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McLaren P1 image taken from Forza Motorsport 5



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Figures may vary depending on driving style and conditions. App store is a service mark of Apple Inc. Google Play is a trademark of Google Inc.



Official fuel consumption figures for the Audi RS 6 Avant 4.0 TFSI quattro 560PS 8-speed tiptronic in mpg (l/100km): for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. Image for illustration purpose only and may

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ISSUE 190
CAR OF THE
YEAR 2013

Ed Speak

W

WHEN WE BEGAN NEGOTIATIONS WITH McLAREN

about joining the P1 test team at the Ring, it was expected that the ultimate lap time would be achieved and revealed in time for this issue. At the last minute, I got a text from McLaren that read: 'I have a conclusion on the Ring question. And not sure if you're going to like it.' A few minutes later, I was on the phone to Woking.

During the conversation that followed, it was explained that (spoiler alert!) the P1's lap time would never be revealed and that the official line was that McLaren 'had achieved its objective of a sub-seven minute lap of the Nordschleife'. My first feeling was disappointment because I'm sure many of you will be expecting the time, and we can't give it, but my second feeling was relief. Here's why...

I couldn't give a monkey's about the cult of the Nordschleife lap time. Never have. The chase for a notable lap time has become a form of motorsport in itself, but a motorsport without a governing body, without appropriate safety measures, without independent adjudicators, and a motorsport that is governed by the 'competitors' themselves. The result is a pissing contest, a trivialising of the Ring's history and a chase for lap times that puts lives at risk.

And for what? A marketing message? Well, turn to page 74 to find out what two prominent supercar customers think of the 'allure' of the Nürburgring lap time and the (lack of) effect it has when signing a cheque for the best part of £1million.

Dickie Meaden goes into this in more detail in his excellent column on page 53 – a man who I trust more than any other to deliver an opinion on the Green Hell. It is the most honest, sensible, measured piece about the Nordschleife I've ever read.

McLaren may be pilloried for not announcing a lap time and you may think that it has dodged the bullet because it couldn't beat Porsche. Either way, I'm glad we can put this to bed: had McLaren announced a quicker time there's no doubt that everyone and his brother would attempt to beat it. But how many of those would exercise the same duty of care as McLaren or Porsche? After Sean Edwards' death, and evo columnist Dario Franchitti's terrifying accident last month, the world of performance motoring – and the Nordschleife – does not need any more tragedy or any more controversy.

The Green Hell's role in improving driving dynamics and driving pleasure cannot be jeopardised by the chase for even faster lap times. When you feel its true effect on driving, you can really feel it. I had the privilege of experiencing it this month on eCoty. On a particularly tricky left/right/left-over-crest that turned a few other cars inside out, the sublime Aston Martin V12 Vantage S – a car partly developed at the Ring – carved through imperiously, leaving an experience of near-perfect chassis behaviour indelibly inked in my memory. That's the Ring right there. Not three numbers separated by a colon.



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'The first corner in an F12 is always a shock. You simply don't expect the big nose to jump at the apex so violently'



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When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

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McLAREN P1

The Nürburgring Nordschleife is a notoriously tricky test for any car. But a 903bhp hypercar, traditionally an object designed to star on bedroom walls and boast ridiculous 0-60mph times? David Vivian joins McLaren as the P1 takes on the Green Hell and makes its first move against the Porsche 918 and LaFerrari

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Last month we championed the Caterham 620R, one of the best sports cars on sale. But how much fun remains when the Seven is stripped of its sticky tyres and more horsepower than an entire Golf GTI?

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ELFYN EVANS

If you were unfailingly patriotic in the Richard Burns and Colin McRae era of the WRC, then it might be time to get the Union Jacks out of the loft at long last. Meet Elfn Evans, son of Gwyndaf and British rallying's next big thing

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The leaves are brown and the clocks have gone back an hour. Rather than recommission your winter coat, though, stay inside and settle into our 40-page eCoty extravaganza. Some 11 cars battle it out, with Ferrari, Alfa Romeo and Porsche among those slugging it out for top honours. And unlike last year, there's only one winner this time...

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Meet the lesser-spotted lightweight 911, the 3.2 Club Sport. David Vivian uses it to retell one of his less salubrious driving tales



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Topless Veneno

First look

The low-down on a star car of the future

Lamborghini to build nine open-top versions of its crazy 740bhp, £2.8million special

Words: Mike Duff

I

IT FELT LIKE something was missing at the recent Frankfurt motor show. The

Lamborghini stand didn't feature one of the ultra-limited 'specials' that have become one of the brand's hallmarks. The ones that draw crowds five deep and steal the headlines.

It had originally been planned to have one of these – the Veneno Roadster – in Germany, but the company changed its mind, not wanting to distract attention from the Gallardo Squadra Corse. Which it would have done. Indeed, you could

park the Veneno Roadster next to a solid gold Bugatti Veyron and safely expect the outrageous Lambo to win most of the attention.

This car, an open version of the equally barking Veneno that we saw at the Geneva show in March, but without even a temporary roof to protect you from the rain, is as gloriously mad as you'd expect a Lambo 'special' to be. If you're tempted then Lamborghini will be selling nine examples, priced at £2.8million each before local taxes.

Much of the Roadster is predictably similar to the Veneno. Despite the ultra-limited production numbers, its styling is the result of extensive



p17 2-SERIES REVEALED

First pictures and details of BMW's 2014 follow-up to the 1-series coupe



p18 RALLY GB GETS REVAMP

Five reasons why you should pack up your wellies and head for North Wales



p21 METCALFE MEMORIES

With our editorial director heading off to pastures new, we recall some of Harry's highlights



wind-tunnel time, with the shape of the nose designed to work like an enormous wing element. The underbody is completely smooth and the combination of a motorsport-spec adjustable rear wing and a sizeable rear diffuser will push and pull the car onto the road respectively.

Pretty much the whole structure is made from carbonfibre, with carbon body panels mounted to a monocoque made from the same material. The car's pushrod suspension is a development of that on the Aventador, as is the mid-mounted 6.5-litre V12, which produces 740bhp – a 50bhp increase over the Aventador. Power is



'The Veneno Roadster is as gloriously mad as you'd expect a Lambo "special" to be'

Left: despite the lack of a roof, the Veneno Roadster is claimed to be capable of 221mph



supplied to all four wheels through a single-clutch seven-speed automated transmission, and we're told the car weighs 1490kg 'dry', the 40kg increase over the coupe put down to extra structural reinforcement.

Despite the difference in mass, Lamborghini claims the two cars are identically fast, sharing a 2.9sec 0-62mph time and 221mph top speed (this without a roof, remember). The cabin is even trimmed in a lightweight material called CarbonSkin to trim weight further. The colour in these images is a unique red called Rosso Veneno, but buyers will be able to choose any paint colour they want.

The decision to more than double the production of the Roadster over the coupe is an indication of how important Lambo's 'special cars' are becoming. The programme began because of CEO Stephan Winkelmann's desire to produce something more relevant than pure motor show concepts – leading in 2007 to the spectacular Reventón. But it quickly became obvious that there was demand for these ultra-rare models from rich collectors.

Winkelmann admitted to *evo* that the limited production of the Veneno coupe meant he had to turn down two potential orders on the stand at Geneva. Which is presumably why there will be nine roadsters. ☒

Lamborghini: the next five years



2014 Definite 'LP724'

The Gallardo's replacement – long rumoured to be called the Cabrera – will be unveiled at Geneva next year. It's being developed alongside the next-gen Audi R8 and will use a carbon and aluminium structure. Power will come from a V10 capable of passing EU6 tests and likely to produce at least 600bhp. The car will also get the revised first-generation R8's twin-clutch transmission. Whether there will be manual versions is unknown.

2014? Maybe Aventador SV

We know there's a hotter version of the Aventador coming: Lambo told us as much as the car was launched, admitting that the V12's 690bhp was the least the engine would produce. It's a safe bet we'll see a version boasting at least the 740bhp of the Veneno. It should be lighter, too. But what will it be called? The familiar Super Veloce is our bet.



2017 Definite Urus

Lamborghini's controversial SUV has obvious business relevance – the company reckons it'll sell between 3000 and 4000 of them a year. The final car will be spun off the architecture that underpins the next Porsche Cayenne, Audi Q7 and the production Bentley 9F. It's likely to be powered by a twin-turbo V8 with at least 600bhp.



Never Front-engine GT/ diesel engines

Despite speculation that Lamborghini was planning a front-engine GT car similar to the Estoque concept (pictured), the firm has no plans to produce one. 'It [the speculation] was invented, invented out of the blue,' Stephan Winkelmann told us in Geneva.

Ex-Caterham boss reveals Zenos plans

Ansar Ali's new firm to create trio of lightweight sports cars. Launch of the open-topped E10 scheduled for January

Words: Mike Duff



Top: E10 features lightweight body of recycled carbonfibre and plastic. **Above:** Ali and former Caterham tech guru Mark Edwards (below) are Zenos's co-founders



ANSAR ALI WAS never going to stay out of the sports car industry for long. And two years after leaving his role as Caterham's CEO 'by mutual consent', here's what he and his small team have been working on.

Zenos, co-founded by Ali and former Caterham Technology and Innovation head Mark Edwards, is set to build a range of three light, low-cost sports cars. The first of these – a roofless, doorless special currently called the E10 – is slated for a debut at the Autosport show in January.

Production deadlines mean we can't bring you a picture of the finished car, but we have seen both the engineering prototype and renderings of the final design at the company's base in Hethel, next door to Lotus. And given both the project's clever engineering and market aspiration, such a location is wholly appropriate.

All three cars will be built around a backbone chassis, with a rigid 2.1-metre extruded-aluminium spine running down the centre of the car and a composite tub sitting on this. Front suspension components are mounted directly to this spine, with double wishbones and pushrod-operated springs and dampers. At the back, a

sub-frame holds the engine, gearbox and rear double wishbones.

The tub and bodywork will be made out of a new material that uses recycled carbonfibre over a core of plastic tubes (think something like fast-food drink straws laid end-on). According to Edwards, this is up to 70 per cent as strong as pure carbonfibre but far cheaper, and also means the

transverse gearbox then drives the rear wheels via a limited-slip diff.

As much effort has been given to creating the company and the business plan as making the car itself, and we're promised that we'll find the E10's price 'very surprising' when it's announced nearer the launch date. Zenos won't set up a UK dealer network; instead it will sell cars

'WE'RE PROMISED WE'LL FIND THE E10'S PRICE "VERY SURPRISING" WHEN IT'S ANNOUNCED'

E10 will weigh just 650kg. Bodywork will also be made from composite and has deliberately been designed around multiple smaller mouldings rather than bigger clamshells, for ease of repair. This is a car intended to be used on track as well as road.

The engine in all three cars will be a 2-litre naturally aspirated Ford unit, described as the closest thing the Blue Oval still does to the Duratec that Ali and Edwards introduced to Caterham. This unit will be tuned to produce around 200bhp in the E10 and cooled by a front-mounted radiator that passes its pipework through the central spine. More powerful versions are possible, including ones using forced induction. A five- or six-speed

directly via its website and 'pop-up' showrooms at events and trackdays.

'We didn't want to be seen as one of those brands that turns up at the RAC Club, rolls back the sheet and has a Formula 1 driver there to endorse it,' says Ali. 'The market we're going after is people who understand what makes a good performance car.'

After the bare-bones E10, we'll see the E11, a roadster with doors, and then the E12 coupe. Zenos hopes to produce between 150 and 200 cars in the first year, building up to annual production of 500 cars once all three models are on stream. Those are numbers Ali admits are 'bullish... but we're confident we can achieve them when people see the car and the price.' ❌

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News in brief



Juke Nismo RS on the way

Nissan has confirmed it will unveil a hotter version of the Juke Nismo at the LA motor show in November. Full details haven't been released, but we know the Nismo RS will get more power than the standard Nismo Juke (pictured), which has a 197bhp version of Nissan-Renault's 1.6-litre turbocharged engine. We'd figure on about 230bhp. The upgraded powerplant may well also find its way into a quicker version of the Renaultsport Clio, which uses the same basic unit.



Morgan out

Strange times in Malvern, as Charles Morgan has been forced out of the company that bears his name after what looks like a boardroom bust-up. Morgan is the grandson of company founder Harry Morgan, and was the company's managing director until earlier this year, when he was replaced by Steve Morris. Morgan kept an ambassadorial role, but that has now ended in what seems like acrimonious circumstances. Morgan, who remains a shareholder in the business, is reportedly planning to fight his removal.

BMW makes things even

2-series Coupe and 4-series Convertible set for 2014 release

Words: Mike Duff



Above: 4-series cabrio carries extra 300kg. **Left:** 2-series coupe comes at a premium over 1-series equivalents

B BMW HAS RELEASED pictures of the new 2-series Coupe and 4-series Convertible. Both are set to go on sale next year.

The 2-series is the coupe version of the 1-series, with the same engines and common underpinnings. It's bigger than the 1-series Coupe it replaces, and with a less notchy side-on profile.

Pricing is predictably robust – this is BMW, after all – stretching from

£25,040 for the basic 220i to a very solid £34,250 for the range-topping M235i – some £3680 more than the three-door M135i. Four-wheel-drive versions will follow later, as will a cabriolet.

This neatly brings us to the open-topped version of the recently launched 4-series Coupe. Like the previous 3-series Convertible, the new car uses a retractable hard-top rather than a fabric roof. That means a

substantial weight penalty of around 300kg over the coupe, enough to add half a second to the 435i's claimed 0-62mph time (5.6sec versus 5.1). Such is the price of fashion, it seems.

Engine options match those in the coupe, with a four-cylinder petrol 428i and a twin-turbo in-line-six 435i. But the four-cylinder 420d diesel will, as always, make up the majority of UK sales. We can also expect an M4 cabrio to follow later next year. ☒

World's fastest diesel production car emerges from Alpina

R ENOWNED BMW-fettler Alpina has introduced a new diesel-powered version of the 3-series, said to be good for 173mph.

The D3 Biturbo uses a tweaked version of BMW's twin-turbocharged straight-six diesel, producing 345bhp and 516lb ft of torque. In addition to the headline-grabbing top speed,



those outputs also result in a claimed 4.6sec 0-62mph time alongside official consumption and emission figures of 53.2mpg and 139g/km respectively.

The previous D3 was Alpina's first diesel-powered car, and used a version of BMW's 2-litre four-cylinder engine, tuned to 211bhp and 332lb ft. The new engine raises the bar by a considerable margin, and we've already sampled it

in the XD3 (evo 188).

The D3 gets a subtle visual makeover, including the usual Alpina-branded front airdam, plus 19in multi-spoke alloys. An eight-speed auto gearbox is standard, as is adaptive M-sport suspension, while any BMW factory option can be specified. UK prices are £46,950 for the saloon and £49,950 for the Touring. ☒

5 REASONS TO GO TO RALLY GB

With a heavily revised route, an ex-F1 star in a World Rally Car and a new champion, the season-closing Wales Rally GB on November 14-17 could be the most exciting in years

Words: Dan McCalla



1 Hello North Wales

Rally GB's organisers have received plenty of stick in recent years for confining Britain's WRC spectacular to a tiny pocket of South Wales. Well, armed with renewed sponsorship from the Welsh Assembly Government, the rally has bid Cardiff and Margam Park farewell and decamped to the northern half of the Principality.

With the service park based at the Toyota engine manufacturing plant



on Deeside next to the A55, classic North Welsh stages like Penmachno, Clocaenog and Dyfi all feature on the four-day itinerary.



3 Kubica back at the top

The recovery of F1 race winner Robert Kubica after his near-fatal rally accident in February 2011 has been remarkable, to the point that he went into Rally Spain with a great chance of clinching the WRC2 championship as this story went to press. The factory Citroën team has rewarded the Pole with his first top-flight WRC drive in Wales, in a DS3 WRC, and he stands a decent shout of securing a full works drive in 2014. With plenty of F1 fans missing the attacking flair that took Kubica to the top of the F1 podium in Montréal in 2008, he's sure to gain plenty of support among neutrals.



2 The history boys

If you're worried that there will be a few too many Fiestas and DS3s for your liking, fear not. The supporting Rally GB National – which will run through Friday, Saturday and Sunday's stages in between the two runs for the big boys – features 100 clubman entries. The model names on the entry list are sure to get you excited: Escort Mk2, 911, Chevette, Lotus Cortina, Mexico, Talbot Sunbeam, Impreza and more.

4 The Great Orme

A sheer rock face on one side. A drop to the Irish Sea on the other. Hordes of fans peering down from above. The Great Orme stage, held on a high

limestone headland, offers a dramatic spectacle to complete the rally and the season, as the remaining crews tackle the 2.9-mile ribbon of tarmac that snakes around its edge. Take the hike up from Llandudno town centre and see it – it's worth the climb.



5 Loeb-free zone

The full retirement of Sébastien Loeb, who bade farewell to the sport at Rally France in

early October, has made Rally GB a much more open affair compared to recent years. And while Volkswagen's Sébastien Ogier (pictured) has dominated this year, wrapping up his first WRC title with two rallies to spare,

his record in Britain is dreadful: in five previous Rally GB appearances, he's never finished in the top ten. This gives young hotshots like M-Sport's Thierry Neuville a golden opportunity to challenge for a maiden WRC win.

Wilson's British team dream



M-Sport boss Malcolm Wilson still harbours dreams of running an all-British WRC team as he attempts to keep hold of promising Welsh driver Elfyn Evans (featured on page 96).

The Cumbrian outfit operated as the works Ford team for 16 years until it lost its backing from the Blue Oval at the end of 2012. This year it has run its Fiesta WRCs with funding from Qatar,

but that deal has yet to be renewed.

'Our sponsorship from Qatar was a 12-month deal, so we're in discussions with them [about an extension] at the moment,' Wilson told *evo*. 'Elfyn could be the British driver we need to revive the sport, and I'd like nothing more than to be able to field a two-car all-British team. I think that would really help WRC's popularity in the UK.'

evo comment

Ten years ago, there were plenty of works drives in the WRC but no new British drivers to fill them. Now the opposite is true, with numerous drivers approaching the top flight but only three factory teams entered for 2014. British success would be a real shot in the arm for rallying in this country, but it needs more carmakers to commit to the sport before that can happen.

Brace yourself.



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➤ **Ford EcoBoost Engine**

The Focus ST is a remarkable car. Its lightweight, aluminium 2.0-litre 250PS EcoBoost Engine delivers exhilarating power with 0-62 in just 6.5 seconds. Just as impressive are the exceptional levels of fuel efficiency of 39.2mpg and CO₂ emissions of a mere 169g/km.

Official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the Ford Focus ST engine (250PS): urban 28.5 (9.9), extra urban 50.4 (5.6), combined 39.2 (7.2). Official CO₂ emission 169g/km.

The mpg figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results, are provided for comparability purposes and may not reflect your actual driving experience. Vehicle shown is the Ford Focus ST3 with optional Driver Assistance Pack, privacy glass and ST Style Pack available at extra cost. EcoBoost engine comes as standard on all Focus ST models.



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Fuel consumption figures for the Civic 1.6 i-DTEC ES Manual in mpg (l/100km):
Urban 70.6 (4.0), Extra Urban 85.6 (3.3), Combined 78.5 (3.6). CO₂ emissions: 94g/km.
Fuel consumption figures sourced from official EU-regulated laboratory test results,
are provided for comparison purposes and may not reflect real-life driving experience.

Model shown: Civic 1.6 i-DTEC ES Manual in Alabaster Silver metallic paint at £21,095.



Goodbye Harry Metcalfe

evo 1998-2013

As our editorial director drives away from **evo** Towers for the last time, Peter Tomalin leads the tributes

Words: Peter Tomalin, Richard Meaden and Harry Metcalfe

SUMMER 2000, Tuscany. We'd taken a group of the world's greatest supercars, including some flashy new upstart called a Pagani Zonda, to what can only be described as God's own playground. At the end of each blissful day, when we'd had our fill of driving, we'd repair to the boss's hillside villa for the night. I can remember drinking chilled beer under the starriest sky you've ever seen, then waking the next morning to find Harry tending to the pots of coffee bubbling on the stove. If Carlsberg did group tests, they wouldn't have been half as good as this.

Funnily enough, it wasn't always like that. For every sun-drenched Tuscan valley, there was a bleak, rain-lashed Yorkshire moorland or a biting cold Welsh mountainside. Or more likely the umpteenth late night

in the office, racing to beat the next deadline, fuelled only by coffee, pizza and doughnuts. But when it was good, it was very, very good indeed.

Working on **evo** in the early days wasn't like working anywhere else. For a start, there was just a handful of us. The office wasn't in some anonymous modern block, but in converted farm buildings around a gravelled courtyard. Reception didn't have a fancy coffee machine, but it did have a huge PlayStation rig with the latest version of *Gran Turismo* on permanent play.

An awful lot of that was down to Harry Metcalfe and the way he does things. Harry (only his father calls him Harrison) first entered our lives in the mid-1990s when he wrote a letter (no emails back then) to *Performance Car*, where John Barker, Richard Meaden, Roger Green and I were then working. Would we, he wondered, like to try

his new Maserati Ghibli? Since Maserati itself didn't have a press fleet in the UK at the time, we bit his hand off. Later, when he got a Ghibli Cup, he started to contribute long-term test reports, and in 1997 he brought the Cup along on Performance Car of the Year.

By then, however, *PC* was damaged goods, having been driven downmarket by management drunk on the success of the recently launched *Max Power*. The circulation nosedived and in the spring of 1998 we were told the mag was to close. It was on the very last *PC* group test that John Barker and Dickie Meaden asked Metcalfe if he'd consider launching a new title.

Meaden recalls: 'I can remember sitting on a bench with Harry, looking out to sea, waiting for the right moment to pop the question. I'd pilfered the *PC* budget sheet, which

Above: 'Lord Metcalfe', as he was affectionately known, with his pair of Lambos outside the actual Harry's Garage

'TO ESTABLISH EVO, HARRY SECURED A £275,000 LOAN ON THE BASIS THAT IT WAS "TO BUILD A NEW GRAIN FACILITY" ON HIS FARM'

he took away to peruse. Fortunately he had the nous to realise that by stripping out all the big-company costs, there was a decent profit to be made from a small mag.'

And so it began, first with a 'dummy issue' to get the industry and key advertisers on board, then with the renting of the aforementioned offices and the appointment of key editorial and advertising staff to get the first few issues out. What we didn't know at the time was that Harry had secured a £275,000 loan on

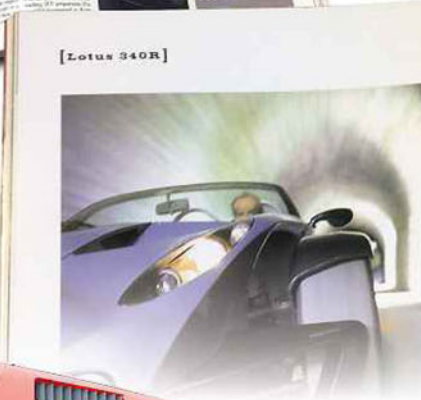
proper job as junior designer on the launch of *Max Power* magazine. Switched to two wheels and held the position of art editor of top-selling *Performance Bikes* before joining *evo*



Harry Metcalfe, managing director
Frustrated by the lack of a pure enthusiast's motoring magazine, Harry decided to fill the gap in the market himself. To this end formed Evo Publications and assembled a team to create a genuinely fresh and exciting product. Launched *evo* instead. Sorry – launched *evo* instead of buying a villa in Tuscany



Far left: back in the early days. **Above left:** closure of *Performance Car* led to Harry funding the birth of *evo*. **Above and right:** Maybach at the Ring and 340R on the Klausen Pass were classic Metcalfe moments. **Below:** Harry's Espada



the basis that it was 'to build a new grain facility' on his farm. Good man.

There was a real feeling of us against the world, everyone mucking in and working silly hours to produce the magazine we all believed in. Fortunately, when issue 001 hit the shelves on October 8, 1998, *evo* found an audience.

Harry's feel for the magazine was almost unerringly right, though as Barker says: 'We did have to ease him gradually into the real world with the odd car under £50k.' There was no 'mission statement' pinned to the wall – just a photocopy of the announcement by our old bosses at Emap that there was no future for *PC*, which was being absorbed into *Car*. If there was one thing that drove us on through those early months, it was the thought of proving them wrong. When *evo's* circulation overtook that of *Car* a few years later it was a deliciously sweet moment.

Just four issues in, however, it

'HARRY BASICALLY SAID: "WE'RE IN THE SHIT AND WE MIGHT NOT BE HERE IN THE NEW YEAR. OH, AND HAPPY CHRISTMAS." MOTIVATIONAL SPEECHES WEREN'T HARRY'S THING PERHAPS'

almost ended before it had begun. We'd just put issue 004 'to bed' and were about to leave the office for a well-earned festive break when Harry addressed the troops. The gist of his Christmas message was: 'We're in the shit and we might not be here in the new year. Oh, and happy Christmas.' Motivational speeches weren't quite Harry's thing perhaps.

Fortunately, balance sheets were. The problem was that we'd had all the costs of producing four issues, but the revenues had hardly begun to trickle in from issue 001. Harry slashed the overseas print run, the ad team applied maximum pressure to advertisers to pay up and somehow we got through. We returned in the

new year to find that issue 003 – the very first eCoty – had flown off the shelves. *evo* was here to stay.

Harry's astuteness served the magazine well. As Barker observes: 'Nothing escaped his gimlet eye, and he only spent money where it really counted. He'd never waste it on market research. It was all done on gut instinct – his and ours.'

Harry certainly looked after the pennies, both the magazine's and his own. Many was the time we went out for a pub lunch and Harry would pat his pockets the moment the bill arrived, mumble something about having come out without his wallet, and someone else would pick up the tab. But at other times he could be

incredibly generous. Several of us had holidays in one of Harry's cottages in the West Country or at Sasso Corvo, his villa in Tuscany, and the team had some great 'blue sky' days down at his place near Burford, mostly spent bombing around the fields in one of his Volvo 340s.

He was also turning out to be a prolific writer, if at times something of a challenge for the subs desk, and his love of an adventure led to some of *evo's* most memorable features. Driving a 340R half-way across Europe to storm the daunting Klausen Pass (021), lapping the Nordschleife in a Maybach limo (059), tackling snow and ice on an Alpine pass in an early Murciélago (056) – these and many more were classic Metcalfe features.

His naked enthusiasm shone through those yarns, even though he was the first to admit he wasn't a 'proper' journalist. In print – and occasionally in speech too – Harry

was capable of some wonderful malapropisms. Top-speed runs were attempted on the German 'autobar'. Petrol-electric cars were always 'hybrids'. For the duration of one eCoty, the Ruf engineer's girlfriend, Astrid, was addressed by Harry as 'Ostrich'.

There were some absolute gems in Harry's unsubbed prose, too. Here's one example where he describes the recipe for a hot hatch: 'Install the most powerful engine you can, beef up the suspension and brakes accordingly, add a pair of decent seats and viola, you have the perfect hot-hatch.'

And from an Ask the Expert: 'I'm a now a big fan of having projective film applied to venerable areas.' Well, who isn't?

Occasionally the smutty minds of the editorial team would imagine filth where none was intended. 'Next job was to get the 308 properly detailed,' wrote Hazza in a recent Fast Fleet report, 'for which I booked in Richard Tipper of Perfection Valet for a full-on two-man all-day session.'

In another long-term report, he penned the words that became an *evo* office legend: 'The next day, I

grab the first coffee of the day and wander over to the barn where I parked the Zonda late last night. Just standing there in my dressing gown, staring at the beast in the early morning light is enough to give me goosebumps.'

Behind the chuckles there was respect and affection, for Harry was unfailingly good company. His slightly-bumbling-English-eccentric persona masked a keen mind – Harry clearly is the Boris Johnson of the motoring world. His easy charm had industry figures and PR bosses in his spell. To observe a Metcalfe in full schmooze mode is to witness something touching on genius and it would serve the magazine well on many occasions.

And now he's landed a dream job at JLR. Good news for Harry – and good news for all car enthusiasts, I reckon, because above all else Harry is 'one of us', and it has to be good that someone like him will now be helping shape the cars we'll be driving in years to come.

Meanwhile, the magazine he founded and helped shape enters a new era. There are different challenges now – mostly to do with

the advance of digital media – but so long as it stays true to its core values, there's no reason why it shouldn't surmount them. But I doubt it'll ever be as much fun to work on as it was in the early days. Personally and professionally, the early years of *evo* were the most demanding and the most rewarding I've ever had, and I know that was true for all of us.

I feel incredibly fortunate to have been in on the birth of *evo*, and none of it would have happened without a certain Mr Metcalfe.

Harry, it was a privilege. **PT**



Fulfilling Dickie's dream

TWO WEEKS. For two long weeks in the spring of 1998, John Barker and I waited while Harry crunched the numbers that would ultimately decide whether he could get behind the magazine concept we'd been courting him with for months. It's fair to say that when he came back to us with an unflinching 'yes', none of our lives would be quite the same again.

The beauty of Charles Harrison Metcalfe is that when he sets his mind to something, big things tend to happen. In the beginning, that meant Hazza focusing on grown-up stuff like paying for everything, while the original team (that's to say myself, Barker, Damian Smith, Allan Pattison, Peter Tomalin and Stuart Gallagher) concentrated on crystallising our ideas into a dummy issue of the magazine that we could show to the industry. Just a few months after the euphoria of issue 001 (pictured) hitting the newsstands, Harry had to dig deep once again, pledging homes, kids and probably a kidney to his bank manager in order to release more funds to keep the dream alive. When it comes to balls, H has a pair of space-hoppers.

It wasn't all a bed of roses working with Harry; indeed there were times when he could be absolutely infuriating. I can still recall the evening he did my head in so completely I decided I either had to kill him or leave the office. So I left, with 6000rpm showing on my RS Clio 172's tacho and a shower of gravel in my wake. I returned next morning to find next door's office windows being replaced..

I'm not surprised H has moved on. He's always busied himself with enough projects over the years to keep him in yachts and Italian V12s. The motor industry bewitched him from day one and I know he's thrilled at his new role with JLR. Yes, things will be different around here, but as Harry himself would acknowledge, *evo* was built around an ethos, not an individual. There are plenty more thrills to seek and we'll continue to share them with you – and our new reader, Mr H Metcalfe – as best we can. Same as it ever was. **RM**





From the man himself...

W WHAT'S THAT FAMOUS saying about time flying when you're having fun?

Well, the past 15 years at **evo** Towers have flown by, although, to be honest, it was impossible not to have fun given the team we put together and the cars we got to test.

Of course, over those 15 years our world of performance cars has changed dramatically. In the early days, ABS braking was rarely standard-fit, paddle-shifts were in their infancy and today's ubiquitous ESP button was a twinkle in the eye of some boffin in Munich. These days, engineers have to grapple with ways to keep tailpipe emissions down while still creating cars we want to drive. But as a glance through any recent issue will reveal, there are still plenty of new cars to get excited about.

So why have I decided now is the time to stop getting paid to drive the best cars on the planet? Well, just as launching **evo** was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, another opportunity came my way that was simply too good to miss.

It came about after a conversation I had at this year's Goodwood Festival of Speed. I was there as a guest of Jaguar Land Rover and I put it to one of their chaps that JLR's little-known internal division ETO (Engineered To Order) had real potential to become a separate premium brand within JLR, like AMG at Mercedes but not only focused on pure performance variants. It was suggested I put my ideas in an email, so Ralf Speth (CEO at JLR) could have a look too.

The next thing I know, I'm in Dr Speth's office discussing the proposal in more detail and discovering he's been thinking along the same lines for some time. A week later, I'm offered the chance to become part of the team charged with setting up a new division at JLR. It's not often you're at the very start of something potentially this big and that's why I simply had to jump ship.

As I write, I'm three weeks into my new role, and I report directly to the

evo

THE THRILL OF DRIVING

From evo to ETO

HARRY'S CAREER SWITCH EXPLAINED BY YET ANOTHER TYPING MISHAP



'HOW MUCH?!'
Harry pops out for milk

MARKET CRASH!
Bank of England forced to print more money as Harry's expenses come in



HAT'S LIFE
Nutkins lookalike now available for personal appearances

Above: as is a tradition here at **evo**, we created a 'leaving cover' for Harry; just this once, we thought we'd share it with you...

newly appointed MD of the Individual Products Division, John Edwards, on ways to create exciting new ETO variants of current and future JLR models. One day I might be working up a proposal for extreme versions of the Land Rover Defender, the next it could be ultra-sporting Jaguars. Make no mistake: there are big plans at JLR to build a raft of exciting cars within the recharged ETO division. I can't spill the beans just yet, but we're hoping to have something special at Geneva next year.

But whatever the next chapter holds, **evo** will always be incredibly special to me and I will always be grateful for the support and encouragement we've received from you, our readers. I'll never forget the avalanche of mail we got in the weeks after issue 001 went on sale. 'Big thanks for such a great new mag – all the best bits without the boring bits,' wrote one reader in November 1998.

We ended up collating your letters and comments into a big folder we called 'the happy book'. If I ever felt

down, all I had to do was pick it up, read a few pages and be reminded why we were doing what we did. It's still on my desk today: it's a little tatty now, but it remains one of my most treasured mementos. A more recent surprise has been the amazingly supportive comments for my **evo** Diaries on YouTube; they're another thing that I'm going to miss badly.

Thank you all for making my time at **evo** so very special. I can honestly say it wouldn't have happened without you.

HM

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This month

**ASTON MARTIN
VANQUISH VOLANTE**
Range-topping Aston
supercar loses its roof

p26



AUDI RS Q3
quattro GmbH makes its
RS-badged SUV debut

p32



BMW i3
First drive of electric-powered
hatchback

p36



**PORSCHE PANAMERA S
E-HYBRID**
Plug-in Panamera with 71g/km
official CO2 figure

p39



BIRDS BMW M135i
Rear-drive hot hatch gets
LSD and other upgrades

p40



RENAULT TWIZY F1
KERS-equipped Twizy with
acceleration of RS Mégane

p42



MG3 STYLE
104bhp hot (ish) hatch
priced under £10k

p44



**BMW M6 GRAN COUPE
v AUDI RS7**
Rival 550bhp supercoupes
go head-to-head

p46



The test team

Between them, our road test team have driven the vast majority of post-war Aston Martins. To celebrate the firm's centenary, they pick out their favourites:



NICK TROTT
Editor

'V12 Vantage RS concept. At Paul Ricard, it was as quick as the DBR9 works racer down the Mistral.'



MIKE DUFF
Motoring editor

'The DB7 V12 – big and crude by modern standards, but looks brilliant and brimming with character.'



HENRY CATCHPOLE
Features editor

'The DBR1. Never driven one but it's been my dream car ever since I watched Peter Hardman racing one at Goodwood.'



JETHRO BOVINGDON
Contributing editor

'Vanquish S. Glorious to look at, superb balance and a V12 noise they've not bettered since. Love 'em.'



RICHARD MEADEN
Contributing editor

'Le Mans-winning DBR9. Fabulous engine, brilliant brakes, lots of aero and that famous Gulf livery. Perfect!'



DAVID VIVIAN
Contributing road tester

'For its beauty, its exhaust note and its Linn sound system, it has to be the original Vanquish S.'

RISE
4
248
Driven



📍 Test location: Palm Springs, California, USA GPS: 33.83029, -116.54529

Aston Martin Vanquish Volante

New-generation Vanquish gets soft-top treatment,
but can it match the coupe's performance?



Y

YESTERDAY, CRUISING at 38,000ft somewhere over Greenland, I settled down to watch a film called *The Bling Ring*. Rather erroneously

I'd thought it was going to be an interesting documentary about the doomed attempts at commercialising the Nürburgring by building roller coasters, casinos and suchlike. Emma Watson was at the top of the cast list, so I

assumed that, in a typical Hollywood-style leap of the imagination, she'd been given the role of Sabine Schmitz.

Anyway, fairly quickly it became obvious that I was very much mistaken (although I think Sofia Coppola should seriously consider my proposal for her next directorial effort). The plot in fact revolved around the true story of a bunch of bratty teenagers who broke into famous people's houses in Los Angeles (where

my flight was heading) while the famous people were out being papped at premieres or charity benefits. The young scoundrels would then go round the temporarily vacant properties, trying on clothes, jewellery, watches, etc. before pinching a certain amount. Their thinking was that the famous people wouldn't miss a few items from amongst the many. It worked for a while, too, meaning they were able to taste a lifestyle they couldn't afford.



I'm rather conscious of being like one of those teenagers today (without the burglary bit). The Vanquish Volante fits right in as it slopes through Palm Springs. I, on the other hand, do not. I'm merely playing at being a Vanquish owner, and not very convincingly. This desert resort may not quite be the Hollywood hangout that it once was when Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and Bob Hope were building houses here, but it still has an air of wealth and glamour about its boulevards, and the Aston's beautifully muscular bodywork and eye-catching paintwork have an appropriately salubrious swagger for the surroundings. However, in a town where people don't seem to have a hair out of place, I have a barnet that wilfully rejects combs like a feline coughing up furballs. So, as we glide through the traffic, roof down, my tousled mop being gently dishevelled anew by the slipstream, I realise I'm fooling no one.

What I'm more concerned about is whether the car will turn out to be a fraud when we

finally escape into the mountains nearby. The roads up there are excellent and an exacting test of a chassis (it's where we did the V12 Vantage S drive in the last issue), so if by going Volante the stiffness of the Vanquish has become more akin to a wet noodle, we will be able to tell pretty much instantly.

The Volante is endowed with the same updated 5.9-litre V12 as the coupe, which means headline figures of 565bhp at 6750rpm and 457lb ft at 5500rpm. In these days of 730bhp F12s, these are not numbers to make jaws hit floors but they still compare reasonably well with those of what might be seen as rivals. The Bentley Continental GT Speed has more power at 616bhp but also weighs 2320kg, so its 0-62mph time of 4.2sec is a tenth slower than the Aston's. However, the Volante isn't exactly a lightweight itself at 1844kg, so the SLS Roadster, which has similar outputs (563bhp and 479lb ft) but weighs 184kg less, manages to trump it in the 0-62mph sprint, at just 3.8sec.

One area in which the 'AM11' engine can easily hold its own is in the sound it orchestrates. In the same way you can pick out a Ferrari V8 or Porsche flat-six at a thousand paces when you're in London, there is something about the deep, comforting, slightly lazy burble at idle that is instantly recognisable as Aston. It's a very mellifluous, distinguished sound, not as raw as that of some cars in its class and somehow beautifully befitting.

What's not quite so tasteful is the interior. I'm not sure how many Smurfs were slaughtered to create the effect but I really don't think it was worth it. The quilting on the seats is also dubious as far as I'm concerned, but no doubt some of you think it all combines to create the nattiest cockpit since TVR went under. That's the point of personalisation. The square steering wheel isn't the easiest on the eye either, but as soon as you take hold of it you are instantly won over, because in your palms it feels like the perfect size and shape.



‘Perhaps it’s a consequence of having the roof down, but the Vanquish Volante feels stunningly quick between the corners’

There are also a couple of other practical things worth mentioning, one of which is the satnav. Whilst the screen still rises slightly awkwardly from the dash, it is at last packed with decent Garmin software and so is worth using. What’s more, if you plan on plugging in a destination on the other side of a continent, then you’ve got a decent amount of room in which to pack luggage for the trip. The boot is 50 per cent larger than the one in the DBS and isn’t affected by the roof being stowed. The rear seats are also available for extra luggage space – because you’re certainly not going to fit any human beings in them.

Although I’ve been enjoying the early-morning sunshine with the soft-top down (14 seconds for the transformation from open to closed and visa versa), the mercury is now rapidly heading towards 100deg F (38deg C), so it’s a relief to finally leave the city behind, increase speed and get some decent quantities of the stifling air moving around. There are



Specification	
Engine	V12, 5935cc
CO2	n/a
Power	565bhp @ 6750rpm
Torque	457lb ft @ 5500rpm
0-62mph	4.1sec (claimed)
Top speed	183mph (claimed)
Basic price	£199,995

Far left: interior can be specced in any one of 32 colours; test car’s is ‘True Teal’. **This page, top left:** leather-trimmed paddles bat through automatic gearbox’s six speeds. **Above left:** venerable 5.9-litre V12. **Top right:** 398mm front discs are taken from the One-77. **Right:** don’t expect to sit people in the rear seats





three damper modes – Normal, Sport and Track – which are selected via a glass button in the bottom-left sector of the steering wheel. I'd argue that for spirited driving on the road, Track mode is actually the one to go for. It's not as stiff as the same mode on the V12 Vantage S and it keeps the Vanquish tied down and agile. Even in this stiffest setting, there isn't any appreciable wobble or shake from the structure, which is very impressive. Aston claims that the Vanquish Volante is 14 per cent torsionally stiffer than the DBS Volante, and it feels every bit of that and more.

It's a big car, so the extra width of the Californian roads undoubtedly helps the Vanquish, but the steering is also beautifully accurate and has a surprising amount of feel, so you're always confident of placing the car where you want. You can feel the weight of the Vanquish in the corners, but it's well controlled and you certainly don't notice it under acceleration. Perhaps it's as much a consequence of having the roof down and the exhaust noise rebounding off rock faces, but the Vanquish feels stunningly quick between the corners. You feel the weight again as you

hit the brakes and lean the car on the huge 398mm front discs and six-piston calipers (lifted from the One-77), a sensation which could be disconcerting given some of the drops off the side of the road. However, Aston does some of the very best carbon-ceramic brakes in the business in terms of feel, so through the ball of your foot you get a reassuring sense of how heavily the pads are biting, and you always know how near the limit you are.

With the coupe, the only major blot on its dynamic copybook is the gearbox, which never feels like it is fitting for a car meant to be at the pinnacle of the company's range. The Volante has the same six-speed auto and it certainly doesn't have the snap of the best twin-cutch 'boxes available. However, the speed of the shifts certainly doesn't seem obstructive either. The flowing nature of the roads here undoubtedly helps, as it's easy to plot your course a decent way ahead and therefore plan the gearchanges in advance, but I never feel frustrated by the 'box in the same way that I sometimes have in the coupe.

In fact, I'd go so far as to argue that Volante status suits the Vanquish rather well. As a

coupe I'm never quite sure where the Vanquish is designed to fall – as the top of the Aston tree, it clearly wants to be a supercar, but largely because of the automatic gearbox, its demeanour is more fast GT. Lop the top off the body, however, and there seems to be less ambiguity about its character and less need for it to be considered as an out-and-out hardcore thrill-seeker battling against Aventador Roadsters, 458 Spiders and the like.

It's still mighty fast and very capable, but as a slightly softer-looking car (I can't think of a convertible that doesn't look less aggressive than its hard-top counterpart), it feels more comfortable in its carbonfibre and canvas skin, because the driving experience now more closely matches the image it's projecting. ✘

Henry Catchpole (@HenryCatchpole)

Verdict

- ⊕ Beautiful engine sound, accurate steering
- ⊖ Edged by rivals in the power stakes

evo rating: ★★★★★

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Test location: B662, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.41016, -0.43763

Audi RS Q3

For the first time, Audi gives an SUV the RS treatment. Is the Q3 worthy of the badge?

S **SO THE REGULAR Q3 IS** inoffensive and unexceptional in vanilla spec. This much we know. But when Audi slaps an RS badge on its rump and slots the stonking 2.5-litre five-cylinder turbo motor from the TT RS and RS3 beneath its bonnet, our interest can't fail to be piqued.

And then there's the added intrigue that comes from this being a product of Audi's notoriously hit-and-miss RS high-performance

division, which yo-yos between brilliance and bloody awfulness with infuriating regularity. On the face of it, this should be yet another underwhelming RS variant to file under 'What were they thinking?', but experience suggests quattro GmbH is consistently inconsistent with its range-topping derivatives. This alone makes the RS Q3 worth a try.

Styling is a subjective quality, so I'll leave you to decide how successfully you think the Q3 wears Audi's traditional RS cues. Suffice to say

the lowered stance, bold intakes, brushed alloy brightwork and optional 20in chariot wheels (£195) lend it plenty of on-road presence, albeit in a rather conspicuous fashion. There's no disputing it looks like a premium item both inside and out: in flawless Sepang Blue and with plenty of supple leather wrapping comfortable, supportive sports seats, the feel-good factor is successfully ramped up before you even start the engine.

Press the starter button and you immediately



'You can accurately and enthusiastically hustle the Q3 down a challenging B-road'



discover the RS Q3 wears its heart on its sleeve. Its thumping five-banger has been the core of the TT RS and RS3's appeal, but perhaps because its gruff warble is more incongruous in the Q3, the effect on your psyche is one of childish delight. Its outputs – 306bhp and 310lb ft – are more adult, if slightly down on the TT and RS3's. Put to the tarmac via Audi's familiar Haldex clutch-controlled quattro four-wheel-drive system and mated to a seven-speed S-tronic paddle-shift DSG gearbox, the RS Q3 is a gifted sprinter, punching to 62mph in 5.5sec and on to a limited top speed of 155mph.

In line with its Q3 flagship status, the RS gets Audi's Drive Select system, which gives you the choice of three modes – Comfort, Auto and Dynamic – which control the damping, steering weight and response, and the sharpness of the power delivery. There's no Individual mode

allowing you to pick and mix settings from Comfort and Dynamic, but as the first few miles pass beneath the RS Q3's fat wheels, you discover that isn't the issue you might fear.

More often than not, an RS Audi can be characterised by dead, artificial-feeling steering and all-or-nothing damping, but the Q3 immediately confounds that stereotype with clean, linear, intuitively responsive (if a fraction too light) steering and a pliant, controlled ride in Comfort mode. To be honest, you could superglue the Drive Select button to Comfort and live quite happily with this setting, for you can accurately and enthusiastically hustle the Q3 down a challenging B-road without ever wanting for tighter body control, significantly weightier steering or sharper throttle response.

However, moving to Auto mode doesn't ruin the show. Indeed, it does what you'd

Specification

Engine	In-line 5-cyl, 2480cc, turbo
CO2	206g/km
Power	306bhp @ 5200-6700rpm
Torque	310lb ft @ 1500-5200rpm
0-62mph	5.5sec (claimed)
Top speed	155mph (limited)
Basic price	£43,000

Top: fat 8.5 x 20in wheels give the 1655kg RS Q3 plenty of grip; ride feels well controlled. **Above right:** add-ons aren't as subtle as on some RS models



Left: £1495 Technology Package and other options push this RS Q3's as-tested price to £49,965. **Below:** Nappa leather is standard; Drive Select's Comfort mode suits most situations



'The RS Q3 is a car that has the potential to make many a hot hatch or sports car driver's day'



hope, enabling the Q3 to up its game or let down its guard, depending on your pace and the demands of the road. Dynamic is the most contrived of the settings, adding resistance to the steering and sharper edges to the damping, but you still might be tempted to indulge on the smoother, faster leg of a solo drive.

In terms of outright pace the RS Q3 is one of those cars that has the potential to make many a hot hatch or sports car driver's day. It's a cliché, but because you're perched a little higher you have a more commanding view of the road ahead. This matters on fast country roads, where enlightening glimpses through corners or over hedgerows aid your confidence and increase safety margins. The broad spread of power and torque means the Q3 builds speed rapidly and never feels caught between gears, and a crisp up- or downshift is only ever a finger stretch away in any case. The brakes – 365mm at the front and gripped by eight-piston calipers – have major-league stopping power, and while they have a fraction too much bite on initial

application, they're easy to modulate at low or high speeds and have superb outright ability.

As you can probably tell, the RS Q3 is a car you find yourself warming to despite an underlying, instinctive mistrust of something so unnatural as a top-end hot hatch on stilts. The weird thing is that although there are compromises – body roll is noticeable, ultimately limiting the pace and enthusiasm with which you can lob the Q3 into any given corner – grip levels and therefore cornering speeds remain high. The body roll simply means you have a welcome extra sensory touchstone with which to gauge your pace. You feel connected to the car and understand its physics, and because the Q3's engine is mounted low and transversely, it is spared the worst plough-on effects of the more nose-heavy models in Audi's RS armada. It's tidy, fun and indecently rapid point-to-point.

Life has a habit of pulling the rug from under your low-slung, two-seat aspirations. Kids and flat-pack furniture all need transporting, and (if you know what's good for you) partners

sometimes need appeasing, at which point the RS Q3 suddenly makes sense. With decent rear leg- and headroom for two or three adults, proper luggage space and a towing weight of just under two tons (perfect for a nag, or a trackday toy) the RS Q3 answers a lot of those questions. Crucially, it also cuts it as a source of entertainment.

Of its ilk, it's far more appealing than the carbuncular Cooper S Works Countryman or equally ugly (and stupidly named) BMW X1 xDrive35i. If you want to be more creative with your £50k budget, then a used Cayenne Turbo or ML63 AMG might prove tempting, while a rapidly morphing market throws up another all-wheel-drive alternative in the shape of AMG's ballsy A45 superhatch.

It feels wrong to be writing this, but the RS Q3 is a far more successful and enjoyable machine to drive than the RS3, 4, 5, 6 or 7. Quite how Audi's engineers can so consistently drop the ball with such potentially brilliant cars, then stick one in the back of the net with something as unpromising and irrelevant as the RS Q3 is totally baffling, yet that's precisely what they've done. The Neckarsulm enigma continues. ❌

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)

Verdict

- 👍 Engaging, fun to hustle, lovely to live with
 - 👎 It has serious and seriously tempting rivals
- evo rating: ★★★★★**

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The mpg figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results obtained through laboratory testing. These are provided for comparability purposes only and may not reflect your actual driving results. *Offer available to business users for orders received between 01.10.2013 - 31.12.2013. All figures exclude VAT. £209 per month figure is based on a new Mazda6 Saloon 150ps SE Diesel, without metallic paint, on a non-maintenance contract hire package over 36 months, 10,000 contract miles per year. Advance payment equal to 6 monthly payments is payable followed by 35 monthly payments. Excess mileage charge applies if contract mileage is exceeded. For full terms and conditions and specification please refer to the Mazda Contract Hire Master Agreement and your local dealer. All quotations are subject to availability, status and agreement. Free metallic paint is only available in conjunction with Mazda Contract Hire offer and applies to selected models only. Guarantees may be required. Terms are unavailable to existing customers under specific end-user terms with Mazda Motors UK Ltd. Details correct at time of publication and may vary, eg. if list price changes. Mazda Contract Hire Limited does not offer tax advice to individuals: company car drivers should consult their accountant on their tax position. Contract hire by ALD Automotive Ltd., trading as Mazda Contract Hire, Oakwood Park, Lodge Causeway, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 3JA. Models shown with monthly payment: New Mazda6 Saloon 150ps SE Diesel. OTR £21,995. Model shown features optional Soul Red Metallic paint (£660). On the road prices include 20% VAT, number plates and 3 years' European Roadside Assistance.



BMW i3

The first-of-its-kind electric hatchback is finally here. But can it justify its £25k price tag?

📍 Test location: Amsterdam, Netherlands GPS: 52.37751, 4.91165

WILL WE LOOK BACK IN five years' time and say that this was where the future started? Or will the BMW i3 join the growing list of electrically powered turkeys that are struggling to manage even small fractions of their over-optimistic sales targets?

There are two ways of looking at the i3. On one hand it's a seriously impressive piece of engineering, and is set to nick the Alfa 4C's short-held title of the cheapest carbon-structured car on the market. On the other, it's basically a supermini that costs £25,680 in its cheapest form, and that's with the hard-bitten UK taxpayer chipping in a five-grand subsidy.

The technology is pretty immense. BMW has opened a new factory in America just to produce the quantity of carbonfibre it needs to make the i3's passenger compartment. Onto this are bolted lightweight plastic panels, aluminium

suspension and – at the back – an alloy subframe containing the powertrain. The basic electric-only model – which we're testing here – just has a 125kW motor (or 168bhp, as we said in the olden days of internal combustion). This drives the rear wheels through a single-speed reduction gear. The 'Range Extender' version adds a tiny 647cc, 37bhp two-cylinder petrol engine, which isn't connected to the wheels but serves solely as an onboard generator to recharge the battery pack on the move.

The lightweight construction means that, despite the mass of the 18.8kWh battery pack under the floor, the electric-only i3 weighs just 1195kg, and the range-extender version 1315kg. By electric-car standards, that makes them dieting supermodels: the Nissan Leaf is nearly 300kg heavier than the electric-only i3.

The i3 feels like a real quality item, too. The upright, narrow design is pretty much the opposite of BMW's customary combination of

low and wide, and it's fair to say the space-age detailing won't appeal to everyone (although it certainly helps the car stand out on the street), but the cabin feels classy: taller and lighter than the 1-series' gloomy interior. You sit high on thin, lightweight seats facing a narrow-rimmed steering wheel and a small instrument screen, with the gear selector a strange little joystick on the side of the instrument binnacle.

The first surprise is the lack of any motor noise when you move away. Both the Leaf and the Tesla Roadster whine like tube trains under acceleration, but the i3 barely whispers. At urban speeds it feels properly quick, surging off the line with the motor's seamless delivery intensifying the feeling of gathering momentum. With a 0-62mph time of 7.2sec it's pretty much a rocketship by EV standards.

But like all electric cars, it struggles when asked to go faster. Our test is based in Holland, where hitting 30mph often feels like

an achievement, but a brief run on a Dutch autoroute confirms that acceleration really falls away beyond the 70mph mark. Top speed is limited to 93mph, as higher speeds devour the battery pack. At an indicated 80mph cruise on straight and level motorway we are losing two miles in range for every mile travelled. But in town the i3 can be driven normally and stay true to its claimed 80-mile 'real world' range. Recharging takes about ten hours from the mains, or four hours from a high-speed charger that BMW will be selling alongside the car.

Dynamically, it's confusing. The i3 drives well enough – just not like any other BMW Group product. The ride is noticeably firm even on super-smooth Dutch tarmac, so it will be interesting to see how it copes in the UK. And the tyres are surprisingly noisy considering their tiny 155 width – although that might well be because of the absence of any engine sound (BMW has, fortunately, opted not to create a fake soundtrack). The steering is accurate and has a modicum of feel, but the modest limits are flagged up with understeer; the electronics refuse to give the rear wheels enough torque to have any influence on the cornering line.

The oddest part of the experience is BMW's decision to give the i3 what's described as 'one pedal' operation. There are two pedals, but you

'It feels properly quick, the seamless delivery intensifying the feeling of gathering momentum'

rarely need to use the brake for anything except staying still. When you lift off the throttle the electric motor switches to regenerative braking, turning the motor into a generator, and the i3 slows down as if you have given it a reasonably firm shove on the brake pedal. The effect doesn't diminish as you slow, even as the motor stops regenerating at low speed, and it will actually stop the car dead if you let it. If you want to keep rolling, or even slow down at a slower rate, you have to press the throttle, which feels deeply odd, even after two days in the car.

By the standards of electric cars, the i3 is a good one – quick, light, clever and far funkier than its utilitarian rivals. But it doesn't get much closer to answering the fundamental 'why would you?' question than any of the slow-selling models already out there. Eco-puff aside, this is a very expensive way to cut your fuel bills. ❌

Mike Duff



Top: futuristic looks make it clear that this is something different. **Below:** i3 has no B-pillars, and the rear doors open backwards for easy access to the rear



Specification

Engine	125kW electric motor
CO2	0g/km
Power	168bhp
Torque	184lb ft
0-62mph	7.2sec (claimed)
Top speed	93mph (limited)
Basic price	£30,680 (£25,680 after UK EV grant)

Verdict

- ⊕ Fast, well built, carbon tech
 - ⊖ Expensive, uncomfortable outside town
- evo rating:** ★★★★★





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Test location: B662, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.40498, -0.42092

Porsche Panamera S E-Hybrid

Petrol-electric saloon claims 91mpg. But is it Porsche enough?

Photography: Dean Smith

THE PANAMERA S E-HYBRID is Porsche's first plug-in hybrid (the second will be the 918 Spyder, due later this year). It replaces the previous-generation, non-plug-in Panamera Hybrid and, like its predecessor, is a parallel hybrid – in other words its (rear) wheels can be driven by the car's combustion engine, its electric motor, or a combination of both.

Combined power from the E-Hybrid's supercharged petrol V6 and electric motor is 410bhp, of which 94bhp is delivered by the electric motor. Fuel consumption and CO2 emissions are claimed to be 91mpg and just 71g/km respectively. The 0-62mph sprint takes just 5.5sec, and the E-Hybrid can reach 167mph. It qualifies for London Congestion Charge exemption and reaches full electric charge in four hours. The E-Hybrid could also, in theory, complete a lap of the Ring on electric power: its claimed 'E-Power' range is 11-22 miles.

Now for the drive. Initially, the E-Hybrid doesn't feel like a Porsche. The familiar creaminess of the controls, consistent brake pedal feel and alert responses are dimmed slightly. The sole remaining echo of that signature Porsche feel is in the taut body control: disappointing, but unsurprising when you consider the E-Hybrid weighs 2095kg – 285kg more than the regular Panamera S (which also has a petrol six-cylinder).

E-Power mode is the default on start-up, delivering lazy but adequate performance. Refinement is off the scale, as you'd expect. The electric motor is virtually silent, with just a muted rumble from the tyres reminding you that you're connected to the road surface rather



than floating just above it.

You can reach 84mph on E-Power alone, but the petrol engine is always primed for additional urge, and likewise when in petrol-engine mode the electric motor can boost performance on kickdown of the eight-speed Tiptronic auto 'box. The most impressive aspect of this from a driver's perspective is the synchronicity of the combustion engine and electric motor – the powertrain shuffling is detectable but never intrusive. Also mightily impressive is the coasting mode, whereby the petrol engine shuts off and the Panamera maintains velocity via gentle intervention of the electric motor.

In terms of handling, the E-Hybrid offers balance and security but little of the connection we expect of Porsches: the steering is direct but vacant, and brake feel is poor. Ultimate grip and agility is high, but trying to extract performance from the E-Hybrid is a joyless experience. The diesel Panamera is markedly more alert.

In terms of fuel consumption, it's easy to be impressed initially. If the salesman points to the trip readout after a few miles of a test drive, you'll witness an astonishing number. But continue beyond the initial electric phase

Specification

Engine	V6, 2995cc, supercharged, plus 70kW electric motor
CO2	71g/km
Power	410bhp (combined) @ 5500rpm
Torque	435lb ft (combined) @ 1250-4000rpm
0-62mph	5.5sec (claimed)
Top speed	167mph (claimed)
Basic price	£88,967

and the number slowly falls as the petrol engine generates charge for the battery and has to push around the weight of said battery. For us, the E-Hybrid eventually settled at around 26mpg for general usage: a long way off real-world diesel Panamera figures and around the same as the standard petrol V6 car.

To conclude, the Panamera E-Hybrid nails the New European Driving Cycle test and little else. The official mpg and CO2 figures collude to a point where the E-Hybrid costs similar to a BMW 320d Efficient Dynamics in company car tax. If your commute is short, includes a congestion charge area and has a power point at either end, then the E-Hybrid makes some sense. But if you enjoy driving, the £62,992 Panamera Diesel is a far better option. ❌

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Verdict

- ❑ Coasting mode, overall refinement
 - ❑ Limited appeal, doubts over real-world mpg
- evo rating:** ★★★★★



Test location: near Iver, Buckinghamshire, UK GPS: 51.46408, -0.68253

Birds BMW M135i

LSD upgrade improves an already impressive rear-drive package

W E'RE BIG FANS OF THE BMW M135i. The package is a simply brilliant blend of performance, useability, fun, frugality and quality, wrapped up in bodywork that some people quite like and others say scares small children. The one fly in the ointment as far as we're concerned is that with so much accessible torque from the turbocharged 3-litre straight-six, the rear axle really needs a limited-slip diff. Traction in itself is pretty good, but it's when you push beyond the limits of the Michelin Super Sports that the M135i becomes a bit scrappy, messily spinning up its inside rear wheel in a flare of revs.

