

Porsche 911 SC Targa

"Only \$23,249? Why, we've got almost that much equity in the house."

--Cory Farley to Mrs. Farley, 1978

What we have here could be called, as they say too often in adland, a unique experience.

The Porsche 911, in its most recent form called the SC, is flat the only car of its kind. That's for starters. There aren't many cars that can make that claim, and we don't want any letters from owners of two-stroke, three-cylinder Saabs, either. Even the hairiest of the multibuck sports or GT cars or whatever they're called these days can't claim weirdness of the dimensions of the weirdness of the 911. Fewer still can match its performance.

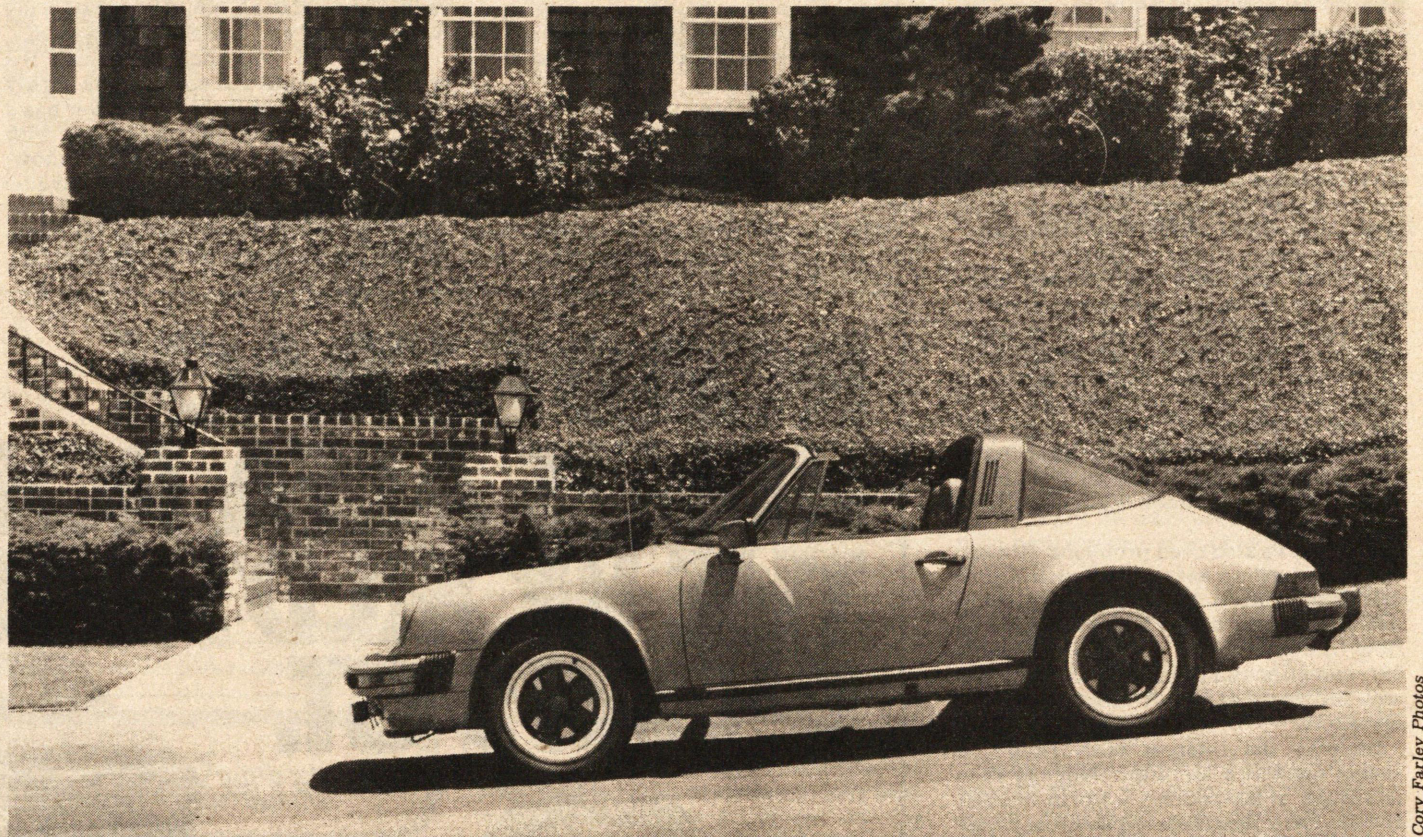
But the amazing thing is that the car is old. This is the 14th year of production for the 911, and the SC is, for all sane purposes, the best one yet. It accelerates like a .22 Hornet, faster than the ultratechnocrat 928 all the way up past 110mph. It still has that odd, delightful, deceptive feeling of cornering from somewhere behind the driver in quick maneuvers, as though there were a direct connection from brain to tire contact patch, with no messy dawdling around in the synapses to interfere with the process of control.

