

NEILL WATSON

Professional Writer and Photographer

Writing about cars and other related subjects for publishers and businesses alike, both for print and online. Able to create work to your brief, delivering accurate facts, captions and boxouts, all within deadline and word count, I work with your photography and video staff or independently supply accompanying images as required. The new media technologies are just as fascinating as the new cars we'll soon be driving and I find the flexibility of these channels an exciting place to be.

New media requires writing for both humans and search engines. The 'legacy effect' of quality online content meaning that blog archives attract readers literally for years after the printed edition is in the recycle pile. In addition to printed, long form features, I create online content for your audience crafted with both eyeballs, SEO and the Legacy Effect of digital in mind

Cars and driving are my first loves, but I've also covered aviation, homes, travel and architecture. Indeed, I'm happy to go anywhere and feature anything. If you love a Cosworth DFV as much as a Merlin

V12 and admire the late Ray Hanna as much as Sir Stirling, then we're on the same page.

It's an interesting time to be writing about cars and transportation. There's a fundamental change happening that will transform the face of motoring forever over the next decade. The impact these new technologies are having on our society is already being felt and while I'm as big a piston engine lover as the next person, there's no doubt that the internal combustion engine's days are numbered. My love of historic motorsport combined with a fascination and enthusiasm for new automotive technology means I generally have a point of view on most topics.

Using contacts nurtured over many years, I specialise in stories that strive to put the reader in the car with me, looking over my shoulder and enjoying the experience. I've talked to readers about such diverse subjects as driving a Lamborghini LP640 at 200mph, exploring the grip of frozen lakes in Sweden and being caught speeding by the Gendarmes in France.

I've talked to World Champions of Formula One, spent time with traffic police perfecting TPAC interception driving, sat alongside Boy Band Star drift car drivers and have flown back seater formation aerobatics with world class pilots. My work is published regularly in print and online and I've previously been featured in Evo and online at Jalopnik. As well as my own blog and online writing for clients, I also publish regularly online at Historic Racer and Car Photographer blogs. My social media weapon of choice is Twitter, where you can follow my every move [@NeillWatson](https://twitter.com/NeillWatson)

I tell everybody this is work, but we know it isn't, not really.

The new media technologies are just as fascinating as the new cars we'll soon be driving and I find the flexibility of new media an exciting place to be. The following articles give a flavour of my style of writing and include features created for printed publications as well as digital blog posts and eBook articles.

If you feel that we would be a good fit, contact me for a chat about your project at nw@neillwatson.com or pick up a telephone and dial +44(0)7812 766760 UK time.



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DRIVING THE FERRARI 288GTO

The ignition key is tiny, with a black grip worn by the passage of time. The door key plain metal and even smaller. I scoop them up and walk towards it, bright red paint shining in the sunlight as only a Ferrari can wear, chisel edged front spoiler like a blade at shin height, four driving lights recessed deep below that.

Beyond the curve of the front wings and the jet fighter-like rake of the windscreen, there are those iconic door mirrors, up high on stalks to give the driver a view rearwards over the top of the rear arches. Utterly gorgeous, Pininfarina was having a good day at the office when he drew this.

Open the door, again a tiny handle almost too delicate, slide down over the vented rivets in the seat back. No matter how many cars you may have driven in your career, or how fast they may have been, you cannot help feeling your pulse quicken as you slide the key into the ignition of a 288GTO. Sit and look out beyond the instruments, two red front wings are in your peripheral vision, but the main view out is directly to the road ahead, the front panel dropping steeply away. Glance left, take in that door mirror. You can't help but smile. Right hand drops to the gearshift,

clack, clack in the gate to check for neutral. Twist the key. High pressure fuel pumps whirr behind you, tiny lights in the dials illuminate. Twist again, push the button, high pitched Ferrari starter whine, then a grumpy bark into life.



