

FROM PAGE G1: PORSCHE 911 GT3

engine, for instance, fires up with a few extra, labored cranks that suggest you're waking up something big. You can hear the gears meshing and clanging and lashing, audible from beneath the rear of the cabin, since the sound-deadening is removed.

More examples exist. But the gist, is that in the same way a little red toy Porsche can light up the mind of a young car buff, this new GT3 is full of race car compromise stuff that'll get the big boy (with a big chequebook) all wide-eyed.

Driving the GT3 is a wide-eyed experience, too, in more than one way. On one hand, drivers will be wide-eyed watching for potholes and curbs and frost heaves and bumps and lifted sewer covers, all of which threaten to unfavourably modify the wheels, the paper-thin tires wrapping them, or the front lip, which you won't hear scraping things at idle speeds when you're being extremely careful, since the exhaust drone covers it up.

But drivers will be wide-eyed, moreso, thanks to the performance. Steering and handling, for instance. The steering is the most precise, razor-sharp and instantly obedient I've ever used, and executed with such a thick heaviness that you'd nearly forget there's no engine up front to weigh things down.

For telling drivers the front end is bolted to its line, with just minimal inputs, and enough feel that your fingertips can pick up when traction is running out, this thing nails it. Things you're isolated from in other 911s are proudly on display here.

Plus, rear-axle steering and torque vectoring and adaptive mounts that control the directional inertia of the engine in fast corners add further fine-tuning to the experience. Word of the day? Precise.

Push it a little into, through and out of some bends, and you feel little squirms, shifts and slides as

the GT3's chassis re-arranges itself to find grip. It's not like an AWD Porsche 911 with its extremely high grip threshold; it's more playful, more lively, and happier to be steered with the throttle and brakes, in addition to the steering wheel.

Those brakes are of the cross-drilled variety, curiously showing off two hole sizes and a unique pattern on each rotor, which themselves are the size of trash-can lids. Stops come fast, almost startlingly so, and though the brake pedal doesn't quite match the steering for all-out precision and feel, the stopping power is tremendous. Under full braking, you'd go through the seatbelt if it was any thinner.

But the real GT3 performance party favour is the powertrain. At its core is a 3.8 litre, 475-horsepower non-turbo flat six engine, which is just something else. Hammer it.

Revs pile on, aggressively, and the noise ramps up steeply as torsos are pressed into seatbacks. You start noticing how quickly the speedometer is climbing, and how long the gears are, as the intake tone escalates from a howl to a wail. That's by 7,000 RPM.

Stay on it, and all of the above turn up a notch. By now, the GT3 feels like its pulling exponentially harder than it was a few thousand RPM ago. The noise is saturating the cabin. Flooding it. Piercing. Full. Thick. You're grinning ear to ear, and praying to the go-fast gods that there's nobody with a radar-gun nearby. That's 8,000 RPM. Stay on it. Now, the howling intake noise is drowned out by a purely mechanical zing from the engine behind you. It's all engine noise, now — no intake howl. It's a curiously harsh and alarming sound, and it feels less like it's flooding into the cabin and more like it's being transmitted directly into your brain.

Velocities of the engine internals, like pistons and valves and the crankshaft, approach the sound barrier. You start to wonder how the engine will stay together, almost. Nine thousand revs. Nine



At the GT3's core is a 3.8-litre, 475-horsepower, non-turbo, flat-six engine. **JUSTIN PRITCHARD**

thousand! Then, click the right upshift paddle, the tachometer needle drops a handful of revs faster than the second-hand on your wristwatch, and you feel as if the GT3 just round-housed you in the tailbone thanks to impact of the upshift.

There's a lick of wheelspin as it shifts, and you're back on it again. But not for long, at all, if you want to keep your license.

It's all over so fast. The GT3 can do 0-to-100 km/h, which is the speed limit in most of Canada, in 3.3 seconds. Assuming you're not using the launch control and burning the million-dollar Michelin tires whenever you're going to enjoy the power and grip and 'holy bananas this thing shifts fast' transmission behind that number, you're already moving when you drop the hammer.

