



ON YOUR
MARK, . . .

The new Panamera GTS is not only a powerful cross-country runner. It also does commanding sprints on the racetrack. Race-car driver Eric Zwart, who drives historic Formula One cars in the GP series, is at home in both disciplines—and is delighted with the sportiest of the Porsche four-door vehicles during his all-around test-drive in southern Spain.

By Peter Ruch **Photos by** Patrick Staud



*A moment of concentration before his first drive in the new Panamera GTS:
Eric Zwart is calm even in new situations—perhaps owing to the long period
he spent in Asia, including time spent in a monastery.*

... GET SET, ...



Eric Zwart laughs. “I have no idea how many laps I’ve driven here on Circuito Alberto Ascari,” he says. “It has to be in the thousands.” Got it. Asking the son of the owner of the Ascari circuit in southern Spain about the extent of his experience on the family racetrack is not the sharpest of questions. But Zwart’s passenger might be a little addled from the endurance test he just experienced as the Panamera GTS zoomed through the replica of the Nordschleife’s Carousel. One shouldn’t ask any questions immediately after such a drive, but rather keep one’s mouth shut for a while. Which should be the case anyway for a passenger on “one of the most challenging racecourses in the world”—as former Formula One world champion Fernando Alonso described the 5.4-kilometer (3.4-mile) Circuito Alberto Ascari located near Ronda.

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Eric Zwart is a Scot. Or a Dutchman. At the moment he is a Spaniard, working as the track manager for his father Klaas Zwart, who founded the Ascari Resort. In addition to being a race-car driver, Eric has already been a helicopter pilot and a Thai boxer. He first started racing at the age of 20, and shortly thereafter told his father that he probably wasn’t fast enough. Now, at 30, he sometimes regrets a little that he might have prematurely abandoned his chances for the Formula Three. He currently drives successfully in the Boss GP series, which features tough battles among historic Formula One cars. He greatly enjoys the Radical racing series, and also has achieved respectable results in the GT3 championship.

**A QUICK REV-UP GREETES
ZWART AS HE STARTS THE
ENGINE.**



*TWO SIDES OF THE
PANAMERA GTS AND OF
ERIC ZWART: RACING AND
CRUISING SPEEDS.*

Although he possesses the requisite experience and is familiar with a wide range of cars, Zwart is driving a Panamera for the first time. He likes the starting procedure in a Porsche: when turning on the engine, he is greeted by a quick rev-up. He then takes the first two or three curves placidly. But on the back part of the stretch he speeds up. He doesn't say very much, limiting himself to brief assessments, such as "An honest car." Or "No problem." Or "Impressive." Or "It holds the road very well."

On the second lap he starts pushing the limits, and the Panamera GTS takes every curve with aplomb. Zwart smiles when he drives smoothly yet again through one of the more difficult segments, the exact replica of the Eau Rouge in Spa-Francorchamps. Yes, he knows the circuit, and yes, as a passenger one notes that he has quickly gained a lot of trust in the Porsche. After half a dozen fast laps he turns off into the pit again. There he remains seated for a bit, taking a closer look at the interior of the Panamera GTS, running his sensitive fingers over the Alcantara.



ANTICIPATION:
ZWART CHANGES PACE—
LEAVING THE RACETRACK,
HE HEADS FOR
A RENDEZVOUS.

Later he will say, "I'm surprised at how quickly I had complete trust in the GTS. After only a few curves I had a good sense of the car, I knew how it would behave, how it would respond—and that's a great feeling. Sufficient power, very good torque, great transmission, excellent brakes—it's sensational for a road-going car with four seats." Zwart is not one to toss around superlatives. He lived for a long time in Asia in a quest to become centered, and he speaks the way he drives—in a calm and concentrated form.

The Porsche engineers who are present in Andalusia listen to Zwart's verdict with satisfaction. That was their precise aim for the Panamera GTS: it should be not only a powerful presence on long-distance drives, but also a pleasure on racecourses. To achieve this feat, they pulled a number of tricks from their sleeves. The 4.8-liter V8 engine generates 22 kW (30 hp) more than in the Panamera S/4S, namely, 316 kW (430 hp) at 6,500 rpm. Peak torque is now 515 Nm





SOUGHT AND FOUND:
EYE CONTACT AND APPROACH.

