



WHO'S AFRAID OF THE

# PERSIAN GULF?

دبي

DUBAI

IN DUBAI, PORSCHE'S 520-HP **CAYENNE TURBO S** IS THE CARAVAN OF CHOICE BY JOSH DEAN • PHOTOS BY MARK BRAMLEY



# THE FIRST THING

in my notebook is this, scrawled in the hand of the insane: "10 p.m.—I lost Thursday!" Not that long ago, it had been Wednesday night and I was at JFK, boarding a plane for the Middle East where I would be driving Porsche's monstrously fast Cayenne Turbo S. Now I'm leaving Dubai International Airport, where my Emirates flight arrived on time and without incident, and it's 11 p.m. on Thursday. Seriously, what happened to Thursday? Was it jettisoned, like frozen waste, somewhere over Libya? Or is *Cinderella Man* seriously that long?

Most of the disconcerting things about a 12-hour flight to a place that's nine hours ahead of your hometown are assuaged by the free champagne and reclining seats of business class, but this thing is not: I will never regain Thursday. I hope someone recorded *The Office*.

Dubai International, like most things here in the Vegas of the Middle East, is new and shiny and built of marble and gold. It buzzes with a mix of business travelers, men in the traditional *disdashas*, and women in tiny halter tops, as that sort of thing is not exactly frowned upon in this most liberal of Arab countries. Veronika, a blonde woman from an Eastern European nation that is never specified, collects us just past customs wearing a scarlet jacket-and-skirt combo that appears to have been assembled from Charles Oakley's suit remnants. "Welcome to Dubai," she says, tossing aside her Porsche placard. "It's great to visit, but maybe not such a great place to live. It's all brand-new

concrete and glass but two years later, you start to see the cracks." I'm still not sure if she intended the metaphor.

I mention to Veronika that I am looking most forward to skiing indoors, because where I come from, we have to do this outdoors, where the temperature and lighting can be inconsistent. She says that the indoor skiing is nothing; that, indeed, work is underway on a whole winter village, a collection of chalets that will be built inside a massive dome where it is always snowing. That pretty much sums up Dubai.

Because Dubai is the land where dreams come true. If you can imagine a kindergarten full of boys who possess trillions of dollars in oil wealth, that's Dubai; a land of whimsy in excess, where Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum and his sons have launched a plan for—at this point, members of the Saudi royal family might want to stop reading—a future beyond oil. I will call their plan Tourism Without Bounds.

Just imagine the scene around the, um, sandbox: "I'm gonna build an indoor ski mountain—with a TGI Friday's!" And so it shall be: Ski Dubai! "I'd like a series of islands that, from the air, form the shape of the world's continents." Okay! Sign a lease for your spot on The World now! "And when I grow up, I'm going to have dancing grizzly bears and rollercoasters and killer whales!" He is, of course, dreaming of Dubailand, soon to be the largest and most extravagant theme park on Earth, rising like everything in Dubai, from a





barren patch of desert crowded with dozens of cranes operated by a cheap, imported workforce housed in makeshift tin huts.

At the moment, Dubailand is merely a gaudy, neon-adorned gate and a sales office, plus a series of towering billboards that, our driver told us as we passed the site on the way to our hotel, show "all of the major attractions that you will find there." They are, in no particular order: a kid in a pith helmet, a grizzly bear, a killer whale, a snowboarder pulling a method air, and dinosaurs.

Leaving the airport, our driver takes us on a long, straight highway that is mostly empty. It pushes on through the desert toward Abu Dhabi, another of the United Arab Emirates (there are seven); the skyline of Dubai's downtown is only faintly visible in the distance. After 10 miles or so, he takes an exit off a roundabout and we are heading down a perfect two-lane that snakes just enough for him to need to use the steering wheel. It is lit, every few feet, by a towering streetlight, in the manner that some American highways are when they pass through populated sections, only this one is lit for its entire 35-kilometer length and it's entirely in the middle of nowhere.

"So," I ask the driver. "This is a really well-lit road. Where does it go?"

"To Bab Al Shams," he says, citing the name of the resort where we'll be spending a few days.

"So basically," says another writer, also in the car, "it's a driveway."

Like I said, dreams do come true in Dubai.

