



Rare Birds

Excellence Magazine

NO. 235 April 2016
Story and Photos by Sean Cridland

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT PORSCHE excellence

911 GT3 RS ON TRACK AT ROAD ATLANTA! CAYMAN GT4



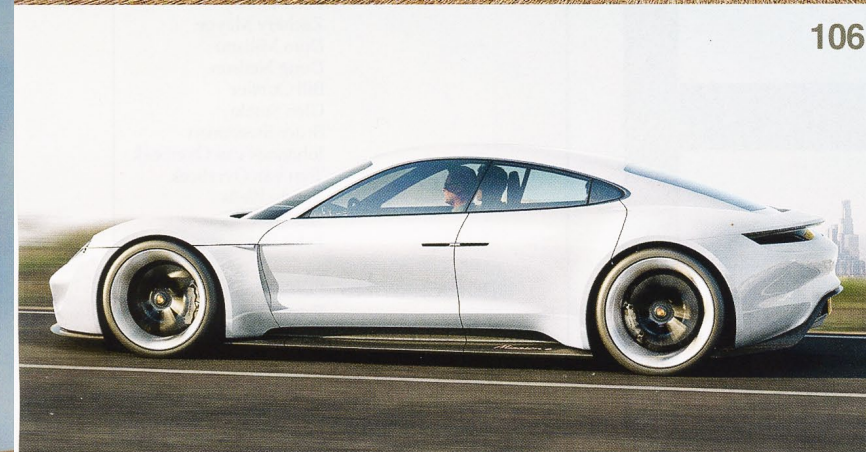
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\$5.99 (Canada \$5.99)

