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America's winningest
sports car driver takes on
the ultimate street Porsche

Al Holbert
Porsche 959

010-S*****

MAXIMUM DRIVER MAXIMUM CAR

Sports car ace Al Holbert comes to grips with the ultimate street Porsche

By Leon Mandel

These civilized hills have seen many December mornings as crisp and sunny as this one, but few dawns that have in store such a dramatic surprise.

It is an early winter Monday at Weissach, a place where the shamans of Porsche concoct their magic safe from searching eyes. The ground here is bare, brown and hard, covered only with the sturdy tufts of seasonal growth that shrug off morning frosts and nighttime freezes. The ice of darkness is just now beginning to relinquish its hold over a winding, two-lane road from Tiefenbronn. It is just a country lane, really, filled with twists and surprises, lined here and there with stone fences.

Test track gate guards are the same all over the world. They are the commandos of the Rent-a-Cop corps.

"Remember," I have been cautioned, "you do not see what your eyes show you here." I know the drill.

So, as I stand by the break in the Armco barriers and look across the start/finish strip of test track at Weissach, I neither see the prototype 964 at my elbow nor do I hear the unmuffled hoarse shriek of the vehicle tiny in the distance that shatters the postdawn peace of this swale. It makes its metrono-

mic, rickety way up one side of the opposite bank, turns abruptly on its tracks like a toy in the F.A.O. Schwarz window, marches alongside the fence for 100 feet, and pitches mindlessly downward again to the same beat and sound all morning long.

This maniacal puppet is so hypnotic I fail to notice the car.

Fail to notice the car! How is it possible to overlook a device its creator said is endowed with "... the closest approximation to racing car performance ever seen in a series production car"? To overlook likely the most coveted performance piece in the world. To be so distracted that the meanest, nastiest, sleekest, toughest, angriest, fastest, costliest, rarest automobile in the world sits whitely and serenely in the Swabian sunshine, unseen?

The answer is: I am not a believer.

The orthodoxy of the followers of Weissach demands the most exacting understanding, requiring an absolute dedication. Theirs is an ornate worship. The text of everyday gospel is intricate enough and has always been difficult to follow. Before me now is the centerpiece of that gospel as it is revealed to today's congregation. The litany of the 959 is elaborate. This is how it reads.

The car designated 959 is the sheet metal

realization of the intentions of Professor Helmuth Bott, Porsche head of research and development, and Peter Schutz, former chairman, to use the 911 as the basis for a limited production precursor to the product future of the company.

But it is *not* a 911. Almost none of the stampings, pressings, forgings, castings, parts and pieces, tools or dies of the 911 are anywhere involved in its building. Almost unbelievably, it shares only engine placement and number of cylinders with the 911.

The 959 is, however, clearly that car's spiritual heir. The 959 is the car that keeps the 911 alive in the hearts and minds of Porschephiles and holds the front-engined car heretics at bay in their quest to breach Porsche's philosophical gates. Not only



Auto Motor und Sport photo

does it have a four-wheel drive, unlike the 911, "... the 959 features new axles, new damping and ride-height control systems, a new antilock brake system, a new six-speed gearbox, water-cooled four-valve cylinder heads, a load-dependent limited slip differential on the back axle, electronically controlled front/rear axle torque split ..." and more and more, in the rhapsodic words of Professor Bott.

Oh, yes indeed. This wholly new car surely does bristle with hardware and software enough to preoccupy a war lover for a century of gaming, or more importantly, to induce a sports car fanatic to part with about \$302,700 F.O.B. Warrington, Pa., if he could buy one of the 26 coming to the U.S., which he cannot. It looks disdainfully upon

its inferiors from a perch of technological marvels made up of: a 2.85 liter, four-valve, quadruple overhead cam engine, with water-cooled, three-chambered heads that, with the assistance of twin-intercooled, sequential turbos, makes 450 hp at 6500 rpm. This, in short, is the maximum car.

And now, on this ice-bright morning in December at the wizards' lair in Weis-sach, a white 959 crouches by my side, awaiting only a worthy driver. That is not to be me. An old friend is on his way from the Stuttgart airport. Al Holbert is coming to play. Maximum driver, maximum car. What hath Bott wrought? We are about to find out.

As part of his baggage, Holbert willy-nilly carries the reputation for being a

highly competent driver of wide experience whose great strength lies in his technical proficiency. This was a judgment I shared for many years; the times of Holbert's seasoning during which he drove in the Trans-Am, IMSA and NASCAR. In 1980, when I spent a year with the Can-Am, and in 1981, when I returned for most of the summer, I discovered once again how witless it is to accept stereotypes. Particularly at Riverside in that second year, I saw a raw, determined, tough side of Holbert he almost never gets credit for.

