

**G**T3. It needs no further introduction. No explanation, no protracting reasoning as to why it's here, no excuses. In less than a decade the normally aspirated 911 homologation special has earned a seat on the top table at the 911 family get-together. And unless you've been litter picking at the summit of Mount Everest for the last 12 months you'll be aware there is a new one, the next generation of über 911, a bi-winged chariot with a race-bred engine and

attitude to match. The arrival of a new 911 is always special, the birth of a new GT3 is way beyond that.

Where to start? With the specs. This example fresh from Porsche's generous press fleet is a full-on Clubsport spec, which means a half-roll cage bolted in place behind the (cost option, but necessary if you want a Clubsport car) Carrera GT sourced, carbon-fibre backed and fire retardant cloth-trimmed bucket seats. Point of note number one: unlike the cloth-trimmed

Recaro bucket seats fitted to previous-generation GT3s these have no Porsche crests stitched into where your head will go. I liked them in the old car, and miss them in the new one. Perhaps I should get out more. Other Clubsport items included are a six-point harness and fire extinguisher, both of which need fitting by the dealer on delivery if you so wish, and revised door cards that do away with the conventional storage compartments in favour of increased padding. As the saying goes, if you are going to

be a bear, be a grizzly; if you are going to have a GT3, go Clubsport if only to save a bit of weight. A carbon-fibre bucket weighs half that of the 24-kilo standard fit sport seat, and having recently lifted an Adaptive sport seat which very nearly resulted in a hernia a bucket seat probably saves the same weight again over these all singing, all dancing electric-stuffed items too.

The other noticeable option fitted to this test car is the PCCB brakes. Much has been penned about Porsche's composite stoppers, in

particular the early examples' habit of cracking after track use and Porsche's inconsistent approach to warranty claims. The intervening years have seen the Weissach engineers working closely with Brembo, the brakes' manufacturer, to improve cooling and heat dispersion (the cause for the discs to start cracking after hard use). The results are less complaints, fewer claims and generally a slow down in internet forum activity as to the should-I-or-shouldn't-I debates. With the arrival of the GT3 to UK

customers coinciding with the end of the track day season we'll have to wait a few months before owners who have specified the £5,800 stoppers suffer any of the symptoms experienced by the earlier, previous-generation PCCBs. For the unsprung mass saving alone (20 kilos) we'd be seriously tempted to tick the box.

The Carrera white paintwork works so well with the GT3's design. Having its roots in the motorsport department help, but with today's trend for white cars the GT3 looks so natural

# THE NEXT GENERATION

Never has a car had so much to live up to than Porsche's new 911 GT3, so just how good is it?

Words: Stuart Gallagher Photography: Antony Fraser





and so right. It lifts the black, lower front lip spoiler and the Gurney flap on the leading edge of the lower tier of the rear spoiler and adds to the menace of the cooling ducts in the car's front bumper assembly. The only criticism would be that the 'spats' placed in front of the rear wheels to help protect the wider rear arches from stone chips had already discoloured and had an unappealing yellow tinge to them after just 4,000 miles.

It's a detail soon forgotten once you've fallen into the bucket seat (and let out an expletive after the seat belt buckle has punched you in the kidneys), gripped the alcantara steering wheel and twisted your right hand to light the fuse that brings the 3.6-litre flat-six to life. With an identical capacity to the previous-generation GT3's engine you'd think the powerplant was a direct carry-over. You'd be wrong, because only the crankcase has made the trip, the rest is new.

The remit for the engine boffins was to reduce mass and mechanical loads to allow for a significant increase in engine speeds in order to

extract yet more power from the Le Mans-winning GT1 sourced engine. This included not only reshaping the forged pistons but reducing their size by one millimetre, the result being six pistons each weighing 30 grams less. The piston crown was also redesigned to enhance combustion. The titanium connecting rods have been extended in length (by 1.5 millimetres) to improve maximum engine speed and reduce loads, and are thinner and therefore lighter by a total of 150 grams.

The crankcase may be a carry-over item but the crankshaft has been thoroughly overhauled, resulting in a lighter unit by some 600 grams, again allowing Porsche to reach the new, higher engine speed targets it had set itself when developing the new car's engine.

