bad boy

THE GT4 MAY BE A NEWCOMER, BUT IT JOINS THE 911 GT3 AS A LEGITIMATE FACTORY HOT ROD

STORY BY **PETE STOUT**
PHOTOS BY **THE AUTHOR** & **PORSCHE AG**

The moment Porsche announced the Cayman GT4,

you knew the GT3 comparisons would begin. It's what Porsche people *do*, fitting each new model into the family tree with its role carefully defined. Or is that decreed? ❖ Keeping an eye on the banter in a 981 internet forum is one way to pass the time at SFO before boarding the first of three flights to get to Portugal for the GT4 press launch. Some pundits are already comparing the GT4 to the $131,395 991 GT3. Others take a more sensible approach, looking back to 997 GT3s. ❖ Trouble is, the GT4 isn't meant to be a GT3, or compete with one. While its basic form is familiar, it is something *new*—much like the 2004 996 GT3 was when it showed up on U.S. shores and joined the 996 Turbo near the top of the 911 lineup. Both were fast 911s, but in different flavors. Other similarities between the GT4 and the 996 GT3 are hard to ignore. Just consider some numbers: The GT4 is rated at 385 hp, five more than the first U.S. GT3 had. Its 3.8-liter flat six offers 310 lb-ft of torque from 4750 to 6000 rpm, shading the 3.6-liter GT3's 284 lb-ft at 5000 rpm. Porsche says the new GT4 weighs 2,954 pounds, 90 pounds *less* than a 2004 GT3. Their tire widths, at 245 front/295 rear for the GT4 and 235 front/295 rear for the GT3, are as eerily similar as their 0-60 times, separated by just 0.1 second. The GT4 wins, hitting 60 mph in 4.2 seconds, but falls seven miles per hour short of the 996 GT3's 190-mph top end.

If the GT4 sounds like a mid-engined return to rear-engined performance in 2004, it isn't. Porsche expects to improve on the GT4's lap time of 7:40 on the Nürburgring Nordschleife—a track where top speed matters—but it's already two seconds ahead of Walter Röhrl's official factory time in the 415-hp 2007 997 GT3. It's also eight seconds faster than German magazine *Sport Auto*'s lap in the 2007 GT3, and 14 seconds faster than its lap in a 2004 996 GT3. That's the march of time, a funny yet predictable thing when it comes to Porsche performance.

With the GT4, time has had an equally intriguing effect on price. The 2016 GT4 has a base price of $85,595 while the 2004 GT3 cost $100,665 new, or about $125,000 in 2015 dollars. That makes the GT4 sound like a bargain. So does the $76,195 Cayman GTS. For another $9,400, the GT4 adds a 3.8-liter Carrera S engine, dynamic transmission mounts, GT3 brakes, GT3 front suspension, and the developmental might of Porsche Motorsport.

Question is, how can it be any sweeter than the simply superb Cayman GTS? And how *will* it stack up against its big brother, the 991 GT3? Filing onto Air France Flight 83, the anticipation is a killer.

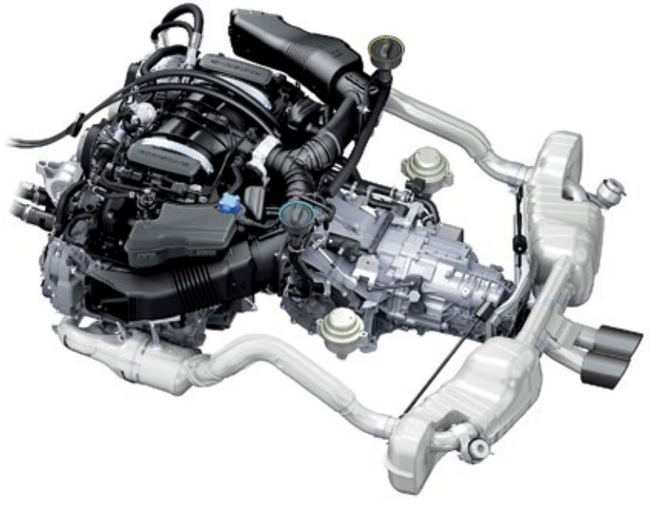
GT4 in White next to Sapphire Blue and Rhodium Silver examples at the Porsche store in Faro. The GT4's front spoiler juts forward, extending the nose by 1.3 inches against a normal Cayman.

