

NEW MAZDA MX-5 v USED BOXSTER, GT86, 208 GTI & CATERHAM

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BUY OR SELL?

Sports car values, what next?

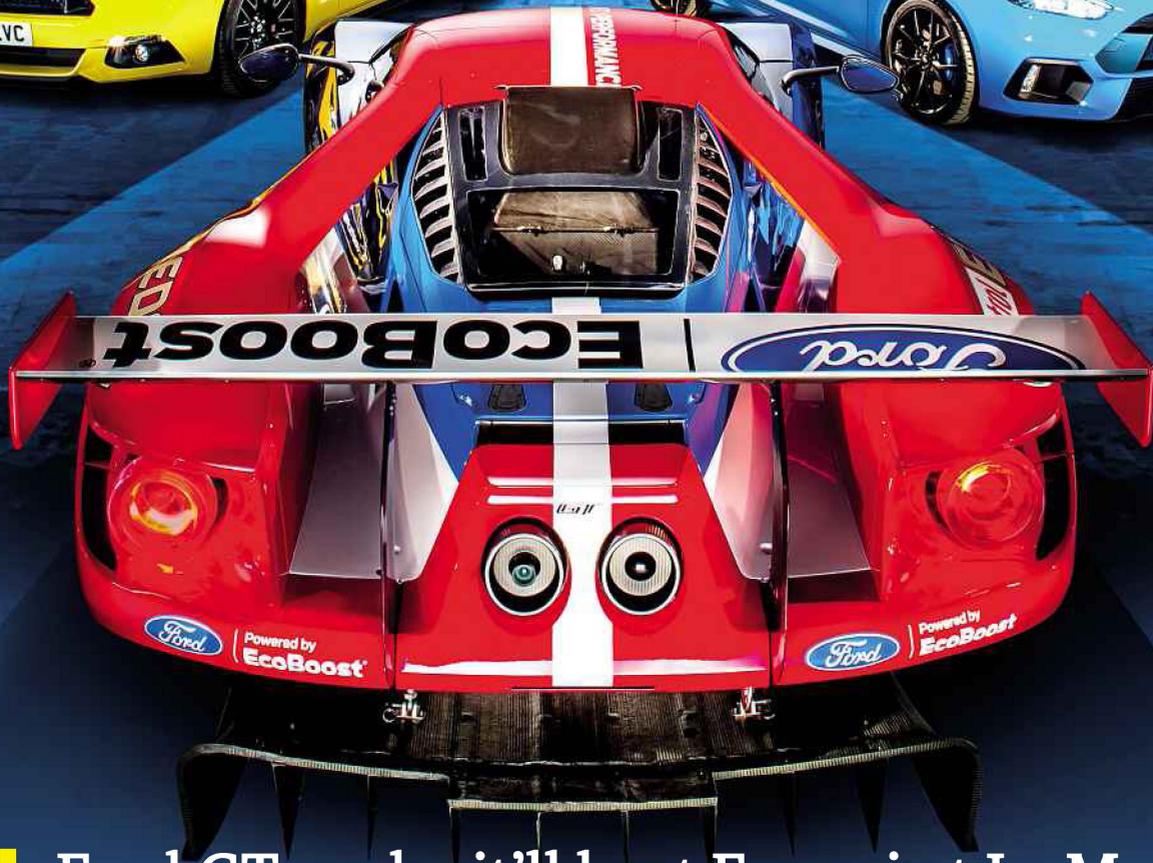
ICON: BMW M3 CS

The forgotten M-car tested

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FOCUS RS

DRIVEN Brilliant mega-hatch & bargain Mustang



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+ Ford GT – why it'll beat Ferrari at Le Mans

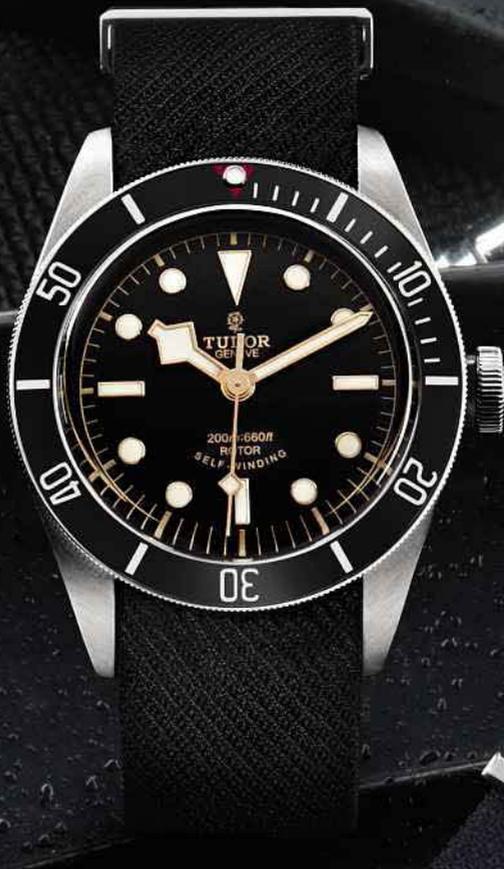


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MOST PEOPLE – CAR enthusiasts or not – tend to have an experience or memory of a fast Ford, such is their sheer number and deep history. I'd love to hear

yours; I have three that stand out.

Firstly, a banzai ride through the lanes with a local, erm, character in his modified Mk2 Escort when I was 16. The Pinto (and passenger) was screaming, the 15-inch tyres smoking, and my desire to be 17 years old grew stronger by the second. That car made every moment that passed until my 17th birthday feel like an age. In short, that car multiplied that ache to drive into a genuine heart-wrenching pain.

Next up, the sheer awfulness of a modified Fiesta RS1800 owned, funnily enough, by our managing editor, Stuart Gallagher. We worked together in the late-'90s, and Stuart owned said vehicle. He also modified said vehicle, with crappy coilovers and a geometry setup that I can only assume was carried out by Marty Feldman (google him, kids). That car was lethal. As in sudden-catastrophic-oversteer-at-any-speed lethal.

My third and final searing memory of fast Fords is of the first GT – and an epic drive in Wales during *evo's* 200th issue 'Greatest Car Ever' megatest. At the beginning we predicted a solid mid-table result for the V8 GT. But the more we drove it, the more magic it revealed. It fires an arrow into what we love about driving and remains one of the most underrated supercars ever.

It still feels modern, too. Indeed if we threw it, along with the new Ford GT, into a test with a Lamborghini Huracán, a Ferrari 488 GTB and a McLaren 650S, the old GT would still have a good chance of overall victory.

So it's with great pleasure that *evo* dedicates the meat of this issue to Ford performance cars – the Mustang, the Focus RS, the new Ford GT and the people responsible for them. Our universe is a darker place without fast Fords, and having them back is a significant moment.

But the proof is in the driving, right? You'll find out what we think of the Mk3 Focus RS and new Mustang on pages 56 and 64 respectively. And feel free to send your Ford memories to nickt@evo.co.uk or @evoNickTrott. ☒

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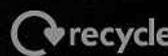
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Ford LET GO OF WHAT YOU KNOW



RADAR

Hatch
**NEW
DS3**

Coupes
**LEXUS &
INFINITI**

Sport
**PIKES
PEAK**

Tech
**ELECTRIC
SUPERCHARGERS**

BMW's i Vision of the future

by HUNTER SKIPWORTH

Spyder show car spearheads
the new tech revolution



The Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas has traditionally been the preserve of the geek. Taking place every January, it sets the agenda for the tech trends of the year. Usually, this has meant bigger TVs and more expensive smartphones, but in 2016 all of that changed.

This year's CES felt more like a motor show than anything else, with car manufacturers, keen to demo their latest technological innovations, all scrambling for space on the show floor. It was the likes of BMW and Audi that ended up stealing the show, with eye-catching concepts that, while seeming far-fetched, aren't actually that far off production.

The recurring theme was a move towards streamlining and simplifying car-tech. Nowadays, the capabilities of your car can in many cases exceed those of the smartphone in your pocket, but with more features rapidly being added, interfaces have become off-puttingly complex. From what we saw at CES, they're about to get a lot more intuitive.

Also on the agenda was improving the technology on offer in more affordable vehicles. Virtually every

manufacturer now plans to offer systems such as Apple CarPlay or Android Auto in even its lowliest entry-level models. Application support, traditionally the preserve of the high end, is now filtering down the automotive price spectrum.

Most exciting was the revelation that autonomous cars aren't the threat to driving thrills that many fear. Most of what we saw at CES was about using autonomous systems to get the boring stuff out of the way, with the car handling parking and the motorway and the driver taking over when there is fun to be had.

What's clear is that auto technology is at the same tipping point that smartphones were nine years ago.

“ Autonomous cars aren't the threat that many fear ”

Applications, services, processing power and ideas are all converging at the same time, setting car-tech up for a similar seismic shift to the one triggered by the iPhone.

Below: BMW's i Vision concept is a clear hint at an i8 Spyder as well as a showcase for next-generation gesture control technology. **Below right:** Faraday Future unveiled its own, slightly more far-fetched vision

BMW i VISION FUTURE INTERACTION CONCEPT

The BMW i Vision Future Interaction Concept, otherwise known as 'what an i8 Spyder will look like', offers a fascinating glimpse into the BMW interior of the future.

Using a next-generation version of the gesture control technology seen in the new 7-series, both the passenger and driver's side of the i Vision Concept feature sensors that allow you to use your hands to control the infotainment system.

The system itself is spread across a high-definition LCD screen that wraps around the entirety of the right-hand side of the car's fascia. Controlled using a combination of your hands and a single button built into the car's steering wheel, it is far simpler and easier to use than the iDrive found in BMWs currently on sale.

The i Vision is also completely autonomous, in theory at least. The asymmetric seats both face slightly towards the infotainment system and, when the vehicle is driving itself, the steering wheel slides back and away from the driver, allowing them to make video calls or send emails. A set of LEDs built into the wheel then glows red when the driver needs to take control again.





FARADAY FUTURE FFZERO 1



The subject of an unbelievable amount of launch hype, the Faraday Future concept (below) really wasn't the promised game-changer. Looking like a Le Mans prototype, it features a number of exciting ideas but also some utterly bizarre ones.

Sitting in the centre of the steering wheel in the FFZero 1 is your smartphone. Rather than using a dedicated screen, Faraday Future wants an application on your mobile to control all interior functionality. It's a neat idea, although it would work better with a tablet's larger display.

Less persuasive is the decision to have the car's single-seat cockpit suspended in a 'low-gravity environment', requiring the driver to wear a helmet with an oxygen and water supply...

VW BUDD-E CONCEPT

While affording yet another glimpse of the VW microbus that could be, the Budd-e was also VW's way of showing how its car of the future would interact with both the driver and their home.

Inside, the steering wheel uses a haptic feedback system that vibrates depending on how hard buttons are pressed, meaning the driver doesn't need to take their eyes off the road while controlling the infotainment system.

Gesture control means you can open the doors with a single swipe of the hand, while the entire car is connected to the home, using data services to let it know when you're on your way back, so lights and heating can be switched on.



“ Budd-e afforded yet another glimpse of the VW microbus that could be ”

Below: VW Budd-e teased a microbus concept once again, this time with lots of 'connected' tech.
Bottom and right: Audi is looking to do away with analogue dials and buttons altogether

AUDI NEXT-GENERATION VIRTUAL DASHBOARD



Audi used CES to demo its next-generation in-car infotainment system. Using a similar approach to the one found in the current TT, albeit with several more screens, it aims to eliminate the need for analogue dials and buttons altogether.

A big, bright, 14.1-inch screen sits behind the steering wheel, displaying car and navigation data, while entertainment is controlled via a display in the top of the centre console and temperature on one below.

It's a step on from the simple and logical display found in the TT, but more screens mean Audi can load even more tech into your next A4.





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ABOUT PERFORMANCE, THEN EXPERIENCE
THE NEW ABARTH 595 YAMAHA FACTORY RACING.**

- BASED ON THE ABARTH 595 1.4 T-JET,
THE 'YAMAHA FACTORY RACING' UPGRADE PACK INCLUDES:**
- LOWERED SUSPENSION WITH KONI SHOCK ABSORBERS & EIBACH SPRINGS**
 - POWER INCREASE FROM 140 HP TO 160 HP**
 - RECORD MONZA EXHAUST**
 - 17" FORMULA MATT BLACK ALLOY WHEELS**



The New Abarth 595 Yamaha Factory Racing starts from £17,420 OTR. Official fuel consumption figures for Abarth 595 Yamaha Factory Racing: mpg (l/100km): Combined 47.1 (6.0), Urban 35.8 (7.9), Extra urban 57.6 (4.9), CO₂ Emissions: 139 g/km. Fuel consumption and CO₂ figures are obtained for comparative purposes in accordance with EC directives/regulations and may not be representative of real-life driving conditions. Model shown is the Abarth 595 Yamaha Factory Racing 1.4 T-Jet 160 HP at £17,890 OTR including Gara White paint at £300 and optional Side Stripe and Mirror covers at £170. Abarth UK is a trading style of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles UK Ltd.

Hot DS3 incoming

DS Performance hijacks Peugeot 208 GTi hardware to create a hot hatch with flair

HANGING A NEW automotive luxury brand off the back of a supermini seems unorthodox, but with 390,000 sales already to its name as a Citroën, the updated DS3 will be a hugely important vehicle for the newly formed 'DS Automobiles'.

It's the latest model to be facelifted and rebranded to better align itself with the rest of the DS line-up, after the DS5 and DS4. Like those models, it features a reprofiled front grille flanked by thick strips of chrome trim, dubbed 'DS Wings'. Above those are new LED headlamps, and while the fang-like LED daytime running lights remain, the unique '3D' LED tail lights are arguably the more successful carry-over.

As befits the DS3's boutique positioning, there's a huge range of personalisation options – three million combinations, says DS, though we'll resist the urge to count – as well as new interior design schemes and abundant leather.

PureTech three-cylinder and THP four-cylinder petrol engines plus BlueHDi four-cylinder diesel units will power the DS3 range, though it's the DS3 Performance we're interested in. With 205bhp and 221lb ft from a 1.6-litre THP engine, it will share its mechanical make-up with the Peugeot 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport – one of our favourite compact hot hatches. It will also feature the same six-speed manual gearbox and Torsen limited-slip differential.

More promising still are the suspension revisions, with 15mm shaved from the ride height and 26mm added to the front track, 14mm to the rear. The suspension tuning has been carried out by the DS Performance team, which has



“The fastest DS3 will get a six-speed manual 'box and a Torsen limited-slip diff”

also fitted 323mm front brake discs (complete with Brembo calipers) and 249mm discs at the rear.

Styling changes will include a dual exhaust tip, carbon side mouldings and matt-black wheelarch extensions. DS has yet to release images of the Performance model, so we'll have to wait to see the results. Inside we're promised bucket seats trimmed in leather and Alcantara.

We're eager to try out the new car, which could provide a cultured alternative to Peugeot's ebullient GTi. Whether the DS3's other revisions will be enough to continue that sales success – and support the fledgling DS brand – is another matter.



Caterham Seven 620S

ONLY CATERHAM WOULD describe a windscreen and heater as luxury items, but unless you're inclined to wear a full-face helmet on every journey, they're a welcome addition to the new Seven 620S.

Mechanically, little separates the new road-biased 620S from its track-ready 620R brother. Under the slim bonnet a 2-litre Ford Duratec motor nestles, developing 310bhp that only has to push along 610kg.

The result is a 3.4-second 0-60mph time and 145mph top speed, though you'll be swapping cogs through a five-speed manual gearbox

Madcap 620R gets new creature comforts, but it's all relative...

rather than the 620R's six-speed sequential. The wheels are 15-inch pieces with Avon ZZS tyres, whereas the 620R uses 13-inch rims and track-biased rubber.

The 620's rampant performance can now be enjoyed from the relative comfort of leather seats, though the 620R's carbonfibre pews are still available for £600 (£995 if they're heated). A hood and sidescreens bring further weather protection.

For 'generously proportioned' customers (Caterham's words), the wide-bodied 'SV' chassis is available for £2500 on top of the 620S's £44,995 (factory built) price.



5.2 LITRES

The engine capacity of Aston Martin's new twin-turbocharged V12, which is set for the DB11 later this year.

100

Production run of Gazoo Racing's Toyota GT86. It boasts 213bhp and weighs 45kg less than standard.

50 YEARS

...since the Alfa Romeo 'Duetto' Spider debuted. Alfa plans to honour it with a special 4C Spider variant.

225,000

The number of cars Porsche delivered globally in 2015. More than half of those were Cayennes and Macans.

50

The length in km of motorway stolen by the acting deputy chief of Russia's prison service.

Subaru enters BTCC with RWD Levorg

Think Subaru, think rallying. That may change if Team BMR is successful in 2016 though, as it is to run the new Subaru Levorg Sports Tourer in the British Touring Car Championship.

The car will be constructed to the 'Next Generation Touring Car' rules introduced in 2011. The technical regulations have seen an influx of new manufacturers enter the series over the

last few years (albeit through independent teams), of which Subaru is the latest.

Until this year, BMR was running the Volkswagen Passat CC in the series, and in 2016 will retain 2015 runner-up Jason

Plato and fourth-place finisher Colin Turkington as its drivers.

The road-going Levorg has four-wheel drive, but this arrangement is banned under NGTC rules, so BMR has elected to power its Levorg through its rear wheels. The race car's 1.6-litre flat-four engine will be built by Mountune.



VLF Automotive Force 1 V10

The VLF Automotive Force 1 V10's Detroit motor show unveiling was overshadowed by the threat of legal action from Aston Martin over its aesthetic similarities to its DB10.

In the metal, however, almost nothing connects Henrik Fisker's latest project with the cars

of his former employer, which is a way of saying the Force 1 has a character all of its own.

VLF claims the car embodies Fisker's design language, though there's little to connect the Force 1 to projects such as 2011's Karma plug-in hybrid. Not least its engine: a 745bhp 8.4-litre V10 taken from the Dodge

Viper. A six-speed manual gearbox is standard, while an auto is an option.

Computer-controlled active suspension dictates the behaviour of the 21-inch wheels, while an integrated champagne holder dictates the behaviour of the occupants, one of whom will have spent \$238,500.

Lexus and Infiniti take on 911 & M4

Japanese makers unveil new high-tech sports coupes

BY UNVEILING THE LC500 and Q60 production cars at January's Detroit motor show, Lexus and Infiniti put Japan firmly back on the high-performance coupe map. Boasting a raft of innovative technologies, both cars appear to have the potential to rival the very best sports coupes Europe and the US have to offer.

Not only is the LC500 the most exciting fast Lexus since the stunning LFA supercar of 2010, it also introduces a new product-development philosophy that, the company claims, is 'better suited to meet the needs of the next generation of customers'.

Powered by the same normally aspirated, all-aluminium 5-litre V8

as the existing RC F and GS F, the LC500 is expected to reach 60mph in less than 4.5 seconds. The 466bhp, 389lb ft engine drives the rear wheels through a wet-clutch ten-speed automatic transmission, which Lexus reckons comes close to matching a twin-clutch gearbox for shift speeds.

The LC500 production car is unusually true to the LF-LC concept of 2012, faithfully retaining that model's angular detailing, rakish roofline and muscular haunches. The 2+2 coupe, which will rival the likes of the BMW M6 and Porsche 911 Carrera S, is a result of closer collaboration between Lexus's design and engineering teams.

It's also the first car to use the company's new GA-L architecture,

“The V8-engined LC500 is stiffer than even the LFA supercar”



LEXUS LC500 IN NUMBERS



275/35
R21

size of rear runflat tyre



4760/1920/
1345mm

length/width/height



52bhp

more than Carrera S



52/48

weight distribution



which will provide the underpinnings for future front-engined, rear-drive Lexus models. The platform puts the engine behind the front axle line to improve weight distribution and locate as much as possible of the car's mass within its wheelbase. Front and rear overhangs are short, meanwhile, to reduce the polar moment of inertia, and the car's centre of gravity benefits from the drivetrain and occupants being positioned low in the chassis, all of which contributes to a 'more dynamic driving experience and character unlike that of any previous Lexus model'.

The car is suspended by double wishbones at the front axle with a multi-link arrangement at the rear. All but one of the suspension arms is

made of forged aluminium to reduce unsprung weight. The monocoque – the stiffest Lexus has ever produced, LFA included – uses high-strength steel to minimise flex, while weight has been reduced through the use of aluminium panels and carbonfibre for areas such as for the inner door structures. Lexus has not yet announced a kerb weight.

The Infiniti Q60, meanwhile, debuts an all-new 3-litre twin-turbo V6, codenamed VR30, which develops 400bhp and 350lb ft of torque. Pitched at BMW's 425bhp M4 and Lexus's 470bhp RC F, the top-spec Q60 drives all four wheels via an 'intelligent' system that can split the torque evenly between each axle in normal conditions or divert 100

per cent to the rear axle alone. The 208bhp turbocharged four-cylinder version drives the rear wheels only.

Infiniti's second-generation Direct Adaptive Steering steer-by-wire system reduces unwanted interference from the road surface and offers a multitude of modes and settings – although whether it offers any sensation of steering feel remains to be seen. Adaptive dampers, or Dynamic Digital Suspension in Infiniti-speak, are said to contribute to the Q60's 'best-in-class handling responses and agility'.

The Q60 will go on sale in the second half of 2016, while a release date for the LC500 is yet to be confirmed. Prices for both cars are yet to be revealed.

Far left: LC500 will see Lexus enter the competitive £100k sports car category, facing up to the likes of the 911 and AMG GT.

Below: Infiniti Q60 has a no less easy task, with rivals including the BMW M4, Mercedes C63 Coupe and Lexus RC F



INFINITI Q60 IN NUMBERS



0.28

drag coefficient



70bhp

less than Lexus's RC F



1000

DAS adjustments per sec



16%

Infiniti sales up in 2015



ASK GOODWIN

Are you bored with the VW scandal yet and what do you think the long-term effect will be?

**Gareth Ellaway,
Swindon**

I'm bored of VW's high command banging on about finding those responsible, but it's still an interesting subject. Many car journalists are passionately interested in the industry itself and have an encyclopaedic knowledge of who's who. I follow what's going on but I'm more interested in the cars themselves and the engineers and designers who create them.

As for the second part of your question, I think Volkswagen will eventually shrug it off.

Most people aren't that fussed about emissions anyway and are clued-up enough to realise that a combination of government and industry has been giving us a load of tosh about fuel economy and emissions for years. Now the government wants to reform the testing procedures so that they are more 'real world'. We'll see.

One effect of the VW mess that isn't talked about is the reaction of members of Generation Y, who are already distrustful of big institutions. They're not as interested in brands as the generations before them, either. They'll shop at Lidl and Aldi because they offer good value and acceptable quality.

Thanks to VW, Gen Y will now dump car companies into the same bracket as governments and banks – dishonest and on the make. I can see these youngsters shunning flash brands such as BMW and Audi and instead doing a Lidl and buying Dacias and other simple and unpretentious brands.

Car companies are aware that fewer young people are learning to drive but I'm not sure they've got their heads around the possibility that those who do take to the wheel will not be interested in brands for brands' sake. It could be the biggest challenge facing the industry.



Pikes Peak

Famous hill climb rewards commitment with dramatic scenery and superb race cars

ON SATURDAY JUNE 18 the 100th running of the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb kicks off. The Americans do motorsport better than most because they know how to create a spectacle and they know how to look after the punters. For the centenary of the country's oldest and one of its most historic events, they're bound to pull out all the stops.

evo's Dickie Meaden competed there in 2007 (evo 109) and 2008. Without wanting to blow smoke up the lad's fundament, he did pretty well. He stunned the locals with his performance and the event stunned him. 'It's like no other motorsport meeting I've ever been to,' says Meaden, 'in every conceivable way.'

Before we go any further, let's have a look at the hill itself. Pikes Peak is in Colorado and to get there from the UK you'll fly to Denver and then drive an easy 75 miles south to Colorado Springs, the nearest large town to Pikes Peak (25 miles away). British Airways flies direct



Top: evo's Richard Meaden pushing to the limit in 2007.
Above: Scion FR-S (Toyota GT86 to Brits) charges at dawn

and you'll be looking at around £750 for a return ticket. The Peak is 14,115ft (4302m) top to bottom and the road leading up to the summit is the hill climb track. It's 12.42 miles long and has 156 corners. It's a toll road, which for \$12 per person you can drive up.

Because the track uses a public road, practice has to take place early in the morning before the locals or tourists want to use the road. This year the Monday (June 20) is scrutineering, with the first of four practice and qualifying days starting on Tuesday. 'It's this early practice that makes Pikes Peak so unusual,' explains Meaden. 'Spectators start arriving at the mountain in the dark, around 3am, and the practice itself starts at 5.30am and wraps up at 9am when the road reopens.'

Because of the altitude, the weather can be anything from baking hot to flash thunderstorms to snow. You need to take an assortment of clothing and you'll

need warm gear for those early starts. You'll also need stacks of water to drink because at these heights it's very common to suffer from altitude sickness if you're not careful. Once you're up on the mountain you're not going to be able to move to another section. 'It's how I imagine the Targa Florio to have been,' says Dickie. 'You find your place by the side of the course and stake a claim equipped with all your gear and provisions for the whole day.' The good news is that you can get really close to the action.

The racing itself takes place on Sunday June 26, but because this is US motorsport there is plenty to do during the week leading up to race day, including fan events in downtown Colorado Springs. Unlike a conventional motorsport event, there are no permanent pits or paddocks at Pikes Peak. On practice and race days the whole circus arrives, sets up and then moves on again at the finish of the day's play. All around Colorado Springs and

the neighbouring towns you'll see race transporters in motel car parks and people fettling their machinery.

The atmosphere at Pikes Peak is incredibly friendly with a feeling that everyone's in it together. It's a heck of a schlep to the venue, whether you live in Pittsburgh or Peterborough. For only a day's actual competition it requires a high level of commitment from not just the racers taking part but from the fans and spectators.

Some machinery, though. Pikes Peak is about variety. You'll see cars, trucks and bikes taking part (Guy Martin rode the event in 2014) with everything from electric motion to good old-fashioned big-block V8s (thankfully). When Dickie Meaden took part the course was half tarmac and half dirt, but today the whole run is paved. That takes a bit of the drama away from the

course, but not much. Have a look at the epic *Climb Dance*, the film of Ari Vatanen tackling the Peak in a Peugeot 405 T16, for the full dirt-and-dust effect. Then look at the huge number of sheer drops. Get it badly wrong at this hill climb and you'll be waving to Tim Peake as you go into orbit off the side of the mountain. Thankfully, although the event looks ridiculously dangerous, there have been only a handful of fatalities over the years.

Because of the stunning scenery in the area, Pikes Peak would make a great interlude on an American outdoors holiday. The enthusiasts can get up at sparrow's to watch practice while others in the family have a lie-in, and then all can watch the actual competition on the Sunday. The hardy can camp overnight so they're in place early for racing to start at 8am.

GPS 38.84087, -105.04225
Length 12.42 miles
Turns 156
Elevation change 4720 ft



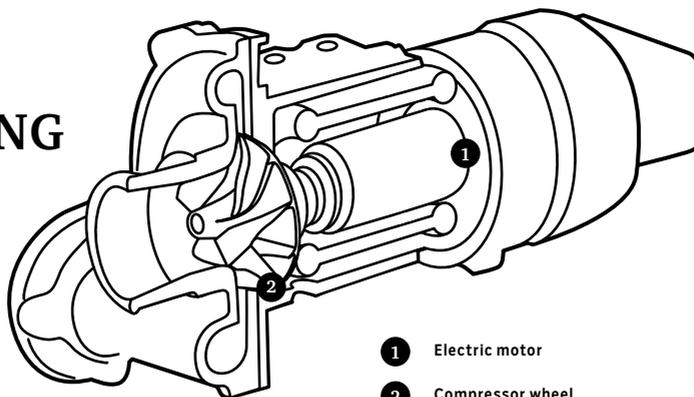
FOCUS

ELECTRIC SUPERCHARGING

ENGINE DOWNSIZING and turbocharging is becoming the de facto way for manufacturers to reduce emissions while maintaining performance. In extreme cases the downsizing is significant. Take the BMW i8, for example. Its combustion engine is a tiny 1.5-litre three-cylinder unit. However, it can output a substantial 228bhp thanks to a huge turbocharger.

The problem with this kind of setup is the amount of turbo lag that is inherent with small-capacity engines equipped with large turbochargers. The i8 has electric motors that can accelerate the car at a decent lick until the turbo is in its boost threshold, but what can you do to battle lag if you don't have a hybrid system? A company called Aeristech, based in Coventry in the UK, may hold the answer.

Aeristech produces electric superchargers, or as it calls them, eSuperchargers. The job of these eSuperchargers is to force air into the engine at low revs until the engine's crank speed is enough for the conventional turbo to become effective. eSuperchargers are not powered by the engine crank rotation like a normal supercharger, nor do they use exhaust gases like a turbocharger. Instead, they use



1 Electric motor
2 Compressor wheel

“The response time is faster than a conventional supercharger or turbocharger’s, and practically eliminates lag”

power from the car’s battery to spin the air compressor, meaning it can reach full speed even while the engine is at idle.

Currently car electrical systems are powered by 12-volt batteries. This voltage isn't enough to enable an eSupercharger to produce a useful level of boost, but with cars gaining more tech with every generation and requiring more electrical power to run it, 48-volt electrical systems are on the horizon, and so the eSupercharger also uses a 48-volt system.

So, voltage aside, what are the

numbers? The turbine can spin up to a maximum of 120,000rpm and can reach that speed in 0.5 seconds. This response time is faster than a conventional supercharger or turbocharger’s, and practically eliminates lag.

In a collaboration with Mahle Powertrains, the Aeristech eSupercharger has been tested with a 1.2-litre engine, and the results look very encouraging. The setup achieved 259bhp, meaning a specific power output of 216bhp per litre. To put that into perspective, the BMW i8’s petrol motor delivers 152bhp per litre; even the Ferrari 488 GTB’s turbocharged V8 achieves ‘just’ 169bhp per litre.

The eSupercharger has huge potential, then, and as more manufacturers go down the downsizing route, this technology could see emissions targets being met *and* vast increases in performance being achieved. That’s an appealing combination that could mean we’ll be seeing a lot more of Aeristech over the coming few years.



ASK MIKE

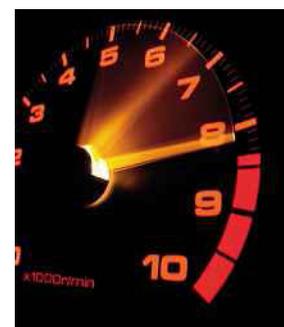
Your tech questions answered

Q Why do some cars have a higher red line than others?
– Sterling Campbell

A It all boils down to how tolerant the engine is to vibration and friction. The faster you spin the crank, the more friction and vibration you have. F1 engines spin really fast, but are made with very lightweight materials and high-specification coatings.

Why do some road cars permit higher peak revs than others? In issue 216 we covered how more power is made from an engine – and a higher crank speed is one of them.

Send your question to experts@evo.co.uk



TECH GAME-CHANGERS

VARIABLE DISPLACEMENT ENGINE

First production application: Cadillac 'V8-6-4' engine When: 1981



If you don't want to hybridise or downsize, you could follow in the tracks of manufacturers such as BMW, Audi and Bentley and use cylinder deactivation instead. This technology enables up to half of an engine's cylinders

to be turned off to save fuel, but it's not quite as straightforward as it sounds...

If you simply stop feeding fuel to a cylinder and suspend firing its spark plug, it will still be sucking in and blowing out air, incurring

pumping losses. So instead, the valves for a deactivated cylinder are closed after an intake of air, creating an air spring. Effort will be required to push the piston up to top-dead-centre, but this is returned by the air spring effect pushing

the piston back down to bottom-dead-centre. This theoretically equals out the energy losses.

Some studies have shown that cylinder deactivation can be very efficient, reducing emissions by up to 25 per cent.

However, other studies have shown savings in single figures. One thing's for sure, though: this is currently the only way to retain a high-capacity engine's characteristics whilst trying to meet emissions targets.

NAUTISCHE INSTRUMENTE
MÜHLE
GLASHÜTTE/SA.



Teutonia II Großdatum Chronometer

A legend returns: With the new Teutonia, our most successful watchmaking family is returning to the roots of its now vastly-diverse family tree. In the year 2002, still simply named „Teutonia“, the model with the large date function gave impetus to a success story that has continued to this day. Naturally, this Mühle features several stunning innovations: In addition to the silver-coloured dial with the characteristic guilloché finish, one immediately notices the midnight blue face bearing a grooved finish. Both models are each limited to 250 pieces. In addition, the timepiece is certified according to the German chronometer standard in the Glashütte observatory.



INVESTIGATION

WHEN DO WINTER TYRES BECOME UNSAFE?

IT WILL SOON BE THE TIME of year when drivers who swapped to winter tyres for the cold weather are thinking about putting summer rubber back on.

