

# GET IN THE RING

## We square off against four variations of Porsche's mid-engined rear-drive open-top

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**S**ome of the best things in life are 'fun' precisely because you have to work at it. A lot of the thrill comes from the chase, which begins with hard work and finally climaxes in that heady sense of satisfaction when everything falls perfectly into place. Of course, a new generation of whingers might disagree, seeing as it's all about the instant gratification these days and how quickly one can upload artfully styled images to social media – who even has time for hard work any more?

If the past 38 issues haven't clued you in, we're huge fans of hard work... well as far as driving fun is concerned. We aren't commuters by any stretch of imagination so driving fast shouldn't be as easy as putting your foot down. To us, the 'fun' in driving is learning to exploit the peculiarities of a car, not just about the paper specifications or having the most expensive model. Unfortunately, the dynamic limits of modern cars have risen so high that one can no longer legally claim to have any driving fun on the roads, which is why

we continue to appreciate the simpler things in life that allow us to do so.

Porsche clearly recognises this too, since for every ultra-super-solid limited edition it puts out for the new money buyers, it also has room in its stable for purist models such as the Cayman GT4 and the latest 981 Boxster Spyder.

Of all the Porsche models, we daresay the mid-engined Cayman and Boxster offer the best accessibility to driving pleasure, versus their more iconic 911 brethren – and don't even start to tell us you can drive a 911 hard if you're the sort to leave all the electronic nanny aids active to begin with; we've been in hard-charging rear-drive 911s before and the combination of throttle and car control while deliberately unsettling the weight balance is nothing short of mind-boggling.

Now, our topless quartet of Porsche's mid-engined rear-drive sportscars features some familiar faces, like last generation's Boxster Spyder (a firm favourite of ours) and current 981 Boxster GTS, while the 914/6 and Ruf 3800 S Roadster complete the roster to bare their fighting prowess.



# PORSCHE 914/6 - CLASS DIVIDE

This 1970 vintage cherubic Gulf Racing-liveried Porsche 914/6 is an oddity of sorts in the brand's history, chiefly because of Volkswagen's (the brand, not the Group) involvement in the original 914 project from 1970-1976. The less-informed like to attribute the entire model range to VW, but only the base 914s were built by Karmann in Osnabrück; 914/6 variants like this one were all-Porsche, right down to the air-cooled flat-six 2.0-litre mounted in the mid-ship.

These "VW-Porsche's" were blighted with an underrated cult status due to their VW connection, especially with collectors busy chasing up values of air-cooled 911s. However, this has probably worked out well for 914/6 owners, since it means there are that much fewer cars around – as far as Singapore is concerned, there is just this one and another 914 still on the road.

The cheeky'un joined our gang-bang because it puts a smile on our faces, and we feel it's the missing link between the 550 RS Spyder of the 1950s and today's Boxster, even with its Targa-esque silhouette and manual fibreglass flat-roof (about 7+kg). Compared to the trio of modern Boxsters we've gathered, the lightweight 914/6's dimensions are dainty (even as its personality is larger-than-life), even with the ultra-rare 916 variant's fender flares.

However, it should come as no surprise that it proved to be the most physically and mentally involving to drive of our quartet, and not just because we didn't have the air-con on either! Its sub-950kg kerbweight makes it a doodle to steer, even without power-assisted steering, and if nothing else, helps break our habit of forcing the steering wheel when the car is stationary.

Apart from the rear flared arches, the Porsche enthusiast/owner of this 914/6 has bolted in a pair of tasty Porsche bucket seats – in case you're wondering, they came off a 964 RS and some friends have quipped that the pair could cost more than the car they're in! Needless to say, the seats are nicely snug and hold you well in place even though the car's performance doesn't come close to its modern counterparts' high-g dynamics.

