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Edge of Heaven

**John Guthrie's otherworldly experience
with a 2010 911 Turbo S • see page 14**



Challenge Series Reborn!

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Edge of Heaven

RMR's John Guthrie enjoys the world's greatest road car across three time zones, two race tracks and thousands of miles of open road

At a unique driving festival in Indiana in 2008, I first sampled the 911 Joy of Driving. For \$2700, I drove 16 of the hottest cars on the planet for 20-30 minutes each, over three days. The cars included multiple Ferraris, Bentleys, Lamborghinis, a Maserati, a Callaway C17, a Spyker, an Aston Martin DB9, an SLR and two 911's: a GT3 and a GT2. The GT3 was a dream. When I deftly missed a small turtle crossing the road, the GT3 suspension instantly rebounded to steady state. The GT2 was just too

nervous for me. I ended up driving it like an idiot—one hand on the wheel, the other on the shifter, trying to keep the gearing low so the turbos wouldn't kick us into the weeds. The GT2 was raw, compared to the F430 Scuderia and GT-R. I liked the Spyker, but thought the GT3 was the best "sports car" (although for a "grand touring," I'd take the Maserati, at half the price of a Bentley flying carpet).

Months later—February, 2009—I was in Scottsdale AZ, getting screwed on some business. To make up for the



lemons I was dealing with, I decided to make lemonade and purchased a used 997 Turbo with 20,000 miles... on the shortest month of the year, in a recession. I got a great deal—\$3,000 below Penske Porsche's documented cost.

By the end of September, that 997 had another 8,500 miles on it, much of that from an August trip to Pebble Beach and the Historics at Laguna Seca. (On YouTube, search "Wyo550" and you'll see, turn-by-turn, the Historics, where Porsche was the featured marque.) I also did a DE event while at Laguna Seca. I was hooked on the 911 Turbo. At Fallon

Naval Air Station on US 50, a couple of F-18's came down "on the deck" and screamed over me as I took the car to three times the speed limit on the completely empty, perfect highway. The 997 was as stable as my Ferrari 550 at top speeds—without the 400-pound V-12 holding the front down. New Bridgestone Pilot Sport 2 tires acted like glue sticks at the track. The buzz around Monterey was the 911 Turbo upgrade coming in 2010. Now hooked, I went straight back to a Colorado Porsche dealer and traded in the 997, becoming first in line for a 2010 Turbo.

In January, 2010, Scottsdale Porsche called to ask if I wanted a Turbo S. I had never heard of the "S" from the Colorado dealer. By February, the Colorado dealer (sort of) had the 2011 Turbo S option data, and it was time to spec out a car. Even though my novel, *Edge of Heaven*, had just launched and no books had yet sold, I decided to pretend I could afford a \$165,000 sports car when it was delivered in the summer of 2010. I was annoyed that the Ice Blue Metallic exterior color wasn't available until a September build (same for the RS wheel option). Later, an oil executive based in Paris told me that Porsche was offering these features to Russians and Europeans as "something you can't get in America."



My Arctic Silver 911 Turbo S was built in late May, 2010. It traveled from Emden, Germany to Wharf 9T in the Port of Houston aboard the Panamanian automobile transport ship, *Marina Ace*. On June 21, the car was at the Colorado dealership, and I took delivery July 1 to avoid losing a single day of Wyoming annual registration costs. The dealer told me that PCNA wanted to count the sale as a "June book." I was offered some kind of one-year maintenance for free if I'd agree (PCNA sent me a voucher for that service, good at any Porsche dealer). So far, so good.

I put 2,000 miles on the new car in two weeks—tough duty, on wide-open Wyoming roads. I hit the rev-limiter (up) once, learning the hard way that the "Sport Plus" engine map is only for track use. The Sport setting is perfect for noodling around state highways. On July 6, my onboard video caught a littering fool, dropping a bag of empty beer cans right into the front of my car. That video cost him. By the weekend of July 18, I was at HPR with a now broken-in Turbo S. I did two DE days at HPR in July, and the car flew—much better tracking corners than the 997 had been—on the factory Bridgestone RA-050A tires. But at a second, two-day DE event in August, the compound chemistry in the factory tires was cooked.

Now, I was only good for two or three laps, before acceleration grip and lateral adhesion were "pay attention, dummy" compromised—to the point where I retired early. By the final session of the two-day August event, I was smart enough (read "scared") to grid start at the end of the pack, so I wouldn't be in the middle of everybody as my tires (inevitably) gave out.

Lucky move. Because, on the "warm-up" lap, the cars were already flying... so fast, the guy ahead of me went off-track with two wheels. Then, on the first "hot" lap, three cars ahead of me passed on the long straight—almost all the way into the exit turn—without a hand signal that I could see. A few laps of that I and I got off the track because of a snarky driver in a GT3. I didn't see any of that at Laguna Seca, where the corner workers absolutely rule with radios and black flags—even sound ordinance enforcement. *[Editor's note: You shouldn't see such behavior at HPR, either, as Driver Education is foremost about safety. If you observe any unsafe behavior at a DE, please bring it to the attention of the Chief Driving Instructor, the event chair or a board member!]*

In September, I did one "Launch Control" start. It threw me back so hard, my



Motoring through Yosemite National Park. Does it get any better than this?

foot lifted from the pedal (see YouTube). I then had new Bridgestone RA11 tires mounted. In the process, I discovered that the security lug for the old 997's wheels was in a coffee can in the garage. The old car had been sold to a woman—without the lug. I personally delivered the lug to the dealership. Days later, I e-mailed the dealer's salesman—twice—asking about purchasing a GT2RS with delivery in 2011. The first e-mail "wasn't received," and the second e-mail got me, "I'm on vacation with my family and I'll get back to you next week." That's fine, but I never heard back from him—or anyone—about buying a \$245,000 car. (My GM dealer sent me a Christmas card for buying a used Acadia!) Ferrari of Denver sent a card, just for doing maintenance. The Porsche dealer, where I generated a quarter-million in sales in two years? Nothing. In August, the dealer *did* send me a battery charger, which was nice and useful, and I did appreciate that.

