

CLASSIC DRIVER

Porsche's new 911 Carrera 4S launched



Unveiled at the Frankfurt Show in September, Porsche's new Carrera 4S will go on sale in the UK early in 2002, priced at £62,260.

Essentially, this latest addition to the current 911 range is powered by the normally-aspirated 'Boxer' engine, uprated to 320bhp; it has permanent four-wheel drive plus the bigger wheels, beefier brakes and wider-bodied look of the Turbo. Unlike the Turbo, it has no need of intercooler air intakes. This, and its own relatively discreet spoilers front and rear, endow the Carrera 4S with an exceptionally clean but muscular appearance.

In line with Porsche tradition, the increase in power from 285bhp to 320bhp comes with the added advantage of a seven per cent improvement in fuel consumption. On the road the four-wheel drive model is supremely surefooted. The perfected viscous couplings in the 4wd system mean that the excessive understeer and inadequate front-wheel traction in extremely slippery conditions displayed by successive, earlier all-wheel drive 911s is entirely absent. Most of the time, no more than five per cent of the drive goes to the front but, turn it fast into a slippery hairpin, boot it, and this new car displays immaculate manners. There's a trace of initial understeer, then the power kicks in and balances the car with a safe little twitch of the tail: instantaneously the traction control takes effect and the car rockets serenely away - even on a slippery road.

It's hard to convey in words just how reassuring this car feels, even at the highest speeds, and it will exceed 170mph. Driving it is a supremely tactile experience which will appeal strongly to any good driver, including diehard 911 fans of old. The attention to the tiniest details of design, and the quality of construction, are

simply a delight. What's more, the increase in power is very noticeable and, from the driver's point of view, the distinctive 911 engine noise is the most pleasing yet. The harder you rev it, the better it sounds.

Porsche engineers were at pains to point out that the new Carrera 4S has lapped the old circuit of the Nurburgring in their hands in 8min 16sec, four seconds faster than the Carrera 2. A top race driver would beat the engineers' times but this is a valid comparison and, believe me, extremely quick by any standards. However, the superior speed of the 4S on this greatest of all historic race circuits is probably more a function of its bigger wheels than of the 4wd system, and no doubt many enthusiasts will still prefer the traditional rear-wheel drive models anyway. The 911 Carrera 4S will replace the existing Carrera 4 and will be launched in the USA in February. The US market market seems to be holding up well despite the Twin Towers Tragedy: Porsche experienced a 16 per cent decline in US sales in the month following September 11: Boxster sales took a big dive at that time but US 911 sales actually rose by 21 per cent. Overall, Porsche sales in California and Florida are at normal levels and the East Coast is showing signs of steady recovery.

Technical facts: Porsche Carrera 4S

Engine: 3,596cc, six-cylinder horizontally opposed, aluminium crancase and heads, water-cooled, normally aspirated, four valves per cylinder, continuous 'VarioCamPlus' camshaft control and valve lift adjustment, dry sump; 320bhp at 6,800rpm, torque 370Nm (273lb ft) at 4,250rpm; max revs 7,300rpm

Transmission: Permanent 4wd, varied torque distribution with viscous coupling to front wheels; six-speed manual gearbox or five-speed Tiptronic S

Wheels: Front 8J x 18 ET 50; rear 11J x 18 ET 45

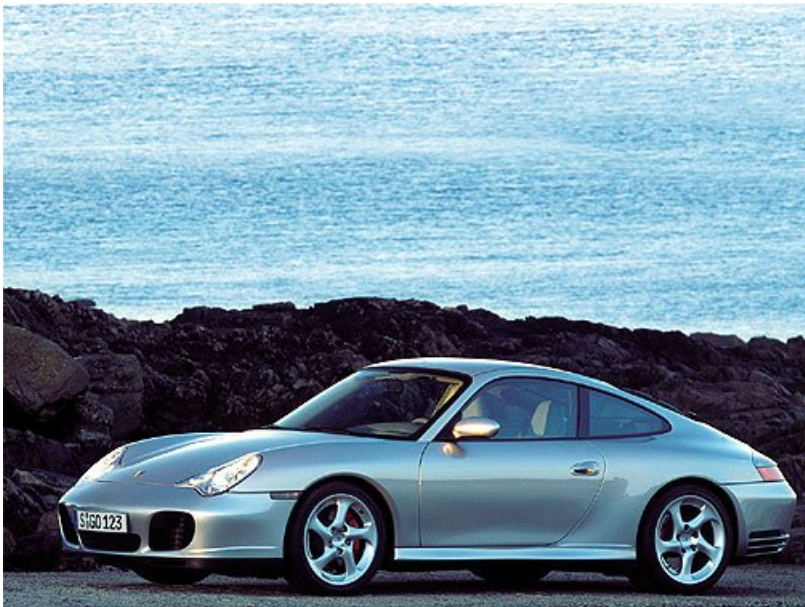
Unladen weight: Manual: 1,470kg (28.9cwt); Tiptronic S: 1,525kg (30.0cwt)

Dimensions: Length: 4,435mm (174.6in) Width: 1,830mm (72in) Height: 1,295mm (51in) Wheelbase: 2,350mm Fuel tank: 64 litres (14gal)

Performance: Manual: 174mph; 0-62mph 5.1sec, Tiptronic S: 171mph; 5.6sec

Fuel consumption: Total EU Standard/Urban/Extra-urban: Manual: 24.8mpg/17.3mpg/33.2mpg; Tiptronic S: 23.3mpg/15.5mpg/31.7mpg

First road test by Tony Dron







Gallery

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