



USED CAR MODEL GUIDES

Porsche 928 GTS

(1992- 1995)

ONE MILLION YEARS GT

BY ANDY ENRIGHT

Models Covered: 928 5.4V8 3dr

In 1938 Hendrick Goosen, whilst fishing off the coast of Madagascar, hooked a coelacanth, a 'living fossil' of a fish that was supposed to have become extinct 400 million years ago. You can experience a similar feeling by test-driving a used Porsche 928 GTS, a true dinosaur amongst performance cars. Unlike a coelacanth, a used 928 is fitted with a 5.4-litre engine, generates 340bhp and will still look good in twenty years time. In common with its fishy forebear though, it has benefited from years of development whilst being largely ignored by Madagascan fishermen. Which means that tracking down a good used example is easier for the likes of us. Here's how.



HISTORY

In May 1992, the Grand Touring class was taking a bit of a hammering. The overblown BMW 850 was about as welcome as a bailiff's visit, the Jaguar XJR-S was struggling in its death throes, as was Mercedes' venerable SEC model. Porsche, having campaigned with the 928 since 1980 looked at the culture of the caring, sharing nineties, pondered the inexorable rise of fuel prices and promptly launched the 928 GTS, a car with more of everything.

More power, up from 5.0-litres to 5.4-litres, more grip, more attitude, more speed, but understanding that less could be more, it was also granted less relevance. The market realised the 928 was on its last legs and promptly went out and bought 911s instead. Porsche continued offering this 340bhp behemoth for three more years, fitting a driver's airbag in 1993, before finally admitting defeat and axing the 928 series in January 1995. At the time few mourned its passing, but history may yet be kind to the 928.

As successive generations of Porsche 911 get more civilised, more powerful and more refined, it's not difficult to sit behind the wheel of a 2001 model year 911 Turbo and imagine that the driving experience isn't that far removed from where Porsche were going with the 928. Park a 1992 911 and a similar vintage 928 GTS next to one another and the 911, with its upright windscreen and Beetle-esque fascia looks like a museum piece, whilst the 928 still looks fresh. With prices on the crest of a slump, buying a used 928 GTS might be a canny way of getting a big portion of Porsche for Mazda money.

WHAT YOU GET

The V8 engine is almost worth the upfront payment on its own, but what do you get thrown in with it? The body shape is undoubtedly the best looking of all the 928 variants which is perhaps surprising, as when most cars get older they become tarted up in the most questionable manner. The last of the Jaguar XJR-S models are a case in point, facelifted until their sump plugs sit on the grille. The GTS looks considerably sportier than any other 928, with a shape that's all power bulges, welts and aggression, with just the right amount of cool Porsche branding. Not too eighties, in other words.

The 17-inch five-spoke alloy wheels are shod with enormous 40-series Bridgestone tyres that appear to stand proud of the wheelarches, giving the GTS a cartoon character attitude. The sporting intent is reinforced by the fact that a manual gearbox was a standard fit, with automatic an optional extra. Inside, it's a mixed story. There are some genuinely nice touches, like the way the instrument binnacle moves with the steering wheel when you adjust it up and down, but do make sure you avoid some of the more lurid colour schemes. Best to opt for classic black leather and carpeting. Space is good up front, and the dash design doesn't betray the car's antediluvian origins too badly. If you want to get in the rear, you'll probably need legs that are less than two inches in diameter, else you'll need to sit sideways. And remember to duck when the tailgate closes, else you could find yourself wearing the rear screen as a hat, which as the Audi TT has shown us, is very This Year.

WHAT YOU PAY

When Porsche 911 owners trot out the old clichés about how, in the long term, a 911 is a relatively cheap car to run, 928 owners tend to go rather quiet. The GTS is an expensive car to run, but no more than any premium-priced GT car. To gain entry to this exclusive club, you won't need to be nominated or seconded, you'll just need around £12,000 and a keen eye. This should net you a 1993 K-registered GTS, still a few thousand less than an equivalent year 911 which would still be 90bhp shy of the power of the big 928.



