



The Numbers game

Own a 997 Turbo or considering buying a used example but worried you'll be seen off by newer, more powerful machinery? Worry not, Parr Motorsport has a solution. Story: Adam Towler Photography: Antony Fraser





In front, the Gen 2 Panamera Turbo squats slightly and there's a momentary pause. In that brief instant I imagine its PDK 'box flicking urgently to a lower ratio and the twin-turbochargers spinning rapidly up to speed.

And then it's off, its strident V8 rumble permeating the windscreen glass of the 997 Turbo I'm driving, charging like some bizarre armoured elephant towards a sequence of quick S-bends slightly downhill from our position.

In the blink of an eye it has pulled out an easy eight car lengths on us. Damn it, I've been caught napping. I'm in fourth gear and I'm already familiar enough with this car to know that there will be little more than a disinterested groan from the engine bay if I summon the horses now. A down-change to second in the manual 'box sacrifices yet more time but now I have at least 3000rpm on the big central tach,

and I do the only sensible thing: I brace myself and hold on.

With almost no warning the engine simply erupts. Subjectively, the next impression is of the front wheels almost lifting off the ground, like one of those drag strip Chevy 'Gassers' of the '60s. No sooner has my hand made the jump from gearstick to 'wheel, it needs to dart back again to strike for third. The net result, delivered just moments later, is that photographer Antony Fraser's eyes are writ large on the Panamera's rear view mirror as his view becomes 997 Turbo and nothing else. Oh. My. Word. What kind of four-wheeled insanity is this?

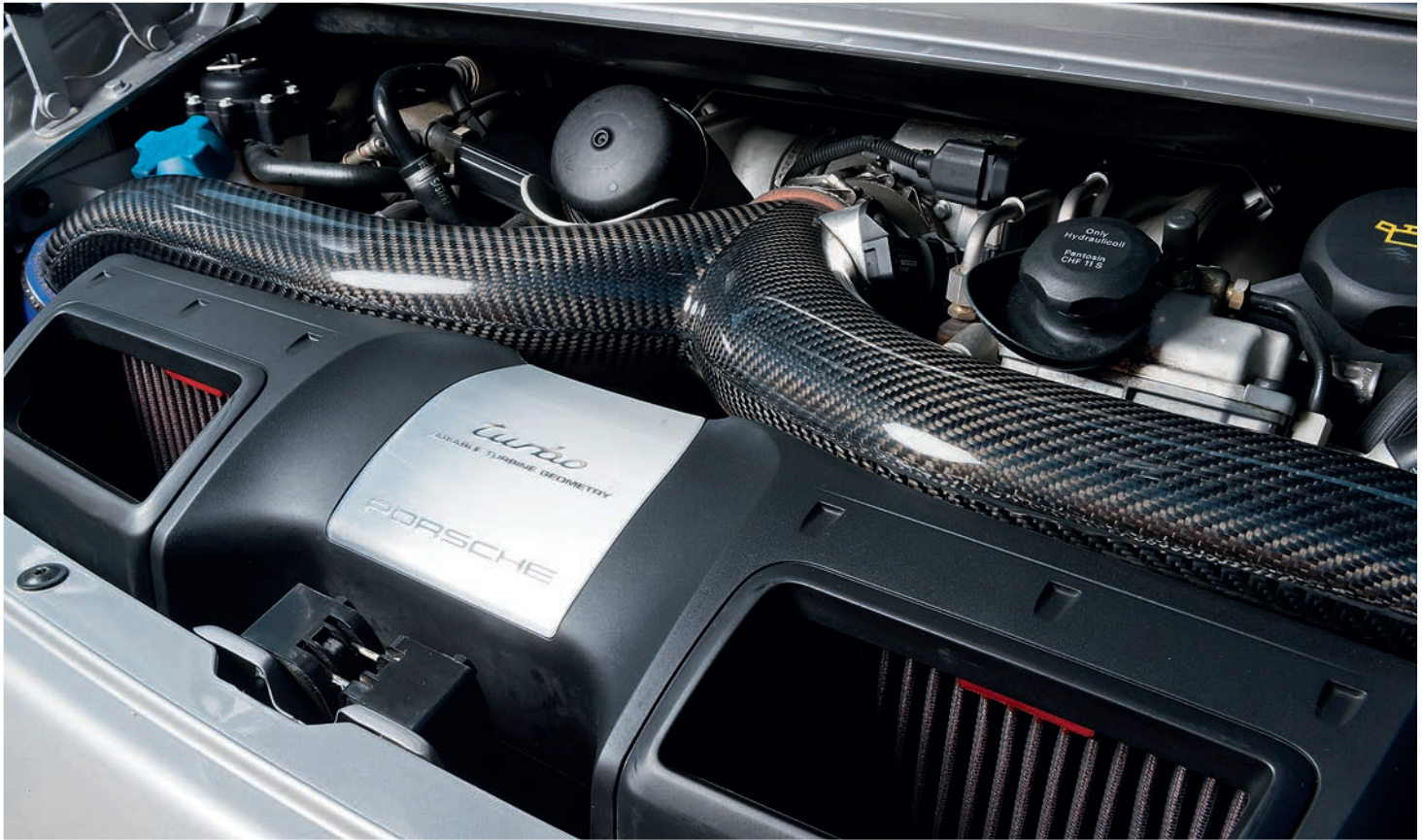
Given that the beastly Panamera had done much the same thing to an unsuspecting and completely wrung-out Aston Martin DB9 during my journey to Parr's Crawley base, I'm slightly lost for words at the ferocity of this Turbo's

