



*Locked &*



# Loaded

Cargraphic has worked its magic on the latest 997 GT3.  
It's subtle, but we like it! Story: Dominic Holtam Photography: Max Earey

There is a feeling among the tuning fraternity that Porsche's sudden predilection for centre-locking wheels has less to do with passing race car technology to the road and more to do with making life difficult for the aftermarket. After all, outside of the dealer network, who has the resources available to deal with them, or the customer base to warrant the investment to acquire it?

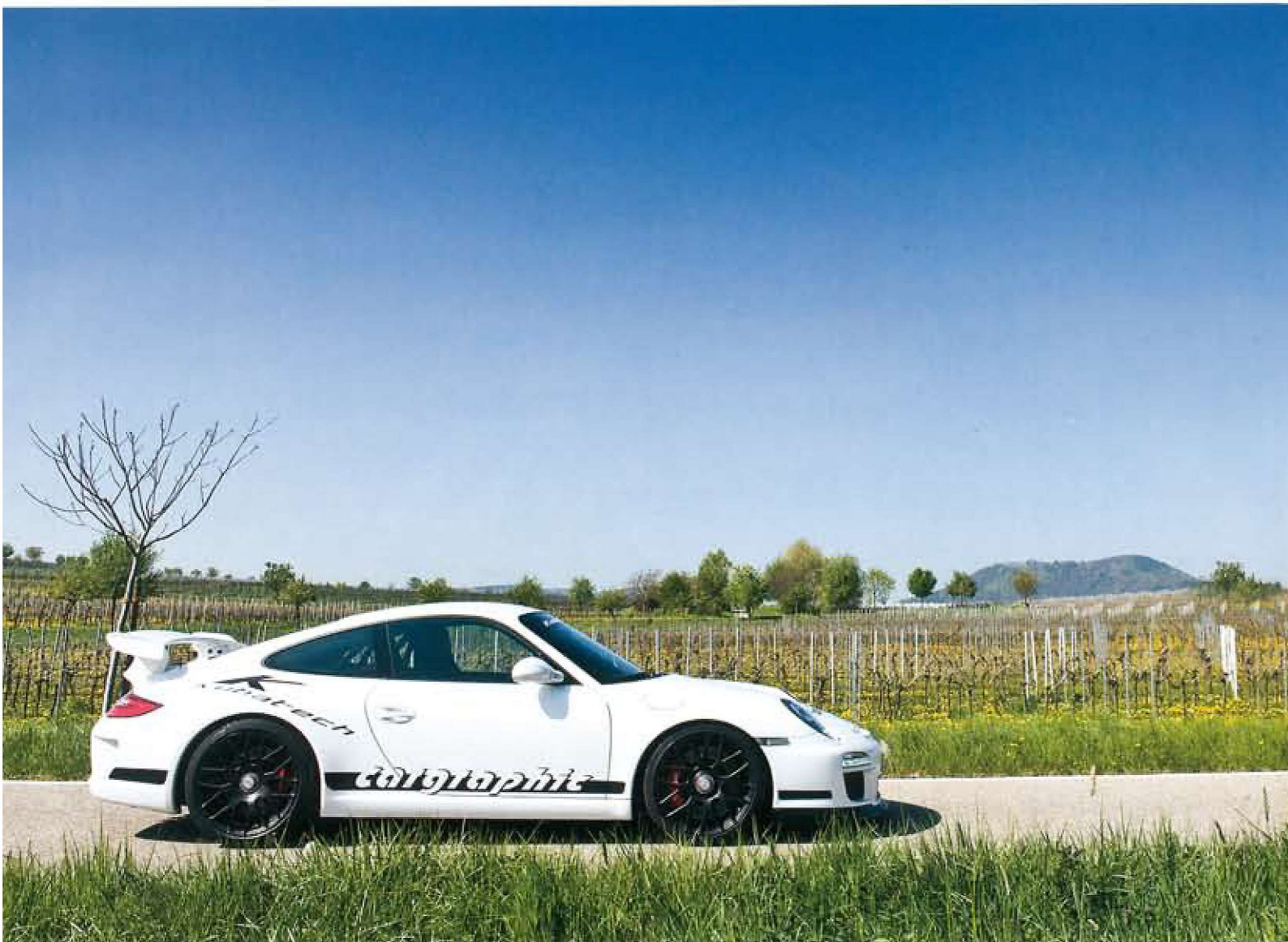
First you need to justify the market for manufacturing these super-specialised and low-

volume items. Then you have to put in place the hardware and infrastructure for fitting and alignment. Wheel and tyre fit will be almost totally monopolised by the dealer network – after all, the local Kwik Fit isn't likely to be able to handle the task.

Cargraphic, however, has the advantage of being a wheel manufacturer in its own right, rather than just a vendor. And with fast Porsches making up a key part of the company's clientele, the investment in this new wheel technology was deemed totally

worthwhile. In fact, Cargraphic was the first tuner to offer a centre-locking wheel option for this new breed; in the shape of the IS-One.

The black, lightweight multi-spoke design befits the car's track credentials (in fact, it has been designed as much with racing as road applications in mind) and ties in with the 25th Anniversary livery that the company's demo cars are currently wearing. The sizing is 8.5x19-inch at the front, wearing 235/35 rubber, with a 12-inch rear wrapped in 315/30s. The wheels weigh



Beneath the plastic and the plumbing sits Cargraphic's hand-crafted exhaust, which boosts power and cuts weight

11.25kg and 12.25kg front to back, and will clear brake disc callipers up to 380mm. Cup brakes and PCCB, too. The tyre in question is the Dunlop Sportmaxx GT. The price for rims and rubber is just under €5000, plus another thousand by the time you've factored in UK VAT. Not cheap, then.

