

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

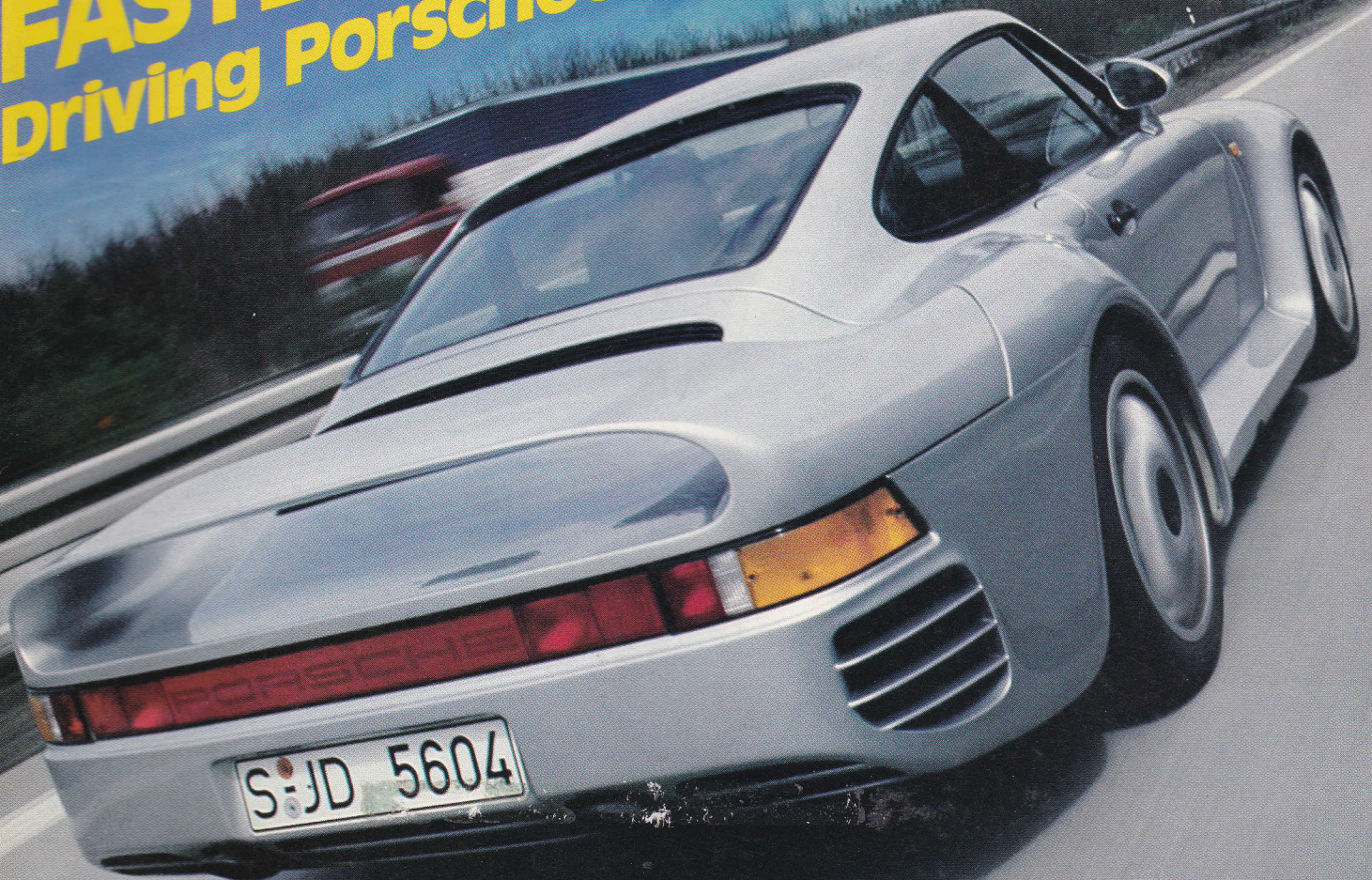
# ROAD & TRACK

JULY 1986

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







# DRIVING THE PORSCHE

*We finally experience this  
most Porsche of Porsches—wow!*

BY PAUL FRERE & DENNIS SIMANAITIS  
PHOTOS BY JEFFREY R. ZWART

959 959 959 959





**T**HERE ARE FEW cars I have been as anxious to drive as the Porsche 959. This car must be the ultimate expression of the 911 concept, the evolution of which I have followed for more than 23 years now. What's more, the 959 is surely the most technically advanced production car yet conceived, and also the most powerful and fastest yet designed for road use.

Paul Frère is absolutely right. This is the car everyone's waiting to drive. And I've just driven it. Not just seen it up close; that was at Frankfurt 1983 (R&T, December 1983). Not just crawled around the rally variant in preparation for Paris-Dakar; that was March 1985. Not just pored over a cutaway version; that was Frankfurt 1985 (R&T, January 1986). No, I honest-to-God drove the thing. If slowly.

