Can-Am races – and it was one of my favourite cars," enthuses Gijs. "I was never afraid of any understeer or oversteer because it was so nicely balanced, and you could drive it on the throttle fantastically because it had a 100% locking limited-slip differential. But I was lucky not to drive it in 1969, when they hadn't sorted the aerodynamics! It felt very good already in 1970, and then in 1971 it improved again with the 5-litre flat-12 instead of the 4.5."

Gijs' Le Mans debut came in 1970 with privateer David Piper, the pairing running second after 10 hours when Piper crashed the 917. Gijs had proved his ability by then, however, and was promoted to the works-supported Martini team for 1971 alongside Marko. The B-team provided stiff internal competition, just as engineer and 917 driving force Ferdinand Piëch liked it.

"John Wyer had the official factory team, but the Martini team had all the factory Porsche people – Mr Dechent was officially our team boss but he wasn't really in charge," Gijs recalls. "We had people such as Wolfgang Flegel, Helmuth Bott, all the factory guys. It was a little bit Gulf against Martini."

Neither Gijs nor Marko knew that their number 22 car had a new magnesium chassis, which had been prone to failure during testing. "The welding was difficult and the first car they tested at Weissach broke after three or four hours," reveals Gijs. "Our car had different welding and was tested for 12 hours and didn't break, but not 24 hours. I didn't feel angry after finding out that it was magnesium, not at all. If Porsche says you have to race, you race."

Gijs and his teammate qualified in fifth, some five seconds adrift of Pedro Rodríguez's pole time in the JWA 917. After six hours, the JWA Porsches were running 1-2-3, but every one of them suffered setbacks during the night, and both the other Martini entries had cooling-fan trouble, so number 22 took the lead after 12 hours – partly because the mechanics proactively ensured its fan wouldn't fail.

"The fan was known to break and that would be the end of the engine," recalls Gijs. "So at every pit stop, starting in the evening, they'd change one bolt – there were four – so it was no problem and we could use 8400rpm." Instead, the brakes proved to be the chink in the 917's armour.

"It was the old circuit then with White House, the quick left-hander," says Gijs. "Six hours before the end we ran out of brakes more or less: they were thinner, so they'd get hot. We were two laps in front of the John Wyer car but knew that if we changed the discs we wouldn't win, so we decided to lift early, not to brake so much and to hope for the best. It was the first time we drove with drilled brakes and you can still see all the little cracks in the discs on the car in the Porsche Museum – it's just as it was after the race."

Only 12 finishers were classified in the results, but Gijs and Marko won Le Mans at a record speed and set a new distance record that would endure for nearly 40 years.

It was the Short-tail with which Richard and Herrmann won Le Mans, and that's the variant we're driving today – not the winning car in Team Salzburg colours, but its iconic Gulf livery couldn't be more appropriate.

This is chassis number 15 of a total of 35, run by British team JW Automotive Engineering in the 1971 World Sportscar Championship. The JW stands for John Wyer (and co-founder John Willment), who had previously overseen Aston Martin and Ford racing successes, and had been responsible (courtesy of inventive engineer John Horsman) for finessing the aerodynamics.

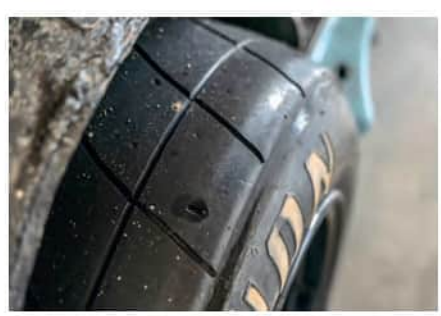
This very car won the Spa round of the 1971 championship with Pedro Rodríguez and Jackie Oliver driving, finished second in Buenos Aires and third in the season finale at Watkins Glen. After one more race in the USA in July 1971 it was retired, but it didn't lie idle: from 1972 to '79 it was used as a 'race taxi' at Porsche's Weissach team headquarters (hopefully with a more accommodating passenger seat), and it has been tucked away in the Porsche Museum since 2009.

The bare cabin amplifies every movement with the engine dormant, and the ignition key seems tiny for a car so intimidating. But with one twist the flat-12 explodes into life behind your head with an air-cooled chatter and thrum. The way the revs flick up with such a lack of inertia is an early indicator of just how responsive this engine is with its titanium conrods, quad cams and Bosch fuel injection.

Unfortunately, the 917 has been shipped to Sonoma on cut slicks and there are no spares, so really quick laps are out of the question. But it's still a thrill to slot the famous balsa-wood gearknob to your right up into first (oddly, unlike in the contemporary 911 there's no dog-leg here) and ease up a clutch that's heavy and tremors with tension as it bites in a narrow window at the very top of its travel. With Richard looking on it's a relief I don't stall, and soon I'm trickling down Sonoma's pitlane in a Porsche 917. Bloody hell.

The speeds are quite modest, but the 917 is such a distinctive thing to drive that it reveals its character very easily. It feels very much as if you're perched over the front of the car, able to place it perfectly on the apex, while the steering

'This very car won the Spa round of the 1971 championship, finished second at Buenos Aires and third at Watkins Glen'



Below, from top: Attwood first drove the 917 at Le Mans in '69 and it was a handful, but a year later he returned to win in the short-tail car; tailpipes hang off the rear of the transmission

Above: this car's 5-litre flat-12 engine makes around 620bhp, along with a glorious multi-cylinder cacophony. Left: cockpit looks spartan and remains uncomfortably cramped

is surprisingly light and feelsome, as if you could jab in some emergency lock, no problem.

This all lends a wieldiness and agility to the 917's dynamics, and you can feel the fat tyres arcing to that grainy state of near-understeer on the low-grip surface. A quick lift and jab of throttle would surely bring the rear into play, but I'm also aware of the mass and potency of that monster 12-cylinder engine mounted in the middle of this machine. And the value. Always the value...

The Porsche Museum guys told me to keep the revs up, but the flat-12 actually feels quite tractable from low rpm, and the way it shoots this old racer forwards on the lightest throttle opening is quite remarkable. Hold out and it chomps through revs so rapidly – bassy, with a kind of distorted 'flat' sound at low engine speeds, yet deliciously smooth and perfectly balanced as the revs and the treble climb – that soon you're reaching for that balsa-wood gearknob and praying you don't mis-shift in the notoriously tricky gearbox. The change is light enough in its action but needs a confident pull home to engage. Dip the clutch and for a split-second the flat-12 orchestra is replaced by a suck of induction, then the gear engages and you're straight back on the throttle.

'The way the flat-12 shoots this old racer forwards on the lightest throttle opening is quite remarkable'

At one point I reach fourth (I don't even know if 'our' car has a fifth, which some do) and the performance is never in doubt, but the brakes are – the pedal's travel is long and spongey, and the stopping power feels decidedly mediocre. Given that I can sense the 917 lifting up and feeling skittish over standing water, I'm in no mood to push my luck here, so I just enjoy the experience, driving as hard as I feel comfortable while I soak up this bucket-list moment.

Rolling back into the pits, Richard Attwood is standing there, waiting to ask what I think, as if this is some fuggy jet-lag fantasy. I'm just glad to get the 917 back in one piece and to be one of the few to have experienced it. It's incredible to think that in similar conditions in 1970, Richard and Herrmann beat the world.

Thanks to *Richard Attwood, Gijs van Lennep and Porsche AG (porsche.com)*

SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST

Eleven-time Le Mans contender Nick Faure is reunited with Stuttgart's final naturally aspirated GT racer, the Porsche 911 3.0 RSR he helped steer to sixth overall at the 1975 24 Hours

