

# NEW MODIFIED ARMY

The ultimate road race 996 might be the GT3, but these two modified Gen 1 and Gen 2 996 C2s run our own Project GT3 pretty close at a fraction of the price

Words: Steve Bennett Photography: Antony Fraser



**M**odifying, tuning, enhancing, improving. Call it what you will, but it's a slippery slope and a rather personal one at that, fraught with risk, compromise and even delusion. Manufacturers like Porsche spend zillions on developing their cars, and us enthusiasts come along and reckon that we can do a better job. I mean come on, who are we kidding.

I know, I've been there and ruined all sorts of perfectly acceptable cars in the process. In the days of carbs and camshafts, I spluttered, banged and popped around in various pieces of tat, waiting for the bloody thing to 'come on cam' or the turbo to finally wake up, before tearing off down the road on suspension that felt as if someone had filled the dampers with concrete. Happy days.

And as long as there have been Porsches on the road, there have been folk modifying them. Just look at our own fleet in the back of the mag. Very few of the cars that we run are actually standard in any

way. Most have mods – even my boggo 944 Lux is running on a mutated version of the standard injection system, and our own Johnny Tipler has just seen his infamous 964 enhanced with another 20bhp. Just about all of them feature suspension upgrades. After all, when the original stuff wears out, it makes sense to explore uprated kit. Hell, it's often cheaper too.

Some Porsches lend themselves to the tuning/modifying game more readily too. Recent trends have centred on the backdating route, but values of the air-cooled donor cars are such that it's not so prevalent now. That said, with RSs going stratospheric in value, there will always be a certain appeal and value to backdating, say, a Carrera 3.2. As you can see in this issue, even the '74 Carrera 2.7 is on the agenda to be cloned. The 964 was a prime candidate for modifying a few years ago, largely because it was somewhat unloved and it could be turned into an RS lookalike very easily. Not now though. With prices marching on, its value is in its standard state.

All of this brings us neatly to the 996. It's no secret that we're championing the 996 a bit these days. As the front cover star of our Dec 2014 issue, we hailed the 'Return of the 996.' The reasoning being two-fold really: It's a fine car, and a bloomin' bargain to boot and the market will at some point wake up to its potential. In fact there is a stirring right now as the dross sinks and the good cars out there start to make their climb out of the doldrums. It's a Porsche, it's a 911, it's inevitable.

But right now, the 996's bargain status makes it ripe for tuning. Why? Well, with a bit of imagination you can build yourself something quite special for not a lot of money. Something that will quite easily hang on to the slipstream of a passing GT3 and something to which you can integrate all those life enhancing engine mods that will future-proof a 996. Which is why we've gathered a trio together here at Bruntingthorpe for a bit of a showdown. And to liven things up, we've included our own Project GT3, which, after all, is what we're aspiring to here.





On a wing and a prayer. The view from the GT3's rear. Truth be told it's got the power to keep the 996 pretenders at bay, but on the handling front all three are pretty even

## THE REAL DEAL: PROJECT 996 GT3

So let's start there then. Project GT3 belongs to our very own *911&PW* resident snapper, one Antony Fraser, and it's been making sporadic appearances in the mag for three years or so now. Fraser's mission is to turn it into a track weapon of repute, while also retaining some on road prowess. To that end it's been extensively modded. Engine wise the mighty Mezger produces 400bhp, thanks to a Cargraphic exhaust and a DMS remap, and with a lightweight flywheel none of that extra fizz is lost either.

Suspension, though, is where he's really gone to town recently, which is another reason we're at Bruntingthorpe, to give it a bit of a shakedown. As documented in the last issue, the whole standard set up has been binned. After 15-years or so it was on its last legs. In its place is bolted a Bilstein/Eibach coilover set up, with extensive RSS suspension arms/links and coffin arms, all rose-jointed and running with minimal compliance on Powerflex 'Black' urethane bushes. To finish he's just fitted a new set of Yokohama AD08R track day tyres. In short then, this is a Gen 1 996 GT3 with all the bells and all the whistles. It's a well used car too, with over 80,000 miles on the clock, but hey it's a Porsche,

so no reason to be afraid of big miles. Plus the Mezger engine is reckoned to be indestructible and the inside of the bonnet on Antony's car has been autographed by father of the GT3, Andreas Preuninger, which must count as a blessing of sorts.

