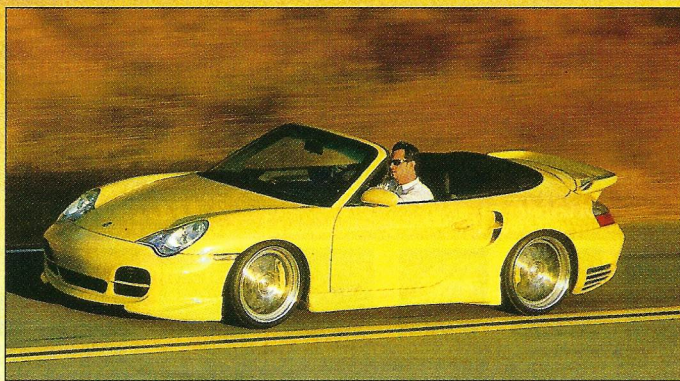


# Beauty and the Beast



Fairy-tale offerings from two high-performance Porsche tuners

By Mitchell Sam Rossi

Photos by Les Bidrawn

**W**hy do our basic needs so often contradict our passionate desires? It seems an unfair paradox, created with the sole intent of ravaging the human spirit. We are well aware that our automotive needs can be met by an ubiquitous minivan—comfortable, convenient, perfect for the kids, great on gas mileage and downright practical. But, in a corner of our hearts we lust after a Harley-Davidson Sportster—wicked, contemptuous, out of control.

And it is not even a matter of social acceptability. We really need the van, but at the same time we really want the hog. Maybe it is a yin and yang thing. Left brain, right brain. Dark and light. Who knows?

To deepen our vehicular conundrum, two high-performance automotive tuners have set a pair of Porsches upon the offering plate. While they could hardly choose a better grand tourer with which to torture our sensibilities, these are not the run-of-the-mill, somewhat customized, kind-of hot-rodged German sports cars. Oh no, these two apples in Eden are at the extreme of the “wow meter.” Yet, they could hardly be more different from each other. One is a breath-taking beauty, the other a heart-stomping, mega-horsepower beast.

## Beauty

Adorned in stunning Speed Yellow is the Beauty, a 996 twin-turbo cabriolet. This wide-bodied drop-top turbo, however, is not a creature of Weissach. It is the concept of By Design, a merchant of high-performance components for the latest renditions of the 911.

“We wanted to produce a wild cab, but not with aftermarket pieces,” said Larry Strong, the shop’s general manager. “We wanted to use actual factory parts. Quarter panels, fenders, lights, bumpers, the whole deal.”

Starting with a perfectly honorable 2000 996 cabriolet, By Design’s crew commenced with the unpleasant task of stripping the car down to the chassis. The fact that the 996 shares a base structure with its mighty twin-turbo brethren allowed the fabricators to fashion this remarkable car with a minimum of metal work.

Up front, the transition from the narrow-body 996 to the wider car was a simple matter of swapping fenders, bumper and headlamps. The hood remains, as do the doors. To change the rear panels, the work was much more demanding. The quarters were sliced off the original car and the factory turbo fenders welded in place.

The most difficult piece in the process, Strong explained, was the rear deck. The 996 Turbo differs greatly from its narrow-bodied sibling by a stylistic crease running through the taillight lenses and across the engine lid. Below this ripple, the hood drops steeply into the bumper.

As the cabriolet’s deck is also shorter than that of the coupe’s, the fabricators were forced to create a new body piece to enclose the engine bay.

To retain the cabriolet’s sensuous lines, a tea-tray spoiler from German aftermarket manufacturer TechArt was incorporated onto the deck instead of the Turbo’s hydraulically activated wing. And for a bit more pizzazz, stylistic side rockers and a front lip spoiler, also from TechArt, were added.

Drop the top and switch on the Panasonic CQ-SRX 7000U audio system, and the car suddenly becomes a rolling





version of the Hollywood Bowl. The built-in digital sound processor, MP3 player and CD changer, along with ten Diamond Auto speakers and two 500-watt Phoenix Gold amplifiers, envelop the cockpit with concert-hall-like surround sound. And for that drive-in theater experience, two LCD monitors—one in the dash and one in the passenger's visor—offer the occupants a screening of their favorite DVD blockbuster movie.

For comfort, the pilot and passenger are awarded Turbo sports seats wrapped in leather and suede with color-coordinated yellow stitching. The splashes of carbon fiber on the steering wheel, e-brake handle and a variety of other cockpit surfaces may seem to contradict the elegance of this car, but a closer study reveals this Beauty is more than a pretty face.

Under the deck, the 996's original 3.4-liter motor was upgraded to a twin-turbo delivering 400 bhp with a boost of 1.2 bar. Unlike the factory coupe, the By Design turbo cab is propelled only by the rear wheels as the car retains its original six-

speed transmission. Whatever acceleration is lost in grip, however, returns in weight savings.

