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TINKER TAILOR

There are many ways to create your dream Porsche: you can spend weekends tinkering, or have a specialist tailor it to your liking; or, more rarely, you can buy an off the shelf factory-made pastiche

One of them you can drive to your heart's content, as fast and rampageous as you like, while the other, more than likely, has only the life of a garage queen to look forward to. We're presented with a couple of exquisite 997s, one a refined rebel rouser, the CSR Retro created by RPM Technik and the closest thing to a professionally-made outlaw 997; the second is a limited-edition factory-built special, the Sport Classic, quite the most beautiful and understated example of the 997 line-up, if not the entire range of earlier water-cooled 911s. And here's the issue: are Porsches

for driving or hoarding? The former, surely, no question. Even the Porsche Museum makes a good fist of airing priceless exhibits, so you'd hope that the same philosophy applies to cars like our 250-off Sport Classic; indeed, it can be: in the past I've been handed the keys to two of them by their generous collector-owners.

Their tweaked and personalised specifications reflect a desire to challenge the conventional, yet, given the superficial similarities linking them, the moot point is not about their respective aesthetics, so much as relative values. The 997 Sport Classic is a wonderful car, sufficiently rare so as to command a £quarter-of-a-million

price-tag, minimum, while RPM Technik's 997 CSR Retro is more like £50–60K depending on spec, for which you get a bespoke 911 that you don't feel in any way inhibited about using as your daily driver. There's the rub: the 997 Sport Classic loses value the more it gets used, while the beauty of the 997 CSR is that you can revel in its usability.

We've come to Lakeside Classics, based in the glorious Shropshire countryside near Shrewsbury, who have one of the three 997 Sport Classics currently available in GB (as far as on-line ads would have us believe). It's one of only 33 configured in right-hand drive, and



it's done a mere 3000 miles, so we're not about to add a great deal to that. Conversely, Phil Churchill – he of the racing Boxster featured recently on these pages – has driven up to meet us in his freshly-finished RPM Technik 997 CSR Retro, which we'll take for a run up on

bespoke versions of the water-cooled Porsche range; their first effort was a 986 Boxster S, by coincidence newly returned to their Hertfordshire premises with 175K miles on the clock and still going strong. Having tinkered with my Boxster and 996, it's a pastime I am totally in accord with.

Boxster/Cayman CSR, 996 CSR, 997 CSR, as well as Retro versions of both the 996 and 997 CSRs. Cost-wise, a 'donor' 997 could have a price tag of £25K, plus another £25–£35K for RPM Technik's CSR conversion. The difference in the price bracket is driven primarily by level of interior re-trimming. How is that expense disbursed? On the engine side, the air filter and exhaust are exchanged for optimised CSR versions, with Evans waterless coolant and low temperature thermostat installed. As far as the driveline is concerned, there's a lightweight clutch and flywheel, limited-slip diff and short-shift kit. Suspension upgrades on the gen 1 997 CSR means swapping active dampers for coil-overs and consequent deletion of PASM, which is incompatible with hunkier aftermarket gen 1 coil-over systems. Performance discs and pads are employed, plus new lower arms and Polybush joints are fitted, along with polyurethane engine mounts, and, finally,

The 997 Sport Classic was Porsche's own take on the whole retro 911 vibe

Phil Churchill's RPM CSR build was very much influenced by the Sport Classic look, hence the subtle stripes and, of course, the 'ducktail' style rear wing

“ It's like creating and expanding on your car's personality ”

Shropshire's spectacular Wenlock Edge.

Let's take a look at Phil's car first. It's based on a 997 C2S, with upgrades – customising if you like – to engine, suspension and bodywork. RPM Technik launched their CSR programme in 2010 with a view to producing more focused,

Apart from cosmetics, RPM's CSR Boxster 986 featured KW suspension, short-shift kit, lightweight clutch and flywheel and a modest ECU upgrade. It's like creating and expanding on your car's personality. RPM's CSR faction has its own dedicated website, and they'll deliver the mods on the 981





The wheels are factory made 19in Fuchs. Well, nothing else would do really

hallmarks for me is the ducktail, and that's why I went for the backdated 2.7 RS look for my own car. I know we live in a world where it's all about originality, especially for investment purposes, but a fair number of companies are taking their favourite aspects of Porsche and blending them together to make the perfect 911, so in this respect the Sport Classic represents almost an outlaw 997, done by Porsche themselves, which makes it original. They have taken the most identifiable characteristics of the 911 and blended them together with a frankly unlikely colour combination that's incredibly subtle. The fact that it's a 2S, as opposed to a 4S, yet it still has the wide body at the back, makes it unique in that respect, too.' So, the bodysell is 44mm broader-beamed in that respect, and the aerodynamic profile of the sills is different from standard. There are vents behind the rear wheelarches to disburse hot air from the brakes, while lights are subtly different from normal front and rear, and the stone guards on the leading edges of the rear wheel arches are in matching grey. The fuel cap purports to

be classic alloy, and the doors are also in aluminium. The Sport Classic runs on 19in factory-made Fuchs alloys, shod with Pirelli P-Zeros, 235/35 ZR 19 on the front and 305/30 ZR19 on the back, consolidating the period look. Its 3.8-litre Carrera S flat-six develops 23bhp more than standard, giving 403bhp, achieved via mods to the intake manifold and airflow, and a special exhaust

classic ceramic composite brakes. It's also equipped with a limited-slip diff, and suspension features PASM with 20mm lower ride-height and wider rear track. Beautiful and distinctive, it's the bourgeois belle compared with the racing bias of its contemporary 997 exclusive, the 4.0 GT3 RS. The Espresso brown and hound's-tooth woven leather and tweed cabin is also

