

## An Easter Egg That Doesn't Have To Hide

### **AUTOWEEK** Driving Impression: **No.39**

It made its first public appearance at the 1963 Frankfurt Auto Show and while the world oohed and aahed over its swoopy sheetmetal, the purists howled at its use of a (Horrors!) six-cylinder engine. It was called the Porsche 901 and it was easily one of the most handsome automobiles yet created.

Well, it's 12 years later, we've driven upon the moon, Vietnam has come and gone, our wheat farmers are doing business with Russia, our once preeminent national position is rapidly eroding, once again we no longer have Richard Nixon to kick around, and the Porsche 911 is still with us, brought to us this year in a pair of mechanically identical guises identified as the 911S and 911 Carrera. Umm, in case you've forgotten, by the bye, the reason the car has never been officially known to the buying public as the 901 is because Peugeot has all three digit model numbers, the middle digit of which is zero, locked up tight. And you know how the French are, right? Hence the 911, and the Porsche factory's enforced divergence from its logical numerical sequence.

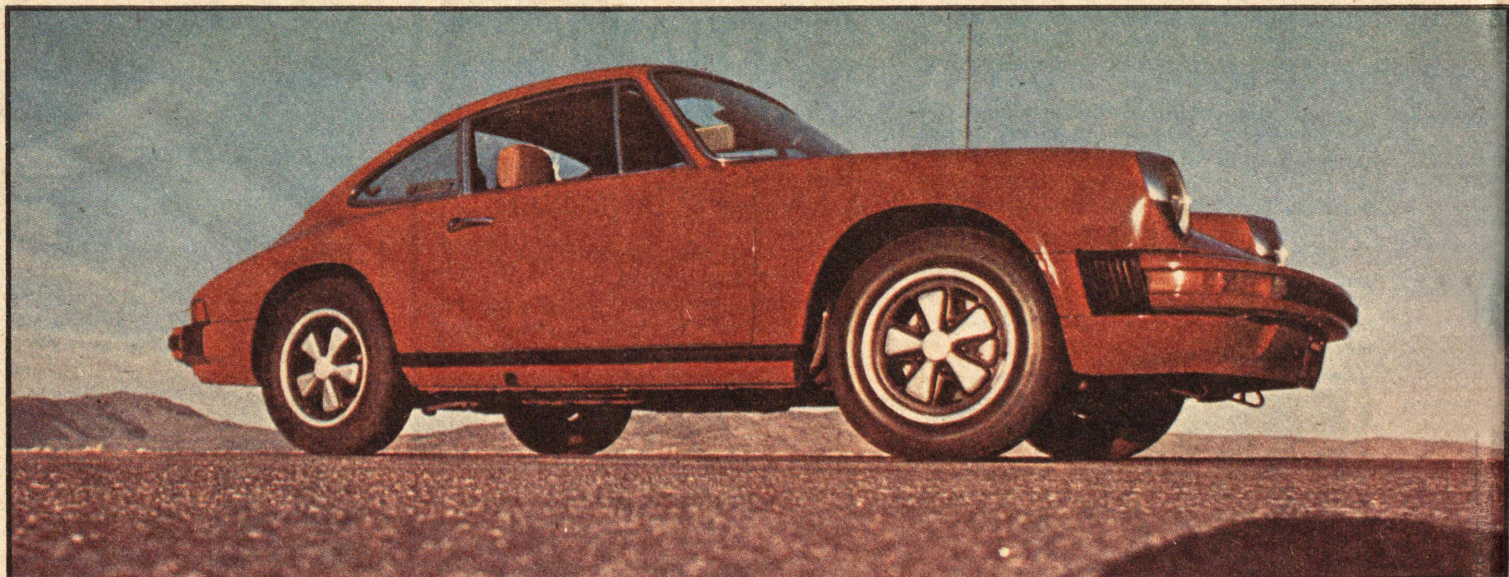
But never mind; the car may well be 12 years old, and it may not have the right model number, but it sure as hell still has all the Right Stuff.

