

RENNSPORT MASTERS

As the current epitome of Rennsport, the 997 GT3 RS offers the purest form of modern Porsche 911 exhilaration. But is the second generation a marked improvement on the first?

Written by Tony McGuinness Photography by Andrew Tipping



The heat vapour is clearly visible, rising off the black tarmac and dissipating into the air on the desolate Southern California mountain road. It is typically cool in this part of the Temecula Valley, 45 minutes north-east of San Diego, but the day is an abnormally scorching affair, with temperatures hitting 96 degrees Fahrenheit. Among the sintering heat, two of Porsche's finest 911s ever to grace the planet are on a mission and engaged in a duel: like the legendary gunslingers of the old west, Billy the Kid and Jesse James, these modern-day legends are going head to head to see which generation of the 997 GT3 RS is the most electrifying to drive.

Aided by exceptional aerodynamics, both cars have speed and power delivery in abundance, with their stripped-back and cut-throat nature making for one of the purest forms of road-legal driving, such is the moniker of a 911 RS. Where lesser models would find such an environment exhausting, here corners are attacked with aplomb. These two differing 997-generation GT3 RSs are as at home on these mountainous roads as they would be on a race track – which, of course, they were essentially designed for. Both Rennsports jockey for position and exchange leads from the front several times as the howling of the high-revving ↻

'Metzger sixes' resonates. If ever there was an example of heavenly driving, this was it.




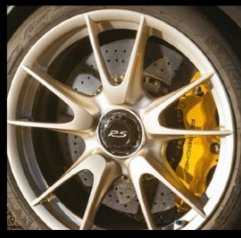



The mere mention of 'GT3 RS' ensures 'pinnacle of the 911' is on the cusp of most driving enthusiasts' lips. It doesn't get any better – it's a purist car by every definition. By driving or owning one you are experiencing a piece of road-going Porsche racing heritage that is arguably not found with any other manufacturer. The GT3 RS models are exclusive machines, inspiring and leaving you in awe. They are breathtakingly beautiful and staggeringly functional in every sense of the word.

Unlike other 911s, these two naturally aspirated Rennsports are built by the Porsche Motorsport division, the same group that for many years manufactured 911 Cup cars, the RSRs, and even the RS Spyder. Racing is in their DNA.

The RS lineage dates back far with the 911, starting with the introduction of the 1973 Carrera RS. When water-cooling reached the 911 in 1999, Andreas Preuninger and Porsche soon introduced the new RS in 996 GT3 form to great acclaim. With the subsequent introduction of the 997 Gen1 GT3 RS in 2006, the change from the 996 GT3 RS was a substantial evolution of the new RS moniker. The 997.1 GT3 RS – with its wide Carrera 4 body – had purists drooling. While the Gen1 997 was well received, Porsche was struck by comments from customers that the GT3 RS did not offer considerably more performance over the standard 997.1 GT3. On paper at least, the RS only offered a quicker sprint to 62mph by 0.1 seconds over the GT3, while the official weight saving of just 20kg was noted as somewhat paltry.

The 997.1 GT3 RS is no slouch, but Porsche clearly listened to its customers and set about ensuring vast improvements for the 3.8-litre 997.2 GT3 RS. Duly arriving in 2010, performance was markedly improved above and beyond that of its new GT3 brethren of the same generation.

Four years of manufacturing separate the two 997 GT3 RSs in our pictures (the Gen1 rolled off the production line in 2007, the Gen2 in 2011), but they are different. The changes from Gen1 to Gen2 are, in Porsche terminology, evolutionary rather than revolutionary. However, there are stark differences. What is immediately noticeable is the magnificent larger, carbon fibre rear wing on the Gen2 supported by forged aircraft aluminium struts. Although neither are subtle, the wing of the Gen2 is certainly more pronounced than

997.2 GT3 RS (2011)		Model Year	997.1 GT3 RS (2007)	
 3,800cc 12.2:1 450bhp @ 7,900rpm 430Nm @ 6,750rpm Six-speed manual		Engine Capacity 3,600cc 12.0:1 415bhp @ 7,600rpm 405Nm @ 5,500rpm Six-speed manual		
Independent MacPherson struts; Independent multi-link		Suspension Front Independent MacPherson struts; Independent multi-link Rear Independent MacPherson struts; Independent multi-link		
 9x19-inch centre-locking alloys; 245/35/ZR19 12x19-inch centre-locking alloys; 325/30/ZR19		Wheels & tyres Front 8.5x19-inch five stud alloys; 235/35/ZR19 Rear 12x19-inch five stud alloys; 305/30/ZR19		
4,460mm 1,852mm 1,370kg		Dimensions Length 4,445mm Width 1,852mm Weight 1,375kg		
4.0 secs 192mph		Performance 0-62mph 4.2 secs Top speed 187mph		



“As the RS nears 8,500rpm, the engine noise pulsates through your body”



“The GT3 RS feels edgy and alive. What more could you want?”