Suddenly, a blue Rent-an-Opel wheels up and out steps our driver, gloriously outfitted in a red, white and black Porsche Motorsport jacket. He wears no hat, his shoes are not Gucci/Simpson/Air Jordan winkle-

pickers, but the same kind of loafers he might put on to work in the office over a weekend. There's a big grin on his face which stretches the already taut skin tight. The Holbert presence has grown so much lately, and his reputation as a taskmaster remains so close to the surface, that any encounter is filled with the same kind and quality of misapprehension as exists about his driving: that he is cool, aloof, not far from being barely civil. So it is forever a surprise at each meeting to rediscover that his manner is utterly relaxed and his voice easy. What's more (I'm not sure how often or how publicly he shows this), Holbert is a man who sees the world's drolleries. Thus his humor, which he uses as a liberal conversational condiment, is wry.

We ease into the car and settle in. Holbert suggests it might be a good idea to fasten my shoulder and lap straps. Out we go, out onto a circuit that's legendary as the test track for Mark Donohue's development there of the brutish 917/30 and on which Niki Lauda set the record in his McLaren-



Al Holbert drove white 959 at Weissach, red car was used for additional photography

TAG Formula One car of 1:04.6. By the time we get to the first turnoff start/finish, a rising then swooping left-hander, Holbert has the 959 going quick enough that I feel the gs. There is an enormous smile on his face. "You're smiling already," I say, surprised to hear myself speaking so quietly. Holbert nods silently, the smile fixed on his face. He is at work, concentrating, feeling,

seeing, absorbing the car's reactions to his movements of the steering wheel, his foot's pressure on the throttle, each shift, each squeeze of the brake.

The first lap is surprisingly fast, the second faster. From then on the speeds rise in astonishing increments. At least it feels that way until the fifth lap or so when we are going as fast as I have ever been on a race-

The Italian Connection

A Turinese industrialist's Grand Prix aspirations inspired 959 design

The Porsche 959 is the far edge of street car cum race car cum technoid's delight. It is Helmut Bott's ultimate achievement. Why should such a man have built such a car?

Two reasons at least are offered for public consideration. Safety and the Cisitalia (say "Cheez-italia").

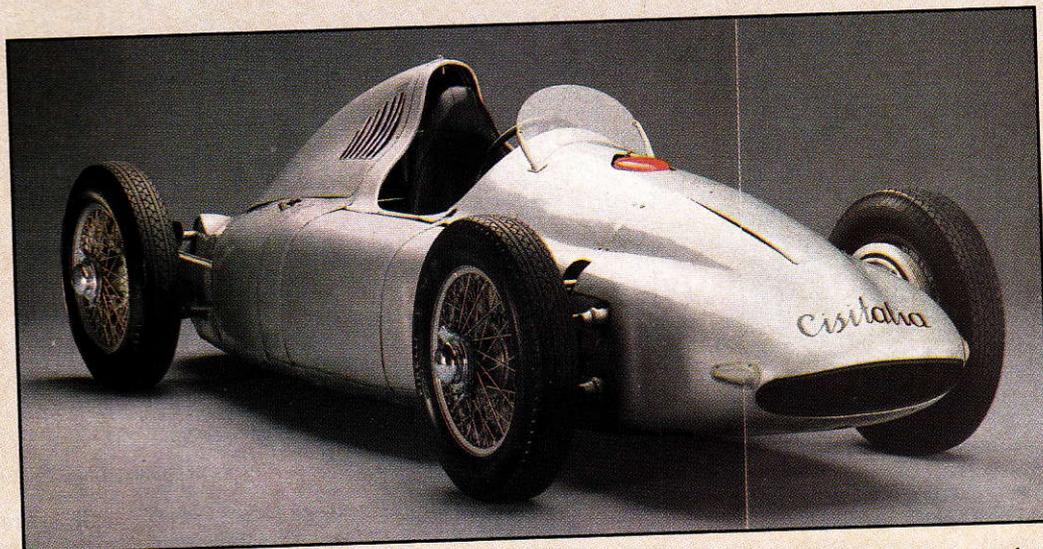
Safety, says Professor Bott, Porsche head of research and development, made it all but necessary for Porsche to engineer the 959 to be the winner of the Performance Excess Award of the decade.

"Unless one experiments with the outer limits of vehicle performance, in respect of speed and lateral acceleration, it is impossible to improve safety at lower speeds," he says.

And was Porsche successful in its elected mission?

"This seems to me to be the closest approximation to racing car performance ever seen in a series production car," Bott asserts.

