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CAR OF THE YEAR

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2011

THE CONTENDERS

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BMW M5 » Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0
McLaren MP4-12C » Porsche Cayman R
Lotus Elise Club Racer » BMW 1M Coupe
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It wouldn't have been possible without

David & Matthew Hall, Tom Heron, Phil Holland, Nick Jones, Ana Pimentel, Paulo Pinheiro, Miguel Santos, Matt Taylor, Josh Timlin, Tyres Northampton and all at Portimão Circuit and the Bedford Autodrome

Welcome to our Car of the Year issue, in which we bring together the most talented and desirable performance cars of the last twelve months. The line-up for 2011 is about as good as it gets, including everything from a bantam-weight roadster to a four-wheel-drive Ferrari. In fact, the only absentee from our original list of possible contenders is the Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale, which we first fell for back in issue 155.

No matter how much we begged, Maserati refused to supply us with a car, saying that it doesn't take part in comparison tests unless it's with a direct competitor. Maserati's loss turned into BMW's gain, because to fill the gap it managed to make available one of its spectacular new M5s, a car that instantly became a big hit with everyone thanks to its unique combination of load-lugging ability and supercar pace.

To guarantee an overdose of sunshine this year (we nearly drowned at last year's eCoty when we based ourselves in the UK), we packed all 13 cars onto a fleet of transporters and waved them off for the 1600-mile journey to the incredible Portimão Circuit complex in southern Portugal. And what an amazing few days it turned out to be, with perfect weather from the moment we arrived, great scenery, quiet roads and a brilliant track with more twists and dips condensed into its 2.8 miles than Cadwell Park and the Brands GP layout combined.

Sorting the logistics of getting all those cars and a similar number of people to the Algarve turned out to be child's play compared to trying to pick a winner amongst this year's group of brilliant contenders. Normally, you get a sense of which car is going to come out on top after the first couple of days, but not this time, with the fight for the top spot going right down to the wire. At one stage, there were five different cars



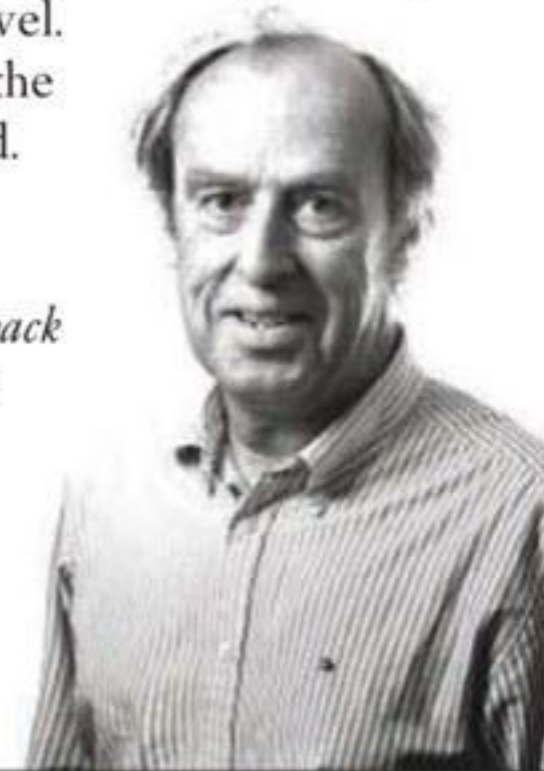
'AT ONE STAGE THERE WERE FIVE DIFFERENT CARS TOPPING THE EIGHT ECOTY JUDGES' SCORECARDS'

topping the eight judges' scorecards – a situation I've never known before. It really was that close.













Which came out on top? Well, you could turn straight to page 94 to find out, but I strongly advise you don't. To get the full flavour of our biggest test of the year, you should find a quiet moment to sit down and drink in the whole eCoty experience from the start (page 56). It might take a couple of hours, but I guarantee it'll be worth it, with more twists along the way than an Agatha Christie novel. I just hope you enjoy the ride as much as we did.

Nick Trott is currently away recovering from a back operation; we wish him a speedy recovery.

Harry Metcalfe
 Editorial Director



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THIS MONTH ON PLANET EVO



EVO VIDEOS

» Check out www.evo.co.uk to see this month's videos, including Chris Harris's take on each of our 2011 eCoty contenders, plus his first drive of the 2012-spec Nissan GT-R. And, of course, you can still see all the videos from past issues, including Richard Meaden's recent drive of a turbocharged Renault F1 car.



NEW SUPERCAR MAGBOOK

» *The Supercar Directory* is a brand new Magbook from the team at **evo**. Packed with new content, it contains the facts, figures and definitive verdicts on every new and classic supercar, from Miura to McLaren MP4-12C. On sale now, it costs just £9.99. Buy your copy from www.evo.co.uk/shop



QR CODE FOR ISSUE 164

» Scan this code using your smartphone and you'll be taken directly to a special microsite where you'll find all the new videos from this issue, as well as five new wallpapers of this month's most stunning photographs. Don't have a smart-phone? Simply open your web browser and go to extras.evo.co.uk/ev164



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Photographic repro by Gildenburgh Ltd, 30 Stapledon Road, Orton Southgate, Peterborough, PE2 6TD. Tel 01733 39181 Printed in the UK by BGP, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 4QZ Printed in China by C&C Offset Printing Distributed by Seymour, 2nd Floor, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT Tel: 020 7429 4000. Fax: 020 7429 3625 e-mail: seymour.co.uk ISSN 1464-2786 USPS 024-1836

The Editors and Publishers of this magazine give no warranties, guarantees or assurances and make no representations regarding any goods or services advertised in this edition.

Evo (USPS 024-1836) is published monthly by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD, United Kingdom. For subscriptions in the USA and Canada, visit www.imsnews.com, phone 1-888-428-6676, fax 1-757-428-6253, or email cs@imsnews.com. U.S. Agent Pitney Bowes International Mailing Services, 158 Mt Olivet Avenue, Newark NJ 07114-2114. Periodicals postage is paid at Paterson NJ and additional mailing offices. US POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Pitney Bowes International Mailing Services, 158 Mt Olivet Avenue, Newark NJ 07114-2114. Subscription records are maintained by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD, United Kingdom. Subscription prices: UK £47.99, Europe £58.20, Rest of World £88.40, USA \$115. All for 12 issues.



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Fuel economy figures for the Continental GTC in mpg (l/100km): Urban 11.1 (25.4); Extra Urban 24.9 (11.4); Combined 17.1 (16.5). CO₂ Emissions (g/km): 384.



BENTLEY

For more information call 01270 535032[†] or visit www.continentalgtc.co.uk

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328i IS NEW 3-SERIES STAR

MOST INTRIGUING MODEL IN NEXT YEAR'S ALL-NEW 3-SERIES RANGE IS THE 328i, PROMISING A COMPELLING BLEND OF PERFORMANCE WITH ECONOMY.

MIKE DUFF HAS ALL THE DETAILS

BMW has released details of the new 3-series ahead of its official debut at the Detroit motor show next year. This is the sixth generation of the evergreen compact exec, set to go on sale here in February, initially with a limited range of engines. And the big news is the combination of performance and economy, with the most interesting car in the range – this side of the inevitable M3 – set to be a new four-cylinder 328i that's capable of delivering both 242bhp and 45mpg economy.

In design terms the 'F30' 3-series is clearly closely related to the current 5-series, sharing a similar front end treatment and a very

Right: what big kidneys you have! BMW is expanding the size of its trademark twin-grilles, and the new 3-series is latest to get the updated family look. Below: also shared with other new BMWs is this 2-litre direct injection turbocharged petrol engine, which promises to give the 328i up to 45mpg and 0-62 in 5.9sec



'NOT ONLY IS THE 328i VERY NEARLY



wide version of the trademark radiator grille 'kidneys'. It's 93mm longer than the outgoing 'E90' generation, with 50mm of that in a longer wheelbase. Standard equipment on everything from the base model upwards will include cruise control, keyless start, a 6.5-inch dashboard display screen and a cut-down version of BMW's trademark iDrive turn-and-click controller, iPod connectivity and – wait for it – single-zone climate control (upgraded on more expensive versions). Pricing is as solid as ever, with even the boggy 316d ES set to weigh in at a hefty £24,880 and the range-topping 335i M Sport costing £38,025 before options. BMW is also introducing a new 'Sport' trim level, between SE and M Sport (pictured), and intended to appeal to those looking for a

more visually subtle (and cheaper) bodykit.

Only four engines will be available from launch in the UK, all turbocharged. The 2-litre diesel engine from the outgoing 320d continues unchanged, being offered in both 182bhp and 161bhp 'Efficient Dynamics' states of tune. As before, it's anticipated to make up the bulk of sales, with around half of the new 3-series set to wear one of the two 320d badges. Both motors get under the 120g/km barrier that brings various tax benefits. Switching to petrol, the 3-litre twin-turbocharged engine from the current 335i is carried over unchanged, but the big news is the return of another familiar boot-badge in the shape of the 328i.

Before you get too excited, this isn't the

THIS MONTH

NEXT M3 SPIED TESTING

Flagship of new 3-series range caught at the Nürburgring P14



EVO AND THE TOP GEAR TAXI

Our man Harris tries out The Stig's latest set of wheels P15



BRIGHT SPARKS: TECH ANALYSIS

Why this spark plug will mean more power *and* better mpg P18



A 3 AS FAST AS THE 335i, IT'S ALSO SET TO BE A MASSIVE £6500 CHEAPER'



Cabin will be well-equipped. Standard kit on everything but the base model will include cruise, keyless start, a 6.5in display screen and iDrive



creamy six-cylinder motor that powered late E36s and early E46s, rather an all-new 2-litre four which uses direct injection to deliver 242bhp, a 5.9sec 0-62mph time and – when working with the optional eight-speed autobox – a claimed 44.8mpg on the official combined cycle. Not only is it very nearly as fast as the six-cylinder 335i – which is just 0.4 seconds quicker to 62mph – it's also set to be a massive £6500 cheaper. We've already driven the new engine in the 5-series (page 44) and been impressed by everything but its lack of a six-cylinder soundtrack.

Later in 2012, the 328i will be joined by a 320i, using a downtuned 181bhp version of the same engine. BMW insiders confirm that the company is anticipating a shift back towards



petrol during the seven-year life cycle of this 3-series, as tougher emissions regulations force up the cost of diesels, with the 320i and 328i set to appeal to those wanting to switch without sacrificing too much economy.

The same goes for the ActiveHybrid 3, which arrives in 2013. It's a performance hybrid rather than a hair-shirt special, with a 40kW electric motor supplementing the output of the same 3-litre twin-turbocharged petrol six from the 335i, delivering a claimed 44mpg. Although it's aimed more at the US and China than Europe (those being the anticipated number one and two markets for this 3), the HybridEfficiency will offer a green alternative to the M3 at the top of the model tree. BMW has also confirmed that we'll see

'A PERFORMANCE HYBRID WILL OFFER A GREEN ALTERNATIVE TO THE M3 IN 2013'

four-wheel-drive 'X' versions of this 3-series – a first for the UK – although we'll have to wait until 2013 for them.

Notably absent from the model plan are any six-cylinder diesel engines. Although demand for bigger diesels has been in steady decline in recent years, the 325d, 330d and 335d still accounted for around 15 per cent of E90 sales

between them. Insiders say more powerful oilers will follow, although a twin-turbo four-cylinder is more likely than a mid-output six. And despite internet speculation the 3-series probably won't get the new triple-turbo 3-litre diesel that M Division has been working on – and which is tipped to deliver over 600lb ft of torque – as it would have to be priced too close to the same engine in the 5-series.

Other body styles? The Touring will arrive later next year, but we'll have to wait until 2013 for the new Coupe and Convertible versions, with the current cars soldiering on until then. Apparently a heated debate is still raging within BMW as to whether or not they'll get '4-series' branding to distinguish them from the saloon and estate. Watch this space.



Left: four tailpipes and widened track identify this as the test mule for the next-generation M3. But what's under the bonnet?

...AND HERE COMES THE NEXT M3

FOUR-DOOR PROTOTYPE CAUGHT TESTING; UNLIKELY TO ARRIVE BEFORE 2014

No sooner have details emerged about the new 3-series than spy photographers have captured an M3 prototype testing at the Nürburgring.

The four-door test mule, complete with the M3's trademark exhaust tailpipes and widened track, shows BMW is pressing ahead with the development of a saloon version of the

M3, something the company had previously hinted it was considering dropping. The current M3 Coupe will stay in production until mid-2013, so we're unlikely to see the next M3 before early 2014. As with lesser versions, it's possible the next Coupe and Convertible will carry 4-series branding, meaning the 'M' version would wear an M4 badge.

Mechanical details are sketchy at present, although BMW insiders have effectively ruled out both eight- and four-cylinder powerplants, meaning we can anticipate a return to a straight-six configuration, working with either two or three turbochargers to return similar power to the current M3, along with dramatically improved mpg and CO2 ratings.

3-SERIES EVOLUTION



E21

Years: 1975-1983
Model: 323i
Power: 143bhp
0-60mph: 8.3sec
Mpg: 23mpg



E30

Years: 1983-1990
Model: 325i
Power: 168bhp
0-60mph: 7.2sec
Mpg: 25mpg



E36

Years: 1990-1998
Model: 328i
Power: 191bhp
0-60mph: 6.4sec
Mpg: 31mpg



E46

Years: 1998-2005
Model: 330i
Power: 231bhp
0-60mph: 6.5sec
Mpg: 33mpg



E90

Years: 2005-2012
Model: 330i
Power: 258bhp
0-60mph: 6.3sec
Mpg: 39mpg



TAXI FOR MR MEADEN!

EVO WRITER GETS A WHITE-KNUCKLE RIDE IN THE TOP GEAR TAXI

Standing stationary, you wouldn't give it a second glance. But, once unleashed, this innocuous-looking black cab is one of the most sideways vehicles on the planet, and is set to be one of the stars of the forthcoming Top Gear Live shows in Birmingham and London.

Our very own Chris Harris has had an exclusive turn behind the steering wheel – when it gets into the Top Gear Live arena it will be piloted by some bloke wearing a white suit. You can see our exclusive video of Harris drifting it around the Bedford Autodrome at evo.co.uk – with the luckless Richard Meaden drafted in to act as his reluctant passenger.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the car itself is a carefully crafted cut-and-shut, with most of the external bodywork of an FX4 taxi grafted onto the floorpan and mechanicals of a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII FQ-340. It's a sufficiently neat job that you have to look closely at the position of the front wheel within the arch to spot the Lancer's shorter wheelbase, although inside the game is given away by the presence of the Mitsu's bulkhead and dashboard. Mechanical modifications are limited to custom controllers for the active differentials to help



Top: Harris takes Meaden for a spin. Centre: about 20 minutes later... Above: engine is from Mitsubishi Evo VIII FQ-340

engender low-speed oversteer, and also to allow the taxi to do its party piece of pivoting on the spot with all four wheels spinning. Transmission and brakes are standard.

In the arena, the taxi only gets to use first and (sometimes) second gear, so its trip to Bedford gave it a rare chance to stretch its legs. 'It's nice to see it fulfilling some of its potential,' said Paul Jackson, Top Gear Live's chief technician, as Harris persuaded it into ever more unlikely slip angles.

» Top Gear Live, with the stars of the TV show, is at the Birmingham NEC from November 11-13, and at the ExCeL in London from November 24-27. Find out more at topgearlive.co.uk

*'HARRIS PERSUADED
IT INTO EVER MORE
UNLIKELY SLIP
ANGLES'*



A4 REVAMPED TO FIGHT NEW 3-SERIES

» Audi has re-armed the A4 for battle with the new 3-series. There are power hikes peppered across the range, despite an 11 per cent average drop in fuel consumption, plus a general smartening-up of the interior and exterior styling. A 118bhp entry-level diesel boasts 67mpg and 112g/km CO2 emissions; the 328bhp supercharged V6 S4 continues to top the range, with combined fuel economy upped to 35mpg.



LOTUS EVORA GP EDITION

» Lotus has pulled the wraps off another special edition Evora. Happily, this one has nothing to do with famous rock band frontmen (Lotus recently produced a one-off Freddie Mercury Edition for charity) instead taking its inspiration from Lotus-Renault's 2011 Formula 1 car and its iconic black-and-gold livery.

The Evora S's 345bhp supercharged 3.5-litre V6 and rear-wheel-drive transmission remain untouched, but with just three being made, the price rises nearly £6K to £69,950.



MAZDA TAKERI UNVEILED

» The 2011 Tokyo motor show takes place this month, and here is Mazda's headline act. The Takeri is a smartly attired saloon concept that appears to take hints of Jaguar, Aston Martin and Infiniti and serve them up in a typically edgy Japanese design. It previews the next Mazda 6 repmobile, which will boast the company's clever Sky Activ technology: highly efficient petrol and diesel engines, compact new gearboxes, lightweight suspension components and a modular steel structure.



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WHAT ARE CORONA IGNITION PLUGS?

THEY INCREASE POWER AND IMPROVE ECONOMY, AND THEY COULD BE FITTED TO YOUR NEXT CAR. **RALPH HOSIER** FINDS OUT MORE

Engineers strive for efficiency like normal people need air. But the humble internal combustion engine is massively inefficient, which is really rather irritating. One of the problems is that when the spark triggers the combustion process, it takes time for the expanding flame-front to reach all the contents of the cylinder. At high engine speeds much of the fuel/air mixture goes 'bang' far too late to put any useful power into the crank; all it does is make the exhaust hot.

Ideally what is needed is a way of igniting more of the mixture a bit sooner, and that's what the new Advanced Corona Ignition System from American automotive supplier Federal-Mogul does. Instead of one small spark jumping the 1mm gap between the centre electrode and ground electrode at the tip of the spark plug, this system shoots out large plumes of ions that reach far into the combustion chamber, a bit like a miniature flamethrower. If you think of those decorative plasma globes from a few years ago, you can visualise what's going on.

Instead of the single jolt of electricity that you get in conventional ignition systems, ACIS uses a high-frequency stream of high-voltage pulses and a spark plug design that encourages the ion plumes to reach out. As well as the special plugs, ACIS uses a unique high-energy ignition control system, which completely replaces the conventional plug and coil, but it fits into roughly the same space so engine designs don't have to change much to accept the new system.

The benefit is more of the mixture is ignited at the beginning of the cycle. That means the

» **CONDUCTOR**
Produces high-energy, high-frequency electric field that creates multiple ion streams

» **ION STREAMS**
30-40mm corona of ions ignites the fuel/air mixture throughout the combustion chamber

» **INSULATOR**
Made of ceramic. As with the rest of the plug, already-proven materials are used to ensure reliability and reduce costs

» **BODY**
ACIS plugs are designed so they can fit existing engine architectures

» **NO EARTH ELECTRODE**
With no earth electrode on the plug, and no arc jumping to it, there's no erosion, improving durability

'LESS OF THE MIXTURE IS WASTED, AND MORE OF THE FUEL'S ENERGY IS TURNED INTO POWER'

mixture at the edges of the chamber doesn't have to wait for the flame front to reach it, so less of it is wasted when the exhaust valve opens and more of the fuel's energy is turned into useful power.

With no other modifications to an engine, ACIS alone yields fuel savings of up to 10 per cent. But it also allows engines to run very lean mixtures reliably, which could save even more fuel. Add stratified charge injection and very high exhaust recirculation rates and a vehicle's economy could be doubled. And, of course, it will emit fewer pollutants too.

ACIS also means that ultra-high boost levels can be reliably used where before the ignition system may have struggled with the higher range of mixture resistance from idle to full load, and this opens the door for smaller and lighter turbo engines to replace bigger naturally aspirated engines, or for existing engines to develop even more power without losing efficiency.

More power for less fuel. Happy days.

SPARK PLUG FACTS

- » Conventional plugs use a hard nickel alloy with a core of copper to conduct heat away and reduce resistance.
- » Platinum reduces wear; usually a platinum pad is attached to the end of the centre electrode.
- » 'Double platinum' plugs have a coating of platinum on the earth electrode too, to further extend plug life.
- » The earth electrode gradually erodes as each spark pulls a few molecules off it. Two-, three- and even four-electrode plugs have been made to extend plug life, but there is no performance advantage.



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RACE PROVEN

New limited-edition Jaeger-LeCoultre chronograph, as tested by Aston Martin Racing's works drivers

JAEGER-LECOULTRE AMVOX 5 WORLD CHRONOGRAPH LMP1
PRICE: £15,000
FROM: JAEGER-LECOULTRE.COM

It's now seven years since Jaeger-LeCoultre jumped on the 'car watch' bandwagon with the original AMVOX model. The latest variation on the theme is the World Chronograph LMP1, which pays homage to Aston Martin Racing's endurance cars and was tested on the wrists of team drivers Darren Turner, Harold Primat, Stefan Mücke and Christian Klien. Fitted with Jaeger-LeCoultre's rugged Calibre 752 automatic movement containing 279 components, the watch has a 44mm ceramic case and combines a chronograph with the useful world-time function that shows the hour in 24 different zones simultaneously. There's also a 'movement operating' indicator (the circular cut-out above the date window) while the chronograph counters are made from carbonfibre in a nod to the cars' monocoques and brake discs. The blue, grey and 'Gulf orange' colour scheme was inspired by Aston's racing livery and the watch is supplied on a perforated strap made from calfskin and Cordura. Just 250 will be available worldwide.



ORIS RAID 2011 ALARM
PRICE: £5800
FROM: ORIS.CH

This summer saw the 21st edition of the Suisse Paris Raid, a 600-mile regularity trial for pre-1975 classics. Oris became the official timekeeper of the event last year when the outright winner was a pristine, 1953 Austin Healey 100M, which had such delectable-looking dashboard instruments that it was decided to use them as inspiration for a pair of 2011 'Raid' wristwatches. There is a choice of an attractive but conventional chronograph (£2650) or the rather more interesting alarm model pictured here (£5800). A mere 50 examples of the latter will be made.

PIRELLI PZERO DISK_O POWER
PRICE: €790
FROM: PZEROWEB.COM

If you've always wanted to reflect your favourite road rubber in your choice of wrist wear, the awfully named 'Disk_O' from Pirelli might provide the opportunity. The original Disk_O was launched last year with an aluminium case, but its popularity among Italian petrolheads has prompted the introduction of this more expensive titanium version. As you'll have gathered from the name, the 44mm watch is intended to look like a brake disc being gripped by a miniature caliper, which provides a mounting point for the winding crown and chronograph push pieces. Black, white or blue-dial variations are available, along with a choice of titanium or ceramic bezels (add €190 for the latter). Straps are, of course, made from Pirelli-branded rubber and movements are Swiss quartz jobs. Pirelli watches are produced under licence by the giant Italian watch firm Morellato & Sector.





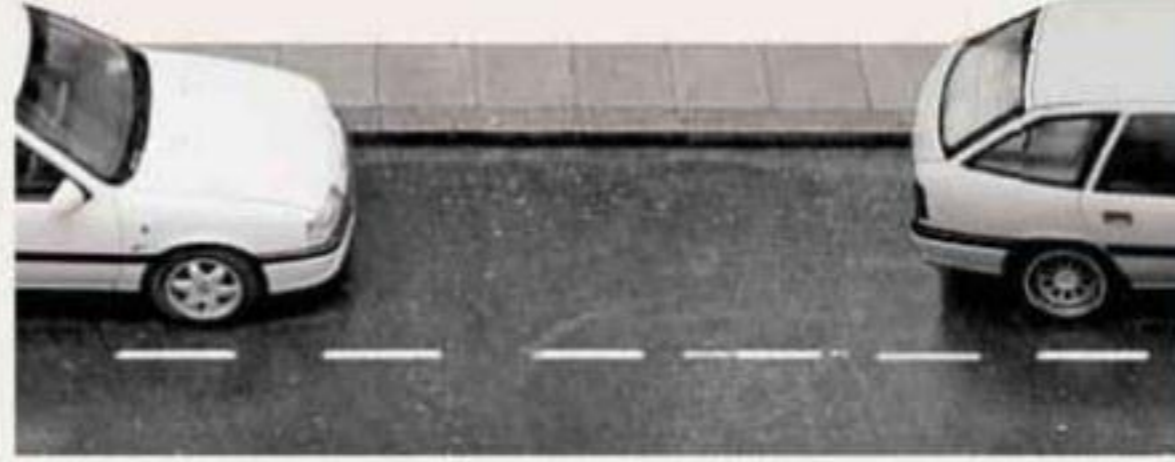
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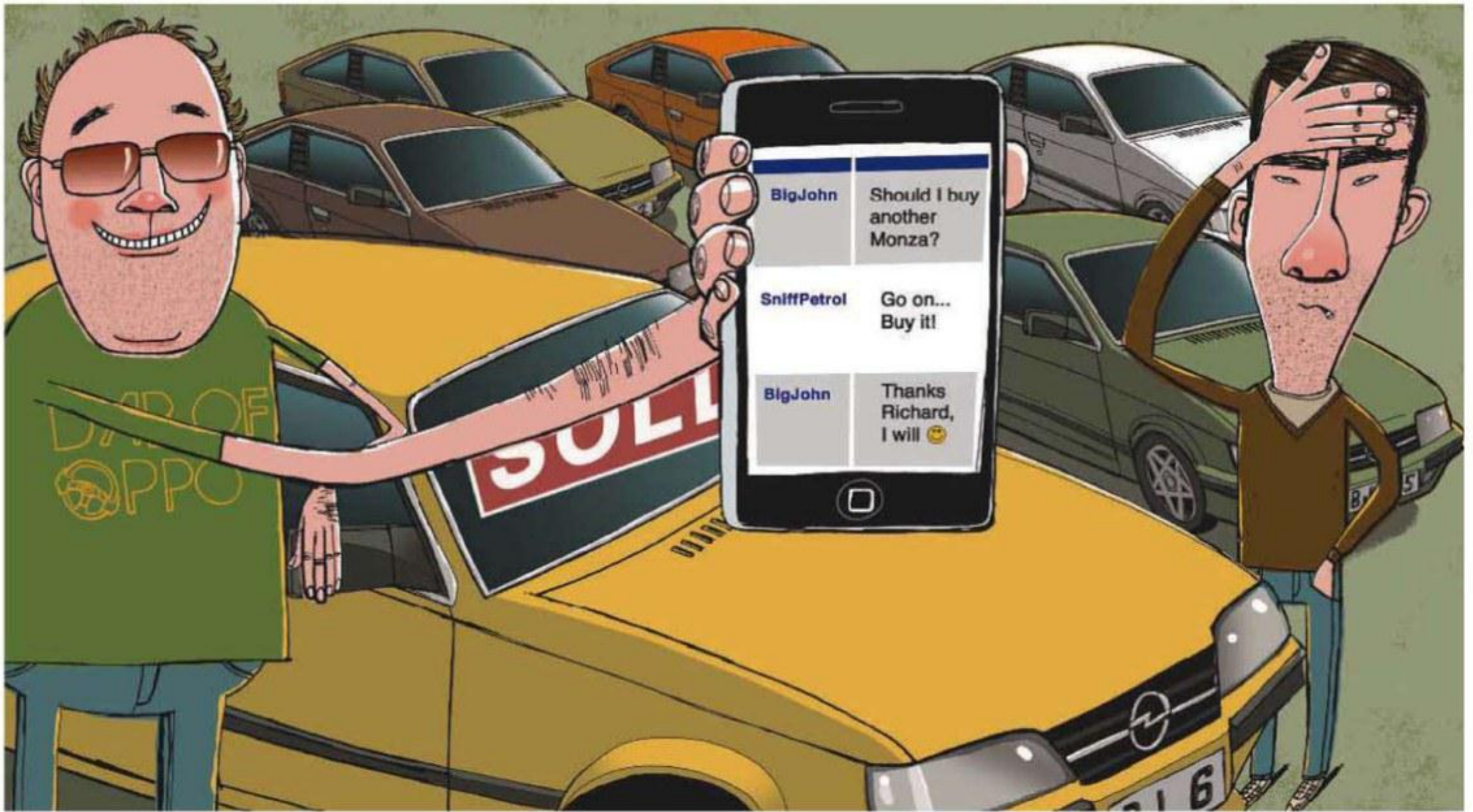
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Official Fuel Consumption Figures in mpg (l/100km) for Yaris range: Urban 41.5 (6.8) - 58.9 (4.8), Extra Urban 60.1 (4.7) - 80.7 (3.5), Combined 51.4 (5.5) - 72.4 (3.9). CO₂ Emissions 127g/km - 104g/km



A case of mistaken online identity led Porter to sign up to Twitter. And much to his surprise, he rather likes it

It was about two years ago. My mate Big John rang for one of those idle phone chats that women are good at and men would rather was taking place in a pub. We got to talking, as we usually do, about cars. 'Oh,' said Big John brightly. 'I know what I meant to tell you: I've just bought an Opel Monza.'

'You've what? Why the bloody hell have you done that,' I spluttered.

You might think this cruel. You might yourself harbour a strange inner desire for a handsome 1980s coupe with a lusty straight-six and an interior of purest velour. But you're not Big John. You're not a man who already owns five Opel Monzas.

'Seriously mate,' I said. 'Why have you done this? I mean, what's wrong with you? Surely you of all people didn't need to buy another Monza?' Big John was confused. 'But... you encouraged me to buy it,' he said softly.

'I bloody well did not,' I snapped. 'Yes you did,' John insisted. 'On PistonHeads. The car was advertised there, I went on their forum, said I was thinking of buying it and you went on there to say that I should.'

'I haven't been on PistonHeads for months,' I hissed, rapidly approaching the red line of exasperation and preparing to shift up into the lower register of righteous indignation. 'But you were on there when I mentioned this Monza,' John insisted. 'Sniff Petrol? That's you isn't it...?'

Then the penny dropped. Sniff Petrol is indeed the name of my website. But it's not the pseudonym I use on PistonHeads. No, you see someone else uses it instead. I'd noticed this a few months earlier and had an online conversation with the bloke who'd got

'I TOLD BIG JOHN HE DIDN'T NEED ANOTHER OPEL MONZA. "BUT YOU ENCOURAGED ME TO BUY IT," HE SAID'

it. He was just a fan of my website, he explained, and since I hadn't taken it as a username, he thought he would instead. There was nothing I could do about this, although since people might assume he was something to do with my Sniff Petrol website, I did ask if he could avoid suddenly becoming a massive online racist or something. He obliged, and a while later he very graciously changed his username, but by then the damage was done. My mate Big John had bought another Opel Monza. And that, my friends, is how I ended up on Twitter.

Twitter was becoming the Next Big Thing, so one day I went on there, discovered that the Sniff Petrol username was still available and bagged it


for myself, purely in the interests of preventing someone else from nabbing it and then accidentally convincing my mate Big John to buy another 1980s coupe he doesn't need. Trouble was, once I was on there, I couldn't keep my big virtual mouth shut and these days I happily Twitter (or is it Twat?) with the gusto of a lowbrow, car-orientated Stephen Fry.

You might regard Twitter as an inexplicable fad. You may think that, even by the cloyingly self-regarding standards of social media, the 140-character idiot stream is the most inane use of the internet and one that consists almost exclusively of deeply uninteresting people drivelling on about how they've just bought some crisps or watched *Come Dine With Me* or been for a poo. But the truth is, it's actually a rather good source of car news. Follow the right people and you get links to breaking stories first, especially if you're into Formula 1. If you're a long-time reader of this magazine, you may be interested to know that most of its staff are now on there too, including Trott, Meaden, Barker, Catchpole and the prolifically Twittering Chris Harris, who dispenses excellent rants about Lotus and vague details about how he inexplicably started this year's evo Car of the Year at the wrong racetrack in the wrong country.

Far from being a fad, Twitter has become a prime source of car news and I've learned to embrace it with gusto. At least until the next social media trend comes along, at which point I'll have to sign up for that too. Not for me, you understand, but just to protect Big John.

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Land Rover is obviously struggling to come up with a replacement for its Defender. Metcalfe to the rescue!

Frankfurt 2011 yet again proved to be an unmissable show, with covers being ripped from intriguing concept cars everywhere you turned. But not every manufacturer got it right, and if I had to pick one in particular that goofed up badly

then it would be Land Rover and its Defender-replacement concept, the DC100.

Now, if there was ever a concept where form should follow function, then this should be it, but instead of the engineering team presenting what a new Defender should be like, it was left to Land Rover's design director, Gerry McGovern, to show the world his vision for this iconic car. Big mistake.

How Land Rover should replace its ancient workhorse has been an ongoing saga that already spans two centuries, but I'm starting to realise Land Rover still doesn't know what to do, and that's why it's now asking us for help – something I find almost cringeworthy. Porsche never asks for help each time it reinvents the 911, nor, for that matter, does Land Rover when it comes to replacing the Range Rover; the only reason it doesn't know what to do with the Defender is that it has left it so flipping long, it has actually forgotten what the car is all about.

My biggest beef with the DC100 concept is that

a new Defender needs to be, first and foremost, a commercial vehicle. It will only become a so-called lifestyle accessory if people accept it as being the 'real deal', therefore making it cool. Trying to do it the other way round never works, as no potential commercial user will want to buy something that's seen as – how do I put this? – a bit 'girlie' (Suzuki Vitara Van anyone?).

Think how they do it on the other side of the pond, where they adore their pick-up trucks. I've spent the last few summers in Canada and still can't believe how many trucks you see on the roads, but what's fascinating is that, while they are basically lifestyle

***'DEFENDER REPLACEMENT?
 A PROPER, STRIPPED-OUT
 SHORT-WHEELBASE DISCO
 PICK-UP WOULD BE PERFECT'***

statements, they're all put to work in some way.

White-van man doesn't exist in Canada – he drives a pick-up. Canadian action-man types (of which there are plenty) only want tricked-up Dodge Rams or Ford F-150s with either a jet-ski, skidoo or dirt-bike strapped to the rear deck, and I guess that's the market Land Rover is aiming at, too, with its new Defender. The thing is, these pick-ups often double up for both work and pleasure, with many put through the books as business tools, making them instantly cheaper to both buy and run.

But I believe there's an easy solution available to Land Rover. All it needs to do is take a leaf out of VW's book and build a proper, commercial

Discovery 3 instead of the current 'life-style' version. Back in the '80s, VW fancied having a crack at the commercial pick-up market and, by welding a pick-up rear to a mk1 Golf front end, it created the legendary VW Caddy, which, despite being based on an old model, proved an instant hit. Now imagine Land Rover doing something similar with its Disco 3, replacing the expensive air-suspension with steel springs and fitting the original rubber dash. When it was launched back in 2004, the cheapest Disco 3 was £26,995, but reduce the door-count to three, fit fabric trim and minimal equipment and that could morph into a list price of around £24,000 today.

I'm sure such a vehicle would be a massive hit as, amongst my farming friends, the Disco 3 is already the default Defender replacement (no farmer I know would buy a new Defender, it's way too agricultural...). The Disco can tow 3.5 tonnes, is good off-road and looks nicely utilitarian. Its only downsides are that it's a bit too big and is smothered in posh carpet, so a proper, stripped-out short-wheelbase Disco pick-up would be perfect.

The problem here is that the incredible success of the Range Rover models has led Land Rover's management to lose sight of their roots – the commercial market. Toyota and Ford sell over half a million Hiluxes and F-150 trucks a year, or roughly 480,000 more than the number of Defenders sold last year, so the potential for a proper commercial Disco is huge. So I hope Land Rover leaves the glitzy launches to new Range Rovers; the new Defender should be a utility vehicle first and foremost, and if 'Posh' doesn't like it, that's absolutely fine because she won't be buying one. But her plumber might.



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Advertise a product on the side of a racing car, and Harris will buy it – or at least try it once. But there's a problem here...

The biggest disappointment of my formative years was learning that Parmalat, the seemingly enigmatic word written down the side of Nelson Piquet's Brabham BT49, was in fact a dairy conglomerate. So the ultimate aim of F1's most exciting era – Piquet, 1300bhp,

experimental fuel and welded wastegates – was not to push the dynamic envelope, it was to flog powdered milk. This was a shattering revelation.

I take a very simple view of motorsport sponsors: any company willing to spend large amounts of its shareholders' cash supporting a sport I adore is a friend of mine. I will buy products that are advertised on the side of racing cars. I've been doing it for decades, but this 30-year experiment appears to be identifying some worrying trends.

There seems to be a direct relationship between the coolness of a brand on the side of a car and its agreeableness in the real world. The surprise being that they are inversely proportional. Cool equals grim.

By way of an example, I give you Rothmans. This might be the funkiest cigarette brand ever wrapped around a racing car, because it appeared on everything from the Ascona 400 to Jacky Ickx's Dakar 959. But if you were an impressionable 13-year-old buying snouts from the local shop, as I was, and you only had eyes

for the ones endorsed by Stefan Bellof, there was a shock waiting for you. They could strip a throat in three drags. They were nasty, rough coffin-nails. In fact the only nastier fag brand I've smoked is West – the ones that spurred Mika to his world titles.

I would like to drink Martini, largely to pay homage to Gijs van Lennep's 1973 victory on the Targa Florio in a 2.8 RSR, and also in honour of the company's vast catalogue of motorsport success, but have you actually tried drinking the stuff? It's horrid. It's one of those weird fortified-vermouth-wine things that doesn't make sense, so you have to either drink it as a Vodka-based cocktail (and rapidly get wasted) or order it with

'ROTHMANS WAS THE FUNKIEST CIGARETTE BRAND EVER, BUT THEY COULD STRIP A THROAT IN THREE DRAGS'

lemonade. I cannot recall the glory of Van Lennep by ordering a Martini and lemonade.

Jägermeister's even more problematic. Show me a Jägermeister 935 from the late '70s and I will show you rousing tumescence. This is perhaps the race-livery of all liveries, but the drink itself appears to have been based around a culinary tragedy between a can of coke and some marmite. Youngsters mix it with Red Bull to maximize their pissedness/energy ratio – which is fitting for me because I'd probably rather drink Dietrich Mateschitz's wee than ever taste that caffeine-laced rocket-fuel ever again. The stuff's bloody dangerous.

For a while I smoked JPS, but always preferred the taste of Marlboro Lights, which kind of proves the

hypothesis, doesn't it? Marlboro has the strongest association with motorsport of any fag brand, the product itself is (or was to this sadly reformed smoker) very good, but I've never really thought it looked that cool on a race car. Certainly not on any of the Ferraris, though actually it did work on a McLaren MP4/5, so perhaps I'm being a bit harsh. But for all Marlboro's efforts, JPS still resonates stronger for me.

Boss looked awesome on those McLarens, but the clothing is a just a bit too, well, Ron for normal humans. Benetton was better, but a scary encounter with some bright green corduroys as a child left me unsure of how to approach the Italian clothing giant. Still, selling cloth was marginally more exciting than selling milk. Especially if you had New Man painted on your Porsche 956 – sadly the tat it equated to on the high street made C&A look like Jermyn Street.

I will continue to buy stuff on the basis that it appears on a racing car because I have had a few successes. Tic Tac looked just perfect on the Ferrari, and the confection is equally good. The chest freezer we inherited eight years ago is made by a company called LEC, surely the only fridge manufacturer to have owned a Formula 1 team, on account of David Purley's father being one of the company's founders. I like the fact that whenever I go to get the kids an ice-cream, I see a logo that reminds me of a Ford DFV.

At some point in the future I would like to own an Olivetti printer and find a way of flying Saudi Air. Maybe even fly to Spain and take out a mobile contract with Telefonica, as a way of thanking them for supporting Carlos Sainz and his unflinching work ethic. As for milk, the disappointment is still too much to bear, so for now I'm still a Unigate man.



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THE EVO VERDICT ON THIS MONTH'S NEW LAUNCHES

FERRARI 458 SPIDER

» FOLDING HARD-TOP » SAME 562BHP V8 » 0-62MPH IN 3.4SEC
» REVISED SUSPENSION » RETUNED ENGINE NOTE

SPECIFICATION

Engine V8, 4499cc **CO2** 275g/km
Power 562bhp @ 9000rpm
Torque 398lb ft @ 6000rpm **0-62mph** 3.4sec
(claimed) **Top speed** 198mph (claimed)
Price £198,856 **On sale** Now

Some of you may remember the scene from the 1985 film *Weird Science* where the lead teenage nerds, Gary and Wyatt, attempt to create the perfect woman (from their hormone-addled perspective) on the computer in Gary's bedroom. As a contribution to the canon of feminist cinema, it isn't a classic. What's interesting is the MO. With high hopes, but little idea of how things will turn out, they simply input their fantasy wishlist, commandeer a few extra gigaflops by hacking into a supercomputer belonging to the US Air Force, there's a convenient freak electrical storm and, wouldn't you just know it, Kelly LeBrock is suddenly standing in the bedroom.

Of course she is. Let's switch subject

matter. If you didn't know the Ferrari 458 Italia was merely the next stage in an evolutionary sequence that runs 308, 328, 348, 355, 360, 430, the idea that it was actually a conglomeration of fevered schoolboy supercar fantasies crunched and configured by liquid-cooled petaflops of processing power and zapped into existence by a lightning strike would be strangely believable.

There is a sense of the unreal about the 458. A sense that it's just a bit too good to be true – from the way it looks on an Italian hillside in the soft evening light to the way it namechecks every known feelgood supercar sensation, whacks them up to 11 and then splices in a low-effort lightness of touch and directional acuity a Lotus Elise would struggle to better. It's the kind of synthesis more usually found in the best driving simulations and has led some to describe the Italia driving experience – further hyped by the think-it fast dual-clutch gearshifts and galactically wide power-

TESTED THIS MONTH

FERRARI 458 SPIDER

AUDI S8

CITROËN C1 GTI

P32

NISSAN GT-R

P38

SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT

P38

VAUXHALL ASTRA GTC

P40

CITROËN DS5

P41

BMW 528i

P43

CHRYSLER 300C

P43

P44

P49



band – as being like a perfectly pitched, hyper-real arcade game precisely choreographed to thrill and reward, but one from which a few layers of raw physicality have been removed.

As such, the 458 is unlike any other supercar I can think of and, almost by definition, ought to be more acutely sensitive to the consequences of lopping the roof off. On the face of things, this could go two ways. Either the extra exposure – to the elements and the 458's powerful singing voice (surgically re-tuned for the alfresco concert) – intensifies and completes Ferrari's finest driving experience. Or the additional weight and reduced rigidity do just enough to break the spell. In reality, the upshot is something of a revelation.

Predicted to be Ferrari's best seller, a drop-top 458 was always a given following the company's usual pattern with its V8 models. It breaks with the soft-top tradition, though, in being the

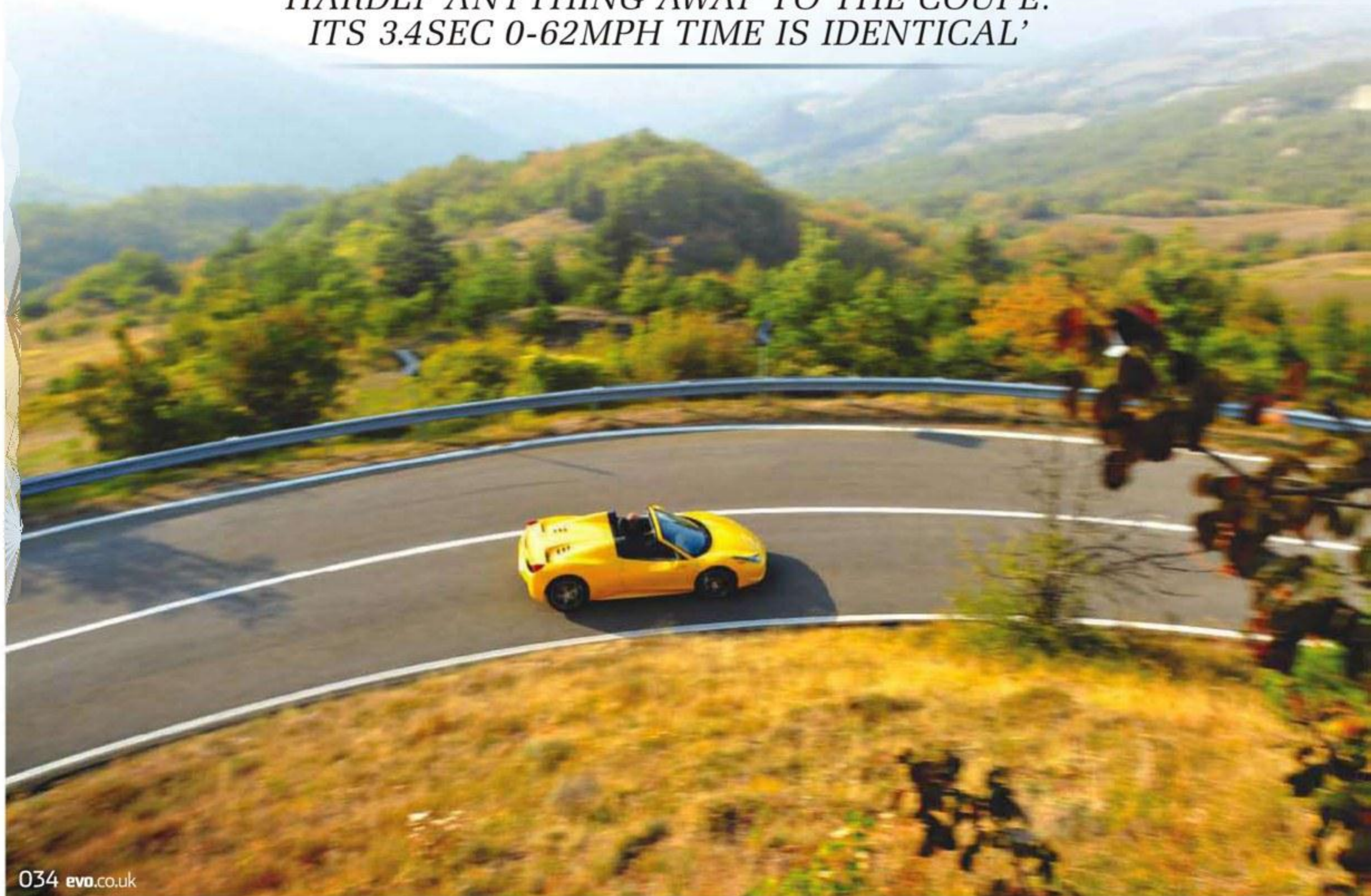


first mid-engined Ferrari convertible with a folding metal roof. It's actually aluminium and all in weighs 25 kilos less than the F430's fabric affair. Opening or closing in just 14 seconds, the so-called 2D design was inspired by the 575 Superamerica's; it folds in two sections and stows very space-efficiently beneath the engine cover. The whole mechanism is so well packaged it even liberates a little more cabin room compared with the 430 Spider – enough for a couple of

custom-made suitcases or squashy bags to be placed on a shelf behind the seats to supplement the relatively generous front boot capacity.

There's only the slightest increase in aerodynamic drag with the roof in place (from a Cd of 0.33 to 0.335) and nothing awkward about the way it looks. If anything, the Spider's reconstituted back end is more handsome than its hard-top sibling's, despite losing the transparent engine cover. In its place is a

'IN COLD STATISTICS, THE SPIDER GIVES HARDLY ANYTHING AWAY TO THE COUPE. ITS 3.4SEC 0-62MPH TIME IS IDENTICAL'





painted cover with vents, which although plainer lends a tougher, more coherent look to the rear aspect, especially in conjunction with twin buttresses that rise to flattened points just above the seats' head restraints. The buttresses provide roll-over protection as well as helping to manage the airflow over the cabin with the roof down – further tailored by a little glass window between them that can be raised and lowered to suit and has an 'optimum' default position.

The Spider weighs only 50 kilos more than the coupe (for comparison, opting for an Audi R8 Spyder adds 100 kilos to the equivalent coupe's weight) and, as you might expect, Ferrari's engineers have made various mechanical adjustments to finesse the car for its perceived clientele: slightly softer damper rates (though the spring and anti-roll bar settings are unchanged), a gentler throttle map (more on this in a moment) and specific induction

Opposite page: hard top can be raised or stowed in just 14 seconds; paddle-activated shifts are still lightning-fast. Above left: exhaust note has been retuned

and exhaust tuning to re-master the soundtrack of the 562bhp, 4.5-litre V8 for maximum aural gratification.

In cold statistics, the Spider gives hardly anything away to the coupe. Its 198mph top speed is 4mph down, its 3.4sec 0-62mph time identical and its lap time around Ferrari's Fiorano track – presumably with test driver Dario Benuzzi at the wheel and all of the chassis' electronic aids switched off – barely half a second slower.





Above: V8 has the same 562bhp as the coupe's, but the window in the engine cover has been lost

So, to all intents and purposes, you'd expect the 458 Spider to deliver a drive within a gnat's crotchet of the coupe's. And, fundamentally, the performance and chassis dynamics feel pretty much the same. The astonishing acceleration and grip levels seem undiminished, likewise the almost preternaturally direct and precise steering, the utterly nailed front end and the exploitable degrees of response/noise/playfulness the various manettino settings allow. Perhaps just a fraction of the coupe's uncanny, Lotus Elise-like liveness and agility is missing and, on some of northern Italy's more ravaged and beaten-up roads, a few shimmies can be felt through the body structure and steering column. This is no impediment to the Spider's speed across the ground, though, nor its suspension's remarkable ability to retain uncannily exact control of the body while absorbing the punishment and curve-balls dealt by roads

with broken surfaces or oddly contoured by local subsidence. As ever, your common-or-garden bat out of hell wouldn't see which way the Ferrari went.

The brilliant thing is, these sundry imperfections, on a purely subjective level, have a kind of humanising effect on the 458. By adding the grain and grit that's completely missing from the coupe, the Spider, even with the roof in place, somehow feels more honest and communicative. And with the roof down, all remnants of the coupe's 'digital gameplay' demeanour simply vanish. Although not the most 'open' of open-top cars – partly due to the cocooning effect of the buttresses – the rush towards the horizon is more visceral and heroic with the wind ripping through your hair and the chance to hear the 458's uniquely penetrating scream taking on a whole new range of textures and colours as it bounces

off the surrounding roadside furniture, countryside, tunnel wall or whatever. I suspect this makes more difference to what you actually hear than any tailoring of the induction and exhaust note Ferrari may have done.

I'd like to think that the ultra sensitivity of our test car's accelerator pedal over the first few millimetres of its travel (making it virtually impossible to modulate speed smoothly in traffic around town or on the autostrada) was more a 'tolerance issue', as claimed by Ferrari's technicians, than a result of the Spider's 'gentler throttle map'. That apart, the open-top 458 eclipses the Italia coupe for pure enjoyment and is the better Ferrari for it.

David Vivian

evo RATING ★★★★★

- A more organic 458
- Er, 4mph slower?



A scenic landscape photograph featuring a clear blue sky and autumn foliage. In the foreground, there are branches with leaves in shades of green, yellow, and red. The middle ground shows rolling hills covered in dense forest with some autumnal tints. The background consists of more distant, hazy hills under a bright blue sky. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

*'THE SPIDER, EVEN
WITH THE ROOF IN
PLACE, SOMEHOW FEELS
MORE HONEST AND
COMMUNICATIVE'*



AUDI S8

» RANGE-TOPPING AUDI SALOON » NEW TWIN-TURBO V8
 » 513BHP » 479LB FT FROM 1700RPM » 0-62MPH IN 4.2SEC

SPECIFICATION

Engine V8, 3993cc, twin-turbo **CO2** 237g/km
Power 513bhp @ 5800rpm **Torque** 479lb ft @ 1700-5500rpm **0-62mph** 4.2sec (claimed)
Top speed 155mph (limited)
Price c£80,000 (est) **On sale** March 2012

XXL saloons works here. Company users willing to take the tax hit of a big petrol engine tend to be looking for a flashier badge, while keen drivers are likely to select something more agile. It's also a statistic that makes it a bit easier to understand why the S8 fails to deliver on British dynamic tastes.

More of that in a moment, but first the new engine. We've already driven a pre-production version of the S8's new 513bhp twin-turbo V8 (evo 163), but this is our first chance to experience it on proper roads – in this case the fast, flowing tarmac around Pamplona in northern Spain. This



Above: cabin comfy and well equipped. Below: new engine 69bhp up on old V10. Bottom: carbon brakes an option

Meet what's almost certain to become one of the rarest Audis ever. The company's official anticipation is that no more than 150 S8s will be sold in the UK each year – volumes to make the R8 look positively commonplace.

It's a prediction that's based on a realistic understanding of how the market for

is the same engine that's set to find its way into the Bentley Continental and – in downtuned form – the forthcoming Audi S6 and S7. It's a storming powerplant, mustering the sort of effortless urge that the previous S8's naturally aspirated V10 struggled to deliver. Now the combination of a torque peak that starts at just 1700rpm and a quick-acting eight-speed autobox translates into an any-speed surge of seemingly relentless acceleration.

Most pre-launch attention has been won by the new motor's clever cylinder-deactivation system, which turns it into a V4 under gentle use, helping to deliver a 27.7mpg combined economy figure. In the real world the cylinder shuffling is effectively invisible, as even the gentlest





SPECIFICATION

Engine In-line 3-cylinder, 998cc, turbocharged **CO2** n/a **Power** 110bhp @ 6200rpm **Torque** 98lb ft @ 5000rpm **0-60mph** 7.9sec (claimed) **Top speed** 125mph (est) **Price** See text **On sale** Now (www.c1gti.co.uk)

CITROËN C1 GTI

» TURBO CONVERSION » UP TO 110BHP
» 0-60 IN 7.9SEC » HANDLING PACK TOO

A modern-day Peugeot 205 GTI is a very appealing idea and that's exactly what Balance Motorsport has tried to create with the car you see here. It might seem odd therefore to have started out with a Citroën C1 rather than the mechanically identical Pug 107, but the argument is that you can buy a C1 in an even more basement spec than the Pug, so it's likely to be closer to the claimed 790kg kerb weight. It's also prettier.

The C1 GTI's transformation is being offered in several stages. For £2995 you get the cooking 96bhp turbo conversion (up from 68bhp), then for another £500 you get the full-fat 110bhp. If you want the complete GTI spec of this car, including stainless steel exhaust, white wheels and new suspension, then you'll need to find £4995. The Turbo used is a KKK K03 (as found on the old 1.8T Golf GTI) and it's been placed in a space created by moving the battery to

Above: lift-off oversteer is of the benign rather than hedge-seeking variety. Demonstrator is C1-based, but conversion could also be applied to Pug 107 or Toyota Aygo



the boot. Engine longevity has been a priority in the development, so as well as a new air filter and an oil cooler, you get water injection for the higher boost state of tune. AVO coilover suspension sits in the arches and, perhaps even more importantly, a custom 22mm anti-roll bar has been added at the rear to try to recreate a 205-style handling balance. The white alloys are by Rota and the tyres are track-biased Marangonis.

I'd recommend going for the full 110bhp. It makes a much more noticeable difference than the 96bhp upgrade and really brings the C1 alive. The spool-up is very gradual so you still need to rev the 998cc engine hard and it's not stupendously quick, but the rewards are there. It sounds great too, with a ripping air noise like a baby Mégane (or even 911) Turbo, an undertone of three-cylinder warble and a comedy PING like a bicycle bell as what you imagine must be a miniature dump-valve deploys.

It's paying the handling a compliment when I say that it makes you long for better seats. The steering is still too light and vague, and the ride has suffered, but the chassis is good fun, with surprising front-end grip and proper throttle-adjustability. Thankfully on slightly damp Surrey roads it wasn't hedge-seeking like an old 205 GTI, just very benign fun. In fact photographer Dean Smith said he didn't take any pictures on the first run through the corner because he was laughing so much.

The full conversion looks pricey, but when fitted to a second-hand C1 it's an intriguing and engaging alternative to a Panda 100HP. **Henry Catchpole**

throttle application will get all eight cylinders fired up again.

Sadly, when it comes to the business of corners, the S8 comes straight back to the too-familiar fast-Audi script of relentless competence. The steering lacks feel behind its artificial weighting, and although there's lots of grip and a commendable enthusiasm to stick to a chosen line, on slower stuff the S8 starts to feel nose heavy, with driving quickly becoming the customary story of managing understeer. Audi's sport differential can be felt doing its thing by vectoring torque to the outside-rear corner – but you have to really drive through front-end slip to persuade it to step in and tighten the line.

So, another dynamically inert fast Audi. The S8 is enormously fast, impressively stable and equipped with everything bar the kitchen sink – but for excitement you still need to look elsewhere. **Mike Duff**

evo RATING ★★★★★

- Performance, economy, cruising ability
- Understeer, lack of driver involvement

evo RATING ★★★★★

- A lot of fun in a small package
- Vague, over-light steering



SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT

» ALL-NEW VERSION » 134BHP » SIX-SPEED GEARBOX » JUST 15KG HEAVIER

SPECIFICATION

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1586cc **CO2** 147g/km
Power 134bhp @ 6900rpm
Torque 118lb ft @ 4400rpm **0-62mph** 8.7sec
 (claimed) **Top speed** 121mph (claimed)
Price c£14,000 (est) **On sale** January 2012

You might have thought that the coefficient of grip couldn't get any lower than that between a polished parquet floor and some cotton socks. It turns out it can. A Spanish road seeing its first rain for weeks develops the sort of surface sheen that makes it feel like you've turned up to Rally Sweden on slick tyres. The front end of the Suzuki Swift Sport is constantly sliding as we head up along a fantastically tight, twisting forest road and then steeply downhill towards Barcelona. Thankfully the front tyres let go in a very faithful, reassuring way, but it's a relief that this new Swift Sport weighs only 15kg more than the old one, so there's not too much momentum slithering across the tarmac.

Spring rates have been increased and there is noticeably less roll, which means you get a car that handles direction changes with a flatter stance and more precision than before, but you also lose a bit of adjustability at the rear. It's still

a hugely fun car, however, and it seems happiest being grabbed by the scruff and chucked around in true Early Learning hot-hatch fashion. This slightly more aggressive approach suits the steering too, as it lacks a bit of weight and feel around the straight-ahead but loads up encouragingly once you've got some lock on and the tyres working.

The engine rewards a committed attitude to the throttle as well. Give it a few miles to warm its fluids, then try not to let it dip under 4000rpm because below that it struggles, but above and all the way to the pillowy-soft limiter just beyond 7000rpm it is tremendously eager to spit out its 134bhp (up 11bhp).

The downside of the Swift's buzzy attitude used to be that on the motorway it could feel like you were sitting inside a large beehive, such was the engine noise. This has been solved with the new six-speed gearbox, which lets the engine relax a little when cruising. The shift action retains the positive short-throw feeling of the old five-speeder, and it's lost a little of the rubberiness of the old 'box too, although it doesn't relish being rushed through the gate quite as much.

The one aspect that these Spanish roads



New Sport is just 10mm longer, 5mm wider. Below: wheels are 17s. Above right: cabin better equipped



don't allow you to assess terribly easily is ride. I spend some time diverting onto side-roads in an attempt to find bumps, but there seems to be nothing that falls between farm tracks and motorway-grade asphalt. Over the few imperfections that I do find, the Swift has a lovely, composed and rounded edge to its damping that should suit British roads perfectly as long as it can keep up with repeated hits as well as just single impacts.

The new driver's seat is, then, a good (if still marginally lofty) place to be. Refinement is generally up a notch,

'IT'S A HUGE FUN CAR TO GRAB BY THE SCRUFF AND CHUCK AROUND'



SPECIFICATION

Engine V6, 3799cc, twin-turbo CO2 n/a Power 560bhp @ 6400rpm (est)
Torque 470lb ft @ 3200-6000rpm (est) 0-62mph 3.4sec (est)
Top speed 197mph (est) Price c£72,000 (est) On sale Early 2012

NISSAN GT-R

» REVISED FOR 2012 MODEL YEAR
» MORE POWER » ASYMMETRIC CHASSIS(!)

Much as it was true of Michael Jackson in his pomp, a live performance from Mizunosan, daddy of all things GT-R, is not to be missed. Live in Silverstone – for one day only – he talks us through the finer points of his GT-R philosophy, streaming brilliant Jano-Saxon phrases at every opportunity. Everything about this car is ‘cleverness for life’ and ‘creating dramatic emotion’, the message underpinned by a PowerPoint presentation that uses every imaginable font on each page. The only thing we’re missing are numbers: there’s no fixed spec for now.

He does, however, suggest that the leap from the 2011 to 2012 model years brings greater gains than the '09-to-'10 tweaks, which saw power rise from 478bhp to 523bhp; so you'd have to guess at around 560bhp for the latest evolution. That's quite a lot.

There are some internal changes to the motor, and if my weak grasp of Mizuno's presentation are to be trusted, they are to the inlet valve, the manifolds, the head and the piston design. The motor now wants to rev much harder beyond 5000rpm, we're told. The big news is the chassis. Not content with bludgeoning the laws of physics for the best part of 20 years, Mizuno now wants to be the first man to deliver a road car with an asymmetrical chassis set-up (at least since the Renault 16), and no, the GT-R isn't about to enter NASCAR.

Below: Kazutoshi Mizuno, chief vehicle engineer for the GT-R, talks with evo's Chris Harris about the upgrades for the 2012 edition of Nissan's supercoupe



Top and below: brief drive on a damp track didn't allow Harris to uncover too much about the new GT-R, but the increased power is apparent

The GT-R's transaxle gearbox sits just to the right of the main propshaft, which means in right-hand-drive form it carries 50kg too much corner weight on the right-hand side. This has been addressed by adding spring rate and damper support to the right front of the car, and removing it from the front left. The actual pivot position of the respective sides has been adjusted too. It's a remarkable solution and one I'm sad to say I just couldn't properly test in very slippery conditions at Silverstone during a brief squirt in the car.

I can confirm that the engine does indeed pull more aggressively beyond 5000rpm, even if it doesn't feel nearly 100bhp stronger than those first R35s did back in 2007. In other news, there will be a Track Pack option for right-hand-drive markets, with no rear seats, grippier front seats, a brake cooling pack, new springs and adjustable dampers.

The GT-R remains one of the most characterful and mind-scrabbling experiences available. We await prolonged exposure to this new version with great expectations. **Chris Harris**

EVO RATING ★★★★★

➤ Even faster than before

➤ We need a proper test of it



because not only is it quieter but the equipment count has also improved, with climate control, Bluetooth, seven airbags and tinted rear glass all standard.

