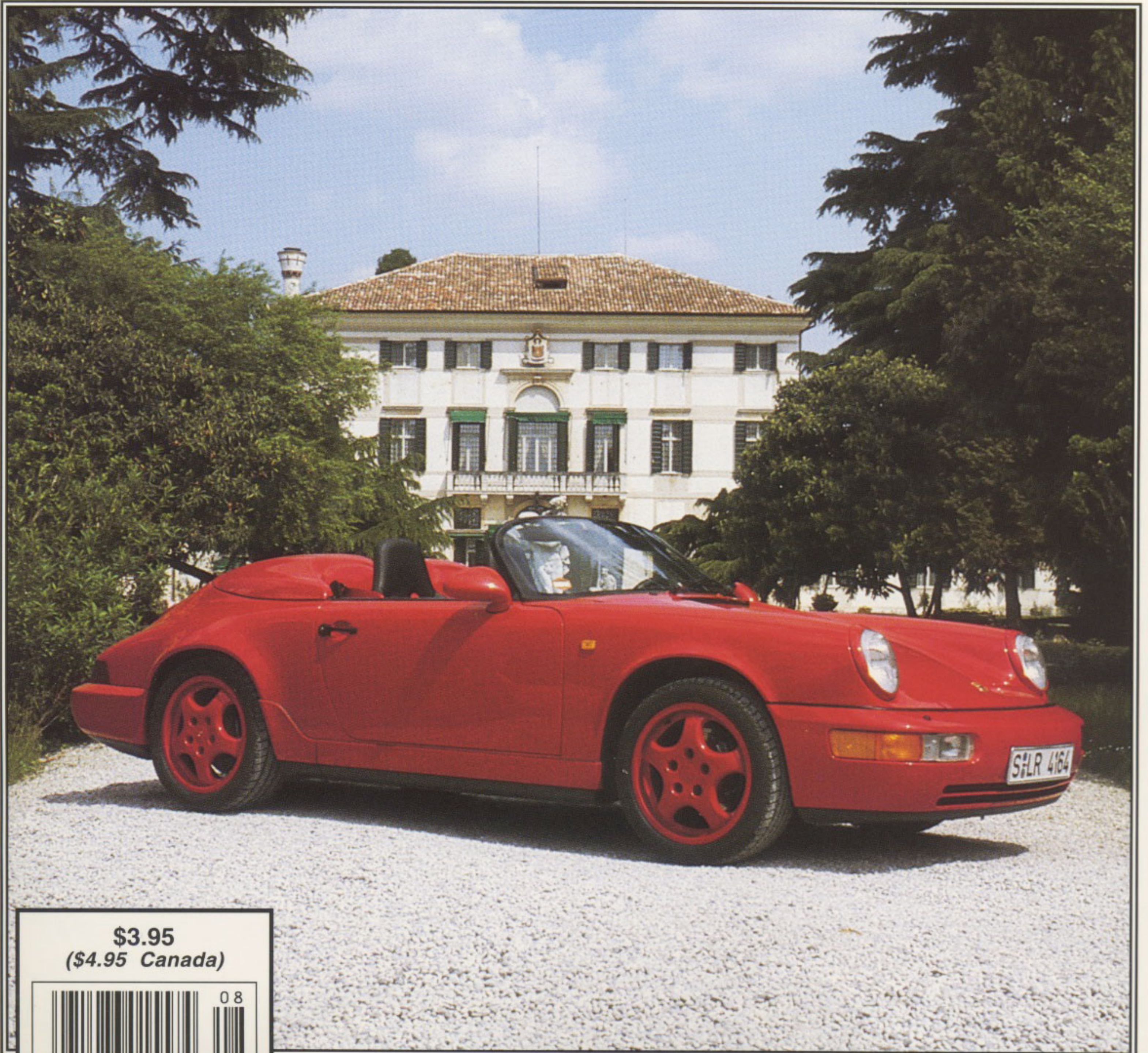


Excellence

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PORSCHE'S NEW 911 SPEEDSTER



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Why are all the driving photos of a Porsche Speedster taken with the top folded? To show the driver's ear-to-ear grin of course. If it isn't sunny enough to drive a Speedster open — take a different car. Although Porsche claims identical performance times and weight, the Speedster feels (subjectively) livelier: typical Carrera 2 vigor notched up one.



