



RSR

(Ready, Set, Race)

In most racing, the work-to-fun ratio is all out of whack. A solution? Porsche's RSR 3.8.

BY JOHN PHILLIPS

The ground crew for the Goodyear blimp *Stars and Stripes* was nervous. A windstorm had earlier sucked the letter "G" in their logo clean off the side of the blimp's immense hangar. The "G" happened to be the size of my garage. Then it rained for ten hours. Then *C/D* showed up at the Pompano Beach Airport, in Florida, with a banana-yellow Porsche RSR 3.8. Between 120-mph blasts down runways, we began turning skidpad circles on the apron in front of the blimp, to keep the RSR's tires warm.

"Kind of a fast car," observed an anxious blimp mechanic.

"Yep," I said, shouting over the shattering exhaust blat, a refreshing change



following 18 years of turbo-charged racing Porsches that just whooshed.

Perplexed, he continued: "It won't, you know, like swerve out of control and center-punch our blimp or anything, will it?"

"I haven't lost control since yesterday," I assured him.

"Maybe, ah, you should move closer to the runway," he suggested.

We did.

The car you see here—an RSR 3.8—is important. It represents Porsche's return to grass-roots sports-car racing following acute disenchantment with multimillion-dollar GTP exotica. The company has

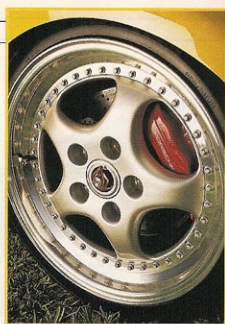
rediscovered what it does best: build simple, production-based racing coupes that run as predictably as lifelong politicians but require fewer bribes. The RSR 3.8 (named after the brutal coupes Porsche produced in 1973 and '74) is in every sense a turnkey racing car. You could drive it on the street—although because it's imported as a racing car, you could also go directly to jail.

Owning one is simple. Place an order with the factory, then wait eight weeks as the RSR is hand-assembled in Germany. Jürgen Barth, director

of Porsche AG Customer Racing in Weissach, then tests the car until he is satisfied it is perfect. Next, he parks it in the cargo hold of a Lufthansa 747 bound for Miami or New York.

When this particular RSR 3.8 arrived, it didn't even need to be washed. A mechanic topped off the brake fluid, checked the oil, filled it with 100 liters of 98-octane fuel, then twisted the ignition key. The engine fired instantly and idled happily at 1000 rpm. That weekend, the owner raced the thing at Sebring.

As turnkey racing cars go, the RSR 3.8 has a shot at becoming the most successful, most reliable street-based



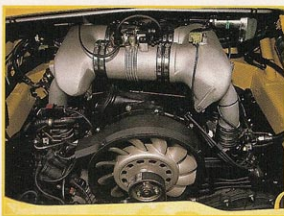
Brakes are lifted from a 911 Turbo S but with racing pads. Porsche says the naturally aspirated flat six produces 320 hp; we say 375.

coupe yet conceived. Directly from their Weissach shipping crates, RSRs have won outright at the 24 Hours of Spa and the 1000KM of Suzuka. Interspersed was a class victory at Le Mans. Then came another overall victory at the 24 Hours of Interlagos.

But it wasn't until the car made its North American debut that doubters masticated large portions of crow. At the 24 Hours of Daytona, the RSR 3.8 not only swept the first four spots in IMSA's GTU class, but the lead car of the four also finished *third overall*—six places in front of the fastest WSC prototype. Weeks later, as if to emphasize the point to remaining non-believers, another RSR won its class at the 12 Hours of Sebring. It was *fifth overall*.

Our chrome-yellow test car (RSRs are also available in white, red, blue, or black) was imported by Champion Porsche-Audi of Pompano Beach for a customer who prefers to remain anonymous. Champion is owned by Dave Maraj. Dave is happy. This is because his dealership sold more Porsches in '93 than any other U.S. dealer. Actually, that is not the complete truth. Dave sold more Porsches than any other dealer in the world.

This has advantages. For starters, Dave can afford to field an IMSA 911 Turbo driven by the likes of Brian Redman, Bill Adam, John Paul Jr., and Juan Manuel Fangio II. That car's co-sponsor, H.H. Brown, makes shoes with Goodyear's patented Aquatred soles, which—ah, this gets complex—is how we wound up on the blimp's runway. But Maraj, a practical guy (he says it's because he was raised in Trinidad), prefers the naturally aspirated



RSR to the troublesome turbo.

