



On The **RIGHT TRACK**

Porsches and track days go together like builder's tea and a fried breakfast, which is why Porsche specialist RPM Technik has created the Boxster CSR.

Story: Richard Meaden Photography: Matt Richardson

It's a fair assumption that most of us have dreamed of owning an affordable Porsche that's been honed, but not wholly dedicated, to track day fun. With 944s, 968s and even early 996s littering the online classifieds for horribly tempting money, there's never been a better time to buy a Porsche that panders to the weekend warrior lurking within us all.

I don't know about you, but whenever my mind wanders to this kind of thing I always seem to overlook the Boxster. Which is strange, as these mid-engined gems are perhaps the sweetest handling of all affordable Porsches and offer decent performance in S specification. That they're also dirt cheap at the moment – a good, manual 986 generation Boxster Ss can be readily found for as little as £5000 – means there's rich pickings out there if you're prepared to look beyond the more obvious, and dare I say manly, metal.

Why the sudden evangelical tone? Because I've driven RPM Technik's Boxster CSR and against all expectations, fell for it in a big way. Some of you will know RPM, but others won't, so here's a potted history... Established in 2001 by Ollie Preston, RPM has recently moved to new

premises in Long Marston, Hertfordshire, which is managed by Preston and business partner Darren Anderson. Like all good independent specialists, RPM's technicians have main dealer experience and can tackle anything from a 356 to a Cayenne.

As well as building a strong reputation for sales and servicing, RPM has successfully incorporated a motorsport department that does everything from track day preparation and support to full-blown arrive-and-drive deals in assorted club level Porsche race series throughout the UK.

It's through this motorsport activity that RPM has identified the Boxster as a perfect fast road and track day car for novices and experienced drivers alike. The result is the Boxster CSR. In essence the CSR conversion subjects a standard Boxster S to a Clubsport-style transformation that enhances the looks, feel, performance and handling to create a Boxster with much more attitude and aptitude for track use, yet crucially preserves enough of its on-road usability.

The first thing you notice is the more hardcore stance and aggressive looks. The former comes courtesy of the new suspension setup (more of



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which later), while the latter is achieved through clever use of the Porsche parts bin. As we all know, the Boxster and 996 shared many parts, and while this caused much consternation when both were new, it now means you can make a Boxster look much tougher simply by fitting the Mk1 996 GT3 front bumper and side skirts. A set of team Dynamics Pro Race wheels completes what is a very effective exterior makeover.

The next step in the CSR conversion is RPM's chassis modifications. Centred on KW's Variant 3 suspension kit (built to RPM's specification) the

adjustable dampers are complemented by a set of Powerflex bushes to take any slack and unwanted compliance out of the suspension. As a £5k Boxster is also likely to have done a few miles, the new bushes will ensure the suspension has all the precision and control you'd expect. Once the hardware is fitted, RPM give the CSR a full geometry and corner weight setup to make sure everything is perfectly aligned and balanced. Fitment of Toyo R1R rubber delivers a significant uplift in outright grip while Castrol SRF brake fluid improves resistance to brake fade.

A big part of the CSR ethos is to keep things simple and to maximise the Boxster's potential without risking too much, or spending too much, on engine tuning. Instead, RPM go for straightforward upgrades such as a lightweight clutch and flywheel, sports exhaust, hi-flow air filter and Porsche Motorsport short shift kit to improve response, feel and character. Then attention shifts to making the motor as reliable and durable as possible.

To this end an LN Engineering IMS bearing upgrade and sump extension kit are fitted,

addressing one of the few weaknesses in the engine, safeguarding it against oil starvation during sustained high-g cornering and giving you some peace of mind.

There's certainly a much more purposeful air about it as it sits in the pit lane waiting for our test drive, thanks to its proximity to the tarmac and the way those orange alloys fill the wheelarches with just a few centimetres to spare. It looks at home.

Open the driver's door and a Recaro Pole Position seat is there to greet you in an otherwise

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standard interior. I like this, as although it's tempting to strip all superfluous weight from a track day car, it does – to my mind at least – render it a far less desirable road car. Better to do as the factory does with the GT3 and RS 911s and retain some semblance of civility for a more habitable driving environment.

The CSR starts sweetly on the key with a slightly beefier engine note that's pleasing to your ears, but nothing to trouble the Clerk of the Course's noise meters. The clutch is a little heavier than standard, but again nothing to worry about. With the hard top in place and the Recaro holding you firmly in place there's a pleasing sense of occasion and purpose that seems more akin to a 911 than the humble Boxster.

As we trundle down the pit lane I make a quick scan of the dials, at which point my eyes spot the mileage: a whopping 144,000! That's quite a tally, and quite a vote of confidence from RPM in the Boxster's mechanical integrity to base its demo car on one with more miles than your average minicab.

To be fair you'd never tell the mileage from the way the CSR drives. It feels taut and keen, with clean, tight responses and an infectious appetite for laps. With 252hp and 1295kg to

haul the CSR has a decent turn of speed, but like all Boxsters it needs revs to come alive. That's something you'll feel happy to do from the off, for this CSR feels beautifully planted and inspires real confidence. There's plenty of grip, as you'd expect from track day-spec Toyos, and while the KW suspension is unquestionably firmer and more supportive than the standard road setup, it retains that progressive and exploitable feel that makes a Boxster so much fun on the road.

With a little time you find the limits of the mechanical grip, at which point the CSR reveals a balance that stays very true to the standard road car. Through longer corners, the nose gently fades to understeer, which settles the car and ensures you can ease out of the throttle without fear of upsetting the rear.

Medium and low speed corners place more demands on the front-end, but it finds plenty of bite, and given the amount of grip and traction available at the rear you can begin to play with the balance on corner entry, braking later and deeper, and perhaps lifting slightly as you turn-in to induce a little yaw at the rear to help maintain a more neutral balance.

It's a really satisfying process and one that extracts indecent corner speed from the CSR



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when you get it right. The beauty of this car is that it's encouraging and forgiving enough to be the perfect car for a novice to gain experience and learn their craft, yet it's also rewarding and responsive when driven with total commitment. It is great fun in the dry, and would doubtless be a hoot in the wet, thanks to its perfect balance and completely exploitable straight-line performance.

It's hard to think of a car that would give you as much road and track day fun for the money – RPM has this very car for sale at just under £15,000 – or packages of upgrades that would be as satisfying to fit as and when your budget

allowed. It's cheaper to get the whole CSR package fitted in one hit, which makes sense, but you don't have to. To give you an idea of what you'd need to spend doing the work bit by bit, the KW Variant 3 suspension, Powerflex bushes and RPM's geometry and alignment costs £3520 plus VAT. The lightweight clutch and flywheel, exhaust and air filter is £2515 plus VAT, and for mechanical peace of mind £965 plus VAT (when done in conjunction with clutch and flywheel) for the LN Engineering IMS and sump kits seems a small price to pay.

If you think you're an RS type of person then there's no question you could live with a Boxster

CSR on a daily basis, so you don't need to add the purchase price of an everyday car. Moreover the upgrades also make the Boxster more motorsport-friendly, so you could do the odd sprint and hillclimb to put your track-honed skills to the test in a low-risk competitive environment. Find a mate to share the car (and costs) with and for no more than £9000 each you have got yourselves the perfect weekend toy. Man Maths comes no more compelling than this ○

For more information contact RPM Technik on 01296 663824 or visit www.rpmtechnik.co.uk