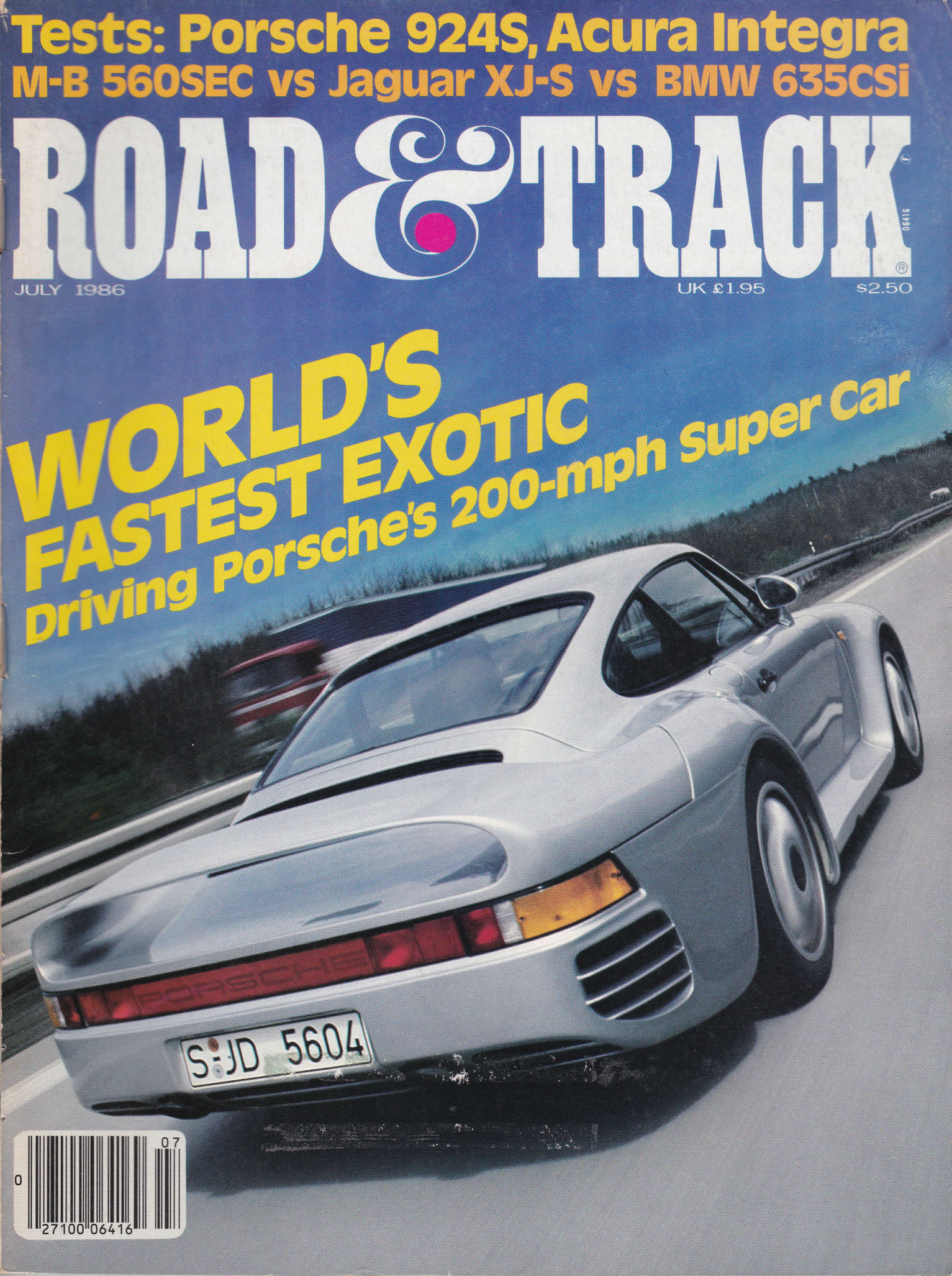
Tests: Porsche 924S, Acura Integra
M-B 560SEC vs Jaguar XJ-S vs BMW 635CSi

ROAD & TRACK

06416

JULY 1986 UK £1.95 $2.50

WORLD'S FASTEST EXOTIC
Driving Porsche's 200-mph super car



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PORSCHE 924S

A step backward is two steps forward

PORSCHE HAS A history of doing things no other car company could or would do, so it's no surprise that the latest accomplishment from Stuttgart is that Porsche has decided to rewrite its own history.

