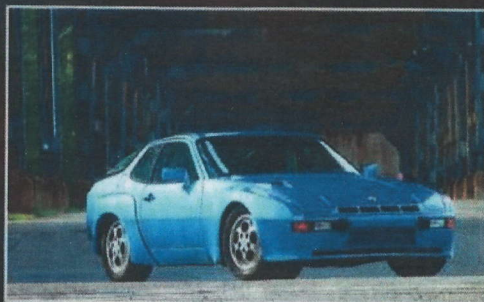
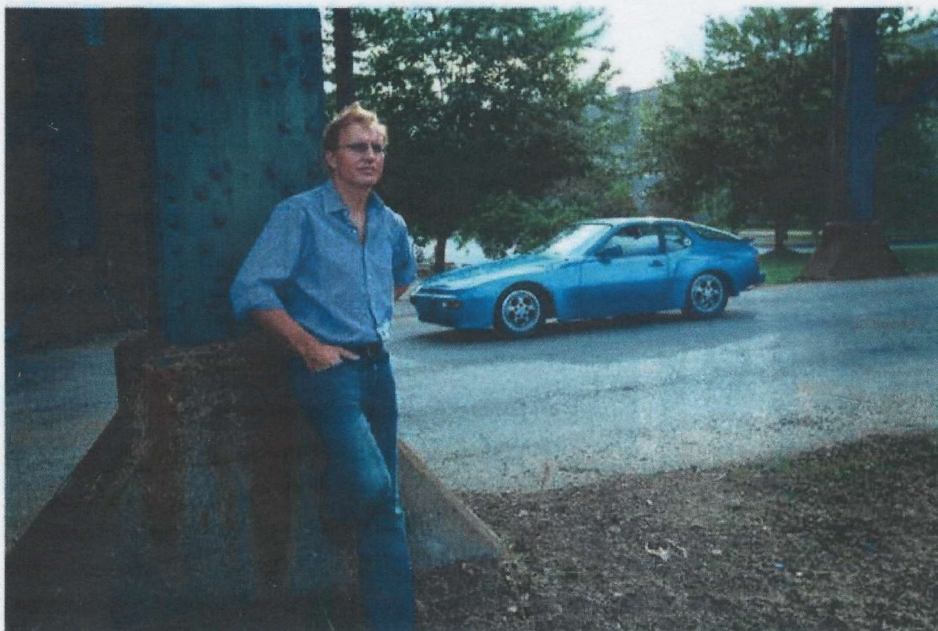


Cool Blue Blast



THIS 924 TURBO CAME FROM THE DEALER WITH A MARTINI-THEMED RECARO INTERIOR, MODIFIED SUSPENSION, AND PANELS FROM PORSCHE'S 924 CARRERA GT HOMOLOGATION SPECIAL.

STORY BY **JAMES TATE** PHOTOS BY **RICH CHENET**



Thierry Verstraeten finds he has to clear up a lot of assumptions about his 1980 924 Turbo.

"People often see the car and say, 'Nice 944.' But, it's not a 944." It's easy to see how the two cars might be confused for each other in the eyes of the uninitiated, but Thierry's 924 is unique in ways that even Porsche devotees may have a hard time picking out. The front-bumper intake and distinctive NACA duct on the hood might say "924 Turbo," but it's nearly impossible to know the exact configuration of this car on sight.





Original owner William Braunlich Jr. took delivery of this 924 Turbo as you see it today from Sewickley Porsche in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, on March 14, 1981. According to Thierry, Braunlich agreed to buy the car on the condition that Sewickley would "transform it into a Carrera GT" inspired by the 924 Carrera GT that Porsche built for Le Mans homologation purposes. The factory built 406 examples of the Type 937 Carrera GT, plus another 76 Carrera GTS and GTR variants for road and racing use. Engines were rated at 210, 245, and 375 hp, respectively.

Rebadged as a Carrera GT by Sewickley, this period "dealer special" is notable for wearing factory fiberglass-reinforced polyurethane body parts—including its front bumper, front fenders, and rear flares. There is some question as to whether Sewickley Porsche purchased the components directly from Porsche Motorsport in Germany or from Holbert Porsche in Warrington, Pennsylvania, but everything was painted to match the factory Minerva Blue paint at Greater Pittsburgh Collision.

