

# ONCE BITTEN

This classy 997 remix from RPM Technik combines retro and modern influence into one classy and fine-handling 911 with a character of its own

Words: Dan Trent Photography: Paul Harmer





There are plenty of highly regarded Porsche specialists out there making a decent living buying, selling and servicing cars of all eras to suit their particular customer base. Graduating from that to developing and building your own self-branded special editions is a big step though, and one requiring a fair degree of chutzpah. Not to mention investment and expertise.

It's a bet that's paying off for Buckinghamshire based RPM Technik though, the car you see here the 28th built under its CSR programme since it was first conceived back in 2010. Sales and servicing still form the core of the business but it's clear among both staff and

customers the CSRs are where creativity and passion for Porsches can be fully expressed in cars built to be driven, not tucked away as investments.

While there's no rigid blueprint for what qualifies as a CSR there's a consistent theme running through them all. Basically that involves a package of upgrades for 'civilian' Carreras, Boxsters and Caymans to sharpen performance and handling to something approaching that of the GT models but without compromising the usability or relative affordability of the cars on which they're based. Some have been built more as track cars, others under the self-explanatory 'Retro' banner. If not about headline-grabbing power outputs, or fixated on chasing lap times, then CSRs are more

for those who appreciate subtle tweaks that can turn a good Porsche into an exceptional one, enhancing the factory product without corrupting its style or intent. Or trying to be something it isn't.

So to the car we have here, based on a first-generation 997 Carrera S and christened 'Snakebite' in honour of the owner's original concept for the interior. One that didn't see it through to the finished product after the various interested parties – owner's wife included – decided a green and purple interior wasn't the way to go. Probably for the best. But the name stuck.

Brought to RPM as a straight, silver Carrera S with a six-figure mileage, the car is now a very different proposition, sitting low on KW Variant 3 suspension and fancy

Our man Dan, looking cool, calm and collected and relieved that the original 'snakebite' interior colour combo of green and purple was vetoed

Back in black! Well, it was originally silver, so quite a radical transformation. Black works, though





HRE wheels and menacing in Brewster Green paint. The understated shade is a photographic challenge that has snapper Paul Harmer scratching his chin, unnecessarily as it turns out because, as you'll see, it looks as stunning on the page as it does in the metal. Where other CSRs

Something like a custom-spec, 997-shaped twist on the GT3 Touring, if you will. Minus the dealer politics or speculator mark-up.

So the bodywork has been left more or less original, an Aerokit front bumper giving a more ground-hugging stance while at the back there's a GT3 bumper with neatly

been replaced with figure-hugging, slim-fit Recaros. Green leather bolsters with houndstooth centres and gold stitching to match the wheels coordinate cabin with exterior, details including a Carrera GT inspired wooden gearknob and deep-dish Momo Prototipo wheel with airbag delete. Alcantara on the dash meanwhile completes the look, the quality of the stitching and finish all highly impressive for an operation of RPM's size. It's a timeless look incorporating respectful nods to Porsche traditions without pretending to be anything it's not, helped by the removal of the dated PCM module for a handy cubby, infotainment needs catered for with hands-free Bluetooth integration to the owner's phone. A neat solution that won't date like a built-in system.

So it looks good. But the kit that makes this a CSR is more out of sight, tucked away in the engine bay and chassis. KW Variant 3 coilovers have long been a favourite of RPM's, the quality of the damping and range of adjustability matched

Latest RPM build sits just right on lowered KW Variant 3 suspension. Front end is enhanced with an Aerokit front bumper

“ It's rather like a custom-spec, 997 twist on the GT3 Touring ”

have gone a little more extrovert with stripes and stickers this one is rather more subtle, in keeping with the owner's wish to have an upgraded Carrera capable of delivering its extra performance hit over long-distances. Hence the heated seats, air-con, the neatly integrated sub-woofer on the rear shelf and even a plug-in fridge, trimmed in houndstooth to match the seats.

integrated stainless steel mesh in the vents and the trademark CSR carbon ducktail. Set against the HRE wheels it's a classy and individual combination telling you all you need to know about the car's intent without shouting too loudly.

If the exterior is neatly executed the interior is a real demonstration of RPM's craftsmanship. The standard seats have



It wouldn't be a CSR build if it didn't feature a carbon ducktail. Right: Rear also features a GT3 rear bumper





with longevity and reliability for cars built to rack up hard miles on road and track. This one also gets KW's HLS front-axle lift kit, which reacts faster than Porsche's own and is pretty much a necessity given the road-skimming Aerokit front splitter. Combined with adjustable anti-roll bars, polybushed mounts, Eibach adjustable coffin arms and a full geometry and corner-weighting calibration there's plenty of room for tweaks, BTCC legend Tim Harvey adding some star quality to RPM's in-house expertise when it comes to set-up. The CSR ethos is more about working with the customer to settle on a package rather than dictate a fixed format, the package

therefore offering opportunity to tune the car to what the owner actually wants to do. Accordingly, this one is more to the fast road end of the spectrum, though others have gone the other way and been more track focused.

The CSR brake package involves a full strip down of the calipers, replacement of seals, pipework and pistons as required and then paint and logos according to customer wishes. The transmission meanwhile gets a short-shift kit, lightweight clutch and flywheel, RPM switching from the previous Wavetrac torque biasing differential to a more traditional plated limited-slip unit. Again, this offers opportunity to tune the

behaviour of the diff according to the customer's needs and taste, not to mention driving style.