Enter Birds and the Quaife ATB LSD (£1681 fitted). The ATB is a torque-biasing differential that uses an internal gear mechanism rather than the more commonly found clutch system. The principal reason for this is that it's a less aggressive method of locking, which, while not perfect for all applications (in a rally or race car you'd generally go for the clutch-type diff), should suit a road car better and last longer.

This particular M135i (fitted with the excellent eight-speed auto 'box and adjustable suspension) belongs to a Birds customer who has kindly lent it to us for a day down in Surrey. The first thing to say is that if you're concerned that the addition of an LSD might morph the M135i into some sort of graunching, stuttering recalcitrant during low-speed manoeuvring (like a GT-R), there's no need to worry. You



simply don't notice the new addition to the rear axle during normal pottering.

Where you do notice a difference is with the DSC off. On a tight, wet uphill bend where the standard car would have just felt untidy and a bit frustrating, this car simply spins up its rear wheels in unison and arcs round in an easily gatherable slide. Even better, the transition to oversteer isn't snappy, and with a healthy amount of lock in the steering you can let it go to fairly big angles without worrying. It would be interesting to see how the diff copes with longer slides on track, but on the road it's brilliant.

Another addition to this particular car is an M Performance exhaust system, which also seems like a very worthy addition. It's an official BMW product (£840 plus fitting) that has chrome-plated stainless-steel pipes with discreet M badges etched onto the ends of them. It certainly injects a bit of extra character to the engine note, with the added gentle burble at idle particularly pleasant.

Specification

Engine	In-line 6-cyl, 2979cc, turbo
CO2	188g/km
Power	362bhp @ 5900rpm
Torque	383lb ft @ 2950rpm
0-62mph	4.7sec (estimated)
Top speed	155mph (limited)
Basic price	See text

Birds has also installed a Hartge ECU in this car (£2028 fitted), which is claimed to lift power to 362bhp and torque to 383lb ft while not affecting the CO2 output. To be honest, though, the standard M135i feels punchy enough already and the increases seem to sacrifice some smoothness in the way the engine comes on boost, so I'd be inclined to leave it standard.

So the differential and the exhaust are the bits to go for. They may be just the icing on the sort of cake that would have already won considerable praise on *The Great British Bake Off*, but I do like a bit of icing. ☒

Henry Catchpole (@HenryCatchpole)

Verdict

- ☑ Completes the M135i package
 - ☑ Shame the LSD doesn't come as standard
- evo rating: ★★★★★**



Charged Performance.

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PORSCHE

Estimated fuel economy figures for the Porsche 918 Spyder in mpg (l/100km): Urban N/A (N/A), Extra Urban N/A (N/A), Combined 85.6 (3.3). CO₂ emissions: 79 g/km.

The mpg and CO₂ figures quoted are sourced from internal test results using pre-production vehicles, are provided for comparability purposes and may not reflect your actual driving experience. Fuel economy figures obtained in combined hybrid power train mode using a battery charged from mains electricity. *Fastest ever lap of the Nürburgring Nordschleife for a car with global road homologation, set 04 September 2013. 20.6 km lap covered at an average speed of over 111 mph by Porsche factory driver Marc Lieb.



📍 **Test location:** CERAM, Mortefontaine, France **GPS:** 49.14106, 2.59775

Renault Twizy F1

Electric city car gets the full Renaultsport concept treatment

I'M WRITING THIS JUST after the Korean Grand Prix. Sebastian Vettel has won again and Renault engines have locked out the podium. Power outputs of Formula 1 engines are still shrouded in secrecy but one thing's for sure: Renault's win more F1 races than the competition's combined at the moment and they never seem to fail.

And yet Renault hardly ever crows about its achievements. Renault's bread-and-butter sales are a million miles from the savagely competitive world of F1. So how do you relate a 2.4-litre V8 that revs to 18,000rpm and produces somewhere north of 750bhp to a Clio dCi 90 Eco2 Expression+ Stop & Start (yes, I had to look that up)? Well, you have to get creative. Remember the wonderful Espace F1? An MPV with a carbon chassis and a mid-mounted 800bhp 3.5-litre V10 engine. A car capable of 0-124mph in 6.9sec. Well this is its bastard offspring. A Twizy with, erm, 97bhp.

Of course there's no V8 here: just a KERS system comprising an electric motor, a control unit and lithium-ion batteries, supplementing the standard Twizy electric motor and batteries. A huge amount of engineering was required to get the 60kW KERS unit, which spins at 36,000rpm, to work with the standard 12kW motor that rotates at 10,000rpm.

The project was handled by Renault Sport Technologies (which heads up all Renault's non-F1 motorsport programmes as well as



the development of electric cars like the Zoe and standard Twizy) in collaboration with Renaultsport F1. The Twizy F1 is intended to demonstrate the power of the KERS unit and how electrical assistance could be used as a performance-boosting aid instead of just a way to duck under stringent CO2 targets. Power is up from 17bhp to 97bhp, while the kerb weight jumps from 470kg to 564kg.

On chunky slicks from the Formula Renault 2.0 single-seater and with (meaningless) carbonfibre aero addenda, the Twizy F1 looks the part. It feels pretty cool when you hop in behind the button-festooned steering wheel, lifted straight from a Formula Renault 3.5 racer, while the little clunk and manic whirring when you turn on the KERS unit, which sits where the passenger seat usually would, is exciting. To launch, you simply pull both of the carbonfibre paddles behind the steering wheel (usually used to change gear) and jump on the throttle.

The Twizy F1 scampers off with a chirrup of

Specification

Engine	12kW electric motor, plus 60kW KERS unit
CO2	0g/km
Power	97bhp (using KERS)
Torque	n/a
0-62mph	6.9sec (claimed)
Top speed	68mph (claimed)
On sale	Never

wheel slip and a serious thump, the KERS unit whizzing away behind like it's about to explode. To prove its performance, there's an RS Mégane alongside and on the short, straight-line course, the Twizy matches it every step of the way. So 0-60mph is circa 6sec. Brake hard at the finish and the front splitter scrapes the tarmac, and when trying to turn around you realise the slicks make for an oil tanker-style turning circle.

The Twizy F1 is a fun, technically challenging project. It also suggests that a range of Renaultsport hybrids can't be far away. But it's no Espace F1. ❌

Jethro Bovingdon (@JethroBovingdon)

Verdict

- 👍 Looks fun, sounds fun
 - 👎 After KERS boost, it's just a standard Twizy
- evo rating:** ★★★★★



Charge Exempt.

The new Panamera S E-Hybrid is the first plug-in hybrid in the luxury segment. Thanks to CO₂ emissions of just 71 g/km it is also exempt from both road tax and the London congestion charge. It uses Porsche's E-Hybrid technology to deliver the thrilling driving experience you would expect, alongside a level of efficiency you might not. The figures speak for themselves: 416hp and 0-62mph in 5.5 seconds, yet 91.1 mpg on the combined cycle and up to 21 miles on electric power alone.

The new Panamera S E-Hybrid.

The DNA of the sports car has evolved.



PORSCHE

Official fuel economy figures for the Porsche Panamera S E-Hybrid in mpg (l/100km): Urban N/A (N/A), Extra Urban N/A (N/A), Combined 91.1 (3.1). CO₂ emissions: 71 g/km.

The mpg and CO₂ figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results, are provided for comparability purposes and may not reflect your actual driving experience. Electric range is dependent on driving conditions. Power output, performance and fuel economy figures obtained in combined hybrid power train mode using a battery charged from mains electricity.



MG3 Style

Chinese-built hatchback offers 104bhp for a pound under £10k

Test location: B660, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.44575, -0.34675

I PROBABLY SHOULDN'T admit to this in public, but I used to own an MG Metro. As a penniless student in the mid-1990s the lukewarm hatch made a decent case for itself, with tiny running costs and hit-it-with-a-hammer fixability. It was reasonably entertaining to drive, too – at least, it was when the 17mph-per-1000rpm gearing wasn't melting my brain.

Which is why I'm giving the Chinese-built MG3 a fair go. For all MG's historic association with chaps in cravats driving leaf-sprung roadsters between country pubs, those of us under 40 are just as likely to associate the brand with go-fastered '80s Austins. And with its low price tag and above-average performance, the Three is basically trying the same trick.

It's generic Far Eastern supermini in design: you'd probably think it was a Kia or Hyundai from a distance. The most interesting thing about our test car was the optional stripes, but the overall effect is inoffensive, if lacking in any hot hatch aggression. The cabin is well designed and well stocked with kit, but the materials feel – and smell – cheap up close. Opening the door is like entering the paint aisle of a DIY store.

Power comes from a 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine producing 104bhp and delivering a claimed 0-60mph time of 10.4sec. It's no rocket ship, but it is noticeably quicker than all its sub-£10,000 rivals. Indeed, for the younger buyers MG is targeting, there's an unarguable appeal in



the combination of low price, warmish pace and an insurance grouping of four. Could this be a Saxo VTR for the new generation?

Let's not get carried away. The MG3's engine is gutless at anything but full thrash, and it's loud and coarse when revved. The gearing is relatively tall – there are only five speeds – and the anaemic bottom end means it tends to bog down when you change up. There's lots of wind and road noise at cruising speeds, too.

But the chassis shows promise. Although built in China, the MG3 was largely developed by a UK-based engineering team, and British cars have been further tweaked to account for our dreadful tarmac. The chassis is on the firm side, but the dampers keep everything in check and body roll is well contained given the car's relatively narrow track. The steering is good, too, with old-fashioned hydraulic assistance combining nice weight with decent feel. It's far better than the feedback through the cheap electric systems fitted to rivals.

Specification

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1498cc
CO2	136g/km
Power	104bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	101lb ft @ 4750rpm
0-60mph	10.4sec (claimed)
Top speed	108mph (claimed)
Basic price	£9999

The grip generated by the 195-section Goodyear EfficientGrip tyres is modest and the front washes wide if you push too hard. But at less than max attack there's a decent dynamic balance, the Three tightening its line predictably if you lift off mid-corner. Behind an over-light pedal the brakes have reasonable bite, despite using drums at the rear.

It's well priced, although depreciation will likely be fairly brutal. It's a simple, unpretentious little performance car, and if that doesn't earn it the right to wear an MG badge, I don't know what does. ☒

Mike Duff

Verdict

- ☑ Decent chassis, performance and price
 - ☑ Thrashy engine, cheap cabin
- evo rating:** ★★★★★



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Test location: B671, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.54736,-0.39422

Driven twin test: BMW M6 Gran Coupe v Audi RS7

The latest supercoupes are prodigiously powerful, stupendously quick and eye-wateringly expensive. But are they any fun to drive?

Words: Richard Meaden Photography: Dean Smith

FOR SHEER PRESENCE AND SPEC-sheet appeal, few cars short of specialist mid-engined exotica are more compelling than the new breed of four-door coupe, represented here by Audi's imposing RS7 and BMW's lithe M6 Gran Coupe.

This, then, is a supercoupe slugfest. In the red corner, the RS7 Sportback: a huge, tightly tailored five-door coupe based on the underpinnings of Audi's formidable RS6 Avant. In the blue corner, the M6 Gran Coupe: a lavish, long-wheelbase four-door evolution of the two-door M6 Coupe, which in turn is an evolution of BMW's M5 four-door saloon. Confused? Me too.

We'll get onto the all-important driving impressions in a moment, but for now ruminate on this: an M5 with a few options is approximately £80,000. As tested, this M6 Gran Coupe is £118,050. Whether or not you fell backwards off your chair at this revelation is perhaps the most accurate indicator as to whether you're a prospective M6 GC customer. Personally my head is still reeling. The spec-sheet for this particular car reveals that the basic price of £97,700 has been inflated by a further £20,350 of options, the headline-grabbers being £7395 for carbon brakes, £1865 for M multi-function seats, £5635 for BMW Individual Merino leather and £1995 for Tanzanite Blue metallic paint. That's big bucks for a Beemer.

The RS7 is pretty punchy, too, when it comes to pricing, though at least Audi has the good grace to keep the price of the RS6 within spitting distance. Dropping six figures on any car is a serious display of wealth, but I suspect that's precisely what these cars are designed to do. They might wear familiar mainstream badges, but their combination of bulk and bling ensures they never go unnoticed. Not always in a good way either, as photographer Dean Smith can testify after a completely unprovoked gesticular drive-by on the M1. What the RS7 (or Dean) had done to deserve The Bird is anyone's guess, but it's a sad truth that both these cars seem to attract admiration and resentment in equal measure.

Not so long ago, either of the powertrains concealed within this svelte pair would happily have graced a supercar. Both have prodigious power and torque from twin-turbo V8 engines, the Audi's displacing 4 litres and developing 552bhp and 516lb ft of torque, the M6 boasting slightly greater swept volume at 4.4 litres and making 552bhp and 501lb ft. Such firepower makes light of their near-two-ton masses, the Audi just nudging beneath the magic 4sec barrier from zero to 62mph, the traction-limited M6 GC taking a few tenths longer. Sadly top speeds are electronically limited to 155mph, but would doubtless nudge 200mph given free rein.

Transmission-wise both have double-clutch gearboxes

Left: both M6 Gran Coupe and RS7 pack near-supercar levels of firepower beneath svelte fastback bodywork, and with room for four fully grown adults. So, what's not to like?

Specification	BMW M6 GRAN COUPE	AUDI RS7
Engine	V8, 4395cc, twin-turbo	V8, 3993cc, twin-turbo
CO2	232g/km	235g/km
Power	552bhp @ 6000-7000rpm	552bhp @ 5700-6600rpm
Torque	501lb ft @ 1500-5750rpm	516lb ft @ 1750-5500rpm
0-62mph	4.2sec (claimed)	3.9sec (claimed)
Top speed	155mph (limited)	155mph (limited)
Basic price	£97,700	£83,495



with paddle-shifts. Likewise, both have sophisticated driver-configurable dynamic modes that adjust the responses of the suspension, steering and throttle. When it comes to transmitting all that performance to the road, however, the similarities end, for both brands have remained true to type: the RS7 boasting quattro all-wheel drive, the M6 GC remaining resolutely rear-drive.

For Millennium Falcon-style acceleration and a sense that you could steamroller an entire continent into submission, the RS7 is hard to beat. It delivers power and torque in a more linear fashion, and you feel the full force earlier in the rev-range. It's an addictive delivery that has you yearning for a long journey. And no speed limits. It's beautifully refined, slipping through the air with minimal rustling from the window seals and a distant, creamy pulse from the V8. It's a soothing, satisfying car to spend time in, whether you're stuck in traffic or eating up the miles.

Where things unravel is when you start to explore the RS7's performance away from the motorway network. Yet again Audi appears to

have misjudged its damper settings, so Comfort feels a little bit wallowy and Dynamic feels like it has concrete springs. When left to do its own thing the RS7 begins to feel a little more together, but the steering is horribly artificial so you never feel connected to the car. When the car in question is the size and weight of an RS7, that's not a good thing.

Worse, when you really push into the throttle's travel you get torque-steer as the front wheels battle to share the workload. Combined with the uneasy damping and detached steering, it results in a cumbersome experience. I wouldn't expect the RS7 to have M3-like urgency or agility, but it shouldn't feel as reluctant and flat-footed as this on entertaining (but not unfairly challenging) roads. Quite how Audi continues to get this stuff wrong in its flagship performance models is mystifying.

Swapping from the Audi to the BMW, it's immediately clear the M6 GC can match the RS7 interior's feel-good factor. I'm not sure about the colour of the pale cream leather option, but there's no doubting its quality. The controls for the dynamic settings (a row of individual

switches arranged next to the gear selector) are much easier and speedier to use than the Audi's, as you don't have to enter a sub-menu to make adjustments. There's a head-up display too, which naturally appeals to the wannabe fighter pilot in me.

There's a greater sense of urgency in the M6. Its responses are more alive and alert. Critically, there is a more natural, connected – though far from analogue – feel to the steering and a tighter, more controlled quality to the damping in every dynamic mode. It's a big car, but one with definite sporting overtones to the way it goes down the road. Not only does that make it easier to place with accuracy and confidence, but it encourages you to drive in a more spirited fashion. That it also matches the Audi – and at times surpasses it – for ride quality highlights the flaws in the RS7's set-up.

As with the M5, the M6 GC has a slightly annoying engine noise synthesiser, which gives it a Wookiee-like warble under wide throttle openings. I don't mind the sound it generates, but it is a shame that it's not the engine's natural voice. No matter, for it's a mighty powerplant

with much of the Audi's low-down thump, but with a bit more fizz as the revs rise. As you'd expect, traction can be an issue, especially on damp, greasy roads, but the stability control system copes admirably, blending out of the power as smoothly as possible, then feeding it back in so you get maximum forward motion with minimal wheelspin. The carbon brakes have terrific stamina and better pedal feel than the Audi's.

For outright handling, the M6 GC is in another league to the clumsy RS7. It turns in better and remains more neutral through the corner. And of course you don't get the distracting torque-steer tugging through the steering wheel on corner exit. Disable the stability control and you can hustle the M6 GC like an M3, albeit one that will fill both lanes if you get it completely sideways. That's not something you're going to do everyday, but it's an extreme expression of the essential difference between the two cars. In the Audi you soon learn to surrender all hope of working in partnership with the car on a fun road. Actually you're more likely to seek main arterial routes. In the BMW you know you're going to feel part of the process, so you're more inclined to make the effort. Yet if you're tired or just want to get home it is equally adept at munching through the miles on a motorway.

It won't come as a great surprise to learn



Above left: 4 litres of twin-turbocharged Audi might. **Above right:** carbon-ceramic brakes are an (expensive) option on both cars. **Left:** BMW also boasts carbon in its roof panel. **Below:** quick but rather uninvolved

'Disable the stability control and you can hustle the M6 GC like an M3, albeit one that will fill both lanes if you get it completely sideways'

that of the pair the M6 GC is an infinitely more exciting and dynamically capable machine, yet no less comfortable or refined. I also happen to think it's the more handsome of the two (and it has a funky carbon roof!), but that's purely personal taste. Is either worth comfortably north of £100k? In terms of their outright performance, you'd have to say yes, but there's no question they test the elastic limits of these premium brands as never before.

Walk into a Bentley or Aston Martin dealership with £120k burning a hole in your Experian credit rating and I'd be very surprised if you couldn't walk out with the key to a new or at least pre-registered (but barely used) Flying Spur or Rapide S. Both go like stink, deliver another level of opulence and carry far more top-end luxury kudos than Audi or BMW can muster in a month of Sundays. Whether these quirky four-door and five-door coupes can act as springboards that help fulfil the lofty aspirations of both German marques remains to be seen. A niche too far? Only time – and sales figures – will tell. ✖

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)



Verdict

BMW M6 GRAN COUPE

- ⊕ Fast, feelsome and genuinely entertaining
- ⊖ Crazy money for an M5 in a couture frock

evo rating: ★★★★★

Verdict

AUDI RS7

- ⊕ Monstrous mile-eating ability. Quality
- ⊖ Joyless to drive

evo rating: ★★★★★

Watches

This month, a watch from Detroit, a Tazio Nuvolari tribute and a Swiss-made drivers' timepiece

Words: Simon de Burton

Watch tech

The watch 'glass'

Much is made by watch brands about the toughness of anti-shock movements and the resilience of cases hewn from high-tech materials such as ceramic, carbon and titanium, but the most vulnerable component of any watch is usually the 'crystal' that protects the dial.

In the early years of the wristwatch, crystals were made exclusively from mineral glass, which was prone to being scratched and could be broken easily. Various measures were taken to protect watch glasses in those days, ranging from the metal grilles often fitted to officer's 'trench' watches during the First World War to the ingenious flip-over case made famous by the Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso.

In the mid-20th century, makers of the first true 'sports' watches began to adopt acrylic or Plexiglas as a protective material because of its high impact resistance and because its flexibility made it suitable for fitting tightly to the case of a waterproof watch, with the use of a tension ring. The downsides of acrylic, however, are that it scratches easily (although it can be polished), it 'yellows' and it can give a distorted view of the dial.

In the early 1970s Rolex began to fit its models with synthetic crystals, and these are now used on the vast majority of luxury watches. These are laboratory-grown and sliced into the appropriate size with a diamond-coated saw before being ground and polished. The result is a tough, heat-resistant covering that is an excellent transmitter of light and which scores nine on the Mohs scale of hardness, second only to diamond, which scores ten.

While sapphire crystal is highly scratch resistant, it does shatter relatively easily. And if you do succeed in scuffing it, marks can't be polished out.

1 Shinola Runwell

Price: from £525 **From:** shinola.com

Shinola is a newly launched brand that has risen from the ashes of the decimated Detroit motor industry. It specialises in luxury leather goods, retro bicycles and watches, the latter being assembled by former car plant workers in the old 'Argonaut' building that once housed General Motors' research lab. Each watch is hand-built using components made by the Swiss company Ronda, with straps cut from leather produced by Horween of Chicago, one of America's oldest tanneries. The 41mm Runwell is a simple, retro-look three-hander that suggests we can expect great things from Shinola.

2 Saint Honore World Code

Price: €719 **From:** saint-honore-paris.com

Another day, another drivers' watch made from car-inspired carbon and ceramic. French-based St Honore's Swiss-made World Code is, in fact, brimming with car-watch clichés, from its carbonfibre dial to its tachymeter scale and urgently coloured chronograph hands. But everything has been thoughtfully put together to create what we think is a very successful design. The affordable price is partly accounted for by a quartz movement, but there has been no skimping on the 43mm case, the well-engineered notched bezel or the high-quality bracelet, all of which are made from scratch-resistant ceramic.

3 Eberhard Tazio Nuvolari 'Naked'

Price: £3650 **From:** classic-time.co.uk

This 'Naked' addition to Eberhard's Tazio Nuvolari Vanderbilt Cup collection is so called because the self-winding chronograph movement can be seen through the sapphire case-back, which carries a facsimile of the Italian racing legend's signature. The watch was launched at September's 'GP Nuvolari', the rally that pays homage to the Gran Premio Nuvolari, a special section of the Mille Miglia established in 1954, the year after Nuvolari's death. The black dial, white numerals and triple chronograph counters give the 42mm watch a classic look, which works best with the leather strap rather than the bracelet.

Now & Then



NOW Edox Chronorally Worn by: Martin Prokop

Czech rally star Martin Prokop has been spotted wearing one of the chunky 'Chronorally' automatic chronographs by Edox, which was designed specifically for the sport. The Swiss brand is also the official timing partner of the Dakar Rally



THEN Bulova Worn by: Tazio Nuvolari

Although Eberhard now makes a range of watches in memory of the great Tazio Nuvolari (see above), he is known to have owned a Bulova given to him by writer and daredevil Gabriele D'Annunzio. The watch fetched £4600 when it was auctioned by H&H in 2010.



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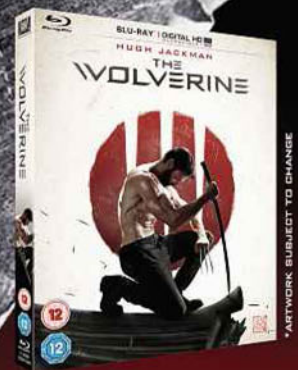
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Outside Line

by RICHARD MEADEN



A new round of Ring one-upmanship leaves Meaden unimpressed

BACK IN 2000 WE RAN A COVER STORY entitled 'Eight Minute Heroes', in which we gathered together the handful of road cars that had lapped the Nürburgring Nordschleife in less than, you guessed it, eight minutes. It was quite a collection of cars, amongst them the Jaguar XJ220, Porsche 996 GT3, R33 Nissan Skyline GT-R and a Caterham R500, in which I foolishly agreed to have a passenger ride alongside Robert Nearn, who'd set Caterham's sub-8 time.

Back then there was a bit of mystery about the place, and a sub-8 lap in a road car seemed genuinely mind-boggling. Nowadays any brand worth its marketing budget has taken some kind of lap record and written a kiss-and-tell press release. Hot hatches and small sports cars are now squabbling in the low-8s; 991 Carrera Ss romp round in times that left Walter Röhrl breathless in the previous-generation GT3; the 991 GT3 is as quick as the Carrera GT, and Nissan GT-Rs apparently achieve times that challenge every law of physics. As for the Nordschleife itself, this once majestic old lady of the Eifel has become the village bike: everyone's had her and boasted about it to anyone who'll listen.

Don't get me wrong. If a car has the power, stability and stamina to excel at the Ring, then its capabilities are far in excess of anything you or I will ask of it in the real world. Trouble is, ego has now become the driving force, reducing a once intriguing and worthwhile process into vulgar corporate cock-swinging.

Fittingly it's the latest GT-R Nismo time that re-opens the can of worms. The very public spat between Nissan and Porsche some years back exposed how seriously manufacturers take Nürburgring bragging rights, and how readily they'd engage in a mud-slinging contest. Can a 600bhp, c1700kg road car complete the 12.9-mile lap in 7min 11sec? Every shred of common sense and experience suggests not, yet the claim is out there so it's up to others to beat it – or question Nissan's integrity by suggesting the car was running big boost or a cunningly concealed JATO rocket.

The whole Nürburgring nonsense has reached a new and farcical level with the battle between the makers of the latest breed of hybrid hypercar. Porsche has simply got on with it, sending out a prototype with a handy German racer at the wheel, setting a time and posting the footage for all to see. Ferrari hasn't quoted any figures, instead uploading evocative footage of LaFerrari at Fiorano to distract the YouTubers. Meanwhile McLaren has been tying itself in knots trying to live up to its boast that the P1 is the fastest hypercar around any given race track. To not issue a definitive lap time from the Ring, even though everyone knows

you've been busting your balls for months to set one, is foolhardy at best. Yet that's exactly what McLaren has done with its uncharacteristically casual 'sub-seven minutes' claim for the P1.

What are we left to conclude from this ambiguous claim? Chris Goodwin dropped his stopwatch through the Tiergarten compression? That releasing a definitive lap time will only result in the men from Maranello claiming LaFerrari has gone a second or two quicker? Such paranoia is perhaps understandable given the rivalry between Woking and Maranello, but rather overlooks the fact that some simple, unedited over-the-shoulder GoPro footage of the entire lap is all that's required to prove who did what. Until we see that from McLaren or Ferrari, Porsche has the moral high ground and the fastest hybrid.

What does it all mean and where will it all end? I honestly

'The whole process is so open to abuse, any resulting lap time doesn't mean a thing'

don't know. Worse, I don't really care, despite counting the Nürburgring as one of the finest places on Earth to drive a car fast. I've driven there dozens of times, for trackdays, tourist laps, VLN races and N24 epics. If you've been too you'll know every lap is special. But lap times set in prototype road cars, running in an undisclosed state of tune and policed by nothing more than the conscience and integrity of the manufacturer? The whole process is so open to abuse that any resulting lap time doesn't mean a thing. With every published claim (honest or otherwise), the impact, significance and relevance of anything before or since is further eroded.

Thankfully there's still one Ring lap time that remains sacred: the late Stefan Bellof's 6min 11sec outright lap record. What that man achieved at the wheel of his scrutinized, race-legal Porsche 956 is a lesson in what can be achieved with lots of downforce, a massive pair of spuds and limited imagination. It's also a chilling reminder of how fine the line can be between genius and insanity. Had he lived to see it, I doubt a claimed 'sub-7min' lap in any car, let alone a 900bhp hypercar built by an F1 manufacturer and benefiting from three decades of engine, tyre, chassis and electronic development would impress him much.

 @DickieMeaden

Richard is a contributing editor of **evo** and an experienced Nordschleife racer



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Petrolhead

by RICHARD PORTER



The car industry in France is struggling. Could Porter's recipe for a perfect French car help save it?

I **IF THERE'S ONE THING THE FRENCH ARE** very good at, it's being French. Go into any village in France and there they'll be: French men and women getting on with the business of being French. Young people wander the streets with fresh baguettes tucked under their arms; old men play boules in the square; a rural chap with a face like a deflated basketball enjoys a cheeky pastis outside a café. The inhabitants of the French countryside are just two berets and a string of onions shy of being straight out of Hollywood central casting.

Yet, whilst the French themselves are good at being unself-consciously French, the same can't be said for French cars. It's a rot that started with the Renault 9, a car so carefully designed to be inoffensive that it ended up as bland as a daytime TV presenter. And after that low water mark, French cars started losing some of their vim until we ended up at the Citroën Xsara. Not a bad car to drive, but so wilfully generic that trying to recall its standout feature is harder than remembering what you had for lunch five Wednesdays ago.

The return swing was, if anything, even worse. French car companies realised they'd become too generic and started making efforts to be more individual. As a result, we got bustle-backed Renaults, sliding-doored Peugeots, and Citroëns with a 1989 Saisho hi-fi bolted to the central boss of the steering wheel. Trouble is, in the same way that anyone who openly describes themselves as 'wacky' is in fact a crashing bore who should be strangled to death with their own Homer Simpson tie, any car company desperately trying to be left-field with no customer benefit just looks like it's trying too hard. And now, having spent too long gazing at their navels, French carmakers appear to have no idea what they're supposed to be. Their cars are confused, their customer base is shrinking and the whole industry is sliding down the pan.

How to solve this problem? Well, look at the perma-smoking gentlemen you see strolling through your average Place de la République. He doesn't mutter 'oh-eoh-eoh' under his breath whilst chewing cloves of garlic like gum. That would be a silly, self-conscious attempt at Frenchness. Much like the Renault Avantime. But his daily wander into the village to buy bread, that's just taking care of the practicalities of everyday French life. And the practicalities of French life are exactly what French cars need to reflect.

Let's start with the basics. Rural French roads are often quite narrow and yet French motorists have a buttock-puckering devotion to keeping it pinned when a car comes the other way. So let's make this car a sensible and wieldy width. There's actually

a good reason why French drivers will risk losing a door mirror rather than backing off: they were raised on 2CVs, 1.1-litre Peugeots and other small-engined cars in which maintaining momentum is key. So our true French car needs to have masses of grip and superb handling so that every bend can be taken flat out. French back roads are often pretty rough and, to paraphrase the late LJK Setright, what's good for ride is also good for handling, so let's give it soft suspension, all the better to soak up a mid-corner pothole without skipping into the path of an oncoming lorry.

I've also noticed that when they do have to use the middle pedal, the French like to leave it late. Alain Prost, with his early-and-gentle braking technique, was known worldwide as Le Professeur. Having watched the way his countrymen drive, I can't help thinking at home he was thought of as *un wuss*. So a true French car needs excellent brakes.

'French motorists have a buttock-puckering devotion to keeping it pinned'

With the elements in place to allow spirited progress, the engine itself can be small and the whole car can be light, especially since it will be stripped of non-essential equipment. Modern French cars seem to be stuffed with gadgets yet, with the best will in the world, PSA and Renault are not famed for the integrity of their automotive electrical systems, so why should they make life hard for themselves? There's a good reason why villages from Brittany to Provence remain packed with old Peugeot 205s and yet you'll struggle to see a single 1007 with its idiotic and over-complicated electric doors. The French like simplicity, and their cars should be simple too.

And there we have it. A compact, lightweight, simple hatchback with a lusty motor, sublime handling, a great ride and strong brakes. That's the car the people of France really want. I think the rest of us could get on board with it too, saving the beleaguered French car industry in the process. You have to admit it sounds appealing. Almost as appealing as spending your days strolling to the village for boules, bread and a cheeky pastis. ☒

 @sniffpetrol

Richard is *evo's* longest-serving columnist and the keyboard behind sniffpetrol.com

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M3 E90/92 » 445 BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
M3 E46 » 370 BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
F10 520D » 221 BHP
F10 530D » 296 BHP
F10 535D » 358 BHP
335i/135i/X6 » 370+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
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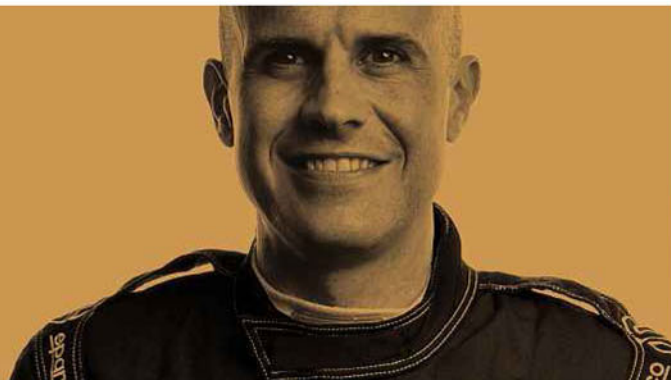
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Champ

by MARINO FRANCHITTI



With Dario injured in an IndyCar crash, brother Marino stands in to share his love of the Ferrari 250 GTO

A **AS SOME OF YOU MAY KNOW, MY** brother Dario had an enormous crash on the final lap of the Houston Grand Prix at the beginning of October. I'd been racing in Virginia the day before and was driving back to Washington airport to fly back to London when it happened. I'd just pulled into the Hertz rental car lot and I was listening to the last-lap commentary. I was willing on Scott Dixon (Dario's team-mate) to win the race and then I just heard their voices saying: 'There's been a massive crash.' I've always had this sixth sense with Dario and I just had this feeling that it was him straight away. There was hardly any information at first so I just said to myself: 'Right, well he's either injured or worse, so I need to go there.' So I went into the airport, booked a flight to Houston and jumped on a plane.

In many ways he was incredibly lucky. He had a broken ankle, two fractured vertebrae and concussion. I've watched the accident once (and once only) and it's horrific. It's just incredible that he's still with us, and that, in time, he'll be back to 100 per cent. To that end, I owe a massive thank-you to Dallara and IndyCar for the safety of the cars. A few weeks on, he's doing well, and as I write, everything's healing and he's due to get the stitches out of his ankle tomorrow. The concussion's improving too, but he asked me if I could write this column for him...

As a Ferrari 250 GTO has just been sold in America for a barely believable £32million (making it the most expensive car in the world), and as I've been lucky enough to drive Nick Mason's car a few times, I thought I'd write a few words about that. I first drove it at the Goodwood Revival in 2008 with Nick, and although it was an absolute pleasure to race together, I'm not going to deny that it was very intimidating, simply because it's a piece of history that's so revered and so valuable. You have to treat it like any other car, though, because if you drive with apprehension or fear then you're more likely to get yourself in trouble. You've got to forget what it is and just drive the car to its limits (or your limits), react to what it does and drive with the talent that you have. If you do anything else then that's when you start getting in trouble.

The 250 is a legend for a reason and it's not just because it's a beautiful car to look at: it also drives so beautifully. From the moment you first drive it around the paddock it's light and easy. Then you take it on track and it's the same. It just talks to you and does exactly what you want it to do. That quiet high, open-gated gearshift is just wonderful, too. I'm sitting here doing the movement with my hand: the perfectly sized and rounded gearknob, that lovely dogleg first, and then you're into the meat of it... it's just lovely. In fact, it's not until you have a big moment in

the car that you actually think about what you're doing and that maybe you're getting a bit *too* much of a slide on. When I drove it that first time, and as I got faster and faster, Nick didn't know whether to put my times or the present value of the car out on the pit board...

Strangely, I actually enjoy the car more when it's in road spec, on road tyres and with the original damping. Driving it up the hill at the Festival of Speed like that was wonderful because it rolled a lot more, lifted up an inside wheel and felt more like I was getting the original experience of the guys that drove it back in the early '60s. It started pissing with rain when we were in the assembly area one year and so I was just sitting in the GTO on my own, waiting, for about 40 minutes. It was wonderful because it was a chance just to drink it all in. When you look at it, the steering wheel has engraving on its face almost like a Beretta

'Nick Mason didn't know whether to put my times or the present value of the car out on the pit board...'

rifle with those lovely little triangles. Where the spokes are, you can see it's all worn away just on the edges where people have held it and it made me think about all the things that car had been through, all the famous races it had done, all the things it had achieved and the people that had driven it.

There is one other reason the 250 GTO means a lot to me, and it's also why it was especially intimidating the first time I drove it. I'd been going out with Nick Mason's daughter, Holly, for a couple of years when he first asked if I'd like to race the GTO, and I almost said no because I was thinking: 'I want to ask this man for his daughter's hand in marriage. What if I damage his car?'

It was even more nerve-wracking when I raced it again the following year, because by then it was my wife-to-be giving me the strict instructions not to damage it. The reason? Only a few weeks later, her dad drove her to the church in the GTO for our wedding and then I drove us away in it after the service. Holly had to wrap herself in a blanket, because it's a proper car and there's oil and dirt everywhere and she was trying to keep the dress clean. But an unsilenced 250 GTO in the middle of November in the UK, when just married? It was perfect. ☒

@mfranchitti

Marino is a long-established star of American sportscar racing and is Dario's younger brother

Inbox

Who's driven your old Merc this month?

I 4C trouble

When I first read the spec sheet of the Alfa Romeo 4C (*evo* 189), I was optimistic that the unassisted steering might give feedback something like that of Nick Trott's Porsche 911 SC. I do not suppose allowing the car to 'walk' with cambers is an option, but having to make small inputs (corrections) to drive in a straight line is undesirable to say the least.

Richard Meaden ended his feature with something I entirely agree on: 'It doesn't feel like it would take much to add a pinch of feel to the steering.' Are there companies out there that can re-engineer caster, camber, toe, bushes, (steering) boxes, gearing and level of assistance? Or to put it another way, tweak the whole kit and caboodle to give us what we desire?

If money was no object I'd love to be the entrepreneur to do that, and there certainly seems to be plenty of candidates out there to attend to.

Peter Hassett

Magical Maser

I quite agree with Harry (*evo* 188) – not only is the Maserati GranTurismo the most beautiful GT car available, it's also a fast, comfortable four-seater.

I bought a low-mileage GTS MC in March and having driven it in Comfort mode and almost complete silence to Magny-Cours in France for a classic racing weekend, it then transforms into a loud track racer at the touch of the Sport button. And the sound!

Anyone who dismisses the Maserati should try one first. All those little mid-engined cars are all very well, but the Maz has more style – and luggage space for two.

James Sutcliffe

Collectormania

Harry Metcalfe's column on supercar prices (*evo* 188) really hit the mark, but in ways that he perhaps didn't expect.

There are two key reasons why classic car prices are so elevated: the world is awash with money from all the money printing that has gone on, and modern cars are having all the joy regulated out of them. Carmakers are no longer giving their customers what they want. The likes



Above: Peter Hassett thinks there's a market for improving cars like Alfa Romeo's new 4C



Above: GranTurismo is a hit with James Sutcliffe. **Below:** Dean Stopford's ex-Senna 190E



Above: you can't limit classics, says Hywel Rees. **Below:** Matt Bindon had fun in 330d



of VW are suffocating aspiration and homogenising their products through innovations such as automated braking, lane keeping, etc. It won't be long before new cars have speed limiters, and that really will be the end.

Harry's article has given me a sense, for the first time, that investors in 'classic' cars may be onto something. It may be difficult for regulators to impose speed limiters and auto-controls on older vehicles on two levels. First, it would be technically difficult if not impossible for pre-electronic cars, and secondly, it might be politically difficult, too. That would mean that many will flock to pre-electronic-era vehicles (although such vehicles might be punitively taxed), potentially driving prices out of the reach of the genuine enthusiast.

Hywel Rees

Hired fun

After becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of value-for-money from recent driving experiences, I was looking for a new way to get maximum thrills on a minimal budget, and I think I've cracked it.

For £80 and a tank of fuel, I recently hired a BMW 330d M Sport for 24 hours. After planning a route on roads I knew would do the job, I got up at 3am and was off. For three hours it was just me, empty roads and a very capable motor. It was fantastic!

I implore fellow petrolheads to do some digging around on the web and see what is out there for hire, because for me, this was really what it's all about.

Matt Bindon

Senna's surprise

I enjoyed Mike Duff's article on Ayrton Senna's 190E (*evo* 185). I thought you may be interested to know that shortly after Senna won the famous race at the Nürburgring, he purchased an identical road-going version of the car he raced.

Fortunately for me, he decided to sell the car prior to his relocation from Surrey to Monaco when signing to McLaren from Lotus. I later purchased the car from that buyer, a friend of Senna's manager, and have now had it for 20 years. I even took it with me when I emigrated to Australia.



Letter of the Month

Treat Caterham with caution

I think *evo* 189 should have had some kind of Caterham special edition tag on it!

When I saw the TCoty feature and a Caterham on the list, I thought: 'Oh well, there's another third or fourth place for them.' But no, you've surprised me! Finally Caterham has won something in your magazine, and about time too.

But my heart sank when I read the 'When Harry met Tony' article. Talk of private-equity funding, stock-market flotation, brand transformation and lots of new models in the pipeline smacks of future collapse and bankruptcy. I'm thinking along the lines of TVR, Lotus, Marcos, Jensen and other dying or dead British sports car firms.

I hope I'm wrong, but that result seems to be more common than the success Tony Fernandes is hoping for. He does seem to have a better business model than most, but the fact he isn't using his own money doesn't fill me with confidence.

Peter Garforth

The star letter wins a Road Angel Gem safety camera & blackspot alert device worth £129.99



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Above: Mark Walton loved his Ring experience in a 997 Carrera S, but wanted paddle-shift too

There was an interesting story told by Peter Warr, previous Lotus F1 team principal. When Lotus was trying to sign Senna, he was invited to Norfolk and took the 190 Cosworth up there. While he was being shown around their facility, the mechanics went out to the car park and chocked the car up a few mm off the ground.

At the end of the visit, the whole team came out to wave him goodbye and Senna decided to give the car an F1-style departure by burning the rears. You can imagine the laughter as he revved the engine, dropped the clutch and went nowhere.

Dean Stopford

Without a paddle

A few weeks ago I did my first true 'balls out' trackday in a friend's 997 Carrera S, on the Nürburgring GP circuit nonetheless. Lucky me! What struck me most about the experience was not the fantastic lack of red tape (turn up, pay, go flat-out) but what happened as I barrelled into the very first corner for the very first time in his left-hand-drive machine.

As I flailed around for the gearlever to change from third to second while desperately trying to 'find the apex', there was only one thought in my head. I wanted a paddle-shift. Peeling off into the pits at the end of the (admittedly awesome) session, I was still thinking the exact same thing.

Mark Walton

Support supercars

With high fuel and insurance costs, the possibility of road pricing, and increasing environmental pressures, the factors against ownership of an enthusiast's car are building. Moreover, the national psyche in this country is unfortunately more anti-interesting car than in many other countries. Recently, I noted with dismay hand gestures made by a pedestrian towards a young man in an orange 12C in West London. Public antagonism towards the fast car is another knock to those who might consider buying one.

As someone who appreciates seeing interesting cars being driven, I encourage **evo** readers to counter this negativity by showing appreciation for your fellow car enthusiasts. I've begun such a movement and now regularly demonstrate my approval when I see a car deserving of it. A cheeky thumbs-up for the chap in the Mégane R26.R on Clapham High Street, a 'nice car' to the girl who commutes through the Elephant and Castle in her S2 Elise every day, or a wave of the arms to the chap in the Morgan Plus-4 out for a Sunday blast: anything to show my appreciation for these machines and the individuals who, despite the pressures, have the conviction to buy and drive them for us all to see.

Join me in supporting your fellow petrolheads and encouraging the regular use of these cars for their (and our) enjoyment!

Andrew McCormick

Your opinions matter

I appreciate that your letters page would be largely redundant if **evo** readers didn't express opinions over why their car choice is best, but it seems pointless. We typically bond with and naturally defend our choice of car, even if we know it's flawed.

I've owned 15 cars and driven many more. Most have been featured in **evo** and plenty have been criticised in group tests you've run, but I've loved every one to varying degrees. Automatic v manual is a hot topic at present, which boils down to personal preference. I currently run a DCT BMW, and I think the gearbox suits the low-torque/high-revving engine. During a recent service visit I drove a manual 1-series courtesy car and, after the DCT 'box, changing gear manually felt like the equivalent of getting up to change channel on a TV after using a remote control. Despite my preference, I enjoyed driving the 1-series and appreciate why another reader would defend it.

What is it they say about opinions?
Andy Bullock



From the forums: community.evo.co.uk

Thread of the Month

JOHNMCS2000

'Mk7 Golf GTI. Any good?'

Do any of you own or have you driven a mk7 Golf GTI? I'm considering selling my 996 to get back to something a little more practical and cheaper to run, but I still would like a bit of fun to the drive. Any of you with experience of them and advice of what to spec or not, please chime in.

MARV

The Mk7 has had some pretty good reviews, though it still lacks the outright handling of the Mégane RS and others, apparently.

ALAN

I've driven one. It is a very good car and very well made. Not sure it needs the Performance Pack, despite what most reviews say, unless you are driving it very hard.

JOHNMCS2000

Thanks Alan. Was thinking of adding the Performance Pack and the adaptive chassis just to max out the performance side of things (and to try and lessen the come down in performance a little). I'm also wondering whether the DSG is worth it, or would I be better sticking with the manual?

ALAN

The one I drove was a manual. In fact

it was pretty much a base car with no leather, PP or DSG. I think the manual suits this type of car very well, and in fact the basic one with few options is probably the one to go for.

SCOTTA

The mk6 Edition 35 is worth a look. It's got a detuned version of the 'R' lump. Simple remap and it goes to 300-ish bhp.

ERIC PISCH

Dual-clutch is for driving in traffic, when you're tired or for wide-open throttle, full-speed corner cog changes. Manual is for those that have mastered heel-and-toe.

DAVID_YU

Drove one at an SMMT event and nearly fell asleep with boredom, sorry. Dull exterior, duller interior. Unexceptional to drive. I wish I'd tried the Fiesta ST that was there, although that is a size smaller.



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P1

by DAVID VIVIAN

The most powerful British road car ever put into production faces the most formidable race track ever built. We get strapped into the McLaren P1 for a flat-out lap of the Nürburgring Nordschleife





‘DENUDED OF BODY PANELS AND WHEELS, THE P1 TAKES ON THE APPEARANCE OF AN ANATOMICALLY EXPOSED SCULPTURE’



I LIKE TO THINK I'M a good passenger. Just as world-class sprinters have the advantage of being born with fast-twitch muscles, I have the ability to place my imagination inside a hermetically sealed lead chamber and lower it through a fissure in the ocean floor so deep not even James Cameron would go there.

This allows me to recalibrate my comfort zone to accommodate any and all passenger experiences with wide-eyed, child-like wonder and relish: James Hunt drifting a Mercedes 190E 2.3-16 Cosworth through Donington's Craner Curves one-handed while talking about Austin A35s, or Stefan 'Yellow Bird' Roser refusing to drive anywhere without an armful of opposite lock and smoking rear tyres in a Ruf 911 BTR. Or how about Colin McRae hurtling flat-out towards a house-sized pile of logs in a Subaru Legacy before flinging it sideways at the last moment and missing it by half a micron? Or skimming past a wobbly, slow-moving VW Golf at 202mph in a Lamborghini Diablo on a narrow two-lane Autobahn with advanced driving guru John Lyon at the wheel? Actually, with that last one, Lyon later admitted to giving himself a good talking-to in the mirror of a service station toilet to psyche himself up before the run.

If I'm counting, there have been more close shaves over the years than a Gillette ad campaign. Maybe I've been lucky in more ways than I know. But when I'm invited to take a trip to the Nürburgring for a shotgun ride in McLaren's £866,000, 903bhp P1 hybrid hypercar as it sets out to make good on Ron Dennis's promise of a sub-seven-minute Nordschleife lap, I don't have to check the diary. My inner child has already thrown it out of the window.

We arrive late morning on a sunny, dry day in mid-August. As McLaren doesn't have its own garage at the Ring, the silver P1 (codenamed Experimental Prototype 2 Revised – XP2R for short) is parked up at its tyre partner Pirelli's facility, a five-minute drive from the circuit. Predictably, it's in bits and hoisted up to eye level on hydraulic ramps. The scene is genially chaotic as McLaren technicians busy themselves around the core of the car.

DenuDED of several body panels and its wheels, the P1 takes on the unsettling appearance of an anatomically exposed, carbon-tissued sculpture that wouldn't seem out of place among Damien Hirst's more visceral excuses for modern art. Those Akebono mirror-finish carbon-ceramic discs, coated in silicon carbide, look the business, though.

McLaren's press officer, Dave Eden, assures me that XP2R will pull itself together and get out on track soon. While that's happening, I have an opportunity to look right inside and try to fathom the almost fractal approach to





'ACTIVE AERO IS WHERE THE P1 DEPARTS FROM EVERY OTHER ROAD CAR IN THE WORLD'

functional minimalism that dictates every aspect of the P1's design from surface to centre. It was a guiding principle in Gordon Murray's McLaren F1 and it's arguably even more vital here, as it has to offset the weight imposed by the 176bhp electric motor and its plug-in rechargeable battery pack. It isn't just that the P1's clamshell bodywork, via the magic of Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), has been shrink-wrapped onto a fabulously stiff carbonfibre 'MonoCage' chassis that weighs just 90kg, there literally isn't a gram of excess weight anywhere.

'If it's not doing something, it's not on the car,' Eden says. Minus their minimal padding, the carbon-shelled seats weigh just 5kg each. 'And if you've got a really keen eye,' he continues, 'you'll notice that the interior carbon doesn't have a top layer of lacquer. That alone saves 1.5kg.' Obviously every little helps – even the bits you can't see.

All right, let's have a think about this. At



This picture: active rear wing can extend by 300mm, providing 600kg of downforce at 161mph, while ride height lowers by 50mm in Race mode (top left).

Left: Vivian gets strapped in beside test driver Goodwin

1395kg dry, the P1 weighs 258kg more than the F1, but it's a much bigger car. Some 132kg of its bulk is accounted for by the electric motor and battery pack. Of the three hybrid hypercars currently bidding for world domination, it's comfortably lighter and more powerful than the Porsche 918, but trails the LaFerrari by around 95kg and 47bhp.

These stats are reflected in the claimed straight-line performance figures. The 918's proposed 0-186mph (0-300kph) time of 27sec looks pretty damn respectable (about the same as a McLaren 12C's). But with its Ricardo-built, mid-mounted turbocharged 727bhp 3.8-litre petrol V8 providing serious mid- and high-end shove, and with the electric motor plumping out the torque curve as the jumbo-sized turbos spool up, the P1 gets there a whole ten seconds sooner. That's five seconds quicker than an F1 could ever manage and just 2.5sec behind a fully lit Bugatti Veyron Super Sport. Remarkable.

However, the Ferrari would be looking

down the 1183bhp Veyron's drain gutter-sized exhaust, trailing by just half a second. And that's plain nuts. The Bugatti bowls on to slug it out with the likes of the Koenigsegg Agera R and Hennessey Venom GT for ultimate 250mph+ laurels after that, of course. But for the Porsche, McLaren and Ferrari hybrids (electronically pegged at 203, 217 and 217mph respectively), it seems the bragging rights may be decided on the full-body workout that is the Nordschleife. And when McLaren Automotive's boss, a man not noted for imprecision, sets a bogey time for his best car on the world's most challenging circuit, I guess you hop to it. As we now know, Porsche hopped a bit faster but, back in August, no one had made a move.

THERE ARE A FEW REASONS WHY THE McLaren guys reckon I'm about to have the ride of my life. One is that McLaren chief test driver Chris Goodwin, who's just turned up and is talking to the boys at the back of the garage,



looks in particularly high spirits. The key man in the P1's dynamic development, Goodwin is a trim, terminator-class GT3 racer and Ring ace who smiles and chuckles at the very notion of driving the P1 to within an inch of its life with me on board.

The other reason is what insiders sometimes refer to as the P1's secret weapon: active aero. This is where the P1 departs from Formula 1 (where it's banned), the 918, LaFerrari and every other road car in the world. In 'Race', the most extreme of its multiple driving modes, its active rear wing can generate an astonishing 600kg of downforce at 161mph, working in conjunction with the rear diffuser and the active side flaps on the front wing. The double-element rear wing is arguably the P1's crowning glory: from sitting flush into the bodywork, it extends and adjusts its angle to increase downforce as the P1 ups its pace.

A DRS (Drag Reduction System) can be activated by a button on the steering wheel –





‘THE SHOCK OF THE P1’S ACCELERATION HAS PULLED ME SO FAR OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE I CAN HARDLY SWALLOW’

Above: P1 passes 200mph down the Antoniusbuche straight.

Right: McLaren chief test driver Goodwin won the Formula Ford Champion of Brands title in its 1980s heyday



as in F1 – to flatten the wing and reduce drag by 23 per cent on the straights. Race mode also lowers the adaptive electro-hydraulic self-levelling suspension’s ride height by 50mm and increases roll stiffness by 350 per cent, gluing the P1 even more securely to the road and allowing it to corner and brake on road tyres at an unprecedented 2G.

Goodwin wanders over for a quick chat before my lap of truth. As he’s the only person who’d really know, I ask him if the P1 will feel as extreme and physical as a lap in his 12C GT3 race car. ‘The P1 is slightly heavier than the GT car, but not by much,’ he says. ‘There’s considerably less tyre grip – road-legal rubber versus slicks – but the P1’s powertrain is obviously quite a big deal. And the active aero adds a massive amount to the dynamic performance. What the P1 loses in mechanical grip it makes up in aero, and it gives the car a different character.

‘Driving the P1 at the Nordschleife is an event. In a GT3 car, you have to push yourself



quite hard to get to the pace. It's satisfying to do a good lap time – that's the thing that gives you the buzz – but subjectively it's a duller experience. In the P1 you're feeling it. It's loads more fun, and that's what it's all about.'

As air guns noisily torque up the last of the P1's wheel nuts, it's helmets on and a little less conversation. I duck under the swing-up dihedral door, ease down into the wafer-thin but amazingly comfortable carbon bucket seat and haul on the full harness straps until I can barely breathe. It doesn't matter. I'm feeling a bit giddy with anticipation anyway.

The P1 gurgles out of the Pirelli garage and into the sunshine. Goodwin is keen to show me its cuddly side, so the triple-clutch transmission (the third is between the gearbox and the electric motor) is doing its feathery-soft auto thing as we head down the road to the Ring. The ride is supple and forgiving, too, filtering out small bumps and ripples just as calmly and quietly as a 12C would. The business-like

carbon-swathed cut of the cabin is similar to the 12C's too, but with a lighter, airier ambience thanks to its vast windscreen, stem-slender A-pillars and glass roof. The driving position and control layout look fiercely driver-centric.

'That was the first part of the project: to work out the sight lines and visibility,' Goodwin explains. 'You really can pinpoint the stone you want to land on at the apex. We've carried over the steering wheel profile from the 12C but increased the paddle dimensions, which makes them easier to find at times of over-exuberance. There's a subtle repositioning of some of the controls, too, but it's a similar design philosophy. We wanted to put the most important, dynamic controls high up, so you don't have to look down. This is a fast car: you need to focus on the job in hand.'

Goodwin points to the DRS button on the left steering-wheel spoke: 'It's to trail off a bit of drag on the straights.' It's mirrored on the right by the button for the KERS-style Instant Power

Assist System (IPAS): 'Where we get the 176bhp boost from the electric motor – it's a sort of push-to-pass button if you're driving the P1 in normal circumstances.' But today it won't be needed. 'We'll put the hybrid power onto Auto for this lap,' he says, 'which means we'll automatically get the maximum power all the time.' It's an industry testing day at the Ring, so we won't get a clean lap. But that's not a bad thing. There are a few tasty-looking Astons out on track to act as speed differential markers and that will make it easier to gauge relative performance. Goodwin presses the button marked Race.

Some perspective: I've sat next to fast drivers in fast cars round the Nordschleife before – most recently, and perhaps most impressively, in a one-off lightweight 600bhp M5 CSL driven by racer Claudia Hürtgen on a sub-8:00 mission. That experience was brutal: a raw quest for preserved velocity that used every last inch of the track's width, scavenged grip and braking power seemingly out of thin air and

'SEVERAL PHOTOGRAPHERS SAY THAT THEY'VE NEVER SEEN ANY ROAD CAR MOVE AS FAST AS THE P1'

Right: extra downforce keeps P1 pinned through the corners. **Below:** McLaren set a target of sub-7:00 around the Ring for the P1, but may not publicly release a time



Porsche's record-breaking 6:57 lap of the Ring emphatically threw the gauntlet down to McLaren and Ferrari. Indeed, we may now never know how quick the P1 and LaFerrari can lap the Nordschleife.

All power to Porsche for that, but watching the 918 in-car footage reveals a hugely impressive but rather joyless lap. Don't get me wrong: Marc Lieb is one of the quickest Ring specialists and his commitment is undoubted. But the clinical manner in which the 918 tackles the Ring's blind crests and ballsy fast corners is not the stuff of YouTube legend.

Clearly you aren't going to break the 7:00 barrier in a car that has to be chased and hustled every inch of the way, but if it remains so composed while having its neck wrung on the toughest track of them all, what chance is there of accessible on-road fun for us mere mortals? **RM**

cut the margins for error to virtually zero. That, to the best of my memory's ability to recall, is a formidable benchmark.

Before the end of Hatzenbach, barely 30 seconds into the P1's lap, it's been forgotten. Everything I've ever experienced inside a supercar has been forgotten. The hermetically sealed chamber protecting the runaway scenarios of my imagination has been smashed open and they're spilling out. The shock of the P1's initial acceleration – a neck-wrenching slam delivered with an almost digital kind of immediacy and a tough, hard, unromantic V8 howl – has pulled me so far out of my assumed impregnable comfort zone I can hardly swallow. And I badly need to. My ears are popping and the cabin pressure changes seem to be more transient than elevation related, caused by the rate at which we're gaining and shedding speed. And any hope of taking some hand-held smartphone video have vanished, along with the phone, which was forced to my lap by the

compression G on the downhill run to Flugplatz, then to the footwell through Aremberg.

Goodwin's steering inputs are fast and accurate, and if a smooth approach has been sacrificed for sheer speed, the managed violence seems devastatingly effective. The P1's ride is almost unbelievably hard, yet the car is absolutely pinned to the circuit's far-from-friendly tarmac. There isn't much understeer in the tighter turns, either. The P1 seems every inch an extension of Goodwin's determined attacking style. It's doing his bidding and, apart from a couple of reflex-caught slides at the start of the lap when the tyres were cold, it isn't fighting back.

By the time Goodwin and the P1 have made the notoriously tricky Bergwerk – where Lauda had his big one – seem no more menacing than the Kingston bypass, my neck's aching and I've rubbed some skin off my right knee from forcing it against the door to brace against the lateral G-force. But the early feeling of being



overwhelmed is abating and I'm beginning to get a handle of the magnitude of the P1's faster-everywhere advantage over other industry traffic. A skilfully driven Aston Vantage is rapidly closed down, does its best to not get in the way through Wippermann, then disappears into the P1's slipstream as if being yanked backwards by a giant bungee. A couple of hot VW Golfs present themselves as little more than a moving slalom. It has been tweeted by several photographers who have virtually set up home on the banks of the circuit that they've never seen any road car move as fast as the P1.