In those terms it should certainly justify what is likely to be a slightly higher price than its main dynamic rival, the Twingo 133 Cup. I'm looking forward to the twin test already... **Henry Catchpole**

EVO RATING ★★★★★

➤ Still a great pocket rocket

➤ Has lost a little adjustability

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SPECIFICATION

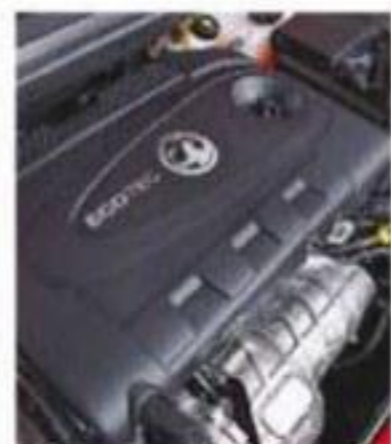
(1.6i SRi) Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo
CO2 168g/km **Power** 178bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 169lb ft @ 2200-5400rpm
0-60mph 7.8sec (claimed) **Top speed** 137mph
 (claimed) **Price** £21,480 **On sale** Now

VAUXHALL ASTRA GTC

» THREE-DOOR COUPE
 » UPGRADED SUSPENSION

Don't say hatchback. Vauxhall is determined to pitch the new three-door Astra GTC as a practical coupe rather than an underported version of a mainstream hatch. We're meant to compare it with the VW Scirocco, Audi A3 and Peugeot RCZ. Despite some similar design cues – and a shared floorpan – every exterior panel on the GTC is different to those of the five-door hatch. And, befitting the aspirational, upmarket image, only higher-spec GTCs will be available, all UK versions coming in either 'Sport' or 'SRi' trim.

There are mechanical changes too, with the GTC getting the same 'HiPerStrut' front suspension as the Insignia VXR – clever, separately swivelling hubs that use the same mounting points as the MacPherson struts fitted to lesser Astras,



18, 19 or 20-inch wheels are available; current petrol engines are disappointing; cabin is smart with good refinement



and which improve wheel location and reduce camber change. At the back is the same torsion beam as the standard Astra, but secured by a Watt's linkage to reduce lateral motion. There are also firmer springs and dampers and UK-specific settings for the electric power steering.

We like the way the boggy Astra drives, and the GTC builds on the solid dynamic base of its five-door sister. It feels light and agile on its feet, with excellent damping delivering good body control and the steering combining nice weight with a decent, if digitally synthesised, impression of feedback. There's lots of grip and – beyond it – a nice, exploitable chassis balance that allows the back end to be brought into play in a non-intimidatory fashion.

Less good news is the choice of engines. There's a turbocharged petrol 1.4 in 118bhp and 138bhp states of tune – we tried the latter, and it showed no mid-range enthusiasm and a tight-feeling top end. The more expensive 1.6-litre turbo petrol boasts 178bhp and feels far pokier, but is similarly unwilling to rev. Sad to report, the best-suited engine – for now at least – is the range-topping 163bhp 2-litre turbodiesel, which combines a nice, fat slug of overtaking torque with acceptable refinement. Excitement will come later with the VXR version.

The GTC is a thoroughly likeable car – but it's still a Vauxhall Astra. And, in the style-focused segment it's set to compete in, that's likely to be its biggest challenge. Anyone willing to see beyond the griffin will find a fine-handling, stylish and practical coupe. **Mike Duff**

evo RATING ★★★★★

- Good to look at, good to drive
- Petrol engines lack zing, Astra badge



CITROËN DS5

» LATEST 'DS' MODEL
 » BMW 3-SERIES RIVAL



SPECIFICATION

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo **CO2** 155g/km
Power 197bhp @ 5500-6800rpm
Torque 203lb ft @ 1700-4500rpm **0-62mph**
 8.2sec (claimed) **Top speed** 146mph (claimed)
Price £26,000 (est) **On sale** March

The Citroën DS5 is the third and latest in the company's upmarket DS line, aiming to lure buyers who, too often, see life as impossible without a posh German car in the driveway. Well, this one's French and proud of it. Inside, it's full of lush leather, expensively machined metal and crisp graphics. There's not much room in the back, though, because the boot is big and the doors are thick.

So it's a pushed-up, revved-up take on a C5-size Citroën, yes? No. This time the number doesn't tally with the underskin genes, because the DS5 is based on a stretched C4/DS4/308/3008/RCZ platform. Which means it can be powered by a 197bhp, 1.6-litre, PSA/BMW turbo engine, or by various diesels, or a 3008-derived hybrid powertrain.

The 197bhp THP 200 goes with the vigour and smoothness you'd expect. But this would-be 3-series rival has a torsion-beam rear axle (hybrid excepted), which just isn't good enough in this size of car. It makes the balance inert and, because Citroën wants the DS5 to be 'dynamic', the ride full of thump and fidget.

A plush Citroën with a poor ride. Error, error, error... **John Simister**



DS5 is confidently styled; roof has three glass roof panels

evo RATING ★★★★★

- Looks terrific, goes with vigour
- Cheap suspension lets it down



SPECIFICATION

Engine In-line 4cyl, 1997cc, turbocharged
CO2 152g/km **Power** 242bhp @ 5000-6500rpm
Torque 258lb ft @ 1250-4800rpm
0-62mph 6.3sec (claimed) **Top speed** 155mph (limited) **Price** £33,610 **On sale** Now

BMW 528i

» TURBO FOUR-CYLINDER
 » 242BHP » 0-62 IN 6.3SEC

How long is your memory? Once upon a time, a 528i was close to the top of the 5-series tree. It meant a 2.8-litre, six-cylinder engine with, typically, somewhere between 180 and 200bhp. If you drove a BMW 528i, you had made it in the world.

So, what's this? BMW has brought us a new 528i, this time with 242bhp, 258lb ft of torque and the promise of fuel efficiency undreamed of back in the '70s, '80s and '90s when the various past 528i models held sway. It has a combined official mpg figure of 43.5 and emits 152g/km of CO2. Sorcery is at work here, clearly. Where's the catch?

Those figures apply to the eight-speed auto version with official-test-optimised gearing, true, but the manual isn't far behind. It's an auto that *evo* has sampled, and there's no doubt that it feels every bit as lively as the claimed outputs suggest it should. It takes off with authoritative thrust, the vast plateau of its torque curve requiring little unseemly revving, although the engine spins keenly and very smoothly to the 6500rpm power-peak speed. It feels crisp, muscular, fully fit for purpose. But it sounds wrong.

There's no creamy straight-six hum here, no BMW-specific sonic signature. That's because the new 528i has a 2-litre engine with *four cylinders*. The downsizing



fairy has visited and has brought with it a twin-scroll turbocharger and every efficiency trick in the book, from stop-start to throttle-less Valvetronic valve-lift control. Thirsty nat-asp sixes are history.

Chassis-wise, as we have said before, Integral Active Steering (four-wheel steering) and Adaptive Drive (active anti-roll bars) are necessary options to bring the bulky Five alive, but thus equipped it has precision and rides well.

So, a four-cylinder BMW 528i that sounds like a 518i. Get used to it, because it's the future.

John Simister

Above: 528 badge no longer means there's a straight-six under the bonnet. Above left: interior gets leather, Bluetooth and iDrive as standard

evo RATING ★★★★★

- Downsizing as it should be done
- You'll miss the straight-six soundtrack

Below: prices for the 'Touring' estate version start at £35,885 for the entry-level SE-trim version – saloon is £2275 cheaper



BMW Z4 20i

» FOUR-POT FOR Z4 TOO
 » 181BHP AND 41.5MPG



SPECIFICATION

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1997cc, turbocharged
CO2 159g/km **Power** 181bhp @ 4800rpm
Torque 199lb ft @ 1250rpm **0-62mph** 6.9sec (claimed) **Top speed** 142mph (claimed)
Price £29,480 **On sale** Now

The BMW Z4 range has been dominated by six-cylinder models, but thanks to the influence of CO2 regulations, there's now a couple of new four-pot turbo options.

This sDrive20i is now the entry-level Z4 and it dips below the £30K mark thanks to a £945 price drop over the 23i it replaces. The kit count is stronger, however, with leather seats and Bluetooth among the newly standard equipment. BMW's biggest boast, though, surrounds the new 20i's cleanliness. Its 2-litre engine is 500cc smaller than the 23i's straight-six, and while at 181bhp it's 20bhp lighter, it's 15lb ft healthier and 42g/km (and four tax bands) cleaner. Fuel economy is up from 33.2 to 41.5mpg, too.

Predictably, it doesn't sound as good as its predecessor, but the 20i still makes an interesting, if slightly synthetic noise. There's some aural reward for hanging on to the revs, but with peak power delivered at a diesel-like 4800rpm (and maximum torque at a mere 1250rpm), the engine works better if you shuffle through the gears.

It's brisk enough, but not wholly engaging, and it's a similar story dynamically – the steering and manual gearshift are nicely weighted (an eight-speed auto's an option) but they aren't attached to the most playful of chassis. Think of this as an efficient SLK alternative rather than a Boxster battler.

If you crave more power, an extra £4165 buys you the sDrive28i, which actually has the same engine but tweaked to 242bhp and 258lb ft (in fact basically the same unit that's in the 528i on the left) but with identical CO2 and mpg figures.

Stephen Dobie

evo RATING ★★★★★

- A cleaner, cheaper Z4
- But a slightly less fun one

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» 330BHP » ACTIVE-VALVED EXHAUST » BIG BRAKE CONVERSION

SPECIFICATION

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo **CO2** n/a
Power 330bhp @ n/a rpm **Torque** 317lb ft @ n/a rpm
0-62mph c5.0sec (est) **Top speed** 155mph (limited)
Conversion price See text **On sale** Now (millteksport.com)

The big promotional graphics down the side are the most obvious thing about this Milltek Golf R. Strip them away and you have a hatchback that could easily have cruised unnoticed into our Q-cars feature last month. Depending on your point of view on aftermarket tuning, this might be a very pleasant or a very disappointing thing.

Stickers aside, one of the major changes Milltek has made to this Golf R is to fit a new exhaust downpipe complete with a high-flow sports catalyst (£748, excluding fitting) and a cat-back section with active exhaust valves and titanium tips (£974). The four-cylinder R has never had the most soulful of voices, and to be honest this exhaust doesn't really change matters. The volume has been turned up a fraction and the note is a touch deeper, but not a lot. On the plus side it's EU-homologated and hasn't turned the R into a ghastly booming motorway annoyance.

The main purpose of the system is to reduce back-pressure and improve spool-up of the turbo. With assistance from



Above right: titanium tailpipes measure 100mm in diameter; difference in sound is modest. Above: ten-piston front calipers bring improved stopping power



Above: engine is fed by an upgraded fuel pump, contributing to the 64bhp increase. Below: Golf R's looks remain as understated as ever (imagine it without the graphics)

this car's Autotech high-pressure fuel pump and accompanying Custom-Code software (£924, from jbsautodesigns.co.uk), it certainly hits the spot. There is added zip to the throttle response and huge punch lower down, although the engine does run out of enthusiasm at higher revs. Claimed total power is 330bhp (up 64bhp), torque 317lb ft (up 59lb ft).

Because Milltek does a lot of testing on track with this car, it has also been fitted with some Tarox front brakes. The ten-pot 'B360' calipers with 360mm discs have actually added more to the aural output of the Golf than the exhaust, because they squeak like terrified hamsters when the hard pads are cold. However, once you've got some heat into them with a couple of decent stops, the hamsters recede and you're left with a very effective upgrade. The pedal is nicely firm with real power from the top of the pedal, and there's no over-servoed snatchiness. But at £3000 plus fitting, they're not cheap.

In the end you're left with a car that is improved but doesn't feel much more extrovert than the standard one. If you bought a Golf R for its subtlety, these upgrades may appeal. **Henry Catchpole**

EVO RATING ★★★★★

- Subtle but effective upgrades
- Will be too subtle for some

VW GOLF 1.4 CABRIOLET GT

» 158BHP TURBO PETROL
 » 150G/KM AND 44MPG



SPECIFICATION

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1390cc, turbocharged
CO2 150g/km **Power** 158bhp @ 5800rpm
Torque 177lb ft @ 1500-4500rpm **0-62mph** 8.4sec (claimed) **Top speed** 134mph (claimed)
Price £25,295 **On sale** Now

Smart-looking thing, the new Golf Cabriolet. Its styling is both worlds away from its pram-like mk4 ancestor and classy enough to steal sales from its drop-top Audi A3 cousin.

But while the Golf GTI-engined 207bhp 2.0 TSI Cabriolet proved a 'proper driving machine' (evo 158), this less potent 158bhp 1.4 TSI simply isn't quick enough to be interesting. Its power and torque figures sound healthy enough, but considering its 177lb ft maximum arrives in a quoted 1500-4500rpm powerband, it's not as punchy as you might expect. To make decent progress you have to work the engine hard, and you'll average around 30mpg rather than the claimed 44.

And if it's an economical Golf you want, you're better off picking the 138bhp 2.0 TDI Bluemotion. This 1.4 doesn't reward your petrol-burning loyalty with an enthusiastic soundtrack, and the driving experience is cossetting rather than captivating; the ride is mostly settled while the major controls are light and pleasant rather than sharp and feelsome.

This Golf Cabriolet may possess stylish looks and a quality interior, but the Thrill of Driving is conspicuous by its absence. **Stephen Dobie**



Golf has cloth roof; hard-top Eos continues

EVO RATING ★★★★★

- Looks and feels good
- Keen drivers need the 2.0 TSI





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CHRYSLER 300C

» ALL-NEW PLATFORM » TURBODIESEL V6 » MUCH IMPROVED CABIN

SPECIFICATION

Engine V6, 2987cc, turbodiesel **CO2** 185g/km
Power 236bhp @ 4000rpm **Torque** 406lb ft @ 1800-2800rpm **0-62mph** 7.8sec (claimed)
Top speed 143mph (claimed)
Price c£36,000 (est) **On sale** March 2012

The headline above says Chrysler, but those of you with eagle eyes will have spotted that the car in the pictures has a small blue Lancia badge on it. That's because while the last 300C was a product of the Mercedes/Chrysler partnership, this latest one is a product of the new Fiat/Chrysler era and in the rest of Europe will be badged as a Thema.

It has taken just 18 months to develop, and a staggering \$1 billion has been spent on it, so it's a slight shame that, despite it being an entirely new car on an entirely new platform, it just looks like a rather mild mid-life facelift of the outgoing 300C. Not that it's a bad looking beast – it's attractively assertive in Chicago gangster fashion. As a Thema it'll probably appeal to the Italian mafia too, now I think about it, although I'm still not sure the UK market will ever entirely warm to it, unless perhaps the Rotary Club takes a slightly sinister turn.

Anyway, we were big fans of the old 300C, which proved surprisingly well-balanced and entertaining, so our hopes are high for this new one. Things don't get off to a very promising start, however, because our shores sadly won't be graced by the 282bhp V6 petrol version (unless you choose to import one) so the most powerful 300C available in showrooms



Interior is a significant step on from the old 300C, with a better quality finish and more cohesive design immediately evident

Despite being all-new, the exterior styling hasn't changed massively; 20in wheels are optional, 18s are standard

will be this, admittedly much torquier, 236bhp 3-litre turbodiesel. The five-speed auto fitted to our test car in Turin will be replaced by a new eight-speed ZF auto by the time the car reaches British soil, which is no bad thing as the five-speeder offers little in the way of celerity of shift.

At 2042kg and with optional 20-inch wheels on it, the 300C is never going to feel sporty, but the balance of the rear-wheel-drive chassis is pleasingly engaging and actually rather taut underneath all of the inertia. The passively damped ride is good, the electro-hydraulic power steering is nicely weighted and, given some space and a slippery surface (neither of which are available in Turin), I can imagine it might actually be quite fun, in a ridiculous sort of way.

Two facts will be of more interest to anyone looking at a 300C as an alternative to an Audi A8 (at an A6 price-point), namely that the interior is vastly improved and that the engineers have done a huge amount of work on sound-deadening, so the cabin is now an extremely refined, whisper-quiet and very relaxing place to be. So, all-new this Chrysler 300C may be, but it remains a curiously appealing gangster's paradise. **Henry Catchpole**

evo RATING ★★★★★

- Still rides and handles well
- No petrol version in the UK

CHRYSLER DELTA MULTIAIR 140

» REBADGED LANCIA
 » 138BHP TURBO 1.4



SPECIFICATION

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1368cc, turbocharged
CO2 132g/km **Power** 138bhp @ 5000rpm
Torque 170lb ft @ 1750rpm **0-62mph** 9.2sec (claimed) **Top speed** 126mph (claimed)
Price £18,495 **On sale** Now

Lancia is back in the UK, but not quite as we know it. The Italian firm's Delta hatchback and Ypsilon supermini join the second-gen 300C in Chrysler's range, parent Fiat Group believing the Chrysler name means more to British buyers than Lancia.

Another explanation is that the new products simply don't live up to the Lancia legend. Utter the word 'Delta' to anyone with petrol in their veins and the image of a Martini-liveried rally car will pop into their heads. In 2011, the truth is somewhat different: the Delta is a hatchback that's miles behind the class leaders. It doesn't even fully live up to Chrysler's own 'Luxury Liberated' tag, its interior sporting some questionable plastics and plenty of blank switches if you don't opt for range-topping (£26K) 'Limited' trim.

The Delta is not bad to drive, but nor is it inspiring. Grip levels and body control are decent but there's little feedback through the light steering while the pedals and six-speed manual gearbox lack feel, too. Keen drivers shouldn't apply.

The engine range, shared with Fiat and Alfa, is a saving grace; we tested the 138bhp 1.4-litre MultiAir, the pokiest petrol option, which combines brisk pace with 50mpg potential. A 165bhp/55mpg 2-litre turbodiesel tops the range, hitting 62mph in 8.5sec. Sadly, or perhaps thankfully, there'll be no Integrale. **Stephen Dobie**

evo RATING ★★★★★

- Smart-looking alternative hatch
- The boring choices are much better



PROMOTION

Have you checked the odds on a white Christmas? Are you dreaming of winter snow? Long range weather forecasts have yet to offer a cast iron promise for the season ahead, but coming on the heels of consecutive winters that saw temperatures drop way below average, the months ahead are sure to serve up a surprise or two – whether it's wild or mild!

To help you keep one step ahead, BMW has launched a new specialist winter tyre programme fine tuned to help give drivers the best in on-road performance, whatever the weather. Independent performance tests have proved the superiority of winter over summer tyres in a wide range of conditions. Stopping distances of cars fitted with winter tyres can be up to 20 percent better in sub zero conditions, while the latest winter tyre packages easily outperform summer tyres at temperatures below 7°C too. And there's more. Because of the winter tyres' specialist construction and design, they show up to 40 percent better resistance to wear on cold roads too, helping you save money.

So what is it that makes winter tyres so superior? Firstly, they feature a greater number of tread blocks than summer tyres, and these blocks contain more channels to dissipate water, giving you more grip. A greater number of 'sipes' – the name tyre engineers give small grooves in tread blocks – also helps the tyres reach higher working temperatures in very cold conditions, making the tyres more flexible and better able to grip the tarmac beneath the car. With that in mind, the fact that changing tyres to cope with differences in road conditions between warm and dry summer months, and a wet and cold winter is commonplace in Europe shouldn't come as much of a surprise. And helps explain why it's growing in popularity here too. You don't need polar conditions to ensure fitting a winter tyre makes sense – but what about the physical process of getting them fitted? ►



GET A GRIP ON WINTER

We look at the facts behind choosing winter tyres for your car as the weather turns cold





The new winter tyre programme from BMW is designed to be as simple as can be, and involves swapping your summer alloys and tyres for a set of steel or alloy wheels with the latest winter rubber.

The service is available at BMW dealers, and even offers drivers the option of storing their wheels and tyres with BMW for just £30, until the winter period has ended – useful, if you don't fancy the hassle of taking your own tyres back home. Prices start from around £700 for a complete set of four winter tyres with steel wheels and hub caps. While this winter's weather might be hard to second guess, predicting the way your car is going to react to it has just got a little bit easier.



For more visit bmw.co.uk/winter-tyres

WHAT'S PUSHED YOUR BUTTONS THIS MONTH?

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Gripped by a tyre test

I'll be honest. A tyre test is the kind of feature I – and I suspect other readers – usually skip in favour of something more emotive. Well, who wants to read about longitudinal force versus slippage, especially when the article is sandwiched between one about a turbocharged Formula 1 car and possibly the greatest ever Porsche (Chris Harris's new GT3 RS 4.0)? But I believe John Barker's investigation into winter tyres (evo 163) was one of the most important motoring reports in years.

Take the obvious benefit – the superior stopping in the snow of the cold-weather tyres. To pull a car up in less than a third of the summer tyre's distance is simply jaw-dropping.

That's the kind of braking differential that exists between a road-going car and circuit racer in the dry.

However, what really got my attention were the lap times in the wet, where the winter tyres pretty much reversed the advantage the summer tyre has in the dry. And when John signed off by saying cold-weather tyres carried 'no road or ride comfort penalty' my conversion was complete. Consider how many days in the UK are wet and cold, consider too that road driving is primarily about staying safe, and I'd be surprised if there isn't a rush from readers to change their tyres this winter.

David Ewen, Aberdeen

'I BELIEVE JOHN BARKER'S INVESTIGATION INTO WINTER TYRES WAS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MOTORING REPORTS IN YEARS'



Last month's winter tyre test was a bit of an eye-opener for David Ewen

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Forza Bugatti!

Great issue this month as ever (163). Loved the Forza theme cos I love the game, so I thought I'd pay tribute to Richard Meaden's record-breaking Skoda (check out the pic). Unfortunately no Skodas are in the game so I used artistic licence and chose another car from the VW group. Think it might reach 227.08mph?

Jason Butler

Above: Jason Butler designed this Veyron in Forza Motorsport 4. His inspiration? A certain 227mph Skoda

Sounds like a bad idea

I'll never forget hearing a Porsche 911 for the first time, the low, distinctive thrum as I watched the car cover the ground so effortlessly. That was outside the car, so driving it would naturally provide an even richer experience of speed and sound. Which leads me to ask, why on earth would a company of BMW M's calibre introduce synthesised engine sounds into its most iconic of models (new M5, evo 163)? When Chris Harris revealed this fascinating fact, I turned off the article, the car and the manufacturer.

Seriously, which focus group of performance

saloon enthusiasts did BMW consult that gave this ridiculous user-experience the green light? Things have gone too far if listening to a cocktail of engine sounds through a car's hi-fi system is deemed the Thrill of Driving. Out.

Michael Thomas, London

And the winner is...

It feels a tad strange penning a letter about evo Car of the Year 2011 before it's even published, but I thought I'd share what many of your loyal (but not creepy-fanatical!) readers are feeling as we anticipate the imminent arrival of this year's Big One...

After more than ten years of eCotys, we know we can trust that wherever you take us (unfailingly spectacular) and whatever the cars (always the year's most thrilling) we'll feel like we're riding shotgun thanks to evo's signature avant-garde photography and regaling penmanship. Uniquely, you include yourselves in the story, sharing the highs and lows, and refreshingly you're not afraid to call a spade a spade. All of this, along with an honest and self-deprecating sense of humour, allows us to experience the thrill as if we're there.

If cars were to disappear tomorrow I'd miss them but could live without them. If pushed, I'd say they're of no eternal consequence (Dan Wheldon's tragic passing is a sad and sobering reminder of what's really important). However, while cars are still here, and I'm still able, I'll continue to enjoy them and find a particular thrill in driving them. Most of us readers will never experience driving this year's best cars

but, thanks to the team at evo, we know we'll actually get far closer than anyone might rightfully expect! Many thanks (in advance).

Ralph Whitten, Aussie in Spain

Taken for a ride

Chris Harris must have been reading my mind when he wrote his column on suspension (Crossed Up, evo 163). It sums up how the vast majority of Audi, BMW and Mercedes car buyers must perceive an options list.



I am currently looking for a car for long-distance journeys that can also cope with the narrow, hilly, and sometimes slippery Devon lanes where I now live. After careful consideration I decided that an Audi Avant S4 3.0 manual petrol with adaptive damping, Dynamic Steering, quattro diff and 18 (not 19) inch wheels would be perfect.

Checking out the second-hand market, I could find not one car in that spec. However, if I want bling wheels, hi-fi to blow my ears out, Lane and Hill Assist (what's that about?), it's all there. When I phoned some dealers, the replies were all pretty much the same: 'No demand for that sort of spec, sir,' and, 'Of course we can order it for you, but don't expect delivery till late February.'

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DMS 135I
"THE STANDARD CAR IS GREAT BUT DMS HAVE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL"
BMW CAR MAY '09

DMS SL55 AMG
"THIS CAR IS STUPENDOUSLY FAST"
PERFORMANCE CAR MAY '08

DMS RS6 V10
"THICK LOW END TORQUE MORPHS INTO OHMIGOD TOP-END"
EVO MARCH '09

DMS 330CD
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997 CARRERA S » 376+ BHP
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997 CARRERA PDK » 368 BHP
997 GT3 » UP TO 436 BHP
996 3.6 » 344 BHP
BOXSTER 3.4S » 336+ BHP
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CAYENNE GTS » 440 BHP
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C63 AMG » 530+ BHP & DE-LIMIT
SL63 AMG » 560+ BHP & DE-LIMIT
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CL600 BI-TURBO » 580+ BHP
S500 2008 » 411+BHP
SLK55 AMG » 389 BHP & DE-LIMIT
SLK 350 » 328 BHP
SLK 200K » 205+ BHP
C220 CDI (W204) » 210 BHP
280/300 CDI V6 » 257 BHP
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4.7/5.5 V8 BI-TURBO » PLEASE CALL

BMW:

M5 V10 » 548+ BHP 205 MPH
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M3 E90/92 » 445 BHP & DE-LIMIT
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F10 520D » 221 BHP
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X5 3.0D » 278 BHP
X6 X50I 4.4 » 500+BHP
535D / 335D / X5 SD » 334 BHP

EXOTIC & MISC:

FERRARI CALIFORNIA » 487 BHP
FERRARI 599 » 647 BHP
FERRARI 430 » 525 BHP
GALLARDO » 546 BHP
GALLARDO LP560 » 600+ BHP
MURCIELAGO LP640 » 707 BHP
MASERATI GRANTURISMO » 438 BHP
MASERATI QUATTROPORTE » 438 BHP
GRANTURISMO S / MC » 479+ BHP
AUDI RS6 V10 » 680+BHP & DE-LIMIT
AUDI R8 V10 » 592+ BHP
AUDI B7 RS4/ R8 » 439 BHP & DE-LIMIT
AUDI Q7/A8 4.2 TDI » 387 BHP
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Great, so it's on with the current car, a 1994 Ford Escort Estate, till then.

Alan Peacock

The wrong Audi

Having owned a few Q-cars myself, I really enjoyed your recent Q-car celebration (evo 163), especially as a former keeper of a Sapphire Cosworth (included) and Audi 100 S4 (grandchild included). Considering the vast array of exotica that you have access to, it was also refreshing to see the more realistic and affordable weapons of choice covered in the '10 Heroes of Q'.

What did surprise me a little was the absence of the S6 – an anonymous executive saloon with a glorious V10 engine related to the Gallardo's!

My idea of Q is a car you come away from thinking 'I really wasn't expecting that'. The first time you hear an S6 go by, you will know exactly what I mean (go on, put 'Audi S6 sound' in YouTube).

Tim Slater, Derby

Lambo infatuation

I can't recall the last time I put off reading an article I was so interested in with such conviction. I'm talking about the Lamborghini extravaganza in the November issue (162).

The cover image of the four Lambos provoked a life-flashing-before-my-eyes moment that took me from a boyhood craving, helped but not sated by collecting every picture of a Countach I could lay my hands on, to actually muttering quiet expletives out loud when I flashed an Aventador out of the Sevenoaks Lamborghini dealership last weekend. My god, my hairs stood on end – and I was sat in the car behind it. Some 30 years separate those events.

Purchase of that issue coincided with a family holiday and I promised myself that this article was to be savoured, with a hand-picked beer, in peace and quiet at some point during the holiday. The right time never came. Tonight, with the benefit of a heatwave kicking in just as *Strictly* marks the start of what should be autumn and distracts my wife and daughters totally, the time came.

And it was worth it. The fantastic quality of the writing and photography adding another short chapter to an ongoing fascination with these wild, indulgent and life-affirming creations.

I might just have to stick pages 88 and 89 (sideways QV) on my bedroom wall.

Alistair Drysdale

Sound affects

Enjoyed your articles on the art of noise (evo 161). It reminded me of when I was 18 and had just moved away from home. I was living in a lower-ground-floor flat and about once a month a guy used to park a '55 Chevy just outside my living-room window. It was a beauty, jacked up all round with fender-well headers exiting behind the front wheels. He always left around midnight, and the aural sequence was always the same. He had the timing so far advanced the car would barely turn over, so I would hear this *whump... whump...whump...* and then the thing would catch and explode. I swear the whole car would jump two feet off the ground. It would then settle into a very lumpy, high-cammed idle. Thinking about it now, 30 years later, still makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

Alexander MacKay, London



Above: perhaps not the reaction Maserati was looking for from its new luxury 4x4

Kubang to rights

Regarding the new Maserati Kubang (evo Radar, issue 163), I think the reaction of the lady in the background of your shot on page 14 speaks volumes.

Andrew Haine

X1, the thrill and Sir Chris

I'm a long-time reader of your excellent magazine and evo 163 will always have a special place in my heart.

I'd been mulling over Chris Harris's piece about cheap suspension as I had an X1 out on loan from BMW, when my wife's suddenly frequent contractions meant a dash to the hospital was in order.

An excellent opportunity to combine the thrill of driving with a quick review of the car whilst 'pressing on'. From my blurred memory, the suspension handled the speed bumps in our road quite well, and we stayed remarkably well poised negotiating windy roads and roundabouts.

And to take us to the back pages of evo 163, Sir Chris Hoy's niece Dulcie was born minutes after arriving at the hospital and luckily not in the car. Thanks again for a great magazine.

Garry Williams, Edinburgh

FROM THE FORUMS: 'ACTIVE SOUND DESIGN'



The new F10 M5 plays engine sounds through its hi-fi; forum members have been sounding off at community.evo.co.uk

Mik: This technology has been touted for some time as useful if you want your (future) electric or force-fed inline-4 supercar to sound like an 'old school' multi-cylindered supercar, but for the new M5 to replay a facsimile of the actual engine noise into the cabin via the stereo seems criminally synthetic to me.

Orange Cola: So a really quiet car for wafting and a nice noise when pressing on. I assume this is all very good until the passenger covers the speaker with their leg/handbag and it's game over.

Speedingfine: That, is cool.

JL: How about replacing the windscreen with an LCD monitor that plays films of a car driving REALLY REALLY FAST?!! It's about as authentic. Worst thing I've ever heard. Stop it now.

Jobbo: It's not vastly different to the 1989 MX5 being tuned to sound like an old British sports car, but with 20-year newer technology.

ShockDiamonds: How'd ya figure that out? You could therefore say the same about any tuned/optimised exhaust system available today. The sound is 'real' however engineered it may be. But the new M5 is creating a binary noise. And that's crap.

Barry: What ShockDiamonds said. Why not take a leaf out of Ferrari's book and have a flap that keeps things quiet, and the PC brigade happy, which then opens after 70mph.

Mark BT52: I was shocked to read this. I was so angered that this feature alone means I will NEVER buy one of these cars. Thought BMW had a bit more integrity than that. What on earth do they think they are doing!?

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Words: Richard Meaden

pic. That's the only word to describe this year's eCoty competition. From hot hatch to hypercar, lightweight sports car to heavyweight supersaloon, this year's gathering encompasses a truly remarkable cross-section of 2011's most compelling new cars. We've been conducting the original and best Car of the Year test since 1998 (1990 if you go back to our roots in the old *Performance Car* magazine) and we've crowned many exceptional victors in the process. Still, in all those years I don't think we've ever managed to assemble quite such an impressive collection as this.

The scale of what we're about to embark upon hits home when we arrive at the fabulous Portimão Autodrome in the heart of Portugal's Algarve: our base for the week of non-stop driving that makes eCoty a unique highlight of the year. It's like we've wandered into the title sequence from *Gran Turismo* or *Forza Motorsport*.

In the otherwise deserted paddock are half a dozen car transporters, within which are contained thirteen brilliant cars worth a collective £1.5million. Tail-lifts whirr and engines fire into life as truck drivers nervously edge a seemingly endless array of exotica down ramps and into the shady seclusion of the pit garages. We walk around as though in a trance, each garage revealing yet more treasures for us to sample.

Our first discovery is a brace of white Lamborghinis. The raw aggression and outrageous lines of the Gallardo Performante and Aventador are enough

to make Catchpole, Barker and I go weak at the knees. Next door sits a lonely Porsche GT3 RS 4.0. Bristling with attitude, its wings, decals and semi-slick tyres lend it the look of a purebred racer with Stuttgart registration plates, which in a way is just what it is. That uncompromising focus is the 4.0's greatest strength, but will it be too much for this road-based test? We'll know in a few days.

The raucous holler of a beautiful, inky-blue Aston Martin V8 Vantage S snorting into life grabs our attention. It shuffles down the transporter's ramp and parks alongside its arch-rival, the bewinged, pumped-up Jaguar XKR-S. Just a few cars along, and looking like it wants to start a fight, is the new Mercedes C63 Coupe by AMG. How this trio of V8-engined two-door bruisers fair against one another and in the group as a whole is just one of the fascinating in-fights that pepper this year's test.

Basking in the sunshine and looking as cartoonish as ever is *evo*'s very own BMW 1M long-term test car. It won our hearts – and a group test – earlier in the year, but its margin of victory was so fine we couldn't resist setting up a rematch with Porsche's Cayman R. Both represent the more affordable and attainable end of the 2011 spectrum so it's particularly



THE JUDGES



HARRY METCALFE
Editorial director

» **evo** founder, serial supercar buyer, gentleman farmer and (little known fact this) a Scouser by birth. Boss!



HENRY CATCHPOLE
Features editor

» Currently features ed but a mainstay of our road test team and a keen rally driver too. That's lanky toff Catchpole.



ROGER GREEN
Features writer

» Rattles off the odd feature in between racing. Motto: if it doesn't catch fire, you're not driving it hard enough.



MIKE DUFF
Motoring editor

» **evo** new boy Duff (you have to be here at least six years before you get your own desk) loses his eCoty virginity.



CHRIS HARRIS
Contributing editor

» If there's any oppo to be dabbed in, Harris is your man. Recently bought an RS 4.0 he couldn't really afford.



RICHARD MEADEN
Contributing editor

» 'Dickie' Meaden is the mighty atom of the road test team, short of stature but a giant of oppo-dabbery.



RICHARD PORTER
Contributing writer

» Script editor for Top Gear TV and the man behind sniffpetrol.com, so effectively invented the 'dab of oppo'.



JOHN BARKER
Editor-at-large

» When he's not road-testing, helps manufacturers develop future models. Current project: the Ford Capri V8.

'DAY ONE. THE SCALE OF WHAT WE'RE ABOUT TO EMBARK UPON HITS HOME... SUCH AN EXTRAORDINARY TEST DESERVES AN EQUALLY SPECIAL STAGE...'

2011 THE CAR OF THE YEAR

*'THE ROADS HERE ARE CHALLENGING, WITH
RELENTLESS TWISTS AND TURNS, STEEP
CLIMBS AND THRILLING DESCENTS'*





heartening that both are regarded as serious contenders for overall honours.

Across the paddock sits the IM's big brother, the all-new M5. It's quite a coup to have the twin-turbo supersaloon here so soon after its launch and there'll be an unseemly fight for the keys when the driving begins. Another welcome four-seater to the eCoty party is the intriguing and controversial Ferrari FF. As with the M5, only one of our number has previous experience of the four-wheel-drive Ferrari, so the rest of us are relishing the chance to get to know it.

In less exceptional years that little lot would be more than enough to constitute an eCoty entry list, but the cars just keep on coming. The deep, resonant burble of a turbocharged V8 heralds the arrival of perhaps the most significant high-performance car of 2011, the McLaren MP4-12C. It had a bruising encounter with its main rivals in our mega-test earlier this year, but, with a raft of detail changes made partly as a result of our findings, we wanted to give the McLaren another chance to shine. If it fulfils its abundant promise, the 12C could make a comeback worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster.

Fans of simplicity and purity will rejoice in the inclusion of the Lotus Elise Club Racer. There's no doubt the little blue sports car is a relative minnow swimming through shark-infested waters, but its forebear – the original Elise – won PCoty back in 1996 so it's one of the few

cars here with title-winning DNA.

Another everyday foil to the lottery-win exotics comes courtesy of Renaultsport and the Mégane 265 Trophy. Renault also has a fine record on eCoty, with the Clio Trophy, Clio V6 255 and Mégane R26.R all scoring strong results against some very serious metal in years gone by. With a recent front-wheel-drive Nürburgring lap record to its name, the Mégane 265 Trophy's inclusion is no hollow act of tokenism and we all know it has what it takes to claim some highly fancied scalps.

Such diversity is the spice of eCoty. It's this 'apples and oranges' comparison that elevates it beyond any single test we've done in the intervening 12 months, perhaps even the last 12 years. There's no denying such an eclectic, high quality mix makes it devilishly difficult for our judging team to arrive at a winner, but when years are as good as this we really wouldn't want it any other way.

Such an extraordinary test deserves an equally special stage, and there are few more impressive venues than Portimão. This undulating and extremely technical circuit will provide us with the perfect opportunity to push our contenders to the limit, but, as ever on eCoty, the track sessions are to get some full-on images of the cars in action rather than to attempt any timed laps. Still, for those cars with capabilities that really can't be fully exploited on the road, it'll also help us add some intense flashes of colour to the



Top: this is why we shoot most of the action on a circuit; try this in downtown Portimão and you might just attract the attention of the Guarda Nacional Republicana. Above centre: Richard Porter limbers up for a bit of Troy Queefery

dynamic picture we've built during our road driving. We might even have some fun while we're at it...

Portimão also happens to be located at the centre of some excellent driving roads boasting a comprehensive variety of surface quality, topography and character. Those that wind up into the mountains above Monchique are especially challenging, with relentless twists and turns, steep climbs and thrilling descents, while those that head for the windswept coastline at the most southerly tip of Europe promise fast open curves and spectacular vistas.

Add dawn-till-dusk sunshine and a few cold pints of local Super Boc beer to oil the wheels of debate at the end of each day's driving and you begin to appreciate the level of hardship we endure to bring you the biggest test of the year.

Joking aside, with spiralling fuel costs and increasing environmental pressures it's easy to look upon the object of our shared passion – the fast car – as an embattled and endangered species. Yet if this year's eCoty looks set to prove anything, it's that the industry continues to present us with ever more impressive ways to stimulate our adrenal glands. And that, my friends, is something to celebrate in time-honoured *evo* fashion. So without further ado, Henry it's over to you...



THE CONTENDERS

*'LIKE THE BEST M-CARS
IT'S NOT JUST A FAST
5-SERIES, IT FEELS LIKE
A STAND-ALONE MODEL'*

evo ISSUE 163



BMW M5

Layout Front engine, rear drive **Engine** V8, 4395cc, twin-turbo **Power** 552bhp @ 5750rpm
Torque 501lb ft @ 1500rpm **Top speed** 155mph (limited) **0-62mph** 4.4sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 300bhp/ton **Basic price** £73,040

*'McLAREN HAS ALTERED
THE FUNDAMENTALS
OF SPORTS CAR
DYNAMICS'*

evo ISSUE 155

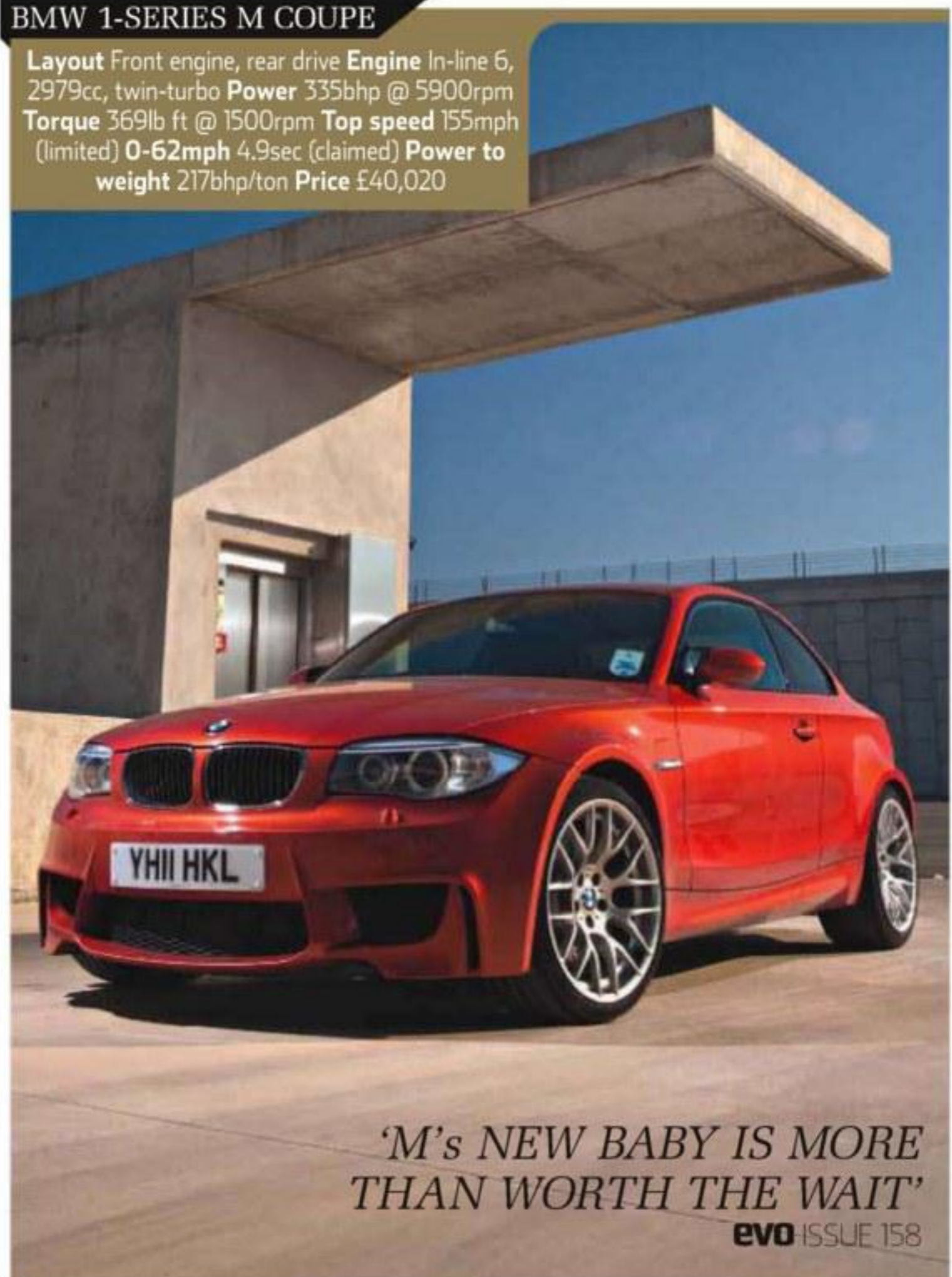


McLAREN MP4-12C

Layout Mid engine, rear drive **Engine** V8, 3799cc, twin-turbo **Power** 592bhp @ 7000rpm
Torque 442lb ft @ 3000rpm **Top speed** 205mph (claimed) **0-62mph** 3.3sec (claimed)
Power to weight 419bhp/ton **Price** £168,500

BMW 1-SERIES M COUPE

Layout Front engine, rear drive **Engine** In-line 6, 2979cc, twin-turbo **Power** 335bhp @ 5900rpm
Torque 369lb ft @ 1500rpm **Top speed** 155mph (limited) **0-62mph** 4.9sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 217bhp/ton **Price** £40,020



*'M's NEW BABY IS MORE
THAN WORTH THE WAIT'*

evo ISSUE 158

'A BEWITCHING MIX OF GRIP AND RIDE AND SUBLIME STEERING'

evo ISSUE 158



LOTUS ELISE CLUB RACER

Layout Mid engine, rear drive **Engine** In-line 4, 1598cc **Power** 134bhp @ 6800rpm
Torque 118lb ft @ 4400rpm **Top speed** 127mph (claimed) **0-60mph** 6.5sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 160bhp/ton **Price** £27,500

RENAULT MÉGANE 265 TROPHY

Layout Front engine, front drive **Engine** In-line 4, 1998cc, turbo **Power** 261bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 265lb ft @ 3000rpm **Top speed** 158mph (claimed) **0-62mph** 6.0sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 191bhp/ton **Price** £27,820

'THE 265 TROPHY WAS CREATED TO SET A FRONT-DRIVE LAP RECORD AT THE RING. IT DID JUST THAT'

evo ISSUE 160



'THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE AVENTADOR IS THE BEST V12 LAMBORGHINI EVER MADE'

evo ISSUE 162



LAMBORGHINI AVENTADOR

Layout Mid engine, four-wheel drive **Engine** V12, 6498cc **Power** 690bhp @ 8250rpm
Torque 509lb ft @ 5500rpm **Top speed** 217mph (claimed) **0-62mph** 2.8sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 116 **Price** £247,000

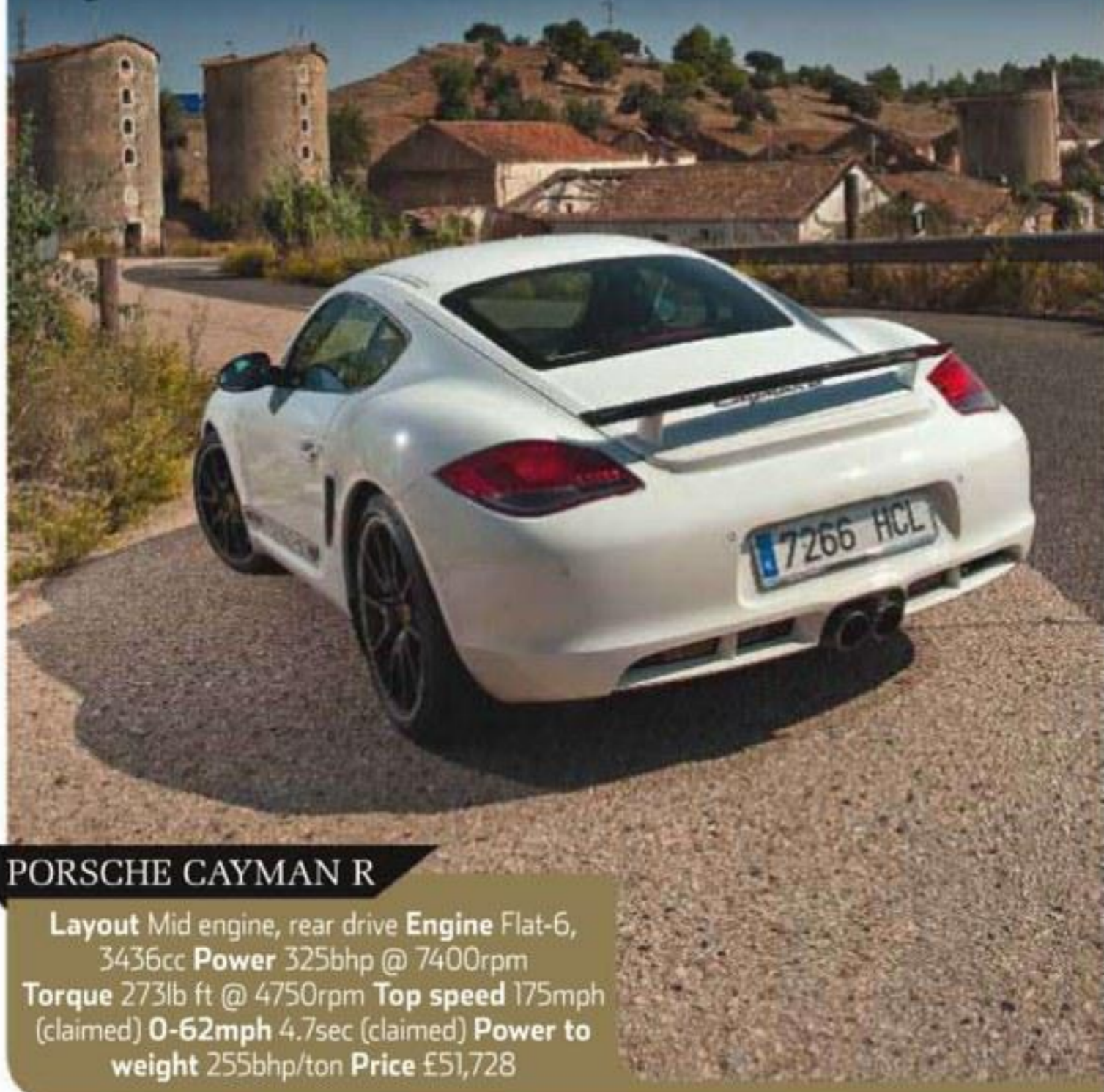


MICHELIN

A better way forward

'BE IN NO DOUBT, THIS IS A PHENOMENALLY CAPABLE SPORTS CAR'

evo ISSUE 156

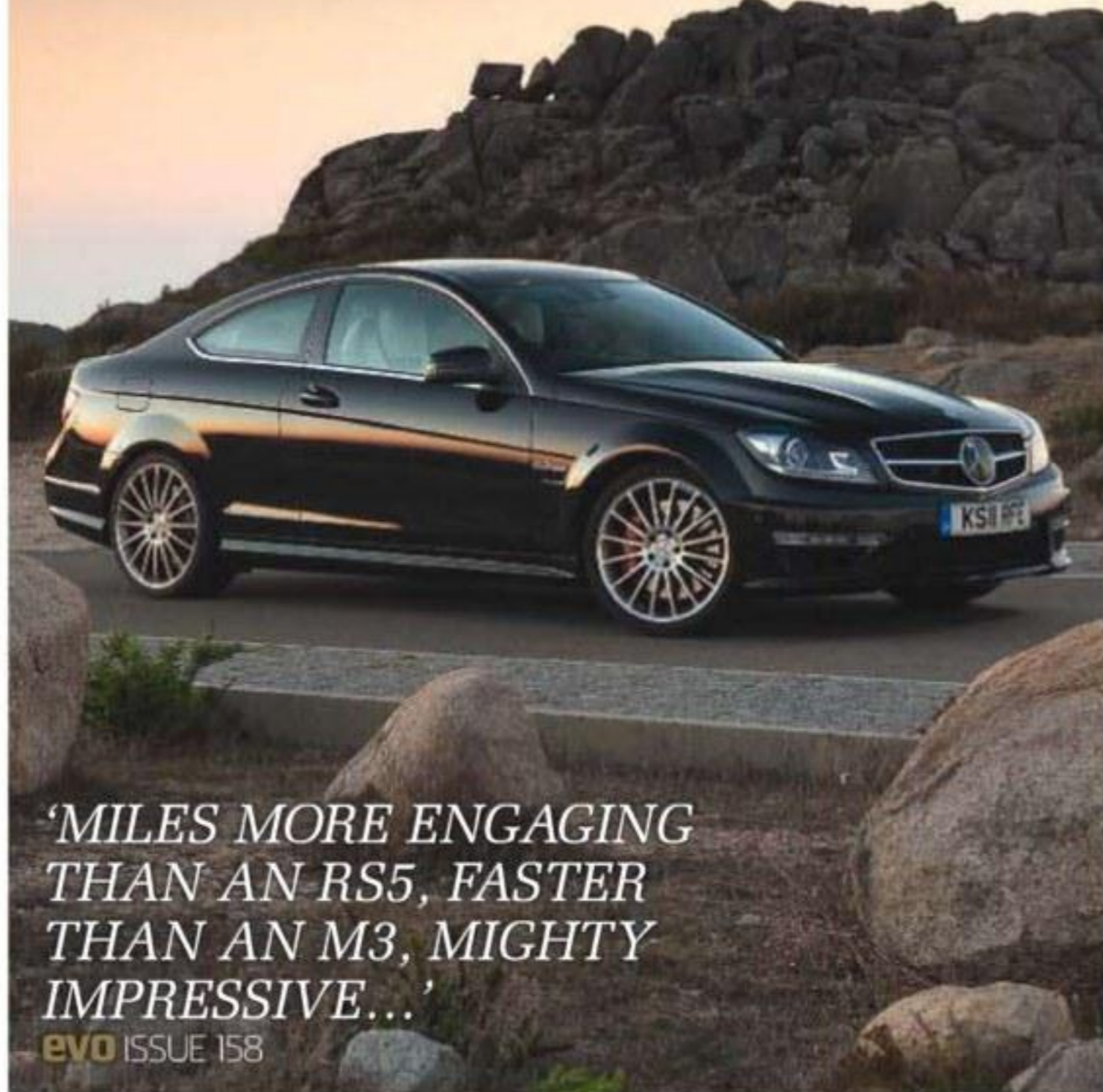


PORSCHE CAYMAN R

Layout Mid engine, rear drive **Engine** Flat-6, 3436cc **Power** 325bhp @ 7400rpm
Torque 273lb ft @ 4750rpm **Top speed** 175mph (claimed) **0-62mph** 4.7sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 255bhp/ton **Price** £51,728

MERCEDES C63 AMG COUPE

Layout Front engine, rear drive **Engine** V8, 6208cc **Power** 451bhp @ 6800rpm
Torque 442lb ft @ 5000rpm **Top speed** 155mph (limited) **0-62mph** 4.5sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 264bhp/ton **Price** £57,165

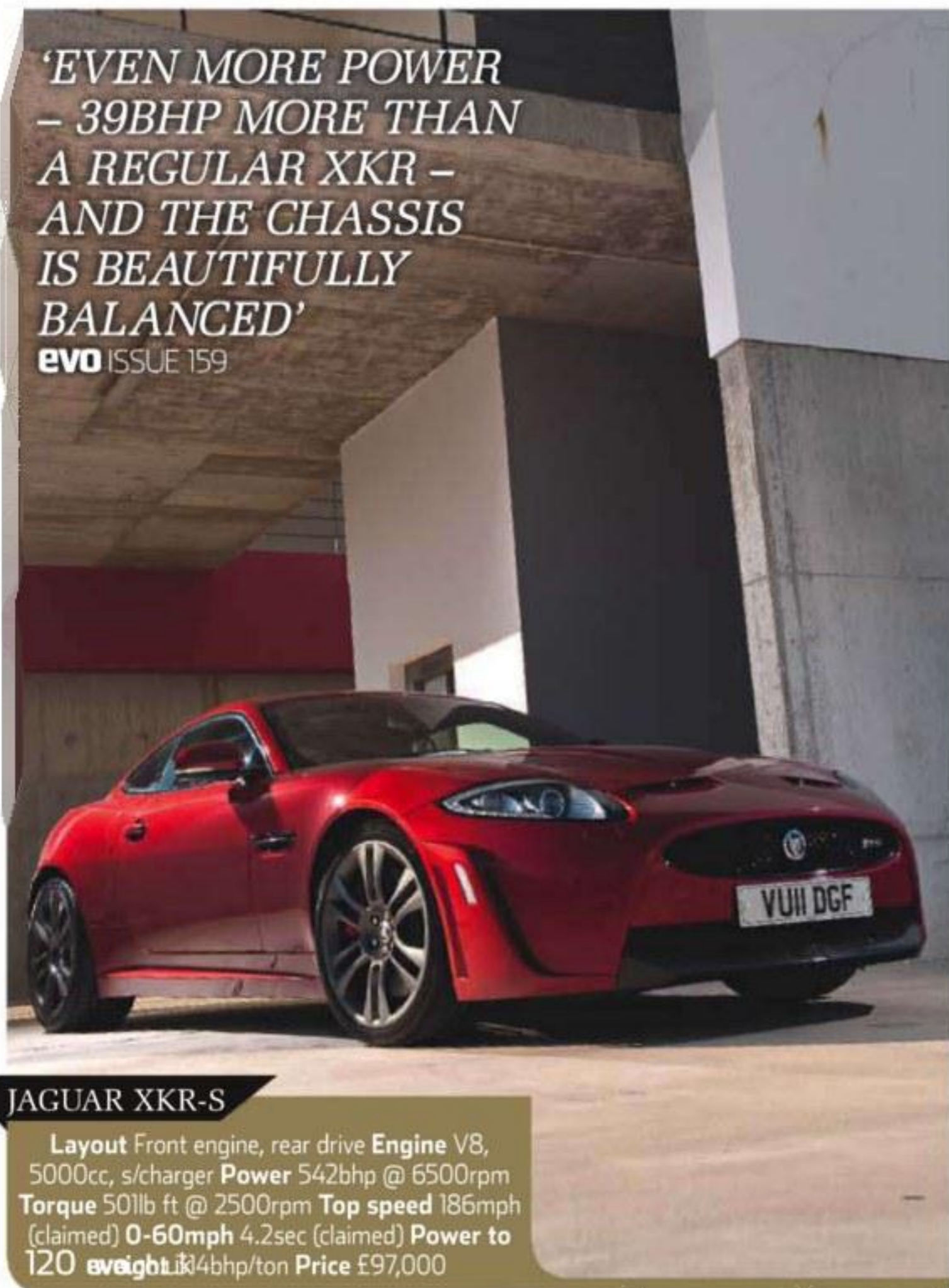


'MILES MORE ENGAGING THAN AN RS5, FASTER THAN AN M3, MIGHTY IMPRESSIVE...'

evo ISSUE 158

'EVEN MORE POWER – 39BHP MORE THAN A REGULAR XKR – AND THE CHASSIS IS BEAUTIFULLY BALANCED'

evo ISSUE 159



JAGUAR XKR-S

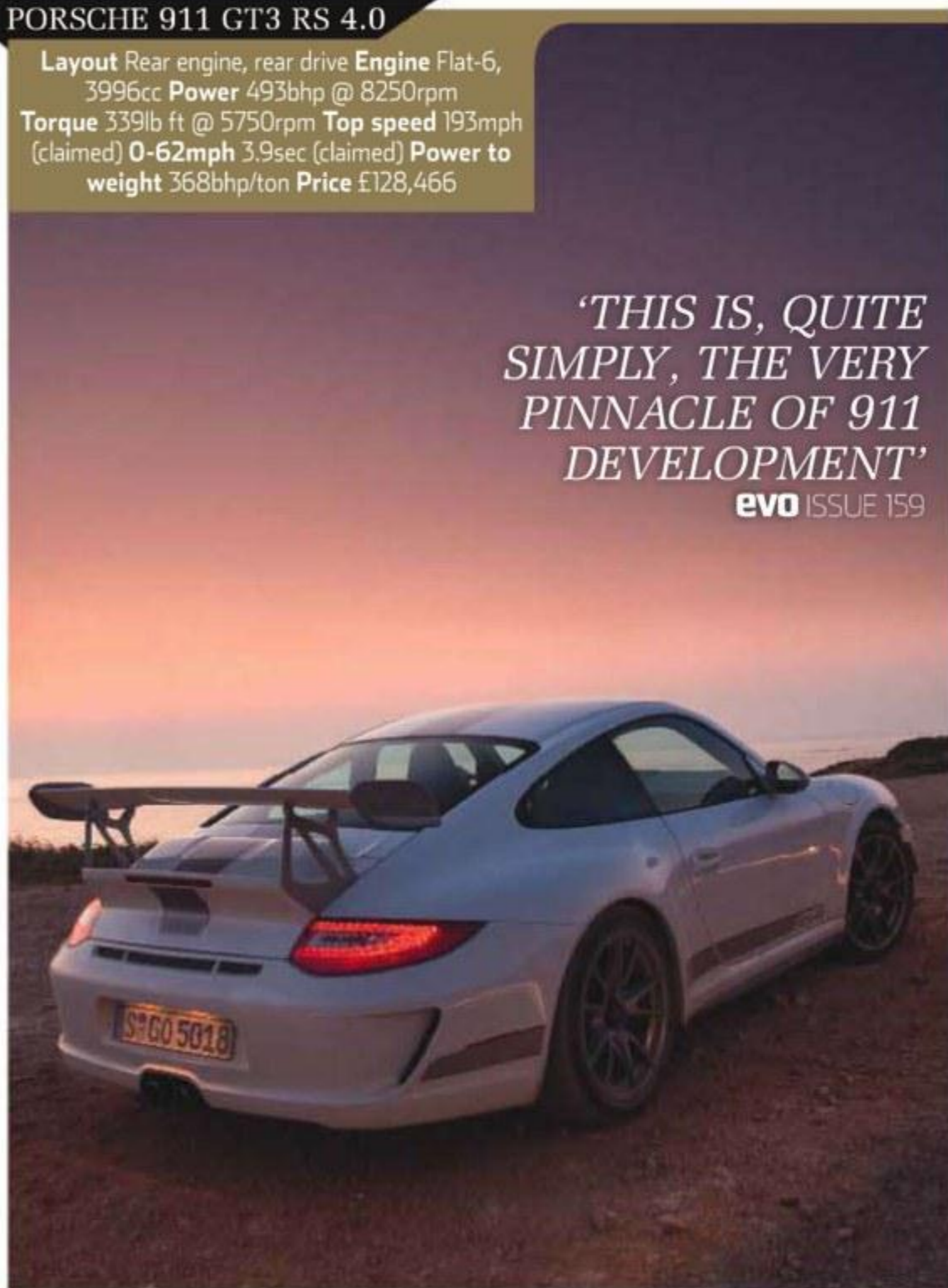
Layout Front engine, rear drive **Engine** V8, 5000cc, s/charger **Power** 542bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 501lb ft @ 2500rpm **Top speed** 186mph (claimed) **0-60mph** 4.2sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 344bhp/ton **Price** £97,000

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS 4.0

Layout Rear engine, rear drive **Engine** Flat-6, 3996cc **Power** 493bhp @ 8250rpm
Torque 339lb ft @ 5750rpm **Top speed** 193mph (claimed) **0-62mph** 3.9sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 368bhp/ton **Price** £128,466

'THIS IS, QUITE SIMPLY, THE VERY PINNACLE OF 911 DEVELOPMENT'

evo ISSUE 159



*'THE CALLARDO
PERFORMANTE
IS THE HARD
MAN OF SOFT-
TOPS. IT SIMPLY
BRISTLES WITH
ATTITUDE'*

evo ISSUE 160



LAMBORGHINI PERFORMANTE

Layout Mid engine, four-wheel drive **Engine** V10, 5204cc **Power** 562bhp @ 8000rpm
Torque 398lb ft @ 6500rpm **Top speed** 201mph (claimed) **0-62mph** 3.9sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 384bhp/ton **Price** £186,000

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE S

Layout Front engine, rear drive **Engine** V8, 4735cc **Power** 430bhp @ 7300rpm
Torque 361lb ft @ 5000rpm **Top speed** 189mph (claimed) **0-62mph** 4.5sec (claimed) **Power to weight** 271bhp/ton **Price** £102,500



*'IT'S A CAR THAT
MAKES YOU WANT
TO DRIVE – AND
THEN KEEP DRIVING'*

evo ISSUE 156

*'THOUGH THE FF FEELS LIKE A BIG CAR, IT SHRINKS
AROUND YOU WHEN YOU START REALLY DRIVING'*

evo ISSUE 157



FERRARI FF

Layout Front engine, 4wd **Engine** V12, 6262cc
Power 642bhp @ 8000rpm
Torque 504lb ft @ 6000rpm **Top speed** 208mph (claimed) **0-62mph** 3.7sec (claimed)
Power to weight 347bhp/ton **Price** £227,077



'DAY TWO' AND WHAT BETTER WAY TO START THE DAY THAN IN A COUPE WITH A 6.2-LITRE V8?