One winter's use should see a set of tyres fine for keeping until the temperature drops again, but what if they've already been on two or three times? They may be legal, but are they worth keeping? With the help of Continental, we've been able to find out, as alongside the launch of the WinterContact TS 860 (evo 218), we got the chance to see how wear affects winter tyres' snow grip.

So when should you change? A clue can be gained from other European countries. In Norway, Sweden and Finland the legal minimum tread



depth for winter tyres is 3mm; in Austria it's 4mm.

We tried tyres at 2, 4 and 8mm in traction and braking tests, plus subjectively on buggies around a small handling course. The biggest difference could be felt in the loss of lateral grip, with the buggies getting progressively difficult to turn and control under power. The 2mm machine was much slower than the other two and very easy to spin thanks to the increased reliance when cornering on snow-on-snow grip within the tread grooves, which is reduced with wear as there is less in the tyre.

It was a similar story in the straight-line tests, which showed snow braking performance drops by



two per cent per millimetre from 8 to 4mm, but double that from 4 to 2mm. From 50kph (31mph) a tyre at the UK legal limit will need 26 metres longer to stop than a new one. Easily the difference between having a crash or avoiding one.

For traction the drop to 4mm was around 3.5 per cent per millimetre and almost 7 per cent per millimetre beyond that. The higher percentages in this test are because we were accelerating with just two wheels but braking with four.

These results apply across all tread designs, incidentally, while the loss of lateral grip is more dependent on the tread design.

The results are even more dramatic in wet braking, where independent tests for Continental show that while the drop off down to 4mm is similar to on snow, below that it doubles to 8 per cent per millimetre.

So when it comes to swapping back to summer tyres, have a good look at the winters coming off. If their tread depth is below 4mm, it is worth budgeting to replace them.



INSIDE FINLAND'S WINTER TYRE TEST TUNNEL

Where do you go to test tyres on snow when Europe is enjoying summer sun? Until last year tyre engineers headed to New Zealand, but now they can take the shorter hop to Ivalo, Finland.

The Test World facility based there has recently added a unique indoor snow-handling track – a kidney-shaped tunnel kept at a permanent -11C. The 350-metre circuit is wider than most outdoor snow-handling tracks at 10 metres, but then the barriers are not soft snow banks but unforgiving walls. Key to the design is that, unlike indoor ski slopes and the like, the snow is natural and packed in during the winter to around 40cm deep. As it wears away through use and frequent regrading to ensure a consistent surface for each tyre, there is around 10cm left at the end of the season.

So what's it like to drive? I tried it during the launch of Test World partner Hankook's new winter tyre line-up (evo 216). It was immediately obvious that it is all too easy to lose where you are thanks to the lack of reference points and there being mainly right-hand turns. The lack of windows also makes it oddly claustrophobic. The surface felt no different to the outdoor handling tracks I've tested on and the extra width means corners can be adjusted with cones.

There's definitely a compromise with indoor snow facilities, but tyre design lives are getting shorter and the pace of development necessarily faster, and this innovative track fills the increasing demand for testing time.

NEW PEUGEOT 308 GTi

BY PEUGEOT SPORT

AWARD WINNING MEETS LEGENDARY



1.6L TURBOCHARGED
270 HP

0-62 MPH IN
6 SECONDS

TORSEN® LIMITED-SLIP
DIFFERENTIAL

PEUGEOT RECOMMENDS TOTAL Official Fuel Consumption in MPG (l/100km) and CO₂ emissions (g/km) for the 308 GTi are: Urban 34.9 (8.1), Extra Urban 57.6 (4.9), Combined 47.1 (6.0) and CO₂ 139 (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. Information correct at time of going to press. Visit Peugeot.co.uk for further information.

NEW PEUGEOT 308 GTi

MOTION & EMOTION



PEUGEOT

35 AWARDS

NEED WE SAY MORE?



CITROËN C4 CACTUS

There's probably no need for us to waffle on about all the wonderful award-winning features, so here's a little wordsearch...

Discover more at citroen.co.uk

- AIRBUMPS
- EFFICIENT
- ENGINE
- PANORAMIC
- ROOF
- THERMODYNAMIC
- TOUCHSCREEN



CRÉATIVE TECHNOLOGIE

   citroen.co.uk

CITROËN prefers TOTAL Model shown: C4 Cactus PureTech 82 manual Flair. OTR price £16,490 (incl. Polar White paint and Chocolate Airbump® at extra cost of £250 and £150 respectively).

Official Government Fuel Consumption Figures (litres per 100km/mpg) and CO₂ Emissions (g/km) (Range). Highest: Citroën C4 Cactus PureTech 82 manual with 17" wheels: Urban 5.6/50.4, Extra Urban 4.0/70.6, Combined 4.6/61.4, 107 CO₂. Lowest: Citroën C4 Cactus BlueHDi 100 S&S manual with 15" wheels: Urban 3.5/80.7, Extra Urban 3.0/94.2, Combined 3.1/91.1, 82 CO₂. 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.

CARBONFIBRE

Six ways to get more of the seductive call of 'motorsport' in your life



➤ **REVERIE ECLIPSE 255 STEERING WHEEL (201g)**
£562.80

At 201g, we found Reverie's 255mm wheel – the same diameter as that found in our long-term Caterham Seven 420R – to be even lighter than the claimed 250g, though we'd say its satin-smooth rim would be best operated with gloves.

reverie.ltd.uk

➤ **SS STEALTH WALLET (37g)**
£55

It's a rare thing to see carbonfibre weave without a shiny resin coating, but there's an extra degree of tactility to this design that you won't find in most carbon products. It has six card pockets and two hidden inner pockets.

cuttingedgecarbon.com



➤ **M-TECH IPHONE 5 CASE (11g)**
£85

If you're the sort whose iPhone screen is covered in cracks, a strong, carbon case could be an accessory worth investing in. This one fits snugly around the phone and will perhaps preserve its screen for just a little longer in your clumsy tenure.

cuttingedgecarbon.com

➤ **ELEMENTO RULER (16g)**
£15

A ruler possibly isn't the first product you'd think of making from carbonfibre, but it's hard not to be impressed by the beautiful weave in this 30cm-long metric and imperial example from Elemento. It looks and feels like it'll last forever and passes the classroom-desk twang test, too.

cuttingedgecarbon.com



➤ **REVERIE 'LIGHT BULB' GEARKNOB (11g)**
£127.74

Everyone has a preference when it comes to the shape and size of gearknobs, but Reverie's ultra-lightweight offering would be the perfect complement to a flyweight Caterham Seven. Not cheap, but then neither is a Seven these days.

reverie.ltd.uk



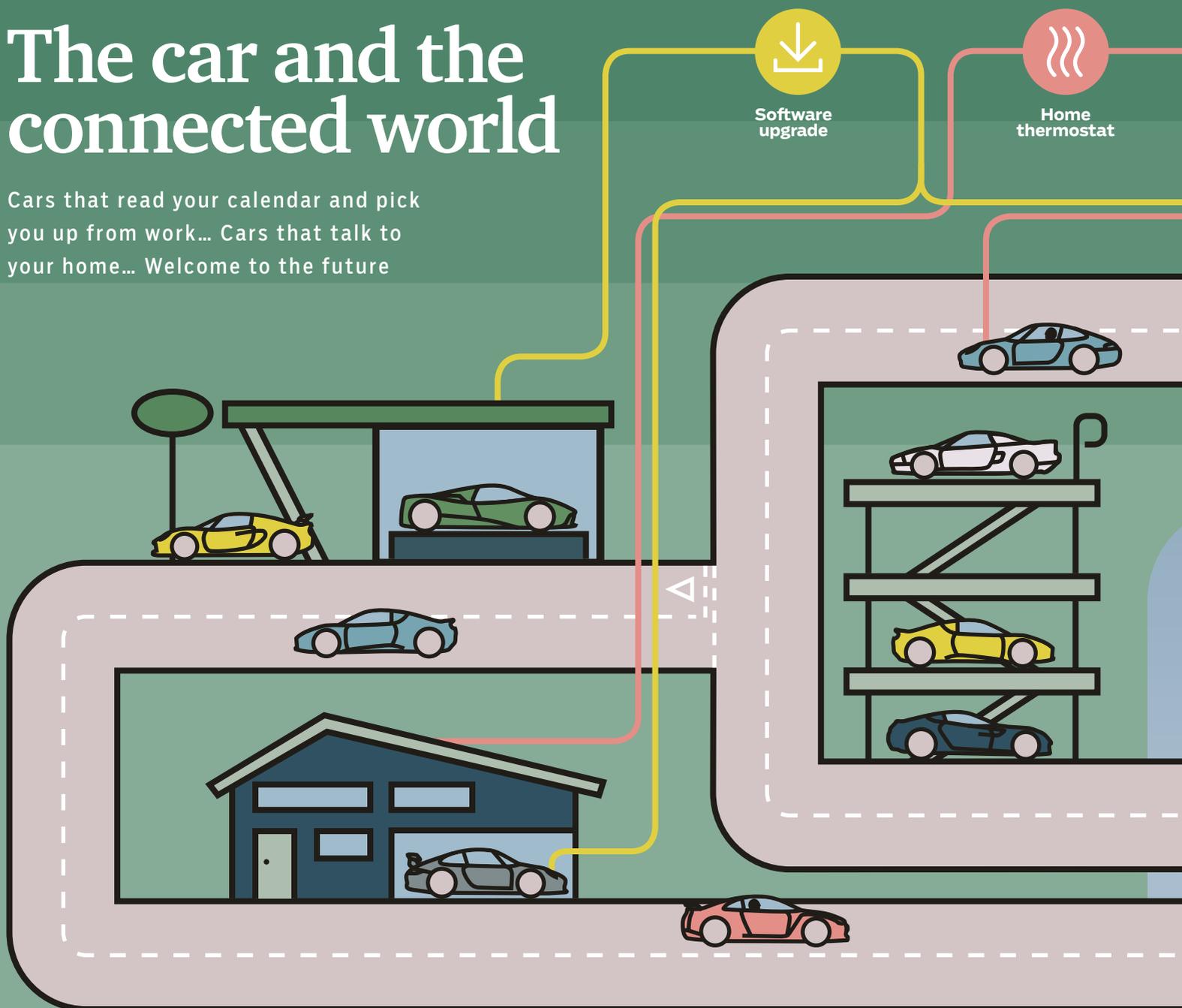
➤ **CUTTING EDGE PEN 2.0 (35g)**
£40

A weighty item for one with a carbonfibre body, but it's nice to have a bit of heft to a pen anyway, which is why people desire Mont Blancs rather than Bics. Cutting Edge says the '1x1' fibre weave is of the kind you'd find in Formula 1.

cuttingedgecarbon.com

The car and the connected world

Cars that read your calendar and pick you up from work... Cars that talk to your home... Welcome to the future



THE ONCE-FAMILIAR MOAN about having no mobile reception has become almost a thing of the past in recent times (unless you happen to work in the *evo* office). And that increasing availability of a data connection has enabled car manufacturers to use mobile phone networks to communicate with vehicles and let them communicate with each other and even with their owners' homes.

Right now, Tesla, for example, has the ability to update its cars over the air, adding new functionality and updates while the Model S sits at home in your garage. But this is just the tip of the iceberg.

BMW's vision for the connected car of the future is one where your car automatically knows the ins and outs of your daily schedule, using 'the cloud' to obtain the info, as opposed to inputting it all in manually.

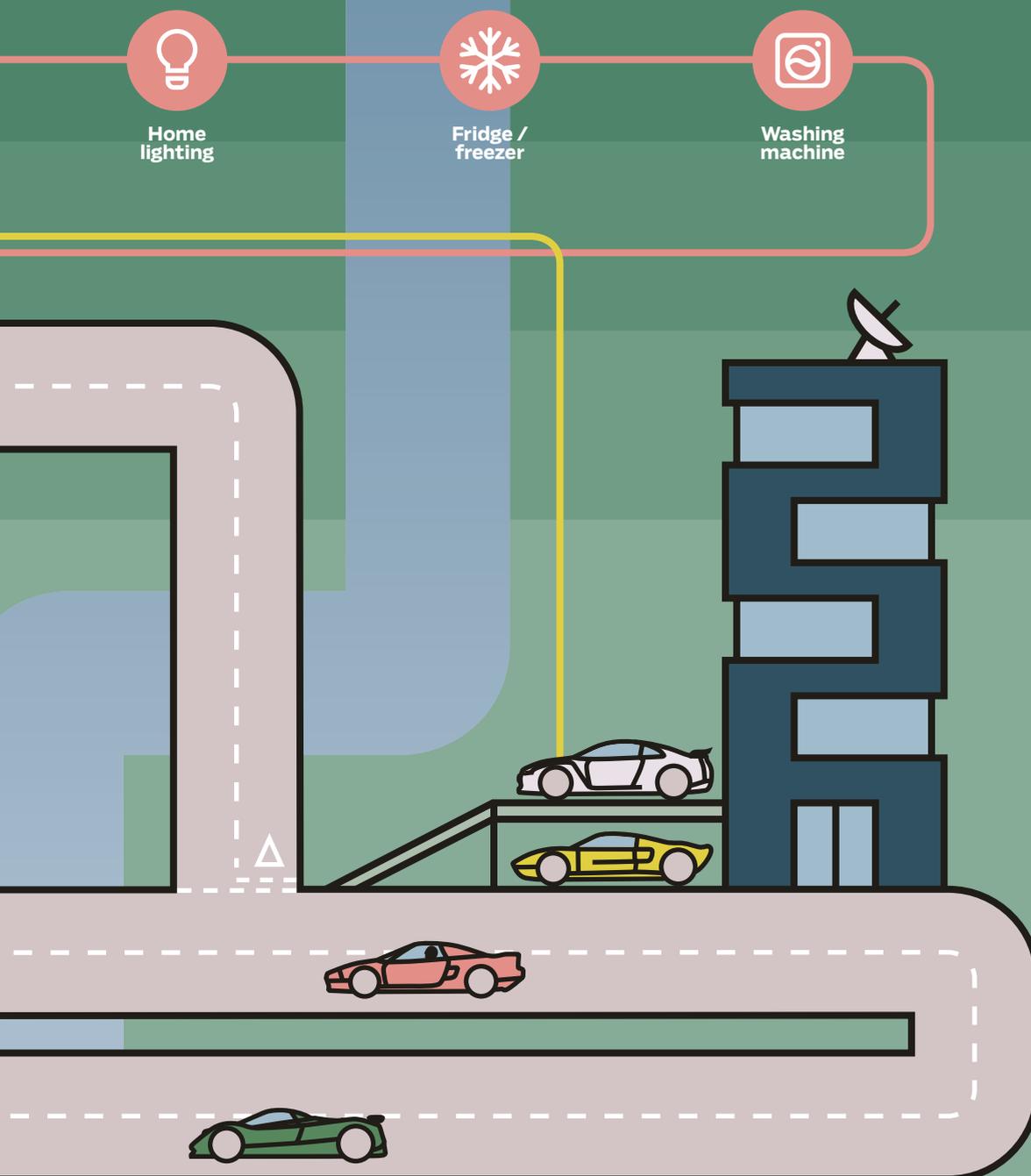
This way an autonomous vehicle can slot into your daily life with minimum fuss, sitting outside your house with the interior pre-heated, taking you to work and then driving itself home and parking, only setting off again to your office to collect you at the end of the day.

While this is some way off, Tesla is already experimenting with the idea. A software update sent to owners recently allows the Model S to park

itself remotely, without a driver inside. It can also exit a parking space remotely when needed.

This, on top of Tesla's quasi-autonomous 'autopilot' cruise control, could eventually lead to a scenario where a car could pick you up and drop you off all on its own.

VW's Budd-e concept, unveiled at CES in Las Vegas (see page 11), looks at a slightly different way of incorporating the car into your



everyday life. Systems already exist that allow your home lighting, thermostat and even your washing machine and fridge to be controlled via your smartphone. Volkswagen wants to add the car into this mix, letting you control your home from the Budd-e and vice versa.

Finally, the smartphone app for the car will become a much more powerful tool over the coming years. Many manufacturers already

offer rudimentary mobile phone connectivity, allowing you to lock and unlock a car, or see where it's parked, but there's plenty more to come. Soon you'll be able to remotely access the parking cameras on your car via an app, with them automatically recording collisions should someone bump into your car while you've left it parked. Ford hopes to use applications to allow your smartphone to pre-book parking for the end of your journey,

or even set up ride-sharing with other Ford owners.

The key to all of this will be ease of use. Much of the success of Apple's iPhone is down to its simplicity, so, for the connected car to truly take off, car manufacturers will have to build systems and applications that are easy to understand. Right now, BMW's app suite is closest, but expect rivals to catch up pretty quickly.

Hunter Skipworth

NOW & THEN

LED exterior lighting



Light-emitting diodes, or LEDs, are remarkable things. Invented in 1927 but only commercialised in 1962, they pervade modern life, illuminating everything from street signs to television screens – as well as lighting the way ahead in cars.

The first automotive LEDs were red in colour, so perfect for tail lights and high-mounted central brake lights. The Ford Thunderbird (above) used LED tail lights as early as 1992.

LEDs illuminate around 0.25 seconds before filament bulbs, making them ideal for brake lights – providing an additional 8 metres of braking distance for a following car at 70mph. Their next role was also safety-related, forming the 2004 Audi A8 W12's daytime running lights.

By the mid-2000s, LED brake and tail lights were common, but in recent years the tech has really taken off. Their energy efficiency, high luminosity and quick response makes them perfect for headlights, too. Lexus fitted LED low beams on the 2006 LS; Audi debuted full LED lamps in 2007 with the R8 V10.

LED headlights remained the preserve of luxury vehicles for a few years, but cars such as the Nissan Leaf brought them to more humble vehicles, the low energy draw appealing in a vehicle where every watt counts.



ON
OR
OFF?

Electric handbrakes

They've improved in recent years, but electric handbrakes are still a gadget too far for Teemy Nieminen on our Facebook page. 'Rarely intuitive,' he says, 'and often harder to use than a lever.'



BE ONE WITH IT

Be one with your tyres, and the road will be one with you.



ventus S1 evo²

Luxury that never compromises safety

With an advanced VAI system that allows drivers to track vehicle alignment and aerodynamic sidewalls that minimise noise and vibration levels, the Ventus S1 evo² delivers the promise of performance and enhanced fuel efficiency.



WATCH TECH

Bulgari 'papillon' minute system



Just as there are several ways to skin a cat, there are also many ways to display the time on a watch. The 'retrograde' method is particularly intriguing, typically showing the hour as digits on a revolving disc and the minutes on a semi-circular track. The name 'retrograde' refers to the fact that, once the hand that indicates the passing minutes reaches 60, it automatically springs back to zero in order to count through the next hour.

With its new line of 'papillon' watches, Bulgari has refined the retrograde system. Instead of a single minute hand there are two small pointers that revolve around the centre of the dial directly opposite one another. This means that one will always be pointing at the minute track, so no springing back is required.

However, once a pointer passes the 60-minute mark and becomes redundant, it turns sideways by 90 degrees (so it doesn't obscure the hour display) and remains that way for the remainder of its journey around the dial until it once again reaches zero.

Prices for Bulgari's papillon models start at £26,500.



THIS MONTH

Bremont Jaguar MkIII

Price: £3495
From: bremont.com

The British-based Bremont brand has added to its existing range of watches inspired by the Jaguar E-type (see *evo* 208 for details of the earlier models) with this new 'MkIII'. It features a slimmed-down, 43mm case housing a dial that is, once again, loosely based on the look of an E-type tachometer – complete with a 'red line' sector. There's more automotive imagery in the form of a tyre tread pattern on the winding crown and 'heritage' Jaguar logos on both the dial and the solid case back. Like all Bremont watches, the MkIII is chronometer certified for accuracy.



Hanhart Primus Desert Pilot

Price: £2480
From: pageandcooper.com

Hanhart, a brand well known for making stopwatches and chronographs that have been widely used in motorsport for more than 50 years, started 2016 by continuing its sponsorship of veteran Dakar Rally partners Stephan Schott and Holm Schmidt, who competed in this year's event as part of the X-raïd Mini All4 team. The German duo each wore one of these rugged, 44mm 'Primus Desert Pilot' chronographs, a model which alludes to the dunes with its buff-coloured dial and matching, textile strap. A transparent case back reveals the robust, self-winding HAN 3809 movement.



Davosa Renault Alpine A110

Price: £1220
From: classic-time.co.uk

The affordable Swiss brand Davosa – which majors on hand-wound mechanical watches – has launched four new models linked to classic cars. Each is supplied as a set comprising the watch itself and a scale model of the relevant motor. The Alpine A110 version pictured here is possibly our favourite, being based on the good-looking Pontus All Stars Big Date model. It's a limited-edition piece, with just 100 examples being made. The other variants pay homage to the Mercedes 300SL (£720), the Jaguar E-type Series I (£1220) and the Alfa Romeo Montreal (£1440).

CHRONO



Read more from Simon de Burton in *Chrono*, the interactive watch magazine for iPad and iPhone, available now from the iTunes Store.



GRAHAM SILVERSTONE STOWE

As worn by Mike Flewitt, CEO McLaren Automotive



'I acquired my Graham Silverstone Stowe around eight years ago. Before that, I wore the same Seiko every day for almost 30 years – it was an 18th birthday present from my parents, and it still works perfectly.

'The Silverstone appealed to me because,

although the watches are made in Switzerland, the brand majors on British heritage and is named after George Graham, the English clockmaker and inventor. Entirely coincidentally, I recently learned that Eric Loth – the founder of Graham – is also a McLaren owner.

'When I'm more formally dressed, I wear my other Graham – a simpler, more classic-looking 1695 model. I think I could become a serious watch enthusiast, but right now cars are my work and my hobby – there's no time for anything else.'

EVERY NEW EVO CAR THAT MATTERS,
REVIEWED AND RATED

 **Driven**

AC SCHNITZER BMW M4 ACS4 SPORT
JAGUAR XF 3.0 TDV6 S // **KTM** X-BOW GT4
RPM TECHNIK PORSCHE 996 CSR RETRO
LOHEN MINI COOPER S // **BIRDS** BMW 335D B3X-3.5



Test location: Somersham, Cambs **GPS:** 52.405841, 0.026602

Photography: Aston Parrott

AC Schnitzer BMW M4 ACS4

Tuner's take on the M4 lifts peak power to 503bhp, while chassis changes include new wheels and coilovers and a lowered ride height

IT'S 'AUSTIN YELLOW', naturally. Lowered on a set of coilovers, with 30-profile rubber stretched extravagantly over tuner-style 20in alloys, it has an exhaust gurgle and snort on the overrun like a whale with indigestion. Predictably, it's an M-DCT example. So if you're the sort of M-car purist who believes that BMW's current core M-car is too big, too bling and too dynamically compromised, you might expect this ACS4 Sport to darken your winter blues even further.

But if that is you, hold off on the

stereotypes for a moment, because this AC Schnitzer M4 is much more than just a set of big wheels and a noisy exhaust.

On a damp, dank, January day, an additional 78bhp sounds like the last thing an M4 might need, but that's what this car has, taking the peak output to a slightly surreal 503bhp. The standard car has 'enough': it's using that surging power, or, more specifically, torque (406lb ft as standard, lifted to 476lb ft here), that proves the M4's undoing on the kind of undulating, cambered, slick surfaces common on a wintry British



The team

This month, we asked our road testers to name the best tuner car they've driven...



NICK TROTT
Editor

'Feels wrong to call it a tuner car, but the Alfabolics GTA-R is the finest "improved" car I've ever driven'



STUART GALLAGHER
Managing editor

'Ruf CTR Yellowbird – not a tuner's car in the truest sense, but it is the best'



HENRY CATCHPOLE
Features editor

'Good enough to reach eCoty 2012, the Alpina B3 GT3 was very appealing'



DAN PROSSER
Road test editor

'A 900bhp Porsche 997 Turbo, tuned by DMS. My first indicated 200mph!'



JETHRO BOVINGTON
Contributing editor

'Yellowbird for me, too. More than lived up to the legend. Ruf just does things right'



RICHARD MEADEN
Contributing editor

'Hennessey Venom GT for me. Extraordinary performance matched by brilliant execution'



DAVID VIVIAN
Contributing editor

'My old long-term Mountune Focus ST. Loads more performance, same lousy consumption. Not bad for £1200'



ADAM TOWLER
Contributing road tester

'Supercharged BMW E39 M5 by Waffzuf. Docile, comfortable, intuitive, manic; loses traction in fourth gear'

B-road. In such an environment, the M4 is either a slave to early DSC intervention, or an unintentionally lively thing at times.

Liberating the additional power and torque is achieved through a separate 'piggyback' ECU in series with the M4's original unit. By doing it this way AC Schnitzer is confident enough to offer a standard two-year/60,000km (37,000-mile) warranty on all drivetrain components alongside the original manufacturer warranty, extendable to three years at extra cost. Quite rightly, Schnitzer feels that elevates

this conversion above the majority of aftermarket 'remap' jobs.

The S55 turbocharged straight-six now exhales through an AC Schnitzer cat-back exhaust system, here in, ahem, 'export' trim for added sonic fireworks. No performance claims are made for this, but on cold starts or a sudden lift of throttle it's rude in terms of volume.

The parts most obvious to the eye are the carbonfibre body additions, comprising deep front lip spoiler elements, little carbon 'canards' either side of the nose, and a rear 'diffuser'. I can't imagine you'll ever

notice the difference behind the wheel, but they certainly add to the aggressive presence of the M4, if you're into that sort of thing.

The most interesting parts are the suspension, wheel and tyres. No longer is there EDC via the BMW M adaptive dampers; instead Schnitzer has fitted coilover units it calls its 'RS suspension kit', the third and final stage in the suspension upgrades it offers for the M4, and manually adjustable for compression, rebound and ride height. The setup on this particular car lowers the ride height and is the result of considerable

on-road testing in Germany, supplemented by further tweaks by Rossiters (AC Schnitzer UK).

Finally, there are the larger forged '5-design' wheels, one of four options, now with Michelin Super Sport 255/30/20 tyres on the front axle and 275/30/20 on the rear.

Drive 200 metres or so up the road and the ACS4 Sport certainly lets you know there have been changes made. The broad expanses of treadblock and the minimal sidewalls force the springs and dampers into reacting to every slightly raised surface, every ridge,



Left: AC Schnitzer's RS suspension kit gives a more natural feeling than BMW's adaptive dampers and also enhances throttle-adjustability.

Below: 20in wheels fill the arches a treat; new ECU liberates extra 78bhp



and their response is determinedly busy. From the driver's seat it's like a form of binary code on the face of the road – which in itself is not without appeal. It's soon obvious that far less of this motion is really impacting upon the cabin in a significant way, more that the noise of the suspension, the way the M4's structure reverberates to intrusions, and the manner in which the tyres thwack and drum over poor surfaces and catseyes amplifies the sensations. The coilovers do, in the main, round off the worst of the jagged edges. Only occasionally, on a poorly surfaced major trunk road, can it become wearing.

However, it doesn't take long to realise that the quicker you go, the happier and calmer the car feels.

It's also a pleasure not to have to faff around with different damper modes: the M4's dash still glares back at you with reports on how the drivetrain, suspension and steering are calibrated, but at least you can forget about the middle one and concentrate on the road instead.

The ride feels more natural than with EDC in its standard setting, with superior body control through dips and over crests, but less agitated and harsh than with EDC in its more aggressive settings. It's particularly impressive in the way it settles quickly after dealing with something major at high speed. As you pile on the miles, the fact the car always responds in the same way, every time, means you learn its ways, start to trust it, and then exploit it.

Exploiting the ACS4 on a day like today means one of two things. One, careful throttle modulation to avoid frequent sightings of a little flashing yellow light. Or two, oversteer. Lots of it. Front-end grip is fabulous, and, although the geometry is the same, the revisions seem to impart a little more information back through the wheel rim.

The ACS4 could never be called benign, because, let's face it, no rear-driver with over 500bhp is ever going to be that, and there's always a quiet subtext that getting too blasé will lead to a large chunk of flesh being removed from your posterior, but you can really push it hard, revel in it, and giggle nervously as it teeters on the very edge of adhesion, everywhere. The delicacy of

feedback and throttle adjustability through the M diff once traction is lost are sublime.

It's stating the obvious, but this car is ferociously quick. Just working the engine between 2000 and 3000rpm is enough for rapid daily driving: up to 4000rpm and you could fool yourself into thinking there couldn't possibly be more to give, but wrung-out it's an experience to behold – and one to be savoured in fleeting moments.

With everything fitted, this M4 has £20,831 of modifications. Much of that, personally, I could do without, but at £3545 for the second ECU and £2504 for the suspension, the M4 takes on a new, more transparent and riotous appeal. ☒

Adam Towler (@Adam Towler)

Specification

+ Huge acceleration, instant response, more predictable handling - Firm low-speed ride; body mods not to all tastes

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	evo rating	Weight	Basic price
In-line 6-cyl, 2979cc, twin-turbo	194g/km	503bhp @ 6800rpm	476lb ft @ 4000rpm	4.0sec (est)	155mph (limited)	★★★★★	1537kg (333bhp/ton)	£77,886 (as tested)

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Jaguar XF 3.0 TDV6 S

Test location: Iwer, Buckinghamshire **GPS:** 51.520923, -0.512925

C CONSIDERING THE LOWS Jaguar had reached under Ford's ownership (the S-type and X-type are unlikely to be hailed as Solihull icons this side of the next millennium) the original XF deserved all the credit and plaudits it received following its 2007 launch.

True, that first XF may have trailed its German counterparts when it came to core fleet models and even niche **evo** examples – an XFR was a hoot but never felt as polished as an M5 – but it provided stability and confidence at Coventry and demonstrated that the big cat still had some of its nine lives intact.

Now, after nine years that have seen a new XJ, a totally new two-seater sports coupe and roadster and a new junior saloon (and with the F-Pace SUV just around the corner), Jaguar has given the XF a significant update.

This all-new XF does away with the previous model's steel architecture, in its place a more Jag-like aluminium structure and body, which means it's lighter (by up to 190kg depending on spec)

and stiffer by 28 per cent despite the wheelbase growing by 5cm. The extra wheelbase length means there's more room inside, too.

Under the new, Ian Callum-styled body (it looks far less like an XE in the open than the pictures suggest) is aluminium double-wishbone front suspension and a multi-link rear, with active dampers and lighter springs also part of the update. The steering is electrically assisted and torque-vectoring is standard across the range.

As Adam Towler concluded in **evo** 214, with the 3-litre supercharged V6 petrol engine the new XF is a credible alternative to rivals from Audi, BMW and Mercedes – better looking than an E-class, the dynamic equal of a 5-series and a break from the monotony of an A6. In fact, the only downside of that example was its petrol engine, which felt strained and in need of being driven at higher than desirable crank-speeds to get the most from it. Which is where this 3-litre TDV6 variant comes in, with its 516lb ft of torque – a figure identical to a 911 Turbo, incidentally.

Twin-turbo diesel gives the new XF welcome muscle. In fact, this could be the most enjoyable car in its class



The new XF has huge car-park appeal, although like many of Callum's designs it needs big wheels and some sporting battledress to avoid looking rather like a Chinese clone of a Jaguar. In 'S' trim – which includes the bodykit you see here, though the 20in wheels are a £1200 option – our test XF looked spot-on; but it did retail at £58,355 (that's what £8410 worth of options does for you), so push for a discount because no diesel saloon is worth this much of your taxable income, no matter how good it is. And this XF is good. In fact it's very good.

The drivetrain makes for effortless progress. The eight-speed ZF auto gearbox is perfectly mapped to the twin-turbocharged derv-burning engine, to the point that you only

notice it's changed gear if you catch the rev-needle dropping a couple of thousand rpm as it switches ratios.

Best of all, the new XF steers, rides and engages the driver better than anything in its class. Although you should bear in mind that Mercedes has just announced its new E-class and BMW isn't far from doing the same for its 5-series, so Jaguar has a small window of opportunity to get you out of your German saloon and into its Indian-backed, British-built one.

So, if an exec saloon is required in your motoring life, should you make the switch? In a word, yes. The XF comforts you when you need it to, and rewards when you find a road worthy of your enthusiasm for covering ground at an enjoyable pace. There's directness to everything it does and a sharpness that's missing from its rivals. It's not the most exciting car **evo** will drive in 2016, nor the most enthralling or desirable, but in its class the new XF would be our choice. ☒

Stuart Gallagher
(@stuartg917)

Specification

➕ Best chassis – and looks – in class ➖ 3-litre diesel is the best engine in the range

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-60mph	Top speed	evo rating	Weight	Basic price
V6, 2993cc, twin-turbo diesel	144g/km	296bhp @ 4000rpm	516lb ft @ 2000rpm	5.8sec (claimed)	155mph (claimed)	★★★★☆	1675kg (180bhp/ton)	£49,945

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DMS 997 TURBO 3.6 (EVO SEPTEMBER '08) "IT'S EPIC, HILARIOUS AND ADDICTIVE IN EVERY GEAR, YET DOCILE WHEN CRUISING"

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- 330D E90 » 296+ BHP
- 320D E90 » 215 BHP
- 420i/320i/220i/120i » 275+ BHP
- 435i/ F30 335i » 390 BHP
- 428i/328i » 295 BHP
- 535D / 335D / X5 SD » 355+ BHP
- 640D/335D/535D/435D » 390 BHP
- 730D » 305+ BHP
- X5 4.0D / 740D » 370 BHP
- X5 3.0D » 305 BHP
- X6 X5.0i 4.4 » 500+BHP
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Photography: Aston Parrott

RPM Technik Porsche 996 CSR Retro

Porsche specialist goes
back in time to deliver
a knock-out Carrera

WITH THE SEEMINGLY inexorable rise and rise of classic Porsche 911 values, it's forgivable to think that unless you're already 'on the ladder' you might as well abandon all hope of ever owning one. However, to arrive at that sad conclusion would mean you've ignored the 996.