'It comes alive in the high-speed corners,' shouts Goodwin, at last able to relax a little as the P1 begins winding out to over 200mph on the final Antoniusbuche straight with the left-hand kink (a little lift today) a mite over halfway along. 'With a car capable of generating this amount of downforce, that could make it quite pitch-sensitive at higher speed, especially when you're running low in Race mode. But

controlling the big downforce number with the active aero and the adaptive damping helps open up the operating window massively. For instance, we were really rocketing up the long climb from Bergwerk. It's an awful bit of road: cambered, bumpy and you're picking up a lot of speed. In a passive car you'd really start bouncing around at the top of the hill, but we could trail off damper stiffness as we got to those high speeds to gain some compliance. And that means you can keep your foot in.'

Goodwin does so for the remainder of the lap and as we peel back into the pit lane, I'm convinced, as is he, that the P1 isn't just a seven-minute car but one that will go comfortably under that. We may never find out by how much, though. While McLaren will later confirm that the P1 did indeed beat its 7:00 target, it will reveal no more than that. However, if the stars aligned, and Goodwin kept his foot in, you can bet the lap made the Porsche 918's mark of 6:57 seem a little pedestrian. ❏

Specification

McLAREN P1

Engine V8, 3799cc, twin-turbo, plus 131kW electric motor
CO2 194g/km
Power 903bhp (combined) @ 7500rpm
Torque 664lb ft (combined) @ 4000rpm
Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox, rear-wheel drive, Brake Steer
Front suspension Hydro-pneumatic proactive suspension, adaptive roll control
Rear suspension Hydro-pneumatic proactive suspension, adaptive roll control
Brakes Carbon-ceramic discs, 390mm front, 380mm rear, ABS, EBD
Wheels 9 x 19in front, 11.5 x 20in rear
Tyres 245/35 ZR19 front, 315/30 ZR20 rear
Weight (dry) 1395kg
Power-to-weight (dry) 658bhp/ton
0-60mph 2.8sec (claimed)
Top speed 217mph (limited)
Basic price £866,000
On sale Now



P1 MEETS FORZA 5

Forza Motorsport 5, the biggest racing game of 2013, is about to launch – and just as McLaren’s P1 is a supercar game-changer, so Forza 5 will transform the way we think about racing sims. Here’s how

by PETER TOMALIN



Y

YOU’LL KNOW BY now just what an extraordinary machine the McLaren P1 is. As *evo*’s David Vivian has been finding out, it takes the supercar to a whole

new level with a raft of dazzling new technologies that deliver thrills like nothing else that we’ve experienced. All of which makes it the perfect poster car for a racing simulator that is also, in every sense, a game-changer.

Forza Motorsport 5 arrives on November 22, coinciding with the launch of the Xbox One. Not that it’s a coincidence at all, of course. Forza 5 is the ideal showcase for the phenomenal capabilities of the new platform, including its ‘cloud’ computing support, which

enables multi-player gaming in a way we’ve never seen before. More on that in a moment.

The Forza Motorsport series has always been a firm favourite with the dedicated petrolhead. So you’ll be relieved to know that in the safe hands of developers Turn 10, its core values have remained intact. But it now takes the interaction and the immersion in the whole gaming experience into a new dimension – and throws in an even wider choice of great cars and brilliant tracks, all rendered with a level of detail and realism never before seen on a games console. This, then, is the world of Forza Motorsport 5.

As one of Xbox One’s exclusive launch titles, Forza 5 was always planned as a showcase for the new platform, whose cloud computing support effectively boosts the console’s specs by the power of three. If you want to play Forza



Left: McLaren's P1 has raised the bar in terms of what we expect from a hypercar, and Forza 5 will do the same for racing simulators



'The Drivatar system is an AI learning feature that creates your own digital driving personality based on in-game behaviour, and shares that personality over the internet'

5 straight out of the box without going online, that's fine. You'll get a stunning line-up of cars, circuits and gameplay, and you'll be able to race against pre-programmed AI (artificial intelligence) drivers.

But if you connect to the internet you'll also, of course, be able to play in multi-player mode, up to 24 players at a time – and this is where Forza 5 gets really innovative.

One of the most important ways it uses the cloud is the new Drivatar system – an AI learning feature that creates your own digital driving personality based on your in-game behaviour, and shares that personality automatically over the internet.

Using the near-limitless power of cloud processing, Forza 5 will watch your behaviour, learn how you race, and when you're not playing, your Drivatar will carry on racing around the world without you, making decisions, copying your moments of aggression, caution and – who knows? – maybe even the odd flash of brilliance!

As you learn the tracks and the cars, and as your driving improves, so does that of your Drivatar. Next time you fire up the Xbox One, you'll see just how the digital you has performed – and how much prize money you've accrued! Conversely, if you want to race against your Forza-playing mates, but they're not actually available to play, you can call up their Drivatars. As lead gameplay designer Rhett

Mathis puts it: "With a system like this, we can race together, even when we're not together."

Turn 10 creative director Dan Greenawalt adds: "We can build a profile of you that can go anywhere. So I can race him on the tracks I like even though he hasn't been there, and I get to see the cars he's using."

What's more, the whole system will grow and evolve the more people use it. "Every day that people race is going to make the Drivatar set that much more accurate, that much more diverse, that much more interesting."

However, the innovation doesn't stop there. Forza 5 also makes full use of the Xbox One controller's Impulse Triggers – new rumble-motors placed into the triggers of the new controller that work alongside the standard ones in the body to provide even more precision feedback to your fingertips. So you'll be able to feel things like the ABS pulsing, or the tyres starting to lock up.

Combined with new levels of realism in both the cars (see Page 76) and the circuits (Page 82), it all adds up to the 'generation-topping racer' that Turn 10 has been promising since development began. Racing, it's fair to say, will never be quite the same again.





M c L A R E N P 1

Customers speak

The people the P1 needs to impress most are those paying £866,000 to buy one. We speak to one man who's already got his, and another who is on the waiting list

by DAVID VIVIAN

P **P1. IN CASE WE WERE** in any doubt, the name says it all. McLaren's tech-fired successor to the F1 has no intention of playing second-best to the other hybrid hypercars on the block from Porsche and Ferrari. We can't pick a winner from that particular scrap just yet, but we have spoken to a couple of people with enough faith in McLaren's track record and ambition to have already signed on the dotted line.

Paul Bailey, racing driver, *evo* contributor and 'modern supercar collector' (his description), took delivery of his Volcano Orange P1 just before flying to Spain. He specced it with the Stealth Pack, exposed glossy carbonfibre and the upgraded Meridian hi-fi for those trans-Continental trips when you need a musical massage rather than your scalp tingled. When we speak to him, he's desperate to get back, take it on track and 'drive it until the weather

becomes so bad that I can't any more'. He'd like to drive it through the winter too, if McLaren could supply winter tyres. They aren't available yet, but one reason Bailey has dived in with an early P1 (despite the 27 recalls on his equally early 12C coupe) is his belief in McLaren's can-do attitude and, in his experience, its peerless after-sales customer care.

It's a theme reflected by *evo*'s Secret Supercar Owner, who won't take delivery of his P1 until 2015 but is thinking more along the lines of a low-key approach with muted colours (probably no orange). But he is confident he's made the right decision: 'I think McLaren considered me as a 12C Spyder owner with a long history in supercars and not someone they could extract a consistent amount of cash from,' he says. 'I've been very well looked-after and that's certainly a factor in my decision to buy a P1.'

There's got to be more to it than that, though. You don't stump up £866,000 for a P1 just because you've got a 12C. Bailey's insatiable

need for speed will eventually see a Porsche 918 and a LaFerrari join the McLaren in his garage, but he calls the P1 his hypercar of choice. 'I've been so impressed by the 12C that it's impossible for the P1 to be anything other than a totally awesome car,' he says. 'I intend to use it to the full. The first questions I asked were: "What's the service interval?" and "Can I get spare parts if I bash it?" That's the reason I got the car: I'm going to drive it. I'm not going to stick it in the garage and polish it. I also can't believe it's the only car I've ever bought that has zero running-in. McLaren runs in everything – the gearbox, the differential, the suspension. Even the carbon-ceramic brakes are bedded in. You can literally wait for the car to come up to temperature and cane its arse if you want to.'

The SSO says he never seriously considered the 918 or, perhaps more intriguingly as the owner of an F40 and an F50, the LaFerrari: 'For me, it came down to who has produced the best supercar ever. In my estimation, that crown's



Left: Paul Bailey's Volcano Orange P1 is one of the first to be delivered. **Bottom:** endurance racer Bailey rates McLaren's customer service



held by the F1. So as the P1 is the natural successor to the F1, I decided to go with the P1. That was one aspect; the other was that I never really bought into the whole Ferrari thing of having to buy X, Y and Z before you could be considered for a LaFerrari.'

But what if the P1 manages to beat the 918's 6:57 lap of the Nordschleife only to be buried by LaFerrari? 'I think it's a total nonsense,' says Bailey. 'If you had three different drivers and raced the three cars, the result would have nothing to do with the cars, it'd be about the drivers. I think the Ring time is important to people who spend their time on the internet. People who buy the P1 won't base their decision on the P1 being 1sec faster than this or that.'

The SSO concurs: 'I absolutely couldn't care less. In terms of it affecting a purchase decision, it's completely irrelevant, though all the internet coverage is amusing. But how it relates to the way the car actually performs in the real world, I don't think it's relevant. I'll probably

'THE FIRST QUESTIONS I ASKED WERE: "WHAT'S THE SERVICE INTERVAL?" AND "CAN I GET SPARE PARTS IF I BASH IT?" THAT'S THE REASON I GOT THE CAR: I'M GOING TO DRIVE IT'

use the car for a combination of long multi-day road trips and occasionally scaring myself silly on the track. I don't intend to use it every day. The 12C is much better-suited to that.'

Bailey perhaps takes a harder line when it comes to extracting the most from his P1, and despite his ongoing success driving a Ferrari 430 in the British Endurance Championship, he intends to participate in McLaren's driver training programme for P1 customers: 'Any driver training you can get, I think, is critical. I believe one of the reasons I've had such a successful racing season this year is because I've got a full-time coach. I believe that coaching is what makes people really quick.'

The SSO finds resonance with McLaren's Formula 1 provenance – 'it's probably one of the reasons I'd rather have a P1 than a Pagani or a Koenigsegg' – and would love to take part in the training if he can find the time. But first he's got to sit down and think about how he's going to spec his P1. Lucky man. ✕

FEEL THE FORZA!

Supercars, Group B rally cars, Formula 1 cars... Forza Motorsport 5 has them all, and with a level of tactility and realism we haven't seen – or felt – before

by PETER TOMALIN

IT'S THE CARS, STUPID. For all the talk of Forza 5's game-changing artificial intelligence and cloud computing, as an evo reader what you're really interested in is, of course, the metal. It's hard to imagine there has ever been a more mouthwatering selection of machinery put at your disposal in a racing sim. And they've been rendered in such extraordinary detail that you can almost see the pools of drool forming on their lustrous paintwork.

We'll get to the modelling in a moment. First, let's just consider the cars that you'll be able to slip your virtual behind into from November 22. The roll-call reads like an evo reader's wish-list. Literally hundreds of the most exciting

road and race cars ever built, from hatchbacks to hypercars and everything in between, from classics like the Mercedes 300SL Gullwing to modern evo icons such as the Nissan GT-R and Ferrari 599 GTO.

The list of hypercars alone includes the Pagani Huayra, Bugatti Veyron, Koenigsegg Agera and, of course, the brand new McLaren P1. Not a bad little evo group test right there. And the really dedicated petrolhead will appreciate the additions of Group B heroes like the Ford RS200 Evolution and Nürburgring legends such as the Ruf CTR 'Yellowbird'.

Forza 5 also sees the debut of open-wheel racing cars for the first time in the series' history. They'll include current and historic Grand Prix cars, and race cars from the IndyCar series, too. A special mention here for the McLaren M23 and the Ferrari 312-2 driven by Niki Lauda and James Hunt,

Advertising feature





‘The roll call of cars featured reads like an evo reader’s wishlist. Literally hundreds of the most exciting road and race cars ever built, from hatchbacks to hypercars and everything in between, from classics like the Mercedes 300SL Gullwing to modern evo icons such as the Nissan GT-R and Ferrari 599 GTO’



Top and above: Icons from the likes of Pagani, Ford, Audi and Aston Martin are all featured, and rendered in extraordinary detail. The developers say that Forza 5 showcases more realistic designs than ever before because it now includes cars’ imperfections, such as the notorious ‘orange peel’ paint effect

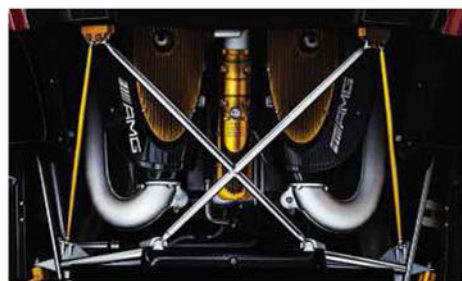
respectively, during the 1976 Formula 1 season. Now immortalised on screen in the movie *Rush*, they will be available as a free download to all Forza 5 players at launch.

So far, so very good indeed. But developers Turn 10 have also promised a “generation-topping racer from day one”, with new car physics and “scintillatingly modelled imperfections”. Thankfully they were happy to explain themselves. Turn 10 creative director Dan Greenawalt explains: “Developing and improving the driving physics has, in many ways, become the central pursuit for the Forza Motorsport series.

“We are always chasing that perfect simulation where we can accurately recreate the infinite variables of driving in the digital world. At the same time, that pursuit is always tempered by the limits of what we know about the science of vehicle dynamics and the properties of high-performance materials.”

So, during the development of Forza 5, pallets of tyres were sent to Calspan, an automotive industry research facility in Buffalo, New York, where researchers collected data on how heat, friction and pressure affect rubber performance and wear at track speeds.

“For Forza Motorsport 5, we have an incredibly powerful console at our disposal in the Xbox One,” continues Greenawalt. “To make the most of that power, we had to



Above: Feel the power of Huayra's cutting-edge engine



Above: The stunning detailing of Pagani is unmistakable



Above: Kerb an alloy and Forza 5 will now show damage

collect data on tyre variables that have never been isolated – to refactor our understanding of tyre technology through the lens of a much more powerful console; one that could handle the increasingly complex formulae of heat, slip and weight transfer that our increased understanding demands.

“Thanks to the power of the Xbox One and our Calspan partnership, we are implementing truly cutting-edge scientific understanding of tyre physics, suspension geometry and aerodynamics – we’re not implementing the recommendations of last year’s text books, we’re running the tests that will write the vehicle dynamics text books of the next several years.”

Impressive stuff, and Forza 5 players will be able to feel – quite literally – the benefits of all that research, thanks to the Xbox One controller’s new Impulse Triggers. These are rumble-motors actually mounted inside the triggers themselves, which will allow you to feel when the tyres are on the point of lock-up, and the ABS starts working.

A similarly rigorous attention to detail has also been applied to the engine and exhaust notes, capturing every nuance, every change of volume and timbre to reflect the environment – open circuit, cityscape, tunnel, mountain pass – and the throttle openings.

Then there’s the look of the cars. “The new generation is about more than poly count and

texture resolution,” says Greenawalt. “We’ve transcended that. It’s about the details that make things feel real.”

And the key to making the cars look even more realistic is that rather than striving for perfection, the developers at Turn 10 have actually modelled the cars’ imperfections. John Wendel, content director, explains their thinking. He says: “People have asked, your cars were perfect in Forza 4 – so how are you going to make them better?”

“Well, the answer we found is actually making them less perfect, bringing in some of that imperfection that you see in the real world. A coat of paint never goes on perfectly evenly; even on a million-dollar car, there’s what we call orange peel. It’s a slight imperfection, you see it in the reflection of the car.”

So now your virtual Lamborghini or Mitsubishi will come with a slice of orange peel. Interestingly, the one car you won’t see imperfections on is the P1. Apparently McLaren employs a wet-sanding specialist, so its P1 has a nearly perfect surface in the game.

On the other hand, if you kerb it, the damage will be there for all to see. Yep, that’s another Forza 5 first: scuffed rims. Still, you can always blame it on your Drivatar...





INTERVIEW

Dan Greenawalt

As creative director at Turn 10 Studios, Dan Greenawalt is Mr Forza Motorsport. Here he talks about physics modelling, deep partnerships and the game's appeal to French women

by NICK TROTT | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

Can you explain how you model the physics of a car?

People tend to approach physics and simulation from a driver perspective. The issue is that from a driver perspective you're dealing with the testing of a car, which is actually the end result of all the physics, but it's not the physics itself. So for example, what that means is that we don't simulate understeer, we simulate suspension architecture, tyre dynamics, heat in the tyres, air pressure in the tyres, body roll, body stiffness – and those result in understeer.

So you're not simulating the car's behaviour, you're modelling what causes the behaviour?

Exactly. People ask me how I recreate the understeer in a car, and it's like, I just recreate the car, and the car understeers.

Can you give us an example of how you worked with manufacturers?

In Forza Motorsport 4, we had a very novel approach to doing tyres. We worked with Pirelli and they gave us test data, and we changed our tyre simulation so that we could input the data without any manipulation from us. That meant a player was literally driving test data, which was very cool, and other games are now mirroring

that approach. There was one issue, though: it seemed that the methodology for doing the test did not isolate out heat, it didn't isolate out wear, and as you're running the tyre test, the tyre heats up, so that tyre curve is muddy. When I talked to the Pirelli engineers, I asked them about how I could isolate all of these variables. Their answer was that you can't isolate the variables, don't worry about it, that's just how it is.

That must have been frustrating?

We're perfectionists on the team so we decided to go to the source, and we started working with a company in Buffalo called Calspan. If you're not an engineer you probably haven't heard of Calspan, but the test that Pirelli was running on its tyres – those are called Calspan tests. So we went to Calspan and asked them the same question and their answer was, that's really interesting – we don't know the answer to that either, but we might be able to come up with tests to isolate these variables.

So I sent out a bunch of tyres, and they took two weeks to test them, and they sent us millions of data points. What it means is that we now have a level of isolation on all these variables – tyre, heat, wear. Our tyres heat up on the inside, the outside and the middle, plus you have the core temperature when the tyre heats up the

carcass and keeps it from cooling down, the gas expanding as it heats up. All of this is simulated in our game.

What does this mean for the player?

Now every variable can be isolated, we're able to simulate to the player a level of depth that power-wise wasn't possible on last-generation hardware. It's not just power, it's the approach. We now know more about tyres than the tyre manufacturers know about their own tyres.

So, with the open-wheelers in Forza 5, do the brakes heat the tyres as they do in real race situations?

You got me! No they don't, but we do simulate how much rolling friction heats up the tyre, how much the air cools the tyre down at higher speeds vs lower speeds, all of that stuff.

How much do you rely on manufacturer data?

Sure the manufacturers send us data, and we thank them politely, and we put it to the side. Because what we found is their data is not usually sent to us by their engineers, but by the marketing and licensing departments. Because that's who creates the press packets, so we're getting the same press packets that

you get. Now we do deep partnerships with certain manufacturers, and that's great because when we do a deep partnership we're able to talk to their engineers. And when we talk to their engineers we're able to get a broader understanding, not just of their car, but of cars, so we're talking about general suspension kinematics, and yeah, the Audi engineer knows the Audi kinematics, but guess what – he knows the BMW kinematics as well. He knows how the double A-arm suspension's gonna move, how it's gonna get camber, the length of the different arms, pushrod, MacPherson, all these different types of suspension geometry. So every version of the game, we use our partnerships with the race teams and manufacturers to make the overall simulation better.

Does this apply to suppliers as well? Do you speak to them?

Yes. When it comes to reconstructing an individual car, we go to the original manufacturers of the parts. We might go to a Zytex or a Prodrive or a Quaife and find out, for example, what is the weight of that driveline so that we can get the moment of inertia. Or it might be body stiffness. You know some of that through building a complex math model by working with engineers, sometimes engineers from a race team, to not just simulate their own cars but actually understand what type of bodies are going to have more or less flex, based on how

they were welded and built up. So we research what a particular body was made of and then our simulation can recreate the flex of it because that's how those were.

Performance car technology is moving forward at an incredible pace. This must present a fascinating challenge for your developers?

What's happening right now is the rebirth of the hypercar. It's basically been ten years since we've had a real reboot of the hypercar, and you're right, the 918, the P1 and the LaFerrari are absolutely in a different league than the Enzo, Carrera GT and the F1.

Understanding how they do torque-vectoring and hybrid assist, how they architect their geometry, these cars defy physics. They're fast in a way and driveable in a way that shouldn't be possible with 900bhp. The front tyres on that P1 are nowhere near wide enough, and yet the car

'SO WHAT WE'VE GOT IS A GAME WHERE WE NEVER COMPROMISE ON THE PHYSICS. NEVER'

handles amazingly, so we actually do work with them to update our physics in the game because they're learning things about the physics of cars that weren't known two years ago.

It's actually quite hard to enjoy the performance car today, with rising costs, speed limits, social acceptance, etc. Is Forza a substitute?

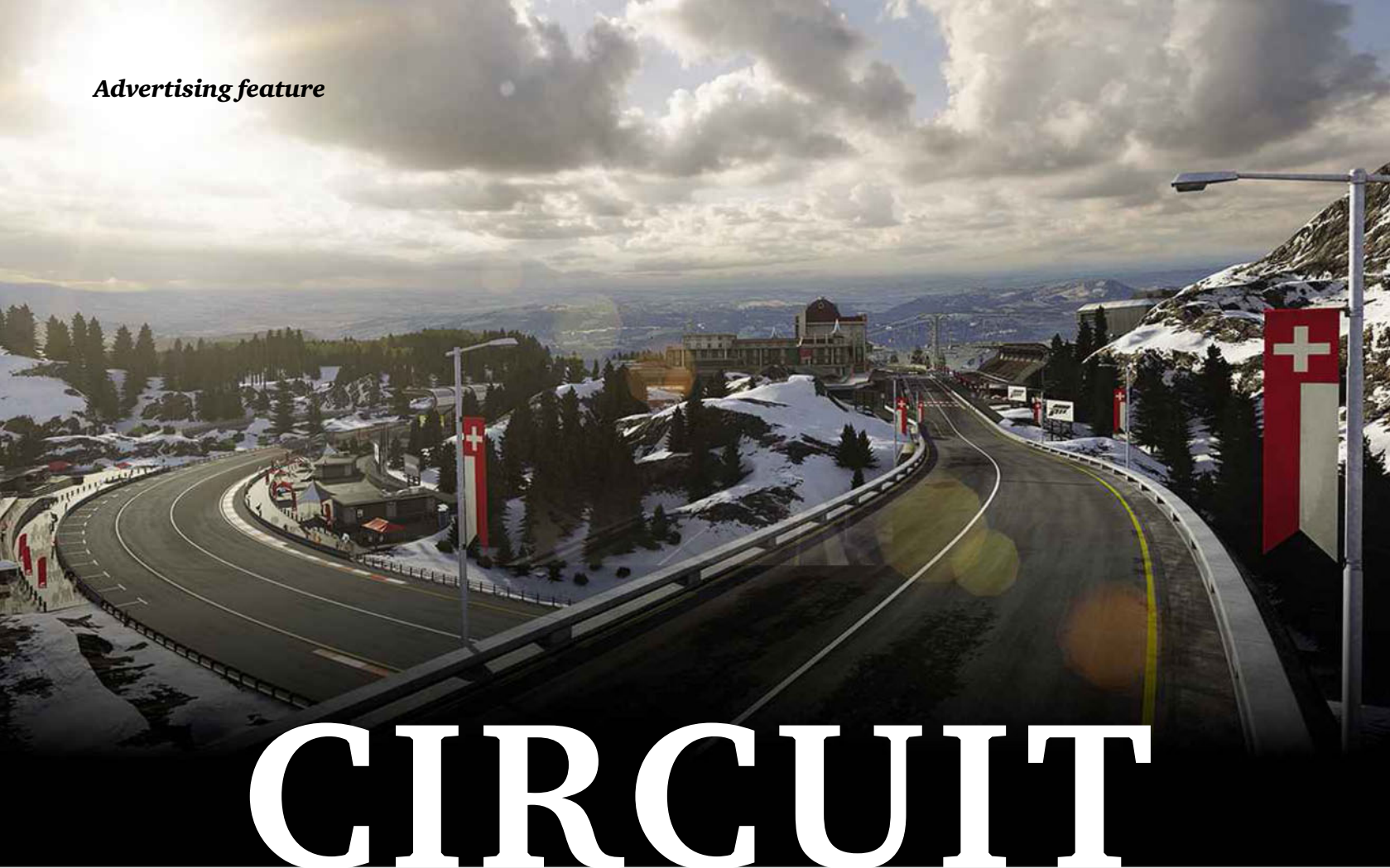
The thing I love about working on Forza is that it's different things to different people and what I love about car people in general is that most of the ones I know are hugely opinionated. I love arguing about cars, but in my position I actually have the perspective to understand that nobody's really right, just really opinionated about it. So what we've got is a game where we never compromise on the physics. Never. We're always pushing and pushing, to learn more and implement it. But then we add assists that make it easier to drive. And that means that when you've got someone who's ready, they can drive it with a wheel, raw simulation, but you also have five-year-olds that play. And almost 40 per cent of our players in France are women.

That's a surprise...

This is the diversity that cars bring in. What I found is that most people think that everyone who plays Forza is like them: 'Yeah, I'm a car guy and I play Forza and all my friends that play Forza are car guys.' Well it's just not true. What I love is I want people who are really into cars to feel like it's their home, like a hand in a glove, it fits so well, and I want a five-year-old to have room to grow and have a great time smashing cars, and I want a woman in France to express her passion for cars through our game.

So do I see it as a substitute? For some people it is. For some people it isn't. For race drivers it's a practice thing. Stéphane Sarrazin came to our studio before Petit Le Mans and took two days of practice in our game at our studio – he just lived at our studio, ate lunch with us, practised and then went to Petit Le Mans and got pole position. So we've got fans like that, and we've got five-year-old kids playing split-screen, smashing up cars. What I can say is that for the five-year-old kid it's replacing Matchbox cars, for Stéphane it's replacing track time and for everyone in between you have some kind of fantasy. 🚗





CIRCUIT MAKERS

Epic new circuits and a new dimension in realism – wherever you want to race, Forza Motorsport 5 will put you right there on the tarmac. We get the inside line

by PETER TOMALIN

O

OBSERVATIVE attention to detail. Not something that you'd necessarily admire in your tax inspector, but in your game developer it's most definitely A Good Thing.

For Forza Motorsport 5, developers Turn 10 Studios haven't just gone the extra mile, they've rendered that mile in extraordinary detail and allowed you to see and feel every pimple on the tarmac.

New tracks for Forza 5 include a number of firm evo favourites – Spa Francorchamps is brand new, while Laguna Seca is back, fully updated to take advantage of Xbox One, as is Britain's very own Silverstone.

There's also the legendary Australian Bathurst circuit for the first time, all of them

laser-scanned down to the last ripple in the blacktop and the last tooth on the kerbing. Spa, Laguna Seca and Bathurst are well known for their dramatic elevation changes, and with legendary corners such as Spa's Eau Rouge and Laguna Seca's Corkscrew, a fast lap could feel more like a roller-coaster ride.

But it won't stop there. Connect the Xbox One to the internet and you'll also be able get all the very latest content – further new tracks and new cars – as soon as it's available.

And in January, that will include arguably the most challenging circuit on the planet – the Nürburgring Nordschleife. Well known to evo readers, the 'Ring has become the ultimate performance benchmark, a lap time the supreme arbiter of a supercar's talents.

From January, you'll be able to compare your times with the test drivers from McLaren,



Left: Classic Australian track Bathurst will feature on new Forza Motorsport 5 game
Below: The unmistakable Silverstone, home of the British GP, is also set to be included



‘The goal is to give players not just the look and feel of the track itself, but to bring to life everything that makes the circuit so special. Of course, this means getting the small details right’



Pagani and all the others. You could even get to race against evo’s own Drivatar... The process of capturing the detail of all of these circuits is both painstaking and fascinating. Take Mount Panorama at Bathurst, the spiritual home of Australian motorsport and one of the world’s great tracks. Turn 10 content director John Wendl explains: “Mount Panorama has been one of the most highly requested tracks for years for the Forza Motorsport series.

“In the past, we simply didn’t have the technology to properly capture and render this unique circuit. Now, with digital laser scanning and our all-new graphics engine on the Xbox One, we finally do.

“It’s a beautifully complex and technically challenging circuit. It’s known for its extreme elevation changes and the subtle camber differences throughout the track. To capture all of this intricate detail, we’re now utilising cutting-edge digital laser scanning technology that allows us incredible precision on both the vertical and horizontal axis.”

In 2012, Turn 10 sent a six-man crew to the circuit for three days. They captured not only the racing surface, but the surrounding areas, including walls, trees and grandstands.

Continues Wendl: “Our goal is to give players not just the look and feel of the track itself, but to bring to life everything that makes the circuit so special. Of course, this means getting the small details right – the cracks in the asphalt, the track signage, and even things like the TV camera towers correct.

“Beyond that, however, we want to provide players with a real feel for what it’s like being at the track, what the light looks like at eight

o’clock in the morning...” On the Xbox One, all this is rendered at a glorious 1080p resolution and 60 frames per second. What’s more, cloud computing will allow Forza 5 to preserve high-definition performance, despite the power-guzzling trackside effects.

Mark Skaife, star of V8 Supercar racing and a Bathurst regular, put the digitally rendered Mount Panorama to the test at a special preview. Afterwards, he was clearly extremely impressed and told reporters: “I was blown away by how well they had captured the track. The racing line takes you through at the right angles to attack the corners.

“The camber changes on the Mountain Straight are captured perfectly. And the markers that I’ve used for years – like the grate in Reid Park – are all there in the game. When you play the game you can truly understand what it’s like to challenge the mountain.”

Corners to look out for? According to Skaife, it’s The Dipper. “The game really captures the adrenaline rush you feel shooting through the Esses and into The Dipper,” he said.

“Also, at 300 km/h, the Chase is the fastest touring car corner in the world. You need to go flat out in the Conrod Straight and hit the drive line perfectly. You don’t want to miss this one.”

So there you have it. Chances are, in a few months’ time, we’ll be talking about The Dipper and The Chase in the same awed tones currently reserved for Eau Rouge and The Corkscrew. That’s the Forza effect.



Caterham Seven 160



by JETHRO BOVINGDON

PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

Simple Seven

Just three months after we tried the fastest Seven ever (the 311bhp 620R), Caterham has gone to the other extreme and created a true back-to-basics model – the 80bhp, three-cylinder-engined 160. We head to Wales to find out why it's every bit as rewarding to drive





W

WE'RE 604 MILES west of the Nürburgring and the harsh autumnal sun is slowly burning away stubborn morning dew. The Black Mountains have rarely

looked so beautiful and the road haphazardly flung across them is quiet save for the odd gaggle of bikers enjoying the last remnants of sunshine before winter sets in. It's the perfect place and the perfect day to get our first taste of a car with lofty ambitions – to get to the very essence of the thrill of driving.

Its arsenal to meet that target? Three cylinders, 660cc, 80bhp, a five-speed manual gearbox, some aluminium bodywork and four skinny 14-inch steel wheels wrapped in 155/65 Avon ZT5 tyres. The exciting but ultimately pointless quest to lap the Ring ever more quickly might as well be taking place in another galaxy.

So this is the Caterham Seven 160, the new entry-level model that weighs in at just 490kg and £17,995 fully built (or £14,995 in kit form). There's no active aero, no electrical assist other than an intermittently faulty fuel gauge, and even when you 'push to pass' the throttle you

need quite a long straight to fizz past slow-moving traffic. I suspect you'd need a calendar rather than a stopwatch to record its lap time around the Nordschleife. Even so, sliding down behind its tiny Momo steering wheel and fumbling and scraping my left knuckles trying to insert the key into the ignition barrel feels pretty damn exciting. The idea of a super-lightweight, narrow-tracked Seven on trailer tyres and with a revvy little Suzuki-sourced turbocharged engine sounds like heaven to me.

Locked into the driver's seat the view out is, of course, very familiar. Ahead is that dinky steering wheel framing a rev counter, which reads to 8, on the left and a speedometer on the right, optimistically marked to 160mph. Beyond that is the classic paper-thin louvred aluminium bonnet, the cycle wings that bobble and shimmy with the road, and two chrome domes that form the back of the headlights and cast an odd but hypnotising fish-eye reflection of the Seven and the sky behind it as you wend your way along.

With simple rocker switches for most of the major controls and slim toggle switches for high beam and the indicators, all set into a crackle-black dash, it's a rudimentary environment.

Cosy too, what with your right arm resting on the sill, your left brushed by the transmission tunnel and your feet squeezed into a tight footwell with tiny and close-spaced pedals. However, compared to the cramped and exposed cabin of the Morgan 3 Wheeler, whose success the 160 would love to emulate, it feels snug and natural. You feel instantly focused on the road ahead and ready to go.

Twist the key, wait for the red light in the middle of the dash to stop flickering, signifying that the immobiliser has disabled, and twist again. Now the little three-cylinder engine catches with a rorty boom. It's a good start, but the initial flourish settles quickly into a quiet, fluffy idle that parps out of the peashooter exhaust rather limply. The 660cc turbocharged engine was originally designed for Japanese Kei-car applications and it certainly has a white-goods feel at idle. Still, there might be surprises in store, as it produces its peak 80bhp (up from 64bhp) at 7000rpm and the limiter doesn't kick in until a promising 7700rpm. Torque is rated at 79lb ft at 3400rpm. For the record, Caterham claims that the 160 will reach 60mph in 6.5 seconds and run out of puff at 100mph. By way of comparison, the Roadsport 125's 1.6-litre



**'THE QUEST TO LAP
THE RING EVER MORE
QUICKLY MIGHT AS WELL
BE TAKING PLACE IN
ANOTHER GALAXY'**

Right: back-to-basics look gives the 160 a delightfully retro vibe that gets all the right kind of attention. **Above:** exhaust is spindly compared to those of more powerful Sevens. **Top:** Welsh weather plays ball for this test





‘FORGET THE “ACCESSIBILITY” OF A GT86 OR ANY HOT HATCH YOU CARE TO MENTION, THIS IS PROPERLY ACCESSIBLE’

Ford Sigma engine delivers 0-60mph in 5.9 seconds and 112mph for £22,995.

The black anodised shifter is cold to the touch and it requires a good shove to select first. As soon as the car is rolling you'll need second and then third in short order. The 160 is very short-gearred to make the most of its 80bhp, with second all done at 45mph and third not quite reaching 70mph. So you're immediately busy and engaged, and within maybe 300 yards you're a bit of a fan of that tiny engine. It has a distinctive three-cylinder thrum and rumble up to around 3500rpm but there's little chance to enjoy it as you always seem to be up at 5500rpm or so, where the exhaust's deep howl has subsumed it. It zips around to 7500rpm and just labours slightly

to the limiter, but wring it out like this and the 160 really flies along. Turbo lag simply isn't an issue due to that short gearing. Between 40 and 80mph it's a genuinely quick little car, and more importantly the power-to-grip ratio feels just about spot-on. Like the gearing, the chassis keeps you rather busy...

Beneath and poking out from the simple aluminium skin is a standard Seven chassis not so much downgraded as back-dated. So at the front it has standard wishbones rather than the longer Superlight versions we've become accustomed to, meaning that the track is narrower. Just below your backside is a drum brake-equipped live axle instead of the De Dion unit that has also become a Seven mainstay in recent times. It's there because it's light,

simple and helps to keep the price down, too. On smooth tracks live-axle Caterhams are no problem at all (just ask Dickie Meaden, whose old flyweight Caterham Fireblade – just 369kg! – used a live axle), but up here on gnarly roads it could be an issue. Especially when paired with tyres that would pass for space-savers on an average family hatch these days.

Sure enough, this most basic of Sevens demands a period of acclimatisation. Even after a solid four hours with the little engine roaring away at 5500rpm in fifth, the heater burning my legs and the odd roundabout and slip road to explore, the first time the road opens up over the mountain and I start to lean on the 160, it's a bit of a shock. Where a Superlight would have rock-solid control and a



real sense of precision, the 160 wanders around on its sidewalls, and the softer suspension/live axle combination seems to serve up a strange mix of roll and heave matched to occasional shuddering thumps thwacking through to your seat. On a really bumpy road your backside/seat relationship mirrors the rear axle's flight off the ground almost exactly. For these first few miles – and absurd as this sounds – the engine feels too much for the chassis and the 160 is actually quite intimidating. Did I just write that? Oh dear... but it's true.

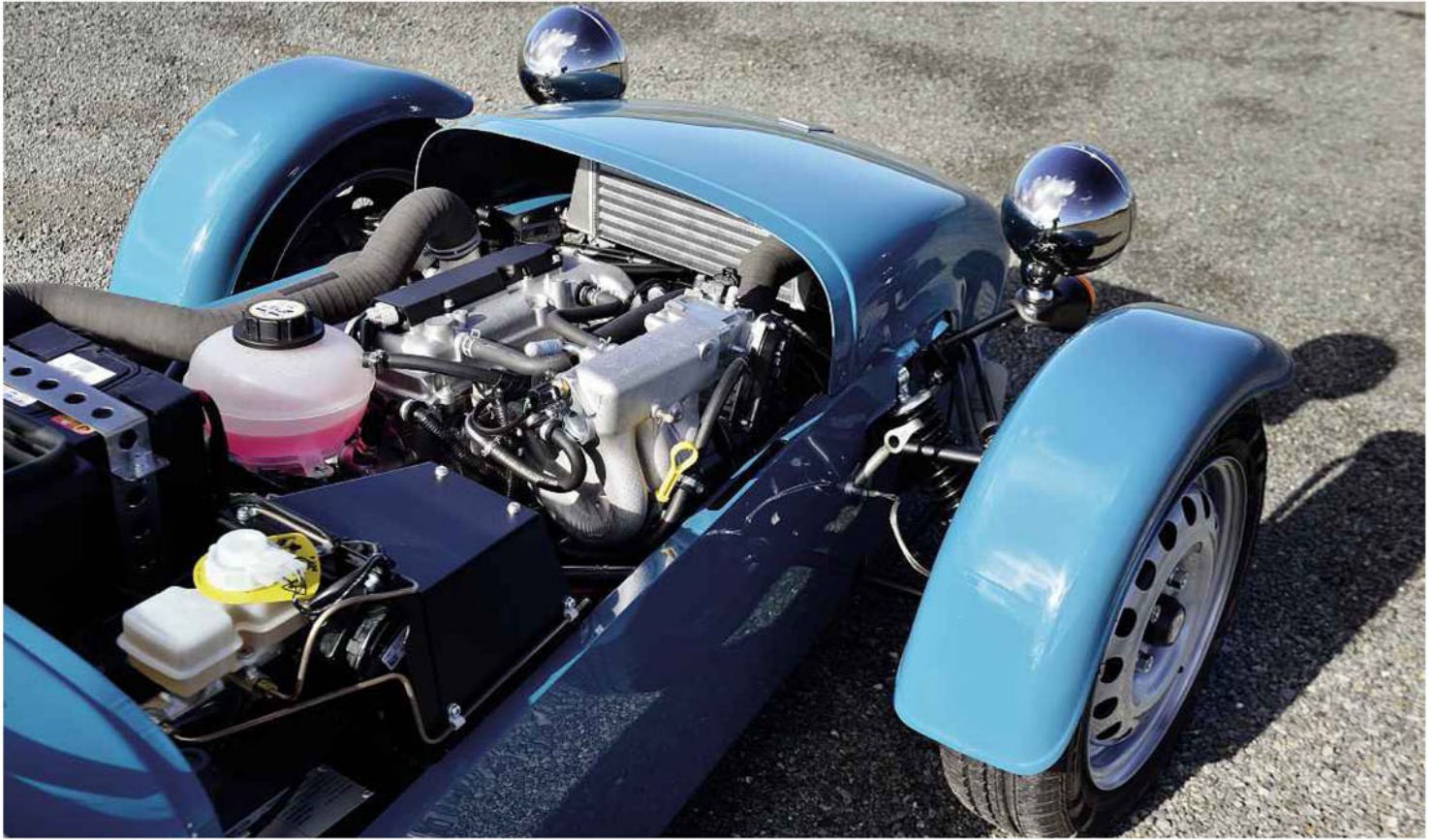
However, this initial shock is like an ice bath after a raging sauna – heart-stopping but ultimately good for you. And after a few miles all that's left is a warm glow of satisfaction and a sense of real achievement. You've relaxed

into the car, stopped wrestling it and started trusting it to grip at the front and then swing elegantly at the rear in a neat arc to minimise your steering input. This pattern is the key to the 160 and takes practice to master. It always slides just a little at the rear and initially you find yourself trying to scribe a smooth arc around a corner but instead darting straight to the perfect racing apex – often on the wrong side of the road. The rear axle literally 'over steers' the front of the car onto a tighter line than required. To account for this the initial steering input needs to be clean but minimal, and as soon as you commit to the throttle you can wind off the lock and dance through in a proper old-school four-wheel drift. It's the best and most satisfying technique, but just

occasionally you'll give the little three-cylinder engine its head and revel in the transition from neutral to a tail-led stance, too. There's no limited-slip diff, but only on second-gear hairpins do you really miss a locker.

What's really special about this constantly shifting balance and the way the 160 demands to be steered on the throttle is that it really is a constant process. Whether you're doing 30mph in third or 60mph in fourth, you will be micro-managing the balance, thinking about every little input that you make and driving close to or beyond the limit. Forget the 'accessibility' of a GT86 or any hot hatch you care to mention, this is properly accessible. A GT86 feels like an over-tired monster in comparison and requires much less respect for speed limits to

Caterham Seven 160



**'IT'S AN EDUCATION IN CHASSIS DYNAMICS PLAYED OUT
IN SLOW MOTION, BUT IT REMAINS A CHALLENGE'**



Top: 660cc Suzuki engine puts out 80bhp, but as the car it's in weighs just 490kg, that means a power-to-weight ratio of 166bhp/ton – hence, with a bit of rounding down, the name '160'



truly come alive. Here the Caterham grants you a great freedom. You can drive the steel wheels off the 160 and never leave your lane even on narrow roads; you can smash into the limiter in second and third and use all the grip available, and other road users – cyclists and walkers included – will just give you a cheery wave... It is simply brilliantly liberating.

But for how long? That's the key question, isn't it? Can 80bhp – even in just 490kg – really keep you challenged and entertained for more than one or two passes over a lovely mountain road? There's no simple answer to that question. I love the 160's delicacy and the way it demands constant attention, the sensation when you nail a sequence of corners without ever really feeling like you've had to turn the steering wheel, even the need to thrash it mercilessly to get the performance from it. I also like that it punishes you for mistakes and will roll into oversteer should you take too much speed into a corner whilst still hanging on the brakes. It's an education in chassis dynamics played out in slow motion, but it remains a challenge, and driving the 160 hard is not a simple process – not compared to a modern hatch with fat tyres and stability control.

Even so, there will be moments, maybe whole days, when you'd like a little more stability, a shade more grip and a heap more acceleration. In the wet the 160 can be quite a lairy little thing through quicker curves and a bit scrappy in slower corners due to the open differential. I suspect it would be terrific fun on a trackday but also a mite frustrating when it comes to trying to pass slower traffic. And yet it perfectly fulfils its brief: it feels quick enough at road speeds and never fails to entertain... plus it looks gorgeously retro, too. It doesn't have the sheer sense of occasion of the Morgan 3 Wheeler – what does? – but it's a much better car to drive on the road and has a far sweeter balance.

So the short answer is that 80bhp is enough. That this little car sucks you so completely into the process of extracting what performance it has that any notion that you might get bored with it seems crazy. It's a hoot and one that can be maximised on UK roads every day of the week. However, there is still one thorny issue that must be addressed. The 160 costs £17,995 fully built. Add paint to that and the price rises to £19,145. Then you'll want the 'On the road package', which includes IVA inspection, 12 months' tax, registration and delivery, and

bumps things up to £19,705. Oh, and there's the weather equipment (windscreen, doors, hood) at £1250, and if you're a soft southern shandy like me the heater (£300) is essential, too. So the optimum fully built, painted and useable Seven 160 is £21,255. This is not a cheap car by any stretch of the imagination and the lure of a barely used Superlight R300 sets your mind wandering.

That price is writ large in my mind as I go for one last blast over the mountain before the long slog back to Northamptonshire. It really is the perfect day for this car and the road is a match for the cloudless sky and vast scenery. It climbs quickly with smooth black tarmac and then gets more ragged and narrower as it starts to plateau. Many of the corners are blind or you get wrong-footed by gravel car parks on each side that can look like the path of the road from a distance. In many ways this is the 160's worst nightmare – a nasty surface to send the live axle skimming and blind turns that can leave you in the wrong gear at any moment. Then the road runs fast and almost straight for a time with just a couple of fast kinks and a long left-hander to really load up the chassis.

I'm well dialled-in to the way the 160 deals



‘TO SO CONSISTENTLY BE DICTATING THE CAR’S ATTITUDE WITH THE THROTTLE IS JUST FANTASTIC FUN AND INCREDIBLY SATISFYING’

with the road now and the slightly wandery sensation seems to distract much less. Instead I focus on executing my gearshifts and turn-in points correctly and maintaining speed, letting the rear slide but not so much that the wheels spin up messily. It feels sensational. Despite drum brakes the middle pedal has great feel and progression, understeer only takes hold if you massively misjudge the corner, and the way the 160 telegraphs its intentions through steering and seat is so transparent. After the lovely, close-stacked lower ratios, only the bigger jump from third to fourth gear disappoints, killing the intensity of the engine’s delivery and just occasionally betraying the car’s turbocharged make-up.

There’s body roll, some dive under braking

and plenty of squeal and slip, and I’m busy reading the road, trying to work out the right gear for each corner, but once again it’s the economy of steering input that really strikes. To so consistently be dictating the car’s attitude with the throttle is just fantastic fun and incredibly satisfying.

What price do you put on that level of engagement? That sense of achievement? These questions are the very crux of the issue and everyone will have their own take on it. In the end I just stopped worrying about what the 160 *can’t* provide but instead focused on its unique qualities – qualities that can be enjoyed on real roads every single day. A rare commodity indeed. Suddenly the price didn’t seem an issue at all.

Specification

CATERHAM SEVEN 160

Engine In-line 3-cyl, 660cc, turbocharged
CO2 TBC

Power 80bhp @ 7000rpm

Torque 79lb ft @ 3400rpm

Transmission Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

Front suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Live axle, coil springs, dampers

Brakes 245mm solid discs front, drums rear

Wheels 4.5 x 14in front and rear

Tyres 155/65 R14 front and rear

Weight (kerb) 490kg

Power-to-weight 166bhp/ton

0-60mph 6.5sec (claimed)

Top speed 100mph (claimed)

Basic price £17,995 (fully built)

On sale Spring 2014

evo rating: ★★★★★



Swiss movement, English heart



C70 DBR1 CHRONOMETER
HISTORIC 100 PIECE LIMITED EDITION

Made in Switzerland / Back-plate incorporates metal from historic 1959 Le Mans winning Aston Martin DBR1/2 / Worldwide limited edition of only 100 pieces / Thermo-compensated ETA 251.272 Chronometer / 1/10ths second split-timing / 316L marine-grade stainless steel case / Anti-reflective sapphire crystal / Signed provenance certification / Vintage leather strap with Bader deployment / Deluxe presentation case and Special Edition owner's handbook

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by DAN McCALLA





ABOVE

Since Colin McRae and Richard Burns left the World Rally Championship, British interest in the sport has collapsed. Now on the fringes of the top flight, young Welshman Elfyn Evans could be about to change all that

R

REMEMBER THE DAYS WHEN THE WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP rivalled Formula 1 for the affections of the British motorsport fan? When Colin McRae, Richard Burns and their ilk were familiar names even to the average bloke down at the Rose and Crown? Feels like centuries ago, doesn't it?

The decline of the WRC's popularity in this country in the decade since the 'Colin and Burnsie' era has been astonishing. The series has plummeted from healthy seven-figure audiences on Channel 4 to barely scraping five-figure ones on digital channels so far down your Sky Guide that you'd never noticed them before. Will the glory days ever return?

Elfyn Evans, the 24-year-old Welshman on the cusp of hitting the big time, could be a crucial part of the sport's recovery. Fresh from two sixth-place finishes in the WRC this season, Evans is in pole position to become the successful British driver he believes would bring rallying back into the national consciousness. 'Part of the reason for the lack of interest is that there hasn't been a British "idol" in the world championship for a very long time,' he says. 'Colin and Richard were the last two that we had. Richard's title win was 12 years ago now, and it's been a long time since we've had a British driver winning rallies and fighting for the championship. Of course, we always hope to get more of a British following anyway, but maybe it needs one person to have that success to rekindle the interest.'

'It would actually be great to see more than one person [from Britain] getting to the top over the next few years. We've got a really strong crop of talent in Britain at the minute, and there are some really good drivers coming through, so I hope we can get an opportunity to show everyone what us Brits can do.'

If a star rally driver being called Evans rings a distant bell, it's with good reason. Elfyn is the son of Gwyndaf Evans, former British champion and all-round rallying legend, who has guided his progeny through the lower ranks of the sport to the fringes of the WRC. Although Evans Sr perhaps can't offer the same level of expertise at world level as he could when Elfyn started rallying in 2007, the bond between them remains strong.

'It's not necessarily advice in the same way now, but he's still always there for an opinion if I need it,' the younger Evans explains. 'He's someone I really like to have around when I'm competing and when I'm preparing for rallies. OK, he doesn't compete as much now as he used to, but you have to make the most of having someone so close to you who has so much knowledge about the sport.'

His father giving him a solid grounding in motoring mechanicals has helped Elfyn's sporting progress enormously. Until earlier this year, he combined his rally duties with a day job as service manager at his father's Ford and Suzuki dealership

Previous page: Evans made his WRC debut in Sardinia.

Right: he won four WRC Academy rounds in a row in his front-wheel-drive Fiesta R2 en route to the 2012 title.

Far bottom right: co-driving with Giovanni Bernacchini in Sardinia took Evans out of his comfort zone. **Below left:** father Gwyndaf (left) has taught his son well

in Dolgellau. That, combined with Gwyndaf's exploits in Escorts and Sierras, has fostered a strong sense of 'brand loyalty' towards the Blue Oval in Elfyn. That's continued through his rallying, the vast majority of which has been conducted in Fiestas in varying levels of specification, although he says that's purely coincidental.

'We started with the Fiesta ST back in 2007, and we've progressed in Fiestas because that was the route that was most logical for me and my career,' he says. 'I had a season in a Subaru in 2011 as part of the Pirelli Star Driver programme [Elfyn won a free British championship campaign in an Impreza], and aside from that we were planning to get into the WRC Academy, which also happened to use the Fiesta R2 I also had. It's just happened that the series that have suited me best have all required Fiestas.'

'The family has been involved with Ford cars for decades, so there is a strong link to Fords there. That doesn't mean to say that I won't drive anything else, but there's definitely a strong personal link there. It's nice to be able to continue rallying them as well.'

That's all well and good, but the problem is that 'Fiesta' doesn't scream brutal, exciting rally car in the same way 'Stratos' or 'Quattro' does. One criticism frequently levelled at modern-day rallying is that watching four-wheel-drive hatchbacks haring across the countryside just isn't as exciting as the over-powered fire-breathing drama that came with the Group B cars of the 1980s. Evans is firm in his defence of modern rally machinery, however, insisting that the likes of Fiestas and Citroën DS3s still have the wow-factor and pose just as significant a challenge to drivers.

'For sure, the cars have changed, but what people have to realise is that technology has come on so much,' he says. 'If people actually get to the stages, they'll see that the speed the cars are carrying through the corners now is absolutely mind-blowing, even if the cars don't have 500-600bhp like the Group B cars did. It'd be good if people could experience it for themselves and appreciate what we have now rather than the fire-breathing monsters of old.'

'One of the biggest challenges driving the modern car is that it isn't difficult to drive up to a certain standard, but the capability of the car is so high that it's hard to commit to drive at a high speed and to extract all that capability. That level of commitment needed to be competitive is what makes it exciting.'

Evans' progression through Fords (and winning the WRC Academy title last year) helped him land a full-time job with M-Sport, Malcolm Wilson's Cumbrian outfit that builds and runs rallying Fiestas from entry-level all





'EVANS IS IN POLE POSITION TO BRING RALLYING BACK INTO THE NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS'



MALCOLM WILSON, as head of the M-Sport organisation that runs Elfyn Evans' Fiesta R5 and has built most of the cars he's ever rallied, has seen the Welshman's progress at close quarters. And if Evans is rated by a man of the stature of Wilson, British champion as a driver and world champion as a team boss, you know he must be good.

'Nowadays drivers need the whole package to be successful, and Elfyn has got huge dedication and commitment,' says Wilson. 'His experience in junior two-wheel-drive cars has helped, because that's made his style very neat and tidy, which is the quickest way to drive the modern 4wd cars.'

'My one regret is that we couldn't get him started at this level earlier. I've been really impressed with what I've seen this year. He put in a very sensible drive in Sardinia in difficult circumstances, with a new co-driver and so on, and delivered a great result. On top of that his pace in Finland and Germany was very impressive, and ahead of our expectations for him.'

Wilson has long dreamt of guiding a British driver to WRC glory and hopes that, if he can hold on to him for next year, Evans could be that driver: 'I'd like to think we can find a way to keep him in a Fiesta. Our first priority is to make sure we can keep the team running, which hasn't been easy since the decision from Ford [to pull its official WRC backing] last year.'

the way up to World Rally Cars. As well as testing cars and working on them at the factory, Evans also drives an M-Sport Fiesta R5 (as tested in evo 186) in the WRC2 series – effectively the GP2 of rallying.

Although he's been hit with some unreliability in his WRC2 campaign, his role at M-Sport made him the ideal candidate to step into the breach when the full WRC team needed a last-minute stand-in. When Nasser Al-Attayah was tied up with business commitments in his native Qatar in June, Evans was drafted in to take his place on Rally Italy alongside Al-Attayah's regular co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini. Despite it being his full WRC debut on one of the series' roughest gravel events, Evans finished an admirable sixth, earning himself huge plaudits and marking himself out as a rising star to watch.

'I'd met Giovanni previously but we'd never even sat in a car together until the day before the race started,' Evans recalls. 'Normally you work with your co-driver for days and days preparing before you get to a rally, so imagine sitting with someone new, whose first language isn't English, when you're making your World Rally Car debut on an event as tough as Sardinia. It really doesn't fill you with confidence! It was an unforgettable experience, though. Giovanni is a world-class co-driver and he was a huge help to me all the way through the event.'

The good news for British fans is that Evans' heroics in Sardinia (and Germany, where he took another sixth overall driving the R5) has put him in the frame when it comes to works drives in 2014. With returning marque Hyundai increasing the number of manufacturer teams to three (alongside Citroën and Volkswagen, without taking the Qatar-backed M-Sport team into consideration), a shake-up is expected in the driver market. Evans, who is not contracted to anyone for 2014 as yet, is keeping his options open.

'We're not sure where we're going for next year at the minute, and we're still in the early stages of discussions, but I certainly hope I've done enough to earn a place in the team for next year,' he says. 'Whether we'd have to bring some funding to make a deal, I don't know at the minute. The biggest thing is to get experience of all the WRC events, and in a competitive car. If we could learn all the rallies and get the experience ready for a full assault in 2015, that would be ideal.'

If Evans can follow through on that plan and win a rally in 2015, the recovery of the WRC in Britain will have well and truly begun. Here's hoping. ❧

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20 **evo** 13

CAR OF THE YEAR

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It's been an incredible year for performance cars. After much deliberation, eleven were deemed worthy of a shot at the 2013 eCoty title, with two rounds – one in the UK, one in France – necessary to find a winner. Place your bets...

by HENRY CATCHPOLE | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

F

FORGET ALL THAT KEATS NONSENSE ABOUT MISTS AND mellow fruitfulness, autumn surely only means one thing to a right-headed person: **evo** Car of the Year. When we sat down on a selection of hard chairs in a hot meeting room back in the summer and started compiling the list for 2013, it was immediately obvious that this was going to be an exceedingly good batch. Richard Meaden has been involved in (nearly) all of the previous 15 eCoty tests and can't remember there ever being a more promising line-up (he can't remember where the keys to his 964 are, either, but that's a different matter).

This year we've got a first round in the UK, where a shortlist of seven cars will be whittled down to four. This quartet will then board a Eurotunnel carriage and head to France to meet a big-hitting, had-to-be-there trio coming from their home markets in Italy (Ferrari F12) and Germany (Mercedes SLS AMG Black and Porsche 911 GT3). The intriguing Alfa Romeo 4C also gets a bye to the second round because it's so fresh out of the oven it will be coming straight from the launch in Italy. This final eight will then spend three days on and around the glorious Route Napoleon being rigorously assessed for 'the thrill of driving' in order to find the winner.

If you're only going to read one test this year, then it should probably be the Veyron versus Huayra one we did back in the spring (**evo** 185). But if you missed that, then pour yourself a drink, find a comfortable chair and immerse yourself in what follows over the next 38 pages. The weather's probably all misty outside anyway.



Jaguar F-type V8 S

by NICK TROTT

YOU'VE PROBABLY heard a lot about the Jaguar F-type this year. Perhaps seen an ad campaign or two, or read a road test or three? If you haven't been exposed to the extraordinary marketing hype that surrounded its launch, then tell me: how is the weather on the moon?

Suffice to say, the *evo* team was excited when, in early April, a pair of F-types arrived at the office. One was a V6 S with 375bhp, the other a V8 S with 488bhp. Having savoured the performance of a range of increasingly powerful Jaguar sports and saloon cars, if not the driving involvement, we hoped the F-type would hit us with the type of dynamic edge that Porsche has sharpened over the years. The

Specification

Engine V8, 5000cc, supercharged
Power 488bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 461lb ft @ 2500-5500rpm
Weight (kerb) 1665kg
Power-to-weight 298bhp/ton
0-62mph 4.3sec (claimed)
Top speed 186mph (claimed)
Basic price £79,985

F-type simply could not claim to be a sports car if it rode like a tractor, sounded like a washing machine and responded like an octogenarian goalkeeper. But the first impressions were good. Very, very good.

The F-type does an excellent job of delivering its manifesto the moment you climb in. The joystick gearlever falls to hand, the dashboard has a colour, finish and details that wouldn't look out of place in Lockheed Martin's latest

warplane, and the engine (either V6 or V8) starts with a scream and a crackle that's part-Neolithic wolverine, part-porn actress. There's even a grab-handle for the passenger.

The seduction continues on the road. The engine note extends its reach and range, the responses are good, the steering sharp and the performance more than adequate. In our first test, the V6 S was defeated by the Porsche 911, but the manic V8 S beat the Aston Martin V8 Vantage. The V8 S was our overall choice: a greater entertainer than the V6 and with a wild side missing from most modern Jaguars. 'The Jaguar disrespectfully exposes the Aston's age with sharper dynamics, more focused appeal, and a chassis that allows the driver to be more expressive,' said, erm, me in the conclusion to the twin test (*evo* 183).

But does this sparkle and genuine driver appeal allow the V8 S to reach the final of eCoty 2013? You'd think so, wouldn't you? Read on...