We're due at the Mayor's house in Portimão first thing for a group photo for the local paper, and since there can be few better ways to start a day than in a coupe that has a 6.2-litre V8 and oversteers as easily as a puppy with buttered rear paws, I snaffle the Mercedes key for the journey across from Monchique. Mist is gently rising off the hillsides and ever-shortening shadows are retreating down the valleys, but the C63's xenons still feel the need to flicker into life as the cavalcade rumbles and grumbles its way out into the dawn (yes, the cars make interesting noises too...).

Initially it's nice just to waft along in that effortlessly relaxed way that fast Mercedes have, especially as it allows a grandstand view of the Aventador in front. As the Lambo accelerates, its rear spoiler rises like a mono-brow on an opera singer and that huge mouth of an exhaust emits a stunning, almost classic F1, aria. Over the coming days this oft-repeated performance will be one of the most memorable sights (and sounds) of eCoty 2011.

Despite the slightly more rakish outline of the coupe compared with the saloon,



the C63 AMG still has one of the more everyday shapes in this test, particularly cloaked in black. But that's also part of the appeal – it's fun to see supercar drivers glancing nervously in their mirrors at something apparently mundane matching their pace. The Merc struggles to hang on to Italian coat-tails a little more in the corners, trading outright grip for a more laid-back cornering approach. It appears to have decided that it doesn't need to prove anything, so it's adopted the persona of an easy-going hooligan. If you're in the mood, every

roundabout and well-sighted bend becomes an opportunity to trace long, lazy black stripes on the road surface.

The only downside to this chilled-out attitude is that when you really start pushing and want the C63 to step up its game, it can feel a bit soft, the grip of the front tyres seeming to give up earlier than you want, limiting turn-in speed. In the final few percentages, where a true sports car tends to sparkle, you realise the C63 is happier not pushing quite so hard.

We spend a few hours amongst the impressive fountains outside the Mayor's house, shuffling the cars around for the man from the Portimão Chronicle, before heading back out to the hills again. Fleeing the hustle and bustle of the town turns out to be a slightly more chaotic procedure than our surprisingly ordered

run in, as everyone makes a dash for it, some following satnavs, some the sun and others, even more worryingly, using male intuition. I'm still trying to work out what mode I want the M5 to be in as the last

Above: photocall in Portimão. Right: C63 AMG Coupe does its thing



MICHELIN

A better way forward



set of tailpipes disappears off the cobbled square. If you like having settings to fiddle with, then the M5 could just be your dream car. There are three levels each for the steering, suspension, throttle and gearshift, which, I think, makes 81 possible combinations. As a result there are now not one but two programmable M buttons on the left spoke of the steering wheel.

The narrow streets accentuate the gargantuan feeling of the new M5 as we squeeze between the rows of parked cars, but with everything in its most relaxed setting the big BMW does an excellent job of *not* being a performance car and instead just cocooning you from the metropolitan maelstrom outside.

Predictably I get lost, or rather

I lose sight of everyone else, so I pull over and delve into the iDrive satnav. Some time later we're off again, but just as we're pulling onto the motorway I notice that one of the bings or bongs when I started up the twin-turbo V8 had been accompanied by a picture of a jaundiced-looking fuel pump. I won't bore you with the rest of the tale of refused credit and debit cards, lack of Portuguese vocab and mild panic, but let's just say that on reaching the first bit of good road with a full fuel tank I was more than in the mood to unwind with the help of everything the M5 could offer.

While we regularly chant the lightweight mantra in these pages, there is something undeniably awe-inspiring about a big heavy car travelling extremely fast. Think Jonah Lomu charging down the wing for the All Blacks and that's



Top: M5 is a technophobe's nightmare, with three different settings for not just the suspension but the steering, throttle and gearshift too. Elise (right) couldn't be more of a contrast





*'IN THE M5 YOU
RIDE THIS SURGE OF
BARELY CONTROLLED
GATHERING MOMENTUM'*

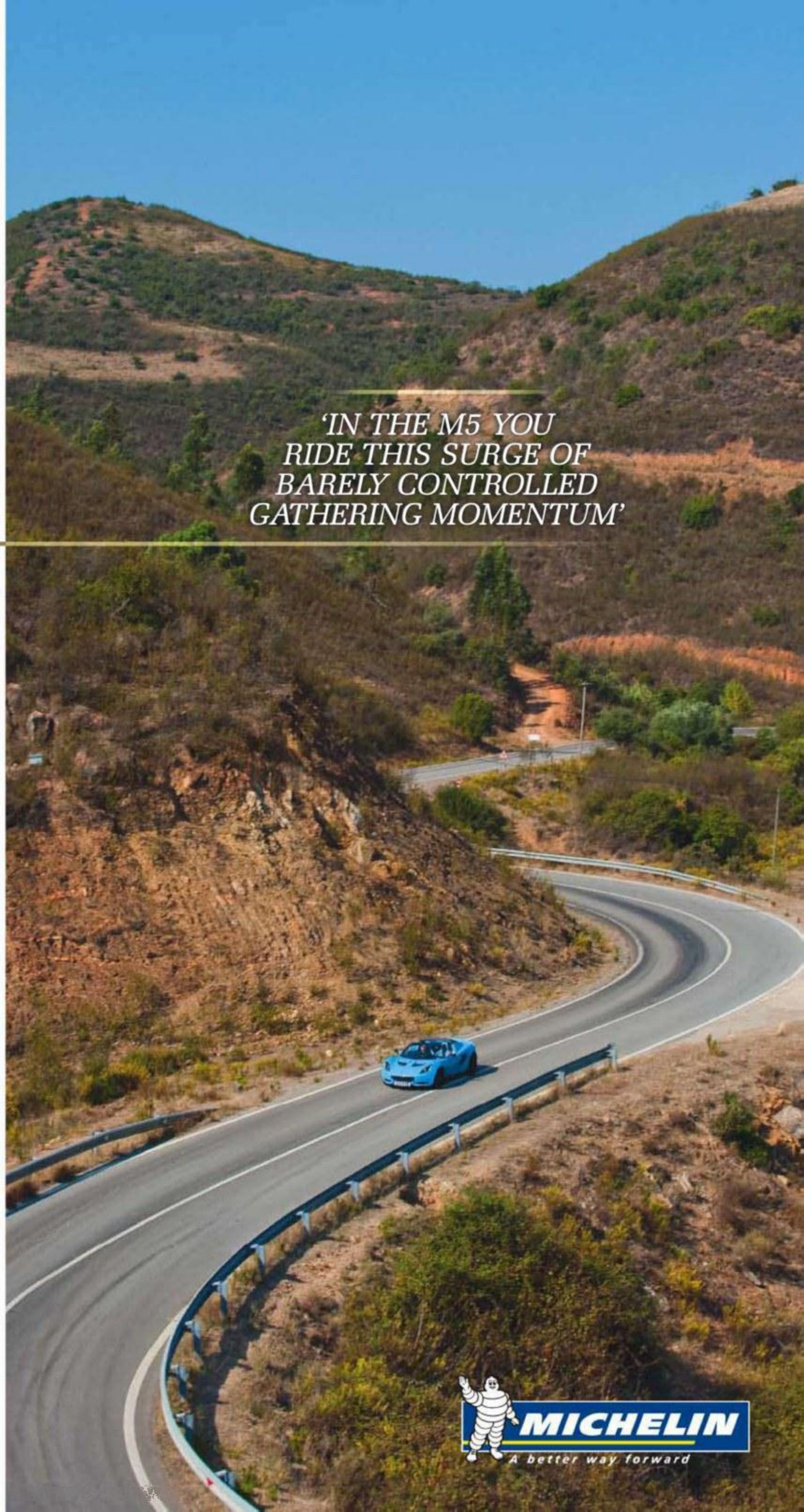
what the M5 feels like tackling fast A- or B-roads. So astonishing is the grip and speed being generated that you're not entirely sure how it's doing it. The twin-turbo V8 is monstrous but it's matched every step of the way by the twin-clutch 'box so that you ride this surge of barely controlled gathering momentum.

It feels like an unstoppable force and at times when you get on the brakes you fear it might actually be... unstoppable. The very bulk that wows you when it's being balletic is sometimes slightly too obvious when you're straining to slow it down and manoeuvre round tighter corners. You know when it's struggling because you start fiddling with the settings to try to recapture the composure. Ramping up to Sport level on steering and dampers gives more control down the bumpier sections of road, but the most natural-feeling combo (weirdly almost E39-M5-like) was with steering and dampers in Comfort and the throttle in Sport-plus.

After my various dramas I'm late to our lunch-stop, so I eat quickly and eavesdrop on the conversations going on at the various nearby tables: 'Bonded with the 12C far more than I did in Wales,' Meaden is telling Metcalfe. 'The exhaust sounds much better too...'

'The mark of a great car is one whose overall competence exceeds what you should expect from its individual components and the 1M does just that,' says Harris to Duff. 'The stumpy shifter makes shifting a precision art - you up your game to get the satisfaction,' adds Barker, demonstrating what he means with a pepper grinder.

'I think we need to go to the coast,' says Lipman to fellow snapper Smith...





Top: locals enjoy a slightly different pace of life. Below: lots of carbonfibre in the Performante; slightly sharp-edged paddles in the Aventador; red cover for start/stop button is a delight

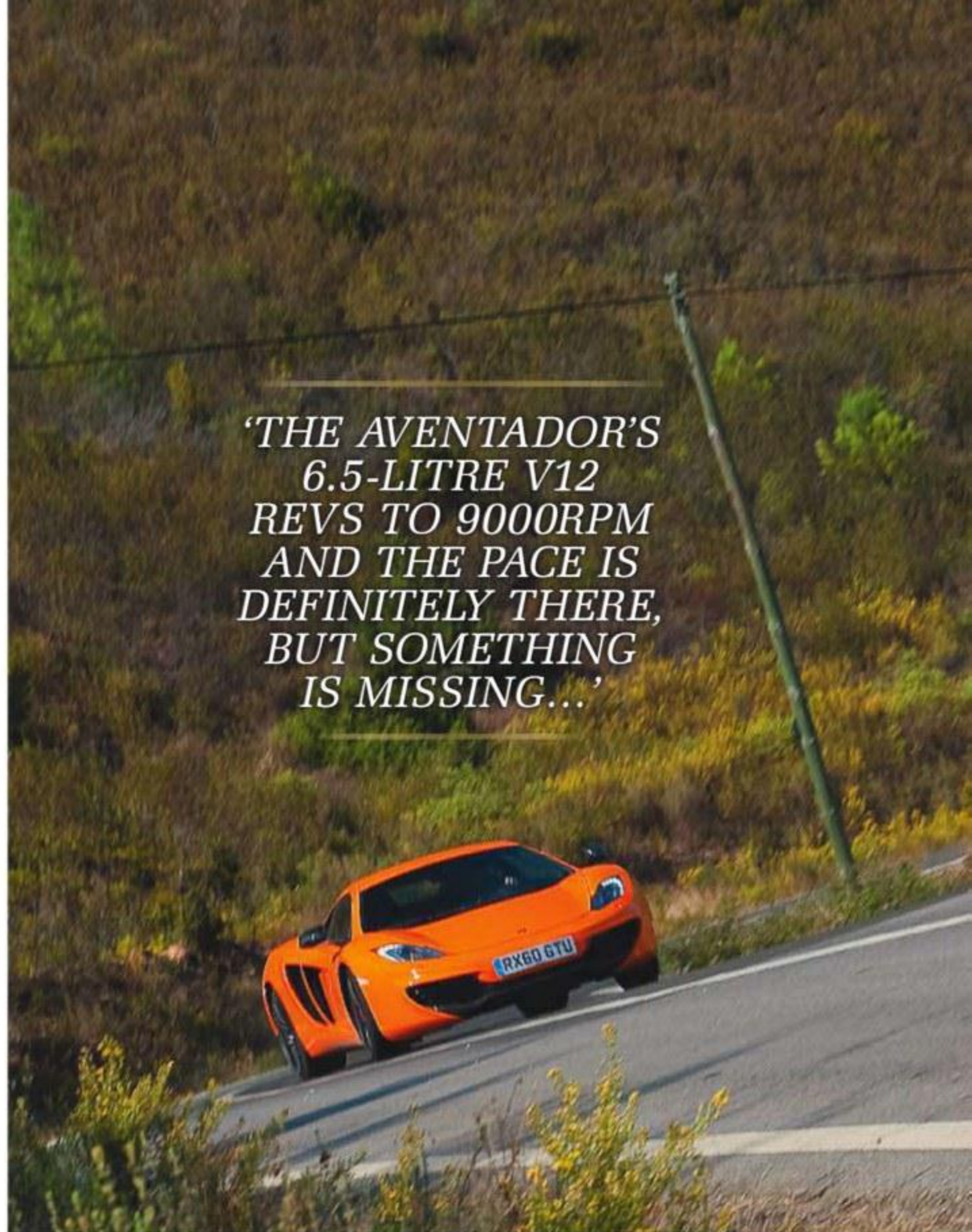


THE HIGH MIDDAY SUN beating down into the open cockpit is so hot that the skin on my bare forearms feels like it's turning to crackling with every mile that we hammer along the road. Holding each gear until all three lights are blinking, the sound of the Lamborghini Performante's epic V10 rips across the sleepy Portuguese countryside, interrupting the siestas of several donkeys. The brake-lights glow and there are one, two yelps as the lower gears slot home, then the four-wheel drive kicks the white shard of Modenese sculpture down the next straight. I should probably mention at this point that I'm not actually in the Lambo, but behind it in the little Elise Club Racer, working harder than a Sniff Petrol cliché to keep up with Troy Queef in front.

Trying to carry every last drop of momentum and use every last inch of a dusty road to hustle the quad tail-pipes of a much more powerful and expensive car is, for me, one of the highlights of this yearly bonanza. The Performante stretches the imaginary elastic on every straight but the Lotus has the advantage in the braking areas, so you wait for the red lights to come on, summon up some courage, pass the Lambo's braking point, count to two and then smoothly mash pad into warm disc with all the force that the ball of your right foot can muster and the tyres can take.

The Elise might have put on a bit of weight over the years but it still weighs just 852kg and, particularly in pared-back CR spec, feels indubitably lightweight. The lack of trivialities like carpet and a radio means you have a much closer relationship with all the mechanicals of the car. Travelling in the bare aluminium tub, it's rather like driving a technical cutaway drawing. You feel every bump in such a lucid way it's almost impossible not to envisage the movements of the wishbones, picture the way the kickback runs from the wheel to the rack, up through the column and into your hands.

Thankfully, after half an hour and



'THE AVENTADOR'S 6.5-LITRE V12 REVS TO 9000RPM AND THE PACE IS DEFINITELY THERE, BUT SOMETHING IS MISSING...'

just before my skin starts blistering, someone at the front of the line pulls over into a side-road and a game of musical performance cars begins. When Harry turns off the Ferrari's radio, I'm unfortunately standing next to the one parked at the end of the line and which needs reversing furthest. Slightly tricky when the car in question is the Aventador.

Yes there's a rear camera, but really there's only one way to reverse a scissor-door Lambo, so I nervously shuffle myself onto the sill with the door up and crane my neck to look back over the roof. On the up-side there's just one pedal for each foot, but on the nerve-wracking side there are 700bhp and large, unyielding boulders marking out the boundaries of the track. I could do without the crowd of on-lookers too. Guiding the Lambo as gingerly as a U-boat commander entering a mined estuary, I eventually make it out.

The door's quite heavy to pull down and the jagged angles of the exterior are carried over onto the paddles, which actually feel sharp as an edge digs into the tips of your fingers when you pull back

for first. There is a lot of obviously Audi switchgear (not to mention the enormous key), but you can ignore this when there are such delights as the beautifully damped red cover for the start/stop button. Once again the others have long gone by the time I'm on my way, so I give chase as fast as I dare. It's a strange experience. Driving a V12 Lamborghini flat-out in pursuit should be just about the most thrilling experience on four wheels and in some ways it still is. The car's just as wide and intimidating as ever, the base of the windscreen is somewhere by your feet and the view out is something akin to driving with a postbox on your head, so overtakes on a normal size road actually make you hold your breath. The engine revs to 9000rpm and the pace is definitely there, but somehow it's missing... a buzz, some tingle in the spine. Weird.

First I try ramping up the gearchange modes. Strada is too ponderous, Sport is fine but not as impressive as the best dual-clutch systems here, and then there's Corsa. A full-bore upchange in this fiercest mode certainly does something



to your spine, but tingle doesn't quite capture it. Try imagining the shock, noise and violence of a small train-crash and you're close to the brutal *BANG* that occurs. As Richard Porter says, 'First time you gasp, second time you laugh, third time you start to wonder what the bloody hell it's doing to the car and why the front axle appears to be smacking into the bulkhead. You don't do it a fourth time, unless you have no mechanical sympathy whatsoever.'

There's a long, tree-lined straight, and in the distance I can see the MP4-12C engaged in an overtake, so I decide to follow suit. I'm not quite sure how many cars I pass, but it's quite possibly some sort of record (perhaps not a world record but maybe a small local record for the region or something). The point is, I just keep piling on the speed – and I suddenly realise that what I'm actually chasing is that moment when the car clicks and





'THE GT3 RS 4.0 IS UNASHAMEDLY HARDCORE, WITH EVERY

comes alive and makes you long to have another go in it. But it doesn't quite happen. I get out, slightly confused, at the next petrol station. How can something that looks and sounds so incredible from the outside not inspire the driver in the same way on the inside?

The Performante might be based on a much older car, its carbon brakes might still be rubbish, and there might well be something wrong with the front axle in ours (it seems to be pulling to one side under acceleration and braking, while sniffing out every camber in the Algarve) but nonetheless you have the flaring theatre of the gearchanges, steering that feels gritty and real, and when you nail the throttle you get the type of hearty slap on the back that would spill your drink if you were standing up. In short it feels like a Lamborghini.

We devote the rest of the afternoon to static photography out on a peninsula before eventually it gets too dark for even the widest aperture. It's a long drive back to Portimão so I grab the keys to the

911. Meaden's been driving it, so I'm just sliding the bucket seat back on its rails, adjusting the grey Alcantara-trimmed wheel and generally fiddling with the mirrors to account for the foot-and-a-half height difference when art editor Paul Lang taps on the window and asks if he can jump into the passenger seat.

I decide to follow John Barker in the Cayman R, and it pretty soon becomes clear that JB has sniffed the air, smelt a hoppy alcoholic liquid in a distant bar and consequently set off towards it like a man possessed. The GT3 RS 4.0 is unashamedly hardcore, with every fibre of it seeming to be alive underneath you, yet it actually gives you all the tools to drive as smoothly as you desire. The steering, for example, is quick, direct and weighty when you're in a corner but just around the straight-ahead it seems fractionally calmer, so that you're not unsettling the nose as you make the first movements pouring it into a corner. All the controls are weighted utterly reassuringly so you aren't left compensating or hesitating at

any point: you can simply concentrate on driving it as well as you're able.

Get it right and you never feel you're fighting the 4.0 – even when it starts sliding it doesn't kick back, doesn't try to regain full purchase instantly, nor does it relinquish all hold on the tarmac in a heartbeat. Instead it's wonderfully progressive, spookily retaining some level of grip even when it's moving around. Through long-radius corners you feel that distinctive 911 smudging of the front tyres as you play with the throttle, the light nose wanting to push wide, making you wait... and wait until the bend begins

Below: Catchpole settles into the GT3 RS 4.0 (top). Right: Aventador and Elise race back to the hotel. The big Lambo looks simply spectacular



to uncurl and you can feed in all the power and drive out of the corner with the weight transferred over the rear wheels.

The 911's engine has clearly got the legs of the Cayman's (probably the only reason I can actually stay with the lager-lusting Barker) but it's its character that sets it apart from every other engine in the test. Sitting at a red traffic light in neutral, it chunters away. Dip the clutch to slot first with the precise yet slightly obstructive shift and the racket is hushed to reveal an underlying burble. As you pull away and travel through a full sweep of the rev-counter, the sound morphs from a burble to a growl to a howl, which suddenly gets louder as the exhaust flaps open and then finally builds into a pure, highly strung motorsport yowl. It's the ultimate aural incitement to keep accelerating and you feel sure a jury would consider it mitigating circumstances.


A couple of bigger bumps get the 4.0's underbelly scratching the tarmac where I suspect a 3.8's wouldn't, but that's the price you pay for the final extra level of response the rest of the time. As I turn the key and hear the engine revs die sharply outside the welcoming lights of 'home', I'm busy trying to burn the previous 45 minutes into my memory for safekeeping. Paul, I suspect, is trying to do the opposite.



Above: a fitting end to day one. Far left: this man is so absorbed in his driving he hasn't noticed it's now nighttime and he's still wearing sunglasses

OF IT SEEMING TO BE ALIVE UNDERNEATH YOU'





'DAY THREE AND WE'RE BLESSED
WITH MORE GLORIOUS SUNSHINE.
SOME GREAT ROADS, TOO. TIME TO
TAKE THE 1M FOR A QUICK RECCE'

Wednesday dawns as bright and cloudless as you'd hope a Wednesday would in southern Portugal. But as we arrive in the paddock at the Portimão circuit there's bad news: the Performante has been withdrawn from the running. The handling quirks we noted yesterday have been getting worse; seems it suffered damage to its suspension in transit from Italy. Lamborghini family honour will

have to be upheld by the Aventador.

The plan is to use the surrounding roads for driving and photography, while Chris Harris, who has jetted in from Spa to join us, concentrates on video. So, as Harris disappears into make-up (it's all blusher and eyeliner to get that look, you know) Meaden and I take the 1M for a recce of the surrounding countryside.

With its outrageously pumped arches, the littler BMW certainly manages to

hold its own with the exotics in terms of road presence, but there's not a lot to get excited about inside. The seats and wheel are both on the plump side and it's all a bit dark, with not so much as a single shiny button to spark the interest of your inner magpie. There is, however, a gearlever sprouting from between the seats...

It's a strange thing when the manual 'box is no longer the norm in a Car of the Year test, but just four of the 13 contenders are



the old-fashioned DIY type. The BMW's shift is light and slightly less knuckly than some previous ones but it still possesses that feeling that the internals are made of nylon. It's lovely.

You can tell exactly how far the money for the race circuit spread, because there is a very abrupt deterioration in road quality as soon as you go much beyond the perimeter. The 1M feels busy all the time on the bumpier stretches (in stark

contrast to the Cayman, incidentally) but it really only struggles over the bigger compressions, where it lacks a bit of travel in the suspension. What it doesn't do is wallow. Every input to the short wheelbase from the road below or with the direct, meaty steering is met with an immediate reaction, so you are continually involved. A small bundle of excitable energy, it feels rather like the C63's exuberant alter-ego as you hammer





'YOU HAVE TO KEEP THE CAYMAN'S 3.4-LITRE MOTOR SPINNING ALL THE WAY TO 7000RPM AND BEYOND, WHERE IT MAKES ITS FULL 325BHP'

down the road. Mike Duff has the canine analogy nailed: 'It's terrier-like.'

As we climb out of the valley, Meaden suggests we hang a right onto a smoother, faster, more moneyed road that runs through the trees. The 1M's twin-turbo straight-six is a stonker up here. It's almost utilitarian in the way it delivers its huge punch, yet it still manages to have what Barker describes as 'that classic BMW note – gritty yet aristocratic'. It's hard to believe just how fast the pint-sized 1M is until you experience it, but at times it's almost unsettling.

Diving down off the ridge again, back towards the circuit, is a road a little better than the first but not quite as smooth as the second, with tighter hairpins tumbling down the hillside. The 1M's short wheelbase and lack of roll mean that it can feel quite a snappy car over the limit, but with the throttle set to Sport (the one and only setting you can change) you have the perfect tool to keep the rear wheels spinning just as much as you want: once sideways it seems to stabilise sweetly, albeit with a lot of tread being shed from the tyres. One last bit of Magellan-esque



Left: Cayman and 911 share a number of components, including doors. 'M' button on 1M's wheel (far left) simply alters the throttle response



route-finding from Meaden and we're back at the circuit with our very own Portuguese 'evo Triangulo' mapped out.

Leaving the BMW's cooling metal pinking in the paddock, I head back out again to retrace the tracks just made. The door-card and red door-pull next to me are just the same as last night, but there is a smaller flat-six closer behind the shoulders this time. At first the Cayman R feels a bit like 'my first performance car' after the full-on assault of the GT3 twelve hours ago. The steering is a little lighter and the reaction to every input a little more muted with less overall grip, particularly at the rear. It's a feeling neatly summed up by their respective rear wings.

But the Cayman R is a grower. Once you've accepted the lack of initial fireworks, you start to settle and concentrate on extracting the most from the chassis and engine in much the same way as you do with the Elise. First you realise that you have to keep the 3.4-litre motor spinning all the way to 7000rpm and beyond, where it makes its full 325bhp. Up here, the throttle has edge and bite, which in turn imbues the whole car

with some teeth. Keeping it spinning is made easier by this particular car's PDK gearbox – although most of us would have preferred a manual, it's a pleasant surprise how responsive and smooth it is when you're asking for changes under full load.

Into shadow, brush the brakes, flick down a cog, hear the metallic rasp as the revs climb and then turn into the fast right sweep. It's here that the Cayman is brilliant. 'The magic is its mid-corner poise,' says Barker, who is brimming with praise for the R. There is an uncanny feeling that the whole car is settled the instant you're into the corner. Although the 911 is devastating in its exit traction, you have to wait longer to get on the power than you do in the Cayman, which just seems to rail round the bend with minimal fuss and blissful balance.

Bumps are the Cayman's other forté; no other car in this test is so sublimely unruffled down a Portuguese back-road. It simply glides over holes, hollows, ridges and mounds. It's so good that as you potter back into the circuit you can't help but find yourself pondering the age-old question, 'what would a Cayman be like



From the sublime... Cayman (top) takes Portuguese roads in its beautifully damped stride. Above: filmmaker Riley, art ed Lang and Catchpole

with a bit more power?'

I'm keen to try our new road-loop in the other direction; I think it might be even better driven anticlockwise. And as the Aston has its swan-wing door invitingly open and appears to be surplus to requirements right now, I tumble inside.

The sun has lifted the ambient temperature in the dark interior of the Vantage S to oven levels, so I drive the first little bit with the window open. To be honest I would probably have opened it even if it was snowing. That's because to get out of the inner paddock you have to go through a high-ceilinged tunnel under the circuit's main straight; I don't think anyone during the entire week is able to resist 'testing the acoustics' as they do so. The V8 in the Vantage has always sounded good but just a little bit *thin* in the past, but not in S form. Now it has a full, deep, V8 bellow, which Barker is a particular fan of and Meaden reckons sounds 'like Thor playing the drums'.





Above: C63 AMG doing what it does best before an unfortunate low-speed collision curtailed its participation in the test



There's an honesty to the Vantage S that's very appealing. Right from the outset the steering requires bit of effort and the ride is firm so you're being fed a constant flow of information, and this mechanical lucidity makes it enjoyably involving even just pottering through a village. It's like a friend who you know is completely open and relaxed with you, rather than one that is intelligent and great company but you never feel you truly know (McLaren, perhaps?). With its short-wheelbase, front-engine, rear-drive layout and short-travel suspension there is actually a similar feeling to the 1M. The difference is in the mid-corner balance, where the Aston seems to have more roll as it leans into the bend and loses just a bit of steering immediacy.



Above: 92 litres is an expensive fill-up in anyone's currency. Safe to say this wasn't the Mégane

The other obvious difference between the two is the gearbox. Barker is very complimentary about Aston's new seven-speed, single-clutch, automated manual in Auto mode and manual downshifts are also exemplary, but if you want to use the leather-covered right-hand paddle, then you're left with a rather old-fashioned one-pause-two change up. It's not enough to spoil the experience of being in the Aston, however. The V8 makes you grin every time you hear it bellow under load or rumble on the overrun, the chassis is involving and quite simply you can't help but feel good about being in a car that looks so phenomenally good. That

flick-up on the boot-lid is my favourite detail on any car in the test – subtle but so much more achingly beautiful than any enormous bolted on rear wing could be.

Lunch brings a cheeseburger – and bad news about the C63, which has had a coming-together with a local car, fortunately not at any great speed but enough to put it out of action for the rest of the test. News and food digested, I head back to the paddock with Harris, who has some interesting observations. ‘For fleeting moments,’ he says, ‘I think the Elise is the best car here – the purest driving device. It isn’t quite fast enough to be thrilling all the time, but that’s as much a case of long gearing as a lack of grunt. The Mégane proves that hot hatches always have a place in eCoty too...’

It’s sometimes easy to overlook something like the Mégane at eCoty. That might sound unfair, even vaguely unprofessional, but really, if you were presented with a car park like this, could you hand-on-heart say that, for all the Mégane’s red rim-tape and Liquid Yellow paint-job, your head wouldn’t be turned by the glamorous silhouette of an Aventador or distracted by the thought of driving a new, 592bhp McLaren?

The other problem that the Mégane has is its ancestor, the R26.R. With its plastic windows, half-cage and sublime suspension, the R26.R remains the pinnacle of hot hatches, and there is a

tacit assumption that however good this new 265 Trophy might be, nothing with a radio and rear seats could come close to its magical, big-bummed predecessor.

Inside, you’re hugged by waspish Recaros set in a slightly upright seating position remarkably like that of the other hatchback in this test, the one with the prancing horse on the bonnet. Seats aside, it’s fairly prosaic, as you’d expect, but the bright yellow rev-counter, which makes up the left side of a dial triptych under the cowl, looks remarkably like a real version of the Aventador’s virtual display.

The turbocharged four seems to have found a voice, with a rasping rortiness overlaying the more familiar ‘Darth Vader hovering in a windtunnel’ rushing sucking noises. The engine certainly feels all of its 261bhp (265PS) and also seems more eager to rev than before, with nice, short gearing meaning that you rip through to the red line (and its slightly annoying up-change beep) without the slight labouring you used to get.

The really fun bit about the Trophy, though, is what it does in the corners. Lift off mid-bend or trail-brake on the way in and you’re treated to proper, tail-happy, big-grin adjustability. But more excitingly still, just like in the legendary R26.R, you can get on the power ludicrously early in a corner. Most cars, including a lot of rear-wheel-drive cars, will simply understeer if you start feeding the throttle



in before the bend has started to uncurl, but the Mégane is different. Turn in, then immediately jump aggressively on the throttle. You’ll feel the limited-slip diff between the front wheels react and your line will actually tighten slightly as the nose tugs towards the apex like a dog that’s caught a whiff of something interesting. Then simply stay on the throttle and surf the power as the front wheels drag you out of the corner. Just as you need to experience using the weight balance of a 911 or the purity of a Caterham at least once in your motoring life, you need to try this too.

By the time I get back to the circuit I’m

Above: McLaren offers the most focused driving environment of any of the cars here, and an unrivalled view of the road that’s coming fast towards you

‘THE MP4-12C IS THE FASTEST HERE OVER ANY GIVEN ROAD. THE WORRY IS WHETHER THE THRILL IS COMING PURELY FROM THE INCREDIBLE SPEED’





buzzing. Improbable as it sounds, I doubt that 'the loop', or *el laco* as Roger Green likes to call it when he slips into the local lingo, could be tackled much faster than in a fully-committed Mégane. Certain narrow bumpy sections are not really suited to wide, low-slung supercars, while the sight-line from the Renault's more loftily positioned Recaro must be a help, too. There is one supercar, here, though that offers a unique view of any road...

Settling into the McLaren, you feel your limbs adopting a position that's quite reclined but with good support under your hamstrings. You sit very low in the carbonfibre tub and so far forward



Top: lift off mid-bend, or trail-break into a corner, and the Mégane will do this. Everyone should try it, but as the plaque implies, just 50 Trophies will be coming to the UK

that you're convinced your hips will be arriving at a corner at the same time as the front tyres. So often in cars you can feel a bit like you're stuck behind a pillar at a wedding ceremony; the MP4's visibility could only be improved if you removed the windscreen and A-pillars entirely.

As with every car here, you find yourself acclimatising over the first few miles. By the time you're away from the circuit's access roads, you've judged the primary things like the brakes (the McLaren's optional carbon-ceramics are still rather all-or-nothing) and the gearshift, of which more in a second. The big roundabout at the entrance to the circuit then lets you suss out the fundamental balance and grip levels at each end of the car, then the tractability of the engine from low revs (a bit of lag in the 12C's case) as you accelerate off it. The first few tight ess-bends give you a chance to judge steering rate and traction under load.

And so your knowledge builds like a Catchphrase picture being revealed, until fairly soon you're pushing as hard as you want to. But by half-way round the loop I'm still learning in the McLaren. The grip just seems to be never-ending, so you commit more and more as you're sucked into looking further down the road (encouraged by that brilliant view out), braking later, turning harder and generally carrying sillier and sillier speeds.

The new paddles, which offer significantly less resistance when you pull them back, are a real improvement. It might sound a relatively small thing, but the lighter action means you don't think about or fumble the process of changing gear like you did before, leaving you to concentrate more completely on how you're threading the car down the road.

I pull over into a lay-by to investigate a worrying clonking noise on the left side of the car (this pre-production car was far from glitch-free during the test). Finding nothing obvious I get back in and head off – just as the 911 appears round a corner behind me. It's a mark of how fast the McLaren is that I know that only if Walter Röhrl himself has made a surprise appearance at eCoty will the GT3 be able to keep up with the 12C.

Through the next village we trickle, dive-planed nose to slatted tail. Then, as we pass the derestriction sign, the McLaren's twin-turbo V8 blares in a way that's angry and loud but strangely unmusical. A couple of yards are pulled down the first straight, but it's the corners where the 12C really opens the gap. After three of them, driven with as much commitment as I dare, the 911 is beaten. I wait at the left turn that leads down the hill onto the bumpy road and we begin again, but this time I know the Porsche won't even be able to put up a fight





V8 Vantage has discovered its voice as well as some attitude in S form. Interior and styling details (above) are just delicious



because the MP4-12C's loose-limbed non-anti-roll-bar suspension will simply glide where the RS 4.0's firmer set-up will have the driver backing off.

And yet, as much as I love driving what is undoubtedly the fastest car here over any given road, there's a worry that the thrill – and it is a massive buzz – is coming purely from the incredible speed you're driving at. It does rather beg the question of what there is to enjoy when you're not going flat-out. As Harris opines, 'the way a driver interacts with it remains, perhaps, weighed too much in favour of the machine rather than the operator'.

Wednesday evening is cover shoot time, and once the unknown Italian motorbike manufacturer (Desmond said itchy?) has left the circuit we can start lining the cars up. It would take paragraphs to describe the process, so I won't. Suffice to say it's very *very* dark by the time we leave for the hotel. The FF seems the perfect car to take, and not just because some think its breadvan shape should only be allowed out at night. Following the tail-lights of the Aston, Jag and Lambo accelerating away one by one out of the circuit, it sounds for all the world as if I might have taken a wrong turn in La Sarthe in June. I decide that dissecting the FF can wait until morning. I'm just going to enjoy this.



'FOLLOWING THE ASTON, JAG AND LAMBO ACCELERATING AWAY FROM THE CIRCUIT, IT FEELS LIKE LA SARTHE IN JUNE'

'DAY FOUR AND A
FEW NAGGING DOUBTS
SURFACE ABOUT THE
FERRARI FF...'





Next morning, as the wind turbines spin lazily up on the ridge and the ground temperature begins to swell, I'm back in the FF, the slipstream stripping the beads of early morning dew from the well-waxed paint. The Ferrari is big, both outside and in. The size of the seats and wheel and the generally airy space inside make you feel just a little like a child in an adult's car. All the Ferrari cues are there though – the steering wheel carries not only the manettino but also the switchgear for the lights, wipers and indicators. There's even a button to the left with 'pit lane speed limiter' written on it. How very Ferrari.

For a big car designed to transport a quartet across a continent, the FF has a surprisingly firm ride over the detail stuff but it absorbs the bigger impacts with aplomb. It genuinely feels like a Ferrari, too. The steering is light and super-sharp just like a 458's. Pull back on the huge right-hand carbon paddle and you're treated to an addictive upshift that's only matched in speed and smoothness by the M5's, but has much more aural drama. If you wait to change until the V12 is at its zenith and all the red LEDs in the top of the steering wheel are burning fiercely (particular fun in the darkness last night), then you're rewarded with a proper small-firearms *crack* as the dual-clutch transmission switches input shafts.

Grip is huge, yet the uniquely complex four-wheel-drive system is spookily unobtrusive. It only really makes itself felt when you notice that although the FF settles into a corner with a perfect rear-wheel-drive stance, slightly weighting-up the tail, the subsequent scope for adjustment is tiny. Nevertheless, you can cover ground at what can only be described as big-league supercar pace,

although braking hard over bumps will trigger the ABS and the hazard warning lights just like a Fiat 500, which is not quite so cool.

It is, overall, a deeply impressive car... but... there's a nagging feeling about it. It was the same amongst everyone who I canvassed last night when we sat down for some 'local' steak and chips.

'Didn't really bond with the Fezza,' mused Duff, while Porter added: 'If the world really needs a practical Ferrari, we might as well teach sharks to do maths.'

'I'm not really sure what the FF is trying to be,' worried Meaden.

'People say the California is "off brand" but for me, this four-wheel-drive, four-seat hatchback is just as far out there,' commented Barker.

'Bunch of...'

'...lovely people,' interjected Metcalfe, finishing Harris's sentence for him.

Back in the paddock today, Richard Porter's just getting out of the XKR-S as I park up the FF, so I ask him what he thinks of the Jaguar before taking the key. 'Monkey Harris was banging on about how the steering isn't good enough because you can't place the car accurately,' says Porter, 'but I think what he means is he's too small to see over the dash. It's the car I'd pick if I had to drive from Port Meow back to London on my own. If I had to drive back with two or three other people, it would be in the M5, but "comfort" is a silly name for one of its steering modes – since when has any car had uncomfortable steering?'

I agree, but I'm more concerned to hear if he's heard of Barker's whereabouts this morning. JB has been struggling to find a path between his outlying room and the main hotel building. Apparently someone saw him take a large comedy step off a small cliff in the darkness last night while trying to navigate his way round a

swimming pool. I'm sure he's fine.

The XKR-S might be the fastest and most focused Jaguar available, but as you settle into the huge, wing-backed seat, you don't find yourself in what one might call hardcore surroundings. If anything, it feels like a much more relaxed and convivial place to while-away a long journey than the Ferrari. Press the starter button, and as the gear selector rises like a Wurlitzer from the transmission tunnel, the R-S signals its intentions by snarling surprisingly loudly into life like a lion roused too early in the morning.

I'm definitely tall enough to see over the dash and yet I do understand some of Harris's problem with the steering. If you

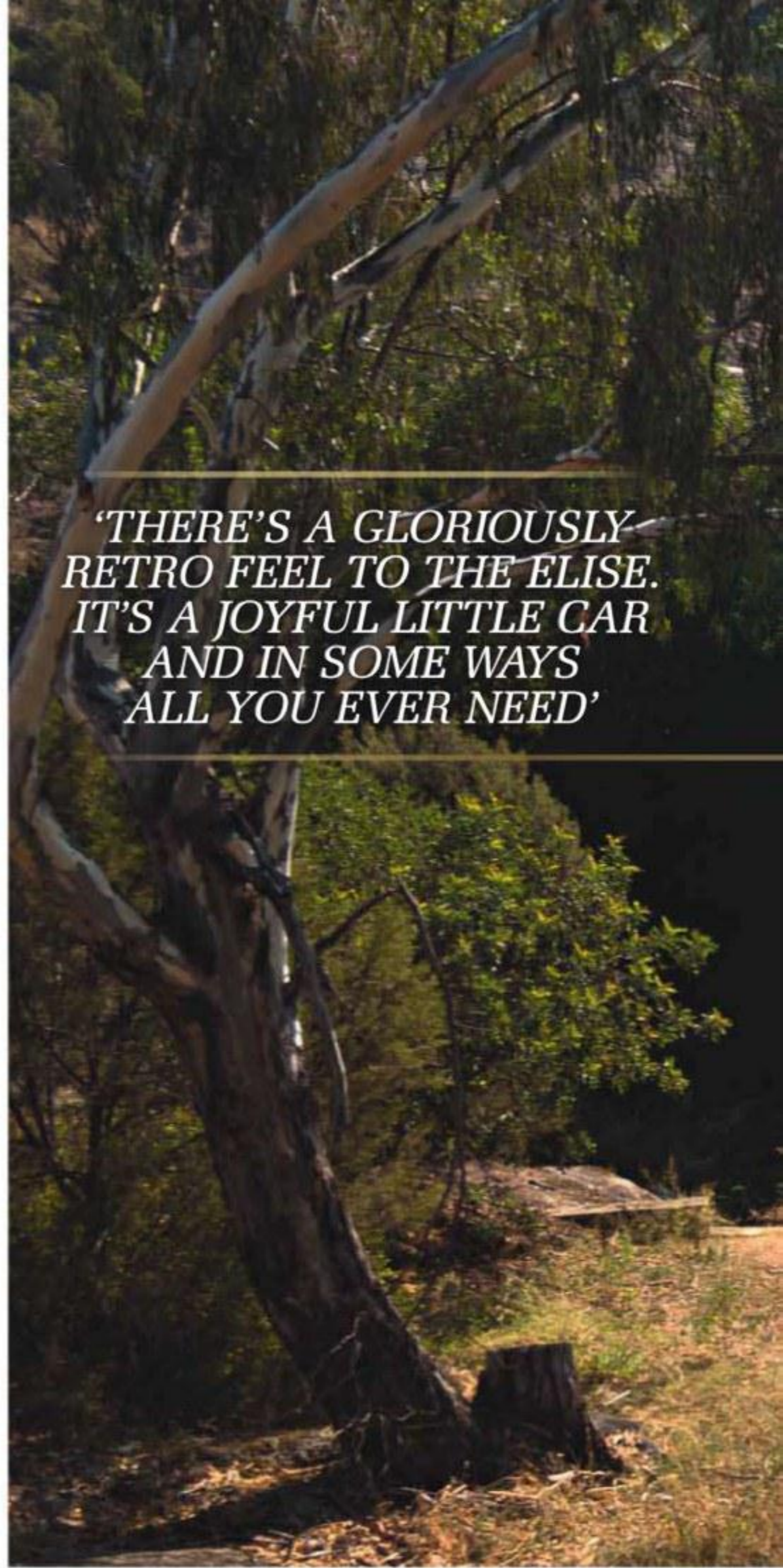


Above: Harris bonds with the 1M. He didn't get on quite as well with the XKR-S (above), though there's no questioning the Jaguar's stonking pace or its lairy demeanour



Above: FF might be the practical Ferrari, with 4wd and a hatchback, but its wheel and dash could be straight out of a 458 Italia. Left: Jag's rising gear selector adds sense of theatre





*'THERE'S A GLORIOUSLY
RETRO FEEL TO THE ELISE.
IT'S A JOYFUL LITTLE CAR
AND IN SOME WAYS
ALL YOU EVER NEED'*

jump from any other car here into the Jaguar, the controls in general feel lighter and more assisted. That doesn't mean that they lack positivity or are wishy-washy in their responses, far from it, just that you feel slightly more removed from the mechanics. If the Elise is like painting by dipping your fingers into a pot of paint and daubing the colour across a canvas, the Jaguar is more like creating a picture on your iPad.

But if I'm making the Jaguar sound horribly clinical, now is probably a good time to discuss its apparent hatred of its own rear tyres. The R-S's huge 501lb ft of supercharged torque is a match for the M5 and FF, but it's well over 100kg lighter than either, making it quite probably the lairiest car here. If doughnuts and burnouts are what tweak your cravat, then this is the car for you.

In many ways it has a similar easy-going but daft-as-a-bag-of-badgers demeanour to the C63. You pour it into corners almost treating the front and rear axles like quite distant entities, guiding the nose in then switching your attention to the rear and driving it through from the back wheels like you would a classic. It's the antithesis of the Mégane, in which you chuck all four wheels about in unison, almost tempted to hook the rims into the forbidding-looking concrete drainage ditches at the side of the road.

Over the limit, the Jag's electronic rear diff splits opinion – some like the fact that it appears to lock initially to get the tail kicking wide and then slacken to naturally stabilise the slide, but others would prefer the slightly sharper, more predictable control of a normal LSD. You can't question the automatic gearbox, though, or the noise, which rivals the Aston's for '2011's most pleasant way to get a headache' as I dip the windows

through the tunnel on the way back into the circuit.

Wandering into one of the pit garages, I find Green and Duff (who sound like some sort of posh ice-cream brand) comparing Porsches. 'You really can buy a Cayman R and not subsequently wish you could have afforded a 911,' muses Green. 'Except, possibly, if that 911 is a GT3 RS 4.0,' says Duff. 'The 4.0's sort of terrifying and wonderful in equal measure. And I know it's got some fundamental flaws as a road car, but I still absolutely love it – so much pace and such unambiguous responses.'

'Shame about the Aventador, though. All that promise from the sensational looks, all that technology and the carbon tub. I'd set my expectations so high and then it ends up feeling a bit like Audi's RS5 engineers have had a hand in it.' Ouch.

I decide I'd better have another go in the big Lambo. Threading it along the smoother top road, it's still an incredible place to be. The brakes are good, thankfully, and there is absolutely no doubt that all 700bhp are there because you get the glorious light-limbed feeling under sustained acceleration. But the engine feels like it isn't trying. It's all new, so perhaps the engineers have designed it to produce 1200bhp and then turned the wick down – that's what it feels like. It's a shame, too, that more of its amazing soundtrack doesn't make its way inside. I know that to all the surrounding villages it must sound like the Targa Florio has been revived and moved to Portugal, but inside you don't get that.

Reversing my driving order from Monday, I jump back into the Elise again for one last go. There's so much feedback over the bumps on the rural valley road that you definitely need both hands on





the wheel to stop it getting distracted from its line. The handling can also feel a little 'prescriptive' (description copyright R Meaden circa 1998) with the sticky tyres robbing you of a bit of smudge at the front and swing at the rear at road speeds. But as Barker says, there's a glorious retro feel to it, harking back to a simpler time with its classic Austin Healey Sprite A-series on twin carbs with a straight-through pea-shooter pipe sort of noise from the motor. It's a joyful little car and in some ways all you ever need.

Far left: FF's magnificent, 642bhp 6.3-litre V12 is set well back in the chassis. Left: Cayman R is making a compelling case for not actually needing a 911 (unless it's a GT3 RS 4.0 of course...)

Track-time has started when I return to the circuit, and as I stroll over to listen to the FF chasing the Lambo down the pit-straight, I find Barker in the M5 with the door open, blipping the throttle and trying to pin down the exhaust note. 'It sounds like a flat-plane-crank V8, a la Ferrari 458,' he says, half-shouting over the noise. 'Bit nasally like the last M5 V10, too. But after 40000rpm it sounds like a bellowing naturally aspirated V8 would if you had waterlogged ears after swimming.' Or just falling in a pool, perhaps...



'TRACK TIME AND A CHANCE FOR THE JUDGES TO LET THEIR HAIR DOWN BEFORE THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF VOTING'

That's it, photography's finished, the track's all yours.' I didn't need telling twice. In fact I had already switched out the traction control and flicked the gearbox into Corsa mode while still doing the low-speed tracking shot.

Not entirely necessary while trundling around at a steady 40mph, but, like a good boy scout, I was prepared. Next thing, the underside of the Aventador's throttle pedal got friendly with the bulkhead, the V12 wailed and for a moment smoke spewed from the rear tyres. Then all four tyres hooked up and the great white scud fired itself at the sinking sun.

It was art director Paul Lang who had given the all-clear, and he later describes the surreal sight of the disappearing Lambo: 'One moment it was there, the next there was this incredible noise, and then it was gone,' he enthuses when I arrive back in the pitlane and hand the gently warmed Lambo to Harris.

I'd sampled most of the cars earlier in the heat of the day, but the Aventador escaped me – another member of the judging panel had always slid under the scissor doors first. Funny thing is, most came back a little nonplussed and after just the first corner – a third- or (if you're brave) fourth-gear right-hander – I was already beginning to understand why. It washed wide of the apex, a tendency it repeated throughout the lap, whatever technique I tried.

Catching up with Dickie afterwards, it seems he experienced the same thing: 'I have to say that while it's amongst the very quickest cars here, it's not the most exciting,' he says with a sigh. 'The long corners highlight its propensity to understeer, and while I'm not saying I'd



Above and below: Portimão circuit is one of the best in Europe and provided a superb workout for our contenders. Crowds were a bit thin though



want it to be a wildly fishtailing monster. I would prefer it to feel a little less inert.' Impressive, then, but also a little disappointing.

In the interest of direct comparisons, I bag the other V12, all-wheel-drive Italian supercar next. In the FF you can feel the effect of the transfer of power between the axles more clearly. And perhaps because your expectations are a little lower, its performance is arguably more satisfying. JB reckons it reminds him of an R34 Skyline in the way it adjusts drive if you keep your foot in once the rear begins to slide. 'Get it right and you don't even have to apply corrective lock,' he says, smiling. It does chew up the outer edges of the tyres pretty rapidly though...

McLaren next, and if we'd put a stopwatch on the cars this thing would undoubtedly have set a very rapid lap, one that I'm not sure any of the others would have matched. But it's not all good news. JB again: 'Loved it on road but here the nose feels light and a bit understeery at times, and there's a mild sensation of odd stuff going on with its hydraulic suspension. The upshot is that

it feels like there's only so much you can control, and when you get on the gas hard and that mega engine kicks, you're never quite sure if you'll be needing a dab of oppo.'

It was perhaps a given that the GT3 RS 4.0 would be exceptional on track – the 3.8 was superb last year and this one has been further honed for the raceway. Which may be to its detriment on the road, but here it's sensational. Richard Meaden describes it as 'head and shoulders above the other cars here for raw driving thrills'. And he should know, he kept sliding it until the rear tyres delaminated...

And if you've not got over £100,000 to blow on a trackday weapon, fortunately there's still plenty of fun to be had. The M5 reveals itself to be as happy sideways as any of the previous generations, and while there's no escaping the mass, there is a sweet connection between the throttle and delivery so keeping things balanced is pleasingly simple. A worry about the longevity of the anchors keeps the runs down to a couple of laps at a time, and it's a similar story in the 1M, which, being our long-term test car,



has already taken some punishment in the stopping department. It's fair to say though that, despite this, Dickie's still a fan. 'Love it, love it, love it!' is his succinct summation, and I have to agree. It's the engagement you get from the simplicity of a tactile manual gearbox, a slippery diff and enough puff to exploit it that makes it hard to argue against.

It's funny, but even though the Cayman R has only ten fewer bhp, it does feel slightly short of grunt. It's torque it lacks, exaggerated by the undulations of Portimão. Beautifully balanced though. The Aston is another that would benefit from a little more mid-range urge; it would not only





XKR-S could have done this all day if we'd brought enough tyres, but on track it can't disguise its considerable mass

make showboating easier but would also help hide the sensation of it being a little heavy. Having said that, all the power you could ever wish for doesn't hide the bulk of the XKR-S, although it does redeem itself with the hooligans amongst us by revelling in smoky drifts.

You won't get those in the Mégane, but it is one of the most accomplished front-drive road cars I've driven on track – right up there with the R26.R in terms of composure and, thanks to greater power, it laps faster too. Trying to keep up with it in the Elise proves futile, but don't dismiss the baby Lotus: in the corners it's as quick as anything. Dickie sums it up perfectly: 'It's grippy enough to stay neat and tidy, but malleable enough to bend into an interesting shape into a corner on the brakes. A perfect illustration of what Lotus does better than anyone else: light, uncomplicated and superbly honed sports cars.'

Below: despite being the least powerful car here, Elise is as fast as anything in the corners. FF impresses too

And the star of this year's track session? It has to be the circuit itself. It is right up there with Spa and Brands Hatch – in fact it feels like a combination of the two and I can't think of a better road car to lap it in than a GT3 RS 4.0.



Words: **Chris Harris**

The most memorable moments can never be organised, they just happen. It's the law of the great-night-out: try to lay plans for something tumultuous and it will always disappoint; happen across a few people you haven't seen in years in a random bar, and you will awake the following morning with no idea how you came to break several ribs.

Okay, I have forced the script a little by getting into the Aventador with a view to latching on to Meaden (GT3 RS 4.0) and Barker (MP4-12C) as they lap, but there are no GoPro cameras, no long lenses: just end-of-the-day playtime.

Keen to make the Aventador a little slower, one R Green clambers into the passenger seat before I can slam the door shut and leg it. That's right, we're not in any way competitive.

We wait on the pit-lane exit for some headlights to appear over the crest at the end of the main

straight – the last vestiges of daylight remain, leaving a honey covering of warmth on everything they touch. Portimão looks breathtaking like this, and even more so when a white GT3 RS *ker-pows* into view with an orange McLaren seemingly pushing it through Turn 1. Game on. A few seconds later, we're in the mix.

Meaden brakes the GT3 hard into the apex of the slow right-hander that is Turn 2, then gives the car room to move way to the right over the blind left-hand crest of Turn 3. The Porsche looks balanced, natural – though the MP4 gives the impression of lurking before an inevitable pass – but as the Porsche scoots down the following straight the McLaren cannot do enough to make a clean pass: it just lost too much on the immediate exit phase. This is only part of the news though: ever since we caught the back of the train, the McLaren has presented a delicate cascade of blue flame from its exhausts – no great spews of combustion, instead

'IT'S END-OF-DAY PLAYTIME, AND I TAKE THE AVENTADOR AND LATCH ON TO THE GT3 RS 4.0 AND MP4-12C. GAME ON'



hampers it from apex to exit and the McLaren edges a car length away, but then I have the advantage of following into the braking zones and the Aventador seems that little bit quicker in a straight line.

Next lap we push harder, working through the Aventador's frustrating understeer, the perception of speed amplified by the near-darkness. In the fast turns the Lambo has immense stability, and we can begin to close the MP4-12C – enough to try to get a run from the never-ending right-hander that leads onto the main straight. And that's when we learn that the Aventador *just* has the legs on the Brit: popping from the tow, it edges past.

A few turns later we're flagged down by art director Paul Lang, for once speechless at the spectacle of the two cars croaking flames and the Aventador's Jaffa-orange carbon-ceramic brake disks. These are sights and sounds I will never forget. And yes, Meaden *bad* skidded himself into a shredded Michelin.

a controlled, consistent tongue of blueness so captivating in the fading light that, into the following 180-degree hairpin, we nearly out-brake ourselves through distraction.

Meaden seems keen to remind Barker what fun the Porsche's absence of microprocessors will afford him and the GT3's velocity drops as it moves into an arching second-gear powerslide, only for the car to slow further and peel away from the track.

Must be tyre-trouble. No time to ask because Barker pins the MP4-12C and heads into the gloaming.

And then these so-called cars cease being cars – they become speeders from a science fiction film. The vivid whites and reds of the Lambo's dash under-lighting; that persistent, ghostly luminescence seeping from the British car's tail-pipes. They're so closely matched, too – despite its four-wheel drive, the Aventador's understeer



In one of those wonderful unplanned moments, Harris (Aventador) finds himself chasing Meaden (GT3 RS 4.0) and Barker (MP4-12C) as Day Four draws to an end. Above: delicate blue flames from the MP4-12C



'THE RECKONING. IT'S DAY FIVE, AND AFTER ONE LAST DRIVE IN ALL THE CARS, THE JUDGES HAND IN THEIR SCORECARDS'

It's been a great year for V8-powered coupes, and the Aston Martin Vantage S, Jaguar XKR-S and Mercedes C63 AMG were virtually level-pegging on most of our judges' scorecards. Yet despite the on-paper similarities, they are quite different characters.

We like the Vantage a lot. The best-looking car here in most people's opinion, it has improved over the years as the pace of its V8 has caught up with the promise of its handsome shape and its handling has been honed to greater levels of accomplishment. The voice of

Above: reflecting on a vintage year for new performance cars. But which of these will make the cut for the top five? We're about to find out

its motor is now more brazenly V8, and dynamically it's a 'transparent' car; easy to get into, drive briskly and enjoy.

'It's ageing with grace and dignity,' reckoned Harris. Alongside the Jag it feels a little torque-light and it's handling is a bit more grabby and less playful than the Merc, but Catchpole spoke for most with his sum-up: 'It feels like it's all finally slotted into place for the V8 Vantage... except for that gearbox.' The automated manual is the only option on the Vantage S and while some saw the good in it – 'Not the quickest unit but definitely better than

the old one,' said Duff – most of us were left yearning for a manual shifter.

There was a greater variance of opinion on the more potent XKR-S. Louder both aurally and visually, the 542bhp Jaguar is a thrillingly fast, muscular coupe when you're in the mood, yet with its superbly refined ZF auto and a ride that's just supple enough, it's also a habitable GT. 'An underrated all-rounder,' said Porter.

'A fantastic car to spend a long time in but loses out here because it still doesn't feel as focused as the best,' said Catchpole. For a cost it was the lightness



of the steering that was the main issue and prevented a few testers from 'clicking' with it. Meaden and Harris also thought its looks were a little OTT, and Metcalfe had trouble with its £97K price-tag, saying, 'There are too many tempting rivals at this level.'

We're big fans of the C63 saloon and, although the C63 AMG coupe isn't quite as stealthy, it's still discreet enough to surprise the unwary with its big-hearted, thunderous delivery. Reducing the door-count doesn't seem to have made it any more of a rival for the BMW M3; there doesn't seem to be any gain in

structural rigidity, and its chassis set-up feels softer and less precise and grippy than the Aston's or Jag's.

All aids off, the Merc powerslides with ease, which endeared it to most testers, though as Meaden observed, 'The M5 highlights the limitations of the Benz's soft set-up and slow-witted automatic 'box. The lack of traction is initially amusing, but soon gets tiresome.' Not all agreed: 'What a sweet, sweet thing,' said Duff. 'Yes, you lose some ultimate back-road pace compared to the BMWs, but I just loved the way the chassis balance could be adjusted seemingly at will in a



Above: Barker gets to grips with the Aventador LP700-4

completely non-intimidatory fashion.' 'It was a big ask for the Mégane to shine in such extraordinary company,' says Meaden, 'but the Trophy didn't disappoint.' Once again, a relatively humble Renaultsport fast hatch is snapping at the heels of some seriously potent, brand new supercars. Agile, adjustable and faithful, the front-drive Trophy didn't really put a wheel



wrong. Harris described it as 'a hoot'; Duff called it 'brilliant fun on the narrower roads'. There's even a decently enthusiastic engine note, too.

And yet we didn't warm to it quite as we did 2009's Clio. Indeed, Renaultsport's back catalogue might be partly to blame, as Porter explains: 'I love hot hatches and this is a ruddy good hot hatch. It's just that the old R26.R leaves a huge burden of expectation on this new model.' Although there are traces of the R26.R's DNA, the Trophy didn't feel quite so extraordinarily special in a way that would have put it amongst our favourites this year.

The surprise isn't so much that the brand new Ferrari FF doesn't make it into the top five but that it wasn't that close to making the cut. 'Not quite sure what the FF is trying to be,' said Meaden. There are four full-size seats, a decent boot and four-wheel drive to harness the power of the V12, but these things are mated to fantastically direct and high-g geared steering and a constantly jiggly ride – just the things to stop your passengers feeling relaxed.

'I didn't walk away loving it,' said Metcalfe. Duff added: 'It lacks a sense



Above: judges deep in thought as they score the cars. Lang makes sure there's no cribbing or tactical voting. Below: under-achieving Lambo



of occasion for something wearing a Ferrari badge, and it's devoid of the sort of feedback to make me want to find out what lay behind the monster grip.'

'I love the idea of a V12 shooting brake but this is a Ferrari and I just don't think the world needs a practical Ferrari,' said Porter. 'Ferrari's Cayenne moment,' added Meaden.

Massive performance in a family-sized package: the new BMW M5 shares some attributes with the FF but finds the target with considerably more accuracy. 'Heavenly combo of twin-turbo engine and twin-clutch transmission,' said Meaden. 'I don't need a car this big in my life, but if I did the M5 would be top of my list.' Duff was a big fan, too: 'It's a remarkable achievement.'

The new twin-turbo V8 sounds obviously synthetic alongside the Jaguar or Mercedes, but it shifts the M5's considerable mass with awe-inspiring conviction and there are plenty of opportunities to tailor its dynamics. The brakes feel hard-worked, though, and for some it wasn't a pure M-car experience: 'It had moments where it amazed and then some where it frustrated and you started hunting through the settings.

Ultimately it just felt too heavy at times,' said Catchpole.

The Performante ruled itself out, but are you surprised that the brand new Aventador didn't make the cut either? So is Harry, who placed it first. 'Really surprised at the lack of love for the Aventador,' he said. 'It feels modern, makes massive performance accessible and looks drop-dead gorgeous.' We all agreed that it's a real, old-school supercar event – stunning to look at and exotic when you climb in – so where does this all-new Lambo veer off course?

Oddly, the linearity of the delivery and lack of V12 thunder make it feel as if something is being held back, and that's just not right in a £250K, 700bhp supercar. Also, the shift of the single-clutch automated manual is either too lazy or too frantic. 'On the road it's supple, fast, useable and still an event, if somehow less special than the last SV,' said Harris, while Catchpole found it 'intimidating because of its size and visibility, not because of any outrageous driving experience.' Meaden summed it up rather well: 'Utterly mesmerising to follow down the road, but strangely aloof to drive.' And then there were five...



'SURPRISED THAT THE BRAND NEW AVENTADOR DOESN'T MAKE THE CUT?'



AND THE WINNER IS...

Sitting consistently in the top half of our testers' scorecards were the five standout cars of 2011. So, after the initial round of scoring, we asked the judges to rank the top five cars in order. This, then, is the final countdown...

5th: Lotus Elise Club Racer

There's a wonderful retro-modern feel to the baby-blue Elise. The recipe is a classic – modest power and light weight – and after some of the fabulously complex and potent cars here it's refreshing as a lemon sorbet. 'It's just pure essence-of-car and it made me smile as much as anything here,' said Porter. 'It's a delight to have light, unassisted steering writhing in your hands and an enthusiastic engine at your back propelling an obviously small mass with a faintly classic, parpy exhaust note. The ride is, as ever, effortlessly supple, though a bit firmer as befits the Club Racer brief, and it flows down the road like butter over hot new potatoes.'

'Feels outgunned on inclines and straights, but in isolation it's a blissful little car,' said Meaden. True, the

gearing is a bit over-long, so it's not getting the most out of the 130bhp Toyota engine, but it's a beguiling little back-to-basics sports car, and we adore it. 'The purest driving device; the best steering and the greatest connection between driver and machine,' said Harris. 'At times, the best car here.'

4th: Porsche Cayman R

With supercars and the 911 GT3 RS around, the tamer Porsche looked a bit half-hearted, but the Cayman R's beauty is the way it drives. 'The real underdog hero here,' said Duff. Show it any kind of challenging road and this Cayman pulls into focus like few other cars on the planet, and the magic is its mid-corner poise. It's a mesmerising combination of superb steering weight and feel, exquisite balance, and the lucid sense of mechanical grip at each corner. Lovely, lovely, lovely.

