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DRIVING THE PORSCHE
THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN
CALLED 914R—RIGHT
AFTER A DRIVE IN A 911R

STORY BY RAY THURSBY
PHOTOS BY DAVID GOOLEY







This old Porsche gives its pilot plenty to work with — a rev-happy 2.0-liter engine that pulls more strongly than you'd expect, a nice spread of ratios in its five-speed gearbox, and a stable platform that seems to hide no surprises.

That doesn't, however, mean that this car is an easy sit-back-and-relax experience. The closer you get to the 914-6 GT's limits of adhesion, the more it seems like a car that will not drift so much as simply pivot around its center point, pinwheeling you off the pavement in the process. That doesn't happen — or at least didn't when I was driving — but the mere suggestion of it as an inevitability can be daunting.

What makes this issue more important is the GT's deceptive behavior as speed increases. This is a soft car, riding on its long wheelbase and wide track smoothly, reacting gently to all control inputs right up to the point where self-preservation instincts kick in. In this, the GT shares a trait common to many well-balanced cars:

You're not conscious of how quickly you're going unless you glance at the gauges. Or, in this case, by listening.

The aural character of the 2.0-liter, twin-plug flat six alters as the revs climb, from loud/harsh in the 3000-4000 rpm range to something approaching demonic as you reach the 8000 marker on the pie-plate that serves as a 10,000-rpm tach. Heading into Willow Springs Raceway's pits, I learn that many of the people in the paddock were as mesmerized by the slightly muffled six-cylinder symphony — think Schoenberg discordant rather than Mozart melodic — as I was. They were keenly aware of the GT's track position at any given moment, and reacted visibly when the music struck a false note

Those who remember the 911R article in our April, 2007 issue will recognize that both the car owner's name — Bill Noon — and the test venue are the same then as now. But, where months separate articles, mere minutes elapsed between the

time I parked the R and my on-track foray with the GT began. Hence my initial caution the second time around. With no track experience in a 914 of any kind, I still had the wit to think the latter car might be a different kettle of fish handling-wise.

An accurate supposition, as it turned out. Dynamically and visually, neither R nor GT could be anything but a Porsche. But the differences between them belie the mere three years that separate their dates of manufacture. The R feels, simply put, like an old car (and therefore, to me, more fun) while the GT displays many of the hallmarks of a modern racer. Some of that is engine location, some has to do with structural stiffness — the GT felt rock-solid, the R a bit more flexible — and the difference between old and new tires played into the equation, as well.

On track, the 911R was frisky, accepting a little bit of flinging about with no loss of composure. Though no subsequent 911 can be called more focused than the



911R, the 914-6 GT felt even more like a no-nonsense car — purposeful, efficient, and perhaps more accomplished at covering a great deal of ground in the shortest possible time. Its steering was more direct than the R's and didn't require that extra effort to move the wheel off-center typical of 911s. On the other hand, both R and GT displayed flawless braking behavior, which I consider another typical Porsche trait. With roughly equal engines pushing cars of similar weight, both were plenty fast. Obviously, the GT racked up the laps more quickly, though it felt subjectively slower to this driver.

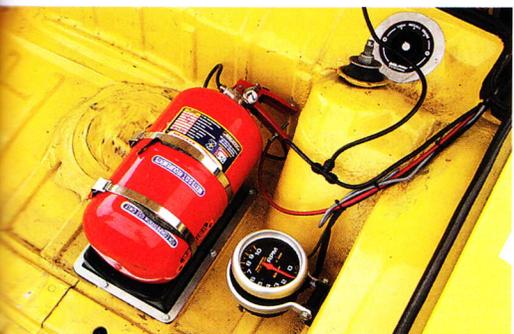
It must be said that one characteristic

— or so I've been told — of 914-6s came off as less than exemplary, however. The shift linkage was, to put it mildly, sloppy. The throws were long and more than once I managed to catch the wrong cog while exiting a corner. That's not nice on the road, but it's a real pain on track. A quick flick of the R's shift lever was all it took to make quick changes while the GT's linkage demanded concentration.

We had one nervous moment, the GT and I, when the fuel level in its 100-liter tank dropped too low. Willow Springs' Turn 1 is a moderately fast left-hander at the end of the main straight, and I had just touched the apex with the Webers' throt-



But for their black centers, 15x7- and 15x8-inch Fuchs look period-correct on this GT, though it would have been delivered on early 15x6 or 15x7 Fuchs. Rally muffler is a nice touch visually and aurally, but the fire bottle and other additions in the rear trunk are obviously modern equipment...





