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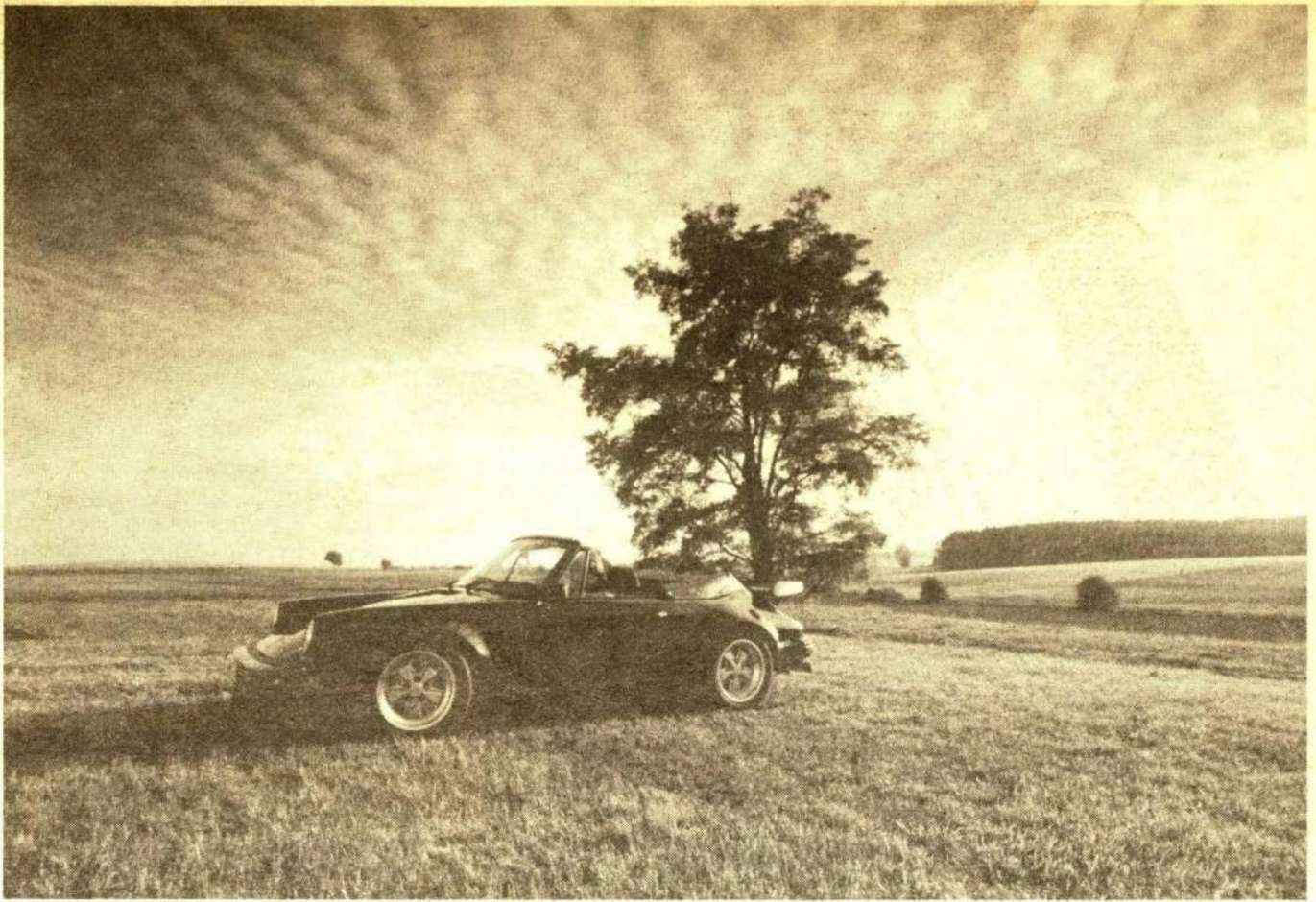
Raising the Ruf

*Luis Ruf
takes the 911
to new heights*



NEWS





**COVER PHOTO
OF RUF PORSCHE 911
BY WOLFGANG DREHSEN**

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Diamond in the Ruf Luis Ruf challenges the likes of Ferrari and Aston Martin with his specialty Porsches. **10**