This would be foolish, for as the 911 has continued to mature, the original water-cooled model has rather come into its own, not least because a little over £10k will still secure you one. Alright, so it won't be a minter, but if you buy carefully and are prepared to treat it as a project, it really can't be beaten.

Living proof of this comes from independent Porsche specialist RPM Technik, which has been fettling 996 Carreras for some years. Like the firm's similar Boxster and Cayman

CSR models, the 996 CSR focuses on improving the performance, handling and looks, but it also addresses the 996's wear-prone interior to give you a car that's pretty much box-fresh.

This car is RPM's CSR 'Retro', which as its name suggests goes a step further by embracing the current trend for backdating 911s. It doesn't attempt to go the full Singer, but instead offers factory-inspired interior trim options plundered from the '60s, '70 and '80s. This particular car combines extensive use of Porsche's iconic – and eye-crossingly psychedelic – 'Pasha' trim with swathes of Alcantara, which are used to cover the seats, dashboard, door cards, headlining, centre console and pretty much anything else that can be upholstered.

All the metallic silver-grey plastic trim inserts, such as those around

the air vents and centre-stack, have been replaced, as have the centre-console switches. The steering wheel and gearlever have been wrapped in Alcantara, while the tachometer has been replaced with a bespoke CSR item. It makes for a far more sumptuous interior than the 996 ever had in period, and while £8000 is a huge amount of money in the context of a £10,000 car, when done in conjunction with the other CSR upgrades it really is the icing on an especially tasty cake.

The interior, GT3-style bodywork (£6300) and 18in Fuchs rims shod with Michelin Pilot Sport tyres (£2900) create the look, but the heart of this car is the work RPM does to the nuts and bolts to make it drive as well as it looks.

To allay fears of those water-cooled 911 engine horror stories,



Left, below and far left: Fuchs alloys, Porsche's famous (or is that infamous?) 'Pasha' cloth and a cheeky ducktail spoiler combine to take the 996 back in time; Wavetrac diff gives impressive precision



there's an IMS-bearing upgrade, a low-temperature thermostat and waterless coolant, while a CSR exhaust system (£1900) and high-flow air filter improve the 3.4-litre flat-six's breathing. This car also has a switchable engine map (which delivers a 25bhp and 10lb ft boost and some fruity pops and bangs on the overrun), polyurethane engine mounts and a full geometry and corner-weighting setup to get the best from the standard CSR chassis upgrade. That itself comprises KW V3, coilovers, Eibach hollow, adjustable anti-roll bars, custom CSR lower arms and more polybushing (£4500). A lightweight clutch/flywheel assembly, a Wavetrac limited-slip diff (£5400), a short-shift kit and a Performance Friction pad-and-fluid swap complete the conversion.

The CSR Retro is one of those cars that has you hooked before you even turn a wheel. It looks GT3-sharp, while the interior lifts the one area in which a 996 is most likely to disappoint. The Pasha pattern is very in-her-face, but if it's not for you, RPM will also work with other classic Porsche fabrics, such as houndstooth or tartan.

'The CSR Retro is one of those cars that has you hooked before you turn a wheel'

Start the engine and it emits snorts and gurgles that are sure to raise a smile. The clutch has a satisfying weight and a short, positive feel, which sets the tone for the rest of the car. The suspension is controlled and not so unyielding that it trips up on bumpy roads, while the mildly breathed-on engine (peak power is 321bhp) is smooth and keen across the rev range.

On cold, wet roads you might expect a tuned 911 that predates traction or stability control to be a bit of a handful, but the CSR Retro is fabulous. Poised and communicative at all times, it's more than feelsome enough to gauge available grip and traction and the Wavetrac diff works consistently well, so you can be precise and accurate when you do have the opportunity to play through a tighter corner. Outright performance is modest by modern 911 standards, but strong when measured against a real-world yardstick. In fact it seems to strike just about the perfect balance, being fast and feelsome enough to be fun without having to drive at insane speeds. This is an exploitable car that feels special at all speeds.

It's a compelling concept. One that's all the more attractive because RPM lets you do the upgrades piecemeal to spread the cost. So long as you fit all the elements, the car will be granted a custom build plate and documented in RPM's record of builds.

Spending three times a car's purchase price on upgrades might seem like madness, but that's most definitely not the case with this 996. The work RPM carries out completely transforms the car in every way, refreshing, enhancing and personalising it with such success it makes the c.£30,000 conversion cost feel like money very well spent. ✕

Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Specification

Engine
Flat-six, 3387cc

➕ Performance and backdated style; a truly desirable 996 Carrera ✖ Requires vision and courage to invest £30k

CO2
n/a

Power
321bhp @ 6800rpm

Torque
268lb ft @ 4600rpm

0-60mph
5.0sec (est)

Top speed
174mph (est)

evo rating



Weight
1320kg (247bhp/ton)

Basic price
See text

KTM X-Bow GT4

Test location: Automotodrom Grobnik, Croatia
GPS: 45.382245, 14.508840

Carbonfibre trackday favourite sprouts a roof for GT4-category racing – and there's a strong suggestion of a road-going version to come



THE KTM X-BOW HAS been used in competition ever since it entered production in 2008, but in the new X-Bow GT4 the Austrian manufacturer now has a purpose-built racing machine. It shares the road car's carbonfibre monocoque, 2-litre turbo engine and inboard suspension architecture, but with closed wheelarches and a full canopy it's lost that version's pared-back, exoskeleton styling.

The GT4 was developed in conjunction with Reiter Engineering, a German company that's best known for building and campaigning GT3-spec Lamborghinis. Being based on a track-ready car rather than a road-biased sports car, the

X-Bow GT4 is considerably lighter than its competition, which brings numerous benefits but also one very specific consequence. KTM quotes 999kg for the car, which makes the VW Group-sourced four-cylinder engine's 355bhp go a long way. Being so much lighter than the competition means the X-Bow uses tyres and brake consumables much more sparingly, too, which in turn reduces running costs. Reiter reckons the X-Bow costs €4 per km to run, compared to €15 per km for a Porsche 911 Carrera Cup car.

The GT4 competed throughout 2015 under the factory banner, achieving a number of encouraging results despite a stifling Balance of Performance ruling. The issue KTM

and Reiter Engineering have is that the car was so fast in the corners, owing to its low weight, that its lap times were well below those of its GT4 rivals. To level the playing field, the regulators stipulated a very tight air restrictor to reduce engine power. This meant the car was still very fast in corners, but on the straights – where you can actually overtake – it was now being passed by more powerful rivals. The engineers plan to adjust the toe and camber settings to limit corner speeds in 2016 and gain a more favourable Balance of Performance ruling.

The road car's six-speed manual has been ditched for a sequential unit with paddles mounted behind the steering wheel. Running with

'With no power steering and massive cornering ability, it can feel violent through bends'



its most aggressive ride height, the X-Bow GT4 generates significant downforce, but the Balance of Performance ruling also stipulated a higher ride height to further limit its performance. The car is running in this setting when I sample it at Automotodrom Grobnik in Croatia.

The canopy hinges forwards at its leading edge to reveal a thick roll-cage. You have to thread yourself through this to access the cabin, which, like the road car, still has two seats. The seats themselves are actually part of the carbon

tub, which means they're solid and immovable. Instead, the pedal box and steering column adjust through a wide range so that you can easily find a comfortable seating position.

The cabin feels snug once the canopy has been lowered, but visibility is good. As KTM points out, this is the only GT4 racing car on sale that uses a carbon tub, which makes it arguably the safest car of its type.

While the road car's engine can feel boosty and quite flat, this one is more linear, with a red line that's worth chasing. Straight-line

Top: front-hinged canopy opens to expose inboard suspension and a very snug roll-cage. **Above:** GT4 race car could well spawn a road-going rival to the Lotus Exige

performance is very strong indeed and the sequential 'box does shift quickly, although the paddles are a bit of a stretch away and they require a very deliberate and patient tug.

With no traction control or ABS, the X-Bow GT4 doesn't suffer fools, but it's a readable and intuitive thing to step into and drive quickly. It is, though, very physical. With no power steering and massive cornering ability on slick tyres, it can feel violent through the bends. Rather than fighting against the steering forces, the trick is to keep a lighter hold of the wheel and let the car do the work. After telling 20-year-old development driver Naomi Schiff that I found it so physical to drive, she replies, 'I've been telling them the steering is too light.' Clearly I'm a long way from being race-fit...

The speed in the GT4 comes from trusting the front-end grip and maintaining momentum through sweeping corners, and by braking deep into the apex in tighter corners. If you brake in a straight line and release the pedal before turning in, you'll leave buckets of lap time behind. By braking very late and using the first half of the corner as the second part of your braking zone, lap times tumble.

Running the tight air restrictor, the engine does run out of shove before the end of the straights, which leaves it a sitting duck to more powerful cars. As mentioned earlier, this is one of the key issues the team will address for 2016. With so much inherent pace locked inside this car, it's only a subtly different Balance of Performance ruling away from being a seriously competitive GT4 racer.

Details are few and far between for the time being, but KTM has suggested that this car could inspire a road-going version in the near future. On the evidence of this test drive it could be a true giant-killer. ❌

Dan Prosser (@TheDanProsser)

Specification

🟢 Sheer pace, very low running costs, safety 🟡 Hard work for drivers used to power steering

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-60mph	Top speed	evo rating	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo	n/a	355bhp @ 7200rpm	n/a	3.6sec (est)	150mph (est)	★★★★★	999kg (361bhp/ton)	£125,300

Lohen Mini Cooper S

Test location: B660, Cambridgeshire
GPS: 52.40183, -0.37266

The R56 Mini chassis is good, but good enough to handle 279bhp?



IN A CAR AS DIMINUTIVE as the R56 Mini hatchback, 279bhp is a fairly ludicrous amount of power. The most potent factory-specification model of that generation was the 215bhp John Cooper Works GP, which is made to look woefully underpowered by Lohen's own effort.

Taking the Cooper S as its starting point, Staffordshire-based Lohen borrows the bigger turbocharger from the JCW model (£1050), updates the ECU with a Manic Motorsport Stage 3 map (£720) and fits an intercooler (£489), an uprated intake kit (£340) and a full Akrapovic exhaust system (£1905). Peak power arrives at 6420rpm with a massive 305lb ft of torque arriving at 2850rpm. A Quaife torque-biasing limited-slip differential (£690) slots in between the front wheels to try and make some sense of those enormous figures and the clutch and flywheel are also upgraded (£865).

This particular demo car also has Brembo brakes (£1930), KW coilovers (£1512) with Eibach anti-roll bars (£345), a strut brace (£220) and OZ



Racing wheels (£984) wrapped in sticky Pirelli P Zero Corsa tyres. It's clearly been built with track work in mind, but Lohen intends for it to be relatively civilised and practical in everyday use as well.

The ECU remap and improved intake and exhaust systems have liberated close to an extra 100bhp from the 1.6-litre four-pot, which as a proportion of the stock 181bhp is a massive gain. Naturally the character of the engine has changed dramatically, and there is now a wider dead spot at the very lower end of the rev range, but from around 2500rpm it starts to pull in a linear and rampant manner with good throttle response. The torque in the mid-range is simply vast and

the rush to the limiter is frantic, all of which means this car feels just about as rabid and angry as it's possible for a hatchback to be.

Boosting the engine so aggressively is all well and good, but if the chassis is entirely overwhelmed it will all be rather futile. The differential and P Zero Corsa rubber do their very best to deploy more than 300lb ft and on smooth, dry surfaces there is very good traction. The steering wheel does tug at your fingertips as the torque builds, but you don't need to wrestle with it to keep the car pointing in a straight line.

Soon enough, though, the smooth surface is replaced by a bumpy, rutted and cambered one, at which point the combined efforts of the engine, differential and aggressive chassis tune do make the car jolly lively, even in a straight line. Better to short shift now and temper your right foot until the road levels out again.

On smoother surfaces the car feels fantastic. These Minis have always been characterised by

flat-bodied response in cornering, a darty front end and a mobile rear axle. Lohen's chassis revisions have simply turned those traits up by two or three notches, so the car feels like a pumped-up, more focused version of itself, albeit with a reduced operating window.

The grip those Pirelli tyres claw out of the road surface takes a bit of a mental recalibration, but you can still feel the front axle nudging up to its limits and the rear end loading up after the turn-in point. There is still tactility and interaction, then, rather than unrelenting grip and nothing more.

The colour-coded JCW aerokit and white wheels give this car the look of a heavily modified car, which for my tastes spoils the fun somewhat. I'd keep mine looking as standard as possible and bait Porsche Boxster drivers for sport. In giving the car so much power and narrowing its focus to a laser beam, Lohen has wrung out the Mini's potential and, on smooth roads at least, it really is tremendously exciting to drive. ❌

Dan Prosser (@TheDanProsser)

Specification

➕ Performance, character, dynamic ability on the right road ❖ A handful on the wrong road

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-60mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo	n/a	279bhp @ 6420rpm	305lb ft @ 2850rpm	5.5sec (est)	160mph (est)	1150kg (247bhp/ton)	See text

evo rating



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Birds BMW 335d B3x-3.5

Test location: Iver, Buckinghamshire **GPS:** 51.52092, -0.51292
Photography: Aston Parrott

AFTERMARKET TUNERS have long been extracting scarcely believable torque figures from performance diesel engines, but all too often the real-world outcome is an overworked traction-control system rather than effective and useful straight-line pace. A tuned diesel engine mated to a four-wheel-drive system, however, is one of those automotive pairings that just makes sense, particularly at this time of year when our roads are slick with grime.

In standard guise the BMW 335d xDrive would appear to be plenty potent enough, its 3-litre six-cylinder engine returning 309bhp and 465lb ft. Like all manufacturers, though, BMW has a carefully balanced model hierarchy to protect, so it falls to the likes of tuner Birds to tap the engine's latent potential. An ECU remap lifts output to 375bhp and a mighty 575lb ft (the latter at just 2100rpm). Two driven wheels just would not do.

Of course, a big torque figure is one thing, but it's torque over a wide rev band that makes a car feel quick.

Drinking as it does from the black pump, this engine doesn't sustain its full twisting force throughout the rev range, but at 4200rpm there is still as much torque as the standard car produces at its peak.

Out on the road the car feels strong and muscular without ever shocking you with its straight-line pace, while throttle response is reasonably sharp and the run towards the limiter impressively vibrant for a diesel engine. The gruff engine note is hardly tuneful, but at least it's never coarse or unpleasant in the way diesel-burners can be.

On roads brought to a sheen by a sharp downpour, the xDrive system delivers that faintly absurd torque output without any fuss, and certainly without awakening the traction control. Effortless performance, four-wheel-drive security and high-30s fuel economy – no matter what you do – all stack up to form a compelling package.

Birds has also set to work on the chassis, fitting springs and dampers of its own specifications as well as Alcon front brakes. The suspension

Conversion for four-wheel-drive diesel takes only-car-you'll-ever-need theme and runs with it to astonishing effect



kit was developed both on the Nürburgring and UK roads, the goal being to find a balance between control and agility while improving the standard car's ride quality. Despite the 19-inch wheels and low-profile tyres, there's a distinct plushness to the way this car deals with bumps and intrusions, rather than the brittleness you might expect. Body control, meanwhile, is taut, with enough support at each corner that you really can commit to a sequence of bends.

Sports-saloon purists will always long for rear-wheel drive (to say nothing of this car running on the devil's own), but despite the xDrive system there's enough adjustability on the throttle to keep you entertained. The steering, however,

is a weak spot, with an irritatingly springy self-centring action.

The complete B3x-3.5 conversion costs £8010, including fitting. The various upgrades can be bought individually, though: the engine remap costs £2496; the suspension is £1682; the brakes are £3380 and Birds' preferred Continental SportContact 5 tyres cost £1460. All told, the kit represents a £1000 saving over the individual items. Additionally, Birds offers Alcon rear brakes for £2810, an anti-roll bar kit for £1037 and a Quaife limited-slip diff for £2016, although even company founder Kevin Bird reckons the last two of those options would be overkill.

Tick every box and you'll add close to £14,000 to the £41,015 list price of a brand new car, which takes it firmly into M3 territory. With used 335ds available for less than £30,000, though, the Birds conversion really does start to make sense for those drivers who want performance, an engaging chassis and good fuel efficiency in a single package. ✉

Dan Prosser (@TheDanProsser)

Specification

+ Useable performance; ride and handling; economy - Expensive if you tick every box

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-60mph	Top speed	evo rating	Weight	Basic price
In-line 6-cyl, 2993cc, twin-turbo diesel	n/a	375bhp @ 4700rpm	575lb ft @ 2100rpm	4.5sec (est)	155mph (limited)	★★★★★	1540kg (247bhp/ton)	See text

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VW Golf GTD Estate v Ford Focus ST TDCi Estate

Two performance estates with a nod to economy. But which is the better drive?



IT HAS TAKEN VW FIVE generations of Golf Estate to bring a performance wagon to the range (the designers only received orders to make space for the dog from the Mk3 on) but now it has two – the R (see Driven, **evo** 210) and this, the GTD. Think of it as a pseudo-GTI wagon with a 2-litre turbodiesel in place of the turbocharged petrol engine. So, it produces less power than a GTI (181bhp against 217) but a bit more torque (280lb ft plays 258).

So why did VW not slip the GTI's petrol engine into the Mk7 Golf Estate's body and deliver us a hot tourer with the most famous hot hatch badge on its tailgate? Because

the GTD hatch outsells the GTI three to one. It was a no-brainer.

As with the GTD hatch, the wagon gets GTI front and rear bumpers, deeper side sills and 18-inch alloys as standard. Inside there is tartan trim for the seats and a golf-ball-inspired gearlever (this car is manual, but a six-speed DSG is also available). Mechanically it's identical to the hatch, complete with the XDS+ electronic software that does a good impression of a limited-slip diff by nipping the brakes of whichever wheel is on the inside of the corner. It's no Golf R, but the GTD is a good step above its BlueMotion siblings.

It also has a direct rival in the shape of the Focus ST, Ford's first

hot diesel estate. This is **evo's** Fast Fleet ST-3 version, which means it has every bell and whistle available. It is mechanically standard, however, which means there's a 2-litre turbodiesel four with 182bhp and 295lb ft delivered through a six-speed manual gearbox to the front wheels. The Ford also wears the full battle dress of its petrol hot hatch and estate brethren (yes, there's a petrol ST estate, too) and you don't need me to tell you which looks the more overtly sporting of the two.

Where the VW is subtle and perhaps tries a little too hard to be understated, the Ford is in your face with its Aston Martin-esque chin and centre-exit exhaust. Inside, it

even comes with a tight-fitting pair of leather-finished Recaro seats.

If you've driven any Golf GTI from the Mk5 onwards, from behind the wheel the GTD Estate could come across as an imposter. The visual cues may be there, but it doesn't take long to conclude that not all of the GTI spirit has made it across (less so, in fact, than in the GTD hatchback).

It's certainly a step up from a regular Golf diesel estate, however, and the contact points do their best to remind you where your £28,000 went. And yet the performance doesn't entice you to summon up everything on offer. This car covers ground more quickly than a regular



VW Golf GTD Estate		evo rating ★★★★★☆	
Engine	CO2	Power	0-62mph
In-line 4-cyl, 1995cc, turbodiesel	115g/km	181bhp @ 3500rpm	7.5sec (claimed)
Torque	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
280lb ft @ 1750-3250rpm	143mph (claimed)	1400kg (131bhp/ton)	£28,285

+ Performance and build/materials quality - Still no GTI

Ford Focus ST TDCi Estate		evo rating ★★★★★☆	
Engine	CO2	Power	0-62mph
In-line 4-cyl, 1997cc, turbodiesel	110g/km	182bhp @ 3500rpm	8.3sec (claimed)
Torque	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
295lb ft @ 2000-2750rpm	135mph (claimed)	1488kg (124bhp/ton)	£23,295 (ST-1)

+ Sophisticated chassis, punchy engine - Lacks refinement in this company

Golf Estate – the surge of torque is spread evenly across the rev range so you're not constantly throwing gears at it, and if you don't ask too many questions of the platform it will feed back all you need to know to maintain pace – but that's all really. It delivers 20 per cent more than you'd expect of a diesel Golf with an additional 225 litres of luggage space. At no time do your senses detect the delights associated with the petrol-powered GTI.

Unlike the Focus's steering, which buzzes with enthusiasm and vigour, the Golf's seems mute. The Ford at least lets you sense the grip-level build across the front tyres before peeling into understeer. Indeed, the

‘The Focus is more direct and precise, but it becomes increasingly ragged the closer to the edge you get’

Focus is the more direct and precise of the two, although it does become increasingly ragged the closer to the edge you get. The Ford is also more organic and natural in how it drives at speed, tightening its line in a seamless transition should you need to lift out of the throttle sharply, whereas the VW is more artificial – it remains in control but you feel a step removed from the process. The GTD performs to the standard expected of many who will experience it, but the Ford's chassis is better tuned and more composed, and is one that encourages you more.

The Golf GTD fights back with a more refined powertrain; one that sounds less like a diesel and is both

smoother and has a more linear power delivery than the Ford's. The Focus's is quicker to rev and requires more gears more frequently, although at times it doesn't feel any quicker because of it. Of the two, the Ford's gearshift is the more precise.

Ultimately, the Golf GTD never feels more than a sport-inspired Golf, which is perhaps down to one's expectations being higher because of the bar set by its GTI cousin. It's the more upmarket of the two, with a wider appeal in a premium world, but the Focus is closer to its performance aspirations and the better hot diesel estate. ☒

Stuart Gallagher
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Outside Line

by RICHARD MEADEN



Enough is enough, says Meaden, who's fed up with petrolheads spending hundreds of thousands of pounds only to endure crippling pain

O **OF THE MANY NEW CARS I GET TO DRIVE** on your behalf, most are very fast, many are very beautiful and all are the product of painstaking design, obsessive engineering and exhaustive development programmes. Nothing is left to chance. Apart, it seems, from our comfort behind the wheel.

I'm not talking about air-conditioning or heated/cooled seats swathed in supple leather. I'm talking about the fundamentals of a sound driving position and a truly supportive, correctly aligned seat in which to sit. The days of crazy offsets for the steering wheel and pedals might be gone (thank goodness), but that doesn't stop manufacturers signing off cars with small but critical compromises to the alignment of seat, steering wheel and pedals that force our bodies into invisible stress positions.

This year, as in the last 20 or so, I'm sure a few of those new cars I'll test will be gloriously comfortable, yet others will be excruciating, and most will fall somewhere in between. Given those same cars will be faster, cleaner, safer and most probably lighter than the models they replace, why is feeling comfortable and at one with a car by now not a given?

I've lost count of how many times I've fiddled with the reach, rake and height of a steering wheel, shuffled the seat back and forth and up and down, tilted half a degree this way or that, only to grudgingly concede the driving position still isn't quite right. How can this be? I'm not freakishly tall (or short, despite what Wikipedia says), don't have legs like Danny DeVito or arms like an orangutan. I'm pretty much Mr Average, yet still I can't get comfortable.

The more mainstream the car you drive, the more likely you are to be comfortable. Jump into a Ford Mondeo and the basics are sound. Apply that to a more **evo** sphere and it's the cars with populist roots, such as the Golf GTI or BMW M3, that tend to feel best. Perversely, it's when you push further towards the pinnacle of high-performance cars, where you'd hope the interface between car and driver would be flawless, that the patchier things become. I loved my S2 Lotus Exige, but there were times when my monthly osteopathy and Nurofen bills rivalled that of my car-finance payments. Similarly, a few years ago I drove an Aston Martin DB9 to the Nürburgring and endured such lower back pain as to question whether it contravened the Geneva Convention. Yet this was nothing compared to the Lamborghini Huracán I drove last year, which was so uncomfortable I experienced such intense pins and needles in my right leg after 20 minutes that I was forced to periodically use my left foot to operate the throttle. It struck me that if this had been the car of my dreams, bought on the back

of many years' work and a lifetime's yearning, such intolerable discomfort would have left me devastated.

Inevitably the worst culprits are those fixed-back carbonfibre sports seats so beloved of high-end sports car brands. They might be light and look race-car funky, but they never seem to offer sufficient lower back support and are rarely the right width for hips, ribs and shoulders. Yes, I know we're all different shapes and sizes. Indeed that's exactly my point, which is why these ill-fitting, form-over-function instruments of torture are so disappointing, for they promise so much yet deliver so little in the way of connection and support.

Compare this with my recent fitting for a new bicycle and the car industry's failings are thrown into stark relief. I used

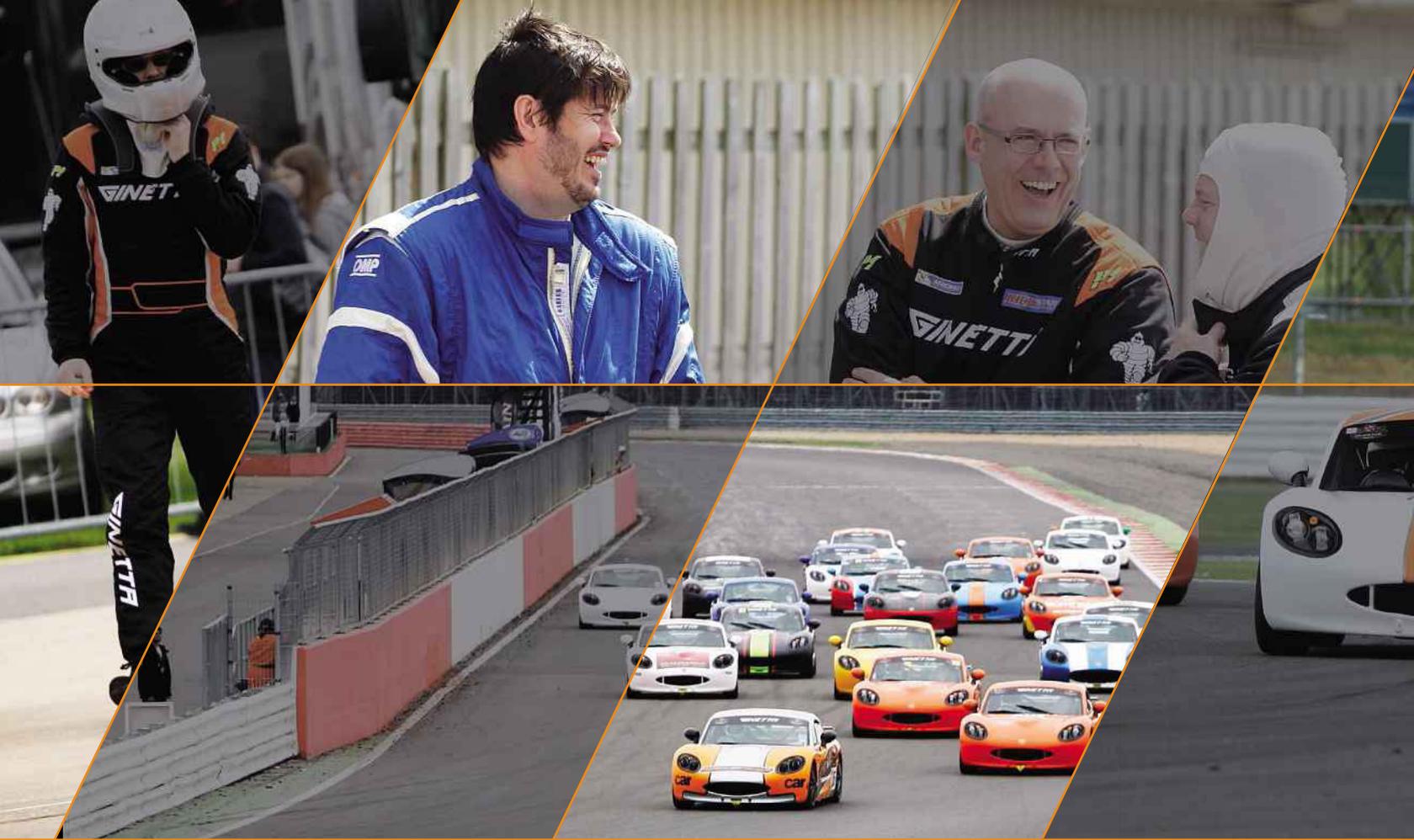
'After 20 minutes in the Huracán, I was forced to periodically use my left foot to operate the throttle'

the Body Geometry Fit service offered by Specialized, but most high-end bike brands or specialist stores offer something similar. In short, I spent two hours having a one-to-one session that was three parts science and one part Savile Row, in which I was paired with the perfect size of frame, then matched to the perfect width, height and alignment of handlebars and saddle, the sweetest throw of the pedals and ideal size of shoe. Detailed biomechanical analysis using profile and head-on video footage scrutinised my riding position and tracked the movement of my legs, which was then used to adjust the cleat position on my shoes and fine tune the bike's setup. All for £150.

How is it that a bicycle maker will ensure a customer spending perhaps a few thousand pounds is as comfortable as they can be, yet a customer spending hundreds of thousands on a supercar is expected to accept what they're given, even if that means they are unlikely to enjoy the car without experiencing some level of discomfort? You wouldn't pay a fortune for a pair of handmade shoes without going for a fitting, and you certainly wouldn't accept them if they were cripplingly uncomfortable. It's about time the world's aspirational high-performance brands stopped expecting you to do just that with your car. ❌

📧 @DickieMeaden

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



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Petrolhead

by RICHARD PORTER



Forza Ferrari? More like forza tantrum, says Porter, who takes issue with Maranello's annual F1-related pomposity

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SEASONAL tradition? The annual seeing of the family? The losing of the patience with the family? The yearly race to fill your house with foods you simply wouldn't bother with at any other time of year?

For me, the greatest tradition is a quaint Italian custom which translates as 'the throwing of the toys from the pram' undertaken by the Ferrari Formula 1 team towards the end of every year. Here it goes again, threatening to leave the sport if it doesn't get its way, as it has done with delightful regularity for many years.

It never happens, of course, and this time was no different as even sweater-wearing dilettante Sergio Marchionne took a break from delaying another Alfa recovery plan to admit that, annual tantrum or not, it was 'highly improbable' Ferrari would take its ball home. Yet still it goes through the motions of a hissy fit, still everyone debates what would happen if it really did quit, and still various pundits claim 'F1 needs Ferrari more than Ferrari needs F1'. Well I'm sorry, but that last bit is total Prancing Horse poo.

If Ferrari really did walk away, F1 isn't going to collapse. Its Italian TV audience might take a bit of a knock but it'll soldier on because the whole enterprise is bigger than any one team. Having Ferrari there is quite useful because it's a name people know and that helps sell the whole thing around the world, it brings a nice bit of history and continuity, and it carries the welcome weight of old-money prestige in a sport that otherwise comes across as crassly Eurotrash and jingle-jangle nouveau. You'd expect nothing less from a sport run by a fisherman's lad made good. So yes, F1 would *like* Ferrari to take part. But it doesn't *need* Ferrari.

Whereas Ferrari has a major problem if it bins off F1. Firstly, it's got to sack 700 employees and find something to do with a very expensive wind tunnel, beyond simply lending it to Haas. Then it's got to explain to marketing that it can't sell the road cars as 'F1-inspired' or 'F1-developed' or with 'F1-style seat stitching' or however else the company milks its deep involvement in the sexy end of motorsport. That's got to include a new ban on those plaques and stickers boasting of past F1 world titles, because you can't brag about such things if you've turned your back on them. It sounds hollow and it leads inevitably to the question: if you were that good at it, why have you stopped? To which it would have to answer, 'It's because we have had a stampy-footed tantrum. *Wah wah wah*, buy a 488 please, as not-developed by Sebastian Vettel.'

If you want another example of Ferrari's absolute need for F1, remember that it is now listed on the New York stock exchange. Its company code is RACE. Bit of a giveaway, that one. And what

better way to make investors feel good about their stock than the prospect of some tangible success every other Sunday. It's more heart-warming than occasionally spotting an old 308 in the street and remembering that you spaffed the kids' college fund on a certificate with a horse in the corner. Plus, when the company wants to court the heavyweight Wall Street guys, it can invite them on lavish trips to Grands Prix and show them a nice time at the glamorous end of their investment. Without that option, these Wolfish types will find themselves standing in a showroom on Long Island sipping a glass of warm Merlot and pretending to give a fig about how a road-going e-diff works.

