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Editorial

Telephone 020 7907 6310
Email eds@evo.co.uk Website www.evo.co.uk
5 Tower Court, Irchester Road, Wollaston,
Wellingborough, Northants NN29 7PJ, United Kingdom

Editor Nick Trott
Motoring editor Mike Duff
Art director Rob Gould
Features editor Henry Catchpole
Road tester Dan Prosser
Production editor Ian Eveleigh
Staff photographer Dean Smith
Film-maker Sam Riley
Staff writer Stephen Dobie
Sub editor Dan McCalla
Designer Will Beaumont
Staff writer (website) Matthew Hayward
Contributing editor Jethro Bovingdon
Contributing editor Richard Meaden
Contributing editor Tiff Needell
Road test contributor David Vivian
Columnist Richard Porter
Columnist Dario Franchitti
Office administrator Jane Townsend-Emms

Contributors (words)

Kim Adams, Simon de Burton, Simon George,
David Lillywhite, Peter Tomalin, David Yu

Contributors (pictures)

Stuart Collins, Gus Gregory, Paul Harmer

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Andy Bond, Brynteg Holiday Home Park, Gwyn Evans, Stuart
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Advertising & Promotions

Telephone 020 7907 6773 Fax 020 7907 6601
ISDN 020 7580 0297 email ads.evo@dennis.co.uk
30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

MD of advertising Julian Lloyd-Evans
Advertising director Sarah Perks
Advertising manager Tim Deeks
Business development manager Shaza Agabani
Account manager Neale Salt
Sales executive Alexander Rumble
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Licensing & syndication

International director Ian Bedwell
Syndication senior manager Anj Dosaj-Halai
Licensing manager Carlotta Serantoni
Licensing & syndication executive Nicole Adams

evo Cars for Sale

Telephone 0207 907 6660 email chris_wood@dennis.co.uk
Commercial director Chris Wood

Publishing

Publishing director Geoff Love

Dennis Publishing Ltd

Group managing director Ian Westwood
Chief financial officer Brett Reynolds
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Chairman Felix Dennis

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Ed Speak



WHAT IS YOUR HOT HATCH STORY? WE ALL SEEM TO have one, and if the **evo** team is anything to go by, the stories tend to relate to the joy of at some point owning the ultimate democratised performance car. That and near-misses, but more on that later.

The hot hatch represents the entry point to everything we covet at **evo**. Buy the right one and you can walk tall knowing that your car is imbued with the same characteristics that make a GT3 so capable. Of course, not everyone recognises this; heathens will accuse you of being a boy racer and snobs will sneer at the badge on the nose, the gold wheels or the Rallye stripes. However, deep down, you'll know it's their loss. As life-affirming driving experiences go, there are few greater than slicing along a complex B-road in a hot hatch.

I have two hot hatch stories I'd like to share. The first is a moment in France when I was a nipper and nearly fainted when I spotted a Countach. Seconds later, I saw a Citroën Visa Mille Pistes and experienced the same thrill. 'Citroën Visa what?!' I hear you cry. Bear with me. My dad had a Visa GTI and that made him a total hero. That the Visa was ugly didn't matter. The mags said it was great to drive, and I pored over every word. It also had the crucial GTI badge. Well, it should have had the badge; my dad removed all stripes and stickers from his Visa so he could bait Escort RS Turbos on the roads near our house. The Mille Pistes? It was a four-wheel-drive Group B version of my dad's car and that made it off-the-scale, at least to the impressionable 11-year-old me.

My second hot hatch story involves Dickie Meaden. Before I knew him, we worked on different mags but in the same building. I owned an AX GT and he was testing a brand-new BMW Z3 M Roadster. Our eyes met (stop sniggering at the back) as he oversteered the Z3 M through a tricky switchback near the office... and I emerged heading towards him, also oversteering, in the AX. The synchronicity was stunning if fortuitous, but what I took from it was that we were enjoying similar thrills but my car cost just £1500. Share your hot hatch stories and pictures on the community at evo.co.uk or **evo's** Facebook.

Meanwhile, we're proud to announce Dan Prosser is **evo's** new road tester. A former contributor to the *Daily Telegraph* and PistonHeads, Dan is a diligent, talented writer and road tester. You can read his first **evo** test on the Porsche 911 50th Anniversary Edition this month and follow him at @TheDanProsser. Welcome, Dan!



Nick Trott Editor (@evoNickTrott)



More video and more galleries in the **evo** app this month, plus new 360-degree interactive images, and sound effects. Go to evo.co.uk/ subscribe and get five print and digital editions for just £5.



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When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

'Within a minute of driving the Clio Trophy you'll be grinning and within five you'll feel punch-drunk by the sheer crazed focus of it'

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AUDI'S PERFORMANCE FUTURE



With a 414bhp two-litre engine and an electric R8 both likely to make production, great things are in the pipeline at Ingolstadt

Words: Mike Duff

BEFORE MAKING THE trip to the Geneva motor show, we weren't expecting to find too much excitement on the Audi stand. We knew the new TT, a car that pings the **evo** radar even in standard form, would be making its debut, but with so much other performance machinery at the Palexpo, the third generation of Audi's cutesy coupe didn't look set to steal the show.

And it didn't. What did was the car sitting next to it – the TT quattro Sport Concept, built to show off both Audi's engine-building prowess with its 414bhp 2-litre motor, and also the company's new emphasis on lightweight tech. The latter is set to culminate next year with the arrival of the new R8, which will use carbonfibre in its structure for the

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Honda and Vauxhall unleash their front-driven contenders to rival SEAT's 276bhp Leon Cupra 280



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XE four-door saloon likely to be priced below £30k, with both RWD and 4WD variants available



first time. We also got confirmation that the next TT RS will get an even more powerful five-cylinder engine and that we're very close to an announcement on a production version of the once-cancelled e-tron supercar. It's fair to say that Audi is taking performance models very seriously again.

Let's start with the TT quattro Sport, and its astonishing power output. The concept is basically a GT3: a lightweight special two-seater with an integral roll-cage. Audi has indicated that the car is likely to form the basis for a one-make racer, but more importantly, the engine is '100 per cent viable' for road use according to company insiders, and we're told it will appear in production models soon. According to Audi's chief technical officer, Ulrich Hackenberg, it came from a challenge he issued to the

development team to beat the output of AMG's 355bhp 2-litre turbo four. 'At first they offered me an engine with 400 PS [394bhp],' he said. 'I told them to keep working – and now it has 420 PS [414bhp].'

The result is an engine that raises the bar for specific output to another level. Although based on VW Group's familiar 'EA888' turbocharged 2-litre four, the engine has been substantially modified. It has a strengthened block, aluminium pistons with integrated cooling channels, and a forged steel crankshaft. It also features 'dual injection', with both direct and indirect systems allowing it to maximise power while minimising emissions. The single turbocharger produces a maximum 1.8bar of boost. Peak power is at 6700rpm and the red line is set at 7200rpm. Despite that, peak torque of 332lb ft is delivered all the way from 2400rpm to 6300.

The new TT uses aluminium for its sills, external panels, roof and most suspension components, with Audi claiming a 50kg reduction on the outgoing car spec-for-spec. The Sport Concept has wider arches, a carbonfibre splitter and is claimed to weigh 1344kg, while Haldex-delivered four-wheel traction and a quick-shifting double-clutch gearbox mean a claimed 0-62mph time of 3.7sec. Even allowing for a bit of motor show hyperbole, putting this engine into pretty much anything in

Left and opposite page:

TT quattro Sport Concept boasts a 207bhp/litre specific output. **Bottom left:** Ulrich Hackenberg has revived the e-tron R8 (bottom right)

the Audi range would result in stunning straight-line performance.

Yet, confusingly, the Sport isn't an early view of the next TT RS. The concept has been produced by Audi AG rather than the quattro subdivision that's responsible for RS models, and whose boss, Stephan Reil, confirmed to **evo** that the RS version of the TT will stick with an evolution of the division's five-cylinder turbo engine. 'We have already said that there will be RS models on the MQB [platform],' Reil said, 'and I think they should have five cylinders.' Although the five-cylinder is unlikely to match the output of the Sport Concept's four-pot, we can expect a substantial improvement on the 355bhp of the previous TT RS Plus.

Hackenberg also confirmed that the new R8, which we'll see next year, will share its core structure with the new Lamborghini Huracán, with a similar carbon-aluminium composite structure. He told journalists that around 60kg of the R8's bodysell will be structural carbon. It will be slightly bigger than the Lambo and have different suspension geometry, but will share the Huracán's electric power

steering. The common architecture extends to powertrains, with the bad news being that – as with the Lambo – the R8 will have a seven-speed twin-clutch gearbox as standard, meaning no manual option. Boo, hiss.

The new car will continue to offer naturally aspirated V8 and V10 engines according to Hackenberg, the V10 being a slightly downtuned version of the Huracán's motor. However, he also confirmed that Audi is planning a turbo engine in the R8 'for the markets where we need to reduce the capacity of engines'. Our bet's on a 3-litre V6.

There's also likely to be a zero-emissions all-electric version, in the form of a rebooted e-tron. That was the project canned by Audi's former R&D boss, Wolfgang Dürheimer, but now back on the agenda since Hackenberg took charge. 'When I joined the company the e-tron was cancelled because of business case and range,' Hackenberg said. 'We've increased the range to more than 350km [217 miles]. The business case is still a problem, but I need such a car as a "technology carrier". The decision will be taken in the next few weeks.' ❏





Maserati's beauty spot

Gorgeous Alfieri 2+2 concept shown off at Geneva – and could make production with 454bhp V8

Words: Nick Trott

O OF THE MASERATI brothers, Alfieri was the engineering wizard. At the Geneva motor show in March, the Italian manufacturer unveiled a concept car bearing his name to celebrate the brand's 100th anniversary and indicate the design direction of future Maseratis. And tantalisingly, this fully functional 2+2 – or something very like it – is also expected to go into production.

Speaking to **evo**, Maserati CEO Harald Wester said: 'It seems to be the proper product to round up our range, which is kind of an understatement.' Smaller and more compact than the current GranTurismo, the Alfieri is described by Wester as: 'Totally different. A 2+2 sports car rather than a bigger 2+2 grand tourer.'

The Alfieri is based on the GranTurismo MC Stradale chassis. The wheelbase is 24cm shorter but 15cm wider, giving it real presence, at least on a show stand. A 454bhp 4.7-litre V8 built by Ferrari in Maranello is fitted – the same engine as in the MC Stradale – although Wester said a V6 option

will be considered if the car makes production. A transaxle with an LSD completes the drivetrain, featuring Maserati's six-speed MC Shift single-clutch automated manual gearbox.

Like the new Ghibli, the Alfieri was designed in-house rather than by Pininfarina. Styling highlights include the concave and ribbed grille, a new bi-xenon and LED headlamp design and taillights that top the rear shoulder and then cascade down into a dramatic vent. Maserati design boss Lorenzo Ramaciotti explained: 'It is a

transition point between 100 glorious years of history and the future that is opening up before us.'

Wester told **evo** that the price would 'slightly interfere' with the GranCabrio, which starts at £98,315. Rivals, on price at least, would be the Porsche 911 GT3, Aston Martin V8 Vantage (or any replacement) and the forthcoming Mercedes 'GT' sports car. 'I can't honestly say that we'll see this car in production in the next two years, but I'm certain we'll see something very similar,' concluded Ramaciotti. ✕

'A V6 option will be considered if the car makes production'



evo Comment

At the end of the first press day at Geneva, all VW Group's senior engineering execs marched over to the Maserati stand to see the Alfieri, and their mere presence means that Maserati should be taken seriously.

The concept is dramatic, and while Jaguar and Aston Martin employees could be heard pointing to similarities with their own cars, I couldn't see them. Maserati has a similar tradition for low, long, wide front-engine/rear-drive sports cars and uses the 1954 A6GCS-53 for inspiration in particular here.

Some of the styling touches are perhaps overwrought, but I love the rear end and sense that it will be more aesthetically pleasing when the production process shakes off the more excessive design flourishes. **NT**

Viva la Revolucion

Stunning new version of Pagani's Zonda gains more power and loses weight, resulting in 749bhp/ton **Words:** Mike Duff



'The V12 is tuned to deliver 789bhp – 50bhp more than in the track-only Zonda R'

THE ZONDA Revolution has been seen before: it first appeared at the international 'Vanishing Point' Pagani gathering last year. But Geneva gave a chance to get close to what could be the ultimate Zonda.

Extensive use of lightweight materials, including carbonfibre

and titanium for the monocoque, translates to a claimed 1070kg kerb weight. On the other side of the power-to-weight equation, the familiar 6-litre Mercedes V12 engine is tuned to deliver 789bhp – 50bhp more than in the track-only Zonda R – and 538lb ft. Although performance figures haven't been confirmed, we anticipate a

slight improvement on the R's 2.7sec 0-62mph time and 217mph top speed.

The Revolution looks absolutely stunning in the flesh, with clear-coated carbonfibre bodywork and some of the most aggressive aero addenda ever fitted to a road car, including a DRS rear wing that can be stalled either manually or automatically to trim drag

at high speeds. Braking is done by new carbon-ceramic discs that are claimed to be 15 per cent lighter than the old ones and last four times as long.

The price tag of €2.2million before taxes works out at around £2.65million on the road in the UK. As for whether this really will be the last Zonda, we'll have to wait and see. ☒

Also starring at Geneva...



Volkswagen Golf GTE

After the Golf GTI and the GTD comes the GTE, a hybrid version of the perennial hot hatch. Power comes from the combination of a 148bhp 1.4-litre turbocharged petrol engine and a 75kW electric motor, giving a theoretical combined output of 250bhp – although the powertrain limits itself to a maximum of 201bhp. The battery pack means it's 173kg heavier than the GTI.

Gumpert Explosion

Gumpert is back – the company went under a couple of years ago – with a Geneva debut for its new model. The Explosion (yes, really) is based around a tubular chassis and Audi running gear, with power coming from the 414bhp 2-litre four-cylinder engine that we saw in the TT quattro Sport Concept also at the same show. We're told it does 0-62mph in 3.0sec and will cost around £86,000 before taxes.



Bugatti Veyron Rembrandt

Another motor show, another Veyron limited edition, this one boasting the daftest name so far. Meet the Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport Vitesse Rembrandt Bugatti, the fourth of the six 'Legends of Bugatti' editions that the company is working through, and named to celebrate Ettore Bugatti's famous sculptor brother. Just three will be made, all in an appropriately sculptural bronze colour.

McLaren 650S Spider

Another predictable development at Geneva was the Spider version of the new McLaren 650S (featured in **evo** last month). It's mechanically identical to the coupe, meaning it has a 641bhp version of McLaren's twin-turbo 3.8-litre V8. The official 0-124mph time of 8.6sec is nearly half a second lower than the Ferrari 458 Speciale's time for the same benchmark. It's yours for £215,250.





Left and bottom right: Civic Type-R could have as much as 340bhp. **Right:** Astra VXR Extreme is 100kg lighter than its base car, with over 20bhp more

tweaks crank things up considerably. Carbonfibre for the front wings, roof and bonnet combine with the binning of the rear seats to cut 100kg from the standard 1475kg kerb weight, while the 2-litre turbo four has been wound up to just shy of 300bhp. There are adjustable dampers and a beefier mechanical LSD, plus bigger brakes and a set of Hankook semi-slick tyres.

Many of the mechanical upgrades come from the Astra OPC Cup racer, familiar to Nürburgring 24 Hours fans. That ought to make production viable, and while OPC commercial director

Hot hatch Ring battle intensifies

SEAT's Leon Cupra is the first front-drive production car to break 8min at the Nordschleife – but Honda and Vauxhall could soon be challenging its success

Words: Stephen Dobie

FRESH FROM ITS 7:58.4 front-wheel-drive Nürburgring record, the SEAT Leon Cupra 280 should already be looking over its shoulder. The Honda Civic Type-R and Vauxhall Astra VXR Extreme concepts arrived at Geneva looking pumped and clutching specs that suggest sub-8min Nordschleife times are more than plausible.

The Civic was a show star. Part of that is down to its wild appearance, all of which we're told either aids cooling or downforce and should largely translate to the production car. But the built-up

anticipation for the first fast Honda in years dwarfs that wing. Purists may sniff at a 2-litre VTEC engine with a turbocharger, but the upside is the combination of CO2 emissions that make production viable and a marked increase on the last Civic Type-R's 198bhp. Prototypes have been running 280bhp, but figures as high as 340bhp have been rumoured for the 2015 production car.

Power will be transmitted to the front axle via a traditional six-speed manual gearbox and a mechanical limited-slip differential. A dash-mounted 'R' button is set to sharpen up the throttle, steering and damping while improving the stability control's sense of humour.

After a chat with the concept's senior project designer, Masaru Hasegawa, we're surprised the car isn't that focused the second it's fired up. 'We want the Type-R to be a racing car for the road, not an understated high-performance Civic,' he said. So is Honda targeting Nordschleife bragging rights? 'That's one goal,' Hasegawa told us. 'We also want the car to be not too stiff.' Gabriele Tarquini, who races a Civic in the World Touring Car Championship, has been part of early development at the Ring.

The Astra VXR proved fairly extreme as standard when we ran one long-term, but some Mégane R26.R-esque

'These concepts looked pumped and were clutching specs that suggest sub-8min Nordschleife times are more than plausible'

Jörg Schrott was coy – 'We wait for the reaction of the show car' – his body language was more positive. Expect a limited production run (Schrott suggested between 50 and 500 cars) and a price tag notably higher than the standard VXR's £26,995. And what about a Ring record to help shift them? 'It's not planned yet,' said Schrott, 'but I must say that I'm quite sure the Extreme is able to do really fast laps of the Nürburgring.' The fastest? 'I guess we have really high potential.'

And as if the front-drive fight wasn't looking fierce enough, sources within Renaultsport have hinted at the current Mégane 265 getting the R26.R-style treatment as a send-off. Those turned off by Porsche and Nissan's record-swapping at the Ring had better look away now. **✉**



Rumour mill

Audi is planning a wave of new RS models following the success of the RS Q3, but we won't see a mega-powered A1. 'We have to focus on where the money is,' a quattro insider told us. Audi will also be the first company to produce a road car with laser headlights. We'll see it later this year. Possibly from space.

Bentley will continue to produce its W12 engine for as long as there's market demand, despite the fact that up to half of buyers are now choosing the V8.

We won't be seeing a Touring version of the new **BMW M3**: M division bosses say the numbers just don't add up. Anticipate an M4 Gran Coupe, though.

Ford is planning to introduce a diesel version of the Focus ST. Presumably for those who insist on more than 220 miles of fuel range.

Nissan 'remains committed' to a Z-badged sports car in its future range, between a new lightweight roadster and the GT-R.

Renault hasn't ruled out offering the RS Clio with a manual gearbox instead of its disappointing twin-clutch.

Rolls-Royce is working on a plug-in hybrid.

Vauxhall isn't planning a VXR version of the Adam. The 148bhp 'S' will be as hot as it gets.

Infiniti takes on Eau Rouge



ALTHOUGH OFFICIALLY JUST a 'high-performance styling exercise', the Q50 Eau Rouge is a car Infiniti really needs to produce. The basic ingredients are compelling: a pumped-up version of the Japanese company's mid-sized saloon that's been mated to the Nissan GT-R's 3.8-litre twin-turbo V6 engine. The result is a four-wheel-driven four-door with 560bhp and a claimed sub-4sec 0-62mph time. For a brand that's been crying out for a worthy halo model for years, this looks like a perfect fit.

It's not quite that simple, not least because of the need to square the Eau Rouge's flame-spitting powertrain with Infiniti's Zen philosophy, but insiders have said that an engineering feasibility project has been commissioned. We think Infiniti should definitely green-light it – if only to give its 'director of performance', Sebastian Vettel, something quicker and more reliable than his Red Bull RB10.

Italdesign's MPV vision



GENEVA WAS SHORT of weird and wonderful concepts this year, so credit to Italdesign Giugiaro for demonstrating the flexibility of VW Group's MQB architecture by designing the Clipper: an electric-powered MPV with six seats and no fewer than four rising doors – the two at the front pivoting butterfly style and those at the back opening in gullwing fashion. Truth be told, it was often hard to see the Clipper behind the bevy of models Italdesign seemed determined to hide it behind. But a motor show isn't a motor show without at least one gullwing door.



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ABARTH WITH



Along came a Spider

Soft-topped Alfa Romeo 4C unveiled ahead of expected 2015 release **Words:** Mike Duff



A

ALTHOUGH OFFICIALLY A concept, the Alfa 4C Spider is pretty much

identical to the production soft-top that will follow next year. It's mostly as you'd expect: an open-top version of the coupe, with the same powertrain and some minor styling tweaks.

Swapping the fixed roof for a removable fabric one hasn't done anything to mess up the 4C's lines – and the soft-top should cut down on some of the boomy acoustics we've noticed in the coupe's cabin. Extra reinforcement to maintain structural strength has added 60kg over the hard-top's kerb weight.

Mechanically the car is unchanged, apart from a natty-looking Akrapovic exhaust system with switchable acoustic flaps, which might be

standard on the production version. The Spider also gets revised headlights with a single projector unit under a clear cover, in place of the odd 'fly's eye' lights fitted to the coupe. Alfa sources indicate the new lights are likely to appear across the range soon, and it should also be possible to retrofit them to earlier coupes.

There's no word on pricing, but anticipate a chunky supplement over the £45,000 coupe (especially if that trick exhaust comes as standard). The Spider will be on sale next year – but given the waiting list for the hard-top you'll probably need to get a deposit down now if you want to be driving one in the summer of 2015. **X**

Fiat 500 gets even hotter with Biposto

Stripped-out two-seater Abarth achieves 187bhp and weighs less than a ton **Words:** Mike Duff

W

WE'VE SEEMINGLY HAD as many limited-edition Abarths as Bugatti

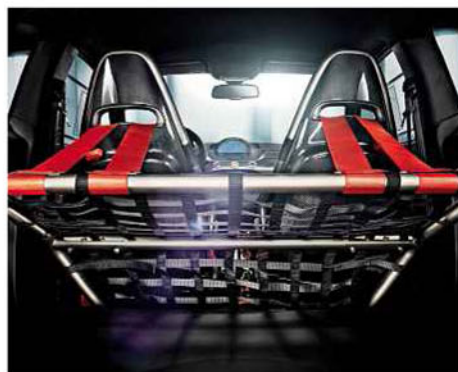
Veyrons, but this one really is something special. The 695 Biposto is basically Abarth's response to the Mini JCW GP, sharing the same two-seat layout and a similarly hardcore dynamic mission.

Power comes from a 187bhp version of Fiat's well-known 1.4-litre turbo motor, but some aggressive weight saving – including polycarbonate side windows – results in a kerb weight of just 997kg. There's also a titanium roll-cage, lightweight bucket seats and a proper race-spec 'dog ring' sequential

manual gearbox. Fiat says the Biposto can dispatch the 0-62mph benchmark in 5.9sec, making it the quickest 500 variant so far.

The cabin is pretty special, with a central race-style display and a beautiful open-linkage gearchange mechanism. Oh, and there's an Akrapovic exhaust system as well – Fiat Group must be getting a bulk discount (see Alfa 4C Spider story).

There's no pricing news yet, but given the tech and Abarth's ability to get people to dig deep for previous 595 and 695 editions, expect to pay over £30,000. And Biposto? It's Italian for 'two-seater', of course. **X**



Above: rally-style sliding sections in side windows enhance sporting look. **Right:** rear seats have been dispensed with to save weight



MAZDA HAZUMI

This smart, minimalist supermini was one of the mainstream stars at Geneva – it's an early chance to see what the next Mazda 2 should look like. It's based on a cut-down version of the 'SkyActiv' structure that underpins the bigger 3 and 6, but with a twist-beam rear axle instead of a multi-link set-up. An MPS version would work well, wouldn't it?



RENAULT TWINGO

Geneva saw the debut of the most radical Renault for a generation – the rear-engined, rear-driven new Twingo. It shares its core architecture with the next Smart, hence the new powertrain, but it looks cuter and cooler than a Volkswagen Up. Only two engines will be offered, both three-cylinder – a 1-litre naturally aspirated unit and a 900cc turbo version. There are no plans for a Renaultsport edition, sadly.

MINI CLUBMAN

We've barely driven the new Mini – now it's time for the inevitable torrent of variants. The new Clubman was previewed by this concept, which is bigger than the old car and loses its compellingly strange rear-hinged 'clubdoor', gaining a normal front-hinged four-door layout. Powertrains will be pretty much the same as those for the hatch.



From concept to reality

Some of the stars of the Geneva motor show that will reach our roads soon – and some that won't

Words: Mike Duff



BRABUS B63S-700 6X6

Brabus was never going to let a thing as ludicrous as Mercedes' 6x6 G-wagen go unmolested. The result is this 690bhp monster, using a tuned version of AMG's 5.5-litre twin-turbo V8. It weighs nearly four tons, yet it's still claimed to manage 0-62mph in 7.4sec. Top speed is limited to 100mph due to the 38in tyres. We don't know if 'wow' or 'ouch' describes it best.



HYUNDAI PASSOCORTO

A mid-engined Hyundai sports car... Too good to be true? Yes. The PassoCorto is nothing more than the stylish result of a joint project between Hyundai's European design centre and the Istituto Europeo di Design in Turin. It has a 266bhp 1.6-litre engine driving the rear wheels, but sadly, according to an impressively forthright brand spokesman, there's 'absolutely no bloody chance' of it being built.

SKODA VISIONC CONCEPT

Skoda is planning to join the four-door coupe club, dropping broad hints as to how the finished thing will look with this smart concept. The VisionC is clearly aiming at the Mercedes CLA and even the Passat CC, with company insiders indicating we're likely to see a production version next year, sharing the Octavia's 'MQB' underpinnings.



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Ring purchase announced

Iconic racetrack is taken over by car parts company. 2014 events intact; roller coaster to be dismantled

Words: Stephen Dobie

BEHIND THE RECENT flurry of new lap records, the Nürburgring has been facing a tough test of its own. Concerns over the circuit's future have been rumbling on for a while now, its owner – Nürburgring GmbH – filing for insolvency in 2012. There's light at the end of the tunnel, though: German car parts company Capricorn has had a bid 'in excess of €100million [c£84million]' accepted for the business.

It's significant not only because it ends months of worry and uncertainty – which culminated in a high-profile 'Save the Ring' campaign with racer and Ring taxi driver Sabine Schmitz among its public faces – but because up to 25million euros (c£21million) will be invested in the site – and without theme park connotations, we're happy to report.

The 'Ring Racer' roller coaster is being removed, as is the clunky and unloved Ring Card payment system,

while a proposed 'Automotive Technology Cluster' will replace the Grüne Holle entertainment complex. As well as aiding local businesses, the investment should further heighten the regard with which the Ring is held among car development circles.

But what about us, the enthusiasts? Well, Capricorn will 'continue to run the business operations of the Nürburgring, with its numerous motor races, music events, tourist and test drives, as well as the hotels and holiday facilities,' we're told. This appears to be good news, though increased investment in the Ring's industry activity could restrict the times the circuit is available for its celebrated tourist laps. Only time will tell.

Capricorn will take over Nürburgring GmbH's assets on January 1, 2015, providing the European Commission doesn't look for it to repay state aid. The full 2014 calendar – including the N24 race on June 21/22 – will go ahead as planned. ✕

'INCREASED INVESTMENT IN THE RING'S INDUSTRY ACTIVITY COULD RESTRICT THE TIMES THE CIRCUIT IS AVAILABLE FOR ITS CELEBRATED TOURIST LAPS'

Jag XE takes aim at 3-series

WITH JAGUAR'S grindingly slow model releases, it often feels like the waiting has barely started. And so it is with the new XE saloon, a single picture of which was released at Geneva. This is the company's new small saloon – yes, a 3-series rival – which will go on sale next year, with a new aluminium body and power from the company's new range of 'Ingenium' four-cylinder petrol and diesel engines.

Details are predictably scarce at the moment – we can anticipate they'll be drip-fed out over the next year – although company sources have indicated that the car will have

both rear-wheel-drive and four-wheel-drive variants and a starting price under £30,000. We can also expect it to grow into a model family in its own right, with saloon and estate versions certain, and coupe and cabriolets being actively considered. The same platform will underpin the production version of the C-X17 SUV concept that we saw at the Frankfurt show last year.

Jaguar's been here before, of course – the 2001 X-type saloon was presented as a 3-series and Mercedes C-class challenger, but struggled to make its presence felt in the market thanks to its combination of faux-retro styling and Mondeo underpinnings.

Second time lucky? ✕

MD

Corrections & clarifications

Following our story last month about the California T, Ferrari has asked us to point out that the car's engine was designed and engineered entirely in-house at Maranello and not in collaboration with Maserati. We're happy to do so.

Also last month, we said our Car of the Future competition winner, Tom Henwood, was a graduate of Cardiff University. Tom in fact completed his BA in Automotive Design at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in Swansea. Apologies for any confusion.

Every new evo car that matters, rated

This month

JAGUAR F-TYPE S COUPE

Hard-top version of British sports car gets first road test

p22



TESLA MODEL S PERFORMANCE

416bhp electric supersaloon driven ahead of UK launch

p26



BMW 435d xDRIVE M SPORT COUPE

Latest Beemer coupe gets 309bhp diesel engine and 4WD

p30



INFINITI Q50S HYBRID

First-ever production car fitted with steer-by-wire system

p32



LAND ROVER DEFENDER CHALLENGE

Bowler-prepared off-roader for one-make rally raid series

p35



PORSCHE 911 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Half a century marked with premium edition of Carrera S

p36



MERCEDES-BENZ C-CLASS

New C-class saloon sampled in petrol and diesel forms

p39



The test team

This month, we asked our road testers to name their favourite Jaguar they've had the pleasure of driving:



NICK TROTT Editor

'Sublime D-type aside, the F-type Convertible V8 S. Raw, noisy, unhinged, but also sexy and comfortable. Brilliant.'



MIKE DUFF Motoring editor

'The S-type R – fast, discreet and with a reasonable amount of the waftiness you'd expect from a Jag saloon.'



HENRY CATCHPOLE Features editor

'Just for its pure theatre – and the rehashed Metro 6R4 engine – it has to be the XJ220.'



DAN PROSSER Road tester

'Original XFR. Genuinely staggered by how fast it was in a straight line, but also how refined when you weren't nailing it.'



JETHRO BOVINGDON Contributing editor

'C-type on the roads around Le Mans on race weekend. Throttle response like I'd never experienced, then it rained.'



RICHARD MEADEN Contributing editor

'Group A TWR XJS. Scintillating performance, charismatic and an engine/exhaust note that could wake the dead!'



DAVID VIVIAN Contributing road tester

'A £1million D-type that had competed at Le Mans. Not at all disappointing.'



Test location: Prades, Catalonia, Spain **GPS:** 41.35860, 0.99619

Jaguar F-type S Coupe

With the same 375bhp and a price tag over £7000 cheaper, can the hard-top F-type outshine its Convertible sibling?

Photography: Paul Harmer



C

CARDS ON THE TABLE:

I'm not the world's biggest fan of the F-type Convertible. Brutishly handsome as it is, I think it looks a little too 'club sandwich' – oddly thick through the middle. Yet, frustratingly, the boot is so tiny it seriously hurts the car's very obvious touring potential. And while undeniably an entertaining steer – replete with Spinal Tap 'well, 11's one

louder' soundtrack, even in V6 guise – it isn't a particularly intimate one, the chassis feeling rather aloof and trading too heavily on grip and security at the expense of precision and finesse. At its best, as the 375bhp V6 S, it's a desirable and charismatic car, but a Porsche Boxster S does a better job all told.

It might lead you to believe that nothing much will change when the Convertible's new sibling, the F-type Coupe, makes its case to

potential purchasers of the Cayman S or 911. But, as Mike Duff discovered at Spain's Circuit de Catalunya (*evo* 193), the cat with the long tin roof is clearly the more evolved animal. He was driving a pre-production example of the R, the £85,000 542bhp V8 range-topper, but wasn't allowed beyond the confines of the circuit and so rightly demurred from delivering a definitive verdict. The signs were positive, though. Aside from the obviously mighty



performance, the collective impact of Jaguar's stiffest-ever bodyshell, a revised 'second-gen' electronic active diff, carbon-ceramic brakes, new software for the electric power steering, and recalibrated springs and dampers seemed to raise the F-type's game in all the areas that mattered (on track, at least). A properly sized boot and a more aggressive pricing policy – pitching the V8-engined R some £55k cheaper than the similarly powerful 911 Turbo S – were further sweeteners.

We're back in Spain with the F-type Coupe, but this time on all but deserted and fabulously twisted country roads north of Prades in a production-spec V6 S, the hardly thrust-deprived £60,235 model that, if our experience with the Convertible holds true, should represent the sweet spot in the range. For a start, it doesn't have the slightly weaponised look of the R but instead remains achingly pretty from just about every angle, and the S-specific 19in 'Propeller' alloys are things of comparable beauty. Allusions to the E-type coupe remain as valid as when they were made with the C-X16 concept, which can be regarded as the template for much of the F-type Coupe's design. The nod

to the old classic is most obvious at the back, where the low-cut roof narrows and tapers over the tailgate to give that iconic rear window frame shape and accentuates rear haunches so muscular they'd have been regarded as borderline pornographic in the E-type's day.

It's such a powerful piece of design that the F-type Coupe even looks good with the hatch wide open. Given the priority afforded to good looks and body rigidity, the boot aperture is somewhat narrow but the luggage compartment itself, measured at a supermini-sized 315-litres, is positively cavernous compared to the Convertible's flattened lunchbox. A shallow compartment under the boot floor further boosts practicality.

Clearly aimed at those who believe sporty doesn't have to mean slumming it, the cabin is largely unchanged from the Convertible's and heavily biased towards comfort and feel-good gadgetry. The best examples of these are the wholly unnecessary but rather cool kinetic air vent housing that glides into position from its dash-top bunker when you press the engine start button and the extravagantly powerful Meridian sound system. More importantly, the

shapely seats, low-slung driving position, bold and clear instruments, touchscreen functions and general control ergonomics hit their marks, too. And the appealingly snug, plush ambience of the cabin isn't compromised by restricted headroom or visibility.

Also unchanged for the S is the supercharged 3-litre V6 driving the rear wheels through Jaguar's Quickshift eight-speed paddle-shift automatic transmission. It develops 375bhp and 339lb ft of torque and makes the S Coupe a genuinely quick car, capable of sprinting to 60mph from rest in 4.8sec on its way to an electronically limited 171mph top speed.

Sports suspension with adaptive dampers is standard and, accessed either via the touchscreen display or the centre console buttons, you'll find Dynamic Mode (which is configurable to personal taste), Dynamic Launch (launch control) and Active Sports Exhaust (more blare, rasp, pops and bangs). The standard steel discs at 380mm front/325mm rear are generously sized, with carbon-ceramics offered as an option. The R Coupe's active e-diff isn't, though having the standard mechanical LSD instead hardly seems like a raw deal.



Left: driving environment is largely unchanged from the Convertible. **Below:** 19in Propeller wheels are standard on the S Coupe



‘From the off the F-type S Coupe feels notably more precise and alert than the soft-top’



Now, Spain's roads are mostly so smooth and well engineered they put many racetracks to shame. So a word of caution: our S Coupe wasn't subjected to the type of rigours Blighty's finest will present. That said, from the off the Coupe feels notably more precise and alert than the soft-top, as if the more rigid body structure and the tweaked suspension, damping and steering are sharpening and resolving what would be slightly blurred feedback from the Convertible. The quality and intensity of the feral exhaust note seem undiminished, too, despite the enclosing bodywork. Anyone keen to feel the carpet with the toe of their right foot would be well advised to tense up other parts of their body, because the F-type really can generate G-forces. And the supercharged V6 howls and bangs. It isn't a sophisticated, multi-layered sound – it is raw, loud and violent. And when the straight road runs out, the rapidly accumulated speed is wiped away by the monster brakes like raindrops from a windscreen.

Half an hour out of Barcelona on the motorway, we happen upon a closed hillside road that's sometimes used as a tarmac rally stage. It has a manic combination of short



straights, fast sweepers, tight curves and flick-flacks. It's a wicked little ribbon of tarmac and shows that the Coupe's chassis is equally rewarding, supplementing huge grip with fast responses and acutely executed changes of direction. The steering is well weighted, with fine precision around the straight-ahead and reassuring heft (if not finely textured feel) on lock, while body control is exemplary, finessed by damping that's taut yet supple. The Jaguar tracks undulations with no wasted body movement and uses its damping to desensitise the impact of the few ruts and rucks we do encounter. And yet it's also clear this would be a great car in which to attack a big distance, and if it didn't do it with quite the Zen-like calm of a Bentley, it would still be comfortable, easy on the nerves and constantly engaging.

Unless you can't live without the wind in your

hair, choosing between the F-type S Coupe and equivalent Convertible is shockingly easy. The tin-top costs £7000 less and it's easily the better car. Choosing between the Jag and a decently specced Porsche Cayman S has suddenly become an awful lot harder. **X**

David Vivian (@davidjvivan)

Engine	V6, 2995cc, supercharged
CO2	213g/km
Power	375bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque	339lb ft @ 3500-5000rpm
Performance	4.8sec (claimed 0-60mph), 171mph (limited)
Weight	1594kg (239bhp/ton)
Basic price	£60,235

evo rating: ★★★★★

- Exquisite style, more rewarding than roadster
- Steering lacks feel

Test location: B660, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.30010, -0.38568

Tesla Model S Performance

All-electric five-door saloon boasts 416bhp, 442lb ft from zero rpm, and 0-60mph in 4.2sec. Ahead of its UK arrival in right-hand-drive form, we try one on British roads

Photography: Dean Smith

I**N CASE YOU HADN'T** noticed, 2014 is the year the future arrived. First came the hybrid hypercars, then BMW introduced its funky-looking i3 to the UK, and now Tesla is poised to introduce its acclaimed Model S in right-hand-drive form.

The pioneering US brand has been at the forefront of all-electric car technology for a decade. We thoroughly enjoyed the Tesla Roadster, and the Model S has been selling like hot cakes in the States. So the chance to drive a left-hand-drive version on UK roads in advance of the RHD car's arrival later this spring is too intriguing an opportunity to miss.

Parked among the array of **evo's** more conventional test cars, the Model S has real presence. It's a big car (almost 5m long) but handsome too, albeit in a slightly generic way. As you approach, it senses the key and all four door handles power out to meet you. It's a nice touch, but I suspect the novelty might wear off. There's no ignition or any means of turning the car on: it's primed as soon as you climb in. From here, all you do is depress the brake, pull down on the Mercedes-sourced gear selector stalk, squeeze the throttle and pull away.

The sensation is eerie at first, but you soon get used to the lack of conventional engine sounds, while the familiar thrum of road and wind noise makes things seem more familiar. The steering has three modes to ramp up the weight and response, all of which are accessed via the humungous 17in tablet-style screen that dominates the interior. These settings go from too light to slightly too heavy, and none offers

great levels of steering feel (although few cars in this class do, to be fair). If pushed, I'd say it's not dissimilar to a Porsche Panamera's helm in feel, and certainly more convincing than Audi's hateful optional Dynamic steering.

This being **evo**, we're driving the range-topping Model S Performance. The 'Performance' part indicates the fitment of a higher-capacity 85kWh battery (up from the entry-level car's 60kWh) plus a high-capacity inverter for increased output, namely 416bhp and 442lb ft of torque. That's sufficient to propel the rear-drive, 2.1-ton Model S to 60mph from a standstill in just 4.2sec. OK, the 130mph top speed won't worry an M5, but with all that torque available instantaneously, and seamlessly sent to the road via a single-gear transmission, it really does deliver scintillating shove from a walking pace to motorway cruising speed – in other words everywhere that it counts 99 per cent of the time.

Model S prices start at £49,900 for the 60kW version, but the Performance is £69,080. This test car is pretty much fully loaded with options, including but not limited to 21-inch wheels (£3800), air suspension (£1900), a Panoramic glass roof (£2100), leather 'Performance' seats (£2100) and an upgraded hi-fi (£2100). On top of all that, the £5500 Performance Plus package brings uprated dampers and tyres among various handling-orientated tweaks. In total, the price of this car is £98,430, or £93,430 when the £5000 government plug-in tax credit payment is factored in. Nobody said saving the planet would be cheap...

As you'd expect, there's abundant road-



Tesla Model S Performance



holding, and with all the weight of the batteries sandwiched in the floorpan for a super-low centre of gravity, the Model S feels very stable but does test the limits of its traction and stability control systems, especially on damp roads. The ride is taut enough to confirm you're in a sporting car, but there's enough pliancy to take the edges off severe road imperfections. What you do notice is a palpable tied-down feeling, as though Tesla has worked hard to contain vertical movement over crests and into compressions. It's effective but doesn't let the car breathe freely enough with the road to make it feel in complete harmony.

Driving the Model S is effortless, but certain aspects of its delivery take some learning, in particular the regenerative braking. You can disable the regen so the Model S coasts like a normal car, but why do that when you can harvest free energy? The slowing effect when you back off the throttle is similar to gently covering the brake pedal (enough to warrant the brake lights illuminating to warn following drivers). This can feel odd at first, but the crucial thing to say is that once you're through the learning phase it all becomes second nature. If you enjoy getting to know a car and understanding how best to drive it, you'll find there's much more to enjoy about the Model S than its rather startling straight-line stonk.

With a comfortable real-world range of 250 miles on a full charge, it's more than able to cover most there-and-back commutes. Inevitably, longer journeys will require more planning than with a hybrid, but Tesla will soon have a network of so-called 'Superchargers' dotted around the UK's primary north-south motorway network. These will complete a full charge in just over an hour, or a half-charge in just 20 minutes. And they'll be free.