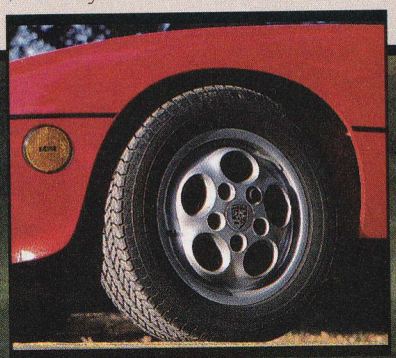
History tells us, among other things, that the Porsche 924 was an inferior Porsche. It was too noisy and didn't have enough power. The early chapters of this history explain that the 924 was originally designed by Porsche for Volkswagen-Audi as a replacement for the 914. As such it used every VW component it could, including the engine, some of the suspension and quite a few interior bits.

This original 924 would have made a terrific Volkswagen, but changes of command at VW resulted in the design being sold back to Porsche even though production went ahead at the Audi factory at Neckarsulm. This was the first front-engine, liquid-cooled Porsche produced, though it was soon followed by the similar-but-larger 928. As a Porsche, the 924 left so much to be desired that

every year or two since the 1976 introduction, the VW parts have been systematically replaced by superior Porsche pieces.

These substitutions improved the original 2.0-liter engine, brought 4-wheel disc brakes, added a 5th gear to the transmission, insulated the worst of the noise and vibration and eventually led to the 924 Turbo and then the 944. It was the 944 that introduced the all-Porsche 2.5-liter, sohc aluminum inline-4 with counterrotating balance shafts. The 944 also brought a revised body with fender flares that looked much more aggressive than the original 924. Porsche continued to improve the 944 with a desperately needed interior redesign and, only this year, new cast aluminum suspension components borrowed from yet another 924 derivative, the 944 Turbo.

Prices, unfortunately, kept pace with the improvements until 944s have become $25,000 to $30,000 sports cars. What have become nearly $20,000 sports/GT cars are the Mazda RX-7 and the Toyota Supra, to name two, and anyone who has driven these ➟



AT A GLANCE	Porsche 924S	Mazda RX-7 GXL	Toyota Supra
Price, base/ as tested	$19,900 $21,287	$16,645 $17,954	$17,990 $18,865
Curb weight, lb	2765	2790	3410
Engine/drive	inline-4/rwd	2-rotor Wankel/ rwd	inline-6/rwd
Transmission	5-sp M	5-sp M	5-sp M
0–60 mph, sec	7.8	8.5	7.0
Standing ¼ mi, sec @ mph	15.8 @ 86.0	16.5 @ 85.0	15.4 @ 91.0
Stopping distance from 60 mph, ft	145	151	147
Lateral acceleration, g	0.80	0.83	0.86
Slalom speed, mph	62.0	62.0	60.6
Fuel economy, mpg	22.0	18.0[1]	18.0

	Pro	Con
924S:	much better 944 engine, good acceleration, excellent handling feel	old 924 dash looks cheap, steering wheel position too low, unsupportive seats
RX-7 GXL: tested 2-86	excellent, tossable handling; responsive engine; a sports car of few compromises	body lacks individuality; average interior materials quality, brakes skittish at limit
Supra: tested 5-86	secure handling with high limits, excellent acceleration, smooth engine, excellent seats	overweight, pricey, rear seats only for children; bland generic styling

[1]Trip fuel economy

PHOTOS BY JOHN LAMM

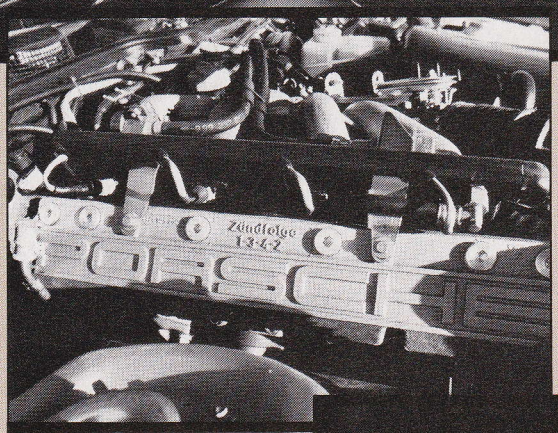
ROAD & TRACK R&T ROAD TEST

Porsche's 944 interior, right, makes the 924's accommodations appear spartan and uncomfortable. Proximity of steering wheel to the driver's seat is the 924's major failing.