But there's more than that. Because beyond the investment and the marketing and the corporate hospitality opportunities,

'Ferrari without Formula 1 would be the ex-smoker of the car world, nervously biting its nails and fiddling with bar mats as it struggles to find something to do'

there's the real reason Ferrari needs F1: it's in its very foundations. It's not a road-car company that goes racing to sell more cars. It's a racing team that has discovered it can flog road cars with great success, especially if they come with the sheen of an F1 connection. Ferrari without Formula 1 would be the ex-smoker of the car world, nervously biting its nails and fiddling with bar mats as it struggles to find something to do with itself. Ferrari isn't just embedded in F1; it's addicted to it and it gets too much in return to make quitting a serious prospect.

F1 itself may wax and wane but it'll muddle through somehow, as it always has. It's nice to have Ferrari around, whinging and all, but if it bugged off there's nothing that couldn't be fixed by focusing on better racing, more interesting personalities and the real things that draw people to their tellies on a Sunday afternoon. The only people who see Ferrari as the beating heart of the sport are Ferrari. And that's why Ferrari needs F1. Just as every year it needs to pretend that it doesn't. ❌

📧 @sniffpetrol

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

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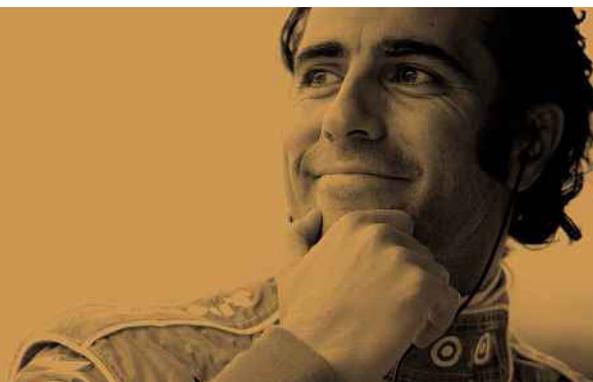
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Champ

by DARIO FRANCHITTI



Fans of racing are all heading to the same place, and you don't need to be a genius to understand why, says Dario

T

THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF MOTORSPORT.

What does that mean to you? I ask because there's a lot of chatter about motorsport's best days now being firmly behind us. Do you feel that motorsport is trading on nostalgia? That we might lose the

kind of magic that saw oceans of spectators amass for Rallye de Portugal in the 1980s if nothing changes?

There is some truth in the claim that F1, Touring Cars and rallying aren't what they were. The racing is still top-drawer – possibly even closer than ever – but a move towards much tighter regulations and the perfection of wind tunnels and computer modelling has meant that the engineering is now more about incremental gains than trial and error, with fewer of the eureka moments of years past. A lot of that is to do with the tightening of belts – innovation costs a hell of a lot of money – and that's a shame. But there is somewhere that's still free-thinking: Sportscars. In prototype racing, Audi, Porsche and Toyota are all going in totally different directions with technology, but when it comes to lap times there's a thrilling convergence.

During the 2015 World Endurance Championship season, among these three teams was a naturally aspirated 3.4-litre V8 (soon to be replaced by a V6 turbo), a V6 turbodiesel and an incredible little V4 turbo petrol engine, not to mention lithium-ion batteries, a flywheel and a supercapacitor. It's enough to invoke memories of Derek Gardner, the Tyrrell chief designer who specified an additional front axle for the P34 in a bid to reduce front-end drag and improve grip, or indeed Gordon Murray's Brabham BT46B – the 'fan car' driven to devastating effect by Niki Lauda at the 1979 Swedish Grand Prix.

Indeed, a culture of engineering creativity now exists at the pointy end of the endurance racing grid and the teams have the drivers to exploit it. The battle between Mark Webber and Marcel Fässler at the 6 Hours of Fuji, where the pair diced through rain-soaked shoals of Porsche 911s and the like, chasing the throttle like madmen, jousting for the inside line, was remarkable. Fässler's Audi R18 had the handling, Webber's Porsche 919 had the straight-line pace, hauling itself out of the bends at a rate that would leave a Formula 1 car in its expertly crafted wake. Over the course of a lap the difference between the two was cigarette-paper thin and yet the powertrains fundamentally differed. After six hours Webber's no. 17 Porsche finished just a single lap ahead of Fässler's no. 7 Audi. And if you think that was close, at the 6 Hours of Silverstone, the difference between Audi and Porsche was just 4.61 seconds, with the fastest Toyota barely ten seconds adrift in third place.

It was racing that stirred the soul, and these machines – and this is a hallmark of endurance racing – are inspirational. With talk of 1200bhp in qualifying trim, I'm sure the 919 Hybrid will be talked about in the same breath as legends such as the 917K, 956/962, Sauber C9, Mazda 787B and the XJR-series Jags.

In fact the only way prototype racing could get any better would be if some of the big names from yesteryear were to return. Mercedes, Ferrari, Ford and Jaguar all have history in endurance racing, but the machinery is now so uncompromised that the cost of competing is astronomical. Audi is said to spend around \$240m annually on its WEC programme. Can you imagine Jaguar investing such a massive sum just for the opportunity to try to

'The pair diced through rain-soaked shoals of Porsche 911s, chasing the throttle like madmen while jousting for the inside line'

beat Audi or Porsche? They'd have to sell a lot more F-types...

Further down the WEC grid things might not be quite so space-age but the variety and quality is still enough to upstage almost any other racing series. There are the front-engined Aston Martin Vantage GTEs, the rear-engined Porsche 911 RSRs and the mid-engined Ferraris (and let's not forget that Ford is getting its act together with an entry based on the stunning, box-fresh GT, which my brother Marino will be driving!). These cars compete directly but are inherently different to drive on the limit. Again, the drivers are often world-class and the tactical battles are fascinating, plus there's the added thrill of watching what are essentially road cars going wheel to wheel. Indeed, so proficient is a 991 GT3 RS, McLaren 675LT or Ferrari 458 Speciale that there's not a vast difference between what you can buy and what you see racing at Le Mans. And with something like an Aston Martin GT12, well, the difference is almost non-existent.

So, my advice is to buckle up for the 2016 WEC season, especially if you're the sort who only usually tunes in for the big showdown every summer at Le Mans. You can thank me later. ✕

✉ @dariofranchitti

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

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Inbox

What's flicked gravel at your windscreen this month?



Letter of the Month

Back to the future?

I like the look of the new 911 Carrera and it is a tempting proposition. Once again, in typical Porsche fashion, there are bundles of new tech, increases in economy and another 0.1 or 0.2sec off the 0-62 time.

The pace race must be finite, though. The new Turbo S dips under 3 seconds to 62mph. Is that a comfortable experience? Would 2 seconds be better? Perhaps more like a punch from Mike Tyson than from a mechanical boxer. More importantly, surely there is very short joy within the legal envelope. And these cars are so packed with digital advances that they must surely have a built-in obsolescence or a very expensive dependence on the franchised dealerships.

Imagine for a moment that you could take today's super-light 911 body and fill it with analogue tech. No driver distractions or aids, no PDK, PASM, PDCC, P-whatever. Now stick some skinny tyres on it for an emphasis on handling and in the back a revised, EU-compliant 300bhp air-cooled engine. A 911 R-Classic? I'd buy one.

Greg Thompson

The Letter of the Month wins a Christopher Ward watch

The writer of this month's star letter receives a Christopher Ward C7 Rapide Chronometer, worth £599. One of a limited edition of 500 pieces, it features a 42mm case, an Italian leather strap, and a 27-jewel Swiss quartz movement that has been certified by the Contrôle Officiel Suisse des Chronomètres for its accuracy.



CHR.WARD LONDON www.christopherward.co.uk

Evolution of evo

Like many evo readers, I've been a petrolhead pretty much from birth. So as much as I enjoy reading the monthly articles comparing current and slightly older supercars and performance cars, my automotive passion actually spreads much further than this: I also have a genuine love of quirky off-roaders (F150 Raptor, Land Rover 101), American muscle cars (I own a '71 Mustang) and other classics – not to mention motorcycles!

The reason I wanted to share this is because I thought your decision to include the gravel group test in issue 218 was spot-on for real car fans. Having driven off road in rally cars and performance off-roaders, I can completely relate to the fact that these experiences are as appealing as taking a purebred Italian supercar around a track. A completely different experience, of course, but both offer absolute drilling thrills.

You're bound to hack off a few people, but I'm pretty confident that your plan to include articles throughout 2016 on the Thrill of Driving in less familiar places will appeal to most readers. Change is always uncomfortable for some, but it's spot on this time in my opinion.

Shaun Knights

918 not all that

Just got my subscriber copy of evo 218, and settled back for a good read. I enjoyed the Ambition article with Frank-Steffen Walliser, but I have to take issue with his boast that 'the 918 is the most powerful engine in the world in terms of bhp per litre – we have 132bhp per litre. Nobody thought this was possible'.

I'll assume that by 'in the world' he meant 'naturally aspirated road-going engines', but clearly young Frank has

never ridden a motorcycle, as a good modern motorcycle engine makes very nearly 200bhp per litre (BMW S1000R, Yamaha R1M, Aprilia RSV4, etc).

Maybe he meant car engines, but the 200bhp per litre or so that is now commonplace makes 132 look pretty damn feeble, doesn't it? And these aren't temperamental and highly tuned or unaffordable homologation specials with 500-mile service intervals, but regular sports road bikes that can be ridden every day in all conditions with normal servicing intervals and superb longevity. Looks like Frank has got a bit to learn...

Brett Jeffrey

Different league

I've just read Will Rowlands' letter on his Cayman S versus the GT4 (evo 218) and I have to take exception to his theory that he's not missing out. Will, you need to drive both cars!

I loved driving my Cayman S Sport and did so pretty much every day for over six years, so I can relate to the joy of the old Cayman. I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time and as a result I am now the proud owner of a GT4. I drive it almost every day and it brakes, handles and accelerates in a way that is nothing like the S.

All I can suggest is that Will finds a dealer and gets on a prospective waiting list now. It will be worth it.

Paul Bouncer

Cat back

Enjoyed your recent piece on Abarth Classiche (evo 218). Just one thing: looking at the silhouettes on the opening pages, is that a kitten I can see sheltering under the propped-up engine cover of the Abarth 595? I never realised cars from the 1960s could be equipped with a cats...

Mimi Parker



Above: Shaun Knights wants more off-centre articles like our gravel group test



Above: Mimi Parker spotted a stowaway in the back of our Abarth 595 silhouette

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Talking Point

Movie cars

Last month, we drove the V8-powered Jaguar C-X75 that appeared in *Spectre*. We also asked which car from the silver screen you would like to sample. Here's what you said...

Eleanor, simple!

Paul Giannandrea

Aston Martin DB10. Looks beautiful, sounds amazing. Who doesn't want to be a modern 007?

Alex_

The Bond Lotus Esprit submarine, so I can drive to work down the canal and avoid the traffic. Or a flying DeLorean time machine, which would let me have a lie-in, dodge traffic, and still get to work on time.

Si_

Cameron Frye's dad's 250 GT California. Needs no explanation.

Barry

Though presumably not backwards through a plate glass window...

GPG

The Citroën DS used in the 2011 version of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. Although I am not sure it would have been entirely appropriate to be used by spies in England during that era (far too conspicuous, surely), it looked a lovely example, especially in the scene on a runway near the end of the film.

Bishopwasahero

The *Mad Max* Interceptor. In fact, I'd happily drive it as a daily. Nothing beats a blown V8 on open pipes for sound and it looks badass.

NotoriousREV

The Porsche 928 from *Risky Business*. Because it's a Porsche 928, why else?!

I.A.M

Manual black Porsche 928 in *Weird Science* for me. I wore out a VHS tape watching it in my teens. Why? As a kid in the '80s, that's what I thought my teenage years were going to be like.

carlos

The Porsche 356 A Speedster from *Another 48 Hours* is stunning and timeless.

Suf

A bit of a cliché, but the Miura from *The Italian Job*, on the same road. Minus the bulldozer in the tunnel.

Twig

When I was younger I always wanted a Trans-Am like the Bandit had, but now I realise that would be horrendous every day. Would work as a toy, though.

clio200

Think I'd probably go with the '70 Firebird from *American Beauty* rather than a '77 car – with 'American Woman' on the radio, as per the film.

GPG

John Milner's chopped '32 Deuce Coupe complete with THX 138 plate from *American Graffiti*.

ste

The car from the opening sequence of *The Pink Panther*. I was sooo jealous of the lad that drove it...

mik

A 1968 Ford Mustang GT, in the vain hope that I could ever be as cool as Steve McQueen.

Jimmy Choo

Join the discussion

Keep an eye on evo.co.uk or follow us on Facebook ([facebook.com/evomagazine](https://www.facebook.com/evomagazine)) to participate in our regular Talking Point debates.

The best comments will be published here each month

Thread of the Month

PaulJ

Servicing costs

My partner had the first service done on her Abarth 595 yesterday. It cost £424 at the supplying dealer. It's done 18,000 miles so we had new front tyres too and the tracking checked, bringing the total spend over the last two days to £650. Are all town cars/lifestyle accessories this demanding?

What the hell did they do, put in a new engine? Seems expensive for oil, an oil filter and an air filter. And you should use US-spec tyres. You may not get round corners but you'll get 60,000 miles out of them, easy...

FatChris

They did send us a video clip of the car underside to show us the tyre wear. Maybe the voiceover guy was expensive.

PaulJ

It's the halo version. High maintenance costs are expected...

Alex_

The first service in 18,000 miles cost £450. That is nothing if you think about it.

SimonB

Cost per mile no, but what was involved other than an oil change? It's a first service, not a 1,000,000-mile overhaul.

JL

The spark plugs and the micro filter were also changed, so all in all I suppose it's OK.

PaulJ

First service on the Yeti at 18k miles was £200. They valeted it and left a litre top-up bottle of oil in a fancy case in the boot.

Carlos

I got a five-year servicing plan on my M5 for £500. It may be worth getting something similar on her next purchase.

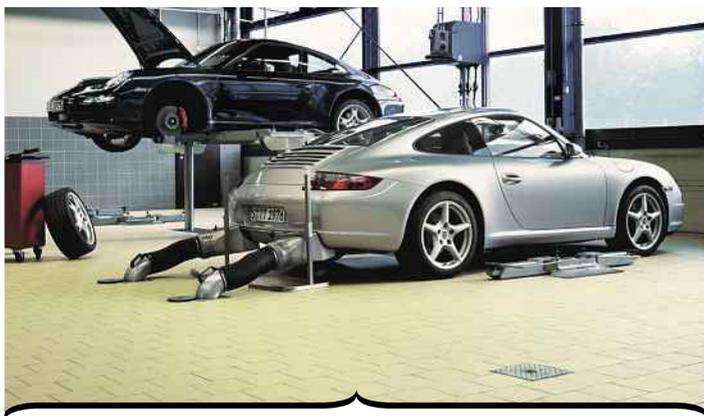
IanF

A major service on a Bentley costs just over £1000 at HR Owen, which makes a car with 12 cylinders seem cheap to service compared to a four-cylinder derv.

Mito Man

Seven-year maintenance is included in the Ferrari's 488 GTB's price. That will not include tyres and brakes though...

pilouil



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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.

ROAD ANGEL™

FORD FOCUS RS

UNDER



by DAN PROSSER

PHOTOGRAPHY by GUS GREGORY

There's been hype, Ken Block, Drift mode, the Stig and a 12-month drip-feed of information. Now we've driven the new Focus RS, does it deliver on its promise to be one of the best hot hatches ever?

PRESSURE





WHEN YOU'RE TRYING TO RATIONALISE

a new car's dynamic behaviour, there's one very obvious framework of reference on which to call: prior experience of whatever else you've driven. You drive the car, recall similar traits in other cars and then allow those impressions to settle into a neatly labelled folder in your mind. But when you find yourself rummaging around in the duller parts of your long-term memory – in this instance a family holiday in Cyprus, aged 12 – in order to understand just what the hell is going on, it's clear that the car in question is a unique thing.

The term 'hot hatch' just doesn't seem adequate any more. With the emergence of the second-generation Audi RS3, the Mercedes-AMG A45 and, to a lesser extent, the Volkswagen Golf R, we've witnessed the rise of a whole new sector. I'll propose 'super hatch' (took hours that one) and save 'mega hatch' for the inevitable moment that one manufacturer or other busts the 400bhp threshold. The new Ford Focus RS certainly meets the lofty requirements of the super hatch category: 345bhp, 347lb ft and 0-62mph in 4.7 seconds.

It's the third Focus to wear the RS badge, but it differs from the first two generations by powering all four wheels (we should probably ratify that as a prerequisite of this new class here and now). Power comes from a 2.3-litre, turbocharged four-cylinder, with the only transmission option being a six-speed manual. Where the RS stands apart from the rest of the

super hatch crowd is that it doesn't just use an off-the-shelf Haldex four-wheel-drive system, which is fundamentally limited in how precisely it can apportion drive between each wheel. The RS's four-wheel-drive system is quite special. For one thing it can send a higher proportion of torque rearwards than a Haldex setup can, and for another it uses a couple of clutch packs in the RDU, or rear drive unit, to finely control the torque split between the rear wheels. It's proper torque vectoring. This means Ford's engineers have been able to write countless lines of code that instruct the four-wheel drive to behave exactly how they want it to. We can take it as a sign of those Ford engineers being thoroughly likeable blokes that what they want is for the RS to powerslide.

The Blue Oval is as blue collar as it gets, but what the Focus RS loses in badge appeal to its class rivals it wins back in value. Its 345bhp puts it almost 50bhp clear of the Golf R, but starting at £29,995 it's actually the better part of £1000 cheaper than the VW. The slightly underwhelming RS3 and A45 AMG do outgun the Ford – by 17bhp and 31bhp respectively – but the German alternatives are at least £10,000 more expensive.

The RS's cabin does fall short of its rivals' in terms of fit and finish, but it'd be a hard taskmaster who finds the materials to be wholly inadequate. The standard sports seats offer good support, but my preference is for the optional shell-backed



‘The new Focus RS certainly meets the lofty requirements of the super hatch category: 345bhp, 347lb ft and 0-62mph in 4.7 seconds’

buckets. Not only are they more supportive still, but they also do away with the standard items' slightly garish blue leather trim across the shoulders.

With the car set to its Normal mode, the steering is light, the exhaust subdued and the ride ever so slightly bouncier than a Golf R's. Beyond the Normal mode the RS offers Sport, Track and, intriguingly, Drift settings, with a number of additional parameters for each. 'Sport mode gives the driver a sportier feeling without making any huge changes,' says David Put, vehicle dynamics supervisor at Ford Performance. 'This mode is for road use and we try to keep it controllable. The electronic stability control is unchanged, for example. The steering gets heavier, you get pops and burbles from the exhaust, the throttle is sharper and there is a little change in the calibration of the RDU.

'Track mode moves the ESC into a middle setting – we call it Sport. This mode is for a smooth track and it gives the fastest lap time. The RDU settings change to optimise traction and shoot the car out of corners. In Drift mode the ESC stays in Sport but the RDU can send all the torque to one side instead of splitting it evenly, so you get maximum yaw gain. The torque split is continuously adapting to speed, grip and so on [to sustain a powerslide].'

In each of the various drive modes the ESC system can be set to Sport or switched off fully via a button next to the gearlever, while another button on the left-hand stalk allows

you to switch between two damper settings. Put says the firmer setting was developed solely for track use, explaining that the default mode gives plenty of control on the road. Finally, there are two tyre options: Michelin Pilot Super Sports and the track-ready Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2. Again, Put prefers the base tyre for road use, but says the Cup 2 is better on circuit.

The launch route takes in the spectacular mountain roads to the west of Valencia before leading us to the nearby Moto GP race circuit. The roads are as smooth as a marble floor and a little short on grip, at least until the sun breaks through the morning cloud to burn away the dew. Every corner is a neat, constant-radius bend, most of them taken in third gear but some right at the top of second.

The steering immediately feels weightier in Sport mode and for the first few miles I'm irritated by the artificial resistance around the straight-ahead – the kind that dulls any sense of connection to the front axle on initial turn-in. With the chassis loaded up in a corner, though, and with more than a few degrees of lock dialled in, the steering becomes very crisp and detailed, with none of the nasty, springy self-centring that blights so many modern steering systems.

The gearshift is slick with a direct throw and the engine feels sharper than it did in Normal mode. Throttle response is good, and with maximum torque available from 2000rpm there's an enormous swell of thrust to tap into at all times.



‘A trackday marshal would soon be waving his black flag if you used Drift mode to its full potential’



Above: six-speed manual is the only gearbox offered. **Below and left:** rear wing, diffuser, bumpers and grille are all new for the RS; Nitrous Blue paint is £745





Top: 20-spoke wheels are optional; basic design has ten spokes but is the same 8 x 19in size. **Top right:** standard Recaros, complete with showy blue detailing. **Above:** 2.3-litre four has a twin-scroll turbo and puts out 345bhp; open air filter helps to maximise air-flow on rolling roads

The engine seems to surge a little at 4000rpm, then once again over the final 500rpm to the red line.

This is not a thrilling engine, though, which is pretty much a universal truth of modern four-cylinder turbo units. The engineers have worked hard to imbue it with some character – the warbling induction note and pops and bangs on the overrun are a bit of fun, if ultimately contrived – and in all objective terms it is very well conceived. Ultimately, though, it's effective rather than memorable.

Time and again I crave another 500rpm right at the top of the rev range, just to allow me to hold a lower gear as I approach the next corner rather than having to change up. With the rev limiter set at 6700rpm the engine runs out of reach, like the puck of a fairground strongman game falling short of hitting the bell. The temptation is to assume that 345bhp in a hatchback would feel outrageously, inordinately potent. The RS's straight-line performance is very strong, no doubt, but it doesn't ever feel violently accelerative.

I try the stiffer suspension mode for a few miles, but it clearly adds nothing to the car's dynamic ability. Instead, it simply finds whatever imperfections there are in this smooth surface and shunts them into the body as small vertical inputs. Importantly, there's such abundant body control and composure in the default mode that there's no need to tie the car down any further. Not once does it get light or floaty over crests or in direction changes, which means you can throw input after input into the car without ever having to wait for it to settle and regain its composure. As it lands in compressions at speed, meanwhile, the suspension soaks up the impact in a single stroke without ever running out of travel.

There is a degree of roll in the chassis when cornering, but it's a very natural and intuitive consequence of leaning hard on the Michelins rather than a lack of control. In fact, it's the roll that makes you feel as though you're working the chassis hard and it's the roll that paints a clear picture of how much purchase the tyres are finding mid-corner.

The front axle responds at a very predictable rate to steering inputs and it finds enormous bite on the way into bends, particularly if you trail-brake. These Super Sport tyres actually hold a line so effectively that I wonder at the need for Cup 2s on the road. So often adding grip to a chassis just neutralises it, and the more approachable limits of a lower specification tyre make for a more rewarding driving experience, I'm sure.

With a fairly pointy natural chassis balance the car will take a slight rear-led attitude on the way into tighter corners when you turn in off the throttle. If you get the car into a corner in that shape, which does require a fair degree of commitment, and stand on the power a lot earlier than seems sensible, the four-wheel-drive system will convert that lift-off oversteer into the gentlest of powerslides, just enough so that you can open the steering slightly and feel the car being driven from the rear. It's almost as though you're flying the car and it's precisely the kind of behaviour I crave in each of those Haldex-equipped rivals.

On a wet road the RS can be persuaded to slither around a little, but in the dry it'll never sweep out of a corner on a half turn of corrective lock in the manner of a rear-wheel-drive car. It just has too much traction for that. Instead, the fun in the RS is in that very slight entry and exit slip,

and in that window it is hugely entertaining, not just in the context of its class rivals but in overall high-performance car terms.

It does remain to be seen just how effectively the RS deals with a really rotten British back-road, but I'd be staggered if the chassis was completely untied by a rutted, broken surface. The brakes, meanwhile – which comprise 350mm ventilated discs with four-piston Brembo calipers at the front, plus 302mm solid discs at the rear – are strong and easy to modulate and the pedal stays reasonably firm even as the system temperatures soar.

Running on the Cup 2 tyres and in Track mode, the RS feels tremendous on circuit, too. So often road cars just feel all at sea on a wide circuit, but the Ford is agile, responsive and – with the dampers set to their stiffer mode – very well controlled, too. The four-wheel-drive system claws enormous traction out of the track surface, which means you can stand on the power very early in corners and slingshot the car down the next straight.

And so to the Drift mode. Before I go any further it is necessary to note that the typical trackday marshal would soon be waving his black flag so hard if you used this mode to its full potential that he'd probably take flight. That's a pity, really, because Drift mode is terrific fun. It's at its best in long, second-gear corners.

The key is to get the car understeering slightly on turn-in before standing on the throttle with as little decorum as you can muster. The four-wheel-drive system then overloads the outside rear tyre, at which point the car will swing into a wide, sweeping arc. All you need to do now is keep your right foot planted and the steering wheel straight, at least until the end of slide, where you do need to dial-in some corrective lock.

It's as though the car is connected from the front bumper by a taut wire to a pivot point at the apex of the corner, about which it rotates. It's a completely alien sensation to me in automotive terms. I can only equate it to the feeling of an inflatable rubber ring being swung out wide behind a speedboat in a high-speed turn (Cyprus, aged 12).

It's not at all like the sensation of a rear-wheel-drive car in a slide because there's no need to modulate the throttle and the steering inputs aren't so critical. It isn't terribly civilised behaviour, but I have so much fun going back and forth through the same corner that I overheat the four-wheel-drive system.

I suppose fun is what this Ford is all about, be it on the road or a circuit. Among a group of cars that are characterised as much by their inability to really excite at the limit as by their genre-busting levels of performance, that makes the Focus RS stand out. ☒

FORD FOCUS RS

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 2261cc, turbo

CO2 175g/km

Power 345bhp @ 6000rpm

Torque 347lb ft @ 2000-4500rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, four-wheel drive, torque vectoring, ESC

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension SLA independent with control blade, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes 350mm ventilated discs front, 302mm solid discs rear, ABS, EBD

Wheels 8 x 19in front and rear

Tyres 235/35 R19 front and rear

Weight 1524kg

Power-to-weight 230bhp/ton

0-62mph 4.7sec (claimed)

Top speed 165mph (claimed)

Basic price £29,995

On sale Now

evo rating: ★★★★★



by JETHRO BOVINGDON

PHOTOGRAPHY by PAUL HARMER

One-trick pony?

*It's the first Mustang
developed for Europe as well as
the US. But does it offer more than
just traditional muscle-car brute force?*



Y

YOU'VE HEARD THE NEWS, RIGHT? YOU know, the *big* news. Nope, not 'Ludicrous Mode' or the advances in autonomous driving. Not even anything to do with 'connectivity' or 'mobility solutions'. The **BIG** news. The Mustang. It's got independent rear suspension. I know, right? *Independent* rear suspension. And you can buy it in right-hand drive. For £34,495. Not some watered-down V6 or four-cylinder turbo version. A full-fat 5-litre vee-mutherflippin'-eight Mustang with 410bhp for the price of an M235i. Right in time for crashing petrol prices and the diesel backlash. Did I mention it's got multi-link rear suspension?

Apologies for the hysteria but there's something about the Ford Mustang that seems to whip up a storm of excitement, hype and, in its home market at least, amazing loyalty. Ford guys are Ford guys, GM guys are GM guys and never the twain shall meet eye-to-eye. Here in the UK the landscape is rather different. Oh sure, the Mustang has its own vehement following, but it's miniscule, and although

every five or six years there's a buzz of anticipation in the press as tentative plans to officially offer the Mustang are rumoured, it always comes to nothing. A press car arrives, gets plenty of coverage and then disappears because there's no real business case for it. But now the Mustang is on sale here officially and in right-hand drive. And it's arguably the most relevant Mustang there's ever been for Britain and continental Europe, fitted as it is with that new rear suspension system and tuned to work globally through the 'One Ford' philosophy. So we must judge it as a real car, rather than a fun, noisy piece of fluff. On a freezing cold day in January, wind howling and carrying great sheets of rain and sleet, that shouldn't be a problem.

Having said that, the Mustang is near-impossible to judge as we might something such as the new and not dissimilarly priced Focus RS. How do you pick a rival? An M235i or 370Z Nismo, perhaps? Or maybe a 435i, RS3 or even an M4? Then again, maybe Focus RS or Golf R buyers might fancy something more unusual but still reliable and vaguely practical? It's a



'Quality has taken a leap upwards, yet the Mustang still feels big and brassy'



bit of a minefield. So for now the group test can wait. We want to get to know the Mustang all on its own, on typically bumpy, testing roads, to cut through both the immediate Americana intoxication and the distraction of a Golf R travelling just shy of the speed of sound on a sopping wet road. And besides, Mustang versus B-road is an intriguing battle all on its own. Today we discover if the Mustang is actually any good.

The drive to Pontypridd in south Wales last night confirmed it's definitely not bad. That might sound incredibly condescending but the last Mustang I drove, a Shelby GT500 (evo 178), felt pretty horrendous in similar conditions: no grip, a shuddering, loose ride quality and a general sense of slightly shambolic engineering and execution. It was thumpingly fast, but on greasy roads in the UK and later in Germany (we tried and failed to do 200mph) the novelty of being in a Mustang soon gave way to disappointment served up with a super-sized portion of fear.

This car is different. It projects the famous pony badge onto the pavement as you approach at night.

Silly, but quite cool. You slide in and it feels a bit like Mustangs of old but quality has taken a perceptible leap upwards. It still feels big and brassy, those sharp-edged ridges running along the bonnet adding to the sense that this is something alien, something exciting. This Mustang doesn't feel huge, though. The last car – dimensionally almost identical – really did feel tall, wide and bulbous. This one is altogether leaner, or at least persuasively gives that impression.

The drivetrain and ride quality felt transformed last night, too. Still very definitely not from around these parts, but with a polish I had hoped to discover but doubted I would. The 5-litre V8 is smooth and torquey, emitting a deep and resonant woofle at low revs but with a clean, hissing delivery as it works through the mid-range and up towards the rev limit. The six-speed manual is also a treat. The throw is short and toothy, requiring just enough muscle to operate and fitting with the tight, energetic delivery of that hypnotic V8. More encouraging still is the much more sophisticated feel to the chassis. The GT still patters at low speeds

Above: standard-fit Pirelli P Zeros struggle in the cold and wet; enjoyable for oversteer, not so much for understeer. **Left:** along with the rest of the cabin, the instrumentation is aeronautics-inspired

on rough roads but cruising on the motorway there's a fluency and control that's unrecognisable from various Mustangs I've tried over the years. So this morning I'm feeling positive, the Mustang a ray of 'Triple Yellow' sunshine on an otherwise filthy day.

Hearing the big quad-cam V8 fire up only adds to the sense of anticipation. Despite all the improvements we hope to find, I guess it's still the V8 that defines this car's appeal and will lure buyers. And why not? The numbers it produces are strong – 410bhp at 6500rpm and 391lb ft at 4250rpm – and it's full of burly charisma. The GT isn't a light car, at 1711kg, but it still hustles up to an electronic limiter at 155mph and hits 62mph in 4.8 seconds. Suspension is by MacPherson struts at the front and an aluminium-intensive multi-link setup at the rear and the GT has some tasty hardware in terms of braking, too. Up front are six-piston Brembos with 380mm discs.

Of course, the GT comes with a Torsen-type limited-slip differential to make the best use of its rear 275/40 R19 P Zeros. Despite three steering modes (Normal, Comfort and Sport) and four driving modes (Snow/Wet, Normal, Sport+ and Track) the Mustang actually uses fixed-rate dampers and never feels like a car that requires decoding before it feels naturally configured. It's quite an intuitive car right out of the box. Fiddle around and you'll find that the drive modes alter throttle response, and in Track there's a more lenient stability-control setting. You can disable traction control and ESC completely in any mode. For a slice of pure American fun, it also has a Line-Lock function, which applies the front brakes but allows the rears to spin freely into a radiant burn-out.

Our chosen route climbs gently out of a village, the road ragged and coarsely surfaced but with only gentle curves. Then it bunches up for a few tighter corners

before the incline steepens and there's a blessed stretch of fresh black tarmac. Turn left at the peak and the surface deteriorates again, the road fast, blind and full of wicked little compressions and treacherous rivers of mud and stones washed down the adjoining forestry tracks. Then it opens out and falls down a spectacular ridge – hairpins, Armco and crumbling slate throwing even more surprises into the mix. For me it feels like home. For the Mustang it's a funny kind of holiday.

As mentioned, the Mustang is an intuitive car and even away from everyday driving that remains the case. It feels natural and balanced with nicely weighted steering and easily measured responses. The big Brembo brakes – part of the Performance Package in the US but standard-fit here – are superb, offering instant and consistent bite and a real sense of how much grip there is. You need to tune into those signals and listen to what your backside is telling you, because the Mustang's steering has a nice rate of response but there's very little feedback humming through the big, chunky rim. Sport mode is best avoided as the weight it adds masks what little information you may glean.