THIRTY HOURS LATER, the airport van turns off a gritty thoroughfare and into Faro's only Porsche dealership. Any architectural thoughts about the building's metallic façade fade the moment five GT4s—in White, Sapphire Blue, Rhodium Silver, Racing Yellow, and Guards Red—are spotted. Where metallics look great on the 991 GT3, solid colors seem to treat the GT4's bodywork better, softening its details while emphasizing its shapes.

The GT4's mix of subtle and overt visual tweaks instantly set it apart from regular Caymans. Its forward-reaching front spoiler is hard to miss, as is its huge rear wing. But there are details worth lingering over, too, like fat Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2s filling the fenders, side scoops that signal added power, a tidy ducktail under the rear wing, and the subtlest touch of all: new taillights with tinted lenses and no chrome interior elements.

Andreas Preuninger, Manager of High Performance Cars at Porsche Motorsport, is all smiles. He's proud of his team's work over the last 28 months—much of it hidden. Take the rear wing, added to a trunk lid that was

Rear wing (left) can be tilted by 5-7° to increase downforce from 220 pounds to more than 240 pounds at top speed. Front-to-rear aero is balanced by removing underbody spats ahead of each front wheel (below, left), a process accomplished in minutes with no need to lift the car. GT4 engine (below) is adapted from the 400-hp Carrera S, but is rated at 385 hp here. The six-speed manual transaxle is located with active mounts.



never intended to support it. The small rubber stoppers under the trailing edge of the trunk lid look like those used to adjust panel gaps in regular Caymans, but they are stiffer. Unique to this car, they transfer pressure from the wing into the GT4's specially reinforced unibody.

The wing's end plates are counterintuitive, splaying outward. That has to add drag, right? Preuninger says the opposite is true, thanks to the way air spills off of the roof and fenders. The odd angle keeps the end plates from introducing drag. While zero lift was the original goal for the GT4 aero package, significant downforce comes with a drag coefficient of 0.32, just 0.01 up on a Cayman GTS.

Facts and figures aren't the point here, however. Preuninger says his team focused on the driving experience rather than ultimate performance. He says that's a luxury they enjoyed because Porsche could identify no direct marketplace competitor for the GT4. As fun as it is to talk about the newest 981, keys to it are being handed out, and the Rhodium Silver car is ready to go…

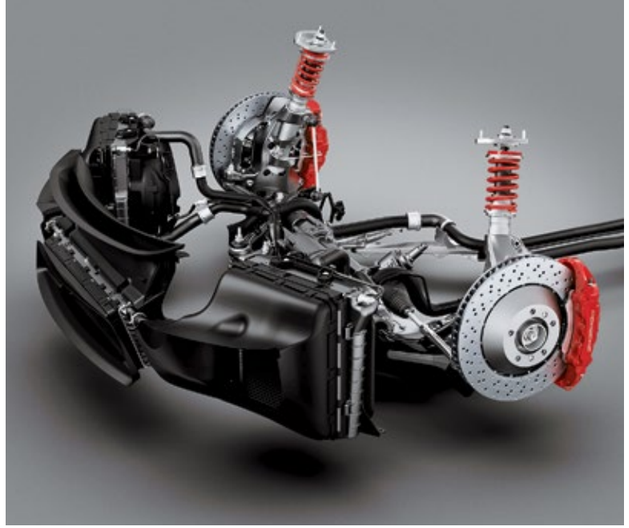
THE GT4'S VOICE IS FAMILIAR, BUT LOUDER. As all flat sixes do, the 3.8 sounds special, even at idle. Those expecting a full-on 991 GT3 aural experience will be disappointed, however, because this 3.8 doesn't have that 3.8's angry, impatient idle. It is more refined, which is no surprise because it isn't all that different from the 400-hp mill found in a Carrera S. It's mounted more intimately in the mid-engined Cayman, though, and Preuninger & Co. decided to ditch the sound deadening. Good call.