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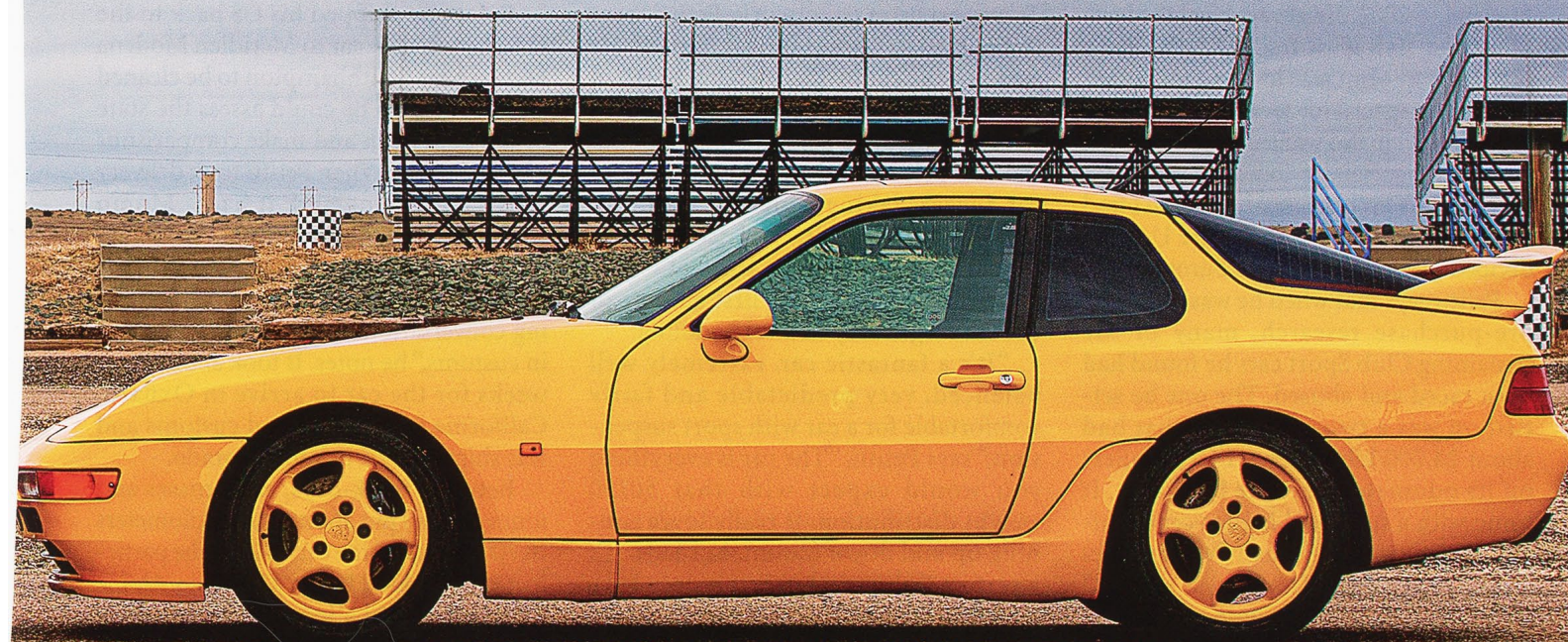
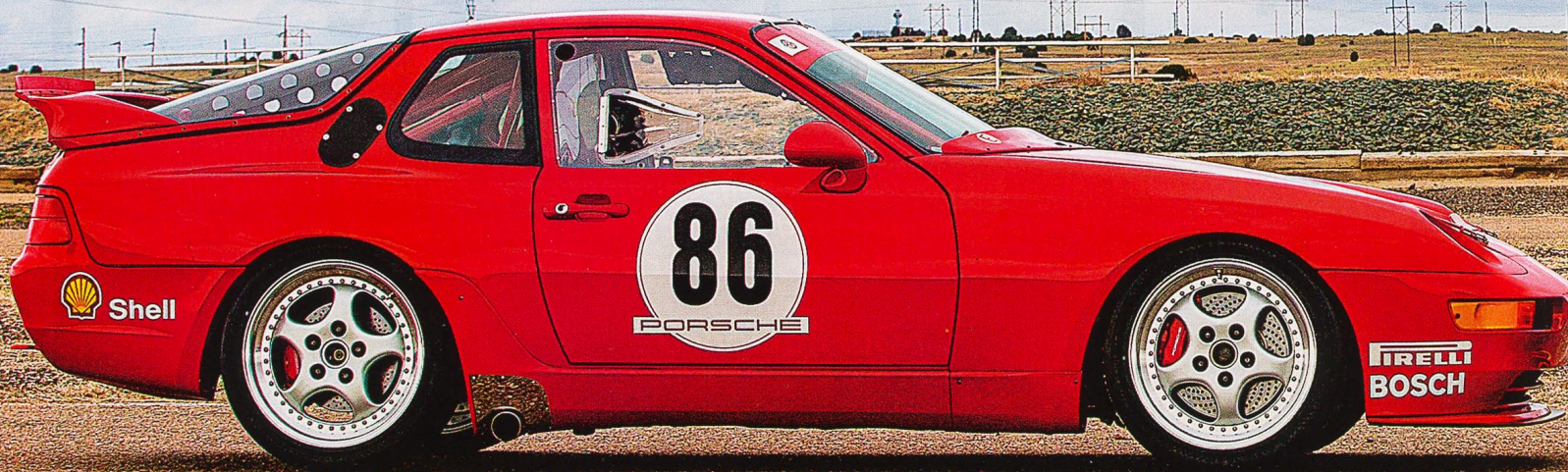
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rare

The only 968 Turbo RS to run Le Mans and a super-clean 968 Club Sport meet up in Colorado.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SEAN CRIDLAND

birds



PRODUCED FROM 1992-1995, the 3.0-liter, 236-hp 968 represented the final chapter in Porsche's front-engined, water-cooled, four-cylinder sports car formula that began with the 1976 924. With only 12,776 models built (of which only 4,665 made it to North America), the 968 is one of the rarest regular production Porsches ever made. It also served as the foundation for some remarkable special editions.

Ask any car nut what is the rarest Porsche RS of all time and you'll likely get an answer that involves the 911. But any response that includes a rear-engined machine is incorrect. The rarest factory-built RS of all time is, in fact, the front-engined 1992-1994 968 Turbo RS, of which just four examples were built.

Around the same time the 968 Turbo RS was being made, Porsche built another rare version of its "water pumper" sports car: the 968 Club Sport, of which only 1,923 were made. Today we have an example of each of these cars together on the roads of Colorado for a comparison.