Unlike their European counterparts, the rear windows in both cars are real glass – not plexiglass – to satisfy US laws

the Gen1, helping the 997.2 to create the same amount of downforce at 100mph as the 997.1 does at 190mph.

Other evolutions include the revision of the front fenders of the Gen2, which are now 26mm wider to accommodate its larger front tyres. Also redesigned in the Gen2 are larger front air intakes and outtakes; they suck in air and push it out again with the utmost efficiency, while the wire mesh covering these openings provides protection to the internal workings in the front. The front splitter on the Gen2 is also larger and more aerodynamic, again contributing to the 997.2's nous for downforce.

Despite its racing pedigree, the GT3 RS retains the 911 spirit of being the everyday supercar, further exemplified by a front lift kit fitted to the Gen2, yet missing from the Gen1. The push of a button inside the cabin raises the front just enough to prevent scraping on driveways and ramps that are not drastically sloped. First available on the Gen2, this is an option that's well worth the money to protect the front of your Rennsport 911. Another interesting observation is the side mirrors of the Gen2, which were made bigger to satisfy EU safety laws.

As well as a boost in engine capacity from 3,600cc in the Gen1 to 3,800cc, the jump in power from 415bhp to 450bhp isn't the only engine-based improvement. The all-new dynamic engine mounts on the Gen2 model minimise oscillations and vibrations of the drivetrain, helping you take corners more precisely. The tailpipes are titanium and the single-mass flywheel is lighter in the later

variant, as the redline is increased by 100rpm to 8,500rpm. Twinned with the boost in performance are weight-saving improvements in the Gen2, like a lightweight lithium ion battery that saves 22 pounds over the Gen1. This means the later RS is five kilograms lighter than its 997 GT3 RS counterpart.

The stats suggest vast improvements in the second instalment of the 997 GT3 RS, but how does this translate behind the wheel? After all, both cars remind you that they are primarily race cars, and in racing, even the most minute technical improvement can lead to substantial performance gains. So is the Gen2 much better than the Gen1?

I climb in the cockpit of the splendidly outfitted Gen1, with original orange wheels painted black to show off the yellow PCCB brakes nicely. A clear bar has been installed on the front bonnet to repel stones and other shrapnel. Besides this, the car is straight out of the Weissach factory. I take in the view inside. It doesn't have the cloth straps installed on the Gen2, but the orange door handles are striking nevertheless. Moreover, carbon fibre inserts throughout the interior and door sills are well placed, and provide quality craftsmanship.

The Porsche adaptive sport seats are beautiful with Alcantara inlays, which is also present on the roof of the cabin, and a rich, soft leather dashboard with deviating stitching sets off the whole car. The rear wing sits low and does not obstruct the rear window. Glance over your shoulder, and you'll see the 'RS' badge where the seats would be in a 911 Carrera. The purposeful interior means you can't help but feel excited as you fire up the engine. ➔

996 GT3 RS: dawn of water-cooled RS

In 2003, the predecessor of the current 997 GT3 RS was introduced. The 996 GT3 RS was Porsche's first water-cooled RS, which trimmed 50kg from the 996 GT3 Clubsport models. Available in white with either blue or red decals, side stripes and matching colour-coded wheels, the 996 GT3 RS utilised a 3.6-litre M96/79 powerplant taken from the narrow-bodied 996 GT3, producing 381bhp at 7,400rpm before shooting on to a top speed of 190mph. Later, the 996's sublime engine was to be utilised in the Gen1 997 GT3 RS, albeit with some reworking.

The 996 GT3 RS featured carbon body parts, which were replicated by the 997 variant, although the carbon front bootlid on the 996 was replaced by an alloy item in the Gen1 997. In true RS weight-saving form, the Porsche crest on the front bootlid was actually a sticker, later replaced with a standard metal-oriented emblem on the 997 Gen1 and Gen2 RS variants. Crucially for track enthusiasts, the 996 GT3 RS came with PCCB as standard, reduced to an option for the 997.

Although road legal, the ride of the 996 GT3 RS was deemed incredibly harsh for anything other than a track. The lessons learned from the first water-cooled RS had a great impact on the development of the 997 GT3 RS, including increased power, comfort, aerodynamics and safety. Not sold in the US or Canada, the 996 GT3 RS was the perfect swansong for the 996 series 911, and wore the RS badge with great distinction, as noted in **Total 911's** 'Performance Icons' in issue 107.



Retailing at £94,000 when new, the first 997 GT3 RS had a refined cabin, though a roll-over and cloth bucket seats were options



Differences in the dash and doorcards mark this 997.2 out as more hardcore. Note the transmission: is this the last manual RS?