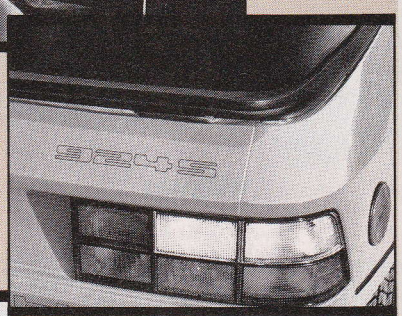
two Japanese cars knows that they are very nearly the Porsche's equal in every possible way.

Time for action, and the latest chapter in our history book. Porsche has brought back the 924, now the 924S, to do battle with the lower-cost sports and GT cars in America. In other markets, the 924 has been selling alongside the 944, so the reintroduction of the lower-cost car to the U.S. isn't all that revolutionary. List price is a strategic $19,900, and this includes air conditioning, electric window lifts and electrically adjustable mirrors.

More importantly, the 924S has the same drivetrain as the 944. Output is 147 bhp at 5800 rpm, torque is 140 lb-ft at 3000 rpm, while engine response, smoothness and noise level are all that you'd expect in a $20,000 sports car. It's not detuned or revised in any way, and as a result the slightly lighter and more aerodynamic 924 is maybe a couple of knots faster than the 944. Porsche claims a 131-mph top speed for the 944 and 134 mph for the 924, and we believe it.

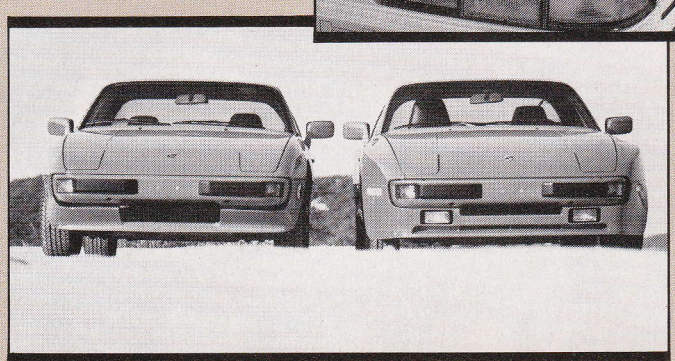


The 924 gets exactly the same 2.5-liter engine as the Porsche 944, but the narrower, lighter body makes the 924 faster.



Porsche also claims that both the 924S and 944 accelerate at the same rate, though our test 924S was a tad quicker than our most recently tested 944, and a little quicker than Porsche says it is. Time for 0–60 was 7.8 seconds, which is about a second quicker than the unbroken-in 944 we tested in comparison with the Mazda RX-7 in February. The quarter-mile time of 15.8 sec at 86.0 mph is 0.8 sec quicker. Testing conditions vary some, and the last 944 was abnormally slow, so we retested a 944 for comparison; it was only a couple of tenths slower to most speeds and distances but it appears that the 924S, in a drag race, is going to be quicker than the 944.

Otherwise the two Porsches perform as much alike as you might assume. The 944 has slightly wider tires, so it has greater lateral acceleration, 0.86 to 0.80g, and the slalom speed is also faster for the wider 944, 62.5 to 62.0 mph, though that's hardly enough to notice. The 944's aluminum A-arms are lighter than the 924S's stamped steel arms for reduced unsprung weight, but the effect is→



negligible. Both cars are as beautiful handling as anything made, with wonderfully responsive and predictable steering, just the right amount of understeer and a touch of oversteer available when letting off the throttle in a corner.

Brakes are typical Porsche: no fade, short stopping distances, excellent pedal feel and fine modulation.

But hold on. There is a rub, literally and figuratively. Our test driver came back from a day at the track where he jumped back and forth from 944 to 924S and reported that the cars are vastly more different than the numbers suggest. Sure, the 924S is a match for the 944 in most performance, he said, but the driver is so much better accommodated in the 944 that there's no comparison. The 944, in its current incarnation, is ideally shaped for all drivers, while the 924S retains the original seating position that interferes with hard driving. The steering wheel is low and it's mounted eccentrically so that the driver's hands hit his legs when turning the wheel even a quarter-turn. The 924S was a challenge to drive through the slalom because of this awkward seating position, while the 944 was easy.

When the rest of us climbed from 924S to 944 and back again, we were all surprised at just what a marvelous improvement the new 944's interior is. Until this interior decoration a couple of years ago, the 924 and 944 interiors looked plain but acceptable. Now the 924's looks decidedly unattractive and uncomfortable. The materials are inferior, the white-on-black gauges look clumsy, the dash has no dash and the proximity of steering wheel to seat simply prohibits some drivers from ever fitting into the 924S.

