



Best of breed

Turbocharging the 924 did its image the world of good, but the ultimate is surely the 924 Carrera GT. Similar on paper they may have been, but how do they compare over a quarter of a century on?

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Photography: Michael Bailie

It was 1980 and my father had a dark blue Triumph TR6 in the garage. I was almost nine years old and this was the first car that had ever interested me. It was an interest, though, that had gripped me by the throat and was refusing to let go. For the first time in my life I had some sort of focus, a hobby. And there was plenty of wall space available in my bedroom for pictures of my favourite motors. My pocket money went on *Car* magazine every month, but I didn't read the words – no point when I hadn't the first clue what even a clutch did. I just looked at the photographs, cut them out, got my mum to frame them for the wall and then imagined what it'd be like to even sit in one.

Porsche immediately became a favourite marque. A friend of the family donated a Porsche sales brochure that folded out to form a big poster of the range, all parked in formation in the grounds of some stately home. The 911 didn't really do it for me as an eight-year old. I needed pop-up headlamps and sleek lines. For me, the space-age 928 was king and I had a sort of nagging respect for the 924 Turbo, particularly in its dual-tone



924 TURBO

ENGINE:	2.0-litre, in-line four, water-cooled, turbocharged
TRANSMISSION:	Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
KERB WEIGHT:	1180kg
MAX POWER:	170bhp at 5500rpm
MAX TORQUE:	181lb ft at 3500rpm
0-60MPH:	7.8 seconds
MAX SPEED:	140mph
PRODUCED:	1979-1983
CURRENT VALUE:	£6000

red-and-white paint job.

But there was a newcomer that had really made an impression – one that was too new for inclusion on the poster. It was a 924 Turbo, but with added menace. It had bulging hips and a pinched waist, and it had just the coolest name

ever: the 924 Carrera GT. That year I got to visit my first motor show at Birmingham's NEC and I experienced sensory overload. There was a 924 Carrera GT in the building and I was able to push my nose against the glass and stare at it for real. I decided there and then that my life's ambition was to own a 928S and one of those new 924s. It would be almost a decade before I was able to take my driving test, so there was plenty of time to save up.

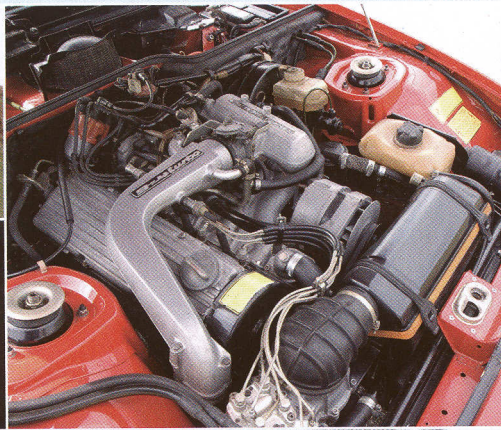
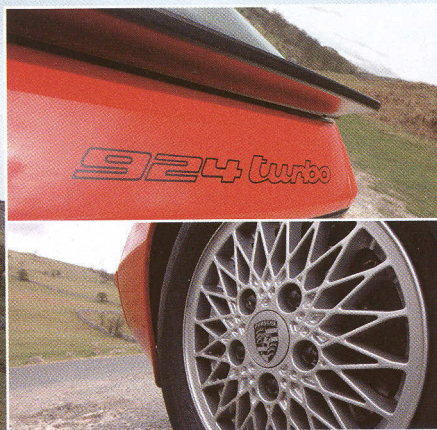
Soon there was a framed photo of the 924 Carrera GT on the wall next to the poster. There was a bearded Australian bloke called Mel Nichols behind its wheel and I was jealous. I wanted his job and I wanted that car. Years later I got the job and, in 2002, there was a 928S2 on the drive.

Five years later I'm holding the keys to a gleaming black 924 Carrera GT – and I'm wondering which of my pre-pubescent dreams are still to be fulfilled. Only I don't own it. I do have it for the day, though, along with a Guards