Jurgen Lewandowski, in his stunning book about the 959, *Porsche 959: Art & Car Edition*, tells us about Bott's fascination with the Cisitalia and that magnifi-



cent creature's influence on the wonder-Porsche. The Cisitalia was to be a Grand Prix car to the 1949 formula, 1.5 liters. It was commissioned by an Italian industrialist named Piero Dusio desirous of building prestige for his new marque by matching the victorious racers from Alfa Romeo, Ferrari and Maserati. Lacking the knowledge within his own, still-growing automobile company, Dusio sought out the Porsche design department which was still located in Gmund, Austria. Ferry Porsche and Karl Rabe were told money was no object.

The two took Dusio at his word. Ignor-

ing current practice, and without a by-your-leave to convention, they created a water-cooled, two-valve flat 12 of 1493 cc with quadruple overhead cams that made about 385 bhp at 10,600 rpm. The engine was in front of the rear axle. Under normal circumstances, its power went to the rear wheels only, but the car had a cockpit control that allowed the driver to engage the front wheels. On-demand four-wheel drive in a 1949 race car!

The Cisitalia weighed 718 kg (1580 lb) and had a potential top speed of 300 kph (186 mph). Just as it was ready to race, Dusio ran out of money. The car

track. I am outside myself observing me observing Holbert. Holbert is reading out the car's behavior; which has by now become an extension of his own. He has not driven the 959 very much, he says, only to follow Professor Bott home one day, a drive Holbert will remember as one that gave him a whole new dimension of respect for the gentle, scholarly, late-50ish genius whose personality the car so vividly expresses. "He scared me trying to keep up," says Holbert later, with surprise still in his voice.

Now, he's talking to me and to the car and to himself and he's using the same word. "Normally, I'm scared to death here," he says, his body parts working as though the car were connected to them. "Those poles?" he nods his head to indicate striped sticks that line this tight, twisting, defiantly cambered blacktop, set down inside banking which drops away on the driver's side at just the moment he is busiest, revealing dramatic views of the nearby valley. "I used to think they were steel. Then I found out they were just plas-

tic. I found that out the hard way."

We are going blindly fast. Holbert is into his rhythm, and it comes to me I am watching no mechanistic, emotionless driver. A technician, certainly, the surgical correctness of his movements is there to detect but *detect* is the operative word because it is covered over by a kind of joyfulness. Holbert's driving this morning in this legendary place in this extraordinary car is, well, it's almost lusty. He is a confident master of his craft, disdaining even a pretense of being unaffected by its pleasures.

In my day, I have ridden with some accomplished drivers. Dan Gurney I remember as playful. When I think of Mark Donohue the word "mischievous" leaps to mind. He was full of surprises, most of them on the edge of lunacy. Peter Revson was, as you'd expect, almost sedate. I never remember driving even a lap at close to race speeds with him during which he was anything but serious. I come close to being tempted by "irrepressible" when I think of Danny Sullivan whose sense of what most

of us would think of as responsibility seems to be placed on hold when he gets in a car. As a result of his Speedway spin, he is a man more credited with luck than with the uncanny talent for car control which is his true strength.

This morning, I am seeing in Holbert not just the immense technical mastery I expected but something well beyond. A great pianist has a genius for fully exploiting his instrument but he has more. His empathy with the music it produces invokes the emotion in that music and so evokes its feelings in us as we listen to him play. Holbert clearly understands the rigorous technical demands of this instrument. Because he is so much the master of what he does, his driving can go beyond the boundaries within which the rest of us live and into what is almost art. Holbert's driving is a sequence of movements filled with shadings and subtleties and nuances; an act that can only be thought of as Performance: The Dance at the Edge.

Ah, the instrument. The 959. The car. It



Uwe Neumann photos

The marvels lying under the sleek skin of the 959 recall the grand leap in technology embodied in the Cisitalia. First the engine: 2.85 liter flat-six, quadruple overhead cams with a four-valve, water-cooled, three-chambered head and twin turbos, generating 450 hp. Power gets to the wheels via a six-speed transmission and the Porsche Control Clutch, a device that uses micro-processors to balance power between front and rear axles in ratios from 20:80 to 50:50 according to four computer programs, each chipped to deal with specific problems of adhesion dependent on the road's composition and condition. Contact with the ground is made through Bridgestone or Dunlop Denloc run-flat tires which share air with hollow magnesium wheels. All four sets are constantly monitored to ensure they reveal their pressure secrets to the driver, a partnership enabled by aural and visual cockpit warning signals. The tire patches are kept in maximum contact with the ground via twin control arms on all wheels which accommodate the car's posture and attitude in any one of the three-position ride heights and three shock absorber settings

went to South America and then came back, eventually, to Europe (Porsche owns it now), but it never saw a *grande epreuve*.

