

A PEEK IN THE PERFORMANCE ATTIC

PART THREE

» AMONG THE SUBARU PERFORMANCE CARS STORED IN ITS “MUSEUM” IS THE PURPLE SVX THAT ONCE PACED THE FIELD FOR INDY CAR WORLD SERIES EVENTS.

» A storage building near Subaru of America, Inc. headquarters in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, houses a number of legendary Subaru performance vehicles. These are some of the more favored and treasured vehicles in Subaru history – stored much as you would keep things in an attic. Previous issues of *Drive Performance* have featured the Impreza 22B STi Coupe and Justy land speed record-holder that reside in that large room. In one of the corners, the purple SVX pace car rests as something of a counterpoint in design to the rest of the vehicles stored there.

With the Pace Car program, PPG drew attention to the capabilities of its paint.

» In the early 1990s, the SVX helped bring exposure to the Subaru brand and elevate the public's perception of it. At the time, the name *Subaru* was associated with the BRAT and the slogan, “Inexpensive, and Built to Stay that Way.” Although Subaru was beginning to make inroads in the world of rallying, Subaru rally blue wasn't yet world famous, so performance was not part of most enthusiast's perception of the brand in any part of the world. Now here was a stunning, sporty Subaru, complete with an extremely strong powertrain, luxurious GT interior, and all-wheel drive.

At that time, the races in the PPG Indy Car World Series were well-attended. They offered high exposure to enthusiasts who followed the racing in person or on television. The series' PPG

Pace Car program featured brightly painted street vehicles prepared for the track. Driven by female racers, the cars and pickup trucks in the program not only paced the races and were used as safety vehicles during the course of a race, they were used to give VIPs hospitality rides around the track during breaks in the race weekend's schedule.

According to Roger Banowetz, who was involved in the program for Subaru, “Image, exposure, and performance were the goals of this program.”

“It was a rarified world, that of a PPG Pace Car,” continued Banowetz. “Not just anyone was invited to play. First there was the requisite business relationship – paint for the SIA production line in our case, but that was not a guaranteed entry. In the case of the SVX, the unique styling was the draw. The Pace Car program at the time was dominated by U.S. makes – Camaro, Mustang, sedans, and the rare pickup truck. The only other Asian vehicle was a Nissan Z. Compared to these vehicles, the SVX was a different type.”



» THE SVX – “A DIFFERENT TYPE”



A brochure about the SVX concept prototype, shown at the 28th Tokyo Motor Show in 1989 suggests the positioning of the SVX: “The new Subaru SVX™ combines two seemingly contradictory elements – comfort and performance. While a well-balanced sports car appeals to the driver in everyone, most people don’t want to sacrifice comfort and luxury. The Subaru SVX actually creates a new passenger car niche – the balanced luxury performance coupe.”

“This sleek new Subaru is powered by a strong 3.3-liter opposed six-cylinder engine coupled to a high-traction all-wheel-drive

system. The SVX delivers outstanding performance and driving control balanced with a high level of luxury and comfort.” – Isamu Kawai, President, Fuji Heavy Industries Ltd. (FHI)

Styled by famed Italian designer Georgetto Giugiaro, the SVX was equipped with a considerable amount of contemporary automotive technology. Among the available features were:

- A new 3.3-liter, DOHC, 4-valve, 6-cylinder Boxer engine
- Active torque-split AWD
- 4-wheel disc brakes with 4-sensor, 4-channel ABS
- Mid-frame side windows, glass-to-glass canopy with solar-control glass
- Resin-molded fuel tank
- Resin-molded trunk lid
- Projector-beam headlights

Top speed for the SVX was more than 140 mph.



» THE MAKING OF A PACE CAR

PPG paint and a 140-mile-per-hour top end did not automatically qualify the SVX as a pace car for the racing series. Banowetz commented: “The cars were used on the actual tracks as needed during competition. The goal was to give the PPG guests and spectators ‘excitement,’ so the car had to perform. Wally Dallenbach, Sr. (Indy Car Chief Steward and PPG Pace Car evaluator) and the PPG team were not convinced that 3.3 liters and 230 horsepower would be adequate. However, after an audition at Phoenix International Raceway, Mr. Dallenbach came away surprised and impressed. The SVX was in the program.”



Preparation for racetrack duties came at the hands of Roush Industries in Michigan. “The car remained amazingly stock,” explained Banowetz. “FHI provided struts and springs for a tighter and lower handling package. The brakes, wheels, engine, and transmission received no modifications. The muffler was changed to add to the excitement factor. Other changes were for safety and the attention-getting appearance.”

Safety is always a concern in racing, and pace cars receive comprehensive modifications to that end. Banowetz listed the work done for the SVX: “Safety enhancements included an unobtrusive, tightly integrated roll cage. A lot of work was devoted to the cage construction. In addition to providing accident protection, the cage was to be as transparent as possible to the PPG guests. The idea was not to look like a racecar. Also, the cage needed to be out of the way for entry and exit. The time allotted for on-track pace car activities was limited, and PPG wanted to have as many guests experience the ride of a lifetime as possible. Climbing through a myriad of roll-cage tubes was not an option. The cage was hardly noticeable in the headliner.”

“Other safety equipment included a means to shut off the electrical system in the event of a rollover, replacement stainless braided fuel lines, racing-style seatbelts, and a fuel cell. PPG added the roof-mounted strobe, replaced the tail and headlights with strobes, and added a crowd-warning beeper for transits through the paddock.”

That wasn’t all that PPG did to the car. “PPG took the lead for the paint and interior color,” said Banowetz. “A unique front-to-rear fade was chosen – very unusual, as most fades are top to bottom. The color needed to be striking and one-of-kind, and the purple fade accomplished exactly that. The coordinated interior color rounded out the package.”

“Most pace cars saw only one season of use before being retired. The SVX, being a driver favorite, remained longer.”



Online Exclusive:

For more information and images about the Subaru SVX and this PPG Pace Car, go to www.driveperformance.subaru.com.