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Pendulum Porsche

After a dozen years of 911, Porsche swung hard in the opposite direction with the 928. We drive the ultimate iteration of the legendary grand tourer, the 928 GTS

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KOCH





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Is there solace to be found in the notion that 356 enthusiasts grumped about the 911 when it, too, was new?

We are by now familiar with the outcry of the faithful every time Porsche tries to do something that isn't in lock-step with the rank-and-file's desires. The 914 was dismissed as a warmed-up VW, despite its having exorcised some of the 911's ruder handling habits. The 924 used a water-cooled Audi-based engine—in the nose. The Cayenne? An SUV, for heaven's sake. And the Panamera was the four-door that had been rumored and scuttled for

decades. All were topics of derision. And yet all sold well enough.

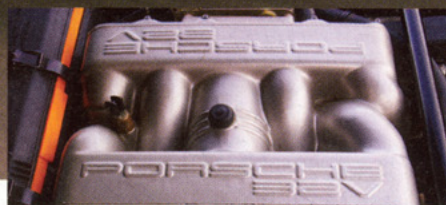
And then there was the 928.

Despite having no parts cribbed from Audis or VWs to cast aspersions on its parentage, the 928 instantly became Public Enemy Number One. The 928 was a hedge against the future, conceived in a time, following the first OPEC crisis, when it was not at all clear that sports cars (including the 911) would have any sort of future.

Perhaps its greatest crime? The 928 was an easy drive—outstanding, but not challenging. Anyone could access near-

Porsche-Turbo-levels of performance without the Turbo's scary reputation of combining instant-on boost and tricky on-the-limit handling. The Turbo rewarded the knowledgeable, and could catch out the unwary, the clueless, or the neophyte with little regard. Your grandma could drive a 928. As L. J. K. Setright opined in *Car and Driver*, "It is better for Porsche to perform a *volte-face* in the showroom than for a customer to do one on the road."

The 928 was as opposite to the 911 as the company could conceive, and still have a sporting 2+2 coupe: eight water-



cooled, linerless cylinders arranged in a 90-degree V in the front of the car, versus an air-cooled flat-six astern; efforts to stay as close to a 50/50 weight bias as possible (transaxle, rear-mounted battery), versus hanging the engine's weight out over the tail; a relatively chunky curb weight (3,300 pounds) despite an aluminum-intensive diet that included engine and pieces of skin, versus the all-steel structure of the older car; fat tires (Pirelli P7s, initially) in an era when 911 skins were still pretty thin; an interior full of psychedelic Pascha fabrics rather than the dour monochrome

look. The narrow, tall 911 driving position gave way for a wider, lower cabin and driving position. The Weissach axle, a passive rear-steering suspension that appeared a full decade before the late '80s onslaught of four-wheel-steer production machines (and which some contend may not have worked as well as initially intended). The bumpers integrated so seamlessly into the body that it appeared to have no bumpers at all. Flip-up headlamps—but pointed at the sky, rather than tucked into the front fascia. An automatic transmission, a *no-cost option*. And a hatchback—like a VW

Golf, or perhaps a mere 924? Any one of these items would have been a bold choice on what was a \$25,000 car in 1977; all of them on a single car was an eye-opener. But on a car that was meant to replace the beloved and eternal 911? Unacceptable.

Porsche kicked the 928 upmarket, giving it the soul of a GT rather than the pure sports-car breeding of the 911. By the time it came out in 1977, talk of 911 replacement had quieted considerably—a decision on the elder model was half a decade off, at least. For now, the 928 was something for 911 owners to aspire



“It is a true GT cruiser; the V-8 has great torque, which makes driving effortless, the handling is great and the looks are timeless.”



Gauge binnacle tilts with the adjustable steering column, so you're guaranteed a clear view.



Door panels once used the same wild cloth as the seats, but the GTS's is tone-on-tone.



Window, rear wiper and sunroof switches are console-mounted, between armrest and shifter.

to. Magazines worldwide raved about the 928's solidity, its pace, its comfort, its control, its sheer excellence at being a GT. Yeah, it was a bit big for the twisty B-road bits, but really, it wasn't that sort of car: It was for the executive who needed to get from Monaco to Milano by lunchtime, or from Leipzig to Stuttgart for a business meeting, and didn't want to fiddle with the inconvenience of commercial airlines, the cost of a private jet, or the musty smell of a train car. It was impressive enough that it warranted election as European Car of the Year for 1978.