Despite not being the last word in feedback, it says much for the Mustang's inherent balance that you quickly find yourself reaching for the traction-control button. Maybe not disabling ESC altogether but flicking traction control off in order to use this big coupe's lovely power delivery to help steer you along a road. It's a pretty well judged mode, letting you bring the tail into play but stepping in curtly should you take too many liberties. Perhaps in the dry the stability control might feel a little too severe when it activates, but on hellishly cold and wet surfaces it at once encourages you to breach the limits but defines just how far you can go with reassuring discipline. Track mode has its own distinct and slightly more

'The GT's inherent balance means you quickly find yourself reaching for the traction control button'

Left: this is the first Mustang to be made with right-hand drive in six generations. **Far right:** 5-litre V8 surely a major selling point, although a 2.3-litre EcoBoost model will follow (really)





'It feels pretty heroic slip-sliding up the ridge, V8 hammering away'

refined halfway-house setting, but I find the throttle mapping too jumpy in these tricky conditions.

I should say that the P Zeros don't find much grip at all in the wet. Turn in at what feels like a very reasonable speed and the front starts to glide away from you. Give it a split second and the grip comes back, but now that you're near the limits, even the tiniest throttle opening yields oversteer. In slower corners it's easily dealt with by the electronics or a flick of steering correction, but exiting faster corners it's easy to get a spiteful swat of oversteer that can feel a bit edgy. In reality this is just the Mustang's way of doing things, so long as you're ready it's a very easy car to provoke, control and exploit. It feels pretty heroic slip-sliding up that ridge, the V8 hammering away and the tail gently swinging behind it. Graceful, too.

You might imagine that I'm pretty happy in my Mustang, then? Pretty. But there are some issues. Independent rear suspension or not, the Mustang doesn't like rapid-fire bumps and the dampers can't cope with bigger lumps, either. There's one particular right-hander that drops away just after you turn-

in. It doesn't look like much but it exposes all of the Mustang's weaknesses in one moment of panic...

So you turn and the outside front wheel immediately falls away into the dip. The car feels light, floating above its dampers, which don't want to grab hold of its weight. You instantly realise that the car will soon hit the bottom of the compression and that you then need to brake slightly and turn in the opposite direction for the adjoining left. Will it grip? You can't tell: the car is in a state of flux, completely disconnected from what the road is doing. Before you can so much as yelp, the wheel reaches the bottom of the compression, thwacks back up at the body rapidly and sends a shuddering hit through the chassis. It grips, just, but the suspension is still struggling to find equilibrium and now you've got to brake and turn left. The front pushes into understeer then the lightest touch on the throttle gives a flash of oversteer, all the time the body heaving around uncomfortably. We make it through but both of us need a breather.

Of course, you don't get a breather up here and for every corner that the Mustang drives through cleanly





FORD MUSTANG 5.0 V8 GT

Engine V8, 4951cc
CO2 299g/km

Power 410bhp @ 6500rpm

Torque 391lb ft @ 4250rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, LSD

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs, 380mm front, 330mm rear, ABS, EBD

Wheels 9 x 19in front, 9.5 x 19in rear
R19 front, 275/40 R19 rear

Weight 1711kg

Power-to-weight 243bhp/ton

0-62mph 4.8sec (claimed)

Top speed 155mph (limited)

Basic price £34,495

On sale Now

evo rating: ★★★★★

Left: new Mustang GT gets substantial 380mm Brembo discs at the front and 330mm discs at the back. With a kerb weight of 1711kg, it needs them

and balanced on the throttle, there are four of five moments where the body control just disappears. For me this is a deal-breaker because I hate that sensation of a car's body and suspension running out of sync, the car unable to respond to your commands precisely. A sports car needs an inner steel and on these roads the Mustang can't summon the composure that sets apart the really great cars. In fact the body control is far too lazy to use all of the performance. That's frustrating because beneath the limited body control is a predictable, entertaining balance.

I can't help reflecting how the Mustang might have fared should we have brought rivals along. Of course, it wouldn't run with a Golf R or any of the best hatchbacks for more than about 30 seconds before their blunt rear ends disappeared out of sight. I suspect an M235i would generate more grip and certainly exhibit better body control, but the BMW has its own issues: poor traction and a jagged, sharp-edged gait that feels fighty rather than fluid. A 370Z Nismo? Perhaps that's the closest in spirit to the Mustang and it feels smaller and lighter than the Ford, but the Mustang's

voluptuous V8 is so much more appealing than the Zed's coarse V6. The required £35,000 or thereabouts buys you some truly great cars, then, but there's not a dynamically unimpeachable coupe short of the Cayman, which costs from £39,694. So in the context of appealing, fast, capable but slightly compromised competition, does the Mustang stack up?

That rather depends. You see, the Mustang simply isn't good enough when you're driving just for driving's sake on the sorts of roads we love. It feels too heavy, the body control is compromised too easily and despite so many promising ingredients, in the end it still feels like a fish out of water in the UK. That's a killer blow. And yet I can understand why somebody might forego locked-down, muscular dynamics on roads like these in order to have access to that drivetrain, those evocative looks and a taste of something entirely different every single day. Despite my reservations, there's a really good car lurking within the Mustang. The GT350 version, which has a 5.2-litre flat-plane-crank V8 with 526bhp and a more aggressive chassis setup, should be quite a car. Can we have it in right-hand-drive, please? ☒

THE FORDS AWAKEN

by NICK TROTT,
HENRY CATCHPOLE AND
STUART GALLAGHER

Fifty years after dethroning Ferrari at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Ford is attempting to repeat the trick with the stunning new GT. evo reveals how it's going to happen



OVER THE LAST YEAR, EVO HAS BEEN following the story of Ford's return to the supercar arena – and its return to top-flight endurance racing. What you are about to read is the result of a truly international information-gathering exercise. We've chased the key Ford Performance people all over the world in the last 12 months to get a real handle on what is arguably the most exciting car of the year, and the most important motorsport story of 2016.

From Raj Nair, the man who ultimately presses the start button on any racing programme, to the drivers, engineers, execs, designers and directors – we've got them all. It proved to be a deeply fascinating exercise...

Why does motorsport matter to Ford?

Raj Nair, executive vice president, product development, and chief technical officer: Motorsport remains important to us – our heritage is founded on a race that Henry Ford won in 1901. We shouldn't forget that we build cars, and there's an entire sport revolving around cars. There are not a lot of businesses that can claim this.

Engagement provides a return, and at the moment the return is pretty good – NASCAR especially. In some other sports, the series have become more about the driver

than the manufacturer, so when you win it's the driver that wins and when you have a mechanical issue it's the manufacturer that loses. For Europe, we support WRC, but we're not a factory team. And, frankly, F1 and the expense it takes and the return... It seems more about Lewis versus Nico than it is about Mercedes against Ferrari.

So there's a passion for motorsport at all levels in the company, but we have a responsibility to our shareholders and our employees to use capital wisely.

Why does the return of Ford to GT racing matter?

Dave Pericak, global director, Ford Performance: To celebrate 50 years of heritage with the programme is important to us. More importantly, the Ford GT serves as the pinnacle of performance to us. It's a global deal for us – to show what we can do. It's a representation of what's great at Ford.

How important is tradition?

Jim Farley, executive vice president and president, Europe, Middle East and Africa: I encourage us to look at traditional and non-traditional motorsport. Take our relationship with Ken Block – that's non-traditional. It's given us tremendous exposure but it's not racing. The reality of the



motorsport world is that there are so many more choices of where to spend those dollars. And the digital experience is becoming so much more attractive.

How important is Le Mans?

Chip Ganassi, team manager, Chip Ganassi Racing: It goes back to when I was a child and I had a GT40 slot car. So the Ford GT and I go way back. I raced in Le Mans in 1987 – I drove. Our team have won a lot of races, including Indianapolis, but this, Le Mans, is another one of the four great races. That's what we're here to do.

Why partner with engineering outfit Multimatic?

Raj Nair: They brought a lot of expertise when we were thinking about doing the GT – from some aspects of other work they had done in this vein. The fact that they bring the carbonfibre expertise, that they bring the race expertise. They're a known entity to Ford, a long-standing partner, so they were really a perfect choice as a partner to develop both the road car as well as the race car. Certainly in my career, this is the first time I can remember where we're actually developing both cars in parallel.

Will it win?

Larry Holt, motorsports technical director, Multimatic: We've done everything we can technically to make this car win. We'd be crazy to say that it's going to win, because there are so many other factors when you go racing. But when it comes down to the technical basis of what we're racing, then we have a race-winning car. Between Ford and ourselves at Ganassi, we've developed the race car with the road car to take advantage of doing it in parallel. While we were doing it – a globally homologated road car – we also had the FIA rulebook open so we were able to take every advantage we could to make a competitive race car. And it does look the nuts... In this particular case, form follows function and the beauty is in the performance.

How closely linked are the road and race cars?

George Howard-Chappell, programme manager, Multimatic: When we did the road car, we designed an aero road car from the beginning. So having that to turn into a race car has helped my job enormously. It is a very special road car – you will have to be very close to your passenger though...

Dave Pericak: EcoBoost is one of the smartest technologies that we've got – improving fuel economy across the group, from a 1-litre engine to this new 3.5-litre unit that will be in the GT and the new Raptor truck. We can get more than 600 horsepower out of this six-cylinder engine with very good fuel efficiency.

What challenges do the GTE rules present?

George Howard-Chappell: In terms of fuel economy, our car should do the numbers – but you don't really know until you're out there with your rivals. In the GTE class, the fuel capacity is adjusted so that every car can do the same number of laps, and the restrictor from the refuelling tank is adjusted so you do the refill in the same amount of time. So the advantage of a fuel-efficient engine lies in not having so much fuel – and therefore weight – in the car.

What you want, because of Balance of Performance rules, is a car that's very easy to drive in all conditions, and is easy on its tyres. That's where you can make a difference in the car. If everybody is doing their job properly and the administrators have balanced the performance – they want everyone to drive around at the same pace so they get a close finish – the difference comes down to racecraft in the drivers, in making the car easy to drive, and being easy on the tyres.

To make a racing car easy to drive you have to have a very insensitive aero platform. So as the car moves around, the forces don't change very much. You don't want the aero forces going all over the place. You want a nice low centre of gravity. You want the power to arrive in a nice smooth way and you want the weight distribution perfect for the tyres. Then after that you're into geometry, whether the power steering works properly, whether the car is stiff enough, and whether the wheels do the right thing when the car is loaded up.

The design criteria for the car was that it had to be beautiful but functional and purposeful. A mixture of them all. Ford Design was involved in the intimate details of how the car looked – it wasn't purely an aero thing.

How did you decide on the drivers?

Dave Pericak: We believe these guys are the best. You know, we didn't have a shortage of drivers who wanted to drive the car – that's a good problem to have – but being good is only one part of the equation. We look for the right guys; guys that can contribute in a group; guys that can dig deep. We're honoured to have these four.

George Howard-Chappell: The primary reasons for choosing the drivers is speed and experience – definitely Le Mans experience. You could grab someone out of an F3.5 car and they'd be super-quick, but they've not driven in a team before and they may be very single-minded.

Driving the Ford GT...

Marino Franchitti: I'm massively proud to be part of Ford's attack on the WEC, and to take the GT back to Le Mans. It's incredible – it goes even better than it looks. The first time I drove it I didn't want to get out of the car. To be part of the ground-up development, it's a real privilege.

Stefan Mücke: It's a great car in every detail – and I can't wait to feel it in a race. We are here for winning – we want to win the WEC and we want to win Le Mans. Our engineers have given us a great car so it's now up to us to get the most out of it.

Olivier Pla: It's a huge honour for me to represent Ford – the Ford GT is a very special car and it is a privilege for me to drive it. The level of competition is going to be incredibly high in the WEC and I can't wait to race. Personally, as a Frenchman, lining up at Le Mans as a Ford GT driver will be something very special.

Andy Priaulx: Ford and Chip Ganassi don't go racing for fun, which means this car has absolutely everything we need. Winning Le Mans is a big challenge, a lot of things can get in the way, but these guys have given us the tools. With all manufacturers it's about working as a team, and partnering each other through tough times. And being able to fully do the job when the pressure's on. So we have

**'ON A TECHNICAL BASIS,
THE GT IS A RACE-WINNER'**



Top: GT road car was developed alongside the race version (right). **Above:** the drivers (from left): Olivier Pla, Stefan Mücke, Andy Priaulx and Marino Franchitti

INSIDE THE GT

'ARE YOU SERIOUS? ARE YOU actually asking me that question?'

I feel a little sheepish. 'Well, it might have been a bit stressful given the short amount of time...' I offer by way of a chastised line of reasoning.

In a mollifying tone Amko Leenarts tells me that, yes, it was a huge amount of fun designing the interior of the Ford GT.

Until now, the cockpit has been the only significant unknown element of the road-going GT's design. We are walking down a long concrete corridor in the bowels of Ford's Dearborn, Michigan, design HQ on our way to see some of the mood boards and drawings that led to the final design. We walk past shelves

with polystyrene casts of wheels and body panels. A large stack of white foam lies waiting to be cut, and just beyond it is a totally nondescript brown door. Behind it, however, is a windowless room where the GT was plotted. Only 12 people had a key to this door during the 15 months the car took to come to life. The other 600 employees here at Dearborn knew nothing.

'Such was the secrecy,' says Leenarts, 'that much of the early work was actually done in a studio in London, well away from here.' Like the rest of the car, the interior's form was heavily influenced from the outset by the intention of racing and winning at Le Mans. The first example of this is how close the driver and passenger sit. It's Elise—snug between the seats and this was needed to maximise the exterior teardrop

shape of the glasshouse, which gives the desired aero efficiency that Ford hopes will pay dividends on the Mulsanne Straight. The seats are fixed (although the back rests tilt a small amount) like in a LaFerrari, with the pedals and steering wheel able to move a huge 200mm to allow for different heights of driver.

The snug confines of the cabin dictated the striking steering wheel, too. Leenarts explains that the range of adjustment in the column meant there could be no stalks, so controls were moved to the wheel. It looks much more crowded with buttons than a Ferrari wheel, but then it is very small – just 340mm in diameter, and with a flattened top and bottom reducing the size further. 'A normal steering wheel just looked *huge*,' says Leenarts. There are real touches of beauty, too – I love the finned circular

switch that changes between the driving modes and echoes the car's rear lights in its design.

Other restrictions? Well, Leenarts wasn't allowed a central air vent, so the solution was to build pairs of vents into the doors, which has ended up looking pleasingly dramatic. Leenarts confesses that this isn't a car for carrying golf clubs in either, as there is only the bare minimum luggage space required by the racing rulebook.

The designers might have worked in harmony with the engineering team, but the more you hear about the performance goals and racing aims that constrained Leenarts and Chris Svensson (the Brit in charge of the GT's design), it really does make the stunning looks of the new Ford GT all the more impressive.

Henry Catchpole

to deliver time-in time-out, and it demands full commitment from the drivers, the engineers, the team managers – everybody. Particularly in a 24-hour race, the pressure is intense – the concentration required is immense in the dark, in the rain, in any adverse weather.

Finally, how can you convince *evo* readers that the Thrill of Driving is still important to Ford?

Dave Pericak: Look at the products coming out of Ford for a start, but when you look at a car like this you know that the people who built it love it. And I truly believe that a car is a reflection of those who created it – you can't generate something like this unless you have the passion. Because the passion has to go through every decision you have to make with a car like this. This car is made by men and women who go home at weekends and wrench on stuff in their own garages, then come back on Monday with ten things that we should do. This is how passionate they are. ❌

EVO COMMENT

Away from the gravel stages of the World Rally Championship, Ford's most recent on-track motorsport activities haven't delivered the results to back up the investment and the PR machine's enthusiasm. It took Red Bull, via Jaguar, to make Jackie Stewart's plan for Ford's F1 dominance to work.

The focus on sportscar racing in the WEC and IMSA not only returns the company to the sport where it has celebrated some of its most famous successes, but in terms of growth and credibility, sportscar racing is enjoying a

renaissance and a growing following. It's engaged with its audience and celebrates innovation.

The attraction of being able to communicate a technology transfer from track to road is one of the biggest draws – look at what it has done for Audi in terms of diesel tech and even laser headlights. Beating Porsche, Aston Martin, Corvette and Ferrari is a marketing team's dream. Racing in front of over a million engaged car buyers in some of the world's most famous races (Daytona, Sebring and Le Mans) is where opinions are formed and reputations built. Ford coined the phrase 'Win on Sunday, sell on Monday'; the new GT will be the biggest test of this philosophy. **Stuart Gallagher**



BILL SHEPHERD MUSTANG



Bill Shepherd Mustang are proud to announce their appointment as the Shelby American Mod-Shop franchise for the UK and Europe. All Shelby packages can be fitted under license at our Byfleet premises and we offer a full vehicle post registration upgrade to official Shelby status – complete with Shelby Chassis number and entry in the Shelby World Registry. The Shelby GT Mustang is offered in a two stage package of [a] suspension, brakes, wheels/tyres, exhaust, aero/appearance and interior and [b] power upgrade by Supercharging to 670hp. All components used are approved and tested by Ford - substantially enhancing what is already a great car and creating an outstanding but daily practical supercar.

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KNOW YOUR ENEMY



The Mazda MX-5 has no direct rivals, but there are plenty of alternative options in its price bracket. We pit it against three contemporaries and one used wildcard to find out where it slots into the hierarchy of driving thrills

by ADAM TOWLER

PHOTOGRAPHY by GUS GREGORY



Right: Caterham Seven takes 'lightweight' to a greater extreme than even the Mk4 MX-5; at 540kg it weighs just over half what the Mazda does

BACK WHEN WEARING LEATHER DRIVING gloves was acceptable, and print ads drew a direct link between purchasing an ageing, home-grown sports car and your success rate with the opposite sex, this group test would have been a breeze to organise. A call to the press offices of most British car manufacturers would have extracted a simple, archaic two-seater with its roots in the post-war export drive. Up the budget slightly and there would have been something sublime but eternally trying from Norfolk, or a model from any number of tiny, independent manufacturers offering lightweight sports cars for road and weekend competition use. Look overseas and Italy was a proud exponent of the breed, and there were plenty of other numbers to dial in the industry contacts book. If one wanted an affordable performance car 50 years ago, by and large, one bought a sports car.

So what happened? Fashions changed, cars changed. The hot hatch arrived and offered performance *and* practicality on a budget. It took relative minnow Mazda, in 1989, to remaster the sports car concept, and in doing so it carved an admittedly niche market of its own. This leaves *evo* with something of a conundrum: with what do you compare the new, Mk4 MX-5?

This is what we've come up with: three similarly priced, small sporting vehicles, and as for our used fourth choice... well, we'll come to that particular hot potato in a moment.

Nevertheless, these comparisons should each probe the MX-5's proposition, exposing weaknesses, validating strengths, and most of all putting the new Mazda into some kind of context.



Caterham Seven 270S

Round one: let's begin with a real sports car. If the Caterham's nose box could morph, cartoon-like, into a sneer, you sense the arrival of the Mazda would have its snout twisted pompously in derision. 'Call yourself a real sports car?' it spits with indignation from that chunky, exposed side-exit mouthpiece. 'How can you be a real sports car when to raise the roof is almost instant and leaves your fingernails intact?'

Despite its burning, acid-green paint, this Seven is the recently launched entry-point of the Ford-powered range, at £23,495 factory built (£3000 less as a kit) and with 135bhp. It can be upgraded to either road-biased 'S' trim or racy 'R' spec. This is an S, which for an additional £2995 brings the oxymoron of 'comfort' seats, plus full weather gear and 14-inch alloy wheels – upgraded again on this particular car to 15-inch items. (Somehow, a Seven not rolling on lightweight, shirt-button-style 13-inch alloys just looks a bit odd, straying slightly off *evo*'s beam into kit-car territory.) It's a milder, kinder Seven on your spine and hair roots, then, but still far out there compared to the MX-5.

The Mazda's chief headache in this sparring contest is that all the



CATERHAM SEVEN 270S

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1595cc **Power** 135bhp @ 6800rpm
Torque 122lb ft @ 4100rpm **Weight** 540kg
Power-to-weight 254bhp/ton **0-60mph** 5.0sec (claimed)
Top speed 122mph (claimed) **Basic price** £26,490



MAZDA MX-5 2.0 SPORT NAV

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc **Power** 158bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 147lb ft @ 4600rpm **Weight** 1000kg
Power-to-weight 161bhp/ton **0-62mph** 7.3sec (claimed)
Top speed 133mph (claimed) **Basic price** £23,105

*‘The Seven is not
so much steered as
altered in trajectory
with a neuron
to contact-patch
interface’*

‘real sports car’ traits it trades on doing well, the Seven rather makes a mockery of. Mazda makes plenty of noise about the directness of the MX-5’s gearshift, and in isolation that’s largely justified, but short of reaching down and seizing the selector forks with my bare hands, it’s hard to imagine how the Caterham’s gearchange could be any more direct. And this is with the five-speed ‘box, not Caterham’s own fabled six-speeder which, in truth, has an even more direct, satisfying action. This Seven’s lever also has very little of the irritating vibration felt through the Mazda’s, a trait it’s tempting to feel has been deliberately left in the Japanese car for faux authenticity.

Mazda will tell you that the new MX-5 has a helm that, and I quote, offers ‘lighter, faster and more precise steering’, with measures that ‘deliver even more direct feedback and feel’ over the previous hydraulic setup. I’d suggest that was rather optimistic on the part of the PR people.

The Seven is not so much steered as altered in trajectory with a neuron to contact-patch interface. More often than not, a tightening of your clench on the wheel is enough to cajole the car to where you want to head. In this company, the MX-5’s rack is monosyllabic, with a sheen

‘The 208 GTi thrives on being thrashed as hard as possible, and it responds in turn’

of escalating electronic resistance that offers virtually no information on the road’s surface and your relationship with it in that instant. Small sports cars live and die by the calibre of their steering, and it hurts to say the new MX-5 is nothing special in this regard.

So the Seven has the MX-5 sewn up for all those earthy, touchy-feely driving attributes. But the Mazda isn’t quite dribbling on the canvas just yet. It may be stating the obvious, but the appeal of the Caterham wanes quickly when any form of mild adversity presents itself. Maybe modern man has gone soft, but when a car passing in the opposite direction flicks up a stone that slices into my forehead and summons a bead of claret, I long for the Mazda’s user-friendliness. The cold, grey conditions conjure up an icy wind that persists in finding every tiny gap down the back of my collar, while my lower body starts to overheat from the proximity of engine, gearbox and exhaust. Basic breathing, especially with the side screens off, is almost impossible at speed.

So it strikes me that if you are going to put up with the downsides, you might as well maximise the thrill and on that basis a feisty Seven 360R is a car I’d happily put up with regularly. And anyway, before long the engine in the 270 feels a bit flat: it’s all about a decent mid-range torque-to-weight ratio, so there’s less of an incentive to rev it, and the



rough burp from the exhaust is hardly musical. The question, then, is more along the lines of whether or not the MX-5 gets close enough in the entertainment stakes while offering vastly more useable, habitable qualities. For most people, even weekend sports car drivers, when compared to a 270S the answer has to be 'yes'.

Peugeot 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport

The tone for this particular contest has been set. Driving to the *evo* office this morning, a light spattering of raindrops on the MX-5's windscreen, the sickly yellow and purple smears of a recent diesel spill meant a roundabout was about to provide considerable material for thought. Naturally, I had already switched the Mazda's ESP system off, as you invariably do, just for giggles.

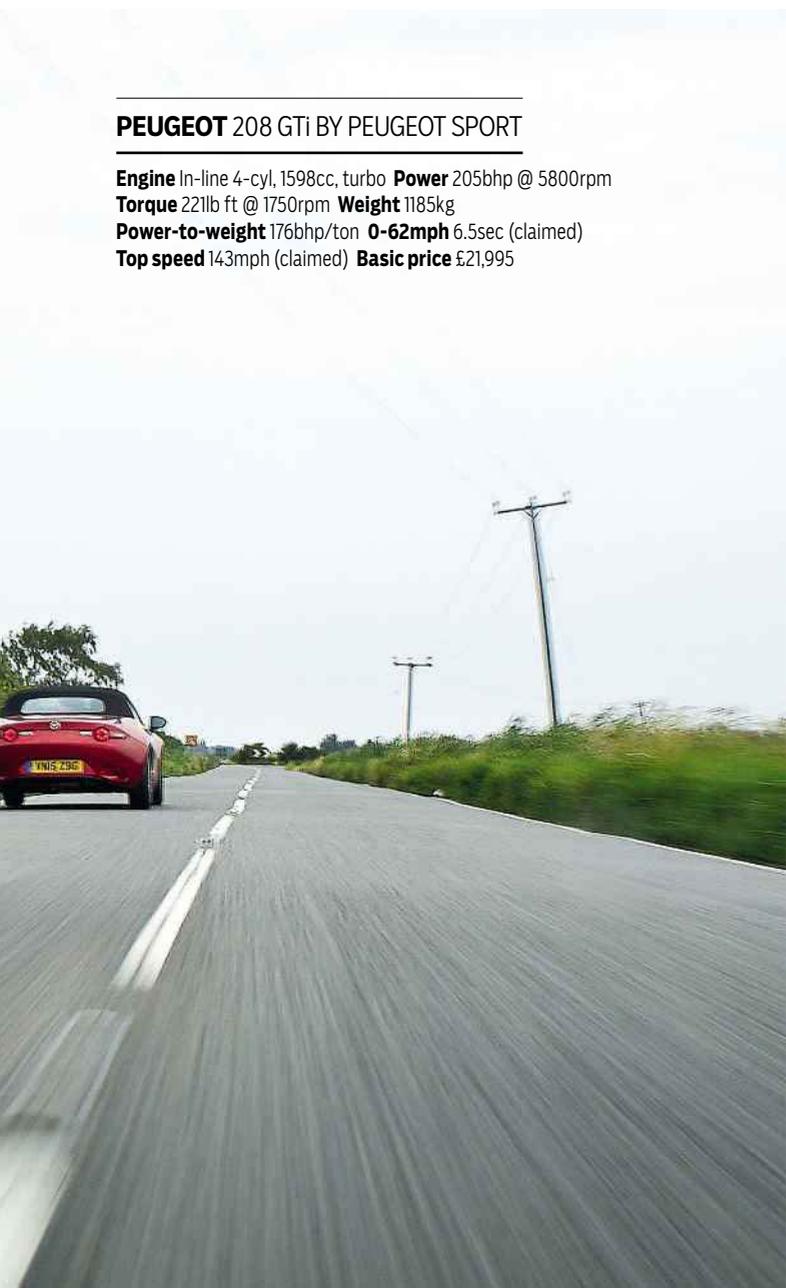
I heard the ensuing slide first – a scudding, shuddering vibration – and felt it through my backside rather than the steering wheel. You can guess the rest. Relieved to be still pointing in the right direction afterwards, I then spent the rest of the journey pondering whether the MX-5 had just torpedoed the 208 GTi below the waterline before the punch-up had even started. This is surely the rear-drive roadster's ace card: you could drive the 208 for ten years but would your heart rate



Above: 208's small steering wheel obscures the dials for some drivers. **Below left:** divisive two-tone 'Coupe Franche' paintjob is optional

PEUGEOT 208 GTi BY PEUGEOT SPORT

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo **Power** 205bhp @ 5800rpm
Torque 221lb ft @ 1750rpm **Weight** 1185kg
Power-to-weight 176bhp/ton **0-62mph** 6.5sec (claimed)
Top speed 143mph (claimed) **Basic price** £21,995



ever spike quite so high as when the MX-5 oversteers under power?

Perhaps against expectation, the 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport has really impressed *evo* so far. See beyond the divisive 'Coupe Franche' paintjob – that's £945, note – and what you're looking at here is a non-limited-edition version of the recent 30th Anniversary special, just based on the facelifted 208. That means the recalibrated chassis tuning, limited-slip differential, 18-inch rims shod with Michelin Super Sport tyres, bigger brakes and all the cosmetic enhancements are carried over, even down to the red floor mats. And all for £21,995, compared to the £23,105 that Mazda wants for the Mazda 2.0 Sport Nav.

I'm concerned this is going to be a bit like trying to judge whether a creamy Red Leicester is better than tangy Cheddar, but here goes anyway. Even now, three years after it was launched, there's still consternation about the Peugeot's Lilliputian steering wheel. Being tall, I find the sight lines fine, but for plenty of people the view of the instrumentation is irritatingly obscured (not that the MX-5 is an example of ergonomic perfection, as the GT86 will expose). The 208 is nicely finished in the main, though, which brings into relief the flyweight build of the MX-5.

First impressions on the move are of a keen car rife with contrasts. The steering ratio is very quick, the ride abrupt in its dealings with even the smallest bump, and while there's no limit to the speed with which cogs can be swapped, the actual shift quality is loosely defined. The familiar 205bhp 1.6-litre turbo engine is a strong-but-silent type, with all the wooden personality of a 1950s Hollywood B-movie extra. It may have instant punch whatever the revs, but it's almost inaudible inside the car, and its linearity of delivery could be construed as dull were it not for the rate in which it gets the 208 moving.

The Mazda initially feels much the more tactile car to drive. It's all about the experience, from the carefully tuned rortiness of the exhaust to the mechanical feel of the gearlever and, most of all, the way the suspension has been set up. The MX-5 has a significant amount of body roll engineered into the suspension to give the average driver the impression of speed. Potter about and it's not an issue, but up the pace and the significant roll rate is at odds with the fast steering, meaning it's easy to overdrive the car. To make quick, clean progress it's essential to be economical with your inputs, but that forces you to drive how the car wants you to drive, and not vice versa.

‘The little Toyota immediately feels right, pivoting around the driver on turn-in’



The 208 has no such qualms. It thrives on being thrashed as hard as possible, and responds in turn, too. Attack badly surfaced roads and sense the dampers really earning their additional crust; lean on the brakes and feel their resistance with no sign of wilting. At last this is a Peugeot hot hatch that appears to have been developed by those who really enjoy driving. It's not perfect, but it is both seriously rapid and a blast. And there's more: lift the throttle when loaded up mid-corner and it'll oversteer like a supermarket trolley with a 12-pack of lager at the rear, albeit without the terminal characteristics of a 205 GTI with a knackered rear beam and period tyres. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

Toyota GT86

This is arguably the bitterest contest of all. It's a curious coincidence that both the consciously back-to-basics mainstream sports cars on the market today hail from Japan. Both preach a similar creed in different tongues: the Mazda with its 'horse and rider as one' analogy, the Toyota with its homage to the simple pleasures of the AE86, drifting, and hardcore Japanese car culture.

The Toyota gets its first blow in early, and hard. After a morning

TOYOTA GT86

Engine Flat-four, 1998cc **Power** 197bhp @ 7000rpm
Torque 151lb ft @ 6400-6600rpm **Weight** 1240kg
Power-to-weight 161bhp/ton **0-62mph** 7.6sec (claimed)
Top speed 140mph (claimed) **Basic price** £22,495

spent wedged into the Mazda with the impression of wearing a stifling pullover one size too small, the GT86's excellent ergonomics are something to savour. OK – ergonomics is a rather dry subject matter, let's be honest, but it's something you'll always appreciate when done well, even if subconsciously. In the GT86 you sit almost on the floor, with the wheel at just the right distance away and the gearlever much the same. It feels small, cosy, and the view out through the narrow windscreen focuses the attention, but somehow there's also plenty of head-, leg- and elbow-room, and the prospect of an eight-hour drive would not hold any fears. That's not something I'd particularly look forward to in the MX-5. Its biggest flaw is a lack of reach adjustment for the wheel, and so as to not drive in a Stirling Moss-style fixed-arm



position I have to move nearer, whereupon my left knee brushes the dashboard. That alone would prevent me from buying an MX-5.

The Mazda isn't down and out though. If you do fit in it, then you've a front row seat to admire an interior design that masks the lightweight build with sharply defined sculpting, an attractive infotainment system and splashes of coloured trim. The GT86 frankly doesn't even make an effort: it's utterly functional, defending its hard, over-square interior by reaffirming to anyone who'll listen that it's a car where such things don't matter. For many, I suspect, they will, day-to-day.

A few miles down in the GT86 and I couldn't care less about its ugly fascia. The coarse, intrusive sound of the 197bhp boxer is endearing if you're being charitable (or just downright rough and unappealing, depending on your viewpoint), and it needs extending into its higher – and noisier – rev range if the car is to feel anything like as fast as you might hope. That's a characteristic it shares with the Mazda's 158bhp 2-litre in-line four-cylinder unit, although the latter is at least a little easier on the ear. However, the Toyota immediately feels right, pivoting around the driver on turn-in, the low centre of gravity from the boxer motor obvious. It matches the Mazda's shift quality, managing to do without the pronounced vibration through the lever, and the steering, while also electrically assisted, is helped by having a vastly stiffer structure within which to work. It has a smoother, more consistent response away from the straight-ahead, and it feels in tune with the chassis setup.

