



# SO YOU THINK YOU CAN DANCE?



Back in the day, if you were to enter a BMW M5 into a comparison test with another car—any other car—the results were a foregone conclusion. Nothing on this planet could touch the mighty BMW's combination of stealth, power, and handling. Winner: M5. Well, the world is a different place today. Other manufacturers got the message that it's not only possible, but profitable to make big four-door sedans handle like sports cars. Mercedes-Benz has the E63 AMG; Cadillac makes the CTS-V; Jaguar has the XFR; and Audi has the S6. All of them, it can be reasonably argued, will give the M5 a run for its perennial crown. Porsche joined the party a few years back with the introduction of its controversial-looking but deadly effective Panamera. And for this comparison, we've lined up the sportiest version, the GTS, to take on BMW's latest Q-ship, the F10 M5. Ten years ago, the results would have been shocking.

The Panamera GTS represents a best-of-breed effort, as well as something of a performance "bargain." I'm putting bargain in quotes because it's laughable to term any

car that starts at \$111,975 a bargain. Also, the as-tested price of our silver car is \$146,250. (Germans and their comical options.) But here's Porsche's thinking: Were you to take the most powerful non-turbo Panamera, the \$97,325 4S, and tart it up with all the available performance options, the resulting car would sticker for more money than the GTS, yet be down 30 horsepower. See, the GTS' naturally aspirated, 4.8-liter V-8 gets the hotter cams and valve lifters out of the Panamera Turbo S engine, along with a revised air-intake system. In addition to the extra power (430 hp for the GTS), you also get 15 additional lb-ft for a total of 384. Hence, "bargain."

The GTS also offers up a revised version of Porsche's air suspension (PASM) that has the car sitting 10mm lower and allows it to drop

an additional 5mm when the standard Sport Chrono Package (an option on less sporty Panameras) is in Sport Plus mode. The track is also widened by 10mm. Additionally, the GTS gets Cayman R-style blackout headlights and exhaust pipes as well as the nifty split-folding wing off the Turbo models. So as with the 911 GTS, for our money this is the sportiest Panamera you can buy. (Never mind the \$175,975 Panamera Turbo S sitting at the other end of the showroom.) Our particular test unit also came with the optional, \$5000 PDCC with PTV Plus—Porsche speak for active anti-roll bars and a torque vectoring rearend. All in all, the GTS is formidable as far as 4367-pound attack sedans go.

As you'd expect, the all-new BMW M5 is no shrinking violet. The fifth-generation version packs the most powerful engine ever offered in a BMW. The numbers are borderline silly. The 4.4-liter twin-turbo V-8 produces a monstrous 560 hp and 500 lb-ft of torque, the latter available from 1500 rpm to 1350 rpm under redline. Of course, like all force-fed BMW engines of late, these numbers are underreported. The horsepower





Words Jonny Lieberman ★ Photographs Michael Shaffer

**Both are big, fast, and fun, but only one German beefcake is bona fide**



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## BMW M5 vs. Porsche Panamera GTS



figure is much closer to 600 hp than not, and peak torque is reputed to be just below 550 lb-ft. In other words, bonkers. The test results of the first Fro M5 we got our hands on bear out these power estimates. That 4384-pound tub of guts hit 60 mph in an incredible-for-a-rear-drive vehicle 3.7 seconds and ran the quarter mile in an astonishing 11.9 seconds at 120.3 mph. As Paris Hilton likes to say, that's

huge. However, that car was a European-spec version. The lava-colored beastly you're looking at is U.S.-spec. And slower.

I asked the BMW folks about the discrepancy, and they claim there shouldn't be any. European and American M5s, they say, are identical. They speculate that the car we're talking about today wasn't "broken in properly." We have our doubts, but BMW has

promised to send us a properly broken-in U.S. market car to retest in the near future. As it stands, here's what the hot orange car ran on our test track: It hit 60 mph in 4 seconds flat and (still) flew down the quarter mile in 12.4 seconds at 114.2 mph. Obviously, that's quite a bit slower than the first car. However, for the purposes of this test, the M5 was faster than the slightly lighter and "underpowered" Porsche. The GTS used its AWD advantage to hit 60 mph in 4.1 seconds and run the quarter in 12.7 seconds at 107.2 mph. Totally fast, and totally respectable, but slower than the M5. But there is another but.

The fast time for the BMW (like the Porsche) was achieved using launch control. And the procedure to place the M5 into launch control is absolutely the most convoluted process our team has ever encountered. It's supposed to work like this: First, you need to place the seven-speed dual-clutch transmission in manual mode. Then, you hit the little button below the shifter joystick twice to put the transmission into the fastest shift mode. Next, you hold the traction control button down for about 10 seconds to turn all the nannies off.



**SIMPLE?** The center stack is loaded with buttons, but they're logically laid out and consistent from Porsche to Porsche. The Alcantara-wrapped steering wheel is totally button-free. We love that.

Activating launch control in the Panamera GTS is as easy as one, two, three.

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