

DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

Comparison-shopping the
Porsche 924S, 944, 944S and 944 Turbo

PHOTOS BY JOHN LAMM

PORSCHE. WHAT'S IN a name? Well, it all depends on when you ask, and whom you ask. What's in the name "Porsche"? If the truth be known, for anyone over the age of 35, say, it means a high-powered, tricky-handling race-bred VW Beetle caricature, with the engine in the back, disturbing the air and the ear with its air-cooled rattle. To younger enthusiasts, Porsche means the more affordable 924/944 series of sports cars, and the 928 luxury GT.

Porsches elicit an emotional rather than a logical response. Those buying a Porsche will generally not consider alternatives from other manufacturers, regardless of their merits when compared with the devices from Stuttgart (or, in this case, Neckarsulm). To them, "Porsche" is synonymous with the long straight at Le Mans and the forests of the Nürburgring. The drive to work is no longer a chore, but rather a practice session at Hockenheim. And you can't turn hot laps at Hockenheim driving something with no history behind the name, can you?

If your mind is set on a Porsche, what choices do you have among the array of 4-cylinder models? What are the relative merits—and demerits—of the four different 4-cylinder Porsches? You will be paying extra for the Porsche name, German technology and a weak dollar. Still interested? Read on.

Porsche 924S

STARTING AT the bottom, we have the 924S, first tested in R&T in July 1986, but essentially, in exterior and interior design, the same car first tested in

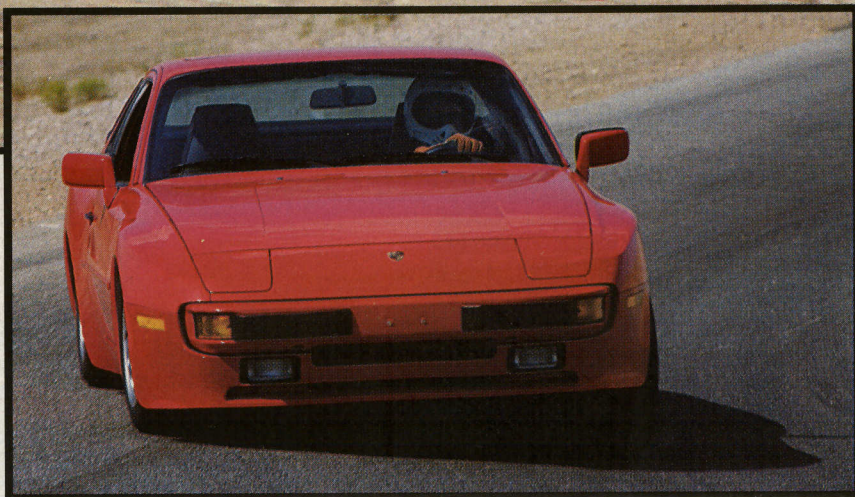
these pages more than 10 years ago, July 1976 to be exact.

Porsche broke with its air-cooled tradition with the introduction of the 924. The *Vierundzwanziger* was an unwanted child of sorts. The design had originally been penned by Porsche, under contract to Volkswagen, as a sports car to be built as a joint venture, similar to the 914 that it would replace. Power was to come from an overhead-cam 2.0-liter inline-4, produced at the VW Salzgitter plant; this engine would also power the VW LT truck, 1977 Audi 100 and, as it turned out, the AMC Gremlin. The VW/Audi transaxle would also be used. VW pulled out of the joint venture and, because it had been footing the bills, got the rights to the so-called EA425. But then came the 1973 Arab oil embargo, and VW's ledgers were flowing red ink. Cuts had to be made, and the VW sports car was one of them. Porsche bought the design back and renamed it 924, first sold as a 1976 model. The car would be produced by ex-NSU (now Audi) personnel in Neckarsulm, north of Stuttgart, under Porsche's supervision; Audi would build Porsche's cars for them, for a slight fee you understand. The only Porsche parts on the car were the badges. Everything else was out-sourced from the VW/Audi parts bin and subcontractors.

The 924 was replaced by the 924S in the U.S. market in 1986. The 924S is powered by the newer engine used in the 944, in both applications developing 147 bhp at 5800 rpm, maximum torque of 140 lb-ft at 3000 rpm and redlining at 6500 rpm. The engine is content with unleaded regular fuel. By the way, it and







Stock 924S handling is tire-limited; the optional suspension and tires would help (top). The 944 was surprise winner in slalom and skidpad numbers.

its 4-cylinder brethren are assembled in Porsche's Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen factory and then shipped to the Audi plant in Neckarsulm, where all the 924/944 family is built.

