




The new mid-engine roadster is fun but its leisurely performance and high price make it less than a bargain

 **HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF.** Of late the prices of Porsches have gone right out of sight, thanks to an inflating German economy and the upward revaluation of the Deutschmark—the cheapest 911, the T, now lists for \$6530 and Porsche dealers, now without the cheaper 912, newly divorced from VW franchises and awaiting their bread-and-butter Audi sedans, were languishing with stocks of 911s ranging up to over \$9000. When Porsches first appeared in the U.S. in the early 1950s they seemed incredibly high-priced—imagine, a 40-bhp coupe for \$4400! Then, when the Speedster appeared in 1958—a simplified car as compared to previous models, at a lower price—the Porsche became available to far more people. Now we have the new 914, the result of a joint effort of Porsche and Volkswagen, carrying the name Porsche and listing for only \$3695. In that light the price seems quite right. But in terms of what the 914 actually does for its driver and passenger, compared to other roadsters available today in the same price range, the price makes our little 85-bhp 914 a questionable dollar value.

The 914's styling has come in for a lot of criticism. We understand that it was the work of a long-time Porsche designer and not that of Ferry Porsche III, who designed the graceful 911 and later the Targa derivation of it. Some of us had difficulty accepting the silhouette view of the 914, but

that's something we may be able to get used to: when the engine is located ahead of the rear wheels—as it is going to be in an increasing number of sports cars—there is not only an unfamiliar relation between the center section and the rear overhang but a difficult problem in getting adequate rear vision combined with decent esthetics. The “basket handle” roof section of the 914 does indeed look strange, but to make the car more esthetically palatable (i.e., more like the beautiful mid-engine cars such as the De Tomaso Mangusta) would have meant accepting decreased rear vision or an exceedingly expensive expanse of glass. The truncated roof with its simple flat pane of glass provides good rear vision and, all things considered, is a reasonable solution to the problem. Detailing of the body—especially the bumpers and the front lighting arrangement—are much less satisfactory, in our opinion.

But what's it like to drive this first example of mid-engines for the masses? For one thing, it's noisy but not as noisy as we thought it might be. The air-cooled, flat-4 engine, which comes directly from VW's largest sedan (the 411LE) sounds just like what it is—a VW—and generates about the same level of noise as one hears in a Beetle. Blessed with VW-Bosch electronic fuel injection, it starts well and runs smoothly hot or cold. Its 5600-rpm redline is high for a VW

engine but its 85 bhp from 1.7 liters is typical for an engine design that apparently doesn't lend itself to high specific output with tractability; a lot of shifting is required to get any performance out of it and, in the VW tradition, top gear is a long-legged ratio that allows highway cruising with practically no engine noise.

A 5-speed gearbox, though, seems a bit pretentious in a car with such modest performance and a low-speed engine. The shift linkage is vague and the throws long—getting into 1st gear (over to the left and back) brings interference between a tall driver's legs and the shift lever and is an uncertain operation anyway. Other shifts—down and up—can be made quickly once you have the hang of it; the Porsche synchromesh is flawless and the pedals, though offset to the right, are positioned so that heel-and-toe downshifts are practical. Both 4th and 5th gears seem like top gears; 5th is usable from about 50 mph up.

Around town and on winding roads, then, the 914's performance can be characterized as rather busy, noisy and torqueless; on the highway, quiet and relaxed. Balancing the marginal performance is exceptional fuel economy: we got 25.5 mpg, which with the 16.4-gallon tank up front means a cruising range of over 400 miles!

One thing we expect from a small, light 2-seater—especially one with its engine behind the passengers—is maneuverability. The 914 has that; though its turning circle isn't fantastically small, it has light, quick steering (not, however, remarkably light considering the low weight on the front wheels) and the sort of flat cornering that lets a driver nip and tuck through traffic with confidence. On the open road the 914 has a straight-line stability which, combined with the precision of rack-and-pinion steering, makes long-distance travel quite untiring even though wind and road noise are in the "moderate" rather than the "silent" category. This is in contrast to some large, ghostly quiet cars we've driven lately that tire the driver not by noise or a hard ride but by imprecise steering and suspension that make it a chore just to keep the car aimed down the road and in one lane. This kind of straight-line handling is something that can't be described with numbers and is one of those intangibles that makes fast driving in a Porsche so natural. It needs mentioning, too, that the 914 is noticeably more stable in a crosswind than any roadgoing Porsche to date.