There are some common engine components that would be familiar to previous-generation GT3 owners, but these have all been revised, updated or improved. There are new cooling ducts for the aluminium cylinder heads allowing the engine to deal with higher

thermal loads while at the same time benefiting from improved heat dissipation. Porsche's VarioCam system is the latest item developed when the 997 was introduced in 2004, and as with the 996 GT3 RS the 997 GT3 has a ram air dome fitted to the top of the engine cover to force intake air directly into the engine's air filter housing with increased pressure. The filter housing is a development of the previous models and the throttle butterfly diameter is larger, up from 76mm to 82mm. There's also a new variable intake manifold that includes a multi-stage intake system with a number of resonance flaps in place to allow the engine to perform consistently throughout its power and torque band. These flaps are carefully controlled to ensure a smooth and consistent torque curve, with both flaps remaining closed at low and medium engine speeds with the first flap opening when the engine revs reach 5400rpm, this process also opening the small connecting pipe in the intake system. When the rpm reaches 6350 the

small pipe closes and the second flap opens a larger pipe, with the process ensuring the torque curve stays strong and consistent throughout the engine's power band. There is also a new exhaust system for the GT3, now exiting from the centre of the rear bumper and while being bigger than the previous car's system weighs 8.5 kilos less.

The results speak for themselves. 415bhp produced at 7600rpm and 298lb ft of torque kicking in at 5500rpm. At 115.3bhp per litre, it's the most powerful, normally aspirated production car engine in the world. And it's a cracker.

Unfortunately, thanks to a technical glitch that resulted in our GPS-based timing gear being launched into orbit to see if it could find a single bleedin' satellite now it was in the same atmosphere as them, we couldn't run any performance figures on the car. But while at the test track we thought we should at least get our money's worth for the track time we had booked. With shorter gear ratios for all but first

gear over the previous GT3, the new car makes full use of its fettle race car engine. Porsche claims 4.3 seconds for the 0-62mph sprint and 8.7 to the ton. They're lying. This engine is such a colossus it feels previous-generation 911 Turbo quick on Bruntingthorpe's long straight. In the first three gears, once you've got a hand on the rampant wheelspin that will greet a yobbish launch, there's little point taking your hand off the suede-covered gear knob. So quickly do the revs race past the 7600rpm peak and head for the 8400rpm redline that the first few seconds consist of a deafening wall of flat-six sound, a tachometer that can barely keep up and your left hand a blur as it negotiates the lever around the gate. There's a yellow tell-tale change-up light on the dash to pre-warn you of the violent limiter ahead, but the moment you see the warning triangle it's too late, you're bouncing off the engine's electronic safety net. Fourth and fifth are mind-altering gears when hooked up to this muscular shove and when you slot home into sixth the revs still climb

with the athleticism of a Boxster S pulling hard in third. With a damp surface and those standard Michelin Pilot Sport Cup tyres (they offer better wet weather traction than you afford them) and a longer than normal brake pedal the brave pills wore off at an indicated 190mph, reached from a standing start in just over a mile and three-quarters. GT3 performance has stepped into another league. But what did you expect from a car that delivers a near identical power output as a 996 Turbo but with 145 fewer kilos to haul around?

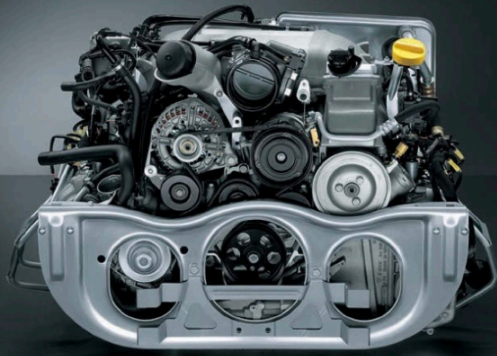
It's hard to get away from the GT3's phenomenal motor. Around town it's as docile as a Carrera, although the clutch is heavier and the gear-shift at low speed is a little reluctant to slot home unless you give it a committed shove. The shift itself is taken from the sport-shift kit available on the regular Carrera models but is shorter still by some 22 per cent, and 15 per cent shorter than that of the previous GT3.

