

# CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

A 911 wearing RS battle dress is the weapon of choice for the track day afficiando, right? Don't be so quick to dismiss the regular 911 GT3 so easily.

Story: Richard Meaden Photography: Andrew Morgan



When it comes to building track day-ready road cars, Porsche is the acknowledged master. Whether it's an otherwise everyday Cayman or 911 Carrera fitted with sport suspension and limited-slip differential options, or a full-house 997 GT2 RS, if its engine is located somewhere aft of your shoulders, chances are Porsche has an off-the-

shelf answer to your road and track needs.

Arguably the best and most enduringly popular choice is the 911 GT3. Now in its fourth and most focused generation, the 3.8-litre 997 GT3 is the product of Andreas Preuninger's desire to give the GT3 the teeth of a race car with the everyday manners of a road car.

It's a laudable quest, and a compelling prospect, especially as my arduous assignment is

to put Preuninger's concept to the test by driving from the UK to Spa-Francorchamps for a track day. It's a jammy gig, but a true test of the car, for we'll be heading out on a Sunday, enjoying track time on Monday and then heading home the same day. Including a few modest photographic detours, that's a 1500-mile round-trip.

When the Aqua blue – a lovely colour by the

way – GT3 Clubsport arrives at my house it's impossible not to stifle a grin. The noise, the stance, the attitude and, yes, the flash 911 GB registration plate all add up to one helluva sight to have parked outside. Like all Porsche press demonstrators, it comes with a useful list of options specific to the car. A quick scan down the list soon explodes the myth of the GT3's apparently modest £85,564 price tag, as it states

that I'm leaving £101,672 worth tucked-up at the kerb.

I've already clocked the yellow callipers, which mean PCCB brakes at £5800. Then there's £1981 for the front-end lift (I never use it, but customer feedback suggests not having the option is often a deal-breaker). Carbon sports seats – now with folding backs for better rear access – add another £1981, with the clever

Dynamic Engine Mounts costing a further £793. Porsche Communication Management (PCM) with navigation adds a whopping £1945, plus another £523 for the telephone module (this seems a bit of a piss-take), £388 for a (very good) 235 watt stereo and £730 for the lovely blue paint job.

The only truly contentious option is a further £1819 for a black leather interior which, so far



as I can tell, comprises a leather-wrapped dashboard and door cappings. So, with the exception of the leather, if you regard the rest as legitimate options for a GT3 (which I do) the true price is just a few grand shy of £100k. Gulp.

I always enjoy the anticipation at the start of a long European trip. Even the M20 feels good when you're heading towards the Eurotunnel. In the GT3, the feeling is accentuated, for it's non-nonsense character immediately raises the journey to 'mission' status.

It's surprising how much you can squeeze into the car if you're prepared to improvise a little. The front luggage area is fine for a few overnight bags, while the hollows where the rear seats would have been are a natural place to stow crash helmets.

There's little doubt the no-cost option Clubsport package is the way to go if you intend to do any serious track day work (or mix-it with the buses and bikers on a certain one-way 'toll road' in the Eifel region of Germany).

The factory-fit half cage is a neat installation – although it does compromise the amount of luggage you can crush through the tubing. The cage, along with the six-point harness fixings, fire extinguisher and preparation for the battery master switch are all sensible pieces of equipment on a car aimed at keen track day goers, as unfortunately 'the worst' doesn't always happen to other people. It's true your non-petrolhead mates will wonder why your Porsche's seats are upholstered in what looks like cheap nylon, but the fireproof cloth seats are wholly appropriate for this type of car.

If you want to educate such doubters as to why the GT3 Clubsport has racing seats up front and scaffolding in the back, there's no better teacher than the 3.8-litre, 435hp flat-six. Mated to the sharp-shifting six-speed H-pattern 'box and exhaling through a frankly rude sports exhaust it's about as pure and intense an experience as you can have on four wheels.

