



BEST OF THE BEST

FOUR 911s FACE OFF ON PUBLIC ROADS
AND AT MOTOR SPEEDWAY RESORT
HOUSTON FOR THE RIGHT TO BE CALLED
OUR FAVORITE PORSCHE GT RS.

STORY BY **SRIVATHSAN IYENGAR** AND **REGGIE DRAPER**
PHOTOS BY **NICK BERARD**

Say what you will about Jeremy Clarkson, but the man was at least consistent—that is, consistent in his disdain for what most of us think of as God’s own sports car, the Porsche 911. That changed the first time he hauled his heavily opinionated British posterior into the driver’s seat of a 991 GT2 RS: “The GT2 RS is a properly brilliant sports car. And this from a man who’s never been a Porsche fan. I truly loved it. Everything about it.” So now that we’ve established that the GT2 RS is a car capable of converting even the most stubborn of heathens, the question is, which version of the GT2 RS is the best? Is it the 997 GT2 RS or the 991 GT2 RS? Or is the greatest GT car not a GT2 at all? Could the last of the naturally aspirated Mezger GT cars, the 997 GT3 RS 4.0, actually be the greatest GT car of them all? Or is the more polished 991 GT3 RS the *ne plus ultra* of water-cooled 911s? That’s what we’re here to find out.



FIRST, A LITTLE BACKGROUND

Let’s start with the 997-based 2011 GT2 RS, the most powerful of all 911s built up to that time. It’s rare, with only 500 built. With 620 horsepower driving just the rear wheels, and with driver’s aids that are far less intrusive than what you’d find on the latest cars, the 997 GT2 RS still feels faintly analog and is arguably the last GT Porsche that can be called a widowmaker. Although the RS moniker is traditionally reserved for homologation specials, such as the 911 GT3 RS that homologates the 911 RSR for racing, the engineers in Weissach designed the GT2 RS to be so track-focused that they deemed *RennSport* a worthy suffix.

The car was the first and only GT2 RS to be offered solely with a manual transmission. The 3.6-liter flat six that powers it is an evolution of the biturbo engine used in the Le Mans-winning 911 GT1 race cars, producing an adrenaline-pumping 172 horsepower per liter. Several exposed carbon-fiber pieces, such as the hood, mirror caps, side intake covers, and shark-fin exhaust outlets, adorn the car. The painted front quarter-panels are also made of carbon fiber. These features, along with other weight-saving measures, reduce the 997 GT2 RS to 3,020 pounds, 154 pounds lighter than the 997 GT2. The weight-to-power ratio is an incredible 4.9 pounds per horsepower.

But Porsche wasn’t done with the 997. Instead of calling it quits after the GT2 RS, Porsche produced a final, very limited-production version of its naturally aspirated 911 GT3 RS with a new 4.0-liter 500-hp flat six. Unlike the GT2 RS, the GT3 RS 4.0, as it was called, was a homologation car that was fitted with Porsche’s first 4.0-liter flat six, the last naturally aspirated Mezger engine to power a 911. Also unlike its twin-turbo sibling, the RS 4.0 can trace its lineage all the way back to Porsche’s first naturally aspirated homologation car, the 1967 911R, which was followed by the legendary Carrera RS 2.7, Carrera RS 3.0, 964 Carrera RS, 993 Carrera RS 3.8, and 996 GT3 RS (the first to receive the GT3 name, which

The 997 GT2 RS has a signature red and black Alcantara interior, as seen on the steering wheel.



A sticker replaces the normal metal badge on Porsche GT RS cars. The 991 GT2 RS has a larger rear spoiler than the 997—but not big enough to block downtown Houston’s skyline.



Porsche successfully trademarked for use on road cars). The 997 GT3 RS showcased rapid engine development, advancing from 3.6 liters to 3.8 liters to 4.0 liters within a span of just five years. Limited to 600 cars, the RS 4.0 was the last RS to have a manual transmission. Could it be the most exhilarating road-going 911 of all time?

