

Supercar Face Off!

Story and Photos by Sean Cridland

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SUPERCAR FACE OFF!

THE 887-HP 918 SPYDER AND 612-HP
CARRERA GT GO HEAD-TO-HEAD



TWIN-ENGINE PORSCHEs

LOU FAGEOL'S RADICAL
EIGHT-CYLINDER MACHINES

THE OTHER CARRERA GT

A RARE AND UNUSUAL
1980 924 CARRERA GT

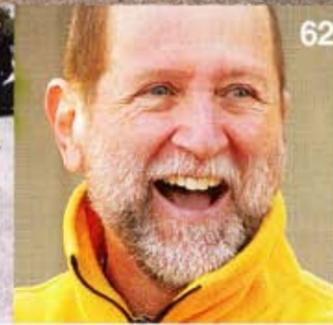
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88



83



62

56



114



contents

NO. 228 JUNE 2015

- 56 Supercar Face Off!**
The 918 and Carrera GT go head-to-head
SEAN CRIDLAND
- 62 Roger's Ride**
A custom-built 1973 911 "RS/GT"
RANDY WELLS
- 69 5 Great Porsches Under \$25,000**
Fast and fun Porsches for less than \$25K
- 83 Fageol's Twin-Engined Porsches**
Lou Fageol's radical eight-cylinder machines
KARL LUDVIGSEN
- 88 Ruf's Carrera 2.7 RS & 3.4 RSR**
Alois Ruf works his magic on two classic 911s
IAN KUAH
- 95 Simplicity 912**
This 912 has served its owner well for 35 years
DAVID MATHEWS
- 100 Winter Wonderland**
911s, Caymans and Cayennes on the snow
GREG HUDOCK & IAN KUAH
- 107 Profile: Michael Mauer**
Porsche's Design Department head speaks
SUSANNE ROEDER
- 114 The *Other* Carrera GT**
A rare and unusual 1980 924 Carrera GT
DOM MILIANO

74 READER SALES REPORTS

- 6 EDITOR'S DESK** GREG HUDOCK
- 10 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**
- 21 THE RIGHT LINE** JOHANNES VAN OVERBEEK
- 26 TECH NOTES** MARK ROBLES
- 136 BACK PAGE**

- 119 BACK ISSUES**
- 120 EXCELLENCE MARKETPLACE**
- 135 ADVERTISER INDEX**

COVER SHOT
THE 918 SPYDER AND THE CARRERA GT
CREDIT: SEAN CRIDLAND

SUPERCAR FACE OFF!

The 918 Spyder and Carrera GT go head-to-head!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SEAN CRIDLAND

STANDING ALONE at sunrise on a quiet stretch of road in Northern New Mexico, I hear it, the unmistakable throaty roar of a Carrera GT's 5.7-liter V-10. A couple of alternating up and downshifts in the distance and the Porsche pops into view, its voice no longer muffled by the forest. It screams toward me, slows and pulls in. An instant later there's a rush of air and a high-pitched whine as a brand-new 918 Spyder zooms past.

I'm here today to run these cars back-to-back to see how 10 years of technological advancements has affected Porsche's supercar experience. The stretch of road we're on is an ideal starting point, as it's an equal distance away from both of the car's owners—Southwestern Porsche collectors who asked to remain anonymous. The location is also a great place to drive two ultra high-performance Porsches: mountain roads, lots of corners, few obstructions and very little traffic. Who needs coffee on a morning like this?



FACE-TO-FACE

The Carrera GT is a rear-wheel drive, LMP 2000 racer-based supercar that is perhaps best known for its closed-course speed records set by racer David Donohue and *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno in 2005 at the Talladega Superspeedway.

The 2015 918 Spyder is Porsche's modern technological marvel. Powered by a 608-hp 4.6-liter engine, a 125-hp electric motor in front and a 154-hp motor out back, the all-wheel drive supercar has a total system output of 887 hp. And since the 918 is a hybrid, it can return an extraordinary 67 mpg.

Putting these machines next to each other, there appears to be little difference in overall height, length and width. In terms of style, the Carrera GT is dated only because it has styling traits similar to other Porsches from the last decade (which took their design cues from it).

