

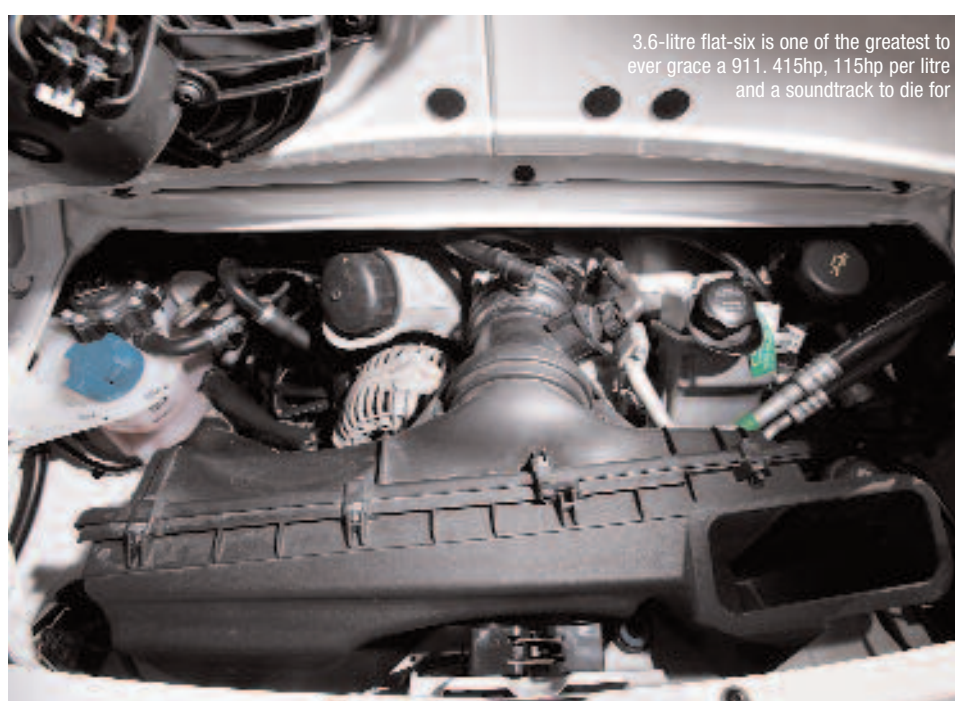
997 GT3 BUYING GUIDE

With Walter Rohrl behind the wheel it'll lap the Nordschleife in 7 minutes 42 seconds. Introducing the Porsche 997 GT3.

Words: Richard Middleton Photography: Malcolm Griffiths



The nerve centre of one of the most accomplished 911s ever built. Comfort or Clubsport interior available; the latter gives you bucket seats, half-cage and preparation for a battery master switch, fire extinguisher and harness



3.6-litre flat-six is one of the greatest to ever grace a 911. 415hp, 115hp per litre and a soundtrack to die for

As production of the 997 GT3 drew to a close around this time last year, we paid homage to the icon by taking it to the roads of south Wales for a farewell drive. While the last few fortunate owners were taking delivery of their cars, one newly arrived member of *GT Purely Porsche's* staff was given the chance to get behind the wheel of one of the greatest drivers' cars of all time. It left me itching, yearning and seriously contemplating a Robert De Niro-style *Heat* heist in a desperate attempt to get my hands on one.

All eyes at the moment are on the latest GT3 that was recently unveiled at Geneva's Salon, but if you can't quite muster the new model's £81,914 price tag then its predecessor shouldn't be overlooked. Thus, if you're one of the few hedge fund managers who haven't fled the country pending Inland Revenue investigations or you've got £65,000 to spare, which, let's face it, won't be earning you much sat in the bank, then let our buying guide whet your appetite for what is one of the greatest 911s ever built.

I'll be frank; the first time I drove a 911 I

didn't really get it. It was a 996 and for the life of me I couldn't really work out where its reputation as one of the world's best sports cars had come from. Was it a myth? I'm certainly no Walter Rohrl, far from it in fact, but I knew I could drive and the 911's tendency to punish excessive entry speeds courtesy of its rear-engined layout seemed a bit unnerving. However, after more and more time spent at the helm of Porsche's rear-engined icon, I began to learn and appreciate the slow in, fast out doctrine and lo and behold its charm began to rub off on me. One bright sunny day in Wales piloting a press-loaned 997 GT3 set the world to rights. Looking out over those grey dials with Carrera GT-inspired yellow etchings, rev counter indicating the motor's potential to sing all the way round to a stratospheric 9000rpm, staring at an undulating stretch of Welsh ribbon; the heather, moss and fluffy white clouds practically unspoilt except for the shrieking wail of a Porsche flat-six.

