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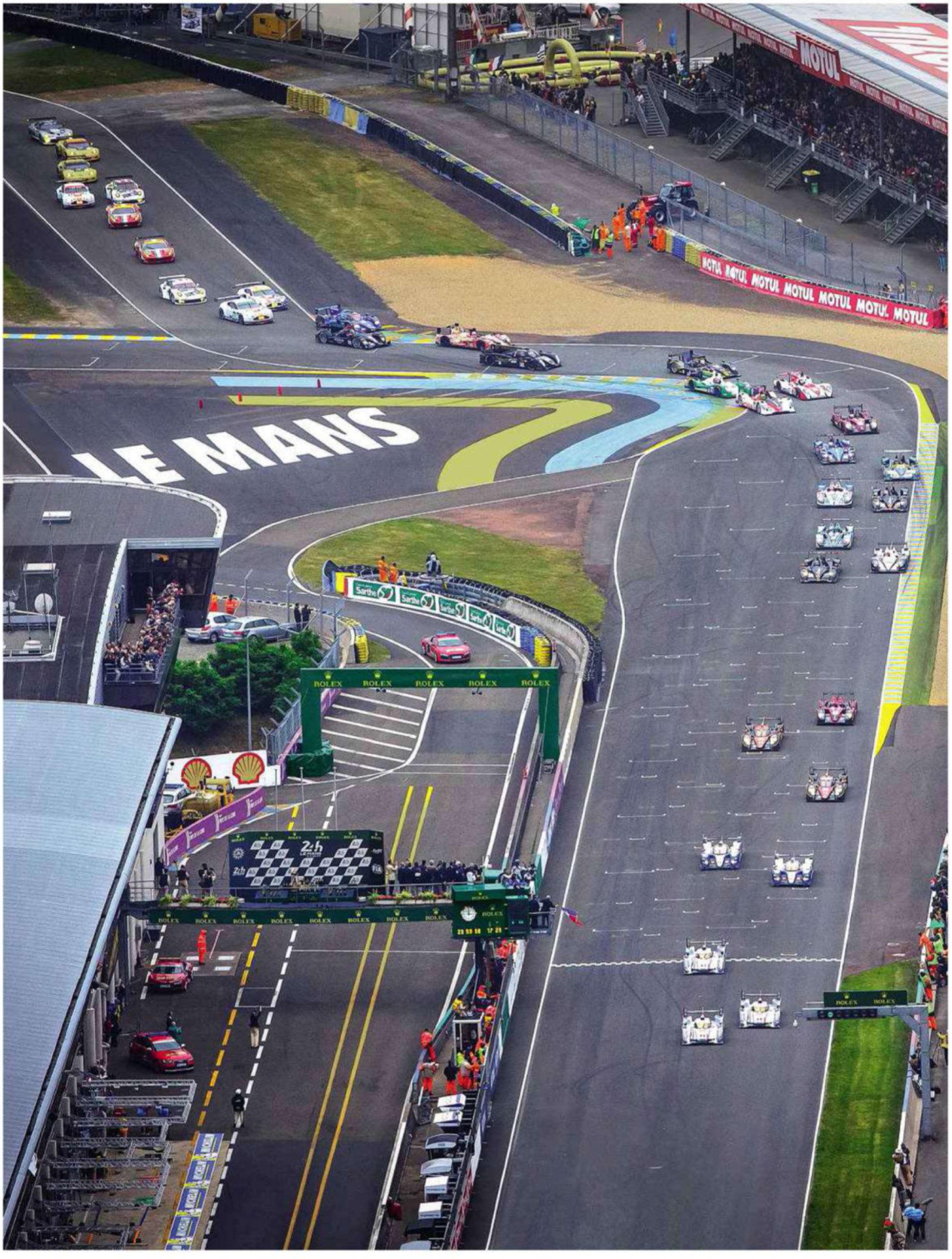
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Ed Speak

ANOTHER CRACKING STORY FROM DICKIE MEADEN THIS month. This one is on the fabulous EK9 Honda Civic Type R (see page 120) – a car that is old enough to tickle the nostalgia gland but young enough not to feel completely outclassed from a dynamic perspective. Incidentally, that's the basis of an interesting formula to apply when assessing older cars, which is something I've been doing a lot recently…

Let's take a few examples and run with them. Firstly, the BMW M3 CSL. If this car's engine, carbonfibre roof and swollen boot-tip don't foster feelings that even you yourself don't understand, then you need to go to the doctor and ask him or her to check the level of petrol in your veins. The CSL is a bona fide **evo** hero.

However, the Audi RS3 on page 42 would *murder* it on any given road or track. (Feel free to try to explain this to your hot date in the M3's passenger bucket – that your lightweight-BMW-Motorsport-coupe-with-a-fancy-carbon-intake has been whupped, in pure performance terms, by a five-door Audi hatch. Of course, she won't care about dynamic behaviour, so you should dump her immediately.) Yet the bottom line is that sharp dynamics trump outright performance, so when you apply the formula, the CSL scores highly.

The Ferrari F430 is an interesting car on which to exercise the formula. Launched in 2004, it's not quite old enough to inspire a huge level of nostalgia, and its performance, while strong, can't match that of its successors. But then little can – the 458 is a weapon and the 488 GTB likely to cause a sonic boom when we test it in Italy in a few weeks.

However, in pure dynamic terms the F430 is still a peach; sharp, playful and with modern chassis systems to keep you from the kitty litter. In that respect, it's a car only waiting for nostalgia to kick in for it to become a rather compelling option for those who want a taste of modern Ferrari but don't want the aftertaste from writing a £200,000 cheque. Mmm…

Here's another example for you. A 1982 Porsche 911 SC. It's an old-school, air-cooled, narrow-bodied 911, so unless you're Jeremy Clarkson you'll love it. Your wife will love it too. Not because it's easy to drive (it isn't) or cheap to run (it's not), but because for some reason there's a rocket under air-cooled 911 values at present and the two of you will soon be able to buy Neckar Island and retire on it.

However, referring back to the formula, the Porsche is no quicker than a modern VW Golf GTI and dynamically it's challenging at best and downright rubbish at worst – compared with modern standards, that is. Not without reward, but way off modern dynamic behaviour. In that respect, it would appear that applying the formula to the SC yields unsatisfactory results and, having bought one, I'm a mug.

The petrolhead's brain is a mysterious place, but we tend to take comfort in knowing that we're not alone in our own personal formulas, thoughts and eccentricities. On that note, I'd like to hear your nominations for cars that score highly with the above formula – and whether you've convinced yourself to buy something based on some, erm, questionable logic.

Nick Trott Editor (@evoNickTrott)

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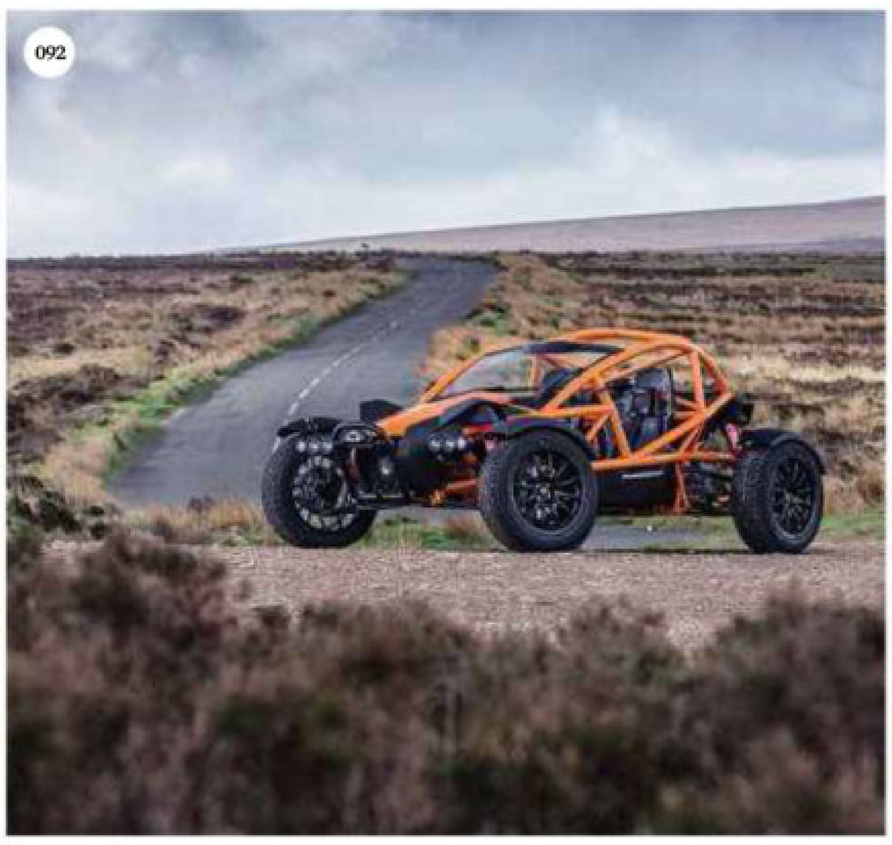

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Having dispatched Porsche's 911 Carrera GTS by the slimmest of margins in issue 204, Mercedes' new coupe now has a much tougher fight on its hands. **evo** assembles four talented rivals that together form a daunting cross-section of the performance coupe landscape. Surely this is a fight the newcomer can't win?

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British outfit Ariel has little to prove when it comes to cars for road and circuit use, but now it's pursuing challenges off the beaten track. Catchpole drives the Nomad – a blistering, back-to-basics, cross-country racer that is perhaps the ultimate toy...

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Glickenhaus SCG 003

by DAN PROSSER

HAVING GROWN FRUSTRATED AT THE STATE OF modern-day endurance racing and the complexity of the latest crop of hybrid hypercars, New Yorker Jim Glickenhaus has announced his latest ambitious project. As a lifelong sportscar racing fan, the former movie producer has used his considerable personal wealth to launch Scuderia Cameron Glickenhaus. At the heart of the company is the SCG 003, a road and competition car that was first shown at this year's Geneva motor show, in March.

'Perhaps I'm stuck in the mid-'60s,' says Glickenhaus, 'but the Ferrari 330 P3/4 and Ford GT40 were race cars that bore a resemblance to road cars. At Le Mans the prototypes were basically road-legal cars. The differences between sports cars and race cars were not as extreme

CONTINUED OVER

as they are today. I think there should be a connection to road cars even in the top classes at Le Mans – I'm trying to make a car that goes back to the times when there was more of a connection.'

The competition version of the SCG 003 will race at the Nürburgring 24 Hours as this issue hits the shelves, with **evo** contributor Marino Franchitti behind the wheel. The car proved to be competitive against the leading GT3-specification racers at the qualifying race earlier in the year and Glickenhaus is confident of a strong result.

Leading the engineering team is Glickenhaus's long-time collaborator, Paolo Garella. A renowned expert in the design and development of one-off and low-volume performance cars, Garella worked on Glickenhaus's Enzo-based 'Ferrari P4/5 by Pininfarina' and the subsequent P4/5 Competizione race version.

The first customer 003 has already been sold and will race alongside the factory car at the Ring. Two further race cars are due to be delivered in September and Glickenhaus says the company is close to securing orders for the first road cars.

Built at the company's Turin factory, the SCG 003 is constructed

"The SCG 003 has proved competitive against leading GT3-spec race cars at the Nürburgring"

1 VENTS

The vents in the front wings help to increase overall downforce. GT3 regs dictate that in plan view you must not be able to see the tyre or suspension through the vents. The designers sculpted the body in such a way that these large vents satisfy the rules.

2 MIRRORS

Wing mirrors tend to be aerodynamically inefficient. The SCG 003's mirrors are mounted within the extremities of the body to reduce drag. Glickenhaus admits that they're not terribly effective as mirrors, but the car also runs a rear-facing camera system.

by DAN PROSSER

around a carbonfibre monocoque with carbonfibre subframes mounted front and rear. The front subframe, which carries the radiators, air conditioning unit, steering rack and front suspension, is identical for road and race cars. The two versions will use different drivetrains and therefore their own rear subframes, but they will be interchangeable.

'Theoretically,' says Glickenhaus, 'if you owned a road car and wanted to convert it to a race car, we could sell you a second rear subframe, engine and gearbox ready to plug and play.'

The competition car uses a Honda Performance Development twin-turbo V6, which produces 510bhp. It powers the rear wheels via a Hewland sequential gearbox. The road car, meanwhile, will use an off-the-shelf, Euro 6 compliant engine and an automatic gearbox.

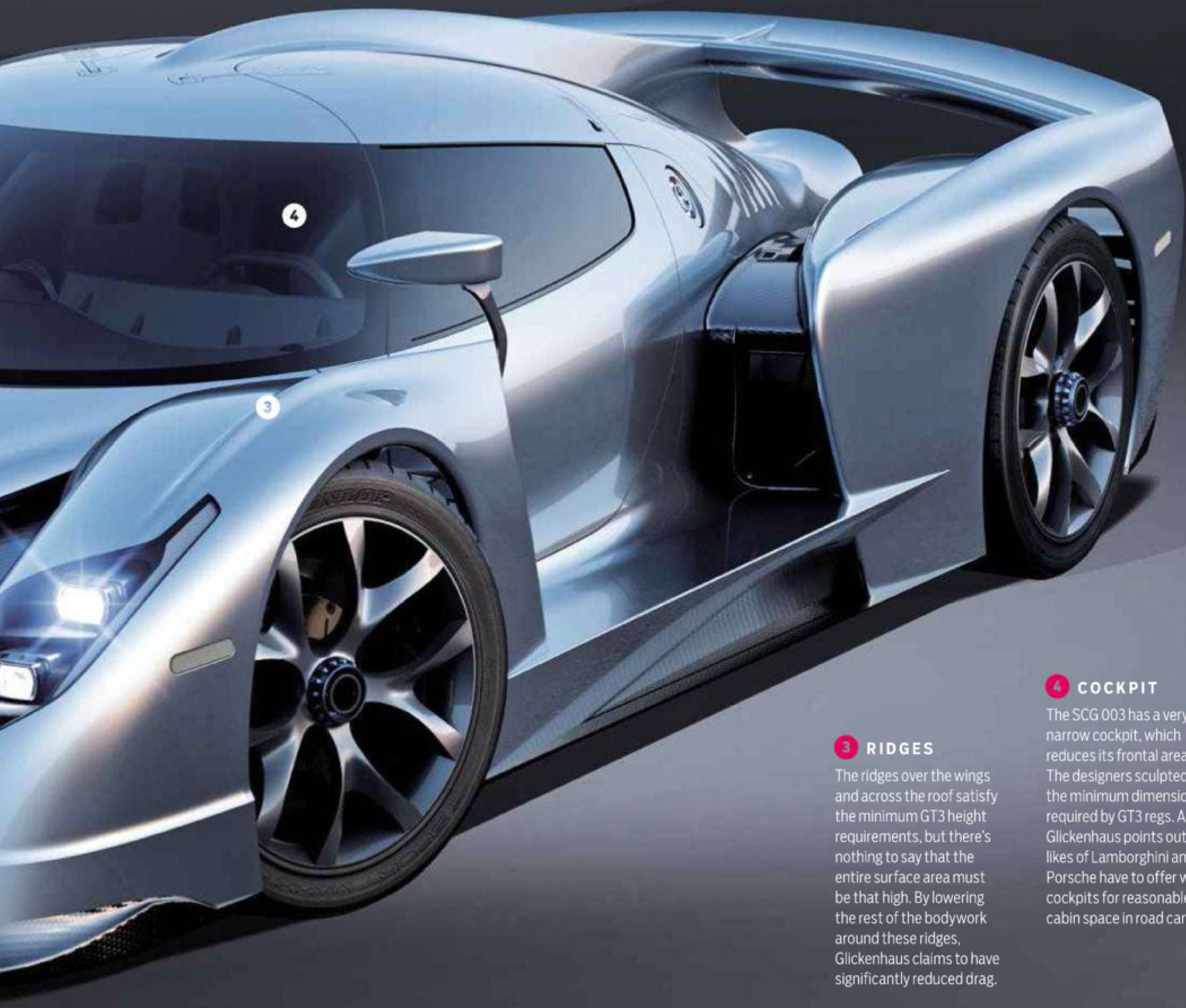
'One option that we're currently looking at is the Maserati twin-turbo V8, which is a very nice engine,' says Glickenhaus. 'We will develop it for our car with a dry-sump lubrication system so we can keep the centre of gravity low.'

Glickenhaus is targeting a power output of around 650bhp, but hints at more to come. 'We do have an amazing thing we're considering. We know of a company that manufactures twin-turbo V12 engines for aircraft. They use them in aerobatic planes. In their current configuration they're diesel motors that produce over 740lb ft of torque. They *could* be petrol, and they're all made in magnesium so are relatively light. We are working with the company in the hope of some day being able to make one of these engines emissions compliant.'

The competition car conforms to GT3 technical regulations, although it isn't homologated to compete directly against existing GT3 cars because the company hasn't built 1000 examples; it will therefore run in the newly formed SPX class at the Ring. However, for its aerodynamic performance, its has taken inspiration from the latest LMP1 cars.

'The figure that matters is aerodynamic efficiency,' explains Glickenhaus. 'That's the amount of downforce you make for every pound of drag. LMP1 cars have an aerodynamic efficiency of about 5.5 – for every pound of drag they make, they produce 5.5 pounds of downforce. The average GT3 race car would be around two. We kiss four with a GT3-legal car. We actually crank downforce *out* for V-max.'

The road car, which will cost



3 RIDGES

The ridges over the wings and across the roof satisfy the minimum GT3 height requirements, but there's nothing to say that the entire surface area must be that high. By lowering the rest of the bodywork around these ridges, Glickenhaus claims to have significantly reduced drag.

4 COCKPIT

The SCG 003 has a very narrow cockpit, which reduces its frontal area. The designers sculpted it to the minimum dimensions required by GT3 regs. As Glickenhaus points out, the likes of Lamborghini and Porsche have to offer wider cockpits for reasonable cabin space in road cars.

Storemags

around $2.5million, features less aggressive aerodynamic devices for ease of use, but Glickenhaus still conservatively estimates 900kg of downforce – 300kg more than McLaren claims for the P1 at 160mph. With the emphasis on light weight rather than outright power, Glickenhaus reckons the road-going SCG 003 will weigh considerably less than the P1 (1395kg) or LaFerrari (1255kg). The result, he says, is a quicker Nürburgring lap time: 'I think we could kiss 6 minutes 30 seconds.'

As Glickenhaus explains, the 003 is just the start for Scuderia Cameron Glickenhaus: 'As we sell cars, we're using the money to keep the company going – this isn't a financial venture for me. I'm lucky, I don't need to earn money from it. Our dream is to sell enough SCG 003s to have the capital to embark on an LMP1 programme at Le Mans in 2017. I'm not sure we'd have a chance against Audi, Porsche, Toyota or Nissan, but if the [organiser] ACO wants us to be competitive, it could make us competitive.'

"The road-going SCG 003 will weigh less than the LaFerrari or McLaren P1"

RIVAL

Koenigsegg One:1

At c$2.5m, the SCG 003 will cost roughly twice the price of a LaFerrari. It'll be considerably rarer too, so it's perhaps more of a rival for the Koenigsegg. But only one can enter races...

WEIGHT

Road-going SCG 003 is expected to be much lighter than obvious rivals

INTERIOR

The fighter-jet vibe of the SCG 003 race car's cockpit, with its narrow, tight dimensions, numerous controls and angled centre console, is unmistakable. Note the screens flanking the steering wheel that act as virtual wing mirrors. Designed for racing, it will be cosy on public roads...

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by DAN PROSSER

DOWNFORCE

900kg

Downforce of road-legal SCG 003

IN DEPTH

1 STEERING

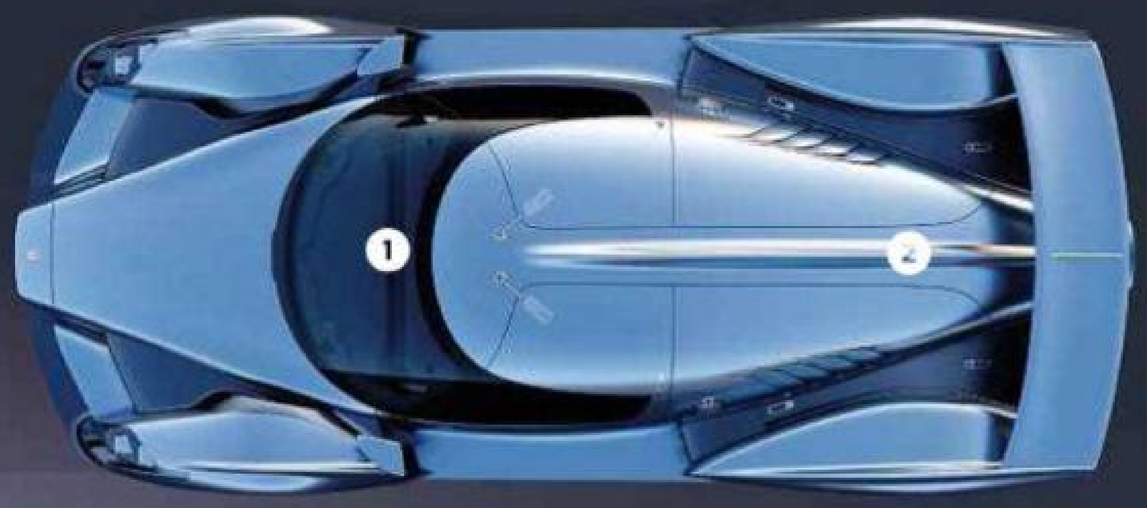
The car has hydraulic power steering that can give varying assistance. 'Even in the race [power steering] configuration, you could drive it on the road,' says Glickenhaus.

2 GEARBOX

Instead of the race car's sequential 'box, the road car will use an auto. Glickenhaus is working with a firm that manufactures OE gearboxes for several car companies.

3 WHEELS

The racer runs 18in wheels, while the road car uses 19s on the front and 20s on the rear. The overall dimensions of both sets are the same when fitted with tyres, though.



TECH CLOSE-UP

SUSPENSION

Both versions of the SCG 003 use inboard-mounted pushrod suspension with double wishbones at each corner. Glickenhaus says the Nürburgring setup is compliant enough for road use.

CONSTRUCTION

As well as the monocoque and subframes, the bodywork is also made of carbonfibre to keep weight as low as possible. As such, the SCG 003 will be far lighter than the vast majority of supercars.

WINDSCREEN

The SCG 003 uses the thinnest automotive windscreen in the world, according to Glickenhaus. He says the supplier, like many involved in the project, is 'doing it for the sport and for the old days'.

THE BIG NUMBER

Estimated Nürburgring lap time for road car

A NEW APPROACH TO RACING

'Glickenhaus and his team deserve huge credit for this project, which was born out of a passion for sportscar racing in the '60s.

'The team has flipped the approach to building a GT3 car on its head. Most manufacturers start with a road car and modify it for racing; Scuderia Cameron Glickenhaus built a car that exploited the GT3 regulations to the tiniest detail, then set about making it road legal. There's little doubt that the SCG 003 competition car will be very fast indeed.'

Dan Prosser

THE DRIVER

Marino Franchitti

'THE FIRST TIME I DROVE the SCG 003 in anger was at the Nürburgring 24 Hours qualifying race in March. I had three hours in the car, it was dry and the track wasn't too busy. It was mega.

'My teammate Manuel Lauck put the car in the top ten in qualifying on its first lap, which is outstanding. We didn't really have a setup on the car – we just went out and saw how it was. In the race we ran in the top two in the first hour against some really strong GT3 opponents. The car ran for six hours without issue, which for its first race was bloody impressive.

'The speed is in the car, there's no doubt of that, but like all new cars there are things we want to work on – mostly driver comfort and *feel* things. The aero is impressive and you really feel it in high-speed corners.

'The car has no vices. The engine is making lovely torque and the team has done a great job of dialling in the driveability. It's competitive with GT3 cars – not miles quicker, but just where it needs to be.'

SPECIFICATION (RACE CAR)

Engine	V6, 3500cc, twin-turbo
Power	510bhp @ n/a
Torque	n/a
0-60mph	3.0sec (est)
Top speed	190mph (est)
Weight (dry)	1100kg (471bhp/ton)
Basic price	$3.25milion
On sale	Now

THANKS

Pictures taken from *Inside SCG 003*. This two-volume book set covers the birth of SCG 003 and its appearance at the Nürburgring 24 Hours. Just 500 copies will be produced, priced at €280 and available from *waft.be*

FERDINAND PIËCH

PIËCH: NONE MORE EVO?

Relentlessly ambitious, fanatical about racing and, until his recent resignation, the master puppeteer of the VW Group. We look back at his remarkable career

Storemags

by STUART GALLAGHER

THE RESIGNATION OF A 78-YEAR-old chairman of a German automotive company wouldn't normally warrant more than a sentence or two in the opening pages of **evo**. But Dr Ferdinand Piëch was no ordinary industry chairman. In fact, he could quite possibly be the most **evo** man in the entire car industry.

Ignore the shared platforms, drivetrains and components – Volkswagen Group's cross-brand family of models that almost takes badge-engineering a step too far – and instead consider what Piëch stood for. While those who head up rival manufacturers are predominantly from a sales and marketing background, the Austrian was first and foremost an engineer fascinated with new technology and always looking for an advantage.

His product back-catalogue is an embarrassment of riches, one from which any chairman or CEO would be content to have just a single item on their CV. How many of Piëch's rivals can claim to have built a Le Mans winner, brought pioneering technology to the masses and signed off the most aerodynamically efficient car of its time? Who else could set their engineers the task of building the fastest, most powerful production car ever and tell them not to come back until the job was done?

Early in his career, Piëch showed signs that settling for second best was never going to be an option. When he worked in Porsche's motorsport department and wanted his grandfather's company to win Le Mans for the first time, he fought against using the company's 2-litre flat-six production car engine and got the go-ahead for a 4.5-litre flat-12 racing engine and a chassis and body to put it in. And when the FIA inspectors came to check on the progress of Porsche's new sportscar, instead of having the usual two or three finished cars and the same number again in various states of build, Piëch made sure that all 25 machines required for homologation were built and lined up for inspection.

A switch to Audi in the early '70s saw him focus his attentions on winning-over BMW drivers by injecting performance and groundbreaking technology into the sector. He used four-wheel drive to not only claim victory on the stages of the World Rally Championship, but also to give the firm's less fashionable saloons a USP over their Bavarian rivals.

But it was Piëch's determination to innovate, lead and push for the VW Group's brands to compete head-on with each other that appeals so profoundly to **evo**. Every brand he added to the Group is stronger because of it. Before Audi took control of Lamborghini, you couldn't think of a more inappropriate owner – a German saloon car manufacturer having control of an Italian supercar company just shouldn't work. Yet the Gallardo was

"He fought against a 2-litre flat-six and got the go-ahead for a 4.5-litre flat-12"

NUMBER OF CARS SOLD IN 2014

10,217,003

PIËCH v THE MANAGEMENT

Ferry Porsche

Arguably responsible for Piëch's dogged determination to reach the top. Two decades after Ferry Porsche took over the business his father founded, he turned it into a public company, declaring that no member of the Porsche or Piëch families (Ferry's sister, Louise, had married Anton Piëch) could run Porsche, leaving young Ferdinand no option but to leave the family business and forge his own career at Audi.

Bernd Pischetsrieder

Having risen through the ranks at BMW, Pischetsrieder was appointed CEO of SEAT in 2000, a position he held until he succeeded Piëch as chairman of VW in 2002. It didn't take long for him to start to rile Piëch, though, first by delaying the Veyron and then by trying to block plans to combine VW's MAN and Scania truck operations. In 2006, Piëch replaced him with Audi's Martin Winterkorn.

Martin Winterkorn

After Pischetsrieder's exit, Audi chief Martin Winterkorn was given the top job at Volkswagen. Piëch was his strongest advocate and the two had a similar passion for cars. But in recent years, Winterkorn has failed to meet Piëch's expectations when it has come to costs and growth in the US. However, when Piëch tried to squeeze his former protégé out, Winterkorn won the board's backing.

Wendelin Wiedeking

On his second stint at Porsche, Wiedeking took the company from the verge of bankruptcy to being a financial powerhouse and back again – a journey that ultimately led to his downfall. He embarked on an ambitious plan for Porsche to take control of VW Group in 2008 – a move Piëch didn't discourage – but when the deal soured and Porsche was left with €10bn of debt, Piëch had seen enough…

Matthias Müller

The man who would be king. Müller has worked his entire career in the VW Group, starting with Audi in 1977 and working through the ranks. When he joined Porsche in 2010 as its new CEO, it was thought to be the beginning of the end of Porsche's independence, but he's grown Porsche and built on its core values. Piëch is a big fan and wanted Müller to replace Winterkorn.

VW BRANDS

12

The number of brands within VW Group, satisfying Piëch's desire to build motorbikes, trucks, supercars and everything in between. Audi controls Lamborghini and Ducati, with SEAT, Skoda, Bentley and Bugatti under VW's control. Porsche operates independently but is developing the next Bentley platforms.

Storemags.com

by STUART GALLAGHER

PIËCH'S CARS

Bugatti Veyron

In today's world of hyper-hybrids, the Veyron is often overlooked, but here was a supercar from a company that also made the Skoda Fabia. That Piëch ordered Bugatti's engineers to build a 1000 PS, 250mph car that could be as easy to drive as a Golf – and that they achieved just that – cannot and should not go unrecognised.

Audi Quattro

When he joined Audi, Piëch embarked on an aggressive, engineering-led agenda. His most famous achievement was taking four-wheel drive and installing it into a sports car, in this case the humble 80 coupe. The resulting Ur-Quattro was a textbook example of Piëch's automotive philosophies.

VW Golf Mk4

There's very little to attract **evo** readers to the Mk4 Golf, but this humble hatchback showcased just how far Piëch was prepared to go. When Ford first saw the VW's fixtures and fittings, it hastily threw a cover over its then-new Focus's interior as it frantically worked towards upping the quality. The Mk4 provided VW's bedrock of quality.

VW 1-LITRE

On retiring as chairman of VW in 2002, Piëch's engineers presented him with the '1-Litre': a carbon-bodied, two-seater tandem concept car that could travel 100km on one litre of fuel. The car represented everything Piëch strived for in his engineering career, being light, efficient and tech-led. In 2014 a version of it made production as the XL1.

Porsche 917

One of the greatest racers of all time, the 917 highlighted Piëch's unstoppable ambition. Its development pushed Porsche's finances to the limit and the factory drivers refused to race the early cars due to their instability at high-speed – caused by Piëch's fascination with aerodynamics. Only a rule change could stop it.

an **evo** favourite from day one. And then Audi went and built a rival to the Gallardo – the R8 – so the VW Group gave us *two* brilliant mid-engined supercars, each benefiting from a combination of shared knowledge and rivalry. Meanwhile, the sanctioning of a Group SUV project allowed Porsche to cash in, produce the likes of the Carrera GT, and ultimately head back to Le Mans.

Motorsport is perhaps where Piëch's strongest attributes lie. Resisting F1, he's pushed the Group's brands in multiple disciplines: DTM, GT racing, the World Rally Championship and, of course, the WEC and Le Mans. Under his stewardship, VW Group brands have won the Le Mans 24 Hours 14 times in the past 15 races. And when Porsche returned last year there was no Audi withdrawal, instead both brands have been encouraged to slug it out for victories. Under Piëch's stewardship it was very much a case of, 'If you can't beat an in-house rival, how do you expect to beat an external one?'

There is, however, a delicious twist in the Piëch affair. He may have been forced to resign from the Volkswagen supervisory board, but his family still owns a 51 per cent stake in Porsche Automobil Holding SE, the company that owns VW Group. Piëch isn't finished it yet.

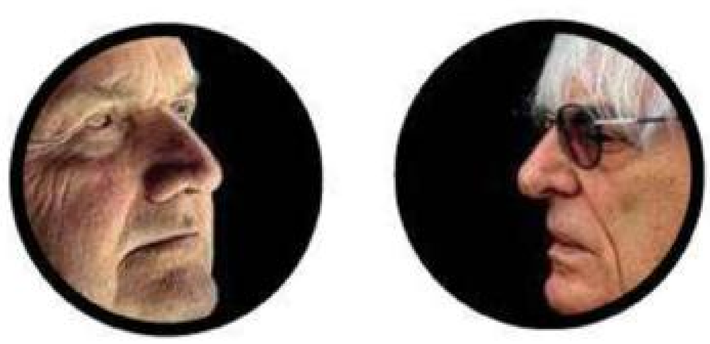
COMPETITIVE MOTORSPORT

Piëch's fierce competitive streak was not only shown in the boardroom, but played out on the world's racetracks, too. Other multiple-brand companies usually do everything they can to keep their brands from competing with each other, but for Piëch, internal competition was the strongest kind.

When Porsche announced it was returning to Le Mans after a 16-year hiatus, many assumed that Audi would be withdrawing. But no, both brands have raced head-to-head since Porsche's return in 2014 and there's no sign of any let-up this year.

VW and Skoda also compete on the World Rally stage, while Porsche, Lamborghini, Audi and Bentley battle each other in numerous GT categories around the world. In fact, only Bugatti is bereft of a racing programme.

HEAD-TO-HEAD



Ferdinand Piëch v Bernie Ecclestone

Why isn't the VW Group represented in F1? Because Piëch doesn't trust Bernie Ecclestone, a view he has backed-up by saying that no Group brand would enter F1 while Bernie was still in charge. In April, prior to Piëch's departure, Ecclestone said he would step down if his involvement was the reason why a manufacturer wouldn't enter the sport.

Audi has been strongly linked with F1 for two decades, most recently with rumours of it buying either Red Bull or Williams. Current Audi chief Rupert Stadler has always been a strong advocate of the brand being in F1.

by SOFIANE KENNOUCHE

Supercars at Wilton House

On June 6 and 7, the grass of Wilton House in Wiltshire will be trampled by tens of millions of pounds' worth of classic cars and supercars.

Confirmed attendees include the hybrid hypercar trio of the LaFerrari, Porsche 918 Spyder and McLaren P1. An Aston Martin One-77 will also be present, as well as one of only five Bugatti Veyron Pur Sangs. A special display dedicated to the Veyron and celebrating the record-breaking car's ten-year production run is also planned.

The event, organised by Wilton House owner (and Veyron driver) Lord Pembroke, will also showcase an Alfa Romeo Giulietta Zagato prototype recently rediscovered in the USA after its whereabouts were unknown for 50 years. In addition, the 135,000bhp Bloodhound SSC, which is aiming to surpass 1000mph in South Africa later this year, will sit in the grounds of the country house for visitors to admire.

While the Saturday will be geared towards the many classic cars on show, Sunday will showcase the more modern machinery. More than 500 cars and bikes are expected to be on display, and **evo** contributor Tiff Needell will host interviews with drivers in each day's parade through the grounds.

Alongside the Classic Car of the Show and Supercar of the Show trophies, Lord Pembroke has added a Concours d'Histoire to the honours list. This new category will celebrate the cars with the best story behind them, with barn-find, family-owned classics and road-trip veterans all in contention.

Food and trade stalls will be present, the Palladian interior of the House itself will be open to the public, with its art collection put on display, and there will be live music, too.

More information and tickets, which start at £20 for adults and £7.50 for children aged 5-15, can be found at wiltonclassicsupercar.co.uk.

by ANTONY INGRAM

New NSX laid bare

Honda's hybrid supercar promises class-leading rigidity and integrated approach to aerodynamics

HONDA HAS WHEELED OUT a production-ready NSX at several motor shows since its debut in January, but specific details are still relatively sparse. However, the company has now revealed information on the car's construction, and it is set to be as advanced as the original aluminium NSX was back in 1990.

This time, Honda has employed a 'multi-material body' – shorthand for an aluminium-intensive space frame that incorporates high-strength steel and a carbonfibre floor. The upshot, says Honda, is that the NSX will have the most rigid structure in its segment.

A new casting technique, ablation casting, combines traditional casting methods with rapid cooling to pair rigidity (for stiffness) with ductility (for impact absorption) for some of the aluminium sections. Meanwhile, the use of ultra-high-strength steel for the A-pillars means they can be thinner for improved forward visibility – a highlight of the original NSX.

Cooling and aerodynamics have also come under scrutiny. A barrage of radiators is tasked with keeping the complicated drivetrain cool – explaining the proliferation of vents that have appeared since the original concept debuted. Said vents also form part of the car's 'total airflow management', which ensures active aero components are not required.

LITRES

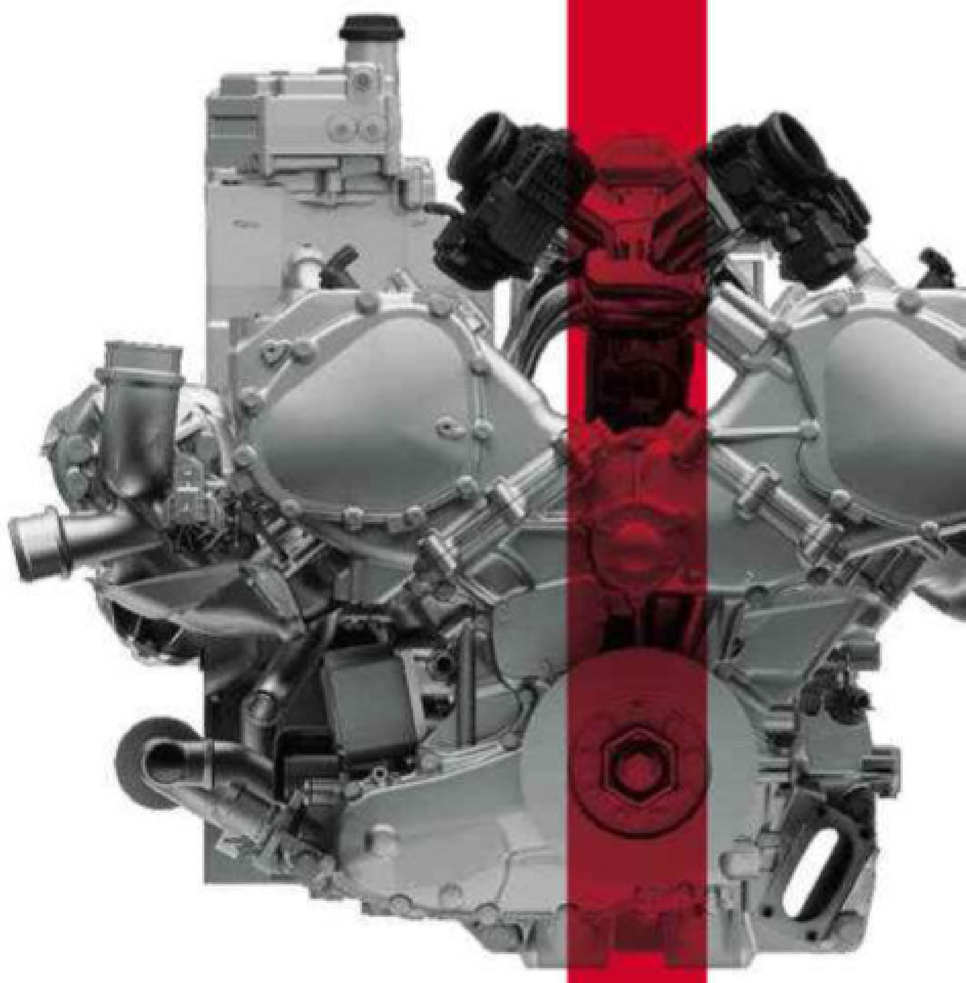
3.5

Honda has finally confirmed the new engine's capacity. The twin-turbo V6 also features both direct and port injection.

DEGREES

75

The angle of the 'V' in the mid-mounted V6. Honda says it optimises engine rigidity and lowers the centre of gravity.



Subaru STI: the big plan

What one hand giveth, the other taketh away. This is Subaru STI's new sports car... and why we can't have it

AT THE NEW YORK MOTOR show back in March, Subaru unveiled an 'STI Performance Concept' based on the BRZ. As you can see from the pictures here, it's a mouth-watering proposal.

Heading to the rear wheels is 345bhp and 332lb ft of torque from a turbocharged, 2-litre boxer engine. An aero package wrought in carbonfibre and honed in a wind tunnel adorns the bodywork, while 18-inch wheels hide Brembo brakes. Not only has the suspension been heavily retuned by the STI division (it now has Bilstein dampers), but there is also a flexible strut brace between the turrets of the front suspension (see right for more info). Inside the car are Recaro seats and a distinctly Ferrari-inspired steering wheel with revs lights built into the rim and a manettino-style switch.

'Build it *this instant*' has been the general consensus amongst all who have seen the concept, but the official line from Subaru is that it is just a showcase for STI engineering and will not enter production. However, in recent weeks there have been rumours coming out of the US that a hot version of the BRZ *will* be produced. Sadly, it's thought that it might be a rather tamer thing than the concept, possibly without any power increase. This seems a crying shame, but when **evo** asked Subaru why STI seems to be shying away from engine upgrades, the reply was that the division 'pursues totally balanced performance', tuning vehicles 'depending on each model's character, so there are some cases where engine upgrades are not essential modification points'.

Worse news for the UK is that if a hotter BRZ does go into production in one form or another, Subaru is currently saying it won't come to Europe. Indeed, parent company Fuji Heavy Industries (FHI) says we're not likely to see even lesser 'tS' models ('tuned by STI' – think Ford's ST line) in Europe in the next few years. The reason for this is that Subaru is currently concentrating all its efforts on the US, and it's easy to see why.

Subaru sells more than half a million cars a year in the States – up from 190,000 in 2008. Half a million might not sound like a huge number, but the US is by some distance the largest market for Subaru. In Japan, the second largest market, Subaru sells about 170,000 cars annually, and its global production figure is around 900,000. As such, it seems obvious that FHI would focus its efforts on building the STI brand in the States, something it has already started to do with the STI Performance Concept.

STI is also said to be looking to

Storemags

by HENRY CATCHPOLE

increase its motorsports involvement in America. Currently the only competition that Subaru is officially involved with is the Super GT series in Japan, plus the Nürburgring 24 Hours, where a team has competed for the last eight years. Questioned on why there is no longer a WRC campaign, Subaru cites the current regulations, explaining that the 'harsh road' conditions of the Ring are similar to the WRC and so 'STI keeps on challenging this race in pursuit of enhancing its driving performance'.

However, there is somewhere where Subaru is still reigning victorious in rallying, and you can probably guess where that is: America. With David Higgins leading up the Rally America championship in recent years and Travis Pastrana before that, a Subaru WRX STI of some description has won the title in all but one of the years since the series was launched in 2005.

All this talk of a US-focused way forward for STI seems like bad news, but the good part is that there is a way forward for STI at all. For some time now, the stock of performance Subarus has been on the wane (certainly in the UK) and it has felt like the heydays of STI are behind us. If the US can reinvigorate the famous 'pink' badge (it's actually Cherry Blossom Red), even if it takes time, then that can only be a good thing.

ENGINE

Lifted from the GT300 racer that competes in the Japanese Super GT series, the concept's engine is the 'EJ20' 2-litre turbocharged boxer. Officially it has 345bhp, but rumours are that it could have 100bhp more.

FLEXIBLE STRUT BRACE

The idea of this brace, designed by STI, is to add stiffness only in desirable directions. Its principal aim is to increase stiffness laterally and improve steering precision. However, STI says that solid braces can also reduce vertical compliance, which results in poorer ride quality, hence the flexibility added into this brace.

THREE-LETTER INITIALISMS

Fuji Heavy Industries (FHI) is the parent company of Subaru. Other branches of the company are involved in aerospace – both commercial and defence – and in industrial power units. STI stands for Subaru Technica International and is the performance arm of Subaru. It was founded in 1988.

EVO AND SUBARU STI

Performance Subarus, especially Imprezas, were a core part of **evo** when it first hit the shelves back in the late '90s, but STI was actually only a small part of the scene. At the time, Subaru was enjoying rallying success and was British-leaning, both in terms of drivers and the team. As a result, we had the Impreza Series McRae, the RB5 and the P1, but none of these were actually STI models.

The only STI to officially come to the UK in **evo**'s early years was the limited-edition Impreza 22B. There were, however, plenty of STI imports from Japan and, indeed, over the years some of **evo**'s favourite Subarus have been imports: an Impreza Spec C (above right) did incredibly well in eCoty '03; I loved the Type RA that I drove to Rally Ireland in '07, and the Forester STI (above left) in eCoty '05 was marvellous. So, if we don't officially get new STI products in the UK, it's nothing new and it doesn't mean we won't drive them.

by STUART GALLAGHER

BMW updates 3-series to battle Jaguar XE

BMW has revealed details of its revised 3-series in time for the arrival of Jaguar's new XE saloon (page 52). The updated model goes on sale in July – prices will be announced closer to the date – with a three-cylinder turbocharged petrol engine joining a line-up of new four- and six-cylinder powerplants. A six-speed manual and a new eight-speed automatic gearbox will be offered, along with BMW's xDrive four-wheel-drive system on certain models.

Visual changes are limited to new bumpers and LED headlights. However, it's under the bonnet where BMW has gone to town. This will be the first 3-series to feature a three-cylinder engine, which is the 134bhp 1.5-litre turbocharged petrol unit taken from the Mini and 2-series Active Tourer. With a six-speed manual 'box, the '318i' saloon will hit 62mph in 8.9sec.

Also new is a 3-litre, straight-six petrol engine developing 321bhp and 332lb ft. Badged 340i, it replaces the 335i, and reaches 62mph in a claimed 5.1sec.

The M3 will also come in for a midlife nip and tuck, also with new bumpers and LED treatment, a tweaked interior and some mild tuning of its twin-turbocharged straight-six to bring it into line with Mercedes' new C63 models. Expect the M3 upgrades to be announced in September at the Frankfurt motor show, where BMW will also introduce a 330e plug-in hybrid, due for 2016.

MX-5 PRICES AND SPECIFICATION CONFIRMED

Mazda has confirmed prices and options for the fourth-gen MX-5. Two engines and five trim levels will be offered when the car goes on sale this summer, with prices starting at £18,495 for the 129bhp 1.5-litre SE and rising to £23,295 for the 158bhp 2-litre Sport Nav.

Every model comes with a six-speed manual gearbox as standard, while all 2-litre engined cars get a limited-slip diff, and 2-litre Sport models also come with Bilstein dampers. Standard kit across the range also includes LED headlights and 16- or 17-inch alloy wheels.

400,000

*Subscribers for the **evo** YouTube channel. Thank you, one and all. Visit youtube.com/evo*

198MPH

Highest speed at Round 2 of the FIA WEC at Spa. Set by Brendon Hartley in the #17 Porsche 919 Hybrid

14,000,000

Number of 3-series BMW has produced during the model's 40-year production run

FAST MUSTANGS MUSCLE INTO EUROPE

The performance figures for the forthcoming Ford Mustang models are out. The 412bhp 5-litre V8 coupe reaches 62mph from rest in a claimed 4.8sec, making it the fastest accelerating Ford coupe ever offered in Europe, Ford GT and RS200 aside. The sprint time is for the six-speed manual model fitted with launch control, and makes it a tenth quicker than Porsche's Cayman GTS. The 2.3-litre EcoBoost Mustang, meanwhile, will hit 62mph in a claimed 5.8sec.

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EXCITING AS THE DRIVE. **ALMOST.**

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PureTech PEUGEOT RECOMMENDS TOTAL Official Fuel Consumption in MPG (l/100km) and CO_2 emissions (g/km) for the 308 GT Line are: Urban 43.5 – 65.7 (6.5 – 4.3), Extra Urban 64.2 – 83.1 (4.4 – 3.4), Combined 54.3 – 76.3 (5.2 – 3.7) and CO_2 119 – 97 (g/km).

MPG figures are achieved under official EU test conditions, intended as a guide for comparative purposes only and may not reflect actual on-the-road driving conditions. *Passport 1.9% Representative APR up to 37 months. Terms and conditions apply, participating dealers only or visit peugeot.co.uk. Peugeot Motor Company is acting as a credit broker and is not a lender. We may introduce you to a limited number of lenders to finance your purchase. Over 18s only. A guarantee may be required. Finance provided by and written quotations available from PSA Finance UK Ltd t/a Peugeot Financial Services, Quadrant House, Princess Way, Redhill, RH1 1QA. All offers available on qualifying vehicles ordered and registered between 01.04.15 and 30.06.15 or until such time as they may be withdrawn by Peugeot at its complete discretion. Excess mileage charges may apply. Visit peugeot.co.uk for full terms and conditions. Information correct at time of going to press.

NEW PEUGEOT 308 GT LINE

storemags.com

MOTION & EMOTION

PEUGEOT

Stormags

by NICK TROTT

Ben Bowlby

Nissan will arrive at Le Mans next month with a front-engined, front-driven LMP1 car. The man behind the radical GT-R LM Nismo talks to evo

WHEN NISSAN SAID they wanted to go LMP1 racing, it was not to copy the incumbents – it was to innovate. Innovation as a way to disrupt the status quo and to make a difference – and get an advantage quickly and cost-effectively. Nissan is all about using innovation to give the customer something special without costing the earth.

'I've got to tell you, innovation at this level is not very comfortable – we haven't had a starting point that we *knew* would be great – but our goal is to do the best possible job.

> *"You don't want the drivers hanging on by their fingernails"*

'I think that racing is a very complex relationship between a machine and a human team, and something remarkable happens when you achieve your potential. Obviously we were sad not to be at [the 6 Hours of] Silverstone and Spa – and going straight to Le Mans 24 is a negative for us. However, if we were not at those races because we were working to get into a position where we can deliver our optimum, then so be it.

'What we're seeing is that the GT-R LM Nismo has some great strengths, and we're going to play to those strengths at Le Mans. It was designed as a Le Mans special and I think we'll be respectable. At Le Mans it's anyone's guess – anything can happen. We're going in to perform at the best possible level we can achieve. That's what it is all about.

'I think that what we've done at Nissan is to create a car with a very broad operating envelope. This is absolutely critical at Le Mans. The car has to run day or night, wet or dry. You're going to encounter someone's oil on a corner, and you're going to hit rain when you've got slicks on the car, you're going to struggle with vision with sun on the window. So having a car with tremendous stability, that is giving up nothing in performance or lap time, is very, very important.

'If you can consistently run fast laps, you're going to be in a really strong position. You don't want the drivers to be hanging on by their fingernails and on the ragged edge lap after lap. It needs to be a relatively low effort and it needs to be relatively simple to get the performance out of the car.

'Most of us recognise that a front-engined, front-drive road car tends to be less tricky, with more predictable handling characteristics than a rear-engined, rear-drive car. Having drive, the engine and the centre of mass very far forwards means you have a fundamental stability. There are other ways of getting stability in a vehicle, but this is a very good one.

'We think that we will have a very consistent level of performance, and of course wet weather is common at Le Mans. Having a front-mounted engine and front-wheel drive at Le Mans, with its better resistance to aquaplaning and stability in torrential rain or when running at high speed on slicks on a damp track – these are big advantages. Nobody wishes for a rainy Le Mans, especially not the fans, but we won't be too upset if storm clouds are brewing…'

TIME TO WALK THE WALK

Bowlby's honesty, and indeed the transparency of the entire Nissan/Nismo racing operation, is to be commended. But so far, that's all we've had to go on – straightforward, open and compelling theory lessons on why the GT-R LM Nismo should perform very well at Le Mans.

There's little doubt the GT-R LM Nismo is the Brabham BT46B 'fan car' of our era – frighteningly innovative, disruptive and tremendously exciting. The fan car won first time out and was promptly banned. The Nismo won't get banned – it fits comfortably within the more open LMP1 regulations – but it's unlikely to win, either.

Beating Porsche, Audi and Toyota would take a miracle for Nissan. However, unlike the DeltaWing, we hope Nissan continuously evolves the car so that us fans of racing can see the GT-R fulfil its potential. ***Nick Trott***

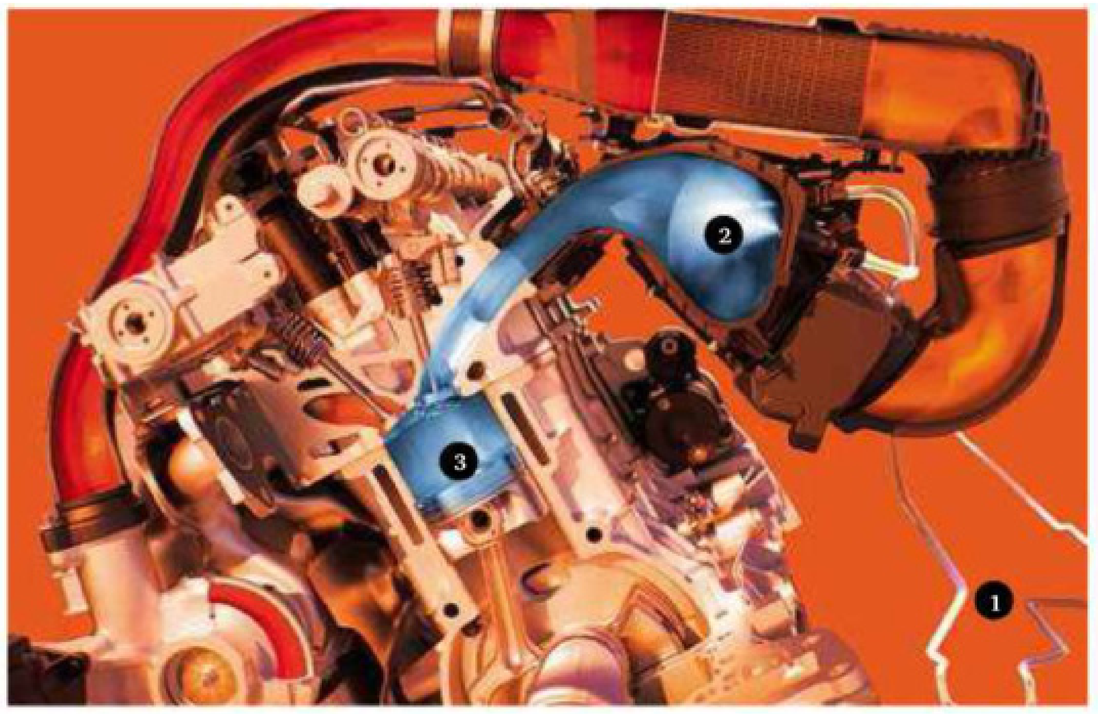
FOCUS

WATER INJECTION

TURBOCHARGING IS A HOT topic in today's automotive circles. With external pressure to reduce emissions, manufacturers are relying heavily on turbocharging smaller power units to meet emissions targets while maintaining high performance levels. However, the more we turn up the wick on turbochargers to get more performance, the more risk we run with heat build-up, and therefore premature detonation in the cylinder and inefficiency.

When we compress air – as is done by a turbocharger – the temperature of that air increases. Intercoolers are commonplace in modern turbocharged cars, and it's their job to take some heat out of the compressed intake air. As this air travels through the intercooler, it is cooled by cold air passing over the intercooler's external fins. But when we start to have higher compressor speeds, such as towards the top end of the rev range, the compressed air is not adequately cooled by the intercooler alone.

When the air being forced into the engine is highly compressed, it can cause early detonation of the air/fuel mixture, known as 'knock'. Normally, manufacturers specify higher octane rated fuels to combat knock, and that's why the label on the fuel flap of most turbocharged performance cars will state that 97 octane, or higher, should be used.



"Temperatures are reduced by squirting water directly into the intake"

1 Lines from water reservoir 2 Water injectors 3 Denser charge = more performance

However, BMW has implemented an old-school cooling method to combat knock and increase the performance of its M4.

The M4 MotoGP safety car uses water injection to reduce intake temperatures by squirting water directly into the intake. The system works in a similar way to how we control our body temperature: it's all about evaporative cooling. When we get hot our bodies produce sweat on the skin. This salty water then evaporates with the cold air passing over it, and when the water transitions to vapour, it takes away some heat from the body.

The MotoGP M4 uses this same underlying principle to control heat build-up at high revs. At above 5000rpm, when the intake air gets very hot, water is injected into the inlet plumbing after the intercooler. The water is highly atomised by specially designed nozzles, which means that the highest possible surface area can be achieved. The charge air is then cooled, which makes for a denser charge, which means more performance.

Not only does this system increase performance and economy, but nasty nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions are reduced. These are usually created under high temperatures in the combustion chamber, and with lower temperatures due to evaporative cooling, reduced NOx emissions result.

Will the M4 MotoGP technology ever make it to a road car? Perhaps not a mass-produced one, but there are rumours that an M4 GTS may feature it, which would surely only add to this ultimate M4's appeal.

ASK MIKE

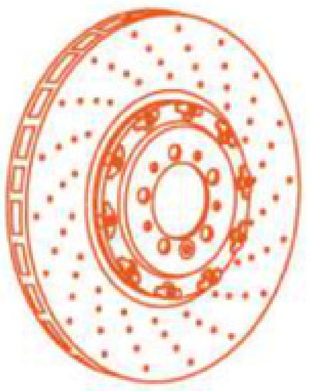
Your tech questions answered

Q Carbon ceramic brakes seem to be one of the most expensive options on performance cars. Are they really worth it?
– Michael Miley

A We took two Jaguar F-Types – with standard and ceramic brakes respectively – to the track to find out in **evo** 206. For heavy-duty use, the ceramics lasted and lasted, whereas the cast iron units started to fade after a few cycles.

So, if the car will get a lot of track abuse and you require repeatable hard stops, they are brilliant. But if you only brake hard when a rabbit jumps out into the road, maybe leave that option unchecked.

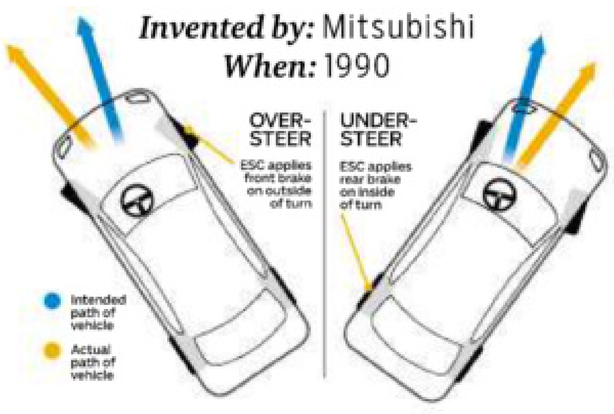
Send your question to experts@evo.co.uk



TECH GAME-CHANGERS

STABILITY CONTROL

Invented by: Mitsubishi
When: 1990



The first 'anti-skid' system is attributed to the Toyota Crown in 1983. However, the first full stability control system that is comparable to what we see today was introduced on the Mitsubishi Diamante in 1990. Such systems became more commonplace later in the '90s on German saloons such as the BMW 7-series and Mercedes S-class.

Stability control uses a range of sensors for things such as steering angle, throttle position and yaw rate. Using data from these sensors, the ECU can decide whether the car's behaviour is what the driver intended and, if it appears that it isn't, can then calculate what intervention is needed to try to regain control of the vehicle. This most commonly takes the form of individual brake modulation and throttle plate manipulation to sap power.

The latest versions of these systems are so clever that they can allow certain amounts of slip, to increase both driver enjoyment and overall speed out of corners. Ferrari's 'Side Slip Angle Control' software, for example, as seen on the 458 Speciale, allows enough slack that the driver can perform small drifts around corners without worrying about spinning out.

British GT Championship

www.britishgt.com

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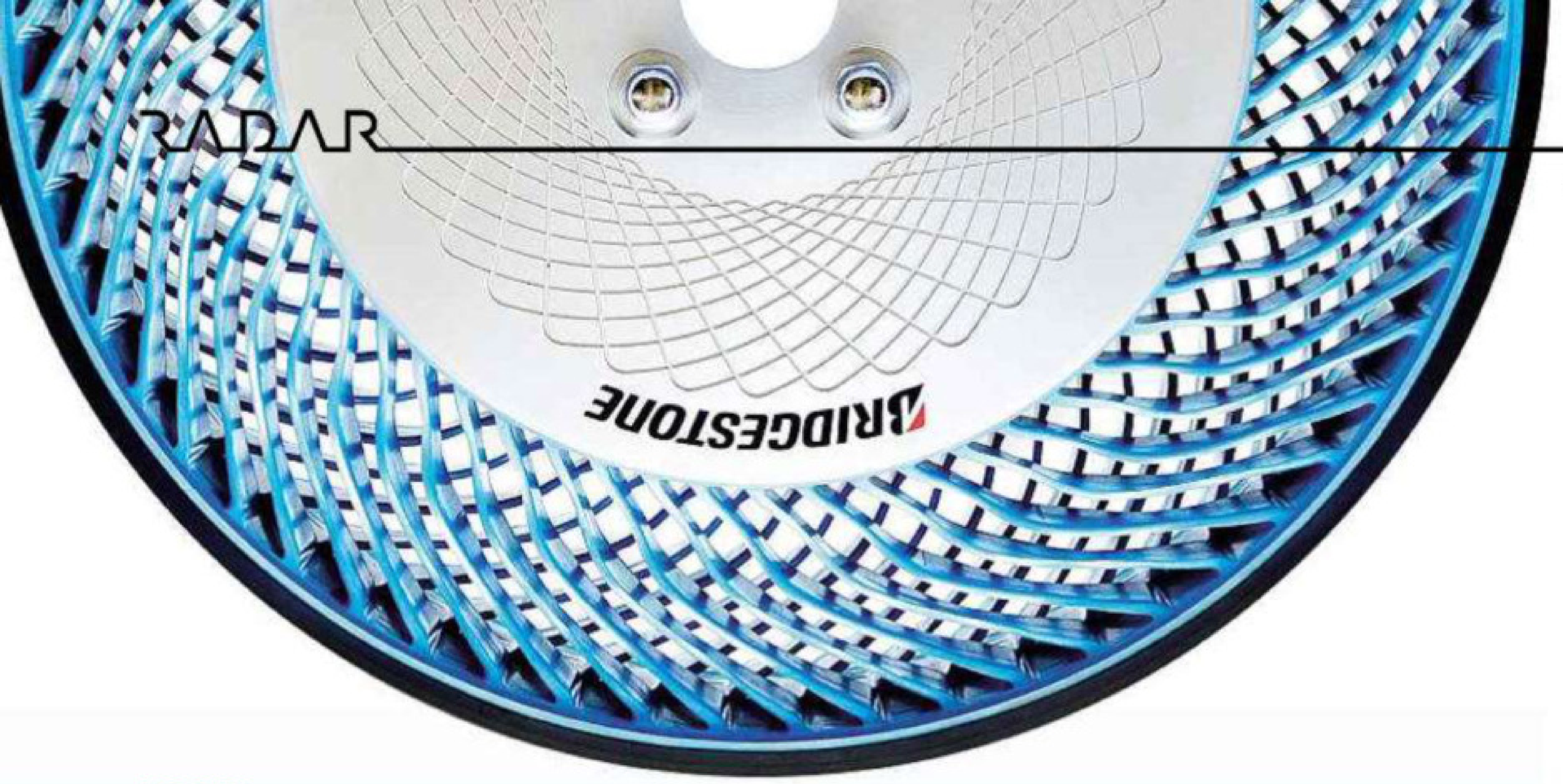

FOCUS

BRIDGESTONE'S PUNCTURE-FREE FUTURE

BRIDGESTONE SAYS ITS 'Air Free' concept tyre could make production in less than two years, after undergoing testing on ultra-light vehicles.

As the name suggests, the concept is a non-pneumatic tyre and consists of three main parts: an aluminium inner wheel, a rubber-based outer tread and thermoplastic resin spokes. The interlaced structure of the spokes helps the concept behave like a conventional tyre, supposedly offering the same level of manoeuvrability and stability.

'One of the key benefits of the concept is that there's no need to worry about punctures,' says Bridgestone's consumer sales and marketing director, Farrell Dolan. 'There's also no need to check tyre pressures.'

Though no specific weight figure has been touted for the concept, Fallen confirms that it is at least comparable to current products. 'They're light compared with puncture-less tyres, such as urethane-filled and solid rubber tyres. Even rolling resistance is at an equivalent level to fuel-efficient pneumatic tyres.'

Now in its second generation, the Air Free concept has been tested at speeds of up to 37mph on vehicles weighing 410kg. Bridgestone's engineers reckon each tyre can amply support 150kg, meaning eco-vehicles such as the Renault Twizy could easily be catered for.

Dolan does admit that the concept's unique spoke structure is vulnerable to picking up objects, although Bridgestone claims to have that issue covered: 'As the distance between the spokes changes while the vehicle is moving, objects will generally come lose.' Generally...

As well as creating a puncture-free future, a production version of the Air Free could improve tyre sustainability by using recyclable materials in its construction.

The idea of puncture-resistant tyres that can also be recycled into new units certainly has its appeal as a driver. But given that a significant proportion of new tyre sales must come as a result of punctures, you have to wonder what's in it for Bridgestone.

TYRE NEWS ROUND-UP

It's been a busy few weeks in the tyre industry, particularly in Europe.