It's a Porsche, is what it is, and a damn good one too for all that it's as old as Tatum O'Neal.

And it should, finally, lay to rest rumors that Porsche is going to crawl out from under the 911 anytime soon. When the 924, and later, the 928, came along, word circulated that the 911 had come to the end of the trail. Not so: Porsche has kept its interest, continued to develop the car and to improve it. It probably is slated for disappearance eventually, but as long as there is a demand for them, Porsche will keep cranking out 911s.

That there is a demand for them can be seen from the pricing. There is probably no logical way to justify spending \$23,249 for a car, and that's what our test Targa cost. Even the "stripper" 911 coupe bases out at \$17,950; the Targa starts at \$19,549 and the price of the options is almost a gauntlet in the face of the prospective purchaser. Our test car wore the following bangles and beads: "Y-31" Option Group, \$1835; air conditioning, \$895 (twice the cost of a better unit in a Chevrolet!); black trim in place of chrome, \$275; power windows, \$295; AM-FM radio, \$195; heated rear view mirror, \$95, and emissions control, \$110.

This last at least seems a little far-fetched, but what's a driver to do? If a Toyota salesman is rude or you don't like his price or his sport coat, you can go to Datsun, Honda, Fiat, or Chevrolet. But if the Porsche salesman is rude you swal-



Cory Farley Photos

Now in its 14th year of production, the 911 still has to rank near the top of any enthusiast's want list, though the price puts it out of reach of all but the wealthiest.

1978 PORSCHE 911SC TARGA

Base Price \$19,549
Price as tested \$23,549
ENGINE
Type air cooled flat six
Bore & Stroke 95.0 x 70.4mm
Displacement (cu. in./cc): 183/2994
Compression ratio: 8.5:1
Max. HP 172 at 5500rpm
Max. torque 189 at 4200rpm
Valve train single ohc

TRANSMISSION
Type five speed manual

SPECIFICATIONS

Gear ratios
1st 3.18:1
2nd 1.83:1
3rd 1.26:1
4th 1.00:1
5th 0.82:1
Final drive ratio 3.88:1

SUSPENSION/CHASSIS
Unit steel construction with MacPherson struts
lower arms, torsion bars and tube shocks front;
semi-trailing arms, torsion bars, tube shocks, antiroll
bars front and rear.

Wheels: forged alloy,
16 x 6J front, 16 x 7J rear
Tires: Pirelli P7;
205/55VR front, 225/50VR rear.

STEERING
Type: rack & pinion
Turns lock to lock 3.1

BRAKES
Type front/rear vented discs

WEIGHTS, DIMENSIONS, CAPACITIES
Curb weight: 2790lbs
Wheelbase: 89.4in
Length: 168.9in
Front track: 53.6in
Rear track: 53.8in
Width: 63.4in
Height: 52.8in
Fuel Capacity: 21.1 gal.
Fuel Economy: 17.8mph in mixed driving

low your pride and reach for your check-book, because he really does offer the only car that'll satisfy you if it takes a Porsche to satisfy you.

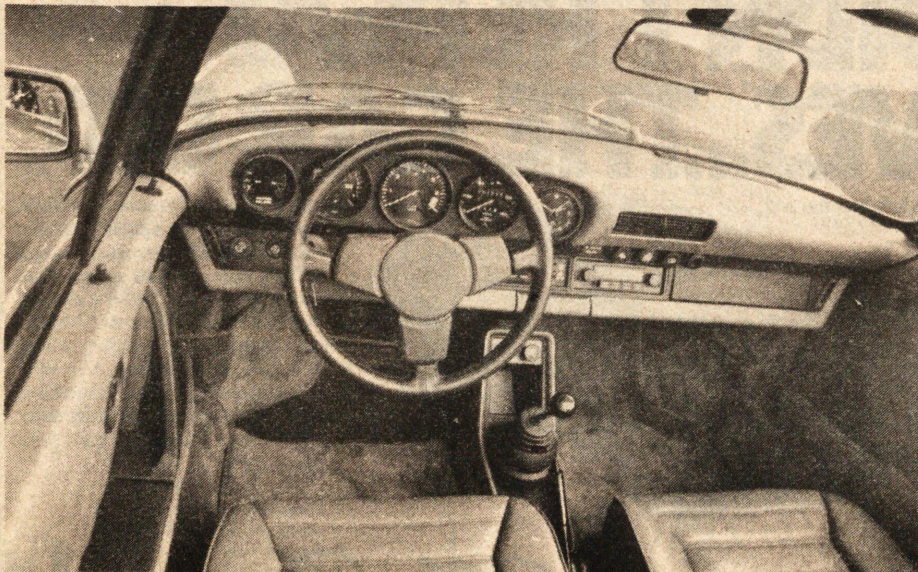
Porsche has kept abreast—and then some—of the increasingly restrictive