Audi R8 V10 Plus

by RICHARD MEADEN

T

THE R8 MADE ITS first eCoty appearance back in 2007. Since then it has continued to evolve and improve with every passing year, each small step adding

further lustre to an impeccably polished machine. On the face of it, the V10 Plus was yet another subtle incremental step, but from the moment we drove it on the launch we knew it was something very special.

Less weight, more power and firmer fixed-rate passive dampers created a tighter dynamic focus for an added pinch of aggression. Retention of a six-speed manual gearbox showed Audi understands the needs of the purist, while adoption of a new double-clutch S-tronic transmission finally gave the R8 a worthy paddle-shift 'box.

Since that first drive, we've only become more smitten by the ultimate R8. It may

Specification

Engine V10, 5204cc
Power 542bhp @ 8000rpm
Torque 398lb ft @ 6500rpm
Weight (kerb) 1570kg
Power-to-weight 351bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.5sec (claimed, S-tronic)
Top speed 197sec (claimed, S-tronic)
Basic price £128,710

sound strange – especially for an Audi – but there's a real mellowness and warmth about this 550bhp V10-engined machine. Where so many supercars concentrate on setting new benchmarks for acceleration and lap times, the R8 provides a welcome antidote to the increasingly frenzied willy-waving practised by brands that should know better.

The R8 has always been refreshingly understated, but in the V10 Plus this subtlety

belies an assured confidence that makes it a unique, desirable car. It's truly accomplished in every respect: a fully formed, perfectly rounded car that's effortless to use, yet one that can give you moments of true inspiration when you extend it. Stable and communicative, beautifully measured, stonkingly quick, yet cool and calm for maximum confidence, it's a cerebral, grown-up take on the supercar.

So high is our regard for the V10 Plus that we confidently pitched it against the McLaren 12C and Ferrari 458 for a group test (*evo* 183). We knew it couldn't compete for sheer bravado, but we wanted to look beyond the showmanship, instead exploring their relative abilities as real-world supercars. That the R8 could match the McLaren and Ferrari's point-to-point pace on challenging moorland roads, and was by far the most accomplished car to live with despite costing barely half the money, secured its place here in the eCoty eliminator round.



Ford Fiesta ST Mountune

by MIKE DUFF

T

THE FIESTA ST WAS one of 2013's freshest breaths of air. Back in the spring we knew that it was one of three new junior hot hatches that were set

to reach the market almost simultaneously. The early hype focused on the other two, the Renaultsport Clio 200 Turbo and to a lesser extent the Peugeot 208 GTI, and on paper the ST looked set to be an also-ran: down on power at 179bhp and (we thought) likely to stick to its predecessor's combination of a decent drive let down by lukewarm performance.

We were wrong. Both the 208 and Clio turned out to be damp-squib disappointments, the feel-free Renault particularly so with its dull-witted double-clutch gearbox. The Fiesta was

Specification

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1596cc, turbocharged
Power 212bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 236lb ft @ 2750-3500rpm
Weight (kerb) 1088kg
Power-to-weight 198bhp/ton
0-62mph 6.6sec (claimed)
Top speed 140mph (claimed)
Basic price £17,594

the revelation: pure, double-distilled essence of hot hatch. We fell in love with it from our very first encounter, when David Vivian returned from an early drive at Ford's Lommel test track with his adjectives stretched. And once we'd got it onto British roads, it was clear the ST was something properly special – grippy, agile and with a tireless enthusiasm for being worked hard. The ST's turbocharged 1.6-litre engine might be down on power, but its revvy nature

and rorty soundtrack give the car a keenness that makes its rivals feel characterless.

The Fiesta's group-test encounter with Clio, 208 and a luckless Nismo Juke (evo 184) turned into a bloodbath. Not only did the ST rout the competition on road, it also put in the quickest lap on track at the Bedford Autodrome, besting the more powerful cars through its lightweight construction and chassis agility. And when Ford announced the Mountune pack shortly afterwards, the factory-approved tuning kit boosting power by 33bhp for just £599, the Fiesta's status as a blue-collar performance hero was secured. Apologies for the horrendous cliché, but – in terms of new-car purchases – you can't go faster for the money.

But can it stand a chance in eCoty? We know from experience that even the most talented hot hatches can struggle to make their presence felt when surrounded by mega-powerful rivals. Is the Fiesta good enough?





Mini John Cooper Works GP

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

I **IT'S NO SECRET** that we're massive fans of hardcore hot hatches here at *evo*. So when the Mini John Cooper Works GP was officially confirmed, we were more than a little excited. Then we delved into the specification a little deeper and rejoiced in the detail.

Even a standard Cooper S is a fast and seriously feisty little car, but the GP promised something altogether more serious. Apart from the stickers and the aero kit (which actually reduces drag by six per cent), it benefitted from a radical programme of upgrades: new adjustable-ride-height coilover suspension (with inverted dampers at the front) providing increased camber and reduced front toe-in for greater agility, an all-new braking system featuring six-piston calipers and 330mm front discs, GP-specific and super-sticky

Specification

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo
Power 215bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 206lb ft @ 2000-5100rpm
Weight (kerb) 1140kg
Power-to-weight 192bhp/ton
0-62mph 6.3sec (claimed)
Top speed 150mph (claimed)
Basic price £28,790

trackday tyres, and reconfigured stability control functions including a more aggressive Electronic Differential Lock Control. Oh, and no rear seats. Far from a simple aesthetic makeover, the Works GP had all the makings of a new hero hot hatch.

Then we drove it. For the first few miles, its manic, furious, sometimes unruly character seemed too much for most roads. It's a stiff, hyper-agile car and with plenty of torque-

steer and even more lift-off oversteer, the GP is something of a shock when you first experience it. However, with time you start to revel in the sheer enthusiasm and focus of the car and admire Mini for allowing something so uncompromising to make it to the showroom.

Even against competition as exceptional as the Ford Focus RS500, Audi A1 quattro and Mégane R26.R (*evo* 181), the GP shone fiercely, and on track it outperformed even the completely stripped-out Renault. After two days in its company we'd forgotten that its 215bhp 1.6-litre turbocharged engine produced just 7bhp more than the standard JCW for a £5000 premium. Instead we just wanted to celebrate the fact that it existed at all and to drive it until the tank ran dry.

So put any cynicism you might have to one side and for 'Works GP' read 'Giant Killer'. Surely it deserves its shot at the big boys on the greatest roads on Earth?



Aston Martin V12 Vantage S

by MIKE DUFF

Y

YOU MIGHT WELL be wondering what the Vantage is doing here. This is a car that, in its basic form, is close to its tenth birthday, and is here in a test reserved

for 2013's ultimates. However wonderful the venerable Aston might be, surely it doesn't stand a chance in this company?

Yet there's no element of sympathy or pity in the Vantage's inclusion here; rather an acknowledgement that, on the right day and on the right road, this remains one of the most entertaining cars on the planet. Because although its basic design might be nearing the end of its first decade, the V12 S stands as glorious proof that Aston's evolutionary approach really does let the company punch

Specification

Engine V12, 5935cc
Power 565bhp @ 6750rpm
Torque 457lb ft @ 5750rpm
Weight (kerb) 1665kg (estimated)
Power-to-weight 345bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.9sec (claimed)
Top speed 205mph (claimed)
Basic price £138,000

well above the weight its modest development budgets should earn it.

And don't forget that the standard V12 Vantage has always been pretty much our favourite contemporary Aston: lighter and more lithe than the Vanquish while sharing the same sublime engine. The fact the V12 came only with a manual gearbox merely heightened its appeal.

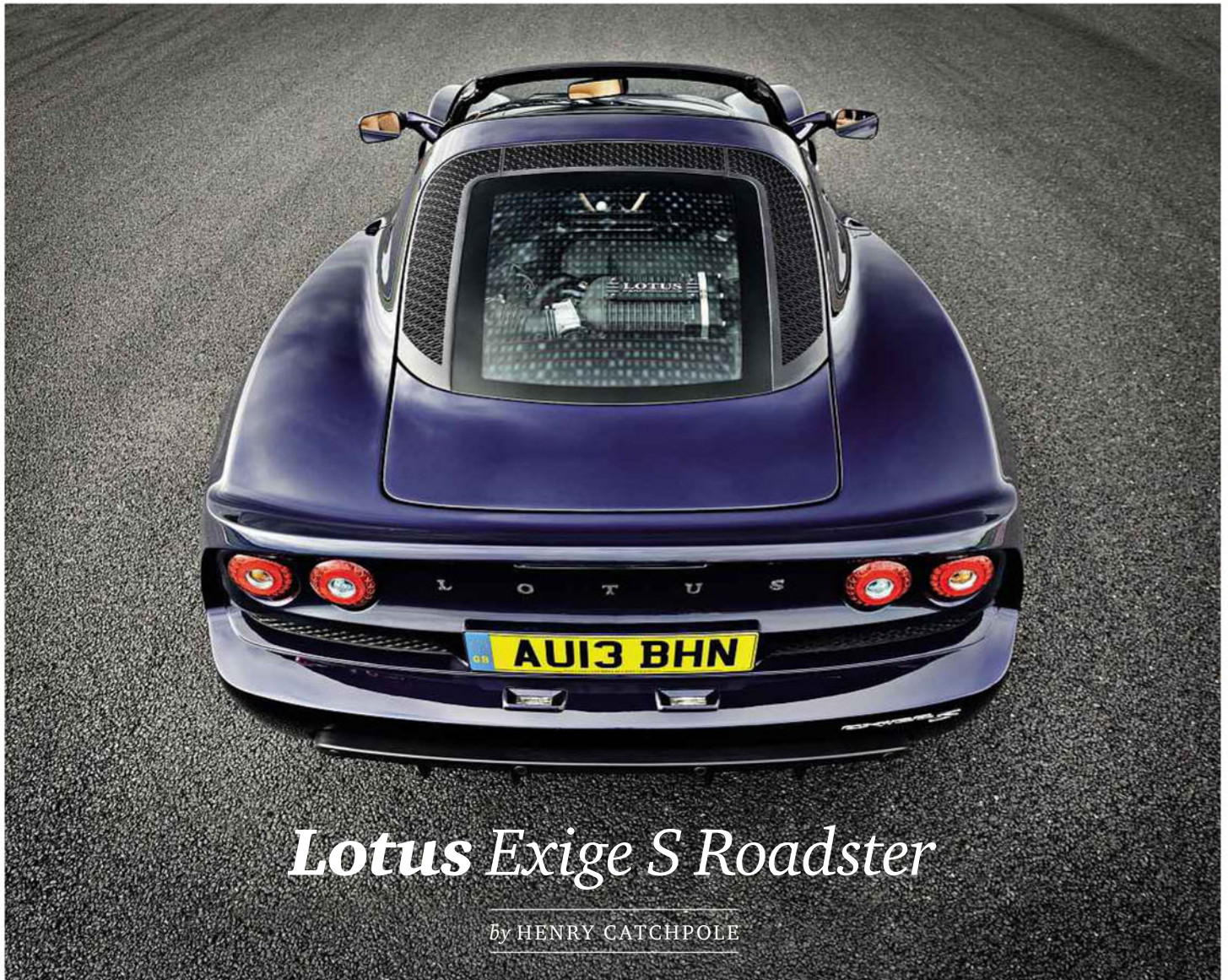
Which is where the new 'S' is different, of

course: more power, a sharper dynamic focus when you really up the pace, and the sole transmission option of Aston's single-clutch 'Speedtronic' automated shifter, now re-engineered to deal with the V12's output. This 'box can't come close to matching the speed or refinement of rival twin-clutch systems, but the rest of the car really is so good that, after a few minutes of acclimatisation, you learn to ignore the *onethousand-twothousand* pause between asking for a gear via the steering paddles and feeling it arrive.

It's the combination of pace and grace that makes the Aston feel so special: a devastating full-attack mode (accompanied by what remains one of the best soundtracks in the business) combined with ultra-comfortable cruising. It's old, but it's definitely still game.

And can you think of another car that manages to still look this good, and this fresh, after nearly a decade of exposure?





Lotus Exige S Roadster

by HENRY CATCHPOLE

A

AS I'M SURE YOU remember, last year the Exige S became the first-ever joint eCoty champion along with the Pagani Huayra. And while the intervening

12 months haven't been the rosiest for Lotus, the chaps in Norfolk have managed to release a roadster version of the Exige.

'But a roadster version of the Exige is surely an Elise?' I hear you ponder. And how right you are, but let's not get mixed up in naming semantics here. All that matters is that the wide body looks fantastic (albeit slightly less aggressive than the coupe, as it's been denuded of some aero), the supercharged V6 still puts out a stonking 345bhp and 295lb ft, and everyone apart from Jethro likes a car without a roof.

Back in June (*evo* 186), the six-cylinder roadster took on an all-star cast in Wales. The basic Jaguar F-type V6 didn't even get a look in.

Specification

Engine V6, 3456cc, supercharged
Power 345bhp @ 7000rpm
Torque 295lb ft @ 4500rpm
Weight (kerb) 1166kg
Power-to-weight 301bhp/ton
0-62mph 4.0sec (claimed)
Top speed 145mph (limited)
Basic price £52,900

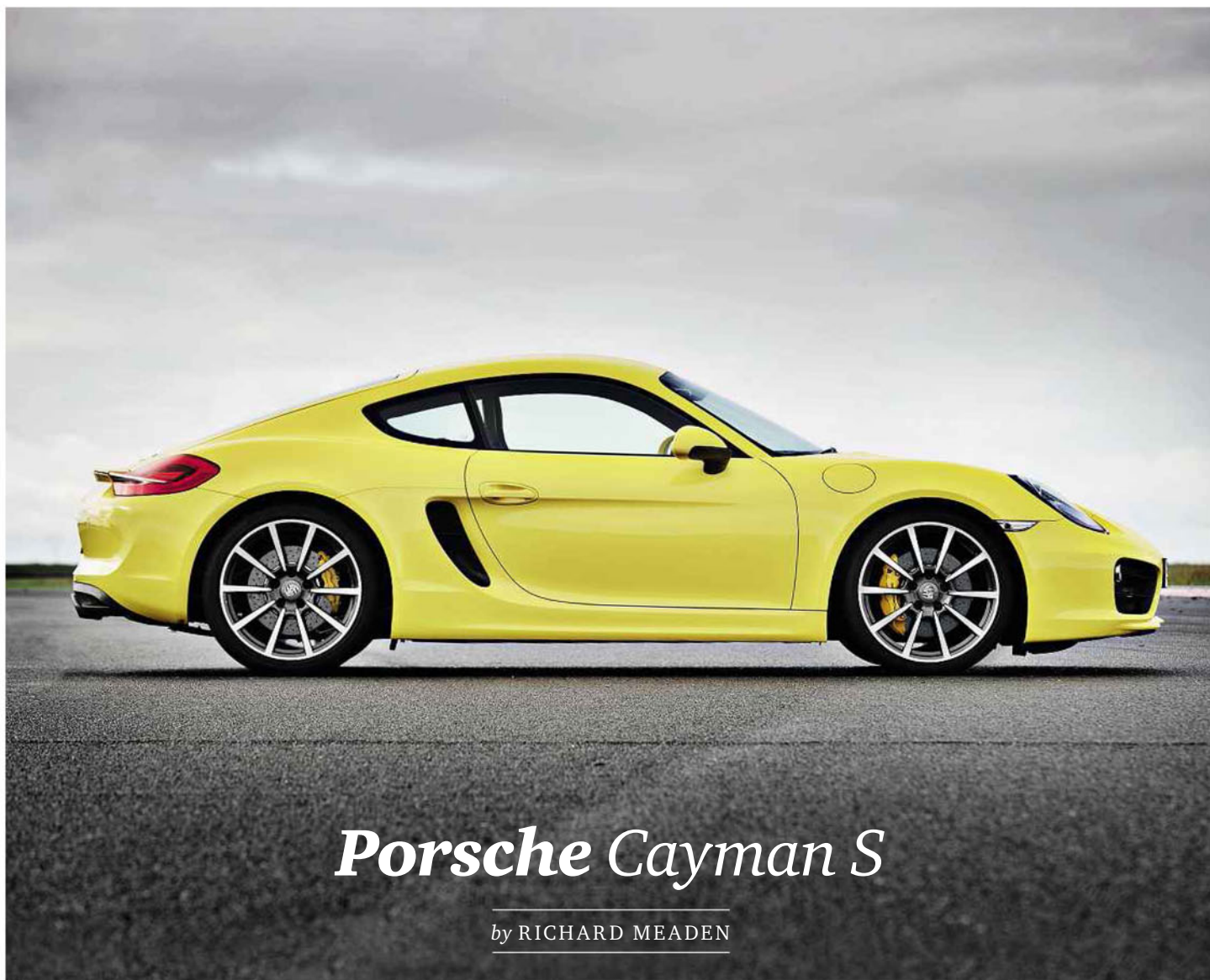
Neither did the SLK 55. David Vivian eventually chose the Porsche Boxster as the better all-round ownership proposition for £50,000, but he also said that in pure driving terms 'the Exige gets what really matters so right that it delivers more sublime moments than the other three cars put together.' High praise indeed.

On one of my favourite test routes, the Exige S Roadster feels stunningly quick, to the point where the claimed 0-62mph time

of 4.0sec seems almost conservative. It might not have the most charismatic V6, but it has an addictively rich seam of punchy torque thanks to that supercharger. The dampers have been wound back a smidge and the geometry has been slightly tweaked for the Roadster, but it still has a ride and steering that leave you in no doubt about the road surface you're travelling over (I actually take off at a point where I don't ever remember leaving the ground before, at which point I admittedly have no idea of the road surface underneath me).

So despite the slight softening of its looks and suspension, and despite the addition in this particular car of a cup holder (I mean, really!), the Exige S in roadster form remains a surprisingly focused, some might even say hardcore proposition, but we love it.

A topless version of a past champion – surely that's a shoo-in to go through to the final shootout...?



Porsche Cayman S

by RICHARD MEADEN

F

FOR SO LONG THE 911's poor relation, Porsche pulled out all the stops with the new-generation Cayman. The result is a car with an intoxicating

blend of silken powertrain, feelsome steering, breathtaking poise and keen pricing.

So the Cayman S is a compelling car in many ways, not least because it signals a shift in Porsche's attitude towards its sub-911 coupe. With the 911 pushed unashamedly upmarket, the Cayman has been allowed to mature into a more credible and desirable model in its own right. Confidently emerging from the 911's shadow as a brilliant all-round package that needs no excuses, it actually eclipses the 991 Carreras for feel, cohesion and enjoyment.

Specification

Engine Flat-six, 3436cc
Power 321bhp @ 7400rpm
Torque 273lb ft @ 4500-5800rpm
Weight (kerb) 1320kg
Power-to-weight 247bhp/ton
0-62mph 5.0sec (claimed)
Top speed 176mph (claimed)
Basic price £48,783

Where the 991 Carrera and Carrera S are frustratingly numb and aloof, the Cayman S delivers a vibrant, engaging driving experience. It's beautifully polished in everything it does, feeling as at home in everyday driving as it does rollicking along your favourite road. You can't help but fall for its fabulous flat-six engine, especially when it exhales through the optional sports exhaust. Spinning sweetly to 8000rpm with a glorious howl, it's a superb motor with a

soundtrack to match. Likewise the chassis is a mid-engined masterpiece. Taut and controlled but with all-important pliancy, it manages to revel in smooth tarmac yet shrugs off lumpy B-roads. The way it flows through corners is magical, the manner in which it nurtures novices and entertains experts is genius.

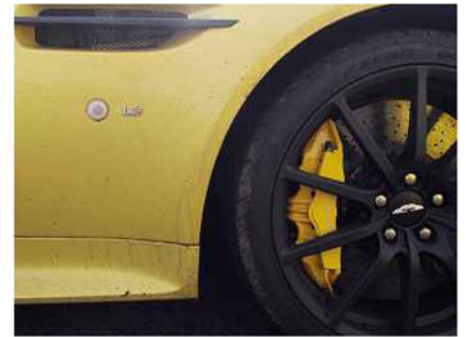
Fitted with the optional PDK transmission it is surely the ultimate effortless daily driver, but for purity and complete sensory immersion you can't beat the exceptional six-speed manual, which has one of the slickest shifts you'll ever experience. There's even an automatic throttle-blip function, which makes everyone a heel-and-toe hero, though this being a Porsche you're free to do the fancy footwork when you disable the driver aids.

It's not as extreme as some other eCoty contenders, but its depth of ability, infectious character and shining quality books the Cayman S a place in this first round.





Left: all the driving for eCoty took place on the road, but we went to a wet Bedford Autodrome to shoot our first-round contenders. **Far left:** without a spare wheel, the F-type's boot space is almost acceptable. **Below:** Aston's 398mm front discs dwarf the 350mm items on the Cayman (top left)



Above: Exige cupholder clearly designed to hold more lightweight coffees. **Above right:** designer Will Beaumont uses a spare wiper to dry septet for photography. **Right:** chair gives Smith extra height for photography



CAR OF THE YEAR

The selection

by NICK TROTT

W

WE'VE BEEN DRIVING the contenders all week: slithering our way around local roads, driving them back-to-back, taking notes, having disagreements. But

now's the time to trim seven down to four.

eCoty is not about finding the best: it's about finding the best of the best. Each of the cars you've just read about is among the finest performance cars of the year, but only four can graduate. It's times like this when we remind ourselves of The Thrill of Driving, our central tenet. After a week's testing, it's all about picking the cars that are capable of taking on – and possibly beating – the fabulous foursome that await in southern France.

The first to find itself booked on the 8.50am

Eurotunnel is the Mini GP. It radiates The Thrill of Driving to an extent where we're all sensing a major shock come final judging. This punchy little Brit-built hooligan has made it absolutely clear that when it comes to providing outright driving joy, it has few rivals. Ferrari, Porsche, Mercedes and Alfa should be worried.

Sadly, it isn't all rosy for the Brits. The Lotus Exige S Roadster is one of the best cars of the year, but the edge of the hard-top version has been softened slightly and its rivals prove just too good. And the F-type V8 S? A sublime first effort, but there's a sense it needs another couple of years of evolution before it can graduate to the final of an eCoty. Also, we remind ourselves that we're choosing cars that have a shot at winning overall, and hand-on-heart, none of us feel that way about the F-type.

Conversely, we're in no doubt that the Audi R8 V10 Plus and the Porsche Cayman S can win the Big One. Both yield visceral driving experiences on any road and in any weather and both are evolved to perfection. Both qualify.

Now things get tough. Only one ticket to France is left... and the Aston just nabs it over the Fiesta. That Ford's firecracker can be spoken about in equal terms with Aston Martin's best road car is a testament to the Fiesta's brilliance – be in no doubt that the Fiesta Mountune is an exceptional car. However, we feel that the V12 Vantage S – having raised its game and absorbed a little of the One-77's manic energy – stands a better chance of winning.

And so with that, the Mini, Cayman, Audi and Aston form an unlikely convoy to one of the greatest driving roads in Europe.



*'EACH OF THESE SEVEN CARS
ARE AMONG THE FINEST OF
THE YEAR, BUT ONLY FOUR
CAN GRADUATE'*



20



13

CAR OF THE YEAR



The Gathering

by HENRY GATCHPOLE

PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH





*From supercar superstars to giant-slaying hot hatches, each of these eight finalists can stake a credible claim to being crowned **evo's** top car of 2013. A thorough examination on and around Route Napoleon in France will determine which is deserving of the accolade*

T

THE YOWLING AND

howling exhaust pipes disappear up the road, the distinctive sounds fading... fading... until at last they're subsumed into the mundane

cacophony of Digne-les-Bains going about its business on a Tuesday morning. Suddenly I feel quite lonely. As I glance around the car park of the Hotel Campanile (think French Travelodge, then ratchet back the luxury levels a bit), the only things left are a diesel Peugeot 307 and a purple Fiat Panda (last-gen). Given the choice I'd go for the Panda, but I don't have the keys, so I go back to my room to wait.

The GT3 was meant to emerge from the back of a truck here at 8am, but by 9.30am it still wasn't here, so the others have set off without me. A couple of phone calls later and it seems the lorry driver ran out of hours last night somewhere near Lyon and has only just got going again. So I'm twiddling my thumbs, staring out of the window at an industrial estate and jumping up every time I see a lorry big enough to conceal a wide-bodied 991.

After supper last night, I had a wander around all the other cars before I toddled off to sleep. The colours were muted in the weak glow of the streetlights and the engines lay silent, but it was like looking at the presents under the tree on Christmas Eve, only with a much greater level of anticipation and no tree. Having travelled out with the Aston, Audi, Cayman and Mini, their shapes were familiar, but they'd been joined by the monstrous Ferrari F12, which Mike Duff had picked up from Maranello, the huge Mercedes SLS AMG Black Series that Jethro Bovingdon drove down from Stuttgart and the beautiful little Alfa 4C, fresh from its international press launch. Today it feels like all the other children have unwrapped their toys and are playing with them outside, while I've got to wait patiently for uncle Hildebrand to turn up. The hours pass like days...

Then at around 2pm, just as I'm nodding off, it's here: a Guards Red body riding on the most insanely beautiful wheels is being backed off the transporter. Papers are signed and before I know it I'm behind the Alcantara wheel and my left leg is stupidly but instinctively stamping at



Above: Aston chases a pair of Italian exotics – the 4C and the F12. **Right:** roads near the Route Napoleon offer stunning backdrops for eCoty shootout

fresh air, looking for a third pedal. Twist the key set in its traditional position on the dash near the door and the 468bhp flat-six engine starts with a more muted version of the familiar GT3 clatter. Select 'D' and begin manoeuvring out of the car park, however, and the feeling of the tight diff on full lock and the slight chuntering grumpiness of the drivetrain at low speeds signals that this is a car with only a thin layer of civility cloaking its race car internals.

A couple of wrong turns and a couple of bewildered laps of roundabouts later, the oil is warm just as I finally find my way onto the Route Napoleon, heading south. It's at least half an hour to where the others are based and the famous N85 is dry, so progress is swift through the first few miles of fast, sweeping turns. Despite the numbers on the speedo, the GT3 only feels like it's cruising to the grid on a warm-up lap, such is the grip available from this 991 chassis. It's catching traffic and exerting almost disconcerting G-forces on my body without even trying, which is a bit scary, yet even though I'm barely scratching the surface of its talents, it still feels poised and alert. The

steering is weighty but calm, transmitting all the lateral-grip loadings through your palms to your forearms. The throttle is instantly responsive. The fixed-back buckets lock you into the chassis' tautness. It all feels supremely honed, if a little more aloof than GT3s of old.

There's a group of half a dozen motorcycles ahead, leapfrogging the traffic. They're only BMW tourers but a couple of them are making decent progress and clearly aren't expecting company. Just after the town of Barrême you thump over a railway line and there are then several extremely long straights. As the tracks pass underneath, I pull out left and give it everything in third gear. Instantly I know I should have gone for second and then, seemingly at the same moment I have that thought, we are in second. In the same amount of time it took for my brain to register the finger-pull of the left-hand paddle, the revs have risen with a bang and the GT3 is firing forward even faster. The downshift was so quick that I thought it must have been an ECU-led kick-down rather than a response to a request from me. But no, the lever is clearly clicked across





Above: Audi R8 Plus is in a class of its own when it comes to wet handling. **Right:** controversial new 911 GT3 faces stiff competition; test Cayman runs optional carbon-ceramic discs





and locked in manual mode. Extraordinary.

The bikes are long gone by this point. One briefly kept up but understandably chickened out as the Porsche swept imperiously through the first bend at well over 220kph. Minutes later, just as the hairpins arrive, the rain comes, and by the time I've splashed my way along another 20km to the lay-by where the others are waiting, there's a full-on thunderstorm to herald my arrival. Even though the GT3 has now turned up, it transpires that we're still one car down: the Ferrari got a puncture earlier from a stray sharp rock (of which there can be many, thanks to the big cliffs at the sides of the roads). So with the F12 on its way to the farrier in Cannes and the weather not playing ball, we decide to head to the nearby town of Castellane and seek out coffee and hot chocolate.

The Audi's seems like a good seat to head for and I get in just as the SLS Black starts up in front, neatly disguising both a clap of thunder and, more impressively, one of Dickie Meaden's

understeer than ones we've tried previously, but nonetheless it is wonderful the way you can head hard into a perilously wet downhill bend. Windscreen wipers flashing back and forth, and with the steering and damping giving you the confidence to lean on the front end all the way through the corner, it's secure where an Aston skitters and planted where an SLS merely tiptoes gingerly over the sodden surface.

Rather than clogging up the small town centre with lots of cars, we leave some of them outside a supermarket just up the road. The thought of a hot chocolate is mighty tempting as I watch a miniature waterfall cascade off the nearest endplate of the GT3's wing, but as I feel like I'm playing catch-up, I tell the others to go on ahead. A quick run up the hill in the Cayman seems in order.

Apart from mid-engined layouts, the similarities between Cayman and Audi R8 might not be immediately obvious from the outside, but there is definitely something of the

'THE AUDI'S V10 IS FEROCIOUS, INTOXICATING AND FEELS EVERY BIT OF ITS 542BHP'

gastric rumblings. The Audi feels instantly different to the 911. This R8 might have a Plus after its name, but gone is the simmering race car angst of the Porsche, replaced by an almost creamy sense of polish. You sit much lower, but the ease with which you can simply drive away and seamlessly slice down a road lulls you into a more relaxed frame of mind. Speed is increased as smoothly as turning up the perfectly damped volume control on a high-end stereo.

The R8's double-clutch gearbox is every bit as quick in its upshifts as the GT3's, the change in sound just as bewilderingly instantaneous. However, it takes fractionally less effort in the Audi because the paddles are smaller items with the sort of travel that makes a light-switch feel long-winded. The V10 also seems to deliver in a way that's less stressed. It's ferocious, intoxicating and feels every bit of its 542bhp, but even at over 8000rpm, it never feels like the rubber band has been stretched to the point of snapping as it does with some of the others. Whether these are good traits or not is really personal preference, but it certainly creates a less highly-strung attitude in the R8. A long road race would surely be its forte.

What's also instantly obvious is how happy the R8 is in the wet. Jethro had already mentioned to me that this car has a little more

same silky depth of talent in both cars. As Mike Duff comments rather neatly: 'They're both spherical in their talents, no particular aspect stretched to dominate the rest'. One thing that does stand out in this company, however, is the Cayman's manual gearbox. It's perfect. The stubby lever itself is positioned quite high and close to the wheel, and the short, precise throw across the H-pattern is smooth and quick yet has enough movement and weight under your palm to feel engaging. But it's not just the lever. The springing in the clutch pedal allows you to be perfectly precise as you bring it through the biting point, and the throttle response is such that the 321bhp engine's revs always climb as quickly as you can flash your hand through a downshift. Throw in the spiky yowls of the blips and it makes you feel like a heel-and-toe hero. And I'm not even out of the town yet.

Heading back up the road through the same medium-speed corners that the Audi demolished, the Cayman feels twitchy by comparison. You can balance it on the edge, but only really by experience, because in the wet there's a certain amount of guesswork as to exactly when the limit will arrive. As with its big brother, the 911, the electric steering is the problem, because while the lovely rate and precision remain intact, the reduction in grip in





the wet means feedback from the road surface is markedly reduced. To be fair to the Cayman, though, everything but the Audi would struggle in these conditions: the rain is atrocious and the road is so glassy that I wouldn't be surprised if this was the first time in months that it had seen any precipitation. Time for a *chocolat chaud*.

The others are sitting outside around a couple of tables under a large canopy.

'Alreet?' says our resident Mackem, Stephen Dobie, as I wander over.

'No, I was in the Cayman, not the Audi,' I reply, leaving us both slightly perplexed.

Meanwhile, Dickie has been grappling with the SLS: 'It is wild, but I've been spending a lot of time with it today and it's also beautifully nuanced.' Intriguing. David Vivian is struggling with its appearance, though: 'Every time I look at it, I just picture Vin Diesel getting out of it.'

Up the other end of the table I can hear Mike and Nick Trott discussing the Ferrari. 'Maranello must be incredibly pleased with that engine,' says Trott, 'but it's too much in the wet.' Duff replies: 'On the way here from Italy

yesterday, I used full throttle twice. And both times it was in a dry tunnel.'

With the heavy pitter-patter of rain not subsiding and the occasional fork of lightning seemingly the only brightness in an otherwise leaden sky, we decide to call it a day and head the 40km back to Digne.

'What do you want for the drive back?' asks Jethro.

'Well,' I reply, 'I really ought to try the Mini...'

'Pussy!'

'What are you going to take?'

'That tricky, four-wheel-drive R8...!'

Jethro's right, of course. Getting into a small hot hatch should be a comforting thing on a day like this. But a hot hatch wearing semi-slicks and with a personality so manic it arguably needs a shot of Valium in every tank of unleaded doesn't really feel like the warm, fuzzy option. There's just something about the Mini that makes you want to drive absolutely flat-out and I bundle out onto the road at the head of the queue with Duff, Meaden and Bovingdon behind me in the GT3, SLS and R8 respectively. The first section

twists back and forth through hairpins where you'd expect the Mini to drop the big hitters, but with so much water on the roads it's easy to fizzle the front tyres if they aren't in a straight line out of the corners, so the advantage is small.

As the road opens out down the same long straights where the GT3 dispatched the bikes earlier, I'm expecting to get passed by the trio behind. But no. The GP's engine may not have a character to compare to the others (4C excepted) but boy is it effective, and 215bhp feels like a considerable underestimation. Through the quick, linking corners, the chassis feels edgy, with such a responsive set-up that you feel it could spin like a top in its own short length if you turned in too hard. By the time we reach Digne, I'm sure I wouldn't be more wired if I was in any of the three cars behind, and judging by the yo-yoing distance of their headlights in the mirror I don't think I'd have been travelling any faster either.

Over supper, there is all sorts of talk about monster rooster tails and wheelspin at three-figure speeds. But that's just videographer Sam

CAR OF THE YEAR

Specifications



PORSCHE 911 GT3

Engine Flat-six, 3799cc
Power 468bhp @ 8250rpm
Torque 324lb ft @ 6250rpm
Weight (kerb) 1430kg
Power-to-weight 332bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.5sec (claimed)
Top speed 196mph (claimed)
Basic price £100,540



FERRARI F12 BERLINETTA

Engine V12, 6262cc
Power 730bhp @ 8250rpm
Torque 509lb ft @ 6000rpm
Weight (kerb) 1630kg
Power-to-weight 455bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.1sec (claimed)
Top speed 211mph+ (claimed)
Basic price £239,352



MERCEDES-BENZ SLS AMG BLACK

Engine V8, 6208cc
Power 622bhp @ 7400rpm
Torque 468lb ft @ 5500rpm
Weight (kerb) 1550kg
Power-to-weight 408bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.6sec (claimed)
Top speed 196mph (claimed)
Basic price £229,985



ASTON MARTIN V12 VANTAGE S

Engine V12, 5935cc
Power 565bhp @ 6750rpm
Torque 457lb ft @ 5750rpm
Weight (kerb) 1665kg (estimated)
Power-to-weight 345bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.9sec (claimed)
Top speed 205mph (claimed)
Basic price £138,000



AUDI R8 V10 PLUS

Engine V10, 5204cc
Power 542bhp @ 8000rpm
Torque 398lb ft @ 6500rpm
Weight (kerb) 1570kg
Power-to-weight 351bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.5sec (claimed, S-tronic)
Top speed 197sec (claimed, S-tronic)
Basic price £128,710



MINI JCW GP

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo
Power 215bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 206lb ft @ 2000-5100rpm
Weight (kerb) 1140kg
Power-to-weight 192bhp/ton
0-62mph 6.3sec (claimed)
Top speed 150mph (claimed)
Basic price £28,790



PORSCHE CAYMAN S

Engine Flat-six, 3436cc
Power 321bhp @ 7400rpm
Torque 273lb ft @ 4500-5800rpm
Weight (kerb) 1320kg
Power-to-weight 247bhp/ton
0-62mph 5.0sec (claimed)
Top speed 176mph (claimed)
Basic price £48,783



ALFA ROMEO 4C

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1742cc, turbo
Power 237bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 258lb ft @ 2200-4250rpm
Weight (dry) 895kg
Power-to-weight (dry) 269bhp/ton
0-62mph 4.5sec (claimed)
Top speed 160mph (claimed)
Basic price £45,000

Coffee chez Ari



'I'm having coffee with Ari Vatanen tomorrow,' says Mike Duff, casually.

And sure enough, 24 hours later we (well I was hardly going to let him go on his own, was I?) are outside the gates to a large farmhouse not far from Digne. Mike knows the rallying legend because he's done some work with him in the past, but I have absolutely no idea what I'm going to say, and I realise that it could be a bit awkward. I'm prepared to take the risk, though.

What follows is one of the most surreally wonderful couple of hours of my life. Utterly down to earth and relaxed, Ari is happy to just sit in the sun outside,

drink coffee, eat meringues and talk about everything from his five dogs, to being an MEP, to his favourite rally car (205 T16). He's off to Finland tomorrow, but has had the house in France for over 20 years and clearly loves it. After coffee he shows us round, finishing up in a small room stuffed with all his race suits, helmets, etc.

He then says we must sign the visitor's book and entreats us to pop in again next time we're around. As I use my hand to shield my eyes from the low sun on the way back, Mike says, 'Well, they're wrong about never meeting your heroes aren't they?' **HC**



evo Car of the Year 2013

Riley in his hired Hyundai. Photographer Dean Smith wants to get up early to make up for time lost to the weather, and as I spent most of the morning just waiting for a Porsche, I agree to an unsociable alarm call. Nothing like an early-morning drive, after all, but what to shatter the peace with...?

IN THE DAYTIME IT LOOKS BIG, BUT lurking in the far corner of the car park in the dark hours before dawn, the SLS AMG Black looks monstrous. Just walking towards its sleeping bulk you feel intimidated, like you're approaching an automotive version of the Jabberwock. Certainly if anything was going to have eyes of flame, go whiffling through the tulgey wood and burble as it went, then this is it.

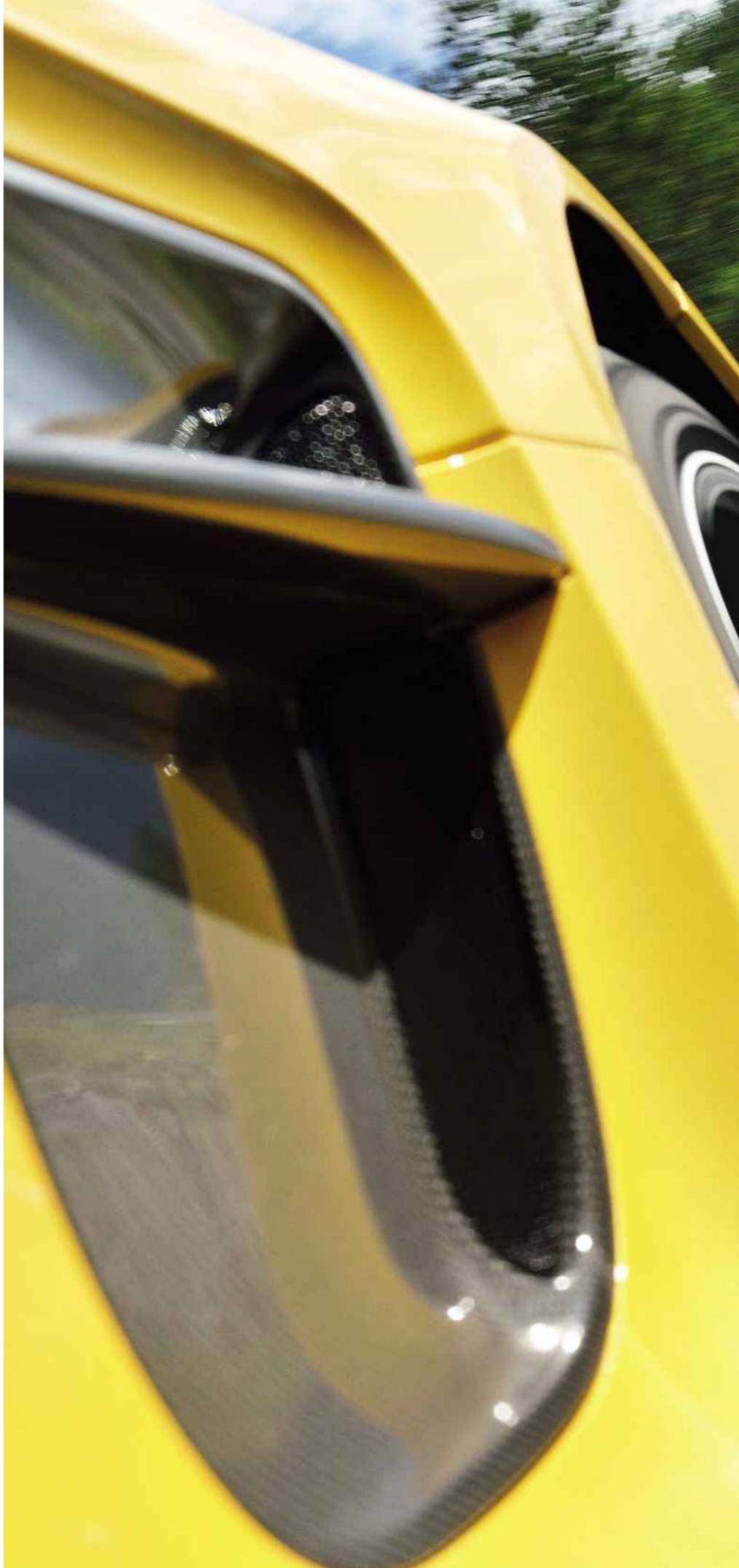
Blip the key and the doorhandles emerge ready for you to lift up a gullwing. The seats are the raciest of a racy bunch, yet they're instantly comfortable as you sink into them. Even with my orangutan arms I have to stretch to pull the door closed so I imagine Dickie (famously 4ft 9in in his Cuban Sparcos) has to jump from the sill. Press the glowing starter button on the transmission tunnel to waken the 622bhp 6.2-litre V8, enjoy the resulting eruption from the exhausts underneath you, pull the stubby lever back to 'D' and look around for some tug boats to help you steer the vast acreage of bonnet out of the parking space.

Assumption is perhaps too strong a word, so let's call them expectations. Not having driven an SLS Black before, I'd expected it would be very track-biased. I'd expected traction to be tricky and I'd expected that the ride would be unforgiving. It's lovely when your expectations are confounded.

The SLS is perfectly happy mooching along through town and then cruising the first few miles of the N85. The suspension button always has one of its two lights lit and the ride is firm, but there are never any uncomfortable jolts or thumps. In fact it's compliant enough that I'd be perfectly happy if it was the only setting on a standard SLS. What gives the Black its focused feeling is the short travel at each corner, which means the whole car is hunkered down and stays incredibly flat through corners, tilting all of a piece with cambers. The steering's lovely, and the dual-clutch gearbox seems far better than any other Mercedes 'box I've tried.

More light is seeping into the sky with every mile but there are still big clumps of mist hanging around and the roads are still damp, so I'm being cautious with the throttle. There's much more traction than you think, but there's also enough front-end grip to unsettle the rear on balance alone, and through a third- or fourth-gear corner, a shimmy wakes you up quicker than a cold shower. It's clearly not a car you learn quickly, so for the moment I relax and enjoy the view of the sunrise as we descend towards one of the turquoise lakes near our eCoty base camp.

After we've got a few photos in the bag, the others begin to turn up with breakfast. They also bring the F12 with them, which has been re-shod overnight, but I'm going for the other Italian first.



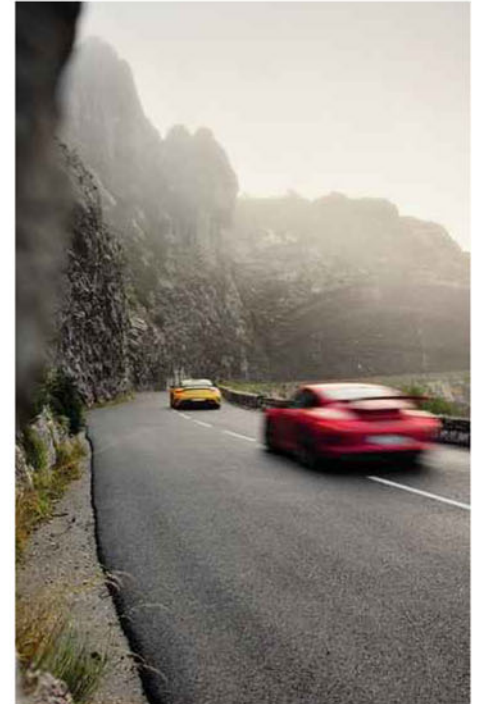


ES 885VB





Left: Alfa 4C's engine note leaves Catchpole unimpressed. **Below:** mixed conditions in France put the eight finalists through a tough test. **Right:** Cayman offers plenty of handling precision



On looks alone I think we're all agreed the 4C is a winner – you could park it up next to pretty much anything you care to name and it would hold its own. Swing open the door, drop into the interior and you can marvel at the wide weave of the carbon tub. It's very reminiscent of getting into an early Elise (with the roof on), except all the naked aluminium has been replaced with naked carbonfibre. The controls are a mixed bag: the pedals look and feel great but the steering wheel is an awkward chunky thing and the paddles are flexible and cheap. However, even though it's obvious where money has been saved, it still feels like a very special car... until you start the engine.

The 1742cc turbocharged four-cylinder just sounds out of place in the Alfa. It's not that a four-cylinder is a bad idea per se, it's just that when you first twist the key, this one sounds like it's been lifted from a cheap '80s hatchback. It's like taking your seat in the opulence of the Royal Opera House and then James Blunt appearing on stage (nice chap though he is).

With 237bhp, the engine is at least effective and imbues the little Alfa with decent, if noticeably surging turbocharged pace in a straight line. Immersed in the process of threading the car down the road, you don't

'THE ENGINE IMBUES THE LITTLE ALFA WITH DECENT, IF NOTICEABLY SURGING TURBOCHARGED PACE'





really notice what sound it's making, so it's less of a problem. And the 4C certainly has some pace through the corners: the alacrity of the direction changes make it obvious how light and stiff it is, while the levels of lateral grip it generates are huge. Sitting low in the tub, you feel right at the centre of the action, and as you lean ever harder onto its tyres you just start wishing the seats had some more support to hold you and your internal organs in place.

The only slip you'll find in the dry is at the front, where the nose will just start to push wide. Even if you lift sharply at this point, there's just the subtlest movement from its beautifully sculpted hips as the weight transfers rearwards, the light little engine not having enough mass to overcome the grip of the 20in rear wheels. The unassisted steering is curious and seems to be a bit inconsistent, so I haven't made my mind up about it by the time I get back to the car park. I shall have to return to the Alfa.

Video filming is in full swing when I return and the Aston that I'd mentally earmarked is doing its bit pouting for the camera alongside Jethro (who always pouts). But the Cayman looks mighty enticing, and as the roads are now dry I feel I've got the perfect excuse to snaffle it away for half an hour to do some exploring.

Although everyone talks about the Route Napoleon, it is in reality only a small part of the tarmac story in this area of France. Turn off either side of the N85 (as we have) and there is a wealth of wonderful roads flanked by magical scenery. What's more, because the peaks don't soar like the Alps and a famous bike race only rarely clutters it up in July, the whole area is much quieter and more peaceful than other, more famous parts of France. The Cayman and I head down a cracking bit of road that eventually winds high up along the side of a gorge. There are a few more bumps on this section, but even so, the Cayman almost needs to be in its stiffest damper setting to give it a bit of edge.

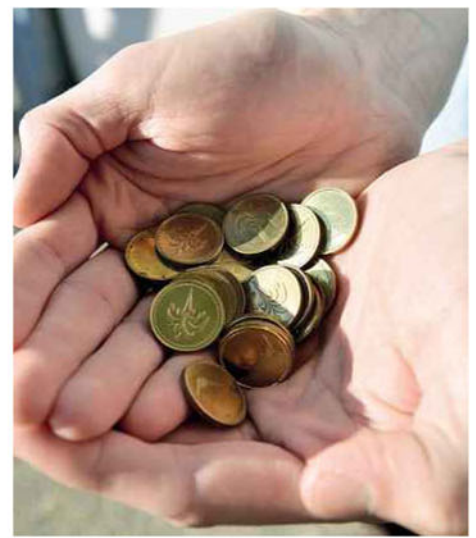
As the miles pass, I discover something a little disappointing: the Cayman has both a fantastic engine and a stunning gearbox, but you can only use one of them at a time. The engine will rev all the way to nearly 8000rpm and does its most sonorous and most productive work in the last 3000 of those rpm. However, if you hit the limiter in second gear you will be doing 85mph, so on these roads (most of which are tighter than you expect) you can simply leave the Cayman in second. That seems like a waste, however, so you throw in a couple of early upshifts to enjoy the delicious manual shift, at which point the

performance starts to feel a tad flat. It's a tricky conundrum, though it's a relatively minor gripe in what is basically a perfect display of poise and precision.

The Aston has been freed from Bovingdon duty by the time I return, so I plunge the small glass block into its carbon dash, listen to the loud, snarly start-up and get comfy in yet another fixed-back bucket, this time trimmed extravagantly in yellow and grey stripes of Alcantara to match the exterior. There's something about the Aston, especially after the SLS this morning, that feels just right. The size, the power, the grip levels... all of them are enjoyable rather than intimidating.

I head back up the road I've just been down in the Cayman and instantly the 565bhp V12 Vantage is flooding feedback through the wheel, pedals and seat. There must be at least as many set-up options as on the Ferrari or GT3, yet somehow they seem less fussy in the Aston; press the Sport button for more response, set the three-stage dampers to the medium firmness and turn the stability control to Track or completely off. Easy.

In new S form, there's nothing complicated about the balance of the V12 Vantage, either. The weight of that crowded engine bay at the



Above right: car wash required its own currency. **Far left:** cheese and ham sandwiches one of the safer autoroute service station lunch options. **Left:** potato-themed restaurant did a mean strawberry mojito, according to designer Beaumont. **Below left:** when not driving, Meaden enjoys throwing stones at inanimate objects. **Below:** lack of space at the hotel meant the spare wheels for the Alfa had to be kept in Trott's bathroom. **Bottom middle:**

Bovingdon tries 'the Catchpole look'. **Below:** Vivian breaks the habit of a lifetime and washes a car (the 4C's looks have strong powers...). **Bottom:** Smith wedges his frame into the boot of the Aston to gain some tracking shots. **Opposite page, top left:** Alfa Romeo technicians teach Mike Duff how to smoke, Italian-style





‘THERE’S A SENSE THAT THIS IS SIMPLY GOING TO COME DOWN TO PERSONAL PREFERENCE’



Top middle: Meaden's impromptu disguise, should he need to evade the gendarmerie. **Top right:** Focus ST long-term was extremely useful for carrying a colossal amount of camera equipment, and as a bin. **Above:** frost in the mornings was a surprise. **Above left:** monopolising the local supermarket's car

washing facilities. **Far left:** Viv checks out the new *evo* app. **Left:** very little travel on the GT3's suspension. **Below left:** test team demonstrates poor intelligence levels by trying to keep pizzas warm on the nose of a mid-engined car. **Below:** Bowington and Dobie help push a local man's broken-down Bertone Freeclimber





front has been miraculously tamed and the car now turns into and then oversteers out of corners exactly like you imagine a beautifully set-up front-engined rear-driver should; you link corners with the car always on its toes, using the ample torque to ride out small slides, all the time feeling utterly in control thanks to that steering, which subtly lightens and weights up while never losing its positivity.

Likewise, there's a huge sense of reassurance on the way into corners in feeling the beautiful pressure of the brake pedal as you squeeze it towards the bulkhead. It's as satisfying an underfoot sensation as sinking a spade into good turf. The only niggling doubt is the gearbox. The seven-speed automated manual is fine. In fact, it's really good when you're driving with commitment. But the trouble is that, rather like being the team-mate of anyone called Seb, the Aston's 'box inevitably suffers a little by comparison in the context of this eCoty. The saving grace is that none of us are sure if the slightly analogue nature of the shift (which requires a lift here and a finesse there at lower speeds) doesn't actually rather suit the Aston! What is beyond doubt is that this is the best drivers' Aston the firm has built. It's gone

straight to the top of my personal scoresheet.

The rest of the morning is taken up with photography and Jethro using the F12's rear tyres like rollers to paint various hairpins black (or 'Railings', as David 'Farrow & Ball' Vivian refers to that particular shade). Now that people have driven a few more cars, there are a lot of opinions flying around. The 4C seems to be bemusing people, but otherwise everyone is getting out of cars with huge grins.

'I've never known a year like it,' says Meaden. 'They've all got such likeable characters and there's nothing that's desperately flawed, which makes judging really hard.' Nick is slightly in awe of the Mini: 'It's in a whole different league to normal Coopers and JCWs. If a Cooper S is a 911 Carrera 4, the GP is a 911 GT2. It's night and day.' Jethro, meanwhile, is in awe of the SLS's bonnet: 'It looks like a double bed, it's so big. It would probably be nice and warm to sleep on after a good strop, too.' Hoping for a more useful quote that I can actually use, I ask the usually eloquent Vivian about the F12, as this is the first time he's driven one: 'Bloody hell,' he declares. 'But seriously. Bloody hell.'

After lunch, Duff and I head off in the R8 to go and visit a politician who lives locally (see

boxout) and it's an illuminating drive. Although the Audi shone in the wet, its real prowess is in the high-speed stuff in the dry. No other car in this test feels so mighty when the numbers are big and you've got to turn into a corner. The reason for this lies in a combination of factors: the low centre of gravity, the clear view out you get from sitting in front of the engine, the planted nature of the four-wheel drive, the calm steering, the beautiful damping – it all just instils a reassuring confidence in you as a driver and as a result you find you can nervelessly commit to crests and adjust angles when the stakes are at their highest.

All of which is just as well really, because we stay longer than we should at the politician's house (you would too) and need to cover the distance back to Castellane rather quickly to make it in time for the group static photo. An hour later, as we arrive metaphorically breathless in a flurry of perfect DSG downchanges and hot carbon discs, it turns out we needn't have rushed. Dean has issued his oft-heard lament that 'the light's all wrong' (to be fair, the sun is behind a mountain) and as a result, we'll need to come back early the following morning.



I need and want to do more miles in some of the cars, and so far the F12 is the only one of the pack I haven't driven at all, so I snaffle the keys for the drive back to the hotel. By the time we leave, it's dark, and as I switch the ignition on and the car goes through its pre-flight checks, the full row of red LEDs in the steering wheel lights up and almost blinds me. I press the starter button and the V12 sparks into life with a growl that's similar to the Aston's but with just a touch more edge. Pull back the almost comically big carbon upshift paddle, feed in the throttle and we're away.

The first corner in an F12 is always a shock. You simply don't expect the relatively big nose to jump at the apex so violently as you put in what should be a normal amount of lock. Down the next straight you almost need to slow down and waggle the steering wheel from side to side like Fernando Alonso approaching the grid. Not because you need to warm the tyres (although a little display will tell you when you have) but because you need to recalibrate your own inner understanding of what a degree of steering lock equates to in terms of response. It's as though the chassis needs to jolt you into alertness with all the violence of a sleep twitch, just to make



Opposite page: Mercedes takes some taming on the limit. **Top:** 5.9-litre V12 in the front of the Aston makes the rear swing out with gusto. **Left:** F12 sounds epic through tunnels. **Above:** N202 links Nice to Lake Geneva



evo Car of the Year 2013

absolutely sure you're ready to try and delicately dish out 730bhp with your right foot.

My synapses might be tingling, but I'm not entirely sure I'm going to push the F12 to its limit in the next half an hour simply because with no moon and no catseyes, it's so flipping dark. The dip/full beam button on the steering wheel isn't helping either because it seems to be positioned perfectly only for people with an Anne Boleyn-like extra thumb on their left hand. Then the hairpins arrive and I can't resist. Race mode is good, CT Off is better, but Everything Off is definitely best. Unleashed from the clever but constantly nibbling electronics, the F12 is more than happy to cut loose and make full use of that phenomenal powerplant just next to your ankles. Best-ever drivetrain in a road car? You won't find me arguing.

Over the last miles coming back into town I'm being caught. Not by one of the other eCoty contenders, but a local in a people carrier. To be fair, I don't know the roads (where's a co-driver with some pace notes when you need them?) and like the electrician for Area 51, I'm still struggling with the lighting situation. Then again, as we go through a village, I can just make out that he's got a roofbox to really augment the already atrocious CoG. Clearly I don't stand a hope. Pulling back into the hotel car park, I see Dickie walking back to his room looking slightly dejected. Turns out he and the SLS Black were similarly worked over by an old lady in an Ibiza. We both agree that we'll never mention it again...

Over supper, Nick decrees that we've got to have made up our minds by the time camembert meets baguette at lunch tomorrow. There's genuine consternation at this (Mike nearly backfires his coq au vin) because I don't think anyone has even settled on a top three yet, let alone a winner. So good are so many of the cars that objectively there's really nothing separating them. There's a sense that this is simply going to come down to personal preference and that there's still a lot of driving to be done.

I'M ABOUT TO GET INTO THE GT3 THE following morning when I see the 4C next to it. Giving up the keys to a GT3 is not something you do lightly, but the 4C's siren-like looks make me decide that I ought to have a longer journey in it, and so I find myself back in the small piece of Italian exotica.

If I'm honest, the initial part of the drive doesn't do it any favours, because at slow speeds you tend to notice the four-cylinder engine more and at some frequencies it buzzes through the carbon chassis, up your spine and right into the centre of your head. That said, I imagine its fuel consumption is more impressive than the others', so it's admittedly not without benefits (can you tell that I want to like it?).

The steering is still curious, though. Pushing the nose hard in a smooth corner, it's great and you can enjoy the loaded wheel transmitting the grip back to you. However, as the car reacts to bumps and cambers, so the steering takes on a life of its own, tugging your hands hard one way then suddenly







going very light, almost like a powerful front-wheel-drive car torque-steering. It's a strange sensation, and you expect to get out and see some very aggressive camber on the front wheels. As Jethro says later: 'It certainly shows that good steering isn't achieved just by dialling back the power assistance.'

The last part of the journey drops down off the hills into a town and here the 4C shines again. There is a set of second-gear turns linked together so that you go immediately from full load one way to full load the other. Commit the 4C fully and you get this wonderful sensation of slaloming down the hill, carving hard turns with lots of grip one way then the other. It's a clean, precise way of cornering and enjoyable because the lateral limits are so high, although to use a Meaden phrase, it is a touch prescriptive.

Half an hour later, the cars are being cleaned and shuffled into position for the group shot on the beach. Some shapes, like the R8 and Mini, are familiar, representing the pinnacle of a model's development over time, while others, like the F12 and Cayman, are fresh and new. I love the diversity of the daytime running lights too, with LEDs strung out in myriad different patterns. It really is a cracking-looking octet.

Meanwhile, editor Trott is feverishly busy

Above: Alfa shines through direction changes. **Far right:** turquoise lakes nearly as jaw-dropping as the cars. **Top right:** SLS's huge carbon bonnet





'THE ANIMAL BRUTALITY OF THE SLS BLACK'S ENGINE IS ALMOST LITERALLY BREATHTAKING'



over by Dean's Focus ST Estate. Bereft of proper coffee for the last two mornings, Nick's taken matters into his own (trembling) hands and has bought a portable coffee maker from the local supermarket, which he is now anxiously trying to hook up to the 12-volt supply. He's not an addict, you understand. He could give up any time...

