

New 911 Turbo pushes limits of speed, power and prestige, even further

by Mark_Maynard

The last time I drove a Porsche 911 Turbo I was clocked at 176.8 mph. It would have been faster, but I was beating into a head wind.

Lucky me, it wasn't the police aiming the radar gun but the U.S. Auto Club on a stretch of Nevada's Black Rock Desert, not far from the annual Burning Man festival. That speed run on the crusty, dry lake-bed surface was the scariest experience in my career and it was part of a Porsche media event.

NEW PORSCHE - It requires effort to keep the Porsche 911 Turbo under 80 mph. New technology boosts the twin turbo engine to 480 horsepower. CNS Photo courtesy of Porsche. That was six years ago in a 415-horsepower, twin-turbocharged, all-wheel drive 911 Turbo that would do 0-60 mph in 4.2 seconds. The new 2007 model costs about \$11,000 more and is pumped up to 480 horsepower with new turbo technology. It's faster to 60 mph by about a half-second.

I didn't repeat a speed run with the test car. I barely got over, um, well, fast enough to know my limits and respect the car. And this car does like to run. It requires effort to keep it under 80 mph, yet there is much wasted performance.

How many owners will have the opportunity to drive this Porsche at its limits? Or near the limits? It can do zero-to-60 in 3.7 seconds with the six-speed manual transmission or 3.4 with the five-speed Tiptronic automatic, which is faster because there's no human error in banging through the gears. Top speed is limited to 193 mph, though the speedometer is crammed with digits up to 225. But, really, all the driver needs to monitor is the tach and the digital speed readout, which spins like a slot machine when hard on the throttle.

There was some manly challenge in the previous model in tending to the clutch and slotting the gears of the manual transmission. This car has taken away those stress points and relieved them with a clutch that can be actuated repeatedly in stop-and-go traffic without muscle cramps or stalling the engine and a gearbox of oiled precision.

The cabin is fairly accommodating for drivers of all sizes. Operating quietly around town, the Turbo has no supercar issues, such as running hot, blind spots and mammoth turning circles. The power is manageable, but be ready when it's time to call on your inner Hurley Haywood - the notorious Porsche racer. The variable-vane turbo technology pokes at the lion in the cage, the engine screams and all tires start pulling like a NASA launch. And that's when owners realize why this car costs so much and why so many will pay for it.

If you are one of those who's been waiting to buy, sorry. The 2008 models will cost \$3,300 more, with no significant changes. But you will be able to get in line for the Turbo Cabriolet, which goes on sale soon for \$136,500.

Porsche engineers adapted the variable turbine turbocharger from truck engines, which deal with exhaust temperatures up to 1,830 degrees. The variable turbine geometry packages a small and a large turbocharger, which gives a significant power boost through a wider rpm range, Porsche says. The engine has 460 foot-pounds of torque from 1,950 to 5,000 rpm; it gives the car obscene pulling power from near takeoff to well into sixth gear. The car cruises at about 3,000 rpm in fifth on the interstate, so there's plenty of power in reserve when you need to get around that motor home.

And then there's the \$1,840 Sport Chrono package that features an overboost feature, pushing peak torque to 505 foot-pounds. Hit the sport button on the instrument panel and the suspension shifts to attack mode, stiffens the shock absorbers, remaps engine electronics for even sharper throttle response and then there's a 10-second overboost of turbocharging in the mid- to upper-rpm range. You can cover a lot of ground in 10 seconds with 505 foot-pounds of torque.

But not all the options on the test car were as enjoyable and there were almost \$17,000 in upgrades. For example, the \$8,840 ceramic composite brakes slam this car to a stop with more impressive force than the engine launches it. But, if you don't heat 'em up occasionally, they squeal. And it's hard not to have brake-dust buildup and squealing in stop-and-go traffic. And since when has Porsche's standard 13.8-inch vented discs been considered inadequate?