WORDS **GREG MACLEMAN**
PHOTOGRAPHY **OLGUN KORDAL**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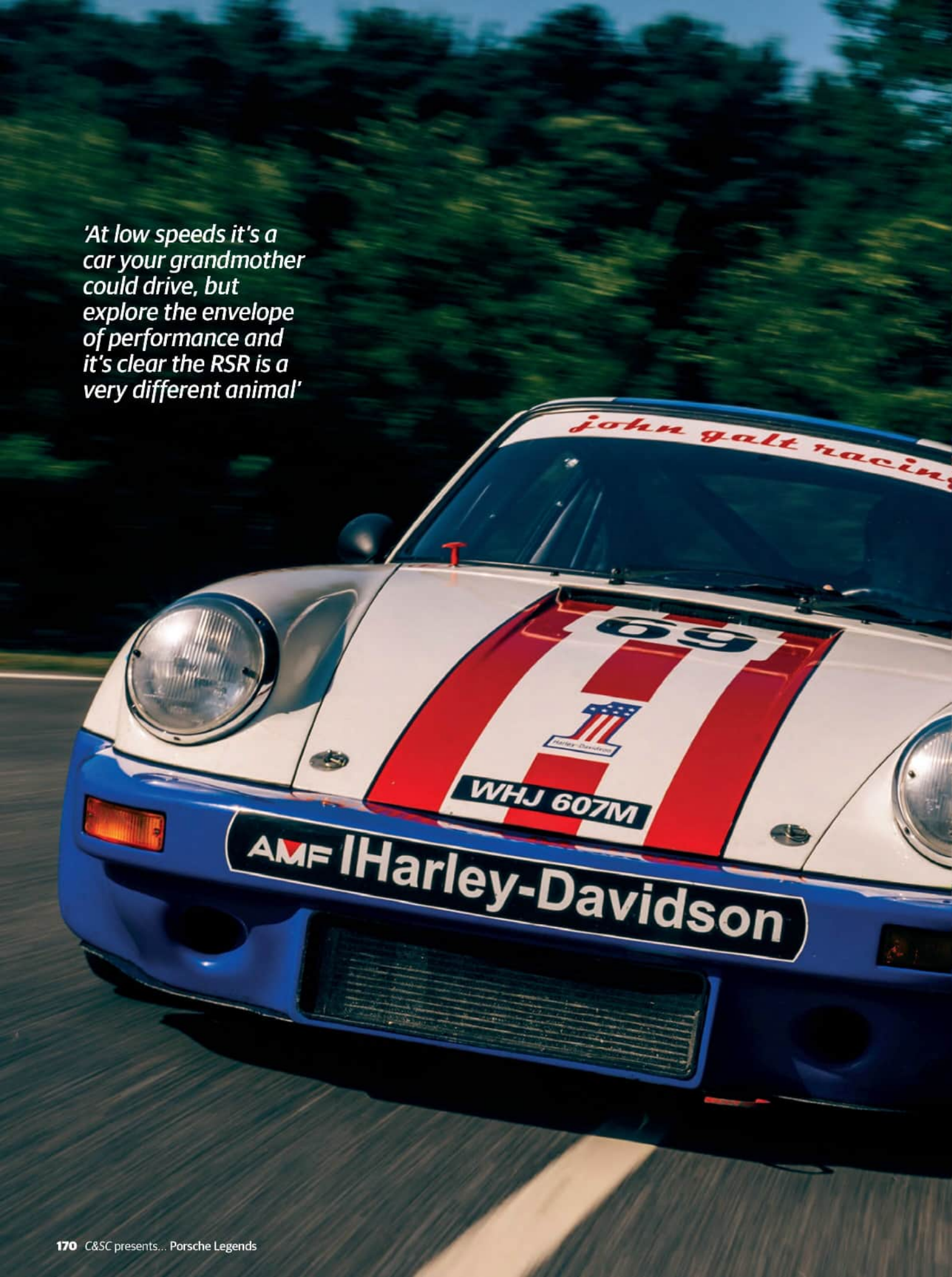
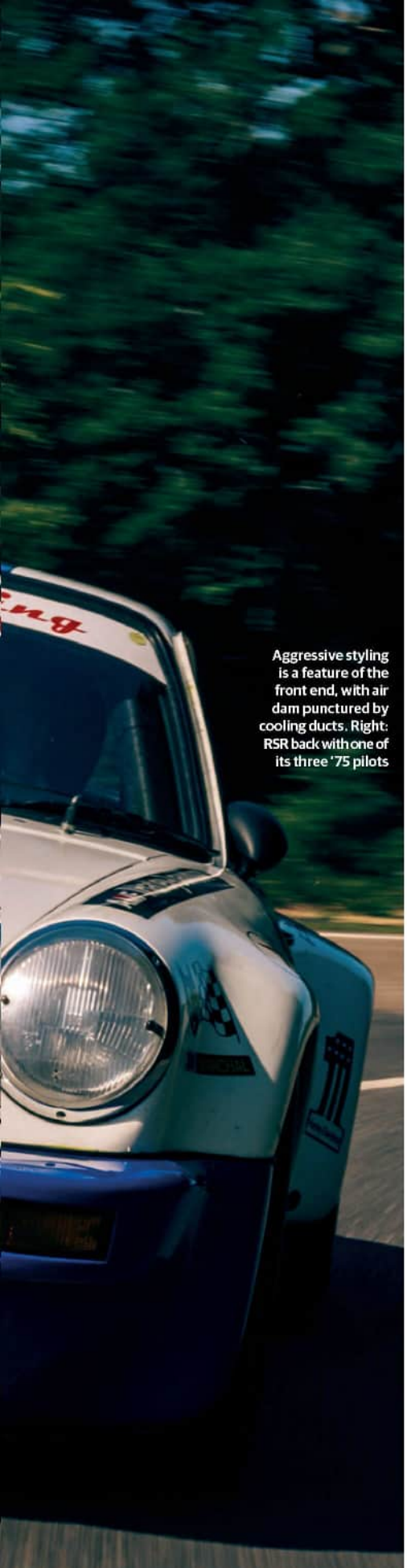


'At low speeds it's a car your grandmother could drive, but explore the envelope of performance and it's clear the RSR is a very different animal'



Aggressive styling is a feature of the front end, with air dam punctured by cooling ducts. Right: RSR back with one of its three '75 pilots

It's gone midday in late July and the sun is fierce. It's quiet, bar the hum of tweeting birds and chirping grasshoppers; the sort of lazy calm that only comes on still summer days, the heat acting as a blanket that hangs heavy over the circuit and stifles the senses. Then the spell is broken: rising from the distant treetops the unmistakable report of a blipped throttle and an aggressive downshift, followed by the glorious howl of a pinned flat-six. In what seems like a split second the boxer scream is all around us, reverberating from the tunnel of trees through which the white, black-wheeled blur explodes, its driver massaging the wheel and feathering the throttle through a sweeping left-hander. You can't help but smile.

The scene is a familiar one to the car and its driver, both of whom have a lifetime of racing experience, the earliest part shared by man and machine at one of the most exciting races in the world: the 24 Hours of Le Mans. The man is Nick Faure, lifelong competitor and Porsche enthusiast, and the machine is one of the rarest and most focused naturally aspirated sports-racers to ever leave Stuttgart: the Porsche 911 3.0 RSR. How the two came together at Le Mans in 1975 is a story that began with a chance discovery.

"One day I was rummaging through my mother's coal shed when I discovered a small etching," explains Faure. "It was a Rembrandt, hidden underneath a few bits and pieces along with a Dürer etching. My grandmother was living with my mum at the time because she was pretty elderly – she was about 93 – so I went up to her and asked, 'Granny, do you think I could have that Rembrandt etching?' She said, 'Oh yes Nicholas, you can have that.' I took it to Christie's and got enough money out of it to buy three quarters of GVB 911D, Porsche's demonstrator that was given to Vic Elford to race."

The unexpected windfall only got Faure so far, with the remainder of the balance settled by Chris Maltin of Maltin Cars in Henley, on the agreement that the dealer had one race in it. "So basically, Rembrandt got me racing," says Faure.

Already no stranger to Porsches, he gelled immediately with the 911 and quickly gained a reputation for success that led to AFN, Porsche's concessionaire in the UK, financing his future seasons. "I couldn't even buy tyres," laughs Faure. "I was racing on last year's rubber – and doing quite well actually!"

Just as Faure was honing his skills on the track, so too Porsche engineers were perfecting the 911 for competition. Having proved its capability, the 911S was soon joined by the 911R, a lightweight racing version featuring glassfibre wings, Plexiglas windows, aluminium doors and a stripped-out interior, though only 24 were made – some 476 shy of the homologation requirement for GT-class racing.

It wasn't until 1973 that an opportunity once again presented itself for a bespoke racing 911, in the wake of new regulations that effectively banished the halo 917 from competition following its domination of both the World Sportscar Championship and Can-Am.

The new machine was named for the firm's historic success in the Carrera Panamericana, and was designed with the sole purpose of taking on the more powerful Ferrari Daytona and De Tomaso Pantera. A crash course in weight-saving meant several panels were replaced with thinner steel alternatives, and the addition of slimmer glass made by Glaverbel. Fatter arches accommodated 15x7in rear wheels on a wider track and the bumpers were made of fibre-reinforced polyester, while a distinctive ducktail 'Burzel' spoiler was added to the rear that, working in conjunction with the deeper-lipped front spoiler, significantly reduced the aerodynamic lift that had been a problem with earlier models.

Most important, however, were changes made beneath the bodywork to the powerplant, where Biral liners were dispensed with in favour of a Nikasil coating that allowed the

bore to be taken to 90mm. Capacity went from 2341 to 2687cc, adding 20bhp to the 190bhp of the 2.4-litre 'S'.

The Carrera RS 2.7 made its debut in 1973, bringing with it a gilt-edged opportunity for Faure to continue racing: "I thought my career had come to an end because I couldn't afford anything, then AFN rang me to say it was buying two RS Lightweights, and would I like to come and drive one... Who was going to say no to that?! The idea was to make sure that there was always a car ready to race most weekends if there happened to be a problem with one of them, but they were so reliable that the 'back-up' car was sold on halfway through the season."

Faure quickly found his feet in the RS. Always driven with flair, RGO 2L stormed to victory in the 1973 STP Production Championship having taken top honours in no fewer than 16 races.

As well as its on-track results, the RS 2.7 had proved something of a surprise sales success for Porsche, which had reckoned on shifting little more than the 500 examples required for homologation – even going so far as to issue them as company cars for executives. The response, however, was overwhelming and all order slots had been accounted for a month after the close of the 1972 Paris Auto Salon. In the end, 1580 were sold, many to serious racers.

In an effort to capitalise on the competition clientele, 55 chassis were taken from the production line and turned into 2.8 RSRs – hardcore, works-inspired machines targeted squarely at privateers. As well as ventilated and drilled discs from the 917, plus 9in front and 11in rear wheels and a bigger front air dam, the RSR featured a further bore increase to 92mm, taking capacity to 2806cc, plus Mahle pistons and 906 Carrera 6 camshafts.

Engine proudly shows the wear from its colourful racing life. Below: unmistakable Porsche flat-six, despite the tune. Left: adjustable rev limiter

The evolution continued with the advent of the 3.0 RS in 1974, a true homologation special that required just 100 examples to qualify in Group 3 for Production GT Cars. Though externally similar to the 2.8 RSR, the new machine was even more focused, taking the best elements of previous iterations and addressing many of the flaws. Fully bored out to 2994cc, the highly tuned 911 produced 230bhp at 6200rpm in road trim, while its predecessor's habit of throwing its flywheel was cured and the problem of its weak magnesium crankcase was addressed, albeit at the expense of an extra 10kg.