Lewandowski quotes Bott, who marvels at the design creativity of the Cisitalia, as saying the "... 959 is (its) legitimate successor." Adds Bott: "It was so far ahead of its time that if only a little more money had been available, it could have been winning races for years to come. With a mid-engine, a supercharger and an optional four-wheel drive, it was the most technologically advanced car of its day. At the time when it was built, nobody else so

much as dared to try and design such a complex piece of automotive machinery."

When the word went out on Jan. 21, 1983, to 959 project leader Manfred Bantle to create a progenitor to a new line for Porsche, there were echoes of that earlier mandate to the Porsche design department: "... compromises and half-measures were ruled out from the beginning," says Lewandowski. "The designers were concerned with two questions only: What is the best way of doing this, and can we do it even better?"

— L.M.

is quietly, efficiently, remorselessly inhaling the road surface. "Feel the sequential turbos?" Holbert asks, as we accelerate off a corner so purposefully we seem to be shoving the entire world behind us. "Let's see what the brakes do." Down we come straight but brutally from 250 kph. "It tracks so well," says Holbert marvelling. "It is just so consistent around a corner, it just hunkers down."

We have turned so many laps I can't count them anymore. Holbert has become a little pensive; he is quiet for two or three circuits then says softly, "In this car I can appreciate a whole new threshold."

I ask him what the lap record is. He doesn't know but race-driver's mischief, perhaps contracted from his late friend Mark



Holbert likes car's cornering 'consistency'

Donohue, steals into his voice. "Let's find out how close we can get to whatever it is."

If I had thought Holbert was hustling, I see another side to him now; the intent Holbert, the professional at work, the competitor with just a hint of the glow of the fire in his belly. One forty-four flat. Maybe not Formula One time, but Holbert, deeply

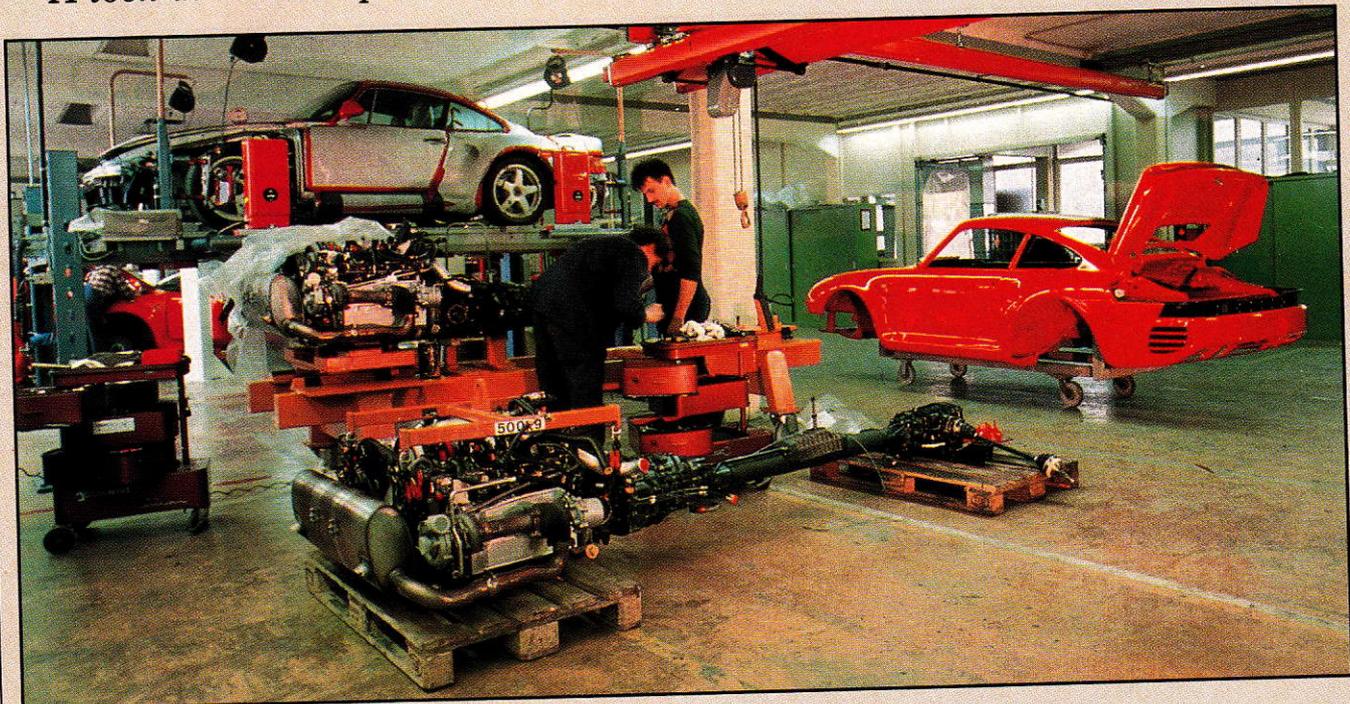
though quietly impressed, says it is the fastest he has ever been in a production car and that the time is not outrageously off Mark Donohue's time in the 917/30.

