

# 911 H E A V E N

We gather ten of the finest roadgoing 911s of all time, including the phenomenally quick new GT2, to find out which is the greatest of all

**9**11. It's an icon, a legend, a four-wheeled testimony to the process of evolution. Few cars, let alone sports cars, have enjoyed such an extended production run and evolved so purposefully and effectively. Certainly no other car has been a match for the best in its class for four decades, and no other car has remained so compellingly desirable.

The original 911 was unveiled in 1964 and back then no-one, not even its designer, 'Butzi' Porsche, could have predicted that 911 would become such a revered number, or that the petite, curvaceous 2+2 would be pivotal to the fortunes of the company through to the next millennium. Its overhanging rear engine ought to have limited its lifespan, yet while the rest of the market subsequently abandoned the layout, Porsche famously – stubbornly almost – persevered and refined it, accentuating its advantages while gradually minimising its shortcomings.

It's a measure of Porsche's success that, 37 years later, it has no qualms about launching the new GT2, a 911 with 455bhp, rear-drive and only organic traction control – the driver's right foot. In the mid-'80s this would have seemed outrageous even within the walls of Porsche's research and development department in Stuttgart. There, its engineers had been given free rein to make the accountants weep and create what remains the most incredible 911 derivative, the 959. We're still waiting for a road car with a more sophisticated four-wheel-drive system – a system deemed necessary to handle the sledgehammer blow of the twin-turbo engine's 450bhp...

Try to explain the 911's appeal to someone who's never driven one and you keep coming back to the

engine. The uniquely vocal flat-six dominates the car and it doesn't need to be gargantuanly powerful. Indeed, the less muscular, non-turbo versions of the six-cylinder horizontally-opposed 'boxer' are generally more characterful and deliver instantaneous throttle response, which you'll appreciate as you get to grips with the initially odd balance that its far flung location dictates; the nose light and bobbing along the road surface, the tail heavy and driven into it by the engine's weight.

You never forget your first hack along a twisting road in a 911 – the abundant, precisely delivered urge, the almost lazy, guttural throb that resonates through the body, and the physics lesson at every corner. More than likely, you'll step out wondering why such an effortlessly quick and surprisingly compact car feels so reluctant to go around corners. Welcome to the motorised conundrum that is the 911, the reason it has been such a compelling driver's car for so long. Like red wine, jazz music and smoked salmon, the 911's dynamics are an acquired taste. You won't appreciate how effective they can be or feel you're exploiting them until you've driven a 911 a few times, but once you've tuned in, you won't be able to stay away.

Yet if it is such an ultimately rewarding and beguiling layout, why have so few other sports car makers chosen to use it? Perhaps because the appeal of the Porsche isn't solely dynamic; it is also remarkably compact, famously reliable, surprisingly efficient and has great integrity. And, crucially, it's wonderfully tactile – its steering, pedals and gearshift have a consistent, engineered feel and weighting. It's a quality thing.

Mind, you can't wonder at the reluctance of other sports car makers to take on the 911 – every car that Porsche itself has designed since has been either mid- or front-engined. And, so far, the 911

has out-lived them all, relegating the 914, 924, 928, 944 and 968 to bit parts in the Porsche story.

