

Words: Johnny Tipler Photography: Antony Fraser

# TAKE IT TO THE TOP

Few country roads are as sinuous as the 6-mile run up Freiburg-Schauinsland hillclimb and, by coincidence, this uphill helter-skelter is on the doorstep of Porsche parts purveyors FVD Brombacher. So, as the location to snap 'n' sample their latest 991 GTS showpiece, it's a no-brainer



**W**e've come to the glorious Black Forest region to visit old friends FVD Brombacher – in fact, young friends would be more apt as we're greeted by the next generation of the Brombacher family, Franziska, Max and Theo, who are handling day-to-day business and tech whilst their father Willy tans in Florida. In amongst a cross-section of Porsches – 997, 968, 964, 993, 3.2 Carrera – I'm in the workshop chatting with the three siblings plus FVD Brombacher sales manager Alex Ben-Mahmoud. From one to another they tell me variously about the GTS and ongoing FVD Brombacher projects.

Hospitalities to one side for a moment, we focus on the firm's brand-new 991 GTS show car. The parts specialists and components suppliers have always had a project car on the back burner to assess the components they sell and demonstrate their tuning prowess – putting their money where their mouth is, in fact – and we've featured several over the past few years. The latest ex-factory GTS is capable of 194mph thanks to its 3.0-litre twin-turbo flat-six, while the FVD Brombacher car is tuned with uprated software and modified exhaust, hiking the model's normal output from 450bhp to 540bhp on the dyno. Finished in Achat Grey Metallic, picked out with lemon yellow flashes on the front lid, roof, side-skirts and engine lid, the GTS runs centre-lock BBS wheels whose rims are also picked out in matching yellow. External graphics include a yellow fvd logo and Brombacher side-stripes on the doors. Carbon leather seats dominate the cabin, with special stitching highlighting the leather upholstery.

As well as a mechanical test bed for evaluating products they'd happily endorse and offer for sale, FVD Brombacher are in the process of trying out the Nankang tyre brand, not a make we'd normally associate with high-performance sports cars. To be perfectly honest, till now it had simply never booted up on my rubber radar, focused as I currently am on Vredesteins and Continentals. This is not intended to be a tyre review, nor a eulogy of any particular brand; save to say that FVD Brombacher is mightily impressed with Nankang's AR-1 on-road semi-slick, and although it is not Porsche approved due to the lack of an N-rating,



they feel it is an economical alternative to the brands that most of us conventionally fit on our Porsches. Their evaluation will continue for a while yet, with on-track excursions planned because, as Max explains, 'they're not conventional street tyres, as much of the tread surface is slick. You do get a lot of tyre noise on the road, so for long distance drivers we would probably not recommend them. But my first impression is that it's like glue on track and on street, but it's noisy so we have a plus and a minus at the moment.' Once they are happy with them they'll add an appropriate wheel and tyre package to their web stocklist inventory. 'More customers are now using their cars on weekends for trackdays, and it makes sense to offer a cheap possibility for trackdays.' It's likely to be about €400–€500

you're a little bit more conservative they'll last longer, but driving competitively they will be finished in a day.'

Apart from last year's outrageous 997 Turbo Cabriolet, which was wilder than anything dreamed up by Stuttgart's bling-merchants, FVD Brombacher are generally not that extravagant in terms of visual embellishments. But, as far as fresh aero parts go for the GTS, it already has the side skirts mounted on its sills, which are more than 2cm wider than the original ones, while the front splitter, diffuser and rear spoiler Gurney flap are yet to be applied. The light strip spanning the rear of the car is normally unique to the four-wheel drive Carrera 4S, but FVD Brombacher think it looks great so they've installed it on their GTS. The

version is more like a 993 RS without such big wings. So, there will be two virtually different cars in the end, the less dramatic RS style or GT3 Cup style with bigger aero.' It's not just about the look: the aerodynamic additions are checked in the wind tunnel to verify their efficacy. It will also be possible for customers to combine elements of the two 'looks', because all the parts are produced by the same supplier, Moshammer who're based in Berlin. 'We were impressed by the parts and the mountings we received from them, and they are easy to fit, you don't have to cut or glue because you're only mounting on the original existing mounting points. We like that, because we can send the parts all around the world and we don't need to explain to somebody in Hong Kong how to mount the part because it's obvious and straightforward.'

