



Larry Dodge Illustration

Miami Advice

*You don't have to be Danny Sullivan
to drive this car well—but it helps*

By Leon Mandel

Any man who can do a 195mph pirouette practically in front of Mari Hulman George's Turn Two Indianapolis Motor Speedway suite and not so much as ripple a guest's mint julep ought to be able to terrify your basic over-age, cowardly passenger in a 911 Turbo on the streets of Miami, no?

Not a chance.

Danny Sullivan didn't become the driver/spokesman for Miller Beer, contract representative for Marlboro and all around role model for Alberto Culver users by indulging in unsanctioned displays of vulgarity.

Nor did he come to be the public presence for all these Great Companies by revisiting

the incorrigible public behavior that marked his growing up years in Louisville. We are dealing here with a civilized, polished gentleman driver who would be aghast at the thought of twirling a test car like a baton.

Unless, of course, it were at night. Somewhere no one could see him. Away from the cops.

In a place with nice tight switchbacks and big ol' sweepers.

Which is where Danny has by now already been, and without me, so that my hair has been spared being shaped into a Jim McMahon spike.

Hair acts like iron filings and magnets in the presence of fear. I know this because I have served my terror- and resultant cone-head-time with Sullivan in the salad days of the CanAm. We did a rental car trip through the infield at Brainerd I shall never forget nor my linen supplier either. I rode shotgun with him once on Mulholland Drive in a Scirocco he had just had fitted with a dry sump Super Vee motor. I'm not about to claim he shamed the canyon running regulars, but police reported very little, um, *lively* activity on Mulholland for two weeks thereafter.

An almost apocryphal story, that one, but this is not: Allow me to report the astonishing fact of sitting right seat with Danny Sullivan in a Porsche 911 Turbo through Coconut Grove, the appendix of Miami, and never exceeding 50mph.

All right—80.

There are some very sound reasons for this. First of all it is Sullivan I am sitting next to because he does this sort of thing for *AutoWeek* from time to time, he is a first-rate tester and Olympic-level racing driver, and he can discern the characteristics of a car without all the thrashing and heaving you and I have to go through just to get a sense of how things begin to feel. But specifically, he is driving slowly because he has the craze to put the landscape rapidly behind him temporarily out of his system. Sullivan has spent the previous day outrunning one Rahal, a pair of Unsers and various other persons of high-speed inclination and collected almost \$60,000 for his trouble. Call it speed catharsis. For the time—this can last as long as 48 hours—Sullivan's bloodstream is cleansed of nature's amphetamine, the special drug that seems to be generated in the systems of world-class drivers.

There is a more important reason, though. The car. Reintroduced to this land after a six-year, emissions-motivated sabbatical, it is still one of the most ferocious vehicles this side of Al Holbert's Porsche 962 race car—and possibly more difficult to drive quickly. Danny is here to tell us how to approach this *wunderwagen* in order to enjoy it fully, which does not include wrapping \$48,000 worth of whaletail Porsche around the nearest stone crab stand. Hence, the (relatively) sedate pace. Sullivan says it succinctly: "This thing can eat you."

Let us pay attention.

We are cruising underneath palm trees and through the balmy day a weather-obsessive could want. It is so bright and sunny it could break the hearts of Rust Belt dwellers; for the PPG Indy-car season ender is in November, and, up north, the frost is on the earlobes. Foot traffic is heavy. Sidewalks and streets, too, are populated by those languid walkers who seem to dwell in the tropics in perfect safety despite their disregard for the difference between highway

and footpath. Don Johnson is right: The world around us is pastel.

Not the Porsche. It is a nasty shade of black-and-blue, like a barfighter's eye the day after. The car profiles nicely through this equatorial scene, and that is Sullivan's point at the moment. "It can deceive you into thinking it's inoffensive, particularly around town, and that is dangerous."

"Why? Because if you live in town and drive the car around town mostly, you can come to have contempt for it, which may be one of the most dangerous things you can do with this car."

Look, says Sullivan, who knows the upcoming topic better than most racers, people buy a high-performance car like this one because it's fashionable. Or because it's the hottest car on the road. Or because, in their minds, it's the ultimate sports car. But like anything else, he says, a new offshore powerboat, or high speed bass boat, or fishing rod, or any instrument that is made by one craftsman for another, you have to learn how to use it.

It begins by starting to understand the Porsche's eccentricities, of which, according to Sullivan, there are several, starting with where you sit. The seating position is offset, which can be disconcerting to the unprepared. Sullivan has spent the last 15 years or so driving sports and formula cars, most of them with offset seating; he barely notices his slightly sideways position. The trouble, and the only trouble, with offset, he says, is that if you're unaccustomed to it, you're unconsciously insecure in your feeling of control. "So, as with any car, get secure," says he.

