

Perfecting **perfection**

You may think that the 997 GT3 RS is perfect, but AP Car Design reckoned it could be improved. This is the result

Written by Nick Hall
Photographed by Lyndon McNeil



AP Car Design GT3 RS

Suggesting room for improvement in the 997 GT3 RS might just be the catalyst for a fight in certain parts of the world. For some, the RS is the ultimate expression of Porsche's philosophy and messing with it is heresy. But Thomas Nater believes that a few minor changes can make the world of difference to the car that has become his calling card, and can convert it from a street-orientated compromise to one of the finest track cars in the world.

Thomas's company, AP Car Design has been around for 13 years, starting with BMWs and Opels and moving on to Porsches six years ago. The GT3 has become his signature dish and he made a splash recently when he converted Patrick Huisman's old 993 Supercup for street use. This was a labour of love, and he waited 14 months before his offer was even accepted, but now Thomas's focus lies with the RS and he has worked hard on the development.

AP hit the rolling road to verify the base setting of 410bhp of this particular engine. From there it was a case of putting a new Ram Airbox that added 10-15bhp at more than 160kph, engine remap and a new exhaust system to unleash a useful 440bhp. But it's never that simple, of course.

Thomas tried four different exhaust systems and had no interest in making them louder and fruitier in the tried and trusted tuning vein. In fact, one of the variants he offers – the TDi look, as he calls it – is designed to kill a few decibels.

It a good idea, too, as noise restrictions on trackdays are toughening up everywhere and the RS has been barred on occasion. With the exit pipes angled downwards in a diesel style, Thomas reckons there's no danger of a trackday ban, and with a few decibels less the car is actually more pleasurable to drive. It comes with a Sport button, too, which opens the flaps over

// Noise
restrictions
on
trackdays
are
tightening
up //

70kph for the full-bore effect, while keeping town driving relatively comfortable.

For those looking for something a little racier, however, there are eight different exhaust options within AP's gates, including a full-bore race exhaust with bypass system that looks every bit as good as it sounds, but might be pushing the limits if you line up for a Thruxton trackday.

And the TDi version works perfectly; as we take the roads through town in search of a location there is none of that on-edge racing car noise that can blight the loudest conversation. If ever there was a relaxed GT3 in this world, this is it. Pile on the revs and the sound erupts like a volcano blowing its stack as the buzzing hornet that is the 3.8-litre engine whips into a high-pitched feeding frenzy that would scare sharks, but on a gentle throttle there's just no price to pay for the added power.

Nater could have wrung more horses from the

powerplant, but that gets complicated, and expensive. His business isn't centred around huge conversions back at base and he prefers to sell off-the-shelf components that any handy engineer can fit themselves. Besides, as he puts it: "The GT3 engine has so much power and so much pull between 2800rpm and 8500rpm that you really don't need much more."

The Ram Air box is a simple bolt-on unit that costs less than €500 and Thomas has specialised in finding cheaper suppliers than the other tuners, which then gives him the opportunity to sell top-quality parts at a knockdown price. As a result he works with companies in the Czech Republic, Singapore and even further afield to get TÜV-approved parts to his customers at the lowest possible prices.

Many tuners assume that because someone has the money to buy the Porsche in the first place they will pay through the nose for additional parts, and €150,000





“Safety features are high on the list at AP”

conversions are the norm rather than the exception, but Nater has carved his own niche out in the budget tuning sector doing exactly the opposite.

His carbonfibre strut brace weighs 1.2kg, is adjustable and costs just €199; the chequered flag roof film produced perfectly to shape costs only €169 and a full set of carbonfibre mirrors are a mere €590.

Then there is perhaps his finest move – the full rollcage. “I designed this really for me, I have a small family and track driving is so much safer with a full rollcage, so I decided to make this part,” Thomas explains. “It has proved very popular. Yes, it probably helps the structural rigidity slightly, so it will help the handling, but this is more about safety.”

Two thick pillars sit in each of the front corners and join forces with the factory-fit half-cage to provide the invaluable added protection. Of course, it makes getting in that little bit trickier, but if the worst happens and you

find yourself upside down then getting out at all – however long it takes – will be a bonus.

