

964 RS America

At the 1991 Geneva motor show, Porsche revived the famous 'RS' (Rennsport) initials on the 964 Carrera RS. This lightweight 911 was based closely on the Porsche Cup 911 race car of the period (see *Total 911*, July 2007) and was an obvious attempt by Porsche to rekindle the excitement generated by the original RS – the iconic 2.7 Carrera of 1973.

The introduction of the 1992 Carrera RS was a successful exercise at a time when Porsche's fortunes were at a low ebb and reaction to the car was very positive. Porsche had evidently succeeded in authentically recreating the RS 2.7, albeit with modern suspension and running gear. Journalists were less complimentary about the RS's uncompromising suspension, though, which was plainly set up for track use and some voices questioned Porsche's marketing strategy of positioning this stripped-out RS at £10,000 (in the UK at least) above the list price of the standard 911. But in terms of how the RS went, there was unanimity; no 911 since that 1973 car had revved with such joyful exuberance and the raw immediacy of the driving experience was utterly intoxicating. Porsche's racing pedigree was once again clear for all to see.

Not the least of the admirers was to be found among the contingent of reporters and writers for the North American press who also recalled the halcyon days of the 2.7 RS. Even in 1973, though, US federal legislation, principally concerning emissions at that time, prevented

official imports of the 2.7 Carrera RS. Some years later, a few examples were, apparently, granted a waiver by the US Department of Transport when the model was deemed as having achieved classic status. However, this was to be the last vestige of generosity on the part of the federal authorities: as the fruitless battles of some rich enthusiasts who frantically tried to import the Porsche 959 showed, there was no going back.

The US Porsche concessionaire, Porsche Cars North America (PCNA) understood, therefore, that the 1992 model year Carrera RS was another flagship model that it would not be able to import or sell. In order for this to happen, the car would have to be homologated to Federal safety standards, which would be prohibitively expensive (involving writing off several cars during crash testing) and thus impossible to justify with Porsche's limited financial means and a relatively small sales forecast; 200 to 250 cars had been mooted. On the other hand, the US and Canada have always been Porsche's largest market and PCNA under its new CEO, Fred Schwab, did not want to miss the publicity or commercial opportunity which the 964 RS represented. With a team of diehard Porsche racing enthusiasts, spearheaded by none other than Britain's Vic Elford (see panel) PCNA persuaded Zuffenhausen to develop an RS-specification 911 based on the current 964 Carrera 2 which could be sold in North America without homologation. The outcome of



what could have been a cynical marketing exercise was a 911 which instantly found its niche and its sales exceeded all expectations. The Porsche 911 RS America, as it was baptised, lacked some of the rawness of the European RS and was not as light, but deft changes to the steering, suspension and equipment levels created an overtly sporting 911 which today has the cult following that *Christophorus* magazine in North America predicted.

Initially, North American dealers were not excited by the idea of a reduced specification Porsche 911. They recalled the Clubsport which, when introduced without fanfare four years earlier, had generated minimal interest. Priced at \$46,000, the same as the standard 3.2 Carrera, but without the latter's air-conditioning, sound system or central locking, it seemed to be a car without a purpose. *Car & Driver* announced that it offered no performance advantage, administering effectively a veritable kiss of death – a mere 28 cars were sold.

By 1991, though, circumstances had changed considerably. The decline in the value of the dollar was matched by Porsche's waning fortunes. The 964 Carrera 2 cost almost \$20,000 more than the 3.2 Carrera of 1987 and this increase was reflected in far lower sales figures. But the new model did at least present PCNA with an opportunity; by positioning the new RS America, launched in early 1992 at the Detroit motor show, at \$53,900, here was a sporting 911 for \$10,000 less than the regular Carrera 2. For this reason alone it attracted buyers (for comparison, the 1992 911 Turbo S retailed at an eye-watering \$119,000).

The decision to avoid re-certifying the model ruled out using much of the Rest of World (RoW) RS specification. The RS America thus had to employ the standard Carrera 2 spot-welded bodyshell, standard window glazing and steel, rather than aluminium, front lid (the European RS was spot- and seam-welded for additional stiffness and used thinner glass for the side and rear windows). The RS America body was also galvanised and fully undersealed.

The engine was the standard 247bhp M64/01 unit, while the five-speed gearbox and brakes also came straight from the Carrera 2. The RS America was not offered in four-wheel-drive or Tiptronic versions.

