

Seduced **at** first sight

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS RISHAD SAAM MEHTA



With the Porsche Panamera, there's finally a Grand Tourer not only for speed demons but for the entire family.

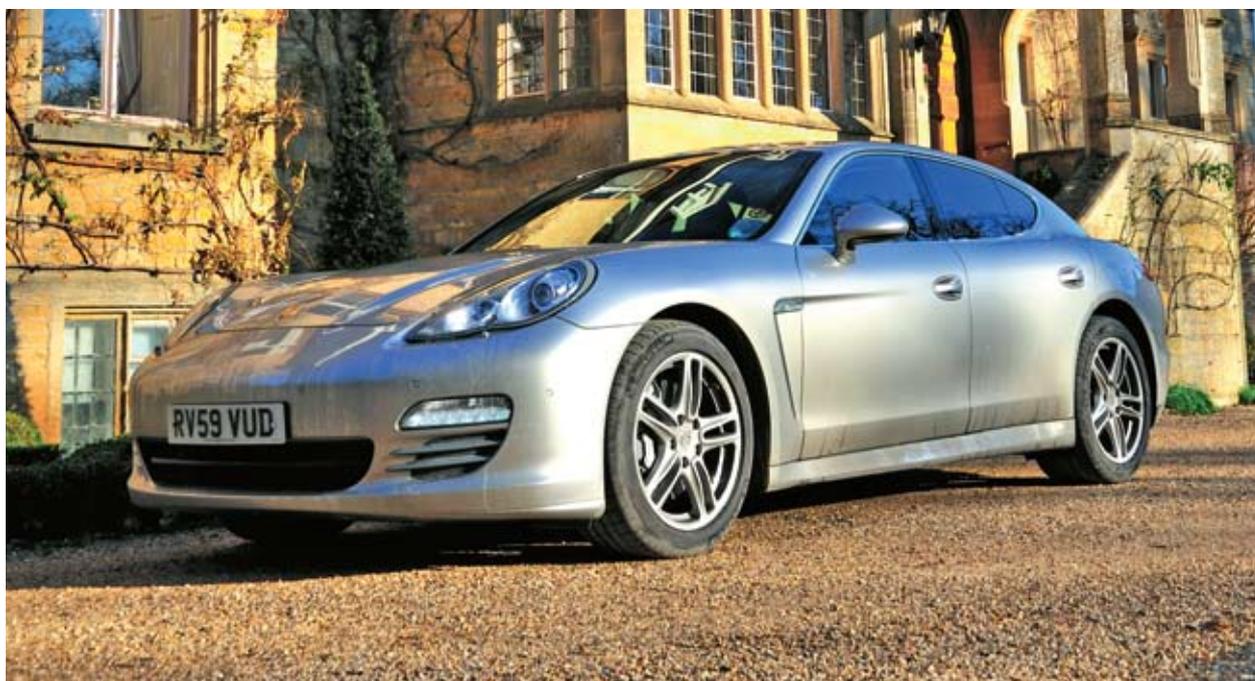
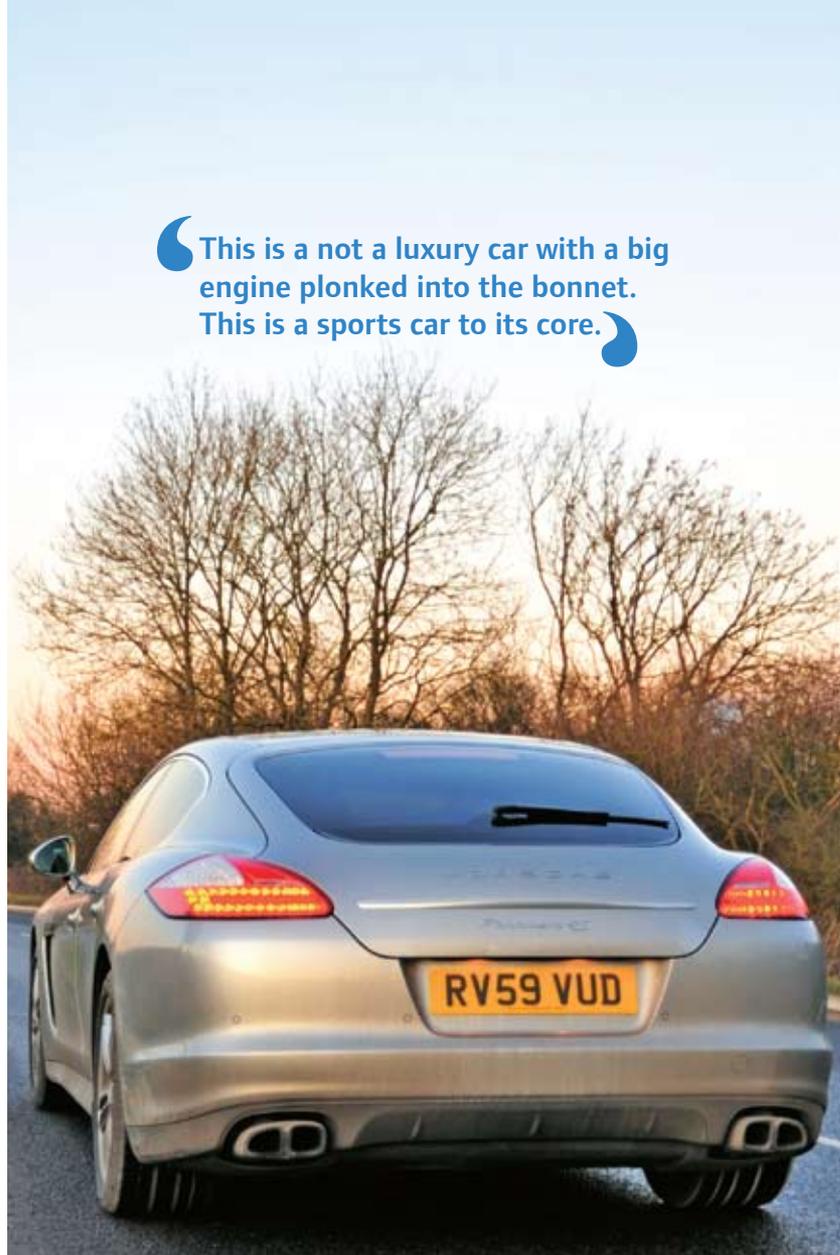
“This is not a luxury car with a big engine plonked into the bonnet. This is a sports car to its core.”

