

DREAMS

We finally will get to see the all-new Boxster at the Geneva Motor Show next March. Between now and then there is some detailed fine-tuning to do. We rode shotgun with Porsche's test and development team in a final sign-off drive of the new roadster in San Francisco and along the famed Pacific Coast Highway to Los Angeles.

By Greg Kable Photos by Wolfgang Groeger-Meier

IN DISGUISE





IN DISGUISE, BUT NOT IN HIDING. THE BOXSTER PROTOTYPES HAVE **MILLIONS OF TEST MILES** UNDER THEIR BELTS.



THE BOXSTER GOES TO CALIFORNIA FOR ITS FINAL TOUCHES. DEVELOPMENT IS BASED ON **FEELING AND FACTS.**

Our journey begins as we burst out of a dimly lit parking station into the push and shove of early morning rush-hour traffic somewhere in downtown San Francisco. We've come to the City by the Bay to hitch a ride in a prototype of the new Porsche Boxster—the 981 as it is known by its internal code name—as Boxster series head Hans-Jürgen Wöhler and his team of engineers put the third-generation roadster through a comprehensive final test. Today is a crucial moment in the life of the new Boxster, coming at the end of a lengthy three-year development program that has seen a battery of prototypes undergo millions of miles of testing on four continents—a procedure every new Porsche model eventually goes through before it is deemed fit for production.

Why San Francisco? "It's typically been part of our production car sign-off process," reveals Wöhler of the hilly metropolis on the Pacific, adding, "We sell a lot of cars in this part of the world, and the topography here offers unique driving conditions you don't find back home in Germany. The roads here stress parts of the car in ways you don't experience elsewhere." We quickly discover what he means.

With some of the steepest streets anywhere in the world, San Francisco is torture for vehicle parts like clutches and brake systems. For the first hour, we explore the extreme gradients of Filbert Street, which maxes out at a gradient of 17.5 degrees at the intersection with 22nd Street. Meanwhile, Porsche's test team records data on the new Boxster's gearbox loadings, as well as features such as the hill-holder function and the new automatic stop-start system—the latter part of an extensive range of fuel-saving features being added to the new model.

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In these first few miles, it becomes apparent that the new Boxster is already all but complete in terms of development. The disguised prototypes Wöhler brought along to this final test, a Boxster and a more powerful Boxster S, might not look like much, what with strategically placed cladding and black tape attached to the bodywork to hide their styling from prying camera lenses, but from a mechanical standpoint they feel, from the passenger seat at least, thoroughly sorted. Wöhler, who was also responsible for the engineering of the previous Boxster and its sister model the

THE BODY IS NOW ALSO MADE OF ALUMINUM, AND THE WHEELBASE HAS BEEN EXTENDED IN PURSUIT OF EVEN **GREATER DIRECTIONAL STABILITY.**



YOU COULD FEEL THE EFFICIENCY IN THE FINAL DRIVE—THAT'S **WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT.**

Cayman, confides that the prototypes represent 95 percent of the later production version. “The gearbox software still needs some fine-tuning. The rubber seals for the Boxster’s newly developed roof need some attention. But in terms of performance and chassis dynamics, it is pretty much where we want it to be,” he says.

As we pay the \$6 toll and head over the Golden Gate Bridge, it becomes clear that Porsche is once again aiming high with the Boxster. The proven mid-engine concept with rear-wheel drive has been retained. It also continues to share key architectural elements with the new 911, not least its front-end structure. So how do you improve on a car that seven years after its introduction continues to set the standard in its class? The answer: Start from scratch. “The changes we’ve made in developing the third-generation Boxster are far more comprehensive than those we made to the previous model,” says Wöhler. “We’re really talking about a whole new car.” The basic philosophy of creating a fast and highly agile sports car with excellent road handling, however, naturally remains unchanged.

One fundamental change is in the material used to build the chassis. While the old chassis was made of steel, the new Boxster is composed of an aluminum/steel mixed construc-

tion. This change enabled Porsche to fulfill an important objective, which was to make the new model lighter than its predecessor while significantly increasing its torsional stiffness. Another obvious difference is the altered dimensions of the aluminum-intensive roadster. Although the car is scarcely longer than the last model, the wheelbase was extended to enlarge the interior, enhance handling and performance, and increase passenger comfort. The front and rear overhangs are noticeably shorter. The front track also has been widened. The significantly larger wheel houses—designed to accommodate the optional 20-inch wheels—are likewise impossible to overlook. The prototypes revealed other interesting new details, such as exterior mirrors that now sit out on the doors, a windshield that is bonded without the need for additional rubber seals, LED daytime running lights and LED taillights, and newly styled wheels, through which you can make out the larger brakes.

