



*When it comes to the thrill of driving, few cars surpass the Porsche 911 GT3 RS. The latest model is a phenomenal machine, and a benchmark against which to measure the new McLaren's ability to astound and excite...*

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by DAVID VIVIAN | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

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**W**hat was the tagline for that old Guinness TV ad with galloping white horses emerging from the sea's rolling surf? 'Good things come to those who... wait.' Yeah, tick follows tock and all that. But however much the serene interior of Porsche GB's Reading HQ conspires to soothe the passage of time, too much caffeine and a fast-spooling imagination have got me pacing the floor like an expectant dad. I'm not sure I've ever wanted to snatch a set of car keys from someone's grasp before, but when PR Nick Perry finally rolls up from the backlot (probably delayed by the application of a final coat of grime-repelling wax that we'll thank him for later) I might do just that.

Actually, I don't. I'm a little too rooted to the spot. It isn't just the Lava Orange paintwork (admittedly, some retinal adjustment required) or the gruff clatter of the drivetrain – a sound that evokes memories of the previous-generation Rennsport GT3's race-derived Mezger engine. No, it's because, in the metal, the 991 GT3 RS looks so unbelievably 'track'. It's as if the guys from Weissach signed it off without ever venturing beyond the proving ground's perimeter. That lofted rear wing, almost the width of the wide-bodied shell's distended and vented haunches, is a fixture no one should misunderstand. It doesn't have the kinetic fascination of a multi-element active airbrake. It doesn't need it. The same goes for the shallower, re-sculpted carbon bonnet and the deep-set jawline with its leading edge splitter and huge, rectangular, meshed air ducts.

But mostly it's the primal motorsport stance. Finding a way to fit the enormous wheels and tyres from the 918 Spyder hypercar apparently kept Porsche's engineers awake at night. The result looks impossible. The 21-inchers at the rear sit so snugly in the arches there isn't even room to poke a little finger between the 325/30 Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres and the bodywork. The 265/35s on 20-inch rims at the front can be glimpsed topside through the slatted gashes in the bodywork above the arches. These are essentially the same as those found on the GT3 Cup racer and are claimed to reduce lift by 30 per cent at the nose, thus helping the splitter do its 110kg thing on the way to an overall downforce tally of 345kg at 125mph. That's a punchy 80 per cent as much as the Cup car. In light of which, and a host of other weight- and lap-time-saving measures, the 7min 20sec it took the GT3 RS, driven by Timo Kluck, to circulate the Nürburgring's Nordschleife on just his third lap – and by which time the track had already begun to dampen – doesn't seem quite so freakish. Just think, nearly nine seconds quicker than the Carrera GT could manage in the dry.



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## 'WHAT A DRIVE LIES AHEAD. THE FINEST ROADS IN NORTH WALES ARE OUR PLAYGROUND'

How do I know this stuff? I've spent the last hour and a quarter reading about it between visits to the coffee machine. The next four and a half will tick by at distinctly sub-light speed via the satnav's 'fastest' route to Beaumaris on Anglesey, where the plan is to meet up with managing editor Stuart Gallagher and designer Will Beaumont – plotting their way from Woking in the 657LT – for a late evening pint at the bar of the Bulkeley Hotel, though no one's betting against snapper Dean Smith's legendary thirst, transported by Range Rover Sport, getting there first. I know that this part of the journey is destined for the cutting room floor and that, with 493bhp at 8250rpm itching for release, it will inevitably be a journey shot through with frustration. But they say the best sort of gratification is deferred. Besides, despite the frequent bouts of cacophonous tyre roar, the resolutely firm (but fair) ride and the lumbar-support-lite, ready-to-race driving position prescribed by bucket seats pinched from the 918 Spyder, there are plenty of warm reminders I'm in a Rennsport 911 and, however long the drive and abraded the senses, that's always a good feeling.

