

996 GT3 BUYING GUIDE

The 997 GT3 might be making all the headlines but lest we forget where it all began, with the motorsport-oriented Mk1 and Mk2 996 GT3s. Here's all you need to know to grab a good 'un.

Words: Chris Knapman Photography: Antony Fraser

It didn't take long for the world's motoring press to spot the new GT3 weighed 30kg more than a standard Carrera 2. It was a seemingly unusual move from a company so well versed in producing limited edition road racers, and left some thinking the unthinkable: had Porsche got it wrong?

Of course it hadn't. At the car's launch in the summer of 1999 any early doubts were dispelled in style as the GT3 waltzed through road tests and planted itself straight into the pantheon of 911 greats. Unlike the numerous RSs that had gone before it this was no ultralightweight racer, but the fact it took its GT3

moniker from the category of international motorsport it was being homologated for was enough to tell you this latest 911 was still the real deal.

The big news was the engine. Derived from Porsche's GT1 endurance racer, it brought with it the credibility of Le Mans wins in 1996 and 1998 (albeit equipped with two turbochargers), and its inclusion in the GT3 spoke volumes about Porsche's intentions for its fastest 996 yet.

Fast-forward to 2006 and the 997 GT3 may have moved the game on in terms of everyday usability but its bloodline is one of such pedigree that its predecessors remain among

the most coveted cars of the last decade. And it is these that we will be looking at in this buying guide, with both the early and rarer 'Mk1' cars built in 1999 and 2000, and the subsequent 'Mk2' models built from 2003 to 2005. We will guide you through the differences between the pair, as well as giving you the lowdown on the Comfort and Clubsport specifications. You will also find out where is best to buy, areas to look out for and why cars that have spent some time on track may be a better bet than those left in the garage and polished to within an inch of their lives.



THE ORIGINAL (1999-2000)

That 30kg weight increase over the Carrera 2 was a result of the GT3 utilising the stiffer bodyshell of the Carrera 4, complete with new mounting points for the engine and gearbox.

This looked like no C4 though, boasting a curvaceous new front bumper, moulded side skirts, an adjustable rear wing, GT3 badge and 18-inch Sport Design split rim wheels. Five millimetre wheel spacers increased the car's track for improved stability, suspension was lowered by 30mm and had revised pick up points that allowed axle geometry to be adjusted to suit drivers' requirements, as could the anti-roll bars. The ABS equipped brakes were improved over a regular 996 with the fitment of 330mm discs with four piston calipers, which gave a great first impression but would struggle with track use.

These were all detail improvements compared to the GT3's USP though, its hand built 3.6-litre engine. Derived from Porsche's Le Mans winning M9680 unit and boasting dry sump lubrication it goes without saying that the prospect of using it as the base for a road car engine was tantalising to say the least. Things got even more enticing when Porsche declared that the engine's conversion to road specification would remain the baby of its motorsport

department at Weissach. As such nothing was overlooked. Inside the aluminium crankcase were six lightweight pistons with titanium connecting rods, which along with a lightweight crankshaft were all unique to the GT3. These rods, the crankshaft and the main bearing journals were also strengthened with a special Plasma-Nitride process that helped the engine rev to a remarkable 9000rpm, although Porsche placed a 'soft' limiter at a safer 7800rpm. Also constructed from aluminium, the heads featured four valves per cylinder.

Power stood at 360bhp, giving the GT3 that elusive 100bhp per litre output, along with 273lb ft of torque. The fact that it hit its power and torque peaks at 7200rpm and 5000rpm respectively suggested this was an engine that thrived on being revved. This was enhanced by the Mk1's two-step Variocam, the latter step of which, at around 6000rpm, produced a wholly unexpected push to the redline and helped the GT3 post a 0-62mph time of 4.8 seconds and a top speed of 188mph.

The transmission was taken from the 993 GT2 race car, which meant it was not only incredibly strong, but the gear ratios could also be adjusted to suit different circuits, while wear and tear items such as synchro rings could be replaced

relatively easily. A limited-slip differential with 40 per cent locking under load and 60 per cent on the overrun was a standard fitment and traction control was omitted.

Customers were presented with a choice of Comfort or Clubsport specifications. Comfort models were acceptable for daily use, albeit still with a harder-edged nature than more run-of-the-mill models. Rear seats were binned to save 8kg, while the fronts were replaced with figure hugging glassfibre backed buckets from Recaro, covered in leather and weighing around 20kg less than those found in a Carrera. Not only did these hold you in place but they sat you lower in the car, further improving the 996's driving position. The lower section of the centre console, usually home to a CD holder, was also deleted, and a subtle GT3 logo placed on the centrally mounted rev counter.