The setting was perfect: the Nürburgring, early in the morning before the rest of our American, British, French, Italian and Japanese colleagues were bused out from the hotel in Bad Neuenahr. This

time around, my drive was for photography only, slow and steady, countered by the thrill of being on the classic 14.2-mile Nordschleife. My hot laps later today would be limited to the new and sanitized Formula 1 track.

Porsche organized things with its legendary efficiency: a quartet of 959s, three for carefully scheduled journalist driving; the other for Porsche racer Gunter Steckkönig taking folks around the old circuit at speed. True, there was another 959 parked outside the Steigenberger, but this one belongs to Prof Helmuth Bott, Porsche development chief. And, hey, I understand perks; I get free magazines.

After the photography, it's back to the new pits, waiting for my 11:30 a.m. send-off in car no. 3, the red one.

And so there were four.

Paradoxically, the 959 retains the general body shape and structure of the 911, and its basic arrangement of major mechanical ➤



components comes as no surprise. The wheelbase too has remained unaltered at 89.5 in. But a great many other elements are quite different. Gone are the front and rear bumpers; integral moldings of soft polyurethane have taken their place. Gone are all the body's external steel panels, replaced by those of Kevlar and fiberglass reinforced plastic, with the doors, lids and front rocker panels of aluminum. The bumperless resilient front end merges into slightly lowered and noticeably widened front fenders, still incorporating non-retractable headlights.

Above the waistline, the body is literally modeled after the 911. But substitution of plastic materials for steel panels has provided an opportunity to bond the windshield flush with its frame, to incorporate an integral rollcage and to delete the old-fashioned and drag-producing rain gutters. Though care was taken to reduce drag ( $C_x$  drops to 0.31 versus the 911's 0.385), the aerodynamicist's principal goal was elimination of aerodynamic lift, said to have been achieved completely. The 959's zero lift is an extreme rarity among road cars, shared only with the Ferrari Testarossa.

Beneath the bodywork, the car fairly bristles with technicalities, hardly the least of which is its 4-wheel drive. Drive goes from the engine via a single-plate clutch to a newly designed 6-speed gearbox. The latter, by the way, incorporates Borg-Warner synchronizers, not Porsche's. The gearbox output shaft drives the rear wheels from its rear end and the front wheels from its front end. The propeller shaft driving the front wheels is enclosed in a tube that rigidly links the engine/gearbox unit to the front differential.

*It's 10:15 a.m. and, inexplicably, the driving schedule is already a half-hour behind. What is worse, red no. 3 passes the pits trailing white smoke from its tail section. It stops farther down and is soon surrounded by folks in Porsche coats. And I don't mean just Porsche Design. This is serious.*

*The Italian journalist driving at the time is asked what happened. "Turbo," he says knowingly.*

*But the Porsche coats ultimately believe otherwise. Examination indicates that a shift was probably missed. In a big way. Very big.*

*And then there were three.*

Instead of the more common torque-splitting central differential allowing for different front and rear wheel speeds in curves, Porsche's full-time 4wd uses a multi-plate clutch integrated into the front differential. This inter-axle clutch resides in an oil-filled chamber, and varying the hydraulic pressure limits the torque transmitted to the front wheels. The driver can select torque limitation according to road conditions, and the car's electronics fine-tunes these settings through an override feature.

Its strategy is 3-fold: It adjusts the plate pressure to match weight transfer under acceleration. Also, should the rear wheels begin to slip, it transmits more torque to those in front. What's more, the controller also operates a second hydraulic clutch checking the slip of the rear-axle differential.

Surprisingly, the inter-axle clutch need not be disengaged when braking to help the anti-lock system. Porsche says that the system's cycle times are sufficiently quick that elasticity of the drivetrain is enough for the minute lockup signals from each of the four wheels to be perceived and processed correctly. The system was developed jointly by Porsche and Wabco Westinghouse.

A very important point—in fact, the key of the 959's 4wd system—is that the front tires are about 1 percent larger in diameter than the rear; thus, they revolve correspondingly slower. This means that, unless the inter-axle clutch is locked solid (only when maximum traction is required off-road), the force with which the front wheels pull the car can be adjusted continuously by varying the grip of the inter-axle clutch. Notice that this would not be the case if the front and rear wheels revolved at exactly the same speed. If they did, changing the grip of the inter-axle clutch would not make any difference to the torque split, unless the rear wheels actually started to spin. Also, a slightly lower revolving speed ensures that the front wheels continue to pull in bends, despite their distance of travel being larger than for the rear wheels. Only in tight bends is this not accounted for, but here the speeds are low and comparatively little power can be used anyway. Porsche says

that the wear caused by this continuous, though slight, clutch slip and the resulting increased rolling resistance are insignificant.

