

2006 Porsche Carrera GT
A Day in the Life of a Supercar
By David Ray, www.hookedondriving.com
For: The Wheel

East Bay resident and car collector Mark Biestman loves cars. With an award winning gathering of automotive finery already in his garage, he recently decided to step to the ultimate in street performance cars – the Porsche Carrera GT. Mark had driven with Hooked On Driving in his S Car Go Racing modified Porsche GT2, but the Carrera GT was an admitted jump from the JV to the varsity. So an agreement was made to take the car to Thunderhill Raceway, where we would together, study, learn, adapt to and drive this Formula One inspired, V10 beast.

5:30AM: We meet at his place. Mark comes out in the brisk December morning, pitch black, climbs in and starts the car to warm it up. As this was an early departure, I had not had my usual cup of coffee to get started. The V10 lighting up did a much better job than Starbucks at getting all bodily systems up and running. As adrenalin kicked in, he backed the car out of the garage, and we prepared for our trip. This does not take long, as there is almost no place to load anything. Two jackets and one helmet fill the trunk in the nose of the car. I climb carefully in and straddle my helmet for the run to Thunderhill. Immediately the unique nature of the CGT becomes evident. The sounds are very different. The complete carbon fiber tub in which we are riding has a different pitch. With any bump, one hears a “plunk” that is a lower pitch rather than the “boing” that would be the equivalent in a traditional steel car. There are many sports cars that advertise a race heritage, but this car doesn’t. This IS a race car. For the competitors among you, just imagine an ALMS car driven on the street. Not a stretch at all. The Carrera GT is stiff – there is no performance compromise here – just plan on a sporty ride with almost no suspension travel.

Driving up Interstate 680, I discover a bit about the owner of a CGT. There will be less than 1300 of them in the world, so this is a rare fellow indeed. My speculation would put owners of this car in four categories; ones that want a collectible and immediately put the car in dry storage, ones that will drive the car at 2/10th of its capacity, but get extra credit at the drive-in, ones that go directly out to the highway to terrorize friends, police and innocent bystanders, and drivers who want an exclusive, unique car that can be absolutely lightning quick if driven in the right way in the right environment. Mark falls into this latter category – his CGT will not be a trailer queen, nor does he try to show off this car’s potential on public highways. This car does not have to show off, to show off. I was frankly shocked as he fended off specific and repeated opportunities to race on the freeway. First with a Ferrari, then a supercharged Z28, both while cruising in pre-dawn peace and quiet. Maybe Mark was just on his best behavior, but I bought it if he was. Clear evidence that his car was to be enjoyed came with our side trip to a Burger King drive through for two large coffees to go. Riding shotgun, I dutifully carried the hot cups as the bridge toll was paid and we were off to the hinterlands of northern California. The Carrera GT does not have cupholders, so we don’t have to do a review on them. And I must admit that I was stricken by some irony as Mark engaged the ceramic twin disc

racing clutch and climbed through the manual 6 speed while sipping a hot cup of BK coffee.

As a road trip car, the CGT is a world-class track car. The seats are carbon shell racing seats, and if you're lucky enough to have their custom size selected for this car fit you, you're much better off than if you have to be inserted in them. My experience was that the base of the seat was about right for a performance seat, but the upper section of the seat did not wrap, and left me wishing for more upper body support. There is no rake adjustment, and for the driver, there is fore, aft, and up/down (with a wrench) adjustment. This is a hard-core interior that, while having a fabulous high-end sound system, is minimalist with other amenities. On a frosty morning, as the sun rose, we needed to fiddle quite a bit with the HVAC to keep from fogging, freezing or overheating the interior. This may be partially because this interior is very cozy. While elegant in the use of color coordinated carbon fiber throughout the cockpit, including the nicely quilted interior roof panel, it is obvious that the CGT was built for driving, not luxuriating. For those seeking the ultimate Grand Tourer, this is not the car for you. This is the ultimate sports car, and you'd better be prepared to drive it.