## READER'S RIDE: GEN 2 996 C2

It was all Dominic Bryant's idea – sort of. Dominic got in touch with us to concur wholeheartedly with our December 996 special issue, and to tell us about his highly modded Gen 2 996 C2, which was just the sort of evidence that we were looking for of life within the 996 market – folk like Dom who could see beyond the issues and

starting to negate their track day appeal (although don't tell our man Fraser). A 996 track day car in the spirit of a GT3 "but not a GT3", as Dominic puts it, seemed to be the best plan, so Dom picked up this black 996 C2 from Dorset Sports Cars in August 2014 for £17,000.

It came complete with full KW Variant 3 coilover suspension, plus GT3 top mounts, anti-roll bars, drop links and poly bushes, not to mention 996 Gen 2 GT3 wheels. A tidy amount of kit considering the asking price and proof that it can be best to let a previous owner soak up the cost of modifying.

Dom's car was reputed to have had engine work by Hartech, but a peak down the bores was enough to see that these

“Folk like Dom could see beyond the scare stories”

the scare stories and the potential of moving forward.

Dom was looking for a new track day toy after running a 944 Turbo for a few years (one of five 944s previously owned, plus a 993 Turbo, a 968 Club Sport and two 928s). He wanted a 996 GT3 but was put off by increasing values, which is

were not Hartech cylinder liners, so Dorset Sports Cars honoured the warranty and undertook a full rebuild. Dom is quick to point out that this wasn't Dorset Sports Cars' fault in any way, and that the service provided was exemplary. It also allowed him to go ahead and really spec and future proof the engine.





De-badged, Dominic Bryant's Gen 2 996 C2 looks super-stealthy in black. The GT3 wheels fill out the arches perfectly and the car sits just right on the road

The crank case was split and sent to Hartech for six new Nikasil liners, while the heads were degreased, de-coked and inspected for cracks. New OE pistons and rings were fitted and attached to Carillo rods and the whole bottom end was balanced including the crank, which obviously received new bearing shells too. Add to that the full gamut of future proofing upgrades including RMS bearing upgrade, cooler running thermostat kit, X51 style front radiator, FVD deep sump kit with X51 type baffles and a magnetic sump plug. The vast majority of this kit came from Design 911.

And there's more. A lightweight flywheel was fitted, Grippa plate type LSD plus IPD aluminium intake plenum and a Manthey racing exhaust. Phew, that's a lot of kit, but also the basis of one very strong engine. Power wise you're probably looking at an extra 20bhp over standard thanks to a careful build and the benefits of the IPD intake and the Manthey exhaust, so let's say 340bhp over 320bhp.

Dominic was, of course, lucky that his engine was rebuilt under warranty, not least because it allowed him to add a whole bunch of extra and upgraded parts at the same time. His spend was £5000 here, but then his labour costs were zero, making this one very cost effective, modified 996.

Dom's car looks very stealthy in black and sans any sort of badging. The stance is

just right and visually lowered further with the GT3 side skirts, and the GT3 wheels really fill out the arches. He's tempted to leave it at that although a rear ducktail spoiler does appeal and Recaro fixed back seats would be a bonus on track, but then it's currently a useable road car too. Decisions, decisions.

### THE ONE JOHN BOUGHT: RPM 996 CSR

John Aylward is another *911&PW* reader who can see the 996's potential in modified form and, like Dominic, he's a serial Porsche owner having run a Gen 1 996 on a daily basis in the early 2000s over a 150-mile daily commute, before exchanging it for a 987 Boxster S, which he ran for four years. There was also a 968 Club Sport for track use too, but right now he's the owner

the graphics and carbon fibre ducktail spoiler (complemented by a carbon bonnet, should you want it), it's quite subtle, helped by the bronze highlighting of the mirrors and the wheel centres. Ah, yes, the wheels. They're HRE three-piece split rims and they look the business, and at £6000 they should, but you have to say that the wheels maketh the car on this occasion. Oh, and the GT3 bodykit too.