The 918, on the other hand, appears more modern. From its complex curves to its LED head and taillights, it looks like a supercar from the future.

The 918's wheels reflect the contemporary move towards larger diameters and smaller sidewalls. The Carrera GT rolls on 265/30R19 and 335/30R20 tires, front and rear, while the 918 wears 265/35ZR20 and 325/30ZR21 rubber.

The most significant difference reveals itself on the scales: The 918 Spyder weighs a hefty 3,750 lbs thanks to its electric motors and lithium-ion battery pack (the 918 Weissach Edition comes in at 3,650 lbs), while the much simpler Carrera GT is just 2,755 lbs—a difference of 900 to 1,000 lbs!

IN THE BELLIES OF THE BEASTS

The interior of the 918 is somewhat

busy with all the switches, swipe-panels and buttons for its various screens (which report on its tech features and driving modes). I've been told that all these items combine to offer somewhere in the neighborhood of 800 possible selection combinations. This is perfectly suited to a generation of gamers, young F1 drivers and fighter pilots, none of which I am.

Still, with some coaching from a skilled guide and a little time, the various panels and adjustments become easier and more intuitive. Besides, the most important button is the simple red one found at 4 o'clock on the steering wheel, surrounded by the letters E, H, S and R. These stand for E-Power, Hybrid, Sport Hybrid and Race Hybrid, and the red button symbolizes the "Hot Lap" mode (which can only be used when Race Hybrid mode is selected).

The Carrera GT's interior looks almost barren by comparison. The only function of its steering wheel is to make the car go right or left, while its gauges are still basic dials with needles reporting on the basic functions: water temperature, speed in mph, rpm (front and center), oil pressure, oil temp and fuel level. As an old-school driver, I like that.

In both cars, the right side of the cabin is very Spartan, with little or nothing to entertain the passenger—other than lively repartee with the driver. There are map lights in each car, though they'd likely only get used in the satellite-navigation-less Carrera GT. In the future, the Carrera GT will be regarded as quaint for having a CD player, just like cars from the 1970s with 8-track tape players are today.

The 918 offers entertainment from digital downloads and satellite radio. I sup-

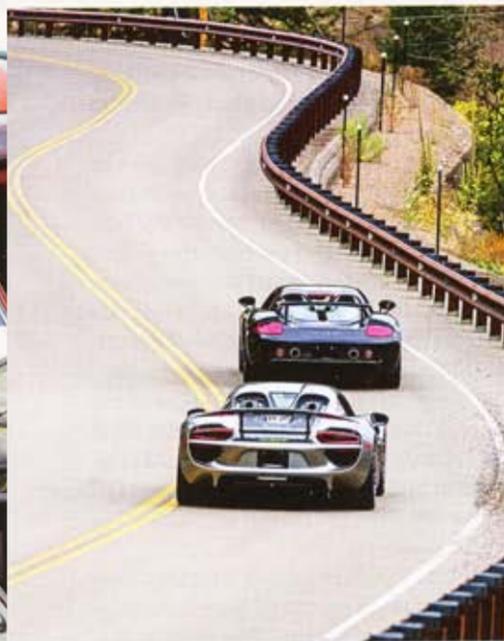


pose if you drive either car often enough, you might get bored with the distinctive sound of their race-inspired engines.

CAN I PLAY WITH MADNESS?

The Carrera GT is up first. It uses six manually shifted forward gears and a small Porsche Ceramic Composite Clutch (PCCC) to channel power to the rear wheels. While fun to use once moving, this setup is tricky from a dead stop; more than a few experienced drivers have stalled this car a time or two...or ten.

When it arrived in 2003, the thought of a street-legal car with a carbon fiber chassis, so much normally aspirated horsepower, a F1-tech suspension and clutch and huge amounts of aerodynamic



downforce boggled the imagination and set high expectations.