Fifteen horses were lost in the adaptation to the 981 chassis. Why wasn't the 430-hp Carrera S Powerkit engine used? Porsche says its taller intake plenum doesn't fit well in the 981 engine bay, and the normal 3.8 already required a new intake system with shorter runners. The exhaust system takes a more circuitous route, and turning the Carrera S engine around meant supply line connections had to be altered. The integrated dry sump oiling system was revised, and has a total capacity of 10.7 quarts. Porsche Motorsport lightened the Carrera S dual-mass flywheel and clutch package, removing about four pounds in all. The clutch pack also features a mild spring effect to keep the Cayman S-based transaxle from bearing the full brunt of the 3.8's torque.

What the optional lightweight seats lack in adjustment, they make up for in comfort and support. The ultra-thin, carbon-fiber shells—first seen in the 918—tie in with the smaller-diameter, 918-style steering wheel. The wheel and shifter are wrapped in grippy faux suede, but leather can be substituted. In a nod to lightweight 964s, 993s, 987s, and 997s, canvas straps replace the usual door releases.

With the seat, steering wheel, and mirrors adjusted, it's time to get moving. The clutch is far lighter than

The optional 918 seats run $4,730, but cut 40 pounds and accommodate racing harnesses. Leather/Alcantara with red stitching is $1,090. Carbon-fiber trim adds $905-$1,180; red seatbelts cost another $350.



those employed in 997 GT3s and GT2s. Merging with traffic, the 3.8-liter flat six feels unburdened. It may be down 15 horses to the Carrera S, but the car it's mounted in is 120 pounds lighter. The GT4 is only available with a six-speed manual, and it's a honey. The transaxle is located by active mounts, and its shift linkage employs bronze bushings. The gear lever is 0.8-inch shorter than a 981 GTS's to shorten shift throws, and does without a counterweight at its base to promote a more positive engagement with each shift. That should lead to stiffer, less fluid shifts, but downsides are difficult to detect. The GT4 shifter is precise, tactile, and Porsche's best to date—no small praise after the GTS's fabulous six-speed stick.

It only takes half an hour to get to the hills above Faro. First thought, three bends in: This is a killer canyon car. As they do on the 918 and 991 GT3, Michelin's Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires offer a *lot* of grip. With ball joints replacing rubber bushings throughout the suspension, it's noticeably sharper than a Cayman GTS. The electric-assist steering rack was lifted from the 991 GT3, but its software has been recalibrated for the GT4's mid-engined platform. It's at least as good here as it is in the GT3, and maybe better. Turn-in is pin-sharp, effort is just right, and the wheel is communicative. The nose feels a lot like a GT3's, no surprise since everything up there is GT3 gear—from the uprights, wheel bearings, and split wishbones to the coil-overs, wheels, and tires.

From there back, the mid-engined chassis comes into play. The longer wheelbase and lower polar moment of inertia make for more stable, more approachable handling. PTV Plus, an electronic torque vectoring system that can brake an inside rear wheel to cancel understeer, is standard—and utterly transparent in use. The GT4 comes off as what it is: a simpler car than a 991 GT3.

Opposite: 20-inch wheels come in gray or silver at no cost, or satin black for $685. Front suspension, steering, and brakes are 991 GT3 gear. Standard brakes get red calipers; optional ceramic-composite brakes get yellow calipers and huge, 410-mm rotors.