RPM is another outfit enlightened in the potential of the 996 and wise also to the pitfalls. But with prices where they are, it's easy enough to work in engine upgrades and still not spend a fortune on a modified 996. That said, RPM didn't exactly scrimp when it came to this car. But then they have all the advantages that come with a pro run garage, where labour etc can be offset. This is eventually passed down to the buyer too. John is a lucky guy in that RPM have

start with the suspension and again it's a KW Variant 3 coilover set up that's fitted, including top mounts, drop links, Powerflex bushes and Eibach hollow anti roll bars, with a set up that's biased between road and track.

The engine has been compression tested, borescoped and rebuilt with an upgraded IMS bearing, deep pan oil sump kit, low temperature thermostat, lightweight clutch and flywheel, Wavetrac LSD and a cooling system top up with Evans Waterless cooler. Finally, to make the CRS heard, RPM's own exhaust system is fitted, which is, er, loud! It's also complemented by a BMC induction kit.

RPM don't quote any performance or

power figures as such, but there's nothing to doubt that this freshly built and uprated engine is producing anything less than its full 300bhp, and quite possibly more with the exhaust and induction mods, so 310-315bhp wouldn't be out of order.

Costs? Not cheap. Present your standard 996 to RPM for a similar makeover and you'll be looking at close to £20,000. But then you don't have to go for the full monty straight away. You might already have the engine upgrades anyway, so a suspension makeover would be transformation enough. You don't have to have the bodywork additions, or you can do it bit by bit, and with Gen 1 996 prices where they are, there's a very cost effective machine to be built here.

### SHUT UP AND DRIVE

So let's return to the beginning of all this, or specifically the bit where we say that it's really very easy to make a pig's ear out of this modifying malarkey, because now it's time to drive these creations.

First up, we're expecting all three of these cars to perform well from a driveability point of view. None have been fitted with uprated cams or had the cylinder capacity increased. In other words, they haven't been interfered with internally. Engine performance mods extend to induction, exhaust and mapping, so it's all about the breathing and, with modern fuel injection systems, there's no excuse any

Top: The Gen 1 GT3 rear wing was easily one of Porsche's finest aero sculptures. Above: RPM CSR wears a GT3 bodykit, but goes with a carbon ducktail for rear downforce

“RPM didn't scrimp with this car”

of this here rather well known 996.

Built by RPM Technik to promote its CSR range of upgrades for 996, 997 and Boxster, John's car benefits from all the tweaks that you would expect from a 'demo' model. Not that it's OTT. In fact even with

absorbed all the big bills for this car, even those HRE wheels.

As you can see from the famous 'fried egg' headlamps, this is a 3.4-litre Gen 1 996, so the cheapest of the breed, which is what makes it perfect for modding. RPM



John Aylward let RPM do all the hard work on the CSR and then jumped in and bought it. Sensible move! Far left: HRE wheels are pricey, but really set the car off





Subtle graphics and clever use of colour gives the RPM CSR a 'grown-up' look not normally seen on a modified 'demo' car. It sits just right too, and those HRE wheels are beguiling

more for bad manners and poor driveability. The GT3 has benefited most here, with a rolling road confirmed increase of 40bhp, which is pretty good going. Dom's Gen 2 3.6 is a little harder to quantify, but a careful build and upgrades would point to an extra 20bhp, while we would estimate 10-15bhp on similar grounds for John's CSR.

Significant to the driving experience with all three cars is binning the dual-mass flywheel in favour of a lightweight single mass job. Immediately the lack of inertia in

replaced clutch needs a firm shove, and the gearshift has a little more drag too.

On solid-mounted suspension, with tight damping and competition bushes, not to mention stiff walled track day tyres, it's actually surprisingly compliant. On the track, of course, this doesn't matter too much. Here it feels alive, with a front end that bites into corners, and with endless grip, even on a near freezing day like this. On the road it's rather more lively, although no more than, say, a 997 GT3 RS, and

surprise. For example both Dom and John's cars use effectively the same narrow bodyshell as the GT3 and both have modified suspension that is not far removed from Antony's car, although neither have gone for quite such a hardcore set up. All three cars could very easily be tuned to pretty much the same spec in terms of geometry, although that is, of course, a personal choice.