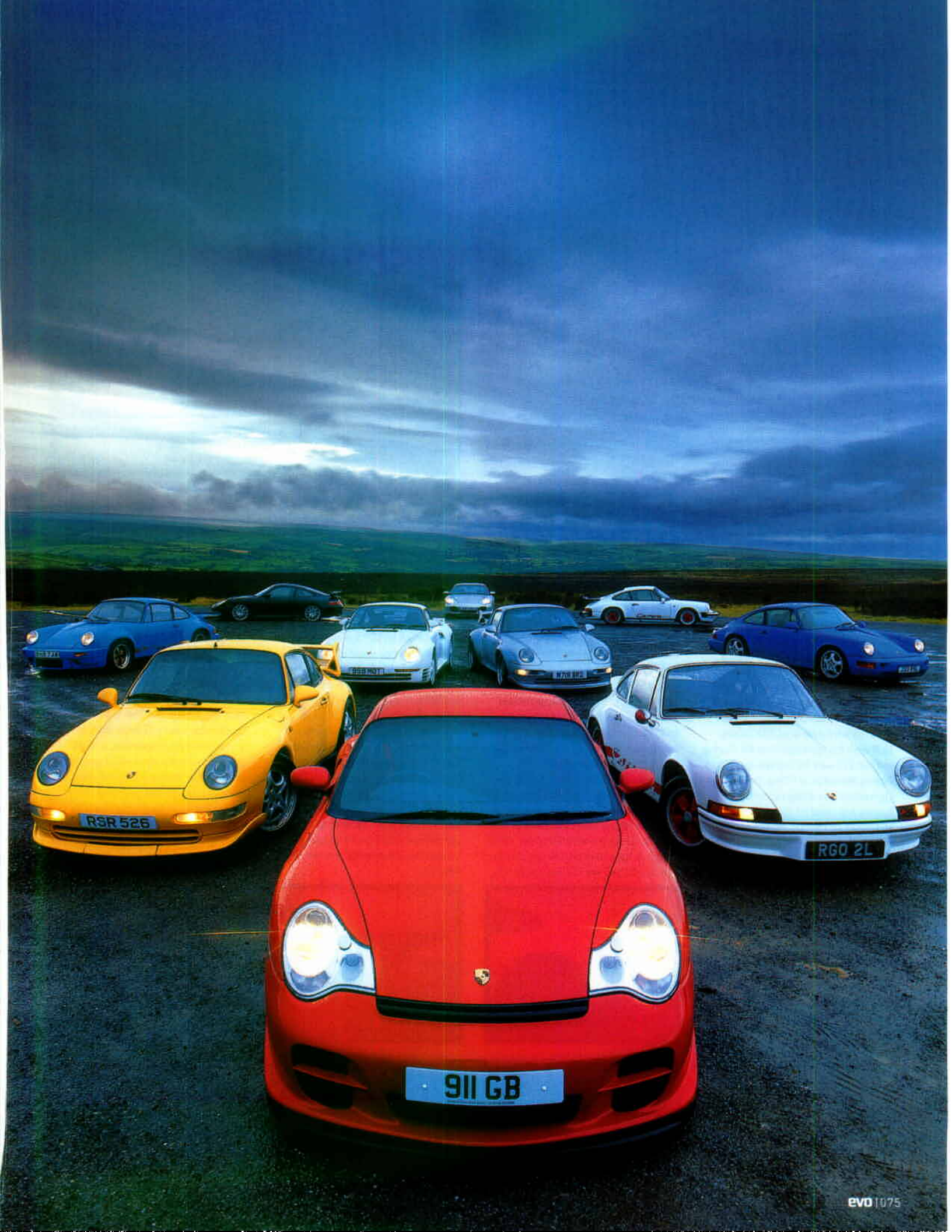
The 911 shows no signs of relinquishing its position as top Porsche, either, even though it's now being pushed hard by the excellent mid-engined Boxster. The Boxster has been around for almost six years, yet it hasn't been able to prevent the 911 from driving off with our Car of the Year title no fewer than three times, the accolade going home with the standard 996 911, then the GT3 and last year the Turbo.

Now there's the GT2, which promises to combine the immediacy and involvement of the rear-drive GT3 with a bigger turbocharged thrill than the 4wd Turbo. Could that make it the best 911 ever?

Possibly, but without driving it back-to-back with the most impressive 911s that have gone before, how could we be sure? We couldn't, so we argued a bit and eventually agreed on nine must-have 911s with as strong a claim to the title of 'Best 911 Ever' as the GT2. Then we arranged for them all to be in North Yorkshire for a couple of days.

And here they are, brightening up a drizzle-soaked moorside, and suddenly it doesn't seem like such a simple idea. Ranged before us is a nape-tingling, stomach-flipping, insurance company-worrying array of 911s spanning almost 30 years, from 1973 to 2001. Chronologically they are: 2.7 RS, 3.0 RS, 959, 3.2 CS, 964 RS, 993 RS and GT2, and 996 GT3, Turbo and GT2. They are what we regard as the most entertaining, most engaging, most cohesive, most rewarding, most competent, most attractive, most thrilling and most desirable roadgoing 911s that Porsche has ever made. Where on earth do you start?

At the beginning seems most obvious, with the 2.7 RS. ●



# [Greatest 911]



## HARDCORE HERITAGE

### ■ 1973 Carrera RS

There were driver's 911s before this, but the unmistakable duck-tailed 2.7 is where the 911 legend really began. Developed by Porsche as a good basis for racing, the RS was endowed with terrific performance thanks to its newly enlarged 2687cc flat-six engine, which developed a healthy 210bhp at 6300rpm. Porsche needed to sell 500 for homologation purposes, but the 2.7 RS proved so popular that a total of 1580 were eventually produced, of which 55 were pure-bred RSR racers, 1308 were the more luxurious RS Touring, and just 227 were RS Lightweights. Tipping the scales at 975kg, the RS Lightweight was 100kg lighter than the Touring and could hit 60mph in 5.6sec and run on to 150mph. No wonder it is still rated by many as the ultimate 911. Best of all, an RS Touring can be yours for a little over £30,000. Tempting, isn't it?



