

READER'S RESTO

WORDS DINO KALIVAS

★ PHOTOS DINO KALIVAS ★
ANDY ENRIGHT & STUART DRUMMOND

Resto file



ORIGINAL CAR
PORSCHE 911 GT3 997

LENGTH OF RESTORATION:
15 MONTHS



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TOP Left-hand drive original in Abu Dhabi

ABOVE Right-hand drive configuration for Australia.

You've probably seen the ads for expensive watches while absent-mindedly leafing through in-flight magazines. "You don't actually own a Patek Philippe", the copy goes, showing a well-groomed gent with his son alongside, "you merely look after it for the next generation." The same could well be said for a Porsche 911 GT3 – you're the custodian for a while

and then pass the driving experience onto someone else. That someone else might have to wait a while to enjoy my GT3. It's come a long way, with the genesis of this GT3's journey starting at the Weissach plant, and going via Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and then continuing 13,600km later into the southern hemisphere to Melbourne. As a road safety and driver training

SWITCH HITTER

LEFT OR RIGHT, THE ANSWER IS THE SAME: 911 GT3



specialist with Driver Education Australia, I was offered the opportunity to work as director of training for the biggest single driving school in the Middle East. To give you an idea of the scale of the driving school, we trained over 100,000 students per year for both pre- and post-license driver training for cars, trucks, motorcycles and buses. The curriculum ran in no fewer than six languages.

The United Arab Emirates, once the land of camels, is a bit of a toy box for the committed petrolhead. The best part? If you're from Australia where we're clobbered with punitive taxation, cars are cheap. Living the car dream in the desert is a whole lot easier with fewer restrictions on choice of newer model exotic and sports cars. The search began for a car that needed to fill a number of criteria.

The car had to be used as a daily driver, it had to be engaging and special to drive, it needed to be comfortable and it was essential that it could cope with the extreme hot climate and be reliable. After exhausting virtually every option, I realized the only car that met all of the criteria was a Porsche 911 GT3. At the time, it was the 997 generation on sale and the only question remaining was whether I should



throw some extra dirhams for the RS version, which was a big call! Without wanting to offend the RS community, I found the visual appearance of the RS, well, lacking something in the way of subtlety. What's more, sourcing an RS with air conditioning in the Emirates is

ABOVE This GT3 got a fair dose of hot weather testing before it arrived in Australia.

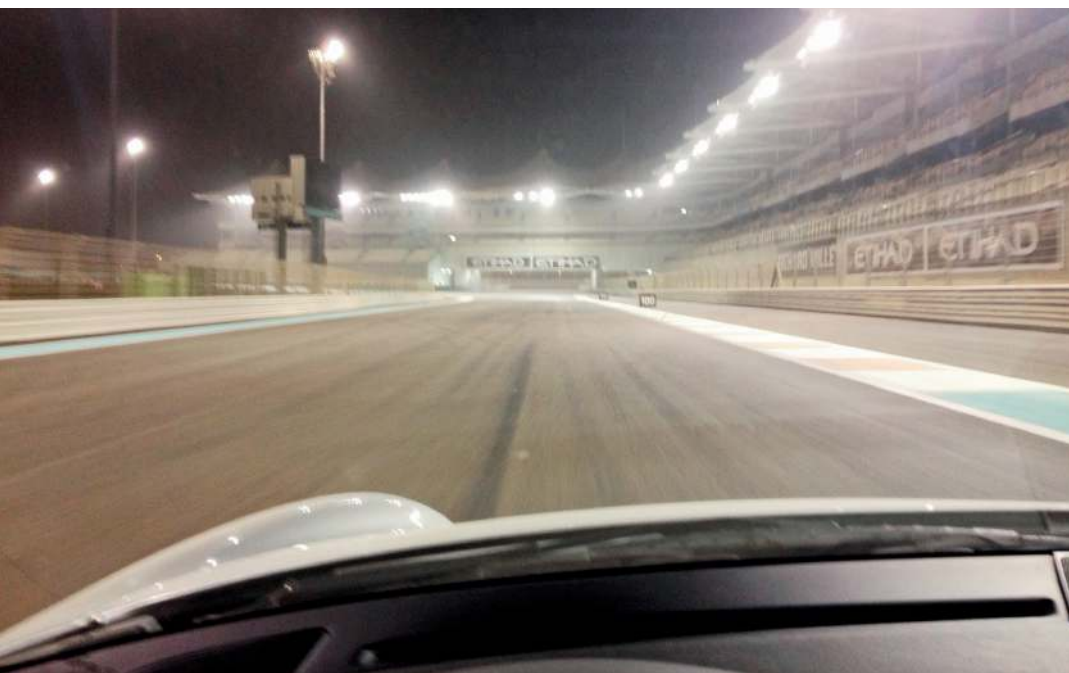
BELOW Weird fact: the track surface at Yas Marina comes from a quarry in Shropshire, UK.

harder than you might imagine and not having it's not good for one's health. Speculators would probably think otherwise.