Safety features are high on the list at AP and Thomas is doing raging business fitting fire extinguishers and a kill switch for customers who use their cars on track. And that is a good number; he attended one trackday recently and there were 60 GT3s with no fewer than 11 fitted with AP modifications. The tow loop still fitted to our test car tells its own story; these are cars built for the track and the road comes a distant second. Thomas will build a car for the road, of course he will, but this example is track-biased to the point of race numbers.

Thomas is not even averse to “taking a little inspiration” from his competitors and has a budget line of wheels that look alarmingly similar to the big name tuners’, but without the massive price tags. A full set of wheels and tyres, can be yours for around €2000, some other tuners wouldn’t give you change from €6000 and

AP Car Design GT3 RS

Thomas argues that if the car is set up right then there is very little to choose between them.

His wheels may lack the logo, but Thomas is experienced with everything from the bottom of the line budget wheels through to magnesium alloys that need to be x-rayed every six months to ensure their integrity. For street use, he argues, these are just fine, although it would take a brave man to go for the orange colour-coded numbers; the five-spoke AP Racing wheels in black might be the safest option on the aesthetic front.

When it comes to handling, Thomas is a perfectionist and so speaks from a position of authority. And he is far from enthusiastic about the base car. "It's fine for street use," he says, before uttering words that will sound like sacrilege to true devotees. "The only problem is that Porsche builds in understeer and so when you really start to push on track it is not so good. The front pushes, and you have to overcome that with power; which is not the fastest way."

So he set to work on a new suspension set-up using the original dampers, but a new set of springs and a whole lot of race craft. He has dropped the car by 20mm and gone a whole new direction with the settings. The resulting negative camber on the rear is shocking and belongs on a racing car, but then, bar the exhaust, that is more or less what Thomas has created.

To go that far took three weeks of work using a consistent 90kg in the driver's seat; a simple trick that he says is overlooked by many as they chase the perfect set-up with no weight in the seat – which inevitably results in an unbalanced car in the bends and under braking – an area that is about to be addressed.

Thomas, like many tuners, hates ceramic brakes with a passion. So he's working on a set of larger steel brakes with the company that supplies Porsche with its hugely expensive PCCB upgrade to come up with the perfect compromise of action, longevity and feel. These things take time, but expect some dinner-plate-sized discs to fill

“Thomas hates ceramic brakes with a passion”



Specification AP Car Design 997 GT3 RS

Engine
AP Car Design Ram Air box, Tdi-style sports exhaust

Suspension
20mm lowering kit

Interior
Full roll-cage

Exterior
Porsche Supercup front spoiler, AP Car Design sideskirts, rear valance. AP Car Design roof film, wing mirrors

Wheels
20in AP Design five-spoke racing wheels with Pilot Sport Cup tyres

Interior (above left) is enhanced by AP's own full rollcage; a sensible safety feature. Engine (above) now produces 440bhp. Wheels (left) are cheaper than competing products



Towing eye (left) was left in from AP's recent track excursion, showing just what this car is designed for. Rear wing (right) is AP's own product





those wheels the next time you see this car.

The car hasn't just spent time on the rolling road as part of its development process; it has been on a rig to analyse every facet and many a day on the local racetracks to ensure the perfect balance. Indeed, on the roads around Göttingen, the RS turned in with razor-like precision and, while there wasn't enough run off to test the theory, it felt like the back would carve a path through the Tarmac at speeds well beyond what most of us would start to think about some remedial opposite lock.

AP has come up with its own aerodynamics, with a new rear wing set up for 330kph-plus, but it's adjustable and brave drivers can flatten it at the track for less drag and higher speeds approaching 400kph with the right draft. Sharp-eyed readers will have already spotted that the front spoiler comes straight from a 997 Supercup

with its engorged air intake that helps feed the Ram Air system. The sideskirts, meanwhile, are commissioned in-house and colour-coded to suit the car far better than the standard black numbers.

And if you want the interior redressed, then Thomas has a master craftsman on hand just down the road to cater to your every whim; from colour-coded stitching to ice white – the choice is entirely yours.

While most tuners offer up conversions with a telephone-number price tag and explosive power numbers, Thomas Nater has carved out his own niche with subtle yet important modifications to the finest driver's cars in Porsche's recent history. And none of them will break the bank.

● www.ap-car-design.de

“Nater has carved out a niche with subtle modifications.”