It didn't matter. The 928's sales never topped half of a given year's 911 numbers (in later years it was a 1:4 ratio), and Porsche was stuck holding the bag. What to do? The 928 turned slowly toward outright performance, both substantive and visual, working to snap the 928 to the company's more overtly sporting image. Five whole liters of displacement, as was intended in the beginning. Single overhead cams became dual overhead cams. The number of intake and exhaust valves doubled. Spoilers front and rear, despite the old assertions from Zuffenhausen that they were unnecessary. New endcaps—not so much because the 928 needed a facelift,

but because the molds for the originals had worn out. Suspension that was gradually, incrementally, lowered and stiffened. Wild fabrics made way for leather. Power and top speed (and weight—over time, the 928 added about 10 percent to what was perceived by some to be already-excessive heft) grew; the 928, what was arguably once the world's greatest GT car, moved away from its original GT brief and became more... well, just *more*.

The 928 GTS (replacing both the S4 and GT models) was the ultimate iteration of the species. It launched in the fall of 1991 in Europe and in mid-1992 as a 1993 model in the States. (There were no '92 928s officially imported here, only "early" and "late" 1993s.) The big news with the GTS was the engine: The all-aluminum 32-valver was stroked from 5.0 to 5.4 liters, unleashing 345 horses and, more importantly, a 12-percent bump in torque, to 369-lbs.ft. The longer stroke necessitated a new crankshaft, one with eight counterweights instead of the previous four, and the previous cast-alloy connecting rods were replaced by steel pieces. The variable-runner intake was fine-tuned for a broader torque spread.

Other changes were equally incremen-

tal. Front brakes, 12.7-inch vented rotors, were cribbed from a contemporary 911 Turbo. (So were the 17-inch Cup I wheels.) The rear wheel arches were subtly flared, on each side, and those 9-inch-wide rear wheels were given one-inch spacers to fill the gap. The suspension was gently tweaked to make the most of these rolling-stock changes. A reflective strip connected the taillamps, and the rear wing was painted body color rather than in as-molded black rubber.

And so we come to our photo example: Rich Andrade's early-'93 928 GTS, which he purchased new in Atlanta, Georgia, before having it delivered to the local dealer near his Mesa, Arizona, home. Rich is a serial 928 owner, having owned a variety of '80s models, both new and used, over time. Painted Amazon Green (which has hints of deep blue in direct light, and which looks nigh on black out of it), it has few options: the dark rootwood selector lever (a hand-carved shift knob that ran \$457), sport shocks, "supple leather seats" with added lumbar support for the driver, and floor mats. Also, the 928GTS callout that should appear between the taillamps was deleted; in its place, Rich has put a subtle decal outlining the shape

of the Nordschleife, a track he's pleased to have driven on two separate occasions (though not, he confesses, in a Porsche). The Mercedes-sourced four-speed automatic transmission, we were shocked to discover, did not feature overdrive (top gear is 1:1) but, with a long-legged 2.54:1 rear, overdrive matters little. (Previous 928s had final-drive ratios as low as 2.20:1.) Also, Rich has added a set of Euro-spec Hella H4 lights to cut through the murky blackness of the nighttime desert.