“the faster and more positively you move the lever, the better 1980's Ferraris shift”

There's a 'thrum' of feeling in your back as it comes to life, the still open door letting in a whiff of fuel and the sound of a cold V8, very akin to the urgent, uneven, fast-idle of a seventies F1 car when cold. Close the door, seatbelt on. Across and back for first, clutch not especially heavy, though the steering is quite weighty and the wheel has that 308-like shallow angle to it. Move off and the revs climb grumpily, plugs fighting to stay un-fouled. Try for second, feel resistance and then remember those '80's test reports about cold Ferrari gearboxes and take third instead.

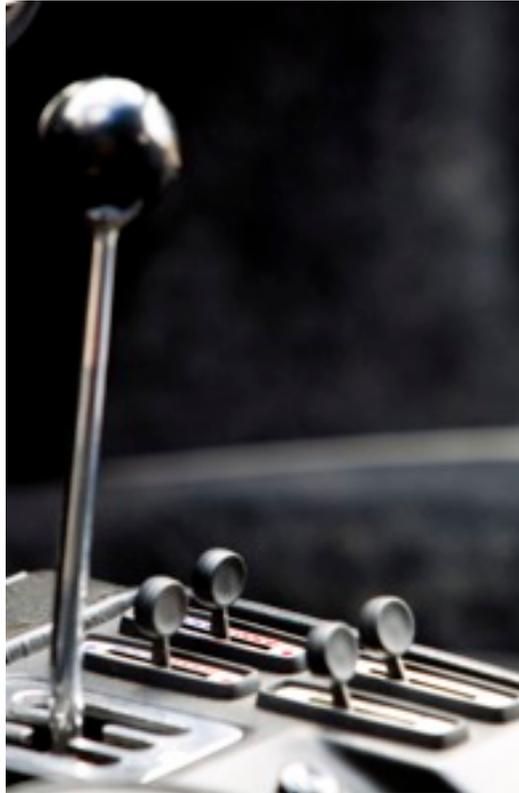
Cruise grumpily through the town and watch the temps climb. Open road ahead and now we're allowed second as the gear oil thins. Squeeze... Smooth, linear throttle response and as the engine

clears its throat, beyond 3,000 and now there's a whistle and a distinct shove from behind. Shift to third, making a mental note to speed up the shift next time and stop pussy-ing about.

There's a combination of hard edged, yet super smooth, V8 from behind and a stronger whistle from the tiny Japanese IHI turbos. Across the gate for fourth and mean it this time, as I recall that the faster and more positively you move the lever, the better 1980's Ferraris shift. Clack. Much better. Open, sweeping bend ahead as we surge across the North Yorkshire Moors, setting up on the opposite side of the road, turning in and feeding in throttle.

The chassis is soaking up mid corner bumps in a way no 1980's car I've ever driven. Soft and compliant, yet with little body roll, staying on line, then surging out with virtually no turbo lag and a lovely, crisp bark, seemingly wanting to rev forever, with no sign of the power tailing off. Down a long straight, take fifth, a glance down at the speed and a moments thought of "Better not be caught..." and a glance into the high mirrors, before squeezing brake for the next bend, heel toe down the box, clack, clack from the gearshift, roll in, pick up the throttle and onwards out of the bend, the grey road surface seeming to disappear directly beneath my feet, such is the view between those red front wings.

"If I die now, then that might just be OK..."



Destination ahead, I slow, flick the tiny, delicate indicator and crunch slowly onto the gravel of the parking area. Open the door as the engine idles to let the turbos cool, there's a honey sweet smell of emissions and hot oil wafting in, the engine now fully warmed and crisp in its responses. A few more seconds, then switch off. I notice that there are hairs on my arms and neck standing on end, goosebumps appearing, almost a lump in my throat.

I drive a great many cars in my line of work and it's been many years since I've had that emotional feeling. For decades, I've wanted to drive a 288GTO, never thought it might happen, indeed sometimes thought that perhaps it's for the best, then I'll never be disappointed. But I'm not.

