

CLASSIC DRIVER

Porsche 924 Carrera GT: Fighting the mountain

Lead

For Porsche purists, the 924 is a red rag to a bull. The engine is water-cooled and it's at the wrong end of the car. The model was never taken as seriously as it should have been, but no one who has driven the 924 Carrera GT hard could be anything but enthusiastic, says J. Philip Rathgen.

The 'save the date' invitation to Arosa, Switzerland, to drive a Porsche in the international hillclimb, was the cause of much euphoria – unusual for a Monday morning. "Which 911 will the Porsche Museum allocate for my challenging 7.8km dash up the mountain?" I wondered. But my elation was soon to suffer a bit of a setback.

"Mr. Rathgen, you will be taking the start in our 924 Carrera GT." My first hillclimb behind the three-spoke steering wheel of the 'housewife's Porsche'? I started to pout.

My arrival in a grey, rainy Arosa matched my mental state rather well. Here I was with the rare privilege of tackling closed Swiss roads at high speed, the only limit being one's driving skill and the laws of physics, and I was lumbered with a plain old Porsche 924. But the need to prove myself a polite guest meant that my inner indignation mustn't show, and I put on a friendly smile when given the keys by the gentleman at the Porsche Museum. I turned to my sports car.

There we stood. The final evolution of the 924, resplendent in Guards Red – and me. Racing helmet under my arm, ready for a test run so I wouldn't be completely unprepared, come the hillclimb. What can I say? After the first few metres I realised that I'd succumbed to the evil vices of prejudice. The Porsche 924 CGT – as his friends call him – is outstandingly good fun. Rarely have I enjoyed myself so much as I did, sitting behind that flexible 1984cc engine. It takes some getting used to, the lag before the first burst of turbocharged power, but once it arrives – and thanks to the generous use of lightweight aluminium and glassfibre – the 1100kg Porsche belts forward. After a few kilometres I even got used to the unusual selector gate, with first gear at the bottom left and not, as is more usual, at the top right position.





Unfortunately, I have only a few minutes before the Regularity Class - in which the winner is the driver who can most accurately match a given time. Waiting at the start, you can tell the 'newbies' by their nervousness, while the 'old-timers' relax and chat. I can't stop worrying that I'll make a fool of myself. Or worse, plunge 70 feet off the edge of road if I skid in the wrong place.

After what feels like an eternity, the time has come for me and my red friend. I'm so nervous that I'd prefer to hide behind the distinctive air-intake for the intercooler on the bonnet... but here's the signal to start. It takes an eternity for the tyres to find their grip, but then I start to enjoy the turbocharged 210HP, although the noise of the engine under full acceleration is cut quite short - as we've suddenly arrived at the first of 76 corners. From third gear down to second, and a courageous squeeze on the brake, and my Porsche and I take the first hurdle with flying colours. Believe it or not, the road-going version of the 924 Carrera GT carries a great deal more 'Group 4' racing DNA than you might think. Concentrating hard, I try to position the car well in each corner; only the low position of the steering wheel gives me any real trouble.





With a quick glance in the mirror, I try to gauge how fast I'm going: apparently fast enough, because I see no pursuers. But I'm about to suffer for my momentary lapse in concentration: I'm heading into a hairpin, driving to the outside, then heading back to the middle of the road. I recall DTM driver Roland Asch's final instructions, just before I started: "Guys, make sure you're not too far out here!" - or something like that, but it's exactly what's happened to me! With all the force of inertia, the laws of physics are trying to push the car outwards, while I'm grappling to head inwards, but to no avail... the tail breaks away and I'm very lucky to get the Porsche back under control. But no time to think about my mistake: there are still 24 corners to go.

The Carrera GT is working its way up the mountain and, with each metre we travel, I'm gaining confidence and enjoying this superb red car more and more. At 6:59:12, I cross the finish line and enjoy the last surge of adrenalin coursing through my veins. Looking back, I would not have swapped my 924 Carrera GT for any other car for my personal hillclimb debut. Its design and appearance might have been the cause of much negative comment, but I'd like to suggest that all Porsche purists should drive one for themselves before making a judgement. For me, the 924 CGT is not the most beautiful Porsche ever, but it's certainly one of the most underrated products of the great German marque.

Photos: Urs Homberger

Gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/cars/porsche-924-carrera-gt-fighting-mountain>
© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.