Speedster



Name which matters — script on tail is only one.

Nearly forty years separate 356 and latest 911 Speedsters.

Photos by author

By
Jerry Sloniger



Third Time — Still A Charm Porsche's New 911 Speedster

Photo compliments of PORSCHE AG



Porsche's New 911 Speedster

All Porsches in the last forty-odd years have been kinda quirky. No surprise there. But the ones called Speedsters were always a little quirkier than the rest. The "niche auto" idea hadn't even been invented when Max Hoffmann talked Porsche into building an "entry level" (another phrase which came later) Speedster for his more sporting American customers.

Porsche eventually built 4822 in 356 form, a relatively good percentage by 1950's production standards. This inverted bathtub progressed through desirable to legendary and eventually became avidly coveted.

Never the firm to let a good idea fade away, Porsche revived the Speedster name in 1987 for its first

911 effort of that ilk and built (probably) 2100 of those too. We know about 171 in the narrow look, while the rest were hippier. What Porsche itself can't say is whether the pre-production cars between 1987 debut and actual deliveries, starting two years later, are included in that 171 figure.

Now it's third-time-lucky for Speedster fans, but their joys will be limited as well. When first announced the new Speedster was assigned a top production figure of 3000. Today they admit, when not quoted personally, that 1500 is more likely in the current

Now it's third-time-lucky for Speedster fans...

car climate and they'd be surprised to reach 2000. Zuffenhausen would naturally be overjoyed to see sales pick up and 3000 new Speedsters go out the door, but the odds are that this will be the rarest of that breed.

For one thing, an updated shape (993) will be announced at the Frankfurt motor show this September. While their latest Speedster could be



built on that base as well, with no real strain, "it isn't in the plans right now." Like the previous 911 Speedster, this one was conceived to extend the delights of a model (964) about to be supplanted. 1989 Speedsters were built in the old body shop, and terminated by their move to Plant V for 964s. Today Coupés, Cabrios and now Speedsters share a single floorpan. Don't bet there won't be a 993 with cut down windshield at some future date.

Low front glass is a permanent part of Speedster identity. This one is fixed, however, unlike both previous models which could be unbolted. Rationale is closer production-tolerance control and better sealing. Water exclusion actually exceeds minimums established in their project book. Also continued, of course, are an unpadded soft top and low side windows. Looking out of a closed Speedster still reminds you of peering out of a mailbox through the slot.

A certain manual cleverness and excellent memory for a complicated sequence of moves will come in handy when raising or lowering the top. Porsche's very own Speedster Project Director admits it still takes him about two minutes to perform the task.

Photos by author

Side view with top in place makes Speedster character most obvious. Extending the top rearwards gave a nice line with it closed, somewhat at expense of vision from the driver's seat. Wheels in car color.

Owners would do well to stop 4-5 minutes before the downpour arrives. Like Nürburgring, which has so many half-curves and linked corners nobody can agree on the actual total, the 911 Speedster requires anything from fifteen different movements upwards. Precise number depends on hands engaged.

Mind you, their applied engineering is extremely clever. It starts with two

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latches above the low windshield, protected by red buttons so you won't trip one by mistake when you only wanted to move those comically narrow sun visors. Then you release an over-center handle behind the driver's seat and

the fun begins. There are two sets of cloth loops to hook onto unseen rods at different times and two more to fish out and pull rearwards, freeing a channel in the cloth from the twin-hump

plastic lid. What looks like snaps, two to a side, are not. Merely indications of where to grasp the top and pull down until another small channel on each side comes clear of the lid edges.



Erecting or lowering top requires several minutes, a good memory for the sequence and gentle hands to get all folds and loops in right place. Lid latches securely and is held up by gas struts.



Guards red and speed yellow are standard Speedster colors, silver wasn't explained.