The completeness of the engine package, the suspension, the surprisingly good ride quality, that pin-sharp turn in for bends and the quite remarkable lack of turbo lag from a 1980's engine leave you buzzing inside. It simply doesn't feel like a twenty five year old design. I sit, soaking in the patina, the chrome gear gate, the beautifully

finished toggle switches and alloy name tags. If I die now, then that might just be OK....

Time to head back. High pitched starter whine, the idle now smooth. Close the door, across and back, the shift now quick and seamless, I turn around, blessed with an unaccountably empty Yorkshire A road stretching into the distance as the gears click home, the dashed white centre line on the road moving from side to side, using both sides of the road across the open moorland, the odd glance into those mirrors, just in case.

Chianti this evening, I think, with a thin crust pizza and some olives. Then I'll search online for some purple ink for my fountain pen..



Andy Meets The Gendarmes.

Neill - "This blog post is a true account of being captured speeding on the French Peage by Gendarmes. It happened in 2009 and soon after, I published the article online. Ever since, it has proved to be what I call an Anchor Post Article, each year attracting web visitors and traffic around the time that many Britons begin driving in France and indeed, around the time of the LeMans 24 Hours, it enjoys particular popularity."

Anyone used to driving throughout Europe on UK plates smugly thinking you're immune and un-catchable would do well to think again if visiting France this year.

I had a trip to Nice planned last spring in a Mercedes CL55AMG and had already heard mutterings of French police being much more rigid and vigilant these days, as well as rumours of reciprocal license endorsement deals between our respective police forces. Little did I know we were about to be enlightened....

Travelling south of Paris on the Peage, gin clear skies, lovely sunny afternoon, Mercedes purring away with virtually nothing else on the road. What little traffic there was politely moving aside, the road surface immaculate and inviting, just some of the many things that makes driving on French roads such a pleasure. Along for the ride and to share the driving, my mate Andy took a turn at the wheel. Him being a racing driver by profession, our progress was brisk, until slowing for



what appeared to be congestion. The 'congestion' was being caused by a Gendarme on a motorcycle gently slowing people down and gesturing us and three other cars to follow into the services. Bugger.

"How much cash you got on you, chap?"

"Just a couple of Euros," replies Andy.

Looks like this one's down to me then. We climb out of the CL55 AMG, me grabbing my 1DS to record the moment....

The bike Gendarme hops off and goes into a huddle with his colleagues before turning and rattling off "193, 175, 155,167", pointing to each car in turn. His gun carrying colleagues disperse to the respective drivers....

"Do you know the speed limit in France,

M'seur?" asks Jean Claude.

Andy, desperately trying to wing it, "Pardon M'seur?" with his best Gallic shrug.

"130 kilometers per hour. You were doing 193. You license and car papers?" He continues politely.

Turning to me, "Do you have a license?" Which I believe proved to be the killer question. Jean Claude glanced at it and handed it back before turning back to Andy, "The penalty is seven five zero Euros".

Andy blinked. *"Did he say seventy five Euros?"* Jean Claude politely shakes his head *"Seven hundred and fifty."*

Lots of very authentic Gallic shrugs from myself and Andy, acutely aware that we don't have that kind of cash on us. Jean Claude gestures to his colleague to explain in more fluent English.

"You need to go into this town and visit the bank with your card. You will get your license and papers when you return"

I was well aware of the fact that France has on-the-spot speeding fines, but was unprepared for the amount, or what happened when we returned.

Amidst much form filling in and Andy handing over a roll of Euros big enough to choke a donkey, it becomes clear that Andy is not actually going to get his licence back. Nor is he driving any further.

Jean-Claude-Gen-Damme, as we've named him by this time, explains to Andy that his license will be returned to him later and that he cannot drive in France any more, gesturing like a baseball umpire, palms down. Instant ban.

While standing around waiting and filling out forms, a German registered Porsche 993 Turbo 4 pulls in. We overhear it's owner being fined 97 Euro.



Hang on a tick, what gives, Jean Claude? We have visions of Andy getting his license returned by post, stapled to a picture of Jean Claude and his mates wearing plastic breasts and having a jolly good time with our Euros.