Engine: Flat-6, 2687cc, 12v, air-cooled  
 Max power: 210bhp @ 6300rpm  
 Max torque: 182lb ft @ 5100rpm  
 Kerb weight: 975kg  
 Power/weight: 219bhp/ton 0-60mph: 5.6sec  
 Top speed: 150mph Number built: 1580

### ■ 1995 993 Carrera RS

Like its illustrious ancestor, the 993 RS has a passionate following amongst 911 connoisseurs. The last air-cooled 911 to wear the RS badge, its 3.8-litre engine, with Porsche's Varioram induction system, produced a scintillating 300bhp, which it fired through the rear wheels via a six-speed gearbox. Built using the time-honoured RS recipe of thinner glass and body panels, the 993 RS also jettisoned interior luxuries in pursuit of lightness. As a result it was an impressive 100kg lighter than the cooking Carrera model, which, combined with lowered and stiffened suspension made it one of the sweetest-handling 911s ever. With just 47 of the 1123 production run coming in right-hand drive, the 993RS remains one of the most sought-after Porsches. Which means you're unlikely to see any change from £50K if you want to buy a good one.



Engine: Flat-6, 3746cc, 12v, air-cooled  
 Max power: 300bhp @ 6500rpm  
 Max torque: 262lb ft @ 5400rpm  
 Kerb weight: 1270kg  
 Power/weight: 240bhp/ton 0-60mph: 5.1sec  
 Top speed: 172mph Number built: 1123

## FORGOTTEN HEROES

### ■ 1974 Carrera RS 3.0

Built in the wake of the 2.7 RS, the bigger-engined, broader-bodied RS 3.0 is one of the lesser-known race-bred 911s. Based on the new-for-'74 G-series 911, the RS 3.0 was the first 911 to wear the infamous 'whale tail' and engorged rear wheelarches that would later become synonymous with the Turbo. The engine was stretched to 2993cc, power increased to 230bhp, though it was effectively no quicker than the 2.7 (0-60 in 5.5sec and a top speed of 148mph) thanks in part to the increased drag generated by those broad hips and that wing. It was even lighter, though, tipping the scales at just 900kg. The RS 3.0's lack of notoriety can partly be attributed to its extreme rarity. Just 111 were built: 54 road cars, 42 RSR competition versions and 15 special IROC versions for a one-make race series in America.



Engine: Flat-6, 2993cc, 12v, air-cooled  
 Max power: 230bhp @ 6200rpm  
 Max torque: 204lb ft @ 5000rpm  
 Kerb weight: 900kg  
 Power/weight: 259bhp/ton 0-60mph: 5.5sec  
 Top speed: 148mph Number built: 111

### ■ 1991 964 Carrera RS

Perhaps the most aggressively focussed RS of all, the 964 RS was built to satisfy both Porsche's motorsport needs and the buying public's desire for a pure-bred, hard-edged, driver's 911 after the introduction of the softer, all-weather Carrera 4 a year or so earlier. Pared down to 1229kg and with a modest power hike from the standard Carrera's 250bhp to 260bhp, the result was a 911 that could dash to 60mph in just over 5sec and comfortably breach 160mph. With its uncompromising suspension, it could also cope with the demands of circuit driving better than any previous road-going 911, though this overtly sporting character also drew criticism from the motoring press at the time. Recently available from as little as £20,000, values are now recovering, with the best cars today fetching nearly £30,000.



Engine: Flat-6, 3600cc, 12v, air-cooled  
 Max power: 260bhp @ 6100rpm  
 Max torque: 240lb ft @ 4800rpm  
 Kerb weight: 1229kg  
 Power/weight: 215bhp/ton 0-60mph: 5.3sec  
 Top speed: 162mph Number built: 2364



## THE APPLIANCE OF SCIENCE

### ■ 2000 996 Turbo

Evo's reigning Car of the Year, the 996 Turbo still shocks with its ability to deliver effortless, enormous speed on any road and in any weather. Like the 959 before it, the Turbo's brief is to flatter rather than challenge its driver. Using the 911's inherent traction advantage and capitalising on it with all-wheel drive and a sophisticated stability control system, the 996 Turbo is quite simply the most exploitable supercar in the world. Heavier as a result of all-wheel drive and increased creature comforts, but more powerful thanks to its twin-turbocharged, 3.6-litre, 420bhp engine, the Turbo may lack a little of the purity and immediacy of its race-bred stablemates but broadens the range of conditions where a 911 can excel. Anyone who has felt its intoxicating accelerative squeeze and sheer ground-covering ability will vouch for that.

