

Forty years since the world premiere of the Porsche 959 at the IAA in Frankfurt

26/07/2026 The fastest and most advanced series production car of its time

- A pioneer that influenced series production
- Series production started in 1987 with all-wheel drive, bi-turbo and lightweight components
- Porsche Heritage and Museum owns the original exhibition car

In 1985, Porsche presented a vehicle that was more than just a technological pioneer: the 959 reinvented the sports car – with all-wheel drive, bi-turbo and the courage to innovate. Its heritage extends to this day.

The Porsche 959 celebrated its world premiere 40 years ago at the International Motor Show (IAA) in

Frankfurt. Bi-turbo, all-wheel drive, adaptive chassis systems: the car that still sounded visionary in 1983 when it was first thought of became reality a few years later and has shaped series production to this day. The 959 is regarded as a milestone in the history of Porsche. Its spirit lives on in many models. “The 959 was the first car in which Porsche aimed to achieve everything at the same time: lightweight construction, comfort, efficiency, performance and day-to-day usability,” says Achim Stejskal, Head of Porsche Heritage and Museum. “It represented courage, progress, the aspiration to explore what was technically feasible – and to set standards in the process.”

The first study of the future super sports car 959 was at the IAA in Frankfurt in autumn 1983 and was called ‘Group B’. This study was a concept for the homologation of Group B. It combined technologies that were still considered pioneering years later: electronically controlled all-wheel drive, a self-supporting body made of light sheet steel with plastic add-on parts and a 2.85-litre six-cylinder boxer engine with bi-turbo charging. Four years later, in 1987, Porsche delivered the first customer vehicles.

The super sports car boasted 331 kW (450 PS) and reached a top speed of 315 km/h. This made it the fastest production vehicle of its time – and at the same time one of the most technologically advanced. The aerodynamic features of the vehicle were pioneering: thanks to the integrated rear wing, the fully panelled underbody and the specially designed air inlets and outlets, the drag coefficient was cW=0.31. Even at high speeds, the 959 did not develop any lift.

Series technology with racing genes

From 1987 to 1988, Porsche produced 292 units of the 959 in the Comfort and Sport variants for selected customers – the list of potential customers was much longer. Soon the 959 was traded on the free market at more than double the list price. For this reason, Development Director Helmuth Bott once said: “The 959 is the most expensive promotional gift Porsche has ever given its customers.”

The Comfort version of the series-production car featured a second electrically adjustable exterior mirror, electric window regulators, an automatically regulated air conditioning system, high-gloss leather interior, fully electrically adjustable seats and a central locking system. That version also featured a speed-dependent levelling system. The vehicle used a newly developed six-speed transmission, an adaptive chassis and aluminium shock absorbers.

Technological pioneer for subsequent models

The 959 also set new standards in motorsport: in preparation for the Paris-Dakar Rally, it lined up in October 1985 at the Pharaoh Rally in Egypt. The 959 featured a 2.8-litre flat engine with bi-turbo charging. One year later, two 959 models took the first two places at the Paris-Dakar Rally. A race track version of the car was the first all-wheel-drive racing car to take seventh place in Le Mans under the designation Porsche 961.

The 959 was not only a precursor to the 911 Turbo, it was a technological pioneer in the best sense of the word. Much of what it anticipated would later be reflected in the series-production vehicles from Porsche. The 959 represented a leap forward 40 years ago. And it still represents a promise: that Porsche will never stop redefining boundaries.

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