Michelin confirmed its acquisition of blackcircles.com, the UK's number one online tyre supplier, for £50million. The website, which can include fitting in the price of tyres, achieved record profits in Q1 of 2015 and will be aligned closely with another of Michelin's brands, ATS Euromaster, to help grow the UK tyre service provider.

The news came not long after François Michelin, the grandson of company founder Édouard Michelin, died aged 88. Having run the company from 1955 to 2002, he was largely responsible for its international growth in the 20th century.

Meanwhile, Toyo revealed that it's recently seen a surge in demand for its Proxes R888s for 16-inch wheels in widths between 205 and 245mm. Interestingly, it appears the sales hike comes partly thanks to owners of classic Porsche 911s and 944s, who are becoming increasingly aware of the tyre's Porsche compatible sizes.

LAW DEMANDS TPMS CHECK-UP

Motorists could see their cars fail MOT tests thanks to new legislation governing tyre pressure monitoring systems. Cars registered after January 1, 2012, are legally required to have a fully functioning TPMS to gain their certificate.

The new rules have been in place since the start of 2015, but Stuart Jackson, chairman of safety organisation TyreSafe, believes many motorists are still unaware of the change: 'People simply don't know. Though there are now systems in place to improve safety, there's little education to tell drivers what the rules surrounding them are.'

The legislation has been introduced to cut the number of cars running with dangerously underinflated tyres.

'When a tyre is grossly underinflated, we tend to find that it gets a concave-shaped contact patch,' says Jackson. 'The shoulders are likely to be in contact with the road, but the main centre-section will not be, therefore your grip on the road and everything related to it is compromised.'

While the legal requirement for a fully functioning TPMS will likely reduce the number of motorists running with dangerously low pressures, Jackson says motorists should still check manually.

'A TPMS is not an excuse for people to stop checking manually. It's only there as a safeguard, as part of the safety systems. You still have a responsibility for making sure you carry out those manual checks, at least monthly and before a long journey.'

For more info, visit evo.co.uk/tyres

storemags.com

Official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the Ford EcoSport range: urban 34.9-57.7 (8.1-4.9), extra urban 53.3-64.2 (5.3-4.4), combined 44.8-61.4 (6.3-4.6). Official CO_2 emissions 149-120g/km.

The mpg figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results (EU Directive and Regulation 692/2008), are provided for comparability purposes and may not reflect your actual driving experience. Ford SYNC is optional, at extra cost.

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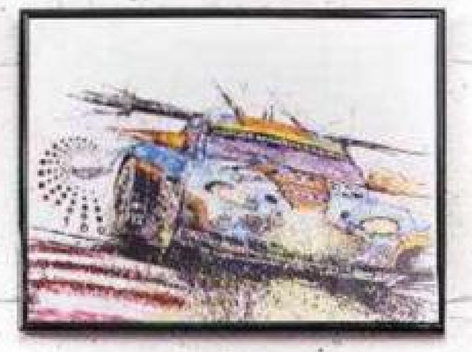
edited by ANTONY INGRAM *photography by* ASTON PARROTT

MOTORING PRINTS

evo's office walls are covered in prints. With more space, we'd add these



BMW E30 M3

30 x 40cm
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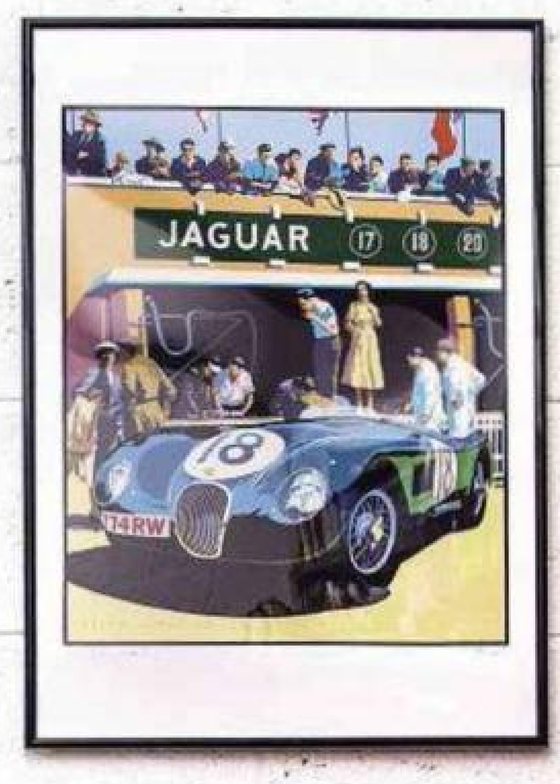


ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE GTE (#97)

28 x 23cm
popbangcolourshop.com

Ian Cook paints amazing scenes, such as this evocative Vantage GTE, with remote-control cars

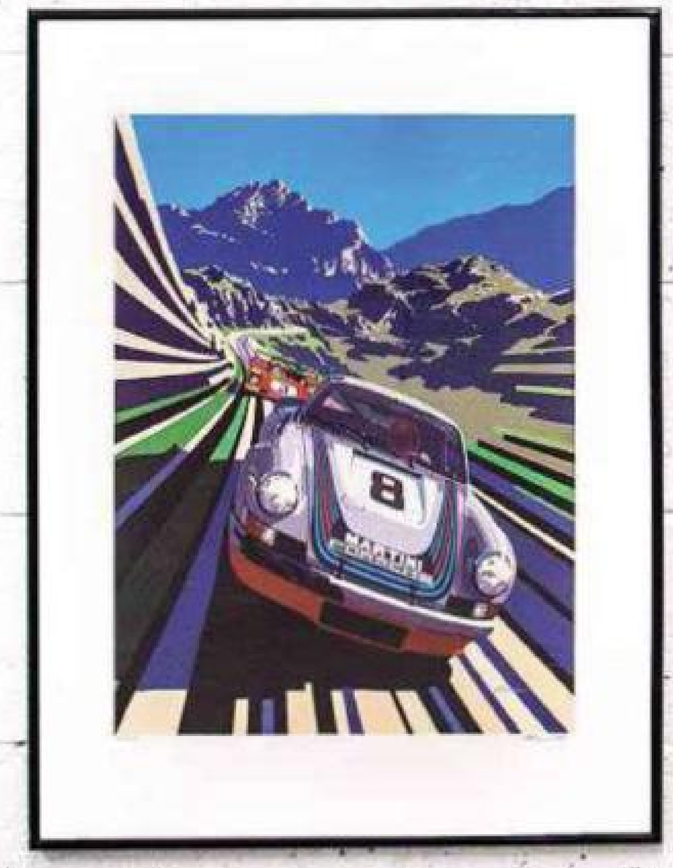
£25

1953 JAGUAR C-TYPE

43 x 52cm (1 of 100)
brianjames.biz

An atmospheric pitlane scene with an iconic vehicle. Each print is signed by the artist, Brian James

£70

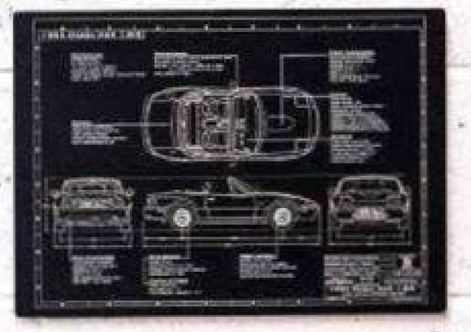


CARRERA TAKES TARGA

44 x 60cm (1 of 450)
timlayzell.com

Tim Layzell's distinctive, dramatic style celebrates Porsche's 1973 Targa Florio success

£195



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I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT...

MY LAPTOP

Iain Litchfield
Founder, Litchfield Imports

'If there's one thing I really couldn't live without, it's our dyno. It's absolutely central to the work we do, enabling us to test our modifications and the customer cars that come through.

'But for a smaller item, it's my laptop. Actually, we have five or six of them for our technicians. They're loaded with the different varieties of tuning software we use to modify a range of vehicles.

'We tend to use Dell laptops. They've got good battery-life – handy when switched between cars – are pretty robust and are easy to replace. All of which is important, as our laptops are a mainstay of my business.'

INTERVIEW

GARY PAFFETT

DEUTSCHE Tourenwagen Masters has a relatively low profile in the UK. Patchy television coverage and the current absence of a UK-based round means the sport doesn't attract the attention it deserves. The racing is close, the drivers – many are ex-Formula 1 stars – highly talented and the cars are as technologically advanced as in any series this side of Formula 1 and WEC.

As in those series, simulators are playing an increasing role in DTM car and driver development. **evo** met with 2005 champ and Mercedes-AMG driver Gary Paffett in Affalterbach to discuss the team's new sim – and how it will help bring them success.

Why does the team use simulators?
To replicate the different setups and changes you can do to the real car. We have tyre, suspension and aero models – all the info collectable from different parts of the car.

Our simulator is relatively early in its development stages, but this is where motorsport is going. Most F1 testing is done in simulators now, and DTM is getting that way.

The tyre model in particular is hard to build and maintain, because everything about rubber changes with wear, temperature, load… It's a difficult process, but we're pushing to get something as realistic as possible.

How well do the hydraulics represent the forces of a car?
They're pretty good, but limited. You can simulate as high a G-force as you like, but maintaining it is difficult. You can't really chase sustained G – what we need is accurate feedback about bumps and kerbs, which the simulator represents very well.

What about steering feel?
The steering load changes over bumps and kerbs, and the brakes change a lot. At the bottom of the rams we have real discs and callipers to replicate the feel from a pedal. Temperature changes we have to replicate in a model.

How much time do the drivers spend in the simulator?
Not a lot right now, while it's in development, but once it's up to a suitable level we'll do debriefs after every race weekend to make sure it still feels like the race car. We'll be updating it every time the car gets new parts. That's what we should be using the simulators for – filtering out the parts that don't work.

> *"Sims are for filtering out the parts that don't work"*

What about learning new tracks?
It's a great tool for learning circuits. Even after driving race cars for many years, I recently found a circuit I didn't know – Moscow.

Drivers in DTM are at such a level, they learn tracks very quickly, so you don't maintain an advantage over an entire weekend. But you probably have an advantage for ten laps, which means you can start working on the car ten laps earlier than the others.

ASK ANTONY

Smartphones: pleasure or pain?

This is just a hunch, but I suspect many **evo** readers are the sort to eschew excessive technology in their vehicles. Few will think ABS is a bad idea, and satellite navigation can be thoroughly useful, but ultimately we drive our cars to experience the sensations of driving.

In other words, our cars aren't a vessel from which to tweet at celebrities and many of us reach for the traction control 'off' button when we want to have a little fun.

But technology has infused our everyday lives and some of it lives quite harmoniously with our cars. Take smartphones, for example. There can't be many of us who leave the house without one these days, and in many cases they can add to the wider driving experience.

Maybe to find nearby driving roads when we're on a road-trip, to seek country pubs off the beaten track, or perhaps for posting pictures of our cars and motorsport events on Instagram and keeping in contact with like-minded people on social media.

We've suggested three handy apps below, but what are your favourites, and how do apps enhance your driving experience? Let me know at @evoAntony on Twitter or via email on antonyi@evo.co.uk.

WATCH

McLAREN F1 v P1

evo F1 P1

Beautiful footage from issue 205's McLaren twin-test cover story.

MINI 1275GT AT GOODWOOD

Swift 1275 Goodwood

Nick Swift's animated in-car video from the 73rd Members Meeting.

HONDA EK9 CIVIC TYPE R

Best Motoring EK9

Best Motoring review of the original Civic Type R (see p120).

APPS

GOOGLE MAPS

iOS/Android **£0**

Still the best maps and navigation app for smartphones. Detailed and accurate.

GREATEST DRIVE

iOS **£0**

User-submitted driving roads in your area, with comments and advice on each route.

CAMERA+

iOS **£2.29**

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WATCH TECH

Hublot 'Magic Gold'

Many people regard gold watches as the height of naff. Personally, I love 'em, which probably says something about my sense of aesthetics. But despite looking attractive, being naturally rust-proof and being available in various tones, gold has a serious Achilles' heel when it comes to its suitability for watch case construction. The usual purity of 750 per 1000 (equal to 18 carats) commonly used for horological applications makes for a hardness of just 180 on the Vickers scale, meaning that it's susceptible to damage from even relatively minor knocks and scrapes.

Hublot, however, has overcome the problem with its scratch-resistant 'Magic Gold', which scores 1000 on the Vickers scale – higher than the average watch-grade stainless steel. The material is said to have taken three years to perfect and is the result of combining pure gold with ceramic to produce a metal that still qualifies for an 18-carat hallmark. It was first used on Hublot's original Ferrari watches, launched in 2012.

THIS MONTH

Zenith Chronomaster 1969 Tour Auto Edition

From: zenith-watches.com
Price: £8100

As part of an ongoing mission to increase its profile in the lucrative classic car world, Zenith has joined forces with leading motorsport organiser Peter Auto as the official timekeeper of six European events, ranging from the Spa Classic to the Monza Historic. The list also includes the annual Tour Auto Optic 2000, for which Zenith has produced this special edition of the popular Chronomaster 1969. It has red, white and blue dial detailing, a perforated calfskin strap in blue and the 'Tour Auto' logo on the case back. Just 500 will be made.

IWC Ingenieur Automatic 'AMG GT'

From: iwc.com
Price: £17,750

IWC chose the 73rd Goodwood Members' Meeting in March to unveil its latest AMG watch, which also marks ten years since the Schaffhausen-based brand established a partnership with Mercedes' performance division. The Ingenieur Automatic 'AMG GT' edition is said to be the world's first watch to feature a case made from boron carbide, the hardest ceramic material currently in production. It's apparently as hard as diamond and as light as aluminium, but is also a devil to work with, which is why a mere 25 examples of the watch will initially be available.

Oris Audi Sport Limited Edition II

From: oris.ch
Price: £2700

Now in its second year as the official watch partner of Audi Sport, Oris has launched the Audi Sport Limited Edition II, which pays tribute to the R18 e-tron quattro endurance racer. The self-winding chronograph, set to be worn by the team's drivers throughout the 2015 season, features a ten-minute countdown timer, retrograde small seconds and an overall dial design inspired by the R18's cockpit instruments. The titanium case gets a tough, diamond-like carbon coating and the bezel features a scratchproof ceramic insert. 2000 will be made.

CHOPARD MILLE MIGLIA

As worn by... Jacky Ickx

Back in the 1970s, Belgian F1 star (and subsequent six-time Le Mans winner) Jacky Ickx was among a group of drivers backed by Heuer, which was then the leading watch brand in motorsport sponsorship. Ickx even had a Heuer watch named after him.

But for the past 25 years or so he has been a Chopard man, having become close friends with brand boss and fellow petrolhead Karl-Friedrich Scheufele as a result of driving with him in a dozen Mille Miglias. In fact, Ickx owns an example of every Chopard Mille Miglia watch ever made.

When I met up with him at Baselworld in March, he was sporting the 2014 model – worn over the top of his cuff, à la the late Fiat boss, Gianni Agnelli.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

Every motorsport fan should go to Le Mans at least once in their life. If this is your year, our survival guide will help you get the most from this unmissable event

THE LE MANS 24 HOURS IS MORE than just a race, it's a vibrant celebration of motorsport, a party to be enjoyed in the company of like-minded friends and fellow evo readers.

Le Mans is special for the drivers, too, as Porsche's Brendon Hartley reveals: 'Le Mans, I love it. In the night it's probably one of the most pleasurable things you get to do as a racing driver.' It's also special for Michelin, which this year goes for its 18th consecutive Le Mans victory. Pascal Couasnon, director of Michelin motorsport, says: 'At Le Mans, the pressure is incredible. But we're in direct contact with our partners... It's brilliant.'

A formidable, unpredictable and sometimes heartbreaking race, Le Mans' 24-hour spectacular is challenging to all who compete in it. Yet for the likes of Michelin, this gruelling competition provides valuable knowledge that can later be applied to the company's high performance road tyres.

This year looks like being an epic tussle. The three main players in the LMP1 class (all running on Michelin tyres) have had more than a year now to get to grips with new regulations and technologies, and to make things even more interesting there's a fresh challenger – Nissan.

If you've never been to Le Mans before, you owe it to yourself to go. To help you get the most from the experience (on 13-14 June), we've compiled this handy survival guide to endurance spectating.

Right: Michelin learns lessons at Le Mans that it brings to the road

Above, top: fans can get close to the pitlane action, where the tyres are lined up ahead of the legendary 24-hour race. **Above:** Michelin is gunning for its 18th consecutive victory in the endurance event

BEFORE YOU GO
Book tickets and accommodation through www.24h-lemans.com, and do it now! Check out the various types of ticket carefully: some grandstands and areas of the circuit require certain grades of pass and they're checked rigorously.

HOW TO GET THERE
Some people use the ferries, many the Eurotunnel. This year, the latter boasts the extra advantage of Michelin hosting a free tyre pressure check as you prepare to leave the UK. It's a long way to Le Mans, but with Michelin's vast experience of the 24-hour race, you can be sure they'll know how best to look after your road car's rubber.

Autoroutes from the tunnel to Rouen, then down to Le Mans are quickest, but will cost you. Alternatively, autoroute to Rouen, then head towards Caen, before picking up the D338 (N138 that was), for an entertaining and leisurely route to Le Mans.

As **evo** reader Dion Price explains: 'Don't rush: the journey is to be savoured. Chatting to like-minded petrol-heads on the Channel crossing, stopping for lunch at a little French village – Gacé is great – and getting off the motorway to hit some back roads is all part of the Le Mans experience.'

Michelin maps can get you from home to track and back again, while Michelin guides will show you where to stop for exceptional food. But stick to the speed limits: the French police are especially active during the week of Le Mans.

WHERE TO STAY
Even if you don't like tents, the party atmosphere of the campsites is worth the discomfort. Plus, you can savour a beer and are close enough to the action that you can easily slope off back to bed once you've had your fill of night racing.

Remember to bring a barbecue and to stock up on food and plenty of your favourite tipple on the way down.

MAPS AND MOVEMENT
Obtain a Le Mans circuit map before you arrive: it's a big place. If your car has room, pack a bike, if not, decent footwear. Also valuable is a rucksack for food and drink, jumpers and raincoats.

ENTERTAINMENTS
Le Mans has amusements, open-air concerts, shopping and other distractions, so bring plenty of (well secreted) cash.

'Mad Friday' is a chance to see publicly applauded burn-outs on certain roads, while in the centre of Le Mans there's a drivers' parade in open-top cars. And make sure you're around when they open the pitlane to the public on Friday morning.

WHICH TEAMS TO WATCH
Any one of the Michelin-shod LMP1 contenders is in with a shot of overall victory. Last year Porsche and Toyota came close to ending Audi's lengthy winning streak, and this year there's an extra rival – Nissan. During the race, keep up to date by watching Michelin's trackside screens, or by tuning into Radio Le Mans.

WHEN TO ARRIVE, WHEN TO LEAVE
Ideally, amble down on Thursday and catch the end of qualifying. And rather than trying to depart on Sunday – tired and in a traffic jam with 150,000 other cars – head home on Monday morning.

MICHELIN RACES, YOU WIN
For Michelin, racing at Le Mans isn't an end in itself. The imposing challenges of the 24-hour race – maintaining consistent tyre performance during hours of extreme straight-line and lateral speeds, whilst also providing good tyre life – help create technical advances that can be transferred from the track to the company's high performance road tyres.

A prime example of a road tyre benefiting from racing is the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2, fitted as standard to the Porsche 911 GT3 and 918 Spyder, Ferrari 458 Speciale and Mercedes SLS AMG Black Series. Not only does the Pilot Sport Cup 2 provide extraordinary grip, its all-round stability adds an extra degree of finesse to some already fine-handling supercars.

Please visit: www.weareallracers.michelin.com

In association with MICHELIN

Audi RS3 Sportback

Test location: Vallelunga Circuit, Italy **GPS:** 42.154283, 12.370324

New four-wheel-drive hardware promises rear-driven antics for the more powerful, second-generation RS3

THERE'S NO POLITE way to say this, so let's be brutally honest: the previous-generation Audi RS3 Sportback was pretty dire. It sounded interesting, thanks to its 2.5-litre five-cylinder turbocharged engine, and it had strong performance, but there was no finesse and the chassis was painfully inert. It was as though all the joy had been wrung out of the RS3 to leave something effective but awfully disappointing. The on-paper promise was sky-high, which made the uninspiring reality all the more crushing. Surely this new car, which positively pulsates with potential, can't get it so wrong all over again?

Well, Audi is on a bit of a roll at the moment, so the form guide is good. The S3 is enjoyable and wickedly quick and the S1 is smaller, sharper and a little bit wilder. If the RS3 can bring some of that feistiness to the table plus a heap more performance and character, thanks to the evocative five-cylinder engine, then it could be a real treat. And although history says that I shouldn't get too carried away by 'the numbers', there's no arguing that the RS3 Sportback does have a pretty mouth-watering set of figures to digest.

So the 2.5-litre 'five' is massaged to deliver 362bhp from 5500 to 6800rpm and 343lb ft from 1625 to 5500rpm. The only transmission available is the dual-clutch, seven-speed S-tronic, but it's said to shift even quicker than before and is coupled to the new Haldex V four-wheel-drive system. The multi-plate clutch system is now located in the rear axle to aid weight distribution and can send up to 100 per cent of power to either axle when necessary.

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It's got 362bhp and a new quattro setup, but does it have that elusive RS magic?

VAUXHALL CORSA VXR p46
Reborn entry-level VXR prepares to take the fight to some tough rivals

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF R ESTATE p51
Does a capacious rear enhance or impair our favourite hot hatch?

JAGUAR XE S p52
All-important new 3-series rival finally arrives. We try it in 335bhp 'S' form

BENTLEY MULSANNE SPEED p54
It's the torquiest production car on sale, but is it an entertaining steer?

PORSCHE 911 TARGA 4 GTS p56
Do a Targa top, 4WD traction and the GTS engine and chassis mix?

RENAULT MÉGANE GT 220 COUPE p58
Sub-Trophy Mégane gets 217bhp and a Renaultsport-tweaked chassis

The team

With the Audi RS3 Sportback our lead Driven this month, we asked the **evo** road test team to name their favourite car to wear the four-ring badge:

NICK TROTT
Editor
'Early Audi R8 V8 manual. Jet Blue. Silver blades. A future classic'

STUART GALLAGHER
Managing editor
'Original 20v. Driving **evo**'s example 1200 miles to the TT's launch in Italy does that to you'

HENRY CATCHPOLE
Features editor
'Any fantasy garage of mine would have to have a B7 RS4 Avant in it'

DAN PROSSER
Road test editor
'The Quattro S1 Group B rally car. Maybe the toughest-looking competition car ever'

JETHRO BOVINGDON
Contributing editor
'There can only be one answer: R8, manual 'box. I'm easy on V8 or V10!'

RICHARD MEADEN
Contributing editor
'Sport quattro. Everything you'd hope it to be and more. Sensational car'

DAVID VIVIAN
Contributing editor
'R8 GT, if only for getting me from Munich to Saxony in -17C without incident. And back'

Select Dynamic mode and power is sent more aggressively to the rear.

The RS3 Sportback is 55kg lighter than before, too, thanks to the new MQB platform (I know, I know, you've had your fill of MQB-speak), although it's not exactly a featherweight at 1520kg – that's around 45kg more than a Golf R or Mercedes-AMG A45. Even so, the RS3 boasts 0-62mph in 4.3sec and the speed limiter can be bumped from 155 to 174mph as an option. Overall it costs from £39,955 – £1760 more than the Mercedes.

On the narrow and horribly surfaced roads near the Vallelunga race circuit in Italy, the new RS3 Sportback feels a vast improvement over its predecessor. 'Our' car is running the standard fixed-rate dampers (Magnetic Ride Control is an option) and there's a litheness and accuracy that's immediately obvious. I'd feared the worst in the

Above: RS3's Haldex four-wheel-drive system is programmed to send 100 per cent of power – up to 362bhp from the turbocharged five-cylinder engine – to either axle as required

small villages at the start of the road route because the ride is pretty tough at low speeds, but it does find a rhythm very quickly once you're above a crawl. In fact, the whole car has a responsiveness that was completely absent in the old model.

The steering is light and clean, even in the heaviest setting, and it acts upon a front-end that's alert and keen to really get stuck in. You can feel the rear of the car helping to point you at the apex cleanly too, and it reacts quickly and accurately to a little lift off the throttle should you start to feel the clutches of understeer. On the road that's pretty rare – especially on the poorly sighted roads we're on today – and the RS3 Sportback is generally neutral and hooked-up. The promise of 100 per cent rear-drive moments never translates to a genuinely oversteery feel, but there's certainly an encouraging degree of adjustability.

The engine is pretty encouraging, too. It sounds hilariously warbly when matched with the optional RS Sports Exhaust System, which also crackles and gargles on the overrun. And despite the flat torque 'curve', the delivery ramps up nicely as you power through the gears. The gearbox, predictably, is smooth and near-seamless in operation.

But despite all that, somehow the RS3's ultimate performance feels a little underwhelming. It's a fast car, of course, but it doesn't feel a huge leap on from the Golf R or even its little S3 four-cylinder brother. I find myself waiting for the big rush of torque to arrive out of corners and then realise that, nope, that was it. Curious, especially when the Golf R feels so ballistic so often.

Perhaps I shouldn't mention the Golf R, but it's hard not to be drawn into comparisons with the supremely talented Volkswagen. It utilises the same basic architecture and four-wheel-drive system, and has a humble four-cylinder engine; it should be fuzzier and less focused than the RS3.

The Golf *is* a little softer, but it

'The whole car has a responsiveness that was completely absent in the old model'

counters that with a fluidity and clarity of feedback that the RS3 can't quite emulate. Perhaps if Audi riposted with some proper blood and thunder then the RS3 would elevate itself beyond these lingering Golf R thoughts... but it's just not exuberant enough to do so. It lacks just a little sparkle, that extra edge of excitement you might hope for and expect given the price.

Even so, the RS3 Sportback is a compelling package. The engine imparts a sense of occasion, the quality is irreproachable, the chassis has enough adjustability to keep you engaged and there's grip and traction to spare. The eight-piston callipers that grip the wave-design brake discs are also superb.

This Audi lacks the piercing focus of the hardcore A45 AMG but is a more enjoyable, more rounded car and feels much less one-dimensional. On the racetrack it'll even allow you to throw it into corners in a deliberate near-spin and then pulls you clear in a cloud of smoke and a gale of laughs. In fact, given the space to really take the RS3 by the scruff, it displays a really indulgent, fun side. It's a shame that for the most part on the road it feels just a little uptight. In summary, much better than the old car but nothing like as spectacular as the spec sheet suggests. ■

Jethro Bovingdon
(@JethroBovingdon)

Top right: 19-inch Anthracite Black and diamond-cut alloys are an extra £895. **Above:** a little engine bay jewellery, as you might expect on a £40,000 hatchback. **Above left:** RS3 does without the new TT's 'virtual cockpit', however

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 5-cyl, 2480cc, turbo	189g/km	362bhp @ 5500-6800rpm	343lb ft @ 1625-5500rpm	4.3sec (claimed)	155mph (limited)	1520kg (242bhp/ton)	£39,955

+ Addictive noise, much lighter on its feet than its predecessor, quality
− Not a big step up from Golf R or BMW M135i in performance terms, still a shade sensible

evo rating ★★★★☆

Vauxhall Corsa VXR

Test location: Knockhill, Scotland **GPS:** 56.130425, -3.505593

Building on the strengths of the previous VXR Clubsport, is Vauxhall's new small hot hatch now a match for the best in class?

NO MATTER HOW good the new Vauxhall Corsa VXR turns out to be, it will have a tough life. The sheer quality in the small hot hatch class is now so high – thanks to the genius of the Ford Fiesta ST and the measured aggression of the Peugeot 208 GTi 30th Anniversary – that a merely competent car no longer gets a look-in.

Beyond those two class leaders, Mini is set to release its latest John Cooper Works imminently, Renaultsport has had a quiet word with itself and will launch a more focused version of the disappointing Clio 200 soon, and the new VW Polo GTI is better than ever. Mediocrity simply will not do.

The original Corsa VXR proved a hit and some 9000 units were sold in the UK across an eight-year lifespan. Its popularity with buyers wasn't necessarily mirrored by critical acclaim in the motoring press, but the Nürburgring special edition and its Clubsport successor, which both ran Bilstein dampers and a Drexler limited-slip diff, were seriously entertaining little hot hatches.

This latest model will hope to continue where the Clubsport left off. To that end, buyers will have the option of specifying a Performance Pack, which adds that same Drexler LSD, plus 330mm Brembo brakes on the front axle, 18-inch wheels with Michelin Pilot Super Sport tyres, and revised tuning for the dampers. At £2400 on top of the £17,995 basic list price it doesn't come cheap, but so equipped the VXR will still undercut our current class leader, the 208 GTi 30th Anniversary. And, as we'll discover, the Performance Pack is worth every penny.

The fourth-generation Corsa actually carries over the previous version's basic architecture, so the dimensions and glasshouse are unchanged. The drivetrain is carried over, too, albeit with significant revisions to improve performance and efficiency. On the engine side, the intake system, fuel injectors, intercooler, ECU and exhaust are either entirely new or overhauled. Peak power is 202bhp, peak torque 206lb ft on overboost – figures that equal the old Clubsport's. However, that 202bhp is now achieved a fraction higher up the rev range (5800rpm rather than 5750) and the torque curve is broader, the peak delivered from 1900 to 5800rpm. Vauxhall claims 0-60mph in 6.5sec and 143mph flat-out – familiar figures again to Clubsport drivers.

The six-speed manual gearbox has received some much-needed attention, with new selector forks and a revised linkage fitted in an effort to improve gearshift quality, which was a main criticism of the previous car. There have been revisions to the chassis, too, with tweaks to the rear suspension geometry, anti-roll bars, spring rates and bushes. The engineers also switched damper supplier for this latest model, from Bilstein to Koni. The latter's innovative damper technology – Frequency Selective Damping – uses an additional valve within the damper unit, we're told, to combine low-speed ride comfort with high-speed body control. Finally, the differential's ramp angles have been modified to reduce the forces fed back into the steering system while retaining the same aggressive effect at the front wheels.

The cabin is much-improved over the previous model's, with an up-to-date infotainment system and better plastics around the centre console, but the overall quality and finish still fall short of what you'll find in a Mini Cooper S or Volkswagen Polo GTI. The Recaro sports seats are very supportive and, crucially, they now position the driver lower down in the car for a more natural driving position.

Another of our biggest gripes with the previous Corsa VXR was the unsettled ride quality. The car seemed to jig around constantly, which was tiring on a long drive and distracting when you wanted to press on. This new version very quickly feels more composed and less busy, which can be attributed to those trick dampers. At the point where the car is running out of suspension travel on the most challenging of road surfaces, the new VXR is also much less likely to skip and bounce. Instead, it absorbs the impacts with much more control.

It still feels just as alert and determined in hard cornering, though. The front axle reacts without hesitation to steering inputs and it finds tremendous turn-in bite. The car still rolls in corners quite markedly, but not in a way that makes it feel loosely controlled or wayward. That degree of roll actually gives a clear indication of the grip levels through the chassis while making the driver feel that he or she is working it hard.

Equipped with the LSD, the Corsa VXR will put its power down far sooner than you might think possible. In fact, a measured throttle input will draw the front axle towards the inside of the corner and drag the rest of the car away from the apex, which gives it enormous

'Equipped with the LSD, the Corsa VXR will put its power down far sooner than you might think possible'

Below: shift of the six-speed manual gearbox has improved significantly; Recaro seats are now set lower for a more sporting driving position. **Bottom:** chassis changes give this Corsa VXR newfound composure

Above: Vauxhall says the 1.6-litre turbo engine now has improved responsiveness at low speeds, while the exhaust, built by specialists Remus, is almost entirely new. **Right:** no skimping – 330mm brakes by Brembo. **Below:** at Knockhill Circuit, where the Performance Pack proves decisive

‘This is an altogether more polished, better resolved chassis’

pace point-to-point. The engineers are very proud of having reduced the corruption in the steering from the LSD, but it does seem a shame that you’re no longer so aware of the differential working as effectively as you would be in the old car.

There’s no slack in the steering, but it is hyper-reactive and the self-centring effect is quite pronounced, which can make the car feel jumpy and nervous. That impression fades over the first few miles, though.

The engine feels more refined in its delivery and the gearshift has been improved vastly – it was all too easy to snag a gear when making a rapid shift in the previous model. In fact, the new Corsa VXR – equipped with the Performance Pack – improves on the last-of-the-line Clubsport in every objective way, but most notably in its damping and body control over uneven surfaces. This is an altogether more polished, better resolved chassis, which makes the VXR a huge amount of fun both on the road and on a track.

We also had an opportunity to try the non-Performance Pack model, and although it was still very capable, it simply couldn’t hold a candle to the fully equipped model for outright thrills. Don’t hesitate to tick that box.

The new Corsa VXR is a significant improvement over the old one, then, but it might just suffer from being a very good car in a class of brilliant ones. Soon we’ll gather the best small hot hatches of the moment and find out how the Corsa VXR really stacks up.

Dan Prosser *(@TheDanProsser)*

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-60mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo	174g/km	202bhp @ 5800rpm	206lb ft @ 1900-5800rpm	6.5sec (claimed)	143mph (claimed)	1278kg (161bhp/ton)	£17,995

+ A very good hot hatch... − ...in a class of brilliant cars

evo rating ★★★★☆

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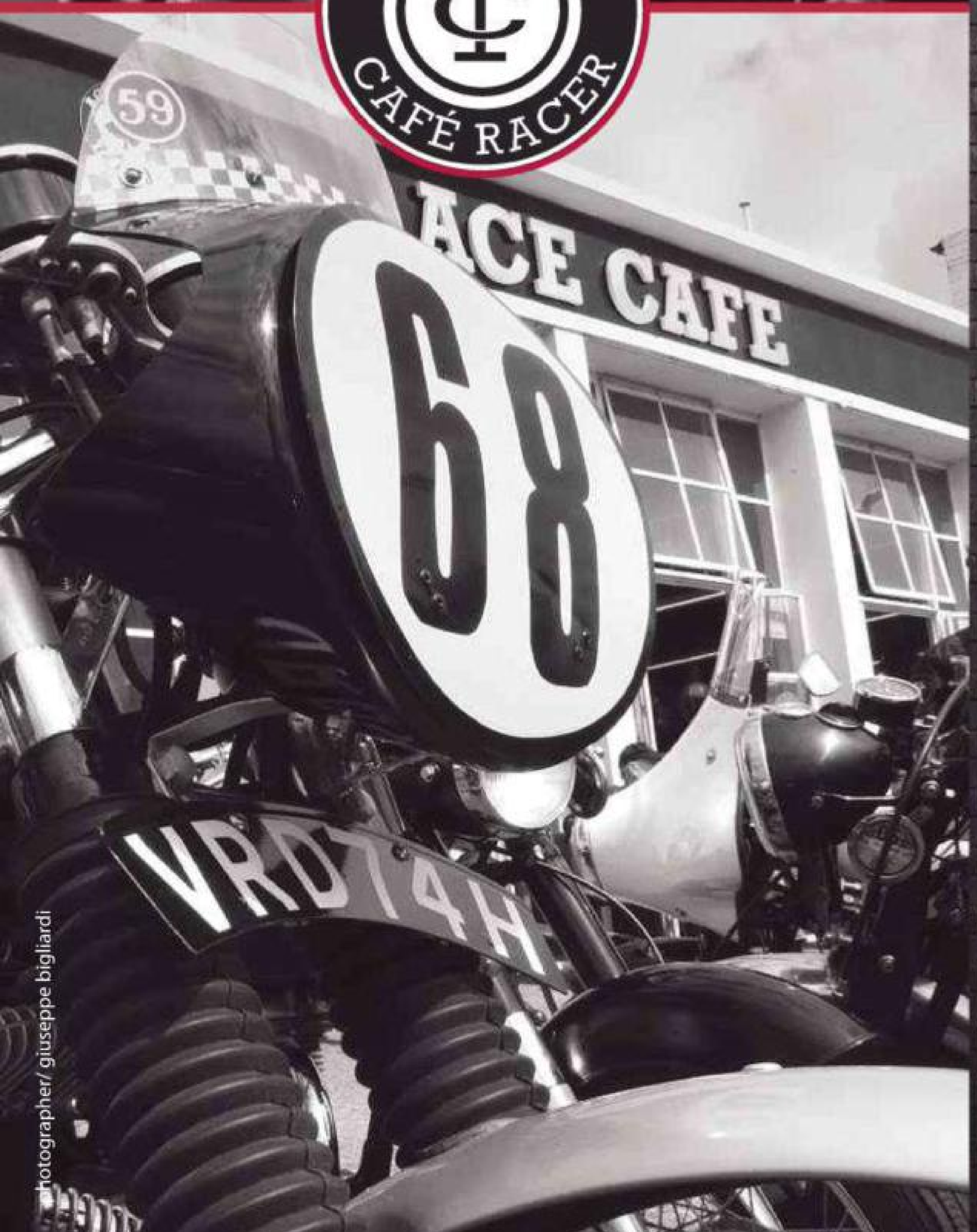

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FIGHTING SPIRIT

Seven severely injured ex-Paratroopers face a new challenge in 2015, when as part of the Infiniti Support Our Paras Racing team, sponsored by TENA Men, they take on the Dunlop British Touring Car Championship

BRITISH TOURING CAR Championship regular racers will have an even more exciting battle on their hands this season, when a tough crew of newcomers rolls up into the pit garages to challenge them – the Infiniti Support Our Paras Racing team, sponsored by TENA Men.

As the name of the team strongly implies, among the ranks of the not-for-profit Infiniti Support Our Paras Racing squad are seven ex-Paratroopers, all of whom were severely injured during active deployment in war zones around the world, and all of whom have come through rough times and thought, 'Stuff happens, but let's just get on with life.'

The aim of the team's participation in the Dunlop BTCC is to raise awareness and funds for the charity Support Our Paras, the official charity of the Parachute Regiment.

For the 2015 season, at least, the ex-Paras on the team won't be behind the wheel – driving duties have been entrusted to Richard Hawken and Derek Palmer, who in recent years have raced successfully in Super Touring Cars. Yet the long-term aim is to train up one of the squad to become a racer.

Meanwhile, the ex-Paras will help manage all other aspects of running the two Infiniti Q50 racers in the 30-race maelstrom that is the BTCC. And that's a demanding, physically gruelling role even if you haven't suffered life-changing injuries; but then, these guys are accustomed to staring down adversity, keeping control of their lives and, well, just getting on with things.

It's the indomitable attitude of those ex-Paras that encouraged TENA Men (part of the global hygiene brand SCA) to take on the key sponsorship of the Infiniti Support Our Paras Racing team. In fact, 'Keep Control' is the theme behind TENA Men's current campaign to raise awareness of urine leakage in men. There, we said it out loud; but for all you blokes sniggering at the back, urine leakage is a condition that one in four men over the age of 40 will experience.

Compared with what the ex-Paras have had to endure in their lives, this isn't something to get worked up about, and with a little bit of help from TENA Men's discreet and modern male-specific products, your days and activities can carry on just the way they always have.

Of all the health issues men over 40 might have to confront, bladder weakness can – with TENA Men's low-key assistance – be consigned to a drawer marked 'not affecting my everyday life'. Meanwhile, during the course of the 2015 Dunlop BTCC season, everyday life for the Infiniti Support Our Paras Racing team will include stress, sweat, adrenaline, countless hours of lost sleep, exhaustion, occasional pain, and hopefully plenty of joy and elation, too.

TENA Men: Designed specially for men like you

SURE, urine leakage isn't a topic most blokes are likely to talk about, but as it's something that will happen to one in four of us, particularly when we hit the age of 40, perhaps we should...

TENA Men offers a range of products designed to comfortably and discreetly fit the male anatomy; they're highly absorbent, soft, close fitting, and neutralise potential odour. And once you're using them you'll have the feeling of security and confidence that will allow you to keep control and carry on with life, whatever it throws at you.

TENA MEN
KEEP CONTROL

VW Golf R Estate

Test location: Malaga, Spain
GPS: 36.721261, -4.421265

Arguably the most rounded drivers' car currently on sale just became yet more useful

THERE HAVE BEEN a few good reasons not to wait for the Volkswagen Golf R Estate. Temptations testing the resolve of the patient include the undeniably potent and practical Skoda Octavia vRS Estate, the keenly priced and dynamically gifted Ford Focus ST Estate and, perhaps the hottest 'okay, this'll do' ticket of all, SEAT's ST Leon Cupra 280, with nearly the same VW-sourced bang for considerably fewer bucks.

On the other hand, why wouldn't you wait? If the all-round, all-drive goodness of the 297bhp Golf R hatch is anything to go, the arrival of the Estate should immediately trigger a mass waving of white flags by the outgunned circa-£30k fast estate 'opposition' – at least when it comes to the result of any toe-to-toe comparison. On paper, the mega-hatch turned cargo-lugger seems simply to be in possession of too much of the right stuff.

The headline stats read as impressively as ever. The vocally enhanced turbo 2-litre four delivers its 297bhp and 280lb ft of torque to both ends in variable amounts via

a Haldex four-wheel-drive system and XDS+ torque vectoring, which can brake both inside wheels if it senses that understeer is getting the upper hand in hard cornering. Unlike in the hatch, however, there isn't the option of a manual gearbox, VW reckoning that it was such a minority interest in the hatch that Estate customers would be of a like mind and go for the six-speed dual-clutch DSG transmission. Well now, regrettably, there isn't a choice.

The good news is that the Estate costs only £695 more than the DSG-equipped five-door hatch which, in purely material terms, seems a pretty fair deal for the extra 32cm of bodywork and commensurate boost in boot capacity – up from 308 litres to a Skoda Octavia-rivalling 605. Less welcome but unavoidable is the 79kg weight gain, which knocks the claimed 0-62mph time back from 4.9 to 5.1sec, though that's still almost a second quicker than the slightly smaller and lighter front-drive Leon ST Cupra 280 (driven in **evo** 208).

Changes to the suspension are roundly the same as for the R hatch, comprising a 20mm drop in ride height compared with the regular Golf estate, but with a marginal stiffening of rear spring rates to cope with the extra bodywork and potential luggage demands. All the cars available at the launch venue in Malaga were fitted with the optional DCC adaptive chassis control tech featuring a full-on Race mode which, unlike the McLaren P1's, is perfectly usable on the road. In fact, we found little reason to switch out of it, even if the extra-growly engine note that's part and parcel of the setting (thankfully far more authentic than some enhanced engine notes) becomes a little wearing over time.

For the most part, the things that make the Golf R hatch such an engaging steer and a formidable point-to-point weapon have been transferred undiminished to the Estate. You can take as much satisfaction from the almost brutish broadband shove of the engine as the seemingly uncanny manner in which the all-drive chassis always seems to find the best way to use it, whether you're trying to be neat and fast or coaxing a few degrees of drift by trail-braking then hammering on past the apex.

Although the electronic stability control isn't too intrusive on the road, even when pressing on, it can be switched off in two stages. On track – we had the use of Ascari for the best part of a day – the Golf R Estate, thus unleashed, proved massively good fun yet entirely benign, indulging the most outrageous liberties with a graceful and flattering sense of poise under pressure that was hard to reconcile with its practical, everyday car remit. The only casualty was the Bridgestone rubber, which looked very second-hand indeed at the end of the track sessions.

Worth the wait? With the proviso that the DSG gearbox isn't quite as responsive as it might be unless you use the paddles, absolutely. Much as we expected, this is a new benchmark.

David Vivian *(@davidjvivian)*

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo	164g/km	297bhp @ 5500-6200rpm	280lb ft @ 1800-5500rpm	5.1sec (claimed)	155mph (limited)	1574kg (192bhp/ton)	£33,585

+ A Golf R with a big boot, what's not to like? − DSG only

evo rating ★★★★★

Jaguar XE S

Test location: Navara, Spain **GPS:** 42.816930, -1.643203

It's here at last. But does Jaguar's highly anticipated entry-level saloon live up to the pre-launch hype?

IT'S A RELIEF AND thrill to finally drive the Jaguar XE on some great roads in northern Spain and not have to wonder if this new model, which Jaguar has poured half a billion into and staked its future viability on, can possibly live up to the supercharged teaseathon. Now it's just the car, a twisted ribbon of tarmac that, in places, has Blighty-like blisters and caved-in cambers, and a sunny day.

Which isn't to deny the task ahead for Jaguar. The XE is a car that has to sell in significant numbers against some estimable German hardware, including the refreshed 3-series, the new C-class and the soon-to-be-revitalised A4, and in that endeavour, it has its work cut out. The inevitable group tests will dig out the finer details, the similarities and the contrasts, but on first contact with the finished article, and especially the range-topping 335bhp 'S', it seems to me that the usually impregnable German hegemony is facing its most serious threat in years, if not decades.

Measured against the 3-series, the XE is notably longer, wider and lower and has a slightly longer wheelbase. As for styling – and for Jaguar this seems to be an increasingly big deal – the XE certainly has presence for a compact saloon but it's partly conditional on your point of view, the body colour and the weather. The nose is all diamond-cut drama and aggression in the house style of the XJ and recently revealed next XF. But much of the rest is so subtle you almost need a crib sheet prepared by Jaguar's design supremo, Ian Callum, to appreciate it. The cab-forward emphasis is easy enough to spot, but the tail's nondescript neatness morphs between several ID possibilities if you're following from a distance, none of them with an obvious Jaguar flavour, even when you get close. A real surprise, this, given that the F-type's bum is its most distinctive feature.

In the right colour (a mid-tone metallic) and on larger diameter wheels, the XE can look stunning. Rolling on punier 17- or 18-inch alloys, it struggles to convince. 'Selling up' shouldn't be a problem. Especially as the entry-level, SE-edition ticket is a keenly judged £26,990 for the 197bhp 2-litre petrol.

Baseline kit includes satnav, DAB radio, cruise control, emergency braking and a lane departure warning system. On-board tech and creature comforts swell through the Prestige, R-Sport and Portfolio trim levels, hitting the buffers with the £44,865 'S', which has an altogether plusher and more cosseting ambience, the biggest and best-looking wheels and the full set of bells and whistles.

Like the best parts of the exterior, the bold, chunky cabin architecture is beautifully resolved and dominated by the speedboat-inspired 'Riva Hoop', a curved ledge that sweeps around the bottom of the windscreen and connects the door tops together, as in the XJ. Although there's a feeling of new tech having been shoehorned into an old-style Jaguar layout, with somewhat confusing switchgear ergonomics the result, the seats and driving position are superb and the new InControl infotainment tech, with an 8-inch touchscreen, finally brings Jaguar's software into line with the systems possessed by rivals. It's cosy in the back, though, and the elegant sweep of the rear door leaves a high sill to negotiate.

With its strong, linear delivery, the supercharged 3-litre V6 is certainly an uncomplicated partner for the

Above right: interior is nicely detailed. **Right:** rear end looks curiously un-Jaguar-like. **Below:** XE S gets 19-inch wheels as standard; these 20s are an £800 option

eight-speed ZF gearbox, with no pesky torque humps or spikes, and although using the steering-wheel paddles adds to the sense of involvement, it isn't necessary, even if you want to press on – the auto really does seem to know what you're thinking and chooses its gears with uncanny prescience. There are no F-type exhaust bangs and crackles on the overrun, either. The XE is a model citizen by comparison, blending a subdued but not too muted howl with a nicely judged layer of supercharger whine.

To begin with, and especially in the passively suspended cars – a Sport spec petrol and Comfort spec diesel – the XE feels a lot like a Mercedes C-Class in the controlled suppleness of its ride and excellent suppression of road noise. Where it differs immediately is in the acuity of its responses. 'Darty' is the first word that springs to mind, though you quickly relax and adjust and begin to marvel at how little effort is required to get the nose arcing towards the apex with great precision as the steering progressively weights up, encouraging you to really dig into the chassis' ample but beautifully balanced reserves of grip. Not bad at all for an EPA helm. No, there isn't much genuine feel and the strong self-centring action feels a bit artificial but, like the F-type, the XE has turn-in chops most BMWs would kill for and a bias towards mid-corner neutrality that's hugely gratifying.

'You can get as down and dirty as you like at the wheel yet the end result will always be poised and polished'

If I had to nail one trait running through the XE's dynamic make up – pulled in various directions by the aforementioned passive suspension specs and the £800-extra adaptive set-up – it would be a kind of imperious 'bring it on' resolve to grip with grace and a fluid economy of motion whatever the road surface or ambition of the driver, however optimistic. You can get as down and dirty as you like at the wheel yet the end result will always be poised and polished, which, of course, is very flattering and something none of the German opposition does quite as well. That, I suspect, when the fight comes to the UK, could be a recurring theme.

David Vivian *(@davidjvivian)*

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V6, 2995cc, supercharged	194g/km	335bhp @ 6500rpm	332 lb ft @ 4500rpm	5.1sec (claimed)	155mph (limited)	1590kg (214bhp/ton)	£44,865

+ Great chassis, strong powertrain, design
− Tight in the back

evo rating ★★★★½

Bentley Mulsanne Speed

Test location: Lake Constance, Germany
GPS: 47.703639, 9.250317

Can the world's most torque-rich production car reward its driver?

ONE OF THE GREAT pleasures of this job is finding The Thrill of Driving in unusual places. Who'd have thought a Twingo RS could be an absolute hoot around Spa? Or that a Skoda Yeti can yield hot-hatch-type thrills along your average B-road? Both are recent examples, I might add.

In a similar vein, it's intriguing to investigate – or call out – manufacturers who claim to have divined The Thrill from the unlikeliest of vehicles. And with that in mind, we bring you the Bentley Mulsanne Speed, or 'the world's fastest ultra-luxury driving experience', according to the men and women of Crewe.

The Speed is Bentley's flagship and, at 2610kg, that's an appropriate term. Power is supplied by the firm's 6.75-litre twin-turbo V8 – a motor that in one guise or another has been in production since 1959. Today this galactic motor is EU6 compliant and produces 530bhp – a 25bhp increase over the standard Mulsanne.

For the Speed, the combustion system has been redesigned, including the chambers, inlet ports, fuel injectors and spark plugs, plus there are revisions to the engine's variable valve timing system and compression ratio.

Torque – the Mulsanne Speed's trump card – is up to 811lb ft from 752, and overall efficiency, according to Bentley, is improved by 13 per cent. With Bugatti Veyron production having ended, that torque figure is the highest of any production car on sale. The standard Mulsanne receives the same 'efficiency upgrades', plus a more relaxed gearshift calibration to create some differentiation between the versions.

And if you like your factoids, here are some more. It takes 400 hours to build a Mulsanne (30 to build the engine), the Speed's wheel design is directional (being unique to each side), the rear lamp ellipses have a 3D effect, the dark matrix grille is laser cut and electrocoated to withstand stone chips at high speeds, the engine has a cylinder-cut function, the bootlid material is composite so that the antennas underneath work, and lastly, Mulsanne customers often personally select wood veneers that have unique patterns in them – like faces. In short, this is an exquisitely lavished car that mixes old and new quite spectacularly.

On the road, the Speed's torque is the first thing that hits you... hard. With it all available at 1750rpm, the

accelerative punch is deep-rooted, relentless and quite startling. The 0-60mph sprint takes 4.8sec and the top speed is 190mph. Porsche owners, then, will need to think carefully about taking on a Speed – at least on the straight bits.

A Bentley insider told us that a three-speed auto 'box would be sufficient given the torque on offer. However, the eight-speeder contributes to efficiency and is perfectly smooth and swift – there's also a new 'S' mode that keeps the engine speed above 2000rpm.

Revised suspension creates a little more feedback and sharpness in the chassis than the standard car can muster, but you would never call the Mulsanne Speed wieldy. There is pleasure to be taken from carving along fast B-roads – the chassis is easy to read, the tyres grip remarkably well and the Speed has no bad habits. Steering feel, as you'd expect, is masked, but there is just enough feedback for you to accurately place and adjust the car neatly when pushing on. Bentley certainly has considered the driving experience, even if physics ultimately prevents the Speed from being a true drivers' car.

In terms of driver settings, you can select four modes – Comfort, Bentley, Sport and Custom. As you progress through the first three, the air suspension gets firmer, steering weight increases and the engine's response is ramped up. Cylinder deactivation is also disabled in Comfort (for maximum smoothness) and Sport (for the fastest response). 'Custom' allows you to pick-and-mix, but on this occasion we doubt you'll need it.

Bentley is adamant that the Speed will be driven by its owners and you can feel that in the chassis. While its bulk prevents it from being an exciting steer, you can sense that it has been engineered by people who care about driving. Sure, the list price may raise an eyebrow, but Bentley's craftsmanship really is something to behold. Add to this the fact that Bentley hasn't just paid lip-service to drivers and you have a tremendously likeable car. ■

Nick Trott *(@evoNickTrott)*

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-60mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V8, 6752cc, twin-turbo	342g/km	530bhp @ 4200rpm	811lb ft @ 1750rpm	4.8sec (claimed)	190mph (claimed)	2610kg (206bhp/ton)	£252,000

+ Characterful; superb build quality; point-to-point pace
− Some body roll; a bit pricey...

evo rating ★★★★☆

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SLK55 AMG » 389 BHP (+DELIMIT)
SLK 350 » 328 BHP
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320 CDi V6 » 274 BHP
350 CDi V6 » 312 BHP
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M3 E46 » 370 BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
F10 520D » 221 BHP
F10 530D » 296 BHP
F10 535D » 358 BHP
335i/135i/X6 » 370+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
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Porsche 911 Targa 4 GTS

Porsche blends the focus of the GTS nameplate with the flamboyance of its targa top. The result?

Test location: Spa, Belgium **GPS:** 50.502283, 5.932037

Photography: Aston Parrott

FIFTY YEARS AFTER the debut of the original 911 Targa, Porsche has released the most dynamic version of its open-top model – the Targa GT3. Okay, I'm kidding. This isn't a GT3, but the Targa 4 GTS is a seriously appealing car and the quickest Targa ever. It costs £104,385 – £7325 more than the Targa 4S.

Let's tackle the part-fabric roof first. To open, the rear glasshouse rises electronically and the small roof panel is repositioned below it. For a company that prides itself on purity and efficiency, the mechanism seems overcomplicated – and at 1555kg (1575kg for PDK-equipped cars), it adds the weight of an adult to that of the Carrera 4 GTS coupe. Manual stowage isn't available, and neither is two-wheel drive.

Smoked, bi-xenon headlights, the swivelling Porsche Dynamic Light System, black, centre-locking, 20-inch 911 Turbo S wheels, SportDesign door mirrors and 'GTS' graphics distinguish the car, as do various black accents at the rear. To our eyes, at least, the car looks mega, and has a considerably more exotic presence than the coupe or cab.

The Targa 4 GTS develops 424bhp from a 3800cc, six-cylinder, naturally aspirated engine – up from 394bhp in the Targa 4S. Sport Chrono (switchable engine mapping) is standard, as is PASM (adjustable electronic damping). Also, the 20-inch wheels are half an inch wider than standard and there's launch control if you specify PDK. Fortunately, our car came with a manual gearbox. That isn't to say that PDK isn't great, but we'll come on to that...

Driving the Targa 4 GTS to Spa and back with two young kids in the back highlighted one of the 911's major attractions, but we won't dwell on it. Simply put, you can't do that with an AMG GT, Aston V8 or a Jaguar F-type.

The fast cruise to Spa revealed superb stability, if also wind noise from the visor-like rear screen. Fuel consumption was pretty good, and we managed 30.3mpg for 180 miles at an average of 65mph.

Deep into the Ardennes, on the

forest's twisties, traction, grip and overall performance, as ever, impressed. The engine in particular is a peach, with the capacity for deep lunges up the speedo when you're in the correct gear and a fierce top-end kick at around 6000rpm. The fact that you can orchestrate it with a seven-speed manual gearbox is a true joy, and this revised shift has improved weight and accuracy. It's a shame that only 10 per cent of customers will get to experience it.

Outright performance is strong. The manual Targa 4 GTS reaches 188mph, according to Porsche, and sprints from 0 to 62mph in 4.7sec (4.3 for the PDK). However, it's the overriding eagerness of the engine that leaves an impression – that it seems to encourage you to exploit its performance at any time, in any place and in any gear. Again, we bang on about it, but why wouldn't you spec a manual when it offers such interaction with this sublime motor?

The interior of the GTS, aside from the Sport Chrono clock, is relatively dour unless you option the decorative stitching and embroidery. From an ergonomic perspective the infotainment system is also beginning to fall behind. However, the important stuff (driving position, visibility, supportive seats, a quaint, round steering wheel) is all spot-on.

If an unscientific office poll we conducted is anything to go by, you're either a Targa person or not. The extra safety and rigidity offered by the rollover hoop wins fans among the cabrio haters, while the coupe lovers point to the 85kg weight increase. The latter only marginally blunts the driving experience, but the engine noise and greater sense of occasion afforded by the Targa configuration compensates. In short, this is another fantastic 911, dammit... ■

Nick Trott *(@evoNickTrott)*

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
Flat-six, 3800cc	237g/km	424bhp @ 7500rpm	324lb ft @ 5750rpm	4.7sec (claimed)	188mph (claimed)	1555kg (277bhp/ton)	£104,385

+ Wonderful engine; relative practicality; standard manual; exotic feel
− Polarising looks; dated satnav

evo rating ★★★★½

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Renault Mégane GT 220 Coupe

Test location: Harrold, Bedfordshire
GPS: 52.20382, -0.602188

Warmed up Mégane proves an excellent temperature for daily driver duties

Photography: Aston Parrott

WORKING AT EVO CAN sometimes give you a bit of a blind-spot when it comes to certain models' mid-range performance derivatives. For instance, ask me the ins and outs of a flagship Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy and I'd be able to tell you how many clicks to give the optional Öhlins dampers for a Ring-optimised setup without referring to the instructions. But ask me about the GT 220 Coupe and, until now, I'd have drawn blanks.

If the GT 220 has slipped beneath your radar too then listen-up, because on the evidence of this drive it could be the hidden gem of the sporty Mégane range. For starters, the engine is the same 2-litre turbocharged motor found in the front of the RS Méganes, albeit in a softer state of tune. Not that it feels that way when you put your foot down, thanks to a substantial 251lb ft of torque at just 2400rpm. That's just 14lb ft down on the 275, and it arrives 600rpm earlier.

The result is that the GT feels really lively. Not as punchy as an RS Mégane, certainly, but there's a pleasing appetite for revs. With 217bhp it's down 54bhp on the 275, but it's surely only an ECU tickle away from RS-rivalling output...

As the discreet rear badge suggests, the magicians at Renaultsport have sprinkled their fairy dust on the chassis. Not to the extent that they have with the full-on RS models, but more than enough for me to spot some dynamic talent within the first few miles. The GT is taut and agile, with a little more edge and on-limit composure than the rival Focus ST but with more pliancy than a Mégane RS. It thrives on fun and commitment, and though it doesn't summon the ferocious pace of the 275 Trophy, what it does offer is much more readily accessible, making it great fun across a wider range of roads. Tellingly, I have a feeling a well-driven GT 220 would harass a less capably driven RS. It's that kind of car.

Without the trick front suspension of the RS, however, you do feel the GT's front wheels tugging at your forearms. The RS torque-steers too, but it's more tightly controlled. The GT's torque-steer is softer, but you don't have the same precision. Still, it has less tendency to wander under power than the Focus ST. The steering isn't especially feelsome, but it's direct, accurate and well weighted, while the gearshift is slick and snappy, so you always enjoy working your way up and down the 'box.

Looks-wise, the GT 220 Coupe is a handsome machine. Smoother and less extrovert than the bespoilered RS models, its stance is still sporting enough and that three-door shape has plenty of impact.

Inside, the general ambience is very similar to an RS's, with smooth fillets of satin-finish carbonfibre and some Renaultsport branding to make you feel good. The seats are supportive, but softer and more everyday-comfortable than the Recaros you'll find in the RS, and for £500 you can have the Renaultsport Monitor, which gives you real-time performance data, plus detailed info on the car's vital signs.

It may not have the kudos of a full-blooded Renaultsport model, but the GT 220 is great fun. It's also £4700 less than the cheapest bona fide RS, the 275 Trophy. And while it's £1735 more than that 247bhp Focus ST, if you're not chasing maximum bhp per buck, the Mégane GT gets our nod. That it's also available as a five-door and an appealing Sport Tourer means it's hard not to fall for this impressive, understated car.

Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo	169g/km	217bhp @ 4750rpm	251lb ft @ 2400rpm	7.6sec (claimed)	149mph (claimed)	1366kg (161bhp/ton)	£24,230

+ Strong performance, subtle yet stylish looks, lively character, sweet handling
− Lacks kudos of RS models, list price a bit strong

evo rating ★★★★½

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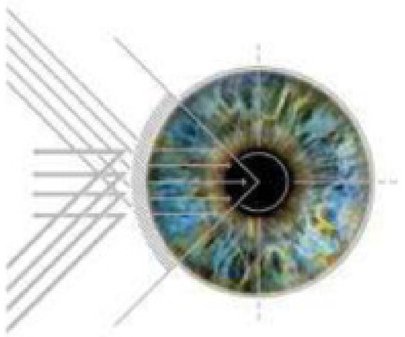

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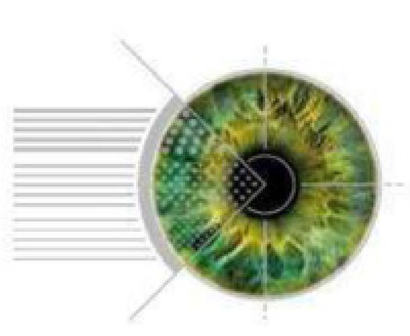

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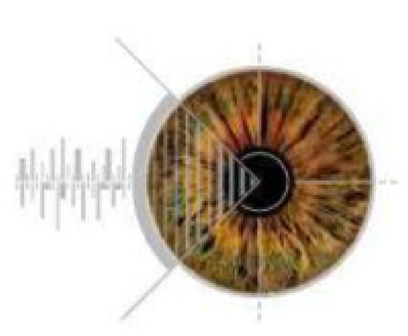

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Outside Line

by RICHARD MEADEN

So you think the motorsport-inspired livery on your car is cool? It might be, says Meaden, as he plays arbiter of automotive taste

COULD YOU DO IT? COULD YOU REALLY tick the box that commits you to ordering your brand new 991 GT3 RS in 'Ultra Violet'? Or Vimto Purple, as would be the more accurate description. I'm not sure I could. Moreover, of the friends and acquaintances I know who are facing that decision for real, none of them can either. Which is a shame, as you can be certain that when the 991 GT3 RS is old enough to be regarded as a classic, it'll be the handful of Ultra Violet cars that draw the most admiration and command the highest values.

Are those bold souls who do go for the outlandish option heroes or lunatics? Probably a bit of both. Even if they genuinely like the crazy colour they choose, it takes a special kind of person to take the plunge when they know it'll most likely draw ridicule from their friends and, doubtless, warnings against short-term residual suicide from their dealer. Witness that other divisive Porsche RS colour, Rubystone. For years I've been unable to abide it, but now there's a growing nucleus of extrovert atoms within me that wish my own 964 was pink and not Basalt Black. I'm not sure why that is, but it's true.

The same goes for stripes and decals. The only misgiving I have about the Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy I run on **evo**'s Fast Fleet is the potentially dubious nature of the stickers attached to its flanks and front spoiler. A portion of me loves them – they're part and parcel of the car's uncompromising character – but the less charitable part of me thinks that if I saw someone had stuck some home-brew decals to the sides of their hot hatch, I'd probably think they were an idiot. Being factory standard adds authenticity and some kudos, but my own hypocrisy leaves me feeling conflicted.

History normally offers useful insight on most topics, but I'm afraid it only muddies the waters on matters such as this. Look back to '70s sports saloons such as the BMW 2002 Turbo and Mitsubishi 2000 Turbo – and I mean literally look back in your rear-view mirror – and you'd see that both sport gaudy reverse script on their chin spoilers. I've not driven either, but there's never been a time when I haven't loved these cars for their daft decals alone. But what was the consensus back in the day, when they were new? Sub-zero cool or utterly crass? Perhaps one of you older, wiser readers can enlighten me.

Issues of a car's aesthetic embellishment and the contradictory emotions such exhibitionism arouses are not exclusive to hot hatches or laggy old forced-induction saloons. Even supercars leave me in the same quandary. If you asked me to picture an early Diablo SV, and more specifically the early Diablo SV I'd like to own, it would be a bright blue one with a huge, swirly 'SV' plastered on each side. Yet ask me to do the same with a Ferrari 599 GTO and it absolutely wouldn't be one wearing stupid white roundels on the doors and some lame evocation of a classic racing livery that has the whiff of try-hard about it.