As you have spotted, Cargraphic has chosen to showcase the IS-One of its 997.2 GT3. Naturally, the company has given the GT3 a little work over, too.





Cargraphic is able to offer its IS-One design wheel to fit using Porsche's centre-lock technology

It's on the open road that this car will ultimately be judged, because bar-stool bragging rights aside, it needs to deliver on the asphalt

Cargraphic has worked hard to optimise the 3.8-litre unit's aspiration. A BMC Sports air filter and optimised management software are married up to a completely reworked exhaust. The exhaust Kit 6 is claimed to add 17hp and 4lb ft of torque – not to mention reduced weight over the standard system by a massive 17.5kg. It consists of equal length primaries, 130mm 200 cell sports cats, optimised gas flow and special 70mm exhaust flaps (compliant with the original 'Sport' switch), exiting through twin 100mm tail pipes and utilising the standard silencer. This is one of a number of exhaust kit combinations on offer from the company and is priced at €4495. The combination of upgrades gives this 3.8-litre lump an output of 474hp and 330lb ft of torque.

As a sop to the kind of day-to-day usability people are demanding of these cars, Cargraphic has fitted its clever 'Airlift' suspension kit, which allows you to raise the height of the car by up to 72mm at the front spoiler lip. Clearly some might see this kind of addition as anathema to a low-weight road-racer such as the GT3, but at just 3kg in weight, I'd happily go on a diet to shed those extra pounds rather than worry about grounding my expensive and effective aerodynamic addenda every time I encountered a speed bump or a sloping driveway.

The system can be operated via a key fob or a hard switch while on the move and takes just seconds to operate. Then, once above 30mph, it automatically lowers again. It is all TÜV-approved and costs €2695 plus VAT. We found it worth every penny during the



It sounds, one might imagine, like Brian Blessed being fed into a wood-chipper: loud, and just a bit frightening

photoshoot as we negotiated kerbs and pothole-strewn pull-ins without fear of damaging the GT3's soft underbelly.

But it's on the open road when being driven with spirit that this car will ultimately be judged, because bar-stool bragging rights aside, it needs to deliver on the asphalt.

Although I enjoy the heavy-hitting of the turbocharged 911s, there are two crucial areas where I feel let down. Firstly, the noise: all that extra pipework takes the hard edge of the exhaust note and no amount of whistle and flutter can

compensate for the bark of a normally aspirated flat-six at full chat. And secondly, the throttle response. The latest Variable Geometry Turbos and Motronic units are very clever and mean that there is little discernible lag as boost builds. But the difference here is between little and none. The GT3 has always had perfect, linear response to any input from your right foot.

Those two traits have been taken to another level again in this car. The sound, as you might expect, is glorious. From a throaty burble at tickover it builds into a rich, mechanical roar as

accelerator meets bulkhead, overlaid with a hard-edged induction. But it is as the tacho needle sweeps into the final section of the clock that it really struts its stuff, bellowing its way to a fabulous, mechanical finale. It sounds, one might imagine, like Brian Blessed being fed into a wood-chipper: loud, and just a bit frightening.

It's the way the GT3 responds to throttle inputs that makes this car such a driver's delight. The nose feels light but direct – there's no vagueness through the lucid, informative steering, just constant feedback and a



Cargraphic has left the GT3's interior alone. Not that there is much room for improvement anyway!

willingness to go where you point it.

It sweeps into turns with a GT3's precision and stability and cornering attitude can be tweaked to suit your mood. On unfamiliar roads, the best option is to settle the car into slight understeer – although it is difficult to unstick either end – but if you know your corner more intimately it is happy to slide.

And the precision of the throttle and the linearity of delivery from the engine means you know exactly where you are and exactly what is required. The mere suggestion of movement





The GT3 still remains a benchmark driving experience. And attempting to improve on something approaching perfection is always a risk

from your throttle foot is answered with exactly the right amount of power. There's no swell or dip in the delivery as you get with a Turbo, just rapid, rabid response whenever you need it.

In general, though, those massive 315-section boots just dig in on the warm, dry, roads and generate terrific levels of mechanical grip which fire you out on to the next straight like a bullet from a gun.

The GT3's top end has always been frenetic and trying to discern the extra performance from this car isn't always easy as you head north of 8000rpm on bumpy and challenging roads. But there is a brawny, torquey feel to the car that was quite surprising. It responds savagely from almost any revs and pulls cleanly in every gear.

The standard brakes are deemed good enough for the job and there's no argument from me. Strong, progressive, fade-free... the full list of braking clichés are absolutely applicable here. 'Nobody does it better' still holds water on this evidence.

With the possible proviso that my lardy frame and knackered spine no longer get on very well with low-slung and hip-hugging bucket seats, the GT3 still remains a benchmark driving experience. And attempting to improve on something approaching perfection is always a risk. But Cargraphic's take is bang on: it makes an already fabulous engine that little bit stronger and that little bit rortier. It adds practicality in the form of the Airlift system and individuality in the shape of those IS-One alloys. All-round, it's a bit of a winner ○

