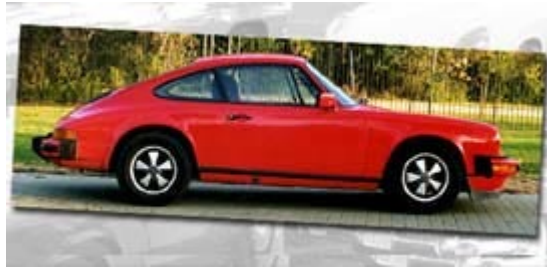




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Valvoline - Modern Classic: 1976 Porsche 912E

## The proverbial poor-man's Porsche

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To qualify as "modern classics," we're choosing vehicles that are comparatively affordable now and that we think will increase in value over time. These are cars that many people would love to have: head-turners, trend-setters in their time, cars that people still see that make them smile, cars that were definitive in their own right, stylish and fun to drive. We're focusing on cars that are at least 25 years old so they can be registered and insured cheaply and aren't subject to annual inspections.

Tastes may vary, as may peoples' own definitions of "affordable." Our theoretical limit is \$50,000 for a car in good to excellent condition, which rules out many of the traditional exotics. This month's selection is the 1976 Porsche 912E.

### Pseudo 911

Porsche's new 911 was a dramatic move upward from its venerable (and—by 1964—outdated) 356 Series. Stuttgart's management knew that they had a home run with the new model, but they fretted that the 2.0-liter six-cylinder's \$6,490 U.S. price tag (nearly \$2,000 more than a 356SC 1600 coupe here) would exclude potential buyers. A "stripper" four was the obvious answer.

The 1966 912 arrived in September 1965, selling for \$4,690 (with a four-speed) or \$4,770 (with a five-speed—basically the same box as the 904 racer's, with a dogleg First). Its traditional pushrod-four was a slightly detuned SC engine (102-bhp versus 107-bhp), upgraded with 12-volt electrics. Improved aerodynamics meant nippier performance—a 115-mph top speed and 0-60 in 11.5 seconds (despite the 5-bhp loss).

Inside, the 911's five-dial instrument panel and teakwood applique were replaced with a spartan three-dial setup reminiscent of the 356's. Offsetting trim differences and the 911's 40-bhp advantage, the 912 was lighter, with better weight distribution (44/56 versus 41/59). Porsche intentionally made the 912 and 911 virtually identical outside (save a 912 decklid badge). In 1967, the five-dial panel was restored; the 912 got the marque's new safety door locks, and through 1969, 912 coupes and Targas received most running production upgrades, including a 2.25-inch longer wheelbase.

Problem was that 912 coupe pricing had crept up to within \$700 of a six-cylinder 911T by 1969. The four was slower than it looked, and Porsche had big plans for a much cheaper model, the 914. So away went the 912. After the 914 flopped, Porsche reprised the 912E (for Einspritzung—fuel injection) in 1976 for a single interim year before it was replaced by their newest try at a bargain, the front-engine 924.

Powered by the 914's 86-bhp Volkswagen 411 unit hooked to a five-speed, laden with safety and luxu-features, and only available as a coupe, the 912E had gained over 300 pounds since 1969. Some people criticized the car's

1,971-cc Volkswagen-sourced engine, saying it wasn't really a Porsche. Undaunted, "Car and Driver" notched a 9.7 second 0-60 time, calling the "E" the prototypical road car: "comfortable where the (Turbo) Carrera is harsh, rational where the Carrera is excessive." Priced at a heady \$10,845 (twice the 1969 model), it was now \$2,000 less than a 1976 911S coupe. Still, when the 924 arrived at \$9,395, it was auf wiedersehen forever for the 912E.

The 912E's Bosch L-Jetronic injection proved troublesome initially, but it's fixable today. These Porsches make a great starter sports car, with a chance of future appreciation. The older Targas are nice too. They've all got the 911's Porsche crest, styling and suspension. Handling is quite acceptable, much more neutral than a 911's. Yes, they're slow-ish, but that's what 1,700-cc big-bore kits are for. These cars don't rattle, but you'll need to look for rust in the fenders, around the taillight housings, in the trunk near the battery, and at the front A-arm mounts. Just delete the decklid label; you'll fool all but the most knowledgeable aficionados.

And you won't spend a fortune. CPI says a good-to-excellent 1976 Porsche 912E coupe will run you \$11,900; add \$500 or so for a Targa.

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