

Great(er) Expectations

Could Porsche really improve on the generation one 997 GT3? Three days in south Wales and a trip to the test track with the new 911 GT3 was the only way to find out.

Story: Stuart Gallagher Photography: Malcolm Griffiths



Details, those small intangibles you question individually as to what their influence is on a product. But when packaged as a collective, detailing often produces extraordinary results. And it's these details that make the new 911 GT3 one of the finest pieces of automotive engineering in Porsche's illustrious history. It was a given that the latest GT3 would be quicker than its predecessors at Hockenheim (see page 44), and while there is no arguing that a great many GT3s will spend their time beating apices of the world's finest circuits into submission, unlike its hardcore big brother, the RS, the regular GT3 has always offered that duality of a track day machine that is equally happy demolishing great lengths of the Queen's highway. So, with not a

pit lane in sight we've brimmed a v2 997 GT3 with 60 litres of V-Power and headed for the automotive playground of south Wales.

Even when parked within a car park full of new metal at Porsche's Reading HQ, the new GT3 oozes presence. The centre-locking mechanism for the new multi-spoke 19-inch wheels catch your eye first (they weigh three kilos per wheel less than the previous GT3's), and then you spot that the arches can barely contain the semi-slick rubber of Michelin's Pilot Sport Cup tyre. Sitting 30mm lower to the ground than a regular Carrera helps, of course. Combine this look with *that rear wing* and the result is the closest that the GT3 road car has come to mimicking its Cup car brethren. The wing's top plane is not only adjustable and attached to a new engine cover

design featuring two openings to ram cold air into the engine's intake, but for the first time, the end plates extend either side of the supporting struts for maximum aero-efficiency. And, of course, those wing-end plates are embossed with those famous numerals 3.8. Save for the LED front lights Porsche introduced last summer on all 911s, the front of this new GT3 is little changed compared to its predecessor. That is until you get closer and notice that the openings beneath the daytime running lights are bigger and that there are now metal grilles fixed within them to offer better protection to the radiators behind from low-flying objects. The opening on the leading edge of the bonnet is larger, too, not only to enable the hot air drawn through the radiators to escape with less restrictions, but it

also plays a large part in the new car's improved aerodynamics. These detail aerodynamic changes make for a leap and bound improvement in the downforce generated, with double the downward pressure produced than the previous generation car, which should make for some serious high speed stability.

There is nothing flash about the GT3's cockpit, and that's a good thing. It's solid, functional and straightforward with no frills or distractions. Alcantara covers the contact patches: steering wheel and gear level, and, in this Club Sport model, the half roll-cage sits behind £3000 worth of fixed-back carbon fibre sports bucket seats. If you go down the Clubbie route, you are required to have these chairs, which, asking price aside, is no bad thing as they are the best we've



The generation two 997 GT3 wears a new aero kit that doubles the downforce of the previous generation car. Interior features the latest PCM module



A no-nonsense metallic chatter kicks things off before those six cylinders are awoken and start quaffing their super-brew potion



2009 911 GT3

ENGINE

Six horizontally-opposed cylinders, water-cooled
Bore x stroke: 102.7mm x 76.4mm
Capacity: 3797cc
Cylinder head: Four overhead camshafts, four valves per cylinder, VarioCam
Compression ratio: 12.0:1
Max power: 435hp @ 7600rpm
Max torque: 317lb ft @ 6250rpm
Max engine speed: 8500rpm

Power to weight: 311hp per tonne
Ignition & Injection: DME engine management

TRANSMISSION

Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

SUSPENSION

Front: McPherson strut, coil springs, PASM
Rear: McPherson strut, coil springs PASM

BRAKES

Front: Six-piston callipers, 380mm cross-drilled and ventilated disc, ABS, PSM
Rear: Four-piston callipers, 350mm cross-drilled and inner ventilated, ABS, PSM

WHEELS & TYRES

Front: 8.5Jx19 & 235/35ZR19
Rear: 12Jx19 & 305/30ZR19

MEASUREMENTS

Weight: 1395kg
Length: 4460mm
Width: 1808mm
Height: 1280mm
Track (front & rear): 1497/1524mm

PERFORMANCE

Max Speed: 193mph (claimed)
0-60mph: 4.0 seconds

HOW MUCH?

List price: £81,914

tried in a long while. Porsche's other bucket seat, with its backrest folding party trick, doesn't sit you low enough in the car because of the subframe it's mounted on. This fixed back seat, though, dumps you as low as possible for that perfect 911 driving position. Naturally you can throw as many options as you wish at the GT3, including Chrono or Sport Chrono Plus (neither of which are fitted here), sat nav, Bluetooth connection (which is) and as much carbon or leather trim as you wish.

In truth, little work is required with the options list, as this new GT3 has a far more engaging way of grabbing your attention and all it requires is a twist of the key and for you to sit back and savour the sound of a masterpiece coming to life.