The Clubsport was aimed squarely at track day addicts or those wanting to use the car for motorsport. Identifying a Clubsport over a Comfort is easy; just look for the fitment of a half roll-cage behind the front seats. As well as providing rigidity, the cage acts as a major load bearing device, incorporating spring strut supports on the rear axle which carry much of the force transmitted by the suspension that

would normally be borne by the car's body. Clubsports were also supplied with the front part of this cage, which owners could fit themselves if desired.

In place of leather the Clubsport's Recaros had a Nomex covering, while there was also a fire extinguisher mounted in the passenger footwell, and engine cut off switches fore of the gearstick and under the front bonnet. The Comfort model's side airbags were removed and harness bars for both seats and a six-point Schroth driver's harness fitted. More often than not a second harness will have been retro-fitted. The other key feature of the Clubsport is a single mass flywheel in place of the Comfort's dual mass item, helping the car to rev even more freely. Left hand drive cars benefited from an 89-litre fuel tank that made a 500-mile range possible from a tank of super unleaded but right hookers were lumbered with a much stingier 64-litre tank.

Between 1999 and 2000 1858 Mk1 GT3s were built, 308 being right-hand drive and 106 of those coming to the UK. Just 28 of the UK designation were Clubsports.

THE SEQUEL (2003-2005)

It wasn't until a year after the facelifted 996 appeared in 2002 that the new GT3 broke cover.

Based once again on the Carrera 4 shell, the second incarnation of the GT3 took on a sharper appearance than earlier models, complemented once again by modified bumpers front and rear (the former coming straight from the 996 Cup car), new side skirts and an angular rear wing. This time the wing wasn't adjustable (although you could buy shimmys from Porsche to make it so), but even in its fixed position it contributed to an aerodynamic package that reduced lift whilst maintaining the Mk1 GT3's 0.30 drag coefficient.

In response to criticisms over the Mk1's brakes, the stoppers on the Mk2 were beefed up to 350mm and equipped with six-piston calipers at the front, increasing the contact area between pad and disc by 40 per cent. Porsche Ceramic Composite Brakes (PCCB) were also available as an option, promising fade-free performance, a lifespan of up to 300,000km and an 18kg reduction in unsprung weight (the discs weighed half that of the steels).

The engine remained as in the Mk1 GT3, albeit tweaked to provide more power and torque to the tune of 381bhp at 7400rpm and 284lb ft at 5000rpm, and received detail enhancements to make it as light as possible. Among these were the use of lower jackets and

lightweight pins for the pistons saving 288g compared to the Mk1, connecting rods that were both 2.2mm longer and yet lighter than before, reprofiled valves that weighed 252g less, and smaller tappets that removed a further 500g. Because of these changes the flow of forces to the crankshaft was improved enough to dump the vibration damper, thus saving another two kilos of rotating mass and further improving the flat six's free-revving character to the extent that even the Clubsport could make do with a dual mass flywheel.

New Motronic engine management (version ME7.8 as opposed to the Mk1's M5.2.2) was programmed to increase the engine's rev limit to 8200rpm in the first four gears and 8000rpm in fifth and sixth. The two-stage Variocam system meanwhile was replaced with a subtler, 'stepless' design. The result was 0-62mph in 4.5 seconds and a car that topped out at 190mph.

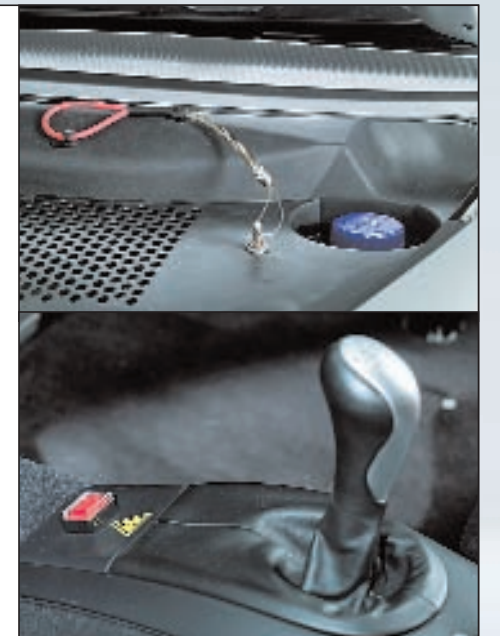
The gearbox was also updated, with splash oil lubrication and external cooling, while the brass synchro rings for third, fourth and fifth gears were replaced with steel items, all in a bid to further improve longevity.

