

SPECIAL REPORT: MOTORING

# GTS lives up to top billing

**Cayenne** is game changer for purists and Panamera is on track, writes **Carl S. Cunanan**



The Porsche 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet approaches the historic town of Ronda on a run which tested engine delivery on the way up and braking ability on the way down.

There is an argument going around the Porsche community that the GTS models are the best cars ever made – that they are the most flexible of all Porsche vehicles, able to be used daily but also run hard on mountain roads or fast on racetrack curves with equal expertise and with equal pleasure.

Porsches are extremely competent handling machines at their most basic. Perhaps the German marque wanted to weigh in on this discussion, because it asked me to head to Spain to do nothing but drive GTS models from Boxster and Cayman through every 911,

including the first-ever drive of the Targa GTS, up to the Panamera and Cayenne.

The drive was to include city, highway and twisty mountain roads to and from the wonderful Ascari Circuit in Malaga, Spain.

The exact same cars, basically taking the beating of a sprint race and a two-way commute all in one day and all without a mechanic. For the flagship 911s, the Turbos may be faster and the GT3s may be more racetrack-centric – but still street legal most places – but the GTSS give the most emotional engagement, the most purely connected performance, the most awesome sound in a package you can still realistically

use to work every day. Most people will be quicker in the GTSS than they will be in the “faster” cars because most people won’t be able to use the Turbos or GT3s fully in anything other than a straight line.

And so, I landed in the Spanish sun to test the entire line of Porsche GTS vehicles. The first drive using a red drop-top Porsche 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet would begin just off the beaches and bring us through high-speed highways and high-speed tight mountain roads that would test engine delivery on the way up and braking ability on the way down.

Herds of sheep crossing the road on a blind curve

contributed to the high levels of testing achieved. Sheep, dogs and shepherds were fine, drivers were first taken aback and then became amused at the photo opportunities presented.

The 911 GTS is more powerful, purposeful and playful than the S model below it, but is not the one-minded track machine that the 911 GT3 is. It accelerates quickly and smoothly, in a more linear fashion than the turbocharged models and with what many say is a far nicer sound. It handles whatever curves you throw at it with ease thanks to improved suspension dynamics and tuning. The brakes are also upgraded, which came in handy when we encountered the sheep.

The road runs brought us to the Ascari Race Resort, a high-end destination, club and racetrack for those who think relaxation is more than just the nearby beaches or historic Ronda with the oldest bullfighting ring in Spain.

The Ascari track has the longest straight in the country, a stable of different high-performance vehicles and instructors and excellent facilities for hospitality, restaurants and downtime in between on-track sessions. We traded the rear-wheel drive GTS Cabriolet for the new half-open top, the just-launched 911 Targa 4 GTS (4 meaning all wheels are driven).

While the Cabriolet is a full convertible, the Targa is the latest take on a classic Porsche 911 model that had the roof open above the driver and passenger but a full cabin elsewhere. This present Targa is arguably the most beautiful the company has ever made, and uses a mechanical system to open up the sky as opposed to the ones where you had to manhandle the half-roof off yourself and stow it behind the seats.

It is gorgeous enough to pull you away from the 911 on aesthetics alone. On the racetrack where you can

consistently push the car to the limits without worrying about sheep, you get a real feel for handling and performance, how the car can continuously and confidently act and react without feeling the tiredness you would in other cars.

It reminds you that Porsche produces more racing cars than any other marque. The cars that were driven to the track were the same ones run hard on the track, and the same ones we ran back to the beach.

The GTS models, from the tall Cayennes to the four-door Panameras to the various 911s to the mid-engined Boxsters and Caymans, all bring in joy and engagement at higher levels than the other “regular” Porsches – but not requiring the technically-demanding skills and sacrifices of the Turbos, which are fast and comfortable, and GT3 and GT4 road/race cars which are fast and not very comfortable.