We are hearing, incidentally, the professorial Sullivan. It comes naturally to him. There was a time just after his return to the USA when he was out of a drive. Flat. Nothing in prospect. But instead of flopping around on the beach and feeling sorry for himself, he took a job as an instructor at a driver's school.

At the school, Sullivan learned to teach and teach patiently. So he is hearkening to those days when he talks about feeling securely placed in a car before trying to drive it near its limits. Initial insecurity for the first-timer in the Porsche, Sully suggests, is exacerbated by the steering wheel, which he plain hates. The wheel has a wide cross plate in the middle with a top and bottom bar an inch or so above and beneath it. Porsche, in effect, is telling its owners where they can put their hands. Very teutonic. Trouble is that's not where many people are accustomed to having their hands, nor is it the position some high-speed driving schools teach as proper for grasping the wheel. Mainly, though, Sullivan hates the wheel because it looks like a Blue Light special. Cheap and ugly. "It does not befit a top of the line Porsche," he sniffs.

If Sullivan does not like the steering wheel, he is even less complimentary about the fact the single turbo does not come in strongly until the aluminum-block engine has been twisted to about 3500rpm (maximum torque and horsepower come on well

up the chart, at 4000 and 5500rpm respectively). For all its high-rev huffing, the 911 Turbo remains a bafflingly weak performer off the line. Even with the extra 29hp Porsche engineers have found in the intervening six years. "The acceleration is not progressive. And, at least for me, it's simply not strong enough until you get into relatively high revs."

All those are merely peculiarities compared to Sullivan's real complaint: the lack of a fifth gear. Porsche says the car doesn't need a fifth because it is so strong you don't need to compensate for lack of power with gearing. In fact, Porsche is absolutely right about the power: There is almost nothing else available to the common man that will set you back in the chair like the 3.3liter, 282hp turbomotor in this car. And top speed is a more than adequate 155mph.

This does not occur to Sullivan, however, whose office is powered by a 750hp turbomotor of its own, good for 225mph. Compared to the Cosworth, the Porsche probably does feel a little limp. Compared to what you and I are used to—and after the turbo has spooled up enough to take up the initial slack—it feels like a boot in the butt from an angry rhino.

"Make this car a five-speed or change the gearing, particularly since the splits in the gear ratios are just not that good."

Okay, so maybe you've heard a lot of this before. The 911 Turbo has been around for better than a decade now. It's been said and said often that it's faster than almost anything you can imagine. It's been said that it suffers from grievous turbo lag. It's been said that it could use a five-speed. You knew all this. It doesn't take Danny Sullivan to tell you it again.

But you also know the 911 Turbo's darkened reputation for handling. The car is tail-happy, they say. Get it right and it's as fast and satisfying as anything on four wheels. Get it wrong, they say, and you'll be hurtling off into space. Backwards.

A surprise, then, courtesy of an expert: "If you get it and take it up to speeds you have never experienced before, the car will do something you don't expect...it'll fly."

As in pick up its nose and take off.

An explanation. "All the weight in the 911 Turbo is in the back end. Now accelerate. You get additional rearward weight transfer, and the car will fly its light front end," says the Indy winner.

Sullivan seems truly perplexed by the notion that the 911 Turbo oversteers in an excessive manner. Part of this is due, no doubt, to the fact that Porsche has changed the Turbo's cornering nature recently, in part by installing even wider rear rubber.

And part of it is Sullivan. A later conversation with the man responsible for setting up the handling of his 1984 Indy racer, Shierson Racing's Ian Reed, puts Sullivan's seeming innocence of the notion that Porsches oversteer into clearer perspective. "Danny wanted the front end of his car (the Domino's Lola) pinned," said Reed, by which he means Sullivan wanted his car to rotate around a front end nailed to the

road. "Al (Unser Jr, Shierson Racing's current pilot) likes the rear end pinned. So, in effect, Danny wanted his car in an oversteer mode, Al wanted understeering."

Sullivan, however, is far from being as unaware as he seems. "From understeer comes oversteer," he says in a wonderfully quotable comment on what happens when the front end either resists going around a corner or toys with the pavement without coming to grips with it ("flying"). Sullivan is saying that when the wheels that steer the car ultimately do get their bite, hell can break loose. "When the front end finally bites, and it will, the car snaps around."

This is something the new sports car owner, particularly the 911 Turbo owner, must learn to control. But how?

The quick way, of course, is to get going too fast in a corner and lift out abruptly. Instant vertigo. Think of yourself in a centrifuge. Hell, think of yourself sitting right smack over the point around which a spinning Porsche is revolving.