### ■ 1985 959

Though originally conceived as a Group B racer, the 959's greatness is rooted not in motorsport glory but its advanced engineering. Boasting every technical innovation Porsche engineers could contain within its 911-derived bodyshell, the 959 was a technical tour de force. All-wheel drive with active torque split, driver selectable traction programs, electronically adjustable ride height and damper stiffness, water-cooled cylinder heads, multi-stage turbocharging, anti-lock brakes, advanced 'zero-lift' aerodynamics and composite bodywork. The 959 had all this and more. In fact if Porsche had charged customers what the car actually cost to produce, the asking price would have doubled. The world had never seen anything like it, nor would it again for more than two decades, until the introduction of the 996 Turbo.

## RACERS AT HEART

### ■ 1999 996 GT3

Not quite an 'RS', the GT3 nevertheless formed the basis for one of Porsche's most successful and prolific GT race cars. Built in limited numbers (just 50 rhd cars came to the UK), the GT3 shunned weight saving measures (it was actually heavier than the Carrera) in favour of more power and sharper dynamics. But the GT3's route to enhanced performance was no less effective. Using a dry-sumped, 360bhp, normally-aspirated development of the Le Mans-winning GT1 motor, the GT3's rev-hungry delivery brought a new dimension to the modern 911 experience. Bigger brakes and significantly lowered and stiffened suspension restored the keenness to the 996's more mellow edge, while the purity and lightness of rear-wheel drive endowed the GT3 with a 996 Turbo rivalling power-to-weight ratio. Undoubtedly one of the very best 911s.

### ■ 1987 Carrera CS

Based on the 3.2-litre Carrera, the Club Sport was, as its name suggested, built as a cost-effective club-level race car. Built without sound deadening, underseal or body cavity treatment, the CS was usefully lighter than the Carrera despite lacking RS-style thin-gauge glass and bodywork. It also had a keener 231bhp engine, thanks to a raised 6840rpm rev limit. Comparatively few CS models were built; Porsche buyers seemed more preoccupied with vulgar Turbo Cabrios, and it was an otherwise barren era for genuine Porsche driver's cars. Indeed, the CS was Porsche's first normally aspirated road-racer since the RS 3.0 of 1974. Denied the cachet of an RS tag, the Club Sport was understated proof that Porsche hadn't lost its touch where raw-edged, race-honed dynamics were concerned. A car shot through with essence of 911.



Engine: Flat-6, 3600cc, water-cooled, biturbo  
 Max power: 420bhp @ 6000rpm  
 Max torque: 413lb ft @ 4600rpm  
 Kerb weight: 1540kg  
 Power/weight: 272bhp/ton 0-60mph: 4.1sec  
 Top speed: 189mph Number built: 4000

Engine: Flat-6, 2850cc, water-cooled, biturbo  
 Max power: 450bhp @ 6500rpm  
 Max torque: 368lb ft @ 5000rpm  
 Kerb weight: 1451kg  
 Power/weight: 315bhp/ton 0-60mph: 3.7sec  
 Top speed: 197mph Number built: 283

Engine: Flat-6, 3600cc, 24v, water-cooled  
 Max power: 360bhp @ 7200rpm  
 Max torque: 273lb ft @ 5000rpm  
 Kerb weight: 1350kg  
 Power/weight: 271bhp/ton 0-60mph: 4.5sec  
 Top speed: 187mph Number built: 1450

Engine: Flat-6, 3164cc, 12v, air-cooled  
 Max power: 231bhp @ 5900rpm  
 Max torque: 210lb ft @ 4800rpm  
 Kerb weight: 1164kg  
 Power/weight: 202bhp/ton 0-60mph: 5.1sec  
 Top speed: 153mph Number built: 340



A RACE APART

1994 993 GT2

Combining the delicacy and lightness of the 993 RS with 430 explosive, twin-turbo'd horsepower, the 993 GT2 was designed with two things in mind: racing and winning. A fearsome-looking machine, complete with riveted-on wheelarch extensions, a high-rise rear wing with hungry air-intakes and a tarmac-skimming ride-height, the GT2 was the four-wheeled equivalent of fusing Prince Naseem's build with Lennox Lewis's punch, the most uncompromising 911 ever to go into production. Though an intimidating prospect on the road, those lucky enough to experience it were immediately surprised by its relatively docile dynamics, which retained many of the 993 RS's qualities. Costing well over £100,000 when new, the 993 GT2 was the most expensive, most exotic, most extreme 911 this side of the £600,000 911 GT1.



