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911 vs Cayman

997 Carrera vs 981 Cayman:
which is the better used
prospect for £35,000?



911 SC
Restored and reworked
911 stylishly mixes SC
and RS influences

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AN INDEPENDENT PUBLICATION





*It's a fluid 911 to drive, easy to thread,
and yet which might, by that same
token, be easy to upset, too*



Tough as it might be to believe thanks to its contemporary silhouette, the 997-generation of 911 is well over a decade old now, and furthermore its arguably more desirable (refreshed) second-generation incarnation is itself not far behind that. Prices for each have steadily dipped over recent years as those of its forebear, the 996, rise up to meet it in the fluctuating world of 911 values. In the current climate you can get behind the wheel of a second-generation 997 Carrera for around £35,000, which would see you sat inside a rather appealing Porsche. But, would it be the correct car for you?

The specification of the 2009 Arctic silver metallic 997 you see here ticks all the right boxes on paper: two-wheel drive, a six-speed manual gearbox, black leather, cruise and climate control,

xenons, and PCM 3.0 navigation. Originally supplied by Porsche Centre Reading, the car has been regularly serviced throughout its lifetime by Porsche main agents or specialists (the last time at OPC Bristol) – the only notable work being replaced front coffin arms. It has covered just 44,000 miles so this is a low-mileage example. That's sure to boost its appeal further. Perhaps the only bone of contention might be whether or not you feel those black 18-inch Carrera alloys are proportionally acceptable for the car. The jury remains out on that one but it's an easily rectifiable issue should it bug you.

As a result of its lifetime of light use and careful maintenance you won't be surprised to learn that this 911 feels fit as a fiddle out on the road. The 3.6-litreDFI Carrera engine pulls hard

through all six gears, working its way up to a swift lick of speed faster than you'd imagine, delivering that rich normally-aspirated Porsche soundtrack in the process. The clutch is light in operation and the steering wonderfully accurate and communicative. It affords the sense that this is a lightweight steer. It's a fluid 911 to drive, easy to thread, and yet which might, by that same token, be easy to upset, too. This is a car that looks modern but which provides a traditional, visceral, Porsche driving experience the like of which is arguably missing from its somewhat muted contemporaries. It's true that it moves around underneath you with a certain level of autonomy if you let it, but the 997 Carrera's looseness on the road is what made these cars so popular. It is a rewarding car to drive and one that will work



with you, but only if you treat it correctly.

So if its driving experience is stimulating, offering a time-honoured Porsche feel, and its looks enduring, where might the 997 fall short in comparison with a more modern Porsche? Plainly it's the ergonomics of its interior that are now beginning to show some age. Although they are a noteworthy upgrade over that of the 996 before it, any car designed and built a decade back will naturally start to struggle when it comes to meeting more modern comfort and convenience features. While the 997's inners still provide a nice environment in which to operate,

it is very much designed in the style of elder 911 interiors whereby you sit higher into the roof in comparison with current cars. That is a little accentuated by its lower door line that sits parallel with the driver's upper arm. There's a bigger glasshouse here, too. While this might make you feel a touch exposed it does result in a light and airy cabin – something that can be missing from up-to-the-minute 911s.

Ultimately the principal sentiment you take away from driving this 997 today is that it is a true 911 in the every sense of the notion. It adheres to the principles established by the air-cooled cars

and subsequently evolved during the water-cooled era, presenting a Porsche that feels light on its feet and fun to drive. If you're new to 911s it's best to build-up to its limits while slowly mastering its weight transfer and cornering characteristics. Maximise its braking and power delivery to best effect, and this is a car that will reward time and time again, growing with you as a driver. An all-rounder as happy on a hard back road charge as it is on a motorway or run to the local convenience store, it is a 911 to be seen in and one you're sure to never tire of looking at. Might it be the best of the water-cooled Carreras? Just maybe...





Unless you've been watching Porsche prices like a hawk, it's likely to have escaped you that 981 Caymans have now dropped down to around £35,000. That's interesting for three reasons. First, the 981 has only recently been superseded by the new '718' Cayman, with which it shares much in terms of its brawny aesthetics so therefore still looks visually fresh. Second, the 981 also represents the last of the six-cylinder normally-aspirated cars given that the 718 features the controversial addition of a four-cylinder turbocharged engine. There's an argument that says the 981 generation of cars will therefore be more desirable assets going forward. Third, the 981's now slightly lower value puts it in direct competition with the second-generation 997 for anyone with £35k burning a hole in their pocket.

This 2013 2.7-litre Cayman, also offered by

RPM Technik, is illustrative of what that money buys you: quite a bit of car. Like the 997, it has a low mileage for its age (22,000 miles) and boasts a strong specification: black leather and Alcantara sports seats (heated); 20-inch Carrera S alloy wheels; Xenon headlights with dynamic cornering; tyre pressure monitoring; PCM 3.0 touchscreen navigation; Bluetooth; park assist (front and rear), and a switchable Sports exhaust system. It is also fitted with a seven-speed PDK gearbox (more on that later), too. Supplied from new by Porsche Centre Cardiff, it boasts a full Porsche service history and it is still covered by a Porsche extended warranty until April 2018. On paper this car makes an awful lot of sense, but can it really offer the same thrill as the 997 on the road?

