

Land vs air – racing the Porsche Taycan Turbo GT against an electric plane

07/05/2025 Reviving a famous format from their days presenting the world's most popular motoring TV show, Richard Hammond and James May recently embarked on a race across the south of England, pitting the Taycan Turbo GT against the Pipistrel Velis Electro – one of the world's first commercially available electric aircraft.

Almost 20 years after the pair first staged a race between a car and an aeroplane, British TV presenters Richard Hammond and James May have brought the format into the electric age, in a new film for the DriveTribe YouTube channel. For the original race, the two were teammates, sharing the cockpit of a Cessna 182 as they raced from the Italian town of Alba to London against their co-presenter, Jeremy Clarkson, in a Bugatti Veyron. This time, however, they were competing against one another, with May taking to the skies in an electric aeroplane and Hammond behind the wheel of the powerful Porsche Taycan Turbo GT.

Heading east across the south of England, the race began at Henstridge Airfield on the Somerset/Dorset border and finished at Dunsfold Aerodrome, the former workplace of the two presenters and home of the famous TV test track. The 174-kilometre route (or 129 km, as the crow flies) wouldn't be long enough to challenge the up-to-555-km range of the Taycan Turbo GT – although if it did need to charge, just 18 minutes would be enough to take the state of charge (SoC) from 10 to 80 per cent, thanks to a peak charging capacity of up to 320 kW.

While the car would have to contend with traffic, roadworks and speed limits as it made its way between the two airfields, the plane would be able to make unimpeded progress. What would level the playing field, however, was the aircraft's maximum flight time of about 50 minutes; to complete the journey, it would need to make a planned charging stop at Thruxton Aerodrome, roughly halfway.

Preparing for the start of the race, May was surprised by the rather uncomplicated pre-flight checks required for the electric aircraft. Indeed, he was to discover that cars aren't the only vehicles to benefit from the added convenience that comes with the transition to electromobility.

The Taycan took an early lead

The Taycan took an early lead off the line and, having started on an airfield rather than a public road, Hammond was able to unleash the full potential of the car's breathtaking acceleration provided by its torque of up to 1,240 Nm with Launch Control, covering the sprint from 0-100 km/h in just 2.3 seconds. In fact, with a peak system output of 1,108 PS when using Launch Control with Overboost, the Taycan Turbo GT produces even more power than the Bugatti Veyron featured in the aforementioned race in 2005.

The past two decades have brought about an enormous increase in the power outputs of cars that are suitable – and intended for – everyday use. Such high levels of performance were, only a relatively short time ago, achieved only by supercars and hypercars. Today, Porsche makes this super high performance much more widely available, accompanied by corresponding levels of control and safety thanks to a huge variety of innovative systems.

As with their famous races from the past, the presenters performed the head-to-head test for real, with the respective journey times for the car and plane roughly calculated beforehand to ensure a close contest. The race was so close, in fact, that Hammond decided to make use of the Taycan's optional panoramic roof with Variable Light Control – which uses a controllable liquid-crystal film to switch between completely clear and opaque – to search the skies for (in his words) the "small electric plane with a spaniel in it".

Once off the motorway and onto sinuous back roads, Hammond was able to reflect on the qualities of the sports car's ride and handling. As well as providing exceptional driving characteristics on track, the Porsche Active Ride chassis control system, which comes as standard on the Taycan Turbo GT, enables an extraordinary degree of comfort while also providing true sports car dynamics – switching from one

extreme to the other at the tap of a screen. With the suspension system's ability to generate tensile and compressive forces (i.e. both up and down) independently at each wheel, the car can compensate for undulations in the road and the motion of the body, and it can even 'lean' into corners – all of which combines to give an exceptional level of stability and control. Thanks to various close-up shots of the wheels, viewers can see this impressive feature working in real time, with the tyre remaining in perfect contact with the road as the body of the car simply 'glides' over bumps.

Throughout the race, the plane benefitted from a strong tailwind of about 20-30 knots, giving May confidence in his chances of victory – and prompting him to enjoy perhaps one cup of tea too many during his charging stop at Thruxton. The aircraft's swift progress, travelling much faster than the national speed limits that the car would be bound by, meant that the race remained too close to call even right up to the final stages as the presenters approached Dunsfold for the first time in more than a decade.

Land or air – Who comes out on top?

Watch the full video below to find out which EV – land or air – came out on top:

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Consumption data

Taycan Turbo GT (WLTP)*: Electrical consumption combined: 21.2 – 20.5 kWh/100 km; CO_2 emissions combined: 0 g/km; CO_2 class: A

*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO_2-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" (Fuel Consumption, CO_2Emissions and Electricity Consumption Guide for New Passenger Cars), which is available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT (Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, www.dat.de).

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