

Dial 911!

Seven models make 1996 the year of the 911

by Mark Vaughn

We never did catch his name, but the guy in the blue 944 loved Porsches. He followed our 1996 Targa through the streets of Pegnitz, Germany, and into our hotel parking lot, where he discovered two rows of new 911 Targas and Carrera 4S models, none of which the rest of the world had seen. It was like the guy had discovered his own little Porsche paradise. He sprinted from his 944 (with the numbers "944" in the license plate) and began a stream of German, of which we caught roughly 20 percent.

"I like very much your car," was the way we translated part of it (either that or "I love you, my main man").

Turns out (we think) that he was a local Porsche dealer, or he worked in the service department of a local Porsche dealer, or maybe there was a Porsche dealer somewhere in this area that he'd once driven past.

"Soon we lose the 968 *und* the 928. We have only the 911, so this makes very important for us."

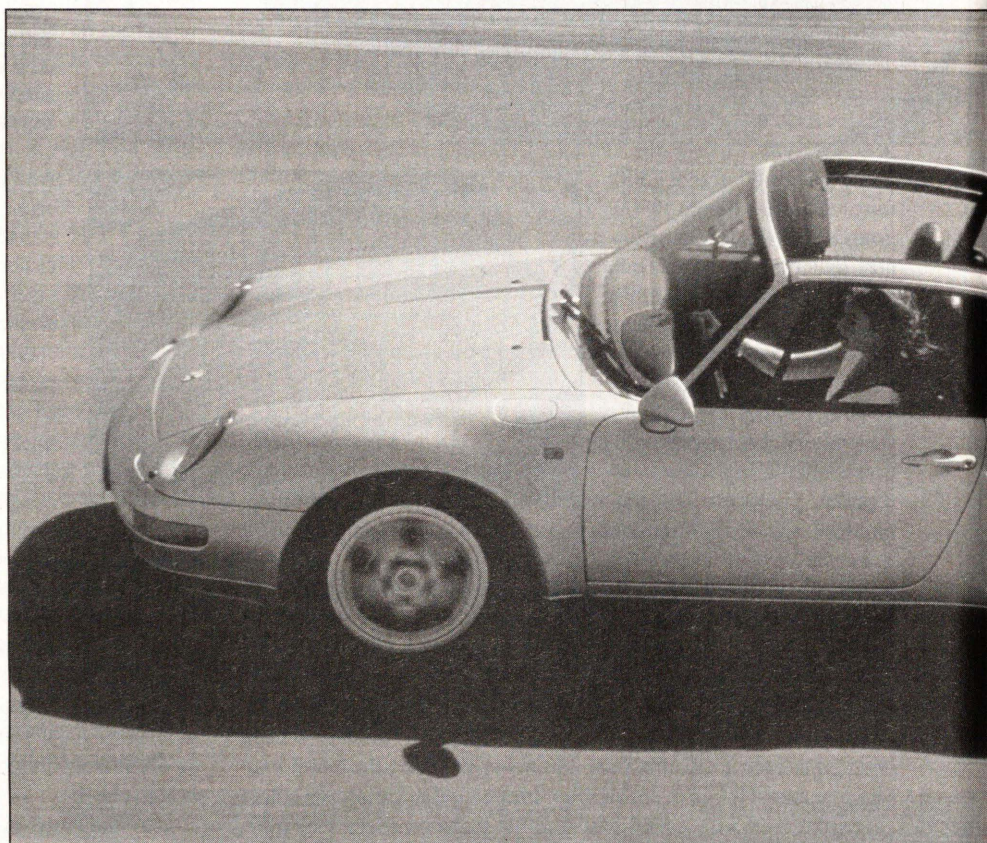
Or very big for us, or fiscally important for us, or his wife was pregnant, or something; at any rate, he had a point. With the demise of the 928 and 968 (the last vehicles rolled off the assembly line in Zuffenhausen a few weeks ago), Porsche has only 911s to hold it over until the Boxster arrives a year from now. That may not be as big a problem as it sounds. With the 1996 model 911s, Porsche buyers will have seven models from which to choose, making this the most diverse product range in the illustrious history of the 911.

