

Porsche 911SC vs Ferrari 308GTS

Beyond compare? We don't think so.

(by John Clucas)



Put a Porsche 911SC next to a Ferrari 308GTS and you immediately wonder how the two can possibly be compared. They both have targa tops, two doors and four wheels, but that's where the similarities seem to end. Drive them both, explore a bit deeper and the reasons for our comparison become much clearer.

When the targa-roofed 911SC was introduced to the Porsche 911 range in 1973 it was the factory's first new cabriolet for a decade. It was a spartan machine and featured a normally aspirated 2.7 litre engine.

By 1982, when our test car was produced, the model had been developed to produce a healthy 200+hp from a fuel-injected, 3.0 litre, rear mounted engine. It offered fast, reliable motoring in luxury.

The qualities of the Porsche 911SC were developed over time, but the same cannot be said for the Ferrari 308GTS.

In 1973 Ferrari terminated production of its V6, two-seat, Pininfarina designed 246 Dino and launched a 2+2 model to compete directly against the extremely successful and popular Porsche 911. The new Ferrari was the 308GT4; it was designed by Bertone and it featured a new 3.0 litre mid-engined V8. It certainly provided competition for the 911 but, after the curvaceous Dino, the styling of the 308GT4 was not so well received.

Ferrari soon had Pininfarina back at the drawing board, designing another new car one based more around the concept of the two-seat Dino. The result was the 308GTB (B for Berlinetta) and the open version, the 308GTS (S for Spider). The public loved them, not just for their looks, but for their performance as well.



The 1982 Porsche 911SC.

The similarities between the 911SC and 308GTS are becoming clearer: 3.0 litres and engines towards the rear, but they had even more in common: five-speed transmissions, four-wheel disc brakes, 0-100 kph in about 7 seconds and both available from the showroom between 1978 and 1982. Their makers were competing head to head in the affluent sports car lovers' market, so a comparison of the cars can certainly be justified.

You need to walk around the Ferrari to appreciate quite how low it is just up to the belly button of a six-footer. So you don't really climb "into" the car; it's more like climbing "down into" the car. And you don't really sit "in" the driver's seat; its firmness and degree of side support give a feeling better described as "encapsulation". It's a seat for someone who will be concentrating more on the drive than the comfort of the conveyance.

Out of the Ferrari and into the Porsche.

The Porsche seat is a good 10 cm further off the ground, offering much easier egress for the taller or more rotund driver.

Settling into the Porsche for the first time, two features leap out at you: the softness of the cushioning and how low you feel relative to the window sills and dashboard. After the Ferrari, where the doors and dashboard are well below shoulder level, the 911 offers the sensation of sitting half buried in a bunker.

These first impressions are quickly forgotten when the drive starts.

THE PORSCHE DRIVE

Fire up the Porsche and two distinctly different sounds emanate from behind: a lumpy rumbling roar, balanced beautifully by a high pitched sound best described as somewhere between that of a jet engine and a huge electric motor. Whatever, it sounds like it means business.

A blip to the throttle and the needle on the big, centrally mounted tacho instantly flicks clockwise. Could it have really been that quick? Do it again, just for the fun of it.

The clutch is typical of early Porsche/VW: light at the bottom and becoming, in relative terms, quite heavy just as the clutch takes up † inducing some tentativeness on take off for a first timer. However the torque of the motor gets you mobile before you know it and instantly dispels any thoughts of stalling.





Ease the throttle down. The response is immediate and the noises from behind: encouraging.

Take second gear, squirt things a bit harder and, with the tacho needle near vertical (at 3500 rpm) the car really surges forward, delivering results well beyond those suggested by performance in the pre-3500 rev range. Smile.

Back right off; then do it again.

This time you won't want to back off. Not at all. Never. Even when you're way past the 6300 red line. The acceleration is electrifying for a 20-year old production car. Within a split second you've reached for the gear stick again.

Finally backing off and coming to your senses again, you'll be disappointed to find that, in fourth gear, the magical 3500 revs (at which the excitement begins) is already 5 kph above a legal speed limit of 100 kph. And that's only fourth gear; there's another gear to go after that. A race track beckons.

THE FERRARI DRIVE

By comparison, the Ferrari looks even faster.

Its V8 crackles to life with a spit and a splutter. Where the Porsche roars, the Ferrari howls, and the howl is complemented most satis-

fyingly by a whirring of quad cams and associated belts.

