

FASTER CAYMANS

Porsche's focussed mid-engined Cayman lends itself to the art of modifying more than the 911. We gather a turbo, two big capacity conversions and a tweaked 3.4-litre car for a tuned showdown

Words: Adam Towler Photography: Antony Fraser



MODIFIED CAYMAN GROUP TEST



This year we finally got our go-faster Cayman from the factory. Just as this generation of the Cayman is coming to the end of its life, Porsche unveiled the Cayman R, and like seemingly everything associated with this coupe it was controversial.

Just why should that be with this car? Everything, from its styling, to its market positioning, its performance and its pricing, the Cayman has always generated heated opinion and debate. With the R it was whether a sacred badge from Porsche's distant past was really appropriate for a car with only a modest power hike and a minor weight loss. Either way, in due course we found out that the R was a good deal more than the sum of its parts, and one of the most

rewarding cars in the Porsche range, let alone sports cars on sale today.

Still, there is a great deal more you can do to make a Cayman go faster, so we've assembled a group here to show some of the possibilities of what can be done. Two of these cars we've featured before, the Autofarm 3.7 'RS' and the Parr Motorsport Cayman Turbo, while we've added into the mix a Mg7 3.8 Carrera S-engined Cayman and a Gen 1 Cayman S with a host of add-on modifications. We nearly managed to get a supercharged car along for the day, in which case we'd have had one of every kind of performance enhancer possible: engine enlargement, turbocharger, engine-swap and supercharger! Nevertheless, the variety on offer is intriguing all the same.



Back in black. Mean and moody Autofarm modded Cayman uses a big capacity 3.7-litre flat six. Body features lots of carbon fibre panels. Lightweight wheels are from Rays

AUTOFARM CAYMAN 3.7 'RS'

First up is Autofarm's Cayman 3.7 'RS', a car we first reviewed back in March 2009. At the time it was certainly the first seriously modified Cayman I'd driven, and I still remember the excitement I felt before the drive, wondering what the mid-engined coupe would feel like with a good dose more power and less weight to haul around.

The heart of the Autofarm car is one of their Silsleeve Mg6/Mg7 engine conversions, taking the opportunity at the same time to increase the bore size to 100mm, and hence the rise in overall capacity from 3.4 to 3.7-litres. The Silsleeve route involves replacing the standard liners with Nikasil coated ones, so in theory one of the major weaknesses of this engine has been removed.

In addition, this engine benefits from Schrick camshafts, new headers and 200 cell primary cats for the exhaust system, plus Milltek secondary cats and back box. There's also a lighter flywheel, stronger clutch, carbon fibre airbox and an ECU remap, as you'd expect, with the result being 367bhp and 295lb ft of torque – useful gains, particularly when you consider that this car probably weighs somewhere in the region of 1,300kg.

The weight loss over standard – approx some 50kg – is due to a carbon fibre bonnet and rear hatch, plus a Lexan rear window. Inside there's a pair of Recaro bucket seats and additional information on what the car is doing courtesy of a readout down at the base of the centre console and an extra dial pack attached to the A pillar.

The suspension features H&R lowering springs that drop it 35mm nearer the ground, and some anti-roll bars from the same concern, but the PASM Porsche

dampers are retained. A Quaife LSD helps distribute the extra power accurately, while Brembo four-pot brakes at the front and GT3-spec items at the rear bring this little track warrior to a stop convincingly.

The Volk alloy wheels – which attracted so much controversy before – have lost their gold finish for a more menacing black, while there's now a carbon fibre extension to the rear wing. In fact, there's all sorts of little details on the car that have been added since the last time we drove it, proof that this has been a real labour of love project for the owner over the past three years and 25,000 miles.

