

Porsche Carrera 4

Short term
Review

Not much of a commuter but it'll knock you out on weekends

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If you think money doesn't buy happiness, purchase a 2001 Porsche Carrera 4, which I recently piloted from Boston to Baltimore.

A precision instrument that sliced through traffic like a shark scything through minnows, the Zanzibar red Porsche blasted past fall foliage like some huge, reddish-orange leaf gone hideously amok. Its 300-horsepower, 3.4-liter, flat-six engine turned a smidgen under 3,000 rpm in sixth gear, and growled unhappily about having to lope along at a mere 77 mph.

Four large Continental tires, the Carrera 4's all-wheel-drive and Porsche Stability Management made the pavement seem bone dry, despite a cold rain. Drivers smartly moved over as the beast approached, preceded by the UFO-like beams of its bluish Xenon headlamps.

To the rear, the car's spoiler had raised automatically, leaving in its wake a gray rooster tail of water that made the Porsche resemble something leaving Cape Canaveral. If that kind of stuff wasn't happiness personified, then please tell me what is.

Too bad status and prestige are inextricably linked with the Porsche name, because the Carrera 4's essence has nothing to do with that stuff.

Think of this car as a tool whose finely machined parts work in symphonic unison, allowing you to display the panache of racecar driver Willy T. Ribbs, while actually having one-third of his talent.

I spent a month with the Porsche Carrera 4, whose doors still close with the tinny 'clunk' of an old VW Beetle, its mind-boggling performance notwithstanding.

When driven over uneven surfaces at high velocity, the suspension of the 2001 Carrera 4 mercifully remains composed and serene. Previous all-wheel-drive Porsches tended to feel



unsettled and bouncy under similar circumstances. Now, you feel secure about keeping your foot on the throttle.

The Carrera 4's steering is balanced just right between light and heavy with a slight bias toward the latter. From the side, the car looks like Carreras and 911s of yore. However, when viewed head-on, the Carrera 4 is identical to the Porsche Boxster, a model costing about \$25,000 less.

It seems a pity to pay Carrera money for a Boxster visage. However, you know you're not in a Boxster once you rev the engine and release the clutch.

The Carrera 4 leaps forward angrily with nary a hint of wheel spin. The car just GOES, providing the surreal sensation of four tires greedily gripping asphalt.

A high roof line generates a fair amount of wind noise that, when combined with the mechanical sounds emanating behind your fanny, can overwhelm interior sounds like the soothing click of the turn signal.

Over time, it

became clear that this Porsche is to be enjoyed during leisurely weekends. It has no business taking part in the daily commute. For one thing, it loathes bumps and potholes and you will, too, after encountering a couple. Furthermore, the Carrera 4 can't hold much, including golf clubs. And it almost seems a sacrilege to place cup holders, small as they are, in a Porsche.

The six-speed manual lacks the crispness one might expect from a car costing more than \$75,000, making occasional errant shifts from second gear to fifth gear possible.

But when things are falling just right and the highway is smooth and clear, it's really, really hard to wipe that silly grin off your face. And that, ultimately, is what the 2001 Porsche Carrera 4 is all about -- Happiness.

Specs at a glance	
Base Price:	\$72,000
Price as tested:	\$77,645
Engine:	3.4-liter, 300-horsepower 6-cylinder
Transmission:	6-speed "manual" automatic
Acceleration:	0 to 62 mph in 5.2 seconds
EPA mileage:	17 mpg city, 24 mpg highway
Miles to tank:	270