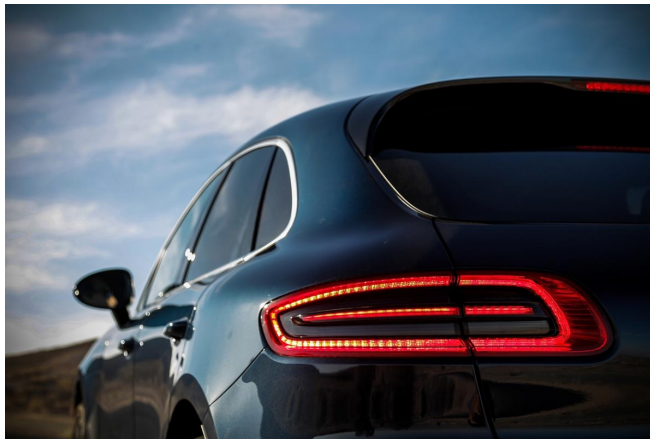




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The Macan Phenomenon

Tuesday, February 9, 2016

By David Newton

Photos courtesy Porsche

Few cars have enjoyed the immediate and lasting impact from concept through development and distribution than the Porsche Macan. Publicly announced in the spring of 2011, it premiered at the Los Angeles Auto Show in November 2013 with deliveries beginning in the spring of 2014. The Macan has achieved an almost cult status.

Experts and analysts have suggested the Macan is poised to catch and surpass the Cayenne as the most popular Porsche model. Not an easy task considering the Cayenne was introduced more than ten years ago, and achieved a remarkable success with Porsche's bold and even controversial step into the SUV marketplace. Yet in January, the Macan did exceed Cayenne sales in the US, with 1,469 sold versus 1,395 Cayennes. Time will tell if the trend continues.

Although the Macan shares the same basic platform with the Audi Q5, the similarities end there. This is not simply a re-badged branding – little is actually shared between the two models. Moreover their personalities couldn't be further from each other. (Having driven both, I'm not even convinced the Macan and Q5 target the same market.)

Initially, two models were released in the United States – the Macan S, powered by a 340-horsepower twin-turbo V6, and the astonishing 400-hp Macan Turbo, also powered by a twin-turbo V6. Either is nicely appointed (if not subdued), with the Turbo more typically draped in premium options. The naming convention is a bit confusing, considering both are turbocharged, but as with the current all-turbo 911 lineup (sans GT3 and GT3 RS), the "Turbo" badge is still reserved for top-of-the-line models.

The virtues and value of these introductory models can be debated, but just consider for a moment that more than \$20,000 separates the base price of the two. As a current owner of the more affordable Macan S, I replaced an aging Acura RDX and chose exceptional over extraordinary – pocketing the difference for gas money.

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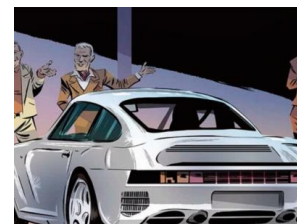
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*Video by Valkyr Productions
Words by Matt Stone*

The Macan Turbo boasts nearly 20% more horsepower than my Macan S and flat out smokes it in every reasonable road comparison, but moving up from the RDX to the Macan S was a gargantuan leap in performance for me nonetheless.

Its namesake taken from the Indonesian word meaning tiger, the Macan was originally codenamed Cajun (a pseudo amalgamation of Cayenne-Junior). But note that from inception, Porsche has insisted that the Macan is not a mini-Cayenne, and in fact adamantly compared it to the 911 Carrera in design, agility, and spirit.

Now, I will never be deceived that I am piloting a 911 positioned behind the wheel of a Macan. But having driven the Cayenne on a few occasions, I would also not compare the Porsche Macan to what some would call its older brother. The Macan appeals to a younger-minded market with emphasis on nimble handling and a sporty functionality.

The Macan is admittedly compact – downright petite if you’re transporting an adult couple to dinner more than 30 minutes away. The Cayenne is comparatively enormous, satisfying the requirements of those preferring more space and hauling prowess over sheer performance.