The engine location of itself doesn't result in great absolute cornering power for the 914—at least not yet. Our test car, which had been fitted with 165-15 tires on 5½-in.-wide wheels (vs the standard 155-15 on 4½ rims) by the west coast distributor, still managed only 0.723g lateral accelera-



STROTHER MACMINN PHOTOS

tion on the 100-ft constant radius, using the recommended tire pressures of 23 psi front/26 psi rear. Raising the pressures to 26/29, the factory setting for "fast" driving, we got 0.767g. By comparison the front-engine Datsun 240Z on its standard wheels and tires and "soft" pressure settings did 0.728g on the same 100-ft radius. An experienced racing driver we know who has driven the 914 extensively feels that with redistribution of roll resistance and other minor suspension changes the 914 will do much better—and that the racing modifications he develops will be incorporated in later production cars.

Though the 914's steady-state cornering capability is disappointing, its transient characteristics—the way it responds when you first steer it into a turn or change the throttle opening in the middle of a turn—are excellent. Initial response to a steering input is utterly without delay, a feature we expect with a central engine; body roll is so slight as to go unnoticed. And what happens when the driver lifts his foot from the throttle in a hard corner—this is the trickiest thing about rear-heavy cars—is simply a mild tuck-in of the front or, at the extreme, a smooth breakaway of the rear. Even if the



PORSCHE 914

driver does something stupid (like stabbing the brakes) after finding himself in a corner going too fast the 914 does nothing violent and control can be recovered easily.

The lack of body roll in cornering—there is no anti-roll bar front or rear—undoubtedly is due to relatively stiff springs, because the 914's ride is definitely on the firm side. Its body structure is rigid and able to take the pounding of rough roads, though our early production car had a few detail rattles and squeaks; suspension travel is limited to the extent that one can bottom the front or rear suspension over dips without wildly enthusiastic driving. On paved highways there are some unpleasant ride motions that need tuning out, mainly a vibration that feels like tire unbalance but which comes and goes according to road surface. Some of the old rear-engine pitch over gentle undulations, which Porsche, VW and Corvair owners know well, remains with the mid-engine but not much.

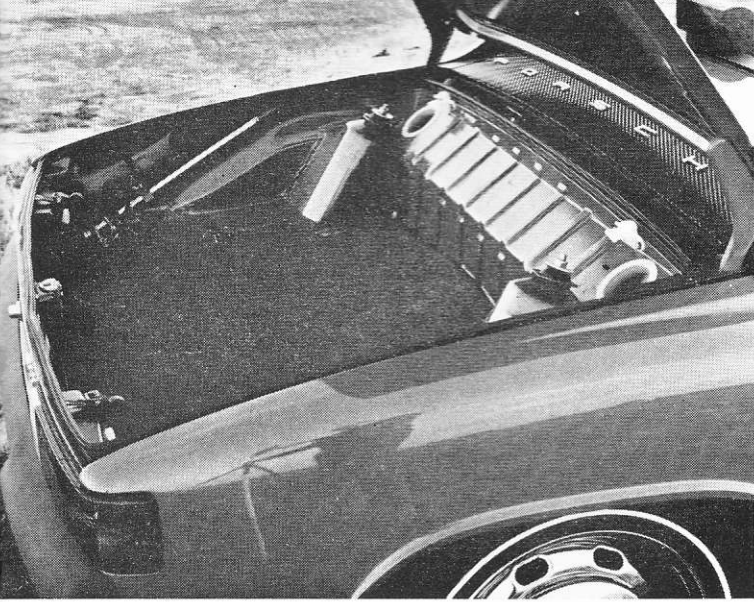
Wind noise with the top in place, as we mentioned, is moderate; somewhere between that of a luxury sedan and an old fashioned roadster. For a car with a removable top we think it's better than acceptable.

On the 4-cylinder 914 the brakes are also taken directly from the VW 411 series; they're solid discs all around with no vacuum assistance. Pedal efforts are high: it takes 40 lb to achieve a $\frac{1}{2}$ -g deceleration rate, which isn't bad, but higher deceleration rates take much harder pushes and a girl might find herself unable to get maximum deceleration in a panic stop. If one can muster the strength for it the 914's panic-stop behavior is very good—27 ft/sec/sec (0.84g) with good straight-line stability in spite of wheel lockup. Fade resistance is so-so, as the Comparison Data panel shows, and we really expected the 914 to do better on this test. A pull-up handbrake at the driver's left holds the car easily on our 30% test hill and has the clever feature of a handle that can be folded down out of the way for getting out of and back into the car; it was sometimes difficult, though, to get the handbrake warning light to go off when releasing it.

