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# The Next 911

THE 997 IS ALMOST HERE AND SHOWS SHADES OF 993 THROUGHOUT  
STORY BY PETE STOUT. PHOTOS BY JENS HADEL/HADEL.NET



Getting stuck in traffic is never fun, but it must have been all the more frustrating for this Porsche test driver. That's because he was driving a thinly disguised 997 prototype when a German car enthusiast — who happened to have a digital camera — got stuck in autobahn traffic with him.

The resulting images are perhaps the most revealing pictures of the 997 we've seen. And the most exciting, too, because the next 911 looks great. Take this prototype, for instance: Its hue appears to be the not-quite-Seal shade of gray now known as GT Silver. We've predicted a return to 993 design cues for some time, but these shots confirm the rumors. While

a between-the-taillights reflective strip will probably be left to the 997 C4S, several 993 elements are present in the basic 997 shell: separate front-end lighting, bulging fender flares, a rounded front hood, and pull-type door handles.

Porsche is close enough to the 2005 911's introduction (slated for this summer or fall) that any remaining test mules probably exist for the purpose of testing optional equipment. And this particular mule has plenty of optional equipment — including park-distance control, a sunroof (standard in the U.S.), a rear-window wiper, headlight washers, special wheels, and a lowered suspension. And that's just what we can see.

**Best shot of headlights we've seen shows that the „fried egg“ section is purely taped disguise. The next 911 will revert to oval headlights as well as far more voluptuous fenders and bumper-mounted foglights.**

Most intriguing is the lowered suspension and those black-owed wheels. The wheels probably won't make production, as they look a lot like unfinished „sample“ rims suppliers provide to Porsche for testing. So these black alloys might be sizing prototypes. Many 997 mules have been running on current „Carrera“ wheels, so expect those (or something with similar sizes) to be offered for the basic 997s. We suspect the strange, black wheels seen



here have something to do with this mule's ride height, which is more aggressive than any other 997 setup we've seen. Perhaps this is final testing for the European sport suspension settings – or initial testing for the „Minus 30“ (aka GT3) setup.

Also interesting are this car's exhaust pipes. Four well-finished, round tailpipes can be clearly seen, which are different than the also well-finished rectangular pipes of other 997 mules. Either this is an optional sport exhaust or this mule has something special under its engine lid. An optional eight-cylinder is the subject of much speculation, but we believe the flat six is here to stay – no matter what motor is eventually offered. Our best source says the basic 997 will either use the current 996's 315-hp 3,6-liter or possibly the X51-package engine, which makes 345 hp.

Several magazines have predicted that the 997 will be quite a bit wider than the 996 due to its flares, but the 997's midsection has been narrowed to keep its overall width within an inch and a half or so of

**Top-Taped-over taillights appear to be more „wrap-around“ than those of the 996. Optional park-distance sensors account for dots along the bumper.**

**Above, left—Engine lid gets new venting arrangement; it loses several grill slats and those openings now face rearward.**

**Above, right—Closer view of the front end. Wheels unlikely to make it to production.**

the standard 996's. Looking down the flanks, the door handles and side mirrors have been redesigned. The former mark a return to pull-type items inside of cavities – though they probably won't be the trigger-type gems of the air-cooled era – while the mirrors are now held up by two supports in semi-Carrera GT fashion.

Not seen here, unfortunately, is the 997's interior. We've seen final-production pictures, however, and the new interior promises a huge step forward in terms of

style. It pairs air-cooled dash architecture with Cayenne-ish (interior) design clarity. The overlapping five-ring gauges are here to stay, but the lower dash area on either side of the steering column and near the glovebox is simple and reminds us of the „shelfy“ design found in 1965-98 911s. The center console takes a commanding role, while the steering wheel is both more modern and substantial. An early report from an outsider who sat in a pre-production 997 says that improved interior quality will also answer previous criticism.

Any potential snags in visual terms? The new hood forces an awkward body seam between the headlight, fender, and hood. Also, other 997 mules indicate that high ride height is no friend to the new flares, a problem that plagued the 993, as well. That said, the 1995-98 993 earned a loyal following among Porsche enthusiasts – as well as many of Zuffenhausen's best and brightest. Combining 993 character with 996 driving brilliance may be a very, very good move. We'll soon find out...