Once Dean's waited for some light and muttered something positive like 'that'll do', we all descend on the cars in what must look like a really rubbish Le Mans start. Dean and I are nabbing the Mini as he needs to do some more photos with it and I want to drive it in the dry. You can drive the little ball of fury smoothly but it's a real challenge, because that doesn't seem to have been the development engineers' intention. Turn in quickly and early to a fast corner and you'll feel the nose grip and the inside rear wheel lift as it scoots round. Turn in even harder to the next bend and you'll feel the nose sink its tyres into the tarmac so strongly that the light rear end starts to unstick entirely. The corner after that, you feel like Jean Ragnotti in a Renault, with the little Mini crossed up and sliding like a supercar.

It's a bit of a leap of faith the first time you slide it, but once you've discovered how fun it is,

the GP takes on a whole new dimension. It isn't the first hot hatch to three-wheel and oversteer when provoked, but it is certainly the most eager, adjustable and catchable. What's more, where the learning experience in a 205 was generally picking yourself out of a hedge and asking a bystander what happened, in the Mini you can do it all in GP mode first, which lets you slide but then catches you safely before it gets too much. Then you can turn it all off and, if he's around, Dean Smith will lie in a verge and take photos of you.

It's one of the delights of eCoty that you can jump straight from a Mini into an SLS that costs eight times the price and not know which you are going to enjoy more. At first the SLS feels eight times the size too, but as I head back up the road and the pace builds and builds, so the Black begins to shrink. I'd swear it's getting lighter too. It seems that the faster you go, the more grip you find, the more it draws you in and the more you feel the difference that weight savings like the carbon bonnet make.

The engine is incredibly deceptive too, because you think you're going stupidly quickly and then you discover you're only using about 4000rpm, which isn't even half the revs. So you make a conscious effort to hang on to the gears

and yet still you find yourself changing up at 7000rpm with 1500rpm still to go. The reason you pull the right-hand paddle early is arguably because a small part of you is very scared by the sheer force of the engine. The animal brutality of it is almost literally breathtaking. What's even more shocking is that the SLS has got the traction to deal with 468lb ft of torque, so every stab of acceleration is a blow right in the small of your back that hurls you up the road. The assault is continued by an industrially loud soundtrack that is part-P51 Mustang, part-unsilenced Ducati Monster.

Occasionally, over a mid-corner bump or ridge, it will suddenly break its seal of lateral grip so that the whole car leaps sideways, which as Jethro says, 'scares the crap out of you, but also adds to the car's no-bullshit character and means you never forget what you're trying to hustle.' Like the GT3, it really does feel akin to a race car that has been lightly disguised for road use, and although it sounds daft, you can easily imagine yourself rolling through the gates and parking it on the start line for the N24. Having driven all the way there.

Heading back to our rendezvous point on top of a hill, I catch the F12 also sauntering back, cooling its brakes and trying to look innocent.



'I THOUGHT THE GT3 WAS TOO ALOOF. AND THEN IT GOES AND DELIVERS PURE MAGIC LIKE THAT'



Top: Catchpole is mesmerised by the GT3.

Right: agile GP keeps the more expensive cars honest through the twistier stuff...

Opposite page: ...and it loves going sideways



It would be rude not to try the two big hitters back-to-back, so as soon as we've parked up I swap seats with Nick, who looks slightly shell-shocked and simply stares at the F12 before saying: 'It weighs 1600kg but it's as thrilling as a Caterham 620R... How do they do that?'

A large part of the answer lies under the aerodynamic bonnet. It's hard to imagine an engine that's even more unhinged than the SLS Black's hand-built V8, but by the end of the first straight it's clear that the F12's 6.2-litre V12 is just that. The Ferrari can and will break traction more than the SLS and at times every stab of the throttle feels about as wild as throwing petrol bombs into a bonfire from close range. No, closer than that – so that your eyebrows are in danger. There's also some pitch and roll in the chassis, which makes it feel like much more of a road car than the AMG, although the damping's beautifully supported so you can actually lean into it reassuringly and use the suppleness to your advantage. When you've built a bit of confidence, you find yourself getting on the power early out of every corner so that the F12 feels closely related to the Aston, with that same lovely front-engined rear-drive balance... but with a sharper front end and an extra 150bhp going down the propshaft.



At first you don't feel certain that you'll be able to harness the added sharpness and power, but you quickly realise you can. On the far side of one particular village there's a great set of fast, well-sighted bends that the Mini was huge fun on earlier. Through the same bends in the F12 you throw the car in hard with just a small twitch of that hyperactive steering, then get on the throttle immediately so that with the seat of your pants you can feel the tyres over-rotate and the rear begin to float underneath you. And to me that's the fun of the F12: not the big slides, but the longer, shallower ones that keep it all flowing down a road. In some ways it would be terrifying if the steering wasn't so sharp because you need that ability to micromanage the angle of the slides as the rears unhook themselves with disdain. As a balancing act you're always acutely aware of how quickly things could flare out of control, but it's a massive thrill trying to tame and harness such rampant power.

Time is pressing on but there's one car that both Jethro and I still need to drive properly: the GT3. Jethro suggests that he drives out and then we turn around and I drive back. This seems like a splendid idea until about two corners in, when I'm convinced he's going to kill us. Obviously I trust Jethro and being British I wouldn't dream

of saying anything even if I didn't, so I just sit there trying to disguise my internal anguish as we head much too fast into a downhill corner. We change up going through what should be a braking point. Then as we finally do brake (him using a real pedal, me pressing an imaginary one in the passenger footwell), Jethro also turns in hard (still downhill remember), which I absolutely know is a bad idea in a 911. Somehow we whistle round with just a tad of opposite lock for fun on the exit and then rush headlong at the next corner of terror.

By the time we reach the turn-around point at Castellane, Jethro's whooping with delight while I feel like I've just had the laws of physics redefined. I say as much to him and he grins, replying that it serves me right for doing the same thing to him in the McLaren 12C this time last year. I had no idea. Anyway, I'm convinced that I won't be able to drive the GT3 anything like as discombobulatingly quickly back up the hill. At least I'm sure until about 500 yards into the drive, when I discover I'm now the one doing the whooping. As soon as you have the wheel in your hands you feel hardwired into the chassis and every tiny shift it makes, which lets you drive it like no 911 should be driven.

Front-end grip isn't just astonishing for a 911,

it's astonishing for any car. And although the limits feel terrifyingly high from the passenger seat, when you're in control you find the car is egging you on and encouraging you to drive it not only up to the edge of adhesion but well over it as well if you want. The breakaway that you assume would be snappy and unpredictable is as readable as a Wodehouse short story. And the stopping? Well, that's just comical. I'm glad to see out of the corner of my eye that Jethro's looking for my phantom passenger brake pedal.

After only a few minutes of driving like I'm interviewing for Kobayashi Cabs, the GT3 has scrambled not only my mind but also the mental scoresheet I'd been quietly happy with. I thought the GT3 was too aloof, that it was too focused on numbers. I had it in fifth position. And then it goes and delivers a few minutes of pure magic like that. Damn thing.

Back in what is currently the best lay-by in the world, there are a lot of furrowed brows as people write their final lists. It feels like the Route Napoleon is silent for the first time in three days. One by one, the pieces of paper are handed to Nick with the solemnity of a papal ballot. At least we won't have a problem generating the white smoke to show we've chosen a winner...

20 **evo** 13

CAR OF THE YEAR

The Reckoning

by HENRY CATCHPOLE

7th



8th



8th: Alfa Romeo 4C

There has to be a last place, and in this toughest of years the 4C sadly stakes a very strong claim to it. 'Road presence as high as any car in the test,' said Trott, 'and credit to Alfa for pushing it into the lion's den of eCoty for its first group test. But it lacks the effervescent sparkle of the considerably cheaper Mini, or the total polish of the Porsche.' Richard Meaden felt an opportunity had been missed: 'Film-star looks and supercar construction ensure it's a hugely desirable car. Taut, controlled damping and powerful brakes suggest expertise and skill exists within the development team, but the flatulent, laggy, lethargic engine is horrid and the handling too inert to hold your attention. What a shame.' Add in the steering issues and it was game over. Vivian summed it up thus: 'The 4C is the future and the Aston, Ferrari and Merc, magnificent dinosaurs that they are, are the past. But for now the car has too many elements that feel unfinished or unfit for purpose.'

7th: Porsche Cayman S

There's probably a smaller gap between seventh and first than there is between seventh and eighth. The Cayman S is a truly fantastic car. In fact it's so good that in another year it could have won. But 2013 is not a normal year.

Jethro said that its poise and creaminess reminded him of the R8, before adding almost reluctantly: 'It just lacked firepower and a bit of edge to emerge from the shadow of the big boys.' Firepower or not, Vivian was bewitched: 'You get in, adjust the seat and steering, and drive fast, immediately feeling in sync with the controls and the road. No surprises, no jarring distractions, just an easy flow and rhythm. That it's so beautifully built, designed and finished helps. And that sweet manual gearchange, of course.' The praise continued from Trott: 'As an everyday performance car, for the money, it has no equal.' Mike Duff went even further: 'I could drive the Cayman S every day for the rest of my life and never get bored with it: so many different answers to whatever you throw at it.' Seventh heaven indeed.

6th: Mini JCW GP

'This car proves why we should always give hot hatches the chance to shine against supercars on eCoty,' said Meaden, and I couldn't agree more. Everyone had a tale of struggling to hang on to the exhaust pipes of the GP or failing to shake its massive nostril from the rear-view mirror. But it wasn't just quick: it was involving too. 'No hot hatch in my experience has been set up with such an unflinching focus on response and agility, to the point where you need to treat it with as much respect as something with rear-drive and 500bhp,' Dickie added. Jethro was so



smitten he was almost tempted to make it his winner: 'On flowing roads with lots of third- and fourth-gear corners it's exceptionally adjustable and so precise. It takes no prisoners in the wet but that's the way a really focused front-driver should be.' And if you're about to quibble on price (£28,790), Vivian has a way to justify that: 'Look at this way: you could have a whole one-make race series for the price of one F12 and the Ferrari still wouldn't be able to shake off the GP on a twisty road.' Man-maths or not, the Mini is a very special little car. Like the Cayman before it, sixth seems a poor reward.

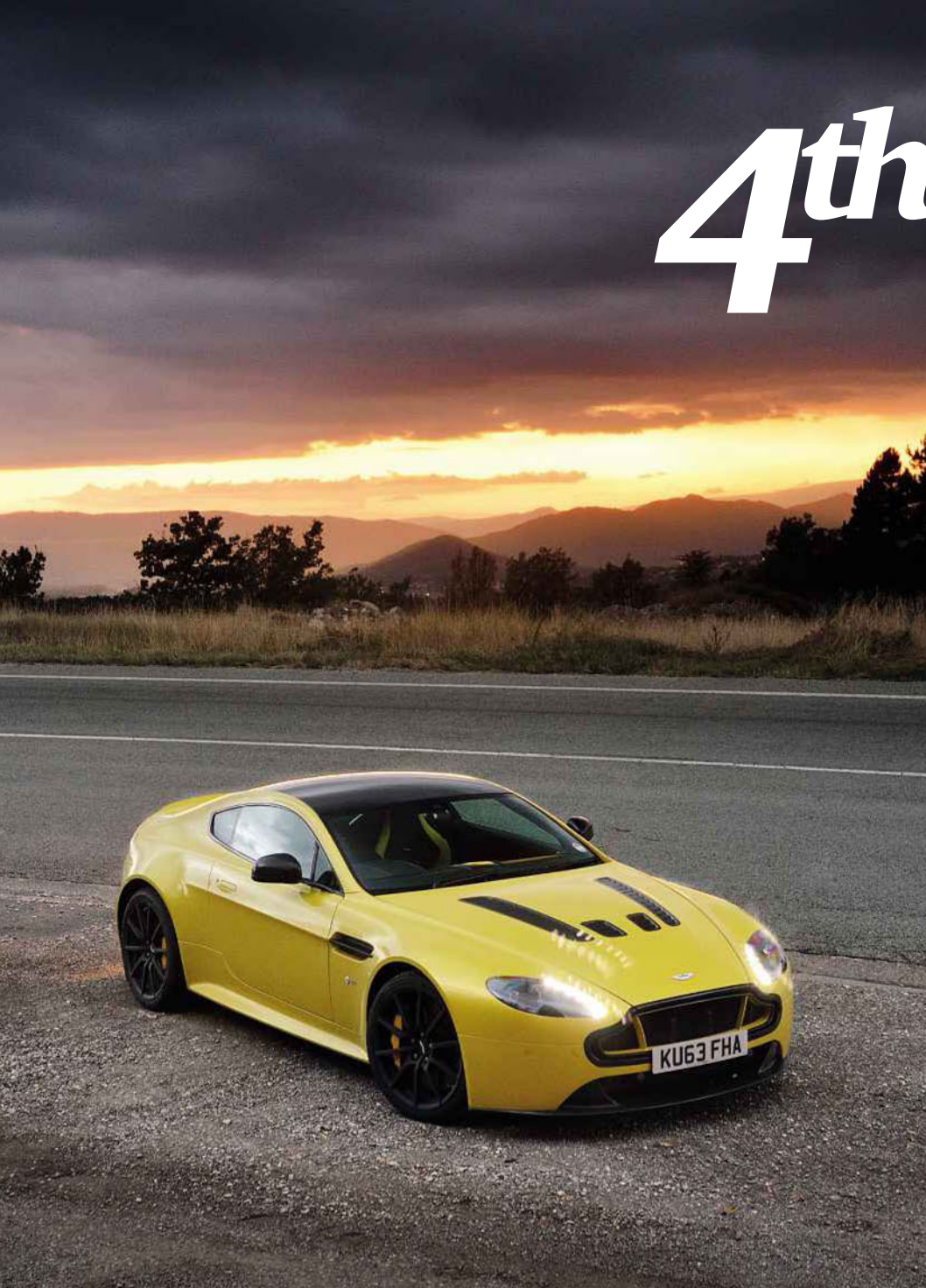
5th: Audi R8 V10 Plus

The R8 is sheer class, always has been. But it's quite incredible how relatively subtle improvements manage to keep it right at the top of the performance car tree. Bovingdon said he

fell in love with the R8 all over again this week. 'Every element of this car is so sweetly judged and smooth it makes everything else feel almost contrived and clumsy by comparison. I want to own this car so badly it hurts. Audi – please inject some of this subtle brilliance into the rest of your range.'

Vivian was also enamoured and placed the R8 second: 'For me, the Audi continues to astound as a supercar that's as easy to live with as it is rewarding to drive in anger. Maybe the cabin and instruments could do with a freshen up but, overall, the R8 still hits it out of the park.' On the score sheets it looks like Mike Duff was perhaps the only one who didn't really fall for the Audi and yet even he was full of praise: 'Great engine, great gearbox, great chassis. It was only pushed down by a relative lack of excitement compared to everything else here.' You'll note the word

4th



**‘THE ASTON
WOULD HAVE
WALKED A
“STEERING OF THE
YEAR” AWARD’**

‘relative’ in that last sentence being redefined in a way more shocking than anything said by Einstein. And of course, if it had rained for three days in France it might have all been very different...

4th: Aston V12 Vantage S

If there were a category for ‘steering of the year’ then the Aston Martin would undoubtedly walk off with the three-spoke trophy. Trott was fulsome in his praise: ‘Total linearity and fabulous feedback – lovely tingles reach your palms directly from the road surface.’ Meaden, always the first to admire a good rack, said that: ‘The hydraulic steering is amongst the very best for feel and consistency – as are the carbon brakes – even though the assistance is variable-

rate.’ The chassis balance was lauded by Dickie, too. ‘The front-end’s response is brilliantly judged – not too quick, not too slow – and the progressive way in which the tail comes into play without the need for crazy commitment or provocation makes the Aston’s limits far more accessible on the road than some of the others.’

‘Just a simple, honest and deeply well-sorted drivers’ car,’ mused Bovingdon, adding, ‘The uprated engine really has found a new sharpness too and it infuses the whole car with more precision and more intent.’ Duff agreed but also loved its versatility: ‘It seems equally happy whether you’re trickling around and enjoying the V12’s purring refinement, or giving it absolute death. It’s a gentleman thug, and it’s as happy in either role. But for the gearbox it would have been my winner.’

3rd: Merc SLS Black

It’s fair to say that the SLS AMG Black was the surprise of the group. There have been some great Black Series cars in the past, but there have also been some stinkers, so there was some trepidation as to which camp the SLS would pitch its tent in. Thankfully it’s the former.

Richard Meaden loved it so much that he decided to select it as his winner: ‘Despite appearances, it’s a nuanced machine. It’s vast and looks totally unwieldy, but with time you discover it’s exceptionally precise, with the lightweight feel of something like a 911 RS. It’s also surprisingly adept at going slowly. Definitely one to make room for in the Meaden Fantasy Garage.’ He wasn’t the only one to make a Porsche connection, but Jethro had his own reasons: ‘It reminded me of a GT2 in that it has superb control, lovely steering and incredible grip and traction, but can just occasionally threaten to kill you in one heart-stopping moment.’

It wasn’t to everyone’s taste, however. Wheelspin at 100mph in the wet unsettled Vivian, who also thought it looked vulgar, while Duff struggled with its sheer size: ‘It feels like there’s about 20 feet of car in front of you.’ He also felt the on-limit traits which Jethro thrived on were a bit too abrupt for his tastes: ‘Grip to slip is pretty much like flicking a switch.’ One man’s meat, etc.

I was one of those that loved the SLS, but I’ll leave the final words on the Black to Nick Trott, who, like Dickie, had it top of his score sheet: ‘I never thought I’d vote a Mercedes top in performance car terms, and I never thought I’d put it ahead of the GT3, but I found it more thrilling more of the time. Of all the cars on the test, it was the one I was mentally specing up in my head. Dark metallic grey, with all the carbon, if you’re asking...’





2nd: Ferrari F12

Just one point ahead of the SLS, the Ferrari F12 takes the silver medal. Just like the SLS and our winner, the F12 topped two judges' scoresheets. One belonged to Mike Duff: 'Wow. The most exciting car here for me, by a fair margin. The V12 is amazing: the fact it produces so much power through nothing more than revs and direct injection feels close to miraculous. I don't think the novelty of running it out to 8500rpm and feeling the brutal gearbox bang in the next ratio would ever wear off either. Every time I got out of it I had an adrenalin high.'

Even those that didn't place it at the top sang the praises of the V12. 'It is a total triumph,' said Trott. 'Ferrari should be honoured for building arguably the greatest road-car engine of all time.' Vivian was equally effusive: 'The powertrain is surely the most remarkable, exciting and addictive of any car on sale today. It isn't just the power, staggering as that is, but the manner of its delivery. The final 2000 revs to the red line and the speed of the shift to the next gear are truly breathtaking.'

The only divisive factor was the incredibly quick steering rack, which proved an acquired taste. Nick was unconvinced, as was Jethro, who also expressed worries that he'd 'go through a set of tyres every 1000 miles'. Hooligan. Viv, however, warmed to the rack: 'You gradually realise the steering is part of a mechanism that endows the F12 with amazing agility.'

I was the other person to have the F12 as their winner, and the memory of being in control of something so fast, powerful and exploitable has me grinning from ear to ear. Add in the feral yelps from a couple of downshifts and the endorphins are almost overwhelming.



evo Car of the Year 2013



1st

Porsche 911 GT3



FIX. INEVITABLE. BORING. I CAN SEE the tweets and emails now. Believe it or not, we are very aware that Porsches do rather well on eCoty tests(!), so with the absence of a manual gearbox in the 991 and an apparently greater focus on speed for its own sake, there was perhaps a secret hope that this one might be beaten. Amazingly, history also showed there was a good chance it wouldn't make the top step, as neither of the 997 GT3s took home the gong (both having to wait for their RS versions).

However, when the scores came in, the margin of victory was clear. Like the SLS and F12, the GT3 only topped two people's lists, but the fact it made everyone's top three clinched the win. As Richard Meaden said (not for the first time): 'It plays the averages without

don't really care. It is simply one of the best cars I have ever driven.'

Nick certainly wasn't nostalgic either: 'The engine is out of this world – a suitably epic follow-up to the Mezger. Jethro mentioned that he misses the chunter and response of the Mezger, but I'll happily trade that for the top-end zeal of the new engine.' A bit of chunter wasn't the only thing Jethro lamented initially, but in the end he was besotted: 'I miss the old 'box... but the chassis on this car is nothing short of scintillating. It grips harder than anything else here and yet invites you to experience everything it has to offer more regularly than you'd dare in the SLS or F12. It feels small and agile just when the others start to intimidate, and the way you feel locked into the chassis'

'WHEN THE SCORES CAME IN, THE MARGIN OF VICTORY WAS CLEAR'

being in any way average.' Both he and Duff did question the sheer pace of the GT3, Mike harbouring a suspicion that 'with 90 per cent of the straight-line pace and 80 per cent of the lateral grip, it would actually be a better road car'. Meaden even called it a 'ruthless number-chaser' and used the word 'clinical'... but still put it second on his list!

Vivian was having none of that, however: 'For me it was all about connection. The GT3 made me feel more connected with the road and my own abilities. Like a movie directed by someone who wants to let the action do the talking, there's an honesty and focused intensity about the GT3 that no other car in eCoty could get close to. If it's less of a "911" than the last GT3, I

every movement is something else. We might be a bit disappointed that this car won eCoty, but we're not at all ashamed of the result.'

And me? About 56 hours after I'd stood listening to the other seven leaving the Hotel Campanile in Digne, I found myself standing in near-darkness atop a remote hill listening to the beautifully baleful voice of the GT3. As it charged up from the valley below, the volume increasing as it ticked off each of the nine hairpins, there was a wonderful stillness, as though the world had stopped to listen and have its collective spine tingled by the flat-six revving to 9000rpm. Due reverence for a worthy winner. In the gloaming I silently vowed to do it as much justice on the way down.

Left: another eCoty victory for a 911, but before you write in, please remember that a Porsche didn't win last year, or in '09, '08, '06, '05, '02 or '01. So there. OK, you can click 'Compose' now. **Right:** how the judges voted; a first was worth 8 points, a second 7, and so on

	JB	HC	MD	RM	NT	DV	Score
Porsche 911 GT3	1st	2nd	3rd	2nd	2nd	1st	43
Ferrari F12	5th	1st	1st	5th	3rd	3rd	36
Mercedes SLS Black	2nd	4th	6th	1st	1st	5th	35
Aston V12 Vantage S	6th	3rd	2nd	3rd	5th	7th	28
Audi R8 V10 Plus	4th	5th	7th	4th	7th	2nd	25
Mini JCW GP	3rd	6th	4th	7th	4th	6th	24
Porsche Cayman S	7th	7th	5th	6th	6th	4th	19
Alfa Romeo 4C	8th	8th	8th	8th	8th	8th	6



RACE AGAINST TIME

Mix Porsche's incredible 918 Spyder hybrid supercar with Michelin's ultra-advanced new Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres and what do you get? A new lap record on the legendary Nürburgring



Watch the record lap at
www.youtube.com/michelinpassion

T

THE SECONDS KEEP TICKING AWAY. TICK, TICK, TICK... Behind the Nürburgring's pit wall, excitement is growing amongst the support teams from Porsche and Michelin.

Nervous tension, too. A record seems likely, but you never know for sure until the clock stops.

Suddenly the matt black snout of the lowslung Porsche 918 Spyder erupts into view, its Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres digging tenaciously into the tarmac. It's travelling fast. Hugely fast. And the sound it's making is magnificent. The hybrid supercar flashes past the final timing beam and for the briefest moment the world stands still; all heads swivel towards the big digital timing board as the lap time numbers flicker into place. And as

everyone simultaneously realises the significance of the time just revealed to them on the board, there's a crescendo of cheering and a surge of high emotion – the 918 Spyder has just lapped the legendary Nürburgring Nordschleife in 6:57.00, a new record for a globally homologated series production car, and a whole 14 seconds quicker than the previous record.

No wonder the Porsche and Michelin teams are jumping in the air and high-fiving everyone within reach. And to put the record into perspective, in 1975 Niki Lauda lapped the track in a Ferrari 312T Formula One car in a time of 6:58.6.

Few would argue that the Nürburgring is the most challenging race track on the planet. It's 14.2 miles long. And according to the official website, there are 33 left-hand bends and 40 to

'The new Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 provides stability, balance, and grip on wet roads as well as improved resistance to aquaplaning when compared with its predecessor'

the right; hard to learn. Plus there are big changes of elevation combined with a track surface that in many places is far from smooth. If your car shines here, it should sparkle anywhere.

Which is why so many car manufacturers put such great store in achieving a good Nürburgring lap time. And what made the iconic German circuit the perfect venue upon which Porsche could conclusively prove the mettle of its new hybrid supercar – powered partly by a 4.6-litre V8 petrol engine working in tandem with electric motors to aid its fuel economy and emissions.

Yet as every serious sports car maker – and race team – knows, you're only as good as the tyres that pin your car to the ground. Hence Porsche's 50-year collaboration with Michelin. And why Michelin was involved from the outset of the 918 Spyder's development.

'We decided to design a completely new tyre line, the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2,' explains Project Manager Olivier Bouhet, who was responsible for the development of this important new tyre, 'featuring a specific tread pattern, a massive external shoulder to maximise dry handling performance, and specific dual-rubber compounds with the inner section reducing rolling resistance, and the outer maximising lateral grip'.

Developing a tyre for Porsche's 918 Spyder – a car capable of 211mph, yet with its hybrid drivetrain also focused on good fuel



consumption and low emissions – and its attack on the Nürburgring production car lap record created special challenges. 'On this track we need to design a really well balanced tyre,' Olivier Bouhet continues, 'because it's not only a matter of maximum grip, it's also a matter of stiffness. Because at the Nürburgring we have very high speed sections, where we really need stability.'

There were other challenges, too. 'In the context of the lap time record, during which you push hard on the tyres, temperatures can be extreme; we can reach over 100°C inside the tyres, and more than 200°C at the surface of the contact patch. So managing properly the tyre temperature is a key factor of success in this context, because you need to have the best performance throughout the lap.'

Cornelius Ter Braak, Michelin's Technical Account Director for Porsche, stresses the importance of the two companies' longstanding relationship in smashing the Nürburgring record. He says: 'We understand their (Porsche's) philosophy, we put in our resources, our elements and, as well, our solutions. What we can see today, the Pilot Sport Cup 2, is the tyre which delivers the record. In the beginning we said "we can", and now we can say "we did!"'

The joint approach is seen as vital from within the Porsche camp, too, as Vice President of the 918 Spyder project, Frank Walliser, underlines: 'A key factor for the success (of the record attempt) is that all the tyre tests have always been jointly Porsche and Michelin tests. This is very important for the project and for the behaviour of the car. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the (timing) numbers on the

board. Unbelievable!' The final word must go to Porsche test driver, Marc Lieb, the man behind the 918 Spyder's wheel for the recordbusting sprint. 'We had a fantastic run, the conditions were perfect. The car was very well prepared, and we had a fresh set of Michelin tyres on. And we had a really good lap time: six minutes 57 seconds in a street-legal production car is absolutely amazing.'



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In association with



CLUB CLASS

by DAVID VIVIAN | PHOTOGRAPHY by GUS GREGORY



In the late 1980s, Porsche stripped the 3.2-litre Carrera of its creature comforts to create a rare gem that starred on road and track. 26 years on, does the Carrera Club Sport still shine?



W

WE CALLED IT 'THE MAD MILE'. A RULER-straight stretch of the A217 dual carriageway in Surrey, between the Cheam traffic-light junction and a roundabout on the outskirts of Sutton, it was roughly a mile long and conveniently close to *Motor* magazine's late-'80s road-testing HQ.

Seeing how fast a fast car would go from a standing start at the lights to a braking point that would only just allow the car to negotiate the roundabout without crashing was, well, highly enjoyable. And mad.

I haven't driven down 'the mad mile' for many years but my guess is that its suitability as a drag strip by proxy has quite rightly been locked down by every speed-enforcement measure known to the law. Were *evo* Towers to be time-warped back to the shoe shop and hairdressing hell that was Cheam 26 years ago, the mind boggles at the standing-mile bragging stats that would be slapped down at the office water cooler after a quick stop in an F12 or, come to that, the latest 911 GT3, which needs only a fraction more than seven seconds to wind up to 100mph from rest.

But hey, it was the '80s. Supercar performance against the





Above: all bar one of the 53 UK examples of the Club Sport were finished in Grand Prix White; with no air con or sunroof, the CS was a turn-off for many Porsche customers in the '80s

'I KNEW I WAS SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE CORRUPTING CHARMS OF THIS MUSCULAR 911 EVOLUTION'

clock was no more violent than that of today's fastest hot hatches, we were young and we took risks that we mostly got away with. Even so, if anyone had good reason not to do the 'mad thing' one sunny lunchtime in 1987, having plucked the keys to a 911 Carrera 3.2 Club Sport from the test-car drawer, it was me. I knew I was susceptible to the corrupting charms of this muscular 911 evolution. Worse still, I had 'form' with road-test 911s.

Four years earlier, a 911 Carrera 3.2 – the car on which the lightweight Club Sport was based – had managed to turn a lonely, late-evening grind in the office writing the road test about it into an experience so existential I believed it and I were invisible on my 50-mile drive home. The start of the journey was unremarkable enough: on the M25, a steady 85mph eased us inconspicuously past slower cars. The Carrera was good at a loping gallop. That glorious air-cooled flat-six sounded sweetly sonorous and, even on the mostly smooth motorway, the steering felt gently alive with tiny twitches and

wiggles dictated by the imperfections of the road surface.

Whenever the traffic cleared, we tentatively took a bite at something more interesting: 120mph or so to begin with, but as the outside lane emptied, the accelerative lunges in fourth and fifth became more addictive and more sustained. Soon we were brushing an indicated 150mph regularly and, I can't deny it, I was loving every second. Given my insular state of mind, this wasn't speeding. It was 'making progress' in an appropriately capable and charismatic car. And, as my solicitor was to claim in court some weeks later, it was accomplished 'in complete safety'.

The Carrera and I were just seven miles into the trip – the 120mph-plus phase – when we overtook a white 2.8-litre Ford Granada police car. It was dusk and I simply didn't see it creeping along in the inside lane with the plug pulled on its roof lights. It saw us, though, and attempted to give chase. Unsurprisingly, its ability to keep up was non-existent. In fact, it

couldn't get within a mile of the 911's bewinged rump. Blue lights madly flashing? Presumably, but by this time I'd more or less given up looking in my rear-view mirror. I was cruising towards home and a beer.

What the cops later called a 'pursuit' went on for 21 miles, giving them plenty of time to radio ahead and organise a road-block at a set of traffic lights on the A21 in Pembury, just outside Tunbridge Wells. Perhaps 'road-block' is over-dramatising it: they just switched the lights to red and got some bloke in a mac to stand in front of them waving a torch. I rolled to a stop, wondering if the man had escaped from a local psychiatric facility. Thirty seconds later, the Granada slid to a halt behind and the penny dropped. What followed didn't exactly adhere to the *Dixon of Dock Green* script writers' style sheet but, rather incredibly, I lost my licence for only two months.

And four years later, on 'the mad mile'? Let me tell you about the Club Sport. Despite the lingering negative associations of being hauled

Porsche 911 Carrera Club Sport



Above: weight-saving drive meant CS's windows had to be operated manually; 3.2-litre flat-six likely put out more than the 228bhp of standard Carrera, although Porsche claimed it didn't

'ADDING LIGHTNESS INVOLVED REMOVING QUITE A LOT OF NON-ESSENTIAL LUXURIES'

out of a car by my lapels, having my arms slammed on the roof and my legs kicked apart, I was still besotted with the 911 and was planning to write a book about it. The 911 Carrera 3.2 Club Sport – in many ways the spiritual forerunner of today's GT3 – represented the pinnacle of the road car story thus far and therefore had to be driven in a spirited manner whenever possible. Its name, emblazoned above the sills in red or blue against the Grand Prix White signature paint job, all but demanded it.

I didn't need convincing. The prospect of exploiting a lighter, harder, more track-focused Carrera was an itch I simply had to scratch. For Porsche's race-bred dieticians, adding lightness involved removing quite a lot of non-essential luxuries. Some were obvious, such as electric windows, rear seats, central locking, a rear wiper and a radio. Others less so: pursuing the racing philosophy that every gram counts, opening mechanisms for the rear quarter lights, door pocket lids, the passenger sun visor, lighting for the engine and boot, some

sound-deadening, the coat hooks and even the underseal were dumped (though UK cars did retain some rust protection). And it didn't stop there. The manual heater controls from earlier 911s were reinstated in place of the regular Carrera's more effective thermostat system, and the car was fitted with a lighter starter motor, a simplified wiring loom and an alloy spare wheel. At least the cabin carpeting stayed. Some examples even had leather seats. The upshot was a 40kg reduction on the scales, the CS recording an impressively trim 1170kg, making it only 95kg heavier than the legendary 1973 2.7 RS.

Mechanically, the CS retained the standard 3164cc flat-six engine, albeit fitted with lighter, hollow inlet valves and located on stiffer mounts. A revised engine management system raised the rev limit from 6520 to 6840rpm but, despite it also being blueprinted, Porsche didn't claim any improvement over the standard engine's 228bhp at 5900rpm. There almost certainly was, but not enough to be in

any danger of overwhelming the fat 7 x 15in, 215/60 VR-shod rear rims in the dry. That said, the 0-60mph time dropped from 5.6 to 5.1sec and top speed increased from 148 to 152mph. The CS's five-speed G50 gearbox delivered a shorter-throw shift and taller fourth- and fifth-gear ratios, while a limited-slip differential was standard. As for the suspension, 'uprated' meant Bilstein gas-filled dampers all round.

Long before it discovered it could get away with charging more for its stripped-out, lightweight models, Porsche did the proper thing and asked less: £1187 less than the regular Carrera in the case of the £34,389 CS, making it even cheaper than the company's front-engined 944 Turbo. Only 340 Club Sports were built, with 53 RHD examples coming to the UK.

We meet Steve – *evo* reader and friend, and owner of the pristine CS you see before you – for a deeply disgusting breakfast at the Amesbury services Little Chef near the junction between the A303 and the A345. Having 'fessed up about the 911 misdemeanours of my youth, I ask him

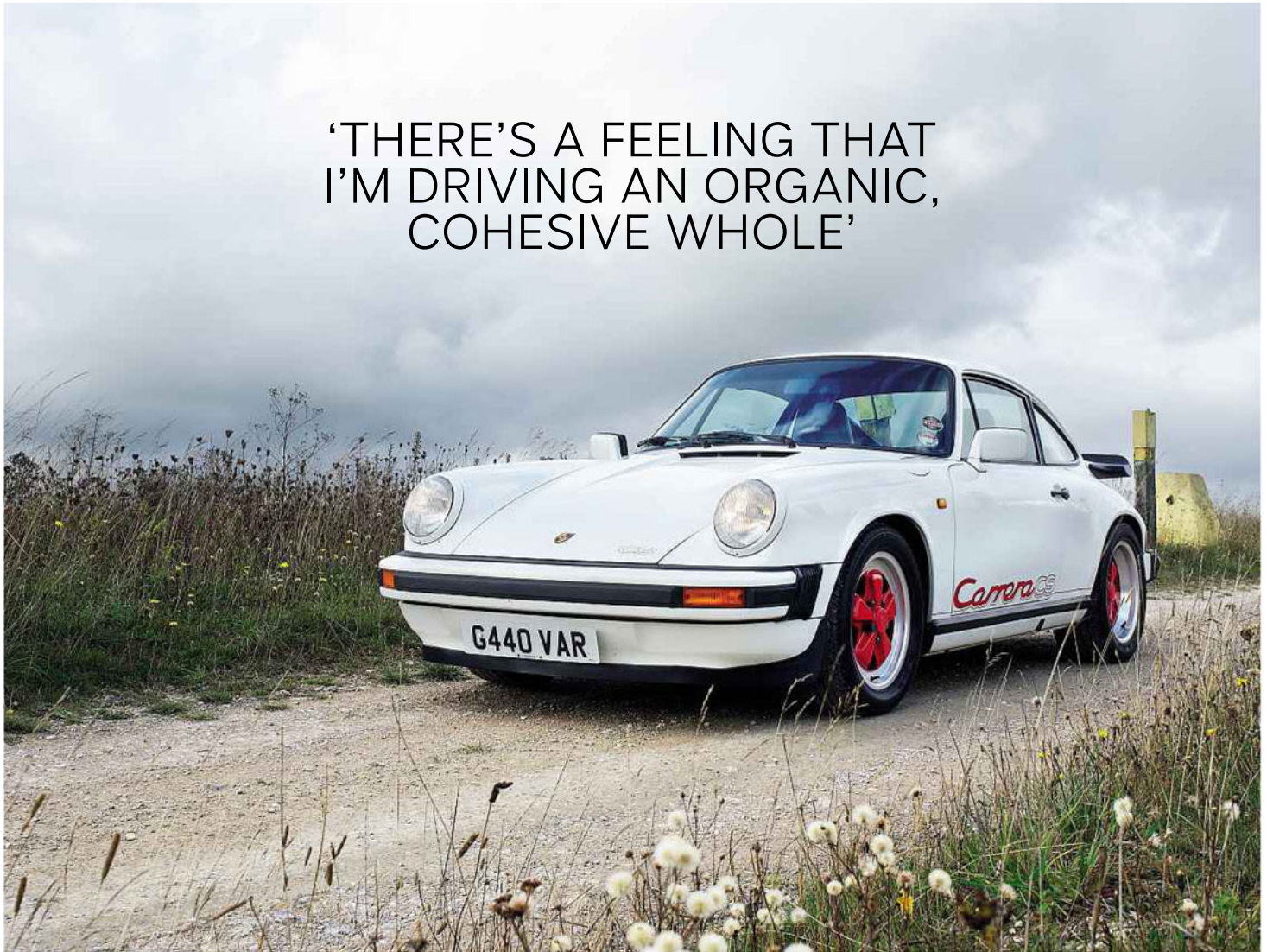
if he would prefer me to go for the big one-five-o before or after Stonehenge. He suggests doing so after he's gone home.

For me, this is a kind of weird reunion with a car so exciting and alluring that I was prepared to risk it all again on 'the mad mile' merely to experience the fleeting accelerative rush. For Steve, it's an ongoing love affair. He owns 21 cars and, ever since he bought the Club Sport eight years ago with just 30,000 miles on the clock, it has ranked among his favourites, keeping good company with a Carrera GT and a 997 GT3 4.0 – both vastly faster and more thrilling steers. But I detect a real soft spot in him for the CS. 'Without a word of a lie I'd always put the CS in my top three,' he says as we head for the hills behind Amesbury. 'I've been a 911 fanatic ever since I first drove one when I was 25. I just thought: "That's it. That's a drivers' car." The CS strikes the best balance between some modernity but also that classic 911 feel. It's quite demanding to drive but I also love the fact that it's just fast enough and got just the right amount of horsepower, so you can actually properly drive.'

Steve is in the passenger seat so I decide that driving properly is the best policy. Do the old memories of reckless exhilaration come flooding back? Not at first. Actually, not at all. Too many



‘THERE’S A FEELING THAT I’M DRIVING AN ORGANIC, COHESIVE WHOLE’



miles and too much horsepower have passed under the bridge. When I finally get to open the taps in second and third, the CS feels usefully brisk but not fast by current standards. What did I expect? Well, maybe just a hint of that ‘mad mile’ naughtiness. But the goal posts have moved.

Steve has access to mind-warping performance whenever he wants but would still rather drive the CS much of the time. And as we head for a particular section of road I know well – used to assess the cornering chops of the 991-gen Carrera 2 when it was launched just a few miles away from here at Thruxton – I’m beginning to see his point. The weighting and textural grain of every non-assisted control surface seems perfectly matched, giving rise to the feeling that I’m driving an organic, cohesive whole rather than a collection of interlinked, electronically calibrated systems. To be honest, I’d forgotten that 911s used to feel like that. I estimate that my best neat-and-tidy speed through the open left-straight-right

combo I’d used for photography with the 991 is at least 30 per cent down in the CS. But the satisfaction of getting it right, muscling the old 911 through with the necessary elevated level of concentration and forearm torque, is at least 50 per cent up.

The gearchange is sweeter than a Gü Key Lime pie, too, and what the engine lacks in contemporary watermark grunt it more than makes up for in pin-sharp throttle response and a real, raw, resonant, unsynthesised boxer-motor soundtrack. What once seemed sensational is now a repository of long-forgotten feelings that makes you wonder if cars that can go faster than a Japanese bullet train are really such a smart idea after all.

I couldn’t quite manage bullet-train velocities behind the wheel of the Club Sport on ‘the mad mile’ back in 1987. I did, however, get stopped by the police (again) and received a severe telling off. ☒

Many thanks to Steve for the use of his Club Sport.

Specification

PORSCHE 911 CLUB SPORT

Engine Flat-six, 3164cc

CO2 n/a

Power 228bhp @ 5900rpm

Torque 209lb ft @ 4800rpm

Transmission Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, LSD

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Semi-trailing arms, torsion bars, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs, 283mm front, 290mm rear

Wheels 7 x 15in front, 8 x 15in rear

Tyres 195/65 VR15 front, 215/60 VR15 rear

Weight (kerb) 1170kg

Power-to-weight 198bhp/ton

0-60mph 5.1sec (claimed)

Top speed 152mph (claimed)

Price new £34,389 (1987)

On sale 1987-1989

evo rating: ★★★★★

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Fast Fleet

Living with evo's
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From 208 to VXR8, evo's Fast Fleet is the biggest and most comprehensive long-term section in the business. This month...

BMW M6 GRAN COUPE

by Nick Trott
Editor

NEW

This month: It's big, fast and a little bit pricey, and it's also on our fleet.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'Took the C63 AMG to the Spa Grand Prix and back. Not an epic distance, but the perfect car for the journey'



JAGUAR XKR-S

by Richard Meaden
Contributing editor

OUT

This month: The R-S has departed.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'An epic 18-hour, 1200-mile journey home from Umbria in evo's old Audi quattro 20v after the launch of the original Audi TT'



VAUXHALL VXR8

by David Vivian
Road test contributor

NEW

This month: The super-rare superstate arrives.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'To the Lake District in a Mini Clubman Cooper S – just the right size for all those tight, twisty lanes'



FERRARI 458 ITALIA

by Simon George
Contributor

This month: A mishap on track...
Longest drive in a long-term: 'A circumnavigation of eight European countries in the orange Lamborghini Murciélago; 6300 miles in three weeks and still no backache!'



RENAULT CLIO 200 TURBO

by Richard Meaden
Contributing editor

This month: Meaden warms to the yellow Renaultsport.
Longest drive in a long-term: See Jaguar XKR-S, left



JAGUAR F-TYPE V6 S

by Jethro Bovingdon
Contributing editor

NEW

This month: The F-type arrives.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'Nürburgring to Northants isn't that far, but it sure feels it when you're in a stripped-out M3 that's stuck in fourth gear'



MAZDA MX-5 MK2

by Peter Tomalin
Contributor

This month: A new stance.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'Estoril to Cambridge in the 350Z – just over 1000 miles – with just a few hours' kip en route. Was quite tired at the end'



AUDI RS6 AVANT

by Mike Duff
Motoring editor

This month: The RS6's real-world abilities impress Duff.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'Berlin to Cornwall in a Merc E-class, stopping only for fuel. Red Bull and the Chunnel – 907 miles in 13 hours'



PEUGEOT 208 GTI

by Sam Riley
Film-maker

NEW

This month: The intriguing French hatchback enters the evo car park.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'From the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides to evo Towers in my 4x4 Skoda Yeti'



ALFA ROMEO GIULIETTA

by Rob Gould
Art director

This month: Gould gets a lesson in weight management.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'To Cornwall and back in the Giulietta. Call it 300 miles each way'



MINI JCW GP

by Ian Eveleigh
Production editor

This month: On track.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'Nice to Cambridgeshire in an Infiniti G37S Coupe. Ideal car for the job. The 902 miles took a leisurely 15 hours, including the ferry crossing'



TOYOTA GT86

by Henry Catchpole
Features editor

This month: Catchpole takes over the running of the rear-drive coupe.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'To Fife and back one weekend in a Caterham R300 felt like the longest – 1000 miles with no roof!'



FORD FOCUS ST

by Dean Smith
Staff photographer

This month: The ST helps out at Smith's wedding.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'From Hitchin to Route Napoleon – 800 miles – in this very Focus ST for eCoty 2013'



McLAREN 12C

by Mike Duff
Motoring editor

This month: The 12C does some lapping for a good cause.
Longest drive in a long-term: See Audi RS6 Avant, above left



RENAULT CLIO WILLIAMS

by Stephen Dobie
Staff writer

This month: New rubber.
Longest drive in a long-term: 'To Italy's Stelvio Pass in my Polo GTI, via the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart. Great way to warm to a moderately talented car'



Also on the evo fleet: BMW M135i, Skoda Superb Outdoor, Jaguar XJR-15, Porsche 996 Carrera 2, Nissan GT-R, Ferrari 430 Scuderia, Ford Escort RS2000, Peugeot 106 Rallye, Porsche 911 SC, Mercedes 190E 2.5-16, Ferrari F50, BMW 2002, Lamborghini Murciélago, Ferrari F40. **Coming soon:** Toyota Celica GT-Four

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NEW ARRIVAL

BMW M6 Gran Coupe

The fearsomely expensive, 552bhp four-door coupe M-car arrives on our fleet. Editor Trott says hello

S SO, WHAT IS IT? Like Audi and Mercedes, BMW has been exploring the dark hinterland between niches of late, and the result is a number of curious products. The M6 Gran Coupe is one of them. The M6 badge suggests two doors, but the Gran Coupe has four, like the M5. So it's priced closer to the '5, right? Wrong. The M6 Gran Coupe costs £24,195 more than the M5 – or significantly more if you're looking at nearly new M5s, prices of which have dropped to around £53,000 for year-old cars in BMW's Approved Used scheme.

'My' M6 Gran Coupe cost £97,700 – well, it would have if the following

options hadn't been fitted: automatic four-zone air conditioning (£695), Comfort Access (keyless entry and push-button start – £665), internet service (£95), carbon-ceramic brakes (£7395 – gulp), multi-function seats (£1865), BMW Individual 'Merino' leather (£5635), 'Reversing Assist' camera (£330), 'surround-view' cameras (£530), soft-close doors (yes, honestly – £560), speed limit display (shows the current applicable speed limit – £250), sun-protection glass (£335) and Tanzanite Blue metallic paint (£1995). Yep, this car comes in at an eye-watering £118,050. In a few months, you'll be able to buy two BMW M4s for that.

The M6 Gran Coupe is without doubt an imposing car to look at. The

styling is menacing and masculine, but too leaden and not enough lead-sled in my eyes. Neat details include the sculptured carbon roof, a neat 'Gran Coupe' legend inside the rear door aperture (and visible through the glass), and simply gorgeous gold brake calipers (indicating the fitment of those carbon-ceramics).

The interior is equally imposing: you sit within an arc of leather, carbonfibre and buttons, cocooned, snug and immensely comfortable. The satnav screen is vast, the latest iDrive is far easier to decipher than previous generations were, and your preferred choices amongst the various switchable driving settings are just a prod of one of the two 'M' buttons away. It is undoubtedly a fine





Above: M6 GC's styling and size are imposing. **Below:** interior wraps around the driver



place to be, but then it should be – the price (with options) is nudging Bentley Continental territory.

The engine is BMW M's 4.4-litre twin-turbocharged V8 with 552bhp. It's a mighty motor, but customers wouldn't be out of line asking their dealer why the significantly more expensive M6 Gran Coupe isn't correspondingly more powerful than the M5. Acceleration is impressive, even stepping from the 12C. BMW claims a 4.2sec 0-62mph time (0.1sec quicker than the M5), with the seven-speed DCT twin-clutch transmission shifting with a neat punch in the ribs and a cool pop as the ignition is cut.

Initial driving impressions? The M6 Gran Coupe is vast – longer than a Ford Transit SWB van and only marginally narrower. On British roads, this means you're acutely conscious of your road position and equally conscious of the fact that if you chose to get the car dancing around, you need to have the space to play. That *loooong* tail likes to step out...

We've got just over six months with the M6 Gran Coupe – the car that BMW says is the 'M-car driving experience at its most exclusive'. It's already proving to be an intriguing companion, with star quality, intergalactic pace and true refinement. It has some tough competition, not just from within the M family but also from the Mercedes CLS63 and the Audi RS7. But I'm keen to find out not if this M6 can stand toe-to-toe with its direct German rivals, but whether it can step up and tackle the ultra-premium Bentley Continental and Aston Martin Rapide S. If it delivers, then the price tag won't look so absurd after all. ❌

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Driver's log	
Date acquired	Sept 2013
Total mileage	3346
Mileage this month	1511
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	17.6

END OF TERM

Jaguar XKR-S Convertible

Richard Meaden reflects on a year with the 542bhp supercharged V8 drop-top Jag



Above right: winter tyres helped in snow. **Below:** 542bhp V8. **Right:** white paint meant regular washes



OBJECTIVITY IS A golden rule with long-term test cars, but I won't lie: seeing the £106,000 XKR-S for the first time after spec'ing it on Jaguar's online configurator was a genuinely special moment. Yes, I got some stick from my colleagues (mostly Jethro) for choosing Don Johnson White, and yes, I did question the sense in my colour choice once the rains came and the building site I call home resembled the Somme. But when the weather played ball and my local hand car washers had just done their thing, it never looked less than fabulous.

I knew living with the XKR-S would be indulgent and pander to the side of me that likes to smoke

around in a big, fast, expensive car. But still I wasn't entirely convinced the XK and I would bond, mainly because I've never truly lusted after a modern Jag.

I needn't have worried, for the R-S is a car that wears its heart on its sleeve. From the exuberant snort as the engine fires, to the pulsing idle and full-throttle Sport-mode holler to wake the dead, this is a car that unashamedly pulls at your petrolhead heartstrings. I was smitten from day one.

It tried hard in other areas, too. The interior – no longer a homage to Jaguar's walnut-and-leather past – mixed colours, materials and textures to create a sporting, if rather 'hot hatchy' ambience. Much like the exterior, if there's a flaw it's a belief that more is more.



'Towards the outer limits of the rev range, the R-S revealed a level of performance previously beyond a series production Jaguar'

The F-type demonstrates greater stylistic maturity.

With 542bhp and an equally chunky amount of torque from a smooth and free-revving supercharged V8 mated to a six-speed paddle-shift automatic transmission, the R-S delivered monster performance. For the first few months it's fair to say I hardly ever truly extended it much beyond 5000rpm, simply because I never felt the need. Rare is the car that devours the road ahead so effortlessly. When I did venture towards the outer limits of the rev range, the R-S revealed a level of performance previously beyond a series production Jaguar.

There's no question it was exciting, but it also exposed the XK's limitations. Traction was often in short supply, and with Pirelli P Zero

summer rubber fitted it lacked progression, especially in damp or wet conditions. It was tricky to sense when the torque was going to overwhelm the rear tyres, and the stability control didn't have sufficiently quick wits to catch it smoothly. I lost count of the times I unwittingly had a heart-pounding moment in slippery conditions. Wet roads or dry, my appetite to drive the R-S beyond eight-tenths was limited.

The winter of 2012/13 was unusually snowy in the UK. You'd think that would have rendered the rear-drive Jaguar immobile, yet when fitted with Pirelli Sottozeros (£1200 for the set) it proved remarkably adept. And when the snow melted, the winter tyres gave some welcome feel and progression, but still the lightness of the steering, initial dead

travel in the brakes and a throttle that gave too much too soon dented the R-S's credentials as a truly focused drivers' car.

Nevertheless I enjoyed life with the XKR-S more than any other modern Jaguar I've ever driven. The performance and soundtrack were totally addictive, it's ability to turn heads endless. I could never reconcile the monster price tag, but judging by the knee-buckling depreciation nor can the trade. The car never missed a beat and used less than a litre of oil (£20). The winter tyres had plenty of meat left on them after their five-month stint, but the summer tyres were getting pretty thin. Our year was up just before the 15,000-mile service was due, the cost of which would have been around £300.

The XKR-S made life feel pretty

special, but it lacked the sense of connection and depth of ability to elevate the driving experience meaningfully beyond that of the regular XKR. That doesn't make it a bad car, but it does suggest Jaguar needs to push well beyond its comfort zone with future R-S models. ❌

Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Driver's log

Date acquired	August 2012
Duration of test	12 months
Total test mileage	15,430
Overall mpg	18.9
Costs	£1520
Purchase price	£106,542
Trade-in value	£67,000
Depreciation	£39,542

NEW ARRIVAL

Vauxhall VXR8 Clubsport Tourer

Rare V8-powered estate from Down Under joins the fleet



T'HAT'S VERY COOL, man.' I didn't have **evo** staff photographer Dean Smith down as a surfer dude, but that's much respect from someone who ran an Audi RS4 Avant for ten months.

Like Dean, you'll doubtless have seen our new Vauxhall VXR8 Clubsport Tourer long-termer before. It's the same car that Henry drove and Dean

snapped in the Driven section when it was a bit newer (**evo** 187). As it's the only one of its kind on Vauxhall's press fleet (possibly the only one in the UK), just about every media Tom, Dick and Harriet has had a go and a gratuitously smoky skid in this £49,500 estate, so it's been optimally loosened up for its stay with us.

It arrived in early September with 8431 miles on the clock, a lightly

shagged set of Bridgestone Potenza wrapped around its dark-tint 20in HSV alloys and, probably for the last time during the months it will spend with us, a brimmed-full tank of super unleaded. Vauxhall PR Simon Hucknall tells me it's possible to get 34mpg from a VXR8. He's a funny man.

The deal is faintly mad but irresistible all the same. I'm only just getting a feel for how much of

the 425bhp and 406lb ft of torque developed by its naturally aspirated 6.2-litre LS3 Corvette V8 I can use before I have to go without food. What's more, an appointment has been made with Tom Walkinshaw Racing to have a factory-approved supercharger bolted on, which will raise the headline number to around 550bhp, or about the same as the supercharged new-gen, Aussie-born

Renaultsport Clio 200 Turbo

Both the looks and the driving experience of the RS hot hatch are starting to grow on Meaden



I STILL HAVEN'T had a great, just-for-the-hell-of-it drive in the Clio, but I'm pleased to say HN13 XYP and I have bonded a little more since the first report. That process was helped by a few airport runs and a five-day trip to Spa for the Six Hours historic race meeting.

The route through Belgium is not what you'd describe as scintillating, but the Clio stormed it, cruising at elevated speeds on the autoroutes for hours and comfortably swallowing a huge racing kit bag that normally requires seats to be folded down.



Above: interior is utilitarian, but central display (below left) boasts G and yaw meters, and a lap timer. **Below left:** 425bhp 6.2 V8



rebadged Holden, which isn't due here until the end of the year.

No sensible person, having sampled the standard VXR8's performance (0-62mph in 4.9sec, nicely muted American muscle car soundtrack), is going to think that what this car really needs is another 125 horsepower, but then sensible people buy Skoda Octavia estates. Me? I'm going to challenge Mike Duff and his Audi RS6



Avant to a drag race at Bruntingthorpe and hang the fuel consumption. Besides, I've always wanted a car that rocks gently on its axis at idle.

This particular VXR8 connects on other levels, too. It looks stunning – far better than you'd expect from photos. And the colour – that blue contrasting with the chunky black bonnet louvers and side vents – reminds me of the first performance Vauxhall I ever

Driver's log	
Date acquired	Sep 2013
Total mileage	8864
Mileage this month	433
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	20.4

clapped eyes on in a magazine as a kid: a vividly blue Brabham Viva with a matt black bonnet.

On various visits to Oz over the years, I've always made a point of driving a Holden HSV and have added it to the list of reasons why I'd like to live there. Of course, none had 'DE51 RED' for a number plate. I'd have been beaten up. ☒

David Vivian

The modest petrol tank meant I didn't quite have the range to get from my last UK fill-up in Maidstone to my hotel in Spa town centre, but after a year with a Jaguar XKR-S it was a pleasant surprise to find I'd used roughly half the fuel I'd previously been burning. That said, the Clio's refusal to do much more than 31mpg, however and wherever I drive it, does make a mockery of its claimed EU combined average of 44.8mpg. A 1.6-litre petrol turbo motor in a small(ish) hatchback really ought to do better. If anyone out there is running a 200 Turbo, I'd love to

know what you're getting.

I've also started to warm to the RS's looks. I wasn't sure about them at first, but now I'm seeing more good angles than bad. It attracts attention and I love the Liquid Yellow paintwork – and not just because it makes the Clio easy to spot in the sea of grey that is an airport car park! ☒

Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Above right: 197bhp turbo 1.6 engine only just manages mpg in the 30s



Driver's log	
Date acquired	August 2013
Total mileage	3340
Mileage this month	1118
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	31.4



Ferrari 458 Italia

The busy 458 has had an unfortunate meeting with a tyre barrier...

IT'S BEEN AN EVENTFUL month for the 458, if only because I managed to foolishly spin it into a tyre wall at 60mph. Arriving into a shallow left-hander on the Longcross test track in Surrey, carrying a tad too much speed, I instantly realised I'd overcooked it.

The 458 was in Sport mode, and so still offering full stability control, but the greasy surface exacerbated matters, sending us into the tyres. I guess no amount of electronics will beat the laws of physics. But the Gods were smiling on me: damage was limited to a smashed wing mirror, a scuffed spoiler and a bruised ego.

WX11 also had a bit of TLC at Graypaul Nottingham recently. After the nearside door glass jammed and various warnings flagged up on the dash, they fitted a new regulator under warranty and had the car back to me the same day. Top effort.

With well over 40,000 miles now on the clock, the 458 still feels as tight and as planted as it did when new. For nearly a year the valves in the exhaust have been jammed open, making it sound like it's in Race mode all the time, i.e. exceptionally loud. I've never told the dealers, since that's how I reckon a Ferrari should be. Not sure my neighbours would agree, though... ☒

Simon George
(@6gearexperience)

Driver's log	
Date acquired	May 2011
Total mileage	43,668
Mileage this month	1451
Costs this month	£535 (tyres)
mpg this month	12.0

NEW ARRIVAL

Jaguar F-type V6 S

It's one of the most talked-about cars of 2013. Now we welcome one to our fleet for its most thorough test yet



Audi RS6 Avant

The powerful estate has been revealing its real-world strengths

I GAVE AN old friend a lift to Heathrow in the RS6. He's a former journo (and one-time **evo** columnist) who has since moved Down Under, taken the PR dollar, and therefore now mostly travels in the cheapish far-eastern hatchbacks he gets paid megabucks to promote.

It was a Friday evening, raining hard, and we hadn't left quite enough time for the journey. It was, in short, the sort of challenge the RS6 was made for – V8 rumbling purposefully as we made safe-but-rapid progress through the sodden conditions. Then the Bose-upgraded audio system burbling away

as we spent 15 minutes sitting in the inevitable M25 jam. 'What a brilliant way this is to end every day,' mused my mate, before trudging off to start his 26-hour journey in an Airbus A380.