The safer way is to learn the car in an environment in which mistakes aren't likely to be final. Find some country roads, he suggests, and be sure they're empty. (Danny's brother Tommy reports a hair-raising number of incidents in which his older sibling went exploring the berms of exurban Louisville and had to be towed out, to their father's exasperation. So when Sullivan says "country roads" be wary.)

Sullivan also recommends empty parking



911's offset seats take some getting used to

lots. You can replicate high-speed dry road behavior on icy concrete at very low velocities, he says. Or, if you can afford a 911 Turbo, get really smart and rent a day at a local race track, complete with attendant ambulance. (Some tracks, Lime Rock is an example, have test days which allow you to

share costs with several others. Several performance driver's schools allow you to use your own car.)

At any rate, the Sullivan advice is indispensable: "Experiment. Sneak up on the car's performance. Don't go out and expect to find the car's limits for some stupid reason like impressing a girl friend."

"Another thing, this car has really great brakes. But just because it does, maybe especially because it does, you should remember that unlike a muscle car with a normally aspirated engine, a turbo motor doesn't work for you on deceleration."

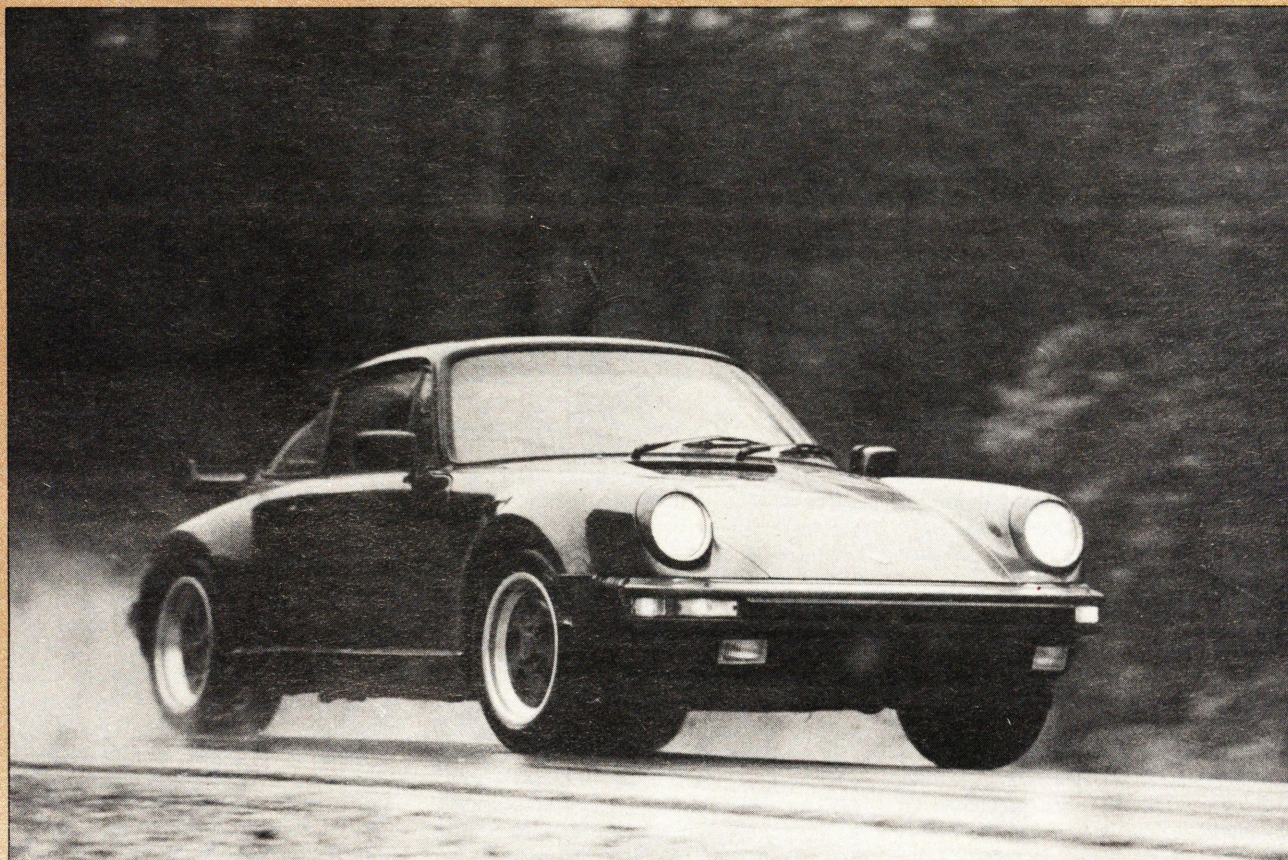
Once you've learned a car like the 911 Turbo, Sullivan suggests you go back to your Porsche dealer and tell him how you want the car to behave to suit your own inclinations (see accompanying box). Don't be bashful about wanting it set-up to your needs. Perhaps you want the boost to come at a lower range. He would, and he would ask for it. Maybe you are adamant about more or less roll stiffness. The point is that cars are adjustable.