A smile of understanding from the Gendarmes produces a thick red book full of tables and rules *"He was at 176, you were 193. More than 50 kilometres over the limit, big fine, instant ban for six months"*

"In France or UK?" Andy's got his cool-but-worried racing driver look on, normally only used when summoned before the stewards when racing.

"In France, six months. In UK....." Jean Claude's palms-upward Gallic shrug is vastly superior to ours. Their vagueness about what was to become of Andy's until-now clean license was particularly un-nerving, as with hindsight it was no doubt designed to be. Chastened, pockets lightened and Andy sans-license, we roll gently out of the services. This episode answers several questions and raises others.

The French Gendarmes, always renowned for their on the spot fines, have clearly been spending the winter devising other methods of frightening non-domestic drivers. Whilst we were stopped, cars of all shapes, sizes and nationalities, including domestic French motorists were being stopped en-masse. It was like watching one of those nature documentaries of grizzly bears catching salmon in the shallows.

Secondly, if you are going to drive quickly in France, be aware that there is a point at 50 kph over the limit that triggers an instant ban in France and a cash-card-melting fine. No doubt there will be many who say "serves you right" and, indeed, that is so. Andy's philosophy is one of "live by the sword, die by the sword and don't cry when you get caught", so he's not looking for sympathy.

Nor will you get any, as Jean Claude politely relieves you of another donkey-choker....193 kph is around 120 mph. Fast, but far from dangerous in those conditions and for someone with that level of experience behind the wheel of a Mercedes CL55 AMG

Thirdly. French roads are wonderful to drive on, rarely congested on the toll routes and the surface is like a mermaid beckoning to a driver used to cameras, white vans and the congested M25. A driver like Andy just has to taste the forbidden fruit.

Finally, what would have happened if Andy had been alone, or I had been unable to produce a license? Apparently French nationals would have been arrested.

This week, Andy's license was returned from France with a letter commuting his ban to three months in France. As someone who makes his living from his license, the nagging doubt over the outcome was un-nerving. Next time, he's taking a 2CV complete with chickens on the roof and faded blue paintwork.



Roger Albert Clark - The Real RAC Rally

Neill - "A blog article created to promote the historic Roger Albert Clark Rally each year in the autumn of the UK. Another online 'Anchor Article' that each year becomes popular as enthusiasts prepare for the event"

For those of us of a certain age, the phrase RAC Rally stirs emotions. Memories of misty cold November days spent walking into a forest, Ordnance Survey map folded to the correct Special Stage and stashed in a rucksack alongside a Thermos flask and some Mars Bars. Then arriving at your chosen vantage point to find it wall to wall with people who all had the same idea, the crowd murmuring in anticipation, the occasional fart ringing out to be congratulated by colleagues. As dusk falls, the banter in the crowd increases until, as darkness completes we're stood waiting in the blackness, torches spearing out as we all make fun of the two fools that decided to climb a fir tree earlier and then got stuck....

You hear it in the distance, the sharp bark of a BDA or a V6 Stratos. Still a couple of miles off, but you can hear the engine note as the driver charges up the gears before a moment of silence as he brakes, the noise not carrying through the trees until he blips on the downchanges before getting back on the power, the engine note giving that slight tremor as it works against the limited slip diff out of the corner with a ghostly echo coming back through the trees.



Then there's the shout from the rally marshalls, "CAR..... !!", whistles blowing like air raid wardens as just over the horizon the skyline is lit up by an armoury of Cibie Oscars blazing through the forest. The engine is very loud now and as it crests the rise, the lights burn into our retinas and the BDA's revs soar as he charges, all four wheels off the ground, then landing, instantly on the brakes approaching our chosen corner, the lights dart left and right as he sets the car up for a Scandinavian Flick.