At the time of purchase, Sewickley arranged for a very "Martini" Recaro cloth interior along with a roll bar. The stock 15-inch, five-lug alloy wheels were swapped out for 16-inch Phone Dial alloys, and the chassis was lowered by 30 millimeters (1.2 inches) to give it a stance similar to that of a 924 Carrera GT.

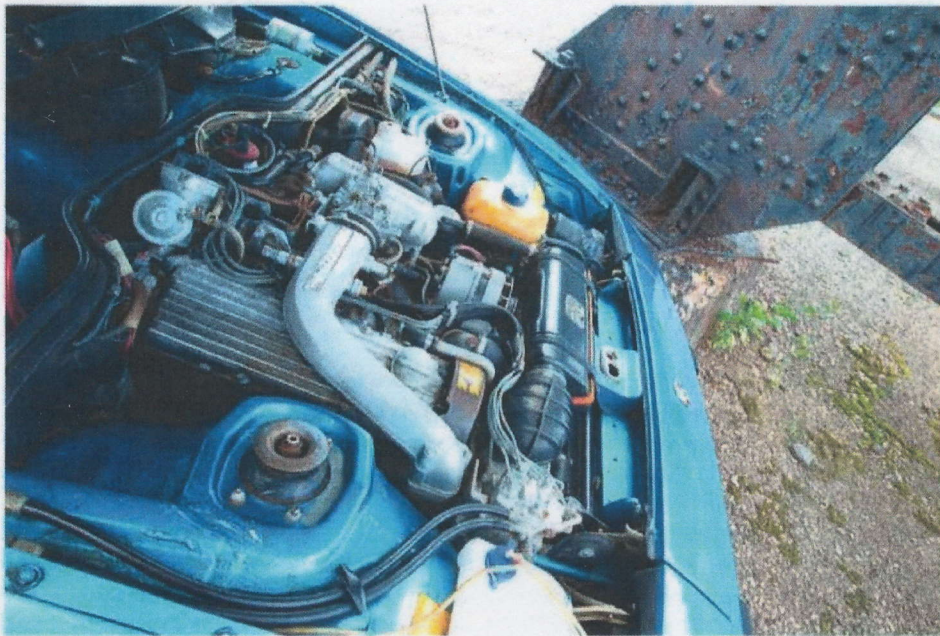
Sewickley left the 2.0-liter, turbocharged inline four the way it left final assembly at Porsche's Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen plant. Above the VW-supplied iron short block sat an al-

loy cylinder head with 10% silicon content to deal with the heat. Flow characteristics were optimized to suit the KKK K26 turbocharger. Other changes included larger exhaust valves, repositioned spark plugs, breakerless electronic ignition, a larger radiator, and an external oil cooler. Bosch CIS fuel injection governed the air/fuel mixture.

To deal with the power, Porsche added more robust components elsewhere, including the drivetrain, suspension and brakes. According to *Porsche Typen* by Jürgen Barth, a European 924 Turbo weighed 110 pounds more than a standard 924. The delta was even greater between U.S. versions, at nearly 200 pounds. Weight distribution was improved, moving from 52/48 to 51/49. A rear spoiler actually moved the drag coefficient from 0.36 to 0.35, making the 924 Turbo the most aerodynamic car sold in the U.S. in 1980.

On 6.5 psi of boost, the U.S.-spec 1980 924 Turbo made 143 hp at 5500 rpm and 147 lb-ft of torque at 3000 rpm. Its European counterpart made 170 hp and 175 lb-ft, thanks to 12.0 psi of boost. *Car and Driver* tested the U.S. 924 Turbo in 1979, noting its weight at 2,780 pounds, or about 100 pounds lighter than the simplest 2014 Boxster. It hit 60 mph in 7.5 seconds on its way to a quarter-mile time of 16.0 seconds and a top speed in excess of 130 mph.

The engine is mated to a five-speed manual gearbox with a dog-leg first gear. If the driver can stay out of the boost, the 924 Turbo can achieve impressive fuel economy: Thierry says his car can cruise all



924 Turbo engine is much maligned, but it transformed the 924, making it into a serious performance car at the time. Black headlight trim and seat bottoms show signs of real wear.



day at 70 mph turning just 2600 rpm while returning 26 mpg, and claims that he routinely gets 300 miles out of each 11.5-gallon tank of gas.