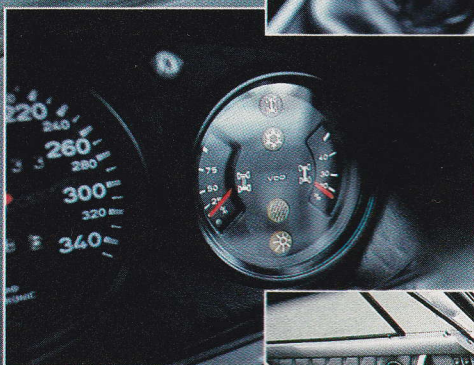
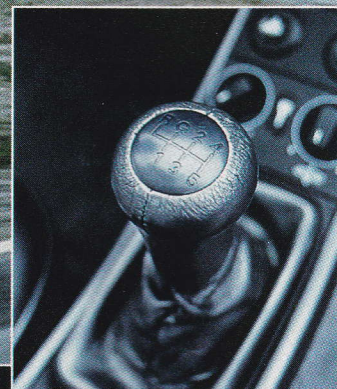
The driver chooses from four programs, actuated by a directional-like stalk on the right side of the steering column. The Traction position is for emergency use only, with the inter-axle clutch and the one controlling the rear differential both locked. At the other extreme is Dry, invoking a 40/60 proportioning of torque, front/rear, respectively, in steady-state condition. The front bias is reduced automatically to a minimum of 20 percent reflecting dynamic weight transfer under acceleration. Also, bias varies automatically in response to rear wheel slip. The Wet position gives approximately the same static split, but somewhat more conservative biasing keyed to the other input. In the Ice position, the inter-axle clutch transmits about 50 percent of the torque to the front wheels in its static mode, with biasing reflective of slippery conditions. The appropriate torque limiting is calculated by a microprocessor using engine speed, gear and road speed.

*It's nearing lunch, and my drive has been pushed back until 2:00 p.m. Now seems a perfect time to accept Herr Steckkönig's kind offer for a quick run around the old circuit.*

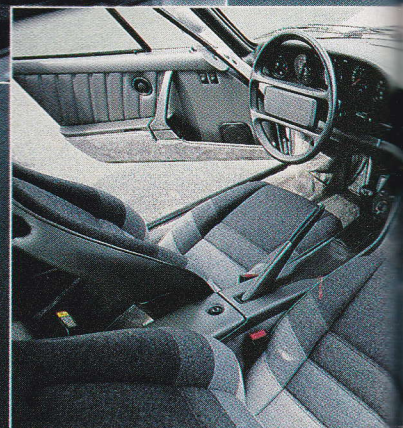
*And quick it is. I resolve to be analytical about such things as road*

*Six-speed linkage has G ("Gelände," off-road) as stump-puller low. Five other ratios are arranged in racing layout.*

*Right portion of torque-limiting gauge indicates fore/aft split; front percentage varies from 50 to 20 percent. Left portion indicates variable limited slip of rear differential. Four lights aligned vertically indicate Dry, Wet, Icy or Traction setting.*



*There's a lot of 911 heritage here, along with a few controls and instruments reflecting the 959's bristling technicalities.*





speed, engine speed and torque limiting. But WOW! On a short downhill stretch, not really all that straight, we touch 260 km/h. Fortunately, I don't recognize this as 161 mph until later.

The circuit is damp here and there, and Steக்கkönig keeps the torque-limiting in its Wet setting. On heavy braking, the torque-split needle pegs at 40; coming out of a corner at full acceleration, it swings to the other extreme of its range, around 25 or so. And Steக்கkönig's driving around the Ring positively dwells on these two modes, full off or full on.

Occasionally, under really hard cornering, I believe I see another gauge indicating lateral torque transfer at the rear. Steக்கkönig's style is the kind that'll light the inside rear tire, but the 959 just grips and goes. I've got my stopwatch running, and as we approach the nice old guy who ordinarily collects 12 Deutsche Mark for a lap, I punch the watch at around 9 minutes 20 seconds.

I ask Steக்கkönig what a really quick time would be in the 959? "Maybe 8:30," he tells me. But 9:20 feels plenty quick, especially when you're only vaguely aware that Eschbach follows Hohe-Acht. Or is that Pflanzgarten? Which is it that wants 2nd gear anyway?

Back in the new pits, I learn that our schedule has been revised. Again. Maybe I drive at 3:00 p.m., but not the full half-hour any