Instant seduction. That's what it was the moment I turned the key and the V8 roared to life with a throaty exhaust burble and an automatic blip of the throttle.

The snugness of the contoured seat, the way the flat-bottomed and chunky steering wheel felt in my hand and the sight of the muscular, characteristic Porsche curves up front left me in no doubt about the excitement that the 4806cc, 400bhp engine was capable of doling out. And, the multi-metre instrument cluster and the cellular phone key-like switches flanking the gear selector all spoke of the clever electronic brains that would further aid and enhance driving pleasure. Strapped into the driver's seat, the Panamera had sufficiently charmed me to forgive this four-seater its hulking rear end.

DESIGN FACTOR

When I picked up the car from Porsche's Reading Centre in West Berkshire, it was parked with a 911 and a Porsche Cayenne SUV on either





side of it. The Porsche Panamera, which is Porsche's first four-door, four-seater luxury Grand Tourer (GT) dwarfs the 911 and is 3mm wider than the Cayenne. In fact at 1931mm wide it takes up more road space than a Land Rover Discovery. But don't for a moment think that these dimensions suggest clumsiness. This is not a luxury car with a big engine plonked into the bonnet. This is a sports car to its core. Porsche has cleverly trimmed the lard to keep the weight down. The window frames are made of magnesium alloy. The engine which is based on the one from the Porsche Cayenne has been made lighter by using a magnesium valve cover, magnesium cam adjusters and aluminium bolts on magnesium components. There is a new

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sump which allows the engine to be mounted lower and hence lowers the car's centre of gravity which is the lowest in its class of four-door Grand Tourers.

SPECS

When I joined the M4 motorway on my way to the Cotswolds, that stretch of it was empty and I could bury my foot down into the carpet, the Panamera responded like a well behaved missile. Its automatic seven-speed Porsche Doppelkupplung (PDK) gearbox moves across ratios rapidly and seamlessly, propelling the car to a 100mph before I had finished veering from the outermost to the innermost lane. This car will continue, unflustered, to more than 170mph (272kph) if unchecked.