914-6 GT interiors vary; this one has GT door panels and gauges (note fuel gauge in radio position) but retains lower dash trim and carpeting. Rally equipment was added. Front trunk takes a spare tire between the bigger fuel tank and the oil-cooler ducting.



tles wide open when the engine simply went silent. Not fun, especially at a point when the traction provided by forward progress is vital. I'm not entirely certain what corrective steps I had to take — maybe none; I'm sure I'd remember serious drama — but, after an agonizingly long moment spent waiting for the sideways g-forces to diminish, the pickup sucked in enough fuel to complete a final, very gentle lap before heading in.

Of course, when the euphoria of the driving experience and the ringing in my ears wore off, history and provenance assumed more importance than before. That's particularly true when one considers that the 914-6 GT's history is pockmarked with suppositions, rumors, wishful thinking, and plain old misinformation. In other words, it's like much of Porsche history. Perhaps that's why research, in this case, would prove to be more enervating than the driving.

The story of the roadgoing 914s and 914-6s is familiar enough not to need recounting here. It is safe to say that Porsche history suggests that a competition

version of the Porsche-powered 914 was inevitable. Regardless of official motive, which could have been an attempt to drum up interest in the car one contemporary road test called "unattractive and overpriced" or a move to augment hyper-expensive 917 prototypes with more "production-based" racing, the staff at the competition department weren't paid to pot plants. Thus began work on a 914-6 that could carry racing numbers with a reasonable chance of success.

It has been reported that enthusiasm for a go-faster 914-6 was somewhat muted within Porsche's workshops. Despite whatever grumbling went on, the finished product was developed to the standards Porsche's customer racers would expect. The development program was a thorough job, incorporating both purpose-built parts and components already proven in other Porsches. In early October of 1969, the first example of what factory documents refer to as a "914 R Sport-Kit" was completed. For those who assume all factory GTs were painted Signal Orange, it's interesting to note the first car was Irish



Green. The "Sport" or "Sport-Kit" designation was, apparently, used by everyone at Porsche save those in the press department, where the shorter and more serious-sounding GT label was born.

Though a fairly basic specification was established for the car that would come to be known as the 914-6 GT, not all GTs were built to it. The Sport-Kit option package was comprehensive, but deletions and additions were as common as cars built exactly to spec. Included, for example, were wide fenders in steel covering wider racing or rally tires on bigger 15x6 "S" or 15x7 "R" Fuchs, longer wheel studs, wheel spacers, bigger brakes, chassis reinforcements, a forward-mounted oil cooler, and a special lightweight interior. Some 914-6 GTs got a 100-liter fuel tank and were powered by a twin-plug, 906-style flat six attached to a beefed-up gearbox with a limited-slip differential while others left the factory with single-plug engines and/or standard fuel tanks. Others, particularly those cars ordered by customers and teams with an "in" at the factory, were fairly certain to enjoy the

benefits of parts that ordinary customers couldn't get their hands on.

Factory records indicate Porsche built just 47 914-6 GTs, each based on a standard 914-6 pulled from the production line. That includes 14 racers and prototypes kept, however briefly, by Porsche for its own purposes before being sold off. At the same time, 400 Sport-Kits were produced, some of which were used by dealers and customers to convert their own 914-6s into GTs. It seems not all kits immediately found their way onto cars, however, as Porsche was apparently selling individual parts from its well even into the 1980s. Many experts feel that standard 914-6s modified in period with factory bits are legitimate GTs, and why not? The Sport-Kits were sold for expressly that purpose. And, given the number of unsold 914-6s languishing on dealers' lots, it made more sense to work with what was available — often at a substantial discount from list price — than to order the "same" car at full price and wait while Porsche built it.

To add a bit of obfuscation, a 1972 bulletin from Porsche "For competition

drivers buying a new car and intending to participate in sports events," 914-6s modified to what was considered GT specification were offered, but referred to only as having "competition equipment." Finally, there was an M471 package that allowed customers to buy a car that had the GT's aggressive flares and stance with standard 914-6 running gear.