A no-nonsense metallic chatter kicks things off before those six cylinders are awoken and start quaffing their super-brew potion. The tickover is just below 1000rpm but there is no hunting or inconsistent idle, the GT3's manners are retained despite its thoroughbred genes.

The 3.8-litre, flat-six engines are nothing new when it comes to 997 Series 911s, but they are when you stick a GT3 badge to the engine lid. The new car's power plant can still trace its bottom end back to the 1e Mans winning GT1, but the detailed internals are very much from the 21st century, including: titanium connecting rods, forged pistons, cup tappets designed specifically for high engine speeds (the mill spins to 8500rpm), and an updated version of Porsche's VarioCam timing system that works on

both the exhaust and the engine's intake. The exhaust system has been redesigned to minimise resistance and features a pair of manifolds that act as fans to force the gases through the system as efficiently as possible. Before the main silencer there are two pre-silencers fitted with map-controlled flaps that are closed on start-up but gradually open as the engine speed increases for optimum flow.

The v2 997 GT3 feels different within a couple of hundred metres of setting off. As with the previous generation GT3, the latest car is once again equipped with Porsche Active Suspension Management (PASM) that provides you with two settings for the dampers – the default Normal mode and the switch-able Sport setting. Left in the default setting the GT3 takes on a Carrera-

like ride quality. Where the first generation car would feel constantly busy in the damping department, its ride to close to the edge of harshness and after a couple of hours behind the wheel verging on the side of tiresome. Although the previous GT3 more than made up for this in the twisties. And this is where Porsche's attention to detail with its new GT3 starts to shine. The ride is more compliant for the everyday monotony of driving we do rather too much of these days, and only the request for another 60 litres of fuel will have you take the opportunity to have a stretch. Intriguingly though, Porsche has stiffened both the springs and the anti-roll bars and makes a point of stating that the default setting has not been designed to offer any greater comfort, as it does with a regular Carrera. What



ever they have done it's resulted in a more rounded GT3. But where this v2 997 GT3 moves the game on considerably is when the road runs over a Welsh mountain rather than around it.

There's more of everything when it comes to feedback and confidence-inspiring communication. The chassis feels alive and agile and, despite the front tyres being wider than the old car's (245 plays 235), there is a more natural feel through the steering than any power-assisted rack has the right to offer. You can imagine exactly how the Cup tyre's tread is hunting around for purchase from the Tarmac, squeezing ever last molecule of grip from its sticky rubber compound. From this you can work harder with the front end but without having to put in any extra effort, relying on the quick-wittedness and

directness of the steering and the dogged determination of the nose to stay glued to the line as if its life depends on it. There is still the odd retro 911 trait to be found if you throw any indecision or ham-fisted inputs into the equation, both resulting in some trad-nose bobble and understeer, but play nice, keep it smooth and stay committed, and the GT3 flows with precision.

Rear traction hasn't been an issue for the 911 since Noah put his woodworking tools away. A lump of Swabian metal hung behind the rear axle has seen to that, and when you include 325 section Cup tyres in the mix, provocation of the juvenile kind is the only way to unstick the tail. Combined with such a secure front end, the result is a 911 offering supreme balance and poise as you tackle a route of crests, rises, blind brows

and long sweeping curves. It just feels so right to drive this GT3 as hard as you dare. You can attack any corner with such confidence that after prolonged exposure to the chassis you are left, as we always are, wondering how Porsche will improve on it. And all this while PASM is left in its default mode, adapting to your driving style and what you are asking of the chassis within a shortness of time that only engineers with big brains can understand. The consequence of this, however, is that the optional Sport mode is now only suitable for a road where the kerbs are painted red and white and you can only travel in one direction. It's far too stiff for any of the public roads we tried the car on and only came into its own when we headed to the test track.

Before rocking up at the track, the GT3's larger

capacity 'six had our chins scraping the floor whenever the opportunity arose to ring it's neck. It is one of Porsche's finest achievements. Its large capacity lungs provide it with a low down surge to do all the hard work before 4500rpm when the first step change in the VarioCam timing takes over. The exhaust note hardens and the engine note takes on a more aggressive tone as the thick yellow needle picks up the pace while it moves around the tachometer. Just shy of 6000rpm and the 3.8 is in full head-down, flat out mode. The soundtrack has changed once again, turning in to full violent attack mode as it reaches its peak (317lb ft at 6250rpm, 435bhp at 7600rpm) and sets its sights on the 8500rpm limiter. It's memorising, spine tingling and deliciously addictive and the flicker of the change

It's memorising, spine tingling and deliciously addictive and the flicker of the change up light in the corner of the rev counter is the invitation to go again