Porsche's New 911 Speedster



Slightly humped look from rear is unavoidable with top in place, although it has Speedster character. And is better handled here than for the previous 911 version.

Carefully lifting that moderately rigid lid up and back on its struts before folding in prescribed order and then relatching the lid completes your stowing. Plus several motions I forgot. Closing the package is a little easier to keep straight because the various loops are already hooked and only need finding.

Since the only differences between a Porsche 911 Cabrio and ditto Speedster lie above the belt line, the top and its effect on driving are what count here.

For instance, the sound of that

engine right behind your ears, apparently funneled forward by the humps, can be half the pleasure of a Speedster. Up to certain speeds, that is. Everybody has a different tolerance threshold for wind noise but there are pretty clear barriers here. Up to 85 MPH there is a little wind buffeting around your centerline ear but you can still drive the freeways with side windows up and enjoy life. About 100, the debate begins between slowing down and putting the top up; at 110, wind roar is becoming noticeably fatiguing if not painful. By 125 MPH, driving a topless Speedster outpaces masochism.

Closing things up isn't actually the answer either. At virtually the same speeds noted above, you progress through open-car noise to excessive roar from the sides (100), on to a shrill whistle above the rearview mirror (110) and build up to something like standing behind a departing jet (125 MPH). In other words, a Speedster is ideal for winding roads and any speed which won't activate the rev limiter in third gear.

Those restyled humps restrict three-quarter rear vision somewhat with the top down but when you raise the roof, vision is completely blocked. An inside mirror aims between the bumps nicely though.

A sunny day, a lot of tight corners, and low traffic levels are Speedster time.

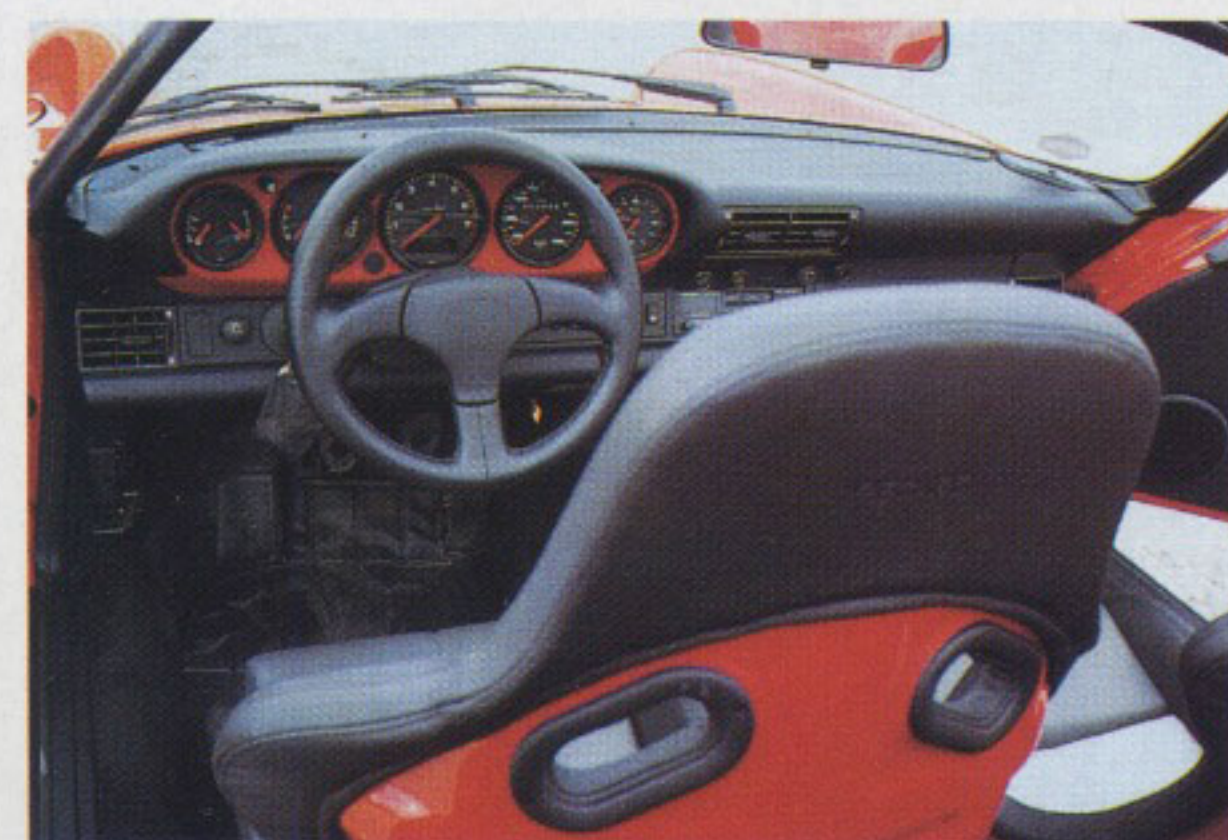
Although there are no rear seats, fewer heavy electrics and less glass, Porsche quotes the same 2975 lb. weight — and identical performance figures — for normal Carrera 2 and Speedster. Maybe it's only a subjective pleasure but the car feels more nimble, wagging its tail just enough as you power out of second-gear bends and diving into downhill hairpins with that off-hand élan and immaculate braking which are 911 trademarks. If we must have quibbles, shift motions aren't as