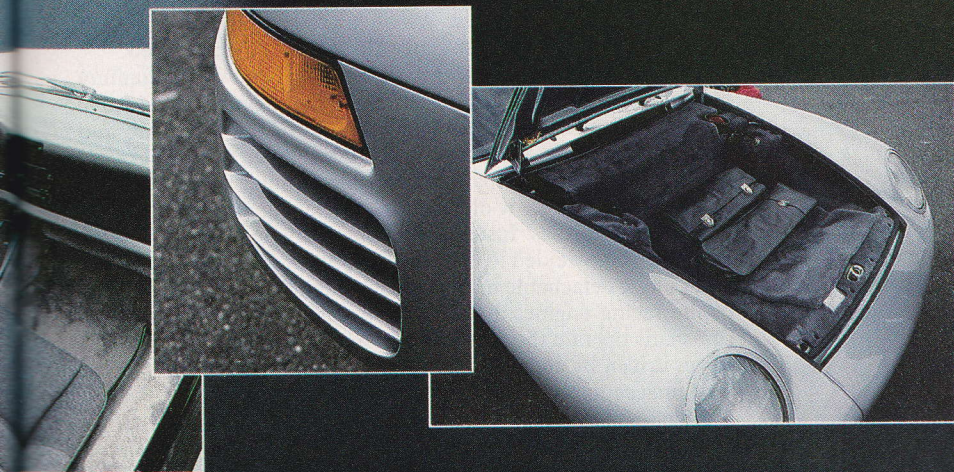
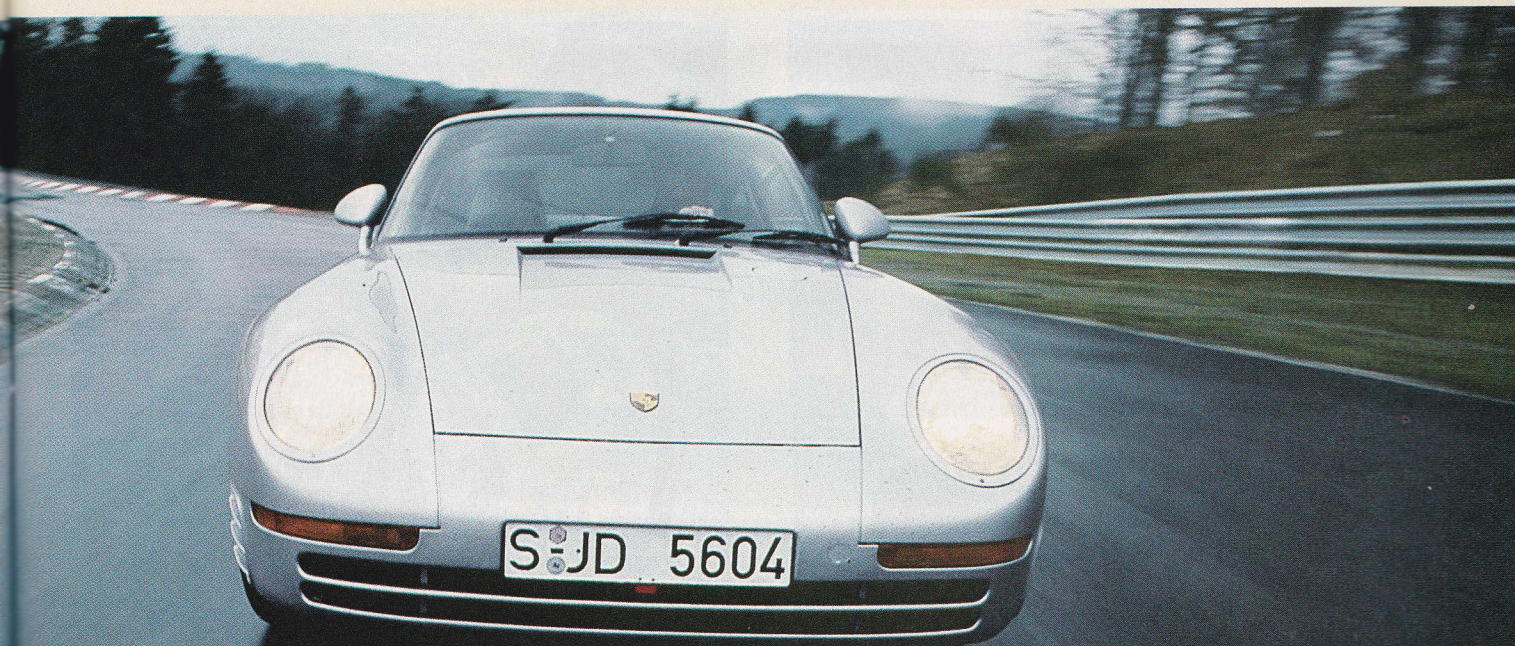
more. As each car comes in, it's engulfed by Porsche coats peering, probing and pronouncing it well. Then the next driver poses for his national flock of photographers. I make a mental note that Jeff Zwart, our ace photographer, and I will be cool.

But what's this? A car trailing lubricant is pushed out of circulation; Porsche coats suspect a cracked gearbox housing. Did it jump? Or was it pushed?

And then there were two.

To reduce reactions of driving torque on the steering, the 911's front strut suspension is exchanged for double transverse wishbones. A similar type of suspension is used at the rear, the 9.0-in. wide rear wheels making it essential to reduce camber and toe-in variations in the interests of straight-line stability. In addition, two shock absorbers are fitted at each wheel. One automatically adjusts as a function of road speed, the other incorporates an automatic ride height adjustment. These systems are electronically controlled, though manual overrides are also provided. Normal ride height is 5.9 in., but from about 95 mph this is reduced to 4.7 in. for better stability and lower drag. For harsh conditions and only at low speed, the ride height can be increased to 7.1 in.