Few racers got on with the 3.0 RS quite as well as Faure, who blew away the competition in the 1974 season – a success that didn't go

"The president of Harley-Davidson put up the £1000 and I did some sketches for him. I met him in a pub and we chose the design together"

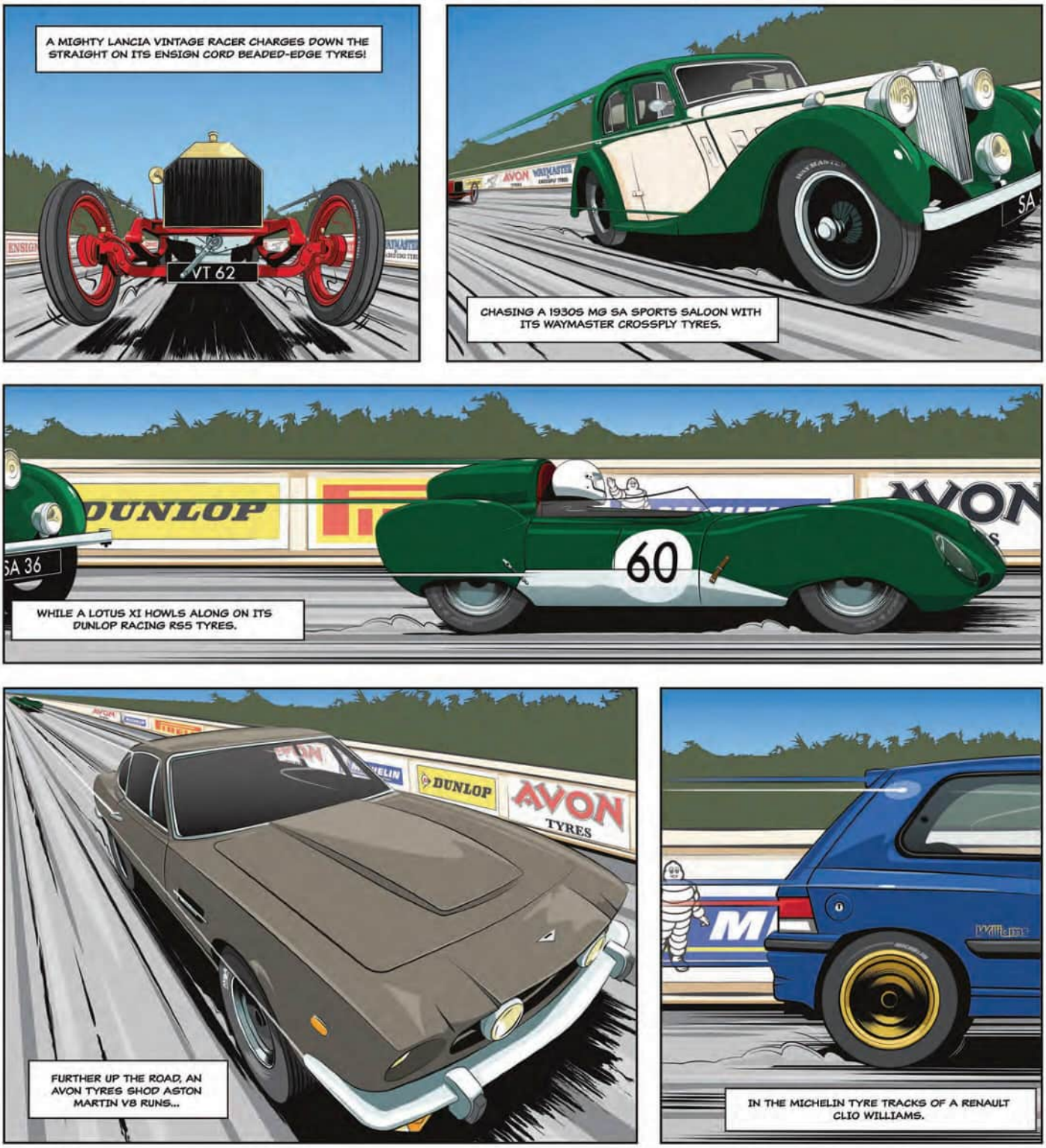
Wide arches and long tail combine for one of the most evocative of all roadgoing 911 racers. Right: Faure's original sketches, settled on in a pub

unnoticed. "A friend of mine, Richard Bond, was great friends with Jean Blaton who raced under the name 'Beurlys' and campaigned a 3.0 RSR at Le Mans," he recalls. "He said Jean had seen my career in racing in the RS – I'd won 18 races in the year in that particular car – and asked that I come and drive at Brands Hatch. He was quite impressed, so the following winter he rang me up and asked if I would like to come and race at Le Mans, and could I find £1000 sponsorship."

Struggling to come up with the money after the loss of his financial backer, Fisons, Faure eventually got lucky after a chance encounter in a London bar: "I got talking to a guy who happened to be the president of Harley-Davidson, a blonde-haired, all-American college kid called Clayton Day Junior, and he loved the idea. So he put up the £1000 and I did some sketches for him. We chose the design together; I met him in a pub and we worked it out. We agreed on the helmet design, and then the final livery for the car. I gave the car the number 69 as a joke – just imagine my astonishment when I got to Le Mans and found that the [race organiser] ACO had allocated the number to us!"

Faure joined the unlikely team at La Sarthe in the hot summer of 1975, to share the 24-hour epic with fellow debutant John Cooper and Le Mans veteran Blaton. Compared to the experience and backing of teams such as Georg Loos' Gelo Racing, which fielded a three-car 911 entry, the solo effort of Beurlys was poised to be something of a David and Goliath story – but in the RSR they had one hell of a slingshot.

Like its 2.8-litre predecessor, the RSR began life as its equivalent RS model. Fifty-four chassis were pulled from the production line, such as it was, to be uprated for top-level racing. The competitions department then bored an extra plug hole in the cylinder heads to receive the same twin-ignition system that graced the 2.8 RSR; timing remained the same but valve lift was increased and the fuel pump beefed-up. The butterfly throttles, good for 308bhp, were changed for slide throttles that



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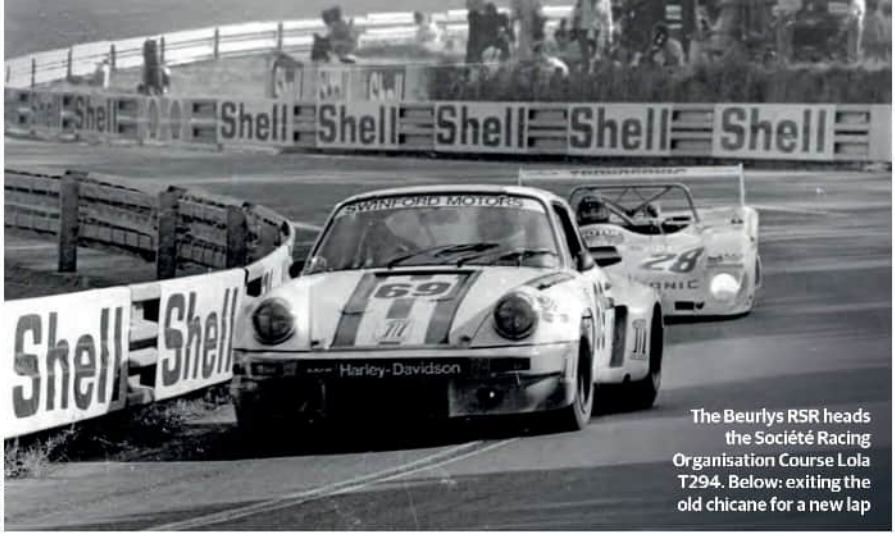
achieved 330bhp at 8000rpm, fully 100bhp more than the 3.0 RS. A straight-through twin-pipe exhaust from the 2.8 RSR was fitted, too, while the geometry was gently tweaked, with raised stub-axles lowering the front of the car by 18mm. Incredibly, the bodywork got wider still, with an extra 2in added to each wing to help accommodate massive 14in rear wheels shod with racing slicks, plus an even larger rear spoiler overhanging the bumper. The 917's braking system was carried over, with the addition of endurance calipers and pads lifted directly from the Le Mans prototypes.

Ever the Porsche fanatic, Blaton was an early adopter of the new model and received his car – finished in the trademark yellow of Ecurie Francorchamps – ahead of the 1974 season, where it ran well at Le Mans before a gearbox problem forced the car's retirement. It was this RSR, chassis 9072 and the 26th of 54 factory examples, that Faure, Blaton and Cooper had to ready for its second outing at La Sarthe.

With the big race just days away, Faure set about transforming the 911 with the stars-and-stripes Harley-Davidson livery that he and Day had settled on back in England. "Blaton rented the Shell garage at Arnage, with a workshop at the back," says Faure, "so we used that as a little studio. We didn't bother painting the interior. We just wanted the outside to be white, so you can still see it's yellow inside. I then chose the colours and bought my aerosols: Guards Red and a Renault Blue. I brought the cans with me from England and cut out stars to use as stencils on the roof. The rest I did by hand including the stripes, which were done using masking tape with an outline in black tape to give it a bit of strength. When they came to pick up the car in the morning they were delighted."