An S letter after a car name stands for sport, and GT stands for Gran Turismo or Grand Touring, which usually means a car suited more for long fast drives than tight racetrack corners. Porsche’s GTS stands for Gran Turismo Sports and signifies purebred sports cars.

The original 904 was run on public road races such as the

Targa Florio in Sicily, and Porsche says that what it learned was that long races don’t always require the utmost abilities of speed if they compromise the driver. It learned to engineer in comfort, easiness to drive and ergonomic efficiency because it found that the result was the ability to drive faster for longer periods.

Since its cars already had superior reputations for reliability, this made for a vehicle that could win the right races and still allow more consumers to actually drive it. The modern GTS is the latest iteration of all that knowledge and ability.

The package of today comprises key components that include design, performance and emotion as supported or engineered. On the design side, the cars, including the SUVs, look more aggressive. Black trim is present in subtle touches, with pieces such as wheels, headlight trim and badges, and smoked tail lights.

On the inside grippy alcantara and contrasting stitching work with anodised aluminium or optional carbon-fibre trim propel the racing car’s look and feel. The wide body configuration of the rear-wheel drive cars is now in use on all GTS models, which makes everything look more aggressive

and also allows for more rubber to grip the road.

The grip is important because on the performance side the GTSS are better than they have ever been. The engines deliver more power than the S, even the previous GTS of similar model, and power is delivered more spontaneously. Using the Sport or Sport Plus button allows you to dial in as much power as you want, along with appropriate stiffness and sound. Porsche wanted to build the most agile vehicle, and the new GTSS are far easier to throw around than ever while still keeping control.

Extensive chassis modifications allow increased longitudinal dynamics and better transverse dynamics which means less body and weight shift as you run through the twisties or settle into wide curves. All this handling is best enjoyed in the sports cars, with the mid-engine Boxster GTS and Cayman GTS being the true scalpels, the 911 GTS variants (coupe, cabriolet, targa and 2WD or 4) being more classic-Porsche tail-happy but not overly or unsafely so at all. The bigger Panamera GTS sedan and the Cayenne GTS SUV have more height and weight, so you cannot expect miracles, but they are surprisingly quick and stable.

## Limited-edition Lamborghini



Lamborghini has launched the Aventador Superverloce LP750-4 in Hong Kong, less than two months after its debut at the Geneva Motor Show. Andrea Baldi, general manager of Automobili Lamborghini Asia-Pacific, described the car as “the most exclusive, purest and emotional production model in the history of Lamborghini”. With acceleration to 100km/h in 2.8 seconds and a top speed of over 350km/h, the new model costs HK\$7.8 million and is being produced in a worldwide limited edition of 600.



The Porsche 911 Targa 4 GTS is the latest take on a classic 911.

# Shanghai Auto Show is big in scale and continues to grow

Mark Andrews

Thanks to a change of venue, this year’s Shanghai Auto Show has become the biggest in the world. The new National Exhibition and Convention Centre is the largest exhibition space in the world, comprising 16 giant halls.

Now in its 16th year, the biennial Shanghai show alternates years with one in Beijing. With the mainland having become the world’s largest car market, the show has grown to eclipse regional rivals such as the Tokyo Motor Show and is now considered of equal importance to the likes of events in Geneva, New York and Frankfurt. In the course of the weeklong event, the 350,000 square metres of exhibition space welcomed more than 900,000 visitors – many of whom were eagerly sizing up cars to buy.

But while Shanghai now dwarfs other auto shows, this year proved it doesn’t quite have the substance to match its size. During the last show in 2013, there was a string of launches from luxury manufacturers. This year, there was only one concept that was close to being ready for production. Instead, a few new versions of existing models were rolled out, plus some concepts.

With an eager market for

luxury SUVs in China, Mercedes-Benz chose Shanghai to unveil its new GLC coupe concept. Essentially a competitor to BMW’s X4, it is more coherent in styling and is also a little bigger. The production version should be launched towards the end of the year.