The springs and dampers were modified to make the car a little softer, which combined with the Mk2's more powerful engine make it

**I BOUGHT A GT3 Mk1 – MICHAEL BATEMAN**

"Having owned a Boxster S and a 993 C4S, I had set my sights on a GT3 to do some more track days. I wanted something a bit special so sought out a Mk1 Clubsport. It really is an extraordinary car; every time the key turns in the ignition a smile creeps across my face. The fabulous engine is the centrepiece, it just revs and revs and then revs some more. But the GT3 is more than just a great engine, it is a great package, steering, brakes and chassis are all superb. The weakest link is my driving ability. I have done six track days this year and have loved every minute. Awesome, this one's a keeper."

"The main consumables have been tyres and brake pads. In terms of tyres I have switched from the Pirelli Corsas to Toyo R888s, both of these are very good track-oriented road tyres but the Toyos are around two-thirds the cost of the Pirellis. I have just replaced the front Pagid brake pads myself which was a relatively easy job. Apart from oil and fuel there haven't been any other major costs. Some people describe the front splitter as a consumable item but I've not grounded mine on any speed bumps yet! So far the car has performed faultlessly."





the quicker and more confidence inspiring of the two road cars for most drivers.

Once again the models were divided into Comfort and Clubsport specifications, with much the same similarities as the Mk1. If anything the new Clubsport wasn't quite as extreme, losing the interior engine cut off and single mass flywheel, although it retained the Nomex covered seats, roll-cage and fire extinguisher. Like the Comfort, it also gained a cup holder, and air-con was a no-cost option.

The single-piece wheels were increased in size over the Mk1, the fronts now measuring 8.5-inches wide (Mk1 8-inches) and the rears 11-inches (Mk1 10-inches). Despite this a set of Mk2 wheels was actually one kilo lighter than those from a Mk1, although in total the new car added 30kg to the GT3's mass.

Unlike the Mk1, this new GT3 would also be sold in the US, which contributed to the model's notoriety. In total around 2500 were built, with 247 of those being registered in the UK.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Firstly, don't be put off if the car's had an unusually high number of owners for its age;

the GT3 will simply be too focused for many drivers and as a new purchase was also susceptible to fall into the hands of those speculating on resale values.

Expect a full service history (OPC or specialist) but don't be satisfied with just this. Find out how the car's been used – a regularly tracked car isn't necessarily a bad one, so long as it's not been crashed and has been maintained accordingly. Service intervals may well be two years/12,000 miles, but a tracked car that is serviced annually is one that more likely than not has been cared for in a similarly attentive manner.

As with any Porsche you should pay close attention to paperwork. It's conceivable that a German import will have been separated from its paperwork but its price should reflect this. Avoid any UK car that doesn't have all of its original documentation.

If the car has been modified in any way expect to see supporting paperwork and try to ascertain what the previous owner was trying to achieve and whether it worked, as well as checking the maintenance schedules for any non-standard parts.

GT3s to avoid are those that have been reshelled. It won't be easy to spot such a car, which is where a professional inspection can help (as a guide Parr charges £144 plus VAT). As ever, look for clues of accident damage, checking panel gaps, removing the carpet in the front compartment for signs of repair and ensuring the paintwork matches. Also, open the doors and check the protective tape on the B-pillars is in place as bodyshops often forget to replace this. There should be a VIL authentication sticker on the underside of the front bonnet that matches an item in the service book. Unscrupulous sellers have been known to cover up an accident-damaged car by steaming the sticker out of the log book and reapplying it to the bonnet, so check both stickers are present and that chassis and engine numbers match from car to book. Also, be sure that the chassis is that of a genuine GT3 by checking that the 13th number from the left is a 9 and not a 0 (a designation reserved for only the GT3, GT3 RS and GT2).