The mechanical embellishments are equally evident – at least when the engine's fired up – by virtue of the modified exhaust system. The conversion starts by incorporating a 200-cell HD converted stainless-steel sports catalytic converter (that's 200 cells per square inch). 'That's the newest generation of the sport catalytic converter,' says Max, 'and it's a really expensive thing because there's a lot of cladding inside, and one of these is around €400 even before we get into the exhaust system. We've made everything a little bit sportier, a little bit more aggressive. And this is something that the customer can already buy, (he shows me the part number), but it is the first time that the complete system including software and all the other modifications is mounted on one car, so we have to test it to prove our initial horsepower and torque gains.' It goes on a dyno before and after. 'The sound is incredible. It is loud – wake the neighbours loud – like a race car, though it is

Following in the wheeltracks of his motorsport heroes, JT punts FVD Brombacher's modded 991 GTS up the famous Freiburg-Schauinsland hillclimb

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per 20in rim. 'We want to be sure this combination works on this car because it's not normal for us to associate with an economy brand like Nankang, so it's a project, and if we're happy with it, it's a new way for Porsche owners to have fun on track for less money.' So far so good, then: 'In a track situation these tyres are retaining their temperature and not exceeding maximum working temperature, and not graining, and although they may have a 30 per cent shorter working life compared with Michelin Pilot Sport Cups, they are less than half the price. And most of the trackday guys destroy their tyres in just one day. Depends how you drive, of course: if

aerodynamic profiling is also a work in progress. 'We have two versions of our project car's bodywork revisions,' reveals Franziska, indicating the blue 991 Turbo on the forecourt, complete with splitter, sill extensions, diffuser and extended rear wing. 'The aerodynamic package on that is the old-style version, and we're developing the young fashion version on the GTS, which is Max's interpretation. So, there's a little bit of competition between Max and Alex while they create two different kinds of look on the car. Max is more inclined towards a big wing area with a big spoiler up front and flaps on the side, more like a racing car, while Alex's



dimmed by the press of the Sport button, and this is our first experience with this range and volume of sound which this system produces, so we are excited about that.

The FVD Brombacher crew reckon their GTS's 3.0-litre engine had a head start in the power-hike stakes, being some 70bhp better off than the quoted standard figure out of the box. 'We were lucky that we had a car with a little bit more power than it should have had as standard, so we tuned it to 70bhp on top of the existing power. So that's 540bhp at

lowers at the end so it's manageable, it's not like its it jumps at you, and it's good to drive.'

By focusing on the 991 GTS as well as the 991 Turbo, FVD Brombacher is on top of the game. 'It's a little bit more complex to tune a normally aspirated car, and now every 911 has a turbo of course, that makes it easier to adjust the boost pressure. It's a whole lot of power that you need to change, and to match that so the car feels natural and not too excited, and especially that you don't risk something with the engine. Our

parts for it that we can sell later on.'

Talking of parts, which is FVD Brombacher's stock-in-trade, we do the guided tour. In the year since we last visited plenty has changed. There's been a lot of expansion, and although the workshop and IT departments haven't changed, the reception has been reshuffled, but, more fundamentally, the purchasing office, stores and dispatch are now around the corner in a different building, with much greater capacity all round. They've painted the 964 hoarding as well – what was Mint is now Yellow. FVD Brombacher also sells a few cars, more as a side-line, and we notice a couple of long-bonnet 911s and a trio of 996 Cabriolets imported from the USA.

Time for an outing. I spend a bit of time concentrating on getting my ear tuned in to the difference between the tyre noise and the exhaust noise, because at a certain resonance they're pretty similar. I alternate the GTS's energy mode switch from Normal to Sport and Sport Plus, where the bubbling noise abates, while the suspension stiffens and the shift actuates more quickly. I can have a comfy ride, a sporty drive or a track-day blast. 'In sport mode it matches perfectly

**On top of the world! Well you would be if you had a 991 GTS and then sent it off to FVD Brombacher for a makeover**

**Porsche's move to turbo engines across the range has made tuning a much simpler affair. Leaving the engine internals alone, FVD Brombacher have managed to liberate another 70bhp from ECU and exhaust tweaks**

**FVD Brombacher have been greatly impressed with Nankang's AR-1 semi slick, road legal track day tyre**

with our exhaust,' says Max, 'because, with the regular exhaust there wasn't much of a difference in the different modes. Now you can really hear the difference when you change the mode.'