Power assisted steering is standard, though both it and the ride ➡



**B**ut development engineers cite unofficial figures of less than 4 sec to 60 mph, less than 15 sec to 120 mph and a bit more than 22 sec for the standing kilometer.



height control are deleted in the 959 Sport version. This one also has stiffer suspension settings, rides at the lowest height and weighs approximately 220 lb less than its Deluxe sibling. Lightweight seats of cloth replace those of leather in the Deluxe version, for example, and amenities such as air conditioning are, of course, deleted as well.

Road tires for cars as fast as the 959 did not exist and Dunlop was asked to develop them specially. The biggest problem was to provide acceptable low-speed comfort together with the ability to run at the car's sustained top end. Yet other requirements had to be fulfilled: Safety was to be ensured in case of a flat or blowout at high speed. And, as no space could be found for a spare wheel of any convenient size, it was essential that the car could be driven for a reasonable distance on a flat tire.

These objectives were achieved by developing a tire along the lines of Dunlop's Denloc system, which prevents the tire from leaving its rim even when completely deflated. But to warn the driver of a puncture or any other pressure drop, the car is also fitted with an electronic warning device originally developed for the Le Mans 24-hour race. A dashboard light warns the driver whenever the pressure in any given tire drops below a preset level.



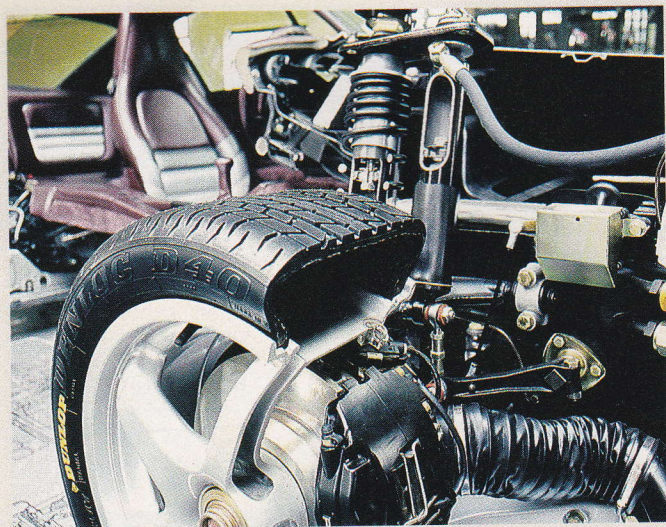
The spokes of the magnesium wheels are hollow. This results in a larger volume of air (useful with such ultra-low profile tires) but has a further advantage: The system detects air leaks in the tire, and also in the wheel itself as a warning of any developing crack.

*Having, as I do, some time to spare, I amble over to the tire changing area. This gives me a closeup of the Denloc's pressure sensor and how it works. Each pressure monitor contains a diaphragm calibrated for a particular reference pressure. If it varies from this, the diaphragm's deflection carries with it a little pin that, in turn, varies the magnetic field of a stationary sensor past which it revolves. The sensor's signal goes to a dashboard instrument that identifies the faulty wheel/tire assembly.*

*Speaking of which, multilingual excitement breaks out as word arrives that Steckkönig and his passenger are stranded out along the circuit somewhere—having lost a wheel! Apparently Steckkönig felt the vibration before things got serious. As they coasted gently to a standstill, the wheel adopted a particularly rakish angle never intended by Weissach. An improperly tightened knockoff is the culprit.*

*And then there was one.*

The wheel size of 17-in. diameter is dictated not only by the requirements of highly sophisticated tires, but also by the brakes.

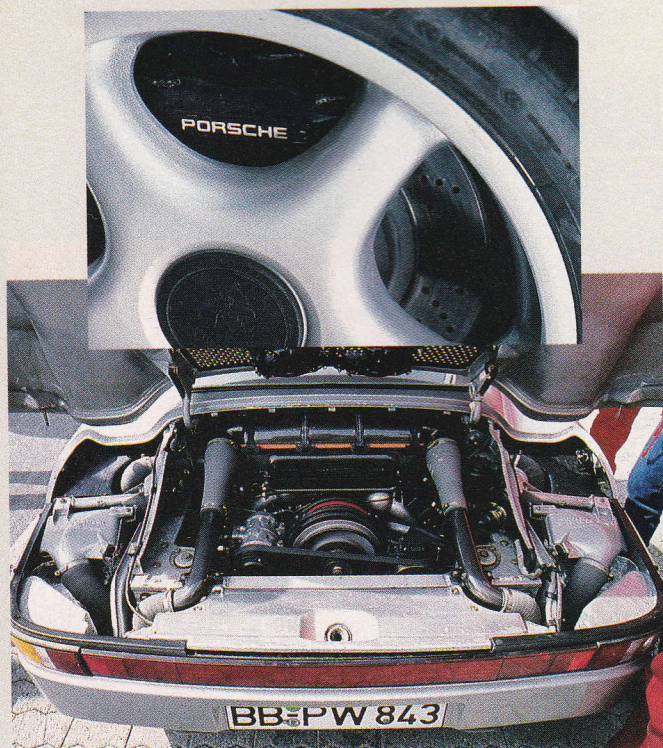


*Intricacies aplenty at right front corner: Hollow wheel spokes increase air volume, allow pressure sensor (at rim center) to detect a wheel crack as well as puncture. Dual shocks have dual adjustability: one for variable ride height, the other for variable damping.*

These had to survive the stress imposed by a 200-mph car with a fully laden weight exceeding 3500 lb. These are direct developments of racing practice and have Porsche-designed 4-piston alloy calipers front and rear. Discs have diameters of 12.7 and 12.0 in., front and rear, respectively. Whether production cars will have these internally vented discs cross-drilled is not yet decided.