A 1994 L-plated example is worth around £13,000, whilst top book price for a 928 GTS will be around £15,000, for which you should be able to land one of the last 1995 M-registered cars. Insurance is Group 20, although given the 928's more mature driver profile, premiums tend to be 'loaded' less punitively than for sporty 911 variants.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

First and foremost, bear in mind that if/when things do go pop, you could well be facing a bill equivalent to the GDP of Burundi. 928s are not cheap to run, so a careful check of your intended purchase is a must. If it's being offered with a warranty, talk through the terms and conditions, finding out exactly what is and isn't covered. Check the condition of the exhaust system, make sure that the cam belts have been changed every 65,000 miles and gauge the alignment of the suspension by the relative tyre wear. Inspect carefully for accident damage, bearing in mind the motor trader's maxim 'See overspray, Walk away.' The engine should burble at idle, but should be loud with a slight thrashiness when worked hard, courtesy of the 32 valves in the cylinder head.

The gears should engage cleanly with plenty of bite in the clutch. Check that the automatics kick down properly in all gears and that they don't fire too much smoke out the back under hard use. Interiors should be in good condition, as the materials are hardwearing. Even high-mileage 928s should only show a slight polishing on the steering wheel and gear knob, although the leather seats can crack. Aftermarket 'hide food' treatments work wonders on 928 leather, though it's probably best to avoid the inexplicably popular pale grey interiors.

There are a number of big value parts that can go wrong on a 928, so the best advice if you're paying this sort of money is to have the car professionally inspected and invest in an HPI check. This may seem like additional upfront expense, especially if you plan to see a few cars, but invariably works out as a wise use of your cash. A full Porsche main dealer/specialist service history is a minimum basic requirement.

REPLACEMENT PARTS

(Estimated prices, based on a 1995 928GTS) Take your wallet out, put it on your coffee table, take a short run up and give it a firm thrashing with a blunt implement. With 928 ownership it had better get accustomed to large and regular leatherings. In all seriousness, spares prices for the big Porsche are a good deal more reasonable than many of its similarly priced competitors. It's just that taken in isolation they do look a bit fearsome. A clutch kit is £500, while front brake pads are around £60 with rears weighing in at about £50. A new alternator is around £450, while a new headlamp is in the region of £170. A new exhaust muffler and silencers is around £1200, whilst a starter motor is a fairly reasonable £290.

ON THE ROAD

The 928 has a reputation as a muscular, if slightly lazy, cruiser capable of swatting entire continents like irksome flies. The GTS is a slightly different proposition, preferring a Gatling gun to a fly swat. As soon as you turn the key and fire up the engine, you realise that this experience is going to be rawer and more urgent than you at first expected. The engine throbs like a classic American V8, not like the more modern flat-plane crank equipped units which feel like two four cylinder units stuck together. Blip the throttle and you feel the torque reaction rock the car slightly on its springs, a more insistent induction noise taking over.

Drop the car into first gear and you'll notice a gearchange that feels quite languid before unexpectedly clunking into gear. The lever hums gently, the linkage transmitting good vibrations from the five-speed transaxle mounted between the back wheels and the steering feels slick, oily but at the same time rich in feedback. The ride is another surprise, being a good deal suppler than the liquorice strip tyres would lead you to believe.

That 340bhp should catapult the 928 GTS down the road with a purpose shouldn't come as a revelation. In any gear at any time the car never feels anything less than pumped up and looking for trouble, the only shock being that your 15mpg is consumed in unleaded petrol rather than nandrolone. The anti-lock braking system conforms to the normal Porsche superlatives, as does the handling. Again, the 928 has the capacity to catch you relying on reputations past. The GTS is a much more capable weapon than you'd at first believe, its bulbous dimensions shrinking round the driver and marking its capability as a serious driving tool. This is one 928 that's not a respite for ex-911 pilots on the slippery slope to pipe and slippersville.

OVERALL

The 928 GTS is a magnificent used car if you make yourself explicitly aware of the costs of ownership beforehand. Whilst £25,000 may seem like reasonable money to pay for a new Saab, a used Porsche 928 GTS is a car which once retailed at over £70,000 with concomitant running costs. Just because it's a few years down the road doesn't make tyres or exhausts any cheaper – quite the opposite in fact. What you are buying into is a marque that offers an uncanny understanding of what makes a proper drivers car. In 1992 Porsche was emerging from a period when it could sell anything with the Weissach crest



CAR BUYING ADVICE



on it into a decade where it had to justify every last pfennig put into the cars. As such, you can tell the 928 GTS comes from an era when Porsche was really trying. Find a decent one and you'll wonder why they ever gave up on it.