968 Club Sport

From 1993 to 1995 Porsche offered the Club Sport version of the 968 as a ROW (Rest of

World) option. This package included Porsche's now-legendary "added lightness" with less sound deadening, air-conditioning delete, crank-windows, no power locks, sunroof delete, lightweight color-matching Recaro seats, factory roll-bar, a revised coil-over suspension lowered by 20 mm over the stock 968 and rear-seat delete.

The 968 CS also has a limited-slip differential, big brakes and matching color-coded wheels. Seventeen-inch rims were mounted with 225-mm front and 255-mm rears tires rather than the stock sixteen-inch rims with 205-mm and 225-mm rubber. Aerodynamic body panels were made by TechArt, which was Porsche's factory authorized aero-kit company at the time. Hence, it has a pronounced turbo chin-spoiler, side skirts and a beautifully sculpted adjustable rear wing.

The Club Sport cars were offered only in Grand Prix White, Black, Guards Red, Riviera Blue, Maritime Blue and—in the case of our test car—Speed Yellow. Large "Club Sport" side graphics were an option. Of course, in Porsche tradition, almost everything deleted was available as an option, for a price.



Dave Petitti of Colorado Springs, Colorado imported this 968 CS from England in 2002. He always liked the handling and styling of the 944—the 968’s predecessor—but was looking for something more special for local track days and autocrosses. He also wanted a car that could be driven to socials, on tours and shined up for concours events. Since he couldn’t find what he was looking for in the U.S., he decided to put out feelers in Europe.

Petitti says that when he was doing his pre-purchase research, many of the remaining Club Sport cars he found had been raced and abused. The one he settled on was a two-owner car that had about 24,000 kilometers (14,913 miles) on its odometer when he bought it. It came with a rare (and higher-center-of-gravity) sunroof, although Petitti wishes it didn’t have one. “The car was so nice,” he concluded, “I wasn’t going to not get it because of the sunroof.”

After putting a deposit on the car and starting the Department of Transportation paperwork, Petitti went to England to inspect the car himself. He first saw the car in Sheringham, north of London. Once satisfied that the car was as represented, he paid the remainder of the sale price and drove the car around for a week, taking a bit of a vacation. During his travels, he drove it to Stonehenge, then to the track at Castle Combe where he got his first glimpse of the car’s legendary neutral handling.

“It’s a fantastic car, extremely well balanced, very predictable and fairly comfortable for a car with sport suspension,” says Petitti. “The car is everything you would expect with that 50/50 weight distribution. It really loves running up and down mountain roads. It’s a perfect Colorado car. But it does have one little cooling fan, so heat will always be an issue, especially at altitude in

Colorado with the thin air, even more so on track days.”

Before he shipped his CS back to the U.S., he took the car to Meridien Modena Ferrari near Southampton to be cleaned and detailed so he could assess the state of the bodywork and make comparisons after shipping. When Petitti took delivery of the car in England, it had a Momo steering wheel, but the broker gave him the original wheel, which he carried home on the plane. “It made for some interesting conversations at airport security and in customs,” he notes. It took about three weeks for the car to arrive in Oxnard, California where it cleared customs and was shipped by truck to Colorado.

Between track-days, autocrosses and tours, Petitti’s put about 14,000 kilometers (8,700 miles) on the car. In 2003, he participated in the local Rocky Mountain/Alpine Regions PCA Challenge Series in which points were awarded in track time-trials,

autocrosses, a rally and concours. The car competed in a class that included 964s, 993s, and of course, other 968s. Not only was Petitti competitive, he won! He later showed the car in the 2009 Porsche Parade Historic Display to very favorable reviews. While he still drives the car occasionally, like many rare Porsches, it has climbed in value. Since then, he has purchased another car to run at track events.

968 Turbo RS

The 968 Turbo RS in our test, chassis #WPOZZ96ZNS820065, is a much rarer bird than the CS. Indeed, it’s the first of only four examples built and the only one to race at Le Mans, which it did in 1994 at the hands of John Nielsen, Lindsay Owen-Jones and Dr. Thomas Bscher. It finished 35th overall due to an accident.

