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GREEN MACHINE

More power, tougher looks; can SpeedArt's C-RS 325 improve on the already sublime Cayman S?

Words: Chris Knapman Photography: Max Earey

On the face of it, driving a modified Cayman S into Weissach is a bit like entering the lion's den wielding a freshly wounded impala. It's not that there appears to be any obvious weakness in SpeedArt's C-RS 325 – far from it in fact – but rather that as a Porsche so clearly subjected to some fettling, driving through a place this close to the company's heart must inevitably leave us vulnerable to a mauling.

Conversely, rather than provoking death stares and abuse from the locals, all we appear to be getting are approving looks and, believe it or not, the odd thumbs-up. Later in the day, when we have parked up to take some pictures, we are even approached by one of Porsche's own employees. He's been out cycling in the local hills and having heard my not so subtle progress in the C-RS, is intrigued. For no other reason than company loyalty I expect him to disapprove of the reworked Porsche, but it turns out that either his lying is as good as his English, or this tuned Cayman S is hitting all the right notes. "I don't know if I would have green though," goes his parting shot before he bids us auf wiedersehen.

He's got a point, for while the green-painted carbon highlights may stand out nicely on this, SpeedArt's show car, as an everyday proposition they could be labelled a touch garish. The rest of the car on the other hand looks pretty much spot on, oozing a muscularity lacking from the standard Cayman S.

This is achieved primarily by the fitment of SpeedArt's 20-inch Cross Racing wheels, the centre of the three-piece rims here finished in gunmetal grey to striking effect. Wearing 305-section Continental Sport Contacts at the rear (the front tyres have grown to 245-section items), the wheels leave all but a rizzle's width between the rubber band-profile Contis and the S-RS's arches.

Sitting atop the C-RS's pert rear is SpeedArt's carbon fibre GT rear spoiler, which uses the mounting points of the original Porsche item, and thus lifts at 75mph by around 80mm.

At the front of the car as well as those love 'em or loathe 'em carbon green mirrors there's a three-piece RSR chin spoiler with integrated flaps (painted in, yep you guessed it, green) to channel air under the car. Usefully, this spoiler fits directly to the S's standard front bumper meaning you can give your Cayman quite a drastic facelift without an expensive trip to the bodyshop.

This is all combined with SpeedArt's sill designs which run down both flanks a ride height lowered by 30mm, and a smattering of SpeedArt stickers and badges to complete the visual makeover. The results are undeniably striking, the Stuttgart-based tuner having done a fine job of toughening up the mid-engined coupé without going overboard.

Of course SpeedArt hasn't restricted the changes to the outside of this Cayman, and matches them with a small hike in power courtesy of the company's Powerkit Two upgrade. This consists of a full sports exhaust system and ECU upgrade resulting in





325bhp and 269lb ft of torque, 30bhp and 18lb ft up on the standard Cayman S and all but identical to the basic 997 Carrera (325bhp and 273lb ft). The exhaust itself is a combination of modified manifolds, sports cats and sports silencer, coupled to a pair of circular exhaust tips.

Fire the C-RS into life and it catches as cleanly as a standard Cayman, only with more of a baritone rumble to its exhaust note. Prod the throttle a couple of times and the six-cylinder engine snarls promisingly. It's also whilst lodged

in the C-RS's cabin you note that the snot green theme has extended to the interior, adorning the Recaro seats, the gearbox gaiter, the cover of the centre storage compartment, the casing of the Sport Chrono stopwatch and the middle of SpeedArt's chunky 340mm wheel. However, once the initial shock of sitting in what could be mistaken for the inside of someone's nose has worn off you begin to appreciate how just a few subtle upgrades can transform the feel of a car's interior from pleasant to genuinely special. Those Recaro GT seats are truly wonderful,

deeply bolstered and grippy in all the right places while at the same time feeling comfortable enough to tackle long journeys in complete comfort. The steering wheel too, with its combination of perforated leather and aluminium, is pleasingly chunky to hold, and the company's short-shift system feels on a par with Porsche's own.

Once on the move the drivetrain is faultless, both in its pick-up and its delivery. No matter how much you jump on and off the throttle, or at what revs, the result is nothing other than

instant, factory-smooth acceleration. Engage the Sport Chrono with its more instantaneous fuel cut off and it's the same story, this Cayman snapping to attention as alertly as the standard Porsche item.