## TAKE THIS ONE:

I have been flown, in business class, on perhaps Earth's plushiest airline, halfway across the globe where, at a five-star resort, I am handed the keys to what may be the world's most awesome SUV. I speak of the Porsche Cayenne Turbo S, a 520-horsepower SUV that is the second most powerful production Porsche ever built, after the Carrera GT. Its twin-turbocharged 4.5-liter V-8 gets it to 60 in just 4.8 seconds, and on to a top speed of 168 mph. It costs \$111,600 and I am expected to beat the crap out of it.

My room at the Bab Al Shams, a palm-shaded oasis that is modeled after an old Arab fort, is plush and comfortable, a mecca of stucco and tile, with velvety pillows, fresh fruit, and complimentary figs. I find myself eating both dates and olives, neither of which I like. Next to the toilet are a phone and an ass shower. Not a bidet, mind you, but a hand sprayer on a hose that, I can only imagine, would make a huge mess.

The Bab Al Shams desert resort also boasts the most vigilantly guarded pool on Earth. It is perhaps the size of two backyard pools but has four or five lifeguards, two of them pacing the boundary, each cradling a curved buoy that might be useful in a pool deeper than four feet. You would need a team of accomplices in order to successfully drown here.

## FRIDAY MORNING

dawns bright and sunny with no clouds—which I have to imagine is the way every day begins in Dubai, or Bahrain, or Saudi



Left: The Cayenne Turbo S gets a sand-flo.  
Right: You and 20,000 of your closest friends—could be here (Cayenne not included).





# دبي DUBAI



## PORSCHE CAYENNE TURBO S

### WHAT IS IT?

Wagon SUV

WHEN? Now

HOW MUCH? \$111,600 (base)

\$113,335 (as tested)

### POWERTRAIN

• Twin-turbocharged 48-valve

DOHC 4.5-liter V-8

• 6-speed manual

• Power: 520 hp @ 5500 rpm

• Torque: 530 lb-ft @

2750-3750 rpm

### SUSPENSION

• Front: Independent, dual control

arms, air springs, adjustable

dampers

• Rear: Independent, multilink, air

springs, adjustable dampers

### DIMENSIONS

• Length x width x height

188.3 x 75.9 x 66.9 in

• Wheelbase: 112.4 in

• Cargo space: 62.5 cu ft (max)

• Curb weight: 5192 lb

### PERFORMANCE

• 0-60 mph: 4.8 sec

• Top speed: 168 mph

### FUEL INFO

EPA mileage (city/hwy):

Not good

Arabia, or Jordan.... Friday is the second and final day of the Middle East's Thursday-Friday weekend, so my Sunday-ish "Gulf News" newspaper, full of ad inserts and special magazines, arrives on Friday. If I wasn't already baffled about what day and time it is/was, I am/will be now.

By 10:16, the Germans are hunting us down for the perfunctory 10:15 press conference, presented in German but translated into the Queen's perfect English via headphones by a man with the diction and enunciation of John Gielgud. I can practically hear the clink of ice in his morning tumbler of Scotch. After the technical presentation, the floor is opened to questions.

A Lebanese journalist raises his hand: "Why do we need another 70 horsepower if the regular Turbo is quite adequate? It is surely going to mean a higher price."

Ooh, ooh—can I answer this one?!

One of the execs adjusts his spectacles and replies: "Because our customers want more power."

## AN HOUR AFTER WE DEPART

the hotel in our Cayennes, we regroup at the Dubai Desert Preserve, a fenced park full of dunes that look like ripples in a cone of soft-serve ice cream; here, we will test the Cayenne's ability in sand. Photographer Mark Bramley and I pair up with

Adnan, a laconic Persian with wraparound shades who is utterly unflappable. When I get us bogged down three times in the first 10 minutes he just raises a hand and says, softly, "Okay, stop. You're stuck." He then takes the wheel and calmly extricates us with bursts of low-gear gas. "Never stop in the desert like this," he says, opening his palm flat to indicate flat ground. "Only like this"—he tilts it forward. "Or this"—tilts it backward.

Once I get the hang of it, the driving is a fine substitute for the rollercoaster I could be riding in Dubailand, were it open. The Turbo S has torque in spades and the ute cuts through fine, knee-deep sand as if it weren't there. In bowls between dunes, I whip the Turbo S in circles, spraying sand in huge waves that crash down on the windshield. "Use the wipers," Adnan says. "That's what they're here for. We have no rain." And when we start to bog down: "Use the gas. Don't be afraid. Feel the turbo? That's good."