Engine: Flat-6, 3600cc, air-cooled, biturbo  
 Max power: 430bhp @ 5750rpm  
 Max torque: 398lb ft @ 4500rpm  
 Kerb weight: 1290kg  
 Power/weight: 339bhp/ton 0-60mph: 3.9sec  
 Top speed: 183mph Number built: 237

2001 996 GT2

The fastest 911 ever (excluding the 959). Quite an accolade, and one that rests firmly on the 996 GT2's broad shoulders. A combination of the GT3's back-to-basics drivetrain and the immense power of a beefed-up 996 Turbo engine, the 996 GT2 is the epitome of Porsche's new-school approach to building the ultimate driver's 911. With nothing but a limited-slip diff to contain the 455bhp passing through the rear wheels, the GT2 is a GT3-locked in hyper-drive. Clever aerodynamics rob its form of simple, unsullied beauty, and a lack of motorsport intent ensures it will never bask in the reflected glory its name-sake enjoyed, but if you're passionate about 911s, the new GT2 commands your full and undivided attention. Does it possess the depth of ability and involvement to earn a place alongside the very best 911s? You're in the right place to find out.



Engine: Flat-6, 3600cc, water-cooled, biturbo  
 Max power: 455bhp @ 5700rpm  
 Max torque: 457lb ft @ 3500-4500rpm  
 Kerb weight: 1440kg  
 Power/weight: 320bhp/ton 0-60mph: 4.0sec  
 Top speed: 176mph Number built: n/a

Having shared the drive north with co-editor Meaden in the new GT2, I'm intrigued and a little apprehensive at the contrast that awaits in the shape of the original Carrera RS. But it quickly becomes apparent that this legendary 911 doesn't need the support of historical perspective to impress.

Unadorned by extravagant spoilers and wheelarch flares, its flanks underscored by the blood red 'Carrera' script, the RS looks incredibly small and narrow. It's hard to believe that this bodysell is essentially the same as that of every other 911 here bar the three current-generation 996s – even the 959 was crafted around it.

Like most of us here, I've driven many 911s but never a 2.7 RS. As I slip behind the wheel I know I shouldn't be surprised at the familiarity of my surroundings, but I am. It's a weird kind of déjà vu, like watching the *Star Wars* movies and seeing the prequel long after you've enjoyed the exciting developments that follow. The view of the long, headlamp-capped front wings through the RS's upright screen is reassuringly distinctive, as is the churning rumble of the flat-six idling away behind.

There are plenty of features that date the RS – the liquorice-thin steering wheel rim, the long, bent-wand gear lever, and the shapeless-looking, short-backed 'bucket' seats – but in less than a mile the RS has established its credentials. Those seats prove surprisingly comfortable and supportive, the gearshift is long-winded but marvellously tactile and accurate, and there's no shortage of dynamic feedback. That spindly wheel rim tells you precisely what the front tyres are up to and through the driver's seat you can feel exactly what's happening at the rear.

For this I am grateful. There isn't such a thing as an 'ordinary' 2.7 RS but this one has a more illustrious provenance than any other: it was a highly successful racing car, campaigned by AFN, before it was bought by 911 collector Lord Mexborough in the mid-'80s. On these seriously puddled roads the RS is frantically, alarmingly alive, deflected by unavoidable pools of standing water but delicately responsive when they can be avoided. And when I eventually get to press its organ-pedal throttle to the floor... *Feez!* does it fly. This 1973 911 is in rude health, and no mistake.

A fill-up (laying at least 40kg more over its front wheels) makes it even better, though it's already clear that Lord Mexborough keeps this RS in tip-top condition; it feels so together, so solid and free of creaks and rattles, and it's to the original spec, apart from a set of Pirelli P-Zeros which undoubtedly improve its grip enormously.

Co-ed Meaden, another 2.7 RS virgin, is as surprised by its performance as I am. 'Really punchy acceleration, made all the more memorable by instant throttle response and that terrific, dry, rasping engine note,' he enthuses. It's clear that the oldest car here has served notice on every other 911 that would claim to be the best ever.

Meaden again, after a run in the dry: 'The whole car feels so delicate, so deft, you hardly need to make any steering input to get the nose turned in. It's almost as though you *think* it into the apex.' Contributor Roger Green is just as amazed: 'It's so pure; every input provokes an immediate response and it's hugely satisfying. Only the brakes betray it's age but once you've acclimatised to them, you really start to crack on. What must it have been like on the roads in the early '70s?' Indeed.



Where the 911 legend really began: the original, scintillating Carrera RS. It was also the first 911 with different size tyres front and rear – in fact the rear 215s were the widest rubber available at the time (1973)



'You hardly need to make any steering input to get the nose turned in. It's almost as though you *think* it into the apex'

'The 3.0 RS looks like it has driven straight out of an early '70s Steve McQueen film'



**T**he next evolution of the 911 wasn't long coming. To stay ahead of its on-track rivals, the RS had to evolve, and so in 1974 Porsche unleashed its successor, the 3.0 RS.