I am elated. Why? When I climbed into the padded seats of this car, I may have been unconsciously disappointed by its almost sybaritic interior. More room in the footbox, I said to myself thinking this brand of 911 had solved at least one problem I had with its forebear. Good heavens, another elaborate radio, I recall thinking, looking into the middle of the dash. Nothing remarkable here, it seemed to me, but then what was I expecting? In fact not much.

My first surprise has come from Holbert's bravura performance. My second from the

Behind the scenes at the 959 factory

A look at the birthplace of the world's most sophisticated production car



Picture this. A room about the size of a small school assembly hall. Around it, 10 car hoists—a bit like the service bays at your local Chevy or Ford dealer.

Except that on each hoist sits a 959.

Ten Porsches in various states of assembly, each likely to cost its owner at least a quarter of a million dollars (more if it is a competition version bound for the U.S.). Altogether some 226 cars—worth at least \$60 million—will be created in the 959 "assembly hall," an anonymous building tucked away in the middle of Porsche's rambling Zuffenhausen plant. It's hard to believe that such a magnificent car could have such an ordinary birthplace. Yet

when you see the sophistication of the hardware that goes into the 959 and see the care with which it is put together, it is easy to understand why this car is creating such a furor.

Immediately noticeable in the 959 hall is the distinct lack of urgency about the working atmosphere. Mechanics and engineers stroll about from station to station, securing this panel, adjusting that fitting. This is not like any normal production line, where speed matters.

Most of a 959 body is specially made from a mixture of materials including steel, aluminum, Kevlar and fiberglass. Only the inner cell of the 911 is carried

over to the 959—you will recognize the familiar cabin layout and instrumentation.

Among the most interesting stages in the assembly process is the appearance of the guts of the car just before they are mated to the body shell. Sitting naked on a big yellow trolley the powertrain, replete with its twin-turbo 450 hp flat-six and massive torque tube that carries power forward to the front wheels, looks muscular enough to do service in a tank. Components of the sophisticated twin-shock suspension system and the prodigious vented disc brakes (based on Porsche's F1 stoppers) sit exposed in all their mechanical glory. This is German engineering at its

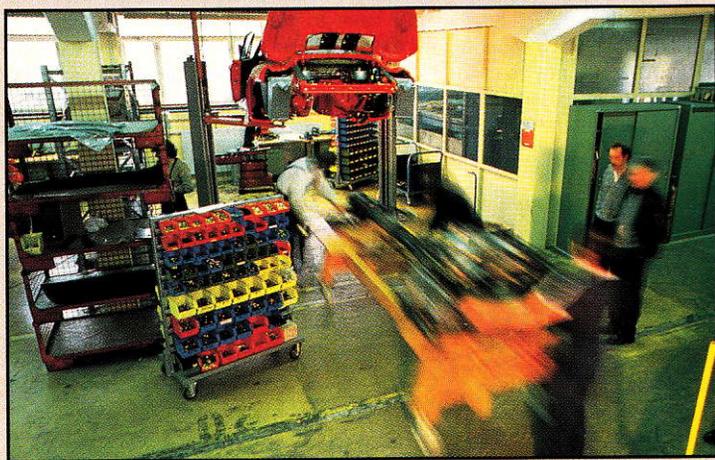
Sport Auto photos

brilliance of the car, which has been almost as subtle. Now we have turned an absolutely stunning lap time in what is no more, no less than a passenger car. As we slow to exit the track, Holbert turns with a giant grin on his face. "Let's take this thing out on the autobahn," he says in defiance of what he has been told. Hell, everything he's done up to now has defied his orders. No racing speeds, he has been instructed. Drive well within the car's limits, was his mandate. You don't tell a racer that, particularly one who loves his work as much as Holbert does. Now his blood is up. He wants to take the car out on the still-slippery two-lane and then the autobahn and do something he'll never be able on the roads at home. Drive it on the public highway.

