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Changing Times

Once the tuning world was about wild body kits, look-at-me aerokits and add-ons for the sake of it. Today, as Speedart's SP91 R shows, it's all very different.

Story: Stuart Gallagher Photography: David Smith.

The world of the aftermarket tuner is now vastly different to how it was just a decade ago. We've touched on it before when testing the latest product from Zuffenhausen to go through the workshops of the big Porsche tuners. Once more we find ourselves with the keys to a 991 that, on first appearances, has the look of a tuned, bespoke specimen with exotic mechanical modifications to match the subtle-as-you-like exterior makeover and the not-so-subtle *ulyse verde* interior hue. The reality is, however, that this 991, Speedart's SP91 R, is a mobile showcase for the company's styling and interior makeover work rather its performance upgrade engine magic.

The lack of manufacturer performance upgrades is easily explained: Porsche doesn't really want those outside of the factory to meddle with its products, its ECUs, or the

performance of its classic flat-six motors. Well, it need not worry... for the moment. "An ECU upgrade is still some time away," explains Bjorn Striening, the man who founded Speedart in 1999, following a stint selling Gemballa conversions. "Porsche, like other manufacturers, doesn't like people reprogramming their ECUs, so it has made it hard for us with even more complex and sophisticated electronics. The switch from Bosch to Siemens has held us all up too. It's proving very difficult to upload the new data to install a remap as it's a completely different system. The car companies are also putting a lot of pressure on the customer not to change the car's ECU - or anything really. It's a bit sad, as cars are meant to be individual."

But while the tuners invest in ECU brain surgeons to write endless pages of code, the designers and stylists have been able to

continue to ply their trade and create a sharper suit with a silky lining for the 991.

As with last month's 991 model from Techart, Bjorn and his team had very little time from receiving their 991 demonstrator to revealing it at the Geneva show in March. "We started work on the design six months before we received our first car, before we had even seen a finished 991 - although being based close to Weissach 991 prototypes weren't exactly hard to track down to get an idea of proportions. Before we started designing the aero-kit for the 991 we had already taken the decision that Speedart would continue on the design language we had introduced with the Panamera. The bumper and lower spoiler treatment is very similar to the design we have for the Panamera, but it's been optimised for the 991."

That front spoiler, along with the rest of the aerokit, has been designed in-house at Rustesheim

before being sent locally for production. A combination of carbon-fibre and glass-fibre are used depending on the component and, as with all the best Porsche tuners, the original mounting points are employed, negating the need for any unnecessary drilling into the bodywork.

The aerokit Bjorn and his team have created is a comprehensive one. There's a one-piece front chin spoiler that fixes to the standard front bumper, reducing front axle lift by an undisclosed amount and helping to improve cooling for the brakes, which are the standard stoppers. "Porsche makes the best brakes; it's very hard to improve on them so we don't," says Bjorn. The aero kit continues along the sills with a pair of more sculptured skirts that are there for looks and to aid airflow along the side of the car. At the rear there is a just-for-show diffuser that attaches to the standard 991 bumper. Speedart makes no wild claims about its





ability to suck the 911 closer to the ground, it's purely an aesthetic addition.

The rear wing, however, is not. Sitting on top of the standard Carrera's engine cover the new fixed wing has been designed to work with the additional downforce generated by the front splitter, both designed to reduce lift. "By fitting the front splitter we've been able to generate an extra level of downforce on the 991's front axle, making it more stable, especially at high speed. But to compensate we had to make sure our rear spoiler design generated enough additional downforce to prevent any lift at the rear axle, while at the same time keep any drag increase to a minimum," explains Bjorn. Despite the addition of the fixed-wing the standard 991 rear wing still adjusts according to road speed or if you have the optional sunroof open. "It's the most complex rear wing we have ever had to design," Bjorn adds.

The pace and global reach of the tuning world has resulted in a greater pool of resources to draw from. For example, the aluminium blanks that are used to form the wheels have been sourced from the USA but are sent to Italy to be manufactured. "We design the wheels in-house, as we do everything that we fit to the car, but this is one component that has a true international DNA," says Bjorn. The Light Spoke Competition (LSC) wheel fitted to the 991 is a twin five-spoke

design that spreads to the far reaches of the rim creating an optical illusion that the centre of the wheel and the spokes are bigger in diameter than the wheel's rim size. They are not, of course, they are 9- and 11-inch wide, 20-inch diameter wheels with 235/30 and 305/25 Michelin Pilot Super Sport tyres. Completing the illusion is the fitment of a set of H&R lowering springs that drop the ride height of the standard PASM chassis by 20mm.

With the days of gullwing doors, wild side strakes and metal flake paint long behind us (well, we hope so at least) in recent years the tuning world has turned to using the interior for their customers to express themselves.

The change in production methods employed by Porsche when constructing its cars' interiors today has opened a whole new world to the aftermarket. "Before, a 911's interior was so solid and part of the car's structure that there was very little you could do to it that would make it truly individual. Now, Porsche has provided us with a blank canvas," says Bjorn.

The Lamborghini *ulyse verde* hue may not be to everyone's taste, but it is a great colour to highlight what is achievable with the 991's cabin. The detailing is exquisite and the bright colours used in this demonstrator highlights how far the 911's interior has come since the 996 days. Quilted panels on the seats and the dash



"Some customers come to us just to have their interior made over. It's becoming big business for us"

Interior makeovers are becoming big business for Speedart. Performance tuning is still at its heart though





20-inch LSC wheels are sourced from the US, designed in-house and manufactured in Italy

top and doorcards, add an air of individuality and the bright green areas of trim show how many individual components go into a 991's interior. "Some customers come to us just to have their interior made over. It's becoming big business for us," reveals Bjorn.

Let your retinas adjust to the colour scheme as you turn the key in the ignition and despite the 400hp 3.8 remaining untouched Speedart has developed a stainless steel exhaust for the SP91 R. And we think it sounds better than the factory item. At tick-over there's a deeper, bassy sound to it and it's a more natural one too, less manufactured like the factory soundtrack. On part throttle there's less drone and a crispy tone and when you open the taps it roars like a thoroughbred through the rev range, delivers a crack with every upshift and burbles and pops when coming back down through the gears. It's childishly addictive.

What is a little more serious is the cost of the work. Everything you see on this demonstrator comes in at a hefty €31,869, including painting and fitting. Plus local taxes, so UK customers can add 20 per cent to that price. The interior, at €16,740 is the big cost, followed by the €6850 charged for the wheels and tyres. Money well spent? As a package it's a striking result: a mix of Porsche subtly with individual elements that stand out from the crowd. As we have seen with all the tuner's products since the 991's launch, the results are also close to a design language the factory could adopt. The tuning industry is changing, and many will think it's for the better ○

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