Today, reality still far exceeds expectations in both handling and outright speed on the lonely roads of New Mexico and Arizona, where I travel long distances in impossibly short periods of time. Handling is crisp and precise, if not forgiving, and the car's wide track and aerodynamic package deliver ample stability at speed. In fact, the Carrera GT is the only car that I've ever driven in which I could feel the ground effect from its huge rear venturis gradually building suction underneath. Sustained speeds of over 150 mph are well within its capabilities.

While many cars might claim the capability to go at such-and-such a high rate of speed, the Carrera GT is, to quote Walter

Brennan from *The Guns of Will Sonnett*, "No brag, just fact." Still, I'm no Walter Röhrl, and pretending I knew such a beast intimately had nearly the same results that you hear about, every so often, when someone who is friendly with grizzlies ends up as nothing more than bear scat.

One morning, acting a bit cocky, I blipped the throttle only to find myself in the midst of a lurid two-revolution spin. I remember slow-motion images, calculating the sum total of my assets and how they might contribute to replacing the car and lots of dirt and dust flying over me. Thankfully, I came to rest before damaging it or me. Oh, but when you get it right and are mindful of its character, the Carrera GT is an amazing drive!

SILENT, LOUD & FAST

Settling into the 918's driver seat, I first notice the beautifully sculpted front fenders and the low front hood, which provide both a sense of awe and great road visibility. Next comes a series of actions more akin to a launch sequence than starting a car. With the ignition key turned on, push a button for motion mode—rearward or forward—and then another button to release the parking brake. When I apply pressure to what we used to call the "gas pedal," the car begins to move, silently. At first it's disconcerting to realize that the car isn't simply coasting, but I get used to it.

The 918 puts its hybrid power to the road through all four wheels via a seven-speed PDK transmission and its front and rear electric motors, which automatically deliver their horsepower and torque to best effect. There's no finicky clutch pedal to worry about, or embarrassing stalls in

front of onlookers. And this high-tech setup does much more than simply provide forward motion. It also offers impeccable traction and stability control—the Carrera GT struggles with the former and completely lacks the latter.

If you like, you can cruise along in electric mode. While it won't provide the starship wallop of the combined power units, it's spicier than you'll need in most urban settings; think VW Golf GTI-like acceleration. E mode is good for up to 22 miles on electric power alone before the hybrid mode kicks in to recharge the batteries.

I also find the E mode marvelously entertaining for the way people look at the car when it cruises silently down the street. They get that puzzled look: They see the car, all swoopy and racy, and they see it move, but it takes a while for them to figure out why it's not making any noise.

Although my test drive was in the mountains, I appreciated having a quiet mode for a few miles, just to appreciate the serenity of the setting and the opportunity to see more wildlife. E mode is also useful if you'd like to cruise through an area and not draw *too* much attention to yourself.

As the battery depleted, the 4.6-liter engine automatically fired up to both power the car and recharge the battery. This was a bit unsettling; I was cruising around quietly when suddenly it sounded as if a UPS truck was following closely behind. I checked the mirrors and saw...nothing. It was the engine running in "charge" mode, which at low speeds sounds a lot like the *blaat* of a delivery truck, thanks to the proximity of the high-placed exhausts, located just a couple feet behind the occupants' heads.



Just as I get used to the racket, the engine cuts off when the battery is charged and I find myself enjoying the quiet, which allows me to hear other cars, the sound of the 918's tires on the road and the occasional stone striking the \$63,000 (!) Liquid Metal Chrome Blue paint job.

Remarkably, because I was in either E or Hybrid mode for the first 10 miles of the test, the graphic on the dash showed that my fuel economy was about 67 mpg. Yet it's important to remember that "hybrid" for the German automaker does not mean wimpy. Quite the contrary; it means optimizing all available power options for efficiency and speed.

The better part of my drive was up and down the access road to a ski area: 28 miles of very twisty tarmac. This is where

just the right amount of twitchiness on this very steep and twisty section of road. Combine that with the added benefit of four-wheel steering—which finds just the right amount of twisting for slow or fast cornering—and you have an amazing mountain/canyon car that will light up anyone's heart rate...and ego.