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It never rains in California, as a well-known song says. And today, at least, there is no denying it. Even so, as we leave San Francisco behind and begin our journey south along Highway 1, we decide to put the new Boxster’s fabric roof to the test. The new structure, lighter and yet stiffer than



before, is now fully automatic, requiring nothing more than the press of a button to retract back behind the seats. Meanwhile, sophisticated mechanics ensure fast opening times for the fully closed roof.

As we cruise toward Los Angeles, it becomes clear the new Boxster is more refined than its predecessor. Mechanical noise has been reduced, making long drives a significantly more relaxing experience. The ride benefits from subtle changes in spring and damping rates as well as the boost in structural rigidity and the larger footprint. Overall, it feels calmer and more cosseting—a feeling that's further enhanced with the roof up. There's less wind buffeting at speed owing to a new construction process which allows for a tighter fit and a heated glass window that is fully integrated into the structure.

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During the drive in California, the final figures for the extensive optimizations were naturally not yet official. After all, the final calibration tests remained to be done. Even so, the results of the final test were unequivocal. Take the matter of efficiency. As we approach Los Angeles after nearly 375 miles (600 kilometers) on the second day of the final tests, rough estimates suggest the new Boxster will post double-digit fuel-efficiency gains, making it the most fuel-

efficient vehicle in its class. There is also a so-called sailing function. Restricted to Boxster models running the optional seven-speed PDK, it opens the clutch to avoid any unnecessary mechanical drag on a trailing throttle.

On a winding descent toward the bright lights of Hollywood, impressions from the drive—even from the passenger's seat—coalesce into memorable experiences. The reworked boxer engine displays its impressive range, from a moderate speed-limit sound to the bold cadences at higher rpms, when a deep mechanical bass and the bellowing tailpipe stir passengers' souls. Yet more impressive is the car's road performance. Sharp turns feel as smooth as silk. Even when faced with tricky high-speed changes of direction on the legendary Mulholland Drive, the Boxster demonstrates the ease with which it taps its vast resources, as well as the calming influence of the suspension's deep reserves. The wider front track lends the front axle not only more stability but greater neutrality. The combination of grip and balance defies description.

At the end of the final test in California, my—admittedly personal—conclusion is that the new Boxster's breadth of talents has been extended. It feels more capable, usable, spacious, comfortable, and refined. Riding shotgun certainly makes one keen to swap places with the driver, and not only on the splendid roads of California. ▲

IN TRICKY HIGH-SPEED CHANGES OF DIRECTION, THE BOXSTER DEMONSTRATES THE EASE WITH WHICH IT TAPS ITS VAST RESOURCES.

BOXSTER (TYPE 981)
Engine: Six-cylinder boxer
Displacement: 2,706 cc
Power: 265 hp (195 kW)
Maximum torque:
 280 Nm at 4,500–6,500 rpm
0–100 km/h: 5.8 (5.7*) sec.
Top track speed: 264 (262*) km/h
 (164/163* mph)
CO₂ emissions: 192 (180*) g/km
Fuel consumption
 City: 11.4 (10.6*) l/100 km
 Highway: 6.3 (5.9*) l/100 km
 Combined: 8.2 (7.7*) l/100 km
 * with Porsche double-clutch transmission (PDK)

BOXSTER S (TYPE 981)
Engine: Six-cylinder boxer
Displacement: 3,436 cc
Power: 315 hp (232 kW)
Maximum torque:
 360 Nm at 4,500–5,800 rpm
0–100 km/h: 5.1 (5.0*) sec.
Top track speed: 279 (277*) km/h
 (173/172* mph)
CO₂ emissions: 206 (188*) g/km
Fuel consumption
 City: 12.2 (11.2*) l/100 km
 Highway: 6.9 (6.2*) l/100 km
 Combined: 8.8 (8.0*) l/100 km
 * with Porsche double-clutch transmission (PDK)



IS THE BOXSTER A CURVE FETISHIST OR ARE CURVES BOXSTER FETISHISTS?



911 (TYPE 991) CO₂ emissions: 229 g/km (Carrera S Cabriolet) to 212 g/km (Carrera), Fuel consumption: 9.7 l/100 km (Carrera S Cabriolet) to 9.0 l/100 km (Carrera)
 911 (TYPE 997) CO₂ emissions: 326 g/km (GT3 RS 4.0) to 242 g/km (Carrera Black Edition), Fuel consumption: 13.8 l/100 km (GT3 RS 4.0) to 10.3 l/100 km (Carrera Black Edition)
 CAYMAN CO₂ emissions: 230 g/km (Cayman S) to 221 g/km (Cayman), Fuel consumption: 9.8 l/100 km (Cayman S) to 9.4 l/100 km (Cayman)