“ The Sport Classic is almost an outlaw 997, built by Porsche ”

Wide rear, twin pipes and a GT3 RS style rear apron dominate. Minus the wing and in any other colour, the Sport Classic would look perfectly contemporary

system with split twin tailpipes. It's coupled to a short-shift six-speed manual gearbox rather than an overly modern PDK 'box, enabling a top speed of 187mph, while 0–62mph takes 4.6sec. Under the ducktail lives a carbon air-intake box that's labelled as the Porsche Exclusive Power Kit. Anachronisms are all very well, but the Sport Classic is fitted with distinctly non-

agreeably different to standard fare, and the Recaro seats are comfortable and supportive, while the basket weave upholstery is echoed in the door panels, so the impression is of a largely brown interior. The paired grey racing stripes are echoed on the gear lever knob and the rev counter, too. Surprisingly, the dinky rear seats are present as well, and the 911 Sport Classic

geometry set-up with corner weighting is carried out. Setting the whole thing off, wheels are HRE alloys shod with Michelin Pilot Sport, or 2s for track days. Bodywork revisions include three front bumper options with custom running-light set-ups, CSR carbon ducktail engine lid, CSR carbon front lid, and retro graphics pack. Cabin refinements include Recaro bucket seats, Alcantara dash, steering wheel and gearlever shroud, CSR rev-counter, and coloured seat belts. The flexibility of this programme means you can either place a donor car in RPM's hands and have them get on with the CSR transformation, or get them to source you one, or you can have it wrought on your own car over time, bit by bit, as funds allow. Phil Churchill took the first route, so his Metallic Basalt 997 emerges with its original hue intact plus the bodywork mods and graphics, and the suspension and engine work done. Depending on how keen you might be to emulate the 997 Sport Classic or another star from the Porsche firmament, you'd have to factor in a respray – or equally

effective spray-wrap. Phil's take on the CSR theme for his 997 is highly personal: 'It's really been about piecing together bits I've seen on other cars,' he says. 'I saw a 996 with tinted rear windows which I thought looked quite good, so I did that. And then the GT2 smile vent; I've got speed bumps down my road, so I wasn't sure how low I could go with the front end, and doing that properly would have been a few £ thousand, so, cost effectively, I put the smile vent on and the splitter and we'll see how we get on. The GT2 smile divided opinion, but I can get rid of the splitter if it gets trashed. All in-house stuff, and it's got the short-shift gearchange and lightweight flywheel, which makes the car feel so much more alive. And the geometry, you find yourself changing lanes before you've even thought about it. CSR is more of a brand, so you get a chassis number, and if you scan that you can pick up the spec of the car. Mine is Chassis 023, and these are genuine 19in factory Fuchs wheels, and Michelin Sport Pilot Cups, 235/35s front and 295/30s on the back. It's got dual-valve

suspension so it's stiff when you lean on it, but there's some give with the potholes. I've got the red rev-counter and the CSR mats tying it all together.'

We'll see how it all stacks up on the road in a minute, but first let's have a resume of the 997 Sport Classic, which provides the other side of the coin, so to speak. It sets out to evoke, if not recreate, Porsche's illustrious history, rather like the newer 991R. The one at Lakeside Classics is number 169 out of the 250 cars built. The model was introduced at Frankfurt in 2009, on sale from January 2010 and priced at £140K in GB. At least double that today. Most obvious references to an era that's by no means bygone are the ducktail engine-lid spoiler, the pair of retro racing stripes over the roof and front lid, the Zagato-style (Carrera GT) double-bubble roof, while the front panel is bereft of splitter, but retains minimal lower air scoops sculpted from the valance, plus black grilles. Lakeside proprietor Henry Thomas admires the Sport Classic. 'I do love classic Porsches,' he declares, 'and one of the most distinctive

The 997 Sport Classic was unique in that it used the Carrera 4S bodysell, but in 2WD form

Espresso brown interior is classy and a riot of leather, with every available surface trimmed, right down to the coat hooks on the backs of the seats





legend is embossed in the headrests, scripted in chrome on the door sills, while the glovebox lid reveals its numerical ID.