In factory form, the 914/6's flat-six 2.0-litre is the same engine found in the 911 T (the lowest powered 911 of its time) and produces 110bhp and 157Nm – this seems modest by today's standards, but it will shift the flyweight to 100km/h from a standstill in under 10 seconds. It's interesting that even then (as now), there's no usurping the performance of the 911s by any model lower down in the brand's hierarchy. Hmmm, so that's a 911 engine transplant into a compact mid-engined model... sound familiar yet?

The mechanicals of the car are such that we had to rev-match, even when upshifting via the five-speed manual box, but there's sweet satisfaction in hustling the car along, especially in light of the purity and focus of its charismatic personality. Its dynamics make every corner a joy to tackle and the best part is it's possible to tap into the car's performance within the speed limits.

Like the Boxster, the 914/6 is more about flowing with the corners on its Fuchs 15-inch footwear than blitzing down straights – however, it should be qualified that modern Boxster iterations now give you good straight-line grunt as well. Everything about the drive is deliberate, and you really need to show commitment to achieve any swift progress – there's no waffling about with this critter.

Once you're properly on the move, it's possible to seamlessly string together a series of corners through the small-diameter steering wheel, which returns the favour with a meaty communication and a natural, organic feel. The rousing rolling thunder on the move from the carburettors under hard acceleration go well with the heady smell of oil and the clitter-clatter of the engine, which served as the potatoes and veg to go with the meaty meal – now that we think about it, the most advanced things in the car that day were probably our smartphones!



**“914/6 THE MOST PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY INVOLVING TO DRIVE OF THE FOUR”**



Nothing fancy here, just the essential info you'll need to enjoy the drive



Rear fender flares are from the 916



## PORSCHE BOXSTER SPYDER - FIGHTING SPYDER

We never need an excuse to pull this one out, because it's such great rewarding fun to drive anytime, anywhere and on any road, which is also why we're awaiting its 981 Boxster Spyder successor with bated breath. It's like the scrappy street-fighter who's always raring to go, so you'll never deal with any of that "I have a headache tonight" spiel when you're up for some fun, since the only things this Spyder will be spinning are its tyres. Although it pre-dates the Cayman R of the same generation, the Boxster Spyder is essentially a lightweight, harder edged variant of the Boxster S, albeit still powered by the range's 3.4-litre that has been tweaked for a little more grunt.

In its purest form, we're looking at carbonfibre-backed race buckets with both radio and aircon-delete, as well as a six-speed manual transmission, so in total that's about 80kg dropped off the standard S. However, we understand no such cars exist in Singapore, so we reckon the next best bet is this one: cf seats (saving 12kg off the regular seats) and Spyder rims, but PDK, air-con and hi-fi.

The largest weight culprit is the roof's electronics and folding mechanism, so ditching those saves 21kg. Elsewhere, the Boxster Spyder does without an instrument cowl and makes do with fabric door-pulls, in a racy red to match the seatbelts naturally; even the door skins and panels are aluminium jobbies that come from the GT3 RS.

Roof down or up, the most outstanding visual statement about the Boxster Spyder are its lovely

humps, which are reminiscent of the Carrera GT, while the silhouette with the lightweight fabric roof up is unmistakable especially with the tautly stretched tent-like canopy that is secured to sockets in the rear deck. We spent a fair bit of time with the car, so with some practice, manage to knock the roof-raising/removing time down to about a minute flat – far longer than the automated systems of the other two Boxsters, but not quite as complex as many make it out to be.

The Boxster Spyder's trump card for edgy performance is a holistic one of peaceful weight-shedding... which ironically results in pretty vicious tarmac-shredding abilities. You find yourself slowly upping your game to keep pace with its voracious appetite for corners, where everything slow and fast are eagerly dispatched and devoured without ever missing a beat – the last thing anyone will hear is the fearsome buzzing of killer hornets receding into the b-road distance.

We're not saying the Boxster Spyder is stripped-out to the extent where all you feel are the bones, because there's also a decent level of meat to make commuting tolerable. In terms of dynamics, the Spyder is lowered and includes LSD – which sharpens up the car's already-incisive abilities – as well as a sports steering wheel with proper shift paddles (as opposed to the titchy thumb-twiddling controls on the GTS), so the flow of the drive is always natural and intuitive.

