



CAYMAN R

# RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE

When Walter Röhrl takes the wheel of the new Cayman R, look for quick movement along the vertical axis. The last winner of the Monte Carlo Rally in a rear-wheel-driven, mid-engine sports car should have a good deal to say to the youngsters in Zuffenhausen.

By Till Daun

Photos by Jens Ebner

**Have a seat:** Walter Röhrl tests the new Cayman R

**You can't do that!** It's a very bad idea to pull in like that! The country road winding wantonly through the hills of Lower Bavaria is covered with ice, while a freezing wind has dusted large stretches of the asphalt with powdered snow from the fields to the left and right. And the equally snow-white Cayman R with Porsche double-clutch transmission (PDK), which is tearing through a long curve right toward the blinding white expanse with a raw surge of engine power, is driving on summer tires. The R version of the mid-engine sports car will come onto the market in the spring, so our Cayman R is still a pre-production vehicle. And it left its winter tires in the development workshop. After all, we were just supposed to go out for a short photo session.

This doesn't seem to disturb the man at the wheel. He guides the steering wheel sensitively with his two big hands, his eyes resting calmly at a point in the distance. Panic, however, builds silently on the passenger side, where one hand lies cramped on the seat while the other grips the door for support. The legs press involuntarily against the foot well, and psychosomatic dizziness swirls between the ears. "This is Walter Röhr!"—the intellect telegraphs insistently to the raving limbic system—"if there's anyone who can maneuver like this, it's him!" But the message is sent in vain, for all the synapses are flooded with adrenaline.



**Comfort on a diet:** Red straps instead of door handles accentuate the sporty design





And then the compact mid-engine sports car hits the snowfield. Walter Röhrl tugs briefly on the wheel to bring the breaking rear axle back in line—and in a few seconds we’re gripping the asphalt again. Röhrl nods and notes with admiration, “It’s downright spectacular how the Porsche engineers command the mid-engine design.”

An iron-clad rule dictates that anyone who wants to explore the dynamic possibilities of a mid-engine racer should be in top form and have sound instincts, whereas Sunday drivers are advised to remain well within the grip zone with a car like this. “The Porsche team has shown that that isn’t true,” says Röhrl. “The suspension in the Boxster and the Cayman is so brilliant that thanks to the integrated early warning system you don’t have to be a gray-zone guru to sense when the car will skid. It’s all so smooth and easy.”

In 1983, which was the last year before the high-performance all-wheel-drive powerhouses of the legendary Group B appeared, Walter Röhrl skillfully won the Monte Carlo Rally in a mid-engine sports car. “The Lancia Rally 037 was a thoroughbred racer,” he notes. “It didn’t signal the grip limit at all; you really had to listen to the suspension and essentially counter-

steer preventively. It took pure instinct.” Röhrl looks serious, like a professor shaking his finger and warning his students not to try it out on their own. But behind the serious expression his eyes are shining as memories surface that he clearly relishes.

Then he continues his explanation. “An engine in the middle means that the car’s center of gravity is in the middle, and everything revolves around this point in a very playful manner. This is great for turning in as quick as a weasel, but if you take this too far the next second you’ll be looking straight at oncoming traffic.” Porsche took the positive aspects and amplified them considerably, while filtering out the negative effects. Röhrl casts a quick conspiratorial glance at the passenger side and observes that “there are a few tricks to building a suspension that take the hitches out of a mid-engine design and teach it manners. They know how to do that at Porsche—based on experience accumulated since back in 1953 with the 550 Spyder.”

We’re flowing toward the end of our short trip and the Cayman R will have to go back into the truck. There is still a series of softly rising and falling curves to go, however. As if to confirm what we were just discussing, the Cayman R throws itself with verve

and precision into the radii. No waste, no fuzziness, no oversteering or understeering. Just pure, neutral, unfiltered turning in and stretching out. Input equals output. Very clear. The Cayman is zen in motion.

And thus the Cayman R becomes an impressive tool for all fans of carving out sharply defined curves, enriching the pure doctrine of mid-engine machines with yet more dynamic elements. Fifty-five kilos (121 pounds) lighter and 10 horsepower more powerful than the Cayman S, and sharpened by a sports suspension lowered by 20 millimeters (0.78 inches), the Cayman R lives up to its initial—“R” for remarkable, refined, and above all racy.



Almost like in a racing car: Sport seats with Alcantara

**CAYMAN R**

Engine: Six-cylinder boxer  
Displacement: 3,436 cc  
Power: 330 hp (243 kW) at 7,400 rpm  
Maximum torque: 370 Nm at 4,750 rpm  
0–100 km/h: \* 4.9 sec.  
Top track speed: \* 280 km/h (174 mph)  
CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: \* 218 g/km  
Fuel consumption\*  
– City: 14.0 l/100 km  
– Highway: 6.6 l/100 km  
– Combined: 9.3 l/100 km  
\* with Porsche double-clutch transmission (PDK)