Put your foot down though and this car shows it is appreciably different from the standard item, the extra power and torque detectable as the car hauls in the road ahead at a pace 997 drivers will be familiar with. The delivery of the 3.4-litre engine remains as inherently torque rich as Cayman S owners will

be familiar with, only this time it feels to have been given a further shot of steroids. This is complemented by an exhaust note that, slight boom at 2000rpm aside, endows the C-RS with a fully fledged war cry, as if the standard car's voice has broken. The howl as the tach needle sweeps past the italicised 6 on the dial really will fulfil that oldest of clichés and make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end.

Another advantage of the Powerkit Two upgrade is that because the gains it makes are relatively mild the extra strain on the drivetrain

is negligible. In this case the car has in fact been fitted with a sports clutch but SpeedArt's boss, Björn Striening, insists it is not needed and was only fitted in this case because the C-RS represented SpeedArt in the Tuner Grand Prix, where it recorded a respectable lap time of 1.16.024 around Hockenheim's short circuit.

Out on the roads around Weissach the C-RS retains the sublime handling of the standard car; turn-in is as precise as ever, and because those front wheels are only slightly bigger than normal any additional unsprung weight



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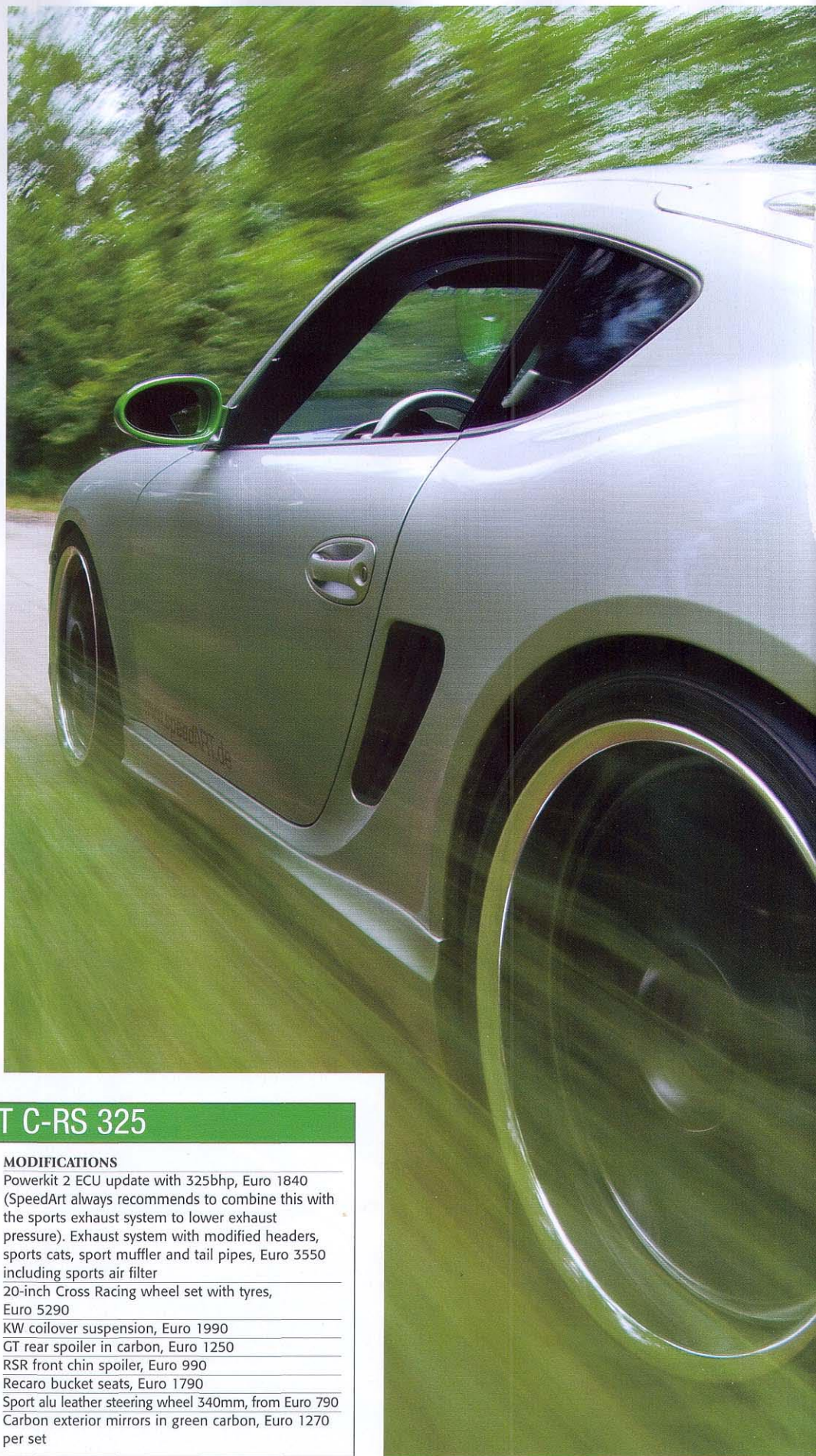
negligible. Those enormous rear tyres provide prodigious grip at the C-RS's back end and you feel that, on dry roads at least, it would take a heavy hand to tip this car into oversteer. As it is the Cayman's natural mid-engined balance and the almost telepathic front end allow you to barrel into corners at speeds that a 911 just wouldn't give you the confidence to do.

