

I don't know how many 997 GT3 RSs have so far been sold in the UK, but it would appear that most of them are here at Snetterton as we roll in with Porsche GB's Viper Green machine. This is an RMA Paddock Club track day – and wall-to-wall Porsches are to be expected, but the sheer number of GT3s in all 996/997 guises is staggering. This is the track-day weapon of choice for those who can afford to run one.

We have just two full days with this latest RS – and we've got to make them count. The schedule reads: the morning at Snetterton to get the on-track low down, followed by a dash north to the roads of Cumbria and an overnight stop; the following day is an opportunity to really put the car through its paces on great driving roads. As a follow-up to the snatched three-hour drive at the press launch late last year, this should satisfy our enquiring minds.

For most GT3 RS buyers, the circuit will be the logical destination, so Snetterton is our logical starting point. The green machine attracts a crowd, and the frequent question appears to be: 'Has it been set up yet?' According to the hardcore GT3 elite, the standard factory set-up is just not up to the job. Fortunately, we have *g11* & *PW* driving guru, Mark Hales, on hand for the track duties – and if anyone can get to terms with the nitty and the gritty of on-the-limit handling, it is he.

At this point, my total GT3 RS seat time is just 30 minutes, so I'm not qualified to make any real comment – yet. Still, it would be rude not to punt it round for a few laps, just to say that I have. The real driving lesson, though, comes from the bearded one. Without wishing to show off, I've sat with everyone from Senna to Moss, and Hales ranks as one of the best drivers I've been with.

As with all good drivers, Hales seems to slow the

action down. Heel and toe down-changes are deliberate and precise – the driver's equivalent of multi-tasking. Apexes are chopped, grip is found where you and I wouldn't know to look, and limits are breached as the GT3 RS starts to reveal its on-track character. And the paddock experts are right: in standard set-up the new Renn Sport hero is none too friendly. Snetterton's most demanding sequence is a ballsy two-part 180-degree off-camber sequence, taken fast in third – even fourth. The Bomb Hole morphs into Coram and the GT3 RS doesn't want to bite at the apex and then, as understeer builds up and when you're not expecting it, it throws its tail. Whoa! We weren't anticipating that.

This is a track-focused machine and you will never discover that sort of trait on the road, but its track manners throw back mixed messages. Even my brief stint suggested a chariot that wasn't entirely on my side. Without wishing to steal our great man's thunder, the fix is just a geometry tweak away – and Porsche's intention to supply a safe-handler out of the box has backfired ever so slightly. The good thing is that we were able to compare set-ups at Snetterton – and to bring you a rather more considered track test than anything you will read elsewhere.

For now, though, thanks to RMA, we're heading 'oop north, lad'. The long slog up the A1 allows us to concentrate on where the GT3 RS fits into the great scheme of things. Essentially, it's a homologation special, built in order to legitimise the *g11* RSR endurance racers rolling out of the Weissach

**An epic car like the GT3 RS is deserving of epic roads and we found them in Cumbria with the A686, a twisting joy ride if ever there was one. It's hard to think of a better tool for the job than this new RS**

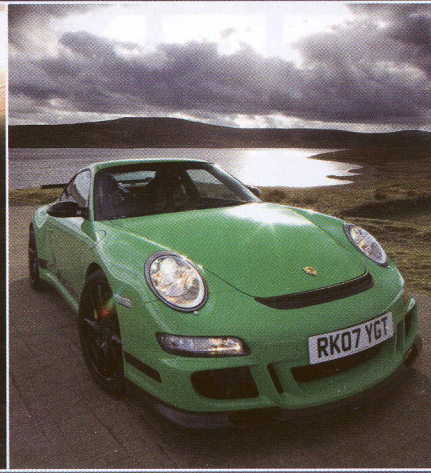


# GREEN PARTY

Just 48-hours with the new GT3 RS is enough to discover that Porsche have blended the ultimate road and track weapon

Words: Steve Bennett Photography: Antony Fraser





**It's worth remembering that the GT3 RS isn't just an exercise in supercar excess. It exists to homologate the racing RSR making it very much a road racer in the traditional sense. It's a role that it plays with some ease**

Motorsport facility. Key differences to the GT3 are a 34mm wider track, modified rear suspension, a stiffer C4S-derived bodyshell and a 20kg weight reduction, thanks to more composite parts and a Perspex rear window. Even so, its 1375kg kerb weight is not that svelte – and the sum total of these changes over and above the standard GT3 account for a rather hefty £14,000 price difference.

Our test car is fitted with the Ceramic

Composite brakes at £5800, special order paintwork at £1522 and Xenon lamps at £705, all of which takes the price to a dizzying £102,000. Still, that's a snip compared to any Ferrari these days – and you just know that when the 430 Stradale arrives it will be at least £130,000. One thing your extra dosh does buy is a much tougher-looking car. It certainly makes the standard GT3 look a little bland.