Environmentally speaking, the Model S is classed as a zero-emissions vehicle, but as most of the UK's domestic electricity is generated by fossil fuel-burning power stations, every mile you drive still has a CO2 consequence (estimates suggest a figure of around 85g/km). However, if you're motivated by money – or rather saving it – the tax incentives for company car users, zero-rated VED and the fact you can 'fill up' for less than a tenner (or for nothing if you use a Supercharger point) make the Model S an extremely attractive proposition. That it's also a uniquely impressive and genuinely entertaining machine is as reassuring as it is satisfying, for it suggests the future of the fast car is palatable even for dyed-in-the-wool driving enthusiasts like us. ✖

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)



Engine	310kW electric motor
CO2	0g/km
Power	416bhp
Torque	442lb ft @ 0-5300rpm
Performance	4.2sec (claimed 0-60mph), 130mph (claimed)
Weight	2100kg (201bhp/ton)
Basic price	£69,080

evo rating: ★★★★★

- ✚ Intoxicating performance, soothing refinement, running costs
- ✚ Generic styling, charging limitations



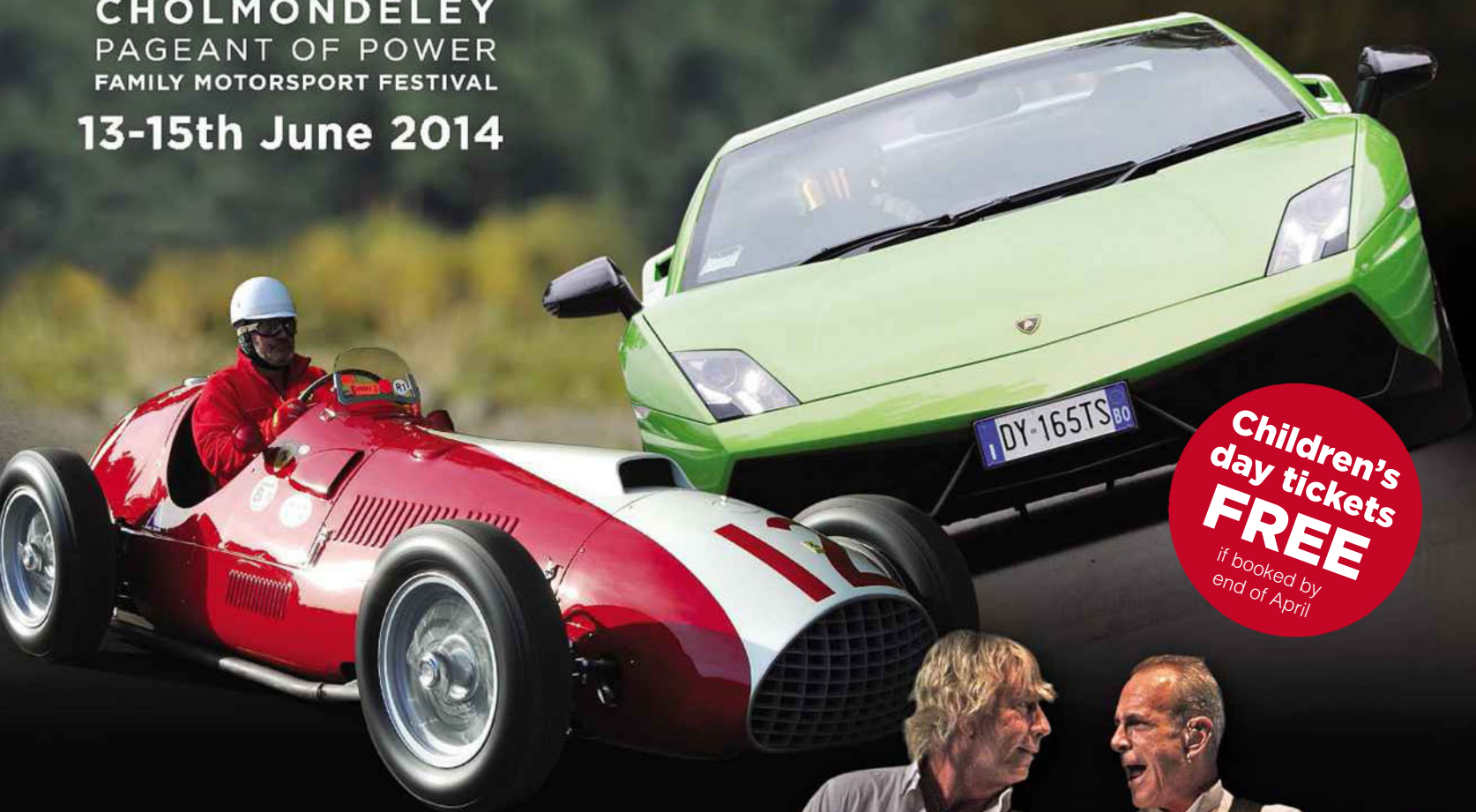
Above: enormous 17in touchscreen dominates interior and controls most functions. **Left:** 85kWh Model S is claimed to be capable of 312 miles on a full charge. **Bottom:** absence of a combustion engine up front means additional storage space



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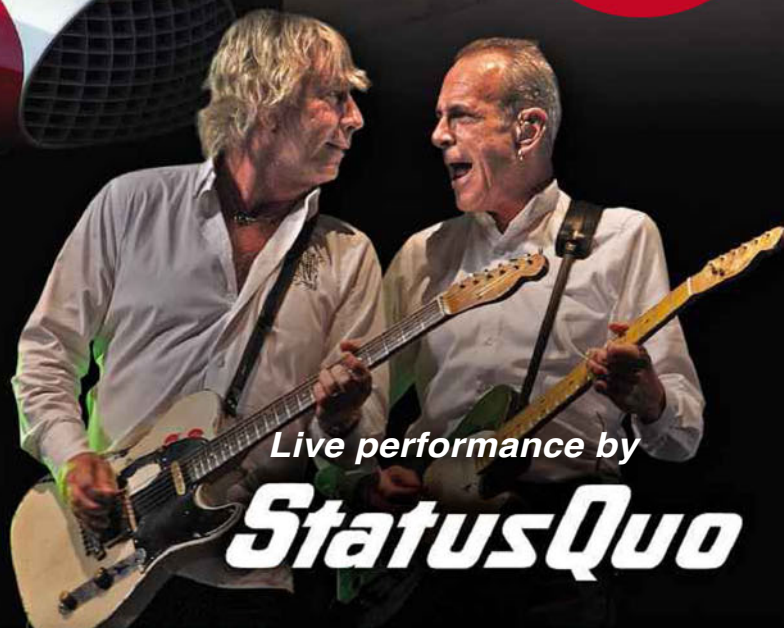
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Test location: Megève, Haute-Savoie, France **GPS:** 45.85820, 6.61633

BMW 435d xDrive M Sport Coupe

Packing 309bhp, this is the most powerful 4-series yet, and it comes complete with four-wheel drive. But does the combination make the 435d the pick of the range?

I **IT REALLY ISN'T LONG** since BMW's model line-up was about the easiest to understand thanks to a range perfectly stratified between obviously sized models and engine capacities. A 3-series with a 2.5-litre petrol engine was a 325i, a 5-series with a 3-litre diesel was a 530d, and a 7-series with a 5-litre V8 was a depreciation disaster. But you get the idea. All of the company's models shared a close family resemblance, drove their rear wheels and rested pretty much half their static weight over each axle. Those famous 'Ultimate Driving Machine' adverts pretty much wrote themselves.

How things change. Now BMW has such a

plethora of niche models and spin-offs that you suspect even the all-powerful marketing department must struggle to keep up. Badges no longer correspond to engine size, the claims about optimum weight distribution have been quietly dropped from large parts of the range, and now there's even a front-wheel-drive model – the 2-series Active Tourer, unveiled at the Geneva motor show.

Yet for all the frothing about the idea of a wrong-wheel-drive Beemer, I reckon that it's the company's recent decision to offer four-wheel drive on some of its non X-badged models that demonstrates how knotted the brand's values have become. Don't get me wrong: the 435d xDrive you see here is a deeply impressive all-

rounder, capable of delivering both supremely composed high-speed progress and freakishly good mpg figures at the same time. But it also shows how BMW in the UK really seems to be struggling with the very concept of cars that send drive to more than two wheels.

In Britain – presumably at the behest of the marketing department – we're only getting a relatively small part of the xDrive range. So you can have an xDrive 320d or 320i, but you can't get xDrive on a 328i or a 330i – or any 5- or 6-series. There's an xDrive version of the 330d, but not the mechanically identical 430d, and while buyers in mainland Europe can buy an xDrive M135i, we're denied it. Meanwhile, if you want either a 335d or a 435d then xDrive

is compulsory – there's no two-wheel-drive version any more. Yet the 7bhp less powerful 335i and 435i remain rear-drive only. It's enough to make your head spin.

The four-wheel-drive system itself is brilliant. We've already experienced it in the 330d xDrive Touring (evo 193), and comments for the 435d are very similar – xDrive is pretty much imperceptible until you actually need it. Drive from the 309bhp, 465lb ft twin-turbo six-pot diesel is sent forwards through an electronically controlled multi-plate clutch behind the gearbox. Normally 60 per cent of torque goes to the rear axle, but the system can divert up to 100 per cent to either end in just 0.1sec when slip is detected. Driving on some snow-covered Alpine roads reveals the 435d never loses its rear-driven feeling, but once the back starts to slip, xDrive responds quickly, sending more effort forwards to help pull you back to your chosen line.

On drier roads, the effects are more subtle – and that's despite our test car sitting on winter tyres. At everyday speeds the 435d feels pretty

'Once the back starts to slip, xDrive responds quickly, sending more effort forwards to pull you back to your line'

much exactly like its rear-drive sisters, up to its opening gambit of gentle understeer when you carry too much speed into a corner. You can power through this and get the four-wheel drive working, but it takes a big throttle opening (or a mid-corner slide) to persuade xDrive that you really need some help. It finds noticeably more traction than you get in the rear-drive 435i and, once doing its thing, it puts the car into a nice, neutral, rear-led stance, or even mild oversteer.

The 435d is more cruiser than bruiser, though. While it steers accurately and grips well, it feels bigger and heavier than the old E92 3-series Coupe, and its electric power steering seems to have been set up to deliver a constant weighting rather than any meaningful feel. You

detect the car slipping through your stomach rather than your fingers. But the car is extremely stable at speed and the dampers maintain tight control without ever feeling over-hard: I stay comfortable throughout a six-hour stint at the wheel between Switzerland and Calais on my trip back from the Geneva motor show.

Predictably, the engine is more about torque than power, and although the motor spools up quickly, the standard eight-speed automatic gearbox delays things in Drive while it tries to decide how many ratios it needs to shed. If you know you're going to need to accelerate hard, it's better to override it manually beforehand. The engine is muted most of the time and acquires a nice rumble in the middle of the powerband, but wringing it out leaves you in no doubt what fuel you're running on. But diesel does give the 435d some unarguable benefits – foremost (according to the trip computer) the ability to average 100mph and 40mpg at the same time.

Yet apart from four-wheel drive, it's not really obvious what the 435d brings over the considerably cheaper 430d or the more charismatic 435i. It's when BMW offers the six-cylinder petrol engine with both xDrive and a manual gearbox that I suspect we'll find the ultimate non-M 4-series. ❌

Mike Duff

Right: M Sport spec brings aluminium trim.
Below right: 3-litre diesel is claimed to yield 50.4mpg combined.
Below: xDrive four-wheel-drive system constantly reacts to slip



Engine	In-line 6-cyl, 2993cc, twin-turbo diesel
CO2	146g/km
Power	309bhp @ 4400rpm
Torque	465lb ft @ 1500-2500rpm
Performance	4.7sec (claimed 0-62mph), 155mph (limited)
Weight	1625kg (193bhp/ton)
Basic price	£45,040

evo rating: ★★★★★

⊕ Pace, grip, economy

⊖ Not the sharpest steer, slow-responding 'box



Infiniti Q50S Hybrid

Test location: B660, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.37771, -0.39769

Tech-laden 359bhp Japanese saloon targets BMW's 3-series

Photography: Dean Smith

INFINITI HAS AN unenviable task with the Q50, particularly in Europe. With this car the Japanese premium brand is attempting to tackle the overall excellence of the BMW 3-series and the popularity of the Audi A4. Its weaponry? First and foremost, technology – and in particular a hybrid powertrain and the world's first steer-by-wire system on a production car.

The Q50 range consists of a 2.2-litre diesel or a 3.5-litre V6 electric hybrid in a single, highly specced 'S' trim level. The Q50S Hybrid is also available with four-wheel drive, but it's the rear-wheel-drive model we're testing here.

Infiniti claims its 'Direct Response' hybrid tech is the 'new turbo where petrol engines are concerned'. The engine/hybrid unit comprises a 302bhp 3.5-litre V6 and a 67bhp electric motor, which together deliver a peak of 359bhp and a claimed combined fuel consumption figure of 45.6mpg. For comparison, a similarly priced turbo six-cylinder automatic BMW 335i delivers 302bhp and a claimed 39.2mpg. The Infiniti sprints to 62mph in an impressive 5.1sec, the 335i in 5.2sec. Nothing in it? Perhaps, but the 3-series is 230kg lighter than the Infiniti...

Out on the road, the Q50S Hybrid is cossetting and refined. The electric getaway is smooth, with decent throttle response and weight. The brake pedal feels oddly elastic underfoot but the seven-speed auto gearbox is smooth and responsive. Acceleration, both from take-off and in the mid-range, is very impressive – and you can actually feel the 199lb ft of the electric motor infilling the torque at lower revs. Overall then, it's a very good powertrain.

There's little to fault in terms of the chassis, either. Ride comfort and handling are easily class standard, with the Q50's double-wishbone front suspension and multi-link rear providing decent balance and agility. Also, you're never in doubt that this is a front-engine/rear-drive chassis – and that, of course, is a good thing.

Approaching a series of bends you receive some decent signals from the seat of your pants, but you soon realise that very few of those crucial informative frequencies reach your palms – and those that do are difficult to interpret. According to Infiniti, its wired 'Direct Adaptive Steering' exists to increase response (by removing mechanical losses) and offer tailored steering weight and gearing. And here's the thing: 'all this is achieved with retention of feedback from the road'. At least that's the claim. How? There's a force actuator on the column to mimic feedback. Sadly, at present, the steering feel is poor and offers no discernable dynamic advantage over mechanical systems.

DAS is plugged into Active Lane Control, which uses the steering to keep the Q50 'magnetised' (in Infiniti's words) to its lane, even adjusting for surface changes and crosswinds. But again it's hard to feel any advantage. Driven in high winds with ALC off, the Q50 slices through the air with little deflection. With ALC on, the system tends to introduce correction just as you intuitively do the same, resulting in an odd oscillating sensation. And that's the problem: when you switch on ALC you have to switch off your own intuition, and that's borderline impossible.

Moving on to more conventional areas, the Q50's cabin architecture follows the same

individualistic form as the exterior. The build quality and materials are on a par with those of its rivals, while the standard kit level is generally higher.

Which brings us neatly back to... the BMW 3-series. The 335i isn't the only version of the benchmark German at this price and performance point, of course. So even if you dismiss the petrol BMW on economy and emissions grounds, you have the petrol-electric Active Hybrid 3, which just nudges ahead of the Q50 with 47.9mpg versus 45.6, and 139g/km of CO2 against 144. And then there's the diesel 330d, which positively trumps the Infiniti with figures of 57.6mpg and 129g/km.

You can see where this is going, can't you? While the Infiniti Q50S Hybrid makes more sense in diesel-averse markets, it can't compete in the UK. It will appeal to the individualist, and that should be commended, but for those who covet driving enjoyment, the Q50's steering in particular presents a major impediment. That it masks an essentially fine chassis compounds the frustration. ❌

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Engine	V6, 3498cc, plus 50kW electric motor
CO2	144g/km
Power	359bhp (combined) @ 6800rpm
Torque	402lb ft (combined) @ 5000rpm
Performance	5.1sec (claimed 0-62mph), 155mph (limited)
Weight	1750kg (208bhp/ton)
Basic price	£40,000

evo rating: ★★★★★

➕ Good powertrain, promising chassis, will be a rare sight

❌ Lacklustre steering, strong rivals

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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. The model shown is the all-new Mazda3 120ps Sport Nav featuring optional Soul Red metallic paint (€660). OTR €19,895. OTR price includes 20% VAT, number plates and 3 years' European Roadside Assistance.

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Fixed Rate of interest p.a	3.04%
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📍 **Test location:** Gaydon, Warwickshire, UK **GPS:** 52.18460, -1.49891

Land Rover Defender Challenge

Bowler-prepared 4x4 gives rally raid beginners a taste of the Dakar



USUALLY WHEN YOU clamber over a roll-cage, you're getting down into a car, not climbing up. Likewise, when your abdomen and thighs are being clenched by a racing bucket seat, most of the time your view out is down around waist level rather than high enough to look a carthorse in the eye. But this is the slightly surreal world of a competition Land Rover.

You may have already heard about the Defender Challenge, but for those of you who haven't, it's a bit like the Caterham Academy for rally raid. This year sees the Challenge's inaugural season, which will run over a mixture of classic gravel rallies as well as some hill rallies. And if most people get into their Caterhams dreaming of Le Mans, then most of the Defender Challenge drivers will get into their Bowler-prepared steeds with half an eye on the Dakar. The difference, of course, is that whereas the only Caterhams at Le Mans are in the campsites, this FIA-approved Defender could actually take part in the Dakar for real.

It's road-legal, so you can also drive it along the B4100 if you're of a less adventurous nature, and that's exactly where I experience it first. It looks great and although NVH is fairly harsh in the pared-back interior, there's part of me that feels that this is what a Defender should be like anyway. Although it's got a roll-cage and an Alcantara steering wheel with a yellow 'straight ahead' strip at the top, it also has a 170bhp 2.2-litre diesel under the bonnet, so it isn't fast. The six-speed manual gearbox requires



fairly frequent stirring to make the most of the engine too, because the 332lb ft of torque (up from 265lb ft in the standard car) arrives in a shortish mid-range rush. The Kumho tyres are also noticeably squirmy in the corners on the road, but it's good fun and to be expected given that they're designed for a much looser surface.

The gravel loop of the Gaydon off-road course feels tight in places when you're perched up high and trying to manhandle a 1771kg Defender quickly. My first thought is that given this car is for novices, it is not an easy thing to get the hang of. The short wheelbase means that it's pretty lively when it lets go, and on the brakes it will happily and quickly pitch sideways. Under power it largely wants to understeer and all of a sudden 170bhp feels more than ample.

On my second lap things improve and I get the hang of it slightly more, but it still feels fairly intimidating trying to stay on top (literally) of the short wheelbase with the relatively slow steering. The trick is to keep inputs to a minimum, making use of the cambers and cuts as much as possible to maintain speed and

getting the car to slide very neutrally if possible. The Defender also teaches you to be incredibly sensitive to the loading the front tyres can take (not much) and to work around that. Bumps are tackled by Bowler's heavy-duty racing spring, damper, bush and anti-roll bar upgrades, and although they don't create anything like the magic carpet ride you get in one of its full-on EXRs, they certainly soak up the punishment.

The litmus test for something like this is how you feel once the madness stops and you get out. My instant reaction is that I want to get straight back in and keep learning what feels like a whole new set of skills, and that's without even tackling the nuances of a more extreme hill rally. The only downside is that although this is an entry-level championship, you still need £60,000 for the Bowler-prepped Defender and another £10k to cover your entry fees. Mind you, given the choice between a BMW X6 50i or a year preparing for the Dakar in one of these... ❌

Henry Catchpole (@HenryCatchpole)

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 2198cc, turbodiesel
CO2	n/a
Power	170bhp
Torque	332lb ft
Performance	7.0sec (claimed 0-60mph), 110mph (claimed)
Weight	1771kg (98bhp/ton)
Basic price	£60,000

evo rating: ★★★★★

- ✚ Excellent fun and will teach you plenty
- ✚ Expensive for a machine targeted at beginners



Test location: B4040, Wiltshire, UK GPS: 51.52843, -2.30919

Porsche 911 50th Anniversary Edition

Limited-edition model marks half a century of the 911 with styling tweaks and wider bodyshell

Photography: Gus Gregory

F

FOR THE SECOND TIME

in a few years, Porsche has plundered its heritage to produce a retrospectively styled 911. Making do with little more

than aesthetic upgrades on a standard Carrera S, this 50th Anniversary Edition is a less ambitious exercise than the 997-based Sport Classic of 2010, which went to such lengths as bespoke chassis settings, a reworked engine and substantial bodywork revisions – most notably a ducktail spoiler – to set itself apart from the rest of the range and achieve collectible status.

The 50th Anniversary, arriving in the UK a little late for its own birthday party, will run to 1963 units in a nod to the year Porsche first unveiled its rear-engined sports coupe. With a production run eight times greater than the Sport Classic's, it isn't likely to have well-heeled 911 enthusiasts aflutter in quite the same way.

If not a 911 for the ages, the 50th Anniversary is surely the best-looking 991-spec Carrera so far. It is rear-wheel drive but borrows the C4's wider bodyshell, giving it a visual tension missing from the other rear-driven Carreras; given the increased track width that brings, it's also the most significant engineering upgrade.

The nostalgic Geyser Grey paint will split opinion – it looks better in low light and is more pearl than beige – but the darkened headlights and Fuchs-inspired 20-inch wheels contrast against the pale hue brilliantly. The chrome highlights across the engine cover sit a little less comfortably, while the cloth trim within the cabin may also be divisive among enthusiasts.

Aside from that wider track, which does add a layer of sure-footedness when attacking



a demanding road, the driving experience is similar to that of a standard Carrera S, which is to say – for the most part – very impressive indeed. The quality of the damping is beyond doubt: even over heavy compressions at speed the car soaks up impacts in a single motion without scraping its underbelly or running out of travel and skipping off-line. Similarly, on uneven surfaces there's sufficient compliance in the suspension that the car breathes over lumps and bumps. Porsche Active Suspension Management is standard and the system is adaptive, so even the firmer setting works on rougher surfaces.

As with any other 991, the natural balance is more neutral than that of 911s of old. The front end doesn't feel quite as light so there's less initial push to work around, and the pendulum effect of an engine behind the rear axle isn't so marked. Body control is iron-fisted, while the standard Porsche Torque Vectoring and limited-slip differential make for truly impressive levels of poise and traction on corner exit. It isn't a perfect driving experience, however, and as we've come to expect of 991s, the electrically assisted steering is a weakness. There are no

weighting or accuracy complaints, but never is there the intimate sense of connection for which earlier 911s are celebrated.

The 394bhp 3.8-litre flat-six has a joyous, elastic quality in the way it keeps pulling harder and harder with every additional rev all the way to the red line. Beyond 5000rpm the car feels seriously rapid and with the optional (£1772) sports exhaust fitted it sounds fierce, too: over the final couple of hundred revs the quad pipes emit a desperate, demonic howl. A pity, though, that given the ultra-long gearing, opportunities to sample it are few and far between – even in second gear you'll need to surpass the UK motorway speed limit to hear it bark. The seven-speed manual gearbox, meanwhile, has improved since the 991 was first introduced, but it still isn't as slick and satisfying as Porsche's superb six-speed manuals. A seven-speed PDK is a £2525 option.

The 50th Anniversary Edition is £8809 more than a standard Carrera S, but it is, if only by a slim margin, the most complete Carrera S we've come across yet. ✕

Dan Prosser (@TheDanProsser)

Engine	Flat-six, 3800cc
CO2	224g/km
Power	394bhp @ 7400rpm
Torque	324lb ft @ 5600rpm
Performance	4.5sec (claimed 0-62mph), 186mph (claimed)
Weight	1410kg (284bhp/ton)
Basic price	£92,257

evo rating: ★★★★★

👍 The 991 Carrera S at its best

👎 Electric steering still disappointing

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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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Test location: Aix-en-Provence, France GPS: 43.52912, 5.44528

Mercedes-Benz C200 SE

New Merc saloon is lighter than its predecessor, but is it exciting?

WAFT IS BACK. AFTER two days spent in the new C-class, it's clear that Mercedes is no longer trying to copy BMW and imbue its smallest saloon with that strange German concept of 'schportiness'. Instead the new C seems to be trying to be a miniature S-class, both in the way it looks and the way it drives. From a marketing point of view, it's possibly a good idea – but it definitely isn't a recipe for driving excitement.

Of course, people have rarely bought basic C-classes in the expectation of white-knuckle thrills, but the previous-generation car was, behind its soft chassis settings, always a decent steer. Yet the new one feels very different – bigger, more solid... and more stolid. It's grown to the extent it's now pretty much exactly the same size as the mid-'90s 'W210' E-class (the buggy-eyed one), and pretty much every bit of new tech offered with the new S-class will also feature on the C's huge options list. But as a drivers' car? I fear we're moving backwards.

It didn't help that I started out in the C300 BlueTec Hybrid, the range's economy champion, which combines Merc's 2.1-litre four-cylinder diesel in 201bhp tune with a 20kW (27bhp) electric motor. It's a combination claimed to deliver both a 6.4sec 0-62mph time and 78mpg on the official test. And at urban speeds it's very good, with the 'leccy motor working silently by itself at low speeds and the engine switching in and out quickly and quietly when it's required. It cruises well at motorway speeds too, whispering along almost as quietly as the S-class and with its (optional) air springs



pillowing away imperfections. But getting it onto a twisty road reveals an almost complete lack of interest in proceedings, with the powertrain's various elements seeming to work against each other, and a proper 'one-thousand, two-thousand' hesitation between pressing the accelerator and feeling much happen.

As you'd expect, top-spec Cs get switchable driving modes, and changing into Sport and then Sport Plus does sharpen the responses up. But it also turns the seven-speed automatic transmission aggressive to the point of belligerence, holding on to low ratios for no apparent reason and filling the cabin with diesely noises. And although the steering gets heavier, the helm never loses a sort of comfortable numbness.

Switching to the more basic C250 diesel proves that less is slightly more, as shedding the electrical assistance removes the elastic that seems to connect the C300's throttle. But the automatic gearbox remains resolutely slushy, and although you can override it using paddles behind the steering wheel, there's no manual mode, meaning that, after ten seconds or so, it

defaults back into Drive. The other thing that's missing is a stability control button. Of course, in the old C this was a bit of a joke, as pressing it just turned on a dashboard light and allowed a tiny amount of slip. But in the new car there's no Sport mode and no play at all, the system killing the throttle before any slides, like in the über-paranoid A- and B-classes. For all the dynamic difference rear-wheel drive makes, the C-class might as well drive its front wheels.

I ended up having the most fun in a basic C200 petrol, fitted with the six-speed manual gearbox nobody outside of Spain or Italy will order and without any switchable driving modes. The direct-injection 2-litre petrol engine delivers a healthy 181bhp and, although working against some ludicrously tall gearing (second runs past 70mph), it seems to enjoy being pasted in a way nothing else in the range does. The gearshift is decent, too – for what it matters.

The new C-class is a deeply impressive piece of engineering. But, for now at least, it's not really an *evo* car. ❌

Mike Duff

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1991cc, turbo
CO2	123g/km
Power	181bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque	221lb ft @ 1200-4000rpm
Performance	7.5sec (claimed 0-62mph), 147mph (claimed)
Weight	1370kg (134bhp/ton)
Basic price	£26,855

evo rating: ★★★★★

- Looks, awesome cabin, extremely relaxed
- Inert steering, killjoy stability control

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Watches

This month, pieces inspired by a Majorcan rally, a one-off custom motorbike and the creator of a Porsche engine **Words:** Simon de Burton

1 Oris Calobra

Price: £2650 **From:** oris.ch

Oris backs the Rally Isla Mallorca, famous for a stretch of mountain road featuring a looped section known as the 'Nus de sa Corbata', which translates as 'tie knot'. In honour of the event, the brand has produced the Calobra special edition (named after a Majorcan village), based on its Artix GT sports chronograph with some automotive touches, such as red detailing and a perforated leather strap. The dial is unusual in having chronograph hands that come to rest at the eight o'clock position and a linear indicator for running seconds.

2 Bell & Ross BR01-94 B-Rocket

Price: €4500 (c£3700) **From:** bellross.com

French firm Bell & Ross teamed up with British custom motorcycle builder Shaw Speed & Custom to create the B-Rocket, a retro-futuristic drag bike inspired by the jet planes of the 1950s. There's also a B-Rocket watch in the form of this 46mm chronograph featuring a black dial bordered by a black and white tachymeter scale for speed and distance calculations. The strap is padded black leather and based on the 'kneeler' bike's knee supports.

3 Scalfaro LM917 Hans Mezger Edition

Price: €6917 (c£5700) **From:** scalfaro.com

Hans Mezger will be familiar to **evo** readers as the designer of the air-cooled engines that powered Porsches to 15 victories at Le Mans. Perhaps the most famous car to carry a Mezger engine was the 917, now commemorated in a chronograph by German firm Scalfaro. The case contains 'original material' from a 917 and the seconds indicator is a miniature replica of a Porsche cooling fan. Mezger personally approved the design of the watch and his signature appears on the dial. Some 917 of these will be available in time for Porsche's return to the top class at Le Mans in June after 16 years away.

Now & Then



NOW Halda Race Pilot Worn by: Marcus Ericsson

The 23-year-old Caterham F1 driver Marcus Ericsson recently became the latest ambassador for Halda watches, which are made in his native Sweden. The 2009 All-Japan Formula 3 champion made his F1 debut at the Australian GP on March 16.



THEN Heuer Autavia Worn by: Jo Siffert

The late Swiss driver was the original F1 watch ambassador, having been signed by Jack Heuer after winning the British GP in 1968. It's said Steve McQueen modelled himself on Siffert in the film *Le Mans*, although Siffert wore a Heuer Autavia, not the Monaco famously sported by McQueen.



Watch tech

Moon phase

Since time is all about the relationship between the planets, it's not surprising that horologists have long been adept at recreating the waxing and waning of the moon in the miniaturised universe of a watch. The 'moon phase' display can take many forms, from a simple flat disc that roughly tracks the passage of the real thing, to elaborate three-dimensional orbs that replicate the moon's rotation around the Earth with remarkable accuracy.

One of the most impressive of all moon phase watches was unveiled by Saxon maker A Lange & Söhne at Geneva's SIHH watch show in January. The Grand Lange 1 Moonphase displays an extra-large moon formed from a solid gold disc (pictured above – only one moon at a time will be visible through the dial, of course). The disc's patented coating makes for exceptionally brilliant colours and sharp detail.

More than 300 stars are laser-cut on to the disc to create a truly spectacular representation of the galaxy, behind which sits Lange's hand-wound, calibre L095.3 movement, comprising 446 parts and featuring components made from untreated German silver.

The mechanism drives the moon phase display to such a degree of accuracy that the actual motion is impossible to detect. This is thanks to the use of a seven-gear reduction transmission that, assuming the watch is correctly set and kept running, means it will only need resetting once in every 122.6 years. That means a claimed accuracy of 99.9978 per cent!

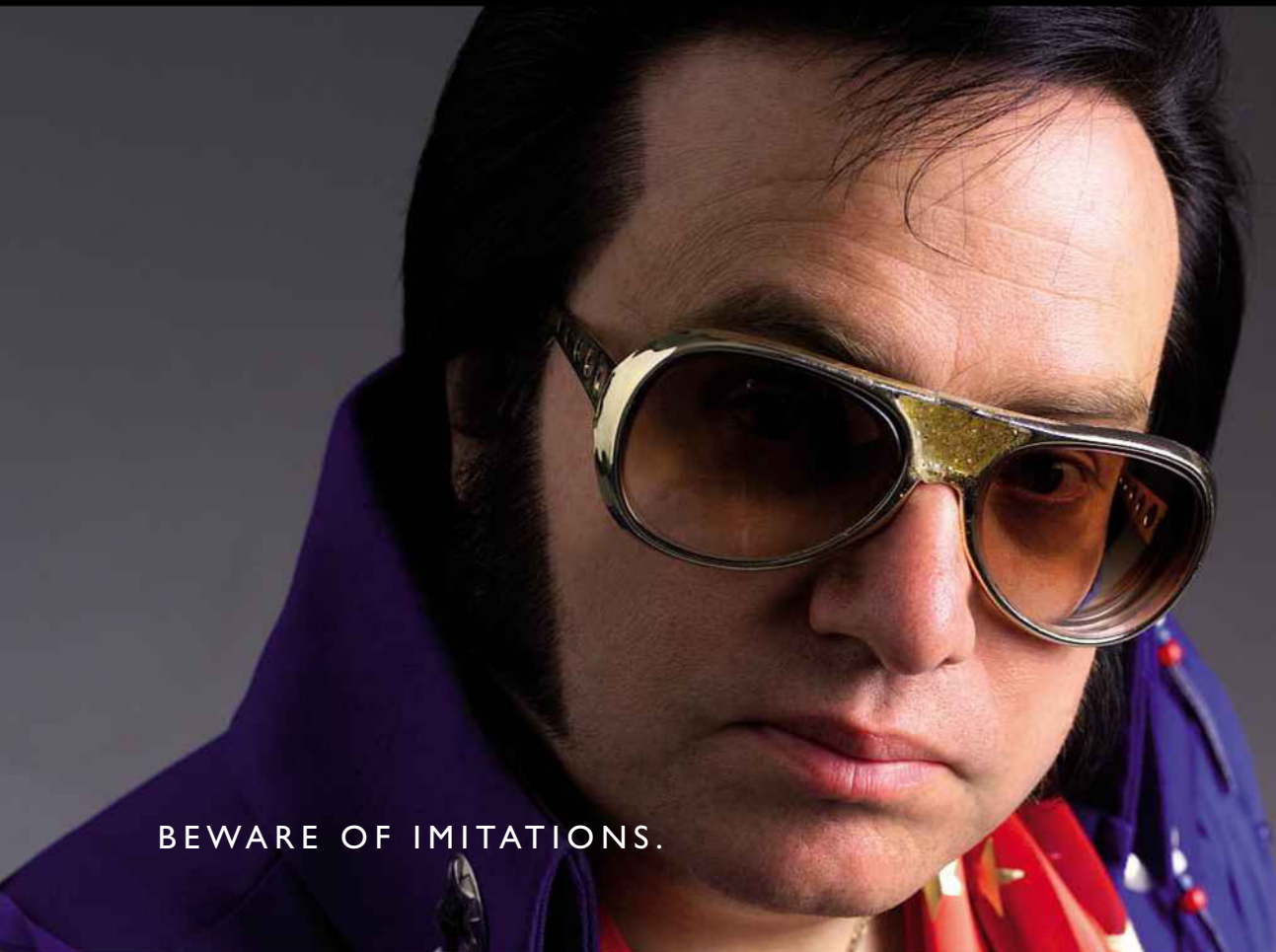
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Simulations

The latest news, kit and reviews from the world of racing sims

Words: David Lillywhite and Matthew Hayward



Simulator

BASE PERFORMANCE SIMULATORS

Formats: Bespoke GT simulator
From: baseperformance.net
Price: POA

MOST PROFESSIONAL-LEVEL simulators are in single-seater format. They're easy to climb in and out of, they're cheaper to construct, they take up less room and they appeal both to keen amateurs and pro racers who tend to view single-seaters as more exciting than GTs.

But what if you prefer GTs? Single-seater simulators don't feel right for drivers more used to saloons or GTs and, more practically, they tend to be set up for left-foot braking. No-one knows this better than Darren Turner, Aston Martin works driver (in GTs of course), Le Mans class winner and a director of Base Performance Simulators near Banbury, Oxfordshire.

To answer this, BPS has built a new GT simulator based on the shell of a crashed GT2 Aston Martin. The finishing touches – right down to exterior mirrors – have been added, and it's now available for training and practice sessions. It would have been rude not to try it out.

Although it's an Aston, inside the simulator it feels suitably generic, which is good because there's a huge range of cars that can be simulated on a choice of over 90 circuits. 'We can reverse-engineer any car from real data,' says Darren, 'and get them down to half-a-second-a-lap accuracy.'

Training starts with a few gentle laps, and inevitably it takes a few

minutes to acclimatise to the virtual view projected onto the 5m-radius curved screen up ahead. The gearchange can be paddle or (sequential) manual, the steering weights up realistically, the pedal box feels real, the soundtrack is as exciting as in the real thing, and it doesn't take long for total immersion to occur.

After each stint, the lap and sector data is analysed to work out the strengths and weaknesses of the driver's technique. Darren and his team will pick up on any obvious weak points and find ways to overcome them. At this level, a simulator does so much more than merely demonstrate which way a circuit goes. **DL**



Game

NEED FOR SPEED: RIVALS

Formats: PS4, PC & others **Price:** £28-£48 **From:** needforspeed.com

ELECTRONIC ARTS' *Need for Speed* franchise is the most successful racing game series ever, totalling sales of more than 150 million over the last 20 years. The latest *NFS* game to hit the shelves, *Rivals*, offers a fine selection of cars – including the McLaren P1 and officially licensed Porsches. It also looks fantastic (we tested the PS4 version, although it's out on PC and most other consoles).

Sadly, and this comes from an avid player of *Need for Speed* games ever since the original 1994 3DO console

version (anybody remember that?), the game fails to deliver much beyond its pretty façade. You're offered the choice of playing as good-guy cops or bad-guy speeders – a bedrock of *NFS* offerings – but the controls and physics feel dumbed down to the point you have to forget everything about how a car really corners.

If you're into the social aspect of online gaming, *Rivals* comes into its own. As an arcade-style proposition, there's fun to be had, just don't expect a sim to rival *Gran Turismo*. **MH**



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Outside Line

by RICHARD MEADEN



Is the increasing obsession with ever-lower speed limits resulting in deskilled drivers? Meaden reckons so

D

DO YOU ALWAYS OBEY SPEED LIMITS?

We're all grown-ups here, so I feel I can confess that no, I don't. Given *evo* is dedicated to 'The Thrill of Driving', that probably hasn't come as a great shock, but in case you're an excitable *Daily*

Mail reader who has picked up *evo* by mistake, please allow me to elaborate before you immolate with indignation.

There's a road near where I live called the B660. It's a classic British B-road: fast, open and challenging, with all kinds of corners and a liberal sprinkling of dips, compressions, lumps and bumps. In short, you can't fail to enjoy driving it. Better still, long stretches have no junctions or houses, which means that on occasions it is – whisper it – perfectly safe to exceed the posted 'de-restricted' 60mph limit in a state-of-the-art high-performance vehicle. Or crap-encrusted Land Rover Defenders, as local farmers demonstrate on a daily basis.

Along the way there are a number of villages, some with a posted speed limit of 40mph. Most of these have obscured driveways and farmyard entrances, so I drive through at 30mph, sometimes less. It just feels uncomfortable if I go any quicker. This decision to remain well within the speed limit is informed by local knowledge, but also by the same logic and judgement that tells me it's okay to do more than 60mph when I'm clear of inhabited areas. I don't believe this makes me more dangerous than the driver who sticks religiously to all posted limits, but shifting attitudes towards speed are beginning to make me feel marginalised.

As a skilled and responsible driver you make critical, unprompted and sometimes unconscious decisions in every mile of every journey. You believe it's important to read the road ahead, match your speed to the conditions and remain alert to the behaviour of the cars around you. Fell the forest of road signs and you'd still know a dangerous road from a safe one, still see the sight lines and judge whether the corner ahead is tightening or opening. Bad drivers – the majority, apparently – sleepwalk their way through journeys, paying little or no attention to anything other than the posted speed limit, effectively driving by rote. Often they can't even manage that. How many times have you followed someone doing 45mph on a de-restricted B-road and safely overtaken them, only to see them angrily flash their headlights in your rear-view mirror, then catch you in the next village as you slow to 30 and they continue to whistle through at 45? In the eyes of the law we're both speeding motorists, yet it's those who never drive at high speed who unfailingly assume the moral high ground.

I'm not so arrogant as to ignore the grim realities of inappropriate

speed. Doing 80 in a 60 can be catastrophically dangerous, but there are times when doing 30 in a 40, or even 20 in a 30 can be equally dicey. I'd also venture to suggest there are many roads where given the right car and conditions you could comfortably double the national speed limit without putting anyone at undue risk. Good driving is not about machismo or ego, it's about being safe and smooth, observant, alert and courteous. Get your head around these skills, work on them every time you pull the seatbelt across your chest, and safer speed comes as a welcome by-product. Put simply, if you make the effort to learn the language of the road, you know when it's safe to go and when you need to slow.

Unfortunately good driving, or bad driving for that matter, aren't concepts that can be expressed in a punchy slogan or

'Bad drivers sleepwalk through journeys, paying little or no attention to anything but the posted limit'

portrayed in a heart-rending 'Speed Kills' ad campaign. Poke your head above the parapet to argue the case for adopting a mature attitude towards measured, appropriate speed and it feels like you're defending the indefensible, as if pushing down an accelerator pedal is akin to pulling a trigger. If you're a totally reckless individual then that's close to what you're doing, but to treat all of us as latent lunatics is insulting. Worse, it's counter-productive in the long-term as from what I can see the more our roads are dumbed-down, the worse driving standards become.

Cars have never been safer or easier to drive quickly, yet our speed limits are inexorably and insidiously being lowered, presumably so as not to exceed the ability of the lowest common denominator. But by 'protecting' us from the critical decision-making process of driving, all that's being achieved is dead-eyed, disengaged drivers, sedated by speed limits and all-too happy to adopt a brain-off, cruise-control-on mentality.

I would never belittle the consequences of reckless speeding or the horrors of serious accidents, but with whom would you rather share the roads? Skilled, focused drivers who think for themselves, or those who stopped learning about driving the moment they passed their test? ❧

@DickieMeaden

Richard is a contributing editor of *evo* and one of the magazine's founding team

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Petrolhead

by RICHARD PORTER



Porter's frustration with the disposable nature of modern gadgetry doesn't extend to the latest in car technology

WHAT IS WRONG WITH MODERN kettles? I'm pretty sure my parents had the same kettle for the entire duration of my childhood, whilst here in the 21st century I reckon I get through one kettle every 18 months on average.

I've expressed this disappointment to my wife, but she is from the United States and has no benchmark for kettle longevity. It turns out Americans, damn their disloyal Boston Harbour shenanigans, do not drink tea and therefore don't have kettles at home. I tried the same moan with a mate who looked equally blank and then slowly explained that he doesn't need a kettle because his swanky new-build flat has one of those built-in boiling water taps. I should have remembered this after seeing a mutual friend inadvertently attempt to wash his hands under it. You could hear the screams 20 miles away.

If you're American or modern, you won't necessarily understand how strangely unreliable and expendable kettles have become, but you may have noticed those traits in other things. I've had a four-year-old fridge-freezer develop a fault which a reassuringly expensive engineer diagnosed as uneconomic to repair. I've had a shop assistant in an easy-iron short-sleeved shirt describe a four-year-old laptop as 'very old'. You'll probably keep your current mobile phone for a year or two at most and then be tempted to upgrade to a newer, shinier model with 4G, fingerprint recognition and a thing for getting stones out of horses' hooves.

And so, because we are fickle and live in a disposable world, and because when we buy new things we don't want them to be too expensive, consumer durables aren't durable at all. They're built down to a price and carefully 'lived' so they're not over-engineered for the length of time we'll have them. This is true of fridges, dishwashers and, most frustratingly, kettles. But I don't think it's true of cars. In fact, I think it's the opposite.

My parents bought a fridge in the early '70s and it lasted 20 years, yet in about 1977 my mum bought a Vauxhall Chevette and within three years the front wings were going rusty. Can you imagine that now? If you bought a new Corsa today, aside from marking yourself out as an idiot who can't drive, you'd have every right to be cross if a blister of rot popped up on your paintwork within the first three, five, even ten years of ownership. Likewise if it broke down. Which it almost certainly won't, because when do new cars break down?

If you see an AA man on someone's drive this week, I bet he's not sucking air in through his teeth and muttering something about an engine rebuild. He'll be charging or replacing the battery, as that's the only bit of a modern car that seems to go a bit dicky. Likewise,

next time you're on a motorway, have a look at the stationary cars flashing their hazards on the hard shoulder and note how many of them seem to have suffered an actual mechanical or electrical meltdown. A quid says most have got a puncture, or a small child weeing next to them. Or it's someone in a convertible, it's started drizzling and they've stopped under a bridge to put the roof up. Contrast that with 40 years ago, when I'm pretty certain the entire side of the M1 would have been littered with oil-dripping Austins and smoking Triumphs. Cars used to go wrong all the time. Now I'd wager they're the most reliable things we have. Unless you've been fitted with a pacemaker.

And it isn't just that cars have quietly become the most durable and dependable things in our everyday lives. It's that they've done

'It isn't just that cars have become the most durable and dependable things in our lives. It's that they've done it whilst getting more complicated and yet no more expensive'

it whilst getting more complicated and yet no more expensive. In March 1994, a Ford Fiesta XR2i cost £10,495 – about £17,600 in today's money. Yet 2014's Fiesta ST starts at £16,995 and includes many more electrical things plus air con, airbags and a proper bangin' stereo. Also, unlike the '94 XR2, it isn't crap. You could buy a brisk Fiesta today for slightly less than it would have cost you 20 years ago, and I'm certain you'd get a good ten years' faithful service out of it. Not that many people will, because as we've established, we live in a disposable and fickle world where things are expected to break after three or four years and get preemptively thrown away even if they haven't.