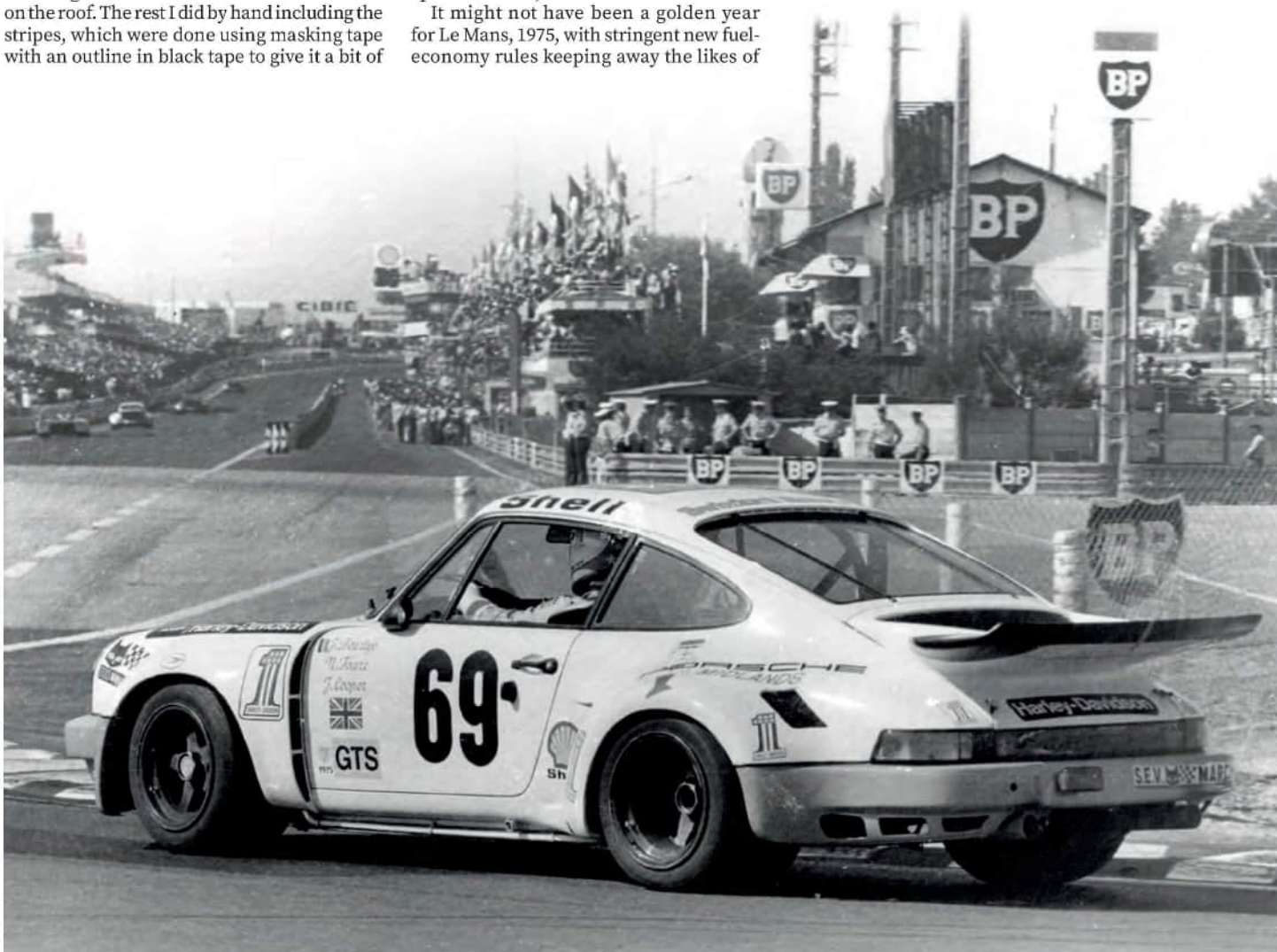
MAURICE LOCKEY

The Beurlys RSR heads the Société Racing Organisation Course Lola T294. Below: exiting the old chicane for a new lap

As well as being new to Le Mans, Faure was a novice when it came to night racing and his first experience of driving in those conditions in anger came during qualifying: "It was so easy – everyone is going in the same direction, so all you had to look at was red lights. You just dipped your mirror if they had their lights on full; you're aware of the cars that are coming up really fast because the lights close quite quickly. I'll always remember Vic Elford saying to me, 'If it's foggy in the morning, and you come to the rise just before the kink and you're going flat-out, don't slow down. Just count one, two, then turn in as soon as you go over the rise and you'll find the apex.' It worked; don't lift."

It might not have been a golden year for Le Mans, 1975, with stringent new fuel-economy rules keeping away the likes of Ferrari and Alfa Romeo, but it was certainly a purple patch for Porsche. More than half of the grid was filled with 911s, including several privateers fielding RSs and RSRs as well as a number of big-money teams such as Kremer and Jägermeister.

By the time the chequer fell on Sunday afternoon it was Jacky Ickx and Derek Bell in their Gulf-Mirage GR8 who led the pack, followed by the Ligier of Jean-Louis Lafosse and Guy Chasseuil, the sister GR8 and the Joest Porsche 908/3. Showing their pace and reliability, the following seven places were locked out by RSRs and RSs, with the Gelo car leading the class ahead of the Beurlys RSR, which was brought home in the final hours



"The car just ran and ran – we were in the pits for only 20 minutes in the 24 hours, almost a record. We didn't even change tyres!"

Clockwise from main: meticulous work even went down to the decals; interior reveals original yellow; massive Avons; backer's badge; Faure revels in returning to his old Porsche's cockpit

collection for the following 25 years. The Porsche was restored in around 2006 by marque specialist Manfred Freisinger to the exact specification in which it contested Le Mans, including the yellow interior. It remains one of the most original of its type.

Squeezing into the competition bucket seat, you get some sense of what it might have been like back in 1975, and of the RSR's strange mix of the exotic and familiar. But any comfort that you may draw from the many similarities it has with more approachable 911 road cars evaporates the instant the magnificent 3-litre flat-six clears its throat.

The Type 911/75's high-lift camshafts offer a lumpy idle that reverberates around the bare cabin; as with most racers it's happiest on the move. The Fichtel & Sachs single-plate clutch and '9156' gearbox shared with the 2.8 RSR make a wonderful combination, with a light pedal and a smooth action that will feel familiar to anyone who's driven a 911 of similar vintage. At low speeds it's a car that even your grandmother could drive, but begin to explore the envelope of performance and it's clear the RSR is a very different animal. Plant the throttle in any gear and the acceleration arrives with the immediacy of a lump-hammer hitting a plate-glass window. It's seriously quick, with a brutal kick that pins your head to the upright seat. You very soon appreciate the need for the centrally mounted tachometer, rotated by 90° to afford a necessary at-a-glance view of the 10,000rpm business end.

The RSR is blistering in a straight line, as your strained neck muscles can testify, but it's in the bends that the car truly excels: the low centre of gravity, wide track and those enormous tyres give you a fresh understanding of mechanical grip. You could say it corners as if it's on rails, but the old cliché doesn't do justice to just how fleet of foot it feels, how alive and responsive the steering remains even under extreme load.

"I think it's probably one of the best driver's road/race cars," reckons Faure. "It certainly develops the greatest feel of any car I've driven and it responds to you as if it's a glove; you wear it. The car is basically doing what it wants to do, and you only guide it."

"It brings back the most fantastic memories," concludes Faure, "not just of the car but being with such a congenial team and being able to enjoy the atmosphere of Le Mans, which is really the most special race in the world. I think it would be the ambition of any racing driver to drive at Le Mans. To be reacquainted with the car now is just a dream."

second in class and sixth overall – a full 22 laps ahead of the closest privateer.

"I drove the car for the last stint, between midday and 4pm, just one minute short of my allowance," remembers Faure. "The RSR just ran and ran and we were in the pits for only 20 minutes in the 24 hours, almost a record. We didn't even change tyres! In those days the concrete pit balconies were directly above the track and the pitlane. You were very aware that everyone was looking straight down on you – you felt like a matador in the bullring. After the race everyone crowded on to the circuit, the whole team and the Harley boys with their 'bikes. Everybody was thrilled – they never expected to finish like that."

At the season's close, Blaton offered the car to Faure for £3600 but, not having the funds, it was sold to a syndicate and made its way to South America. The 911 appeared in Ecuador, where it stayed for four years before being repatriated to Germany and going into a private

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BACK IN THE SADDLE

Meeting fellow competitors on the Tour de Corse re-run, after an unforgettable blast alongside former winner Gérard Larrousse in a Porsche 911SC/RS

WORDS **MALCOLM THORNE** PHOTOGRAPHY **PORSCHE/MALCOLM THORNE**

Clockwise, from left: Gérard unleashes the huge grip and acceleration of the SC/RS on one of the transit sections; stunning Corsican scenery; Vic and Gérard receive a heroes' welcome

HAWK COBRA 289

Stanislas Machoïr Jnr and Snr, a father-and-son pairing from Toulouse, were taking part in a British-built Hawk Cobra replica. "It's my first time on the Tour de Corse," said 20-year-old Stanislas Jnr, "and the first run for the car here, but it's my father's fourth entry. It's a fantastic event, with incredible scenery – complete with cows and goats wandering around the countryside. The best bit was Notre-Dame de la Serra, which snakes along the coast to Calvi. The car has a Mustang 4.7 V8 so is quick, but we weren't worried about our times – we were just here to have fun."

