

The Targa

The Original Topless 911

By Mitchell Sam Rossi
PHOTOS BY LES BIDRAWN

An empty, twisting road. Sun cascading through the trees, stippling the smooth asphalt. The roar of the wind. A high-performance automobile and the raspy song of a finely tuned flat-six engine filling an open cockpit. The fantasy of every gentleman driver, and most gentlewomen drivers as well. By definition, a Porsche moment.

Yet, when the 911 was introduced in 1963, this measure of speed, poise and automotive freedom could not be experienced in the successor of the famed 356. An important segment was missing from its lineup, a convertible.

While the new model garnered praise almost as soon as it rolled off the Zuffenhausen assembly line, the press and public were quick to notice this gaping void. And as the previous open-air bathtubs had generated a significant number of Porsche sales, those who paced

the halls of the home office also recognized the problem and were pondering how to fix it. But the company had invested too much of its resources in launching the 911 to undertake the redesigning and retooling necessary to produce a cabriolet, even if the only changes needed to the car were aft of the B-pillar.

The solution came from chief designer Ferdinand "Butzi" Porsche. As the architect of the 911, the engineer was able to re-master his car, undaunted by the limitations that an open-top version had to retain as much of the coupe's sheetmetal and interior design as possible. Instead of creating a true convertible, what flowed from the craftsman's pen was a unique and, for the era, a somewhat startling concept that combined a broad roll-over bar, a removable top and a clear plastic, convertible-like rear window.

Adopting the name Targa in celebration of the company's competitive successes in the renowned Targa Florio race across Sicily, the new body style bestowed 911 drivers with the open-air feel, while the wide, brushed steel hoop delivered the safety of an enclosed coupe. This was a time when fears resonated through the automotive industry that the U.S. Congress was about to implement legislation sending the droptop automobile into exile. While perhaps hasty in its response to the rumors, Porsche was able to boast the new design as "the world's first safety convertible."

To fill the span between the windshield and hoop, several different styles of tops were considered, but an important criteria was the ability to take the car's hat along for the ride. Even on a sunny day, one never knew when the wind would chill or a thunderstorm would

appear around the next bend. The final rendition was a cleverly designed unit that collapsed via a scissor-hinged frame, covered with a rubberized, textured vinyl and lined inside with a felt material.

The rear window was constructed from a clear, flexible sheet of plastic called "Polyglas" and edged with a single zipper so it could be easily inserted or removed as the driver saw fit. One drawback to this pliable material was that temperatures below 60°F (15°C) caused it to shrink, making removal or installation nearly impossible.

This "soft" window, standard from 1967-68, gave the Targa owner four different ways in which to enjoy his or her unique automobile. When the roof and rear window were in place, Porsche called the car the Targa Hardtop. Remove the top and you had the Targa Bel Air, and with only the window

The Targa

displaced, the Targa Voyage. When the full, open-air experience was sought, the extraction of the top and window delivered the Targa Spyder. These

flamboyant names, a not-so-subtle gimmick of Porsche's sales department, were abandoned in 1969 when the soft window was replaced by permanently installed wraparound safety glass.

The Targas



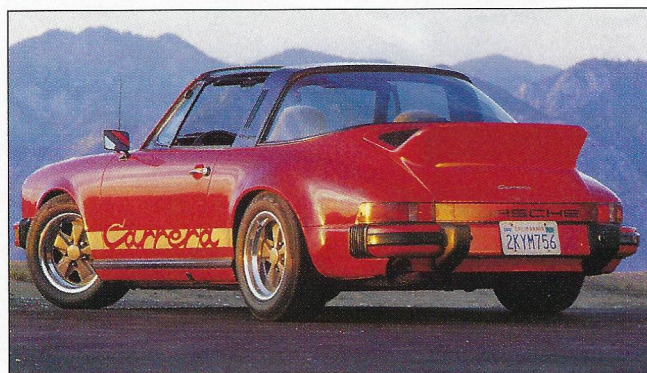
This large, half-dome glass piece allotted an additional amount of comfort and quiet to the cockpit and, for the driver, the convenience of a rear-window defogger. It also allowed for the Targa-top 911 to be registered as a 2+2 in the U.S. market instead of a two-seater as was the classification for the soft-window version.