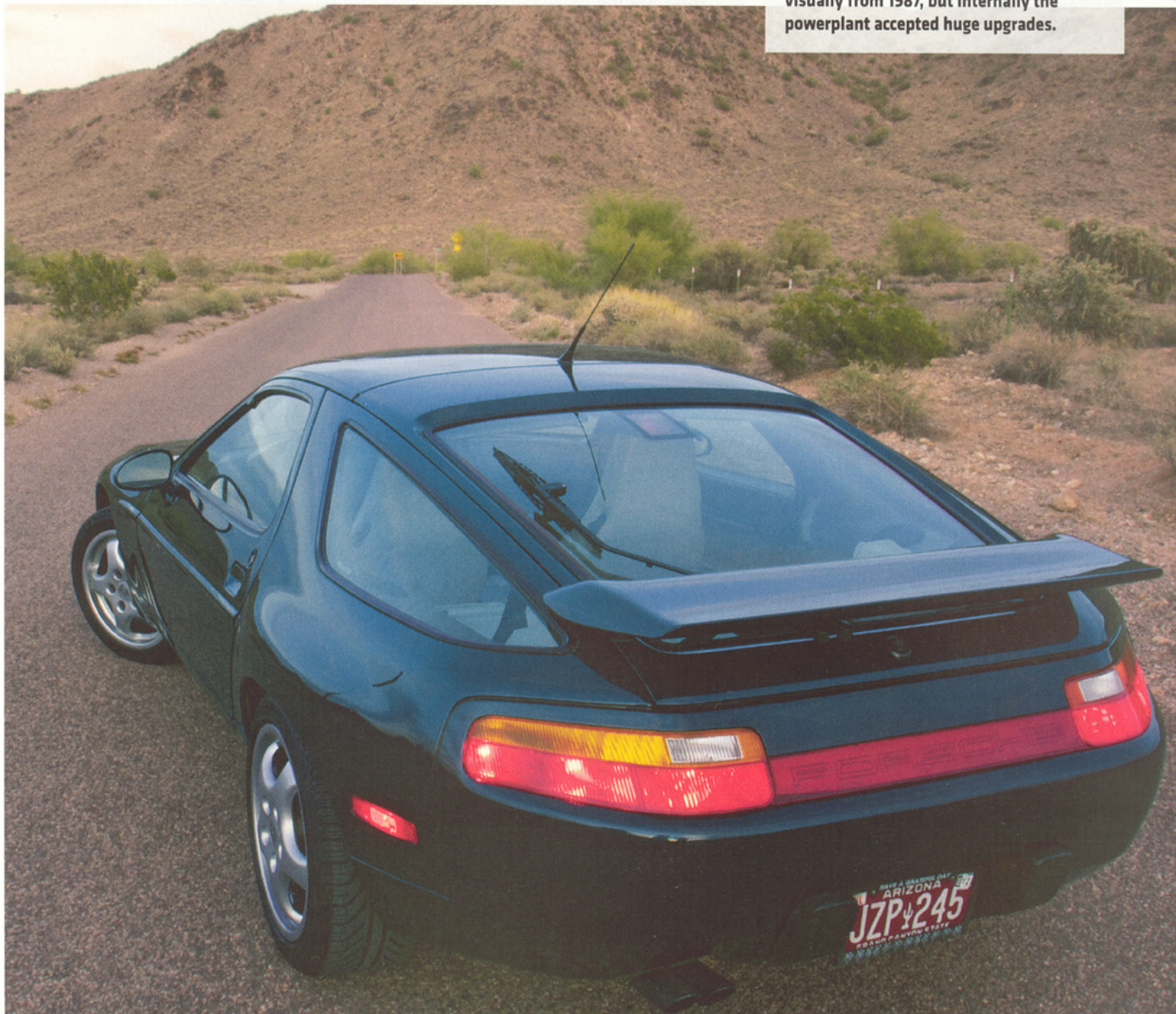
At barely 50 inches off the ground, the excitement of sampling a legend collides with the reality of stepping inside. Will I fit? The doors don't quite wrap into the roof, but we have to duck less here than while getting into our Dodge Caravan photo vehicle. Shoulder and leg room is ample, but the tall of torso will wish for one of the rare non-sunroof models. Even so, you feel

like you're practically reclining, compared to the upright feel of an early 911. The seat, even with the extra lumbar support, allows easy ingress but still touches upon all the right areas, and the adjustability of the pedals and the wheel/instrument cluster means you can see and reach everything.

Get on it, and you realize why the 10-pounds-per-horsepower figure is so magical. Off-idle torque is magnificent, anything from idle on up is usable, and the transmission won't shift until redline or you let up on the throttle, whichever comes first. We see why the transmission is keen to start you off in second; it feels like first would in any other car. Whatever the ratios lack in terms of gear multiplication, the engine's flexibility more than compensates for; the variable intake lets the 928 operate like two four-cylinder engines below 4,000 RPM, and a single, blustery great V-8 above



The 928's engine bay didn't change much visually from 1987, but internally the powerplant accepted huge upgrades.





Pop-up headlamp (with Hella H4 illumination) is a signature feature.

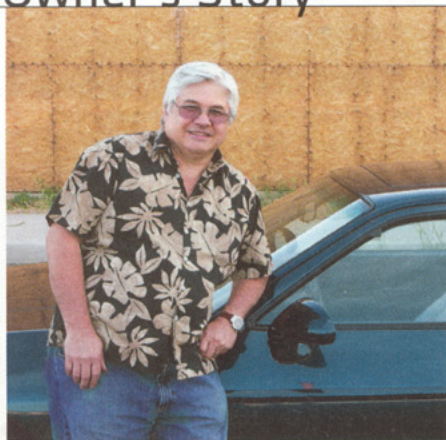


Stock tires were Bridgestone Expedias, but the 17-inch Cup wheels on our feature car rode on Michelin Pilots.