If you're of a certain age, the Porsche name will be synonymous with race circuits and road cars – be that prototypes howling into the night along the Mulsanne, or bankers' wheels clogging the streets of EC1. In both production and competition terms Stuttgart's activities are very focused, and mixing it with Subaru and Mitsubishi isn't the name of the game. Not even the Cayenne likes to get its wheels dirty.

Yet leaf through the *Sport* pages of *C&SC* and, among the inevitable Escorts and Minis, you'll find a mass of 911s tearing up the special stages, flicking their pert tails across the gravel with abandon. Zuffenhausen might be more LMP than WRC today, but it wasn't always so. The firm was once big on the rallying scene.

Perhaps aware that such exploits are slowly drifting from the public mindset, the maker is keen to set things right, and thus it was that we found ourselves on a tiny plane bound for the beautiful Mediterranean isle of Corsica where, for the first time in the retrospective's 17-year history, the factory museum had entered a brace of hot 911s on the Tour de Corse Historique.

This wasn't just about enjoying some autumn sun, either: Porsche has previous here. The gruelling Tour de Corse was first held in 1956 and the German manufacturer took its maiden win on these Tarmac stages four years later, when Herbert Linge and Paul-Ernst Strähle were victorious at the helm of a 356B 1600 GS Carrera GT. Herbert still vividly remembers the event: "It was one of the hardest and most interesting rallies ever in terms of driving. It revealed the extraordinary beauty of this island and included everything that you could wish for in a long-distance competition."

The firm scored another podium in 1966 when, left largely to his own devices on a shoestring budget, Vic Elford clinched third in a 911. "I'd been driving Cortinas but they were too unreliable," he recalled, "so I persuaded Porsche comps boss Huschke von Hanstein to lend me a 911. At the time there was no rally programme, so all I got was a car and a couple of mechanics – but no spares. Our result changed that, though, and led to money being ploughed in for 1967, when I finished third again. And then, of course, the following year I won in Monte-Carlo."

The next overall win on Corsica came in 1969, when French ace Gérard Larrousse bested an armada of Alpine-Renaults to take the laurels in a 911R – one of three significant rally victories for the Frenchman that year. Between them, then, these two former works drivers are inextricably linked to Porsche's reputation on the island, so who better to conduct a guided tour?

Actually, that is a bit of a misnomer: we're not here for sightseeing. For a start, our mount is far from being a bucolic version of the 911. The museum has brought along two examples of one of the rarest variants, the SC/RS. Only 20 of these Group B homologation machines were built at the end of 1983, in accordance with the regulations that came into force at the close of previous year, the cars being deemed an evolution of the production model and, as such, negating the requirement to construct the usual 200 examples stipulated by the FIA rulebook.

Based on the regular SC, this factory special incorporated the wider body, wheels and brakes of the turbo, and the 2994cc flat-six was good for 250bhp at 7000rpm (298bhp in competition trim) thanks to hotter cams, Type 935 heads and Bosch mechanical fuel injection with a Kugelfischer pump. Weight was down to 1057kg (957kg in rally guise) courtesy of aluminium doors, bonnet and front wings, as well as thinner glass, glassfibre bumpers and minimal soundproofing, while the suspension was also uprated.

The result is a car that looks mean, like a stripped-for-competition 930 turbo, and goes like stink. It might have lacked the four-wheel drive of Group B rivals, but this was a seriously fast machine. In 1985, Bernard Béguin and Jean-Jacques Lenne took theirs to third here as part of the World Rally Championship, followed by their Irish teammates Billy Coleman and Ronan Morgan in fourth place.

Between them, Gérard and Vic have a combined age of more than a century and a half, but neither is hanging about. Now relying on a stick to get around, 'Quick Vic' has lost none of the thirst for speed that gave him the sobriquet. He has some great stories to share, too, from 'tuning' his first car – "I had an Austin A35 that I painted red to look like a Speedwell car, but that was as far as the modifications went" – to his role in the Nürburgring 84 Hours: "I did the night stints – four of them, each seven hours. I loved driving in rain, fog and at night, so everyone was happy to let me get on with it." Gérard, a mere stripling in comparison, also regales us with anecdotes about his career: "The number 21 was always unlucky for me. When I was a parachutist I broke my leg on my 21st jump, and whenever I had car 21 something would go wrong."

"It's great to be back," adds Vic, as the friends jump effortlessly between English and French. "It's been 30 years since I was here. I always loved mountain roads, and was very fast on them – going down as well as up. You can't make a mistake on the way down, though." Did he ever make a mistake? "Just once, in a Ferrari Daytona," he says. "A corner turned out to be much sharper than it said in the pace notes, so we went off. The car flew through the air, but landed undamaged in some bushes. It was a very rare mistake, though. You had to trust your co-driver 100%, and David [Stone] was the very best in the business."

Talk of co-drivers reminds Gérard of his partner in 1970, Jean-Claude Perramond: "He was nice but used to smoke a pipe. I couldn't stand the smell, so Porsche installed a little chimney." These old friends are in agreement, though: on roads such as these, the co-driver's role is not to be underestimated. No pressure, then, for those on the maps – including me, as I do my best to keep Gérard on the straight and narrow (although the straights are few and far between – the Tour de Corse is often referred to as the rally of 10,000 corners).

As we're flagged away for our first special stage, mild-mannered Gérard breaks out his alter ego and the 911 roars up the road with alarming alacrity. If you think you're a bit tasty behind the wheel, strap yourself in alongside a *real* driver and you'll soon realise how slow you actually are – it's a mesmerising experience. Despite his years, this French hotshoe makes his pace look easy on these perilous, narrow

From top: ex-WRC R4 stalks Porsche through narrow streets; mountain roads leave little margin for error 'Quick Vic' on the '67 Tour; Gérard on the '69 Tour

Gérard Larrousse

Born in Lyon in 1940, Gérard Larrousse enjoyed a career in sports cars and rallying as well as F1 – both as a driver and team principal. After starting out hillclimbing a Renault Dauphine – "With 55bhp you had to avoid the brakes at all costs!" – he joined Porsche in 1969, taking second place at Le Mans with Hans Herrmann in a 908.

The following year he again finished second, with Willi Kauhsen in a 917, but partnered with Vic Elford in 1971 he won the Sebring 12 Hours in a 917, as well as the Nürburgring 1000km in a 908/3. His finest hour in sports cars would be back-to-back wins at La Sarthe in 1973 and '74 in the wailing Matra MS670B, and he also won the Targa Florio in 1974 in a Lancia Stratos.

This true all-rounder confirmed his talent with numerous rally and road-race victories: in 1969, in addition to the Tour de Corse, he won the Rallye Neige et Glace and the Tour de France, as well as a second on the Monte in 1970 and '72. After directing RenaultSport's competition activities from 1976-'84, he spent two years as head of Ligier before forming his own F1 team.

Vic Elford

Five decades after first competing in Corsica, Victor Henry 'Quick Vic' Elford is still regarded as one of the best – and fastest – drivers in the history of motorsport. Born in London on 10 June 1935, his first outing was as a navigator on a local rally in a friend's MG TF, and that eventually led to factory-backed drives with DKW, Triumph and Ford.

After he joined Porsche, within the space of five months in 1968 he famously won the Rallye Monte-Carlo, Daytona 24 Hours, Targa Florio and Nürburgring 1000km, as well as coming fourth in the French Grand Prix for Cooper – his first F1 outing. A big fan of the Porsche 917, he was the first driver to lap Le Mans at a 150mph average and was clocked at almost 240mph on the Mulsanne Straight in 1971. "The car should have done 250mph," said Elford, "but as the tyres got hotter they swelled up and increased drag, slowing it down." On 4 February 1967, driving a borrowed 911, Vic was also victorious in the world's first rallycross event, which took place at Lydden Hill Race Circuit.

Clockwise: the Tour de Corse Historique takes in some of the island's most spectacular roads; Gérard and a slightly queasy Malcolm; SC/RS shares its wide body with the 930, but is naturally aspirated

1985 RENAULT 4 GTL

A 270,000km R4 may seem improbable, but Antonio Pinto dos Santos' car has some 11 international rallies under its belt: "I bought it from a fireman in Lisbon in '97 with 100,000 on the clock. I did the Tour de Corse in 1999 as part of the WRC: with 34bhp it isn't fast, but it's great for sightseeing! The engine gets hot uphill, the brakes get hot going down the other side, but we've never had to retire it."

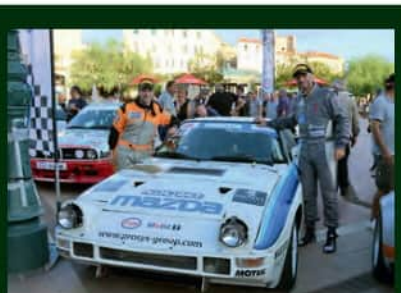
Clockwise: competition machinery as far as the eye can see, with plenty of Porsches and Alpine-Renaults; the rally is a huge event for the island; 911 twins line up at the start of a special stage

mountain roads, with a sheer drop to one side and a wall of rock to the other. The role of navigator is rapidly supplanted by that of mere ballast; wide-eyed, I sit and stare while Gérard throws the musclebound 911 around as a cat would play with a toy mouse. He's having fun, but I'm struggling to keep up.

"I'm not here to race," he later admits. "I'm too old for that, but I love driving. The car is hard work without power steering, and I'd have softened the dampers by about 50% and raised the ride height. It's a fantastic machine, though – the grip is amazing, the rear just doesn't come unstuck. The best moment was when I first took the wheel: the noise was just like before, a very metallic sound, so typically Porsche."