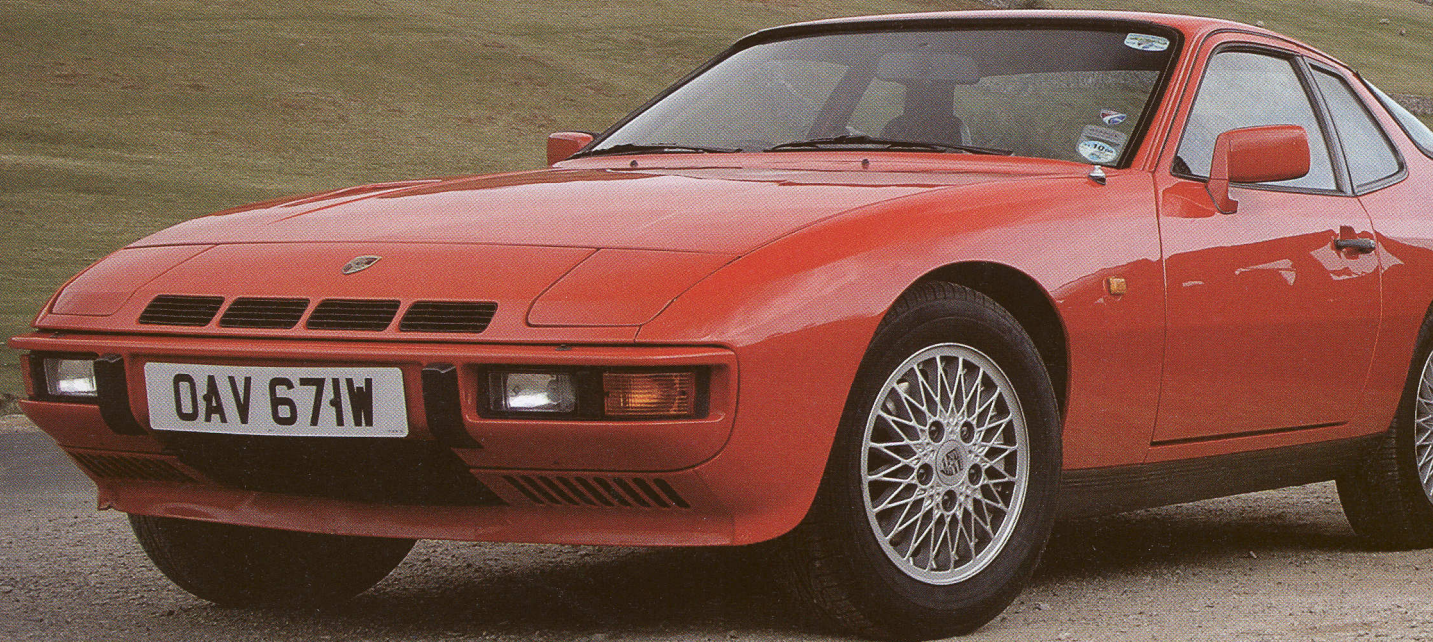
Red 924 Turbo – and I'm fascinated by what I might discover with these two turbocharged 924s. After all these years will I end up bitterly disappointed?

Editor Steve Bennett asserts that you should never meet your heroes – that you can't help but feel let down, especially when it comes to cars. He talks from bitter personal experience! But standing here, letting the 924 Carrera GT's muscular lines seduce me as they did all those years ago, I don't care – this car still floats my boat. The standard 924, though, has never held any interest for me. I'm grateful that it sold in enough numbers to save Porsche from bankruptcy, but that's really where it ends. I've driven them before and come away unimpressed, but today is all about discovering what a 924 is like with forced induction.

The 924 sold remarkably well, despite the protestations of purists that a water-cooled, front-engined car should never wear the



Standard 924 Turbo looks puny compared to the wide-arched Carrera GT – and that Pascha interior will always be an acquired taste. Carrera GT engine is the same basic 2-litre unit, but with an intercooler and a power boost to 210bhp



Porsche badge. But, by the late 1970s, it was time to give it some kick, to make it more worthy of a place in the line-up. In 1979, along came the 924 Turbo with a KKK turbocharger, which helped to squeeze 170bhp from the in-line four which, for its time, wasn't bad at all. The base model 911 could only muster 188bhp – a far cry from today's entry-level 997 with its 321bhp. Top speed for the blown 924 was quoted as being 140mph, again very close to the 911 SC's 141mph. No wonder, then, that the 924 Turbo was almost as expensive as a 911 – something that didn't exactly help sales.

Today, it's easy to see why the 924 Turbo only lasted five years. It was expensive, it looked practically the same as a standard 924 – and, when the 944 came along in 1982, it was suddenly a nonsensical purchase. The 944 might not have had the same impressive top speed, but it looked and felt much more modern and, by 1983, the 924 Turbo was dead. The red one here

was first registered in January 1981 – I'd turned nine by the time its owner took delivery.

In the late 1970s, turbocharging was still very much in its infancy. Porsche had led the way with the 930 and BMW had come and gone with its 2002 tearaway, but there wasn't much else out there. The Audi Quattro helped to change all that, but it's worth remembering the 924 Turbo as a brave attempt at bringing forced induction to a bigger audience. Taking what they already knew to be a very strong engine, Porsche's engineers gave the 924 unit a new cylinder head, new forged alloy pistons, improved oil flow and, of course, that KKK blower.

Brakes were improved with a larger servo and ventilated discs sourced from the 928. The hydraulic dampers were substituted with gas-filled items that gave a much more sporting feel and, as if all that wasn't enough, there was a dog-leg gearbox just to add that bit of spice to proceedings. It all worked, too, and

924 CARRERA GT	
ENGINE:	2.0 litre, in-line four, water-cooled, turbocharged
TRANSMISSION:	Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
KERB WEIGHT:	1180kg
MAX POWER:	210bhp at 6250rpm
MAX TORQUE:	203lb ft at 3000rpm
0-60MPH:	6.9 seconds
MAX SPEED:	150mph
PRODUCED:	1980-1981
CURRENT VALUE:	£15,000

the press loved it. The 924 Turbo was a genuine junior-league supercar.