Dozens of flashguns lance out from the tree line momentarily illuminating the crew inside, showing the sponsorship, the door number and sometimes a deep gouge in a rear wing or on occasion, a flattened roof and star crazed windscreen, testament to an off-piste adventure elsewhere. Small stones pepper our feet and legs and then they're gone, lights illuminating the forest track we'd walked along on the way in, red tail lights getting smaller by the second, the spots left on our eyeballs fade as the blackness returns, murmurs of approval from the assembled experts. Sixty seconds later, the sequence repeats. "CAR!!!" We take a step back into the tree line.

Thirty minutes later, we've decided that the quickest guys have now been seen and we walk briskly back to the car, every minute or so taking a few strides back into the tree line as the slower midfield runners pass us by. Back

at the car, we're dumping our gear in the boot alongside the Primus stove, packs of bacon and bread buns and then grabbing the OS Map and heading to our next pre-planned vantage point.

Today, the WRC is a totally different affair. Located around a central point that the FIA claim is to help the logistics of media coverage and to contain costs, the UK round is no longer the four day marathon for both competitors and spectators. Instead, you travel to Wales and pay quite a lot of money to watch the top ten cars compete at a truly incredible pace, before the speeds drop dramatically off. With luck, today's WRC might let you see the cars twice in a day. Sadly, the RAC Rally with its UK wide route is no longer a WRC event. However, the RAC Rally is in fact still out there. And it's still great fun.

These days, the RAC part stands for Roger Albert Clark, the man who made Ford Escorts and muddy forests as fashionable as Cossack hair products. Revived in 2004 by DeLacy Motor Club, the event has defied the doubters and now become a firm favourite with crews and spectators. No four wheel drive, no turbos, just hard driven, traditional rally cars and a route that pay direct homage to the iconic stages of years gone by. Names like Dalby Woodyard, Helmsley, Croft

Circuit Kiedler and Hamsterley all feature each year with a route that takes in North Yorkshire, Durham, Cumbria, Northumberland and southern Scotland, it's a huge event.



For spectators, the whole road trip adventure is there to be re-created, or experienced for the first time. Beginning in Pickering, North Yorkshire on Friday 23rd November, the route takes in all of the aforementioned iconic stages, running deep into the night and with a quality entry list that a World Championship Rally would be proud of. Venturing across Durham and into Cumbria, before scything up to the Scottish Borders then back through Northumberland and finally finishing on Sunday at Brampton town centre in Cumbria.

Without 'centralised servicing' crews can often be seen in lay bys and cafe car parks grabbing a quick coffee and fresh tyres before continuing on, accompanied by chase car crew in a 4x4 with whip antenna waving on the roof, spares piled high in the rear window. With larger service halts and re-groups to keep the event on schedule, there will be something for even the most timid of rally spectator, with Croft Circuit hosting the sole tarmac stage and giving people ample opportunity to get up close to the action. This years entry includes the omnipresent Ford Escorts by the score, Perez's

beautiful Lancia Stratos, what is sure to be a great sounding Corolla AE86 entered by Midgley Motorsport plus a handful of Porsche 911's.

For the more adventurous, I strongly suggest you turn off your GPS, lock it into the glovebox and learn how to use a map once more. The scenery is stunning, the night time can be pitch black but you'll see more of the remote UK countryside than on a bank holiday weekend. But forests don't have post codes, so download the route maps from the rally website, grab an HB pencil and find that great hairpin that tightens up, stand back, but not too far back and let the oversteer commence.



Driving the Ferrari 458 Italia vs Porsche 911 GT3RS

Neill - "Created for Total 911 Porsche magazine, one of a series of long form print features taking a period Porsche 911 and comparing it with it's Ferrari contemporary"

Is this a pointless comparison? Surely, the Porsche must be hopelessly outgunned by the technical barrage of the Ferrari 458 Italia and indeed, I wouldn't blame you for thinking that. As I set out to undertake this test, I openly admit, I was biased in favour of the Ferrari. Apart from the fact that I'm very familiar with the particular car featured here, having driven it extensively, you cannot avoid being influenced by the gushing press reports ever since the new 458 hit the streets.

