

THE TIE THAT BINDS

A ONE-OWNER 1987 924S
THAT'S GOING TO STAY IN THE FAMILY.

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IT WAS ANOTHER sultry morning at Porsche Parade 2018 in the Ozarks. The sun was just rising above the mottled green foothills to the east, and another sweltering 95-degree day lay ahead. Jack and Kathy Baker, longtime Peachstate Region members, were unfazed by the heat, the humidity, or the early hour. Gaz-

ing at their Guards Red 1987 924S, they smiled and looked at each other, lost in unspoken memories.

"I first became involved with sports cars in the 1960s with an MGB," recalled Jack. "When I was in pilot training down in Del Rio, Texas, one of the doctors on base had a 356. He and his wife formed a little

sports car club called Scuderia Rio Grande at the base." Jack developed a strong friendship with the doctor and his wife, and that friendship was maintained throughout Jack's overseas tour of duty.

A graduate of the Air Force Academy, Jack flew combat fighters in Vietnam. After completing active

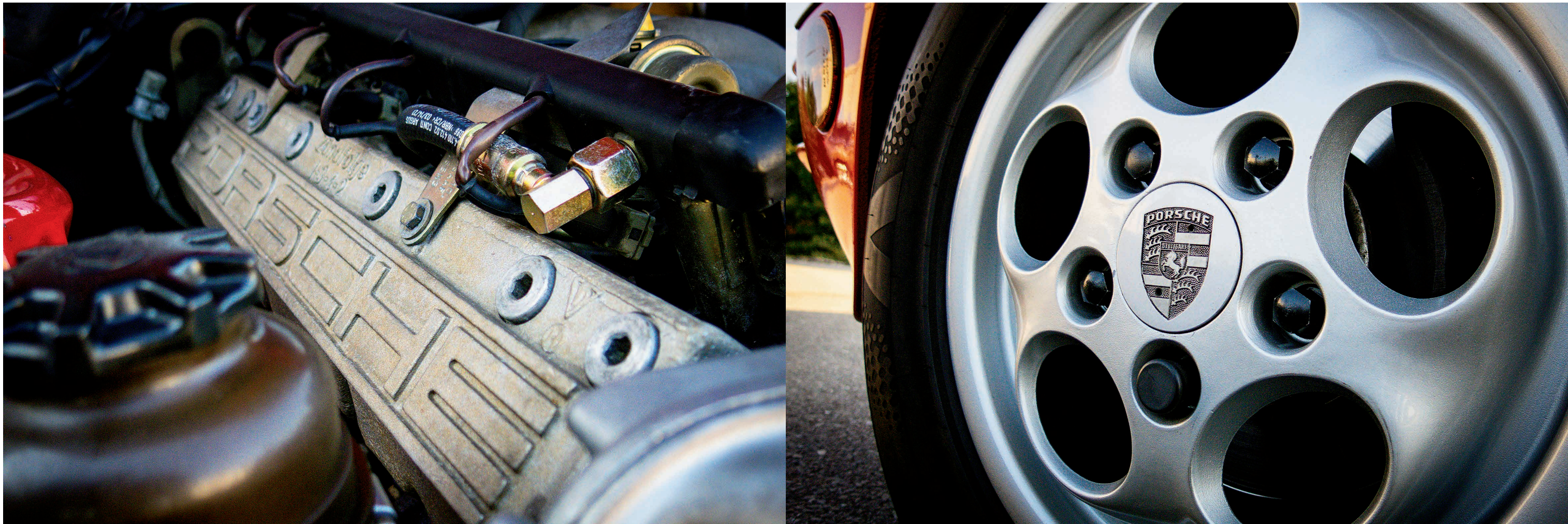
duty, he was hired by Delta Air Lines to fly commercially and moved to Marietta, Georgia with Kathy, who was teaching first grade. As fate would have it, Jack's doctor friend, who had also completed active duty, moved to Decatur, Georgia with his wife and established a private practice in nephrology. The good friends

were close once more.

"One day, Dr. Turner's wife, Betty Jo, pointed her finger at me and said, 'You have to buy a Porsche,'" said Jack. Wait a minute. Dr. Turner? Dr. Leonard Turner? And his wife...Betty Jo Turner? The renowned photographer and the 43-year editor in chief of *Porsche Panorama* Turners? Yep,

that was the couple who turned Jack and Kathy on to Porsche sports cars and PCA in 1970.

Jack continued: "I replied, 'Betty Jo, I'm making \$625 a month at Delta Air Lines as a new hire. I can't afford a Porsche.'" As we know, though, where there's a will, there's a way. Jack eventually found a used 912. "I



Above: This 924S shared with its 944 sibling a 2.5-liter engine producing 150 hp and phone dial wheels. **Right:** A Christmas surprise for the family in 1986.



COURTESY JACK BAKER

campaigned that car for 40 years—autocrossing, rallying, you name it.”

The Bakers’ 912 served them well for years, but Jack regretted that he had not owned it from new. “When this car [the 924S] came out, I thought to myself, I’m going to buy

a new one of those,” he said. The 924S was purchased off the showroom floor, and the only thing Jack would have preferred was that it not have a sunroof. “The salesman tried to convince me to buy an automatic, but I wanted the manual. This car

was available, so I test drove it, and wrote the check.”