The 924S is lacking some very important features of its newer cousins. It still has elements of the 1976 interior, most notably the instrument cluster and the tighter fit between seat and steering wheel. Many of the parts are straight from the VW warehouse and are instantly recognized as such. To an extent, it still has the old suspension. The front anti-roll bar is a bit smaller than that on the 944; there is no standard rear bar. The 944's front bar and a smaller-than-optional-944 rear bar may be ordered as

an option. The brakes, however, are identical on both cars. Standard tires are 195/65VR-15 on 15 x 6-in. rims all around. The transmissions differ; the 924S has a lower 5th gear. The idea was to ensure that the 924S wouldn't outrun the upmarket 944. But more on that later. A 40-percent limited-slip differential is optional on this and all the other 4-cylinder Porsches. Power-assisted steering is standard on all 924/944 cars. Current base price for the 924S is \$24,935.

Porsche 944

NEXT STEP up the social-climbing ladder for Porscheophiles is the 944, most recently tested in R&T for February 1986 (against the then-new Mazda

RX-7). This step costs \$4165, to a base sticker of \$29,100. The 944, introduced in 1981 as a 1982 model, was a well-worked-over 924. More aggressive running gear and fender flares were taken from the limited-production 924 Carrera GT. Although most of the parts still came from the VW/Audi Meccano set, the engine was an all-new design, basically one-half of the 928's all-aluminum V-8. Displacement was bumped up to 2.5 liters, which is big for a four; twin balance shafts were necessary to calm the engine's shaking.

The interior of the 944 was extensively restyled for the 1986 model year. Seats in the 944 series are upgraded and redesigned from the 924S. Rake and fore-and-aft adjustments are set using levers, but the front and rear cushion heights are varied electrically via rocker switches on the side. The rear anti-roll bar and larger front bar used on the Turbo are optional; normally, the 944 gets only a front bar. Standard tires are 215/60VR-15 on 15 x 7 rims all around. The wheel and tire option package for the 944 gets you 205/55VR-16 on 16 x 7s at the front, 225/50VR-16 on 16 x 8s at the rear; the rims are cast alloy; forged alloys are yet another option. Brakes are identical to the 924S but ABS is an option, as on the 944S and 944 Turbo.

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Porsche 944S

THE 944S is the new kid on the block, introduced with the 1987 model year and growing out of a need to offer an intermediate stage between the 944 and its force-fed turbo twin: So! The customers don't like turbo lag and turbo prices? Well, let's see now—what are the automotive *couturiers* doing this year? Four valves per cylinder! Hmm . . . Take the parts from the 4-valve 928S, charge a bit less than the Turbo, get a broader product offering. Call it 944S.

The 944S and its extra mechanical bits will set the buyer back \$34,580, \$5480 more than the normal 944. The S-model's manual transmission is the same gearbox used in the 944. The engine revs higher, to 6800 rpm. Horsepower is 190 bhp at 6000 rpm, torque 170 lb-ft at 4300 rpm. Unleaded premium is recommended. No automatic transmission is available. Except for badges, the car is identical to the 944.

Porsche 944 Turbo

SOON AFTER its 1981 introduction, the 944 found itself up against an increasing number of well performing cars that sold at lower prices. "Na gut," said the Weissach engineers. "If they want performance, we'll do what we did so well on the 911. We'll stick a turbo-charger on the thing. Restyle the body a bit, put in a new interior, and presto, what was once a VW sports car is suddenly a high-powered, high-priced luxogt called the 944 Turbo."

The Turbo is the top of the Porsche 4-banger line. Its price jumps \$2755 over the 944S, to \$37,335. The 944 Turbo is recognizable by its shapely front-end cap and rear undertray spoiler, useless as such. Scuttlebutt is that marketing demanded the spoiler for product identification: 944 Turbo owners needed something to identify themselves to traffic they'd just passed.