And yes, they're all true. Every last "I'm In Love" road test, every blazing track report, blog post, online video and TV road testing celebrity. They're all true. It's a quite amazing car. You should drive it. And indeed, if I hadn't driven the 458 Italia directly against the GT3RS 3.8, back to back, that's about where this feature would be finishing. The statistics also outgun the 911, with 560 bhp vs 450 bhp. Seven speed twin clutch paddle shift vs 6 speed manual, carbon brakes standard on the Ferrari, optional on the Porsche, 0-100kph 3.4 seconds vs 4.0 seconds, top speed 202mph vs 192mph. £175,000 list price vs a mere £109,000-ish for the 911. The only statistic that the Porsche wins on is weight - it's actually 10kgs

lighter, but your average cool Italian test driver probably weighs less than Walter Rorhl anyway...



By now, you're shouting "4.0 RS!" in defence. But the GT3 4.0RS is a limited edition of just 600 cars, not in continuous production, so the 3.8RS is the most direct comparison. If Top Trumps is your favourite after dinner game, you'd want to be holding the Ferrari card. But bear with me, because there's a whole load more to it than that. If you have the means to fund either of these two cars, you're probably far more interested in how they drive, which one excites you, which one you admire the looks of most and perhaps above all, which one that you'd most like to see yourself reflection of driving slowly past shop windows. Without a doubt, both of these machines have an utterly striking appearance. Pretty much as soon as we began photography, a small crowd of iPhone toting onlookers gathered and stayed all the time we were shooting, such was the impression the cars made.

However, these two cars are utterly different in their personalities, in the way they interact with the driver and in the way they deliver their performance. They have completely different DNA, a different view on what constitutes a great drive and a very different way of delivering what is still a great driving experience, regardless of your personal choice.

Approach the pair and the Ferrari stands out as the more flamboyant. It's combination of gorgeous curves, the deep, deep gloss Rosso Corsa paintwork and Crema leather interior scream Ferrari at you. It can be nothing else. However, this shape was created not by Pininfarina or Bertone, but by Ferrari themselves, crafted in a wind tunnel, with great care and attention to detail.

The curvaceous rear arches are designed to channel air into the rear mounted clutch and gearbox radiators, mounted high up beside a pair of circular tail lights that pay homage to the 308. The front end is characterised by a single aerodynamic vent and two large side air intakes for engine radiator cooling. The front lights are very modern looking, with LED daytime running lights stacked vertically above bi-xenon headlights.

The more you look at the shape, the more small design touches you see, such as the blade-like brake air intake sitting beside the daytime lights and the sharp edge to the front of the bonnet line that flows upwards into the two front wheels, a sharp crease either side looking like they have been scored into the bonnet with a metal workers scribe. The combination of sharp functional edges and Italian curves work well and you could quite happily sink a bottle of Chianti while strolling around studying the design details.



The GT3RS is equally distinctive. The outline is instantly Porsche, you could park a '73 2.7RS beside it and a casual bystander would get the idea. The rear has the usual curvy wheel arches that a certain Porsche editor once admitted to immensely enjoying slowly rubbing a chamois leather over.

They house the massive Michelin Sport tyres and when viewed from directly behind the silhouette screams "Grip" and "Traction" at you.

The Supercup rear wing sits on top of a duck tail style rear spoiler with a functional intake feeding cooling air into the engine bay and intakes. On other cars, it would look very boy racer, but it fits the GT3 and balances out the oh-so-low front bumper with integral splitter complete with additional cooling slots and small extensions to the front wheel arches.

If you move inside, the Porsche doesn't hide it's purpose. The doors open and close with that quality sound that you only get from those very expensive briefcase locks, the one you buy just once and lasts your entire lifetime.

Slide down into the tight seats, complete with slots for harnesses and clad in that black material that the most expensive FIA approved Recaros and Sparcos wear, grip the wheel and the gearshift and it feels as if the entire car has been machined from a single billet of metal. You get the impression that in fifteen or eighteen years time, it will feel the same way.