The 2014 model year began the curious epoch when all 911s became force-fed, even though only some of them were actually called the “Turbo.” In order to meet stringent EPA guidelines, Porsche fitted all of its mass-production 911s with turbochargers. The sole NA holdouts were the GT3s. Following the 2015 GT3, the 2016 991 GT3 RS was equipped with a revised, even more sophisticated naturally aspirated 4.0-liter flat six that made 500 horsepower. A

technological and mechanical advance from its predecessor, this beast sported staggered 20- and 21-inch-diameter wheels wrapped in Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires and employed rear-wheel steering. Porsche’s GT car division also decided the quick-shifting PDK would be the only available transmission for RS models—a manual would only increase lap times. Three years later, a meaner looking Mark II version was released, with a 20-horsepower bump supported by several aerodynamic upgrades (e.g., NACA ducts, sturdier wing, larger air intakes). When teased to disclose what was so different about the 991.2 GT3 RS compared to the 991.1 model, Andreas Preuninger, head of Porsche’s GT division, pointed to a higher-revving engine with solid lifters, less sound-deadening,

and overall a more visceral driving experience.

Fast forward to 2018, when Porsche introduced the 991 GT2 RS. To highlight the unreality of its prodigious and technologically enhanced performance envelope, the car made its public debut at the Electronic Entertainment Expo during a *Forza Motorsport 7* unveiling. Porsche-philosophers thought they would get the GT2 version first. However, Weissach decided to circumvent tradition and produced the most powerful, breathtaking (0-60 in 2.7 seconds), Nürburgring-smashing (6:47) 911 GT2 RS first. This time, there was no preset production limit. It was the first 3.8-liter GT2 and boasted much larger turbos and more boost for an astounding 700 horsepower, enough to snatch the crown of Porsche’s most powerful 911 ever.



THE OWNER'S STORY

When I was growing up in South India in the 1990s, most of the cars I saw were Hindustan Ambassadors or Fiats, plus mopeds and auto-rickshaws. The fanciest four-wheelers were Ford sedans, or at best a Mercedes-Benz C-Class for the über-wealthy. Yet I still developed a love for anything with an internal combustion engine. I was always eager to slide into the driver's seat of my parents' car at rest stops and play aimlessly with the steering column gear shifter. I still have an exhaust burn scar on my left leg from when I tried to start cousin Vik's Yamaha bike when I was just ten years old. Fast forward to my first actual car purchase—an E60 BMW M5, which became my commuter and shelter, my grocery-getter and track toy. I began to appreciate German engineering, German design, and German automobiles.

Unbeknownst to me, it was all just prologue, leading up to the purchase of a real German sports car, the most iconic one of all. Microwaves, cook tops, digital watches, somehow they all seemed to read the same three digits at random glances, a number my mother would remind me was for medical emergencies. But to me, it was enigmatic, prophetic, and most of all, alluring. And so, on June 27, 2011 I drove out of Porsche North Houston proudly in my first 911: a beautiful Dark Blue Metallic 911 Turbo S. It was never babied, never relegated to the garage. I drove it like it was stolen, and it became my new track toy.

But the all-wheel drive, unpredictable non-linear power delivery of forced induction, and muffled exhaust note dulled the experience. I needed a rear-wheel-driven, naturally aspirated 911. I needed a GT3. The all-new 2016 Lava Orange 991 GT3 RS was love at first sight. The wailing noise of its 8400-rpm, naturally aspirated flat six was a game-changer. A life-changer. It engaged my psyche like no other car. I had crossed a point of no return. The only music I listened to came from the engine. I eventually traded for a black 991.2 GT3 RS, but



The 997 GT3 RS 4.0 was limited to 600 examples and by default came with a stripe over the top of the car. RS interiors always have lots of Alcantara, but the 997s were the last to be offered with a manual transmission.



there was one thing missing: a clutch pedal.