Some people at Porsche could see the potential for racing with the car and, in late 1979, the company took the wraps off the Carrera GT 'design study' at the Frankfurt motor show. By



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1980 it was a production reality. Here was a homologation special that would allow the 924 to go racing at Le Mans. Suddenly, the 924 was getting some pedigree, some bragging rights.

By 1980 the 911SC was putting out 204bhp, but the 924 Carrera GT trumped it with 210. At last it could pull some sort of rank – and boy, did it look good! A total of 406 road cars were built, with 75 right-hand-drive models making it to the UK. It's thought that only half that number survives here today, so this black beauty is obviously very special. Previously owned by motoring journalist Kyle Fortune, it's a car that has obviously been cherished. With just over 30,000 miles under its belt, it's pretty much

ratio and ran higher levels of boost, all of which gave it a 10mph advantage over the Turbo – and it was almost a second quicker from 0–60.

Externally it was, and still is, the finest looking 924. With a polyurethane air-dam and front wings, flared to house wider wheels and tyres, combined with spats over the rear wheelarches, the Carrera GT looks utterly mean, where the 924 Turbo looks dainty and inoffensive. The CGT has black-painted Fuchs forged alloy wheels – which look absolutely right on it, and there's a bigger rear spoiler.

My eagerness to get into the CGT is probably a mistake. Choosing to drive that to our photographic destination, instead of the Turbo,

faster than it actually is. I've always wanted to do this, but I have to stop Bennett's words ringing in my ears – it's not the car's fault that it doesn't feel quite as fast as it looks.

The 924 Turbo, on the other hand, doesn't look at all fast. The 924's shape remains unadulterated by plastic addenda, save for a rear spoiler. The air scoop in the bonnet and the four small grilles along its leading edge are all that tell those in the know that this is a Turbo. Well, apart from the sticker on its rump, obviously.

Getting in and out of the Turbo is an easier affair, as the seating position isn't quite so low. Once inside, there's a feeling of cost-cutting – it feels less plush than the CGT, and once the

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faultless and I'm itching to get behind the wheel.

Derek Bell, Tony Dron and Jürgen Barth all competed in the 1980 Le Mans in 924 Carrera GTs, with the cars finishing in sixth, twelfth and thirteenth places overall. The engineers managed to squeeze an almighty 370bhp from the same 2-litre engine in the later competition 924 Carrera GTR – and there was a strictly limited-edition GTS which had Perspex lamp covers and more power than the standard road car. But neither of those adorned my bedroom wall, and today is going to be a trip down memory lane.

The two cars are actually pretty similar on paper, with the CGT having some of the 924 Turbo's components beefed up. The Carrera has an intercooler for the turbocharger, which is why there's a big cowl over the NACA duct that sets the 924 Turbo apart from its less powerful relatives. The intercooler boosted power and made the blower more reliable, too, because the standard 924 Turbo suffered from extreme under-bonnet temperatures, which caused no end of problems. The CGT also had a higher compression

means I'll be working my way down once I'm in the red car. Putting such thoughts to one side, I enjoy the CGT for what it is: a truly rapid performer. At a standstill, it sounds gruff in a kind of boy-racer way – the exhaust note being a burble that's ever so slightly uneven. Once on the move, providing you remember where first gear is, the 2-litre engine pulls keenly, with the turbocharger whistling its head off.

The sensation of speed is helped by the driving position. You sit fairly low in the superb seats, with the transmission tunnel seeming quite high up. The stubby gear lever feels great and the steering wheel is almost vertical. The steering in both of these cars is non-assisted – and it's heavy at low speeds, especially with the GT's wide front tyres. There's no shortage of luxury items: electric windows and mirrors, sunroof, air-con – it's all here, and I can't help but wonder whether it'd be even more sprightly without all of this stuff.

Not that it's slow, mind you. We live in times when a Mini Cooper S would give the 924 Carrera GT a good seeing to, so it's important to remember the Porsche's vintage when weighing up its attributes. It charges along with ease, the stiffly-sprung suspension making the car feel

engine fires up that feeling is compounded by its rattling nature. When this 924 was built, Porsche was still busy fiddling with the balance shafts that would make the 944 so smooth and refined. This feels like an old Cortina in comparison – and even the Pascha 'chessboard-on-drugs' upholstery is failing to make this feel special for me.

On the move, the Turbo tries its hardest to give me all it's got – and I can imagine that, compared with its contemporaries, it's probably impressive. But there isn't the sensation of speed that I had in the GT – and the noise, well, it's just ordinary.

I'm being unfair, I know. The 924 offered Porsche ownership to the masses and the Turbo is the sexy one. But the Carrera GT is tugging at my heartstrings with its perfect blend of good looks and usable power. It gives a sense of occasion and, even though it's no quicker than most hot hatches today, it has a character that's all its own. I'd still love to own one – for its racing pedigree and the fact that it commands so much respect within certain circles. It's the car the 924 Turbo should have been all along. **12**

Thanks to Gmund Cars, where both these 924s are for sale. Visit www.gmundcars.com for details.

Back in their day, the 924 Turbo duo were genuinely quick cars, with the Carrera GT bordering on junior level supercar status. These days, they can still cut it