You Don't Buy, You Apply



With production of 25 cars a year, Luis Ruf can afford to be selective about what he builds — and who buys them

By Burge Hulett

The *mindelmarkt* in Pfaffenhausen is crowded on a summer Saturday afternoon. The line to the cashier is thick with weekenders from Munich stocking up on fresh fruit and canned goods for camping at one of the nearby lakes. The youngish men and women, many of them dressed in brightly colored Lycra bicycle suits, chat eagerly with the town's residents, who are at the market to buy their groceries for the week. The mood is festive, a buzz and bustle, the only busy place in this sleepy, little West German town of under 2,000.

The *mindelmarkt*—and Pfaffenhausen itself for that matter—aren't traditional tourist spots. They should be the kind of place where you can cause a major stir just by letting it be known you're from a far-off land. Like Tokyo. Or Los Angeles.

But it doesn't work that way. Instead, what a stranger gets from people here is a

look of recognition. And a question: "Herr Ruf?" they ask.

Sitting catercorner to Pfaffenhausen's biggest intersection is the Ruf Automobiles works, a low, mostly one-story building, a haphazard series of interconnected rooms. Over multi-overhead doors, painted in dark green on a white background, is a single word: Ruf. Inside are 25 technicians who spend regular 10-14-hour days. Their speciality is building turbocharged 911s, Ruf-modified versions of normally aspirated Carreras, and Porsche restoration.

In terms of most manufacturers, or even tuning shops, the firm is tiny. Production is about 25 complete cars a year, plus less ambitious work on a few dozen more.

In reputation Ruf has greater stature. German Porsche tuners aren't exactly a new subject. Most car buffs can recite the names: DP, Kremer, Gemballa among countless others. But just as Pfaffenhausen is a special place secreted away from the hustle and bustle of

Stuttgart, about two hours away, or Munich, an hour to the east, so are Ruf-modified Porsches special. And wonderful. And blisteringly fast. And expensive: To bring one to the States would cost something on the order of six figures.

From a business standpoint it sounds like a wonderful circumstance, too, for whomever owns the firm: One imagines streams of people, lined up with fistfuls of marks, dollars, yen and lira, maneuvering to be one of the few each year who will own a Ruf Porsche.

Indeed, it is a pretty wonderful situation for Luis Ruf, the firm's owner, who is enjoying a level of success he perhaps never foresaw. He does not worry much anymore about where his next meal is coming from. In back of the *mindelmarkt* is a large, empty lot, now no different from the acres of rolling cow pasture that engulf the town, but soon to be the new, expanded home of Ruf Automobiles. Call it growth. Call it success.

But just as Ruf's success has given it the reason and resources to grow, so is explosive growth antithetical to Luis Ruf's traditionalist philosophy of building automobiles. Growth means more production for more income. Growth means being less involved personally with each car and each project. Growth means finding not 25 top-notch, dedicated engineers, but perhaps someday 250. Growth means the dilution of a dream.

Luis Ruf likes to joke and say he's just a simple country boy from Bavaria. He says it in jest; Ruf is educated, speaks multiple

languages, has traveled everywhere, and has an insight and a single-mindedness about automobiles that is not easily matched. Education aside, his roots are in Pfaffenhausen, the place where he was born and the place he chooses still for his home and business.

Ruf doesn't question his qualifications for running a growing automobile firm. If he did, likely he wouldn't be where he is. The part that causes him concern is the quandary created by the prospect of no longer being able to control completely all aspects of the company he owns.

"It's what made us what we are today," he says. "My father and I began working on 911 Porsches. He taught me cars must be right, which means to me perfect, and I don't know how I can stay on top of all that and continue to see my business grow, even though I know we must grow if we are to stay ahead of all the others."

American enthusiasts learned about Ruf in *AutoWeek* a year ago (Oct. 8, 1984), and heard more some months later when *Road & Track* staged a competition to find the fastest production car in Europe. The winner, a Ruf Turbo, blasted through the timing traps at 186.2 MPH.