So, that 3.3 seconds to the speed limit is cut, maybe, in half. Or, hammer down from a roll for that full 3.3 seconds, and you're deep in demerit-point territory.

Max out first gear, you'll be doing somewhere around 85 km/h. Second gear redlines at about 120 km/h. Third gear maxes out at a speed that will get you and your car thrown in jail, and an impound lot, respectively. Four gears remain after that. You get the idea. You just can't let the poor GT3 really stretch its legs, most of the time.

Of course, the acceleration isn't the only thing the GT3 has going for it. And, in fact, though it's the least comfortable 911 I've ever

visited, it's still road-trip ready and could get away being louder, rougher and more unpleasant.

The lights are powerful. The noise is kept mildly in check during cruising. The racing seats are stiff and thin, but my back had minimal issue with them, even after no fewer than four highway trips at over four hours apiece.

But ultimately, this one's a tricky bit of a machine to sum up. Maybe I'm an old lady, but I think I'd rather a less-powerful and tamer 911 variant. One with All Wheel Drive.

One where I wasn't as stressed out about losing a tire, or a front lip, or my driver's license every time I got in. And one where I could use more of the performance, more of the time.

If I had a racetrack nearby, it'd be a different story. But usually, I don't. And in the real world, with its speed limits and fellow motorists and police with radar guns, I figure most of what the GT3 can do will go to waste, most of the time. Which is a shame.

That said, it is the most badass, dramatic, crowd-gathering and haywire 911 going.

And that's going to help sell a lot of copies to the folks with the funds.

Pricing? As tested with some interior dress-up options, the tester came in at \$165 grand.

You'll want to budget for a radar detector, and a lifetime pass to your closest racing circuit, too. I've said it before and I'll say it again — stay in school kids!

Pritchard's futuristic cabins for relative budgets

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Driving an actual spaceship is a bad idea because spaceships are difficult to park, conspicuous, and very pricey to fuel and insure.

Further, full-throttle operation vaporizes anything within a half-mile, and all of your fellow motorists would know you're a great big geek — just like my friend Sean.

Sean is many things—including a medical doctor straight out of school, a card-carrying Star-Trek fanatic, and a definite non-car buff. Sean can tell you how many warp-speeds the USS Enterprise can do when being chased by evil Borg space cubes, but he doesn't know how many cylinders a V8 engine has. You get the idea.

The other night we were talking cars. Sean wanted something more upscale to replace his second Honda Civic, a 2009, which he bought primarily because it'll probably never break, starts at 30 below, and gets good gas mileage.

I asked Sean the usual questions to help form an answer: his price range, his priorities for fuel mileage, space, comfort, looks, and what he wanted his car to do for him. I also asked for his wish-list of features and technologies.

Sean's answer was interesting. He wanted something 'reasonably' priced, (we decided on keep-

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NOVA SCOTIA AUTOMOBILE DEALERS ASSOCIATION

Manufacturers and dealers are not one in the same

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While the signs outside a dealership may have names on them such as Hyundai, Mazda or General Motors, the exact nature of the relationship between the manufacturer and the dealer isn't well understood by the general public.

Often viewed as one and the same, the relationship between the two parties is in fact quite different.

"Manufacturers build cars, dealerships sell and service cars," said Rick Gauthier, the president and CEO of the Canadian Automobile Dealers Association, the national association for the 3,500 franchised automobile and truck dealerships that sell new vehicles in Canada.

Put another way, the dealer is the go between for consumers and manufacturers.

When most people think of franchises, restaurants are usually what come to mind.

Typically, purchasing a restaurant franchise will involve core elements such as paying a flat fee for the franchise, plus the entrepreneur having to pay royalties to the company.

Auto dealerships have a much different arrangement, says Gauthier. For example, dealerships don't have to pay for the franchise, nor do they have to pay



Automobile dealerships in Canada are all privately owned and the dealers put up their own money to start and run the business. **AP PHOTO**

royalties. These facts might give one the impression it isn't expensive to start a dealership, but it certainly is.

Dealerships are all privately owned and the dealers put up their own money to start and run the business. There are many expenses they incur.

