

WHEELS

Panamera V-6 blends fuel economy, performance



The Panamera is comfortable for four people, but hustles like a sports car.

By TOM STRONGMAN

Porsche's four-door Panamera was designed to be a "true sports car for four people," in the words of David Pryor, vice president of marketing for Porsche Cars North America, at the 2009 press introduction. Slipping a 295-horsepower V-6 under the hood for 2011 has done little to diminish that claim.

When the 2010 Panamera first came to market, it was available with either a 400-horsepower V-8 or a 500-horsepower turbocharged V-8. The turbo blistered the pavement as it romped to 60 mph in four seconds and a top track

speed of 188 mph.

Now comes the V-6 model, and while 300 horsepower would appear to pale in comparison, it actually acquits itself very well. Sixty mph comes up in 5.8 seconds, which is not exactly snail territory, and the top track speed is 160 mph. I'd say that's good enough.

When the Panamera was introduced in 2009, some purists scoffed that Porsche didn't need a sedan or that the styling wasn't elegant, but the car was a sales success because it was not only supremely comfortable as a luxury sedan, but it could also hustle around a racetrack like a sports car.

Porsche calls the Panamera a gran turismo, and touring is its forte. On the high-

way, it is fast and relaxed. It would be ideal for a high-speed, cross-country journey because it feels like a personal jet. The rear bucket seats are as deeply contoured and as supportive as those in the front, and rear headroom and legroom are surprisingly generous.

The back seats fold forward, and the resulting cargo space can accommodate a bicycle.

The Panamera's seven-speed transmission is essentially a manual transmission that is shifted automatically, or with paddles on the steering wheel. Called PDK, for Porsche Doppelkupplungsgetriebe, or dual clutch transmission, this unit shifts gears with lightning speed, and it seems to have the right gear for nearly every situation.

Air suspension is standard, but an optional dynamic chassis control (\$5,000) helps eliminate body roll in corners.

The Panamera has a start-stop function that shuts off the engine when the car is stopped and restarts it immediately when the brake is released. This feature saves fuel and reduces emissions. Porsche says this is the first use of such a system with the PDK transmission.

Fuel economy is rated at 18 mpg in the city and 27 on the highway. Those are surprising figures for a car of this caliber.

The cockpit feels like that of an aircraft. Porsche wanted to avoid using a mouse-like knob that is becoming popular among high-



end cars, so the driver is surrounded by buttons – on both sides of the center console and on the ceiling. While the number of buttons looks confusing at first, they are grouped by function and are easy to understand.

To save weight, aluminum, magnesium and boron steel are used for the body. The underbody is smooth for more efficient aerodynamics, and a movable spoiler rises up from behind the rear window to create downforce at high speed.

One particularly impressive option is the Burmeister audio system (\$5,690) that has 16 speakers and 1,000 watts of power. The stereo is as awesome as the car is fast.

Price

Base price of the V-6 Panamera is \$74,400. The test car's options included metallic paint, heated seats, heated steering wheel, 19-inch Turbo wheels and a Bose surround-sound stereo. The sticker price was \$82,190.

Warranty

Four years or 50,000 miles.

The Specs

2011 Porsche Panamera

Engine: 3.6-liter, 300-hp V-6

Transmission: Seven-speed PDK automatic rear-wheel

Wheelbase: 115 inches

Curb weight: 3,880 lbs.

Base price: \$74,400

As driven: \$82,190

MPG rating: 18 city, 27 hwy.

Old cars and old airplanes hold equal appeal for this enthusiast

By TOM STRONGMAN

John Swander flies his 1932 WACO UEC cabin biplane like he drives his 1932 Ford coupe: window down, elbow out in the wind, his hands grasping the wheel-shaped yoke with relaxed confidence.

Swander's hobbies might lead you to think he's stuck in a time warp. In some ways he is because his heart and soul are smack in the middle of what he calls the golden age of aviation, 1927 to 1941, and the golden age of hot rodding, 1945 to 1955.

Although Swander is one of the owners of Volkswagens in Merriam, Kan., his after-hours wrenching is focused almost entirely on traditional hot rods that look as if they came straight from racing on one of California's dry lakes.

One of his current rides is a 1932 Ford five-window coupe whose originality is a badge of honor. The paint is faded, a horse blanket covers the seat, one of the windows is cracked and the chrome is pitted. Patina has never looked so good.

About six years ago at the L.A. Roadster Show in Pomona, Calif., Swander met Ken Schmidt and Keith Cornell, owners of Rolling Bones, a New York shop that specializes in creating vintage hot rods. He immediately connected with them and their philosophy. The three of them put their heads together and decided that the old '32 hot rod sitting in Swander's garage was ripe for a project.

He shipped the car to their shop and they built a new frame, installed period-correct hydraulic front shocks and an original '32 Ford front axle. The hood is now

about 1 inch longer than stock, but the paint was weathered so that it matched the car's existing finish.

Swander installed a small-block Chevy engine, dressed with three two-barrel carbs. The transmission is a five-speed and the rear-end is a Halibrand quick-change.

Swander builds his cars to drive, and he has driven this one to California three times. It's like driving a piece of history, he said. And that's exactly how he feels about flying the biplane that he restored. The Experimental Aircraft Association named it Grand Champion in 2000. He flew it in the National Air Tour in 2003.



A perfect pair: A 1932 Ford and a 1932 WACO biplane.

As if cars and aircraft aren't hobbies enough, Swander smiled when he said he is learning to play the electric guitar. He plays a replica of a vintage Fender, of course. The time warp lives on.

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