You meet all types of people living in the UAE. My first encounter was with the typical Emirati playboy, gold neck chain, designer sun tan, ostentatious shades and plenty of female company. We had a brief chat over the phone and we met at the Dubai main beach. This should have rung alarm bells straight away. It was soon apparent that he

was more interested in playing beach volleyball than showing me the round the car. In the end, he tossed me the keys to his GT3 and suggested to me that I "drive it and enjoy yourself." I couldn't fault his generosity but I passed on the car.

Several cars later I find the right one. It was a two owner, dealer serviced and maintained vehicle, owned by a wonderful Brit expat who couldn't drive the GT3 as he had developed an inner ear infection and got dizzy each



KNOW YOUR GT3

The GT3 is the rawest, raciest version of the Porsche 911, with naturally-aspirated engines, weight stripped out of the cars and a specific track focus. There are three main generations: in chronological order, 996, 997 and 991.

The 996 was built between 1999 and 2005, originally powered by a 3.6-litre 265kW flat-six, which was eased out to 280kW for the 2004 facelift referred to by Porsche people as the 996.2. Dino's car is a 997, also using the race-sourced Mezger engine.

The 997 GT3 arrived in 2006 with a 305kW version of the 3.6-litre engine, upsizing to a 3.8-litre 320kW unit in 2009 for the 997.2 model.

The latest model is the 991 GT3, with an all-new 3.8-litre direct injection engine good for 354kW and only offered - for the moment at least - with a PDK twin-clutch auto transmission. Each generation of GT3 also got an even racier RS version, values of which tend to go stratospheric.





KEEP LEFT?

Of all the 997 GT3 models that Porsche produced, some 76% of them had the steering wheels on this side.



ROAD TO NOWHERE

The Jebel Hafeet road is one of the best local roads for stretching a GT3's legs. No through road means little traffic.

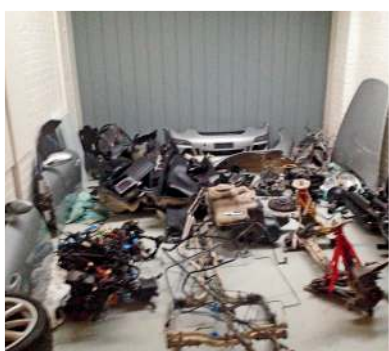


PIT PASS

Dino's 911 cooling its jets in pit lane at the Yas Marina circuit. The tunnel is still the strangest pit exit of any F1 exit.



“PORSCHE HAD DESIGNED AND MACHINED CERTAIN PANELS THAT SUITED BOTH LEFT- AND RIGHT-HAND DRIVE CARS”



TREASURE TROVE

Here are all the parts stripped from the front half of Dino's GT3. Labelling clips and screws proved one of the most involving jobs.