Throughout the event, a brightly coloured convoy of negative camber and sticky tyres floods the towns and villages. Predictably, Porsche and Alpine-Renault are much in evidence; Gérard has close links to both marques, but a less well-known machine catches his eye. "I drove one of those, too," he says, as he spots a Simca CG Proto MC, a Chrysler-backed rival to the Alpines. Gérard gave the mid-engined coupé its maiden win on the Critérium des Cévennes in 1970. We have little time to admire such gems, though, because the next stage is always just around the corner.

After this punishing regime, how did we fare? Admission time: I'm clearly not cut out for a diet of Tulip maps and high-speed hairpins, and my stomach failed to maintain the rhythm. Fortunately, Porsche also brought along a spotless 1984 911 Carrera 3.2 from the factory fleet. Though it lacks the pace of the SC/RS, it's a wonderful way to tour the island and also serves to demonstrate that competition really does improve the breed. So thanks Vic and Gérard, for all that development work.



1984 MAZDA RX-7

Pierre Lafay narrowly missed out on victory. "It was fantastic," he said. "The car was reliable and very quick. Originally built to Group B spec, it's good for 270bhp and weighs 1040kg, which makes it competitive here. This was our second time and our goal was to win. We were fastest on the penultimate stage, but couldn't catch the winning Porsche of Jean-Francois Mourgues. We'll be back!"

1955 PANHARD DYNA Z1

This was Pierre-Henry Mahul's fifth Tour, but his first with the Dyna: "The roads are steep and have a poor surface, so the Panhard coped fantastically. There's not much power, but great agility and stability. We're only competitive on the rough when the fast cars can't use their pace, but came 15th in the regularity. I've been racing Panhards since 2004: it's more fun to drive a slow car fast than a fast car slow!"

Dick Lovett

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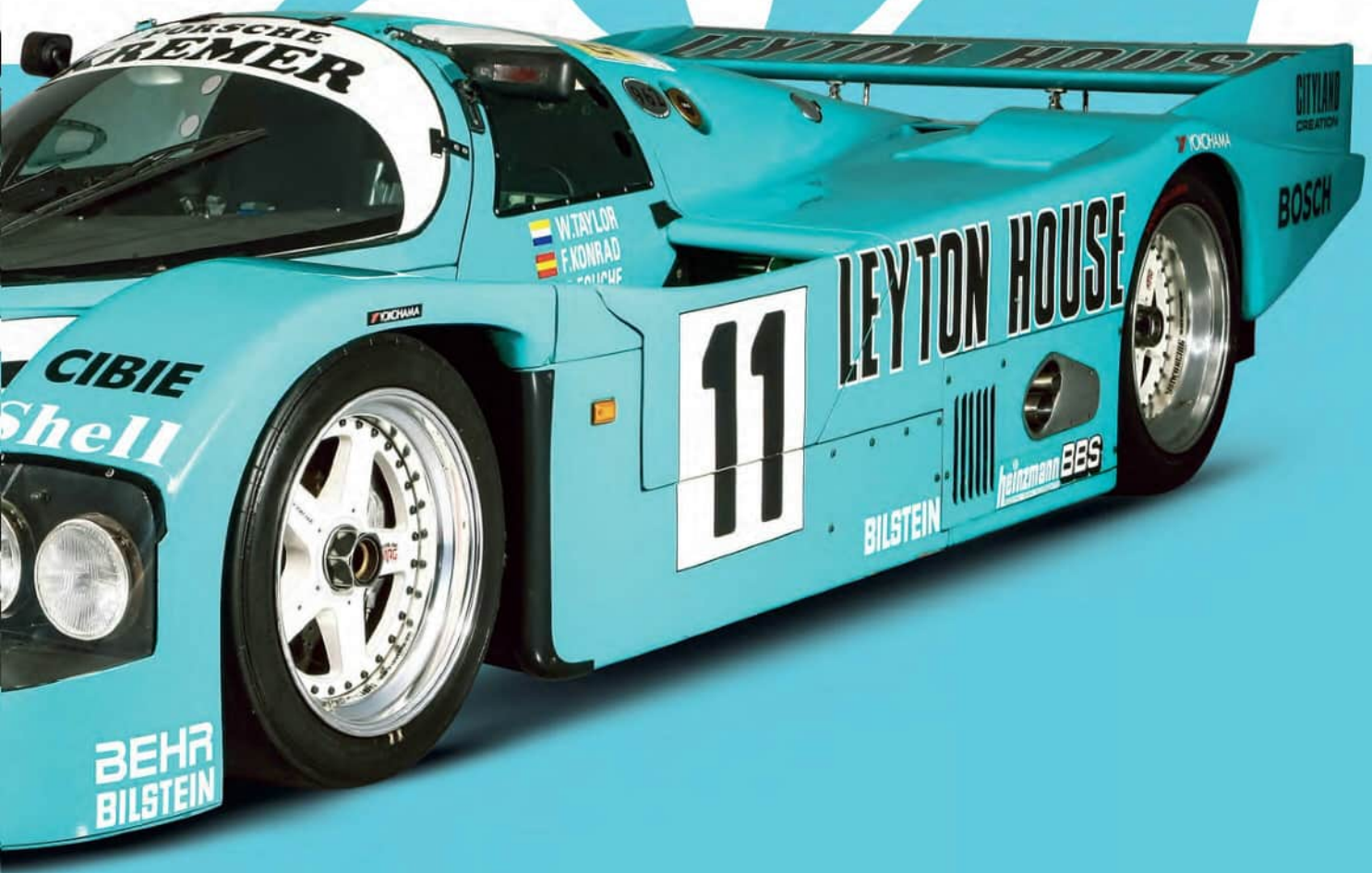
“It’s a superb bit of kit... I’d even drive one around a car park”

So says Le Mans hero Derek Bell of Porsche’s legendary 956/962, with its rich history from works glory to privateer stalwart

WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE**
PHOTOGRAPHY **LYNDON MCNEIL/MOTORSPORT IMAGES**

Leyton House 962C ran at Le Mans in 1987 and ’88. Left: Bell and his good friend Hans Stuck toast their dominant win at La Sarthe in 1986

962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Few cars had the staying power for such a lengthy campaign as Porsche's 956 and, by proxy, its 962 descendant. Seven victories at Le Mans represent just the tip of a particularly large iceberg; the last win came a full 12 years after the first, let's not forget. The fact that variations on the theme outlived the formula for which the model was conceived says it all.

To a generation of racing fans whose formative years were the 1980s, Porsche *was* Group C. Those who witnessed the category in its pomp still recall it with awed reverence. Introduced in 1982, it breathed new life into an arena of motorsport that had been flogged once too often over the previous five years. Grids during the Group 6 era ebbed as manufacturers left, and the few that lingered recorded hollow victories over privateers and makeweights.

Governing body FISA responded with a series based on fuel efficiency. This acted as a stabilising force, which in turn attracted the manufacturers. And former Grand Prix stars, young wannabes looking to forge their reputations, competent gentleman drivers and local hotshoes.

The movement gained momentum in North America, but FISA's hopes of framing universal regulations with the International Motor Sports Association failed to reach fruition after IMSA rejected the fuel-based principles. Instead, it introduced an equivalency formula – Grand Touring Prototypes – based on engine capacity and weight. It also flourished, with Indycar – and even NASCAR – stars racing against the established sports car aces.

There were healthy grids and, for the most part, support from fans, even if the initial emphasis on fuel efficiency mitigated against outright speed come race day. Then 3½-litre, normally aspirated Formula One-based engines arrived in 1990. Costs ballooned, manufacturers bade farewell and, in 1992, Group C tanked, with IMSA GTP lasting one further season.

That wasn't quite the end for the car that came to symbolise Group C, however: the 956/962 wasn't ready to be pensioned off just yet. A little ingenuity – and a lot of homologation chicanery – ensured that the model remained in contemporary motorsport well into the mid-'90s.

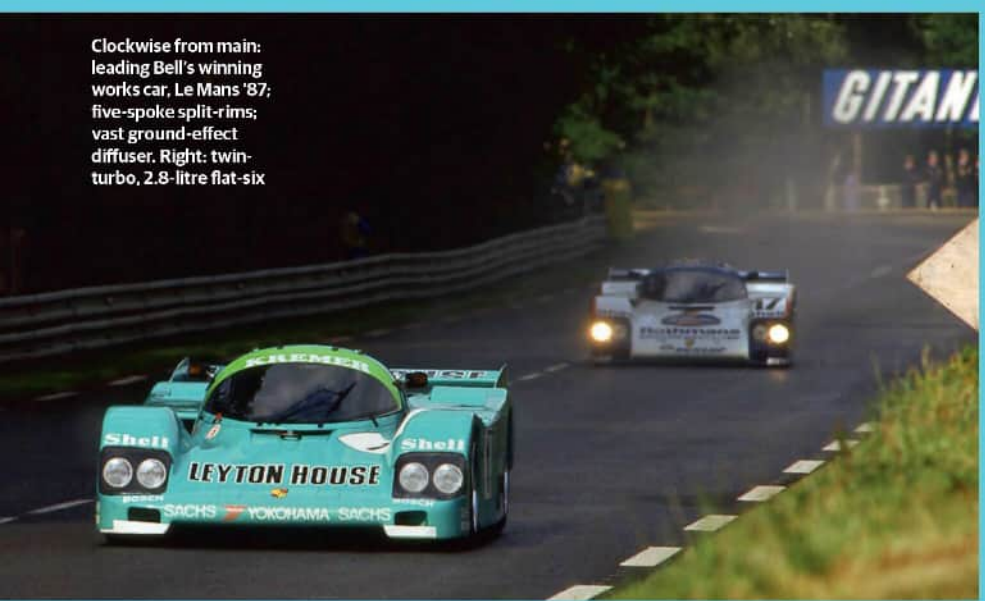
The Porsche's beauty lay in the fact that it was a customer car – a turnkey racer in the literal sense – driven by everyone from Ayrton Senna to AJ Foyt, Sir Jack Brabham to Jean Alesi. And though it would ultimately be ballasted into irrelevance in the World Sports Prototype Championship, the 962 continued to claim titles elsewhere, from IMSA to the German Interserie.