The engine's induction system was enhanced by a BMC sport air-intake unit, while at the other end of the powerplant, a specially modified exhaust system incorporates custom headers, a European high-flow 800-cell sport catalytic converter and sport mufflers.

One of the more aggressive aspects of the car is its fully adjustable GT3 coilover suspension system, including the GT3 anti-sway bars and adjustable drop links. Mind you, this is not aftermarket equipment. This is all Porsche, down to the parts numbers. Perched at the end of the front struts are 14-in. two-piece floating cross-drilled rotors passing through Brembo four-piston calipers. At the rear, the clamps are GT3 calipers and 13.1-in. rotors.

For dancing shoes, Beauty pirouettes on SAC RG5 three-piece forged wheels, 8.5x19 front and 11x19 on the rear, and all wrapped with Goodyear F1 rubber, 245x35 and 275x30, respectively.

As By Design is located in the trendy westside of Los Angeles, this unusual cab seems perfectly suited toward the discriminating tastes of its local clientele. Strong admits, however, that the car is a bit extreme. "Most of our customers who drive cabriolets don't want the intense perform-



## Beauty and the Beast

ance of this car. They want something to take out on Sunday to cruise the beach.”

To appease those who want flare without the mind-numbing effects of twin turbos and racing suspension, By Design can build a beauty such as this in a variety of optional stages. “It is basically a matter of our customer’s imagination. We want to offer them a unique car that they can have fun in and be proud of,” Strong said.

Stage One is strictly the aesthetic transformation of a generic 996 cab into a Turbo-bodied soft-top and comes with a price of about \$22,000. Again, except for the rear deck, which is an \$8,000 custom piece, the procedure uses only factory-supplied parts and hardware. It is the same for Stage Two, the GT3 suspension, which adds another \$7,000 to the package.

Stage Three is where the engine work comes into play. This is a broad area in which the customer can decide just how

radical a motor he or she deems necessary for his or her particular car. By Design can deliver anything from putting a bit more grunt in the original engine to replacing the power unit with a highly tuned factory 996 motor that will turn the cab into a topless rocketship. But, like buying diamonds to seduce any beauty, tinkering with the soul of the 996 is a costly endeavor. This stage can set the suitor back anywhere from \$20K to \$70K.

The enhanced braking system comes under Stage Four and runs about \$12,000. Of course, if one has just dropped \$70 gees on a 500+ bhp motor, it is probably wise to garrison enough stopping power under the wheels to slow it down.

While the numbers add up quickly, there is a difference between By Design’s customizing philosophy and the other bad-boy cars rummaging around the streets. “It’s all genuine factory parts,” Strong points out. “You can bring it back to us or take it to Porsche. There is nothing that the

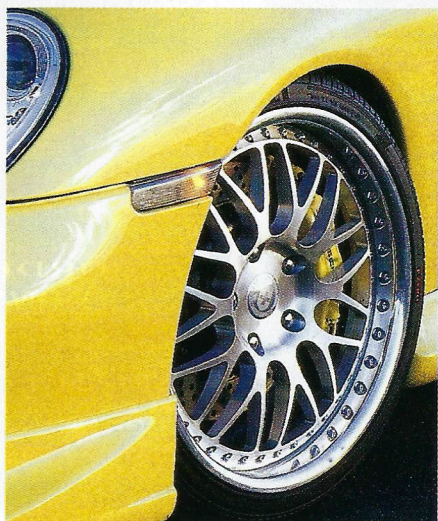
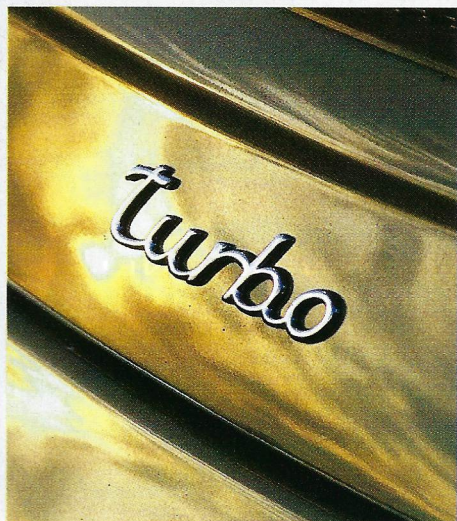
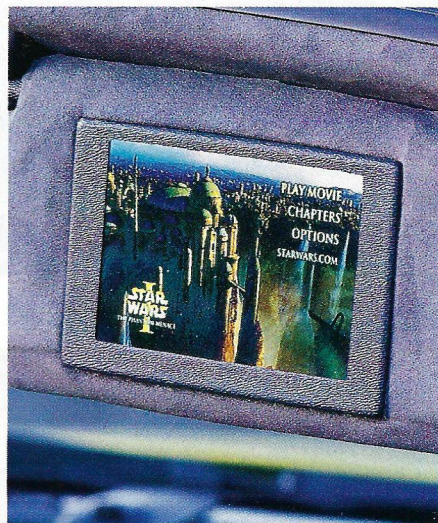
dealer can’t replace. The parts are all warranted, but because of the modifications the car isn’t. We assume that. And it is the same for the motor and suspension.” Of course, Strong admits the exception is the rear deck.

