

CLASSIC DRIVER

[My 1000-mile love affair with a Porsche 996 Turbo](#)

Lead

Some things are just too good to be true, and sadly the 996-generation Porsche 911 Turbo I bought sight unseen shortly after moving to South Africa didn't turn out to be the bargain I hoped for. Here's why my Turbo love affair ended after just 1,000 miles...



At the end of 2023, I packed up my life in London and moved to South Africa to spend more time with my family. Of course, this was the story I told non-car enthusiasts — the real motivation behind the move was the enticingly low prices of [996-generation Porsche 911 Turbos](#) in the Rainbow Nation. So, in true Classic Driver fashion, less than a month after arriving in the country, I found myself standing on the side of a road at midnight in Knysna — my hometown located along the Garden Route — watching two shirtless men reverse a Lapis Blue 2001 996 Turbo off the back of a transporter truck. “Not exactly silver service, but this is Africa,” I thought as I tried to ignore the perilous proximity between the exhaust and potholed tarmac.



The reason behind my choice of ride was twofold: firstly, I have always missed my old 1998 Carrera 2, which I sold far too soon to avoid London's ULEZ charges, and secondly, the 996 Turbo just seems like a ridiculous bargain in the current collector car landscape. It's not just down to the model's genuine motorsport heritage — thanks to the genetic ties between its twin-turbocharged Metzger flat-six and the one that powered the Porsche 911 GT1 to a win at the 1998 24 Hours of Le Mans — but also because the curvaceous Pinky Lai-styled bodywork has never looked better to my eye. Throw in the 25 percent discount relative to Britain's 996 Turbos, and my mind was made up before I even got on the plane.

The first few moments of ownership were nothing short of boost-induced bliss. It had been a while since I last sat in a 996, but the Turbo felt like the final evolution of my Carrera. The ride was quite noticeably firmer — almost too firm for Knysna's patchy road network — and it was much, much quicker than the Carrera. After taking delivery, I spent at least thirty minutes blasting along the empty roads of the Knysna Waterfront. I found that while the 996 Turbo is irrefutably still an analogue car, the slingshot-like acceleration truly made it feel like a rocket ship, and a very dusty rocket ship at that.



The next morning, the top priority was to get the Turbo detailed. A few hours later, it was glistening in the sunlight, looking every bit the range-topping 911, with its Lapis Blue paintwork demonstrating an incredible dynamism between light and shadow. I will fight anyone who doesn't think Turbo Twists are some of the greatest wheels ever fitted to an automobile, and, after a quick check, I was pleased to discover that they were indeed the genuine hollow-spoke units, not the heavier cast items found on very early 996 Turbos. I was lost in admiration, until I discovered a football-sized petrol stain on the front fender, next to the fuel flap. It had paint protection film, but rectifying this in the best-case scenario would mean a costly PPF reapplication with the lurking horror of potentially having to respray the panel.

Despite looking shinier than ever, the sheen of ownership wasn't quite so bright, and this was not helped when I discovered that post-clean, the passenger footwell had become as damp as the Knysna Lagoon because of clogged drain pipes (an easy fix, at least). A second test drive along a particularly torturous bit of road known as George Rex Drive had also exposed a cacophony of creaks and rattles from the windshield and dashboard. Then, only a few days later, the parking bulb in the right headlight melted in its socket — the cost of replacement being no less than 2,500 euros. Of course, the Turbo has rare, mirrored headlights not found on other lesser 996s, which doesn't favour one's wallet.



I was conflicted, to say the least; in isolation, the 996 Turbo as a car was simply amazing, but had I just landed myself an absolute lemon? Despite the growing snag list, as time passed, I only became more infatuated with the Turbo's curves. The joy of seeing family members' reactions as I exerted them to the acceleration of a 420-horsepower twin-turbo flat-six never diminished either. While the engine is extremely responsive, there is definitely turbo lag, yet it only adds to the experience. Before the two turbos spool up, it feels similar to the naturally aspirated 3.4 in my old Carrera 2, but then a second or two after mashing the throttle, the boost kicks in and the world outside the windows becomes a Salvador Dali painting.

I quickly racked up hundreds of kilometres rediscovering the Garden Route's many amazing roads, with South Africa's natural beauty undoubtedly adding to the experience. The Turbo added a feather to its cap during an afternoon blast chasing a friend in his manual 1st-gen R8, which proved that the Porsche was just as quick as the half-decade newer Audi. I had been careful to do a leak-down test before my purchase, and at the very least, I was confident that the engine was extremely healthy, as it would so eagerly prove with a stab of the throttle. However, there was one more honeymoon period-shattering issue in store, and it was something I had seen no mention of during my research.



While 996s are notorious for the IMS bearing's tendency to go bang — an issue not shared with the Mezger-engined Turbo and GT3 — prospective Turbo owners should be aware that the gearbox is not without fault. I painfully discovered this when my car began popping out of second gear. At first, I thought I simply wasn't engaging the gear properly, but after some testing, I realised that when travelling downhill with my foot off the throttle, the car would occasionally spit itself out of second like a toddler rejecting their vegetables. I'm no mechanic, but I know gearbox trouble means a world of pain for the wallet, so I had the car inspected by an expert in the form of Divan Wentzel in Cape Town, who provided me with very bad news indeed. Second gear was toast, and getting the car back to its advertised "five-star" condition would cost around 200,000 rand (roughly 10,000 euros). A good day, this was not.



Fortunately, I had purchased the car from a large dealership chain, who, partly because of South Africa's laws around car sales, agreed to either pay for the repairs or refund me and take the car back. Unsurprisingly, when they saw the bill, they asked for the keys, and a few weeks later I waved my gorgeous and troubled 996 Turbo away as it disappeared as it arrived: on the back of a rusty vehicle transporter. Would I buy another 996 Turbo? Absolutely, but this is the last time you'll catch me buying a car sight unseen!

Photos by Mikey Snelgar

Gallery