Fleeting bursts of searing through-the-gears acceleration on a lumpy bit of Belgian autoroute gives your adrenal glands a satisfying work out, but there's no question it does little but heighten the urge to really explore the GT3's manic appetite for revs. Spa really can't come soon enough.

After four hours of lumpy Belgian autoroute – including the arrow-straight Jabbeke Highway, scene of Jaguar's hairy speed record attempts in the 1950s – photographer, Andy Morgan, and I are pleased to peel off the autoroute and follow signs to Stavelot. This large and picturesque market town is a blessed relief after the soul-less motorway service areas, and provides the perfect opportunity to cool a sweaty back and stretch your legs.

Heading in toward the modern circuit from this direction also means you get to drive on long sections of the old Spa Grand Prix circuit. It's an odd feeling when you realise the significance of the asphalt on which you're



## PRICES

<b>List Price</b>	£85,564.00
Options fitted to test car:	
Aqua blue metallic paint	£730.00
Club Sport Package	No cost option
(built-in roll-cage, six-point racing harness for driver's side, fire extinguisher, preparation for battery master switch)	
Porsche ceramic composite brakes	£5800.00
Dynamic engine mounts	£793.00
Lifting front axle	£1981.00
Sports bucket seats	£1981.00
Black leather interior	£1819.00
Porsche Communication Management with navigation mode	£1945.00
Telephone module	£523.00
Sound package plus	£388.00
Universal audio interface	£76.00
Floor mats	£72.00
<b>Total price with options</b>	<b>£101,672.00</b>





driving. There's nothing to signify you're on an old race track, save a few old sections of Armco in odd places, but there's a tangible sense of greatness about the languid, flowing curves, not to mention an obvious potential for butt-clenching speed. Then, as you negotiate a serpentine left-right ess, you see the sign for Masta and it all falls into place: This is the fearsome Masta Kink!

Blind on entry and exit, with a camber change in the middle, it's the kind of corner that must have filled drivers with a terrible mix of dread and exhilaration, as lap after lap, head and heart battled to assume control of a wavering right foot. There's no official commemoration for

what is surely the greatest corner in motor racing, but there is a chip shop – The Masta Friterie – as you exit the kink.

This unremarkable-looking establishment is something of a Mecca for past and present *GT Purely Porsche* contributors. I was introduced to it by Chris 'Monkey' Harris, and I suspect he was taken there by Andrew Frankel or Colin Goodwin. Its evocative location certainly adds some spice to your chips and mayonnaise, especially when you appreciate that Porsche 917s would routinely approach the kink at 218mph. Spa must have been a monstrous place to race in the late Sixties and early Seventies.

Fortunately for us, the cut-down version of

the circuit remains a challenge and a true pleasure to drive. With corners like Eau Rouge (or Radillion as it's also known), Pouhon and Blanchimont, it still rewards bravery, but the stakes are mercifully less high. In recent years, it too has undergone some changes. For a long time you could still drive sections of it as a public road, but around a decade ago, it became a wholly closed course, with no public road access.

That's a shame if you're passing and fancy driving a bit of hallowed tarmac, but it only serves to ramp-up the sense of occasion when a track day company such as Goldtrack ([www.goldtrack.co.uk](http://www.goldtrack.co.uk)) hold two back-to-back

days in the height of summer. This much is evidenced by the number and variety of cars that fill the paddock, with everything from a Murciélago SV, a F430 Scuderia and a Nissan GT-R, to a Morgan Plus 8 and a Renaultsport Clio joining the fray.

Reassuringly, and somewhat predictably, the most prevalent brand is Porsche, with GT3s and GT3 RSs forming the backbone of this particular track day's contingent. Consequently, arriving in a GT3 might not make you the centre of attention, but it does give you a certain sense of belonging, not to mention the satisfaction of knowing you're in a car clearly built to soak-up whatever punishment you care

to throw at it.

