

CLASSIC DRIVER

Test ride in the 2012 Porsche 911



Whenever Porsche announces a new 911, the car world holds its breath. We accompanied the Stuttgart firm's test drivers in the 991 series - which will officially make its debut in September at the Frankfurt Motor Show - on a prototype run in South Africa.

The most important change is at the rear. Currently, an owner who likes to show off the 911's potent Boxer engine to friends and acquaintances opens the boot. But the heart of the 991-series Porsche is more hidden than before. Instead of a hood at the rear, the powerplant is hidden behind a 'service door' - similar to the Audi A2. This is because the aerodynamics benefits from a new rear design with a retractable spoiler, and is significantly wider than previous models. Anyone who sees the back of the 911 detects a subtle design parallel to Aston Martin. "The Porsche 991 is a completely new 911," says development manager Bernd Kanau. "The outgoing 997 is largely based on its predecessor, the 996. The 991 is very different."



For more than three years, the new Porsche has been thoroughly tested in Scandinavia, Germany, Africa and the USA. Since the European temperatures in mid-February are anything but warm, a test team took eight vehicles to South Africa. The trio of sinister-looking prototypes we ride in are painted black with front and rear body cladding, but barely look any different from the current 997-series. We start our journey in Cape Town, travelling along Highway 301 in the direction of the Wittebrug nature reserve, and continue further north into the mountains. The chassis and dampers are put under the microscope during the full day's programme, along with the air-conditioning, bodywork, power units and wheel/tyre combinations. This is Bernd Kanau's final project, his life having been dedicated to the Porsche 911. Since the G-series, he's been the man in charge of the Porsche development team, succeeding his father who did a similar job at the Zuffenhausen development headquarters. His work will be complete in the autumn: when the new 911 is unleashed on the market, Kanau will go into automotive retirement. He is happy in South Africa, where for 10 years Porsche has subjected its new models to the prolonged torture which testing requires.



"We are doing lots of tests in computer simulations," explains Kanau, "but obviously there is no substitute for real-world testing. Today we're putting the cars through these tests, which we will use to prepare the model for market launch." One would be foolish to doubt the words of Bernd Kanau, as the prototype of the 911 Carrera he drives looks largely ready for production, apart from the exterior camouflage. Inside, the Porsche 991 is almost unrecognisable compared to its predecessor, but the instrument panel, switches and instruments show a close affinity with those in the Panamera and Cayenne. A few panels of grey leather in the prototype are misaligned, and you need to ignore the wind noise and creaking from interior fittings and the large sunroof. But this is why the Stuttgart development team comes to the southernmost tip of Africa: it is where these imperfections are eradicated.





After numerous visits, Heinz Bernhard knows this region like the back of his hand. He's also part of the Porsche development team, responsible for the secret test routes and vehicle camouflage. "Here in South Africa it's much easier for us to test prototypes, without being hassled, than it is in other regions - especially Europe," comments Bernhard. "There are hardly any spy photographers and we have the freedom of the mountains for our tests." About six months before series production of the 991-series 911, the hardest work is done. Now is the final parts testing and tuning stage, and Porsche has 50 to 60 prototypes taking part. While some of the vehicles sweat in South Africa, others in Sweden, Finland, Namibia and the United States also play their parts. Every day, the new measurement data is sent to Stuttgart and Weissach, where parts are adapted and new software releases for engines, transmissions and on-board electronics are developed.



The new Porsche 911 is now 4.49m long, a measurement not only set by its performance and dynamics, but also through its efficiency ratings. The 3.4-litre Carrera base model produces 350bhp and can reach 180mph, but Porsche claims a respectable fuel economy of 33mpg. A start-stop system will be included as standard. In

addition, the new 911 is the first production vehicle with a seven-speed manual gearbox, derived from the previous seven-speed dual-clutch transmission. Porsche says around 80 per cent of 911 customers now opt for the PDK, and this is likely to be no different in the new car. In addition to the 350bhp Carrera, a 3.8-litre Carrera S with 400bhp will be available. It has already cracked the 300km/h mark (186mph) and will boast fuel economy of up to 31mpg. Next year, the 997-series cabriolet will also be replaced. "We are also thinking about a Targa," said Director August Achleitner, leaving the future of a third body variant open. Porsche has offered a glass-roofed 911 since the early 1980s, and it retains a loyal customer base despite being far from a best-seller.



The new car's wheelbase was lengthened by six inches to make the interior more spacious, and the seats are much better than those in its predecessor. On the twisty mountain roads in the hinterlands of Cape Town, the qualities of the newly developed anti-roll bar and the dynamic engine bearings – which are available in

November in conjunction with the Sports Chrono Package – are obvious. "Our best lap on the Nordschleife with the new Carrera S was 7:40," adds Kanau. "This is 13 seconds less than before. Most of this is due to the Bilstein dampers. We just had to be quicker, and this has been achieved." He's right. Now he can head off happily to his well-deserved retirement.

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Photos: Press-Inform









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