The Ruf car knocked off some pretty big reputations: A Ferrari 512 BBi, an Aston Martin Vantage, a 928S, a factory 911 Turbo and a couple of other European hot shots. Two things made the achievement unique. First, one of the rules was that only manufacturers could enter, which eliminated the tuners and their mercurial horsepower and top-speed claims. Ruf, in the eyes of the German government, is not a tuner or rebuilder, but a manu-

facturer, no different in concept than Porsche AG, BMW, Volkswagen or Audi. Each Ruf car carries its own identification plate and serial numbers.

Second, and perhaps more significant, is the fact that the car Ruf supplied to ex-racers Phil Hill and Paul Frere, who did the driving, was not a one-off record car. It was a customer's car, borrowed for the occasion from Ruf's attorney, who uses it as a daily driver. The car has about 90,000km on its chassis and 30,000 on its engine and is still being driven around Munich. After running 186.2 MPH, it was driven home. It has yet to be serviced.

Says the owner, "Why? It doesn't need anything. Ruf's cars will run at top speed any time; I have never heard of one having a mechanical failure."

Ruf is different than most Porsche specialists in that, save for an occasional oil change on his mother's 3-series BMW, he works only on Porsches—and only on rear-engine Porsches at that.

"I have nothing against the newer Porsches," he says. "In fact, I think the new 944 Turbo is a wonderful car. It's just that my father and I started working on 911s when they were introduced and that's what I know best. I grew up working with my father on these cars, and even though my business grows every year we are still able to technically innovate the cars the Porsche factory builds. I see no reason to change."

Much of the younger Ruf's philosophy and success is attributable to his father, now deceased. The elder Ruf started in Pfaffenhausen in 1939 with a shop repairing farm equipment, fixing crashed cars and pumping gas. He appreciated fine automobiles, and early pictures show Luis teaching himself to drive everything from a tractor to his father's Maserati 3500. Luis hung around the shop, and

eventually his father put him to work learning about machinery and the right way to make a car out of parts. After work, young Ruf read car magazines and dreamed of powerful, agile automobiles instead of hay spreaders and tractors.

After graduating from school, Luis became an apprentice. He began the nine-year training period required before he could call himself a *Meisterbrief*, a title which meant he could operate an automobile business and train employees.

Ruf's father also made sure his son experienced another kind of education, one he wouldn't get in Pfaffenhausen running the family business. He wanted his son to travel. He insisted on it, leading to several summers in places like Redondo Beach, Calif., and many European vacation spots.

As the younger Ruf grew, he became fascinated by the cars being created by Dr. Porsche in nearby Stuttgart. He pestered his father to bring some to the shop. It was nothing the elder Ruf thought

particularly important, at least not enough to change a nice family business to accommodate. But one day a crashed 911 was dragged through the door. A chassis jig was needed to repair it, so Ruf and his father built one. The owner was delighted with the result, Luis was in love and the company bearing his father's name was launched on a road that would forever change its destiny.

Ruf Automobiles has grown rapidly during the 22 years of 911 production, a room at a time, each one added to perform another task, a paint booth, an engine and transmission assembly room, a get-ready area, three dyno rooms, a showroom—on and on.

Ruf suppliers have also changed, now far exceeding the early country garage vendors. Today Ruf-designed five-speed transaxles are built in Pfaffenhausen with parts shipped from Getrag, Porsche's gear supplier. They join Ruf-designed spoilers, oil coolers, special stainless steel four-pipe exhaust systems, huge

aluminum intercoolers, Ruf pistons from Mahle, cylinders, cams and Ruf-designed suspension pieces; torsion bars, wheel spacers, bigger brakes and sway bars all from some of the most prestigious manufacturers in Germany.

The obvious question is why? Why would a firm like Getrag, one of the foremost transmission and gear suppliers in the world, bother selling a little company like Ruf gear sets for 80 five-speed transaxles? Surely not for the money.

One of Ruf's associates explains, "Luis is one of the best-connected people in Europe." Maybe that's true, but it's only part of the answer. The other part is that one of Getrag's owners shares the Ruf philosophy that biggest doesn't always mean best. When Ruf had the idea for the five-speed and needed Getrag's help to make it reality, he approached the firm's upper management. They listened. They were persuaded to help.

