

On Days Like These

As deliveries of the 991 GT3 begin, we grab the keys to a 997.2 GT3 and GT3 RS to begin to answer the seemingly impossible question: Which is the better 911?

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Two days from now I'll close the door on 911 GB and RO10 HBV for the very last time. I've covered thousands of miles in these two cars since they arrived on the Porsche GB press fleet and I don't mind admitting that waving them goodbye will be depressing. Perhaps more than any other two cars these machines represent everything that I want in a car, perhaps everything that any genuine enthusiast would want in a car. One day I *must* own a 997 GT3 or GT3 RS.

Forty-eight hours isn't very long but we're determined to create another set of memories that will last a lifetime. We're heading to our favourite stomping grounds in Wales for a day of driving on the quietest, most challenging roads that we know and then we've got a whole day booked on the riotous Anglesey race circuit. We'll seek to identify and describe the differences between the Gen 2 GT3 and GT3 RS on the road and discover if the more extreme machine provides a tangible increase in control and decrease in lap time at Anglesey. But most of all we'll just enjoy ourselves. You'll have to wait until next month to see if and why the RS is the faster track machine. This is the story of 24 hours on knarly roads and thankfully the sun is almost shining so we can really push hard. Once more into the breach dear friends...

I know this road as well as any in the world and I guess the same could be said about this 997 GT3. It always feels like an old friend and yet it's always got surprises in store. I've spent quite a bit of time in 991s recently, from Carrera to Carrera 4, new GT3 and Turbo and Turbo S, and in the context of the latest 911 the GT3 is almost shocking. The upright windscreen that seems so close, the noise of Cup+ tyres roaring through the structure, the sheer weight and awkwardness of the six-speed manual gearbox and the way the wheels can skip over nasty bumps. In some ways it feels 20 years older than the 991 but within maybe half a mile you just know you're in something with timeless brilliance. Somehow I hadn't expected the GT3 to feel so intense, but as newer cars come along that are more refined and easier to extract the best from, so the GT3's character becomes ever more infectious and ever more special.

It's the drivetrain and the steering that really dominate the experience when you're acquainting or even reacquainting yourself



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with the GT3. The Mezger engine is much-celebrated but sometimes you wonder if it can really be *that* good. It is. It chunters at idle and rattles as you pull away but very quickly it finds its real voice, a strange mix of harsh, mechanical thrash and a tight, precise howl that emerges from the cacophony as the revs build and build. It's the sound of motorsport and the way the engine responds to the throttle and the way it chases the redline serves to underline its enviable heritage and its class.

The gearbox can feel stiff and reluctant at lower speeds and remains a physical device even when you're really moving along, but if you're positive and accurate it responds in kind. You might wait a day or two to nail the perfect second-to-third shift across the gate, but third-to-fourth from rev limiter back into the really angry part of the rev range is there for the taking every time and it feels spectacular. The new GT3's PDK 'box is fantastic but it simply isn't as engaging no matter the 150-millisecond shifts or the clutch-kick function or whatever else the press blurb might mention. This is real and you're bound up in it – reading the road ahead with more intent, judging when to execute the gearshift at the perfect moment and sometimes making horribly clumsy mistakes. It's all part of the process and you're right at the centre of every second of it.

So the drivetrain's fury doesn't diminish with time. It's nothing short of scintillating and every time you crack the throttle at 4000rpm or more it blows your mind – especially if you let it wind out to the limiter. But there is so much more to the GT3, and despite the almost brutal turn-in capabilities, the massive power of the

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26mm, the rear by 44mm. These are small numbers – mere detail changes. However, the 20hp boost in combination with 13 per cent shorter gearing makes for quite a remarkable response. In fact, the first time you pin the throttle it sounds as though the clutch is slipping because the revs build so fast. It's extraordinary.

So, what is undoubtedly one of the great road car engines ever is suddenly even better. The 'box is familiar but even weightier – perhaps a result of this car's tortuous life – and the noise is just everywhere, so you feel like you're wearing the engine. Few cars bombard your senses so completely. If you jumped from a long day in the standard GT3 into the RS and went for a ten-minute

thrash you'd undoubtedly decide that lighter, wider and faster can only mean more exciting and plain better. Yet as time wears on the added grip and response of the RS and the wider bodyshell can make it a trickier car to enjoy on real roads. Even wide, empty ones in a remote corner of Wales.

We'll get to why that might be in a moment. For now let's just immerse ourselves in that first ten minutes and the differences that you feel. Strangely the ride seems no harder and the RS retains the short-travel but beautifully damped feel that means for the most part it flows but can occasionally leap a few inches off line over really craggy sections. There's tangibly more control –





the front and rear of the car feel locked together, so much so that the centre of gravity feels lower. You can really fling the RS at an apex safe in the knowledge that the rear will follow instantly and then dig for traction. You feel the broader footprint then, but it doesn't seem to detract from how involved you are in the process of unlocking the car's potential. The shifts in balance might be smaller but they are even more precise and you just tune right into what the chassis is doing and how you can manipulate it any way you like.

On a flat-out blast along our test route the RS is irresistible. The engine sounds so angry but the tyres deal with the power superbly, the wide track means no understeer to speak of and because body control is even better the rear of the car seems to slide with more accuracy. Louder, faster and even more finely balanced at the limit, the RS eclipses the GT3 for thrills pretty comprehensively.

Of course you can't know every road as well as I know this one and the potential of these cars is such that often you must be content with enjoying them at considerably below the limit. Which is where the GT3 starts to shine again. I love the sense of *is-this-really-legal?* lunacy of the RS but there's no question that on narrower, hedge-lined roads the slimmer-hipped GT3 feels a little

more agile and gets up on its toes earlier. Essentially the driver feels more crucial to the way the GT3 is skimming along the road and gets more glimpses of its incredible adjustability. And of course without an RS for company you'd never miss the extra response of the engine because in isolation it's hard to believe it can be improved upon...

After a tank-and-a-half of fuel and countless blasts along some of the best roads in Britain and then a mad cross-country dash to our Premier Inn (it's not all glamour, y'know), our final fling is nearly over. Tomorrow we're on track but today has been fantastic fun and very revealing. These two cars feel quite different – the RS is more stable, angrier and ultimately offers more precision, but the GT3 counters with a feeling of greater agility and adjustability at road speeds and often its narrow build actually makes it faster and more wieldy – but they are both simply incredible drivers' cars. For me the RS is just a shade more exciting and I'm a sucker for the tacked-on wheel arch extensions and huge rear wing, but either car would thrill and satisfy for years to come. We all wondered how Porsche would improve upon the 997 GT3 and RS when they were new... I'm not sure they've managed it yet. Perhaps they never will. They're that good. To be continued... ○