HERE'S A (PERHAPS not so) strange thing. The mild stir I'd caused when I parked up the previous evening is completely eclipsed by the attention the McLaren is receiving 12 hours later. It's as if the Porsche, admittedly tucked away in a corner by the hotel's dining room, has donned Harry Potter's invisibility cloak. Not too many 911 aficionados taking the morning air, then. But, then again, why should children licking their ice cream cone breakfasts care when there's an orange-and-carbon riot of slinky curves and peer-down ducts barely taller than they are to run into and scream at? And never underestimate the pulling power of scissor doors. Even the parents seem to get a kick out of their majestic arc skywards.

My turn to attempt an effortlessly graceful limb-dump into the 675LT's carbon-and-Alcantara-swathed cabin. Fortunately, I had some practice at Silverstone, and although my bum doesn't exactly glide towards the pit of the P1-cloned bucket seat on the far side of the broad sill, I feign a kind of Simon Cowell-esque half-smile and insincere wave to disguise the less than pillowy landing. But, oh my, it feels good to be back in the taut embrace of the Macca's immaculately precise driving environment – surely one of the best thought-out ever. Although the 911's easier-to-enter cabin has been licked into shape over the years with all the idiosyncrasies carved and buffed away, the advantages of a clean-sheet approach were immediately evident with the 12C and seem just as sublimely sussed now in the 675LT. The cabin is lean and functional, with forward sight lines and control relationships that simply seem more compatible with the human form than most other supercar 'architectures' and instantly feel more natural and efficient.



Door down and we're away with a crowd-pleasing bark of revs and... ah, a little trouble here. There are some tight-ish turns needed to exit the car park, turns the 911 swings through with metres to spare and the Range Rover breezes. The McLaren doesn't or, rather, can't. There's no easy way to put this: it has a truly lousy turning circle. For the further entertainment of the now slightly quieter and more confused onlookers, I thumb the 'R' button down on the console between the seats, back up, reassess my trajectory and, exhaust gargling gently, roll sheepishly out of the car park. Not even Cowell can save me now.

What a drive lies ahead. The finest roads in north Wales are our playground, the source – depending on cloud cover – of Dean's delight and despair and, ultimately, a silent witness to who makes the greater track-massaged supercar for the road. On paper, it looks like an ask too far for the naturally aspirated 4-litre flat-six Porsche, which gives away 173bhp and 177lb ft to a car that costs £128,000 more. Both in acceleration and top speed it's on the back foot, trailing the McLaren's 2.9sec 0-62mph time by 0.4sec, its 7.9sec 0-124mph time by three seconds and its 205mph top speed by 12mph. For straight-line thrust, Ferrari's 488 is a closer match for the McLaren, lagging by mere fractions all the way through to an identical top speed. And Porsche's own 911 Turbo S, with four-wheel drive and 552bhp, is more than capable of giving the Macca a bloody nose at the lights.

But even McLaren will admit that, as a pure expression of motorsport philosophy for the road, against-the-clock performance metrics aren't what defines the 675LT. It knows the only comparison that really matters is Porsche's A-game on truly testing roads such as those that soar and swoop through the hills and valleys between Bala, Llanberis and Ffestiniog. The violently coloured melange of wing and CinemaScope derriere filling the McLaren's screen as we stop 'n' slow through roadworks on the outskirts of Beaumaris is precisely that car. You know where we're heading.

We're not there yet. This morning's first impressions reveal the McLaren's slow-traffic chops to be softer and more benign than anything I experienced in the GT3 RS on the way up. With the powertrain portion of the ProActive Chassis Control system dialled back to Normal, initial throttle response is slugged to the point where the 675LT feels almost sleepy, the seven-speed double-clutch transmission extreme short-shifting to the resonant drone of the McLaren's lightweight titanium exhaust system behaving like a rapidly stepped tone-generator heading for the basement. There's enough low-down torque to indulge the software's laid-back approach and you know all 666bhp is waiting at the end of the throttle travel should you need it, but the built-in torpidity feels a little contrived all the same.