We've deferred to Lakeside's request that we don't drive the car, simply because they don't want any more miles on it. But I have driven a couple of Sport Classics in Europe, and I can recount what they felt like behind the wheel. You get a superb driving position, arms bent and close to the wheel, a taut ride, though not bouncing overly on the bumps, and predictable behaviour. From the outset, it's beautifully responsive on the throttle, accelerating without drama but still going hard, and there's a different exhaust note when notching up and down through the gears. On a stretch of dualled A-road where it can be opened up it proves to be seriously fast, a fabulous car, with coordinated looks, ergonomics and controls, offering dazzling performance and predictable handling. No hot-rod, this; it feels like a favourite armchair, unpretentious and enigmatic in appearance; the concept's right, and it's easy to see why someone would want to replicate it. But why

did they make just 250? Is it cynical to suggest it was always destined to be unaffordable to the majority of us? Now, if there were 25,000, or 250,000, perhaps we'd all be in with a chance. As it is, we have to do our own thing; dare to be different, eh!

And here's where RPM Technik come in. Phil's 997 version has that purposeful stance of a lowered 911, and it looks – and sounds – like it means business; the exhaust is certainly way fruitier than the Sport Classic. The acute steering feedback manifest on the road is a geometry thing – they've not put a quicker rack on it – it's a combination of ride height, geometry set up, and new KW springs and dampers. RPM's Commercial Director Darren Anderson tells me, 'We're going to be standardising the CSR suspension with KW coil-overs. This decision was driven by the quality and diversity of their product, and our ability to create bespoke CSR products based on their off-the-shelf suspension packages.'

What about the donor car? It's a 2005 gen 1 997 C2S, with sunroof. 'The price of

gen 1 997s has picked up so there are not quite so many cheap gen 1s available,' says Phil, 'and if you haven't got total confidence in the engine then you have to factor in an engine rebuild. It took me almost a year to find this car.' However, he views the CSR as 'being a bit more cost-effective than buying a later model, which is quite a financial commitment, which I'd then have to spend out on to get it how I want it.' Phil's CSR has a low temperature thermostat, which is seen as an engine preservation measure. His engine hasn't been rebuilt, because it is a Porsche replacement unit, exchanged under guarantee probably because of bore-scoring. 'It had a bore inspection when I bought it, and was found to be absolutely fine, so I just left it well alone, but RPM generally recommend having an engine rebuild if it's a gen1 unit, though they regard the gen 2 as being more reliable.' There's attention to detail in the cabin, of course. 'I think with both the 996 and the 997, the interiors are what lets them down, because they are not like an old air-cooled 911

Phil Churchill's CSR is based on a gen 1 997 C2S, which is a more cost effective 997 entry level, but riskier in terms of engine issues. Phil's car had already had a replacement engine from Porsche, probably due to bore scoring

Red trim details and CSR dials lift the interior. 997 interiors can suffer from wear and tear, but replacing and renewing the odd scuffed and worn piece of trim can really make a difference



Factory 19in Fuchs are essential to the whole retro look, as Porsche realised itself, with the Sport Classic. Tyres are RPM faves in the form of Michelin Sport Pilot Cup

where the patina just gets better the older it gets. The 996 interior is beginning to age quite nicely, but all of them get worn out, because the materials aren't brilliant. If you take out worn out and slightly scuffed items and put lovely new things in, it lifts the whole thing.' In Phil's case, detailed upholstery choices were made based on trim samples supplied which Phil selected from, picking up a riotous symphony of red and black in the material. As for the exterior, panel fit is impressively tight. 'I could have had a lacquered carbon-weave CSR engine lid,' says Phil, 'but I wanted it to look a bit more stock so I elected to have the top surface painted black. It hasn't had a complete re-paint, they just did the front bumper and bonnet, and the stripes, and the rest has just been polished.'

As good as a 997 Sport Classic? Well, it's certainly 90% there, we'd say and each CSR build is unique to its owner's specification

Out on the Shropshire moorland roads it's a hoot. Immediately I sense it feels beautifully poised. There's a positive tautness about it, and it entices you to revel in its perkiness. It pulls sharply in every gear,

a gain facilitated by the lightweight flywheel. Immediately the chassis feels stiff and the steering input is direct, and as for the ride, well, you feel all the undulations in the road, especially up on the moors, but then that's par for the course with fine-tuned suspension set-ups. The effect of the lightweight flywheel

drivability stakes, the CSR is more like a GT3, whereas the Sport Classic is a rather softer proposition.

In conclusion, the rare 997 Sport Classic is an art object, while RPM Technik's no less distinctive 997 CSR Retro is a usable thrill machine. No question: much as I like the

“ Out on the Shropshire moorland roads it's beautifully poised ”

means that I do have to apply slightly more revs than I would perhaps otherwise do to avoid stalling on take-off, but it does get up and go extremely rapidly. Throttle response is absolutely on the button, and turn-in precise; it drives exactly where I guide it, while the steering also feels light, and it's a beautifully balanced combination. In the

Sport Classic, the cost factor points me straight to the CSR. Plus, I've always loved modifying cars – my last three Porsches tell the tale – and the RPM Technik route is more my thing than buying a readymade that the factory has already done the tinkering with. Now, where's that customising catalogue? **PW**



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