Conceived and named after the sporting category of the time, the GT3 was the ultimate

road-going 911. It may very well follow the same fundamentals that have been the 911's genetic building blocks for over forty years – engine slung out over the rear wheels, rear-wheel drive and the familiar 911 shape; however, the GT3 provides an experience quite unlike any run-of-the-mill 911. If it were a cocktail it'd be a precisely mixed Martini, albeit with a lemon twist. Exact, compelling and with that added spice.

Taking the Carrera 4's body structure (necessary to accommodate the GT3's larger fuel tank), the homologation special borrows panelling from the more slender 911 derivative, the Carrera 2, but with its six degree adjustable rear wing and squat appearance it stands apart from the usual crop of Stuttgart metal. Take the engine for example. Everything aside from the crankcase was new. A six-cylinder, normally aspirated flat-six engine that's as acoustically sublime as the GT3 is rapid and something that every petrolhead should experience. The upshot of the thoroughly reworked, Le Mans-winning GT1-sourced engine is a motor that redlines at 8400rpm and produces its peak power of 415hp



at 7400rpm. It doesn't muster the Turbo's thump-in-the-kidneys shove through the mid-range but once you take it over 4500rpm and delve into the higher increments of the rev range it's far, far more satisfying. The stats speak for themselves: 115.3hp per litre, 193mph and 0-60 despatched in 4.3 seconds accompanied by a banshee scream from the twin-exit tailpipes.

To enable the engine to spin at these dizzying revolutions, Porsche's engineers needed to concentrate on making the internals as light as possible. Take the pistons for example, the

CHECKPOINTS

ENGINE, GEARBOX & CLUTCH:

When engaging the clutch you should look out for a high biting point. If the car you're driving has one, it's probably a sign of a worn clutch. The GT3's biting point isn't set high and it's not adjustable, so any sign of this or a slipping clutch will mean a replacement is nigh. The dry-sumped flat-six is a pretty bulletproof engine; however, ignition coil packs can fail at a replacement cost of around £30 each. Oil leaks from the cam chain housing are also known.

Make sure the car has been serviced at the correct intervals and treated to the best oil.

BRAKES, TYRES & SUSPENSION:

When the discs get hot, generally from track use, cracks start to appear from the cross-drillings. Porsche says that once these cracks are longer than 5mm the discs should be changed. Jonas from Porsche specialist JZ Machtech says that the brakes, both discs and pads, particularly with the optional ceramics, tend to wear out quite quickly. A quality set of aftermarket items, such as kits produced by

Alcon, are very effective and offer good longevity.

"On early cars we've seen the front screws that hold the bells to the discs coming loose in some cases. Porsche failed to Loctite the screws, which can result in them coming loose, and seeing as these hold the discs to the car it can be quite a serious issue. Porsche addressed this problem with the later cars but it's worth considering it when you're looking at a car. We also see quite a few GT3s come in with noisy front shocks (usually a rattling noise), which can develop into a knocking sound. Again Porsche has offered to replace these defects under warranty.*

"Some people choose to fit the larger anti-roll bar from the 911 GT2. This can help to eliminate some of the understeer that cars naturally have but can make it a more tricky car to handle on the limit."

Specialist Parr Motorsport echos the front suspension issues, caused by the coil springs cutting into the top mounts, a problem that Porsche remedied for the later cars. The specialist also commented that the rear brakes often wear out quickly, particularly with enthusiastic track driving, as the traction control system brakes the rear wheels when accelerating heavily out of a corner. Running

with traction control disabled is an obvious remedy and something that many track drivers will do anyway.

Mick from Paragon Porsche advises that checking for uneven signs of tyre wear is definitely worth doing. "A severe track setup will wear tyres unevenly but the car will still drive okay. Uneven tyre wear and a car that doesn't drive well is what to look for. In my opinion, too radical a setup is not always best. A standard setup with a few minor tweaks and Toyo 888, Pilot Sport Cups or Pirelli Corsa tyres is much better. Having a full geometry check is definitely worthwhile, too."

BODY & INTERIOR

Getting the car up on a ramp to look for signs of damage underneath is always a good idea. Check for gravel present in places where it shouldn't be, for example at the top of the undertrays or sitting on top of suspension arms, etc, could be a sign that the car has been off and a closer inspection would be wise. Other than checking that all the electrics work, interiors should be problem-free.

WE FOUND:

2006 997 GT3 Clubsport Pack, 6500 miles, £66,950 miles (trade).



forged items have been redesigned with a 1mm narrower shape, saving 30g, the titanium connecting rods lengthened and trimmed, and the main bearing crank made lighter by some 600g. Polished cylinder head ports, Variocam variable valve timing and a 12.0:1 compression also feature, as does a new sports exhaust (some 8.5kg lighter than its predecessor) and a Sport button that, when engaged, endows the GT3 with an addictive fruity throb.