I once asked a fellow Porscheophile if he knew the real difference between a 997 GT3 RS 3.8 and the GT3 RS 4.0. His answer was an innocent “Point two?” But what I was really trying to ascertain was whether the premium for the 4.0 was worth it. Despite its rarity, I felt no qualms about being part of what must be a small handful of owners who daily drive a 4.0. The single-mass flywheel, the RSR crankshaft, and the Cup car exhaust note offered a trifecta of pure automotive exhilaration. Not to mention, the trifecta of Porsche Motorsport colors adorning the car: black, red, silver. Everywhere I went, she went. As a result, today, I am the proud owner of a 25,000-plus-mile 997 GT3 RS 4.0.

It wasn't long before a silver 997 GT2 RS joined the stable. It commands reverence—and delicate care—so I

drive it only occasionally to C&C meets (where I first met fellow gearhead, engineer, and capable driver Reggie Draper, whose driving impressions follow), and rallied a few times through scenic Houston routes. Despite the gas-guzzling consequence of getting into the RS's 24 psi max boost pressure, its Michelin Cup 2 tires always urged me on with their sheer mechanical grip. Though the muffled exhaust sound and short-revving engine subdue the experience, I have come to realize just how discreet this king-of-the-hill Porsche really is: While just another Porsche to the unsuspecting eye, the 997 GT2 RS remains my most prized 911.

The final piece of the puzzle was a Weissach Package Guards Red 991 GT2 RS—a complete set that we're looking forward to driving back to back on both the road and the track. —*Sri Iyengar*

997 GT2 RS

Scanning the design scheme of the 997—sporting the classic GT Silver, carbon fiber hood, and rose gold wheels—quickly highlights the generational gap between the 997 and the 991. My first observance once seated in the cockpit is the familiar openness of a classic 911, with a steeply raked windshield and low center console. The spartan interior, reflecting this car's singular focus on appealing to drivers, is adorned by the now trademark black and red Alcantara trim. The carbon-fiber bucket seats actually have adjustable backs and are surprisingly comfortable as well as functional.

I turn the key and the twin-turbo flat six ignites into a deep, raspy rumble. Frankly, it doesn't sound that special and certainly belies the fact that it makes 620



The 997 GT2 RS spoiler is sculpted with air intakes and is a more elegant piece than the 911 RSR-mimicking rear wing of the 997 GT3 RS 4.0. Both of the 997s have carbon-fiber hoods and front fenders.



horsepower. Working the overly heavy clutch and the notchy gear lever is a gut check, and within the first mile on public roads the car has already made a strong impression. At part throttle, turbo lag is evident, and the dramatic hissing and swooshing of two turbos and their matching wastegates creeps into the cabin, along with a wave of g-force. With the suspension in its normal setting, road imperfections are rebelled against, but not entirely rejected. This car is obviously built for the circuit.

A 620-horsepower sports car is not all that uncommon these days, but the 997 GT2 RS weighs just a little over 3,000 pounds, and I've vastly underestimated the ferocity of its acceleration. Into second and then back on the throttle, turbo spool and muffled induction noise engulfs the cabin. The force is menacing. This is the most intimidating car I've ever driven. I never gathered the confidence to go full throttle in any gear on the street during this test, nor did I feel the need to. The consequence of doing so in any gear other than first would be steep indeed. In typical 997 form, the hydraulic steering clearly communicates the conditions, and the handling is decisive with a bit of that 997 tiptoe sensation under power. These are the highs, but ultimately the 997 will tire you—heavy inputs to the clutch/gear-shift are relentless. This is not its natural habitat.

On the road, the 997 GT2 RS is unyielding. It wants to feel at home, but instead it's like a cheetah stuck on an uncomfortable sofa, forced to watch an endless video loop of impala herds in the wild chock full of stragglers. I call it Thor—big hammer, big power, one primary focus, no excuses.

On track, the 997 GT2 RS strips itself of unnecessary niceties. Using all of its 620 hp, the RS carves its way through 100-degree Texas air without asking for a breather. When the car is at an optimal operating temperature, the heavy drivetrain engagements relax, but make no mistake, this RS is a monster. Each gear offers a fresh truckload of power, and the fat Michelins are holding their own, even as the Texas heat tests their limitations.

