



2003 JRD PANOZ ESPERANTE RSr

More 'tude for an already capable sports car



Panoz has earned an impressive racing reputation with its dominating LMP roadsters and Trans-Am-winning Esperantes. The Panoz Esperante JRD delivers a bit of that flavor in a custom-built street machine.

WHAT'S HOT

- Best integration of a centrifugal supercharger we've ever tested
- Wonderful balance and predictability
- Race-car looks

WHAT'S NOT

- Serious pricetag
- Needs better rear traction
- Where's local dealer for servicing?

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find our road test of the Panoz Esperante—perhaps the nicest low-volume specialty roadster we've come across.

Some owners may want to further capitalize on Panoz' pro sports-car-racing success; others might just want to give their Esperante more bite. Answering that call is JRD Tuning.

Johan Ragnarsson assisted Danny Panoz' team with the chassis development of the Esperante as the car was coming to market, so he knows it stem-to-stern. Like a good pizza, you can order your JRD with a wide variety of toppings. We tested the house special, Johan's top-of-the-line RSr coupe.

The heart of the RSr is its seriously uprated powertrain built around a hand-assembled 5.2-liter DOHC Ford V-8. Based on the 4.6, it incorporates forged pistons and con rods, reworked heads, a ported intake manifold, and a stroker crankshaft. Finishing touches include a Vortech centrifugal supercharger, custom intercooler, upgraded fuel system, and revised computer calibration. Handmade stainless-steel headers team with high-flow cats and free-

flow mufflers. The tuneup translates to 600 horsepower at 6800 rpm and 510 lb-ft of torque. Power delivery is linear and predictable with almost seamless integration of supercharger boost. All that torque easily overpowers the rear tires in the form of good fish-tailing fun. Senior Road Test Editor Chris Walton stated, "It's nearly impossible to put the power to the pavement." In spite of the traction challenge, the RSr notched a stellar 12.18 e.t.

Fully adjustable Penske shocks team with shorter/stiffer Eibach springs and 18x8.5/18x10 alloy wheels wrapped in BFG g-Force T/A KD tires to deliver improved handling while maintaining a surprisingly smooth ride. A Tremec T-56 six-speed manual gearbox and heavy-duty clutch deliver power to a beefed-up limited-slip differential fit with 3.55:1 cogs and oversize halfshafts. Walton noted, "Good poise with exceptional balance—this car would be great on a road course." A custom Brembo brake kit with 14-/13-inch cross-drilled rotors clamped by four-piston calipers delivers fade-free performance, though we expected even shorter stopping distances.

JRD offers visual pepperoni, too:

Our tester had bi-Xenon headlights, a custom vented hood, racing-style rear bumper, chromed mesh grille, and lightweight hard-top. The racebred front splitter, adjustable rear wing, engine cover, engine-bay panels, and brake cooling ducts are of carbon fiber. The cabin also goes upmarket, via specially trimmed Recaro seats, Alcantara leather and carbon-fiber trim, and a top-line Alpine stereo/CD/DVD system with flip-up navigation screen and subwoofer.

If you think all this power, technology, and race-inspired appearance sounds expensive, you're right. A loaded-to-the-gills RSr will set you back \$169K, but that's for a full-boogie car. JRD will build one with as much of its hardware as you wish. We're impressed by how well-developed, sorted, component-matched, and utterly driveable this car is. It's all backed by JRD's own warranty and permits the Esperante owner to make an already limited-production car all that more unique.

	'03 Esperante	'03 JRD RSr
0-60 mph	5.11	4.12
¼ mile	13.60@105.34	12.18@119.55
Braking, 60-0 ft	130	123
Slalom, mph	64.3	64.8