Of the two, it's the Toyota that feels the more genuine behind the wheel. Nevertheless, as we've said before, while the fitment of Prius-spec Michelin Primacy rubber with meagre contact patches sounds like an inspired move, the reality is their eco-centric characteristics aren't always appealing in a car such as this. We know that on a track the GT86 can play the hooligan, but setting a quick lap time is hindered by tyres ill suited to the task. On the road, the paucity of torque through the low- and mid-range means that momentum, certainly in the dry, needs to be brought into play before you'll unstick the rear – something that's rarely possible let alone always desirable. Pushed hard the tyres can blunt the precision of the GT86's fine chassis, and while there is sometimes oversteer at saner speeds, it can feel quite nervous with higher numbers on the dial. Thrown into a dry roundabout it can be annoyingly reluctant to break traction at the rear, but then on another occasion (with the stability system switched off, of course) there's an unnerving, awkward wriggle from the rear axle at the top of third or fourth gear on a damp road and the palms become moist.

In short, a different set of tyres on the Toyota and a new set of springs and dampers on the Mazda would change everything, but even so, it's great to sample what the GT86 can do once again. Given that the 'Primo' model is £22,495, it now has a price in line with its proposition.

Porsche Boxster

Yes, it's a Porsche. Yes, it's a second-hand purchase. Ouch. As direct comparisons go, this is a non-starter. If no one bought new cars, then there'd be no second-hand cars of tomorrow, but of course, in the real world if you have £24,000 to spend on a sports car, then there's an armada of used Boxsters to choose from. And there can't be many **evo** readers who wouldn't give that idea at least a passing thought.

The Boxster highlights three key things about the Mazda. One, that the actual quality of controls – the weighting, the linearity and the relationship each one of those has with the others – is a large part of what separates good cars from great ones. It's not about the price, because a lot of what bears influence on such things is in the fine tuning, the gut feel of the development engineer, which the Boxster evidences in spades. The Mazda not so much. You could argue that the Porsche probably has the more expensive dampers and higher quality brake components, and, of course, it has a hydraulically assisted steering system, which always helps. But there's something about this Boxster



Top: eco tyres are a GT86 weak point.
Left: the Toyota is the closest match for the Mazda in terms of concept; the two also have identical power-to-weight ratios

*‘The Boxster exposes
the sacrifices the MX-5’s
development team had to make
to keep that kerb weight low’*



PORSCHE BOXSTER (987)

Engine Flat-six, 2893cc **Power** 252bhp @ 7200rpm
Torque 214lb ft @ 4400-6000rpm **Weight** 1335kg
Power-to-weight 192bhp/ton **0-62mph** 5.9sec (claimed)
Top speed 163mph (claimed) **Price now** c£24,000



that just works, without gimmicks, in a seamless and intuitive way. The MX-5 can't quite offer that; the gearshift and brake-pedal weighting and action are good news, but the initial roll rate and lack of steering feedback tarnish the overall picture. You can jump into the Porsche and drive it like you've owned it for years, but the Mazda takes longer to really get a handle on. The MX-5 demands you toe its line.

Secondly, the Porsche's 2.9-litre flat-six (this is a 987-generation non-S model) makes the Mazda's long-stroke four-pot seem really average. Now that is to be expected, but this, again, isn't just about pound signs. Think of some great little four-bangers: a Honda B16 VTEC lump, an Alfasud flat-four or the little 1.3-litre short-stroke screamer in a Peugeot 205 or 106 Rallye. They were all available at much more humble prices, all featured only four cylinders, but they were all vivacious, tuneful, deeply special. They were memorable. The Mazda's 2-litre engine makes an effort with some strident induction and exhaust tuning, but in all senses – performance, sound and smoothness – it's fairly ordinary. In this regard it's no match for the shorter-stroke 1.5-litre engine in the entry-level MX-5, which is surprisingly perky in all respects and not to be overlooked.

Thirdly, the Boxster exposes the sacrifices the MX-5's development team had to make to keep its kerb weight low (1000kg in the case of the 2-litre car). I'm not about to compare the two interiors because that would be ludicrous, but it does focus the mind on how the new MX-5 lacks some of the solidity, sound insulation and grown-up feel that later versions of the Mk3 possessed. Naturally we've celebrated the substantial weight loss that Mazda has achieved, and rightly so, for it makes a considerable contribution to the car's zestfulness, but it's worth remembering for a moment that even in the engineering world, there's no such thing as a free lunch.

The 2.9-litre Boxster was a relatively short-lived model, but is something of a forgotten gem. It lacks the firepower and aggression of the S, but the extra torque over the earlier 2.7-litre car is useful and it's not so fast as to feel anti-social. Fast enough to feel potent, though. It does have 252bhp, after all.

This particular car has none of the extra modes and equipment common on a Boxster from the Porsche press fleet, and has a more mellow character compared with the current-generation car. That flat-six is content to whir expensively but soothingly over your shoulders, the throttle response is progressive with an organic feel to the long pedal travel, and the acceleration is purposeful but hardly violent. But the more you drive this car, the more you want to; the more the brain seems to obsess over turning in at exactly the right moment, of nailing that clipping point to the last millimetre, carrying that little bit more speed, wringing that last silky, musical revolution from the engine. How much can you get one of these for again? (Note to self: mustn't get carried away, must remember it's not a new car and it's not fair on the other cars here, must give it back to its owner now. Yes, right now.)

Conclusion

Such is the legacy of the MX-5 that when a new one arrives it feels like a watershed moment in the history of the performance car. Love them or loathe them, you can't deny their popularity or importance, and with its inspiring message of footprint reduction and weight loss, the Mk4 has the sort of ethos many of us have been preaching for years. That it is merely good in the final execution, rather than excellent, leaves a somewhat sour, disillusioned taste in the mouth. I desperately wanted to love this car, to think that it changed, well, everything. But somehow the MX-5 has come up a little short and the other cars here illustrate that succinctly in their own idiosyncratic ways.

It just doesn't feel right to make a six-year-old Porsche a serious element in this conclusion, but I can't deny I'd be seriously tempted if it were my cash being spent. How unfortunate that the 'baby Boxster' project never got the green light: those qualities in a smaller, cheaper package would be dynamite.

The Caterham is, as ever, in its own orbit – an interesting contrast to the others here, but unlike them it would undoubtedly be a second car, for use only when the conditions played to its strengths.

I'd buy the Peugeot or the Toyota over the Mazda, because even before debating the way the MX-5 steers and is suspended, without something as fundamental as reach adjustment for the steering wheel I couldn't live with the driving position. The GT86 has a dynamic head start over the MX-5 because it's a coupe, and while it has shortcomings of its own it's a more enjoyable car to drive. However, there's still a feeling that it's a blank canvas, a starting point for something even better.

The Peugeot, on the other hand, is great just as it is. Not only does it cover all the bases but it gets better the harder you drive it. I don't think many of us have said that about a Pug for a very long time indeed. ❧

With thanks to Mike Runnalls for providing his Boxster for this feature.

Top: used Boxster's cabin is in a different league to the MX-5's



Mazda
ターボパイク箱根



R I S I N G



by HENRY CATCHPOLE
PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

F U N

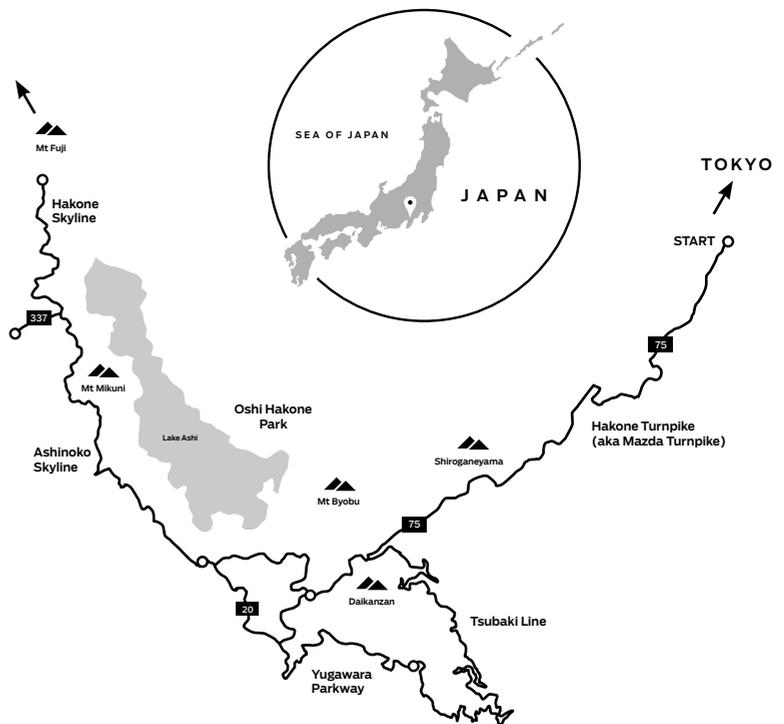
This tollbooth is the entry point to the mountain roads where the cult of drifting was born. We explore them, and the culture that makes these roads so infamous



ONE BIG FILM SET. THAT'S WHAT JAPAN feels like. Everything is so neat, so clean, so very Japanese that it feels like it's come to life from a carefully crafted storyboard. The traffic around us on the motorway is all moving in such a considered, almost polite fashion that I begin to wonder if it is referring to some unseen script. When the lanes drop from two to one, everybody filters perfectly, like a zip. The cars themselves are pristine, with no dents or scrapes in sight, as though they're props only taken out in the dry and then popped back in bubble wrap every night. When we pull into the Ebina Service Area there is a Nismo R35 GT-R and a V-spec R34 parked up, because that's what you'd expect. I really don't think I'd be surprised if Godzilla itself (the lizard, not the eponymous R32) heaved into view on the horizon. If the roads we're aiming for live up to this cinematic fantasy then we'll find ourselves inside *Initial D*, rendered in anime and delivering tofu, before the day is out.

Ten years ago Richard Meaden and Andy Morgan drove out of Tokyo in exactly the same direction as photographer Aston Parrott and I are going. You might wonder why we're heading the same way, given that there are so many fantastic places to explore in Japan, but while Meaden and Morgan investigated the north-westerly end of the famous Hakone roads in a Nissan 350Z (evo 088), they left the south-easterly stretches of the region untouched. So, with time to kill between the Tokyo motor show and another appointment nearby, Aston and I have half-inched a Cayman GTS (lovely, if not the most culturally appropriate set of wheels) and are heading towards Kanagawa Prefecture to see what we can find.

I actually have an idea about what our first destination will reveal because Japanese magazine *Motorhead* (RIP Lemmy, but this wasn't his



gig) held a small hill climb event on a portion of the road in 2014 and the resulting film, which you can see on YouTube, is stunning. After leaving the Tomei Expressway, we're relying on the satnav, which is a slightly baffling JDM device slotted into the hole where the PCM screen usually lives. As we head further into a town, I feel certain that we must be going the wrong way, but the road signs mean nothing to either me or Aston so we have to trust the pictures on the small screen. Just as I feel sure that I've seen the same Nissan garage at least three times, we spear off onto a side road and drive past a big green sign pointing up a steep access ramp hoisted above the ground. 'Welcome to the famous Hakone Turnpike'. The Hayakawa tollgate is not really very picturesque, yet nevertheless there is something attractive about it. The rare Ducati Sport 1000S parked up artfully next to it probably helps. The stage is set.

The nice man in the regulation blue jacket bows slightly and almost reverentially hands me my change through the window of the Cayman (a ticket costs about £5), then we're released onto the turnpike. Built in 1962, it is essentially an 8.6-mile bypass for National Route 1, but it is also the gateway to the famous 'touge' roads where drifting was born, raised and became legend. In 2007 Toyo Tyres took on sponsorship of the road and then in 2014 Mazda took over the naming rights. I've heard it referred to as Japan's Nürburgring, so I'm excited, but my enthusiasm is rather tempered by the knowledge that, unlike the Ring, the turnpike is two-way and there is a 50kph limit (albeit rather loosely enforced, as we'll soon find out).

The gradient is steep initially, but the road is wide and the corners are long. They've stuck to the seemingly Japanese tradition of labelling them in accordance with their radius, so there is everything from a 100R (100-metre radius) up to a 200R. It's strange, because although it's a lovely

Left: Cayman GTS not the most appropriate car for the Hakone Turnpike in cultural terms, but few cars feel as sweet on this quality of tarmac. **Below:** GTS not the only mid-engined German on the Turnpike

'This is the gateway to the roads where drifting was born, raised and became legend'



bit of road it looks like you would have to be travelling ridiculously quickly before it became a real test of car and driver. There are, however, some beautiful stretches, none more so than when the trees part to reveal a perfectly curved red bridge spanning a small valley. I instantly recognise it from a scene in the *Motorhead* film where a 1000bhp drift-spec Rocket Bunny R35 GT-R, smoke pouring from its rear tyres in fifth gear for 100 metres or more, oversteers perfectly across this bridge. The tyre marks are gone now, but I can picture the scene in my mind's eye and, like seeing the Mulsanne straight on a non-race day, it's somehow still impressive.

After a couple of miles we pull into the Goshonoiri car park, a largish area complete with a small fishpond containing some koi carp. This was the makeshift pit area for the hill climb but it's empty today. Aston decides to take a few detail shots of the Cayman while I stretch my legs.

Quietly an Audi R8 slips into the car park and stops a little distance away. It's an early car clothed entirely in black – sideblades, wheels, the lot. It looks fantastic. A mass of immaculately wild hair wearing a white T-shirt and jeans gets out (unsurprisingly it's a left-hand-drive car, as having the wheel on the European side adds kudos in Japan) and walks around to the front of the car where he pops the boot. Aston returns to taking photos and I wander over to talk to the fish. It's all rather peaceful.

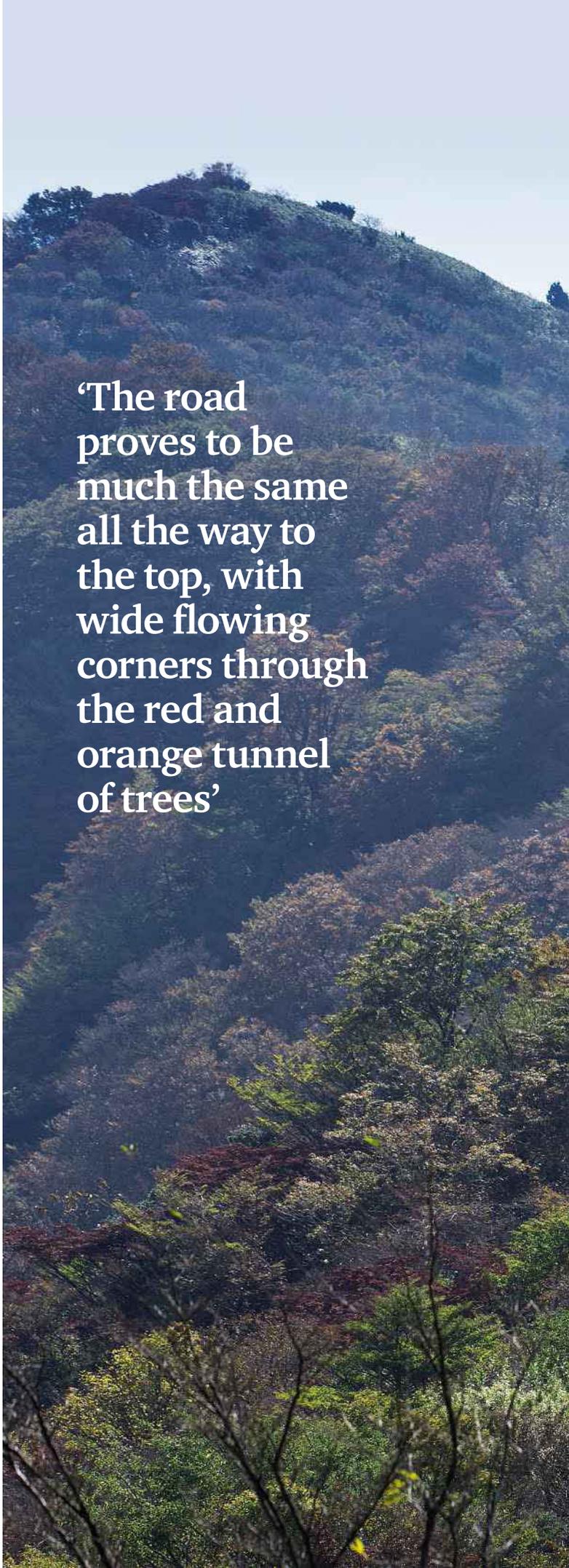
A couple of minutes later I glance back towards the R8 just in time to see the fellow calmly removing the second screw from the front registration plate and putting it all in the boot, leaving a completely blank black nose. Odd. He then drops into the driver's seat, fires up the distinctive 4.2-litre V8 (which it's now obvious is attached to an aftermarket exhaust) and rolls past us before exiting the car park as though he's just reached the end of a pitlane. The fish scatter as in a heartbeat the V8 shatters the previously sepulchral silence, the driver only punching in upshifts once he has squeezed every last rev from each gear. It's such a calmly blatant two-fingered salute at the speed limits that I can't help smiling. Aston and I stand there listening to the fading noise as the R8 attacks the turnpike flat-out, no holds barred. It is one of the coolest things I've ever seen.

After a while we continue up the turnpike, not quite at the same speed but certainly emboldened by the R8's display. The road proves to be much the same all the way to the top, with wide flowing corners through the red and orange tunnel of trees. I imagine it must be equally spectacular when the pink cherry blossom is out, but whatever the time of year, it feels too fast and too broad to be enjoyable unless it was closed to other traffic.

It would be a shame to get rid of the other cars, however, as they are proving as interesting as the road. There is an immaculate 1980s 911 Targa, an Impreza that has had a huge amount of work done, various Skylines and GT-Rs, a couple of MX-5s, another 981 Cayman, an AE86 and various motorbikes. And this is on a quiet mid-week morning in November. A hexagonal restaurant marks the top of the road and provides a viewpoint towards Lake Ashi far below and also along the ridge towards the Skyline roads that run alongside the lake. You can turn round here and go back down the turnpike or you can loiter and look around at the machinery coming and going. It's a bit like the car park on the Döttinger-Höhe straight, but with a better view and noodles rather than bratwurst. Alternatively you can head onwards...

The Mazda Turnpike actually carries on for an extra couple of miles, although you first have to drive along a stretch of normal public road to get to this second section, which winds along under a huge cliff and is still fast and wide. Go through the toll at the end, turn left, then immediately left again and you reach another tollbooth. There is more polite exchanging of yen and, as we drive away, Aston kindly points out that I seem to be mumbling fake Japanese noises in a slightly bumbling British attempt at a respectful response to the smiling tollbooth attendants. I tell him he must have been mistaken and turn the radio up to listen to the dulcet tones of some Teletubbies on a particularly nasty acid trip.

We are now on the Yugawara Parkway toll road descending down and down into a bowl of autumn colours. This stretch is much more suited to



‘The road proves to be much the same all the way to the top, with wide flowing corners through the red and orange tunnel of trees’



CAYMAN GTS IN JAPAN



‘The Yugawara Parkway toll road’s surface is rough and pitted, but the corners are just that bit tighter and suit the Cayman’



Above: the Fuji View cafe's colourful diary of cars that have scaled the Ashinoko. **Right and below right:** car park is home to pure evo cars. **Bottom right:** musical tarmac ahead, obviously





the Cayman. The surface is pitted and rough but the corners are just that bit tighter and more closely linked, requiring second and third rather than third, fourth and fifth. It plays to the Cayman's strengths of beautiful poise and is a reminder that while the GT4 is taking all the headlines, the GTS is still a wonderful thing. As the road plunges onwards into the trees the standard steel brakes are getting a serious workout but thankfully don't appear to be wilting. We don't see another car in the 3.5-mile length of the road and it feels much wilder and more remote than the Mazda Turnpike, so I feel much happier driving quickly here, enjoying the lovely six-speed 'box and listening to the sports exhaust with the windows down.

At the bottom of the road there's a small village where we turn left. This loops us back up to the viewpoint restaurant via the Tsubaki Line, which *Initial D*-legend has it is the home course of Sidewinder. Despite the yellow stripe down the middle it feels fiendishly narrow, and after the Turnpike and Parkway it seems like we're on a sliding scale of serpentine, with this the most tortuously twisting yet. The vegetation either side is dense and crowds in tightly to the side of the road, adding to the tunnel-like feel.

We pop back out at the top of the ridge behind a second-generation Daihatsu Copen and this time we carry on past the Mazda Turnpike, heading instead for the famous Ashinoko Skyline. There is yet another tollgate and I remember to remain tight-lipped as I hand over the money, but as we drive away Aston, almost in tears, points out that I have replaced faux-Japanese mumbling with repeatedly bowing very slightly instead.

Just up the road we stop briefly at the Fuji View cafe to get some coffee and chocolate and admire the huge wall of car photos that have been snapped outside over the years. It seems everything from a 1950s MG TF to various modern Ferraris have visited. Despite not having a sponsor, Ashinoko Skyline has more of the same commercial polish found on the Mazda Turnpike, but yet again it is distinct in character from all the other roads we've driven so far. Rising and falling as it tracks the ridge,

it is perhaps the most beautiful road yet and much of it is great to drive if you ignore the 40kph speed limit, as plenty of people seem to be doing. Sadly, however, there is a fly in the ointment. Pretty much any corner that looks like it might once have been a prime location for a clutch kick and some opposite lock is painted with thick red lines that act like mini speed bumps. Even the Cayman's PASM hasn't got a chance of smoothing them out so you're forced to trickle round, jiggling like you've flat-spotted every Pirelli. Dorift-no.

There is one part of the road where you very definitely want to drive slowly, however, and it's so that you can hear the music. Not the bizarre stuff on Aston's iPod, or even the yowl of the 3.4-litre flat-six, but the music from the road. You see, there is a short stretch of tarmac that has been laid specifically so that tyres hum loudly at varying tonal pitches as they go over it. Much like some sections of the M25. If you drive at a steady 40kph then the theme tune from an animated Japanese television series called *Neon Genesis Evangelion* drifts hauntingly on the breeze. It's rather fun. The tune is apparently called 'The Cruel Angel's Thesis', which makes me think it is slightly more sophisticated than *Thundercats*.

We drive up and down the Ashinoko Skyline a few times, stopping to take photos, and as the sun comes out and Mount Fuji appears to the north-west it is an undeniably lovely place to be. A Honda SP-2 plies back and forth, getting progressively quicker as it nails the lines through a particularly good (unpainted) section. We meet the owner of a rather nice Lotus Exige, complete with a removable steering wheel and some excellent carbon bucket seats that are much better than the standard items (I swap him a sit in the Porsche for a sit in the Lotus). But although we're having a jolly nice day, there is also a feeling that it's all a bit controlled, like these toll roads are now museum pieces or tame theme park rides. They might once have been the illicit home of drifting, but it seems to have moved out some time ago.

CAYMAN GTS IN JAPAN



WITH TIME RUNNING OUT, THERE IS JUST ONE MORE ROAD

I want to try. Originally when I was planning our adventure on Google Maps, back in the office 6000 miles away, I had thought we might drive over to Fuji Speedway, and although there isn't time for that today, I still want to have a look at the road that would have taken us there: prefectural road 337. If I wasn't looking for it there is no way I would have found it because the entrance is disguised by trees and a lay-by cunningly masks the tarmac's flow from the main road into this backwater. As the Cayman noses down the steep incline over rough tarmac, the thoughts scudding across my mind are all saying that this is a mistake. Only the narrowness of the road and a nagging curiosity mean we decide to push on until there's somewhere wider where we can shuffle out a three-point turn.

The light seems to dim as we descend further into the autumnal patchwork. Then, abruptly, it begins: dark tyre marks scrawled all across the surface of the road. We drive on, marvelling at the almost blanket coverage in places. At times the lines seem to have been scribed in unison, but elsewhere the strands separate like spaghetti picked apart. Then it stops. Guillotined in full flow. We continue on to check, but it's clearly just those couple of kilometres that have been used. It's like flicking through an apparently blank new notebook only to discover that the middle few pages have been vividly attacked by a three-year-old with a crayon.

We eventually turn round and head back to the hallowed stretch, parking up after a few corners to walk the 'track' and inspect the artwork. The road is almost gallery quiet, adding to the reverential air with which we inspect the scene. Framed by the tall, thin trunks of the trees, there is a beautiful flow to the lines. The white Armco scribes one clean stripe up the road with the tarmac following it more broadly. Overlaid on this are the tyre marks, which seem to curve in unison with the asphalt at points but then exaggerate or even contradict the natural radii of the road.

Kneeling down to inspect the surface more closely, it's clear the tarmac



'You can't help but have respect for whoever the tarmac tattoo artists are'

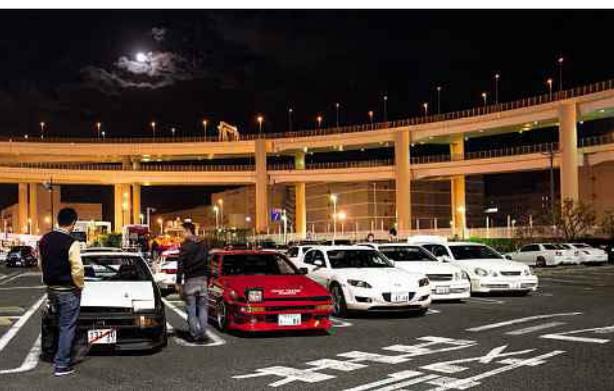
is covered with more rubber than a gimp in mating season. I feel like an Indian, tracking the path of individual cars, noting where one has transitioned earlier than the others, or where another has run wide, the black marks arcing into the contrasting white paint on the road's edge. The thickness of the rubberisation visibly builds and recedes through the corner where the drivers have worked the throttle to provoke, sustain and rein in the slides. You can almost hear the fluctuations in engine note, big-bore exhaust roaring loudly in the confined space, building, plateauing, dying with a dump-valved *tchieww!* then repeating over and over.

Of course I can't resist a quick run up the road in the Cayman with the PSM turned off. The road feels even narrower from behind the wheel and you can't help but have respect for whoever the tarmac tattoo artists are. There is a helpfully positioned convex mirror on the outside of each switchback, which is nice, and although the long gearing and slightly timid limited-slip diff aren't natural aids to drifting, the Cayman is pleasingly willing to throw some shapes on the corners. As we already know, it is a beautifully balanced chassis, and there is a nice sense of how the grip is ebbing, so that you can really make the most of the 280lb ft of torque. Push the nose in hard, wait for the right moment, then be aggressive with





Above: Tokyo's twisting, concrete-walled suburban toll roads are almost mesmerising. **Below:** car meets in Tokyo's docks bring together all manner of different machinery and tastes; police present to check the cars are legal



the throttle, confident that you can hold the slide into the camber of the uphill bend. It's great fun but a little bit of me can't help lusting after a tatty 200SX with a drift diff and a big bar.

With the light fading, Aston packs up and we head back to the ridge to begin the two-hour journey back to Tokyo. I'm much happier than I was a few hours earlier, though. I had feared that the drifting that brought fame to these roads in Fuji's shadow had been eradicated. But it's clear from this small side road that while it might have been forced to vacate the famous touges, its underground heart still beats up here near Hakone.

USUALLY THAT WOULD BE IT. CREDITS ROLL. BUT ONE OF the most exciting bits of driving actually comes on the way back into the fluorescent firework of a metropolis that is Tokyo. Driving in foreign countries, and particularly their large cities, is always exciting, and nowhere is this more true than Japan. The expressways that carry us through the suburbs are toll roads, but somewhat different to the ones we've been on in the mountains. Soaring above the rest of the city's streets on concrete stilts or diving beneath them through tunnels, the Tomei and Shuto Expressways are marvels of engineering. These tributaries of traffic are slim dual carriageways, closely boxed in by concrete walls. The further you head into the city, the more they seem to twist and turn like an increasingly wild rollercoaster, meaning you often have a relatively short and narrow field of vision. Despite this the traffic flows at a remarkably rapid rate; cars, motorbikes and small lorries all slicing neatly around each other as vehicles dip in and out of the stream via the short entry and exit ramps. I'm pleased that the Cayman feels small and easy to place.

At night it is mesmerising with the headlights and taillights rushing through the darkness. We drop down into a tunnel where the walls are painted with huge arrows as it curves sharply left, then we turn back right while rising to the surface and dashing between the twinkling facades of the adjacent skyscrapers. It feels impossible not to link it inextricably with video games like *Wipeout* and suddenly I'm 14 years old and back in front of my friend Chris's original Sony PlayStation.

Dive off the expressway and things become even more bamboozling. Roadworks are lit up with more lurid flashing lights than a dozen fruit machines all dispensing jackpots and your eyes swim as you try to see past the vibrant miasma. Stumble into one of the busier districts and even on a quiet Tuesday evening it looks like Oxford Street during the Christmas sales. Stop at the traffic lights on one of the major junctions and such is the sheer number of bodies swarming over the multiple zebra crossings that it looks more like a murmuration of starlings than a crowd of people.

Later on we head out to the docks and Daikoku Futo, where beneath a huge helter-skelter of a motorway junction, cars of every shape and size gather for impromptu meets. There is a Lexus with serious stance, a gorgeous track-spec NSX, a pair of Truenos with single headlights popped up and a Ferrari 360 with LEDs and a paintjob that definitely wasn't sanctioned by the Maranello fashion police. Talking of which, a vast convoy of cops swoops in about half an hour after we arrive, blocking the exits and setting up a mobile MOT station. It feels rather exciting and I've never seen so many ride-heights altered or exhausts muffled so quickly.

The famous roads that we went looking for, then, are good, but like the movie's lead character that finds love in an unexpected place, the car culture in Japan is what's been even more fascinating. You might think that we catch glimpses of it in the UK with the GT-R and Type R tribes, but there is so much more to it than that, evinced by the sheer variety of machinery that we've seen today. The mixture of home-bred shapes and European cars, expensive and humble, all cared for, tweaked and fettled with enthusiasm is endlessly captivating. Some of the mods are for performance, others are for show, but it's all done with pride. And it's nice to know that when no one's looking there are still some that are prepared to head up into the hills and use the side windows as windscreens. ☒



PORSCHE CAYMAN GTS

Engine Flat-six, 3436cc **Power** 335bhp @ 7400rpm **Torque** 280lb ft @ 4750-5800rpm **Weight** 1345kg
Power-to-weight 253bhp/ton **0-62mph** 4.9sec (claimed) **Top speed** 177mph (claimed) **Basic price** £55,397

evo rating: ★★★★★



It's

in





the



genes

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

We've all heard the marketing spiel; now it's time to find out just how robust the link between supercars and their track-only brethren really is. Step forward the multi-faceted Porsche 911...

W

WIN ON SUNDAY, SELL ON MONDAY.

Racing improves the breed. Just thought I'd get those out of the way early so they don't creep into the story a little later by accident. Anyway, welcome to the EuroSpeedway Lausitz, or Lausitzring, located 130km south of Berlin, deep in former East Germany. We're here to corroborate, or not, all those 'race car for the road' headlines that hover above the Porsche 911 GT3 and GT3 RS on magazine covers the world over. To do this we have those celebrated hardcore road-going 911s, some real racing cars, a data logger and a couple of factory Porsche racing drivers. Oh, and I'll drive all the cars to see if I can feel strands of DNA stretching between our beloved GT3s and the racers we like to imagine are the same save for a fire extinguisher, full roll-cage and a sequential gearbox.

This is serious business. Or it should be. But seeing the clean, precise lines of a GT3 parked alongside the strakes, swollen bodywork and the great plank of carbonfibre that makes up the GT3 RS's rear wing in a sun-soaked pitlane can't help but raise a giggle. Then, on display inside one of the pit garages, there's a 1973 2.7 RS, tiny and perfect in Light Yellow, beside it a mighty Martini-stamped RSR to remind us of the 911's unique heritage and how the link between road and track has always been key to its appeal and shaped its evolution.

If things weren't tantalising enough already, the latest 991 GT3 Cup and a GTE-spec (Le Mans and WEC) 991 RSR are warming up side-by-side in the next pit garage. The flat-sixes aren't tuneful, each emitting a hard, fast blare of furious energy and an occasional and painful *wap-wap-wap* – as the engineers bring everything up to temperature. Whilst they do so we're given a brief rundown of the format. Jörg Bergmeister will be setting definitive times in each car and then I'll get my chance to



Above: the GT3 and GT3 RS represent the road-going contingent of today's driving. Very little beats either on the road, but how do they compare to their liveried siblings?

drive – the GT3 and GT3 RS in the fastest ducks-and-drakes laps in history behind Nick Tandy (you may know him; won a race in France last year for Porsche) and the GT3 Cup and RSR all alone save for the eyes and ears of the team and the ridiculously talented factory drivers watching in the pitlane.

GT3 and GT3 RS

You can absorb all the numbers, stand agog at the sheer size of the GT3 RS's rear tyres and its front track, you can understand completely that this is a GT3 taken to an unprecedented extreme, and yet until you drive a GT3 and GT3 RS back-to-back it's very hard to imagine just how successful a metamorphosis has taken place. Better still, drive them in convoy behind Nick Tandy absolutely on the limit in a 991 Turbo S showing you the perfect



line. This seems to sometimes involve ploughing through guidance apex cones and exiting corners well beyond the kerbs, kicking up dust, with half a turn of corrective lock. I can almost see his grin wrapping around the back of his head.