One of the biggest expenses is the facility itself. Because dealerships are single-use buildings — meaning they can't be used for anything else — they tend not to be available, so dealers usually have to build them from scratch when they are starting up a dealership.

Dealers must also have sufficient capital to pay for things like branding, marketing, staffing and the cost of buying vehicles.

"Once that vehicle lands in the dealer's yard, the manufacturer that built that car is paid," he said.

If the vehicles don't sell, it's the dealer who is on the hook. The dealer can't just send them back to the manufacturer and get a refund.

Given these realities, there is lots of incentive for the dealer to sell vehicles, be a good corporate citizen in the community and provide good customer service. These factors all benefit the consumer.

"The customer is dealing with someone that has a vested interest in establishing a relationship," said Gauthier.

The independence of the dealer from the manufacturer also means that for people having problems with a vehicle which might fall under a grey area of warranty coverage, the dealer may be able to help out.

"Dealers have some discretion," said Gauthier.

This also speaks to the vested interest dealers have in keeping their clients happy.

Gauthier has worked in the auto industry for 45 years and he says over the years, some manufacturers have tried to run their own dealerships, but inevitably, the experiment has failed.

He feels this is because the arrangement where the franchised dealership is independent from the manufacturer is the one that best serves consumers, while causing the fewest headaches for the manufacturer.

"They've all gone back to that formula," he said.

CANADIANS ARE DISTRACTED BEHIND THE WHEEL

What are you doing behind the wheel? The answer should be a simple one: driving.

According to a recent survey

conducted for RSA Insurance, Canadians are seeing other drivers do many things behind the wheel besides driving, while a far smaller number admit to actually doing those things themselves.

For example, 63 per cent of drivers reported seeing other drivers apply makeup and 57 per cent saw others fixing their hair.

However, only three per cent and seven per cent of Canadians, respectively, admitted doing these things behind the wheel.

There was one category where drivers seemed to be a little more honest about their behaviour.

Sixty one per cent of Canadians said they have seen other drivers distracted with a vehicle's radio or GPS system, while nearly half of survey respondents admitted to it themselves.

Distracted driving is dangerous. "We know that distracted drivers are three times more likely to be involved in an accident," said Alex Walker, the director of claims relations for RSA, in a press release.

RSA offers up a few suggestions to avoid distracted driving. Some of its suggestions include inputting information into your GPS before leaving, as opposed to doing it while on the road. If you don't have a GPS and are instead relying on a map, study the map thoroughly before you leave.

RSA also recommends turning your phone off while driving or simply putting it away.

Natural Resources Canada reaches agreement for new fuel economy label

MICHAEL HATCH

Natural Resources Canada has come to an agreement with the major automotive manufacturer associations for a new fuel economy label for the 2015 and 2016 model years.

The federal government and the manufacturers have agreed on the design and content of the EnerGuide fuel consumption labels for light-duty vehicles.

For the model year 2015, vehicle manufacturers are using an improved testing procedure to determine the fuel consumption ratings of new cars and light trucks.

The new test methods are more representative of typical driving conditions and styles.

The new test methods will supplement the standard city and highway tests by adding three additional test cycles that account for air conditioner usage, cold

temperature operation and driving at higher speeds with more rapid acceleration and braking.

These methods will result in higher fuel consumption ratings than the current method.

During this transition year, many dealerships will have 2014 model year vehicles alongside 2015 model year vehicles.

For 2015 vehicles, the EnerGuide label looks the same, but provides fuel consumption ratings based on the new test methods.

It may appear the 2015 vehicle has poorer fuel consumption than the 2014 vehicle because, for the same make and model, the new test methods can produce fuel consumption ratings 10 to 20 per cent higher than the old ratings.

The difference simply reflects the switch to the more robust testing procedure for the 2015 model year.

Beginning with 2016 model year vehicles, a redesigned EnerGuide label will be affixed to new

light-duty vehicles, providing dealers and their customers with more comprehensive fuel consumption and environmental information.

The fuel consumption ratings shown on the new label will be based on the new test methods introduced for model year 2015 vehicles.

■ Michael Hatch is chief economist of the Canadian Automobile Dealers Association.