The fixed glass added a bit more stiffness to the car. Like cabriolets, the Targa suffered from its own supply of creaks, rattles and moans, but its lack of rigidity was addressed early on with additional reinforcements to the floor pan and chassis.

Since the Targa model was designed to fit within the production

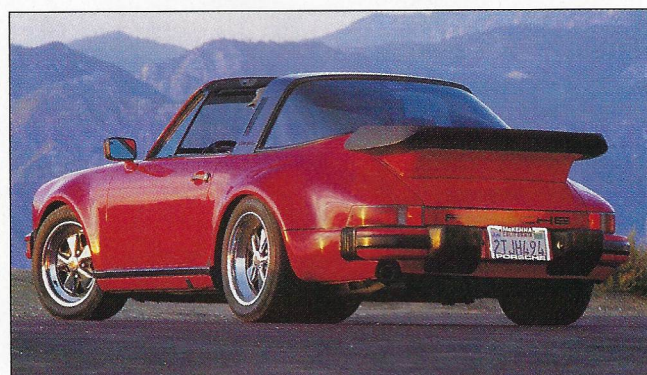
1967 911 "Soft-window" Targa

Owner: Pete Cooper
Engine: Flat six-cylinder, 2.0L displacement
Transmission: Five-speed manual
Wheels: 4.5Jx15-in., Fuchs
Tires: 165x15
Distinctions: Owned since 1971; 105,000 miles; dealer added air conditioning; first year of Targa model



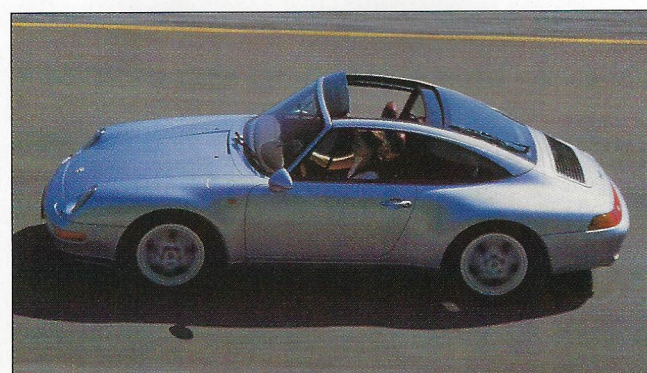
1974 Carrera Targa

Owner: Don Dicker
Engine: Flat, six cylinders, 2.7L displacement
Transmission: Five-speed manual
Wheels: Front, 6Jx15; rear, 7Jx15, Fuchs
Tires: Front, 185/70VR; rear, 215/60VR
Distinctions: First-year Carrera Targa model; gold Carrera script on doors



1986 Turbo-look Carrera Targa

Owner: Tonya Daugherty
Engine: Flat, six cylinders, 3.2L displacement
Transmission: Five-speed manual
Wheels: Front, 7Jx16; rear, 8Jx16, Fuchs
Tires: Front, 205/55ZR; rear, 225/50ZR
Distinctions: One of two Turbo-look Targas built for 1986



1996 911 Targa

Owner: Porsche AG
Engine: Flat, six cylinders, 3.6L displacement
Transmission: Six-speed manual
Wheels: Front, 7Jx17; rear, 9Jx17, two-part light alloy
Tires: Front, 205/50ZR; rear, 255/40ZR
Distinctions: Last of the aircooled production engines

The Targa

line without substantial alterations, it was possible for Porsche to offer the unique top on any of its 901-based cars, including the four-cylinder 912. Even a high-performance 911S could be so ordered, which today is one of the most sought after models.