The engine output is up to 217 bhp at 5800 rpm, maximum torque of 243 lb-ft at a surprisingly low (for a turbo) 3500 rpm; redline is 6500 rpm. Like the 944S, it requires unleaded premium fuel. Indi-

GENERAL DATA

	Porsche 924S	Porsche 944	Porsche 944S	Porsche 944 Turbo
Price				
Base price.....	\$24,935	\$29,100	\$34,580	\$37,335
Price as tested ¹	\$26,837	\$32,221	\$37,701	\$40,456
General				
Curb weight, lb	2815	2965	2975	3115
Test weight.....	2950	3090	3130	3260
Weight dist (with driver), f/r, %	51/49	49/51	49/51	50/50
Wheelbase, in.	94.5	94.5	94.5	94.5
Track, f/r	55.9/54.8	58.2/57.1	58.2/57.1	58.2/57.1
Length	168.9	168.9	168.9	168.9
Width	66.3	68.3	68.3	68.3
Height	50.2	50.2	50.2	50.2
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal.	17.4	21.1	21.1	21.1
Engine & Drivetrain				
Engine type	sohc 2-valve inline-4	sohc 2-valve inline-4	sohc 4-valve inline-4	sohc 2-valve turbo inline-4
Bore x stroke, mm	100.0 x 78.9	100.0 x 78.9	100.0 x 78.9	100.0 x 78.9
Displacement, cc	2479	2479	2479	2479
Compression ratio, :1	9.7	9.7	10.9	8.0
Bhp @ rpm, SAE net.....	147 @ 5800	147 @ 5800	188 @ 6000	217 @ 5800
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft	140 @ 3000	140 @ 3000	170 @ 4300	243 @ 3500
Fuel delivery	elect. fuel inject.	elect. fuel inject.	elect. fuel inject.	elect. fuel inject.
Transmission	5-sp manual	5-sp manual	5-sp manual	5-sp manual
Gear ratios, :1, 1st	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.50
2nd	2.12	2.12	2.12	2.06
3rd	1.46	1.46	1.46	1.40
4th	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.03
5th	0.83	0.73	0.73	0.83
Final drive ratio, :1	3.89	3.89	3.89	3.38
Chassis & Body				
Layout	front engine/ rear drive	front engine/ rear drive	front engine/ rear drive	front engine/ rear drive
Body/frame	unit steel	unit steel	unit steel	unit steel
Steering type	rack & pinion, power-assisted	rack & pinion, power-assisted	rack & pinion, power-assisted	rack & pinion, power-assisted
Brake system, f/r	11.1-in. vented discs/ 11.4-in. vented discs, vacuum-assisted	11.1-in. vented discs/ 11.4-in. vented discs, vacuum-assisted	11.1-in. vented discs/ 11.4-in. vented discs, vacuum-assisted	11.7-in. vented discs/ 11.8-in. vented discs, vacuum-assisted
Wheels	cast alloy, 15 x 6J	cast alloy, 15 x 7J	cast alloy, 15 x 7J	cast alloy; 16 x 7J front 16 x 8J rear
Tires	Continental Super Contact, 195/65VR-15	Dunlop SP Sport Super D4, 215/60VR-15	Pirelli Cinturato P6, 215/60VR-15	Pirelli Cinturato P7; 205/55VR-16 front, 225/50VR-16 rear
Suspension, f/r	MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/semi- trailing arms, torsion bars, tube shocks	MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/semi- trailing arms, torsion bars, tube shocks, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/semi- trailing arms, torsion bars, tube shocks, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/semi- trailing arms, torsion bars, tube shocks, anti-roll bar

¹Price as tested includes: for the 924S, std equip. (air cond, elect. window lifts, elect. adj mirrors), AM/FM stereo/cassette (\$672), rear window wiper (\$284), sunroof (\$946); for the 944, std equip. (auto. temp control, elect. window lifts, elect. height adj for driver's seat, elect. adj mirrors, fog lights), leather interior (\$556), sunroof (\$946), rear wiper (\$284), cruise control (\$413), alarm (\$250), AM/FM stereo cassette (\$672); for the 944S, std equip. (auto. temp control, elect. window lifts, elect. height adj for driver's seat, elect. adj mirrors, fog lights, left & right airbags), leather interior (\$556), sunroof (\$946), rear wiper (\$284), cruise control (\$413), alarm (\$250), AM/FM stereo cassette (\$672); for the 944 Turbo, std equip. (auto. temp control, elect. window lifts, elect. height adj for driver's seat, elect. adj mirrors, fog lights, leather steering wheel, left & right airbags), leather interior (\$556), sunroof (\$946), rear wiper (\$284), cruise control (\$413), alarm (\$250), AM/FM stereo cassette (\$672).

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vidual gear ratios are taller than those on the other cars, except for 5th, identical to the 924S, and the final drive is much taller, for top speed. Compared with the other 944 models, the front anti-roll bar is larger in diameter and the rear anti-roll bar, optional on the others, is standard on the Turbo. Disc brakes are considerably larger all around. ABS brakes are again optional equipment. Wheels and tires are the same as the optional package on the 944 and 944S; the Turbo's upgrade includes 245/45VR-16 rubber on 16 x 9 rims (at the rear only).