Powerwise, the latest GT3 RS has the same continually-tweaked 3.6-litre GT1-derived engine that arrived with the Mk1 GT3 in 1999. Power now is up to 415bhp, which Porsche concedes is about the realistic limit for a road-going six-cylinder engine. Rumours abound of a flat-eight

for the next generation 911 to keep up with the power-obsessed competition. Imagine what that could sound like? Oh, and talking of sounds, the GT3 RS still retains the previous GT3's traditional nuts-and-bolts chatter at idle and titanium-edged shriek when beaten hard. A lighter flywheel ensures a snappier response, too.

As with the 997 GT3, we're expecting the 997 GT3 RS to be a little more benign than its 996 predecessor – a car that was beyond what was acceptable as a road car in terms of its potchy and pointy behaviour. The adoption of Porsche's really rather bloody good Active Suspension Management system – and some further suspension tweaking – has tamed what was a





wayward beast that, particularly in Mk2 form, always felt as if it was going to bite back in a snappy sort of way, even if it never quite did. More than any other 911, the Mk2 GT3 and GT3 RS made you very aware of that mass of rearward engine. In truth, it was a tough car to extract the best from – tougher, certainly, than the Mk1 GT3.

The run north is accompanied by a cacophony of road noise, most of it from the Michelin Pilot Cup Sports. Personally, I think I'd have an extra set of wheels, and go for rather quieter tyres for road use and save the Cups for the track. Still, aside from that, it's amazingly comfortable.

Scotch Corner arrives and we peel off down

the A66 for 20 miles or so, jumping off at Barnard Castle. This is where the action starts. Ultimately, we're heading for Alston, which is slap in the middle of the A686, one of the best driving roads in the UK. Frankly, though, we're surrounded by a network of really great roads.

The pace starts to pick up now as the GT3 RS starts to divulge its hidden talents and dynamic secrets, and gradually something major begins to reveal itself. This 911 GT3 – RS or otherwise – doesn't have a back end that feels like it's constantly moving and pitching its weight around. The weight is still there, obviously, but it feels as if its sole purpose has shifted to help turn the car into the corner. It's something that

**Two days at the wheel was something of a hardship for Bennett, but he coped admirably. Interior is spartan as you would expect. Viper Green paintjob is fabulously retro and suits this Porsche's hardcore appeal perfectly**

911 meisters have always exploited – but here with the GT3 RS, it appears to do this for you. The on-the-limit track traits are simply not apparent on the road, which is slightly arse about face, given the RS's purpose in life.

Not that we're complaining, mind. It would appear that the Porsche engineers have dramatically reworked the rear suspension. The track is obviously wider and, together with that come wider split lower suspension arms that

“ This GT3 - RS or otherwise - doesn't have a back end that feels like it's constantly moving and pitching its weight around. Thankfully ”



allow for greater camber adjustment. The rear wheels are also pushed back by 5mm. Factor in the PASM that has been specifically tuned for the GT3 RS's wider track, and you have some significant advances – and a g11 that invokes almost total confidence from its rear end. Now, when has that ever happened before?

Dynamic revelation number two in the GT3 RS's repertoire is the aforementioned PASM. On the choppy black stuff, the wheels work with the surface, moulding and adapting to the changing topography. Bumps and surface scabs that you think should bounce it off the road are shrugged off. Only the rather low front spoiler hampers things by grounding out every now and again. Ultimately, this incredible ride quality and damping control, combined with a propulsive rear and a scalpel-sharp front, endow the GT3 RS with a level of confidence that you can't help feeding off and revelling in.

There's no hanging on tight and hoping for the best here. This is a car that you can blend with

and move with. It's wieldy, too, which always helps on our narrow highways and byways – and stringing together open sequences of road becomes intuitive. The way the back-end gets the power down as the unloaded front patters across the tarmac, and the rate at which it will change direction is mesmerising. And it's fast. Blisteringly, mind-warpingly fast. But, thanks to the above, it's not overwhelmingly fast. Its power can be harnessed and manipulated – even played with – without the potential of a trouser-filling moment.

The A686 runs from near Hexham to Penrith and it's a road that you must try. In mid-April it's clear of tourist traffic – and with only Alston and a few villages along its 40-mile path, plus an amazing lack of cameras – it's a pure unadulterated driver's road. It flatlines as far as Alston before climbing up to Hartside Summit, from where the hills of the Lake District and the Solway Firth hove into view, before dropping away in a series of switchbacks.

The ten-mile climb to the summit is probably the defining stretch – the bit you'd want to practise and hone like a special stage, stopping at the peak for a cuppa and a gander at the view, while your chariot of choice pings and ticks as the metal cools. And the GT3 RS is mighty on this climb. Where even a good poky hot hatch would struggle with the never-ending incline, the Porker just squats down and heads for the sky. The return is just as good – and here the PCCB brakes certainly earn their keep.