“BOXSTER SPYDER  
IS GREAT FUN TO  
DRIVE ANYTIME,  
ANYWHERE AND ON  
ANY ROAD”





# PORSCHE BOXSTER GTS - SPIDER SENSE

The GTS variants traditionally feature sporty add-ons, tasty aesthetic elements and a little more power to the standard S models and have now swelled in ranks to include a ‘GTS’ variant for every one of Porsche’s models – from Boxster to the Cayenne and everything else in-between, save the Macan... but that’s just for now, we reckon. Unlike some of the other marques, Porsche understands what makes its purist fans tick and creates products accordingly to slake their bloodlust. On the one hand, you’ll see Porsche models in one limited edition guise after another to pander to the brand aspirants, serial upgraders or those believe the latest is the greatest, while on the other, us enthusiasts get to continue to enjoy the hardcore driving tools the brand is known for, especially if the Cayman GT4 and 981 Boxster Spyder are any indication of harder-edged things to come!

In a nutshell, the Boxster GTS serves to offer the enthusiast driver all the right specifications needed to maximise top-down driving pleasure for both touring and track (or B-road), so it includes the bits as standard that are cost-optional on the S, but at less than the cost of speccing the S model up. For instance, sports exhaust, PASM and Sport Chrono package come standard, as do the silky gloss black badges on the outside. Instead of the carbonfibre-backed sports seats in the other two Boxsters, the GTS boasts electrically-adjustable sports seats Plus for what we can imagine to be better comfort during touring use. Needless to say, the cabin colours and trim can be customised to complement either body colour.. or wardrobe.

At the heart of the GTS beats a tuned version of the familiar 3.4-litre, which now delivers 15bhp and 10Nm more. Of course, cars like the Boxster are all about handling finesse and the GTS builds further on this with its spitting snarling soundtrack to intimidate any challengers, which is blared out via the black-finished tailpipes – another GTS trait. With the Sport Chrono and PDK’s launch control function, the 100km/h sprint from standstill is dispatched in 4.7 seconds, and we find these bursts of speed great for getting you from one corner to the next.

The Boxster S is already a compelling performer so it was good we had an opportunity to sample the GTS on a circuit as well, since it is the on-limit dynamics that make all the difference. The acceleration may be brisk rather than brutal, but we’ve learnt long ago that straight-line speed is never directly related to fun. In competition yes, when every second counts, but if you’re just out on the track having fun, we’d much rather have an agile and responsive handler that lets you play safely and progressively on the b-roads or on a track. In Sport Plus, the PASM does its magic to stiffen the dampers and provide the driver with better body-control, but this probably works best when the surface is baby-bottom smooth.

It may be a driver’s car, but the GTS caters to varying degrees of expertise. Regardless of level, it’s possible to get in and drive without worrying about getting flung into the hedgerow if you get a corner wrong, yet there’s enough depth to the car’s personality to entertain even more serious drivers, yet never compromising on the comfort levels required for cross-country touring.





# RUF 3800 S ROADSTER - RUF & TOUGH

Ever driven the wonderfully balanced Boxster and wondered how it would feel with more punch? Well, before Porsche's Cayman GT4 and the recently announced 981 Boxster Spyder, Ruf was busy shoehorning 911 engines into the Boxster body... and that's since the first generation 986 Boxster from 2000. In case you're wondering, Ruf is a Porsche tuner and also recognised by the German Federal Bureau of Motor Vehicles as an independent vehicle manufacturer that has been in the business of tweaking and building complete Porsches for the better part of 50 years.

