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The beast with two turbos is back – and we've driven it first!

997 GT2



It wasn't a good night's sleep, despite the consumption of a couple of beers with snapper Fraser in the hotel bar. Was it the fact that I was in a strange bed, disturbed by the light pollution of downtown Stuttgart – or was it because, at nine of our earth hours, we would be strapped into the twin-turbo terror that is the new 997 GT2? Fleeting images of rear tyres wreathed in smoke, as the hard men of

before we'd even driven it.

OK, I exaggerate, but only a bit. I mean, is there a 911 that has developed such a fearsome reputation in the modern era? Not even the 993 GT2 can claim to have frightened witless so many hapless souls as the 996 GT2. It's an old school supercar, stripped of the electronica that tame the current generation. The 996 GT2 started as a homologation project and kept on

poked up the arse with a sharp stick. Gangsta rappers sing of respect – and the 996 GT2 was the Gangsta 911 bar none.

And now it's back. Can you believe it? Of course, we've been expecting it: blurred images from the Nürburgring with Herr Röhl at the wheel. But, in a range that tops out with the GT3, GT3 RS and the Turbo, where the chuff does something like the GT2 fit in, anyway? Well,

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motoring journalism inflicted their sideways punishment on the previous 996 GT2 scudded across my consciousness. Evil handling traits and required skill levels beyond your average 'hand' short-circuited around my cranium. The beast with two turbos was delivering its revenge

going, even when rule changes made it a white elephant. Race cars don't need PSM, PASM or anything else ending with SM, although S&M might have been appropriate. As such, it was always going to react to any sort of half-arsed concept of the law of physics, like a grizzly bear

I guess it's Porsche's Spinal Tap moment. Yes, the others go to 10 – but this goes to, like, 11, which is one more. Or perhaps, more aptly, the others go to 192mph (yes, all three of them have the same top speed), while the GT2 will go 204mph, which is, like, 12 more. And that, in itself, is significant. It's the first road-going 911 to crack 200mph. Christ, it's no wonder I can't sleep as images of the Tap's Nigel Tufnell and Walter Röhl hurtling round the 'Ring trouble my fevered mind. Take it to 11, Walter!

Meanwhile, back in the real world, as ever it's all about numbers. Lots and lots of numbers. Big numbers for big power are good, while smaller numbers for weight loss are equally good. In fact, given that the 997 GT2 is both lighter and faster than the previous psycho sled, then it's all good. And those numbers? Well, if you haven't already downloaded them into that place that men reserve purely for bhp and performance figures, then they are thus: maximum power has been boosted to 523bhp at 6500rpm, while torque is wide and plentiful, scoring 501lbs/ft at 2200-4400rpm. Top speed we've mentioned, but 0-60mph is just 3.7 secs. More numbers? Power-to-weight is more than 20 per cent up on the 911 Turbo and GT3, at 369bhp per tonne. And, to put all this into perspective, the 997 GT2



Above: Interior is familiar 911 territory – although, like the GT3, the GT2 gets an alcantara-trimmed wheel and gearlever. Carbon-backed buckets are a racy addition. Left: It's wet and I'm in a GT2. Mummy!



You're unlikely to see the rump of one of these for very long before it blasts off into the distance, so have a good look now! Vents and undertray distinguish it from the Turbo

Not much to see - but pipework and carbon-fibre air box, plus GT2 badging, hint at the 523bhp mayhem that lurks in the engine bay



will nip up to 60mph quicker than a Carrera GT – and is just 1mph short of the CGT's 205mph top speed. Oh, and here's the final big number: list price for the 997 GT2 is £131,070. This is a full-on supercar.

Exploring the weight reduction a little further, Porsche has managed to drop 145kg from the weight of the standard Turbo. Offloading the drive to the front wheels and the electro-magnetic centre diff help, as does a titanium rear exhaust box and the standard fitment of Porsche's Ceramic Composite brakes. The rear subframe is made from aluminium, as opposed to steel – and inside the rear seats have gone and the fronts are full-on carbon buckets.

What else do we need to know? Well, that 50bhp hop over the standard 911 Turbo engine is achieved from the cylinder-charging efforts of two larger VTG turbos, which snort air through the ram-charge air intakes integral with the rear

though, is that the GT2 has just become even more efficient at turning the force-fed air/fuel mixture into horsepower, which is perhaps why

the previous model apparently shunted, then I guess Porsche thought it prudent to go some way to save those challenged in the driver hero