First impressions? Again it's the sheer pick up and the buzz and response from the engine that catches your attention, not to mention that flat six howl. And then there's the whole sum of the parts, the 911 feel that's accentuated by the stiffer chassis. Dom admits that he's yet to have it set up properly, but it doesn't feel far off. The 911's handling nuances are all there, but with extra clarity. There is more control over the weight transfer and seemingly more grip from the rear, which translates into that characteristic 911 steering feel as the front end goes momentarily light exiting a corner and loads going in. On the road Dom's car is perhaps a little stiff, with the back end feeling a little too lively, but a softening of the dampers would probably improve grip. Overall, though, it's a spectacular bargain considering the spec sheet.

John's CSR feels the lightest and the most nimble. Again it positively zings in

response to the throttle, and the 3.4-litre engine relies more on revs for performance, but that's no hardship, and while the exhaust wasn't popular with Bruntingthorpe's noise meters, it didn't half sound good on the road.

Inside, the fixed back Recaros seats and dished Momo steering wheel make for a more track biased feel, but that said, it's still got all the creature comforts, and you're drawn to the odometer which is registering 116,000-miles. We mention this because the bodyshell feels tight and there's no rattles to speak of. Well, 996s get an unfair rap for build quality.

RPM obviously set up the suspension on the CSR as they did, incidentally, on Project GT3. So do they feel the same? Well, not quite, but certainly similar, with the CSR being more compliant on the road and less inclined to wiggle over cambers. Of the three it certainly felt the more sorted, with incredible LSD induced grip out of corners and a balance that encourages pushing and exploring grip levels to its limits. Steering response, as with the other two, is a stand out feature. The most fun and accessible of the three? Yes, probably, but Dom's car is but a suspension tweak behind, and Antony's GT3 is conceived for more

hardcore pursuits.

So an enjoyable exercise in the art of 996 tuning. Were we right to pitch in with the GT3? Yes, not least because when our project was born, Gen 1 GT3s could be had for well under £40,000. Not now, but that is where the standard 996 comes in to be built up to as near as dammit GT3 spec for a fraction of the cost. And yes, we know that the GT3 Mezger engine is super-strong, but that doesn't mean it's going to last for ever and all those titanium bits won't come cheap, you know.

In the meantime, we'll keep the 996 flag flying whether standard, or modified. **PW**

Above: 996 GT3 is the range topping 'halo' car, but in reality there's not much to separate it from its 996 siblings. Most suspension components are interchangeable, although engine is a different matter. Antony's GT3 runs on Bilsteins, while Dom and John's car both use KW kit

**CONTACT**  
RPM Technik  
Units 6/7  
Old Airfield  
Industrial Estate  
Cheddington Lane  
Long Marston  
Herts  
HP23 4QR  
01296 663824  
rpmtechnik.co.uk

**Dorset Sports Cars**  
Three Cross Garage  
99 Ringwood Rd  
Three Legged Cross  
Wimborne  
Dorset  
BH21 6RD  
01202 825911  
dorsetsportscars.co.uk

“ Dom and John's car use the same narrow bodyshell as the GT3 ”

the drivetrain can be felt and the extra throttle response is palpable. Each also has a short-shift (standard on the GT3) gearchange to match the extra response and each works with similar efficiency.

Needless to say the GT3 feels like 'The Daddy!' It's the car the other two 'wannabe'. You can't argue with 400bhp and the extra torque that comes with it. It feels relentlessly strong, but it's also the heavier car to drive in terms of inputs. The recently

without that particular machine's plain obstructive clutch and gearchange. It's beyond what is truly comfortable for the road, but not so much that you would never choose to take it out for a blast. On the right road and devoid of traffic, it would make a devastating companion.

Dominic's Gen 2 C2 is proof of what an underrated machine the 996 is for the money. It is probably 8/10ths the car the GT3 is. This shouldn't really be any great



Dominic Bryant sporting essential 'on the day' head gear. Cold doesn't really cover it. As ever there's not much to see under the back, although Samco induction hose cheers the engine bay up a bit. Gen 2 GT3 wheels hint at performance and handling