We motor leisurely through Freiburg and head through the prosperous suburb of Günterstal, where the climb starts at a totally innocuous spot 400m above sea level. There is a white marking on the road indicating the start, but blink and you miss it. It's like that at the top, too, with no obvious finish line, though the adjacent restaurant is quite busy so I'm watching out for vehicles at this point rather than signposts. Back in the day, Freiburg-Schauinsland was one of the most spectacular hillclimbs on the European Hillclimb Championship calendar, and had a reputation for being one of the most difficult, too. Comprising 127 corners, it runs for nearly 12km, summiting at an altitude of 1200m in the Schauinsland highlands that, once you're out of the trees, afford fabulous views into valleys and the distant hills. To start with, the

route is flanked by mature beech trees and scrub, but after a few corners it climbs into a dense forest of conifers, with single-section Amco barrier to one side and, more often than not, rock face on the other. I have to say, these Nankangs are gripping mightily impressively as I twirl the steering wheel. I glimpse forest tracks on some hairpins, daylight on others, but the blacktop is flanked by unremitting green till it emerges dramatically at the Holzschläger Matten-Kurve, where we pause to survey the most glorious view out over the sub-alpine pastures – and return later to attend Die Kurve chalet restaurant for lunch. This is but half distance on the climb, where in its '60s heyday most of the 60,000 spectators gathered in the grandstands, long gone now, to catch a glimpse of the cars as they flashed by, one by one, before ducking back into the forested turns for the final half-dozen kilometres.

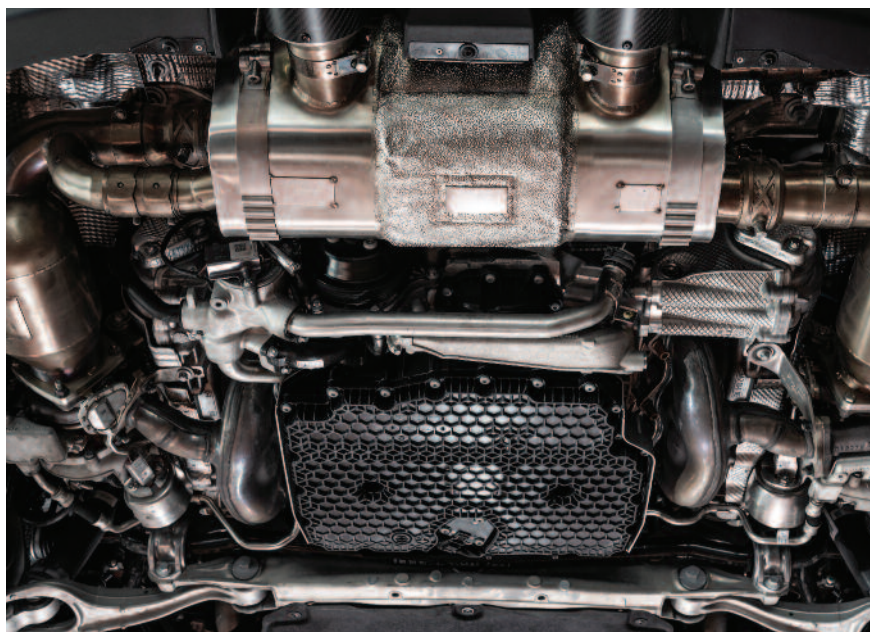
Back in 1957, the new FIA European Hillclimb Championship featured works teams from Porsche and Ferrari with drivers of the