The list goes on. Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale? Meaden-spec would *have* to come with the hugely expensive painted tricolore stripe or I simply wouldn't acknowledge it as a true Stradale. 997 GT3 RS? Hmm, tricky one, that. I could never quite abide those vinyl chequers, or the single 'GT3 RS' script snaking up one haunch like a bad tattoo, but show me the nose of a 924 Carrera GT and I'd fight you to the death if you suggested the name decal running down the top of the right-front wing was anything less than iconic. Trouble is, if you come back and ask me about the GT3 RS's stickers in ten years' time, I'll probably love 'em.

> 'It takes a special kind of person to take the plunge when **they know it'll most likely draw ridicule** from their friends'

Even Aston and Bentley are getting in on the act, and inevitably causing me grief in the process. Both the limited-edition Vantage GT12 and Continental GT3-R quasi-racers wear more warpaint than a Magaluf hen party, but the fact they provide a credible link to each brand's respective GT3 race programme should mean I love them equally. Yet why do I think the Aston is acceptable and the Bentley a bit dodgy? Such a moral stance can hardly be justified on grounds of taste, when both stray so far into territory that's arguably unbecoming for two such noble marques.

Then again, perhaps it's the shock value that bestows cult status on such divisive cars, and immediate (or belated) hero status on those who order them. This would certainly explain why I feel boundless admiration for the owner of any Alpina wearing the full-on stripe kit, for there are few things more incongruous than an elaborately pinstriped Beemer. It's also why I'm going to make a point of shaking the hand of the first Ultra Violet 991 GT3 RS owner I meet, for they have taken the risk so the rest of us don't have to. If that's you then feel proud, for **evo** salutes you. And your Vimto Porsche.

@DickieMeaden

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

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Petrolhead

by RICHARD PORTER

It's a journalist's job to scrutinise a product and a customer's right to complain, but it's also a mechanised miracle that modern cars exist

A GIANT ORANGE ROBOT REARS ITS head, whirls around, arches its back then dives forward with chilling precision and begins squirting molten glue from its head. It's the kind of dream from which you'd wake screaming, except this isn't a dream at all. This is the reality of making modern cars.

A few weeks ago, Jaguar invited various journos, liggers and buffet enthusiasts to Solihull to witness the opening of the factory that will make the new XE. As a man who so consistently misreads invitations he once turned up to a wedding in trainers, I didn't clock how big a deal this would be. But it was. There was razz and there was matazz, sometimes at the same time. Films of the Red Arrows were played on screens; Stirling Moss appeared on stage to tell a fantastically off-brand 1950s-spec anecdote about 'crumpet'; a cavalcade of old Jags and Land Rovers filed around the site as employees lined the roads to cheer and clap and do that cross-eyed face people have when they're watching events unfold through a cameraphone.

When you think about it, of course opening the XE plant was a big deal, not least because the saloon will be the first Jag to be made within what's widely regarded as Land Rover's factory. The company acknowledged this with a cheesy mission statement, 'Two brands, one Solihull'. As anyone who's ever spent a Saturday at the area's Touchwood shopping centre will agree, one Solihull is quite enough, thanks. Anyway, today's rampantly ambitious Jaguar Land Rover is no place for partisan divisions and it's not like the factory has only made 4x4s thus far. In fact, the last time it saw massive expansion was in readiness for the 1976 Rover SD1 when, if urban legend is to be believed, they installed the paint shop extractors the wrong way round, sucking in dirt from the outside and ruining the bodywork.

No such comedy cock-ups today. There can't be. Jaguar has put its bottom on the line for this one, spending a hefty £500m on the factory expansion. Of that, £213m has gone on the bodyshop alone, in return for which they've got 630 robots and one of the most fascinating pieces of modern manufacturing theatre I've ever seen. As you stand on the clean, bright factory floor, all around you strangely anthropomorphic machines grab complete body sides and whirl them around in a way that you're convinced is going to smack them into the ceiling. And yet, each time, the swirling shell assembly ballet completes each procedure with the same utter accuracy. The XE being largely aluminium, there isn't anything as noisy and unseemly as welding – it's all held together with rivets, smoothly punched into place by a spooky, spider-leg congregation of automated arms. For added strength there's also the precisely applied spurts of adhesive from the benign glue gun robot that elegantly picks its way around a freshly presented bodyside before releasing it to be mated to the carcass of the car. And the 'bots do this again and again with endlessly repeatable precision, because the whole mechanical dance routine was laid down and refined in a virtual world, long before any of these mesmerising orange monsters first arched into life.

This stuff makes my brain hurt. Think about the complexity and content of a modern car and wonder, for a moment, where would you start with this jigsaw? Funnily enough, twice in the past few months, people from different car companies have told me that they were present at that very first project meeting for a brand new model. Confidentiality prevents them from sharing the minutes, but I'd like to think the first words from the person at the head of the table were, 'So… Er…' followed by a pause as everyone wonders where the ruddy hell to begin. What size will it be? What shape will it be? Where will the fuel filler go? Where shall we put the heater buttons? How deep do we want that groove down the side? Are we going to offer the seats in blue as well as cream? Every single one of those decisions affects the giant, daunting, co-ordinated effort that goes into actually building the damn thing over and over again to an acceptable standard of safety, endurance and quality. And at some point someone's got to work out which bits go in where and in what order.

'No comedy cock-ups today. There can't be after a £500m investment'

They've got to get that bit right, because at JLR's Solihull plant alone they're delivered two million separate components every single day. Two million. That's two million separate bits and brackets and widgets, all arriving at the right time and all getting fitted into the right car in the right place. And Solihull isn't even that big a factory. Imagine the crateloads of stuff that fetch up to Nissan in Sunderland or VW's Wolfsburg megaplant every second. It's a head-meltingly massive logistical mind-frig.

As such, mass-producing complex cars so quickly is an incredible feat of human achievement and it's a breathtaking sight to behold because, frankly, I wouldn't know where to begin. In fact, at the time the first facelift was due I'd still be trying to work out how to switch on the glue gun robot.

@sniffpetrol

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

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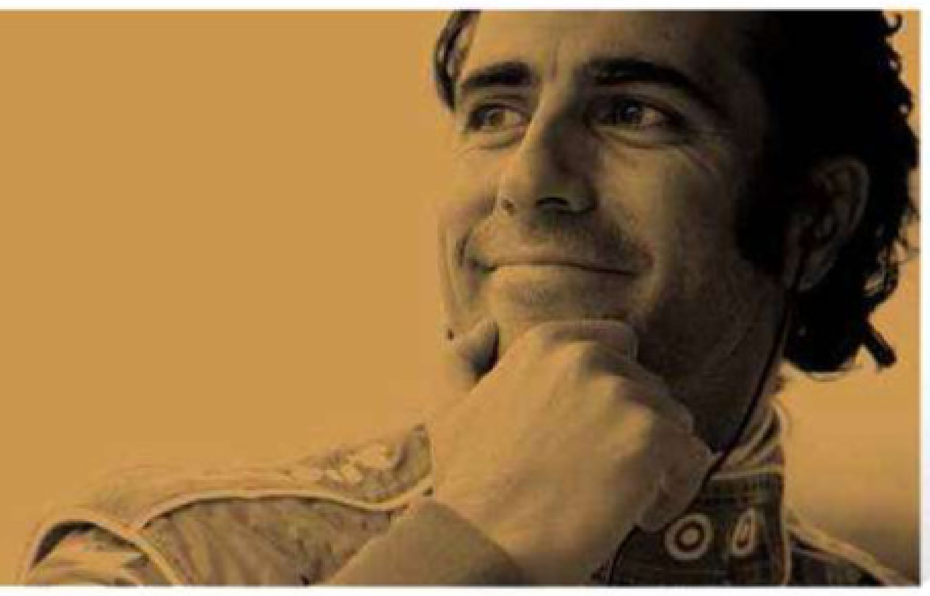

The best drivers can win races before they even get in the car, says Dario. It's all a matter of preparation – lots of it

SINCE I STOPPED RACING I HAVE ONLY once stood on the pit wall and thought, 'Out of my way! Let me have go!' Yet it wasn't long after that I was looking at the Target Chip Ganassi Racing live data at Indy, saw the guys dealing with oversteer in turn one, and thought, 'Nah, I'm done with that.'

I suspect many former professional sportsmen and women only realise just how much mental, physical and emotional energy was channelled into competing and winning in hindsight. At the time, when you're focused on your goals, the level of commitment required and the risks that are taken are considered quite normal.

When you are immersed in such a competitive environment you want more – from every test, every practice and qualifying session, every race. You want fewer mistakes – from you and the team. You want the car to be better. It's all-consuming, and I loved every moment of it.

When I first started racing in IndyCar and winter arrived, I'd take a couple of months off from it all. I'd still follow a light training programme, but it was probably no more than treading water. Then, when the season start was getting closer, I'd hit it hard and be ready for that first test. As my career progressed and success (and advancing years) came, that time off was slashed to four, maybe five days. Four or five days a year. The demands on my time came from all angles, but training and mental preparation became more crucial with every win, every title. The expectation grew.

I certainly wasn't the first to experience it – professional motorsport has always been a sport for athletes, but drivers are rarely acknowledged for the levels of fitness and mental discipline they need and are expected to reach.

It's a racing driver's natural instinct to be competitive and to find an advantage over rivals, and when you're younger your raw talent and ability takes you a long way. Your body is in good shape, your natural fitness levels are high and, if you're lucky, you haven't suffered any major injuries.

But it's not long before the hard work needs to step up to the next level. While, aged 18, clinching the title in my first season in the Vauxhall Junior Championship had been the toughest challenge I had ever faced, the hard work had just begun. The following year I struggled and it was left up to me to figure out what had gone wrong. Work away from the track intensified and I started keeping a notebook by my bed and would write everything down that I thought would help – every last piece of detail. The key to winning or losing was all in the detail. More time was spent poring over data. No avenue was left unexplored. After a tough winter I came back to win another title in 1993, but the following year I finished fourth, thoroughly beaten by my teammate. When you think you're doing enough, someone shows you've still a lot more to do.

Today's Indy cars may have less power than those of a generation ago, but they generate more G under braking and through every corner. They lap whole seconds quicker and there's no power steering. In a fast corner, your head and crash helmet together weigh more than 20kg and it doesn't take many laps to expose those who haven't prepared themselves well enough.

Drivers only started using science to take care of themselves in the modern era, with Senna and Schumacher the early adopters. And not only were they using it as an advantage in the car, but also as a psychological one. Schumacher bringing his gym to the paddock had every driver on the grid beaten before the first practice session!

> 'Drivers are rarely acknowledged for their **fitness and mental discipline**'

However, Stirling Moss, Jackie Stewart, Niki Lauda and even James Hunt – who was a super-fit athlete, something he is rarely credited for – knew that they could gain an advantage before they even got in their cars by training hard and leaving nothing to chance. And of course, once you start, there is no option but to keep it up, to keep pushing. Slacken off away from the track and it won't take long for the effects to show. Halfway through a race your arms start to ache, your back can't take the strain, your neck goes and ultimately you get slower to relieve the pressure and ease the not inconsiderable pain. It's miserable! If you've suffered a major injury, a lack of training and preparation shows even earlier, the pain is so much worse, the drop-off in pace far greater. And, even worse, your team will know it's you and not the car.

With success comes expectation and, in sport, every new season you're a year older and it takes a little more effort to get back to the level you were previously at. And with every professional sportsperson, there comes a time when either the trappings of success, the years of relentless effort or a lack of success affect the desire to win. And that's when you have to make the toughest decision of your career.

@dariofranchitti

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

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Inbox

What's rattled your timing chain this month?

Letter of the Month

The yearn to learn

After reading Ed Speak (**evo** 209), I couldn't agree more with what Nick Trott said about young students been 'malleable and receptive'. So as a 16-year-old who is just about to start learning to drive, why am I being penalised before I have even taken the wheel?

First-class instructors say that teenagers make the most attentive learner drivers, yet the government often talks of increasing the minimum driving age, newspapers are frequently negative about young drivers, and outrageous insurance costs mean many people my age are simply being completely priced out of learning to drive.

With a ten-year-old Kia Picanto on the horizon, I am one of the lucky ones able to afford a car and the insurance for it. Hopefully, one day I'll be able to afford to insure an '**evo**' car… Maybe a Polo GTI by the time I'm 40, eh?

Ted Welford

The Letter of the Month wins an Elliot Brown watch

This month's star letter writer receives an Elliot Brown Bloxworth 929-008 (pictured), worth £450. It features a Swiss-made chronograph movement, Superluminova markings and – for a relaxed look – a washed blue canvas strap lined with supple nubuck leather.

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The BMW bounce

Last month's Audi TTS group test prompted me to write. More specifically, the infuriating problem with the BMW M235i 'letting the side down' with its handling of vertical inputs to the chassis.

I bought a 58-plate 335i Sport Coupe a couple of years ago. It is generally a fantastic car – but my wife hates the ride! The undulations of Suffolk are a nightmare for this car. I often wonder if the ditch next to me has my name in it as I kangaroo along my regular country roads…

The perturbing thing is that the new 2-series suggests the problem is getting worse. BMW really needs to test its cars – with sports suspension and the dreaded runflats – in the UK. This may prevent owners like me seriously thinking of selling their car and buying something else.

Robert Lintott

Order! Order!

Fantastic Audi TTS group test. It was great to see you give these affordable cars the same treatment you give the super- and hypercars.

One thing, though. You published the car's lap times and called the Porsche Cayman the overall winner, but Dan Prosser didn't rank the other contenders. Was this deliberate? Was it too close to call? Did you not want to upset the other manufacturers? I'd be interested to see the final finishing order from the road section, if only for bragging rights – I take delivery of an RCZ R in May off the back of Henry Catchpole's group test last year.

Kevin Riva

*As the only other car in the test to receive five stars, the Exige comes second. Then it's the BMW 235i (third), 370Z Nismo (fourth), RCZ R (fifth), TTS (sixth) and 4C (last). It is a close-run thing in the middle of this pack, though, and you definitely won't be disappointed with your Peugeot. – **DP***

Still got it…

Just had to write after flipping open issue 208. The R8 LMX night shots were incredibly ballsy (and probably raised the printer's ink bills for the month). Then I hit the jump shot. With all four wheels clearing the perfectly lit background, that has to be one of the top ten **evo** shots of all time.

Then in the following article, previewing the next R8, the slash of the layout matches the sideblade on the car. Nice touch. It says the layout folks actually care about the cars.

Even after all these years, everywhere I look there are fresh things to appreciate. **evo** is like the Zonda of car mags. Thanks for doing it.

Chris Edgette

Performance art

As I trudge toward the office I'm buoyed these days by a 'secret supercar owner' who insists on illegally parking his Lamborghinis right outside. Today it's a lime green Huracán. Resplendent with its Corporation of London parking ticket (no doubt cheap all-day parking), the looks it attracts are many and frequent.

It got me thinking how great it is that people still make and design such beautiful cars; even better that people still buy them and put them on display for the rest of us to admire. It's a bit like art: most of it I can't afford, but as long as those who can are happy to show it, I can still benefit.

At 45 years old I can't believe I took a picture and texted it to my son. But why not? The thrill of looking – it can be as good as the thrill of driving.

Brian Simmons

Above: Kevin Riva wants to know if the RCZ got a podium place in our coupe test

Above: Chris Edgette was wowed by Dean Smith's night-time shots of the R8 LMX

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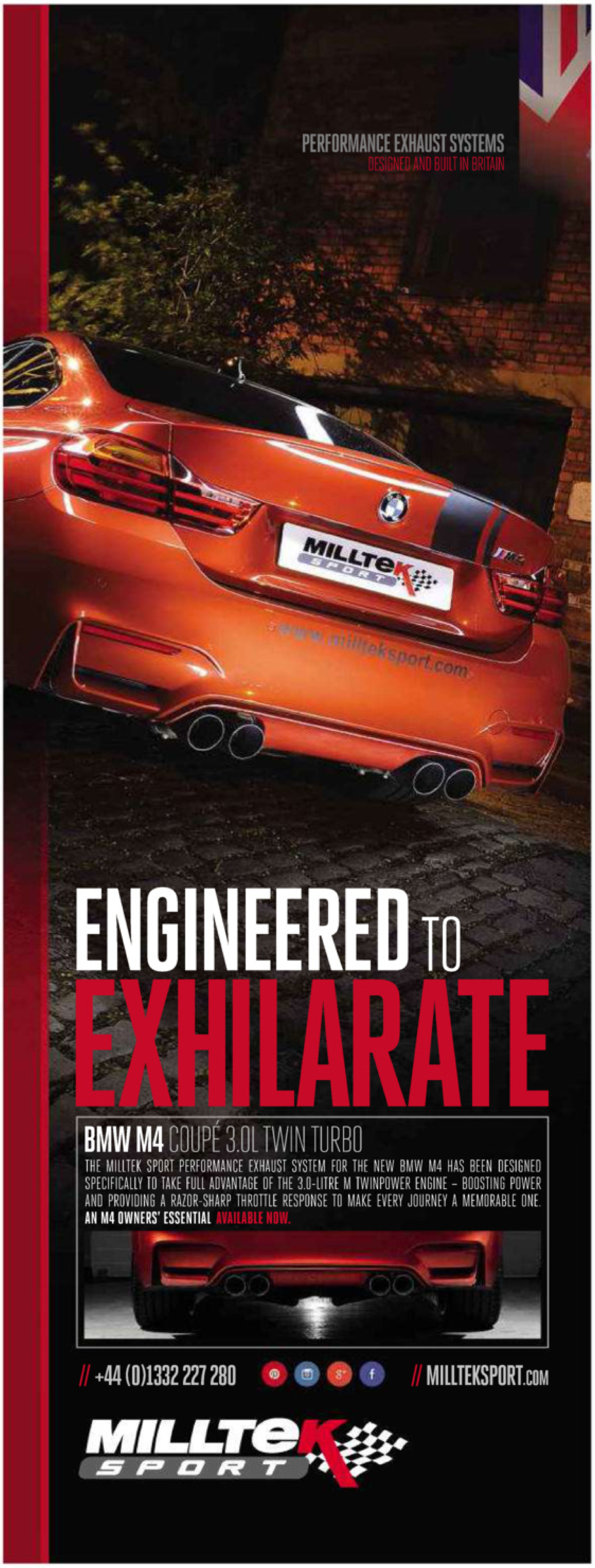

Talking Point

Daily-driving supercars

Last month, Dario Franchitti recalled how trying to use his Ferrari F40 for every journey(!) quickly took the shine off the experience. He also asked what you thought: should special cars be saved for special drives, or should you use them at every opportunity?

If you can afford the upkeep, why not drive a supercar all the time? Simon George's Lamborghini and Rowan Atkinson's Macca F1 were well used, which was great to see.
NotoriousREV

If my 'special' car was a Ferrari FF, then I'd love to have it as my daily driver.
thelittleegg

Life is for living, so mindful of mechanical sympathy, I'd drive it every day. After all, I would have bought the car to enjoy the driving experience, so withholding that from myself would seem unnecessarily masochistic.
Markcoopers

I definitely would, if it was affordable to me. Those special little drives sometimes just happen: a late night at work, getting lost and finding a great road, or an early morning airport run. I'd rather be in a useable supercar to take advantage of them and get the enjoyment the car gives.
GraniteV8

I don't enjoy using my old Civic Type R every day, let alone a supercar! Keep it for drives you want to enjoy and savour, not the ones where you want to murder everyone around you.
Barry

No matter how hardcore you are, there would always be a time that you jumped in the other half's easy-to-drive automatic Range Rover or similar. I recall my RX-8 was a pain when nipping out to the shop for a bottle of milk. The shop was too far to walk but not far enough for the Wankel to warm up. Not quite the same, but I imagine supercars tend to have their quirks.
Michael Hunt

I used a 550 Maranello every day. I bought it specifically because I'd always wanted a Ferrari and accepted the fact from day one that 9000 miles in a year would do sod all for the value. It was bought to use, so I used it. If somebody buys a car for an investment then that's different, but in my humble opinion, a modern car – any modern car – should be used, and used regularly.
ShockDiamonds

It depends on where, I suppose. Through central London? No. But then there was the guy in Germany who commuted a hundred miles a day (or was it more?) on unrestricted Autobahns in his McLaren F1. He was driving it like Gordon Murray intended! If it is the right car for the need, you should.
DeskJockey

I suspect the answer is yes, and then ultimately no. If you've got loadsa money you'll probably soon realise that you can afford to have a supercar *and* an M5 for those less desirable journeys. It would be a nice decision to have to make, though...
duncs5000

No man lying on his deathbed has ever said: 'I wish I drove my F40 less.'
Bas Kohne Von Jaski

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Thread of the Month

IanF

McLaren 540C

Just seen the news of this new entry-level McLaren. 0-60mph in 3.4sec, 199mph. Still not slow, is it?!

So who's going to buy the 570S now? Surely the point of that at £143k was to tempt people out of 911 Turbos and to encourage them to stretch themselves to get a McLaren. Now they don't have to stretch as far. Just get a £126k 540C!
Rich B

I don't understand what McLaren is trying to pull here. If it launched this before or even at the same time as the 570S, it would make some sense. But why now?

It has a line-up of six cars that in reality are only three cars with different specs and trim. Exclude the P1 and it's five cars from only two real models.

I think McLaren is trying too hard to force a full range of sport cars into the market, but I do like the cars a lot and even if I don't find this the correct approach, I hope it succeeds.
kad

I don't see the issue. All manufacturers do this. For example, the Mercedes C-class comes out. At launch there's a C200 and C350. Later on they're joined by the C280, C320, etc. The Land Rover Discovery Sport is getting a new engine this summer after launching this spring.

The 570S and 540C are just models of the Sports Series range.
IanF

I'm glad McLaren is bringing them out. The MP4-12C was losing £5k a month in depreciation and last time I looked they were under £100k second-hand. Hopefully 540Cs will drop to £60k-70k in 3-4 years' time. I'd buy one.
NicDale

Maybe we should wait until a few people have driven them before deciding that McLaren doesn't know what it's doing.

I know, I know... Crazy talk.
FaceFirst

I thought the real differences between 570S and 650S didn't sound great, despite what McLaren says, so the differences must be wafer thin between the 540 and 570. I think Ferrari has done a better job of differentiating between models with similar headline performance figures.
horace11

Good to see McLaren offering various engine options...
Foz

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

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

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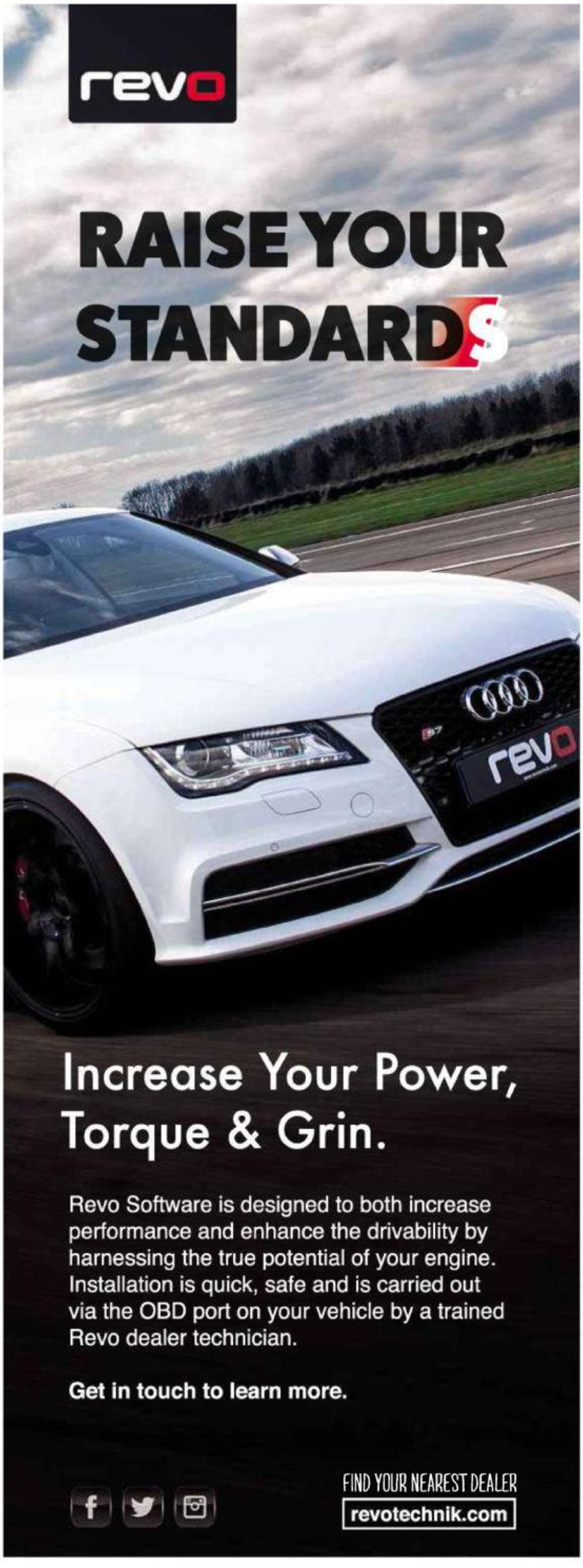

N MID GRO

by JETHRO BOVINGDON, DAN PROSSER & RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* DEAN SMITH

O DLE UND

*The replacement for the heroic SLS arrives square in the middle of a dogfight for supremacy in the sports coupe arena. **evo** assembles five rivals, each with their own unique credo, to collectively ask the new Mercedes-AMG GT S the toughest questions…*

storemags

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
JETHRO BOVINGDON

Introduction

I'M A LITTLE TENTATIVE AS emails fly around with arrangements for this group test. Don't get me wrong, it sounds like A Good Day at the Office. It's just that the first time we featured the new Mercedes-AMG GT (**evo** 204), I said its long nose was some way out in front of the beautifully honed Porsche Carrera 991 GTS's: faster and more theatrical, but also finely balanced, more communicative and, startlingly, more focused, too. That was a few months ago in an unseasonably rainy California. Now it's the proper Judgement Day on roads we know and love in Scotland. A Scotland resplendent in unbroken sunshine, as it turns out. I'm really hoping it wasn't just new car euphoria and jetlag that turned my head.

The welcoming committee for the new AMG, here in full-fat GT S guise and sharpened by the £1795 AMG Dynamic Plus Package, will certainly offer a stern test. It also almost seems to chart the evolution of the sports car over the past decade or so very neatly indeed.

Let's start by travelling back in time with the Aston Martin V8 Vantage N430. It feels resolutely old-school thanks to its six-speed manual gearbox and naturally aspirated 4.7-litre V8, with a piffling 430bhp and just 361lb ft of torque produced not from 6 to 6000rpm, as is the practice these days, but building until it hits a peak at 5000rpm. It'll be interesting to see how the Aston copes with the onslaught of performance offered by the other protagonists. However, some things are certain: it looks timeless and stunning, the rigid aluminium chassis is anything but a relic and it makes *some* noise. The olden days weren't so bad, y'know. What's more, it's also almost cheap in this company, at £89,995.

Nissan's GT-R is the future as seen from about ten years ago. It's got a half sci-fi, half arcade-game control screen, an industrial 3.8-litre V6 with twin turbochargers and 542bhp and a hellishly complicated four-wheel-drive system with two propshafts – one running from the engine to the transaxle, the other running in the opposite direction to power the front wheels when required. It's huge and heavy and utterly focused on performance. I clearly remember driving one for the first time and thinking this was it… cars could get no faster across the ground, no more effective. Even today GT-Rs have an other-worldly quality about them and we had to bring one along to face up to the GT S. The Nissan remains a benchmark in terms of capability but also authenticity and character. It's also the cheapest car here by some margin, at £78,030.

The here and now is, of course, the Porsche 911 Turbo. It offers GT-R-humbling performance in an almost discreet manner. The 3.8-litre flat-six is relatively quiet but delivers clubbing performance with its 513bhp at 6000rpm and 524lb ft developed from just 2100rpm. The seven-speed PDK gearbox is as fast as the GT-R's but so smooth at low speeds you'd barely know it's there at all, the ride is supple but body control is quite extraordinary, the four-wheel-drive system offers outrageous traction yet rear-drive balance and excitement beyond the limit. All told, the 991 Turbo is so complete, so freakishly talented that you wonder if every other sports or supercar is pretty much redundant. It's not cheap, at £120,598, but that doesn't seem like such a high price to pay to become superhuman. The 911 feels like the toughest competition the AMG GT S could ever face.

Finally, the future is represented within our group by BMW's £99,590 i8. It's an extraordinary creation that fuses carbonfibre construction with plug-in hybrid technology to create a whole so cohesive and seamless you can't quite believe it's version 1.0. Much like the Aston, with 357bhp it's outgunned in this company but offers so much more than raw numbers to make up for that. Of course, the novelty of the i8's electric mode might one day wear off, but the killer punch of torque might not and the supreme damping certainly never could. This is a really enticing car in so many ways, not least of which is as a pure sports car. Can it cut it against the fury of the Turbo or the tactility of the Aston? We'll soon see.

There are intriguing in-fights all over the place here and that's before you factor in the £110,495 AMG GT S. The car I remember from California is sharp, single-minded, breathtakingly controlled and sounds outrageously potent. It might just represent the best of all worlds: the intuitive balance of the Aston, the character of the GT-R and the sheer eye-popping performance of the Turbo married with a sense of occasion to match the i8. On paper its 4-litre twin-turbocharged V8 with 503bhp at 6250rpm and 479lb ft from 1750rpm to 4750rpm is right on the money. In theory its devastating turn of pace on the US launch should translate well to the ragged, scarred roads of the Scottish Borders. But, of course, 'on paper' and 'in theory' don't count for much. So here's to the real world of yumps and cambers, of GT-Rs and Turbos. Oh, and later of Anglesey Circuit, too. We want to test every element of the AMG's dynamic make-up. So godspeed GT S. Please don't let me down.

The cars

ASTON MARTIN
V8 VANTAGE N430
Engine V8, 4735cc **Power** 430bhp @ 7300rpm **Torque** 361lb ft @ 5000rpm **Weight** 1610kg
Power-to-weight 271bhp/ton
0-62mph 4.8sec (claimed)
Top speed 190mph (claimed)
Basic price £89,995

BMW i8
Engine In-line 3-cyl, 1499cc, turbo, plus 96kW electric motor **Power** 357bhp @ 5800rpm **Torque** 420lb ft @ 3700rpm **Weight** 1485kg
Power-to-weight 244bhp/ton
0-62mph 4.4sec (claimed)
Top speed 155mph (limited)
Basic price £99,590

MERCEDES-AMG GT S
Engine V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo
Power 503bhp @ 6250rpm
Torque 479lb ft @ 1750-4750rpm
Weight 1570kg
Power-to-weight 326bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.8sec (claimed)
Top speed 193mph (claimed)
Basic price £110,495

NISSAN GT-R
Engine V6, 3799cc, twin-turbo
Power 542bhp @ 6400rpm
Torque 466lb ft @ 3200-5800rpm
Weight 1740kg
Power-to-weight 316bhp/ton
0-62mph 2.8sec (claimed)
Top speed 196mph (claimed)
Basic price £78,030

PORSCHE 911 TURBO
Engine Flat-six, 3800cc, twin-turbo
Power 513bhp @ 6000-6500rpm
Torque 524lb ft @ 2100-4250rpm
Weight 1595kg
Power-to-weight 327bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.2sec (claimed)
Top speed 195mph (claimed)
Basic price £120,598

‘The Mercedes-AMG GT S might just represent the best of all worlds’

Storemags

ROAD TEST EDITOR
DAN PROSSER

On the road

NOSE TO TAIL WE ROLL THROUGH Kelso's cobbled town square. One bright red, a shocking blue, a yellow so vibrant it could melt ice cream, red accents on white, and the square jaw of a GT-R. Our convoy is not subtle. At this early morning hour we try to creep without disturbing the peace, but with a pair of warbling V8s and a couple of fizzing turbocharged six-pots, not to mention a stampede of fat tyres slapping against polished stone, we hardly go by unnoticed. At least the silent i8 offsets some of our racket.

We must look as though we've become separated from the Gumball Rally, but we're greeted with waves and smiles and cameraphones as we crawl out of the pretty square. The first drive of an important group test is always a gentle one. Nobody wants to be the guy who bends a car before we've bagged a single photograph, so we sit patiently behind the support car and cruise along through the verdant Scottish Borders, hedgerows and overhanging trees slipping by, towards the first location.

Inevitably, though, the pace begins to increase. Photographers have a puzzling ability to pedal support cars along at ungodly rates, and as the road twists this way and that I catch glimpses of Dean Smith a few cars ahead of me hustling our Range Rover Sport as though he's competing on the Jim Clark Rally. It lists like a sinking oil tanker in corners and fires up great plumes as the fat tyres clip earth banks. All it takes to keep pace with a diesel SUV in a Porsche Turbo is to shift up at 4000rpm rather than 3000, but we're stroking along at a fair rate now and this 911 is beginning to show its hand.

Is there anything this side of the price of an average London terraced house that accelerates with the brutality of a 911 Turbo? The impregnable four-wheel-drive system and Table Mountain torque curve give it violent levels of point-to-point performance and this particular car has a frantic top end, too. So rampant is the acceleration that it begins to dominate the whole experience and, as we trail Dean on his joyride, I find myself leaving space to the car in front just to feel that hit over and over again.

I'm driving it as though it's a point and squirt machine, which is

mindless and wasteful. There should be a great deal more to enjoy about the 911 Turbo, but this approach will not unravel it. The problem is, I'm a little spooked by the car's front end. In timeless 911 fashion it feels light, as though the front tyres are hovering an inch off the road surface, and more than any other 991-generation model I've driven, the steering is numb. In one tight corner I trip the car into understeer just to see if the steering does awaken but, with the front tyres scrubbing wide, the helm remains completely lifeless.

So I can get between corners in the blink of an eye, but I'm not certain how much speed I can carry into them. The sensible approach is to build up to it, so for each oncoming bend I commit a little harder and every single time the car snaps into the apex as if to mock my diffidence. A few miles in I realise there's no shortage of front-end grip and that the car's cornering potential is every bit as impressive as its straight line urgency, but that disconnect and lack of immediate, intuitive trust is a pity.

By the time we reach our first photographic location at St Mary's Loch, I'm left speechless at the 911's galactic on-road performance, but I'm wondering where the fun is. I reckon it must cover ground more quickly than anything else here, but on the evidence of that first drive it seems to do so autonomously.

'It's the most up and down car here,' says Jethro, who seems to have recognised my indifference. 'If you drive it absolutely balls to the wall it's pretty amazing, but anything below that it can feel quite ordinary.' That was just the first drive of this group test, though, and a cautious one at that. As we set up the first of our static shots, I promise myself I'll return to the 911 later on in search of its sense of fun.

'The 911 Turbo covers ground more quickly than anything else here, but it seems to do so autonomously'

There's a slightly giddy atmosphere among the team this morning. This is one of the first really warm days of spring and the scenery is to die for, but there's something else. Everybody is rhapsodising about the car they drove here from Kelso. The sheer quality on this test is of such a high standard that both Jethro and Henry Catchpole liken it to an **evo** Car of the Year shoot.

The Nissan GT-R stands out in this company for not wearing a premium badge. Its pantomime feud with the 911 Turbo has long since grown wearisome, but in objective road-testing terms this does remain an intriguing comparison. With a handful of photographs committed to memory card and those early group test anxieties fading away, I slip off the in the GT-R.

The Nissan shades the Porsche for power output, but it's down a lump of torque and has another 145kg to shift, so it doesn't quite deliver the same whack directly to the back. But while the 911 seems to be powered by an unseen force, the GT-R has an engine of real character and voice beneath its bonnet, one that wants to be worked hard.

Immediately, then, this is a more immersive experience. It helps, too, that the GT-R steers beautifully, giving you a clear picture of the grip across the front axle and the rising and falling loads across the chassis.

The road that runs from the northern tip of St Mary's Loch back towards Kelso is at times open and well sighted, and at others lined with hedgerows or shaded by trees. It's great fun to drive, though, particularly if you feel tuned in to your car.

In the way the GT-R accelerates, in the sense of size and weight, the way the gears thump in, the way it lands into compressions and in the flawless traction of the four-wheel-drive system, it is a brutal car. But in absolute contrast to all of that, there's an uncanny delicacy exactly where you need it: in the precision and feel of the steering, in the quality of the damping, in the way it responds to tiny weight transfers and in the malleable chassis balance. It seems to exist at opposing ends of the performance car spectrum, somehow both ferocious supercar and dainty lightweight, rugby prop and ballerina, in exactly the right quantities. For the driver, that means the GT-R is stupendously fast across the ground, but also wonderfully engaging and responsive.

For one of such mass and tenacious grip, the Nissan is surprisingly adjustable. On the approach to a corner you can use the forward weight transfer on the brakes to excite the rear axle, which rotates the car in towards the apex and keeps the front axle pinned to its line. The car responds to subtler weight transfers than that, too, such as lifts off the throttle, then at corner exit the four-wheel-drive system will divert enough torque to bring the back axle into play once again. So you find yourself exiting second-gear corners on half a turn of corrective lock, astonished at the liberties you can take – at how you can bully a brute.

'You can feel everything,' says Stuart Gallagher. 'The grip through

Above: AMG's twin-turbo V8 is dry-sumped and mounted impressively far back in the chassis; optional AMG Dynamic Plus Package (fitted here) adds dynamic engine and transmission mounts

‘In the Nissan you find yourself astonished at the liberties you can take – at how you can bully a brute’

Above: Turbo’s cross-country pace borders on the supernatural, and neither the GT-R nor the AMG are quite as fast. **Right:** the Nissan does offer more in the way of communication, however, and is actually surprisingly adjustable

the steering, the weight moving around, the torque shifting front to back.’ Jethro is completely sold: ‘For me, the GT-R is the most enjoyable car here. It’s just so adjustable and the four-wheel-drive system is so much more involving than the Porsche’s.’

The Nissan has set the tone. No more nervy hesitancy. The Mercedes AMG GT S is a captivating thing to behold and in this AMG Solarbeam paint finish (a £10,695 option!) it turns heads like nothing else here. I find myself a little uncertain about some of the styling – I wonder if the smooth, rounded edges soften it too much – but the proportions and its stance on the road are no less than perfect.

For all the similarity in their silhouettes, the AMG GT and its forerunner, the SLS, could hardly feel more different on the road. This car’s GT moniker is completely misleading – it’s a sports car through and through. That much is obvious in the total absence of inertia on turn-in and during direction changes, the resolute body control on even the most three-dimensional road surfaces and the incredible traction. The steering is light, slightly remote and hyper-alert – much like a modern Ferrari’s – and that can be a little

disconcerting at first. Similar to the way in which you must learn that the 911 Turbo's front axle will stick, you have to tune into the GT's hummingbird rate of response to steering inputs.

Once you settle into it, the GT is truly eye-popping. With the engine mounted so far back in the nose there's no hesitation on turn-in, and with the centre of gravity apparently somewhere around your ankles the car rolls just enough to give you a sense of it being worked hard, but no more. It'll carry enormous speed into a corner, settle onto its springs after just the very slightest delay, then find bucketloads of lateral grip.

Its behaviour in the exit phase is equally impressive. Despite channelling more than 500bhp to the rear wheels, the GT has prodigious traction – it makes the similarly powerful Jaguar F-type R look as though it's running 195-section rear boots by comparison – and the throttle response and rate of acceleration away from the corner is astonishing.

The GT feels balanced and poised in corners, super direct and alert, but there's also good pliancy over bumps, particularly in the softer damper settings. Jethro will later tell me he was searching for a setting between the intermediate and stiffest modes over some surfaces, but he'll also concede that it's a minor point. For the most part the GT is close to flawless in dynamic terms – it's just the slightly aloof steering that blots its copybook.

The twin-clutch gearbox is very good, the cabin and seating position are superb and the exhaust sounds appropriately dirty in its noisy mode. Such is the performance and dynamic quality of the Mercedes that it's actually a match for the mighty GT-R on cross-country pace. And, like the GT-R, it's fun and engaging to drive quickly, but the GT also has a want-one factor that nothing else here can compete with.

'The grip and precision in the chassis is crazy,' reckons Henry. 'It's got massive lateral grip, but you can tell what's going on at the limit of that grip.'

'It's a remarkable thing,' adds Jethro. 'With that quick steering it can feel nervous and busy if it does start bumping around on a really rough surface, but overall it's very impressive. It's actually

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quite an extreme thing – much closer in feel to a 911 GT3 than I had imagined.' I hog it for next few hours, and over the course of a sunny afternoon in Scotland I fall for it entirely.

By the time we've bagged a few options for the cover image we're all ready to head back to the hotel. The BMW i8 rather stands out in this company – and not just for looking like something that's landed from the set of a Michael Bay film. With its three-cylinder turbo engine and battery-powered electric motor it's clearly a very different sort of machine, but it's here on its strengths as a sports car.

With the Aston Martin in my mirrors, I point the i8's spearhead nose back towards Kelso. Its light and remote steering is familiar to me by now, but so is the sense of rigidity in the structure and the suppleness in the damping. Those skinny, 195-section front tyres hint at yards of understeer, but the i8 actually finds really strong turn-in bite. That's helped by a pervading sense of neutrality in the chassis. Overwork the front tyres and it will, naturally, push on, but keep it just below the limit of front-end grip and it flows beautifully, pivoting around the centre point of the car while the fluid damping irons out imperfections and keeps the body finely controlled.

The vague steering is a weak point, but because the i8's limits are lower than those of its rivals it's actually easier to nudge it up to the edge and keep it there. So you settle into this rhythm of carrying good speed, enjoying the fundamental agility and body control while marvelling at the urgent straight-line performance afforded by the 129bhp electric motor.

I'm some way off the pace of the Turbo and GT-R, but in my mirrors I can see the Aston is working hard to keep up. I've driven enough i8s to know better, but I still find myself surprised by the sheer fun you can have in one. I push a little harder, knowing that a great sports car would respond by communicating more directly and by thrilling in the way it hovers around that margin between grip and slip. Instead, by pushing the i8 beyond its limits, it just starts to run out of ideas. The front axle begins to let go just when you want it to tuck in again, there's no adjustability on the throttle and the braking performance is not quite strong enough to fill you with confidence.

'The i8 is good to a point,' says Jethro. 'It has the stiffest structure here, the damping is awesome and it's bloody quick. The problem is the quicker you go, the less convinced you are, because the chassis is quite hard to read. Sometimes it pushes a bit, sometimes it's really locked down and in some quick corners you get oversteer. It can be brilliant, but it feels like it needs its potential unlocked.'

'It's the tyres,' reckons Stuart. 'They're the problem for the front end – the grip, the brakes. The chassis feels nicely hooked up, but its shortcomings are all down to those skinny tyres.'

Ultimately, the i8 can't afford to be as single-minded in its pursuit

Right: AMG and Aston are worlds apart on paper and the lighter, more powerful Mercedes simply pulls away on public roads. However, the allure of a naturally aspirated V8 and a manual gearbox is oh-so strong

‘The AMG GTS feels special at a standstill and is even more enjoyable on a charge’

Right: our Mercedes test car was heavily optioned and cost an eye-watering £146,795; a 'base' BMW i8, meanwhile, is more than £40,000 less expensive...

'The N430 is arguably the most rewarding and engaging car here'

of driving thrills as the GT-R or 911 Turbo – it has a much broader point to make. In the city it can do things that no other £100,000 sports car can, so the fact that it talks to driving enthusiasts in any way whatsoever is a credit to BMW's depth of engineering.

The i8 and Vantage N430 bookend the story of the modern sports car. Whereas the former points to a more ecologically minded future, the latter resolutely adheres to the time-honoured formula of front-mounted, naturally aspirated V8, manual gearbox and rear-wheel drive. What's remarkable is that these apparently divergent approaches to performance motoring actually converge into spookily similar levels of cross-country pace.

Halfway back to Kelso I switch into the Aston. Similar pace, perhaps, but the N430 is immeasurably more satisfying to drive quickly. Having spent the day riding along on waves of effortless torque, I struggle to squeeze any meaningful pace out of the N430 at first. It takes a conscious effort to wind the 4.7-litre V8 all the way to the red line, but it makes all the difference.

The Vantage never feels rampantly quick in a straight line, but if

you do use the engine's full reach and stir the manual 'box – being sure to get down to second gear in tighter corners – there is strong performance to be had from it. I'm not convinced that it has the outright pace to keep up with the quickest cars in this test, but after a mile or two I'm so wrapped up in the experience that I just don't care.

In corners there's a sense of the N430's centre of gravity being higher in the chassis than the AMG GT's – there's a moment of looseness on turn-in as the weight settles and in direction changes it seems to flop a little where the Mercedes snaps without delay. There's also more suspension travel in the Aston and more overall body movement, but to call it a fundamental lack of body control would be unfair. In fact, it just feels very natural and it's quite helpful to be so aware of the chassis loading and unloading.

The N430 schools the AMG GT for steering feel, though, and it also has a sweet balance and a very keen, readable front axle. When it does meet the limit of its abilities it doesn't bite, rather it lets go gradually – it's like walking down steps rather than jumping off a garden wall. It does take the most effort to hustle quickly, but the pay-off is that it's arguably the most rewarding and engaging car here. One by one, we all realise that we adore it.

Over dinner that evening Dean announces that he wants to try for a sunrise shot in the morning. We all groan, push away our half-sunken beers and set alarms for 4.30am.

It's a dark, misty morning and the cars are all flashing up ice warnings on their dashboards. At times like this I'd rather have a four-wheel-drive system beneath me, but I'm curious to know if the N430 really can keep pace with the turbocharged cars. I squeeze in behind Henry in the Mercedes and we potter out of Kelso once more.

Eventually the road opens up and Henry increases his pace. I'm stretching the Vantage through third and fourth now, trusting in the detailed steering and using all the front-end grip. The N430 is so beautifully balanced and adjustable, the body movements so natural and fluid. It's as much fun as I've had at any point on this test, but with every acceleration phase Henry pulls away a length or two. I watch him thread the GT through a sequence of sweeping bends and laugh out loud at how immediate, flat-bodied and controlled it looks.

‘There’s brilliance in the 911 Turbo, but it’s not within easy reach’

Ultimately, you can only drive so quickly on the road, so the Vantage does always claw back the deficit, but there’s no question in my mind now that in outright terms the 911 Turbo, AMG GT S and GT-R are all a fair bit quicker. It hardly seems to matter though, and as Jethro says: ‘The Aston is so sweet. The way it revs, the throttle response, the steering, the manual gearbox – it’s lovely.’

All of which leaves me with just one unanswered question – is the Porsche actually fun to drive? I point it towards a road I’ve come to know quite well and begin to ramp up the pace. I’ve more faith in the front end now, confident that it will stick despite the lack of feel. When the road does tighten unexpectedly there is always enough front-end grip in reserve to adjust your line.

At anything less than full attack the 911 Turbo is quite flat and inexpressive, but with speed it comes alive. Now I can use the weight transfer under braking to keep the front axle locked down and to rotate the rear end just a little; I can toy with the car’s balance and feel the grip levels rise and fall on the outer edge of the car. It’s now engaging like a great sports car should, drawing me into the process of going quickly rather than doing all the work for me.

I back off just a little and it quickly becomes benign and distant again. There is brilliance in this car, but it’s not within easy reach. The Mercedes-AMG GT, by contrast, feels special at a standstill and is even more enjoyable on a charge. It’s a truly remarkable car and the perfect companion for a long drive to Anglesey Circuit.

On track

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
RICHARD MEADEN

Direction: Clockwise
Distance: 1.55 miles
Location: Aberffraw, Anglesey, UK
GPS: 53.18833, -4.49639

FROM ONE EPIC LOCATION TO ANOTHER, in the glorious setting of Anglesey, where our five fascinating sports coupes are set to do battle on one fabulous racetrack.

There's no set running order, so I grab the Aston's key first. Everything about the N430 feels familiar. That's partly because the Vantage has been around for a decade, but also because it follows a pure and simple recipe. You sit low – initially it feels a little too low thanks to that high dashboard – but you're well located in the seat. It's great to have a gearstick to stir around, though it's always been set too far back in the Vantage to be completely comfortable.

The N430 is all about balance. It's so beautifully neutral as you build up speed that it fills you with confidence. Then, as the tyres find useful temperature, it generates more grip and you really begin to work it, braking deeper, carrying more speed and generally leaning on the front end until it yields progressively into understeer. Encouraged, you then chase the throttle to hunt down those last few tenths, at which point the tail comes usefully into play, but never more than you ask. It's fun to have such a responsive car underneath you, especially as it's one of the few cars that remains consistent – and consistently capable – in fast, medium and slow corners. It's not blisteringly quick, but like the chassis, what power and torque there is is readily accessible and sweetly delivered. And it sounds *great*.

Pushed to extremes, the brakes begin to go a little soft and the tyres eventually lose their edge, but the front and rear ends fade in harmony, so while your ultimate entry and exit speeds are lower, the balance remains the same. Of course, you can hang it out with some provocation, but it somehow feels a bit unseemly to rag this finely wrought machine. Not the fastest, but a purist's delight.

Next up, the 991 Turbo. There was a time when all-wheel-drive 911 Turbos were pretty nasty things to drive on track. Somewhat in conflict with themselves, the front and rear ends would fight for the upper hand, shifting and snatching the balance from your hands, sometimes in the same corner. How times have changed.

This 991 is a sublime thing to push to and beyond its limits. No, it's not a precision tool in the manner of a GT3, but the way it puts its prodigious power and torque into the track and the freedom it gives you to explore its limits is borderline remarkable. It has so much performance and deploys it so readily that it takes you a few laps to summon the courage to keep the throttle pinned through the really fast sections. Your brain simply can't believe it'll stick. Neither are you convinced it'll stop for the tight, second-gear left that starts the

Rocket complex, but hammer the (standard, non-ceramic) brakes and it's as though you've hooked an aircraft carrier's arrestor wire.

There's abundant grip and traction, but the Turbo is far from inert, sliding smoothly into power oversteer like it's the most natural thing in the world. You can even back it into the slow corners – MotoGP-style – stealing yourself to allow the flat-six pendulum to swing, then gathering it up on the throttle, clever diffs shuffling all that torque while you confidently squeeze the throttle to the carpet and giggle with the adrenalin rush. I'd never thought I was a Turbo person, but this 991 has me converted. With a 1:15.2 lap, it's 3.9sec ahead of the Aston.

You know the i8 is a different kind of high-performance car when you have to leave it charging in the pit garage for a couple of hours to ensure its batteries are fully juiced-up for its string of fast laps. Suitably 'brimmed', all that's left to do is knock the gear selector across to the left to activate Sport mode, press the DSC button to deactivate the stability control, squeeze the throttle and away we go.

The soundtrack is an odd blend of gruff little 1.5-litre petrol triple and a backbeat of whirring motors. It ain't no Aston, but it does sound fun. Circuits tend to suck the drama from all but the most accelerative cars' outright pace, so it's no surprise that the i8 doesn't feel quite so impressive as it did on the drive to Anglesey. Thanks to its torque

Technically speaking...

TECHNICAL CORRESPONDENT
MICHAEL WHITELEY

Porsche 911 Turbo
The Turbo is packed with technology to help increase cornering speeds. The combination of Porsche Torque Vectoring at the rear and four-wheel steer makes for a highly responsive chassis. PTV modulates brake pressure at the inside rear wheel, both initiating a moment of yaw about the rear axle and even sending more torque to the outside rear wheel to increase the effect. Four-wheel steering turns the rear wheels in the opposite direction to the fronts at low speeds, increasing agility, and in the same direction at high speeds, increasing stability.

BMW i8
The i8 uses a front-mounted electric motor and an internal combustion engine at the middle with a smaller electric motor attached. This hybrid layout means the car can exploit something that the others can't: regenerative braking. A lot of energy is generated as heat during braking in cars and is therefore lost. In the i8, however, this energy is harvested by using the electric motor as a generator. This energy is then stored in the battery pack as chemical potential energy, ready to be re-used for tractive effort.

Mercedes-AMG GT S
Like most modern performance cars, the AMG GT S uses turbocharging to increase power. The twin turbochargers on this car are snugly nestled in the 'hot V', thus reducing the distance between engine and turbocharger. This technique reduces turbo lag, which is usually a major concern. Thus turbocharged, the M178 unit produces plenty of torque at lower revs, transforming the feel of the car compared to one with a naturally aspirated engine. Combined with an electronically controlled locking diff that knows when you want a locked axle, the result is a drift machine.

Nissan GT-R
Introduced in 2007, the R35 GT-R made waves as a technical marvel. Even though technology has since moved on, it can still hold its ground amongst modern machinery. This is partly down to the three differentials it has. The centre differential is an electronically controlled, multi-disc hydraulic unit. This uses an array of sensors to see where torque should be distributed between the front and rear axles. The front is a basic open diff, whereas the rear is a mechanical limited-slip diff. Because of this, GT-Rs have a rear-biased feel, where you can provoke the rear to step out under power alone, or even with hard braking and a downshift.

Aston Martin V8 Vantage N430
With a modern electronically controlled locking differential, torque is intelligently distributed between the driven wheels depending on factors such as steering angle, yaw rate, throttle position and wheel speed, and to a degree this stabilises the car for you. The locking effect, and thus torque distribution, of the N430's mechanical limited-slip diff is caused only by the torque input from the drivetrain. This typically means that you have to correct faster and more deliberately than with an electronic diff.

delivery it's deceptively quick, though, both along the straights and through the corners.

It's not all good, however. Foremost in the list of gripes is the lack of front-end grip. You can walk a fine line where the i8 doesn't dissolve into understeer. You're mostly the right side of this on the road, but on track you can push through it readily, at which point it becomes a fun-free zone. There's a frustrating lag in the throttle response, too, so you have to try and compensate by flooring the throttle a few fractions of a second before you need it. This, combined with hesitant downshifts during hard braking, becomes irksome.

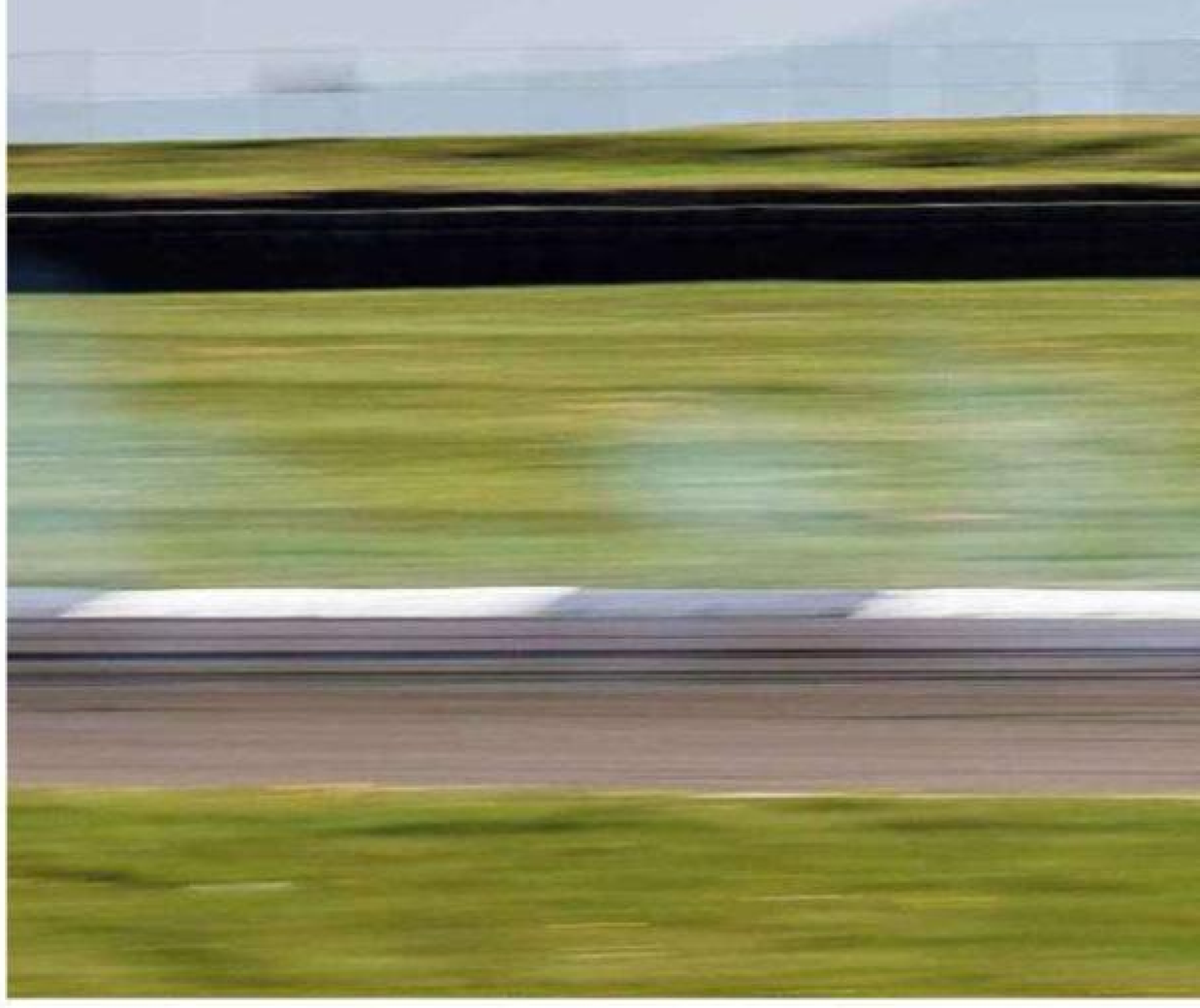
It's a surprise to see the plug-in hybrid BMW get quite so close to the N430. It crosses the line just 0.3sec behind, but rarely have such similar lap times been delivered in such different ways. When it comes to the tactility, excitement and emotion that are integral to the thrill of driving on a racetrack, it's way off the pace.

The R35 Nissan GT-R is getting long in the tooth, but point its bluff nose onto a track and it still has some bite. Switch off the stability control, set the transmission and suspension to R mode, slot the gear selector to M(anual) and you're ready to go. Immediately on leaving the pitlane you feel the stiffness of its body control, the car fighting itself a little as it pogos in a manner reminiscent of a McLaren 12C. It never tries to hide its bulk, neither does it ever want to work in harmony with the track. Instead it seems to revel in going to war with physics, bludgeoning its way into, through and out of the corners and hammering down the straights.

If you're going for a lap time you need to get your best effort in early, when the tyres are fresh, for that's when the GT-R feels at its indomitable best. It's then that its nose is keenest to turn and all four wheels will find brutal traction. Push for more than a few laps, however, and it begins to unravel, front pushing wide through the long, fast corners, tail breaking loose under hard acceleration out of the hairpins, and a muddled mix of the two in medium-speed turns.

Likewise the (cast-iron) brakes do an admirable job of slowing the charging Nissan from big velocities, but you feel them begin to lose their edge where the Turbo and GT S carry on regardless. It's odd to say it of a machine so inextricably linked with ballistic Nürburgring lap times, but the GT-R never feels like a natural track car. It has to do things its way, not your way, and whilst this makes it jaw-slackeningly rapid, the experience is not dissimilar to a night on

Right: get too eager with the GT S's throttle and things can get unruly, but drive intelligently and this AMG offers more traction than you might expect



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the Jägerbombs: brutally effective, but not a pleasure. Its best lap is 1.7sec behind the 911 Turbo's.

Last up is the AMG GT S. Don't be fooled by its suave looks. It's a thug. Even by AMG's standards this biturbo V8 is an exceptional motor. Hard as nails, ultra-responsive and boundlessly potent, it makes for an explosively exciting lap. With minimal body roll and super-responsive steering, the GT S feels up for it the moment you leave the pitlane. Pretty much everything we've criticised in previous AMGs on track has been addressed here. Ramped-up to its most responsive Race mode, the gearbox delivers up and downshifts with newfound immediacy. There's pleasing aggression to the upshifts, but best of all it doesn't leave you hanging when you ask for a string of downshifts in big braking zones. The brake pedal is brilliantly firm; the brakes themselves – optional carbon ceramics on this car – apparently impervious to the punishment you're administering. It holds its line, even with ABS intervention, which makes the flat-out run through School and into Rocket a little less scary.

The balance is nicely neutral and not dissimilar to the Aston's, though the levels of grip available and the speed you're carrying in are of a different league. You can be so precise in placing the car it's uncanny, and there always seems to be just enough grip left to fine-tune your trajectory. Of course, there's so much torque on tap that it's easy to whip the rear tyres into a whirl of expensive smoke, but so long as you're disciplined with the throttle and don't ask too much too soon, there's surprising traction to be found. There are limits, though, which is why when you really begin to chase the throttle the limitations of rear drive versus four-wheel drive become apparent, but even then that fabulous V8 is so responsive and linear you can be as measured or as manic as you like. It can't match the crazy time of the 991 and is pipped by the GT-R – by 0.1sec – but in terms of thrills, enjoyment and adrenalin head-rush, it's second to none.

Results

Porsche 991 Turbo	1:15.2
Nissan GT-R	1:16.9
Mercedes-AMG GT S	1:17.0
Aston Martin N430	1:19.1
BMW i8	1:19.4

VIDEO
See and hear these incredible machines in action online
Visit youtube.com/evotv or evo.co.uk

Conclusion

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
JETHRO BOVINGDON

SO THE DUST HAS SETTLED and we've thrown everything we can at the GT S: the toughest roads, the fiercest competition and even a racetrack. It hasn't wilted. In fact it has relished every second and emerged as a clear and unanimous winner.

All that on-paper promise, all those attributes that we hoped would translate from the launch location in the US, all our expectations met or even exceeded. The GT S is the real deal – an SLS Black Series shrink-wrapped and refined for the challenge of even the hellishly unpredictable roads of the Scottish Borders, a car that need not be bowed by 911 Turbo or GT-R. Above all, it's a real sports car. Each and every one of us had one of *those* drives in it. The sort that lives with you and blows apart any preconceptions.

'There were times when it was simply breathtaking,' begins Henry. 'The direction changes and the way it stayed so flat was simply stunning.' Stuart is similarly won over. 'The steering is too light for me, but otherwise it's a revelation. It feels like there's not a gram of weight above your hip point and the car just pivots. Remarkable.' I didn't venture to Anglesey but got a text report from Dickie that pretty much summed up everyone's feelings: 'The AMG is nuts! Love it.'

What of the rest? Well, perhaps unsurprisingly it's the i8 that falls first. There's so much good here and even more that's ingenious, but ultimately the car's lines of communication and its throttle response just don't provide the clarity and control to match the others. However, the i8 has a long and bright future ahead of it and we can't wait to see where it goes from here. The potential is vast.

In fourth place is the 911 Turbo. Let me say that again. In fourth place is the 911 Turbo. It's an amazing car, but despite moments of such dazzling brilliance that even the GT S couldn't hope to compete, the Turbo ultimately left us frustrated. On the track it's massive fun and on the road, at full flight, the addictive mix of agility, grip and sharp, fierce performance is astonishing. The problem is that a 991 Turbo at full flight is so heinously fast that to truly unleash it on the road is almost impossible. You might do it for fleeting moments but no more, unless you happen to live on the Isle of Man or have diplomatic immunity. And at less than maximum attack it can feel so within itself that real thrills are hard to come by. Compared to the effusive GT S it's just too cool, too clinical.

That's a criticism also levelled at the Nissan GT-R but, I presume, only by people who've never driven one. After the smoothly polished Turbo, the GT-R is raw and positively alive with feedback. It ties for second place with the Aston, a car that couldn't be more different but, similarly, is humming with tactility. Henry and

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Dan put the N430 ahead of the GT-R; for Stuart and me it's the big Nissan that just edges it.

'I'm so tempted to give the Aston the overall win,' says Henry. 'The driving experience is simply magical – so involving, so malleable. It's the one I'd buy.' Dan seems almost bemused by just how much fun the Aston is out on the road. 'I just thought it would be embarrassed, but in the end it more than holds its own. Do you need to go faster than this? Probably not. And once you've let the Turbo or GT-R disappear into the distance, you can focus on the simple thrill of extracting the maximum from it. Loved it.'

Stuart is equally blown away by the GT-R. 'I can't quite believe how much I enjoyed the Nissan. The physicality of it just draws you deeper and deeper into the driving experience. You can feel everything; you can use the weight transfer to adjust its balance, and despite its crazy cross-country speed you feel fully involved even when you're not driving like you hair's on fire.' Or like your baldy scalp is melting, I suppose. Anyway, I tend to agree. For me the Nissan edges the Aston because it has the power to use that inherent adjustability. You can really bend the GT-R to your will and on these roads it is completely immersive and laugh-out-loud funny.

It's not enough to stop the AMG GT S from emerging as a clear winner, though. Its V8 is a quality item and proves better than any other that turbocharging need not erase character at all. Finally, the seven-speed dual-clutch transmission isn't a source of frustration, either. On upshifts it's as good as they come, and while downshifts might not match a GT3's or Ferrari's, they're quick enough not to get in the way of enjoying the drivetrain. What's especially satisfying, though, is that the engine doesn't dominate. It's just a part of a whole that is controlled but indulgent, scalpel sharp yet progressive and deeply satisfying on every level. It's a mighty, breathlessly exciting car. And finally I can relax again.