*Performance:
What it's all about*

ALL RIGHT then, what performance do you get for your 4-cylinder Porsche dollar? Several of our testers felt that these engines are rough and rumbly at low revs, this despite the high-tech balance shafts. Not surprising when one has 100-mm pistons and 2.5 liters of displacement in a 4-cylinder. These cars beg to have a smooth V-6 installed.

The engines, however, are unique in the way they produce power. The ordinary 924S/944 engine is in many ways the best of the lot; although it runs out of breath at high speeds, it is very tractable at low revs. It has none of that "coming into the power band" feeling; torque buildup is progressive and smooth.

The 944S suffers a bit at low engine speeds compared with its 8-valve brethren, but above 3500 rpm it comes on strongly, revving smoothly to its 6800-rpm redline. The engine's strength in the upper rev range exaggerates the need (real and imagined) for a more muscular bottom end.

The 944 Turbo was described by our testers as "slow around town" and "docile at low revs"; "badly in need of low-end torque." The engine does not come into its own until the revs are around

The 944 Turbo's strong suit is flat-out speed. Top-end power translates into effortless high-speed cruising, but thrust for low-speed maneuvering is lacking, thanks to turbo lag.

3500-4000 rpm. But then it sings a lovely torquy song. It's an engine more suited to the *Autobahn* or the race track than to the low-speed cut-and-thrust of a daily freeway commute.

The transmissions, too, have individual character. The shifters feel rather heavy and rubbery, not surprising with the transmission located in the rear of the car. Smooth shifts are not easy and require finesse and concentration. The 944 didn't outrun the 924S despite the former's taller 5th gear. Our 924S was considerably faster than the 944 in top speed, clocking 128 mph; the newer car managed only 121 mph. Part of this difference is, of course, due to the higher aerodynamic drag of the 944's wider tires and fenders. But 7 mph is an awfully big difference, and we suspect that our 944 was not in top top-speed form.

By virtue of its higher top-end power and higher rev limit, the 944S should reach a higher top speed than the 944. It does, clocking in at 131 mph. However, that's only 3 mph more than the bottom-line 924S, which, interestingly, has a shorter 5th gear. So the 4-valve technology doesn't get much better top-end performance; said another way, those extra 3 mph cost the 944S buyer more than \$3200 each!

The Turbo's clutch effort is much higher than that of its stablemates, not surprising in view of the power it must transmit. Top speed was measured at 149 mph—clearly in an entirely different league. A note here: These measured top speeds were less than previous figures because of the extreme temperature (110 degrees Fahrenheit) at the site of our top-speed evaluations.

In flat-out acceleration, the 944 Turbo was the clear leader, reaching 60 mph in 6.6 seconds and getting down the quarter mile in 15.1 sec at 95.5 mph. The next quickest was the 944S (no surprise) with 0-60 in 8.0 and the quarter in 16.2 sec, 87.5 mph. Third was the 924S, with 0-60 in 8.5, quarter mile in 16.4 sec, 85.0 mph. The lower 5th gear ratio of the 924S undoubtedly helps. Also, it's lighter than the 944. The 944 was the least quick at 0-60 in 8.7, the quarter in 16.6 and 84.5. And, once again, ambient temperature played a role, though not so dramatic as in our desert top-speed runs.

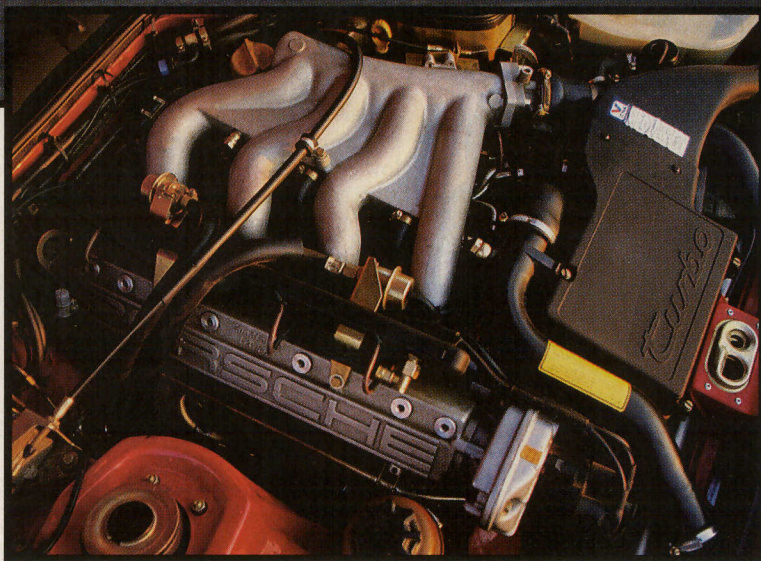
Performance differences arose in slalom and skidpad testing. Predictably, the 924S generated the lowest skidpad value, 0.78g, because of its narrower