Your average sports car purist, in a rare fit

of lucidity, would probably tell you that a sports car is a car with nothing on it that doesn't make it go faster. If that view is to be subscribed to, perhaps the 911S that *Auto-week* evaluated isn't a sports car. The subject of this driving impression was, after all, loaded to the very gunwales with every comfort and convenience option known to modern man, short of an automatic headlight dimmer switch and a Dynaflo transmission. There was an electric sunroof, air conditioning, and one of the finest FM-multiplex radios it has yet been our pleasure to encounter. Additionally, the car was equipped with the optional five-speed transmission. And while this assemblage of

expensive equipment won't make the car go any faster (with the questionable exception of that five-speed tranny), and may even make it handle a bit off the optimum, it works to transform the car into a smooth, reasonably quiet, ultracivilized touring machine that even the most jaded purist would soon be panting for after he rode the first 50 miles between, say, Reno and Sun Valley in his "sports car." Because, and we'll say this right out front, we have occasion to lay a throttle foot to many different pieces of automobilia, and it's just pretty rare that something comes along that is so universally coveted by every staff member as was the 911S.

Sheetmetalwise, the 911S, 1975 edition, just isn't too much different from that 901 shown at Frankfurt. The basic smooth, fluid lines of the car have not been tampered with. After all, why screw up a winning shape, right? But there have been detail changes over the years, and you probably know about most of them, including the flared fenders and front spoiler, and the federalized front and rear bumpers, the latter of which has been revised for this year, and the wall-to-wall tail-light that was introduced last year. None of these changes have really hurt the car's look, however, not even the bumpers; Porsche's body architects have done their jobs exceedingly well.



When first introduced, the sting for the 911 series was packed in its tail in the form of a two-liter, horizontally opposed, carbureted engine. But that was before the feds cracked down with exhaust emissions regulations, and in order to maintain the car's really spirited performance and still be able to sell the thing in this country, there have been changes. Gone are the carburetors, replaced by electronic fuel injection, the better to produce detoxed exhaust. Gone, as well, is the two-liter engine, which has given way, but in stages, to a 2.7-liter unit that produces 157bhp in both 911S and Carrera form. Seems kind of pale beside the 1972 version, which with 2341 cubic centimeters pumped out 210bhp, but what the hell, clean air is worth it.

Oh, and if you're in California, the car will be down five additional horsepower to 152, due to the installation of an exhaust gas recirculation device made necessary by that state's stringent emissions regulations. But it could be worse. This year's 911s are two of the very few cars that are not fitted with catalytic converters. Compression ratios are 8.5:1, and while this means you can probably burn lead-free fuel if you feel like doing so, you aren't locked to the stuff. That's nice, because try finding it in a place like, say, Murphy, Calif.

As noted earlier, the car we drove was fitted with a five-speed gearbox, instead of the standard equipment four-speed (the five-speed does come as standard equipment on the Carrera). Little needs to be said about the transmission itself, except that it is oh, so smooth (are not Porsche synchromesh units the standard for the industry, after all?) and the gear ratios are spot on, perfectly matched to the engine's torque and power curves. What is a little weird, however, is the shift linkage. Don't get us wrong, it's a whole lot better than it used to be, but the throws still seem very long, the detents are nowhere near as precise as we feel they should be in a car in this price range and the gear-shift knob requires an immediate fix, since unless a driver's very first act is to epoxy it on, the damned thing always seems to come off in your hand right in the middle of a shift. The knob is just jammed onto the lever, with a piece of corrugated sheetmetal wrapped around the lever itself to (presumably) act as a sort of shim and keep the knob in place. Well, it just doesn't work, not at all, and the people at Porsche ought to be just a little ashamed of themselves for such a cheap-assed half measure. It can't cost *that* much more to actually put matching threads on the knob and lever, can it?