The Turbo remains its magnificent self into the 1996 model year, which is just fine with us. It's difficult to argue with 400 hp. There is also the two-wheel-drive Carrera Coupe and Cabriolet, the all-wheel-drive Carrera 4 Coupe and Cabriolet, and now, two new 911s.

One is an innovative Targa. There were about five or six of these for our excitable German friend to see. He got to open and

To open the top, you just flip a switch and the front half of the glass slides quickly and easily under the rear half, leaving about a two-foot by four-foot rectangular window onto the great outdoors.

"The former Targa, with its removable roof and awkward storage, was out of the question," says Porsche chief designer Haarm Laagay. "Transparency and splendor are the key words for the new Targa," he says, describing what went into the design of this top.



close the new glass roof (but we didn't let him drive). That's right, a glass roof. In German it's *fenster kopf*, or something. But these are not the Targas we (or our friend) remember.

The old Targa roof, discontinued in 1994, was a solid piece of steel attached at the front to the windshield header and at the rear to a very wide and solid rollover bar. The roof panel could be stuffed awkwardly into the front trunk when semi-open-air motoring was desired.

Even with the roof firmly in place, the new Targa is much easier to operate and much better at providing that semi-open-air feeling. Apart from the steel rails along the edges, this new top is all glass, from the windshield header back to the engine cover. The glass is smoked and an electrically drawn shade reduces solar gain.

No translation needed here.

It's a mechanically sound design. At the factory, the Targa bodies go down the assembly line as cabriolets. That means they're pretty-well stiffened to begin with. The roof modules, made by Webasto in Munich, arrive at the factory already complete, then are screwed and glued to the cabrio bodies.

The bonding is tight. Even in the prototypes we drove, there were no squeaks or rattles in the Targa roofs and no problems operating the tops. Porsche claims sophisticated water ducting can ensure a dry interior when the top is opened after a rainstorm. Wind noise with the top open is surprisingly low, thanks to an automatically deployed glass wind deflector. Even at 90 mph on the autobahn, wind noise is quieter than driving in a coupe with its windows down. With the glass fully

retracted, vision out the back is limited by the double panes of smoked glass. Rear visibility with the top open could pose a problem but the bright and sunny conditions that prompt opening the top to begin with will typically shine enough light through both panes of glass.

If that's still a problem, try the next most visually exciting 911 for 1996—the “Turbo-look” 911, officially called the Carrera 4S. The problem with the Turbo-look is that it's missing the most Turbo-looking item on the Turbo, that monster

While you shouldn't expect that anyone will point and gawk at your new Carrera 4S based solely on its Turbo similarity, do expect a unique styling appeal not found on the other six 911s.

The C4S has the Turbo's wider body, wider track, slightly extended roof, large front air inlet, and bigger tires, giving it a much more aggressive look.

But the C4S is not just a cosmetic package. It comes with the four-wheel drive of the Turbo, and with many of the Turbo's performance features. A six-speed manual

Brakes are the Turbo's four-piston fixed caliper discs with ABS, which, along with Porsche's automatic differential brake system, provide exactly as much pressure to each disc as is required. A limited slip rear differential, which locks tighter under braking than it does under acceleration, helping to prevent lift-throttle oversteer, is also standard. Combined with the standard viscous center differential and with Porsche's new Lightweight-Stable-Agile rear suspension, traction in almost all paved conditions is practically guaranteed.

Perhaps the C4S's best feature is one shared with all the non-Turbo 911s—more power. Porsche has increased the output of the normally aspirated 3.6-liter flat sixes in all its 911s with a new three-stage induction system called Varioram. Varioram is based on the two-stage system used on the 1995 911s, and adds a third stage to help power and torque at lower engine speeds.