'So deeply impressive on the bumpier stretches of road that it put everything except the McLaren in the shade,' said Catchpole, and Metcalfe was in agreement: 'The most beautifully balanced chassis here. Showed up the track-biased nature of the GT3 RS.'

The engine is just potent and

keen enough, the PDK gearbox is – unexpectedly – snappy, refined and never wrong-footed, and the seats give fabulous, un-shouty support. But even conceding its dynamic aplomb, Harris wasn't convinced: 'I find its closeness to perfection weirdly irritating. Just give us a Cayman GT3 and stop messing about.'

3rd: BMW 1M Coupe

The chunky 1M finishes a strong third, having claimed the top score of one of our testers. We're fans of the regular, top hat-shaped 1-series Coupe and the 1M cements that appeal with gorgeous flared arches and a raft of scaled-down M Division cues, including the quad tailpipes. The best thing, however, is that it drives like a proper M-car. Indeed, its turbocharged straight-six gives it stronger and more accessible performance more of the time than the current V8-engined M3.

'The antithesis of so many other cars here because it has no paddle-shift, no louder exhaust option, no settings menu. You get in, you drive it,' said Porter. 'It's not the last word in sophistication but it's just so bloody loveable.' There is a degree of vertical chop to the ride but you feel in charge, encouraged to push, and when you do it's classic rear-drive entertainment. 'A bubbling keg of driving fun: best BMW in yonks,' said Harris. More tellingly, Catchpole (who ranked it first), Meaden and Harris all said that it's a car they'd love to own.

2nd: McLaren MP4-12C

The MP4-12C shouldn't be second. It should be on the top step, crowned



We're now at the sharp end of eCoty 2011, and we're down to the final five. What's really got us excited is that they're not all supercars: Elise, 1M and Cayman are all utterly brilliant drivers' cars



MICHELIN

A better way forward

*'THE LAST BASTION OF ANALOGUE PURITY
IN AN INCREASINGLY DIGITAL WORLD,
AND ALL THE BETTER FOR IT'*



Several testers thought the GT3 RS's ride was just a little too track-biased in 4.0 form, but it still delivered the biggest hit of driving thrills

evo Car of the Year 2011. 'I had my most memorable drive of the test in the MP4-12C and went faster than I would have thought possible,' said Catchpole. 'I expected it to be a bit bland and a bit computer-gamey but it's not,' said Porter. 'There are moments when it's doing stuff that goes much further than exposing its competitors in this test – it questions the fundamentals of what a sporting car should be; how it should behave,' said Harris. But it finishes second because almost all complimentary comments on the McLaren were followed by '...but...'

When it was right, the McLaren was nigh-on untouchable, but almost from the moment its wheels hit the warm Portuguese asphalt it was troubled by niggles and issues. Some of us only experienced it as it should be late in the test. Then it was devastatingly effective, utterly engaging, ludicrously wieldy and fast; a car to show up the shortcomings of the Ferrari 458 which beat it in our summer group test (issue 159). But... 'There's this feeling that you're not driving the finished article,' said Catchpole. And that's what tempered the enthusiasm of too many of us. 'It

was so close,' said Green. 'Even if it had been on the standard brakes, it might have won. Maybe next year...'

1st: Porsche GT3 RS 4.0

The GT3 RS 4.0 is a pure drivers' car with a quite extraordinary naturally aspirated engine at its heart. To feel and hear this 4-litre flat-six pull from idle to its 8500rpm red line is almost worth the asking price alone but, as ever, Porsche also provides a pretty handy and engaging chassis so that you're encouraged to take it out and exercise it.

It's increasingly unusual that it's



SEE THE VIDEO
AT WWW.EVO.CO.UK



01



Below: how the judges voted for the top five cars. Awarding five points for first place down to one for fifth, the final score shows just how close it was, the Porsche just pipping the McLaren by a single point

just you and the car; these days it's usually you and the car and a hidden control room full of electronics sorting things out. In the 4.0 the tweaking and tempering, optimising and anticipating is all down to you, so it's terrifically satisfying when the gearshifts are slick, the lines are just-so and progress is fast and fluid.

'The last bastion of analogue purity in an increasingly digital world, and all the better for it,' said Meaden. 'Unrepentant, irrepressible, uncompromising and at times unforgiving... When I close my eyes and think back to this year's test,

memories of this car that will be the most vivid.'

There was a feeling that the chassis of the 4.0 had gone a bit too stiff for road use. 'For me it's not quite the road car the 3.8 was; I was having to watch for the bigger bumps,' said Catchpole, a comment echoed by others, though as Porter said, 'What cancels out this concern is that on the right road it's bloody good fun.' But the last word goes to Duff: 'Despite recognising some of its flaws, I absolutely loved this thing.' A great many of us did, which is why the GT3 RS 4.0 is evo Car of the Year 2011.

FINAL SCORE

	HM	HC	MD	JB	RM	CH	RG	RP	FINAL SCORE
1. PORSCHE GT3 RS 4.0	5th	5th	1st	3rd	1st	1st	1st	3rd	28
2. MCLAREN MP4-12C	1st	4th	2nd	2nd	3rd	3rd	5th	1st	27
3. BMW 1M COUPE	3rd	1st	3rd	5th	2nd	2nd	2nd	5th	25
4. PORSCHE CAYMAN R	2nd	2nd	4th	1st	4th	5th	4th	4th	22
5. LOTUS ELISE CLUB RACER	4th	3rd	5th	4th	5th	4th	3rd	2nd	18



MICHELIN

A better way forward

RACING PEDIGREE

Tyre technology developed to win the gruelling 24 Hours of Le Mans is now available for you to enjoy your car to the maximum delivering safety, performance and fun

Key to creating a top performance machine is getting all the elements of a car to work together and a vital part of that package is the tyres. Engines, gearboxes, suspension and aerodynamics count for nothing if they cannot be translated to the road, which is why Michelin developed its flagship Pilot Super Sport tyre, designed for the world's fastest cars, with Porsche, Ferrari and BMW's M sports division.

The result is a tyre that delivers not just great performance in extreme conditions but also the driving enjoyment demanded by the car owners. And where better to develop the technology that combines safety and performance than on the race track and in the most gruelling race of them all – the 24 Hours of Le Mans where Michelin has won for the past 14 years on the trot.

Two key features of the Pilot Super Sport were initially developed as part of its endurance racing programme – the Twaron fibre belt under tread for high speed stability and the Bi-compound which has different rubber mixes on the inner and outer side of the tyre. The outer compound is optimised for durability while the inner is to maximise grip on wet roads. The Pilot Super Sport also has the latest version of Michelin's Variable Contact Patch to ensure the same amount of rubber remains on the road even when it changes shape under cornering.

Launched earlier this year the Pilot Super Sport is available for 18 to 22-inch rims.

But it is not just supercars that Michelin caters for as its high-performance range includes the Pilot Sport 3 for high-powered saloons and smaller sports vehicles. The Pilot Sport PS2 is aimed at high-performance machines and is gradually being replaced by the Pilot Sport 3 and the new Pilot Super Sport, while the Pilot Sport Cup+ bridges the gap between road and track and is suitable for both.

All benefit from Michelin's unrivalled commitment to R&D which totals close to 500 million Euros each year and its extensive motorsport programme. Alongside Le Mans and endurance racing it competes in the top flight World Rally Championship and increasingly popular Intercontinental Rally Challenge where performance in a wide range of conditions from mud to snow is vital. On the circuits it supplies tyres for the Porsche Carrera Cup GB and club level GT3 Cup Challenge. It is also the tyre of choice for Renault's frantic Clio Cup and single seater Formula Renault UK – the series that helped world champions Lewis Hamilton and Kimi Raikkonen to the top. And it is also on the cars of motorsport's youngest drivers in the Ginetta Junior Championship for 14-17 year olds. It runs alongside the GT racing feeder series, the Ginetta GT Supercup where Michelin is also the tyre partner.





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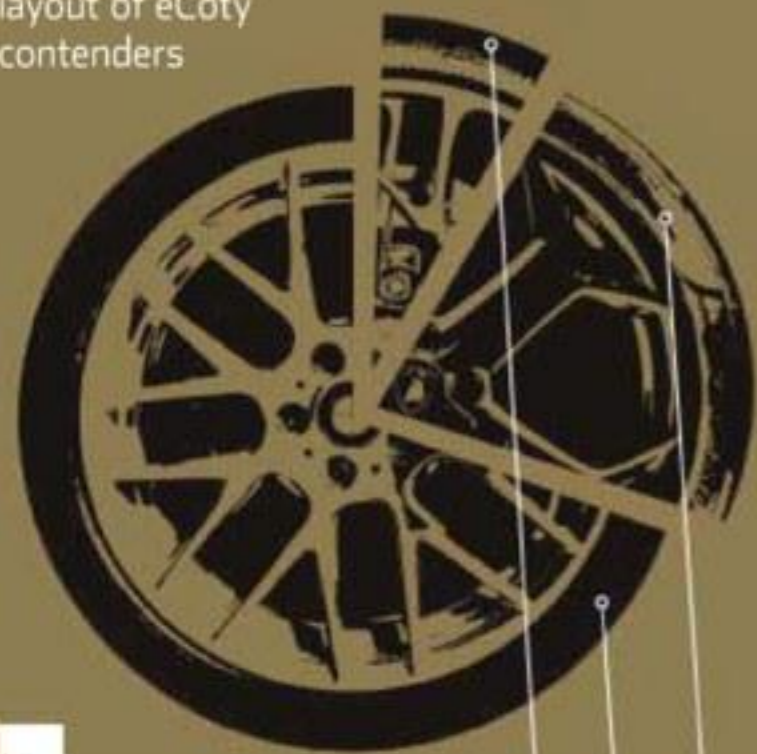


MICHELIN Pilot Sport Cup+

For vehicles with the highest performance for road and track use



» Rear-wheel drive remains the favoured layout of eCoty contenders



1 FRONT-WHEEL DRIVE (2010: 1)

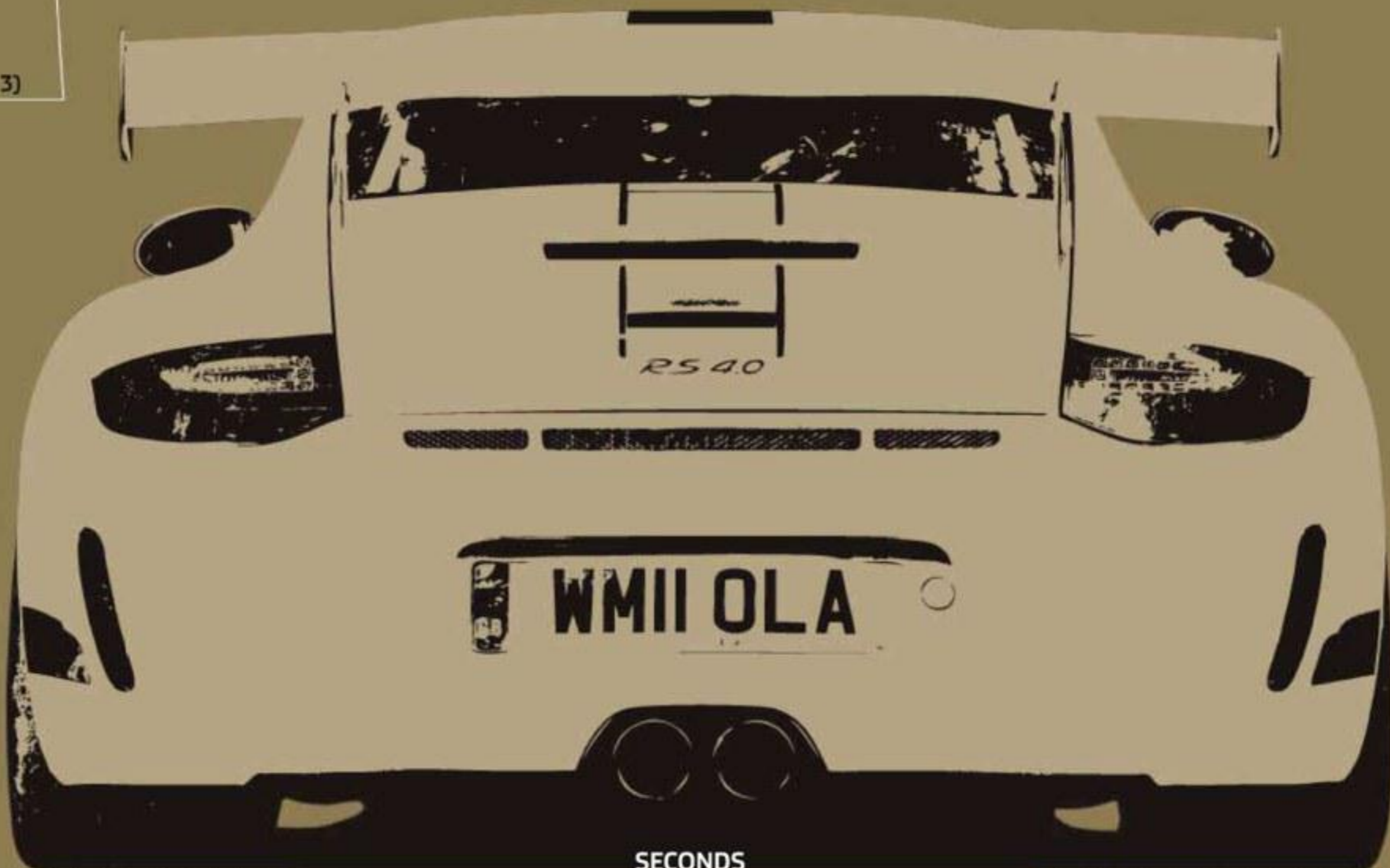
9 REAR-WHEEL DRIVE (2010: 6)

3 FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE (2010: 3)

2011 ^{evo} Gear OF THE Year

IN NUMBERS

So there were 13 contenders and one winner, but what are the other significant numbers of this year's eCoty, and how do they compare with last year's event? Mike Duff's calculator needs new batteries



Value of cars

2010 AVERAGE
£138,461

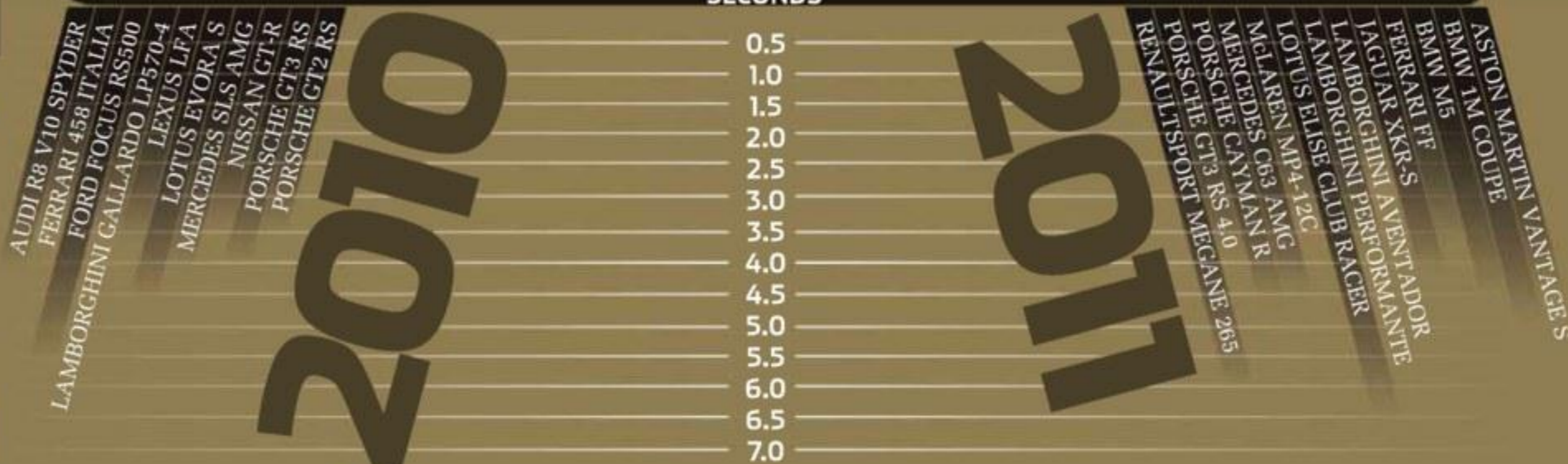
» More affordable this year, but still not cheap...

2011 AVERAGE
£110,295



Transmissions

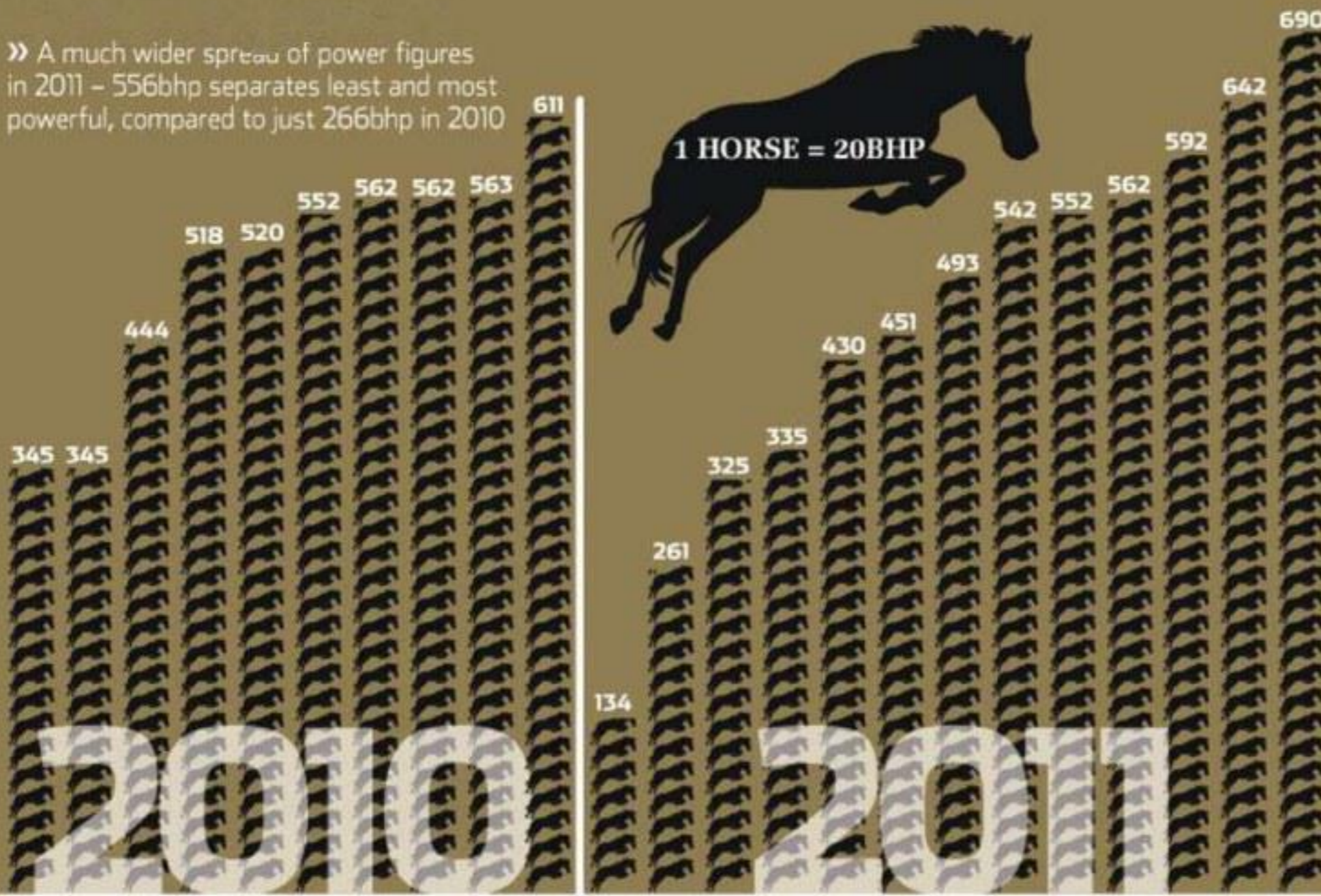
» Is the manual gearbox on the wane? There were more (five) in 2010's smaller eCoty group



0-60 times

» The average 0-60mph time is slower for 2011 (4.4sec plays 4.0 in 2010), thanks to the inclusion of two 6sec-plus cars (Elise and Mégane). 2010's quickest was the Ferrari 458 on 3.4sec; both the McLaren (3.3sec) and Aventador (2.8) beat that this year

» A much wider spread of power figures in 2011 - 556bhp separates least and most powerful, compared to just 266bhp in 2010



Horsepower

2010 AVERAGE 502 bhp	2011 AVERAGE 463 bhp
Biggest 611 bhp (GT2 RS)	Biggest 690 bhp (Aventador)
Smallest 345 bhp (RS500 & Evora S)	Smallest 134 bhp (Elise)

Fuel used

2011
£2731.33

» That's around 1800 litres, or 400 gallons



Engines

» V8 is the most common 2011 layout. In 2010? The V10 (LFA, R8, Gallardo)



2x V12s
5x V8s
2x 4-cylinders
2x flat-6s
1x straight-6s
1x V10

Cylinders

2010 AVERAGE	7.5
2011 AVERAGE	7.69

» A pair of V12s raises the average number of cylinders per car this year. Average number of turbos is unchanged from 2010 at 0.5

Beers



» Plus five Malibu and Cokes for Chris Harris. This year's beer of choice: Super Bock



Layouts

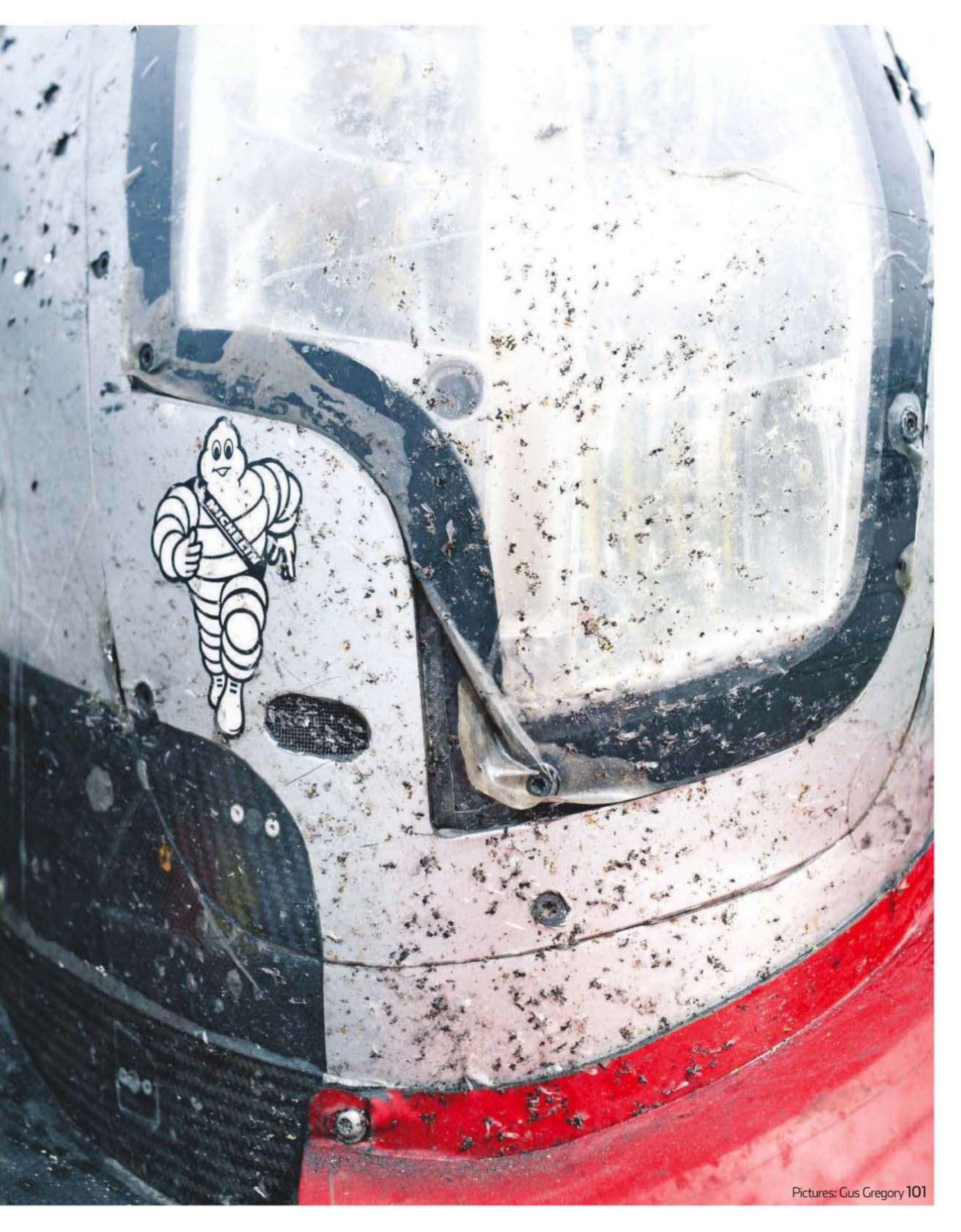
» Front-engined cars outnumber the other layouts in this year's larger eCoty group - in 2010 front- and mid-engined were neck-and-neck on four apiece. More mid-engined cars made the final five this year, though: three, up from just one

2011 RACE CAR OF
THE YEAR



24 HEAVEN

*After 24 hours of racing, this Audi R18 TDI crossed the finish line at this year's Le Mans less than 14 seconds ahead of the rival Peugeot. It was the race of the year – now **Richard Meaden** is going to drive that winning car*





This year's Le Mans 24 Hours

was a remarkable race for many reasons. Searing pace, race-long acrimony between arch rivals Audi and Peugeot, two of the most terrifying accidents you're ever likely to witness and one of the closest finishes in the race's history.

In the end, the less fancied of the three Audi R18 TDIs took the spoils, beating an increasingly desperate Peugeot squad on home soil to take a thrilling and well-deserved victory that will live in the memory of all who witnessed it. Indeed such was the drama and relentlessly intense driving, we rate it as our Race of the Year and the R18 TDI as our Race Car of the Year.

After such a tumultuous battle, in which the other two R18s were completely destroyed, you might expect Audi to have the surviving car – the winning car – safely wrapped in cotton wool and locked in some de-humidified chamber at a secret location. Remarkably, nothing could be further from the truth.

News that Audi was planning a very special track test came to me via a text message from *evo* editorial director Harry Metcalfe late on the evening of the Frankfurt motor show press day. It went something like this: 'Dickie, fancy driving this year's Le Mans winner? I'm out with the Audi boys tonight and thought you might fancy it...' I'd like to say I replied



Left: Meaden (centre) nervously eyes up the car he'll shortly be driving; Audi racers Johnny Herbert (left) and Allan McNish (right) are on hand to help calm his nerves... Right: the no.2 R18 leads the pack early in this year's 24 Hours



'UP CLOSE IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S BEEN THROUGH A WAR, CAKED IN A LAYER OF CARBON BRAKE DUST'

with some ice-cool quip about not doing diesels, but my response was a succinct, if rather excited, 'Yes yes yes yes yes. Er, did I say yes?'

A week after Harry's text and I'm standing in the sun-baked pitlane at Misano on the Adriatic coast of Italy. Audi has booked the circuit exclusively, so the paddock is deserted apart from a pair of immaculate Audi Sport trucks and a lone Michelin tyre lorry, which are parked behind our garage. Outside, surrounded by attentive engineers, sits the no. 2 R18, nicknamed 'Red Sonja' by the team at Le Mans – a

reference to the identifying colour of its mirrors and the strip along its stabilisation fin.

It's an awesome machine. Sinister in black and silver, the weird amalgam of converging curves and conflicting angles lends it the odd, abstract shape of a stealth fighter. Up close, it looks as though it's been through a war. Caked in a layer of carbon brake dust, the body is daubed and smeared with the fingerprints of drivers and technicians, while the right-hand sidepod has been buffed conspicuously clean by the ingress and egress of Marcel Fässler, Benoît Tréluyer and André Lotterer, no. 2's triumphant trio.

On the nose, the silver wrap is pockmarked and peeled back where stones have peppered it at 200mph. There's also the unmistakable burnt swirl of a tyre on the front right-hand wheelarch, the result of a no-prisoners overtake or the unsighted mid-corner meandering of a slower driver. It's a perfect illustration of how fine the line is between victory and disaster at Le Mans.

Before I can drive the R18 I need to be briefed on what I need to do – and perhaps more importantly what not to do – by Leena Gade, race engineer for the no. 2 R18 and the first woman to engineer a car to a Le Mans win. There are a few minor setting changes to the engine mapping and traction control that I need to perform via the steering-wheel switches once the low-speed photography laps have been completed, but otherwise it's straightforward.

It's still all pretty intimidating, though, not least



because I've never driven anything like an LMP1 car before. To add to the vertiginous learning curve, the closest I've come to Misano is watching MotoGP in my living room. It's a pretty nondescript circuit, most notable for the fact its owners decided to reverse the direction of travel a few years back.

Allan McNish, who was driving the no. 3 R18 at the time of its accident, is also here to try the winning car, and to give me a few tips, so we jump in an A3 TDI for a few sighting laps. Thanks to the reverse direction, all the track's corners are deceptive, tightening up the further you drive into them. It doesn't feel at all natural and is tricky to learn, but there's a good mix of turns and a decent straight, which leads into a very fast kink that then feeds into another pair of curves and a compressed braking area into a 180-degree hairpin. McNish is his usual impish self, declaring with a grin 'the first kink's easy flat, the second too, and probably the third as well if I was really on it. Probably best you build up to it though, mate...' I think he's lying about the third curve. If he's

not, I ought to hang up my crash helmet now.

I've got just seven laps to sample the R18: a pair of tracking laps for photography, then a five-lap run comprising an out-lap, three fliers and an in-lap. These track tests are only ever designed to give a flavour of what the car's like, but inevitably they're fraught with the conflicting emotions of wanting to go for it, but not wanting to throw a precious car at the barriers. That's a heady mix at the best of times, but in a car with more mechanical and aerodynamic grip than a modern Formula 1 car, it's positively explosive. My guts churn with anxiety and adrenalin.

The seating position is reclined with your feet pushed up above the level of your hips, just like in an F1 car. As Martin Brundle would say it's like lying in the bath with your feet on the taps. The steering wheel is close, so your arms are tucked in at your sides. It's not exactly spacious, but you're so well located you feel like a component of the car.

The view out is very restricted. The windscreen is a long way forward with a deep visor strip at the top,

Top: all the buttons and switches are either on the steering wheel or the control panel right beside it; view through the windscreen is limited. Above left: cockpit is a cosy place in which to work. Left: red strip on the no. 2 car's stabilisation fin helped earn it the nickname 'Red Sonja'. Right: car still wears the dirt and scars from Le Mans. Far right: McNish on the pit wall and Meaden in the driving seat





'POWERING THROUGH THE GEARS, THE SENSATION IS ONE OF A CONSTANT, EVER-INCREASING SWELL OF ACCELERATION'

so you're effectively looking through a widescreen letterbox. The front wheelarches rise up seemingly around your ears, perfectly shrouding the front slicks and completely obscuring your view as you turn in to a tight corner. Vision might be compromised, but the cockpit ergonomics are perfect. The essential buttons are all on the steering wheel and clearly labelled, while the other controls are all located on the main switch panel to your left. The labels are large and luminous so they can be easily spotted at night. It's a spine-tingling place to sit.

Gade's voice comes over the intercom. It's time to drive. The 3.7-litre single-turbo 120-degree V6 engine starts with a surprisingly diesely chunter and runs at an elevated idle, which makes feeding the clutch in easier. Regulations restrict the motor to 3bar of boost, but still it delivers over 532bhp and more than 664lb ft of torque. The transmission is a six-speed paddle-shift, so apart from when starting and stopping you don't touch the clutch pedal at all. Once out of the pitlane, Gade reminds me I need to adjust

the traction system to setting 10 (a couple of clicks up from that used by the pro drivers).

With the photography laps soon over, I'm free to tentatively explore the abilities of this spectacular endurance racer. Powering through the gears, the sensation is one of a constant, ever-increasing swell of acceleration hurling you forwards, as you'd expect with so much torque propelling just 900kg including fuel and driver. The delivery is smooth and beautifully linear with minimal lag thanks to Audi's Variable Turbine Geometry (VTG) technology, and even though the engine only revs to 5000rpm it definitely feels like a race unit. The traction control is subtle and brilliantly effective, rounding the rough edges off my corner exits. It takes a real leap of faith to simply plant your right foot and let the electronics do the work though, and it's only on my last few laps that I start to fully trust the technology.

The available grip and stopping power is mind-(and neck) bending. Each lap, I attempt to screw my courage up into a tight little ball to brake deeper and



carry more speed into the corners, but every time my feet refuse to follow orders. Through my nemesis – the fast sequence of ‘easy flat’ kinks – it’s all I can do to go through the first kink with a feeble lift of the throttle. Through the supposedly flat second kink I brake and change down a gear, then do the same through the third. Later I see McNish’s telemetry and indeed he does take the first two flat (reaching a peak speed of 171mph versus my 159), though interestingly not the third. I knew he was telling porkies! Nonetheless it’s humbling stuff, for never have two divergent traces more cruelly illustrated the difference between a legend and a ligger.

What I find more astonishing is the way the drivers can dice and hustle these LMP1 racers like karts. To push a car like this to the limit on a qualifying lap is extraordinary enough, but to race wheel-to-wheel for lap after lap, stint after stint, hour after hour is something I simply can’t get my head around. The

fact that Lotterer beat his team-mate Tréluyer’s pole-setting qualifying time in one of the last stints of the race while battling to stay ahead of the chasing Peugeot tells you all you need to know about the intensity of modern endurance racing, the durability of the R18 and the ability of Lotterer and Co.

All too soon the pit board is hung over the wall with ‘IN’ writ large on it. For a moment I contemplate a cheeky extra lap and mentally rehearse the ‘Sorry, didn’t see the pit board’ excuse for the inevitable moment when Gade bollocks me over the radio. Then I imagine the amount of trouble I’d be in if I binned it on my extra lap and wisely decide to ease out of the throttle and savour my last few moments behind the wheel of a car only a handful of people will ever have the privilege to drive. I’ve only scratched the surface of its capabilities, but still I’ve learned enough to know this exquisitely engineered machine is the most incredible car I’ve ever driven.

Right: R18 no. 2’s drivers Benoît Tréluyer, Marcel Fässler and André Lotterer on the podium; 13.854-second gap to the second-placed Peugeot 908 made this the fourth closest finish in the history of the Le Mans 24 Hours





'IT'S ASTONISHING HOW THE DRIVERS DICE AND HUSTLE THESE LMP1 RACERS LIKE KARTS'

SPECIFICATION

AUDI R18 TDI

Engine V6, 3700cc, turbodiesel

Power 532bhp+ @ n/a rpm

Torque 664lb ft+ @ n/a rpm

Transmission Six-speed sequential gearbox, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential, traction control

Front suspension Double wishbones, pushrod-operated adjustable dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Double wishbones, pushrod-operated adjustable dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated carbon-ceramic discs front and rear

Wheels 14.75 x 18in front, 14.5 x 18in rear

Tyres 360/710-18 front, 370/710-18 rear

Monocoque Carbonfibre composite incorporating aluminium honeycomb core

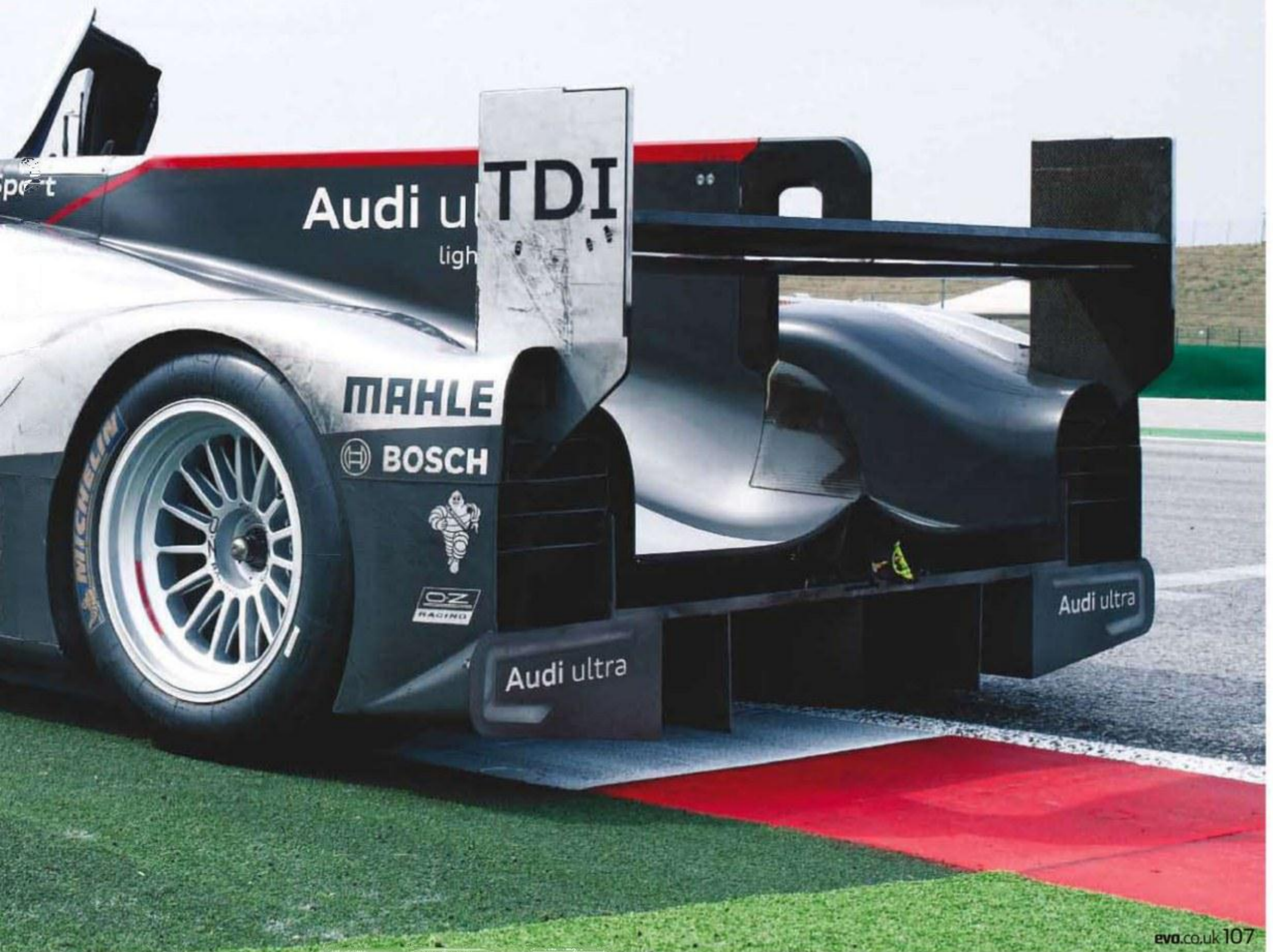
Length/width/height 4.65/2.0/1.03m

Weight 900kg (including fuel and driver)

Power-to-weight 600bhp/ton

0-60mph sub-3.0sec (est)

Top speed 210mph+ (est)

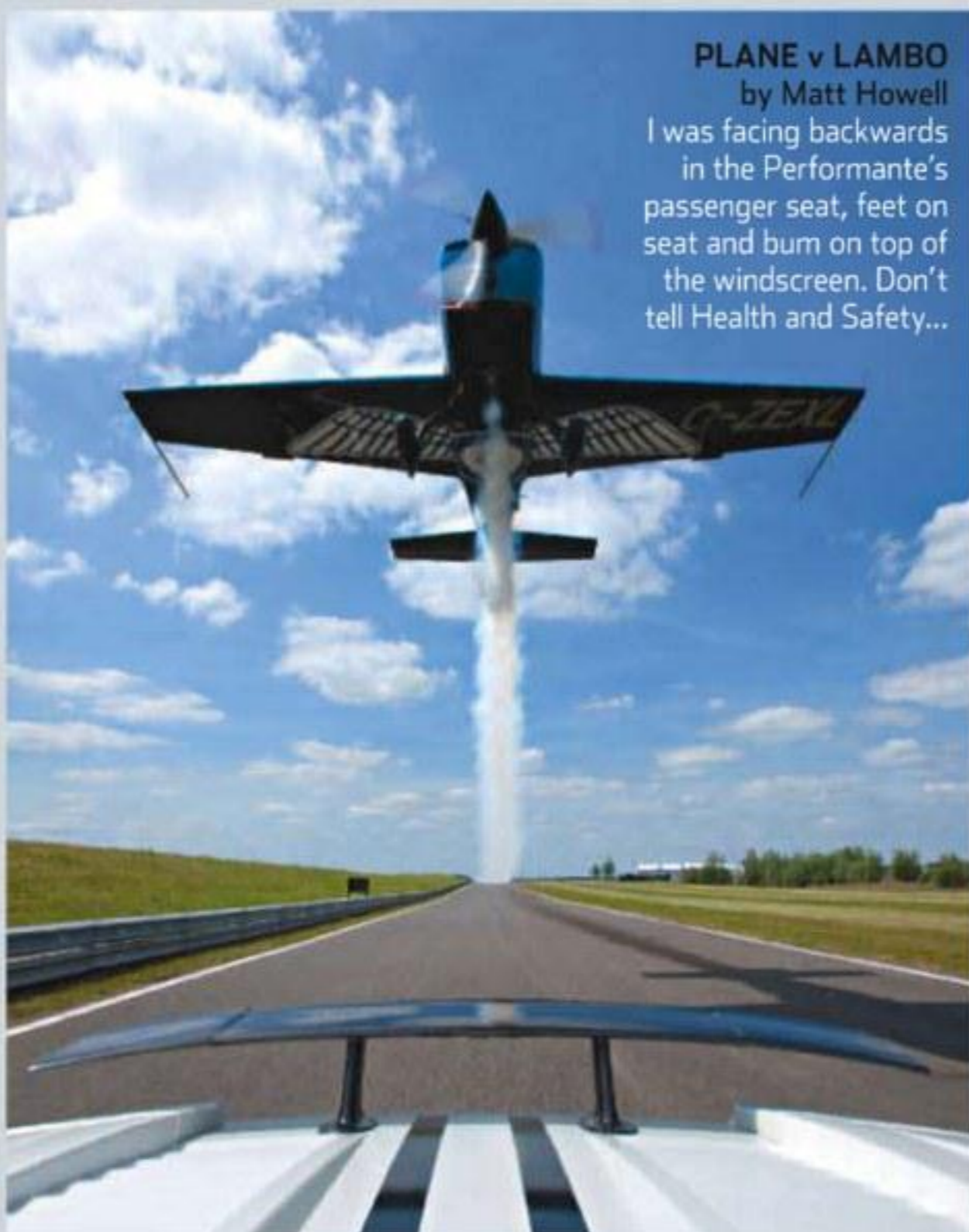


BMW 3.0 CSL v M3 GTS
 by James Lipman
 BMWs are techy cars,
 so I wanted to evoke the
 evolution of the CSL into
 the GTS by making this
 look a bit like a blueprint.



EVO IMAGES OF

*Every year, **evo's** team of photographers capture countless images of fabulous cars*



PLANE v LAMBO
 by Matt Howell
 I was facing backwards
 in the Performante's
 passenger seat, feet on
 seat and bum on top of
 the windscreen. Don't
 tell Health and Safety...



AGERA R
 by David Shepherd
 « We were in
 Norway, and the
 Koenigsegg guys
 said they knew
 a good location.
 Rarely do these
 promises deliver,
 but on this occasion
 they took us to the
 road of our dreams.



JAGUAR C-X16
 by Dean Smith
 « We had just four
 hours in the studio
 with this car – at
 6am on a Sunday.
 Not ideal, but the
 C-X16 was worth it.



CLIO 200
 by Max Earey
 « Hot hatches,
 Welsh mountain
 roads and top
 wheelmen... What
 a recipe! **evo's**
 designers asked for
 'air'; two runs later
 my Nikon caught
 the Clio in full flight.



THE YEAR 2011

in stunning locations. Here they tell us about some of their favourites from 2011

JAGUAR E-TYPE

by Gus Gregory

The light metallic blue picked up enough reflected light from the snow to shoot directly into the sun that was bursting through the pines. It was all down to luck – we were just goofing around.





BMW M5
by Bernhard Limberger
» What better way to show what the 552bhp, rear-drive F10 M5 is all about?

JAGUAR XKR-S
by John Wycherley
» I really like this shot of the XKR-S drifting around the Portimão circuit – it makes me wish I had car-control skills like that.

599 GTO v LFA
by Dave Smith
« To make the best of the moody sky, I took this shot with the clouds rolling in off the mountains near Glen Nevis. The noise from the exhausts echoing back was amazing.

ENZO v IMPREZA
by Matt Howell
» Two-car cornering shots are always risky, but when the lead car is Nick Mason's Enzo the stakes go up no end. Full respect to Dickie Meaden, who was inch-perfect, no messing.



STELVIO PASS

by James Lipman

⤴ My radio shutter release had packed in, so I had to wedge my arse in the boot and ride down the hill with the camera!

ESCORT RS1800

by Matt Howell

⤴ With that front wheel in the air and the length of the dust-trail, you just know that slide was fast and held for an age.

BLOCK FIESTA

by Barry Hathaway

⤴ Chris Harris was a lucky man, getting to drive Ken Block's *Gymkhana* car. He seemed to enjoy it...





F40 v XJ220

by Matt Howell

Every *evo* reader probably had a poster of an F40 back in the '80s. Here I wanted to redress the balance and make the Jaguar the star of this supercar chase.

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MARK HIGGINS' 150MPH TANK-SLAPPER

Sideways at 150mph on a road lined with garden walls. Normal people would curl up into a ball and wait for the impact. Mark Higgins spent seven very long seconds wrestling his out-of-control Impreza back into a straight line before driving it flat-out for another 36 miles round the Isle of Man TT course...



Top: Higgins' Subaru WRX STI just before his 'moment' (above) – see the video at evo.co.uk. He would complete the lap, setting a new four-wheeled record average of 115.3mph

LEXUS BEATS FERRARI

Shock result in the Highlands as the LFA trumped the mighty Ferrari 599 GTO (issue 161).

EVO SETS A WORLD RECORD

Our own Richard Meaden drove a Skoda to 227mph on the Bonneville Salt Flats (issue 162). The *Daily Mail* described him as 'Daredevil test driver Richard "Dickie" Meaden'.



Above: Meaden holds proof of his speed record for a forced-induction 2-litre production saloon

MEADEN AND HARRIS HEAD-TO-HEAD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NÜRBURGRING 24-HOUR RACE

Endurance races usually require a sense of restraint; the general idea is to dial it back a notch and settle into a fast but not frantic groove. That went out the window when by pure fluke Meaden in an Aston Zagato found himself sharing the same section of track as a 911-mounted Chris Harris.

For a whole hour they went at it hammer and tongs, never more than a second or two apart. Both were ultimately beaten by editor-at-large John Barker in an Audi R8, mind...

BARKER'S V8 CAPRI FINALLY SETS A BEDFORD LAP TIME...

...some ten years after the project first began. He says it's still not quite finished, though.



Left: LFA outshone the already impressive 599 GTO in our twin test. Above left: Meaden and Harris running close at the N24. Above right: Barker's V8 Capri laps the West Circuit at last (evo 163)

TURKEY OF THE YEAR 2011



*Power. Beauty. Soul.
Just three of the things
you don't get with an
Aston Martin Cygnet.
Then there's the small
matter of performance.
Mike Duff prepares
the stuffing mix*

Let's get this clear: the Aston Martin Cygnet isn't here because it's a bad car, rather because it's an incredibly bad idea. The Toyota iQ that lies underneath isn't ever likely to get its image stuck to a teenager's bedroom wall, but it would be churlish to deny that it's a clever bit of engineering – fitting three and a half seats into a platform barely longer than that of the Smart ForTwo. The problem is that, barring its questionable bling, the Cygnet doesn't add anything meaningful to the Toyota it's based on. Behind the pseudo-Vantage front grille, and the cabin that several cows have died to trim, the Aston-isation is barely skin-deep.

Precisely nothing has been added to the driving experience. The Cygnet has the same engine as the iQ, the same output, the same thrashy soundtrack and the same leisurely performance. This alleged Aston takes a yawning 12 seconds to get from rest to 60mph. Then there's the not-so-small matter of the Cygnet's pricetag: £31,000 basic, getting on for three times the £12,500 that Toyota will charge you for the

1.3-litre iQ it's based on. It's fair to say it's not hard to see the financial appeal from Aston's point of view.

But when it comes to the Cygnet's other reason for being – that of trimming Aston's corporate CO2 emissions, things get murkier. The EU seems to be realising there's little point in holding sports car makers to the same standards as mainstream manufacturers, and in a recent interview Aston boss Ulrich Bez admitted that Aston 'doesn't need' the Cygnet to make its fleet average go down. Slow early sales (not helped by quoted six-month delivery times) suggest that the Cygnet's target market are similarly failing to see the point.

Aston Martins have always been about style and performance. The Cygnet struggles to deliver on even half of that equation. So roll forward, slowly, our Turkey of the Year 2011.

Aston Martin has transformed itself in recent years and currently produces some of the world's greatest sports cars. And the Cygnet



iQ is a fine piece of packaging. Trouble is, the Cygnet brings nothing new to the table besides some leather, a grafted-on grille and a £30K-plus price tag

**'THIS ALLEGED ASTON
TAKES 12SEC TO GET TO 60'**



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*To receive your free greetings card in time for Christmas, gift orders must be received by the 9th December 2011. This offer closes on the 31st December 2011. All gift subscriptions will start with the January 2012 issue.

OFFER CODE

MINI COUPE v CORSA NÜRBURGRING v
CLIO 200 CUP v ABARTH 695 TRIBUTO





MINIATURE

HEROES

*Three new hot-hatch contenders – Mini JCW Coupe, Vauxhall Corsa VXR Nürburgring and Abarth 695 Tributo Ferrari – take on the reigning champion, Renaultsport's Clio 200 Cup. **Richard Meaden** presides*



'IT'S A FIERCELY CONTESTED NICHE AND ONE THAT PROVIDES A DIVERSE COLLECTION OF CARS'

As perfect driving combinations go, a glorious autumn day, a deserted B-road and a quartet of sparky little hot hatches really takes some beating, especially when the hatches in question are the freshest and hottest of the breed.

Not so many years ago, a hatchback with more than 200bhp would have been regarded with awe, yet nowadays a couple of

hundred ponies really is the entry level for the serious drivers' supermini. It's a fiercely contested niche and one that provides a really diverse and intriguing collection of cars, four of which we've gathered for this test.

Renaultsport has come to define all that's great about hot hatches, and the Clio 200 Cup is a real *evo* favourite. A no-frills spec, no-nonsense dynamics and sensible pricing (£16,930) make it hard to resist. Its naturally aspirated 197bhp 2-litre engine is a real firecracker, but its love of revs and lack of torque does leave it exposed to the threat of some new turbocharged rivals.

Mini and Vauxhall are also hot hatch stalwarts, so the introduction of the quirky Mini Coupe (£23,795 in John Cooper Works spec, as here) and hardcore Corsa VXR Nürburgring (£22,295) have to be taken seriously. With a tad more power (208 and 202bhp respectively) and a whole heap more torque, they have the muscle to put the Clio under serious pressure.

As no *evo* group test would be complete without a wildcard entry, we've also thrown an Abarth 695 Tributo Ferrari into the mix. At the best part of £30,000 it's a crazy car, but with 178bhp from just 1.4

turbocharged litres, plus a single-clutch paddle-shift transmission and enough carbonfibre to make a Pagani owner smile, the hotted-up pocket-sized Fiat is a welcome splash of irreverent colour.

All four cars fight for your attention, but it's the Mini that arouses the greatest curiosity, so that's the key I grab first. The rakish windscreen, bubble roof and abrupt bobtail are undeniably bold, but there's something slightly odd about the overall effect. Personally I can't forget (however hard I try) the Coupe's designer saying the roof was supposed to represent a baseball cap worn backwards. It all seems desperately uncool, the four-wheeled equivalent of your dad dancing.

Like the exterior, the interior is an acquired taste. To my eyes it tries far too hard, but it does feel a cut above the Abarth and Renault for quality. The speedo-cum-satnav screen is ridiculously huge, yet ironically it is actually quite hard to read the speedo. The two-seat cockpit feels rather confined, but the clever domes in the headlining win plenty of headroom for taller drivers. Rear visibility is rotten, though.

The driving position is nice and low so





you feel part of the car, but the steering wheel rim has caught elephantitis from BMW's M Division and feels too fat in your hands. The turbocharged 1.6-litre engine is strong from the outset, pulling hard and smooth to the 6500rpm red line. With 206lb ft from just 1850rpm, the JCW Coupe delivers big-car torque, which gives you stonking overtaking ability and high-gear roll-on acceleration, but in the lower gears it asks too much of the chassis,

Near-£30K Abarth (opposite page, top) faces stiff competition from Clio 200 (far left) and Mini Coupe (below). Interiors, clockwise from above: Abarth, Corsa, Clio, Mini

which wriggles and writhes and squirms with torque-steer.

Point to point, this Mini is a truly quick car with strong brakes and a tight, punchy gearshift, but it takes some hanging on to. The wheel control is crashy and there's a slight disconnect between the response of the front and rear ends, which tends to exacerbate the wayward behaviour under hard acceleration. When you turn the ESP off, the Coupe struggles for traction (it uses

electronics to attempt to mimic the action of a limited-slip differential) and can also exhibit surprising amounts of turn-in and lift-off oversteer. As a result it feels hyperactive at best, ragged at worst, and on a bumpy, wiggly B-road it all conspires to make the car feel borderline unstable. Is the JCW engine and suspension a step too far? On this evidence, yes.

From the Marmite styling of the Mini to the Hollywood looks of the Corsa VXR.



MINI COUPE v CORSA NÜRBURGRING
v CLIO 200 CUP v ABARTH 695

Right: Nürburgring Corsa has new wheels, a limited-slip diff, lower suspension, a freer-flowing exhaust and an extra 13bhp over the regular VXR. Far right: Mini chases Abarth



Even in Kermit Puree Green it still looks fantastic, with chiselled features and a road-skimming stance. The Nürburgring upgrades are comprehensive and joined up. Bespoke Bilstein springs and dampers, a 20mm front and 15mm rear reduction in ride height, better Brembo brakes, lighter alloy wheels and a multi-plate mechanical limited-slip differential have been fitted to get the best from the revised 1.6-litre engine, which has turbo, exhaust and management modifications to boost power and torque outputs to 202bhp and 206lb ft respectively.

The leather upholstery and Nürburgring decals enhance the Corsa with varying levels of success. Some elements are great, some are rather tacky, which aptly is a bit like the Nürburgring itself. Judged as

a whole, though, there's no doubt it's a proper petrolhead's upgrade and one that justifies the chunky £3395 premium over the regular VXR.

After the hyperactive Mini, the Corsa at first feels rather inert. The steering is lighter and there's less fight through the wheel, while the suspension, although firm, has greater control and consistency. The gearshift, or to be more specific the large, oddly shaped knob itself, is quite awkward, but you learn to work with it.

There's a phase where you feel slightly underwhelmed by the VXR, but gradually it reveals more character and ability, so you warm to it and dig a bit deeper. Despite posting an identical peak torque figure, the VXR Nürburgring doesn't feel quite as fiercely accelerative as the

JCW Mini, but this is most likely down to delivery rather than a genuine performance gap. The Vauxhall doesn't sound as fruity as the Mini either, which is perhaps more disappointing.

No matter, for driven hard along the same roads, the Corsa exhibits a far greater level of composure and much better traction. You can really sense the limited-slip diff working, so once you've got the nose turned in and get back on the power you can feel the inside front wheel pulling the nose round and tightening your line. It requires an adjustment to your driving style, but once the penny drops you have great faith in the Corsa's cornering ability.

If there's one thing you wish the VXR had it's a bit of throttle adjustability. Vauxhall (or rather Opel, and its OPC performance division) traditionally sets up its hot hatches to be supremely stable, and the Corsa Nürburgring is true to type, with a resolutely nose-led stance. It's nicely grippy and 100 per cent trustworthy, but when you really push it (with ESP off) it leans too hard on the outside front wheel and refuses to be coaxed, cajoled or provoked with a lift of the throttle on turn-in. This is frustrating, not least because you sense it's a cultural thing rather than a lack of understanding from the OPC engineers.

If they want a lesson in livewire dynamics they need look no further than the Clio 200 Cup. We've written so many eulogies about

'DRIVEN HARD ALONG THE SAME ROAD, THE VXR EXHIBITS A GREATER



Above: Mini Coupé's looks divide opinion. Right: gearbox is a six-speed manual. Below: turbocharged 1.6-litre engine has 208bhp and 206lb ft of torque. Left: leather sports seats are standard equipment



Above: Tributo's Ferrari-red paint (with Scuderia stripes) looks fab. Right: gearbox is an automated single-clutch job. Below: 178bhp, 170lb ft turbocharged 1.4. Left: chairs have carbonfibre shells





LEVEL OF COMPOSURE AND MUCH BETTER TRACTION THAN THE MINI'



Above: lowered Nürburgring Corsa hugs the ground. Right: gearknob for six-speed manual 'box is an odd shape. Below: turbo 1.6 has 202bhp and 206lb ft. Left: leather seats have Ring logos



Above: Cup chassis Clio sits lower than regular 200. Right: manual six-speed gearshift. Below: 197bhp, 159lb ft naturally aspirated 2-litre needs to be revved. Left: cloth Recaros functional but brilliant



MINI COUPE v CORSA NÜRBURGRING
v CLIO 200 CUP v ABARTH 695

this car, but it deserves every column inch of praise, for no hot hatch makes the most of what it has more effectively and, crucially, more entertainingly than this Renaultsport Clio.

That's not to say it's perfect, for having jumped into it after the Corsa your immediate thought is, where's the power gone? The answer is about 1500rpm further round the tacho. Yes, the Clio needs revs like you and I need oxygen. The more the better, in fact, for you need 7100 of them to find all 197bhp (200PS), and 5400 of them to extract the naturally aspirated 2-litre engine's relatively modest torque peak of 159lb ft.

Consequently you need to forget the high-gear roll-on driving style that's perfectly adequate to go very, very fast in the Mini or Corsa and instead adopt a Hertz rental drive-it-like-you-stole-it approach, at which point the Clio comes alive. As *evo*'s resident sage Harry Metcalfe points out, this relies on you having the opportunity to do so, which means a clear road, but when the gods conspire to deliver empty tarmac, the Renault is in a different league.

Everything is so communicative, from the great brakes and whip-crack gearchange to the perfectly telegraphed grip from each corner of the car, that you instantly feel as though you've been driving the 200 Cup all your life. Seriously, it's your best friend on four wheels: predictable, exploitable, encouraging, enthusiastic, dependable and always forgiving. In fact I'd go so far as to say no other front-drive car on sale has its poise and minutely adjustable balance.

It's a pretty basic package in terms of creature comforts, but as the cheapest car here by over £5K you can afford some

options. The cloth Recaros are perfectly functional and set the appropriate tone, just as cloth Recaros do in a 997 GT3 RS, but still the materials and general ambience fall short of the Mini and Corsa. If you value soft-touch plastics this might deter you from the Clio, but it's a small price to pay for such dynamic brilliance.

You can't help but smile at the Abarth 695. It's an absurd amount of money – nearly £6K more than the Mini and a whopping £12,670 more than the Clio – but there's something rather special about the leather, funky wheels, quad exhaust pipes, enamel badges and carbonfibre. It really does do a pretty convincing job of being a baby Ferrari, especially when you spot the paddle-shift transmission and drilled brake discs front and rear.

Some of the cosmetic package is less than convincing, though. The plastics feel and look very cheap indeed, as do the switches for the ventilation system. I suppose you can't completely disguise the 695's origins, but a bit of Alcantara would have gone a long way to cover the worst bits of trim.

Twist the key and the Tributo does all it can to win you over again. Those four exhaust pipes emit a proper turbocharged gurgle, which suggests big boost and plenty of fun. You sit quite high and over the steering wheel, but with only two pedals the driving position is less of an issue than in the manual 500 Esseesse. You engage drive by pressing a button with '1' on it. There's then a choice of auto or manual modes. Sounds a bit of a faff, but the switches are intuitive so you soon become used to it. Low-speed manoeuvring, however, can be a little jerky.

The most important button is the one marked 'Sport', for it brings the throttle response and transmission to life. There's





*'JUMPING INTO THE CLIO AFTER THE CORSA,
YOUR IMMEDIATE THOUGHT IS, WHERE'S
THE POWER GONE? THE ANSWER IS ABOUT
1500RPM FURTHER ROUND THE TACHO'*

MINI COUPE v CORSA NÜRBURGRING v
CLIO 200 CUP v ABARTH 695 TRIBUTO

SPECIFICATION

ABARTH 695 TRIBUTO FERRARI

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1368cc, turbo **CO2** 155g/km
Power 178bhp @ 5750rpm **Torque** 170lb ft @
3300rpm **Transmission** Five-speed manual, front-
wheel drive **Brakes** 284mm ventilated and drilled
discs front, 240mm cross-drilled solid discs rear
Wheels 7 x 17in front and rear **Tyres** 205/40 ZR17
front and rear **Weight (kerb)** 1145kg **Power-to-
weight** 158bhp/ton **0-62mph** 6.9sec (claimed) **Top
speed** 140mph (claimed) **Basic price** £29,600

evo RATING ★★★★★



SPECIFICATION

RENAULTSPORT CLIO 200 CUP

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc **CO2** 190g/km
Power 197bhp @ 7100rpm **Torque** 159lb ft @
5400rpm **Transmission** Six-speed manual gearbox,
front-wheel drive **Brakes** 312mm ventilated discs
front, 300mm solid discs rear **Wheels** 7.5 x 17in
front and rear **Tyres** 215/45 ZR17 front and rear
Weight (kerb) 1204kg **Power-to-weight** 166bhp/
ton **0-62mph** 6.9sec (claimed) **Top speed** 141mph
(claimed) **Basic price** £16,930

evo RATING ★★★★★

plenty of urgency to the 695's performance and impressive low- and mid-range muscle that really shoves you through the gears. With just five forward ratios the gearing is tall, but the 1.4-litre turbocharged engine has the torque to make them work. Consequently the 695 is a deceptively rapid little car. Give it free rein and it seems to settle at a natural 90mph, which is great fun, but a rather weak defence should you attract the attention of Her Majesty's Constabulary.