calibre of Ludovico Scarfiotti and Edgar Barth. Although the calendar varied, Mont Ventoux, Gaisberg and Freiburg-Schauinsland were included every season for 15 years. Porsche drivers wore the Sports Car category crown from 1958 to 1968, while in the Gran Turismo class, they annexed the GT title literally every year from 1960 right up to 1980. Perhaps Freiburg-Schauinsland's most important meetings were in 1963, '64 and '65, when the World Sports Car Championship included both rallies and hillclimbs, and Edgar Barth (Jürgen's father) was victorious in '63 and '64, though in '65 Lodovico Scarfiotti led Gerhard Mitter home in the Ferrari Dino 206P. In '63 Barth, driving a Porsche 718 RS, posted an average speed of more than 100kph for the first time in the event's history, and in '64 he won again in the 718 RS, taking 6m 36.4s to cover the 11.2km, followed in 3rd place by Herbie Müller in a 904/8. Between '57 and '70, the list of Schauinsland winners is topped by Barth, with Jo Bonnier, Scarfiotti, Heini Walter, Gerhard Mitter, Peter Schetty and Rolf

**“ We had a car with a little bit more power than it should have ”**

6500rpm, and the torque figure is 480lb ft at 4000rpm, which is conservative, and we've already pulled back because we felt we had too much for a rear-wheel drive car. We've mostly achieved that increase in power by re-mapping the ECU. It's a nice power curve; it

target is to make it stronger, more reliable and a daily drive car. The best solution would be to have a racing car at the push of a button, and that's not possible, but we're going in this direction, and that's only the start. It's a project car, and we're developing





Stommelen also claiming the laurels for Porsche – and, just twice, Ferrari. The factory teams' interest waned in the early 1970s, though Freiburg-Schauinsland staged one final meeting in 1972 when the DRM (Deutsche Rennsport-Meisterschaft) visited the hillclimb in its inaugural year. The 139-strong entry featured Reinhold Jöst in a 908/03, though the winner was Hans-Joachim Stuck in a Köln 2600 Capri. Would we cut the mustard in a 991 GTS?

Undoubtedly, though the heroes of yesteryear wouldn't have had to contend with cyclists, hikers and bikers – who are banned on weekends for their own good.

After lunch there's more serious photoshooting to be done, and shooting means driving. Schauinsland is an amazing adrenalin rush as I sling-shot from one curve to the next, sweeping into the large, open radius of the Holzschläger Matten-Kurve: there's hardly a straight worth the name, just endless bends of varying degrees of arc and apex, sometimes open enough to see the exit, sometimes that's obscured by foliage. All the time at the back of my mind is the

historical perspective – that the titans of the sport once hurtled up here, putting life and machine on the line. There's never a feeling that the GTS is going to get away from me; I feel you can trust it all the time, it's not going to bite me mid-turn. Maybe I lose a little in the way of emotion in a car that's so competent; imagine how raw the experience would be in a short-wheelbase 911! Then I would be living more literally on the edge.

Going quickly, FVD Brombacher's GTS is a combination of driver intuition and coordinated controls. Steering is impeccable, and from bend to bend I aim it precisely where I want it to go and it complies with no drama. There's the omnipresent popping and banging on the over-run, and the throttle response when I press down and the turbos come in is instantaneous with that satisfying surge forward. No need for trepidation about grip: these Nankang semi-slicks really do do the business, heating up and holding their temperature well, considering this is a 'B' road, at a relatively high altitude, where it's cold but sunny. They really do have a lot of purchase when they're leant on, and their

road noise is something I could probably live with because they are so grippy.

What goes up must come down, and even though I prefer going up, it's just as thrilling zooming down, and of course you don't need to have so much power on heading downhill because you have gradient and weight of car working for you. But, in the ascendant, you feel the engine working harder, and that's more thrilling because it's delivering the most power and the most torque. Going down doesn't require full throttle to attain optimum performance; it's about braking harder, too, as well as judging turn-ins accurately. 'It's also a little bit safer to go up than down,' Max reckons, 'because if you miss a corner you really are going too fast, but if you're heading up you always have a little bit of gravity to fight against.' Whatever, this is the perfect environment for honing and appreciating an automotive work of art. It may be a project car but, frankly, it's hard to see how the GTS could be bettered as it is, though the additional aero might raise the stakes, on the Autobahn as well as visually. Whatever they do, it won't be an uphill struggle. **PW**

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