New 19-inch wheels are 3kg lighter than those fitted to the previous model. Centre lock fixing are standard, PCCB brakes optional



**ACCELERATION
2010 997 GT3**

THROUGH THE GEARS

0-20	1.2
0-30	1.7
0-40	2.3
0-50	3.3
0-60	4.0
0-70	4.9
0-80	5.8
0-90	7.4
0-100	8.7
0-110	10.2
0-120	12.4
0-130	14.4
0-140	16.8
0-150	20.8

IN-GEAR 2ND

20-40	2.3
30-50	2.1
40-60	1.9
50-70	1.8
60-80	1.9

IN-GEAR 3RD

20-40	3.4
30-50	3.2
40-60	3
50-70	2.8
60-80	2.6
70-90	2.6
80-100	2.7
90-110	2.9

IN-GEAR 4TH

20-40	4.9
30-50	4.4
40-60	4.2
50-70	3.9
60-80	3.8
70-90	3.6
80-100	3.5
90-110	3.6
100-120	3.7
110-130	3.5
120-140	4.6

IN-GEAR 5TH

30-50	5.7
40-60	5.7
50-70	5.7
60-80	5.5
70-90	5.4
80-100	5.4
90-110	5.2
100-120	5.2
110-130	5.5
120-140	5.8
130-150	6.5

IN-GEAR 6TH

40-60	7
50-70	7.2
60-80	7.1
70-90	6.9
80-100	7.1
90-110	7.4
100-120	7.2
110-130	7
120-140	7.5
130-150	8.4

**ACCELERATION
2007 997 GT3**

THROUGH THE GEARS

0-20	1.2
0-30	1.9
0-40	2.5
0-50	3.5
0-60	4.5
0-70	5.6
0-80	6.7
0-90	8.4
0-100	9.9
0-110	11.6
0-120	13.9
0-130	16.2
0-140	18.9
0-150	23.15

IN-GEAR 2ND

20-40	2.3
30-50	2.1
40-60	2.0
50-70	2.0
60-80	2.1

IN-GEAR 3RD

20-40	3.5
30-50	3.2
40-60	3.1
50-70	3.0
60-80	2.8
70-90	2.8
80-100	3.2
90-110	3.1

IN-GEAR 4TH

20-40	4.6
30-50	4.3
40-60	4.3
50-70	4.1
60-80	4.2
70-90	4.1
80-100	3.8
90-110	3.9
100-120	4.1
110-130	4.4
120-140	5.0

IN-GEAR 5TH

30-50	5.7
40-60	5.6
50-70	5.7
60-80	5.5
70-90	5.7
80-100	5.9
90-110	5.6
100-120	5.4
110-130	5.7
120-140	6.2
130-150	7.0

IN-GEAR 6TH

40-60	6.9
50-70	7.2
60-80	7.4
70-90	7.2
80-100	7.5
90-110	8.2
100-120	8.3
110-130	8.1
120-140	8.1
130-150	9.2

up light in the corner of the rev counter is the invitation to go again and snatch another ratio.

The gearshift is another item that has been fine-tuned. The 'box starts life as the regular six speeder found in a Carrera complete with the short shift option, and a box of ratios 22 per cent shorter. But whereas the v1 997 GT3 had a shift action that was at best stiff, and worse a bit blunt when climbing up and down the 'box, in this latest example there is more precision, more smoothness and confidence when you're on it and a fluffed change isn't in the script.

Just how devastating this new engine is, is demonstrated when we download the data from the timing gear. The sprinting benchmarks, 0-60, 0-100mph, are dispatched in 4.0 and 8.7 seconds respectively, a full half a second quicker than the previous model to 60 and an incredible 1.2 seconds quicker to 100. As a comparison, the outgoing 997 Turbo recorded a 3.6-second run to 60 and 8.4 to 100 when we figured an example back in August 2007. The new car's in-gear flexibility is equally astounding. In the first three ratios it

shaves at least two-tenths off every 20mph increment, but when you get in to the big speeds in the higher gears the engine's stronger heart begins to show through. 110-130mph in fourth is dispatched nine-tenths quicker in only 3.5-seconds and it is half a second quicker from 80 to 100mph in fifth (5.4 seconds). Equally impressive is just how stable the thing is when you clock 160mph and the speed keeps climbing but the GT3 remains arrow-straight and rock solid as the aero tweaks get the workout they were designed for. Which presents two questions? How on earth did Porsche make a normally-aspirated, 1370kg coupé so quick, and how fast is the new 997 Turbo going to be against the clock?

For now, though, we're happy to be entertained and enthralled by a 911 that demonstrates that, despite the shenanigans of the past few years, where the management started to out-grow its boots, the engineers still have one single focus: to build the best sports car they possibly can. And with the v2 997 GT3 they have done just that ●

**the engineers still have one single focus:
to build the best sports car
they possibly can**