noise and emissions laws by increasing the displacement of the venerable flat six engine. It's 2994cc in this latest form, up from 2687 last year. As a three liter it seems happier than it's been in some time: the old peakiness is gone, it'll plug

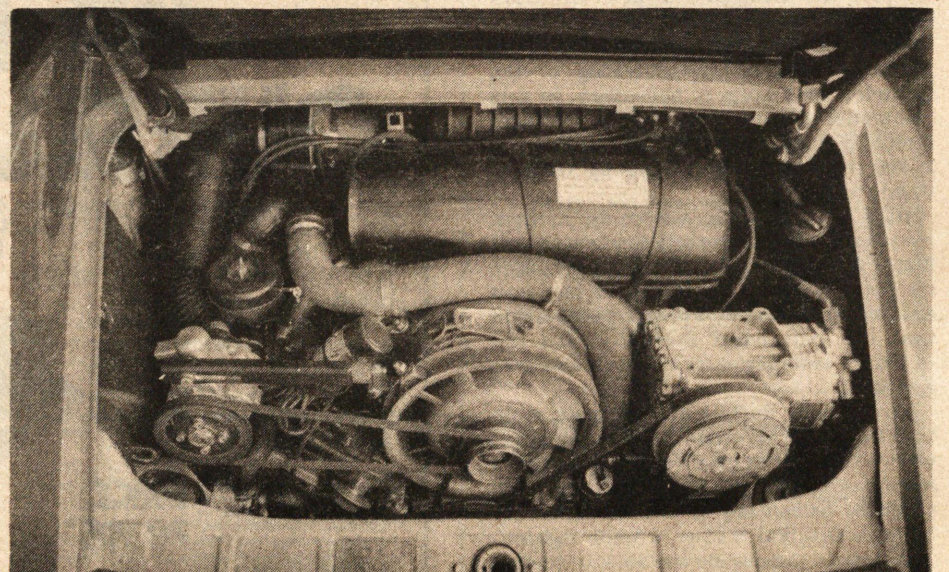
through traffic like a Checker and run clear down to almost idle speed in fifth gear, if you have the heart to do it.

The clutch was an annoyance in traffic, with a strong "over-center" feeling that

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The interior is unmistakably Germanic and close to perfect; only the placement of the steering wheel offended some drivers.



No place for novices: the flat six has become more and more crowded in the engine compartment of the 911.

More On:

911SC

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came over the top just a sixteenth of an inch before the plates engaged, flinging out the pedal and locking everything up all at once (we're off!) just when the driver got used to the light pedal pressure. But once the car was rolling, it would creep along in first or second so slowly that pedestrians rocketed by on either side. A far cry from the fussy 911s of yore.

On the road or in the mountains the three liter was even more of a delight. Performance in the upper registers does not feel much stronger than the 2.7, but the low end torque makes the car much easier to drive without hurting the sporting feel. It's extremely smooth all the way to the redline, with strong acceleration particularly from about 3800rpm up. 0-60 came in the mid-sixes despite a reluctant 1-2 shift, and the maximum speeds in gears were roughly 35, 65, 90, and 110 in the first four with fifth still pulling when we ran out of road. Porsche says the car will exceed 125mph and we see no reason to doubt it.

One modern characteristic we didn't

\$50 Billion Wasted In Car Repairs?

WASHINGTON—The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said Americans spent more than \$50 billion on auto repair last year and wasted approximately 40% of their money.

On an individual basis, that works out to about \$150 of waste per vehicle registered in the U.S. NHTSA said.

The majority of it occurs from having to purchase unneeded package deals and in the owner not being reimbursed for faulty repairs, the agency said. Those two items alone account for an annual loss of \$6 billion.