What a shame. Yet in its own way, it's also admirable. The 924S widens the Porsche range, allowing people to own a Porsche for less money. Nothing wrong with that. How many other car companies are working to lower the cost of their cars? But a less expensive Porsche has to sacrifice something, and it's to Porsche's credit that the performance of the 944, in every facet, was maintained in the lower-cost car. What suffers is the interior.

No doubt this will change in the future. When the 4-valve cylinder head from the 928 finds its way to the 944, then perhaps the 944's interior can find its way into the 924S, preserving the difference in value, while improving both cars.

In the meantime, the decision is yours. Whether the leftover interior is too big a price to pay for the smaller price depends on physique as much as income. At least we now have more Porsches to choose from, and there's not a bad one in the lot.

PRICE

	924S 1986	944 1986
List price, all POE	$19,900	$22,950
Price as tested	$21,287	$29,104

Price for the 924S as tested includes std equip. (air cond, elect. window lifts, elect. adj mirrors), elect. sunroof ($730), AM/FM stereo/cassette ($657)

GENERAL

Curb weight, lb	2765	2900
Test weight	2910	3060
Weight dist (with driver), f/r, %	51/49	49/51
Wheelbase, in.	94.5[1]	
Track, front/rear	55.9/54.8	58.2/57.1
Length	168.9	
Width	66.3	68.3
Height	50.2	
Trunk space, cu ft	10.4 + 7.9	
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal.	17.4	21.1

[1] Single entries indicate identical specifications.

ENGINE

Type	sohc inline-4
Bore x stroke, mm	100.0 x 78.9
Displacement, cc	2479
Compression ratio	9.7:1
Bhp @ rpm, SAE net	147 @ 5800
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft	140 @ 3000
Fuel injection	Bosch LE-Jetronic
Fuel requirement	unleaded, 87 pump oct

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	5-sp manual	5-sp manual
Gear ratios: 5th	(0.83) 3.23:1	(0.73) 2.84:1
4th	(1.07) 4.16:1	(1.07) 4.16:1
3rd	(1.46) 5.68:1	(1.46) 5.68:1
2nd	(2.13) 8.29:1	(2.13) 8.29:1
1st	(3.60) 14.00:1	(3.60) 14.00:1
Final drive ratio	3.89:1	3.89:1

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout	front engine/rear drive
Body/frame	unit steel
Brake system, f/r: (924S & 944) 11.1-in. vented discs/ 11.4-in. vented discs, vacuum assist	
Wheels	alloy, 15 x 6J / alloy, 15 x 7J
Tires	Pirelli P6; 195/65VR-15 / 215/60VR-15
Steering type	rack & pinion, pwr assist
Turns, lock-to-lock	3.6
Suspension, f/r: (924S & 944) MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/semi-trailing arms, torsion bars, tube shocks, anti-roll bar	

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/bhp (test weight)	19.8	20.8
Bph/liter	59.3	
Engine revs @ 60 mph in 5th	2680	2250
R&T steering index	1.22	
Brake swept area, sq in./ton	315	299

ROAD TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

Time to distance, sec:		
0–100 ft	3.1	3.1
0–500 ft	8.5	8.7
0–1320 ft (¼ mi)	15.8	16.1
Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph	86.0	84.5
Time to speed, sec:		
0–30 mph	2.2	2.4
0–60 mph	7.8	8.2
0–80 mph	13.3	14.0
0–100 mph	25.0	26.0

SPEEDS IN GEARS

Maximum rpm	6500	
5th gear (rpm) mph	est (5950) 132[2]	(4650) 123
4th	(6300) 110	112
3rd	(6300) 83	84
2nd	(6300) 56	57
1st	(6300) 33	34

[2] Manufacturer's claim.

FUEL ECONOMY

Normal driving, mpg	22.0	22.1[3]

[3] Trip fuel economy.

BRAKES

Minimum stopping distances, ft:		
From 60 mph	145	145
From 80 mph	245	256
Control in panic stop	excellent	
Pedal effort for 0.5g stop, lb	19	
Fade: percent increase in pedal effort to maintain 0.5g deceleration in 6 stops from 60 mph	nil	
Overall brake rating	very good	

HANDLING

Lateral accel, 100-ft radius, g	0.80	0.86
Speed thru 700-ft slalom, mph	62.0	62.5

INTERIOR NOISE

Idle in neutral, dBA	57	59
Max, 1st gear	74	76
Constant 70 mph	72	72

ACCELERATION