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PANAMERA GTS

YES, A FOUR-DOOR
PERFORMANCE
PORSCHÉ
THAT JUST
ROCKS



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DRIVES

FISKER KARMA

BMW ACTIVEHYBRID 5

MINI COOPER S ROADSTER

crain



NO GTS, NO GLORY

PORSCHE UNLEASHES SPORT-TUNED PANAMERA

BY BARRY WINFIELD



AN OLD JOKE AMONG PRODUCT planners is that at some point, you have to shoot the engineers. Otherwise, they'd continue trying to perfect the car forever. So it's lucky for Porsche engineers that they are sorely needed for the numerous variations and upgrades on every model the company produces.

Case in point: the recently arrived

Panamera GTS. This model is the ninth variation on that theme, based on the existing 4S and incorporating aspects of other models, too. But who's complaining? The car has its own distinct persona, and even at \$110,000, it costs less than a 4S with all of the upgrades needed to make them comparable.

And still they wouldn't be the same.

The GTS has a modified valvetrain with new cams and valve springs that provide an extra 30 hp at higher revs, with a higher redline of 7,100 rpm. That modification required increased air input, and there are two additional air-filter housings controlled by electronically supervised flaps.

More air in means more air out, so wider exhaust pipes are used, along with valved mufflers that allow higher flow and an enhanced engine sound. The owner can readily review the various systems by cycling through the sport and sport-plus buttons on the console, because the GTS has what Porsche calls a "sound symposer" that pipes induction noise into the A-pillar for additional atmosphere, and you only hear it in the performance modes.

All of this imparts a decidedly sporty character to the GTS, which you might find surprising in a two-ton, four-door grand tourer designed for high levels of comfort and refinement. To emphasize the dual personality of the car, Porsche had us drive to the Ascari circuit outside Málaga, Spain, on roads of varying character.

DRIVES

As is true of all great performance cars these days, adaptability and versatility rule the day. With Porsche's active suspension control altering the performance of its air springs, variable damping shocks and anti-roll bars, the GTS unravels canyons as readily as it swallows stretches of freeway. The 4.8-liter V8 revs so willingly that its cutoff point beyond 7,100 rpm arrives surprisingly early if you're not watching the tach.

Using launch control, the car leaps forward with brutal force and lunges to 60 mph in just 4.3 seconds, snapping through the gears with split-second interruptions of power. (Brief individual cylinder shutoff

hastens gearshifts in the GTS's PDK tranny.) Perhaps because of the car's two-ton heft and vaultlike structural stiffness, sprints don't feel dramatically quick.

Until you reach the brake markers, that is. Then you thank the stars for the car's big rotors and giant monoblock calipers. Also, if you've checked the carbon-ceramic-brakes

2013 Porsche Panamera GTS

ON SALE: Spring

BASE PRICE:

\$110,875

DRIVETRAIN: 430-

hp, 384-lb-ft, 4.8-

liter V8; AWD,

seven-speed dual-

clutch automatic

CURB WEIGHT:

4,300 lb 0-60 MPH:

4.3 sec (mfr) FUEL

ECONOMY (EPA): 22

mpg (mfr)

option box—a mere \$8,840 addition—you have the assurance of fade-free braking performance.

A ride along with Porsche's test driver Gunther Ofenmacher quickly underscored how capable the GTS is as a track car. Yet a trip back to the hotel in the rear seat also



emphasized to this six-foot-five-inch passenger how roomy and comfy the back seats are, provided you make a minor incursion into front-seat space.

All of this versatility and the renowned Porsche image for about \$110,000 sounds like a reasonable deal for the 1-percenters. The rest of us can just kvetch about the car's peculiar looks. It'll make us feel better. 🍌



W LONG-TERMER

TIRED BUT TRUE

BMW 550I XDRIVE IS A FAVORITE, DESPITE RUBBER TROUBLE

BY BOB GRITZINGER

WE'D LOVE TO GIVE NOTHING but praise to BMW's 550i xDrive sedan after a year in our long-term test fleet. But we'd be lying.

A few niggling details aside, the car is nothing short of spectacular. But keeping the car rolling on properly inflated rubber proved a tiresome experience. We went through not one, not two, but seven replacement tires during the year, at a cost of about \$500 per. You do the ciphering.

The problem was so pronounced that it put the car off-limits for most long-distance travel, on the off chance that we might pop a tire in some hinterland where a replacement couldn't be located. When the snow tires were mounted, we had no spare on the run-flat-equipped car. (By an accident of mismatched tires, we discovered that the car's traction- and stability-control systems are so sensitive to tire differences that the computer will significantly reduce engine power, misinterpreting tire variances as wheel slippage.)

It's hard to measure how much time

was lost to tire problems during the year. Why so many? It can't be attributed solely to Michigan potholes—one flat occurred in Vermont, and several tires failed without any report of hitting severe bumps. We blame the taut suspension and standard-issue run-flat tires.

Get past the tires, however, and everything is golden. It all starts under the hood, where the impeccably mannered twin-turbo 4.4-liter V8 sends gobs of power to all four wheels via an eight-speed automatic transmission. There's plenty of power, for sure—400 hp and 450 lb-ft of torque—but it never, ever feels ragged or raw in operation. While some might sneer at the all-wheel-drive option, we can't think of a better way to enjoy winter than from the toasty-warm seat of this \$75,000 snow machine. The AWD doesn't hurt on rain-slicked roads either.

We learned early on to punch up the sport setting to get the most out of the car's powertrain and chassis while still having all of the electronic nannies in place to help keep us out of trouble. Driven hard in that mode, the car responds like a sports car, feeling much