Anyone who's driven a 930 knows Ruf was right on target—the car screams for a five-speed. It's just that no one else was particularly willing to tackle the creation of a new clutch, pressure plate and other transmission parts to make a 930 five-speed a reality. Ruf worked out the details, knowing whatever he came up with needed to withstand the output of the basic Ruf turbo engine: 374bhp.

Getrag did the gear development and Ruf did the testing, a process that took more than two years, and now the standard Ruf Porsche turbo has a five-speed transaxle. According to Ruf, the difference is like an additional 100 horsepower. A Ruf Porsche shifts like no other 911, and is transformed from a tip-toe cornering car to one you can toss in and drive out steering with the throttle.

Ruf's customers are as different as his
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Wolfgang Wörner photos

A sleepy West German town called Pfaffenhausen is home to the Ruf works (above). Despite the determination of Luis Ruf (bottom) to keep his company small, ever-increasing pressure from customers has forced him to plan a new plant. In the body shop (below left)

Porsche 911s and 930s are given the Ruf treatment, while the transmission department (below right) builds special five-speed gearboxes for 930s—Porsche-supplied 930s come only with four-speeds.



RUF

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suppliers. They are more than wealthy. They are hand-picked. By Ruf. He won't sell to just anybody; he hasn't had to, with such limited production and shop space.

One of the added benefits of owning a Ruf Porsche—assuming you pass the initial screening—is getting an invite to a twice-annual driver training program sponsored by the firm. What happens is everybody shows up in their Ruf cars at a racetrack (the last few years at the Salzburgring in Austria), and participates in two days of careful instruction in ultra-high-performance driving. Ruf hires the instructors, brings his shop staff to do any needed repair work and generally oversees the entire affair. What this means to Ruf is a lot of time spent listening to his customers and their needs, something he can do in one of six

languages, and seeing to it they're satisfied.

This year a new twist was added. Along with the Ruf crew of mechanics was a group from Yokohama Tire Co. Their presence in itself is nothing surprising. High-performance tire manufacturers just seem to show up where fast cars cluster. What's significant is the only recommended tire on a Ruf Porsche is a Yokohama A008. For a car builder with Ruf's reputation, specifying a Japanese tire raised more than a few eyebrows in the staunchly nationalistic German auto community. Ask him if he cares.

The success of the Ruf tire connection means a lot to Yokohama in terms of prestige, particularly in the important German market. And it means a lot to Ruf. For him, Yokohama is a source of heretofore unavailable technical expertise (resulting in the addition of yet another room to Ruf's sprawling facility).

Says Ruf, "We have been looking for a

Ruf's edge: The NATO 911

This is possibly the meanest, most savage-looking car in Europe. Even at low speeds, other drivers look in their mirrors only for an instant, then move over. At 165 MPH on the *autobahn*, they hunt for places to hide.

And well they should. The NATO 911 Turbo, so named for its stark NATO olive drab exterior scheme, is Ruf's test car, its rolling laboratory for new experiments in speed and G-force. Its basic equipment list falls in line with most other Ruf-modified 911 Turbos (they used to be called 930s when they were last sold in the U.S.)—sport suspension, front-mounted Castrol cooler, five-speed transaxle with limited slip, playground-size intercooler—and a motor with so much punch that Joe Horsepower, Ruf's engine and ballistics expert, has taped the boost wheel well below maximum atmospheres to ensure the engine's survival for at least the weekend.

Inside the NATO is a beat-up battle zone of naked wires and exposed metal edges. It is a stark, severe environment, perfectly appropriate for a car that is

flogged mercilessly until a component fails—or proves itself worthy of the Ruf name.

At 165 MPH on the *autobahn*, the NATO still accelerates. Ruf says he doesn't know how fast it will go, he hasn't tried to find out. Face it: You probably don't want to go that fast anyway. Its secret of speed is not its 400-plus-horsepower engine, nor its five-speed transaxle (factory Turbos come with a four-speed). The NATO's secret is that it's a full 600 pounds lighter than a stock 911 Turbo's 2,976 pounds.