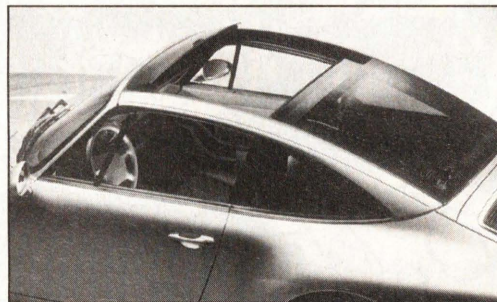
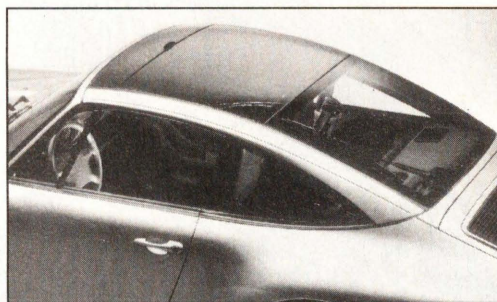
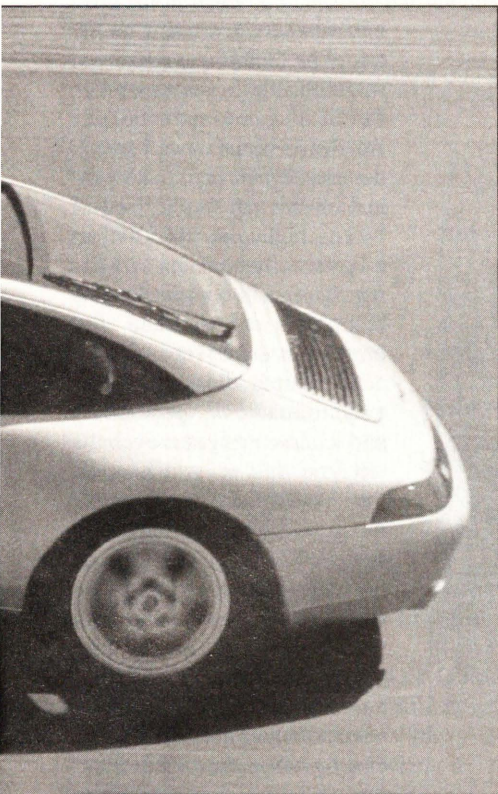
On top of the 1995 model's intake manifold, Porsche has added a spider-like manifold with six intake runners and a set of butterfly valves. Below 5000 rpm, Varioram uses only these intake runners to get the gas/air mix into the cylinders. The mix flows through retractable intake tubes which run from the upper manifold directly down into the cylinder ports.

That's the new part. Above 5000 revs, those upper intake runners actually retract, sliding into the upper manifold to allow the air/fuel mix into the lower manifold tubing everywhere but at the rear resonant tube. Above 5800 rpm, the rear resonant tube is open.

Though power is raised only 12 hp to 282, and torque goes up just 7 lb ft to 250, Varioram improves mid-range torque by 15 percent between 2500 and 4500 rpm. The torque curve is wider and flatter than in the past. The transition between intake systems is seamless to the driver, since each of the three intake stages crosses over at a matching point in the rev range. Stage two picks up where stage one begins to fall off, and so on.

We couldn't explain any of this to our German friend, at least not with any degree of technical proficiency. We tried, but the closest we came was, *Das neuen drei-mal einspritzen macht besser ausgehen*, or, “Three in and six out mean you really haul buns.” Or something.

He didn't get it, but in a few months, when the Varioram Porsche comes to his dealership, or when his wife gives birth perhaps, he'll understand. ■



At left and above, the Porsche Targa's new all-glass roof slides automatically at the touch of a button. The Carrera 4S (below) gets the Turbo's look, but not its rear wing.



rear wing. Porsche claims that since it has no intercooler, the C4S “doesn't need” the fixed rear wing. That may indeed be the case, but a rear wing would sure go a long way toward impressing the neighbors.

transmission is standard. Eighteen-inch wheels are similar in appearance to the Turbo's and of the same dimensions, meaning 225/40ZR-18s on the front and 285/30ZR-18s on the rear.