

PORSCHE 944 TURBO

Ah, those immortal words: 'If it was my money, I'd buy the...'. Alright, I'll admit it. When it comes to flogging the odd cliché to death, I'm as guilty as anyone. But there's something about that vacuous, hollow phrase that really makes me cringe every time it gets wheeled out by some uninspired motoring hack.

Ironically enough, here I am thinking about which Porsche I'd buy if I had ten large burning a hole in my pocket and risking what precious little journalistic credibility I had in the process.

Last month I voted the 912 to be the ideal beginner's Porsche, and I still stand by that sentiment. They're cheap to buy, cheap to run, and offer a more vibrant, truer taste of Porsche ownership than similarly-priced models. But if the selection criteria were to be reset to which Porsche gives you the most bang for your ten grand, I'd go for the 944 Turbo SE every time.

While the editor is having his rusty old SC welded together again and deputy editor Dom Holtam's 968 Club Sport is having most of its tired-out chassis replaced, I'll be grinning from

ear to ear and occasionally scaring myself witless in a 250bhp turbocharged missile. And my smug grin will only widen with the thought that where both Holtam and Gallagher's £10,000 got them average examples of their chosen steeds at best, my wad bought one of the best 944 Turbos money can buy. And let's face it, buy a blown 944 and you're getting a lot of car for your money.

Forget the pre-1988 Turbos, they're getting on, will probably need some money spent on them and only had 220bhp and 243lb ft to offer in the first place. Stick to the later '88 to '92 'Silver Rose' or SE versions and you'll get a car capable of demolishing the 0-62mph sprint in 5.7 seconds and hitting a top whack of 163mph. And because the later cars came with a slippery diff, bigger brakes and ABS as standard, they're also sweeter to drive on the road and all the more at home being caned around a racetrack.

Although the later 944 Turbo isn't quite as laggy as its predecessor, it still delivers an almighty kick in the pants around the three

grand mark when the 'charger chimes in and all hell breaks loose. But while they demand respect, that explosive delivery is as addictive as crack cocaine, and you'll suddenly find yourself exploiting every straight bit of road to make the Turbo sing and get another hit. Which is not to say that the 944 isn't fun round the twisties.

With the engine at the front and transmission at the back, the Turbo is almost perfectly balanced, and subsequently nicely poised and predictable when driven close to the edge. Don't be too surprised if suddenly every familiar B-road turns in to a supersprint stage, and every cross-country jaunt turns into the last lap of the Mille Miglia. And if for some reason 250bhp isn't quite enough for you, for just a few hundred quid 300bhp yours is with a few simple modifications to the ECU and wastegate. Barking!

Alright, so it may not be the prettiest car Porsche ever built, and doesn't have the kudos of the 911. But with its muscular haunches and squat stance, the Turbo has a purposeful, aggressive look about it that makes sure it stands out in a crowd. It's also aged very well,



£10k buys the very best example of a late 944 Turbo SE.

and unlike the space-age 928, doesn't look too dated today.

The interior is a bit primitive, but you get electric everything and the hardware itself is supremely robust, making it ideal as an everyday hack. A virtue that's helped along by the Turbo's modest running costs: £258 for a 12,000 service and £346 for a 24,000-miler isn't bad at all. And because 651 Turbos were sold from '88 on, you shouldn't have trouble picking one up either. If you can't source a good example from *AutoTrader* or the likes, try the 944 Register at the Porsche Club, or give 944 specialists Harteck a ring on 070 0010 0944.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

Because of their explosive delivery and tail-happy tendencies, quite a few 944 Turbos out there will have been pranged to one extent or another. So when inspecting a prospective buy, you can pretty much forget about everything else until you're completely satisfied that what you're looking at is a straight car.

Keep an eye out for irregular panel gaps and

faults with the pop-up headlights, both of which can betray a bent car. You should find a white sticker in the boot, next to the nearside rear light, if not the car may have been rear-ended.

Mechanically, the Turbo is nigh-on bulletproof. You can expect the 'charger to last over 120,000 miles without needing to be replaced or rebuilt. All the same, check for smoking and rumbling from the unit. If the car is miley, the wastegate springs may be tired, effectively reducing the pressure in the turbo and sapping performance.

Make very sure that the belts have been replaced in the last 48,000 miles or four years, and examine the water pump for leaks and excessive noise. If the belts go, or the pump seizes, it could kill the engine, costing you upwards of £2000 to fix.

Engine mounts wear, especially on the nearside where the exhaust manifolds are, causing severe vibrations. Because the transmission takes a beating, you need to check for worn synchros. Also, clutch springs and pinion bearings lead a hard life, so look

out for baulky shifting, noise and excessive vibration. Severe tramlining on the road will indicate worn wishbone ball joints, a common fault on all 944s. Finally, the brake calipers often seize and need rebuilding; take the time to inspect them properly. Find a 944 Turbo with the right history, and you're laughing.

WE FOUND

A quick search on *autotrader.co.uk* dug up a 1991 944 Turbo SE with only 98,000 miles on the clock, which judging by the picture supplied looks to be in mint condition. The owner is asking £10,500, which can be taken as read that ten large is what he's after, so this example is right on budget. Imposing in black, this 944 comes with ivory leather, a bridge spoiler and has recently had new belts, tyres, shocks, and driveshaft. It's even had the gearbox rebuilt recently. What's more, the car has a full set of Porsche stamps in the logbook, and comes with every past MoT and a clutch of bills and receipts. In short, it's ready to rock.

