

AutoSunday



BY JASON STEIN
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How does one describe the indescribable?

When it comes to the Porsche 959, you could pull out every superlative and every piece of hyperbole from your verbal arsenal ... and it still might not be enough.

This little-known but highly touted hyper-Porsche turned the 1980s definition of high performance completely upside down with its futuristic approach to speed, handling and computer-controlled hardware. It was a car that was light-years ahead of its time and one that would become the benchmark for all Porsches that followed.

Conceived, designed and built in the 1980s to go racing in a new factory-experimental class, Porsche also set out to build about 200 copies (as mandated by the rules) of the 959 for public consumption.

Of course, racing had been in Porsche's blood since the company's modest beginnings shortly after World War II. From its earliest "bathtub" cars to the modern-day 911, all models have benefitted from the lessons learned on the track.

The beginning point of the 959 was the mid-1980s 911 Carrera, a competent sports machine, but not aerodynamically suited for high-speed competition. To address the problem, all-new bodywork was designed, including a smoother nose and a flat spoiler that extended across the rear deck. Bulging Kevlar-reinforced fiberglass fenders and protruding rocker panels allowed for extra-wide wheels and tires. Under the body, a special belly pan was attached to further enhance air flow.

Beneath the rear decklid sits the basis for any successful racing Porsche, and the company went flat-out to develop it: a flat six-cylinder powerplant for maximum velocity. Displacing just 2.8 liters,

the horizontally opposed double-overhead-cam engine featured twin turbochargers and intercoolers, three separate cooling systems, six oil pumps and 12 fuel injectors. With 444 horsepower and 369 pound-feet of torque, the 959 made 230 ponies more than the production car upon which it was based.

A six-speed gearbox, featuring an ultralow first gear for getting under way on off-road terrain, was standard. Dropping the clutch in second gear was the norm when starting off on paved surfaces.

To give the car suitable torque at low speeds, the turbos operated in sequence. At 4,000 r.p.m. or lower, only one turbo was working. Above that range, the other turbo would kick in and the engine would rocket to its 7,800 r.p.m. redline.

The performance numbers generated by the 959 were staggering. They still are, even by today's standards. Zero-to-60 mph flashed by in about 3.8 seconds, with 100 mph occurring in less than nine seconds. Top speed was 195 mph.

Porsche's success in breaking the four-second zero-to-60-mph barrier can largely be attributed to the 959's all-wheel-drive system that virtually eliminated traction loss from a dead stop.

The amount of power directed to the axles depended upon which one of four driver-controlled settings was selected: Dry, Wet, Ice and Traction. The latter locked up the front clutch and rear differential for maximum off-road grip and was successfully employed when early test versions of the 959 finished first — not once, but twice — in one of the world's toughest automotive contests, the 6,500-mile off-road Paris-Dakar (France to Senegal) rally.

Other complex groundbreaking items included computer-controlled hydraulic ride height, twin shock absorbers and coil springs positioned at each wheel, and a tire-pressure monitoring system used

Fine Lines

Porsche 959

with low-profile Bridgestone run-flat rubber.

Two trim levels were offered: Comfort, which included air conditioning, ride-height control and power windows and seats; and Sport, containing none of the Comfort's extras, which provided a 125-pound advantage.

There were a number of major obstacles that stood in the way of prospective 959 buyers when the car finally went on sale in 1987. First was its prohibitive \$227,000 price tag. Second, the company was very particular about who was allowed to buy it. Only regular customers who were deemed important or mature enough to handle the 959's awesome power were given a spot in a line that was only 230 buyers long. They also had to promise not to sell within six months.

Further complicating matters was the fact that the car could not be certified for use on North American roads (although a few vehicles managed to sneak in under the noses of government watchdogs).

Although the closest most of us will ever come to a 959 is the picture printed on this page, the benefits of this true supercar can be found in many of today's Porsches. In fact, the 400-horsepower, all-wheel-drive mid-1990s 911 Turbo is a direct descendant of the 959 program.

Nearly 20 years after the last of these hand-built rear-engine monsters left the factory, 959 values continue to appreciate, regularly breaching the \$250,000 barrier.

Such is the demand for this high-tech hall-of-fame Porsche that rewrote the exotic-car book and left behind an impressive technological legacy.

Classic recollections



Al Pasternak of Mount Prospect restored this 1934 Chevy.

Building show-quality cars is a Pasternak family tradition

BY SHERRY GIEWALD
Daily Herald Correspondent

When Al Pasternak of Mount Prospect brought home a 1934 Chevy with just a body and frame, it looked like a piece of junk. But Al saw possibilities.

"I didn't want a car that was intact," he said. "I only wanted a body and frame because I wanted to build a street rod."

So Al and his son Eric put in an engine, transmission, rear axle, front steering system and upholstery. "We did everything," Al said.

Today Al owns three Corvettes, a bunch of Camaros — the first one, last one and all the milestone ones in between—and of course his '34 street rod. That's not all. There are the motorcycles — three Harleys, a Kawasaki and some Hondas.