Although the powertrain is what people yammer about when the topic is the 997 GT2 RS, the real beauty is in the chassis. In pure 997 form, the car is mechanical bliss. Hard on the ceramic composite brakes (PCCB) out of the back straight—stay on the brakes, heel-and-toe downshift, careful of the revs, trail the brake into the apex, and admire how it feels to drive a 911 correctly. I almost feel like I'm good enough. Out of the apex on the throttle, the torque is massive. The car squats and the rear rubber slingshots the 997 forward.

Back on the straight, I'm humbled once again. The GT2 RS expects you to work for your reward. It demands extreme focus, a relaxed mindset, and titanium nerves. It's the only car I've driven that requires me to remind myself to breathe. There is too little tech, too much power, and too much value for me not to continuously think about the things that could go wrong. For



The 991 is shockingly quick but manages to feel less extreme than the 997.

every second I smile, I spend two hoping my skill set doesn't run out. And this may be the conundrum with rare, valuable vehicles. For us amateur drivers, it's a dream that comes with a very serious reality—the potential for calamity increases exponentially the harder you push. Would I be more at ease in the cheaper, less rare, more buttoned down, younger brother 991?

991 GT2 RS

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." If Arthur C. Clarke's First Law isn't the anthem for the 991 GT2 RS, then nothing is. With 700 hp, there is no other car that blends ruthlessness with placidity so effortlessly. Guards Red paint and carbon

fiber adorn the exterior. The rose gold wheels fill the fenders sufficiently to satisfy any millennial, and the exaggerated aero gives the 991 a wow factor. Combine all that with the leather/Alcantara carbon buckets, seemingly right out of an artist's imagination, and there is no confusing it with a typical 911. Stunning.

On the road, the 991 gives a grumpy combustion note, but despite the increased stiffness and road noise, it still feels like a 911. The big differentiator is power combined with the bipolar genius that is the PDK transmission. Load the throttle and the car transforms. Ironically, I'm more confident going full throttle in the 991 than in the 997. There is a bit of lag, but revs gain quickly: upshift and *boom*—an endless surge of power.

I know I'm accelerating faster than in the 997, but the fear factor is negligible. It's a sudden reminder that fun isn't the result of pure acceleration alone; instead, it's the intensity of the sensation and how the g-forces are applied. The 991 eases the intensity in the name of computerized efficiency, whereas the 997's inherent imperfections, due to human intervention, offer a much more organic, analog impact. The 991 is shockingly quick but manages to feel less extreme than the 997. The 991 has a 5% power-to-weight advantage, but the 997 fills that void with a subjective 10% increase in visceral experience, and my brain can't differentiate it.

It's obvious we need to drive this RS on a track to push closer to the limits. Within the first 20 seconds, my

Porsche decided to go with a larger, adjustable rear wing on the 991 GT2 RS (red car). Huge front air intakes on the 991 also hint at the cooling needs required for its 60-hp advantage over the 997.

face is wearing a full smirk. Gone is the reproaching fear and the extra brain cell needed to ensure the car is in the correct gear. I immediately simplify my thoughts and focus on the quickest line. The power down the straights is relentless yet polished, harnessed by the immense grip from the 991 platform and the latest Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires. The corners are coming way faster than in the 997 and my braking is far later, not because the 997 wasn't able enough, but simply because I feel much more comfortable. Banging the PDK and testing the limits of the PCCBs is easy and relatable. Turning into a tight double-apex corner, the car seems to have no limitations. The rear-wheel steering is the stuff of fairy dust. The 991 does things the 997 just can't do.

There isn't one instance when I couldn't enjoy the effectiveness of the 991's engineering. It's the track car for both pros and plebeians, and leaves the 997 feeling somewhat anachronistic. The 991 is a charming brute that seemingly defies physics by employing technological refinement. It's better in every measurable category. For amateur drivers who want to experience an uninterrupted envelope of performance, the 991 is the choice, but if I want to satisfy my hooligan side, it can't quite match the 997. Make sense?