"It's more simple, more reliable, and still *real fast*," he says of the RSR. "My customer wanted the RSR simply for Porsche club events, then maybe to get a competition license. But the nice thing is, if he wants to go pro racing—some really flat-out stuff—he can use the same car."

True enough. The RSR 3.8, with minor mods, is eligible to race in IMSA GTU/GT2, or you can slap a turbo on it and race in the GTS category. It is also legal in the SCCA World Challenge, in SCCA club events, in Porsche Club soirees, in German ADAC GT races, in the Italian Supercar GT Championship, at Le Mans and other FIA-sanctioned enduros and sprints, and in any driving school except the one you took as a high-school sophomore. "A gung-ho guy could race it 20 times a year," says Maraj.

Your basic RSR arrives with a flawlessly welded roll cage, a Recaro racing

seat, six-point belts, a fire-extinguishing system, a fuel cell, a racing clutch, 911 Turbo bodywork (but with aluminum hood and doors), and an adjustable wing reminiscent of the old Porsche 935. The 18-inch Speedline wheels are 9.5 inches wide in front, 11.4 inches wide in back.

Glorious details abound. Like the Porsche logos on the chrome valve stems. The pinky-finger wheel-well clearance. And the red button in front of the gearshift, which uncorks a reserve jelly-glass of fuel, enough to complete one final lap.

The suspension is fitted with stainless Heim joints, Bilstein racing shocks, and adjustable anti-roll bars. The brakes are lifted from the existing 911 Turbo S (but with racing pads) and avoid what Norm Crosby calls "heat prostitution," thanks to a rat's maze of cool-air ducts. There's also a trick anti-lock system. Barth says the racing ABS's pulsing cycles are briefer, the system returns to standard braking more quickly than regular ABS, and pedal feel also returns sooner after one wheel has become airborne and has been fooled into triggering the circuitry.

We never got our test car airborne—a small concession to its owner—but we did discover that the car will stop from 70 mph in an ear-pinning 150 feet. It will do this repeatedly, all day, tomorrow, the day after, and into next week. The stopping

grip is so great that if you should alter belts aren't cinched like the QE2's hawsers, your body lifts out of the seat, is suspended magically aloft, then makes a concerted effort to drag you feet-first through the windshield. In the Mulsanne chicane at Le Mans, Barth's RSRs commenced their braking at the same point as the Group C Peugeot prototypes.

More massaged than any other component is the RSR's engine. Compared with the new Carrera street car's 3.6-liter aluminum flat six (producing 270 horsepower), the RSR gets a 146cc increase in displacement, lighter pistons with an 11.4:1 compression ratio, a different crankcase, dual ignition, a remapped Bosch Motronic ECU (mounted behind the driver's seat and with the owner's name writ formally thereupon), and new

intake manifolds. The result, says Porsche—a company notoriously prone to glib understatement—is 320 hp at 6900 rpm. Yeah, sure. And Liz is just big-boned.

What makes us suspicious? After you side-step the clutch at 4600 rpm, this 2679-pound banana fractures 60 mph in 3.7 seconds of sound and fury—significantly quicker than a Ferrari F40 or a Dodge Viper. Compared with a streetgoing 911 Turbo 3.6, the RSR is 0.3 second quicker to 100 mph and 0.3 second quicker through the quarter-mile. Up to 120 mph, the RSR 3.8 is more than five seconds quicker than the latest 911 Carrera. *C/D's* fearless estimate: this little naturally aspirated two-valve-per-cylinder six belts out 375 hp at 6900 rpm, which is some 55 hp beyond Barth's claim.

Top speed? Well, it's a race car, so it depends on gearing. Opt for a final-drive ratio of 3.55:1 and you'll achieve 165 mph—a velocity that is suited to most U.S. circuits, with the possible

exception of Daytona.

Behind the wheel, what you notice first is that this car is comfortable to drive *slowly*—one of the signs of a tractable drivetrain—despite its ridiculously short first gear (for pit work only) and its grabby racing clutch. The switchgear is stock, right down to the stalk for the wipers, the knob for the lights, the sun visor, even a cigarette lighter for a Dick Trickle-style mid-race smoke.

The steering is synapse-fast and as communicative as any we've encountered in the previous two decades—although below 30 mph, it's as dimwitted and heavy as a sack of Quikrete. Dynamically, the car's greatest drawback is its shift linkage, whose throws, by racing standards, are both long and balky (ours was, admittedly, a brand-new car). On the third-to-second downshift, in particular, this imposes a needlessly deliberate heel-and-toe ballet.