Of all these, the '34 Chevy is Al's pride and joy. "My son and I built it from nothing," he said. "Corvettes are fun to drive, but I didn't build them."

Al bought the '34 Chevy in 2000. "It had a sleek look," he said. "The fender line reminded me of the shape of a female body, just a beautiful style. The hood ornament is plexiglass that lights up — similar to what ships have to guide them through the night."

The love of cars is a family affair for the Pasternaks — Al and his wife Denise (now deceased), son Eric and daughter Carissa.

Eric is into Corvettes. He owns a '93 Corvette and has been restoring his dad's '69 Corvette convertible for the last 2½ years. He also has a project car, a replica of the car used in the 1980s

Show off your classic

- Send a photo and a few details or memories about your car to auto@dailyherald.com.

TV show "Hardcastle & McCormick," and three motorcycles.

Eric has always been interested in cars. As a kid, he tore up the carpet with his Hot Wheels, which he now displays as a collection. "I pretty much have an interest in anything with wheels — bicycles, go carts, skateboards, everything," he said.

Daughter Carissa owns a '95 Camaro Z28 that she drives, races and shows. Being a female in the predominately male-dominated world of cars, she gets challenged a lot, she said.

"People wonder if I'm just a woman with a pretty car or if I actually know what I'm talking about."

Carissa and her boyfriend Kyle Casimer, who owns a '72 Chevelle, plan to have their cars in their wedding procession. "That's how important they are to us," Carissa said.

Each family member has won many awards. Al's 1934 Chevy and Carissa's '95 Camaro Z28 each took first place at the International World of Wheels at McCormick Place. Carissa also received the rising star award for people under 25 years of age and best female in competition. Eric's paint job on Carissa's car was so spectacular it won best paint.

"This is our hobby," Al said. "We're a close family; the kids and I see each other all the time. And this car thing really keeps us together."



Al Pasternak, left, daughter Carissa and son Eric show off their hardware won at a recent car show.

Spark plugs are not the only change needed at 100,000 miles

Q. I have a 99.5 Nissan Pathfinder LE that has a 100,000-mile tuneup warranty. I have 103,000 miles at the moment and haven't had the tuneup done. What are the parts that need to be changed during this tuneup? Do I just change the spark plugs and spark plug wires? Can I use an iridium spark plug or does it really matter?

A. The original equipment plug for your vehicle is a double platinum. If you want to put the iridium plug in you can. However, I usually recommend the OE spec ignition components.

The other things you'll want to think about replacing are the ignition wires, distributor cap and distributor rotor. If



Doug McAllister
Under the hood

Q. I read with interest what one reader was saying about the ABS light being on. It concerns my ill-fated 1999 Chevy Silverado, 4WD pickup. I had a situation on a drive to Pittsburgh from Elgin, towing a 6-by-12-foot trailer, except my ABS warning light did not

you have not replaced it in a while, you also should put on a new fuel filter and PCV (positive crankcase ventilation) valve. Lastly, don't forget to make sure the air filter is clean.

come on.

During "pit stops," I heard what sounded like a motor running under the truck after exiting. I would return and hear the same motor-running-sound. I went on to Pittsburgh, starting to worry about something running continually under the body.

At my destination in Pittsburgh, I pulled a 60A main fuse to disable whatever was running under the truck. With the fuse pulled, everything else worked OK and I could drive the truck normally. The next day, a Chevy dealer told me the ABS pump/system failed and it would cost about \$1,100 to replace. The dealer told me, confidentially, not to spend \$1,100 to replace the ABS

pump — it wasn't worth it!

Now I like driving my truck without ABS. The brake pedal is much firmer — and consistently firmer. Formerly — with ABS — I never knew where the brake pedal was. I grew up having driven a 1938 Ford with mechanical — not hydraulic — brakes, so I don't need a computer to tell me how to brake.

A. Thanks for sharing your story with us. As I shared in the column, you can certainly drive a vehicle with an ABS brake light on. This means that the ABS will not engage when there is a wheel lock. Unfortunately in your case, the most expensive part of the system failed and by disabling it you solved the one problem but are left with only the regular

braking system. This is fine as long as you would be the only driver, and come winter time or other slippery situations you know what to do. You will have to go back to the old days and pump the brake pedal in order to keep the car from skidding. I have a couple concerns for someone with a different kind of ABS failure.

In the case I wrote about we had a teenage driver that may not be as experienced in a slippery situation and I think the anti-lock brakes working properly would be an important safety feature. The second concern is that the main pump is not usually what fails; usually it is a wheel speed sensor which is not as expensive to replace as the controller

or pump. The concern is that sometimes when a sensor fails it can give you a false activation, where the ABS engages on dry pavement when coming to a stop. This can increase the stopping distance by a wide margin. In your case this will not happen because you have totally disabled the system. Just don't forget to get ready to work that brake pedal the next time you need to stop fast on a snowy or icy road.

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