PANAMERA GTS
Engine: V8
Displacement: 4,806 cc
Power: 430 hp (316 kW)
Maximum torque: 515 Nm at 3,500–6,500 rpm
0–100 km/h: 4.5 sec.
Top track speed: 288 km/h (179 mph)
CO₂ emissions: 256 (251*) g/km
Fuel consumption
 City: 16.1 (15.8*) l/100 km
 Highway: 8.0 (7.8*) l/100 km
 Combined: 10.9 (10.7*) l/100 km
 * with 19-inch all-season tires featuring optimized roll resistance

KINDRED SPIRITS: SHE SEES THE DETAILS, HE THE DRIVING PLEASURE.



at 3,500–6,500 rpm. This increase in power is due, among other things, to adapted valve springs with greater preload characteristics as well as to two sharper camshafts. These are needed because Porsche gives the Panamera GTS a huge induction-air boost via what is known as a ram-air system. The forward part of the car has two additional airshafts for this purpose (and therefore also a SportDesign front end) which open at 3,500 rpm to let the engine breathe more deeply. “And the performance values?” asks Zwart. With pleasure: the top speed of the Panamera is 288 km/h (179 mph), and the vehicle sprints from zero to 100 km/h in 4.5 seconds (0–60 mph in 4.3 seconds).



Zwart is especially excited about the suspension. This includes, of course, all-wheel drive. And Porsche Torque Vectoring Plus (PTV Plus), which features variable torque distribution to the rear wheels as well as an electronically controlled rear-axle differential lock that optimizes turn-in performance for sports-oriented driving styles. At its standard level, the pneumatic suspension of the Panamera GTS lies 10 millimeters (0.4 inches) lower than that in the other Panamera models, and its damping is designed to be tauter (but not uncomfortable). Porsche Active Suspension Management (PASM), with its level control, height adjustment, and adjustment of the spring rate and suspension, can further enhance driving dynamics. The Panamera GTS also comes with the Sport Chrono Package as standard equipment, which offers Sport and Sport Plus in addition to its standard mode. The extendable four-way rear spoiler, familiar from the Panamera Turbo, is a gem.

Zwart doesn't have to think about it. He selects Sport Plus, which means that Porsche Stability Management (PSM) intervenes markedly later and that greater longitudinal and lateral dynamism are both possible. “It's amazing how agile this car is when braked,” he says, “and the steering precision is really extraordinary for such a large vehicle.” He then asks, “I assume that our car is equipped with ceramic brakes?” That's right—to which he adds, “Yes, if a car sees regular action on racetracks, I'd recommend them.”

Act Two: it's Friday evening in Ronda, and this town in Andalusia is still quiet, as its inhabitants don't go out to eat until 10 p.m. Dressed for the occasion, Zwart calmly drives the 15 kilometers (nearly 10 miles) from Circuito



DESTINATION RONDA:
THE PANAMERA GTS PAYS A VISIT TO THIS TOWN IN THE SPANISH PROVINCE OF MÁLAGA.

Alberto Ascari to Ronda with his companion Maria—and the young woman is impressed by how quiet the Porsche is. Laughing again, the driver shifts down two gears and lets the eight-cylinder engine rev up. Now there's no shortage of engine sound in the car. Zwart attempts to explain to his companion how the sound symposer works—the system that Porsche engineers have already installed in the new 911 (Type 991). It sends air oscillations in the induction channels via a membrane directly into the A-pillar to provide a very special acoustic experience. Maria, however, is not terribly impressed; she had preferred the earlier driving ambiance. Zwart, ever the gentleman, restores the calm—at the touch of a button.

But he has had his acoustic pleasure back on the racecourse. There he played with the switch on the central console; it opens additional discharges on the fourfold sports exhaust system and thus generates a fuller sound quality. The larger

diameter of its pipes means that the sports exhaust system has less counter-pressure and can therefore provide greater performance.



Those are not the features that really interest Maria, however. Her enthusiasm is reserved for other details of the Panamera GTS. Her fingers run over the headrests embroidered with the initials GTS, over the leather seats, over the Alcantara on the armrests and roof lining. She notices elements such as the fine Panamera GTS insignia on the door sill panels—not that Zwart is indifferent to such subtleties, but he's more interested right now in the acceleration values. His gaze turns back to the road leading to Ronda. Actually, he would like to take another turn on the superbly maintained country roads around the town. After all, this is his first time in a Panamera. ▲