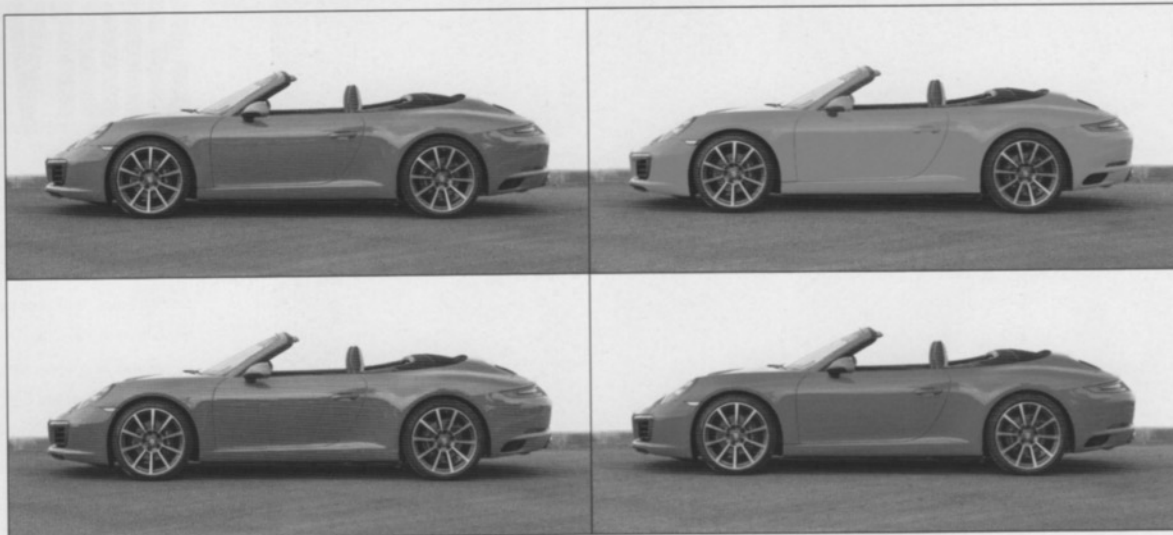


EDITOR'S NOTE



PTS: Porsche's most elusive option

PAINT TO SAMPLE. For a few grand, "PTS" allows you to order a Porsche in any color you can conjure—in theory, at least. To some, it's one of Porsche's most alluring options. To others, it's a sore subject. Why? The factory simply cannot meet demand. Once promoted by Porsche as the ultimate way to custom tailor its cars, PTS is now downplayed.

"Ask me about anything—so long as it isn't Paint to Sample," quipped a Porsche Exclusive representative recently. I felt her pain, because the forums are rife with chatter, rumors, and misinformation regarding PTS.

Part of the problem is that Porsche's regular color palette is quite limited. Want a green 981 or 991? PTS is the only way to get one—which means you probably won't. Popular colors available from other manufacturers aren't available on a Porsche. And, frankly, Toyota, Mini, Jeep, and Fiat are leaving Porsche behind when it comes to great vintage shades.

Demand for PTS is so high that its model-dependent price of \$5,500-\$6,515 clearly isn't enough of a de-

terrent. A *lot* of people are trying to order Porsches in a unique color—or something other than a Standard Color, Metallic Color (\$640-\$790), or Special Color (\$2,580-\$3,140).

Today, PTS availability is fleeting, frustrating customers, dealers, and Porsche employees alike. "PTS windows" open and close quietly and quickly—and do so in ways that mystify potential customers. Effectively, a PTS window might be measured in *minutes* by the time a customer is presented with the possibility.

Availability is so limited, in fact, that the program's name has become something of a misnomer. While it is still theoretically possible to submit a color sample and have it approved, that's an unlikely scenario unless you have time and the right connections on your side. As demand swelled, customers were forced to choose from a list of previously approved colors. Now that list is hard to come by.

THE ORIGINAL IDEA behind the program is evident in its name: You supply a sample of a color you like, and

Porsche builds a car painted to match. The color might come from lipstick, a note card, or an old shoe.

The practice goes back a ways, likely to Porsche's beginnings. Early 356s were painted in custom colors. So were 911Rs. Although the idea is simple, execution is anything but. Some critics contend that other manufacturers do a better job with similar programs—a claim that's probably easier to state than confirm. Just as the world has grown more complicated, Porsche is no longer a small company. It sells more than 200,000 cars annually, each one warrantied and compliant with environmental laws.

That means Porsche must conduct feasibility studies to ensure that a requested color can be formulated with current technology. It must pass Porsche's durability standards and be able to be rendered across multiple materials like steel, aluminum, plastic, and composites. It must be compatible with clear coats, flex agents, and textured undercoating—and must be able to be duplicated in Porsche's paint shop as well as

Above: You can order a Porsche in any color you want...as long as the Paint to Sample window is open, you happen to catch it, and your color is feasible. In other words, you probably can't.

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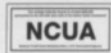
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those of its suppliers, since many parts are painted elsewhere and arrive ready to be installed on the line. Now add the requirements of just-in-time manufacturing.

In the past, PTS colors that passed Porsche's feasibility tests were usually approved. Today, you're probably better off choosing a color that's already been approved. In fact, that may be your only choice.

The program has become something of a game, with Porsche customers connected to one another via the internet competing for "PTS allocations." This is especially true with special models such as GT3s or GT4s, and for good reason: If a popular color is selected, PTS can add significant value to a car on the second-hand market.

A factory insider told me that a high percentage of Porsche's PTS capacity is taken up by a relatively small number of colors. Think Tangerine, Viper Green, Mexico Blue, Slate Gray, or colors that recall them. One customer liked Voodoo Blue—a Toyota FJ Cruiser color—better than Porsche's Mexico Blue, and got it approved. Thanks to web forums, a surprising number of GT3s have been painted Voodoo Blue.

One suspects many of those customers would have been happy with Mexico Blue or Club Blau. Those pining for a Signal Orange 991 might be happy with Orange, a 997 GT3 RS color. That got me thinking.

COULD THE SOLUTION to the PTS problem be found in the PTS order books? Why not take the most popular colors and make them available in a special category priced similarly to Paint to Sample?

Feasibility would be guaranteed, and colors currently clogging the PTS system would no longer prevent customers from ordering truly unusual colors. "Safety Colors" of the 1970s—bright oranges, greens, and blues—would cover a lot of ground. "Family Colors" such as Irish Green, Brewster Green, Oak Green Metallic, Ice Green Metallic, and Forest Green Metallic would offer a nod to tradition. "Classic Colors" might include Silver Metallic, Gold Metallic, Slate Gray Metallic, and Slate Gray.

After all, why put ten customers and their dealers through the PTS rigmarole when you can easily sell 50 or 60 cars in the same color *and* make that customer pining for a GT3 RS in Rubystone Red happy? I don't know; it's just a thought. —Pete Stout