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Porsche 911 - The Iconic Sports Car

By Ralf G. Bahr

The Porsche 911 is the longest-running sports car in production. Ferdinand Alexander Porsche designed it as the successor to the Porsche 356. Initially named the 901, it was renamed 911 after Peugeot claimed the 901 name. As a result, only a handful of Porsches were labeled 901. Before the 901, there was the 356, which had been in production for a long time and was nearing the limits of its mechanical capabilities. Many variations were introduced during its run, with mechanical improvements and minimal visual updates. In the mid-1950s, Porsche developed prototypes for the successor to the 356, featuring a similar structure but incorporating a new front suspension, disc brakes, and a six-cylinder engine.

The Porsche 911 was launched on September 12, 1963, at the Frankfurt International Motor Show, with production beginning in September 1964. Initially, it was available only as a fixed-head coupe. In 1967, a Targa model with a removable roof was introduced. It featured a 1991 cc air-cooled flat-six engine producing 130 horsepower and a top speed of 130 mph.

The Porsche 912, designed similarly to the 911, served as a bridge between the 356 and the 911. It had fewer amenities, less power, and weighed about 250 pounds less than the 911. It was equipped with a 5-speed gearbox and a detuned 4-cylinder engine producing 64 horsepower. The engine was mounted in the rear and powered the rear transaxle. The car had excellent handling thanks to its disc brakes and independent torsion-bar suspension. Recaro seats provided secure support, while the responsive rack-and-pinion steering enhanced the driving experience. Optional features included air conditioning, a rear window wiper, halogen fog lights, an electric sunroof, and three-point seat belts. The Porsche 912 was available in coupe and Targa styles, with the Targa more popular.

Produced from 1965 to 1969, it initially outsold the more powerful 911 models because of its lower cost. In 1967, it won Car and Driver's 'Readers' Choice' award and also succeeded in motorsport, including a victory at the European Rally Championship.

After the 914's production ended in 1975, the 912E, also known as the Type 923, was introduced. It featured a 2-liter engine and used the 911 body, but it had smaller wheels and non-vented brake rotors. The 912E was Porsche's last air-cooled four-cylinder vehicle, with over 2,099 units produced before the 924. In total, 35,000 912 models were manufactured.

Porsche 911 Targa

In 1965, the Targa was introduced as an open version of the 911. The name comes from a road race in Sicily called 'Targa Florio.' Targa also means 'shield,' which describes the roll bar. The rear window could fold down, and the panel between the windshield and the roll bar could be removed, creating an open version of the 911.

Porsche 911 S

In 1966, the 911S was introduced as a more powerful version of the standard 911. It featured engine upgrades that added thirty horsepower, a modified chassis, larger brakes, and lighter Fuchs alloy wheels.

The 911 T debuted in 1967 with a detuned six-cylinder engine producing 110 horsepower at a lower price. That same year, the 911S received ventilated disc brakes. By 1968, new emissions regulations had led to the 911S being replaced by the 911L in the U.S., but it returned in 1969.

In 1969, the 911 E became the base model, with 140 horsepower in the U.S. and 160 in Europe. The 911T offered 125 horsepower, while the 911 S had 170 in the U.S. and 190 in Europe. A five-speed manual gearbox was also introduced.

By 1970, engine capacity increased to 2165 cc, boosting power to 125 for the 911 T, 155 for the 911 E, and 180 for the 911 S. During that model year, a lightweight performance version of the 911 S was introduced, resulting in an 1840-pound, street-legal race car.

By 1972, a standard spoiler was added to the 911 S, and by 1973, it became standard across all models as the engine's stroke increased, achieving a displacement of 2.4 liters.

Porsche Carrera RS

In 1973, Porsche aimed to compete in GT racing and needed to produce 500 street-legal race cars for homologation in the Group 4 GT class. To meet this requirement, they built the RS, which became popular, with 1,636 units produced. The RS was lightweight, using thin-gauge steel and fiberglass, though some cars were built with standard-weight parts.

Compared with the 911S, the RS was 330 pounds lighter, thanks to wider aluminum wheels, Bilstein shocks, and modified sway bars for improved handling. A distinctive 'ducktail' rear spoiler added downforce, while a modified 2.4-liter engine produced more horsepower.

Porsche Carrera RSR 3.0

The RSR 3.0 produced 20 more horsepower than the 2.7 version but weighed 180 kg more because of larger components. This made the RSR slower than the 2.7, though it handled better with wider tires. Only 109 examples were produced, including 60 road versions.

In 1973, the 911E, 911T, and 911S were equipped with a 2.4-liter six-cylinder engine. The following year, the Carrera was introduced as the performance option, with the 911S positioned as the intermediate model, as with the earlier 911E. The Carrera was distinguished by its black exterior components, including door handles, wipers, and window frames.

In 1974, the Porsche 911 Turbo debuted as the world's first turbocharged sports car, powered by a 3.0-liter engine producing 290 horsepower. By 1976, the Carrera received an engine update, producing 200 horsepower. In 1978, the lineup included the Turbo and the SC models. The 911 SC, equipped with a dependable 3.0-liter engine rated at 180 horsepower, was more luxurious but heavier, which affected its performance compared to the 1977 Carrera 3.0. Meanwhile, the Turbo was upgraded with a 3.3-liter engine, boosting its output to 300 horsepower.