I take that last one to heart, cresting a rise at full gas. "Okay, okay! Slow!" Adnan yells. We fly over the dune's peak, catch a bit of air, and then slam the nose down on the other side, half expecting to hear the hiss of a busted radiator. When all is well, Adnan looks at me: "Okay, don't do that again."

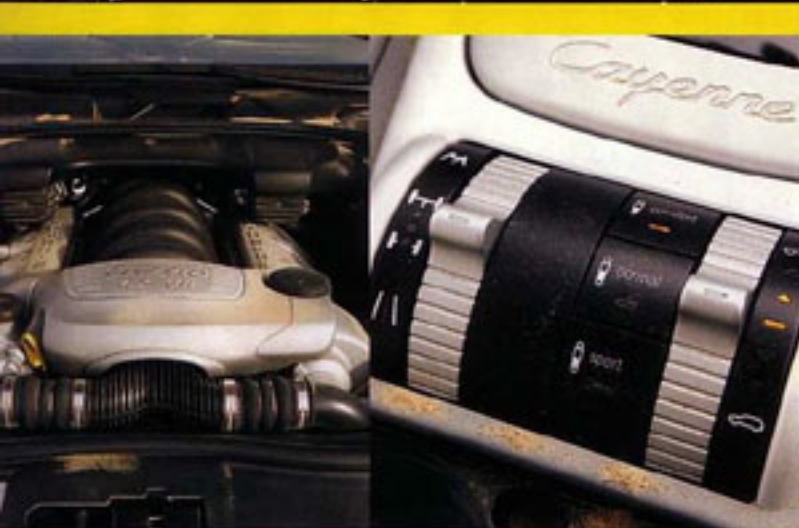
Over a lunch of Middle Eastern salads—*mezze*, if you're taking notes—laid out in a carpeted tent, the local writers confer with Porsche's head of Middle East sales, a South African. He says he was recently chatting with His Highness the Sheikh, who plans to grow Dubai's population from seven to 15 million in the next 10 years. "They are issuing 1000 work permits a day," the South African says.

"Keep giving people high-horsepower sports cars," a local writer replies, "and this will not happen."

"It's true," the South African says. "The roads we have are spectacular, but when it goes bad, it goes spectacularly bad."

As the caravan of Cayennes disappears into the desert, we convince Adnan to take us for another few laps around the dunes. He confers with his boss.





Below, left: The S's twin-turbo V-8 gets its 70-hp edge over the Cayenne Turbo by boosting pressure to a whopping 21.5 psi. Below, center: Air-suspension controls.



"Josh," he says to me. "What's your last name? Dean? James Dean. I'm going to let them go, so just do not get stuck. We have no help. Don't stop."

I make three or four laps of a bowl, kicking up massive clouds of sand, widening my arc until I descend into a pit of soft sand and get stuck. Adnan shakes his head at me, extricates the truck, then puts on a show, rolling up onto a ridge and sliding down sideways. Just as the car seems on the verge of a roll, he gases it and whips into a power slide. Sand is billowing up, over and around the truck, covering it and then sliding off to reveal the shiny silver paint.

"Look at that," Bramley says. "Amazing. All that and it's still immaculate."

We buckle up and attempt to catch air off a sharply pointed dune because Bramley wants the photo. On the radio: Dubai's channel 4, which plays a mix of Usher, Blink-182, and Kelly Clarkson. In between songs, a sassy British DJ broadcasts live from the Dubai pet show.

Adnan gets one tire off the ground, then two—but they're both on the same side. Bramley was thinking more Duke Boys, so we try a few more times, each time increasing speed on the dune's upside.

"One more time," Adnan says, crossing himself.

"You're Catholic?" I ask.

"I'm Muslim," he answers.

**WITHOUT FAIL,** I turn on the TV in my room to find a bed of Arabic music underneath rotating, hypercolorized snapshots of the hotel, including many still-lives of fruit overlaid with words that invite me to "experience the desert." Channel-surfing pulls up the inevitable music-video show, some sort of period drama starring men with impressive beards, and also Bloomberg news. Here is a random sampling of other things you'll find on Friday-night TV in Dubai:

- 1> Middle Eastern basketball of indiscriminate origin played in front of an empty arena (literally—zero people in crowd!). A Nike team in yellow plays

a Puma team in red. Quality of play: somewhere between my rec league and Division 3 college ball. The play-by-play is in Arabic.

2> Men in traditional garb with red headscarves eating dates around a table. Also in Arabic.