For the first few laps I'm directly behind that dancing Turbo S in the GT3, the RS following my lead and driven by a simian former colleague recently confirmed as one of the new *Top Gear* hosts. I know I've got my work cut out as the RS has the edge in every department: the GT3's 3.8-litre flat-six produces 468bhp at 8250rpm and 324lb ft at 6250rpm to the RS's 4-litre unit with 493bhp and 339lb ft. My car is also 10kg heavier, at 1430kg, despite using a narrower shell and hence running narrower tracks front and rear by 36mm and 2mm respectively (the RS actually runs a wider front track than rear by 30mm). In terms of contact patch,

it's also at a disadvantage, the GT3 running 20-inch 245-section and 305-section Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres to the RS's 265- and 325-section tyres, the rears of which utilise a 21-inch rim. Add to that the huge aero advantage of the RS and the result seems inevitable...

The Turbo S ahead fires out of corners and just hauls away on the straights, but I can drive right up to its rear bumper under braking, turn in just a shade faster and keep in touch over the course of a lap. Not that it matters. The GT3 is such fantastic fun: its engine is possessed of reach, soundtrack and instantaneous response and its chassis alive to my every input. The brakes (optional ceramics) are fantastic, too. It feels so hooked-up, so sharp, and yet fluid and forgiving. I'm having a great time, until I look in the rear-view mirror to find the RS about 3mm behind and obviously impatient to get past. So



I try a bit harder; the GT3 starts to slide into understeer on turn-in and through the long corners in particular the RS is clearly being held up hugely. 'Was that me or the car?' jokes our small friend back in the pitlane. If a car could sulk, the GT3 would have slumped shoulders and wear a scowl. I adopt the pose in sympathy.

The next few laps thankfully prove it *was* the RS's brilliance that made the difference. This time I'm following the GT3 and the RS I'm in just has more grip, much better turn-in and superior traction. It eats up the GT3 so easily that I can back off maybe 15 car lengths and then recover the gap within two or three corners. The way you can lean on the front tyres is remarkable, and that neutral mid-corner balance allows you earlier access to full throttle as the car refuses to wash into understeer. It's an edgier experience, more likely to snap sideways than bleed away from the apex, nose first, but the RS clean blows the GT3 away.

Bergmeister's laps serve to highlight the differences. The GT3 records a 1:31.99 to the RS's 1:30.61 around this 2.1-mile circuit. The speed trace shows the RS eking out time relentlessly. It hits 151.4mph to the GT3's 147.2mph along the start/finish straight – an illustration not just of its greater acceleration but also superior traction away from the very tight final chicane. From here the advantage just grows. Into Turn 1 the RS carries more speed and is 3.1mph faster at the slowest point. Jörg is faultlessly smooth out of each corner, showing that the GT3 too has exceptional traction, but the RS's strong front grip, bigger contact patches and better aero mean it's faster into every corner and

can use its power advantage to good effect on the way out. Through the long left hairpin off the banking and the following long, tightening-radius right-hander it's devastating. Just as my laps in the cars suggested, the GT3 is fighting the onset of understeer here, whereas the RS is balanced, composed and driving forwards.

GT3 Cup and 911 RSR

They're just like the road cars. I keep repeating it like a mantra whilst circling the GT3 Cup and the beautifully distended form of the RSR, but of course the nerves won't dissipate. Not for a second. However, for once I don't care if I stall or potter around at an embarrassing pace. For somebody who loves the 911, an opportunity to drive a factory racing car with 'RSR' stickers lightly applied to its engine cover is akin to a devout Christian breaking bread with Jesus Christ. The slower I go, the longer it'll last. I can live with that.

Like the GT3 and RS, this pairing doesn't seem so dissimilar on paper. Both use the revered Mezger engine rather than the new DFI engine of the road cars, the GT3 Cup running a 3.8-litre version with 453bhp at 7500rpm and the RSR running a 4-litre unit restricted to around 464bhp. (The GT3 R, which sits between the Cup and the GTE-class RSR in the GT3 category, has now switched to the DFI engine and there are rumours the RSR may even go turbocharged.) Both run a six-speed paddle-operated sequential 'box and weigh around 1200kg. However, look beyond the bald figures and you'll discover they're very different animals.

Above: Porsche's GT3 Cup car (right) runs in the F1-supporting Supercup series, while the formidable RSR competes at the sharp end of international sportscar racing



The GT3 Cup really is closely related to the road cars – essentially it's a GT3 that's been stripped, fitted with racing dampers (non-adjustable), an uprated braking system, a six-speed sequential dog 'box, safety equipment, lightweight panels, aerodynamic modifications and slick tyres. It costs from £148,800 (including a £6240 spares package). The RSR is something else: a full works car built not to compete in a controlled one-make series but to race head-to-head with the best GT racing cars in the world. Delve into the details and it's so much more sophisticated. It runs a more refined pneumatic-shift 'box, the front suspension is by double wishbones rather than MacPherson struts and the RSR features four-way adjustable Multimatic dampers all-round. The electronics are far more advanced and provide detailed information to the team over the course of an endurance race. It also generates more downforce, features more carbonfibre bodywork, runs wider tyres and bigger brakes. The factory drivers simply describe it as 'a proper racing car' and it costs around £750,000. Proper money.

The GT3 Cup feels like an authentic racing car to me, but also an authentic 911. Like with all racing cars, the first moments are a mixture of blind panic and sweaty intimidation: you sit low and can barely see out, the car resonates with the hard-edged flat-six, you want to take in the information on the electronic display ahead but it feels like a tangle of numbers and colours. Yet pretty soon the Cup starts to feel like a natural progression from the road-going GT3. It has the same defining traction, similar throttle response and the noise is even

purier. The way it ingests each gear is now tinged with a wicked hint of violence. It's simply fantastic and the steering feel and braking performance is astonishing, although I'm mindful that there's no ABS and so don't jump on the middle pedal too bravely.

Those 911 traits still hold true in the RSR but everything is exaggerated and refined to such an extent that it simply feels more polished, almost effortlessly deconstructing the track with its amazing combination of agility and rock-solid composure. One real point of difference with the RSR is that the steering is very, very light, but I find that suits the car's incredible response, the energy that zings through the drivetrain and the almost serenely controlled chassis.

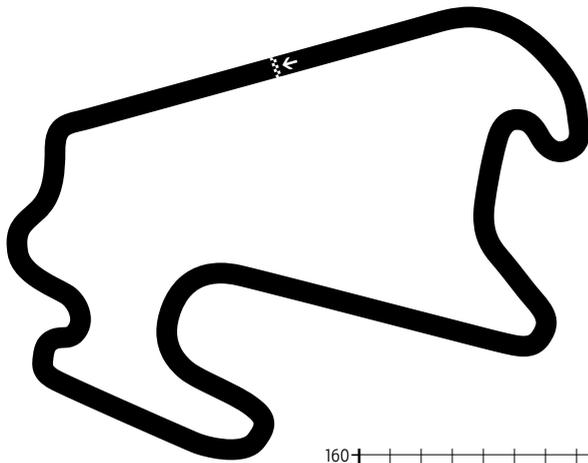
The RSR has a marginally longer wheelbase than the GT3 Cup. It's also wider and the wheels are 12.5 inches wide at the front compared to the Cup's 10.5-inches (in fact the front wheels of the RSR are wider than the rears on the GT3 Cup). Coupled to the more sophisticated suspension and dampers, the result is a chassis that loves to change direction. You turn and it just fires into the corners and the traction capabilities actually make you laugh. 'Surely I can't give it everything *here*,' I ponder earlier and earlier at each successive corner. Then I pin the throttle and it fires out of the turn, the engine spinning so freely and the gearbox more seamless and faster than even the twin-clutch unit of the road cars. Unbelievable. The RSR – at least at the speeds I can achieve – is just the sweetest thing.

Jörg seems to feel the same, suggesting that the Cup car still very much needs time to adapt to whereas the

'Soon the Cup starts to feel like a natural step on from the GT3 road car'

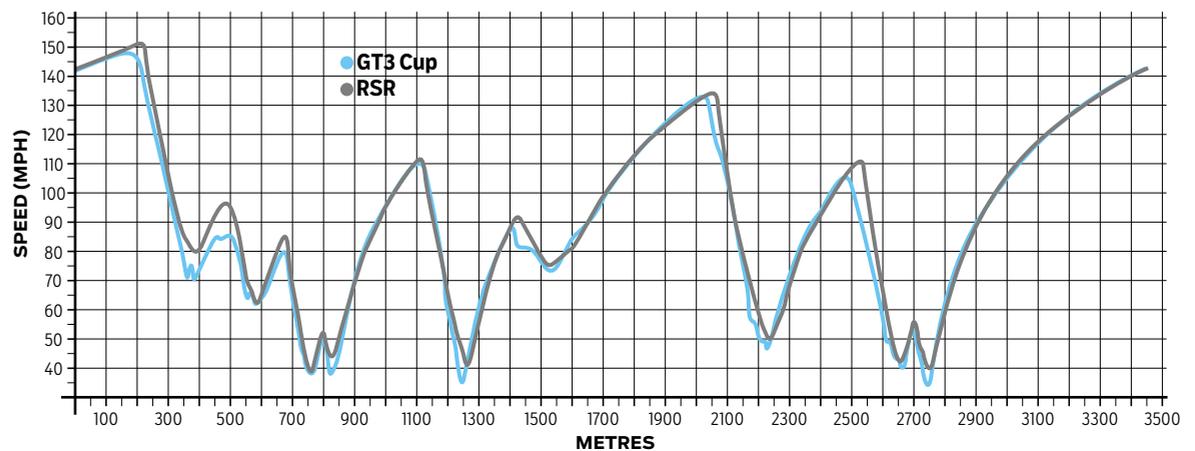
**'The real lesson
is how endlessly
adaptable the 911
formula is'**





Venue Lausitzring,
Brandenburg, Germany
GPS 51.53456, 13.92844
Conditions Dry
Length 2.14 miles
Direction Anti-clockwise

Car	Lap time	Peak speed (mph)
GT3	1:31.99	147.2
GT3 RS	1:30.61	151.4
GT3 Cup	1:24.57	149.1
RSR	1:22.51	152.3



Above right: traces show where the RSR gains an advantage on the GT3 Cup. **Left:** Porsche works driver Jörg Bergmeister set all the lap times to ensure consistency

RSR is easier, even for a 911-novice to master. Even so, he says you have to 'stay adaptable' to get the best from it as there's usually a foible or trick to unlocking its full potential on each particular circuit. Around Lausitzring it records a 1:22.51 to the Cup's 1:24.57. As with the road cars, the data reveals that the RSR has the Cup car covered in every department. It's not much faster in a straight line, but by carrying more speed, braking later and more smoothly, and firing out of the corners so cleanly, it absolutely monsters the GT3 Cup. Interestingly, it hits 152.3mph on the main straight, just 0.9mph more than the GT3 RS road car. That it goes on to record a lap eight seconds quicker goes some way to describing the gulf between an extraordinary road car and a Le Mans-spec GT racing car.

What's most interesting about the RSR's speed trace is how clean the braking and acceleration curves are, the car's precision played out right before your eyes. By comparison the GT3 Cup's trace is much more jagged, the car clearly having to be cajoled around the track and asking a lot of the driver. To me it feels like a pretty convincing race car, but I can understand why the drivers, having tasted the purity, accuracy and sophistication of the RSR, think of the GT3 Cup more as a modified road car than an out-and-out racer.

Conclusion

Today wasn't meant to be about surprises. The GT3 was never going to steal a victory against the more powerful, lighter and more extreme RS, and the

sublime RSR was always going to be the fastest car around the Lausitzring. Yet I'll never forget trying to find every last bit of grip the GT3 could summon, braking as late as I dared and trying to smoothly get on the power nice and early in the corner, only to see an RS utterly unfazed in my mirrors. It might as well have been flashing its headlights. It was surreal watching the process in reverse, too. The GT3 visibly struggling to get turned in and then edging into understeer and oversteer several times throughout a corner whilst the RS sat behind totally composed and ready for full throttle if only that bloody GT3 would get a move on...

The RSR was shocking, too. Not because of its sheer performance (which was fantastic), but because it felt so beautifully resolved and managed to combine amazing agility with stupefying composure under braking and the most surreal traction. I'd expected it to feel quite restricted, too, but the engine was sharp and angry. Most of all I remember how calm it was. Driven at tenths I'm sure it's a busy, physical experience, but I suspect the sense that it's been finessed to perfection remains to a certain extent. The sheer polish of every control and the chassis' reactions must help towards the end of a double stint...

Of course, the real lesson is how endlessly adaptable the 911 formula is, and how there seems to be no end to its potential. It makes you wonder when the next GT2 RS might come along, doesn't it? 'I can't think of a good reason not to build it,' says a Porsche Motorsport representative who works on road-car development. Me either. ☒

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

EASY SLIDER

The E46 M3 CS wasn't about outright power; it was all about intimate responses and perfect balance. Ten years on, can it really be as good as we remember it?



LJ56 OHN



I 'VE GOT DOZENS OF AMAZING moments from various *evo* Car of the Year weeks down the years. Sequences that I can replay in my mind with perfect clarity. Usually they involve chasing another car back to the hotel at night after the final sunset shots on an exposed hilltop, cold, hungry and in a real hurry to settle down to a steak, a pint and tales of the day's heroics. My E46 M3 CS memory is different. All alone, in the height of the midday sun, driving to pick up some lunch in Castellane, nestled in a fold of rocks on the Route Napoléon.

The CS had already finished second in our 'real world' preliminary round, just behind the extraordinary Clio Trophy, thus qualifying it to face the big boys: Ford GT, F430, Gallardo SE and others from Aston, Porsche and Mercedes.

That lunchtime dash told me it wouldn't be overwhelmed by either the competition or the location. In fact, its exquisite straight-six, serene responses and outrageously malleable balance matched the road, the weather and my mood to perfection. As it tumbled down into Castellane, feeling almost weightless, sweeping through turns in its great, almost elastic sweet-spot, the relatively humble BMW jumped right to the top of my list. It took a Ford GT to displace it, and only after much soul-searching. The M3 CS felt like a superstar.

That would have been late October 2005. The sun didn't stop shining, the pizza in Castellane's town square was hot and drizzled with fresh chilli oil, the local gendarmes looked kindly upon us after a quick blast in the Ferrari, and the Gallardo shot the most beautiful blue flames at night. Nirvana. This is Bedfordshire in January 2016, I've just had a petrol station sausage roll for breakfast, the roads on the way here were crumbling after weeks of howling wind and apocalyptic rainfall and it's dark. I'm not sure it'll really get light at all today. That's OK though, because waiting for me is a pristine M3 CS. Still nirvana over a decade on? Let's see.

Back in '05, the CS pack – known as the Competition Package in the US and Europe – cost £2400 here in the UK, taking the price of the M3 to £43,555. The E90 3-series had already been launched at this point, so the mildly tweaked M3 was a last hurrah for the E46. On paper it did look like a pretty mild upgrade, too. The CS gained CSL-style 19in alloys (lighter than the optional 19s that so upset the fluidity of the standard M3 but half an inch narrower at the front than the pukka CSL wheel), the faster steering rack and M Track mode stability control setting from the CSL, plus revised spring rates and bigger brake discs. It came with the six-speed manual gearbox as standard, although most were fitted with the SMG 'box, a £2100 option to give you even more of the CSL experience. We loved the manual then, and the evolution



of paddleshift systems has only underlined the appeal of the H-pattern, three-pedal car. An SMG feels pretty creaky in 2016.

We needn't worry about that today because Soni Pone's Carbon Black M3 CS, the last registered in the UK in October '06, is a six-speed manual. It also looks like it's been locked in a temperature-controlled, dehumidified time capsule since it was registered. It's done 36,000 miles, but you'd hardly believe it. Soni treats it like his baby, whereas I think of the CS more like that old girlfriend you had before settling down. You know the one. Fortunately, he's happy for me to enjoy it to the full, he says. An invitation I couldn't possibly refuse...

Aargh, the seats! I remember now. Adjustable in about a thousand different directions but still almost impossible to get truly comfortable in. After two or three minutes of playing with the electric adjusters, I settle for the best compromise: a little too high despite being on the lowest setting, steering wheel just a shade too far away, and the lumbar contorting my back in unnatural ways. The CS had an Alcantara-trimmed wheel and its buffed, bobbly surface is the only sign of wear in an interior of stark simplicity. Set in a simple oval cluster ahead are two large grey-faced dials – on the left a speedo marked to 180 and to its right a rev-counter with small yellow lights around its outside edge starting at '4' that disappear one by one as the engine warms through. A permanent amber light comes at 7500rpm and two red lights, also unblinking, mark the zone from 8000 to 9000rpm.

The three-spoke wheel is famously chunky and squishy but my muscle memory adapts instantly. There's just one button on the right horizontal spoke, a small oblong mysteriously marked 1/0. It activates M Track mode, that CSL-spec halfway-house stability control setting. Press it and the circular outline of the yellow DSC warning symbol illuminates beneath the small fuel gauge to the left of the speedo. Ahead of the gearlever on the centre console are DSC and Sport buttons, the latter creating sharper throttle response. Not that the iron-blocked 3.2-litre straight-six needs it, if I remember correctly. The 'S54' engine has an 11.5:1 compression ratio, individual throttle bodies for each cylinder and the most intimate throttle response.

The M3 CS looks small, almost dainty these days. It feels that way, too, despite placing me a fraction too high on that riddle of a driver's seat. It doesn't have that sense of tininess that you experience when jumping from a 991 to a narrow-bodied 997



*'THIS WAS
THE LAST CS
REGISTERED
IN THE UK. IT'S
DONE 36,000
MILES, BUT
YOU'D HARDLY
BELIEVE IT'*

or 996, but the CS immediately imparts a sense of airiness and agility. The engine seems to ingest pure oxygen, the revs building quickly with an insatiable hunger. It adds to a picture of easy, perfectly rendered accuracy and overflowing energy. Even the straight-six's metallic, trebly resonance sounds light, free from inertia. Of course, with 338bhp at 7900rpm and 269lb ft at 5000rpm, the CS's performance lags miles behind that of a new M4. Even so, it flows along at a good pace, even while I'm in the reacquaintance stage, rarely venturing beyond 4500rpm. The real rewards are waiting right up past 7, though...

It's fascinating to be splashing across familiar roads in the CS. I remember that the M3's steering effort increased with the CS package, but it's heavier than I recall and has a smooth, slightly gloopy feel. It doesn't wriggle with texture then, but you sense the ebb and flow of grip beneath the tyres as its weight subtly shifts through these sodden and often bumpy, ugly-looking corners. The gearshift was never perfect – slightly longer than you'd hope and with a notchy, fragile action. I'd expected it might feel loose and baggy even after this car's pampered life. It doesn't. In fact it's got a nice physicality to it. I'd stop short of calling it 'sweet' but it doesn't get in the way for a second.

What does feel absolutely as I remember it is the CS's control and its transparent balance, so accessible and so simple to exploit. The E46 M3 was always a hugely enjoyable car but the suspension struggled to deal with short, sharp bumps. On a car with 18in wheels, this manifested as off-putting vertical movements, the ride turning lumpy along the trickiest roads and rather knocking your confidence. With the heavier 19in wheel/tyre combination it could at times feel out of control, the car's strange pogoing motion tangling the chassis' usual fluidity in knots. The CS pretty much solves that. Even on these weather-ravaged roads it feels supple, deft and yet with serene



Left and above: 3.2-litre straight-six is light on torque but rich in character with an insatiable hunger for revs; innocuous-looking button activates the DSC stability control's 'halfway-house' M Track mode



poise. In tennis commentary they talk about 'soft hands' when Federer absorbs a 100mph forehand and floats back the most delicate of drop volleys. The CS has that amazing combination of powerful control and almost poetic subtlety. Just occasionally there's a little vertical leap – a hint of its roots – but it's not enough to stop you committing to every corner entry and loading up the M-diff at the earliest opportunity.

In terms of balance, the M3 CS has a purity that today's torque-rich M4 or C63 AMG just can't touch on real roads. There's just a taste of understeer on turn-in with a slick surface but front grip never threatens to fall away suddenly. The push disappears as soon as you add throttle (I prefer not to use the rather jumpy Sport mode), the CS finding a neutral balance and holding its line. However, with that M-diff so keen to lock-up, a world of thrills awaits those brave enough to peek over the edge of grip. In fact 'edge' isn't such an accurate word because once traction is breached you quickly realise that the CS offers an expansive plain on which to express yourself. It feels sensational just loading up the tyres until they're spinning a fraction faster than road speed, requiring you do no more than wind off a fraction of lock to scribe the perfect line. If you prefer, you can go further – much further – and set the CS up to slide into, through and out of every corner.

The key here is that the CS seems to get so many of the basics right. It's compact, it has incredible throttle response

and a fantastic power-to-grip ratio, and the front and rear of the car are beautifully aligned. Add all that stuff up and the CS manages to feel fast enough to be genuinely exciting but not so edgy that sensing the wheels spin-up gives you palpitations. In many ways it's the exact opposite of the new M4 on a bumpy, glistening road – predictable, possessed of excellent traction and so intuitive that leaning on the electronics isn't the only sensible (and safe) option. Driving it quickly offers a sense of freedom that you'd never find in an M4 without a smooth and bone-dry racetrack and a pit garage full of new tyres for you to destroy.

Of course, it's not all good news. The brakes. My, the brakes. Initially they feel fantastic, the pedal firm and responsive and with a short travel. In fact they're so quick to bite that it's tricky to summon the accuracy to apply the correct brake pressure while blipping the throttle on downshifts. You tend to overslow the car with a lurch or get a limp flare of revs that does no good at all. Don't beat yourself up too much, nor worry unduly about recalibrating your sensitivity to work with the CS, because by the time you do, the brakes will be groaning in protest, the pedal perceptibly lengthening if you fail to listen to the noisy, almost painful protestations. They are a glaring weak link.

Just how weak is thrown into ruthless focus by the engine. My, the engine. It feels special at low speed not because it

BMW E46 M3 CS

Engine In-line 6-cyl, 3246cc
Power 338bhp @ 7900rpm
Torque 269lb ft @ 5000rpm
Weight 1495kg
Power-to-weight 230bhp/ton
0-60mph 5.1sec (claimed)
Top speed 155mph (limited)
Price today £15,000-25,000

evo rating: ★★★★★



punches you in the guts with its torque (it doesn't), but because it sounds so crisp and spins so freely. It really is the heart of the car and it only gets better the more you exercise it. Of course, we're growing more and more accustomed to engines that produce peak torque from 2000rpm and, judged against them, the S54 is hopelessly torque-light. Yet foregoing the ability to overtake a row of dawdling cars without shifting down from sixth is no great sacrifice if the pay-off is the opportunity to feel and hear an engine build and grow to such a show-stopping climax. Its appetite to rev and rev, to climb through all the phases of its searing delivery, is just so addictive. The sharp, splintered noise adds a deliciously satisfying edge, too. It's one of the great road car engines, no question.

In this hellishly wet winter it's something close to a miracle when the clouds part and the road starts to dry for my final drive of Soni's CS. He's alongside in the passenger seat and we're both smiling. The noise, the way the car digs for grip but manages to glide into gentle oversteer, and its composure even when it's working hard to absorb the road's gnarliest sections, offers such pure, uncomplicated fun that it's impossible not to fall for the CS. When I think of an M3 – an M Division car in general – it's this lightness of touch and the facility to indulge

and entertain that comes to mind. It's the very essence of what makes them such special cars and why we're critical when the magic is lost in a whirlwind of sledgehammer performance and binary dynamics. The M3 CS nails that balance with pinpoint accuracy. Hard-edged and exciting, yet tolerant and playful, it could only be the product of the M Division.

Today, on these roads, in pretty miserable conditions, the CS hasn't created another one of those indelible memories that I'll be recounting ten years from now. But we're not on the Route Napoléon; we don't have the blessing of the local police; that sausage roll was not a freshly pulled and generously topped pizza. That the M3 CS still shines so brightly in the context of another decade's worth of fantastic drivers' cars, under the cover of drizzle and splashing through puddles, is a testament to its inherent rightness. An agile front-engine/rear-drive car honed by people who know and care, married to a naturally aspirated engine that revs to the heavens and drives through a manual gearbox and a locking differential is a timeless recipe. The CS is still a superstar. Now and forever. ☒

With thanks to Soni Pone and also to Laura at Munich Legends (munichlegends.co.uk).



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MONTH

NISSAN GT-R // MAZDA MX-5 // CHEVROLET CAMARO Z/28 // VOLKSWAGEN GOLF R //
AUDI RS Q3 // VAUXHALL CORSA VXR // PORSCHE 996 GT2 // SUBARU IMPREZA TURBO //
SKODA OCTAVIA vRS ESTATE // CATERHAM SEVEN 420R // FERRARI 458 ITALIA



END OF TERM

Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy

It's farewell to a perfectly compromised hot hatch that remained unbeaten during its time with **evo**

I IT WAS A NO-BRAINER to get a Mégane Trophy on the **evo** long-term test fleet. I suppose I could have secured the even more hardcore 275 Trophy-R if I'd asked Renault *really* nicely, but as the ultra-focused two-seater Ring-record holder was built in very small numbers and all but sold out, there seemed little point. Besides, with a few choice options

I reckoned the Trophy could get very close to the R as an occasional trackday toy and easily trump it as a daily driver. I had 12 months in which to put my theory to the test.

A little over 19,000 miles later it's time for the Trophy to go back to Renault, and I have to say it has proved to be every bit as good as I'd hoped. Like all the best long-term tests, anticipation was built

with a session on the Renaultsport configurator. I agonised over the colour, eventually going for black on the basis I didn't want white, I'd just had a grey Audi R8 long-termer, and had previously run a yellow Clio 200 Turbo. Besides, I've got a thing for black cars, and they annoy the hell out of photographers. That's a win-win in my book.

One thing I wasted no time in

selecting was the all-important Öhlins Road & Track suspension (£2000), which would bring the Trophy up to Trophy-R specification where it really mattered. And when you spec the Öhlins you can also have the optional lightweight Speedline Turini wheels (£1000) and Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres (£1000) to complete the dynamic package. Quite what a semi-slick-



shod 275 Trophy would feel like on wintry roads I had no idea, but that's what ESC is for, right?

By the time I'd finished spec'ing the Mégane it was £34,000, which I'll admit made me catch my breath somewhat. It's not often you could argue the case for a Renault costing more than a competitor from a premium German brand, but if you're a real enthusiast there's no doubt you can see where the money goes. Those Speedline rims and that sticky Michelin rubber are the best you can get. Add Brembo brakes, Recaro seats, an Akrapovic titanium exhaust and those Öhlins dampers and it's clear the Trophy takes the things that matter to another level.

It felt like it did, too. Whatever the journey, I always knew I was getting into something special, a feeling bolstered by the Trophy's no-nonsense looks. The decals are an acquired taste, but I rather liked them, just as I did the simple, well-put-together interior. The Recaro seats were firm, but fitted me well with an impressive balance of support and comfort. Front-seat passengers (mainly Mrs M) felt less cosseted, especially on the long-haul European trips we made to race meetings at Dijon and Spa, and a week's holiday to Nendaz in



Switzerland, but it was fine for more regular trips.

Did it ever let me down? Not once. I did suffer a front puncture, which rather frustratingly necessitated swapping the good rear to the front and putting the spacesaver on the rear as it doesn't clear the brick-sized Brembo caliper, but otherwise the Trophy was faultless. People seem surprised when I say it soaked up some pretty extreme use without complaint or signs of deterioration, but it proved tough as old boots. The R-Link multimedia system froze on a couple of occasions, but employing the IT specialists' standard procedure of switching it off and on again always did the trick.

Costs? Well, apart from the regular 12,000-mile service (£214.24), a couple of litres of oil and two sets of tyres at the best part of £200 per corner, there were no unexpected



bills. I think that's impressive, especially for a car that must have done hundreds of laps of Bedford Autodrome, Anglesey and Blyton for assorted editorial assignments. I ran it on both regular 95 unleaded and assorted 98- and 99-octane superunleaded petrol. It definitely preferred the hard stuff, feeling sharper, punchier and possibly doing a few extra miles per gallon, but it ran happily on Fosters-spec fuel.

Of course, the best bit about living with the Trophy was the high-quality driving experience it delivered every time I got behind its Alcantara-wrapped steering wheel. The natural, detailed and vibrant feeling of connection never failed to impress, likewise its formidable cross-country pace. There was some torque-steer to manage, and the tyres required me to be mindful until they'd come up to temperature, but I soon

accepted this as part of the occasion of driving the Trophy.

There are more powerful hot hatches, but none that make better use of what they have. I loved the feeling of powering out of tight second- or third-gear corners and feeling the Mégane squeeze every last drop of traction from the front tyres, diff working hard to find added bite. The balance was actually very neutral, but alive and finely throttle-adjustable. The Öhlins dampers were never less than brilliant, adding another layer of control and pliancy. Reaching into the darkest recesses of the wheelarches to find the one-click adjusters wasn't as easy or instantly gratifying as pressing Sport or Sport+ as you would in, say, a Golf R or Civic Type R, but with some experimentation it was possible to arrive at an everyday compromise that precisely suited my taste and local roads, while the track settings really did release extra grip, traction and response.

One thing I never got round to was visiting Renaultsport HQ and having the optional big-brake kit fitted. That was partly because I never had sufficient spare time to take the car to France, but also because I never found the regular brakes wanting on the road. They stood up impressively during track use, too, even when lapping against the clock.

When I took possession of the Mégane Trophy in December 2014 it was the purest and most accomplished drivers' hot hatch money could buy. One year later, and in the face of fresher rivals from Honda and SEAT, that's still the case. That it's also one of the best long-term test cars I've ever lived with makes the last 12 months all the more memorable. My next long-term car has a tough act to follow. ❌

Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Date acquired	December 2014
Duration of test	12 months
Total test mileage	19,143
Overall mpg	28.4
Costs	£214.24 service, £1510 eight tyres
Purchase price	£34,000
Trade-in value	£23,500
Depreciation	£10,500

Nissan GT-R

It may have been pipped by the new 911, but our GT-R has still got it

I I'M STILL EASING INTO LIFE with a GT-R. Still chuckling at just how awful it is when cold, shuddering and shunting around, the gearbox rattling and the whole car feeling close to a very ugly death. It only lasts a few minutes but it would be a shock to anyone used to a more conventional performance car such as an M3 or 911. I'm also still laughing every time the GT-R hits boosts and rips through the gears, the digital speed readout struggling to keep pace. And I'm still wondering how a GT-R can tell you the oil temperature in the transmission, your lateral and longitudinal G-force, trace your throttle openings and steering angle, and give you a live readout of the front-to-rear torque split, but doesn't have DAB.

The GT-R is a car of contradictions

and the best of them all is that such an electronically sophisticated car feels mechanical and characterful. I think I've used this analogy before, but if the GT-R is the Terminator (and it is), then it's definitely a gnarly Arnie-spec T-800 with sewn-up bullet wounds and wearing the leather jacket of some biker it's kicked the crap out of rather than the clean-cut, clinical T-1000 of Robert Patrick. There's something so authentic and charismatic about the GT-R and so far the longer-term

exposure to its personality hasn't dimmed the appeal.

Our GT-R has been busy, too. Last month it took on the new 911 Carrera, the BMW M4 and the Jaguar F-type R. Dan Prosser wrote the piece and suggested that the GT-R was the most exciting, immersive car on a charge, but the 911 just held out for a slim victory. It must offer slightly more headroom for the quiff or something.

Anyway, the point is that the GT-R – now an old stager – is still an

extraordinary car to experience. For us it's still the honeymoon, of course, but I can't think of another car that combines comfort and useability with such thrilling performance. Everything is rosy. **X**

Jethro Bovington
(@JethroBovington)

Date acquired	December 2015
Total mileage	14,346
Mileage this month	1322
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	19.7



Mazda MX-5

With the roof firmly up for the winter, our MX-5 turns load-lugger

S SUCH ARE THE JOYS OF the weather at the moment that the last month hasn't seen the MX-5's roof open once. That's a shame, as top-down driving had started to become one of the defining experiences of my time running the MX-5. It's something that helps separate the Mazda from the other options in this price bracket, and the simplicity and speed of the roof mechanism contributes towards the car's back-to-basics feel.

I managed to fit more decent B-roads into my travels this month,



so I'm starting to get used to the way the MX-5 rolls so much on turn-in, which in turn means I'm driving it that little bit harder. It can still be unnerving, but the front-end grip is definitely there. I'm sure the car would be all the more exciting with a few setup tweaks, though.

I also keep coming back to the

idea that the only version of the MX-5 you need is a 1.5-litre model with nothing on it. The interior isn't that plush, the extra power from the 2-litre engine isn't really needed and all the options feel superfluous.