Behind you sits a bright red half roll cage and a large fire extinguisher sits comfortably in the passenger footwell. Bright red webbing door pulls shut the doors, shuffle down further into those perfectly hip hugging seats and the yellow tell tale band signifying top dead centre on the steering wheel sits just on your eye line. This is a racing car that just happens to have had some number plates screwed onto it.

Wriggle out of the seats, stroll over to the Ferrari. The tiny door handles, in comparison, need only a thumb and forefinger to open, the design reminiscent of the 308 and 288GTO. Delicate.

The doors feel lightweight, but the car has a quality feel about it that Ferrari have worked hard to achieve over the last few years. It's not up there with the Porsche, but the build quality is far better than any Ferrari I've previously driven. This car has several expensive options. The seats are the 'racing seat' option. Which in Ferrari speak doesn't mean jet black racer cloth, but a pair of beautiful looking carbon skeletons clad in soft, immaculate, fine grain crema leather. Not quite as tight as the Porsche seats, but still reassuringly comfortable.

The steering wheel is a sculpture in itself, framing a huge bright yellow rev counter that goes all the way to 9,000. With the optional LED 'shift lights' built into the carbon wheel, slightly flattened at the base and carrying a whole host of buttons and features, it comes straight from Alonso's Sunday office. At first glance, it all looks very pretentious and

glam and more than a little PlayStation, but place your hands on the wheel and reach around with your fingertips and you start to see the ergonomics of it all. Reach behind, two long blades in carbon, embossed with Up and Down trigger the twin clutch gearshift that everyone raves about. They don't move with steering wheel angle, which is sensible. Low down on the wheel are two attention getters.



A flamboyant "Engine Start" in bright red on the left and that famous Manettino switch that controls the modes and moods of the car, ranging from Wet, through Sport and Race and becoming braver still with two settings that progressively remove the traction and stability controls, leaving the driver to reach deeply into his own bucket of skill with no safety net. Indicators, headlights and wash wipe are all activated from the front of the wheel. Spend a few minutes acclimatising and it's all very sensible. The

horn buttons, one on each side, are actually in the steering wheel rim, right under where you'd rest your thumbs. Only the Italians would build the horn button into the steering wheel.....

The stark difference in personalities goes far, far deeper than just looks. Stroll around the rear of both cars and lift the engine covers. The Porsche is, well, typical Porsche. Very little to see, the Mezger block buried deep in the quest for a low centre of gravity, behind twin plastic air intakes. The only admission to anything unusual is a brushed alloy plate saying "RS 3.8 Porsche" The Ferrari shouts from the rooftops, its engine on plain view like an automotive sculpture behind a glass cover, two lovely red crackle

finished plenum chambers display the Ferrari font seen on so many famous cam covers over the decades. Start up the engines, the theme continues. Start the Porsche on the key, the usual starter chatter, instantly awake into a low key idle familiar to 911 owners over the decades, that noisy gear chatter almost overpowering the quiet, fuss free idle.

The Ferrari has a little sequence to go through, turn the key, wait for the LCD screens to awaken, foot on brake, push of that big red button and it springs alive with a sharp bark of revs before the exhaust flaps close up and it quietsens down to what it actually a demure exhaust note. But your neighbours will definitely know you've started it.

Both engines have that instant SNAP of throttle response that only car manufacturers that develop their engines through motorsport seem to be able to achieve. The 458 sounds like an angry Cougar that you've just poked under a rock with a stick. The GT3RS sounds like only a GT3 can, revs instantly up, instantly down.

So let's drive the Ferrari first. Flick a gear paddle and away for a drive, the gearshift in default Auto mode as seamless as a Lexus, no dramas, slicking up and down the gearbox. You could take Granny shopping, she'd never know what lies beneath. Push the auto mode off and



select Race on the Manettino for the first time, build up some pace down a twisting A road and the smile spreads over your face.