You'll never see the NATO in the U.S. For one thing, Ruf has already refused offers from his European clients (although he'll build a lightweight lookalike), and for another, it could never be sneaked in so long as the Clean Air Act and the Salt II Treaty remain in effect.

But if you're ever in Germany and spot an olive drab missile getting big in your mirrors, move over.

And count your blessings.

—B.H.



long time for a tire manufacturer who would work with us like other tire companies work with larger auto companies. We needed their ideas and testing facilities to continue developing our versions of the 930. So far the association had far exceeded my dreams and you'll see some of the results soon."

Some of the results can be found in a special room at Ruf's, the one reserved for wheels and tires. In it are some tires from Japan no one outside of Tokyo or Pfaffenhausen has seen. And in Ruf's desk is a drawing of a wheel, a Ruf design, that is now in development. It is all very hush-hush.

So how does Ruf maintain his edge in a competitive market, building cars with lower horsepower claims than some of his competitors and with a lot less flash than most? The answer is embedded in Ruf's country boy upbringing and reluctance to change for the sake of change. He does it by not yielding to compromise—even though it's cost him, especially in the lucrative American and Middle East markets.

Ruf says he's unconcerned. "We think our cars are built for a certain kind of driver," he says, "and frankly all my cars reflect what I think a car should be, which is a pure driving machine, not just what someone is willing to buy. I can't see any point in building something that's not necessary just because someone will pay for it. There are other people who do that, and it's their business, not mine."

A good example is what Porsche people call a slope nose, a road-going modification of the former factory production racing car called the 935. Porsche Werks 1 will build you a slope nose, although you'll have to wait. The factory's production line is full. Several aftermarket American and German companies also will sell you a slope nose. The look to many is the cutting edge in Porsche styling, and it is in great demand.

To Ruf, the slope nose, however authentic, is a travesty, untrue to the original 911's design and shape. Some of Ruf's advisers pressure him to build a slope nose for the American market. The theory is expensive cars sell better, or at least faster, if they look expensive. Ruf listens politely, and shakes his head sadly. "I know they are right," he says "and the slope nose is now popular. It's just that I don't think it's necessary in a country where people can't drive their cars fast. Our Ruf spoiler and oil cooler is designed to provide the best in aerodynamics and cooling, and we know with our suspension kit it provides plenty of stability at least to 182.6 MPH."

Resignedly, Ruf is working on his own version of a slope nose, although there will be significant differences from others. It will be coupled with engine development, more suspension refinement and some special wheels and tires. The goal is a new top-speed record. (If Ruf's going to cave in to mainstream tastes, he's going to do it on his terms.)

Ruf isn't saying any more about a record run, although he has a computer printout telling him exactly what he needs to do to break it. Two-hundred miles per hour? Is that the target? We'll have to wait to see. Even if the record attempt fails, it will let Ruf explain to himself why he changed the look of the car he loves.

The future of Ruf Automobiles will hinge in large measure on Luis Ruf's ability to maintain traditionalist values, yet accommodate the increasing business demands to step up production.

"We have many things under test right now," says Ruf, "and I have ideas for lots of other ways to make the 930 a more desirable car, or at least one people want more than the stock turbo."

Ruf knows the factory is introducing four-wheel-drive, two turbos on one system, ABS brakes, Denloc wheel systems, sophisticated engine management electronics and water-cooled heads for its street cars. "We will use some of

these things," he says, "but I'm not sure all of it applies to the kind of cars we build. Most of our customers want a more traditional car, one with plenty of power, but not so complicated as the new ones. I'm not sure new is always better. I have always tried to refine what was there and bring all the parts up to absolute potential."

As Porsche continues to refine the 911 and 930, the cars Luis grew up with, he will continue basically on the same path of refinement and enhancement, betting more people with enough money to afford his cars agree.

If he's right, and he can continue to innovate while preserving his own sense of the 911's tradition, Ruf Automobiles could grow without losing its grandeur. And Luis Ruf believes it will happen. Looking out his office window across the street to the empty lot next to the *mindelmarkt*, he says, "We can take on the giants and be better."