The scores

	DP	HC	JB	SG	pts	pos.
Mercedes	1st	1st	1st	1st	**20**	**1st**
Aston Martin	2nd	2nd	3rd	3rd	**14**	**2nd=**
Nissan	3rd	3rd	2nd	2nd	**14**	**2nd=**
Porsche	4th	4th	4th	4th	**8**	**4th**
BMW	5th	5th	5th	5th	**4**	**5th**

evo ratings

Mercedes-AMG GT S	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage N430	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo	★★★★½
BMW i8	★★★★½

by HENRY CATCHPOLE

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ASTON PARROTT

LET OFF THE LEASH

When the furiously fast and wonderfully pure Atom entered a world of ever-heavier sports cars, it was a true revelation. But can the same philosophy really translate to a vehicle also capable of thrilling off-road? The moment of truth for Ariel's Nomad has arrived

FAMOUS PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS MUCH smaller in real life. Even the tall ones. Watch them on-screen, see them on billboards, listen to them on the radio and somehow they grow in the mind so that they seem like towering figures that you feel sure must be unable to walk amongst us unnoticed.

As it rolls off the back of the transporter, I think something similar to this mental inflation must have occurred with the Ariel Nomad. Such has been the ardour for this car since it was unveiled at the start of the year, I had unwittingly scaled it up in my mind until it had reached junior monster truck proportions. Clearly I'm not alone either, as the first thing both film-maker Sam Riley and photographer Aston Parrott say as it settles in the lay-by is: 'It's smaller than I thought.'

More diminutive maybe, but no less extraordinary. It is unlike anything else on the road and its tangle of tubular triangles will have people slowing down, giving the thumbs up, even waggling their wings (I'll explain in a bit) for all of the day that we're with it. It looks capable of surviving a forward roll through a war zone, but crucially it manages to do this without appearing too aggressive. It retains an air of fun that makes it seem approachable. The ultimate toy? It certainly looks like a 1:1 Tamiya buggy.

'It looks capable of surviving a forward roll through a war zone'

Our playground for the day is Exmoor and, despite the sunshine, it is distinctly chilly this morning with a west wind slicing through clothing and making our skeletons feel as 'exo' as a Nomad chassis. We'll retreat to some small, tree-lined lanes later, but out here, with nothing growing much above shin height, you can see for miles; the mixture of brown heather and green grass blanketing the rolling countryside in every direction with just the occasional dash of vivid yellow gorse disrupting the camouflage.

Two styles of entry are possible if you go in through the Nomad's 'door'. The best way is to hang on to the frame, get both feet on the seat and then, as you post them further on towards the pedals, perform a twisting slide with your torso as the rest of your body follows. The perhaps more conventional left leg, bum, right leg routine is made tricky by the A-pillar and looks more like something you'd do in

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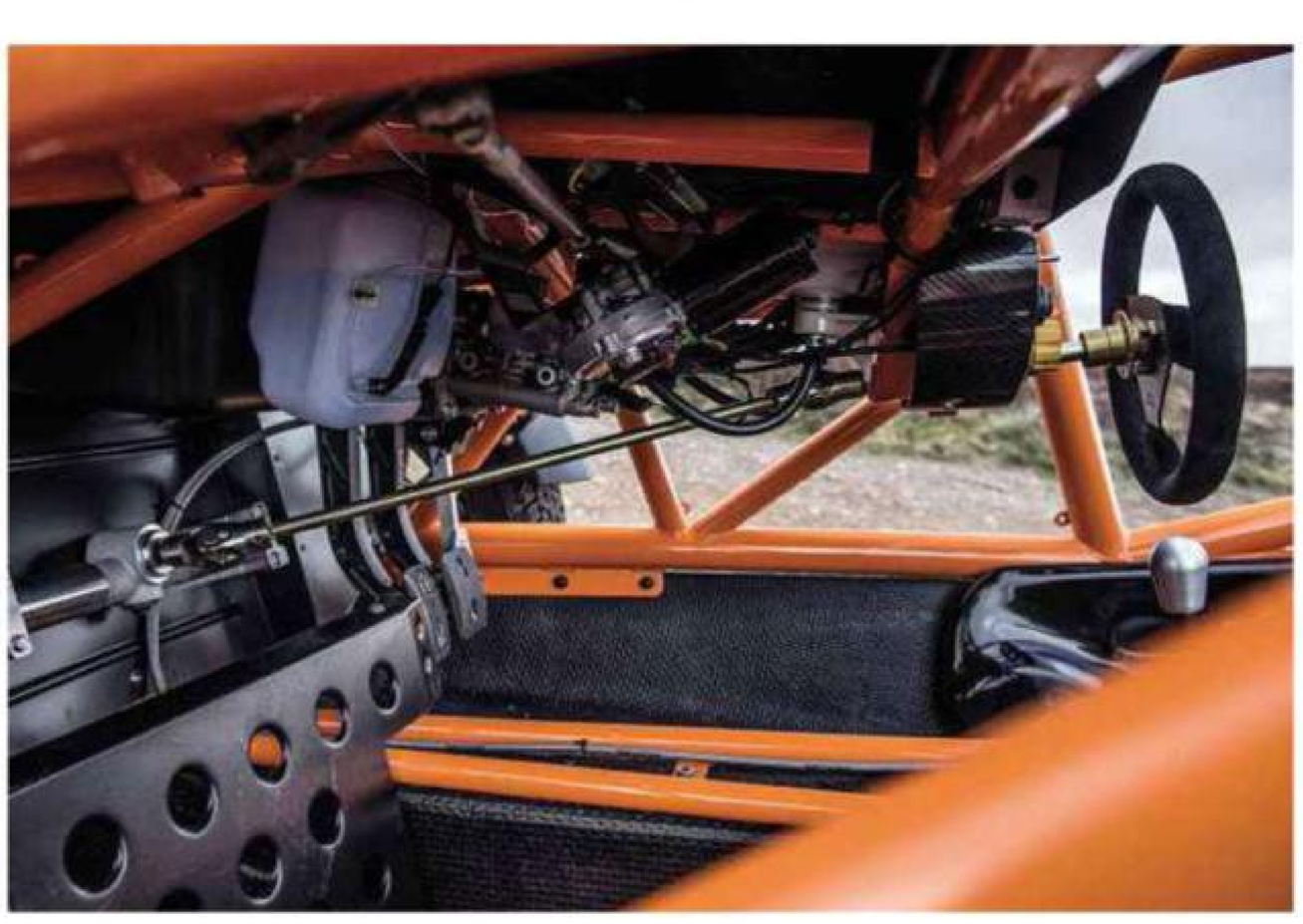

Right: the open-worked Nomad exposes its driver to all sorts of invigorating sensations, but it can also get cold... **Below middle:** fabric covers offer light protection for Eibach coil springs, which might be exposed to quite a bit of abuse. **Bottom:** the bare necessities, Ariel style

a yoga class. And as with all yoga classes, there's a strong danger of cramp, failure, getting permanently stuck or kneeing yourself in the face.

The more fun and spectacular way to gain access, however, is to clamber up the frame and then go in through the 'roof', as though you're dropping down through the turret of a tank. With practice you could probably incorporate some sort of vault. Whether you're a *Dukes of Hazzard* devotee or a *Mad Max* fan, once inside you'll feel perfectly at home if you've driven an Atom. The rest of the car might be new, but the cabin architecture is largely unchanged, with the familiar digital dash, simple steering wheel and wand-like gearlever. Although there are no brand-name components, there are also no obvious parts-bin refugees amongst the switchgear, and that somehow makes the whole car feel more bespoke and expensive as a result. Individual buckets grace the interior of this particular Nomad, and although the driver's seat could do with being a size or two smaller to really hold me in place, it is a vast improvement on the flexy, moulded one-piece sofa that has been in every Atom I've ever driven.

None of the switches or rubbery buttons are marked in an Ariel, you just have to memorise them, which I rather like. Turn a dial hoping to find some headlights and you could be unwittingly adjusting the brake bias if you're not versed in the layout. To start: flick down the ignition toggle below the display, wave the immobiliser fob under the dash, then press the black squidgy button to the left of the toggle to fire the engine into life behind you.

The first few miles are some of the most intriguing I've ever travelled. Drive at a relaxed pace and you can just enjoy the wonderfully unruffled sensation of long-travel suspension soaking up the bumps and lumps of a moorland road. Yet it's not a floaty, waterbed sensation, because the car always keeps you in touch with what's going on (more so than I'd imagined) and the weighty steering will kick back if it encounters a mid-corner bump. There is a bit of squat under acceleration, but the dive under braking is far more noticeable because the nose pitches forwards between the front wheels, sniffing the tarmac.

It's easy to forget what an immersive experience it is driving something as open as the Nomad. There's the smell of fluids warming and new materials losing their freshness. There's the sharp hiss when the tyres encounter water and the clatter when you cross a cattle grid... although you don't have to back off as you usually might.

The naturally aspirated four-cylinder over the back axle continues Ariel's long relationship with Honda, but this is a 2.4-litre, American-spec engine – 'K24' to its nearest and dearest. As such, it has 235bhp, which is 10bhp down on the

2-litre naturally aspirated engine in the Atom. However, as you've probably guessed, the greater displacement means more bottom end, and at 221lb ft it comfortably surpasses even the supercharged 2-litre Atom's torque output, and offers greater driveability. It doesn't sound like the smoothest or most refined engine initially, but once the digital tacho is above 4000rpm, the tone changes and the engine feels like it's into its stride. From here to 7000rpm is where you want to keep it, flicking up and down between the closely stacked ratios of that tight little H-pattern 'box to keep everything humming. If you do, you're rewarded with a soundtrack that is the very essence of rorty.

It never gets dull looking across the passenger footwell of an Ariel to see the nearside wheel and front suspension working away. Unlike in the Atom, however, in the Nomad you can see the bottom of a spring and damper unit, as there is a conventional outboard setup rather than the sports car's inboard system. With 250mm of travel and chunky tyres, I expect a certain amount of slop and imprecision to have crept into the steering and handling, but the biggest surprise in the first few miles is how much weight and accuracy the steering has. The Yokohama Geolander tyres also generate far more grip than I was expecting, given their all-terrain tread. Drive a gravel rally car on the road and it can often feel like you are sideways at walking pace, as the rubber deforms and squirms underneath you, but in this guise the Nomad has terrific traction and can generate serious lateral grip, which initially is almost a disappointment! Henry Siebert-Saunders, the brain behind the Nomad, admits he was also surprised by the ability of the tyres, although he assures me that on a full gravel tyre it is as lazily sideways as you'd expect. There's a degree more negative camber than the Atom boasts on the front wheels (taking them to 1.5 degrees) to help turn-in, but the rears are the same, at 0.75 degrees.

'Overcome the purchase of the rear tread blocks and you can have the Nomad oversteering sweetly'

Despite the grip from the tyres, turn in to corners can feel a little unnerving. After an impressive initial reaction to the first turn of the wheel, the car then leans into the suspension as loads increase, which inevitably makes it feel like the front end is running away from you a little.

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But you learn to work with this, understand how much speed you can carry, and in slower corners you quickly find that trail braking keeps the car loaded up nicely. The limit of the tyres is actually beautifully telegraphed and very progressive. Turn in hard and the front tyres will give, but it just feels like an invitation to switch the balance to the rear, with the car then shifting attitude smoothly through its gangly suspension so that it's leaning on an outside haunch. It's remarkable, given the inherently bum-heavy weight distribution, just how friendly and manageable this all feels, and with enough throttle you can even overcome the purchase of the rear tread blocks and have the Nomad oversteering sweetly.

Even with the (optional but advisable) windscreen, you are still at the mercy of the elements, and the air temperature on the moors is certainly low enough to warrant a jacket and gloves while driving. I think a rear panel just behind the head might actually be of benefit too, stopping the slipstream from whipping round and making a rearguard attack on your barnet. In time there will be a full weather kit, making this the most practical vehicle that Ariel has ever produced, but in general I still like being able to smell the blossom caught in the wind and hear the skylarks as I wait at a junction. The exposure also means all normal impressions of speed are exacerbated tenfold, but even once you have acclimatised to the maelstrom of rushing air and scenery assaulting your senses, the Nomad still has more than enough performance to remain exciting. The 0-60mph time is claimed as 3.4 seconds, which seems eminently feasible. The top speed is 134mph, but somehow that feels pretty irrelevant, especially as the tyre noise at 100mph is enough to stop you pushing on any further.

Talking of tyre noise, at about 30-50mph the rushing *sssccchhhh* sound from the Geolanders is exactly the same sort of noise heard when there is a military jet approaching. Perhaps that's why I don't flinch when a Tornado, banked at 90 degrees with wings vertical, passes low overhead while we are sitting having lunch. As we can clearly see inside the plane's cockpit, I assume the pilot has a good view of the orange climbing frame below. I'd like to think the definite

Above: generous torque, a six-speed 'box and 300mm of ground clearance mean almost any kind of road can be dispatched quickly. A quicker, supercharged version of the Nomad, with up to 300bhp, is also in the works. **Left:** Nomad can be coaxed into oversteer and is well behaved in the event of a slide. Grip levels are surprisingly high, however

Left: digital dash and lack of labelling will be familiar to Atom owners. **Below left:** Catchpole's preferred egress technique. **Bottom:** suspension is mounted outboard, unlike on the track-focused Atom

wing waggle he does immediately after he passes us is showing RAF approval for the Nomad.

Being a small company, Ariel hasn't got a fleet of Nomads and this one currently has to fulfil show car duties, customer demos and early press drives, such as this. In order to try to keep it looking vaguely tidy, it's been restricted to road work (we'll be giving one the full off-road treatment very soon). However, in the course of capturing the photos and video, I have to do a lot of turning around in the numerous small car parks and lay-bys dotted across the moorland. Many of these would be totally off limits if I were in any of the other cars in this magazine, but not the Nomad.

Because you don't actually feel like you're perched up high in the cockpit, I'm initially unconvinced that its 300mm of ground clearance will be adequate for some of the drops and ramp angles that I want to negotiate. But as the day continues, so the fears recede and I realise just how capable the Nomad is. This is hugely liberating. Suddenly your whole view of the world changes as tracks and byways become part of the game plan. At one point I miss out a hairpin entirely, opting instead for a little cut through a gravel car park. Having the option to suddenly turn off the road and explore like this is truly thrilling and a LaFerrari suddenly seems rather limiting.

But even restricted to sealed surfaces, the Nomad is a wonderful and novel experience. The exaggerated way you can and *must* manipulate the car's weight distribution feels endlessly fascinating. And yet the way the suspension travel has been blended with precise controls means the whole thing has a deftness and immediacy that is very unusual. Part of this comes from the fact that the Nomad only weighs 670kg, so it never feels ponderous like most off-road vehicles with long travel. Other contributing factors are things like the beautifully snickety, short-throw gearbox, the responsive engine and the perfectly placed and weighted pedals, all of which combine to give a sense of incisiveness.

In some ways I'd actually like to try an even softer, more compliant setup to exaggerate the movements. I'm not saying it would necessarily be better, but it would be fun to try. And the beauty of the Nomad is that, as an owner, you could tinker with this sort of thing to your heart's content, fiddling with damper rates and spring weights, changing tyres to suit mood and condition. An automotive Action Man as much as a Tamiya buggy. Whatever the toy box analogy, the Nomad really does feel like the most tremendous plaything, and I can see it becoming a necessary addition to any garage, real or fantasy.

ARIEL NOMAD

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 2354cc **Power** 235bhp @ 7200rpm **Torque** 221lb ft @ 4300rpm
Transmission Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
Front suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, dampers
Rear suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, dampers
Brakes Ventilated 240mm front discs, solid 240m rear discs
Wheels 15in front and rear **Tyres** 235/70 R15 front and rear
Weight 670kg (750kg in off-road trim, inc. underbody protection) **Power-to-weight** 365bhp/ton
0-60mph 3.4sec (claimed) **Top speed** 134mph (road tyres)
Price now £33,000

evo rating: ★★★★★

HALF-A-BILLION FORTUNE, CAR IMPORTER, ENGINEER, BRDC DIRECTOR, SOFTWARE DEVELOPER, ENTREPRENEUR, CHEMICAL FIRM OWNER, GOVERNMENT ADVISOR, LE MANS CLASS WINNER... WHAT'S NEXT FOR GINETTA'S SAVIOUR?

*From devising care home economics to an unexpected win at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Ginetta's Yorkshire-bred multi-millionaire boss is not your typical petrolhead. Or is he? **evo** sits down with Lawrence Tomlinson*

by HENRY CATCHPOLE
PHOTOGRAPHY *by*
DEAN SMITH

SITTING AT THE KITCHEN TABLE THE DAY before my scheduled interview with the boss of Ginetta Cars, I decide to do a bit of research. There's a soft clatter of keys as I type 'Lawrence Tomlinson' into Google. The distinctive white page with blue, green and grey writing brings up the expected reference to Ginetta, but also results relating to care homes and RBS during the banking crisis. With three such disparate topics, you might imagine that Google has pulled up the results for three different Lawrence Tomlinsons. But not so.

A click on his Wikipedia entry reveals such a wealth of talents and experiences that I wonder whether the page has been hacked, but as I dig a little further it all seems to be absolutely kosher. Amongst other things, this same Lawrence Tomlinson is estimated to be worth more than £500million, is an engineer, has been a director of the British Racing Drivers' Club, owns a chemical company, has been the government's Entrepreneur in Residence and won his class at the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 2006.

Clearly there is going to be plenty to talk about, but I'm slightly apprehensive too. Raised in Batley, near Leeds, he went to a grammar school in Huddersfield and then studied engineering at Bradford University. You couldn't get much more Yorkshire-born-and-bred. And by all accounts he has the bluntness and dislike of fools that you might imagine of a successful Yorkshire businessman…

Tomlinson stands up to greet me as I walk into an empty office overlooking the old pit straight at Silverstone on a chilly and grey spring day. He's tall and thin, wearing jeans and a dark blue trench coat with the collar turned up. There's more than a hint of Simon Pegg in his face. He sits down next to the window, where a mug of something hot is resting. Outside there is a private test day going on and the noise seeps in of various Ginettas going past at flat-chat on their way from Woodcote to Copse.

What I really want to know is how much of a car guy Tomlinson is. Despite holding a degree in engineering, I have read that he started out in business trading cars…

'It's a crazy story, really,' he says, 'but when I was leaving university, a guy who is now my brother-in-law and I decided to go to America to travel around. We'd heard that you could buy a Rolls-Royce over here, take it to America and sell it for, like, shitloads of money – them there Beverly Hills is paved with gold. So we started to do our research but there was no t'interweb in those times because I'm really ancient. Fortunately we worked out that if we'd bought a Silver Shadow, or whatever it was, we'd have lost shitloads of money, 'cause they were giving them away, like, free in your Frosties in the States.'

Tomlinson and his friend didn't give up. With the exchange rate at about two dollars to the pound they decided to import rather than export. So they flew to New York because it was the cheapest flight, rented a car that his friend was too young to drive, got lost in Queens, tried to drive halfway across America, realised how big America was when they still hadn't left New Jersey the following morning, and then, unable to afford the mileage on the hire car, bought a Cadillac.

'A '72 Coupe de Ville,' recalls Tomlinson, 'which was a massive 8-litre shed in gold with a beige roof and white leather. It was fabulous. Big bench seats front and back. I would drive for a couple of hours then jump in the back and sleep while Rupert drove for a couple of hours. Eventually we got up to Calgary and bumped into a

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guy called Bruce. He was great and worked for Molson Brewery. He gave us some free sunglasses and filled the boot with beer, which was a lot of beer. He had a gorgeous wife, a Jag XJS and this black Series 1.5 E-type, which we bought. We photographed the car and then FedExed the photos to [Jaguar specialist and restorer] Nigel Dawes, who is still trading from Birtsmorton Court in Malvern – very posh – and he wired us the money. It took, like, a week, in which time we went up to Banff and tried to drink all this beer. We got a 20-foot container in Calgary and then literally just nailed this E-type to the floor.'

Tomlinson subsequently brought in a 1956 XK140 MC Roadster and then went on to import MasterCraft water-skiing boats. Business turned towards care homes after that, when he bought out his parents' company and then developed software for the industry. Cars were always a part of his life, however, and particularly TVRs, which he loved. He had a 350 Wedge, a Griffith 430 and a Tuscan Speed Six. ('I was one of the few who had no problems with the car at all, no engine problems,' Tomlinson says of the Tuscan. 'But apparently with the guy who bought it from me, the engine shit itself about 1000 miles later, which was unfortunate.') It was with the Tuscan that he almost stumbled into racing.

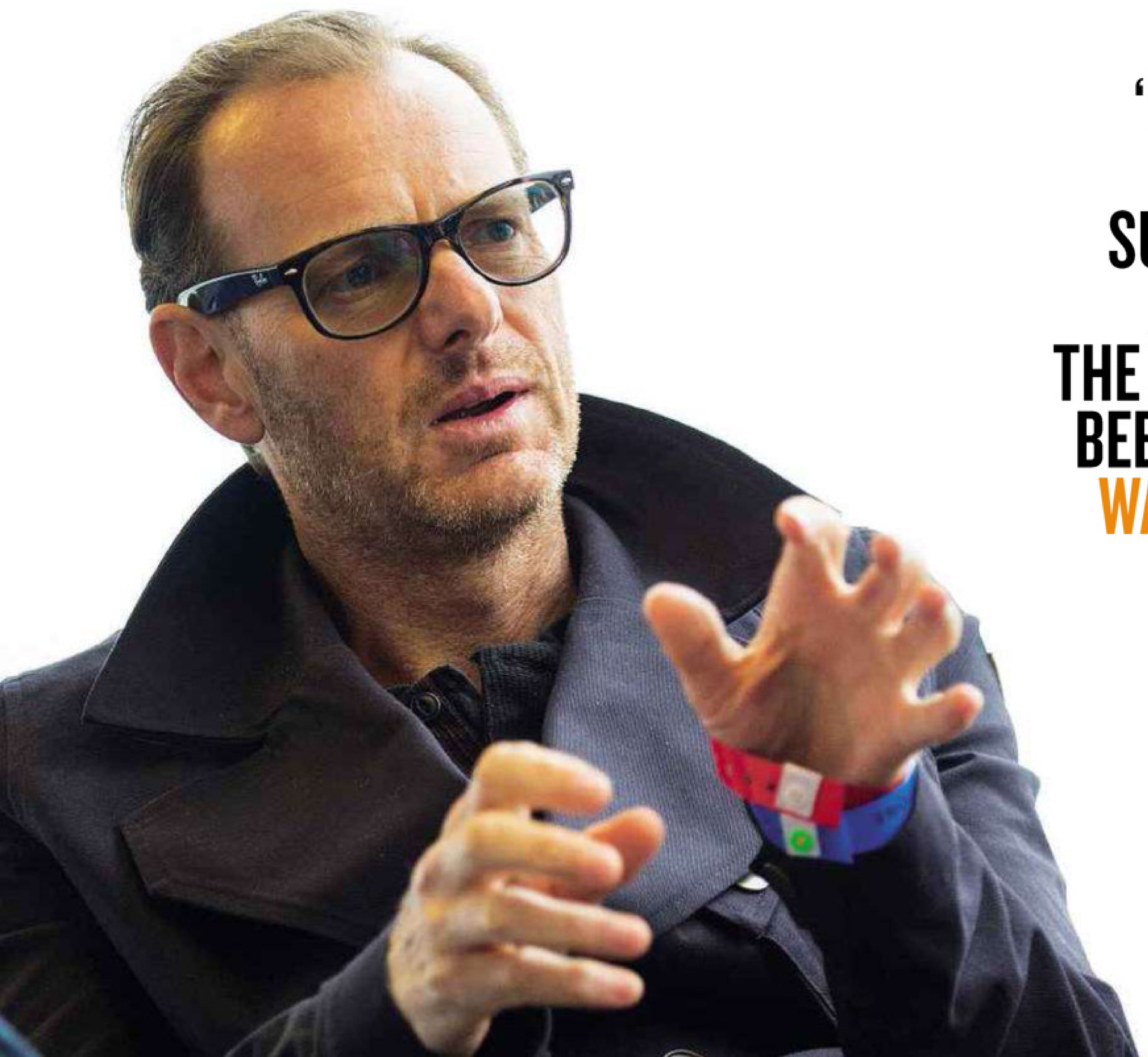
'I went on a trackday and the instructor – a racing driver – said, "You're really good at this. In the ten years I've been doing this I've only come across two guys who had the same level of car control that you have." I thought, "Oh yeah? I bet you tell that to all the boys. Whatever."'

The two wound up in the pub that evening with a mutual friend (a TVR dealer) and Tomlinson ended up buying the instructor's chemical business. Tomlinson says it's 'really quite successful now', before going on to explain that originally the company made products sold in Tesco that de-iced windscreens and paths, but now it de-ices 40 per cent of all the runways in North America and is the sole supplier to Network Rail.

Anyway, encouraged by the instructor, Tomlinson found himself racing a Ginetta G27 on his 38th birthday. He describes the car as being 'fun but put together poorly'. A relative whirlwind of racing activity saw him do half a season in Ginettas then move to a Radical ProSport – 'best product they ever made. Super car on F3 slicks… very honest' – before switching to British GT in a TVR T400R. He came second in his first race, which understandably surprised a few people. He started up his own team at this point and in 2004 they lined up on the grid at Le Mans.

'I hadn't been racing two years when I took the flag at Le Mans, which was quite a steep learning curve. I really probably shouldn't have been there, but I did finish the race, which was quite amazing. I did quite a lot of the driving as well, which I enjoyed.'

The following year, Team LNT tackled the European Le Mans Series and, despite taking TVR's first ever



'HE GAVE US SOME FREE SUNGLASSES AND FILLED THE BOOT WITH BEER – WHICH WAS A LOT OF BEER'

Above right: the G40R is a road-legal version of Ginetta's hugely popular G40 race car; the 175bhp coupe is built in the mould of the Mazda MX-5 and Lotus Elise

international win and coming first and second at the Spa 1000km in the GT2 category, Tomlinson got fed-up with having the engines 'shit themselves'.

'So I met uncle Don Panoz at Le Mans in 2005,' recalls Tomlinson. 'We weren't in the race that year and I went to see him in his truck. It was like meeting a legend; he came out smoking this goddamn cigarette and drinking coffee and we talked about the Esperante that he was campaigning that year. What I knew about it was that it had a *fantastic* donkey. It had that Ford V8, which was just solid and really grunty and sounded fantastic.'

Tomlinson did a deal for the cars based on results and the team promptly did phenomenally well in Europe the following year, taking second and third in the championship, only being beaten by a certain Marc Lieb in a Porsche 911 GT3 RSR. Tomlinson himself came third-equal in the drivers' standings with Richard Dean (the Porsche drivers being first-equal). The year's highlight, however, was a very unexpected victory in the GT2 class at Le Mans. Having qualified tenth out of the 14 in the class and being up against not only all the Porsches but also a factory Panoz team, Team LNT took a tortoise and hare approach, sticking to a lap time and staying off all the kerbs. It paid off, and I remember not only the wonderful noise of the car but also the delight in the crowd when this underdog British team took the victory.

But what about Ginetta? Well, Tomlinson bought the company in 2005, but not before he nearly bought TVR.

'I'd more or less done a deal with Peter [Wheeler] and then Nikolai Smolensky turned up, suitcases full of money. Metaphorically speaking, of course… I think it's probably worked out better for me, because I started with a clean sheet of paper yet I've got the heritage of the Ginetta brand, which is great. And no back-catalogue of unreliability in general-public terms, whereas – whether it's true or not, and everybody's got their views on it – everybody perceives the TVR badge as being unreliable.'

The first car to arrive was the G50, which celebrated 50 years of Ginetta and cleaned up in the British GT4 Championship for several years. Before they designed the G50, Tomlinson says that he did a lot of market research.

'I measured the Corvette, the 911, the F430; measured the wheelbase, the width, looked at the stats, looked at the styling and thought: "If I make something that's much different from this, it's going to be shit! But if I can make what they're doing at a fraction of the price and make it so that it's really reliable on the racetrack, is great fun and has a standard engine…" I went back to the genetics of Ginetta because the G4 [produced in the early '60s] was a groundbreaking car, a bit like the original Lotus Elan. Lightweight, really good fun, and using a fairly standard engine. The only twist that we have on that theory today is that we want to be at the forefront of modern safety.'

Such is the triumph of the G50 that, Tomlinson claims

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quite feasibly, there would be no GT4 category today without it. This year they'll have eight or nine on the British GT grid, plus another 50 Ginettas of various descriptions running in the support races. But while the racing scene is successful, I'm intrigued by the road cars. First there is the car that started out as the Farboud GTS, became the Farbio GTS, and was then bought by Tomlinson and named the F400, before he renamed it again as the G60.

'Chris Marsh [who owned it as the Farbio GTS] was shovelling custard uphill with a pitchfork trying to get bank debt and grow a business. It wasn't going to happen, and I just thought it was too pretty to die and took it on.'

Much as Tomlinson liked the way the Farbio looked, however, what was underneath wasn't so satisfactory. 'We ended up re-engineering the chassis, redoing the wiring, the lights, the windows, the touchscreen, changing the engine, the exhaust, the handbrake, the brakes, the uprights, the radiator and the air-conditioning system, but apart from that we left it pretty much as it was!

'We ended up with a really nice car and we've been to Le Mans in it and we've sold a few, but it's just a very difficult car to build. We're so busy concentrating on mainstream products that if someone asks for a G60, I tell them it's 18 months delivery and we really don't want to build it.'

The road car that they are happy to build is the entry-level G40, which was designed to replace the venerable G20 (a car that I did my very first race in about ten years ago). 'As a road car, the G40 still looks nice,' opines Tomlinson. 'It's still current, it's different, it's small, it's light, nobody else is really matching it. It is our version of the Elise. I could never understand how everybody raved about how good and how fantastic that car [the Elise] was. I mean, the press went mad about it and still do really and it's just, like, inherently an understeering piece of shit. Sorry. Maybe I got a particularly bad one to try. And it's hard to criticise it when it was so successful.'

'THE PRESS WENT MAD ABOUT THE ELISE AND STILL DO, BUT IT'S JUST AN UNDERSTEERING PIECE OF SHIT'

'Race car for the road' is what Tomlinson sees as Ginetta's unique selling point, and he's also very keen on the safety angle, with the G40 having a full FIA-spec cage. In an outlook very reminiscent of Peter Wheeler's, Tomlinson is scathing of the feeling of many modern cars, saying that it's like 'driving with rubber gloves on and asking a computer to do something for you'.

'We do have ideas for road cars going forward,' he says, 'but I think it will always be a similar, very raw product in a unique space and we're never going to make loads of cars because we're protective of our customers. We see our customers as extended family and we're really protective of the cars' residuals. If you go down to London and see a DB9, you don't go, "Bloody hell, that's an Aston!" If you drive a Ginetta G40, people go, "What the hell's that?""

I ask about his brief but slightly tumultuous time as a director of the BRDC at the end of 2014, but for the first time in the interview he's very measured and reserved, simply saying, 'I came up with a restructuring plan for the business to help it out of where it was and take it to somewhere else.' And then he's off to do some driving in a G50 ahead of a test in Ginetta's new Nissan-powered LMP3 car. There are hopes that this might lead them on to building an LMP2 to the new 2017 regs, which could in turn see Tomlinson back on the grid at Le Mans. And even though he's 50 this year, there's something about him that means I wouldn't bet against another class win.

Below: Tomlinson admits that Ginetta earnestly deters customers from buying its flagship product

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BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT3

UNUSUAL

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SUSPECT

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

A 2.2-ton grand tourer might not be an obvious starting point for a new race car, but Bentley's Continental GT3 is already collecting trophies. So what is this unlikely gentleman's racer like to drive? Time to find out…

‘I’D BE HAPPY JUST TO LOOK
AT THIS WILD, RIDICULOUS AND
WONDERFUL MACHINE’

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LAST NIGHT WAS BRILLIANT. Over dinner, a group of us chatted to Bentley factory driver Andy Meyrick (pictured above) about the Continental GT3: its development, its relative strengths and weaknesses compared to other GT3 contenders, the talent of the Cumbrian M-Sport team who spearheaded the development of the car and their incredible work ethic forged in the harshest conditions. After keeping the likes of Colin McRae on the road amongst the dust and rocks of the Acropolis Rally, the deep snow of Sweden or the sludge of Rally GB, it seems nothing in the world of endurance racing can phase M-Sport. Meyrick says they are 'extraordinary' and their amazing ability to adapt to the speed and intensity of GT3 racing has been a large part of recent successes for the baddest and most unlikely racer in town.

But that was last night. When hearing about the Bentley's broad window of performance seemed so relevant ('Everyone says you need years to hone a setup at the Nürburgring. We turned up and qualified second with a sort of best guess'), and being told it was easy to drive quickly was a huge reassurance. Now that hardly seems to matter. The wind is rattling the pit garage doors at Anglesey Circuit and the Conti GT3 is slowly warming through.

Today I'll get to drive it but – and this sounds weird – I'm almost not bothered. I'd be happy to just look at this wild, ridiculous and wonderful machine and to listen to its twin-turbo V8 belching out deep, heavy-metal beats at idle. At first its sheer volume, the preposterous rear wing and the vast front splitter just drop your jaw, then soon after you're just smiling. Everyone is. What a fantastically exciting car just to be around.

It seems that excitement doesn't wear off with exposure. The team really are all smiles and they love watching the reaction the car gets from those looking at it with fresh eyes and hearing it with fresh ears. The truth is that all GT3-category cars are very, very special and so much more exciting than prototype racers: it's just easier to relate to a familiar shape that's been pulled and stretched and peppered with aero addenda than the half-spaceship, half-insectoid hybrid LMP1 cars. But the Bentley has something else – a fascinating mix of brutality and warped context – that makes it even more appealing. And its unconventional development and links to heroes of the rally stages just adds to an already heady cocktail. Plucky Brit, Bentley Boy glamour, outrageous looks, V8 thunder, built-in partnership with a rally team... I mean, the Continental GT3 couldn't be much cooler, could it?

The project was handled in partnership between Bentley Motorsport and M-Sport and was built in response to customer demand. Quite simply, a great number of owners felt Bentley should be racing, and the factory tended to agree. Brian Gush, Bentley's director of chassis, powertrain and motorsport, is a petrolhead to the core (there are tales of Lotus Twin Cam engine rebuilds in the kitchen and a spare in the loft) and was instrumental in the Speed 8 Le Mans victory in 2003. 'Let's just say we didn't need to be

asked twice,' he says of the call to return to motorsport. 'LMP1 was also considered, but it's a very big-budget affair these days. The next logical step was to look at GT3 with a road-car-based project, which really gets back to Bentley's roots anyway.' That was back in 2012, and the 'Concept Racer' was shown in September of the same year at the Paris motor show. The finished car made its debut in the Gulf 12 Hours in Abu Dhabi in December 2013.

So just what is a Continental GT3? Well, the basics are as you might expect. It utilises the 4-litre, twin-turbocharged V8 engine from the road-going GT V8 S, only repositioned to align with GT3 regulations – it sits 400mm further back in the chassis and 150mm lower. Derestricted, the engine would have over 600bhp, but for GT3 it's knocked back to more like 500bhp, although it revs to 8000rpm. Drive is sent to the rear wheels through a six-speed Xtrac sequential gearbox with pneumatic shifts. Braking is by Brembo cast-iron discs with six-piston callipers at the front and fours at the rear, and it runs 13 x 18-inch OZ Racing wheels. There's full racing ABS and an adjustable traction control system (phew). Suspension is by double wishbones and features four-way adjustable Öhlins dampers. And the weight? Less than 1300kg, which is remarkable when you consider a dealership-spec Continental GT V8 S weighs 2220kg.

The numbers are pretty extraordinary, then, and the Continental GT3 is now race-proven and a race winner. In only its second Blancpain Endurance Series event, at Silverstone in 2014, Meyrick, Guy Smith and Steven Kane won a thrilling race from a hard-charging McLaren MP4-12C GT3. Since then, it's been around the clock at Spa, won on US soil with Dyson Racing and finished fourth at the Bathurst 12 Hour in Australia. But right now I'm more concerned with the steering wheel. It has 12 buttons framed with red, green, yellow, blue, white and purple labels, four dials with as many as 12 individual settings on each… and just looking at it gives me a nauseous feeling. I also can't quite see over the top of it to read the dash display and see the shift lights clearly. Oh well, at least it's not raining.

As I stand on the pit wall, watching Meyrick warming the tyres and brakes, the Conti GT3 is at once inspirational and terrifying. It sounds so, *so* good. A big, unmistakable V8 noise, not soft and woofly but with a harsh metallic edge, and it hammers back towards us in great serrated spikes. Through the fast, never-ending right-hander opposite our vantage point it looks absolutely secure, but a while later, as it enters the pit straight, Meyrick gets a wicked spit of oversteer up on the kerbs. It suddenly looks snatchy and big and a bit unhappy. Well, I'll soon find out the truth, as I'm first in the car in about a minute's time.

Meyrick is cool as he hops out of the car but delivers a message that belies his demeanour. 'It's like there's no grip out there today. Spend the first lap accelerating and then braking hard to get tyre temp. It'll be really tricky at first but the car is fine, so enjoy it.' The carbonfibre door shuts with a thin rattle, I select first and then judder away rather inelegantly but without stalling. I always stall bloody race cars, so this is an encouraging start. And for once this taster is on a racetrack I actually know and love, so at least I can concentrate on the car and not whether to aim left or right.

'I'M BUOYED BY THE GT3'S AGILITY, CAPTIVATED BY THE ENGINE'S KILLER TORQUE'

Opposite page: GT3's form is very obviously adopted from the road car's; the racer is hundreds of kilos lighter, however. Carbonfibre panels, front splitter and rear wing all help keep weight down, as does being rear-drive only

Unlike with most tin-top racers, you don't sit so unnaturally low that you want to continually strain your neck upwards for a better view. That's a great relief, and reduces some of the intimidation factor. I pull out of the pitlane wary of the tyres having lost temperature but aware that I've only got a few laps. So I give it a sensible amount of throttle, the V8's note hardens and the GT3 lunges forward with the inertia-free feeling of a powerful Caterham. Wow, the engine is mighty. And, even from inside a crash helmet, that noise is fabulously naughty.

The hydraulically assisted steering is light and super-precise, adding to the bizarre and unexpectedly lightweight feeling of the whole experience. At the first long hairpin the GT3 understeers gently and I can feel the tyres are pretty cold, so I abandon any heroics and do just as Meyrick says – accelerating hard and then jumping on the brakes – for much of the first lap. Even so, I'm buoyed by the GT3's agility, the feel through the steering and the phenomenal brakes, and deeply captivated by the engine's combination of killer torque and then a willingness to rev out to 8000rpm. It might be restricted but you'd never guess. If only I could see the gear indicator a bit better and make sense of the shift lights that run up either side of the dash as well as more conventionally along the top. Snagging the limiter will be a pattern of my time in the GT3, but at least it sounds good as it bangs momentarily against an ignition cut.

The next couple of laps are just superb. Meyrick might be right about the surface being dusty from the high winds, but to me the grip levels feel extraordinary. The Conti brakes with such stability and once the tyres are warmer

Mobil 1
Mobil 1

BLANCPAIN
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PIRELLI
PIRELLI

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT3

Engine V8, 3993cc, twin-turbo
Power c500bhp @ n/a rpm
Torque c500lb ft @ n/a rpm
Transmission Six-speed sequential transaxle, rear-wheel drive, LSD
Suspension (front and rear) Double wishbones, coil springs, four-way adjustable dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes Cast iron front and rear, driver adjustable bias, ABS
Wheels OZ Racing 13 x 18in front and rear
Tyres 310/710 R18 front and rear
Weight (dry) <1300kg
Power-to-weight c391bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.0sec (est)
Top speed 180mph (est)
Price £368,000

evo rating ★★★★★

there's very little understeer. In fact, the car feels so neutral at first that I simply concentrate on nailing the braking and turn-in points and the rest of the corner seems to take care of itself. The traction control is brilliant. In truth, you barely feel it at all and, even when I get greedy with the throttle a couple of times, the way it works in unison with my own correction inputs is quite magical. Very few, if any, road car traction control systems work with such fluidity – if you step in to help with those, the electronics are wrong-footed and you lurch and wobble out of any oversteer moment as driver and electronics clash. Here, though, it just tidies up your excesses and makes you faster. Brilliant.

My other experience of a GT3 machine was the McLaren 650S, and they're very different cars. Initially the Bentley feels more reassuring; I think because of the driving position and the front-engine/rear-drive feel. But as you go a bit harder, I reckon the McLaren's amazing traction and the way you feel so close to the front wheels, and hence can position it so accurately, are an advantage. My laps in the 650S felt like I was getting closer to the car's limits, although some of that is because there's an awful lot less to hit at Blyton Park and I had pretty much as many laps as I wanted to build up to the car's limits. The thought of racing them wheel-to-wheel and trying to find an advantage in the tiny braking zones or through a fast corner when the aero is really working is unbelievably exciting.

By the final lap at Anglesey I'm pretty confident in the Conti. It really does have good balance and a feeling of invincibility wrought from that incredibly responsive and rippling power delivery, the brakes and the sheer stability mid-corner. I'm probably barely scratching the surface of what it can do, but here and there I get moments where it feels like it's working. A little understeer on the way into one of the hairpins, a little flare of oversteer on an off-camber exit… It feels terrific.

The surprise is the agility. I know it's a purpose-built racer, but somehow this shape and that badge staring back at me from the steering wheel leads to certain expectations my brain can't short-circuit. However, there's no sense of heft, just an instantaneousness that runs through everything, from the monster engine to the incredibly fast, smooth 'box and the flat, precise turn-in response.

All the Bentley Boys nostalgia, the romance of a small manufacturer and a rally team combining to take on the might of Audi, BMW and McLaren factory teams… It's great, but it doesn't matter. What matters is that the end result is compelling and competitive. Oh, and the noise. You need to hear it.

Right: GT3-R might share the same colour scheme and nomenclature as the race car, but it's not a natural track car. **Below:** it's brilliant on the road, however, with heightened handling and poise. Interior trim is a matter of taste...

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

On track in the road-going Continental GT3

PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE DRIVEN the road car first. With the extraordinary control and agility of the Continental GT3 racer fresh in the memory, the GT3-R road car feels soft and very heavy around the tight confines of Anglesey Circuit. In fact, 'GT3-R' – an evocative name that sounds so unerringly focused – seems almost entirely inappropriate. This is no trackday special, despite the lairy graphics and the ceramic brakes and the omission of rear seats.

A lap or two later, though, and more pertinently after a few miles on the roads nearby, I'm pretty smitten with the GT3-R. It definitely is not a 'GT3' in the mould of which we're used to, but it has an awful lot going for it. Not least the simply superb 4-litre twin-turbocharged V8 and eight-speed automatic gearbox. The former produces 572bhp and 518lb ft, but more importantly it has a crisp, urgent edge that elevates the car way beyond the 521bhp Continental V8 S. It feels so fast and keen to rev. The 'box plays its part too, shifting with a sweet punch.

Bentley has stripped 100kg from the standard car (no rear seats, titanium exhaust, a sprinkling of carbonfibre), but it's still a heavy beast. You feel that on the track, with plenty of body roll and some understeer if you try to bully it into turns. However, you can use the weight by braking into corners to swing the tail wide. The four-wheel-drive system then helps to pull you out of slides pretty neatly. It's not a power-oversteerer like, say, an Audi R8 can be, but there's enough adjustability to make it really enjoyable.

On the road, it's familiar Continental GT with a new edge. That it isn't transformed might disappoint a few, but look beyond the name and stickers to the car beneath and the performance, sense of occasion and the beautifully honed responses are hard to resist. It's big fun and the acres of Alcantara, carbonfibre and the splashes of green trim dotted around the cabin are gorgeously executed and show a knowing sense of humour, too. Just 300 will be made and it's a whole heap of money, at £237,500. See **evo** 203 for our full on-road review.

BENTLEY
CONTINENTAL GT3-R

Engine V8, 3993cc, twin-turbo
Power 572bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 518lb ft @ 1700rpm
Weight 2120kg
Power-to-weight 274bhp/ton
0-60mph 3.6sec (claimed)
Top speed 170mph (claimed)
Basic price £237,500

evo rating: ★★★★½

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by STUART GALLAGHER, NICK TROTT, ANTONY INGRAM & MATTHEW HAYWARD

*Some swear by them, others swear at them. Either way, warranties are a key factor when buying a performance car. **evo** explores the available options and picks some superb warranted sports cars*

FAST, FUN & UNDER WARRANTY

IF YOU BOUGHT A SPORTS CAR IN THE 1960s, you could almost guarantee that it would need an engine rebuild at 60,000 miles. Today, that mileage is covered by a typical factory warranty and most cars will reach 200,000 miles before such major work is required.

However, while cars are now more durable, they are also dramatically more complex, meaning repairs can be painfully expensive. Take a Porsche 911: you'd perhaps have a stab at tracing a fault and fixing it with a 25-year-old 911, but would you dare attempt it with a modern one?

For many, a warranty is a deciding factor when buying a used car. And as our guide demonstrates, this doesn't mean you can't consider some proper **evo** cars.

We've grouped cars into six classes and provided four examples in each. This logic is based on a potential buyer having a fixed budget with which to buy a certain type of car and debating whether to buy a more exotic or exciting older car (with expensive or expiring warranty options) or a newer car with a longer warranty option.

Of course, what we're talking about here is peace of mind and choice. As with everything, though, it's not quite that simple. Read on…

KEY & INFO

Servicing

There are simply too many variables involved to include servicing in the price tables. However, servicing should be considered when choosing a car, because your warranty options can be affected by where/when a car has been serviced.

Tyres

Here we're assuming that you'll buy a full set in your first year, half a set (fronts for front-drivers, rears for rear- and all-wheel-drivers) the next year and a full set in the third year. Prices refer to original equipment tyres where possible.

Insurance

We've had to make some assumptions here with regards to driver age and vehicle mileage, but the important thing is that vehicles in each class use the same criteria. Discrepancies are due to personal circumstances. All quotes fully comp.

Warranty

Prices are sourced either from manufacturers' extended schemes or third-party warranty providers. As a rule, we've quoted the cheapest price. However, we recommend that you always obtain a quote from both sources and check car eligibility.

Is it sensible financially?

Do you buy cars with your head or your heart? This scale uses the stated costs to help you make a decision. We have intentionally discounted depreciation as there are too many other variables to consider, but as a rule, older cars have already suffered their worst depreciation.

How good is it to drive?

The most important factor. We have used the **evo** star ratings from the Database, plus feedback from our road testers, as a guide. However, the sliding scale is broader than our star ratings scale in order to illustrate a clearer differentiation between the cars featured.

How desirable is it?

We've all experienced that *total* lust for a car. A lust that erases all practical thoughts and leads you into a potentially ruinous financial situation. But hey, what's the worst that could happen? This scale reflects that lust – it's subjective, but it's still important.

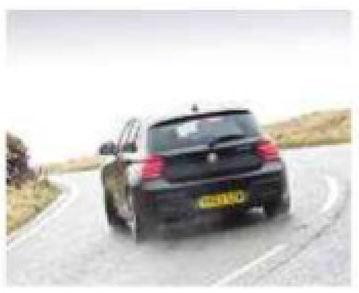
£10,000
Superminis

	2011 *Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup*			2012 *Mini Cooper S*			2013 *Renaultsport Twingo 133*			2014 *Suzuki Swift Sport*		
Year of ownership	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Tyres	*£354*	*£177*	*£354*	*£376*	*£188*	*£376*	*£384*	*£192*	*£384*	*£398*	*£199*	*£398*
Insurance*	*£518*	*£518*	*£518*	*£687*	*£687*	*£687*	*£388*	*£388*	*£388*	*£307*	*£307*	*£307*
Warranty ****	*£378*	*£378*	*£378*	*£279*	*£279*	*£279*	*£0*	*£0*	*£402*	*£0*	*£0*	*£321*
Total	*£1250*	*£1073*	*£1250*	*£1342*	*£1154*	*£1342*	*£772*	*£580*	*£1174*	*£705*	*£506*	*£1026*

When it comes to sporting superminis, youth is key. The Swift Sport and Twingo 133 are a step down from both the Cooper S and Clio 200 in terms of pace, but they're significantly cheaper to run as a result. Each has two years of manufacturer warranty left, saving a major used-car cost. Not only that, but the Suzuki and the Twingo are considerably cheaper to insure for our 25-year-old driver.

** Insurance quotes based on 25-year-old male, driving 20,000 miles a year, on-street parking, five years no-claims*
*** Renault and Mini warranty illustrations based on purchasing a three-year extended warranty but budgeting over three years*

£20,000
Hot hatches

	2011 *Ford Focus RS Mk2*			2012 *BMW M135i*			2013 *VW Golf GTI Mk7*			2014 *Renaultsport Mégane 265*		
												
Year of ownership	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Tyres	*£525*	*£262*	*£525*	*£448*	*£266*	*£448*	*£342*	*£171*	*£342*	*£468*	*£234*	*£468*
Insurance*	*£466*	*£466*	*£466*	*£393*	*£393*	*£393*	*£304*	*£304*	*£304*	*£296*	*£296*	*£296*
Warranty**	*£556*	*£556*	*£556*	*£371*	*£371*	*£371*	*£0*	*£500*	*£500*	*£0*	*£0*	*£0*
Total	*£1547*	*£1294*	*£1547*	*£1212*	*£1030*	*£1212*	*£646*	*£975*	*£1146*	*£764*	*£764*	*£764*

The Mégane 265 is one of the best to drive and least expensive hot hatches to run, especially as 2014 cars will benefit from a four-year factory warranty. Insurance isn't bad either. Of the remainder, the BMW continues to offer good value as it ages, while the Ford belies its humble badge with expensive tyres and high insurance costs. But what price a warbling five-pot soundtrack? The Golf, as ever, is an excellent all-rounder.

** Insurance quotes based on 30-year-old male, driving 17,500 miles a year, driveway parking, seven years no-claims*
*** Ford, BMW and VW warranty illustrations based on purchasing a multi-year extended warranty but budgeting over the term*

ON WARRANTIES...

Dean Price
Mini Cooper S

The standard factory warranty on Dean's Cooper S expires this year and he has received a letter from Mini asking him if he'd like to extend the term.
'I'm in two minds,' explains Dean. 'The car has generally been reliable, but as I'm going to keep it, I'm conscious that I could have some big bills on the horizon. If I do go down the warranty route, I'm likely to stick with Mini's plan because repairs will only be undertaken with genuine Mini parts and mechanics.'
Like many, though, Dean says that 'the price has to be right', otherwise he'll look closely at other warranty providers.

ON WARRANTIES...

Simon Greenway
BMW M135i

Simon has claimed using his factory warranty for a new heater fan, corroded exhaust tips and a turbo pipe.
'I've also had the brake wear sensors reset and the alloy wheels are of slightly questionable strength – three have buckled already.
I wouldn't run the car without a warranty. The niggles cost a few quid and a serious engine or gearbox issue would be a chunk of its overall value.
I intend to sell it before the three-year warranty expires, but if I'd been offered a well-priced four- or five-year warranty from new, I'd have given it serious consideration with a view to keeping the car for longer.'

In detail

USED-CAR WARRANTIES

Keep the money in the bank? Too many exclusions and conditions? Are warranties really worth the cost? There are a number of valid questions surrounding used-car warranties, and an even greater number of forum horror stories. What is clear is that you need to do your homework and proceed with caution – in short, not all warranty providers are the same.

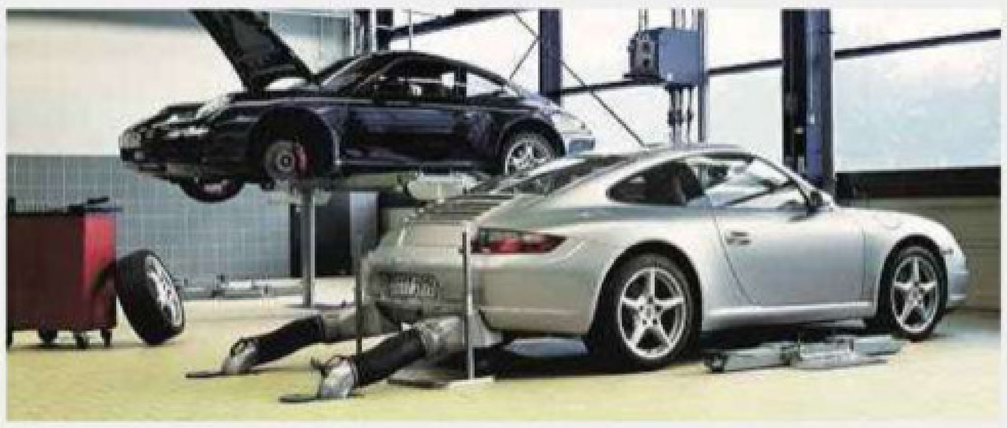
Before you commit to a used-car warranty, don't succumb to pressure. A salesman, either at a dealership or on the phone, will work to sign you up as soon as possible. We advise that you decline and then settle down for an hour or two online, scouring warranty provider websites and reading their T&Cs in detail. You'll also need to research repair costs for major items and then be honest with yourself about whether you can afford those repairs.

If you decide that peace of mind is indeed the way forward, there are certain things to be aware of. Be wary of the phrase 'wear and tear'. Some providers have degrees of wear and tear, from 'premature' to 'normal'. It's the latter that's of most concern – after all, has anyone ever truly defined 'normal' wear and tear?

Likewise, scour every line of the 'insured items' list and, if in doubt, ask for clarification in writing. For instance, you may not be covered for failure of an insured part if that failure was caused by a non-insured part – the 'for the want of a nail' scenario.

We recommend that you discuss the likelihood of this circumstance, in relation to your car, with a specialist repairer or dealer. You'll be amazed at their knowledge and experience of warranties.

With regards to labour costs, you may be given independent or main-dealer options. Don't assume that ticking the main-dealer-repair option will increase your policy premium, because in many cases the cost is the same. Also, relating to labour, take note of any diagnostic test fees. Are these fully covered or seen as being 'reasonable' costs?



The claims limit is another area to check. You may be offered the full value of the vehicle or a decreasing scale of values as the car ages. Also, take note of the maximum mileage at the proposed start date – you may be able to afford a 120,000-mile Audi RS6 but you may not find a warranty provider prepared to cover it.

You may be asked to volunteer a 'contribution' to a claim. Like insurance, some warranty providers will reduce your premium in relation to your excess contribution, which is generally a value up to £1000. Likewise, a single repair cost bracket is often offered, usually spanning £500 to £10,000.

Using a 2011 Ford Focus RS as an example, if you fix the single repair limit at £5000 (which will cover most major mechanical failures) but offer only a £50 contribution, your policy is likely to cost £175 per year more than if you volunteer a £1000 contribution.

ON WARRANTIES...

Russell Holdaway

Lotus Evora

'It's been amazing,' says Russell. 'The highlight being a road-trip to Sienna, in Italy. The car didn't skip a beat. I've had a few warranty claims, though – all dealt with by the dealer, Bell and Colvill.' The claims have included a repainted roof, due to a paint defect, new gear cables, a new passenger door release and 'a few other niggly bits'. The paint defect was noticed by the dealer at the end of the factory warranty period and fixed by Lotus for free. Russell has not bought a third-party warranty for his Evora. 'I just assume they will wriggle out of claims,' he says.

£30,000

Four-seat coupes

	2011 *Lotus Evora*			2012 *BMW M3*			2013 *Audi S5*			2014 *Peugeot RCZ R*		
Year of ownership	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Tyres	£412	£255	£412	£693	£371	£693	£778	£389	£778	£615	£308	£615
Insurance*	£587	£587	£587	£550	£550	£550	£430	£430	£430	£242	£242	£242
Warranty**	£767	£767	£767	£0	£571	£571	£0	£720	£720	£0	£0	£349
Total	£1766	£1609	£1766	£1243	£1492	£1814	£1208	£1512	£1901	£857	£550	£1206

Ignore the badge snobs, the RCZ R is well worth considering – it scored highly in our coupe group test in **evo** 209. It does stretch the definition of a four-seater, though. The M3 is seriously tempting. Here's a proper M-car with a searing naturally aspirated V8, reasonable insurance costs and a year's approved used warranty included, but only if you buy from a main dealer. And the Lotus? Specialist servicing isn't too scary and the Toyota engine keeps warranty costs low. It should be light on tyres and insurance.

** Insurance quotes based on 35-year-old male, driving 15,000 miles a year, driveway parking, ten years no-claims*
*** Second and third year BMW warranty illustration based on purchasing a two-year extended warranty and budgeting over two years. The Audi cost is based on purchasing a two-year extended warranty and budgeting over two years*

£45,000

Saloons

	2011 *Maserati Quattroporte*			2012 *BMW M5*			2013 *Mercedes C63 AMG Estate*			2014 *Jaguar XFR*		
Year of ownership	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Tyres	£828	£455	£828	£898	£443	£898	£582	£341	£582	£670	£352	£670
Insurance*	£587	£587	£587	£550	£550	£550	£411	£411	£411	£468	£468	£468
Warranty**	£1632	£1632	£1632	£971	£971	£971	£0	£974	£974	£0	£0	£767
Total	£3047	£2674	£3047	£2419	£1964	£2419	£993	£1726	£1967	£1138	£820	£1905

This is where costs really stack up. You can buy these cars for £45,000, but their complexity means higher running costs. The XFR shows the benefits of buying a newer car, with a useful two-year approved used warranty scheme if you buy from a main dealer. However, extended or third-party warranties are well worth the money at this point – mechanical repairs can be very high on all these cars.

** Insurance quotes based on 40-year-old male, driving 20,000 miles a year, driveway parking, ten years no-claims*
*** Maserati and BMW warranty illustrations based on purchasing a three-year extended warranty and budgeting over three years*

£60,000

Sports cars

	2011 *Audi R8*			2012 *Aston Martin V8 Vantage*			2013 *Porsche 911 Carrera*			2014 *Nissan GT-R*		
Year of ownership	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Tyres	£702	£463	£702	£680	£360	£680	£719	£398	£719	£1046	£572	£1046
Insurance*	£944	£944	£944	£487	£487	£487	£451	£451	£451	£536	£536	£536
Warranty**	£0	£1632	£1632	£1632	£1632	£1632	£981	£981	£981	£0	£0	£2467
Total	£1646	£3039	£3278	£2799	£2479	£2799	£2151	£1830	£2151	£1582	£1108	£4049

Buy a 2011 Audi R8 from an official dealer and you'll get a year's warranty. But look at the car's insurance costs compared with the others – they are supercar-steep. Spending £2467 a year on a GT-R warranty seems excessive until you realise that a gearbox costs more than £9000. Interestingly, if you add up the costs over a full three-year ownership term, the running costs are very similar.

** Insurance quotes based on 45-year-old male, driving 15,000 miles a year, car garaged, ten years no-claims*
*** Factory warranty on 2013 Porsche 911 Carrera only extended to two – not three – years, hence warranty cost quoted from year one*

Insurance

A recent AA report stated that the average quoted premium for a typical annual comprehensive car insurance policy decreased by 5.8% during the past year.

However, the report also warned that this trend won't continue and premiums will increase next year.

A combination of shopping around and keeping your licence clean will, hopefully, negate the likely increase. This is why the stated insurance costs in this feature are the same from year one to three.

ON WARRANTIES...

Mark Walton

Mercedes C63 AMG 507

Mark made a claim on his standard Mercedes factory warranty at 12,000 miles, when the centre console started rattling.

'It was resolved quickly at the first attempt,' he explains. However, like many owners of cars younger than three-years-old, he did not take the offer of a Mercedes extended warranty because he didn't know how long he'd keep his car. Previous experience of a third-party warranty provider had also been disappointing.

'Every claim was a challenge,' he says, and adds that he would need convincing before buying another.

ON WARRANTIES...

Simon George

Lamborghini Gallardo (2004)

As the co-owner of 6th Gear Experience, Simon runs five Gallardos – and they get used *hard*. He's also a supercar owner and, for personal use, recommends warranties. 'For peace of mind, especially on an exotic, it's a no-brainer. I know a lot of Gallardo owners and they warrant their cars. It comes down to doing your research. If you know your Gallardos, you know that at 50,000-60,000 miles, piston rings and diffs can go. That's a minimum £11,000 repair. So, if you're thinking of buying a Gallardo around that mileage, why wouldn't you warrant it? The thing is, once fixed they are robust.'

£100,000

Supercars

	2011 *Lamborghini Gallardo*			2012 *Mercedes C63 AMG Black*			2013 *Bentley Continental GT*			2014 *Porsche 911 Turbo*		
Year of ownership	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Tyres	*£836*	*£457*	*£836*	*£817*	*£380*	*£817*	*£668*	*£334*	*£668*	*£837*	*£434*	*£837*
Insurance*	*£1187*	*£1187*	*£1187*	*£944*	*£944*	*£944*	*£1065*	*£1065*	*£1065*	*£1180*	*£1180*	*£1180*
Warranty**	*£2156*	*£2156*	*£2156*	*£974*	*£974*	*£974*	*£0*	*£1745*	*£1745*	*£0*	*£0*	*£1219*
Total	*£4179*	*£3800*	*£4179*	*£2735*	*£2298*	*£2735*	*£1733*	*£3144*	*£3478*	*£2017*	*£1614*	*£3236*

Anyone spending £100,000 on a used performance car shouldn't be under any illusions of experiencing affordable running costs, but some of these cars still throw up surprises. Two years of remaining warranty should take the stress out of 911 Turbo ownership. Little will excite more than the Lamborghini, but a wise owner would invest in a warranty – that's expensive, but less so than replacing five-figure components. Year one 2013 Bentley costs are as low as for a 2011 Evora, but rise dramatically after the factory warranty expires.

** Insurance quotes based on 50-year-old male, driving 10,000 miles a year, car garaged, ten years no-claims*
*** All warranty illustrations based on purchasing a multi-year extended warranty and costing over the term*

In detail

MANUFACTURER WARRANTIES

There is a solution to protecting your **evo** car other than buying a third-party warranty, which is to stay within the manufacturer's approved warranty scheme.

However, as with most scenarios that involve a main dealer, there are a few cost considerations and practicalities to take into account.

Manufacturer new-car warranty terms are becoming ever longer and more comprehensive, but in order to benefit from their protection, you do need to follow strict criteria when it comes to servicing and the use of replacement parts.

The manufacturers we are dealing with here provide an approved used warranty on cars that are sold through their approved used dealer network or have been maintained in accordance with manufacturer guidelines. Lotus is the only one that doesn't offer a warranty on its approved used cars. However, its three-year, unlimited-mileage warranty provided with every new car is transferable to the next owner.

By opting for a manufacturer-backed warranty, you are buying into similar levels of reassurance as you are when buying a new car. Manufacturer schemes typically run for a year, although an exception is Ferrari, which offers a two-year warranty. Most provide unlimited-mileage cover, with a few imposing a 100,000-mile restriction. Renault, for example, allows you to extend the warranty on a car that's up to ten years old, although it can't exceed 100,000 miles.

With a manufacturer's warranty, you're insured against all major factory-fitted mechanical and electrical components failing, with general wear-and-tear items excluded. This is where you need to clearly identify what is and isn't covered. For example, Audi will cover brake systems failing, but not pad and disc wear.

There are, of course, a number of terms and conditions that manufacturers insist upon if you take out cover. The car must be serviced and maintained to their recommended schedule, although an EU ruling means owners are no longer tied to main dealers to have work done. However, approved manufacturer parts must be used. Some manufacturers have other caveats in place, such as Porsche, which requires that you have your car inspected by one of its technicians prior to a warranty being supplied. Renault will only supply a warranty if there has been no break in cover.

Many manufacturers also cover overseas repairs and provide breakdown cover during the warranty period, too. In the case of Aston Martin, its warranty even covers owners taking part in its organised driving events, which include trackdays.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most revealing facets of this article are the quotes from owners of performance cars. Take Simon George, for instance. Few people know more about running exotic cars than Simon, and his comments about warranting the more expensive cars being a 'no-brainer' cannot be ignored.

Saying that, as Mark Walton demonstrates, one bad experience can leave a lasting impression, and Russell Holdaway's comment that he expects providers to 'wriggle out of claims' suggests that there's a perception issue that needs to be tackled.

What is clear is that a warranty can generate sufficient peace of mind to justify the purchase of an extremely exciting car – but only if you go in with your eyes wide open.

We suggest that you arm yourself with knowledge – knowledge of parts prices, likely failures (and when they'll occur) and specific car history, plus an absolutely frank assessment of what you can or can't afford, should the worst happen. Only then should you make a decision on what's best for you.