It's worth celebrating the fact that, despite our fondness for the latest thing, cars are the one item to buck the trend. A cheap hatchback of 2014 could see you through a decade. A medium-sized saloon could go through five owners, become a minicab and still keep going. Even a 2014 Ferrari or Lamborghini could be used every day. Cars have achieved the extraordinary feat of getting more complicated and more reliable at the same time. I wish I could say the same about kettles. ☒

@sniffpetrol

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



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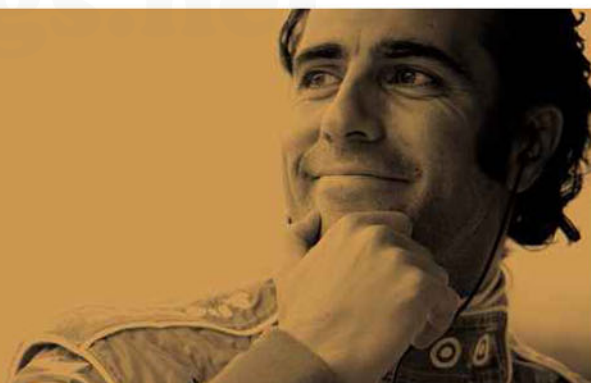
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Champ

by DARIO FRANCHITTI



Having grown up with hot hatches, Dario still has a hankering for a Mk2 Golf GTI. Must be those tartan seats

MY MUM AND DAD HAD MATCHING MK1 Golf GTIs, so hot hatches have always been a part of my life. In fact I think pretty much every member of my family had a Mk1 GTI at one point. My grandfather, my aunt, my dad, my mum, my uncle... they all had one. So there was this plethora of fast little VWs at the house. I think it was the idea of a small high-performance car that made it so appealing. Something for everyday use that was also rapid and handled well. And although I don't really remember because I was only about seven or eight at the time, I think there was definitely a fashion element to it as well. It was probably the tartan seats that really swung it for my family of course.

One of the first cars I actually drove was a 1.6 205 GTI that my old man had. We were racing karts up in the north of Scotland at a place called Golspie on the east coast, and there were sort of roads, dirt roads really, down the back of the beach where the kart track was. I started driving this car and then driving it some more and driving it some more, and then when my dad went to go home apparently there wasn't much oil in his 205 because somebody had put a hole in the sump... I might have heard about that one afterwards!

The first hot hatch I actually owned was an Uno Turbo with so much torque-steer you really needed a three-lane road to control the thing. To say it was wayward is an understatement and you had to be very careful of the tyres too: I remember having a massive bout of oversteer one night in the wet and only *juuuust* managing to catch it before it all went wrong. I read a book recently about one of the guys that used to drive Enzo Ferrari around. Apparently Il Commendatore had an Uno Turbo that he kept sending back to Fiat in Turin to be tweaked, encouraging them to get more and more power out of it every time. I think Enzo owning one has to be the ultimate seal of approval for an Uno.

I loved the Renault 5 GT Turbo at the time, too. It had a much nicer driving position than the Uno, and although power-wise there wasn't much between them, the Renault definitely handled a bit better. However, back in the day the Fiat was considerably cheaper and that was the defining factor for me at the time. Much later in life I actually got to drive one of the rear-engined R5 Turbos, which was pretty entertaining. I can confirm that the doors start to bend outwards at 140mph!

After the Uno, I had two different Mk2 16v GTIs. I've always loved the way the 16-valve revved and although it might have had less low-down torque than the eight-valve, I think it was worth it. The first I owned was a white one, on an F plate, and I adored it.

I remember lowering it, putting a stereo in and putting some big wheels on it. However, big wheels at the time were 15in and unusually for mods like that they actually did improve the car!

Clearly it was a very different experience to a rear-wheel-drive car, but the cross-country pace, hanging a hind wheel in the air round an apex, keeping the momentum up, making sure you're in the right gear all the time, it was just brilliant. I drove that thing everywhere until somebody nicked it. I was living in Harrold in Bedfordshire at the time. I woke up one morning and I was just looking at the keys in my hand and then looking out in the street and then back at the keys thinking, 'I'm sure I parked it there... I wonder if somebody's borrowed it?' And then there was the dawning realisation that someone had pinched it.

That was one of the risks with hot hatches back then, of

'In spite of the appalling state of the roads, an old hot hatch is something you can still have a load of fun with'

course, and they also inspired that whole *Max Power* generation. I actually appeared in a couple of issues of *Max Power* doing tests on things like modified Mk1 GTIs on a runway. One had a VR6 engine and was absolute madness. Of course, back then there was this whole trend of modifying, modifying, then modifying some more. Yet as these things become older and more cherished (or perhaps cherished in a different way and by a different age group) everybody wants originality. It applies to all cars of course, but perhaps hot hatches in particular because these things had a hard life with people doing massive miles in them. It's nice to see something like an early GTI or a Clio Williams that's really been appreciated and looked after.

I would love another hot hatch. Right now the McRae Subaru is the first candidate for restoration but I quite fancy a Mk2 GTI (16v, obviously) as the next project – though I've noticed the prices are really creeping up. It'll be worth it, because in spite of the truly appalling state of the roads in this country, and the speed cameras and the sheer density of traffic, an old hot hatch is actually something you can still have a load of fun with. They might be a blast from the past, but I think they will definitely be something for the future, too. ☒

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Dario is a three-time Indy 500 winner and four-time IndyCar champ



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What's dropped your Creme Egg this month?



Letter of the Month

Kids today...

Like Richard Meaden (*Outside Line*, **evo** 194), I have many pleasurable driving memories of my younger days. I covered many thousands of miles from Land's End to the Scottish Highlands in a Morris 1000 Traveller. Today's 'turgid 1-litre hatchback' may not sound like much, but it would go, handle, and more importantly stop far better than the Traveller ever would. You wouldn't have to carry a toolkit, a Haynes manual or litres of oil and water to get you there and back, either.

Contrary to what Meaden suggests, I would argue that cars today are no more expensive to buy and run in relation to income – it took me two years to save for my first car and 'the bank of mum and dad' covered insurance and new tyres to get me going. What seems to have changed is young peoples' wants and attitudes. Wouldn't it be great if they could be re-engaged with motoring – and a sense of adventure – by having some driving as part of the school curriculum?

Rob Speak



The Letter of the Month wins an Elliot Brown watch

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The next generation

I felt the need to write about Richard Meaden's column on the modern day relationship (or rather lack of it) between driving and today's youth. I agree, as I'm 20 years old and seem to be the only petrolhead I know.

The problem is how inaccessible the car has become to young drivers. Regulations, laws and insurance companies have created a world of unfortunate souls paying thousands of pounds for a standard 1.1-litre Saxo (I speak from experience). Having said this, there are still some of us out there who will keep the oil-stained community going. People who, despite modern logic telling them not to, will still smile at the sound of a Rover V8 as it rumbles past, who will still do anything and everything to get a few extra bhp from a nine-year-old Astra hatchback.

Yes, the cost of car ownership is crippling, but the young car enthusiast will carry on – for that one moment of freedom and joy that can only be achieved with a first set of car keys and a world of tarmac to explore.

Jack Rawlinson

Heel-and-no

Richard Porter's admiration of the 'perfectly timed and delightfully unnecessary heel-and-toe' performed by the driver of a Suzuki Ignis Sport (*Petrolhead*, **evo** 194) triggered many memories. I learned to drive mainly in non-synchro cars or cars with clapped-out synchro cones, so double-declutching was a necessity for smooth gearchanges. Long before taking my test, I would lie in bed going through the motions to achieve my perfect imaginary gearchange.

Eventually it became second nature



Above: good pedal positioning is crucial for heel-and-toeing, says Roger Billing

and I would always double-declutch, even on the best synchro 'boxes, but as speeds increased the art of heel-and-toeing became more necessary. The technique has served me well, particularly when racing, but it is my experience that the vast majority of cars do not facilitate this well, if at all.

Two things are critical for heel-and-toeing: the pedal positions and the sensitivity of the brake and throttle pedals. I remember a Saab Turbo that had fabulous brakes and well-spaced pedals but would lock up and throw you at the windscreen when attempting a downchange. Other cars have required double-jointed ankles to achieve a satisfactory result, and although I mainly drive automatics these days, the occasional outing in a manual is normally spoiled by difficulty in achieving a good heel-and-toe downchange.

Roger Billing

In a nutshell

'Their irrelevance makes them desirable, and their existence is something to be celebrated. ... There remains a shining, adolescent desire to create mischief.' These words by Nick Trott about the Mercedes S63 AMG L and the Jaguar XJR (**evo** 191) not only define the adorable ridiculousness of these superpower machines, but the words 'adolescent desire to create mischief' in a way also tells us what **evo** is all about! Isn't it?

Arshjeet Singh, via evo India

Blue suede shoes

Please see below my response to the recent letter from Hywel Rees (**evo** 194), where he said: 'My God, you wouldn't wear suede loafers, would you?' Life would be so boring if we were all the same!

Richard Jones



Above: it turns out some people *would* wear suede loafers: Richard Jones does



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Talking Point

McLaren P1

Will you be adding one to your fantasy hypercar garage?

YES To my eyes it's clearly the best looking of the three, and all the tests I've read say that it's more exciting to drive than the 918. The P1 is definitely in my fantasy garage at the moment, but we know very little about how the LaFerrari drives. It would have to be seriously amazing to push the P1 out!
duncs500

NO Initially I was not impressed with the design of the P1, but I have come to like and then love it. The performance is breathtaking. It is by far my favourite of the current 'big three'. However, it is aurally weak and there is still 'something' missing. It's just not quite there for me. One of the road-legal Zonda R derivatives is still top of my hypercar list.

Philomena Cunk

NO I need to drive all three before coming to a conclusion.

Marv

YES Of the three current hypercar protagonists, the P1 is, erm, P1. I like the looks, and by all accounts it appears to go and handle rather well too. It's a whole new thing. Fascinated that it doesn't have an LSD...

mik

YES If I could afford a P1, I'd probably buy all three to save the hassle of deciding which is best.

Alex_

NO None of the big three are in my fantasy garage. There are too many classics to purchase first, which are proven to be fun, fast and deliver a thrill. I fear these new hypercars are all

a bit too much bling and created out of technical willy-waving rather than born from customers needs.

Markcoopers

NO I would get a Carrera GT before any of these, and most probably an Enzo with straight pipes also.

tazsura

NO I love them all from an engineering perspective, but lust after none. I'd take any of the cars from *evo*'s recent analogue supercars test over any of the hybrids; they just have a purity that's more attractive to me.

speedingfine

NO I'd also look at the Huayra and Agera too and make my decision then. Oh what a position to be in...

JohnMc

YES I've never really felt the desire to own an F1 or a 12C. I'm sure they're awesome but they've never caught my imagination like, say, an F40. But the P1 has.

NotoriousC

YES The 918 is a beautiful thing but a typically safe Porsche design. The LaFerrari is an awkward-looking car but sounds superb. I've loved the P1 from day one. It's only got better over time and would be my choice.

JustMax

YES It's amazing what good magazine/video coverage can do to a car. I went from hating the P1 to loving it. It's also amazing what black paint and hearing turbo noises will do too...

markmctavish

Next month

This issue we've tested the greatest hot hatches ever made. Which of our group – or maybe a model we didn't include – do you think is the greatest hot hatch of all, and why?

Email your thoughts to letters@evo.co.uk, or join the discussion at community.evo.co.uk

From the forums: community.evo.co.uk

Thread of the Month

MARK BT52

P1/918 power – cheating?

The Porsche gives 600bhp from its engine plus 282bhp from the electric motors. But this is only for 10 minutes of flat-out driving.

After that you have a 600bhp car (albeit with some additional charge from brake regeneration). The P1 has 727bhp with 176bhp from the electric motors. But once the batteries are flat you have a 727bhp car until you can find a spare seven hours to charge it again. This all feels like cheating. You can only have full power for a very short period of time, whereas more traditional cars like the Veyron can give full power all day long. This makes a bit of a mockery of lap times with hybrid cars to me.

SPEEDCAMERA

Don't these things charge the battery under normal driving conditions?

MARK BT52

From the engine, yes, in the case of the P1. But obviously this causes a corresponding drain in the power output from the engine to the wheels...

JOBBO

That's not that much of a problem while you're braking. If it'll manage 10 minutes at full throttle producing full power, that's sufficient for any straight on the planet, surely?

MARK BT52

Apparently the 918 would be completely out of charge after 1.5 Nürburgring laps, that's where I got the 10 minutes from.

So I assume that you don't even get 10 minutes of full boost.

ERIC PISCH

Another reason to get the Koenigsegg.

HARDBOILEDPHIL

And how much longer would a tank of fuel last in a Veyron? They were talking about it only lasting 10 minutes flat-out.

JOSE_90

Supposedly the P1 never runs out of charge in the batteries, in any mode. McLaren test driver Chris Goodwin says that it is set up so it doesn't, even on the finish straight in the Ring. The P1 lapping a track will only be using full throttle 40 per cent of the time, so the battery will keep recharging itself and you will have 903bhp that 40 per cent of the time.



Thread of the Month wins a Road Angel safety camera & blackspot alert device worth £159.99



The originator of the best **evo** forum thread wins a Road Angel Gem+. The Gem+ automatically updates its camera database as you drive and allows users to share the locations of 'live' camera vans.

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IN THE BEGINNING...

by RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY by
DEAN SMITH

Our 36-page celebration of the hot hatch starts with the story of how one car created the genre and continues to define it today – the Volkswagen Golf GTI





GTI. THREE LETTERS

that changed the world. All right, perhaps that's a slight exaggeration, but they certainly changed our world.

Yes, there were fast, small cars sticking it to bigger and more powerful machines long before VW turned an unofficial spare-time project conducted by in-house engineers into what is, by common consent, the progenitor of the hot hatch breed. But none managed to capture the collective imagination so completely, nor achieve – and then sustain – iconic status quite like the Golf GTI.

OK, so there have been one or two stinkers along the way – none stinkier than the travesty that was the Mk4 – but while rival brands have had a pop over the years with faster, harder and more focused propositions, the GTI has prevailed as the consummate all-rounder. As such it has remained the benchmark by which all other hot hatches are judged, almost 40 years after it first shone a bright, energising light into an otherwise drab and lacklustre sector of the market.

It's impossible to stand here in 2014, in the midst of an era that continues to provide us with an unprecedented abundance of exceptional drivers' cars, from the affordable to the astronomical, and imagine how it must have felt when Volkswagen launched the Mk1 Golf GTI at the 1975 Frankfurt motor show. Let us not forget the Golf replaced the Beetle, a car that was conceived in the 1930s and had changed little in the intervening 35 or so years. Sharply styled, efficiently packaged and blessed with a front-engined, front-wheel-drive chassis that owed nothing to its hedge-seeking forebear, even the most basic Golf must have been a revelation to drive. The GTI, the fastest car Volkswagen had ever built, must have seemed too good to be true.

If you love cars you simply can't approach and drive a Mk1 Golf GTI today and not feel something of the frisson that electrified enthusiasts back in the mid-1970s. It looks small and simple, as all cars do from that era to eyes accustomed to 21st-century scale and styling, but there's something special about the GTI. Significance, yes, but that's something that continues to grow as the years pass. What grabs you about it now is what captivated people then: its stance and proportion (surely one of Giugiaro's finest pieces of design), its freshness,

purity, practicality and intent. Here was a car that promised something new and dynamic: a sweet, tractable 112bhp 1.8-litre engine (or a 108bhp 1.6 on early cars) that delivered crisp performance, mated to a chassis blessed with deftness and precision and wrapped in clean, confident bodywork that stood out from the crowd, yet remained rooted in real life. Here was a car that could fulfil the duties of a workaday family hack and bring a smile to your face when opportunity and inclination allowed. It was a sports car for people whose lives, pockets and needs had hitherto denied them access to a car that existed as much for the delivery of enjoyment as it did getting them to work, the shops or simply from A to B.

It's that simple, egalitarian manifesto that informs the hot hatch blueprint to this day, and why on this occasion we've elected to stay true to that ethos and exclude the wilder evolutionary excesses. So, much as we'd like the excuse to slide around in a Lotus Sunbeam and covet an Escort Cossie, for this journey to the heart of the hot hatch we've limited ourselves to cars that are front-wheel-drive four-seaters. Highlights include 1980s classics like the flyweight Citroën AX GT and timeless Peugeot 205 GTI, 1990s ravers the Clio Williams and 306 Rallye, and 2000s heroes such as the Mk1 and Mk2 Focus RS and Mégane R26. Nevertheless, I'm sure some of you will still be disappointed, but with four decades of greatness from which to choose it rapidly became clear we were mining a very rich seam. So rich, in fact, that we knew hard decisions would have to be made when our initial 'shortlist' exceeded 50 cars...

The upside of this is that we've been able to fully immerse ourselves in driving the most iconic hot hatches of all time on the best roads we know. The result is a test of unprecedented breadth; a riotous, reverential celebration that will chart the changes and provide precious context to tell us what it is that makes this breed of car so special. In so doing, we'll learn why its recipe has endured for so long and – perhaps – how 2014 marks the point where the hot hatch has finally outgrown its time-honoured front-wheel-drive roots.

So sit down, buckle up and hang on tight as Jethro Bovingdon, David Vivian, Dan Prosser and yours truly three-wheel (and sometimes two-wheel!) our way through this exceptional gathering of hot hatch idols. It promises to be quite a ride.



THE 1980s

by RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY by
DEAN SMITH

The '80s saw the Golf GTI evolve into its Mk2 guise, while French rivals emerged in the form of the Peugeot 205 GTI, Citroën AX GT and Renault 5 GT Turbo





OF ALL THE GROUPS WE'VE

assembled, this is one of the most evocative. It's also the one that's the most nostalgic to me. Too young to appreciate the Mk1 GTI's arrival in the mid-to-late 1970s, by the mid-to-late 1980s I was a driver-in-waiting, devouring car magazines and longing for the day I could pass my test. When I did, these were the kind of cars I aspired to own. I ached to have a Citroën AX GT, but the harsh realities of finance and insurance meant a brochure was as close as I ever got to fulfilling my dream. Life has since taken me on a weird and wonderful journey, but still the chance to drive an AX GT eluded me. Until today.

Honest to God, you wouldn't believe how hard it was to track this little Citroën down. Along with good, un-bugged-about-with Mk2 Golf GTI 16-valves, the AX GT must be one of the rarest performance cars on UK roads. Organising the 918 Spyder v McLaren P1 v LaFerrari test will be a breeze compared to putting this one together.

Hook your finger under the small latch and swing open the AX GT's door and you're immediately reminded of this cheeky little car's famously frail build. It feels like it's made from paper. Inside is a dated mix of exposed metal, scratchy plastic and plush velour. This is French cars as they used





‘YOU CAN
HUSTLE THE
FIVE THROUGH
CORNERS
WITHOUT THE
EDGINESS OF
THE 205’



to be: soft and squidgy seats, a high driving position and quirky dials. The tacho in particular is miniscule.

The little 1360cc engine starts with a splutter, then ticks happily away at idle. It has a single twin-choke carburettor, develops 85bhp and 86lb ft of torque and propels 722kg of tin and plastic to 60mph in 9.2sec and – eventually – a top speed of 110mph. A McLaren P1's heater has more poke, and yet as I point the AX's pretty little nose into some of the *evo* Triangle's trickier turns, my palms are sweating. This is a car that likes to dance on its tippy-toes, especially in the wet. It's not often you feel 60mph is sufficient, but the AX is a master at accentuating the sensation of speed. This, plus a formidable reputation for lift-off oversteer, ensures you feel bizarrely intimidated. Thankfully, as confidence builds you begin to trust it not to fire you into a hedge, and with this growing faith you rev it harder, brake later and feel happier to work with the body roll and tip the door mirrors a little closer to the tarmac. It takes a while to make sense of the GT, but once you do you'll have a friend for life in this uniquely charming – and challenging – little device.

The owner of this AX, Matthew Hocking, makes a very good point about his car, and indeed the remaining French pair in this quartet of '80s icons, in that they all share an unthreatening femininity that distances them from the machismo normally associated with performance cars in general and hot hatches in particular. I'm not sure the bluff, bespoiled R5 GT Turbo is a shy maiden of the road, but the 205 remains heartbreakingly pretty.

The Peugeot's 1.9-litre engine has a smooth, linear spread of power and torque, and a clean, characterful note, but it's easy to forget such a colossal reputation was built on just 130bhp. It still feels fresh and frisky, but here and now in 2014 it's only mildly brisk. No matter, for as we're learning, hot hatches are all about modesty and balance; keeping power, grip, handling and response in proportion to deliver something special. And the 205 is very special.

We chose a later 205 with power-assisted steering, kindly supplied by Stuart Farrimond, because the non-assisted rack hobbled early cars with slow steering and too many turns lock-to-lock. Assistance brings the car to life, injecting it with welcome urgency and agility, but it means you need calm hands and a steely nerve if you're to avoid over-agitating the flighty Pug. The front end is dazzlingly responsive, but the tail is equally keen to play. Judge your turn-in just right and you only need a minimal amount of lock to initiate the turn before you then have to gently wind it off again. It's a fine balancing act and one that'll have you making noises like



Far left: the Renault's 105kg weight advantage helps it keep up with the 19bhp more powerful Mk2 Golf GTI. **Left:** Meaden loves the GT Turbo's steering wheel. **Below left:** what 205 GTIs are famous for... **Below:** AX feels faster at the wheel than its 85bhp suggests



you're lowering yourself into a very hot bath if you carry too much speed into a quick corner. It's not quite on a knife-edge, but you need your wits about you if you're to drive it to its limit. This is a car created and signed off by engineers and drivers, not marketing men and corporate liability lawyers.

Back in the day, the 205's most formidable foe was the Renault 5 GT Turbo. We revisited this boxy wonder in *evo* 191, when we compared it to the current Clio 200 Turbo. I loved it then and I love it now, from the comedy Legoland body kit to the gutsy little force-fed 1.4-litre, 120bhp engine and what is officially The World's Best Steering Wheel. You sit low in the Five, snug as a bug in the softly supportive seat and wide-eyed with wonder at the dashboard architecture and brittle plastics.

The steering is unassisted, but it's manageable at low speed and perfectly weighted once you're up and running. It's also perfectly matched to the needs of the chassis, so you can hustle the Renault through corners without the edginess of the 205. It has decent grip, but traction can be at a premium when the turbo eventually starts

puffing. The brakes and gearshift mirror the weight and feel of the steering, so although the Five is light there's some meat to the primary controls that's unusually satisfying. It's a small car too, so like the AX and 205 you have generous amounts of road to play with.

It doesn't feel like there's much in it between the Pug and Renault in terms of straight-line speed, but I'd put my money on the Five being the quicker car point-to-point, simply due to the fact that you feel more comfortable driving it closer to its limits more of the time. It's a great shame so many of these cracking cars have been boosted and body-kitted to buggery, but that just makes driving exceptional, standard examples like this an even greater privilege.

The 'big-bumper' Mk2 Golf GTI 16v, loaned to us by Kelly Harris, just about sneaks into the '80s, but it feels much more modern than the French trio. It was a big jump from the Mk1 to this in every respect, yet shut your eyes and you can feel the continuity in the gearshift, damping and steering response, even though this Mk2 has power steering. The flakiness of the French cars' build is all part of their appeal,

and the lack of mass informs how they drive. It sounds like a cliché, but the GTI is classically Germanic, with a dense and totally dependable feel. It drives that way too, riding with big-car assurance and cornering with greater stability and neutrality. The 16v motor is a slugger with 139bhp and 124lb ft of torque, which just pips the 205. It looks like it should weigh more, but at 960kg it's only 50kg heavier than the Pug.

You're not quite so immersed in the action when you push the GTI hard, but where you nudge up to the limits of the 205 you can take liberties with the Golf, for its nose just digs deeper into its reserves of grip, not to mention the travel of the outside-front wheel. You really do feel it tip into corners, but the sensation soon becomes a signal that you're getting things right. It's surprisingly playful and very effective; proof you don't always need sweaty palms to test a hot hatch's limits.

As you can imagine, choosing between these four cars is very, very difficult. When you're sitting in a lay-by wrestling with thoughts that you might actually prefer the R5 GT Turbo to the 205 GTI, it's not just difficult, it's borderline sacrilegious. Of course, nothing I write here will tarnish any of these legendary cars' reputations, but nevertheless I find it fascinating how the march of time constantly changes the context by which icons such as these are viewed and compared.

For me, the 205 has now reached that point where its performance (in standard tune), and the way it delivers that performance is more

CITROËN AX GT

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1360cc
Power	85bhp @ 6400rpm
Torque	86lb ft @ 4000rpm
0-60mph	9.2sec (claimed)
Top speed	110mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	722kg
Power-to-weight	120bhp/ton
Price new	£8492 (1992)
Value today	£3000-4000
evo rating	★★★★★

PEUGEOT 205 GTI 1.9

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1905cc
Power	130bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	119lb ft @ 4750rpm
0-60mph	7.9sec (claimed)
Top speed	124mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	910kg
Power-to-weight	145bhp/ton
Price new	£10,295 (1988)
Value today	£2500-5000
evo rating	★★★★★

RENAULT 5 GT TURBO

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1397cc, turbo
Power	120bhp @ 5750rpm
Torque	122lb ft @ 3750rpm
0-60mph	7.8sec (claimed)
Top speed	120mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	855kg
Power-to-weight	140bhp/ton
Price new	£7360 (1986)
Value today	£2000-4000
evo rating	★★★★★

VW GOLF GTI 16v (MK2)

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1781cc
Power	139bhp @ 6100rpm
Torque	124lb ft @ 4600rpm
0-60mph	7.9sec (claimed)
Top speed	129mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	960kg
Power-to-weight	147bhp/ton
Price new	£12,298 (1988)
Value today	£1500-3000
evo rating	★★★★★



'THE MK2 16V IS A VERY GROWN-UP CAR IN LOOKS, FEEL AND PERFORMANCE'



classic than modern. Likewise the AX GT, which makes terrific use of 85bhp and requires high levels of skill and finesse to get the best from, but really does come from another age. The GT Turbo is cut from much the same Gallic cloth, but the control weights and meaty boost-engorged power delivery make for a style of performance that's more in line with modern expectations. You feel less nervous about feeling for its limits, too, which ultimately makes for a more entertaining car more of the time.

And the Golf GTI? Well, the Mk2 16v is a very grown-up car in looks, feel and performance. In fact it makes the others feel a bit toy-like. It was ahead of its time, too, for despite being three decades old now, you could still quite easily use a fresh, well-sorted example as your everyday car, such is its impressive blend of big-hearted pace, solid build and long stride. That it'll also hoist an inside rear wheel like a Jack Russell watering a lamp-post is an endlessly enjoyable reminder that GTIs can let their hair down with the best of them. A pleasure and an education to drive, these are four unforgettable characters and four very fine hot hatches. ☑



THE 1990s

by DAVID VIVIAN

PHOTOGRAPHY by
DEAN SMITH

The initial wave of hot hatch excitement faded with some marques during the '90s, but the French stuck at it, producing the brilliant Peugeot 306 Rallye and Renault Clio Williams





IF THERE'S A tumbleweed decade for the hot hatch, it has to be the 1990s. After the fizzed-up '80s, when car journalists used words like 'brio' and

any manufacturer worth its salt brought its A-game to the party, the idea that brand kudos could be acquired by fielding the feistiest hot hatch seemed to lose its urgency. Ford kept the faith with the Fiesta XR2i (although sadly that car wouldn't quite cut the mustard in this test), but the warmed-over efforts from other quarters – perhaps most notably VW – seemed mostly tokenistic. Which largely explains why this group numbers just two.

There is some good news, though. Shining like precious gems from the gloom, those two cars are the Renault Clio Williams and the Peugeot 306 Rallye – not just the outstanding hot hatches of the '90s, but arguably among the best of any decade. And not just because they were more potent versions of what had come before. In a couple of important respects, they changed the game, pulling the focus back from firmly sprung, twitch-response, on-the-edge hyperactivity and introducing hitherto undreamed-of levels of comfort and compliance – but in a way that enhanced the full-on driving experience rather than detracting from it.

The Renault should look familiar. It belongs to *evo* staffer Stephen Dobie, who's been writing it love letters in the Fast Fleet pages since November 2010. It's a clean, fit, rust-free Mk1 from 1994 (number 0421) and is closing in on 100,000 miles.

Renault launched the Clio Williams in 1993, having already attracted a healthy following with the 5 GT Turbo and the direct forerunner to the Williams, the naturally aspirated Clio 16V. Boasting a fairly modest 150bhp and 126lb ft of torque, the car with the golden wheels wasn't startling in a straight line. Weighing just 981kg, it could hit 60mph from rest in 7.6sec, a time 0.7sec down on the heavier but more powerful 306 Rallye. Whatever the figures said, it looked and felt special. Those gleaming wheels, the pumped arches, the minimal kit roster, the unique paintjob, those hugely bolstered but extraordinarily squishy seats, the F1 cachet of the Williams name and the limited-edition exclusivity all added massively to its desirability.

But perhaps the biggest draw was the sense of a genuine rallying pedigree. The 1764cc F7P engine from the Clio 16V and the estimable driving chops of Jean Ragnotti had proved a winning combination for Renault's Group A Clio rally car in the European Rally Championship. But there was more to come. Exploiting the 2000cc class limit, Renault

decided to homologate a 2-litre (F7R) Clio. That car was the Williams, so named (and painted in Williams 449 Sports Blue) to commemorate the fact that the dominant Williams F1 cars of the day were powered by Renault engines and not because Williams had anything to do with this Clio's development. Then as now, that work was undertaken by Renaultsport.

The Peugeot 306 Rallye didn't appear until 1998 and was essentially a de-kitted edition of the excellent 306 GTI-6 with some garishly coloured claw-tear stickers just behind the

'THESE TWO AREN'T JUST THE OUTSTANDING HOT HATCHES OF THE '90S, BUT ARGUABLY AMONG THE BEST OF ANY DECADE'

front wheelarches. A pure rallying bloodline? Not really. A practical family hatch with a six-speed gearbox, a nod to weight saving and some tasty mechanicals? That's about the size of it. Despite the bulk-paring ethos denoted by the 'Rallye' tag, only 16kg was trimmed out, giving a kerb weight of 1199kg. Yet it seemed to make a difference: the deletion of air conditioning, some sound deadening, the leather trim option, electric windows and conventional badges (replaced by stick-on decals) lifted a layer of inertia that subtly altered the car's character, making it feel a little more raw but also slightly more responsive.

Gwyn Evans' white Rallye is in particularly fine shape and completely original apart from a K&N air filter that lends the already rorty induction note an even throatier timbre. It's not a case of all sound and no fury, either. The Peugeot's 2-litre motor is a brawny affair, developing 167bhp at 6500rpm (respectable by today's standards) and 142lb ft at 5500rpm (a little peaky by today's standards). Having a six-speed 'box with evenly spread ratios to divide up the workload undoubtedly helps as well.

It's a good gearbox, too, even if the shortish lever is a bit of a stretch from the high seating

position – a trait it shares with the Renault. The Rallye's seats aren't quite as soft and form-hugging as the Clio's but, within the first few miles, it's obvious that the Peugeot's suppleness and damping of the suspension set the bar very high indeed, treading the line between control and comfort with a deft assurance that makes most of the tautly sprung modern hot hatches feel like hard work.

Indeed, the way the Rallye nails the sweet spot between pliancy and precision feels close to sorcery and it's a quality that really hits home on the more roughly surfaced sections of the *evo* Triangle, the car staying composed and unruffled over bumps and ruts that set newer machinery bobbing and jiggling. The Peugeot might not have contemporary standards of grip or turn-in response but its steering is accurate, well weighted and beautifully communicative. Crucially, you can feel the grip at the front and trim the line even when the tyres are loaded up. In short, it flows and has wonderful roll-on pace which goes an awful long way to making the most of its engine's outputs.

By the time I get back to the muster point, feeling somewhat in awe of the old-timer, Dobie has turned up in the even older Williams and, icon as it may be, I can't help feeling it's got its work cut out if it's going to eclipse the drive I've just had in the Pug. But it makes a good start. Just sitting in probably the most comfortable (yet properly supportive) seat ever installed in a small hatch and surveying the cosy cabin with its numerous Williams flourishes, it's easy to understand why the car made such a splash at its launch. Heading down the same stretch of tarmac having just stepped out of the 306 Rallye, however, first impressions are a little disconcerting. Its steering around the straight-ahead seems almost impossibly light and bereft of feel, almost 'loose'. The engine note is gruffer and harsher, too, and the gearchange grittier. Throttle response is comparably crisp, though, and the ride even better at smoothing away small surface imperfections.

The magic comes with speed and as the roads get twistier. All right, there's plenty of body roll – much more than with the 306 – and grip isn't so good that you can trust it with your life, especially in the wet conditions prevailing on the Triangle. But the steering comes alive and there's a delicious lack of inertia that endows the Williams with a sense of effortless immediacy beyond even the Peugeot. What transpires is a fully rounded chassis that gives the driver just about every option save full-blooded oversteer when pressing on. Not only does the Clio make gold wheels and decals look good, it delivers a steer that's utterly addictive. Brilliant as the 306 Rallye is, the Clio's wider repertoire and charisma win the day. Just.



PEUGEOT 306 RALLYE

Engine
Power
Torque
0-60mph
Top speed
Weight (kerb)
Power-to-weight
Price new
Value today
evo rating

In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc
167bhp @ 6500rpm
142lb ft @ 5500rpm
6.9sec (tested)
137mph (claimed)
1199kg
142bhp/ton
£16,190 (1998)
£1500-2000
★★★★★

RENAULT CLIO WILLIAMS

In-line 4-cyl, 1988cc
148bhp @ 6100rpm
126lb ft @ 4500rpm
7.6sec (tested)
121mph (claimed)
981kg
153bhp/ton
£13,275 (1993)
£2000-5000
★★★★★

Above: these '90s hatches offer a much softer ride than later equivalents, and they're none the worse for it. **Left:** gold 15in wheels are a Williams signature. **Far left:** Rallye's six-speed 'box is a joy, although short stick is a stretch





THE 2000s

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

PHOTOGRAPHY by
DEAN SMITH
& STUART COLLINS

The noughties saw a hot hatch renaissance with two Focus RSs, the best Golf GTI for years, and Renaultsport's sparkling Clio Trophy and Mégane R26

IT'S STRANGE, BUT ALL of my hot hatch memories seem to be bathed in sunshine: as a kid, the sun on my neck as I cupped my hand against the side window of the black 205 GTI 1.9 that lived in our village; squinting across at the crazy digital dash of my mum's Fiat Uno Turbo i.e., willing the boost gauge to light up on the school run... Later, many of the fondest and funniest moments of my road-testing career have been at the wheel of hot hatches. Like the time I watched an Elise S disappear off the road in my mirrors as it tried to match the turn-in speed of a Renaultsport Mégane at eCoty 2006 (a miraculous gap in the Armco meant a dusty but otherwise pristine Lotus). Blinding sunshine, that weird excitement you feel in your stomach, and laughs... that's what hot hatches mean to me.

Well, today it's not particularly sunny and it's freezing cold. But this is my era of hot hatches –

with all the engineering might Ford could throw at it. A team of 60 worked on the RS for two years and they deemed it necessary to upgrade 70 per cent of the Focus's basic components for the return of that iconic badge. So while it was never stage-proven, with Sachs dampers, Brembo brakes, a Garrett GT2560LS turbocharger, Quaife torque-sensing limited-slip differential, 25mm lower ride height and 65mm wider track, there was no doubting that the Focus RS meant business. The world really did hold its breath for this car.

In 2014 that fevered anticipation and the sense that Ford was really pushing the boundaries seems almost laughable. The RS might look hard-as-nails but its 2-litre turbocharged in-line four produces just 212bhp at 5500rpm and 229lb ft at 3500rpm. In the first two gears, torque is limited to 177lb ft. Limited. On the other hand, that power was dragging a trim 1278kg and the Focus RS always punched harder than the raw numbers promised. When we extracted 0-60 and

'THESE NOUGHTIES HATCHES ARE USEABLE, FAST, THRILLING AND – MY FAVOURITE BIT – AFFORDABLE'

the noughties. The era of Clio 172s and 182s, of VW rediscovering the GTI's mojo, and the wild Focus RS brothers. While I'd still love a 205 GTI or Renault 5 GT Turbo, they're almost vintage cars these days. They're fragile and parts are scarce, which means they're cars to be cherished and enjoyed sparingly. By contrast, these noughties hatches – Focuses, Clio Trophy, Mégane 230 F1 Team R26 (yep, they really called it that) and Golf GTI Mk5 – are accessible, useable, fast, thrilling and, my favourite bit, affordable. They're more relevant now than ever. Or at least I hope they are. There's something rose-tinted about these cars as they wait together for another judgement day, but I'm hoping that's just my Prada eyewear – it keeps my colleagues amused – and not the deceptive glow of nostalgia.

We start in 2002, with one of the most controversial and baffling hot hatches of any era, the original Focus RS. Controversial because it divided the media straight down the middle and baffling because every one that I've driven has felt different – sometimes wildly so. But doesn't it look special? The way the simple, 18in alloys fill the flared wheelarches, the rake of the ride height, the wide lower intake... it's aggressive, functional and has a real aura of motorsport about it.

Of course the RS didn't really have much to do with motorsport at all. This was no WRC car for the road, but instead the hot hatch re-imaged

0-100 times of 5.9 and 14.9sec respectively, the RS proved to be fastest front-driver we'd tested by some margin. Job done.

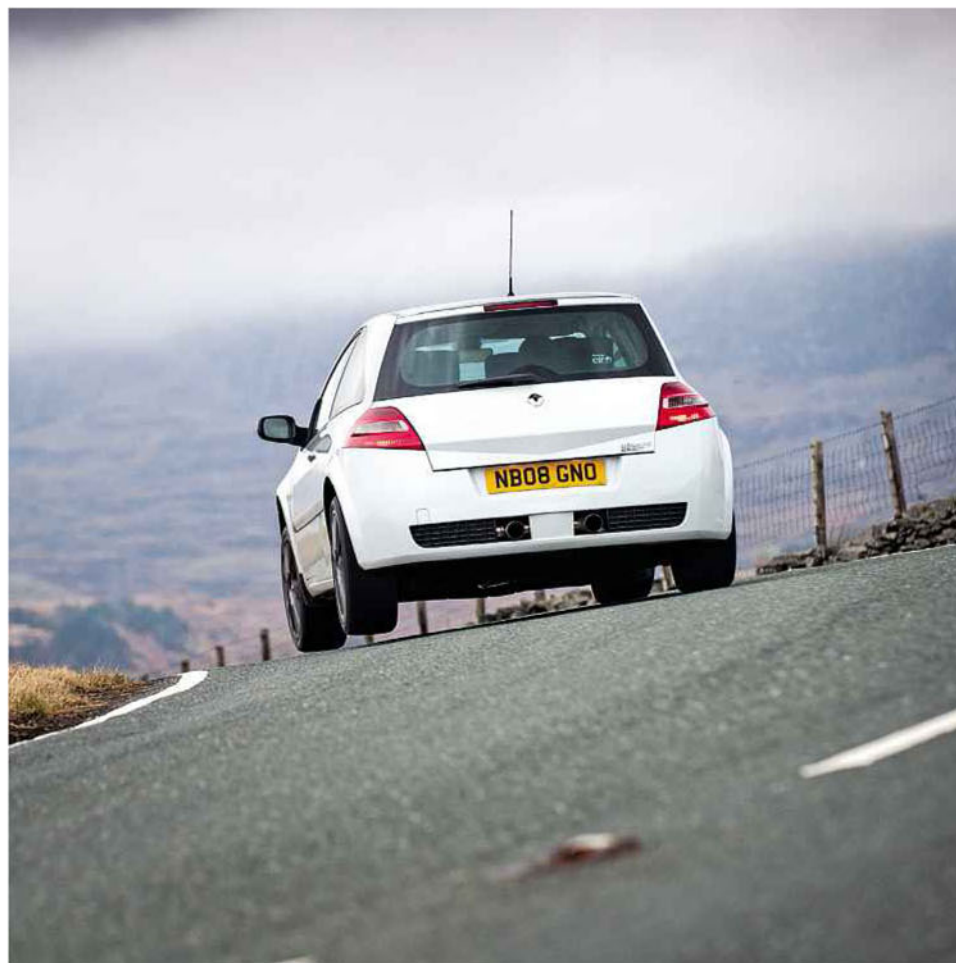
Only it wasn't, because the stiff, torque-steering RS didn't really stack up against your average British B-road – surely the spiritual home of the hot hatch breed. Driving the RS hard could feel like a hopeless fight at times. We concluded with this: 'It's such a shame that the RS can't take the fight to the Japanese rally replicas on the roads they've made their own.' But the story took more twists and turns as customer cars we tried didn't suffer from angry torque-steer and were so much more enjoyable. Which RS will turn up today?

So the exterior looks good enough to eat, but the interior could have been vomited out by a teenager who's been at the WKD Blue. The blue-faced instruments are fine but the garish steering wheel trim and striped Sparco seats look pretty nasty. Fortunately they feel much better than they look, and when you press the green starter button on the transmission tunnel, the RS is shaping up to be something pretty special. The five-speed gearbox has a slightly loose and rubbery shift, but just a few yards reveal the quality of the damping, while the turbo chuffs and whistles as a reminder that it's ready to get to work.

The innate rightness of so much of what the RS does is evident from the way my pace ramps up and up so quickly. The suspension feels superbly







with a gentle meandering in, say, third gear as you chomp from 4000 to 5000rpm. At times, though, it's more vicious than that. For example, if you're shifting from the rev limit in second and into third and the surface is a bit ragged, the car rips hard left or right under the shock of it all. In streaming wet conditions or on narrow, bumpy roads it seems that the RS can still bite and still frustrate. I love its precision and the determined grip is impressive, but there's a stodginess to the steering and somehow the chassis doesn't feel finessed or interactive.

Stodginess. Not a word ever used to describe a Clio Trophy. In fact after being impressed but never truly excited by the Focus RS, the Trophy is something approaching revelatory. It positively bursts with energy. It's so light and agile, so alert to steering, throttle and braking inputs that it's like the whole world has come to life and is rushing up to embrace you. The road surface streams through everything you touch and operate and you need every bit of information you can absorb to truly exploit the Trophy. There's huge grip to lean on, but the front-end bite can also be used to agitate the chassis and then it really comes alive – shifting its balance millisecond-by-millisecond, metre-by-metre. It three-wheels around corners, scrabbles for traction, jinks and weaves under braking, and zings and vibrates as the limiter approaches. Within a minute of driving the Trophy you'll be grinning and within five you'll feel punch-drunk by the sheer crazed focus of it. The Trophy's intensity is something else.

Following a long line of terrific 172 and 182 Cups, we always knew that the Trophy was likely to be one of those landmark hot hatches. It arrived in 2005 and although the 2-litre engine was unchanged with 180bhp at 6500rpm and 147lb ft at 5250rpm, Renaultsport didn't skimp on the chassis upgrades. In fact with remote-reservoir Sachs dampers featuring hydraulic bumpstops, no expense was spared – indeed, Renaultsport claimed the trick dampers were ten times more expensive than the units they replaced. Lighter Speedline alloys saved 1.3kg per corner, the xenons were ditched to save a little more weight and the Trophy gained the rear roof spoiler from the Clio V6 and a gorgeous set of Recaros mounted 10mm lower than standard to improve the driving position. All up, the Trophy weighed 1090kg.

It still feels like you sit too high and the steering wheel is canted back almost like an old van's. The pedals are tiny and a bit flimsy; the plastics are functional but VW wouldn't even line a door bin in this stuff. When the four-cylinder engine catches, it buzzes keenly, while the chunky gearshifter vibrates in sympathy. It's like the whole car is alive to the touch, and that's exactly how it feels when you start



Top: Mégane shows it's not just the Clio that can cock a wheel (or two). **Above:** after two generations of so-so GTIs, the mk5 was bang on the money. **Opposite page:** 2009 Focus RS chases the 2002 original

controlled, firm even by today's standards, without descending into that brittle, sharp-edged feel you get with poorly resolved set-ups. That control is mirrored by accurate if slightly gloopy steering and the RS's keenness to scribe a clean line around any given corner, even as you start to lean on the outside front tyre. Riding on new Michelin Pilot Sport 3s, it really does grip and it takes crazy commitment to push the front wide other than with a clumsy bootful of mid-corner acceleration. Any thoughts of deft trail-braking to set the tail in motion are soon quashed, though. On the road at least, it's not a car that feels indulgent or greatly adjustable.

Small details frustrate, like the terrible pedal placement that means the accelerator is way too high when you're into the brake travel. However, the quality of the body control and the superb brakes make up for that. They're full of detail and have an almost race car-like firmness. Even the power delivery feels strong. There's plenty of lag and things only really get moving at 3500rpm or so, but from there to 6500rpm it feels fitter than 212bhp, although it lacks the top-end ferocity of modern hatches.

