

# à la Carte

WANT TO GO YOUR OWN WAY?  
THIS 997 IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF ANOTHER  
ROUTE TO A PERFECTLY PERSONALIZED PORSCHE.

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## The lure of the “perfect” 911

can be devilishly strong. It can lead one along a complex, circuitous decision-making process in which logic is at odds with passion. Perhaps, like us, you’re familiar with the situation. ❖ Unless you’re able to order a new 911 to your liking, you’ve got to start with Porsche’s back catalog. It’s a big catalog, and you can spend years searching for the right rear-engined soulmate from the right generation with the right options in the right colors—only to arrive at an inevitable conclusion: You need more than one 911. Shortly after that epiphany, a new struggle emerges: facing reality. If you can’t park half a dozen 911s in your front yard, how do you maximize the aspects of each 911 that you love best? Simple: You modify one 911 to match your vision. ❖ Throughout his life—including nearly a decade deployed in the Middle East with the U.S. Army—PCA member Shane Ladd did exactly this sort of daydreaming. “It was probably one of the few things that maintained my sanity,” says Shane. “It was something to concentrate on and be excited about.” ❖ His daydreams would lead him to a 2012 911 Carrera GTS Cabriolet—with a twist.



**WHEN IT COMES TO** personalizing their 911s, some owners get into updating, backdating, or serious modifications. Shane, a member of PCA’s Space Coast Region, isn’t one of those owners. His Carrera GTS reflects a “less is more” approach, one that led to a subtly different 911 that is nevertheless a knockout.

It’s an example of the “OEM Plus” philosophy—a mildly modified car that looks as if it could have come from the factory but is a little lower, a little sharper, and looks a bit more put together. The OEM Plus movement arguably reached its height in the 1980s and 1990s but

has faded in today’s world of factory hot rods, cheap leases, and ever-slimmer enthusiast magazines. Have car nuts stopped thinking for themselves? Shane hasn’t.

As a lifelong car guy, he has owned his share of performance vehicles, including an Infiniti G35, a BMW 330ci, a Mercedes-Benz C63, an Audi S4, and a Cayenne GTS. But he never held onto any of them for long, because the 911 kept calling him.

“I always wanted one, you know, so I was always settling,” explains Shane. “I kinda knew what I wanted, but I couldn’t afford it.” However, as his time in the Army



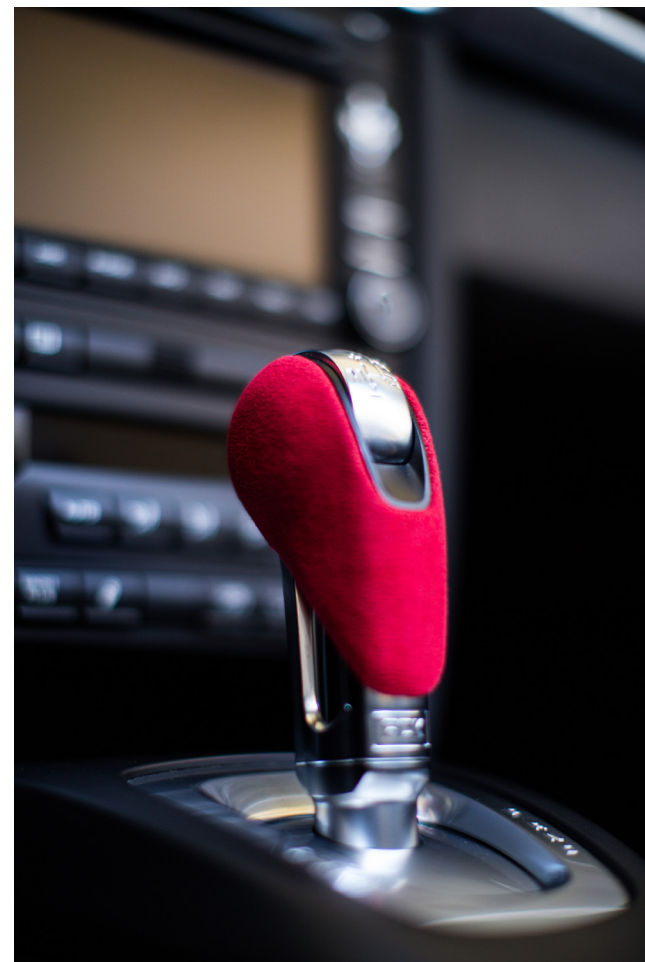
windshield, revised rear tonneau, and five-lug wheels.

Shane wasn't interested in building a Speedster replica, though. He wanted to borrow design elements and parts from other special-edition 911s to create a unique look. Finding a partner to make that dream a reality was easy. While living in North Carolina, Shane forged a relationship with Stephen Klitzsch at GMP Performance in Charlotte. "I worked with him extensively on a Mercedes C63," says Shane. "I was quite satisfied with the work."

The project would start from the inside out. A red top mark sits at high noon on the steering wheel—a touch borrowed from the 997 GT3 RS 4.0—while the PDK shifter and emergency brake handle are wrapped in red Alcantara. Red door pulls from a 997 GT3 RS replace the stock GTS door handles. Carbon fiber was used to trim the ignition surround and the center console and is sparsely featured throughout the rest of the cabin, including the illuminated doorsills. The final interior touches included SpeedArt pedals and red gauge faces, along with red-trimmed black floor mats to add contrast to the red bits surrounding the driver.

