

2023's BEST BUYS

GO YOUR OWN WAY

Fancy a GT4 RS without the eye-watering price tag? Porsche specialist, Parr, has developed the GT4 RX, a 991 X51-powered 981 offering 450bhp as its starting point. We head to Brands Hatch and try this custom Cayman for ourselves...

Words Steve Bennett Photography Dan Pullen



With this edition of *911 & Porsche World* being themed around 2023's best buys, what do you do if the Porsche you want to acquire just isn't available to you? Come again? Surely, Porsches are built in sufficient enough numbers for this not to be an issue? Well, yes, in high-end sports car terms, this is the pretty much the case, but there are GT models everyone gets excited about, but only the few can actually buy. Not because these cars are necessarily prohibitively expensive, but because they are rationed. To get one, you really

have to be in your local Porsche Centre's very good books. Perhaps take the Sales Director on holiday? Something like that.

What are we suggesting?! We jest, obviously, but there's no disputing there are hoops to jump through, criteria to be met, rolled up trouser legs, funny handshakes and so on. Seriously, though, what do you do if, for example, you want a 718 Cayman GT4 RS and the computer says no? Well, you could ask West Sussex-based Porsche specialist, Parr, to build one for you. This is precisely what a Parr customer did after experiencing time behind the wheel of the company's own Cayman track car and after being

given the brush-off by his local Porsche Centre when enquiring about the purchase of a GT4 RS. The result is the Cayman GT4 RX, in all its eye-popping, Shark Blue-wrapped glory.

It's a head-turner all right, the kind of car making you feel like some sort of celebrity on four wheels, but rest assured the GT4 RX is rather more than a cosmetic exercise — there's plenty of *go* to match the *show*. GT4 RS-style go? You'd better believe it.

Of course, the eagle-eyed among you will have spotted the GT4 RX is based on the 718's predecessor, the 981-generation Cayman, which is a sound 'best buy' move, not least because





Porsche built plenty of non-GT4 981s. Availability and prices are very much aligned and nobody is precious about modifying these cars. As a blank canvas, the 981 is an excellent platform to play with. And what of this one? It began life as an early 981 Cayman S. In fine fettle at the beginning of the GT4 RX project, the car cost its owner £22k. As a starting point, that's not exactly breaking the bank, especially when you consider the cost of acquiring a 718 GT4 RS hovers around the £110k mark.

What's amidsthips, though? Gone is the standard 320bhp, 3.4-litre atmo flat-six. In its place is a 3.8-litre, first-generation 991 X51 powerplant, delivering close to 450bhp. Granted, that's a little short of the GT4 RS's 493bhp, but it is a useful seventy horses up on the 3.8-litre 981 Cayman GT4. Besides, try getting hold of the current GT4 RS motor for sensible money. Or any money. Liberated from a front-end smashed first-generation 991 GTS, the low-mileage lump used in the GT4 RX build was a snip at ten grand. Come again? Yep, just £10k, which kind of puts the cost of an average M96 rebuild into perspective.

The numbers are adding up — so far, donor car and mega-power unit have amounted to a smidge over £30k. Was it difficult to fit the 3.8-litre 991 engine into a 981 originally powered by a 3.4-litre boxer? Not really. These engines are, after all, physically and dimensionally the same size. Increased capacity comes from different bore and stroke ratios. According to Parr project engineer, Peter Garman,

there are some detail issues, such as positioning of the oil filter housing, which required re-working (if only to make it accessible), but given the modular nature of Porsche powertrains, all the bracketry and mounting is already in situ, meaning any Cayman-specific parts and ancillaries will fit straight onto the 911 engine. Easy peasy, huh? Not quite. The project wasn't without its challenges, but they were rarely mechanical.

The 991 flat-six bolts straight onto the Cayman 981's standard seven-speed PDK

gearbox, which is what we have here. Is the semi-automatic transmission up to the job? It certainly is — all PDK boxes are essentially the same across each generation of Porsche model line-up, which makes PDK attached to non-GT Caymans, Boxsters and 911s very under stressed indeed. Sure, a manual gearbox would be nice, and we have no doubt someone else configuring this build may well have demanded one. Having said that, with PDK, you get shorter gear ratios, unlike the crazy-long manual ratios,

Above and below
A plethora of carbon-fibre features on the GT4 RX, from the TechArt bonnet to the custom tailpipes





which do blunt the performance of an engine that likes to rev. Unsurprisingly, this build also features a limited-slip differential. It's a plate-style unit from German motorsport transmission specialist, Drexler.