Santa delivered the 924S to the Baker driveway on Christmas Eve 1986, a bow draped over the roof. Jack continued, “It was a surprise to Kathy and the two boys, who were eight and ten at the time.” But the surprise was nearly discovered early. Jack had personalized plates for the car, 913, to commemorate Kathy’s birthday. “I requested the plates be sent to the dealer and not to our home, but they came to the house anyway. Luckily, Kathy wasn’t home when the mail came.”

One of the best features of their new car was its engine. Gone was the Audi 2.0-liter inline four-cylinder from earlier years; in its place was a “real” Porsche engine, the 2.5-liter powerplant of its big brother, the

944. Unfortunately, this new engine came with teething issues. As Jack explained, “The fuel injector wires were wound too tightly around the edges of the fuel manifold.” The wires would chafe (because of the rubbing) and begin to spark. That sparking would then melt the O-rings, and the injectors would spew fuel over the top of the engine. The spray of fuel, combined with the sparking an inch or two away, created a perfect storm.”

For Jack and Kathy, that perfect storm struck on their 17th wedding anniversary. They’d owned their 924S for six months. “We were out with some of our Porsche friends and they invited us back to their home for a little more socializing,” recalled Kathy. “When we pulled into their driveway, Jack saw some

smoke coming from under the hood. He told me to hop out fast and grabbed the fire extinguisher he always carried in the car.” Jack was able to put the fire out, but by then the damage was done.

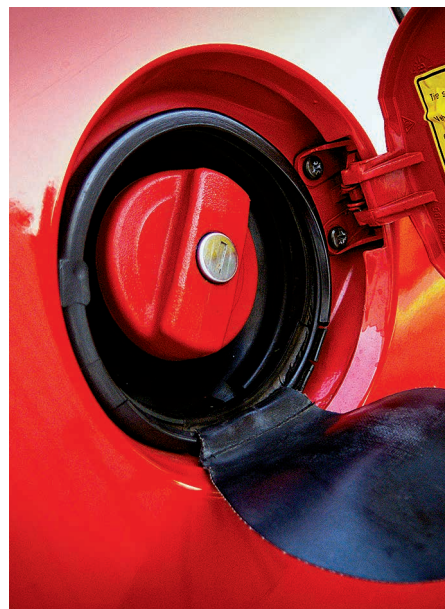
“We found out later that cars were burning up left and right,” continued Jack, “and the factory didn’t really know why.” Because Jack was able to extinguish the fire before it destroyed the car—preserving the evidence, as it were—the factory dispatched five technicians to the dealership to examine the engine, determine the cause, and make the repairs.

“They rebuilt the front of this car and totally rewired it. I showed up at the dealer one day, and they were rolling around this *huge* bundle of wires on top of the engine. I thought, man, that doesn’t look good. I wish

I had taken a photo of it. The dealer had the hood repainted [because of the fire]. Anyway, we haven’t had a problem with the car since.”

DESPITE THAT SIX-MONTH hitch in the giddyup, the Bakers continue to enjoy the 924S. “The car’s held up very well,” said Jack. “I love the way it handles; 911s had the reputation that if you lost the rear end, you couldn’t get it back. With my old 912, I could slide the car sideways and not lose control. I can do the same thing with this car. It’s perfect. We’ve been very pleased with it.”

The PCA Parade veterans (33 for Jack and 30 for Kathy) compete in all three headline events—concours, TSD rally, and autocross—without fail. Considering the emphasis Jack placed on handling, one



could conclude that autocross was his favorite venue. Not the case.

"We are a rally team. That's what we primarily do. If Parade is on the West Coast, we'll fly out commercially and work a rally checkpoint. Then the next day, with a copy of the route instructions, we run the route [with a rental or borrowed car] and score ourselves to see how we would have done."

Jack has found that the skills he acquired during his Air Force career align with those necessary to achieve a winning rally score. "When we were doing very low-level missions in Europe during the Cold War, we had to stay on course and on time. That was the whole objective to getting the bomb on target. Maintain speed, stay on course, be on time."

Kathy added, "We have loved rallies from the very beginning of our marriage. We joined PCA in 1970 and were married the same year. We found it was fun to work as a team.

Jack always drives. Now, I have to say that we each have had our fair share of screw-ups, but we stopped pointing fingers and blaming each other a long time ago. We recognize that it [making mistakes] is part of the game. We have to think it out, work it out. It's a mind game. We've even taught rally schools because we like it so much. It's been our favorite event forever."

WHEN ASKED IF he had ever considered upgrading and buying a new Porsche—after all, his 924S is 32 years old—Jack replied: "No, not really. The new cars have so much stuff on them, stuff I don't even care to know anything about. I like the old stuff." Does he do his own maintenance? "No, I don't. I do the maintenance on my airplane, but not the car. I leave that up to the people who know what they are doing."

