

A Porsche 964 Buyer's Guide

(an owners view)

by Tony Davies

The basic principle with a 964 is to get the latest model you can afford because there were some issues with the early ones that were designed out later. Otherwise check that the work has been done or budget for getting it done. Key ones were the Dual Mass Flywheel, oil leaks around the heads, through bolts and pipes, distributor venting plus ify electrics.

1991 model or later (from engine number 62M06836) have the oil leaks fixed.

1992 model or later (from engine number N01738 have the DMF fixed. 1989 cars (all C4s) did not have a DMF.

There are some quite expensive oil pipes that run through the right rear wheel arch that can leak and are visible. Otherwise the engine leaks cannot be seen without removing the undertray. Similarly I believe there is a small inspection hole and if you know what to look for you can spot a DMF ie leave them for the inspection and check receipts to see if work has been done. The only easy one is the distributor vent which is a piece of plastic pipe from the distributors to the cooling air shroud. The vent kit is a cheap and easy fix but if not done the belt drive between the distributors can break which can mean the engine firing at a VERY expensive time ie leading to a top end rebuild.

The 964 has galvanised body, so assuming the car is well looked after rust should not feature, however, check:

- a) around windscreen rubbers
- b) where windscreen wipers attach to body (water collects here and doesn't drain away)
- c) tight under headlamps (road muck can gather here and difficult to clean)
- d) sun roof drain holes (coupe)

Cabriolet and Targa roofs can leak. The main place to check for leaks is the rear footwells where water will gather. I've had my cab hood and all the seals replaced yet I've still got a problem. You will see adverts for replacing the hood for around £800, budget on doubling that if you need the seals, the roof lining, tension cables and plastic door linings done as well.

I think it is worth investing in a windbreak for a cabriolet. The Porsche ones are expensive, but aftermarket ones are just as good. I've replaced the nuts with wingnuts so it is easier to take it in and out. I also find that if it is vertical, I get a low level back draft, but this is resolved by angling the top forward a bit.

C2 v C4? The C2 gives the authentic Porsche driving experience which can include visits to the undergrowth if you overdo it a bit but in the dry and in the right hands it should be quicker than a C4. So if you are after a weekend dry weather car go for a C2. The C4 is a real all weather car, they can understeer a bit but that can be sorted by adjusting the steering geometry to something approaching the RS spec. For an everyday car go for the C4. All you will lose is 14% space in the luggage compartment plus a gain of 75kg for the extra transmission. Some will say it is extra complex but the whole car is so well engineered this is not an issue. The cars are very sensitive to tyres and pressures. Tyres need to be N rated and the same type all round. If you mix brands it will really upset the handling. 36psi all round is a good start point if on 17" wheels, but some people tweak it a little to change the handling. I've also fitted a front strut brace, which tightened up the front a lot.

Tiptronic?

- a) Tames unpredictable power delivery & hence excitable rear end of C2 (not available on C4)
- b) No clutch to burn out (although there is probably lots else instead to go wrong)
- c) Offers easy relaxing town driving in 'auto' mode, but still allows manual control of gears in 'tiptronic mode'.
- d) Can accelerate, some say, quicker than manuals due to elimination of human error (just floor the accelerator and let the computer change gears at optimum revs with no missed gears)
- e) Could be a bit boring

Manual?

Some people find the clutch is heavy on a 964, and tiring for a lot of town driving or use as an everyday car, I don't. For weekend fun use only a manual is OK

Air Conditioning?

The A/C is well worth having - it does work quite effectively if correctly charged with refrigerant. Originally supplied with R12 refrigerant they must now be converted to use R134a as R12 is now illegal.