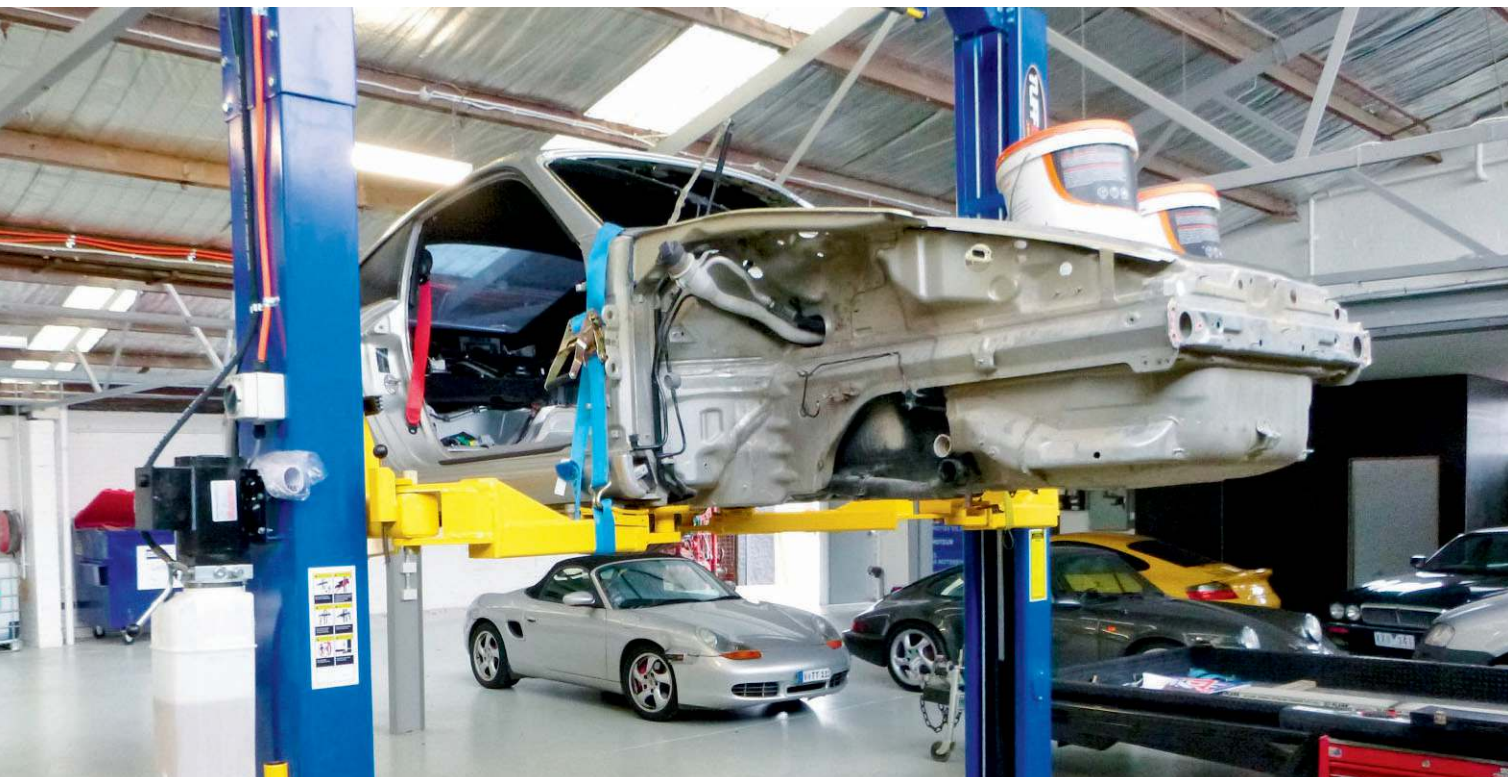
FRONT AND CENTRE

The great thing about converting a 911 to RHD is that there's no pesky engine to get in the way.



TANK BUSTER

Sourcing the correct fuel tank was one of the biggest headaches as not all GT3s are created alike.



time he punted it round a corner. I couldn't pass up an opportunity like that and the price looked right. A stretch, but right.

If you're an enthusiast of the 997 GT3 you will have read volumes on the driving experience. Each drive is special, the precision of the steering, its feel and feedback, the manual gearbox, raw, deliberate, yet precise and the magic sound of the race-bred Mezger engine. The GT3 has two personalities in one, keep it below 4000 rpm and it's respectable, refined and life is relaxed: cruise and collect. Wind the needle round the dial and it unleashes a raw energy that coincides with that wonderful howl of the exhaust which makes your driving world

take on a new dimension. It becomes insane and yet at the same time intoxicating brilliant – a world away from the latest generation of turbocharged Porsche units.

The UAE is also a world away from what I was used to as a typical Aussie bloke. Most people associate the Emirates with desert, desert and more desert, but there are great driving roads from Abu Dhabi which head south into the mountains towards Oman, from Dubai east along the coast towards the entrance of the Arabian Gulf and located on the outskirts of the desert city of Al Ain, home to Jebel Hafeet, one of the UAE's tallest mountains, which is serviced by a winding road that featured on Top Gear some seasons ago.

ABOVE NINE Auto has carved a name for itself as a leading Porsche independent.

LEFT The non-business end of a 911. The bulkhead was something that needed a bit of a think through.

RIGHT After sorting the loom and bulkhead, the RHD dash goes in.



