

# Boxster on boost

The Boxster is the near perfect roadster lacking only in ultimate horsepower. Not any more, however. If you want to add an extra 100+bhp fast, then Parr's ready to go turbo conversion is for you. It certainly was for *g11&PW* reader, David King

Words: Adam Towler Photography: Antony Fraser



Quite possibly the most amusing thing about the Boxster S you see on these pages is not the strident in-gear performance, nor the stunning exhaust note it produces – more on both in a little bit – but the fact that it is virtually impossible to tell that it is anything other than a standard Boxster S from looking at it. As such, anyone who decides to try and out-accelerate this car had better have a large surfeit of performance over the regular Boxster S on tap otherwise they are going to look very foolish indeed. This is a mid-engined Porsche with 911-levels of bite.

The story of this car goes back to another Porsche we featured in this magazine last year. Keen readers may remember the very orange Cayman S that had been fitted with a turbo conversion by Parr Motorsport down in Crawley, Sussex. With around 500bhp on tap, and a host of other modifications including a limited slip differential, small bodywork additions and additional cooling, this particular Cayman blew us away with its performance and driving characteristics on the road.

One man who saw that car was David King. He had been the owner of a 996 Turbo with the X50 power upgrade, a car that he loved very much, but found his head turned by the thought of owning an Aston Martin. As great as the X50 was, it seemed almost too fast to actually enjoy on the public road – without the prospect of getting into serious trouble if you did – and the Aston looked enticing. This was all going on during the recent crash at the beginning of the credit crunch,

and unable to get a decent trade-in deal on his 996 from the Aston Martin dealer, he sold his Porsche privately and then took advantage of a full day test drive in the Aston expecting to fall in love. Except he didn't: he hated it, but it was too late as the Turbo had departed and thus he found himself with an empty garage.

If there was anything positive to take out of this situation it was probably that he hadn't saddled himself with a car he didn't like, and also that it meant time for a fresh perspective on finding a car in which you could use more of its performance on the public road. Soon after, a particularly smart, low mileage Boxster S caught his eye, a car that seemed to fit the bill of driver precision and usable performance perfectly. Except what do you do when you're used to 450bhp at your disposal? In comparison, the Boxster's performance was in danger of looking a bit toothless, especially through the mid-range. Enter Parr's turbo conversion, and the quest for a Boxster that, while less potent than the hard-charging Cayman Turbo, offered a serious but balanced performance increase.

David's '55' plate Boxster S is a particularly nice example of the breed. The car's low mileage attracted him – just 8,500 miles on the clock in five years – as did the subtle but high specification, including the unusual pale grey hood fabric. The condition of the car was excellent, clearly in line with the mileage and the occasional use the car had been subjected to. As an early 987 Boxster S this car has the 3.2-litre engine with 276bhp at 6,200rpm and 236lb ft between 4,700-

6,000rpm. As those numbers betray, this is an engine that majors on power rather than low down grunt, and while it's happy to sing to the limiter all day long, at low revs it lacks energy. You could argue that simply means you have to drive it in a classic sports car manner, working the gears to maintain the engine revs in the power band and letting the top end power do the talking, and indeed, when you do so it's a lot of fun.

Where it can't hope to compete equally with rivals that feature larger displacement engines is out of tighter corners; a sudden overtake, or in deploying effortless performance without the driver having to try too hard. As much as outright power, that's where this particular Boxster aims to redress the balance.

As with the Cayman Turbo, Parr source the turbo conversion from the USA before making some adjustments to their own specifications. The kit

comprises of the turbocharger; a water to air intercooler; the exhaust system (including cats and downpipe); a new intake plenum and air intake including filter; larger fuel injectors and different spark plugs and an installation kit. For this you're looking at around £8,000 plus VAT. In addition, optional extras are the third radiator (which this car has), a limited slip differential and what are referred to as 'upgraded cooling ducts' fitted in the front PU.

Owners can then choose to fit the kit themselves, if they feel confident enough in their own mechanical abilities, but if they don't then Parr will do it for you, for which you'll be looking at around 30 hours of labour costs on top of the price of the kit.

What you get for your money is a nice round power increase of 100bhp – thereby taking peak power to 376bhp at 7,200rpm (1,000rpm higher) and a far more

*Bolting a turbo onto the already agile and sure footed Boxster makes for an entirely different driving experience. Where it was previously all about revs and top end power, the turbo conversion equals a much wider power band*

substantial 322lb ft peaking at 5,700rpm. This, you may remember, is some way short of the 480bhp offered by the Parr Cayman Turbo, but then David was after a more rounded conversion to suit the roadster ethos of the Boxster.

A glance at the new power and torque graphs tells you a lot. Like that Cayman Turbo (but even more so) this is a low-pressure turbo installation and runs at a peak of only around 4psi. Both graphs are therefore very linear, so there's no meaty plateau of torque that you might get with, say, a g11 Turbo from the factory. With the engine internals unchanged, this is how Parr seeks to ensure that the Boxster's flat six won't blow itself to pieces. In short, it simply isn't run at the levels of stress that would cause the internals to buckle under those kinds of pressures.

set off in search of some mobile phone signal and climbed up onto a hill overlooking the road where we were working. I must have been about 100 metres away by this point, but the sound of this Boxster was loud and rich in tone: if you'd been facing the other way you'd have guessed that some exotic old Porsche race car was flying past behind you. It's a deep sound, far more so than you'd normally associate with a Boxster, and when the car is being worked hard there's the slight chirrup of the excess boost between gears.