Performance upgrades were focused on improving handling rather than maximizing power, as the GTS already features the highly desirable factory Powerkit engine, which is rated at 408 horsepower. Asked if he

**A race-inspired "noon" marker on the steering wheel, red gauge faces, red Alcantara-wrapped shifter knob and e-brake, and SpeedArt pedals customize the interior in Shane Ladd's 911.**



was extended, the capital he could invest in his "some-day" car grew. Shane adjusted his automotive daydreams accordingly, but he says one thing remained constant: "I always wanted a 911, so I was gonna have one."

Returning to the U.S., he originally sought out a 911 Turbo, but he couldn't find the right car. His wife, Eileen, helped speed up the process. She wanted to buy him a 911 to celebrate his impending retirement, and they ended up with a 997-generation Carrera GTS Cabriolet.

Shane got the Porsche he had dreamed about—and had enough funds left over to turn it into exactly the 911 he always wanted.

**EVERY PORSCHE PROJECT** needs an inspiration, and the inspiration for this one was the 2011 911 Speedster, a limited edition that was mechanically identical to the 997 Carrera GTS Cabriolet except for its manual top, lower





The black-rimmed headlights give Ladd's 911a Speedster-like appearance, while the bumper-top vent is from a 997 GT3. Below: A Brembo big brake kit with custom-painted calipers sits behind Forgeline GA1R center-lock wheels.



wished he had ended up with the Turbo he originally sought, Shane says the difficulty of finding one may have been a blessing in disguise.

"I like the responsiveness of the normally aspirated engine versus forced induction," says Shane, who goes on to compare the GTS to his wife's twin-turbocharged BMW M6. "The M6 has gobs of horsepower, but it's not as responsive as the 911. I think the 911 handles much better, too. I like this engine, and I like this configuration—the sound is unique and erotic."

Happy with the GTS's power, Shane looked into chassis upgrades. A set of Öhlins Road & Track coil-overs replaced the factory PASM suspension, and an aftermarket Brembo big brake kit replaced the factory Brembo brakes. In one of the more subtle touches on Shane's GTS, the white Brembo logos on the upgraded calipers were replaced with black Porsche logos. On

red factory calipers, the logos would be white.

The larger brakes can be easily seen through the Forgeline GA1R center-lock wheels. Measuring 20x9 inches up front and 20x12 inches in the rear, the wheels are wrapped with Michelin Pilot Super Sports. A Sharkwerks muffler bypass setup lets the 3.8-liter engine sing a little louder than it did in stock form.

Customizing the exterior was actually fairly simple, given that this car's inspiration was the 997 Speedster. The GTS already came from the factory with Speedster-style rocker moldings, so a Speedster front lip and rear valance were added and painted to match. As a final flourish, a matte-black GT3 RS front bumper top vent and Speedster-style black-trimmed headlights were installed.

**THE END RESULT** is a car with the kind of style that goes down well with bystanders. The uninitiated might have

a tough time figuring out what, exactly, has been done to this Porsche. Those who know their modern 911s will likely pick up on the changes, but it may take a while. Far more important, the car perfectly suits its owner.

"I have waited my whole life for this," says Shane. "I've never had a personal relationship with a car before; it's difficult to articulate, but I have a visceral response every time I start the engine." Does he plan to put his 997 on a race track? No. Or, at least, not yet. "I'm slowly working into it. I'm nervous just because I like the car so much and it's so nice."

Shane enjoys driving his 911 on the road, which is one reason he says he's glad he ended up with a GTS instead of one of Porsche's more intense, track-minded 911 models: "I got the GT3 parts that I like without having a GT3—I think a GT3 would just be too rough to drive every day. This was my only car for some time, and



**A Speedster front spoiler adds another subtle custom element, and a Sharkwerks muffler bypass gives this 911 a custom sound to go with its look. Below right: After decades of dreaming, Shane drives his 911 into a new chapter of his life.**

I learned to appreciate its graceful manners around the corners of North Carolina's winding roads. It's been comfortable and appropriate as my daily driver for quite a while now."

Is it the perfect 911? For Shane, it just might be. For others, it might not be—but the car also prompts an interesting question in light of skyrocketing early 911 prices. Namely, would you rather have a mint 1971 911T or a 997 with a warranty and money to spare for modifications? There's something else, too: Early 911 prices are beginning to encourage period-correct restorations rather than customization. The opposite is true with later 911s—availability of good used examples and a wealth of factory, OEM, and aftermarket parts affords

an owner the opportunity to change as much or as little as wanted, guilt-free.

Of course, Shane could have had a brand-new 991 for similar money. Did he have any interest? "I haven't spent that much time with one," he admits. "But I do like the 991 a lot—are you kidding me? It's awesome." On the other hand, his 997 has a personal connection that a brand-new 911 wouldn't have.

"I just feel like the GTS is a really good fit," says Shane. "I like the way it performs, and I like the way it looks. I'm just happy with it. It suits me. I'm transitioning out of the Army after serving for 28 years, and I'm doing so with a smile on my face knowing that I have my dream car. It only took 45 years!" ●