The rear wheel openings were blistered an inch on either side for the GTS models.

1993 Porsche 928 GTS Owner's Story



I purchased my first Porsche 928, a 1984 model, in 1988 from a friend who purchased it new. I'm grateful for the introduction! At the time I bought this one, it was one of only 15 GTS models in the country, and this one had the color and options I preferred.

It is a true GT cruiser; the V-8 has great torque, which makes driving effortless, the handling is great and the looks are timeless. Many purists feel that a Porsche should have a manual transmission, but the automatic is a fantastic match for the power and torque of the V-8.

For anyone looking to buy one today, I suggest buying the cleanest and best-maintained example they can find within their budget. So few were made, parts availability can be an issue for body and interior parts. A pre-purchase inspection by a mechanic who knows 928s specifically is very important.

It's not just a car, it's a lifestyle. It never fails to turn heads or take compliments from onlookers and fellow drivers. The 928 owner, service and parts community is a caring and supporting group; I've made friends from all over the world based upon my choice of car and participation in group activities.

—Rich Andrade

it. Exhaust roar and the chatter of 32 valves drown out wind noise.

Thirty-five hundred pounds sounded so outrageous 15 or 20 years ago; today, a new 911 Carrera Cabriolet weighs as much. And you don't feel the pounds: The engine does not feel constrained in any way, and the handling (in our limited on-the-road experience) is unfussed. Only the low-speed ride feels a little on the busy side, and that could be as much to do with the low-profile rubber as with the suspension.

What you do feel is solidity. Your ears nearly pop when you shut the door. The steering, particularly at low speeds, makes you wonder whether it really is power-assisted. The ride is rumbly, particularly over the lousy pavement near our photo location, but you never feel as if you'd be caught out. And on the trot, you feel as if the machine around you were carved from a solid ingot; there isn't a trace of flex or give to be found in the structure.

And the brakes! Vented four-wheel discs, with anti-lock control, of course, but they're everything brakes should be: astounding grip from first to last, absolutely fade-free, with an easily modulated pedal. Brakes this strong from speed usually take a while to adjust to around town, lest you strain against your belts at the first tap of the pedal, but these feel right at any velocity.

The lack of drama is surprising; it's not boring, but at legal speeds, the calm is slightly eerie. The 928 takes everything in its stride, does what you need and ask, and does it with such ease that you don't feel it working hard. The truth is this: In the States, this car's performance envelope is so distant that driving it at legal speeds is a dawdle. To get a sense of the 928's purpose, we'd need to travel at triple-digit speeds, something that isn't going to go unaccounted for on Arizona's smooth, wide, relatively untrafficked, if heavily patrolled, highways. Our drive was barely a warm-up.

The 928's story ends with the GTS. The more Porsche tried to transcend the 928's GT-car origins, the more sales sank. Just

190 928 GTS models came to the U.S. in the 18-month 1993 model year, and just 2,887 were built for worldwide distribution from 1992-'95. (Surely the strong deutschmark and the lackluster dollar allowing the base price to slip north of \$80,000 didn't help matters.) By the end of 1995, the 928 was dead. Fewer than 61,000 were built, ever; 18 years sounds like a good run, until you realize that the 911 has been around since the mid-1960s. And despite their rarity, you can still find 345-horse 928GTS models for the cost of a new Camry.

Is the 928 GTS the pure GT car that it was at the 928's birth? It is not. It is, however, a loud and clear message: The purists can go hang. 🌐

What to Pay

1993 Porsche 928 GTS	
Low	\$22,000
Average	\$24,000
High	\$27,000

Club Scene

928 Owners Club

Attn: James Morrison,
membership chair
2900 Juneau Drive
Cedar Park, Texas 78613
www.928oc.org
Dues: \$29.28/year
Membership: 800-plus

Porsche Club of America

P.O. Box 1347
Springfield, Virginia 22150-0347
703-321-2111
Fax: 703-321-2110
www.pca.org
Dues: \$42/year
Membership: 100,000

Pros & Cons

Pros

- Performs all tasks with casual ease
- Bank-vault solidity
- Strangely affordable for buyers