The Turbo RS was modeled after the almost-as-rare 968 Turbo S (of which 14 were built), but was designed specifically for racing. In this article you see it in its original Guards Red color, though it raced in Europe in both Guards Red and Speed Yellow. In its factory configuration, a Kühnle, Kopp & Kausch (KKK) L41 turbocharger pushed air through its 3.0-liter four-cylinder engine with an eight-valve head derived from the 944 Turbo (951) to deliver 350 hp.

This RS was raced in various European series by Team Joest for Manuel Reuter and by Team Seikel Motorsport from 1993 to 1994. The 968 Turbo RS was then sold to Lloyd Hawkins of Rennsport Racing New Orleans, Louisiana to be raced by himself,

David Murry, Shawn Hendricks and Boris Said in IMSA Firehawk competition from 1995 through 1997. It later became part of the Matt Drendel collection. The car now resides in Colorado as part of the Boulder Classics collection. It occasionally runs at local track events and was recently seen at Porsche Rennsport V at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.

Joest had originally ordered a Speed Yellow car for the ADAC (Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club e.V. or General German Automobile Club) GT series. That car, chassis #4 of the series wasn’t ready, so the #1 car was loaned to the team. Though the car was raced a few times in Guards Red, it was eventually painted yellow. The car remained in Speed Yellow throughout its European career where it raced with mixed results. Its highest placing was a fourth at the Avus circuit in 1993.

Eventually, Rennsport Racing New Orleans manager Dennis Boada saw the car advertised by John Nielsen and visited the

Seikel shop and thought it might have great potential for the IMSA Firehawk Endurance Championship. Their first couple of races with the car, at the 1995 Sebring and Road Atlanta rounds, showed the car much as it was delivered, still a fairly stock car by contemporary racing standards and still in the Speed Yellow livery.

Since there was some time between when he took delivery and the next race at the Texas World Speedway in the spring of 1996, Boada went through the car from top to bottom, stripping it down to metal to repaint it in its factory-original Guards Red. He also re-engineered it so that it would meet the new rules and regulations being implemented by the IMSA racing series. With a larger turbocharger, the RS is thought to have raced in the U.S. with as much as 490 hp.

David Murry, who co-drove with Lloyd Hawkins, remembers all the work that Boada put into making the 968 a trackable and competitive race car. “That car had more



Right, top: Comparing the Club Sport engine with the Turbo RS, the differences are striking. The CS has obvious similarities with other street versions while the Turbo RS is a full on race-engine with custom fabricated intake, plenum, cooling and exhaust not seen on any other 968.

Middle: Though the Club Sport receives some extra safety and rigidity over the plain vanilla 968, it’s remarkably clean and simple when compared to the Turbo RS full cage tied to all suspension points and with a fuel cell custom fabricated by Dennis Boada.

Bottom: The Club Sport’s dash is stylish, efficient, but easily recognizable as a 968. The dash of the Turbo RS was designed and fabricated by Boada in order to efficiently monitor the engine systems and give useful real-time data to Hawkins, Murry and the other drivers during IMSA Firehawk races.

power than many of the 993s we were running against because of the turbocharger,” he said, “but it also had problems maintaining the power because of heat build-up.”

The RS also had problems with mechanical grip and downforce. Though it would have been legal to run bigger tires, Hawkins was conscious of the uniqueness and the value of the car and was reluctant to carve up the body in order to put on larger fenders or a custom racing wing. Eventually Boada fashioned a Gurney-type lip for the rear wing to get more downforce.

In its best race at Road Atlanta, it was a heat-induced gremlin that saw Murry and Hawkins slip from the lead to fifteenth by the end of the race. During development, Boada had created some equal-length

the underside that’s still in the car today. On another occasion, IMSA’s fuel supplier brought a bad batch of gas to an event, leading to burned pistons that resulted in a complete engine replacement. At that point, the writing on the wall was becoming clearer. Boada had done all the development work on the car with no help from Porsche Motorsport. He remembers Alwin Springer saying his hands were tied. There would be no technical assistance to make the 968 faster than the factory supported 993s. Besides, with only four examples built, it’s not like the factory had bins full of 968 Turbo RS parts just sitting around.

Hawkins finally realized that the car was more valuable as a collector car than it was competitive as a race car. It wasn’t

neutral handling, great torque and normally aspirated acceleration from low rpms to top end. It’s a fun ride.

