

# 996.1 GT3 v 996.2 GT3

The 996 GT3 might be overlooked by some but it spawned an enduring, much-loved legend



The year 1999 seems like an eternity ago now. The 996 was still box fresh, though Porsche took very little time to offer something special for customers wanting something a bit more focused. The GT3 brought a new, now familiar, badge to the range, adding sharpness for those wanting their 911 with a hint of homologation about it. It allowed Porsche to fulfil the wishes of the motorsport rule makers, creating a tangible link between road and track. Porsche's answer with the GT3 wasn't the usual lightened route it had taken with RSs, the GT3 actually heavier than its standard Carrera relation (by around 30kg). The addition of a high-revving naturally aspirated, dry-sumped, 3.6-litre Mezger flat six, with its DNA directly traceable to Porsche's GT1 endurance racer, arguably injected the GT3 with more credibility than thinner glass and lighter panels ever could – those lightweight bits, inevitably, coming with the return of the RS sticker with the Gen2 GT3 model. Arriving at RPM Technik and seeing a Gen1 996 waiting for me reminds me of the excitement when driving them new. A well-known car in Porsche circles (owned by car photographer Antony Fraser) say what you like about Pinky Lai's interpretation of the 911 in 996 form, I have time for the flat flanks it presents. 996 deniers would do well to remember that early 911s did

without shapely hips, the 996 very evocative of the earliest cars. Even with the aerodynamic addenda that demarks the GT3 (and a host of aero-kitted Carreras) it's a compact car. It's dwarfed when someone parks a new Boxster alongside it! Sitting some 30mm lower on split-rim 18-inch alloys, behind which sits 13-inch ventilated and cross-drilled brakes pinched by four-piston aluminium calipers, the uninformed could miss its significance. Compared to later and current GT3s with their overt aero, the Gen1 GT3 is very pure, the rear wing's only betrayal to its motorsport intent being the sharp-edged gurney flap on the lower portion's trailing edge. Clambering in highlights how far Porsche has come with interiors. The 996's cabin hasn't aged particularly well, even if, fundamentally, it's correct in its function. The steering wheel is pleasingly unadorned, the GT3's dash and door cards shared with the standard Carreras, airbags and all, air conditioning and electric windows, too, with Porsche customers, however intent on engagement and speed, still appreciating such modern-day necessities. Turning the key reveals immediately that Fraser's car is not running as it left the factory; there's a Cargraphic exhaust, which combined with a DMS remap, helps that 3.6-litre engine push out 403bhp, in comparison to the standard car's 360bhp. The revisions don't stop there; a racing flywheel and Sachs





Model	996.1 GT3
Year	1999
Engine	
Capacity	3,600cc
Compression ratio	11.7:1
Maximum power	360bhp @ 7,200rpm
Maximum torque	370Nm @ 5,000rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual
Brakes	
Front	350mm discs
Rear	350mm discs
Suspension	
Front	Lower wishbones and MacPherson struts with combined coil springs and dampers; anti-roll bar
Rear	Multilink with parallel wishbones; combined coil springs and dampers; anti-roll bar
Wheels & tyres	
Front	8x18-inch; 225/40/R18
Rear	10x18-inch; 285/30/R18
Dimensions	
Length	4,430mm
Width	1,765mm
Weight	1,350kg
Performance	
0-62mph	4.8 sec
Top speed	188mph



Model	996.2 GT3
Year	2003
Engine	
Capacity	3,600cc
Compression ratio	11.7:1
Maximum power	381bhp @ 7,400rpm
Maximum torque	385Nm @ 5,000rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual
Brakes	
Front	350mm discs
Rear	350mm discs
Suspension	
Front	Lower wishbones and MacPherson struts with combined coil springs and dampers; anti-roll bar
Rear	Multilink with parallel wishbones; combined coil springs and dampers; anti-roll bar
Wheels & tyres	
Front	8.5-18-inch; 235/40/R18
Rear	11x18-inch; 295/30/R18
Dimensions	
Length	4,435mm
Width	1,770mm
Weight	1,380kg
Performance	
0-62mph	4.5 sec
Top speed	190mph



clutch, rose-jointed Rennsport control arms, Eibach springs and Bilstein dampers are among Fraser's list of changes. The result is a GT3 closer in character to the car that followed it; more track based and – crucially – used. They were built for driving after all. It's engaging, enjoyable and, despite its track pretensions, the suspension is supple, the performance sensational and the brakes never in question. There's the beautiful steering feel that's apparent in all 996s, heightened by the GT3's more aggressively set-up suspension. The engine is a free-revving masterpiece that's as addictive in its acceleration as its note, remaining one of Porsche's finest engines, mated to a six-speed manual that's long been a highlight in the Porsche line-up.

If the Gen1 car is GT3 genesis then Gen2 represents its first obvious evolutionary step. Visually, it's a sharper looking GT3, the later cars, arriving early in 2003, benefitting enormously from the revised headlights that came with the Gen2 996, and the simpler looking but more aerodynamically effective rear wing. The sills add a sharper line along the flanks, and those larger alloy wheels with their reverential styling nod (to my eyes, at least) to the Fuchs that have long been associated with Porsche, yet add a modernity over the split rims of the Gen1 car. The front air intakes are more neatly defined, the more aggressively pouting lower edge further delineating its motorsport origins. Still purposeful rather than overt here, the GT3 Gen2 is arguably peak GT3 for those wanting a discreet road and track weapon. It's gorgeous, as much as the Gen1 car represents pure GT3, it's difficult to question Porsche's shift with the Gen2 to make it sharper still, taking its bias more towards track car over the supplier (in standard guise at least) Gen1.

Key changes are under that simpler rear wing. The engine remains at 3.6-litres, though the GT team went through it with fastidious attention to detail. Anything that could lose weight did; the valves, pistons (losing nine per cent of their weight) and con-rods shaving mass, the loss of a crankshaft damper too, helping to see a reduction

of 3.5kg. VarioCam was added, raising the rev limit to 8,200rpm and adding 21bhp to see the GT3 boast 381bhp. The way it responds is so linear, the accelerator sharp, the slightest flex of your right foot having that 3.6-litre's lighter internals spin up towards that redline with an enthusiasm that's unyielding in its ferocity.

The numbers inevitably improved over the Gen1 car, though they're both scintillatingly quick, the real difference being the Gen2's greater mid-range urgency, allied to the suspension's tauter ride. That makes the Gen2 a busier road car, though not too compromised because of it. Walter Rohrl's lap times would demonstrate how effective the Gen2's changes were, particularly when optioned with PCCB carbon ceramic brakes, shaving some useful seconds off the Gen1's hugely impressive lap time of seven minutes and 56.3 seconds around the 'Green Hell'.

Inside, both cars are largely the same aside from a few details on the instrumentation and switchgear, though Gen2 cars inevitably benefitted from the quality improvements that came with the range. This Gen2's interior is lifted by the addition of optional carbon trim and wing-backed seats. It's the car I'd take home, as much for the looks as the small but significant improvements in performance it brings.

And the fact that it's so close to its 996 GT3 RS relation makes it even more of a bargain – you would need to add a one in front of a Gen2's list price to get your hands on a GT3 RS. The 996 might not be a car that's reached its potential, but the GT3s have already piqued the interest of those chasing returns. Financially, that is, rather than the joy they bring on the road, which is a disaster, as cars like this should be driven, as they're designed to be... ➡



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