THE DRIVE: After a warm up session where we did some lead and follow, Mark knew that my mandate for the day was to guide him on driving the Carrera, so he handed me the keys and said the equivalent of, "here's my new friend, why don't you two go get to know each other." Helmet on, we entered the track. I had been warned, but the clutch is a controversial element of the CGT package. Porsche engineers did not compromise

here. The clutch is a PCCC (Porsche Ceramic Composite Clutch) and I'd been told just to slowly release it at idle and allow the car to engage in first. Using this technique, there was no problem, but there sure would have been if I'd been uphill. One would have to use the emergency brake for a clutch-saving release to climb a hill. Note: two separate Porsche dealer reps who had been trained in delivery of this vehicle disagreed on how this system was to be described. One says this clutch represents a launch control, the other says not. Simply put, this may have been one hard-core race engineering element too many placed in a car designed to spend most of its time on the street. Rumor has it that many novice owners are shredding these high-tech clutches while the cars are still new. Good news – we were headed out to the track and we had no plans of stopping any time soon.

On track, I immediately went into sensory overload. Everything about this road car was different. First impression – the quickest steering I'd ever experienced, including having driven a Porsche Cup car the previous month. The steering wheel, a standard sport wheel with airbag was obviously out of place. Operating track day events regularly, I'm lucky enough to drive many of the finest cars in the world on the track. But the Carrera GT was different. What did this car remind me of? Not another super car, not the Porsche GT3, aha – it was a Formula Mazda that I'd driven, only with a body and more horsepower! Then, I realized why so many new owners seem to be having difficulty driving the CGT – this quick steering combined with 612 HP is a challenging combination. With 19" X 9.5" front and 20" X 12" rear alloy wheels carrying custom manufactured Michelin Pilot Sport tires sticking to the pavement, anyone with a heavy foot, or aggressive steering input would have this car in the bushes in no time. This is an advanced car, and I found myself applying all of my driving experience as I picked up the pace. By the third lap, I allowed myself a brief moment to appreciate this rare privilege, and to enjoy every apex. Again, turn in was the quickest of any car I've driven, handling was very neutral, and the 600+ horses were completely predictable with a linear increase in torque that inspired confidence. The gearbox, while mysteriously mounted almost at shoulder level in the console is quick and precise, with virtually no learning curve for an experienced driver. The pedals are a floor mounted racing unit, similar to that you'd see from Tilton. The heel and toe motion gave no problems at all as a ball of foot on brake with a quick rock of the foot on the accelerator produced the desired blip as I downshifted at speed. The brakes, a ceramic composite system with 6 piston aluminum calipers provided excellent feel. Entering turn one, a fast left hander, slowing from 145mph, the ceramics responded more sensitively to pressure than others I've driven, and transition without fanfare into a progressive ABS if you're really on them. The suspension is state of the art formula car technology. With double wishbones and pushrod activated shocks at all four corners, this is a thoroughbred that shines only on the smoothest of surfaces. After racing sedans at Thunderhill and wondering what the karters and open wheelers were complaining about when they talked about bumps – I now understand. The CGT is so stiff, with so little travel and rebound that as I picked up the pace it would just skip in many places on the track that were not pancake flat. Driving the Carrera GT fast takes one thing – smoothness. If I could get away with being the least bit abrupt in tossing my T2 Z around, there was no such room for an aggressive driving style with this car. Having said that, this car is the most rewarding I've ever driven. Screamingly fast, it is light on its

feet, has monster power that can be applied subtly, with lightning response to input. By the 10th lap, I was driving hard, leaving a bit on the table out of deference to the fact that I did NOT own the car and it had no cage, I was thoroughly captivated by its purpose-built nature, even though this car was street legal. Through turn 8, a very fast left-handed kink, I fed the Carrera through as fast as I was comfortable and got a rear tire chirp as the tail came out and then caught. Leaving the four channel traction control system on was the way to go – this car needs it, not unlike current F1 cars, these systems allow the driver to push rather than those of lesser cars that seem to simply take the fun out of pushing. As I crested turn nine, a banked left turn that crests a hill just past the apex, the traction control light looked like Christmas tree lights going off. Then, just as quickly, a checkered flag brought me back to the real world, and I dutifully exited the track.



Mark, and friends Tim and Frank spent the day in the CGT, the GT2, and a Frank's Ferrari 355. With lead and follow guidance and some in-car coaching, it was rewarding to see Mark settle in to a consistent line, a quicker pace, and more importantly a smoother style of driving the Carrera GT. There is an argument that all owners of this car should have a practice session with some coaching – even for experienced drivers – learning what this special car is capable of, while gaining respect for its potential in a controlled setting like Thunderhill. This was an experience that I'll never forget, and the reward of seeing the owner fall in love with his car all over again, was just awesome.