With less noise insulation, the CS is a little louder than a standard 968 inside. As Petitti mentions, at altitude you want to pay attention to the temperature gauges. But its sport seats hold you firmly in place and its factory roll-bar provides just the kind of stiffening a performance-minded driver enjoys.

Its long hood and flowing fastback rear window have their origins in the 1970s designed 924 and take cues from the 928, the 959, and the 993, but its chin-spoiler and rear wing help the car to appear remarkably modern all the way into the middle of the second decade of the 2000s. It’s that pretty of a car. And because there are so few, you’re guaranteed to turn heads at any show or track event you attend.

Though the 968 Turbo RS retains the 968 road car’s basic shape, it’s a much different beast. It’s a race car from the ground up with very little comparison to the 968 Club Sport other than shape. It has a full factory developed racing roll cage, which stiffens the chassis considerably. Doors and hood are made of carbon-fiber as is the racing dash that Boada and his team developed to efficiently monitor the car’s systems and give proper feedback to the driver.

Inside, the Turbo RS is stark, with no creature comforts other than the driver’s seat. The interior is hot, loud and harsh. Still, as Murry said, one thing consistent across the entire 968 line is the neutral handling as a result of the rear-mounted transaxle providing such an even weight distribution. The privileged few who have driven the 968 Turbo RS will tell you: It drives as nicely as any 944 spec racer you’ve ever been in, but better.

Better balance, better grip (bigger, stickier tires), stiffer springs and bushings, with practically as much horsepower as you’d ever want is what the 968 Turbo RS is all about. Though, as Porsche fans, we’re not supposed to want anything to be better than a 911, one has to wonder what this car might have been like if Porsche hadn’t abandoned the concept and let it race against the 993s. It’s that good!

In the end, we suppose putting the two together is not so much of a comparison as an exposition of a direction that Porsche might have gone, had they not come to their senses and retained the 911 as the flagship model. But for all those who still love their 968s...we can dream, can’t we? ■

968 Club Sport & Turbo RS Specs

| | 968 Club Sport | 968 Turbo RS |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Drive | Rear-wheel drive | Rear-wheel drive |
| Layout | Front-engine | Front-engine |
| Wheelbase | 94.5 inches | 94.5 inches |
| Engine | 3.0-liter inline four | 3.0-liter inline four |
| Transmission | 6-speed manual | 6-speed manual |
| Horsepower | 236 hp | 490 hp |
| Torque | 305 lb-ft | 505 lb-ft |
| Weight | 2,910 lbs | 2,690 lbs |
| Power-to-Weight | 12.3 lbs/hp | 5.5 lbs/hp |
| 0-62 mph | 6.3 seconds | 3.2 seconds |
| Top Speed | 152 mph | 190 mph |
| Base MSRP* | \$47,960 (approx.) | \$137,500 (approx.) |

*These cars were not originally sold in the U.S. These prices reflect their original prices in U.S. dollars.

headers to allow for better engine flow and to maximize turbo-boost. The headers fed into a collector just before the turbocharger. But heat buildup allowed the collector to slip off the header pipes, resulting in a considerable loss of boost.

The team also had some issues with the original center-lock hubs. In one race, one of the front hubs separated itself from the upright. The wheel came off, but without significant damage. Boada immediately replaced those hubs with five-lug racing units, leaving the center-locks on the rear, considering that the rear hubs were under significantly less load than the fronts. The problem appeared to be fixed. That was until a race later when a rear hub broke, sending a wheel under the car, tearing out the rear suspension and leaving a dent in

too long after that the car ended up in Matt Drendel’s collection. Upon his passing it was auctioned.

How Do They Compare?

As we expected, the 968 Club Sport and the Turbo RS are dramatically different animals, even if they’re grounded in the same DNA. Anyone who has driven a 968 knows that they are remarkably well-handling cars with a reasonable amount of power for their era. They aren’t world-beaters in any sense of the term, but they are good cars.

The Club Sport variant is what any enthusiast would want from a streetable track car. It’s lower and lighter than its more common cousins. Hence, a pretty good car becomes a quite good car. It has