

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driven: Porsche Panamera S Hybrid

Lead

This hybrid Panamera is no planet-saving eco-machine but it is, perhaps, a step in the right direction. We have driven the green standard-bearer of Zuffenhausen.

The self-sufficient cabin in the woods is not the only solution. A sustainable lifestyle starts with the little things: buying locally grown vegetables, for example. In a similar vein, most of us have now realised that the ideal of zero-emission mobility is far more complex than we first thought, not least because modern man doesn't relish the discomforts of total abstinence. So the auto industry has developed a certain eco-pragmatism. Until, in the distant future, the combustion engine disappears altogether, and we move to a new, more environmentally friendly technology, we simply have to seek clever solutions to reduce the fuel consumption and CO2 emissions of our existing global fleet. There's no one answer, no single, brilliant idea, but rather a multi-part, pragmatic package of measures. And that applies to large, fast cars, as much as to everything else. Let's not stigmatise such cars as 'evil', but instead seek to limit the damage – realistically.





The hybrid Porsche Panamera is not the solution to all problems; high-volume diesel models can run even more economically than the petrol-electric combo with its heavy battery pack, but this hybrid is a start. Our test route leads from Stuttgart to Hamburg – far enough not only to test the driving experience, but also to wince at current fuel prices, which quickly add up.





Then again, no one who buys a Porsche is going to want to stick to the inside lane, keeping pace with trucks. Fortunately, our Panamera S Hybrid boasts a six-cylinder engine with 333HP and an electric motor with another 47HP that sits between the engine and the eight-speed automatic gearbox that drives the rear wheels. Despite the 380HP (in total), the Panamera S Hybrid claims a Combined fuel consumption of 41.5mpg, and spits out a fairly low 159g/km of CO₂.

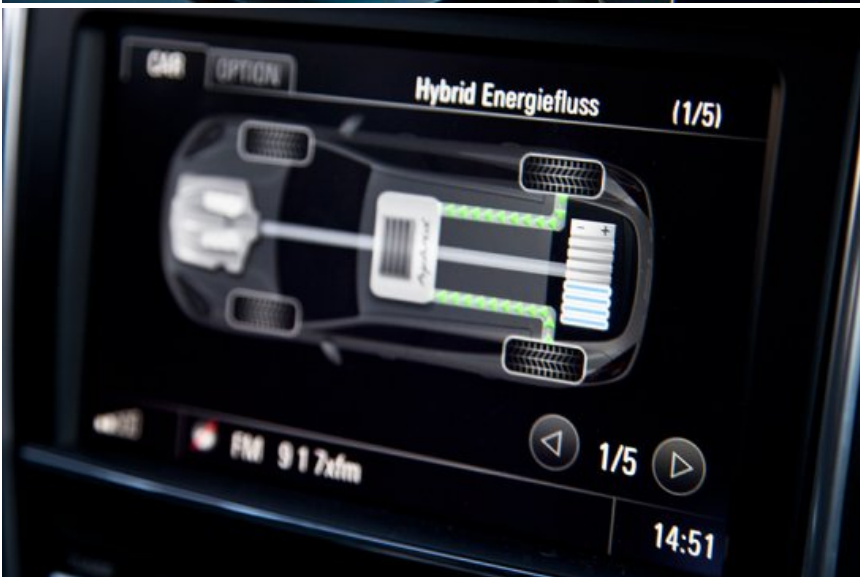


The technical package is extremely smooth and, at speeds up to 75km/h, the electric motor can drive the car by itself (for short distances, that is) and allow you to sneak into the city as silently as a Rolls-Royce. The electric traction appears effortlessly elegant and agile, making the Panamera feel smaller than it actually is. Step on the gas pedal a little harder, and a V6 ensemble emerges from the orchestra pit – a change in key, but not with a bang. The transition is melodic and well-balanced.





Those who wish can delay the use of petrol power by pressing the 'E-Power' button, which changes the characteristics of the throttle pedal to bring the combustion engine in later... and makes the driving experience easier, and more comfortable. Meanwhile, the 'E-Boost' button makes the acceleration sportier. On our lengthy trip of more than five hours, trying the various driving modes repeatedly, we still averaged just over 28mpg. Room for improvement, but not unimpressive.



We could no doubt help the fuel economy along by learning to drive in a more 'eco' manner. For example, the

battery under the boot floor is recharged during braking, and this regenerative braking can be tracked on the central display – Bonus Points and Miles collectors will love this feature, and the more you practice, the better you get.

All in all, the creators of this hybrid Porsche have come up with a superior package, a car that is perfectly suited for everyday use, but not one which shouts 'economy'. Do the maths. The base price is a little over £86,000. It is, therefore, a transport choice for individuals who enjoy avant-garde technology, a green(-ish) image and the Porsche badge on the car's nose. Perhaps the hybrid Panamera will be even more interesting as an investment – in 50 years' time, as an early artefact of technological change, it could certainly be a collector's piece. Given the none-too-inspiring rate of sales, it could also benefit from a certain rarity value.

Photos: Jan Baedeker

Gallery

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