If the pace and delivery are impressive and

engaging in equal measure, the suspension and steering are rather less satisfying. The damping is slightly more rounded than the Esseesse's, but if you've ever driven one you'll know that's not saying much. There's a constant fidgety feeling from all four corners, and if you hit a sequence of bumps the Abarth can buck and pitch uncomfortably. At speed it's enough to deflect you from your chosen course, but if you temper your pace slightly it can be at least partially tamed.

What remains constantly frustrating is the

steering, which is almost totally numb. It's a huge shame because the 695 is a car you really want to chuck around, but the dead steering means you never feel the tyres begin to absorb the lateral load or key into the road. There's also a strange stickiness to the self-centring, and a resistance rather than weight felt through the rim. With better feedback from the steering you could at least partially forgive the rotten damping, but together they're a deal-breaker if you take your driving seriously.

SPECIFICATION

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS COUPE

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo **CO2** 165g/km
Power 208bhp @ 6000rpm **Torque** 206lb ft @ 2000-5100rpm **Transmission** Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive **Brakes** 316mm ventilated discs front, 280mm solid discs rear **Wheels** 7 x 17in front and rear **Tyres** 205/45 ZR17 front and rear **Weight (kerb)** 1165kg **Power-to-weight** 181bhp/ton **0-62mph** 6.4sec (claimed) **Top speed** 149mph (claimed) **Basic price** £23,795

evo RATING ★★★★★



SPECIFICATION

VAUXHALL CORSA VXR NÜRBURGRING

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo **CO2** 178g/km
Power 202bhp @ 5750rpm **Torque** 206lb ft @ 2250-5500rpm **Transmission** Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive **Brakes** 305mm ventilated discs front, 264mm solid discs rear **Wheels** 8 x 18in front and rear **Tyres** 225/35 ZR18 front and rear **Weight (kerb)** 1166kg **Power-to-weight** 176bhp/ton **0-60mph** 6.5sec (claimed) **Top speed** 143mph (claimed) **Basic price** £22,295

evo RATING ★★★★★

'THE CORSA'S SENSE OF CONNECTION ISN'T IN THE CLIO'S LEAGUE, BUT IT HAS GENUINE ABILITY AND STRONG OWNERSHIP APPEAL'

THE VERDICT

After much consideration it feels right to put the Mini and Abarth in equal third place. The former is a very strange car in both concept and looks, to the point where it's hard to see why you'd want to sacrifice two rear seats for no gain in performance and a dubious stab at individuality. The fact it's also a pretty ragged thing to drive hard is extremely disappointing and

at odds with how any fast Mini should feel.

The latter's near-£30K price tag renders it largely irrelevant, which is perhaps just as well given its dynamic limitations. The numb steering and pogo-stick suspension are major flaws that inhibit your pace on country roads. So it says an awful lot for the car's overall charm that it's still a very easy car to love. If you had the money to burn you probably would.

An honourable second – by some margin – goes to the Corsa. With handsome styling, impressive

build quality and gutsy performance, it's a very desirable package. Its sense of connection and agility isn't in the Clio's league, but it has genuine ability and strong ownership appeal.

So it's a win for the Clio Cup. There's no denying it needs effort to make it sing, but as a car to fire down a great stretch of A- or B-road it's about as good as front-wheel drive gets.

» Huge thanks to Rockingham Cars (rockinghamcars.co.uk) for supplying the 695. Track test over the page...

ON TRACK

Hot hatches are always fun to lap at the Bedford Autodrome. Being small, light and agile means you can really attack the braking areas and chicanes, while the mix of slow-, medium- and high-speed corners is a real test of a front-wheel-drive car's traction and balance.

Unfortunately we aren't able to lap the Abarth as it's on loan from a dealer rather than being a manufacturer press car like the other three. That's fair enough. Still, it's a shame, as the little Fiat was at its best on smooth roads so it would be fun to see what it's capable of on track.

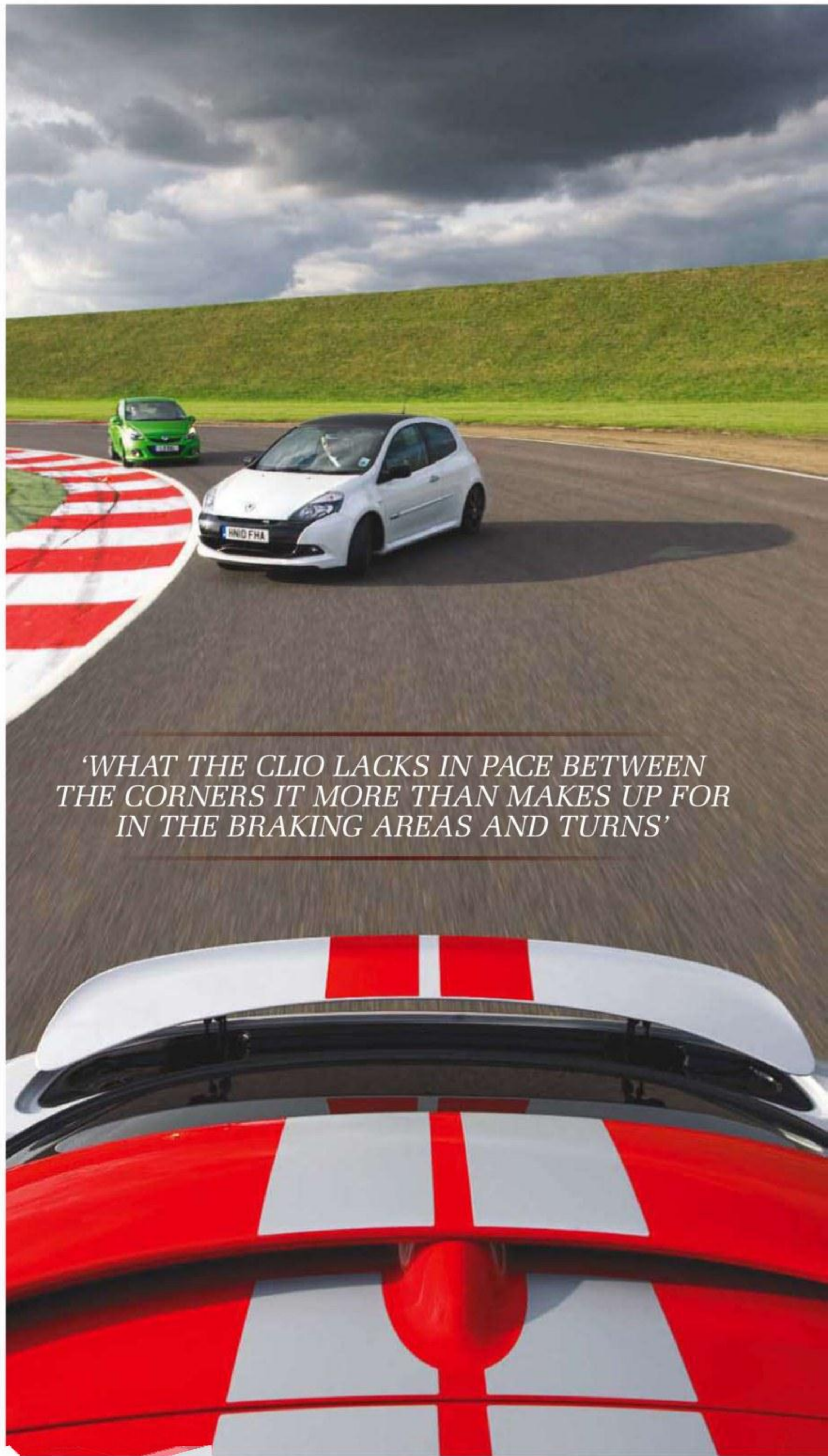
Of the three cars we can lap, we decide to start with the Mini Coupe. We always lap with the traction and stability systems disabled (unless you can't deactivate them, obviously) to get a true picture of the chassis, and almost immediately the Mini's on-road traction issues rear their ugly heads again on track. The JCW simply can't put all its power down out of the tight second-gear hairpin, forcing concerted feathering of the throttle to give the front tyres a chance to regain their purchase. It's the same story through the third-gear elements of the tricky Palmer Curves, and only once through the final, fourth-gear right-hander does the Mini find its feet.

Interestingly the wayward rear end feels more controlled than on the road, but this is because the track allows you to work the front-end hard enough for it to start sliding and this gives the tail a chance to keep up. There's no arguing with the straight-line pace, but timed laps are a scrabble and not especially fun.

The Corsa is a much more enjoyable car. Tidier, more precise and with exceptional traction courtesy of its proper mechanical limited-slip diff, you can get on the power early and maintain full throttle where the Mini ties itself in a knot. The Brembo brakes are more than man enough for flat-out lapping (as are the Mini's stoppers). Pace-wise the Corsa's 1.6-litre turbo doesn't feel like it has quite the same fizz as the Mini's motor, despite very similar on-paper stats, but this could be because the chassis copes with the outputs better.

If we could ask for anything, it would be a less nose-led balance, as this would give you more options on the way into the quicker corners. There's not much in it in lap times – the VXR is 0.3sec faster – but it's a much nicer experience.

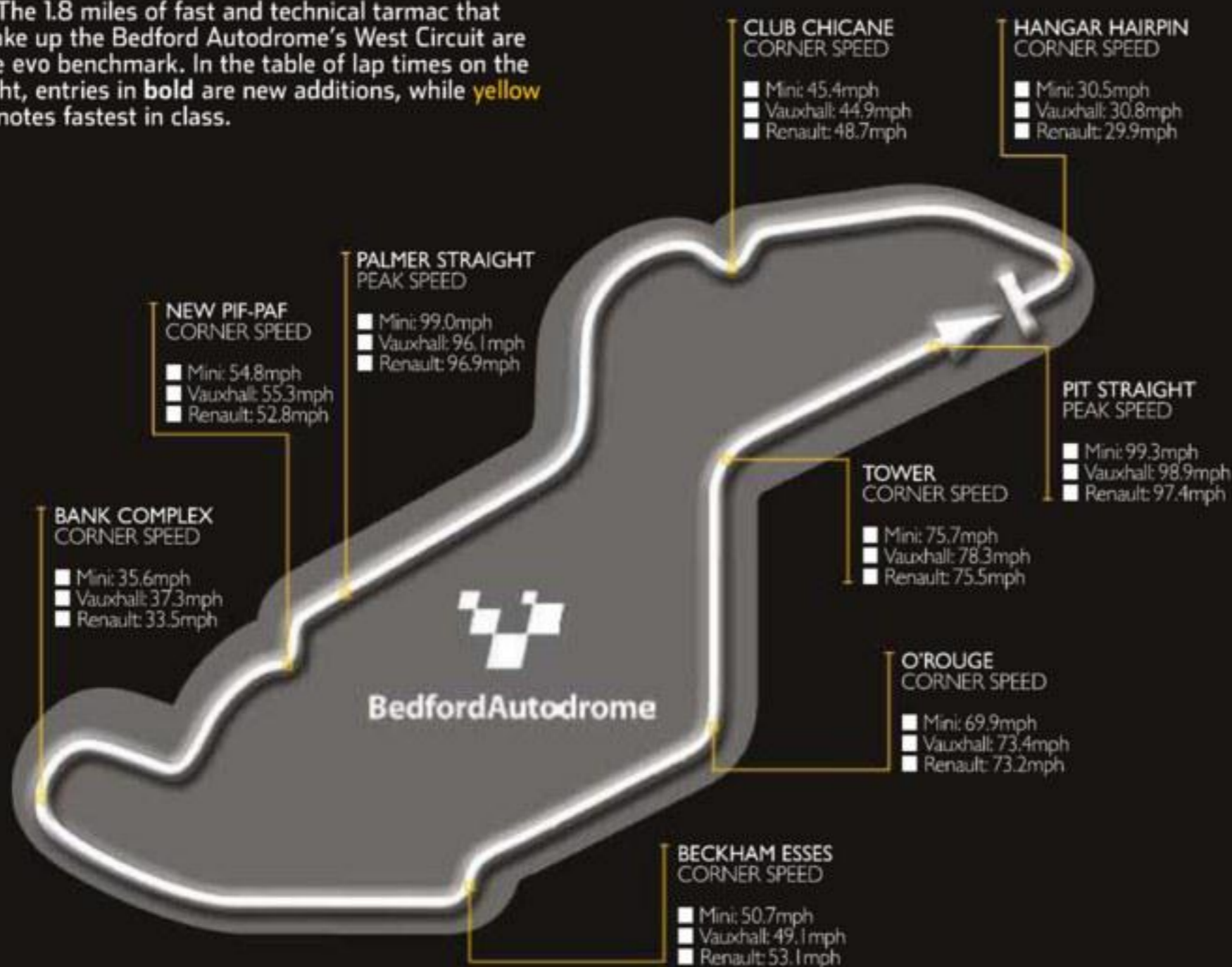
As you'd expect, the Clio really feels fabulous on track. What it lacks in pace between the corners – and it does lack pace compared with the turbo cars, which



'WHAT THE CLIO LACKS IN PACE BETWEEN THE CORNERS IT MORE THAN MAKES UP FOR IN THE BRAKING AREAS AND TURNS'

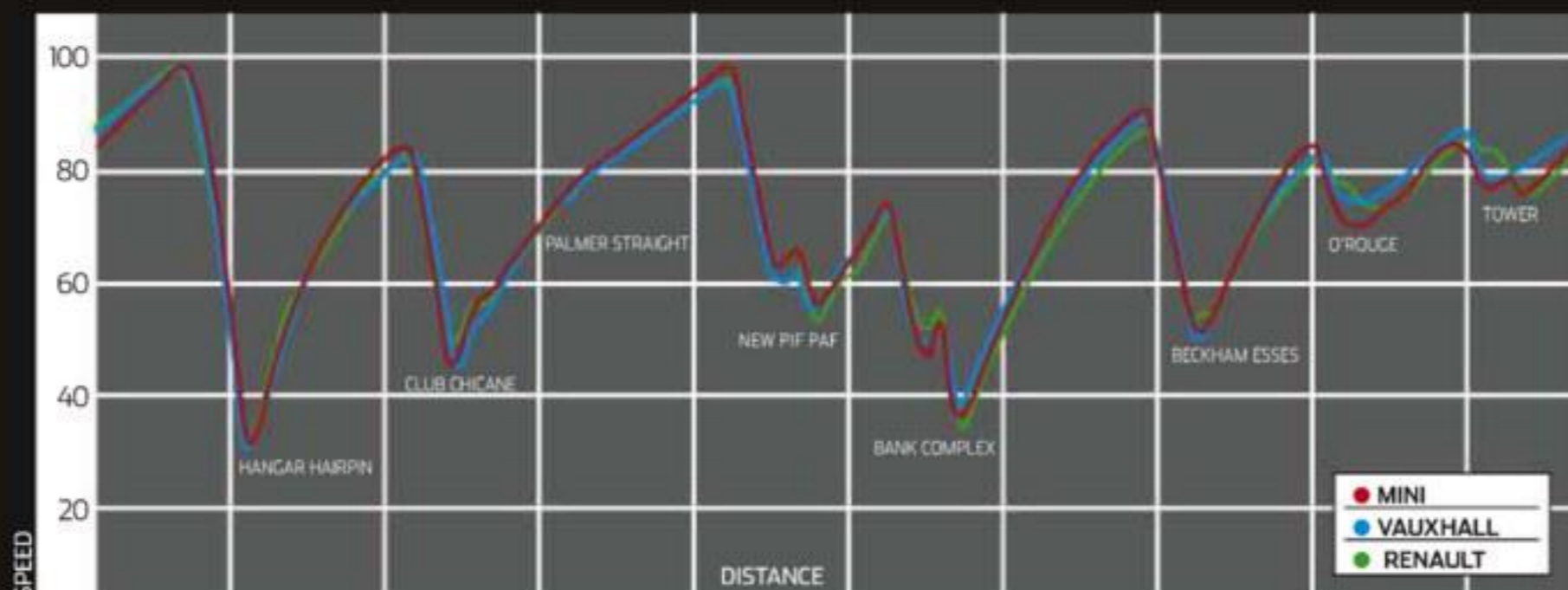
THE WEST CIRCUIT

» The 1.8 miles of fast and technical tarmac that make up the Bedford Autodrome's West Circuit are the evo benchmark. In the table of lap times on the right, entries in **bold** are new additions, while **yellow** denotes fastest in class.



WHICH WAS FASTEST?

VAUXHALL 1.30.4 (peak speed 98.9mph) **MINI 1.30.7** (99.3mph) **RENAULT 1.31.2** (97.4mph)



» Clio (green trace) is best in medium-speed turns like Club Chicane and Beckham. Turbocharged Mini (red) sets the highest peak speeds, with the Corsa (blue) close behind. The VXR's tidier approach results in the fastest lap

MINI COUPE v CORSA NÜRBURGRING v CLIO 200 CUP v ABARTH 695 TRIBUTO

THE LEADERBOARD	LAP TIME	PEAK
Renault Sport Clio (fastest car)	1:13.6	127.8
Caparo T1 (fastest supercar)	1:14.8	130.9
Ferrari 458 Italia	1:15.5	120.0
Gumpert Apollo S	1:19.4	120.4
Caterham Levante V8	1:19.6	118.6
Porsche 997 GT2 RS	1:19.9	122.3
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	1:20.1	113.2
Caterham Superlight R500	1:20.2	115.7
McLaren MP4-12C	1:20.6	120.9
Noble M600	1:20.8	121.8
Porsche 997 GT3 RS 4.0 (fastest coupe)	1:21.0	119.2
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	1:21.3	121.1
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	1:21.5	113.6
KTM X-Bow (300bhp)	1:21.5	112.7
Ferrari A30 Scuderia	1:21.7	112.2
Porsche 997.2 GT3 RS (3.8)	1:21.9	116.8
Lamborghini Gallardo LP580-4	1:22.5	119.1
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	1:22.9	116.7
Porsche Carrera GT	1:23.3	115.2
Porsche 997.2 GT3	1:23.3	114.5
Porsche 997 Turbo S	1:23.5	117.5
Porsche 997 GT2	1:23.5	115.1
Nissan GT-R	1:23.6	113.1
Lotus 340R (190bhp)	1:24.2	110.0
Caterham Superlight R300	1:26.3	101.5
Maserati Gran Turismo MC Stradale	1:24.5	115.1
Mercedes SL5 AMG	1:26.6	115.7
KTM X-Bow	1:25.0	105.0
BMW E92 M3 Coupe	1:26.1	109.1
Mercedes SL65 AMG Black	1:25.2	108.6
Audi R8	1:26.4	108.8
Porsche Cayman R	1:25.5	106.8
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	1:26.8	101.9
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400 (fastest saloon)	1:25.9	107.5
BMW 1-series M Coupe	1:26.6	106.4
Mitsubishi Evo X RS 360	1:26.1	106.6
Audi TT RS	1:26.3	107.2
Aston Martin DBS	1:26.4	109.5
Audi R8	1:26.5	112.0
Porsche Panamera Turbo	1:26.5	109.2
Jaguar XJ220	1:26.7	111.7
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (fastest 4x4)	1:26.9	107.4
Lotus Evija	1:27.1	104.2
Nissan 370Z	1:27.1	104.0
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	1:27.7	111.0
Lotus Elise SC	1:27.7	104.6
Vauxhall VX8R Bathurst S	1:27.8	106.1
BMW E46 M3 CSL	1:27.8	105.4
Renaultsport Megane R26 R (fastest hot hatch)	1:27.8	103.3
Audi RS6 Avant (fastest estate)	1:27.9	111.0
Jaguar XFR	1:27.9	108.1
Honda Civic Type-R Mugen	1:28.0	104.4
Lexus IS F	1:28.1	108.2
Porsche Boxster S	1:28.1	105.4
Subaru WRX STI	1:28.3	101.6
Jaguar XJ Supersport	1:28.4	106.6
SEAT Leon Cupra R	1:28.7	102.4
Ford Mustang Boss 302	1:29.0	108.4
Bentley Continental Supersports	1:29.2	105.8
Lotus Elise Club Racer	1:29.2	95.5
Renaultsport Megane 250 Cup	1:29.9	101.4
Vauxhall Corsa VXR Nürburgring	1:30.4	98.9
Mini John Cooper Works Coupe	1:30.7	99.3
Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup	1:31.2	97.4

both have a 47lb ft torque advantage – it more than makes up for in the braking areas and the turns themselves. It literally dances through the tighter corners, hopping slightly on the exit as you keep your right foot pinned. In the faster turns it's beautifully poised and maintains a neutral to oversteer stance depending on your entry style.

Through the fast final corner you just need a slight lift – no braking! – to get the tail to turn the nose in, then you're back hard on the power and onto the straight with zero wasted momentum and a big smile on your face. The lap time of 1.31.2 is half a second behind the Mini, but trackdays aren't about lap times, and given the choice between the Mini and Corsa's grunt or the Clio's inspirational handling, I'd take the Renault every time.

Mini's wayward rear end can be exploited on the wide expanses of a track, helping to get the nose turned in. Left: Clio will wag its tail too with a lift on corner entry



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END OF TERM MERCEDES SLS AMG

Date acquired April 2011 Duration of test 5 months Total test mileage 9992
Overall mpg 19.3 Costs £0 Purchase price £180,220
Trade-in value £120,000 Depreciation £60,220

It's a measure of how seamlessly the SLS adapts to your way of life that I had no idea it was fast approaching the 10,000-mile mark. It hadn't needed servicing and the rear tyres were the same ones it rolled on when it arrived in late April showing fewer than 30 miles.

During those miles, the SLS proved many things to me, and to the dozens of people who came into contact with it. It also emphasised a point of view I have long



supported, namely that supercars developed and built by large car companies are among the most impressive mechanical objects because they have astounding performance and presence, but also pass the same rigorous reliability tests, in the case of this car, as a C200 CDI.

Running it in was a complete pain and wasted 1000 miles of potential playtime, but once the 6.2-litre V8 was loose enough to be thrashed, it became very clear that the SLS has enough performance to make any journey an exercise in restraint.

It's a remarkable motor too, running the same block as the normally aspirated 6.2s in lesser AMGs, but with enough internal and ancillary differences to use a different internal model code - M159 instead of M156. Power is 563bhp, torque is 479lb ft and the kerb weight is 1620kg. evo figured one doing 0-100mph in 8.4sec; with 10,000 miles showing, this one felt quicker than that.

The category of the sporting GT is the 400 metres of the automotive world in that

it requires excellence in two fields that are by their very nature contradictory: refinement and outright speed. Many companies have tried - and failed - to execute a car that can scratch with a Porsche 911 but then coast across a continent without shaking its occupants to pieces. There isn't another car on sale that can match the SLS as a one-stop solution to going fast, being seen and covering distances.

I ended up doing four big European drives in KN11 VZR. Each was an adventure made more absorbing because of the Benz's unique character - within hours it could lap the Nürburgring with a group of tricked-out GT3s then cruise quietly enough (just) for me to use the Bluetooth phone. In truth, tyre noise was pretty intrusive above 90mph, and fuel consumption dropped into the teens if you sustained big speeds; a normal cruise would see 22mpg. But any supercar that can retain a driver's attention and admiration at uninteresting speeds is a special car.

The specification of this car certainly helped broaden the SLS's talents as far as possible. It came with the standard sports seats - which were just plain excellent



Above: standard seats were comfortable and supportive. Above right: gullwing doors proved surprisingly practical. Top: hefty door hinges. Left: that mighty 563bhp 6.2-litre V8

'IT'S A ONE-STOP SOLUTION FOR GOING FAST, BEING SEEN AND COVERING DISTANCES'



LONG-TERM TESTS

This month: Mercedes SLS AMG Ford Escort RS2000 Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 Jaguar XJ Supersport Nissan 370Z Roadster Maserati GranTurismo S Jaguar XJR Renault Clio Williams Lamborghini LP640 Ferrari 458 Italia VW Polo GTI Mini Countryman SEAT Leon Cupra R BMW 1M Coupe VW California Infiniti EX30d Audi RS5 Fiat 500 TwinAir Ford Capri Aston Martin Rapide



because the side bolsters were so large – and the basic steel brakes. Back-to-back tests have shown the optional ceramics resist fade better, but also leave the pedal grabby at low speed. Riding on standard suspension, it was always at the harsher end of what was acceptable for everyday use, but not once did I find myself cursing the car for being too firm, even if it would run out of wheel-travel earlier than expected.

The SLS generates immense mechanical grip through its layout, not through special sticky tyres and other disruptive influences. I think that's why it does so many things so well – the front-mid-engined configuration

works with a dry-sumped motor that sits impossibly low beneath that flat bonnet to make the car agile and, crucially, operate without noticeable understeer. I used the standard Continental SportContacts throughout my time with the car and they would handle two fast laps of the Ring before gradually overheating. The brakes were the same: that's immense from standard parts on a 1620kg car.

If passengers were in rapture over the speed, grip and noise of the SLS, those who had ridden in a Ferrari 458 couldn't believe they shared a gearbox. In auto mode, the Mercedes was excellent, to the point that I



evoFast Fleet



Interior wasn't as flash as many a supercar's but it was a great place to cover miles nonetheless

always left it in the slowest of the three shift modes, but in manual there was such a long delay after pulling for an upshift that if you waited for the shift-lights to turn red before clicking the paddle, the car would slam into its limiter. It's just a matter of calibration, but apparently Mercedes thinks it suits the SLS. Having lived with the car for 10K miles, I think they are completely wrong.

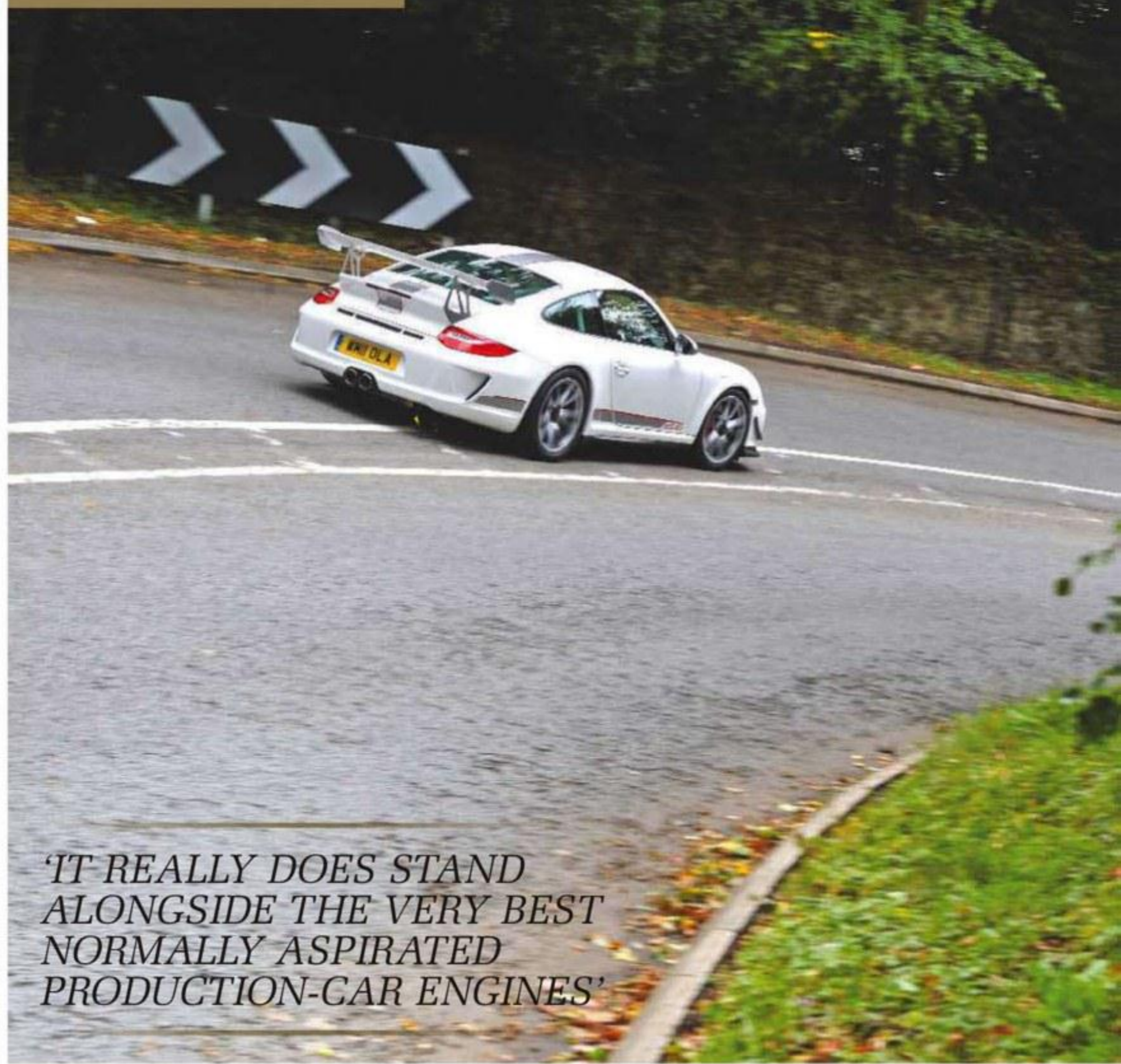
There were other frustrations of course. Having such a long bonnet made pulling out of blind junctions a hazardous exercise, and the position of the A-pillar and driver's wing-mirror created one of the most difficult blind-spots I've ever experienced.

Two golf bags would fit in the boot, as would a decent amount of clobber and my crash helmet – just not all at the same time. The cabin was definitely lacking in spaces to leave stuff and the only real downside I could find for the gullwing doors was the lack of door bins. Otherwise they were a brilliant combination of theatre and practicality. The SLS is a very wide car, and on dozens of occasions I could only park where I did because of the fancy hinge-point. Supercars should always offer something that never fails to make adults and children smile: the SLS's doors do just that.

And now to the thorny issue of depreciation. The market is scared of this car, and the prices of used examples suggest that the SLS might have been a touch overpriced when new. Cars laced with carbon and ceramic brakes have left showrooms north of £200K, but this one was a tiddler at £180,220. I know, it's a vast sum of money. A realistic trade bid is probably £120K right now, so you can do the maths on those heavenly 10,000 miles. Yep, they've been expensive. The flip-side is it makes the SLS one of the used bargains of the moment. For the same money as a 997 Turbo you could have the best sporting GT currently being made. I will miss its V8 rumbles and crackles more than I care to mention. **Chris Harris**

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS 4.0

Date acquired August 2011 Total mileage 1151
Mileage this month 581 Costs this month £0
mpg this month 18.1



'IT REALLY DOES STAND ALONGSIDE THE VERY BEST NORMALLY ASPIRATED PRODUCTION-CAR ENGINES'

FORD ESCORT RS2000

Date acquired August 2011 Total mileage n/a
Mileage this month 125 (est)
Costs this month £0 mpg this month n/a

One of the things that I love about my Escort is starting it up. You need to have a fundamental assumption that pilots are quite cool (an upbringing on Biggles books ensures I do) because the closest thing I can compare it to is the pre-flight procedure in an aeroplane. Headset ('cans' if you prefer) on, turn the big electrical cut-out switch a quarter-turn clockwise, and pull the two organ stops out to stir the whirring of the fuel pumps in the boot.

Then, but only then, do you go for the key in the ignition barrel. Twist it all the way round whilst giving it a bit of throttle and hopefully you should hear and feel the 2.1-litre Pinto engine come loudly to life after a couple of seconds.

Keep blipping the throttle while reaching over with your left hand to flick up the toggle switch for the fan, and if it's dark flick a couple more toggles to illuminate the Cibie lamps as well. The more authority you can do all this with, the more *Top Gun* you feel. And, of course, when you've finished driving you get the satisfaction of quickly twist, twist, push, push, flick, flick, flicking it all off again. **Henry Catchpole**



Above: Escort starts with a key – once you've flicked and pushed all the other switches and buttons needed to bring the car to life (right)

Harris has been enjoying his 4.0 at every possible opportunity – there just haven't been enough of them. Faulty dampers remain unfixed



I really am not getting the time to drive this car at the moment, to the extent that I still haven't had the intermittent fault with the PASM dampers sorted by my dealer.

Time with this car is so precious while the weather is still good that I want it available the minute I have the chance to drive it.

As for the motor, well I've just started using more of its potential, and as you might have guessed, it really does stand alongside the very best normally aspirated production-car engines ever seen. What I find most surprising is the way it pulls over the final 2000rpm – larger capacity tends to bring bigger gains at low revs, but this 4.0 unit just seems to go slightly feral beyond 7000rpm.

The front-axle lift system continues to be a life-saver, although I sometimes leave it raised and end up cruising through villages *à la* RS off-roader. The gearshift has

loosened well – I'm glad I've had the chance to do the running-in myself, because the shift/clutch action is much smoother than many of the press cars I've driven.

Adding solid links to the lower rear suspension arms on the 4.0 has certainly made the RS even more responsive, but it does bring an increased propensity to follow truck grooves and cambers. Grip the wheel and it's not a problem. On damp roads the lightly treaded Michelins are fine, but I have enough knowledge of their performance in standing water to have avoided driving this car in those conditions.

I've still got the full sticker-set in place – it's fairly obscene, but you know what, I love this car and feel that removing its identity would somehow be an admission of shame on my part. With the new '991' 911 now unveiled, this car feels more and more like the final celebration of a type of sports car soon to be extinct.

Chris Harris



'STARTING THE ESCORT IS CLOSE TO A PRE-FLIGHT PROCEDURE IN AN AEROPLANE'



Above: until Catchpole finds a co-driver, headphones just muffle the noise from the stripped interior

evoFast Fleet



'THE CURRENT XJ DOESN'T JUST SURGE TO HIGHER SPEEDS LIKE THE OLD XJR. IT'S ACTUALLY BLOODY QUICK'

JAGUAR XJR

Date acquired July 2010 Total mileage 37,889
Mileage this month 760
Costs this month £0 mpg this month 19.8

One of my favourite things about the X308-gen XJR is that it happily trundles about at normal speeds but can unleash a gentlemanly swell of supercharged grunt when required. So it was interesting to get into Peter Tomalin's current-shape XJ Supersport, also equipped with mechanical forced induction, and discover that it doesn't simply surge to higher speeds on demand. It's actually bloody quick.

No real surprise there, I suppose, with the old 4-litre V8 being comprehensively

outgunned by the latest 5-litre: 370bhp plays 503. Yet the overall manner in which the SS conducts its business isn't so different. It's a softly spoken limo that doesn't let its performance abilities overwhelm the day-to-day business of being a quiet, comfortable, relaxing way to get around.

Like my 1999 XJ, the new model has a slightly firmer ride than expected but it's still more than acceptable and the trade-off is that it can be chucked around with more abandon than you might imagine.

The cosy, enveloping atmosphere of the interior is familiar too, even if the actual design is far more modern. There are of course many differences between these cars, two generations apart as they are. The newer car actually has lighter steering,



Top: two generations of fast Jaguar: 1999 XJR meets 2011 XJ Supersport. Below left: supercharged V8s, 5.0 litres in the SS, 4.0 in the XJR



though it's also quicker and more accurate, if not notably more full of feedback.

The new car also manages to belie its size and weight by being remarkably wieldy on country roads whereas my car always feels about the size that it is, which is fortunately pretty narrow by modern standards. Interestingly, despite being made of aluminium rather than steel, the new car weighs 117kg more, a corollary of being rather bigger in every direction.

Still, it's gratifying to discover that, despite this expansion, the latest XJ feels as pleasantly Jaguarish as the old one and if supercharged versions are one day available for the sort of depreciation-tastic bargain price I paid for my old XJR, I'd have one like a shot.

Richard Porter





JAGUAR XJ SUPERSPORT

Date acquired February 2011 **Total mileage** 16,101
Mileage this month 1217
Costs this month £0 **mpg this month** 21.7

Porter looked just a little anxious as he handed me the dainty keyfob for his XJR. I could understand his slight reticence. The late-1990s XJR is the sort of car that engenders a protective streak – the last of the ‘classic’ Jags, clearly descended from the first XJ6, and Richard’s has clearly been loved all its life. I promised him I would take good care of it. I then handed him the altogether chunkier, weightier and more ostentatious ‘smart key’ for the Supersport. Like so much about the SS, it’s a bold statement and not to everyone’s taste.



Below: Porter and Tomalin swap notes after swapping seats. Below right: current XJ cabin is a bold departure from cosy, woody Jaguars of old



The old XJ is like a Werthers Original (they were probably on the options list): familiar, smooth, creamy, comforting. There’s not much of a V8 soundtrack, but when cajoled the old girl picks up her skirts and launches herself with pleasing vigour, as Porter’s erstwhile colleague Quentin Willson might have said. The steering’s both weightier and chattier than the SS’s, but the suspension does get occasionally wrong-footed by combinations of bumps and cornering forces. Overall the XJR is more than adequately brisk, big on understated charm, but lacks the tight, solid, precision-engineered feel of the newer car.

That said, the Supersport’s structural integrity isn’t everything it might be either. I mentioned last month that ours was going

back to the local Jaguar dealership, who had acknowledged that the creaking from around the rearmost of the twin sunroofs was unacceptable. Jaguar had sent them a kit to try – basically it meant removing the fixed rear glass roof panels, installing a load of new washers and seals, then refitting everything. It took a day and a bit to do – and the problem’s still there. Over uneven roads there’s an almost constant chirruping from the rear of the cabin. It seems there’s a bit of flexing somewhere in the aluminium shell, no doubt exacerbated by the Supersport’s stiffer set-up, and not to put too fine a point on it, it’s bloody annoying.

Such a shame this, because as Porter rightly identifies, the SS is a proper Jag as well as a mightily quick car. **Peter Tomalin**



evoFast Fleet

RENAULT CLIO WILLIAMS

Date acquired September 2010
Total mileage 89,539 Mileage this month 442
Costs this month £90 (windscreen excess)
mpg this month 23.9

The Williams suffered a spot of bad luck this month following its recent near-faultless MOT performance. It came in the shape of an arm-length crack in the windscreen. It was no big deal financially, setting us back no more than the £90 excess on our insurance policy to get the glass replaced. But our Autoglass technician had some news for co-owner Dobie and me: at some point the Willy's front pillars have been resprayed.

Not really an issue, you'd think, but then the chap began to explain that whoever carried out the work had done so in a half-arsed manner, only removing the rubber surrounding the windscreen rather than the glass itself. They'd then applied a red oxide primer down the A-pillars, sprayed on the famous metallic blue paint and fitted the rubber back in place.

Little did the cheeky scamp know that red oxide primer reacts nastily with the polyurethane glue used to fit windcreens. This reaction had created gaps for water to travel along, resulting in hidden surface rust down both pillars.

Our windscreen fitter had to strip down the affected areas to pretty much bare metal using a quite brutal-looking chisel. He then applied a coat of the correct type of primer before, finally, fitting the new screen.

What we'd assumed would be an easy job ended up taking two hours. We didn't have to pay any extra, though, and the rust should be cured.

So the crack may have been a blessing in disguise. As Mr Autoglass explained, left untouched, the rust would have bitten deeper than the pillars' surfaces, eventually causing major structural problems. It could also have meant him walking away without fitting the new screen. He told me of other jobs he's attended where the rust was so bad that the whole windscreen frame had practically disappeared! Apparently, rusted holes are a patch-job using welded-in metal, but a full replacement is an extremely complicated welding job that can cost over £800. On balance, then, I'd say that crack wasn't bad luck at all!

Adam Shorrock



Above: massive crack in the Willy's windscreen. Far right: with the glass removed, a botched repair job on the A-pillars was revealed; thankfully, the nice man from Autoglass tidied it up (right)



FERRARI 458 ITALIA

Date acquired May 2011 Total mileage 10,446
Mileage this month 1442 Costs this month
£2500 (brake discs) mpg this month 15.1



Can't say I've ever been particularly fond of carbon-ceramic brake discs on road cars. When push comes to shove, I'll wager most track drivers, racing or otherwise, would agree. It speaks volumes that GT teams use steel discs on their race cars; even F1 teams only use ceramic discs once then bin them. In my humble opinion they're one of the biggest money-making exercises ever dreamt up by car manufacturers. They simply don't get hot enough to be properly effective on road cars.

To that end, all of 6th Gear's road and track-based supercars get converted to steel discs, 599 GTB, LP640 and DBS included. This month it was the 458 Italia's turn, with Mode Performance of Silverstone doing the honours, fabricating a beautifully engineered set of steels. The result? No loss in performance and a far smoother action.

'THE 458 HAS BEEN CONVERTED TO STEEL DISCS'

WX11 has been on form this month. I'm still reeling from just how much grip this supercar has. On track it's mind-boggling – it's almost impossible to unstick that gorgeous rear end. Away from the track, I still think those steering wheel-mounted indicator controls are superb. OK, they're a pain on roundabouts, but the positives outweigh the negatives.

The little spanner has just appeared on the dash, so the 458 will soon be making the trip to Graypaul Nottingham for its first service. I'll keep you updated.

Simon George



LAMBORGHINI LP640

Date acquired August 2007 **Total mileage** 48,885 **Mileage this month** 1882 **Costs this month** £988 (radiator) **mpg this month** 14.1

It's been a good year for LP07 EVO, all things considered. Hammered around a variety of circuits by countless different instructors and having its backside kicked on the road by yours truly, it's stood up to the punishment exceptionally well. That said, as with the orange Murciélago before it, its gearbox is now struggling, especially in third, where the droning from a worn bearing is getting damned irritating. As mentioned a while back, in December the 'box will come out so the relevant nasties can be replaced.

The other issue has been the rear-mounted radiators, both of which packed up during a recent driving experience day. Parts weren't available immediately, so the aforementioned Murciélago acted as a donor, one of its radiators being borrowed temporarily to get the show back on the road.

Below: old orange Murciélago donated a radiator to the LP640 recently, but then nearly fell off a transporter when its handbrake cable snapped (far right)

Talking of the old orange Lambo, on that very same day its handbrake cable snapped as it was being loaded into one of the double-decker transporters, causing it to roll back almost off the end of the tail-lift until some quick-thinking instructors saved the day. I'm just grateful a picture hasn't appeared this month with the car's arse on the ground and its nose pointing skywards...

On a different note, it now looks like LP07's replacement should be landing in January.

Apparently the Aventador is an easier drive, which isn't a surprise. I just hope it's no less of a monster than the LP640 is. But how does one value a supercar that's had over 7000 paying customers behind its wheel? It's a tough one, but since the supercar graveyard seems to be the Far East these days, it looks like this is where LP07 will end up. One thing's for sure, ignore the third cog and it drives as well as it ever did. Please submit your offers... **Simon George**



evoFast Fleet

HARRY'S GARAGE: MASERATI GRANTURISMO S

Date acquired June 2011 Total mileage 18,760
Mileage this month 3059 Costs this month £0 mpg this month 19.3

Since the Maserati arrived in June we've managed to cover well over 4000 miles together, and if you were to plot a graph of how our relationship has gone so far, it would kick off with a pretty bumpy line that then heads increasingly skywards as more miles have clicked by.

Those early bumps were almost completely down to learning to live with the car's robotised manual gearbox, the 'MC-Shift' in Maserati-speak. This transaxle 'box is shared with the Ferrari 599 and, on paper, it sounds like a pretty trick bit of kit, with a race-style twin-plate clutch and a shrunken flywheel to help the Ferrari-built 4.7-litre V8 gain or lose revs in an instant, therefore allowing gearchanges to be punched through in double-quick time.

This all sounds great, but first thing in the morning, when I'm backing M4SER out of the garage with the engine humming at a fast tickover (approximately 1400rpm in order to warm up the catalyts), it's not long before I'm cursing it and wishing the car had the proper auto 'box fitted instead. There's a real lack of precision when the engine is cold: you might want to move six inches or



Above: Sport mode gives access to super-snappy manual shifts; Auto mode is a little less successful. Below: paddles a pleasure to use



so, but brush the throttle and it jumps three feet instead. Then there's the grabby clutch, which seems to engage a special warp-speed reverse just when you want a 'crawler' mode. It's all stacked against you, just when you really don't need it.

One solution is to wait the 40 seconds or so it takes for the revs to subside, as then slow-speed manoeuvring is definitely easier. And once you're on your way, the auto function seems to work pretty well – it's not up to conventional auto standards in stop-start traffic, but it's bearable all the same.

The flipside to all these annoying slow-speed foibles is that, under maximum attack, this MC-Shift gearbox morphs into something utterly brilliant. Select Manual and Sport modes and you enter a world that can only be bettered by the very best DCT cars out there (like the 458). Keep the engine spinning above 5500rpm and use 80 per cent throttle or more and the cog-swapping gets even quicker, changes rammed home in just 100 milliseconds, which is properly fast. The sheer pleasure to be had from flicking through this 'box via the perfectly placed, over-sized column-mounted paddles makes all those low-speed shenanigans simply fade away. Driven like this it's a cinch to keep the GranTurismo's manic engine in its sweet spot, and anyone within earshot is treated to one of the greatest soundtracks on the planet.

A GranTurismo S Automatic might still be the right choice if you spend a lot of time driving in town, but living with this MC-Shift 'box has turned me into a paddle-shift convert, thanks to the fact that I spend more time on the sort of roads that really suit it than I do sitting in traffic. In fact, I'm now at the point where the thought of wrestling with a manual gearbox in a car like this makes no sense to me at all, and I never thought I'd say that.

Harry Metcalfe



NISSAN 370Z ROADSTER

Date acquired July 2011 Total mileage 5261
Mileage this month 1213
Costs this month £0 mpg this month 23.1

I mentioned last time that the Bridgestone Potenza RE050A tyres fitted to the 370Z Roadster really suit it. I say this for three reasons.

One: being regular tyres rather than runflats, they don't jar over imperfections. Compared to the BMW Z4 I used to run it's the difference between treading on a pebble with a trainer or a clog, and it makes

**'YOU CAN
GET ON THE
ACCELERATOR
INCREDIBLY
EARLY WHEN
EXITING A
CORNER'**

Right: 370Z Roadster generates massive grip on dry tarmac – unlike Ev's old long-term, the 370Z-based Infiniti G37S Coupe





**'UNDER
MAXIMUM
ATTACK, THIS
MC-SHIFT
GEARBOX
IS UTTERLY
BRILLIANT'**

THE OTHERS



» **FERRARI 330GT**
Hate cleaning the wire wheels!



» **PANDA 4X4**
Has its Vredestein winter tyres on



» **CLIO TROPHY**
Is there a better hot hatch at its price?



» **LOTUS ELAN**
Superb in the late summer weather



» **RANGIE TDV8**
New monthly high of 27.5mpg



» **COUNTACH QV**
New rear tyre has finally arrived!



the Nissan instantly more appealing.

Two: the amount of grip they generate is huge. At 275/35/19, the rears on these GT Pack wheels are virtually supercar-spec, and in the dry at least you can get on the accelerator incredibly early when exiting a corner; the back tyres just dig in, the rear of the car squats and away you go.

Three: if you do get close to the tyres' limits – although you have to be pushing particularly hard to do so – they don't suddenly surrender grip and call upon the stability control to tidy things up, disrupting

your progress in the process. Instead they send you clear messages about how much grip is left, so you can rein things in yourself, which is far more satisfying.

But then how much of this is down to the rubber, and how much the chassis it is attached to? Interestingly, my last long-termer, an Infiniti G37S Coupe, wore RE050As too (albeit in slightly narrower sizes), and despite being a close relative of the Zed, it had markedly less grip and gave you far less warning on the limit. Answers on a postcard...
Ian Eveleigh

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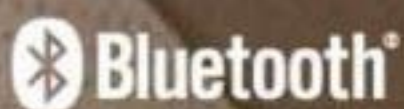
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MINI COOPER S COUNTRYMAN

It took me a while to discover the Mini's strangest feature – the interior lighting changes colour, the 'ambient lighting' of the door panels moving between blue, green and red as you drive along. Gimmicky, but strangely calming too. **Mike Duff**

VOLKSWAGEN POLO GTI

I'm really getting into a groove with the GTI, its DSG gearbox in particular. Left in fully automatic mode, and with the paddles left unflapped (normally they encourage you to chase the 7000rpm rev limit), my commuting mpg rises from 38 to around 42. A quick bit of man maths calculates a £30 monthly saving, enough for a ticket to see Sunderland AFC disappoint at the Stadium of Light. **Stephen Dobie**



Dobie's been getting some impressive mpg figures out of the Polo by leaving its gearbox in auto

BMW 1M COUPE

Love the 1M, hate the indicators, more specifically the 'return to centre' stalk operating them. Manually cancelling them is the particular problem because it's all too easy to find yourself signalling in the opposite direction instead of turning them off. You end up in the indicating equivalent of a tank-slapper. **Henry Catchpole**

VOLKSWAGEN CALIFORNIA

The California continues to be in great demand. The Tomalins took it to the Peak District for a weekend and loved it. There's not many long-termers in which you can doss down, then cook a full English next morning. Tried it in Harry's Zonda once. Absolute disaster. **Peter Tomalin**

RENAULT WIND GORDINI

Date acquired August 2011 **Total mileage** 3003 **Mileage this month** 779 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 34.3

Three thousand miles in, the little Gordini roadster is beginning to loosen up nicely. The engine is zippier, and decent feedback through the steering keeps things engaging enough to be enjoyable. In fact, the only part of the driving experience that isn't fun is the brakes.

Now I'm driving the Wind quicker and braking later than before, I've noticed a

SEAT LEON CUPRA R

Date acquired September 2010 **Total mileage** 19,627 **Mileage this month** 713 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 28.2

Driving the Cupra R into the Evo Towers car park one morning recently, I found myself parking next to another Leon: the FR+ that we tested in our Driven section last month. I had to take it for a spin.

I felt at home straight away as the layout of the interior is exactly the same as in the Cupra R, although the seats aren't quite as supportive. On the move, the acceleration on offer really surprised me. The FR+ is 53bhp down on the Cupra R – 208bhp playing 261 – but it is still rapid, with the same slick manual gearchange, meaning you can cover ground very quickly. The only thing missing was the roar of the engine and raspy exhaust note of the R.

Throwing the FR+ into a sequence of corners, it coped well. The slightly stiffer set-up of the R would give me more

confidence and therefore allow me to carry a little extra speed, but really there wasn't much in it. The ride is certainly smoother in the FR+, but I've grown to prefer the Cupra R's harder chassis.

And then there are the brakes. Last month, Top Gun Catchpole called the Cupra R's stoppers 'hateful', which I thought was a little harsh. Yes, they are over-servo'd, but when you get used to them you find they really do their job well. The FR+'s brakes are perfectly good and will suit most drivers fine, but as with most other cars after the R, I found myself having to really stamp on the middle pedal to get the responses I've become accustomed to.

At £21,780 – £4215 cheaper than the Cupra R – the FR+ is a great car for the money. But if I was choosing between the two, I would pull out all the stops to get the R. It just has that something extra, an X factor that really gets the petrol pumping around my veins. **Paul Lang**



Below: FR+ (red) meets Cupra R. Cupra R's seats (above) have the edge over the FR+'s (middle)



'THE LEON FR+ IS 53BHP DOWN ON THE CUPRA R, BUT IT CAN STILL COVER GROUND VERY QUICKLY'

disconcerting grinding sensation underfoot when I'm hard on the anchors. The ABS seems to be cutting in when braking on bumpy roads and also at that momentary overlap between the end of braking and the start of turning in for a corner – what the road testers call 'trail braking'. When this happens, the car's front end tends to stubbornly continue straight on rather than in the direction of your choosing.

Out of curiosity, I turned the stability control off and the pulsing sensation through the pedal disappeared, so I can only assume



With the ESP off, the Wind's tail-happy balance is revealed

the ABS effect is part of the stability control. However, with the ESP off during enthusiastic driving, you are reminded that the Wind isn't a light car for its size. With the roof neatly folded in the rear, the heavy derriere makes itself known, and it's inclined to step out when braking hard into a bend.

So to compensate I've adjusted my driving style and now complete all my braking before I start steering for a corner – not unlike the approach you might take when playing safe in an old-school French performance car like a 205 GTI, in fact. **Adam Shorrock**

'I WAS ESPECIALLY WORRIED BY THE ALIEN-SHAPED IMAGE...'



INFINITI EX30d

Date acquired July 2011 Total mileage 14,226
Mileage this month 991 Costs this month £0
mpg this month 30.5

I feel quite sorry for the Infiniti, as it has spent most of the past month waiting in airport car parks for my return. And when it hasn't been sat in a car park, it has been going up and down the M1 and around the M25 carting me and my video gear to and from the various London airports. I wouldn't wish that upon any car.

Despite all the boring drives, the Infiniti hasn't complained a bit. In fact this small (or is it big? I can't decide) crossover continues to impress me. It sounds strange, but I'm sure the 3-litre turbodiesel V6 is getting torquier. What's more likely is that I've come to fully appreciate how well this car's comfort masks its pace – glance at the speedo when the 406lb ft of torque is at work and you realise just how quickly the

EX pulls the numbers. It can certainly move when it has to – it just does it in style and luxury. I now know why editor Trott kept trying to steal it from me...

My only issue this month was when a mysterious message appeared on the information display: 'maintenance: other'. I have to admit, I was a little worried, especially by the alien-shaped image that accompanied the warning. I went through the touchscreen system to try to pinpoint what it actually meant, but I couldn't find anything.

I eventually rang the very helpful people at Infiniti, who figured out that it was a service alert. Our EX30d spent a few months on the Infiniti press fleet before becoming our long-termer, and its services haven't quite followed the normal 9000-mile intervals. As it was last serviced just before it arrived with us 3300 miles ago, all I had to do was reset the warning myself. Not really a problem at all, then. Phew! **Sam Riley**

AUDI RS5

After the frightening expense of the first service and a replacement windscreen last month, it's been a quiet few weeks for the RS5. Partly this was because I've been on holiday, but also because it's not exactly the most sought-after machine in the car park. If it was an M3, I reckon the wheels would never have stopped turning. Which tells its own story about the Audi's dynamic shortcomings. **Roger Green**

FORD CAPRI V8

After its track test last month, the setup is begging for attention; the front tyres scrubbed mostly on the outer edges and the car feels stiff in a straight line and roly in the corners – the exact opposite of what it should be. I wonder how much we can gain without changing (expensively) from forest to asphalt struts. **John Barker**

SUBARU LEGACY 2.0D SE

The Legacy had to be rescued by the AA this month. The cause: a puncture too large for the can of tyre sealant to do its job. Shouldn't a spare wheel be standard fitment on all vehicles so that drivers are never stranded at the roadside? I certainly think so. Send your thoughts to me at fastfleet@evo.co.uk **Dean Smith**

ASTON MARTIN RAPIDE

By the time you read this the Rapide will have returned to Gaydon. It was only supposed to be a three-month loan, but as possession is nine tenths of the law I managed to stretch that by a month or so.

It'll leave a large literal and metaphorical hole in my life when the big V12 machine finally goes back, even if my credit card will breathe a sigh of relief at no longer being bludgeoned by regular £120 fill-ups. I suspect my neighbours won't miss the Rapide's early morning trumpeting either.

I hadn't expected the Rapide to change my way of driving, nor the journeys I enjoy, but such is its breadth of abilities I've relished long motorway stints as much as short and sweet cross-country dashes.

Expect a full review of my time with the Rapide next issue. **Richard Meaden**



Rapide is leaving shortly; Meaden will miss it

FIAT 500 TWINAIR

Date acquired May 2011 Total mileage 5406
Mileage this month 1521 Costs this month £0
mpg this month 38.1

The 500 TwinAir's objective justification for existence is that it uses very little fuel. Driven with the vigour it encourages, our Fiat has so far averaged 38.3mpg, which is about 30mpg less than the 'official' figures portray. No matter; it's still frugal for a fun car. The problem arises when the fuel gauge's LCD bar graph shows imminent emptiness, which happens often

Eco button limits the TwinAir's torque and reduces its fuel thirst



given the small tank, and – worse – the 'range' indicator turns to dashes. Panic sets in, made all the greater by the gradual disappearance of Britain's rural filling stations.

What to do? Press the Eco button. Torque is then limited from the

usual 107lb ft to a gentle 74, that lovely low-end thrust abates and with it the fuel thirst. It feels as if it has suffered a turboectomy but, as if by divine intervention, sufficient numbers to reach a fuel source reappear on the range display.

Driven thus, the 500 might indeed approach the official 68.9mpg 'combined' figure. Maybe I should leave it in Eco for a week to test the theory, but that's like denying yourself the bar of chocolate you know lurks in the larder. Impossible. **John Simister**



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INSIDE THIS MONTH'S PACKED, 40-PAGE KNOWLEDGE SECTION

JUST LOOKING

p149

Every month, we try two of the cars from the classified ads. This month a Vauxhall VX220 Turbo and a Merc CL600

BUYING GUIDE

p152

£60,000 could get you behind the wheel of one of the great modern Ferraris, the F430. **John Simister** is your guide

SPEEDSHOP

p157

Our monthly look at the latest tuning products, plus expert advice on how to get the best from your car

WORKSHOP

p159

All the latest tools and cleaning products, plus our experts answer your questions on how to maintain your car

ESSENTIALS

p161

Amongst this month's gotta-get stuff: FF and Aventador models, retro F1 T-shirts and DVDs on Senna and the Isle of Man TT

TRIPS & TRAVEL

p162

How to get the best from Italy's Stelvio Pass, plus a reader's road trip to Le Mans and a test of a new camera from Panasonic

TRACK & RACING

p164

Advice on driving Anglesey Circuit, the low-down on Matt Neal's BTCC title win, plus **Roger Green** on racing at the Britcar 24hrs

KNOWLEDGE

p168

All the essential data – and **evo's** verdict – on every new performance car, plus the very best second-hand buys

ME & MY CAR

p186

Racing driver **Marino Franchitti** talks about the Volkswagen Golf GTI Edition 30 he bought as a runabout but came to love

MARKET WATCH



Now's the time to buy a used 4x4

Prices may have fallen of late, but they could be about to stabilise

If you've ever thought about buying a second-hand 4x4, right now is the best time of the year to do it. Prices of 4x4s have been tumbling badly recently, thanks mainly to their perceived high running costs, but if history repeats itself, values will settle from now until March or even firm slightly if it snows. One Land Rover specialist I know describes snow as being his 'white gold', such is the effect it has on 4x4 values. So it's best to start scanning the classifieds now before any falls.

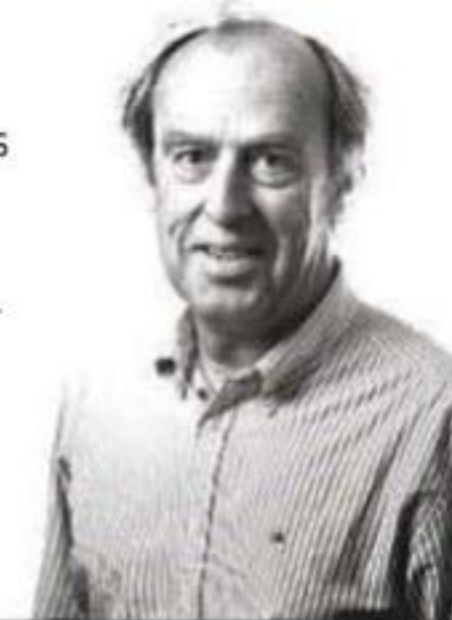
Looking at Range Rovers first, up until recently the TDV8 model from 2006 onwards has been holding on to its value much better than previous Range Rovers have, thanks mainly to its reputation for relatively reasonable economy (25-27mpg) and good reliability (no, really). But over the last six months or so, values have tanked – *Glass's Guide* reckons they've been losing up to £1250 a month – meaning good examples are now available for £25-28K. That's starting to look good value.

Turning next to the Range Rover Sport, I expect values of these to remain low thanks to the arrival of the Evoque, which might tempt some existing RRS owners to downsize, leading to a glut of TDV6 Sports on the market. You can already find decent 2006, 60,000-mile examples priced at £18,000 – a good £10K less than a year ago.

Another 4x4 worth considering is the 2006-on BMW X5, which received a significant update that year making it even more economical and better handling. A useful seven-seat option was also introduced at the same time. The 3.0d SE model is probably the one to go for, as it has a low CO2 rating (195g/km, meaning £245 per year road tax), handles very well and still has decent performance. You can find 50,000-mile examples at BMW dealers for around £20K and, for such an accomplished car, that seems excellent value to me.

Finally, if you fancy a 4x4 with a bit of attitude, then consider the Mercedes-Benz ML63 AMG. Not many were sold (unsurprisingly) but look hard enough and you should find some decent '07 examples out there for around the £25,000 mark. Don't be afraid to bid under that either, as they are difficult cars to sell in today's market. But they're a hoot to drive – for a 4x4 – and that 6.2-litre engine delivers a proper punch. Happy hunting.

Harry Metcalfe
Editorial director



DEAL OF THE MONTH: MINI COOPER S JCW £10,995

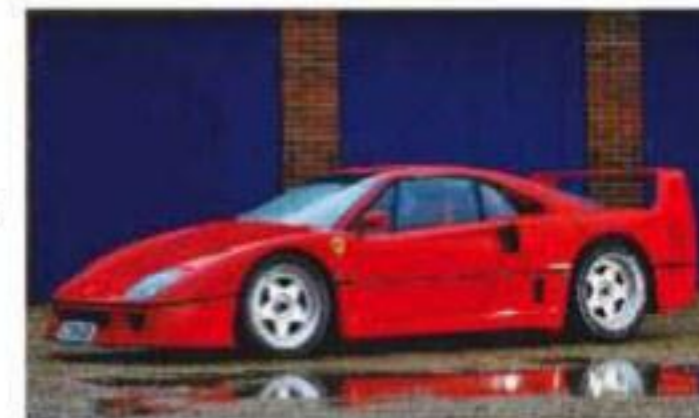
» A latest-generation Mini Cooper S with the John Cooper Works aftermarket tuning kit fitted is well worth tracking down, as these are seriously fun cars to scoot around in. Check carefully, though, as many cars advertised as JCW Minis only have the body kit fitted rather than having the essential engine tweaks done too. To give you an idea of values, here's a low-mileage 2007 model in Laser Blue Metallic. It has a full BMW service history, twin panoramic sunroofs and a full leather interior. It cost its original owner £26,000, but today it can be yours for just £10,995.



Year 2007 Mileage 19,000
Vendor Ashley Autos, West Malling, Kent
(www.ashleyautos.co.uk, 01732 848199)

AUCTION WATCH: FERRARI F40 £250,000-300,000

» With only 198 kilometres recorded, you'd expect this F40 to be worth £500K-plus, but it's up for auction with Bonhams with a guide price of just £250-300K. The reason is that the car suffered a heavy front-on collision back in 1995. However, it was rebuilt and restored by renowned Ferrari specialist Michelotto in Italy using a new tub – which Ferrari stamped with the same chassis number – and the original drivetrain. The milometer was then zeroed (from an unknown figure) and the car has covered just 198 kilometres since. At this guide price, it looks like a bargain.