What happened to their 912? "We kept both the 912 and the 924 for

years, but finally sold the 912 about five years ago. We have only a two-car garage, so storage became an issue. I was keeping the 912 in my hangar beneath the wing of my airplane." That arrangement was fine when Jack had a high-wing aircraft, but when a low-wing aircraft took its place, the jockeying between the plane and the car became a bother.

Considering the Bakers have three decades of Parades under their respective belts, does one stand out as more memorable than the others? Kathy quickly responded, "Well, the Asheville [1981] Parade." Jack picked up the conversation. "I was the autocross chairman for that parade. It was detrimental to try to organize something like that from long distance. If I'd had time, I might have been able to schmooze with the air traffic controllers, and we might not have lost our autocross site the night before the event. Fortunately, we had the mayor of Asheville."

Opposite: From any angle, this Harm Lagacai-designed 924S shouts Porsche. The large glass hatch, brain-child of Richard Soderberg, was included in the final design. Below: The vanity plate commemorating Kathy's birthday.





ville on our side, and he convinced one of the local mall owners to let us use half of the parking area for our autocross. It all worked out, but it did cause a stressful night for us.”

Kathy continued on a more pleasant note, “We’ve made lasting friendships through PCA. Some of our best friends have come from this club. One of the things we liked about it from the very beginning was the variety of people, different occupations, different economic levels, yet we all have this one thing in common that we enjoy in our own way. It’s been fun.”

References: *The Transaxle Era*, Issue 376 (4Q 2016), *Christophorus*; *Porsche Buyer’s Guide 2016-2017*, *Excellence*; 1987 *Porsche 924S Vehicle Valuation Report 2018*, www.hagerty.com

Evolution from Revolution

IT WAS Porsche’s new deal: water-cooled rather than air-cooled; front engine rather than rear; a wedge-shaped, four-cylinder, four-passenger Porsche with a small price tag and an expansive chunk of glass encasing a reasonably usable rear luggage compartment. A collaborative venture between Volkswagen and Porsche, the 924 was originally intended to be VW’s entree into the sports car market. At the same time, it was to serve as the replacement for the 914, Porsche’s entry-level model.

Thomas Fuths provided an excellent narrative of the design process in his piece, “The Transaxle Era,” published in issue 376 (Q4 2016) of Porsche’s *Christophorus* magazine. Fuths quotes Porsche designer Harm Lagaij, who says: “It started off as a VW project. There were three final proposals for the exterior. One came from Richard Soderberg, one from Dawson Sellar, and one from me. All three were based on the transaxle package, and they were very different.”

The three versions were presented in Wolfsburg as 1/5-scale models. “My design was chosen,” says Lagaij. While he provided the overall style for the proportions of the 924, another designer supplied the car’s most striking feature. “The VW executive board was very taken by the large glass hatch on Soderberg’s proposal, so his glass dome was added to my design.” The interior of the 924 was created by designer Hans Braun.

However, after spending considerable millions in design and development, VW backed

away from the project. The 1973 oil crisis and increasingly restrictive governmental regulations likely prompted VW’s retreat. Porsche, though, remained in the game. The company purchased sole rights to the design and outsourced the building of the car to Audi in Neckarsulm, about 40 miles north of Stuttgart.

Using the 2.0-liter engine from Audi’s seriously unadventurous 100, Porsche tweaked it to produce 95 horsepower (U.S.). Its transaxle configuration—engine in the front connected by a torque tube to a combined rear axle/transmission unit in the rear—gave it nearly perfect balance, with an ever-so-slight rear bias. Using brakes, wheels, and a four-speed transmission out of the VW/Audi parts bin, Porsche produced the 924 rather inexpensively. At its introduction in 1977, automotive journalists raved about the handling and raged at the anemic performance.

To quell the whining, Porsche bumped the power mid-year to 115 hp. In 1978, the car became available with an optional five-speed transmission (standard in 1979) and Porsche’s first ever fully automatic transmission. Still, there was grouching from the Porsche faithful—it needed more power.

In 1980, the 924 Turbo hit the market. The car was equipped with a beefier clutch, driveshaft, and auxiliary oil cooler, as well as an engine that produced 150 hp and kick-in-the-pants torque when boost came on. Enthusiasts were, well, enthusiastic. Most of them thought the air scoop on



More discreet than the bold Tartan plaid of the Sebring Edition 924 or the psychedelic Pasha print of the 928, this simple cloth inset whispers elegance. Maintaining its pristine appearance for the past 30-plus years has been a challenge.



the hood was pretty cool, too.

In 1983, Porsche pulled the 924 out of the U.S. market, banking on the newly introduced 944 to grab newcomers to the brand. But as the price of the 944 escalated, it could no longer be considered “entry level.”

Its older sibling re-entered the market in 1987 as that car. Badged as the 924S, the newly improved 924 now had a bona fide Porsche engine—the 2.5-liter from the 944. The 924S did not have the fat fenders or fancy interior of the 944, but it did have most of the 944’s underpinnings. It was also close to 200 pounds lighter, faster, and considerably less expensive. No wonder it became the darling of the inline four-cylinder crowd in the late 1970s. Porsche sold more than 150,000 924s worldwide during its model run, making it a resounding financial success. —DM