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As good as the local roads are, if I really wanted to see where the GT3's limits lay, the Yas Marina F1 circuit was hard to look beyond. You really have to tip your hat off to the GT3 engineers as the car ran on several occasions at Yas track evenings where the ambient air temperature hovered at 41 degrees, and it never experienced cooling, mechanical, brake or any other problems. The same couldn't be said for owners of Audi R8s, Corvettes, Mustangs and BMW M5s, which frequently needed 'resting'. There's something immensely satisfying when you can run an engine between 7000 and 8400rpm for 20 to 30 minutes at time and

experience, a good reputation and a person who was technically and mentally up for the challenge. Enter Stuart Drummond. For those in the Porsche community on the eastern seaboard of Australia, Stuart is well known after having worked with Porsche Cars Australia for many years. In 2015 he established NINE Auto with his business partner Tim Rout, and set up a Porsche specialist workshop in the south east of Melbourne. The timing of events suited us both, and after a long conversation, several more long conversations and hours of homework on Stuart's part, he agreed to take on the job. My objective for the conversion had

“I HAD A TOUGH CHOICE TO MAKE; SELL THE CAR OR BRING IT BACK TO OZ?”

not feel that its internals are being blown out the exhaust.

Upon the completion of my contract, I had a tough choice to make; sell the car or bring it back to Oz? Bringing the GT3 home meant it would have to be converted from left to right-hand drive. You can imagine the purists thinking converting a Porsche 911, sacrilege! Porsche tuner Magnus Walker would probably say “Cool, but you didn't go far enough,” but life sometimes is about adventure and on the plus side this car has ownership history, dealership maintenance and complete service books. Plus it's still a GT3.

Given this conversion would be a world's first I needed someone with

several goals. Above all was the need for quality work that would ensure the car would perform and function as per factory standards, including all electronic, and safety systems. To that end, I insisted on Porsche factory parts throughout. I wanted the car to look and feel absolutely identical to a car that was born with its steering wheel on the right.

Dismantling proved straight forward and Stuart was surprised by the fact that there was less work to do than converting an air cooled 911. This was due to the fact that Porsche had designed and machined certain panels that suited both left- and right-hand drive cars. The major change is limited to removing and replacing the fuel tank bulkhead as the rest of the key



STUART DRUMMOND



THE JOB would have been easier if it was a Carrera because everything just unbolts from one side to another. Because it's a GT3, we basically stripped it from the back seats forward. We sent it to a panel shop and they put a new bulkhead in because of the configuration of the fuel tank. The tank's bigger in a GT3 compared to a Carrera. Because it's bigger, it needs a new bulkhead and it needed a RHD-specific fuel tank because it has a cut-out for the steering column. The firewall is stickerflexed on with a couple of bolts that needed to be replaced and then we had to buy all the RHD parts. After that, the biggest problem was the wiring loom. We remanufactured Dino's loom because the harnesses are programmed to the car. After the conversion, we reprogrammed it as a RHD car. We even had to replace the electric window motors with RHD-specific motors because they're configured and programmed that way.

The biggest drama was the fuel system. In LHD cars there's one fuel tank, one fuel pump, one fuel sender unit. In RHD cars there are two different fuel systems. The first one we tried was wrong, so we tried again. There's one with a breather system and one without. Some RHD countries require it, some don't. It was really hard to communicate what I was doing to Porsche, because all their systems required a VIN number to interrogate and as soon as I did that, it started recommending LHD parts! They couldn't tell me what RHD parts were required. We got a lot of parts from a donor car because we needed to keep costs realistic. The car drives amazingly but we'd be able to do the job a lot quicker now. I'd do it again. It was a challenge, but when the engineer came, he couldn't fault it. If you didn't know it was converted you wouldn't pick it. I did much of the work and I wouldn't pick it!





ABOVE With all the correct Porsche parts sourced, it looks as good as factory.

BELOW No junk in this trunk.

“IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW IT WASN'T CONVERTED, YOU WOULDN'T PICK IT. I WOULDN'T PICK IT.”

parts are mechanically fastened. Once stripped of all essential parts, the car was prepared for bodywork, which required the removal and replacement of the fuel tank bulkhead.

The most difficult challenge with the conversion has been with the electronics and front wiring loom specifically as this system also carries vehicle diagnostics and the scores of small parts that play vital roles. We spent many extra hours working on fine details. Craig Munro and his team at B&M Refinishers worked on some of the bodywork, including the welding, which was done to factory specifications. There

were no bodywork changes required to the guards or front end.

After 15 months the GT3 was back in circulation and the result was beyond my most optimistic forecast. The car behaves, runs and drives beautifully and is testament to the Porsche principles of designing and engineering a car for both LHD and RHD markets with typical German efficiency and logic. All the safety systems, diagnostics and driver aids work as specified. I couldn't be happier and, yes, it still worked out cheaper than buying one over here! 🚗



Vital Stats

997 PORSCHE GT3

ENGINE 3.6-litre DOHC flat-six Mezger

TRANSMISSION Six-speed manual or seven-speed DCT

LENGTH 4427mm

WIDTH 1808mm

HEIGHT 1280mm

WEIGHT 1394kg

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