The GT3 RS is too good an all-rounder to keep purely as a track-day special – and that's something you would never have said of its predecessor. It's been developed into a more accessible, involving and rewarding drive, although whether it's worth the premium over the standard GT3 is debatable. For some, though, the ultimate is the ultimate. And besides, the engineering solutions meted out on the famously wayward rear elevate the GT3 RS above all its predecessors. **P**



## THANKS TO

RMA for valuable track time and to Steve and Jonas at JZ Machtech for the lowdown on GT3 set up advice. Contact: [www.rma-ltd.com](http://www.rma-ltd.com), [www.jzmachtech.com](http://www.jzmachtech.com)



# On track

Mark Hales discovers that the new GT3 RS is a few tweaks short of on-track greatness

I drove the latest GT3 at its launch in Venice last year where it was notable mainly for the vastly improved ride comfort on less than perfect Italian roads, but also for its resolute unwillingness to be provoked on the tight and twisting Adria racetrack. As several of those seeking smokily lurid shots for the lens discovered, it would rather push its nose wide than sling its tail. That could have had something to do with a circuit which was remarkable only for the number of 180 degree hairpins crammed into an industrial estate and little else, but the engineers said it was down to deliberate set up. They had opted for minimal amounts of negative camber to keep it comfortable for the road (half a degree or less at the front), but they said it would still be fine for the track and lots of kilometres round the Nürburgring with Walter Röhrl at the wheel was their proof. Besides, the suspension was infinitely adjustable and if you wanted something different, then that was up to you and your spanners, but this was how the car should be when it left the factory.

Presumably the RS version came with much the same, so an opportunity to whang it round Snetterton (notable for its lack of 180 degree hairpins) was welcome, and immediately familiar was the unbelievably wide rev range, pulling all the way round the dial from four and a bit to eight and a bit, accompanied by that magical wail from the twin exhausts. Second, third and fourth gears were all you needed for Snetterton and I caught a glimpse of 135mph before it was time to tread the Ceramic brakes ready for the Esses. So far so wonderful. Less so was the behaviour of the chassis.

How you get a Carrera slowed and turned into tighter corners is what breeds g11 experts and I'd be the first to admit it can take a few laps to remind yourself how it's done but the faster corners where the car was already settled and you are already on the gas proved distinctly uncomfortable. The whole car had a strange tip-toe feel to it despite an armful of understeer and at least once through Riches and two or three times at Coram, the car would do that corkscrew thing where it dips and lurches its tail to the left then straightens itself out almost before you can react - almost as if you're wearing slicks and hit a puddle.

Meanwhile the front tyres were chirruping and whimpering all the way round. Then when you tried gently to load the car up on the brakes to point it into the slower corners, it did much the same thing only too far away from the turn to be of any use. A former Touring Car driver who had just stepped from another RS described it as "not feeling remotely connected to the car" which sums it up perfectly. It also suggests it wasn't just this particular example.

All of which would have been something of an anti-climax had it not been for an enthusiastic owner in the shape of Simon Langdale. He mentioned that his gleaming bible-black 2,000 mile-old version had felt much the same until he had the set up altered by long-time Porsche exponents JZMachtech of Kings Langley. I was welcome to try it and see for myself, and no, he didn't want to come along for the ride... Amazing, but generous.

The difference on track proved to be subtle but significant. It was still possible to reach the corkscrew-and-lurch point but it wasn't inevitable

and when it occurred, it was much later in the corner. The best thing though was the absence of the tip-toe sensation which immediately imparted a greater feeling of confidence and connected you to the car - to borrow the phrase again. More succinctly, that connection came from a feeling of extra stability and more grip - not a huge amount and not just at the front - but at both ends. The tyres were quieter too.

On the slight downside, the steel brakes didn't have quite the bite offered by the press car's ceramics and they began to feel a tiny bit soft at the end of the main straight after a few laps. A cool-off tour brings them back exactly as they were though and you probably wouldn't have thought anything of it had you not experienced the others. Having thanked Simon for his largess, I asked Machtech's Steve McHale how they set the car.

Most interesting to me was the fact that he doesn't immediately recommend you throw away all the dampers, springs, brakes, and rollbars like some, instead offering some simple changes to camber (there's an obvious amount of extra negative at the front, and apparently some more at the rear), plus attention to wheel toe, corner weights and ride height. Which begs the obvious question, why don't Porsche set it this way in the first place. The most likely reason is that the different setup is likely to wear out the inside edge of the tyre more quickly.

Someone else suggested that it's also a question of how seriously you want to take your track days and how hard you want to drive but I'm not sure I agree with that. Even if you don't deliberately drive towards the outer edges of the envelope, the original set up is more likely to punish a simple mistake and anyway, I can't see the point of spending the money on extra capability if you don't at least try and use it. Langdale for one agrees with that assessment and seemed perfectly resigned to the fact that extra tyre wear is an inevitable consequence of going to a track and using the abilities of his car. He is even considering a set of slicks because they are no more expensive than the road tyres and there is a strip and refit service available at the RMA days he likes to attend. Makes perfect sense to me. Might even shift the lurch and corkscrew to a place where you can't find it... 12