Engine-wise, the good news is that the rear main seal problem that has been the 996 and Boxster's Achilles heel hasn't affected the GT3. A

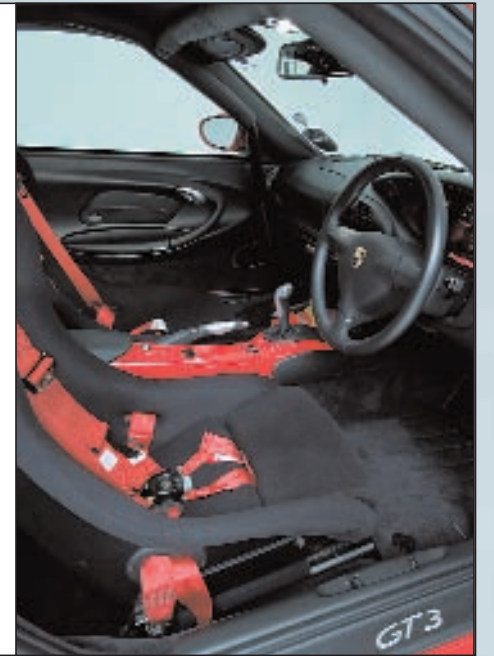
few reports of leaking front main seals (FMS) have appeared on a couple of forums, but this isn't a well-known problem. If at some point you have to replace the clutch, which incidentally will only last around 15,000 miles with a bit of track use, then you may just as well replace the seal too. A few very early cars had problems with porous crankcases and duff water pumps but these should have all been repaired under warranty. Keep in mind too that GT3s sound notoriously rough when cold because all of the oil drains away from the engine when they are stood, but this should disappear after a few seconds. Speaking of oil, expect Mobil 1 and nothing less.

The GT3 gearbox has also proven itself to be bulletproof. The worst problem you are likely to encounter is a troublesome selector on Mk1s, but this was something that could effect all early 996s and in truth, is pretty rare. The only other potential issue is worn synchros as a result of sloppy gearshifting, a problem that could potentially be accompanied by a £2000 repair bill. Be aware too that the gearbox can feel notchy when it's cold so ensure your test drive is long enough to let the oil warm through and

I BOUGHT A GT3 Mk2 – PHILIP TAYSON

"Since 1998 I've progressed from C2, C4 on to the Turbo and in 2001/2 I owned a Mk1 GT3 and thought it was simply great, for me the car Porsche should have made as the standard 996. A Mk2 Comfort I had was great fun but not raw enough, so I then had a brief flirtation with a GT2 Clubsport (awesome but deadly and really only an 'occasions' car) but found I missed having a GT3 so much and wanted a Clubsport. The GT3 is so nimble, so well balanced. Yes it's 100bhp down on the GT2 but its narrower track and reduced weight (and the lack of turbos!) makes for a real point and shoot car, agile through the twisty bits and yet useable everyday.

"Living with a GT3, for me, is quite easy. I'm a great fan of the early 911s (pre-1974) and so quite used to the harsh ride. The GT3 makes an excellent long distance tourer and returns a respectable 23mpg on a good run. Spirited driving will see this go to more like 17mpg. GT3s also eat tyres and brakes. I've heard a lot of other owners have switched to Pirelli Corsas or Toyos but I choose to stay on Michelin Pilot Sport Cups as I like the ride and grip they offer, and just have to remember when it's wet not to boot the throttle on roundabouts!"



the gearbox loosen up. The limited-slip differential can make groaning and creaking sounds during slow speed cornering but this is nothing to be alarmed by. You can expect differential plates to survive no longer than 10 track days though. To check for wear jack up the rear of the car and spin one of the wheels. If the opposite wheels doesn't spin at the same speed, in the same direction, new plates are needed.

If there was one criticism of the Mk1 GT3 it concerned the brakes. Although upgraded over a regular 996, they simply weren't up to sustained track use, vibrating and then fading after several hard stops. A simple and popular upgrade is to retro-fit the brakes from the Mk2, which being 20mm bigger in diameter and with two more pistons in the caliper are more than up to the job. Mk2s were also available with PCCB ceramic brakes, although the chances of finding these affixed to the car are as likely as them being in a box in the owner's garage. Unquestionably excellent in terms of stopping power and resistance to fade, early PCCB discs were known to have cracked after sustained track use. With replacement discs costing a whopping £3500 for a front and £3200 for a

rear it's easy to understand why many owners revert back to the steel setup. You might also find that an upgrade such as Brembo's floating disc setup has been installed, which will almost certainly suggest the car has had some fairly hard track use. Once again, this need not be a problem, so long as the car has been appropriately maintained.

GT3 suspension is tough, but, as with any car, components will wear and eventually give up the ghost entirely with the main culprits being rear struts (indicated by weeping fluid) and anti-roll bar drop links. Remember too that suspension alignment is critical for a GT3 and a couple of knocks will be enough to throw things out of kilter. Our advice is to get an alignment check carried out as soon as you buy the car so you can be confident your GT3 is handling as Porsche intended, and if you're using the car on track get the geometry checked every six months or so.