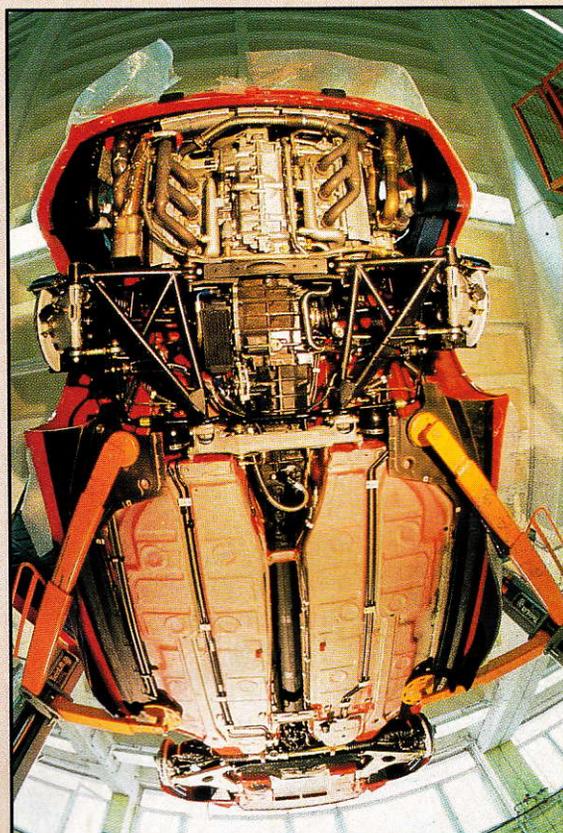
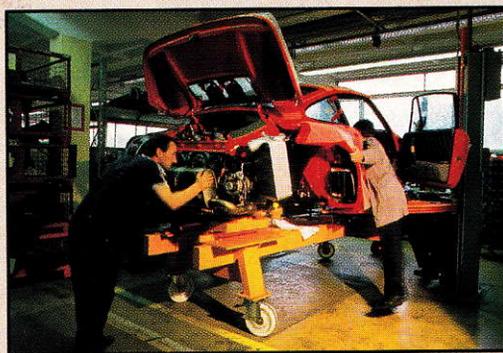


Holbert nods pleasantly but with appropriate condescension to the gate guard and launches on the road to Tiefenbronn. The car, which should be breathing hard, is not showing any sign of heaving flanks. No

whiff, however faint, of hot brakes. The idle is smooth, all instrument readings normal. We snake down the two-lane as gently as if we were delivering loose eggs in a paper sack. It's a little hard to bring myself



The 959 build process takes roughly two weeks from start to finish. Flat-six engine and 4wd drivetrain are prepared (left) before being mated with body (above). Under-view (far right) reveals complexity of 959 hardware



finest. It is also very rare engineering; one of the reasons that Porsche declines to build more 959s is that the crucial suppliers—Bosch for fuel injection, KKK for turbos, Mahle for pistons and the German/American firm WABCO for the supersophisticated ABS system (it's too expensive for lesser cars)—could not contemplate manufacturing another small run of parts for such a car. Low volume deals like this do not make big money for these firms; it was the kudos of being associated with the 959 project that attracted them.

A 959 takes about two weeks from the day it is started to the day it is ready for the customer. So far, about 60 have been

completed. The recipients have come to the factory on Stuttgart's northern outskirts where they have been given a comprehensive introduction to their cars before driving off into the sunset. The head of Porsche's research and development department, Helmuth Bott, and the chief of the 959 project, Manfred Bantle, a modest Swabian engineer who readily downplays his immense achievement in bringing the 959 to life, are on hand to explain the car to the new owners. And the small team of experts responsible for assembling the 959 will be kept together for servicing the cars; many owners are expected to bring their cars to the factory for service rather than

entrust the task to local mechanics.

Porsche admits the 959 took longer than expected to reach customers' hands because engineers encountered unexpected problems with some of its leading edge technology. As the delays multiplied there was talk in some quarters that Porsche had bitten off more than it could chew. But the company persisted, and at one point even sent out expensive models of the 959 to appease waiting buyers.

Now, at last, 959s are emerging from Zuffenhausen, and for the buyers who have yet to receive their cars the wait is coming to an end.

— John McCormick

to realize the magnitude of what this car has managed to accomplish within the last five minutes. It's gone faster than a greased weasel on a viciously demanding track, stopped from 150 mph in race-car distance, and is now pottering along as though it were trying to coddle the sensibilities of an octogenarian suffering from congenital car sickness.