This was due in no small part to the efforts of enterprising privateers. Richard Lloyd kicked things off in 1984 with his own replacement/development 956GTI monocoque and revised suspension. Within this small cottage industry of independent chassis builders, John Thompson's TC Prototypes concern was highly regarded: Walter Brun was among the customers for his honeycomb aluminium tubs, as were the Kremer brothers – Erwin and Manfred – who ran the Leyton House car pictured here.

The Group C warhorse acted as a blank canvas for a variety of striking liveries, but few were as memorable as this. While it might sound like a brand of instant coffee, Leyton House encompassed all manner of enterprises, from real estate to clothing. In the mid-'80s, the firm sponsored entrants in the Japanese Touring Car Championship before making the leap to the global stage, showing well in International F3000 and then sponsoring March on its return to Formula One in 1987.

This in turn led to the outright acquisition of the team, which was capable of springing the occasional surprise: Ivan Capelli famously led the 1990 French Grand Prix in the Adrian

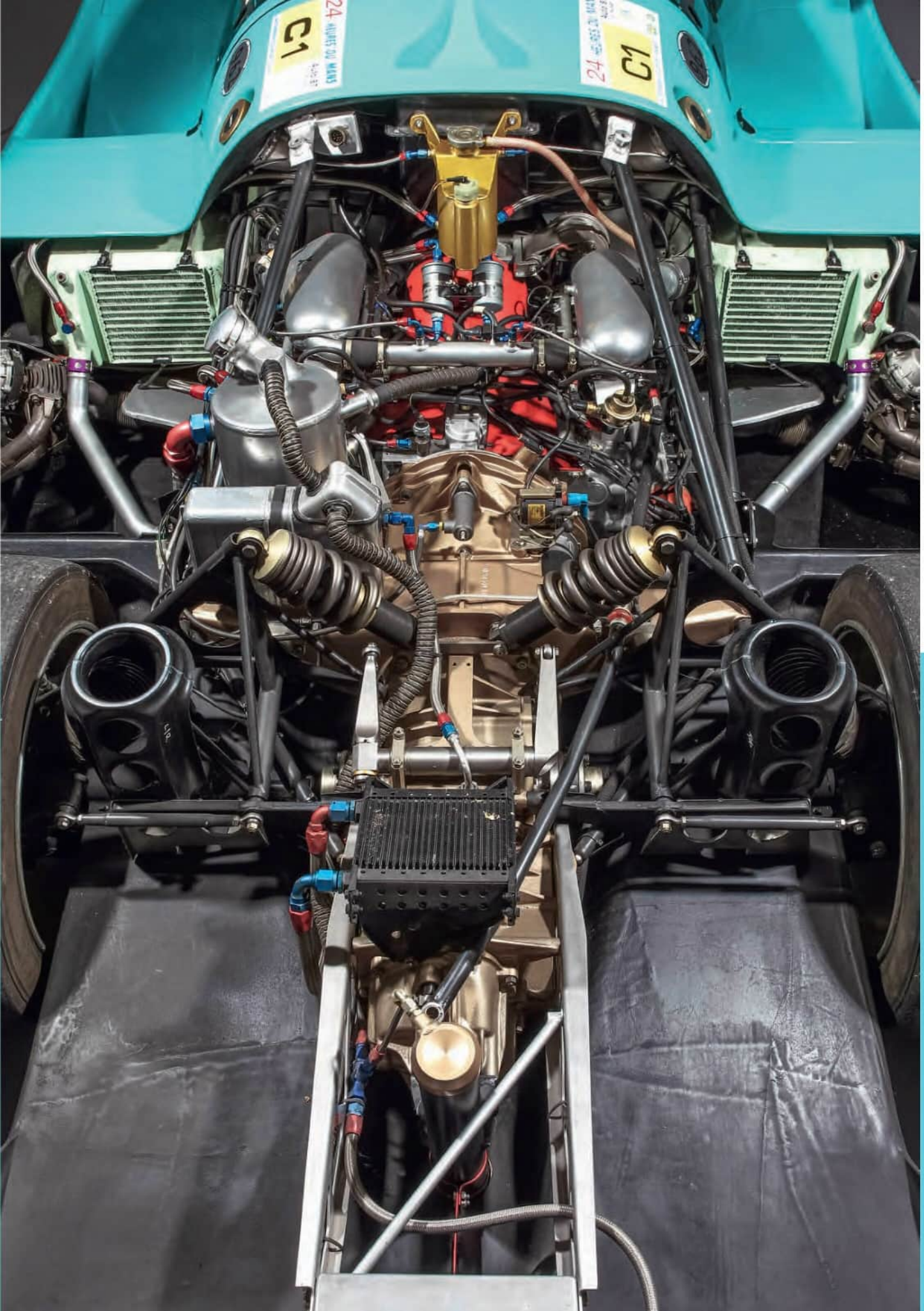
'To a generation of racing fans that grew up in the 1980s, Group C meant Porsche'



Clockwise from main: leading Bell's winning works car, Le Mans '87; five-spoke split-rims; vast ground-effect diffuser. Right: twin-turbo, 2.8-litre flat-six

Roll of honour

Le Mans 24 Hours
1982 (Ickx, Bell)
1983 (Schuppan, Holbert, Haywood)
1984 (Ludwig, Pescarolo)
1985 (Ludwig, Barilla, 'Winter')
1986 (Bell, Stuck, Holbert)
1987 (Bell, Stuck, Holbert)
1994 (Dalmas, Haywood, Baldi)
Daytona 24 Hours
1985 (Foyt, Wollek, Unser, Boutsen)
1986 (Holbert, Bell, Unser Jnr)
1987 (Holbert, Bell, Unser Jnr, Robinson)
1989 (Andretti, Bell, Wollek)
1991 (Haywood, 'Winter', Jelinski, Pescarolo, Wollek)
***Sebring* 12 Hours**
1985 (Foyt, Wollek)
1986 (Stuck, Gartner, Akin)
1987 (Mass, Rahal)
1988 (Ludwig, Stuck)
World Endurance/Sports Prototype Champion
1982, '83, '84, '85


24 HEURES DU MANS
C1
24
C1

Newey-designed CG901 before being jumped by Ferrari's Alain Prost with just three laps remaining. Sadly, the Leyton House adventure didn't last much longer, with the team unravelling as key insiders were either headhunted or fired. It didn't help that founder and CEO Akira Akagi became mired in a financial scandal as the Japanese economy collapsed in 1991. The team changed hands that year and reverted to its March moniker for its final cash-strapped season.

The featured car was built by Kremer Racing for an attack on the 1987 Le Mans 24 Hours and featured the team's 'CK6' upgrades, not least a Thompson-built aluminium honeycomb monocoque. Running a 2826cc twin-turbo 'six', the car wore the team's 962-118 chassis plate and was driven by George Fouché, Franz Konrad and Wayne Taylor to fourth place.

It was subsequently prepared for a return bid in 1988, with changes including lower venturi floors in line with the latest regulations. Kris Nissen and Harold Grohs joined Fouché to finish eighth. The Kremers then mothballed the car, retrospectively numbering it CK6-87 while the '118' plate was refitted to their regular 'sprint' car.

It remained in the brothers' collection until 1998, and was acquired from Henry Pearman by Paul Michaels in 2006. Save a track test at Donington Park and a run up the Goodwood hillclimb during the 2008 Festival of Speed, it has been on static display ever since: Michaels is adamant that this highly original car won't be seen in historic racing any time soon.

The Kremer brothers later experimented with their own Kevlar/carbonfibre set-up, while the likes of Holbert Racing and Dave Klym's Fabcar concern catered for the American market. Among the more substantially changed designs was that of Vern Schuppan's equipe. A winner at Le Mans for the factory team in 1983, the Australian went so far as to initiate a street-legal adaptation in 1991 (a snip at £830,000).

And it would be a (sort of) roadgoing rendition that would mark the 962's send-off at international level. Like Schuppan, German Jochen Dauer offered his own take – the Dauer 962 Le Mans – which featured largely new bodywork, although it was still recognisably a 962. Improbably – and some might say inexcusably – it was allowed to compete in the GT1 class at Le Mans in 1994 and triumphed outright with factory assistance. A race car that had been transformed into a road car and then changed back into a racer had claimed victory.

Nonetheless, it wasn't the old stager's final triumph at contemporary level. An altogether less spurious 962, fielded by Team Taissan, won a round of the All-Japan Grand Touring Car Championship at Fuji Speedway in August of that year. To put that victory into perspective, by that stage 956s were already appearing in historic meetings Stateside.

It had been quite a ride since design work commenced on this sports car steamroller in August 1981. Departing from standard Porsche racing practice, the 956 had a monocoque, due largely to the provision of ground effects and crashworthiness. Not that there was anything particularly novel about the car's construction. Designed under the direction of Norbert Singer, the tub comprised sheet aluminium out of expediency, while the body panels were Kevlar, glassfibre and aluminium.