It doesn't take too many corners to find the trade-offs. With less weight over its rear wheels, 10-mm narrower rear tires, and a mechanical limited-slip differential instead of the 991 GT3's variable e-diff, the GT4 offers less rear-end traction. And while the rear suspension benefits from reinforced control arms, a reinforced anti-roll bar bridge, special knuckles that revise the suspension geometry, and GT3-style coil-overs with helper springs, the 991 GT3 keeps its sophisticated multi-link rear suspension and rear-wheel steering. Does that leave the GT4 at a disadvantage? In performance terms, undoubt-

Opposite, above: Leather/Alcantara interior with yellow stitching and door-release straps costs the same $1,090 as the one with red highlights. No-cost radio delete leaves a giant cubby in the dash, while the no-cost luggage net adds a bit of utility to the footwell.

Cool air in, over, and around; hot air out: Factory illustration (above) shows GT4 aero package at work. Center radiator vents hot air through the top of the bumper to help stick the nose, à la GT3. Side scoops are needed with the 3.8, says Porsche. The stiffer of two PASM settings was a bit much on the street, but perfect on the Portimão circuit (below).

edly. Fun is a different story, and that's where it reminds you how good a relatively simple sports car can be.

The 3.8's torque lets you carry third gear into tight bends where you'd drop down to second with a 3.4. When you do grab second, the sprint to the 7800-rpm redline takes you to 81 mph, and quickly. That's awfully fast for a back road, and third goes to 113 mph! We're left wishing for closer ratios, especially with such a joyous shifter.

The 3.8 sounds great at full throttle, deeper and more authoritative than the 3.4 in the GTS. Is it too loud? With the sport exhaust on, most people will say yes, early 911 owners will find it just right, and GT3 fanatics will ask if the engine is on. The big 3.8 offers useful torque down low, but it doesn't feel lazy. It revs freely, if not quite as keenly as a GTS 3.4 up top. Calling the 3.8 merely wonderful is damning it with faint praise, but unavoidable after being spoiled by GT3s that scream past 8000 rpm.

The GT4 is surprisingly compliant and fluid on roads that recall Northern California with lumps and bumps created by storms and sporadic fixes. Its ride comfort comes in somewhere between a PASM-equipped Cayman GTS and one with X73 Sport Suspension. Against the latter, the GT4 is stiffer but no harsher. There's an extra layer of sophistication, as you'd expect with PASM dampers and know-how borrowed from GT3 development.

Preuninger and his team are in new territory, however, and the Cayman GT4's back end doesn't feel quite as nailed down as a GT3's. While the front springs are the same as those in the GT3, the rear springs are 33% softer. Even so, the GT4's rear end can get a bit bouncy—and did over two bumps at 60-70 mph on a downhill straightaway. Would a 991 GT3, with more weight behind its rear wheels, more sophisticated multi-link rear suspension, and another decade of developmental intel, have done the same thing? That's hard to know without driving one over the same section, but experience in GT3s on similar roads suggests no. The GT4's dampers deal with the landing beautifully, handling the compression and keeping rebound in check *right now*. Before the fact that the rear end pitched up even registers, the tires are planted and the grip is there.

As for the brakes, you don't think about them; they just work. The Rhodium Silver GT4 is equipped with the $7,400 PCCB ceramic-composite setup, which offers a predictable pedal, precise modulation, and no hint of fade. The system shaves 33 pounds in unsprung, rotating mass despite 16.1-inch front rotors in place of the standard 15.0-inch iron rotors. Borrowed from the 887-hp, 3,692-pound 918, PCCB is overkill on a 385-hp, 2,921-pound car. Even the standard brakes are more than up to the task, having been swiped from the 475-hp, 3,153-pound GT3.

The reality is that it's hard to get anywhere near the GT4's limits on the road. Arriving at the hotel, the promise of track time tomorrow sounds like a very good idea.