We amble though the center of town, a typically crooked, crowded, cobbled market street, lined with carts and bicycles and shawled women. In and around them stand workmen leaning on their shovels or cradling lunch, some even tending to barrows or mounds of earth. The 959 is as happy here as on the Can-Am track at Weissach. It neither bucks nor barks. "Let's see something," says Holbert as the road out of town opens. Putting the car in sixth, he points to the tach which is reading 1000 rpm. Then he puts his foot in it. As smoothly as though it were powered by steam, the 959 gathers momentum, never hesitating on its way up, up, up ... until the entrance to the Stuttgart-

Karlsruhe autobahn looms and we are on it.

This is not one of the new roads. It is just two lanes in each direction. Traffic is on the heavy side today, the inevitable trucks lumbering along on the right. In this countryside their wallow and pitch seem to mirror the topographical elevations of the landscape. They are like ships in a long and heavy sea.

From the moment we entered the autobahn, Holbert has had the car on full throttle. If he had not put me so in regard of his ability on the track, I might just be uncomfortable in traffic at these speeds. Uncomfortable, hell, petrified. "Look," he says, nodding downward at the speedometer, "300 Ks." Just as I realize that's almost 190 mph, a tiny little box of a car, 2CV-sized, bounces out from behind a truck rushing backwards towards us, blocking our lane completely. "Ohshitohdear," I hear someone say. It is me. But my voice sounds like no voice I've heard from my mouth before. Holbert is absolutely expressionless as the brakes haul the car down without

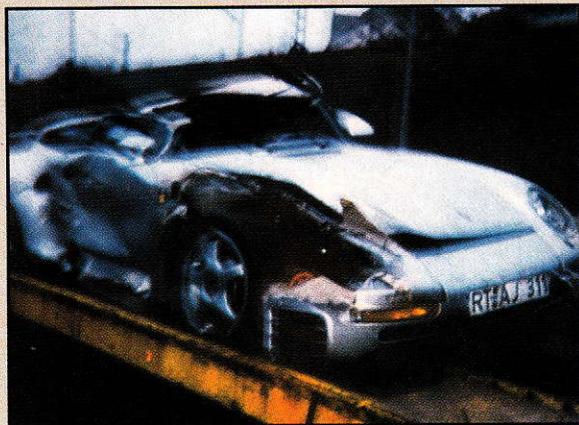
even a hint of abruptness. No loss of balance. No pitching forward in the seat. Just the insistent, firm hand of deceleration and suddenly we are three lengths behind the little box, ambling along at 100 kph, just another car moving at an idiotically slow pace in the fast lane.

Minnow-quick, the box dives in ahead of the truck. It has taken it exactly the same time to dart out, pass and dive back, as it has taken us to catch it up and scrub off 200 kph. We pass and I look over casually to see a young woman who is staring at the road ahead, frozen in terror. She has seen us in her rearview mirror. I wonder idly how, when she arrives at her destination, she is ever going to manage to unfix her hands from the steering wheel.

An immense, catastrophic wreck on the other side of the road, the side on which we will have to return, has traffic backed up beyond the rise of the far hill, so we dive off at a handy exit. Holbert knows these roads well. "I'm lost," he says within five minutes. It makes absolutely no difference.

Autobahn accident claims one of the first 959s made

Porsche racing privateer has \$250,000 car for one day before high-speed crash



Horst Bobzin photos



Imagine owning a 959 for one day and then crashing it. That's exactly what happened to Porsche sports car racer Jurgen Lassig when he took his 959, one of the first to be produced, out for a high speed run on an autobahn.

Lassig, a 45-year-old financial analyst from Reutlingen near Stuttgart who races Porsche 962Cs as a privateer (he was a driver in the second-placed car at last year's LeMans 24 hours), miraculously survived the accident without a scratch. His passenger, who suffered a broken shoulder, was perhaps even luckier judging by the way the car's roof was crushed.

The accident happened on a lightly traveled autobahn between Stuttgart and Lake Constance, in West Germany. Lassig, obviously used to high speeds in racing Porsches, was seeing what his 198 mph street Porsche could do when an Audi 80 pulled out and into his path. Apparently a car ahead of the Audi was exiting the autobahn and the Audi driver moved over to pass without noticing the fast-closing Porsche behind him.

Lassig called on all of the 959's braking ability—the Porsche left 200-foot-long skid marks—but it was not enough. His car struck the Audi which spun and crashed

(fortunately the occupants were uninjured). Then the 959 veered towards the autobahn crash barrier, forced its way *underneath*, rolled and careered into a ditch.

Although Lassig was undoubtedly very lucky to have survived such a high speed accident, he now holds the dubious honor of being the first 959 owner to crash his car. Not all is lost, however. Lassig had made sure his precious Porsche was adequately insured and the car, which had covered just 500 miles, is going back to Zuffenhausen, where its undamaged drivetrain will be united with a new body.

