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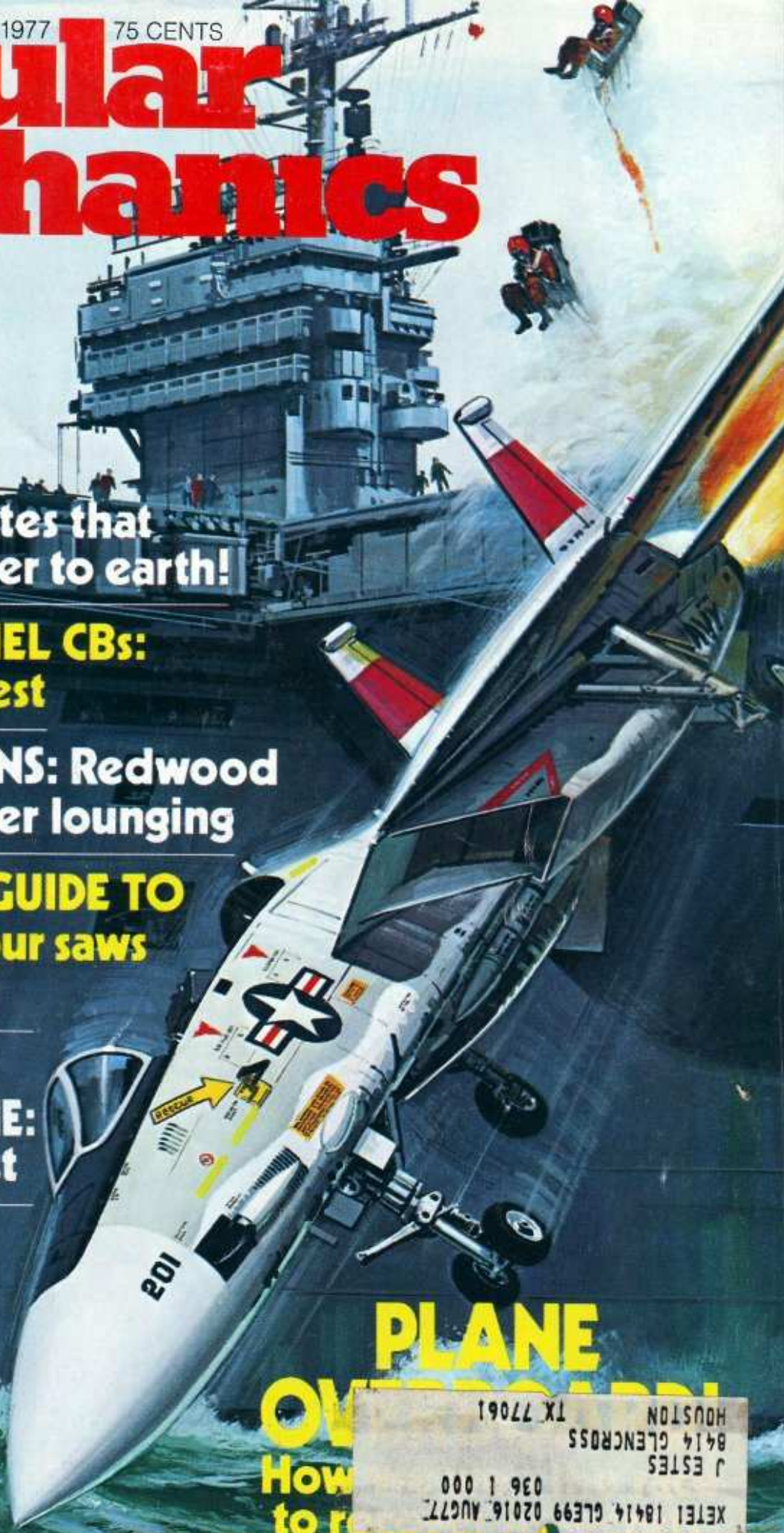
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FIRSTHAND REPORT

by Bill Hartford

AUTO EDITOR



It's every cubic inch a Porsche—even though it will first be scorned by rear-engine 911 nuts as a Stuttgart sellout—a crude Corvette with a fat V8 up front.

The 928 will go on sale in the fall and overnight the 911 driver will become legend: He'll be a barnstormer—a driver whose expert flicks on the steering wheel and sensitivity at the throttle are all that keep the twitchy rear end of his car from spinning him into oblivion.