performance. I couldn't imagine anything humbling the new Panamera Turbo in a straight line so that it looked like an overweight, underpowered limo but I'm pretty sure that's exactly what I just experienced. Then again, that was before I'd seen the sheet of paper on the 997's passenger seat that mentioned 624hp.

For me, the beauty of this car is that unlike a lot of modified Porsches, it looks almost exactly the same as a regular 997 Turbo, save the addition of a GT3 front air extractor vent. And even that is a regular Porsche production part – and very nice it looks, too, in this application. As a 'sleeper', it takes some beating.

The owner that oversaw its creation wanted an ultimate 'GT' Porsche that could also match a GT3 on the track and, bar the final suspension modifications, he nearly completed his objective before selling the car on due to a change in





The 997 Turbo's 3.6-litre Mezger engine may not have the efficiency of the current car's DFI motor, but with this Stage 4 conversion it produces over 100hp more than a 991 Turbo



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circumstances. It's been run by Parr boss Paul Robe recently, and the day after our photoshoot was due to be picked up by a new owner. But what exactly has this lucky new owner bought?

The heart of the conversion is the Cargraphic Stage 4 engine, developed in conjunction with Reinhold Schmirler of RS Tuning. This is the ultimate level you can take the standard engine to before terrifyingly expensive internal surgery is required, including a capacity rise to 3.8-litres and the loss of the 997's trademark variable vane (VTG) turbochargers for more conventional units aimed specifically at giving maximum power. I've driven an all-out 'power' car before, one of 9FF's creations, and while its acceleration was one of the most hilarious moments I've ever experienced in a vehicle, in terms of usability, and hence effectiveness on the public road, it was severely compromised. Retaining the VTG units bodes well for flexibility.

But anyway, for the Stage 4 you're combining all the elements of the previous stages: stainless steel sports exhaust with 200-cell motorsport cats, free-flow air filter, ECU remap, equal-length manifolds, 'modified' (Cargraphic is coy about exactly how) VTG turbochargers, upgraded clutch, larger intercoolers and a new inlet plenum. That lot, in parts alone, will set you back a not inconsiderable £20,000. Added to that, this car also features a larger throttle body, free-flow carbon fibre 'Y' pipes (clearly visible if you pop the engine lid) and silicone boost hoses.

As you've probably gathered, it's quite fast. So fast, in fact, that the 991 Turbo S I'd been driving the week before suddenly didn't seem so outlandish after all. If anything, thanks to the dear old 997's much more connected character, and not least its flaws or relative technical crudity if we can call it that, it actually felt a lot more dramatic. But I think the true joy of this conversion is that it's genuinely hard to know it's there in normal driving – which might just be an odd thing to say after spending £20,000.

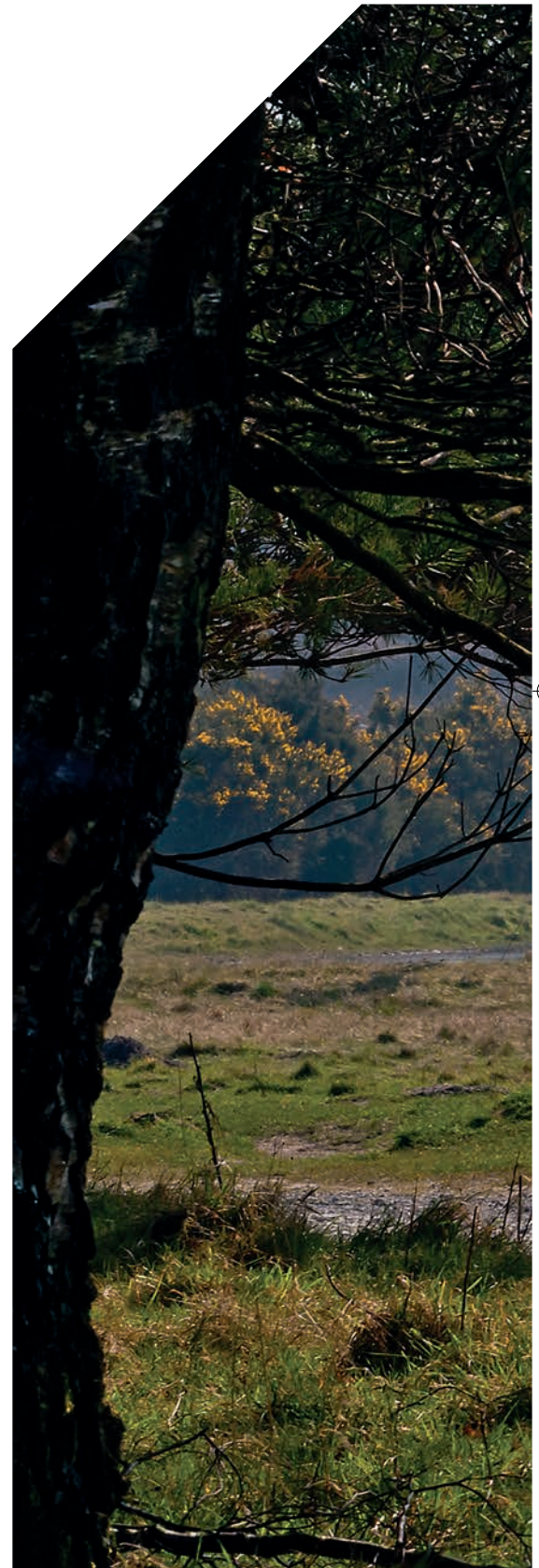
Fire up the engine, and if it's a while since