911 engine in a Cayman GT4 or 981 Boxster Spyder sound 'much wow!' now? Well, the Ruf 3400 S roadster from 2000 would see a model evolution that would lead to the 3600 S and today's 3800 S, which is available as both Roadster or Coupe. As you can see, the idea of a grunter 911 Carrera S engine in Porsche's agile mid-engined, rear-drive roadster is nothing new – Porsche getting into the act now goes some way towards validating Ruf's engineering efforts from almost 15 years ago.

If you're expecting some OTT bodykit and loads of badges to go with the 3800 S's increased displacement, you'll be sorely disappointed because that's not the way Ruf rolls. The aesthetics are functional rather than for fashion and if you've had a chance to peek into the cabin, there's even a healthy dose of nostalgic whimsy as well – we love both the houndstooth fabric centre-inserts on the sports buckets and the Malachite green instrument illumination. Some of the other elements that help remind you you're in something special include the Ruf sports steering wheel (again with proper shift paddles to control the brand's RDK transmission) and sports pedals. Even the branding is discreet and understated, and there's no need for full-colour 'Ruf' emblems everywhere.

Visually, it gets the cooling vents on the front spoiler between the headlights – which first appeared on the 997 Mk2 911 GT3 and also feature on the Cayman GT4 – and quad-tailpipes out the back to trumpet out its defiance. To cater to the 3.8-litre's more furious performance, the Ruf front spoiler's air-dams are even more prominent than on the GTS, while the classically-styled 20-inch five-spoke rims keep things hunkered down and purposeful, yet accommodate the 6-pot/4-pot (F/R) brake set-up.

The 3800 S Roadster only shares a visual identity with the Boxster on which it is based, but the important changes are under its skin and like Alpina, the Ruf is best experienced in person, since pictures don't do justice to something that has to be driven. The 3800 S's exudes a subtle understated aura, that is, until you fire her up – the flat-six awakens with an almighty thrummm, but otherwise seems perfectly docile when not driven in anger. There's a mellow bellow from inside the cabin, but we also had the chance to hear a full-bore fly-by from street-side and by gum, it seemed almost decadent to have such a throaty howl come from something so svelte.

The driving position is spot-on and the seats offer snug support. Again, like the Alpinas, it's easy to forget you're in something that only looks like the Boxster (or BMW in Alpina's case), because the moment you unleash the full force of the 3.8-litre, everything becomes crystal clear... well, not quite, because everything actually turns into a manic kaleidoscopic blur as the 3.8-litre musters its might and dispenses its fury like a howling hurricane with the driver in its eye. On the move, the ride is well-damped with sublime body-control with performance that is always controlled, and there's a depth of character to the 3800 S's abilities that you can appreciate immediately.





# GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

Ruf is one of those brands you need to drive to fully appreciate – and drive hard at that – since to all casual outward appearances, it could be ‘just another Porsche Boxster’. The fine details are testament to the brand’s meticulous work and because it can be commissioned for bespoke builds, the quality is never in question. Under its skin, there’s a lot more that goes into the 3800 S than just a simple engine transplant: chassis engineering, as well as suspension, engine and transmission tuning are all Ruf’s own, which allows the 3800 S Roadster to feel and drive the part of the complete car that it is – this is definitely no ‘Frankencar’ creation.

There’s never any feeling that the Ruf is ‘artificially inhibited’ by internal model politics, so this ‘entry’ to Ruf ownership sees the Carrera

S’s 3.8-litre delivering 420bhp and 450Nm. Best of all is the tasteful discretion that comes with Ruf ownership, since its appeal is in the appreciation from another cognoscenti – and even then it’s on a nudge-wink basis – not about shouting loud and hard about how much you might have spent. Ruf is the big performance stick you wield behind your back when you’re speaking softly, because the value is in everything technical under the skin and the exhilarating drive that results in the parts working perfectly in concert.