While the initial reaction to the Targa raised a number of eyebrows, by 1970 the model garnered more than 40 percent of all 911 sales. When the early 911 body style was replaced with the 2.7-liter car (1974-77), the Targa continued to be a customer favorite. A solid fiberglass top became standard for 1974-75, but most U.S. cars were delivered with the optional folding lid.

Throughout the 911's evolution, the Targa persisted. When the car billowed muscular wings, buffet-table-sized tails and packed monstrous engines with turbocharged punch, Porsche understood there were customers who wanted their cars in Targa form no matter the width of the wheels or the size of the powerplant. For 26 years, from the 901 to the 964, Butzi's open-top creation remained a staple of Porsche's line-up even after a true 911 cabriolet was introduced in 1983.

Although the last of the Targas with the original design was built in 1993, its essence was revisited in 1995 aboard the sleek 993. Foregoing a removable top, Porsche flexed its engineering prowess by creating an electronically operated glass panel that retracted smoothly under the rear window. When the panel was closed, the occupants had the option of drawing an electronically operated cloth shade from within the windshield header or allowing the sun to filter through the translucent top.

This year, Porsche introduces the 2002 996 Targa, the latest, and unarguably the finest rendition, of Butzi's ingenuity. Like the 993, the glass roof slips beneath the rear window, but the aperture of the 21st-century Targa has expanded to nearly 0.45m. The rear window, no longer a fixed piece as with prior models, now lifts, hatchback-like, allowing access to the rear seating area.

As it was from the start, the Targa is still the choice of a distinctive breed of Porsche enthusiast. Never as quick or agile as a coupe, not as wildly carefree as a cabriolet, the Targa offers a bit of both worlds, the perfect car for the driver who sees no reason for compromise.

Purchasing Tips

The 911-based Targas were not mechanically different from the coupes or the later cabriolet models. Standard and optional equipment choices for each model were similar, and thus the Targa arrangement can simply be considered another option of the baseline coupe.

Beyond the usual scrutiny that any potential automobile purchase should undergo, a few points are critical when shopping for a pre-owned Targa.

Akin to a true convertible, the Targa chassis had a tendency to flex. The older the car, the more likely it will be that the doors do not align perfectly. Evidence of any large or uneven gaps in the door jams should be followed up by a close inspection of the underbody and interior floor panels. Rust, of course, exacerbates this problem as would any prior accident. Taking the car to a professional body shop may be the best way to resolve questions about the merits of the chassis.

Inspect the rubber stripping over the windshield and along the rollover hoop. These are

Targa Timeline

1967

- First year of the Porsche Targa
- Roll-over hoop covered with a brushed stainless-steel band
- Rear window was a removable piece of flexible "Polyglas"
- Folding Targa top is made with a steel subframe
- Headliner is a perforated black vinyl
- Exterior material of the top is black vinyl
- Interior lights are mounted behind the side windows

1968

- Headliner changes to a denser material
- Solid rear window becomes optional

1969

- Weather sealing improves
- Top's interior steel frame is redesigned
- Air vents added to the stainless-steel band
- Single interior light is mounted in the center of the roll-over bar
- Solid rear window becomes standard, "Polyglas" window is an option

1973

- Top's exterior material changes to a leather-grain vinyl

1974

- Solid plastic top becomes standard—the folding top is optional
- Third locating pin on the rear hoop frame
- Carrera roll-over hoop becomes matte black

1976

- Folding top is again standard equipment; the solid plastic top becomes optional

1977

- Door vent windows become non-operational

1979

- Black roll-over hoop becomes standard

1984

- Improved weather stripping

1985

- Becomes available as a Turbo-look model

1986

- Top's locking mechanism improves (some 1985 models are also equipped with this update)

1987

- Becomes available as a Turbo model
- More improved weather stripping and rain gutters

1989

- Last of the Turbo Targas

1993

- The last of the traditional Targa-topped cars end with the 964 model

1996

- Targa returns as a retractable glass roof on the 993 model

1998

- Demise of the glass-top Targa with the ends of the 993 model

2002

- Return of the terrarium Targa

The Targa

crucial, not only for wet weather conditions but also for wind noise. Check the locking mechanisms. Bent or misaligned latches will cause the top to rattle or, worse, imitate James Bond's DB5 and eject itself as you head down the highway.