And what of the fabled torque-steer? Well, it's there all right. Mostly it makes itself known



'THE SECOND-GEN FOCUS RS TOOK THE HOT HATCH POWER WAR TO UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS'

to drive. Every time you squeeze the throttle the Trophy bursts forwards and the engine's serrated note saws its way into the cabin; the brakes are terrifically powerful and set the rear of the car weaving and jinking when you really work them hard; the front end is minutely responsive, and the lack of mass is writ large every time you steer, accelerate or brake. It's a liberating feeling and the Trophy melds this sense of abandon with real control in a way that's just joyous to behold.

So you go faster and faster. You sense the inside rear wheel getting air-time and feel a cushioned bump as it lands again. Understeer just isn't an issue, so the Trophy encourages you to turn that bit harder and brake that bit later. Before long you're almost throwing the Clio into corners, astounded that it still digs in. The five-speed 'box isn't snickety-precise but it allows fast, forceful shifts and the engine spins quickly, so rev-perfect downshifts are easy to achieve. So you go faster again. And the Trophy gets better still. It feels like a car that's benefited from evolution after evolution, like a car honed and tweaked and set up by real enthusiasts. It is, simply, magical.

I feel guilty, like I should have left the Trophy

until last. How can the Golf, Mégane or second-gen RS – all bigger, heavier – possibly compete?

The VW, launched in late '04, simply doesn't bother. That's not to say it isn't a superb car, it's just a very different sort of hot hatch. Where the Trophy is scalpel-sharp and frenetic, the GTI is smooth, quiet, supple and classy. It also feels huge after the Clio, though you sit really low and the seats are excellent. The engine is smooth and distant, almost anodyne after the Trophy or the whistling, chirruping Focus RS. Compared with the Clio and Focus, the damping is creamy and, although it exhibits more roll and pitch, the weight transfer is always controlled and actually comes to define the chassis balance. Only the slightly hollow feel of the six-speed manual gearbox disappoints. It actually works just fine but the polish present everywhere else doesn't shine so brightly here.

The 2-litre engine might only have 197bhp, but with 207lb ft from 1800 to 5100rpm the Golf feels genuinely fast, and because the wheel control is so assured there's no need to back off for nasty-looking bumps or cambers. It just flows. Of course it doesn't offer those moments of terror/excitement that the Trophy seems to serve up every few seconds, but the

GTI is hugely satisfying. The smooth (that word again) steering is the key, for it connects you with sweet precision to the front wheels and reassures you when the outside-front digs in and the inside rear hoicks up into the air. Through quicker turns the rear axle sometimes even swings just a few degrees wide, giving a deliciously malleable feel to the balance. In fact the way it gently breaches and then recovers the limit of grip is very addictive indeed.

In contrast to the suave but satisfying Golf, the second-generation Focus RS and Mégane R26 attempt to bring the agility and intensity of something like the Trophy to a bigger, faster, turbocharged package. The RS is a mighty machine, its 2.5-litre turbo five hammering out 300bhp at 6500rpm and 324lb ft from 2300 to 4500rpm. When it arrived in 2009 it took the hot hatch power war to unprecedented levels. It also adopted 'RevoKnuckle' front struts to help mitigate against the torque steer its predecessor had suffered. The system essentially adds a C-shaped lower mount that connects to both the hub and the suspension, significantly reducing the king-pin offset and providing a much more consistent platform under duress.

After the Golf – a car launched five years



before the RS, remember – the interior quality is shocking. Hard, shiny black and grey plastics butt-up uncomfortably with carbonfibre-effect trim and a slimy ‘aluminium’ centre console. Thankfully the thick, slightly squishy-rimmed steering wheel feels terrific, and when the brawny five-cylinder engine booms into life, its deep, rich tone fills the cheap cabin with expensive noises. Like the Trophy, the RS has terrific Recaros that are set just a centimetre or two too high... but that’s where the similarities begin and end. Where the Trophy is all lightness and fine adjustability, the RS feels much heftier (as well it might at 1467kg) and likes to do everything big. Really big.

The weightiness and speed of the steering, the short, sharp feel to the damping and the sheer stonk of the five-cylinder engine hit you first. The RS feels like a big car but it’s also super-sharp on turn-in and only a tiny lift of the throttle mid-corner sets the tail wagging with alarming speed. Yikes. Forget precisely measuring slip angles and deftly riding the limit... the RS is either gripping hard or oversteering a lot. The RevoKnuckle system clearly works though, because traction is

excellent and although there is some torque-steer it’s not savage or unpredictable. That’s one less thing to worry about, then.

After the calmness of the Golf, the eye-popping grip, punchy power delivery and that uncompromising balance ensure the RS feels pretty damn exciting. Sure, the steering lacks detail and the body control sometimes feels clumsy, the big engine heaving slightly over crests and the rear axle’s slides ending with an unseemly bobble as nearly 1500kg gets back on the straight and narrow, but there’s no question that the RS feels unique and seriously hardcore. On a quick test drive you’d probably just fall in love with the warbly, barrel-chested delivery and the keenness to change direction. If you found a particularly friendly salesman you might even start to enjoy the RS’s tail-sliding party tricks. It’s quite a package. Just don’t jump straight into an R26 afterwards. You don’t want to upset that nice salesman now, do you?

You see, the R26 actually had its own version of ‘RevoKnuckle’ before the Ford came along. It’s also a much lighter car at 1345kg, has its own helical limited-slip diff and, compared with the RS, offers more precision, greater

agility, improved body control and even spookier mid-corner traction. This particular R26, owned by **evo** reader Andy Bond, has been treated to a new exhaust, intake and remap to liberate around 275bhp (up from 227) but still the chassis exhibits greater depth of ability and polish than the Ford’s. It really is a stunningly effective and exciting car to drive hard.

It’s not without flaws. Where the RS’s steering can feel viscous, the Mégane’s is arguably overly light. I like the sense of agility that brings, but it lacks some detail and puts a small barrier between the road and your hands. There’s also some kickback over rough surfaces. The shifter for the six-speed manual is mounted nice and high but the action has a stringy quality to it, though it’s preferable to the RS’s heavier, slightly indistinct shift. It’s when you really get going that the R26 elevates itself above the Focus. There’s more grip, the centre of gravity feels much lower with benefits to the body control, which benefits traction as the inside front wheel doesn’t unload, which increases exit speed, and all of that snowballs until you’re driving with more commitment and greater economy of effort.

Below: OZ Racing, Brembo and, of course, RS itself – the original hot Focus had all the right labels. **Right:** driver braces for torque steer



FORD FOCUS RS (MK1)

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
Power	212bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque	229lb ft @ 3500rpm
0-60mph	5.9sec (tested)
Top speed	144mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1278kg
Power-to-weight	169bhp/ton
Price new	£19,995 (2002)
Value today	£6000-11,000
evo rating	★★★★☆

FORD FOCUS RS (MK2)

Engine	In-line 5-cyl, 2522cc, turbo
Power	300bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque	324lb ft @ 2300-4500rpm
0-60mph	5.9sec (tested)
Top speed	163mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1467kg
Power-to-weight	208bhp/ton
Price new	£26,995 (2009)
Value today	£16,000-25,000
evo rating	★★★★★

RENAULTSPORT CLIO TROPHY

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc
Power	180bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque	148lb ft @ 5250rpm
0-60mph	6.6sec (tested)
Top speed	140mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1090kg
Power-to-weight	168bhp/ton
Price new	£15,500 (2005)
Value today	£5000-7000
evo rating	★★★★★

RENAULTSPORT MÉGANE 230 R26

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
Power	227bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque	229lb ft @ 3000rpm
0-60mph	6.2sec (tested)
Top speed	144mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1345kg
Power-to-weight	171bhp/ton
Price new	£19,570 (2007)
Value today	£5000-9000
evo rating	★★★★★

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI (MK5)

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo
Power	197bhp @ 5100rpm
Torque	207lb ft @ 1800-5100rpm
0-60mph	6.7sec (tested)
Top speed	145mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1336kg
Power-to-weight	150bhp/ton
Price new	£19,995 (2004)
Value today	£5000-9000
evo rating	★★★★★

That economy is what defines the R26. It has a minutely adjustable balance but it's not a wild oversteerer – instead its cornering line is maintained by an ebb and flow of grip, by little shifts in balance directed by the throttle. And boy does it grip. You really have to push like mad to find any understeer and then – and this feels truly freaky – you can pin the throttle to eradicate that push and tighten your cornering line thanks to that diff. Effectively you feel like you've found the limits of the R26, only to discover it can stretch them still further as you adjust your technique. It's mind-bending stuff.

The R26 soaks up 275bhp with relative ease and the pops and crackles on the overrun add to the drama. However, it's the chassis control that really makes it special and that would be the same running the standard 227bhp. One thing's for sure, the Mégane makes the Focuses feel rather flat and the Golf, brilliant though it is, slightly too sensible. Trophy or R26? The Clio gets the nod for its lightness, its tiny footprint and that raucous naturally aspirated engine but, whichever way you cut it, the noughties belong to Renaultsport... Can it get any better than this? ☒







2010– 2013

by DAN PROSSER

PHOTOGRAPHY by
STUART COLLINS

The early years of this decade have brought us some of the best small hot hatches to date. We revisit the Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup, Suzuki Swift Sport and Ford Fiesta ST Mountune



OUT ON THIS wonderful road and on paper too, the little Suzuki Swift Sport is outgunned in this company. The B4391 that runs between Bala and Ffestiniog could have been sketched by Hermann Tilke's delinquent brother – the first five miles from the Bala side really do have the feel of a Grand Prix circuit that has been stretched out and discarded over the terrain – and no matter how defiantly a driver keeps their foot pinned on the throttle through the well-sighted sweepers, the Swift just falls away. Around every corner the grippier Clio edges a little further into the distance, and with each new gear the turbocharged Fiesta pulls out a length or two.

The bare numbers suggested as much. The Swift's normally aspirated 1.6-litre engine delivers a modest 134bhp; rather less than the 197bhp of the Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup or the 212bhp of the Ford Fiesta ST Mountune. It is a fact that the Swift is slower, but to dismiss it as a result would be myopic in the extreme.

But let's rewind a little. The current decade has a real significance in the context of the small hot hatch and this colourful trio expresses that quite neatly. Between them they remind us how the small hot hatch genre reached this point, and they show us which direction such cars will head in the future. Drive these three little chargers back-to-back across these beautiful, barren moors and you travel not only at an alarming pace along some of the most rewarding roads in the country, you also travel right along the small hot hatch evolutionary timeline.

The Swift is so true to the spirit of those very first hot hatches of the 1980s that it seems directly descended from them; more so, in fact, than its rivals here. It does without any form of forced induction for one thing, but for another the styling and engineering upgrades over and above the standard car are actually quite modest. However, it's the type of driving experience that those few revisions help deliver that most clearly draws a line between the Swift and an early Golf GTI or an AX GT.

So I'm driving in convoy, chasing a long line of much faster cars in this demonstrably slower one. The road is mostly dry by late morning, but this particular stretch is barely wider than single-track. The surface is shocking, too; not only with cracks and scars, but with bigger yumps and crests. Bright red brake lights first flash on at the head of the queue, then leap

back one car at a time as each driver hurriedly sheds a little speed to negotiate a turn or a nasty bump. The challenge in the Swift, though, is to only lift off when the drivers of the bigger cars brake, and to stay flat when they lift off, making the most of the compliance advantage over the heavier, firmer cars ahead. True to those early hot hatches, accessing the Swift's performance is an exercise in momentum and carrying speed. Braking is too much of a penalty, for there just isn't the power to quickly rebuild the speed after corner exit.

This sod of a road eventually reaches a junction and the leading cars turn onto a wider, flatter stretch. Their power begins to count for more and they start to pull away. With each brow crested and each corner navigated, the cars ahead become smaller and smaller.

No amount of commitment can reel them back in, but to at least keep them on this side of the horizon the Swift needs to be kept on the boil. The steering initially feels a little remote, a touch too light for confidence, but with the chassis loaded right up it improves. The set-up is quite soft; there's more pliancy than body control, so the Swift rolls and dives. That compliance – achieved through the soft set-up rather than any particular damping quality – enables the Swift to breathe over the surface rather than skip and hop over it, but in consequence there isn't the same precision as in the Clio or Fiesta. The throw of the gearlever is short and direct, while the ratios themselves are tightly stacked to keep the engine on top of its power curve.

The Swift is a hot hatch from the '80s, modernised, and when its driver can keep that throttle pedal pinned and resist the fatal confidence brake, it is a huge amount of fun. Its significance in the context of this test, though, is its normally aspirated engine. When all other small hot hatches have since gone turbo, the Swift stubbornly adheres to that original formula with a buzzy little power unit like the last advocate of a discredited practice.

If the Swift is where small hot hatches have been, the Clio is where they arrived this decade. It immediately feels like a more serious proposition than the Suzuki: its (optional) seats are heavily bolstered and wear the logos of Recaro, the ride feels tough and unforgiving, the steering has more weight and the Brembo brakes seem to have more bite. The drivetrain, too, feels as though it was conceived specifically for a performance car and the gearshift action is probably the most satisfying of any car of this type.



Above: softly sprung Swift rolls noticeably through the corners – unlike the hard-riding Cup-spec Clio. **Below:** 179bhp Fiesta ST is tuned to 212bhp by Mountune





‘IF THE SWIFT IS
WHERE SMALL
HOT HATCHES
HAVE BEEN, THE
CLIO IS WHERE
THEY ARRIVED
THIS DECADE’



Step directly from the Suzuki into the Renault and the blue car's shortfalls are immediately lit bright in the mind's eye. While the Swift eventually capitulates to this faster stretch of road and its relentless twists and turns through a fundamental lack of body control, the tough Clio remains resolute even at full attack. That stiff ride isn't a concern on this smooth road; it gives the car incredible precision and a rock-solid control of its mass, a composure and a security that the Suzuki can't hope to match.

The approach should be the same as it is in the Swift: keep off the brakes where possible, but stand on them late and hard where necessary, turning in towards the apex before lifting off. The Clio hardly seems to roll after turn-in, but instead it just rotates a little about its centre point and grips equally hard at both axles. The steering is direct and with the chassis loaded it's communicative too, but the limit of adhesion is so high that it takes a while to build up to it, talkative rack or no talkative rack. The brake pedal, meanwhile, sends a distinctive judder through the driver's foot just before the point of lock-up.

Where the Swift's engine begins to give up, the Clio's really starts to let rip. It's the speed that the green car carries, though, that really stands out. Get a Clio Cup onto its toes and you begin to believe that not a single car throughout this hot hatch celebration could cross the ground quicker, so raw and involving is the experience. That's nonsense, of course, but the impression is genuine and deeply satisfying.

This Clio, it seems clear, will forever be remembered for lifting the junior hot hatch class to a whole new level. Never before – perhaps with the exception of the earlier Clio Trophy – has a hatchback shaken off its humble origins quite so completely. It's a trick that the Fiesta ST simply had to emulate. Drive a Mountune version over the B4391 and you'd scarcely believe that it shares anything whatsoever with a modest shopping hatch. The cabin, for one thing, feels tuned to its tiniest detail for flat-out driving: the wheel comes close to your chest and the seats wrap themselves right around your kidneys.

That brawny turbocharged engine pulls harder than the normally aspirated units in the Swift and the Clio, but there's still a satisfying top end. The gearshift action is slick, too, but it's the Fiesta's fluidity down this road that really resonates. Like the Clio it rotates a little on turn-in – not into real oversteer, just a slight adjustment of attitude – but where the Clio stays flat, the Fiesta rolls slightly. That small amount of lean gives a clear impression of the grip levels across the outer edge of the car, and combined with the rotation it just makes the Fiesta flow down the road beautifully. It feels

FORD FIESTA ST MOUNTUNE

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1596cc, turbo
Power	212bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	236lb ft @ 2750-3500rpm
0-62mph	6.6sec (claimed)
Top speed	140mph (estimated)
Weight (kerb)	1088kg
Power-to-weight	198bhp/ton
Price new	£17,594
Value today	n/a (on sale now)
evo rating	★★★★★

RENAULTSPORT CLIO 200 CUP

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc
Power	197bhp @ 7100rpm
Torque	159lb ft @ 5400rpm
0-62mph	7.3sec (tested, 0-60)
Top speed	141mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1204kg
Power-to-weight	166bhp/ton
Price new	£16,175 (2009)
Value today	£6000-12,000
evo rating	★★★★★

SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1586cc
Power	134bhp @ 6900rpm
Torque	118lb ft @ 4400rpm
0-62mph	8.7sec (claimed)
Top speed	121mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1045kg
Power-to-weight	130bhp/ton
Price new	£13,999
Value today	n/a (on sale now)
evo rating	★★★★★



‘THE FIESTA FLOWS BEAUTIFULLY. IT FEELS ALMOST AS THOUGH YOU’RE DRIVING ON GRAVEL AND IT’S UTTERLY ADDICTIVE’

almost as though you're driving on gravel and it's utterly addictive.

The Ford matches the Renault for outright fun (although the French car is more frenzied in its delivery of those thrills) but the Fiesta also covers ground just a little more quickly and, with a more complaint ride and a less frantic drivetrain, it's significantly more appealing as a daily prospect. It therefore sets out the blueprint for the small hot hatch of the future: turbocharged, engaging, fast enough down a

road to trouble a dedicated sports car, but also useable as an everyday machine.

This decade has perhaps been the most significant for the small hot hatch since the genre's inception. During the past few years the archetypal junior hot hatch has discarded its unassuming roots like never before, it has become turbocharged as a general rule, and in the Clio Cup and Fiesta ST Mountune has delivered two of the very best affordable performance cars of all time. ☒



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

by RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH



WHAT MAKES A GREAT hot hatch? Drive the AX GT or 205 GTI and you'd say it's all about lightness and minimal inertia. Drive the R5 GT Turbo and you'd add control

weights, turbo boost and supple damping to the mix. Then you drive the Mk2 Golf GTI 16v and understand how sophistication and maturity can also enhance the experience. They might be simple, unassuming, practical machines, but hot hatches are more complex, contradictory characters than you might think.

In the '90s, many of these qualities were distilled into the Clio Williams and 306 Rallye. Both tingle vitality and urgency yet they are palpably grippier, more exploitable and more complete than their predecessors. They are also faster, but sacrifice little or nothing in the way of feel and both will bite if you take liberties. For many of us this pair represents the zenith of the hot hatch: old enough to feel a world away from today's guided missiles, but modern enough not to have to make too many allowances.

By the noughties, power, performance, size and weight have all climbed, yet the hatches that shine brightest do so by striking the sweetest and most harmonious balance between the key ingredients. Rapid developments in brake, tyre, suspension and traction control technology allowed much greater quantities of power and torque to be fed through the front wheels, a fact illustrated by the leap from the Mk1 Focus RS's 212bhp and 229lb ft to the Mk2's 300bhp and 324lb ft. Both are tremendously exciting, but

they also have a thuggish feel compared with the finely balanced Clio Trophy and similarly sparkling Mégane R26: two cars that showcase Renault's mastery of the hot hatch art.

Throughout this 40-year evolution, the Golf GTI has remained true to itself, growing and maturing, yet resisting the temptation to deviate from the inspirational blueprint. While Renault, Peugeot and Ford have scrapped over who could be the fastest, most powerful and most extreme, VW has played it cool, maintaining a watching brief like the grown-up in the room. No surprise, then, that the GTI has annexed its own sector of the hot hatch market.

If driving these icons has taught us anything, it's that there's no fixed formula that guarantees greatness. Step from the Clio Trophy into the Golf and you'll rarely encounter a more vivid contrast in two essentially similar cars, yet both are brilliant. Try to get your head around why this is and there's a danger of over-thinking things. Judging by the three-day perma-smiles stretched across our faces, the most important thing we've learned – or rather been reminded of – is that when it comes to inspirational driving of the highest quality, a great hot hatch is more than a match for any other car at any price. Indeed there are times when they perfectly define everything there is to love about driving.

As we prepare to drive our penultimate group, all thoughts will centre on steering feel, performance and handling, yet the most accurate barometer is the driver's face. When it comes to the very best hot hatches, if you're grinning, you're winning.





HATCH

by RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY by STUART COLLINS & DEAN SMITH



OF TODAY

Four decades on from the invention of the class, the hot hatch competition is as strong now as it's ever been. We pit six current cars against each other to decide which one is top of the pile right now



Y

YOU KNOW THE DRILL

by now, right? We pull together a handful of hot hatch heavy hitters, furnish you with their vital stats, build in some carefully crafted jeopardy and throw them at some corners. Then Jethro rocks up in the Mégane 265 Cup and it's game over. See you later, losers. Don't let the door hit you on the backside on the way out.

Believe it or not, we get tired of that scenario too. It's hardly Renault's fault that it has built one of the most exciting, most together, most on-the-money hot hatches of this or any other generation, but the fact remains that no one likes foregone conclusions, especially when they come after three days freezing your ball joints off in the foothills of Snowdonia. So thank the Lord for whoever it was that spiked the water coolers at VW Group's Wolfsburg HQ. Whatever the secret substance was has not only resulted in a truly reinvigorated Golf GTI and a compelling new Golf R, but a SEAT Leon that has apparently come from nowhere to steal the Nürburgring front-wheel-drive production car record with a gobsmacking 7:58.4 lap. Even to someone who has come to regard the endless pursuit of Ring records as one of the car industry's more meaningless and self-serving obsessions, that rather grabbed my attention.

So the seemingly impregnable Mégane appears to have a fight on its hands from the new front-drive Ringmeister and the ferocious all-wheel-drive Golf R (yes, we're going to relax our FWD-only rule for this test). But if you've got £30k or so to spend there are a couple of other protagonists to throw into the mix, in the somewhat lumpen shape of BMW's M135i and Vauxhall's pugilistic Astra VXR. Together they make for a disparate quintet that showcases front, rear and all-wheel drive, a choice of manual, DSG and torque-converter transmissions, four- and six-cylinder turbo engines and a breadth of characters and abilities that range from track-focused headbanger to all-weather weapon. Keeping a watching brief, meanwhile, is the classy, unassuming Golf GTI, fulfilling the role of exemplary all-rounder.

It feels appropriate to begin this test as we began the feature, with a benchmarking drive in the GTI. It might seem downplayed and understated in the face of more powerful,



'THANK THE LORD FOR WHOEVER IT WAS THAT SPIKED THE WATER COOLERS AT VW GROUP HQ'

aggressive opposition (in-house or otherwise), but when you're navigating your way through any gathering of top-end hot hatches it always pays to use the GTI as your objective and subjective compass. The Mk7 doesn't disappoint, for within just a few miles you have a growing and emphatic sense that it could just strike the perfect balance of performance, prestige and practicality.

Somewhat unfashionably, our Fast Fleet GTI is fitted with a six-speed manual transmission. As the majority of GTIs leave the factory with DSG this makes it something of a rarity, but this preference for a stick over paddles doesn't detract from it being an absolutely cracking car. It's an affliction of the modern age that you normally spend hours, maybe days, trying to find the sweet spot amongst numerous steering, damping, throttle and transmission modes. Sometimes it's a fruitless search, but in the GTI you just jump in and drive. Everything feels slick and intuitive, with consistent response and weighting that frees you to concentrate on enjoying the performance.

It's a supple, fluid, unflappable machine to drive up to and beyond sane speeds. There's a generous spread of power and torque, yet the engine wants to rev. It's not a screamer, but gone are the days of VW Group engines giving you a big slug of torque in the first few millimetres

of throttle travel, only for the sensation to fizzle out as the engine plateaus. You won't be popping this 2-litre 227bhp motor (upgraded by the Performance Pack option) off its limiter, but it has some welcome sparkle.

Traction is strong thanks to a mechanical limited-slip differential (part of the PP), wheel travel is generous and the brakes are smooth and powerful. It's an effortless car in which to make spirited, but not brain-out progress. Only when you up your tempo and push beyond eight-tenths in search of the chassis' limits do you begin to feel the GTI lose its composure. It doesn't give up on you, but as you ramp up the pressure it begins to buckle under the interrogation of awkward mid-corner bumps and ruthless compressions. Persist and the poise and unity between front and rear is shaken, the front end finally crying enough, but only at speeds and a level of commitment that would take a sustained effort to reach.

It makes most sense to step from one Golf to the other. You do so wondering how much better the Golf R can be. The answer is quite a lot. Not as an all-round car – the GTI already has that nailed – but it's on another level in terms of acceleration, corner speed, stability and, crucially, excitement. In many respects it's reminiscent of old Impreza STIs and Mitsubishi Evos: you see the road tumble across the scenery





Above: Golf R uses the latest Haldex 4WD to help gets its power down on the road. **Below:** M135i test car is fitted with eight-speed paddle-shift automatic. **Right:** Mégane is stiff but offers plenty of feel



ahead and you just want to attack it, carry speed and feel the car working beneath you.

You throw it at corners, cambers and crests just to try and challenge it because it can soak up so much punishment. More often than not it leaves you slightly incredulous, in a manner not dissimilar to the emotions conjured by a Nissan GT-R; not in terms of outright brutality but absolutely in terms of how it manages to deploy more performance than you think possible, and the way it makes your heart pump with the excitement of carrying such speed on roads that regularly tie good cars in knots. What's just as impressive is how it remains true to the GTI's time-honoured credo, possessing decent ride quality, great refinement and comfort levels, and true family car practicality.

The engine, good for 297bhp and 280lb ft, has more fire and revs considerably harder. It also sounds ballsier, though much of this is down to a synthesised soundtrack that's triggered when you engage Sport mode. At first I really wasn't sure whether I liked it or not, mainly because to my ears it sounds more like a Subaru flat-four. With time you tend not to be so conscious of the less-than-authentic off-beat note, but I fear it will put some of you off.

Like the GTI, this example also has a manual transmission, which is useful as DSG does make you drive in a very different manner. You sacrifice 0.2sec in the dash to 62mph, but at just 5.1sec the manual R is hardly shabby. It's also lighter than the DSG-equipped car at 1476kg, which commendably is also 45kg less than the previous Golf R. Using the latest generation of Haldex all-wheel drive, the R shrugs off its power and torque increase, putting every last bhp and lb ft into the tarmac with ease.

It has that familiar GTI fluidity, but there's a palpable feeling of tighter body control and more incisive turn-in. In bald terms you turn the wheel and the R grips and goes. But there's more to it than that, the most welcome difference being greater throttle adjustability and a more intimate connection between you and the chassis. You know exactly how hard all four tyres are working, and depending on how you set the R up for the corner you can lean hard on the front end for added bite in tighter turns, pitch it in for some fun through medium-speed corners or keep things ultra-neat through fast sweeps. It's a cerebral process, but one spiced with perspiration and adrenalin. From take-off to landing, the Golf R is quick with a capital F.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN SEAT WAS A force to be reckoned with, but since the success of the Ibiza Cupra R of the early 2000s and the Leon Cupra R that followed it, the Spanish brand hasn't given us much to get excited about. Until now. Whoever decided the new

Leon Cupra 280 should attempt the Ring record is a smart cookie, for although mastering the Eifel tarmac is no guarantee of a great road car, it means you fancy your chances against Renaultsport's sublime Mégane 265 Cup. If you want to get yourself noticed by the hot hatch fraternity, that's impeccable company to keep. Especially when you beat it.

There's not been any reference to styling in this test so far, because on the whole we're dealing with familiar shapes. The Leon is a fresh face, and a striking one at that, but once you get beyond the sharp frown of its distinctive DRLs (and the rather dubious satin orange wrap inexplicably applied to this test car) it looks rather bulky. Though we're all excited at the prospect of driving it, none of us are especially keen on its looks, which could be an issue in what is an image-conscious sector.

Let's not get too distracted by the subjectives of styling, for when it comes to hardware the Leon Cupra 280 has no problem grabbing your attention. For starters it has the same engine that sits in the nose of the Golf R, albeit detuned to 276bhp in order to leave some headroom for the rumoured Cupra R and channelled through the front wheels only. Three-stage dampers (controlled by the fiddly infotainment system, like in the Golf R) give you a choice of stiffness, while a Haldex limited-slip differential called VAQ can put 100 per cent of the turbocharged in-line four's torque to one wheel if you lean on it hard enough. Our test car is fitted with

**'THE MÉGANE
MAKES THE
MOST OF
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FINESSING
THE FEEL'**



a DSG transmission, which means it can hit 62mph from a standstill in just 5.7sec, making it the most accelerative SEAT ever. It's a serious driving tool, make no mistake.

Fire it down a quick stretch of road and, despite the power and torque deficit, it feels like it possibly has more top-end urge than the Golf R. You feel how hard the front tyres are having to work, but it's far from the squirmy wrist-wrencher you might expect. That diff works exceptionally well. Indeed, it takes some getting used to if you're to get the best from it, for it's only when you push beyond the limit of the front end but keep your right foot planted that you discover it manages to tighten its line, such is the effectiveness with which it can apportion torque and find the purchase to deploy it.

The manual 'boxes in the Golfs are very sweet shifters, but they don't allow you to commit so hard and so deep into corners. With both hands on the Leon's wheel you can carry tremendous pace and brake ridiculously late, initiating turn-in even while you're right on the limit of grip (or rather the supremely honed limits of the ABS and stability control). It really does beggar belief how you can ask the Cupra to multi-task while so finely balanced, but once you've experienced it you have absolute faith in its ability to maintain tip-toe composure.

So it challenges you to explore its limits, and has grip and corner speed to trample the GTI and worry the R, but it doesn't quite have the transparency and fluidity of the all-wheel-drive Golf. It's a very hard thing to explain – David Vivian comes closest when he says it's a bit 'gummy' in its responses – but the upshot is that it can't quite scribe as clean a line from turn-in through apex to exit, nor be placed with the same level of precision and consistency on and over the limit as the Golf R. It's not a fatal flaw by any means, but any weakness will be punished in company this talented.

Talking of which, it's time to drive the 265 Cup. The recent facelift has slightly altered the Renault's familiar face, like a bespectacled friend who's changed their glasses. It remains a good-looking car both outside and in, with business-like (optional) Recaro seats to hold you tight and a driving position that just feels right as soon as your bum hits the cushion. It's not as grown-up as the German cars, though, and the satnav screen looks like the afterthought it is.

The 265 benefits from a long, detailed evolution by engineers that were in their pomp when the car was conceived. That mojo seems to have been lost with the latest RS Clio, and it's a real joy to be reminded why Renault has ruled the hot hatch roost for much of this century. All the Mégane does is make the absolute most of what it has, sweating the details and finessing

the feel until steering, clutch, gearshift and brakes all share the same honed, intuitive, consistent precision you get from a thoroughly sorted, unflinchingly driver-focused car.

The steering weight and responsiveness is as sharp as a tack and there's lots of information coming at you through the wheel and the seat. There's a bit more grit to the process of driving it than the VW Group cars, its granular feel contrasting with the Golf R, which engages you with a more finely filtered dialogue. The Mégane's ride is stiff and the clutch and gearshift are a little more physical. There's more road noise and less refinement, but the sense of connection is absolute.

With the RS button pressed to access the full 261bhp, the Mégane's straight-line performance feels strong, but it doesn't build speed with the relentless insistence of the Golf R, or indeed the Leon Cupra. It doesn't have their stability either, though this impression comes from being more acutely aware of the car's balance shifting beneath you as you turn in. It's not twitchy to the point where you need fear what it will do, but in telling you everything, it does ask that you pause to listen. You don't have need for that hesitation in the R or Cupra. In some respects the Mégane is feeling its age, but much like the 997-generation 911 its dynamic qualities have made it an instant classic. We're unlikely to see its like again, which is all the more reason to celebrate its qualities while we still can.

IT ALWAYS SURPRISES ME THAT YOU

can have an M135i for broadly similar money to a top-spec Golf, but I guess that's the power of the BMW brand, the kudos of rear-wheel drive and the promise of a spine-tingling turbocharged 3-litre straight-six. In terms of raw specs appeal the Beemer has the others licked, but then you see it in the metal and feel a bit cheated. No, the 1-series is not a looker, but its peachy powertrain has a great personality, especially when you give it as grand a stage as Snowdonia on which to play.

With the most power (316bhp), the most torque (332lb ft), a competitive kerb weight (1445kg with five doors and the auto 'box) and the purity of rear-wheel drive, it's a pretty compelling recipe. When you first get to wind it through the revs it is totally seductive, thanks to a searing, silky-smooth soundtrack. It feels and sounds expensive and exotic in a way no synthesised engine note can ever replicate, and it goes like stink. Pity, then, that the bits which connect you to the action – the steering and suspension – are as jagged and inconsistent as the engine is captivating. There's no limited-slip diff either, which only serves to exacerbate the bouncy damping and jumpy steering.



Top: Leon Cupra gives the Golf GTI a run for its money. **Right:** Golf R's new pads got a little smoky after Jethro played at being Sébastien Ogier



‘FIRE THE LEON
DOWN A ROAD
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'THE FLAGSHIP GOLF MAKES SENSE OF THE R BRAND TO THE POINT WHERE WE SHOULD TAKE IT VERY SERIOUSLY'

It's far harder than it should be to make measured direction changes. You don't pour the M135i into a corner as you do with the Golfs, nor do you punch it to the apex like in the Renault or SEAT. Instead you nudge it through with continual adjustments, your initial input invariably being too severe, which forces you to try and wind the lock off, then on, then off until you get the car settled. Coupled with its agitated ride and inconsistent traction you can work the BMW into a bit of a lather on more challenging roads. In the dry it's frustrating and in the wet it's downright nervous. All of this is a great shame, for the bits done well – drivetrain, straight-line performance, interior, build quality – are great, but try and drive it like the Renault or the VW Group cars and it's so out of sorts you might think it was BMW's first stab at making a rear-wheel-drive car.

So it's safe to say the M135i isn't the toughest act to follow, yet the Astra VXR is still hard to like. Admirably muscular on the outside, it's surprisingly comfortable and well equipped on the inside. But as soon as you start the engine and take hold of the steering wheel you know it's right down there with the BMW for feel and response. There's something deeply wrong about the on-centre feel, and though things improve once you've wound on a bit of lock into the corner, it never gives you any reassurance or sense of detailed connection with the front end.

In its most aggressive dynamic modes there's no doubting it has a solid slug of power (276bhp to be precise), but the engine is laggy and suffers from an uninspiring note. There's also a looseness to the gearshift that makes it feel more ponderous than it actually is, and though you do feel the mechanical limited-slip diff working, it doesn't respond as cleanly or incisively as that in the Leon Cupra. It's all a bit stodgy and disconnected, which proves a major barrier to your enjoyment because you begin to doubt it's ever going to reveal anything worth discovering. **evo** newbie Dan Prosser is left feeling distinctly underwhelmed on first acquaintance, but perseveres to discover: 'There are times when it's actually fun and fluid. The chassis seems to get more satisfying the harder you go, but you really have to give it a workout.' Old hand Vivian is less charitable, saying: 'It raises the bar for synthetic-feeling controls and boring engine notes to unprecedented heights. It's so outclassed by the Golfs and Cupra, it's laughable'. Ouch.

I think we're clear on the also-rans, but what of the others? SEAT has been in the hot hatch wilderness for too long prior to this test, but the Leon Cupra is a huge surprise and a great return to form. It does some things sensationally well, but its controls don't quite have the clarity or tactility to trump the exquisitely feelsome

Mégane or the Golfs. It's right up there, though, and the prospect of a Cupra R is one to strike fear in the heart of all SEAT's hot hatch rivals. It'd be a very tough call between it and the GTI, but we'd give the Leon the nod.

So that leaves the Golf R and the 265 Cup. Unlike its predecessors, the flagship Golf makes real sense of the R brand to the point where we should now take it very seriously. The killer blow is the car's ability to match or surpass the pace of its more extreme sporting rivals – most notably the Mégane – while managing to sidestep their attendant compromises. The Renault still trumps the Golf R for absolute tactility and unflappable, track-sharp damping, and though its compromises make a commendable statement about your commitment to ultimate driving dynamics, they also ensure the RS sits at the outer limits of what many consider a tolerable everyday car.

By contrast, the Golf R is a real have-cake-and-eat-it proposition: a thing of class and quality, but also a car that elevates the hot hatch to another level with its addictive combination of immense pace and a truly impressive and engaging driving experience. Few of us felt we knew what to expect from it, but the Golf R is the revelation, and the winner, of this test. It can't match the Renault for purity and engagement, but it moves the game on appreciably. ✕





BMW M135i

Engine In-line 6-cyl, 2979cc, turbo
Power 316bhp @ 5800-6000rpm
Torque 332lb ft @ 1300-4500rpm
0-62mph 4.9sec (claimed, auto)
Top speed 155mph (limited)
Weight (kerb) 1445kg
Power-to-weight 222bhp/ton
Basic price £30,835
evo rating ★★★★★

RENAULTSPORT MÉGANE 265 CUP

In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
261bhp @ 5500rpm
265lb ft @ 3000-5000rpm
6.0sec (claimed)
158mph (claimed)
1387kg
191bhp/ton
£25,990



SEAT LEON CUPRA 280

In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo
276bhp @ 6000rpm
258lb ft @ 1750-5300rpm
5.7sec (claimed, DSG)
155mph (limited)
1320kg
212bhp/ton
£26,940

★★★★★

VAUXHALL ASTRA VXR

In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
276bhp @ 5500rpm
295lb ft @ 2500-4500rpm
5.9sec (claimed 0-60)
155mph (limited)
1475kg
190bhp/ton
£27,260

★★★★★

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI PP (MK7)

In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo
227bhp @ 4700-6200rpm
258lb ft @ 1500-4600rpm
6.4sec (claimed)
155mph (limited)
1351kg
171bhp/ton
£27,120

★★★★★

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF R (MK7)

In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo
297bhp @ 5500-6200rpm
280lb ft @ 1800-5500rpm
5.1sec (claimed)
155mph (limited)
1476kg
204bhp/ton
£29,900



Opposite page: GTI only loses its poise when worked extremely hard.
Above: M135i is shaken by the newer talent in this test. **Left:** Astra's 20in wheels are biggest here; Mégane's Recaro seats and red Brembo calipers enhance hot hatch look



by HENRY CATCHPOLE

PHOTOGRAPHY by STUART COLLINS

But...



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SOME SCALLYWAG

once described the Ferrari FF as a hot hatch. However, just because a tomato's a fruit, we at **evo** wouldn't necessarily put one in a fruit salad.

So, how far should you stretch the definition of a hot hatch? Is a 205 T16 or a Clio V6 a hot hatch? Well, probably, yes. But as we only have four weeks to put this magazine together (and a finite number of pages) we decided to draw the line at the engine being moved. However, we will bend our 'must have four seats' rule briefly so we can include these three: the Honda Civic Type-R Mugen, the Renaultsport Mégane R26.R and the Mini John Cooper Works GP.

Dropping into the Mini's fairly standard-looking seats, there isn't initially much that yells extreme. But swivel in your seat and you'll see the stripping has been done behind you, with nothing but a red metal tube in the echoing cavern where the back seats were. It's the most obvious way of making a hot hatch hotter (the Mégane is the same, while rear seat deletion was an option with the Mugen) but it always makes me wonder whether there's untapped potential to be explored in the hot van market.

Anyway, even if you hadn't bothered to turn around, you would be in no doubt about the GP's extreme credentials after even the briefest of drives. The 1.6-litre engine is rabid and the claims of just 215bhp seem wildly modest as it hurtles along on turbocharged surges of barely contained fury. With suspension 20mm lower at the front and 15mm lower at the rear than a regular JCW, not to mention wider wheels wrapped in Kumho trackday rubber, the chassis also keeps you very busy down a B-road. Hunting over cambers and diving into corners like it's got the wheelbase of an original Mini, then oversteering if you've got the ESP loose enough, it has the wildest handling balance of these three and possibly of any hot hatch ever.

The mighty Mugen, with its slammed suspension, is almost as busy over bumps as the Mini. But it's the Civic's engine you'll be

revelling in. This 237bhp unit could come to be seen as a defiant last stand for a naturally aspirated motor in a hot hatch (FF aside), but it's a last stand of which Butch and Sundance would be proud. The change in character as you breach the i-VTEC barrier is instant and intoxicating, the sound switching from mundane to mad. From 5600rpm to the near-9000rpm limiter it has an incredible waspish zing, devouring revs like an extended, four-cylinder version of a 991 GT3 engine's crazy last 500rpm.

The trigger-light throttle response and the high, short throw of the gearshift both match the engine's super-sharp inertia-free character too, so you get addicted to keeping everything fizzing. Hold the gear, rush the change, brake, blip-shift back down... you have to wonder what the Mégane would be like with this engine.

That's because the R26.R has the least characterful powerplant of the trio and with just 227bhp, its straight-line pace isn't that extreme by current hot hatch standards. Yet it simply doesn't matter. The R shed a whopping 125kg compared to the standard R26 and details such as the plastic rear windows and the titanium exhaust are a weight-weenie's delight. You really can feel the lightness too, in the way the whole car responds to steering and braking

inputs. Renaultsport famously softened the dampers for the lighter R and it deals with bumps and yumps with composure that the smooth-surface-biased Mini and Civic simply can't begin to match.

Squeezed tight in the bucket by the Sabelt harness, you feel a part of the car and the steering always lets you know what's going on, whether it's picking up an inside-rear on the way into a corner or using the LSD to rip out the other side. The resulting confidence you get to wring every last drop of performance from the whole package (including yourself) and throw it down a road or track is one of the very best feelings you can have in any car.

This test cemented the R26.R's legendary status, but it also got me hoping that these won't be the last extreme hatches we see, because it really is a wonderful breed of car. There's hope: Vauxhall showed us the Astra VXR Extreme at Geneva and rumours are that the SEAT Leon which completed the 7:58 lap of the Ring was cheekily honed over and above the Cupra 280 that you can actually buy. But how about a proper VW extreme hatch now that Polos are dominating WRC? And just imagine a Mégane 265 R. Or perhaps Ferrari could junk the FF's rear seats and create a modern Breadvan... ☒

What about the extremes?

We're not quite finished yet, because no celebration of the greatest hot hatches ever would be complete without a look at these three hardcore specials

**HONDA CIVIC
TYPE-R MUGEN**

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc
Power	237bhp @ 8300rpm
Torque	157lb ft @ 6250rpm
0-62mph	5.9sec (estimated)
Top speed	155mph (estimated)
Weight (kerb)	1233kg
Power-to-weight	195bhp/ton
Price new	£38,595 (2010)
Value today	£25,000-30,000 (estimated)
evo rating	★★★★★

**MINI
JCW GP**

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo
Power	215bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	206lb ft @ 2000-5100rpm
0-62mph	6.3sec (claimed)
Top speed	150mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1160kg
Power-to-weight	192bhp/ton
Price new	£28,790
Value today	n/a (on sale now)
evo rating	★★★★★

**RENAULTSPORT
MÉGANE R26.R**

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
Power	227bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque	229lb ft @ 3000rpm
0-62mph	6.0sec (claimed)
Top speed	147mph (claimed)
Weight (kerb)	1220kg
Power-to-weight	189bhp/ton
Price new	£23,815 (2008)
Value today	£18,000-22,000
evo rating	★★★★★





THE EQUALISER

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

PHOTOGRAPHY by PAUL HARMER

Christian von Koenigsegg's riposte to the latest hybrid hypercars is to make the first-ever car with equal power and weight figures – the 1360 PS, 1360kg One:1



I

IT'S 8AM ON TUESDAY

February 25, precisely one week before the Geneva motor show flings open its doors to the world's media.

Along with a dozen or so

Koenigsegg customers, we're at the company's factory to see the new One:1, so called because for every kilogram of mass there's one metric horsepower (1 PS) to propel it. It weighs 1360kg. Just think about that for a moment. Suffice to say, myself and photographer Paul Harmer are pretty excited.

Then we see it. Lifted in the air, no wheels, no front splitter, no interior, covered in protective tape... Paul grimaces, as do the guys working feverishly to get the car finished. To clear customs, the One:1 has to leave the factory tomorrow, but at the moment it looks like it's a week or more from completion. I email the *evo* office to let them know our photo shoot might be, erm, challenging.