Year 1990 Mileage 198km Auctioneers
Bonhams (www.bonhams.com) Date
December 1 (Mercedes World, Brooklands)

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308/328	£445	£790	£1,020	£60	£120
456/456M	£1,290	£790	£1,890	£60	£160
550/575	£790	£1,290	£1,890	£80	£160
512/TR	£480	£1,090	£1,390	£60	£120
612	£790	£1,290	£1,890	£80	£160
F40	£600	£890	£1,300	£80	£160
F50	£800	£1,400	N/A	£80	£200
Enzo	£790	£1,200	N/A	£90	£200
599	£790	£1,290	N/A	£80	£160

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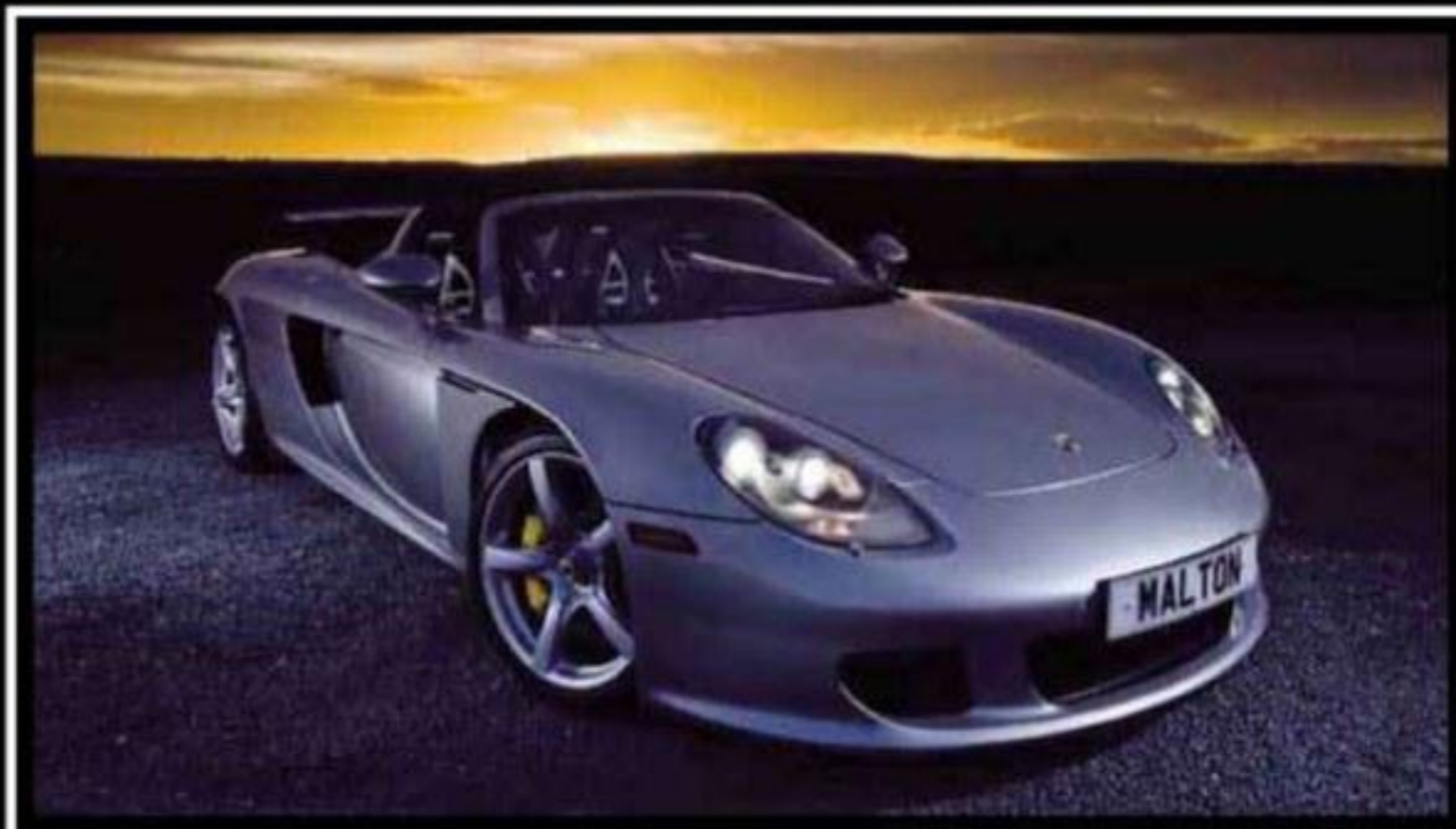


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MERCEDES-BENZ CL600 £13,995

Vendor Cambridge Car Company, Cambridge, CB21 4XN
www.cambridgecarcompany.co.uk 01223 891216

How much car can you get for a fiver short of 14 grand? I reckon you'd be hard pushed to do better than this 2004 Mercedes CL600 currently being offered by the Cambridge Car Company.

Beneath its bonnet lies the later, twin-turbo V12 that puts out an astonishing 493bhp and 590lb ft of torque, while elsewhere there is every imaginable piece of kit: satnav, TV, keyless go, heated/vented/massaging seats, electric boot lift, electric door closing... the list goes on.

There are just 64,700 miles on this car's clock and the metallic silver paintwork looks even younger. It's the same story inside, too, with very few signs of use.

On the road, the bi-turbo V12 feels as fit as you'd hope: floor the throttle and the car lunges forward relentlessly, its two-ton weight dismissed and your neck muscles given a workout. The ride is more relaxed than sporting – this is not an AMG model, remember – but you could easily imagine breezing across whole continents in this car.

It's a rare sight, the CL600, and getting rarer: many are being exported to parts of the world where its thirst would be less harmful to the owner's wallet. It'd be a shame to see this one leave these shores too. Ian Eveleigh



Top and bottom: big CL has obviously been cared for. Above: 19in AMG alloys like new. Left: interior is tidy too



SPECIFICATION

Year 2004
Mileage 64,700
Engine V12, 5513cc, twin-turbo
Max power 493bhp @ 5000rpm
Max torque 590lb ft @ 1800-3500rpm
0-60mph 4.8sec (claimed)
Top speed 155mph (limited)

SUMMARY

EXTERIOR

» Bodywork very tidy for the car's age; wheels completely unmarked

INTERIOR

» Very good condition, and equipped with every toy you could want

MECHANICALS

» Feels fit. Full service history and a six-month warranty should provide piece of mind

VERDICT

» A very fast, very comfortable £90,000 car – with £76,000 off

ALSO FROM THIS DEALER

ASTON DB9 £64,995, '08, 9951 miles
» Automatic, metallic black, black leather
BMW Z4 23i £23,495, '09, 12,223 miles
» Manual, grey metallic, red leather

Simon Furlonger

SPECIALIST CARS



Ferrari 360 F1 Spider

2005, 17,261 Miles

Finished in Nero Daytona with Crema electric Daytona seats. Factory spec includes front Challenge grills, Xenon headlights, Modular wheels, Scuderia shields, Crema roll over hoops, Yellow calipers, electric Daytona seats, Nero inserts, Nero stitching and a factory fitted Challenge Stradale exhaust system.

£59,990



Ferrari Challenge Stradale

2004, 20,836 Miles

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360 F1 Spider
2002, 19,800 miles
£51,990



Challenge Stradale
2005, 8,756 miles
£104,990



LP640
2006, 2,314 miles
£169,990



612 Scaglietti
2005, 26,834 miles
£69,990



Diablo SV
1998, 30,101 miles
£79,990



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911 (997) TURBO 3.6 (07 - 2007)
GT Silver with black leather,
sat nav, 26,000 miles.....**£57,000**



911 (997) "C4S" 3.8 (55 - 2005)
Basalt black with sand leather,
sat nav, 38,000 miles.....**£36,000**



911 (997) "C2S" 3.8 (55 - 2005)
Silver with black leather, sat nav,
37,000 miles.....**£33,000**



911 (997) "C2S" 3.8 TIP (55 - 2005)
Basalt black with grey leather,
sat nav, 41,000 miles.....**£33,000**



911 (997) "C2S" 3.8 (05 - 2005)
Silver with black leather, sat nav,
40,000 miles.....**£33,000**



911 (997) "C2S" 3.8 TIP (05 - 2005)
Silver with metropole leather,
sat nav, 48,000 miles.....**£31,000**



911 (996) TURBO 3.6 "X50" (04-2004)
Silver with black leather, sat nav,
52,000 miles.....**£35,000**



911 (996) TURBO 3.6 TIP (52 - 2002)
Seal grey with cinnamon leather,
sat nav, 52,000 miles.....**£30,000**



911 (996) TURBO 3.6 TIP (52 - 2002)
Silver with black leather, sat nav,
45,000 miles.....**£30,000**



911 (996) "C4S" 3.6 (04 - 2004)
Atlas grey with black leather,
sat nav, 45,000.....**£27,000**



911 (996) "C4S" 3.6 (53 - 2004)
Silver with black leather, sat nav,
47,000 miles.....**£26,000**



911 (996) "C4S" 3.6 (53 - 2003)
Seal grey with black leather,
sat nav, 46,000 miles.....**£25,000**



911 (996) "C4S" 3.6 TIP (53 - 2004)
Lapis blue with grey leather,
sat nav, 45,000 miles.....**£26,000**



911 (996) "C4S" 3.6 (03 - 2003)
Seal grey with black leather,
sat nav, 48,000 miles.....**£25,000**



911 (996) "C4S" 3.6 TIP (04 - 2004)
Basalt black with black leather,
sat nav, 72,000 miles.....**£23,000**



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11,000 miles.....**£42,000**

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FERRARI F430 F1 NERO DAYTONA
Nero Daytona style seats, Gripping/stitching, Nero carpets, Giallo callipers, SAT NAV, 1 pos, paint shield, 11,000 miles, 3 owners, all books, keys and tools complete, 18 months Ferrari warranty remaining, immaculate condition.....**£70,995**



FERRARI F430 COUPE F1
Rosso/Crema/Bordeaux carpets, 30,500 miles, Scuderia wing shields, Rosso callipers, Main dealer history, front paint protection. An immaculate original.....**£72,995**



FERRARI 360 SPIDER F1
Grigio Alloy, Blu Scuro, Blue Carpets, Blu hood, 37,000 miles, Aluminium Callipers, Scuderia wing Shields, Siemens TrakBak System, FSH.....**£45,995**



FERRARI 350 M
Argento/Bordeaux/Nero Carpets, 30,300 miles, Excellent history, recently had annual / cambelts, new rear tyres, full front and rear brake overhaul, Tbil sports exhaust.....**£47,995**



FERRARI 355 SPIDER
(07) Rosso/Crema/Crema tonneau/Bordeaux carpets, 31,700 miles, Major service and cambelts replaced in 2010 at Maranello Egitua. An excellent original example undergoing our restore preparation.....**£47,995**



FERRARI 355 BERLINETTA
(07) Rosso/Nero/suede inserts, Carbon racing seats, 31,300 miles, Carbon sills, Sports exhaust, Comprehensive history file. All books and tools complete.....**£45,995**



FERRARI 328 GTS
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FERRARI 355 Berlinetta F1 (99) Rosso/Nero Carbon racing seats, Challenge grill, 18,000 miles, FSH, Sports exhaust. A fabulous original car.....**£40,995**
FERRARI 355 Challenge, Rosso, Recent major service including cambelts/camseals, New Carbon seat/belts/fire extinguisher, new shock absorbers, spare wheels, ready to race.....**£45,995**
FERRARI 355 Challenge, Rosso, 12,500 miles, Aero kit, 2 sets of wheels, Sparco Pro 2000 racing seats, Schroth 5 point harnesses, Momo steering wheel, Life line fire extinguisher, New front brake discs, Undergoing annual and cambelts service, MOT'd, rare to find a Challenge car in this condition.....**£45,995**
FERRARI 456 M GTA Tour De France Blu/Sabbia/Blu stitching, 37,500 miles, 2 previous owners. Recent major service including cam belts, exceptional.....**£37,995**

FERRARI 348 TS (01), Rosso/Nero, 40,000 miles, Carbon sills, colour coded targa top, Sports exhaust. A fastidiously maintained example that has competed in FOC Concourse events over the last few years. Beautifully detailed.....**£37,995**
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FERRARI 246 GT, 1973, Blue Metallic Dino/Blue scuro, 37,450 miles, refurbishment carried out by ourselves in 2008, an exceptional Dino.....**£POA**
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VAUXHALL VX220 TURBO £10,773

Vendor Stratstone Jaguar, Milton Keynes, MK15 0EB
www.stratstone.com 01908 350836

On its 2003 launch, the VX220 Turbo offered pace its Lotus Elise base car couldn't. The increasing power of Elises and Exiges since makes the VXT feel tamer now than it did then, but its turn of speed is still impressive.

This 2005 example at Stratstone in Milton Keynes feels in rude health, and with the 2-litre turbo engine serving up maximum torque below 2000rpm, it's adequately quick in all five of its forward gears. Its soundtrack is suitably roarty, too. That's great news, as the sheer volume of wind and road noise that makes it into the cabin makes this car's trick aftermarket stereo next to pointless.

There are a few clonks from the suspension, and while more than likely just mechanical noise audible via the car's lack of carpets and sound insulation, I'd be tempted to do some checking. It certainly feels fine to drive, its sub-1000kg frame exceedingly well-balanced and responsive to direction changes.

The exterior is nearly immaculate, but there are numerous scratches and marks inside. This is one of the cheapest VXT's on the market, though, and if you're buying it as an occasional second car or track toy, the scuffs are probably inconsequential. **Stephen Dobie**



Above and left: this VX220 Turbo looks smart on the outside. Below and below left: interior hasn't fared as well, with several scratches and marks, but at this price you can't complain



SPECIFICATION

Year 2005
Mileage 47,660
Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbocharged
Max power 197bhp @ 5500rpm
Max torque 184lb ft @ 1950rpm
0-60mph 4.7sec (claimed)
Top speed 151mph (claimed)

SUMMARY

EXTERIOR

» In great nick, and looks sharp in silver with 'snowflake' alloys

INTERIOR

» Appears to have had a hard life, with a few imperfections

MECHANICALS

» Pulls strongly, sounds good and is a sharp steer, though suspension is a touch noisy

VERDICT

» More miles than other VXTs, but it looks good, drives well and is cheap

ALSO FROM THIS DEALER

JAGUAR XFR £46,897, 2010, 398 miles
» One-of-50 limited edition, £18K off new price
AUDI RS6 V10 AVANT £35,991, 2008, 71,985 miles
» Moonstone grey, TV, BOSE stereo

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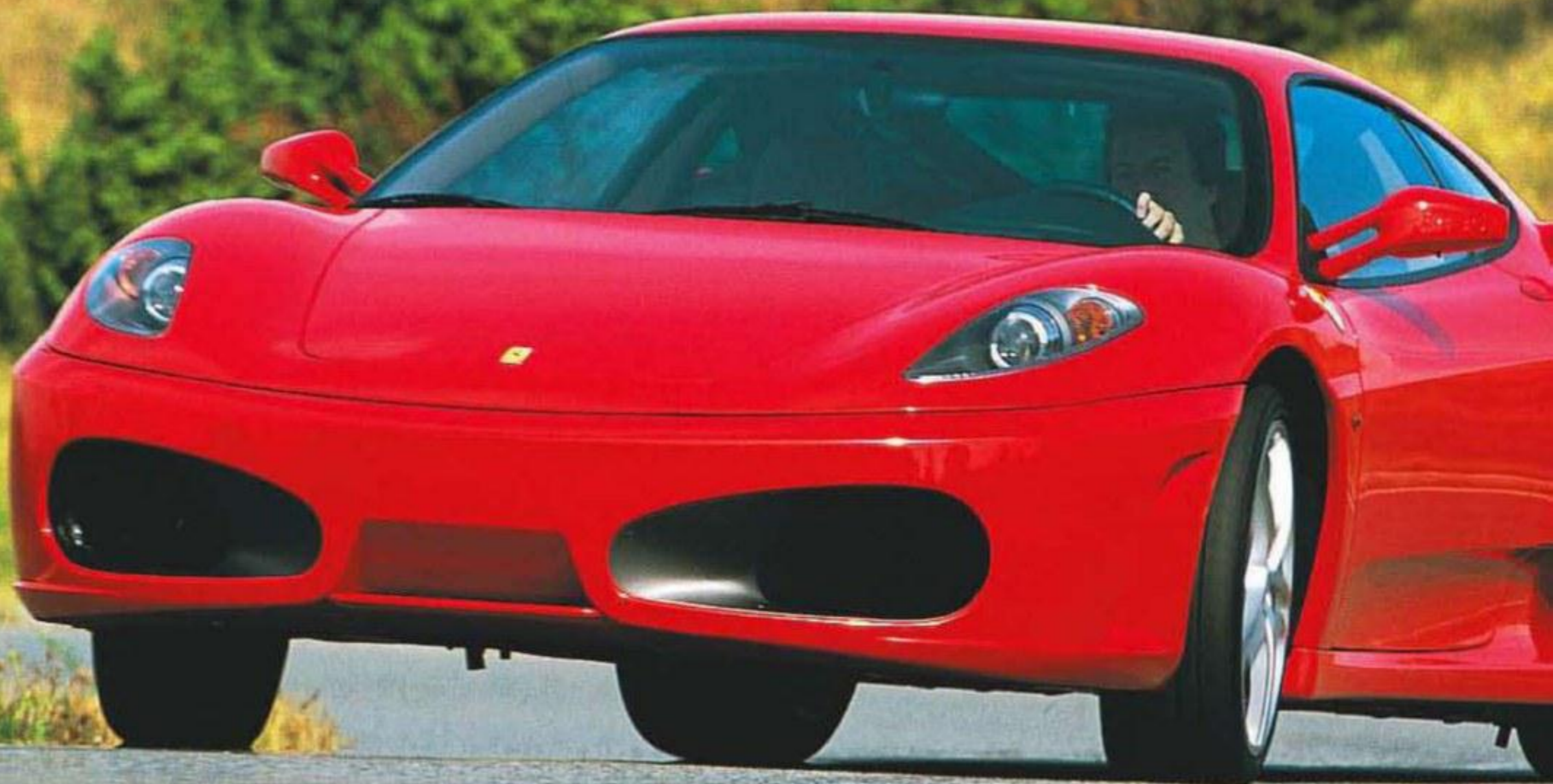


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evo Buying Guide

THE INSIDE LINE ON BUYING USED



FERRARI F430

*It's got more power than an F40, yet it was one of the first truly 'useable' Ferraris – and you can now get a good one for £60,000. **John Simister** investigates*

Here's a milestone car. The F430 was the first no-butts Ferrari, the first Maranello product for which no excuses needed to be made. It was regarded by most critics as, if not perfect, as close to theoretical Ferrari road-car perfection as a Ferrari had ever been.

It seems odd now to be writing this in the past tense, because the F430 is a car that seems to have dated hardly at all. Yet the truth is it was launched almost seven years ago and has now been replaced by the yet more wonderful 458 Italia. Quit while you're

ahead; it's always a good philosophy.

A new 458 will cost you £173,000. A new F430 cost around £117,000 at launch, depending on options. Today you can get into an F430 for little more than half that launch price, and it could well be a car that has covered very few miles because F430s generally aren't used intensively. They can be, though, without ill effect – and that's one of the things that sets them apart from earlier Ferraris, including the 360 Modena from which the 430 is derived, and which makes them such a compelling pre-owned purchase.

Nor need running one be prohibitively expensive, especially if you have it looked after by one of the numerous independent Ferrari specialists. Some parts do have a short life, notably suspension components and the F1-shift cars' clutches, but mostly the F430 is bombproof. Nor do you have to pay Ferrari main-dealer parts prices; suppliers such as Eurospares sell genuine Ferrari parts, or equivalents branded by the component company that actually makes them, at sometimes significantly lower cost. It's worth knowing, for example, that the hydraulic



pump for the F1 gearbox is the same as that for an Alfa Selespeed 'box.

So why is the F430 so wonderful? Its aluminium structure is more rigid than the 360's, and its engine was all-new, with a block casting shared with the contemporary Maserati V8s and its own unique cylinder heads – four valves per cylinder instead of the 360's five, and chain camshaft drive instead of belts to the great reduction of service costs. Power, at 483bhp, exceeded even that of the mighty (and turbocharged) F40, while the torque spread was extraordinary for an engine keen to howl beyond 8500rpm.

Then there are the looks, crisper-edged than the 360's with a strong hint of Enzo around the surface-erupting tail-lights. There's the manettino, the steering wheel-mounted selector for stability systems, damping, shift speed and throttle response. And there's the E-diff, whose calibrations

Top: V8 was all new for the F430, and has proved trouble-free even on high-mileage cars. Above right: carbon-ceramic discs attract a premium, but standard ones are perfectly adequate



CHECKPOINTS

» Phil Redpath of Herts/Bucks-based specialist DK Engineering, at which F430s rub shoulders with 250 LMIs, 330 GTCs, Lussos and more, speaks highly of the F430's durability. 'We look after some hire cars which have done over 80,000 miles and they've just needed routine servicing,' he says. He's our guide here.

ENGINE

» No cambelts to worry about and no innate problems: 'It's bulletproof,' says Redpath. Check for the sounds of a cracked exhaust manifold, though, as this is common and new ones are very expensive. DK prefers to weld-repair them for a stronger cure that won't fail again.

TRANSMISSION

» The gearbox itself is tough and trouble-free, and like the clutch is the same unit for both manual and F1 cars. F1-shift cars can eat a clutch in as few as 12,000 miles – the system rides the clutch a lot in first gear, so it's best to shift to second as soon as possible in traffic. If it's worn, an F1 car will be sluggish to pull away and a manual will have a heavy pedal with a high biting point. If left too long the flywheel can be damaged; typically it has to be replaced anyway every other clutch-change.

SUSPENSION & BRAKES

» Ball-joints and wishbone bushes have a short life, and you'll feel any snags here through the steering or hear them over bumps; the F430 is normally an impressively rattle-free car. In theory new bushes mean replacing a complete and expensive wishbone, but DK and other specialists can re-bush existing wishbones to an equivalent standard.

Many cars have the expensive carbon-ceramic brakes option but the standard iron discs are entirely adequate for road use.

BODYWORK & INTERIOR

» The cars are too new to suffer from the corrosion that now afflicts some 360s, but the satin black paint under the bonnet and on the hinge pillars is prone to flaking off, revealing body colour beneath.

Check for wobbly rear lights – the fragile plastic mounting bracket often breaks. The only cure is a complete new unit.

On the other hand, the interior wears well and the electrics have proved reliable.

MODELS BOOKS DVDS & CLOTHING



SPECIFICATION

- » **Engine** V8, 4308cc
- » **Max power** 483bhp @ 8500rpm
- » **Max torque** 343lb ft @ 5250rpm
- » **Transmission** Six-speed manual or F1 automated manual, rear-wheel drive
- » **Tyres** 225/35 ZR19 fr, 285/35 ZR19 rear
- » **Weight (kerb)** 1449kg
- » **Power-to-weight** 342bhp/ton
- » **0-60mph** 4.0sec (claimed)
- » **Top speed** 196mph+ (claimed)
- » **Price when new** £121,750 (2006)

PARTS PRICES

- » Supplied by DK Engineering. Tyre prices from blackcircles.com. All prices include VAT at 20 per cent
- » **Tyres** £265.38 each front, £207.55 each rear (Pirelli P Zero Corsa, fitted)
- » **Brake pads (front set)** £262.80 standard, £674.49 carbon-ceramic
- » **Brake discs (front pair)** £561.60 standard, £4785.60 carbon-ceramic
- » **Clutch** £1188 disc, £1560 pressure plate
- » **Flywheel** £766.80
- » **Oil filter** £44.40
- » **Air filter (pair)** £58.90
- » **Exhaust, back box and tips** £1382.40

SERVICING

- » Prices from DK Engineering
- » **Annual/6250miles** £948
- » **18,000 miles** £1188
- » **Clutch change from** £2076

WHAT TO PAY

» Currently, £60,000 is about as low as a good-condition F430 with a proper history goes. High-mileage cars could go for less, which would make them a bargain purchase, but they are rare. Few F430s have got much beyond 25,000 miles, even the early ones. At the other end of the scale a late F1 coupe with minimal mileage can nudge £100K. A Spider is around £10K more for comparable age, mileage and condition, while a Scuderia (launched in 2008) starts around £120,000 and reaches £160,000 – or approaching £200K for the final 16M Spider versions.

Manual cars attract a small premium. The optional recessed Ferrari wing shields are seen as desirable, as are carbon brakes.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- » www.maranellosales.com (dealer)
- » www.greypaulferrari.co.uk (dealer)
- » www.dkeng.com (specialist)
- » www.simonfurlonger.co.uk (sales)
- » www.theferraricentre.com (specialist)
- » www.ferrariownersclub.co.uk (club)

'I BOUGHT ONE'

Nick Jones

» Ferrari enthusiast Nick has had 348s and a 360, and had long wanted an F430.

'I finally bought one nine months ago when the price became right. It's a 2005 manual car. I prefer driving a manual because I like the feel, the control.

'I've done about 3500 miles in it now and it's been pretty much trouble-free. The build quality is much better than the 360's – you don't get that feeling of fragility when you pull the doors shut. It's better engineered in every aspect. The only problem was with the instrument lights,

which stopped working, but DK Engineering fixed it straight away with no bill. They have been excellent – I wouldn't go anywhere else.

'One of the best bits is the sound. A 360 has a high-end scream but this has a low-end growl, too. The steering and throttle response are brilliant and the traction control isn't that intrusive in Sport. And Race mode is stunning on the road – you can feel yourself right on the edge but it always looks after you.

'Crucially, I don't get the worries I had in earlier Ferraris. It's a more useable car.'

this alters, a clever, clutch-controlled active differential that sorts out waywardness not by inhibiting one rear wheel but by pouring more torque into the other. Ferrari reckons it's worth 3sec a lap at the Fiorano test track, and it certainly helps make the F430 a far more forgiving machine than the 360, and a car of supremely subtle and keen responses.

Fine. So which F430? You can have coupe, Spider or F1-shift-only Scuderia, this last one a hardcore, stripped-down machine that is not only even faster with 503bhp but can also ride better when you're cracking along a lumpy road. How so? Because, unlike in the regular car, you can control the damping separately and mix suppleness with speedy shifting and liberated stability systems. 'We

'IT'S A CAR OF SUPREMELY SUBTLE RESPONSES'

did it because Schumacher recommended it,' said Ferrari at the time. We journalists had been asking for it since 2004...

During a five-year production life (it wound down in 2009, with the 16M Spider version of the Scuderia as the grand finale), around ten per cent of F430s were manuals. This figure is probably higher in the UK although Ferrari's British importer, curiously, won't reveal the numbers. A manual car might offer a purer experience and the clutch will last much longer. But the F1-shift was working pretty well by the time the F430 arrived, and in the 430 Scuderia it can feel magical. Your choice; either way, you can't really go wrong.

IN THE CLASSIFIEDS



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- » dkeng.com

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- » F1 Spider
- » 15,300 miles
- » Nero, tan leather, upgraded stereo with satnav, FSH
- » theferraricentre.com

£79,995



- » 2007
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- » 7755 miles
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Image: Danry Dzenis www.dd-photography.co.uk

PIPER CAMS
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Arguably the biggest name in camshafts, Piper has added new Ford Duratec cams and tuning components to its extensive range. Available for all 1.8, 2.0 and 2.3-litre Duratec engines, the new camshafts are available in six different profiles, from a mild road upgrade to a full race version. There's also an 'Ultimate Road' profile, designed for remapped engines with internal modifications and throttle bodies that delivers optimum power in the 3000-7000rpm rev-range.



E-TECH SEAT BELT ALARM STOPPER
£4.49
AUTOINPARTS.COM

Here's a clever little device if you've got a safety harness fitted in your car for trackdays but have kept the original inertia-reel seat belt in place for daily driving – a gadget from E-TECH that clips into your belt-buckle to stop the seat-belt alarm chiming when you're negotiating Copse. In the wet. Flat. Also handy for mechanics, rolling-road engineers and valets. A snip at £4.49.



QUICKSILVER EXHAUSTS
£1195
QUICKSILVEREXHAUSTS.COM

QuickSilver has been making exhaust systems since 1973 and caters for a wide range of cars, from Audis to Bugattis. The new Porsche 996 system pictured here is made from T304 stainless steel. It weighs 10kg less than the standard system and comes with a 25-year, unlimited-mileage guarantee.



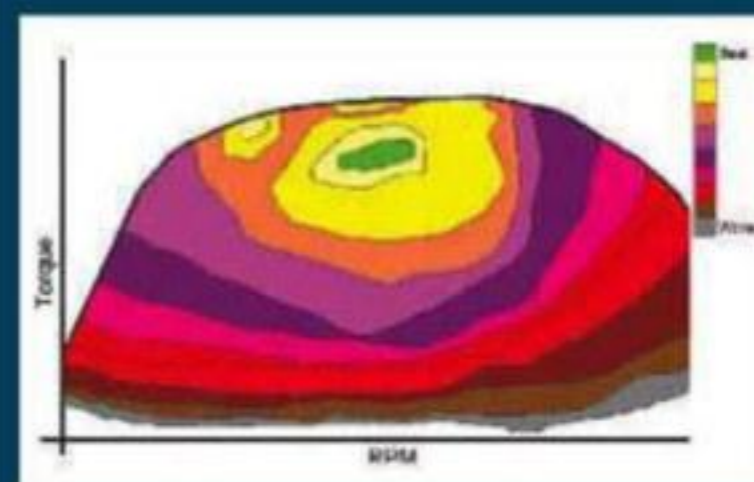
CITROËN DS3 RACING SUPERCHIPS ECU REMAP
£455.00 WWW.SUPERCHIPS.CO.UK

We've been a little underwhelmed by Citroën's DS3 Racing. This remap promises to address the issue by lifting power 26bhp to 230bhp and torque 34lb ft to a chunky 237lb ft. Improved low-speed and mid-range performance are also claimed.

ASK THE EXPERT

Q Having had my car remapped, resulting in more power and torque, I am regularly achieving the same mpg figures as before – sometimes better. I've heard it theorised that it only takes a certain amount of power to move a car at a certain speed, and because the engine now makes more peak power, the power required to move the car is made at a lower rpm, and that this is where the improved mpg comes from. Is this true?

James Swift



An engine's best efficiency is at peak torque

A It's complicated. Peak power has little bearing on mpg because you are rarely using the engine at full power, instead it's the light-load and mid-rpm parts of the engine map that count. If you were to draw a map of engine efficiency with speed as the X axis and load as the Y axis you would see something a bit like a terrain map of the Lake District. Generally speaking, the best efficiency is at peak torque.

A car gets the best possible mpg when the drive cycle takes the engine through these sweet spots on the map, which usually means accelerating fairly briskly but not flat-out and then cruising at a reasonably constant speed. Your re-mapped engine might get you up to cruising speed a bit quicker so you spend more time at the mid-rpm sweet spot. This is quite common with mildly tuned engines. The downside is that the emissions are usually worse, and emissions tuning is a whole world of complicated.

Without changing your gearing you probably won't be benefiting from lower rpm, and lowering the rpm only makes a relatively small improvement anyway. The engine tune – ignition, fuelling, boost, cam position, etc – will all have a much bigger effect.

Ralph Hosier

TRIED & TESTED

'TORQUE' APP £2.95
WWW.TORQUE-BHP.COM

» Anyone interested in tuning their car will want to know exactly how their upgrades are performing. Historically this required expensive and bulky test equipment, but today a smart phone can do the job for a fraction of the price.

I tested an app called 'Torque', which gives graphs showing acceleration, yaw rates, braking G force, 0-60 times, quarter-mile times and engine power. With a separate OBD-to-Bluetooth adaptor it can also interface with your vehicle's on-board diagnostics system,

which opens up a whole new range of possibilities. Because it then knows engine speed, the app can work out engine torque from the acceleration. It can also display accurate values from the engine management system such as temperature, air flow and air/fuel ratio. There is even a widget that shows you how economically you are driving.

All the data can be logged and downloaded to a PC, so if you are tuning a car you have a record of how much difference each tweak made. As well as the performance measurements, Torque also has access to all the on-board diagnostics functions – it can



read fault codes and clear them.

I used the app on an HTC Desire handset and it did exactly what it said on the virtual tin, although it is very dependent on the quality of the OBD/Bluetooth adaptor – good ones can be had for about £100. **Ralph Hosier**

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PHAZE 175-PIECE TOOL KIT
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This two-drawer metal chest (with internal locking system) is packed with a full mechanic's starter kit, including sockets, ratchets, spanners, screwdrivers and bit sets. At under £50 quid, it's perfect Xmas-pressie fodder.

CLARION DTX501E DIGITAL TV TUNER £259
WWW.CLARION.CO.UK

Capable of receiving all the standard terrestrial digital channels, this new TV tuner can be used with Clarion's top-end NX or NZ501E multimedia/navigation systems, enabling touchscreen operation and two-zone tech that allows those in the front to listen to audio while those in the back watch TV.



G3 SCRATCH REMOVER
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This scratch remover uses a blend of 'engineered diminishing abrasive particles' that break down and reduce in size as you remove scratches, then turn into a smooth wax polishing fluid. Clever stuff. A flawless showroom finish is promised.



NIMBUS MOTORSPORT 'SAVE-A-BATTERY' RANGE
FROM £71.94
WWW.NIMBUSMOTORSPORT.COM

If you're leaving your car unused this winter, now's the time to think about its battery. The best way to keep it in tip-top shape is with a charger/maintainer, and Nimbus has a no-nonsense range you may be interested in. Features include a charger and microprocessor-controlled maintainer to recondition and rejuvenate a battery, while an array of testers warn of a problem. The top-of-the-range model has a 'deep cycle rejuvenator' that is said to de-sulphate the plates on weak batteries and bring them back to life.



ASK THE EXPERT

Q I've got an Elise, which I just use in the summer and for trackdays. Now winter's almost upon us, I want to store it away in the garage till the spring. What steps should I take to ensure it still looks good and starts first time when I take it out again next March?

Darren Leader, Leeds



An indoor cover will help protect a stored car

A Firstly, the car should be thoroughly cleaned inside, outside and underneath as best you can – not only will dirt deposits and road grime contaminate components and paintwork over the winter, it will feel lovely to unwrap an immaculate car when the warmer months arrive.

Ideally replace all the engine, brake and coolant fluids and ensure the tank is full of fuel. This will prevent any moisture building up in the tank and system.

Assuming the area you are storing the car in is an average-sized garage, I would suggest getting hold of a large ground-sheet that is wider than the car by at least the height of the wheels. Also buy yourself a set of four little A-frame stands, which you can jack the car onto. This will take the weight off the suspension and bearings and also prevent the tyres from developing flat-spots.

The ground sheet should go between the A-frames and the car, with the edges tucked up over the wheels and the sides shut in the doors to hold it in place. This will deter any little rodents from nesting in the nooks and crannies under the car.

Leave a window open slightly to allow the interior to breath and buy a good quality breathable indoor car cover. A trickle charger will keep the battery maintained. Finally, ensure the handbrake is off and the car is in neutral, then just sit back and wait for the good weather to arrive again!

Richard Tipper

Twitter: @perfectionvalet

TRIED & TESTED

VALET PRO BILBERRY WHEEL CLEANER & NON-SCRATCH SOFT BRUSH FROM £9.60
WWW.VALETPRO.CO.UK

» If, like me, you're not fond of cleaning fussy alloy wheels, Valet Pro's Bilberry Wheel Cleaner might be for you. Its maker claims that by using this product neat, or diluted up to a ratio of 1:3, you can get clean wheels by simply spraying it on and jet-washing it off. It's completely acid free, too, so is safe to use on painted or lacquered wheels.

However, at £9.60 for a 1-litre bottle, your wallet may start to look thin after

a few weeks of using it neat. I therefore tried a dilution of around 1:5 (in a Valet Pro bottle with trigger – £4.20) and used Valet Pro's non-scratch soft brush (£9.60) to reach those awkward places on my Subaru long-termers' alloys.

The brush is a quality thing and was just hard enough to remove the stubborn brake dust yet soft enough not to scratch. The wheel cleaner itself worked brilliantly and actually smelt of berries. Most importantly, I didn't feel like I was damaging my alloys by spraying harmful acids onto them.

A great product, then, but a little pricey when used neat. **Dean Smith**

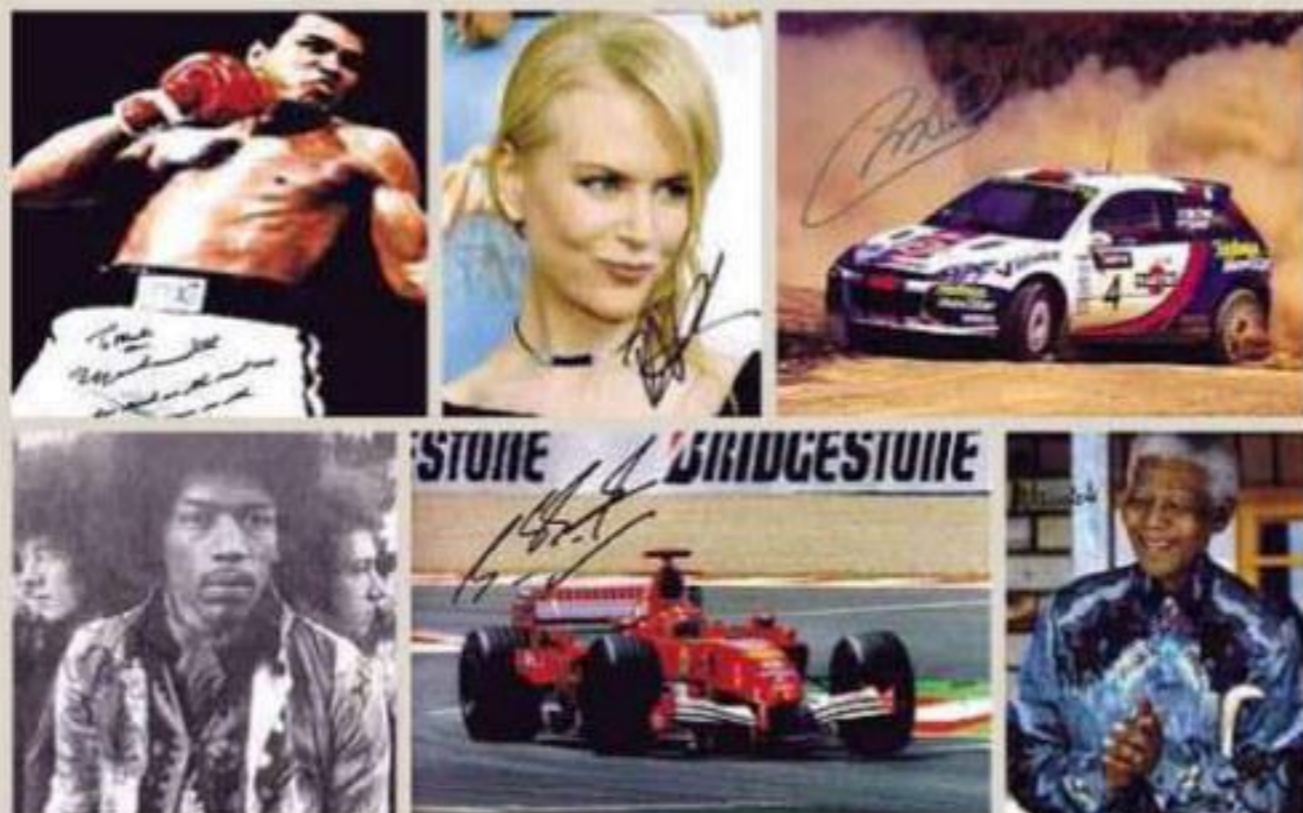


Bilberry Wheel Cleaner made light work of cleaning multi-spoke alloys

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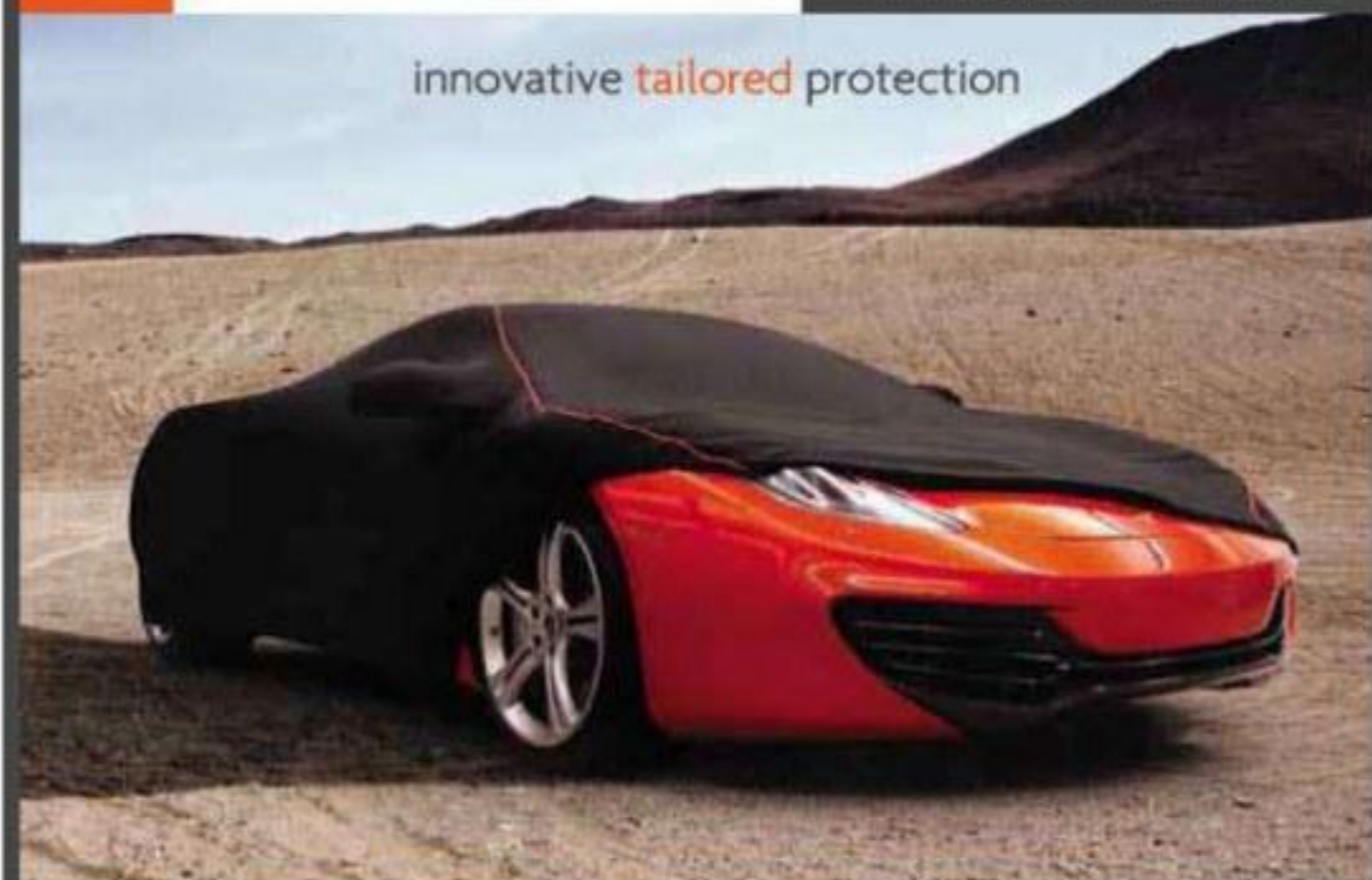
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LAMBORGHINI AVENTADOR LP700-4 £49.99 WWW.DIECASTLEGENDS.COM

New V12 Lamborghinis don't come around very often, and, being a clean-sheet design right down to its engine, the Aventador had a lot riding on it. Thankfully, it delivers, looking and driving exactly as you'd hope a big Lambo would. This 1:43-scale Mattel model of the LP700-4 is available in a variety of colours.



FERRARI FF £112.99 WWW.GRANDPRIXLEGENDS.COM

It's safe to say that, when it was first revealed earlier this year, the styling of the FF took almost everybody by surprise. If you're a fan of the shooting-brake-meets-overgrown-Z4 looks of Ferrari's first four-wheel-drive car, this 1:18-scale model from Mattel will allow you to admire the 208mph, four-seat GT for a little less than the real thing's £227,000 asking price.

T-SHIRTS



PARMALAT BRABHAM
£24.95
RETROFORMULA1.COM
Kicking off a trio of fabulous classic designs from Retro Formula 1 is this tee sporting the logo of Italian dairy firm Parmalat, better known in the UK for its sponsorship of the Brabham F1 team. The shirt also bears a large '5' - Nelson Piquet's early '80s race number - on the back.



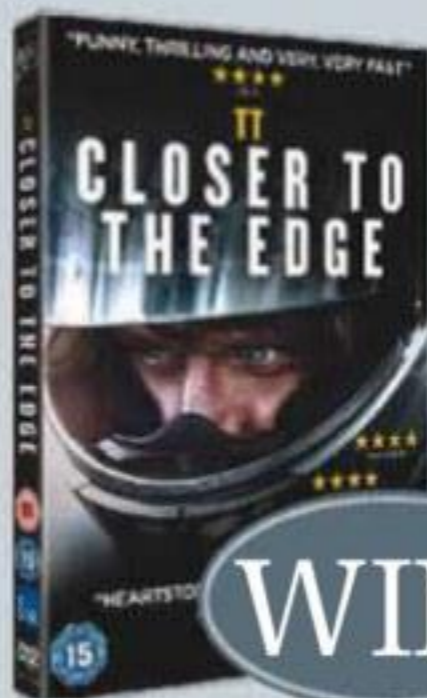
WARSTEINER ARROWS
£24.95
RETROFORMULA1.COM
Next up is a T-shirt with the Warsteiner logo and colours sported by the Arrows team in the early 1980s. In addition to Goodyear, Champion and Cosworth logos on the right sleeve, there is a number 29 on the left sleeve and back, that being the number of Riccardo Patrese, who scored the team's sole F1 pole position.

DVDs



SENNA £8.99

SAINSBURYSENTERTAINMENT.CO.UK
This film is required watching for anyone with even half an interest in motorsport, so if you missed it in the cinema then you need to buy the DVD. There are quite a lot of subtitles so it's best watched on a decent-sized screen to save you squinting at the text. This will also let you immerse yourself properly in the fantastic onboard footage - the downchanges on the way into the chicane at Suzuka are worth £8.99 on their own.



TT: CLOSER TO THE EDGE £10.85 WWW.THEHUT.COM

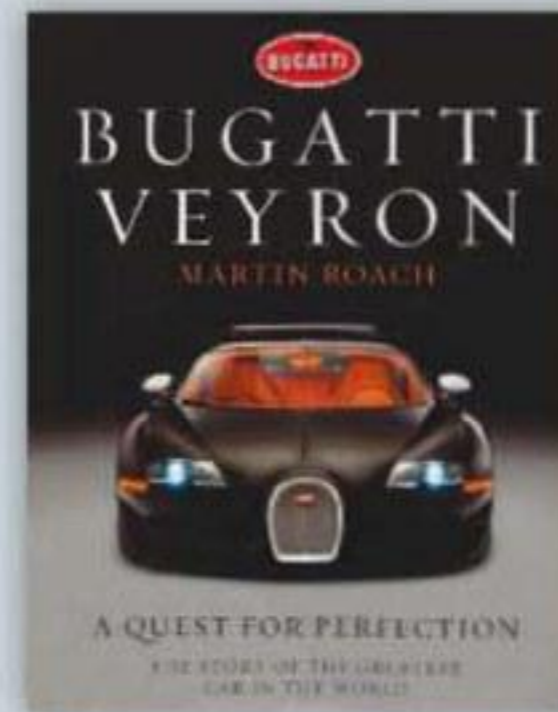
OK, so it's not about cars, but it does feature a familiar face from these pages - that of Guy Martin - and one of the world's greatest road circuits: the Isle of Man TT course. This documentary follows Martin and his fellow competitors as they prepare for and compete in the 2010 TT - and face the consequences of what happens when things goes wrong. It's a compelling insight into the mindset of a TT rider. We've got five copies to give away. Visit competitions.evo.co.uk

WIN!

BOOK OF THE MONTH

BUGATTI VEYRON: A QUEST FOR PERFECTION

£20 WWW.RANDOMHOUSE.CO.UK
The birth of the Bugatti Veyron wasn't easy. In *A Quest For Perfection*, author Martin Roach describes the trials and tribulations of its development in great detail, looking at every aspect of the colossal engineering task faced by those involved. From the creation of a road-going engine that is



capable of propelling a car to 253mph to those infamous but all-important £20,000-per-set bespoke tyres, you'll find it all here.

Roach had access to the Veyron's chief engineer, designers and test drivers for this book, along with Bugatti's archivists and photographers, and even the company's president. It's the definitive Bugatti Veyron book.



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HESKETH RACING
£24.95
RETROFORMULA1.COM
Finally, it's the only teddy bear that it's acceptable for a grown man to be seen wearing on his chest - the one that was the logo of the notorious 1970s race team, Hesketh. This tee has blue sleeves, one of them showing the number 24, which, of course, belonged to James Hunt.

CATCHPOLE'S VIEW

'IT'S GOOD THAT WE DIDN'T DRIVE OUT TO ECOTY THIS YEAR'

As the youngest and least world-weary member of *evo's* road-test team, I generally get given the daft stuff to drive long distances. Need a Caterham or a X-Bow to North Wales in the middle of the night? Easy. An Ariel Atom from Somerset to the Isle of Man (via Troon, in Scotland) and back again? Not a problem.

But the one time I thought I might have overcooked it was on the way to eCoty 2007. Driving a Lotus 2-Eleven from Surrey to Clermont Ferrand in the middle of France in one hit should have been fine, but Harry Metcalfe was leading the five-car convoy and decided the quickest route was via Troyes. It isn't. The little Lotus also had a curious aerodynamic effect that made your bonce wobble uncontrollably and slightly nauseatingly in an 80mph slipstream. The extra strain on the eyes when night fell (yes, it took that long) didn't help either. I eventually cried enough with just 30 miles to go.

So it's probably quite good for my health that we didn't drive out to eCoty this year. I can guarantee someone would have suggested that we have a Morgan 3 Wheeler in the test just so that I could drive it 3000 miles to Portugal and back.



Henry Catchpole
Features editor



GREAT DRIVES

STELVIO PASS, ITALY

It's perhaps the best known and most photogenic mountain pass in Europe, but it has more to offer than just those famous hairpins

Italy's Stelvio Pass has grown in reputation notably of late, partly thanks to its inclusion on a certain motoring TV show a couple of years back. The *Top Gear* trio named it the world's best driving road, and for once their hyperbole isn't too misplaced; the switchback-packed

Stelvio and its approach roads from Switzerland are certainly among the greatest in Europe.

You can't go too far wrong in the Alps, nature dictating roads that satisfy all the facets a petrolhead craves, ones that snake intricately up and down mountains via *Italian*

Job scenery and long, third-gear-amplifying tunnels.

But the Stelvio Pass is the pinnacle. It has been a little typecast by its 60 hairpins, which while suitably challenging do get a little tiresome, especially for your brakes. The best, more flowing bits lie on its western

EVENTS CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

» **11-13 November** Classic Motor Show, NEC, Birmingham www.necclassicmotorshow.com

» **24-27 November** Top Gear Live, Excel, London www.topgearlive.co.uk

DECEMBER

» **2-5 December** Roger Albert Clark rally, Croft www.rogeralbertclarkrally.org

» **3 December** Historics of Brooklands auction, Surrey www.historics.co.uk

» **3-4 December** Race of Champions, Düsseldorf www.raceofchampions.com

» **10-13 December** Le Jog 2011 time trial www.heroevents.eu/Events/LeJog

MORE EVENTS AT
WWW.EVO.CO.UK/EVENTS

READER'S TRIP



Above: reader Matt Taylor's Alpine GTA in the campsite at Le Mans

ALPINE GTA TO LE MANS

» It's a pilgrimage I have longed to make for years, so on June 9 at 9pm my father and I left Cambridgeshire for the 12.10am Dover-to-Calais ferry, our destination the Circuit de la Sarthe to watch the 2011 Le Mans 24 hours.

It's the farthest I have driven my car – a 1986 Renault Alpine GTA Turbo – and with concerns about its fragility (it's from the 1980s and it's French!) plus a set-up that is currently too firm, we chose the simplest route from Calais, the E402 via Rouen all the way to Le Mans, avoiding back roads. Thankfully, the car coped well.

The early hours drive was smooth and clear but we took it easy, having been warned of the zealous gendarmerie. The GTA ate up the miles, its turbo's on/off nature providing plenty of giggles and

side, connecting the pass's 2760m peak to the town of Bormio (which happens to boast numerous petrol stations and other amenities).

A stretch of ten miles, it takes in a dozen hairpins as well as faster, more sweeping roads and a number of tunnels. It's well worth doing this run several times; it feels different on the way up to down, and you'll want to stop and photograph the marvellous scenery at several points, too. If it's foggy or wet, don't fret, as it doesn't take a long period of sun for the valley



Left: roads just don't come any more dramatic. Above: hairpins can be tight

to clear and for the views and road conditions to change for the better.

The Stelvio's eastern side is mostly hairpins. The road is much narrower and its tarmac feels pretty neglected. In something small it's fun and rewarding, but you need to look well ahead and be mindful of oncoming traffic. In a big supercar or something with a poor turning circle, several of the stone-walled tighter turns could prove nerve-shredding and might even require a swift three-point turn. And watch the brakes; give your pads an easier time by letting them cool off a little before coming to a rest.

HOW TO GET THERE

Calais to Stelvio is 700 miles, so enter Germany as soon as possible – much of the route is on derestricted Autobahn, handily cutting the journey time while avoiding French motorway tolls. A detour via Austria to Davos in Switzerland is recommended in order to take the fabulous Flüela Pass towards the Livigno Tunnel. Twelve euros later and you'll exit onto the SS301; follow this to Bormio for a fuel and food fill and the Stelvio will be well signposted. Flying and hiring at Milan airport is a cut-price option.

WHERE TO STAY

The Stelvio National Park caters for lots of Alpine pastimes, and local towns such as Bormio and Santa Caterina boast plenty of accommodation. But our tip lies on the Stelvio Pass itself. Hotel Folgore (www.albergofolgore.com) couldn't be more conveniently placed, is well priced and serves excellent local food.

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR

Bikes, both pedalled and powered. Visit on a sunny day and the road might be swarming with them, so you'll need to be alert. During peak season you can expect caravans and motorhomes to be making snail-like progress up the pass. Go on a Monday morning, though (when most of Italy's shops and cafés are closed), and you should be able to get a run up and down with few interruptions. Finally, as it's the second highest road in the Alps, check for snow-based closures in winter. **Stephen Dobie**

THE BIT TO DRIVE, TURN AROUND, AND DRIVE AGAIN



» LENGTH: 22 MILES
» APPROX TIME: 40 MINUTES

Google © 2011 Cnes / Spot Image, Image © 2011 DigitalGlobe



Left: Aston's AMR-One racers – sadly early retirees in the race

helping keep fatigue at bay. We received many appreciative waves, nods and requests to rev her up from the locals, especially around the circuit – the French love their Alpines.

Camping in the middle of the circuit near the Porsche Curves, surrounded by motorsport fans from all over the globe and watching one of the closest Le Mans 24-hour races ever was an unforgettable experience. As was the drive back, chasing a Porsche 993 all the way to the ferry. A brilliant weekend. **Matt Taylor**

TRIED & TESTED

PANASONIC LUMIX G3 £628.99 WWW.PANASONIC.CO.UK

» Trips can sometimes seem like a bit of a blur, so what you need are photos to enjoy and reminisce over once you're back home. A good camera is an invaluable travelling companion and you want something that is both good enough to do the scenery and your car justice, but not so bulky and complicated that it feels like a chore getting it out and using it.

In our opinion the Lumix G3 strikes an excellent balance between compact convenience (the body weighs just 336g) and full-on DSLR adjustability and quality. As well as having a new 16-megapixel sensor and the ability to shoot movies in full HD, the Intelligent Auto Plus (or idiot-proof) mode is excellent, and for anyone who plays with Photoshop it's nice to be able to save both jpeg and raw files. The three-inch touchscreen is not the most sensitive, but the capacity to

Right: Lumix G3 strikes a handy balance between compact camera and full-size DSLR



shoot from awkward angles when you can't use the viewfinder is invaluable. Most importantly, the picture quality is fantastic.

As the lenses are interchangeable, you can buy the body alone or, as here, with a 14-42mm lens (the equivalent of 28-84mm in 35mm terms). **Henry Catchpole**

HAVE A PRODUCT FOR US TO REVIEW? CONTACT TRIED&TESTED@EVO.CO.UK

GREEN'S VIEW

'WHATEVER THEY DO, MOTORSPORT WILL REMAIN DANGEROUS'

It's the ugly side of motorsport. Thankfully it's rare these days for a driver to be killed, particularly in the top echelons of the sport, and perhaps that's why Dan Wheldon's death was so shocking. He may not have been a household name in the UK, but that was only because he plied his trade in America. Over there he was as revered as Button, Hamilton and Alonso, and quite rightly so. Twice he'd won the Indy 500, arguably the world's biggest race, and in 2005 he was the first man to win the 500 and the IndyCar championship in the same season.

The fact he was such a star somehow makes it harder to take than if it had been one of the lesser lights in the championship. It shouldn't do, but – in the same way that Senna's death affected the world far more than the equally tragic crash suffered by Roland Ratzenberger the day before – it does. Same goes for the tragic loss of MotoGP star Marco Simoncelli.

Lessons will be learned and you can be sure changes will be made, but whatever they do, motorsport will remain dangerous. It's part of the game, it drives the adrenalin and to some degree makes it the sport we love. But it can also make you hate it too.



Roger Green
Features writer

HARD DAY'S NIGHT

evo's Roger Green on a challenging Britcar 24hrs experience

It might be a little scruffier than some of the other 24-hour sportscar races held around the world, but the annual Britcar event at Silverstone certainly has its own unique charm. It's more clubby and therefore more accessible, you don't need the latest GT3 machine to take part (there was even a Smart Forfour that completed the distance to huge cheers this year), and there's always plenty of inter-team co-operation to get as many cars to the finish as possible.

Below: Thorney Motorsport M3 races into a new day. Right: the team celebrate their hard-earned third-in-class finish



The early October heatwave turned the 2011 edition into a race of attrition, particularly in Class 2, where I was competing. The Thorney Motorsport BMW M3 spent a frustrating percentage of the night in the pit garage after the gearbox input shaft snapped a mere seven laps into the race – just I was getting stuck into my first stint.

We didn't have a spare, but Thorney wasn't going to give up that easily. They dispatched one of the team to Daventry with the broken parts where they were welded back together and balanced on a lathe. Such determination went well beyond the call of duty, and we clawed ourselves onto the class podium by the end of the race. It was just reward for an astonishing effort.

The race overall was won by the McInerney Ferrari F430, with a Nicholas Mee Aston Martin GT4 second and a Marcos Racing Lotus Evora third. They may have been fast, but boy did they have it easy...



2011 champion Neal now has three BTCC titles and six independent drivers' titles to his name

NEAL SEALS BTCC CHAMPIONSHIP

Third crown for Honda driver as title fight goes down to the wire

After an intensely fought season that came down to the final race, Matt Neal secured the 2011 BTCC title at Silverstone, leaving teammate Gordon Shedden second in the championship and Jason Plato in third. The three drivers came into the final weekend separated by just five points, and most observers believed it would be the Honda Civics of Neal and Shedden, with their more powerful turbo motors, that would hold the advantage over Plato's normally

aspirated Chevrolet Cruze on the long straights of the Northants track.

And so it proved. Neal's pole position for race one gave him a crucial advantage that allowed him to take the first win of the day. Shedden got in front for the second race, but a reverse grid for the final race handed the advantage back to Neal and he was able to hold on, despite strong pressure. It meant a clean sweep for Honda Racing, with a one-two in the drivers' championship plus the team

and constructors' crowns. James Nash won the independents' title in his Vectra run by 888 Racing.

It's been another strong season of racing in the BTCC, and with 30 cars on the grid for the final rounds it's looking very promising for next year as more cars move to the NGTC regulations. Neal and Shedden will be back with all-new Civics, while it's likely that Plato will also have turbo power. On this evidence, it's set to be another thriller.

TRACK GUIDES: NO. 5 ANGLESEY

Three years ago, Anglesey Circuit went through a major redevelopment that saw almost the entire original track ripped up and disposed of. In its place, a wider and, at 2.1 miles, considerably longer circuit was built, one that follows the contours of the cliffs, giving the most dramatic backdrop

of any circuit in the UK. Just beyond the cliffs the sea crashes into the shoreline, while on a clear day you can see Snowdon and its surrounding mountains.

Of course there's no time to admire the view once on track, for this new layout has plenty to keep you occupied, from the very fast

(possibly flat) Church to the technical challenges of Rocket and Peel. There are three circuit layouts that can be used, but the most common is the full-length 'International' version, which is the one shown below.

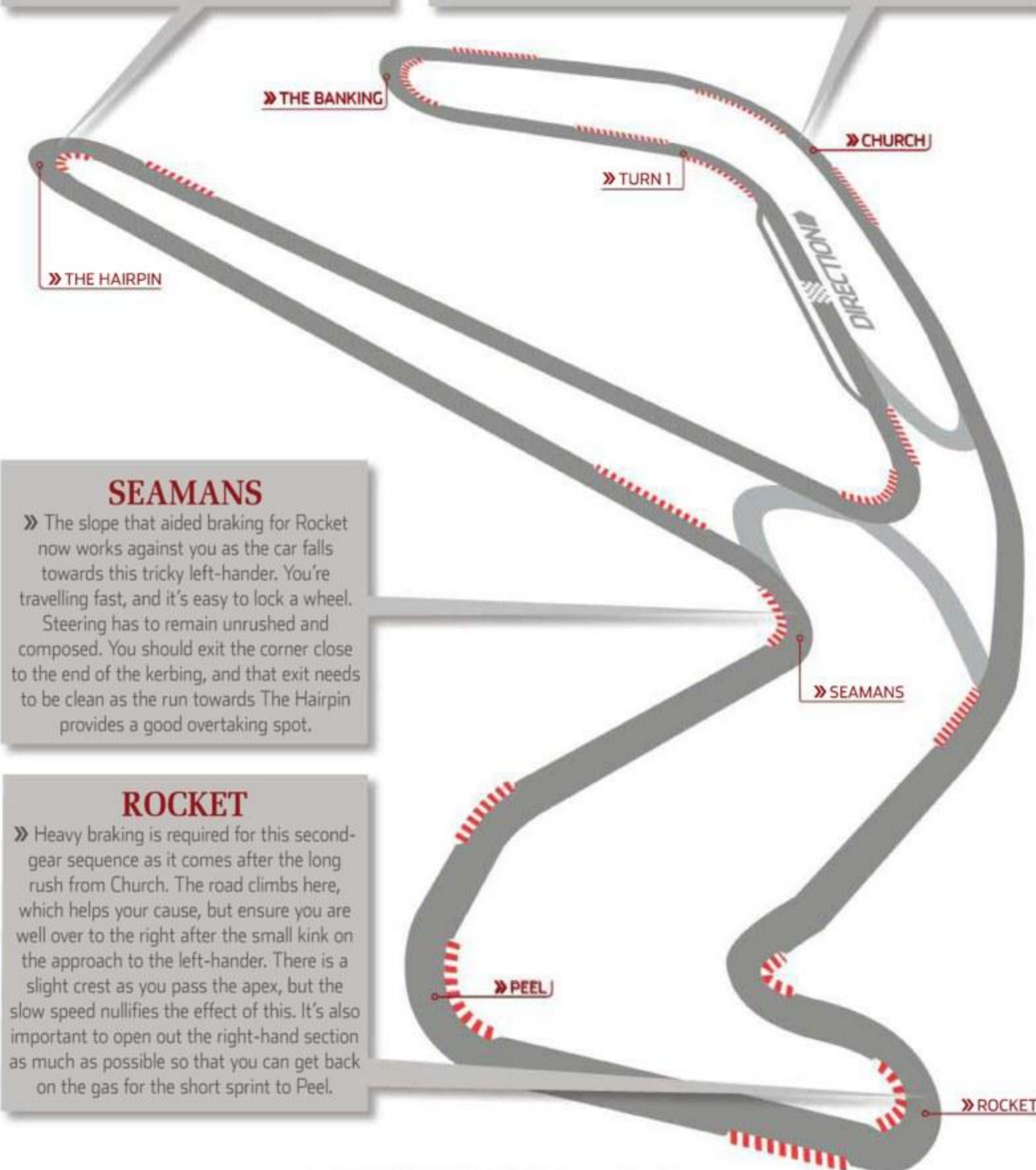
Stuck out on a limb on the top of North Wales, Anglesey is a long haul for most, but it's certainly worth it.

