

A few issues back we compared a genuine gen 1 996 GT3 with a modified 996 Carrera of the same vintage. The comparison was not so much about what was the better car – for that's obvious if you're buying with performance and driver enjoyment in mind – but how close a tuned Carrera could get in terms of offering driver fun, but at a lot less money. I think it's entirely fair to say we were very impressed with the Carrera: while the M96 engine lacked the fizz, character and durability of the Mezger

engine, it still pushed the Carrera along at an impressive rate, and made a great noise while doing so. Having digested the implications of that story – the Carrera might be a third of the price but it's a lot more than half the car – our enthusiasm for 996 Carreras, and modified ones at that, reached new peaks of excitement. It's time to get a whole band of the cars together!

Our selection of cars today covers a broad span of the typical modified Carreras currently out there at the moment. We've got everything from a lightly modified car that's looked after almost entirely by its

owner, to a 996 with a significantly more powerful engine, and plenty more in between. All further reinforce our belief that the dear old 996 is in many ways just entering its prime, and that when taken in a specific direction through modification it can offer just as much as any other generation of 911.

I start the day with James Putman's tidy looking gen 1 Carrera 3.4, a very late model on the cusp of the switchover to the 3.6 gen 2 variety and hence with electrical switches for the front boot and engine lid opening, not levers as on earlier gen 1 machines. James' story is particularly

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CLUBMOD 996

With entry to the 996 club so realistically in reach, buyers can afford a few mods, too, without breaking the bank. That's not to say you can't spend big money, and in this five car shootout we've covered all the bases



Mark McConnell's RPM modified C4 has a massive spec with a rebuilt engine, using Hartech liners, plus lightweight flywheel and sports exhaust and headers. Suspension is Bilstein PSS10 and GT3 geometry

the style of the 50th anniversary 997 model, and then incorporated Alcantara trim pieces around the cabin such as on the doors. The rear seats have been removed, and a half cage now sits in their place, but as Mark mentions, there is also that modern tech incorporated that strikes a balance between the old and the new.

It's immediately obvious once you're behind the wheel that this is a more aggressive car than the ones already driven today. The ride is firm, as Mark has set it up to be, but it is also

finding great traction out of the slippery corners and feeling less nervous than the rear-drive examples here today.

Mark's fleet includes some other interesting performance cars, but I can see how this unique Carrera is something that maintains its appeal even in distinguished company. It's comfortable enough that it could be used as a daily drive, but it must always feel very special every time he eyes it across the car park, or opens the door on a dark, damp, winter's morning.

cars. The exterior colour helps too, I think, an unusual but great choice when almost everyone at the time was going for the ubiquitous silver.

Breaking down the spec of the car into sections, the exterior has a GT3 front bumper with mesh, there are side skirts and the RPM ducktail spoiler, with fresh Michelins all round, while inside there's a complete colour change from red to dark grey/black Alcantara and leather, with colour-coded stitching and seat backs (in Vesuvio), a new Porsche carpet set and CSR-branded dials.

The performance modifications consist of a CSR exhaust system, BMC air filter, short shift kit, lightweight clutch and flywheel conversion, IMS upgrade and a CSR LSD for the drivetrain; a performance friction brake fluid change, caliper overhaul and replacement discs and pads for the brakes; and for the suspension a KW suspension kit, the rebushing of front and rear lower arms with Powerflex inserts, an Eibach anti roll bar kit (hollow) and a geometry set up.

All in, those modifications cost the owner around £38,000, on top of the price of the donor car. So building a full-spec CSR isn't cheap, but what you end up with is a car that feels a very long way removed from the

“ Pulling strongly this is much more the GT3-lite experience ”

nicely controlled, and I never get the feeling that it's simply crashing into potholes or over ridges. Roll is almost negligible, and the engine is so immediate, right there in the cabin with you, pulling strongly through the mid range and to higher revs. This is much more the GT3-lite experience, and it actually works well with the four-wheel drive setup,

Our 'full' RPM CSR is the car in which I drive to the photoshoot in, having picked it up from RPM's workshop that morning. I had first seen the car a few weeks previously when it happened to be on their premises, and it caught my eye immediately, brilliantly channelling the retro themes we love about old Porsches into the late 1990s generation of



Fuchs wheels are the defining external feature of the RPM modded cars. Not cheap, but they look great. Interior is a retro inspired feast of Alcantara and Pasha





The RPM CSR could be termed as the ‘factory’ car here seeing as it’s RPM’s latest build. Unlike the rest of the cars, that feature standard or modified Bilstein suspension, the RPM car has KW Variant 3

original 996 Carrera – and for most people in a very good way. This is a far more direct, boisterous machine than the original car, one that’s still perfectly comfortable and usable every day, but that wears its performance styling with pride, and announces it to all with a deep, gravelly exhaust note that growls at low revs and sings higher up the dial. The revs rise and fall quickly thanks to the flywheel conversion, and the short shift kit makes the gearchange feel extremely direct, with the same stiffness particularly from cold that you’ll find in any GT3.

The car’s chassis behaviour and engine are well matched: everything has a directness of feel, the KWs giving a firm ride but with just enough elasticity in the first portion of their response to maintain enough comfort on the M25 so that the car doesn’t become tiring. But it’s when we’re off the motorway and onto the lanes around the photo location that the car

really comes into its element, the exhaust noise ricocheting off the high Surrey hedgerows and thick woodland, and the steering having that precision that only a well-sorted, upgraded 996 seems to be able to offer. Everything is instinctive, never requiring a second thought before an input is made. It’s a really appealing package, the CSR, combining thoroughness and quality of build, especially in the visuals, with the performance and hardcore feel of Porsche’s more exclusive, high-powered models. Whether retro-influenced or more modern in CSR interpretation, it’s another strong case for using the 996 as a starting basis.

Actually, that’s probably a sentiment that could be applied to all the cars here. Some show the brilliance of the standard car when restored to how it should be and then given a personal twist, while others naturally reflect a more extensive brief – and budget. But

whether spanning on the driveway or comprehensively evolving the interior at significant expense, these are all 996s that justify the increasingly large amounts of money that are being spent on the cars. It reminds me how the 996 Carrera is coming of age in styling terms, but also being rightly appreciated for being the right sort of size for a 911 (in modern terms), and of retaining classic 911 traits like great steering, a typically 911 handling repertoire (especially when setup right) and of course, a classic flat six noise. As one owner remarks to me on the day, “I don’t see much appeal in the latest 911s. They’re too big, and not fun enough to drive. Even if I was to go out and spend £25,000, I don’t know what I could replace this car with that would give me the same satisfaction.” Having driven this collection of cars, I think he has a good point. **PW**

CONTACT

With thanks to all the owners who brought their cars along on the day, and to:

RPM Technik:
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Interior retrim is all part of the RPM CSR ethos and adds a fair bit to the cost of the build. It does lift the cabin ambience over the standard 996 though, particularly as interior standards were never that great in the first place

