

CLASSIC DRIVER

No, this Porsche Gemballa Mirage GT is not an illusion

Lead

Now more so than ever, ultra-rare supercars audaciously modified by reputable tuning houses are hot property in the collector car market. Using this spectacular Porsche Gemballa Mirage GT, which is poised to be auctioned in Paris next week, we're exploring just why that might be...

Have you ever wondered what the Porsche Carrera GT would have looked like had its maker taken it endurance racing? With its ground-scraping splitters, swollen air intakes and enormous active rear wing, Gemballa's audacious take on the vivacious V10 supercar, christened the Mirage GT, paints the perfect picture.

Contrary to the car's conspicuous appearance, the longstanding German tuning house – whose enigmatic founder Uwe Gemballa was murdered in South Africa in 2010 under shady circumstances – actually aimed to make Porsche's noughties flagship a bit more user friendly. Need we remind you of any of the high-profile incidents involving Carrera GTs over the years?

Yes, believe it or not there's method to this madness – this is not another clueless tuning company needlessly slicing up what is an undeniably beautiful supercar in a bid to garner popular YouTube vloggers' precious minutes and shock people silly on Instagram.



There's a new adjustable suspension system which employs gas-filled dampers and, among other things, can be raised or lowered at the push of a button. The notoriously difficult clutch has been improved with special pads to facilitate judder-free stopping and starting. And the redesigned wheels and enlarged air intakes (including the scoop on the carbon-fibre roof panel) help to cool the brakes and engine respectively.

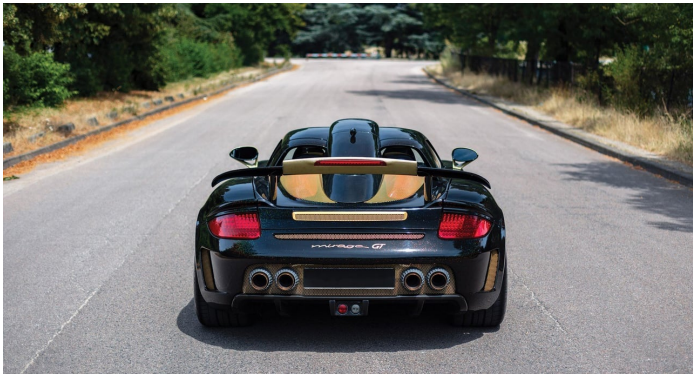
The 1,000 hours it took Gemballa to finish each of the 25 Carrera GTs it transformed weren't all devoted to frankly boring practical concerns, though. Beloved by oil-rich sheikhs, Hollywood film stars and bling-obsessed rappers alike, Gemballa's cars have always been outrageous – who remembers the 1980s Porsche 930 Turbo-based Avalanche, a car that screamed of the devil's dust perhaps more than any other in the era of excess?

The mere idea of the Mirage GT, of 'fixing' an object that is so obviously not broken, is outrageous in itself. But the result works miraculously well in our opinion. Sure, it's extravagant and wild and as diamond-encrusted as Mr T, but we don't think any of the aesthetic changes are not in harmony with the original design. When the Carrera GT arrived on the scene, supercars from across the world were flooding the market at a rate of knots and we suppose it was logical that some owners might want to distinguish themselves.



As mentioned, the Mirage GT looks like it's about to take to the grid in an FIA GT race. And if it did, it would likely stand a good chance of winning. Gemballa naturally turned up the performance wick as well. The mighty 5.7-litre V10 received a new intake system, four freer-flowing stainless steel exhausts and a remapped ECU. The result was a 58bhp hike on the original car's output, to 670bhp, a reduced 0-62mph sprint time of 3.7sec and a reported 210mph top speed. If owners were left wanting for even more visual drama, we're fairly sure they were sufficiently catered for on the performance front.

We appreciate that taking one of the most prized supercars in the world and, for want of a better word, defacing it will horrify many of you. But in an automotive world where standing out from the rest is increasingly important, there is a place for these ultra-rare, opinion-polarising creations – after all, there were more than 1,270 Carrera GTs built, while just 25 of them received the Mirage GT makeover.



The 775,000-875,000-euro pre-sale estimate of [this particular car](#), which will be sold by RM Sotheby's at [its Paris sale on 5 February](#), appears to back up that claim. It's one of just three Mirage GT 'Gold Editions', which, as far as we can work out, simply means that there are gold accents all over the car. The metallic gold exhaust tips are a bit too Knightsbridge for our tastes, but the rest works quite well - even the deep black paint with its dazzling multicoloured metallic flecks.

Of more interest to some will be the man who commissioned the car from Gemballa: Samuel Eto'o, the great Cameroonian footballer who played for such great clubs as Barcelona, Chelsea and Inter Milan. Whether the 400,000-euro bill for the conversion was worth it for the mere 6,500km he - the only registered owner - put on the car is for him to decide. With summer fast approaching, here's hoping someone equally unashamed in their taste will continue to enjoy the Porsche's newfound audacity and, somewhat contradictory, user-friendliness. Perhaps the Mirage GT is an illusion after all.

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