He was right. The key appeal of the RS6 is just how adaptable it is, and how much it keeps in reserve in the real

I’D NEVER USUALLY deliberately avoid driving a significant new performance car, but having missed the initial F-type group tests (evo 183) due to other commitments, I was determined to do just that. It wasn’t easy.

The new Jaguar was big news and every time I popped into the office for meetings there seemed to be another bloody F-type to tempt me. But I’d always walk straight past. You see, I’ve known for some months now that I’d soon be running an F-type of my own, so I decided to wait until ‘my’ car turned up to experience Jaguar’s new sports car. I wanted that day to feel really special.

There was intense debate over which F-type we should go for. Harry championed the V8 S for its wild handling and charisma, likening it to a modern-day AC Cobra. Much as I liked the sound of the V8 S, my head was saying we should go for the V6 S – still with a storming 375bhp and 339lb ft from its 3-litre supercharged engine, but priced at a sub-911 level at £67,520. Dickie also said the conventional locking differential of the V6 S was more natural in feel to the V8’s electronically controlled unit and that the less fearsome motor allowed the chassis to really shine. Model chosen, then. Time to head to the configurator...

I didn’t want to go too mad. I really didn’t. Then I saw the 20-inch Blade wheels with carbonfibre spokes (£2500). Tick. Who could resist ‘Performance Seats’ (£2445)? Tick. And of course the

Super Performance Braking System (£1255) was a must. This was a slippery slope that also included the Switchable Active Sports Exhaust, sports steering wheel and a few other goodies. To be fair, I think I’d call our car ‘well specced’ rather than ‘fully loaded’. Even so, with gorgeous Salsa Red paintwork (BRG wouldn’t be right for a car signalling a bold future for Jaguar), our F-type comes in at nearly £78,000. It goes without saying that I hoped it would look, sound and feel worth every penny...

Was I excited when it arrived? Oh yes (even though Jaguar had run it in to the tune of 4171 miles!). Do I think we got the spec right? Yes again. I love the colour and the blade wheels are gorgeous – although the thought of kerbing them keeps me awake at night.

Now I’ve tried it, do I get along with the F-type? I think so. I was delighted that the F-type immediately felt very different to the XK – firmer, more responsive and with some decent steering weight and feel, plus much improved traction. It feels like a sports car and it reacts like one once you start driving it hard. I’m looking forward to getting to know it properly in the coming months very much indeed. ☒

Jethro Bovingdon
(@JethroBovingdon)

Driver’s log	
Date acquired	Sept 2013
Total mileage	5416
Mileage this month	1245
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	23.5

world. And having pointed out its lack of involvement on track in my last report, it’s only right to highlight how well it deals with the real world.

It’s a point that was made when I met quattro GmbH boss Frank van Meel, at the Frankfurt motor show. I asked how concerned he got about the negative reaction of journalists to much RS-branded product. His response? ‘We make cars for our customers, not for journalists.’

As an almost-customer sitting in both camps, I’m beginning to see his point. ☒

Mike Duff

Driver’s log	
Date acquired	July 2013
Total mileage	5416
Mileage this month	811
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	22.1

Mazda MX-5 1.8i

Up-rated springs bring new life to the little roadster

THE MX-5’S STANDARD ride height is better suited to a 4x4 than a sports car, rather as though it’s been set up to wade through water. Not good. After I mentioned this a couple of months ago, the very helpful chaps at Eibach got in touch and offered a set of their Pro-Kit springs for evaluation. A popular aftermarket fit to mk2 and 2.5 MX-5s like mine, they lower the ride by around 25-30mm, so nothing too extreme. And the clincher: according to Eibach they’re made from the same material it uses for its F1 springs. Sold.

RRP for a set is £175, but you can pick them up from MX-5 Parts for £163.35 including VAT. I had them fitted by my local garage, which added another £160. The last time the MX-5 was there for its MOT they’d noted the rear discs and pads were badly worn, so I had those replaced at the same time – £78.56 for the parts, £60 labour – and all topped off with some snazzy new flexible brake hoses. Total garage bill, including VAT: £290.40.

An expensive month, then, but was it all worth it? Well, beauty is in the

eye and all that, but I reckon the visual transformation is almost worth the money alone. I’m still exploring the dynamics, but a cross-country blat up to Bourne in Lincolnshire at the weekend suggested the chassis has been similarly transformed. The MX-5 feels like it’s spent a month in the gym. It’s suddenly all beefed-up and broad-shouldered. A smidge firmer, yes, but not stiffer (a fine distinction, but an important one). There’s little of the crashiness and jigginess that I’d been fearing. Just a more robust, muscular feel to the way it deals with lumps and bumps. Less dip under braking, a tad less roll in the corners, and a more all-of-a-piece feel when pushed hard through a turn. That, I believe, is what’s known as a result.

Peter Tomalin

Driver’s log	
Date acquired	April 2012
Total mileage	115,224
Mileage this month	317
Costs this month	£532.31
mpg this month	32.4



Above left: new Eibach springs. Above right and below: ride height before and after



NEW ARRIVAL

Peugeot 208 GTI

The spiritual son of a hot hatch pioneer joins the fleet



AFTER THE SOLID dependability of the Skoda Superb (full end-of-term report soon), I needed a bit of spice back in my daily driving life. One of the newest hot hatches on the market is just what the doctor ordered, and I am now the keeper of the key to a fabulously French Peugeot 208 GTI.

Capable of 0-62mph in 6.8sec and a top speed of 143mph, the basic 208 GTI comes in at £18,895, but the car I'll be running for the next six months or so is fitted with two options. The first is the huge panoramic sunroof (£400), which makes this relatively small car feel enormous inside. The second is the integrated satnav with Peugeot

Connect SOS and assistance service, which at £650 brought the total cost of my machine to £19,945.

A different choice of colour would have pushed the price over the £20k mark, but KV13 UEM came with the basic Bianca White paintjob, and in fairness it looks pretty sharp as it is. I probably would have specced that colour anyway given the choice, as the other schemes all cost an extra £495 for no extra street-cred.

I have to say I was surprised (and not in a good way) about the cost of the satnav/assistance option. Having had plenty of experience of nav systems from a variety of manufacturers, I'm left with the feeling that Peugeot is lagging behind here.

This system doesn't have full postcode recognition – instead it forces you to put in the first part of your destination postcode and then choose from a shortlist of streets. I've never been a big fan of these systems and I'm disappointed that a new car in 2013 can't process full postcodes when just about every smartphone on the market can manage it.

When it was first tested in *evo* 183, Mike Duff found that the Pug was a well-engineered car that possibly wasn't quite rough enough around the edges. My first impressions are that this may be the kind of car that takes time to warm to. So far I've found the sharp handling, controlled by a bizarrely tiny steering wheel, great

fun down B-roads, and with 197bhp and 203lb ft to punch just 1170kg down the road, the 208 certainly feels quick enough.

Peugeot has made much of the fact that this car is intended to be the spiritual successor to the famous 205 GTI of the 1980s. Time will tell whether that's truly the case, but I'm very much looking forward to finding out. ☒

Sam Riley (@samgriley)

Driver's log

Date acquired	Sept 2013
Total mileage	8056
Mileage this month	1819
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	35.7

Alfa Romeo Giulietta Cloverleaf

Gould finds out that his Alfa's performance is a weighty matter

KEEPING WEIGHT DOWN is really important. This fact hit home on the way back from the office one day recently when the Giulietta was relegated to the role of a taxi. With four adults in the car, its sparkling acceleration had disappeared along with the usually agile feel of the chassis. Crunching some numbers revealed why...

The car's quoted power figure is 232bhp and its kerb weight 1320kg, but that latter figure is without a driver. Let's say the average adult is 70kg. If we calculate the power-to-weight ratio with a driver we get 170bhp/ton.

But factor-in three more people and that figure plummets to 147bhp/ton.

For curiosity's sake, I did the same calculation for the 217bhp mk7 Golf GTI (1351kg) with a driver (70kg) and came up with 155bhp/ton. That's lower than the Alfa, but the VW is still quicker to 62mph (6.5sec versus 6.8). I'll put that down to the slightly higher torque output from the Golf's 2-litre turbo engine compared to the Alfa's turbo 1.7, and maybe slightly different gearing.

But weight is still clearly the all-important factor here – and why the Giulietta felt like a taxi that day. ☒

Rob Gould (@RobGould72)



Above: Giulietta's turbo 1.7 gives 232bhp

Driver's log

Date acquired	December 2012
Total mileage	16,391
Mileage this month	532
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	28.9



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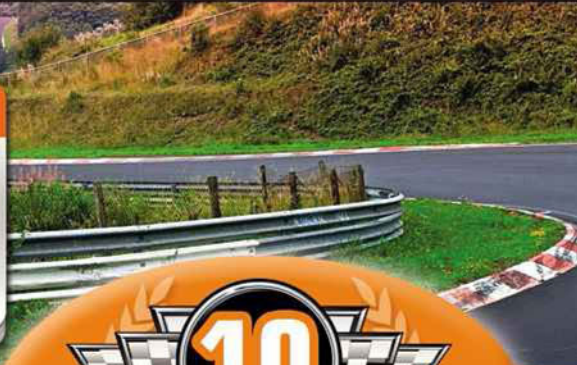
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Mini GP

The GP's been on track – and got some new tyres

SO OUR GP RETURNED from last month's **evo** Track Car of the Year contest with its head held high, having emerged as our favourite 'road car'. This came as no surprise to me, as I'd already experienced just how good the GP is on track at an **evo** track evening a few weeks earlier.

As the TCoty team discovered, the rate at which the GP can change direction is quite astonishing. Darting left-right-left through the Bedford Autodrome's Club Chicane left me stunned lap after lap. I don't think I've ever driven a sharper front-driver.

With the unique 'GP mode' selected – which relaxes the stability control by a perfect amount – the electronic limited-slip diff could be felt doing its thing, too. Unlike a mechanical LSD, it doesn't shout about its presence with an obvious tug of the steering in the direction you're turning, yet the GP could still pull itself out of tighter turns without lighting up the inside wheel.



Above: the GP lives up to its image on a circuit, its ingredients combining to make it a highly accomplished track car

Subtle, then, but effective.

Add to this a punchy engine and powerful, fade-free brakes and you'll understand why the GP barely spent a minute in the pitlane all evening. Whenever I climbed out, another member of the **evo** team hopped in, the lapping only coming to a halt when the once-full tank of super unleaded had almost run dry.

The downside of all this track action was that, by the end of TCoty, the GP's front tyres were illegal, while the rears

weren't far behind. So a new set of the trackday-spec Kumho Ecsta V700s (£150 each) has now been fitted.

It turns out these only have 5mm of tread depth when new, rather than the usual 8mm or so. Presumably this is for minimum tread flex and extra precision on track, but it also helps explain why some Ecsta users (with other cars) are reporting getting just 4000-5000 miles out of them on the road. Gulp. Perhaps our GP was already on its second set when it

arrived with 4000 miles on the clock...

I'll keep an eye on how the new ones wear – and perform on winter roads – over the coming months. ❌

Ian Eveleigh

Driver's log

Date acquired	July 2012
Total mileage	8029
Mileage this month	1488
Costs this month	£600
mpg this month	32.3

Ford Focus ST

Photographer Smith's wedding put the Ford's practical side to the test

THE POOR FOCUS had to take a back seat this month as I called in a favour from some Italian friends for my wedding. Yet whilst the menacing, dark-grey Lamborghini Gallardo certainly looked, went and sounded the part, there wasn't much room in the two-seat supercar for anything other than the mile and a half of bunting that we managed to squeeze in the front boot. Therefore the ST



Above: try doing this with a Gallardo...

estate and its large, easy-to-access load space was the star behind the scenes, carrying all of the excessive wedding decorations that will no doubt be listed on eBay any day soon.

Actually, I'm really impressed with the ST's boot space. The luggage blind is a couple of inches taller than the one in my old RS4 Avant long-termer, so I can stand some of my awkward photography cases upright, leaving the rear bench intact for five-up trips to the Co-op for lunch. Unfortunately, though, it means the wife was right all along – size *does* matter. ❌

Dean Smith (@evoDeanSmith)

Driver's log

Date acquired	August 2013
Total mileage	5113
Mileage this month	1251
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	27.5

Toyota GT86

Catchpole takes over the running of our Toyota – and is already smitten

IF I START watching a film I find it incredibly hard to tear myself away. No matter how cheesy it might be or how late in the evening it might have flickered onto the television, I will generally prop open the eyelids and see it through to its dénouement. I imagine Jethro, on the other hand, has no idea of the thrilling climax to most Steven Seagal blockbusters.

Having been distracted by the soft-top wiles of an F-type, Bovington has abandoned the GT86 halfway through its time with us. Fortunately, with my M135i having returned to BMW (end-of-term report soon), the musical Recaros have aligned such that I can pick up his discarded Toyota and see the test through until the credits roll.



Above: new keeper, same sideways tricks

Driver's log

Date acquired	May 2013
Total mileage	7021
Mileage this month	1295
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	31.3

And after just a couple of drives, I'm thoroughly looking forward to the next few months. The recently added Dunlop Sport Maxx RTs are proving enjoyable, but I think that winters could be the way to go... ❌

Henry Catchpole (@HenryCatchpole)



Darren Kamara

McLaren 12C

Mike Duff borrows the 616bhp supercar for some fast lapping at Goodwood – all for charity, of course

FROM ACROSS THE desk, editor Trott wore the expression of a man who had just found last week's winning lottery numbers marked on an unused slip. 'I've been called to London for a meeting tomorrow,' he said, 'but I was meant to be taking the McLaren to Goodwood to give passenger rides.' It took me approximately 2.4 nanoseconds to put my hand up.

It couldn't have been for a better cause. The event was the Mission Motorsport Invitational Trophy, run on behalf of a charity that helps to rehabilitate wounded service personnel through participation in racing and motorsport, with the idea being to give recovering troops fast rides in a huge range of cars.

Getting there meant picking the 12C up from Woking, where it had been receiving a service. The run from there to Goodwood was a reminder of just how capable the Macca is in the real world. It also revealed that the rain that had been falling in Surrey

was showing no signs of abating as I got closer to the coast, and one of the fastest circuits in the country. Gulp.

Driving into the paddock at Goodwood, the first thing I saw was a 1929 Blower Bentley, the second was a 997 GT3, and the third was the reassuringly familiar form of Dickie Meaden, standing next to a Lotus Elise

'By the end of the day the McLaren was pulling an indicated 150mph by the end of the Lavant Straight'

Club Racer. Clearly this was going to be something a bit different.

Mission Motorsport director Jim Cameron introduced himself and explained we'd be running in different batches – with Dickie and me among the 'modern supercars'. Then I was introduced to my first passenger, a former soldier called Jeremy, who was absolutely delighted to have scored a ride in the McLaren.

The whole day was absolutely brilliant – humbling and life-affirming at the same time, and brilliantly run by the guys from Goldtrack. The first couple of runs were fairly cautious given the sodden conditions, although they gave me a chance to follow Dickie as he attempted to drive the entire circuit sideways in the Elise. But as the rain stopped and the track dried out, speeds increased, and by the end of the day the McLaren was pulling an indicated 150mph by the end of the Lavant Straight. All this, and it managed to handle a traffic-clogged M25 on the way home.

Awesome day, awesome blokes, awesome car. You can find out more about Mission Motorsport at www.missionmotorsport.org ✉

Mike Duff

Driver's log	
Date acquired	March 2013
Total mileage	18,112
Mileage this month	901
Costs this month	£1415
mpg this month	17.1



Renault Clio Williams

Dobie's classic Clio gets treated to some new, track-biased rubber

WITH TWO OF the Willy's Conti Premium Contact 2s past their best, I thought I'd seize the opportunity to try some new rubber; something a little stickier and sportier to reflect the car's occasional, fun-biased use. A quick natter with our tyre tester extraordinaire Kim Adams highlighted Yokohama's Advan Neova, described by its maker as 'the fastest street tyre in the world', though it looks like it'd be far more at home on track. And, shall we say, *interesting* when this winter's snowpocalypse descends.

'Bet those will put stress on the suspension' and 'Ooh, cool tread pattern' are two of the 'helpful' views offered by colleagues. At £100 a corner, I'm hoping for more than a funky set of grooves.

First impressions, on a dry, warm road, are of a firmer edge to the ride (the Neova's sidewalls have steel inserts) and steering that's more direct, with welcome extra weight on initial turn-in. First impressions they remain for now, though, as my request for a wheel alignment check during the swap was quashed when one of Tyres Northampton's ever-friendly fitters diagnosed a next-to-knackered front-offside wheel bearing. That's one job added to next month's MOT, then...

Stephen Dobie
(@evoStephenDobie)

Driver's log	
Date acquired	August 2010
Total mileage	94,865
Mileage this month	345
Costs this month	£402
mpg this month	34.8



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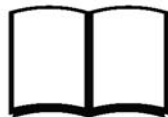
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Market Watch

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Market watch

BARGAIN EXOTIC

£1k Fiat Coupé Turbo puts spotlight on Italian modern-classic

SUPERCARS ARE ALL well and good if you have deep enough pockets, but what if you fancy something with an exotic feel for a much smaller sum of money?

Think 'exotic' and you'll probably think 'Italian'. Alfa's GTV is tempting, and lower-mileage examples with the must-have V6 engine start at around £2500. Then there's Fiat's Barchetta, which instantly feels exotic in the UK thanks to its steering wheel being on the 'wrong' side. Prices start at £2k, but it's now a hard car to come by, and with only 130bhp the performance could disappoint.

So what would you say to an Italian car that offers more than 200bhp, has a sub-7sec 0-60mph time, tops out at 155mph and costs around £1000? At the end of August, a Fiat Coupé 20V Turbo crossed the block at auction house Historics at Brooklands, where it fetched a paltry £1064. This was no ordinary 20V Turbo, either, but a top-spec Limited Edition model from 1998. For his (or her) money, the buyer got a great-looking car that had even benefitted from a new engine and turbo within the past 45,000 miles.

In reality, that £1000 auction car was either

a fabulous bargain – or a potentially huge money pit. The very best, lowest-mileage LE models can command £5000, but there are plenty of well-cared-for 20V Turbos – with the same 220bhp five-cylinder engine – on the market in the £2-3k range. Inadequate maintenance, tired turbos, cracked exhaust manifolds, worn-out suspension and missing electronic keys (each car was supplied with one each for ignition, spare and ECU coding) are all common problems.

Mechanically, however, the cars are surprisingly tough if properly maintained – and there are now specialists who can help, with the annual/12,000-mile service costing around £250. Rust is also less of a problem than might be expected, because Coupé bodies were fully galvanised. And with more Turbos sold in the UK than any other version of the Coupé, there's no need to rush into the first one you see. Although it might be hard to hold back on a £1000 bargain like the one sold at Historics...

Simon de Burton



Auction watch

Entry-level Ariel Atom and early Lancia Integrale stand out in Anglia Car Auctions sale

THE SELECTION OF lots at Anglia Car Auctions' next sale (November 9) is, as usual, eclectic to say the least.

The 2005 Ariel Atom 2 is an unusual auction star, being one of the earliest Honda-engined versions. This particular example was also specified with the lesser-spotted 160bhp Civic Type-S engine. With an estimate of £18,000-22,000, it is also one of the cheapest Atoms you can buy, and is sure to attract some serious attention.

It's slightly less extreme than the 220bhp Type-R-powered versions, but don't let that fool you into thinking the basic model is a slouch. Weighing a shade over 500kg, it still pushes out over 300bhp per ton. Having just had a £12,000 rebuild at Ariel, it's also a safe bet that there are many years of track fun still to be had in this Atom.

And now for something completely different. The Range Rover 'In Vogue' model was the original 'posh' Rangie, featuring a number of fashionable extras, one of which was a picnic hamper. More importantly, the interior was trimmed with high-quality wood door cappings, and carpets with an even thicker pile – taking away slightly from the working nature of the original Range Rover. It also received a high-compression version of the Rover V8 engine. This fine-looking 58,000-mile, 1981 example is expected to sell for £12,000-15,000.

Finally, there's one of the rarest Lancia Integrales – the original 8-valve version. Okay, it's not quite original, having been converted to right-hand drive and fitted with a strut brace and a 16v bonnet, but it will appeal to a lot of people. Although at the time of writing there's no guide price, it could sell for anywhere between £4000 and £8000 depending on who's in the room on the day. With nice Evo 2s now selling for £30k-plus, it does make you think...

Matthew Hayward (@evoMatthew)



Above: Atom 2 has received a £12k rebuild, but has an estimate of £18-22k; 8v Integrale could go for just £4k

Market Watch

Knowledge

Insights into the used-car market



Ask the expert

Q I own a 2005 Audi S4 Avant. I love the sound of its V8 and the build quality, and it's a nice place to sit, but it isn't that fun! It has a serious drink problem too. I want to change it for something really fun and a bit more economical. My budget is £10k.

Richard Gunn, Devon

A The obvious choice for something with similar space but a more entertaining chassis would be an E91 BMW 330d Touring. You'll be down a fraction on outright pace, but not by as much as you'd expect thanks to over 400lb ft of torque from the six-cylinder turbodiesel.

Slightly more unusual options include the mk2 Mondeo ST TDCi

(great chassis) and the Zafira VXR, or if you still want four-wheel drive for the Devon lanes, you could try boosting your adrenalin with one of the run-out Subaru Impreza WRX GB270 Sport Wagons (pictured). At 266bhp, it's well down on power compared with the 339bhp S4, but it's considerably lighter, too, so can match the Audi's acceleration while feeling more 'alive'. In its own way, the 2.5-litre boxer engine sounds as mellifluous as a V8 and, with only 100 GB270 Wagons made, you might (repeat, might) even have an appreciating asset.

Admittedly, it will be as thirsty as the S4 when driven hard – but exercising restraint should squeeze 30mpg. If you can find one, some hard bargaining should buy you a good example for around £10k. **sdb**

Trader chat



Tony Glym, Fosker's Ferrari

www.foskers.com

'The recent news of a Ferrari 250 GTO selling for a world-record \$52million is obviously good for anyone in the Ferrari business, as it confirms the investment value of the marque and demonstrates just how buoyant the market is. Buyers seem keener than ever, and prices are subsequently continuing to rise across all of the classic models. Even a lower-end car, such as a 308 GT4, for example, will now fetch £30,000-60,000, whereas it would have been £10,000-12,000 just three or four years ago.

'The restoration side is also very strong. The Dino is one of our particular specialities, and we have already received the blue car that fetched £236,000 at the Bonhams auction during the Goodwood Revival – it is not quite as good as it looked, and the owner is about to spend a further £10,000-15,000 on it. But that will make it an excellent example.

'We've noticed, too, that many people buying their first classic Ferrari are not starting at the bottom, but coming in at around the £500,000 mark and going for models such as the 330 GTC or various 250s. We currently have a stunning 1951 250 PF coupe, which is being treated to a bare-metal repaint, and that will probably sell fairly rapidly at around £425,000.'

Just looking

The pick of the classifieds this month



Audi RS4

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028 9445 9446

This is increasingly looking like a rare thing indeed – a performance Audi brimming with involvement and tactility. The B7 Audi RS4 wowed us when it arrived in 2006, and hasn't been surpassed by a fast four-ringed saloon or estate since.

Available for little more than a new top-spec A1, this 2007 example at Hollybrook in Northern Ireland has covered a decidedly modest 41,000 miles, and looks pretty

mega in its Sprint Blue/black leather combo. It also possesses perhaps the most detailed ad of any RS4 currently on sale, with a snappy walk-around of its wheels, exterior and interior.

The rest of Hollybrook's stock list is wonderfully eclectic too, ranging from an Escort RS2000 to a 911 RSR recreation, with an Alfa 90 Gold Cloverleaf in between.

Stephen Dobie (@evoStephenDobie)

Jaguar XKR-S

£61,995

Targa Florio Cars, West Sussex

www.targafloriocars.com

01243 641117



It may be two years old, but this Jaguar XKR-S has covered just 5800 miles, and at a smidge over £60k, it looks like incredible value for money. Good for its next owner, as that means a barely run-in Jag with a healthy discount. Not so good for its first owner, as that price equates to around £6 per mile in depreciation...

The car is in gorgeous French Racing Blue, with matching stitching for the leather,

while underneath the bodywork is Jaguar's most potent current powertrain. A 542bhp supercharged 5-litre V8 does its best to grenade the rear tyres in all conditions – even with the traction control on!

It's a wild ride, the XKR-S, but in an age of sports cars where torque vectoring and ESP are wrestling control from the driver, a bit of madcap muscle remains more than welcome. **SD**

Fantasy garage: £120,000 challenge

This month, we challenged our market expert, Simon de Burton, to find a trio of coupes for £120,000 amongst the ads at forsale.evo.co.uk



1
Datsun 240Z
£10,500

My favourite Scalextric car as a kid, and even better-looking in real life. The period colour scheme of this particular example only adds to the appeal...



2
Porsche 993 Turbo
£47,995

The ultimate air-cooled 911 is still blisteringly quick, but practical too – and the rear wing is almost discreet. But not quite.



3
Bentley Conti R Mulliner
£62,000

Of course, there are better, cheaper, less thirsty cars for continent-crossing – but none as menacingly majestic as this.



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Bentley Arnage



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2012/61, 10,500miles, 1 Owner, Linen Hide,
Crested seats, Sat Nav, R/Cam £149,999

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2012/12, 2,300miles, 2 Owners, Cream hide
Walnut burr wood veneer £149,999

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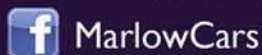
Aston Martin DB9 Volante, 2006/56, 15,800miles, Black/Black with Black piano wood, Sat Nav, AMFSH £45,979
Bentley Continental Flying Spur, 2005/05, 42,900miles, Silver, Black leather, Glass Sun Roof, Heated/Cooled seats front & rear £35,999
BMW X6 40D, 2012/61, 18k miles, Black with Black leather, R/Cam with top view, HUD, Side Cam, Upgraded Sound £39,999
Porsche Panamera S PDK, 2010/10, 12,900miles, White with Black leather, Sat Nav, R/Cam, Bose sound £54,800
Mercedes-Benz S500L Pullman, 2003/53, 110k miles, Silver with Cream leather, Stretch Limo, Six Seater, Glass Divide, Huge spec £21,999

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Lamborghini Gallardo LP560
Cordelia Alloys Ocuitura Stitching Lifting Gear 5,000 miles 2011 **£114,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo LP560 Bicolore
Skorpius Alloys Clear Engine Bay Cover Lifting Gear 7,000 miles 2011 **£109,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo V10 Spyder HIGH SPEC
Calisto Alloys, Branding Pack, Heated Seat, 36,000 miles, 2008 **£69,990**



Lamborghini Murcielago
Hercules Alloys Egear Lifting Gear 15,000 miles 2005 **£94,990**



Lamborghini Murcielago
Hercules Alloys SV Spec Bicolour interior 62,000 miles 2004 **£89,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo LP560
Colour SatNav Calisto Alloys Electric Seats 29,000 miles 2010 **£79,990+ VAT**



Lamborghini Gallardo
Lifting Gear Reverse Camera Egear 21,000 miles 2008 **£79,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo
Lifting Gear Calisto Alloys Reverse Camera 29,000 miles 2008 **£77,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo
Branding Pack Matt Black Cassiopea Alloys Sportivo Interior 11,000 miles 2007 **£74,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo
Calisto Alloys, Branding Pack, Reverse Camera 16,000 miles 2007 **£74,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo V10 Coupe LHD HIGH SPEC
Lifting Gear, Clear Engine Bay Cover, Yellow Brake Calipers, 14,000 miles, 2005, **£59,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo
LHD Reverse Camera Calisto Alloys 8,000 miles 2009 **£74,990**



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Calisto Alloys Special Edition Colour SatNav 59,000 miles 2005 **£57,990**

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Audi R8 V8 coupe 2007-present



Overview

Early V8 R8s hold their value well – for a good reason. For a blend of supercar thrills and useability, nothing else comes close

Words: Peter Tomalin

TWO PERSONAL MEMORIES of the R8 from *evo* Car of the Year 2007: being utterly blown away by its sheer driveability on the roads of central France, and, later, watching Meaden and Bovingdon drift it round the Mas du Clos circuit, smoke curling from the rear tyres. After years of slightly numb-feeling, nose-led Audis, the R8 was a revelation. Beautifully built, properly quick and deliciously feelsome at any speed, it was an instant hero, and six years on, the appeal is undimmed.

Closely related to the Lamborghini Gallardo under the skin with its aluminium spaceframe and many shared components, and hand-built at a new facility at Neckarsulm, the R8 went on sale in the spring of 2007. The engine was a dry-sumped version of the all-aluminium quad-cam FSI V8 from the B7-generation RS4, generating 414bhp at a dizzy 7800rpm. The basic coupe with the six-speed manual gearbox listed at £76,725; the paddleshift R-tronic version was £81,925. Both were all-wheel drive, but biased 70/30 in favour of the rear wheels.

The V10 arrived in 2009, and Spyder versions the following year, but it's the V8 coupe we're focusing on here. Towards the end of 2012 a facelifted V8 was introduced, heralding the arrival of the S-tronic twin-clutch gearbox and a number of detail improvements and cosmetic tweaks, but the R8's core appeal remained unchanged. It's a wonderfully 'complete' package, genuinely useable every day but capable of serving up proper thrills on the road – and the track too.

Extended warranties are available from Audi (and other providers) for total peace of mind (typically £1000-£1200 a year), but the R8 is proving extremely reliable compared with most supercars. Running costs are generally lower too. And while big bills can lie in wait for the unwary, follow the advice of the experts and you could be driving a junior supercar with all of the pleasure and none of the pain.

Checkpoints

Engine

The V8 is a sophisticated unit – all-aluminium, two chain-driven overhead camshafts per bank, variable valve timing, dry sump – and according to Andy McLeish of specialists APS (autops.co.uk) it's proving virtually bombproof: 'The only issue we've found is that some engines carbon-up over time, so check for smoke on start-up, which could point to it needing a de-coke at some point. Otherwise as long as it's serviced properly – we recommend every year or 10,000 miles, whichever comes sooner – it seems trouble-free.' Alex Green of Fountain Motors (fountain.co.uk) concurs: 'High mileage isn't a problem. In fact the more these cars are used, the better they seem to perform.'

Transmission

The gearbox and clutch are basically the same whether it's the manual or the R-tronic, and again the experts say they're proving issue-free, though if you do a lot of low-speed manoeuvring, the semi-auto will wear the clutch faster. It's expensive to replace (c£2.5k), so check carefully. Juddering with the auto – or a heavy clutch and/or a high biting point with the manual – are signs it's on

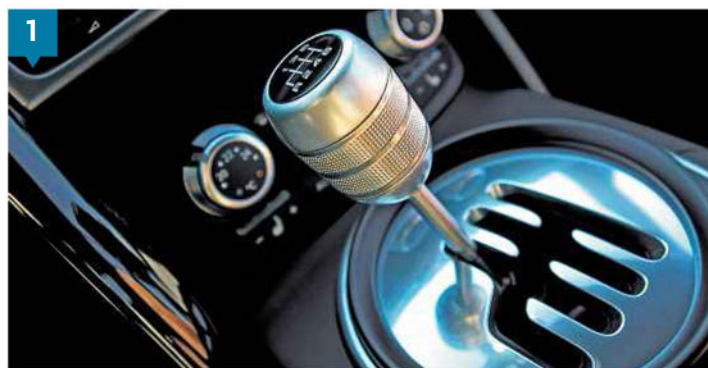
the way out. A dealer or specialist can tell how much clutch life is left via the diagnostics port.

Suspension, steering, brakes

Brakes are expensive – as much as £3k to renew a full set of iron discs and pads – so check there's plenty of life in them. 'Ceramic discs should last forever, but again the pads are expensive,' says McLeish. Tyres are pricey too (c£2k for a set of OE Pirelli R01s). Listen for knocks from the suspension – the rear arms may need replacing (an upgrade to V10 items is common). MagneRide dampers generally last as long as conventional items, but again they're pricey.

Body, interior, electrics

It's well worth getting a potential purchase inspected – including removing the underbody trays to look for signs of damage or repairs. Interiors and electrics are proving predictably robust. There was a recall in August 2011 for cars built between April '09 and June 2011; this was to inspect and protect a fuel pipe that was at risk of chafing.



1: manual and R-tronic transmissions share a common gearbox and clutch. 2: bodywork has no real corrosion issues. 3: brakes, whether iron or carbon ceramic, are expensive

What we said

March 2007



'Smoother and less animalistic than a Gallardo's V10, but more intimate and muscular than a 911's outboard flat-six, the R8's V8 soundtrack is civilised at idle but simmers with potency and responds immediately to every blip of the throttle. The clutch is light and progressive, the open-gate gearshift similarly delicate. Even at low speed you know you're in something genuinely special.

'The sense of occasion intensifies as the R8 settles into a satisfyingly broad-shouldered, no-nonsense gait. You can feel the structural rigidity and the sporting bias to the springs and dampers, but there's a subtle, rounded feel to the ride that smoothes the sharpest edges without isolating you from what's going on.

'We'd expected terrific lateral grip and traction. What we hadn't bargained for was such precise and exploitable throttle-adjustability, such a willingness to be driven below, at or beyond the limit, and such involvement and entertainment when you do. If you're looking for fun on challenging, unforgiving roads, the R8 has all the consistency, progression and predictability you could wish for.'



Above: R8 has quattro four-wheel drive, but a rear bias means oversteer is possible



Above left: V8 has a reputation for reliability. Above right: interior is hard-wearing



Specification

Audi R8 (V8)

Engine V8, 4163cc
Max power 414bhp @ 7800rpm
Max torque 317lb ft @ 4500rpm
Transmission Six-speed manual (automated manual option), 4wd
Weight 1560kg
Power-to-weight 270bhp/ton
0-62mph 4.6sec (claimed, manual)
Max speed 187mph (claimed)
Price new £76,725 (April 2007)

Parts prices

(Prices supplied by APS (www.autops.co.uk) using Audi parts. Tyre prices from blackcircles.com. All prices include VAT but exclude fitting charges)

Tyres (each) £198.70 front, £295.46 rear (Michelin Pilot Super Sport)

Front pads (axle set) £307.60

Front discs (pair) £588

Front damper, inc spring £303.21

Mag damper, inc spring £778.50

Exhaust front section (inc primary cats) £1981

Exhaust, cat-back £2162.40

Set of spark plugs £119.71

Servicing

(Prices supplied by APS, inc VAT)

APS recommends 12-month/10,000-mile intervals, whichever comes first

First service £298.39

Second service £344.74

Third service £617.95

Clutch change (inc all parts and labour) £2417.08

Brake fluid service (all inclusive) £155

What to pay

Limited supply means R8 prices remain strong. Approach sub-£40k cars with caution. £40k-£50k is where you'll find most early V8s, with the price dependent on history, mileage, condition and spec. MagneRide, B&O hi-fi, satnav, leather, heated seats, carbonfibre blades and interior trim – all these will boost the price. Don't be put off if the car has been used on track, or by a high mileage – just make sure the servicing has been meticulous.

'I bought one' Greg Bird

'I bought my R8 two and a half years ago from an independent specialist dealer. It's a 2008 car in Jet Blue Metallic with silver blades and a black leather interior. The key options I wanted were the B&O stereo and the switchable Mag ride, although having said that I rarely press the button to stiffen the ride – it only really comes into its own on track.

'I've done just over 9000 miles in the car – mostly long-distance journeys

within the UK and local blasts at the weekend, though it's equally happy to be driven around town. It really is the everyday supercar.

'The car simply exudes quality and power, and when driven hard the handling is sublime, the acceleration controlled yet breathtaking, and the V8 sounds lovely. But the main things I love about the car are the relative exclusivity – you rarely see them on the road – and

the looks. Even in a car park of Porsches and Ferraris, the R8 always gets the attention.

'It's proved to be very reliable indeed. The only problems have been a flat battery and a windscreen washer hose breakage. The only large bill was to replace the dampers – two were spent so I had to replace all four. At £800 each, that was £3200 for the parts alone, so buyer beware!'

In the classifieds



2007 R8 4.2 FSI

⊕ 30,000 miles
 ⊕ Daytona Metallic
 ⊕ carbon sideblades ⊕ satnav
 ⊕ part black leather
 ⊕ full dealer history
 ⊕ redlinespecialistcars.co.uk

£45,995



2008 R8 4.2 FSI R-tronic

⊕ 38,000 miles
 ⊕ Phantom Black Metallic
 ⊕ cream nappa leather
 ⊕ Mag ride ⊕ satnav
 ⊕ full Audi history
 ⊕ speedsgx.co.uk

£47,950



2008 R8 4.2 FSI

⊕ 10,552 miles
 ⊕ Ice Silver ⊕ cream leather
 ⊕ satnav ⊕ B&O hi-fi
 ⊕ parking sensors
 ⊕ full Audi history
 ⊕ stratstone.com

£49,784

The rivals

Porsche 911 Turbo (997.1)

£40-45k gives you a wide choice of '06-'09 Turbos, offering more pace (472bhp) than an R8 but not quite the exclusivity.

Aston Martin V8 Vantage

Average Vantages are now under £30k. For £40-45k you get the pick of '07-'08 cars with low mileages and impeccable histories.

Lamborghini Gallardo

R8 a bit too sensible for you? The Gallardo shares many of the Audi's underpinnings, but with a 494bhp V10. Now dipping below £60k.

Useful contacts

⊕ unit20.org
 servicing, upgrades
 ⊕ r8talk.com
 forums, advice, cars for sale
 ⊕ autops.co.uk
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 ⊕ fontain.co.uk
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AUDI R8 4.2 V8 QUATTRO R-TRONIC AUTO 08 REG
Phantom Black Pearl with Black Nappa Leather. 29,000 Miles with F/A/S/H. Spec Inc DVD Sat Nav Bluetooth Prep, Climate, E/H/Seats with Lumbar, Multi CD, Bang & Olufsen Sound System, Bi-Xenons, PDC, Audi Magnetic Ride, S/Steel Pedals, Computer, M/F/S/Wheel and 19" Alloys. Tracker Fitted.
£49,995



BENTLEY CONTINENTAL FLYING SPUR SALOON AUTO 06 REG
Moonbeam Silver, Portland Main and Beluga Secondary Hide. 38,000 Miles. F/B/S/H. Coming Home Function G/D/O/Oper, Sat Nav, Phone Prep Inc Privacy H/Set, Voice Control, Climate, E/G/Solar Sunroof, E/H/M/Ventilated Messaging Seats, H/Ventilated/Rear Seats, Multi CD, Dark Stained Burr Walnut, Adjustable Suspension, M/F/S/Wheel and 20" 7 Spoke Alloys.
£37,995



BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT MULLINER COUPE WITH SUPERSPORTS STYLING AUTO 06 REG
Beluga with Portland Main and Beluga Secondary Hide. 77,000 Miles. Full Bentley & Specialist Service History. Full Supersports Styling, Diamond Stitched Leather with Embossed Logo, Drilled Alloy Sports Pedals, Sports G/SH, Sat Nav, Phone Prep, C/H/Function G/D/O/Oper, Climate, Cruise, E/H/M Message Seats, Multi CD, Piano Black Wood, Adjustable Suspension, Computer, M/F/S/Wheel and 20" Speed Look Alloys. Bal of Warranty until 25/4/14.
£37,995



BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GTC MULLINER CAB AUTO 08 REG
Beluga Black, Full Beluga Hide. 46,000 Miles, F/B/S/H - Recent Service. Mulliner Drivers Spec Inc (Diamond Quilted Leather with Embossed Bentley Logo, Aluminium sports Pedals, Sports G/SH, Keyless Go, Sat Nav, TV, Bluetooth Prep, Voice Control, Climate, Cruise, E/H/M Message Seats, Multi CD, Xenons, PDC, Closing Aids, P/Hood, Power Boot, Double Glazing, S/Glass, Chrome Grills, Adjustable Suspension, Computer, M/F/S/Wheel, F/Mirrors, T/P/Monitor, Piano Black Wood Inc S/Wheel and 20" Speed Style Alloys.
£38,995



FERRARI CALIFORNIA 2+2 CAB P1 AUTO 2011
Nero Daytona, Full Crema Leather. 4,000 Miles. F/B/S/H. Touch Screen Sat Nav, Bluetooth, Ceramic Brakes, Climate, E/Seats, IPOD Connection, Magnetic Ride, Scuderia Shields, Carbon Fibre S/Wheel inc LED Lights, PDC, P/Hood, Yellow Rev Counter, Yellow Callipers, Auto Dim Mirrors, T/P/Monitor and 20" Diamond Cut Sport Alloys. NavTrak Fitted. Bal of 4 Year Warranty.
£119,995



PORSCHE BOXSTER S 3.4 CAB 62 REG
White with Carrera Red Natural Leather. 8,000 Miles. Spec inc PCM 3, Touch Screen Sat Nav, Bluetooth Phone Module, Auto Start / Stop, Climate, E/H/Seats, CD Player, Portable Audio Interface, Xenons, LED Daytime Running Lights, Red P/Hood, Computer, Red Callipers and 20" Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty.
£39,995



PORSCHE 997 C2 CARRERA 2 GEN 2 2009 MODEL PDK AUTO 08 REG
Guards Red with Stone Grey Leather. 33,000 Miles with F/S/H. Spec Inc Sport Chrono Pack Plus, PCM 3.0, Extended Touch Screen Sat Nav, Bluetooth Phone Module, Climate, Cruise, Sports seats, Guards Red Seat Belts, Multi CD, Universal Audio Interface, Bose Sound, PDC, PASM Suspension, Rear Wiper, PSM, T/T/Screen, Aluminium Trim and 19" Sport Design Alloys. This Launch Car was Specified by Porsche in 2008 to Showcase the Upcoming 2009 Model.
£36,995



PORSCHE 997 TURBO COUPE FACELIFT TIP S AUTO 08 REG
Midnight Blue Met, Sand Beige Leather. 31,000 Miles, F/B/S/H - Recent Service. Sports Chrono Package Plus, PCM 3.0, Touch Screen Sat Nav, Bluetooth Phone Module, Climate, Cruise, E/H/Seat, E/H/M/Comfort Seats, Universal Audio Interface, CD Player, Bose Sound, Xenons, PDC, PASM Suspension, Computer, Sports M/F/S/Wheel, PSM, T/T/Screen, Full Turbo Body Styling and 19" Turbo Alloys. Bal of Porsche Warranty Until Sept 2014.
£32,995



AUDI Q5 2.0 TDI QUATTRO SE 170 S-TRONIC AUTO 10 REG
Brilliant Black with Full Black Leather. 45,000 Miles with F/A/S/H. Spec inc HDD Sat Nav, Bluetooth Phone Prep, Voice Control, Climate, E/Seats with Lumbar, CD Player, Audi Parking System Plus, Power Tailgate, PDC, Daytime Running Lights, M/F/S/Wheel and 18" Alloys.
£23,995



AUDI Q7 3.0 TDI QUATTRO S-LINE 8 SPEED AUTO 11 REG
White with Full Black Leather. 25,000 Miles with F/A/S/H. Spec inc Panoramic Glass Roof, Sat Nav, TV, Reverse Camera, Climate, Cruise, E/H/Seats, Bose Sound, Bi-Xenons, Electric Tailgate, S/Steps, S/Glass, R/Rails, M/F/S/Wheel, F/Mirrors, Full S-Line Styling and 21" Black Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty.
£37,995



RANGE ROVER 3.0 TDV6 VOGUE 8 SPEED AUTO 13 REG
Luxor Metallic with Espresso / Almond Leather. 8,000 Miles. Spec Inc Touch Screen Sat Nav, TV, Rear View Camera, Start / Stop System, Passive Entry Push Button Start, Climate, Cruise, E/H/M Seats with Lumbar, H/Rear/Seats, Contrast Stitching, DAB Radio, Premium Audio, Adaptive Xenons, PDC, Ambient Lighting, S/Glass, Electric Tow Bar, Shadow Walnut Veneer, H/M/S/Wheel Inc G/Spades and 21" Diamond Turned Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty VAF Qualifying. £34,167 plus £12,833 Vat. We Can Supply Vat Free For Export - Admin Fee Applies, Due in Door.
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RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 TDV6 HSE 2010 MODEL AUTO 08 REG
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RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 TDV6 HSE WITH REVERSE STYLING AUTO 11 REG
Fuj White with Full Ebony Leather. 20,000 Miles with F/B/S/H. Spec Inc Full Reverse Body Styling, Touch Screen Sat Nav TV, Rear View Camera, Personal Telephone Integration, Voice Control, Passive Entry, Push Button Start, Cool Quibby Box, Climate, Cruise, E/H/M Seats with Lumbar, H/Rear/Seats, Portable Audio Connection, DAB Radio, Premium Sound, Bi-Xenons, PDC, Terrain Response, Adjustable Suspension, E/S/O/Column, Piano Black Veneer, Ambient Lighting, F/Mirrors and 20" Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty.
£44,995



RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 TDV6 HSE WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHY STYLING 2012 MODEL 8 SPEED AUTO 08 REG
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£42,995



RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 TDV6 AUTOBIOGRAPHY DYNAMIC 2014 MODEL AUTO 08 REG
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New from t-lab

Corkscrew



Number 4 in our 'Great Bends of the World' series celebrates the most famous bend in the USA - Laguna Seca's Corkscrew. Blind high-speed approach, fierce drop, sharp left, sharp right - all in a few mad yards of track.

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2 1 3



4



evo Essentials Top 3: T-shirts

Corkscrew
£25 t-lab.eu



The latest in t-lab's series celebrating famous corners, this shirt depicts the terrifying Corkscrew at Laguna Seca.

GT3 rear wings
£16.99 shotdeadinthehead.com



The latest evo T-shirt features the spoilers from the 996.1, 996.2, 997.1 and 997.2 versions of the Porsche 911 GT3.

Bruce McLaren M7A
£35 gearboxgifts.com



An official McLaren Heritage tee, featuring the M7A that delivered Bruce McLaren his last GP victory at Spa in 1968.

Experience

Classic American Muscle Mustang Experience

From £79.99
classicamericanmuscle.co.uk

1 Fancy trying some well-prepared slices of Americana? The Classic American Muscle Mustang Experience has a range of Mustangs from the '60s to the '90s, plus a C3 Corvette Stingray and a Greenwood Corvette C4. With events at Brands Hatch, Snetterton, Goodwood and Dunsfold, deals range from a three-mile blast for £79.99 to several laps in three different cars for £299.

Brakes

Tarox BMW M3 brake upgrade

£950 en.tarox.com

2 This new two-piece brake disc upgrade from Italian specialist Tarox is a direct replacement for the standard parts on E90/92/93 M3s and is designed to work with the original calipers and ABS system. The discs are machined from steel billet rather than cast iron for durability and the separate bell helps dissipate heat to eliminate warping. Its maker claims they have good cold bite and work well on track and road.

Lights

Osram LEDriving Fog DRL

£349.99 osram.co.uk

3 Want to add daytime running lights (DRLs) to your car but don't fancy cutting holes in the grille? This new kit from Osram could be the answer. The units are designed to go in existing 90mm fog light mounts and act as DRLs when the headlights are off. The DRL LEDs go out when the headlights are on, and the units also work as LED fog lights.

Model

Porsche 911 Sport Classic (1:43)

£39.95 www.schuco.de

4 With just 250 built, the retro-looking 911 Sport Classic was an instant hit, selling out very quickly in 2010. If you like the styling but can't justify the £100k+ price tag of the real thing, this superbly detailed Schuco model might just do the trick.

www.nightbreakerunlimited.co.uk



*compared to a standard Osram bulb.





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Silva Ninox II

£50 www.silva.se

Trying to change a late-night puncture last winter with only a torch propped on the ground for light persuaded me to keep a headtorch in the glovebox. And this new Ninox II from Silva will be the one in there this coming winter.

The LED revolution means these tiny torches are now seriously bright – you really don't want to look into one when

it's on. With others I've used, this means a narrow, sharply defined beam, but the Ninox II spreads its 140 lumens of light from two LEDs much wider, with no sharp cut-off, in turn meaning much less head movement is needed. It's powered by three AAA batteries said to be good for 30 hours, although there is a reduced-power mode that can triple that.

It's comfortable too, with a wide, soft, elastic headband that has a rubber grip on the inside, and at around 100 grams you hardly notice it's there. The torch can be swivelled 180 degrees vertically so you can get light where you need it. The only drawback is the price, but if you use a headtorch regularly, it's easily justified.

Kim Adams (@cargadgetguru)



Mio MiVue 388

£199.99 www.mio.com

Dashboard cameras are all the rage at the minute and can now be the deciding factor in proving fault in insurance claims. Digital Video Recorders are designed to be left in the windscreen of your car, recording every journey in case evidence is required in the event of an accident.

This Mio MiVue 388 camera records video in full HD quality, along with speed and GPS location – and can also be used to take still images post-accident. The Mio differs from most by giving accurate speed camera locations, too. When sat in its mount, it's actually quite a tall piece of kit, taking up a substantial amount of windscreen space. That could prove to be a problem if you wanted to use a satnav simultaneously, or if (like me) you dislike window clutter. It's easy to set up, and the menus and buttons are all fairly simple, although it would be worth getting a professional to hard-wire it into your car to prevent the annoyance of cables running across your dashboard.

I reviewed the footage of an average commute and was pleasantly surprised by the quality – even in low sun. The pictures appeared slightly dark, but considering the difficult light conditions they were more than adequate.

Matthew Hayward
(@evoMatthew)

Armor All Insect Remover

£4.49

www.armorall.eu

This revised Insect Remover from Armor All is a good way of keeping your paintwork shining, claiming to take away the hard work of removing dead insects.

I reckon Armor All is right, too. Unlike some bug cleaners that are more like liquid polishes and leave a white spray that's a pain to remove from grilles and trim, this spray is essentially clear. It clings well, running off slowly and has a slightly sticky feel. Leave it to work for a minute or so, then wipe off with a wet cloth.

Compared to the usual bug cleaners, this is certainly effective and the wet cloth seems to help with stubborn stains, making quick work of bugs and bird droppings. It can also tackle tree sap and be used as a pre-wash on stubborn marks. While the wet cloth helps shift the bugs, you do need to go over the area and dry it to get a shiny finish.

Kim Adams (@cargadgetguru)



Breffo Spiderpodium Original

£14.95 www.breffo.com

It's hard to make a smartphone mount look funky. I mean, they're hardly the most exciting things in the world, are they? Then the postman came along one day and plonked a Breffo Spiderpodium on my desk.

This rubbery, arachnid-shaped creation features eight long legs extending from a small central base. Each leg has four joints, meaning they can be individually bent in any direction you like to hold your phone (or indeed, any device of a similar size). In a car, you can wrap three or four legs around an air vent or similar to keep the Spiderpodium in place, then use the

others to snugly secure your digital device. We tried it in a Lotus Exige, where it held a phone tightly in position for use as a satnav. The major drawback, however, was finding somewhere to mount it: we had to resort to the cup holder.

As well as coming in a larger version for tablets, the Spiderpodium is available in a range of colours, but we recommend the black one, primarily as a means of scaring people that suffer from arachnophobia. Imagine the look on someone's face when their phone rings and a huge spider looks like it's clambering all over it...

Dan McCalla



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The best destinations to visit in your car

Great drives: Carrera Panamericana, Mexico



Start point: 16.33397, -95.28579 (Tehuantepec)

The road: Mexico 190

Great for: Mercedes SLS AMG or any other junior supercar



A

AS IT'S ISSUE 190, and being a fan of numerical symmetry, I thought we'd have a quick look at route 190 in Mexico.

This is perhaps better known as the course of the Carrera Panamericana, arguably the greatest road race ever run.

It was held for just five years in the 1950s, but nevertheless reached legendary status due to its length (about 2000 miles), speed and the proliferation of cars disappearing over cliffs.

I was lucky enough to drive a section of the road a few years ago (evo 144) in a Mercedes SLS (sadly not a Mercedes 190), and it remains the most continuously winding and perfectly cambered stretch of tarmac I think I have ever driven. The scenery is impressive if not spectacular, but it's the way the road continues to twist and tip from apex to apex for hours on end without any sort of break that is so engrossing.

The race began in Tuxtla, but we started further west in Oaxaca and followed the 190 north for a couple of hundred miles until we reached Puebla (if you fancy an even longer run you could try starting further east, in Tehuantepec). Cartographically the 190 is a more minor road in this section and so can be easy to miss. To be honest, though, if you look on a map or Google Street View then it is obvious that you could choose any number of roads south of Mexico City and have an equally memorable time, as they all appear to wriggle like a hooked minnow.

Contrary to what you might expect, the 190 is decently wide, well surfaced and incredibly sparsely trafficked, which is wonderful. However, you need to keep in mind that, unlike in the race, any other vehicle you do encounter is likely to be travelling at a fraction of the speed you are and will quite possibly have a large number of passengers both in it and precariously attached to the outside of it.

Henry Catchpole
Features editor



The route



Start **Finish**

Distance: 400 miles

Time: 8 hours



Where to stay

Oaxaca would provide a great base to explore the roads both to the north and south of the city. It is also a very attractive place. The Holiday Inn Express in the Centro Historico might not be the most imaginative place to stay, but it should provide you with a reassuringly clean and safe haven. Importantly, it also has free parking.



Watch out for

Caracaras are sort of big black eagles and one famously went through the window of a Gullwing Mercedes in 1952, so I feel duty-bound to warn you about them. More seriously, avoid travelling at night and generally keep your wits about you as car-jackings are not unheard of. The drug-related violence is generally in the north of the country near the border with the USA, but please check the Foreign Office advice before travelling.

Reader road trip Island hopping

I'd wanted to visit the Isle of Lewis for years, not only because I share the same name, but for its remoteness and scenery too.

Starting from Perth, we pointed our MX-5 towards Glenshee. The A93 and A939 were a perfect start to our trip, before the empty A835 to Ullapool and our ferry to Stornoway.

Days two and three were spent exploring the Isle of Lewis, starting with the Butt of Lewis at the far north of the island, and returning to Stornoway via the A858 – the best road of the week, winding alongside lochs, with no traffic (or barriers).

Our third night was spent in Carnish, a hamlet on the west coast with a perfect white beach – the highlight of the trip.



Our next stop was on Berneray, from where we drove to South Uist, crossing North Uist and Benbecula, before catching our ferry to Skye – five islands in one day!

After exploring Skye, we headed back to Perth via the A830 to Fort William – an awesome road – then the A82 past Glencoe. It was a great week on amazing roads – we'll be back to Scotland next year!

Lewis Craik

Email your road trip story to
henryc@evo.co.uk

Events calendar

NOVEMBER

November 8-10

Roger Albert Clark Rally
www.rogeralbertclarkrally.org

November 11

Bedford Autodrome GT Circuit trackday
www.msvtrackdays.co.uk

November 14-17

Wales Rally GB, North Wales
www.walesrallygb.com

November 22-24

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix, Interlagos
www.gpbrasil.com

Database

Key ■ = new entry this month. * = grey import. Entries in italics are for cars no longer on sale. **Issue no.** is for our most recent major test of the car (D = Drive, R = Road test or group test, F = Feature). You can order back issues where still available - call 0844 844 0039. **Price** is on-the-road including VAT and delivery charges. **Weight** is the car's kerb weight as quoted by the manufacturer. **bhp/ton** is the power-to-weight ratio based on manufacturer's kerb weight. **0-60mph** and **0-100mph** figures in bold are independently recorded, all other performance figures are manufacturers' claims. **CO2 g/km** is the official EC figure and **EC mpg** is the official 'Combined' figure or equivalent.