AFTER A FITFUL NIGHT'S SLEEP, we arrive at one of Europe's very best race tracks. For a newcomer, Portimão's circuit is tricky. Braking zones are often blind, and two- and three-corner complexes can be deceptive—turning out to be a single bend meant to be handled with a single steering input. The GT4's neutral yet easily adjustable chassis inspires confidence through a plunging, high-speed left-hander, and its stability under braking comes in handy on the way to a slow right-hander you can't see over a crest. After slowing the car in a straight line, you pop over the hill, pinch the turn late, and get onto the throttle hard. It would be a tricky section in a GT3, with a lot to manage. It's just plain fun in the GT4.

GT4 drivers are going to give 997 and 991 pilots fits at PCA track days. The car is unerringly stable at speed—this *without* adjusting its aero package to maximize downforce, a process that only takes a few minutes. For the brave (and non-jet-lagged), the unobtrusive stability management system can be defeated in two stages.

Speaking of driver aids, the Sport button on the center console arms a throttle blipper that eliminates the need to heel-and-toe to match revs during downshifts. Its inclusion was hotly debated within Weissach, but Preuninger decided to add the system because it can be ignored by those who don't like it. When it's armed, you simply push the clutch in, pull the shifter down a gear, and let the computers do the rest. They do, perfectly.

On track, the gearing stands out again. In third, the tach needle doesn't sprint from 7000 to 7800 rpm in the way you might expect in a Porsche wearing a GT*x* badge. At Portimão, this is where one begins to think about the 991 GT3's frenetic sprints to 9000 rpm, seven perfectly spaced cogs, and instantaneous up- and downshifts.

Back in the pits, Walter Röhrl is offering rides. On the first lap, he isn't his usual smiling, chatty self—and he skips the sideways antics. Coming onto the front straight again, he reaches forward…to start a timer. His second lap is a study in economical inputs, and it pays off. "Two oh two point five," says Röhrl with obvious satisfaction. For context, swift British journalist and Porsche specialist Chris Harris set a 2:02.02 here in a 991 GT3 on Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2s. Of course, comparing a world champion to a writer/driver on different days is a fuzzy yardstick, but Röhrl's 175-pound passenger is a big disadvantage. Yes, the GT4 is *fast*.

Röhrl clearly enjoys driving it. "The weight is in the right place," he says. "It gives you so much confidence—you'll never be afraid because everything goes so smoothly, even if you go over the limit. I think most drivers will be faster in this car than a 911." Röhrl likes mid-engined Porsches, and recently bought a 987 Boxster Spyder. The teenage boy in him comes out when he talks about its handling. His smartphone comes out, too. Pictures of a cool white Spyder are seen. Yes, Walter is one of us.

Cool blast: The freeway run to Faro showed the GT4 is a surprisingly good touring car, this despite its considerable on-track talents and 1.2-inch ride-height reduction against a normal 981. The Motorsport-grade suspension offers more setup choices and substitutes spherical bushings for rubber bushings at key points. The front end is pure GT3, while the rear suspension got a stiffer subframe, larger wheel bearings in new hub carriers, split forged alloy lower control arms, and coil-overs with helper springs.

THE DRIVE BACK TO FARO is mostly freeway, a good opportunity to live with the GT4 in the everyday world. Back on the road, we find ourselves wishing for a shorter gear stack from first through fifth, with a taller sixth to allow for sub-3000-rpm freeway cruising.

Other quibbles are few: An auxiliary audio input and Bluetooth are standard, but those who want a USB port or Bluetooth audio must buy CDR Plus Audio for $1,700 or Porsche Communication Management including Navigation for $2,965. Really? In 2015? The GT3's nose-lift system is sadly missing from the options list, but that's only because its pump doesn't fit in the 981 unibody. Fortunately, the GT4 nose has better approach angles, and we're told replacement spoilers will be priced attractively.

The rest of the GT4 options list is simple by Porsche standards. Lightweight bucket seats seem like the one must-have, being trick and a bargain at $4,730 against their parts-counter price. One Porsche engineer reckons the seats and the $7,400 PCCB brakes might cut 73 pounds, theoretically dropping the curb weight from 2,954 to 2,881 pounds for $12,130. Romantics can delete the air-conditioning and audio system at no cost. That might get a GT4 under 2,850 pounds, or some 300 lighter than a 991 GT3. Extreme? Yes, but the 918 Weissach Package asks $84,000 to shave 89 pounds. It deletes your conditioned air, too.