The 959 engine is the only production one I know with titanium connecting rods. It is largely based on the 4-camshaft 24-valve powerplant, which has been so successful in the types 956 and 962C Group C car, a powerplant itself developed from that of the production 911/930. Apart from its larger bore, which raises its capacity to 2849 cc, it differs from the racing engine in several other characteristics: Instead of having individual cylinder heads electron beam-welded to the cylinders, the production engine features single detachable heads for each bank of three cylinders. As in the racing engine, the cylinder heads are water-cooled. The camshafts operate the valves via hydraulic tappets and are themselves driven by chains rather than spur gears; the latter, considered unacceptably noisy for a production engine.

Obviously, the road car's state of tune is not that of a race car. Its turbocharger installation, for example, is completely different, having been designed for optimal flexibility rather than maximum efficiency. As with the racing engine, there are twin turbos, but



*An exercise in symmetry: Twin intercoolers reside in flanks, twin turbos are inboard and beneath. Flat-6 produces 450 bhp DIN. And it's designed to run on European unleaded!*



these are smaller than those in the race car and they operate on a completely different strategy. In the 959, as long as the engine is at less than 4000 rpm, exhaust gases from both cylinder banks are directed to the turbine of only one turbo, thus driving it with the highest possible energy. From 4000 on, though, valves progressively switch one cylinder bank's flow to the other turbocharger, the total energy now being sufficient to produce full boost from both devices. The result is useful boost obtained some 1000 rpm earlier than would be the case with twin turbos running in parallel.

Boost is governed to a maximum of 14.5 psi up to 4300 rpm; beyond this engine speed, it tapers off to 13.0 psi. The engine's colossal torque peak of 370 lb-ft comes at 5500 rpm; maximum power is 450 bhp DIN, obtained at 6500. This performance is realized with a relatively modest compression ratio of 8.3:1, chosen to accommodate fuel of only 95 RON and aided considerably by elaborate engine electronics and knock sensing. Tuning the engine for 95 RON is part of a plan for a catalyst version, though such cars will not be ready for some time.

*I know about cars not being ready for some time. But that's okay, for it gives me opportunity to chat up the Porsche coats (the long gray padded ones are particularly neat) about U.S. plans for the 959. I've already seen the press release stating the Americanization efforts have been abandoned. This is because neither powerplant nor bodywork is especially amenable to our regulations. Instead, the release goes on, the development capital can be used in more rapid application of 959 technology to other U.S.-legal Porsches.*

*I believe this translates into "Give us the 4wd 911 earlier," but then again, my Corporate isn't much better than my German. At any rate, there will be some race cars sold in the U.S. And certainly some will come in via the aftermarket compliance route.*

*If you've got one on order, do keep R&T in mind. I've got an experiment all planned to investigate the efficacy of variable 4wd in different handling settings, slalom, skidpad and the like.*

*As explained by 959 project manager, Manfred Bantle, the torque-limiting strategy is designed to increase front bias—and thus promote a tad of understeer—as speed goes up or as surface conditions become slicker. And it can be fine-tuned even more: "I've got a computer chip for Nürburgring," Bantle observes, "and another specially calibrated for Steyckkönig. He likes a neutral feel."*

*And if you're keeping track of how many cars are still running at Nürburgring, increase your tally by two: Steyckkönig's car is back, its wheels properly affixed, mixing it up with the rest of us in hot laps around the new circuit. Another journalist 959 has materialized: this one, sans ABS or power assist for its steering. The latest plan is each remaining journalist will do 10 minutes in the nonassisted car, followed by 10 minutes in the full-tech one. That should keep them guessing.*

*And then there were three. Again.*

Compound turbocharging not only improves low-speed torque, it also reduces turbo lag. According to factory data, if the throttle is abruptly opened with the car traveling at 3000 rpm in 3rd gear (about 50 mph), full boost arrives after only 2 sec. By contrast, a conventional twin turbo layout takes 7 sec to reach this pressure. In acceleration, this means that 3000–4000 rpm in 3rd, approximately 50–72 mph, is achieved in around 4 rather than 6 sec.

It was not possible for me to do any timing, however informal. But development engineers cite unofficial figures of less than 4 sec to 60 mph, less than 15 sec to 120 mph and a bit more than 22 sec for the standing kilometer.

Getting into the 959, a 911 owner immediately feels completely at home. He identifies the same steering wheel, same dash layout, same seats, and same view forward. Sure, there are a few more switches, such as for the torque-split, ride and shock-absorber controls, while the familiar analog clock yields its place to the torque-split indicator. The 340-km/h (211-mph) speedometer also attracts attention, especially from onlookers.

