

Executive Class

MARK ANDREWS

When Porsche launched the Panamera, they clearly had China in their sights. It made a dramatic premiere in 2009 on the 94th floor of the Shanghai World Financial Centre. Earlier this year, Porsche chose the Shanghai Auto Show to unveil the car's facelift – the Executive.

Despite topping out at over five metres long, the regular car was not particularly spacious in the back. The Executive model adds a 15cm plug to the wheelbase, which largely translates as extra legroom for rear occupants.

Visually, the Panamera was divisive with looks somewhat akin to a stretched 911 or squashed Cayenne, however, it is distinctly Porsche-looking and had the low riding stance of a true sports car. The stretch means that the rear doors are longer and the roofline doesn't fall as soon as on the standard car.

Red seatbelts contrasted nicely with the dark interior of our Panamera 4S Executive test model. The central console extends the length of the passenger compartment making it a four-seater. Good quality materials dominate, with liberal use of leather and silver trim strips. A seven-inch touch screen display is used for the entertainment, GPS and a reverse camera viewer. It can be changed into English and the navigation system proved capable of accurately getting us back to Pudong from Songjiang.

In the front, both driver and passenger have low mounted, electrically adjustable sports style seats. The controls wrap around the driver with most mounted either around the central console or, airliner style, on the console for the sunroof. Front storage space is limited to small door pockets, a glove box and a reasonably capacious unit in the centre.

In the rear, there is also dual zone air conditioning. Rear seats come with electric adjustment of lumbar support, backrest angle and seat-length as well as heating and fan cooling. It is possible for rear passengers to move the front passenger seat for more leg space. Unlike some stretched cars, the interior space is still not huge in the rear, however, legroom, along with headroom, proved more than adequate. The Executive version has a storage compartment in the central console housing two 12V and a 230V power supply.

One of the first things you notice when driving the Panamera is how big it is – especially the width. Nonetheless, it is surprisingly nimble and handles like




a sports car rather than a limousine. Acceleration is brisk thanks to the twin turbo 3.0 litre V6 engine and you have to keep your right foot seriously in check if you don't want to be breaking speed limits. Despite having power in abundance, the Panamera is civilised in slow moving city traffic; the dual clutch unit has seven ratios and changes are seamless.

Mounted on the central console are the Sports and Sports Plus buttons which evaluate the road conditions and driving style, and tenses the damping forces for each wheel accordingly. They also optimise the gearshifts for sportier driving. Paddle shifts allow some manual control of gear changes.

The speedometer dial is tiny and we largely ended up looking at the digital display under the rev counter. The car is started by a fixed key to the left of the steering wheel

– a nod to Porsche's racing heritage. One thing that is lacking, and doesn't appear even an option, is a blind spot warning indicator that would definitely come in useful even though general all round visibility is reasonable. Reversing without the use of a rear vision camera is difficult thanks to the small rear window.

Despite only being about half the price, comparisons will be drawn with luxury cars such as the Bentley Flying Spur. While the Bentley is faster and has far more space, it is a limousine whereas the Porsche is a true sports car – it just happens to seat four comfortably and have rear doors. Prices for the Panamera Executive start at RMB 1,618,000 and go up to RMB 2,688,000.



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