The adaptive sport seats, with leather, \$1,145, may be adaptive if you are of the size to fit in them

comfortably. The side and seat-bottom bolsters can't be adjusted, so you either fit or you don't. And the bolsters, I expect, will soon show the fatigue and scuffs of large drivers hoisting themselves in and out. I've driven hundreds of miles at a stretch in the base Porsche seats and stepped out without back pain. And the test car also had a \$270 Porsche crest embossed in the headrest. Big whoop. If the lines of this car, the bi-wing that raises at speed and the Turbo script on the tail aren't prominent enough, embossed headrests really won't help.

The Turbo is somewhat of a phenomenon. With a 2007 base price of \$123,695 that easily runs to \$140,000 with options, it has been Porsche's top seller for months in a row. The garden-variety Carrera, \$73,855, for example, sells around 88 to 100 a month. The Turbo has had more than 300 sales.

That's quite ridiculous, I know. But the Turbo has evolved into such an agreeable car to drive that its supercar ferocity is deceiving - it's there, however, just a little deeper into the throttle.

Mark Maynard is driving in cyberspace at mark.maynard@uniontrib.com. SPECS

2007 Porsche 911 Turbo

Body style: 2(plus)2 coupe with rear engine and all-wheel drive; doors and trunk made of aluminum

Engine: aluminum, 3.6-liter six-cylinder with horizontally opposed pistons, four overhead camshafts, four valves per cylinder and variable intake valve timing and lift control; twin turbochargers with variable turbine geometry and two intercoolers

Horsepower: 480 at 6,000 rpm

Torque: 460 from 1,950 to 5,000 rpm; with optional overboost, 505 foot-pounds from 2,100 to 4,000 rpm

Transmission: 6-speed manual; optional 5-speed Tiptronic

Acceleration: 0 to 60 mph, 3.7 seconds; 3.4 Tiptronic; top speed, 193 mph

EPA fuel economy estimates: 18 mpg city, 25 highway; 17/25 Tiptronic; 91 octane recommended

Fuel capacity: 17.7 gallons

Trunk space: 3.6 cubic feet

Length/wheelbase: 175.2/92.5 inches

Curb weight: 3,495 pounds; 3,572 Tiptronic

FEATURES

Standard equipment includes: remote locking, auto climate control, full leather interior with alcantara headliner, power sunroof, power adjustable seats with lumbar, bi-Xenon headlights with leveling and cleaning system, LED front turn signals, navigation system, Bose surround sound audio system with MP3-capable CD player.

Safety equipment includes: front, side and side head air bags, traction control and stability control, Braking Readiness with Brake Assist, tire pressure monitoring

CHASSIS

Brakes: front, six-piston aluminum monobloc calipers with cross-drilled, 13.78-inch inner-vented brake discs; rear, four-piston aluminum monobloc calipers with cross-drilled, 13.78-inch inner-vented brake discs

Suspension: MacPherson struts with track control arms, longitudinal arms, conical stump springs with

actively controlled single-sleeve gas pressure dampers; rear, 5-arm, cylindrical coil springs with coaxial, inner-mounted, actively controlled single-sleeve gas pressure dampers

Tires and wheels: front, 235/35-ZR 19-inch; rear, 305/30-ZR 19-inch; alloy wheels

PRICING

Base: \$123,695, including \$795 freight charge; price as tested, \$140,650

Options on test car: GT silver metallic, \$2,380; special leather cocoa, \$430; cocoa floor mats, \$115; adaptive leather sport seats, \$1,145; locking rear differential, \$950; heated front seats, \$480; ceramic composite brakes, \$8,840; sport chrono package, \$1,640; electronic logbook, \$650; remote CD changer, \$650; Porsche crest in headrest, \$270

Where assembled: Stuttgart, Germany

PLUSES: Astonishing acceleration, disconcerting braking: it's so good, yet everyday drivability.

MINUSES: Anybody with \$140,000 can own one.

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