No such degree of skill is necessary to guide the well-behaved 928 safely through the esses and even less to keep it on the straight and narrow. The devotee of the classic Porsche will miss the twitch and the sidewind sensitivity. And it'll take him some miles to get hooked on the new sounds and sensations peculiar to the 928. But when he does, there'll be no going back. Only the purest of the purists would prefer the original 356 Ferdinand-Porsche Porsche over a 911.

Preflight checkout

The 928 is an all-new car, but sitting at the wheel, any Porsche fan will feel right at home: The design of the sport steering wheel continues in the tradition of the marque, and, as with all Porsche

models, it's a car that you "wear."

Before you move off the line there are a few things to do: First, there's a muscle-wrenching reach for the shoulder/lap belt (see below) which protrudes from the B-pillar panel far behind the front seat back. A small hook on the side of the seat back could be used to keep the belt within reach. Otherwise it's easy to settle in: Seats are fully adjustable, and so are the pedals and steering wheel.

Some of the controls, switches and instruments are familiar and in the usual places; others are not. The ignition, for example, is not on the steering column, but in the instrument cluster in front of the driver. The trickiest switch of all is on the carpeted rocker panel at the driver's left: It's the "fine tune" headlight aim to adjust for different loading conditions, of course. But it may be used by the overzealous to fry thoughtless drivers who don't dip their high beams.

The car is fitted with headlamp and windshield-washing systems, with the windshield getting a special squirt of cleaning solvent from a second reservoir.

In the center console is a 12-function warning system for malfunctions: Flashing lamps indicate loss of vital fluids like engine oil or brake fluid. Steady illumination of other lamps tip you off to low washer fluid, brake pads wearing thin and so on.

That innocent-looking glovebox—are you ready?—is not exactly a refrigerator, but it is cooled by a strategically placed airconditioner duct. And why not? Now on summer picnics you can double the range of your egg salad sandwiches with mayo.

Taxiing for takeoff

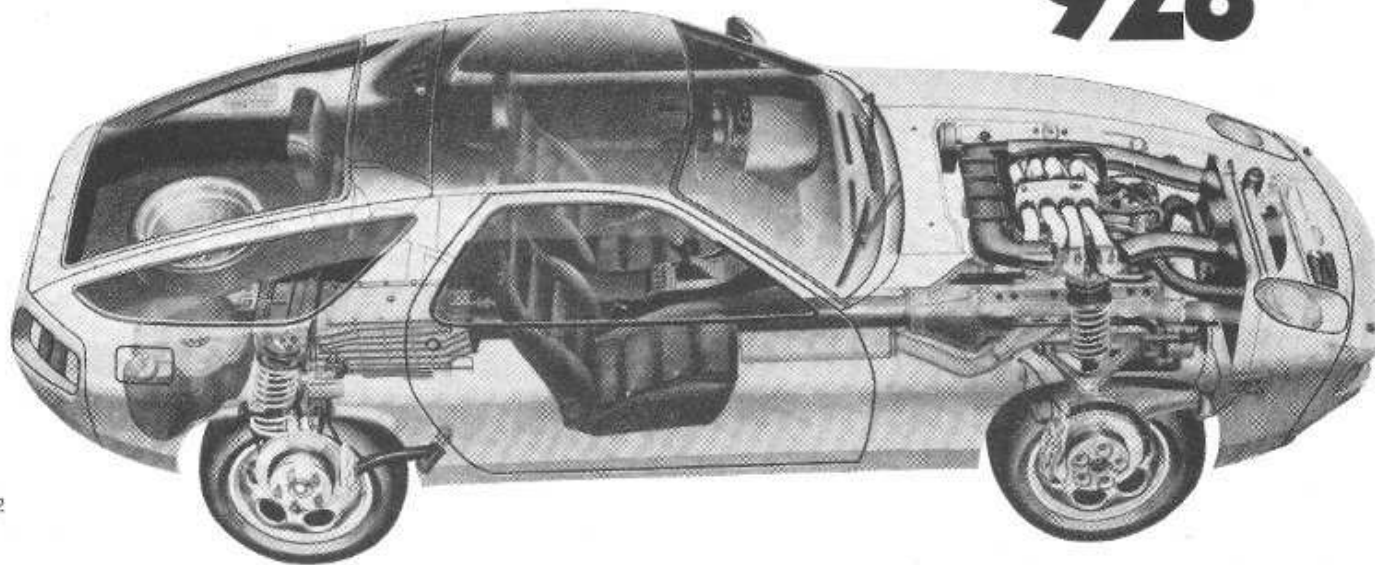
Turn the key on the 928 and let the Bosche K-Jetronic do all the thinking. No choke. No pumping.

