



SO CLOSE TO ...

HEAVEN

Celebrating the new 911 Cabriolet: driving with the top down is about the nuances of life, not the weather. We outwit the fleeting nature of time, recognizing and experiencing the grandezza of simplicity.

By Herbert Völker
Photos by Breun&Grega

IN THE RED:
FOR ALL ITS OUTER
BEAUTY, ONE
MUST NEVER LOSE
SIGHT OF WHAT'S
INSIDE.



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We all know that the appeal of a convertible has a lot to do with beauty. Something of their character rubs off on us, a welcome side-effect in later days; the driver radiates the windswept glory of the drive. There's no point denying it: convertibles have to be beautiful—anything less is pointless.

Even the most ascetic of technology fans would have to concede that the new 911 Cabriolet is beautiful. The compulsory aesthetic exercise becomes a grandiose demonstration of simplicity, a gracefully sleek form slipping through the wind. The closed roof profits from the slight roof curvature of the new 911, while the rear window's seamless downward flow evokes the look of the Coupé. And with the roof down, the Porsche is the picture of uncluttered gracefulness, as if it had no roof at all. Amazing clarity—never before has everything been packed away so neatly.



The design of the new 911 Cabriolet is so magnificent that technicians had to invent new words to sing its praises. If the term "Flächenspiegelverdeck" seems unwieldy, perhaps even contrary to the elegant lines of the machine, the results are nevertheless worthy of unbridled admiration.

When the roof is down, all soft parts, including supporting elements, wholly disappear from view. This includes the aforementioned two new "Flächenspiegel" (panel bows), which are folded into position on top of one another in the unchanged Z-folding mechanism. When the roof is closed, these two rigid parts enable the Cabriolet to follow the sleek lines of the new Coupé. The logic of the practical promotes the appealing appearance. The new roof design, combined with the now complete coverage of the insulating mat under the exterior material, creates an interior atmosphere that reminds one more of a hardtop than a soft top. From the interior, the two middle sections in the roof are perceptible only as graphic elements, if at all.

Like it or not, the electrified fanning out of the roof is an all but extinct phenomenon, even for soft tops, the classical motion having been replaced by the intricate puzzle-work of fitting pieces together in ever-subtler structures. It is a great example of the perfect functional sequence as an aesthetic category. This latest and most intricate incarnation of the Z-folding mechanism delights the observer with its alternating sequences of progressive and overlapping motions. The fifteen-second choreography is characterized by a seeming effortlessness that can scarcely be described in



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terms such as “soft-top compartment lid” and “rod flaps”; the two “rigid units” naturally join the dance. Flights of poetic fancy simply cannot do justice to this opening show. After all, no lyrical description of the gracefulness of a rhythmic gymnastics performance ever contained the word “Flächenspiegel.”

Unchanged—to return to the subject—is the possibility of opening or closing the roof at speeds of up to 50 km/h (31 mph). Admittedly, the temptation to show off is great. You don’t put your talent under a bushel.

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Speaking of talent, let’s talk about the driving dynamics. Walter Röhrl accompanied both the Coupé and the Cabriolet throughout their development. The dyed-in-the-wool Porsche man displays his Bavarian straightforwardness: “The bone-rattling rides of the past are long gone; we’re light-years beyond that. But to be perfectly honest, the ideal convertible scenario from a driving-dynamics standpoint can be achieved only with carbon fiber. In the Carrera GT, it makes no difference whether you have a roof or not. In a steel car, there will always be that little bit of play between a coupe and a convertible. But in the last twenty years, Porsche, above all, has continually reduced

this difference, and now we’re talking about such minimal differences in terms of driving dynamics that they are truly negligible—you’d need an extremely sensitive backside to even notice them. In normal circumstances—even with a very vigorous driving style—the coupe/convertible question is not an issue.”



As regular readers of this engaging magazine will know, when our colleague Wolfgang Peters first took the 991 out for a spin, he compared it to the sound that an obedient hunting dog would make upon breaking into a cookie factory and going to town on the annual production. With the Cabriolet, we can add the true-to-life nuance that even if we were not invited to the cookie factory, everyone would nevertheless be happy to receive the visit.



Mere nuances now separate the Coupé and Cabriolet. Porsche has worked continuously to bridge the gap. The differences in driving dynamics are now so minimal as to be all but imperceptible.