Piloting this beautiful Gen1 out into the hills, I am struck by its raw feeling. I accelerate onto the deserted road which, unfortunately for me, becomes quite bumpy. This isn't something you would necessarily feel in a standard 911, but the stiff chassis communicates that it would prefer to be on smooth tarmac. After a few bone-jarring hiccups, the road becomes smoother. Immediately, I am dealt a left-handed sweeper. I downshift and blip the throttle, hearing a throaty exhaust note from the flat six. The turn-in is crisp and razor sharp. Just before the halfway point, the nose starts to go a little light, and I can feel understeer, which sends adrenaline flowing through my veins. It feels edgy and alive, and wants to challenge you.

Unwinding the steering wheel and exploding out of the turn, the Gen1 regains its composure. Within seconds I shoot into a right-handed hairpin. Just as I start to feel more confident, the rear end twitches. It wants to swing out as the huge, semi-slick rear tyres try to dance away from me. I am forced to bring it in with careful corrections. Clearly, this GT3 RS has the devil in it, and tells you so. I exit the hairpin quickly and with much more confidence.

However, as I dip into another sweeping left-handed corner, once again the nose starts to lift and understeer requires correction. As I do so, the back wants to push out. The feeling is one of exhilaration as I make slight inputs and corrections

to bring her back in; she settles nicely and is once again balanced. But driving this car this hard isn't for the novice; I am required to be totally involved, alert and focused. It needs you to listen to it and coax it. Tell it what you want it to do and deliver the right inputs, and you will be rewarded. The experience is hair-raising and exhilarating. This is exactly what you require in a car of this magnitude. On the return leg back to where the Gen2 is waiting, I feel excited and drained in equal measure. Surely that was the ultimate in road-going flat-six thrills?

Climbing into the 997.2 GT3 RS, I notice it's not too dissimilar to the 997.1. There are slight upgrades in the dashboard layout carried over

from the facelifted 997 Carrera, and although the adaptive sports seats in the Gen2 are the same as the Gen1, the Gen2 seems more refined inside. This Gen2 doesn't have the optional leather outfitting from the Gen1, although in the context of what these cars are, I think it is a good thing. It is simply bare bones in comparison, with reduced noise insulation materials in the plastic dashboard and door panels. The orange door handles that were in the Gen1 are now thin red straps. While some people have called them a gimmick, this gives a distinct Cup car feel. It has a stereo and PCM system as per the Gen1, while both have air conditioning – which, by the way, is one option you should never want to be without. Deleting

air-conditioning for the sake of weight saving just isn't worth it unless you are hell bent on extremely serious racing competition.

The thick Alcantara steering wheel has a sensational feel to it. Looking over my shoulder to the rear of the interior, the badge no longer merely says 'RS', instead letting you know unapologetically that it's an 'RS 3.8'. I fire up the engine and notice how the rattle at idle of this powerplant is loud and mesmerising. It's a statement of intent: that very light single mass flywheel helps to give it a unique sound.

Taking the same course as with the Gen1, I dump the clutch and accelerate down the deserted, bumpy asphalt. The heavy clutch takes some getting used

to, but feels great. Likewise, the short throw shifts are fast and precise. Gathering speed over the same bumps I encountered earlier, I'm pleasantly surprised, as the car handles them less jarringly. The upgraded PASM suspension in the 997.2 deals with the bumps with little fuss, and my bones remain intact. Again, the ride isn't as smooth as a 911 Carrera, but these are race cars that happen to have a license plate. Heading into the left-handed sweeper, I downshift and blip the throttle as I prepare for the front end to become light and the car to move into understeer. I am ready to make corrections, but none are needed! The wider front track and revised front end virtually eliminate the lift experienced in the Gen1



GT3 RS running costs

Ownership of any 911 comes at a price, although these are substantially increased with a 911 of such high motorsporting calibre. Although you'll be covered by a warranty when purchasing from new (usually two years in Britain with the option of the third, or four years/50,000 miles in the US), what this warranty doesn't cover is standard maintenance including fuel, tyres, and typical wear and tear.

Because this Rennsport demands to be driven in a spirited manner, fuel replenishment is obviously required with astonishing frequency. The Gen2 comes factory equipped with the specially designed Michelin Pilot Sport

Cup Tyres, which are incredibly sticky yet very soft, coming with only 3mm of tread. On the street with spirited driving, the tyres – costing around £250 per corner – could last for 3,000 miles (the wider rear tyres tend to wear out faster with engine load, of course). Also, due to the sticky nature of these tyres when warmed up, they can pick up metal road hazards easily, so require replacing much sooner. The Gen2 in our pictures has covered just over 18,000 miles to date. The rear tyres have been changed four times, with the tyres on the front axle being replaced three times.

