

First Drive Retro Touring R

PRICE £200,000 (approx)
ENGINE 3.8l 6cyl petrol, 300bhp
PERFORMANCE Top speed 170mph;
0-60mph 4.9 seconds



REVERSE GEAR

JUST when my contemporaries should be trying to look younger by reaching for the Grecian 2000 and making misguided sartorial purchases, just the opposite is happening.

Those with salt and pepper up top let it bloom, while others wear herringbone flat caps or have beards you could use to scour a roasting tin.

Despite owning a hot hatch worthy of lapping any provincial high street, one friend wears a double-breasted mac and struts about as if he's going to solve at least one murder in the next ten minutes. It seems that the illusion of veneration trumps that of youth these days.

Which is exactly the philosophy that gave birth to the beautiful automotive confection you see here. Built by Essex-based PS Autoart, the Retro Touring R is clearly a Porsche 911, but which one? Its stocky proportions indicate early-1990s 964-series, but its detailing recalls the early-1970s 2.4 S.

The truth is that it's a 964 Carrera 4 that's been "backdated" to look longer of tooth. Mechanical-



Richard Webber

ly, the 964 was a big step forward, lending new-found modernity, sophistication and usability to the 911, but with the benefit of hindsight, its brash, plastic-fantastic styling now seems at best overcooked and arguably even a bit vulgar, while the considered delicacy of the 2.4 has aged

altogether more gracefully. PS Autoart's founder, Paul Stephens, has been dealing in 911s for 20 years, and found his customers lusted after the just-so aesthetic of earlier models but shrank away from the compromises of tech that largely predates *Sergeant Pepper*.

This prompted him to start building backdated 911s, the latest and greatest of which is this Retro Touring R. Of the bodywork, only the doors and roof are original; the rest is neatly fabricated in steel, aluminium or GRP that all come together to produce a wincingly handsome but purposeful shape.

In place of the 964's fat, colour-coded bumpers and skirts, slivers of rubber are bordered by slimline brightwork that also adorns the lights, mirrors and glasshouse, while two-tone Fuchs-style wheels add authenticity. There's devil in the detail, too, with in-the-know references to earlier 911s. See those black rings ahead of the rear wheels? They're purely cosmetic, mimicking the old torsion bar covers, and throwback exposed rubber oil lines (which actually work) run down

the side skirts. If you do have a beard, now's the time to nod sagely and stroke it.

Inside, there's high-quality leather everywhere (even stitched around the roll cage), bespoke aluminium switchgear and a lovely old-school Becker Mexico stereo head, while the quilted seats are as comfortable as they are good-looking. The general interior feel is that of a newly built luxury car with old-fashioned simplicity of design. But while the aesthetics hark back 40 years, the mechanicals have been given a proper modern makeover, with upgraded suspension, brakes and engine, most of which has been achieved with the use of genuine Porsche parts. This lends the confidence necessary for PS Autoart to offer its cars with a three-year, 60,000-mile warranty – the same as most of today's mass-market cars. There's none of your improvised shenanigans here.

And on the road, it shows, the Retro Touring R feeling solid and accomplished. Enlarged from 3.6 to 3.8 litres and enriched with 993 RS-spec cams, cylinder barrels and pistons, its air-

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cooled flat six engine now makes 300bhp and is an absolute treat. Torque delivery is super-smooth, with a little kick at 4,000rpm, beyond which a deep scream soundtracks properly eye-widening pace right up to 7,000rpm. The Retro Touring R matches today's 200kg-heavier, water-cooled 911 Carrera 4 from zero to 60mph, but fills those 4.9 seconds with a gusto and character far beyond its modern counterpart.

The five-speed manual gearbox is slick, the brakes strong and progressive. The power-assisted steering has an equally glossy feel that's peppered with gentle kickback and the front-end bobbing that's characteristic of older 911s. While the ride is suppler than in standard 964s, rippled B-roads elicit an unsettling vertical reactivity at speed that deviates from the car's "Touring" remit, but tweaking the adjustable Bilsteins might help.

But what a covetable machine – PS Autoart has made this Porsche 964 both more attractive and more fun to be around than before. There's hope for all of us.