

Tried and tested

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28/03/2018 Porsche brand ambassador Mark Webber takes the new GT3 RS on a snow-strewn European road trip. In the Porsche Newsroom he talks about his impressions.

Stuttgart was in the grip of the mother of all cold snaps, and sheltering in one of the more secretive sections of Zuffenhausen HQ that afternoon, I got my first glimpse of the all-new 911 GT3 RS. The car was counting time in the off-limits Porsche Exclusive area, box-fresh and finished in pure White, to my mind the best colour to offset those race-derived carbon elements. And my arrival, as it often turns out here, was no coincidence. This car was being prepped for yours truly and my orders were pretty simple: put some miles on it.

So it was a quick kip in Stuttgart that night, then up early to embark on my first long stint behind the wheel, en route to a friend's house in Villars-sur-Ollon. I had four days to play with, and the GT department wanted to see at least 2k on the clock when I brought it home. Sometimes, you just have to do what you're told.

Straight out into central Stuttgart traffic then, and as tractable as the most powerful normally aspirated 911 ever made proved to be, the autobahn was beckoning, and with it the opportunity to stretch those long, high-revving legs.

It didn't take long to clock some respectable numbers on Germany's derestricted straight stuff, where the car's stability simply blew me away. And another surprising factor was the refinement. For a lightweight, track-focused car with reduced sound insulation, even at serious speeds the level of noise in the GT3 RS is pretty much the perfect balance between raw emotion and useable daily comfort.

Laying down the miles for about four hours, I eventually pulled over to grab my first tank of fuel. When I emerged from the bathroom the car was surrounded by people taking photos and asking questions. Turned out the as-yet unlaunched GT3 RS was already hot property. And definitely not a car for going under the radar.

The last 10km up to Villars is super twisty, super steep and full of challenging hairpins, so this was the first real opportunity to test the agility and braking of the RS. Leaving the selfie session behind, I opened her up again and began to climb. The steering response, the precision and the instant confidence the car gave me to push was incredible. The higher I went, the more snow there was at the side of the road, and yet that confidence never wavered. At that sort of lick, Day 1 was over all too soon. And as nice as it was to arrive, that road, in that car, wanted to be twice as long.

The itinerary for Day 2 looked pretty good however: from Switzerland to Monaco and through the Mont Blanc tunnel, although the weather was still creating some dicey driving conditions as I pointed the RS south. For a GT3 car with increased track focus, it never missed a beat, always calm and composed, visibility always excellent. Just the odd squirt of washer liquid for the wipers was all that was required, and for an ex-racing driver this is bloody important; a perfectly clean screen at all times.

Arriving in the south of France, I was now on some very familiar roads, the hills behind Monaco the perfect place for testing the RS's insane change of direction. And the perfect excuse to crack a window and hear that exhaust note, echoing through the tunnels and bouncing off the cliffs. Safe to say the locals knew I was coming, and even among the high-end metal of Monaco, that rich flat-six stood apart. That night, I tucked her up in the underground car park – front axle lifting system working an absolute treat – and tracked down some old friends.

A good night in Monaco meant a bit of a late start on Day 3, inching out of town towards Parma at a little gone 2pm. These would be the slowest and most treacherous conditions of the whole trip, with the aggressive front spoiler of the GT3 RS tucked up behind a snow plough as it cleared the main route east into Italy. But the stereo was on and the RS on song, taking it all in its stride on those implacable winter tyres.

It was slow and steady along the busy autostrada, arriving in Parma just in time for dinner. The friends I was meeting had a motorsport background and inevitably they all wanted a go in the GT3 RS. One of them was a newbie to PDK and simply couldn't believe the speed of the system. I said “Paolo, my friend,

this is normal for Porsche," as we barreled out of wet roundabout, hunting out another 9000rpm shift point. Challenging conditions for any car, but the RS lapped it up and I was so happy to show it off to him.

Watch @AussieGrit presenting the new #Porsche GT3 RS! All details about Weissach's latest treat: https://t.co/azlm8I7cBU #PorscheGIMS #GimsSwiss pic.twitter.com/yk4OLMupeM

Day 4 was to be my last with the car – Parma back to Stuttgart, the longest single trip at around seven hours. Two things about this stretch were pretty interesting though: I drove a hefty four hours 45mins before nature called and my legs, back and backside were absolutely no problem when I clambered out of the car. In terms of comfort as well as ergonomics, that driving position is simply perfect for me.

The other surprisingly thing about the return leg was that I drove from Parma to Stuttgart on a single tank of fuel, despite having given that 4.0-litre unit another proper work out on the autobahn. Again, the refueling process required plenty of car chat and a fair few selfies, but an outside temperature of minus 5 meant we were all keen to keep moving.

So Tuesday night I rolled back into Zuffenhausen and reluctantly handed over the keys. I'm incredibly proud of what the GT team has been able to produce in the RS: a lightweight, high-revving, incredibly versatile yet highly emotional street car. I need to wait a few more weeks to see how it fairs on track, but I already have a pretty good idea. Watch this space.

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