Suspension remains unchanged, with torsion bars all around, and wishbone and shock absorber struts up front and semitrailing arms in the rear. Front and rear sway-bars are also fitted. It's all pretty straightforward, and it works like crazy, keeping the car's wheels glued to the pavement, no matter what. The ride is firm but supple, and the sensation as one steers the car over rough sections of road is that the suspension travel is like that of a really fine dirt bike—lots. Steering is light, precise and direct in feel; twitch the steering wheel, even just a little, and the car reacts instantly. Point it somewhere, anywhere, at nearly any speed and on nearly any surface, and it goes just where it's pointed.

One area we felt was not up to Porsche's usual standard of excellence was braking. Oh, the brakes stop the car with amazing

alacrity, and just cannot be made to fade, but the left rear wheel had a distinct tendency to lock up prematurely, and when that happened the car's directional stability tended to get just a little funny. Additionally, the pedal feel itself was spongy and imprecise, making modulation, and thus, really rapid deceleration, very difficult. Was there air in the brake system? Probably not. Do the four-wheel disc system's caliper's flex, or do the brake lines expand slightly under pressure? Good questions, and ones we don't have the answers to. We just know that when you tromp down on the brake pedal you don't get that super-secure feeling that makes you know you're going to be hauled down from speed in record time. It takes some getting used to.

Inside, the car is arranged so that the driver has maximum access to everything. Steps have also been taken to see that he is as comfortable as possible during his stint behind the wheel. The seats themselves are hibacked, with the headrest and seatback being built as one piece, and while more comfortable car seats are being built, the Porsche's seats are really not bad. We did notice some back discomfort on long trips, and headroom with the sunroof is such that we were in constant contact with the headliner, but several of us here are somewhat taller than the norm and that may just be our cross to bear. The seats are constructed with enough lateral support to keep you placed as you flail around corners, and there's plenty support for one's thighs. As per standard practice these days, the seatback rake is adjustable, so one can pretty much pick one's own driving position.

Instrumentation is the most complete most of us will ever see, with even such functions as oil temperature and oil tank level (the engine is dry-sump lubricated, and thus requires an oil tank) being monitored. The tachometer and speedometer are predominant in the arrangement, both are large and round and center-mounted and are placed adjacent to one-another, so a glance through the steering wheel immediately tells the driver what either instrument has to say.

Once in the car, the natural thing to do is to take it for a bit of a drive, and after you do you'll know why Porsche owners are such a smug bunch. The first thing you'll notice, after all the bits are warmed up and you're out on a stretch of straight highway, is that the car, even in 1975 detoxed form, is incredibly fast. Acceleration from rest to red-line in first and second gears is so quick, in fact, that the factory has seen fit to install a rev limiter so an overzealous driver can't over-do it and burst that very, very expensive engine. The limiter is built into the distributor and set to 6600rpm, which one reaches very quickly indeed. If you should bump against it, the engine stutters and just stops accelerating.

Our test car, equipped as it was with the five-speed box and 185x15VR rubber, was quite happy to run along at the 55mph speed limit at 3225rpm. In third gear. Not even halfway to red line. In fourth gear, 3150rpm translated to 80mph, and in fifth—sigh—3875 translated to a very, very visible 90mph. At those speeds the engine is just loafing; it doesn't even get up on its cams until about 3900rpm. Now aren't you glad our government has seen fit to make the nation's roads safe for us all? Top speed? Well, the factory says the 911S, California version, will go



132. We at *Autoweek* would not want to blow our cover as the soberest of men, so we won't tell you how fast our test car went, but believe us, the Porsche factory wouldn't lie to you about a thing like top speed.

We will say, though, that at great rates of speed the car is dead stable; it is, that is, until the speedo begins reading, oh, say, 125 or so, and the, front spoiler or no, the front end begins getting just a little light. Nothing really extreme, mind you, but the amount of concentration required to maintain a reasonably straight line at top speed could be above the comfort level for some drivers. Where the car feels completely and totally in its element is at speeds between 80mph and 125mph. It's smooth and composed and anything slower feels like extreme slow motion.

