

CLASSIC DRIVER

Porsche 911 GT 3



Let's play a game. Name one current track-day car which is (a) genuinely road-usable and (b) better than Porsche's 911 GT 3. Tricky one, that. What's more, you can spend a whole afternoon belting a GT 3 round a circuit and drive home without compiling a job list for your favourite motor mechanic. The Porsche is not merely exquisite to drive and blindingly quick, it is delightfully robust.

After 800 miles in a week in this one, I am already missing it. That feeling of high-quality engineering as you open the door and get aboard, the sound of the engine as you start it up and the feeling of well-supported comfort in the cockpit are things that make you love a car rather than just admire it. The racing-style seats look uncompromisingly practical, almost Spartan, but once you drive it for any distance you appreciate the depth of knowledge that has gone into every single part. Somebody in Stuttgart knows what I like, I thought to myself, and this is it – exactly it.

Before I get too carried away, I should say that for pure road use a standard 911 Carrera is a better car. There is no point in buying a car like the GT 3 if you don't intend to take it on a circuit and use it to the full. Such thoughts, however, are somewhat academic because you can't buy this car any more. The entire UK allocation of 911 GT 3s was sold out long ago, and that's hardly surprising. With prices starting from £80,660, including VAT, the GT 3 was a bargain. Yes, it's a huge amount of money but it's extremely competitive in this exalted little corner of the market.





The total price of this actual car was £94,792, thanks to extras including ceramic brakes (£5800), lightweight bucket seats (£3130), leather interior (£1648) and Porsche Communications Management (£1946). No-cost options built into it were automatic air-conditioning and the Clubsport package comprising rollcage, driver's racing harness and other items for circuit use.

The neat chronometer on top of the dash added a mere £380 to the price and would be handy for recording lap times. Operated by a stalk on the left of the steering column, it would be simplicity itself to use it each time you cross a start/finish line. The GT 3 is still very much a bargain with those extras loaded into it and no fewer than 186 current models have been delivered to UK owners.



Also sold out, the current GT 3 RS is an even more trackworthy version based on the Carrera 4 body, giving a slightly increased rear track and making the car 1.7in wider across the back. Priced at £95,640, the UK has taken 108 of them. With more lightweight materials, such as the adjustable carbonfibre wing and plastic rear window, the RS is 44lb lighter than the standard GT 3. The six-speed RS gearbox has closer ratios, suited to circuit use, and there are other minor differences in keeping with its role as an homologation special. Apart from a lighter flywheel, the normally aspirated 3.6-litre flat-six engine is unchanged and 415bhp is claimed for both models. Bodywork differences mean that the GT 3, at 193mph, is slightly faster on top speed than the RS, for which 187mph is quoted. The RS is predictably a little quicker on acceleration.



On the road with the GT 3 as tested, the ride was surprisingly comfortable but there was considerable road noise on coarse concrete surfaces. Apart from the occasional brief blast in second or third gears, the performance could not be used on public highways. The GT 3 is just too quick for that but it was still a wonderful experience, tootling around at a fraction of its potential and gliding along with majestic ease. Although it wasn't at its best whenever I had to take to the nastiest little bumpy English lanes, it was always perfectly safe, absolutely controllable and still a delight to drive. However, I did remind myself again that a standard Carrera would be better for that sort of motoring. For what it's worth, the onboard computer told me that I had achieved 25.2mpg during my 800 miles on the road in the GT 3.





Almost everything I've said about this current GT 3 could have been applied to the previous model but there is one big difference - the handling. The current car is just so much better in fast corners. I never did drive the old 996-based GT 3 on the road but I did drive one round Spa for a few hours about three years ago, giving 'taxi-rides' to members of the Goodwood Road Racing Club.

It was a glorious machine in the way it drilled its way up that long, long hill after the fearsome Eau Rouge, always reaching 150mph. The brakes never wilted, it sounded great and it felt perfectly safe but there was something not quite satisfying in its handling. It was hard to tell exactly how it would balance itself in the fastest corners and it's in that respect that the current GT 3 wins hands down. You can plant it and nail it in the best of Porsche tradition, keeping a broad smile on your face as you do it. This GT 3 should be logged in Porsche history as one of the true classics in the long story of the 911. It is magnificent.

Text: Tony Dron

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