THE 924 MODELS have been unfairly branded by some as a forgettable Malaise Era economy play by Porsche. But that overlooks the significance of models like the 924 Turbo. While its horsepower ratings aren't overwhelming by today's standards, it offered a combination of power, fuel economy, and capability unlike any Porsche—or any car—of its era.

More importantly, it still satisfies Thierry in 2014. "It's underpowered

by today's standards, (but) it's not a power car," he says. "It drives like a regular car, then suddenly you have this little push at 3000 rpm."

With more than 12,400 examples sold worldwide between 1979 and 1984, the 924 Turbo demonstrated clear demand for a higher-powered four-cylinder Porsche. Some aspects of and cues from the 924 Carrera GT would carry into the development of Porsche's highly regarded 944. In fact, today's 924 owners can often benefit from parts compatibility between the two models. Needless to say, Thierry's 924 Turbo foreshadows the 944 more than most of its





kind with its dramatic—and prophetic—fender flares.

The car's original owner sold it with 8,300 miles on the odometer in 1984 to a gent by the name of Thomas Tiernan. The latter drove this 924 regularly until 1988, when it was stored away with just 19,200 miles on its odometer. That's where Thierry comes in. You see, Thierry and Tiernan are not just old friends; Thomas was the best man at Thierry's wedding and is the godfather to his first son. The two men are dyed-in-the-wole Porsche enthusiasts. Both of

them own 930 Turbos—and Thierry also has a highly modified 2001 996 Turbo in his stable.

Some things, however, defy even the closest friendship—and it took Thierry nearly 20 years to convince Thomas to sell him the 924 Turbo. At last, in 2007, Thomas relented. Thierry took possession of the car and then embarked on a restoration to get it back on the road again, where it belongs.

Thierry took the 924 Turbo to Exoticars Pittsburgh with a hefty to-do list. "The gas tank was cleaned



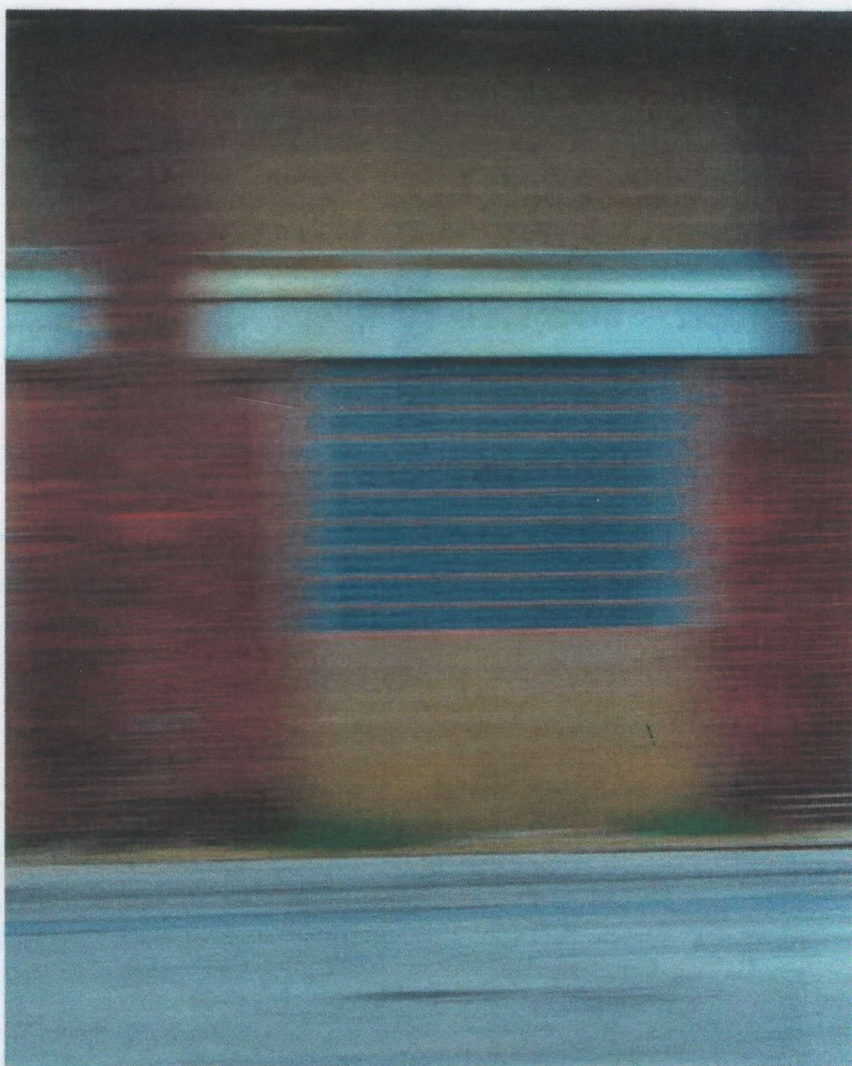
and coated, and the main and transfer fuel pumps were replaced," he recalls. "Numerous turbo hoses, rotors and pads, brake lines, the alternator, the fuel accumulator, the clutch and clutch master cylinder, brake fluid reservoir, the master cylinder and seals were also replaced."