The KW coilover suspension has allowed SpeedArt to tune the C-RS to the exact specification it is after. As such it seems to take the edge off what you expect to be a rock hard ride, whilst remaining largely flat during cornering. As a bonus, on the (admittedly mostly well-surfaced) roads we tested the car it didn't show any signs of tramlining. This system doesn't work in conjunction with PASM's Normal and Sport settings, but SpeedArt also offers a Bilstein B16 kit, or simple replacement sport springs that will.

The brakes, while boasting green calipers, are in fact the standard items from the Cayman S, meaning 318mm discs up front and 299mm at the rear, with four-piston calipers all round. As such they are a lesson to rival manufacturers in stopping power, feel and consistency. Obviously you could fit bigger discs and calipers behind those wheels should you wish but unless you are going to use your Cayman solely for track work it just doesn't seem worth the expense, so good are the standard stoppers.

What SpeedArt offers with its C-RS 325 then is something that not only makes the Cayman stand out from the crowd but that also offers enough power to take on a 997 Carrera. These, says Striening, were the primary targets for the car: "Cayman customers like very sporting driving so like the great sound and performance of our Powerkits. There is also a great demand for the body parts because there are many possibilities of how to style the new Cayman."

So no matter whether it's the styling package, the power upgrade or both that prick your interest, there's no denying that SpeedArt has done a great job of adding a touch of exclusivity to the mid-engined coupé. And let's face it, if it can turn heads in Weissach it must be good ○



SPECIFICATION – SPEEDART C-RS 325

ENGINE

Power-unit: 3387cc, flat-six, water-cooled

Power: 325bhp@6540rpm

Torque: 269lb ft@4600rpm

Transmission: Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

SUSPENSION

Front & rear: KW coilovers, lowered by 30mm

BRAKES

Front: 318mm discs, four-piston calipers

Rear: 299mm discs, four-piston calipers

WHEELS & TYRES

Front: 20-inch SpeedArt Cross Racing three-piece wheel set with 245/30 Continental Sport Contact 2 tyres

Rear: 20-inch SpeedArt Cross Racing three-piece wheel set with 305/25 Continental Sport Contact 2 tyres

MODIFICATIONS

Powerkit 2 ECU update with 325bhp, Euro 1840 (SpeedArt always recommends to combine this with the sports exhaust system to lower exhaust pressure). Exhaust system with modified headers, sports cats, sport muffler and tail pipes, Euro 3550 including sports air filter

20-inch Cross Racing wheel set with tyres, Euro 5290

KW coilover suspension, Euro 1990

GT rear spoiler in carbon, Euro 1250

RSR front chin spoiler, Euro 990

Recaro bucket seats, Euro 1790

Sport alu leather steering wheel 340mm, from Euro 790

Carbon exterior mirrors in green carbon, Euro 1270 per set