Entry-level 911 Carrera holds its own against more expensive models

by Mark_Maynard

Porsche's monthly sales report is my favorite fantasy reading.

NEW PORSCHE - There's not much new for 2008 on the 911 Carrera, but it's still an iconic Porsche. CNS Photo courtesy of Porsche. SPECS

2008 Porsche 911 Carrera

Body style: two-passenger, rear-wheel-drive coupe; steel body with aluminum trunk lid

Engine: aluminum, 3.6-liter horizontally opposed six-cylinder with double overhead camshafts, four valves per cylinder with variable valve timing and lift control

Horsepower: 325 at 6,800 rpm

Torque: 273 foot-pounds at 4,250 rpm

Transmission: six-speed manual or five-speed Tiptronic

Acceleration: 0-60 mph 4.8 seconds (5.2 Tiptronic automatic); top track speed 177 mph

FEATURES

Standard equipment includes: remote locking, leather seat surfaces, Alcantara headliner, power tilt and sliding sunroof, halogen headlights, speed-activated rear spoiler, cruise control, three power outlets, stainless steel exhaust system

Safety features include: six air bags, belt pretensioners and force limiters, active brake differential, stability - management system, anti-slip regulation, four-piston vented disc brakes

CHASSIS

Brakes: four-piston, aluminum monobloc calipers with cross-drilled, inner-vented brake discs with anti-lock control and Porsche Stability Management; 12.52-inch discs front, 11.78 rear

Steering: variable ratio, power rack and pinion

Suspension: MacPherson front struts, multilink rear

Tires and wheels: high performance 235/40 ZR 18-inch tires front, 265/40 rear; alloy wheels

PRICING

Base: $74,360, including $860 freight charge; price as tested, $85,765

Options: Macadamia Metallic paint, $690; Sand Beige full leather interior, $3,365; power seat package, $1,550; bi-xenon headlights, $1,090; self-dimming mirrors, $385; heated front seats, $500; wheel caps with colored crest, $185; navigation system, $2,110; Bose audio system, $1,390; floor mats, $140

PLUSES: Iconic Porsche.

MINUSES: Reflective glare in lower half of windshield; chin scrapes on some driveway and entrance inclines. Minuscule array of controls for audio and climate controls. What's new for the 911 in 2008

This generation went on sale in 2005 and gets yearly tweaks to keep the image fresh. There's not much new this year.

Among the enhancements is an option for leather race seats with a folding back, which maintains daily-driving functionality and access to the tiny back seats. The carbon-fiber reinforced seats weigh about 15 pounds less than the standard seats, which are quite comfortable. The race seats range from $3,485 to $6,490 for full leather.

Paint color changes include Macadamia Metallic, which is brown. It's a $690 treatment that was handsome

with the Sand Beige full-leather interior of the test car.

Other color changes are Atlas Grey Metallic, $3,140, which replaces Lapis Blue Metallic. There's also Slate Grey Metallic, Meteor Grey Metallic, Arctic Silver Metallic and GT Silver Metallic, which are all close in silver to gray hues. Malachite Green Metallic replaces Lagoon Green Metallic and Carmona Red Metallic is replaced by Ruby Red Metallic.

All of these choices will help differentiate from the standard, no-cost colors of black, Carrera White, Guards Red and Speed Yellow.

Inside, Palm Green is no longer available and Carrera Red was added as a new natural leather option.

There are four standard interior colors - black, gray, dark blue and Sand Beige - but to get the special colors or two-tones requires the full-leather interior option, which runs $3,365. Special colors are $1,500 and two-tone adds an additional $430. Get a grip

With all the different electronic devices that motorists pack along every day, finding a way to safely mount them becomes an issue. Many states prohibit devices mounted to the windshield, and other add-on mountings can be too shaky to be safe in a collision.

The View Base appears to be a good choice for safety and simplicity. The anti-skid base mounts to the dashboard without adhesives or drilling, and works with the standard windshield-mounting bracket that came with the electronic device, such as a navigation system or satellite radio. If a device does not have a mounting bracket, the Grip-All bracket can be ordered for $10. The company says that in its testing for rapid stop, rapid acceleration, swerving, etc., the View Base didn't budge.

Order at marketgypsy.com or by phone at 866-674-9779. Allow $5 to $8 for shipping.