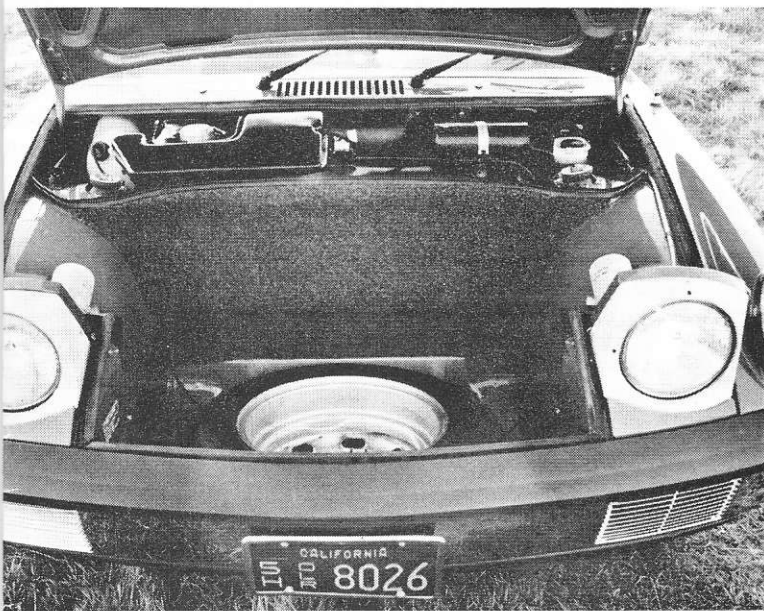
Porsches are always spacious for their two principal occupants and the 914 is no exception; there is legroom and elbow room in abundance. The seats are plain but good; not particularly buckety, but the soft side padding gives a little side support and besides, who drives without seat belts these days? Speaking of seat belts, Porsche's are less than ideal; lap and shoulder sections are adjustable separately for length and the excess belt is nicely taken care of but the inboard part with the female buckle is not adjustable for length and thus the buckle position doesn't suit everybody's anatomy. Head restraints are built into the seats and aren't adjustable, but they're closer to the driver's head than many we have encountered. The right seat is also fixed, a movable footrest accommodating legs of varying lengths.

Passengers sit so low in the 914 (it's the lowest Porsche road car—4 in. lower than a 911) that headlights of following cars are often annoying; thankfully there's an anti-glare mirror. Vision to the rear is the best of any mid-engine car (except full roadsters) we've driven—the blind spot made by the basket handle is so far forward that it can't obstruct anything that needs seeing. The view forward is also good, but fixed quarter panes mean a vertical post in the door and the headlights are decidedly ugly to look over when they're in the up position.

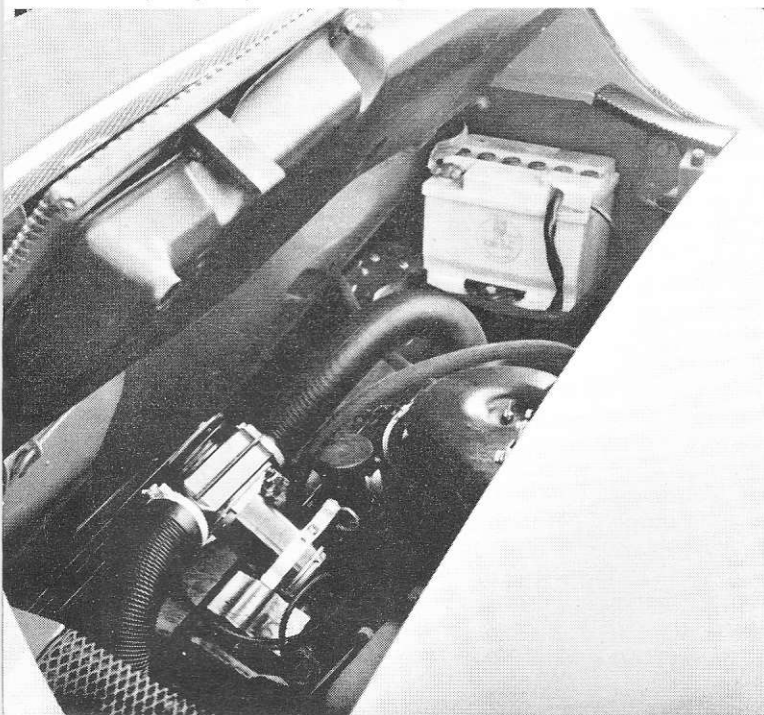
Instrumentation is minimal, to put it mildly. There's a big 911-type tachometer and a small ditto speedometer, but other than these there is only a fuel gauge and idiot lights. Finish throughout is austere but well fitted and likely durable—



Four clamps for removable top can be seen at edges of rear trunk, above. Spare tire lives under removable floor up front, below; note fuel-tank evaporation control also.