Inside, the RS America retained the driver and passenger airbags and Porsche's heavy but comfortable electrically adjustable sports seats. These were trimmed in corduroy rather than leather which, combined with the side bolsters, gave better lateral support and was more practical than leather in hot climates. As with the RoW RS, the America had no rear seats (except, bizarrely, in the last examples delivered in 1994). In place of the rear seats Porsche was required to fit twin storage bins, as the US Department of Transport stated that without rear seats it was possible for a person to sit in the rear of the car with no seatbelt, which was a safety issue. Although retaining the electric windows, the RS America borrowed the simplified door furniture of the RoW 964RS with its plain door panel and leather pull strap. These straps generated so much favourable comment, not just in terms of sporting aesthetics, but also sheer practicality that you wonder why Porsche did not make them a more widely available option.

The door mirrors on the RS America were manually adjusted and all cars were fitted with wiring, two speakers and an amplifier for the optional (\$986) radio. The car came with an alarm system and a heated rear window,



Unlike the European RS, the RS America used the standard 250bhp Carrera 2 engine

Here was a sporting 911 for \$10,000 less than the standard car

but no rear wiper.

The other changes to the standard 964 specification showed Porsche using its parts bin with its usual imagination. The ride height of the RS America had to remain the same as the standard Carrera's, but Porsche fitted the firmer coil springs and uprated dampers of the then-current 964 Turbo, together with the latter's thicker (22mm) front anti-roll bar. This was effectively the M030 suspension upgrade; a \$640 option on the regular Carrera 2. In addition, the RS America had cast 17-inch hollow light alloy Cup 1 wheels (7-inch at the front and 8-inch aft) which were a \$1352 option on the Carrera 2. Not only was the RS America \$10,000 cheaper, then, but you also got \$2000 of options for your money – a point not lost on buyers.

The RS America came in three primary colours;

964 RS America

Guards Red, Black and Grand Prix White. Two metallic colours, Polar Silver and Midnight Blue, could be had for \$1030 extra. In line with the bare bones track attitude the RS America options catalogue ran to only four items, compared to 48 for the Carrera 2. Besides the AM/FM radio-cassette, you could specify a limited-slip differential (40 percent locking value) for \$913, an electrically operated sunroof for \$1952 and air-conditioning for a cool \$2805. Although the most expensive, the latter proved the most popular option and around 75 percent of RSAs were so equipped. Half were specified with radios and/or sunroofs and two-thirds with the limited-slip differential. Only a dozen of the cars had none of the options fitted.

The interior is based on a US-spec 964, complete with chunky airbag steering wheel. Note RS-style door panels but with electric window operators

The larger Cup 1 alloys, the neatly scripted RS decals on the flanks just ahead of the rear wheels and the 'RS America' emblem on the engine cover served to differentiate the RS America from its more expensive sibling. But the striking difference and the car's trademark was the glassfibre whaletail spoiler which replaced the mechanically operated device on the Carrera 2 and Carrera 4 and, indeed, the RoW Carrera RS. It was this

traditional 911 feature that emphasised above all the RS America's distinct and sporting personality.

Although the RS America was not a true lightweight by Porsche standards, at a published 2954lbs (1340kg) it was still, in standard spec, about 40kg lighter than the US-specification Carrera 2 thanks to the absence of power steering and air-conditioning, the electric sunroof and its lighter alloy wheels. However, this was enough for the PCNA publicity machine to go into action, describing this new version as "A pure protein Porsche," and continuing: "Porsche now commemorates the 25th anniversary of the Porsche 911 RS with the creation of the Porsche 911 RS America. Released in the late spring of 1992 as a 1993 model, the RS America is available only in North America. The 1993 RS America captures the spirit of the RS in its emphasis on performance."

The ebullient Fred Schwab went further. At the Porsche Club of America's Parade concours banquet in San Diego, he said: "If you like autocross, this is your car. If you are a time trialer, you need this car. If driving is for fun you need this car, the car the PCA built."

With such a billing, the RS America would have a lot to live up to, especially after the flop of the Clubsport. This time, however, there were few disappointments: Porsche had carefully managed expectations as this extract from the US Porsche magazine, *Excellence*, for August 1992 shows: "For years Americans have heard all about the great Porsches they couldn't have. If it was a good one, you couldn't buy it over here. Emissions, laws, crash restraints, you name it, our puritanical heritage insisted on constructing a labyrinth of laws that conspired to keep trick Porsches abroad."