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precise as their six-speed box and a heavy, slightly dead brake pedal is set too high for heel-toe maneuvers.

Recaro buckets — with holes at the top to fit four-point harness although they are also a pleasant tribute to slotted 356 Speedster seats — give ideal lateral support without having sides so high it's hard to enter. Only modest agility is required, even with that low top in place. Heavily dished backs block access to the three-point belt though. Basic Speedsters don't have electric seat adjustment but that hardly matters, except that a comfortable distance from the clutch brought the wheel a little too close. It sits low anyway.

I can't be too dogmatic about standard, not-offered and optional



(above) Recaro bucket seats have holes at the top for four-point harness — also in memory of slots in original 356 Speedster seats. Seat backs, instrument surround, shift lever and handbrake in car color. Seat cushions in three shades of gray.

(below) Typical weight-saving touch of recent Porsches: loop to release door latch from inside, plain handle to pull door closed — both in car color.



Three-quarter view reveals the twin-hump rear lid to cover the folded top — a Speedster feature since the 1987-89 version.

equipment for any given land. Not when Porsche's own press release and house magazine couldn't agree for German cars. Suffice that this Speedster can be much better equipped than a stripper, although it IS somewhat simpler in the basic version.

For instance, the seats in three gray tones are normally adjusted by hand and you have to lock each door separately, but electric windows should be standard. One option would be Tiptronic, another dual air bags and that is unfortunate for a firm which made such a point of being the first to fit them to every car it builds. A price-driven retreat from Porsche-like safety commitments to my mind — even if the non-bag steering wheel is handsomer. A leather interior is another option, along with air-conditioning and/or computer.

Like most of their recent limited editions, car colors are supposedly restricted to guards red, grand prix white, maritime blue, speed yellow and black. "Supposedly" because there was a silver car at the first-drive launch outside Venice. Probably to match the 356 Speedster from their museum — but a possible customer color too. All tops are black. Seat backs are (usually) painted car color, as are 17" wheels (black car excepted). Instrument surround, shift and

handbrake levers and door pulls match the car color. Generally.

There was no chance to take accurate performance figures in the Dolomite foothills and Porsche blandly claims the same 162 MPH top speed and 0-60 in 5.6 seconds as they do for the Carrera 2 Coupé. One engineer admitted the reduced frontal area was worth 1.2 MPH around the Nardo bowl, despite a soft top, so 163.2 is semi-official. No hardtop is planned this

time around but it would add another bit. More in the Porsche style is 60 to 0 in 2.7 seconds. Their brakes are simply so good it's redundant to mention them.

In sum, this would only be a reasonable first car for those few who can't live without a Speedster. More likely as a second Porsche or third car in the family. Few Porsches are more fun. Or less practical. "Logical" simply never figured in any Speedster project book.



With top tucked under its plastic lid, rear view of car takes on twin-headrest Speedster look.