

Boxing *clever*

Motoring writer Tim Barnes-Clay feels the thrill of the new-generation Porsche Boxster

In 1948, the 356 was the first sports car to bear the Porsche name, and in July that year the lightweight mid-engined roadster achieved its first motorsport victory. Since then, the technology Porsche uses may have developed, but the company's ability to produce a two-seat, mid-engined sports car, unlike any other on the road, remains.

The latest generation Boxster roadster is a perfect example of what the German motor manufacturer is all about. It features the flat-six 'boxer' engine, developed with new technical features from the ground up, providing more power and fuel efficiency. A further improvement is Porsche's new double-clutch gearbox (*Doppelkupplungsgetriebe*, if you speak German), now available as an option on both the standard Boxster and the beefier Boxster S.

Displacing 2.9 litres, the engine of the basic Boxster, on test here, develops 255 bhp – that's an increase of 10 horsepower over the preceding 2.7-litre model. And if you're interested, its big brother, the Boxster S, has a 3.4-litre lump and now delivers 310 bhp – that's a power hike of 15 bhp.

When you first drive the Boxster, the power-to-weight ratio of the car makes for a seriously exhilarating drive, which is only enhanced by the optional seven-speed double-clutch gearbox. It does cost £1,962 to have the box fitted, but as the test car was already hooked up with the option I had no choice but to have a play. To use the transmission, you can either shift gears by sliding toggles on the steering wheel, or via the gear selector lever. You have to press forwards to shift the gears up, and press them from behind to shift downwards. Alternatively, pushing the gear selector lever forwards shifts up a gear, and pulling it back



shifts down. The seven-speed gearbox does make a real difference, shifting the cogs up to 60 per cent faster than a conventional automatic transmission. This helps to give the new Boxster a 0-62 mph time of 5.6 seconds, propelling it to a cheek wobbling 162 mph, where legal.

All that power is surprisingly easy to handle, largely thanks to the new suspension set-up, which makes for greater driving dynamics and better comfort. Modification of the steering gear also serves to reduce steering forces, giving the Boxster more agile and spontaneous behaviour. It's the soundtrack of the car that really impresses, though – especially if you go for the £1,434 optional sports exhaust system. It's a must-tick option in my book because out on the road the flat-six's awesome aural accompaniment becomes richer and more colourful with the more melodious pipes.

On the looks side of things the latest model Boxster is clearly distinguishable from the outside through its redesigned nose and tail. The new halogen headlights with their integrated direction indicators are reminiscent of the lights on the Carrera GT, while at the rear, fresh LED lights taper to the outside and are integrated elegantly into the restyled bodywork. Incidentally, for the first time, the Boxster is available with a lights package featuring bi-xenon headlights, dynamic cornering lights and LED daytime

driving lights. Replacing the fog lamps, these light units are made up of four LEDs positioned next to one another. A nice touch.

Inside, the Boxster's interior is rather unexciting, but all the controls work with well-weighted, polished precision. The new Porsche communication management system, again available as an option, is useful and, when specified, adopts the role as the central control unit for all audio, communication and navigation features.

In the past the Boxster has been dismissed as a poor man's 911, but that's simply nonsense. This entry-level Porsche is an extremely accomplished sports car in its own right, delivering a thrilling driving experience while feeling solid and safe on the UK's speed-limited roads. Behind the wheel of a Porsche Boxster is indeed a very special place to be. **V**

PROS 'N' CONS

- Good looking ✓
- Powerful ✓
- Image ✓
- Fun ✓
- Expensive options list X

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 162 mph
- 0-62 mph 5.6 seconds
- Combined mpg: 30.1
- Engine: 6 cyl, 2893 cc
- Power: 255 bhp at 6400 rpm
- Torque: 290 Nm at 4400 – 6000 rpm
- CO2: 221 g/km
- Price: £35,827 basic OTR (£48,977 as tested)