Knowledge

Superminis / Hot Hatches

	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft./rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
Abarth Punto Evo	149 R	£16,852	4/1368	161/5500	184/2250	1155kg	142	7.9	-	132	142	47.1	+ Attractive and fun - Needs the Esseesse power upgrade ★★★★★
Abarth 500 Esseesse	129 R	£17,207	4/1368	158/5750	170/3000	1035kg	155	7.2	20.4	131	155	43.5	+ A properly fun, old-school hot hatch - Limited numbers being imported ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Miito Cloverleaf	149 R	£18,755	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1145kg	149	7.5	-	136	139	47.1	+ Great MultiAir engine, impressive ride - Not as feisty as we hoped ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulietta Cloverleaf	144 D	£25,510	4/1742	232/5500	251/1900	1320kg	179	6.8	-	150	177	37.2	+ Shows signs of deep talent... - but should be more exciting ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo I47 GTA	187 R	£31.06	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1360kg	185	6.0	15.5	153	-	23.3	+ Mk1 Focus RS pace without the histrionics - Slightly nose-heavy ★★★★★
Audi A1 1.4 TFSI S Line		£21,270	4/1390	182/6200	184/2000	1190kg	155	6.9	-	141	139	47.9	+ Audi's Mini rival is an accomplished thing - But not a hugely fun one ★★★★★
Audi A1 quattro	181 R	£41,020	4/1984	253/6000	232/2500	1420kg	181	5.7	-	152	199	32.8	+ Polished 253bhp all-wheel-drive A1 - Just 19 for UK, Porsche Cayman price ★★★★★
Audi S3	188 R	£31,260	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1395kg	216	5.4	12.5	155	162	40.4	+ Lots of grip and one of the best-sounding four-pot turbos - Still a little too clinical ★★★★★
Audi S3	106 R	£06-12	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1455kg	183	5.6	13.6	155	198	33.2	+ Very fast, very effective, very... err... clinical - A little too clinical ★★★★★
Audi RS3 Sportback	156 R	£11-12	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1575kg	216	4.5	-	155	212	31.0	+ Above, with added five-pot character - Again, see above... ★★★★★
BMW 125i M Sport	176 D	£26,070	4/1997	218/5000	228/1350	1420kg	156	6.4	-	155	154	42.8	+ Performance, price, running costs - Dull four-pot soundtrack ★★★★★
BMW M135i	186 R	£30,555	6/2979	316/5800	332/1300	1425kg	225	4.8	12.9	155	188	35.3	+ Powertrain, noise, chassis, price - Ordinary styling; a limited-slip diff would be nice ★★★★★
BMW 123d M Sport	122 R	£07-11	4/1995	201/4400	295/2000	1420kg	144	6.5	17.4	148	138	54.3	+ Economical and no slouch - Doesn't feel special enough ★★★★★
BMW 130i M Sport	106 R	£05-10	6/2996	261/6650	232/2750	1450kg	183	6.1	15.3	155	-	34.0	+ Fantastic engine - Suspension can still get a little boingy ★★★★★
Citroën C1/Peugeot 107/Toyota Aygo	126 R	£7995+	3/998	68/6000	68/3600	790kg	87	14.2	-	98	103	61.4	+ Full of character and insurance-friendly - Insurance friendly power ★★★★★
Citroën Saxo VTR	013 R	£97-03	4/1587	100/5700	100/3500	920kg	110	9.3	-	116	-	36.7	+ VTS poise, half the insurance group - Cramped pedals ★★★★★
Citroën Saxo VTS	020 R	£97-03	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	935kg	130	7.6	22.6	127	-	34.9	+ Chunky, chuckable charger - Can catch out the unwary ★★★★★
Citroën DS3 1.6 THP	142 R	£16,800	4/1598	154/6000	177/1400	1240kg	126	7.2	-	133	155	42.2	+ A proper French hot hatch - Petrolheads might find it too 'designed' ★★★★★
Citroën DS3 Racing	153 D	£11-12	4/1598	204/6000	203/2000	1240kg	167	6.5	-	146	149	-	+ Faster, feistier version of above - Not as hardcore as its 'Racing' tag suggests ★★★★★
Fiat Panda 100HP	132 R	£06-11	4/1368	99/6000	97/4250	975kg	103	9.5	-	115	154	43.5	+ Most fun per pound on the market - Optional ESP can't be turned off ★★★★★
Fiat Punto Evo Sporting	141 D	£14,500	4/1368	133/5000	152/1750	1155kg	117	8.5	-	127	129	50.4	+ Great engine, smart styling - Dynamics don't live up to the Evo name ★★★★★
Ford Sportka SE	084 R	£03-08	4/1597	94/5500	100/4250	934kg	102	9.5	-	108	-	37.2	+ Big fun in a little package - Could handle even more power ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta 1.0T EcoBoost 125PS	181 D	£15,445	3/999	123/6000	125/1400	1091kg	115	9.4	-	122	99	65.7	+ Three-pot engine is surprisingly feisty - Struggles to justify the premium price ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta 1.6T Zetec S	184 R	£16,995	4/1596	179/5700	214/1500	1088kg	167	7.4	18.4	137	138	47.9	+ Chassis, price, punchy performance - Not as powerful as key rivals ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta 1.6T Zetec S	188 D	£17,594	4/1596	212/6000	236/2750	1088kg	198	6.6	-	140	138	-	+ One of the best mid-sized hatches made even better - Badge snobbery ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	123 D	£08-13	4/1596	118/6000	112/4050	1045kg	115	9.9	-	120	134	48.7	+ Genuinely entertaining supermini - Grown up compared to Twingo/Swift ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta Zetec S Mountune	132 R	£08-13	4/1596	138/6750	125/4250	1080kg	130	7.9	-	120	134	48.7	+ As above, with a fantastically loud exhaust... - if you're 12 years old ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST	075 D	£05-08	4/1999	148/6000	140/4500	1137kg	132	7.9	-	129	-	38.2	+ Great looks, decent brakes - Disappointing chassis, gutless engine ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST185 Mountune	115 R	£08	4/1999	185/6700	147/3500	1137kg	165	6.9	-	129	-	-	+ Fiesta ST gets the power it always needed - OTT exhaust note ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	020 R	£00-02	4/1596	102/6000	107/4000	976kg	106	10.2	-	113	-	38.2	+ Better than you'd ever believe - No-one else will believe it ★★★★★
Ford Focus 1.6T Zetec S	165 D	£20,695	4/1596	179/5700	199/1900	1333kg	136	7.8	-	138	139	47.1	+ The fastest, keenest Mk3 Focus yet - The Mk1's sparkle is still absent, though ★★★★★
Ford Focus ST	188 R	£21,995	4/1999	247/5500	265/1750	1362kg	184	6.5	16.8	154	169	-	+ All-round cracking hot hatch. Good value, too - There's a bit of torque-steer ★★★★★
Ford Focus ST Mountune	181 D	£23,220	4/1999	271/5500	295/2750	1362kg	202	5.7	-	154+	169	-	+ Great value upgrade - Steering still not as feelsome as that of some rivals ★★★★★
Ford Focus ST	119 R	£05-10	5/2522	222/6000	236/1600	1392kg	162	6.7	16.8	150	224	30.4	+ Value, performance, integrity - Big engine compromises handling ★★★★★
Ford Focus ST Mountune	137 R	£08-11	5/2522	256/5500	295/2500	1392kg	187	5.8	14.3	155	224	-	+ ST takes extra power in its stride - You probably still want an RS ★★★★★
Ford Focus RS	188 R	£09-11	5/2522	300/6500	324/2300	1467kg	208	5.9	14.2	163	225	30.5	+ Huge performance, highly capable fwd chassis - It could be the last RS... ★★★★★
Ford Focus RS500	181 R	£10-11	5/2522	345/6000	339/2500	1467kg	239	5.6	12.7	165	225	-	+ More power and presence than regular RS - Pricy ★★★★★
Ford Focus RS	053 R	£02-03	4/1998	212/5500	229/3500	1278kg	169	5.9	14.9	144	-	-	+ Some are great - Some are awful (so make sure you drive plenty) ★★★★★
Ford Escort RS Cosworth	157 R	£92-96	4/1993	227/6250	224/3500	1304kg	176	5.8	-	143	-	24.5	+ The ultimate Essex hot hatch - Ultimate trophy for tea leaves ★★★★★
Ford Puma 1.7	095 R	£97-02	4/1679	123/6300	116/4500	1041kg	120	8.6	27.6	122	-	38.2	+ Everything - Nothing. The 1.4 is worth a look too ★★★★★
Ford Racing Puma	128 R	£00-01	4/1679	153/7000	119/4500	1174kg	132	7.8	23.2	137	-	34.7	+ Exclusivity - Expense. Standard Puma does it so well ★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R	102 R	£07-11	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	158	6.8	17.5	146	215	31.0	+ Looks great, VTEC more accessible - Steering lacks feel, inert balance ★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R C'ship White	126 D	£09-10	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	158	6.6	-	146	-	31.0	+ Limited-slip diff a welcome addition - It's not available on standard car... ★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R Mugen	144 R	£09-11	4/1998	237/8300	157/6250	1233kg	195	5.9	-	155	-	-	+ Fantastic on road and track - There'll only be 20, and it's a tad pricey... ★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R	075 R	£01-05	4/1998	197/7400	145/5900	1204kg	166	6.8	16.9	146	-	31.7	+ Potent and great value - Looks divide opinion, duff steering ★★★★★
Kia Procede GT	186 D	£19,995	4/1591	201/6000	195/1750	1448kg	141	7.4	-	143	171	29.1	+ Good chassis, appealing price - Thrashy engine ★★★★★
Lancia Delta Integrale	011 R	£8-93	4/1995	210/5750	220/3500	1350kg	158	5.7	-	137	-	23.9	+ One of the finest cars ever built - Demands love, LHD only ★★★★★
Mazda 2.1s Sport	132 R	£13,495	4/1498	102/6000	101/4000	1030kg	107	10.4	-	117	135	48.7	+ Fun and funky - Feels tinny after a Mini ★★★★★
Mazda 3 MPS	137 R	£23,995	4/2261	256/5500	280/3000	1385kg	188	6.3	14.5	155	224	29.4	+ Quick, eager and very good value - The steering's iffy ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz A250 'by AMG'	173 D	£29,025	4/1991	208/5500	258/1200	1370kg	154	6.5	-	149	148	46.3	+ Mercedes builds a proper hot hatch - But denies it a manual gearbox ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG	188 R	£37,845	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1480kg	244	4.3	10.6	155	161	40.9	+ Blisteringly quick everywhere - Not as rewarding as some slower rivals ★★★★★
MG Metro 6R4 Clubman	181 R	£84-87	6/2991	250/7000	225/6500	1000kg	254	4.5	-	140	-	-	+ The most extreme hot hatch ever - Engine noise, heat soak, five mpg ★★★★★
Mini One		£13,460	4/1598	97/6000	113/3000	1070kg	92	10.5	-	116	127	52.3	+ Perfect power-to-grip ratio - HUGE speedo, slow car ★★★★★
Mini Cooper	185 F	£14,900	4/1598	120/6000	118/4250	1075kg	113	9.1	-	126	127	52.3	+ Brilliant ride and composure: could be all the Mini you need - You'll still buy the 'S' ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S	149 R	£18,180	4/1598	181/5500	177/1600	1140kg	161	7.0	-	142	136	48.7	+ New engine, Mini quality - Lacks old car's direct front end ★★★★★
Mini Cooper SD	158 D	£18,870	4/1995	141/4000	225/1750	1150kg	125	8.0	-	134	114	65.7	+ A quick diesel Mini with impressive mpg - But no Cooper S alternative ★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works	184 R	£22,460	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1160kg	182	7.2	16.7	148	165	39.8	+ A seriously rapid Mini - Occasionally just a little unruly ★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works Coupe	164 R	£23,800	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1175kg	180	6.3	-	149	165	39.8	+ The usual raucous Mini JCW experience - But with a questionable 'helmet' roof... ★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works GP	181 R	£28,790	4/1598	215/6000	206/2000	1160kg	188	6.3	-	150	165	39.8	+ Brazenly hyperactive - Too much for some roads and some tastes ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S Works (Mk2)	111 R	£07-08	4/1598	189/6000	199/1750	1130kg	170	7.6	18.0	145	-	-	+ Cracking hot Mini - Expensive with option packs included ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S Works GP	144 R	£06	4/1598	215/7100	184/4600	1090kg	200	6.5	-	149	-	32.8	+ Storming engine, agility - Tacky styling 'enhancements' ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S (Mk1)	077 R	£02-06	4/1598	168/6000	155/4000	1140kg	143	7.8	19.9	135	-	33.6	+ Strong performance, quality feel - Over-long gearing ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Colt Ralliart	132 R	£14,229	4/1468	147/6000	155/3500	1060kg	141	7.4	-	131	161	40.9	+ Price, handling, performance - Its looks are a little odd ★★★★★

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Our Choice

Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup. You'll struggle to find a front-drive chassis more sublime than the 265 Cup's. Poised, flattering and entertaining too, when combined with the 261bhp turbo engine it enables the Mégane to set a searing cross-country pace.



Best of the Rest

BMW's M135i feels like a bargain at £30k, and it's rear-wheel drive too, of course. At close to half the money, the mid-sized Fiesta ST (left) is an absolute riot, especially in Mountune form, while if it's a junior hatch you're after, the Suzuki Swift Sport is a belter.

Superminis / Hot Hatches

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft /rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
Nissan Juke Nismo	184 R	£20,395	4/1618	197/6000	184/2400	1306kg	153	7.7	19.5	134	159	40.9	+ More than the sum of its parts - Not enough to add up to a pukka hot hatch
Nissan Sunny GTi-R			4/1998	220/6400	197/4800	1269kg	176	6.1	-	134	-	25.1	+ Nissan's Escort Cossie - Make sure it's a good one
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 2)			4/1587	103/6200	97/3500	865kg	121	8.8	-	121	-	34.0	+ Bargain no-frills thrills - Not as much fizz as original 1.3
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 1)			4/1294	100/7200	80/5400	826kg	123	9.3	-	118	-	35.6	+ Frantic, thrashy fun - Needs caning to extract full potential
Peugeot 106 GTi 16v	034 R	'97-'04	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	950kg	128	7.4	22.2	127	-	34.9	+ Fine handling supermini - Looks its age
Peugeot 208 GTi	184 R	£18,895	4/1598	197/5800	203/1700	1160kg	173	6.8	17.9	143	139	47.9	+ Agile chassis works well on tough roads - Could be more involving
Peugeot 205 GTi 1.9	095 R	'88-'91	4/1905	130/6000	119/4750	910kg	145	7.9	-	124	-	36.7	+ Still scintillating after all these years - Brittle build quality
Peugeot 306 GTi-6	020 R	'93-'01	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1215kg	139	7.2	20.1	140	-	30.1	+ One of the great GTIs - They don't make them like this any more
Peugeot 306 Rallye	095 R	'98-'99	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1199kg	141	6.9	19.2	137	-	30.1	+ Essentially a GTI-6 for less dosh - Limited choice of colours
Renaultsport Twingo 133	175 R	'08-'13	4/1598	131/6750	118/4400	1050kg	127	8.6	-	125	150	43.5	+ Renaultsport experience for pocket money - Optional Cup chassis gives bouncy ride
Renaultsport Clio 200 Turbo	184 R	£18,995	4/1618	197/6000	177/1750	1204kg	166	6.9	17.9	143	144	44.8	+ Faster, more refined, easier to drive - We miss the revvy nat-asp engine and manual 'box
Renaultsport Clio 172 Cup	154 R	'04-'06	4/1998	197/7100	159/5400	1204kg	166	6.6	16.7	141	190	34.5	+ The hot Clio at its best - Why the long face?
Renaultsport Clio 197 Cup	115 R	'07-'09	4/1998	194/7250	158/5550	1240kg	161	6.9	-	134	-	33.6	+ Quick, polished and capable - Not as much sheer fun as 182 Cup
Renaultsport Clio 182	066 R	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1110kg	165	6.6	17.5	139	-	34.9	+ Took hot hatches to a new level - Flawed driving position
Renaultsport Clio 182 Cup	187 R	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.5	-	139	-	34.9	+ Full of beans, fantastic value - Sunday-market upholstery
Renaultsport Clio Trophy	095 R	'05-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.6	17.3	140	-	34.9	+ Most fun you can have on three wheels - Just 500 were built
Renaultsport Clio 172 Cup	048 R	'02-'04	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1011kg	171	6.5	17.7	138	-	-	+ Bargain old-school hot hatch - Nervous in the wet, no ABS
Renaultsport Clio V6 255	057 R	'03-'05	6/2946	255/7750	221/4650	1400kg	182	5.8	-	153	-	23.0	+ Supercar drama without the original's edgy handling - Uninspired interior
Renaultsport Clio V6	029 R	'99-'02	6/2946	230/6000	221/3750	1335kg	175	5.8	17.0	145	-	23.0	+ Pocket supercar - Mid-engined handling can be tricky
Renault Clio Williams	095 R	'93-'96	4/1988	148/6100	126/4500	981kg	153	7.6	20.8	121	-	26.0	+ One of the best hot hatches ever - Can be fragile like an Integrale
Renault 5GT Turbo	123 R	'87-'91	4/1397	120/5750	122/3750	831kg	146	7.8	-	120	-	28.4	+ Clio Williams' grand-daddy - Most have been thrashed
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	188 R	£25,245	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	191	6.4	14.8	158	190	34.4	+ Same power as limited-edition Trophy; chassis still superb - Not a lot
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	139 R	'09-'12	4/1998	247/5500	251/3000	1387kg	181	6.1	14.6	156	190	34.4	+ Fantastic chassis... - partially obscured by new-found maturity
Renaultsport Mégane dCi 175 Cup	119 R	'07-'09	4/1995	173/3750	265/2000	1470kg	119	8.3	23.5	137	-	43.5	+ A diesel with a genuinely sporty chassis - Could take more power
Renaultsport Mégane Trophy	087 R	'05	4/1998	222/5500	221/3000	1355kg	166	6.7	17.3	147	-	32.1	+ Mega grip and traction - Steering needs a touch more feel
Renaultsport Mégane 230 R26	102 R	'07-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1345kg	171	6.2	16.0	147	-	-	+ Best hot Mégane... until the R26.R - FI Team stickers in dubious taste
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	181 R	'08-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1220kg	189	5.8	15.1	147	-	-	+ One of the true hot hatch heroes - Two seats, plastic rear windows
SEAT Ibiza FR 2.0 TDI	144 R	£16,715	4/1968	141/4200	236/1750	1245kg	115	8.2	-	131	123	60.1	+ More fun than the petrol FR, manual gearbox option - The Cupra's not much more
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	183 D	£18,575	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1259kg	144	6.9	-	142	139	47.9	+ Punchy engine, unflappable DSG - Lacks engagement
SEAT Leon FR TDI 184	184 D	£22,075	4/1968	181/4000	280/1750	1350kg	136	7.5	-	142	112	64.2	+ Performance, sweet chassis, economy, comfort - Boorish engine
SEAT Leon FR	163 D	'11-'12	4/1984	208/5300	206/1700	1334kg	158	7.2	-	145	170	38.7	+ As quick as a Golf GTI 5dr but £4K cheaper - Misses the VW's completeness
SEAT Leon Cupra R	139 R	'10-'12	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1375kg	193	6.1	14.0	155	190	34.9	+ Bold car, blinding engine - Lacks the character of its rival mega-hatches
SEAT Leon Cupra	105 R	'07-'11	4/1984	237/5700	221/2200	1375kg	175	6.3	-	153	190	34.0	+ Great engine, composure - Doesn't have adjustability of old Cupra R
SEAT Leon Cupra 20v T	020 R	'00-'06	4/1781	178/5500	173/5000	1322kg	137	7.7	-	142	-	33.2	+ Terrific value - Lacks sparkle of very best hatches
SEAT Leon Cupra R 225	067 R	'03-'06	4/1781	222/5900	206/2200	1376kg	164	6.9	-	150	-	32.1	+ Cross-country pace, practicality, value - Not as thrilling as some
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146 D	£16,915	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1218kg	148	7.3	-	139	148	45.6	+ Well priced, well made, with great engine and DSG 'box - Dull steering
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk1)	077 R	'04-'07	4/1896	130/4000	229/1900	1315kg	100	9.6	-	127	-	55.4	+ Fascinatingly fun and frugal hot hatch - A little short on steering feel
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk3)	187 D	£22,990	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1350kg	163	6.8	-	154	142	45.6	+ Quick, agile, roomier than a Golf - Ride is harsh for what could be a family car
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk2)	163 R	'06-'13	4/1998	197/5100	206/1700	1395kg	143	7.3	-	149	175	37.7	+ Drives like a GTI but costs much less - Green brake callipers?
Smart Fortwo Brabus	110 D	£15,000	3/999	97/5500	104/3500	780kg	126	9.9	-	96	119	54.3	+ Telling people you drive a Brabus - Them realising it's not a 720bhp S-class
Subaru Impreza STI CS400	146 R	'10-'12	4/2457	395/5750	400/3950	1505kg	267	4.6	10.7	155	-	-	+ Cosworth kudos. One of the fastest hatches we've tested - Pricey. Lifesless steering
Subaru Impreza WRX	125 D	'08-'10	4/2457	251/5400	288/3000	1395kg	180	5.5	-	130	270	-	+ An improvement over the basic WRX - Still not the WRX we wanted
Subaru Impreza STI 330S	124 R	'08-'10	4/2457	325/5400	347/3400	1505kg	219	4.4	-	155	-	-	+ A bit quicker than the STI... - but not better
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk2)	175 R	£13,499	4/1586	134/6900	118/4400	1045kg	130	8.7	-	121	147	44.1	+ The Swift's still a great pocket rocket - But it's lost a little adjustability
Suzuki Swift Sport	132 R	'05-'11	4/1586	123/6800	109/4800	1030kg	121	8.9	-	124	165	39.8	+ Entertaining handling, well built - Lacking in steering feedback
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154 R	£18,900	4/1598	189/5850	192/1980	1166kg	165	6.8	-	140	172	38.7	+ Looks snazzy, punchy engine - Lacks feel, uncouth compared with rivals
Vauxhall Corsa VXR Nürburgring	164 R	£22,295	4/1598	202/5750	206/2250	1166kg	176	6.5	-	143	178	-	+ VXR gets more power and a limited-slip diff - But it's over £3k more expensive
Vauxhall Astra GTC 1.6t SRi	164 D	£20,215	4/1598	178/5500	169/2200	1393kg	130	7.8	-	137	168	39.2	+ Three-door Scirocco rival looks good, drives well - Non-VXR petrol engines lack zing
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk2)	173 R	£26,995	4/1998	216/5500	295/2500	1475kg	190	5.9	-	155	189	-	+ Better than the car it replaces. Loony turbo pace - Lacks RS Mégane's precision
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk1)	102 R	'06-'11	4/1998	237/5600	236/2400	1393kg	173	6.7	16.7	152	221	30.7	+ Fast and furious - Lacks a little composure and precision
VW Up/SEAT Mii/Skoda Citigo	171 R	£7630+	3/999	59/5000	70/3000	854kg	70	14.1	-	99	105	62.8	+ Accomplished city car is dynamically sound... - but predictably slow
VW Polo GTI	154 R	£18,935	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1184kg	153	6.8	-	142	139	47.9	+ Modern-day mk1 Golf GTI gets twin-clutch DSG - It's a little bit bland
VW Golf GTD (Mk7)	188 D	£25,285	4/1968	181/3500	280/1750	1377kg	134	7.5	-	143	109	67.3	+ Pace, fuel economy, sounds good for a diesel - Lacks the extra edge of the GTI
VW Golf GTI (Mk7)	188 R	£25,845	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1351kg	163	6.5	-	152	138	47.1	+ Brilliantly resolved - Mégane 265 beats it as a pure drivers' car
VW Golf GTI (Mk6)	172 R	'09-'13	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1318kg	160	6.4	16.5	148	170	38.7	+ Still a very accomplished hot hatch - 207bhp isn't a lot any more
VW Golf GTI Edition 35	168 R	'12-'13	4/1984	232/5500	221/2200	1318kg	179	6.5	-	154	189	34.9	+ Mk6 GTI gets the power it craves - Expensive compared to the standard car
VW Golf R (Mk6)	140 D	'10-'13	4/1984	266/6000	258/2500	1521kg	178	5.5	-	155	199	33.2	+ Great engine, tremendous pace and poise - High price, ACC only optional
VW Golf GTI (Mk5)	102 R	'05-'09	4/1984	197/5100	207/1800	1336kg	150	6.7	17.9	145	-	-	+ Character and ability: the original GTI is back - Lacking firepower?
VW Golf R32 (Mk5)	087 R	'06-'09	6/3189	246/6300	236/2500	1510kg	165	5.8	15.2	155	-	26.4	+ Tractor's great and you'll love the soundtrack - We'd still have a GTI
VW Golf R32 (Mk4)	053 R	'02-'04	6/3189	237/6250	236/2800	1477kg	163	6.4	16.3	154	-	24.6	+ Charismatic - Boomy engine can be tiresome
VW Golf GTI 16v (Mk2)		'88-'92	4/1781	139/6100	124/4600	960kg	147	7.9	-	129	-	26.6	+ Arguably the best all-round Golf GTI ever - We'd be splitting hairs
VW Golf GTI (Mk1)	095 R	'82-'84	4/1781	112/5800	109/3500	840kg	135	8.1	-	112	-	36.0	+ The car that started it all - Tricky to find an unmolested one
Volvo C30 T5 R-Design	122 R	'08-'12	5/2521	227/5000	236/1500	1347kg	165	6.6	16.9	149	203	32.5	+ Good-looking, desirable Volvo - Lacks edge of best hatches. Avoid auto

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Our Choice

BMW M5. The turbocharging of BMW's M-cars met with scepticism, but the current M5's 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 feels a perfect fit. It's a brutally fast car, and there are clever (and useable) adjustable driving modes. It looks cool, too. The best big saloon is now even better.



Best of the Rest

Mercedes' AMG department is on a roll right now: the 6.2-litre C63 is superb as either saloon or estate, likewise the E63, which is now in its second turbocharged iteration. Jaguar's showy XFR-S (left) has a particularly impressive chassis, while Lexus's tail-happy IS-F remains a wonderfully alternative choice.

Saloons / Estates / 4x4s

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cy/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Alfa Romeo 156 GTA	045 R	'02-'06	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1410kg	180	6.3	-	155	-	23.3	★ Noise, pace and individuality - Front-drive chassis can't keep up	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 159	188 D	£54,950	6/2979	404/5500	442/3000	1535kg	267	4.2	-	190	177	37.2	★ Understated appearance, monster performance - E90 M3 is better on the limit	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 159	120 R	'08-'12	4/1995	211/4000	332/2000	1495kg	143	6.9	-	152	-	52.3	★ Excellent chassis, turbodiesel oomph - Rather narrow powerband	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 159	149 D	£75,150	8/4395	533/5200	538/2800	1845kg	293	4.5	-	198	244	26.9	★ Big performance and top-line luxury - Driver not really involved	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 159	118 D	'07-'10	8/4398	523/5500	535/4750	1720kg	309	4.5	-	197	-	23.0	★ Quicker and more exclusive than the E60 M5 - Suspension has its limits	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 159	134 D	£98,800	8/4395	533/5200	538/2800	1965kg	276	4.6	-	194	230	28.5	★ Massive performance and top-line luxury - Feels its weight when hustled	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide S	182 D	£149,995	12/5935	550/6000	451/5000	1990kg	281	4.9	-	190	332	19.9	★ Performance, soundtrack, looks - Small in the back, brakes lacking	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide	141 R	'10-'13	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1990kg	240	5.2	-	188	355	-	★ Better than its DB9 sibling - More a 2+2 than a proper four-seater	★★★★★
Audi A4 2.0 TFSI quattro	£31,220	4/1984	208/4300	258/1500	1535kg	138	6.4	-	153	159	41.5	★ A good match for its German foes - No longer any naturally aspirated options	★★★★★	
Audi A5	166 D	£39,020	6/2995	328/5500	324/2900	1685kg	198	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	★ Great powertrain, secure chassis - The new RS4 is here now...	★★★★★
Audi S4 (Mk2)	073 D	'05-'08	8/4163	339/7000	302/3500	1700kg	206	5.4	-	155	-	-	★ Effortless V8, agile handling - Lacks ultimate finesse of class leaders	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (Mk3)	173 D	£55,525	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1795kg	251	4.6	-	174	249	26.4	★ Looks, value, quality, noise, balance - Harsh ride, unnatural steering	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (Mk2)	088 R	'06-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1650kg	255	4.5	10.9	155	-	-	★ A leap on for fast Audis, superb engine - Busy under braking	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (Mk2)	105 R	'07-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1710kg	246	4.6	-	155	-	20.6	★ 414bhp at 7800rpm! - Everyone thinking you're married with kids	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (Mk1)	024 R	'00-'02	6/2671	375/6100	325/2500	1620kg	236	4.8	12.1	170	-	17.0	★ Effortless pace - Lacks finesse. Bends wheel rims	★★★★★
Audi RS2	101 R	'94-'95	5/2226	315/6500	302/3000	1595kg	201	4.8	13.1	162	-	18.0	★ Storming performance (thanks to Porsche) - Try finding one	★★★★★
Audi S6	091 D	'06-'11	10/5204	429/6800	398/3000	1910kg	228	5.2	-	155	299	22.4	★ Even faster, and discreet with it - Very muted V10	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant	183 D	£76,985	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1935kg	290	3.9	-	155	229	28.8	★ A mighty ground-coverer - Is that all you want?	★★★★★
Audi RS6	124 D	'08-'10	10/4991	572/6250	479/1500	1985kg	293	4.5	-	155	331	20.3	★ Looks and drives better than estate version - M5 still looks tempting	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant	116 R	'08-'10	10/4991	572/6250	479/1500	2025kg	287	4.3	9.7	155	333	20.2	★ The world's most powerful estate - Power isn't everything	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant	052 R	'02-'04	8/4172	444/5700	413/1950	1865kg	242	4.8	11.6	155	-	19.3	★ The ultimate estate car? - Numb steering	★★★★★
Audi RS7	187 D	£83,495	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1920kg	292	3.9	-	155	229	28.8	★ Stonking performance, great looks - Numb driving experience	★★★★★
Audi S7	171 D	£62,330	8/3993	414/5000	406/1400	1945kg	216	4.6	-	155	225	-	★ Looks and drives better than S6 it's based on - Costs £8000 more	★★★★★
Audi S8	164 D	£78,225	8/3993	513/5800	479/1700	1975kg	264	4.1	-	155	237	21.7	★ Quicker and much more economical than before - But still underwhelming to drive	★★★★★
Audi S8	088 D	'06-'10	10/5204	444/7000	398/3500	1940kg	232	5.1	-	155	-	27.4	★ V10 engine, ceramic brakes, fantastic gearbox - Light steering	★★★★★
Audi Q7 V12 TDI	124 D	'08-'12	12/5934	493/3750	737/1750	2635kg	190	5.1	12.2	155	298	25.0	★ Undeniably quick, relatively economical - A tad ostentatious	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Flying Spur	185 D	£140,900	12/5998	616/6000	590/1600	2475kg	253	4.3	-	200	343	19.0	★ More power than old Flying Spur Speed - Feels its weight; engine sounds dull	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Flying Spur	080 D	'05-'12	12/5998	552/6100	479/1600	2475kg	226	4.9	-	195	396	16.6	★ Performance, wonderful interior - Have you seen petrol prices?	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Flying Spur Speed	141 R	'08-'12	12/5998	600/6000	553/1700	2440kg	250	4.6	-	200	396	16.6	★ 600bhp; surprisingly fun handling - Could look a bit more like it goes	★★★★★
Bentley Mulsanne	178F	£225,900	8/6752	505/4200	752/1750	2585kg	198	5.1	-	184	393	16.7	★ Drives like a modern Bentley should - Shame it doesn't look like one too	★★★★★
BMW 320d	168 R	£28,410	4/1995	181/4000	280/1750	1495kg	123	7.4	-	146	120	61.4	★ Fleet-friendly new Three is economical yet entertaining - It's a tad noisy	★★★★★
BMW 328i	165 D	£29,400	4/1997	242/5000	258/1250	1430kg	172	5.8	-	155	149	44.8	★ New-age four-pot 328i is great all-rounder - We miss the six-cylinder soundtrack	★★★★★
BMW 330d M Sport	180 D	£36,610	6/2993	254/4000	413/2000	1540kg	168	5.6	-	155	129	57.6	★ Great engine, fine handling, good value - Steering confuses weight with feel	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E90)	123 R	'08-'11	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1605kg	262	4.9	10.7	165	290	22.8	★ Every bit as good as the E92 M3 coupe - No carbon roof	★★★★★
BMW M3 CRT (E90)	179 R	'11-'12	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1580kg	285	4.4	-	180	295	-	★ Saloon chassis + weight savings + GTS engine = best E90 M3 - Just 67 were made	★★★★★
BMW 335i M Sport (E90)	134 R	'05-'11	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1535kg	200	5.6	-	155	196	31.0	★ Stunning drivetrain, controlled chassis - Looks a bit steady	★★★★★
BMW 528i	164 D	£34,020	4/1997	242/5000	258/1250	1710kg	144	6.2	-	155	152	41.5	★ Four-pot 528i is downsizing near its best - You'll miss the straight-six sound effects	★★★★★
BMW 535i	141 D	£39,370	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1685kg	182	6.1	-	155	185	34.9	★ New 5-series impresses... - But only with all the chassis options ticked	★★★★★
BMW M5 (F10M)	165 R	£73,375	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1870kg	300	4.3	-	155	232	28.5	★ Twin-turbocharging suits all-new M5 well - Can feel heavy at times	★★★★★
BMW M5 Touring (E60)	105 R	'07-'10	10/4999	500/7750	383/6100	1780kg	285	4.8	-	155	-	19.3	★ Brilliant at ten tenths - Feels slightly clumsy when pottering	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E60)	129 R	'04-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1755kg	289	4.7	10.4	155	-	19.6	★ Close to being the ultimate supersaloon - SMG gearbox feels old-tech	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E39)	110 R	'99-'03	8/4941	394/6600	369/3800	1795kg	223	4.9	11.5	155	-	-	★ Magnificent V8-engined supersaloon - We'd be nit-picking	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E34)	110 R	'92-'96	6/3795	340/6900	295/4750	1653kg	209	5.9	13.6	155	-	-	★ The Godfather of supersaloons - The family can come too	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E28)	182 R	'86-'88	6/3453	282/6500	251/4500	1431kg	200	6.2	-	151	-	-	★ The original storming saloon - Understated looks	★★★★★
BMW M6 Gran Coupe	184 D	£97,490	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1875kg	299	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	★ Enormous performance, stylish looks - Price tag looks silly next to rivals, M5 included	★★★★★
BMW X6 xDrive 50i	118 D	£58,420	8/4395	408/5500	442/1750	2190kg	186	5.4	-	155	292	22.6	★ Stunningly good to drive - Will you want to be seen arriving?	★★★★★
BMW X6M	134 D	£86,220	8/4395	547/6000	502/1500	2305kg	241	4.7	-	171	325	20.3	★ Fast, refined and comfortable - But it definitely lacks the M factor	★★★★★
BMW 750i	174 D	£71,355	8/4395	449/5500	480/2000	2020kg	226	4.7	-	155	199	-	★ Well specced, impressively refined - Lags far behind the Mercedes S-class	★★★★★
Bowler EXR S	180 R	£186,000	8/5000	550/6200	461/2100	1800kg	310	4.2	-	155	-	-	★ Outlandish all-terrain supercar - Vast suspension travel takes some getting used to	★★★★★
Brabus Bullit	119 R	£330,000	12/6233	720/5100	811/2100	1850kg	395	3.8	-	217	-	-	★ Seven hundred and twenty bhp - Three hundred thousand pounds	★★★★★
Cadillac CTS-V	148 R	£67,030	8/6162	556/6100	551/3800	1928kg	293	3.9	-	191	365	18.1	★ It'll stand out among M-cars and AMGs - But the novelty might wear off	★★★★★
Chrysler 300C SRT8	096 D	'06-'11	8/6059	425/6000	420/4800	1965kg	220	4.9	-	168	337	20.2	★ Looks, supple ride, composed chassis - Too much understeer, slow 'box	★★★★★
Ford Mondeo 2.0 EcoBoost Titanium X	£28,115	4/1999	237/ n/a	251/ n/a	1569kg	153	7.5	-	153	179	36.7	★ Terrific chassis, sweet engine - People will still want an Audi	★★★★★	
Ford Mondeo ST220	043 D	'02-'07	6/2967	223/6150	204/4900	1550kg	146	6.8	-	151	-	27.7	★ Muscular engine, fine chassis - Hotted-up repobable image	★★★★★
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth 4x4	'90-'93	4/1993	220/6250	214/3500	1305kg	159	6.6	-	144	-	24.4	★ Fast and furious - Try finding a straight one	★★★★★	
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth	'86-'90	4/1993	204/6000	204/4500	1220kg	169	6.2	-	143	-	-	-	★ Roadgoing Group A racecar - Don't shout about the power output!	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R *	108 D	'07-'10	4/1998	222/8000	158/6100	1525kg	180	5.9	-	150	-	-	★ Screaming engine, razor-sharp chassis - Specialist import only	★★★★★
Honda Accord Type-R	012 R	'99-'03	4/2157	209/7200	158/6700	1306kg	163	6.1	17.4	142	-	29.4	★ One of the finest front-drivers of all time - Lack of image	★★★★★
Infiniti M37S	150 D	£45,225	6/3696	316/7000	265/5200	1765kg	182	6.2	-	155	235	21.7	★ Stands out from the crowd - Not as involving as some rivals	★★★★★

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Saloons / Estates / 4x4s

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft./rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	ET mpg	evo rating	
Jaguar XF 3.0 V6 Diesel S	145 D	£41,860	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1695kg	162	5.9	-	155	159	47.1	+ Sweet handling plus diesel economy - But we'd still have the R	★★★★★
Jaguar XF Sportbrake 3.0 V6 Diesel S	177 D	£44,360	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1695kg	153	6.1	-	155	163	46.3	+ Looks and drives better than the saloon - Pity there's no Sportbrake R...	★★★★★
Jaguar XF 3.0 V6 Supercharged	178 D	£47,570	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1695kg	201	5.7	-	155	224	29.4	+ Fast, comfortable, refined - Bland engine, poor economy compared to diesel V6	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR	181 D	£65,415	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1800kg	284	4.8	10.2	155	270	24.4	+ Brilliant blend of pace and refinement - Doesn't sound as special as it is	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR-S	187 R	£79,995	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1912kg	288	4.4	-	186	270	24.4	+ XF gets turned up to 12 - Except for the soundtrack	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ 3.0 V6 Diesel	148 D	£56,265	6/2993	271/4000	442/2000	1700kg	162	6.0	-	155	167	46.3	+ A great Jaguar - But not as great as the Supersport...	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ Supersport	163 R	£91,770	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1795kg	285	4.7	-	155	270	24.4	+ Superb handling, monster performance - Opinion-dividing looks	★★★★★
Jaguar XJR	054 R	'03-'09	8/4196	400/6100	408/3500	1665kg	244	5.0	-	155	-	23.0	+ Genuine 7-series rival - 2007 facelift didn't help middle-aged image	★★★★★
Lamborghini LM002	016 R	'86-'89	12/5167	450/6800	369/5200	2700kg	169	-	-	130	-	-	+ Craziest 4x4 ever, Countach V12 - Craziest 4x4 ever...	★★★★★
Lexus IS-F	151 R	£58,416	8/4969	417/6600	372/5200	1714kg	247	4.7	10.9	173	270	24.4	+ Shockingly good Lexus - The M3's available as a (second hand) four-door too	★★★★★
Lotus Carlton	170 R	'91-'93	6/3615	377/5200	419/4200	1658kg	231	4.8	10.6	176	-	-	+ The Millennium Falcon of saloon cars - Every drive a work-out	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte S	184 D	£80,095	6/2979	404/5500	406/1750	1860kg	221	5.3	-	177	242	26.9	+ Tempting alternative to V8 - Feel-free steering, secondary ride lacks decorum	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte V8	179 D	£108,160	8/3798	523/6800	479/2250	1900kg	280	4.7	-	191	274	23.9	+ Performance, sense of occasion - Lacks the charisma and edge of its predecessor	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte S	137 R	'08-'12	8/4691	425/7000	361/4750	1990kg	216	5.1	12.1	174	365	18.0	+ A QP with the bhp it deserves - Grille is a bit Hannibal Lecter	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	141 R	'08-'12	8/4691	433/7000	361/4750	1990kg	221	5.1	-	177	365	18.0	+ The most stylish supersaloon - Slightly wooden brakes, unforgiving ride	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte	085 R	'04-'08	8/4244	394/7000	333/4500	1930kg	207	5.1	-	171	-	17.9	+ Redefines big-car dynamics - Don't use auto mode	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	113 D	'07-'08	8/4244	396/7000	339/4250	1930kg	208	5.5	-	167	-	-	+ Best Quattroporte chassis so far - More power wouldn't go amiss	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.5-16	185 F	'89-'92	4/2498	207/6750	177/5500	1360kg	147	7.2	-	142	-	24.4	+ M-B's M3 alternative - Not as nimble as the Beemer	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG	151 R	£56,965	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	271	4.4	9.7	160	280	23.5	+ Monstrous pace and extremely discreet - M5's just a little better...	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C55 AMG	088 R	'04-'08	8/5439	367/5250	376/4000	1635kg	228	5.2	-	155	-	23.7	+ Furiously fast, commendably discreet - Overshadowed by M3 and RS4	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	187 D	£73,745	8/5461	549/5500	531/1750	1770kg	315	4.2	-	155	230	28.8	+ Power, response and accuracy in spades - A little lacking in originality	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	165 R	'11-'13	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	1765kg	298	4.2	-	155	230	28.8	+ Turbo engine doesn't dilute E63 experience - Sometimes struggles for traction...	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	096 D	'06-'09	8/6208	507/6800	464/5200	1765kg	292	4.5	-	155	-	19.8	+ Brilliant engine, indulgent chassis - Vague steering, speed limits	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	052 R	'03-'06	8/5439	476/6100	516/2650	1760kg	271	4.8	10.2	155	-	21.9	+ M5-humbling grunt, cosseting ride - Speed limits	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	'98-'02	8/5439	354/5500	390/3000	1642kg	219	5.5	-	-	155	-	23.0	+ Dragster disguised as a limo - Tyre bills	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG	148 D	'10-'13	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2040kg	267	4.5	-	155	244	26.9	+ Massive torque, massively reduced emissions - Massive car	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S65 AMG	098 R	£165,120	12/5980	604/4750	737/2000	2185kg	281	4.4	-	155	334	19.8	+ God's own supersaloon - Unholy price and thirst	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	178 R	£81,905	8/5461	518/5250	516/1700	1795kg	313	4.3	-	155	231	28.5	+ Owner performance, 549bhp option - Not as desirable as a Bentley or Aston	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	099 R	'06-'11	8/6208	507/6100	464/2650	1905kg	270	4.5	-	155	345	19.5	+ Beauty, comfort, awesome performance - M5 has the edge on B-roads	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz ML63 AMG	176 R	£83,655	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	2270kg	232	4.7	-	155	276	23.9	+ Great engine, surprisingly good dynamics - 585k buys a Boxster and an ML350...	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz G63 AMG	172 D	£123,140	8/5461	537/5500	560/2000	2475kg	220	5.4	-	130	322	-	+ It exists; epic soundtrack - Ancient chassis, silly price	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-300 SST	118 R	£31,349	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1590kg	185	5.2	13.9	155	256	26.2	+ Evo gets twin-clutch transmission - Not as exciting as it used to be	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-360	122 D	£38,559	4/1998	354/6500	363/3500	1560kg	231	4.1	-	155	328	19.9	+ Ridiculously rapid new Evo - A five-speed gearbox?	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-330 SST	134 R	'08-'12	4/1998	324/6500	322/3500	1590kg	207	4.4	-	155	256	-	+ Great engine and gearbox combo - It still lives in the shadow of the Evo IX	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-400	181 R	'09-'10	4/1998	403/6500	387/3500	1560kg	262	3.8	-	155	328	-	+ Most powerful factory Evo ever... - About X grand too much when new	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-340	088 R	'05-'07	4/1997	345/6800	321/4600	1400kg	250	4.3	10.9	157	-	-	+ Gives Porsche drivers nightmares - Points. Lots of	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX MR FQ-360	181 R	'05-'07	4/1997	366/6887	363/3200	1400kg	266	3.9	-	157	-	-	+ Well-executed engine upgrades - Prison food	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII	055 R	'03-'04	4/1997	276/6500	289/3500	1410kg	199	5.1	-	157	-	-	+ The Evo grows up - Brakes need beefing up	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII MR FQ-300	057 R	'03-'05	4/1997	305/6800	289/3500	1400kg	221	4.8	-	157	-	20.5	+ Extra pace, extra attitude - Extra money	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII	031 R	'02-'03	4/1997	276/6500	282/3500	1360kg	206	5.0	13.0	140	-	20.4	+ Terrific all-rounder - You tell us	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII RS Sprint	041 D	'02-'03	4/1997	320/6500	327/6200	1260kg	258	4.4	-	150	-	-	+ Ruthlessly focused road weapon - For the truly committed	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI RS Sprint	011 R	'99	4/1997	330/6500	323/3000	1255kg	267	4.5	11.8	145	-	-	+ Lighter, keener, quicker than regular Evo - A little uncompromising	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI Mäkinen Edition	181 R	'00-'01	4/1997	276/6500	275/2750	1365kg	205	4.6	-	150	-	-	+ Our favourite Evo - Subtle it is not	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera 4S	186 D	£85,721	6/2997	414/6000	383/1750	1870kg	225	4.8	-	177	208	31.7	+ Strong performance and typically fine Porsche chassis - Misses characterful V8 of old S'	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera GTS	168 D	£91,239	8/4806	430/6700	383/3500	1920kg	228	4.4	-	179	251	26.4	+ Sharper chassis; more urgent and vocal V8 - A BMW M5 is £17k less...	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo	137 R	£104,758	8/4806	493/6000	516/2250	1970kg	254	3.6	8.9	188	270	24.6	+ Fast, refined and dynamically sound - It still leaves us cold	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo S	159 D	£123,776	8/4806	494/6000	590/2250	1995kg	276	3.7	-	190	270	24.6	+ Pace, excellent ergonomics - Steering feel, ride	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne S Diesel (Mk2)	185 D	£59,053	8/4134	377/3750	627/2000	2195kg	174	5.7	-	156	218	34.0	+ Supercar levels of torque; impressive all-round performance - GTS drives better	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2)	173 D	£68,117	8/4806	414/6500	380/3500	2085kg	202	5.6	-	162	251	26.4	+ Dynamically the best SUV on sale - At two tons, it's still no sports car	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk2)	144 D	£89,324	8/4806	493/6000	516/2250	2170kg	231	4.7	-	173	270	24.6	+ Greener, faster, better - Odd rear styling, numb steering	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo S (Mk2)	184 D	£107,784	8/4806	542/6000	553/2250	2215kg	249	4.5	-	175	270	24.6	+ Near-identical power and torque to a Zonda C12S - In an SUV	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mki)	104 R	'06-'10	8/4806	494/6000	516/2250	2355kg	213	4.7	11.4	171	-	19.0	+ Appears to defy physics - Still cracks mirrors at 50 paces	★★★★★
Range Rover Evoque Coupe Si4	160 D	£41,510	4/1999	237/6000	251/1900	1670kg	144	7.0	-	135	199	-	+ Striking looks, sporting dynamics - Hefty price, and petrol version is auto-only	★★★★★
Range Rover Sport V8 Supercharged	186 D	£81,550	8/4999	503/6000	460/2500	2310kg	221	5.0	-	155	298	22.1	+ Deceptively quick and capable sports SUV - It's still got a weight problem	★★★★★
Range Rover Sport V8 Supercharged	135 D	'09-'12	8/5000	503/6000	461/2000	2590kg	200	5.9	-	140	348	19.0	+ Thumpingly fast and hugely comfortable - It's no Cayenne in the corners	★★★★★
Range Rover SDV8	180 D	£78,120	8/4367	334/3500	516/1750	2360kg	144	6.5	-	140	229	32.5	+ Lighter, more capable, even more luxurious - Diesel V6 model feels more alert	★★★★★
Range Rover V8 Supercharged	134 D	'09-'12	8/5000	503/6000	461/2000	2710kg	189	6.9	-	140	348	19.0	+ Fast, comfortable, luxurious - Big, heavy, thirsty	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Ghost	186 D	£200,500	12/6592	563/5250	575/1500	2360kg	242	4.7	-	155	317	20.8	+ It's quicker than you think - It's more enjoyable drive slowly	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Phantom	054 R	£276,275	12/6749	453/5350	531/3500	2560kg	180	5.7	-	149	377	18.0	+ Rolls reinvented for the 21st Century - The roads are barely big enough	★★★★★
Subaru WRX STI	151 D	'10-'13	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1505kg	200	5.1	-	158	243	26.9	+ Fast Subaru saloon returns - Without the blue paint and gold wheels	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX GB270	109 D	'07	4/2457	266/5700	310/3000	1410kg	192	5.2	-	143	-	-	+ Fitting final fling for 'classic' Impreza - End of an era	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STI	090 R	'05-'07	4/2457	276/6000	289/4000	1495kg	188	5.3	-	158	-	25.9	+ Stunning to drive - Not so stunning to look at	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STI Spec C *	084 D	'05-'07	4/1994	320/6730	311/3500	1350kg	240	4.3	-	157	-	-	+ Lighter, faster, fiercer - The need for self-restraint	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB320	105 R	'07	4/2457	316/6000	332/3750	1495kg	215	4.8	-	155	-	-	+ Fitting tribute to a rallying legend - Too hardcore for some?	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX STI PPP	073 R	'03-'05	4/1994	300/6000	299/4000	1470kg	207	5.2	12.9	148	-	-	+ A Subaru with real edge - Bit too edgy in the wet	★★★★★
Subaru STI Type RA Spec C *	067 R	'03-'05	4/1994	335/7000	280/3750	1380kg	247	4.3	11.1	160	-	-	+ Best Impreza since the PI - Lost its throbby flat-four voice	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WR1	067 R	'04-'05	4/1994	316/5800	310/4000	1470kg	218	5.3	13.1	155	-	-	+ Most powerful official UK Impreza until RB320 - Spec C is better	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza Turbo	011 R	'98-'00	4/1994	215/5600	214/4000	1235kg	177	5.4	14.6	144	-	27.2	+ Destined for classic status - Thirsty	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza PI	067 R	'00-'01	4/1994	276/6500	260/4000	1283kg	219	4.9	13.3	150	-	25.0	+ Ultimate old-shape Impreza - Prices reflect this	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB5 (PPP)	187 R	'99	4/19											

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Our Choice

Audi R8 Spyder. The Spyder boasts supercar looks, presence and performance, yet you really could drive one every day. The V8 has a sweet engine and great dynamics, but if money's no object, we'd be seriously tempted by the equally brilliant V10.



Best of the Rest

The mk3 Porsche Boxster S is a brilliant all-rounder, while the Lotus Exige S Roadster counters with a more focused driving experience. Jaguar's F-type also impresses in both V6 S (left) and V8 S forms. Mazda's MX-5 is best for budget rear-drive fun, but for the ultimate thrills, get a Caterham 620R or Ariel Atom.

Sports Cars / Convertibles

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
<i>Alfa Romeo 8C Spider</i>	161 R	'09-'11	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1675kg	273	4.5	-	181	-	-	+ Beauty meets beast. They hit it off - Good luck trying to buy one	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3.5 Supercharged	180 D	£38,000	4/1998	310/8400	169/7200	550kg	573	2.7	-	155	-	-	+ As mad as ever - Rain	★★★★★
Ariel Atom Mugen	165 R	£55,000	4/1998	270/8300	188/6000	550kg	499	2.9	-	150	-	-	+ Perfect engine for the Atom's chassis - Only ten being made	★★★★★
Ariel Atom V8 500	165 R	£146,699	8/3000	475/10,500	284/7750	550kg	877	3.0	5.8	170	-	-	+ An experience unlike anything else on Planet Car - £150K for an Atom	★★★★★
<i>Ariel Atom 3 245</i>	113 D	'08-'12	4/1998	245/8200	155/5200	500kg	498	3.2	-	150	-	33.0	+ The Atom just got a little bit better - Can still be a bit draughty...	★★★★★
<i>Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged</i>	138 R	'09-'12	4/1998	300/8200	162/7200	550kg	554	3.3	-	155	-	-	+ It's brilliant - It's mental	★★★★★
<i>Ariel Atom 2 300 Supercharged</i>	123 R	'03-'09	4/1998	300/8200	162/7200	550kg	554	3.3	-	155	-	28.0	+ Makes your face ripple - ...like Clarkson's	★★★★★
<i>Ariel Atom 1</i>	015 R	'99-'03	4/1796	125/5500	122/3000	496kg	256	5.6	18.0	115	-	-	+ Amazing styling, huge fun - As practical as a chocolate teapot	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster	130 R	£95,080	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1710kg	250	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	+ Sportiest, coolest drop-top Aston in years - Starting to feel its age	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S Roadster	161 R	£105,080	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1690kg	258	4.6	-	189	299	21.9	+ Sounds amazing, looks even better - Still not the best drop-top in its class	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage Roadster	175 R	£151,080	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1760kg	294	4.4	-	190	-	-	+ As good as the coupe, with amplified V12 rumble - Just a smidgen shakier	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB9 Volante	150 D	£143,080	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1815kg	263	4.6	-	190	368	18.2	+ Consummate cruiser and capable when pushed - Roof-up wind noise	★★★★★
<i>Aston Martin DBS Volante</i>	133 D	'12-'	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1810kg	286	4.3	-	191	388	17.3	+ A feelgood car par excellence - It's a bit of a heavyweight	★★★★★
Audi TTS Roadster	122 D	£38,025	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1455kg	187	5.6	-	155	189	34.9	+ Effortlessly quick - Long-term appeal open to question; not cheap either	★★★★★
Audi R8 V8 Spyder	133 D	£48,140	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1510kg	225	4.7	-	155	212	31.0	+ Terrific engine... - ...is the best thing about it	★★★★★
<i>Audi TT Roadster (Mk1 225bhp)</i>	016 R	'00-'06	4/1781	225/5900	206/2200	1395kg	164	6.9	20.0	150	-	30.4	+ Winner on the King's Road - Trails Boxster on the open road	★★★★★
Audi S5 Cabriolet	130 D	£46,500	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1875kg	178	5.6	-	155	199	33.2	+ Gets the S4's trick supercharged engine - Bordering on dull	★★★★★
Audi RS5 Cabriolet	179 D	£68,985	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1920kg	235	4.9	-	155	249	26.4	+ Pace, looks, interior, naturally aspirated V8 - Not the last word in fun or involvement	★★★★★
<i>Audi RS4 Cabriolet</i>	094 D	'06-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1845kg	228	4.9	-	155	-	-	+ That engine - Wibble wobble, wibble wobble, jelly on a plate	★★★★★
Audi R8 V8 Spyder	186 D	£101,360	8/4163	424/7900	317/6000	1660kg	259	4.8	-	187	337	19.6	+ More delicate and subtle than the V10 - The V10 sounds even better	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Spyder	185 R	£122,460	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1720kg	306	4.1	-	194	349	19.0	+ Sensational for the money - Not quite a rival for the 458 and 12C Spiders	★★★★★
BAC Mono	189 R	£101,940	4/2261	280/7700	206/6000	540kg	527	2.8	-	170	-	-	+ The most single-minded track car available - That means no passengers...	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GTC V8	168 R	£136,250	8/3933	500/6000	487/1700	2470kg	207	4.9	-	187	254	25.9	+ Arguably the world's best topless GT - Still no sports car	★★★★★
Bentley Conti GT Speed Convertible	187 D	£168,000	12/5998	616/6000	590/1700	2495kg	251	4.1	-	202	347	19.0	+ Effortless performance, style - Running costs a tad on the high side	★★★★★
<i>Bentley Continental Supersports</i>	147 D	'10-'12	12/5998	621/6000	590/2000	2395kg	263	3.9	-	202	388	17.3	+ Fast, capable and refined - Coupe does the Supersports thing better	★★★★★
<i>Bentley Continental GTC Speed</i>	131 D	'09-'11	12/5998	600/6000	590/1750	2485kg	245	4.5	-	200	396	17.0	+ A great convertible just got better - Optional carbon brakes a necessity	★★★★★
BMW Z4 sDrive 20i (Mk2)	164 D	£29,715	4/1997	181/4800	199/1250	1470kg	125	6.8	-	142	159	41.5	+ The Z4 has grown up... - ...and got fat	★★★★★
BMW Z4 sDrive 35i (Mk2)	186 D	£39,935	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1505kg	204	5.2	-	155	219	30.1	+ Looks, hard-top versatility, drivetrain - Clumsy chassis is upset by ragged surfaces	★★★★★
<i>BMW Z4 3.0si (Mk1)</i>	094 D	'06-'09	6/2996	265/6600	232/2750	1310kg	205	5.7	-	155	-	32.9	+ Terrific straight-six - Handling not as playful as we'd like	★★★★★
<i>BMW Z4 M Roadster</i>	091 R	'06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1410kg	244	4.8	-	155	-	23.9	+ Exciting and characterful, that engine - Stiff suspension	★★★★★
<i>BMW M Roadster</i>	002 R	'98-'02	6/3246	325/7400	258/4900	1375kg	240	5.3	-	155	-	25.4	+ Fresh-air M3, that motor, hunky looks - M Coupe drives better	★★★★★
BMW 335i SE Convertible	102 D	£40,580	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1735kg	177	5.8	-	155	205	32.1	+ Looks good, great to drive, fantastic engine - A bit shaky	★★★★★
BMW M3 Convertible (E93)	119 D	£59,075	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1810kg	232	5.3	-	155	297	22.2	+ M DCT transmission, pace, slick roof - Extra weight blunts the edge	★★★★★
<i>BMW M3 Convertible (E46)</i>	035 D	'01-'06	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1655kg	207	5.3	-	155	-	23.3	+ That engine - Gets the wobbles on British B-roads	★★★★★
<i>BMW M6 Convertible</i>	098 D	'06-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1930kg	264	4.8	-	155	352	19.2	+ Composure, grip, power, comfort - Steering lacks feel at low speed	★★★★★
<i>BMW Z8</i>	026 R	'00-'03	8/4941	400/6600	369/3800	1585kg	256	4.8	11.1	155	-	14.4	+ M5-powered super-sportster - M5's more fun to drive	★★★★★
Brooke B200 Double R	094 R	£34,995	4/2261	260/7500	200/6100	550kg	480	3.9	-	155+	-	-	+ Fast, dynamic, well built - No roof, looks not for everyone	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Roadsport 125	105 R	£22,995	4/1595	125/6100	120/5350	539kg	235	5.9	-	112	-	-	+ New Ford-engined model is just great - Bigger drivers need SV model	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Roadsport SV175	140 D	£30,995	4/1999	175/7000	139/6000	555kg	321	4.8	-	138	-	-	+ The Caterham for everyday use, R300 engine - Loses intensity of R300	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Supersport	165 R	£24,495	4/1595	140/6900	120/5790	520kg	273	4.9	-	120	-	-	+ One of the best Caterhams is less than £20K... - ...if you build it yourself	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Supersport R	180 D	£27,995	4/1999	180/7300	143/6100	535kg	342	4.8	-	130	-	-	+ The best road-and-track Seven yet - Impractical, noisy, uncomfortable	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Superlight R400	105 R	£35,995	4/1999	210/7800	152/5750	525kg	406	3.8	-	140	-	-	+ R400 reborn with (lots of) Ford power - Slightly hesitant low-rev pick-up	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Superlight R500	123 R	£42,495	4/1999	263/8500	177/7200	506kg	528	2.9	-	150	-	-	+ Better power-to-weight ratio than a Veyron - Until you add the driver	★★★★★
Caterham 7 620R	187 R	£49,995	4/1999	311/7700	219/7350	545kg	580	2.8	-	155	-	-	+ Banzai on track, yet still relevant on the road - £50k for a Seven?	★★★★★
Caterham CSR 260 Superlight	094 R	£44,995	4/2261	256/7500	200/6200	565kg	460	3.8	-	155	-	-	+ Brilliant for high days, holidays and trackdays - Wet Wednesdays	★★★★★
Caterham Levante	131 R	£115,000	8/2398	550/10000	300/8500	520kg	1074	4.8	8.2	150	-	-	+ Twice the power-to-weight ratio of a Veyron! - Not easy to drive slowly	★★★★★
<i>Caterham 7 Superlight R300</i>	150 R	'09-'12	4/1999	175/7000	139/6000	515kg	345	4.5	-	140	-	-	+ Possibly all the Caterham you need - They're not cheap	★★★★★
<i>Caterham 7R300</i>	068 R	'02-'06	4/1796	160/7000	130/5000	500kg	325	4.7	-	130	-	-	+ Our 2002 Trackday Car of the Year - Not for wimps	★★★★★
<i>Caterham 7R400</i>	068 R	'03-'06	4/1796	200/7500	150/5750	490kg	415	3.9	-	140	-	-	+ Race-car with a number plate - Your missus will leave you	★★★★★
<i>Caterham 7R500</i>	068 R	'99-'06	4/1796	230/8600	155/7200	460kg	510	3.6	8.8	146	-	-	+ Fine for the Nürburgring - Hard work around the Bullring	★★★★★
<i>Caterham 7R500 Evolution</i>	069 R	'04	4/1998	250/8000	190/4000	460kg	552	3.9	8.1	150	-	-	+ Maddier than Mad Jack McMad - Er, it's a bit mad	★★★★★
<i>Chevrolet Corvette C6</i>	083 D	'04-'13	8/6162	430/5900	424/4600	1460kg	300	4.3	-	186	316	21.2	+ Corvette performance - Convertible dynamics, electronics	★★★★★
Donkervoort D8 GTO Performance	185 R	£130,000	5/2480	375/5500	350/1750	695kg	548	2.8	-	168	-	-	+ There's nothing else like it - Pricey for a car with a five-cylinder engine	★★★★★
Ferrari California	171 D	£152,154	8/4297	483/7750	372/5000	1705kg	290	3.8	-	193	299	-	+ Revised with sharper performance and dynamics - We'd still take a 458 Spider	★★★★★
Honda S2000	118 D	'99-'09	4/1997	237/8300	153/7500	1260kg	191	6.2	-	150	-	28.2	+ An alternative and rev-happy roadster - The Boxster's better	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type V6	186 R	£58,520	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1597kg	213	5.3	-	161	209	31.4	+ Beautiful, enjoyable, responsive - Noticeably junior to the V6 S	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type V6 S	183 R	£67,520	6/2995	375/6500	339/3500	1614kg	236	4.9	-	171	213	31.0	+ Better-damped and more rounded than the V8 S - A Boxster S is £20k cheaper	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type V8 S	183 R	£79,985	8/5000	488/6500	461/2500	1665kg	298	4.3	-	186	259	25.5	+ Wilder than the V6 S - Could be too exuberant for some	★★★★★
Jaguar XK 5.0 Convertible	171 R	£71,465	8/5000	380/6500	380/3500	1621kg	238	5.3	-	155	264	25.2	+ Basic XK gets extra power... - ...but loses some of its GT refinement	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR Convertible	130 R	£83,965	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1725kg	296	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	+ Gains Jag's fantastic new V8 - Loses sporting ground to its main foes	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S Convertible	167 R	£104,465	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1725kg	319	4.2	-	186	292	23.0	+ Loud and mad; most exciting Jag in years - It's also the most expensive in years	★★★★★
<i>Jaguar XK</i>	089 R	'06-'09	8/4196	294/6000	303/4100	1635kg	183	6.6	-	155	-	25.0	+ Every bit as good as the XK coupe - 294bhp still only just enough	★★★★★
<i>Jaguar XKR</i>	089 R	'06-'09	8/4196	414/6250	413/4000	1705kg	247	5.0	-	155	-	-	+ First Jag sports car for years - Overworld detailing	★★★★★
<i>Jaguar XKR</i>	004 R	'97-'06	8/3996	370/6150	387/3600	1750kg	215	5.4	12.8	155	-	15.6	+ Hurricane-in-the-hair motoring - A danger to toupees everywhere	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow GT	183 D	£674,000	4/1984	281/6400	310/3200	875kg	326	4.1	-	144	189	34.0	+ Extraordinary ability, now in a more road-friendly package - Price	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow R	165 R	£64,850	4/1984	296/5500	295/3300	818kg	368	3.6	-	144	-	-	+ Sharper handling, more power - Pity it's not even lighter, and cheaper	★★★★★
<i>KTM X-Bow</i>	138 R	'08-'12	4/1984	237/5500	229/2000	818kg	294	3.8	-	137	-	-	+ Mad looks; real quality feel - Heavier and pricier than you'd hope	★★★★★