Thankfully, you're not assaulted by this sound all of the time you drive the car, as on light throttle openings it dies away, but even from the moment you fire up the engine you're aware of its potency from inside the cabin. The Cayman Turbo sounded fabulous too, but as ever, a convertible allows you to hear so much more of

**“This car has a very different character. You don't need to concentrate so hard on in gear choice”**

Of course, as with any modified car, this is a step into the relative unknown. And on top of that, the Boxster's water-cooled engine, like any of the new-era Porsche powerplants, hasn't exactly earned itself a reputation for trouble free motoring. In our position as testers reviewing the car on one day, it would be impossible to say what the long-term effects on the engine will be of running it at this higher output. Parr will point to a number of cars in the USA that have had this kit fitted and that have subsequently be driven for relatively high mileages without a problem. These can be factored into the reasoning if wished, but in the end the risk boils down to the individual. And in any case, although I was going to add that such a conversion kit as this can't be expected to offer the long term reliability of a factory Porsche engine – one that has to undergo all the endless pre-production testing that entails – the considerable number of owners who've had problems with their own standard cars may not view this as something to get too precious about...

Predictably, the first thing you notice with this car is the noise. Quite simply, it makes one of the very best noises I've heard from the tail pipes of a Porsche. At one point during the shoot, David drove his car backwards and forward for the photographer so he could capture a panning shot. Having an idle moment I

the noise.

Perhaps the beauty of this conversion is that it keeps all the manners we've come to know and love about the Boxster. In normal driving there doesn't seem to be much difference in how this car drives, and that's a compliment. Just like the exterior, if you didn't know you'd simply think that it was running a fruitier exhaust system. But there's no doubt whatsoever once you've planted your right foot at about 3,000rpm: in the standard car this wouldn't really achieve that much apart from an increased amount of noise from over your shoulder, but in this Boxster you're suddenly pushed forward with an invisible and effortless energy that makes any progress so relaxed. Keep your foot in and you can feel the power steadily increasing – there's no surge of power, rather the revs build all the way to the cut out north of 7,000rpm and you just seem to go faster and faster.

As such, this car has a very different character to the standard machine. You no longer need to concentrate so hard on gear choice when you're trying to cover ground really quickly, and in most cases, you can afford to be at least a gear higher for any given situation. This means that a) when you just want to amble along you can leave it in the same gear for an overtake or such like, and b), when you're really going

*Turbo kit is pure bolt on with no internal modifications needed. Expect an extra 100bhp taking the power of this particular Boxster up to 376bhp*





A turbo normally acts as a silencer, but our man Towler reckons that this conversion has given the Boxster's exhaust note a new edge

for it you have more options. In fact, even though this engine still revs like the standard car, some people might miss revving the nuts off it to access the performance in much the same way that Honda's small VTEC engines have their die-hard fans that wouldn't want it any other way. It's all a matter of taste.

There is one other benefit to this upgrade, and that's what it does to the Boxster's handling repertoire.

Those that know the Boxster well will appreciate that its core strengths are the balance of its chassis, the accuracy and faithfulness of its steering and its ability to string corners together in a fluid yet entertaining fashion. But it would also be fair to say that it's an efficient sort of car, and not one given to lurid powerslides and other such rowdy entertainment. That's partly due to the exceptional grip of the chassis, but also the power-biased nature of the engine and the characteristics of the mid-engined layout. On a circuit the picture can be different, but on the road it's unusual to see a Boxster moving around much.

However, having 322lb ft of torque under your big toe changes matters a great deal. Now when you turn into the corner you have more options: on a typical second gear curve, if your entry speed is fairly high and you've loaded the chassis up there's now the delicious sensation of the car going neutral as you apply the power at the apex, and then the tail starting to move if you keep your foot in. David's car doesn't have the

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

### PORSCHE BOXSTER TURBO

ENGINE:	3200cc, flat-six
POWER:	376bhp at 7200rpm
TORQUE:	322lbs/ft @ 5700rpm
TRANSMISSION:	Six-speed manual
TOP SPEED:	170+mph
0-62MPH:	4.5 secs
CONVERSION PRICE:	£8000

limited slip differential option to exploit this to the full, but so fitted out this would be another element to driving one of these cars. It's great fun, and the Boxster's balance and fabulous steering allow you to really feel what's going on at the road surface. And this was in the dry remember, in the wet it could get quite hairy indeed, although there is the safety net of PSM if things get too out of hand.

In the end, unless you're buying a Boxster that's already been converted, the turbo option comes down to numbers. David paid what he regarded to be a keen price for his car, and then spent a significant sum creating the car you see here. Yes, he could have bought something else with the total amount, but he wanted a Boxster, just one that went not only quite a bit quicker than standard, but that also offered him effortless roof-down performance. From sampling this car, and experiencing first-hand the grin it puts on your face, it looks as though he's succeeded. **PW**

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