That said, the McLaren really can do passive and painless to a degree that belies its true intent. Over breakfast, Will confessed to falling asleep in the passenger seat on the slog over from Woking. Not a great advertising slogan for McLaren's second most focused road and track weapon, maybe, but a telling demonstration of its dual personality and potential as a long-distance cruiser.

As the morning commuters reach their destinations and intrepid tourists meander towards tea shop adventures, the roads open up and so does Stu in the RS. For a few moments I hang back, click the centre console rotaries round to Sport to wake things up and just look at the thing go. Maybe because the McLaren's lightweight windscreen is 1mm thinner, I can hear it, too, and it sounds properly stoked and mighty. Pretty sure Stu's giving it everything. But, and this isn't entirely unexpected, in the 675LT I don't have to. On the first decent straight the shrinking orange blob is comfortably hauled back to widescreen with no more than 80 per cent throttle. Extraordinary. The engine doesn't feel turbocharged at all, just stupefyingly energetic with a superbike-like appetite for revs sliced up by those 40-millisecond ignition-cut gearshifts.

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Truth is, and I'm beginning to think that 666bhp claim is distinctly conservative, the LT feels a whole layer of manic quicker than a 650S and more like a 99th percentile P1. A little quieter with a more linear delivery and not so much wastegate *pisshhh* and flutter. But from memory on these very roads, there can't be much in it. If anything, the LT's performance, if not easier to access, is easier to exploit. Whichever way you want to slice it – and even if, as seems to be the case, the RS wings it for sheer cornering and braking power –the German car simply doesn't have enough under its engine cover to hurt the McLaren.

Stu returns the favour when we switch cars and head for our favourite stretch of Bala blacktop. No doubt about it, with a spectacular road winding out to the far horizon and a plan to waste not a single metre of it on part-throttle out of respect to what might be the greatest race-honed road car on the planet, the last thing you want behind you is a McLaren 675LT. Even if its driver isn't channelling Fangio, it will be a haunting experience. Stu isn't Fangio, or even channelling him, but try as I might to exert every last track-tautened sinew of the RS, the ground-sucking snout of the LT remains a permanent fixture in the rear-view mirror.

It shouldn't matter, but brand egos are at stake here and at least one score has been settled early. The McLaren is the faster car across the ground. If that was the only thing we were here to establish, it would be game over for the RS. Fortunately for the Porsche, the more exhilarating and memorable flipside of speed is sensation and engagement, and here there's still everything to play for. After experiencing the mind-bending feats of the McLaren, Stu's initial doubts have been blown away. 'It's so addictive and fast that the only gamble is how fast you dare to go,' he says, but, intriguingly, it's the GT3 RS we both feel we want to know better, and over the following hours, as surely as tick follows tock, the Porsche's surfing stallion moments start to come thick and fast.



*675LT feels closer to the P1 than the 650S on the roads of north Wales. That said, so focused is the Porsche that it develops 80 per cent of the downforce of the GT3 racer. Game on...*

## 'THE 675LT REMAINS A PERMANENT FIXTURE IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR'

Like a supercomputer taking on a grandmaster at chess, the McLaren seems to have an answer to any move the Porsche cares to make. But, if you could, it's the human thoughts you'd want to read. And that's how it is with the RS. It isn't that the McLaren's pursuit of sector-humbling pace is an end in itself – by now I'm in no doubt the 675LT is hugely more malleable and less prescriptive than the original 12C – but in the RS it's the very process of acquiring speed, what it does with it and how it makes you feel that sets it apart. Every strand of its being fizzes and bristles with tactile and aural information, from the tiniest nuance of steering feel to the final malevolent twist of its searing engine note as it soars towards 8800rpm. For all that the 675LT doesn't feel turbocharged, it can't quite emulate the fine throttle modulation gifted the RS by its un-blown flat-six. It adds to the feeling that the 911 possesses extra precision, clarity and detail where it matters. Despite a level of chassis electronics similar to the McLaren's, it feels more naturally mechanical and more physically connected. In margin-scrawled detail, it shows every last scrap of the method as well as providing the answer.