There are people everywhere: two underneath

the engine, one sitting inside on the bare carbon tub, another leaning in through the passenger door and one jostling the carbon snorkel intake to check it fits correctly, while two more slide the bonnet into place. I'd stop short of calling it chaos because everyone is working calmly, there are no raised voices and not a single shortcut is countenanced. It's fascinating to see this incredible car come together and – not that I'll admit it to the rather freaked-out photographer thinking of the pages he needs to fill – I'm glad we're here to witness the birth of a car that is nothing short of extraordinary.

Let's deal with the raw figures first. The One:1 weighs 1360kg with all fluids and half a tank of fuel. Its 5.1-litre twin-turbocharged V8 produces 1341bhp at 7500rpm when running on E85 biofuel (which is widely available across Scandinavia), 1262bhp on 98-octane superunleaded and 1213bhp on regular 95. Despite pushing out up to 265bhp per litre, the powerband should be vast. Peak torque is 1011lb ft at 6000rpm, but there's over 737lb ft

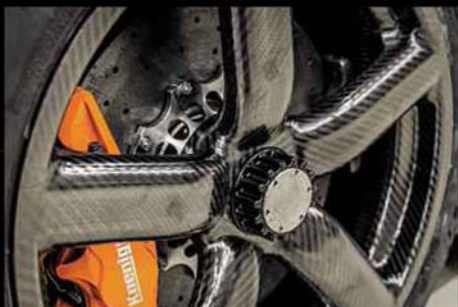
available anywhere from 3500 up to 8000rpm – just 250rpm shy of the rev limit. Koenigsegg's calculations suggest a top speed of 273mph. In terms of acceleration the usual 0-60 and 0-100 stuff seems rather mundane, so wrap your brain around this instead – the One:1 should be capable of 0-400kph (248.5mph) in less than 20 seconds. To put that into perspective, the LaFerrari is claimed to cover 0-300kph (186mph) in 15.5sec, and the Veyron Super Sport has been independently timed over the same discipline at 17.5sec. Just six examples of the One:1 will be produced and they're all sold, despite a price tag of \$2.8m (c£1.67m) plus local taxes. For reference, Koenigsegg's 1124bhp Agera R costs \$1.52m (c£910,000) before taxes.

On paper, then, the One:1's performance is of a whole different order, and in combination with its 1 megawatt power output, Koenigsegg's assertion that this is the first 'megacar' is hard to dispute. The funny thing is that nobody around here wants to talk about straight-line performance at all. 'We build extremely fast cars





Far left: our man Bovington (left) with von Koenigsegg. **Left:** rear wing acts as an airbrake as well as generating downforce. **Below left:** wheels are carbonfibre. **Below:** the first One:1 in build at the Ängelholm factory



'I'M GLAD WE'RE HERE TO WITNESS THE BIRTH OF A CAR THAT IS NOTHING SHORT OF EXTRAORDINARY'



and we have an airstrip next to the factory, so we've almost become typecast,' explains head of sales Jens Sverdrup. 'But our cars are more than just performance – the engineering, the chassis set-up, the whole experience is what's important to us.' The One:1 might struggle to break that stereotype such is its raw power, but spend a little time at the factory in Ängelholm in Sweden and you discover that the depth of in-house engineering and manufacturing skill is indeed genuinely staggering.

So if we're not to discuss the 273mph top speed and *that* engine, then what is the One:1 really all about? Christian von Koenigsegg, a picture of calm despite Geneva looming, explains: 'The One:1 came about for a couple of reasons. Firstly the dream of creating a car with one horsepower for every kilo is something long-held – our old GT1 race car was under 1000kg, for example. However, with crash legislation, the technology and the equipment that our customers demand, it's impossible to build a 1000kg [road] car. But as our engine development produced results we couldn't have

predicted not too long ago, the concept started to look feasible. Then our customers started to ask for a Cup-type version of the Agera R...'

That was the spark that ignited the project and it says something about Koenigsegg that more than 50 per cent of its customers use their cars for trackdays. In China, from where the principal demand for the One:1 emerged, that figure is more like 80 per cent. You might think that the simple thing to do would be to take the Agera R, chuck in some lightweight seats, fit stiffer suspension and call it the Agera RS, but instead the project became an opportunity to aggressively evolve every element of the car.

The One:1 is also something of a riposte to the McLaren P1, LaFerrari and Porsche 918 Spyder. 'We knew these cars were coming and that they were going to make our performance – which has always been considered extreme – more normal, if you like,' says von Koenigsegg with a wry smile. 'So we had to respond. We started the development two years ago and at the time we didn't know the numbers we would face. In hindsight perhaps we overshot the target.'



Above left: winglets form part of the One:1's new aero. **Above:** rear of the mid-mounted engine bears a '1M' graphic. **Left:** ceramic brakes help One:1 stop from 248mph in a claimed 10sec

SO WHAT'S NEW? WELL, NOT QUITE everything, but to describe the One:1 as a faster Agera R would do it a disservice. Every element of the design and manufacturing has been examined, and wherever possible improved and lightened. The carbonfibre chassis looks identical, but the use of new lay-up techniques and the latest, strongest fibres mean it's 20 per cent lighter at just 72kg (18kg less than the P1's 'MonoCage') and considerably stiffer too.

In fact the obsessive quest to cut weight is something to behold. Nearly all the screws and fasteners are titanium and the fuel pump is a cast alloy thing of beauty. The unseen supports to the new aero-enhancing carbonfibre mirror casings are beautifully machined webs of aluminium that seem to have no mass at all when you pick them up, but they can support the managed airflow pushing down on the long, elegant mirrors. There are lighter carbonfibre seats, carbonfibre hinges, hollow-spoke carbonfibre wheels and even carbonfibre sun visors. The engine and gearbox internals have also shed some weight. The company claims to have added 30kg of functionality but to have still reduced weight by 80kg over an Agera R. Koenigsegg might not do jewel-like details and design with the flair of Pagani, but the quality and engineering on display is right up there.

The 5.1-litre twin-turbocharged engine of the One:1 might be dimensionally similar to that fitted to the 1016bhp Agera S and 1124bhp Agera R models, but it's had more than a simple bit of electronic fiddling to hit the 1 megawatt barrier. 'To get to this level with a great safety margin, reliability and driveability we had to go through the engine in every aspect,' explains von Koenigsegg. 'We could have just put on





Above: body panels are made from a carbonfibre/kevlar mix. **Right:** sculpted door mirrors clean up side airflow

'TO DESCRIBE THE ONE:1 AS A FASTER VERSION OF THE AGERA R WOULD DO IT A DISSERVICE'



huge turbos, but it would have been laggy and unresponsive. So the ceramic ball-bearing turbos, built by Precision Industries in the US, are only slightly bigger. We patented a new turbine solution a few years ago for use in the Agera R, but the response of those turbos was so good anyway that we didn't utilise it. But now we use that variable turbine housing, so basically it is a smaller and a bigger turbo at the same time. As low as 2500rpm we already have 0.5bar of boost and the peak boost is 1.8bar.' Incidentally, the turbo housing and exhaust outlet are 3D-printed in titanium. 'It's hellishly expensive, but for such a low-volume car it's still cheaper than tooling, plus we can create incredible shapes and save weight.'

To deal with the extra power and the 8250rpm rev limit, as well as to save weight, the engine has been radically modified. Von Koenigsegg reels off the components without drawing breath: 'The rev limit has increased, necessitating new connecting rods. The cylinder heads are now all hand-ported, there are new valve seats, new valves, new springs, new retainers, new camshaft drive, cam chain and sprocket, a new head gasket design, head studs, injectors, new fuel pumps and fuel lines, new wastegates, upgraded programming...'

The engine drives through a seven-speed single-clutch automated manual gearbox. However, it uses a second wet clutch to slow the input shaft on upshifts, allowing faster synchronisation and faster shifting. 'Measuring shift speed is tricky because you have to understand exactly what you're timing,' says von Koenigsegg. 'But if we talk Ferrari's language then with the Scuderia [the last Ferrari with a single-clutch automated transmission], it

Koenigsegg One:1

claimed a shift speed of 60 milliseconds and a torque-to-torque of 100-120ms. Our system offers a 30ms shift and a 60-80ms [torque-to-torque] shift.' The transmission incorporates an electronically controlled mechanical limited-slip differential, and stability, traction and launch control are all fitted.

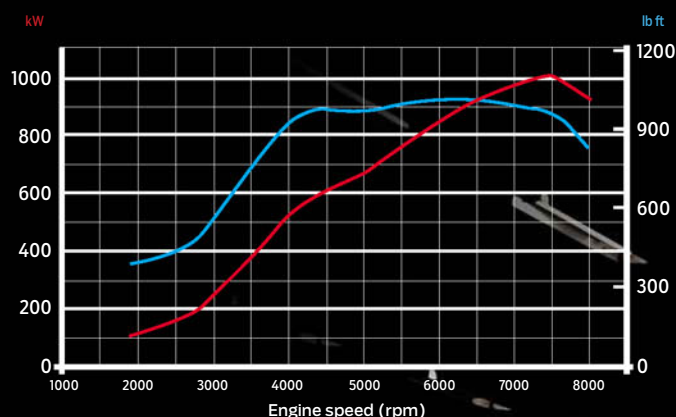
SO IT'S LIGHTER AND MORE powerful – which is to be expected. But the One:1's real ingenuity lies in its active aerodynamics and adaptive chassis. So far today we've seen aerodynamic devices individually on trolleys and workbenches, and the huge rear wing is unmissable. But it's not until I beg for the car to be fully assembled before the guys disappear for a quick lunch

that the full drama (some might say insanity) of the One:1 becomes apparent. To be honest I feel rather awkward making the request – there's still so much to do and they'll only have to take it apart again after they eat – but it turns out to be a very special moment. None of the team has seen the car complete and after a flurry of activity, the last protective tape is peeled away, the huge front splitter wiggled straight and then everyone steps back. The customers, staff and even von Koenigsegg himself seem stunned and there's an eerie moment of complete silence before the place bursts into applause. It's like being in a room full of proud parents. The tired expressions evaporate and it's all smiles and back-slapping.

'It's not what you'd call our most understated

design,' says von Koenigsegg, grinning. He's not joking. That front splitter – made from polished rather than clear-coated carbonfibre, as it's lighter – is vast, and the two huge dive planes above it give the One:1 an incredibly aggressive look that's carried through the rest of the design with total confidence. The rear wing is a thing of almost grotesque beauty. It all works, too. The One:1 produces 610kg of downforce at 174mph, similar to the P1, which produces 600kg at 160mph.

The One:1's active aerodynamic devices consist of a 'dynamic front venturi flap' and that rear wing, which has low and high downforce settings as well as an airbrake function, where it flips up to 25 degrees. It's not as dramatic as a Veyron's airbrake but is



Above: while the One:1 reaches its 1MW (1341bhp) peak near the top of its rev range, it sustains a high, flat torque curve from 4000rpm upwards

**'THE ONE:1'S REAL
INGENUITY LIES
IN ITS ACTIVE
AERODYNAMICS AND
ADAPTIVE CHASSIS'**



said to offer the best compromise between high drag and downforce to squeeze the specially developed Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres into the surface. 'The underside of the wing is the most effective area,' explains von Koenigsegg. 'That's why LMP cars have supports that wrap over the wing and attach to its top side to leave the underside as clean as possible. We've gone further still by supporting the spoiler from the front – there are no pillars to interrupt its performance.'

Those long wing supports also allow an elegant, lightweight solution to controlling its angle of attack. The hydraulic actuators are housed low down in the support and towards the centre of the car. They manipulate a thin carbonfibre pushrod, which acts on the wing

depending on speed and G-force. The entire system weighs just 9kg. Coupled with the new bonnet, which channels airflow around the sides of the car; the new door mirrors that help clean up the flow to the rear wing; drag-reducing larger outlets just behind the front wheels; wider side sills; and a flared side air intake to increase airflow to the intercooler by 40 per cent, the One:1 works the air hard to extract maximum downforce and cooling with minimum drag.

The suspension of the One:1 also plays its part in managing the airflow. Koenigsegg describes it as an 'active' set-up, as bump, rebound and ride height can all be independently adjusted on the move, while the spring ratios are variable too. Öhlins

provides the dampers but the hydraulic system that enables the suspension to adapt on the fly is all Koenigsegg's own. Even in its base Normal setting the One:1's set-up is around 60 per cent stiffer than the Agera R's. When the ride height is lowered by 20mm in Race mode, stiffness is further increased by around 200 per cent. The system also allows the rake of the car to be changed as speeds increase to help prevent too much downforce building up.

Furthermore, due to the One:1's GPS positioning sensor and 3G connectivity, the chassis can be optimised in pre-determined locations on a corner-by-corner basis. So you arrive at, say, the Nürburgring. Select the Race chassis mode and the screen will display



Above: air passing through the front cooling system is released via bonnet ducts with minimal drag. **Above right:** Alcantara and carbonfibre dominate interior. **Right:** titanium exhaust outlet is 3D-printed



Koenigsegg One:1

the track name. Accept the location and, using Koenigsegg's own test data, the car will set itself up corner-by-corner as you drive round the track – the wing, ride height, bump and rebound all adjusting. 'It means that the car will know if you're about to jump over Pflanzgarten and stiffen up the shocks for the landing, or through the Karussell it might raise the ride height,' says von Koenigsegg. Of course, this depends on Koenigsegg having tested the car on the particular track you arrive at, but over time it hopes to map the car's optimum settings at as many circuits as possible. It's a fantastic party trick and should help when Koenigsegg comes to setting its own lap time at the Ring...

WELL, WE HAD TO MENTION IT SOME time, right? 'Of course we will go there,' says von Koenigsegg. 'We don't have any predictions but we expect the car to be incredibly fast. On the

Cup 2 tyres it will generate over 2G of cornering force. The McLaren has a bit more downforce than us but I think we're around 200kg lighter, which should more than make up for that. The problem is who we get to drive the car.'

It's an interesting point. A flat-out lap of the Nordschleife in a 1341bhp 'megacar' is a task only the clinically insane would take on without a large degree of trepidation. 'Our test driver obviously has huge experience with the car but is not a Nürburgring specialist, but those specialists don't know our car so well,' ponders

Christian, before adding: 'I'm sure we'll work something out.'

Koenigsegg's young tester, Robert Serwanski, has been putting lots of laps in but admits the thought of setting a time in the One:1 is a little intimidating: 'I love it there – the track and the whole area and the people you meet. Of course, there's no margin for error and nobody has driven a car with this much performance and on street tyres around there. I guess it would be something of a step into the unknown.'

It strikes me that this is what makes everyone at Koenigsegg tick. They love a challenge and squaring up to the latest hypercars from McLaren, Ferrari and Porsche has made them dig deep. This promises to be quite a car. Later I ask if a One:1 will be made available when we get a P1, LaFerrari and 918 Spyder together. 'Of course, we'd love to be there,' is the response. We'll hold them to that. ✕

Specification

KOENIGSEGG ONE:1

Engine V8, 5065cc, twin-turbo

CO2 n/a

Power 1341bhp @ 7500rpm

Torque 1011lb ft @ 6000rpm

Transmission Seven-speed automated manual gearbox, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip diff

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

Rear suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated ceramic discs, 397mm front, 380mm rear, ABS

Wheels 9.5 x 19in front, 12.5 x 20in rear

Tyres 265/35 ZR19 front, 345/30 ZR20 rear

Weight (kerb) 1360kg

Power-to-weight 1002bhp/ton

0-60mph sub-2.9sec (estimated)

Top speed 273mph (estimated)

Basic price c£2million

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by MIKE DUFF

GATHERING STORM

Meet the replacement for the Lamborghini Gallardo. Its name is Huracán, and it's set to take the fight to the likes of Ferrari's 458 Italia. We get the low-down on the new 602bhp, V10-engined 'baby' Lambo





YOU CAN PRETTY MUCH TELL HOW important a company thinks a new car is based on who turns up for its launch. As the new Huracán is the successor to the Gallardo, the most successful Lamborghini of all time, it's no surprise to find all of the Sant'Agata senior brass assembled on stage in Italy

for the official unveiling. And, this being Italy, they are wearing some of the sharpest clothing you've ever seen; president Stephan Winkelmann sports suits better than most male catwalk models.

What is more surprising is the presence on the stage of another man, one who seems considerably less at home under the bright lights and standing in front of a brand-new supercar, squinting through thick glasses and wearing a suit that, next to the Italian finery, makes him look like a mid-level accountant. Yet Ulrich Hackenberg is one of the motor industry's biggest beasts, the no-nonsense German who somehow manages to combine the roles of being Audi's head of R&D and the man who co-ordinates product development across the entire VW Group.

So the man responsible for the engineering efforts of an empire that sold 9.2million cars around the world in 2013 has turned up for the launch of a new model that, even under the most optimistic forecasts, will make up less than 1 in 3000 group sales. We couldn't be given a better indication of how important the Huracán is to Lamborghini, but also how important Lamborghini is to Audi and VW.

This has been a golden era for Lamborghini. It has sold twice as many cars in the last decade as it did in the previous 40 years. Indeed, the 14,000 Gallardos built between 2003 and 2013 constitute very nearly half of the company's total all-time production. And with demand for the Aventador showing no signs of diminishing after three years, and an as-yet unconfirmed production version of the Urus SUV set to expand the brand's reach even further, the next decade should be even better.

Design is probably where the Huracán breaks the least new ground. Its proportions are very similar to the Gallardo's, but the styling owes a fair amount to the Aventador. The design team has played on Lamborghini's attachment to six-sided shapes, which are everywhere from the side window graphic to the shape of the cabin's air vents. And although there are still plenty of crisp lines and sharp edges, the Huracán is more rounded than the Gallardo and is not exactly dripping with the sort of visual aggression that we tend to associate with Lamborghini's



Above: fighter jet-style red ignition switch dominates centre console. **Top right:** air intakes look similar to those that front the Aventador. **Right:** large diffuser produces enough downforce to negate the need for a spoiler

– design director Filippo Perini even uses the word ‘feminine’ when introducing it. From the back it looks strangely underendowed when compared with the wing-wearing variants that marked the latter stages of Gallardo production; the inevitable plethora of harder-cored versions that will follow the ‘standard’ LP610-4 will doubtless redress the balance. Impressively, the new car manages to produce 50 per cent more downforce than the Gallardo despite its lack of wingwork, and without any moveable aerodynamic surfaces.

The interior is very different from the Gallardo's, with a heavily sculpted dashboard and a deep centre console that no longer needs to accommodate a manual gearchange. A large 12.3in TFT screen that can be configured to give priority to the rev counter, the speedometer or the satnav display has replaced conventional instruments. Control stalks have gone too – Lamborghini has taken a leaf from Ferrari's book and moved the controls for the indicators and wipers to the face of the steering wheel to make space for extra-large gearchange paddles.

The steering wheel also has a button for the switchable driving modes – Strada, Sport and Corsa. The system has been named, with an acronym desperate enough to put Jaguar's former CATS offering to shame, as Adaptive Network Intelligence Management – or ANIMA, which just happens to be Italian for ‘soul’. The electronic architecture is still all Audi (the satnav display is a straight clone) but the Huracán's switchgear is

‘THE CONTINUATION OF THE V10 GIVES PROOF THAT LAMBORGHINI HAS KEPT THE FAITH WITH NATURAL ASPIRATION’

no longer from the corporate parts bin, the star feature being an engine start button under an aircraft-style safety flap.

It's beneath the surface that the Huracán gets more radical. The bodysell is constructed from both aluminium and carbonfibre. The ‘backbone’ that runs down the centre of the floor, plus the back of the sills, the rear bulkhead and the B-pillars are all made from composite; this is then bonded and riveted to the rest of the structure, which is made from alloy. The shell is 10kg lighter than the Gallardo's, but 50 per cent more torsionally rigid, and Lamborghini is now acknowledged to be one of the pioneers of lightweight technology within the Audi group and VW Group at large, explaining Dr Hackenberg's presence.

The Huracán's bodysell is made and painted at Audi's Neckarsulm plant in Germany, with the V10 engines coming from the same brand's Győr factory in Hungary. Final assembly takes place in Sant'Agata on a separate production line next to the Aventador. We are taken on a tour of the factory and see a few ‘pre-build’ Huracáns travelling very slowly between the 29 stations on the line, in contrast to the hive of activity on the Aventador side of the factory. It's certainly an extremely efficient and well-organised place, complete with a quality-testing room where tolerances are measured to a hundredth of a millimetre. The days of blokes knocking cars together with hammers while cigarettes dangle from their lips are well and truly over.

Mechanically, the biggest change on the Huracán is to the transmission rather than the engine. The continuation of the V10 motor gives welcome proof that Lamborghini has kept the faith with natural aspiration. Indeed, R&D boss Maurizio Reggiani insists that the company will avoid turbocharging until emissions standards make it absolutely necessary. The Huracán's engine is an evolution of the Gallardo's, sharing the same 5204cc of swept capacity but with both direct and indirect fuel injection to enable it to combine power with the all-important emissions compliance. The result is a peak 602bhp at 8250rpm (up 50bhp on





‘AS WITH THE GALLARDO, WE CAN ANTICIPATE MORE POWERFUL VERSIONS, BUT ALL HURACÁNS WILL SHARE THE SAME BASIC POWERPLANT’

the Gallardo LP560-4, and 40bhp more than the Ferrari 458 Italia), with 290g/km of CO₂. The maximum 413lb ft still arrives at a peaky 6500rpm, but direct injection has beefed up the torque curve at lower revs. As with the Gallardo, we can anticipate more powerful versions to follow, but all Huracáns will share the same basic powerplant. ‘One car, one engine – that is how we do it,’ says Winkelmann.

Perhaps inevitably, there won’t be a manual gearbox option. ‘By the end of Gallardo production demand was close to zero,’ Winkelmann explains. ‘Every request was going over the table of the board.’ The Huracán switches to a new seven-speed dual-clutch transmission, and another three-letter initialism joins the lexicon of such systems – LDF, standing for Lamborghini Doppio Frizione (that’s ‘double clutch’ in Italian, of course). Contrary to what you might expect, LDF is unrelated to the twin-clutch set-up in the S-tronic Audi R8.

LDF drives all four wheels through an all-new four-wheel-drive system based around an electronically controlled clutch rather than the Gallardo’s viscous coupling. This is faster acting and, although the normal torque split is 30 per cent front and 70 per cent rear, it can send up to 100 per cent to the back or up to 50 per cent to the front.

Lamborghini has only given us a dry weight for a car fitted with ‘lightweight options’. It comes in at 1422kg, with 42 per cent resting over the front axle when static – impressive, but we’ll have to wait until we can get one on our scales to see how that translates to a real-world weight. There’s definitely still plenty of opportunity to reduce mass further for

the inevitable Superleggera version, as the standard car uses metal for the roof and all exterior panels. The raw performance figures are 3.2sec for 0-62mph (down 0.5sec on the Gallardo, and quicker than the 458’s ‘<3.4sec’), 9.9sec for 0-124mph and a top speed ‘better than’ 202mph, but we’re told the main target for the development team was lap times. Lambo claims that the Huracán is ‘at least’ three seconds quicker than the Gallardo around the 3.86-mile handling track at Nardò in Italy.

Electric power steering is standard, with the option of a variable-ratio system that adjusts according to speed and the selected ANIMA mode – this system is one we’ll need convincing on. Surprisingly, adaptive dampers are also an option, the standard car sticking with a passive arrangement. But the technical highlight is the ‘piattaforma inerziale’ or ‘inertial platform’ – in effect an advanced telemetry system that delivers real-time data on what the car is doing to enable the various active systems to respond almost instantly. It’s similar to systems used by modern aircraft, with three gyroscopes and three accelerometers positioned in the car’s centre of gravity directly reporting on how it is moving through X, Y and Z axes. Lamborghini insists this will enable the Huracán to respond more quickly to changing conditions than its rivals.

The overwhelming lesson from a day in Sant’Agata is that Lamborghini is still very good at being Italian. The factory is surrounded by Audis wearing Ingolstadt plates, and the cases that carry components to the line all wear Volkswagen Group branding, but in spirit and execution Lambos are still Lambos – brash, exciting and with a slight hint of gold Rolex about them. As such, the tech-packed and marginally more modest Huracán is an interesting new direction, although I’ve little doubt the company will sell the 3000 cars a year the factory can produce.

But Lamborghini is very much a subsidiary of Audi, a point reinforced by the Q-and-A session at the end of the presentation, during which I raise my hand and ask if there is any chance of a two-wheel-drive version. Winkelmann smiles as he delivers the sort of polite non-answer you typically get from a senior exec when you invite them to look too far into the future: ‘We’re not ruling anything out, but I can’t confirm anything either.’ Then Hackenberg reaches for the microphone: ‘The car will be able to run with two-wheel drive, yes.’ You’re never left in any doubt which company wears the trousers in this relationship. And they’re made of leather and finish just below the knee. ☒

Specification

LAMBORGHINI HURACÁN LP610-4

Engine V10, 5204cc

CO₂ 290g/km

Power 602bhp @ 8250rpm

Torque 413lb ft @ 6500rpm

Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox, four-wheel drive

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

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

Brakes Carbon-ceramic discs, 380mm front, 356mm rear, ABS, EBD

Wheels 8.5 x 20in front, 11 x 20in rear

Tyres 245/30 R20 front, 305/30 R20 rear

Weight (dry) 1422kg

Power-to-weight (dry) 430bhp/ton

0-62mph 3.2sec (claimed)

Top speed 202mph+ (claimed)

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by DAVID VIVIAN

Lambo's Bambinos

The Huracán is the latest in a long line of entry-level Lamborghinis that stretches back over 40 years. Here's our guide to them all

1 URRACO P250

Year: 1972-1976 **Number built:** 520

Lambo's first stab at a junior supercar was an object lesson in exquisite proportioning, considering the need to package '+2' seating and a mid-mounted V8. While performance was less than startling in a straight line (it had just 220bhp), its Bob Wallace-developed chassis was more than good enough to put the frighteners on rivals such as the Ferrari Dino and Porsche 911. Shoddy build quality during troubled times for Lamborghini blighted its early reputation.



2 URRACO RALLYE

Year: 1973 **Number built:** 1

Or, perhaps more accurately, Bob Wallace's personal hot rod. An early skunk-works special using a 1971 pre-production P250, the Rallye was painted a lurid orange and powered by a 310bhp 3-litre engine with four-valve-per-cylinder heads and dry-sump lubrication. The engine was mated to a six-speed gearbox, the stripped interior featured a full roll-cage and the suspension was heavily breathed on with Koni adjustable dampers.



3 URRACO P300

Years: 1974-1979 **Number built:** 190

The P300 inflated the Urraco's V8 from 2.5 to 3 litres and bestowed each cylinder bank with twin-cam heads which were (more reliably) driven by chains. With comprehensive gearbox and suspension modifications and improved standards of build and finish, the P300 was a more potent (250bhp) and satisfying steer than the 250 and considered much closer to the 'entry-level' model Ferruccio Lamborghini had intended to build.



4 URRACO P200

Years: 1974-1977 **Number built:** 66

Ferrari had a tax-busting 308 (the 208) to sidestep Italy's punishing levies, and Lamborghini similarly made a smaller-engined Urraco, the P200. Powered by a sleeved version of the original 2.5-litre V8, its swept volume of 1995cc dipped under the Italian authorities' 2-litre threshold, beyond which taxes became more punitive. Unfortunately the resulting 182bhp proved to be more of an embarrassment than an incentive.





URRACO SPECIAL

Year: 1975 **Number built:** 1

Lamborghini took a late-example US-spec Urraco P300 off the production line and turned it into a working test bed. Painted a vivid yellow with a black interior, the car's mission was to gather data on road-holding and suspension settings when using larger wheels and tyres on the back than at the front, the chassis arrangement slated for the forthcoming Silhouette. The (necessary) bulging wheelarches were taken from the Countach S.

SILHOUETTE P300

Years: 1976-79 **Number built:** 55

Cash-strapped Lamborghini couldn't afford to replace the Urraco with an all-new model, so it asked styling house Bertone to design a new body for the existing mechanicals. The result was the Silhouette P300 – essentially a Urraco with a square-jawed macho makeover, no '42' rear seats and a targa-style removable roof panel. The interior took a huge leap forward too, both aesthetically and ergonomically.



JALPA P350

Years: 1982-88 **Number built:** 410

The V8 Urraco bloodline continued with the Jalpa, which was very obviously an evolution of the Silhouette, with a slight softening of that car's spectacularly angular styling – again executed by Bertone – but retention of the targa-style roof arrangement. Quality continued to improve and the Jalpa's new box-style instrumentation was bolder and more dramatic. The V8 was enlarged to 3485cc, giving 255bhp and a scalp-prickling soundtrack.



JALPA SPYDER (NOT PICTURED)

Year: 1987 **Number built:** 2

Conceived as a model that could potentially outsell the regular Jalpa and its limiting targa roof, the Spyder started life as a Bertone concept commissioned by Lamborghini called the Athon, which didn't have a roof at all but was well received at motor shows. Buoyed by this, Lambo made a couple of prototypes with retractable roofs, but they didn't look right and the project was canned.

GALLARDO

Years: 2003-2013 **Number built:** 14,022

Almost half the Lamborghinis ever made are Gallardos. Constantly evolving through two model generations, there have been a remarkable 25 iterations and special editions, not to mention the GT3, Super GT and Le Mans racers. While it's tempting to think of the Gallardo as a marketing-led entry-level 'baby Lambo', it fundamentally outgunned its rivals in 2003, with weapons that would stand it in good stead for the next ten years.



HURACÁN

Years: 2014-

Lighter, more powerful, faster, better-looking and more technologically advanced than the hugely successful Gallardo it replaces, the Huracán LP610-4 is everything fans of the 'entry-level Lambo' could hope for. It could be the best car to roll out of Sant'Agata yet.



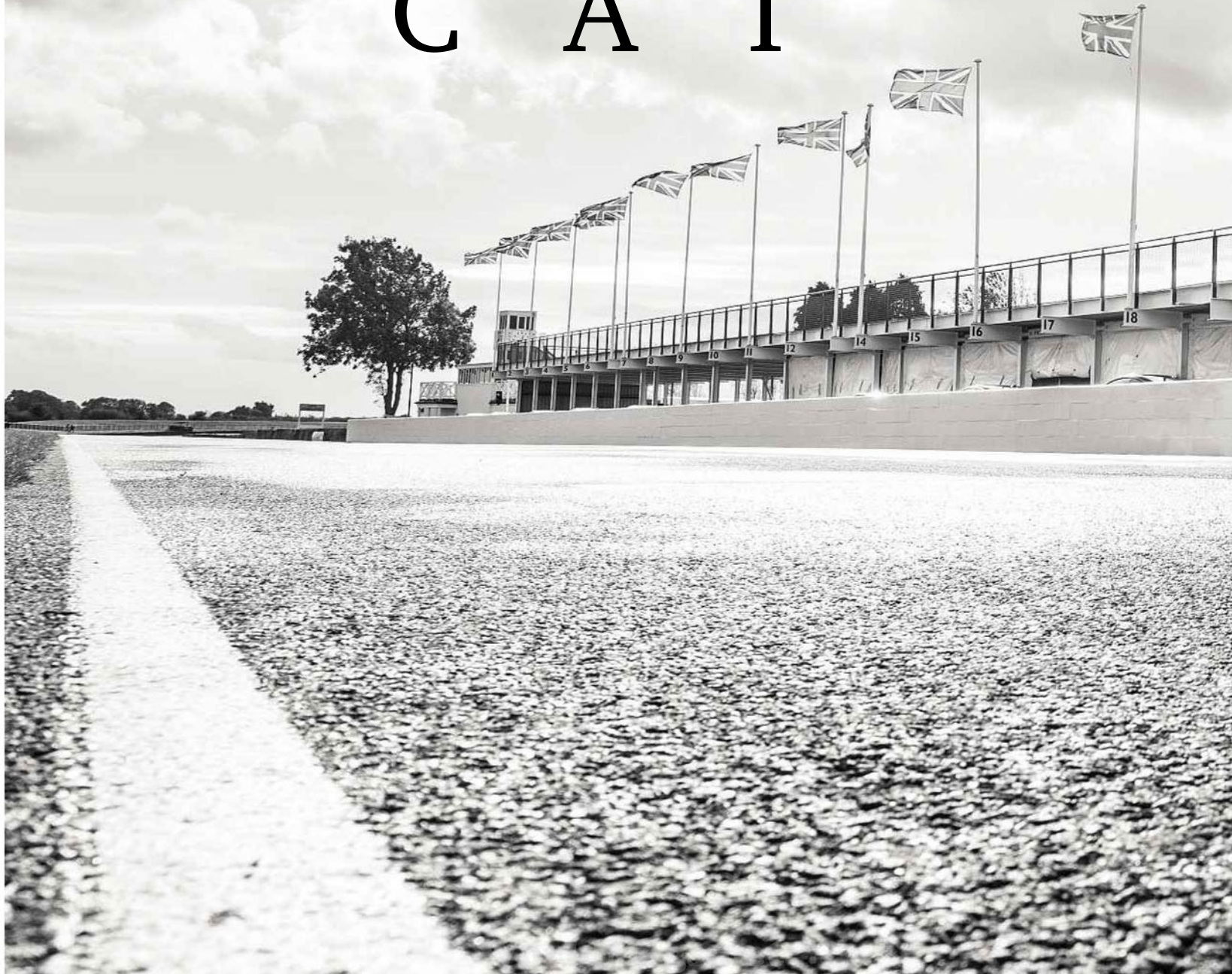
Eagle E-type Low Drag GT

C O P Y

by HENRY CATCHPOLE | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

In the early 1960s, Jaguar built a small number of lightweight, aerodynamically efficient E-type coupes for racing use. Half a century later, Eagle has created its own, road-going version of the Low Drag – with a modern twist

C A T





Eagle E-type Low Drag GT



**‘THE BARE
ALUMINIUM
SHELL WAS THE
MOST BEAUTIFUL
AUTOMOTIVE SHAPE
I HAD EVER LAID
EYES ON’**

Above: Eagle's Low Drag is based on a 1967 E-type. **Right:** the originals used to be serviced at Goodwood, as Catchpole will discover later





T

THERE ARE SOME VERY SPECIAL moments in life when you're stopped in your tracks as surely as if you'd stepped into a pair of concrete brogues. Clapping eyes on a truly spectacular landscape can, for example, leave you agape and wide-eyed with wonder. The view of Glen Coe along the A82 gets me every time. Sometimes meeting or even just seeing someone can have a similar effect. Equally the moment you hear that particular disc from your desert island eight that you'd save from the waves, the one with the notes that resonate to your very core, you'll pause whatever you're doing to listen, captivated. In all these instances it's as though you're held in a spell, mesmerised by a beauty and wonder that cuts through everything else. It's uplifting, as if the fug of normal life has receded and you're breathing in a more rarefied air.

Nearly five years ago, I stood rooted to the spot in just such a way, in some workshops in Sussex. I'd been rendered immobile by what was then just a bare aluminium shell. Having spent the day driving the original Eagle Speedster (evo 137) – itself a truly beautiful car – Paul Brace, Eagle's technical director, was showing me some original E-types that the firm had been restoring. But in the corner, gleaming amongst the shadows of the barn, was this silver body. It was the most beautiful automotive shape I had ever laid eyes on. Something about the fullness and fluidity of the lines just looked so stunningly right – as perfectly curvaceous as an original Countach LP400 is perfectly angular.

'That's our next project,' said Brace. 'It's our version of a Low Drag E-type.' Suffice to say, I've been eagerly waiting for it to be finished ever since.

Eagle, in case you don't know, has been in the business of restoring and upgrading Jaguar E-types since the company was established by Henry Pearman over 30 years ago. The cars are not replicas, as each one is based on an original E-type that Eagle will take apart and recondition so that it is as good, if not better, than new. Each owner then has the option of adding things like better brakes, uprated suspension or even a more powerful straight-six – the sort of things that Jaguar itself might have done had production continued. It's all very sympathetic and exquisitely tasteful, and the Speedster and the Low Drag are in many ways the ultimate examples of what is possible.

The story of the original Low Drag is a little complex, so I think it's worth setting out the bare bones of it here. Perhaps the most famous Low Drag was produced by Jaguar after a commission from German Jaguar importer Peter Lindner and his racing partner Peter Nöcker (it's always referred to as the Lindner Nöcker car). Penned by Malcolm Sayer after taking a Ferrari 250 GTO into MIRA's wind tunnel, it was hoped that this Low Drag would take Jaguar back to success at Le Mans. However, development switched to the Lightweight roadster (which was less heavy by some 70kg) after it proved to be quicker around a test circuit.

Sadly the Lindner Nöcker car was subsequently crashed

Eagle E-type Low Drag GT

at Montlhéry in 1964, killing Lindner and four others, although the wreckage has recently been painstakingly restored. However, two more 'originals' also exist: one was a Lightweight roadster that was converted to a Low Drag body (albeit with a slightly longer snout) after a crash at the Nürburgring. The other, known as the Protheroe car, was made of lightweight steel rather than alloy and now wears the famous CUT 7 number plate. These both still race today, which brings me rather neatly to our location for this test...

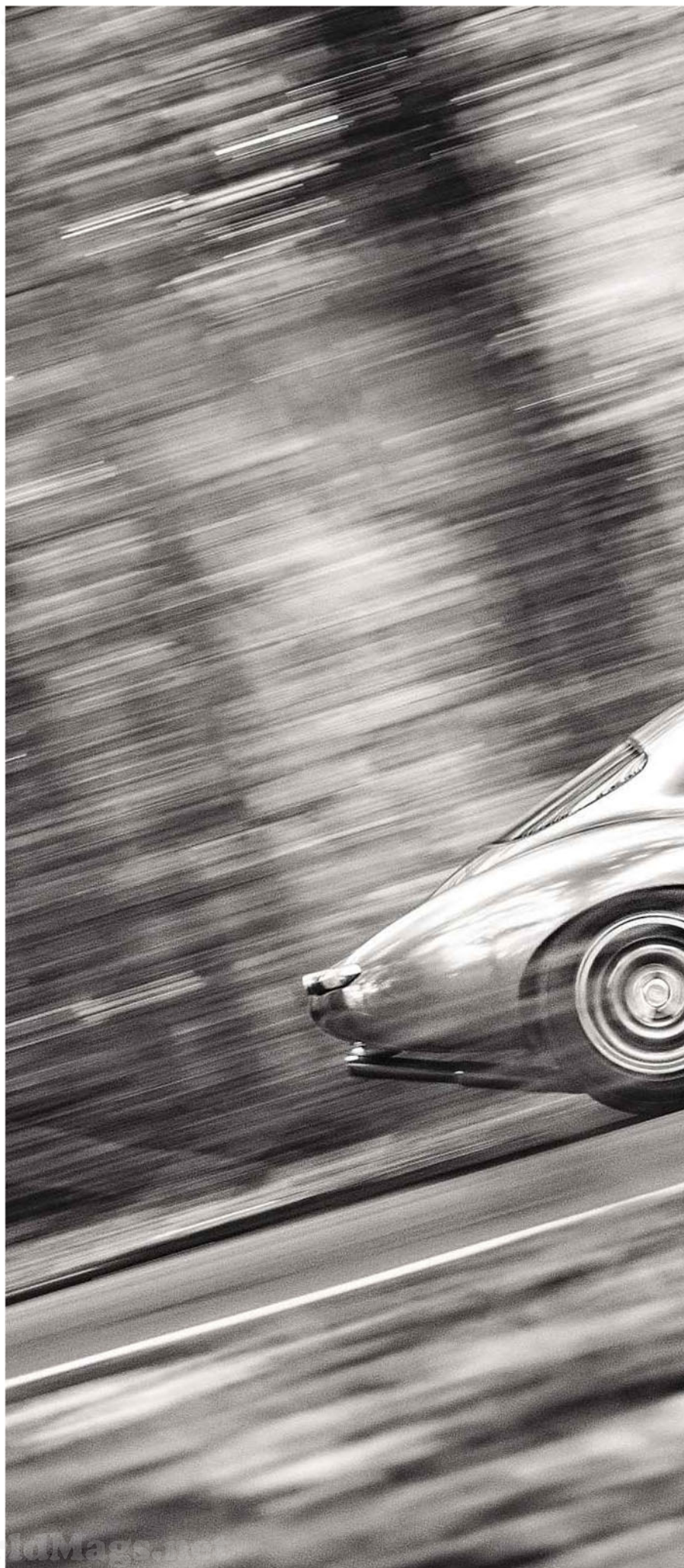
Back in September 1998, I was 16 years old and wearing a flat tweed cap as my parents and I wandered back in time. Handing our tickets over, we walked straight into the bustle of a race paddock that felt close to heaven. It was another one of *those* moments. I can picture it so clearly: flags fluttering, the deliciously sweet aroma of Castrol R hanging in the air and several unsilenced straight-eights and V12s warming up, drowning out the plummy voice emerging from the tannoy. Luckily, everyone else seemed to have got into the spirit and dressed up in period clothes too, so we all felt like an integral part of this magical re-enactment, which was, of course, the very first Goodwood Revival meeting. A Lightweight E-type won the RAC TT Celebration that year, but I distinctly remember the sixth-placed car shared by Sir Jack Brabham and Martin Brundle... CUT 7.

As a result of this, Goodwood's period pits seem like an utterly appropriate place to rendezvous with the finished Eagle Low Drag GT today. In completed form, Eagle's creation is every bit as beautiful as I remember. The Dunlop steel wheels (16in versions of the 15in originals) are tucked up perfectly purposefully in the arches. The rake and curve of the four specially commissioned pieces of glass is such that they seem to melt into the shape of the car. The overall effect is so simple, yet so sublime and it manages to tread the line between being delicate and aggressive more subtly than any other car I can think of.

Underneath the skin of 18 EE is a 1967 E-type that, although sound, was in need of a complete rebuild. For its new body, Eagle tried to take all the best bits of the original three Low Drags, while also adding a couple of tweaks to make it more habitable. The floor pan has been lowered to give a little more headroom, the wheelbase has been extended a couple of inches to allow a bit more legroom and the doors have been lengthened slightly to improve access. They are tiny adjustments and in isolation you would never notice them, but importantly for me they should mean that I'm able to fold my 6ft 5in frame into the car.

The long bonnet hinges at the nose and what it reveals when you lift it up is a masterpiece. In these days of stylised plastic engine covers, it is wonderful to behold the gleaming riot of aluminium, augmented on the intake side with a gorgeously molten-looking mass of carbonfibre. It is Eagle's

**'THE RAKE AND CURVE
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‘SITTING SILENTLY ON THE DAMP, GLISTENING TARMAC, IT LOOKS

version of the classic straight-six but expanded to 4.7 litres, given sequential fuel injection managed by a Pectel ECU, and with the block made from aluminium instead of steel. The block isn't the only thing made of aluminium either: both the five-speed gearbox and the limited-slip diff are also made from the lightweight metal. Combined with the aluminium body, the Low Drag GT tips the scales at just 1038kg, a figure that's even more enticing when allied to the engine's quoted outputs of 346bhp and 360lb ft of torque.

One more thing that Brace mentions while Dean Smith is busy doing the static photos is the paint. Yes, the paint. The bodywork, with its mirror-like surface, looks as though it is simply bare aluminium, but in actual fact it is an extremely clever hand-applied 'Mercury' paint finish (it doesn't actually contain mercury, it just gives the same liquid look). Apparently they had to put a lot of black into the mixture to make very sure it didn't look like a chrome wrap, but it's worked.