you're driven a 997 Turbo you'll ponder over whether it's a slightly louder, more sinister exhaust note, but you won't be immediately certain. Drive off, and its manners are the same as the production car: there are no histrionics, lumps in the torque curve or racy noises. This is a 600-plus horsepower monster that's almost ridiculously easy to live with every day. But frankly, the mind boggles, and my driving licence wants to run away and hide at the very thought of it.

You will be aware that things have changed when the boost begins to come into play, for that uniquely breathy intake suck of the standard car has all but been eradicated. Now there's a healthy engine note – still of the subdued turbo-six variety, although clearly of Mezger origin – and also the hissing sound of the turbos really getting to work. But let's be realistic, what you're really aware of is an almighty punch in the small of your back, the like of which I struggle to recall from a standard 997 Turbo. Normally, I'll study the engine's characteristics in relation to the rev counter for the sake of tests such as this one, so I can describe the way the motor goes about its business, but even in the higher gears I find it hard to tear even one per cent of my concentration away from the road ahead and the need to grab another gear. Ah yes, that's another reason for the wild feeling of excitement: there's no seven-speed seamless cog switching here, just three pedals and a flailing arm to work the short, sharp mechanism of the gear lever around its gate. It's still one of the very best manual 'boxes.

This car also features some other Parr and Cargraphic niceties, such as the aforementioned GT3 air extractor vent, mesh guard protection for the front intakes, and carbon-back Carrera GT-style bucket seats. The rear seats have been removed to save weight and free up additional luggage space.

But some of the most significant changes are to the chassis. The original owner wanted a more positive turn-in, particularly at high speed, so





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the car runs additional negative camber, facilitated by GT3 adjustable lower control arms. There are also adjustable anti-roll bars fitted. The result is definitely a keener breed of 997 Turbo. Much has been written about the relative softness of the standard car, and to some minds its bluntness particularly compared with a GT3, but wherever you stand on the subject this car is much more incisive. The only pieces of the puzzle not changed are the dampers, the car retaining the standard PASM two-stage items. This gives it a surprisingly relaxed gait in standard mode but, conversely, does allow a marked amount of weight transfer when driving quickly. The Achilles' heel of the setup is that the Sport setting is almost intolerably hard on most roads, particularly in its fidgety secondary ride. If there is an improvement to be made, it would be found in a set of quality new dampers but even as is, it's a terrifically useable car with an added sense of precision to how it goes down a road.

I also find it impossible to deny that having this outrageous performance in a 997, with its narrower body (relative to today's 991s) and even narrower feeling cabin, holds very real appeal to me over the newer car. Small lanes and gaps in traffic no longer seem so intimidating, and the upright but shallow dashboard, close windscreen and gimmick-free controls have a cosy, homely feel to them. I suppose what I'm really saying is that it's good to be back in a 997, particularly a Turbo.

£20,000 seems like a lot of money to spend on modifications. Even so, given that this pristine, low-mileage car will have cost its new owner the same amount of money as a new Cayman S with some tasty options – let alone a fraction of a 991 Turbo – it suddenly seems like an unbelievable performance bargain for a car with, let us not forget, one of the all-time classic engines in situ. I know it's bad form to compare new with old but if I were in the market it would certainly make me stop and think ○

Thank you to Parr Motorsport for assistance with this feature. If you would like to discuss similar upgrades to your 997 Turbo please contact the company directly at: www.parr-uk.co.uk or call +44 (0)1293 537 911