

What Dreams Mean

Reality has now overtaken auto-imagination: Porsche's high-performance sports car, the Carrera GT, has made its world debut in Geneva.



Photos: Christoph Bauer

Sometimes reality isn't explanation enough. Take the Carrera GT. There it was, the real live high-performance sports car, showing its dramatic curves and providing deep insights, so that international media representatives could do more than just get an idea. On March 3, the charter terminal of the *Ancienne Aérogare* seemed the fitting place for a world premiere, on the eve of the opening of the Geneva Automobile Salon—fitting, that is, to steer your imagination and your dreams onto the right (or left) lane.

Is only flying better? Better than these 612 horsepower, this zero-to-200 km/h (0–125 mph) acceleration in 9.9 seconds? Doesn't that boggle the imagination? Wolfgang Dürheimer, Porsche Research and Development Director and head of the Carrera GT project, gave up trying to find the answer fairly early on. "We have," he announced to journalists, with a mixture of pride and regret, "not even tried to describe the driving experience to you."

Even Porsche representative Walter Röhrl, who, as a two-time rally world champion, is well acquainted with the outer limits of acceleration and centrifugal force, and who, as a "test driver," knows the unbelievable qualities of this new super sports car firsthand, could only shake his head: "We have no prior comparison." He then started the engine and delicately rationed the gas for idling.

That's the way it must be when what Porsche CEO Dr. Wendelin Wiedeking calls "a dream on four wheels" shows its colors in the spotlight: The purpose of world premiers is to clear up the last remaining issues and to definitively turn a vehicle over to its working destiny. Have all expectations been fulfilled? At a premiere, it's going to be a clear



thumbs-up or down. But the Carrera GT outstrips the usual standards. The more performance and technology details were revealed that evening, the more imaginations ran wild. Wiedeking, Dürheimer and Sales Manager Hans Riedel obviously enjoyed the atmosphere on stage, left the dreaming to the rest of us, and spoke of the real value of this "masterpiece of engineering skill from Weissach." And, as the Porsche boss announced self-confidently: "After the legendary 917 and the 959, we have made our mark for the third time."

In fact, plenty had happened in the 886 days leading up to Geneva. Originally born as an idea in the pit road at Le Mans, the near-production Carrera GT concept rolled up in front of the Louvre in Paris at six in the morning on September 28, 2000. Even then, the roar of the V10 racing engine was just a

Back to the future: Porsche hosted the presentation of the Carrera GT at the charter terminal of the Geneva airport



GT joys: Niki Lauda (above left) takes the seat test, while Harm Lagaay (second from right, adjacent photo), Porsche's head designer, settles important design questions



High society (photo above right): The Duke of Palma de Mallorca, son-in-law of the Spanish king (left), with Porsche Iberica boss Dr. Joachim Lamla (center) and Wendelin Wiedeking. Former Mercedes boss Helmut Werner tested the GT cockpit (photo above left)

Zero to 200 km/h (125 mph) in 9.9 seconds—what's that like?

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Full power ahead: Walter Röhrl (right) explains the advantages of the Carrera GT to tennis pro Thomas Muster

promise: Porsche can do it if Porsche wants to, and if the customers want it to. From that point on, Sales and Development worked together to fulfill the dream. On the one hand, there had to be enough customers prepared to "dig deep into their pockets" for such a high-performance sports car, as Wiedeking put it. On the other, there was the vehicle itself, which was to be a demonstration of the innovative power and efficiency of the company. "However, just tuning up a sports car into a race car wouldn't fit the Porsche philosophy," Wiedeking recounts in Geneva, recalling the initial discussions. "Our engineers were to prove that they could also take a pure-bred race car and make it ready for the road."

The production and racing specialists searched together for new approaches and took a new path to implement them. Thus, Dürheimer, at the terminal of the Geneva airport, was able to report many new advances in sports car technology. There is the engine, designed with 5.5 liters of cubic capacity, ten cylinders and a V-angle set at sixty-eight degrees for use at Le Mans. The cubic capacity has been increased to 5.7 liters, to make it just a little gentler for the road. But, in light of

its output values, this is all relative. The 612 horsepower catapults the Carrera GT from zero to 100 km/h (62 mph) within 3.9 seconds; its top speed is 330 km/h (205 mph).

Regardless of the output, the true strength of the Carrera GT lies in its consistent lightweight design concept. At a length of 4.61 meters (181.5 in.), the roadster weighs in at 1,380 kilograms (3,038 lbs.) unladen. For the first time in a production vehicle, the chassis manufactured in monocoque (unitized) style and the catalytic converter substrate consist of a synthetic material, carbon fiber-reinforced plastic (CFRP). Only carbon—really at home in aerospace technology—provides, after expensive processing, the prerequisites for providing top road performance and driving dynamics with minimum weight and maximum strength. The chassis tips the scales to just 100 kilograms (220 lbs.). That processing of the unusual materials by Porsche was worth a patent application.

The safety potential is high, the CFRP material versatile. The doors, engine and luggage compartment lids and fenders are made of carbon fiber. The designers did not scrimp on the high-quality material as an eye-

catcher in the engine area, the rear end, the door trim, or in doorsill area. The seats weigh only 10.7 kilograms (23.6 lbs.), and, for the first time, are made of a combination of carbon and aramid fibers. In the interior, you keep running across magnesium, a light metal of which the inner door handles and the wheels are also made. Everything that might counteract the lowest possible center of gravity is made of light and functional materials. So, in addition to the Porsche Ceramic Composite Brake System (PCCB), we also find, as a world first, the Porsche Ceramic Composite Clutch (PCCC), a ceramic clutch with an unusually long life-span and small space requirements. The Carrera GT is a complete work of art with unbelievable power.

For a suggested retail price of €390,000, 1,500 exclusive customers will get the pleasure of owning a Carrera GT. But the version of the high-performance sports car on show in Geneva, which is manufactured at the new plant in Leipzig, Germany, is limited. The first owners will take delivery of their cars this fall.

It's an exciting story that started with a courageous idea and, with its happy end, adorns the history of the company. The 911

and all its variants, the history of the Boxster, the Cayenne, the world premier of the GT3, and at the peak, the new Carrera GT—Wiedeking did an accounting in Geneva and delivered the verdict: "Porsche now offers the most innovative and most attractive product range of its history."

The next day on the exhibition grounds, all could convince themselves of that fact first-hand. Late at night, the Carrera GT had been taken by truck from the airport to the Porsche stand, where it was allowed to face a VIP verdict. Michael Schumacher's manager, Willi Weber, wanted to know all the facts. Formula One legend Niki Lauda and tennis pro Thomas Muster gave the Carrera GT a detailed examination. Porsche Le Mans winner Hans Herrmann talked shop with Walter Röhrl; and race drivers Derek Bell and Marc Surer, and DaimlerChrysler Executive Board Member Jürgen Hubbert, took in the show, too.

The search for the best description of the driving feeling in the Carrera GT will continue, regardless. Until someone comes up with it, we can trust the first impression of the meeting at the Geneva terminal: Is only flying better? ◀