A blip of the throttle and the tacho responds instantly.

The clutch is neither light nor heavy and it's much more predictable in operation than that of the Porsche.

Take off quietly and there's no hesitation under the light throttle. Ease the pedal down a little and the car responds precisely as expected; more pedal and the car performs appropriately. Full pedal delivers the lot fiercely but progressively and perfectly smoothly, all the way to the 7700rpm redline. There's noise, but no fuss. And the engine seems just as happy at 6000rpm as it does at 2000rpm.

Back off, change down a notch or two and play around in the gears. Throttle response is totally predictable.

There's a feeling of involvement with the machine, as if you and the car are working as a team, regardless of your skills. It can only be described as a whole driving experience.

In contrast, the driver almost feels like a third party in the Porsche † a passenger witnessing the car's exceptional acceleration, but from a distance.

Accelerating is fine, but all cars have to stop some time. And both of these excel in the braking department giving the driver excellent feedback from the pedal and the confidence to accelerate even harder next time. The Ferrari has the lighter brakes.

AROUND TOWN

While the 911SC and 308GTS were both designed to provide good performance at high speed, they are both surprisingly usable as everyday transport. The 911SC is certainly the more comfortable and practical, but don't write the Ferrari off.

With engines at the rear in both cars and relatively light front ends, power steering was not specified by either car's designer. That's fine for highway driving, but by today's standards, where almost every car's steering is power assisted, both the Porsche and Ferrari take a bit of work at low speeds. Fortunately both cars are fitted with thick, padded steering wheels to make the job of parking a bit easier.

In roundabouts and chicanes the Porsche rolls a little like the family saloon. The steering is still precise, but the car is hardly nimble.

The Ferrari feels more precise and gives the driver better feedback



Driver's view in the 308GTS.

from the road, although that may be attributable to the wheel/tyre combination fitted to this one.

Up the tempo to freeway speed and you realise how far suspension technology has advanced in twenty years. A twitch of the wheel at 100 kph on either car encourages the body to roll measurably before there is much response from the suspension. Despite this feature, the Ferrari's low centre of gravity still makes it feel flat on the road.

Speed humps were always going to be a good test.

For the practical Porsche, humps are not an issue. Going up the hump will certainly wake up an inattentive driver, but the car squats down nicely on the exit, ready for a squirt to the next hump.

Sitting much closer to the road in the Ferrari, a speed hump looks much more daunting, especially when thoughts turn to the low clearance of the front spoiler. Despite our apprehension, the Ferrari managed the humps quite well in second gear without any crunches.

Both cars handle rough roads and rail crossings without fuss or rattles, although the softer ride offered by the Porsche is preferred on these surfaces.

Thanks to a huge rear window and long side windows, all round visibility in the 911SC is excellent, allowing for easy lane changes. Not

so the 308, where, despite view-louvers being provided in the B-pillars, the buttresses running rearwards from the back window make



Driver's view in the 911SC.

the pillar seem about a metre long.

It's not easy reversing the Ferrari either. The view out the back window is minimal and if you're expecting to put your head out the side window, forget it. Wide sills place the driver's seat a long way from the window and the bucket seats are quite deep. A contortionist might manage it, but he'll still crack his head on the edge of the roof above the window. Good mirrors are a must.

Take off their targa tops and both cars become even more delightful to drive. Both lids come off in sec-

onds. The Ferrari's lid stows neatly behind the seats. In the Porsche, to maintain access to the rear seats, the roof must be stowed in the boot. To enable it to fit in the boot it has been designed to fold up, so it contains frames and mechanisms that make it considerably heavier than the 308's equivalent.

The driving position is similar in both cars. Steering wheel and pedals are offset left of centre, in typically European style and the drivers' seats go back well beyond the requirements of a six-footer. Headroom in the Ferrari is adequate, but the Porsche has more.

On first impressions the dashboard of the Ferrari is much neater a clump of white on black instruments showing the driver everything through a three-spoke steer-

ing wheel. A useful, oil temperature gauge and a clock are included lower down, to the right, almost as an afterthought. An assortment of switches is located on a console between the seats.

On the Porsche dash, the big, central tacho is the main feature. The remainder of the instruments (white-on-black with very orange needles) and switches are spread, almost randomly in front, from left to right. The steering wheel inconveniently obscures both the speedo above 90 kph and the temperature gauge. Two air conditioning knobs

sit on a seemingly lonely console ahead of the gear stick.