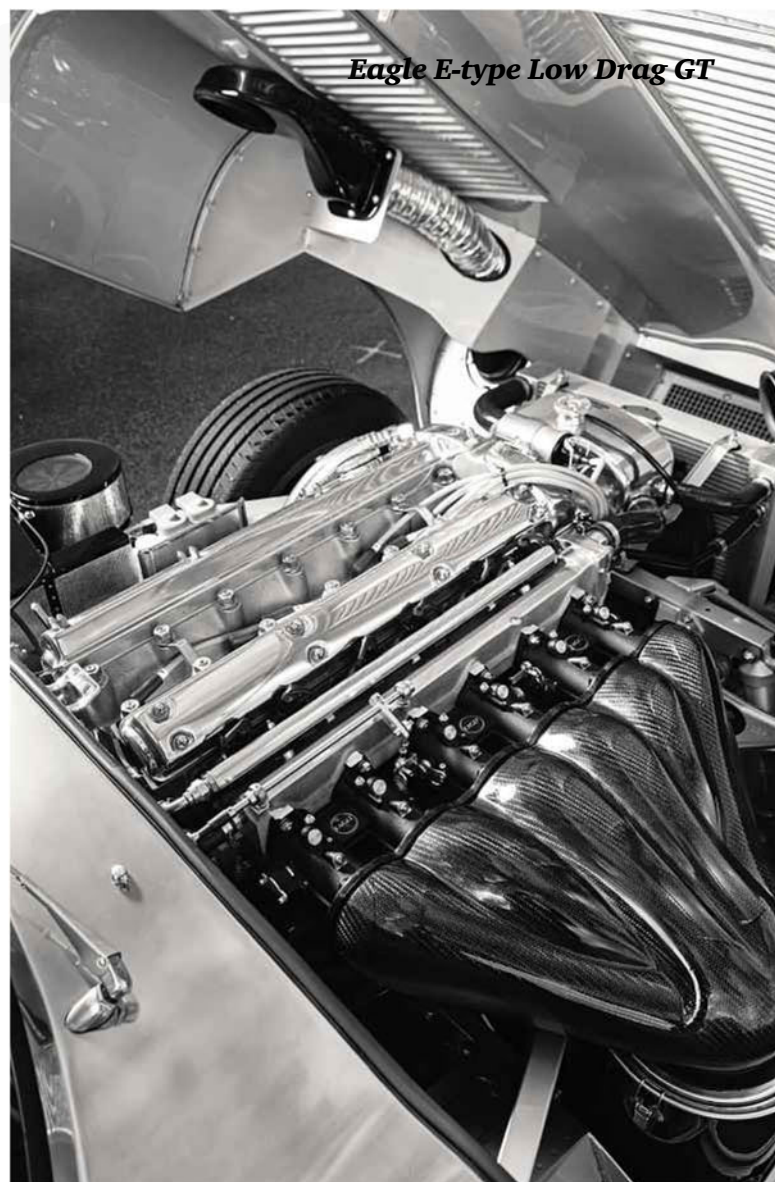
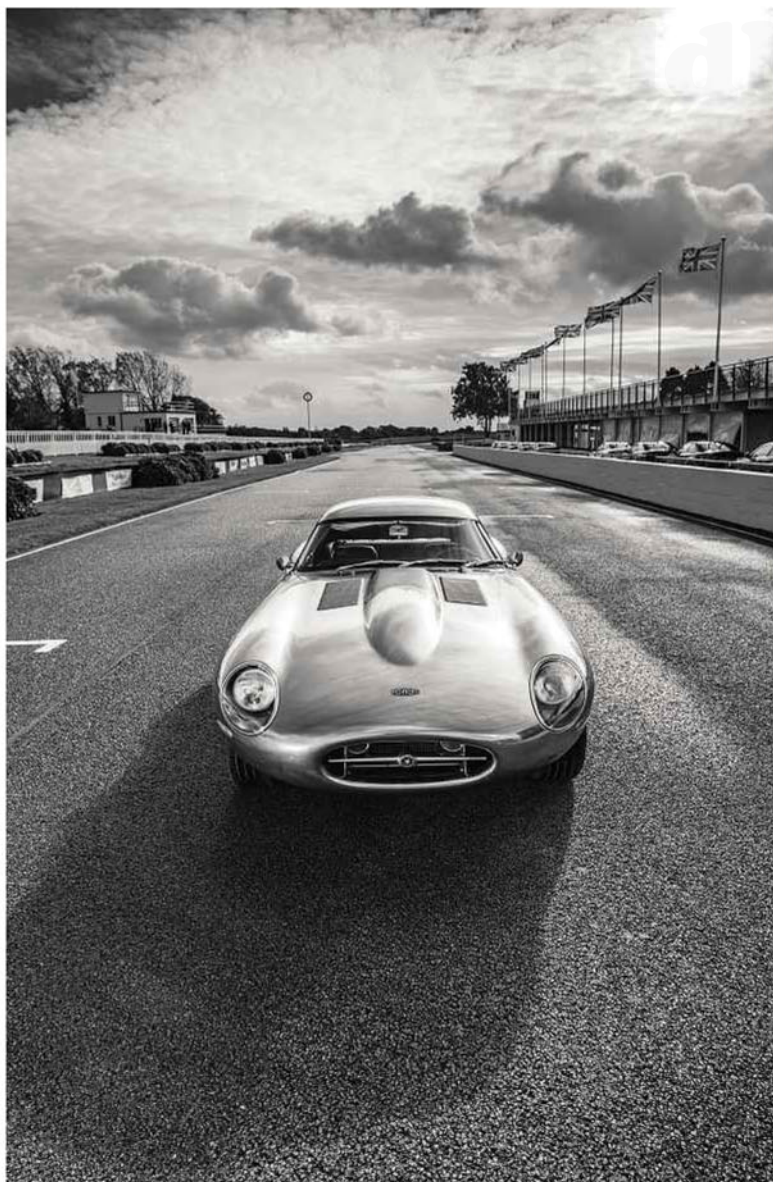
Sitting silently on the damp, glistening tarmac, the Low Drag GT looks almost too good to drive and there's a small part of me that doesn't want to head out into the Sussex lanes just in case I'm disappointed. How frustrating would it be to have waxed so lyrical and then find out that it's

Above: switchgear from original car is retained; five-speed manual shift (topped with a simple ball) is full of mechanical feel

a two-star driving experience? It would be like finding yourself in a clinch with a supermodel with halitosis. It's a risk I'm willing to take, however (so brave, I know), and after contemplating the small opening left by the door, I post an exploratory leg over the high sill into a world of blue leather and turned metal.

Once the rest of me has followed the initial lower limb, I find the driver's seat puts you in a naturally relaxed, backward-leaning position that somehow feels appropriately rakish for the style of the car. Despite having been let out at the seams compared to the original, it's still authentically snug inside, but in a nice, protective way. The dials and little switches are all salvaged from the original '67 car so instantly set the tone, but as you look more closely, you notice small touches like the re-badging of the sliders that now operate the recirculating air conditioning. Look up at the headlining and you see that the sun visors are made from what look like pieces of antique Bristol blue glass. They've certainly got the same rich depth to the colour.

Turn the key in the dash then move your hand left to the small, unlabelled black starter button. The ECU needs the engine to turn over twice in order to orientate itself and the 4.7-litre motor has got quite a long stroke, so you need to press the button for a second or two longer than you might expect. And when it does catch it doesn't happen with a



ALMOST TOO GOOD TO DRIVE. BUT IT'S A RISK I'M WILLING TO TAKE'

sensationalist F-type-like eruption that makes people turn and stare, it just settles to a refined burble. You'd happily start it up early on a Sunday morning and not worry about disturbing those still slumbering in the house. There's no need for a great flare of revs to pull away either, because torque is so abundant that you can simply let in the clutch smoothly and roll off the mark without touching the throttle. It might sound boring, but in reality it just fits the cultured nature of the car – it only shouts when there are revs worth shouting about.

Leaving the pits I drop down through the dark, narrow tunnel under the circuit and then head straight for the road, turning left towards the South Downs. Thread the long nose left-right through a roundabout and then we plunge into woodland, the trunks and overhanging branches reflecting in the bodywork as we go. The undulations of the long bonnet in front of me are captivating and rather more bulging than I'd thought from outside. From behind the wheel, looking over the little louvres and the prominent central hump, it's like I've just crouched down to examine the line of a putt and realised that the green I'd previously thought flat actually resembles a miniature version of the Himalayas.

The gearlever is perched quite high but falls easily to hand. It's a deliciously mechanical shift, slick enough to flatter you but with enough resistance that you want to pay attention to every change. Don't rush it.

Above: aluminium body (left) and engine (right) mean the Low Drag barely breaks a ton in weight and can hit 60mph in 4.5sec

Also, rather like having a thin-rimmed steering wheel, I'm convinced that the hard, diminutive ball atop the lever makes you feel the shift more acutely than the increasingly chunky gearknobs you find in modern cars.

As I settle into the car and the miles begin to pass, so I feel happier pushing slightly harder in the corners. The adjustable dampers are by Öhlins and although they are set up pleasingly firmly for our drive, they can of course be tailored however you desire. To that end you could pretty much make this car handle how you want, but I suspect you would always aim for that distinctive sensation where you nudge the long nose into a corner and then get on the power early, steering and adjusting the line with the throttle. You really can feel quite intimately what the rear wheels are doing beneath you and as you lean on them harder through the corners, it begins to feel totally natural to have them slipping just enough to tighten the line. Particularly through right-handers (this being a left-hand-drive car) there's a lovely feeling of the Low Drag sitting into the outside-rear tyre and making it work beneath you.

Given that it's such an accurate and engaging car in the corners, the feedback from the front wheels is perhaps just a little light, and if this were my car (oh how easy it is to start dreaming!) I would probably do



'IN ANY GEAR, OPEN UP THE THROTTLE AND THE SLIPPERY SHAPE SURGES FORWARDS, PILING ON THE SPEED'

without the electrical power assistance. The whole car is so light that I think you'd lose very little in terms of GT ease and probably just gain a bit more shading in the weighting and a touch more confidence on turn-in as a result. What certainly doesn't need altering is the straight-line performance. Eagle claims a 0-60mph time of around 4.5 seconds, but that only tells half the story, because it's the torque of the straight-six that really makes swift progress seem so astonishingly easy. In any gear, open up the throttle and the slippery shape surges forwards, piling on the speed, the engine's gruff voice filling the cabin more fully.

Of course it would be faintly terrifying if you had that much effortless acceleration on tap but then discovered the brakes were made from mild cheddar. Luckily there's not so much as a whiff of dairy about the drilled and ventilated AP Racing discs, which give decent feel through the middle pedal, and although I suspect they need bedding in a little, they still wipe off the speed with enough reassurance to let you drive the car as fast as you want.

It's only really the onset of dusk and Dean packing away his cameras that eventually stops me charging around the lanes of the Downs. Reluctantly I point the nose back towards the old Battle of Britain aerodrome below us and try to soak up the experience of the last few miles, silently thanking the unknown but extremely generous owner who has let me spend the afternoon in their car. I've sort of avoided mentioning

the price, but I suppose I should. If you wanted a car like this, it would set you back around £650,000. Which either makes it a *very* expensive E-type, or an absolute bargain at approximately half the price of a much less exclusive LaFerrari.

As I swing the headlights through the circuit gates I head for the large hangar where the Mithril Racing driving experience firm is based, as they've said we can use their hose to get rid of the worst of the road grime. I roll to a halt, switch off the engine and as I open the door, little hidden LEDs bathe the interior in a beautiful steely blue light, making the aluminium dash almost sparkle. It just cements the feeling that this is the most beautiful car I will ever drive.

After clambering out, I wander into the workshop to say hello and have a look at the various cars they've got in. 'We used to look after both CUT 7 and 49 FXN, you know,' remarks the man in blue overalls. I can barely believe what he's saying. We've just parked the Eagle outside the place where two of the original Low Drags used to be fettled? Then I look on the walls and littered amongst the photos are pictures of both cars at various meetings and in various states of repair. There's even the pit sign for CUT 7 from the Revival. It makes sense, as Lord Cowdray, whose estate is hardly any distance from Goodwood, owned both cars, but it still feels like the most spine-tinglingly spooky coincidence and the perfect end to a rather wonderful day. ☒

Specification

Engine Straight-six, 4694cc

Power 346bhp @ 4800rpm

Torque 360lb ft @ 3600rpm

Transmission Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip diff

Front suspension Double wishbones, torsion bars, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Trailing arms, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Drilled and ventilated discs, 315mm front, 280mm rear

Wheels 7 x 16in front, 8 x 16in rear

Tyres 225/55 R16 front, 235/60 R16 rear

Weight (dry) 1038kg

Power-to-weight (dry) 339bhp/ton

0-60mph sub-5.0sec (claimed)

Top speed 170mph+ (claimed)

Basic price c£650,000





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BRITISH GT CHAMPIONSHIP	19/21 APRIL	OULTON PARK
MCE BRITISH SUPERBIKES	03-05 MAY	OULTON PARK
MINI FESTIVAL	11 MAY	BRANDS HATCH
BLANCPAIN GT SPRINT SERIES	17/18 MAY	BRANDS HATCH GP
MASTERS HISTORIC FESTIVAL	24-26 MAY	BRANDS HATCH GP/INDY
BRITISH TOURING CARS	07/08 JUNE	OULTON PARK
AMERICAN SPEEDFEST II	08 JUNE	BRANDS HATCH
MCE BRITISH SUPERBIKES	13-15 JUNE	SNETTERTON 300
BRITISH F3/GT CHAMPIONSHIP	21/22 JUNE	SNETTERTON 300
MINI FESTIVAL	12 JULY	OULTON PARK

HSCC SUPERPRIX	12/13 JULY	BRANDS HATCH GP
MCE BRITISH SUPERBIKES	18-20 JULY	BRANDS HATCH GP
BRITISH TOURING CARS	02/03 AUG	SNETTERTON 300
MCE BRITISH SUPERBIKES	08-10 AUG	OULTON PARK
LOTUS FESTIVAL	16/17 AUG	BRANDS HATCH GP
MCE BRITISH SUPERBIKES	23-25 AUG	CADWELL PARK
HSCC GOLD CUP	23-25 AUG	OULTON PARK
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DUTCH SUPERCARS	13/14 SEPT	BRANDS HATCH GP
BRITISH TRUCK RACING	13/14 SEPT	SNETTERTON 300
BRITISH TOURING CARS	11/12 OCT	BRANDS HATCH GP
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Fast Fleet

From M6 to 996, evo's Fast Fleet is the biggest and most comprehensive long-term section in the business. This month...

MINI JCW GP

by Ian Eveleigh

Production editor

OUT

It's been a busy eight months on the fleet for our GP – and now it's gone. Eveleigh looks back at the highlights.



VW GOLF GTI

by Mike Duff

Motoring editor

Our Mk7 GTI is run-in, meaning Duff can now enjoy it to the full. And he's discovered it's more than just a desirable badge.



PEUGEOT 208 GTI

by Sam Riley

Film-maker

Riley's finally had the chance to try the Peugeot on track. And Meaden couldn't resist having a go too...



JAGUAR F-TYPE V6 S

by Jethro Bovingdon

Contributing editor

The drop-top Jag has gone head-to-head with a rare rival: the new Chevrolet Corvette Stingray.



NISSAN GT-R

by David Yu

Contributor

Skidzilla returns to Stealthzilla as Yu visits Litchfield to get the broken four-wheel-drive system sorted.



FERRARI F40

by SSO

Contributor

As his F40 disappears for its annual service, the Secret Supercar Owner reflects on the car's rolling restoration.



VAUXHALL VXR8

by David Vivian

Road test contributor

It's the most anticipated fight in Fast Fleet history, as VXR8 Tourer meets RS6 Avant at the Bedford Autodrome.



FORD FOCUS ST

by Dean Smith

Staff photographer

The ST is back from being repaired after its argument with a lorry. Smith gets reacquainted.



TOYOTA GT86

by Henry Catchpole

Features editor

Catchpole puts on his best Alan 'Fluff' Freeman voice and runs down the GT86's most common flaws.



MERCEDES 190E 2.5-16

by Mike Duff

Motoring editor

The classic Merc has its starting problem stopped, while new springs and dampers are also fitted.



RENAULT CLIO TURBO

by Richard Meaden

Contributing editor

With a new long-term imminent (there's a clue below), Meaden looks back on his time with the Clio.



FERRARI 458 ITALIA

by Simon George

Contributor

Can you use a 458 every day? As his example approaches 50,000 miles, George reckons so – but thinks few would.



BMW M6 GC

by Nick Trott

Editor

Trott compares the £98k M-car to a Tesla and a Bentley, and discovers one of them makes a keen rival to the BMW.



Also on the evo fleet: McLaren 12C, McLaren 12C Spider, Toyota Celica GT-Four, Nissan GT-R, Mazda MX-5 Mk2, Ferrari F40, Ford Escort RS2000, Renault Clio Williams, Ferrari 430 Scuderia, Porsche 911 SC, Ferrari F50, Aston Martin DBS, Jaguar XJR-15, Peugeot 106 Rallye

Coming soon: Audi R8 V10 Plus, BMW M235i

PORSCHE 996

by Jethro Bovingdon

Contributing editor

The classic-in-waiting 911 has had an oil change – after lengthy deliberation about what that oil should be...



Mini JCW GP

END-OF-TERM

After eight months of hard road and track use, Eveleigh's giant-slaying hot hatch has departed the fleet



CAN THE NUMBER of tests that a long-term gets called upon to attend be taken as an indication of how great that car is? If so, the Mini GP must be something quite special. During its eight months with us our GP appeared at TCoty (more in a moment), eCoty (where it finished a very respectable sixth place behind five cars sporting six-figure price tags), in this month's hot hatch extravaganza and even at our recent 4x4 mega-test (where it acted as a front-wheel-drive benchmark).

Sometimes I felt like peeling off the GP logos and stripes and affixing a 'One' badge to the tailgate in an attempt to stop the key being wrenched from my grasp yet again. But that would have fooled no one, as the GP offered too many other

visual clues to its abilities: the huge carbonfibre roof spoiler, the rear diffuser, the bigger front brakes, the nose-down stance...

And these are just some of the features that help the £28,795 GP justify its position as the second most expensive Mini ever (the Paceman JCW costs £750 more...). Less immediately obvious are a front strut brace, a fully panelled underbody (contributing to a claimed 90 per cent increase in downforce at the car's rear), lightly treaded Kumho Ecsta V700 Sport tyres and, behind the dark rear glass, no rear seats. The GP isn't short of kit up front, though: DAB radio, Bluetooth, heated Recaros, climate control and bi-xenon lights are all standard.

YF62 NYK arrived in mid-July 2013

with just over 4000 miles on the clock, having spent the preceding months performing various duties on BMW's press fleet. My initial miles were dominated by how busy I found myself behind the wheel. Torque-steer and tramlining on all but the smoothest roads were magnified by the super-quick Mini steering rack. I had concerns that this might be a chore to live with day-in, day-out, but in fact the GP was surprisingly well behaved on those rare occasions when I managed to resist driving everywhere like I was on a qualifying lap.

It was partly for this reason that I never felt inclined to play with the adjustable coilover suspension, and also because the GP worked so well on track even on its default road settings, as I discovered on an

evo track evening at the Bedford Autodrome. It was an opinion confirmed by a Cayman S-beating 'best road car' finish in our 2013 Track Car of the Year contest (evo 189). At the latter, the GP proved that a track car really doesn't need to have rear-wheel drive to be serious fun. 'Enthralling, challenging and hugely entertaining,' concluded Jethro Bovingdon in his write-up.

The GP was a riot on the road too. The claimed 6.3sec 0-62mph time and the 1.6-litre turbo engine's 215bhp peak power figure really don't convey just how rapid the GP was across the ground. Maybe the 8:23 Nürburgring lap time and the tales of GPs showing 230bhp+ on rolling roads do a better job. Suffice to say it was what you might call 'properly quick', and it was properly



Above: interior wasn't short of equipment; heated Recaros were comfy and supportive.
Left: Kumhos offered superb grip – but wore out extremely quickly

'The GP wasn't too hardcore to live with and was joyous on the right road – or a track'

intense for the driver, too. It may not be the most polished front-driver, but I've yet to experience one that's more involving.

Contributing to this was the phenomenal grip from those Kumhos – in the dry, at least. For a while I thought they could be what defined the car, but after we got through two full sets in under 8000 miles (yes, really – not helped by them only having 5mm of tread when new), I discovered otherwise when we switched to some more sensible rubber for the winter. On Dunlop Sport Maxxes, the GP had less outright grip in the dry (obviously), but its chassis remained thoroughly involving. And better still, I could now enjoy the car in all weathers.

Although tyres were a bit of a financial burden (£600 for a set of Kumhos, £535.68 for the Dunlops), there were no other costs apart from fuel. The car was close to needing its first service when it went back with over 16,000 miles recorded, but it didn't use any oil nor require any other maintenance.

Impressive stuff, as it's safe to say our GP had a hard life during its time with us – and no doubt before that too. The only sign of wear was a bit of 'road rash' on the vents before the rear wheelarches and on the black trim behind each wheel, from those sticky Kumhos throwing up stones. This might bother some, but to me it looked like well-earned battle scars.

So the GP wasn't too hardcore to live with every day and was joyous when the right road (or a track) presented itself. And not once did it fail to feel very special. Only 300 GPs are coming to the UK. I feel privileged to have run one for eight months. If you own one, you're very lucky indeed. ✕

Ian Eveleigh

Date acquired	July 2013
Duration of test	8 months
Total test mileage	11,823
Overall mpg	34.0
Costs	£1135.68
Purchase price	£28,795
Trade-in value	£21,000
Depreciation	£7795

Volkswagen Golf GTI

Having got through the early running-in stage, Duff finds there's much to like about the Golf's dynamics

IT'S AMAZING WHAT a difference a few hundred miles makes. When the GTI arrived last month with 28 miles on the clock the engine felt super-tight. But with nearly 1800 miles now showing, it's become a completely different car, revving with an enthusiasm that belies the flatness of its turbocharged torque curve. On paper, the Golf looks under-gunned compared with its obvious rivals: even with the Performance Pack, ours only has 227bhp. But on the road it really doesn't seem to lack anything in terms of real-world pace.

As predicted, the Golf's niceness is its defining day-to-day characteristic. The cabin is beautifully finished, ride and refinement are markedly better than the hot hatch norm and the engine stays tractable at lower speeds. It also seems determined to emphasise its piety with the

'Eco Tips' it displays on the screen between the instruments if you're not green enough, usually reminding you to change gear. If there's a way to turn these off, I haven't found it yet. If I do, I will.

But there is a harder core beneath the Golf's surface. The adaptive dampers of our long-termer help, with the Sport setting giving the car a noticeable added edge over the Comfort mode. And the Performance Pack's limited-slip differential makes its presence felt too, especially on slippery surfaces – as grip begins to fade into understeer it can be felt starting to lock and helping the front end find some extra bite. It's nothing like as aggressive as the diff in the Renaultsport Mégane 265, which pretty much pulls you into a corner like it's headbutting you, but it does prove that the Golf isn't some sort of badge-engineered wannabe. ✕

Mike Duff

Peugeot 208 GTI

Riley and Meaden enjoy a track outing at Bedford

AAFTER MY ATTEMPT to take the 208 on track at the Nürburgring recently was thwarted by the weather, I got a second opportunity for some high-speed action when I joined our road-testers at the Bedford Autodrome to film some track battles for *evo*TV.

During a break in 'play', I gave KV13 UEM a blast around the West Circuit, and although soaking wet conditions prevailed once again, I had a whale of a time. I wanted to see how the 208 would fare without its protective electronics, so I ran the first couple of laps with the DSC turned off and quickly found the French hatch to be far too much of a handful for me! Sufficiently scared into switching it

back on, I discovered the DSC has the balance just right from a driver engagement point of view, giving me a little slip to work with without being too intrusive.

Dickie Meaden was keen to try the Pug to see how it stacked up against his long-termer – and one of the 208's main rivals – the RS Clio Turbo. He was impressed with the GTI, saying it felt light and nimble, whilst agreeing that it was much easier to drive with the DSC on (although he also described the steering wheel blocking the view of the dials as 'sitting behind someone really tall at the cinema').

It didn't take long after the track outing for it to become clear that five months of hard use had worn the front tyres past their best, so I

Right: Golf's limited-slip diff helps neatly minimise understeer without being overly aggressive

'On paper, the Golf looks under-gunned, but on the road it doesn't seem to lack anything in terms of real-world pace'

Date acquired	January 2014
Total mileage	1798
Mileage this month	1030
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	32.5



made a quick trip to Coventry, where Peugeot HQ kindly furnished the GTI with a new pair of Michelin Pilot Exalto 205/45 R17s. The early signs are that the new rubber has put the 208 back on top form: pre-change it wasn't feeling that grippy and was a bit too eager to break traction on occasion, but now those feelings have completely disappeared.

At £142.09 each on blackcircles.com, the Exaltos are a sizeable investment if you're shelling out your own hard-earned, but on the plus side, this is the first 'cost' our 208 has incurred after nearly half a year on our fleet. And that's certainly something to be thankful for. ✕

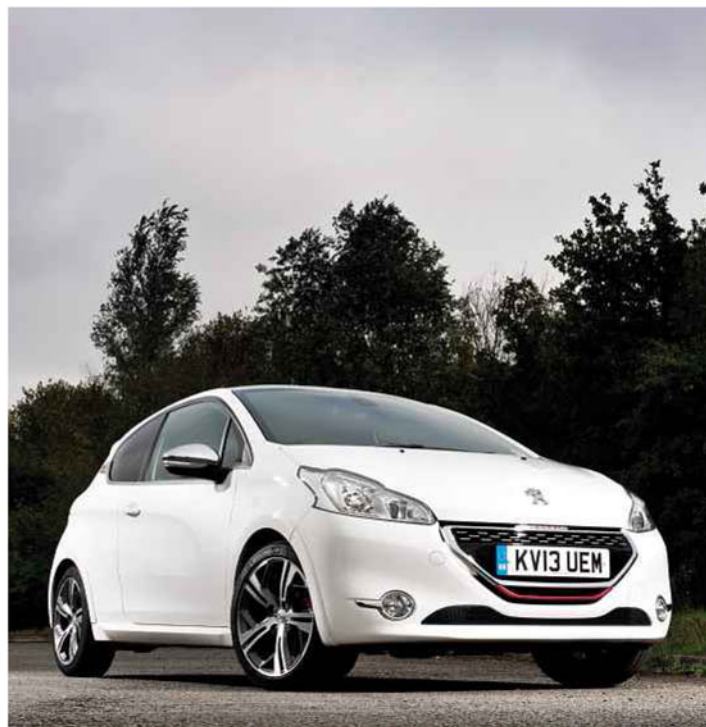
Sam Riley (@samgriley)

Date acquired	September 2013
Total mileage	15,894
Mileage this month	669
Costs this month	£284.18
mpg this month	35.2



Above: worn-down front Michelins had to be changed

'The DSC has the balance just right from a driver engagement point of view'



Peugeot 208 GTI

Jaguar F-type V6 S

An encounter with the new Corvette Stingray in Wales has put the F-type's performance into perspective

THE WHOLE POINT of a long-term test is to experience a car away from the pressures of group tests, on the sorts of roads and journeys that owners will experience every day. Sometimes it's nice to throw them back into the lion's den, though, as happened recently when our F-type took its first trip to north Wales, as support vehicle on a video shoot for the new Corvette.

We lament the huge leap in the price of the Corvette from around £33,000 in its home market to £61,495 here in the UK, but next to the £67,520 V6 S it still looks a bit of a bargain. It massively outguns the 375bhp F-type with 455bhp and 460lb ft, and it's a little lighter too. It also has dry-sump lubrication (with the standard-in-Europe Z51 package), magnetic dampers, an electronically controlled limited-slip diff, a seven-speed manual gearbox... In other words it's a proper job. It also coped pretty well with the worst weather and surfaces Wales could throw at it.

Driving the two cars back-to-back was enlightening. The Vette was on winter tyres, which found incredible grip considering the filthy conditions, and the F-type felt very nervous and snappy initially by comparison. In fact jumping straight into it after the calm security of the Vette was pretty shocking. The



'The nervousness melted away into intuitive responsiveness, and the hard ride ensured much better body control than the Vette'

steering felt jumpy and the ride very hard, meaning the chassis seemed edgy and tricky to read. Bizarrely, it didn't feel as sophisticated nor as exploitable as the Stingray.

As the miles racked up and the tyres found some temperature, things changed. In fact it didn't take long for the F-type to feel completely at home. The nervousness seemed to melt away into intuitive responsiveness, and the hard ride remained but ensured much better body control than the Vette, which

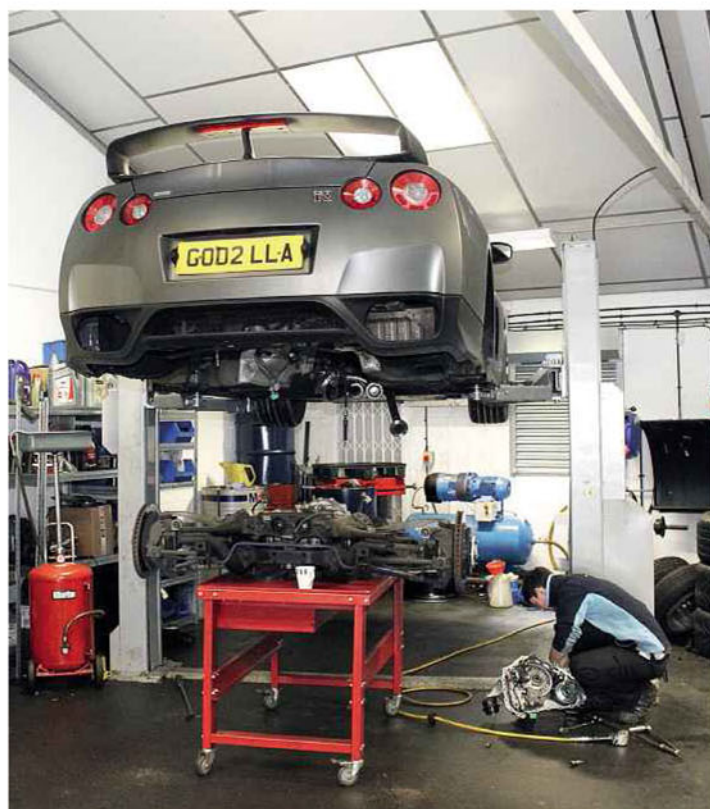
started to lose its composure at high speed and bottomed out alarmingly a couple of times. The V6 S was just great fun: still giving regular spikes of oversteer and needing real concentration but getting better and better the harder I tried.

So its engine can't match the fury of that big V8 and the noise is a bit too synthesised, but overall the F-type felt the more measured, composed and exciting car. **X**

Jethro Bovingdon
(@JethroBovingdon)

Above: Vette (rear) looks pricey at £61,495, but it's £6k cheaper than the F-type and its V8 has 80bhp more than the Jag's supercharged V6

Date acquired	September 2013
Total mileage	10,635
Mileage this month	1247
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	24.7



Above: Stealthzilla gets disassembled. **Below:** Iain Litchfield investigates. **Bottom left:** escaped ball bearings caused failure. **Left:** uprated circlip fitted as a precaution



Nissan GT-R

With the novelty of running with drive to the rear wheels only wearing off, Yu decided it was time to get the GT-R's drivetrain problems resolved

A AS YOU MAY recall from my last couple of reports, Stealthzilla has been reduced to rear-wheel drive lately. And despite the knee-jerk reaction of some Luddites being 'Ooh, that sounds like fun; finally a proper drivers' GT-R!', the reality is that 720bhp simply does not work through the rear axle only.

The GT-R was always designed to share its output between both axles and so during the wettest winter since Noah got his tools out, Skidzilla (as I'd taken to calling it) was pretty much undriveable. Even the slightest applications of throttle resulted in either massive wheelspin, TC intervention or both.

(or more) of the ball bearings from the drive plate to pop free and get jammed, locking the drivetrain in 4WD temporarily. As the failure itself occurred during the drift course I did (evo 191), the rapid blips of throttle needed to keep the drifts going and the subsequent repeated torque reversals probably then caused the jammed assembly to fail. Luckily Iain makes it his mission to buy up any available drivetrain parts and he had a new AWD clutch pack fitted within 24 hours of the car's arrival.

Whilst the gearbox was apart, the main clutches were inspected and found to still be in excellent condition, but I took the precaution of having an uprated Dodson

'Even the slightest applications of throttle resulted in either massive wheelspin, TC intervention or both'

So with a trackday at Donington Park rapidly approaching, I booked the GT-R in with Litchfield Imports, which has by far the most experience in the UK of dealing with GT-R transmission issues.

AWD transfer failure is rare but not unheard of, and is usually down to either burning out the AWD clutch pack or shearing the front drive output shaft inside the gearbox. Within a couple of hours of arriving at his Tewkesbury workshop, one of Iain Litchfield's technicians had removed Stealthzilla's rear-mounted gearbox and disassembled it to diagnose the failure. Once they pointed to the appropriate area, it wasn't hard for me to see the problem: the AWD clutch housing had cracked in two!

Doing his best CSI impression, Iain deduced that over 30,000 miles of enthusiastic use had worn the AWD clutches sufficiently to allow one

Motorsport circlip fitted to replace the weedy OEM item, plus some uprated solenoid clips, as they are prone to failure after prolonged use.

As I write, I'm just waiting for Iain to upgrade the ECU with the latest Version 4 of EcuTek's remapping software, which should add a more sophisticated level of traction control for track use.

So it's been an expensive month, but not as catastrophic as I feared – the bill came to £3220. Bearing in mind this is the first issue G002 LLA has given me in five years and nearly 35,000 miles of fun-filled driving, it speaks volumes for the inherent toughness of the mighty GT-R. **X**

David Yu (@Auto_Journals)

Date acquired	April 2009
Total mileage	34,447
Mileage this month	174
Costs this month	£3220
mpg this month	16.9



Ferrari F40

The '80s icon emerges from hibernation to be taken away for its annual service

JUST BEFORE THIS issue closed for press, the Ferrari F40 disappeared into the bowels of a Carrs Ferrari transporter to begin the 150-mile trip down to Exeter for its annual service. Sadly this was the first time the F40 had turned a wheel in ten weeks, as it is neither amphibious nor an ice-breaker. In fact, its last outing was on a very cold day with ice on the sides of the roads. Driving a 470bhp-plus rear-wheel-drive twin-turbo supercar with precisely zero electronic nannies in such conditions is an excellent stress test for one's cardio system and far more fun than an ECG.

That ice drive was a sad end to what had been a terrific 2013 with the F40. The trip down to Italy was epic, as were a few of the drives across the Alpine passes, while running down an Autobahn at speed proved just how brain-scramblingly

quick this 22-year-old car still is. It also reminded me just how stable the F40 is with the speedometer needle positioned well to the right of high noon.

Carrs has cared for the F40 for six of the eight years I have owned it. Over much of that time we have done a sort of rolling restoration, tackling a new major area each year. To date the suspension, turbos, clutch, fuel cells, most hoses, the headlining and front-end paintwork have all been attended to. We have also done both leak-down and compression tests on the engine to see if it is in need of a rebuild yet, and fortunately for my wallet, it is in terrific condition. This is something

Date acquired	November 2006
Total mileage	44,501km
Mileage this month	250 yards
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	n/a

'This was the first time the F40 had run in ten weeks, as it is neither amphibious nor an ice-breaker'

I attribute to both regular use and regular servicing by a team of great mechanics that really know and understand the car.

The original plan called for having the seats recovered this year, but poor organisation on my part has resulted in this being put off until 2015. This task involves shipping the seats back to Italy – never a quick process – and I don't want to lose the opportunity to drive the car this spring. ☒

Secret Supercar Owner
(@SupercarOwner)



Top: F40 has been largely stationary this winter. **Above:** planned retrim for the seats has been put on hold

Vauxhall VXR8 Clubsport Tourer

It's showdown time, as VXR8 and RS6 Avant go head-to-head on track

C COULD I GET out of bed? Just. Any other day I wouldn't have bothered.

Man flu. Not as bad as real flu but worse than a cold. I felt like a dead man reanimated by a mild electric current applied to my sinuses.

What dragged leaden footfall across the bedroom carpet was the thought that if I could swallow enough pills and rinse my eyes into focus, the hours ahead might just turn good. In short, Big Blue had to report to Bedford Autodrome by 8.15am so it could engage its Teutonic nemesis, Mike Duff's long-term Audi RS6 Avant, in mortal combat on the West Circuit. Actually, Duff's car had long since returned to Audi, but a stand-in was waiting in the car park when I arrived. I parked Big Blue next to it, which suddenly didn't look so big any more.

Dickie Meaden, Jethro Bovingdon



and the video guys turned up a few minutes later to start work on a roster of track battles that would take them through the day, and kindly offered to bump the big estates up the order so I could bugger off back to bed. Fighting off the shivers with sequential vending machine coffees, I watched as Dickie first wreathed the West Circuit in a haze of vaporised rubber and Corvette-at-Le Mans sonic stylings before he started setting about nailing a lap time.

The noise was astonishing, both in volume (a real surprise we didn't

get chucked off) and old-school V8 venom, quickly reintroducing the shivers the coffees had soothed away. Whenever the VXR8 hove into view from my vantage point, it was still going sideways and canted over at an unlikely angle, with the supercharger screaming like the four-minute warning. Green screen in the Australian bush and it could have been a scene from *Mad Max*. Trying to extract an estimate of actual speed from all the drama was near impossible.

But when Dickie took to the track in the RS6, I was left with

'Whenever the VXR8 hove into view, it was still going sideways'

Left: Vivian fought off a bout of man flu to get Big Blue to its date with Audi's RS6 Avant

the hard-to-swallow impression that, although quieter and less spectacular, the Audi did appear to be circulating at a faster rate. I won't give away the result – you'll have to look out for the video at youtube.com/evotv. Big Blue did feel nicely loosened up on the way home, though. ☒

David Vivian (@davidjvivan)

Date acquired	September 2013
Total mileage	12,537
Mileage this month	533
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	19.5



Above: Focus shines during B-road blasts; six-speed manual is a joy to operate when heel-and-toeing

Ford Focus ST Estate

After two months apart, Smith rediscovers the joys of the Focus

I I MUST ADMIT that I was becoming a little tired of using the ST every day for long, monotonous motorway journeys. However, after eight weeks away from it due to the festive season, the car's first service and body repairs following its altercation with a lorry (*evo* 193), I was eager to get behind the wheel of the Focus again. So for my first run from *evo* Towers to Deanton Abbey after we were reunited, I decided to point the ST's nose down some of my favourite B-roads.

It was great to be back in it, heel-and-toeing into the bends, enjoying the sweet manual gearbox, easing on the power to avoid the inside wheel spinning, then getting fully on the gas and fighting with the huge

amounts of torque-steer just to keep the car on the road. It's scrappy progress at times but it's definitely involving: you couldn't ever criticise it for being boring on this type of road.

The ST's first service, at 12,500 miles, should have consisted only of an oil change, but an inspection found that it also needed new brake pads all-round and new front tyres. I was surprised about the need for pads at first, but to be fair, this particular ST undoubtedly gets driven harder than the average model, as it spends most of its time

Date acquired	August 2013
Total mileage	15,600
Mileage this month	374
Costs this month	£543
mpg this month	25.9

blasting across Europe hot on the heels of the latest hypercars, or hooning around Bedford Autodrome and Blyton Park.

The latest software updates for the ECU and instrument panel were also uploaded, although the latter changes must be minor as it remains completely unfathomable to most.

Ford's press garage carried out the service while it was sorting the bodywork repairs, meaning we didn't have the chance to take the car to a dealer, but we calculated that the service would have cost £543, comprising £119 for a minor service, two tyres at £120 each, £95 for front pads and £89 for the rear pads. For more than 15,000 hard-driven miles, that doesn't seem too bad. ☒

Dean Smith (@evoDeanSmith)

Ford Focus ST Estate



Above: new Eibach/Bilstein suspension was fitted by Autoclass in MK. **Right:** self-levelling hydraulics have been made redundant



Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.5-16

Suspension, tyres and fault-finding equals a big bill

THE BEST WAY to deal with old cars is to never look at your credit card statements. Let's just say that I must really love this car, given how genuinely pained I was when totting up the 'costs this month' total for this report.

My first job was sorting out the electrical problems that had laid the 190E low since last year. Autoclass in Milton Keynes reported a coolant hose next to the alternator had split, explaining the lack of charge. So the alternator was refurbished and a new hose fitted, but the engine was still running rough and so – moving to the next item down the line – the overvoltage relay was replaced, restoring the 2.5-16 to health.

£540 down and with the car already in the garage, I opted to have the £199 Eibach Pro-Kit springs fitted, and as they didn't fit with the standard dampers, along came a matching £310 set of very nice Bilstein B8 gas dampers that can cope with the shorter springs. This also necessitated blanking off the Merc's self-levelling system, which

hadn't worked since I blew it at the Nürburgring last year.

The car was now running for the first time in nine months, but some marginal wet-weather braking on the way home highlighted the next problem: the very worn, decade-old Pirellis. The 190E's 205/55 R15s are almost impossibly small by modern standards, with most options clearly being aimed at miserly minicab drivers. Fortunately, Dunlop has kept the faith, meaning four SP Fast Responses were added to the basket (£328 fitted, from the helpful chaps at Tyres Northampton). Last but not least, another new battery to replace the one that the dead alternator seems to have written off whisked another £61 out of my wallet.

So, finally, the 190E is ready for its next adventure. Find out how it gets on next time. ☒

Mike Duff

Date acquired	May 2012
Total mileage	159,891
Mileage this month	230
Costs this month	£1438
mpg this month	23.1

Toyota GT86

Catchpole's been lurking on GT86 owners' forums...

HAVING A BROWSE of owners' club forums is always interesting. Obviously it's quite narcissistically intriguing to see what sort of flak I'm taking for any opinions I've voiced (Catchpole is a nice easy name to search for!), but more pertinently, it's excellent for getting a snapshot of what problems other people are having with their cars.

The GT86 Owners' Club forum reveals four faults various people seem to have experienced. The first is one that I've noticed on our car: condensation inside a rear light cluster. It seems Toyota is aware and most dealers will replace the clusters without quibble if you ask.

Next up is a fuel pump that sounds like an angry field cricket

has become trapped inside. Again, Toyota seems happy to replace the pump as a matter of course. I assume all crickets are rehabilitated.

A lumpy idle and intermittent cutting out has been experienced by some, for which the solution seems to be replacing or reflashing the ECU. Our car has been a little hesitant in starting on cold mornings recently, but it's just an extra turn of the crank rather than a full-blown refusal.

Finally, some owners have noted a recalcitrant second gear, even needing to double-declutch to get round the problem. Again, cold mornings certainly make second gear pretty baulky on our car, but it's fine as soon as it's warm. If anything, I struggle more with fourth, where it feels like it's all too easy to beat the



synchro if you're driving quickly.

Talking of driving quickly, I've come to the conclusion that with the '86 it really is a case of the more you put in, the more you get out. The engine feels strong but only if you make the effort (and it can feel like an effort) to get to the last 1500rpm. Similarly, in corners, the more you commit on the way into the bend, the more fun you have through and out of it (slow-in, fast-out has no

place here). Suffice to say, that's rarely sensible, safe or practical on the road, but there are occasions... More of which next month. ☒

Henry Catchpole
(@HenryCatchpole)

Date acquired	May 2013
Total mileage	12,002
Mileage this month	876
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	30.2

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Renaultsport Clio 200 Turbo

As Meaden's time with the French hatch winds down, he reflects on a car that hasn't quite delivered for him



A ABSENCE MAKES THE heart grow fonder, or so they say. Having spent the last few weeks driving cars other than the Clio, I was intrigued to see how I felt on being reunited with the Renault after a lengthy period of separation. There's no question that I've become far more keen on the looks, especially in its Liquid Yellow. The appearance certainly isn't for everyone, but I'm now a fan.

Things such as the keyless entry sound deadly boring, but actually make a big difference in daily life. I don't know why all cars can't lock and unlock like this. The interior is wearing well, but the seats (though comfortable) look a bit cheap and don't offer enough lateral support. Ultimately you can't beat a pair of Recaros. I've learnt to navigate my way around the touchscreen infotainment system, but it's not as intuitive as it should be. It's also prone to random hissy-fits and periods where it's totally unresponsive to finger prods, thumps and even copious swearing. Then again, it is French, so I suppose you should expect the odd strike.