Beyond the obvious up-sizing of the engine (which took power up from 210 to 230bhp and improved low-rev urge), the new RS sported body-building, attention-grabbing additions: flared wheelarches under which sheltered fatter rims and tyres, a distinctive chin spoiler with a hungrier, square air intake, and the

very first 'whale-tail' spoiler.

While the 2.7 is almost timeless, the blue and gold liveried 3.0 RS is clearly a product of the early '70s. 'It looks like it has driven straight out of a Steve McQueen film,' comments Green.

Despite the 3.0's rarity, its owner, Lord Mexborough, doesn't feel compelled to keep it in as fine fettle as his 2.7, which is rather telling.

'You know this is going to be a less delicate car to drive,' says Meaden, though he adds that it does feel more modern. 'You sit lower, the steering is heavier, the brakes bite more strongly

and you have to adjust your driving style less to cope with it, making it an easier car to drive hard.' That was surely the conclusion of those that raced it, too, yet in road car terms the gain in grip and security is offset by a loss of delicacy and feedback. Although we're reluctant to judge it definitively given that this car isn't on modern tyres like the 2.7, it seems that evolution has sold the road driver a little short.

Even Meaden, keen to see the 3.0 RS in its best light, concludes that it is: 'Progress of sorts, but already that 2.7 magic was being diluted.'



Left: wider arches, fatter tyres, bigger air intakes – 3.0 RS has lost some of the visual delicacy of the 2.7, and that's reflected in the driving. Feels quite a bit more modern, though

Outa-my-way! 959 still looks like the 911 of the future 16 years on, and reads like it too - 450bhp biturbo flat-six, 4wd, abs. It's still awesome



It's a big jump to our next contender, the 959, and we fully accept that its place in this chronology of 911s is rather dubious. We include it not so much for its advancement of the 911 line back in '85 but as a presage of things to come. At the time, the roadgoing 911 Turbo was well established but it was a recalcitrant beast, a fast but blunt instrument. The 959 indicated how it might evolve, with two turbos instead of one and four-wheel drive instead of rear drive.

The 959 was engineered with a Germanic zeal,

resulting in a 2.9-litre 24-valve flat-six producing 450bhp, a 4wd system with selectable dry, wet and snow settings (a feature that's a novelty even now on the Mitsubishi Evo VII), and a much wider chassis clothed in that distinctive, free-flowing bodywork.

I'm in the 2.7 RS when the 959's wide, pebble-smooth nose looms large in the rear-view mirror and it really does seem like I'm about to be overtaken by the 911 of the future. Green emerges with a wry smile; he's been waiting to drive a 959 since he had its poster on his

bedroom wall as a kid. So was it worth the wait? 'I feel privileged,' he says, but he's realistic: 'It's not the perfect driver's tool: the steering lacks the clarity and feel of the best here and it's as if you're expected to sit back and marvel at the brilliance of the Porsche engineers.'

The 959 isn't simply unlike any other 911; it's unlike any other car you'll ever drive. It will cover ground at remarkable speed - as fast as the current Turbo, we discovered - but it's a wild ride over these moorland roads. Pushed hard, body control is spongy, and grip and feedback



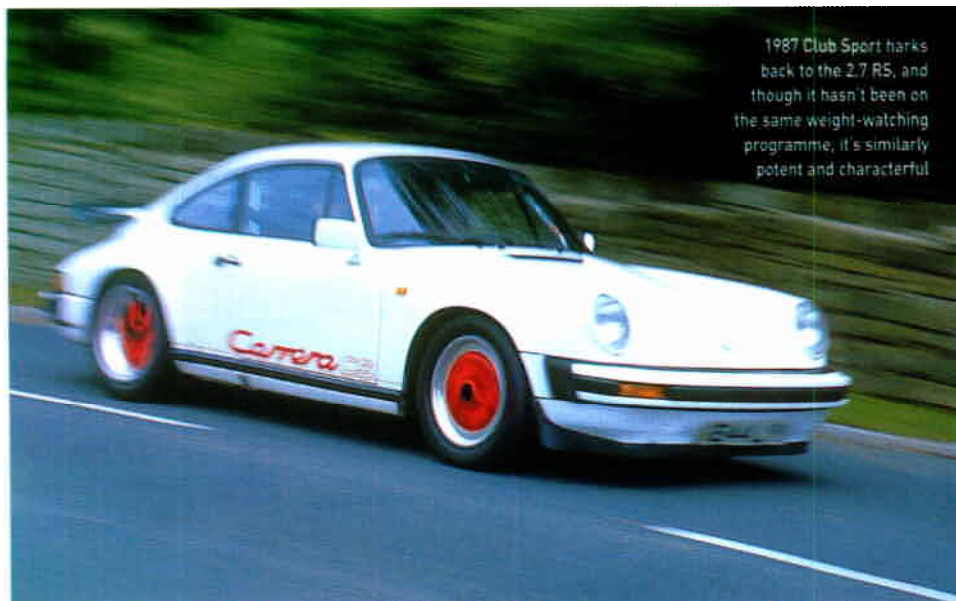
Above: 959 has more switches, gauges and warning lights than any other 911, as befits its complex mechanicals. Purple/grey trim is nice, very nice