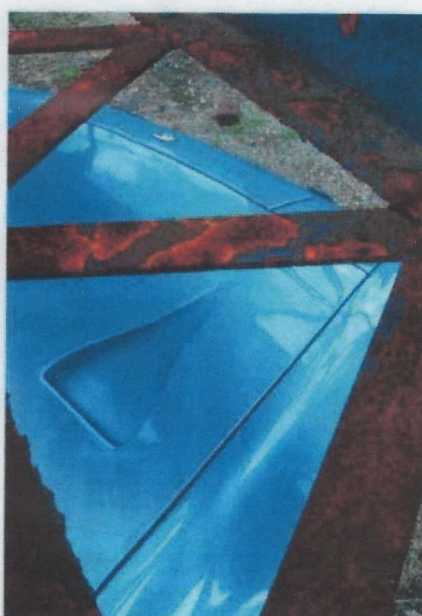
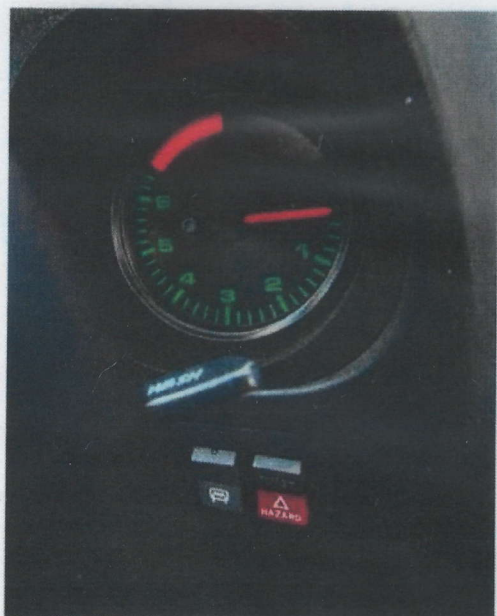
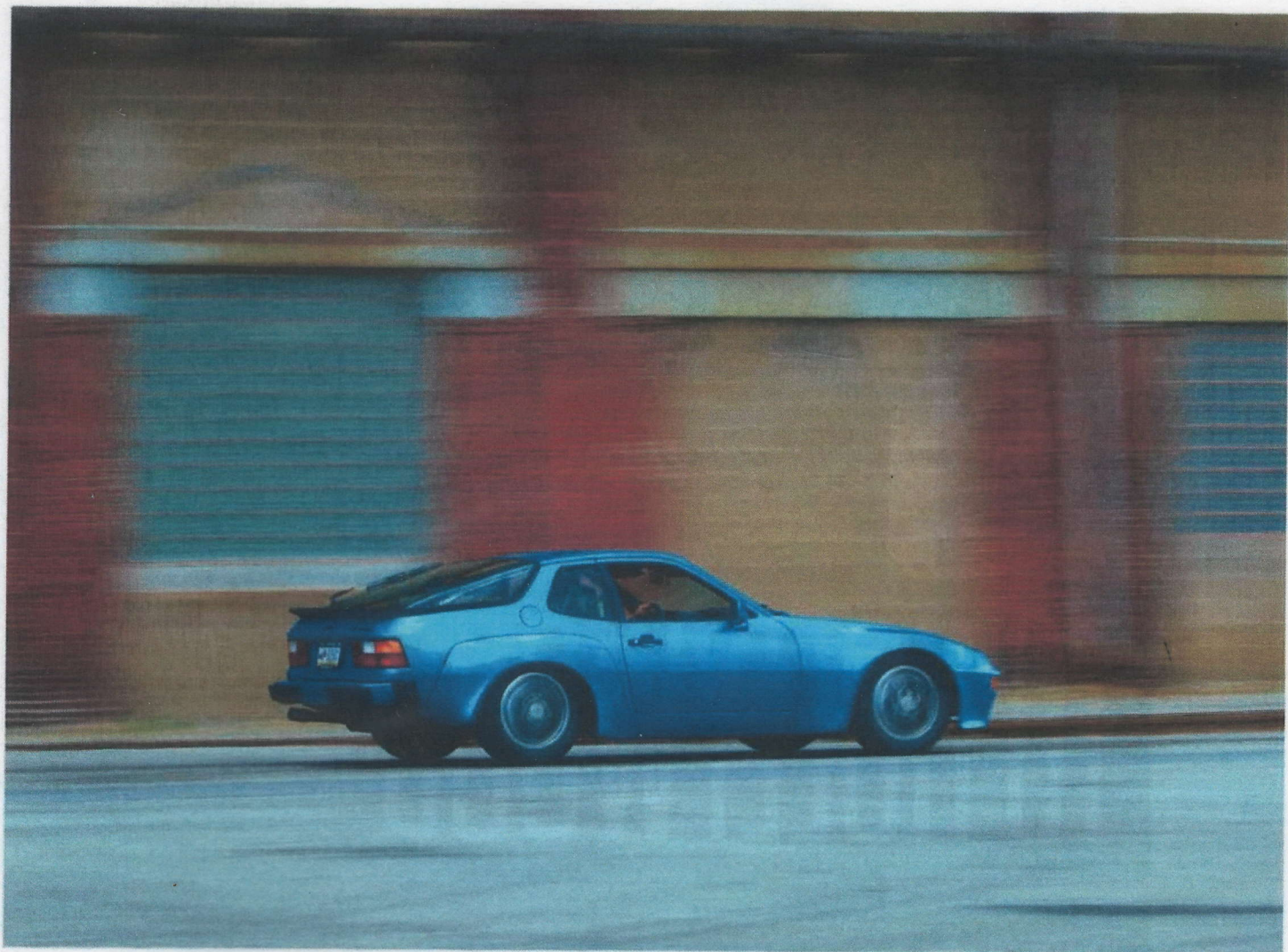
ASIDE FROM TOUCH-UPS on the airdam and rocker panels, the car's paint is all original and in excellent condition. Following its restoration, a specialist called Fast Company in Pittsburgh has performed the car's service work, keeping it running smoothly and strongly—now with a still impossibly low 22,500 miles.