The gearbox was also revised; ratios two and six were brought closer together and the throw shortened by 15 per cent. The most instrumental change for the 997 GT3 was the inclusion of Porsche Active Suspension Management (PASM) and the obligatory variable-ratio steering rack. The chassis, as you'd expect, underwent the usual upgrade programme: strengthening, upgrading, firmer springs and dampers and

uprated anti-roll bars. Adjustable spring platforms front and rear, two basic camber settings to suit road or track tyres and five anti-roll bar settings up front and three at the rear. Other than the standard fitment of Porsche Traction Management, it was down to the talents of the wheelman to keep the car on the road. The exclusion of ESP and the fitment of a limited slip-differential were obvious indicators of where Porsche was trying to pitch its motorsport model. As you'd expect, mighty 350mm discs were fitted as standard (ceramics items being a £5800 option), and also shaving another 20kg of the car's kerb weight. A Club Sport specification was also available at no extra cost, which endows the car with deeper bucket seats, a lattice of scaffolding and preparation for a battery master switch, fire extinguisher and harness.

DRIVING ONE TODAY

If excitement is what you're after then this is the 911 for you. In every sense of the word the GT3 is rapid, and despite its appetite for being stretched out to its redline the engine's relatively flat torque curve means that you don't have to stir the six-speed 'box too frequently to accomplish swift progress, despite the long gear ratios. The shift throw is the only part of the experience we'd criticise, feeling a little over-engineered and making it possible to fluff changes when you're in full-on attack mode. The clutch is relatively weighty in its operation; however, the rest of the controls are tactile and easy to operate. The steering deserves particular praise; so precise, so measured and reacting to every minute input from its driver; informative, direct and compelling in equal measure.

When you're not attempting to chase Walter



2006 911 (997) GT3

ENGINE

Layout: Flat-six, water-cooled

Bore x stroke: 100mm x 76.4mm

Capacity: 3600cc

Compression ratio: 12.0:1

Max power: 415hp @ 7600rpm

Max torque: 298lb ft @ 5500rpm

SUSPENSION

Front: MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll PASM

Rear: Multi-links, coil springs, anti-roll PASM

BRAKES

Front: 50mm discs, six-pot callipers (optional 380mm Porsche Ceramic Composite Brakes, cross-drilled and ventilated discs, six-piston aluminium callipers, ABS)

Rear: 350mm discs, four-pot callipers (optional 380mm Porsche Ceramic Composite Brakes, cross-drilled and ventilated discs, six-piston aluminium callipers, ABS, Traction Control)

TRANSMISSION

Gearbox: Six-speed manual

WHEELS & TYRES

Front: 8Jx19" aluminium alloys with 235/35 ZR19 Michelin Pilot Sport Cups

Rear: 12Jx19" aluminium alloys with 305/30 ZR19 Michelin Pilot Sport Cups

PERFORMANCE

Max Speed: 192mph

0-62mph: 4.3 seconds

ECONOMY: 21.7mpg

RUNNING COSTS

Depreciation: (price when new/after three years)
£79,540 / £65,000 (13,000-mile example)

PARTS

Tyres front/rear: £576/858

Brakes pads front/rear: £616/550

Discs and pads front/rear: £1542/963

SERVICING (PRICES FROM PORSCHE UK)

Minor service (12,000 miles or two years)/major (40,000 or four years) £463/928*

*Major service includes spark plug replacement

*Two-year 20,000 mile warranty offered by Porsche



Rohrl's 7min 42sec lap around the Nürburgring, however, PASM is best left deactivated. With supercar performance comes everyday supercar realities, albeit marginally few compared to its European counterparts. The nose for instance, is set low, meaning the odd buttock clenching moment as you scrape the lower lip plastic spoiler over a speed bump is one of the realities of living with a GT3. Other than that, though, the GT3 is a car that you genuinely use day in, day out. Visibility is relatively good too, just the

lattice of metal in your rear view mirror if you opt for the Clubsport Model. In the supercar world, however, the GT3 is Swiss army-knife practical. Relatively slender proportions (the GT3 is noticeably narrower than its RS counterpart) means that threading it through traffic presents no hassle. Obviously on the track is where the GT3 is in its element, where, in a capable set of hands it excels. Michelin Pilot Sports possess vice-like grip in the dry, in the wet, however, tread carefully ○

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Thanks to Paragon Porsche (01825 830424 or www.paragonporsche.com), JZ Machtech (01923 269788 or JZMachtech.com) and Parr Motorsport (01293 537911 www.parr-uk.co.uk)