Other likely expenses on the GT3 RS include the replacement of the front splitter, which can take some

punishment on the road, even with the optional lift kit fitted. The 997 GT3 RS needs a service every year or 10,000 miles with an oil change, while the Gen2 here benefitted from an additional brake service while back at the OPC.

Ceramic brakes are a well-known yet worthwhile option for a 911 with track ambitions, although their incredible performance, lack of brake dust and longevity makes them extremely desirable. Available from £5,800 as a factory option on the Gen1 GT3 RS, if your GT3 RS has ceramics then expect a hefty bill when it's time for completely new brakes. Running a GT3 RS has significant costs but, for many, the rewards of driving one are well worth the price.

GT3 RS. I power out of the corner and prepare for the back end to swing out and misbehave, but it doesn't happen. The larger wing and wider rear wheels with sticky Michelin Pilot Sport Cup tyres (specifically designed for this Gen2 997) ensure the back end is glued to the road. No loss of grip is experienced, and I am propelled out of the bend and onto the straight. The higher-capacity 3.8-litre flat six begins to wail, and my speed increases until I am forced to brake, the large ceramic brakes bleeding off the speed and preparing the car for entry into the right-handed hairpin turn.

Here, I feel the confidence I didn't experience to the same degree in the Gen1. I can push this car much harder; it begs to be driven hard. Going into this tight switchback, I feel the G forces more, but

again, the wider front end with those phenomenal Michelin Pilot Sport Cup tyres, lacking on the Gen1, provide the ability to enter the corner with more speed and grip. As such, I don't fight with the car as much. While I make slight corrections, they aren't nearly what I needed to do on the Gen1.

I begin my exit out of the corner earlier than I did with the Gen1. I can feel she wants to possibly swing out, but this car – unlike the Gen1 – has stability control to go with the traction control, ideal for wet surfaces. Sure, this car also has the devil in it, but it is kept more in check by the technological upgrades and significantly revised aerodynamics. I am catapulted out of the corner at blistering speed, again reminded of the car's more serious engine growl past 5,000rpm.

Meanwhile, the noise in the cabin is the perfect blend of engagement without irritation. As it nears the 8,500rpm redline, the engine noise in the cabin pulsates through my body. I reach the next dipping, sweeping left-hander, where the ceramic brakes bite hard and shed speed, yet my entry into the corner is significantly faster than the Gen1. This time I feel a little hint of lift, and slight understeer starts to occur, but with gentle corrections and throttle inputs it is insignificant. Again, the car feels more balanced and planted when near the limit. By now, the warmed-up Sport Cup tyres are in even more love with the road, and don't want to let go. I am propelled out of the corner with only a bit of twitching in the back end. Exploding down the final straight, the RS screams at redline. As I bring the

997.2 GT3 RS back to base alongside the 997.1, I am filled with conflicting thoughts.

When you begin driving these cars, initially it isn't easy to detect differences between the two. From a standing start, the Gen1 in first gear seems quicker than the Gen2. The Gen1 wing provides a virtually unconstructive view from the driver's seat, while the rear wing on the Gen2 largely forces you to rely on your side mirrors. However, pushing the cars begins to reveal the contrasting features of these machines. Steering in both RSs feel direct and tight when turning into corners, although the Gen1 does feel lighter in the front. You have to work with it more than the Gen2, and it requires intense focus, which in itself is gratifying yet slightly unnerving. The clutch on the Gen1 is not as heavy, and is easy to

adapt to. While the clutch on the second-generation car is heavy, the shifting in both cars provides an abundance of mechanical feel.

The wheels are a standout difference on the Gen2, where centre-lock wheels fitted with Michelin Pilot Sport Cup tyres provide extra sticky grip, and when warmed up won't betray you. The larger contact patch the Gen2 has over the Gen1 with its wider tyres is no small difference here. Yes, it is fun to let the back end loose, but on the track or street that extra grip is meaningful. It allows you to push the 997.2 harder, as you know it is firmly planted, and you can feel the limit is extended over the 997.1. Likewise, stability control, which brakes each individual wheel thanks to information from sensors, is helpful in the later variant, and does not take away from the

performance and excitement. If anything, it gives you the confidence to push its limits harder.

The Gen1 ticks all the boxes in terms of thrills: it can be scary, and can taunt and excite you. Not having the revised technological changes of the Gen2 isn't necessarily a bad thing either, making it different and challenging in a very special way. In fact, depending on your driving habits and preferences, it is hard to criticise what, in effect, are two perfect cars in their own right. The reality, though, is that Porsche brought out a second generation of the 997 GT3 RS to improve on the previous model. They made the 997.2 lighter, faster, and more aerodynamic. It gives you the thrills, excitement and adrenaline rush of the Gen1, while communicating better. Make no mistake, the 997.1 is a great car, but the 997.2 is even better. **911**