The only other notable launch was the McLaren 540C, but in reality it is nearly identical to the 570S that was unveiled a fortnight earlier at the New York show, albeit cheaper and with less power.

Then there were some new versions of luxury SUVs. Volvo chose to show off its XC90 Excellence. Proclaimed as the most luxurious Volvo ever, it demonstrates the brand’s intent to move more upmarket under the stewardship of new owners Geely. This version has clearly been designed with the Chinese market in mind. The normal seven-seat configuration is eschewed for two rear captain seats with increased leg room, a fridge, handmade crystal classes and a cabin that has been optimised for comfort.

BMW unveiled a new plug-in hybrid version of the X5, while Audi showed off the Prologue Allroad. The third concept in the brand’s Prologue series is a jacked-up version of the Avant shown at Geneva in March, with some more rugged detailing.

It was left to Chevrolet to bring the weird and wonderful with the Batmobile-like FNR. Designed in Shanghai, it noticeably lacked any controls – sensors and roof-mounted radar provide driverless operation.

Other concepts proved to be far closer to reality, and one of

the most exciting wasn’t even a car. MINI’s Augmented Vision concept shows what is already possible with existing technology and combines the features of a head-up display with a Google Glass-type device. Augmented reality allows the user to see through a car’s blind spots and body, which means there’s no more hitting the curb while parking. The glasses can guide the wearer on foot from the car to their final destination and back, and when driving provides navigation cues.

While Citroën’s Aircross

concept featured a futuristic digital interior, it rides on a real platform, and its looks are likely to find their way into a new family of crossover vehicles. It was a similar story with Honda’s Concept D, which is intended to preview a China-only crossover.

Underlining the importance of the mainland market to Volkswagen, its C Coupe GTE concept previews the company’s future design direction with a car that fits between the Passat and Phaeton as a China-only model. Sharing the stand at the auto show was the new Gran

Santana, an estate version of the China-only Santana saloon.

And the Lannia is the first Nissan-branded car to be designed specially for China. With its sharp looks and integrated infotainment technology, this model could prove popular.

The Shanghai show may be victim of timing. Following soon after the shows in Geneva and New York, most manufacturers had already unveiled their new models. A switch to October or November might allow Shanghai to regain its clout.



Mainland carmaker Haval had a prominent display at this year’s Shanghai Motor Show.

## Mainland carmakers out in force

As can be expected, mainland producers were out in force at the Shanghai Auto Show. Haval was the real star with a string of new launches and concepts. It was interesting to see the lack of Great Wall branding and an absence of its small cars from the stand.

It launched the H6 Coupe, which is Haval’s answer to the Evoque, available in front-wheel drive and 4WD models with a choice of petrol or diesel 2.0T engines. Then there was the relaunch of the troubled H8, which now has the gearbox issues sorted out by sourcing rear main retarders from ZF. Finally, there was the soft-roader H7 and seven-

seater H7L version. All displayed impressive interior materials and a good finish.

Geely’s stand was indicative of the transformation it’s undergoing. There was the official launch of the new GC9, which included the ceremonial handing over of the keys to the first six customers. There was also the Emgrand Concept, which previews a similarly bold design for the replacement of the popular EC7, created by a team led by ex-Volvo designer Peter Horbury.

While a lot of the cars showed strong influences, the only real new copy to surface was the Beijing Jeep BJ80C, which looks

very similar to the Mercedes-Benz G-wagen. Zotye also attracted attention due to the Z700’s similarity to the Audi A6, and the E30 for influences from Smart and Tesla.

Meanwhile, there seemed to be a trend of manufacturers producing much larger, more luxurious cars as evidenced by BAIC’s Senova D80, GAC’s Trumpchi GA8 and the Dongfeng Number 1.

The real monster, though, was the Hongqi L55. Riding on the same platform as the L5 limousine, this massive SUV is 5.2 metres long and rides on a wheelbase of 3,060mm.