The GTS is the current 981 Boxster’s most sporting candidate before the Boxster Spyder arrives, but the latter is only available as a six-speed manual, while the GTS still accommodates avid drivers who appreciate the

convenience of PDK, although a stick-shift is also available. It’s far more than the sum of its individual parts, which includes a good array of standard equipment that are cost-optional on the S – bear in mind though, these are only the bits that will enhance one’s driving pleasure, as opposed to just fashionable aesthetics. The GTS’ accessibility is probably its greatest strength, because it opens up the idea of ‘fun’ driving to a broader audience and prepares them for Porsche’s true motorsports DNA – we’re pretty sure some of these drivers will eventually make the natural progression into the brand’s serious enthusiast models.

We included the Boxster Spyder in this melee as the wildcard wildchild of sorts, because it’s the crazy family member you lock away in the attic

when there are respectable guests around. However, it’s hard to keep something so irrepressible in the background since the Boxster Spyder is no wallflower and isn’t afraid to prove it. The Spyder walks the trash-talk and despite its prodigious cornering grip, its tail can also be as loose as you want it to be and unsticks itself easily at the whim of your right foot. However, it’s more than just performance, because its quirky manual roof, styling and distinctive mini-Carrera GT silhouette turn heads wherever it goes, which might go some way towards explaining why Porsche is resurrecting the car with the 981 generation.

With everything about fast cars these days – or any modern car for that matter – geared towards making it easy for the common man-in-

street – or lowest common denominator, if you want to be rude! – to drive fast-faster-fastest from A to B or on a circuit, the 914/6 is a refreshing walk down memory lane. Advanced automated

“Porsche’s mid-engined RWD cars offer the best accessibility to driving pleasure”

gearboxes, seamless turbocharged engines and electronic driving aids mean there’s less need for finesse and balance in driving these days.

Manufacturers are only too happy to tout the ‘effortless performance’ of their cars, as all you really need to do is to put your foot down and steer – ‘old-world’ concerns of balancing braking, clutch/gas pedals and gear-shifts to avoid unsettling a car are yesteryear’s problems, but we certainly enjoyed doing it all with the 914/6.

The unadulterated driving purity of the 914/6 shows us where the Boxster has evolved from (and in some respect, where Ruf’s 3400 S/3600 S/3800 S have come from), and considering it was devoid of any distractions demonstrated how much more focused earlier cars were in delivering their driving joy. **TG**



### Porsche Boxster Spyder

Engine: 3436cc, flat6  
Power/rpm: 320bhp/7200rpm  
Torque/rpm: 370Nm/4750rpm  
Transmission: 7spd PDK  
LxBxH: 4341x1801x1231mm  
Wheelbase: 2416mm  
Kerbweight: 1300kg  
0-100km/h: 4.6secs  
(Launch Control with Sport Plus)  
Top Speed: 267km/h (roof open)  
Fuel consumption: 9.3l/100km  
CO2: 218g/km

### Porsche 914/6

Engine: 1991cc, flat6  
Power/rpm: 110bhp/5800rpm  
Torque/rpm: 157Nm/4200rpm  
Transmission: 5spd manual  
LxBxH: 3985x1650x1240mm  
Wheelbase: 2450mm  
Kerbweight: 940kg  
0-100km/h: 9.9secs  
Top speed: 201km/h  
Fuel consumption: 9l/100km

### Ruf 3800 S Roadster

Engine: 3800cc, flat6  
Power/rpm: 420bhp/7400rpm  
Torque/rpm: 450Nm/5600rpm  
Transmission: 7spd RDK  
0-100km/h: 4.1secs  
Top speed: 300km/h  
LxBxH: 4374x1801x1281mm  
Wheelbase: 2475mm  
Kerbweight: 1350kg  
Price: from \$5520k w/o COE

### Porsche Boxster GTS

Engine: 3436cc, flat6  
Power/rpm: 330bhp/6700rpm  
Torque/rpm: 370Nm/4500-5800rpm  
Transmission: 7spd PDK  
0-100km/h: 4.7secs  
Top speed: 279km/h  
LxBxH: 4404x1801x1273mm  
Wheelbase: 2475mm  
Kerbweight: 1375kg  
Price: from \$5342,788 w/o COE