*The Turbo needs
more tire to exploit
the engine.*



track and 195 tires. The heavier 944S and 944 Turbo were next, at 0.79g and 0.80g, respectively. The surprise was the 944 at 0.83g. In the slalom, the same effect was noticeable. All except the 944, which turned 64.4 mph, were clustered around 62 mph. A significant difference. The Turbo was on Pirelli P7s, the 944S on P6s, the 924S on Continental Super Contacts and the 944 on Dunlop Super Sport D4s.

In our extended run through local mountainous country, the differences and similarities of the cars when driven on real roads became apparent. All displayed rear-end harshness over irregularities, such as Botts dots on the roadway, but the suspensions were otherwise compliant and could soak up big bumps very well. Given high-speed sections, the 944 Turbo could outdistance the others and had a very long-legged feel; there was more speed on tap than the driver might feel comfortable with. At 8/10ths on only mildly twisty bits, the Turbo was a real joy. At lower speeds, where a real premium is placed on handling balance, the Turbo found itself at a disadvantage. The 944S could keep up by staying at high revs. The 924S could maintain contact, but only just. And the 944 just plain couldn't keep up with the



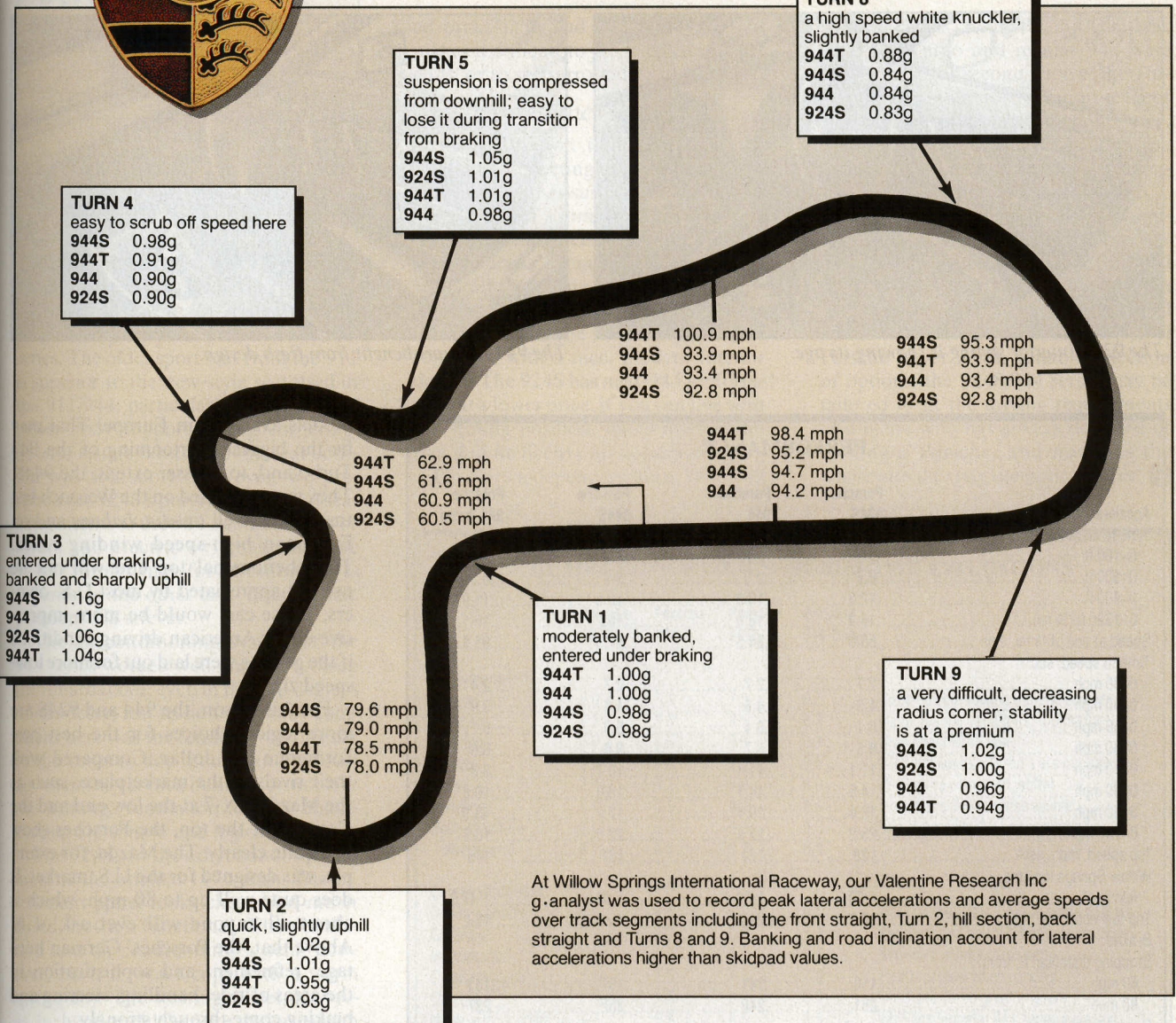
Thanks to its 217-bhp engine, the 944 Turbo edges into the supercar league.