A manual gearbox would be easier from a build perspective. Peter tells us many of the issues he and his team encountered related to getting the engine and PDK to communicate with one another via the standard 981 ECU, which had to be updated using US-sourced COBB Tuning Accessport software. As the *port* bit in Accessport suggests, this is managed via the Cayman's OBD2 port, which allows a COBB map to be loaded to the factory ECU.

LESSONS LEARNED

Other electronic issues? The car's electronic brain was under the impression it was controlling fuelling, ignition and other parameters for the standard 3.4-litre engine. Other 'parameters' also included managing the resonance flap in the induction system/manifold. The 981 Cayman's standard engine has one of these, whereas the 991 X51 engine has three (for extra breathing and therefore more power). The ECU needs to know this. Cue more electronic instruction via the COBB software, as well as a certain amount of development trial and error. Job done, the work is now easy for Parr to replicate on future GT4 RX-inspired builds.

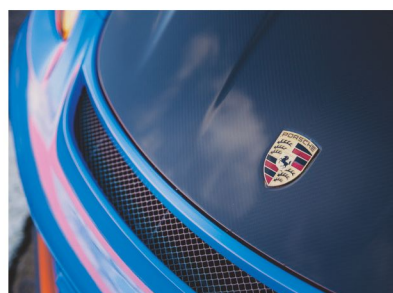
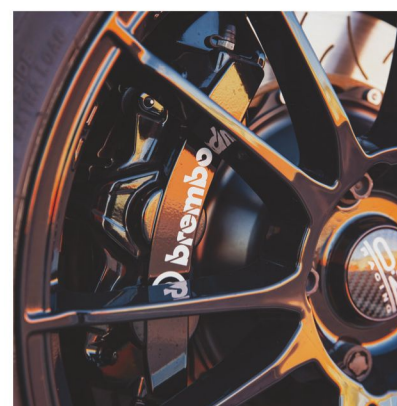
Talking of breathing — heavy breathing, at that — you can't fail to miss the Porsche Motorsport GT4 Clubsport

intake system replacing the rear windows and feeding straight into flexible tubing, blasting power-enhancing oxygen straight into the airbox. Surprisingly, the system is said to be good for only an extra five-or-so horsepower. Whatever, the it looks the business. We'll come to the sound shortly.

Finishing the engine off are Cargraphic exhaust headers with 200-cell catalytic converters, which exhale gases via the standard Porsche Sports Exhaust (PSE), albeit dressed with a carbon tailpipe set, which very much looks the part. As far as the components you can't see are concerned, the suspension set-up

is, of course, much developed, although it retains elements of the standard Porsche Active Suspension Management (PASM)'s switchable Sport and Sport Plus modes, now transmitting to a Bilstein B16 DampTronic coilover system via a DSC Sport plug-and-play controller, which replaces the standard PASM controller. Whereas PASM offers only fixed adaptive control, the DSC box allows for almost infinite custom suspension maps, giving users the ability to tune by g-force, brake pressure, acceleration, speed and steering, whilst controlling effective damping range via shock calibration.

Above and below
The popular Dundon Motorsports parts catalogue was raided for carbon wings, floor, side vents, skirts and rear roll cage





Above Recaro Sportster CS seats are a fantastic choice

Below Genuine Porsche Motorsport intake system is fed from ducts where the rear quarter windows used to reside



This sounds like a lot to get one's head around, but if you're so inclined, then you'll be in suspension tweak nirvana. Or quite bamboozled. One or the other!

We'll come to its effectiveness in good time. Completing the chassis development side of things are Eibach adjustable coffin arms, Tarett Engineering toe arms and GT3-spec H&R anti-roll bars.

On to the brakes. Parr is a dealer for Performance Friction. Naturally, the brand's brake discs and pads are featured,

with clamping duty taken care of by Brembo six- and four-pot calipers, front and rear respectively. These are partially obscured by twenty-inch OZ Ultraleggera

lightweight wheels clothed with sticky Michelin Pilot Sport 4 tyres.

And so, to the aero inspired bodywork and the show to the go. The front and

rear aprons, plus side scoops, are factory Cayman GT4 components, while the rear hatch is a lightweight, aluminium Porsche Motorsport addition. The

carbon-fibre bonnet, complete with RS-inspired vents, is from Techart, the world-renowned designer and manufacturer of aero upgrades for Porsches. The dramatic rear wing

AN EXCLUSIVE PORSCHE-ONLY DAY HOSTED BY PARR IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PORSCHE CLUB MOTORSPORT

(featuring GT4 RS-aping swan neck supports), front flat floor and splitter, carbon front wings (with integrated GT3 RS vents), plus the carbon side skirts, are all from GT Porsche tuning outfit, Dundon Motorsports. It should be noted, the parts are of exceptionally high quality.