These findings highlight a report of the second task force looking into the nation's auto repair industry and the problems consumers have with it. The first such study, done in the late 1960s, revealed an annual consumer loss in auto repair of \$8-10 billion. The second task force adjusted these figures for inflation, growth of the vehicle fleet, and the value of accidents, fuel waste, pollution and reduced vehicle life due to improper maintenance and repairs and concluded today's bill would amount to more than \$20 billion.

When broken down into its major parts, some of the repair costs add up as follows: unneeded parts of package deals—\$3 billion; unneeded repairs due to inadequate diagnosis—\$1.5 billion; faulty repairs for which owners did not get their money back—\$3 billion; unneeded repairs sold with possible fraudulent intent—\$2 billion; wasteful overfrequent preventive maintenance—\$2 billion; and vehicle servicing requiring use of overly modularized parts, highly non-standard parts or excessively laborious repair techniques—\$2 billion, for a total of \$13.5 billion.

Reflective of the problem, the NHTSA task force revealed findings from several diagnostic inspection programs the agency has in place around the country showing "nearly 30% of the cars that failed initial inspection also failing reinspection; 30% of the auto repairs purchased being unnecessary; and 10% of the supposed repairs never having been performed."

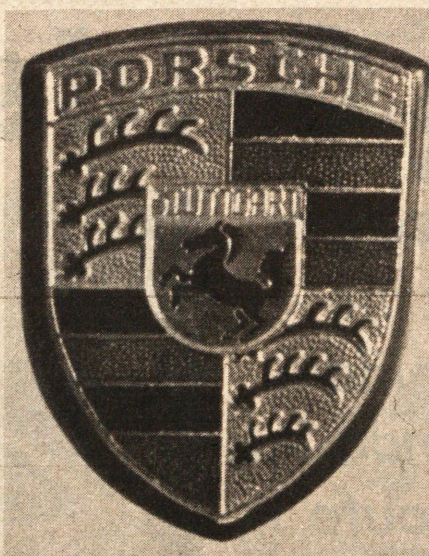
To counter problems such as these the task force suggests 22 remedies which alone or in varied combination with each other might give the consumer at least a fighting chance when it comes time to have a car fixed.

Tops on this list is development of nationwide diagnostic inspection stations.

particularly fancy was the silence. Porsches have always been rather noisy and we've always rather liked it. That one-off aircooled bleeeeang was one of the joys of Porsche-ing, and the raaapaaa exhaust note made you feel like Jacky Ickx even running down to the Mini-Quik for cat food.

It's almost all gone. Even with the slick Targa top stowed and nothing between you and the Source back there except air, you can hardly hear it. Same thing with the exhaust note: no more braaaaap, just a sort of TR7 whuffle.

Porsches oversteer, right? Wrong. The myth persists, but in fact recent models have had the tail-waggin' tendencies bred out of them to the extent that you have to work to get loose. When you try to go really fast the SC would still work like a backmotor, but in anything remotely resembling normal driving it just tracked. Even the old doom move of lifting in mid-bend only elicited a gentle reduction of understeer, and in what passes for spirited driving to most driv-



ers, the in-town nip and tuck stuff, it ranks as one of the most nimble-feeling cars of all time.

The interior is Germanic and nearly perfect. "Germanic" because it feels like all previous Porsches, like Mercedes, even to a degree like a Rabbit. The seats are firm, the controls are firm and operate with a positive snap instead of feeling as though they're being bent out of shape. And "perfect" because everything the driver needs is where he needs it—the steering wheel is a little too far away for some, but just right for the arms-out stylists—and the instruments practically whisper in the driver's ear.

As a group, the AutoWeek staff has resisted the Porsche mystique. Porsche owners in their string-backed, bepatched-jacketed hordes tend to make our teeth clench. Maybe living in Southern California, where about every third car is a poorly driven Porsche with a ski rack on it, makes one cynical.

But resisting the mystique is a lot easier than resisting the car. Frankly, we went into this thing wishing we could find that the Porsche was a rich kid's toy.

Now we wish we were rich kids.

1978 Gold Cup Winner

Bill Muncey asks for Pennzoil

Bill, pilot of the Atlas Van Lines U-00, is the winningest driver in the history of unlimited hydroplane racing. Thundering to victory at the Owensboro, Kentucky, APBA Gold Cup brought his career win total to 47, including six Gold Cups. Bill's winning combination includes Pennzoil. In fact, all twelve unlimited teams rely on Pennzoil's lasting heat and friction-fighting engine protection for the smooth, trouble-free performance it takes to be a champion. Take a tip from Bill Muncey, whatever you drive, wherever you go, Pennzoil is worth asking for.



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