But start the engine, and it will idle at 700 rpm more quietly than any 911 ever did. Depress the clutch, and there is nothing to remind you that it's designed to transmit 370 lb-ft of torque. Select 1st gear, give it the gun, and you immediately realize that there is ➡

## SPECIFICATIONS

Porsche  
959

U.S. Porsche  
911 Turbo

### GENERAL

Curb weight, lb	3190	3060
Wheelbase, in.		89.5 <sup>1</sup>
Track, f/r	59.2/61.0	56.4/58.7
Length	167.7	168.9
Width	72.4	69.9
Height	50.4	51.6
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal.	23.8	22.5

<sup>1</sup>Single entries indicate identical specifications.

### DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	6-sp manual	4-sp manual
	variable torque split	
Gear ratios: 6th	(0.64) 2.64:1	
5th	(0.81) 3.34:1	
4th	(1.04) 4.29:1	(0.63) 2.66:1
3rd	(1.41) 5.82:1	(0.89) 3.76:1
2nd	(2.06) 8.50:1	(1.30) 5.49:1
1st	(3.50) 14.44:1	(2.25) 9.49:1
Final drive ratio	4.13:1	4.22:1

### CHASSIS & BODY

Layout, engine/drive	rear/4wd	rear/rear
Brake system, f/r	vented disc/ vented disc, ABS	vented disc/ vented disc
Wheels, f/r	magnesium	cast alloy
	17 x 8 f, 17 x 9 r	16 x 7 J f, 16 x 9 J r
Tires, f/r	Dunlop Denloc, 235/45VR-17 f, 255/40VR-17 r	Dunlop SP D4, 205/55VR-16 f, 245/45VR-16 r
Steering type	rack & pinion, power assisted	rack & pinion
Suspension, f/r: (for the 959) unequal-length A-arms, coil springs, dual shocks, anti-roll bar/unequal-length A-arms, coil springs, dual shocks, anti-roll bar; (for the 911 Turbo) MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, torsion bars, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/semi-trailing arms, torsion bars, tube shocks, anti-roll bar		

### ENGINE

Type	twin-turbo dohc	turbo sohc
	4-valve flat-6	flat-6
Bore x stroke, mm	95.0 x 67.0	97.0 x 74.4
Displacement, cc	2849	3299
Compression ratio	8.3:1	7.0:1
Bhp @ rpm <sup>2</sup>	450 @ 6500	282 @ 5500
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft	370 @ 5500	278 @ 4000

<sup>2</sup>DIN bhp for 959; SAE for 911 Turbo.

### SPEEDS IN GEARS

Maximum engine rpm	7500	6700
6th (rpm) mph	(7500) 205	
5th	161	
4th	127	(5660) 153
3rd	93	128
2nd	64	87
1st	37	51

### PERFORMANCE

959<sup>3</sup>

911 Turbo

Acceleration:		
Time to speed, sec:		
0–60 mph	3.9	5.0
0–120 mph	14.9	19.5
Time to distance, sec:		
0–1320 ft (¼ mi)	12.5 <sup>4</sup>	13.4

<sup>3</sup>Manufacturer's claim.

<sup>4</sup>Estimated.



just nowhere to use this sort of performance on most roads. But as soon as you find a stretch winding through the country with good visibility, the 959's race-car-like handling becomes evident. And even at comparatively low speeds on mediocre road surfaces, creature comfort isn't all that bad. True, the hard tires and rather stiff suspension bushings do communicate a certain degree of road noise and roughness.

The power assisted steering is tuned to provide good road feel, rather than extreme lightness. It is clearly lighter than in the (non-assisted) 911 and kicks back a lot less, though feel there is aplenty. That some of the engine's ample torque is transmitted through the front wheels is not noticed—at least as far as steering is concerned. The 4wd becomes much more obvious when accelerating out of a corner in a low gear, when a quite amazing amount of power can be applied with the car keeping its line and maintaining excellent balance. This is particularly evident in long, medium-fast curves, such as the ramps linking German *Autobahnen*.

The precision of the 959's handling is uncanny and its acceleration is phenomenal. Yet factory people tell me that driven normally with the verve you might extract from a 911 Carrera, fuel economy is also Carrera-like—and that is pretty good.

Yet, if Carrera performance is good enough for you (as it should be for most people), then at about six times the price, the 959 is just a huge waste of money. If you've paid for it, you should really use it, enjoying the thrill of shifting into top gear at 160 mph.

Driving the 959 on public roads is possibly even more exciting than driving a full-blooded race car on a track. With ordinary road cars sharing the asphalt, everything takes on a new dimension. You come up behind that big Mercedes overtaking another car at 125 mph, and you have to brake hard until it moves over. While waiting, you shift down into 5th. As soon as the Mercedes moves right, you simply leave it standing.