I've moaned about the engine's lack of character, and it could certainly do with a bit more fizz, but it would be infinitely more

tolerable were it not for the horrid gearbox, which never fails to annoy. Sometimes it's so indecisive I think it's actually forgotten it's a gearbox. Renault, please throw this abomination in the bin and give the 200 Turbo the transmission it deserves.

The Clio will be staying with **evo** for a while longer, but with the imminent arrival of a new (very exciting!) Fast Fleeter, my time with the Renault is all but up. It's been a slightly tense relationship and one that's ultimately left me feeling disappointed by a car that should have suited me down to the ground. The fact I've still not seen one other 200 Turbo on the road suggests it hasn't convinced the buying public, either. Considering Renaultsport has owned the hot hatch sector for the best part of a decade, that's quite a shock. Hopefully Renault is working hard on addressing the flaws that spoil what could be a car worthy of the RS reputation. ✕

Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Date acquired	August 2013
Total mileage	11,503
Mileage this month	1332
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	28.4

Ferrari 458 Italia

Ferrari 458 Italia

As the 458 nears 50,000 miles, George looks at the practicalities of driving a supercar every day

WITH NO WARNING lights, no ticking noises and the traction control all present and correct, the Terminator is flying right now. I reckon every supercar I've owned has had its 'off' days, and WX11, despite train-loads of technology, is no different. It's like a petulant girlfriend some days but an absolute delight on others, yet this is a supercar that, when it's on form, is quite extraordinary in its ability to wipe out almost anything else with a set of wheels.

I've still got my occasional gripes. Just like my first-ever Ferrari, a black 308 GTB that I cherished many moons ago, it's the details that

can let the 458 down: for example, the headlight washer covers that more than once have flown away into the scenery (one was replaced at a cost of £46 this month). WX11 does lead a tough existence both on- and off-track that doesn't reflect the use from a typical owner, but two 430 Spiders also on the 6th Gear Experience fleet get the same constant punishment and rarely give any issues, while two Porsche 997 Turbos have had merely replacement tyres and pads in three years...

Given WX11's 47,000 miles, I'm now in a position to answer the most often asked question from fellow petrolheads: could you really use

a 458 Italia every day? The answer is yes. The constant attention (not quite all of it positive) gets tedious and the depreciation is catastrophic given we Brits hate Italian cars with more than 3000 miles on the clock, but it's a friendly thing in automatic and has a boot big enough to get three bags of cement in (I know because I've done it). It's also no worse at munching the miles than a petrol Range Rover. Somehow, though, I can't see us Brits changing the habit of a lifetime and using Ferraris every day. We'll leave that to the creations from Stuttgart. ✕

Simon George
(@6gearexperience)

Date acquired	May 2011
Total mileage	46,951
Mileage this month	839
Costs this month	£46
mpg this month	12.0



Above: control-festooned wheel is gripped day-in, day-out. **Below:** boot is surprisingly spacious for a supercar





BMW M6 Gran Coupe

Editor Trott has found an unlikely rival for the big M-car

I I'VE DRIVEN TWO cars in the past month that ask serious questions of the £98,125 BMW M6 Gran Coupe: the Bentley Continental GT V8 S and the Tesla Model S Performance. On face value, neither is a direct rival for the BMW – although the Tesla has a similar sleek four-door vibe. And at £139,000 and £69,080 respectively, neither falls into the same price

bracket. But both highlight strengths and weaknesses of the M6.

Firstly, the Tesla isn't just a great electric car, but a great car. From a performance, ride and handling perspective, the Model S is a cohesive and desirable package, and feels every bit as quick as the M6. The BMW trumps it for torque (501lb ft versus 442), but thanks to a lack of lag and the instant throttle

response, the Tesla feels quicker in real-world scenarios. On top of that, its traction is mightily impressive – an area where the M6 remains weak (particularly at this time of year).

The Tesla struggles to get within 100 miles of the realistic range of a cautiously driven M6 (around 250 miles versus 350), but the majority of my journeys follow the same pattern – drive around 30 miles, park the car

for a few hours, repeat. Providing I research the locations of charging stations in advance there are few scenarios where the M6 would have an advantage.

The Bentley makes more of a virtue of its duality, by which I mean it can seemingly cruise forever in total comfort (just over 500 miles on a full tank, Bentley claims) and yet when you want to enjoy yourself, you simply wind the suspension down and slip into Sport mode as the engine turns into a blaring Merlin and a grin spreads across your face. The M6, meanwhile, always wants to play: stepping sideways at the merest whiff of throttle and exhibiting a general effervescence that some might find too much.

For those moments when you want to indulge in the finer areas of chassis set-up, the M6 is absolutely The One. But the Tesla in particular should be considered a direct rival (I never thought I'd find myself writing that) – and at a price 30 per cent less than the M6's, too. **X**

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Date acquired	September 2013
Total mileage	7251
Mileage this month	377
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	19.8

Porsche 996 Carrera



Porsche 996 Carrera

Bovingdon's 911 presents him with an oil quandary

THE 996 IS ready for the spring and summer. This month my brother kindly gave it an oil service at family rates (i.e. free!) at the Paragon MOT Centre in Northampton, so I can relax and start covering some miles. Owning a 996 and being 'relaxed' about anything isn't easy, mind: the internet seems to pulsate with horror stories and even choosing something as simple as the oil to best lubricate the maligned M96 engine is a headache.

Renowned specialist Hartech suggests using Millers Oils Nanodrive products, while Porsche recommends Mobil 1 and everyone else seems to have differing opinions. What to do? In the end, I

rang R825 YAU's last owner and he said he'd always used the thicker-than-recommended Mobil 1 15W-15. The car covered thousands of miles in his hands and did several trackdays, so why change?

Well, quite simply because Mobil no longer makes that particular oil. Fortunately, Gulf Racing produces a 15W-50, which seemed reassuringly expensive at £85.25 for 10 litres from Demon Tweaks. But those in the know suggest oil changes every six months for the 996, which means this could get pricey even with favourable labour rates...

With new filters from Design 911 at £95.33 and having vowed never to look at internet forums concerning 996 engines, I should be enjoying

my Carrera. And when I drive it, I really do. I love the GT3-style seats, the noise and response of the engine (thanks in part to the Cargraphic exhaust system) and the fantastic steering feel. Little niggles remain, however, about the scabby paintwork, noisy sunroof seals and a few other bits, but I think it's a common affliction to get hung up on the bad instead of enjoying the positives. My brother put it into perspective. 'Mostly it's pretty good,' I said, unconvinced. 'Mostly it's a 911 and it's yours,' he replied. Put like that, I couldn't be happier. **X**

Jethro Bovingdon
(@JethroBovingdon)

Date acquired	May 2013
Total mileage	141,963
Mileage this month	601
Costs this month	£180.58
mpg this month	21.6

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Market watch

SUPERCOUPE SAVINGS

Why used GT-Rs offer both great value and rock-solid residuals

THE UNVEILING OF the new European-spec Nissan GT-R Nismo at the Geneva motor show set us wondering how the market is faring for pre-owned versions of the 'ordinary' GT-R. It first hit British shores in 2008 as the successor to the old Skyline, and since then has come to be regarded as one of the most capable cars in its segment.

While the GT-R has undoubtedly been developed and improved during the past six years, it has also become considerably more expensive. Not only was the list price of the original way lower than it is now, it also benefited from the temporary reduction in UK VAT to 15 per cent, meaning it was once possible to have a British specification car on your drive for 'just' £52,900.

So how are pre-owned values holding up? There are few people better placed to provide a realistic analysis than Iain Litchfield, whose eponymous tuning company has been buying, selling and tweaking GT-Rs since taking delivery of the first in Europe (it featured in *evo* 116 ahead of the model's 2008 eCoty win).

'The cars are performing ridiculously well on the second-hand market and haven't

really dipped during the past 12 months,' says Litchfield. 'In fact, we have sold the same car twice within the last year for exactly the same amount of money.'

He believes the major factors driving this stability are the ever-dwindling numbers of cars being brought to the UK (only around 200 last year) and the fact that the list price has now soared to £76,610.

'Although values are holding up, it is still a buyer's market in terms of the fact that there are quite a few cars to choose from,' adds Litchfield. 'I would generally steer people away from the 50 to 100 Japanese-specification, grey-import models that came over here, because £30-35,000 buys a really nice UK-spec car either in standard condition or with a few sensible modifications. We regularly see cars with 70,000 miles-plus on the clock which are used as reliable, daily drivers.'

So GT-Rs are enjoying stable values and are dependable too. Sounds like a win-win to us.

Simon de Burton



Paul Field

Auction watch

Iconic race cars go under RM Auctions' hammer at Monaco in May

With James Hunt's story in focus following the Hollywood blockbuster *Rush*, it's perhaps a great time to sell the driver's first F1 car: a Hesketh 308. And at what better place than RM Auctions' sale on May 9-10 in Monaco?

This one is the first of four Hesketh chassis built, and the car that took Hesketh's first F1 victory in 1974. Designed by Harvey Postlethwaite, the car made its debut in the Race of Champions at Brands Hatch, where Hunt took pole position. That race didn't end too well – Hunt retired due to crash damage – but the car did go on to provide Hunt and the Hesketh team with their first F1 victory in the non-championship Silverstone International Trophy.

Despite being taken to most rounds of the 1974 Formula 1 season, Hesketh 308-1 was kept as the spare car for the most part. During 1975 it was driven by Alan Jones, and later Harald Ertl, to moderate successes, before Lord Hesketh pulled his financial backing of the team at the end of the year. Pre-sale estimates range from €400,000 to €650,000 (£330,000 to £540,000), but such a significant car could easily exceed that.

Another interesting motorsport icon up for sale in Monaco will be a 1989 Aston Martin AMR1, from the glory days of Group C Le Mans racing. Despite a promising start in life, with a partnership between Aston Martin and Scottish team Ecurie Ecosse, the AMR1 failed to make a mark on the world of endurance racing during its short-lived career. Plans to develop it further for 1990 were killed off when the Protech team that ran it went bankrupt.

This car, chassis 04, scored the car's best-ever result: fourth place in the Brands Hatch round of the World Sports Prototype Championship in July 1989. It's estimated to sell for \$1million-1.5million (£600,000-900,000).

Matthew Hayward (@evoMatthew)



Paul Field

Top: ex-Hunt Hesketh estimated to fetch £330-540k.

Above: guide for Aston AMR1 Group C car is £600-900k

Market Watch

Knowledge

Insights into the used-car market

Ask the expert



Q

I'm looking to buy a car as an investment. I'm not in the F40 kind of atmosphere, but surely there are some options that are on the up and up that a car enthusiast could invest in?

My current thinking is the 993-model Porsche, specifically the Turbo or better still the Turbo S. Whilst they are already on the rise (circa £80k+ here in Australia), surely they have more room to climb, being the last of the air-cooled Porsches? Does your crystal ball have any other suggestions? I would happily lock the car away to aid appreciation... Well, maybe after one or two drives!

My budget is around £110-135k.

Luke O'Neill, Australia

A

When it comes to buying cars for investment, the most important thing to remember are the words 'caveat emptor'. Also, be aware that not driving a car is often a great way to ruin it – and air-cooled Porsches, in particular, love to be used. That said, the Turbo and Turbo S look set to continue rising in value for a while. With your budget, I'd consider buying the best 1960s/'70s Maserati I could find, an Alfa 8C (although you may have missed the boat on that one) or, if you can stretch to it, a Jaguar XJ220 (pictured). But, whatever you choose, drive it! **SdB**

Email your question to experts@evo.co.uk

Trader chat



Jonathan Franklin, Hexagon Moderns
hexagonmoderns.com

Hexagon Moderns was established around a year ago as a dealer of interesting, low-mileage cars built between the 1980s and now. One of its specialities is the sale of BMW 'M' models, which Hexagon sources from all over Europe.

'BMW's "M" range definitely falls into that bracket of cars which people aspire to own because they remember being impressed by them as youngsters, when they didn't have the means to buy one,' says Hexagon's Jonathan Franklin. 'As a result, our customers tend to range from people in their early 30s right up to the 60-70 age group.'

'Although the E30 M3 has been regarded as a classic for quite some time, the early 2000 cars are now heading that way too, and the best ones are holding their value extremely well. But regardless of the age or model, it is becoming more and more difficult to find the sort of cars that we like to sell – that is, low-mileage examples with a comprehensive service history.'

'The reason for this is that these cars were built to be driven and, if properly maintained, they will clock up big mileages without any trouble. And that makes them appealing to people who want an interesting but practical high-performance car for regular use.'

Just looking

The pick of the classifieds this month



Lotus 2-Eleven

£37,995

Bell & Colvill, Surrey

bellandcolvill.com

01483 286419

The Lotus 2-Eleven is the car Exige and 340R owners call extreme. It was available as a pure track car or, like this one, fitted with an SVA package to make it road-legal. Painted in the iconic Lotus JPS black and gold colour scheme, it's a fairly unsuitable thing, but also super-desirable for anyone who remembers the ultra-cool 1970s JPS Lotus F1 cars.

For sale at Lotus specialist Bell & Colvill, this 2-Eleven has been signed by

Clive Chapman, and has one of the most comprehensive service histories you could want – including factory build pictures. Meanwhile, an epic list of optional parts, such as the full 'Sport Pack', special-order Phantom Black paint, black leather seats, a Lotus Stage One exhaust and an AP Racing Big Brake Kit, make this a car that is just begging to be driven hard on track.

Matthew Hayward (@evoMatthew)

Noble M400

£44,995

The Cambridge Motor Company

www.cambridgemotorcompany.co.uk

01763 260818



The Noble M400 is one of those once-in-a-generation flashes of genius, where a seemingly random assortment of components – including a Mondeo V6 engine with a couple of turbochargers strapped to it – comes together to form something completely breathtaking.

According to the Cambridge Motor Company, this 17,000-mile example is possibly one of the best in existence. Just 75

were produced, and with a power-to-weight ratio exceeding 400bhp-per-ton and no TC or ABS, its fair to say we have probably lost a few since production ended in 2007.

When it was new, the M400 went toe-to-toe with the 996 GT3 RS, and offered similar levels of feedback and involvement – something very few cars can claim. If you can get over the unusual styling, the M400 is a real gem. **MH**

Fantasy garage: £500,000 challenge

evo sub editor and motorsport fanatic Dan McCalla picks out three racing cars – a single-seater, a coupe and a sports car – from the listings at forsale.evo.co.uk



1978 Arrows FA1
c£215,000

Arrows' very first Grand Prix racer carried a beautiful gold livery, although it's hardly the fastest F1 car ever to be built in Milton Keynes...



1978 Jaguar XJ-S Trans Am
c£230,000

Winner of the American Trans Am title in its first season, with Bob Tullius driving, this is a stunningly brutal machine.



1965 Lotus Elan S2
£54,950

Something about racing a proper (FIA-approved) British sports car around the classic tracks of Europe really appeals...

IMPERIALS



BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GTC MULLINER CAB AUTO 08 REG.
Beluga Black with Magnolia and Beluga Hide. 26,000 Miles with F/B/S/H. Diamond Quilted Leather with Embossed Logo, Contrast stitching, Sports Gear Shift, Drilled Alloy Sports Pedals and 20" Mulliner Alloys, Keyless Go, DVD Sat Nav, Reverse Camera, Bluetooth, Climate, E/H/M/ Massaging Seats, IPOD Connection, Multi CD, Bi-Xenons, PDC, Power Boot, Adj Susp, Piano Black Veneer and 3 Spoke Duo Tone M/F/S/Wheel.
£64,995



BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT COUPE SERIES 51 AUTO 10 REG.
Glacier White with Duo Tone Linen / Imperial Blue Leather. 21,000 Miles, F/B/S/H. Diamond Stitched Duo Tone Leather with Contrast Newmarket Tan Stitching and Piping, Sat Nav, Rear View Camera, Bluetooth, Voice Control, Keyless Go, Climate, E/H/M/ Massaging Seats, Multi CD, IPOD Interface, Xenons, PDC, Power Boot, Adj Susp, Wood Trim, F/Mirrors, Series 51 Styling and 20" Series 51 14 Spoke Diamond Alloys.
£72,995



BMW M3 CAB 5MG AUTO 04 REG.
Individual Estoril Blue Met, Full Black Leather. 50,000 Miles, F/B/M/W/S/H. Factory C/Coated H/Top, Professional Sat Nav, TV, Climate, Cruise, E/M/S/ Seats, Multi CD, Harman Kardon, Xenons, PDC, P/Hood, W/Deflector, M/F/S/Wheel inc G/S/Paddles, F/ Mirrors, S/Suspension, Full M Sport Styling and 19" M Alloys. Bal of BMW Warranty.
£15,995



BMW 640D M SPORT COUPE VAT Q AUTO 61 REG.
Motorsport Imola Red, Full Black Leather. 1 Owner. 15,000 Miles, F/ BMW/S/H. Professional Sat Nav, Bluetooth Prep, Voice Control, Extended BMW Online, BMW Assist, Start/Stop Function, Climate, H/S/ Seats, DAB Radio, USB Audio Interface, HFI Speaker System, PDC, LED Fog Lights, Aluminium Trim, Ambient Interior Lighting, M Sport Styling and M Double Spoke Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty. Vat Q.
£36,995



JAGUAR XF R 5.0 SUPERCHARGED V8 SALOON AUTO 10 REG.
Ultimate Black, Full Black Leather. 30,000 Miles, F/L/S/H. Touch Screen Sat Nav, Rear View Camera, Bluetooth Prep, Push Button Start, Climate, Cruise, E/H/M/S/ Cooling Seats with Lumbar and Back Width Adjust, CD Player, Portable Audio Interface, Bowers and Wilkins Sound, Xenons, PDC, H/F/Screen, M/F/S/Wheel inc G/S/Paddles, Full R Body Styling and 20" Alloys.
£26,995



JAGUAR XKR 5.0 S/ CHARGED V8 COUPE AUTO 10 REG.
Ultimate Black, Ivory Leather. 25,000 Miles, F/S/H. Touch Screen Sat Nav, Bluetooth Prep, Keyless Go, Climate, Cruise, E/H/M/S/ Cooling Seats, CD, IPOD, Bowers and Wilkins Sound, Xenons, PDC, Piano Black Wood, R Body Styling, 20" Nevis Alloys.
£35,995



MERCEDES C63 AMG EDITION 125 SALOON 7 SPEED AUTO 61 REG.
Obsidian Black Met, Designo Black Leather. 19,000 Miles, F/M/S/H. Command Online, Sat Nav, Reverse Camera, Climate, E/H/M/S/Seats, E/G/S/Root, Media Interface, DAB Radio, Harman Kardon Logic 7, PDC, LED DRLs, Bi-Xenons, Adaptive Main Beam Assist, F/Mirrors, S/Suspension, Full AMG Styling and 19" AMG Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty.
£37,995



MERCEDES E250 CDI AMG SPORT BLUE EFFICIENCY CAB 7 SPEED AUTO 62 REG.
Diamond White, Red Leather Trim. Demo + 1 Owner. 15,000 Miles, F/M/S/H. AirSart, Command APS, DVD Sat Nav, ECO Start/Stop, Climate, E/H/M/Multi Contour Seats, Media Interface, DAB Radio, Multi CD, Harman Kardon, PDC, Bi-Xenons, LED DRLs, Red P/Hood, AMG 3 Spoke M/F/S/Wheel, Black Ash Wood, Full AMG Body Styling, 18" AMG Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty.
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PORSCHE CAYENNE 4.8 TURBO WITH SPORT DESIGN PACK TIP AUTO 59 REG.
Basalt Black Met, Black Leather / Alcantara. 34,000 Miles, F/P/S/H. Panoramic Glass Roof, Sport Design Pack, PCM, Sat Nav, Phone Module, Climate, E/H/M/Seats, H/Rear/Seats, CD Player, IPOD Connection, Bose Sound, Xenons, PDC, Power Tailgate, PDC, Carbon Fibre Trim, S/Glass, Red Calipers and 21" Alloys.
£34,995



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£37,995



PORSCHE CAYENNE 3.0 V6 DIESEL 8 SPEED TIP AUTO 12 REG.
Meteor Grey Met, Black Smooth Leather. 24,000 Miles, F/P/S/H. Panoramic Glass Roof, PCM, Sat Nav, Bluetooth Prep, Start/Stop Function, Climate, E/H/M/Seats, CD, Universal Audio Interface, Bose Sound, Bi-Xenons, PDC, Power Tailgate, S/Glass, Sports Design S/Wheel inc G/S/ Paddles, Piano Black Wood and 21" 911 Turbo 2 Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty.
£47,995



RANGE ROVER EVOQUE 2.2 SD4 DYNAMIC PLUS 5 DOOR AUTO 12 REG.
Santorini Black w/ Silver Roof, Pimento Red Leather. 1 Owner. 23,000 Miles, F/L/R/S/H. Panoramic Roof, Park Assist, Sat Nav, Rear Camera, Bluetooth, Voice Input, Climate, E/H/M/S/Seats, DAB, HiLine Audio 600W, Bi-Xenons, PDC, Daytime Lights, Power Tailgate, S/Glass, Full Dynamic Body Styling, 20" Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty.
£36,995



RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 TDV6 HSE AUTOBIOGRAPHY STYLING AUTO 60 REG.
Zemra Silver, Black Leather. 42,000 Miles, F/L/R/S/H. Full Autobiography Styling, Touch Screen Sat Nav, TV, Rear View Camera, Personal Telephone Integration, Voice Control, Climate, Cruise, Portable Audio Connectivity, DAB Radio, Harman Kardon, Bi-Xenons, PDC, Piano Black Wood, 20" Alloy Wheels. Optional 22" Alloys Available at Additional Cost.
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RANGE ROVER 3.6 TDV6 AUTOBIOGRAPHY WITH 2012 FACELIFT AND ULTIMATE EDITION STYLING AUTO 08 REG.
Stoneway Grey, Black Semi Aniline Leather. 63,000 Miles, F/L/R/S/H. 2012 Facelift with Full Ultimate Edition Exterior Design Pack, Engine Power Upgrade, Rear Screen Entertainment, Touch Screen Sat Nav, TV, Rear View Camera, Personal Telephone Integration, Voice Control, HomeLink G/D/ Opener, Climate, E/G/S/Root, E/H/M/Cooling Seats, 22" Upgraded Hawke Alloys. HUGE Spec see website for details.
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RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 TDV6 HSE WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHY STYLING AUTO 10 REG.
Stoneway Grey, Ivory Extended Leather. 1 Owner. 49,000 Miles, F/ L/R/S/H. Full Autobiography Styling, Sat Nav, Rear View Camera, Personal Telephone Integration, Voice Input, Climate, Cruise, E/H/M/Seats, H/Rear/Seats, E/G/S/ Roof, DAB, CD, Harman Kardon, Bi-Xenons, 20" Alloys. Optional 22" Alloys at Additional Cost.
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RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 TDV6 HSE WITH REVERE STYLING AUTO 11 REG.
Full White, Ebony Leather. 1 Owner. 10,000 Mile, L/R/S/H. Full Revere Body Styling, Touch Screen Sat Nav, TV, Rear View Camera, Personal Telephone Integration, Passive Entry, Push Button Start, Climate, E/H/M/Seats, H/Rear/ Seats, Contrast Stitching, Portable Audio Connectivity, DAB Radio, Harman Kardon, Bi-Xenons, PDC, S/ Glass, Grand Black Lacquer and Revere Alloys. Bal of Man Warranty.
£49,995



RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 SDV6 HSE DYNAMIC LUMMA DESIGN CLR-RS AUTO VAT Q 13 REG.
Santorini Black, Ebony Leather. Delivery Miles. Full Lumma CLR-RS Conversion which is far too much to list here along with the great land rover spec, please see our website for full details. Currently only 3 of these stunning conversion in the world.
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RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0 SDV6 HSE BLACK EDITION WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHY STYLING 8 SPEED AUTO 13 REG.
Fuj White, Ebony / Pimento Red Autobiography Style Extended Leather. 11,000 Miles, F/L/R/S/H. Autobiography Body Styling, Dual View Touch Screen, Sat Nav, TV, Rear View Camera, Personal Telephone Integration, Voice Input, Passive Entry, Push Button Start, Climate, E/H/M/ Seats, H/Rear/Seats, Portable Audio Connectivity, DAB Radio, H/Kardon, Bi-Xenons, PDC, Power Tailgate and 22" Alloys at Additional Cost. Bal of Man Warranty.
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Lamborghini Diablo
VT Wheels, SE30 limited edition 24,000 miles
1996 **£129,990**



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Carbon Racing Seats 12,000 miles 2010 **£124,990**



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Lifting Gear Egear 9,000 miles 2005
£114,990



Lamborghini Gallardo LP550
Calisto Alloys Reverse Camera Egear Lifting
Gear 7,000 miles 2011 **£99,990**



Lamborghini Murcielago
Hercules Alloys SV Spec Bicolour interior
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Lamborghini Gallardo
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Sportivo Interior 11,000 miles 2007 **£74,990**



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Buying Guide

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Vauxhall VX220 & Turbo 2000-2005

Overview



An Elise in a sharper set of clothes with added power and rarity: the VX is a future classic – but choose wisely **Words:** Peter Tomalin

WHEN THE VX220/Opel Speedster arrived in the autumn of 2000, GM's plan was to build 3000 a year (1000 of them for the UK) for seven years. So had it been a sales success there would be around 7000 VXs in the UK today. It didn't quite work out like that. Just 1214 naturally aspirated cars and 876 Turbos were built before production ended two years early in 2005. With more than a few having ended up in ditches, HowManyLeft.co.uk suggests around 650 Turbos and 900 n/a cars remain in the UK.

Truth is, the Vauxhall badge put a lot of people off, and to a certain extent it still does. But if you're smart enough to see it, what you have is an Elise in a sharper set of clothes, with a torquier engine and added rarity.

The n/a VX220's 2.2-litre Ecotec motor (originally developed by Lotus for GM) developed 145bhp compared with 118bhp from the S1 Elise's K-series, so although the slightly larger and better-equipped VX was 144kg heavier, it still had a marginally superior power-to-weight ratio. The VX was promoted as the more civilised car (it had airbags, ABS and carpets as standard), but in truth it was still pretty hardcore (no PAS, electric windows, air con or central locking) with gymnastic ability required to enter and exit.

The Turbo arrived at the start of 2003. With 197bhp it saw 0-60mph dispatched in well under 5sec, while specialists like Thorney Motorsport and AmD were soon squeezing up to 250bhp from the iron-blocked 2-litre with freer-flowing exhausts and remaps. In 2004, the 220bhp VXR220 was introduced. Just 65 were made, nearly all going abroad.

Some but not all Vauxhall dealers can service VX220s, and some of those are better at it than others. There are also numerous independents, among them Lotus specialists who are happy to take on VXs too. The friendly crowd at vx220.org.uk will point you towards the best ones. The VX is a specialist sports car that needs sympathetic ownership. But a well-cared-for example remains one of the finest driving machines of the last 20 years and prices of good ones are unlikely to drop much lower.

Checkpoints

Engine & transmission

Two engines here. The n/a VX has the all-aluminium Z22SE Ecotec; the VXT has the iron-block Z20LET unit. VX guru and modifier Duncan Grier (duncangrier@hotmail.com), our guide here, says both are robust; the turbo unit copes easily with 250bhp.

Servicing should be every year or 10,000 miles, whichever is sooner. The timing belt on the Turbo should be changed every four years/40,000 miles; the n/a model has a chain, which should easily last 100,000 miles. If it's an early car, check it's had the water ingress kit fitted, otherwise rain soaks the plugs and coils causing misfires. Turbo heat shields can break (c£200 for replacements) and engine mounts may need replacing – listen for knocking when accelerating.

Both models have the same five-speed 'box; up to around 250bhp, the unit itself gives few problems, but the shift cables can suffer water ingress under their plastic coverings; combined with the heat from the exhaust, this causes rust, which leads eventually to failure. If the shift is poor it's worth investigating. Over 220bhp, a clutch and flywheel upgrade is recommended.

Suspension, steering, brakes

The rear toe links are the main weak spot; over time they wear and rust and can eventually snap. Worn outer wishbone ball joints will cause vibration through the steering wheel. Also check the steering for play – anything excessive may require a new rack. Up-rated hub carrier bolts are a common upgrade and some owners change the front wheels from 17s to 16s, as tyre options for the narrow OE 17s are limited. This can confuse the two-channel ABS but fitting a four-channel unit fixes this.

Body, interior, electrics

A fair few VXs have enjoyed excursions into the scenery, so get a full HPI check, and get the car on a ramp to check the tub and subframes for signs of repairs. Lift the carpets too, including in the boot. Look for stress cracks in the bodywork. Paint bubbling is common. Check for play in the door hinges and ensure the seat doesn't rock excessively. Remove and refit the soft-top to confirm the cable mechanism is functioning. Headlights cost c£700 plus VAT so check they're intact and working.



1: Turbo engine can be tuned to 250bhp safely. **2:** cabin is spartan. **3:** Speedline alloys from VXR220 (pictured) are a popular upgrade as their sizes increase tyre options

What we said September 2000



VX220 v Elise v MR2

'Whereas the Elise is a smart (even cute) wee sports car, the VX220 has supercar-rivalling presence. As a head-twister, it's in the Ferrari/Lamborghini class.

'The Elise is an astonishingly pure and honest sports car. It subjects its driver to genuinely G-rich sensations in all planes and communicates the most heightened sense of contact with the road. The big news is that the VX220 covers all these bases with less effort and, ultimately, more panache. It's every bit as fast and hard-hitting but blessed with a more relaxed, balanced and measured technique.

'The twistier the road, the more composed and unshakeable the VX's manners seem to become. Its natural advantages include the strongest, smoothest engine, best driving position, comfiest seats, sweetest gearchange and driveline, and the most powerful and progressive brakes. The body structure feels extremely stiff and the all-double-wishbone suspension works more quietly than the Lotus's. The nub of the VX220's allure is a chassis that can involve and satisfy at all levels of commitment and not punish with a jarring ride.' (evo 023)



Above: VX shares its lightweight chassis – and sublime ride and handling – with the Elise



Above: rare VXR220 was based on Turbo, but with more power and firmer suspension

'I bought one' Ken Price

'I took delivery of my Coral Blue VX220 Turbo in May 2004, when it had just 11,000 miles on the clock. Turned out it was a former press car! I've covered 54,000 miles in it since then. It's mainly used at weekends for spirited fun on country roads, but it's also been used for long weekends. It's surprising just how much you can fit in the boot and the space behind the seats.

'I've carried out no major mods,

except recently fitting a set of VXR220 Speedline alloy wheels to widen the tyre choice, as these drop the front wheels down from 17in to 16in.

'The VX has been the most reliable car I've owned. The only serious problem was a corroded power wire to the ECU, but members of vx220.org.uk helped fix it without it needing to go to a garage. It's also had a new brake servo hose and I've replaced the side engine mounts and

the upper turbo heat shield. Other than that, it's just been normal wear and tear.

'Some parts can be expensive from Vauxhall, but as the engine is shared with the Lotus Europa it's often cheaper to buy parts from Lotus. I get around 30mpg and servicing at a specialist is reasonable.

'I have no intention of ever selling the car. I love its performance, relative rarity and mechanical simplicity.'

In the classifieds



2003 (53) VX220

39,000 miles FSH
Red with black detailing
Full black leather
Gaz Gold coilovers
makmotorsleedsitd.co.uk

£9945



2002 (02) VX220

86,000 miles FSH
Lightning yellow ltd edition (no. 040 of 100)
Hard-top
sovereigncarsales.co.uk

£9995



2003 (53) VX220 Turbo

30,464 miles
Touring Pack
Hard-top
Full service history
williamsmotor.co.uk

£11,995

The rivals

Lotus Elise

Clearly the VX's closest rival, since they share their chassis. Good S1 K-series cars from around £9k, S2s from £12k.

Toyota MR2 (Mk3)

Bargain. Not particularly quick but a peach of a chassis. The very best fetch £5k and tidy cars are just £2-3000.

Porsche Boxster (986)

Impossible to ignore if you've got £6-10k burning a hole in your pocket. Leggy, unloved examples are now sub-£4k but £7k buys you a very nice 3.2S with FPSH.

Specification

VX220 (Turbo in brackets)

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 2198cc

(in-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo)

Max power 145bhp @ 5800rpm

(197bhp @ 5500rpm)

Max torque 150lb ft @ 4000rpm

(184lb ft @ 1950-5500rpm)

Transmission Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

Weight 875kg (930kg)

Power-to-weight 168bhp/ton (215)

0-60mph 5.6sec (4.7sec) (claimed)

Max speed 136mph (151mph) (claimed)

Price new £22,995, 2000 (£25,495, 2003)

Parts prices

(Prices are for VX220 from courtenaysport.co.uk. Tyre price from blackcircles.com. Coilovers motorsportworld.co.uk. All prices include VAT but exclude fitting)

Tyres (each) £145.30 front, £101.77 rear (Bridgestone Potenza RE040)

Front pads (set) £48.20 (Mintex)

Front discs (pair) £142.50 (Courtenay)

Coilovers (full set) £2426.71 (Bilstein)

Clutch £199.95 (fast road)

Exhaust £1275 (Milltek Sport, full system)

Spark plugs (set) £19.60 (NGK upgrade)

Oil filter £11.75

Servicing

(Prices from courtenaysport.co.uk, including VAT)

Service at 10,000 miles/1 year

1st/2nd £142.95

3rd/4th £184.95

5th/7th £142.95

6th/8th £184.95

4th/8th service with cambelt £475

What to pay

Early n/a cars sometimes appear from £6k but approach with extreme caution. £7k is a realistic entry point, and £8-10k gives you a good choice of well-maintained cars. Turbos generally fetch slightly more, but condition and history are everything. Extras worth having include the Touring pack (carpeted sills and additional sound insulation) and Storage Pack (leather sill pockets and bulkhead storage net).

Useful contacts

vx220.org.uk

forums, advice, cars for sale

courtenaysport.co.uk

tuning, parts, servicing

psrautomotive.com

specialist, servicing, etc

thorney.ms

tuning, nationwide centres

phoenixmotorsports.co.uk

tuning, servicing

amdtuning.com

tuning, remaps



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Camera

Sony RX100 II

£649.00 shop.sony.co.uk

1 We used a first-generation RX100 to shoot both stills and in-car videos, and we loved it. This new version has the same huge 1-inch, 20.2MP sensor but adds 'back illumination technology' for improved low-light performance. Also, the new screen tilts, there's a hot shoe for a host of accessories and there's built-in Wi-Fi. It's expensive for a compact, but the incredible image quality justifies it.

Model

VW Golf G60 Limited

£46 (c£38) otto-models.com

2 The G60 Limited was a rare version of the Mk2 Golf that was even hotter than the GTI. It had a unique 207bhp supercharged 16v engine that was coupled to a four-wheel-drive 'Syncro' transmission. The unassuming five-door body, BBS multi-spoke alloys and blue grille surround are captured perfectly in this 1:18-scale model.

Accessory

Forge Motorsport Mechanic's Tool Tray

£86.39 forgemotorsport.co.uk

3 There are tool trays and then there's this lightweight beauty. Measuring 300x480x250mm, it was created for Forge-backed drift and race teams and is handmade from aerospace-grade aluminium. There are holes in the lip for smaller tools, while the handle is large enough to be comfortable.

Modification

ST XTA coilover kit for Ford Fiesta ST

£1099 kwautomotive.co.uk

4 This package includes low-friction dampers and chrome piston rods with adjustable damping, and the camber can also be altered thanks to the addition of aluminium uniball top mounts. The ride height adjustment is German TÜV-approved and drops the Fiesta 5-30mm at the front and 10-35mm at the back.

T-shirt

BMW 3.0 CSL

£25 t-lab.eu

5 The BMW 3.0 CSL won six European Touring Car titles in the 1970s. Its comprehensive aero package, complete with a pair of huge rear fins, earned the car the nickname 'Batmobile' – hence the Batman logo on this shirt.

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GoPro Hero3+ Black Edition

£359.99 gopro.com



The age of the action camera is in full swing, and GoPro is keen to remain at the forefront of the market. The Hero3+ Black Edition isn't a giant leap forward from the Hero 3 Black, but the subtle changes really do make a difference.

The new model has optics that are a claimed 33 per cent better for an even sharper image, plus a 'SuperView' mode to capture the ultimate wide-angle shots, and 30 per cent more battery life (overcoming a major drawback of the old Hero 3). It also features Wi-Fi that is four times faster, which is pretty handy when teamed with the free

GoPro iPhone app. Bigger buttons make it more user-friendly whilst wearing gloves, and the all-new case has a sealed clip that's much easier to open and shut.

I tested the Plus on our McLaren P1 drive in Abu Dhabi and was totally blown away by the car and the images I was able to capture (check out the video at youtube.com/evotv). The Plus can shoot in 4K resolution at 15 frames per second, but 2.7K at 25fps is perfect for our videos. And you get all this for the same price as the previous model.

Sam Riley (@samgriley)

Interview: Nick Woodman

GoPro CEO and founder

GoPros are an essential part of *evo*'s film kit. How do you see them as a professional tool?

We recognised from the original GoPro that if we could get the image quality up to professional standards it would become essential to every film-maker's bag. If you had multiple lenses for different cameras costing thousands, how could you not spend a few hundred on a GoPro?

The small action camera market is booming at the moment. How do you deal with competition?

There will always be competition. It's a bit like racing – we know what we need to do for the future and we are racing our own race, and our competitors are just coming out of the pits on cold tyres. With the resources we have in new lens technology, sensor technology, and new processor technology, the engineering differential is increasing.

The usage of GoPros spans many different forms of video. Are you surprised how far it's spread?



It's as varied as human interest. It's the standard for capturing any human activity, interest or event and as a result the brand is becoming more and more known for this varied content. We now have everything from motor racing to Earth orbits in space. And that's why people pay attention to GoPro, because they are all waiting to see what's next.



Patrona Connector Face

£30 patrona.com

The idea of the Patrona Connector Face is genius in its simplicity. You stick a circular metal pad to the back of your phone, and stick a square pad with a recessed circle within it wherever you want to put your phone in your car. The two are magnetically attracted, and your phone is thus held so strongly that you can operate it in-car with one finger without risk of it moving or falling.

So far, so good. But when it comes to practicalities, there are problems. Luckily my poverty-spec Skoda Citigo has plenty of redundant 'buttons' that can be covered over with the mount, but finding a good spot in better-specified



cars would be a problem. Even Patrona itself must have struggled with this, given that one of its promotional pictures has an attached iPhone partly obscuring a hazard warning button.

Pricing is also a bone of contention: £30 for a couple of bits of metal and some double-sided sticky pads seems very steep. A side issue, meanwhile, is the tendency for loose change to become magnetically stuck to the back of my phone any time they share one of my pockets. I could just keep my phone in another pocket, but then that would be far too simple, wouldn't it?

Dan McCalla



Hankook Ventus V12 evo2 K120

£87 (each, 205/45 R17) hankooktire.com

Hankook is really making a name for itself of late. If you buy a new Mercedes S-class or BMW 5-series, the chances are it will wear the Korean tyre maker's rubber. This growing presence has led to the company staging its first media launch and unveiling two new tyres. One was an SUV version of its Ventus S2 evo2, which could be on your new BMW X5, but of more interest to *evo* readers is the latest incarnation of its Ventus V12, dubbed the K120, which is aimed at the tuner market.

While most makers have switched to asymmetric patterns, Hankook has opted for a directional tread. It claims its DTM racing tyre technology has been used in

the casing to maximise the footprint, and it has ridges in the grooves to help cooling. These ridges also aid water dispersal, while there's a new compound to help improve fuel economy.

So does it all work? I briefly tried the K120 on a Mini Cooper on a tight, wet handling track. The top tyre label rating of A for wet grip, which the whole range achieves, is no surprise, as the V12 was very sure-footed, giving a positive turn-in and stable rear. Fuel economy is less impressive, with either an E or a C rating, depending on size. The K120 is available in 25 sizes for 16-19in rims.

Kim Adams (@cargadgetguru)

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Great drives: Nockalmstrasse, Austria



Start point: 46.96946, 13.72685 (just off the L19 in Innerkrems)

The road: Nockalmstrasse

Great for: a historic Porsche



T

HE WONDERFULLY NAMED Nocky Mountains sound like they belong in a fantasy landscape from Lewis Carroll's imagination. Or possibly like they're made from pasta.

They're not just curious in name either, because their rounded tops mean they have the appearance of overgrown hillocks rather than mighty crags, despite them rising to a considerable 2400m above sea level. Importantly for us, however, they also harbour one of the best driving roads in the world – the Nockalmstrasse.

Let's get the bad news out of the way first: it's a toll road, so you'll have to pay €16.50 (c£13.50) to drive it. It's also only open for six months of the year because of the winter weather. Nonetheless, it's still well worth the trip because this road, which runs through a national park, is absolutely beautiful. The money from the tolls is clearly pumped back into the road too, because all of it is wide enough to fit two cars (there's a white line down the middle all the way) and the surface is immaculate, so there aren't really any limiting factors to what sort of car you can drive up there.

Unlike most Alpine passes, it doesn't just go up one side of a mountain and then fry your brakes down the other: it winds in, out, up and down between various peaks, making for a fascinating challenge. The views are spectacular and when we were there, a morphing mist was melting in and out of the trees (search for 'Carrera 4S' on youtube.com/evotv). Speaking of trees, in the autumn you'll need to watch out for the carpet of orange larch needles that can make some of the hairpins surprisingly slippery.

Austria is, to me, a vastly underrated country for driving in. It's been quiet whenever I've been there and it has that wonderfully unspoilt look of Switzerland, but with a slightly more relaxed atmosphere. It's worth paying to go on roads when they're this good.

Henry Catchpole
Features editor



The route



Start **Finish**

Distance: 20 miles

Time: 45 minutes

Where to stay

Hotel Hochschober is in Turracher Höhe (about four miles north of the eastern end of the Nockalmstrasse) and is a 2014 Travellers' Choice winner on TripAdvisor, so looks like a good bet. At the other end of the Nockalmstrasse you could try the Sporthotel Frühauf near Innerkrems. Just remember that the road is only open from the beginning of May until the end of October.

Watch out for

Make sure you visit the Pfeifhofer Porsche Museum at Gmünd in Kärnten. It's a lovely family-run place and if you ask nicely they'll point you in the direction of the original Porsche factory just up the road (a dark wooden building that was initially a sawmill). The area also has various other toll roads, including the spectacular Grossglockner (Trips & Travel, *evo* 184), and all of them have good websites that link to each other.

Reader road trip

Manx magic

After experiencing the Nürburgring in my friend's Toyota Supra many years ago, a driving holiday benchmark had been set, but what car should follow, and where?

I had wanted an E30 M3 but prices have skyrocketed since. So what future classic was out there that's still cheap? For me, it was the Subaru Impreza. It took the brand from zero to hero and was legendary as Colin and Richard's WRC 'hack', and the Prodrive rally team connections meant it had to be the rare two-door P1 version for me. Then we chose the Isle of Man to visit, as it's local to the UK and has unlimited national speed limits, and because it embraces the Impreza enough to mint a 20-pence coin featuring one!



My friend Matt took little persuading to come along, while another friend, Ryan, was looking for somewhere to stretch his BMW 330Ci Convertible's legs. A three-day trip was planned – outside the busy TT race period, for clear roads – and it was akin to unleashing your dog in a park. It didn't take long to acclimatise to stretches of truly unrestricted road and we soon began making the most of this freedom. Besides that, there's so much to do and see on the island: stunning views, wildlife, castles, history, local cuisine and the incredible Mountain Course of the TT.

Aldous Huxley once said: 'Speed provides the one genuinely modern pleasure.' So when are you going? Oh, and time permitting, drive the A36. You won't be disappointed.