The heart of the 956 was transplanted from the 936/81 that had won Le Mans in 1981. A proven unit, the fuel-injected, 2.65-litre flat-six was topped off by a pair of KKK turbochargers, the gearbox being designed specifically for the model. Making its race debut at the Pace Petroleum Six-Hours at Silverstone in May 1982, Porsche wasn't to be rewarded with a win first

Clockwise from left: livery also graced F1; simple interior – Porsche starts on the turn of a key; Dauer 962s finished first and third (pictured) at Le Mans '94; Senna raced a 956 at the Nürburgring in 1984

time out. Derek Bell and Jacky Ickx had to settle for second place behind the Riccardo Patrese/Michele Alboreto Lancia LC1 and first in class – Group 6 cars were still sanctioned that year and didn't have to comply to Group C fuel regs, which was quite an advantage. A month later, Porsche descended on Le Mans and it was a different story. The Rothmans-backed factory squad blanketed the podium spots, with Ickx and Bell hoisting the winners' trophy aloft.

Derek, who had previously won the 1975 and '81 24 Hours alongside the Belgian star, would go on to become inextricably linked with the model. He recalls: "Aside from my wins with Jacky, one of the undoubted highlights for me as a factory driver was winning the 1983 Silverstone 1000km with Stefan Bellof. I can still recall the sense of elation at winning my home race in front of such a hugely enthusiastic crowd. One of the most remarkable aspects of the 956 was its competitiveness from the get-go."

And so it continued, with the 956 proving the dominant player. The 956B – in essence a customer version of the '83 works car – arrived in '84 after just 11 original privateer 956s had been built. It was then superseded by the 962.

Basically an IMSA version of the existing car, the major difference was the single-turbo, 935-derived engine (2.8 and later 3.2 litres) and lengthened wheelbase to bring the pedal box behind the front axle line. Making its debut in the 1984 Daytona 24 Hours, the Mario and Michael Andretti-driven factory car led from pole position until the transmission packed up.

As IMSA's pedal-box regs were universally adopted, the 962 – or rather the Group C-spec 962C – was campaigned by the works equipe in Europe from 1985. It would spearhead Weissach's charge until Jaguar and Sauber began to come on increasingly strongly in the late 1980s. The 3.2-litre unit, which had been eligible under IMSA's Group 3 engine regulations, was banned in 1987 but, with the Nissans becoming more competitive Stateside and the threat of withdrawal by Porsche teams, twin-turbo engines were allowed back in with 36mm restrictors. Porsche itself was looking to pastures new: despite having an illustrious history rooted in sports cars, it changed tack and endured a disastrous foray into the world of Indycar racing instead.

Derek claimed the 1985 World Endurance Championship title alongside his great friend Hans-Joachim Stuck – "The first championship of any kind that I had ever won" – plus a solo '86 World Sports Prototype crown. On weekends off, he could be found racing a 962 in the US: "I dovetailed outings in the IMSA GTP series, driving with Al Holbert from 1984. My works commitments ensured that I couldn't contend for the overall title due to conflicting schedules, but together we still won 19 races.

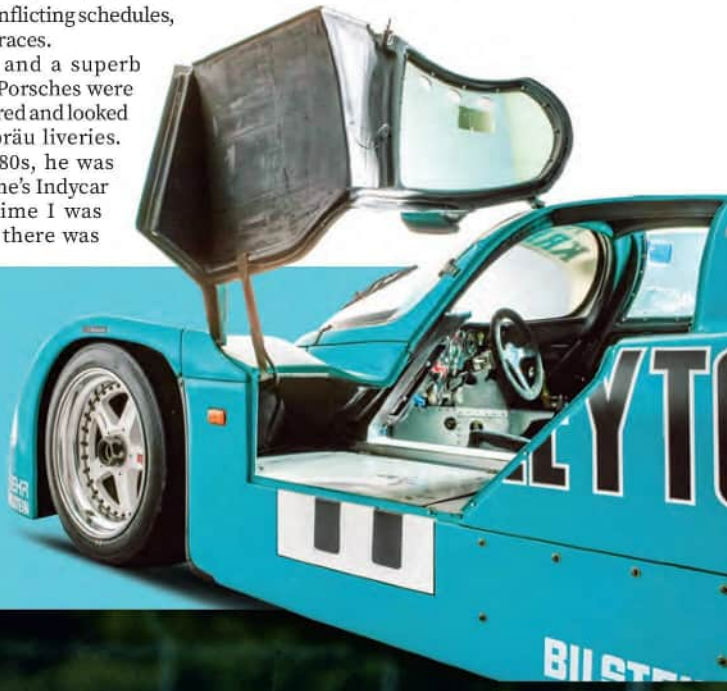
"Al was a good driver and a superb engineer. Holbert Racing Porsches were always immaculately prepared and looked fantastic in their Löwenbräu liveries. Towards the end of the '80s, he was tasked with running Porsche's Indycar programme and at the time I was hugely disappointed that there was no replacement for the 962 in sight – the cars were no longer competitive against the Jaguars and Mercedes."

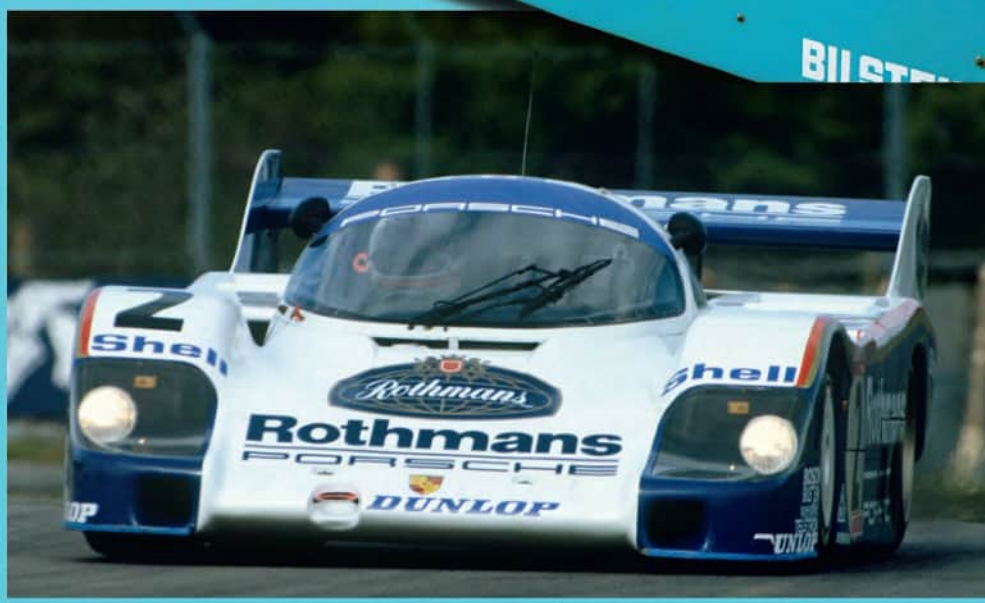
In order to gauge just how great Porsche's Group C icon was, consider its contemporaries from the year of its birth. Having a hard time remembering any? There's a reason for that. The 956/962 was the right product for the time, and much of its success was due to there being strength in numbers.

The last word, however, has to go to Derek, the man who made the car his own: "You have to give a lot of credit to Norbert Singer, who in effect designed the 956 – being a typical Porsche man, he would always play down his role.

"It was just so easy to drive. I was immensely lucky in having teammates such as Ickx and 'Stucky'. I last raced one in 2012 and would drive a 962 around a car park if that was all that was on offer. It was a superb bit of kit, and a car for which I retain great affection."

Thanks to *Henry Pearman; Paul Michaels at Hexagon (hexagonmodernclassics.com)*





Right: chassis CK6-87 features a Thompson aluminium honeycomb tub. Below: Bell (pictured) shared with Bellof to take a memorable victory on his home turf at the 1983 Silverstone 1000km

Racing evolution

1982 956 introduced at Silverstone Six Hours. Water- and air-cooled 2649cc flat-six, twin KKK turbochargers, 620bhp, wheelbase 8ft 8in (2650mm), weight 1852lb (840kg). Five-speed gearbox with magnesium-alloy casing

1984 956s win every round of the World Endurance Championship apart from the Kyalami 1000km. Porsche first tries its sequential, semi-automatic PDK gearbox. 962 appears in IMSA spec: wheelbase 9ft (2770mm), 2826cc, 650bhp, single turbocharger

1985 Group C-spec 962C introduced. Works cars fitted with PDK system, 19in rear tyres and 17in fronts (in place of 16in all round), deeper underbody venturis, revised rear-suspension geometry. The 962 wins 15 out of 16 rounds in the IMSA series

1986 3-litre 'qualifying' engine with bigger turbochargers used at Le Mans

1987 Works cars have 2994cc engine, 660bhp. Customer 962Cs continue with 2.8-litre unit

1988 Factory enters three 962Cs for Le Mans: Bosch Motronic 1.7 engine management, electronically controlled wastegates. 17in Dunlop tyres. Underbody, tail section and nose reprofiled. Stuck on pole position in 3 mins 15.64 secs (fastest Jaguar is Brundle: 3 mins 21.27 secs)

1990 Brun Motorsport uses a high-boost 3.2-litre 'qualifying' engine with 900bhp; races with 3-litre 760bhp powerplant

1991 Joest runs cars in short-tail configuration, with new rear wing and wider nose section

1994 Dauer 962: flat underbody, 2994cc twin-turbo, wider cabin, front 'luggage' compartment, 120-litre fuel tank (962C, 80 litres)

Christmas GIFT GUIDE

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