Stu sums it up nicely. 'Forty years of RS philosophy distilled in a 21st century package. It's the first of the 991s that feels like an old-school 911. There isn't a single area that dominates, the whole car works as one. The steering is easier to read than the McLaren's, the detail more accurate and when you need to make adjustments mid-corner there are no surprises. It changes direction better than any other 991, too, and you can feel the front tyres grab a solid purchase on the road the moment you turn in. Even better, you can turn in on the brakes and it doesn't become unsettled, just remains poised and connected at each corner.'

The McLaren's behaviour on the Llanberis Pass exposes telling contrasts. If a chassis can have good posture, the 675LT's definitely does. It scythes through the series of smooth, high-speed bends with staggering elan and composure. The suspension and damping make it feel as if the road's sharp edges are smothered with a cushioning layer of silicon that draws the sting, pulls the punch of what would be harsh single-wheel inputs. The 911 is more nuggety and resolute and has steering – a revelation by previous 991 standards – that relays how the road and front wheels are interacting without getting too excited. The LT's is less disciplined and feels like it's trying too hard to deliver masses of feedback. As Stu remarks as we break for another breather while Dean composes his final setup, it's very busy around the centre and the tyres have a bad habit of sniffing out cambers, forcing you to make constant small corrections, especially under braking. Yes, you can lean on the front and it responds faithfully and cleanly to your inputs, but ultimately you can't feel precisely what's going on and you need a dose of faith that the car is as good as you think is.

It is, of course. For me, it's the best McLaren since the F1 and asks questions of the P1 that McLaren probably didn't intend. It asks questions of the GT3 RS, too. Objectively, the McLaren is the better car. It's faster, more comfortable and has a wider span of talents. Given its price and power, that shouldn't come as a great shock. But that it matches the latest GT3 RS punch for punch in the pursuit of driving fast on a great road with a richness of feedback that nails all your senses and a pulse-quickenning intensity *does*. Welcome to the road-racer club, McLaren.

## Specifications

### McLAREN 675LT

**Engine:** V8, 3799cc, twin-turbo  
**Power:** 666bhp @ 7100rpm  
**Torque:** 516lb ft @ 5500-6500rpm  
**Transmission:** Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive, Brake Steer  
**Front suspension:** Double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, roll control  
**Rear suspension:** Double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, roll control  
**Brakes:** Carbon-ceramic discs, 394mm front, 380mm rear, ABS, EBD  
**Wheels:** 8.5 x 19in front, 11 x 20in rear  
**Tyres:** 235/35 ZR19 front, 305/30 ZR20 rear  
**Weight:** 1328kg  
**Power-to-weight:** 510bhp/ton  
**0-62mph:** 2.9sec (claimed)  
**Top speed:** 205mph (claimed)  
**Basic price:** £259,500  
**evo rating:** ★★★★★

### PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS

**Engine:** Flat-six, 3996cc  
**Power:** 493bhp @ 8250rpm  
**Torque:** 339lb ft @ 6250rpm  
**Transmission:** Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential, PTV  
**Front suspension:** MacPherson struts, coil springs, PASM dampers, anti-roll bar  
**Rear suspension:** Multi-link, coil springs, PASM dampers, anti-roll bar  
**Brakes:** Carbon-ceramic discs (option), 410mm front, 390mm rear, ABS, EBD  
**Wheels:** 9.5 x 20in front, 12.5 x 21in rear  
**Tyres:** 265/35 ZR20 front, 325/30 ZR21 rear  
**Weight:** 1420kg  
**Power-to-weight:** 353bhp/ton  
**0-62mph:** 3.3sec (claimed)  
**Top speed:** 193mph (claimed)  
**Basic price:** £131,296  
**evo rating:** ★★★★★