EASY ON, EASY OFF

Meguiar's Hot Rims Chrome Polish works on wheels, but it's also good for chrome bumpers, trim and engine parts. The polish removes brake dust and tarnish, and leaves a "vibrant crystal-clear finish in minutes with minimal effort," the 100-year-old wax manufacturer says.

An 8-ounce bottle is $5 plus $3.95 for shipping at Meguiars.com.

For thorough wheel work, also available is Meguiar's Hot Rims Chrome Wheel Cleaner and Hot Rims Aluminum Wheel Cleaner ($6 each), Meguiar's Quik Wheel Detailer ($6) and Meguiar's Gold Class All Wheel Cleaner ($6.49) Even when the economy is bad, it's not particularly bad for Porsche now that it has Cayenne SUVs and the entry-level Boxster and Cayman sports cars to support the 911.

Funny thing, though. The entry-level 911 Carreras are the slower sellers, and it seems that no matter how expensive a Porsche is, it becomes the top seller.

Of the 14 911 models available last month, the basic 911 coupe had 67 sales and the $136,500 Turbo Cabriolet had 152. And this pattern has been fairly consistent. The 911 GT2, which Porsche calls the "Ultimate 911," went on sale in March and had 16 sales. That's not bad for a partial month of sales for a car with a price tag that starts at $191,700.

Porsche Cars North America wanted to get a little love for the garden-variety 911 coupe and sent one down for a week of driving.

The 911 coupe has a starting price of $74,360, but no 911 goes home without another $5,000 to $10,000 more in options, the company says. So the "popularly equipped" test car was $85,765, which included a modest number of extras.

Porsche provides many ways for owners to "personalize" - spend more money on - their new car.

Even an entry-level 911 is an icon and satisfying to drive. Give a little poke to the accelerator and the snarly bark of the exhaust is pure anticipation. The whine of the engine pounding six cylinders horizontally is a constant and pleasurable reminder of why the owner paid so much for two seats and two rear jump seats.

The 911 is simple enough to drive around town and it still rides like a race car that's being driven on the street. Its suspension engineering comes to life at high speeds until what feels like a rough ride settles into high-caliber rifling through interstate air space. That's yet another reward of ownership.

Sure, cabin and audio controls could do with a less complicated array of buttons, but they get figured out. The display screen is small. The wiper blades are the traditional (old-fashioned) frame style, which could be streamlined with the flat, aero blades. The nine-speaker, 280-watt audio system still isn't enough to drown out road noise at high speeds. There's some annoying reflection of the dashboard top in the lower half of the windshield, but nothing that would kick this car out of an enthusiast's garage.

And the 911 can be more "fun" than a 480-hp, twin-turbocharged 911 Turbo, which is either mellow or screaming.

The problem with sales for the 911 coupe isn't the car, but in the other choices in the showroom. If the garden-variety Porsche 911 is good, what about the slightly higher-horsepower 911 S? Or an all-wheel-drive 911 or a 911 Cabriolet, the Targa S? And so on.

There's about a $10,000 difference between the standard 911 model and its slightly more powerful S version. How much more performance do you get for the money? Not as much as the perceived status value, I expect.

The 911 S, for example, starts at $84,660. For that extra $10,000, the 911 S has a 3.8-liter six-cylinder, bored out from the 911's 3.6 liter. Horsepower is 355 versus 325, and the torque is 295 foot-pounds, or just 22 more than the 911. And the 911 S torque peaks later, at 4,600 rpm versus 4,250 rpm for the 911.

That means the 911 S owner can get from 0-60 mph in two-tenths of a second faster than the plain 911, or 4.6 seconds. The skilled 911 driver can make up those differences in smooth driving.

The 911 S has a top speed of 182 versus 177 in the 911. Porsches cruise easily at 150 mph, and I've driven one as fast at 176, but how often will an owner have track time to push the speed to 182, or even 177?

Both cars have phenomenal stopping power from four-piston, aluminum monobloc calipers with cross-drilled, inner-vented brake discs. The base 911 has 12.52-inch discs front and 11.78 rear. But because the 911 S can go slightly faster, it has slightly bigger, 13-inch discs front and rear.

The basic 911 weighs 3,075 pounds, or 56 pounds less than the S.

Not that someone paying $80,000 for a car is overly concerned about fuel economy, but the base 911 is rated 18/26 using premium. The S is a full mile per gallon less city/highway.

Are performance enhancements that are measured in tenths worth $10,000?

There is no logic in the purchase of a 911. But there's no shame in buying the entry-level 911, either.

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