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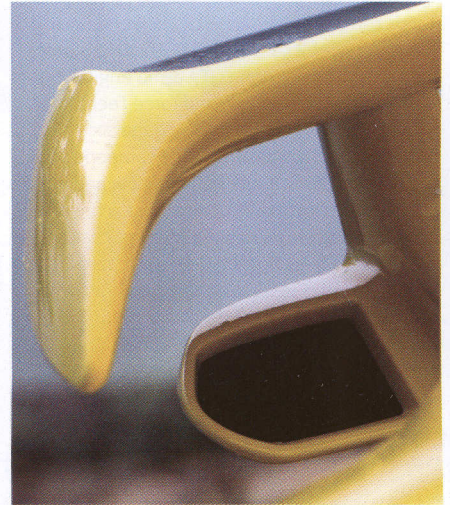
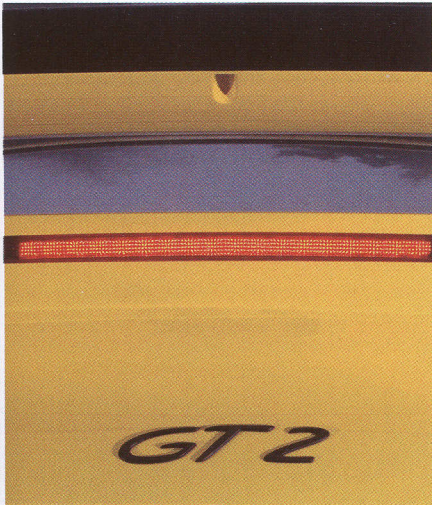
wing, plus a whole new inlet plenum using an expansion-type manifold which cools and modulates the air pressure for a more consistent fuel/air temperature across the rev range. Given that heat is the enemy and turbos thrive on oxygen, then anything that makes this process more efficient is to be grabbed. Bottom line,

Porsche has now fitted PSM (Porsche Stability Management) and PASM (Porsche Active Suspension Management) to the GT2.

The 996 GT2 wore its lack of nannying gizmology like a badge of honour and, of course, we all went along with it – even though secretly we all wanted our mummies. With so many of

department from themselves. I'll happily put myself in that camp, and so the PSM button will be remaining on. However, if you are determined to fly solo, then the PSM can be deactivated in two stages. The first disables the lateral dynamic control function, while traction control remains on – and the second switches





everything off, although, surprisingly, it doesn't post a digital enquiry via the on-board computer as to the size of your gonads.

Of course, all of the above is fed to the fat-boy rear tyres via the six-speed gearbox, which is racer-derived. As such, the gears are placed onto the shafts, rather than pressed, which means that different ratios can be slotted in for different tracks. And, unlike the Turbo gearbox, which receives cooling air via a NACA duct in the flat underfloor, the GT2's gearbox fluid is cooled by a heat exchanger integrated in the coolant circuit. The transmission certainly needs to be tough because, to ensure 'a perfect start at all times', there is Launch Assistant. This is the ultimate standing-start device. Dip the clutch,

select first and hold the throttle flat. The ECU holds the throttle butterflies open and keeps the two turbos spinning at a 0.9bar optimum, while the revs are pegged at 5000rpm. Drop the clutch and that's how you hit 0-60mph in 3.7 secs. Apparently.

Drive day. Drowsy, and still haunted by the demons of my overactive imagination, breakfast is lightweight - in keeping with what's ahead. Still, it can be anything you want it to be in Germany. I thought I'd seen most things - but prawns for breakfast?

We're picking up our car from the factory, which is a treat in itself. We're also going to be the first UK press to get behind the wheel, which is thanks to Porsche GB for pulling out all the stops. We clear security and there, for the first time, our retinas are buzzed by the screaming Speed Yellow of the beast with two turbos. It's a g11 alright, but not as we know it. The bodywork seems to be pulled tighter than ever over the front and rear arches, and the big boots really fill those out and emphasise the beefed-up rear track. The trademark rear wing, with its down-turned edges, offsets the deeper front spoiler and gaping intakes.

There are a few forms to be signed before we're left to our own devices for a scant few hours. Here we go, then... Inside, it's on the comfortable side of stripped-out. The alcantara-trimmed buckets feel and look the part, and the suede-trimmed chunky-rimmed wheel and gearshift add a certain tactile something to the experience. Otherwise, it's all familiar g11 territory.

As we wait for the light to turn green at the factory entrance, we're held in convoy with a red GT2, just as a group of American Porsche enthusiasts on a factory tour arrive. Jaws drop and cameras flash, and the word 'awesome' is perhaps slightly overused and someone whoops. Needless to say, we don't need much encouragement to give the beast a prod as we peel out on to the main drag.

We haven't got long - and we've got to get the pictures, too. Stuttgart and its environs are busy, but we've got a plan. But, first up, what about immediate impressions? The ones that you form straight off from a wiggle of the wheel and a run through the gears, plus a quick whiz round a roundabout? Compared to, say, a GT3, the GT2 immediately feels heavier and blunter,

Specific lightweight GT2 wheels cover the standard PCCB brakes and big six-pot calipers. Aero-mounted intakes give a ram-air effect into the plenum

which it is by over 100kg. However, compared to the Turbo, it's a lightweight - although, like the Turbo, it bobs and twists at the rear as it does its g11 thing. Throttle response is perhaps a shade slower as the bigger turbos spin up but, compared to turbo cars of yesteryear, the reaction time between throttle input and power output is digital rather than sundial. Quick bursts of third-gear thrust, as gaps appear, bring a fleeting glimpse of what 523bhp feels like - and sounds like. Unlike the slightly flat-sounding standard Turbo, the GT2 rips at the air, whooshing and clattering with a brittle resonance. And it goes without saying that the trademark Porsche linearity of throttle, clutch and gearshift are all present and correct!