others if they were driven rather hard.

In testing at Willow Springs raceway, the 944 Turbo was clearly fastest. It was consistently turning laps in the 1-minute 47-second range. The other three cars were all around 1:50 to 1:51. The 944 and 944S could be nicely trail-braked into turns and throttle could be applied quite early on exiting, but the Turbo was less forgiving because of its throttle lag and lack of bottom-end torque, followed by a sudden rush of power when the suspension (and driver) were least prepared for it. The Turbo had to be

revved high to get the best performance.

Though it was quicker by virtue of its ultimately higher power output, the Turbo was developing lower cornering forces than the others in several corners. The Turbo needs more tire to exploit the engine. The big brakes of the Turbo were a help on the track, although no real problems were experienced with any of the cars in the deceleration department. Under normal driving conditions, our test staff felt that the brakes were excellent with good balance and modulation. The 924S, surprisingly, was

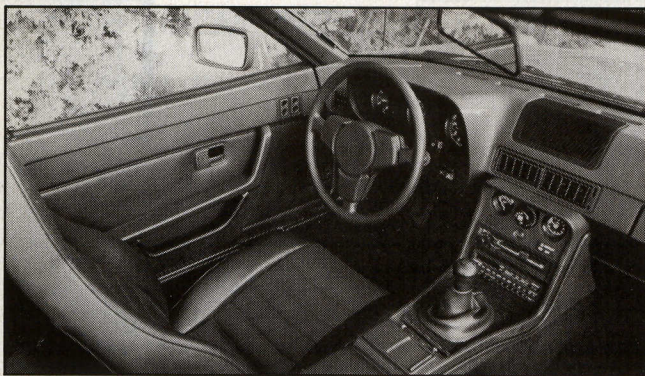


At Willow Springs International Raceway, our Valentine Research Inc g-analyst was used to record peak lateral accelerations and average speeds over track segments including the front straight, Turn 2, hill section, back straight and Turns 8 and 9. Banking and road inclination account for lateral accelerations higher than skidpad values.

preferred by one of our testers on the race track, although most drivers would probably prefer the secure and benign forgiving feel of the 944 series. The 924S had adequate speed in straight lines and felt very nimble in turns with light steering; the car had a predictable feel and, because of its skinny tires, was easy to slide. The tires were also the limiting factor in faster turns. Problems cropped up with the left front tire of the 924S; after several hot laps, the Continental Super Contact lost contact with parts of several tread blocks, which began chunking away. Better tires would have helped all of these cars trim at least 2 sec per lap.

The power-assisted steering of the entire series was liked by all, with good feedback: light, responsive and with good on-center feel, although the gearing feels a bit on the slow side. Handling was also universally liked, described as predictable, forgiving and neutral. The solid, flex-free chassis helped all of the cars get their power onto the ground. All cars were free of rattles, squeaks and wind noise, except for a bit of wind roar around the outside mirrors (although there was quite a bit of resonance induced by the rough-running engines at low rpm). The body styling, on the other hand, was liked in direct proportion to the cars' prices. The 924S

drew comments such as "It's 1976 again," "Dated" and "Wimpy." The 944 and 944S looked better, but the body is beginning to look old. The Turbo was universally liked. The nose and tail treatments and the lower skirts make for an even more appealing, smoother look. Exterior finish of all cars was excellent, but everyone commented on huge gaps at the doors, hood and headlights, probably a vestige of the original design's VW tooling requirements. The American market is about half of Porsche's world sales, and it's interesting how few compromises are made reflecting this. The cars are virtually identical, in engine and transmission, to those



The 924S interior styling is showing its age.