997 GT3 RS 4.0

There's a tiny club of sports cars that seem capable of upsetting the space-time continuum—the 997 GT3 RS 4.0 is a charter member of that club. With the unmistak-

able stripe and heritage colors, the RS 4.0's bold design is the quintessential line between modern and classic Porsches. In mid-2014 there was a worldwide freak-out when the 991 GT3 was released without a manual transmission option, instantly launching the 4.0 to cult status. It was the car that everyone wanted but only a few could have.

Within a few seconds of starting up the 4.0-liter flat six I am reminded why I love naturally aspirated engines. This one howls and screams, and there are other delectable noises at play. At a standstill in neutral with no foot on the clutch, the rattle of the single-mass flywheel is confusing at first yet arousing when you realize why the car makes the noise. Many people might complain about

excessive NVH, but for enthusiasts it only adds to the experience. Moving forward, the gear lever and clutch are overly heavy—a trait of the 997-generation RS cars.

Once the components warm up, nothing behaves like a GT3 RS 4.0. With about 500 hp and 339 lb-ft of torque, the classic Mezger engine has just the right amount of unnecessary power. The response of the 997's drivetrain is hard to believe. Throttle lag is almost unnoticeable; with one touch on the accelerator the car asserts itself within milliseconds. At full throttle, the Mezger flat six has an orchestral wail up to its 8250 rpm redline, and the cabin is once again filled with intake noise. While road compliance seems a bit better than that of the 997 GT2 RS, it's still very much a hard-core driving experience.

Once the components warm up, nothing behaves like a GT3 RS 4.0. With about 500 hp and 339 lb-ft of torque, the classic Mezger engine has just the right amount of unnecessary power.





The mechanical steering is tactile, providing ever-present feedback through your fingers. This is a car that is designed to fulfill the senses, and it lives up to that promise.

The beauty of the RS 4.0 is that one doesn't need to drive fast to be encompassed by its ability, but we nevertheless want to drive it on the track. As with the 997 GT2 RS, every drive component makes its presence known. The engine and manual transmission are fully engaging, with a heft to the shift action that smooths as the operating temperature rises. The front understeers when I don't get corner speed right, and the drivetrain continuously asks me to improve my technique, but when it all comes together the feeling is epic. A redline upshift offers an audible high-five, with the quick drop of revs and reapplication of power offering an unforget-



The 991.2 GT3 RS gained hood-mounted NACA ducts first introduced by the 991 GT2 RS. All future Porsche GT RS sports cars will have a dual-clutch PDK automatic transmission.

table soundtrack. It's one of the few cars that provides almost as much audible engagement upshifting as it does downshifting. Getting the heel-and-toe downshifts right is endlessly rewarding. Every corner requires a delicate balance of inputs. Keeping the front tires tidy is critical, and the car leaps when you apply throttle just right coming out of the apex.

All of this joyful exhilaration is trademark RS 4.0, yet once again, I'm impacted by the potential consequences of risking such a brilliant piece of history. The thought of error indeed affected the experience. That being said, the RS 4.0 is the banner car of exuberance and unmistakably memorable. You might call it the "Dark Side of the Moon" of cars—arguably the most emotionally satisfying supercar of the modern age.

991 GT3 RS

Long live Porsche's naturally aspirated flat six. The king has returned in the form of a neon green-accented scream fest. Fashion designer Virgil Abloh would be proud. Being a modern car, it has to be brilliant on the track, yet Starbucks-enabled on the road. The Mezger engine is missed, but the new car has a brilliant 4.0-liter flat six that produces more power and churns to 9000 rpm. This engine illustrates how Porsche keeps pushing the limits of its flat sixes with every generation of the 911.