THE HAIRPIN

» Unimaginatively named it may be, but this is one of the very few archetypal hairpins in the UK. Approach wide on the left, and turn in late and hard. The key is to get the steering phase out of the way as early as possible because the moment you begin to unwind the lock you can start to re-apply the power.

BALLSIEST BEND: CHURCH

» Just like the corner with the same name at Thruxton, Church is a high-speed blast that is completely flat for some, but for most requires a subtle lift and a balanced throttle, with the car moving underneath you right on the limit of grip. As with all corners of this nature, the trick is to be gentle with the controls – the faster the corner, the slower the steering input needs to be, so you coax the car into the bend with the wheel. Same with the brakes – if you need to use them it should be a gentle squeeze rather than a stab.



SEAMANS

» The slope that aided braking for Rocket now works against you as the car falls towards this tricky left-hander. You're travelling fast, and it's easy to lock a wheel. Steering has to remain unrushed and composed. You should exit the corner close to the end of the kerbing, and that exit needs to be clean as the run towards The Hairpin provides a good overtaking spot.

ROCKET

» Heavy braking is required for this second-gear sequence as it comes after the long rush from Church. The road climbs here, which helps your cause, but ensure you are well over to the right after the small kink on the approach to the left-hander. There is a slight crest as you pass the apex, but the slow speed nullifies the effect of this. It's also important to open out the right-hand section as much as possible so that you can get back on the gas for the short sprint to Peel.

ASK THE EXPERT

Q I've owned several Porsches in recent years, the last two a Cayman R and a 911 GTS. To be honest, I don't really know how best to adapt my driving style for each car's configuration – mid- versus rear-engined. Can you enlighten me? **Martin Wells**



Driving somewhere with plenty of run-off will help Paul Gunn develop his track skills

A A 911 requires more work from the driver, but it's possible to exploit the fact that its engine is in the 'wrong' place. With all that weight at the rear, it's crucial to get the front tyres working and the best way to do this on track is to brake late and trail those brakes as you begin to turn. This keeps the weight balance forward, pinning the front tyres to the tarmac, giving them more purchase.

Try this to the same extent in the Cayman (particularly in high-speed turns) and you'll induce oversteer. A more traditional brake-in-a-straight-line technique pays dividends. However, the Cayman has such a sweet balance it's possible to play with and choose your attack angle.

Two different techniques then, but both are brilliantly rewarding. **RG**

GOT A QUESTION FOR OUR TRACK EXPERT?
email experts@evo.co.uk

EVENTS CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

» **10-13 November** WRC, Wales Rally GB
www.wrc.com

» **13 November** F1 Abu Dhabi GP
www.formula1.com

» **13 November** NASCAR, Phoenix, USA
www.nascar.com

» **17-20 November** WTCC, Macau
www.fiawtcc.com

» **27 November** F1 Brazilian GP
www.formula1.com

DECEMBER

» **3-4 December** Race of Champions, Düsseldorf
www.raceofchampions.com

MORE EVENTS AT
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MSV TRACKDAY TROPHY LAST RACE NERVES...

Oulton Park, the final round of the Trackday Trophy for our novices. **Adam Bates** reports

After last month's wet and windy Anglesey race, it was no little relief that race day at Oulton Park dawned bright and dry, even if signing-on and the drivers' briefing were conducted in the dark just as the sun was coming up!

Team-mate and *evo* competition winner Tony Hurcombe was the one to experience first-race nerves this time, and like myself had never driven around Oulton before. The Trackday Trophy is

*'CONSIDERING
IT COST £700,
THE BRAVO HAS
BEEN BRILLIANT'*

typically run on a single day to keep competitor costs to a minimum, and so at 9am the Bravo whisked Tony off out of the pitlane and into his first ever qualifying session.

A 30-minute session is not long to learn a new circuit, but when you then have to split it between two of you, it amounts to around four flying laps each. Despite finding out that the exit from Lodge is quite slippery before the sun has got on it, we both managed to complete our new-driver minimum three

laps and qualified for the race. Phew!

Considering it only cost £700, the Bravo has been brilliant mechanically. Fluids and tyre pressures checked, we assembled in the collecting area ready for the race. With a new pit-timing system on board (89p digital stopwatch from eBay) and a hand-made pit board at the ready, the nerves were mounting as fast as Tony's glasses were steaming up! The Bravo lined up at the back of the grid after the Corby Racing MG Maestro withdrew and, as the lights went out, Tony was off.

I thought my nerves were bad enough when racing on my own, but standing on the pitwall, each lap looking for your team-mate to reappear, is like waiting for your bride to turn up at the altar! After 20 minutes the board went out and the Bravo came in, the pit-timing strategy shot to pieces as the timer didn't start when Tony pressed it. The stopwatch alarm also provided my only 'moment' as it decided to go off just as I was entering Druids on my first lap, causing a missed gear and a lock-up whilst I tried to work out where the noise was coming from. But we finished.

Oulton Park is a cracking track, a real racers' circuit as our now-to-be-retired tyres will testify, and the Trophy has been a blast. Can't wait for next year.

Supercar Driving Experiences At Two Different Circuits

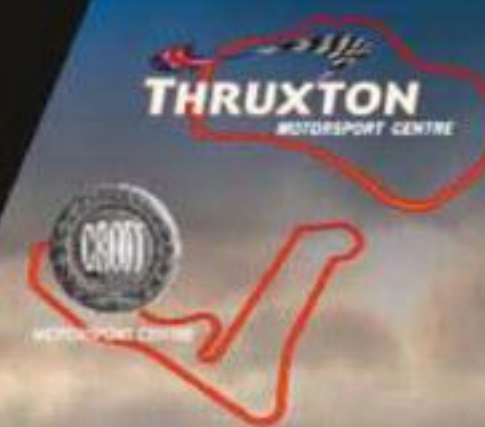


Photo: ©Pete Gibson

Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4 arrives for 2012 and joins the brilliant Ferrari 458 Italia and F430. Plus the Lamborghini Gallardo, Audi R8, Aston Martin V8 Vantage, Porsche Cayman and single seat racing cars.

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SUPERMINIS/HOT HATCHES



OUR CHOICE: Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup. After the mild disappointment of the Clio 197, Renaultsport has got the Clio back to its very best, producing a cracking small hot hatch more than capable of chasing down supercars on eCoty 2009 for a top five finish.



BEST OF THE REST: The Mégane 250 is the Clio's more mature but still thrilling big brother, while Mini's mad JCW still appeals, too. If you're on a tighter budget, the Fiat Panda 100HP, Renault Twingo 133 Cup and Suzuki Swift Sport (right) are all evo favourites.

	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/c	Bhp/rpm	Lb ft/rpm	Weight	Bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating		
Abarth Punto Evo	149 F	£16,847	4/1368	161/5500	184/2250	1155kg	142	7.9	-	132	142	-	+ Attractive and fun - Needs the upcoming Esseesse power upgrade ★★★★		
Abarth 500 Esseesse	129 R	£16,100	4/1368	158/5750	170/3000	1035kg	155	7.2	20.4	131	155	-	+ A properly fun, old-school hot hatch - Limited numbers being imported ★★★★		
Alfa Romeo Mito 1.4 TB	132 D	£15,950	4/1368	135/5250	152/1750	1145kg	120	8.2	-	129	-	51.4	+ So close to being a modern-day Alfasud - But not close enough... ★★★★		
Alfa Romeo Mito Cloverleaf	149 F	£18,365	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1145kg	149	7.5	-	156	139	47.1	+ Great MultiAir engine, impressive ride - Not as feisty as we hoped ★★★★		
Alfa Romeo Giulietta 1.4 MultiAir	144 D	£20,005	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1290kg	134	7.8	-	135	134	48.7	+ Has the equivalent VW Golf covered - An Alfa for your head, not your heart ★★★★		
Alfa Romeo Giulietta Cloverleaf	144 D	£25,010	4/1742	252/5500	251/1900	1320kg	179	6.8	-	150	177	37.2	+ Shows signs of deep talent... - ...but should be more exciting ★★★★		
Alfa Romeo 147 2.0 Lusso	101-109	4/1970	150/6300	134/3800	1270kg	120	9.3	-	129	-	129	-	31.7	+ Fantastic looks, engine and handling - Build quality still lacking ★★★★	
Alfa Romeo 147 GTA	053 F	103-106	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1360kg	185	6.0	15.5	153	-	23.3	+ Focus RS pace without the histrionics - Slightly nose-heavy ★★★★		
Alfa Romeo 145 Cloverleaf	95-101	4/1970	150/6200	138/4000	1200kg	127	8.0	-	129	-	129	-	32.1	+ Fiery engine, individual appeal - Ape-like driving position ★★★★	
Aston Martin Cygnit	159 D	£30,995	4/1329	97/6000	92/4400	920kg	107	11.8	-	106	116	56.3	+ Necessary - Evil ★★★		
Audi A1 1.4 TFSI Sport	147 D	£15,670	4/1390	120/5000	147/1500	1125kg	108	8.9	-	126	122	53.3	+ Audi's Mini rival is an accomplished thing - But not a particularly fun one ★★★		
Audi A3 2.0 TFSI	021400	4/1984	197/5100	206/1700	1295kg	155	7.0	-	148	164	39.8	-	+ Usual Audi strengths - Usual Audi weaknesses ★★★★		
Audi S3	106 R	£31,625	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1455kg	183	5.6	13.6	155	-	33.2	+ Very fast, very effective, very... err, quality - A little too clinical ★★★★		
Audi RS3 Sportback	156 F	£39,930	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1575kg	216	4.5	-	155	-	-	+ Above, with added five-pot character - Again, see above... ★★★★		
BMW 118i	151 D	£21,985	4/1598	168/4800	184/1500	1365kg	125	7.3	-	140	137	-	-	+ Better to drive, and greener than the last one - But no better looking ★★★★	
BMW 125d M Sport	122 R	107-111	4/1995	201/4400	295/2000	1495kg	137	6.5	17.4	148	135	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 bony ★★★★	
BMW 325i Compact	031 D	101-105	6/2494	189/6000	181/3500	1480kg	130	7.1	-	147	-	31.7	-	+ Terrific engine, chassis, price - Looks a bit geeky ★★★★	
Citroën C1/Peugeot 107/Toyota Aygo	126 F	£8695+	3/998	68/6000	68/3600	790kg	87	14.2	-	98	103	61.4	-	+ Full of character and insurance-friendly - Insurance friendly power ★★★★	
Citroën C2 GT	064 R	104-105	4/1587	108/5750	108/4000	1027kg	107	8.7	-	121	-	-	-	+ Appealing and affordable homologation special - Inert steering ★★★★	
Citroën Saxo VTR	013 R	97-103	4/1587	100/5700	100/3500	920kg	110	9.3	-	116	-	36.7	-	+ VTS pose, half the insurance group - Cramped pedals ★★★★	
Citroën Saxo VTS	020 R	97-103	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 F	£16,300	4/1598	154/6000	177/1400	1240kg	126	7.2	-	133	155	42.2	-	+ A proper French hot hatch - Petrolheads might find it too 'designed' ★★★★	
Citroën DS3 Racing	153 D	£23,100	4/1598	204/6000	203/2000	1240kg	167	6.5	-	146	149	-	-	+ Faster, feistier version of above - It's six grand more than a Clio Cup ★★★★	
Citroën Xsara VTS	98-104	4/1997	167/7000	142/4750	1190kg	143	8.0	-	137	-	137	-	33.6	-	+ Citroën's GTI-6 - Missing one gear and a bit of handling polish ★★★★
Fiat Panda 100HP	132 F	£11,005	4/1368	99/6000	97/4250	975kg	103	9.5	-	115	154	43.5	-	+ Most fun per pound on the market - Optional ESP can't be turned off ★★★★	
Fiat Punto Evo Sporting	141 D	£14,095	4/1368	133/5000	152/1750	1155kg	117	8.5	-	127	129	-	-	+ Great engine, smart styling - Dynamics don't live up to the Evo name ★★★★	
Fiat Bravo 2.0 Sport Multijet	126 F	£19,600	4/1956	163/4000	265/1750	1360kg	122	8.2	-	134	139	53.3	-	+ Eager to please, and well made too - Petrol version should be even better ★★★★	
Ford Ka 1.2 (Mk2)	126 F	£8545	4/1242	68/5500	75/3000	940kg	73	13.1	-	99	119	55.4	-	+ Better than a Fiat 500 - Lacks the old Ka's ultimate chuckability ★★★★	
Ford Sportka SE	084 R	103-108	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 Zetec S	123 D	£14,395	4/1596	118/6000	112/4050	1045kg	115	9.9	-	120	134	47.9	-	+ Genuinely entertaining supermini - Grown up compared to Twingo/Swift ★★★★	
Ford Fiesta Zetec S Mountune	132 F	£16,150	4/1596	138/5750	125/4250	1080kg	130	7.9	-	120	134	-	-	+ As above, with a fantastically loud exhaust... - ...if you're 12 years old ★★★★	
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	020 R	100-102	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 Fiesta ST	075 D	105-108	4/1999	148/6000	140/4500	1157kg	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 Focus RS500	152 F	10-11	5/2522	345/6000	339/2500	1467kg	239	5.6	12.7	165	225	-	-	+ More power and presence than above - Pricey (and all sold!) ★★★★	
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	139 R	09-11	5/2522	300/6500	324/2300	1467kg	208	5.9	14.2	165	225	30.5	-	+ Huge performance, highly capable fwd chassis - It could be the last RS... ★★★★	
Ford Focus ST Mountune	137 R	108-111	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 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 RS (Mk1)	053 R	102-103	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 F	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 F	97-102	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	016 F	100-101	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 Mugen	144 F	09-11	4/1998	257/8300	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 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	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	075 R	101-105	4/1998	197/7400	145/5900	1204kg	166	6.8	16.9	146	-	31.7	-	+ Potent and great value - Looks divide opinion, duff steering ★★★★	
Lancia Delta Integrale	011 F	88-93	4/1995	210/5750	220/3500	1350kg	158	5.7	-	137	-	23.9	-	+ One of the finest cars ever built - Demands love, LHD only ★★★★	
Mazda 2 1.5 Sport	132 F	£12,945	4/1498	102/6000	101/4000	1030kg	107	10.4	-	117	135	49.6	-	+ Fun and funky - Feels tiny after a Mini ★★★★	
Mazda 3 MPS (Mk2)	137 R	£23,185	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 still iffy ★★★★	
Mazda 3 MPS Aero Kit (Mk1)	106 R	107-109	4/2261	256/5500	280/3000	1410kg	184	6.1	14.3	155	-	29.1	-	+ Speed, grip, stability - Slightly strange steering, dull styling ★★★★	
MG ZS 180	035 D	101-105	6/2497	175/6500	177/4000	1235kg	144	7.3	-	139	-	29.7	-	+ Well-sorted chassis, characterful engine - Imager looks like a 45 ★★★★	
Mini One	099 D	£13,400	4/1598	97/6000	113/3000	1135kg	87	10.5	-	116	127	52.3	-	+ Perfect power-to-grip ratio - HUGE speedo, slow car ★★★★	
Mini Cooper	099 D	£14,780	4/1598	120/6000	118/4250	1140kg	112	9.1	-	126	127	52.3	-	+ Still desirable - Steering has lost a little feel ★★★★	
Mini One EVO	28/7/11	£18,055	4/1598	181/5500	177/1600	1205kg	153	7.0	-	142	136	48.7	-	+ New engine, Mini quality - Lacks old car's direct front end ★★★★	
Mini Cooper SD	158 D	£18,750	4/1995	147/4000	225/1750	1225kg	117	8.0	-	134	114	65.7	-	+ A quick diesel Mini with impressive mpg - But no Cooper S alternative ★★★★	
Mini John Cooper Works	154 R	£22,320	4/1598	206/6000	206/1850	1205kg	175	6.5	-	148	165	40.9	-	+ A seriously rapid Mini - Occasionally just a little unruly ★★★★	
Mini Cooper S Clubman	110 D	£19,050	4/1598	172/5500	192/1700	1280kg	137	7.6	-	139	137	44.8	-	+ More rear space, load flexibility - Torque steer, looks are a matter of taste ★★★★	



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KEY: ▶ New entries this month. Issue no: our most recent major test of the car (R = Road test or group test with figures, D = Driven, F = Feature article). You can order back issues where still available - call 0844 844 0039. Entries in italics are no longer on sale. Prices are on-the-road including VAT and delivery charges. Weight is the car's kerb weight as quoted by the manufacturer. Bhp/ton is the power-to-weight ratio based on manufacturer's kerb weight. 0-60 and 0-100 figures in bold are independently recorded, all other performance figures are manufacturers' claims. CO2 is the official EC figure and EC mpg is the official 'Combined' figure or equivalent. * = grey import. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of entries, some errors may have crept in. Please send comments/corrections to stephend@evo.co.uk

STAR RATINGS: ★ Thrill-free zone ★★ Tepid ★★★ Interesting ★★★★ Seriously good ★★★★★ A truly great 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
Mini JCW Clubman	137 D	£23,290	4/1598	208/6000	207/2000	1280kg	155	6.8	-	148	157	40.4	+ Ride and handling more composed than the JCW hatch - It's no looker ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S Works (Mk2)	111 F	107-108	4/1598	189/6000	199/1750	1130kg	170	7.6	18.0	145	-	-	+ Cracking hot Mini, until the JCW - Expensive with option packs included ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S Works GP	144 F	06	4/1598	218/7100	184/4600	1090kg	203	6.5	-	149	-	32.8	+ Storming engine, aptly - 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 ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S Works (Mk1)	074 D	03-06	4/1598	210/6950	181/4500	1140kg	187	6.6	-	143	-	-	+ Even more power and pace than the 197bhp version - Even pricier, too ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Colt Rallart	132 F	£15,949	4/1468	147/6000	155/3500	1050kg	141	7.4	-	131	161	40.9	+ Price, handling, performance - Its looks are a little odd ★★★★★
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 308 GT THP 200	155 D	£21,645	4/1598	197/5500	202/1700	1420kg	142	7.6	-	140	159	-	+ RCZ engine in a practical body - Definitely a GT rather than a GTi, though ★★★★★
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 F	94-96	4/1294	100/7200	80/5400	826kg	123	9.3	-	118	-	35.6	+ Frantic, thrashy fun - Needs caring 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 207 GTi THP 175	105 F	06-09	4/1598	172/6000	195/1600	1525kg	132	7.1	-	137	-	39.2	+ Great engine - Sloppy controls and huge body smother the chassis ★★★★★
Peugeot 205 GTi 19	095 F	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	1275kg	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 F	98-99	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1199kg	141	6.9	19.2	137	-	30.1	+ Essentially a GTi-6 for less dosh - Limited choice of colours ★★★★★
Peugeot 309 GTi		89-92	4/1905	130/6000	119/4750	985kg	134	8.3	-	124	-	28.2	+ 205 GTi in drag, cheap - Who wants a cheap drag queen? ★★★★★
Renaultsport Twingo 133 Cup	132 F	£12,210	4/1598	131/6750	118/4400	1049kg	127	8.7	-	125	159	40.4	+ Renaultsport experience for pocket money - Could handle extra 30bhp ★★★★★
Renault SGT Turbo	123 F	87-91	4/1397	120/5750	122/5750	831kg	146	7.8	-	120	-	28.4	+ Clo Williams' grand-daddy - Most have been thrashed ★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup	154 R	£16,930	4/1998	197/7100	159/5400	1204kg	166	6.6	16.7	141	190	34.4	+ The hot Clio is back to 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	074 D	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 F	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	+ Revised Clio V6 is a winner - Uninspired interior ★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio V6	029 F	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 F	93-96	4/1988	150/6100	126/4500	981kg	155	7.6	20.8	121	-	26.0	+ One of the best hot hatches ever - Can be fragile like an Integrale ★★★★★
Renault Mégane GT TCe 180	154 D	£21,070	4/1998	178/5500	222/2250	1320kg	137	7.7	-	139	178	36.7	+ Rides & steers well - Not much cheaper than car below, lacks its sparkle ★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	139 R	£24,020	4/1998	247/5500	251/3000	1387kg	181	6.1	14.6	156	195	33.6	+ Fantastic chassis... - partially obscured by new-found maturity ★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Trophy	160 F	£27,820	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	191	6.0	-	158	190	-	+ Hot Mégane gets more power and fwd Ring record - A pricey upgrade ★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane R26R	157 F	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 ★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane Z30 R26	102 R	07-09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1345kg	171	6.2	16.0	147	-	-	+ Best hot Mégane... until the R26R - F1 Team stickers in dubious taste ★★★★★
R'sport Mégane dCi 175 Cup	119 R	07-09	4/1995	173/5750	265/2000	1470kg	119	8.3	23.5	137	-	43.5	+ A diesel with a genuinely sporty chassis - Could take more power ★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 225 Cup	087 F	05-09	4/1998	222/5500	221/3000	1345kg	167	6.5	-	147	-	32.1	+ Good value and plentiful - You gotta like big backsides ★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane Trophy	087 F	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 ★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza FR	134 D	£15,670	4/1390	148/5800	162/1250	1167kg	129	7.7	-	130	146	44.8	+ Fun and frugal - You're forced to have the DSG automatic 'box ★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza FR TDI	144 F	£17,720	4/1968	141/4200	236/1750	1245kg	115	8.2	-	131	123	61.4	+ Even more fun and frugality - Almost as pricey as the Cupra ★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	139 R	£17,020	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1172kg	154	6.9	-	140	148	44.1	+ Funky (especially in Bocanegra trim), economical - The FR's a better drive ★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	104 F	04-08	4/1781	178/5500	181/2000	1248kg	145	7.1	-	143	-	35.3	+ Well built, punchy engine - The 'warm' FR is a better bet ★★★★★
SEAT Leon FR+	163 D	£21,600	4/1984	208/5300	206/1700	1354kg	158	7.2	-	145	170	35.8	+ As quick as a Golf GTi but £4K cheaper - Misses the VW's completeness ★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R	139 R	£25,995	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1375kg	193	6.1	14.0	155	150	-	+ Bold car, blinding engine - Lacks the character of its rival mega-hatches ★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra	105 F	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	+ Terrible value - Lacks sparkle of very best hatches ★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R 225	067 R	03-06	4/1781	222/5900	206/2200	1376kg	164	6.9	-	150	-	32.1	+ Cross-country pace, practicality, value - Not as thrilling as some ★★★★★
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146 D	£16,415	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 Octavia vRS (Mk1)	077 F	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 (Mk2)	163 F	£20,330	4/1998	197/5100	206/1700	1395kg	143	7.3	-	149	175	37.7	+ Drives like a GTi but costs much less - Green brake callipers? ★★★★★
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk1)	032 D	01-05	4/1781	180/5500	173/1950	1354kg	135	7.9	-	146	-	35.3	+ Remarkably fun and capable - Cabin quality ★★★★★
Smart Fortwo Brabus	110 D	£15,000	3/999	97/5500	104/3500	780kg	126	9.9	-	96	119	54.3	+ Telling people you drive a Brabus - Them realising it's not a 720bhp S-class ★★★★★
Subaru WRX STi	151 D	£32,995	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1505kg	200	5.1	-	155	243	26.9	+ Spec C suspension makes a better drive - No blue paint or gold wheels ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STi CS400	146 R	£49,995	4/2457	395/5750	400/3950	1505kg	267	4.6	10.7	155	-	-	+ Cosworth kudos, Fastest hatch we've tested - Pricey, lifeless steering ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX	125 D	08-10	4/2457	251/5400	288/3000	1395kg	180	5.5	-	180	270	-	+ An improvement over the basic WRX - Still not the WRX we wanted ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STi 330S	124 F	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	132 F	£12,995	4/1586	123/6800	109/4800	1105kg	113	8.9	-	124	165	39.8	+ Entertaining handling, well built - Lacking in steering feedback ★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154 R	£18,900	4/1598	189/5850	192/1980	1166kg	165	6.8	-	140	172	38.7	+ Looks snazzy, punchy engine - Lacks feel, uncouth compared to rivals ★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra VXR	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 ★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra VXR 888	127 D	08-11	4/1998	295/4650	317/4250	1393kg	215	5.1	-	160	221	-	+ Crazy power, chassis copes admirably - Lacks exploitability of Mégane R26 ★★★★★
VW Lupo GTi 6-spd	036 D	00-05	4/1598	125/6500	112/3000	978kg	128	8.3	-	127	-	38.2	+ Looks, performance, snappy gearshift - Lacks fizz of 106 GTi ★★★★★
VW Polo GTi	154 R	£18,790	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 (Mk6)	133 D	£24,395	4/1968	168/4200	258/1750	1329kg	128	8.1	-	138	134	50.4	+ Punchy performance and good economy - Not as much fun as the GTi ★★★★★
VW Golf GTi (Mk5)	139 R	£25,305	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1318kg	160	6.4	16.5	149	170	38.7	+ Still a very accomplished hot hatch - 207bhp isn't a lot any more ★★★★★
VW Golf R (Mk6)	140 D	£31,095	4/1984	266/6000	258/2500	1571kg	178	5.5	-	155	199	33.6	+ 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 F	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 F	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	1111kg	127	8.0	-	124	-	28.8	+ Arguably the best all-round Golf GTi ever - We'd be splitting hairs ★★★★★
VW Golf GTi (Mk1)	095 F	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 TS R-Design	122 R	£21,875	5/2521	227/5000	236/1500	1347kg	165	6.6	16.9	149	203	32.5	+ Good-looking, desirable Volvo - Lacks edge of best hatches, Avoid auto ★★★★★

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HONDA ACCORD TYPE-R, ISSUE 012

SALOONS/ESTATES/4X4s



OUR CHOICE: BMW M3. It's got two more doors than the coupe version but the M3 saloon costs around £1500 less. OK, it does without the carbon roof, but everything else that makes the two-door great is present and correct. What's not to like?

BEST OF THE REST: Lexus's IS-F boasts a glorious high-revving V8 and playful rear-drive. Moving up a size, we heartily recommend the Jaguar XFR (right), while the new twin-turbo M5 is monstrously quick. Merc C63 AMG is our fast estate choice.



	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 F	£102,006	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1410kg	180	6.3	-	155	-	233	+ Noise, pace and individuality - Front-drive chassis can't keep up *****
Alfa D3		£54,070	4/1995	211/4000	332/2000	1495kg	143	6.9	-	152	-	52.3	+ Excellent chassis, turbo diesel oomph - Rather narrow powerband *****
Alfa B5 Bturbio	149 D	£75,045	8/4395	500/5500	516/3000	2040kg	265	4.7	-	191	-	-	+ Big performance and top-line luxury - Driver not really involved *****
Alfa B5 S	118 D	£107,100	8/4398	525/5500	535/4750	1720kg	309	4.5	-	197	-	23.0	+ Quicker and more exclusive than the E60 M5 - Suspension has its limits *****
Alfa B7	134 D	£94,845	8/4395	507/5500	516/3000	2040kg	252	4.5	-	174	-	-	+ Massive performance and top-line luxury - Feels its weight when hustled *****
Alfa B7	085 R	£105,008	8/4398	500/5500	516/4250	1950kg	261	4.8	-	186	-	-	+ Alfa makes a mad, bad 7-series - Over-cautious traction control *****
Aston Martin Rapide	141 F	£149,995	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1990kg	240	5.2	-	188	335	-	+ Better than its DB9 sibling - More a 2+2 than a proper four-seater *****
Audi A4 3.2 FSI quattro S-line	111 D	£35,175	6/3197	261/6000	243/3000	1610kg	165	6.1	-	155	214	31.7	+ A good match for its German foes - An extra £2k buys an S4... *****
Audi A4 3.0 quattro	032 R	£101,004	6/2976	220/6300	221/3200	1505kg	146	6.7	-	151	-	26.9	+ V6 adds class - Jag X-type shows how good fwd can be *****
Audi S4 (Mk3)	163 F	£57,530	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1685kg	198	5.1	-	155	234	29.1	+ More fun than you'd believe possible - When's the new RS4 coming? *****
Audi S4 (Mk2)	073 D	£105,008	8/4163	339/7000	302/3500	1700kg	206	5.4	-	155	-	-	+ Effortless V8, agile handling - Lacks ultimate finesse of class leaders *****
Audi RS4	088 F	£106,008	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1650kg	255	4.5	10.9	155	-	-	+ A leap on for fast Audis, superb engine - Busy under braking *****
Audi RS4 Avant	105 F	£107,008	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1700kg	246	4.6	-	155	-	20.6	+ 414bhp at 7800rpm! - Everyone thinking you're married with kids *****
Audi RS4	024 R	£100,002	6/2671	375/6100	325/2500	1620kg	236	4.8	12.1	170	-	17.0	+ Effortless pace - Lacks finesse. Bends wheel rims *****
Audi RS2		£94,995	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	£106,000	10/5204	429/6800	398/3000	1910kg	228	5.2	-	155	299	22.4	+ Even faster, and discreet with it - Very muted V10 *****
Audi S6	124 D	£108,000	10/4991	572/6250	479/1500	1985kg	293	4.5	-	155	331	20.3	+ Looks and drives better than estate version - M5 still looks tempting *****
Audi RS6 Avant	116 F	£108,000	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	052 R	£102,004	8/4172	444/5700	413/1950	1840kg	245	4.8	11.6	155	-	19.3	+ Huge real-world performance - Inert steering *****
Audi RS6 Avant	052 R	£102,004	8/4172	444/5700	413/1950	1865kg	242	4.8	11.6	155	-	19.3	+ The ultimate estate car? - Numb steering *****
Audi S8	088 D	£106,000	10/5204	444/7000	398/3500	1940kg	232	5.1	-	155	-	21.4	+ V10 engine, ceramic brakes, fantastic gearbox - Light steering *****
Audi Q7 V12 TDI	124 D	£100,370	12/5934	493/5750	737/1750	2635kg	190	5.1	12.2	155	298	25.0	+ Undeniably quick, relatively economical - A tad ostentatious *****
Bentley Flying Spur	080 D	£133,200	12/5998	552/6100	479/1600	2475kg	226	4.9	-	195	396	17.0	+ Performance, wonderful interior - Have you seen petrol prices? *****
Bentley Flying Spur Speed	141 F	£150,900	12/5998	600/6000	553/1750	2440kg	250	4.6	-	200	396	17.0	+ 600bhp, surprisingly fun handling - Could look a bit more like it goes *****
Bentley Mullanne	145 D	£220,000	8/6752	505/4200	752/1750	2585kg	198	5.1	-	184	393	-	+ Drives like a modern Bentley should - Shame it doesn't look like one too *****
Bentley Arnage R	048 F	£102,008	8/6750	400/4000	616/3250	2585kg	157	6.9	17.1	155	-	13.7	+ Twin turbo thrust, limo-like ride - It's a bit heavy *****
Bentley Arnage T	096 D	£106,008	8/6751	500/4200	737/3200	2585kg	196	5.2	-	179	-	14.5	+ Still able to impress - Something of an anachronism *****
BMW 320d EfficientDynamics	143 D	£127,900	4/1995	161/3250	280/1900	1420kg	115	8.0	-	142	109	68.9	+ A diesel close to its best - The Alfa D3 costs little extra *****
BMW 330d SE	123 D	£132,550	6/2993	241/4000	384/1750	1535kg	159	6.1	-	155	152	49.6	+ More power, refinement and mpg - Electric power steering lets side down *****
BMW 325i M Sport		£31,280	6/2996	215/6700	199/2400	1450kg	150	6.6	-	155	168	59.2	+ Stunning drivetrain, controlled chassis - Looks a bit steady *****
BMW 335i M Sport	134 F	£36,920	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1535kg	200	5.6	-	155	196	31.0	+ As above, with added wallop - Still looks a bit steady *****
BMW M3 (E90)	123 R	£53,125	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1605kg	262	4.9	10.7	165	290	22.8	+ Every bit as good as the M3 coupe - No carbon roof *****
BMW 330i Sport	028 R	£99,005	6/2979	231/5900	221/3500	1510kg	153	5.9	17.0	155	-	30.0	+ Clean, classy and confident - Too smooth for its own good? *****
BMW 535i SE	141 D	£38,915	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1685kg	182	6.1	-	155	199	35.2	+ New 5-series impresses... - But only with all the chassis options ticked *****
BMW M5 (F10M)	163 F	£73,040	8/4395	552/5750	501/1500	1870kg	300	4.3	-	190	232	-	+ Twin-turbocharging suits all-new M5 well - Can feel heavy at times *****
BMW M5 Touring (E60)	105 F	£107,000	10/4999	500/7750	383/6100	1790kg	285	4.8	-	155	-	19.3	+ Brilliant at ten tenths - Feels slightly dumpy when pottering *****
BMW M5 (E60)	129 F	£104,000	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 F	£99,003	8/4941	394/6600	369/3800	1755kg	223	4.9	11.5	155	-	-	+ Magnificent V8-engined supersaloon - We'd be nit-picking *****
BMW M5 (E34)	110 F	£92,996	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)	110 F	£85,888	6/3453	286/6500	250/4500	1431kg	203	6.2	-	151	-	-	+ The original storming saloon - Two handfuls in the wet *****
BMW X5 xDrive 40d SE		£47,440	6/2993	302/4400	442/1500	2110kg	145	6.6	-	147	198	37.7	+ Handling, comfort, refinement - Looks like a big X3 *****
BMW X6 xDrive 50i	118 D	£57,430	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	£82,190	8/4395	547/6000	502/1500	2305kg	241	4.7	-	171	325	-	+ Fast, refined and comfortable - But it definitely lacks the M factor *****
BMW 750i		£70,640	8/4395	401/5500	442/1750	2020kg	209	5.2	-	155	266	24.8	+ The ultimate drivers' limo - The back's a nicer place to be than the front *****
Brabus Bullit	119 F	£330,000	12/6233	720/5100	811/2100	1850kg	395	3.8	-	217	-	-	+ Seven hundred and twenty bhp - Three hundred thousand pounds *****
Cadillac CTS-V	148 F	£67,743	8/6162	556/6100	551/3800	1928kg	293	3.9	-	191	365	18.5	+ It'll stand out among M-cars and AMGs - But the novelty might wear off *****
Chrysler 300C SRTB	096 D	£106,000	8/6059	425/6000	420/4800	1965kg	220	4.9	-	168	337	20.2	+ Looks, supple ride, composed chassis - Too much understeer, slow 'box *****
Chrysler 300C 5.7 Hemi	088 D	£105,008	8/5654	340/5000	387/4000	1910kg	180	6.2	15.1	155	-	23.3	+ Gangster chic - Gangsters suspension *****
Ford Mondeo 2.0T Titanium X		£22,695	4/1999	200/6000	221/1750	1581kg	128	7.9	-	144	179	36.6	+ Terrible chassis, sweet engine - People will still want an Audi *****
Ford Mondeo ST220	043 D	£102,007	6/2967	225/6150	204/4900	1550kg	146	6.8	-	151	-	27.7	+ Muscular engine, fine chassis - Hotted-up repmobile image *****
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth 4x4		£90,993	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		£86,990	4/1993	204/6000	204/4500	1220kg	169	6.2	-	143	-	-	+ Roadgoing Group A racecar - Don't shout about the power output! *****
Holden HSV GTS S'charger	041 D	£102,000	8/5665	502/6050	457/5100	1799kg	283	4.5	-	180	-	-	+ Massive linear power, great chassis - Slow 'shift, cheap interior *****
Honda Civic Type-R*	108 D	£107,000	4/1998	222/8000	158/6100	1252kg	180	5.9	-	150	-	-	+ Screaming engine, razor-sharp chassis - Specialist import only *****
Honda Accord Type-R	012 R	£99,003	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 G37S		£40,615	6/3696	316/7000	265/5200	1709kg	188	5.8	-	155	248	26.7	+ Credible alternative to its German rivals - Lacks their looks and kudos *****
Infiniti M37S	150 D	£40,625	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 *****

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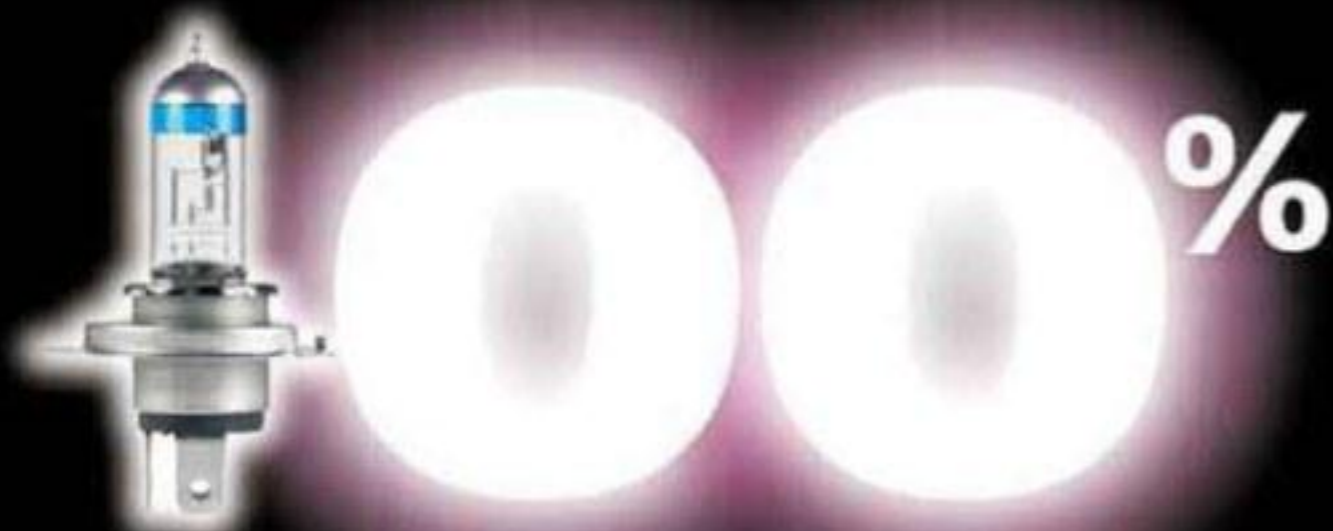
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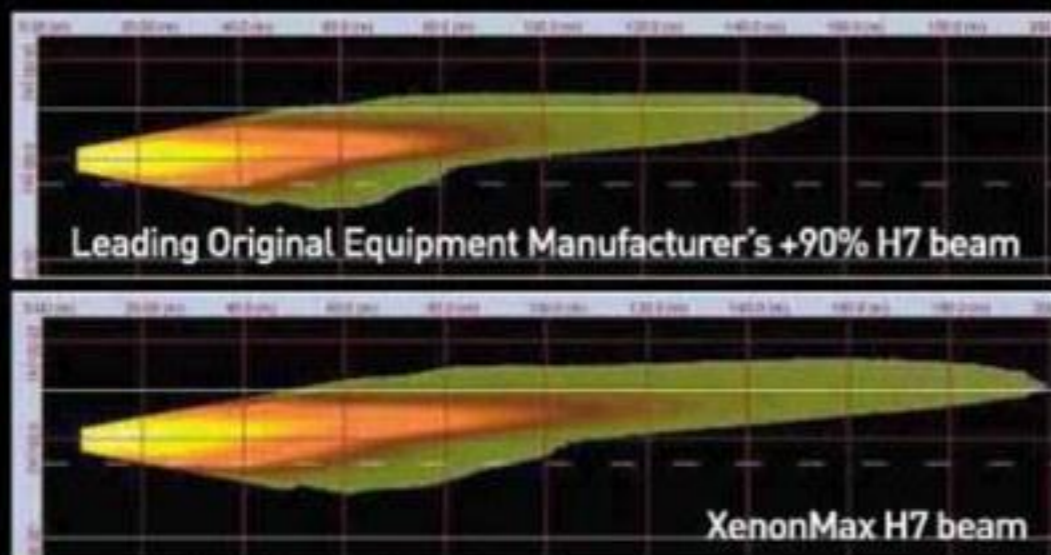
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	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	Bhp/rpm	Lb ft/rpm	Weight	Bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating
Jaguar XF 3.0D S	145 D	£42,950	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1820kg	151	5.9	-	155	179	42.0	+ Best XF after the R - But we'd still have the R... ★★★★
Jaguar XF 5.0		£49,950	8/5000	380/6500	380/3500	1780kg	213	5.5	-	155	264	25.4	+ Ten grand cheaper than the XFR... which is still the one we'd have ★★★★
Jaguar XFR	138 F	£65,350	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1891kg	270	4.8	10.2	155	292	22.5	+ Brilliant blend of pace and refinement - Doesn't sound as special as it is ★★★★
Jaguar XF SV8	116 F	08-09	8/4196	410/6250	413/3500	1842kg	226	5.1	-	155	-	22.4	+ Convincing driving experience - Overshadowed by XFR ★★★★
Jaguar S-type R	048 R	02-07	8/4196	400/6100	408/3500	1800kg	226	5.3	-	155	-	22.5	+ Fine dynamics belie older world looks - Auto-only, and no Isd ★★★★
Jaguar XJ 3.0 V6 diesel	148 D	£55,515	6/2993	271/4000	442/2000	1796kg	153	6.0	-	155	184	40.1	+ A great Jaguar - But not as great as the Supersport... ★★★★
Jaguar XJ Supersport	163 F	£91,050	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1892kg	270	4.9	-	155	289	23.4	+ Superb ride and handling, monster performance - Opinion-dividing looks ★★★★
Jaguar XJR	054 R	03-09	8/4196	400/6100	408/3500	1665kg	244	5.0	-	155	-	23.0	+ Genuine 7-series rival - 2007 facelift didn't help middle-aged image ★★★★
Jaguar XJR 4.0	018 R	00-03	8/3996	370/6150	387/3000	1775kg	211	5.6	13.5	155	-	21.9	+ Matchless grace, extraordinary pace - Not much space ★★★★
Lamborghini LM002	016 F	'86-'89	12/5167	450/6800	369/5200	2700kg	169	-	-	130	-	-	+ Craziest 4x4 ever, Countach V12 - Craziest 4x4 ever... ★★★★
Lexus IS-F	151 R	£58,350	8/4969	417/6600	372/5200	1744kg	247	4.7	10.9	173	270	24.8	+ Shockingly good Lexus - The M3's available as a four-door too ★★★★
Lotus Carlton	035 F	'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	137 R	£87,350	8/4691	425/7000	361/4750	1990kg	216	5.1	12.1	174	365	18.0	+ Finally, a QP with more bhp - New grille a bit Hannibal Lecter ★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	141 F	£94,300	8/4691	433/7000	361/4750	1990kg	221	5.1	-	177	365	17.9	+ The most stylish supersaloon - Slightly wooden brakes, unforgiving ride ★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte	085 F	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		'89-'92	4/2498	197/6750	177/5500	1360kg	147	7.2	-	142	-	24.4	+ M-B's M3 alternative - Not as nimble as the Beemer ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG	151 R	£55,065	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1730kg	264	4.4	9.7	160	312	21.1	+ Monstrous pace and extremely engaging - M3's just a little better... ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz DR520	148 D	£62,920	8/6208	513/6800	479/5000	1730kg	301	4.1	-	187	-	-	+ C63 AMG goes feral - For an extra ten grand, though ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C55 AMG	088 R	04-08	8/5439	567/5250	576/4000	1635kg	228	5.2	-	155	-	23.7	+ Furious fast, commendably discreet - Overshadowed by M3 and RS4 ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	161 D	£75,000	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	1840kg	286	4.2	-	155	295	-	+ New turbo engine doesn't dilute E63 experience - Pricey options ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	096 D	06-09	8/6208	507/6800	464/5200	1840kg	280	4.5	-	155	-	19.8	+ Brilliant engine, indulgent chassis - Vague steering, speed limits ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	052 R	03-06	8/5439	476/6100	516/2650	1760kg	271	4.8	10.2	155	-	21.9	+ M5-humbling grunt, cossetting ride - Speed limits ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG		'98-'02	8/5439	354/5500	390/3000	1642kg	219	5.5	-	155	-	23.0	+ Dragster disguised as a limo - Tyre bills ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG	148 D	£112,290	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2151kg	257	4.5	-	155	244	-	+ Massive torque, massively reduced emissions - Massive car ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S65 AMG	098 F	£163,630	12/5980	604/4750	757/2000	2260kg	272	4.4	-	155	334	19.5	+ God's own supersaloon - Unholy price and thirst ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S65 AMG	073 F	04-05	12/5980	603/6500	758/950	2220kg	275	4.3	-	155	-	16.1	+ Eye-widening wallop - Wallet-shrivelling thirst ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG (Mk2)	154 D	£80,645	8/5461	549/5750	590/2000	1870kg	270	4.3	-	155	231	28.5	+ More power, less weight, more mpg - Pricey options ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	099 F	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	104 F	07-10	8/6208	503/6800	464/5200	2310kg	221	4.6	11.0	155	-	17.1	+ Goes like an SUV has no right to - Gordon Murray will hate you ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz G55 AMG	092 F	£117,460	8/5439	476/6100	516/2650	2550kg	190	5.2	-	130	-	-	+ Thuggishness, anti-style statement - It's a bit silly ★★★★
MG ZS 180	071 D	'01-'05	6/2497	175/6500	177/4000	1255kg	144	7.3	-	139	-	29.7	+ Sweet V6 engine, pace, tidy handling - Image ★★★★
MG ZT 260 V8	068 F	03-05	8/4601	256/5000	302/4000	1680kg	155	6.5	16.3	155	-	21.5	+ Lovely woolly V8, well-sorted rear-drive chassis - Thirst ★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-300		£29,699	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1560kg	189	4.7	-	155	246	27.4	+ The Evo grows up - Perhaps just a little too sensible? ★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-300 SST	118 F	£32,699	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1590kg	185	5.2	13.9	155	256	26.2	+ As above with twin-clutch transmission - As above, with paddles on ★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-330 SST	134 F	£33,799	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-360	122 D	£36,799	4/1998	354/6500	363/3500	1560kg	230	4.1	-	155	328	19.9	+ Ridiculously rapid new Evo - A five speed gearbox? ★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	138 F	09-10	4/1998	403/6500	387/3500	1560kg	262	3.8	-	155	328	-	+ The best Evo X so far... about X grand too much when new ★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-340	088 F	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	103 F	05-07	4/1997	366/6887	363/3200	1400kg	266	3.9	-	157	-	-	+ Well-executed engine upgrades - Prison food ★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII	055 F	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 F	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 F	'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 Makinen Ed.	128 F	'00-'01	4/1997	276/6500	275/2750	1365kg	205	4.6	-	150	-	-	+ Still one of our favourite Evos. Exclusive, too - Import only ★★★★
Porsche Panamera Diesel	161 D	£62,134	6/2967	247/3800	406/1750	1880kg	134	6.7	-	150	172	44.8	+ Impressive economy from sensible Panamera - Not really quick enough, though ★★★★
Porsche Panamera S	160 F	£77,453	8/4806	394/6500	369/3500	1770kg	226	5.6	-	177	293	26.2	+ Great cabin and typically fine Porsche chassis - Only a mother could love it ★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo	137 R	£102,909	8/4806	493/6000	516/2250	1970kg	254	3.6	8.9	188	286	23.2	+ Fast, refined and dynamically sound - It still leaves us cold ★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo S	159 D	£122,623	8/4806	542/6000	590/2250	1995kg	276	3.7	-	190	270	24.6	+ Pace, excellent ergonomics - Steering feel, ride ★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo	144 D	£84,970	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	104 F	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 Si4	160 D	£39,995	4/1999	237/6000	251/1900	1670kg	144	7.0	-	135	199	-	+ Striking looks, sporting dynamics - Helty price, and petrol version is auto-only ★★★★
Range Rover Sport V8 S'chqd	135 D	£66,445	8/5000	503/6000	461/2000	2590kg	200	5.9	-	140	348	18.9	+ Thumpingly fast and hugely comfortable - It's no Cayenne in the corners ★★★★
Range Rover V8 Supercharged	134 D	£85,745	8/5000	503/6000	461/2000	2770kg	189	5.9	-	140	348	19.0	+ Fast, comfortable, luxurious - Big, heavy, thirsty ★★★★
Rolls-Royce Ghost	140 D	£200,500	12/6592	563/5250	575/1500	2435kg	235	4.7	-	155	317	20.8	+ More sporting, more affordable Rolls-Royce - But it still costs £196,300 ★★★★
Rolls-Royce Phantom	054 F	£285,200	12/6749	453/5350	531/3500	2550kg	181	5.7	-	149	377	18.0	+ Rolls reinvented for the 21st Century - The roads are barely big enough ★★★★
Subaru WRX STI	151 D	£32,995	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1505kg	200	5.1	-	158	243	26.9	+ The fast Subaru saloon is back - Blue paint and gold wheels aren't ★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX GB770	109 D	'07	4/2457	266/5700	310/3000	1470kg	192	5.2	-	143	-	-	+ Fitting final fling for 'classic' Impreza - End of an era ★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX	087 F	05-07	4/2457	227/5600	236/3600	1410kg	163	5.4	-	143	-	27.4	+ 2.5 litres gives even greater thump - Slightly light steering ★★★★
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	320/6750	311/3500	1350kg	240	4.3	-	157	-	-	+ Lighter, faster, fiercer - The need for self-restraint ★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB320	105 F	'07	4/2457	316/6000	332/3750	1495kg	215	4.8	-	155	-	-	+ Fitting tribute to a rallying legend - Too hardcore for some? ★★★★
Subaru Imp'z WRX STI PPP	075 F	03-05	4/1994	300/6000	293/4000	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 F	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 WRI	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 F	'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 F	'00-'01	4/1994	276/6500	260/4000	1283kg	219	4.9	13.3	150	-	25.0	+ Ultimate old-school Impreza - Prices reflect this ★★★★
Subaru Impreza RBS (PPP)	011 F	'99	4/1994	237/6000	258/3500	1235kg	195	5.0	14.1	143	-	-	+ Perfect blend of pace and power - Limited numbers ★★★★
Subaru Impreza 22B	011 F	'98-'99	4/2212	276/6000	265/3200	1270kg	220	5.0	13.1	150	-	-	+ On paper, the ultimate - On the road, too uncompromising ★★★★
Subaru Forester STI*	087 F	05-08	4/2457	320/5800	330/3500	-	-	4.8	-	150+	-	-	+ Undercover fun, gutsy engine - Lacks ultimate edge of an Impreza ★★★★
Vauxhall Insignia VXR	163 F	£33,480	6/2792	321/5250	321/5250	1810kg	180	5.6	-	155	249	24.7	+ Highly able and very likeable - It's a £32K Vauxhall... ★★★★
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</													

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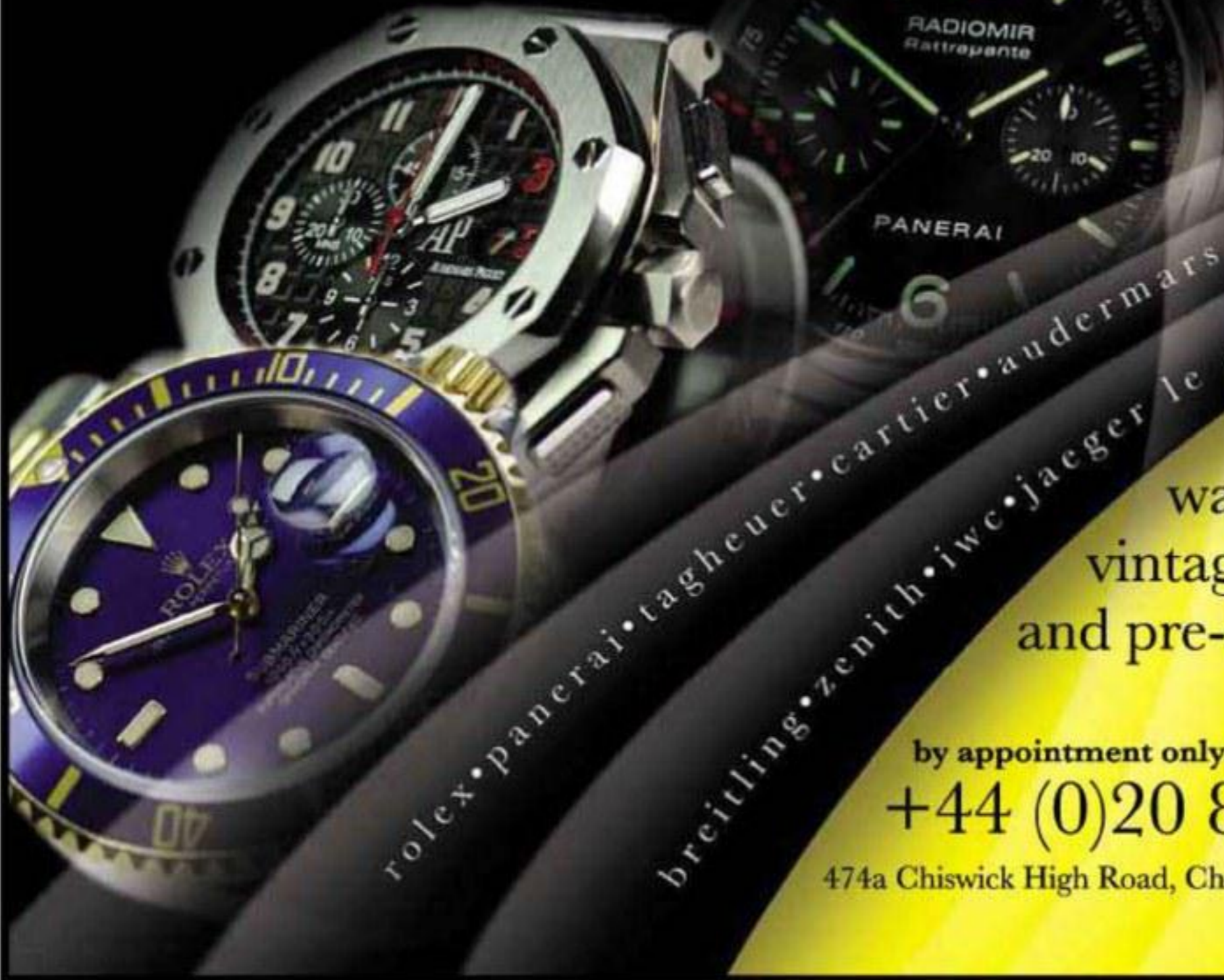
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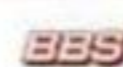


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SPORTS CARS/CONVERTIBLES



OUR CHOICE: Audi R8 Spyder. The Spyder boasts supercar looks, presence and performance, yet you really could drive one every day. And while the V10-engined car makes the more spine-tingling noise, the lighter and even more agile V8 version gets our vote.

BEST OF THE REST: The Elise is a joy, with just enough power, while the revamped MX-5 handles like it should again. The Porsche Boxster is getting on a bit, but still special. For the ultimate thrills, though, treat yourself to a Caterham R300 or an Ariel Atom (right).



	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
AC MiV GT	135 D	£93,500	8/6162	437/4800	431/4800	1000kg	4.4	3.9	-	162	-	-	+ Cobra charm with a modern twist - It's priced against some strong rivals + Beauty meets beast. They hit it off - Good luck trying to buy one + The Atom just got a little bit better - Can still be a bit draughty... + It's brilliant - It's mental + Perfect engine for the Atom's chassis - Only ten being made + An experience unlike anything else on Planet Car - £150K for an Atom + Makes your face ripple - Like Clarkson's + Amazing styling, huge fun - As practical as a chocolate teapot + Sportiest, coolest drop-top Aston in years - Lacks real teeth + Sounds amazing, looks even better - Still not the best drop-top in its class + Consummate cruiser and capable when pushed - Roof-up wind noise + A feelgood car par excellence - it's a bit of a heavyweight + Effortlessly quick - Long-term appeal open to question, not cheap either + Temic engine... - is the best thing about it + Winner on the King's Road - Trails Boxster on the open road + Gets the SA's trick new supercharged engine - Just a little bit dull + That engine - Wibble wobble, wibble wobble, jelly on a plate + Dynamically outstanding, sounds terrific - V10 sounds even better + Looks and sounds sensational - It's the most expensive Audi ever + The world's best, topless luxury GT - Not exactly fuel-efficient + A great convertible just got better - Optional carbon brakes a necessity + Fast, capable and refined - Coupe does the Supersports thing better + Two-and-a-half-ton sunbed - Cheaper Conti GTC a much better drive + The Z4 has grown up... - ...and got fat + As above, with more power - Not as much fun as it used to be + Terific straight-six - Handling not as playful as we'd like + Exhilarating and characterful, that engine - Stiff suspension + Fresh-air M3, that motor, hunky looks - M Coupe drives better + Looks good, great to drive, fantastic engine - A bit shakey + M DCT transmission, pace, slick roof - Extra weight blunts the edge + That engine - Gets the wobbles on British B-roads + Composure, grip, power, comfort - Steering lacks feel at low speed + MS-powered super-sportster - MS's more fun to drive + Fast, dynamic, well built - No roof, looks not for everyone + The Caterham experience starts here - It's pretty raw + New Ford-engined model is just great - Bigger drivers need SV model + One of the best Caterhams is less than £20K - ...if you build it yourself + The Caterham for everyday use, R300 engine - Loses intensity of R300 + Possibly all the Caterham you need - Factory-built cars top £30K + R400 reborn with (lots of) Ford power - Slightly hesitant low-rev pick-up + Better power-to-weight ratio than a Veyron - Until you add the driver + Brilliant for high days, holidays and trackdays - Wet Wednesdays + Twice the power-to-weight ratio of a Veyron! - Not easy to drive slowly + Our 2002 Trackday Car of the Year - Not for wimps + Race-car with a number plate - Your missus will leave you + Fine for the Nürburgring - Hard work around the Bullring + Maddier than Mad Jack McMad - Er, it's a bit mad + Corvette performance - Convertible dynamics, electronics + Despite the CC roof, it's a real Ferrari - We'd still take an F430 Spider + Classic looks, old-fashioned value - Vintage driving experience + An alternative and rev-happy roadster - The Boxster's better + Imagine a Caterham crossed with a Zonda - It's a bit pricey + Basic XK gets extra power... - ...but loses some of its GT refinement + Gains Jag's fantastic new V8 - Loses sporting ground to its main foes + Every bit as good as the XK coupe - 294bhp still only just enough + First Jag sports car for years - Ovenvrought detailing + Hurricane-in-the-hair motoring - A danger to troupes everywhere + The way it drives - The way it looks + Mad looks, real quality feel - Heavier and pricier than we'd hoped + Sharper handling, more power - Pity it's not even lighter, and cheaper + Single-seater style, speed - Old Formula Fords cost £5K + New 1.6 Elise is light and fantastic - Smaller engine could put some off + Even lighter, even more focused Elise - A touch pricey for a stripped-out Elise + Most thrilling Elise yet - Blaring engine note + All the usual Elise magic - Supercharged engine lacks sparkle + Not far off supercharged car's pace - Pricey once it's made road-legal + Impressive on road and track - Not hardcore enough for some

evo POCKET BUYING GUIDE

MAZDA MX-5 Mk1

WHY WOULD YOU?

Because it's an affordable open two-seater with rear-wheel drive, fabulous steering, chuckable handling and a strong dose of trad sports-car vibe. It even made the cut for our Ten Best Drivers' Cars test in 2009 (evo 135).

WHAT TO PAY

There's a rich seam of imported Eunoses between £1000 and £2000. Late low-mileage UK 1.8s seldom pass £3000.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Engines, both 1.6 and 1.8, are bulletproof,

but check for oil leaks on 1.8s. Ensure rubber boots under the gearlever have been replaced as these protect the linkage. Top rot-spots are rear wheelarches, rear sills and base of windscreen pillars. Ensure replacement hoods fit well. (Full guide, evo 163.)



