

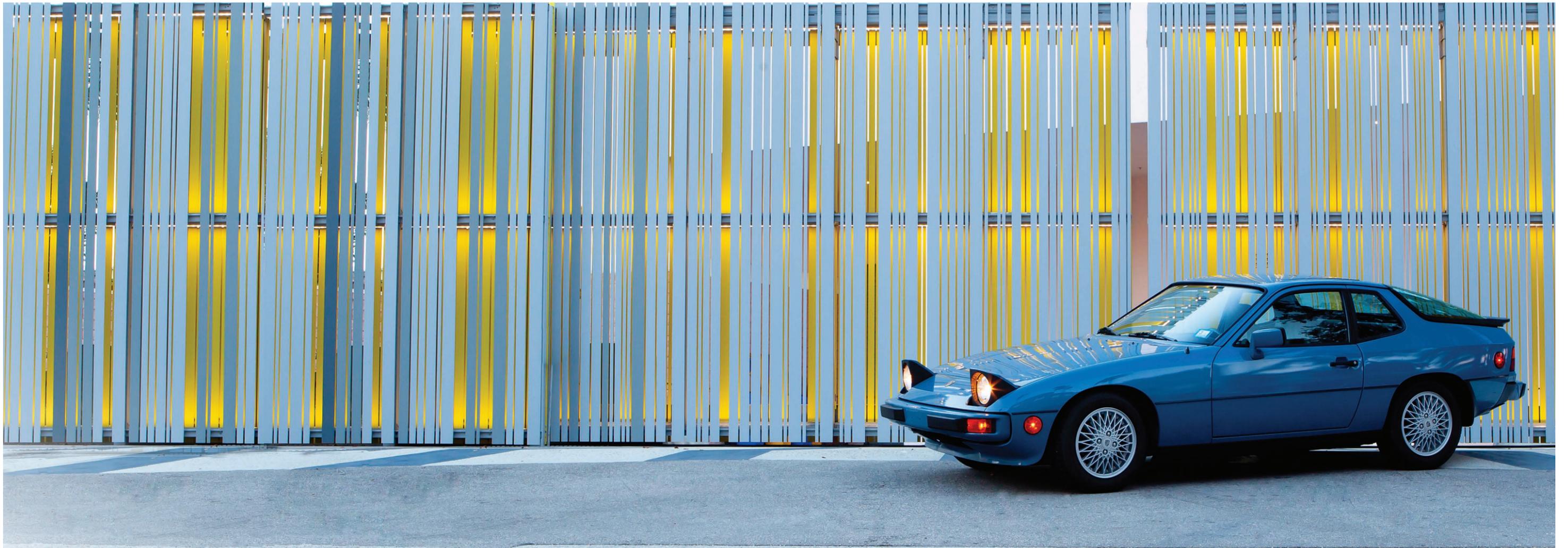


Miller's Pillar

HOW A MONACO BLUE 1980
924 CEMENTED ONE FAMILY'S
PORSCHE PASSION.

STORY BY **DAVID MATHEWS**
PHOTOS BY **MICHAEL ALAN ROSS**

IF CARS COULD TALK, what would this one say? Considered by many to be the odd man out in the Porsche family, the 924 shared little with Porsche's rear-engined, air-cooled, 911 standard bearer. It also didn't share much with its other sibling, the 16-valve 4.5-liter V8 928 transaxle model designed to go head-to-head with Mercedes-Benz and Jaguar grand tourers and the car that had been intended to replace the aging 911. Instead, the VW/Audi-sourced 924, occupying the lowest spot on the Porsche totem pole, was offered as an entry-level car for the masses. In other words, the replacement for the dissed 914 was the poor man's Porsche, version 2.0.



Monacoblau is a rare color. It was offered for only the 1980 and 1981 model years, and only for the 924.

That doesn't mean the 924 doesn't have its champions. For instance, the brightly hued 924 pictured here has enjoyed life within the same family for 40 years. And if the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren have anything to say about it (and they do, of course), it will remain in the family another 40 or more years. Funny how things work out.

HAMPTON "HAMP" MILLER, the octogenarian patriarch of the Miller family, was one of those car-crazed teenagers coming of age in the 1950s. As soon as he could afford it, or more accurately, before he could really afford it, he acquired a 1965 356C that he and his wife Susan toolled around southeastern Wisconsin and drove in SCCA rallies before children came along. "It got to the point where I could either put oil and gas in the car or food on the table," lamented Hamp. "So the Porsche had to go."