Click the colour-matched Guards red seat belts in place and you'll find yourself faced with

matching colour-coded instrument dials in a cabin that is markedly improved over that in the 997. The interior cossets its occupants, positioning you low in the car, while a higher door line serves to accentuate the feeling of being cocooned. It's a doddle to find a natural and comfortable driving position in here. This car has a Sports steering wheel with paddle controls for the automatic transmission which add to the intuitive nature of the 981's controls and overall layout. Fire it up and you're instantly reminded what is missing from the 718 generation of cars; namely that iconic Porsche six-shooter soundtrack pumped out by this car's 2.7-litre engine mated to its Sports exhaust system. So far, so good.

The overriding feeling stepping into this car from one effectively designed several years before (ignoring the 997's generational revisions for a moment), is just how easy the 981 is to



It's playful enough remind you of its rear-drive mid-engined credentials – but never does any twitchiness cause alarm



997 vs 981 Cayman



drive. We know there will be those of you who won't like the sound of that, taking the view that a Porsche should require a touch of advanced skill to pilot effectively, but it's hard to knock the impeccable road manners of this Cayman. In this PDK guise you'll see 62mph in 5.7 seconds from its 275hp unit. That's a lower output than the 345hp engine in the 997 it's up against and yet, on paper, its 0-62mph time is down only eight tenths. In the real world we'd say this car does feel slower than the 911, the result of the 997's larger engine and power output, and also perhaps its lively nature versus the Cayman's utterly advanced composure. But the Cayman's mid-range punch never leaves it feeling too short; it's easy to be travelling quicker than you realise in a newer car.

Really, though, it's the chassis that defines this car. Porsche put a lot of emphasis on lightening the 981 by utilising much aluminium in its construction, and balancing the car with a near perfect 50/50 distribution of weight. That serves to deliver an astonishing driving experience. The Cayman is incredibly planted, even at high speeds, and constantly affords a level of confidence in the driver likely only reserved for the brave or competent in the 997. What this means is that you feel immediately comfortable and able to push on in the Cayman without fear of the car biting you. It has grip whenever you need it but, remarkably, when you don't it's playful enough remind you of its

rear-drive mid-engined credentials – but never does any twitchiness cause alarm. You can lean on this car without trepidation. It's PDK gearbox might not be to everyone's tastes but the harder you push and the faster you travel the more benefit you'll get from it. Indeed, the newer Porsches take kindly to the automatic 'box, some are even better to drive with them, so we wouldn't be so quick to dismiss the consideration of a PDK 981.

There is an elephant in the room perhaps: practicality. You only get two seats in the Cayman versus the 911's two-plus-two format, and while the 997's rear seating is really only suitable for a child or an emergency, the fact remains that it does have that extra room should you require it. That people-moving issue aside, though, the Cayman's front and rear luggage spaces provide arguably more practical stowage than that found in the 997, so it's a largely question of your lifestyle requirements.

In 981 guise the Cayman really came of age. No longer was it considered the 911's subordinate, for it was simply too damn good; it's looking no less appealing now as a second-hand prospect. Driving this car reminds you of how accomplished contemporary Porsches have become, and of how a genuine sports car should feel on the road. It also looks and feels like a car worth a lot more than £35,000 but, more importantly, it is both useable and enjoyable on an everyday level.

There are many, many positives in favour of the 997 but ultimately, as a package, the 981 is tough to beat



THANKS

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So here comes the hard part: choosing between this pair. We could tell you that it's a matter of personal perspective, that your own circumstances will dictate which route best suits you or that whichever way you go you're guaranteed to be one of life's winners. All those things are true, but too much sitting on the fence can lead to lasting medical complications. For us there are a few simple facts here: one of these cars stands out for its thrilling driving experience, contemporary feel and the peace of mind its warranty and modernity provides... the other is a 911. There are many, many positives in favour of the 997 but ultimately, as a package, the 981 Cayman is tough

to beat at its current value. But perhaps there is one sticking point.

As Porsche enthusiasts we all appreciate the virtues of the Cayman, so it's unlikely that you subscribe to the notion that the model is in any way inferior to a 911 based purely on its heritage and the kudos that comes with a '911' badge. But there will be plenty of people out there, the uninitiated, who do. If you are the kind of person who might be troubled by this kind of thing then the 997 is the only way to go, and there's little shame in that for it remains a fantastic prospect. Furthermore if financial issues are a factor for you, judging by the historical record of the 996, one of

these cars has more potential to appreciate in value than the other – that car is the Carrera. Having said that if there were a backlash against the four-cylinder 718s when they begin to appear on the used car market, then there's every chance the 981 Cayman will also rise in value as enthusiasts look to retain them and demand conflicts with supply.

In short, both of these cars reward the driver, and neither is likely to disappoint as an ownership prospect but our money would be spent on the Cayman. Much like that six-year-old kid peering through the sweet shop window, there will soon be an RPM Technik customer faced with a rather challenging decision ○