Cons

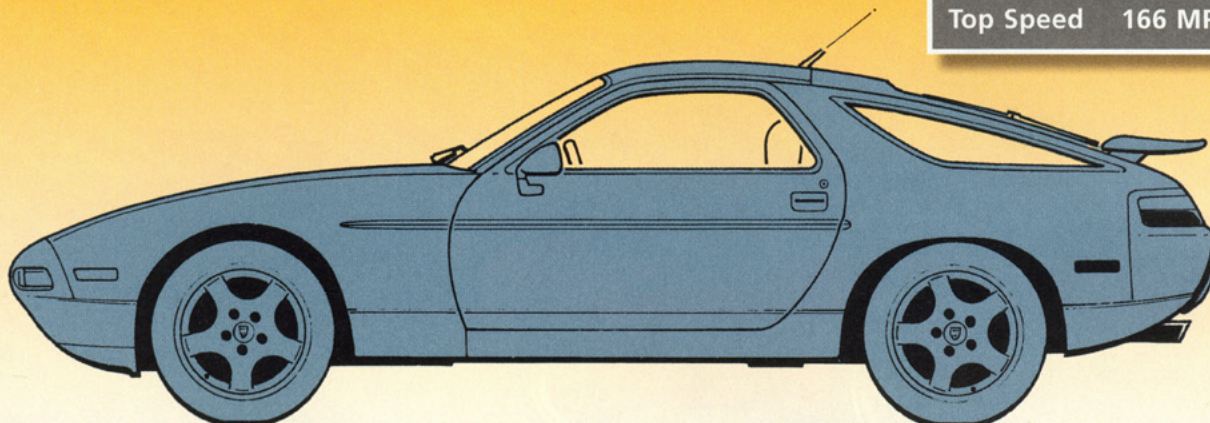
- Finding a road to use its potential
- Sunroof eats up headroom
- Strangely low-valued for sellers

PORSCHE

1993 928 GTS

PERFORMANCE

0-60 MPH	5.3 sec.
1/4 Mile	13.8 sec.
Top Speed	166 MPH



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE

Type..... DOHC V-8, aluminum block and heads
 Displacement..... 5,397cc (335-cu.in.)
 Bore x stroke..... 100.0 x 85.9mm
 Compression ratio..... 10.4:1
 Horsepower @ RPM..... 345 @ 5,700
 Torque @ RPM..... 369-lbs.ft. @ 4,250
 Main bearings..... 5
 Fuel system..... Bosch LH-Jetronic engine control with port fuel injection
 Ignition system..... 12-volt
 Lubrication system..... Gear-driven, internal pressure
 Electrical system..... 12 volts
 Exhaust system..... Dual with catalytic converters

TRANSAXLE

Type..... Mercedes A28.18 four-speed automatic
 Ratios: 1st..... 3.87:1
 2nd..... 2.25:1
 3rd..... 1.44:1
 4th..... 1.00:1
 Reverse..... 5.14:1

DIFFERENTIAL

Type..... Porsche PSD electronic locking axle
 Final drive ratio..... 2.54:1

STEERING

Type..... Power-assisted rack-and-pinion
 Turns, lock-to-lock..... 3.1
 Turning circle..... 38.4 feet

BRAKES

Type..... Hydraulic four-wheel disc with electronic anti-lock
 Front..... 12.7 inches
 Rear..... 11.73 inches

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction..... Steel unit-body
 Body style..... Two-door coupe
 Layout..... Front-engine, rear-wheel drive

SUSPENSION

Front..... Independent; unequal-length control arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar
 Rear..... Independent; unequal-length control arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar

WHEELS & TIRES

Wheels..... Aluminum Porsche C2 Turbo
 Front/rear..... 17x7.5 (front) / 17x9 (rear)
 Tires..... Bridgestone Expedia S-01
 Front/rear..... 225/50ZR17/255/40ZR17

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

Wheelbase..... 98.4 inches
 Overall length..... 178.1 inches
 Overall width..... 74.4 inches
 Overall height..... 50.5 inches
 Front track..... 61 inches
 Rear track..... 63.6 inches
 Curb weight..... 3,708 pounds

CAPACITIES

Crankcase..... 8 quarts
 Cooling system..... 18 quarts
 Fuel tank..... 22.7 gallons
 Transaxle..... 17.5 quarts (including torque converter)

CALCULATED DATA

Hp per liter..... 63.88
 Weight per hp..... 10.74 pounds
 Weight per cu.in..... 11.06 pounds

PERFORMANCE

0-60 MPH..... 5.3 seconds
 1/4 mile ET..... 13.8 seconds @ 102 MPH
 Top speed..... 166 MPH
 Source: Car and Driver, November 1992

PRICE

Base Price..... \$82,260