The 944 interiors benefit from fresh design.

PERFORMANCE

	Porsche 924S	Porsche 944	Porsche 944S	Porsche 944 Turbo
Acceleration:¹				
Time to distance, sec:				
0-100 ft	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.1
0-500 ft	8.9	9.0	8.9	8.3
0-900 ft	12.8	13.0	12.8	11.9
0-1320 ft (¼ mi)	16.4	16.6	16.2	15.1
Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph	85.0	84.5	87.5	95.5
Time to speed, sec:				
0-30 mph	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.4
0-40 mph	4.3	4.6	4.3	3.9
0-50 mph	6.1	6.4	5.0	5.1
0-60 mph	8.5	8.7	8.0	6.6
0-70 mph	11.1	11.4	10.7	8.8
0-80 mph	14.5	14.7	13.6	10.8
0-90 mph	18.4	19.4	17.2	13.3
0-100 mph	23.2	25.4	22.0	16.5
Top speed, mph, est ²	128	121	131	149
Willow Springs lap time,				
min:sec ¹	1:50.7	1:50.4	1:49.5	1:47.3
Trip fuel economy, mpg	19.8	21.2	19.0	16.2
Brakes:				
Stopping distance, ft, from:				
60 mph	150	141	137	133
80 mph	261	248	252	237
Overall brake rating	good	very good	very good	excellent
Handling:				
Lateral accel, g	0.78	0.79	0.83	0.80
Slalom speed, mph	61.9	64.4	62.8	61.8
Interior noise, dBA:				
Idle in neutral	57	59	61	59
Maximum, 1st gear	75	74	76	74
Constant 30 mph	68	67	66	65
50 mph	70	72	68	69
70 mph	74	75	74	73
90 mph	76	77	76	75

¹ average temperature 100°F.

² average temperature 110°F.

CALCULATED DATA

	Porsche 924S	Porsche 944	Porsche 944S	Porsche 944 Turbo
Lb/bhp (test weight)	20.1	21.0	16.6	15.0
Bhp/liter	59.1	59.1	75.6	87.3
Engine rpm @ 60 mph in 5th	2800	2450	2900	2300
R&T steering index	1.22	1.25	1.25	1.25

models available in Europe. That may be the biggest shortcoming of the 944 Turbo and, to a lesser extent, the 944S. They were designed on the Weissach test track to do well on *Autobahnen* and on European high-speed winding roads. The phenomenal top end will not be used or appreciated by most U.S. owners. These cars would be more impressive under American driving conditions if the gearing were laid out for more low-speed zip.

For this reason, the 944 and 924S are more logical choices for the best performance per dollar. Compared with their rivals in the marketplace, such as the Mazda RX-7 at the low end and the Corvette at the top, the Porsches show this quite clearly. The Mazda, for example, was designed for the U.S. market. It does quite well up to 80 mph, which is about all anyone will ever ask of it. Above that, the Porsches' German heritage, refinement and sophistication in the areas of ride, handling, steering and braking come through strongly.

Creature comforts compared

WHAT A difference a restyled interior makes! The shapes found in the 944 series are more flowing, more pleasing to the eye, in that modern German industrial-design style. Individual pieces are now purpose-made Porsche parts, rather than Golf/Rabbit/Audi components. The entire interior has a general Teutonic, stark, businesslike feel, a feeling underscored by the black interiors of all our cars. Some of our staff disliked the Turbo's obtrusive airbag steering wheel; often it blocked the view of the instruments. The 944 and 944S had the 4-spoke. There is still a cobbled-up feeling about some of the control locations. The mirror adjusting switch is on the

Few compromises were made for the American market.

driver's door, but the switch for selecting left or right mirror is on the center console, as is the rear wiper switch. The latter properly belongs on the wiper stalk.

The seats, too, have an afterthought feeling to them. Porsche apparently felt that it needed as many servomotors as possible to justify the prices of the 944 series. The older sport seat from the 911 is superior to the new-style seat used in the 911/944, particularly in the area of upper body support during cornering. Several testers felt the 924S's seat cushion was too short. However, we preferred the 924S's purely mechanical seat adjustments to the 944's combination of levers and electric switches. And the 924S's vernier knob for adjusting rake is superior to the other cars' discrete rake positions via a lever.