Finally, check what tyres the car is wearing. Rubber that isn't Michelin, Pirelli, Dunlop, Continental or Toyo's R888 point towards an owner that may well have skimped on other areas of maintenance.

WHERE TO BUY

As a guide, Mk1s go for anything between £35,000–£55,000, and Mk2s £45,000–£65,000. OPCs still stock low mileage Mk2s from around £55,000 and upwards, although finding a Mk1 within the official dealer network is the exception rather than the rule. However, in truth many of the top independent Porsche specialists will offer similar warranties to an OPC but not charge quite such top dollar for the cars, not to mention offer cheaper labour rates when you need work done (as an example Paragon charges £75 per hour whereas Porsche Centre Tonbridge charges £105 per hour). If you're willing to forgo a warranty a good way to locate cars is through enthusiast forums such as the Titanic GT3 register or the GT3 division of the Porsche Club GB. This will give you access to a wealth of information on what to look for, as well as details of GT3s that members are offering for sale at a given time. For many being able to meet a GT3's previous owner and find out how the car was looked after is just as important as having a warranty.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The GT3 is exactly the kind of car that makes Porsche the marque it is; drenched in motorsport heritage and with an edge that lifts it above the realms of mere sports car.

Whether you go for a Mk1 or Mk2 is all down to personal preference, and don't think for a second that just because the Mk2 commands slightly more money that it is necessarily the better car for you. Yes, Mk1s are the cheaper way

SPECIFICATION – Mk1 GT3 (Mk2 GT3)

ENGINE

Power-unit: Flat-six, water-cooled

Capacity: 3600cc

Bore x Stroke: 100mmx76.4mm

Construction: Aluminium

Power: 360bhp@7200rpm (381bhp@7400rpm)

Torque: 273lb ft@5000rpm (284lb ft@5000rpm)

Transmission: Six-speed manual, limited-slip differential, single mass flywheel on Mk1

SUSPENSION

Front: MacPherson strut, adjustable anti-roll bar

Rear: Multi-link, adjustable anti-roll bar

BRAKES

Front: 330mm drilled and ventilated discs, four-piston calipers (350mm discs, six-piston calipers)

Rear: 330mm drilled and ventilated discs, four-piston calipers

WHEELS & TYRES

Front: 8x18-inch light alloy with 225/40 ZR18 tyres (8.5x18-inch light alloy with 235/40 ZR18 tyres)

Rear: 10x18-inch light alloy with 285/35 ZR18 tyres (11x18-inch light alloy with 295/30 ZR18 tyres)

PERFORMANCE

Max Speed: 188mph (190mph)

0-62mph: 4.8 seconds (4.5 seconds)

Weight: 1350kg (1380kg)

Power to weight ratio: 258bhp/ton (275bhp/ton)

HOW MUCH?

New (1999): £76,500 (€72,750)

Now: £35,000–£55,000 (€45,000–€65,000)

into GT3 ownership but that doesn't make them the poor relation. Indeed, many prefer the Mk1 on account of it offering the more raw, visceral driving experience. For the next couple of years it will also hold its value better than the Mk2.

The second generation GT3 comes with the unquestionable appeal of being the faster car and is slightly easier to live with day to day, but don't think this diminishes its abilities on track – the Mk2 has all of the scalpel sharpness you would expect of a GT3.

Get onto some forums and discuss the merits of each model with owners that use them on both road and track. If you can get along to a track day you will more often than not find that owners will be more than happy to take you for a couple of hot laps so you can experience the car. Rest assured though, whichever GT3 you choose, it really is a win-win situation.

RUNNING COSTS

12k service: £360

Geometry check: £210

Oil filter: £11.42

Air filter: £25.44

Fuel filter: £24.47

Brake discs:

(Mk2) front £827.06

(Mk1 and 2) rear £277.52

Clutch: £652

All prices are taken from an OPC and exclude VAT and fitting

CONTACTS

- www.titanic.co.uk/GT3/

- www.porscheclubgb.com

- www.911uk.com

- www.mobile.de

- www.parr-uk.co.uk

- www.mcp-motorsport.com

THANKS TO:

Michael Bateman (Mk1 Clubsport) and Philip Taysom (Mk2 Clubsport) for providing their cars for this photoshoot, Gary Bullen of the Titanic GT3 register (www.titanic.co.uk/GT3/), Paragon (01825 830424, www.paragon.gb.com) and Parr Motorsport (01293 537911, www.parr-uk.co.uk).