We're heading to the hills above Baden Baden, about an hour from Stuttgart. We know there are good locations - and we haven't got time to fanny around finding anywhere else. Off the Autobahn and onto some quieter secondary roads. Time to explore and build up the pace. After all, this isn't the sort of car that you jump into and drive hard straightaway. Not like, say, a Cayman.

PORSCHE 911 GT2

LAYOUT:	Rear-engined, two-wheel drive
ENGINE:	3.6-litre flat-six, twin-turbo with variable-vane turbo technology
SUSPENSION:	MacPherson strut/coil springs, PASM (front); multi-link, coil springs, PASM (rear)
WHEELS/TYRES	235/35 ZR19 (front); 325/30 ZR19 (rear) Michelin Pilot Sport Cups
TRANSMISSION:	Six-speed manual, limited-slip diff, PCM
PEAK POWER:	523bhp at 6500rpm
PEAK TORQUE:	501lbs/ft at 2200-4400rpm
0-60MPH:	3.7secs
TOP SPEED:	204mph

Glad they gave us a yellow one! Cloud and drizzle descend to create a moody backdrop. Front end features gaping intake for oxygen-hungry rads and intercoolers

For sheer pace and bloated power delivery, you can't beat a turbo engine. The GT2's may not have the purity of a GT3 atmo engine, but when the turbos spin up and force-feed the volatile fuel and air mixture into the six cylinders, it really does feel like someone's lit the afterburners. It hits hard and low and builds, delivering its 501lbs/ft peak across a fulsome 2000-plus rpm from 2200-4400rpm. That sort of power band feels huge. Indeed, compare it to the GT3 - which serves a peaky 298lbs/ft at 5500rpm - and you get an idea of just how chuffing fast the GT2 feels. It's brutal, thuggish and mind-warpingly addictive.

There's never going to be anything subtle

could we get the system to kick in.

Like the suspension on the GT3 and GT3RS, the GT2's is fully adjustable - and it's apparent that Porsche has gone for the standard factory default setting, which is to dial-in understeer for safety. Again, on the road you'll only feel it by going into a corner too fast - and from the nose, which doesn't want to turn in quite as enthusiastically as you might hope. On the 996 GT2, that understeer would turn into snappy, bad attitude oversteer if pushed but, with the PCM engaged, that can't happen. Turn it off, though, and you can probably oversteer until there's nothing left of the rear tyres. We suspect that, as with the GT3, the GT2 will

doubt weight distribution.

Whatever, this is not the GT2's thing. It's still the wild one, constantly moving on its stiffer suspension as the front wheels follow the cambers of the road and the rear sways and bobs. It's not overwhelming, but it certainly grabs your attention although, as with most 911s in this mode, the worst thing you can do is to hang on grimly to the wheel. Keep it pointing in the right direction and it will sort itself out.

Yes, the GT2 is certainly ruled from the rear. It doesn't give the immediate confidence that the GT3 RS seems to come with as standard. The GT2 doesn't feel like it's on your side. Maybe Porsche has decided that 10 was safe and going

“ The GT2 is ruled from the rear. It doesn't give you the immediate confidence that the GT3 RS seems to come with as standard ”

about 523bhp or the effects that it's going to have on the chassis. To really get to grips with the GT2, we need to get it on a track - and that's not going to happen until cars arrive in the UK. So I hope that you'll forgive us that on-the-limit handling was off the agenda. And, if you read anywhere else of on-road heroics, then I'm sorry but I don't believe it. However, we went as fast as we dared. Porsche says that the GT2's chassis is based on that of the GT3's, but with a specifically tuned PASM set-up that is firmer. The PSM is also set at a rather higher 'intervention threshold'. That much is certainly true, because only by being absolutely brutal with the throttle coming out of a slow bend

respond well to a few suspension tweaks and return the front end that most drivers like.

Interestingly, the GT2 has a shorter wheelbase than either the GT3 and the GT3 RS, the latter being the most stable 911 that we've ever driven, almost devoid of the rear-end wiggle that the GT3 - and certainly the GT2 - likes to do. I guess that we were hoping more than anything that the GT2 would be like a turbo version of the GT3 RS, a car which is astonishingly good on all types of roads, even our gnarly, pock-marked byways, thanks to its incredibly well set up PASM and its front end, which can be pointed and held into a corner like no other 911. Part of this is down to the slightly longer wheelbase - and no

to 11 should have that nervous edge. It's certainly psychotically, thrash-metal fast but, faced with such a full-time assault, that could become wearing.

But the jury is out. This is an initial sketch as to the GT2's ultimate abilities. We need to get ourselves into a UK car and spend a few days exploring it on both the road and the track before we can deliver anything like a definitive verdict. And, as if to signal the end of play, as we get to our photo location in the hills over Baden Baden, the clouds plummet and a damp shroud soaks the roads. Definitely time to save the heroics for another day. However, one thing is certain - the beast is back. **12**



Give it a firm kick and watch it disappear. Performance figures are dramatic. Zero to sixty is 3.7 secs. Top speed is 204mph, which makes it the fastest production 911 yet