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by RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ASTON PARROTT

CIVIC PRIDE

While European hot hatches from the '80s and '90s continue to grow in stature – and value – the original, Japan-only Honda Civic Type R remains criminally overlooked. Prepare to discover what you've been missing…

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TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MAKES THE EK9 Civic Type R so special, you need two pieces of information: 182 (bhp) and 1.595 (litres of displacement). In isolation, those figures mean nothing, but divide the former by the latter and you get 114 – a figure that for years placed this humble Honda hatchback above all but the most exotic supercars.

Specific output is one of the more esoteric measures of a car's performance. Where basic acceleration times win beer-fuelled arguments in pubs and power- or torque-to-weight ratios provide a sense of what squeezing the throttle will do to your internal organs, specific output is an intimate character reference of the engine itself. When that engine is naturally aspirated, anything over 100bhp per litre is pretty special, and anything beyond 110 the preserve of exotica. The EK9's 114 places it on a par with precious metal such as Ferrari's 430 Scuderia. In fact, it's only recently that it has been significantly surpassed by the likes of the 458 Italia and Porsche GT3 RS 4.0.

This number says a lot about the remarkable nature of the EK9's engine, but it also offers a window to Honda's mindset in the late '90s. Though in hiatus between spells as an engine supplier in Formula 1, the Japanese

manufacturer was still riding high after a magical period in which Honda-powered teams (Williams and McLaren) secured five consecutive Formula 1 constructors' titles and five consecutive drivers' championships, including Ayrton Senna's three. Clearly, when it came to power, reliability and efficiency, Honda's screaming V12 and V10 Formula 1 motors reigned supreme.

Honda was – and still is – renowned for the transfer of technology from its motorsport programmes (on both two and four wheels) into its series production cars. No surprise, then, that the pursuit of high specific outputs in its road-going sports cars became something of an obsession. The acronym 'VTEC' soon became synonymous with screaming, small-capacity engines. In the UK, our first official exposure to Honda's most extreme four-pots was the DC2 Integra Type R in 1996. This featured a 1.8-litre four-cylinder engine good for 187bhp – still an extraordinary figure for the day – but we were denied the banshee-spec EK9 Civic, which arrived in Japan the year after.

A few did make it to the UK, though. Indeed, I can recall driving one for a *Performance Car* magazine group test in 1998. One of the rivals was a Renault 5 GT Turbo Raider. A fine car, but one that mustered 118bhp from a turbocharged, 1.4-litre engine that still featured pushrods and a carburettor. I'm not sure what a Honda engineer would have made of the Renault engine – an anchor, most probably – but in pure engineering terms the comparison was akin to that of a musket and a machine gun.

Fast-forward almost two decades and the EK9 remains something of a mythical beast. There's still only a handful in the UK – the owners' forum reckons no more than 150, with fewer on the road – and while classic European hatches such as the Peugeot 205 GTI, VW Golf GTI and, yes, the R5 GT Turbo have become deities, the original Civic Type R only enjoys cult status amongst the true cognoscenti.

All of which makes the sight of Alex Williams' immaculate example all the more special. Imported from Japan after an exhaustive search, this particular car is a real unicorn,

'There's a pared-back simplicity to the EK9 Civic's styling that's hugely appealing'

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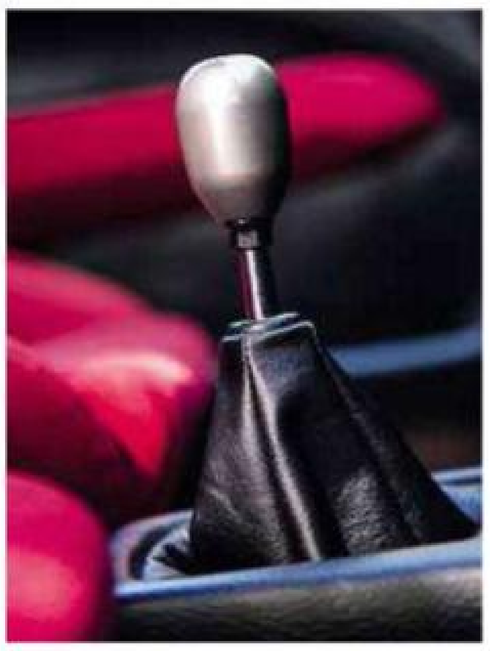

Left (clockwise from top): red cam cover is a Type R signature; it's taken nearly two decades for other NA engines to rev this high; titanium gearknobs have fetched up to £500 on the black market after being filched off Japanese cars waiting for export

being a one-owner car with modest mileage and next to no modifications. It looks stunning.

I can't say I've ever given the styling of this particular era of Civic much consideration or credit, but there's a pared-back simplicity to the EK9 that's hugely appealing. Yes, the dazzling Championship White paint makes a statement, not to mention sets the Type R apart from your common or garden, granny-spec Civic, but the essential purity of the shape and the lack of fuss is refreshing for such a high-performance car. With small (15-inch) wheels shod with modest rubber, a single exhaust pipe, a subtle rear wing, no diffuser and a bare minimum of intakes, it's the antithesis of its new, wing-festooned descendent. It's tiny, too, looking like an eight-tenths scale model in 2015 traffic.

The EK9 is a little more extrovert inside, thanks to a pair of blood-red Recaros and matching scarlet door card inserts, which contrast brilliantly against the otherwise black interior. The dash and instruments are clear and simple. There's a smattering of fake carbonfibre trim, but it's not offensive. Besides, the lovely, genuine titanium gearknob more than compensates for any well-intentioned fakery, although unscrupulous individuals have ensured that not all EK9s have one…

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Another EK9 signature is the tacho, with a dial that winds all the way round to a heady 10,000rpm. The bright yellow needle and chunky white-on-black typeface have a race car's simplicity, while the hatched red zone marking the red line and beyond offers an explicit hint of the hardcore excitement to come. The Recaros are pretty much perfect; plump enough to offer genuine comfort, but supportive enough to hold you snugly in place behind the simple, fat-rimmed steering wheel.

Slide the key into the ignition, give it a twist (no gimmicky start button here) and the starter motor spins the engine into life. Alex has fitted a full Spoon exhaust and induction system, which is high-quality kit but makes for a raucous noise, even at idle. That titanium gearknob is brilliantly tactile – cool and smooth to the touch, and perfectly weighted so the lever navigates the precise gate and slots into first with a clean, satisfying action. Considering the engine revs to the skies, you don't need to make any allowances when pulling away, just feed in the clutch and away you go.

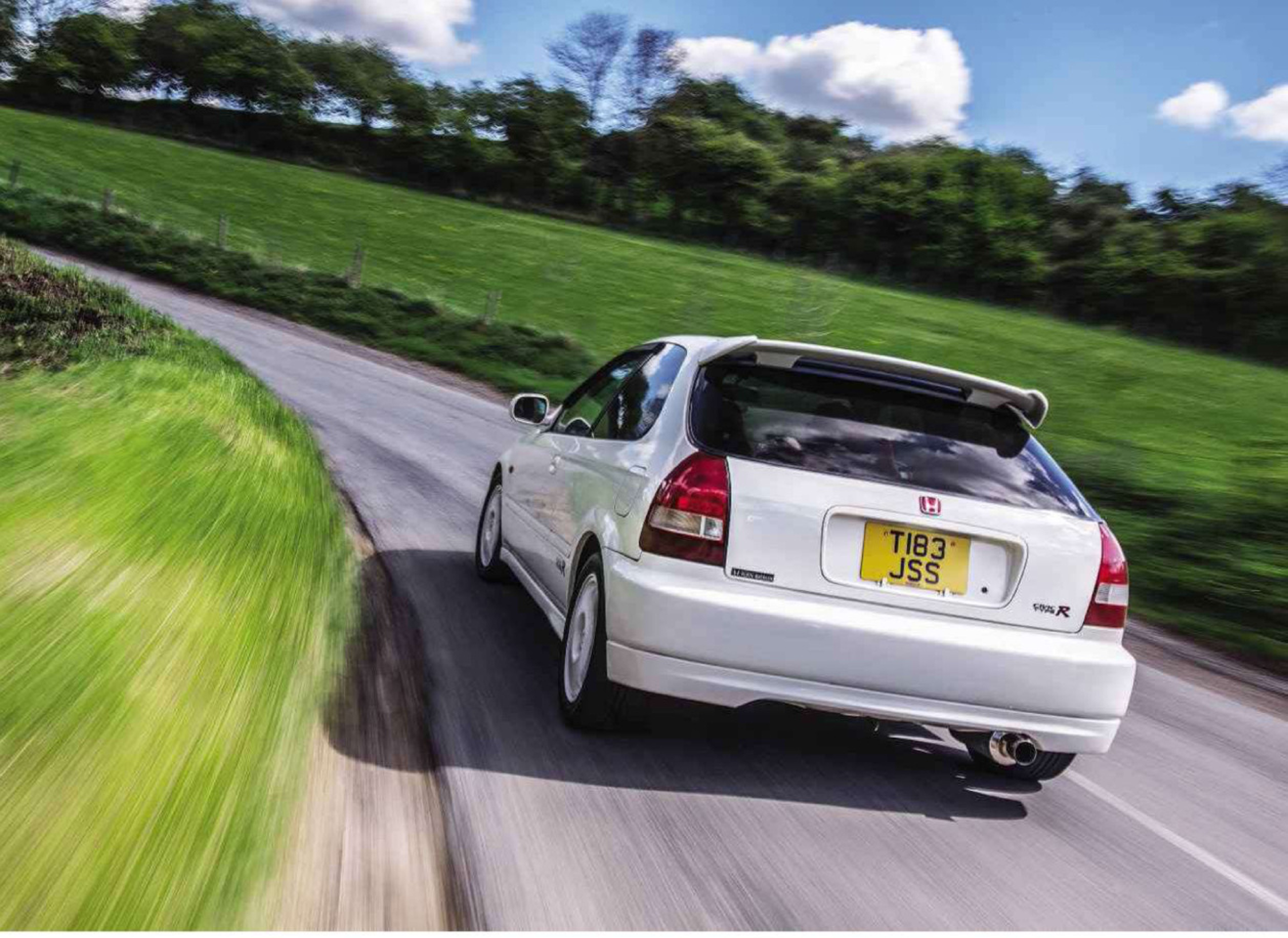
After all the anticipation, the first few miles in the EK9 are a bit bemusing. Here is a car with an engine every bit as special as one you'd find in the most focused Italian or German road-racer, yet once you get beyond the exhaust noise of this particular car, the docility and – dare I say it? – normality of the EK9 make you wonder if history has overlooked it for a reason. Similarly, where a European hot hatch of the same or earlier vintage would immerse you in feedback and connect you directly to the road through hands and buttocks, the Civic is a bit of a cold fish. The steering is a bit numb, the damping a little brittle. None of it is very inspiring.

So you push the throttle a bit harder in second gear. Still nothing much happens. You might have heard racing drivers say that time slows down during a crash or near-miss. Well, much the same is true of accelerating in an EK9 Civic. Drive as you would in any other hot hatch and that natty yellow tacho needle creeps round the dial as though slogging through treacle. You can almost hear the VTEC system snoring as rust begins to form on the dormant cam lobes – 3000, 4000, 5000rpm come and go, yet still the Civic slumbers. This is ridiculous. Then, as the needle nudges beyond 6000rpm – the stage where most hot hatches have already given their best – the EK9 channels its inner Ayrton and does something rather extraordinary.

The switch-like transition in the VTEC's power delivery has become something of a motoring cliché, but I defy anyone not to be amazed by its Jekyll and Hyde duality. If anything, time – and the softening effect of turbocharging – has only served to intensify the experience. At first you can't quite believe what you're hearing or feeling, so you back-off, let the revs drop below 6000rpm, then gas it again just so you can hear its other-worldly howl. What you still don't fully appreciate at this stage is just how much the motor has to give. In fact, it's not even hit its stride.

Even typing this seems absurd, but this mad, wonderful motor – code number B16B – develops its maximum power just 200rpm shy

Bottom left: EK9's driving position is good; low waistline means you have great visibility and a tangible sense of the car's compact size. **Bottom right:** wheels are a modest 15 inches in diameter



‘You need to drive this Type R like you want to blow the engine to smithereens’

of its 8400rpm limiter. Maximum torque – all 118lb ft of it – comes at 7500rpm. No wonder it feels like nothing happens below 6000rpm! To get the best from it, therefore, you need to drive it like you want to blow it to smithereens and keep your right foot pinned for that final, manic assault on the red line. Show it a moment’s mercy or short-shift even a few hundred revs shy of 8200rpm and, rather like a soufflé taken from the oven too soon, the towering, triumphant crescendo falls flat as a pancake.

I can distinctly remember it was enough to make me wince when driving that box-fresh EK9 back in 1998. Now, in a privately owned example with the best part of two decades and 80,000 miles beneath its wheels, working this pride and joy so hard seems like a recipe for disaster, yet it feels fresh as the day it left the factory. Forget titanium, this B16B feels like it has internals forged from Valyrian steel.

The difference between driving the EK9 and *driving* it is startling. Wind it right up through the gears and it’s a totally different experience, the revs always remaining on the hot side of the cam with each upshift. It’s a glorious, exuberant and invigorating process. One that leaves you marvelling at the smoothness and extraordinarily fine tolerances the engine must be engineered to, and revelling in the sharpness and aggression. It does the numbers, too, hitting 60mph from a standstill in just 5.7 seconds – a figure we recorded back in that *Performance Car* test.

There’s a danger all this talk of stratospheric revs and wafer-thin powerbands portrays the EK9 as a one-dimensional science experiment, but just as the engine explodes into life when you make the effort, so the rest of the car begins to shine. The damping settles with speed, feeling just pliant enough but with an overriding sense of sharpness that matches the crispness of the powertrain. Life simmers through the steering, too. It’s never talkative in the manner of a 205’s or R5’s, but the precision and rate of response is ideal.

The biggest and most pleasant surprise is the EK9’s agility and adjustability through corners. Medium-speed curves are especially

enjoyable. Spot your braking, heel-and-toe into third and get it set for turn-in and you can really carry some speed. There's plenty of bite from the front end, but not so much that the tail can't live with the initial direction change. Get back on the power and you feel the lateral load increase, then fade ever so slightly as you reach the limit of the tyres. Ease back on the throttle and you'll feel the nose tighten its line and the tail slip into oversteer – quickly at first, but progressively enough that you intuitively apply corrective lock to restore balance. Once you learn to trust it, this Civic mirrors the dynamics of that other great Type R, the DC2 Integra.

With so little torque to deal with, the front end doesn't pull and tug at the steering wheel on the way out of tighter corners. And thanks to the limited-slip differential, the EK9 always puts what muscle it does possess cleanly into the tarmac. The brakes on this particular car have a little too much initial pedal travel, but the response and stopping power seems well matched to the performance. Of course, the engine is the star, but the road-holding and handling are expertly blended and complete the package perfectly. This is one of those rare cars that's approachable and transparent, but continues to reveal fresh layers of ability and finesse as you spend more time with it. This is a car with which you could really forge a bond.

There's a lot of snobbery that surrounds classic, collectible hot hatchbacks. A lot of hype, too. I love 205s and 106s and 5 GT Turbos, but great though they are, in pure engineering terms this EK9 is in a different league. Yes, its dedication to VTEC means it's fundamentally flawed unless you can cane its socks off, but that single-mindedness is also where its brilliance lies. That there are steely strands of NSX in its attitude, delivery and understated style makes the fact you can get a good one for around £8000 even more of a temptation.

The Far East might not be the cultural or spiritual home of the hot hatch, but the EK9 deserves to be considered amongst the best and most exciting of the breed; a connoisseurs' car, rightly revered by those lucky enough to have driven it, but largely ignored, overlooked or underestimated by the majority who haven't.

The new Civic Type R will undoubtedly be a very different machine, but if it can capture the EK9's individuality and reinvent its intensity for a new, turbocharged age, Honda will have a hero to fight Europe's best.

Thanks to Alex Williams for providing his car for this feature. For more information on the EK9 Honda Civic Type R, visit www.ek9.org

'This is a car with which you could really forge a bond'

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Fast Fleet

*From GTI to STI, **evo**'s Fast Fleet is the biggest and most comprehensive long-term section in the business. This month…*

VW GOLF GTI
by Aston Parrott
Staff photographer NEW

Slammed, widened and looking like it just left Wörthersee, Parrott's Germanic pride and joy makes its Fast Fleet debut

FORD FIESTA ST
by Henry Catchpole
Features editor

Catchpole reflects on a schlep to Geneva in his junior hot hatch. Was it too much to ask of a back-road specialist?

RENAULT CLIO 182
by Sam Sheehan
Staff writer

Choice modifications have Sheehan's defiantly reliable Clio 182 purring from both ends as it approaches 120,000 miles

McLAREN 12C SPIDER
by SSO
Contributor

Is using a 12C as a daily driver something to cause endless anxiety or a surprisingly effortless scenario?

RENAULT MÉGANE
by Richard Meaden
Contributing editor

Warmer road temperatures play to the Mégane's strengths, says Meaden, who can't be trusted with wheels, it seems

PORSCHE 996
by Jethro Bovingdon
Contributing editor

Bovingdon explains why a 996 Porsche might just be the best balance of performance and fun at the best price right now

RANGE ROVER SPORT
by Dan Prosser
Road test editor

Perhaps more suitable for the job than Catchpole's Fiesta, the big Rangie plays its part in a rapid Alpine getaway

MAZDA MX-5
by Antony Ingram
Staff writer NEW

MX-5 connoisseur Ingram delves into ownership not for the first time in his relatively short driving career

SUBARU WRX STI
by Stuart Gallagher
Managing editor

Gallagher identifies the Scooby's performance sweet spot, but this is still a sports saloon with a lot to prove

KIA PROCEED GT
by Aston Parrott
Staff photographer

Parrott's time with the Kia is drawing to an end, but not before it impresses him with another everyday masterclass

LANCIA INTEGRALE
by Richard Lane
Subeditor

A major mechanical malady is offset somewhat by the arrival of a new exhaust. Our Integrale is now impossible to miss…

AUDI S1
by Jethro Bovingdon
Contributing editor

Finally on track and mixing it with automotive royalty, does the S1 buck the trend of Audis that are inert at the limit?

SKODA OCTAVIA vRS
by Dean Smith
Contributing photographer

Diesel and the thrill of driving? If it's the Skoda Octavia vRS you're considering, let Smith clear a few things up…

BMW 2002
by Will Beaumont
Designer

Standard or modified? It's a finely balanced blend of both for Beaumont, as his classic Beemer's bodywork gets tidied

BMW M4
by Nick Trott
Editor

The M4 provides ample evidence that performance is meaningless if it isn't accessible on public roads

Also on the evo fleet:
Ferrari 458 Italia, Ford Escort RS2000, Ford Focus RS, Lamborghini Murciélago, Ferrari Scuderia Spider 16M, Nissan GT-R, Toyota Celica GT-Four WRC, Maserati GranCabrio Sport, SEAT Leon Cupra 280, Ferrari F40

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water-stained fog lights, and it was riding dramatically lower than standard. For the next 15 minutes I was mesmerised, watching through the Defender's back window as this ratty looking, boxy hot hatch tackled tight corners confidently before it finally took a different route.

Later that day, after spending hours walking around the museum, I had a yearning. I longed for the pure mechanical simplicity of driving. No electric steering, no ABS and no 'auto' settings. I wanted a car that could provide me with some old-school fun, and that Mk2 I'd seen was now at the top of my hit list.

The next day I put my Audi A3 Sport up for sale and after two months of searching I became the proud owner of the car you see here, a 1992 Tornado Red Mk2 Golf GTI 16-valve. Over the years I've spent countless hours and money replacing, cleaning and fixing parts so that I could get the car looking and running *exactly* how I want it.

My Mk2 has always been used all year round, from daily errands to filling the boot up with camping equipment and driving to Wales for a long weekend away. I love the driving experience and quickly built up confidence in the Golf's capabilities, which enabled me to push the car harder and ultimately improve my own driving ability. The 16-valve Mk2 gets the **evo** five-star rating and was described as being 'ahead of its time' by Richard Meaden in last year's hot hatch megatest (**evo** 195). Of course, I completely agree.

My car has had some choice upgrades, chiefly a set of 8 x 15in BBS RS 001 wheels accompanied by a set of rare red and gold BBS centre caps. The RSs have been completely refurbished, painted 'BBS Edition White' and wrapped in 195-section Toyo T1-R tyres. The car has also been lowered with a set of Weitec Hicon GT coilovers and the arches have been rolled. The 139bhp 1.8-litre engine now sits on Vibra-Technics engine mounts. Induction is improved by a K&N filter and there's a full stainless steel Milltek exhaust system from the manifold back. The interior remains *relatively* standard: there's a carbon-Kevlar Recaro Profi SPA race seat on the driver's side and a black suede Sparco 383 steering wheel that includes a B-G quick-release system.

My future plans for the Mk2 are to improve on its already planted handling and increase power (naturally) while reducing weight. What I want to create is a classic-looking, fast-road Golf GTI. I'd also like to get the car on track to really test – and explore – the limits of its performance. Watch this space.

Aston Parrott *(@AstonParrott)*

'I love the driving experience and quickly built up confidence in the Golf's capabilities'

Date acquired	April 2012
Total mileage	175,433
Mileage this month	136
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	33.0

Ford Fiesta ST

The ST dances along B-roads with captivating commitment, but how does it handle longer cross-continental routes?

Right: Catchpole's winter tyre-shod Fiesta managed to entertain in the dry and also keep him out of trouble when snow and ice covered the Alpine passes

THE FAST, OPEN ROADS of rural France spread out in front of the Fiesta's blue bonnet. A glorious avenue of trees sweeps past as we crest a small rise. The occasional sleepy village provides a lull in the otherwise largely flat-out blast towards Geneva. I must have paused at a picturesque roadside café, because I can almost taste the espresso now...

I wake blearily from my 15-minute slumber to discover the scruffy Esso garage still in front of me and an empty plastic coffee cup cradled in the appropriate indent just behind the gearlever. I'm just off the A26, south of Calais, and this is not quite how I'd imagined travelling out to the Alps. I need to be in Geneva by 3pm (for motor show duties) and that means my early morning Eurotunnel has to be followed by seven or eight hours on the *péage*. It might not be a particularly fun journey, but it is actually a very good test of the Fiesta ST. We know it can

do the fun stuff on back-roads, but at first glance it is not the sort of car you would choose to undertake a long, non-stop motorway schlep in.

Perhaps the two most important things on such a journey are decent seats and a good radio, and the Fiesta ticks both boxes for me. Some have found the lumbar support of the Recaros awkward, but they fit me well and on the run to Geneva I never once found myself dancing from cheek to cheek, trying to alleviate a numb bum. The radio lacks bass and focuses on the mid-range, according **evo**'s resident audiophile, Ian Eveleigh. But while this didn't do his David Bowie album any favours, it is perfect for listening to the spoken word, which in turn was ideal for my podcast of choice – *Desert Island Discs*.

> 'There was still more than enough grip to get the Fiesta three-wheeling'

Cruise control comes as standard on the ST3 and the Pirelli Sottozeros weren't unduly noisy, so all-in-all it was a perfectly pleasant journey.

Once in the mountains later in the week (I'd managed to fit some skis in the Fiesta, albeit with them sticking between the front seats and acting as an armrest) there wasn't really much snow down in the towns of Courmayeur and Chamonix, but there were still occasions when summer tyres would have left me in a pickle, so I was pleased I'd got the extra sipes in the rubber. Perhaps unexpectedly, the ride quality over smaller bumps was definitely worse than with the ContiSportContact 5s. However, when I found a rather fun road on the Italian side of Mont Blanc (or Monte Bianco) there was still more than enough grip to get the Fiesta three-wheeling.

I'd love to say that the return journey two weeks later was the relaxed rural jaunt I'd hoped for on the way out, but typically things conspired against me again. It was an overnight trip back up the autoroute, starting at about 9pm and ending up at home just before six o'clock the following morning. At least it proved that the ST is a pretty good GT.

Henry Catchpole
(@HenryCatchpole)

Date acquired	July 2014
Total mileage	16,218
Mileage this month	1121
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	38.4

Renaultsport Clio 182

Mechanical treats for Sheehan's surprisingly reliable hot hatch

IF FORUM POSTS AND YouTube comments are anything to go by, when the Clio's odometer hits 120,000 miles there won't be much more than a part-melted steering wheel and sprinklings of French Racing Blue dust left. The internet is rife with claims of reliability and build-quality issues but, for this 182 at least, they couldn't be further from the truth.

Aside from the excitable engine and playful chassis, in the four years I've owned it, this Clio's best trait has been its reliability. Come rain, snow or shine, motorway trek, shopping trip or flat-out trackday, it hasn't missed a beat. Only a flat battery has hampered my travels. As a thanks, I thought it right to treat my car to some new bits.

The first was more of a necessity than anything. I'd been running Michelin Pilot Sport 3s for over a year and was impressed by their consistent ability to find grip in both dry and soaking-wet conditions. Though hard driving had ensured the previous set's lifespan was short, I didn't hesitate to head off to TD Auto Repairs in Cheshunt for a new set.

The next part was a little less necessary. In fact, it was completely unnecessary, but that didn't stop me tearing into the box it was delivered in like a deranged child on Christmas morning. I'd ordered a K-Tec Racing induction kit. On 182s, aftermarket induction systems often end up causing power losses due to heat-soak, but K-Tec's draws air from in front of the battery – the coolest part of the engine bay – and pipes it directly into the throttle body.

Admittedly, attached to my car its effects on power are negligible (I'll soon venture onto a rolling road to confirm them) but, my god, does it transform the engine's tone. From low revs the note takes the form of a mechanical burble, but power on and the sound quickly switches to what I imagine a swarm of angry bees in full attack mode sounds like.

The F4R engine's characterful 5000rpm kick is when the bees really begin to awaken, chasing you all the way to the red line before easing off as you shift into third. But then they're back again and even angrier in fourth... It's all incredibly addictive.

Along with my car's raspy Yozza Sport exhaust, the Clio finally makes all the right noises at both ends, with a nice spread of sound split between intake and exhaust. All I have to do is find an empty B-road, heel-and-toe back into second and floor it, and I'm in four-pot paradise.

Sam Sheehan
(@evoSamSheehan)

Date acquired	May 2011
Total mileage	112,967
Mileage this month	1511
Costs this month	£166 (induction kit) £448 (four tyres)
mpg this month	28.7

McLaren 12C Spider

Everyday duties prove what a well-engineered supercar the 12C really is

THE McLAREN 12C SPIDER has not seen that much road time lately; a heavy travel schedule has served to very effectively keep the mileage down. I believe I have proven that the accumulation of frequent flyer and road miles move in direct opposite correlation to one another (The First Law of SSO). The 12C, however, doesn't seem to get cranky when it sits for a couple of weeks; it runs cleanly at a moment's notice. Other supercars I've owned, from a certain manufacturer near Modena, would take a good long drive before they came back into their own.

One thing I've noticed while using the 12C as a daily driver this winter is just how dirty it gets. Black has turned out to be an excellent choice, as it hides quite a bit of muck. After a week though, the Spider is badly in need of a bath. Most cars in this class are kept perfectly spotless and fettled after every drive. For a daily driver this is just not practical, especially when coupled with my distinct distaste for washing and polishing. Fortunately my local dealer, Park Place in Dallas, offers a complimentary washing service to McLaren customers – a benefit of which I have partaken frequently.

The one compromise I've had to make recently is on routing. Winter has buckled a few of the roads around here quite badly. To keep the 12C intact, my commute has been adapted to avoid a few front-spoiler-eating potholes. A recent engine oil check revealed zero consumption again, and none of the other liquids have needed topping up either. The 12C continues to handle everything thrown at it effortlessly.

Secret Supercar Owner
(@SupercarOwner)

Date acquired	August 2014
Total mileage	1409
Mileage this month	209
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	17.0

Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy

Meaden unlocks another layer within the Mégane's superlative handling portfolio as British roads warm up

SPRING HAS FINALLY sprung and the Mégane is loving the sunshine. I don't think I've driven a car that thrives on tyre temperature quite so markedly as this one. During the winter months it never managed to find any real bite from the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2s, but with the ambient temperature rising into the high teens I've been vividly reminded just how much turn-in bite, traction and all-out corner speed I've been missing. It's not quite like the magical feeling of a fresh set of slicks coming up to temperature, but it's as close as you'll get on the road.

Talking of tyres, I don't think scrabbling through winter has done the fronts any good. There's a bit of life left in them yet, but the tread depth indicators are closer to the surface than I was expecting after a little under 6000 miles of almost exclusively road driving. I would have gone so far as to say a few weeks of enthusiastic use on warmer, more abrasive tarmac would surely see them off, but the day before writing this update I managed to pick up a puncture on the front-right.

Changing a wheel at the roadside can often be a pantomime, but the Mégane's jack, wheelbrace and locking nut key were all present and correct. I even read the owner's manual, which makes me a traitor to the male gender but guaranteed (or so I thought) a hassle-free swap from flat to space-saver. If only I'd spotted the small infographic sticker on the skinny steel rim that says you can only run it on the rear...

In my defence, it fitted onto the front hub easily enough, with no obvious clearance issues, but as I went to pull away, an ominous graunch signalled all was not well. Sure enough, the space-saver had taken a horrid gouge out of the Brembo calliper's luscious red paint. Cue much swearing, followed by another wheel swap (to switch the space-saver to the rear) and a contrite phone call to the Renault press office to confess my cock-up.

Above: car journo changing a wheel. What could possibly go wrong?

Date acquired	November 2014
Total mileage	5837
Mileage this month	828
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	29.3

By the time you read this the Trophy will be on new Michelins and will have tackled the first 2015 **evo** track evening at Bedford Autodrome on May 15 (the next is June 12). We'll play with the multitude of factory settings for the Öhlins suspension, which should be great fun.

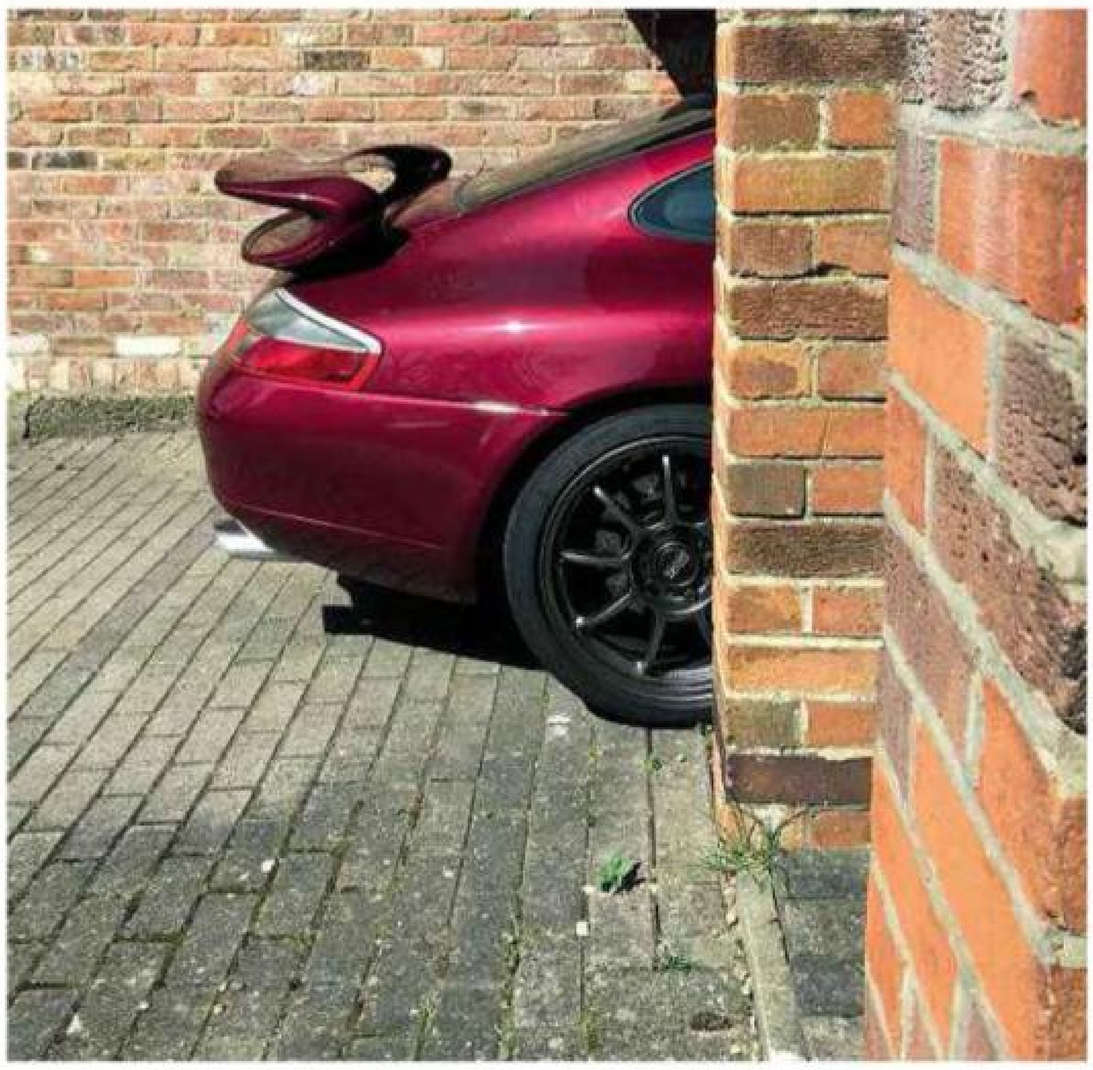
Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Steermags.com

StoreMags.com

Porsche 996 Carrera

Matching rubber (and wheels) complete Bovingdon's ideal street-legal balance



IT'S GREAT TO HAVE THE 996 back in my life. I've been so busy that there have been no special trips or long-lost love-in early morning drives, but just being able to get it out of the garage for a quick drive to the shops or to see nearby family is so satisfying. I'm pleased to report that the respray hasn't changed what I really love about the car – the way it drives and how it makes me feel.

The low mileage since its return is partly because I was a tyre short (after my puncture some months back) and so the car was running with one odd wheel and a knackered old tyre of unknown brand or provenance. It was horrendous, squeaking and squealing and generally feeling very dangerous indeed. Even light braking would trigger the ABS furiously, thanks to that one Bakelite front tyre. Thankfully the car is now running four correct OZ Racing wheels and has matching Michelin PS2 tyres.

Tyres are a bit of an issue when you run an older Porsche. I love the PS2s' progression and they seem to stand a fair bit of stick too, but it's hard not to want to upgrade to newer Super Sports or maybe even Cup 2s to lend my 996 a bit of new-GT3 cool. But for what purpose? More grip? Sounds tempting, but actually I think my car's balance of power to grip is about right. I hope in future the more 'period' tyres don't become obsolete altogether.

I think while wrangling with tyre choices I hit on one of the big appeals of the 996 to me: it seems to inhabit that sweet spot where exciting performance and on-road usability perfectly come together. Time in a 991 Turbo S and Huracán recently highlighted just how far performance has come since 1998, but using those cars' extraordinary capabilities on the public road is almost impossible.

Jethro Bovingdon
(@JethroBovingdon)

Date acquired	May 2013
Total mileage	142,999
Mileage this month	63
Costs this month	£133.48 (tyre)
mpg this month	27.9

Range Rover Sport SDV8

A round-trip to the Austrian Alps? There's only one machine in the **evo** car park worth considering

MY BMW M4 LONG-termer is very good at many things, but ferrying four blokes and their kit to Austria for a snowboarding holiday is not one of them. The editor's Range Rover Sport seemed to be very well suited to the task, though, so I half-inched the key while he wasn't looking and set off for Folkestone.

The first surprise was that we filled the boot rather more quickly than we had expected. Stuffed with four suitcases, a snowboard, a handful of smaller bags and a pair of boarding boots, there wasn't room to spare for my mate Ben's favourite dirndl. With a well-timed shove the automatic tailgate did close, though.

But then there was legroom. The four of us measure six-foot apiece, give or take, which meant we had just enough room for comfort and not an inch more. For a vehicle that casts such a huge shadow, cabin and boot space is only just acceptable – although I happen to know that the same is true of a BMW X5.

Issues of space aside, the Sport really was imperious on the 900-mile drive to the Austrian Alps. It just steamrollered those miles without breaking a sweat, sitting at an effortless 100mph for great chunks of Autobahn. It even dispatched a pair of 911s at 140mph, much to the delight of my passengers.

Off the 'Bahn, 80mph seems to be a critical speed for the SDV8 – above that, fuel economy will drop below 30mpg, but below it'll creep into the mid-30s. Filled to the brim, the 105-litre tank yields around 600 miles. On a long journey that seems to matter more than fuel economy.

It's a pity the Range Rover Sport doesn't offer just a little more boot space and another inch or two of legroom, because that's all that stops it from being entirely perfect for a journey like this one.

Dan Prosser *(@TheDanProsser)*

Date acquired	December 2014
Total mileage	13,916
Mileage this month	3240
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	29.6

NEW ARRIVAL

Mazda MX-5 Mk1

Cheap to buy and run, fun to drive – Ingram's imported Eunos Roadster arrives on the fleet just in time for summer

'INGRAM! WHEN YOU gonna buy a proper car?' sneered Aston for the umpteenth time. **evo**'s staff snapper can press a shutter button with flair but he apparently has a way with words too. I was quite happy with my first-gen Honda Insight and the 70-plus miles I was getting to every gallon, but access to brisker vehicles and the prospect of skill-honing time at Bedford Autodrome did lend impetus to the words of **evo**'s resident quiff enthusiast.

Whether you consider a 1993 Eunos Roadster S-Special a 'proper' car or not is a matter for debate, but there are several reasons why I've opted for the internet's 'answer to everything'. The first is that I'm already very familiar with them, having owned one and driven several more. This one drives as well as any I've tried, and isn't showing any signs of impending mechanical doom.

The next, and perhaps most important reason is that it's an ideal (re)introduction to the delights of rear-wheel drive. People decry the disappearance of the affordable rear-drive car, but on the used market they're plentiful – MX-5s and old 3-series BMWs abound, and while the Japanese option isn't quite as frisky as a scabby 328i, it's cheaper to run and delivers its fun at lower speeds. If you're still honing your driving skills, snapping into oversteer at 30mph in an MX-5 is preferable to doing it at double that speed, or more, in a car that's more expensive to fix.

Another reason is the vast aftermarket available for these cars, both in the UK and further afield. My old MX-5 was liberated from its parking space by a pernicious member of society before I could tweak it to my tastes. I therefore have unfinished business. Some changes to the Eunos will be purely stylistic, but others will be aimed at extracting the most from Mazda's sweetly balanced platform. The aim is to have a car that looks great but also works well on road and track. Not a hugely original aim, but an enjoyable one all the same.

> 'There's enough grip to make progress, but not so much that the car's balance can't be enjoyed'

Date acquired	February 2015
Total mileage	90,368
Mileage this month	742
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	32.5

So how has it been so far? Thoroughly entertaining. It's a mark of the Mazda's inherent rightness that I'm never disappointed to be back behind its wheel after a spell in something fresher, faster or more prestigious. The 114bhp 1.6-litre engine isn't powerful but it's revvy and willing. Clicking through the short gear ratios is a joy and the pedals are ideally placed to finally teach myself the art of heel-and-toe. There's enough grip to make progress, but not so much that the car's balance can't be enjoyed. Oh, and the roof goes down. Once I've removed the hard-top, anyway.

And if you're interested, the Insight is for sale. It's not a 'proper' car, but it'll get you twice as far on a tank of fuel as a 1993 Eunos Roadster... ■

Antony Ingram *(@evoAntony)*

Subaru WRX STI

Has absence made Gallagher's heart grow fonder for the STI?

FZX AND I WERE BRIEFLY reunited this month; long enough for those feelings I have for the car to come flooding back. Some of which are publishable.

A 500-mile return trip to south Wales exclusively using motorways isn't the WRX's or my idea of fun. However, aside from the secondary ride that never settles and makes you wonder if you're driving the first road car to have its springs and dampers hand-carved from granite, after a 5am start and 250 miles I didn't feel the wreck I anticipated I would when I came to halt at Llandow Circuit for issue 209's Caterham triple-test.

The thought of making the return journey on a Friday afternoon didn't feel me with dread, either. Perhaps I've finally been tuned into the WRX's idiosyncrasies and can filter out the irritations: poor throttle response in anything but banzai S-Drive mode, leaden steering unless you're driving the car on its door handles and dull power delivery that never lives up to the promise of a 296bhp flat-four.

The boxer motor has a sweet spot between 3000rpm and just shy of 5500 (peak torque arrives at 4000; peak power at 6000), after which it starts to tail off and feels strained as you push to the higher reaches of the rev range. As a consequence, you need to be quick with the manual gearbox, which is no hardship as the gate is tight and precise, although the clutch is too light and lacking in weight and feel for some in the **evo** office. But – of course there's a 'but' – short-shifting and not running the WRX's engine out to its peak performance leaves you feeling short-changed and frustrated. If only Subaru had stuck with the free-revving 2-litre boxer unit that I adored in the original Impreza Turbos then perhaps a few of the current car's regularly mentioned shortcomings would fade.

With only months left on the fleet, there is still time for FZX to demonstrate some of what made its predecessors so exciting, starting with the first **evo** track evening.

Stuart Gallagher *(@stuartg917)*

Date acquired	December 2014
Total mileage	11,806
Mileage this month	620
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	25.7

Kia Proceed GT

Parrott's Korean hot hatch notches up another victory for the multi-purpose performance brigade

I'VE NOW BEEN DRIVING the Kia nearly every day for ten months and have racked up well over 8000 miles. So far I've needed new brake pads, two new discs and a fresh set of tyres.

My journey with the Kia has definitely had its ups and downs, but generally it's been a pleasure to live with. Over the Easter break, my girlfriend and I randomly decided to go camping in Hedingham in Essex. Subsequently, the Kia was loaded up with all of the key essentials – tent, sleeping bags, chairs, gas cooker and a crate of beer.

The way the GT can cover ground is amazing; the hour-and-a-half journey to the campsite passed in no time, with help from the car's brilliant media system and snug Recaros. But with the campsite sited next to a lovely lake with forest on every side, on arrival we realised that our spontaneity might have landed us with a big problem: the road to the site was a mud track with large sunken holes full of water, and either side were wet grass verges.

We'd come this far, so decided to try our luck and slowly began to make our way along the track.

Left: Château Parrott for the Easter weekend, complete with trusty steed

Well, you can keep your Defenders and Cayennes, because the Kia, on its 225-section summer tyres, performed brilliantly, even on the slipperiest parts of the track.

This is the essence of the hot hatch: throw loads in them, have fun driving enthusiastically on great roads and even do a bit of light off-roading if you have to. Thanks to the Kia, we made it to our plot and had a lovely weekend away. Top marks to the GT!

Aston Parrott *(@AstonParrott)*

Date acquired	May 2014
Total mileage	22,778
Mileage this month	1098
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	29.9

Lancia Delta Integrale

The hills are alive with the sound of a pugnacious rally refugee, as Lane's Integrale gets a tuneful upgrade

'HEAD GASKET,' SAID THE voice on the phone. 'It's gone, unfortunately.'

Head gasket. Blown. Bollocks. What was already an unexpectedly painful service to put right a couple of the Lancia's minor, winter-induced ailments had at the very least now doubled in price. Tyres, fresh engine oil, belts; one budgets for these. But a head gasket failure? God no.

Mercifully, *mercifully*, it happened on a light throttle during a post-service shakedown at Auto Integrale near Reading. The engine was saved, owner Keith hurriedly assured me, but the sorry scenario was an undesirable distraction from the reason why G78 was with Auto Integrale in the first place. Feeling nauseous, I asked how the new Ragazzon exhaust sounded.

The original system was a quarter-century old and the chrome-plated tips straddling the bumper were corroded far beyond redemption. The rest of the car's exterior is in blinding condition, so – of course – the rotten protuberances were the constant centre of my attention. Pure torture.

A small hole, probably in the welding on the resonator, had also transposed a throaty salvo rich with intent into a flatulent fanfare condemned to humiliate the driver. With the car's character at stake, the exhaust, from the cat back, had to go, and finding a suitable replacement wasn't so easy.

Original parts sometimes come up for sale and aren't too tiring to source second-hand from specialists, but clearly longevity wasn't high on the list of priorities when these were first designed. Accordingly, my preference was for a modern piece in stainless steel, and there are several companies offering 'compatible' products.

The problem is taste. Most aftermarket setups are designed for single-exhaust-outlet 'Evoluzione' Integrales and boast a bore more suitable for a JDM Supra circa '95. From what I'd seen on YouTube, they're also likely to channel the full Juha Kankkunen acoustic experience. Fizzling, snarling and gurgling homologation cars are irresistibly cool, I'll never dispute that, but a Group A soundtrack is appropriate neither for a modest eight-valver like mine nor during rush hour on the Marylebone Road (these simple realities are not necessarily a reflection of my true beliefs).

If you've not owned an Italian then it's unlikely you'll know Ragazzon, but you can see the Treviso-based outfit's deft metalwork above. After a few brief email exchanges they set to work creating a bespoke exhaust rear section with dual resonators and, most importantly, elegant mirror-polished tips that are almost identical to the originals. They're actually a smidgen larger in diameter and wield more gravitas as a result.

I'm averse to non-OE mods so this was all something of a leap of faith. Ragazzon's three decades focusing mainly on Italian marques – you should hear what they can do with an Alfa V6 – but latterly on anything that might be fettled to sound fruitier gave me some confidence. That the system is TIG-welded and came with ECC type-approval was also encouraging.

As it happens, Ragazzon's design fits with millimetre precision. And the noise? A volcanic rumble kept on the boil, but not much more riotous than before. Come off the throttle at more than 4000rpm and the car sniggers as unburnt fuel detonates in the sizzling manifold. It idles with a machismo perfectly attuned to the box arches and murderous snout. There's a slight drone at motorway speeds, but otherwise the new tubing serves only to amplify the Grale's turbulent character and I couldn't ask for more.

***Richard Lane** (@_rlane_)*

Date acquired	August 2013
Total mileage	88,244
Mileage this month	156
Costs this month	£357 (exhaust) £857.28 (gasket) £1128.84 (service)
mpg this month	24.4

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Audi S1

Can the S1 cut it with some illustrious company at Anglesey Circuit?

IT'S BEEN A FASCINATING month. I've been almost exclusively in VW Group high performance products of late – from my S1 through to a 911 Turbo S, Lamborghini Huracán and the Bentley GT3-R (I know, poor me!).

Of course, the S1 is very much the baby in this company, but it's definitely not the odd one out. It doesn't have the Bentley's sumptuousness but the four-wheel-drive system feels similar; there isn't the mind-bending performance of the Huracán yet they share a feelgood factor that's hard to beat at their respective price points; and the 911? That feels different. Porsche seems to operate independently of the Group machine, at least with the 911. Long may that continue.

I particularly got to experience the on-limit feel and reactions of the S1 compared to the GT3-R, as I drove them almost back-to-back at Anglesey. The GT3-R is a big, heavy car on track and there's more roll than you might expect given the billing. That said, throwing it into corners off the power, waiting for the car to almost spin before picking up the throttle and exiting in plumes of tyre smoke is highly silly and fun.

The S1 requires the same approach. Drive it neatly and it's effective and very quick, but although it resists understeer well, eventually it does slip away at the front. However, that short wheelbase and the Haldex system combine to give you a lot of options.

A decisive lift on turn-in will bring the rear into play and then the car drives out of turns with an impressively neutral balance. Get even more aggressive and the S1 oversteers wildly on the way into corners and then scrabbles out with all four wheels pulling you straight. It's not on as grand a scale as the Bentley, but it's similarly amusing, and because it's stiffer and much lighter, it feels genuinely exciting.

More track miles are needed in the S1, but it certainly wasn't out of its depth at Anglesey.

Jethro Bovingdon
(@JethroBovingdon)

Date acquired	December 2014
Total mileage	5408
Mileage this month	1493
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	28.6

Skoda Octavia vRS

Smith makes the case for petrol power after commandeering the Skoda's diesel twin

AFTER SEEING HOW MY vRS stacked up against our SEAT Leon Cupra 280 last month, this month I compared the Skoda with another member of the VW Group's vast empire.

This time the rival shared not only the same chassis, but everything except the engine and gearbox. The two cars were so alike, in fact, that equipped with the same optional extras there were no visual clues as to which car was which. The rival was, of course, the petrol vRS's arch enemy: the diesel vRS.

Whilst a performance diesel isn't a new thing, it's still very much a questionable thing, which is why I was keen to try one. Right away, where my car's 217bhp 2-litre engine feels modern, a tractor-like diesel rattle made the 181bhp 2-litre TDI vRS feel very old and normal.

This diesel also weighed 65kg more (20kg of that being the DSG gearbox). However, it was hard to notice any difference in dynamics – there was perhaps a smidgen more front-end push on turn-in. The diesel felt far slower than suggested by the 1.4sec deficit in the sprint to 62mph (6.8sec versus 8.2), and had no appetite for revs like the zesty petrol. It all felt like a bit of a chore. As for DSG, unless you're doing 200,000 miles a year I don't see the point of it in a car with less than 400bhp.

All in all, the TDI vRS felt like a an old-school diesel stuffed into a pretty frock. On a company car scheme it may make sense, but don't be fooled into thinking that it's a sports saloon – or that it's going to be more economical than its petrol-powered sibling. In 2000 miles of varied driving I managed an average of 38.9mpg, which is about the same as I often return in the more powerful, more modern-feeling, more desirable, £1635 cheaper and more enjoyable 2-litre TSI.

Dean Smith *(@evoDeanSmith)*

Date acquired	September 2014
Total mileage	13,055
Mileage this month	33
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	n/a

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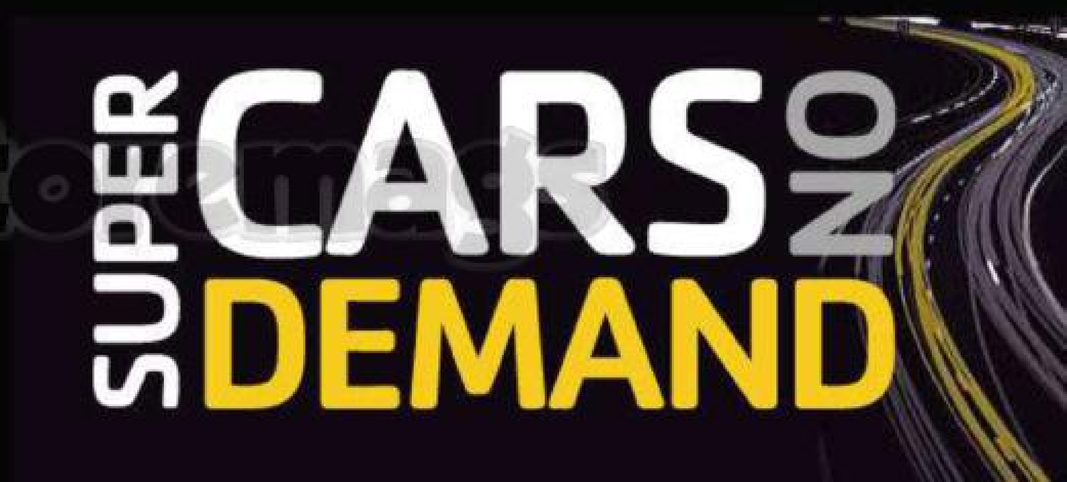

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BMW 2002

With paint imminent, the bodywork on Beaumont's '02 gets an extensive tidy-up

I HAVE GONE TO GREAT extents to preserve originality on my 2002. Yes, me, the person who is repainting his car a completely different colour and fitting a full, white(!) roll-cage. Me, who's recently had his fuel filler hole welded up, the original exhaust cut-out welded up, the spare wheel well removed to be replaced with a flat plate, and every hole for every bit of trim vamoosed with a quick pass with the MIG torch. All of this was OK, but changing the front end to resemble a later model 2002 rather than the early 'round rear light' model that it is – absolutely not.

The entire bottom half of the original front panel had been bodged together and it would have been easier to completely replace it rather than try to fix the mess of steel patches and spot welds. I had a new-old-stock front panel kicking around, but it was from a later model – one with black plastic grilles rather than the delicate aluminium items that adorn earlier '02s. So rather than just fitting this new panel, Steve, the master welder at Faircharm Restorations, chopped out the centre grille section of the original panel and added it to my NOS one.

While pandering to my contradictory opinions on originality, Steve also rectified the other areas of hastily bodged repairs by seam welding around the patches then tiding them up so they will require minimal filler and fettling in the pre-paint process. The main culprits were the offside rear three-quarter panel and the offside sill.

My plans regarding painting the car have now changed. My brother's Mercedes 190E – yes, of course it's a Cosworth – is currently being painted where I had intended to send my car about now. Fortuitously, Shane from Faircharm has just enough time before his next big project comes in to be able to paint mine. So neither my brother nor I have to delay our projects and Shane gets to see my shell through the entire process from blasting it to finishing the paint. And, having seen the quality of the work that Shane and Steve have done so far, I am even more excited to see it painted.

Will Beaumont *(@WillBeaumont)*

Date acquired	July 2008
Total mileage	146,050-ish
Mileage this month	0
Costs this month	£2000 (labour)
mpg this month	n/a

BMW M4

Editor Trott samples the M4 and finds that, for him, it's missed the mark

WITH DAN STEALING MY Range Rover Sport to impress the snow maidens of Mayrhofen (see p135), I was left with his M4 for a couple of weeks. It proved to be a revealing experience.

In many ways, I'm the absolute target customer for an M4. I love rear-wheel drive. I love cars with lineage, and I love clever engineering. However, I have two young kids, therefore on occasion I need four seats and a boot that can carry a buggy. It's a given, then, that I should love the M4. Or so you'd think.

After a couple of weeks I was still struggling to bond with it. The main issues? The M4 feels very ordinary most of the time, and it's a bloody difficult car to 'read'.

Tackling the former first, sure the M4's edgy ride indicates the performance within, but little else does. The throttle response is pretty flat, the steering unremarkable, the engine note harsh.

Dial up the modes, drive it on its door handles, and if the road surface and conditions are perfect (and only then) the M4 has got epic front-end bite and startling acceleration. But when they're not, there's a feedback inconsistency that plays havoc with your confidence. So it's only on track or in very, very limited road situations that the M4 feels suitably 'M'.

To illustrate that it doesn't need to be like this, may I introduce Exhibit A – the Mercedes C63 AMG Coupe that I ran in 2013. The C63's

steering wasn't quite as sharp as the M4's at higher speeds, but it was more transparent more of the time; the rear traction wasn't as strong, but grip levels were communicated better; the engine wasn't as frugal, but it was more powerful, more flexible, and had a more linear throttle response; and while the differential and transmission weren't as sophisticated, the C63 gave you a clearer understanding of how much power you'd asked for, and when you were going to get it.

Put simply, the C63 was more enjoyable, more authentic, and more engaging, more of the time – and this was the previous-generation car, remember...

Nick Trott *(@evoNickTrott)*

Date acquired	October 2014
Total mileage	14,195
Mileage this month	1511
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	24.6

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2014/14, 25,800 miles, Dark Tungsten, Black leather, Rear TV, Pan Roof, Clear Uplit Spirit of Ecstasy..... £164,999

Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud MK2

Factory Convertible, LHD, 1962, 59,000 Miles, FSH, Charcoal Metallic, Beige leather £475,000

Bentley Azure

2006/56, 41,000 Miles, Diamond Black, Black leather, Piano Black wood £89,990

Bentley Continental GTC Speed

2009/09, 18,000 Miles, Moonbeam Silver, Red leather, Naim Sound, Carbon Ceramic Brakes, ...£79,990

Bentley Continental GTC V8

2012/12, 9,500 Miles, Sequin Blue, Two tone blue/Magnolia, Wood Steering Wheel, 21" Alloy wheels £109,990

Bentley Continental GTC Speed

2014/14, 8,700 Miles, Hallmark Silver, Linen/Blue leather, Reverse camera, Heated/Cooled Massage

Bentley Continental GTC

2008/08, 15,800 Miles, 2 Owner, Dark Blue, Magnolia, 3 Spoke Steering wheel, TV Tuner, 20" Alloy wheels,£59,999

Bentley GTC Supersports

2011/61, 19,700 Miles, Silver Tempest, Black, X4 Seat, Red Calipers, Reverse Camera..... £99,949

Bentley Continental GT Speed

2008/08, 12,000 Miles, Beluga Black, Black Quilted leather, TV Tuner £57,999

Bentley Continental GT V8, 2013/63, 2014 Model, Glacier White, Black £104,990

Bentley Flying Spur Mulliner, 2013, 1,900 Miles, Dark Sapphire Blue, Linen, S/Roof, Power boot, Massage seats.....£124,999

Bentley Continental Flying Spur, Choice of Six motor cars from..... £26,999

Bentley Continental GT Coupe, Choice of Six in stock from £33,990

Rolls-Royce Corniche II, 1981, 83,000 Miles, Seychelles Blue, Cream leather..... £60,000

Range Rover 3.0 Autobiography, 2015/15, Delivery Miles, Black, Ivory, Rear screens..... £91,999

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Market Watch

Knowledge *Insights into the used car market*

in association with CLASSIC & PERFORMANCE CAR THE WORLD'S GREATEST CARS FOR SALE

PEUGEOT 306 RALLYE

Minimalist '90s hot hatch looks set to have its used-market moment

IF YOU'RE A REGULAR READER, you might recall that we revisited the Peugeot 306 Rallye in our huge hot hatch celebration last year (**evo** 195). It appeared alongside the Renault Clio Williams, representing the best hot hatches of the 1990s. This was a fairly dry decade for the breed: spiralling insurance premiums sought to kill them off, while increasing weight and safety kit sapped the life out of small, fun cars. Thankfully, the French managed to stay true to the cause.

When the 306 launched in 1993, Peugeot was still at the top of its game. Even the humble models were dynamically adept, offering a supple ride, direct steering and a playful chassis balance – all the things Peugeot was best known for. The cars were even screwed together pretty well.

In 1996 a 167bhp naturally aspirated 2-litre engine was stuffed under the bonnet and mated to a close-ratio six-speed gearbox (back when that was a big deal), creating the 306 GTI 6 – a true successor to the mighty 205 GTI.

To offer something a little bit more focused and around £2000 cheaper, in 1998 Peugeot launched the mechanically identical Rallye. A lack of equipment, some cheaper seats and a set of stickers are really all that separate it from the GTI, but limited production of just 500 – all for the UK – mean the Rallye commands a premium today. Unlike the 205 and 106 Rallyes that preceded it, the 306 wasn't a proper homologation special, but it was said to be around 50kg lighter.

You can still pick up cheap Rallyes. However, the best tend to stick within the clubs, so tracking down a good one can take time. While £1500 will get you a usable example, you'll need £3500 for one of the tidiest. With top examples of the best '80s hot hatches fetching serious money, you can only conclude that these will follow suit, so grab one now while you can, and cherish it.

Matthew Hayward

In the classifieds

1999 306 Rallye

£1300 Private seller (ebay.co.uk)
120,000 miles, black, long MOT, in need of some cosmetic tidying

1999 306 Rallye

£1650 Private Seller (gumtree.com)
82,000 miles, just serviced, timing belt done, bonnet needs a respray

1999 306 Rallye

£2250 Private Seller (306gti6.com)
75,030 miles, white, Spax adjustable suspension, a few blemishes

Or consider...

Rover 200 BRM

It's a special edition, built in limited numbers, and has one of the most luxuriously trimmed interiors you'll ever find in a hatch. There's also a Torsen limited-slip diff, if you can get over the fact it's a Rover...

Renault Clio Williams

The Williams offers a slightly more raw driving experience than the Rallye. Early cars have already earned collector status (and price tags), though.

Citroën ZX 16v

Almost identical to the 306 GTI under the skin, with a slightly less exciting 152bhp engine and five-speed 'box. Much rarer than the Rallye, and much cheaper, too.

Market Watch

Knowledge *Insights into the used car market*

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Ask the expert

Your buying questions answered

Q I currently drive a 2005 BMW E90 325i, which is fantastic for me. However, a neighbour might be selling his 2002 E39 M5, which is completely original and has covered only 50,000 miles.

The M5 has always been a dream car of mine and I've read that a very low mileage example could be a good investment. On the other hand, I know that the running costs would be much higher than for my 325i. I also know that it was not a car famed for reliability. Should I take the plunge if the chance arises, or should I hang on to my 325i?

Kieran Brooks, Lanarkshire

A Make no mistake, there will be a world of difference between running your 325i and an E39 M5. The E39 was a very expensive machine when it was new, and it can be easy to dismiss the supercar running costs involved when looking at a reasonably priced second-hand example. Having said that, the E39 is a much less complicated proposition than its V10-engined replacement, which is partly the reason why values have stayed so strong.

Low mileage, clean examples have picked up in value recently, and it's unlikely that a well looked after car will depreciate much, if at all. Before you make a decision, though, know that it's a simple fact that you will almost certainly end up spending more money than you originally budget. Tyres will need replacing and niggling faults will crop up, but if you love the car (and, trust us, you will), spending the money shouldn't cause you too much pain.

If you can afford to maintain the car to a good standard – which will also maximise its future resale value – then we'd say go for it. It is your dream car, after all... ***MH***

Email your question to experts@evo.co.uk

Just looking

The pick of the classifieds this month

BMW i8
£105,995
Howard Wise Cars, Essex
howardwisecars.co.uk
0208 418 9191

In its short existence, the BMW i8 has dramatically changed automotive perceptions. Equipped with one of the most complex powertrains ever to make mass production, this sculpted coupe has helped make plug-in hybrids cool.

The i8 offers genuine sports car performance while emitting as little as 49g/km of CO2. And though BMW's claimed combined mpg figure of 134.5 can quite easily be quartered in the real world, the i8 confirms that going green doesn't have to be boring.

That's why this 647-mile-old Sophisto Grey example has lost next to no value in its short time on the road. Outfitted with Frozen Grey accents and lightweight 'Spheric' leather, it's also one of the sleekest ways to drive into the future. ***Sam Sheehan*** *(@evoSamSheehan)*

Ginetta G40R
£32,995
Pure Speed, North Yorkshire
purespeed.co.uk
01423 865805

Though it conforms to road-going regulations and returns a respectable 29mpg, the Ginetta G40R is very much a car born of racing. Evidence of this comes in the form of an FIA-specification roll-cage, five-point racing harnesses and an on-board fire extinguisher, not to mention a featherlight kerb weight of 850kg.

That lightness ensures that the Ginetta's 175bhp 2-litre Ford Duratec engine can be put to good use, with power channelled to the rear axle through a five-speed manual gearbox. Most of the car's setup is shared with its racing counterpart, the G40, which explains why there's also a race-spec removable steering wheel.

With 150 miles on the odometer, this G40R for sale at Pure Speed in North Yorkshire is effectively brand new. It comes with air conditioning and interior soundproofing, *and* yields enough boot space to swallow a set of golf clubs. ***SS***

Trader chat

Miguel Andre **Bell & Colvill**

Bell & Colvill is proud to be the world's longest-standing Lotus dealer, and celebrated its 45th anniversary in March. Sales director Miguel Andre believes that the Surrey-based business is the one-stop shop for Lotus enthusiasts.

'Customers now require more than just excellent service,' says Andre. 'We specialise in a multi-dimensional ownership experience and offer a growing series of events, including trackdays at Goodwood and tours to motorsport events such as the Spa Classic. We are *the* destination for Lotus enthusiasts.

'We've seen a noticeable increase in demand for Lotuses, due partly to an improvement in the quality of the product. As you might expect, the Exige and Elise are currently our best sellers, although with the launch of the new Evora 400 we expect the Evora to get the attention it has always deserved.

'That increase in demand for sports cars has arrived particularly in the past year, with customers generally looking for an exciting alternative to the ever-growing dullness of everyday motoring.

'Alongside Lotus, demand for Morgan [a marque that Bell & Colvill also stocks] seems to be growing, too, with new products like the 3 Wheeler and Speedster bringing the brand to the attention of a new generation of buyers.'

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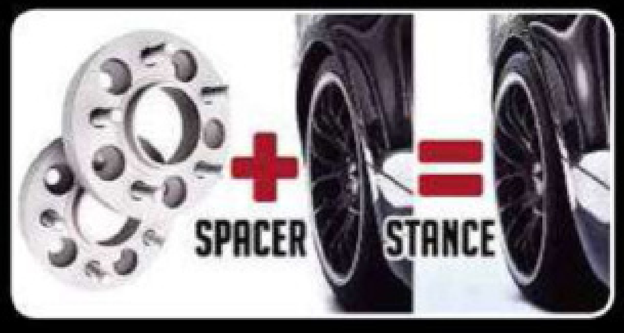

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Buying Guide

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Mini Cooper S & John Cooper Works 2006-2014

Overview

The second-generation Cooper S and its JCW sibling are fast and fun, but also flawed. Here's what you need to know **Words:** Peter Tomalin

GOOGLE 'SECOND-GENERATION MINI' AND THE VERY first suggestion is 'problems'. Look further and you'll discover something called the 'death rattle'. It all sounds rather ominous, but what's the truth? With a John Cooper Works version of the third-generation Mini arriving soon, now's the time to re-evaluate these fine-driving hatches as a used buy.