The author, David Colson, went on to bemoan the plethora of "tape and paint jobs" that had been offered to Porsche buyers in the US when the rest of the world had the choice of all the "R, RS and RSR versions and their derivatives... but all that was about to change."

This set the tone for the rest of the article which went into raptures about the RS America which, not only outperformed the standard Carrera, but cost \$10,000 less



and was for once a Porsche RS that North Americans could buy. Indeed it was even made just for them. Other test reports were similarly enthusiastic. It helped that no one was expecting a replica of the uncompromising European 964RS; the RS America's acceleration and top speed were little different from those of the Carrera 2. *Road & Track* recorded 0-60mph in 5.3 seconds and 0-100mph in 13.0 seconds, in line with factory claims. However, *Car & Driver* and *Sports Car International* recorded 4.6 and 4.93 seconds, respectively, for 0-60mph, suggesting an unusual degree of variation between the press cars. What the testers did agree on, though, was that the RS America's performance fell midway between the standard Carrera 2 and the RoW Carrera RS which, for the price, they found entirely reasonable. The aesthetics – particularly their restraint – also impressed the native scribes, as did the wholetail.

It was the suspension and steering which really got the testers' ink (and blood) flowing, though. The RS America shared the same clever variable-ratio manual steering rack as the RoW (but not UK) RS and combined with the firmer, but not hard, suspension and wider rims, the result was a noticeably sharper driving experience. Indeed, despite having exactly the same engine as the Carrera 2, the dynamics of the RS America were noticeably more vivid and it seemed faster. No doubt the absence of sound-deadening – which Porsche had cannily left out – contributed to the enhanced sense of involvement and it was evident that everyone who sampled the car had tremendous fun. A couple of magazines thought air-conditioning ought to have been a standard fitting and another thought that the limited-slip differential should have been included in the package and not an option. On the whole, though, opinion was that, within onerous financial and technical constraints, Porsche had produced a 911 worthy of the RS badge. The public thought so, too, because by October 1992, PCNA was selling equal numbers of both the standard 911 Carrera and the RS version. By the time of the final deliveries in May 1994, a total of 701 RS Americas had been sold; three times the forecasts which led to the development of the car in the first place.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the received opinion

is that the RS America is merely a low-specification Porsche 911 which should never have borne the hallowed initials. It's a safe bet, though, that few of the critics in Europe have seen an RS America, never mind driven one. In reality, it was an entry level 911, but a classic example of the 'less is more' genre and a model which did much to restore Porsche's fortunes in the US at perhaps the darkest period in its history. As a consequence of Porsche's severe financial constraints, the RS America had been conceived with very little room for manoeuvre. Yet the company still managed to produce a crisp-handling 911 in the lightweight Porsche idiom which, without being an out and out racer, had sufficient dynamic qualities to make it much sought after. Today, the Porsche 911 RS America enjoys a large and knowledgeable following and can sell for as much as twice the price of a standard 964 of the same vintage. If it was a 'marketing exercise', it turned out rather well. **911**

The dynamics of the RS America were noticeably more vivid

Specification 964 RS America

Engine

Air-cooled, flat six
M64/01 unit
Capacity: 3600cc
Compression ratio:
11.3:1
Maximum power:
250bhp at 4800rpm
Maximum torque:
310Nm (229lb ft) at
4800rpm

Transmission

Five-speed manual,
optional limited-slip
differential

Suspension & steering

Suspension upgraded to
M030 specification
Front: Independent, with
lower wishbones and
MacPherson struts with
combined coil springs
and dampers, plus anti-
roll bar
Rear: Semi-trailing
arms with combined coil
springs and dampers,
plus anti-roll bar
Unassisted rack & pinion
steering from RoW 964RS

Brakes

Front: 298mm discs;
rear: 299mm discs. Servo
assisted with ABS

Wheels & tyres

Front: 17x7J, 205/50
ZR17
Rear: 17x8J, 255/40 ZR17

Dimensions

Weight: 1340kg (2954lb)
without options
Length: 4250mm (167in)
Width: 1650mm (65in)

Performance

0-62mph (100km/h):
5.3 sec
Top speed: 162mph
(260km/h)