This far and we've yet to discuss the engine. Main reason for that being it's not actually fitted to the car yet and, at the time of writing, is in RPM's test bay while the project team rebuild it with a wide-ranging package of upgrades to improve both longevity and performance. When the car first arrived it had over 100,000 miles on the clock, a typical CSR overhaul comprising a precautionary full strip-down and inspection, installation of uprated IMS bearing and a range of upgrades depending on how hard the car is to be driven. This can include a

The HRE wheels are stylish touch and make for a change from the more ubiquitous Fuchs option

Carbon weave of the rear ducktail lid is clear to see. The engine will be receiving upgrades in due course, but for the moment it remains as a stock, 376bhp X51 Powerkit unit





third radiator, low temperature thermostat, deep sump extension kit and other sensible mods appropriate for cars likely to be given a hard life on track.

In this instance RPM are also looking at new cams and other upgrades to increase power, though with typical thoroughness is taking its time to make sure it all works as it

finished motor and how they intend to achieve them. But for now this is enough to be going on with, a GT3-style CSR centre-exit exhaust opening its vocal chords and in keeping with the look of new rear bumper.

Appetite suitably whetted it's time to find out if this car goes as well it looks...

Gripped snugly in the heavily bolstered

correct. This customer has opted for a rear-seat delete but you could, of course, retain that option if you want the full cake and eat it combination of stock 911 flexibility and sharper driving experience and many CSR owners have done just that. Each to their own on that one.

Stripped of distractions you're free to focus on the quality of the workmanship, both aesthetic and mechanical. And within the first few hundred yards you're appreciating details like the positivity of the short-throw shift and tactility of the ball-topped selector, the lack of hesitancy in the throttle response and the meaningful weight and lack of slack in the steering. That this comes without the hairtrigger clutch or lumpy idle of a GT3 is a sign of this car's wider brief and focus on usability, too, this being a 911 as comfortable as a daily as it would be for high days and holidays.

The lumpy B-roads outside RPM's gate offer no place for the suspension set-up to hide, the CSR mindset again about more street-friendly suspension travel and bump

Like any RPM build, the already focused 997 qualities are refined yet further, to create an even sharper driving machine



The 917 inspired spherical wooden gearknob is a neat touch. Middle: Gratuitous close-up of HRE wheel. Nice hoops, if you can run to them



absorption than a tied-down, GT3-style track vibe. Saying that it's far, far more focused than any factory Carrera, there being a degree of head-nodding over harsher bumps and the occasional skerrf as the splitter grazes the road. But the KVs have a soft edge, meaning the sharper edges of the bumps are successfully smothered and you get to appreciate the extra body control with the minimum of distraction.

So there's a far sharper front end than you'd get in any factory Carrera and a rich flow of feedback from the wheel, safely transmitted to your hands without any negative traits like camber sensitivity or kickback. This is a neat compromise, meaning the precision is there when you need it but when you're just cruising or racking up the miles there's no tiresome jiggling from the wheel or need for constant little corrections. Mature would be the best way to describe it, the sense being RPM – and its customers – appreciate you can have a more precise set-up without having to sacrifice too much comfort or refinement.

The engine may just be a placeholder too but the car feels commendably complete as a package. True, it doesn't scream like a Mezger. But there's enough extra purpose in the exhaust note to elevate it above a standard Carrera motor and the low-rev lethargy in the stock throttle response is notable by its absence. In its place just instant urge and a wide, rich powerband to enjoy without the binary on/off character switch mid-way through the rev range. There's equal satisfaction to be had leaning on the torque as there is holding a gear and revving it out, the sound building to an inspiring crescendo that makes sense of the stereo delete. Pair your phone if required. But, for this drive at least, the engine is providing all the soundtrack required.

And performance. The finished package will likely be more potent than what you see here but, even now, this car punches harder than a standard Carrera, picking up speed without hesitation and giving you the confidence to carry it through the corners. The light-nosed turn-in you get in standard

911s is notable by its absence, increasing the sense of agility without making the CSR feel nervous or flighty and in no time at all you find yourself settling into the kind of rhythm that'll have you taking the long way home for the sake of it.

What RPM has achieved with this car is that elusive sense of flow many tuners, never mind manufacturers, struggle with. This isn't about power outputs, 0–62 times or vmax stats. It's about the interaction between steering, pedal response, damping, exhaust sound, shifter throw and the million and one other things that contribute to how a car makes you feel. The best Porsches combine all these things into one seamless package without the need for endless modes and configuration, leaving you to simply focus on the road and savour the experience. This is one of those 911s. It's not a car demanding huge commitment or focus to enjoy. But you know if you were in the mood for that it would respond in kind. That it's been carried off with such evident style is the icing on the cake. **PW**

## “ There’s a sharper front end than you get in any factory Carrera ”

should. In the meantime the car is running a stock gen-one 3.8 S motor with the X51 Powerkit, this factory upgrade offering a healthy uplift to around 376bhp with a small increase in torque and across the board improvement in response, power delivery and breathing. The guys are keeping their powder dry when it comes to goals for the

Recaros and with the dished wheel pulled close to your chest, the Snakebite CSR has a racy driving position for a supposed 'touring' configuration but this is no stripped-out, wannabe GT3 RS and retains the refinement and flexibility of a stock Carrera. And if you think that sounds like an appealing combination you'd be absolutely

Left: Momo Prototipo wheel is popular for a reason. Below: Recaros tastefully retrimmed in dark green leather, with houndstooth panels



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