In 1979, modifications to the 911 SC's engine increased horsepower to 188 and improved fuel economy by 10 percent. By 1980, the 911 SC produced 204 horsepower, while other 911 models gained additional power, except those exported to the United States.

Produced in 1980, the limited-edition 911 SC Weissach was built in 400 units (or possibly 406, according to some sources), all of which were sold in the U.S. Half were painted Pongee Beige Metallic, and the other half were charcoal gray. The interiors featured red and burgundy carpets and beige leather seats. This model included an RS wing and a new front spoiler. Priced at \$32,000, the Weissach was notably expensive for its time.

At the 1981 Frankfurt Auto Show, Porsche unveiled a four-wheel-drive cabriolet version of the 911. The following year, it became available as an option on the 911 SC, marking Porsche's first cabriolet.

In 1984, the new Carrera replaced the 911 SC, upgrading from a 3.0-liter to a 3.2-liter engine. The 911 Turbo and 911 Carrera were available in coupe, cabriolet, or Targa styles. The Carrera improved upon the 911 SC with increased luxury, power, and better brakes. The 3.2-liter engine remained in use until 1989, when a 3.6-liter version replaced it. In

1988, the Turbo model featured a five-speed manual gearbox.

Porsche launched the Carrera 3.2 Speedster in 1989. It featured a foldable top stored beneath a fiberglass cover. The Speedster was lighter than the standard model because several electrical options were removed. 2,065 Speedsters were produced, of which 1,894 included the turbo-look option, enhancing their aggressive appearance but adding weight.

Porsche 911 Carrera CS

The 911 Carrera CS, introduced in 1987, was a limited-edition model designed for the racetrack. This lightweight version lacked luxury amenities and included only the essentials. It is distinguished by its red wheels and vibrant graphics. Most models were 'Grand-Prix' white, with one specially constructed Targa. A total of 340 units were produced.

Porsche Carrera 2 and 4

In 1989, the Porsche 911 received significant upgrades, including a 3.6-liter engine, new suspension and transmission, a self-adjusting rear spoiler, plastic bumpers, and improved brakes—resulting in more than an 80% improvement over the previous model. A key introduction was the Carrera 4, a four-wheel-drive variant. The rear spoiler engaged at speeds above 50 mph to enhance stability, while larger brakes delivered improved stopping power. By 1990, the Carrera 2 and Carrera 4 were available in Cabriolet, Targa, and Coupe styles, and a new Tiptronic transmission enabled clutchless shifting.

Porsche Carrera RS

In 1990, Porsche introduced the Carrera RS series, featuring a modified engine producing 260 horsepower. It also included lightweight materials, Recaro seats, and minimalist interiors. The RS touring option added further roadworthy features. A total of 2,051 Carrera RS models were produced, including 76 with the touring option.

Porsche Carrera RS America

In 1993, Porsche introduced the RS America, a lightweight, limited-edition performance version of the 911 Carrera RS, to celebrate its 20th anniversary. The 'RS' stands for 'Renn Sport,' meaning 'Race Sport' in German. The Carrera RS was conceived in 1973 and was available only in Europe due to U.S. safety and emissions regulations. The U.S. version of the 1993 model was known as the 'RS America.' This lightweight model prioritized performance over luxury, offering a sports suspension package, 17-inch wheels, a larger front stabilizer bar, and modified shock absorbers. With weight reduction and improved steering, the 911 RS America became a high-performance racing car. The RS model was highly successful in America and was initially intended for 1993 but continued into 1994. Vehicles from 1993 have 'PS' in their VINs, while those from 1994 include 'RS.' The 1994

models feature rear seats, unlike the 1993 versions, which have dual storage bins. The RS is identifiable by an 'RS' decal in front of each rear wheel well and an RS America emblem on the rear deck lid. It also comes with a large rear spoiler, referred to as a 'wholesale,' and some versions are equipped with a motor-driven spoiler that deploys and stows at different speeds.

Porsche 993

In 1994, the next generation of the Porsche 911, the 993, was launched exclusively as a coupe. It featured redesigned elements, including the removal of upright headlights, wider fenders, and 16-inch wheels, along with a modified 3.6-liter engine producing 260 horsepower and a brand-new six-speed manual gearbox. The larger chassis offered 20% more interior space and improved, driver-friendly interiors. In 1995, a Targa variant was introduced, followed by the Turbo, Carrera 4S, RS, and RS Club Sport in 1996.

Porsche 996

In 1998, Porsche launched the next generation of the 911, the 996, which featured a new, more powerful, water-cooled, fuel-efficient engine producing 296 horsepower. The car showcased an extended length, updated suspension, headlights, and styling. A cabriolet version was also introduced, with the top folding into the body rather than sitting on it.

Conclusion1

Since its introduction in 1963, the 911 has enjoyed remarkable appeal on racetracks and among car enthusiasts. With more than 50 variations, including rear-wheel drive, all-wheel drive, cabriolet, Targa, and special editions, the 911 has consistently set high standards for technology, performance, design, and handling.

Who could have predicted that the 911 would become Porsche's saving grace, surpassing the 356 in both sales and longevity? Emerging as an icon of the 1960s, the 911 (pronounced "Nine Eleven") is now Porsche's flagship model and one of the oldest sports coupe nameplates still in production. Since its debut, the 911 has undergone significant modifications while maintaining its core concept. It was renowned for its air-cooled engine until the introduction of the Type 996 in 1998.

*If you have questions or would like to share your perspective,
I would be interested to hear from you.*

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