Thing is, you can have a GT4 for about the price of the Weissach Pack—and, even with no options, it will be a bull's-eye. The GT4 is great in the canyons, fantastic on track, complete enough to be a real car, and surprisingly refined. It's fast, but, more importantly, it's *fun*.

Does it render the Cayman GTS obsolete? For buyers who want PDK or softer PASM suspension, the answer is no. For anyone who would buy a GTS with X73 Sport Suspension, it isn't so easy—there just isn't much downside here. Is the GT4 a legitimate alternative to the 991 GT3? Not really. The GT3 justifies its $45,800 premium with an engine that's on another level plus PDK-S, multilink rear suspension, an e-diff, and rear-wheel steering.

"With maturity, the GT3 is approaching the limits of what is feasible," states Jörg Jünger, project manager for high-performance cars at Porsche AG. He says that has opened the door for the GT4. "The GT4 exists in its own right, and counters criticism regarding the GT3's lack of a manual transmission. The 991 GT3 keeps, sensibly, its lightning fast but much heavier PDK-S transmission." Given customer response to the GT4, it will be interesting to see if the next GT3 gets a manual. We're equally curious to see if PDK-S will be offered in the next GT4.

What about the engine? Is the heart of a Carrera S enough for a Porsche bearing a GT*x* badge? We'll leave that up to you, but the subject of cost has to be considered. This is a factory built, 3.8-liter 981 with GT3 suspension, GT3 brakes, proper aero, and the full blessing of Porsche Motorsport—for less money than a Cayman with an aftermarket 3.8 conversion. Would an 8500-rpm 3.4 or 3.6 have been cooler? Perhaps, but it would have offered less torque and raised the car's base price.

"Big revs cost big money," confirms Preuninger, but he says that the extremely strong reception to the GT4 in its present, price-sensitive state bodes well for future developments. Dr. Frank-Steffen Walliser, who heads up Porsche's GT road and race car department, has confirmed that a GT4 racer is under consideration. As for a GT4 RS street car? Preuninger says his team isn't working on one, but he doesn't dismiss it as an idea.

In the meantime, it looks like Porsche will build about 2,500 GT4s, with 1,000 to 1,200 earmarked for the North American market. All appear to be sold, a situation that surprised and pleased Porsche AG's board of directors. That's a very good thing for the future of the 981, and for anyone who likes the idea of purer Porsches.

2015 Cayman GT4

Body Type	Mid-engined, rear-drive coupe
Engine Type	Flat 6
Valvetrain	DOHC, 4 valves/cylinder
Induction	Direct fuel injection
Bore & Stroke	102.0x77.5 mm
Displacement	3800 cc
Compression ratio	12.5:1
Power	385 hp @ 7400 rpm
Torque	310 lb-ft @ 4750–6000 rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual
Suspension: front	MacPherson strut
rear	Modified MacPherson strut
Brake calipers: front	Six-piston, monoblock
rear	Four-piston, monoblock
Brake rotors: front	15.0x1.3 inches, vented
rear	15.0x1.2 inches, vented
Wheels: front	20x8.5 inches
rear	20x11 inches
Tires: front	245/35ZR20
rear	295/30ZR20
Length	174.7 inches
Wheelbase	97.8 inches
Height	49.8 inches
Width	71.5 inches (77.9 w/mirrors)
Track, front	60.6 inches
Track, rear	60.4 inches
Curb weight	2,954 pounds (base)
0-60 mph	4.2 seconds (mfg)
Top Speed	183 mph (mfg)
Base price	$84,600 + $995 destination

Want more?
Find the full GT4 press kit and extra photos at www.pca.org/panorama-03.15