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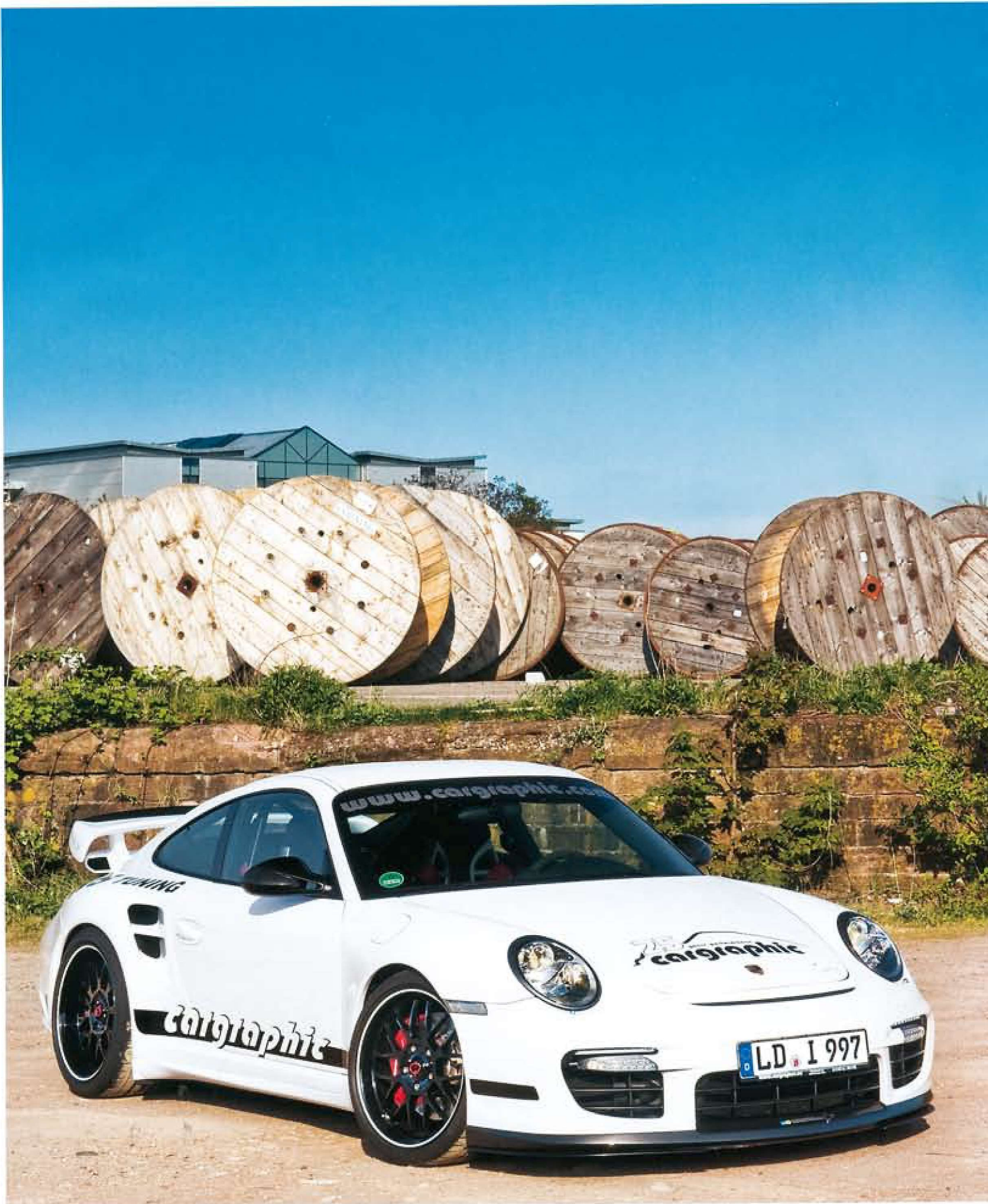
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Silver Service

German-based Porsche specialist, Cargraphic, celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2010, so what better way to mark the occasion than to gather the company's very first, and its very latest creations.

Story: Dominic Holtam Photography Max Earey





"This is the best, most evolved car we've built. The 3.6-litre engine is still, in my view, better than the new one"



What were you doing 25 years ago? Perhaps you were listening to the charity record *We Are the World*? Or maybe watching boxer Mike Tyson make his professional debut (and win by first round knockout, as if you couldn't guess) or Norwich City beat Sunderland in the League Cup Final? Me, I was becoming smitten by the gull-winged DeLorean that starred in *Back to the Future*.

It's fair to say that Thomas Schnarr and his brother, Michael, were doing none of these things: they were too busy setting up their tuning

company, Cargraphic, in Landau, Germany.

We headed over to pay the lads a visit and help them celebrate this milestone in the company's history – by trying the very first, and the very finest car to have ever come from the Cargraphic stable. "This," says Thomas, pointing at the GTR RSC, "is the best, most evolved car we've built. The 3.6-litre engine is still, in my view, better than the new one, and in this car we have done everything."

