

All right, I admit it; when I go to buy a vehicle, I look like a bag lady. It's entertainment. I like to find out how stupid the seller really thinks I am before I spring a dose of reality on him/her. I recently had occasion to consider a 924S (I know; sacrilege. But I'm certain I could get it to leak SOMETHING). But I'm getting ahead of myself. See, I buy cars which someone else has eaten the depreciation on, and which have generally had one key item break which frustrates the owner because the conventional repair thereof is more than he or she deems worth the effort. Now, of course, that broken item is not ALWAYS pointed out by these dear sweet ethical angels, but my batting average is pretty good. And besides; at these prices, the risks are minimal.

So it happened that my 82 BMW 528e, bought for a song from a guy whose "daddy" had just given him a three year newer one and which has provided very reliable service, has an interior which is garbage. The structure is reasonably solid, but the body is perforated. Now the reason I'm frustrated with it is that it handles TERRIBLY, changing to unannounced oversteer in the middle of cornering, which is VERY disconcerting. In short; it's a rat. But everything in it works reliably. So I continue to use it as my backup vehicle for the 87 Audi 4000CS Quattro, a car which I am certain has Iron Crosses beneath it's gold exterior paint, and I'll bet the roof vent is exactly the size for a Messerschmidt turret. The Wermacht will rise again! Paid \$2000 for this little gem, and no it ain't for sale. Anyway, I've acquired lots of cars like it because I knew enough about what made them tick before I bought them to know what was wrong when I did. I bought a 91 Aerostar AWD van last year only after getting the service manuals for each of Caravan, Previa and it, then patiently awaiting the right DEAL. I practically stole an almost flawless example from a guy in Skaneateles who had just bought a new one because he was concerned that it had 131K miles on it. Runs like a top.

But, as usual, I digress. With my job, and my wife's going to school in Troy, I didn't want her to have to deal with the Bimmer, especially in winter. A few years back she had a three door 85 Saab 900 Turbo. A thoroughly funky automobile, but she loved it, except that she wished it was a four door. I don't understand why, but Saab dropped the four door Turbo the next year, keeping the base 900 and the S, with the Turbo in the three door only. Anyway, her original had given up the ghost at 270K when the oil pump let go, having been hit on both ends by other people whose insurances paid my wife more for the car than we had paid plus put into it in repairs in the three years we owned it. I donated it to Rescue Mission for the tax writeoff. (See, I'm really not as nice a guy as you might believe). So I was interested when I spied a similar four door for \$1500 in the Newburgh paper. Except for some minor interior damage, the thing is excellent, and runs great with 213K on the clock. Speaking of which, the clock is the only thing which DOESN'T work correctly, but there is a digital in the radio instead. And no rust. So now she has a FAR more responsive car than her 88 Subaru GL 4WD wagon, a car I paid a similar amount for three years ago with half the mileage, but plenty of rust. Guess which car she drives since it arrived?

So where is all this going? To my relatives and their friends, all of whom want ME to buy them their next cars, because they all seem to pay big bucks for their iron, then massive repair bills while I drive rats and put my money into tires and brake pads for the Porsche. Like my sister who called to ask about an 84 Saab for \$1400 which needed the steering rack replaced, but "he has it". I don't think so. But again, I digress (sound familiar?). So it was funny when my mother told me my 18 yr old nephew was contemplating putting a 1700cc VW Van engine into a '77 911 body he could get for \$75 at a local junkyard, and asked me to "help him decide". Turns out three of his friends cooked up this idea, and Mark barely knows the difference between a wrench and a hammer (come to think of it, I've used each as the other, so maybe that's not so wierd). Again, I... Anyway, I went to look at this and it wasn't worth thinking about. With no suspension, the best he could hope to do was spend more to MAKE this turkey than it would cost to BUY one with a pulled head stud and fix the motor himself, so he'd have a REAL 911. But, being a youngster, he had no means to contemplate an up front over a grand. End of pipe dream. But that night I was talking with a German woman who had

just returned from visiting her family in the Fatherland, and whose son had taken her for a ride in his 944 on the autobahn, where she was both startled at the rapid pace, and amazed at his relaxed poise in doing so. So she asks me to find her a nice car, like a "Fowvay Cabrilee". A what? After a while, I came to understand she was looking for a VW Cabrio. She's been driving a Colt AWD wagon, so you KNOW she's not had any POWER. So I'm looking through the paper and there is an 87 VW Cab for \$3500, but right above it is an 87 924S for \$3900. Needless to say... There ALSO is an ad for a "Porsche Convertible 1975; needs motor". After telling the guy there is no such thing, he says it's a 914, which would be a MUCH better match for Mark's engine. Both cars are close together, about 20 miles away. Road trip. So Mark & his wrench friend join me to scope these out. We arrive in the boonies at the designated address to find a pair of white "kit" cars; an Excalibur and one of those "neo-classics" some moron thought would look neat with dryer hose for fake exhaust ducts through the fenders while the actual powerplant was the VW in the back (probably what actually happened to the 914 motor, or to be more correct ENGINE). I dreaded what we would see next, and I was certainly not disappointed. No metal whatsoever on this pig, and few original pieces, as it had been grafted with 935 look-alike fiberglass (I think this guy was sucking too much resin, myself) and a rose colored metalflake paint which looked like it had been put on with a roller. I finally found a car I could beat in a concours. When the guy told me he wanted two grand I told him I wouldn't give him two DOLLARS, and we left laughing our butts off. The really sad thing is that he is living proof that PT Barnum was right, and there will be some idiot more moronic than him will think that's "neat".

We then went to the home of a guy who obviously wanted to have a sporty vehicle, but clearly lacked just a little knowledge of the subject. The 924S looked to be in decent shape, with what I'd describe as normal wear, but his opening line was to inquire who our mechanic would be that would look over the car. Funniest question I ever heard. I simply indicated we wouldn't bother. He then told us his mechanic had recently gone through it and said it was fine. Hold your wallet. So I asked him to open the hood. There was a rodent's nest on the intake manifold, complete with rodents. This may surprise you, but that is far less a problem than you think, and is far from the first time it ever happened. But if you find one, check your wires carefully; they eat the PVC insulation. Digress again... I asked the guy when he had the timing belt changed and he says about 35K ago. So he starts it and I THOUGHT THE BELT HAD BROKEN! He steps out and says "don't worry, it goes away when it warms up"!!! I would have shut it down immediately, but he left it running long enough for us to hear that it was coming from under the belt cover, but was not valve noise from crashing into pistons. I can only guess that it was his "mechanic" never locked the tensioner on the belt, or his water pump bearings are about to go tango-uniform big time, but when I described what could happen if he DOESN'T fix it before the timing belt fails, he got a lot more concerned. I may look at it again, but I don't think so.

So don't rule out the possibility I may someday be driving a water pumper. But the bill of sale will read "A Song".