The car has participated in PCA Allegheny Region meetings and has been part of the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix Parade since 1985. Thierry still delights in telling all who will listen about this 924 Turbo's tale, of a unique dealer special that was cared for by three inveterate Porsche lovers, all of whom knew each other (William Braunlich Jr. unfortunately passed away in 1995) and all of whom were dedicated to keeping this special car alive.

That brings us back to the present day, and the relentless questioning that greets Thierry whenever he shows his 924 Turbo. At a recent car

Gray 16-inch 928 wheels look great under purposeful Carrera GT flares designed under Style Porsche boss Tony Lapine. The Martini-themed cabin still looks great today, even if wear suggests the cloth wasn't up to Porsche standards. Upside-down, green-on-black tachometer is striking.





meet, he was fielding the usual questions from onlookers when he noticed one attendee taking pictures of the car from every angle.

Thierry approached the man. "If you want to know anything else about the car, just ask," he said. The man's response surprised him: "No, no. If *you* want to know anything else about the car, just ask."

It turns out the enthusiastic photographer was the son of William Braunlich Jr., the car's original owner. Now, we don't know if the junior Braunlich covets his father's former car, or if Thierry would even be willing to sell it to him—but wouldn't *that* be a fitting close to this story of a special Porsche and its close circle of Porsche friends? ●