3> Something that appears Biblical or Koranical, on a channel with an angry Falcon logo in the corner.

4> Footage of angry youth tossing rocks.

5> Soccer!

6> A sitcom that, judging by its laugh track, is hilarious. A kid in a plaid shirt pleads with a guy in a nice suit and headscarf. He is disappointed.

7> Movie trailers introduced by a smoking-hot girl in a Chinese shirt.

8> Angry youth throwing rocks. (Oh, wait, that's CNN.)

9> Bloomberg.

10> Lady in *abayah* (think convertible *burka*) reading financial news.

11> Ben Affleck/J. Lo movie in which they appear to have a loveable runt of a child.

12> Music videos! In Arabic!

13> Adult Swim on Cartoon Network? However: in Arabic.

14> *Monster Garage* with Arabic subtitles that obscure half the screen.

15> *Blade 2*. Dubbed. In no way affects viewing.

**BEFORE I ARRIVED IN DUBAI,** my own land-speed record was about 145 mph, in a Dodge Viper coupe, on the road to Tombstone, Arizona. At that speed, the Viper felt a little squirrely and I eased off the gas before I got to 150, feeling unsure of my ability to avoid a cameo on *wreckedexotics.com*. At 145 in the Turbo S, however, I am just getting warmed up. Some of that is due to Dubai's excellent roads, on which there is little or no traffic. One afternoon, we turn onto the Driveway and proceed to do some speed tests. Occasionally, I have to brake for traffic but mostly we just go back and forth over a





Below, from left:  
Fear the camel, now  
approaching ludicrous  
speed; frankincense?  
Nah, totally myrrh.



straightaway of about three miles on which visibility is excellent. You can see to the horizon. The Turbo S has a metric dash and is hushed inside at speed, so at first I have no real concept of how fast I am going. I'd hit 242 in the morning and get up to 258—at which point acceleration has basically ceased—when I have to back off for an overpass. The next time, though, I reach 260 easily, then the needle crawls upward to 266. I lay even more weight on the gas and it creeps up, 1 km/h at a time, until we get to 272 and the car gives up. Bramley pulls out his cellphone and does the calculation: 169 mph.

I think the biggest compliment I can pay the Porsche Cayenne Turbo S is that it now sits atop my speed list, and is the same vehicle that yesterday ripped up some of the deepest sand I'd ever been in.

Later that night, after noshing for hours on grilled meats served in an open-air restaurant full of belly dancers and stone-faced men toting hooded falcons (no shit), we convene at the Bab Al Shams roof bar to try out a hookah, which in Dubai is known as a *shisha*. None of us knows anything about a hookah, other than we all had a friend in college who smoked pot out of one, typically while listening to Deep Purple. I'm not a smoker—in fact, sitting there with my own mouthpiece (safety first!) I smoke more than I've probably ever smoked in my life, repeatedly inhaling the mild, apple-flavored tobacco and feeling as though there certainly has to be more to it. This is the smoking equivalent of bingeing on water.

"Can I ask you a question?" I say to our waiter. "Are we doing this right?"

He observes: "Yes, sir. Though maybe inhale a bit deeper."

"How long is it good?" someone asks.

"Usually 40 or 45 minutes. How long have you been smoking?"

"About an hour and a half."

His eyes bulge and he removes the bowl from before us immediately, dumping it into the trash.

## I HAVE NO IDEA

what was here before the construction started. Dubai, at least on its business-and-tourist side, is all high-rises. There is no sprawl. No strip malls of Taco Bells and 7-Elevens. So driving in, on immaculate ribbons of concrete, it's desert, desert, desert—skyscrapers! The skyline goes from zero to sixty stories in a single block. Rows of skyscrapers crowd the main road through the city, and shells of others are in various stages of completion as far as the eye can see. There is the incessant clanking of rivets, the blasts of saws and torches, and the dull hum of backhoes. When the double-decker "Tour Dubai" buses cruise by the busiest section of construction, tourists snap pictures of towers-in-progress, as if the actual construction is an attraction in itself. If you believe the shiny billboards that adorn the walls around these sites, which beckon visitors into one of the 3,000,000 sales offices, these sparkly condos and offices will soon be filled by generically attractive Europeans who frolic on beaches with fair-skinned children who will need SPF 80 to avoid crisping up like so much *kafra* in the scorching Middle Eastern sun.