Where, then, does the new GT3 stand? With

**At 115.3bhp per litre, it's the most powerful, normally aspirated production car engine in the world. And it's a cracker**







21st century technology such as PASM (Porsche Active Suspension Management), TC (Traction Control lifted from the Carrera GT) and sat-nav (!) it's been criticised for losing its focus and buckling under the marketing men's pressure to build a car for all markets. After a week up, down, across and round the country clocking up near on a 1,000 miles we can only conclude that a large majority of the nay-sayers have yet to drive the new GT3, or they own the previous-generation car and don't like the idea of being upstaged.

Yes it has PASM, but as with all such equipped Porsches the system offers two settings: 'Normal' and 'Sport', although the GT3 has a slightly different idea as to what a normal damper setting should be compared to that of a C2S or Turbo. Left alone, the GT3's normal damper mode is noticeably harsher than a regular Carrera's yet offers better levels of comfort, yet more control and sure-footedness than the Carrera's Sport setting. In fact, we'd go as far as to say that Porsche should look at adopting the GT3's normal setting as every other model's Sport mode.

On faster A- and B-roads the body control and chassis's composure is exemplary, with every

degree of movement experienced through the oh-so-talkative steering and the seat of your pants arriving in expected, predictable and controllable communication streams like no other GT3 before it. Work within the grip limits of those tyres (they've a compound specifically developed by Michelin for the GT3's handling characteristics) the process of driving quickly has never come so naturally. There's a trace of understeer if you turn in with too much gas, but by closing the throttle and using the grip offered from the 305 section rear boots and the nose is instantly back on target for the apex. Get back on the throttle and the Herculean thrust of that race-inspired motor will dig the tail into the asphalt and glide you through the turn with understated ease and smoothness. And maybe a whiff of corrective lock.

Across some routes you can easily be fooled into thinking the GT3's suspension has run out of ideas and you've reached the limit of the PASM's computing power, until you glance down at the digital speedo at the base of the grey-faced rev counter and discover you're travelling well into three-figures. On a British back road barely wide enough for two cars...

With the dampers switched to Sport mode the

GT3's on-road composure and ability goes out the window. The UK just isn't designed for such a setting, but thankfully MotorSport Vision's Snetterton circuit is.

On track the GT3 reacts and behaves best when treated with the level of respect you'd give a full-blown race car. Be rough, uncoordinated and damn right uncouth with the controls and it will spit you out the venue at the first opportunity. For the first couple of laps the front end was only interested in pushing on into the uninviting fields surrounding the Norfolk circuit, but once some reasonable heat had been generated by the rubber Porsche's latest offering demonstrated what it does best.

The smoothest (and most comfortable) combination of electronic settings we found for a morning's track work was to switch the dampers to Sport, while employing the Sport button situated alongside – this alters the engine's mapping to an optimum setting while at the same time releasing a further 11lb ft of torque between 3000-4250rpm and 14bhp. It also slackens the control of the Traction Control system, and in this mode allows for a higher degree of rear-end slip before interfering. In this

setup the GT3 flows, responding to crisp inputs and fluid movements from turn-in through to exit, making you feel part of the process and totally in control. It allows you to push right up to the limit of the tyres and really feel the chassis working its guts off to deliver you into every turn. And where in the previous-generation cars there were times when you felt you were on your own as the edge of the handling envelope approached, the new car is with you every step of the way.

GT3. It needs no introduction, but you need a conclusion. So here goes. The new 997 GT3 is the most focused 911 to wear the GT3 badge, combining the edgy race car feel of the 996 GT3 RS with that special feeling driving a Mk1 GT3 manages to convey but is strangely missing from the Mk2. The introduction of electronics to the dampers and traction adds more to the driving experience than it takes away. Yes you can equip it with sat-nav and cup holders but if that's one of your stumbling blocks to buying this car perhaps you should look elsewhere.

We wouldn't go as far as saying the new GT3 is a practical, useable day-to-day 911 but if you use it as intended every time you drive it, you couldn't have bought yourself a better car. ●