The further point is that you must begin by adjusting yourself to the car, but when you have, the car can be tuned to suit you.

It is dusk. A pastel dusk. Pink and blue, just exactly as it's supposed to be. We are in the tiled and covered entrance of Sullivan's hotel, a great rococo monster that is merely one component of a great shopping center dripping with Gucci and Giorgio Armani and

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Sullivan suggests learning the high-speed capabilities of this car in a place where mistakes aren't likely to be final



R.L. Montgomery photos

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adorable little shops selling tiny cups of avocado yogurt for roughly the same price as the Porsche. The valet parking attendant is hovering nearby. Earlier, when he went to fetch the Turbo from the downstairs garage, he came back empty-handed. The steering wheel was locked, as wheels are required to be able to do in cars sold in this country, and he wasn't inclined to wrestle it back and forth. Had this been any other car, had Sullivan been anyone other than the Indy and Miami winner, the kid would likely not only have shaken the wheel like a rat but pulled the damn thing off rather than return sheepish and on foot. It is an incidental discovery of what you have to do to be able to intimidate valet parkers.

Before the Miami race, Sullivan's car owner, Roger Penske, said almost offhandedly that if Sully won the finale he could take his, Roger's, 77foot Hatteras sports fisherman and cruise down the Keys for a week. Penske is famous for being as good as his word, Sullivan famous for relishing such hedonistic moments as lie ahead.

Time for Sully to say goodbye to the Porsche, which he does with true reluctance. He has become fond of the Turbo, steering wheel and all.

Specifications

Base Price: \$48,000
 Wheelbase (in): 89.5
 Length/Width (in): 168.9/69.9
 Curb weight (lb): 2976
 Powertrain: Rear-mounted 201.3cu in/3.3liter, horizontally opposed turbo-charged sohc six, alloy block and heads, 282bhp @5500rpm, 278lb ft @4000rpm, rear-drive four-speed manual
 0-60 (sec): 5.5 (factory time)
 Top speed: 157mph
 Suspension: Ind front MacPherson struts with longitudinal torsion bars, anti-roll bar; rear ind semi-trailing arms, transverse torsion bars, coils and anti-roll bar
 Brakes: Discs, vented front and rear
 Tires: 205/55VR16 front; 245/45VR16 rear
 Mpg/range: 22mpg x 22.5gal = 495miles

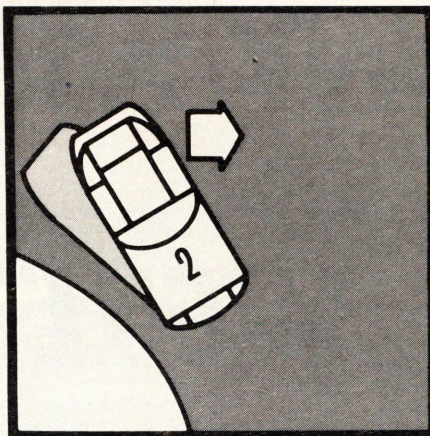
Goodbye then, and an oblique word of warning to me as I embark on the long trip from Miami to Detroit. "I think it was Vic Elford who said maybe people who own cars like this should have to have a different kind of license." If it was Elford, he wasn't the only one. The Porsche points its nose northward to an office where sits an *AutoWeek* editor who, not a month before, wrote the very same thing.

It will turn out to be a lovely trip home. The Porsche performs flawlessly, if somewhat thirstily. It gobbles up whole states at a time without effort, without gasp, without so much as a shrug.

It also is a trip that serves as a reminder of the vast respect required by automotive predators like the 911 Turbo. **AW**

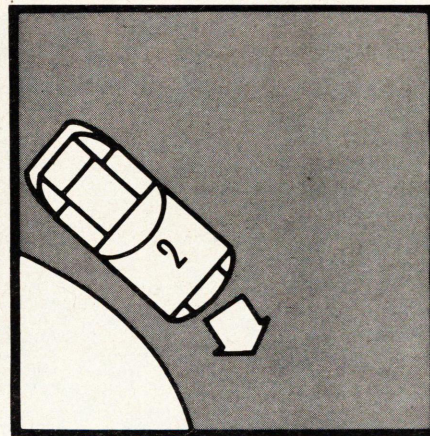
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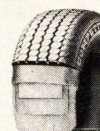
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