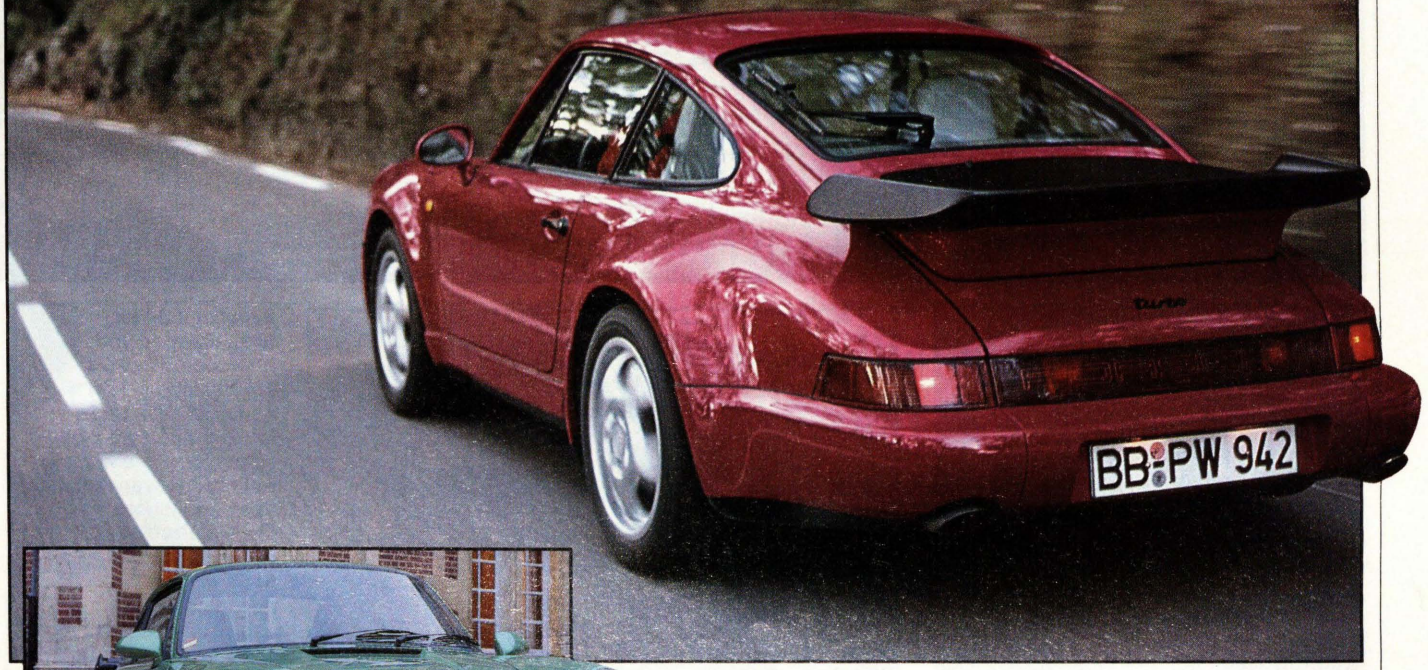
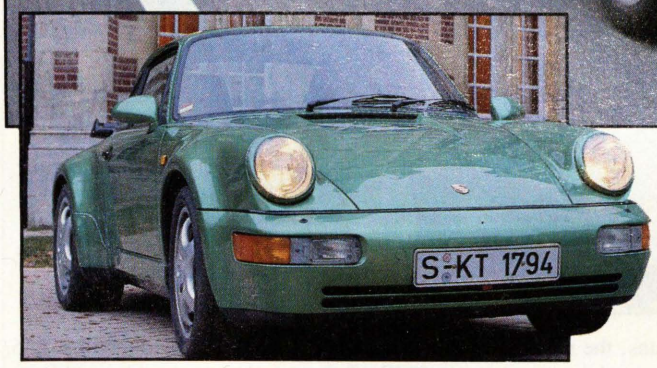
WAIL TALES

Familiar scream of Porsche's flat-six Turbo motor arrives under whale tail, makes latest 911 chassis a leviathan performer

By Mark Vaughn





Whale tail spoiler and wider rear fender flares (above) distinguish Turbo from Carreras 2 and 4, while newer rocker panels and bumpers (left) separate it from earlier Turbos

Leonard Turner photos

It's been more than a year since the last 911 Turbo prowled Porsche showrooms. More than a year of normal aspiration, four-wheel traction and moveable rear wings that looked a little more like hibachi grills than the legendary whale tales of the 930s.

There wasn't a whole lot wrong with the old Turbo, but Porsche has improved on it anyway. By installing an upgraded version of the previous 3.3-liter flat six in the newer coil-sprung chassis (the one that debuted in '89 for the Carrera 4) what was a very good car has been made more powerful, more efficient and, ultimately, a whole lot easier to keep in line.

The new 911 Turbo has more power (315 vs. 282) more torque (332 lb ft vs. 278), bigger tires, bigger brakes and it's more than a second quicker to 60. It even has the Carrera line's power steering.