The second-gen, 'R56' Mini appeared in November 2006. Though it looked similar to the first 'new Mini', in fact it was significantly larger and every panel was new. As was what lay beneath, including revamped rear suspension, run-flat tyres and electric power steering.

There was also an all-new engine, shared with the Peugeot/Citroën group though engineered by BMW and built in the UK. For the new Cooper S, this 'Prince' engine had a twin-scroll turbocharger in place of the old supercharger. It delivered a potent 173bhp (compared with the outgoing car's 168bhp) and 177lb ft all the way from 1600 to 5000rpm, with an overboost function adding an extra 15lb ft under hard acceleration, bringing the total to a very punchy 192lb ft. This translated to 0-62mph in 7.1sec and a top speed of 140mph. (In 2010 power rose to 181bhp, giving 0-62 in 7.0sec and 142mph.) Options included an auto gearbox and a Sport package featuring uprated springs, dampers and anti-roll bars. DSC was standard, as was a Sport button to sharpen the responses of the throttle and add weight to the electric power steering.

In 2008 BMW launched the John Cooper Works Challenge – a purpose-built race car, from its plumbed-in fire extinguisher to its Dunlop racing slicks – and towards the end of that year came the JCW road car. It was a Cooper S with extra boost pressure (208bhp and 206lb ft on overboost), a low-back-pressure exhaust, stiffer suspension, 17in alloys, Brembo brakes, and DSC, DTC (Dynamic Traction Control) and EDLC (Electronic Differential Lock Control). All had a bespoke six-speed Getrag manual 'box and BMW claimed 0-62mph in 6.5sec and 148mph.

Impressive stats, and we loved the way it drove, too. But then came the first reports of engine problems. So how do you find a good Cooper S or JCW, and how do you keep it that way? Read on.

Checkpoints

Engine and transmission

So, the death rattle. By no means all but a significant number of engines are affected. These are noisy, 'tappety' engines at the best of times (blame direct injection), but the so-called death rattle when starting from cold is unmistakeable. It's the sound of the timing chain thrashing around, and if you don't fix it you risk valves hitting pistons.

Paul Webster at specialist 1320 Mini says the cause is usually a low oil level. With insufficient oil pressure to activate the tensioner at start-up, the chain rattles and eventually stretches, while the plastic guide-rails get worn or broken, making the situation worse. Paul has found that death rattle can happen as early as 25,000 miles. Some people replace only the tensioner, but if the rattle has been going on for some time, Paul recommends replacing the whole set: chain, tensioner and guides (£550-600 fitted by a specialist).

So, with any R56 engine it's essential the oil level is checked regularly. BMW itself says using up to a litre every 1000 miles is not exceptional, so if you're buying privately, quiz the owner about how often they check the oil.

Many engines also suffer carboning-up of the inlet valves (another downside of direct injection) causing lumpy running. Again, not all get it, and some sooner than others. The solution is decoking by walnut-shell blasting (c£250). The high-pressure fuel pumps are another weak spot, especially when cold (c£200 to replace).

The gearboxes are robust, but clutches wear quickly. Paul has replaced them after as little as 25,000 miles (c£600). If the pedal's very stiff or biting right at the top, it's on the way out.

Suspension, steering, brakes

Front wishbone bushes wear, particularly if the larger wheels and brakes are fitted. They tend to go after 40,000-50,000 miles. 1320 Mini usually fit poly bushes; around £300 all-in. Tramlining is a clue something is amiss, but check for excess movement on a ramp. Also check the brake pipes – Paul has seen them rusting badly on some early cars and it's several hours' labour to replace them.

Body, interior, electrics

Panoramic sunroofs sometimes stick in their runners, especially in hot weather. Otherwise there are no particular issues, but check all the toys are working.

1: 'Sport' sharpens throttle. **2:** Listen for 'death rattle'. **3:** BMW-style infotainment an option

What we said

Cooper S v Renault Clio 197

'On our first twisty mountain ascent, the Cooper S steadily pulls away from the thoroughly wrung-out Clio 197. Going down the other side, the pair are evenly matched but, when the tarmac becomes steeper and more tortuous again, the Mini wrests back a decisive advantage. We conclude that it has nothing to do with cornering speed (though, interestingly, the Cooper S certainly feels grippier) and everything to do with torque. The Renault's inadequacy here is exposed by the Mini's quite remarkable mid-range punch and the way it hurls itself out of bends and down the next straight.

'Judged against the previous Cooper S, the driving experience doesn't gel quite as satisfyingly. You can really lean on the new car to a degree you'd think twice about in the Clio, however. The extra kinematic scope of the revised rear suspension makes it feel, if anything, more adjustable than the old car, and arguably more fun. Feeding into this, the gearshift and pedals are beautifully weighted and precise, the whole car shot through with an air of heavy, well-damped quality that the Renault can only dream of.' – **evo** 098

Above: broad torque bands make both JCW (pictured) and Cooper S amusingly quick

Above: real adjustability is a trait these cars inherited from BMW; they are fantastic fun

'I bought one' Martin Brown

'My subtly modified 57,000-mile JCW is just what I need – comfy and practical but with a real manic edge. I especially like the popping, crackling exhaust note.

'I had the springs and dampers changed to AP coilovers after finding the standard suspension too hard and crashy. At £500 they're at the budget end, but the ride is much better now – more comfortable and more controlled.

'I've also had to have the engine decoked, and earlier this year I was starting to hear the death rattle so fitted a new tensioner. It cost me £25 and I fitted it myself. It's been fine since, though I check the oil level religiously.

'It is heavy on oil, but oddly not consistently so. I'm careful to get the oil changed every year, even when the schedule doesn't require it – the car came with the balance of the original "TLC XL" servicing package, which runs for eight years or 60,000 miles, so I've still one service left under that. In terms of fuel economy, I get around 35mpg.

'Despite the issues, I'd recommend the car. It's brilliant to drive. The "go-kart handling" is a bit of a cliché but it really is very direct and great on country lanes. And the twin-scroll turbo means there's very little turbo-lag – it's straight on the power. And it makes some lovely noises. I'll definitely keep it for a while.'

In the classifieds

2006 (56) Cooper S

- 46,000 miles
- Full black leather
- Panoramic roof
- Chili Pack
- uniqueprestige.co.uk

£6495

2007 (57) Cooper S

- 31,916 miles
- Laser Blue with dark grey
- Carbon Black/piano trim
- Chili Pack
- westerlybridgwatermini.co.uk

£8495

2009 (09) JCW

- 33,000 miles
- Chili red
- Tuscan Beige leather
- 17in JCW Challenge alloys
- brundallmotorcompany.co.uk

£11,999

The rivals

Renaultsport Clio 197

NA engine gives more power but less torque than the turbocharged Mini. Plenty at £6k-7k, including stiffer Cup models.

Abarth 500

Start at around £8k. With just 135bhp they can't match the pace of the Mini, but they're stylish and fun.

Mini Cooper S Works GP

The ultimate first-gen BMW Mini, the track-inspired GP had a supercharged 215bhp and only two seats. From £10k.

Specification

Cooper S (pre-2010), JCW in brackets

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo
Max power 173bhp @ 5500rpm (208 @ 6000)
Max torque 192lb ft @ 1700-4500rpm (206 @ 2000-5100)
Transmission Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive
Weight 1130kg (1160)
Power-to-weight 156bhp/ton (182)
0-62mph 7.1sec (6.5sec) (claimed)
Max speed 140mph (148mph) (claimed)
Price new £15,995 (£22,460)

Parts prices

(Prices from 1320.co.uk. Tyre price from blackcircles.com. All prices include VAT but exclude fitting charges)

Tyres (each) £127.88 (Bridgestone Potenza RE050A)
Front pads (set) £109.20 (Brembo)
Front discs (pair) £84 (Pagid)
Springs/dampers (set of 4) £888 (Bilstein)
Clutch £598 (OEM, supplied and fitted)
Timing chain set £246.73
Spark plugs (set) £55.20

Servicing

(Prices from 1320.co.uk, including VAT)

Servicing is due every 15,500 miles, but many specialists recommend an annual oil change

Oil & filter £72
Inspection 1 (essentials) £132
Inspection 2 (comprehensive) £228

What to pay

Cooper Ss start at around £5.5k for a private sale with average to high miles. £6k gets a high-mileage car from a dealer. £7k gives you a choice of literally dozens of '07 and '08 cars with average miles, full service histories and often only a couple of owners. Stretch another grand and you're into one-owner and/or low-milers. Also, the first '09/'10 cars start around £8k. £10k buys the best '09/'10 cars with low miles and all the right kit (Chili pack, etc) and is the entry point for higher-mileage JCWs. £12k-13k, meanwhile, buys a '09/'10 JCW with low to average miles.

Useful contacts

- mini2.com (forums, advice, etc)
- minitorque.com (forums, advice, etc)
- 1320.co.uk (specialist, tuning, etc)
- minitechessex.co.uk (specialist)
- classicandperformancecar.com (ads)

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Lamborghini Murcielago LP670-4 SV
Ceramic Brakes High Level Rear Wing Small Decal option 4,000 miles 2009 **£379,990**

Lamborghini Murcielago LP670-4 SV
Ceramic Brakes High Level Rear Wing Larini Sports Exhaust 5,000 miles 2009 **£314,990+VAT**

Lamborghini Diablo
Magnesium Wheels Jota Edition Unique Limited Edition 21,875 miles 1996 **£324,990**

Lamborghini Diablo 6.0 VT Final Edition
Carbon Fibre Driving Zone, Carbon Fibre Inserts, Carbon Fibre Engine Bay, 20,000 miles, 2000, **£164,990**

Lamborghini Murcielago LP 640 Roadster
Bicolour interior Ceramic Brakes Egear 10,000 miles 2008 **£149,990**

Lamborghini Murcielago LP640 Roadster LHD HIGH SPEC
Carbon Fibre Driving Zone, Clear Engine Bay Cover, Ceramic Brakes, 7,000 miles, 2009, **£144,990**

Lamborghini Murcielago V12 LP640-4 Coupe
670 SV Body Upgrade DPE 20 Inch Forged Alloys TUBI Exhaust 5,000 miles 2008 **£134,990 + VAT**

Lamborghini Murcielago LP640 Roadstar LHD
Titanium Hercules Alloys Yellow Brake Calipers Lifting Gear 10,000 miles 2008 **£134,990**

Lamborghini Murcielago VT Roadster
Colour SatNav Lifting Gear Egear, Tubi Sports Exhaust 10,000 miles 2005 **£119,990**

Lamborghini Gallardo V10 LP550-2
Calisto Alloys Reverse Camera Lifting Gear 11,000 miles 2011 **£106,990**

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Lifting Gear Reverse Camera Full Electric Heated Seats 8,000 miles 2009 **£104,990**

Ferrari 458 Spider LHD VAT QUALIFYING
20 inch Diamond Finish Sport Alloys, Colour SatNav, Scuderia Shields, 5,000 miles, 2012 **£136,990 + VAT**

Ferrari F430 Spider F1 HIGH SPEC
Carbon Racing Seats, Carbon Fibre Driving Zone, Colour SatNav, 22,000 miles, 2008 £**79,990**

Ferrari 599 GTB F1 LHD HIGH SPEC
Full Electric Daytona Recaro Heated Seats, 20 Inch Monolithic Alloys, Yellow Rev Counter, 24,000 miles, 2006, **£78,990**

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Market Watch

Knowledge *Insights into the used car market*

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Auction watch

Elegant V12 Aston Martin DB7 stands out in Historics at Brooklands' June sale

HISTORICS AT BROOKLANDS HAS ALWAYS OFFERED A DIVERSE cross-section of the automotive spectrum in its auctions, from pure classics to more modern performance cars, and its next sale, on June 6, is no exception.

In terms of bang for your buck, there's not a lot that can beat the 2001 Aston Martin DB7 Vantage (pictured top) that will be going under the hammer. Although the DB7 started out with a straight-six, the V12 version that arrived in 1999 really transformed Aston's big coupe into something a whole lot more special. This Derwent Green example has covered 69,824 miles and has a service book full of Aston Martin stamps, plus one from specialist Desmond J Smail. Fitted with the ZF automatic gearbox, the car comes with an MOT until February 2016 and a clean bill of health following its most recent full service from Aston Martin Works. Historics' estimate is just £18,000-24,000, making this one of the best value Aston Martins on the market.

We've always had a soft spot for the BMW Z3 M Coupe here at **evo**, and it's one of those cars that has always held its value well – and with good reason. Thanks to its 3.2-litre M3-sourced straight-six engine, it's a real hot-rod, and it has a hugely entertaining chassis, too. Having covered 126,000 miles, this example (above left) has clearly been used and enjoyed to the full, but the huge history file also proves it has been cared for by a loving owner. As well as recent brake discs, pads and callipers, the car offered here has been fitted with upgraded adjustable coilover suspension, along with a full set of polyurethane bushes. It's estimated to sell for £10,000-15,000.

And finally, it seems that the days of finding a cheap Testarossa are well and truly behind us. This nicely presented Nero Metallico example (above right) is expected to fetch around £72,000-82,000 and is about as affordable as they now come. Recently imported from Japan, it has had the big cambelt job done this year and has a fresh MOT from a Berkshire-based Ferrari specialist.

Matthew Hayward *(@evoMatthew)*

Auction results

H&H, April 15

1973 BMW 3.0 CSL
£19,600
1999 Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Volante
£31,640
1992 Porsche 911 Turbo (964) (pictured)
£67,800
1987 Porsche 928 S4
£5040
1992 Ferrari 348 TB
£40,320
1969 Aston Martin DB6
£280,000
1985 BMW 635 CSi
£10,920
1980 Ferrari 308 GTS
£44,800

1994 Mercedes-Benz S600
£1165

Coys, Techno-Classica, April 18

1988 Porsche 959 Lux
€904,500
1995 Porsche 993 RS
€333,080
1972 De Tomaso Pantera
€92,495
1980 BMW M1
€461,765
1994 Aston Martin Virage Volante
€70,115
1993 Ferrari 348 TB
€41,400

Classic Car Auctions, April 21

1994 Renault Clio Williams
£6360
2003 Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG Estate
£10,812
1990 Lancia Integrale 8V
£11,660
1998 Alpina B10 3.2 (E39)
£6996
1994 Porsche 968 Sport
£8480
1992 BMW 850i
£9549
2005 Maserati Quattroporte
£14,840

Auction calendar

May 23
Silverstone Auctions
Silverstone, UK
silverstoneauctions.com

May 23
RM Sotheby's
Lake Como, Italy
rmauctions.com

May 24
Bonhams
Francorchamps, Belgium
bonhams.com

May 29-30
Richard Edmonds
Castle Combe, UK
richardedmondsauctions.com

May 31
Bonhams
Greenwich, USA
bonhams.com

June 2
Classic Car Auctions
Silverstone, UK
classiccarauctions.co.uk

June 6
Historics at Brooklands
Brooklands, UK
historics.co.uk

June 16
Barons
Sandown Park, UK
barons-auctions.com

June 20
H&H
Stamford, UK
classic-auctions.com

Fantasy garage

Three supercar-slaying tuned cars for a total of under £70k.
All can be found in the classifieds at classicandperformancecar.com

Ford Focus RS
£22,994

If the standard Mk2 Focus RS's 300bhp seems a bit mild to you, then this 420bhp example should be more like the handful you're looking for.

Nissan GT-R
£38,000

Tuning is a rite of passage for any GT-R owner, so there are many ready-tuned examples on the market, like this 620bhp Litchfield Stage 4 car.

Mitsubishi Evo V
£6995

Just arrived from Japan, serviced and rust-free, power around 320bhp. Has a huge exhaust and an ECU mapped to 'pop and bang' on the overrun.

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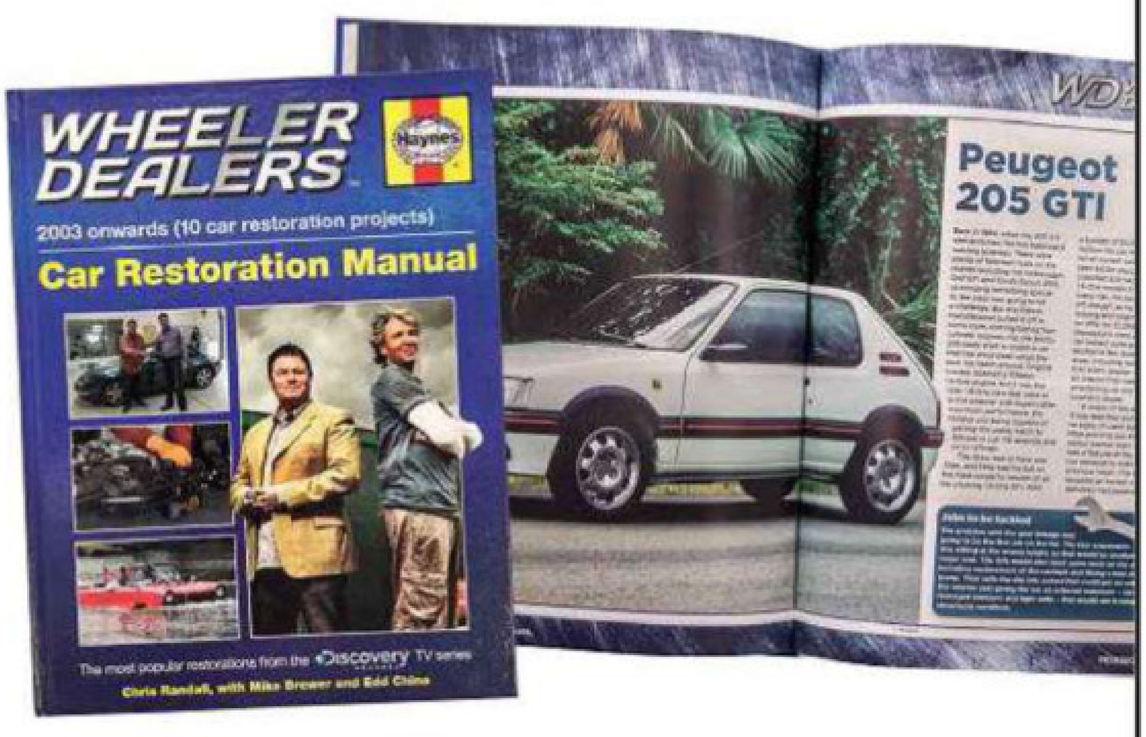
FIA and SFI-approved, the boots are finished in suede and perforated leather, and feature the company's patented Roll Control heel technology.

Finished in red and white or black, they feature a lace-up lower section with a Velcro strap around the ankle, are incredibly comfortable, and the sole is thin enough for ultimate control yet thick enough that walking round the paddock won't feel like you're walking on a bed of nails.

***Stuart Gallagher** (@stuartg917)*



WHEELER DEALERS CAR RESTORATION MANUAL

£22.99 haynes.co.uk

Fans of the *Wheeler Dealers* TV show can now enjoy the work of Mike Brewer and Edd China in print form. Chris Randall's *Car Restoration Manual* covers ten of the show's cars, ranging from a V8 Lamborghini Urraco to a 43bhp Amphicar.

The 176-page Haynes hardback presents China's restoration advice in clear sections, illustrated with images and screenshots from the show. Brewer also provides comment from a buyer's perspective, while a helpful costs table allows readers to gauge how much they'd likely spend. With fewer than 20 pages available for each car, the manual is unable to delve as deep into each project's workings as a model-specific guide can, but as a window into the world of restoration it's a good starting point.

***Sam Sheehan** (@evoSamSheehan)*

MICHELIN PILOT SPORT 3

From £58.98 blackcircles.com

Michelin claims these tyres deliver 'highly precise steering', but I couldn't feel much difference when comparing them to my ageing ContiSportContact 5s.

Michelin could, however, have a point with steering *feel*. We commented in the last **evo** tyre test that 'some will particularly like the distinctively weighty sensation through the steering', and this was apparent to me while driving.

I also noticed a slight increase in fuel efficiency, but not by a massive margin. Add to that a noticeable reduction in road noise and you have an excellent all-round tyre.

***Rob Gould** (@RobGould72)*

OLLOCLIP 3-IN-1 PHOTO LENS

£39.99 olloclip.com

Thanks to the advent of smartphone cameras and Instagram, it seems that almost everyone is a budding photographer these days. For those looking to capture more intricate images, Olloclip has created a range of neat, clip-on smartphone lenses.

We tested the 3-in-1 lens for the iPhone 5C, which features fisheye, wide-angle and macro lenses. Though they're limited by the phone's technical capability, it's surprising to see just how effective a quick lens swap can be. In particular, we were impressed by the macro lens's ability to capture some very convincing close-ups.

Lenses are available for iPhones ranging from the 4 to the 6 Plus, as well as iPads and the Samsung Galaxy S.

***Sam Sheehan** (@evoSamSheehan)*

GTECHNIQ L1 LEATHER GUARD

£5.99 gtechniq.com

'Smart surface science' might sound like marketing lingo, but Gtechniq promises the tagline accurately describes its nanotechnology.

What it means in the case of this Leather Guard is that the product is made up of tiny nanoparticles, which are more effective at evenly covering surfaces and therefore ensuring cracks and imperfections are protected.

You simply spray the solution onto the accompanying soft foam applicator and wipe it into the leather. After a quick buff, the results are plain to see: leather looks refreshed, and high-wear areas such as bolsters immediately feel smoother.

***Sam Sheehan** (@evoSamSheehan)*

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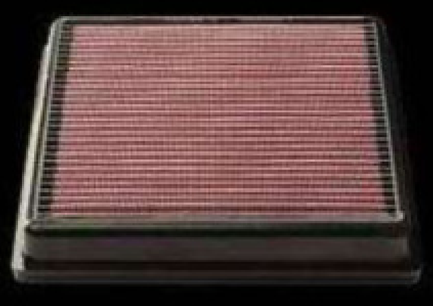

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Knowledge

The best destinations to visit in your car

Great drives: Namlos Pass, Austria

Start point: 47.420023, 10.788338, L21, Bichlbach
The roads: L21 **Perfect for:** BMW M3 GTS (on a dry day)

THERE ARE LONGER PASSES AND THERE ARE MORE SCENIC passes, but few passes are as good to drive as the Namlos, or 'Nameless', pass. Situated just across the Austrian border due south from Munich, it is conveniently placed if you ever want to visit the home of BMW. Head towards the ski resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, passing through the shadow of the Zugspitze (Germany's highest mountain at 2962m), then take the 179/E532 until you reach Bichlbach, where you pick up the L21 at the eastern end of the pass.

The road takes a little while to get going and it isn't a conventional up then down sort of pass. Once you're the far side of the village of Berwang, take a right turn and immediately drop down through a couple of hairpins. The road continues descending through a series of bends that you can straight-line, then a tricky, tightening left is followed by an off-camber right and an open hairpin leads onto a wonderful bridge that feels as though it's suspended amongst the treetops.

Up through a tight hairpin, keep climbing and things really start to get into their stride. There are some very fast, well-sighted sections to the road, particularly the far side of Namlos, and it was here that I remember the orange E92 M3 GTS really coming alive when we group-tested it for **evo** 150. We also took one of my favourite photos here, with a well-cambered corner and some glorious golden light filtering through the trees.

Eventually you drop down though a final couple of hairpins and emerge from the forest into a world of lush meadows. It looks as though they should have Julie Andrews and some von Trapp children permanently gambolling through them. Ahead is the town of Stanzach, which marks the end of the pass, although there is plenty more to explore in this scenically stunning area.

Henry Catchpole
Features editor

The route

Start **Finish**
Distance: 16 miles Time: 35 minutes

Where to stay

The Singer Sporthotel & Spa in Berwang gets good reviews if you want to stay right on the pass itself. Slightly cheaper and closer to petrol stations and other amenities is the Hotel Edelweiss, in Garmisch, just across the border in Germany. If you're heading down to the pass from further west of Munich then you could try the Hotel Hirsch, in Füssen.

Watch out for

Remember that if you're travelling on the motorway while you are in Austria then you will need to buy a vignette and display the sticker in an untinted part of your windscreen. Unlike Switzerland, it's not too expensive as you can purchase a ten-day pass for less than €10 (the fine if you're caught without one is currently €240).

For more driving destinations, visit:
evo.co.uk/track-and-travel

Reader road trip

L'invasion Française

What a weekend! Having met up with 14 other Clio V6s at Lancaster, we travelled to Ings for a blast through the Lake District on roads that these fast but frisky hot (scorching) French hatches seem custom-built for.

That said, driving up the dry-stone-wall-flanked Kirkstone Pass was something of a tight squeeze with the V6s' wide bodykits, and I think we gave a few cyclists a fright as we trundled past. Next up were the idyllic shores of Ullswater lake, where we progressed at a steady pace, just about staying in convoy despite the odd Civic or Corsa squeezing in amongst the pack. Cheeky blighters.

Lunch gave us a chance to chill out for a while, enjoy some nice food and discuss the morning's drive. For some it was also a chance to get the speed detailer and microfibre cloths out and give their cars a polish!

The drive was also a nice opportunity to meet some new owners' club members and have a chat about their experiences with the V6. It's funny how after owning one for a number of years you can easily forget just how special these little cars are.

After lunch we set course for the Honister Pass and had a brew-break at the top with a chance to take in the scenery, which looked utterly magnificent in the sun.

Onwards we went through the small Lakeland villages, with nodding glances of approval from onlookers. It's always funny to hear people counting, 'One Clio, another Clio... Oh look! Lots of Clios!' It's also true that sound travels faster than light now – people heard us coming before they spotted us, with the exhausts notes rebounding off the slate.

Renault only sold a car, but the club certainly augments the experience of ownership. Roll on next summer!

Matt Willett

Email your story to henryc@evo.co.uk

Ratings ★ Thrill-free zone ★★ Tepid ★★★ Interesting ★★★★ Seriously good ★★★★★ A truly great car

Database

Key ✚ = new entry this month. * = grey import. Entries in italics are for cars no longer on sale. **Issue no.** is for our most recent major test of the car (D = Driven, R = Road test or group test, F = Feature). Call 0844 844 0039 to order a back issue. **Price** is on-the-road including VAT and delivery charges. **Engine** is the car's main motor only – additional hybrid tech isn't shown. **Weight** is the car's kerb weight as quoted by the manufacturer. **bhp/ton** is the power-to-weight ratio based on manufacturer's kerb weight. **0-60mph** and **0-100mph** figures in bold are independently recorded, all other performance figures are manufacturers' claims. **CO2 g/km** is the official EC figure and **EC mpg** is the official 'Combined' figure or equivalent.

Knowledge

Superminis / Hot Hatches

	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Abarth 595 Competizione	196 D	£18,960	4/1368	158/5500	170/3000	1035kg	155	7.4	-	130	155	43.5	+ Spirited engine, still looks great - Favours fun over finesse	★★★☆☆
Abarth 695 Biposto	205 R	£32,990	4/1369	187/5500	184/3000	997kg	191	5.9	-	143	-	-	+ Engineered like a true Abarth product - Desirable extras make this a £50k city car	★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo Mito Cloverleaf	149 R	£18,870	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1145kg	149	7.5	-	136	139	47.1	+ Great MultiAir engine, impressive ride - Not as feisty as we hoped	★★★½☆
Alfa Romeo Giulietta QV	199 D	£28,120	4/1742	237/5750	251/2000	1320kg	182	6.0	-	151	162	40.3	+ Still looks good, and now it's got the 4C's engine - Pricey, and it has more rewarding rivals	★★★☆☆
Alfa Romeo Giulietta Cloverleaf	*144 D*	*'10-'14*	*4/1742*	*232/5500*	*251/1900*	*1320kg*	*179*	*6.8*	-	*150*	*177*	*37.2*	*+ Shows signs of deep talent... - ...but should be more exciting*	★★★☆☆
Alfa Romeo 147 GTA	*187 R*	*'03-'06*	*6/3179*	*247/6200*	*221/4800*	*1360kg*	*185*	***6.0***	***15.5***	*153*	-	*23.3*	*+ Mk1 Focus RS pace without the histrionics - Slightly nose-heavy*	★★★★☆
Audi S1	203 R	£24,900	4/1984	228/6000	273/1600	1315kg	176	5.8	-	155	162	40.4	+ Compliant and engaging chassis; quick, too - Looks dull without options	★★★★☆
Audi A1 quattro	*181 R*	*'13*	*4/1984*	*253/6000*	*258/2500*	*1420kg*	*181*	*5.7*	-	*152*	*199*	*32.8*	*+ Polished 253bhp all-wheel-drive A1 - Just 19 for UK, Porsche Cayman price*	★★★★½
Audi S3	188 R	£30,640	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1395kg	216	**5.4**	**12.5**	155	162	40.4	+ Lots of grip and one of the best-sounding four-pot turbos - Still a little too clinical	★★★★☆
Audi S3	*106 R*	*'06-'12*	*4/1984*	*261/6000*	*258/2500*	*1455kg*	*183*	***5.6***	***13.6***	*155*	*198*	*33.2*	*+ Very fast, very effective, very... err, quality - A little too clinical*	★★★★☆
Audi RS3 Sportback	*156 R*	*'11-'12*	*5/2480*	*335/5400*	*332/1600*	*1575kg*	*216*	*4.5*	-	*155*	*212*	*31.0*	*+ Above, with added five-pot character - Again, see above...*	★★★★☆
BMW 125i M Sport	176 D	£26,020	4/1997	218/5000	228/1350	1420kg	156	6.4	-	155	154	42.8	+ Performance, price, running costs - Dull four-pot soundtrack	★★★★☆
BMW M135i	195 R	£30,835	6/2979	316/5800	332/1300	1425kg	225	**4.8**	**12.9**	155	188	35.3	+ Powertrain, noise, chassis, price - M235i looks nicer, and has an LSD on its options list	★★★★½
BMW 130i M Sport	*106 R*	*'05-'10*	*6/2996*	*261/6650*	*232/2750*	*1450kg*	*183*	***6.1***	***15.3***	*155*	-	*34.0*	*+ Fantastic engine - Suspension can still get a little boingy*	★★★★☆
Citroën C1/Peugeot 107/Toyota Aygo	126 R	£8095+	3/998	68/6000	68/3600	790kg	87	14.2	-	98	103	61.4	+ Full of character and insurance-friendly - Insurance friendly power	★★★★☆
Citroën Saxo VTS	*020 R*	*'97-'03*	*4/1587*	*120/6600*	*107/5200*	*935kg*	*130*	***7.6***	***22.6***	*127*	-	*34.9*	*+ Chunky, chuckable charger - Can catch out the unwary*	★★★★½
Citroën AX GT	*195 R*	*'87-'92*	*4/1360*	*85/6400*	*86/4000*	*722kg*	*120*	*9.2*	-	*110*	-	-	*+ Makes terrific use of 85bhp - Feels like it's made from paper*	★★★★½
Citroën DS3 1.6 THP	142 R	£17,475	4/1598	154/6000	177/1400	1240kg	126	*7.2*	-	133	155	42.2	+ A proper French hot hatch - Petrolheads might find it too 'designed'	★★★★☆
Citroën DS3 Racing	*153 D*	*'11-'12*	*4/1598*	*204/6000*	*203/2000*	*1240kg*	*167*	*6.5*	-	*146*	*149*	-	*+ Faster, feistier version of above - Not as hardcore as its 'Racing' tag suggests*	★★★½☆
Fiat Panda 100HP	*132 R*	*'06-'11*	*4/1368*	*99/6000*	*97/4250*	*975kg*	*103*	*9.5*	-	*115*	*154*	*43.5*	*+ Most fun per pound on the market - Optional ESP can't be turned off*	★★★★½
Fiat Punto Evo Sporting	141 D	£13,355	4/1368	133/5000	152/1750	1155kg	117	8.5	-	127	129	50.4	+ Great engine, smart styling - Dynamics don't live up to the Evo name	★★★½☆
Ford Fiesta ST	207 R	£17,395	4/1596	179/5700	214/1600	1088kg	167	**7.4**	**18.4**	137	138	47.9	+ Chassis, price, punchy performance - Not as powerful as key rivals	★★★★½
Ford Fiesta ST Mountune	195 R	£17,994	4/1596	212/6000	236/2750	1088kg	198	6.6	-	140	138	-	+ One of the best mid-sized hatches made even better - Badge snobbery	★★★★★
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	*123 D*	*'08-'13*	*4/1596*	*118/6000*	*112/4050*	*1045kg*	*115*	*9.9*	-	*120*	*134*	*48.7*	*+ Genuinely entertaining supermini - Grown up compared to Twingo/Swift*	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta Zetec S Mountune	*132 R*	*'08-'13*	*4/1596*	*138/6750*	*125/4250*	*1080kg*	*130*	*7.9*	-	*120*	*134*	*48.7*	*+ As above, with a fantastically loud exhaust... - ...if you're 12 years old*	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST	*075 D*	*'05-'08*	*4/1999*	*148/6000*	*140/4500*	*1137kg*	*132*	*7.9*	-	*129*	-	*38.2*	*+ Great looks, decent brakes - Disappointing chassis, gutless engine*	★★★☆☆
Ford Fiesta ST185 Mountune	*115 R*	*'08*	*4/1999*	*185/6700*	*147/3500*	*1137kg*	*165*	*6.9*	-	*129*	-	-	*+ Fiesta ST gets the power it always needed - OTT exhaust note*	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST TDCi Estate	206 D	£23,295	4/1997	182/3500	295/2000	1488kg	124	8.3	-	135	110	67.3	+ Performance not sacrificed at the alter of economy - Interior design still jars slightly	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST	207 R	£22,195	4/1999	247/5500	265/2000	1362kg	184	6.5	-	154	159	41.5	+ Excellent engine - Scrappy when pushed	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST Mountune	187 D	£23,220	4/1999	271/5500	295/2750	1362kg	202	5.7	-	154+	169	-	+ Great value upgrade - Steering still not as feelsome as that of some rivals	★★★★½
Ford Focus ST	*119 R*	*'05-'10*	*5/2522*	*222/6000*	*236/1600*	*1392kg*	*162*	***6.7***	***16.8***	*150*	*224*	*30.4*	*+ Value, performance, integrity - Big engine compromises handling*	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST Mountune	*137 R*	*'08-'11*	*5/2522*	*256/5500*	*295/2500*	*1392kg*	*187*	***5.8***	***14.3***	*155*	*224*	-	*+ ST takes extra power in its stride - You probably still want an RS*	★★★★½
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	*195 R*	*'09-'11*	*5/2522*	*300/6500*	*324/2300*	*1467kg*	*208*	***5.9***	***14.2***	*163*	*225*	*30.5*	*+ Huge performance, highly capable FWD chassis - Body control is occasionally clumsy*	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS500	*181 R*	*'10-'11*	*5/2522*	*345/6000*	*339/2500*	*1467kg*	*239*	***5.6***	***12.7***	*165*	*225*	-	*+ More power and presence than regular RS - Pricey*	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS (Mk1)	*207 R*	*'02-'03*	*4/1998*	*212/5500*	*229/3500*	*1278kg*	*169*	***5.9***	***14.9***	*143*	-	-	*+ Some are great - Some are awful (so make sure you drive plenty)*	★★★★☆
Ford Escort RS Cosworth	*157 R*	*'92-'96*	*4/1993*	*224/6250*	*224/3500*	*1275kg*	*179*	*6.2*	-	*137*	-	-	*+ The ultimate Essex hot hatch - Unmodified ones are rare , and getting pricey...*	★★★★☆
Ford Puma 1.7	*095 R*	*'97-'02*	*4/1679*	*123/6300*	*116/4500*	*1041kg*	*120*	***8.6***	***27.6***	*122*	-	*38.2*	*+ Everything - Nothing. The 1.4 is worth a look too*	★★★★½
Ford Racing Puma	*128 R*	*'00-'01*	*4/1679*	*153/7000*	*119/4500*	*1174kg*	*132*	***7.8***	***23.2***	*137*	-	*34.7*	*+ Exclusivity - The standard Puma does it so well*	★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R	*102 R*	*'07-'11*	*4/1998*	*198/7800*	*142/5600*	*1267kg*	*158*	***6.8***	***17.5***	*146*	*215*	*31.0*	*+ Looks great, VTEC more accessible - Steering lacks feel, inert balance*	★★★½☆
Honda Civic Type R Champ'ship White	*126 D*	*'09-'10*	*4/1998*	*198/7800*	*142/5600*	*1267kg*	*158*	*6.6*	-	*146*	-	*31.0*	*+ Limited-slip diff a welcome addition - It's not available on standard car...*	★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R Mugen	*195 R*	*'09-'11*	*4/1998*	*237/8300*	*157/6250*	*1233kg*	*195*	*5.9*	-	*155*	-	-	*+ Fantastic on road and track - There's only 20, and they're a tad pricey...*	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R	*075 R*	*'01-'05*	*4/1998*	*197/7400*	*145/5900*	*1204kg*	*166*	***6.8***	***16.9***	*146*	-	*31.7*	*+ Potent and great value - Looks divide opinion, duff steering*	★★★★☆
Kia Proceed GT	207 R	£20,200	4/1591	201/6000	195/1750	1448kg	143	7.4	-	143	171	38.2	+ Fun and appealing package - Lacks sharpness and control at its outer edges	★★★★☆
Lancia Delta Integrale	*194 R*	*'88-'93*	*4/1995*	*207/5750*	*220/3500*	*1300kg*	*162*	*5.7*	-	*137*	-	*23.9*	*+ One of the finest cars ever built - Demands love, LHD only*	★★★★★
Mazda 2 1.5 Sport	132 R	£13,495	4/1498	102/6000	101/4000	1030kg	107	10.4	-	117	135	48.7	+ Fun and funky - Feels tinny after a Mini	★★★½☆
Mazda 3 MPS	*137 R*	*'06-'13*	*4/2261*	*256/5500*	*280/3000*	*1385kg*	*188*	***6.3***	***14.5***	*155*	*224*	*29.4*	*+ Quick, eager and very good value - The steering's iffy*	★★★½☆
Mercedes-Benz A250 'by AMG'	173 D	£29,355	4/1991	208/5500	258/1200	1370kg	154	6.5	-	149	148	46.3	+ Mercedes builds a proper hot hatch - But denies it a manual gearbox	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG	194 R	£37,845	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1480kg	244	**4.3**	**10.6**	155	161	40.9	+ Blisteringly quick everywhere - Not as rewarding as some slower rivals	★★★★☆
MG3 Style	190 D	£9999	4/1498	104/6000	101/4750	1155kg	91	10.4	-	108	136	48.7	+ Decent chassis, performance and price - Thrashy engine, cheap cabin	★★★☆☆
MG Metro 6R4 Clubman	*181 R*	*'84-'87*	*6/2991*	*250/7000*	*225/6500*	*1000kg*	*254*	*4.5*	-	*140*	-	-	*+ The most extreme hot hatch ever - Engine noise, heat soak, five mpg*	★★★★★
Mini Cooper (F56)	194 D	£15,300	3/1499	134/4500	162/1250	1085kg	125	7.9	-	130	105	62.8	+ Punchy three-cylinder engine, good chassis - Tubby styling	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper S (F56)	196 D	£18,665	4/1998	189/4700	206/1250	1160kg	166	6.8	-	146	133	49.6	+ Still has that Mini DNA - Expensive with options; naff dash displays	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper S 5-door (F56)	207 D	£19,440	4/1998	189/4700	206/1250	1220kg	148	6.9	-	144	136	47.9	+ Super engine, gearbox and brakes - Lacks some of the agility of the three-door	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works Coupe (R58)	164 R	£23,805	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1175kg	180	6.3	-	149	165	39.8	+ The usual raucous Mini JCW experience - But with a questionable 'helmet' roof...	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper (R56)	*185 F*	*'09-'14*	*4/1598*	*120/6000*	*118/4250*	*1075kg*	*113*	*9.1*	-	*126*	*127*	*52.3*	*+ Brilliant ride and composure; could be all the Mini you need - You'll still buy the 'S'*	★★★★½
Mini Cooper S (R56)	*149 R*	*'06-'14*	*4/1598*	*181/5500*	*177/1600*	*1140kg*	*161*	***7.0***	-	*142*	*136*	*48.7*	*+ New engine, Mini quality - Front end not quite as direct as the old car's*	★★★★½
Mini Cooper SD (R56)	*158 D*	*'11-'14*	*4/1995*	*141/4000*	*225/1750*	*1150kg*	*125*	*8.0*	-	*134*	*114*	*65.7*	*+ A quick diesel Mini with impressive mpg - But no Cooper S alternative*	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works (R56)	*184 R*	*'08-'14*	*4/1598*	*208/6000*	*206/2000*	*1160kg*	*182*	***7.2***	***16.7***	*148*	*165*	*39.8*	*+ A seriously rapid Mini - Occasionally just a little unruly*	★★★★½
Mini John Cooper Works GP (R56)	*195 R*	*'13-'14*	*4/1598*	*215/6000*	*206/2000*	*1160kg*	*188*	*6.3*	-	*150*	*165*	*39.8*	*+ Brazenly hyperactive - Too much for some roads and some tastes*	★★★★★
Mini Cooper S (R50)	*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*	★★★★½
Mini Cooper S Works GP (R50)	*144 R*	*'06*	*4/1598*	*215/7100*	*184/4600*	*1090kg*	*200*	*6.5*	-	*149*	-	*32.8*	*+ Storming engine, agility - Tacky styling 'enhancements'*	★★★★★
Nissan Juke Nismo RS	208 D	£21,650	4/1618	215/6000	206/3600	1315kg	166	7.0	-	137	165	39.2	+ Quirky character and bold styling - Not a match for a pukka hot hatch	★★★½☆
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*	★★★★☆

storemags

Official fuel consumption for the Model Year 16 Volvo V40 T2 R-Design (manual) in MPG (l/100km): Urban 38.7 (7.3), Extra Urban 62.8 (4.5), Combined 51.4 (5.5). CO_2 Emissions 127g/km. MPG figures are obtained from laboratory testing intended for comparisons between vehicles and may not reflect real driving results.

Ratings ★ Thrill-free zone ★★ Tepid ★★★ Interesting ★★★★ Seriously good ★★★★★ A truly great car

Our Choice

Volkswagen Golf R. A flagship Golf to get *really* excited about, the new R offers immense pace and a truly engaging driving experience in a compromise-free package with class and quality aplenty. It's now available as an estate, too.

Best of the Rest

The SEAT Leon Cupra 280 is a real buzz to thread along a tough road, but the Mégane 275 edges it for tactility and involvement. Amongst the smaller hatches, Peugeot's 208 GTi 30th (left) is fabulously focused, while the Fiesta ST is the affordable choice.

Superminis / Hot Hatches

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 1)	*095 R*	*'94-'96*	*4/1294*	*100/7200*	*80/5400*	*826kg*	*123*	*10.6*	*-*	*118*	*-*	*35.6*	*+ Frantic, thrashy fun - Needs caning to extract full potential*	★★★★★
Peugeot 106 GTI 16v	*034 R*	*'97-'04*	*4/1587*	*120/6600*	*107/5200*	*950kg*	*128*	***7.4***	***22.2***	*127*	*-*	*34.9*	*+ Fine handling supermini - Looks its age*	★★★★½
Peugeot 208 GTi	184 R	£18,895	4/1598	197/5800	203/1700	1160kg	173	**6.8**	**17.9**	143	125	47.9	+ Agile chassis works well on tough roads - Could be more involving	★★★★☆
Peugeot 208 GTi 30th Anniversary	207 R	£21,995	4/1598	205/5800	221/1750	1185kg	176	6.5	-	143	125	47.9	+ The most focused and aggressive small hatch on sale - £5k more than a Fiesta ST	★★★★★
Peugeot 205 GTI 1.9	*195 R*	*'88-'91*	*4/1905*	*130/6000*	*119/4750*	*910kg*	*145*	*7.9*	*-*	*124*	*-*	*36.7*	*+ Still scintillating after all these years - Brittle build quality*	★★★★★
Peugeot 306 GTI-6	*020 R*	*'93-'01*	*4/1998*	*167/6500*	*142/5500*	*1215kg*	*139*	***7.2***	***20.1***	*140*	*-*	*30.1*	*+ One of the great GTIs - They don't make them like this any more*	★★★★★
Peugeot 306 Rallye	*095 R*	*'98-'99*	*4/1998*	*167/6500*	*142/5500*	*1199kg*	*142*	***6.9***	***19.2***	*137*	*-*	*30.1*	*+ Essentially a GTI-6 for less dosh - Limited choice of colours*	★★★★★
Renaultsport Twingo 133	*175 R*	*'08-'13*	*4/1598*	*131/6750*	*118/4400*	*1050kg*	*127*	*8.6*	*-*	*125*	*150*	*43.5*	*+ Renaultsport experience for pocket money - Optional Cup chassis gives bouncy ride*	★★★★☆
Renaultsport Clio 200 Turbo	184 R	£18,995	4/1618	197/6000	177/1750	1204kg	166	**6.9**	**17.9**	143	144	44.8	+ Faster, more refined, easier to drive - We miss the revvy nat-asp engine and manual 'box	★★★★☆
Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup	*195 R*	*'09-'13*	*4/1998*	*197/7100*	*159/5400*	*1204kg*	*166*	***6.6***	***16.7***	*141*	*190*	*34.5*	*+ The hot Clio at its best - They don't make it anymore*	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 197 Cup	*115 R*	*'07-'09*	*4/1998*	*194/7250*	*158/5550*	*1240kg*	*161*	*6.9*	*-*	*134*	*-*	*33.6*	*+ Quick, polished and capable - Not as much sheer fun as 182 Cup*	★★★★☆
Renaultsport Clio 182	*066 R*	*'04-'06*	*4/1998*	*180/6500*	*148/5250*	*1110kg*	*165*	***6.6***	***17.5***	*139*	*-*	*34.9*	*+ Took hot hatches to a new level - Flawed driving position*	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 182 Cup	*187 R*	*'04-'06*	*4/1998*	*180/6500*	*148/5250*	*1090kg*	*168*	*6.5*	*-*	*139*	*-*	*34.9*	*+ Full of beans, fantastic value - Sunday-market upholstery*	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio Trophy	*200 R*	*'05-'06*	*4/1998*	*180/6500*	*148/5250*	*1090kg*	*168*	***6.6***	***17.3***	*140*	*-*	*34.9*	*+ The most fun you can have on three (sometimes two) 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*	*251/7150*	*221/4650*	*1400kg*	*182*	*5.8*	*-*	*153*	*-*	*23.0*	*+ Supercar drama without the original's edgy handling - Uninspired interior*	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio V6	*029 R*	*'99-'02*	*6/2946*	*227/6000*	*221/3750*	*1335kg*	*173*	***5.8***	***17.0***	*145*	*-*	*23.0*	*+ Pocket supercar - Mid-engined handling can be tricky*	★★★★☆
Renault Clio Williams	*195 R*	*'93-'96*	*4/1988*	*148/6100*	*126/4500*	*981kg*	*153*	***7.6***	***20.8***	*134*	*-*	*26.0*	*+ One of the best hot hatches ever - Can be fragile*	★★★★★
Renault 5 GT Turbo	*195 R*	*'87-'91*	*4/1397*	*118/5750*	*122/3000*	*855kg*	*140*	*7.3*	*-*	*120*	*-*	*28.4*	*+ Clio Williams' grand-daddy - Few unmodified ones left*	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	195 R	£25,990	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	191	**6.4**	**14.8**	158	174	37.7	+ A hot hatch benchmark - Not a lot	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy	201 D	£28,930	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1376kg	200	6.0	-	158	174	37.7	+ Another cracking Trophy model - Stripped-out Trophy-R is even more thrilling	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy-R	203 R	£36,430	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1297kg	212	5.8	-	158	174	37.7	+ As absorbing as a 911 GT3 RS on the right road - Too uncompromising for some; pricey	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	*139 R*	*'09-'12*	*4/1998*	*247/5500*	*251/3000*	*1387kg*	*181*	***6.1***	***14.6***	*156*	*190*	*34.4*	*+ Fantastic chassis... - ...partially obscured by new-found maturity*	★★★★½
Renaultsport Mégane dCi 175 Cup	*119 R*	*'07-'09*	*4/1995*	*173/3750*	*265/2000*	*1470kg*	*119*	***8.3***	***23.5***	*137*	*-*	*43.5*	*+ A diesel with a genuinely sporty chassis - Could take more power*	★★★★☆
Renaultsport Mégane 230 F1 Team R26	*195 R*	*'07-'09*	*4/1998*	*227/5500*	*229/3000*	*1345kg*	*171*	***6.2***	***16.0***	*147*	*-*	*-*	*+ The car the R26.R is based on - F1 Team stickers in dubious taste*	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	*200 R*	*'08-'09*	*4/1998*	*227/5500*	*229/3000*	*1220kg*	*189*	***5.8***	***15.1***	*147*	*-*	*-*	*+ One of the true hot hatch heroes - Two seats, plastic rear windows*	★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza FR 2.0 TDI	144 R	£17,445	4/1968	141/4200	236/1750	1245kg	115	8.2	-	131	123	60.1	+ More fun than the petrol FR, manual gearbox option - The Cupra's not much more	★★★½☆
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	183 D	£18,765	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1259kg	144	6.9	-	142	139	47.9	+ Punchy engine, unflappable DSG - Lacks engagement	★★★☆☆
SEAT Leon FR TDI 184	184 D	£22,255	4/1968	181/4000	280/1750	1350kg	136	7.5	-	142	112	64.2	+ Performance, sweet chassis, economy, comfort - Boorish engine	★★★☆☆
SEAT Leon Cupra 280	195 R	£27,210	4/1984	276/5600	258/1750	1320kg	212	5.8	-	155	149	44.1	+ Serious pace and agility for Golf GTI money - The Mk7 Golf R	★★★★½
SEAT Leon FR+	*163 D*	*'11-'12*	*4/1984*	*208/5300*	*206/1700*	*1334kg*	*158*	*7.2*	*-*	*145*	*170*	*38.7*	*+ As quick as a Golf GTI five-door but lots cheaper - Misses the VW's completeness*	★★★★☆
SEAT Leon Cupra R	*139 R*	*'10-'12*	*4/1984*	*261/6000*	*258/2500*	*1375kg*	*193*	***6.1***	***14.0***	*155*	*190*	*34.9*	*+ Bold car, blinding engine - Lacks the character of its rival mega-hatches*	★★★½☆
SEAT Leon Cupra	*105 R*	*'07-'11*	*4/1984*	*237/5700*	*221/2200*	*1375kg*	*175*	*6.3*	*-*	*153*	*190*	*34.0*	*+ Great engine, composure - Doesn't have adjustability of old Cupra R*	★★★★☆
SEAT Leon Cupra R 225	*067 R*	*'03-'06*	*4/1781*	*222/5900*	*206/2200*	*1376kg*	*164*	*6.9*	*-*	*150*	*-*	*32.1*	*+ Cross-country pace, practicality, value - Not as thrilling as some*	★★★★☆
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146 D	£17,150	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1218kg	148	7.3	-	139	148	45.6	+ Well priced, well made, with great engine and DSG 'box - Dull steering	★★★½☆
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk1)	*077 R*	*'04-'07*	*4/1896*	*130/4000*	*229/1900*	*1315kg*	*100*	*9.6*	*-*	*127*	*-*	*55.4*	*+ Fascinatingly fun and frugal hot hatch - A little short on steering feel*	★★★½☆
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk3)	187 D	£23,260	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1350kg	163	6.8	-	154	142	45.6	+ Quick, agile, roomier than a Golf - Ride is harsh for what could be a family car	★★★★☆
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk2)	*163 R*	*'06-'13*	*4/1998*	*197/5100*	*206/1700*	*1395kg*	*143*	*7.3*	*-*	*149*	*175*	*37.7*	*+ Drives like a GTI but costs much less - Green brake calipers?*	★★★★☆
Smart Fortwo Brabus	110 D	£15,375	3/999	97/5500	104/3500	780kg	126	9.9	-	96	119	54.3	+ Telling people you drive a Brabus - Them realising it's not a 720bhp S-class	★★★☆☆
Subaru Impreza STI CS400	*146 R*	*'10-'12*	*4/2457*	*395/5750*	*400/3950*	*1505kg*	*267*	*4.6*	*10.7*	*155*	*-*	*-*	*+ Cosworth kudos. One of the fastest hatches we've tested - Pricey. Lifeless steering*	★★★½☆
Subaru Impreza WRXS	*125 D*	*'08-'10*	*4/2457*	*251/5400*	*288/3000*	*1395kg*	*180*	*5.5*	*-*	*130*	*270*	*-*	*+ An improvement over the basic WRX - Still not the WRX we wanted*	★★★½☆
Subaru Impreza STI 330S	*124 R*	*'08-'10*	*4/2457*	*325/5400*	*347/3400*	*1505kg*	*219*	*4.4*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*-*	*+ A bit quicker than the STI... - ...but not better*	★★★★☆
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk2)	175 R	£13,749	4/1586	134/6900	118/4400	1045kg	130	8.7	-	121	147	44.1	+ The Swift's still a great pocket rocket - But it's lost a little adjustability	★★★★½
Suzuki Swift Sport	*132 R*	*'05-'11*	*4/1586*	*123/6800*	*109/4800*	*1030kg*	*121*	*8.9*	*-*	*124*	*165*	*39.8*	*+ Entertaining handling, well built - Lacking in steering feedback*	★★★★½
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154 R	£18,995	4/1598	189/5850	192/1980	1166kg	165	6.8	-	140	172	38.7	+ Looks snazzy, punchy engine - Lacks feel, uncouth compared with rivals	★★★½☆
Vauxhall Corsa VXR N'ring/Clubsport	*164 R*	*'11-'13/'14*	*4/1598*	*202/5750*	*206/2250*	*1166kg*	*176*	*6.5*	*-*	*143*	*178*	*-*	*+ VXR gets more power and a limited-slip diff - But they come at a price*	★★★★☆
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk2)	207 R	£27,315	4/1998	276/5500	295/2500	1475kg	190	5.9	-	155	184	34.9	+ Better than the car it replaces; loony turbo pace - Lacks RS Mégane's precision	★★★★☆
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk1)	*102 R*	*'05-'11*	*4/1998*	*237/5600*	*236/2400*	*1393kg*	*173*	***6.7***	***16.7***	*152*	*221*	*30.7*	*+ Fast and furious - Lacks a little composure and precision*	★★★★☆
VW Up/SEAT Mii/Skoda Citigo	171 R	£7990+	3/999	59/5000	70/3000	854kg	70	14.1	-	99	105	62.8	+ Accomplished city car is dynamically sound... - ...but predictably slow	★★★★☆
VW Polo GTI	206 D	£18,850	4/1798	189/4200	236/1450	1280kg	150	6.7	-	146	139	47.1	+ At last, a real live 'n' kicking baby Golf GTI - Fiesta ST is still more engaging	★★★★☆
VW Polo GTI	*154 R*	*'10-'14*	*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*	★★★½☆
VW Golf GTD (Mk7)	200 D	£25,765	4/1968	181/3500	280/1750	1377kg	134	7.5	-	143	109	67.3	+ Pace, fuel economy, sounds good for a diesel - Lacks the extra edge of the GTI	★★★★☆
VW Golf GTI (Mk7)	207 R	£26,580	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1351kg	163	6.5	-	153	139	47.1	+ Brilliantly resolved - Mégane 265 beats it as a pure drivers' car	★★★★½
VW Golf GTE (Mk7)	202 D	£28,000	4/1395	201	258	1524kg	134	7.6	-	138	35	188.0	+ The most enjoyable plug-in hybrid at this price - Golf GTI still quicker and more fun	★★★½☆
VW Golf R (Mk7)	203 R	£29,900	4/1984	297/5500	280/1800	1476kg	204	5.1	-	155	165	40.9	+ Time to take the R brand seriously - Mégane 265 *just* edges it as a pure drivers' car	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk6)	*172 R*	*'09-'13*	*4/1984*	*207/5300*	*207/1700*	*1318kg*	*160*	***6.4***	***16.5***	*148*	*170*	*38.7*	*+ Still a very accomplished hot hatch - 207bhp isn't a lot any more*	★★★★☆
VW Golf R (Mk6)	*140 D*	*'10-'13*	*4/1984*	*266/6000*	*258/2500*	*1521kg*	*178*	*5.5*	*-*	*155*	*199*	*33.2*	*+ Great engine, tremendous pace and poise - High price, ACC only optional*	★★★★½
VW Golf GTI (Mk5)	*195 R*	*'04-'09*	*4/1984*	*197/5100*	*207/1800*	*1336kg*	*150*	***6.7***	***17.9***	*145*	*-*	*-*	*+ Character and ability: the GTI's return to form - Lacking firepower?*	★★★★★
VW Golf R32 (Mk5)	*087 R*	*'06-'09*	*6/3189*	*246/6300*	*236/2500*	*1510kg*	*165*	***5.8***	***15.2***	*155*	*-*	*26.4*	*+ Traction's great and you'll love the soundtrack - We'd still have a GTI*	★★★★☆
VW Golf R32 (Mk4)	*053 R*	*'02-'04*	*6/3189*	*237/6250*	*236/2800*	*1477kg*	*163*	***6.4***	***16.3***	*154*	*-*	*24.6*	*+ Charismatic - Boomy engine can be tiresome*	★★★★☆
VW Golf GTI 16v (Mk2)	*195 R*	*'88-'92*	*4/1781*	*139/6100*	*124/4600*	*960kg*	*147*	*7.9*	*-*	*129*	*-*	*26.6*	*+ Still feels everyday useable - Very hard to find a standard one*	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk1, 1.8)	*095 R*	*'82-'84*	*4/1781*	*112/5800*	*109/3500*	*840kg*	*135*	*8.1*	*-*	*112*	*-*	*36.0*	*+ The car that started it all - Tricky to find an unmolested one*	★★★★☆
Volvo C30 T5 R-Design	*122 R*	*'08-'12*	*5/2521*	*227/5000*	*236/1500*	*1347kg*	*165*	***6.6***	***16.9***	*149*	*203*	*32.5*	*+ Good-looking, desirable Volvo - Lacks edge of best hatches. Avoid auto*	★★★½☆

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Our Choice

BMW M5. The turbocharging of BMW's M-cars met with scepticism, but the current M5's 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 feels a perfect fit. It's a brutally fast car, and there are clever (and useable) adjustable driving modes. The '30 Jahre' special edition, which has an extra 40bhp, is especially worth a look.

Best of the Rest

Mercedes' E63 AMG offers intoxicating performance, especially with the S upgrade (pictured). BMW's M3 is an appealing all-round package, but its C63 AMG rival has more approachable limits. Meanwhile, the latest Alpina D3 Biturbo is not only the world's fastest diesel production car, but a great handler too.