— John McCormick

We have discovered a few back roads with mixed surfaces, some have patches of ice on them, some have hollows filled with water. Holbert, delighted, begins to use the lever that shifts programs for distributing power between the axles. Whatever he is doing, only he can appreciate. When we see ice ahead, he switches the program but I don't notice a thing when the car gets there. No slipping, no sliding, in fact, no drama whatsoever. Another immense accomplishment that superb engineering has reduced from the astonishing to the mundane.

Sooner than I would want it is over. It could have taken all day and it would have been sooner than I would have wanted. Holbert feels the same way. We enter the gates of Weissach, and putter down to the racing department called "Falkland" for Peter Falk, Porsche's racing chief.

I climb out of the car absolutely elated. I feel very slightly intoxicated but at the same time I feel as though every sense were sharpened. The air is cleaner and purer, the spring to my step livelier, the sounds of far-off engines on the track seem almost melodic.

If I were willing, I would admit to myself I have been touched by a kind of automotive spirituality I did not think myself capable of



feeling any longer. It has been years since such primal chords have been struck inside me; the mind bypassed but left to observe, while feelings have been so exquisitely played and the soul so stirred.

The thought arrives whole in my mind that I have been to visit a place where there is great power to affect human responses, an almost mystical place. I have been taken there by an extraordinarily accomplished

practitioner in its arts. The intensity of the feelings at the tips of my senses will fade, although not quickly, not even soon; but they will leave an imprint.

So it requires reminding at this transcendent moment that I will not be a convert, I will not. I've spent my life resisting, and besides, I can't afford it.

Not a convert, then, but no longer an unbeliever. ■

The coffee table Porsche

America is getting 26 editions of the 959. Each one costs \$300,000 but can't even be driven on the road

Can Porsche build a 959 for you?

It could but it won't. And it doesn't have one available for you to buy either. From the beginning, the project was designed to meet Group B homologation requirements which called for a run of 200 production cars.

In fact, a few more than that will be built. Plans call for approximately 26 competition versions and a handful of pre-production test cars in addition.

The American allocation is 26 cars, all of which are competition versions and all of which are to be distributed through Porsche Motorsport. Al Holbert is Porsche Motorsport U.S. He is disappointed that Porsche did not certify the car for road use in this country. Even though Holbert believes the car had no trouble meeting EPA standards and would have had very little satisfying those safety standards road-going passenger cars must meet to be eligible for sale in this country ("The factory went so far as to crash one"), the 959 will be brought in as a race car. It *could* have been imported in its European trim as a collector's car, but the federal requirements for a buyer to qualify as a collector are so specific and so stringent the buyer

base would have been tiny.

The street use ban, by the way, meant prospective owners were required to sign a waiver, the third paragraph of which reads: "The 959 is for competition use only ..." and goes on to say that operation on public roads is forbidden.

The prohibition discouraged at least two superstars from buying: Actor Don Johnson and tennis ace Martina Navratilova. Indycar driver Danny Sullivan bought one which he planned to keep in Europe, but he is said to have sold it.

The ban *didn't* discourage one Midwesterner who bought three. He is identified by Holbert as the owner of two of the Kevlar-bodied Group B homologation special Audi Quattro Sports. He has already set up a special facility and hired people to tend his 959s. They are in Weissach undergoing training as this is being written. It is this man's intention to lease Brainerd International Raceway and invite all American 959 owners to come and flog their cars around, when the time comes the superPorsches are all in private hands.

About those private hands, by the way, Holbert supposes it's inevitable that brokers are going to get their hands on one or

more of the cars and he's not sure "that's all bad." But they will have had to buy from one of the people already locked into a car or have gone through the sorting process which required a \$60,000 nonrefundable deposit. Sure enough, there were 26 buyers out there and they were allocated cars on a strict first-come, first-served basis—the last two actually decided by the hour of the same day on which both their orders arrived.

The first cars, roll bar and all, no adjustable ride height, no adjustable shocks (deleted for reasons of weight on the U.S. version, which is, after all, intended to be a race car) will arrive probably in early May. They will be delivered without a warranty but owners will not be "buying a pig in a poke." The only 959 owners out of luck will be people who have acquired gray market cars. For them Porsche says it will not provide parts.

There is a body of opinion that says no car is worth the price of a 959. Not as a car and not as an investment. As for the latter, a 959 has already been advertised in West Germany at \$500,000 and another in Tokyo at \$1.5 million. Is this car, any car, worth that kind of money? Listen to Professor Bott: "The Porsche 959 is a car about which people have very definite opinions. One either accepts it or rejects it completely.

"What to some people is part of the 'good things in life' is seen by others as totally superfluous." —L.M.