Many of us expect electronic-assisted steering to equal something along the lines of 1990s-era computer driving games, where you had a wheel but no feel. Not the case with the 918. Just as scientists have figured out how to provide feedback to amputees through their artificial limbs, Porsche has developed incredible interactivity through its high-tech steering, braking and regenerative systems.

Braking comes not just from the friction of the very large Acid Green calipers

few photos and began the trip back down. I finally felt comfortable enough to go for Race mode. As a former downhill ski racer, I've always loved going downhill more than going up.

I punched the throttle, and the car rocketed towards the next corner. It took only a few turns to fully charge the battery system, so I was on old-school friction brakes for the rest of the ride down. The huge brakes bit firmly and smoothly at every corner with nary a hint of drama, despite the car being on the heavy side.

As my confidence grew, I allowed the car to go faster and faster. No matter what I did, though, 918 project engineer Frank Walliser and his team were miles ahead of my ability with the design and execution of this car.

Finally, I pushed the red "Hot Lap" button to release all the stored electrical energy and...remember the first time you saw *Star Wars* and the Millennium Falcon hit light speed? Impressive is an understatement.

The 918 is sure, solid and goes like stink, eating up the Carrera GT on both straights and corners. I know it weighs 3,700 lbs, but it doesn't feel like it. Porsche has a history of exploiting new technology to great effect, and with the e-Hybrid 918 they have done it again.

AND THE WINNER IS...

The Carrera GT is like Lamborghini's supercars from the '70s, '80s and '90s. It's insane fun to drive, but there is always the feeling that it could bite you in the blink of an eye. Buying one is the antithesis of playing it safe. That is part of its appeal, though. That's what makes it exciting.

Although the 918 Spyder is a lot more powerful than the Carrera GT, it's also more civil. You have to be driving it like a complete maniac to get it to do something completely unexpected or dangerous. The 918, then, is like a Carrera GT that got doctorates in mechanical and electrical engineering and graduated from the most prestigious finishing school in Europe.

These two supercars share similar dimensions, but the mechanical and electrical pieces underneath make them almost too different to compare directly. The Carrera GT is for enthusiasts who love raw and aggressive machines and enjoy a little danger. The 918 Spyder is for those who want a technologically advanced supercar that stays composed and stable in situations where the Carrera GT would likely turn its driver into a passenger.

2004-2007 Carrera GT 2015 918 Spyder

LAYOUT	Mid-engine	Mid-engine
DRIVE	Rear-wheel drive	All-wheel drive
ENGINE	5.5-liter V-10	4.6-liter V-8
ENGINE POWER	612 hp	608 hp
ENGINE TORQUE	435 lb-ft	398 lb-ft
MOTORS	N/A	Two AC motors
MOTOR POWER	N/A	125 hp (front)/154 hp (rear)
TOTAL POWER	612 hp	887 hp
TOTAL TORQUE	435 lb-ft	944 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual	7-speed PDK
WEIGHT	2,775 lbs	3,750 lbs
ZERO TO 60	3.8 seconds	2.5 seconds
TOP SPEED	205 mph	214 mph
QUARTER MILE	11.1 seconds at 133 mph	10.0 seconds at 145 mph
NUMBER PRODUCED	1,270	918 (total production run)
ENGINE ONLY MPG	9 City / 15 Hwy	20 City / 24 Hwy
MPGe	N/A	67 Combined
BASE MSRP	\$448,000 (2004)	\$845,000

the drive really got fun, and not just because of the turns. After some time in Hybrid mode, I decided to go for Sport. The sound of the engine immediately changed from a *blaat* to a higher-revving metallic howl.

In Sport, the combustion engine is always on—to very good effect. The car rushed up the straights and pounced on the corners. The 918 is remarkably neutral due to its balanced chassis and smooth power delivery. That said, the handling was quite lively and provided

against the even larger carbon-composite discs, but also from the electric motors running in reverse to re-generate power for the battery pack. In other words, I don't have to think about overheating the brakes, because I'm not really using them until I really stand on the pedal. And once I realized that, the car became interactive in ways I couldn't have previously imagined. As I drive, I become conscious of my role in generating and releasing energy in entirely new ways.

Once I had summited, I paused for a