By that he means taking one 997 Turbo and then instigating a comprehensive restyle, full weight-loss programme and serious, serious

performance. How serious? Well, 677hp at 6430rpm and an immense 662lb ft of torque at 5160rpm. "This car is about as quick as a Bugatti Veyron," said Thomas. The acceleration figure, independently recorded by the German magazine *Sport Auto*, seems to back up this bold claim – 0-100km/h in 3.02 seconds. 0-200km/h in 9.06 seconds – making it, at the time of the test, the fastest street-legal Porsche in Germany. That's a title one suspects is hotly contested and proudly worn.

In comparison to the Turbo, Cargraphic's original machine looks tame. There are no



wings, flares or scoops. Just a very well proportioned, very clean looking old 911.

It was originally a 1980 vintage 3.0 SC, which was then upgraded with the G50 gearbox modification and then, by Cargraphic's team, to 3.2-litre Carrera-spec. The car became a mobile research and development lab, show car and demonstrator as the company began to expand. "The company's first exhaust systems, catalyst conversions and mass flow sensor kits were all tested on this car," explains Michael.

The car is no longer owned by Cargraphic as it was sold a few years ago to a customer and

friend. But the proviso was that it would always be available, if required, for press demos or shows. "It is an important car for us – it's part of our history. And while we can't own every car we ever made, we know that this one is around when we need it. We keep it close," says Michael.

Enough chat, though, time for a drive. First up, the 997. There's a bit of extra muscle required to heft the clutch of the GTR RSC 3.6 – it isn't a real thigh-burner but it lets you know it's there as we negotiate the quiet streets of Landau en route to some quieter roads among the vineyard of the Pfalz region.

It is remarkably easy to drive in traffic and at low speeds. It's polite and smooth at low revs and handles tiny throttle applications very well. And while you can feel the kinetic potential lurking just below the surface, pootling and cruising are not the chore you might expect.

I manage to control myself until I reach a stretch of clear, straight rural road that spear off into a heat-haze about a mile distant. I slow to walking pace to allow Earey in our photographic support car to clear off and, still in second gear, I mash the throttle. The car gathers up its skirts but there is less urge than I'm expecting from



this Bugatti-baiter... and then the boost arrives and everything goes a little bit silly.

Despite wearing 19-inch RG5 wheels clad in 265/30 (front) and colossal 315/30 (rear) Dunlop Sportmaxx GTs, and despite being four-wheel drive, and despite the tarmac being hot and dry, the power and torque of this machine make traction very tricky. Into third gear and the tyres are still scrabbling for grip as the speedo goes berserk. Fourth gear and there's still wheel spin, but the acceleration feels every bit as explosive as in second. Professional analysis has been reduced to a long stream of expletives.

I'm trying hard to remember a machine that has so impressed with its straight line performance and the only one that springs to mind is the 750hp dragster that I once had the misfortune to be strapped into. In fact, I reckon the 911 would run it very close over a standing quarter.

Once past 4000rpm, the forward thrust is mind-boggling. I find myself wondering if Cargraphic should consider offering brain-speed upgrades for potential customers.

Of course, without a suitably impressive chassis to harness this kinetic energy, the GTR

RSC would be no better than that dragster after all. But in this most evolved of Turbos, the attention to every aspect is complete.

Suspension is via the Bilstein PSS10 Clubsport package with Cargraphic's own Airlift system added to aid practicality given the low ride height. Then there is the car's bulk – or lack of it, to be precise. There's carbon fibre everywhere (not all of it real – more of which later) and RS-style anorexic-spec doorcards with cordura pulls. The weight, with fuel on board, is 1495kg – a standard Turbo weighs around 100kg more. Not bad for a four-wheel drive



As well as the shattering acceleration times, consider the top speed of 204mph and that it managed 0-300km/h-0 in just 30 seconds



machine with a roll-cage and full aero-pack.

But the main area of work, clearly, is the engine. The list of modifications is long and distinguished. There is (deep breath): sports exhaust and air-filter, DME control unit exchange, new manifold, upgraded turbochargers, air-pipes, intercoolers and plenum, Carillo con rods and a beefed-up clutch to cope with the near-663lb ft of twist. The company also fits a gearbox cooling system and a choice of limited-slip differential. As well as the aforementioned shattering acceleration times, consider the top speed of 204mph and

that it managed 0-300km/h-0 in just 30 seconds under test conditions.

Now, bear in mind that we drove the car on *normal* roads – not glass-smooth A-roads, not a wide, sweeping race track, but the sort of lumpy, bumpy, twisty, turny roads you might find on your own doorstep. And it worked. Yes the suspension is a little on the stiff side, and yes we had to use the air-lift function to protect the massive rear diffuser when parking up for photography – but it coped superbly well with crumbly asphalt and exhibited a poise and composure that belied its brute force.

In fact, thanks to the four-wheel drive system, it felt remarkably chuckable and if you got a little exuberant with your right foot exiting a corner, you never felt it would bite.

But however much fun there was to be had through the corners, the devil in me couldn't wait for the next straight to experience the full onslaught of that magnificent engine. Not many machines would make a standard 911 feel sluggish, but this is one of them. It is all but impossible to stop either swearing or laughing.