The air-conditioning system of the 944 series worked well enough to keep the innards cool, even in the 110 degrees of our desert test session. The only complaint here was the tendency on one car of the vents to flap around and redirect air when the car hit a bump. Controls for the heating, ventilation and air conditioning are simple and logical.

The 924S, on the other hand, still has most of the original 1976 dash. The instrument panel looks cheap and rather dated, but it's functional. The ventilation and air-conditioning system, however, isn't; it won't cope with a warm spring day. The steering wheel, however, is the nice old 3-spoke design, which locates the hands exactly where they should be.

The sunroof common to the entire line is rather primitive for such a high-ticket car. To enjoy an open feeling, the car must be stopped and the roof panel manually removed and stowed, though there are electric motors to raise the rear edge of the roof for ventilation. Since this system was designed, newer, better sunroof mechanisms have come along. Honda's CRX, for example, gets a large opening on a small roof by letting the roof slide on the outside of the car, overhanging the rear window a bit.

Visibility to the rear is surprisingly limited for such an airy-appearing greenhouse. The combination of high seat-backs, transom, rear wiper, high-mount-

ed brake light and distorted backlight makes it difficult to judge where the car ends, or to see surrounding obstacles.

The bottom line

SO, IT'S decision time. Which is the best? Neglecting price, the 944 Turbo was the consensus favorite. Although it feels a bit of a lump around town, it is very, very fast when driven aggressively at high speeds. From there, opinions differed; all remaining cars tied in scoring. The 944S offers many Turbo features at a lower price. The 944 has good performance with a nice, modern interior design. The 924S has near-944 performance at a lower price, if you can live with the seating position, dated interior design and ineffective air conditioning.

On a price-dependent basis, the 924S

was the car of choice for most staffers. The 944 Turbo and regular 944 were about equal for second choice, the Turbo offering an entirely different level of performance that outweighed the price, the 944 interior and price making it a good compromise. The 944S was considered to be the least cost-effective.

Whether you want ultimate performance regardless of price or decent performance at a more affordable (but still pricey) ticket, these cars offer enough variations on a basic design that should fill the bill of any determined entry-level Porsche buyer. With suitable selection of options, the 924S/944 series may be tailored to fit the driving requirements of anyone who has always dreamed of owning a Porsche, and now has the wherewithal to pay the initiation fee. ☺

CUMULATIVE RATINGS—SUBJECTIVE EVALUATIONS

	Porsche 924S	Porsche 944	Porsche 944S	Porsche 944 Turbo	
Performance:					
Engine	8.0	7.5	7.8	8.5	Turbo has convincing top-end power
Gearbox	8.5	8.3	8.5	8.3	Slight gearing variations; too tall for U.S.
Steering ¹	9.0	9.3	9.3	9.3	Tires affect 924S feel
Brakes	8.8	9.0	9.3	9.5	924S tire limited; Turbo's are outstanding
Ride	7.5	8.3	8.0	8.0	924S more compliant, softer
Handling	8.0	8.3	8.0	8.0	Tires make 944 surprise winner
Body structure	8.8	9.3	9.3	9.3	One tester felt 924S resonated a bit
Average	8.4	8.6	8.7	8.8	
Comfort/Controls:					
Driving position	8.5	8.5	8.5	8.5	Most favored new cars, one chose 924S
Controls ¹	7.5	8.8	8.8	8.8	Redesign and non-VW controls preferred
Instruments ¹	7.0	8.8	8.8	8.8	New instruments much better
Outward vision ¹	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.3	Poor rear view when parking
Quietness	7.3	7.8	8.0	8.3	944S and Turbo great cruisers
Heat/vent/air cond ¹	6.0	8.5	8.5	8.5	924S inadequate; 944 series excellent
Ingress/egress ¹	7.5	7.8	7.8	7.8	Parking brake gets in way
Seats ¹	7.5	7.8	7.8	7.8	Some prefer old design, some new
Luggage & loading ¹	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	Large area, but no height
Average	7.3	8.1	8.1	8.1	
Design/styling:					
Exterior styling	7.0	8.0	8.0	8.8	924S looks dated; Turbo best liked
Exterior finish	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3	Excellent paint; large body gaps
Interior styling	6.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	New look universally preferred
Interior finish	7.5	8.5	8.5	8.5	Good fits, detail work on 944 series
Average	7.2	8.2	8.2	8.4	
Overall Average	7.7	8.3	8.3	8.4	
Staff Preference:					
Price-independent	8	8	8	16	
Price-dependent	15	9	6	10	

Four staff members; 1st choice, 4 points; through 4th, 1 point.

¹Ties following from identical characteristics.