Right away, this car tells you quite openly that you're a wonderful driver. No really, you are. It's like being on a date with the most gorgeous woman you've admired from afar, you know you're punching way above your weight, but then she whispers something about a little later this evening and your confidence soars.

The tactile and overt way that this car tells you what a great time you're both having makes it almost a caricature of a supercar. The exhaust note in Race mode is cartoon like, charge from one corner to another between some Yorkshire dry stone walls and the exhaust screams like an

F1 car, before popping, crackling and banging on the overrun like a Spitfire making a low pass. It makes you laugh out loud first time you hear it.

The twin clutch gearbox is machine gun fast, the car actually feeling as if it accelerates as it shifts the gears, it's that quick. Following another fast moving car, you can visibly see distance to the car ahead being gobbled up on each upshift. The car inspires confidence at all times, makes you beg for reasons to drive it. And yet put it back into Auto mode and all the toys are put back in the box and it could be a Lexus.

I have to say, I'm walking across to the Porsche and I'm thinking, "Sorry, feller, but that red thing really is very good, what can you bring along?"

But a strange thing happens. Slide into the seat, grip the wheel and something inside me says, "Ah, that's better". I can only put it down to years of having Porsche hands, if you get my drift, but as I snick the super sharp gearshift into first, I feel utterly comfortable. Blip a few revs on and away up the road, that GT3 bark is just so reassuring. You have to pay close attention in the lower gears, such is the response and the engine's willingness to rev, you glance down and see eight thousand five hundred coming around very rapidly in first, second, third.

Eyes outside, there's an awful lot of green blur in my peripheral vision and the engine note that started out way down low with a deep chested induction noise rises above six thousand into that hard edged SuperCup bark before a full on scream for the final one thousand. For sure, the Ferrari exhaust designer deserves a medal, but damn that 3.8 sounds good at the top end.

The ride has a similar stiffness to the Ferrari and both cars have clever dampers that are switchable for those stiff, jiggling Yorkshire B roads, both giving a smoother ride and better traction in the softer mode.

But you have to work harder in the Porsche. In the same way that the Ferrari tells you that you're wonderful, the Porsche simply says, "If you've had the intelligence to buy me and park me in your garage, you'd better be damn good. If you're good enough, we're going to go and win some endurance races together".

On the tight twisty Yorkshire roads, you constantly have one hand on the gearshift and your feet are working constantly. It's an immensely absorbing and satisfying process that you just want to keep doing.



In the back of your mind, you're aware that if the 458 were behind you, you'd be struggling to keep it there and it would only be a matter of time before that exhaust note came howling up the inside, popping and crackling through your side window as the carbon brakes complete the move and you're looking at that gorgeous rear end ahead of you.

But the Porsche is sharp, clinical in an almost martial arts kind of way. I don't mean 'clinical' to sound cold and un-involving, its far from that, I mean an economy of movement and efficiency, the type of thing you see in those fast moving Bourne Identity fight scenes.

For two cars to be so utterly different and yet still manage to deliver such emotionally satisfying drives is immensely impressive. The Ferrari is, without a doubt, the quicker of the two, the technically superior, faster over the ground and the new benchmark against which future contenders will be judged. However, this isn't supposed to be a technical test, you've probably read those to death already and my shameless emotional attachment to that unique Porsche 911 feeling that you get when you approach one is also playing a strong part in my mind as I stand looking at the two in the early autumn sunshine.

So which one? It's just so, so, so close. They're both magnificent examples of the best integration of connecting technical excellence and performance with the hands, feet and brain of the driver. They're both, without a doubt, two of the cars you go and drive for no reason at all, just for the sake of driving, which is an increasingly rare thing these days. So once again, which one?

The GT3RS. Why? Because much as I love that Roger Rabbit exhaust note and Sophia Loren's ample curves had a profound effect on me as a young adolescent, these days I see myself as more of a Jason Bourne kind of guy. It's illogical, I know. But it's the reason why sometimes, while we may move away from a Porsche 911 occasionally, we always return, don't we?



We Should Talk

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