There is only one area where one might have reservations and that is aesthetic. Admittedly,



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the aero-pack is quite extreme, but you can understand that. I actually love the extended rear diffuser that looks like it was stolen from an N24 racer. Then there are the carbon front arches, widened to accommodate the bigger wheels, and those GT2-style vents, splitters and slats – tested to provide a genuine aerodynamic benefit.

But there are also a number of pieces in what is euphemistically called 'visual carbon'. I call it plastic. Like the fake cut-out on the rear PU, the

Gurney flap on the rear wing and the front splitters. And given the quality of the real carbon trim (such as the mirror caps) it looks a bit cheap.

By contrast, the original machine is an exercise in understatement. Bar the big wheels, it looks very simple, very clean. There's a purposeful thrum from the big-bore exhaust and as you slip inside you are met by yet more carbon fibre trim. The real deal here, though, and enough to lift the traditionally sombre

old-school 911 interior without looking OTT.

First impressions are that air-con was a great invention, floor-hinged pedals feel weird and that power steering makes three-point turns a lot easier. But remember, this car is as old as I am, has led a much harder life but still manages to feel almost showroom fresh. This is a real time-warp car.

You'd expect the 3.2-litre machine to feel cataclysmically short of performance, giving away a scarcely creditable 450hp and 422+lb ft of



torque. And yet... it's the way it involves you, the effort it demands and the rewards it is prepared to dole out – you just forget the lack of raw speed and get totally absorbed in the old-fashioned.

The wider rubber might rob a smidgen of delicacy from the helm but offers higher levels of grip and a great feeling of stability. The engine not only sounds glorious but it really does feel potent – hauling hard all the way through the rev range. The reworked exhaust and uprated air-mass sensor maximising the car's aerobic reach.

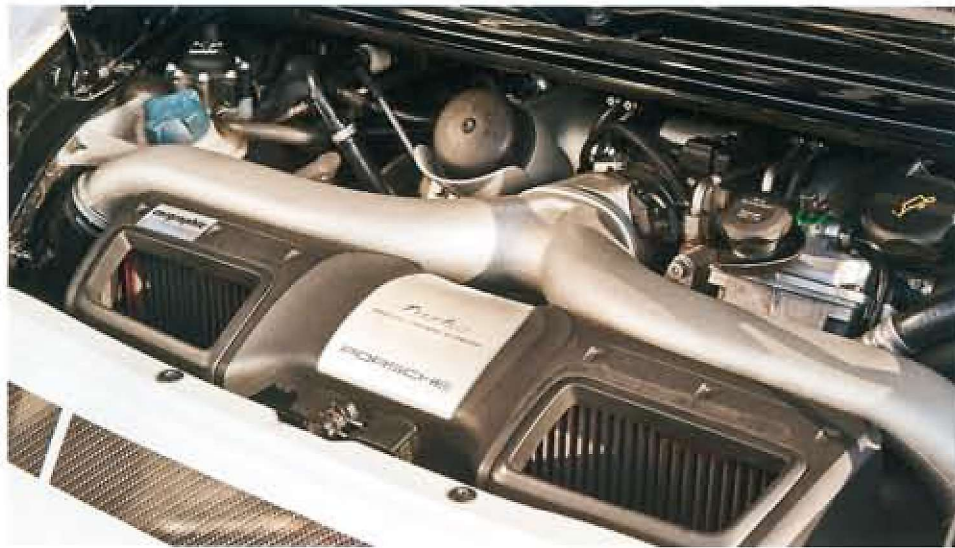
Dynamic evaluation was clearly limited by the historic importance of the car but it really did feel as sweet as a nut. I wonder if the RSC will feel so good after another quarter of a century?

The last few years have been tough ones for the tuning world. People have come and gone from the marketplace. You sense just how hard it has been even for Cargraphic but also the optimism in Michael's outlook: "We've never before had to experience a time when the whole

world was in recession. In the past some markets have shrunk while at the same time others have grown.

"But we have worked hard and have grown our core business into other brands and marques. This has been important – cars like the Aston Martin V8 Vantage have been very strong for us and this has helped during the tough times.

"And that is why the '25 Year' cars are such a big thing. We look at these two cars and in our



view their DNA is the same, despite them being very different machines. For us, Cargraphic's original car is a symbol of a long and successful business. Other people might be out for short-term business, for a quick buck, but we have been around for a long time now."

You can forgive that moment of pride. It's a great achievement. We've driven a lot of Cargraphic machines in the past decade and never a bad one. The best are right up there with the finest cars we've ever driven, anywhere. The company holds true to its core values, it still manufactures its own wheels and exhausts and has already developed its own centre-locking wheels for the new generation GT3 – the first aftermarket company to do so. Who knows, maybe we'll be back to Landau for the occasion of Cargraphic's 50th anniversary. You wouldn't want to bet against it ☐



back issues

SPOTLIGHT ON...
Issue 31 June 2004



CARGRAPHIC GT3 RSC

German Porsche specialist Cargraphic celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2010, and in 2004 it built one of, if not its best car to date: the sensational 996 GT3 RSC. It still remains one of the best 911s we've driven.



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