It's the Autofarm car that I drive to Bruntingthorpe for the test, and it's as gutsy as I remember it. You have to get the motor spinning over 5,000rpm to really feel the meat of the powerband, but that's not to say it's gutless below that figure, just that it thrives on being revved hard. What is odd is that the suspension, in particular the ride quality, seems much better resolved than before, despite Autofarm assuring us that it retains the PASM dampers. Lumpy B roads are no longer the head-nodding challenge I remember them, and I'm therefore at a loss to explain why there's the change: as the car is now, and with the benefit of 'only' 18" rims, it has a really nice pliancy. Not only that, but the suspension geometry set up makes this car quite a bit keener to turn into a corner, while keeping all the friendly attributes of the standard Cayman.

I really enjoy my drive up in the black car – I can see why the owner has had a blast with this car in recent years, because it's loud and intense when you want it to be, but it also retains much of the Cayman's inherent usability. Still, the moment I catch sight of the Parr car I know that, in a straight line at least, the 3.7 is going to have to give second best.



MODIFIED CAYMAN GROUP TEST

PARR TURBO CAYMAN

We covered the Turbo Cayman back in 2009. Crawley-based Parr Motorsport also offer this kit for the Boxster as well which we've since reviewed, and although this particular Cayman is on its second owner both cars are still healthy.

It's interesting to listen to the thoughts of its current owner, who has owned a series of supercars and traded out of a Lamborghini Gallardo to buy the Cayman Turbo. That's quite a move, and a tall order for a modified £40,000 car to live up to, but it sounds as if the Cayman more than holds its own. The Lambo was black with a manual 'box too, so our owner clearly has

turbocharger fed from a water-to-air intercooler, while there's also larger fuel injectors, a new intake plenum, air filter, and airbox plus modifications to the inlet manifold. There's also the ubiquitous Quaife LSD, lowered suspension on progressive-rate Cargraphic springs, and larger Cargraphic brakes (Parr is the UK importer for the German tuning house).

Actually, there's a lot more detail changes to this car than that, but we haven't got the six pages to lay it bare as we had back in 2009. Suffice to say, the key event with this car happens at 3,000rpm: that's the point when all of those 500 horses begin to wake up and the noise builds to a crescendo. The Parr car is

“The Parr Turbo car is easily the fastest thing here today, emitting a brutal bark”

fine taste. But he rates the Cayman precisely because it feels raw, fast and, although he's struggling to put a word to it... a bit naughty. You see, when you take a car that's been designed to handle 300bhp, and then give it the best part of 500bhp, it's going to feel a little bit stretched. The Parr car isn't an unruly beast, but it has more than enough squirt to get you into plenty of trouble, and compared to the four-wheel drive stability of the Lambo, I can see what our owner means when he says it sometimes feels 'nervous' in the corners.

Parr's work on the Cayman doesn't touch any of the engine's internals, which given the perhaps shady reputation of this engine for long term reliability might seem surprising or worrying in equal measure. Nevertheless, the secret lies in the low boost the conversion runs – just 0.34 Bar – from a single

easily the fastest thing here today, and it emits a brutal bark while going about its business. In fact, so loud is it that the car is thrown off Bruntingthorpe airfield for being too noisy...

With 370lb ft at 4,500rpm the Parr Cayman has a completely different character to that of a 911 Turbo. It has nothing like the torque, instead thriving on revs – in fact it has a similar delivery to the standard car except there's more power just about everywhere.

Parr's suspension geometry changes, like the Autofarm car, make this Cayman a lot more aggressive on turn in. It rolls less, but is the keenest of all the cars here to break traction at the rear, even without introducing much power. Just as the owner confirms, if you're near the limit it does require you to be ready with the correct steering inputs fairly quickly.



Want to know that a Cayman chassis can really handle? Well add a turbo and close on 500bhp for the answer. Actually it contains it well, only becoming loose at the limit



Alan Whittaker's track day Cayman is more stripped out and extreme than the other cars here. Engine is lightly tuned, but car features an LSD and some serious Alcon brakes, plus cage and exposed engine for extra noise!



MOTORDRIVE CAYMAN

Our next car belongs to Motordrive seats proprietor Alan Whittaker, a man involved with the Cayman community in the UK from the beginning and owner of one of the very first cars into the country. His Arctic Silver S was purchased on the 12th May 2005, and has since received a large number of modifications yet retains its lightly tuned 3.4-litre factory flat six.