Just off or on. The lightweight aluminum V8 (572 pounds) cranks out its 215 hp (U.S. version) maximum at 5250 rpm more than 1000 rpm below red line. Maximum torque (37 mkp) is available at 3600 rpm and the 928 pulls up to speed smoothly without balking even from low speeds in fifth gear. For real lazy-man driving, there is the optional automatic transmission (that Porsche buys from Mercedes-Benz).

The choice of V8 engine and transaxle drive train layout was made in 1971 when the 928 project began (the 924, introduced here in 1976, was a spinoff). The decision to go to a front-engine, water-cooled V8 was made at a time when more and tighter restrictions were being placed on cars. The improved emissions characteristics possible with a water-cooled V8 was only one factor. Noise regulations are also more easily met with engine noise and exhaust noise separated by the length of the car. The transaxle gives good front/rear weight balance for handling, and the 4.5-liter displacement provides the performance that the driver of this type of car de-

(Please turn to page 136)

At speed in the Porsche 928





Quick, quiet and comfortable, the front-engine, V8-powered Porsche is as refined as a 2+2 production sports car can be. Large hatch and soft butt mark the rear, pivoting headlights identify all-new, 140-mph 928 from the front.

Balance and symmetry show through in layout of the transaxle and fuel-injection systems at left. The ohc, water-cooled, 90° V8 displaces 4.5 liters. Block and head are aluminum, as are hood, doors and front fenders.

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AT SPEED IN THE PORSCHE 928 (Continued from page 92)



Cockpit of all-new 928 is identifiable as a Porsche by traditional steering wheel.

mands. And perform it really does.

Power comes on with a rush, but smoother and quieter than with the 911. A special twin-disc clutch was developed to handle the torque. Let up your left foot and nail your right and in less than seven seconds you cross the 60-mph point. The 928 body's drag coefficient, a scientific term indicating how slippery the shape makes the car, is the same as that of the 911, long admired as one of the most perfect shapes to grace a wind tunnel. Third gear is good to about 90 mph (and 13 seconds into the mission). Stand on it in fourth to about 118 and in fifth to a maximum of about 140. This Sunday drive, by the way, was in Europe and therefore perfectly legal.

The concentration required for driving at such speeds can be fatiguing (especially on top of jet lag) so I took a turn in the passenger seat. With a colleague at the wheel, somewhere on the autoroute near Nice, at between 120 and 140 mph, I fell asleep—out like a light in the reclined passenger seat. Napping is not usual in testing, but it emphasized for me what a *Grand Touring* car the 928 is!

Safe landings

There are other objectives in designing a safety-fast car. All brakes on the 3200-pound 928, for example, are vented discs, and the 16-inch aluminum wheels have specially made radials with an aspect ratio of 50 percent. Brake and fuel lines are corrosion-resistant, but most unusual is the "floating frame" brake-pad design that keeps friction from heating the temperature of the hydraulic brake fluid above 90° C. This is below the boiling point, so no steam bubbles can form in contaminated hydraulic fluid to cause brake fade. Overengineered? Yes, for most of us. But that's part of what it means to own a \$25,000 car.

Another potential lifesaver is the Porsche-engineered suspension. It's a road-holder all right. Under the skin, the 928 chassis sparkles like an Indy racer. Rigid, cast-aluminum trailing arms and front-axle geometry keep the front end pinned the way you want to go even in blow-outs and braking on slippery roads.

Specially developed for the 928, is the "Weissach" rear axle named after Porsche's Weissach engineering facility and test track. This linkage compensates for a phenomenon in curves: When you lift off the gas, such as in a left-hand curve, induced rear-wheel toe-out can tend to turn the car deeper into the curve and into oncoming traffic. The Weissach rear axle is designed to toe-in the rear wheels when decelerating and thus cancel the toe-out phenomenon. That took some fancy engineering and Porsche patented it.

Back down to earth

Even the most sophisticated car needs basic battery care, and Porsche provides a Triptick so the do-it-yourselfer can find the battery. There was no room under the hood so it's in a bracket attached to the back of the differential. You reach it through a hatch. This helps weight distribution and the battery weight is said to dampen vibration.

The plastic fuel tank next to the battery holds 86 liters (22.7 gallons). Fuel consumption of the 928 (not yet EPA-rated) should be about 18 mpg; wheelbase is 98.5 inches; overall length, 175.

Those five-hole, lunar-rover wheels are cast alloy. They're odd at first look, but they'll probably become the slick setup.

Now that you've seen it, if the 928 is just too, too slick for your taste, and you'd rather stick to barnstorming, you'll be able to get a 911, says Porsche, for at least another four years. ★★★