But I must say, there's something weird about Porsche, showing in press releases and write-ups for almost a year a color, Ice Blue Metallic (first photographed in Norway in 2009), that

wasn't available for months after the "S" model release in May 2010. Porsche's strange culture seems to rub off on dealers who make you "be available" five hours for a 30-minute Lojack installation... and who—despite your proven high-end business—don't

throttle response, full-time overboost and brakes are clearly superior. But trashing a work of engineering genius—making it do something it's not designed to do (regular track use)—is egotistical nonsense. If I "make it in Hollywood," I'd like a second-genera-

answer *two* inquiries about buying a quarter-million-dollar GT2RS in 2011! Should I have to ask a *third* time?

No, thanks. After my track experiences this summer, I'm not even going to track the "S" again. I'm just going to respect it as probably the best road car in the world right now. Because, on track with the added AWD weight, it's no match for a properly-driven, high-horsepower, rear-wheel-drive car. The "S" rules (everywhere) with unbelievable acceleration, but on track, the later braking of a lighter, rear-wheel-drive car will catch you in the corners (where they'll cut tighter lines with faster exit speeds). Compared to the 997 Turbo, the new "S" model's torque vectoring,



Busted? Nahh... just filing a police report against some highway litterbugs.

tion Atom 500 with paddles for track-blasting... and a trailer... and a truck... and instruction!

My only interest in "DE" was literally to become educated about my car(s), performing at the very edge of their limits. By the August DE event at HPR, I was "educated" enough not to find myself in the middle of a pack of cars that were running each other off the track in the last session of the weekend! I once skied into a tree on the last run of the day, so I know the danger of being lulled to disaster. Frankly, there were many times on track (in both the 997 and "S") when the Porsche stability and traction controls saved me. Sing along, boys and girls! "Johnny Danger! He's a racer! At home, he drives a Pacer!" So what if I'll never be a good "racer"? Thanks to DE, I know my car and I'm the defensive driver from hell, anywhere... in Chicago, or on I-80 in Iowa, or with deer on the road around any corner.

The best fun on track was when Johnny Danger's DE instructor at Laguna Seca got angry at a BMW M5

driver who wouldn't let us pass with a wave, for most of a lap. So, as we climbed to the top of the Corkscrew I heard the words, "Charge him at the apex!" We'd already proven I had the "Brakes of God" with multiple 145-mph charges of turn 5, last-moment braking at the 130-degree, turn 11 hairpin and modulated 130-140 mph entries into the double-apex turn 2. So, behind the BMW, I

came out of uphill turn 7 at 70 mph and went straight for the tight apex of 8A... where the BMW driver's door would be, seconds later from the right. I'll never forget the whites of this guys' eyes as he saw me coming straight at him like Alex Zanardi in the 1996 CART race!

The Brakes of God worked, and we both fell 70 feet through the Corkscrew. He was completely off-line at 8B, waving me by! By turn 9, my good line and speed had him 100 feet behind me. By turn 11, he was almost a block behind—not because of my driving skill, but simply because I had the acceleration and 500 foot-pounds of the "S" unleashed (and this car gets 26.3 mpg on state roads at 7,000 ft with cruise control!). When I got back to Colorado, Poudre Sports Car found that the (rear) Brakes of God were completely shot. The heat load of 150 miles of Laguna Seca laps had even melted the brake sensors. I was amazed that the front brakes were fine.

After the California trip, I put the OEM tires back on and drove the "S" to Chicago and Detroit in October. I had a great drive—avoiding dangerous, unconscious and a few malicious drivers across the rural/urban/rural midwest with the 911's superior handling, acceleration and braking. Porsches only incite a fraction of the dangerous idiots who want to "take on" a Ferrari. The 911's sound system, with the \$700 Sirius radio option, is wonderful, and the car is generally quiet and sublime. You can even sleep—*really* sleep—in the fully-reclining drivers seat. It's a driver's car! From July to November, I did 11,500 miles of wonderful driving.

The 2011 Turbo S will be my #1 road



The author gearing up at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.

car for years and years. I didn't buy it to destroy it on a track. My 57-year-old's ego is simply satisfied being able to write fiction, in order to pay for consciousness-expansion like this 911—not by beating nice people up on a track day event with more horsepower, torque and electronic controls than they might have. I'm just an inconsistent, middle-aged track-event driver on street tires, that's all. Next week, I'll be

in Los Angeles... dodging potholes in my Acadia!

Be driven! Life is good. Life is short. There are only so many good driving days left.

John Guthrie, Laramie native, is an author, producer and artist. He has owned a 2007 911 Turbo and a 2011 911 Turbo S and runs a Ferrari 550 with a prototype tuned exhaust. John can be found at www.Wyo550.com and at "wyo550" on YouTube.

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