In addition to a healthy list of factory options, Alan's car features a Custom Cages roll cage, a pair of his attractively trimmed bucket seats, some enormous Alcon brakes – 365mm front discs, 345mm rears – with Pagid Blue pads, a Quaife diff (that Alan was instrumental in bringing to the market for the Cayman), extended sump kit to enhance the oil pick up under high loads and a huge list of cosmetic enhancements. The engine has had the ECU remapped by the American tuner Softronic, a Milltek exhaust and cats fitted, while you can't have missed the giant GT3-style rear wing.

Perhaps it's unfair to drive the silver car having blasted around the airfield in the Autofarm and Parr Caymans, because first impressions cruelly expose the relative lack of grunt a near-standard 3.4-litre engine

has. Actually, let me rephrase: the picture is a lot more complicated than that, because Alan's car is very noisy inside the cabin – it has no sound deadening and carpet over the engine, just a transparent panel that lets you see into the bay but allows a lot more noise through – and the Bruntingthorpe circuit is very wide and fast. So the Whittaker car makes a lot of noise but you're quickly aware that it has nothing like the power of the aforementioned pair, and the comparison is perhaps a little bit unfair. Nevertheless, what it does have are the most amazing brakes; the Alcons are vastly superior to anything else here and immediately give you a huge amount of confidence. They must be brilliant on a track day, and their pedal feel is hugely reassuring.

Other than that, the car drives like a Cayman S, albeit with Eibach springs and H&R anti-roll bars reducing body roll by a significant amount. Alan recounts many a track day tale of running rings around supposedly faster machinery, and I can quite see why. As an interesting footnote, in testing a few days later it was found that the huge rear wing was having a massive effect on top speeds (around 30mph on a one mile straight!), which may have contributed to the lack of pace felt on the day of our test.



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**RAMUS CAYMAN 3.8**

The last car to take to Bruntinhorpe's wide expanses represents the engine swap route. Built by Ramus Porsche in West Bromwich, Mark Radford's car began the conversion process as a Cat C vehicle after damage underneath the car, that included scalping the sump, led to a wrecked engine.

Ramus took a 997 Carrera S engine, fitted the X51 factory upgrade that includes new air intake and cylinder heads, and placed it into the car, dropping the engine by 20mm in the process so that the taller 997 engine would fit into the available space. To do this the car required new engine and gearbox mounts, and modification to the crossmember, so it's not the straightforward swap you might imagine it to be. In this state of tune, and with a BMC air filter and an altered-to-fit Milltek exhaust with 100 cell cats, the 3.8-litre engine should be good for at least the factory X51 figure of 381hp at 7,200rpm, although this particular car still requires the mapping sorted to make the most of the modifications to the engine.

There is also a 997-style front end, with a much lower front PU and a GT3 air extractor vent, plus there's a third centre radiator and a set of H&R lowering springs.

This car is something of a sleeper. After the racket of the other three cars, the engine fires like any other Cayman, albeit with a slightly deeper note, and you'd be hard pressed to identify that there was anything out of the ordinary sitting just over your shoulder. But there is – and you quickly realise that this is a Cayman that simply goes: no need to wait for the revs to climb before the action starts, the bigger lungs on this engine ensure that you're spat forward immediately, before it revs out convincingly at the top end. I reckon it could be a bit more aggressive still, but that's probably got a lot to do with the unfinished mapping to be honest. What it does show is that the Cayman works really nicely with the 3.8-litre M97 – in fact, once you've driven it, you can't help feeling that all Caymans should be so equipped, and you start to give credence to the theory that Porsche really should have not held back with the bigger engines in the M97 range...

