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GONE WITH THE WIND

Porsche's 997 Turbo Cabriolet not quick enough for you? Then perhaps SpeedART has the answer, introducing the BTR-XL 630.

Words: Richard Middleton Photography: Antony Fraser

Convertible or coupe; where do you stand? Enthusiasts will argue the latter is the only true way to experience Porsche's flagship; however, SpeedART's BTR-XL 630 presents a strong case to leave any preconceptions rag-top cynics may have at home. The fresh air blowing through your hair, drip-fed adrenaline courtesy of a modified twin-turbo flat-six, and stinging performance are all assets in this car's fearsome arsenal. As its name suggests, the bi-turbo racer wades into battle with 630hp and represents SpeedART's take on the ultimate in wind-in-the-hair motoring. With the

sun shining and the keys to a fettled twin-turbo 911 in my hands, the sense of anticipation heightens as I prepare myself for some turbocharged Porsche thrills.

Although an unmistakable display of affluence, in standard guise, the Turbo Cabriolet is still no jaw-dropper in the looks department. However, SpeedART's creation is more than likely to turn a few heads, and with 630hp from the 3.6-litre twin turbocharged six, the performance is certainly nothing ordinary, either. Mind you, never once having parted company with a 997 Turbo have I been left with the desire for more power.



The senses are provided with the full-on drama that you'd expect from the car's awesome power, extreme levels of grip and audacious looks



Nevertheless, with Porsche's electronic four-wheel drive system harnessing the extra 100-plus raging horses, it can surely only serve to enhance the experience. Modifying is a risky business. Do it badly and you mess up a perfectly good car; perform it properly though and even the most polished of manufacturer's setups can be improved upon.

What SpeedART has done with its BTR-XL 630 is up the ante in the performance stakes and offer its customer a bespoke look, achieved through the aero-kit, wheels and interior modifications that promises to set the car apart from the crowd. The full performance package, as tested here, consists of modified blowers, a sports exhaust complete with sport cats, headers and a modified engine management system. And, if the gut-crunching

acceleration is anything to go by, the claimed power outputs of 630hp at 4000rpm and 620lb ft of torque at 4000rpm seem more than believable. On the inside, old meets new by blending the car's carbon fibre bucket seats with retro Pascha trim. It immediately strikes a chord with snapper Antony Fraser, who comes over a trifle nostalgic as memories of his own 1980s 911 come flooding back. Anyhow, as funky as the retro-trim is, I'm far more interested in finding out whether the car can dish up the turbocharged alfresco madness the exterior hints at.

Firing the car up conjures a purposeful rumble that settles into a resonant hum as the oil comes up to temperature. Slot it into first and the light take-up of the clutch initially comes a tad unexpected, more akin to your gran's Micra than a

600hp Porsche. It only takes a couple of hundred yards, however, to lay any illusions to rest as even the lower regions of the rev range provide an indication of the spectacular propulsion that is to follow. Changing gear with the car's optional SpeedART knob, make of it what you will, and the blown six ceases its raging bark momentarily only to be replaced by the grin-inducing sound of chattering wastegates. We've pretty much exhausted the bank of adjectives available to describe Porsche's six-cylinder engines, but try to imagine what a 911 Turbo with 630hp sounds like and then ratchet it up a couple of notches and you'll probably be in the right ball park. In full-on attack mode, the noise hits you with a similar vigour as the accelerative punch and sends you tearing down the road at an unbelievable pace.

The somewhat unvaried surface of the surrounding roads makes any meaningful diagnosis as to the car's ride quality unviable. However, on this smooth asphalt, the experience is nothing less than amicable. How well the car would ride on your typical British road on the 20-inch wheels is unclear, but the imperfections we do encounter indicate that smaller sized wheels may serve the car better. As a point-to-point weapon, however, there are few cars that could perform the job more effectively. And, now, with no roof over your head to soften the experience, the senses are provided with the full-on drama that you'd expect from the car's awesome power, extreme levels of grip and audacious looks. There's no real turbo lag to speak of, just the rapid build of torque, steadfast

Pascha pattern seats just one of the many ways SpeedART can tailor your car's interior. Modified 3.6-litre twin-turbo engine produces an extra 150hp over the standard car

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traction and tarmac-scorching performance. Riding on modified sports suspension, the car turns in quickly and has a remarkably pointy-front end. Be a bit boisterous with the power-application on the exit of corner and the four-wheel drive 911 can be made to adopt a mild oversteer stance, after you've managed to momentarily break the monumental grip levels.

Although SpeedART reckons the XL 630 will hit 60mph in 3.2 seconds and reach a top speed in excess of 200mph, we weren't able to get any hard data as, unfortunately, the car wasn't recognising the presence of our timing gear. Though, the slugs of acceleration – which continue with true menace upon each upshift – see the car rattle through its six-ratios with frightening ease with the jet fighter soundtrack in play. Each to their own and all that but, for me, the steering wheel is better off being left standard. Bespoke, yes, but as with many of the thicker-rimmed aftermarket items, they tend to rid the driver of some of the all-important feedback. The standard brakes have no problems coping with the extra thrust, reigning in the car's momentum as and when it's required.

By all accounts, this is a relatively practical

beast, too. The safety of Porsche's four-wheel drive system, lightness of the controls and progressive turbocharged delivery make it reassuringly manageable. Shockingly fast, yes, but not daunting by any stretch of the imagination. The modified suspension also retains the use of Porsche's PASM function, and once you've blown away the cobwebs charging through the gears, you can flick the switch to activate the bypass valve in the exhaust, which will aid a more stealthy approach.

So what's the verdict? Well, there's no doubt that the BTR-XL 630 manages to distinguish itself from the standard model. The performance package is terrifically executed, too. The extra power doesn't come at the cost of any loss in driveability, and transforms a ferocious performer by amplifying the car's encapsulating drive. The looks might not be to everyone's tastes, but with a broad range of styling options available to the customer, you can pick and choose how you want to model your car's identity. An intoxicating experience that, as it does to the scorched tarmac, leaves its mark on your mind. Now, time to sort out the Barnet! ●

Visit www.speedart.de for further information