Our Acura (now relegated to my train station commuter car) eagerly swallows almost any cargo, while the Macan is not quite so cavernous. But it is utilitarian enough to serve brilliantly as both a daily driver and general weekend hauler. The rear seats fold down easily enough when needed, and I haven’t yet noticed a shortage in storage space.

What the Macan may lose in cubic feet, it more than makes up for in quickness and dexterity. If I hadn’t acquired a Porsche Cayman, this would (seriously) be the best-handling car I’d ever owned. Astounding road manners and awesomely fun to drive, it rivals some of the most popular sports sedans available today.

Once seated in the cabin, you instantly forget you didn’t lower yourself in as you would have in a more traditional Porsche. The upright driving position is barely noticeable — there’s no indication you are otherwise seated in a Sport Utility Vehicle. You might miss surveying the road from the lofty perch of a more typical SUV, but visibility in the Macan is still excellent.

I have always found Porsche ergonomics to be intelligently functional, as if they asked my opinion throughout the design phase. With little practice, virtually any instrument can be controlled without lifting my eyes from the horizon. And by the way, the Macan’s 918-style steering wheel might just be the best component to come from Porsche in decades.

Comfort is passively luxurious. The seats are firm and hold the driver in position without the sinking plushness of a chaise lounge. The cabin is disturbingly quiet until you wake up the twin turbo V6 with a stomp of your right foot, at which time the exhaust note crackles and pops confidently with an aggressive tone.

Mash the accelerator further, and the power plant connects instantly through the seven-speed dual-clutch PDK transmission, launching you smoothly through successive gear changes with astounding velocity for any car, let alone a compact SUV.

Likewise the brakes do not disappoint. I’m starting to get dangerously accustomed to Porsche brakes in that I expect other cars to react similarly. They do not – and that can get me into trouble if I forget. So let’s just say that when you want to slow down in the Porsche Macan,

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*Article by Rob Sass
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you will do so in a great hurry.

Handling is crisp and confident. It's sometimes hard to comprehend you are driving a Compact SUV (or Cute-Ute), so I can support Porsche's insistence not to pigeonhole the Macan into this popular category. This car responds eagerly to aggressive driving, and surprisingly can even keep up with faster vehicles on the most creative ribbons of blacktop.

But successes in design and function do not add up to the Macan sensation. You can find these features on other vehicles in and out of the Porsche family. So then, what is this Macan Phenomenon? What persuades consumers to line up at dealerships, and why can they presell inventory before it even reaches the showroom?

While I was used to the compliments my Cayman received from strangers at gas stations and convenience stores, I admit I was surprised our Macan coaxed similar reactions. There is something completely original about this car, and having owned one now for several months I believe the Macan possesses an undeniable X-Factor.

The Urban Dictionary defines X-Factor as "...an indescribable quality or something about a person/place/thing that you cannot put your finger on..." The French call this *je ne sais quoi*, while the German translation is *das gewisse etwas*, (a much more Teutonic depiction).

Porsche certainly has a flair for engineering mechanical excellence that speaks to buyers in a way that is very different than the typical automobile brand. Attention to detail approaches an art form. The Macan simply hit the nail on the proverbial head. It appears to have attained both a broad and deep appeal, which is almost unheard of for any consumer product.

Don't be fooled for a second that the German manufacturer stumbled on this by accident however. Aligning these stars was no easy task, and a great deal of planning went into the effort. But even Porsche could not have predicted such popularity. They scored big on this one, and you can bet they will capitalize on the success.

With the more recent announcement of the Macan GTS and the confirmed rumors of the diesel model crossing the Atlantic, the Macan line looks to be on track to exceed Cayenne sales throughout 2016 and beyond. I personally hope they leave the Macan 2.0-liter four-cylinder model to other markets, as I think it would diminish the unique personality already achieved.

I suspect Porsche will apply the lessons they learned in the development and success of the Macan to the production of other products. And one would expect the initial shortages of supply to forecast future requirements, so we'll have to see how that folds out.

For now, I will be watching pending announcements closely. Because some day my train commuter is going to need replacing, and I can see no better way to get to the station than in the Macan S. Particularly if I can convince my wife to consider the next Porsche sensation – the real question is, what could they possibly have planned for an encore?


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