Of course, the elephant squeezed into the room on this occasion is the omission of a Cayman with a GT3 engine. Now that really would be something, and they do exist, but they're very rare for the good reason that it's not an easy fit. The Mezger engine takes its drive

Ramus Porsche built Cayman is a very different animal. With a 3.8-litre 997 engine fitted with the factory X51 upgrade, it sports 381bhp. The effect is very much small car, big engine, with effortless performance and power absolutely everywhere





from a different end of the block and re-engineering it to fit is a complicated and expensive process. On top of which, GT3 engines are hardly peanuts to buy either. Nevertheless, it's hard not to conclude that such a modification would be the ultimate Cayman, and if you're a fan of the VLN series on the Nürburgring and remember the Alzen and M-Speed teams' cars from a few years ago you'll probably agree. If not, get on YouTube and search them out – they're worth seeing and hearing.

So is there a winner? Well, like any test featuring tuned cars – particularly those that are a labour of love for a specific individual – they each have their own strengths and weaknesses, and the way the costs can mount up is frightening. Both the Autofarm and Parr conversions aren't cheap to undertake, with the engines alone costing well over £10,000, depending on final spec and how much of the work you do yourself.

developed car here, the result of an owner and a specialist honing a specific car for a job over a considerable period of time. There has been things tried on this car that have since been taken off, purely because it was felt they weren't working as they should or weren't required – that's the level of commitment that has been shown here. As far as a fast road/track Cayman goes it's probably the most sorted car here, and once again, while it's not been a cheap car to create, it's given its owner a lot of enjoyment along the way. Nevertheless, it seems the time has come for the owner to part company with it, so if you're interested in taking on this rapid little Porsche speak to Autofarm for further details.

That leaves the 3.8-litre car, which might just be the best everyday compromise of the lot. It would have been interesting to drive this car on the road, because from the brief laps conducted at the track it seemed

“The Parr car amazes as much today as it did two years ago with its wild edge”

The Motordrive car is a good example of what can be done without drastic changes, and its pace on the circuit shows that you don't need to squeeze big power out of the engine to have a very fast mid-engined Porsche. The specific modifications to this car do make it a bit noisy for everyday use, but then the car is very much in track day mode at present.

The Parr car amazes as much today as it did two years ago. It really is a sensationally exciting car to see, hear and drive, with a wild edge you won't find in any other Cayman. Can such an engine be reliable without any alterations to the internals? I still find it incredulous what has been achieved with this conversion, but then again, here we are two years later and the car is still going strong. It's not a cheap conversion, but then none of the major alterations in these cars are.

The Autofarm 3.7 feels like the most highly

to have the manners of a car out of the factory, which given the nature of the components kind of makes sense. Big capacity, naturally aspirated performance always appeals, and this conversion shows why. As it happens, it's also now for sale, so contact Mark if you're interested in taking it on.

Our only real regret is that we weren't able to get a Cayman R along as a comparison in this test. Although it wouldn't have had the outright power to compete in a straightline drag race, given the cost of it and the cost of these conversions it would have been very interesting to compare them. When these projects were started there was no such thing as a Cayman Gen2, let alone a Cayman R. For road driving at least, would our owners have felt the same need to modify? It's hard to say, but as the collective fleet of cars gets older, tuned Caymans such as this group are bound to become a more regular sight. **PW**

CONTACTS

Autofarm
www.autofarm.co.uk
Autofarm built the Cayman 3.7 tested here, using tried and tested Silslieve technology initially developed for the 996 M86 engine to cure cracked cylinder liners. The added bonus is an easy route to capacity increases. This highly developed car is now up for sale so contact Autofarm if you're interested

Parr Motorsport
www.parr-uk.co.uk
Crawley based Parr fitted the American TPC Racing Turbo kit to what is the fastest Cayman in our test. Thanks to the Cayman Turbo's second owner for bringing it along

Ramus Porsche
www.ramusporsche.com
As engine transplants go, fitting a 3.8-litre 997 engine is the holy grail of Cayman tuning, except for maybe a GT3 engine. It's not quite a straight swap as Ramus Porsche found out, but achievable with a bit of thought. This car is now for sale. Contact owner Mark Radford on: 07809 458445

Motordrive Seats/Cayman parts
www.motordrive.com
Motordrive's Alan Whittaker is a pioneer of Cayman modifying and tuning. Has developed LSD with Quaife and extended sump pan for track work. Also offers Milltec exhaust systems, and Alcon brake kits