While unique, this Beauty is not a one-of-a-kind. “We are capable of doing 10 to 15 cars a year, but I’d rather build one at a time because our primary focus is quality. It’s better to do six a year and have them absolutely perfect,” Strong said.

At an out-the-door price of \$195,000, this extraordinary drop-top turbo is not simply a beauty but a super-model. But then, this level of perfection and refinement is clearly worth every penny.

### The Beast

Pegging the needle against the other end of the extreme meter is the Beast, a silver 993-bodied, 847-bhp twin-turbo monster. Where the Beauty is grace and purity, this Porsche is a rogue, a villain quick to seduce



## Beauty and the Beast

the unwary with the promise of ballistic-like acceleration.

Built by GT Pro, an independent import tuning shop known for its work on the now-extinct Mitsubishi 3000GT-VR4. "We race and service the cars," GT Pro's owner Brian La Fuente said of the Mitsubishis. "But we are not a service center. We're a tuning shop."

While it may seem like a huge leap to go from tuning Japanese engines to developing an ultra-high-performance Porsche motor, the theory behind employing turbochargers to attain incredible amounts of horsepower is basically the same on any combustion engine. Yet, one critical factor in GT Pro's decision to use the 911 as a test bed is the Beast is owned by the shop's resident fabricator, Mike Kirakosyan.

With the Mitsubishis, La Fuente's shop is one of the premier tuners, not just in the States but worldwide. Yet, when it came to

developing the Beast's powerplant, he admitted at times that he and Kirakosyan were winging it. "I have always had ideas that are a little unorthodox. A little bit different," La Fuente said of his experience building engines. "Mike's car was a real challenge. We came up against a couple of stumbling blocks."

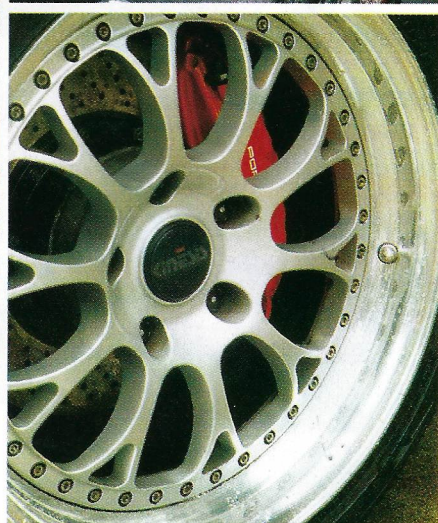
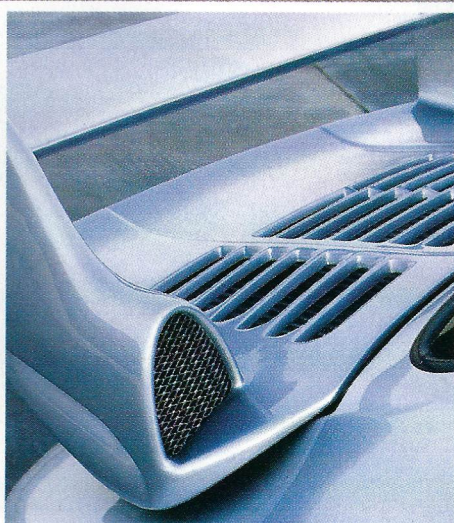
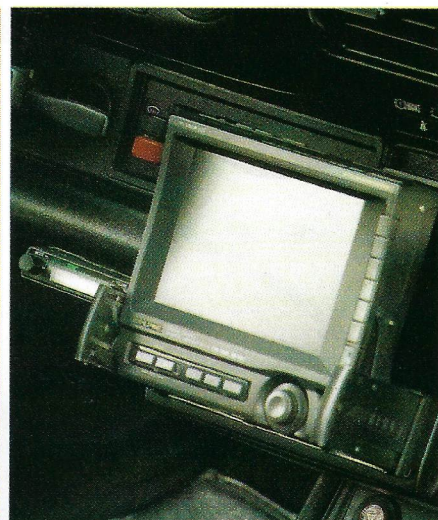
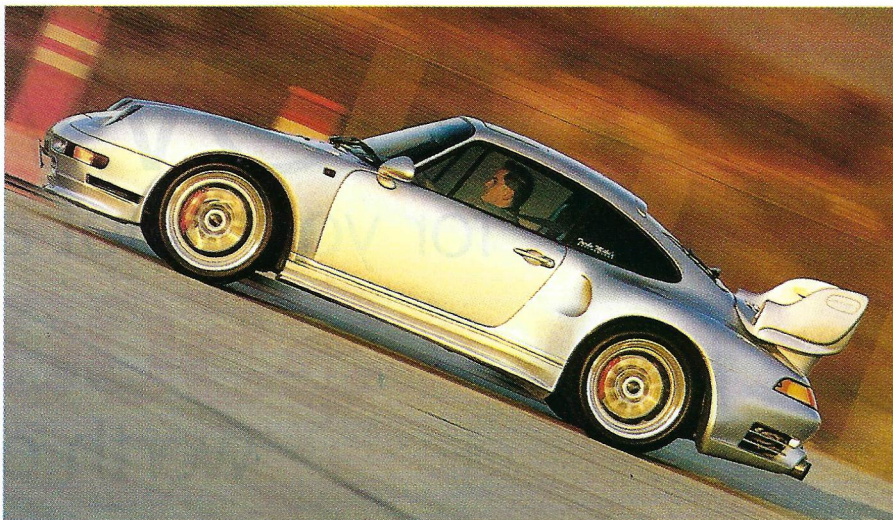
La Fuente makes an example of the intake system they fabricated for the car. In the first trials, Kirakosyan felt the powerband had flattened out. When the fabricator was ready to discard the unit and start over, La Fuente made suggestions on how to rework the piece. "After the changes, the mid-range came back and things started moving in a better direction."