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Maybach 62 Issue 059, September 2003

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Sports Cars / Convertibles

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft./rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Lotus Elise 1.6	144 D	£29,050	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	876kg	155	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	+ New 1.6 Elise is light and fantastic - Smaller engine could put some off	★★★★★
Lotus Elise 1.6 Club Racer	183 R	£28,450	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	852kg	160	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	+ Even lighter, even more focused - A touch pricey for a stripped-out Elise	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S	172 R	£37,150	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	924kg	239	4.2	-	145	175	37.5	+ New supercharged Elise boasts epic grip and pace - £37k before (pricey) options...	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S Club Racer	189 D	£35,600	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	905kg	244	4.2	-	145	175	37.5	+ Purist approach intensifies ability - Lightest, option-free spec requires commitment	★★★★★
Lotus Exige S Roadster	186 R	£52,900	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1166kg	301	4.0	-	145	236	28.0	+ Like the hard-top Exige S, but more road-friendly - Boxster S is a better all-rounder	★★★★★
Lotus Elise R	068 R	'04-'11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	860kg	223	5.6	13.9	150	196	34.4	+ Most thrilling Elise yet - Blaring engine note	★★★★★
Lotus Elise SC	131 R	'08-'11	4/1794	218/8000	156/5000	870kg	254	4.5	11.4	148	199	33.2	+ All the usual Elise magic - Supercharged engine lacks sparkle	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S 1.8	104 R	'06-'10	4/1794	134/6200	127/4200	860kg	158	6.3	18.7	127	-	37.2	+ Brilliant entry-level Elise - Precious little	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S2 111S	049 R	'02-'04	4/1796	156/7000	129/4650	860kg	197	5.1	-	131	-	40.9	+ A genuinely useable Elise - Air-con? In an Elise?	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S2 Sport 135	040 D	'03	4/1796	135/6200	129/4850	726kg	189	5.4	-	129	-	-	+ One of our fave S2 Elises - Brakes need more bite and pedal feel	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S2 Sport 190	044 R	'03	4/1796	190/7800	128/5000	710kg	272	4.7	12.1	135	-	-	+ Fabulous trackday tool - Pricey	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S1	126 R	'96-'00	4/1796	118/5500	122/3000	731kg	164	6.1	18.5	126	-	39.4	+ A modern classic - A tad impractical?	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven Supercharged	127 R	'07-'11	4/1796	252/8000	179/7000	670kg	382	3.8	-	150	-	-	+ Impressive on road and track - Not hardcore enough for some	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	138 R	'09-'11	4/1796	266/8200	179/7200	670kg	403	3.7	-	155	-	-	+ evo Track Car of the Year 2009 - It's a 76-grand Lotus with no roof	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven	126 R	'07-'11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	720kg	267	4.3	-	140	-	-	+ Not far off supercharged car's pace - Pricey once it's made road-legal	★★★★★
Lotus 340R	128 R	'00	4/1796	190/7800	146/5000	650kg	293	4.5	12.5	126	-	-	+ Hardcore road-racer... that looks like a dune buggy from Mars	★★★★★
Lotus Elan SE	095 R	'89-'95	4/1588	165/6600	148/4200	1022kg	164	6.7	-	137	-	21.0	+ Awesome front-drive chassis - Rather uninvolved	★★★★★
Lotus Elan Sprint	126 R	'71-'73	4/1558	126/6500	113/5500	720kg	178	6.6	-	122	-	-	+ Sensational chassis, properly quick - Affording a mint one	★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio	142 D	£98,315	8/4691	434/7000	332/4750	1980kg	223	5.3	-	176	358	18.3	+ As good to drive as it is to look at - Lacks the grunt of some rivals	★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio Sport	161 D	£103,910	8/4691	444/7000	376/4750	1980kg	228	5.1	-	177	377	19.5	+ Looks, performance, cruising ability - Brakes could be sharper	★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio MC	185 D	£111,710	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1973kg	234	4.9	-	179	337	19.5	+ Most powerful GranCabrio yet - The GranCabrio is starting to show its age	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i SE		£18,495	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1155kg	109	9.9	-	121	167	39.8	+ Basic MX-5 offers ESP-less fun - But you'll probably want the 2.0's power	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 2.0 Sport Tech	170 R	£21,595	4/1999	158/7000	139/5000	1173kg	144	7.6	-	132	181	36.2	+ Handles brilliantly again - Less than macho image	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk3 v1)	091 R	'05-'09	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1155kg	108	9.3	-	122	-	-	+ Gearchange, interior - Lost some of the charm of old MX-5s	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk2)	017 R	'98-'05	4/1839	146/7000	124/5000	1065kg	140	8.6	-	123	-	32.5	+ Affordable ragtop doesn't get much better - Cheap cabin	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.6 (Mk1)	131 R	'89-'97	4/1597	115/6500	100/5500	971kg	120	9.0	-	114	-	-	+ The original and still (pretty much) the best - Less than rigid	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK350 Sport	161 R	£44,600	6/3498	302/6500	273/3500	1465kg	209	5.5	-	155	167	39.8	+ Best non-AMG SLK yet - Still no Boxster-beater	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	186 R	£55,335	8/5461	416/6800	398/4500	1615kg	262	4.6	-	155	195	33.6	+ Quicker and more economical than ever - Needs to be sharper, too	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	087 R	'05-'10	8/5439	355/5750	376/4000	1575kg	229	4.9	-	155	-	23.5	+ Superb engine, responsive chassis - No manual option, ESP spoils fun	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG Black	110 R	'07-'08	8/5439	394/5750	383/3750	1495kg	268	4.9	11.2	174	-	-	+ AMG gets serious - Dull-witted TG-Tronic auto box, uneven dynamics	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL500	169 D	£83,490	8/4663	429/5250	516/1800	1710kg	255	4.6	-	155	212	31.0	+ Warty performance, beautifully engineered - Lacks ultimate sports car feel	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	171 D	£110,785	8/5461	530/5500	590/2000	1770kg	304	4.3	-	155	231	-	+ Monster performance, lighter than before - Still heavy, steering lacks consistency	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG	183 D	£168,285	12/5980	621/4800	731/2300	1875kg	336	4.0	-	155	270	24.4	+ Chassis just about deals with the power - Speed limits	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	117 D	'08-'13	8/6208	518/6800	464/5200	1970kg	278	4.6	-	155	328	20.0	+ More focused than old SL55 AMG - Lost some of its all-round appeal	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL55 AMG	070 R	'02-'07	8/5439	493/6100	516/2650	1955kg	256	4.6	10.2	155	-	-	+ As fast as a Murciélago - Not as much fun	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL55 AMG	071 D	'04-'10	12/5980	604/4800	737/2000	2035kg	302	4.1	-	155	-	-	+ Gob-smacking performance - Gob-smackingly pricey	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG Roadster	167 R	£176,985	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1660kg	345	3.7	-	197	308	21.4	+ Loses none of the coupe's talents - But (understandably) loses the gullwing doors	★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works Convertible	130 R	£24,950	4/1598	208/6000	206/1850	1230kg	172	6.9	-	146	169	38.7	+ A manlier Mini cabrio. As hardcore as the hatch... which is still better	★★★★★
Morgan 3 Wheeler	177 R	£30,000	2/1990	80/5300	103/3250	525kg	155	6.0	-	115	-	-	+ Quirky, characterful, brilliant - Unnatural brake feel; you'd better not be shy	★★★★★
Morgan Plus 8	171 R	£85,200	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1100kg	334	4.4	-	155	-	-	+ Hilarious mix of old looks and new mechanicals - Refinement is definitely old-school	★★★★★
Morgan Aero SuperSports	145 R	£126,900	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	332	4.2	-	170	-	-	+ As above, with a V8 and targa top - It's proper supercar money	★★★★★
Morgan Aero 8	105 R	'02-'08	8/4799	362/6300	361/3400	1100kg	334	4.5	-	170	-	25.2	+ Glorious sound, view over bonnet, dynamics - Awkward-looking rear	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z Roadster	143 R	£36,495	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1554kg	213	5.5	-	155	262	25.2	+ The Zed's old-school character remains intact - Its purposeful looks don't	★★★★★
Nissan 350Z Roadster		'04-'09	6/3498	309/6600	264/4800	1600kg	196	5.8	-	155	-	24.8	+ Drives just like the coupe - But doesn't look as good	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (981)	172 R	£38,237	6/2706	261/6700	206/4500	1310kg	202	5.4	-	164	192	34.5	+ Goes & looks better; cleanest Boxster ever - Steering now electric to help cut CO2	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (981)	186 R	£45,384	6/3436	311/6700	265/4500	1320kg	239	5.1	-	173	206	32.1	+ Boxster steps out of 911's shadow - But gets 911's less appealing new steering	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (987)		'05-'12	6/2893	252/6400	214/4400	1335kg	192	5.9	-	163	221	30.0	+ Second-gen Boxster's as brilliant as ever - It's a typically Porsche redesign	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (987)	161 R	'05-'12	6/3436	306/6400	265/5500	1355kg	229	5.3	-	170	223	29.7	+ As above, but with more power - Lighter steering than before	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	188 R	'10-'12	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1275kg	252	5.0	-	166	221	29.1	+ Lighter, more driver-centric Boxster - Collapsed-brolly roof not the most practical	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (986)	049 R	'99-'04	6/2687	228/6300	192/4700	1275kg	182	6.3	-	155	-	29.1	+ Still an impeccable sports car - Very little	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (986)	070 R	'99-'04	6/3179	260/6200	228/4700	1320kg	200	5.5	-	164	-	26.9	+ Added power is seductive - As above	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera Cabriolet (991)	183 R	£82,072	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1450kg	242	5.0	-	178	217	30.7	+ Brilliant engine - Doesn't quite have the 'magic at any speed' character of previous 911s	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S Cabriolet (991)	171 R	£92,108	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1465kg	273	4.6	-	187	229	29.1	+ All-new open 911 drives just like the coupe - Which means the same artificial steering	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet (997)	139 D	'07-'12	6/3800	493/6000	479/1950	1645kg	305	3.8	-	194	275	24.1	+ Absurdly quick and capable drop-top - We'd still take the coupe	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet (996)	060 R	'03-'05	6/3596	414/6000	413/4600	1700kg	250	4.7	-	185	-	-	+ Faster than you'll ever need it to be - Just the image thing again	★★★★★
Radical SR3 SL	174 R	£69,850	4/2000	300/6000	265/4000	795kg	383	3.0	-	161	-	-	+ Our 2011 Track Car of the Year, and it's road-legal - You'll need to wrap up warm	★★★★★
Radical SR8LM	138 R	'09-'12	8/2800	460/10,500	260/8000	680kg	687	3.2	-	168	-	-	+ Fastest car around the Nordschleife - Convincing people it's road legal	★★★★★
Renault Sport Spider	183 R	'96-'99	4/1998	148/6000	136/4500	930kg	157	6.5	-	131	-	-	+ Rarity, fabulous unassisted steering feel - Heavier than you'd hope	★★★★★
Tesla Roadster	131 R	'08-'12	AC motor	248/4500	273/0-4500	1283kg	196	5.0	14.3	120	-	-	+ If this is the future, it's going to be fun - Limited range, high price	★★★★★
Toyota MR2	187 R	'00-'06	4/1794	138/6400	125/4400	975kg	141	7.2	21.2	130	-	38.2	+ Tight lines, taut dynamics - Minimal luggage space	★★★★★
TVR Tamora	070 R	'01-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1050kg	338	4.5	-	160	-	-	+ Well-sorted soft-top TVR - Awkward styling	★★★★★
TVR Tuscan Convertible	091 R	'05-'07	6/3996	365/6800	315/6000	1100kg	337	3.8	8.1	195+	-	-	+ Spirit of the Griff reborn - Over 195mph? Really?	★★★★★
TVR Chimera 5.0	007 R	'93-'03	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.6	-	167	-	26.4	+ Gorgeous noise, tarmac-ripping grunt - Details	★★★★★
TVR Griffith 4.3	068 R	'92-'93	8/4280	280/5500	305/4000	1060kg	268	4.8	11.2	148	-	-	+ The car that made TVR, Cult status - Mere details	★★★★★
TVR Griffith 500	009 R	'93-'01	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.8	11.2	167	-	22.1	+ Gruff diamond - A few rough edges	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220	023 R	'00-'04	4/2198	145/5800	150/4000	875kg	168	5.6	-	136	-	34.4	+ Absurdly good Vauxhall - The badge?	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220 Turbo	066 R	'03-'05	4/1998	197/5500	184/1950	930kg	215	4.7	-	151	-	-	+ Nothing comes close for the money - Marginal everyday usability	★★★★★

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Our Choice

Porsche 911 GT3. PDK, electric steering, a new engine with zero racing pedigree... Yes, we were nervous about the new GT3 before its arrival. Thankfully, it's still fully deserving of the badge, although you'll now need a healthy disregard for your licence to feel it truly come alive.



Best of the Rest

The Carrera 4S is our pick of the 'regular' 911s, while the new Cayman S is right up there with it. The Lotus Exige S (left) is a proper road racer for £53k and our joint 2012 Car of the Year. Audi's R8 is another gem, especially in V10 Plus form. And, of course, we wouldn't dare not mention the Nissan GT-R...

Coupes / GTs

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine c/y/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
Alfa Romeo Brera 3.2 V6	120 R	'08-'11	6/3195	256/6300	237/4500	1532kg	170	6.9	-	155	260	-	• Brera made better for UK roads - Steering lacking some feel
Alfa Romeo 4C	189 D	£45,000	4/1742	231/6000	258/2200	895kg	269	4.5	-	160	157	41.5	• Carbonfibre tub, mini-super-car looks - Hot hatch engine, clunky gearbox
Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione	120 R	'07-'09	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1855kg	288	4.1	-	181	-	-	• Looks, exclusivity, noise, balance - They're all sold
Alpina B3 Biturbo (E92)	108 R	'07-'13	6/2979	355/5500	369/3800	1570kg	230	4.8	-	177	-	29.1	• Alpina's M3 alternative - Too refined for some
Alpina B3 GT3 (E92)	176 D	£66,950	6/2979	402/6000	398/4500	1535kg	266	4.4	-	186	224	-	• Alpina's M3 alternative - Auto gearbox frustrates when pressing on
Aston Martin V8 Vantage	169 D	£84,995	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1630kg	262	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	• 2012 upgrades keep the V8 Vantage on song - Starting to feel a little dated, though
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S	168 R	£102,500	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	271	4.5	-	189	299	21.9	• Keener engine, V12 Vantage looks - Slightly sluggish auto only
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	146 R	'09-'13	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.4	9.7	190	388	17.3	• The car we hoped the V8 Vantage would be - Erm, a tad thirsty?
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S	189 R	£138,000	12/5935	565/6750	457/5750	1665kg	345	3.7	-	205	-	-	• The best car Aston Martin currently makes - Old-school automated 'box
Aston Martin V12 Zagato	181 F	£396,000	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.2	-	190	388	17.3	• The looks, the noise, the way it drives - It's three times the price of a V12 Vantage
Aston Martin DB9	178 R	£131,995	12/5935	510/6500	457/5500	1785kg	290	4.6	-	183	368	18.2	• Better than the old DB9 in every respect - Automatic gearbox could be quicker
Aston Martin DB9	146 D	'10-'12	12/5935	470/6000	442/5000	1760kg	271	4.6	-	190	368	18.2	• Ride & handling improved for 2010 model - Rapide makes 2+2 seating pointless
Aston Martin DBS	142 R	'07-'12	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1695kg	306	4.2	-	191	388	17.3	• Stupendous engine, gearbox, brakes - Pricey. Can bite the unwary
Aston Martin DB7 Vantage	010 R	'00-'05	12/5935	420/6000	400/5000	1770kg	241	4.9	11.2	185	-	18.6	• DB7 with near-super-car pace - Handling lacks edge
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI	155 R	£27,140	4/1984	208/4300	258/1600	1295kg	163	6.3	15.7	152	154	42.8	• Front-driver loses nothing to quattro TTs - Steers like a computer game
Audi TTS	119 D	£39,905	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1395kg	195	5.4	-	155	184	35.8	• Usefully quicker TT; great drivetrain - Still steers like a computer game
Audi TT RS	158 R	£46,160	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1450kg	235	4.4	11.1	155	209	31.4	• Sublime 5-cylinder turbo engine - Rest of package can't quite match it
Audi TT RS Plus	185 D	£49,245	5/2480	355/5500	343/1650	1450kg	249	4.3	-	174	209	31.4	• Stonkingly fast cross-country - Shockingly expensive for a TT
Audi TT Sport (Mk1)	081 D	'05-'06	4/1781	237/5700	236/2300	1390kg	173	5.7	-	155	-	30.3	• Deliciously purposeful interior, crisp chassis - Numb steering
Audi S5	189 D	£43,395	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1675kg	199	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	• Supercharged V6 makes S5 cleaner and faster - Poor body control
Audi RS5	113 R	£59,150	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1715kg	245	4.5	-	155	246	26.9	• Brilliant engine and improved chassis - Still not as exciting as you'd hope
Audi R8 V8	168 R	£92,710	8/4163	424/7900	317/4500	1560kg	276	4.1	9.9	188	332	19.9	• Finally, a true 911 alternative - Exclusivity comes at a price
Audi R8 V10	181 D	£113,810	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	325	3.9	8.4	194	346	19.0	• Real super-car feel - The V8 is £20k less, and still superb
Audi R8 V10 Plus	183 R	£125,810	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1570kg	351	3.8	-	198	346	19.0	• An R8 fit to take on the 458 and 12C - Firm ride may be too much for some
Audi R8 GT	169 F	'10-'12	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1520kg	369	3.6	-	199	-	-	• Everything we love about the R8 - Not as hardcore as we wanted
Audi Quattro 20V	019 R	'90-'91	5/2226	220/5900	228/1950	1329kg	146	6.2	18.2	143	-	19.1	• Modern classic - Buy wisely to avoid big bills
Bentley Continental GT V8	178 R	£123,850	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2295kg	221	4.6	-	188	246	27.0	• A proper driver's Bentley with decent economy - W12 suddenly seems pointless
Bentley Continental GT	152 D	£135,760	12/5998	567/6000	516/1700	2320kg	248	4.6	-	198	384	17.1	• 200mph in utter comfort - Weight, thirsty
Bentley Continental GT Speed	177 D	£151,100	12/5998	616/6000	590/2000	2320kg	258	4.0	-	205	338	19.5	• 205mph in utter comfort - Feels nose-heavy in slow corners
Bentley Continental Supersports	137 R	£170,100	12/5998	621/6000	590/2000	2240kg	282	3.7	-	204	388	17.3	• A thoroughly impressive car... rather than a fun and involving one
BMW 135i M Sport	113 R	'08-'12	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1455kg	211	5.3	-	155	198	33.2	• Fast, fun, £20k cheaper than an M3 - You really want the 1-series M Coupe
BMW 1-series M Coupe	188 R	'11-'12	6/2979	335/5900	369/1500	1495kg	228	4.8	-	155	224	-	• Character, turbo pace and great looks - Came and went too quick
BMW 435i M Sport Coupe	189 D	£41,435	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1510kg	203	5.4	-	155	169	35.8	• Better balance than 3-series saloon - Can feel characterless at lower speeds
BMW 335i M Sport Coupe (E92)	095 D	'06-'13	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1525kg	201	5.2	12.2	155	196	33.6	• Eager engine, exploitable chassis - Slightly unadventurous styling
BMW M3 (E92)	162 R	'07-'13	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1580kg	266	4.3	10.3	155	290	22.8	• Fends off all of its rivals... except the cheaper 1-series M
BMW M3 GT3 (E92)	171 R	'10-'11	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1530kg	295	4.3	-	193	295	-	• Highly exclusive, one of the most focused M-cars ever - Good luck trying to find one
BMW M3 (E46)	066 R	'00-'07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	230	5.1	12.3	155	-	23.7	• One of the best BMWs ever - Slightly artificial steering feel
BMW M3 CSL (E46)	088 R	'05-'07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	230	5.1	-	155	-	23.7	• CSL dynamics without CSL price - Looks like the standard car
BMW M3 CS (E46)	060 R	'03-'04	6/3246	355/7900	213/4900	1385kg	260	5.3	12.0	155	-	-	• Stripped-down road-race M3 - Standard brakes barely adequate
BMW M3 (E36)	148 R	'93-'98	6/3201	321/7400	258/3250	1460kg	223	5.4	12.8	157	-	25.7	• Performance, image - Never quite as good as the original
BMW M3 (E30)	165 R	'86-'90	4/2302	212/6750	170/4600	1165kg	185	6.7	17.8	147	-	20.3	• Best M-car ever! Race-car dynamics for the road - LHD only
BMW Z4 M Coupe	097 R	'06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1420kg	242	5.0	-	155	-	23.3	• A real drivers' car - You've got to be prepared to get stuck in
BMW M Coupe	005 R	'98-'03	6/3246	325/7400	258/3250	1375kg	240	5.1	-	155	-	25.0	• Quick and characterful - Lacks finesse
BMW 640d	165 D	£62,080	6/2993	309/4400	465/1500	1790kg	175	5.5	-	155	144	51.4	• Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Numb steering, unsettled B-road ride
BMW M6 (Mk2)	178 R	£93,820	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1850kg	303	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	• Mighty ability, pace, technology - There are more exotic badges at this money
BMW M6 (Mk1)	106 R	'05-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1635kg	311	4.8	10.0	155	342	19.8	• Awesome GT, awesome sports car - SMG gearbox now off the pace
Chevrolet Camaro	148 R	£35,025	8/6162	426/5900	420/4600	1769kg	245	5.1	-	155	329	20.0	• Looks like a Transformer made real - We'd prefer it in robot mode
Chevrolet Corvette C6	116 D	£49,033	8/6162	430/5900	424/4600	1461kg	300	4.3	-	186	316	21.2	• A Corvette with no apologies needed - Still left-hand drive only
Chevrolet Corvette Z06	099 R	£66,403	8/7011	505/6300	469/4800	1418kg	363	3.9	8.5	198	350	19.2	• 8.5 to 100, brakes, price - Not quite the road-racer we expected
Ford Shelby GT500*	178 R	£60,000	8/5812	662/6500	631/4000	1747kg	385	3.5	-	202	-	-	• Huge performance for the money - Putting it to use takes nerve
Ginetta G40 R	165 R	£29,950	4/1999	175/6700	140/5000	795kg	224	5.8	-	140	-	-	• A race-compliant sports car for the road - Feels too soft to be a hardcore track toy
Ginetta G60	165 D	£68,000	6/3721	310/6500	288/4500	1080kg	292	4.9	-	165	-	-	• Reborn F1 cars GTs boasts great engine and good looks - The ride still needs work
Honda CR-Z GT	144 R	£20,820	4/1497	122/6100	128/1500	1198kg	103	9.9	-	124	117	56.5	• The first hybrid with sporting intent - No match for a good diesel hot hatch
Honda Integra Type-R (DC2)	095 R	'96-'00	4/1797	187/8000	131/7300	1101kg	173	6.2	17.9	145	-	28.9	• Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Too raw for some
Honda Integra Type-R (DC5)*	037 R	'01-'06	4/1998	217/8000	152/7000	1250kg	176	7.1	16.7	140	-	-	• Sharp looks, massive grip - Lost a little of the DC2's magic
Honda NSX	188 R	'90-'05	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1410kg	196	5.5	-	168	-	22.8	• The useable supercar - 270bhp sounds a bit weird today
Honda NSX-R*	051 R	'02-'03	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1270kg	221	4.4	-	168	-	-	• evo Car of the Year 2002 - Honda never brought it to the UK
Hyundai Veloster Turbo	176 D	£22,120	4/1591	184/5500	195/1500	1313kg	142	8.2	-	133	157	40.9	• The usual Hyundai value, with added fun - Styling might be too quirky for some
Infiniti G37S Coupe	127 R	£38,247	6/3696	316/7000	265/5200	1706kg	188	5.8	13.8	155	246	26.9	• Softer 370Z delivers sharp-driving swing at the Germans - Bland looks
Jaguar XK 5.0	130 D	£65,430	8/5000	380/6500	380/3500	1585kg	244	5.2	-	155	264	25.2	• Fine car for the likes of us - Jag buyers may not like the harder edge
Jaguar XKR	168 R	£78,930	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1678kg	305	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	• Fast and incredibly rewarding Jag - The kids will have to stay at home
Jaguar XKR-S	168 R	£97,430	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1678kg	328	4.2	-	186	292	23.0	• The most exciting XKR ever - It's nearly £100,000
Jaguar XKR	'98-'06	8/4196	400/6100	468/3500	1735kg	234	5.2	-	155	-	22.9	• Extra grunt of 4.2-litre motor - Lacks feedback	
Lotus Exige S (V6)	171 R	£53,850	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1176kg	298	3.8	-	170	236	-	• Breathtaking road-racer; our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Doubts over Lotus's future
Lotus Exige S	105 R	'06-'11	4/1796	218/7800	158/5500	930kg	238	4.5	-	148	199	33.2	• Lightweight with a hefty punch - Uninspiring soundtrack
Lotus Exige Cup 260	139 D	'10-'11	4/1796	256/8000	174/6000	890kg	293	4.0	-	152	199	31.1	• Feels like a race car, yet works on the road - Pricey for a four-pot Exige
Lotus Exige (series 2)	068 R	'04-'08	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	875kg	219	4.9	-	147	-	32.1	• Highly focused road and track tool - Lacks visual impact of S1

POCKET buying guide

Lamborghini Murciélago

Years 2001-2011 Engine V12, 6192cc
Power 570bhp @ 7500rpm
Torque 479lb ft @ 5400rpm
0-62mph 4.0sec Top speed 205mph



WHY WOULD YOU?

Because it's a true supercar from the old school, with a 570bhp V12 that can trace its roots back to the Miura. Yet because the Murciélago was developed under Audi, it's pretty robust too.

WHAT TO PAY

£80-95k should buy you a good example of an early car. LP640s (2006 onwards) start at around £120k. SVs (from 2009) at £200k.

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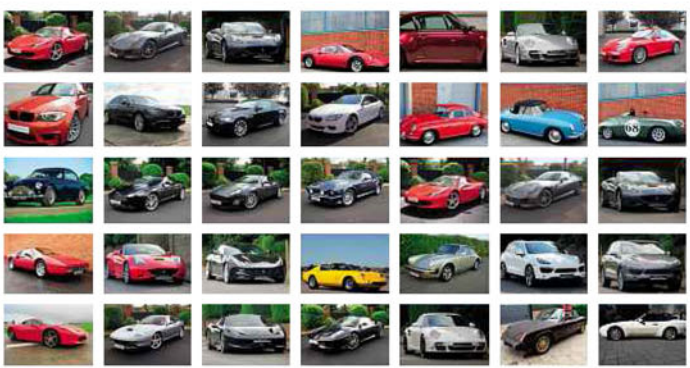
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Coupes / GTs

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cv/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max.mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
Lotus Evige (series 1)	067 D	'00-'01	4/1796	192/7800	146/5000	780kg	247	4.6	-	136	-	-	★★★★★
Lotus Evora	138 R	£52,500	6/3456	276/6400	258/4700	1382kg	203	5.6	13.6	162	217	30.3	★★★★★
Lotus Evora S	168 R	£61,500	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.6	-	172	229	28.7	★★★★★
Lotus Esprit Sport 350	005 R	'99-'00	8/3506	350/6500	295/4250	1299kg	274	4.3	9.9	175	-	22.0	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo	114 R	£82,190	8/4244	399/7100	339/4750	1880kg	216	5.5	12.7	177	330	19.8	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	188 R	£90,750	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1880kg	245	4.8	-	185	331	-	★★★★★
Maserati GT MC Stradale	160 R	£110,045	8/4691	444/7100	376/4750	1770kg	255	4.6	-	187	337	19.6	★★★★★
Maserati Coupe	064 R	'03-'07	8/4244	490/7000	333/4500	1680kg	237	4.8	-	177	-	17.6	★★★★★
Maserati GranSport	073 R	'04-'07	8/4244	400/7000	333/4500	1680kg	239	4.8	-	180	-	-	★★★★★
Mazda RX-8	122 R	'03-'11	2R/1308	228/8200	156/5500	1429kg	162	6.5	16.4	146	299	24.6	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	162 R	£57,165	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	277	4.4	10.3	186	280	23.5	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black	171 R	£98,765	8/6208	510/6800	457/5200	1620kg	317	4.1	-	186	286	-	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG	092 D	'06-'09	8/6208	481/6800	464/5000	1755kg	278	4.6	-	155	-	19.9	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG Black	106 R	'07-'09	8/6208	500/6800	464/5000	1760kg	289	4.2	-	186	-	-	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CL63 AMG	150 D	£115,660	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2010kg	271	4.5	-	155	244	26.9	★★★★★
Morgan AeroMax	097 D	£110,000	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.1	-	170	-	-	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z	180 R	£26,995	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1520kg	218	5.4	-	155	248	26.7	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z Nismo	186 D	£36,995	6/3696	339/7400	274/5200	1535kg	224	5.2	-	155	248	26.1	★★★★★
Nissan 350Z	107 R	'03-'09	6/3498	309/6800	264/4800	1755kg	205	5.5	13.0	155	-	24.7	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2012MY/2013MY)	187 R	£76,610	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	316	2.8	-	196	275	24.0	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2010MY)	152 R	'10-'12	6/3799	523/6400	451/3200	1740kg	305	3.0	-	194	279	23.5	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	125 R	'08-'10	6/3799	473/6400	434/3200	1740kg	276	3.8	-	193	-	-	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	009 R	'99-'02	6/2568	276/7000	289/4400	1560kg	180	4.7	12.5	165	-	20.1	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R33)	019 R	'97-'99	6/2568	276/6800	271/4400	1540kg	182	5.4	14.3	155	-	22.0	★★★★★
Noble M400	089 R	'04-'06	6/2968	425/6500	390/5000	1060kg	407	3.5	-	185	-	-	★★★★★
Noble M12 GTO-3R	155 R	'03-'06	6/2968	352/6200	350/3500	1080kg	332	3.8	-	170	-	-	★★★★★
Peugeot RCZ 1.6 THP 200	070 R	£23,595	4/1598	191/5500	202/1700	1421kg	141	7.3	18.1	147	155	42.1	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman (981)	185 F	£39,694	6/2706	271/7400	214/4500	1310kg	210	5.7	-	165	192	34.4	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S (981)	181 R	£48,783	6/3436	321/7400	273/4500	1320kg	247	5.0	-	176	206	32.1	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman (987)	131 R	'11-'13	6/2893	261/7200	221/4400	1330kg	199	5.8	-	165	221	30.1	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S (987)	132 R	'06-'13	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1350kg	237	5.2	-	172	223	29.7	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman R (987)	158 R	'11-'13	6/3436	325/7400	273/4750	1295kg	255	4.7	-	175	228	29.1	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (991)	168 R	£71,449	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1380kg	254	4.7	-	179	212	31.4	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991)	168 R	£81,242	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1395kg	287	4.4	-	188	224	29.7	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4 (991)	177 D	£77,924	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1430kg	245	4.5	-	177	219	30.4	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (991)	179 R	£87,959	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1445kg	277	4.5	-	185	234	28.5	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (997.2)	121 R	'08-'11	6/3614	341/6500	288/4400	1415kg	245	4.9	-	180	225	29.4	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.2)	121 R	'08-'11	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1425kg	271	4.7	-	188	242	27.4	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.1)	070 R	'04-'08	6/3824	350/6600	295/4600	1420kg	246	4.6	10.9	182	-	24.5	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (996)	051 R	'02-'05	6/3596	316/6800	273/4250	1470kg	188	5.1	-	174	-	-	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (996 3.4)	008 R	'98-'01	6/3387	300/6800	258/4600	1320kg	230	4.6	-	173	-	28.0	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (993)	089 R	'94-'97	6/3600	285/6100	251/5250	1372kg	211	5.2	-	168	-	25.0	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (991)	187 R	£100,540	6/3799	468/8250	324/6250	1430kg	332	3.5	-	196	289	23.0	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.2)	182 R	'09-'11	6/3797	429/7600	317/6250	1395kg	312	4.2	9.2	194	303	22.1	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.2)	152 R	'10-'11	6/3797	444/7900	317/6750	1370kg	329	4.0	-	193	314	-	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 (997.2)	187 R	'11-'12	6/3996	493/8250	339/5750	1360kg	368	3.8	-	193	326	-	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.1)	182 R	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1395kg	298	4.3	9.4	192	-	-	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.1)	105 R	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1375kg	302	4.2	-	193	-	-	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.2)	082 R	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1380kg	272	4.3	9.2	190	-	-	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (996.2)	068 R	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1330kg	286	4.2	9.2	190	-	-	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.1)	182 R	'99	6/3600	360/7200	273/5000	1350kg	271	4.5	10.3	187	-	21.9	★★★★★
Porsche 968 Club Sport	019 R	'93-'95	4/2990	240/6200	225/4100	1335kg	183	6.1	15.7	149	-	-	★★★★★
Renault Alpine A610	187 D	'91-'95	6/2975	247/5750	258/2900	1420kg	177	5.4	13.8	166	-	21.0	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Wraith	189 D	£237,111	12/6592	624/5600	590/1500	2360kg	269	4.4	-	155	327	20.2	★★★★★
Subaru BRZ	170 R	£24,995	4/1998	191/7000	151/6400	1230kg	163	7.6	-	140	181	36.2	★★★★★
Toyota GT86	174 R	£24,995	4/1998	191/7000	151/6400	1275kg	157	7.6	-	140	181	36.2	★★★★★
Toyota Celica GT-Four ST205	187 R	'94-'99	4/1998	239/6000	223/4000	1496kg	162	5.2	-	143	-	-	★★★★★
TVR T350C	057 R	'03-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1100kg	238	4.7	10.0	175	-	-	★★★★★
TVR Sagaris	099 D	'05-'07	6/3996	406/7500	349/5000	1078kg	383	3.7	-	185	-	-	★★★★★
TVR Tuscan S (Mk2)	076 R	'05-'07	6/3996	400/7000	315/5250	1100kg	369	4.0	-	185	-	-	★★★★★
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	004 R	'98-'04	6/3996	350/6800	330/5000	1130kg	315	5.0	11.4	160+	-	-	★★★★★
Vauxhall Monaro VXR 6.0	079 D	'05-'07	8/5967	398/6000	391/4400	1677kg	241	5.1	-	180+	-	-	★★★★★
VW Scirocco GT 2.0 TSI	155 R	£24,705	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1373kg	153	6.1	15.8	149	172	38.2	★★★★★
VW Scirocco R	181 R	£31,135	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1352kg	196	5.8	-	155	189	34.9	★★★★★
VW Corrado VR6	095 R	'92-'96	6/2861	190/5800	180/4200	1237kg	156	6.2	-	143	-	29.5	★★★★★
Wiesmann GT MF5	127 D	£150,000	10/4999	500/7750	383/6100	1380kg	368	3.9	-	193	-	-	★★★★★



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Our Choice

Ferrari 458 Italia. A huge step on from the F430 it replaced. The lack of a manual gearbox is a shame, but the scintillating 4.5-litre V8 and snappy seven-speed twin-clutch transmission result in a car that's markedly quicker than its V8 predecessors.



Best of the Rest

Pagani's awesome Huayra (left) was our joint Car of the Year in 2012. Ferrari's fastest-ever road car, the F12, is on a whole new level to its rivals technologically, but Lamborghini's Aventador has it licked for visual drama. The updated McLaren 12C, meanwhile, remains tantalisingly close to greatness.

Supercars

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine c/y/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating	
9ff GT9R	127 D	£450,000	6/4000	1120/7850	774/5970	1346kg	845	2.9	-	260	-	-	+ Above 100mph eats Veyrons for breakfast - Eats M3 dust at traffic lights	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish (Mk2)	182 R	£189,995	12/5935	565/6750	457/5500	1739kg	330	4.1	-	183	335	19.6	+ A much better car than the DBS it succeeds - Shame it looks little different, then	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk1)	110 R	'05-'07	12/5935	520/7000	425/5800	1875kg	282	4.9	10.1	200	-	-	+ Vanquish joins supercar greats - A tad intimidating at the limit	★★★★★
Aston Martin One-77	179 R	'10-'12	12/7312	750/6000	553/7600	1740kg	438	3.7	-	220+	-	-	+ The engine, the looks, the drama - Gearbox hates manoeuvring; only 77 were made	★★★★★
BMW M1	110 R	'78-'81	6/3500	277/6500	239/5000	1303kg	216	5.8	-	161	-	-	+ Early supercar icon - A bit under-endowed these days	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	134 R	'05-'11	16/7993	1000/6000	922/2200	1950kg	521	2.8	5.8	253	596	11.4	+ Superbly engineered 4wd quad-turbo rocket - Er, lacks luggage space?	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport	133 R	£1.4m	16/7993	1000/6000	922/2200	1990kg	510	2.6	-	253	596	11.4	+ Warp speed and ferocious noise sans-roof - Ridiculous broly/roof thing	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Super Sport	151 R	£2.0m	16/7993	1183/6400	1106/3000	1838kg	654	2.5	-	268	539	12.2	+ The world's fastest supercar - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport Vitesse	185 R	£5.17m	16/7993	1183/6400	1106/3000	1990kg	604	2.6	-	254	539	12.2	+ The world's fastest convertible - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals	★★★★★
Bugatti EB110	078 R	'91-'95	12/3500	552/8000	451/3750	1566kg	358	3.4	-	212	-	-	+ Superbly engineered 4wd quad-turbo rocket - It just fizzled out	★★★★★
Caparo T1	138 R	£301,975	8/3499	575/10,500	310/9000	689kg	848	3.8	6.2	205	-	-	+ Absolutely staggering performance - Absolutely staggering price tag	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	133 R	£106,605	8/6162	638/6500	603/3800	1528kg	424	3.8	7.6	205	355	18.8	+ Huge pace and character - Take plenty of brave pills if there's rain	★★★★☆
Ferrari 458 Italia	182 R	£178,526	8/4499	562/9000	398/6000	1485kg	384	3.2	6.8	202	307	20.6	+ An astounding achievement, looks fantastic - There'll never be a manual	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Spider	185 R	£198,971	8/4499	562/9000	398/6000	1530kg	373	3.3	-	198	275	23.9	+ A 458 that sounds and feels more organic - Er, Amph slower?	★★★★★
Ferrari F430	163 R	'04-'10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1449kg	339	4.0	-	196	-	-	+ Just brilliant - Didn't you read the plus point?	★★★★★
Ferrari F430 Spider	095 R	'04-'10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1520kg	326	4.1	-	193	-	-	+ Berlinetta dynamics, 8000rpm with the roof down - Looks?	★★★★★
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	121 R	'07-'10	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1350kg	378	3.5	7.7	198	-	15.7	+ Successful F1 technology transplant - Likes to shout about it	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Modena	163 R	'99-'04	8/3586	394/8500	275/4750	1390kg	288	4.5	9.0	183	-	-	+ Worthy successor to 355 - Not quite as involving as it should be	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale	068 R	'03-'04	8/3586	420/8500	275/4750	1280kg	333	4.1	-	186	-	-	+ Totally exhilarating road-racer. It's loud - It's very, very loud	★★★★★
Ferrari F355 F1 Berlinetta	163 R	'97-'99	8/3496	374/8250	268/6000	1350kg	281	4.7	-	183	-	-	+ Looks terrific, sounds even better - Are you kidding?	★★★★★
Ferrari F12 Berlinetta	182 R	£239,736	12/6262	730/8250	509/6000	1630kg	455	3.1	-	211	350	18.8	+ 730bhp isn't too much power for the road - We'd rather have an Aventador (just)	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	101 R	'06-'12	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1688kg	368	3.5	7.4	205	415	15.8	+ evo Car of the Year 2006 - Banks are getting harder to rob	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTO	161 R	'11-'12	12/5999	661/8250	457/6500	1605kg	418	3.4	-	208	-	-	+ One of the truly great Ferraris - Erm, the air con isn't very good	★★★★★
Ferrari 575M Fiorano Handling Pack	169 R	'02-'06	12/5748	508/7250	434/5250	1730kg	298	4.2	9.6	202	-	12.3	+ Fiorano pack makes 575 truly great - It should have been standard	★★★★★
Ferrari 550 Maranello	169 R	'99-'02	12/5474	485/7000	415/5000	1716kg	287	4.3	10.0	199	-	-	+ Everything - Nothing	★★★★★
Ferrari Testarossa	185 R	'84-'91	12/4942	385/6300	361/4500	1506kg	260	5.8	-	171	-	-	+ The ultimate '80s supercar - Intimidating handling; needs big roads	★★★★★
Ferrari FF	164 R	£227,107	12/6262	651/8000	504/6000	1880kg	347	3.7	-	208	360	15.4	+ Four seats and 4WD, but a proper Ferrari - Looks divide opinion	★★★★★
Ferrari 612 Scaglietti F1	090 R	'04-'11	12/5748	533/7250	434/5250	1840kg	294	4.3	9.8	199	470	13.8	+ Awesomely capable grand tourer - See above	★★★★★
Ferrari Enzo	156 R	'02-'04	12/5998	650/7800	485/5500	1365kg	484	3.5	6.7	217+	-	-	+ Intoxicating, exploitable - Cabin detailing falls short of Zonda or F1	★★★★★
Ferrari F50	186 R	'96-'97	12/4699	513/8500	347/6500	1230kg	424	3.9	-	202	-	-	+ Still the best drivers' Ferrari - The F40 looks better	★★★★★
Ferrari F40	186 R	'87-'92	8/2936	471/7000	426/4000	1100kg	437	4.1	-	201	-	-	+ Brutally fast - It's in the dictionary under 'turbo lag'	★★★★★
Ferrari 288GT0	064 R	'84-'85	8/2855	400/7000	366/3800	1160kg	350	4.9	-	189	-	-	+ Painfully beautiful, rarer than the F40 - You are joking?	★★★★★
Ford GT	188 R	'04-'06	8/5409	550/6500	500/3750	1583kg	353	3.7	-	205	-	-	+ Our 2005 Car of the Year - JC had one. Reckoned it didn't handle...	★★★★★
Gumpert Apollo	110 R	£275,000	8/4163	690/6300	675/4000	1200kg	584	3.0	-	220+	-	-	+ Stupendous performance. Apollo' - High price. 'Gumpert'	★★★★★
Hennessey Venom GT	180 R	£900,000	8/7000	1244/6500	1155/4000	1244kg	1016	2.5	-	275	-	-	+ 0-200mph in 14.5sec, and it handles too - Looks like an Exige	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ220	157 R	'92-'94	6/3498	542/7200	475/4500	1470kg	375	3.7	-	213	-	-	+ Britain's greatest supercar... - ...until McLaren built the F1	★★★★★
Koenigsegg Agera R	180 R	£1,080,000	8/5000	1140/7100	885/2700	1435kg	807	2.9	-	273	-	-	+ As fast and exciting as your body can handle - It's Veyron money	★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCX	094 R	'06-'10	8/4700	806/6900	678/5700	1180kg	694	3.9	7.7	241	-	-	+ Sweden's greatest supercar - Sweden's only supercar	★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCXR Edition	118 R	'08-'10	8/4800	1004/7000	796/5600	1280kg	797	2.8	-	254+	-	-	+ One of the world's fastest cars - Spike power delivery	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP550-2	176 F	£166,784	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1380kg	399	3.9	-	199	315	16.0	+ The mad rear-driven Lambo is back! - Gallardo not feeling as fresh as the 458	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	180 D	£164,444	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1410kg	398	3.7	-	202	325	16.0	+ Still a missile from A to B - Starting to show its age	★★★★★
Lamborghini LP570-4 Superleggera	152 R	£178,550	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1340kg	426	3.5	-	202	325	20.6	+ A reminder of how great the Gallardo is - LP560-4 does as good a job	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo	094 R	'06-'08	10/4961	513/8000	376/4250	1520kg	343	4.3	9.4	196	-	-	+ On a full-bore start it spins all four wheels. Cool - Slightly clunky e-gear	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera	104 R	'07-'08	10/4961	522/8000	376/4250	1420kg	373	3.8	-	196	-	-	+ Lighter, more agile - Grabby carbon brakes, funky e-gear	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4	182 R	£247,000	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1575kg	445	2.9	-	217	370	17.7	+ Most important new Lambo since the Countach - Erm... expensive?	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador Roadster	184 R	£294,665	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1625kg	431	3.0	-	217	370	17.7	+ Sensational engine and styling - A wee bit on the thirsty side	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murcielago	089 D	'01-'06	12/6192	570/7500	479/5400	1650kg	351	4.0	-	205	-	-	+ Gorgeous, capable and incredibly friendly - V12 feels stressed	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murcielago LP640	093 R	'06-'11	12/6496	631/8000	487/6000	1665kg	385	3.3	-	211	-	21.3	+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murcielago LP670-4 SV	186 R	'09-'11	12/6496	661/8000	487/6500	1565kg	429	3.2	7.3	212	-	-	+ Supercharging in its truest, wildest sense - Be prepared for stares	★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo GT	016 R	'99-'00	12/5992	575/7300	465/5500	1490kg	392	4.1	8.3	211	-	12.5	+ Briefly the world's fastest production car - They made only 80	★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo 6.0	019 R	'00-'02	12/5992	550/7100	457/5500	1625kg	343	3.8	-	200+	-	-	+ Best-built, best-looking Diablo of all - People's perceptions	★★★★★
Lamborghini Countach 5000 QV	184 R	'88-'91	12/5167	455/7000	369/5200	1488kg	311	4.2	10.0	182	-	13.7	+ Still the definitive supercar - Visibility, pract- oh hell, who cares?	★★★★★
Lexus LFA/LFA Nurburgring	161 R	'10-'12	10/4805	552/8700	354/6800	1480kg	379	3.7	-	202	-	-	+ Absurd and compelling supercar - Badge and price don't quite match	★★★★★
Maserati MC12	079 R	'04-'05	12/5998	621/7500	481/5500	1445kg	437	3.8	-	205	-	-	+ Rarer than an Enzo - The Ferrari's better	★★★★★
McLaren 12C	187 R	£176,000	8/3799	616/7500	442/3000	1434kg	435	3.1	-	207	279	24.2	+ Staggering performance, refinement - Engine noise can be grating	★★★★★
McLaren 12C Spider	185 R	£195,500	8/3799	616/7500	442/3000	1474kg	425	3.1	-	207	279	24.2	+ No discernible dynamic compromises - Requires commitment to come alive	★★★★★
McLaren F1	186 R	'94-'98	12/6064	627/7500	479/4000	1137kg	560	3.2	6.3	240+	-	19.0	+ Still the most single-minded supercar ever - There'll never be another	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG Black	131 R	'09-'10	12/5980	661/5400	737/2200	1876kg	358	4.0	8.1	199	-	-	+ Bankers looks, bankers speed - Bankers £250K price	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	159 R	£168,395	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1620kg	335	4.1	8.4	197	308	21.4	+ Great engine and chassis (gutting doors too!) - Slightly tardy gearbox	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Black	182 D	£229,985	8/6208	622/7400	468/5500	1550kg	408	3.6	-	196	321	20.6	+ Stunning engine, superb body control - Appetite for expensive tyres	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren	073 R	'04-'07	8/5439	617/6500	575/3250	1693kg	370	3.7	-	208	-	-	+ Zonda-pace, 575-style drivability - Dreadful brake feel	★★★★★
Noble M600	186 R	£200,000	8/4439	650/6800	604/3800	1198kg	551	3.8	7.7	225	-	-	+ Spiritual successor to the Ferrari F40 - It's a bit pricey	★★★★★
Pagani Huayra	185 R	£1m	12/5980	720/5800	737/2250	1350kg	542	3.3	-	224	-	-	+ Our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Engine isn't as nape-pricking as the Zonda's	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda 760RS	170 R	£1.5m	12/7291	750/6300	575/4500	1210kg	630	3.3	-	217+	-	-	+ The most extreme Zonda ever - The last Zonda ever (probably)	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda C12S	096 R	'01-'05	12/7291	555/5900	553/4050	1250kg	451	3.6	-	214	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2001 - Harry's sold his long-termer	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda F	186 R	'05-'06	12/7291	602/6150	575/4000	1230kg	497	3.6	-	197	-	-	+ Everything an Italian supercar ought to be - Looks a bit blingy next to a Carrera GT	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda Cinque Roadster	147 D	'09-'10	12/7291	669/6200	575/4000	1400kg	485	3.4	-	217+	-	-	+ The best Zonda ever - Doesn't come up in the classifieds often	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo S (991)	188 R	£140,852												

Track Times

Knowledge

Key + = new addition this month. Red denotes the car is the fastest in its class.

Car	Lap time	Peak mph	Issue no.	Conditions
Radical SR8LM (fastest car)	1:13.6	127.8	138	Dry
Caparo T1 (fastest supercar)	1:14.8	130.9	131	Dry
Ferrari 458 Italia	1:19.3	120.0	159	Dry
Gumpert Apollo S	1:19.4	120.4	119	Dry
McLaren MP4-12C (Corsa tyres)	1:19.6	121.2	159	Dry
Caterham Levante V8	1:19.6	118.6	131	Dry
Porsche 997 GT2 RS	1:19.9	122.3	158	Dry
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	1:20.1	113.2	138	Dry
Caterham Superlight R500	1:20.2	115.7	119	Dry
McLaren MP4-12C	1:20.6	120.9	159	Dry
Noble M600	1:20.8	121.8	159	Dry
Porsche 997 GT3 RS 4.0 (fastest coupe)	1:21.0	118.2	160	Dry
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	1:21.3	121.1	134	Dry
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	1:21.5	113.6	119	Dry
KTM X-Bow (300bhp)	1:21.5	112.7	138	Dry
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	1:21.7	117.2	121	Dry
Porsche 997.2 GT3 RS (3.8)	1:21.9	116.8	150	Dry
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	1:22.5	119.1	122	Dry
Brooke Double R	1:22.5	113.2	119	Dry
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	1:22.9	116.7	143	Dry
Porsche Carrera GT	1:23.3	115.2	119	Dry
Porsche 997.2 GT3	1:23.3	114.5	138	Dry
Porsche 997 Turbo S	1:23.5	117.5	146	Dry
Porsche 997 GT2	1:23.5	115.1	119	Dry
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	1:23.6	113.1	119	Dry
Porsche 991 Carrera	1:23.6	112.5	182	Dry
Porsche 991 Carrera Cabriolet	1:23.9	112.3	183	Dry
Porsche 997 Turbo	1:24.1	113.5	136	Damp
Lotus 340R (190bhp)	1:24.2	110.0	135	Dry
Porsche Boxster S (981)	1:24.2	109.3	183	Dry
Caterham Superlight R300	1:24.3	101.5	138	Dry
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	1:24.5	115.1	160	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	1:24.6	115.7	146	Dry
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	1:24.7	107.7	167	Dry
Ferrari California	1:25.0	111.8	134	Dry
KTM X-Bow	1:25.0	105.0	123	Dry
BMW E92 M3 Coupe	1:25.1	109.1	162	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG Black	1:25.2	108.6	131	Dry
Jaguar F-type V8 S	1:25.2	111.2	183	Dry
Audi RS5	1:25.4	108.8	162	Dry
Audi R8 Spyder V8	1:25.5	107.0	167	Dry
Porsche Cayman R	1:25.5	106.8	158	Dry
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster	1:25.6	109.1	183	Dry
BMW M5 (F10) (fastest saloon)	1:25.7	112.0	165	Dry
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	1:25.8	110.9	146	Dry
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	1:25.9	107.5	138	Dry
BMW 1-series M Coupe	1:25.9	106.4	158	Dry
Mitsubishi Evo X RS 360	1:26.1	106.6	153	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Trophy (fastest hot hatch)	1:26.1	105.3	166	Dry
Audi TT RS	1:26.3	107.2	149	Dry
Aston Martin DBS	1:26.4	109.5	143	Dry
Porsche Panamera Turbo	1:26.5	109.2	137	Dry
Jaguar XJ220	1:26.7	111.7	131	Dry
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	1:26.8	104.9	165	Dry
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (fastest 4x4)	1:26.9	107.4	158	Dry
Lotus Evora	1:27.1	104.2	145	Dry
Nissan 370Z	1:27.1	104.0	158	Dry
Porsche Panamera S	1:27.3	102.4	165	Dry
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	1:27.7	111.0	162	Dry
Lotus Elise SC	1:27.7	104.6	131	Dry
Vauxhall VXR8 Bathurst S	1:27.8	106.1	131	Dry
BMW E46 M3 CSL	1:27.8	105.4	153	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	1:27.8	103.3		
Audi RS6 Avant (fastest estate)	1:27.9	111.0	121	Dry
Jaguar XFR	1:27.9	108.1	137	Dry
Lexus IS-F	1:28.1	106.4	151	Dry
Porsche Boxster S (987)	1:28.1	105.4	120	Dry
Subaru WRX STI	1:28.3	101.6	157	Dry
SEAT Leon Cupra R	1:28.7	102.4	162	Dry
Bentley Continental Supersports	1:29.2	105.8	149	Dry
Lotus Elise Club Racer	1:29.2	95.5	162	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	1:29.9	101.4	156	Dry
Honda NSX	1:30.1	101.3	145	Dry
Nissan 370Z Roadster	1:30.3	100.1	173	Dry
VW Scirocco 2.0 TSI	1:30.4	98.9	155	Dry
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	1:30.8	101.8	131	Dry
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk2)	1:31.4	100.9	174	Damp
Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup	1:31.9	97.2	144	Dry
VW Golf GTI (Mk6)	1:32.4	99.3		

TRACK MAP



West Circuit facts

- Location Bedford Autodrome
- Opened 1999
- Length 1.85 miles (2.98 kilometres)
- Direction Anti-clockwise
- Left turns 9
- Right turns 6

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Art of speed



Lexus LFA instruments

by DAVID VIVIAN

L LEXUS HAD A CLEAR CHOICE WHEN IT CAME TO deciding what sort of dials and gauges the drivers of its LFA supercar should see beneath the arc of its exquisite carbonfibre steering-wheel rim: functional or fancy. Fortunately, being a Japanese company that had allotted a more or less open-ended budget and nine years of development time to the realisation of its £350,000 statement two-seater, it could choose both. And the result, for some, was as mesmerising as the sound of the LFA's extraordinary naturally aspirated 4.8-litre V10 closing in on its 9000rpm red line.

Not even Ferrari had a road car with quite such a scintillating 9.0k soundtrack, so making it the focus of the driver's attention was a natural starting point for chief engineer Haruhiko Tanahashi and his team. The LFA's race car-like appetite for revs, and their rapid-fire disposal, in part informed what sort of display was needed – no conventional rev counter would be able to live with the unloaded V10's ability to go from idle to 9000rpm in 0.6sec. The LFA's would, and it would be at the centre of a moving stage.

Thin Film Transistor (TFT) representations of analogue dials were already

commonplace in the latest generation of passenger jets, but rare in the automotive industry. Lexus could have bundled together a number of TFT screens, made them look pretty, and left it there. But the team had ambition far beyond that. With design and programming help from *Gran Turismo* video game wizards Polyphony Digital, it set about creating a thing of fascinating beauty, with a number of kinetic elements that looked more like cinema CGI special effects.

From start-up, the display appears to consist of one large rev counter with a glowing, 3D luminescence and a digital speedo and gear indicator at its centre. This is flanked by two wings of 'virtual' auxiliary gauges. It is a living, all-but breathing, thing. Switch through the LFA's driving modes – from Auto, via Normal to Sport – and the display's numbers, by stages, become bigger and bolder until, in Sport, the dial face changes from black to white and the red line moves to the top of the dial calibration. As the LCD digital needle approaches, the whole dial gets bathed in red (or yellow or green if you prefer).

Amazing enough. But cooler still is the way the big dial smoothly, electrically eases across the display area when you call up the main menu. Until someone invents a holographic head-up display, nothing beats that. **X**

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Miss Reyburn

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Mr Stallard

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4.9% APR representative plus £1,000 towards your deposit† FOLLOW US ON: **SEAT.CO.UK**

Official fuel consumption for the New SEAT Leon range in mpg (litres per 100km): urban 36.7 (7.7) – 61.4 (4.6); extra-urban 57.6 (4.9) – 85.6 (3.3); combined 47.9 (5.9) – 74.3 (3.8). CO₂ emissions 137 – 99g/km.

Standard EU Test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. Model shown is the New Leon 1.2 TSI 105PS SE at £16,790 RRP with optional electric sunroof at £695 RRP, 17" Dynamic alloy wheels at £350 RRP and full LED headlights at £995 RRP. Offer may be varied or withdrawn at any time. Retail Sales only. ¹Payable with first payment. ²Payable with optional final payment. 4.4p per mile excess mileage charges apply. †£1,000 deposit contribution is available to customers who purchase their car with Solutions personal contract plan. Terms and conditions apply. Finance examples include technology pack. Further charges may be payable if vehicle is returned. Indemnities may be required. Subject to vehicle availability. Subject to status. Available to over 18s in the UK from participating dealers only. SEAT Finance, Freepost SEAT Finance. Subject to each model specification and cost option fitment. Pricing and finance valid from 1st October to 31st December 2013. **Offer available on SE and FR models when ordered before 31st December 2013 from participating dealers only. *£1,915 RRP refers to optional specification if priced individually.