THE VITAL STATS (1.6)

Years 1989-97 Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc Power 115bhp @ 6500rpm Torque 100lb ft @ 5500rpm 0-60mph 9.1sec Top speed 114mph



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K666 KTH £399.99	80 WCX £999.99	5 FAN £5,999.99
F4 BME £2,299.99	LAM 30X £4,899.99	POR I £44,999.99
VEV IL £17,999.99	NOB 88IE £1,399.99	PGJ 508 £1,499.99
YII PPE £9,999.99	484 UM £999.99	6 ED £72,499.99

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+Bike-engined road-rocket
- Not big on practicality...
WESTFIELD MEGABUSA, ISSUE 036

	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 2-Eleven GT4	138 F	£76,590	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 Elise S 1.8	104 F	'06-'10	4/1794	154/6200	127/4200	860kg	158	6.3	18.7	127	-	37.2	+ Brilliant entry-level Elise - Precious little ★★★★★
Lotus Elise S2 111S	049 F	'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	776kg	189	5.4	-	129	-	-	+ One of our fave S2 Elises - Brakes need more bite and pedal feel ★★★★★
Lotus Elise S2 Sport 190	044 F	'03	4/1796	190/7800	128/5000	710kg	272	4.7	12.1	135	-	-	+ Fabulous trackday tool - Pricey ★★★★★
Lotus Elise S1	126 F	'96-'00	4/1796	118/5500	122/3000	731kg	164	6.1	18.5	126	-	39.4	+ A modern classic - A tad impractical? ★★★★★
Lotus 340R	126 F	'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 F	'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 F	'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	£98,200	8/4691	434/7000	332/4750	1980kg	223	5.3	-	176	354	18.5	+ As good to drive as it is to look at - Lacks the grunt of some rivals ★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio Sport	161 D	£102,675	8/4691	444/7000	376/4750	1980kg	228	5.1	-	177	377	19.5	+ Looks, performance, cruising ability - Brakes could be sharper ★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8 SE		£17,990	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1155kg	109	9.9	-	121	167	40.4	+ Basic MX-5 offers ESP-less fun - But you'll probably want the 2.0's power ★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 2.0i Sport Tech	138 F	£21,135	4/1999	158/7000	139/5000	1173kg	144	7.6	-	132	181	37.2	+ Handles brilliantly again - Less than macho image ★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk3 v1)	091 F	'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 ragtops don't get much better - Cheap cabin ★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.6 (Mk1)	131 F	'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	£44,225	6/3498	302/6500	273/3500	1465kg	209	5.5	-	155	167	-	+ Best non-AMG SLK yet - Still no Boxster-beater ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	087 F	'05-'09	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 F		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		£81,705	8/5461	383/6000	391/2800	1910kg	204	5.4	-	155	272	24.4	+ Unflappable, gorgeous, beautifully engineered - Just a bit dull ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	117 D	£106,820	8/6208	518/6800	464/5200	1895kg	278	4.6	-	155	328	20.3	+ More focused than old SL55 AMG - Lost some of its all-round appeal ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL55 AMG	070 F	'02-'07	8/5439	493/6100	516/2650	1955kg	256	4.6	10.2	155	-	-	+ As fast as a Muroélago - Not as much fun ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG		'08-'10	12/5980	604/4800	737/2000	2045kg	300	4.2	-	155	-	18.7	+ Humongous torque - Humongously expensive ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG	071 D	'04-'07	12/5980	604/4800	737/2000	2035kg	302	4.1	-	155	-	-	+ Gob-smacking performance - Gob-smackingly pricey ★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works Conv.	130 F	£24,765	4/1598	208/6000	206/1850	1309kg	152	6.9	-	146	169	39.8	+ A manlier Mini cabrio. As hardcore as the hatch... which is still better ★★★★★
MG TF 135		£14,215	4/1796	133/6750	122/5000	1185kg	114	8.4	-	127	185	35.8	+ Cheaper than an MX-5 - But an MX-5 is much better ★★★★★
Morgan 3 Wheeler	161 R	£30,000	2/1982	115/3300	100/3200	480kg	243	4.5	-	120+	-	-	+ Quirky, characterful, brilliant - Unnatural brake feel, you'd better not be shy ★★★★★
Morgan Roadster V6	075 D	£40,000	6/2967	202/6000	206/4900	950kg	216	4.9	-	134	225	28.8	+ Lusty V6, romantic atmosphere - Bygone dynamics ★★★★★
Morgan Aero SuperSports	145 F	£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 F	'02-'08	8/4799	363/6300	361/3400	1100kg	334	4.5	-	170	-	25.2	+ Glorious sound, view over bonnet, dynamics - Awkward-looking rear ★★★★★
Nissan 370Z Roadster	143 F	£31,250	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1554kg	213	5.5	-	155	262	25.2	+ The Zed's old-school character remains intact - Its purposeful looks don't ★★★★★
Nissan 350Z Roadster		'04-'09	6/3498	309/6600	264/4800	1600kg	196	5.8	-	155	-	24.8	+ Drives just like the coupe - But doesn't look as good ★★★★★
Porsche Boxster		£36,572	6/2893	252/6400	214/4400	1335kg	192	5.9	-	163	221	30.1	+ Still as impressive as ever - It's a typically Porsche face-lift ★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S	161 R	£43,800	6/3436	306/6400	265/5500	1335kg	229	5.3	-	170	225	29.7	+ As above, but with more power - Lighter steering than before ★★★★★
Porsche Boxster Spyder	140 F	£47,843	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1275kg	252	5.0	-	166	221	-	+ Lighter, more driver-centric Boxster - Collapsed-brolly roof not practical ★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (Mk2)		'05-'09	6/2687	241/6500	201/4600	1305kg	188	6.0	-	160	-	29.4	+ Mk2 Boxster is even better than the Mk1 - Ubiquity? ★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (Mk2)	101 D	'07-'09	6/3387	291/6250	251/4400	1335kg	218	5.3	-	169	-	27.2	+ Real drop-top alternative to a 911 - It ain't cheap ★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (Mk1)	049 F	'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 (Mk1)	070 F	'99-'04	6/3179	260/6200	228/4700	1320kg	200	5.5	-	164	-	26.9	+ Added power is seductive - As above ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S Cabrio	130 F	£83,861	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1510kg	256	4.9	-	188	242	27.4	+ Minimal compromise, max performance - Questionable image ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera GTS Cabrio	161 R	£85,249	6/3800	402/7300	310/4200	1515kg	270	4.7	-	190	-	-	+ The best 911 drop-top you can buy - Lacks glamour of an RB Spyder ★★★★★
Porsche 911 C4 Cabrio	122 D	'78-'82	6/3614	341/6500	288/4400	1555kg	223	5.2	-	176	242	27.4	+ The usual - The usual image problems ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabrio	139 D	£118,015	6/3800	493/6000	479/1950	1649kg	305	3.8	-	194	275	24.1	+ Absurdly quick and capable drop-top - We'd still take the coupe ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Speedster	152 D	£144,100	6/3800	402/7300	310/4200	1540kg	265	4.4	-	189	242	27.0	+ Rarity, quality, head-turning styling - More collectors' than drivers' car ★★★★★
Porsche 911 C2 Cabrio (1996)		'05	6/3387	316/6800	273/4250	1386kg	232	5.0	-	174	-	25.4	+ Feels solid like the hard-top - What more do you want? ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabrio (1996)	060 F	'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 SR4 Tracksport	070 F	£28,995	4/1500	250/9000	130/8000	462kg	550	3.5	-	160	-	-	+ 2004 Trackday Car of the Year - You may want a trailer ★★★★★
Radical SR8LM	138 F	£88,000	8/2800	460/10,500	260/8000	680kg	687	3.2	-	168	-	-	+ Fastest car around the Nordschleife - Convincing people it's road legal ★★★★★
Smart Roadster Brabus	067 D	'04-'07	3/698	101/5600	96/2500	895kg	115	9.8	-	121	-	54.3	+ Feisty engine, growly soundtrack - Slow paddleshift gearbox ★★★★★
Tesla Roadster	131 F	£88,740	AC motor	248/4500	273/0-4500	1285kg	196	5.0	14.3	120	-	-	+ If this is the future, it's going to be fun - Limited range, high price ★★★★★
Toniq-R Duratec	102 D	£23,500	4/1999	193/6500	174/4500	550kg	357	4.5	-	140	-	-	+ Very good value, well built, and lots of fun too - No roof, no windscreen ★★★★★
Toyota MR2	078 F	'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 T350T	067 D	'04-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1100kg	318	4.4	-	175+	-	-	+ Targa top roof, grumpy engine - Lacks polish ★★★★★
TVR Tamora	070 F	'01-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1050kg	338	4.5	-	160	-	-	+ Well-sorted soft-top TVR - Awkward styling ★★★★★
TVR Tuscan Convertible	091 R	'05-'07	6/3996	365/6800	315/6000	1100kg	337	3.8	8.1	195+	-	-	+ Spirit of the Griff reborn - Over 195mph? Really? ★★★★★
TVR Chimera 5.0	007 R	'93-'03	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.6	-	167	-	26.4	+ Gorgeous noise, tarmac-ripping grunt - Details ★★★★★
TVR Griffith 4.3	068 F	'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 ★★★★★
Ultima CTR	017 R	£45,500	8/6300	534/5800	528/4800	990kg	548	3.9	8.2	204	-	-	+ Turns the M1 into the Mulsanne - You'll have to build it yourself ★★★★★
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 ★★★★★
Westfield Megabusa	036 F	£24,450	4/1298	175/9800	102/9000	430kg	415	3.7	-	140	-	-	+ Bike-engined road-rocket - Not big on practicality... ★★★★★
Westfield 1600 Sport Turbo	140 D	£26,500	4/1598	195/5850	170/2000	650kg	305	4.7	-	142	-	-	+ Very quick and composed - Expensive, and a little on the heavy side ★★★★★
Westfield XI	078 D	'04-'10	4/1275	65/6000	72/3000	498kg	132	8.5	-	120	-	-	+ Old-school charm - Old-school power ★★★★★
Westfield XTR4	068 D	'01-'10	4/1781	220/5900	184/5000	543kg	413	3.6	-	160	-	-	+ Mini-Le Mans racer - You wouldn't want to drive it there ★★★★★
Westfield SEIGHT	068 F	'92-'94	8/3900	270/6000	-	622kg	441	4.4	9.4	144	-	-	+ Snarling, fire-breathing V8, ferocious pace - Spits fuel at you ★★★★★
Wesmann Roadster MF3	077 D	£68,000	6/5246	338/7900	269/4900	1180kg	291	4.9	-	158	-	-	+ Engine, ride, build quality, exclusivity - Umm... '50s styling? ★★★★★

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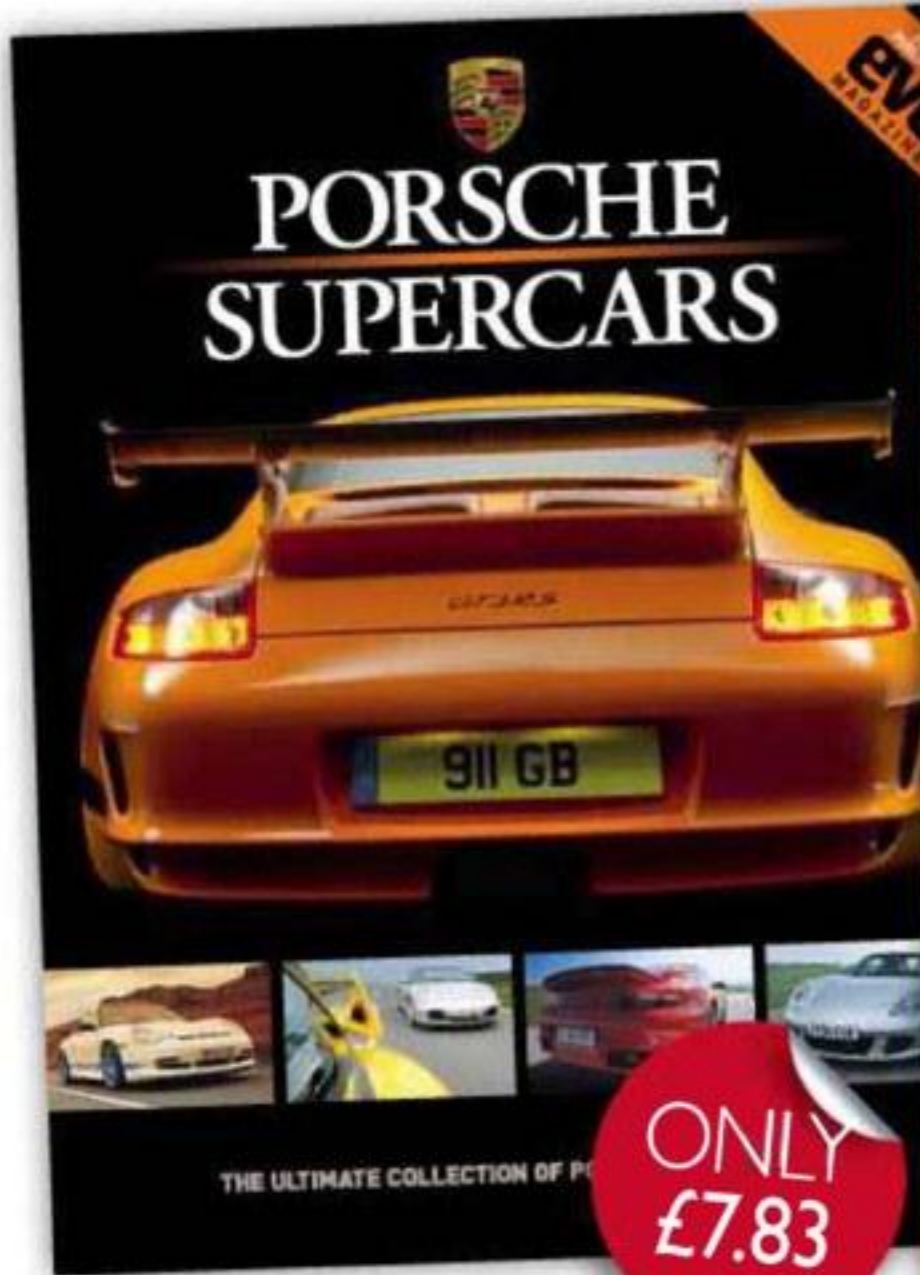
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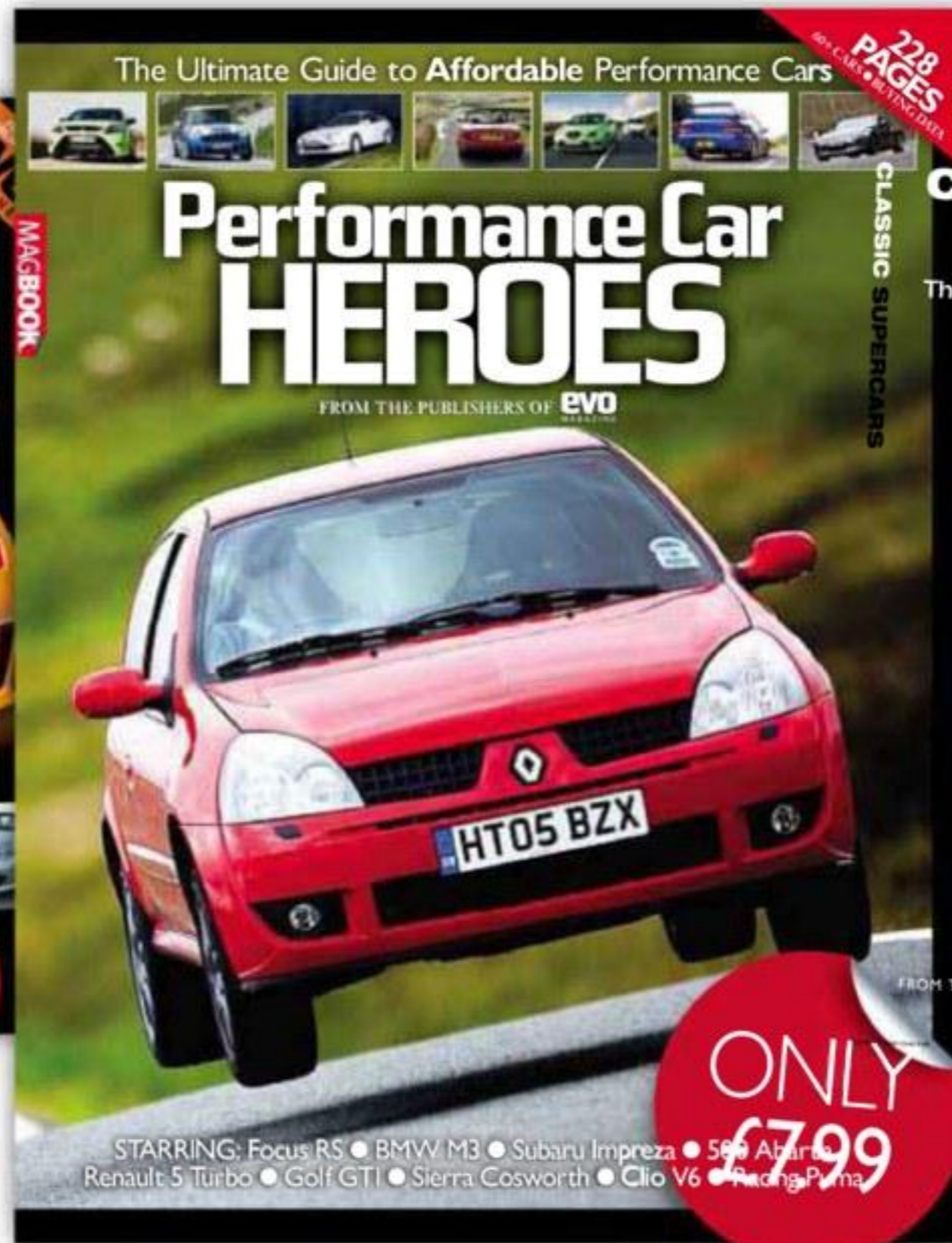
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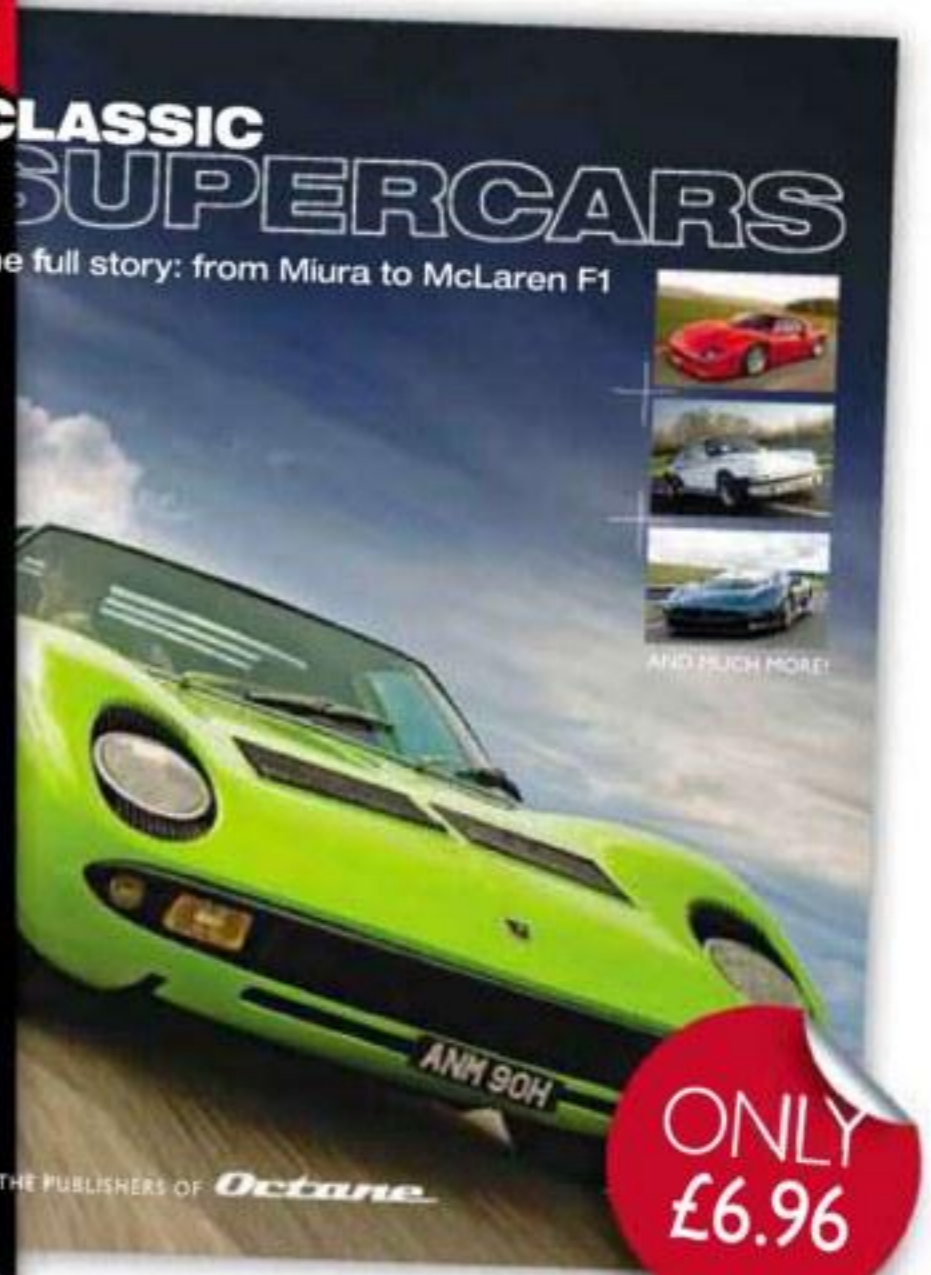
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+ Sublime 5-cylinder turbo engine
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AUDI TT RS, ISSUE 158

COUPES/GTs



OUR CHOICE: Porsche 997.2 GT3 RS 4.0. We really didn't think the previous 911 GT3 RS could be improved upon, but the new 4.0 version is even faster, even more hardcore and even more intoxicating. Quite possibly the best road-going 911 ever, and evo's Car of the Year 2011.

BEST OF THE REST: Lotus's Evora was our 2009 eCoty, offering Elise fun and tactility in a baby-supercar package. Nissan's GT-R (our 2008 eCoty) is supercar-quick, while Audi's RBs are sublime and BMW's 1-series M Coupe (right) is the best M-car in years.



	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 F	£30,065	6/3195	256/6300	237/4500	1532kg	170	6.9	-	155	260	-	+ Brera made better for UK roads - Steering still lacking some feel	★★★★
Alfa Romeo GT 3.2 V6 Lusso	071 R	104-108	6/3179	240/6200	221/4800	1410kg	173	6.3	15.5	149	-	228	+ Gorgeous looks, strong performance - Unsettled ride	★★★★
Alfa Romeo GTV 3.0 V6	010 F	96-106	6/2959	220/6300	199/5000	1406kg	159	6.5	-	150	-	241	+ Glorious V6 makes it a mini-Ferrari - So-so chassis	★★★★
Alfa Romeo BC Competizione	120 F	£111,000	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1585kg	288	4.1	-	181	-	-	+ Looks, exclusivity, noise, balance - They're all sold	★★★★★
Alpina B3 Biturbo	108 F	£50,745	6/2979	335/5500	369/3900	1570kg	230	4.8	-	177	-	291	+ Alpina's M3 alternative - Too refined for some	★★★★★
Artega GT	122 F	£64,860	6/3597	296/6600	258/2400	1100kg	273	4.9	-	170	-	-	+ Stunning looks, chassis up with the best - Interior design, price	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage 4.7	120 F	£90,895	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1630kg	262	4.7	-	180	328	204	+ More power lifts Vantage to a new level - Ride is unrelentingly firm	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage N420	147 F	£96,995	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1630kg	262	4.7	-	180	-	204	+ Aston's best V8 Vantage yet... - is one of the most expensive	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S	156 D	£102,500	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	271	4.5	-	189	299	-	+ Keener engine, V12 Vantage looks - Slightly sluggish auto only	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage 4.3	109 F	105-108	8/4281	380/7300	302/5000	1630kg	237	5.2	12.0	175	-	-	+ Gorgeous, awesome soundtrack - Can't quite match 911 dynamically	★★★★
Aston Martin DB9	146 D	£128,150	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1760kg	271	4.6	-	190	389	172	+ Ride & handling transformed for 2010 - Rapide doesn't cost much more	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB7 Vantage	010 R	100-105	12/5935	420/6000	400/5000	1770kg	241	4.9	11.2	185	-	186	+ DB7 with rear-supercar pace - Handling lacks edge	★★★★★
Aston Martin Virage	156 D	£149,995	12/5935	490/6500	420/5750	1783kg	279	4.6	-	186	-	-	+ DB9 gets DBS assertiveness - Slightly dated feel, seems heavy	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS	142 F	£180,182	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1695kg	306	4.2	-	191	388	173	+ Stupendous engine, gearbox, brakes - Pricey. Can bite the unwary	★★★★★
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI	155 R	£27,140	4/1984	208/4300	258/1600	1295kg	163	6.3	15.7	152	154	42.8	+ Front-driver loses nothing to quattro TTs - Steers like a computer game	★★★★
Audi TT S	119 D	£35,605	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1395kg	195	5.4	-	155	184	35.3	+ Usefully quicker TT; great drivetrain - Still steers like a computer game	★★★★
Audi TT RS	158 R	£45,840	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1450kg	235	4.4	11.1	155	214	31.0	+ Sublime 5-cylinder turbo engine - Rest of package can't quite match it	★★★★
Audi TT Sport (Mk1)	081 D	105-106	4/1781	237/5700	236/2300	1590kg	173	5.7	-	155	-	30.3	+ Deliciously purposeful interior, crisp chassis - Numb steering	★★★★
Audi S5	163 D	£42,790	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1675kg	199	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	+ Supercharged V6 makes S5 cleaner and faster - Pricey once you add options	★★★★
Audi RS5	162 R	£58,725	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1725kg	261	4.3	10.6	155	-	-	+ Brilliant engine and accomplished chassis... - don't get together	★★★★
Audi R8 V8	106 R	£87,935	8/4163	414/7800	317/4500	1560kg	270	4.1	9.9	187	332	20.3	+ Finally, a true 911 alternative - Exclusivity comes at a price	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10	146 R	£109,090	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	325	3.9	8.4	196	351	19.2	+ The fabulous R8 gets a supercar engine - Looks a lot like the V8	★★★★★
Audi R8 GT	151 D	£142,585	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1520kg	369	3.6	-	199	-	-	+ Everything we love about the R8 - Not as hardcore as we wanted	★★★★★
Audi Quattro 20V	019 F	90-91	5/2226	220/5900	228/1950	1329kg	146	6.2	18.2	143	-	191	+ Modern classic - Buy wisely to avoid big bills	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT	152 D	£135,760	12/5998	567/6000	516/1700	2320kg	248	4.6	-	198	384	-	+ 200mph in utter comfort - Weight, thirst	★★★★
Bentley Continental GT Speed	115 F	£144,440	12/5998	600/6000	553/1750	2350kg	259	4.3	-	202	396	17.0	+ Stupendous performance, fine dynamics - Weight, thirst...	★★★★★
Bentley Conti Supersports	137 F	£170,100	12/5998	621/6000	590/2000	2240kg	282	3.7	-	204	388	17.3	+ A thoroughly impressive car... - rather than a fun and involving one	★★★★★
Bentley Brooklands	116 D	£241,600	8/6761	530/4000	774/3250	2655kg	203	5.0	-	184	465	14.5	+ More fun than it has any right to be - It's a bit thirsty	★★★★★
BMW 135i M Sport	113 F	£31,785	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1495kg	211	5.3	-	155	198	30.7	+ Fast, fun, £20k cheaper than an M3 - Not as wild as we'd hoped	★★★★
BMW 1-series M Coupe	158 R	£40,020	6/2979	335/5900	369/1500	1495kg	228	4.8	-	155	224	-	+ Character, turbo pace and great looks - Could hinder BMW M3 sales...	★★★★★
BMW 335i M Sport	095 D	£39,145	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1525kg	201	5.2	12.2	155	196	31.0	+ Eager engine, exploitable chassis - Slightly unadventurous styling	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E92)	162 R	£54,595	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1580kg	266	4.3	10.3	155	290	22.8	+ Fends off all of its talented new rivals - ...except the cheaper 1-series M	★★★★★
BMW M3 GTS (E92)	156 F	£117,630	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1530kg	295	4.3	-	193	295	-	+ Highly exclusive, feels special - Highly priced, too. And it's no GT3 RS	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E46)	066 F	100-107	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 F	105-107	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	103-104	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 F	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)	019 F	86-90	4/2302	220/6750	180/4750	1257kg	178	6.7	17.8	144	-	20.3	+ Best M-car ever! Race-car dynamics for the road - LHD only	★★★★★
BMW Z4 3.0si Coupe	107 R	06-09	6/2996	261/6600	232/2750	1320kg	201	5.6	-	155	-	31.7	+ The looks, the sounds, the way it goes - Fidgety chassis	★★★★★
BMW Z4 M Coupe	097 F	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 640i Coupe	160 D	£59,565	6/2979	316/5800	332/1300	1660kg	194	5.4	-	155	179	-	+ New Six boasts improved looks, effortless performance - Not hugely exciting	★★★★
BMW M6	106 R	105-10	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 SS	148 F	£52,000	8/6162	420/5900	420/4600	1751kg	247	4.7	-	155	-	-	+ Looks like a Transformer made real - We'd prefer it in robot mode	★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette C6	116 D	£49,033	8/6162	430/5900	424/4600	1461kg	300	4.3	-	186	-	21.2	+ A Corvette with no apologies needed - Still left-hand drive only	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Z06	099 F	£66,403	8/7011	505/6300	469/4800	1418kg	363	3.9	8.5	198	-	19.2	+ BS to 100, brakes, price - Not quite the road-racer we expected	★★★★★
Dodge Challenger *	122 D	£40,000	8/6059	425/6200	420/4800	1877kg	230	5.2	-	160	-	-	+ Effortlessly cool... - If you live in Hazzard County	★★★★
Ford Mustang Boss 302 *	162 R	£45,000	8/4951	444/7100	380/4500	1547kg	274	4.6	10.5	155	-	-	+ Looks great and has oodles of character - LHD only, far from dynamically perfect	★★★★
Ford Shelby GT500 *	140 R	£47,000	8/5411	540/6000	510/4500	1780kg	308	4.6	-	155	-	-	+ Massive power never fails to entertain - Heavy, unsophisticated chassis	★★★★
Honda CR-Z GT	144 F	£20,820	4/1497	122/6100	128/1500	1198kg	103	9.9	-	124	117	56.5	+ The first hybrid with sporting intent - No match for a good diesel hot hatch	★★★★
Honda Integra Type-R (DC2)	095 F	96-100	4/1797	187/8000	131/7300	1101kg	173	6.2	17.9	145	-	28.9	+ Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Too raw for some	★★★★★
Honda Integra Type-R (DC5) *	037 F	101-06	4/1998	217/8000	152/7000	1250kg	176	7.1	16.7	140	-	-	+ Sharp looks, massive grip - Lost a little of the DC2's magic	★★★★
Honda NSX	043 F	90-05	6/3179	270/7300	220/5300	1410kg	196	5.5	-	168	-	22.8	+ 'The useable supercar' - 270bhp sounds a bit weedy today	★★★★★
Honda NSX-R *	051 F	102-103	6/3179	276/7100	224/5300	1270kg	221	4.4	-	168	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2002 - Honda never brought it to the UK	★★★★★
Infiniti G37S Coupé	127 R	£38,245	6/3696	316/7000	265/5200	1706kg	188	5.8	13.8	155	248	26.7	+ Softer 370Z delivers sharp-driving swing at the Germans - Bland looks	★★★★
Jaguar XK 5.0	130 D	£65,000	8/5000	380/6500	380/3500	1660kg	232	5.2	-	155	264	25.2	+ Fine car for the likes of us - Jag buyers may not like the harder edge	★★★★
Jaguar XKR	129 D	£78,500	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1753kg	292	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	+ Fast and incredibly rewarding Jag - The kids will have to stay at home	★★★★★

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JAGUAR XKR-S, ISSUE 159

	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 XKR 75	150 F	£85,500	8/5000	523/6000	488/2500	1762kg	302	4.4	-	174	-	-	+ Faster and more involving Jag XKR - They're only making 75 of them ★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S	159 F	£97,000	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1753kg	314	4.2	-	186	292	-	+ The most exciting XKR ever - It's nearly £100,000 ★★★★★
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 Exige	105 F	£35,550	4/1796	218/7800	158/5500	930kg	238	4.5	-	148	199	33.2	+ Non-limited edition of the Exige 240R - Uninspiring soundtrack ★★★★★
Lotus Exige Cup 260	139 D	£45,950	4/1796	256/8000	174/6000	890kg	293	4.0	-	152	199	31.1	+ Feels like a race car, yet works on the road - Costs the best part of £50K ★★★★★
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 240R	087 F	'05	4/1796	243/8000	174/7000	930kg	264	3.9	9.9	155	-	-	+ Lightweight with a hefty punch - Instantly sold out ★★★★★
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 F	£53,080	6/3456	276/6400	258/4700	1382kg	203	5.6	13.6	162	205	32.5	+ Sublime ride and handling, Our 2009 car of the year - Pricey options ★★★★★
Lotus Evora S	163 D	£64,190	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.6	-	172	229	-	+ A faster and better Evora - But one which spars with the Porsche 911... ★★★★★
Lotus Europa SE	127 F	'08-'10	4/1998	222/5600	221/4000	995kg	227	4.9	-	146	-	28.8	+ More of a Lotus than before - Still overshadowed by the Exige and Evora ★★★★★
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	£80,450	8/4244	399/7100	339/4750	1880kg	216	5.5	12.7	177	330	19.7	+ Striking, accomplished GT - Doesn't spike the pulse like an Aston or 911 ★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo S	120 F	£92,360	8/4691	433/7000	361/4750	1880kg	234	4.9	-	183	354	17.0	+ A genuinely sporty Maser - A bit heavier and pricier than we'd like ★★★★★
Maserati GT MC Stradale	160 R	£109,995	8/4691	444/7100	376/4750	1770kg	255	4.6	-	187	-	-	+ Brilliant blend of road racer and GT - No rear seats ★★★★★
Maserati Coupe	064 F	'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 F	'04-'07	8/4244	400/7000	333/4500	1680kg	239	4.8	-	180	-	-	+ Maser Coupe realises its full potential - Very little ★★★★★
Mazda RX-8 R3	122 R	£26,065	2R/1308	228/8200	156/5500	1429kg	162	6.5	16.4	146	299	24.6	+ Even sharper chassis than basic RX-8 - Same water-thin torque output ★★★★★
Mazda RX-8	071 R	'03-'08	2R/1308	228/8500	156/5500	1394kg	166	7.0	19.0	146	-	25.2	+ Never mind the quirkiness, it's a great drive - Dull-sounding engine ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C350 CGI Coupe	159 D	£38,340	6/3498	302/6500	273/3500	1615kg	190	5.9	-	155	164	-	+ Straight-line performance - Cheaper C250 CDI is better in the corners ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	162 R	£57,165	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1730kg	264	4.4	10.3	186	280	-	+ Mercedes makes a proper two-door M3 rival - C63 saloon looks better ★★★★★
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 F	'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 CL65 AMG	150 D	£115,660	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2060kg	264	4.5	-	155	244	-	+ Presence, pace, monster engine - Stiff ride, stiff competition ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CL65 AMG	115 F	£161,595	12/5980	603/4800	737/2000	2240kg	273	4.4	-	155	334	19.1	+ Unsurprisingly rapid on non-wiggly bits - Lacks charm, involvement ★★★★★
Morgan AeroMax	097 D	£110,000	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.1	-	170	-	-	+ Weird and utterly wonderful - They're all sold ★★★★★
Nissan 370Z	158 R	£29,150	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1520kg	218	5.4	-	155	248	-	+ Quicker, leaner, keener than 350Z - Not quite a Cayman-killer ★★★★★
Nissan 350Z (309bhp)	107 R	'07-'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 350Z (296bhp)	094 F	'06-'07	6/3498	296/6400	260/4800	1525kg	197	5.8	-	155	-	24.8	+ Small power boost adds to Z's appeal - Slightly low-rent interior ★★★★★
Nissan 350Z (276bhp)	059 D	'03-'06	6/3498	276/6200	268/4800	1525kg	184	6.1	14.8	155	-	24.8	+ Original 350Z makes a great used buy - As above ★★★★★
Nissan GT-R	152 F	£71,950	6/3799	520/6400	475/3200	1740kg	304	3.5	-	194	295	-	+ Our 2008 Car of the Year. Now even better - Pricier than before ★★★★★
Nissan GT-R Spec V	150 F	£124,950	6/3799	478/6400	447/3500	1680kg	289	3.4	-	193	295	-	+ Phenomenal brakes and handling - Not really worth the extra £55K ★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	009 R	'99-'02	6/2568	276/7000	289/4400	1560kg	180	4.7	12.5	165	-	20.1	+ Big, brutal, and great fun - Very firm ride ★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R33)	019 F	'97-'99	6/2568	276/6800	271/4400	1540kg	182	5.4	14.3	155	-	22.0	+ Proof that Jap hi-tech can work (superbly) - Limited supply ★★★★★
Noble M400	089 F	'04-'06	6/2968	425/6500	390/5000	1060kg	407	3.5	-	185	-	-	+ Devilishly fast - Demon Tweaks interior ★★★★★
Noble M12 GTO-3R	070 F	'03-'06	6/2968	352/6200	350/3500	1080kg	332	3.8	-	170	-	-	+ The ability to humble exotics - Flawed driving position ★★★★★
Noble M12 GTO	023 R	'00-'03	6/2544	310/6000	320/3500	980kg	321	4.1	10.2	165	-	-	+ Gives GT3 drivers a fright - Styling could be more cohesive ★★★★★
Peugeot RCZ 1.6 THP 200	155 R	£23,596	4/1598	197/5500	202/1700	1421kg	141	7.3	18.1	147	159	40.9	+ Distinctive looks, highly capable handling - Could be a bit more exciting ★★★★★
Porsche Cayman	131 F	£39,162	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	132 F	£47,604	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1350kg	237	5.2	-	172	223	29.7	+ Still want that 911? - Yeah, us too (even though it's the best Cayman yet) ★★★★★
Porsche Cayman R	158 R	£51,728	6/3436	325/7400	273/4750	1295kg	255	4.7	-	175	228	-	+ Total handling excellence - Styling additions not to all tastes ★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S	097 F	'06-'09	6/3387	291/6250	251/4400	1350kg	219	5.3	12.2	171	-	26.6	+ Pure and rewarding - If they'd just move the engine back a bit... ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (997.2)		£67,270	6/3614	341/6500	288/4400	1475kg	245	4.9	-	180	225	29.4	+ Faster and greener than the mkl 997 - Lost a little of the 911 magic ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.2)	121 F	£76,172	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 GT3 (997.2)	152 D	£78,371	6/3800	402/7300	310/4200	1420kg	288	4.6	-	190	240	26.6	+ Fitting finale for the 997 generation - Absolutely nothing ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (997.2)		£80,785	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1480kg	261	4.7	-	185	247	26.9	+ Huge grip, power and composure - The Carrera S is £4K cheaper ★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 (997.2)	160 R	£128,466	6/3996	493/8250	339/5750	1360kg	368	3.8	-	193	326	-	+ The ultimate modern 911 - They're all sold ★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.2)	138 F	'09-'11	6/3797	429/6500	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 F	'10-'11	6/3797	444/7900	317/6750	1370kg	329	4.0	-	193	314	-	+ Our 2010 car of the year - Looks and noise are slightly OTT ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Sport Classic	140 F	'10-'11	6/3800	402/7300	310/4200	1425kg	287	4.6	-	188	-	-	+ Curious concept that works well - GT2 price with Carrera S performance ★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.1)	103 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 F	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1375kg	302	4.2	-	195	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2007 - A chunk more money than the brilliant GT3 ★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.2)	066 F	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1380kg	272	4.3	9.2	190	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2003 - Looks softer than previous GT3 ★★★★★
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 RS (993)	036 R	'95	6/3746	300/6500	262/5400	1270kg	240	4.7	11.2	172	-	-	+ Barking engine note, gearchange - Not quite hardcore enough ★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.1)	066 F	'99	6/3600	360/7200	273/5000	1350kg	271	4.5	10.3	187	-	21.9	+ Our Car of the Year 1999 - Porsche didn't build enough ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.1)	070 F	'04-'08	6/3824	350/6600	295/4600	1420kg	246	4.6	10.9	182	-	24.5	+ 'S' is like a junior GT3 - Tech overload? ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (996)	051 F	'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	+ Beautifully polished 911 - 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 968 Club Sport	019 F	'93-'95	4/2990	240/6200	225/4100	1355kg	183	6.1	15.7	149	-	-	+ One of the all-time greats - Lots have been driven very hard ★★★★★
Porsche 928 GT3	'92-'95	8/5396	350/5700	317/4250	1790kg	199	5.2	-	171	-	17.0	-	+ Big-hearted and beautiful - Be sure to buy a good one ★★★★★
Renault Alpine A610	'92-'96	6/2975	250/5750	258/2900	1420kg	179	5.4	13.8	160	-	21.0	-	+ Overlooked, bargain-price French 911. Try one - RS interior ★★★★★
Superformance Daytona Coupe	149 D	£102,225	8/6162	437/5900	424/4600	1300kg	342	3.9	-	200+	-	-	+ Awesome engine, awesome looks - Damp roads equal moist palms ★★★★★
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 Typhon	102 F	'06	6/3996	400/7000	330/5250	1060kg	383	3.9	-	180+	-	-	+ Carbon body, exclusivity - Interesting damping, no supercharger ★★★★★
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	004 R	'98-'04	6/3966	350/6800	330/5000	1130kg	315	5.0	11.4	160+	-	-	+ Accomplished and desirable - Check chassis for corrosion ★★★★★
TVR Cerbera 4.5	014 F	'97-'04	8/4578	420/6750	380/5500	1100kg	388	3.9	-	180+	-	-	+ Genuine supercar pace - Integrity? ★★★★★
Vauxhall Monaro VXR 6.0	079 D	'05-'07	8/5967	398/6000	391/4400	1677kg	241	5.1	-	180+	-	-	+ Improved chassis and steering, 180mph - Looks a bit snouty ★★★★★
VW Scirocco 2.0 TSI	155 R	£24,705	4/1984	207/6300	207/1700	1375kg	153	6.1	15.8	149	172	38.2	+ Golf GTI price and performance - Interior lacks flair ★★★★★
VW Scirocco R	1												

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OUR CHOICE: Ferrari 458 Italia. A huge step on from the F430 it replaced. The lack of a manual gearbox is a shame, but the scintillating 4.5-litre V8 and snappy seven-speed twin-clutch transmission result in a car that's markedly quicker than its V8 predecessors.

BEST OF THE REST: A few detail improvements could yet see McLaren's MP4-12C topple the 458. Meanwhile Lambo's Aventador is a suitably outrageous flagship and the Lexus LFA (right) just edges the Ferrari 599 GTO for us, though both are mesmerisingly brilliant.



	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
911 GT9R	127 D	£450,000	6/4000	120/7850	774/5970	1346kg	845	2.9	-	260	-	-	+ Above 100mph eats Veyrons for breakfast - Eats M3 dust at traffic lights ★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	146 R	£350,000	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.4	9.7	190	388	17.3	+ The best car that Aston Martin makes - Erm, a tad thirsty? ★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish S	110 F	105-'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 Vantage s/c	001 R	'93-'00	8/5340	550/6500	550/4000	1988kg	281	4.6	-	186	-	13.1	+ Two tons of well-hung British beef - Leaden gearbox ★★★★
BMW M1	110 F	'78-'81	6/3500	277/6500	239/5000	1303kg	216	5.8	-	161	-	-	+ Early supercar icon - A bit under-endowed these days ★★★★★
Bristol Fighter	146 R	£234,982	10/7990	525/5500	525/4200	1600kg	333	4.0	-	210	-	-	+ Unique, intriguing, goes like stink - Looks perhaps not for everyone ★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	134 F	£925,000	16/7993	1000/6000	922/2200	1950kg	521	2.8	5.8	253	-	-	+ Superbly engineered 4wd quad-turbo rocket - Er, lacks luggage space? ★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport	133 F	£1.4m	16/7993	1000/6000	922/2200	1990kg	510	2.6	-	253	-	-	+ Warp speed and ferocious noise sans-roof - Ridiculous broly/roof thing ★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Super Sport	151 F	£2.0m	16/7993	1183/6400	1106/3000	1838kg	654	2.5	-	268	539	-	+ The world's fastest supercar - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals ★★★★★
Bugatti EB110	078 F	'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 F	£301,975	8/3499	575/10,500	310/9000	689kg	848	3.8	6.2	205	-	-	+ Absolutely staggering performance - Absolutely staggering price tag ★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	133 R	£106,605	8/6162	638/6500	603/3800	1528kg	424	3.8	7.6	205	-	18.8	+ Huge pace and character - Take plenty of brave pills if there's rain ★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Italia	159 R	£173,181	8/4499	562/9000	398/6000	1485kg	384	3.2	6.8	202	307	21.2	+ An astounding achievement, looks fantastic - There'll never be a manual ★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	101 R	£212,066	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 GTB Fiorano HGTE	146 R	£221,884	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1688kg	368	3.5	7.4	205	415	-	+ As above, with a bit more edge - Can be a little too edgy in the wet ★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTO	161 R	£305,676	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 FF	157 D	£227,077	12/6262	651/8000	504/6000	1880kg	347	3.7	-	208	-	-	+ Four seats and 4WD, but a proper Ferrari - Looks divide opinion ★★★★★
Ferrari 612 Scaglietti FI	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 F430	163 F	'04-'10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1449kg	339	4.0	-	196	-	18.6	+ Just brilliant - Didn't you read the plus point? ★★★★★
Ferrari F430 Spider	095 F	'04-'10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1520kg	326	4.1	-	193	-	18.6	+ Berlinetta dynamics, 8000rpm with the roof down - Looks? ★★★★★
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	121 R	'07-'10	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1350kg	378	3.5	7.7	198	-	15.7	+ Successful FI technology transplant - Likes to shout about it ★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Modena	163 F	'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	1290kg	333	4.1	-	186	-	-	+ Totally exhilarating road-racer. It's loud - It's very, very loud ★★★★★
Ferrari F355 FI Berlinetta	163 F	'97-'99	8/3496	374/8250	268/6000	1350kg	281	4.7	-	183	-	16.7	+ Looks terrific, sounds even better - Are you kidding? ★★★★★
Ferrari 575M 'Fiorano'	050 D	'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	066 F	'97-'02	12/5474	485/7000	415/5000	1716kg	287	4.3	10.0	199	-	12.3	+ Everything - Nothing ★★★★★
Ferrari Enzo	149 F	'02-'04	12/5998	650/7800	485/5500	1365kg	484	3.5	6.7	217	-	-	+ Intoxicating, exploitable - Cabin detailing falls short of Zonda or FI ★★★★★
Ferrari F50	064 F	'96-'97	12/4968	515/8500	347/6500	1229kg	424	3.7	-	202	-	-	+ The best drivers' Ferrari - Lines lack tension ★★★★★
Ferrari F40	157 F	'87-'92	8/2936	478/7000	425/4000	1100kg	441	3.7	-	201	-	-	+ The shape that launched a thousand posters - Er... ★★★★★
Ferrari 288GTO	064 F	'84-'85	8/2855	400/7000	366/3800	1160kg	350	4.9	-	189	-	-	+ Painfully beautiful, rarer than the F40 - You are joking? ★★★★★
Ford GT	159 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 F	£275,000	8/4163	690/6300	675/4000	1200kg	584	3.0	-	220	-	-	+ Stupendous performance, 'Apollo' - High price, 'Gumpert' ★★★★★
Jaguar XJ220	157 F	'92-'94	6/3498	542/7200	475/4500	1470kg	375	3.7	-	213	-	-	+ Britain's greatest supercar... until McLaren built the FI ★★★★
Koenigsegg CCX	094 F	£500,000	8/4700	806/6900	678/5700	1180kg	694	3.9	7.7	241	-	-	+ Sweden's greatest supercar - Sweden's only supercar ★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCR Edition	118 F	£1.5m	8/4800	1004/7000	796/5600	1280kg	797	2.8	-	254	-	-	+ One of the world's fastest cars - Spike power delivery ★★★★★
Koenigsegg Agera R	158 F	£875,000	8/5000	1100/6900	885/4100	1434kg	779	2.8	-	261	-	-	+ As fast and exciting as your body can handle - It's almost Veyron money ★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP550-2	138 F	£166,784	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1380kg	399	3.9	-	199	-	-	+ The mad rear-driven Lambo is back! - For a limited period only... ★★★★★
Lamborghini LP560-4 Spyder	130 F	£162,240	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1550kg	362	4.0	-	201	330	20.0	+ The sound of a V10 with no roof - A smidge less hardcore than the coupe ★★★★★
Lamborghini LP570-4 Sleggera	152 F	£178,560	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1340kg	426	3.5	-	202	325	-	+ A reminder of how great the Gallardo is - LP560-4 does as good a job ★★★★★
Lambo LP570-4 Performante	160 F	£186,000	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1485kg	384	3.9	-	201	-	-	+ It's a Superleggera Spyder - ...that's not really super-light ★★★★★
Lambo Aventador LP700-4	162 F	£247,000	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1575kg	445	2.8	-	217	-	-	+ Most important new Lambo since the Countach - Erm, expensive? ★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo	094 F	'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 Gardo Sleggera	104 F	'07-'08	10/4961	523/8000	376/4250	1420kg	373	3.8	-	196	-	-	+ Lighter, more agile - Grabby carbon brakes, clunky e-gear ★★★★
Lambo Milano LP670-4 SV	138 F	'09-'11	12/6946	661/8000	487/6500	1565kg	429	3.2	7.3	212	-	-	+ A supercar in its truest, wildest sense - Be prepared for stares ★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	093 F	'06-'11	12/6496	631/8000	487/6000	1665kg	385	3.3	-	211	-	21.3	+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes ★★★★★
Lamborghini 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 Diablo 6.0	019 F	'00-'02	12/5992	550/7000	457/5500	1625kg	343	3.8	-	200	-	-	+ Best-built, best-looking Diablo of all - People's perceptions ★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo GT	016 F	'99-'00	12/5992	575/7300	465/5500	1490kg	392	4.1	8.3	211	-	12.5	+ Briefly the world's fastest production car - They made only 80 ★★★★★
Lamborghini Countach QV	162 F	'88-'91	12/5167	455/7000	369/5200	1447kg	320	4.9	-	180	-	13.7	+ Still the definitive supercar - Visibility, pract-oh hell, who cares? ★★★★★
Lexus LFA/LFA Nürburgring	161 R	£352,000	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 MP4-12C	159 R	£168,500	8/3799	597/7000	442/3000	1434kg	419	3.0	6.4	205	219	24.2	+ Staggering performance, refinement - Flawed gearchange, snappy brakes ★★★★★
McLaren F1	145 F	'94-'98	12/6064	677/7500	479/4000	1157kg	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 F	£250,000	12/5980	661/5400	737/2200	1876kg	358	4.0	8.1	199	-	-	+ Bonkers looks, bonkers speed - Bonkers price ★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	159 R	£168,345	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1620kg	335	4.1	8.4	197	308	-	+ Great engine and chassis (gulfing doors too!) - Slightly tardy gearbox ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren	073 F	'04-'07	8/5439	617/6500	575/3250	1618kg	387	3.7	-	208	-	-	+ Zonda-pace, 575-style drivability - Dreadful brake feel ★★★★
Noble M600	159 R	£200,000	8/4439	650/6800	604/3800	1250kg	528	3.8	7.7	225	-	-	+ Leicestershire's unbelievably good attack on the supercar class - It's a bit pricey ★★★★★
Pagani Zonda Cinque Roadster	167 D	£1.5m	12/7291	669/6200	575/4000	1400kg	485	3.4	-	217	-	-	+ The best Zonda ever - The last Zonda ever (probably) ★★★★★
Pagani Zonda F Roadster CS	127 F	'06-'08	12/7291	641/6200	575/4000	1400kg	465	3.5	-	214	-	-	+ As light and stiff as the coupe - You'd better like carbonfibre ★★★★★
Pagani Zonda F	082 F	'05-'06	12/7291	602/6150	575/4000	1230kg	497	3.6	-	214	-	-	+ Everything an Italian supercar ought to be - Choose interior carefully ★★★★★
Pagani Zonda C12S	096 F	'01-'05	12/7291	555/5900	553/4050	1250kg	451	3.6	-	197	-	-	+ Set a new supercar benchmark - Harry won't let us use his long-term ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo (997.2)	140 R	£110,232	6/3800	493/6000	479/1950	1570kg	319	3.2	7.3	193	272	24.8	+ The Turbo at the very top of its game - The GT3's cheaper... ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo S (997.2)	159 R	£125,885	6/3800	523/6250	516/2100	1570kg	339	2.9	6.8	196	268	-	+ As above, with more power - The GT3's even cheaper... ★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 RS (997.2)	157 F	£171,468	6/3600	611/6500	516/2250	1370kg	463	3.5	-	205	284	-	+ More powerful than a Carrera GT. Handles, too - Erm... ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo (997.1)	094 F	'06-'09	6/3600	472/6000	457/1950	1585kg	303	4.0	8.7	193	-	22.1	+ Monster cornering ability - A bit woolly on its standard settings ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo (996)	017 F	'00-'06	6/3600	470/6000	473/4600	1540kg	272	4.1	10.0	189	-	21.0	+ The 911 for all seasons - We can't find any reasons ★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 (996)	072 F	'04-'06	6/3600	475/5700	457/3500	1420kg	339	4.0	-	198	-	-	+ Later revisions made it even more of a star - Care still required ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo (995)	066 F	'95-'98	6/3600	408/5750	398/4500	1502kg	276	4.3	9.2	180	-	19.4	+ Stupendous all-weather supercar - It doesn't rain enough ★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 (993)	003 F	'96-'99	6/3600	430/5700	398/4500	1290kg	339	3.9	-	184	-	-	+ Hairy-arsed homologation special - Harry won't buy one ★★★★★
Porsche Carrera GT	149 F	'04-'06	10/5733	604/8000	435/5750	1380kg	445	3.8	7.6	205	-	-	+ Probably the greatest modern supercar - Can bite ★★★★★
Porsche 959	149 F	'87-'90	6/2850										

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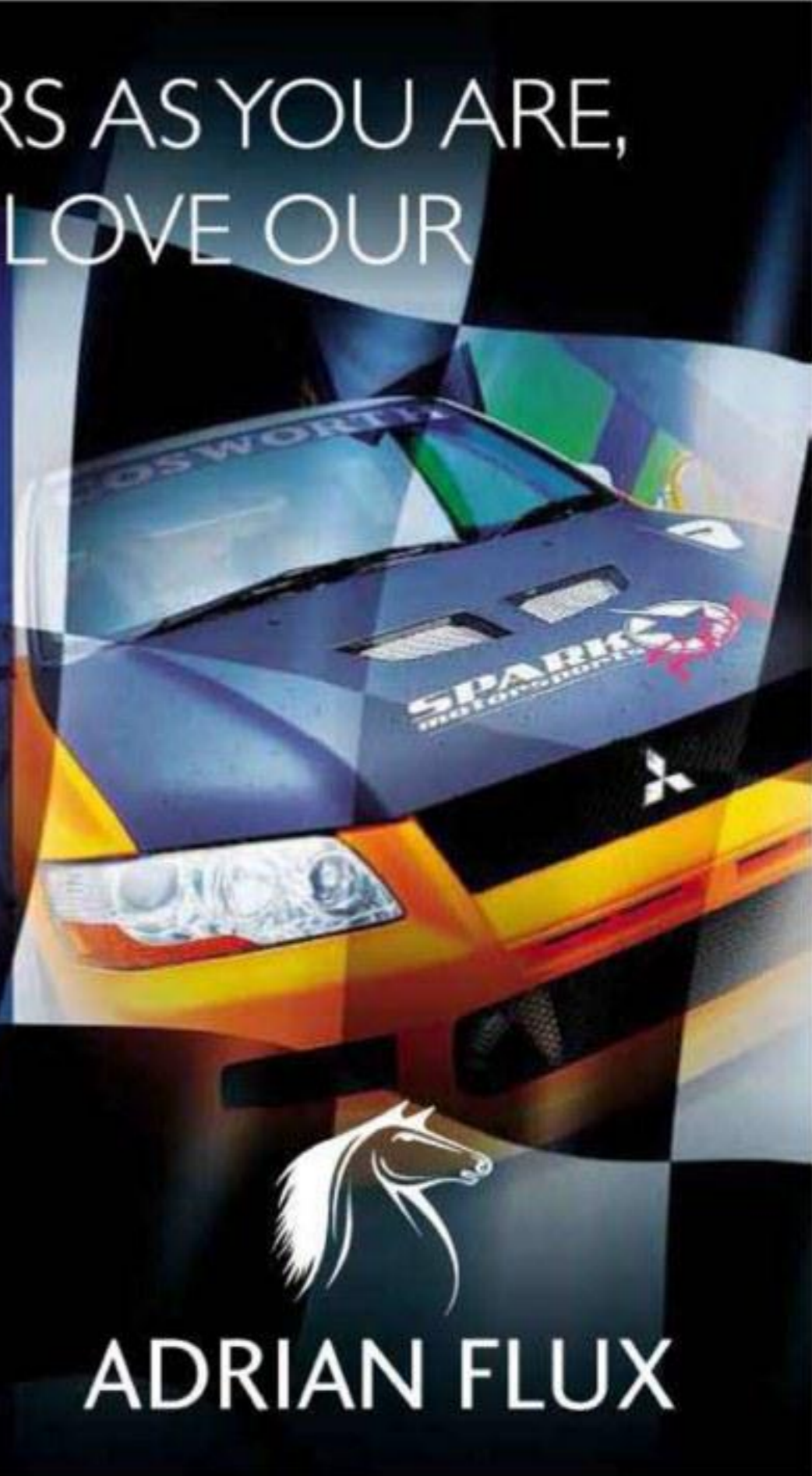
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Marino Franchitti & his

VW Golf GTI Edition 30

The Scottish race driver and younger brother of IndyCar star Dario on why he's joined the Golf club

Getting a Golf really wasn't on my radar. At the time I had a fully loaded C63, which I enjoyed, but it was at the end of its lease and was going back and I really didn't have a clue what to replace it with. You see, at that point my wife and I were moving out of our apartment in London where we had underground parking to a place where the car was going to have to live on the street and I've got a really bad OCD problem. I just can't cope with nice cars being left on the street and worrying about them all the time.

I love my cars. Before the Merc, I had a 993 C2S, and as much as I adored driving the thing, I just hated it here in London. I didn't want to leave it anywhere, and of course you're on the clutch the whole time in traffic. The Porsche deserved better than that so I was determined to sell it to someone who was just as passionate about it as I was. Fortunately, about the same time that I decided it had to go, John Hindhaugh (the commentator) remarked that he wanted one just like mine. The deal was sorted quickly and he says he's just looking after it for me.

So after the C63 I wasn't going to make the same mistake again. I needed to find something that I could leave on the street and not worry if it got bashed about a little bit, but of course I still wanted a car that was going to be fun and was capable of being comfortable on long journeys. I mentioned my dilemma to a friend who buys and sells a lot of cars and he said 'What you want is a Golf, in fact you want an Edition 30... and I just happen to have one.' Typical car salesman, but it turns out he was right, it was the perfect solution.

I bought the car without having driven it, in fact I'd not driven any mk5 Golfs, and I got this one just before I flew off to Australia for a holiday, so I didn't actually drive it until a few weeks later. As soon as I did, I fell in love with it. It's a fantastic car and no matter what I buy next, I think I'll keep this as well.

The retro touches of the tartan seats and the golfball-style gear-selector remind me of the early Golfs my mum and dad had when I was a little boy. And then it has a fantastic DSG gearbox and a great engine and it's very comfortable. It's got everything you need really. It's been a surprisingly enjoyable thing

to own and I've become more attached to it than I ever thought I would.

The funny thing is, everyone who jumps in it always falls in love with it too. My brother was in it recently and by the end of the journey he was saying 'this is great, I've gotta get a Golf'. Other people have said that they want to buy it if I ever decide to sell it. I think it's the combination of the modern look and the old-school features that seal the deal. It works.

'THE RETRO TOUCHES LIKE THE TARTAN SEATS REMIND ME OF THE EARLY GOLFS MY MUM AND DAD HAD WHEN I WAS A BOY'

My only other form of transport currently is my KTM 990R Supermoto, which I use a lot in London – getting my knee down in Parliament Square, that sort of thing... There are plenty of cars out there I'd love to own, but it comes back to the same thing – I couldn't cope with them sitting on the street in London. So until that changes, the Golf will do me just perfectly.

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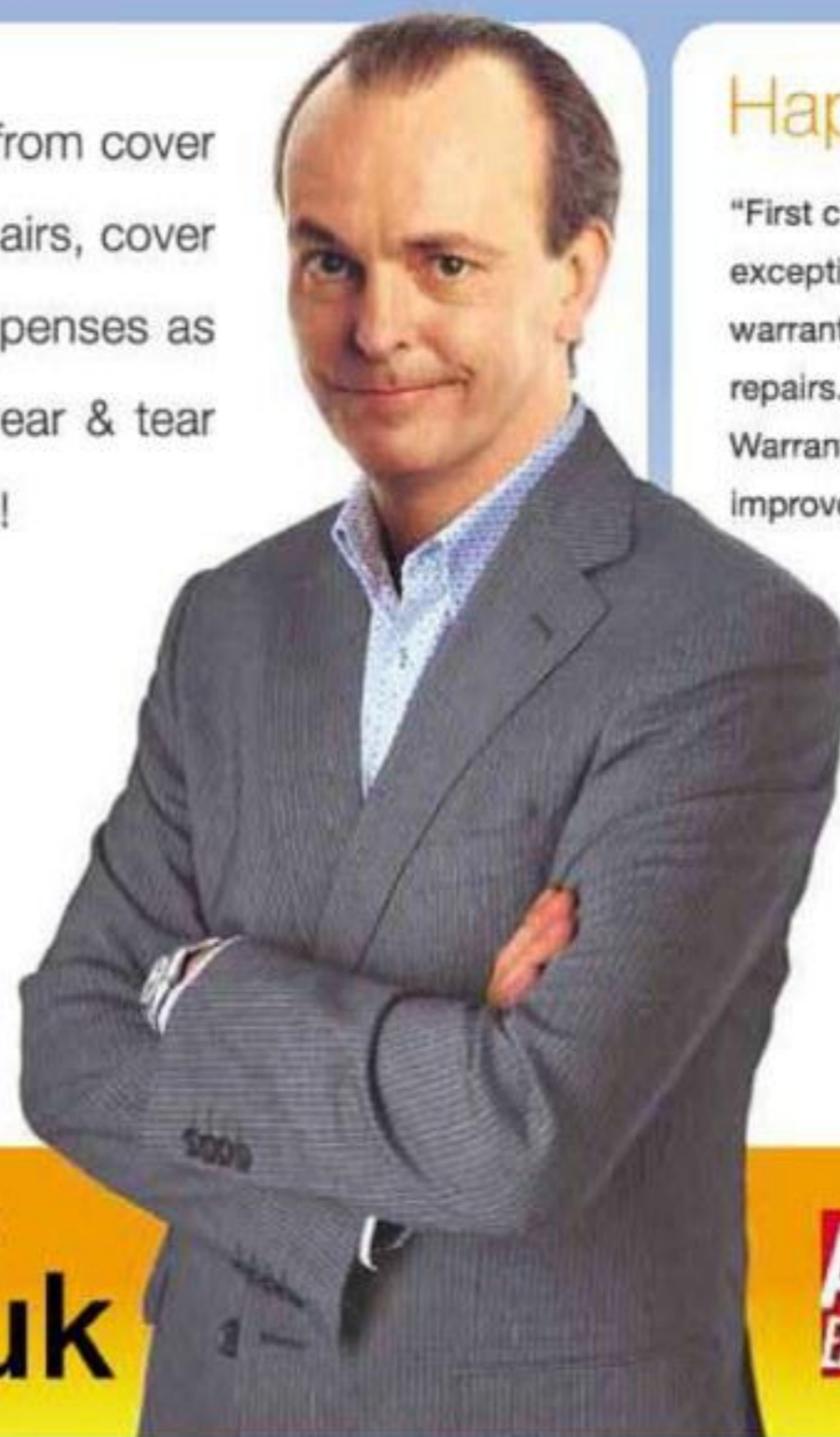
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