It also means you've got some like-for-like machinery to dice with. Er, I mean share the track with, in a responsible manner. Fortunately we're blessed with hot, dry conditions, so the GT3's standard-fit Michelin Pilot Cup+ tyres are in their element. Still, it pays to give yourself a bit of time to get your eye in, especially at a place like Spa, where you power out of the pit lane on a gravity-assisted charge down the hill into Eau Rouge.

The sense of release at finally being able to consistently and repeatedly work the magnificent flat-six to its 7600rpm limit is almost indescribable. It has got true ferocity at

the top-end, yet there is plenty of meat in the mid-range too, so you have some options if you find a corner that leaves you feeling caught between gears.

Once they've got some temperature in them, the Michelins give you plenty of predictable and progressive grip, although it pays to do a few brisk laps, then come in and reset the pressures to 2bar all-round. If you don't you'll feel the rear-end begin to squirm as the tyres begin to over-pressure after another couple of laps.

The switchable controls for the suspension and traction/stability systems mean you can tailor the GT3's limits to your own ability and confidence, or indeed the prevailing weather



conditions. If you're an experienced hand and the weather is clement, then you shouldn't shy away from disengaging both the traction and stability systems, for the GT3 is transparent in its behaviour and how it reacts to your inputs. That said, if you're still gaining experience and confidence, then you'd go very quick and have a lot of fun with all the electronics primed to save you.

The PCCB brakes are potent and impressively resistant to fade, but I'm not entirely convinced by the feel they give you in return. With cast-iron discs I think it's easier to sense when you're working them close to their limits, and the threshold of the ABS, but with the PCCB rotors, you don't seem to get quite the same information through the pedal. That said I'm entirely willing to believe it's a familiarity thing, and there's no doubting the PCCB's ability to feel as good on the way home as they did on the way out.

With so many other 911s circulating at high-speed, the opportunity to gauge the GT3's relative performance is too great to resist. Amusingly, it's when Andy Morgan decides to jump in to do some in-car photos that we find ourselves amongst a group of blokes in a pair of beautiful Viper green Gen 1 997 GT3 RSs, a Nissan GT-R and a screaming F430 Scud with



the amusing registration PANIC.

Apart from being stunned by the Datsun, which is jaw-droppingly, ruthlessly and yes, unbeatably rapid (albeit for just a few laps, at which point it needs to return to the pits for a quiet cool-down in a darkened pit garage), and genuinely scared by the shrieking Ferrari's painful exhaust note, what's most intriguing is how this 3.8-litre GT3 compares with the old master, the 3.6-litre Gen 1 997 RS.

Under braking and through the corners, there's little if nothing in it – even when fully

sideways – but the new GT3's sheer pace out of the corners and on to the straights is more than the old RS can live with. On the run from Eau Rouge down the Kemel straight towards Les Combes we just drive straight by, which is especially impressive.

Andy used a few shorter, more colourful words to describe the experience, which is wholly understandable given I can honestly say I've been in races that were less exciting. That's all credit to the standard of driving on Goldtrack's day, but it's also testament to the GT3, which left me smitten and drunk on adrenaline and G- force.

Despite all this though, I honestly don't know if I could live with a GT3 day-to-day. Not because it's uncivilised or unforgiving, but for the simple reason that it mercilessly preys on those of us with overly-enthusiastic right feet. Seriously, you need the self-control and moral sanctity of a Hindu monk not to find yourself driving like Francois Delacour racing to make last orders at his local boozer.

However, if you have an iron will – or a good lawyer – and want a car that will transport you to work as readily as it'll test your talent and commitment through Blanchimont, the GT3 is a truly remarkable, intoxicating and multi-talented car ☺



#### THANKS

With thanks to Melindi Scott at Goldtrack for her help and patience. For more information about Goldtrack's events go to [www.goldtrack.co.uk](http://www.goldtrack.co.uk) or call +44 (0) 1327 361 316