- a) With a cabriolet, longer motorway journeys are a bit painful on the scalp and ears with the roof down and with the roof up the cabin can be stuffy, so nice cold air is a Godsend. When it has rained, the inside of the windscreen can mist up more easily than in a tin-top, so the A/C is a useful to clear the condensation quickly.

b) The car can get VERY hot when the oil cooler fan kicked in, the oil return pipes go through the offside valance;

c) It will help on resale, as others will look for it as a "must have" option.

d) It works very well if well maintained. Most of them leak from the condenser. Don't take the old "it just needs topping up with gas" You may top it up but it will all leak out the condenser. So make sure the condenser is OK if you go with a/c. BTW: approx £450 to fit a new one. The evaporator (behind the dash) is also prone to corrosion and is a similar price although fitting will invariably double it.

If you are going for a cab, you could look for one with heated seats - these enable you to use the car year round with the roof down. I don't have them and still enjoy top down driving all the year round – when it is dry.

How to buy?

The key thing is to get the service history and all the receipts available. Expect the car to have been serviced by an OPC for its first few years and then probably by a specialist. It is important that these cars are looked after by someone who really understands them. Once you've got an understanding of its history and want to go ahead, get it inspected by a specialist. Provide them with the analysis of receipts. They will give you a view and a list of the things that need doing and an indication of likely cost. You can then negotiate with the vendor. High mileage is not necessarily an issue as long as the car has been looked after. I'd rather have a high mileage one that had been used regularly than one which sat in a garage for weeks on end and was then driven in town or been thrashed around a track. At 120k they will probably be needing an engine rebuild pretty soon so budget around £4k+.

Authenticity?

Get the VIN number (inside the service book cover and on a plate in the luggage compartment). The 964uk.com web site has a decoder (and some good advice on buying). Don't be surprised if the date of registration is later than the year of manufacture. In the early 1990s the Porsche buying fraternity were a bit short of the readies and quite a few new cars sat around for a couple of years.

They are great cars but, particularly the C2, can be tricky to drive. For instance the instinctive reaction to ease off if carrying too much speed into a bend, whilst the right thing for a front wheel drive car is exactly the wrong thing to do in a rear drive. When driven properly they can be driven fast and safe but one needs to learn how to do it:

1 Buy Vic Elford's book on driving a Porsche (available from PCGB)

2 Spend a day with Bernard Aubey www.bernardaubry.com. He's the ex Porsche demonstration driver and is in partnership with racing driver Richard Attwood. The day is a mixture of 'Roadcraft' that would be equally applicable to driving any car, especially performance cars, and the specifics of driving a 911 smoothly and safely including at speed. He explores car control which was all about positioning, when to brake, when to change gear, when to accelerate and how to steer. The rest of the roadcraft is about being alert to risks, reading the road ahead, anticipating problems and being prepared.

When I did it we spent some time at the Chobham test track (now becoming a housing estate, regrettably), initially on the test circles - a set of concentric circles drawn on a large flat area. I drove round at a constant speed with a constant lock keeping within 2 lines, then explored over steer and under steer by use of the accelerator. When comfortable with this, I pushed the speed up and backed off the accelerator. Knowing it was going to happen, I automatically opposite locked as the backend came out and controlled it. Bernard recommends the Elford book and during the understeer/oversteer bit he had me driving with Elford's 'piece of string' principle i.e. imagine there is a piece of string joining the steering wheel to the accelerator and brake. Thus you only have full use of both pedals when the wheel is in the straight ahead and you have progressively limited braking and acceleration when you turn the wheel. Conversely, when you are braking or accelerating you have progressively less turning ability. If you abuse this rule the car becomes unbalanced and ultimately out of control, as I found in this safe environment. Elford and Bernard emphasize the need to maintain balance and control at all times.

Then it was on to the track, first to learn it, then to drive it taking a road line and finally pushing the speed up and taking a racing line.

After lunch we spent more time on the road. Initially with Bernard driving and talking me through what he was seeing, how he was interpreting what he saw and the action he was taking or preparing himself to take. Then I took over again with him advising and commenting. At the end I felt far more confident in driving the car and was driving far more smoothly and confidently.

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