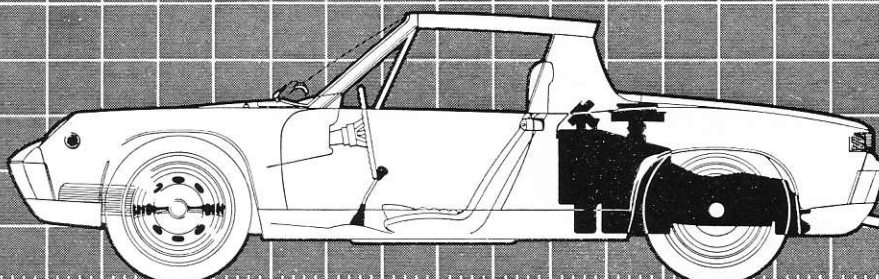
Yes, Virginia, there is an engine down there somewhere.





ROAD TEST Porsche 914

SCALE: 10" DIVISIONS



PRICE

List price, east coast.....\$3595
List price, west coast.....\$3695
Price as tested, west coast...\$4047
Price as tested includes minimum local transportation (\$24), appearance group (\$200), AM/FM radio (\$98 & instal.), 15 x 5½ chrome wheels & 165-15 tires (\$30, available from Porsche-Audi Pacific).

IMPORTER

Porsche-Audi Div., VW of America
600 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632

ENGINE

Type.....flat 4, ohv
Bore x stroke, mm.....90.0 x 66.0
Equivalent in.....3.24 x 2.59
Displacement, cc/cu in.1679/102.4
Compression ratio.....8.2:1
Bhp @ rpm.....85 @ 4900
Equivalent mph.....112
Torque @ rpm.....103 @ 2800
Equivalent mph.....63
Fuel injection.....Bosch electronic
Type fuel required.....regular
Emission control.....fuel injection

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission.....5-speed manual
Gear ratios: 5th (0.708).....3.14:1
4th (0.927).....4.10:1
3rd (1.260).....5.58:1
2nd (1.887).....8.32:1
1st (3.090).....13.67:1
Final drive ratio.....4.43:1

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout.....midship engine, rear drive
Body/frame.....unit steel
Brake type: disc; 11.0-in. dia front, 11.1-in. rear
Swept area, sq in.....470
Wheels.....steel disc 15 x 5½ J
Tires.....Semperit VTT 165SR-15
Steering type.....rack & pinion
Overall ratio.....17.8:1
Turns, lock-to-lock.....2.5
Turning circle, ft.....36.1
Front suspension: lower A-arms, MacPherson struts, torsion bars, tube shocks.
Rear suspension: semi-trailing arms, coil springs, tube shocks.

ACCOMMODATION

Seating capacity, persons.....2
Seat width.....2 x 20.5
Head room.....38.5
Seat back adjustment, degrees.....10
Driver comfort rating (scale of 100):
Driver 69 in. tall.....85
Driver 72 in. tall.....65
Driver 75 in. tall.....60

INSTRUMENTATION

Instruments: 120-mph speedometer, 7000-rpm tach, fuel level.
Warning lights: oil pressure, alternator, handbrake, brake system, high beam, directionals, hazard flasher.

MAINTENANCE

Service intervals, mi:
Oil change.....12,000
Filter change.....12,000
Chassis lube.....12,000
Major tuneup.....12,000
Warranty, mo/mi.....24/24,000

GENERAL

Curb weight, lb.....2085
Test weight.....2455
Weight distribution (with driver), front/rear, %.....46/54
Wheelbase, in.....96.4
Track, front/rear.....52.6/54.1
Overall length.....156.9
Width.....65.0
Height.....48.0
Ground clearance.....4.7
Overhang, front/rear.....30.9/29.6
Usable trunk space, cu ft.....9.9
Fuel tank capacity, U.S. gal.....16.4

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/bhp (test weight).....28.9
Mph/1000 rpm (5th gear).....22.4
Engine revs/mi (60 mph).....2680
Engine speed @ 70 mph.....3120
Piston travel, ft/mi.....1160
Cu ft/ton mi.....64.6
R&T wear index.....31
R&T steering index.....0.902
Brake swept area sq in/ton.....383

ROAD TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

Time to distance, sec:
0-100 ft.....4.0
0-250 ft.....6.8
0-500 ft.....10.4
0-750 ft.....13.4
0-1000 ft.....16.2
0-1320 ft (¾ mi).....19.2
Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph.....70
Time to speed, sec:
0-30 mph.....4.5
0-40 mph.....6.8
0-50 mph.....10.0
0-60 mph.....13.9
0-70 mph.....19.1
0-80 mph.....27.3
0-90 mph.....37.8
Passing exposure time, sec:
To pass car going 50 mph.....7.0

