Porsche 924/928/944/968 the Complete Story

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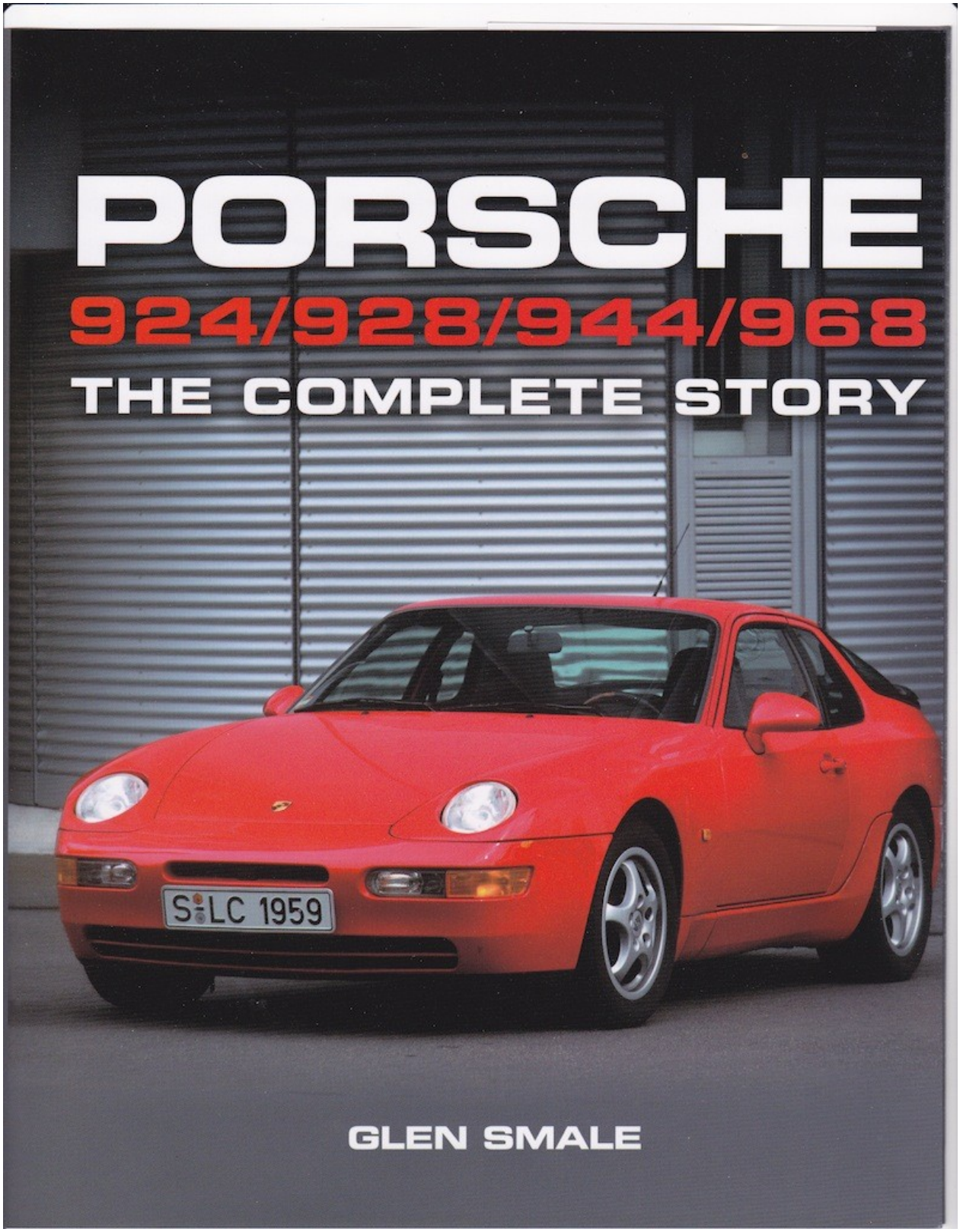
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924/928/944/968
THE COMPLETE STORY
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GLEN SMALE

Twenty years after the last one rolled off the production line, the transaxle cars are almost the forgotten Porsches. Indeed some of the more 'lifestyle' of the Porsche magazines never refer to them.

Yet for over a decade, the 924 and the 944 in particular were crucial to sustaining Porsche's profitability; if the 924 caused derision because it used Audi derived running gear, this is to overlook that its development manager was the late Paul Hensler, one of the original 911 heroes.

The 928, far better engineered than its Jaguar XJS competitor, was a superb GT which would have been seen as an unqualified success had it been the product of any manufacturer except the maker of the incomparable 911.

The 944, in turbo form as fast as the contemporary 911, afforded Porsche a vital mid-market presence and the 1990s version, the 968, if by then falling from favour still provided Porsche with a testbed for the multi-valve heads and variable cam technologies it would introduce with the 986 and 996.

In this eminently readable guide to the transaxle Porsches, Glen Smale shows how the 924 began as a joint venture with VW which Porsche then inherited *in toto* and the design process it went through before its styling was finalised. The remarkable 928 was by contrast an entirely Porsche conception.

The author demonstrates how the 944 grew from the 924 Le Mans racer and how the third member of the four cylinder triumvirate, the 968, successfully acquired the Porsche 'corporate' look to resemble the 928 (and herald the future 993).

The 928 is dealt with in four chapters and recourse to engineers who worked on the car, in this case Wolfhelm Gorissen, chassis and project manager, imparts authority to the writing.

The author has also spoken extensively to Porsche stylists of the period, not just Harm Lagaaij, a familiar figure, but also Hans Georg Kasten and Peter Reisinger. This adds

immediacy and authenticity to his text, and indeed a degree of poignancy for Reisinger, as chief modeller from 1970 to 2005, and a key figure at Weissach, died just before the book went to press. Indeed it is Reisinger who tells one of the best stories, commenting that as soon as the 928 was dropped in 1995, his was informed he could no longer drive his own cherished 928 to work and expect to use his allotted parking space.

The final 968 chapters are less detailed and perhaps the author could have pointed out that by the time of its introduction in late 1991, the transaxle 968 was doomed as the 986-996 platform was already on the drawing board. A fine car, as *Auto Motor & Sport* said, the 968's failure to meet anything like Porsche's expectations for a model which cost over DM 100 million to develop, was because there were not enough buyers prepared to pay DM100,000 (then in UK about £35,000) for a four cylinder sports car.