Saloons / Estates / 4x4s

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Alpina D3 Biturbo (F30)	192 D	£46,950	6/2993	345/4000	516/1500	1585kg	221	4.6	-	173	139	53.3	+ 173mph from a 3-litre diesel! Brilliant chassis, too - Auto only	★★★★½
Alpina B3 Biturbo (F30)	188 D	£54,950	6/2979	404/5500	442/3000	1610kg	255	4.2	-	190	177	37.2	+ Understated appearance, monster performance - E90 M3 is better on the limit	★★★★½
Alpina D3 (E90)	*120 R*	*'08-'12*	*4/1995*	*211/4000*	*332/2000*	*1495kg*	*143*	*6.9*	-	*152*	-	*52.3*	*+ Excellent chassis, turbodiesel oomph - Rather narrow powerband*	★★★½☆
Alpina B5 Biturbo	149 D	£75,150	8/4395	533/5200	538/2800	1920kg	282	4.5	-	198	244	26.9	+ Big performance and top-line luxury - Driver not really involved	★★★½☆
Alpina B7 Biturbo	134 D	£98,800	8/4395	533/5200	538/2800	2040kg	265	4.6	-	194	230	28.5	+ Massive performance and top-line luxury - Feels its weight when hustled	★★★★☆
Aston Martin Rapide S	201 D	£147,950	12/5935	552/6650	465/5500	1990kg	282	4.2	-	203	300	21.9	+ Oozes star quality; gearbox on 2015MY cars a big improvement - It's cosy in the back	★★★★☆
Aston Martin Rapide	*141 R*	*'10-'13*	*12/5935*	*470/6000*	*443/5000*	*1990kg*	*240*	*5.2*	-	*188*	*355*	-	*+ Better than its DB9 sibling - More a 2+2 than a proper four-seater*	★★★★½
Audi S3 Saloon	192 D	£33,540	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1430kg	210	5.3	-	155	162	26.4	+ On paper a match for the original S4 - In reality much less interesting	★★★½☆
Audi S4 (B8)	166 D	£39,610	6/2995	328/5500	324/2900	1685kg	198	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	+ Great powertrain, secure chassis - The new RS4 is here now...	★★★★☆
Audi S4 (B7)	*073 D*	*'05-'08*	*8/4163*	*339/7000*	*302/3500*	*1700kg*	*206*	*5.4*	-	*155*	-	-	*+ Effortless V8, agile handling - Lacks ultimate finesse of class leaders*	★★★½☆
Audi RS4 Avant (B8)	192 R	£56,545	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1795kg	251	**4.5**	**10.5**	174	249	26.4	+ Looks and sounds the part, thunderously fast - Harsh ride, unnatural steering	★★★½☆
Audi RS4 (B7)	*088 R*	*'06-'08*	*8/4163*	*414/7800*	*317/5500*	*1650kg*	*255*	***4.5***	***10.9***	*155*	-	-	*+ 414bhp at 7800rpm! And there's an estate version too - Busy under braking*	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B5)	*192 R*	*'00-'02*	*6/2671*	*375/6100*	*325/2500*	*1620kg*	*236*	***4.8***	***12.1***	*170*	-	*17.0*	*+ Effortless pace - Not the last word in agility. Bends wheel rims*	★★★★☆
Audi RS2	*101 R*	*'94-'95*	*5/2226*	*315/6500*	*302/3000*	*1595kg*	*201*	***4.8***	***13.1***	*162*	-	*18.0*	*+ Storming performance (thanks to Porsche) - Try finding one*	★★★★☆
Audi S6	*091 D*	*'06-'11*	*10/5204*	*429/6800*	*398/3000*	*1910kg*	*228*	*5.2*	-	*155*	*299*	*22.4*	*+ Even faster, and discreet with it - Very muted V10*	★★★½☆
Audi RS6 Avant (C7)	203 R	£77,995	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1935kg	290	**3.6**	**8.2**	155	229	28.8	+ Performance, foolproof powertrain, looks - Feels a bit one-dimensional	★★★★☆
Audi RS6 Avant (C6)	*116 R*	*'08-'10*	*10/4991*	*572/6250*	*479/1500*	*2025kg*	*287*	***4.3***	***9.7***	*155*	*333*	*20.2*	*+ The world's most powerful estate - Power isn't everything*	★★★★☆
Audi RS6 Avant (C5)	*052 R*	*'02-'04*	*8/4172*	*444/5700*	*413/1950*	*1865kg*	*242*	***4.8***	***11.6***	*155*	-	*19.3*	*+ The ultimate estate car? - Numb steering*	★★★★☆
Audi RS7	208 R	£84,480	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1920kg	292	3.9	-	155	229	28.8	+ Stonking performance, great looks - Numb driving experience	★★★☆☆
Audi S7	171 D	£63,375	8/3993	414/5000	406/1400	1945kg	216	4.6	-	155	225	-	+ Looks and drives better than S6 it's based on - Costs £8000 more	★★★½☆
Audi S8	164 D	£80,690	8/3993	513/5800	479/1700	1975kg	264	4.1	-	155	237	27.7	+ Quicker and much more economical than before - But still underwhelming to drive	★★★½☆
Audi RS Q3	206 D	£45,495	5/2480	335/5300	332/1600	1655kg	206	4.8	-	155	203	32.1	+ Surprisingly characterful; better than many RSs - High centre of gravity	★★★★½
Bentley Flying Spur V8	200 D	£142,800	8/3997	500/6000	487/1700	2342kg	217	4.9	-	183	254	25.9	+ Effortless performance with real top-end kick - Determinedly unsporting	★★★½☆
Bentley Flying Spur	185 D	£153,300	12/5998	616/6000	590/1600	2400kg	261	4.3	-	200	343	19.0	+ More power than old Flying Spur Speed - Feels its weight; engine sounds dull	★★★★☆
Bentley Mulsanne	178 F	£229,360	8/6752	505/4200	752/1750	2610kg	197	5.1	-	184	342	19.3	+ Drives like a modern Bentley should - Shame it doesn't look like one too	★★★★☆
BMW 320d (F30)	168 R	£29,475	4/1995	181/4000	280/1750	1495kg	123	7.4	-	146	120	61.4	+ Fleet-friendly new Three is economical yet entertaining - It's a tad noisy	★★★★☆
BMW 328i (F30)	165 D	£30,470	4/1997	242/5000	258/1250	1430kg	172	5.8	-	155	149	44.8	+ New-age four-pot 328i is great all-rounder - We miss the six-cylinder soundtrack	★★★★½
BMW 330d M Sport (F30)	180 D	£36,975	6/2993	254/4000	413/2000	1540kg	168	5.6	-	155	129	57.6	+ Great engine, fine handling, good value - Steering confuses weight with feel	★★★★½
BMW 435i Gran Coupe	203 D	£41,865	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1585kg	194	5.5	-	155	174	34.9	+ Superb straight-six, fine ride/handling balance - 335i saloon weighs and costs less	★★★★½
BMW M3 (F80)	207 D	£56,590	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1520kg	284	**4.1**	**8.6**	155	204	32.1	+ Looks, performance, practicality - On-limit body control; engine lacks character	★★★★½
BMW M3 (E90)	*123 R*	*'08-'11*	*8/3999*	*414/8300*	*295/3900*	*1605kg*	*262*	***4.9***	***10.7***	*165*	*290*	*22.8*	*+ Every bit as good as the E92 M3 coupe - No carbon roof*	★★★★★
BMW M3 CRT (E90)	*179 R*	*'11-'12*	*8/4361*	*444/8300*	*324/3750*	*1580kg*	*285*	*4.4*	-	*180*	*295*	-	*+ Saloon chassis + weight savings + GTS engine = best E90 M3 - Just 67 were made*	★★★★★
BMW 528i (F10)	164 D	£36,570	4/1997	242/5000	258/1250	1710kg	144	6.2	-	155	152	41.5	+ Four-pot 528 is downsizing near its best - You'll miss the straight-six sound effects	★★★★☆
BMW 535i (F10)	141 D	£44,560	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1685kg	182	6.1	-	155	185	34.9	+ New 5-series impresses... - But only with all the chassis options ticked	★★★☆☆
BMW M5 (F10M)	208 R	£73,960	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1870kg	300	4.3	-	155	232	28.5	+ Twin-turbocharging suits all-new M5 well - Can feel heavy at times	★★★★★
BMW M5 Touring (E60)	*105 R*	*'07-'10*	*10/4999*	*500/7750*	*383/6100*	*1780kg*	*285*	*4.8*	-	*155*	-	*19.3*	*+ Brilliant at ten tenths - Feels slightly clumsy when pottering*	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E60)	*129 R*	*'04-'10*	*10/4999*	*500/7750*	*384/6100*	*1755kg*	*289*	*4.7*	*10.4*	*155*	-	*19.6*	*+ Close to being the ultimate supersaloon - SMG gearbox feels old-tech*	★★★★½
BMW M5 (E39)	*110 R*	*'99-'03*	*8/4941*	*394/6600*	*369/3800*	*1795kg*	*223*	***4.9***	***11.5***	*155*	-	-	*+ Magnificent V8-engined supersaloon - We'd be nit-picking*	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E34)	*110 R*	*'92-'96*	*6/3795*	*340/6900*	*295/4750*	*1653kg*	*209*	***5.9***	***13.6***	*155*	-	-	*+ The Godfather of supersaloons - The family can come too*	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E28)	*182 R*	*'86-'88*	*6/3453*	*282/6500*	*251/4500*	*1431kg*	*200*	*6.2*	-	*151*	-	-	*+ The original storming saloon - Understated looks*	★★★★★
BMW M6 Gran Coupe	190 D	£98,145	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1875kg	299	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	+ Enormous performance, stylish looks - Price tag looks silly next to rivals, M5 included	★★★★☆
BMW X5 M50d	191 D	£64,020	6/2993	376/4000	546/2000	2190kg	155	5.3	-	155	177	42.2	+ Straight-line pace - Driving experience identical to standard X5, despite the M badge	★★½☆☆
BMW X6 xDrive 50i	118 D	£63,065	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	£93,070	8/4395	547/6000	502/1500	2305kg	241	4.7	-	171	325	20.3	+ Fast, refined and comfortable - But it definitely lacks the M factor	★★½☆☆
BMW 750i	174 D	£71,575	8/4395	449/5500	480/2000	2020kg	226	4.7	-	155	199	-	+ Well specced, impressively refined - Lags far behind the Mercedes S-class	★★½☆☆
Brabus Bullit	119 R	c£330,000	12/6233	720/5100	811/2100	1850kg	395	3.8	-	217	-	-	+ Seven hundred and twenty bhp - Three hundred thousand pounds	★★★★★
Cadillac CTS-V	148 R	£67,030	8/6162	556/6100	551/3800	1928kg	293	3.9	-	191	365	18.1	+ It'll stand out among M-cars and AMGs - But the novelty might wear off	★★★★☆
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth 4x4	*141 R*	*'90-'93*	*4/1993*	*220/6250*	*214/3500*	*1305kg*	*159*	*6.6*	-	*144*	-	*24.4*	*+ Fast and furious - Try finding a straight one*	★★★★½
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth		*'86-'90*	*4/1993*	*204/6000*	*204/4500*	*1220kg*	*169*	*6.2*	-	*143*	-	-	*+ Roadgoing Group A racecar - Don't shout about the power output!*	★★★★★
Honda Accord Type R	*012 R*	*'99-'03*	*4/2157*	*209/7200*	*158/6700*	*1306kg*	*163*	***6.1***	***17.4***	*142*	-	*29.4*	*+ One of the finest front-drivers of all time - Lack of image*	★★★★½
Infiniti Q50S Hybrid	195 D	£39,995	6/3498	359/6800	402/5000	1750kg	208	5.1	-	155	144	45.6	+ Good powertrain, promising chassis - Lacklustre steering, strong rivals	★★½☆☆
Jaguar XF 3.0 V6 Diesel S	145 D	£46,615	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1695kg	162	5.9	-	155	159	47.1	+ Sweet handling plus diesel economy - But we'd still have the R	★★★★☆
Jaguar XF Sportbrake 3.0 V6 Diesel S	177 D	£49,115	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1695kg	153	6.1	-	155	163	46.3	+ Looks and drives better than the saloon - There's now a Sportbrake R...	★★★★☆
Jaguar XF 3.0 V6 Supercharged	178 D	£48,510	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1695kg	201	5.7	-	155	224	29.4	+ Fast, comfortable, refined - Bland engine, poor economy compared to diesel V6	★★★☆☆
Jaguar XFR	181 D	£65,440	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1800kg	284	**4.8**	**10.2**	155	270	24.4	+ Brilliant blend of pace and refinement - Doesn't sound as special as it is	★★★★½
Jaguar XFR-S	208 R	£79,995	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1912kg	288	4.4	-	186	270	24.4	+ XF gets turned up to 12 - Starting to feel its age	★★★★☆
Jaguar XFR-S Sportbrake	203 R	£82,495	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1967kg	280	4.6	-	186	297	22.2	+ Looks fantastic, huge performance, nice balance - Not as sharp as the saloon	★★★★☆
Jaguar XJ 3.0 V6 Diesel	148 D	£56,870	6/2993	271/4000	442/2000	1700kg	162	6.0	-	155	167	46.3	+ A great Jaguar - But not as great as the XJR...	★★★★☆
Jaguar XJR	191 D	£92,395	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1805kg	302	4.4	-	174	270	24.4	+ Hot-rod vibe, fine cabin - Opinion-dividing looks	★★★★☆

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Ratings ★ Thrill-free zone ★★ Tepid ★★★ Interesting ★★★★ Seriously good ★★★★★ A truly great car

Saloons / Estates / 4x4s

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Jaguar 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*	★★★★☆
Land Rover Discovery Sport	205 D	£32,395	4/2179	187/3500	310/1750	1863kg	100	9.8	-	117	159	46.3	+ Style, packaging, refinement - Will need to prove Sport tag in UK	★★★★☆
Lexus IS F	*151 R*	*'07-'12*	*8/4969*	*417/6600*	*372/5200*	*1714kg*	*247*	***4.7***	***10.9***	*173*	*270*	*24.4*	+ *Shockingly good Lexus* - *The M3's available as a (second hand) four-door too*	★★★★½
Lotus Carlton	*170 R*	*'91-'93*	*6/3615*	*377/5200*	*419/4200*	*1658kg*	*231*	***4.8***	***10.6***	*176*	-	*17.0*	+ *The Millennium Falcon of saloon cars* - *Every drive a work-out*	★★★★★
Maserati Ghibli	186 D	£52,615	6/2979	325/5000	406/1750	1810kg	182	5.6	-	163	223	29.4	+ Bursting with character; good value compared to Quattroporte - It's still a big car	★★★★☆
Maserati Ghibli S	198 D	£63,760	6/2979	404/5500	406/4500	1810kg	227	5.0	-	177	242	27.2	+ Stands out from the crowd; sounds good too - Chassis lacks finesse, engine lacks reach	★★★½☆
Maserati Quattroporte S	184 D	£80,115	6/2979	404/5500	406/1750	1860kg	221	5.1	-	177	242	27.2	+ Tempting alternative to V8 - Feel-free steering, secondary ride lacks decorum	★★★★☆
Maserati Quattroporte GTS	179 D	£108,185	8/3798	523/6800	479/2250	1900kg	280	4.7	-	190	274	23.9	+ Performance, sense of occasion - Lacks the charisma and edge of its predecessor	★★★★☆
Maserati Quattroporte S	*137 R*	*'08-'12*	*8/4691*	*425/7000*	*361/4750*	*1990kg*	*216*	***5.1***	***12.1***	*174*	*365*	*18.0*	+ *A QP with the bhp it deserves* - *Grille is a bit Hannibal Lecter*	★★★★½
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	*141 R*	*'08-'12*	*8/4691*	*433/7000*	*361/4750*	*1990kg*	*221*	*5.1*	-	*177*	*365*	*18.0*	+ *The most stylish supersaloon* - *Slightly wooden brakes, unforgiving ride*	★★★★☆
Maserati Quattroporte	*085 R*	*'04-'08*	*8/4244*	*394/7000*	*333/4500*	*1930kg*	*207*	*5.1*	-	*171*	-	*17.9*	+ *Redefines big-car dynamics* - *Don't use auto mode*	★★★★½
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*	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.5-16	*185 F*	*'89-'92*	*4/2498*	*201/6750*	*177/5500*	*1360kg*	*147*	*7.2*	-	*142*	-	*24.4*	+ *M-B's M3 alternative* - *Not as nimble as the Beemer*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz CLA45 AMG	186 D	£42,270	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1510kg	239	4.6	-	155	161	31.0	+ Strong performance, classy cabin - Pricey compared to A45 AMG hatchback	★★★☆☆
Mercedes-Benz GLA45 AMG	205 R	£44,595	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1510kg	239	4.8	-	155	175	37.7	+ An aggressive and focused sports crossover - Low on driver interaction	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG C63	209 D	£59,800	8/3982	469/5500	479/1750	1640kg	291	4.1	-	155	192	34.5	+ Fast and feelsome - Lacks the ultimate finesse and response of the C63 S	★★★★½
Mercedes-AMG C63 S	208 D	£66,545	8/3982	503/5500	516/1750	1655kg	309	4.0	-	155	192	34.5	+ Tremendous twin-turbo V8 power - Not quite as focused as an M division car	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG	*151 R*	*'07-'14*	*8/6208*	*451/6800*	*442/5000*	*1655kg*	*277*	***4.4***	***9.7***	*160*	*280*	*23.5*	+ *Monstrous pace and extremely engaging* - *Same-era M3 is just a little better...*	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C55 AMG	*088 R*	*'04-'08*	*8/5439*	*367/5250*	*376/4000*	*1635kg*	*228*	*5.2*	-	*155*	-	*23.7*	+ *Furiously fast, commendably discreet* - *Overshadowed by M3 and RS4*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG E63	187 D	£74,115	8/5461	549/5500	531/1750	1770kg	315	4.2	-	155	230	28.8	+ Power, response and accuracy in spades - A little lacking in originality	★★★★½
Mercedes-AMG E63 S	208 R	£84,710	8/5461	577/5500	590/1750	1795kg	327	4.1	-	155	229	28.8	+ Effortless power; intuitive and approachable - Dim-witted auto 'box	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	*165 R*	*'11-'13*	*8/5461*	*518/5250*	*516/1750*	*1765kg*	*298*	*4.2*	-	*155*	*230*	*28.8*	+ *Turbo engine doesn't dilute E63 experience* - *Sometimes struggles for traction...*	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	*134 D*	*'09-'11*	*8/6208*	*518/6800*	*465/5200*	*1765kg*	*298*	*4.5*	-	*155*	*295*	*22.4*	+ *As below, but with an extra 11bhp and squarer headlights* - *Steering still vague*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	*096 D*	*'06-'09*	*8/6208*	*507/6800*	*465/5200*	*1765kg*	*292*	*4.5*	-	*155*	-	*19.8*	+ *Brilliant engine, indulgent chassis* - *Vague steering, speed limits*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	*052 R*	*'03-'06*	*8/5439*	*476/6100*	*516/2650*	*1760kg*	*271*	***4.8***	***10.2***	*155*	-	*21.9*	+ *M5-humbling grunt, cosseting ride* - *Speed limits*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG L	191 D	£119,835	8/5461	577/5500	664/2250	1995kg	294	4.4	-	155	237	27.9	+ Monster pace - Average steering feel	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG	*148 D*	*'10-'13*	*8/5461*	*536/5500*	*590/2000*	*2040kg*	*267*	*4.5*	-	*155*	*244*	*26.9*	+ *Massive torque, massively reduced emissions* - *Massive car*	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG S	199 D	£86,500	8/5461	577/5500	590/1750	1795kg	327	4.1	-	155	231	28.5	+ Remains quick and characterful - Dated gearbox, no four-wheel drive option in the UK	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	*178 R*	*'11-'14*	*8/5461*	*518/5250*	*516/1700*	*1795kg*	*293*	*4.2*	-	*155*	*231*	*28.5*	+ *Monster performance, 549bhp an option* - *Not as desirable as a Bentley or Aston*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	*099 R*	*'06-'11*	*8/6208*	*507/6100*	*464/2650*	*1905kg*	*270*	*4.5*	-	*155*	*345*	*19.5*	+ *Beauty, comfort, awesome performance* - *M5 has the edge on B-roads*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz ML63 AMG	176 R	£86,920	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	2270kg	232	4.7	-	155	276	23.9	+ Great engine, surprisingly good dynamics - £85K buys a Boxster and an ML350...	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz G63 AMG	172 D	£124,000	8/5461	537/5500	560/2000	2475kg	220	5.4	-	130	322	-	+ It exists; epic soundtrack - Ancient chassis, silly price	★★★☆☆
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-300 SST	*118 R*	*'08-'13*	*4/1998*	*290/6500*	*300/3500*	*1590kg*	*185*	***5.2***	***13.9***	*155*	*256*	*26.2*	+ *Evo gets twin-clutch transmission* - *Not as exciting as it used to be*	★★★½☆
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-360	*122 D*	*'08-'13*	*4/1998*	*354/6500*	*363/3500*	*1560kg*	*231*	*4.1*	-	*155*	*328*	*19.9*	+ *Ridiculously rapid new Evo* - *A five-speed gearbox?!*	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-330 SST	*134 R*	*'08-'12*	*4/1998*	*324/6500*	*322/3500*	*1590kg*	*207*	*4.4*	-	*155*	*256*	-	+ *Great engine and gearbox combo* - *It still lives in the shadow of the Evo IX*	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	*181 R*	*'09-'10*	*4/1998*	*403/6500*	*387/3500*	*1560kg*	*262*	*3.8*	-	*155*	*328*	-	+ *Most powerful factory Evo ever...* - *...about X grand too much when new*	★★★½☆
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-340	*088 R*	*'05-'07*	*4/1997*	*345/6800*	*321/4600*	*1400kg*	*250*	***4.3***	***10.9***	*157*	-	-	+ *Gives Porsche drivers nightmares* - *Points. Lots of*	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX MR FQ-360	*181 R*	*'05-'07*	*4/1997*	*366/6887*	*363/3200*	*1400kg*	*266*	*3.9*	-	*157*	-	-	+ *Well-executed engine upgrades* - *Prison food*	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII	*055 R*	*'03-'04*	*4/1997*	*276/6500*	*289/3500*	*1410kg*	*199*	*5.1*	-	*157*	-	-	+ *The Evo grows up* - *Brakes need beefing up*	★★★★½
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*	★★★★½
Mitsubishi Evo VII	*031 R*	*'02-'03*	*4/1997*	*276/6500*	*282/3500*	*1360kg*	*206*	***5.0***	***13.0***	*140*	-	*20.4*	+ *Terrific all-rounder* - *You tell us*	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII RS Sprint	*041 D*	*'02-'03*	*4/1997*	*320/6500*	*327/6200*	*1260kg*	*258*	*4.4*	-	*150*	-	-	+ *Ruthlessly focused road weapon* - *For the truly committed*	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI Mäkinen Edition	*200 R*	*'00-'01*	*4/1997*	*276/6500*	*275/2750*	*1365kg*	*205*	*4.6*	-	*150*	-	-	+ *Our favourite Evo* - *Subtle it is not*	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera 4S	186 D	£86,080	6/2997	414/6000	383/1750	1870kg	225	4.8	-	177	208	31.7	+ Strong performance and typically fine Porsche chassis - Misses characterful V8 of old 'S'	★★★½☆
Porsche Panamera GTS	208 R	£93,391	8/4806	434/6700	383/3500	1925kg	229	4.4	-	178	249	26.4	+ Vivacious V8, entertaining balance - Can feel light on performance next to turbo'd rivals	★★★★½
Porsche Panamera Turbo	137 R	£108,006	8/4806	493/6000	516/2250	1970kg	254	**3.6**	**8.9**	188	270	24.6	+ Fast, refined and dynamically sound - It still leaves us cold	★★★½☆
Porsche Panamera Turbo S	*159 D*	*'11-'13*	*8/4806*	*542/6000*	*590/2250*	*1995kg*	*276*	*3.7*	-	*190*	*270*	*24.6*	+ *Pace, excellent ergonomics* - *Steering feel, ride*	★★★½☆
Porsche Macan S	205 R	£43,648	6/2997	335/5500	339/1450	1865kg	183	5.4	-	157	204	31.4	+ No less compelling than the Turbo - Although lacks its ultimate speed and agility	★★★★☆
Porsche Macan Turbo	207 D	£59,648	6/3604	394/6000	406/1350	1925kg	208	**4.5**	**11.1**	165	208	30.7	+ Doesn't feel like an SUV - Still not a match for a proper sports saloon	★★★★½
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2)	173 D	£72,523	8/4806	414/6500	380/3500	2085kg	202	5.6	-	162	251	26.4	+ Dynamically the best SUV on sale - At two tons, it's still no sports car	★★★★½
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk2)	202 D	£93,574	8/4806	513/6000	533/2250	2185kg	239	4.5	-	173	261	25.2	+ Remarkable performance, handling, completeness - Bigger, heavier, pricier than Macan	★★★★½
Porsche Cayenne Turbo S (Mk2)	184 D	£118,455	8/4806	562/6000	590/2500	2235kg	255	4.1	-	176	267	24.6	+ More power and torque than a Zonda S 7.3 - In an SUV	★★★★☆
Range Rover Evoque Coupe Si4	160 D	£46,660	4/1999	237/6000	251/1900	1670kg	144	7.0	-	135	199	-	+ Striking looks, sporting dynamics - Hefty price, and petrol version is auto-only	★★★★☆
Range Rover Sport V8 Supercharged	186 D	£84,350	8/5000	503/6000	460/2500	2335kg	219	5.0	-	155	298	21.7	+ Deceptively quick and capable sports SUV - It's still got a weight problem	★★★★☆
Range Rover Sport SVR	209 D	£95,150	8/5000	542/6000	501/3500	2335kg	236	4.5	-	162	298	21.7	+ Strong on-road dynamics combined with genuine off-road ability - Sharper rivals	★★★★☆
Range Rover SDV8	180 D	£80,850	8/4367	334/3500	516/1750	2360kg	144	6.5	-	140	229	32.5	+ Lighter, more capable, even more luxurious - Diesel V6 model feels more alert	★★★★☆
Rolls-Royce Ghost	186 D	£216,864	12/6592	563/5250	575/1500	2360kg	242	4.7	-	155	317	20.8	+ It's quicker than you think - It's more enjoyable driven slowly	★★★★☆
Rolls-Royce Phantom	054 R	£310,200	12/6749	453/5350	531/3500	2560kg	180	5.7	-	149	377	18.0	+ Rolls reinvented for the 21st Century - The roads are barely big enough	★★★★☆
Subaru WRX STI	201 R	£28,995	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1534kg	196	5.2	-	159	242	27.2	+ Fast Subaru saloon returns (again) - Without a power increase	★★★★☆
Subaru WRX STI	*151 D*	*'10-'13*	*4/2457*	*296/6000*	*300/4000*	*1505kg*	*200*	*5.1*	-	*158*	*243*	*26.9*	+ *Fast Subaru saloon returns* - *Without the blue paint and gold wheels*	★★★★½
Subaru Impreza WRX GB270	*109 D*	*'07*	*4/2457*	*266/5700*	*310/3000*	*1410kg*	*192*	*5.2*	-	*143*	-	-	+ *Fitting final fling for 'classic' Impreza* - *End of an era*	★★★★½
Subaru Impreza STI	*090 R*	*'05-'07*	*4/2457*	*276/6000*	*289/4000*	*1495kg*	*188*	*5.3*	-	*158*	-	*25.9*	+ *Stunning to drive* - *Not so stunning to look at*	★★★★☆
*Subaru Impreza STI Spec C **	*084 D*	*'05-'07*	*4/1994*	*320/6730*	*311/3500*	*1350kg*	*240*	*4.3*	-	*157*	-	-	+ *Lighter, faster, fiercer* - *The need for self-restraint*	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB320	*105 R*	*'07*	*4/2457*	*316/6000*	*332/3750*	*1495kg*	*215*	*4.8*	-	*155*	-	-	+ *Fitting tribute to a rallying legend* - *Too hardcore for some?*	★★★★½
Subaru Impreza WRX STI PPP	*073 R*	*'03-'05*	*4/1994*	*300/6000*	*299/4000*	*1470kg*	*207*	***5.2***	***12.9***	*148*	-	-	+ *A Subaru with real edge* - *Bit too edgy in the wet*	★★★★½
*Subaru STi Type RA Spec C **	*067 R*	*'03-'05*	*4/1994*	*335/7000*	*280/3750*	*1380kg*	*247*	***4.3***	***11.1***	*160*	-	-	+ *Best Impreza since the P1* - *Lost its throbby flat-four voice*	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza Turbo	*011 R*	*'98-'00*	*4/1994*	*215/5600*	*214/4000*	*1235kg*	*177*	***5.4***	***14.6***	*144*	-	*27.2*	+ *Destined for classic status* - *Thirsty*	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza P1	*200 R*	*'00-'01*	*4/1994*	*276/6500*	*260/4000*	*1283kg*	*219*	***4.9***	***13.3***	*150*	-	*25.0*	+ *Ultimate old-shape Impreza* - *Prices reflect this*	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB5 (PPP)	*187 R*	*'99*	*4/1994*	*237/6000*	*258/3500*	*1235kg*	*195*	***5.0***	***14.1***	*143*	-	-	+ *Perfect blend of poise and power* - *Limited numbers*	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza 22B	*188 R*	*'98-'99*	*4/2212*	*276/6000*	*265/3200*	*1270kg*	*220*	***5.0***	***13.1***	*150*	-	-	+ *The ultimate Impreza* - *Doesn't come cheap*	★★★★★
Tesla Model S P85D	208 D	£79,080	515kW	691	687	2239kg	314	3.2	-	155	0	n/a	+ Dual motors and 4WD equals extraordinary acceleration - Lack of charging points	★★★★½
Tesla Model S Performance	*196 R*	*'14*	*310kW*	*416*	*442*	*2100kg*	*201*	*4.2*	-	*130*	*0*	*n/a*	+ *Intoxicating performance, soothing refinement* - *Generic styling, charging limitations*	★★★★½
Vauxhall Insignia VXR SuperSport	189 D	£29,824	6/2792	321/5250	321/5250	1825kg	179	5.6	-	170	249	26.6	+ A 170mph Vauxhall - Should be a more engaging steer	★★★½☆
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	208 R	£54,499	8/6162	576/6150	545/3850	1834kg	319	4.2	-	155	363	18.5	+ Monster engine; engaging driving experience - Woeful interior	★★★★☆
Vauxhall VXR8 GTS	*160 R*	*'11-'13*	*8/6162*	*425/6000*	*406/4600*	*1831kg*	*236*	*4.9*	-	*155*	*320*	*20.9*	+ *Oversteery and characterful. Available as a pick-up too!* - *Nearly M3 saloon money*	★★★★☆
Volvo V60 Polestar	197 D	£49,775	6/2953	345/5250	369/3000	1759kg	199	5.0	-	155	237	27.7	+ First Volvo to get a full Polestar makeover - Still a close relative of the standard V60	★★★½☆

POCKET *buying guide*

Audi TTS & RS

Years 2008-2014 **Engine** In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo **Power** 268bhp @ 6000rpm **Torque** 258lb ft @ 2500-5000rpm **0-62mph** 5.4sec **Top speed** 155mph (spec is for TTS)

WHY WOULD YOU?

Because the 2-litre four-cylinder TTS produces a potent 268bhp, and the 2.5-litre five-cylinder TT RS 335bhp. Both offer plenty of turbocharged torque, are mated to quattro four-wheel drive and have those sharp, stylish Mk2 TT looks.

WHAT TO PAY

An early, high-mileage S can be had for £13k privately. The rarer RS starts at £22k.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Both the four- and five-cylinder engine are robust, though regular servicing is essential for longevity – specialists recommend an oil change annually or every 10k miles. S-tronic 'boxes are usually trouble free, but it's crucial the oil and filter are changed by 40k miles. The Haldex transmission is also reliable, but must have its oil and filter changed every 20k or two years. (Full guide, **evo** 205.)

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Ratings ★ Thrill-free zone ★★ Tepid ★★★ Interesting ★★★★ Seriously good ★★★★★ A truly great car

StoreMags

Our Choice

Audi R8 Spyder. The Spyder boasts supercar looks, presence and performance, yet you really could drive one every day. The V8 has a sweet engine and great dynamics, but if money's no object, we'd be seriously tempted by the equally brilliant V10.

Best of the Rest

The Mk3 Porsche Boxster S is a fabulous all-rounder, while the Lotus Exige S Roadster counters with a more focused driving experience. Jaguar's F-type also impresses in both V6 (left) and V8 forms. Mazda's MX-5 is best for budget rear-drive fun, but for the ultimate thrills, get a Caterham 620R or Ariel Atom.

Sports Cars / Convertibles

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Alfa Romeo 8C Spider	*161 R*	*'09-'11*	*8/4691*	*450/7000*	*354/4750*	*1675kg*	*273*	*4.5*	*-*	*181*	*-*	*-*	*+ Beauty meets beast. They hit it off - Boot is useless for touring*	★★★★½
Ariel Atom 3.5 Supercharged	180 D	£38,000	4/1998	310/8400	169/7200	550kg	573	2.7	-	155	-	-	+ As mad as ever - Rain	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3.5R	198 R	£64,800	4/1998	350/8400	243/6100	550kg	647	2.6	-	155	-	-	+ Remarkable balance, poise and pace - Pricey	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 245	*113 D*	*'08-'12*	*4/1998*	*245/8200*	*155/5200*	*500kg*	*498*	*3.2*	*-*	*150*	*-*	*33.0*	*+ The Atom just got a little bit better - Can still be a bit draughty...*	★★★★½
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	*138 R*	*'09-'12*	*4/1998*	*300/8200*	*162/7200*	*550kg*	*554*	*3.3*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*-*	*+ It's brilliant - It's mental*	★★★★★
Ariel Atom Mugen	*165 R*	*'12-'13*	*4/1998*	*270/8300*	*188/6000*	*550kg*	*499*	*2.9*	*-*	*150*	*-*	*-*	*+ Perfect engine for the Atom's chassis - Only ten were made*	★★★★★
Ariel Atom V8 500	*165 R*	*'10-'12*	*8/3000*	*475/10,500*	*284/7750*	*550kg*	*877*	***3.0***	***5.8***	*170*	*-*	*-*	*+ An experience unlike anything else on Planet Car - £150K for an Atom*	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster	130 R	£89,994	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1710kg	250	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	+ Sportiest, coolest drop-top Aston in years - Starting to feel its age	★★★★☆
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S Roadster	161 R	£108,995	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1690kg	258	4.6	-	189	299	21.9	+ Sounds amazing, looks even better - Still not the best drop-top in its class	★★★★½
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S Roadster	202 D	£147,000	12/5935	565/6750	457/5750	1745kg	329	4.1	-	201	343	19.2	+ A brilliant two-seat roadster... - ...let down by a frustrating gearbox	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage Roadster	*175 R*	*'12-'14*	*12/5935*	*510/6500*	*420/5750*	*1760kg*	*294*	*4.4*	*-*	*190*	*-*	*-*	*+ As good as the coupe, with amplified V12 rumble - Just a smidgen shakier*	★★★★½
Aston Martin DB9 Volante	150 D	£141,995	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1815kg	263	4.6	-	190	368	18.2	+ Consummate cruiser and capable when pushed - Roof-up wind noise	★★★★½
Aston Martin DBS Volante	*133 D*	*'09-'12*	*12/5935*	*510/6500*	*420/5750*	*1810kg*	*286*	*4.3*	*-*	*191*	*388*	*17.3*	*+ A feelgood car par excellence - It's a bit of a heavyweight*	★★★★☆
Audi TTS Roadster	207 D	£41,085	4/1984	306/5800	280/1800	1450kg	214	5.2	-	155	169	38.7	+ A serious proposition, ranking close behind a Boxster S - Coupe still looks better	★★★★☆
Audi TTS Roadster	*122 D*	*'08-'14*	*4/1984*	*268/6000*	*258/2500*	*1455kg*	*187*	*5.6*	*-*	*155*	*189*	*34.9*	*+ Effortlessly quick - Long-term appeal open to question*	★★★★☆
Audi TT RS Roadster	*133 D*	*'09-'14*	*5/2480*	*335/5400*	*332/1600*	*1510kg*	*225*	*4.7*	*-*	*155*	*212*	*31.0*	*+ Terrific engine... - ...is the best thing about it*	★★★½☆
Audi S5 Cabriolet	130 D	£46,770	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1875kg	178	5.6	-	155	199	33.2	+ Gets the S4's trick supercharged engine - Bordering on dull	★★★★☆
Audi RS5 Cabriolet	179 D	£69,505	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1920kg	235	4.9	-	155	249	26.4	+ Pace, looks, interior, naturally aspirated V8 - Not the last word in fun or involvement	★★★½☆
Audi RS4 Cabriolet	*094 D*	*'06-'08*	*8/4163*	*414/7800*	*317/5500*	*1845kg*	*228*	*4.9*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*-*	*+ That engine - Wibble wobble, wibble wobble, jelly on a plate*	★★★☆☆
Audi R8 V8 Spyder	186 D	£102,385	8/4163	424/7900	317/6000	1660kg	259	4.8	-	187	337	19.6	+ More delicate and subtle than the V10 - The V10 sounds even better	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Spyder	185 R	£123,485	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1720kg	306	**4.1**	-	194	349	19.0	+ Sensational for the money - Not quite a rival for the 458 and 12C Spiders	★★★★★
BAC Mono	189 R	£124,255	4/2261	280/7700	206/6000	540kg	527	2.8	-	170	-	-	+ The most single-minded track car available - That means no passengers...	★★★★½
Bentley Continental GT V8 Convertible	168 R	£150,200	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2395kg	212	4.7	-	187	254	25.9	+ One of the world's best topless GTs - Still no sports car	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT V8 S Convertible	194 D	£160,500	8/3993	521/6000	502/1700	2395kg	221	4.5	-	191	258	25.4	+ A true drivers' Bentley - Excessively heavy; feels like it could give more	★★★★½
Bentley Conti GT Speed Convertible	187 D	£181,000	12/5998	626/6000	605/1700	2420kg	263	4.1	-	203	347	19.0	+ Effortless performance, style - Running costs a tad on the high side	★★★★½
Bentley Continental Supersports	*147 D*	*'10-'12*	*12/5998*	*621/6000*	*590/2000*	*2395kg*	*263*	*3.9*	*-*	*202*	*388*	*17.3*	*+ Fast, capable and refined - Coupe does the Supersports thing better*	★★★★☆
BMW M235i Convertible	207 D	£37,710	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1600kg	204	5.2	-	155	199	33.2	+ Neat styling; great drivetrain - Loss of dynamic ability compared with coupe	★★★½☆
BMW Z4 sDrive 35i M Sport (Mk2)	186 D	£43,005	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1505kg	204	5.2	-	155	219	30.1	+ Looks, hard-top versatility, drivetrain - Clumsy chassis is upset by ragged surfaces	★★★½☆
BMW Z4 3.0si (Mk1)	*094 D*	*'06-'09*	*6/2996*	*265/6600*	*232/2750*	*1310kg*	*205*	*5.7*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*32.9*	*+ Terrific straight-six - Handling not as playful as we'd like*	★★★★☆
BMW Z4 M Roadster	*091 R*	*'06-'09*	*6/3246*	*338/7900*	*269/4900*	*1410kg*	*244*	*4.8*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*23.3*	*+ Exhilarating and characterful, that engine - Stiff suspension*	★★★★½
BMW M Roadster	*002 R*	*'98-'02*	*6/3246*	*325/7400*	*258/4900*	*1375kg*	*240*	*5.3*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*25.4*	*+ Fresh-air M3, that motor, hunky looks - M Coupe drives better*	★★★½☆
BMW 435i Convertible	194 D	£45,680	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1740kg	176	5.6	-	155	190	34.8	+ Impressive chassis, smart looks, neat roof - Extra weight, not as composed as coupe	★★★½☆
BMW M4 Convertible (F83)	202 D	£61,145	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1750kg	247	4.6	-	155	213	31.0	+ As good as fast four-seat drop-tops get... - ...but still not as good as a coupe or saloon	★★★★☆
BMW M3 Convertible (E93)	*119 D*	*'08-13*	*8/3999*	*414/8300*	*295/3900*	*1810kg*	*232*	*5.3*	*-*	*155*	*297*	*22.2*	*+ M DCT transmission, pace, slick roof - Extra weight blunts the edge*	★★★★☆
BMW M3 Convertible (E46)	*035 D*	*'01-'06*	*6/3246*	*338/7900*	*269/5000*	*1655kg*	*207*	*5.3*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*23.3*	*+ That engine - Gets the wobbles on British B-roads*	★★★★☆
BMW Z8	*026 R*	*'00-'03*	*8/4941*	*400/6600*	*369/3800*	*1585kg*	*256*	***4.8***	***11.1***	*155*	*-*	*14.4*	*+ M5-powered super-sportster - M5's more fun to drive*	★★★☆☆
Caterham Seven 160	198 R	£19,330	4/660	80/7000	79/3400	490kg	166	6.5	-	100	-	-	+ The fabulous Seven formula at its most basic - Gets pricey with options	★★★★½
Caterham Seven 270	209 R	£22,995	4/1595	135/6800	122/4100	540kg	254	5.0	-	122	-	-	+ Feisty engine, sweetly balanced, manic and exciting - The temptation of more power	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 360	209 R	£26,995	4/1999	180/7300	143/6100	560kg	327	4.8	-	130	-	-	+ Extra power is welcome - You'll need the six-speed gearbox to make the most of it	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 420	209 R	£29,995	4/1999	210/7600	150/6300	560kg	381	3.8	-	136	-	-	+ It's the one we've chosen to build - Trickier on the limit than lesser-powered Sevens	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 620R	187 R	£49,995	4/1999	311/7700	219/7350	545kg	580	2.8	-	155	-	-	+ Banzai on track, yet still relevant on the road - £50k for a Seven?	★★★★★
Caterham Seven CSR	094 R	£46,495	4/2261	256/7500	200/6200	565kg	460	**3.8**	-	155	-	-	+ Brilliant for high days, holidays and trackdays - Wet Wednesdays	★★★★½
Caterham Seven Roadsport 125	*105 R*	*'07-'14*	*4/1595*	*125/6100*	*120/5350*	*539kg*	*235*	*5.9*	*-*	*112*	*-*	*-*	*+ Great debut for new Ford-engined model - Bigger drivers need SV model*	★★★★½
Caterham Seven Supersport	*165 R*	*'11-'14*	*4/1595*	*140/6900*	*120/5790*	*520kg*	*273*	*4.9*	*-*	*120*	*-*	*-*	*+ One of the best Caterhams is also one of the cheapest of its era - It's quite minimalist*	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Supersport R	*180 D*	*'13-'14*	*4/1999*	*180/7300*	*143/6100*	*535kg*	*342*	*4.8*	*-*	*130*	*-*	*-*	*+ One of the best road-and-track Sevens - Impractical, noisy, uncomfortable*	★★★★½
Caterham Seven Superlight R300	*150 R*	*'09-'12*	*4/1999*	*175/7000*	*139/6000*	*515kg*	*345*	*4.5*	*-*	*140*	*-*	*-*	*+ Possibly all the Caterham you need - They're not cheap*	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Superlight R500	*123 R*	*'08-'14*	*4/1999*	*263/8500*	*177/7200*	*506kg*	*528*	*2.9*	*-*	*150*	*-*	*-*	*+ Better power-to-weight ratio than a Veyron - Until you add the driver*	★★★★★
Caterham Levante	*131 R*	*'09-'10*	*8/2398*	*550/10000*	*300/8500*	*520kg*	*1074*	***4.8***	***8.2***	*150*	*-*	*-*	*+ Twice the power-to-weight ratio of a Veyron! - Not easy to drive slowly*	★★★★½
Caterham Seven R300	*068 R*	*'02-'06*	*4/1796*	*160/7000*	*130/5000*	*500kg*	*325*	*4.7*	*-*	*130*	*-*	*-*	*+ Our 2002 Trackday Car of the Year - Not for wimps*	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R500	*200 R*	*'99-'06*	*4/1796*	*230/8600*	*155/7200*	*460kg*	*510*	***3.6***	***8.8***	*146*	*-*	*-*	*+ The K-series Seven at its very best - No cup holders*	★★★★★
Donkervoort D8 GTO Performance	185 R	£120,000	5/2480	375/5500	350/1750	695kg	548	2.8	-	168	-	-	+ There's nothing else like it - Pricey for a car with a five-cylinder engine	★★★★★
Ferrari California T	198 D	£154,490	8/3855	552/7500	557/4750	1729kg	324	3.6	-	196	250	26.9	+ Turbocharged engine is a triumph - Still places daily useability above outright thrills	★★★★½
Ferrari California	*171 D*	*'08-'14*	*8/4297*	*483/7750*	*372/5000*	*1735kg*	*283*	*3.8*	*-*	*193*	*299*	*-*	*+ Revised with sharper performance and dynamics - We'd still take a 458 Spider*	★★★★½
Honda S2000	*118 D*	*'99-'09*	*4/1997*	*237/8300*	*153/7500*	*1260kg*	*191*	*6.2*	*-*	*150*	*-*	*28.2*	*+ An alternative and rev-happy roadster - The Boxster's better*	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-type Convertible	186 R	£56,745	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1587kg	214	5.5	-	161	234	28.8	+ Beautiful, enjoyable, responsive - Noticeably junior to the V6 S	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-type S Convertible	183 R	£65,745	6/2995	375/6500	339/3500	1604kg	238	5.3	-	171	234	28.8	+ Better-damped and more rounded than the V8 S - A Boxster S is £20k cheaper	★★★★½
Jaguar F-type R Convertible		£92,295	6/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1665kg	331	4.0	-	186	255	26.4	+ Pace, characterful V8 - Costs £25k more than the S	★★★★½
Jaguar F-type V8 S Convertible	*183 R*	*'13-'14*	*8/5000*	*488/6500*	*461/2500*	*1665kg*	*298*	*4.3*	*-*	*186*	*259*	*25.5*	*+ Wilder than the V6 S - Could be too exuberant for some*	★★★★½
Jaguar XKR Convertible	*130 R*	*'09-'14*	*8/5000*	*503/6000*	*461/2500*	*1725kg*	*296*	*4.6*	*-*	*155*	*292*	*23.0*	*+ Fantastic 5-litre V8 - Loses sporting ground to its main foes*	★★★★☆
Jaguar XKR-S Convertible	*167 R*	*'11-'14*	*8/5000*	*542/6500*	*502/2500*	*1725kg*	*319*	*4.2*	*-*	*186*	*292*	*23.0*	*+ Loud and mad; most exciting Jag in years - It was also the most expensive in years*	★★★★½
Jaguar XK	*089 R*	*'06-'09*	*8/4196*	*294/6000*	*303/4100*	*1635kg*	*183*	*6.6*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*25.0*	*+ Every bit as good as the XK coupe - 294bhp still only just enough*	★★★★½
Jaguar XKR		*'06-'09*	*8/4196*	*414/6250*	*413/4000*	*1705kg*	*247*	*5.0*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*-*	*+ First Jag sports car for years - Overwrought detailing*	★★★★½
Jaguar XKR	*004 R*	*'97-'06*	*8/3996*	*370/6150*	*387/3600*	*1750kg*	*215*	***5.4***	***12.8***	*155*	*-*	*15.6*	*+ Hurricane-in-the-hair motoring - A danger to toupees everywhere*	★★★★☆
KTM X-Bow GT	183 D	£95,880	4/1984	281/6400	310/3200	875kg	326	4.1	-	144	189	34.0	+ Extraordinary ability, now in a more road-friendly package - Price	★★★★½
KTM X-Bow R	165 R	£87,480	4/1984	296/5500	295/3300	818kg	368	3.6	-	144	-	-	+ Sharper handling, more power - Pity it's not even lighter, and cheaper	★★★★☆
KTM X-Bow	*138 R*	*'08-'12*	*4/1984*	*237/5500*	*229/2000*	*818kg*	*294*	*3.8*	*-*	*137*	*-*	*-*	*+ Mad looks; real quality feel - Heavier and pricier than you'd hope*	★★★★☆
Lotus Elise 1.6	144 D	£30,900	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	876kg	155	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	+ New 1.6 Elise is light *and* fantastic - Smaller engine could put some off	★★★★★

PAST master

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Pagani Zonda C12 *Issue 011, September 1999*

'When you're piloting £200,000-worth of 400bhp V12-powered left-hand-drive 7ft-wide Zonda, unfamiliarity is pretty hellish. But after the first few miles it dawns on me that I don't need a furrowed brow and elevated heart-rate to drive the Zonda smoothly and cleanly.

'There's great feel and precision; the rack is quick and the flow of information is richly textural. As you'd expect, the Zonda has massive reserves of grip but it's the directness of its responses and the fluid compliance of its damping that impress most. Quick direction changes are just that; no inertia, no unnerving pendulum effect, just rapid, darty, perfectly measured movement.'

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Sports Cars / Convertibles

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Lotus Elise 1.6 Club Racer	183 R	£30,900	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	852kg	160	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	+ Even lighter, even more focused - A touch pricey for a stripped-out Elise	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S	172 R	£37,200	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	924kg	239	4.2	-	145	175	37.5	+ New supercharged Elise boasts epic grip and pace - £37K before (pricey) options...	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S Club Racer	189 D	£37,200	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	905kg	244	4.2	-	145	175	37.5	+ Purist approach intensifies ability - Lightest, option-free spec requires commitment	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S Cup	207 D	£43,500	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	932kg	237	4.2	-	140	175	37.5	+ Rewards precision like no other Elise - You can't remove the roof	★★★★★
Lotus Exige S Roadster	186 R	£55,500	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1166kg	301	3.8	-	145	235	28.0	+ Like the hard-top Exige S, but more road-friendly - Boxster S is a better all-rounder	★★★★★
Lotus Elise R	*068 R*	*'04-'11*	*4/1796*	*189/7800*	*133/6800*	*860kg*	*223*	***5.6***	***13.9***	*150*	*196*	*34.4*	*+ Most thrillsome Elise yet - Blaring engine note*	★★★★★
Lotus Elise SC	*131 R*	*'08-'11*	*4/1794*	*218/8000*	*156/5000*	*870kg*	*254*	***4.5***	***11.4***	*148*	*199*	*33.2*	*+ All the usual Elise magic - Supercharged engine lacks sparkle*	★★★★½
Lotus Elise S 1.8	*104 R*	*'06-'10*	*4/1794*	*134/6200*	*127/4200*	*860kg*	*158*	***6.3***	***18.7***	*127*	-	*37.2*	*+ Brilliant entry-level Elise - Precious little*	★★★★★
Lotus Elise 111S	*049 R*	*'02-'04*	*4/1796*	*156/7000*	*129/4650*	*860kg*	*197*	*5.1*	-	*131*	-	*40.9*	*+ A genuinely useable Elise - Air-con? In an Elise?*	★★★★★
Lotus Elise Sport 135	*040 D*	*'03*	*4/1796*	*135/6200*	*129/4850*	*726kg*	*189*	*5.4*	-	*129*	-	-	*+ One of our fave S2 Elises - Brakes need more bite and pedal feel*	★★★★★
Lotus Elise Sport 190	*044 R*	*'03*	*4/1796*	*190/7800*	*128/5000*	*710kg*	*272*	***4.7***	***12.1***	*135*	-	-	*+ Fabulous trackday tool - Pricey*	★★★★½
Lotus Elise (S1)	*126 R*	*'96-'01*	*4/1796*	*118/5500*	*122/3000*	*731kg*	*164*	***6.1***	***18.5***	*126*	-	*39.4*	*+ A modern classic - A tad impractical?*	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven Supercharged	*123 R*	*'07-'11*	*4/1796*	*252/8000*	*179/7000*	*670kg*	*382*	*3.8*	-	*150*	-	-	*+ Impressive on road and track - Not hardcore enough for some*	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	*138 R*	*'09-'11*	*4/1796*	*266/8200*	*179/7200*	*670kg*	*403*	*3.7*	-	*155*	-	-	*+ evo Track Car of the Year 2009 - It's a 76-grand Lotus with no roof*	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven	*126 R*	*'07-'11*	*4/1796*	*189/7800*	*133/6800*	*720kg*	*267*	*4.3*	-	*140*	-	-	*+ Not far off supercharged car's pace - Pricey once it's made road-legal*	★★★★½
Lotus 340R	*126 R*	*'00*	*4/1796*	*190/7800*	*146/5000*	*658kg*	*293*	***4.5***	***12.5***	*126*	-	-	*+ Hardcore road-racer... - ...that looks like a dune buggy from Mars*	★★★★★
Lotus Elan SE	*095 R*	*'89-'95*	*4/1588*	*165/6600*	*148/4200*	*1022kg*	*164*	*6.7*	-	*137*	-	*21.0*	*+ Awesome front-drive chassis - Rather uninvolving*	★★★★☆
Maserati GranCabrio	142 D	£98,940	8/4691	434/7000	332/4750	1980kg	223	5.2	-	177	337	19.5	+ As good to drive as it is to look at - Lacks the grunt of some rivals	★★★★½
Maserati GranCabrio Sport	161 D	£104,535	8/4691	444/7000	376/4750	1980kg	228	5.0	-	177	377	19.5	+ Looks, performance, cruising ability - Brakes could be sharper	★★★★½
Maserati GranCabrio MC	185 D	£112,370	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1973kg	234	4.9	-	179	337	19.5	+ Most powerful GranCabrio yet - The GranCabrio is starting to show its age	★★★★☆
Mazda MX-5 1.8i SE (Mk3.5)		£18,495	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1075kg	117	9.9	-	121	167	39.8	+ Basic MX-5 offers plenty of fun - But you'll probably want the 2.0's power	★★★★☆
Mazda MX-5 R'ster Coupe 2.0i (Mk3.5)	170 R	£23,095	4/1999	158/7000	139/5000	1173kg	137	7.9	-	136	181	36.2	+ Handles brilliantly again - Less than macho image; no soft-top option with 2-litre engine	★★★★½
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk3)	*091 R*	*'05-'09*	*4/1798*	*124/6500*	*123/4500*	*1155kg*	*108*	*9.3*	-	*122*	-	-	*+ Gearchange, interior - Lost some of the charm of old MX-5s; dubious handling*	★★★½☆
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 R*	*'89-'97*	*4/1597*	*115/6500*	*100/5500*	*971kg*	*120*	*9.0*	-	*114*	-	-	*+ The original and still (pretty much) the best - Less than rigid*	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK350 Sport	161 R	£44,605	6/3498	302/6500	273/3500	1465kg	209	5.5	-	155	167	39.8	+ Best non-AMG SLK yet - Still no Boxster-beater	★★★½☆
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	186 R	£55,345	8/5461	416/6800	398/4500	1615kg	262	4.6	-	155	195	33.6	+ Quicker and more economical than ever - Needs to be sharper, too	★★★☆☆
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	*087 R*	*'05-'10*	*8/5439*	*355/5750*	*376/4000*	*1575kg*	*229*	*4.9*	-	*155*	-	*23.5*	*+ Superb engine, responsive chassis - No manual option, ESP spoils fun*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG Black Series	*110 R*	*'07-'08*	*8/5439*	*394/5750*	*383/3750*	*1495kg*	*268*	***4.9***	***11.2***	*174*	-	-	*+ AMG gets serious - Dull-witted 7G-Tronic auto box, uneven dynamics*	★★★½☆
Mercedes-Benz SL500	169 D	£81,915	8/4663	429/5250	516/1800	1710kg	255	4.6	-	155	212	31.0	+ Wafty performance, beautifully engineered - Lacks ultimate sports car feel	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	171 D	£112,510	8/5461	530/5500	590/2000	1770kg	304	4.3	-	155	231	-	+ Monster performance, lighter than before - Still heavy, steering lacks consistency	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG	183 D	£170,815	12/5980	621/4800	737/2300	1875kg	336	4.0	-	155	270	24.4	+ Chassis just about deals with the power - Speed limits	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	*117 D*	*'08-'13*	*8/6208*	*518/6800*	*464/5200*	*1970kg*	*278*	*4.6*	-	*155*	*328*	*20.0*	*+ More focused than old SL55 AMG - Lost some of its all-round appeal*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz SL55 AMG	*070 R*	*'02-'07*	*8/5439*	*493/6100*	*516/2650*	*1955kg*	*256*	***4.6***	***10.2***	*155*	-	-	*+ As fast as a Murciélago - Not as much fun*	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG	*071 D*	*'04-'10*	*12/5980*	*604/4800*	*737/2000*	*2035kg*	*302*	*4.1*	-	*155*	-	-	*+ Gob-smacking performance - Gob-smackingly pricey*	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Roadster	*167 R*	*'12-'14*	*8/6208*	*563/6800*	*479/4750*	*1660kg*	*345*	*3.7*	-	*197*	*308*	*21.4*	*+ Loses none of the coupe's talents - But (understandably) loses the gullwing doors*	★★★★★
Mini JCW Convertible (R57)	130 R	£25,295	4/1598	208/6000	206/1850	1230kg	172	6.9	-	146	169	38.7	+ A manlier Mini cabrio. As hardcore as the hatch... - ...which is still better	★★★★☆
Morgan 3 Wheeler	198 R	£25,950	2/1976	82/5250	103/3250	525kg	159	6.0	-	115	215	30.3	+ Quirky, characterful, brilliant - Can become a two-wheeler if you push too hard	★★★★☆
Morgan Plus 8 Speedster	202 R	£71,140	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1000kg	368	4.2	-	148	282	23.3	+ Fantastic old-school roadster experience - Gets unsettled by big bumps	★★★★☆
Morgan Plus 8	171 R	£86,345	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1100kg	334	4.4	-	155	256	25.7	+ Hilarious mix of old looks and new mechanicals - Refinement is definitely old-school	★★★★☆
Morgan Aero SuperSports	145 R	£128,045	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.2	-	170	-	-	+ As above, with a V8 and targa top - It's proper supercar money	★★★★☆
Morgan Aero 8	*105 R*	*'02-'08*	*8/4799*	*362/6300*	*361/3400*	*1100kg*	*334*	*4.5*	-	*170*	-	*25.2*	*+ Glorious sound, view over bonnet, dynamics - Awkward-looking rear*	★★★★☆
Nissan 370Z Roadster	*143 R*	*'10-'14*	*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*	★★★★☆
Porsche Boxster (981)	172 R	£38,810	6/2706	261/6700	206/4500	1310kg	202	5.4	-	164	192	34.5	+ Goes & looks better; cleanest Boxster ever - Steering now electric to help cut CO2	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (981)	186 R	£47,035	6/3436	311/6700	265/4500	1320kg	239	5.1	-	173	206	32.1	+ Boxster steps out of 911's shadow - But gets 911's less appealing electric steering	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster GTS (981)	203 D	£52,879	6/3436	325/6700	273/4500	1345kg	246	5.0	-	174	211	31.4	+ Superb dynamics, fantastic engine, great loooks - Sport suspension is very firm	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (987)		*'05-'12*	*6/2893*	*252/6400*	*214/4400*	*1335kg*	*192*	*5.9*	-	*163*	*221*	*30.0*	*+ Second-gen Boxster's as brilliant as ever - It's a typically Porsche redesign*	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (987)	*161 R*	*'05-'12*	*6/3436*	*306/6400*	*265/5500*	*1355kg*	*229*	*5.3*	-	*170*	*223*	*29.7*	*+ As above, but with more power - Lighter steering than before*	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	*188 R*	*'10-'12*	*6/3436*	*316/7200*	*273/4750*	*1275kg*	*252*	*5.0*	-	*166*	*221*	*29.1*	*+ Lighter, more driver-centric Boxster - Collapsed-brolly roof not the most practical*	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (986 2.7)	*049 R*	*'99-'04*	*6/2687*	*228/6300*	*192/4700*	*1275kg*	*182*	*6.3*	-	*155*	-	*29.1*	*+ Still an impeccable sports car - Very little*	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (986)	*070 R*	*'99-'04*	*6/3179*	*260/6200*	*228/4700*	*1320kg*	*200*	*5.5*	-	*164*	-	*26.9*	*+ Added power is seductive - As above*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera Cabriolet (991)	183 R	£82,169	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1470kg	238	5.0	-	177	216	30.7	+ Brilliant engine - Doesn't quite have the 'magic at any speed' character of previous 911s	★★★★½
Porsche 911 Carrera S Cabriolet (991)	171 R	£92,204	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1485kg	270	4.7	-	187	228	29.1	+ All-new open 911 drives just like the coupe - Which means the same artificial steering	★★★★½
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet (997)	*139 D*	*'07-'12*	*6/3800*	*493/6000*	*479/1950*	*1645kg*	*305*	*3.8*	-	*194*	*275*	*24.1*	*+ Absurdly quick and capable drop-top - We'd still take the coupe*	★★★★½
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet (996)	*060 R*	*'03-'05*	*6/3596*	*414/6000*	*413/4600*	*1700kg*	*250*	*4.7*	-	*185*	-	-	*+ Faster than you'll ever need it to be - Just the image thing again*	★★★★½
Radical SR3 SL	174 R	£81,300	4/2000	300/6000	265/4000	795kg	383	3.0	-	161	-	-	+ Our 2011 Track Car of the Year, and it's road-legal - You'll need to wrap up warm	★★★★★
Radical RXC Turbo 500	209 D	£143,400	6/3496	530/6100	481/5000	1100kg	490	2.6	-	185	-	-	+ Huge performance, intuitive adjustability, track ability - Compromised for road use	★★★★½
Renault Sport Spider	*183 R*	*'96-'99*	*4/1998*	*148/6000*	*136/4500*	*930kg*	*157*	*6.5*	-	*131*	-	-	*+ Rarity, fabulous unassisted steering feel - Heavier than you'd hope*	★★★★☆
Toyota MR2	*187 R*	*'00-'06*	*4/1794*	*138/6400*	*125/4400*	*975kg*	*141*	***7.2***	***21.2***	*130*	-	*38.2*	*+ Tight lines, taut dynamics - Minimal luggage space*	★★★★½
TVR Tamora	*070 R*	*'01-'07*	*6/3605*	*350/7200*	*290/5500*	*1050kg*	*338*	*4.5*	-	*160*	-	-	*+ Well-sorted soft-top TVR - Awkward styling*	★★★★☆
TVR Tuscan Convertible	*091 R*	*'05-'07*	*6/3996*	*365/6800*	*315/6000*	*1100kg*	*337*	*3.8*	*8.1*	*195+*	-	-	*+ Spirit of the Griff reborn - Over 195mph? Really?*	★★★★½
TVR Chimaera 5.0	*007 R*	*'93-'03*	*8/4988*	*320/5500*	*320/3750*	*1060kg*	*307*	*4.6*	-	*167*	-	*26.4*	*+ Gorgeous noise, tarmac-rippling grunt - Details*	★★★★☆
TVR Griffith 4.3	*068 R*	*'92-'93*	*8/4280*	*280/5500*	*305/4000*	*1060kg*	*268*	***4.8***	***11.2***	*148*	-	-	*+ The car that made TVR. Cult status - Mere details*	★★★★½
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*	★★★★½
Vauxhall VX220	*023 R*	*'00-'04*	*4/2198*	*145/5800*	*150/4000*	*875kg*	*168*	*5.6*	-	*136*	-	*34.4*	*+ Absurdly good Vauxhall - The badge?*	★★★★½
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*	★★★★★
Zenos E10 S	208 R	£29,995	4/1999	250/7000	295/2500	725kg	350	4.0	-	145	-	-	+ Neutral and exploitable - We need to try one on track	★★★★½

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Our Choice

Porsche 911 GT3. You might think the GT3's win at **evo** Car of the Year 2013 was a foregone conclusion, but neither of the last two GT3s (the 997.2 and 997.1) claimed an eCoty title. Yet the 991 managed it, and in a vintage year too (Ferrari F12, Merc SLS Black). Yes, it really is that good.

Best of the Rest

Aston's V12 Vantage S (left) is a deeply well-sorted drivers' car. The Cayman GT4 is as good as the hype suggests, while Jaguar's F-type R Coupe is the best F-type yet, and finished second in Car of the Year 2014. Mercedes' new AMG GT is also a great drive – enough to trouble the 911 and Audi R8.