But the 911S was not built just for straight-line speed, it was built to go around corners, and it does that with exceeding agility. Kept to moderate speeds, and even slightly immoderate speeds, the car tracks through corners like the Orange Blossom Special. At really great rates of speed, the car's tail breaks loose, but gradually, into just a bit of

oversteer. In a tight, low speed corner it really takes large applications of power to make this happen, but in high-speed bends, accelerating out of the corner will bring the tail out every time, and the driver simply copes. Sort of like driving an early beetle, but with things happening one whole helluva lot faster.

One thing we did notice was that at what used to be freeway speeds in the good old days, there was a goodly amount of noise in the car. It possesses, after all, a very rigid unit body, and the thing resonates like the box of one of C.F. Martin's Dreadnaughts. Additionally, the driver's door and both the rear windows of our test car leaked air, and after an open-topped high-speed blast which pulled the loosely attached sunroof weather stripping off, the sunroof also had a noisy air leak. We did find the noise disquieting.

But in the overview, those complaints are niggling. For the most part the car's assembly appeared to be really fine; the paint was flawless, the interior luxurious and commodious and the carpets, both in the cockpit and luggage compartment (where, by the way, lives a space-saver spare tire and a neat little portable electric tire pump), was fine, high-quality stuff. Oh, and the outside mirror: there were those in this office who carped about its not being adjustable from inside, and perhaps it should be. We can tell you for certain, however, that no matter where you have to go to adjust it, it flat will not vibrate or provide the pilot with a blurred or distorted image of any kind, no matter *how* fast the car is traveling. Perhaps that sounds insignificant, but it's really one of the very few outside, side-view mirrors we've seen that will let the driver see exactly what is behind him, even in the far distance. We like that a lot.

In short, we flat loved the 911S. Who wouldn't? No matter what the purists say, the 911S will do everything a true sports car is supposed to do, and will do it better than most. It's fast, secure, comfortable and reasonably quiet. That it remains all these things in spite of this country's safety and emissions regulations is a measure of the skill and dedication of the men who designed and built it. ☺

## 1975 Porsche 911S Specifications

### ENGINE

Type: Six cylinder opposed, air cooled, single overhead cam, hemispherical combustion chambers, light alloy  
Displacement: 2687cc (163.97ci)  
Bore x stroke: 90 (3.54) x 70.4 (2.77)  
Horsepower: 157 SAE (California, 152) at 5800rpm  
Torque: 166 ft. lbs at 4000rpm  
Induction: Electronic fuel injection  
Electrical system: 12-volt, 66 amp hour battery, capacitor discharge ignition

### DRIVE TRAIN

Type: Rear engine, rear wheel drive  
Transmission, as tested: Five-speed manual, all synchromesh  
Wheels and tires: 6x15 pressure cast alloy wheels, 185x15VR tires  
SUSPENSION

Front: Torsion bars, with wishbone and shock absorber struts  
Rear: Torsion bars, independent semitrailing arms

### BRAKES

Front: Ventilated discs  
Rear: Ventilated discs

### DIMENSIONS

Length: 1168.94 in.  
Width: 63.4 in.  
Height: 52 in.  
Wheelbase: 89.4 in.  
Track: Front/rear: 54.06/53.31  
Ground clearance: 7 in.  
Turning Circle: 35ft. 2in.  
Weight: 2425lbs unladen  
MISCELLANEOUS  
Fuel capacity: 21.13 gallons  
Oil tank capacity: 2.9 gallons  
Fuel required: 91RON  
Fuel economy: 22.6mpg

Price: List: \$11,725 base; electric sunroof, \$615; five-speed transmission, \$250; air conditioning, \$597; FM-stereo radio, \$359.50; alloy wheels, \$215; Koni shocks, \$165; freight, \$34.50; California emission control, \$17