



The Porsche 924 Carrera

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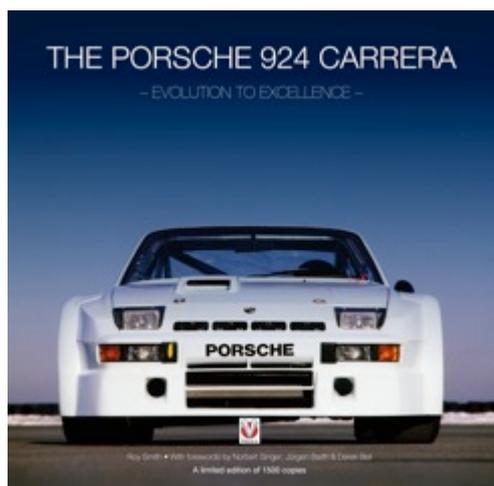
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Roy Smith has a happy knack of uncovering relatively obscure chapters of motor racing history and bringing them into the light with compelling new detail. His recent series of books on Alpine was typical, researching a subject little known outside France and even there not especially well written up, and making it accessible to a much wider readership. Now he has done it again with his most recent effort, the Porsche 924 Carrera.

This rather less famous Stuttgart product grew out of the project to turbocharge the 125bhp 924 to enhance the junior Porsche's performance. Naturally the factory took its new turbo racing - by 1981 at Le Mans, the competition 924 which finished seventh overall was producing 500 horsepower. For homologation purposes, Zuffenhausen had to build 400 production examples and with their flared wings, wider wheels and aggressive snouts these were named the 924 Carrera. Besides giving Porsche much successful competitive exposure at a time when the end of the 911 was officially programmed, the 924 Carrera was the template for the long running and profitable 944.



Roy Smith has spoken at length to the 924's engineers and many of its drivers: their first hand recollections endow the book with the energy and enthusiasm which characterise this author's works. Particularly interesting is some of the background material that he has unearthed. I was fascinated by the revelation that to boost the 924 Turbo's image, a project car was prepared in 1977 for a speed record attempt. Windtunnel testing produced the aerodynamic shape which later would enable the Carrera to exceed 170mph on the Mulsanne straight, and also the look which would become the basis of the 944. Intriguingly, despite extensive preparation, the record attempt never took place. Initially it was seen as a chance to dethrone Mercedes Benz whose five cylinder (Ferdinand Piëch - designed) diesel C111 had reached 157mph. Norbert Singer told the author that Porsche's project was called off by Dr Fuhrmann who had heard that Mercedes was planning a second attempt with a more potent rotary engined car and Fuhrmann didn't want to hand his Stuttgart rival more publicity by seeming to compete against it.

Roy Smith also shows how the racing 924 revived the careers of drivers such as Dron and Bell, and he quotes a letter dated November 1977 from Ickx to Dr Bott where the Belgian says in his charming French-English that though he had retired, he wanted to drive at Le Mans again: "I would be particularly happy if you could consider my integration in the experimental department of the firm...."

The engineering development story is told with the same convincing thoroughness and the book is very impressively illustrated with both technical images and racing archive material. Later chapters recount the 924 Carrera's extensive competition history with privateers in Europe, Australia and especially the US.

Porsche 924 Carrera is a fine book: Porsche is the most written-about car company in the world and Roy Smith's achievement is to have found much original material when so many other works on Porsche tend to cover well trodden ground. This Veloce hardback is substantial and well presented, but once again the regrettably light type face is not the easiest to read.



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Kieron Fennelly