The sole drawback to the 914-6s not converted by Porsche — at least for collectors and speculators — is that no documents have been located detailing where the kits went and/or what cars they were installed on. While in no way detrimental to the fun one can have with a GT, this lack of provenance may hurt the cash value of what some may perceive as "bit-sas" — cars that were put together later, albeit with genuine Porsche factory GT parts or very close copies.

I found much of the foregoing irrelevant while driving Noon's GT; it would have been the mark of a poor driver to be fretting about such matters while trying to extract the little yellow rocket's performance. But the owner says he has spent



considerable time researching his car's history, as he has done for many other cars that have passed through his hands at Symbolic Motors in La Jolla, California. As Noon tells it, his 914-6, with chassis number 914 043 1571, was completed on January 10, 1970 and then modified with many of the parts the Porsche factory could or would include in a GT.

Seventeen months later, it was purchased by well-known West Coast Porsche racer Alan Johnson through Bozzani Porsche-Audi in Monrovia, California. Johnson put the car up for sale after a few months and, in February of 1972, it was purchased by Charles Grimes and Howard De Haven of Tulsa, Oklahoma. At the time, the odometer showed that the car had covered 68 kilometers — just 42 miles.

Apparently, Grimes and De Haven flew to California to collect the 914-6 and drive it back to Tulsa but were dissuaded by Johnson. It would make the trip in the back of a rental truck instead. After Grimes' death in 1985, De Haven became #1571's sole owner and the car continued to enjoy limited use. When Bill Noon acquired it 18 years later, in 2003, the distance showing on #1571 odometer had climbed to 2,563 kilometers — or 1,593 miles. Since then, Noon has used the car in several historic events in the United States and in France, including 2004's Le Mans Classic. Aside from some livery changes, items replaced during routine maintenance, and a few necessary additions including a fire system and rev-limit warning light (the latter necessary given the engine's willingness to wind), Noon says

the car remains as it was when he acquired it. Older pictures of #1571, however, make it clear that some of its GT parts — such as its GT headlight actuators and rear-facing Porsche crest (actually a 356 hubcap center) were added sometime after the car left the Bozzani dealership, most likely during its time in Oklahoma.

As one would imagine, the GT treatment makes for a 914-6 with an extensive list of changes aimed at reducing weight and improving performance. In addition to the special pieces already mentioned, #1571 features a fiberglass front bumper/valance setup with an intake for the front-mounted oil cooler, a one-piece fiberglass rear bumper, aluminum bumper-attachment brackets, thin fiberglass front and rear decklids reinforced with Balsa wood strips, an engine lid with more mesh area than a standard lid, a thinner windshield, a Perspex rear window, special lightweight latches throughout, and mechanically operated headlights that can be opened via a cable release but must be lowered manually.

Inside, this GT has 911-type gauges with a tachometer reading to 10,000 rpm, Scheel racing seats with Repa racing harnesses instead of shoulder/lap belts, a Momo steering wheel, a hand throttle on the floor between the seats with a stop that holds 3500 rpm for engine warm-up, and a battery master switch. Naturally, all extraneous items road drivers might want but racers wouldn't have been removed. The simple door panels feature vinyl skins and no armrests to get in your way. The removable top panel is reinforced and

bolted in place to add a little extra rigidity while a sturdy roll bar offers protection beyond the normal targa bar.

Chassis changes on #1571 include a revised ride height and racing shock absorbers. Factory literature suggests Bilstein units were used, but Noon notes that his car has Konis as well as 908-style brakes with aluminum calipers and a unique hand-brake mechanism. The rear suspension system's semi-trailing arms are reinforced with boxed sheet-steel sections. The engine is equipped with Weber 46 IDA carburetors, twin-plug cylinder heads, purpose-built pistons and cylinders, hotter camshafts, a transistor ignition, and a fiberglass fan housing. The engine and transmission are held in place by heavily-reinforced mounts. The "rally" exhaust system fitted when I drove the car is, according to Noon, factory original.

The more one looks at #1571, the more impressive and thorough its modifications seem. The sum is a magnificent piece of work. Benign, predictable, free of inherent handling flaws, and, most of all, *fast*, the 914-6 GT represents the best of what the 914 could be in its time and hints at what Porsche might have done with the concept if various outside forces — mainly, I suspect, the rather tepid market response to Porsche's expensive 914-6 — hadn't intervened. ■

Special thanks go to Kerry Morse, who provided remarkable documentation from his files plus considerable information about the creation and history of the 914-6 GT. I hope I've drawn the right conclusions from his material. —RT