It's more refined and user-friendly. Where the old Turbo had a tendency to scare the schnitzel out of its owner by slamming into the boost range with frightful suddeness, the new model has a smoother wastegate to deliver the boost more evenly. This is particularly helpful when accelerating in a turn—too much power halfway through a corner in a rear-engined, rear-wheel drive car can have embarrassing and costly consequences.

Porsche also added a simple, yet effective rear differential to help maintain optimum traction on the rear wheels. Under acceleration the differential, which is found only on the new 911 Turbo, locks up 20 percent to reduce any sliding around of the back end. The unit also has 100 percent locking action during liftoff to prevent what Paul Hensler, Porsche's chief engineer for engines and transmissions, called a "spinning inward" of the rear end that occurred with the old diff. The new unit will track straight ahead without wobble when the accelerator is lifted suddenly from the floor. With these two features, the power of the 1991 model becomes accessible to more drivers than the old one could safely accommodate.

Between Turbos, Porsche introduced high-tech spinoffs based on developments from the 959—the all-wheel drive Carrera 4, followed by the rear-drive Carrera 2 and the new Tiptronic semi-automatic transmission. None of these high-tech revisions will be found on the new Turbo, which represents more of a return to the performance

Tight bend, slick surface and more than 300 hp in a rear-engined car used to be a recipe for disaster, but Porsche's car chefs put new diff in new chassis, helping even moderately skilled drivers cook right along in latest 911 Turbo under such circumstances

SPECIFICATIONS

Base Price: $95,000
Wheelbase, (in): 89.4
Length/width, (in): 168.3/70.0
Curb weight (lb): 3274
Powertrain: Rear-longitudinal, sohc, 12-valve, injected, turbocharged 3.3-liter/201 cid horizontally opposed six, alloy block and heads, 315 hp @ 5750 rpm, 332 lb ft @ 4500 rpm, rear-drive, five-speed manual
0-60 (sec.): ..... (est) 4.8
Top speed (mph): ..... (est) 168
Suspension: .... Ind. front strut and lower control arms, antiroll bar; ind. rear semi-trailing arms, antiroll bar
Brakes: ..... Power vented discs front/rear, ABS
Tires: ..... Front 205/5 ZR 17; rear 255/40ZR 17
Mpg/range: ..... n/a

of the 332 ft lbs are already there at just 2500 rpm. Then, they enlarged the intercooler by 50 percent and "flowed" it to reduce friction encountered by air traveling through the unit. Oil-cooled pistons with a new, more efficient shape were installed, as well as a new catalytic converter in the center of a new, larger muffler. The oil tank was moved forward, and a powerful 115-amp alternator was installed ("Porsche is the world champion of powerful alternators," Hensler said). The whole powerplant sits on quieter hydraulic engine mounts.

Though it shares the chassis, the 911 Turbo is not simply a Carrera 2 with a turbo bolted-on: it has an entirely different drivetrain. The Carrera 2, you may recall, uses a 3.6-liter engine; normally aspirated, it generates 247 hp and 228 lb ft of torque. Porsche claims it has no plans to turbocharge the 3.6-liter, since the time and cost of replicating 15 years of work already done on the older engine would be prohibitive. There are also no current plans for Targa or Cabriolet model Turbos.

The Turbo's fixed rear spoiler is the most outwardly noticeable difference between it and the Carreras. While the wing increases downforce and forces plenty of air into the intercooler, the patented whale tail also ups aerodynamic drag, giving the car a Cd of 0.36, not a world class figure. But the old Turbo measured 0.39, so it's an improvement. Porsche even redesigned the rear-view mirrors for more aerodynamic efficiency. The body is a wider version of the Carreras 2 and 4, excepting the wing. Though it's a subjective judgment, the Turbo body has a more appealing, predatory look to it than the Carreras.

And looks have never been cheap. In the U.S. the Turbo lists for a cool $95,000, making it the most expensive Porsche ever sold, unless you were in the market for a 962 or some other racing Porsche. Its MSRP is more than double the 944 S2 Coupe on the other end of the Porsche price spectrum and $23,000 more than the Carrera 4 Coupe. The pricing becomes a logarithmic curve—the Turbo is worth more because it's more powerful, more responsive and generally sexier than the Carrera 4.

Is it $23,000 sexier?

How much money do you have?

While it sits at the top of the Porsche price chart, there is the nagging knowledge that the 928 GT is faster at the top end. But if we had to choose between the two for a 24-hour jaunt at, say, Le Mans, the Turbo would be the easy choice.

Six hundred Turbos per year have been allocated for the U.S. market, where there are already 1100 orders, according to Porsche. Worldwide, orders currently number 4000—the company plans to build 3000 between this month and July. The new 911 Turbo will not be a limited run, either, so you don't have to camp out on the doorstep of your local dealer to eventually get one.

"We'll build as many as the market needs," said Peter. "There's no limit."

And don't worry about the basic 911 body style, either, Peter says it will be around for quite awhile.

"The 911 is the backbone of the Porsche model program and will be consistently developed," Peter said. "I see the 911 still here beyond the year 2000."

With any luck, we'll be there to drive a 25th anniversary model of the Turbo. ■