However, the adage "once bitten, twice shy" simply

does not apply to Porsche enthusiasts. One Porsche seems to beget another, and so on. So after a few sporty cars that Hamp deemed more practical—"I had VWs and a Corvair Corsa that was dynamite"—and a series of promotions (and transfers), Hamp and company relocated to the East Coast with a little more cash in hand.

Hamp had remained active in sports car clubs throughout those early years, working the corners and stewarding at Road America. He had also developed an abiding friendship with the legendary father and son racing duo, Bob and Al Holbert. It was only a matter of time before Hamp and Susan found themselves standing in Holbert's Porsche-Audi showroom in Warrington, Pennsylvania, surrounded by red, black, and silver Porsches—and a brand new Monaco Blue 1980 924. The price was doable. "We were really looking for an entry-level car. Back then, Porsche's prices were rising pretty fast." And that color? Hamp and Susan were drawn to the unusual hue, as it was quite a departure from standard Porsche fare.

On December 20, 1980, Hamp signed the sales agreement, and the 924 replaced a 1980 limited-edition VW

Scirocco in the Millers' garage. "[The Scirocco] was a... very, very fast little car. I took a financial bath on it, but I wanted the 924." With that purchase began the Miller family's four-decade love affair that included road trips and rallies, concours, and cross-country cruising.

Not only is this 924 rare because of its color, but it has another feature that makes it truly one of a kind. One day, Al Holbert phoned Hamp with an interesting proposition. How would he like a rear spoiler on his 924? At the time, Al was deep into racing Porsches, from 924 GTRs with the likes of Doc Bundy and Hurley Hayward to piloting Porsche's ultimate track weapon, the 962. Al offered to build and install an unobtrusive (but effective) lip spoiler near the trailing edge of the rear hatch. "I told him I was working and couldn't just take off during the day," said Hamp. "Al urged me to come past his shop in the evening and he'd do it then. He prepared the spoiler at Holbert Racing behind the dealership. They had some contrived wood/metal buck thing they used to shape it. It's possible they got a prototype [spoiler] from Porsche and modified it to fit the 924, but I have no way

of knowing its original source. I know they had to shape it using the buck to get it to fit without breaking the rear window. Al installed it himself, and I was panicked he'd bust the glass, which he thought was hilarious. He kept telling me not to worry—typical racer attitude regarding damaging a car." Porsche equipped all 924s with a rear spoiler beginning with the 1983 model.

HAMP'S PURCHASE of the 924 reignited his love of the Porsche brand, which had begun with that 356 he had in the '60s. He has owned something like 10 or 12 Porsches since buying that 924, including another 356, 944s, and 911s, as well as his current car, a Speed Yellow Cayman S (six-speed, of course).

The infatuation with that 924 was not limited to Hamp. "I instantly fell in love with the car," said Jeff Miller, Hamp's son. Jeff and his wife Alice are presently members of the Northern New Jersey Region. "I was high school age and wanted to get my hands on it. Dad owned the 924 for about seven years, and then developed an interest in a different model and sold it to my

The rear spoiler, shaped and installed by Al Holbert, is unique, considering it was not standard equipment until 1983. Cleaning the crevices of the lacy alloy wheels generally falls to the small hands of the Miller grandchildren.



brother Chris, in San Diego. Chris owned it for about four years, and then reached out to Alice and me in 1991 to see if we were interested in buying it. I'd always loved the darn car, and it was my 30th birthday, so..."

Jeff and Alice's trip from Ann Arbor, Michigan to San Diego was emotional, a mixture of angst, anxiety, and anticipation. Was buying the 924 the right thing to do? Was it the right time? Could they really afford it? But once in San Diego, those questions evaporated. Seeing the car reignited the youthful lust Jeff had felt 11 years earlier. After completing the paperwork in April 1991, Jeff became the third owner of that all-in-the-family Monaco Blue 924.

Their return to Michigan took longer than the flight to California. But not by much. At the time, many U.S. interstate highways still posted a 55 mph speed limit. (The National Maximum Speed Limit law, or NMSL, enacted in January 1974, was not fully repealed until December 1991.)