Carl Evans

Email your road trip story to
henryc@evo.co.uk

Events calendar

MARCH

March 26-30

Techno Classica Essen, Germany
siha.de

APRIL

April 7

Bedford Autodrome GT Circuit trackday
www.clubmsv.com

April 18-19

European Rally Championship, Circuit of Ireland
circuitofireland.net

April 18-20

World Endurance Championship, Silverstone
silverstone.co.uk

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 = Driven, R = Road test or group test, F = Feature). Call 0844 844 0039 to order a back issue. **Price** is on-the-road including VAT and delivery charges. **Engine** is the car's main motor only – additional hybrid tech isn't shown. **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 Supersport		£17,805	4/1368	178/5750	199/2750	1225kg	148	7.5	-	134	142	46.3	+ Attractive and fun - Needs more power	★★★★☆
Abarth 595 Turismo		£17,905	4/1368	158/5500	170/3000	1035kg	155	7.4	-	130	155	43.5	+ A properly fun, old-school hot hatch - Favours fun over finesse	★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo Mito Cloverleaf	149 R	£18,870	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	£25,530	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 147 GTA	187 R	'03-'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		£21,415	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	'13	4/1984	253/6000	258/2500	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	£30,640	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... quality - 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	£26,020	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	£31,365	6/2979	316/5800	332/1300	1425kg	225	4.8	12.9	155	188	35.3	+ Powertrain, noise, chassis, price - M235i looks nicer, and has an LSD on its options list	★★★★☆
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	£8095+	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 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	£17,475	4/1598	154/6000	171/1400	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	£13,355	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	£14,945	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 ST	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 ST Mountune	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	£20,595	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	187 D	£23,220	4/1999	271/5500	295/2750	1362kg	202	5.7	-	154+	169	-	+ Great value upgrade - Steering still not as feesome 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 (Mk2)	195 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 - Pricey	★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk1)	195 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 Proceed 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	194 R	'88-'93	4/1995	207/5750	220/3500	1300kg	162	5.7	-	137	-	23.9	+ One of the finest cars ever built - Demands love, LHD only	★★★★☆
Mazda 2.1 S 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 D	'06-'13	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	£29,355	4/1991	208/5500	256/1200	1370kg	154	6.5	-	149	148	46.3	+ Mercedes builds a proper hot hatch - But denies it a manual gearbox	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG	194 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	★★★★☆
MG3 Style	190 D	£9999	4/1498	104/6000	101/4750	1155kg	91	10.4	-	108	136	48.7	+ Decent chassis, performance and price - Thrashy engine, cheap cabin	★★★★☆
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, head 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	£15,300	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	£18,650	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	£23,805	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	190 R	£28,795	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 Rallart	132 R	'08-'13	4/1468	147/6000	155/3500	1060kg	141	7.4	-	131	161	40.9	+ Price, handling, performance - Its looks are a little odd	★★★★☆



Defectors willkommen

The Volvo V40 R-Design

Finance subject to status. 5.9% finance available on all V40 models registered by 30th June 2014. *On the road price includes a dealer contribution of £1,812. Example based on mileage of 8000 per annum, excess mileage charge 14.9p per mile. At the end of the Personal Contract Purchase there are three options: (i) pay the Final Payment/GFV (Guaranteed Future Value) to own the vehicle; (ii) part exchange the vehicle, where equity is available; or (iii) return the vehicle. Further charges may be made subject to the condition of the vehicle. Terms and conditions apply. 18s or over. Guarantee/Indemnity may be required. Volvo Car Credit RH1 1SR.



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

The Fiesta ST (left), is now the default affordable hot hatch choice. We'd have ours with the Mountune upgrade. The £29k Mini GP may sound expensive, but you won't find a more focused front-driver. BMW's rear-drive M135i, meanwhile, feels like a bargain at £30k.

Superminis / Hot Hatches

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	
Nissan Juke Nismo	184 R	£20,495	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		'92-'93	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)		'97-'98	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)	095 R	'94-'96	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	'88-'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 200 Cup	154 R	'09-'13	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	255/7150	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	122/5750	122/3750	831kg	146	7.8	-	120	-	28.4	+ Clio Williams' grand-daddy - Most have been thrashed	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	188 R	£25,545	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	£17,445	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	£18,765	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	£22,255	4/1968	181/4000	280/1750	1350kg	136	7.5	-	142	112	64.2	+ Performance, sweet chassis, economy, comfort - Boorish engine	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra 280	194 D	£26,940	4/1984	216/6000	258/1750	1320kg	212	5.8	-	155	149	44.1	+ Serious pace and ability for Golf GTI money - Lacks a little excitement	★★★★★
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 five-door but lots cheaper - Misses the VW's completeness	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R	139 R	'10-'12	4/1984	206/6000	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	£17,150	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	£23,260	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 calipers?	★★★★★
Smart Fortwo Brabus	110 D	£15,375	3/999	91/5500	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. Lifeless 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	£13,749	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	£18,995	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	'11-'13	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 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	£7990+	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	£19,730	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	£25,565	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	£26,125	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	+ Traction'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	★★★★★

PERSONAL CONTRACT PURCHASE REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLE: V40 D2 R-DESIGN

36 monthly payments	£249.00
On the road price*	£21,083.00
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Customer deposit	£1,999.00
Total amount of credit	£18,584.00
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Total amount payable	£23,835.50
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Duration of agreement (months)	37
Representative APR	5.9% APR



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Official fuel consumption for the Volvo V40 D2 R-Design (manual) in MPG (l/100km): Urban 74.3 (3.8), Extra Urban 91.1 (3.1), Combined 83.1 (3.4). CO₂ Emissions 88g/km. MPG figures are obtained from laboratory testing intended for comparisons between vehicles and may not reflect real driving results.

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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. Jaguar's showy XFR-S (left) has a particularly impressive chassis, while the latest Alpina D3 Biturbo is not only the world's fastest diesel production car, but a great handler too.

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	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	★★★★☆
Alpina D3 Biturbo (F30)	192 D	£46,950	6/2993	345/4000	516/1500	1510kg	232	4.6	-	173	139	53.3	+ 173mph from a 3-litre diesel! Brilliant chassis, too - Auto only	★★★★★
Alpina B3 Biturbo (F30)	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	★★★★★
Alpina D3 (E90)	120 R	'08-'12	4/1995	211/4000	332/2000	1495kg	143	6.9	-	152	-	52.3	+ Excellent chassis, turbodiesel oomph - Rather narrow powerband	★★★★★
Alpina B5 Biturbo	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	★★★★★
Alpina B5 S	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	★★★★★
Alpina B7 Biturbo	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	457/5000	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 S3 Saloon	192 D	£33,240	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1430kg	210	5.3	-	155	162	26.4	+ On paper a match for the original S4 - In reality much less interesting	★★★★★
Audi S4 (B8)	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 (B7)	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 (B8)	192 R	£54,925	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1795kg	251	4.5	10.5	174	249	26.4	+ Looks and sounds the part, thunderously fast - Harsh ride, unnatural steering	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B7)	088 R	'06-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1650kg	255	4.5	10.9	155	-	-	+ 414bhp at 7800rpm! And there's an estate version too - Busy under braking	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B5)	192 R	'00-'02	6/2671	375/6100	325/2500	1620kg	236	4.8	12.1	170	-	17.0	+ Effortless pace - Not the last word in agility, 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 (C7)	193 D	£76,985	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1935kg	290	3.6	8.2	155	229	28.8	+ Performance, foolproof powertrain, looks - Torque converter gearbox, gloopy steering	★★★★★
Audi RS6 (C6)	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 (C6)	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 (C5)	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	190 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	27.7	+ Quicker and much more economical than before - But still underwhelming to drive	★★★★★
Audi RS Q3	194 R	£43,000	5/2480	306/5200	310/1500	1655kg	188	5.5	-	155	206	32.1	+ More enjoyable than many RS Audis - Used Cayennes and ML63s are similar money	★★★★★
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 Speed	141 R	'08-'12	12/5998	600/6000	553/1750	2440kg	250	4.6	-	200	396	16.6	+ 600bhp; surprisingly fun handling - Could look a bit more like it goes	★★★★★
Bentley Mulsanne	178 F	£225,900	8/6152	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 (F30)	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 (F30)	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 (F30)	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 (F10)	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 (F10)	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	190 D	£98,125	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 X5 M50d	191 D	£63,715	6/2993	376/4000	546/2000	2190kg	155	5.3	-	155	177	42.2	+ Straight-line pace - Driving experience identical to standard X5, despite the M badge	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Brabus Bullit	119 R	£63,000	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	★★★★★
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 reproible image	★★★★★
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth 4x4	141 R	'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 racer - Don't shout about the power output!	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R *	108 D	'07-'10	4/1998	222/8000	158/6100	1252kg	160	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	27.7	+ Stands out from the crowd - Not as involving as some rivals	★★★★★
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...	★★★★★

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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	EC mpg	EVO rating	
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	£56,865	6/2993	271/4000	442/2000	1700kg	162	6.0	-	155	167	46.3	+ A great Jaguar - But not as great as the XJR...	★★★★★
Jaguar XJR	191 D	£92,370	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1805kg	302	4.4	-	174	270	24.4	+ Hot-rod vibe, fine cabin - 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	-	17.0	+ 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	201/6750	177/5500	1360kg	147	7.2	-	142	-	24.4	+ M-B's M3 alternative - Not as nimble as the Beemer	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLA45 AMG	186 D	£42,265	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1510kg	239	4.6	-	155	161	31.0	+ Strong performance, classy cabin - Pricey compared to A45 AMG hatchback	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG	151 R	£56,965	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	277	4.4	9.7	160	280	23.5	+ Monstrous pace and extremely engaging - M3'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	182 R	£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	1765kg	271	4.8	10.2	155	-	21.9	+ M5-humbling grunt, cossetting ride - Speed limits	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG		'98-'02	8/5439	354/5500	390/3000	1642kg	199	5.5	-	155	-	23.0	+ Dragster disguised as a limo - Tyre bills	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG L	191 D	£119,575	8/5461	571/5500	664/2250	1995kg	294	4.4	-	155	237	27.9	+ Monster pace - Average steering feel	★★★★★
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	'06-'13	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	293	4.4	-	155	231	28.5	+ Monster performance, S49bhp an 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	29.3	+ Great engine, surprisingly good dynamics - £85K 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	178 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 X 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	'11-'13	8/4806	542/6000	590/2250	1995kg	276	3.7	-	190	270	24.6	+ Pace, excellent ergonomics - Steering feel, ride	★★★★★
Porsche Macan Turbo	194 R	£59,300	6/3604	394/6000	406/1350	1925kg	208	4.8	-	165	208	30.7	+ Doesn't feel like an SUV - Still looks like one	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne GT3 (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 (Mk1)	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	2335kg	219	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	5.9	-	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 driven 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	-	-	+ Finding 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	4/1994	237/6000	258/3500	1235kg	195	5.0	14.1	143	-	-	+ Perfect blend of poise and power - Limited numbers	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza 22B	188 R	'98-'99	4/2212	276/6000	265/3200	1270kg	220	5.0	13.1	150	-	-	+ The ultimate Impreza - Doesn't come cheap	★★★★★
Vauxhall Insignia VXR SuperSport	189 D	£29,749	6/2792	321/5250	321/5250	1825kg	179	5.6	-	170	249	26.6	+ A 170mph Vauxhall - Should be a more engaging steer	★★★★★
Vauxhall Vectra VXR	102 D	'06-'09	6/2792	276/5500	262/1800	1580kg	177	6.1	-	161	-	27.4	+ Great engine, effortless pace, good value - Numb steering, lumpy ride	★★★★★
Vauxhall VXR8 GTS	160 R	£49,615	8/6162	425/6000	406/4600	1831kg	236	4.9	-	155	320	20.9	+ Oversteery and characterful. Available as a pick-up too! - Nearly M3 saloon money	★★★★★
Vauxhall VXR8 Supercharged	113 R	'07-'11	8/5967	533/6000	568/4400	1831kg	296	4.5	-	180	-	-	+ The Lotus Carlton reinvented - Doesn't have polish of best Europeans	★★★★★
Vauxhall VXR8 Bathurst S	148 R	'09	8/6162	564/6000	527/4000	1866kg	307	4.6	10.7	155	-	-	+ A tauter VXR8. Bonkers pace, brilliant noise - Gearchange still rubbish	★★★★★
Volvo S60 Polestar	179 D	£40,160	6/2953	324/5250	354/5250	1716kg	192	5.5	-	155	231	28.5	+ Capable of swift, smooth progress - Swift and	

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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 Evija S Roadster counters with a more focused driving experience. Jaguar's F-type also impresses in both 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	
Alfa Romeo 8C Spider	161 R	'09-'11	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1675kg	273	4.5	-	181	-	-	+ Beauty meets beast. They hit it off - Boot is useless for touring	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 245	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...	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	138 R	'09-'12	4/1998	300/8200	162/7200	550kg	554	3.3	-	155	-	-	+ It's brilliant - It's mental	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 2 300 Supercharged	123 R	'03-'09	4/1998	300/8200	162/7200	550kg	554	3.3	-	155	-	28.0	+ Makes your face ripple - ...like Clarkson's	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 1	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	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS Volante	133 D	'09-'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 TT RS Roadster	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	★★★★★
Audi TT Roadster (Mk1 225bhp)	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	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Cabriolet	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 GT V8 Convertible	168 R	£136,250	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2470kg	207	4.9	-	187	254	25.9	+ One of the world's best topless GTs - Still no sports car	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8 S Convertible	194 D	£152,900	8/3993	521/6000	502/1700	2470kg	214	4.5	-	191	254	25.9	+ A true drivers' Bentley - Excessively heavy, feels like it could give more	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Supersports	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	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GTC Speed	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 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	★★★★★
BMW Z4 3.0si (Mk1)	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	★★★★★
BMW Z4 M Roadster	091 R	'06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1410kg	244	4.8	-	155	-	23.3	+ Exhilarating and characterful, that engine - Stiff suspension	★★★★★
BMW M Roadster	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 435i Convertible	194 D	£45,970	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1740kg	176	5.6	-	155	190	34.8	+ Impressive chassis, smart looks, neat roof - Extra weight, not as composed as coupe	★★★★★
BMW M3 Convertible (E93)	119 D	'08-'13	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	★★★★★
BMW M3 Convertible (E46)	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	★★★★★
BMW M6 Convertible	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	★★★★★
BMW Z8	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	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 160	190 R	£17,995	4/660	80/7000	79/3400	490kg	166	6.5	-	100	-	-	+ The fabulous Seven formula at its most basic - Gets pricey with options	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 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 Seven Roadsport SV 175	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 Seven 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 Seven 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 Seven 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 Seven 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 Seven 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 Seven 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 Levante	131 R	'09-'10	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	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Superlight R300	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	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R300	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	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R400	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	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R500	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	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R500 Evolution	069 R	'04	4/1998	250/8000	190/4000	460kg	552	3.9	8.1	150	-	-	+ Madder than Mad Jack McMad - Er, it's a bit mad	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette (C6)	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 Convertible	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 S Convertible	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 Convertible	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		£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	£84,965	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	£103,465	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	★★★★★
Jaguar XK	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	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR		'06-'09	8/4196	414/6250	413/4000	1705kg	247	5.0	-	155	-	-	+ First Jag sports car for years - Overwrought detailing	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR	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	£64,800	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	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow	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	★★★★★

PAST master

Richard Meaden got to grips with the 437bhp, 6.1-litre V8-powered '60s racer recreation

Superformance Daytona Coupe MkII Issue 149, Nov 2010

'Once on the move you don't actually need to change gear that often. Still, there's something truly addictive about stirring the Shelby's artfully kinked lever through the gate, and you'll find yourself playing all sorts of tunes on the pedals, just to elicit the fruitiest possible rasp and overrun cackle from the booming sidepipes.'

'The steering doesn't share the weight and tactility of the other major controls. It demands precision and calm control to guide the car smoothly. You only need to think it through fast kinks with the slightest input, while "recreational" cornering demands a similarly unfrustrated style if you're to avoid over-steering while oversteering.'



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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	222	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 IIIS	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	123 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	126 R	'00	4/1796	190/7800	146/5000	658kg	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 (Mk3 v2)		£18,495	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1075kg	117	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 2.0i Sport Tech (Mk3 v2)	170 R	'09-'13	4/1999	158/7000	139/5000	1098kg	146	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 7G-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	1815kg	336	4.0	-	155	270	24.4	+ Chassis just about deals with the power - Speed limits	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	171 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 SL65 AMG	071 D	'04-'10	12/5980	604/4800	737/2000	2035kg	302	4.1	-	155	-	-	+ Gob-smacking performance - Gob-smackingly pricey	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS 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	312	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	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-broly 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 Chimaera 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. You might think the GT3's win at *evo* Car of the Year 2013 was a foregone conclusion, but neither of the last two GT3s (the 997.2 and 997.1) claimed an *eCoty* title. Yet the 991 managed it, and in a vintage year too (Ferrari F12, Merc SLS Black). Yes, it really is that good.



Best of the Rest

Aston's V12 Vantage S (left) is a deeply well-sorted drivers' car. Porsche's second-gen Cayman S is a truly great all-rounder, or for similar money the Lotus Evija S is a proper road racer and was our joint 2012 Car of the Year. BMW's M235i, meanwhile, could be the perfect real-world M-badged car.

Coupes / GTs

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
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	190 R	£45,000	4/1742	237/6000	258/2200	895kg	269	4.5	-	160	157	41.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Carbonfibre tub, mini-supercar looks - Hot hatch engine, clunky gearbox
Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione	120 R	'07-'09	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1585kg	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	'12-'13	6/2979	402/6000	398/4500	1535kg	266	4.4	-	186	224	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Alpina's M3 GTS alternative - Auto gearbox frustrates when pressing on
Aston Martin V8 Vantage	169 D	£86,080	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	£96,080	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 S	190 R	£138,000	12/5935	565/6750	451/5750	1665kg	345	3.7	-	205	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The best car Aston Martin currently makes - Old-school automated 'box
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 Zagato	181 F	'13	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.2	-	190	388	17.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The looks, the noise, the way it drives - It's several times the price of a V12 Vantage
Aston Martin DB9	178 R	£133,080	12/5935	510/6500	451/5500	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	361/5000	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-supercar pace - Handling lacks edge
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI	155 R	£27,700	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	193 R	£36,045	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	£46,300	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	£49,385	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	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Supercarged V6 makes S5 cleaner and faster - Poor body control
Audi RS5		£59,350	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	£93,710	8/4163	444/7900	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	£114,810	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	325	3.9	8.4	194	346	19.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Real supercar feel - The V8 is £20k less, and still superb
Audi R8 V10 Plus	190 R	£126,810	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	194 R	'90-'91	5/2226	220/5900	228/1950	1329kg	168	6.2	18.2	143	-	19.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Modern classic - The game has moved on
Bentley Continental GT V8	178 R	£123,850	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2295kg	221	4.6	-	188	246	27.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + A proper drivers' 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, thirst
Bentley Continental GT Speed	177 D	£151,000	12/5998	616/6000	590/2000	2320kg	258	4.0	-	205	338	19.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + 205mph in utter comfort - Feels nose-heavy in slow corners
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 135i M Sport	113 R	'08-'12	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1455kg	211	5.3	-	155	198	33.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Fast, fun, lots cheaper than an M3 - You really want the 1-series M Coupe
BMW M235i	193 R	£34,250	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1470kg	222	4.8	-	155	176	34.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Powertrain, chassis, looks, size - Limited-slip diff is an option, not standard
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 GTS (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 CS (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 CSL (E46)	060 R	'03-'04	6/3246	355/7900	273/4900	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	£63,125	6/2993	309/4400	465/1500	1790kg	175	5.5	-	155	144	51.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Great engine and economy, excellent build - Numb steering, unsettled B-road ride
BMW M6 (Mk2)	191 D	£94,605	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1850kg	303	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Mighty ability, pace, technology - You'll want the Competition Package upgrade too...
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	£35,320	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 Stingray (C7)	194 D	£61,495	8/6162	455/6000	460/4600	1496kg	309	3.8	-	190	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Performance, chassis balance, supple ride - Body control could be better
Chevrolet Corvette (C6)	116 D	'05-'13	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	'05-'13	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	£660,000	8/5812	662/6500	631/4000	1747kg	385	3.5	-	202	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Huge performance for the money - Putting it to use takes nerve
Ginetta G40R	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 Fabio GTS boasts great engine and good looks - The ride still needs work
Honda CR-Z GT	144 R	£23,275	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 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 weedy 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	£21,995	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	'09-'13	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	£65,465	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	£78,965	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	£97,465	8/5000	542/6000	502/2500	1678kg	328	4.2	-	186	292	23.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Faster and wilder than regular XKR - The F-type R Coupe is coming
Jaguar XKR-S GT	193 R	£135,000	8/5000	542/6000	502/2500	1638kg	336	3.9	-	186	292	23.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The most exciting XKR ever - It's £135,000, and a very limited edition
Jaguar XKR		'98-'06	8/4196	400/6100	408/3500	1735kg	234	5.2	-	155	-	22.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Extra grunt of 4.2-litre motor - Lacks feedback
Lotus Evija 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 Evija V6 Cup	191 R	£62,994	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1110kg	316	3.7	-	170	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Half a roll-cage sort of being a race car - Regular Evija S is better for road work
Lotus Evija 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

POCKET buying guide

Audi R8 V8

Years 2007-present **Engine** V8, 4163cc
Power 414bhp @ 7800rpm
Torque 317lb ft @ 4500rpm
0-62mph 4.6sec **Top speed** 187mph



WHY WOULD YOU?

Because it's beautifully built, properly quick and deliciously feelsome at any speed. For a blend of supercar thrills and everyday usability, nothing comes close to an Audi R8.

WHAT TO PAY

£40k-50k is where you'll find most early V8s, with price dependent on mileage, condition and spec. Approach sub-£40k cars with caution.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

High miles aren't a problem, but check for regular servicing. The semi-auto R-tronic transmission wears the clutch quickly if you do a lot of low-speed manoeuvring; replacement will cost £2.5k. Brakes are expensive – as much as £3k for a full set of iron discs and pads. Listen for knocks from the suspension – the rear arms may need replacing. (Full guide, *evo* 190.)

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DETAILING SCIENCE

Inside info from the detailing world

Case Study - Paint Correction

1. Before



2.



3. After



4.

Images courtesy of claracooperphotography.com

Beau Technique

Leicestershire

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07866 263550

Beau Technique is a highly respected detailing company based near Loughborough. With a portfolio crammed full of sports, prestige, and historic exotica, as well as a number of more ordinary cars, we felt they were the perfect choice to show us the art of paint correction.

The managing director, Scott Brown, recanted the sad story behind the Aston Martin Vanquish S pictured. Two years ago Scott had painstakingly detailed this British brute, only to have a body-shop ruin his hard work when they washed the vehicle.

One might imagine body-shops, car dealers, hand car washes and automatic car washes are the perfect choice for keeping your car in tip top condition, but alas they are responsible for the majority of damage done to paintwork. A combination of low grade chemicals and poor technique put pay to the perfect finish on this Aston, with the marring clear to see in the first photo.

Watching Scott work it becomes rapidly apparent that there is much more to detailing than meets the eye. The washing and drying procedure, covered in more depth in our other articles, was a masterpiece of discipline and care. With the damaged paint clear to see, Scott set to work with a Paint Depth Gauge (PDG), taking multiple measurements of each panel to ensure it was safe to work on.

As shown in the second picture, the next step was to remove the swirls using a specialist micro fibre pad on a dual-action polishing machine. After each pass with the machine, out came the PDG and yet more measurements were noted, allowing Scott to select the correct pad and compound combination. Using specialist full-spectrum lighting, we could see how the marks were being reduced bit by bit.

The third image shows the result of many hours of careful polishing, the marks have gone, the gloss is restored, and all without taking so much as a micron more than necessary from the lacquer. Scott then applied some top-of-the-line products to protect the finish, which ensured the paint would be impervious to everything from UV rays to watermarks.

The finished article exudes clarity and stunning reflections coupled with an ultra-smooth and vibrant finish. The Vanquish had been returned to a piece of faultless burnished art.

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Coupes / GTs

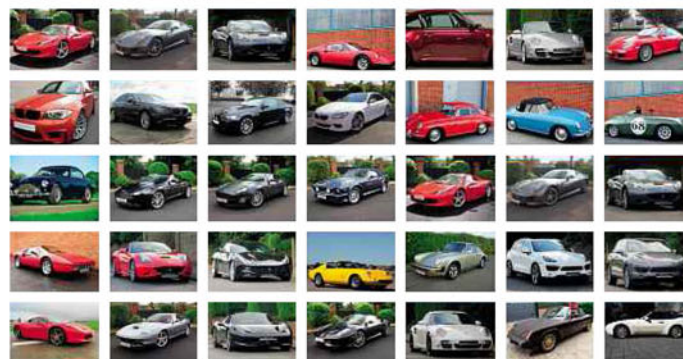
Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
Lotus Exige Cup 260	139 D	'10-'11	4/1796	256/8000	174/6000	890kg	293	4.0	-	152	199	31.1	★★★★★ + Feels like a race car, yet works on the road - Pricey for a four-pot Exige
Lotus Exige (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
Lotus Exige (series 1)	067 D	'00-'01	4/1796	192/7800	146/5000	780kg	247	4.6	-	136	-	-	★★★★★ + Looks and goes like Elise racer - A tad lacking in refinement
Lotus Evora	138 R	£52,500	6/3456	276/6400	258/4700	1382kg	203	5.6	13.6	162	217	30.3	★★★★★ + Sublime ride and handling. Our 2009 car of the year - Pricey options
Lotus Evora S	168 R	£61,500	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.6	-	172	229	28.7	★★★★★ + A faster and better Evora - But one which spars with the Porsche 911...
Lotus Esprit Sport 350	005 R	'99-'00	8/3506	350/6500	295/4250	1299kg	274	4.3	9.9	175	-	22.0	★★★★★ + Designed for track work but brilliant on the road - Limited edition
Maserati GranTurismo	114 R	£82,255	8/4244	399/7100	339/4750	1880kg	216	5.5	12.7	177	330	19.8	★★★★★ + Striking, accomplished GT - Doesn't spike the pulse like an Aston or 911
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	188 R	£90,785	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1880kg	245	4.8	-	185	331	-	★★★★★ + The best everyday GranTurismo yet - Starting to get long in the tooth
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	193 R	£110,110	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1800kg	256	4.5	-	188	337	19.5	★★★★★ + Brilliant blend of road racer and GT - Gearbox takes a little getting used to
Maserati Coupe	064 R	'03-'07	8/4244	390/7000	333/4500	1680kg	237	4.8	-	177	-	17.6	★★★★★ + Glorious engine, improved chassis - Overly sharp steering
Maserati GranSport	073 R	'04-'07	8/4244	400/7000	333/4500	1680kg	239	4.8	-	180	-	-	★★★★★ + Maser Coupe realises its full potential - Very little
Mazda RX-8	122 R	'03-'11	2R/1208	228/8200	156/5500	1429kg	162	6.5	16.4	146	299	24.6	★★★★★ + Never mind the quirks, it's a great drive - Wafer-thin torque output
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	162 R	£58,475	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	277	4.4	10.3	186	280	23.5	★★★★★ + Mercedes makes a proper two-door M3 rival - C63 saloon looks better
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black	171 R	'12-'13	8/6208	510/6800	457/5200	1635kg	311	4.2	-	186	286	-	★★★★★ + The C63 turned up to 11 - Too heavy, not as fiery as Black Series cars of old
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG	092 D	'06-'09	8/6208	481/6800	464/5000	1755kg	278	4.6	-	155	-	19.9	★★★★★ + Power, control, build quality - Lacks ultimate involvement
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG Black	106 R	'07-'09	8/6208	500/6800	464/5250	1760kg	289	4.2	-	186	-	-	★★★★★ + AMG goes Porsche-hunting - Dull-witted gearshift spoils the party
Mercedes-Benz CL63 AMG	150 R	£118,865	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2010kg	271	4.5	-	155	244	26.9	★★★★★ + Presence, pace, monster engine - Stiff ride, stiff competition
Morgan AeroMax	120 R	'08-'09	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.1	-	170	-	-	★★★★★ + Weird and utterly wonderful - Only 100 were made
Nissan GT-R	180 R	£26,995	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1520kg	218	5.4	-	155	248	26.7	★★★★★ + Quicker, leaner, keener than 350Z - Not quite a Cayman-killer
Nissan 370Z Nismo	193 R	£36,995	6/3696	339/7400	274/5200	1535kg	224	5.2	-	155	248	26.6	★★★★★ + More controlled, more polished, more fun - More expensive
Nissan 350Z	107 R	'03-'09	6/3498	309/6800	264/4800	1532kg	205	5.5	13.0	155	-	24.1	★★★★★ + Huge fun, and great value too - Honestly, we're struggling
Nissan GT-R (2012MY/2013MY)	194 R	£76,610	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	316	3.2	7.5	196	275	24.0	★★★★★ + GT-R is quicker and better than ever - But over £20K more than its launch price
Nissan GT-R (2010MY)	152 R	'10-'12	6/3799	523/6400	451/3200	1740kg	305	3.0	-	194	279	23.5	★★★★★ + More powerful version of the original - But they're not worlds apart to drive
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	125 R	'08-'10	6/3799	473/6400	434/3200	1740kg	276	3.8	-	193	-	-	★★★★★ + Our 2008 Car of the Year, now from just £35K - You won't see 20mpg often
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	194R	'99-'02	6/2568	276/7000	289/4400	1560kg	180	4.7	12.5	165	-	20.1	★★★★★ + Big, brutal, and great fun - Needs more than the standard 276bhp
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R33)	019 R	'97-'99	6/2568	276/6800	271/4400	1540kg	182	5.4	14.3	155	-	22.0	★★★★★ + Proof that Japanese hi-tech can work (superbly) - Limited supply
Noble M400	089 R	'04-'06	6/2968	425/6500	390/5000	1060kg	407	3.5	-	185	-	-	★★★★★ + Devilishly fast - Demon Tweaks interior
Noble M12 GTO-3R	070 R	'03-'06	6/2968	352/6200	350/3500	1080kg	332	3.8	-	170	-	-	★★★★★ + The ability to humble exotics - Flawed driving position
Peugeot RCZ 1.6 THP 200	155 R	£26,895	4/1958	197/5500	202/1700	1421kg	141	7.3	18.1	147	155	42.1	★★★★★ + Distinctive looks, highly capable handling - Could be a bit more exciting
Peugeot RCZ R	193 R	£31,995	4/1958	266/6000	243/1900	1355kg	199	5.9	-	155	145	44.8	★★★★★ + The best RCZ yet - 1.6-litre engine needs to be worked hard
Porsche Cayman (981)	185 F	£39,694	6/2706	271/7400	214/4500	1310kg	210	5.7	-	165	192	34.4	★★★★★ + Very enticing for the money in basic spec - You might still want the power of the 'S'
Porsche Cayman S (981)	190 R	£48,783	6/3436	321/7400	273/4500	1320kg	247	5.0	-	176	206	32.1	★★★★★ + The Cayman comes of age - Erm...
Porsche Cayman (987)	131 R	'11-'13	6/2893	261/7200	221/4400	1330kg	199	5.8	-	165	221	30.1	★★★★★ + Extra power, just as involving - Still lacks the desirability of other Porsches
Porsche Cayman S (987)	132 R	'06-'13	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1350kg	237	5.2	-	172	223	29.7	★★★★★ + Still want that 911? - Yeah, us too
Porsche Cayman R (987)	158 R	'11-'13	6/3436	325/7400	273/4750	1295kg	255	4.7	-	175	228	29.1	★★★★★ + Total handling excellence - Styling additions not to all tastes
Porsche 911 Carrera (991)	168 R	£73,413	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1380kg	254	4.7	-	179	212	31.4	★★★★★ + 911 becomes cleaner and cleverer - But some of its character's gone AWOL
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991)	168 R	£83,448	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1395kg	287	4.4	-	188	224	29.7	★★★★★ + As above, but with supercar pace - Electric steering robs it of some tactility
Porsche 911 Carrera 4 (991)	177 D	£78,269	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1430kg	245	4.5	-	177	219	30.4	★★★★★ + A touch more engaging than 2wd 991 - Still stand-offish compared to 997
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (991)	179 R	£88,304	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1445kg	271	4.5	-	185	234	28.5	★★★★★ + The best 991-generation Carrera - Choose your spec carefully
Porsche 911 Carrera (997.2)	-	'08-'11	6/3614	341/6500	288/4400	1415kg	245	4.9	-	180	225	29.4	★★★★★ + Faster and greener than the mk1 997 - Lost a little of the 911 magic
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.2)	121 R	'08-'11	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1425kg	271	4.7	-	188	242	27.4	★★★★★ + Poise, precision, blinding pace - Feels a bit clinical
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	★★★★★ + evo Car of the Year 2004, like a junior GT3 - Tech overload?
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (996)	051 R	'02-'05	6/3596	316/6800	273/4250	1470kg	218	5.1	-	174	-	-	★★★★★ + Second best 996 only to the GT3 - Very little
Porsche 911 Carrera (996 3.4)	008 R	'98-'01	6/3387	300/6800	258/4600	1320kg	230	4.6	-	173	-	28.0	★★★★★ + evo Car of the Year 1998, beautifully polished - Some like a bit of rough
Porsche 911 Carrera (993)	-	'94-'97	6/3600	285/6100	251/5250	1372kg	211	5.2	-	168	-	25.0	★★★★★ + More character than 996 - Harder work at speed
Porsche 911 GT3 (991)	190 R	£100,540	6/3799	468/8250	324/6250	1430kg	332	3.5	-	196	289	23.0	★★★★★ + evo Car of the Year 2013 - At its best at licence-troubling speeds
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	★★★★★ + Even better than the car it replaced - Give us a minute...
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.2)	152 R	'10-'11	6/3797	444/7900	317/6750	1370kg	329	4.0	-	193	314	-	★★★★★ + evo Car of the Year 2010 - Looks and noise are slightly OTT
Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 (997.2)	187 R	'11-'12	6/3996	493/8250	339/5750	1360kg	368	3.8	-	193	326	-	★★★★★ + evo Car of the Year 2011 - Unforgiving on-road ride
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.1)	182 R	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1395kg	298	4.3	9.4	192	-	-	★★★★★ + Runner-up evo Car of the Year 2006 - Ferrari 599 GTBs
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.1)	105 R	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1375kg	302	4.2	-	193	-	-	★★★★★ + evo Car of the Year 2007 - A chunk more money than the brilliant GT3
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.2)	082 R	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1380kg	272	4.3	9.2	190	-	-	★★★★★ + evo Car of the Year 2003 - Chassis is a bit too track-focused for some roads
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (996.2)	068 R	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1330kg	286	4.2	9.2	190	-	-	★★★★★ + Track-biased version of above - Limited supply
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.1)	182 R	'99	6/3600	360/7200	273/5000	1350kg	271	4.5	10.3	187	-	21.9	★★★★★ + evo Car of the Year 1999 - Porsche didn't build enough
Porsche 968 Club Sport	019 R	'93-'95	4/2990	240/6200	225/4100	1335kg	183	6.1	15.7	149	-	-	★★★★★ + One of the all-time greats - Lots have been driven very hard
Renault Alpine A610	187 D	'91-'95	6/2975	247/5750	258/2900	1420kg	177	5.4	13.8	166	-	21.0	★★★★★ + Overlooked, bargain-price French 911. Try one - RS interior
Rolls-Royce Wraith	189 D	£237,111	12/6592	624/5600	590/1500	2360kg	269	4.4	-	155	327	20.2	★★★★★ + Brilliant at wafting; quicker than you'd expect - Not the most engaging drivers' car
Subaru BRZ	170 R	£24,995	4/1998	191/7000	151/6400	1230kg	163	7.6	-	140	181	36.2	★★★★★ + Fine chassis, great steering - Weak engine, not the slide-happy car they promised
Toyota GT86	174 R	£24,995	4/1998	191/7000	151/6400	1275kg	157	7.6	-	140	181	36.2	★★★★★ + More fun than its cousin (above) - Same lack of torque, poor interior quality
Toyota Celica GT-Four ST205	187 R	'94-'99	4/1998	239/6000	223/4000	1496kg	162	5.2	-	143	-	-	★★★★★ + Criminally overlooked homologation special - Finding one
TVR T350C	057 R	'03-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1100kg	318	4.7	10.0	175	-	-	★★★★★ + Looks, engine - Unsupportive seats; chassis lacks ultimate polish
TVR Sagaris	099 D	'05-'07	6/3996	406/7500	349/5000	1078kg	383	3.7	-	185	-	-	★★★★★ + Looks outrageous - 406bhp feels a touch optimistic
TVR Tuscan S (Mk2)	076 R	'05-'07	6/3996	400/7000	315/5250	1100kg	369	4.0	-	185	-	-	★★★★★ + Possibly TVR's best ever car - Aerodynamic 'enhancements'
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	004 R	'98-'04	6/3996	350/6800	330/5000	1130kg	315	5.0	11.4	160+	-	-	★★★★★ + Accomplished and desirable - Check chassis for corrosion
VW Scirocco GT 2.0 TSI	155 R	£26,760	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1373kg	153	6.1	15.8	149	172	38.2	★★★★★ + Golf GTI price and performance - Interior lacks flair
VW Scirocco R	181 R	£31,985	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1352kg	196	5.8	-	155	189	34.9	★★★★★ + Great engine, grown-up dynamics - Perhaps a little too grown-up for some

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Our Choice

Ferrari 458 Speciale. The regular 458 Italia is amazing enough in itself – in fact it used to occupy this very space – but the Speciale follows in the tradition of the 360 Challenge Stradale and 430 Scuderia and makes the car it is based on even more, well, special. *The supercar to buy.*



Best of the Rest

Pagani's awesome Huayra (left) was our joint Car of the Year in 2012, while Ferrari's incredible F12 was runner-up in 2013. The Mercedes SLS AMG Black also surprised by being an impressively adept machine. Lamborghini's Aventador still has it licked for visual drama, though...

Supercars

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	
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 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	££1.7m	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 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 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	'09-'13	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	183 R	£178,526	8/4497	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	8/4497	562/9000	398/6000	1530kg	373	3.3	-	198	275	23.9	+ A 458 that sounds and feels more organic - Er, 4mph slower than the Italia?	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Speciale	191 R	£208,000	8/4497	597/9000	398/6000	1395kg	435	3.0	-	202+	275	23.9	+ Makes the regular 458 feel outmoded - If you don't own a regular 458, nothing	★★★★★
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 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 Scuderia Spider 16M	133 D	'09	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1440kg	355	3.7	-	196	360	18.0	+ A hardcore soft-top Ferrari - Earplugs recommended	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Modena	163 R	'99-'04	8/3586	394/8500	275/4750	1390kg	288	4.5	9.0	183	-	17.0	+ 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	-	16.7	+ Looks terrific, sounds even better - Are you kidding?	★★★★★
Ferrari F12 Berlinetta	190 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 - Super-quick steering is an acquired taste	★★★★★
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	'97-'02	12/5474	485/7000	415/5000	1716kg	287	4.3	10.0	199	-	12.3	+ 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	194 R	£227,142	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 288GTO	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	8/5032	1124/7100	885/2700	1435kg	796	2.8	-	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 - Spikey power delivery	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	180 D	'08-'13	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	'10-'13	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1340kg	426	3.5	-	202	325	20.6	+ Less weight and more power than original Superleggera - LP560-4 runs it very close	★★★★★
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, clunky e-gear	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4	194 R	£260,040	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 Murciélago	089 D	'01-'06	12/6192	570/7500	479/5400	1650kg	351	4.0	-	205	-	-	+ Gorgeous, capable and incredibly friendly - V12 feels stressed	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	093 R	'06-'11	12/6496	631/8000	487/6000	1665kg	385	3.3	-	211	213	-	+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	186 R	'09-'11	12/6496	661/8000	487/6500	1565kg	429	3.2	7.3	212	-	-	+ A supercar in its truest, wildest sense - Be prepared for stares	★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo 6.0	019 R	'00-'02	12/5992	550/7500	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 Nürburgring	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 P1	194 R	£866,000	8/3799	903/7500	664/4000	1395kg	658	2.8	-	217	194	34.0	+ Freakish breadth of ability - We don't know its exact Nürburgring lap time	★★★★★
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	-	-	+ Bonkers looks, bonkers speed - Bonkers £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 (gulling doors tool) - Slightly tardy gearbox	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Black	190 R	£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-prickling 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	-	197	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2001 - Values have gone up a fair bit since then	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda F	186 R	'05-'06	12/7291											

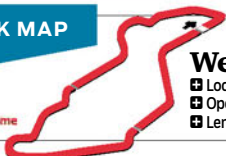
Track Times

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 R55	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 (C6) (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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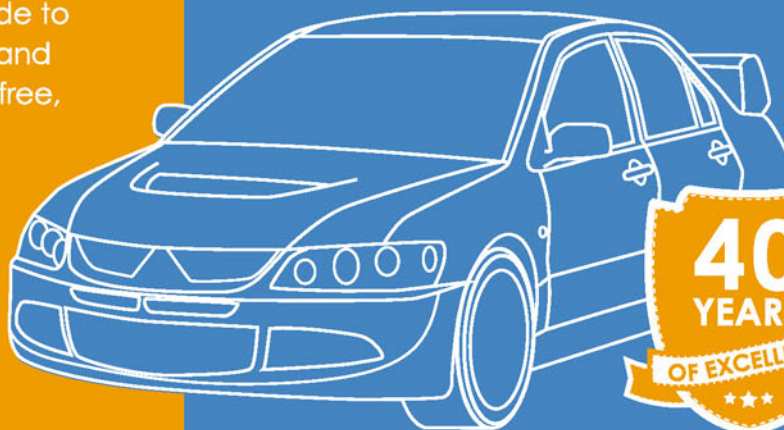
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Art of speed

Camera: Nikon D3. Focal length: 70mm. Exposure: 1/6sec at f/8 (ISO 320)



Aston Martin V12 Zagato double-bubble roof

by DAVID VIVIAN | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

I IS THERE AN EXAMPLE OF FORM FOLLOWING function in automotive design that turned out quite as well as the double-bubble roof; in the sense that, if you didn't know the reason for it, you'd have to believe it was the result of pure artistic licence? I seriously doubt it.

That the idea originated from the pen of Ugo Zagato provides some perspective. Zagato founded the coachbuilding business that bears his name in Milan in 1919 and swiftly established a reputation for using light, strong bodywork structures in aluminium, a continuation of the methods he'd acquired over four years at aircraft construction specialist Officine Aeronautiche Pomilio. But perhaps his most significant carry-over was the streamlined look and performance benefits conferred by sound aerodynamic design. By applying this to both road-going and racing aluminium-bodied Alfa Romeos, Ferraris, Fiats, Lancias and Maseratis through the inter-war years, Zagato's name became synonymous with high performance and racing success.

It wasn't until the early 1950s, though, that in the quest for even greater aerodynamic efficiency, Zagato created its most enduring and recognisable

design cue: the double-bubble roof. It was a radical concept specifically aimed at extracting an advantage on the racetrack, while the form-follows-function logic was simplicity itself: reducing the roof height and frontal area of a car helps it slice through the air better. But the lower roofline inevitably compromises headroom and comfort for both drivers and passengers, especially if crash helmets are worn.

Zagato's solution was to start with the lower roof and elegantly ease out the space directly above the occupants' heads, thus creating the double-bubble, and the treatment had the added benefit of actually strengthening the thin aluminium roof panel. It worked and it looked great, featuring on a host of Zagato-bodied competition Fiats, various privately commissioned one-off Maseratis and ACs, the gorgeous Alfa Romeo 1900 C Super Sprint Zagato and Lancia Appia GTE Zagato, and even some long-wheelbase Ferrari 250 GTs.

Zagato's long-standing association with Aston Martin has given the double-bubble free expression in more recent times, but perhaps the biggest compliment to Ugo's brilliant idea comes via the Peugeot RCZ, which has made it a common but no less beautiful sight on our roads. 📷

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