As you might expect, the Targa top itself is a critical item to review. Check the condition of the interior and exterior materials. Tops left folded for

long periods of time may show creases that will eventually become cracks. With the top locked open, the outer vinyl should be taut with no gaps or tears. The aerodynamics of the 911 cause a low-pressure area over the car's roof that in turn will pull at the material, causing further damage.

If the material needs to be replaced, the exterior vinyl skin can be purchased at the local Porsche dealership for \$461.70; the headliner lists for



\$193.19. A local Southern California upholstery shop quoted a price of about \$150 to assemble the factory pieces or \$450 to wrap aftermarket material around a frame in good condition.

For a new folding top from the factory, the price skyrockets to more than \$4,600. A better venue to scour would be a Porsche dismantling shop such as Parts Heaven in Hayward, Calif. (800/767-7250;

www.partsheaven.com). A used top in good condition can be acquired for about \$1,200. To replace the solid top that was standard on the 1974-75 cars, the dismantler suggested a price of about \$1,400 but noted that these tops are difficult to locate. Needless to say, the quality of either top is extremely important when considering a Targa car.

Targa Price Book

Note: Prices are estimated from an unscientific search through various websites, newspapers and magazine classifieds. In general, Targas command a greater price than corresponding coupes. Range is from working cars in poor condition to great daily drivers—does not include concours-condition cars, special editions or cars with significant enhancements.

Production numbers from Porsche Cars North America, "Porsche 911 Red Book" by Patrick C. Paternie, and "Original Porsche 911" by Peter Morgan.

YEAR	MODEL	PRODUCTION	PRICE RANGE	YEAR	MODEL	PRODUCTION	PRICE RANGE
1967	911	718	\$6,500-10,500	1977	911	1,724	\$7,500-13,000
	911S	483	\$7,000-13,000		911S	2,747	\$7,500-13,500
	912	544	\$6,500-10,000		Carrera	646	\$12,000-20,000
1968	911	268	\$6,500-10,000	1978	911SC	4,308	\$12,000-19,000
	911L	5,441	\$7,000-10,500	1979	911SC	3,839	\$12,500-20,000
	911T	521	\$6,500-10,000	1980	911SC	3,517	\$12,500-20,000
	911S	442	\$7,500-12,000	1981	911SC	3,120	\$12,500-21,000
	912	1,217	\$6,500-10,000	1982	911SC	4,225	\$12,500-21,000
1969	911T	282	\$7,000-12,000	1983	911SC	2,750	\$13,000-22,000
	911E	858	\$7,000-12,000	1984	Carrera	3,793	\$14,000-23,000
	911S	614	\$9,000-15,000	1985	Carrera	3,490	\$14,500-24,000
	912	801	\$7,000-12,000	1986	Carrera	3,813	\$15,500-24,500
1970	911T	2,545	\$7,500-12,000	1987	Carrera Turbo	3,665 330	\$16,500-28,000 \$25,000-38,000
	911E	933	\$8,000-12,500	1988	Carrera Turbo	3,665 868	\$18,500-28,500 \$26,000-40,000
	911S	729	\$9,000-15,000	1989	Carrera Turbo	1,923 224	\$20,000-29,000 \$28,000-43,000
1971	911T	3,476	\$7,500-12,000	1990	Carrera 2/4	480	\$21,000-32,000
	911E	935	\$8,000-12,500	1991	Carrera 2/4	1,942	\$24,000-34,000
	911S	788	\$9,000-17,000	1992	Carrera 2/4	808	\$26,000-38,000
1972	911T	3,344	\$8,000-12,000	1993	Carrera 2/4	556	\$29,000-40,000
	911E	861	\$8,500-12,500	1996	993	2,442	\$45,000-55,000
	911S	989	\$9,000-19,000	1997	993	1,843	\$49,000-60,000
1973	911T	3,624	\$8,000-13,500	1998	993	334	\$53,000-70,000
	911E	1,055	\$8,500-15,000				
	911S	925	\$9,000-22,000				
1974	911	3,110	\$6,000-10,500				
	911S	898	\$6,500-11,000				
	Carrera	679	\$11,000-18,500				
1975	911	998	\$7,000-10,000				
	911S	1,783	\$7,500-11,000				
	Carrera	371	\$11,000-18,500				
1976	911	1,576	\$7,500-12,500				
	911S	2,175	\$7,500-13,000				
	Carrera	2,079	\$11,000-19,000				