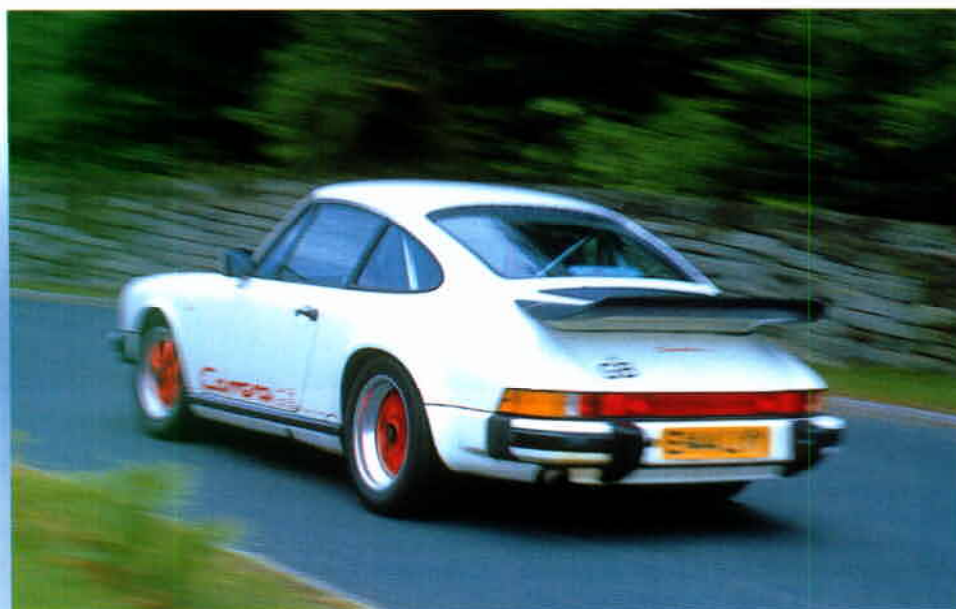
only adequate. Time has not dulled the impact of its two-stage turbo delivery, though. 'Until the second turbo comes on song at 4500rpm there's nothing particularly special about the way it goes,' says Green, 'but at that point everything changes as it kicks in like a booster rocket.'

Meaden has driven it before, as have I, for a feature with the then-new 4wd 993 Turbo, and we both recall it seeming more impressive back then. Still, as he says, 'For a 15-year-old car it is quite remarkable – it must have seemed like an alien spacecraft in the '80s and certainly hinted at what Porsche engineers had in mind for the 911. That they had to wait all those years to do it with the 996 Turbo shows how far ahead of its time the 959 was.'

**T**ucked in behind the 959, chronologically, you'll find the 3.2-litre Club Sport of 1987. 'Not forgotten,' says Meaden, 'but certainly an underrated 911.' Very much so, it turns out. With a will, Porsche could have made the Club Sport an RS. It makes a gesture at performance-enhancing weight reduction (an RS pre-requisite) with only carpet where the tiny rear seats should be but doesn't go much further. Consolation – if it were



1987 Club Sport harks back to the 2.7 RS, and though it hasn't been on the same weight-watching programme, it's similarly potent and characterful



'Of all the flat-sixes here, the 964 RS's is the sharpest, revving with instantaneous, motorbike-like hunger'

needed – comes with the 2.7 RS-lookalike white bodywork with red 'Carrera CS' script and Fuchs forged aluminium alloy wheels. For my money, the Club Sport doesn't need to apologise for aping the 2.7 RS – it's a worthy successor.

We're now 16 years on from the original RS and regular 911 development has delivered small but appreciable improvements, such as fatter, easier to use column stalks, significantly better headlamps, and a shorter, snappier gearshift. The CS also has much better brakes, more grip and a more potent flat-six that I rate as the most engagingly vocal and stimulating

version of the boxer engine of any 911.