The roof mechanism opens more than just new dimensions. The sound experience opens up as well, and that doesn't just apply to the sonatas of the six-cylinder engine. It doesn't have to be Bruckner's Eighth; Lee Hazlewood does the trick too—especially on frosty January mornings.

It is no secret that a certain science related to engine technology has been fine-tuning the essential sound experience that has been a battleground between the tailpipe and the authorities for decades. Ideally, the interior sound dome (whether coupe or open-top) is more robust than the outside noise. In other words, it has more oomph inside than outside. In the case of the 911, additional delicacy is required; the historically air-cooled grumble in neutral needs to percolate up to metallic heights before gaining substance and depth, opening up the bass to let it rumble.

Convertible fans will disagree about whether this sound dome sounds all the more vivid once the roof has been packed away in the back. However many personal examples one can rally to support one's theory, a certain sentimental compo-

nent always subverts any claim to objectivity. It doesn't have to be Bruckner's Eighth; Lee Hazlewood does the trick too, best of all with "Summer Wine" on frosty January mornings, decked out in a stocking cap and a flowing scarf.

One thing is indisputable: driving a convertible is about the nuances of life, not the weather.



We outwit the fleeting nature of time with little rituals, find our reflexes to warm and cold and wet and windy. Fresh air alone cannot be what we're after; if that were so, long walks would be more suitable. It is said that "fresh air" had a kind of magical appeal for the old-time English roadster

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that could be explained only by the peculiarities of British weather; elsewhere the term is less evocative. We know of connoisseurs who prefer to air it out at 25 °F rather than 85 and sunny. Yet another case for the “Arizona syndrome” file, a phenomenon whereby the fewest convertibles are sold in the hottest state in the United States—a no-brainer in this age of air-conditioning.

The theory has been advanced—and it is not the worst one—that to drive a convertible makes one a better person. Anyone who ever said “****” or the like in the cabin of a car immediately senses the ennobling effects of driving a car while fully exposed to his compatriots.

As much as an open roof promotes chivalrous attitude and calm composure, we must not neglect the effects of the wind deflector. At times it does inspire us to drive somewhat faster. Of course, generations of convertible drivers learned to live with the indignities of having a gust of wind blow up the backs of their necks and send unsecured papers flying to the four corners of the universe. But, first, they seldom drove quite that fast; and they knew how to keep things in check, for example with appropriate outdoor hairdos.

Nowadays wind deflectors are standard; the technical term is “draft stop.” New in the Porsche convertible pantheon is a wind deflector stowed not in the trunk but directly integrated in the rear compartment, which can be raised at the push

of a button. No more setting up and stowing away. When stowed, the deflector disappears into the rear compartment cover—where there’s actually no space at all. A circus trick par excellence.



To round things out, let us revisit our historic victory. At the end of the 1970s, brave car-lovers (with journalists on the front lines, it must be said) fought for nothing less than the preservation of the entire convertible species. Rampant narrow-mindedness was partly to blame, but the greatest threat came from U.S. authorities: open-top cars would not be able to fulfill pending requirements.

Indeed, nothing less than the extinction of convertibles was in the cards. Ultimately the dilemma was resolved by the stiffness and safety features that today are industry standards. If simply leaving the roof off would have been enough to satisfy the American call to order, the convertible would have had to be reinvented from the inside out. In retrospect, a task of only middling difficulty; but in the 1980s, one had to plead with the carmakers—pretty please!—just to keep them from abandoning the convertible niche altogether. We regarded this niche as a cultural artifact worthy of protection.

The world has long since taken notice that the battle for the convertible has been won. And the latest piece of evidence has just arrived. ■



911 CARRERA CABRIOLET (TYPE 991)

Engine: Six-cylinder boxer
Displacement: 3,436 cc
Power: 350 hp (257 kW)
Maximum torque: 390 Nm at 5,600 rpm
0–100 km/h: 5.0 (4.8*) sec.
Top track speed: 286 (284*) km/h (178/176* mph)
CO₂ emissions: 217 (198*) g/km
Fuel consumption
 City: 13.1 (11.4*) l/100 km
 Highway: 7.0 (6.7*) l/100 km
 Combined: 9.2 (8.4*) l/100 km
 * with Porsche double-clutch transmission (PDK)