If they get hot, they can always head over to the Mall of the Emirates, cruise up to the top of the parking garage, and descend by elevator to Ski Dubai, which is just past the Quiksilver store, if you take a left at French Connection.

From the outside, Ski Dubai looks like something from *Battlestar Galactica*: a massive, rounded rectangular metal tube, placed at an angle and connected to a swishy mall. Inside, escalators lead upstairs to the slope. For about \$40 you get a lift ticket good for two hours, equipment, a red-and-blue ski suit, and personal accident insurance. You're on your own for hat and gloves.

But if you get cold, you can pop into the slopeside TGI Friday's and enjoy some jalapeno poppers while you watch ex-pats schuss down a trail that approximates a blue run at your average Eastern ski resort but takes all of 45 seconds to descend. There is a small terrain park, sponsored by Snickers, for





Clockwise from left: Spice  
dealer, slinging seeds;  
Burj Al Arab hotel, ready for  
departure; The Sheikh;  
Ski Dubai, obviating nature  
365 days a year.



snowboarders. It must be fun to watch the locals come by and try what has to be an utterly terrifying sport. These are people born to a country where the temperature never dips below 60 and in the summer exceeds 120. It is somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 inside Ski Dubai. The citizens of the Middle East have literally never been this cold. Wait, existential question: Have they ever been cold?

## BRAMLEY AND I HAVE JUST LEFT

the city's old section, a dusty warren of narrow streets and alleys where men hawk knock-off Rolexes and vendors sell gold, spices, and essential toiletries such as Nipple Lightening Cream. We are somewhere just past the Burj Al Arab—that sail-shaped hotel completed in 1999 and calling itself the world's first seven-star hotel (each suite—there are no mere “rooms”—comes with a butler, and a fleet of white Rolls-Royces sits out front to take guests back and forth to caviar baths, or whatever it is they do when they are not being massaged with frankincense by nubile models painted in gold leaf)—when we spot the Ferrari: A fly yellow F430 Spider that careens onto Jumeirah Beach Road and accelerates through a gap in traffic.

“You gotta catch him,” Bramley says. And so I put the Cayenne Turbo S to its final, perhaps most daunting test. The F430 is only at half gallop, biting off chunks of road but not at all blowing us away, and with both turbos belching air we gain on them fast. As we get closer, we see two men in immaculate local garb—the billowing white robe and regal red headscarf. They’re freelancing a little with the sunglasses. I see the driver check his rearview as we roar up on their tail and whip into the adjoining lane. Then he drops the hammer.

A Turbo S is a mean machine, capable of blowing away most everything on Dubai's byways, but it is still no match for an F430. But The Sheikh, as we take to calling him, toys with us, backing off to let me ruffle his robe, then flooring it all over again.

It is fun, but we are late, so I slow down and put on my signal. He does the same, slowing even more and pulling alongside me. The passenger gives us a huge smile; the driver, not so much. All the while, Bramley snaps photos.

“Um, why is he following us?” I ask, rhetorically. “What if he is, like, the prince or something and he’s going to smash your camera? Or your face? Or my face?” And still, Bramley shoots.

We pull a U-turn. He pulls a U-turn. We do this twice. He does this twice. “Okay, right. I’m throwing you under the bus if he’s pissed,” I say. I like Bramley and all, but, really, we’ve just met. I’m all for new experiences, but draw the line at Middle Eastern prisons. And firing squads.

Finally, I make a right into the grand Madinat hotel, where we are meeting our group; its palm-lined drive ends at a marble plaza where towering Dinka tribesmen—oddly present at all hotels we visit—help passengers from taxis. Off to the side, with arms crossed, stands Porsche’s PR director, in front of a phalanx of Cayennes.

“We made a friend,” I say, gesturing at the yellow supercar that has pulled in behind us. Both guys get out and Bramley continues taking their pictures. I prepare to make a break for it.

“You,” the passenger says, smiling widely, all white teeth and sunglasses. “You want to sit in our car?”

This was why they chased us down—for an unsolicited photo opp? Wow, these guys are proud of their Ferrari. You gotta love it. So I take a seat, note the stripped-down cabin and glaring lack of seat warmers and nav system.

As I step out, the big guy nods at the Porsche, which is ticking down.

“Turbo?” he says.

“Yes,” I say. “Two!”

He smiles—for the first time—buckles into his Spider, and with that beautiful eight-cylinder wuffle and a little transmission whine, is gone. **mph**