

PORSCHE

Cayenne GTS

Shopping for a luxury SUV? Richard Bott finds out why Porsche's offering should top your test drive shortlist

What you need to know...

Porsche Cayenne GTS 4.8 V8

0-62 mph 6.1 secs

Top speed 157 mph

BHP 405

Torque 369lb/ft

From £54,350

As a brand, Porsche set out to be the definitive article in every sector of the market in which it competes – easy to say and very difficult to pull off. The fact that it achieves this pretty much across the board is more than impressive. Whether you are a Porsche fan or not, if you drive a vehicle that happens to fall into the same sector of the market as one of its cars, the Stuttgart manufacturer's products will almost certainly have been the benchmark for it.

As a car manufacturer it is a tiny, family-owned firm with a worldwide output of well under 100,000 units per year. On the back of this it has turned itself around from being only days away from closing the doors in the mid

1990s to being the most profitable car company on the planet today – which makes its achievement of being the perennial aiming point of all others even more extraordinary.

Arguably its most difficult task of the last few years has been taking on the SUV market. Its defining of it is, on the face of it, less sharp than in the sports car arena for which it is famous. When the Cayenne first arrived it shocked the traditionalists for its break away from the norm as much as for its challenging looks. For Porsche though, it has been a massive hit and is now its biggest selling vehicle, albeit not in the UK – this honour is given to the ever-popular 911.

Now into its second incarnation with fresh engines and a sharper look, the



Cayenne is trying hard in a competitive field, but is it the definitive SUV? I guess the most controversial thing is still the way it looks. It now has a new face but rivals like Mercedes-Benz and Land Rover have managed to build cars that are universally accepted to be good looking and stylish; and while not everybody dislikes the Cayenne visage, it certainly divides opinion.

To know it is to love it, though. Get past the Marmite looks and into the cockpit and it begins to make more sense. Everything is well thought out and beautifully put together, as it is in any Porsche. Start it up and drive off and the Cayenne's ability to define the SUV becomes a whole lot more obvious. Being able to combine class-leading on-road dynamics, handling and driveability with a proper reduction gearbox and genuine mud plugging, off-road prowess is quite unique. Others have tried but once again, nobody has managed it quite so completely as Porsche.

So which is the definitive Cayenne?

New for this year is the GTS. Positioned between the Cayenne S and the bonkers Cayenne Turbo, it is a mix of some of the best bits of each with some of its own thrown in for good measure.

The engine is a breathed-on version of the naturally aspirated 4.8 V8 found in the S. Now, with 405bhp combined with slightly shorter gear ratios, this gives 0 to 62 mph in just 6.1 seconds; and a

to constantly vary the damper settings to match road and driving conditions means that hard suspension does not mean harsh suspension, and it works very well.

On the road the Cayenne GTS is as quiet and refined as you would expect, with that fabulous V8 warble adding a real sense of purpose under acceleration. Being nicely cosseted, however, means that speed is well hidden so you have to keep a close eye on your velocity; but the brakes have a firm, reassuring bite so getting the speed off again is not a big problem.

Handling and ride quality, however, are startling for a vehicle of this size, weight and layout. Often, ensuring that vehicles of this type handle and don't wallow – because all the weight is a long way from the ground – means making them very stiff, which completely destroys the ride. While the steel sprung GTS certainly feels firm, it does not feel unyielding as the trick active damping goes about its business, protecting the ride quality and the handling. Apart from a very slight fidget, the result is that you get the kind of feel only possible from well-sorted steel springs combined with a more than acceptable ride.

The Cayenne GTS has plenty of presence on the road. With 21-inch wheels and the front end styling from the Turbo, it has an aggressive stance. It also comes in a new range of bright colours to

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top speed of 157mph makes for a very relaxed cruising environment at more usual motorway speeds.

Inside, you get supremely comfortable sports seats and a pleasingly chunky steering wheel. The Cayenne GTS comes with a manual gearbox as standard but Tiptronic is an option that will undoubtedly prove very popular.

There are also two basic chassis options too. You can opt for the air suspension, which combined with the Dynamic Chassis Control system means zero body roll up to 0.6 of a G. Standard though, are more conventional steel springs which are mated for the first time on a Cayenne with the superb Porsche Active Suspension Management as found on the sports cars. The ability for the suspension

ensure – should you want to – that it really stands apart. In addition, you get the kind of industry-leading reliability you would expect of a Porsche – 20,000 mile or two-year service intervals, and a first class bespoke driving course.

So if you are looking for a luxury SUV that avoids the usual compromises of ride, handling, driveability and performance, the Cayenne GTS is the definitive article. ■END

Richard Bott started instructing at racing schools 14 years ago. Since then he has been a senior instructor at Oulton Park Racing School and teaches advanced and high performance driving on road and track. Latterly, he has also worked as a driving consultant to a number of high-end manufacturers.