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal driving, mpg.....25.5
Cruising range, mi.....418

SPEEDS IN GEARS

5th gear (4850 rpm).....109
4th (5600).....97
3rd (5600).....72
2nd (5600).....48
1st (5600).....28

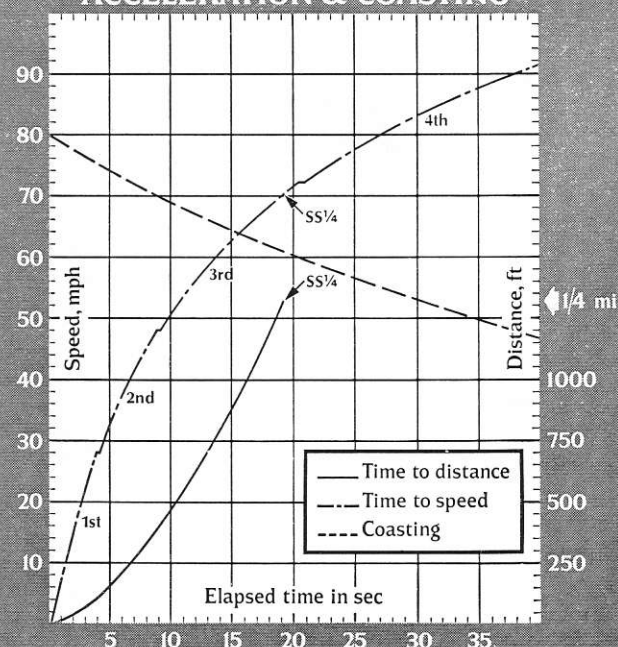
BRAKES

Panic stop from 80 mph:
Max. deceleration rate, % g......84
Stopping distance, ft.....297
Control.....excellent
Fade test: percent increase in pedal effort to maintain 50%-g deceleration rate in 6 stops from 60 mph.....50
Parking: Hold 30% grade?.....yes
Overall brake rating.....very good

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph indicated is actually.....30.0
40 mph.....39.8
60 mph.....59.2
70 mph.....68.3
80 mph.....77.0
100 mph.....94.7
Odometer, 10.0 mi.....9.8

ACCELERATION & COASTING



PORSCHE 914



Chain and hook (not shown) keep footrest from straying.

typically German. An open tray between the seats and a locking glovebox on the right provide a little storage space inside. The radio is so far to the right that the driver has difficulty reaching its tuning knob, and the AM/FM unit in our test car—a comparatively inexpensive one probably made in America—was overly susceptible to interference and very shrill of tone except on its extreme bass setting. Twin speakers are a nice touch, though.

Heating and ventilation controls are from the 911, with a 3-speed booster fan to assist fresh air distribution and a heat control between the seats that also works a booster fan. As with other Porsches there is a hot-oil smell in the interior when the heat control is on and the heat output is impressive. For open-air motoring the fiberglass top comes off easily when four clamps are undone and stores just as easily in the rear trunk, taking little space. And there are no drafts at the back of your neck, thanks to the fixed rear window—although some would prefer the full roadster effect.

In conclusion, the 914 is fun to drive and one that will bring the Porsche name and tradition of good workmanship—not to mention the reliability and inexpensive servicing of a VW engine—to a price class where it hasn't been available for some time. Undoubtedly it has a potential for handling that other sports cars in its class don't have, though that potential is not fully realized yet. But for the same price or less there are some nice 2-seaters that offer better and quieter performance with more luxury, and with handling and braking that aren't that much worse. Which is all a great big disappointment for us, as we thought the 914 was going to revolutionize the field of 2-seater sports cars. Undoubtedly the mid-engine is the coming thing but . . .



COMPARISON DATA

	Porsche 914	Datsun 240Z	Fiat 124 Spider	Triumph TR-6
List price.....	\$3695	\$3526	\$3450	\$3425
Curb weight, lb.....	2085	2355	2090	2360
0-60 mph, sec.....	13.9	8.7	11.9	10.7
Standing ¼-mi.....	19.2	17.1	18.3	17.9
Speed at end.....	70	84.5	76	77
Panic stop from 80 mph, % g.....	84	84	62	78
Fade in 6 stops from 60 mph, %.....	50	10	54	30
R&T wear index.....	31	39	55	52
R&T steering index.....	0.902	1.10	0.937	1.07
Fuel economy, mpg.....	25.5	21.0	24.5	20.7