At Mosoro Motorsports Park, at moderate speeds on a damp track, the RSR tends to oversteer mildly in fast sweepers and to understeer in tight corners. At any point between 4000 rpm and the 7200-rpm redline, however, there is enough power to punt the tail east or west. But the car generally feels so balanced that horsing it around is a little like using a Louisville slugger on the ninth green at Augusta.

So far, so good. But this is, after all, a Porsche. So it costs, what, a quarter-million? Pleasant surprise. The base price for a

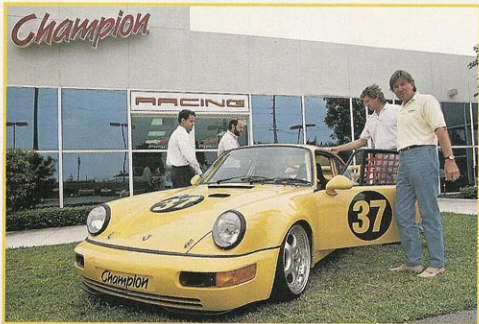
race-ready RSR is \$160,453.

Okay, okay. That's not as cheap as a season of church bingo. But as race cars go—particularly those designed to run flat out for a full season with not much more than a couple of oil changes—it is more fun and less expensive than dating Vassar grads. It is, in fact, *less* than the price of your basic street-legal 911 Turbo S (\$165,311), two of which were on display in Maraj's showroom.

Of course, if you're going to race more than SCCA club events, you'll want to set aside about 20 grand for options that—wow, what a coincidence—Porsche just happens to offer. Our test car was fitted with center-lock wheels (\$4117), so that during pit stops you need to remove only one nut rather than five lugs. To hasten the process further, it was plumbed to accommodate pneumatic jacks (\$4970). Our owner also realized he'd need two spare sets of wheels (at \$1400 per wheel, you



Trunk is stuffed with huge fuel cell. Interior is as luxurious as any you'll find in a pure racing car; second seat is for an instructor.



are deeply motivated to avoid striking curbs), one spare transmission (\$6572), and an extra Recaro seat (\$2089), so that an instructor can ride shotgun and explain in what fashion the driver might possibly maim himself.

To all of this, you must remember to add the cost of extricating a race car from the border guards' Bureau of Red Tape-worms. In this case, the owner took the coward's route and hired a New York lawyer who specializes in customs brokering. The lawyer said, "The EPA has a prejudice against granting waivers, especially for Porsches [*sic*]." So, we learn here that, if you import an entire porch, you're gonna pay.

Once all was said and done, \$4236 was spent on duty, \$2295 got flushed at U.S. customs, then there were fees for "merchant processing," fees for the broker, fees for the harbor, for documents, for towing, plus a fee of \$56.76 for "agriculture." (Hey, these are the feds, so don't even ask; possibly they thought this was some sort of tractor.) All of which raised the total price of this Porsche RSR 3.8 to \$180,836.

As we went to press, 45 RSRs had been assembled under the dangling cigarette and watchful eye of Jürgen Barth, who

claims that his employer is making no deutsche marks on this foray but is nonetheless winning races.

So, snivel before a merciful bank manager who understands Living Large car loans, then simply show him a picture of your Porsche without numbers or decals. He'll think it's your street car. Next thing you know, you're at Pompano Beach airport passing Cessnas and aimed straight for the gondola of *Stars and Stripes*. It could have been Germany's revenge for the *Hindenburg*.



Vehicle type: rear-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger, 2-door coupe

Price as tested: \$180,836 (base price: \$160,453)

Engine type: SOHC 12-valve flat 6, aluminum block and heads, Bosch engine-control system with port fuel injection

Displacement	229 cu in, 3748cc
Power (nfr's humble est)	320 bhp @ 6900 rpm
(C/D est)	375 bhp @ 6900 rpm
Transmission	5-speed
Wheelbase	89.4 in
Length	168.4 in
Curb weight	2679 lb
Zero to 60 mph	3.7 sec
Zero to 100 mph	8.9 sec
Zero to 120 mph	13.1 sec
Standing 1/4-mile	12.1 sec @ 116 mph
Braking, 70-0 mph	150 ft

The RSR 3.8 derives its nomenclature from the brutal RSR coupes of the '70s, like the Martini Racing RSR shown here. The new Turbo, sponsored by H.H. Brown, is Champion Porsche-Audi's latest foray into IMSA racing and is one of the first racing Porsches with the new Carrera nose-and-headlight treatment.