On start-up, the engine is unconsumed by turbochargers and purely mechanical. The 991 isn't as raw as the RS 4.0 at idle or full throttle—partly because of the refined PDK transmission (no manual offered)—but for a new car it's rowdy. A noticeable consistency of the





The lineup (from left to right):
2019 GT3 RS;
2011 GT2 RS;
2019 GT2 RS;
2011 GT3 RS 4.0.



To see video of **THE BEST OF THE BEST**, go to:
PCA.org/news/gt2-rs-comparo

Authors Reggie Draper (left) and Srivathsan Iyengar, who is also the owner of these four GT RS Porsches.



991 platform is the focus on impressionism rather than intimidation. At full throttle nearing 9000 rpm, the GT3 RS exposes its animal side, shifting its musical tone from alternative to metal. It's a Cup car experience without the destruction of the eardrum.

Even with 520 hp, the 991 GT3 RS gives full confidence on surface streets and back roads. Using PDK to downshift for no apparent reason is addictive. You'll speed up just to slow down and pull the left paddle. As with the 991 GT2 RS, the chassis stability and electric steering are sublime. This addictive personality easily makes the 991 GT3 RS one of the most lust-worthy of recent supercars. If you want to bring Cup car engagement to a road-compliant and confidence-inspiring package, this is how you do it.

Eerily, the 991 platform makes track time feel comforting. Give it full power, and as the velocity grows the noise angers, yet the chassis transmits no qualms. The sensation of braking, pulling the left paddle to downshift, and turning into corners is as close to a video game as anyone could imagine. After one lap there was a moment when I actually thought I was a great driver.

Although the 991 GT3 RS is about 150 pounds heavier than the 997 GT3 RS 4.0, the newer car feels even more nimble, in part due to the rear-wheel steering. Similarly, compared to the 991 GT2 RS, it makes track work feel even more effortless. Holding drivers back from a catastrophic mistake due to overconfidence are a plethora of driving aids. It's a car that keeps you on the edge with the electronic safety nets working in the background to

keep all four tires on track. The 991.2 GT3 RS is built to enjoy at the very extremes of life. Fast, loud, reliable—this is one of the greatest naturally aspirated supercars in recent production. —*Reggie Draper*

CONCLUSION

Picking one of these four Porsche GT RS cars as a favorite is no easy task, because they all possess traits that are easy to fall in love with. The 997s, both equipped with a manual transmission, offer an engaging experience at all speeds that the 991s can't quite match. The two GT3 RSs in this test sound fantastic, with more musical exhaust notes and stratospheric redlines. The GT2 RSs, on the other hand, have more power than anybody will ever need—and the 991 puts it to the ground so effectively it will fool you into thinking you're a better driver than you actually are.

That brings us to our first conclusion: The 991 GT3 RS and the 991 GT2 RS are so refined and singularly focused for track work that they were more enjoyable at Motor Speedway Resort Houston. It doesn't seem to matter how much power is thrown at the 991 chassis—520 hp or 700 hp—the electronic aids, rear-wheel steering, and PDK dual-clutch autobox allow the driver to focus on trimming lap times and having fun while doing it. In this environment, the lack of a manual transmission is not a negative.

Our second conclusion is that, while the 997s are great cars to drive on track and they can still turn a quick lap time (with a bit more work from the driver), the GT3 RS 4.0 and GT2 RS don't lose any of the magic when driven on the street at normal speeds. The steering is more tactile, the manual transmission gives the driver total control over the drivetrain, and they already feel a bit old school, like a classic car, compared to the clinical precision of the 991s.

But we're here to decide which one is the best—subjectively—and that honor goes to none other than the 997 GT3 RS 4.0. Driving the 4.0 is a raw experience, representing something Porsche will never do again, although we wish the automaker would. Not only is it enjoyable on the track, where all 500 horsepower can be unleashed, but thanks to the manual transmission and an engine note that raises the hair on your neck no matter the rpm, it's always a pleasure behind the wheel. 🌀

1 pg/non-bleed

7-1/4 in. wide
 X
 9-7/8 in.tall