I took such a drive in a 959 with Porsche's development chief Bott in the passenger seat. In a few seconds, the speedometer (dead accurate, I was told) indicated 300 (186 mph). In the lively *Autobahn* traffic, I reached this speed several times. And once, on a level stretch with no wind, we nudged past 320 (199 mph) and were still moving up when I had to brake for other traffic. Even at such speeds, the 959 feels completely safe and stable.

*And now it's my turn to drive. A couple recon laps with a Porsche coat in the passenger seat, then Jeff takes his place for some happy snaps. A trusting sort, Jeff. Astonishing grip is my first impression. You can really stand on the brakes—and this is the non-ABS car.*

*There's that overrun backfire on each upshift, just like the turbo racers, but, curiously, less brutal acceleration than I expected. These cars have had a hard day, after all.*

*My pace picks up as I come to sense the car's essentially benign character. I can feel all four tires working now on a couple of the circuit's fast-left/slow-right combinations. Go in too hot, and a little throttle liftoff tightens the line. Very forgiving and quite predictable.*

*We swap for the full-tech version, and its power assist rattles me for the first few corners, but then its particular logic prevails. There's plenty of feel, just not a great deal of effort. I probe the ABS as the car balances itself on line into a hairpin; nothing untoward, not even the pronounced gravelly feel of the pedal that accompanies other ABS systems. This one has especially quick cycle times, I recall, and maybe that's why its feel is really subtle.*

*I try switching the torque split from Dry to Wet, to see if I can sense any differences in handling. I don't. This experiment is better left for more familiar surroundings.*

*All too soon, we're past the checkered flag signaling our last lap. Jeff has recorded it all in images, fortunately none of them showing me missing a shift, going off road or looking hopelessly pompous as I climb out.*

*And there are still three.*

You can't feel when the electronic control reduces ground clearance; but whatever the speed, there is never any suggestion of the steering becoming lighter or of having to correct the line. This results not only from the absence of lift, but also from a very high caster angle. During development, it was found that induced cast-

er of these special tires was much smaller than is the case with more conventional counterparts. To obtain good steering feel and straight-line stability, the caster angle was increased progressively to its current 7 degrees. The absence of lift also helps stopping from high speeds and the brakes are immensely powerful.

The only shortcoming in handling I encountered was a certain twitchiness in high-speed curves, the sort one takes on the *Autobahnen* at 125 mph or more. This was also noted by Prof Bott, who responded, "We have noticed this before, but there have been so many things to develop in this car that we have left minor problems for the final period of development. It can surely be easily rectified," he concluded.

And indeed something had already been done by the time Porsche invited a group of journalists to drive the 959 at the new Nürburgring. Anti-roll bars and rear toe-in settings had been modified, and I could detect no recurrence of the problem.

*The day wears on. Having had my drive, I now have plenty of time to chat with Porsche coats, trade exaggerations with colleagues and wonder if spring is always this blustery in the Eifel Mountains. I'm told it is.*

*The first of two German-speaking contingents is coming tomorrow.*





row. Paul, multilingual as he is, could take part in any presentation.

It was a day of intermittent rain at Nürburgring, and the car displayed a distinct tendency to understeer on the slippery track; this, seemingly whatever torque split was chosen. In fact, the understeer proved to be more dependent on the way the car was positioned into the bend than on the setting I selected. Nevertheless, the Wet position seemed to give the best solution.

The 959 appreciated being set up early. Then smooth acceleration would take it along the chosen line in a nice 4-wheel drift requiring very little steering correction. Longitudinal grip was never a problem, neither braking, nor accelerating, and coming out of corners the car just shot ahead like a rocket.

The Ring also gave me a chance to sample the Sports version. With the one I drove, its fixed ride height was that of the Deluxe version at its lowest setting; its suspension, however, was firmer. What with a slippery track precluding any really high lateral forces, no significant differences could be detected between Deluxe and Sports. The latter, however, displayed noticeably less squat and dive.

It is rather surprising that of the 200 orders Porsche has from private non-racing customers, only four are for the Sports version.


The 959 is not an especially quiet car, though anyone finding a 911 acceptable will not object to this one. At speeds quite out of reach of any 911, conversation is still not a problem, partly thanks to reduced wind noise.

That this lavishly equipped supercar weighs only 3190 lb with full equipment is quite another achievement. Porsche believes that the competition version can be stripped to a dry weight of 2530 lb; this, with yet another 200 bhp propelling it. But this is another story.

Whatever the future of the 959, there is no doubt that Porsche has produced the fastest and technically most advanced car yet offered for road use. But as impressed as I was by its exhilarating performance, I was no less impressed driving the 959 back to the factory at lunch time: I threaded the car, literally at a walking pace, among other cars and people. A Volkswagen Polo would not have been more docile.

*I've never driven a Polo around the old Nürburgring, but I have had some 959 time there. In fact, tomorrow is the German-speaking contingent. Hmm . . .*

*Bright and early, Jeff and I are there. "Guten Tag. Ich bin heir fur ein 959. Nicht wahr?"*



*And once, on a level stretch with no wind, we nudged past 320 km/h (199 mph) and were still moving up when I had to brake for other traffic.*