'Feels very similar to the 3.0 RS,' says Meaden. 'The engine's really gutsy, with one of the richest sounds of any 911 here. It's quick too, with muscular mid-range punch and a meaty top-end.' Indeed, the Club Sport has all of the guttural, low-rev throb that characterises the 911 flat-six and combines it deliciously with what we'd have described as a VTEC-like high-rev surge if Honda had got around to launching it by then.

Not only that, the Club Sport has all of that exploitable, typical 911 chassis writhe and steering wriggle that tells you you're going to have to show commitment and skill if you want to go really quickly. Oh, and you'll need muscle. As Meaden says, 'It's tactile but hefty – you need to use your shoulders and forearms to steer it, where the 2.7 is more wristy. It has strong grip and a good, exploitable balance, though you still treat it with far more respect than a current generation 911.'

Its owner, amiable Jim Palmer, a Yorkshireman who looks like he bear-hugs trees before uprooting them, loves his CS and does many track days. 'It's the castor angle that gives the steering its weight. I've had many people drive it and they all say that's how they are. Around the Nürburgring you have to get it to float so you're steering it with the throttle. It's perfect with a quarter-full tank, but you don't get many laps on a quarter tank...'



Last of the 'classic shape' 911s is the early-'90s 964 RS. Stripped-out interior (note wind-up windows, door-pulls) suggests it means business...

**N**ext up is the 964 RS, a 'proper' RS: 100kg lighter than the contemporary de-luxe model and feisty with it. Its five-spoke 'Cup' alloys and fat tyres are barely contained by its unflared arches, there are no visible spoilers front or rear, and it seethes with pent-up aggression. In this company it looks like a 911 that's been given a Number One Cut all over.

Body-wise we're still locked into the 2.7 RS of '73, and equipment is similarly scant: no air con, rudimentary door casings with wind-up windows and a tongue of body-coloured seat-belt material for a door catch, and you're clamped into place by lightweight bucket seats. I'm itching to get behind the wheel despite previous experience. I say despite because my recollection is that it's every bit as hard and uncompromising as it looks. But, boy, does it look pumped-up ➤





993 model was last of the 911 line to retain the air-cooled flat-six. Porsche had extensively reworked the suspension, however, and it feels a lot less edgy

and ready for a good thrash along a nasty road. 'Make sure you give it loads so you can hear the engine,' says owner Adrian Rowlands.

Perhaps cars like the Skyline R34 V-spec have re-calibrated our expectations of ride quality; maybe cars generally have become stiffer; whatever, the 964 RS is firm but not uncomfortable. And it *really* goes. Over to Meaden: 'The suspension's firm but far from flawed – this is a car that has clearly found its niche 10 years after it was launched. It demands you grab hold of it and drive with conviction and commitment. It's light and responsive, alert but just shy of edgy. It combines the rawness and uncensored feel of the 2.7 with modern grip levels, braking and overall dynamic iron-fistedness.' Er, he likes it then? 'It's bloody rapid too, as any of the allegedly quicker cars will testify.' That'll be a yes.

Whatever 911 you were driving, if you started off with the 964 in your mirrors, you'd arrive with it still glued there. On the bumpier roads where we've based ourselves, it feels like the RS is going ten rounds with the tarmac, and giving as good as it gets. Yet it's very rapid, I conclude, as I gradually reel in the broad, flame-spitting rump of the 959, being driven as hard as he dare

by John Hayman. Of all the flat-sixes here, the 964's is the sharpest, revving with instantaneous, motorbike-like hungriness. The bare figures may say it has just 10 extra bhp over the standard 911 of the time, but they don't begin to tell the story.



993 was first of the modern-era 911s, but while the exterior was a departure, from the driver's seat it all looked familiar

Later I find Green, who writes our Buying Guides, looking wistfully at the 964. 'I almost bought one of these instead of my Caterham and driving one again I question my choice – this really is the affordable 911 with reasonable running costs. You can't take liberties with it, you have to stay focused and concentrate on what you're doing, but you feel everything that's going on and although it's not the easiest to drive hard, nothing that happens is a surprise.'

It is to me. I'd anticipated that by now we'd have established one older-generation car with the credentials to take on our fearsome array of modern-era 911s. Instead we've got three – the 2.7 RS, 3.2 Club Sport and now the 964 RS. And I know the next two cars are brilliant, too.

'This is the first RS I ever drove,' says Meaden, a glint in his eye, as he clambers out of the Speed Yellow 993 RS. 'Loved it then, love it now,' he sighs. 'You're not making this very easy,' I chide, knowing full well that this was one of my pre-test favourites. Just then staff writer Bovingdon saunters up. 'I just love the way this car looks,' he announces, 'and the gearchange is faultless...' Oh no, he's driven it too, ➔