While La Fuente lent his expertise, it was Kirakosyan who actually assembled the 3.8-liter flat six. "Mike developed a technique for building the motor that is quite unusual," La Fuente said but declined to elaborate. He did add that this was the first Porsche motor Kirakosyan had ever built.

Perhaps a clue to the engine's power is the pair of Garrett turbochargers force feeding a Holley 80mm throttle body; fuel is stirred into the mix by a Speed-Pro fully sequential engine management system. At an incredible 1.5 bar of boost, the motor generates 847 bhp at the wheels at 6200 rpm. For torque, Kirakosyan's Beast manages to grunt out 730 lb-ft at 5700 rpm.

The power is moved from engine to tires through a 993 six-speed all-wheel-drive transmission Kirakosyan modified to rear-wheel only. The car's original five-speed just could not handle the output. Producing such might, however, comes with a price. "It has no first or second gear," La Fuente said of the car's off-the-line power. "It just smokes the tires and that's anywhere over 1 bar of boost."

A related problem is with the clutch. The Beast eats them for breakfast, lunch and dinner. "We really have been battling the clutch issue. We actually had eight different Muller twin-disc setups in the car.



## Beauty and the Beast

None of them worked correctly,” La Fuente said. They expect to solve the problem with a Tilton triple-disc carbon-carbon unit. “We are hoping that it will hold the power down.”

While La Fuente is clearly pleased to have a massive horsepower Porsche rumble out of his speed shop, there is more to the Beast than vaulted levels of testosterone. Built on a 1974 911 chassis, the 993 silhouette was created entirely out of carbon-fiber body components from American International Racing (AIR). To channel fresh air across the intercooler, Kirakosyan mounted AIR’s GT2 bi-wing tail with side intake scoops. The 993’s muscular fenders allowed for Kinesis wheels sized at 8.5x18 up front and 12.5x18 at the rear; they are wrapped in BFG rubber, 245x40 and 335x35, front and rear, respectively.

With so much forward thrust on tap, the Beast was equipped with a complete 993

Turbo braking system, known among Porschephiles as the Big Reds. Yet, as the primary focus was on reaching stratospheric horsepower, La Fuente and Kirakosyan decided to leave other aspects of the car for later development.

“We are going to be revising the suspension,” La Fuente said. “But we are not 100-percent sure of what direction to take yet.” At this point, the Beast’s front end teeters on its original torsion bar layout, while the rear has been slightly updated to Bilstein coilovers and Eibach springs. The front and rear sway bars, too, remain stock units.

Like the powerplant, Kirakosyan did not cut corners when it came to assembling a high degree of creature comforts. The Beast harbors a complete black leather 993 interior with all the amenities, including power seats, power windows and electric sunroof. And if the growl of the engine isn’t music enough, the fabricator added a six-speaker Alpine CVA 1003 audio system with flip-up CD screen and a pair of massive Precision

Power amplifiers.

Side by side, the Beauty and the Beast are breathtaking examples of extreme Porsches. They could not be more dissimilar in philosophy or execution. Given the opportunity to take one home, however, the choice becomes very personal. There are arguments in favor of both and for neither. Thank goodness the minivan isn’t in the equation. ❧

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