Despite the driver having plenty of leg room in both these cars, taller people will find themselves less comfortable as a passenger. Neither car offers leg stretchability on the left hand side, and the low (but padded) roof line in the Ferrari feels a bit too close to the left side of a passenger's skull.

The 911SC's claim of being a 2+2 only holds true if the extra passengers are under five years. Nevertheless it is interior storage space that is totally lacking in the two-seat Ferrari.

As for boot storage, the Ferrari accommodates two large sets of golf clubs across the rear, while the Porsche fits a decent suitcase and a few stuffable bags at the front, as long as the roof isn't in there too.

If you're fortunate enough to be trying to choose between the Porsche and the Ferrari, then luggage capacity is unlikely to be a major consideration. For some people in this market, it's all about image. For most people, it's all about driving pleasure. And for everyone its all about getting the best you can for what you can afford. [If you can afford better you'll be looking beyond these models.]

In terms of driving pleasure, if you're above 195cm or 120kg the Ferrari won't provide much pleasure, especially on lengthy drives, and we'd recommend the Porsche. The same recommendation applies if you're planning long trips on rough roads.



RUNNING COSTS

When affordability is being considered, maintenance costs must also be looked at, especially when a car is 20+ years old.

At Black Stallion Motors, they work on nothing but Porsche and Ferrari, so they have a good handle on the maintenance costs of each marque. According to the company's master Porsche technician, Spencer Harrison, each model Porsche has its own idiosyncrasies.

"All the 911 models are different and you need quite a lot of experience to be proficient at working across all the models," Harrison said. "However, interchangeability of components between the various models is quite good, so parts are usually available somewhere, even

for the older models," he said.

Tim Embleton heads up the Ferrari division of Black Stallion Motors. He confirmed the commonly held view that, in relative terms, Ferraris are expensive to maintain.

"The 308 has a fantastic engine and it's quite strong," Embleton said, "but you need to keep its maintenance up, to be sure nothing goes seriously wrong.

"Parts aren't cheap and you need a lot of special tools when you're working on them, so they work out more expensive to maintain than a 911, but it's well worth it I reckon," Embleton said.

If the budget won't stretch to the Ferrari, then take the Porsche anyway it certainly won't disappoint.

However, if your physique fits the bill, your bank account has the readies and you're prepared for the maintenance bills, then the Ferrari will really delight.

Test cars provided by Black Stallion Motors.

The Relative Specs

	Ferrari 308GTS	Porsche 911 SC
Year	1982	1982
Engine capacity	2927cc	2994cc
Engine	V8	Flat 6
Claimed power	255 bhp	204 bhp
Aspiration	Weber carburetors x 4	Bosch injection
Transmission	5 speed	5 speed
0 to 100 kph	7.0secs	7.1secs
Top speed	245 kph	230 kph
Brakes	4 wheel discs	4 wheel discs
Weight	1280kg	1200kg
Chassis	Tubular steel frame	Monocoque
Suspension	Independent all round, wishbones, coils, anti-roll bars	Independent all round, McPherson struts and torsion bars
Steering	Rack & pinion	Rack & pinion
Original tyres	205/70-14	Front: 185/70-15 Rear: 215/60-15
Test car tyres	Front: 205/50-17 Rear: 225/45-17	Front: 205/55-16 Rear: 225/50-16
Seating	2	2+2
Air con	Yes	Yes
Power windows	Yes	Yes
Inertia reel belts	Yes	Yes

Car values*

Pristine condition, having traveled 5000km since a total restoration	\$95,000	\$57,500
A very presentable example you could confidently drive Melbourne — Cairns tomorrow	\$80,000	\$37,500
Mechanically OK, but brakes due for overhaul, attention needed to interior trim and needs a repaint	\$60,000	\$30,000

*Approximate car values provided by Black Stallion Motors.

Maintenance costs*

Minor service	\$980	\$350
Major service	\$3,000	\$1,000
Complete brake overhaul	\$5,000	\$1,800
Clutch replacement	\$2,300	\$1,800
Average engine rebuild	\$25,000	\$9,000
Standard tyres	\$400ea	\$400ea

*Approximate maintenance costs provided by Black Stallion Motors.