Coupes / GTs

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Alfa Romeo 4C	209 R	£45,000	4/1742	237/6000	258/2200	895kg	269	4.5	-	160	157	41.5	+ Carbonfibre tub, mini-supercar looks - Hot hatch engine, clunky gearbox	★★★½☆
Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione	*120 R*	*'07-'09*	*8/4691*	*450/7000*	*354/4750*	*1585kg*	*288*	*4.1*	*-*	*181*	*-*	*-*	*+ Looks, exclusivity, noise, balance - They're all sold*	★★★★½
Alpina D4 Biturbo	206 R	£50,950	6/2993	345/4000	516/1500	1585kg	221	4.6	-	173	139	53.3	+ Fifth-gear oversteer - Sounds like a diesel; fuel economy not as good as you might hope	★★★★½
Alpina B4 Biturbo	206 R	£58,950	6/2979	404/5500	442/3000	1615kg	254	4.2	-	188	177	37.2	+ More fluid than the M4; better traction, too - Not as precise as the M-car over the limit	★★★★½
Alpina B3 Biturbo (E92)	*108 R*	*'07-'13*	*6/2979*	*355/5500*	*369/3800*	*1570kg*	*230*	*4.8*	*-*	*177*	*-*	*29.1*	*+ Alpina's M3 alternative - Too refined for some*	★★★★½
Alpina B3 GT3 (E92)	*176 D*	*'12-'13*	*6/2979*	*402/6000*	*398/4500*	*1535kg*	*266*	*4.4*	*-*	*186*	*224*	*-*	*+ Alpina's M3 GTS alternative - Auto gearbox frustrates when pressing on*	★★★★½
Aston Martin V8 Vantage	169 D	£84,995	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1630kg	262	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	+ 2012 upgrades keep the V8 Vantage on song - Starting to feel a little dated, though	★★★★☆
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S	168 R	£94,995	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	271	4.5	-	189	299	21.9	+ Keener engine, V12 Vantage looks - Slightly sluggish auto only	★★★★½
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S	190 R	£138,000	12/5935	565/6750	457/5750	1665kg	345	3.7	-	205	343	19.2	+ The best car Aston Martin currently makes - Old-school automated 'box	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	*146 R*	*'09-'13*	*12/5935*	*510/6500*	*420/5750*	*1680kg*	*308*	***4.4***	***9.7***	*190*	*388*	*17.3*	*+ The car we hoped the V8 Vantage would be - Erm, a tad thirsty?*	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Zagato	*181 F*	*'13*	*12/5935*	*510/6500*	*420/5750*	*1680kg*	*308*	*4.2*	*-*	*190*	*388*	*17.3*	*+ The looks, the noise, the way it drives - It's several times the price of a V12 Vantage*	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB9	178 R	£133,495	12/5935	510/6500	457/5500	1785kg	290	4.6	-	183	368	18.2	+ Better than the old DB9 in every respect - Automatic gearbox could be quicker	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS	*142 R*	*'07-'12*	*12/5935*	*510/6500*	*420/5750*	*1695kg*	*306*	*4.2*	*-*	*191*	*388*	*17.3*	*+ Stupendous engine, gearbox, brakes - Pricey. Can bite the unwary*	★★★★½
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI (Mk3)	204 R	£29,915	4/1984	227/4500	273/1650	1230kg	188	6.0	-	155	137	47.9	+ Desirable, grippy and effortlessly quick - Still not the last word in interaction	★★★★½
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI quattro (Mk3)	203 D	£32,860	4/1984	227/4500	273/1600	1335kg	173	5.3	-	155	149	44.1	+ Looks, interior, decent performance and handling - Lacks ultimate involvement	★★★★☆
Audi TTS (Mk3)	209 R	£38,790	4/1984	306/5800	280/1800	1365kg	228	4.9	-	155	-	-	+ The most dynamically interesting TT yet - Still not as interactive as a Cayman	★★★★☆
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI (Mk2)	*155 R*	*'06-'14*	*4/1984*	*208/4300*	*258/1600*	*1295kg*	*163*	***6.3***	***15.7***	*152*	*154*	*42.8*	*+ Front-driver loses nothing to quattro TTs - Steers like a computer game*	★★★★☆
Audi TTS (Mk2)	*193 R*	*'08-'14*	*4/1984*	*268/6000*	*258/2500*	*1395kg*	*195*	*5.4*	*-*	*155*	*184*	*35.8*	*+ Usefully quicker TT; great drivetrain - Still steers like a computer game*	★★★★☆
Audi TT RS (Mk2)	*158 R*	*'09-'14*	*5/2480*	*335/5400*	*332/1600*	*1450kg*	*235*	***4.4***	***11.1***	*155*	*209*	*31.4*	*+ Sublime 5-cylinder turbo engine - Rest of package can't quite match it*	★★★★☆
Audi TT RS Plus (Mk2)	*185 D*	*'12-'14*	*5/2480*	*355/5500*	*343/1650*	*1450kg*	*249*	*4.3*	*-*	*174*	*209*	*31.4*	*+ Stonkingly fast cross-country - Shockingly expensive for a TT*	★★★★☆
Audi TT Sport (Mk1)	*081 D*	*'05-'06*	*4/1781*	*237/5700*	*236/2300*	*1390kg*	*173*	*5.7*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*30.3*	*+ Deliciously purposeful interior, crisp chassis - Numb steering*	★★★★☆
Audi S5	189 D	£43,665	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1675kg	199	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	+ Supercharged V6 makes S5 cleaner and faster - Poor body control	★★★☆☆
Audi RS5	206 R	£59,870	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1715kg	263	4.5	-	155	246	26.9	+ Brilliant engine and improved chassis - Lack of suspension travel; inconsistent steering	★★★★☆
Audi R8 V8	201 R	£93,785	8/4163	424/7900	317/4500	1560kg	276	**4.1**	**9.9**	188	332	19.9	+ A true 911 alternative - Exclusivity comes at a price	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10	181 D	£114,885	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	325	**3.9**	**8.4**	194	346	19.0	+ Real supercar feel - The V8 is £20k less, and still superb	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Plus	190 R	£126,885	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1570kg	351	3.8	-	198	346	19.0	+ An R8 fit to take on the 458 and 12C - Firm ride may be too much for some	★★★★★
Audi R8 LMX	208 R	£160,000	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1595kg	358	3.4	-	198	299	21.9	+ More of everything that makes the R8 great - S-tronic transmission not perfect	★★★★★
Audi R8 GT	*169 F*	*'10-'12*	*10/5204*	*552/8000*	*398/6500*	*1520kg*	*369*	*3.6*	*-*	*199*	*-*	*-*	*+ Everything we love about the R8 - Not as hardcore as we wanted*	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8	178 R	£140,300	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2220kg	229	4.6	-	188	246	27.0	+ A proper drivers' Bentley with decent economy - W12 suddenly seems pointless	★★★★½
Bentley Continental GT V8 S	204 F	£149,800	8/3933	521/6000	502/1700	2220kg	238	4.3	-	192	250	26.4	+ An even better drivers' Bentley - Vast weight makes its presence felt in harder driving	★★★★½
Bentley Continental GT	152 D	£150,500	12/5998	567/6000	516/1700	2245kg	257	4.3	-	197	338	19.5	+ 200mph in utter comfort - Weight, thirst	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT Speed	205 D	£154,400	12/5998	626/6000	605/1700	2245kg	283	4.0	-	206	338	19.5	+ Desirability meets exclusivity and performance - Ageing styling	★★★★½
Bentley Continental GT3-R	203 D	£237,500	8/3993	572/6000	518/1700	2120kg	274	3.6	-	170	295	22.2	+ The best-handling Continental ever - Expensive; it still weighs 2120kg	★★★★½
BMW 1-series M Coupe	*188 R*	*'11-'12*	*6/2979*	*335/5900*	*369/1500*	*1495kg*	*228*	*4.8*	*-*	*155*	*224*	*-*	*+ Character, turbo pace and great looks - Came and went too quick*	★★★★★
BMW M235i Coupe	209 R	£34,535	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1455kg	224	5.0	-	155	189	34.9	+ Powertrain, chassis, looks, size - Limited-slip diff is an option, not standard	★★★★½
BMW 435i M Sport Coupe	189 D	£42,365	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1510kg	203	5.4	-	155	169	35.8	+ Better balance than 3-series saloon - Can feel characterless at lower speeds	★★★★½
BMW M4	206 R	£57,050	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1497kg	288	4.3	-	155	204	32.1	+ Ferociously fast - Only really sparkles when you're on or over the limit	★★★★½
BMW M3 (E92)	*196 R*	*'07-13*	*8/3999*	*414/8300*	*295/3900*	*1580kg*	*266*	***4.3***	***10.3***	*155*	*290*	*22.8*	*+ Fends off all of its rivals - ...except the cheaper 1-series M*	★★★★★
BMW M3 GTS (E92)	*171 R*	*'10-'11*	*8/4361*	*444/8300*	*324/3750*	*1530kg*	*295*	*4.3*	*-*	*193*	*295*	*-*	*+ Highly exclusive, one of the most focused M-cars ever - Good luck trying to find one*	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E46)	*066 R*	*'00-'07*	*6/3246*	*338/7900*	*269/5000*	*1495kg*	*230*	***5.1***	***12.3***	*155*	*-*	*23.7*	*+ One of the best BMWs ever - Slightly artificial steering feel*	★★★★½
BMW M3 CS (E46)	*088 R*	*'05-'07*	*6/3246*	*338/7900*	*269/5000*	*1495kg*	*230*	*5.1*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*23.7*	*+ CSL dynamics without CSL price - Looks like the standard car*	★★★★★
BMW M3 CSL (E46)	*200 R*	*'03-'04*	*6/3246*	*355/7900*	*273/4900*	*1385kg*	*260*	***5.3***	***12.0***	*155*	*-*	*-*	*+ Still superb - Changes from the automated single-clutch 'box are... a... bit... sluggish*	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E36)	*148 R*	*'93-'98*	*6/3201*	*321/7400*	*258/3250*	*1460kg*	*223*	***5.4***	***12.8***	*157*	*-*	*25.7*	*+ Performance, image - Never quite as good as the original*	★★★★☆
BMW M3 (E30)	*165 R*	*'86-'90*	*4/2302*	*212/6750*	*170/4600*	*1165kg*	*185*	***6.7***	***17.8***	*147*	*-*	*20.3*	*+ Best M-car ever! Race-car dynamics for the road - LHD only*	★★★★★
BMW Z4 M Coupe	*097 R*	*'06-'09*	*6/3246*	*338/7900*	*269/4900*	*1420kg*	*242*	*5.0*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*23.3*	*+ A real drivers' car - You've got to be prepared to get stuck in*	★★★★½
BMW M Coupe	*005 R*	*'98-'03*	*6/3246*	*325/7400*	*258/3250*	*1375kg*	*240*	*5.1*	*-*	*155*	*-*	*25.0*	*+ Quick and characterful - Lacks finesse*	★★★★☆
BMW 640d	165 D	£62,295	6/2993	309/4400	465/1500	1790kg	175	5.5	-	155	144	51.4	+ Great engine and economy, excellent build - Numb steering, unsettled B-road ride	★★★★☆
BMW M6 (Mk2)	191 D	£92,340	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1850kg	303	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	+ Mighty ability, pace, technology - You'll want the Competition Package upgrade too...	★★★★★
BMW M6 (Mk1)	*106 R*	*'05-'10*	*10/4999*	*500/7750*	*384/6100*	*1635kg*	*311*	***4.8***	***10.0***	*155*	*342*	*19.8*	*+ Awesome GT, awesome sports car - SMG gearbox now off the pace*	★★★★½
BMW i8	203 R	£99,590	3/1499	357/5800	420/3700	1485kg	244	4.4	-	155	49	134.5	+ Brilliantly executed concept; sci-fi looks - Safe dynamic set-up	★★★★½
Chevrolet Camaro *	148 R	c£36,000	8/6162	426/5900	420/4600	1769kg	245	5.1	-	155	329	20.0	+ Looks like a Transformer made real - We'd prefer it in robot mode; now import only	★★★☆☆
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray Z51 (C7)	197 R	£69,810	8/6162	460/6000	465/4600	1539kg	304	**4.4**	**9.4**	180	279	23.5	+ Performance, chassis balance, supple ride - Body control could be better	★★★★½
Chevrolet Corvette Z06 (C7) *	206 R	c£88,000	8/6156	650/6400	650/3600	1598kg	413	3.2	-	186	-	-	+ Mind-boggling raw speed; surprisingly sophisticated - Edgy when really pushed	★★★★½
Ford Mustang GT	202 R	£32,995	8/4951	420/6500	400/4250	1678kg	254	4.4	-	155	-	-	+ Great bang per buck, but now handles too - Ride quality may not suit UK roads	★★★★☆
Ford Shelby GT500 *	178 R	c£60,000	8/5812	662/6500	631/4000	1747kg	385	3.5	-	202	-	-	+ Huge performance for the money - Putting it to use takes nerve	★★★☆☆
Ginetta G40R	165 R	£35,940	4/1999	175/6700	140/5000	795kg	224	5.8	-	140	-	-	+ A race-compliant sports car for the road - Feels too soft to be a hardcore track toy	★★★★☆
Honda Integra Type R (DC2)	*200 R*	*'96-'00*	*4/1797*	*187/8000*	*131/7300*	*1101kg*	*173*	***6.2***	***17.9***	*145*	*-*	*28.9*	*+ Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Too raw for some*	★★★★★
Honda NSX	*188 R*	*'90-'05*	*6/3179*	*276/7300*	*224/5300*	*1410kg*	*196*	*5.5*	*-*	*168*	*-*	*22.8*	*+ 'The useable supercar' - 270bhp sounds a bit weedy today*	★★★★½
*Honda NSX-R *	*051 R*	*'02-'03*	*6/3179*	*276/7300*	*224/5300*	*1270kg*	*221*	*4.4*	*-*	*168*	*-*	*-*	*+ evo Car of the Year 2002 - Honda never brought it to the UK*	★★★★★
Hyundai Veloster Turbo	176 D	£22,000	4/1591	184/5500	195/1500	1313kg	142	8.2	-	133	157	40.9	+ The usual Hyundai value, with added fun - Styling might be too quirky for some	★★★½☆
Jaguar F-type Coupe	204 D	£51,260	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1557kg	216	5.1	-	161	205	32.1	+ Drop-dead looks, brilliant chassis, desirability - Engine lacks top-end fight	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-type S Coupe	202 R	£60,260	6/2995	375/6500	339/3500	1594kg	239	**4.5**	**11.4**	171	209	32.1	+ Exquisite style, more rewarding (and affordable) than roadster - Scrappy on the limit	★★★★½
Jaguar F-type R Coupe	203 R	£85,010	8/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1650kg	334	4.2	-	186	259	25.4	+ Looks, presence, performance, soundtrack - Bumpy and boistrous	★★★★★
Jaguar XK	*130 D*	*'07-'14*	*8/5000*	*380/6500*	*380/3500*	*1585kg*	*244*	*5.2*	*-*	*155*	*264*	*25.2*	*+ Fine car for the likes of us - Jag buyers may not like the harder edge*	★★★★☆
Jaguar XKR	*168 R*	*'09-'14*	*8/5000*	*503/6000*	*461/2500*	*1678kg*	*305*	*4.6*	*-*	*155*	*292*	*23.0*	*+ Fast and incredibly rewarding Jag - The kids will have to stay at home*	★★★★½
Jaguar XKR-S	*168 R*	*'11-'14*	*8/5000*	*542/6000*	*502/2500*	*1678kg*	*328*	*4.2*	*-*	*186*	*292*	*23.0*	*+ Faster and wilder than regular XKR - The F-type R Coupe*	★★★★½
Jaguar XKR-S GT	*193 R*	*'14*	*8/5000*	*542/6000*	*502/2500*	*1638kg*	*336*	*3.9*	*-*	*186*	*292*	*23.0*	*+ The most exciting XKR ever - Very limited numbers*	★★★★½

POCKET buying guide

Vauxhall Astra VXR

Years 2005-2011
Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
Power 237bhp @ 5600rpm
Torque 236lb ft @ 2400rpm
0-60mph 6.7sec **Top speed** 152mph

WHY WOULD YOU?
Because it was one of the hottest hatches of its day, and the 237bhp from its turbo 2-litre engine means it still outpowers many modern hatchbacks. The VXR's chassis and steering were specifically tailored for UK roads, too.

WHAT TO PAY
Early cars start below £7k at an approved dealer. Later models can easily top £10,000.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR
The engines are generally strong and reliable, but check for smoke at start-up, which indicates leaking valve-stem oil seals or a turbo issue. Also ensure there have been regular oil changes with the correct 5W-40 fully synthetic. Gearbox whine – most likely in fifth or sixth – or excessive movement in the gearlever when pulling away can indicate worn bearings. (Full guide, **evo** 204.)

PAINTSHIELD

Protect yourself from the Asteriod Belt

Generation 2 Self Healing Protection has Arrived.

Having brought the first Generation of Self Healing Film to the UK two years ago, our Technicians have added the latest Second Generation self healing Protective technology to our Inventory.

In your intergalactic travels protecting yourself from those micro meteor impacts has never been more important. We all know respraying your ship in some far off location is a bit of a pain, much better to not have to. Best of all though wear and tear from scratches picked up in your travels is very disconcerting to the Locals; abductions go much easier when you have a scratch free shiny ship when visiting Earth.

For the best paint protection in the Galaxy drop in to planet earth and contact our specialists on 01733 390777, or fire up the Intergalactic net and warp to www.paintshield.co.uk and they will get you protected and on your way in next to no time (theory of relativity applies).

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combat swirl marks
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- bird lime
- brake fluid & oil resistant

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t: 01733 390777 · f: 01733 390778 · web: www.paintshield.co.uk · e: info@paintshield.co.uk

storemags

Ratings ★ Thrill-free zone ★★ Tepid ★★★ Interesting ★★★★ Seriously good ★★★★★ A truly great car

Coupes / GTs

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Lexus RC F	206 R	£59,995	8/4969	470/6400	391/4800	1765kg	271	4.5	-	168	-	-	+ Great steering, noise, sense of occasion - Too heavy to be truly exciting	★★★★☆
Lotus Exige S (V6)	209 R	£54,500	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1176kg	298	3.8	-	170	235	-	+ Breathtaking road-racer; our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Gearshift not the sweetest	★★★★★
Lotus Exige S (S2)	*105 R*	*'06-'11*	*4/1796*	*218/7800*	*158/5500*	*930kg*	*238*	*4.5*	*-*	*148*	*199*	*33.2*	*+ Lightweight with a hefty punch - Uninspiring soundtrack*	★★★★★
Lotus Exige (S2)	*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 (S1)	*200 R*	*'00-'01*	*4/1796*	*192/7800*	*146/5000*	*780kg*	*247*	*4.6*	*-*	*136*	*-*	*-*	*+ Looks and goes like Elise racer - A tad lacking in refinement*	★★★★★
Lotus Evora	138 R	£52,500	6/3456	276/6400	258/4700	1382kg	203	**5.6**	**13.6**	162	217	30.3	+ Sublime ride and handling. Our 2009 car of the year - Pricey options	★★★★★
Lotus Evora S	168 R	£63,950	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.6	-	172	229	28.7	+ A faster and better Evora - But one which spars with the Porsche 911...	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo	114 R	£82,890	8/4244	399/7100	339/4750	1880kg	216	**5.5**	**12.7**	177	330	19.8	+ Striking, accomplished GT - Doesn't spike the pulse like an Aston or 911	★★★★☆
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	188 R	£91,420	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1880kg	245	4.8	-	185	331	19.7	+ The best everyday GranTurismo yet - Starting to get long in the tooth	★★★★½
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	193 R	£110,740	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1800kg	256	4.5	-	188	360	18.2	+ Brilliant blend of road racer and GT - Gearbox takes a little getting used to	★★★★½
Maserati Coupe	*064 R*	*'03-'07*	*8/4244*	*390/7000*	*333/4500*	*1680kg*	*237*	*4.8*	*-*	*177*	*-*	*17.6*	*+ Glorious engine, improved chassis - Overly sharp steering*	★★★★☆
Maserati GranSport	*073 R*	*'04-'07*	*8/4244*	*400/7000*	*333/4500*	*1680kg*	*239*	*4.8*	*-*	*180*	*-*	*-*	*+ Maser Coupe realises its full potential - Very little*	★★★★½
Mazda RX-8	*122 R*	*'03-'11*	*2R/1308*	*228/8200*	*156/5500*	*1429kg*	*162*	***6.5***	***16.4***	*146*	*299*	*24.6*	*+ Never mind the quirkiness, it's a great drive - Wafer-thin torque output*	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	*162 R*	*'11-'14*	*8/6208*	*451/6800*	*442/5000*	*1655kg*	*277*	***4.4***	***10.3***	*186*	*280*	*23.5*	*+ A proper two-door M3 rival - C63 saloon looks better*	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black Series	*171 R*	*'12-'13*	*8/6208*	*510/6800*	*457/5200*	*1635kg*	*317*	*4.2*	*-*	*186*	*286*	*-*	*+ The C63 turned up to 11 - Too heavy, not as fiery as Black Series cars of old*	★★★★½
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*	★★★★½
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG Black Series	*106 R*	*'07-'09*	*8/6208*	*500/6800*	*464/5250*	*1760kg*	*289*	*4.2*	*-*	*186*	*-*	*-*	*+ AMG goes Porsche-hunting - Dull-witted gearshift spoils the party*	★★★★½
Mercedes-AMG S63 Coupe	205 D	£125,595	8/5461	577/5500	664/2250	1995kg	294	4.2	-	155	237	28.0	+ Thunderously fast S-class built for drivers - Lacks badge appeal of a Continental GT	★★★★½
Mercedes-AMG S65 Coupe	209 D	£183,075	12/5980	621/4800	737/2300	2110kg	299	4.1	-	186	279	23.7	+ Almighty power, fabulous luxury - Nearly £60k more than the S63!	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GT S	204 R	£110,495	8/3982	503/6250	479/1750	1570kg	326	3.8	-	193	219	30.1	+ Gorgeous to look at, fantastic chassis, huge grip - Downshifts could be quicker	★★★★½
Morgan AeroMax	*120 R*	*'08-'09*	*8/4799*	*362/6300*	*370/3600*	*1180kg*	*312*	*4.1*	*-*	*170*	*-*	*-*	*+ Weird and utterly wonderful - Only 100 were made*	★★★★☆
Nissan 370Z	204 R	£27,445	6/3696	323/7000	268/5200	1496kg	219	5.3	-	155	248	26.7	+ Quicker, leaner, keener than 350Z - Not quite a Cayman-killer	★★★★☆
Nissan 370Z Nismo	209 R	£37,585	6/3696	339/7400	274/5200	1496kg	230	5.2	-	155	248	26.6	+ Sharper looks, improved ride, extra thrills - Engine lacks sparkle	★★★★½
Nissan 350Z	*107 R*	*'03-'09*	*6/3498*	*309/6800*	*264/4800*	*1532kg*	*205*	***5.5***	***13.0***	*155*	*-*	*24.1*	*+ Huge fun, and great value too - Honestly, we're struggling*	★★★★½
Nissan GT-R (2012MY/2013MY/2014MY)	200 R	£78,020	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	316	**3.2**	**7.5**	196	275	24.0	+ GT-R is quicker and better than ever - But costs over £20K more than its launch price	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R Nismo	199 R	£125,000	6/3799	592/6800	481/3200	1720kg	350	2.6	-	196	275	24.0	+ Manages to make regular GT-R feel imprecise - Compromised by super-firm suspension	★★★★½
Nissan GT-R (2010MY)	*152 R*	*'10-'12*	*6/3799*	*523/6400*	*451/3200*	*1740kg*	*305*	*3.0*	*-*	*194*	*279*	*23.5*	*+ More powerful version of the original - But they're not worlds apart to drive*	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	*125 R*	*'08-'10*	*6/3799*	*473/6400*	*434/3200*	*1740kg*	*276*	*3.8*	*-*	*193*	*-*	*-*	*+ Our 2008 Car of the Year, now from just £35K - You won't see 20mpg often*	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	*196R*	*'99-'02*	*6/2568*	*276/7000*	*289/4400*	*1560kg*	*180*	***4.7***	***12.5***	*165*	*-*	*20.1*	*+ Big, brutal, and great fun - Needs more than the standard 276bhp*	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R33)	*196 R*	*'97-'99*	*6/2568*	*276/6800*	*271/4400*	*1540kg*	*182*	***5.4***	***14.3***	*155*	*-*	*22.0*	*+ Proof that Japanese hi-tech can work (superbly) - Limited supply*	★★★★★
Noble M12 GTO-3R	*200 R*	*'03-'06*	*6/2968*	*352/6200*	*350/3500*	*1080kg*	*332*	*3.8*	*-*	*170*	*-*	*-*	*+ The ability to humble exotica - Notchy gearchange can spoil the flow*	★★★★★
Peugeot RCZ 1.6 THP 200	155 R	£27,150	4/1598	197/5500	202/1700	1421kg	141	**7.3**	**18.1**	147	155	42.1	+ Distinctive looks, highly capable handling - Could be a bit more exciting	★★★★☆
Peugeot RCZ R	209 R	£32,250	4/1598	266/6000	243/1900	1280kg	211	5.9	-	155	145	44.8	+ Rewarding and highly effective when fully lit - Dated cabin, steering lacks feel	★★★★½
Porsche Cayman (981)	209 R	£39,694	6/2706	271/7400	214/4500	1330kg	207	5.7	-	165	195	33.6	+ Very enticing for the money in basic spec - You might still want the power of the 'S'	★★★★½
Porsche Cayman S (981)	202 R	£48,783	6/3436	321/7400	273/4500	1320kg	247	**4.5**	**10.5**	175	206	32.1	+ The Cayman comes of age - Erm...	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman GTS (981)	203 R	£55,397	6/3436	335/7400	280/4750	1345kg	253	4.9	-	177	211	31.4	+ Tweaks improve an already sublime package - Slightly 'aftermarket' looks	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman GT4 (981)	208 R	£64,451	6/3800	380/7400	310/4750	1340kg	288	4.4	-	183	238	27.4	+ The Cayman we've been waiting for - Waiting lists	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman (987)	*131 R*	*'11-'13*	*6/2893*	*261/7200*	*221/4400*	*1330kg*	*199*	*5.8*	*-*	*165*	*221*	*30.1*	*+ Extra power, just as involving - Still lacks the desirability of other Porsches*	★★★★½
Porsche Cayman S (987)	*132 R*	*'06-'13*	*6/3436*	*316/7200*	*273/4750*	*1350kg*	*237*	*5.2*	*-*	*172*	*223*	*29.7*	*+ Still want that 911? - Yeah, us too*	★★★★½
Porsche Cayman R (987)	*158 R*	*'11-'13*	*6/3436*	*325/7400*	*273/4750*	*1295kg*	*255*	*4.7*	*-*	*175*	*228*	*29.1*	*+ Total handling excellence - Styling additions not to all tastes*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (991)	199 R	£73,509	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1400kg	250	4.8	-	179	211	31.4	+ 911 becomes cleaner and cleverer - But some of its character's gone AWOL	★★★★½
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991)	201 R	£83,545	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1415kg	283	**4.3**	**9.5**	188	223	29.7	+ As above, but with supercar pace - Electric steering robs it of some tactility	★★★★½
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (991)	179 R	£88,400	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1465kg	273	4.5	-	185	233	28.5	+ More satisfying than RWD 991 Carreras - Choose your spec carefully	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera GTS (991)	204 R	£91,098	6/3800	424/7500	324/5750	1425kg	302	4.4	-	190	223	29.7	+ The best RWD 991 Carrera - Optional active anti-roll bars rob feedback	★★★★½
Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS (991)	208 D	£95,862	6/3800	424/7500	324/5750	1470kg	293	4.4	-	189	233	28.5	+ The highlight of the 991 Carrera line-up - Pricey for a Carrera	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.2)	*121 R*	*'08-'11*	*6/3800*	*380/6500*	*310/4400*	*1425kg*	*271*	*4.7*	*-*	*188*	*242*	*27.4*	*+ Poise, precision, blinding pace - Feels a bit clinical*	★★★★½
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.1)	*070 R*	*'04-'08*	*6/3824*	*350/6600*	*295/4600*	*1420kg*	*246*	*4.6*	*10.9*	*182*	*-*	*24.5*	*+ evo Car of the Year 2004; like a junior GT3 - Tech overload?*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (996 3.4)	*008 R*	*'98-'01*	*6/3387*	*296/6800*	*258/4600*	*1320kg*	*228*	*5.2*	*-*	*174*	*-*	*28.0*	*+ evo Car of the Year 1998; beautifully polished - Some like a bit of rough*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (993)		*'94-'97*	*6/3600*	*285/6100*	*251/5250*	*1372kg*	*211*	*5.2*	*-*	*168*	*-*	*25.0*	*+ More character than 996 - Harder work at speed*	★★★★½
Porsche 911 GT3 (991)	206 R	£100,540	6/3799	468/8250	324/6250	1430kg	333	3.5	-	196	289	23.0	+ evo Car of the Year 2013 - At its best at licence-troubling speeds	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.2)	*182 R*	*'09-'11*	*6/3797*	*429/7600*	*317/6250*	*1395kg*	*312*	***4.2***	***9.2***	*194*	*303*	*22.1*	*+ Even better than the car it replaced - Give us a minute...*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (3.8, 997.2)	*200 R*	*'10-'11*	*6/3797*	*444/7900*	*317/6750*	*1370kg*	*329*	*4.0*	*-*	*193*	*314*	*-*	*+ Our favourite car from the first 200 issues of evo - For people like us, nothing*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 (997.2)	*187 R*	*'11-'12*	*6/3996*	*493/8250*	*339/5750*	*1360kg*	*368*	*3.8*	*-*	*193*	*326*	*-*	*+ evo Car of the Year 2011 - Unforgiving on-road ride; crazy used prices*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.1)	*182 R*	*'07-'09*	*6/3600*	*409/7600*	*298/5500*	*1395kg*	*298*	***4.3***	***9.4***	*192*	*-*	*-*	*+ Runner-up evo Car of the Year 2006 - Ferrari 599 GTBs*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.1)	*105 R*	*'07-'09*	*6/3600*	*409/7600*	*298/5500*	*1375kg*	*302*	*4.2*	*-*	*193*	*-*	*-*	*+ evo Car of the Year 2007 - A chunk more money than the brilliant GT3*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.2)	*082 R*	*'03-'05*	*6/3600*	*375/7400*	*284/5000*	*1380kg*	*272*	***4.3***	***9.2***	*190*	*-*	*-*	*+ evo Car of the Year 2003 - Chassis is a bit too track-focused for some roads*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (996.2)	*068 R*	*'03-'05*	*6/3600*	*375/7400*	*284/5000*	*1330kg*	*286*	*4.2*	*9.2*	*190*	*-*	*-*	*+ Track-biased version of above - Limited supply*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.1)	*182 R*	*'99*	*6/3600*	*360/7200*	*273/5000*	*1350kg*	*271*	***4.5***	***10.3***	*187*	*-*	*21.9*	*+ evo Car of the Year 1999 - Porsche didn't build enough*	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Wraith	205 D	£229,128	12/6592	624/5600	590/1500	2360kg	260	4.6	-	155	327	20.2	+ Refinement, chassis, drivetrain - Shared componentry lets cabin down	★★★★½
Subaru BRZ	204 R	£22,495	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1230kg	163	7.6	-	140	181	36.2	+ Fine chassis, great steering - Weak engine, not the slide-happy car they promised	★★★★☆
Toyota GT86	174 R	£22,995	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1275kg	157	7.6	-	140	181	36.2	+ More fun than its cousin (above) - Same lack of torque, poor interior quality	★★★★☆
TVR Sagaris	*097 R*	*'05-'07*	*6/3996*	*406/7500*	*349/5000*	*1078kg*	*383*	*3.7*	*-*	*185*	*-*	*-*	*+ Looks outrageous - 406bhp feels a touch optimistic*	★★★★½
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'*	★★★★½
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	*004 R*	*'98-'04*	*6/3996*	*350/6800*	*330/5000*	*1130kg*	*315*	***5.0***	***11.4***	*160+*	*-*	*-*	*+ Accomplished and desirable - Check chassis for corrosion*	★★★★½
VW Scirocco GT 2.0 TSI	155 R	£26,125	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1369kg	158	6.5	-	153	139	47.1	+ Golf GTI price and performance - Interior lacks flair	★★★★☆
VW Scirocco R	200 D	£32,580	4/1984	276/6000	258/2500	1426kg	187	5.7	-	155	187	35.3	+ Great engine, grown-up dynamics - Perhaps a little too grown-up for some	★★★★☆

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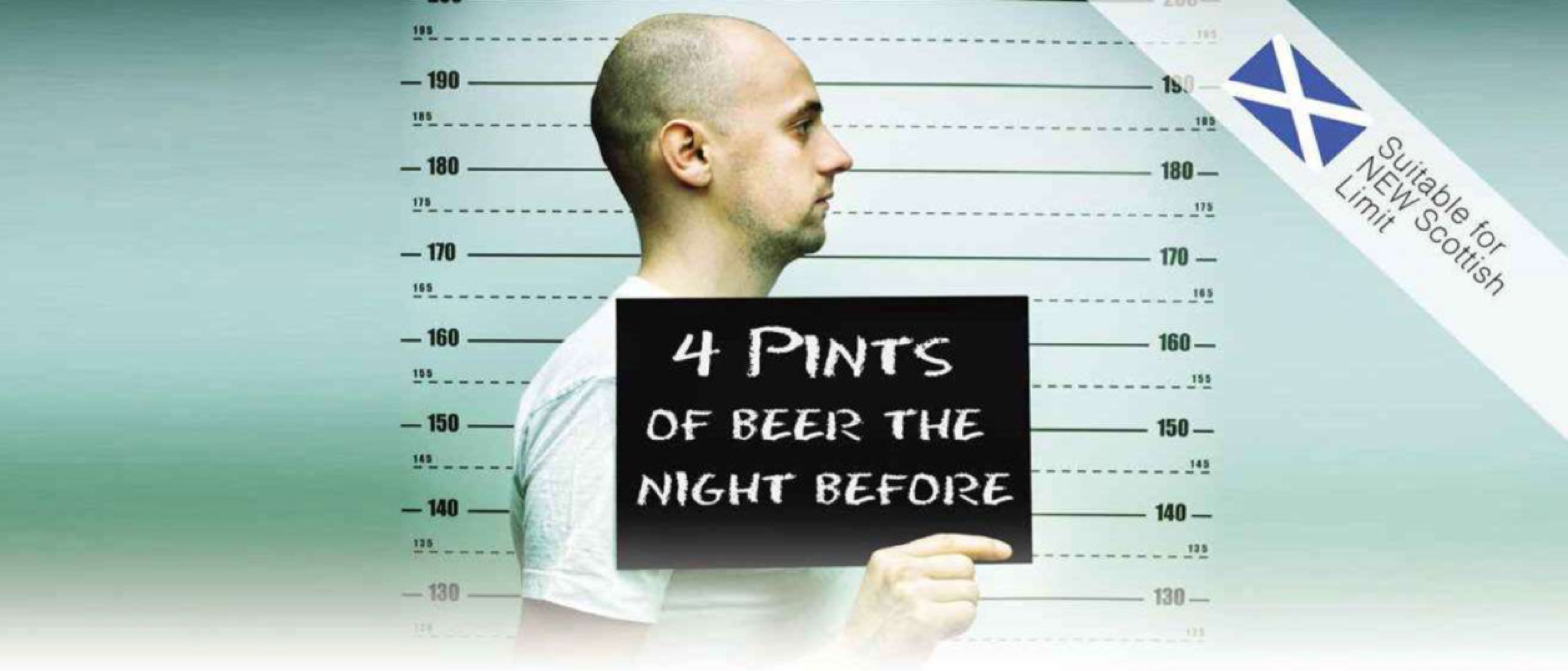

If you drank 4 pints between 9pm and midnight, you may not be sober until noon the following day*. That's why almost 1 in 5 drink drive accidents happen the "morning after"**. AlcoSense quickly and accurately shows your blood alcohol level, so you know when you're clear.

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** 17.1% of drink drive accidents are between hours of 5am and 1pm (Source: Dept. for Transport, Road Accidents and Safety Annual Report 2010)
* 4 Pints of Abbot Reserve contain 14.8 units of alcohol (Source: Greene King) and each unit takes 1 hour to leave the body (Source: NHS). Therefore 14.8 hours after 9pm the alcohol will have passed from the body.

Ratings ★ Thrill-free zone ★★ Tepid ★★★ Interesting ★★★★ Seriously good ★★★★★ A truly great car

Our Choice

Ferrari 458 Speciale. The regular 458 Italia is amazing enough, but the Speciale follows in the tradition of the 360 Challenge Stradale and 430 Scuderia and makes the car it is based on even more, well, special. Our 2014 Car of the Year. It's equally brilliant in open-top 'Speciale A' form, too.

Best of the Rest

Porsche's 918 Spyder (left) pips the McLaren P1 on the road, and vice versa on the track. The LaFerrari is an incredible drive, too. If you can stretch to it, maybe get all three.... Meanwhile, Pagani's Huayra was our joint 2012 Car of the Year and Lamborghini's Aventador offers true supercar drama.

Supercars

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
9ff GT9R	127 D	c£450,000	6/4000	1120/7850	774/5970	1346kg	845	2.9	-	260	-	-	+ Above 100mph eats Veyrons for breakfast - Eats M3 dust at traffic lights	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish (Mk2)	203 R	£192,995	12/5935	568/6650	465/5500	1739kg	332	3.6	-	201	298	22.1	+ Much better than the DBS it succeeds, especially in 2015MY form - It's no Ferrari F12	★★★★½
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk1)	*110 R*	*'05-'07*	*12/5935*	*520/7000*	*425/5800*	*1875kg*	*282*	***4.9***	***10.1***	*200*	-	-	*+ Vanquish joins supercar greats - A tad intimidating at the limit*	★★★★★
Aston Martin One-77	*179 R*	*'10-'12*	*12/7312*	*750/6000*	*553/7600*	*1740kg*	*438*	*3.7*	-	*220+*	-	-	*+ The engine, the looks, the drama - Gearbox hates manoeuvring; only 77 were made*	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	*134 R*	*'05-'11*	*16/7993*	*1000/6000*	*922/2200*	*1950kg*	*521*	***2.8***	***5.8***	*253*	*596*	*11.4*	*+ Superbly engineered 4WD quad-turbo rocket - Er, lacks luggage space?*	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Super Sport	*151 R*	*'10-'14*	*16/7993*	*1183/6400*	*1106/3000*	*1838kg*	*654*	*2.5*	-	*268*	*539*	*12.2*	*+ The world's fastest supercar - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals*	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport Vitesse	*185 R*	*'13-'14*	*16/7993*	*1183/6400*	*1106/3000*	*1990kg*	*604*	*2.6*	-	*254*	*539*	*12.2*	*+ The world's fastest convertible - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals*	★★★★★
Bugatti EB110	*078 R*	*'91-'95*	*12/3500*	*552/8000*	*451/3750*	*1566kg*	*358*	*3.4*	-	*212*	-	-	*+ Superbly engineered 4WD quad-turbo rocket - It just fizzled out*	★★★★½
Caparo T1	138 R	£301,975	8/3499	575/10,500	310/9000	689kg	848	**3.8**	**6.2**	205	-	-	+ Absolutely staggering performance - Absolutely staggering price tag	★★★★½
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	*133 R*	*'09-'13*	*8/6162*	*638/6500*	*603/3800*	*1528kg*	*424*	***3.8***	***7.6***	*205*	*355*	*18.8*	*+ Huge pace and character - Take plenty of brave pills if there's rain*	★★★½☆
Ferrari 458 Italia	183 R	£178,551	8/4497	562/9000	398/6000	1485kg	384	**3.2**	**6.8**	202	307	20.6	+ An astounding achievement, looks fantastic - There'll never be a manual	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Spider	185 R	£198,996	8/4497	562/9000	398/6000	1530kg	373	3.3	-	198	275	23.9	+ A 458 that sounds and feels more organic - Er, 4mph slower than the Italia?	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Speciale	203 R	£208,090	8/4497	597/9000	398/6000	1395kg	435	3.0	-	202+	275	23.9	+ evo Car of the Year 2014 - If you don't own a regular 458, nothing	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Speciale A	204 D	£228,682	8/4497	597/9000	398/6000	1445kg	420	3.0	-	199	275	21.2	+ Same dynamics as the coupe but less shouty - Some chassis flex on bumpy surfaces	★★★★★
Ferrari F430	*163 R*	*'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 430 Scuderia	*121 R*	*'07-'10*	*8/4308*	*503/8500*	*347/5250*	*1350kg*	*378*	***3.5***	***7.7***	*198*	-	*15.7*	*+ Successful F1 technology transplant - Likes to shout about it*	★★★★★
Ferrari Scuderia Spider 16M	*133 D*	*'09*	*8/4308*	*503/8500*	*347/5250*	*1440kg*	*355*	*3.7*	-	*196*	*360*	*18.0*	*+ A hardcore soft-top Ferrari - Earplugs recommended*	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Modena	*163 R*	*'99-'04*	*8/3586*	*394/8500*	*275/4750*	*1390kg*	*288*	*4.5*	*9.0*	*183*	-	*17.0*	*+ Worthy successor to 355 - Not quite as involving as it should be*	★★★★½
Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale	*068 R*	*'03-'04*	*8/3586*	*420/8500*	*275/4750*	*1280kg*	*333*	*4.1*	-	*186*	-	-	*+ Totally exhilarating road-racer. It's loud - It's very, very loud*	★★★★★
Ferrari F355 F1 Berlinetta	*163 R*	*'97-'99*	*8/3496*	*374/8250*	*268/6000*	*1350kg*	*281*	*4.7*	-	*183*	-	*16.7*	*+ Looks terrific, sounds even better - Are you kidding?*	★★★★★
Ferrari F12 Berlinetta	190 R	£240,083	12/6262	730/8250	509/6000	1630kg	455	3.1	-	211	350	18.8	+ 730bhp *isn't* too much power for the road - Super-quick steering is an acquired taste	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	*101 R*	*'06-'12*	*12/5999*	*611/7600*	*448/5600*	*1688kg*	*368*	***3.5***	***7.4***	*205*	*415*	*15.8*	*+ evo Car of the Year 2006 - Banks are getting harder to rob*	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTO	*161 R*	*'11-'12*	*12/5999*	*661/8250*	*457/6500*	*1605kg*	*418*	*3.4*	-	*208*	-	-	*+ One of the truly great Ferraris - Erm, the air con isn't very good*	★★★★★
Ferrari 575M Fiorano Handling Pack	*200 R*	*'02-'06*	*12/5748*	*508/7250*	*434/5250*	*1730kg*	*298*	***4.2***	***9.6***	*202*	-	*12.3*	*+ Fiorano pack makes 575 truly great - It should have been standard*	★★★★★
Ferrari 550 Maranello	*169 R*	*'97-'02*	*12/5474*	*485/7000*	*415/5000*	*1716kg*	*287*	*4.3*	*10.0*	*199*	-	*12.3*	*+ Everything - Nothing*	★★★★★
Ferrari FF	194 R	£227,168	12/6262	651/8000	504/6000	1880kg	347	3.7	-	208	360	15.4	+ Four seats and 4WD, but a proper Ferrari - Looks divide opinion	★★★★★
Ferrari 612 Scaglietti F1	*090 R*	*'04-'11*	*12/5748*	*533/7250*	*434/5250*	*1840kg*	*294*	***4.3***	***9.8***	*199*	*470*	*13.8*	*+ Awesomely capable grand tourer - See above*	★★★★★
Ferrari LaFerrari	203 R	c£1m	12/6262	950/9000	664/6750	1255kg	769	3.0	-	217+	330	-	+ Perhaps the greatest Ferrari ever - Brakes lack a touch of precision on track	★★★★★
Ferrari Enzo	*203 R*	*'02-'04*	*12/5999*	*651/7800*	*485/5500*	*1365kg*	*485*	***3.5***	***6.7***	*217+*	*545*	-	*+ Intoxicating, exploitable - Cabin detailing falls short of a Zonda or F1 's*	★★★★★
Ferrari F50	*186 R*	*'96-'97*	*12/4699*	*513/8500*	*347/6500*	*1230kg*	*424*	*3.9*	-	*202*	-	-	*+ A better drivers' Ferrari than the 288, F40 or Enzo - Not better looking, though*	★★★★★
Ferrari F40	*199 R*	*'87-'92*	*8/2936*	*471/7000*	*426/4000*	*1100kg*	*437*	*4.1*	-	*201*	-	-	*+ Brutally fast - It's in the dictionary under 'turbo lag'*	★★★★★
Ferrari 288 GTO	*064 R*	*'84-'85*	*8/2855*	*394/7000*	*366/3800*	*1160kg*	*345*	*4.9*	-	*189*	-	-	*+ Painfully beautiful, rarer than the F40 - You are joking?*	★★★★★
Ford GT	*200 R*	*'04-'06*	*8/5409*	*550/6500*	*500/3750*	*1583kg*	*353*	*3.7*	-	*205*	-	-	*+ Our 2005 Car of the Year - Don't scalp yourself getting in*	★★★★★
Gumpert Apollo	110 R	£275,000	8/4163	690/6300	675/4000	1200kg	584	3.0	-	220+	-	-	+ Stupendous perfomance, 'Apollo' - High price, 'Gumpert'	★★★★½
Hennessey Venom GT	180 R	£900,000	8/7000	1244/6500	1155/4000	1244kg	1016	2.5	-	270	-	-	+ 0-200mph in 14.5sec, and it handles too - Looks like an Exige	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ220	*157 R*	*'92-'94*	*6/3498*	*542/7200*	*475/4500*	*1470kg*	*375*	*3.7*	-	*213*	-	-	*+ Britain's greatest supercar... - ...until McLaren built the F1*	★★★★☆
Koenigsegg Agera R	180 R	c£1.09m	8/5032	1124/7100	885/2700	1435kg	796	2.8	-	273	-	-	+ As fast and exciting as your body can handle - It's Veyron money	★★★★★
Koenigsegg One:1	202 R	c£2.0m	8/5065	1341/7500	1011/6000	1360kg	1002	2.9	-	273	-	-	+ The most powerful car we've ever tested - It's sold out; we couldn't afford one anyway...	★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCX	*094 R*	*'06-'10*	*8/4700*	*806/6900*	*678/5700*	*1180kg*	*694*	***3.9***	***7.7***	*245+*	-	-	*+ Sweden's greatest supercar - Sweden's only supercar*	★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCXR Edition	*118 R*	*'08-'10*	*8/4800*	*1004/7000*	*796/5600*	*1280kg*	*797*	*2.8*	-	*250+*	-	-	*+ One of the world's fastest cars - Spikey power delivery*	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán LP610-4	209 D	£186,760	10/5204	602/8250	413/6500	1532kg	399	3.2	-	202+	290	22.6	+ Defies the numbers; incredible point-to-point pace - Takes work to find its sweet-spot	★★★★½
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	*180 D*	*'08-'13*	*10/5204*	*552/8000*	*398/6500*	*1410kg*	*398*	*3.7*	-	*202*	*325*	*16.0*	*+ Still a missile from A to B - Starting to show its age*	★★★★☆
Lamborghini LP570-4 Superleggera	*152 R*	*'10-'13*	*10/5204*	*562/8000*	*398/6500*	*1340kg*	*426*	***3.5***	-	*202*	*325*	*20.6*	*+ Less weight and more power than original Superleggera - LP560-4 runs it very close*	★★★★½
Lamborghini Gallardo	*094 R*	*'06-'08*	*10/4961*	*513/8000*	*376/4250*	*1520kg*	*343*	***4.3***	***9.4***	*196*	-	-	*+ On a full-bore start it spins all four wheels. Cool - Slightly clunky e-gear*	★★★★½
Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera	*104 R*	*'07-'08*	*10/4961*	*522/8000*	*376/4250*	*1420kg*	*373*	*3.8*	-	*196*	-	-	*+ Lighter, more agile - Grabby carbon brakes, clunky e-gear*	★★★★☆
Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4	194 R	£260,040	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1575kg	445	2.9	-	217	370	17.7	+ Most important new Lambo since the Countach - Erm... expensive?	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador Roadster	184 R	£288,840	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1625kg	431	3.0	-	217	370	17.7	+ Sensational engine and styling - A wee bit on the thirsty side	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago	*089 D*	*'01-'06*	*12/6192*	*570/7500*	*479/5400*	*1650kg*	*351*	*4.0*	-	*205*	-	-	*+ Gorgeous, capable and incredibly friendly - V12 feels stressed*	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	*093 R*	*'06-'11*	*12/6496*	*631/8000*	*487/6000*	*1665kg*	*385*	*3.3*	-	*211*	-	*21.3*	*+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes*	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	*200 R*	*'09-'11*	*12/6496*	*661/8000*	*487/6500*	*1565kg*	*429*	***3.2***	***7.3***	*212*	-	-	*+ A supercar in its truest, wildest sense - Be prepared for stares*	★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo 6.0	*019 R*	*'00-'02*	*12/5992*	*550/7100*	*457/5500*	*1625kg*	*343*	*3.8*	-	*200+*	-	-	*+ Best-built, best-looking Diablo of all - People's perceptions*	★★★★½
Lexus LFA/LFA Nürburgring	*200 R*	*'10-'12*	*10/4805*	*552/8700*	*354/6800*	*1480kg*	*379*	*3.7*	-	*202*	-	-	*+ Absurd and compelling supercar - Badge and price don't quite match*	★★★★★
Maserati MC12	*079 R*	*'04-'05*	*12/5998*	*621/7500*	*481/5500*	*1445kg*	*437*	*3.8*	-	*205*	-	-	*+ Rarer than an Enzo - The Ferrari's better*	★★★★☆
McLaren 650S	196 R	£195,250	8/3799	641/7250	500/6000	1428kg	456	3.0	-	207	275	24.2	+ Better brakes, balance and looks than 12C; more power too - Costs an extra £19k	★★★★★
McLaren 12C	*187 R*	*'11-'14*	*8/3799*	*616/7500*	*442/3000*	*1434kg*	*435*	*3.1*	-	*207*	*279*	*24.2*	*+ Staggering performance, refinement - Engine noise can be grating*	★★★★★
McLaren P1	205 R	£866,000	8/3799	903/7500	664/4000	1395kg	658	2.8	-	217	194	34.0	+ Freakish breadth of ability - At its mind-bending best on track	★★★★★
McLaren F1	*205 R*	*'94-'98*	*12/6064*	*627/7500*	*479/4000*	*1137kg*	*560*	*3.2*	*6.3*	*240+*	-	*19.0*	*+ Still the most single-minded supercar ever - There'll never be another*	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG Black Series	*131 R*	*'09-'10*	*12/5980*	*661/5400*	*737/2200*	*1876kg*	*358*	***4.0***	***8.1***	*199*	-	-	*+ Bonkers looks, bonkers speed - Bonkers £250K price*	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	159 R	£165,030	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1620kg	335	**4.1**	**8.4**	197	308	21.4	+ Great engine and chassis (gullwing doors too!) - Slightly tardy gearbox	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Black Series	204 R	£229,985	8/6208	622/7400	468/5500	1550kg	408	3.6	-	196	321	20.6	+ Stunning engine, superb body control - Be careful on less-than-smooth roads...	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren	*073 R*	*'04-'07*	*8/5439*	*617/6500*	*575/3250*	*1693kg*	*370*	*3.7*	-	*208*	-	-	*+ Zonda-pace, 575-style drivability - Dreadful brake feel*	★★★★☆
Noble M600	186 R	c£200,000	8/4439	650/6800	604/3800	1198kg	551	**3.8**	**7.7**	225	-	-	+ Spiritual successor to the Ferrari F40 - It's a bit pricey	★★★★★
Pagani Huayra	185 R	c£1m	12/5980	720/5800	737/2250	1350kg	542	3.3	-	224	-	-	+ Our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Engine isn't as nape-prickling as the Zonda's	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda 760RS	170 R	£1.5m	12/7291	750/6300	575/4500	1210kg	630	3.3	-	217+	-	-	+ One of the most extreme Zondas ever - One of the last Zondas ever (probably)	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda S 7.3	*096 R*	*'02-'05*	*12/7291*	*555/5900*	*553/4050*	*1250kg*	*451*	*3.6*	-	***197***	-	-	*+ evo Car of the Year 2001 (in earlier 7.0 form) - Values have gone up a fair bit since then*	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda F	*186 R*	*'05-'06*	*12/7291*	*602/6150*	*575/4000*	*1230kg*	*497*	*3.6*	-	*214*	-	-	*+ Everything an Italian supercar ought to be - Looks a bit blingy next to a Carrera GT*	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda Cinque Roadster	*147 D*	*'09-'10*	*12/7291*	*669/6200*	*575/4000*	*1400kg*	*485*	*3.4*	-	*217+*	-	-	*+ The best Zonda ever - Doesn't come up in the classifieds often*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo (991)	194 R	£120,598	6/3800	513/6000	524/2100	1595kg	327	3.4	-	195	227	29.1	+ Incredible pace, whatever the weather - More involvement would't go amiss	★★★★☆
Porsche 911 Turbo S (991)	188 R	£142,120	6/3800	552/6500	553/2200	1605kg	349	3.1	-	197	227	29.1	+ Still unrivalled as an everyday supercar - At times disguises the thrills it can offer	★★★★☆
Porsche 911 Turbo (997.2)	*140 R*	*'09-'13*	*6/3800*	*493/6000*	*479/1950*	*1570kg*	*319*	***3.2***	***7.3***	*193*	*272*	*24.4*	*+ The Turbo at the very top of its game - The GT3's cheaper...*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 RS (997.2)	*204 R*	*'10-'13*	*6/3600*	*611/6500*	*516/2250*	*1370kg*	*453*	*3.5*	-	*205*	*284*	-	*+ More powerful than a Carrera GT. Handles, too - Erm...*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo (997.1)	*094 R*	*'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 R*	*'00-'06*	*6/3600*	*414/6000*	*413/2700*	*1540kg*	*273*	***4.1***	***10.0***	*189*	-	*21.0*	*+ evo Car of the year 2000; the 911 for all seasons - We can't find any reasons*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 (996)	*072 R*	*'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 (993)	*066 R*	*'95-'98*	*6/3600*	*408/5750*	*398/4500*	*1500kg*	*276*	*3.7*	-	*180*	-	*19.4*	*+ Stupendous all-weather supercar - It doesn't rain enough*	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 (993)	*003 R*	*'96-'99*	*6/3600*	*430/5700*	*398/4500*	*1295kg*	*337*	*3.9*	-	*184*	-	-	*+ Hairy-arsed homologation special - Only 57 were made*	★★★★★
Porsche 918 Spyder	200 R	£781,155	8/4593	875/8500	944/6600	1674kg	531	2.6	-	211	79	85.6	+ Blistering performance; cohesive hybrid tech - Added weight and complexity	★★★★★
Porsche Carrera GT	*200 R*	*'04-'06*	*10/5733*	*604/8000*	*435/5750*	*1380kg*	*445*	***3.8***	***7.6***	*205*	-	-	*+ Still feels ahead of its time - Needs modern tyres to tame its spikiness*	★★★★★
Porsche 959	*192 R*	*'87-'90*	*6/2850*	*444/6500*	*369/5000*	*1450kg*	*311*	*3.7*	-	*197*	-	-	*+ Tech showcase, still a great drive - Limited choice of colours?*	★★★★★
Ruf Rt 12	097 R	c£155,000	6/3746	641/7000	641/3500	1530kg	426	3.3	-	219	-	-	+ Beautifully executed car with truly immense power - Needs care	★★★★★
Ruf CTR3	126 R	c£357,000	6/3746	691/7600	656/4000	1400kg	501	3.2	-	235	-	-	+ The best 911 that Porsche never made - But not the best looking...	★★★★★
Ruf CTR 'Yellowbird'	*097 R*	*'87-'89*	*6/3366*	*469/5950*	*408/5100*	*1170kg*	*345*	*4.1*	-	*211*	-	-	*+ A true legend - We can't all drive like Stefan Roser*	★★★★★

Track Times

Key ✚ = new addition this month. **Red** denotes the car is the fastest in its class.

Car	Lap time	Peak mph	issue no.	Conditions
Radical SR8LM (fastest car)	1:13.6	127.8	138	Dry
Caparo T1 (fastest supercar)	1:14.8	130.9	131	Dry
Ferrari 458 Italia	1:19.3	120.0	159	Dry
Gumpert Apollo S	1:19.4	120.4	119	Dry
McLaren MP4-12C (Corsa tyres)	1:19.6	121.2	159	Dry
Caterham Levante V8	1:19.6	118.6	131	Dry
Porsche 997 GT2 RS	1:19.9	122.3	158	Dry
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	1:20.1	113.2	138	Dry
Caterham Superlight R500	1:20.2	115.7	119	Dry
McLaren MP4-12C	1:20.6	120.9	159	Dry
Noble M600	1:20.8	121.8	159	Dry
Porsche 997 GT3 RS 4.0 (fastest coupe)	1:21.0	118.2	160	Dry
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	1:21.3	121.1	134	Dry
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	1:21.5	113.6	119	Dry
KTM X-Bow (300bhp)	1:21.5	112.7	138	Dry
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	1:21.7	117.2	121	Dry
Porsche 997.2 GT3 RS (3.8)	1:21.9	116.8	150	Dry
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	1:22.5	119.1	122	Dry
Brooke Double R	1:22.5	113.2	119	Dry
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	1:22.9	116.7	143	Dry
Porsche Carrera GT	1:23.3	115.2	119	Dry
Porsche 997.2 GT3	1:23.3	114.5	138	Dry
Porsche 997 Turbo S	1:23.5	117.5	146	Dry
Porsche 997 GT2	1:23.5	115.1	119	Dry
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	1:23.6	113.1	119	Dry
Porsche 991 Carrera	1:23.6	112.5	182	Dry
Porsche 991 Carrera Cabriolet	1:23.9	112.3	183	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	1:23.9	-	YouTube	Dry
Porsche 997 Turbo	1:24.1	113.5	136	Damp
Lotus 340R (190bhp)	1:24.2	110.0	135	Dry
Porsche Boxster S (981)	1:24.2	109.3	183	Dry
Caterham Superlight R300	1:24.3	101.5	138	Dry
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	1:24.5	115.1	160	Dry
Porsche Cayman S (981)	1:24.5	109.2	202	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	1:24.6	115.7	146	Dry
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	1:24.7	107.7	167	Dry
Caterham 7 Supersport	1:24.8	101.6	YouTube	Dry
Ferrari California	1:25.0	111.8	134	Dry
KTM X-Bow	1:25.0	105.0	123	Dry
BMW E92 M3 Coupe	1:25.1	109.1	162	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG Black	1:25.2	108.6	131	Dry
Jaguar F-type V8 S	1:25.2	111.2	183	Dry
Audi RS5	1:25.4	108.8	162	Dry
Audi R8 Spyder V8	1:25.5	107.0	167	Dry
Porsche Cayman R	1:25.5	106.8	158	Dry
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster	1:25.6	109.1	183	Dry
BMW M5 (F10) (fastest saloon)	1:25.7	112.0	165	Dry
Jaguar XKR-S	1:25.7	-	YouTube	Dry
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	1:25.8	110.9	146	Dry
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	1:25.9	107.5	138	Dry
BMW 1-series M Coupe	1:25.9	106.4	158	Dry
Mitsubishi Evo X RS 360	1:26.1	106.6	153	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Trophy (fastest hot hatch)	1:26.1	105.3	166	Dry
Jaguar F-type S Coupe	1:26.2	106.3	202	Dry
Audi TT RS	1:26.3	107.2	149	Dry
Aston Martin DBS	1:26.4	109.5	143	Dry
Porsche Panamera Turbo	1:26.5	109.2	137	Dry
Audi RS6 Avant (C7) (fastest estate)	1:26.5	-	YouTube	Dry
BMW M135i	1:26.6	-	YouTube	Dry
Jaguar XJ220	1:26.7	111.7	131	Dry
Porsche Cayenne Turbo S (fastest 4x4)	1:26.8	106.1	YouTube	Dry
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	1:26.8	104.9	165	Dry
Porsche Cayenne Turbo	1:26.9	107.4	158	Dry
Mercedes-Benz GLA45 AMG	1:26.9	-	205	Dry
Lotus Evora	1:27.1	104.2	145	Dry
Nissan 370Z	1:27.1	104.0	158	Dry
Jaguar F-type V6 S	1:27.2	105.0	YouTube	Dry
Porsche Panamera S	1:27.3	102.4	165	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	1:27.3	-	YouTube	Dry
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	1:27.7	111.0	162	Dry
Lotus Elise SC	1:27.7	104.6	131	Dry
Audi S3	1:27.7	-	YouTube	Dry
Vauxhall VXR8 Bathurst S	1:27.8	106.1	131	Dry
BMW E46 M3 CSL	1:27.8	105.4	153	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	1:27.8	103.3	-	-
Audi RS6 Avant (C6) (fastest estate)	1:27.9	111.0	121	Dry
Jaguar XFR	1:27.9	108.1	137	Dry
SEAT Leon Cupra 280	1:28.0	-	YouTube	Dry
Lexus IS-F	1:28.1	106.4	151	Dry
Porsche Boxster S (987)	1:28.1	105.4	120	Dry
Subaru WRX STI	1:28.3	101.6	157	Dry
Porsche Macan S	1:28.3	-	205	Dry
SEAT Leon Cupra R	1:28.7	102.4	162	Dry
Bentley Continental Supersports	1:29.2	105.8	149	Dry
Lotus Elise Club Racer	1:29.2	95.5	162	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	1:29.9	101.4	156	Dry
Vauxhall VXR8 Clubsport Tourer	1:29.9	-	YouTube	Dry
Honda NSX	1:30.1	101.3	145	Dry

TRACK MAP

West Circuit facts

- ✚ **Location** Bedford Autodrome
- ✚ **Opened** 1999
- ✚ **Length** 1.85 miles (2.98 kilometres)
- ✚ **Direction** Anti-clockwise
- ✚ **Left turns** 9
- ✚ **Right turns** 6

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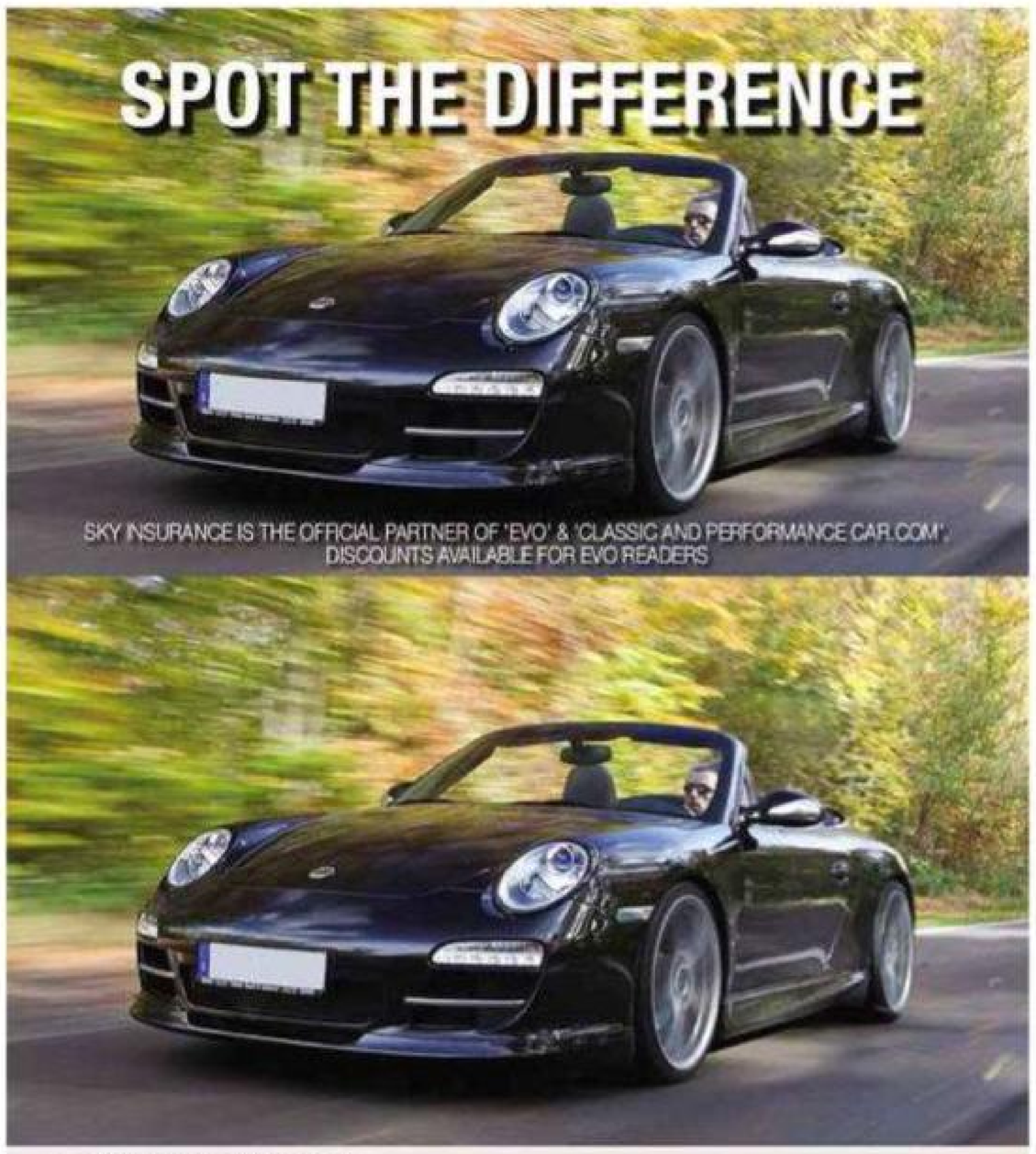

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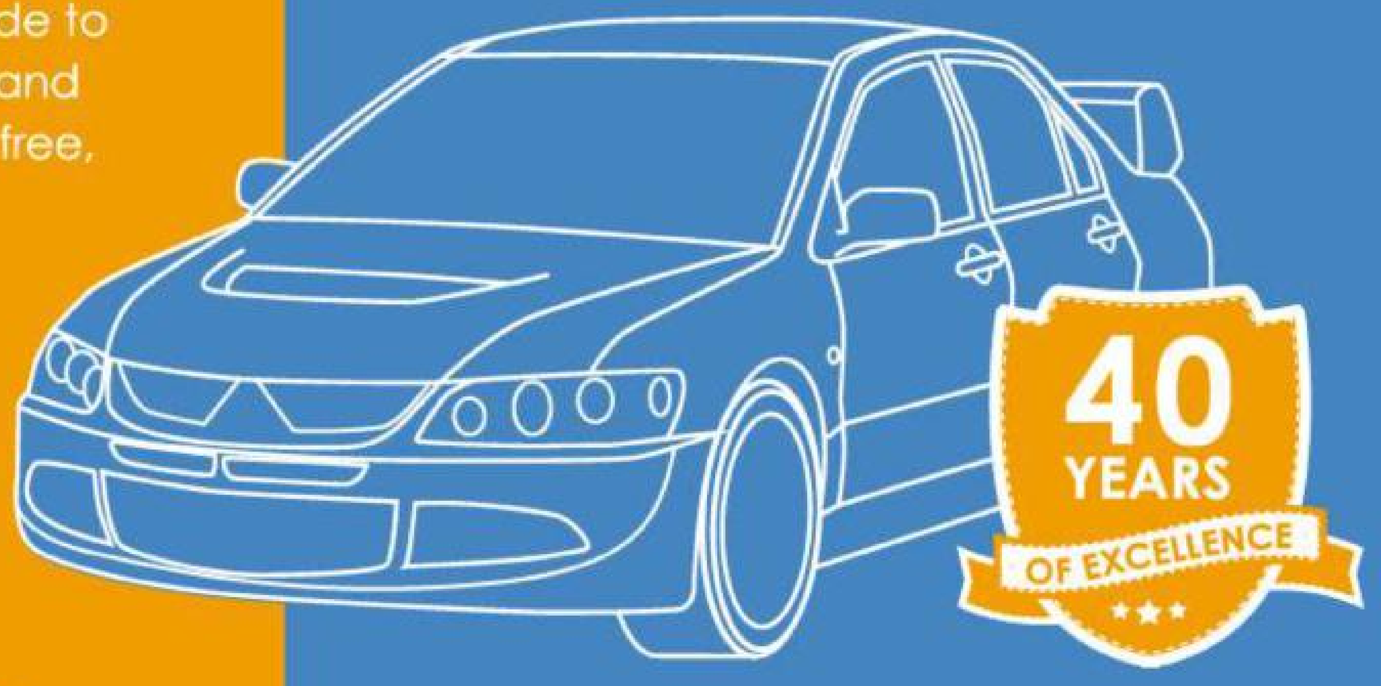

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Art *of* speed

Porsche 993 GT2 *wheelarch extensions*

by RICHARD LANE

GEE-TEE-TOO. THE CHEERY PHONETIC OF PORSCHE'S mid-'90s homologation hot-rod is misleading in the extreme, because applying eugenics to a 993 Turbo by slamming it, injecting its hips with Botox and affixing competition aero yielded unmitigated visual brutality.

Four hundred and thirty horses may not sound too unnerving either, but consider that the GT2's talented but less potent donor car could already make a mockery of the Ferrari F355. Now ditch 205kg and the drive to the front wheels while increasing boost. Back seats, sound-proofing, interior door handles, airbags, electric windows, sunroof, central locking – all gone. Hello racing shells, magnesium wheel centres and a 959-crushing power-to-weight ratio of 339bhp per ton. Yours for £131,000.

It was overkill only warfare could foster, which in this case was the BPR Global GT Series set up by former Porsche factory driver Jürgen Barth. Until the start of GT2 manufacture in the winter of '94, in fact, Porsche's judicious philosophy had been to engineer four-wheel drive into any road-destined car producing 400bhp-plus. Oh, how things changed...

With the order books full to bursting, 193 street-legal examples of the ultimate evolution of the air-cooled 911 left the factory. They were barely sanitised, dispiritingly scarce, relentlessly fast and wide.

Unfathomably wide. The prognathic air dam inherited from the RS 3.8 and the rear wing with integrated scoops that blasted air down to the intercooler were both deeply impressive, but what volleyed home the GT2's real intention with unremitting force were the wheelarch extensions. Grotesque, glassfibre and violently pop-riveted to each corner – seven stamps at the front, eight at the rear – they were a function-over-form detail of the highest calibre. Glassfibre was the material of choice, not thin-gauge aluminium as for the doors and bonnet, because it was easier and cheaper to replace when things got a bit physical. Enough said.

The romance is patent. Racing is so very seductive, and a road car from within which a competition killer is visibly clawing to escape? Off the scale.

So how wide is the pioneering GT2? More so than the traction-control-devoid widowmaker that formed the apex of the next-gen 911 troop? Please. It's actually more sprawlsome than both the standard 997 GT2 and the deranged GT2 RS, the most potent street-legal factory 911 in history. It's also by a decent margin the most likely of the quartet to squeeze under toll road barriers. That's known as 'stance'.

evo NEXT MONTH **New Mini JCW versus its rivals**

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Official fuel consumption for the SEAT Leon ST CUPRA in mpg (litres per 100km); urban 32.1 (8.8) - 33.6 (8.4); extra-urban 50.4 (5.6) - 49.6 (6.6); combined 42.2 (6.7) - 42.8 (6.6). CO_2 emissions 157 - 154 g/km.

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