Step inside and things are reasonably basic. There's no extended leather or other trinketry to spoil the track-oriented look and feel. Of course, the standard seats are gone, replaced by rather lovely Recaro Sportster CS perches. A Dundon Motorsport rear half cage acts as an anchor for the Sabelt four-point harnesses, while an Alcantara-trimmed tiller offers tactile guidance for the front wheels. This looks a like a good place to be firmly strapped into. Let's find out.

You won't have failed to notice we're at Brands Hatch. We're not at just any track day, but an exclusive Porsche-only day hosted by Parr in partnership with Porsche Club Motorsport. There's a sensible number of cars in attendance, some very handy drivers and then, er, us. That is to say 'me.' It's been a little while since I've been on a track and I'm feeling





the weight of responsibility which comes with trying to do justice to what is clearly going to prove itself an accomplished car. Oh, yes, and everyone is watching, which always helps.

The early damp has dried and the track is in fine fettle on this unseasonably warm early November day. We've got our photos in the bag, so no excuses. An initial few laps to get acclimatised is slightly mistimed because the lunch break arrives shortly after. Actually, this is no bad thing — it allows for a little head space.

NO MESSING

Trundling around the track is not an option. Indeed, like many modern Porsches (or supercars in general), the GT4 RS doesn't really respond to dainty inputs or light braking. The chassis needs animating to start working properly. The whole car effectively needs to be 'fired-up' to really come alive. And when it does? Goodness, Peter and his team at Parr have built a weapon. The Brands Hatch Indy circuit is almost too small for really exploring full throttle potential, but there's plenty of opportunity for loading the chassis and really getting the nose planted into corners on the brakes.

With the dampers on the stiffer Sport setting and the throttle and PDK map equally Sport fixed (I decline the savagery

THE SHEER SATISFACTION THAT COMES FROM GOING YOUR OWN WAY AND BEATING THE SYSTEM

of Sports Plus), I'm happy for the most part to let the Cayman self-shift, allowing me to concentrate on getting the best

out of the chassis and really working the track. Loading up through Clark Curve at the top of the circuit and then opening

out on to the Brabham Straight, the noise from the side intakes and the gargling air box is really quite musical. It's a very short dash, but the speedo registers nearly 120mph,

and then it's hard on the brakes to the downturn in for the ever epic Paddock Hill Bend. I could probably have braked later,

Above and below Parr has delivered an absolute stonker of a Cayman and is ready to pick up where it left off by building more along similar lines





and it's clear that there's some aero at work, but I have to remind myself the GT4 RX isn't my car and the gravel trap doesn't look very enticing.

Bottoming out at the foot of Hailwoods, there's a genuine g-force moment. Druids is all about patience and getting the nose turned in for the dash downhill to the deceptively tight Graham Hill Bend onto the Cooper Straight. Surtees is as fast as you dare, bouncing off the curbs and straight-lining, before the turn into McLaren, running out to the edge of Clark Curve and starting all over again. I could have stayed out all afternoon, but when the on-board computer told me I had only five miles of fuel left, and with the sun starting to drop, it was clearly time to stop having way too much fun.

PERSONAL MISSION

The GT4 RX is an epic build, then, and one man's riposte to Porsche's limited edition GT shenanigans. Or should that be one man's 'up yours' to Porsche?! That's overstating things — there was no malice or bitterness serving as the catalyst for this build, just the sheer satisfaction that comes from going your own way and beating the system.

And, yes, we stopped counting the cost of this build. In truth, this is because it's always very difficult to quantify and cost the development work that goes into

the first of anything. Subsequent builds will benefit, just as subsequent builds are bound to be different. What is clear, however, even from a bit of back-of-a-fag-packet calculation, is that even an ultra-Cayman build like this is going to be way more cost effective than buying a 981 GT4 and well and truly in the financial shadow of a 718 GT4 RS.

Best buy of 2023? The GT4 RX's owner

certainly thinks so. He has good reason to. After all, this has unquestionably been an excellent project, saved him cash over the purchase of a GT4 RS and is a credit to all involved. If you fancy something similar in 2023, but you're not on Porsche's A-list, Parr is ready and waiting to take knowledge gained with the GT4 RX and invest it in a bespoke build just for you. Well, what are you waiting for?! ●

Above First-gen 991 GT4 provided the GT4 RX's 3.8-litre X51 powerplant, developing in the region of 450bhp on a stock engine map, with further gains to be had, if desired