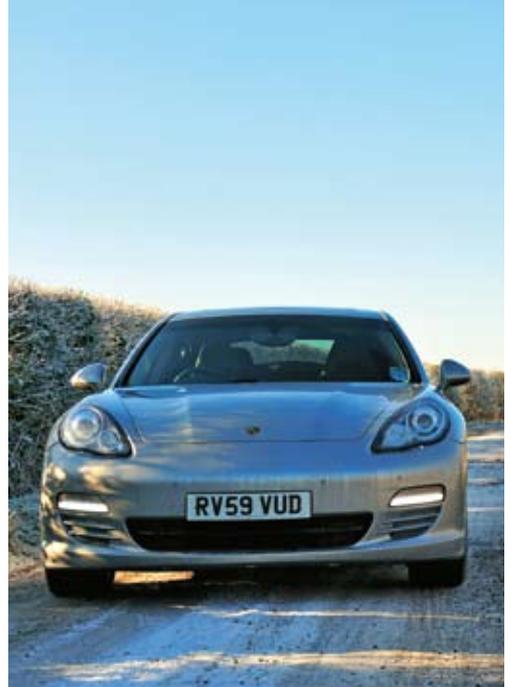
But straight-line thrills are okay for a short while. To revel in the kind of driving dynamics that this car must possess by virtue of its name, I turned off at junction 15 of the M4 and headed towards Cirencester and the Cotswolds.

The Cotswolds' picturesque villages with pretty thatched honey-stone cottages, rambling lanes and secluded churches make it an ideal self-drive destination. Hence during summer, the Cotswolds can get pretty crowded, but right now in January there was hardly any traffic.

It is on these narrow B roads through lush meadows and over rolling hills that the Panamera makes you desire it. Its nimbleness on these roads and agility through the bends belies its size and weight. All over the region on the roads linking quintessentially English villages like Bourton-on-the-Water to The Slaughters or Stow-on-the-Wold, the Panamera thrilled and brought joy. I could eagerly attack corners and quickly pull out of them thanks to the PDK auto box doing its job well. The steering-mounted gear shift buttons take some getting used to but honestly you don't quite need to use them, stamp hard on the throttle and the car downshifts eagerly in response.

One of the switches on the console flanking the gear selector stalk operates the sports exhaust which is just a feel-good gimmick and does nothing to increase performance. But roaring down the narrow Cotswolds roads the exhaust serves to heighten excitement. It tells onlookers that something fast and special is coming their way.

While the driver's seat is undoubtedly the best place to be in this car, the rear seats are well designed too and would even keep a six-footer comfortable. However four adults going on a grand driving tour will have to be light packers because the 445 litre boot space is not very generous.



PLAY HERE WITH YOUR PANAMERA

Five Indian roads that will thrill you at the wheel of your Porsche

1. The Mumbai-Goa road (NH 17), especially between Mahad and Sawantwadi
2. Munnar to Kottayam on the NH 220 in Kerala
3. NH 87 from Nainital to Kaladhungi: This would be pure bliss
4. Himmatnagar to Udaipur on NH8: Four-laned with wide, sweeping corners
5. On NH7 from Nagpur to Katni via the Pench National Park

VERDICT

The PDK Panamera also features the Auto Stop Start function which no doubt increases fuel economy but sometimes is quite exasperating. It makes the engine stop when the car is at rest and the brake pedal pressed. Of course, the electronic brain in the car reckons times when it is inappropriate to stop the engine (on a slope for example) but at other times it does not. So at a roundabout if you stop with your leg on the brake to give another driver right of way and then want to enter the roundabout quickly there is a very slight pause before the engine switches on and you can start, but it's not as quick as you want it to be. Fortunately there is a switch to turn the Auto Stop Start function off and I promptly did that.

The Panamera makes for brilliant motoring days out and will slap on a great deal of exhilaration on the trips you make in it. Its 100-litre fuel tank could give you a range of 900km if you drive sedately but a more practical estimate is just shy of 700km. It is now available in India for Rs 1.48 crore (ex-showroom, Mumbai for the Panamera 4s). It packs loads of appeal and comes without the restriction of just a single passenger. The Panamera is truly an exciting family Grand Tourer and owning one will make you want to regularly undertake thousand-kilometre driving holidays.