



AutoWeek

The next Porsche GT3 is the 911 for the hardcore enthusiast

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ZOOM A picture of The Porsche 911 GT3
The Porsche 911 GT3

Porsche

Engineers who developed the 2010 Porsche 911 GT3 call it "the best of all worlds" in the current 911 lineup: an unsurpassed mix of race, track-grade performance and acceptable street comfort. We'd call the GT3 the coolest and the absolute most engaging 911 to drive, and we're not suggesting the others are anything close to dull. The irony might be that the next GT3 has neither of two key characteristics that have defined the latest generation of 911s.

The current 911 platform, known to Porscheheads as 997 Gen II, was launched in the fall of 2008 with the Carrera and the Carrera S. Both cars debuted with Porsche's latest six-cylinder boxer engine, featuring a one-piece crankcase and direct fuel injection, and an optional PDK dual-clutch auto-shift transmission. The GT3 will be the only car among current and future 997 Gen II variants with an old-school, split-crankcase block and

conventional sequential fuel injection.

That's because the GT3 is the homologation car for various production-based Porsche race cars, from the GT3 RSR to Grand-Am Cup cars, and all of them (not to mention the Grand-Am Prototypes) use the old-style crankcase cast in two separate halves. The GT3's split block engine is more time-consuming and expensive to build than the newer engine, which has far fewer castings in general, and it's not readily suited to high-pressure direct injection. The good news for Porsche freaks is that the split-crankcase boxer still hasn't reached its development potential, and the new GT3 drives the point home.

The 2010 GT3 boxer is similar to the previous GT3s, but it's been bored out an extra two millimeters. Displacement increases from 3.6 liters to 3.8 liters, and the exhaust cams now feature Porsche's VarioCam variable-timing system. The new 3.8 has aluminum pistons, titanium connecting rods, a steel crank and less mass throughout the valve train, thanks to hollow camshafts and lighter valves. It's redline increases to 8,500 rpm, and its dry-sump lubrication system uses seven oil pumps to meet the demands of track-level lateral g loads.

The most obvious improvement? The GT3 3.8-liter boxer generates 435 hp at 7,660 rpm, and 317 lb-ft of torque at 6,250 rpm. That's a whopping 115 hp per normally aspirated liter, same as the previous GT3 engine, with the increase in displacement and an increase of 20 peak horsepower. More significantly, the GT3's 3.8 makes 50 hp and 7 lb-ft more than the Carrera S 3.8, with its one-piece crankcase and direct injection. Yet thanks to the reduction in internal mass and efficiencies such as improved pumps and accessories, the new, more-powerful GT3 engine improves fuel economy two percent in the European cycle and reduces CO2 emissions.

As for the other 997 Gen II trademark--the PDK transmission--purists will be pleased to know that the 2010 GT3 will be available only with a six-speed manual. Its ratios are fairly closely spaced, without an overdrive gear.

Underneath, the GT3 features threaded suspension components that can be track-adjusted for ride height, track width and camber. Its springs are stiffer than any Carrera's, only now the GT3 comes standard with Porsche's PASM electronically variable shocks. The control algorithms are more aggressive than in other 911s, but PASM does good things for ride quality when the GT3 is just motoring between points. The 2010 GT3 will come standard with 19-inch center-lock wheels, each five pounds lighter than the previous generation's, fitted with 235/35ZR-19 Michelin Pilot Sport Cups in front, 305/30ZR-19 rear. Its brake rotors are substantially larger than either the Carrera's or the previous GT3's, and Porsche's ceramic-composite option will be available.

Part of the GT3's appeal lies in its unique aerodynamics and the look they create. The 2010 model generates five times more downforce than its predecessor, according to Porsche, thanks partly to its unique front end, now custom-tailored for the GT3 and available on no other 911. The rear wing is also larger than before, with prominent side plates, and airflow into and out of the engine compartment is improved. The GT3 sports a cross-length vent below its engine-compartment lid, which you won't see on any other 911, and unique vertical slits at each end of the rear bumper.

2010 Porsche 911 GT3



PHOTO GALLERY

The new GT3 weighs 3,076 pounds wet, or 110 pounds less than the lightest Carrera, and only a pound more dry than the RSR race car. Other numbers look impressive, too: 0 to 62 mph in 4.1 seconds, with an aero-limited top speed of 193 mph, according to Porsche. The development engineers say it laps the Nordschleife faster than any 997 Gen II variant to date--15 seconds faster than a Carrera S with every performance option.

From the driver's seat, everything in the new GT3 feels more mechanical than it does in a Carrera, but almost subtly, never jarringly so. The shifter might be the biggest change in this respect, and the hardest to get used to. It's very solid and deliberate, and it won't find the next gear unless the driver puts it precisely in the slot, but it can be very quick. The hard-core will love it, and they'll like the heavier clutch pedal as well.

Better, there's an amazing flow of torque from the GT3, everywhere in the engine's range. Its boxer six pulls in a gloriously visceral way that few automotive experiences match--and all the way to its 8,500-rpm redline. The gear ratios are nicely matched. While it's most fun to use them all, the torque is so well spread across the power band that at least two or three of the six gears will work in most situations.

Beyond the engine, it's hard to decide what we like best about the GT3, though the throttle may be next on the list. The gas pedal has good travel. Once you get used to it, it's easy to manage the car's speed or attitude in a corner with subtle movements of the right foot. And behind everything flows the sweet, raspy exhaust sounds. Push the pedal deep enough, and you'll hear a flap in the pipes reroute the airflow. The roar drops an octave and the decibel level increases.

The GT3 steers with firm directness, and never with the overboosted feel that some very capable competitors deliver these days. Feedback through the wheel makes it easy to tell how much grip is left in the tires. The ride can be surprisingly supple, though what's fine on Germany's smooth back roads may not be so in Denver or Detroit. At 150 mph on the autobahn, the firm suspension generates a washboard harmonic over pavement seams, but small, rapid body movement never feels like lift or lightness or even bounciness. The GT3's tires stay firmly, securely in contact with the road surface.

The 2010 GT3 will offer a couple of new options, starting with dynamic engine mounts intended to improve both handling and comfort. These electronically control the engine's movement in the car, and they allow higher lateral g loads by maintaining balance, according to Porsche. They also improve cockpit comfort by softening and more aggressively damping vibration when the car is driven at a more casual pace. A new Front-Lift System raises the front end 1.2 inches with the touch of a switch, to get the GT3's front spoiler in driveways or over low curbs without scraping. It lowers the car again when speed surpasses about 30 mph.

Counting all the Carreras, Cabriolets and Targas currently available, the GT3 will be the 11th variation on the current 911 available in the States. A new Turbo is certain to follow, and probably a GT2. The GT3 will reach Porsche dealerships by fall, at \$112,200 plus \$950 destination. That's \$35,900 more than the standard Carrera, and the well-heeled hard-core may consider it a bargain.

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