"The 924's speedometer reflected an 85 mph maximum [in deference to that NMSL-imposed limit]," recalled Jeff. "When we reached Arizona, the speed limit signs listed fines one would incur if the limit was exceeded. Between 55 and 65, the fine was this much, 65 to 75 was that much, and over 75 was \$25. Alice was dozing. I thought to myself, heck, I have \$25 in my pocket, so I'm gonna get going. I just buried the needle for the next couple of hours. Had no idea how fast I was going, but I exceeded 85 mph for sure. When Alice woke up

she asked what I was doing. I told her I was just making a little time."

ONCE BACK IN MICHIGAN, Jeff and Alice spent the next two years sprucing up the car and returning it to concours condition. Chris hadn't shown the 924; he simply drove it and enjoyed it. "Our first show was in Cincinnati [1993 PCA Parade], where the car won its class," related Jeff. "We were very excited. We have a photo of Kory [their son] in a stroller at that Parade. It was the first time the car had been shown at the national level. The next year we again took our class at Lake Placid."

In true Miller family fashion, Jeff and Hamp both competed at the 2001 Parade held in Milwaukee. Jeff's 924 garnered second in the transaxle class; Hamp's 1985 911 won the Preservation Class group award. The Miller 924 retired from national competition after the 2005 Parade at Hershey, Pennsylvania, as life, kids, and college tuition took precedence.

The 2019 Boca Parade marked the 924's return to the porch where the big dogs lie. "We wanted to make an impression with the car in Boca," said Jeff. "I wanted it to turn heads. You know, 'Where has this car been?' And, 'Tell us about the color.' What we found in the last few years is how rare it is. Dad didn't know it at the time. Heck, it wasn't selling because everyone wanted red or black. It's not that a 924 is so special, but the color..."

A visit to PCA's www.Rennbow.org indicates how rare

Buttons, switches, and analog dials typify the 1980s. Jeff and Alice Miller's oldest daughter, Megan, shared, on the QT, that the 924's top speed does in fact exceed the 85-mph speedometer reading.



Monaco Blue is. “We saw that Monaco Blue was on the missing list of colors on the site, so I submitted photos of our car,” said Jeff. “The other one shown on the website has European plates. I think ours is one of the very few in the U.S. It’s a ‘five-can’ color, the rarest of the rare. I’m glad I held onto it and didn’t sell it to help pay bills.”

IN AN ODD sort of way, competing in concours has forced the Millers to take exceptional care of their 924 and ensure that it will be there for the next generation. “Each of the kids wants the car when it’s time for me to pass it on, but I emphasize what it takes to care for it. And they’ve learned. This week, all of my kids and grandkids are here—15 of us. And they all pitched in. Each had a job. It’s all about bringing the whole family into it. It’s an appreciation of a piece of art, to understand it, to hold onto it.”

Megan, Jeff’s oldest, shared some memories of this special car. “I remember when Mom and Dad picked it up from Uncle Chris. And after putting it in the garage, under a car cover, they told us how they ‘opened it up in Arizona’ and how fast the car was. I thought that was pretty cool. Then they told us kids not to put our bicycles near the car—ever.”

Brittney, second of the Miller siblings, added, “I remember there was a line in the garage, and we were not allowed to cross that line unless we were helping Dad clean the car. Our job was to clean the tires and wheels

with Q-tips.”

This line of demarcation and the car cover not only protected the Porsche from errant bicycle pedals and handlebars, it allowed the car to serve a practical purpose. Jeff and Alice hid Christmas presents in the 924, safely stowed away from the prying eyes of Megan, Brittney, and Kory.

Kory, last in the lineage, remembers “...sitting on Dad’s lap driving around the cul-de-sac. I couldn’t really steer the car because my hands were too small, so Dad had his hands over mine helping me. But I bumped the curb, and that was the last time I ‘drove.’ He did let me scoot under the car with a creeper. He’d send me under there with a toothbrush to clean anything and everything I could reach.”

The 924 has become the family stalwart, like heirloom china and silver brought out only for holiday festivities. So what do Grandpa and Grandma Miller think of their grandchildren embracing the Porsche as they once did? Megan replied, “They are proud. Going to Porsche events has always been a part of our lives. I’ve been to ten. This car has been the pillar of our family, [the reason] for our going on vacations together. We’ve enjoyed concours since we were very little.” Jeff added, “This car is not going anywhere. It’s staying with the family.”

The Millers, by the way, were named PCA’s Family of the Year in 2020. The Monaco Blue 924 is clearly in good hands. ☺