The Targa

Porsche 911 Targa The World's Fastest View

By Les Bidrawn Photos by the author

One hundred fifty mph is damn fast no matter what car you're driving. Imagine doing it enclosed in a glass pod. Although I've never flown an F-16 Tomcat, driving the new 911 Targa must provide many of the sensations—flesh-twisting g-forces, blurred scenery and an eerie calm under the canopy.



At about 165 mph I had to back down; the sweat from my hands made gripping the steering wheel a less stable proposition. Porsche's Targa engineers tell me the car will do upwards of 177 mph. I'd need to wear gloves to get anywhere near that.

Porsche first unveiled the Targa at the 1965 Frankfurt auto show, where Ferry Porsche himself claimed, "The Targa is neither a convertible nor a coupe—it is an entirely new kind of car."

The idea was that Porsche's Targa would be the perfect solution to the lack of a cabriolet, as both re-tooling the 911 and a convertible's safety were then major concerns. Although several manufacturers at the time fitted their cars with sizable cloth sunroofs, none had the visual elegance of the 911 Targa.



The entire glass roof—with its sliding cover, wind deflector, rear lid and mechanicals—is one complete module. During assembly the roof is passed through the windshield and lifted into place from beneath into the roof opening with the seals already in position. Porsche states fitting the roof from

driver's carefully coiffed hair. Just to check our speed, I sat up and stuck my head out of the roof, a bad idea. The blast of the wind turned my eyes into little parachutes and my mouth filled with gravel. Later I washed it all down with several pints of Späten.

The penance for enjoying the Targa's amazing sightlines is weight; the car is some 150-lb heavier than the Coupe. Like the Porsche Cabriolet, the Targa's frame has been strengthened. The new Targa features 30mm-thick steel reinforcements running from the A-pillars and extending back through the roof frame to the C-pillars. Junction plates then weld everything together, with additional bracing extending from the B-pillars into the roof frame. With 325 bhp on tap, the new Targa has more than enough beans to pull the extra weight—0 to 60 mph in about 5 sec.

You won't see many 911 Targas; its production will be limited to a few thousand, 500 of which are destined for North America. But Porsche would be happy to make more should the demand exist. The MSRP is around \$70,000.

If you need a room on the move with the ultimate view, the new Targa will do just fine. ☒



With the advent of the 993 model, Porsche discontinued the removable roof and replaced it with a huge, sliding glass unit. The new 996-based 911 Targa boasts a whopping 1.5m of glass and features a large rear window that can be opened for access to the rear seating area, which by the way is bigger than the 911 Coupe's. It's a great feature that, unfortunately, is specific to the Targa. Flip a one-touch switch on the dashboard, and the glass top retracts in 8 sec. via two silent motors, providing 0.45 meters of open sunlight. If it gets too bright, an automatic diffuser shade cuts down on the glare when the top is closed.

below prevents the roof from being pulled off at high speeds, a bad thing. Porsche spent considerable effort in diverting the wind flow with a wind deflector, and from what I could tell its efforts were successful. Well into triple digits, the cabin remained calm enough so as not to disturb my co-