I've seen a few other Mk4 MX-5s now and I'm starting to think the car looks at its best in a different colour to ours. A brief encounter with a Crystal White Pearlescent example convinced me that it is the colour to go for. It just looked more aggressive than our Meteor Grey Mica car.

The MX-5 also dealt with the run back to my parents' house for Christmas, in the process seeing off its biggest storage challenge yet. The discovery of the cubby hole between the seatbacks helped, and two runs weren't required, so I think that's me convinced. **X**

Hunter Skipworth
(@HunterSkipworth)

Date acquired	October 2015
Total mileage	3778
Mileage this month	969
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	36.6



AFTER ECOTY FUN IN Scotland and a few laps at Blyton Park, the Z/28 was ready to head to the Continent. Thankfully, by the time I picked it up at Gatwick, editor Nick had fitted a set of Yokohama Advans to replace the bald Pirelli Trofeo Rs. Storm Barney had brought a lot of rain at this point and I had pretty much soiled myself using the Trofeos in similar conditions in California. It all gave me an even greater respect for what Senna did at Monaco in '84.

After I tracked the south coast from Brighton, it stopped raining in Hastings long enough for me to look at the sea from where Guillaume the Bastard came to conquer. Then came the Channel Tunnel and thumbs up for the Z/28 from almost everyone I saw. Try getting that in a Porsche Turbo S.

On the other side of the Channel,

Chevrolet Camaro Z/28

Shod with fresh rubber, our muscle car leaves the UK and heads for its new home: snowy Switzerland

Top: Z/28 reaches the south coast. **Below, from far left:** fine-tuning the pressures of the new Advans; 'shortcut' over the Jura; V8 pulls from 600rpm. **Bottom:** Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery



Date acquired	June 2015
Total mileage	5360
Mileage this month	623
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	16.5

with the car's suspension in its Tour mode, the autoroute was easy cruising to my stopover at Souchez. Shortly after dawn the next day, I arrived at the Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery to visit the grave of my grandmother's cousin, a WWI flying ace shot down aged just 21.

Later that day I got stuck behind a tractor trundling along an uphill stretch at 40kph. Bored stiff, I shifted into sixth and can now confirm that big American V8s really do work from 600rpm! Then it was on through horrendous rain and with terrible visibility behind lorries (why do they overtake each other with a 1kph speed differential?). I got off the autoroute as soon as possible, and took the 'shortcut' to Geneva across the Jura Mountains. It was a good call: no lorries, great roads, windows open and that 7008cc engine.

The next day the first snows came to the Alps and the Jura. Time for another tyre change, I think. ☒

David Price



Volkswagen Golf R

The discovery of well-hidden suspension modes makes our R even better

W WELL, THIS IS AWKWARD. Last month I wrote that my VW Golf R doesn't have Dynamic Chassis Control – adaptive dampers to you and me – but it turns out that it does. Every Golf R I've ever driven with DCC has had a button with an image of a damper on it next to the gearlever, but VW recently ditched the button in favour of an option within a submenu in the infotainment system.

My car was among the first to do away with the button. It was only when I started fiddling with the Individual drive mode for the first time that I saw the option labelled 'DCC'. I've now got the Individual mode set exactly how I like it for fast road driving – DCC in Sport, steering

in Comfort (steering systems are generally ruined by artificially weightier settings) and the engine in Sport. This means I can flick between the Individual and Comfort modes depending on where and how I'm driving, giving the car a really wide operating window.

The firmer suspension setting definitely adds some support at each corner and you can feel more of the road surface through the chassis, but the car still deals with bumps and ruts very well. I'm still impressed by how effectively this car combines comfort and refinement with agility and response.

On another note, Golf R owner Euan Holms wrote in to say he reckons his car is 'bombastically good' in the right circumstances, but that the various driver-assist systems 'utterly ruin' it for him. He says Front Assist, which warns you when you're closing quickly on the car ahead and actually applies the brakes if it thinks you might hit it, is unreliable and even dangerous.

Euan also has misgivings about



the Automatic Cruise Control and the synthesised engine note. With the latter I can sympathise, but I'm yet to have any problems with Front Assist or Automatic Cruise Control. I will report back if that changes. Euan's note did serve as a reminder, though, that as cars become increasingly complicated, manufacturers will have to apply

new tech with real care to ensure they don't impede the bonding process between car and driver. ❌

Dan Prosser (@TheDanProsser)

Date acquired	September 2015
Total mileage	6536
Mileage this month	2245
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	30.3

Audi RS Q3

Audi RS Q3

Smith finds out that his SUV isn't as practical as it might look

T THERE AREN'T TOO MANY drawbacks to being able to make a career from taking photographs of cars. Sure, the ridiculous hours in the summer months, sub-zero temperatures during winter and *evo* designer Will Beaumont's penchant for cropping all my photos into Instagram-style squares surrounded by a sea of 'creative white space' can get a little tedious, but generally it's every bit as enjoyable as it looks.

Apart, that is, from the amount of equipment required for taking photographs of cars. From lens cloths and lighting gear to tripods and stepladders, it all makes for a colossal amount of kit, and for that,



a large boot is required.

With its huge wheels and SUV shape, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the Audi RS Q3 is a big car. But it's not (which is why its handling is genuinely very good and why my wife likes to take it into town instead of her VW Up). Unfortunately this means that I can't squeeze all of my

gear into the boot alone and I end up having overnight bags, tripods and all sorts of other random equipment strewn across the rear bench.

As for transporting bicycles, it's a bit of a nightmare. Audi very kindly supplied me with roof-bars, to which I attached a Thule bike rack, but I soon noticed that the rack was

starting to crush the carbonfibre frame of my bike where it clamped around it... *eeek!*

A fork-mounted rack would avoid that, but it would also void the warranty on my bike. Alternatively, Audi can supply a towbar (which can be manually swivelled out of sight when not in use), but this costs £625 and a rack to fit it wouldn't be cheap at upwards of £300. For now, then, I'm taking the wheels off the bike and throwing it in the car with the back seats down. It's not ideal, but it's not the end of the world.

Other than its size – which can just as easily be viewed as a positive – all is well with the RS Q3 and we're really starting to bond. ❌

Dean Smith (@evoDeanSmith)

Date acquired	October 2015
Total mileage	2630
Mileage this month	1132
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	25.0

END OF TERM

Vauxhall Corsa VXR

After six months with one of the most hardcore small hatches on sale, Hunter Skipworth gives his verdict on what it's like to live with



SOME OF THE MOST memorable drives I've ever had have been in hot hatches. For example, even in the presence of Porsches and Ferraris on our recent *evo* Car of the Year test (*evo* 216), the Civic Type R and Leon Cupra Sub8 delivered moments I'll never forget. As Jethro Bovingdon points out in our eCoty video (head to youtube.com/evo if you haven't yet seen it), a great hot hatch has an uncanny ability to feel 'just right' in virtually any situation.

However, this is where the Corsa VXR fell a little short of my expectations. Hats off to Vauxhall for being so committed with the setup, as it's a very aggressive car, especially when equipped – as our VXR was – with the optional Performance Pack (£2400). But to me it always felt just the wrong side of hardcore for day-to-day driving. The ride in particular was *very* stiff with the updated Performance

Pack dampers, making the car uncomfortable to be in most of the time. That said, I should point out that some of my more hardened colleagues were more accepting of the punishing ride, especially as the pay-off was tight body control when you were pressing on.

The Performance Pack's limited-slip diff was also too aggressive for my tastes on the road. At slow speeds the car had a tendency to tramline and follow cambers as soon as it came on boost, which could make it a bit of a handful around town. Out in the countryside, on sweeping bends, it made more sense, but for me it was only on track that it came into its own.

The steering was a bit dead on initial turn-in, but was direct thereafter, if not that feelsome. The manual gearchange was welcome and suited the car, although with its long-ish throw and slightly rubbery feel, the shift action wasn't as

snappy as those of some rivals. The chunky gearknob was horrible, too.

The Corsa's performance was hard to argue with, though. With its 1.6-litre turbocharged engine producing 202bhp in a compact body, the VXR was properly rapid, while braking was also very impressive (the Performance Pack adds upgraded Brembo front brakes). The Corsa VXR is definitely amongst the more potent of the baby hatches. What it isn't is the most fuel efficient. Getting much more than 30mpg was hard, which compares poorly to the 38.1mpg our long-term Fiesta ST averaged.

Inside, the Recaro seats were a highlight, but otherwise the cabin was rather ordinary to look at, as you might expect in a car that now costs just £18,125 basic. The satnav and sound system also let the VXR down on any sort of road trip, which was a shame as Vauxhall's latest in-car tech is actually quite good. The cabin

'With such strong competition, why would you choose the VXR over its rivals?'

Date acquired	July 2015
Duration of test	6 months
Total test mileage	9011
Overall mpg	30.7
Costs	£0
Purchase price	£20,395
Trade-in value	£15,500
Depreciation	£4895



Above: Michelin Pilot Super Sports provided massive grip. **Below:** Recaro buckets were popular with *evo* staff



was clearly well screwed together, though, being resolutely rattle-free after 9000 miles of being shaken around on that suspension. The only unwelcome noise was a creaking clutch pedal that did a fine impression of a honking goose. Nothing that a squirt of WD40 couldn't fix, I'm sure.

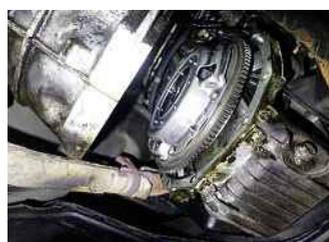
Fast, well priced and uncompromised, the Corsa VXR has a lot going for it. But with such strong competition, why would you choose it over its rivals? It all comes down to how hardcore you like your hot hatches. Some people relish the feeling of a seriously aggressive hatch equipped with Recaros – you just need to look at the following the RS Mégane has for proof of that. But for buyers looking for a more rounded small hot hatch, the Corsa VXR might simply be too over the top. ❌

Hunter Skipworth
(@HunterSkipworth)



Mazda MX-5 Mk1

Some mechanical housekeeping gets the MX-5 fighting fit



B BRAKES, CLUTCH, service. Three items lurking on my to-do list for the Mazda for far too long, and three items I can now tick off and forget after a comprehensive overhaul at MX5 City near Doncaster.

Yes, the 100-mile trek from Northamptonshire to Yorkshire is an inconvenient one simply to fit some fresh consumables, but the MX-5 is now of a vintage where specialist care is preferable to that of the local backstreet grease-monkey. MX5 City is also familiar with my car (it's where I bought it) and I'm familiar with the business, having visited several times while researching for a book. A trustworthy business is worth its weight in gold, and more than justifies the extra petrol.

Which is just as well, because I ended up spending not far short of the Mazda's vaporous mass in gold on having it serviced. With little history for the car, I was keen to

bring it up to a baseline from which future servicing and modifications could be carried out. That meant the engine, gearbox and diff all received a new fill of oil, and both the cambelt and alternator belt were changed – the latter curing the intermittent power steering assistance.

Most significantly, the standard vented front brake rotors have made way for a set of EBC Turbo Groove dimpled discs, which 'cool and clear' the surface of the pad. The pads are EBC Yellowstuff. I'd enquired about Greenstuff 'fast road' pads, but EBC said the Yellows were suitable for street and trackday use, and are race-proven too.

It's too soon to draw any real conclusions on the new brakes – they're no longer squealing, which is a start – but the new OEM replacement clutch from Exedy is certainly noticeable. The old unit was slipping badly under power in low gears and delivered a mushy feel

through the pedal; with the new one the car will pull away from idle and put down all of its limited horses.

I suspect a few prodigal horses may have returned too, not least because MX5 City cleaned the throttle body. Response is now even crisper than before, and the car idles better too. I'm not about to claim the Mazda feels like a new car, but the journey back home on an autumnal evening did much to remind me why I bought it in the first place. The only trouble is, I appear to have come away with an even longer to-do list: buckets, chassis bracing, coilovers, new exhaust, new headers... ❌

Antony Ingram (@evoAntony)

Date acquired	February 2015
Total mileage	93,646
Mileage this month	252
Costs this month	£1015.75 service, £370.50 brakes, £120 clutch
mpg this month	33.0



Porsche 996 GT2

Increased mileage uncovers a few niggles and reveals some GT2 idiosyncrasies

THE GT2 IS RACKING UP the miles, so much so that I think I'll be phoning Sky Insurance soon and requesting an extension on the mileage limit. I can't help it – we've had a very mild autumn and winter and the car is just so addictive to drive. It's great on longer journeys too; despite the stiff ride and fixed-back bucket seats, I've yet to suffer any aches and pains or undue fatigue.

Of course, the miles started to show up a few niggles, which the seller, RPM Technik, offered to look at under warranty. First and foremost was a mild clutch judder, particularly when reversing. My fear was that the dual-mass flywheel was on the blink – an expensive fix unless I took advantage of having it assessed during the warranty period. Ollie Preston, RPM's technical chief, took the car in and tried the clutch alongside that of another 996 GT2 that they happened to have in at

the same time. Both cars exhibited the same characteristic, and with further investigations on both cars suggesting no other reason to suspect a fault, he assured me that it's nothing to worry about.

'Use a few more revs, but try not to drag it,' he advised. 'It's a tough unit; you won't do it any harm.' I guess I've been doing so much day-to-day driving in the GT2 that I'd forgotten that in many ways it's a tough old racing car and can take a little bit of welly.

Other minor issues that RPM fixed included a dodgy fuel-cap lock, which on occasion sounded like a pebble being dropped down a hole when engaged. It only locked occasionally, too, so that's been sorted. Also, I wanted the guys to check the wheel alignment at the front as the tyres were rippling over surfaces when on lock at low speeds. This phenomenon has become increasingly common on sports

cars with aggressive setups – I've experienced it on everything from a Mégane Trophy to a McLaren 675LT – but I couldn't remember the 996s doing it back in the day. Again, RPM said the car was fine, but offered to tailor the setup to my liking this summer when I'm likely to spend more time on track. The range of suspension adjustment is broad with a GT2, so I'm looking forward to personalising the geometry.

Finally, I asked the guys to look at non-functioning heated rear screen (now fixed) and give me an update on the underside protection. These GT2s weren't overendowed with underbody protection as it only added weight. However, RPM had fully cleaned the underside and waxed it as part of the pre-sale prep and there's at least six months (and a winter) left in it. I'll get them to inspect it in June when the car will have been with me for a year. **✘**

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

'I'm looking forward to personalising the GT2's suspension geometry for track work this summer'

Date acquired	June 2015
Total mileage	27,665
Mileage this month	334
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	22.2

Porsche 911 SC

Trott's mods begin in earnest with a new clutch

S SO I TOOK THE PLUNGE and bought a load of Windrush Evolutions (WEVO) kit via EU distributor TwinSpark Racing. As mentioned last month, I want to improve the accuracy and speed of the SC's '915' gearshift, especially as I'm going to have a particularly zingy motor post-rebuild.

A few conversations with WEVO boss Hayden Burvill sealed the deal – he liked what I'm doing to the engine and recommended the full WEVO Shifter kit, PSJs (more on which in a moment) and a '915 Streetlite' clutch and flywheel.

The main issue with the stock 915 shifter is the free-play in the action. It's this that contributed to the missed shift that over-revved my engine. Well, that and another dozen



Left: the SC is in for a treat with WEVO's Streetlite clutch and flywheel, which uses AP Racing hardware and weighs roughly half what the OEM items do

other excuses I've got lined up... The WEVO Shifter kit shrinks the movement from neutral to in-gear to 2 inches – a 30 per cent reduction in travel. Free-play is also eliminated, according to Burvill.

Next up: the PSJs. These are 'Precision Shift Joints' – direct-replacement couplers that fit in the shift linkage mechanism and eliminate unwanted movement. Improved shift accuracy is once again promised.

To top off the shifter end, quite literally, I've gone for a black anodised gearstick and a tall shift knob – think more WRC than IROC. I appreciate that this will look a little

out of place in the SC's distinctly '80s cabin, but I get a bit of a kick out of this juxtaposition, and the fact that it hints at a rather special gearshift mechanism within.

Finally, the SC needed a new clutch and I was looking at getting the flywheel lightened, so Burvill instead suggested WEVO's Streetlite clutch and flywheel. I'm properly excited by this. It uses the stock release bearing, cable mechanisms and starter-ring gears, but has a new billet-steel lightweight flywheel, a 215mm lug-drive aluminium AP Racing clutch, an organic friction disc, and a release bearing adapter and fasteners. The aim? To lower

inertia for a quicker-spooling engine, yet thanks to the organic friction disc, WEVO's piece should have the manners of a normal road clutch.

When all the kit arrived, I popped it down to RPM Technik for inspection. They even got out the scales and confirmed that the WEVO Streetlite clutch and flywheel are almost half the weight of the stock items. I can't wait to try it all. ❌

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Date acquired	March 2014
Total mileage	90,993
Mileage this month	0
Costs this month	£2501
mpg this month	n/a

Subaru Impreza Turbo

Subaru Impreza Turbo

A cheap fix does the job, to the amazement of all

W WHERE DO I START?! Regular readers will know that a year ago I bought a 1999 Subaru Impreza Turbo that went pop before I even drove it.

To briefly recap, the plan was to drive it to the 2015 Monte Carlo Rally, but the car suffered a catastrophic overheating episode just ten miles into the journey while *evo* designer Will Beaumont was driving. Since then it has sat rather unceremoniously outside the office. I guess I was hoping it would miraculously mend itself...



With a blown gasket identified, it looked like a new short engine would be required – a short engine that, when fitted, would probably cost as much as the car did. Damn. So I decided to try another option: a 'pour-in' repair fluid.

I know what you're thinking: it's a bodge. But I'd prepared myself for a new engine, so with nothing to lose (and curiosity to satiate) I bought a bottle of Steel Seal for £39.99.

The process is simple: you pour it into the radiator, put the cap back on, turn the heater to full, run the



engine for 30 minutes, let it cool, then top up the coolant. The fluid is drawn into the damaged area and the chemicals combine to create 'a permanent seal as strong as steel'. Yeah right, you're thinking.

Since then I've had the water pump replaced (the cause of the initial failure) plus a new radiator (thanks paragonauto.co.uk in Northampton) and... *and...* the car is running perfectly! No signs of any overheating issues – none at all.

I won't claim it's a miracle cure until I've done more miles, but I



have to admit that for every mile that goes under the gold wheels, I'm feeling more and more confident about the fix. Confident enough to regroup and attempt another blast to the Monte? Watch this space... ❌

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Date acquired	January 2015
Total mileage	106,706
Mileage this month	149
Costs this month	£577.19 water pump, radiator, labour, £39.99 Steel Seal
mpg this month	n/a



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Skoda Octavia vRS Estate

It's not all glamour in the Fast Fleet, but the Skoda is earning its keep

A AFTER A FEW WEEKS IN our Octavia vRS, I've come to believe that Skoda has got the notion of 'Time And Relative Dimension In Space' nailed. I've thought this about the Superb estate in the past, but now I reckon its smaller sibling falls under the same umbrella. Both cars look angularly handsome in a Kryten sort

of way, but they're also possessed of proportions that seem to disguise how big they really are. They fit into parking spaces just fine and don't feel like minibuses to drive, yet they seem to have the load capacity of a seven-and-a-half-tonner.

During the week leading up to Christmas (and what an exciting week it was...), the Octavia

transported a defunct fridge-freezer, then an old bath (resplendent in avocado green) and finally a large Scots pine (less convenient than those small cardboard ones that hang from the rear-view mirror, but you can't beat the authentic smell). Each time when I wondered whether I might have been overambitious, the tailgate opened and the Octavia

swallowed the item like a humpback gorging on a tin of sardines.

The second thing that has struck me about the big Skodas' Einstein-challenging abilities is that they shrink distances. They seem to shrug off long journeys remarkably easily, leaving you relaxed after hours on the motorway. Despite a very capable chassis, our Octavia isn't the most fun thing to drive on a B-road, sadly. Its diesel engine and DSG gearbox combo just doesn't encourage you to push on. However, there is no denying the distance-shrinking efficacy of the package. The hours are whiled away with even more grace thanks to the ease of access to podcasts and the like that Apple CarPlay brings.

So, it might not be thrilling, but I'm finding much to admire about the Octavia. It's deceptively large inside and seems to make journeys shorter. Skoda really has got this TARDIS thing nailed. ✘

Henry Catchpole
(@HenryCatchpole)

Date acquired	October 2015
Total mileage	6715
Mileage this month	606
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	46.0

Caterham Seven 420R



Caterham Seven 420R

A hard life takes its toll on our trackday special

B BEING THE TECHNICAL correspondent at *evo*, I get excited about cars loaded with new tech. Side Slip Angle Control and torque-vectoring diffs are the sort of things that get me going. However, it is a car with very little tech that has been causing

a stir on the magazine's fleet of late, and after hearing about how the Caterham 420R fared at *evo*'s track evenings last summer, I was keen to find out why it's so dearly loved. So when there was a chance to borrow the Seven for a couple of weeks recently, I took the opportunity – and the steering wheel, keys and electrical cut-off switch – to see what the fuss was about.

On the journey home from *evo* Towers, I heard a squeal coming from under the bonnet. After getting the car up on a high-lift and having a prod around, it became apparent the alternator had snapped clean off its bracket, loosening the auxiliary belt. A call to the team at Caterham saw the car that I had picked up an hour earlier whisked off to BookaTrack's new Caterham dealership at Donington Park for a fix.

Unfortunately, not two days passed before there was another problem. An intermittent stuttering of the engine, previously thought to be related to fuel quality, turned terminal. The car returned to Donington, where the BookaTrack guys diagnosed a worn wiring loom. Once again the issue was quickly fixed and the Seven was soon back on the road. Would it now behave long enough for me to get a decent drive in it? Find out next time... ✘

Michael Whiteley (@MWHFC)

Date acquired	August 2015
Total mileage	3677
Mileage this month	127
Costs this month	£72 alternator bracket, £39 sub-loom, £52.80 spark plugs
mpg this month	31.1

Ferrari 458 Italia

Supercar puts its feet up for the festive season

T HE 458 HAD IT EASY ON the run up to Christmas, posing as a static exhibit in Sheffield's Meadowhall Centre. It was there to promote 6th Gear's supercar driving experiences, and it certainly generated much positive attention. But it's not had it that cushy all year, of course. In fact, only the day before arriving in Sheffield it was tearing round Castle Combe for a full six hours, stopping only for fuel and changes of driver.

This reminded me that I should perhaps point out once again that the use this 458 gets certainly isn't typical. Of the 75,000 miles that have passed beneath its Michelins, many have generated probably twice the amount of wear and tear than would have been the case had the car been restricted to the road.

So, with this in mind, how did the 458 stand up during 2015? The simple answer is 'pretty damn well'.



I'll make no apologies for my firm opinion (stated more than a few times, I know) that modern Italian supercars benefit from mileage and not from sitting unused in an entrepreneur's car collection. There's no need to fear putting big miles on an Italian stallion, just as long as one can stand the depreciation.

But there is one downside to cars like this. In my experience, most modern, electronics-festooned supercars – whatever their parentage – have an annoying habit

of throwing up phantom warning lights when on a track. Also, the trend of having to purchase whole assemblies at huge cost when a small part inside lets go really grates. The 458's recent new wheel-bearing assembly, which came in at over £1000, is a case in point.

That all said, even with its thrice-around-the-world mileage, the 458 still handles no differently to when it first rolled out of the showroom in 2011. It's lost none of its pace and, what's more, the classic magnolia

interior is virtually unmarked.

It took a long while for me to fall for the Ferrari's distinct charms, as regular readers will know. Have I changed my mind as time has passed by? You bet. **X**

Simon George
(@6thgearexperience)

Date acquired	May 2011
Total mileage	75,221
Mileage this month	883
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	14.1

Ford Focus ST TDCi Estate

Another mammoth drive onto the Continent for our workhorse



T TWO MONTHS IN AND my initial disappointment with the Focus ST has dissipated somewhat. Over time you can start to nitpick things you don't like about a car, but you can also find certain things that you do like. These qualities couldn't be more easily discovered than on a road-trip.

Driving to the French Alps in the middle of winter on summer tyres and with no snow chains would be a challenge in any car, and it was certainly the biggest test yet for our diesel estate ST. How it fared came as a pleasant surprise.

It didn't quite reach the peak of Mont Blanc but it did manage to tackle some roads you wouldn't normally dream of entertaining without four-wheel drive. It also cruised serenely along the amazingly smooth French motorways, demonstrating that it's an ideal

candidate for long-distance driving. Moreover, it averaged 44mpg, making the journey considerably more affordable than it would have been in pretty much any other car currently on the **evo** fleet.

The Recaro bucket seats were another boon. They may look a bit chavvy, but they grip you just right. The optional Sony sound system is also a big step up from the standard setup and the huge load space (1502 litres with the back seats down) allowed me to bring back half of the French vineyards. I wouldn't say I'm *loving* the ST, but I'm certainly starting to warm to it. **X**

Sam Riley (@samgriley)

Date acquired	August 2015
Total mileage	12,061
Mileage this month	4400
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	44.1

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However, if you've got anything less than a 911 GT3, you'll probably have an ordinary leather wheel, which leaves the option of getting your existing wheel recovered. It might not give your interior that race-car vibe, but having the same wheel recovered in some soft Alcantara will make a huge difference to how it feels.

Royal Steering Wheels will recover any wheel however you want. I opted for simple black Alcantara but with 'M' tricolour stitching for a bit of excitement. Had I wanted the wheel to be made thicker and in four colours, they'd have been able to do that too. If the car is your daily driver and you can't do without your wheel, Royal offer an exchange

service – they send you an identical wheel to yours that's already been recovered and you send back your existing wheel.

The Alcantara used by Royal is some of the best I've felt. It's also a much darker, richer black than many of the OEM Alcantara wheels. Not only is the Alcantara softer and much more pleasant in your hands than the original leather, but the whole wheel is slightly squidgier. This is possibly because the Alcantara isn't as stiff as the leather. Whatever the reason, it makes squeezing the wheel that bit nicer and improves grip even more.

The quality of the finish and stitching is remarkable, too – as good as you'd expect to see on even the most expensive cars. A brilliant service.

Will Beaumont (@WillBeaumont)



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Sam Sheehan



SERENGETI BRERA

£197 serengeti-europe.eu

Having briefly tried, and found myself impressed with, a pair of Serengetis that were featured in our Essentials section in issue 211, I picked up a pair of Breras with sanded dark brown frames and polarised lenses. At £197 I was expecting great things – and they delivered.

For a start, the construction is faultless, and even small things such as the case, cleaning wipe and packaging feel top quality. The Breras are also light and comfortable, and the lenses immediately impress with their clarity in all conditions. These photochromic lenses are made from borosilicate, a

type of glass that's so tough, light and resistant to temperature changes that it's sometimes used in the storage of nuclear waste!

They are without question the best lenses I've ever used and are significantly better than the equivalently specced pair of Ray-Bans that I owned before the Serengetis. The only downside is an occasional creeping of light around the sides, which means I'll look at a more wraparound frame next time. That aside, I can't recommend these Serengetis highly enough.

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

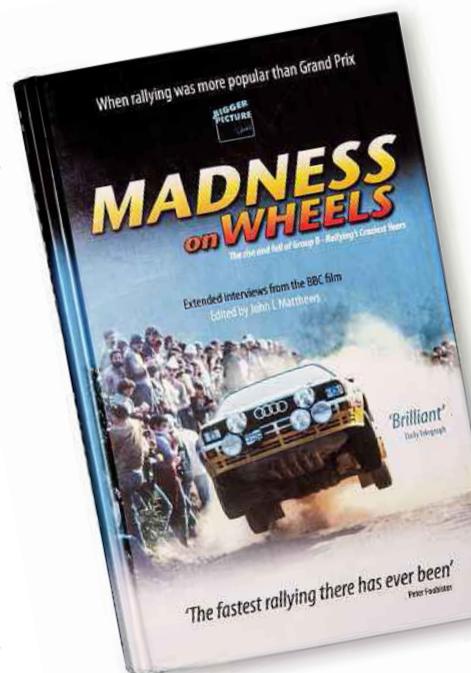
MADNESS ON WHEELS: THE RISE AND FALL OF GROUP B – RALLYING'S CRAZIEST YEARS

edited by JOHN L MATTHEWS
£19.99 amazon.co.uk

If you're looking for an introduction to the story of Group B rallying then this is not the book for you. However, if you already know a bit about what was arguably rallying's greatest period, then this book is a fascinating insight.

It is a collection of essentially unedited interviews (originally filmed and then cut down for the hour-long documentary of the same name) with drivers, co-drivers and team managers who not only lived through Group B but saw it all from the inside. Names such as Gumpert, Vatanen, Todt, Röhr and Mouton all give a range of very interesting and sometimes very different perspectives. Because many of them are speaking in English as a second language, the text can seem a little lacking in flow and hard to read, but you quickly begin to hear each individual's voice and I found it added to the charm. It is fantastic to have these recollections of a spectacular time in motorsport saved for posterity.

Henry Catchpole
(@HenryCatchpole)



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Market

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ANALYSIS: IS THE PERFORMANCE CAR PRICE BUBBLE ABOUT TO BURST?

by Adam Towler

THE PAST FEW YEARS HAVE SEEN unprecedented growth in the classic and nearly new performance car market that has fuelled a surge in interest in specialist motoring in general and made some people – on paper at least – very wealthy. However, this growth has also priced out large sections of the enthusiast community from attaining their dream cars, and removed many great performance cars from the road to a dull existence in a dehumidified garage.

How did we get here, even in a recession? The consensus is straightforward: as the banks crumbled in 2008 and traditional forms of investment suffered under very low interest rates, the wealthiest sections of society looked to diversify their investment portfolios and, along with other 'commodities', cars were very attractive. This is particularly →



‘Some report that interest in certain sectors is dramatically down’

so because there is no capital gains tax to be paid on car sales, and the sale of them – unlike, say, property – is relatively straightforward.

Tom Hartley (tomhartley.com) has been at the forefront of selling high-performance and classic cars for decades. ‘I believe there will be a 20 per cent deduction in prices during 2016,’ he says. ‘But imagine a Ferrari 275 that’s gone from £600,000 to £3million in recent years – even with 20 per cent off that’s still big money, and there’s currently a great opportunity to buy cars from the 1980s. Porsches have a lot of ground to make up.’

Talking of Ferrari 275s, Hartley notes that such cars sold for £8000

in 1963 but are £3million today, offering an unbeatable return. ‘There are two different buyers,’ he says. ‘Those that buy with their hearts, and those with their heads. The former should buy now, the latter have probably missed out.’ Still, the new-car high-performance market shows no sign of slowing down: Hartley was recently the first to sell a pre-owned LaFerrari – for a 100 per cent premium over the list price.

Nevertheless, the more you look into the picture for 2016, the more differences in opinion arise. Rob Johnson at Classic & Sports Finance (see Expert View) cautions that the high-end stuff has really slowed

down: ‘The DB5, the Miura, the F40 – the people out there that wanted them have already bought them. Those buyers that remain are looking carefully at history and condition. I don’t think the bubble has burst, it’s more a correction in the market resulting from a number of factors.’

Mark Donaldson (see Expert View) is a third-generation dealer in cars, and specialises in historic road and racing machines. ‘People were less positive heading into Monterey [the leading classic car auction], but prices have stabilised since,’ he says. ‘2015 was a fascinating year, and I think this year the volume of trade will likely decrease, but I’m very happy with where values are.

The £5million-plus bracket is going from strength to strength, and even if values plateau, people still have a great car.’

One area that has seen plenty of growth in recent years is the auction arena, and Nick Whale of Silverstone Auctions believes the market remains quite strong: ‘The 1960s market is robust, ’50s and pre-war I’d say is shrinking, but with an ageing population there’s an underlying strong demand for cars of the ’80s and ’90s – the E30 M3 is the “sleeping” 911 2.7 RS, but think of Quattros and Countachs as well. The market has gone soft above £500,000 – there’s a general price correction going on – but only a significant

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Is a 59,000-mile black Sport Evo a brilliant investment move at £110,000, or an extortionate amount of money for a car that has already peaked? At least one of our experts called this the 911 Carrera 2.7 RS of the future, and if he’s right, £110,000 will one day seem like pocket-change.

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change in interest rates will attract people to alternative investments.'

The juiciest bits, as ever, are the comments we've collected off the record. Understandably, some traders don't want to be seen to be pouring cold water on the market. However, some report that interest in certain sectors of the marketplace, both for nearly new and older cars, is dramatically down, with prices actively falling.

One dealer told us: 'This sounds like sour grapes, but a flushing-out process in the industry would be good. Prices would be more reasonable and enthusiasts would be able to buy the cars. Our margins wouldn't be any different – it won't affect me. I'm sitting on the fence at the moment; we'll see where it all lands. I got caught in 2008, so I'm not getting a lot of stock in at the moment. The market will find its level in 2016.'

OPINION

THE SPECIALIST

NICK WHALE

Silverstone Auctions

'Ferraris are still a good investment, especially with 1980s cars such as the 308, the 328 and the Testarossa, but to make the top prices they need to be right-hand-drive, UK cars, with a known provenance and a detailed service history. Otherwise they can be harder to sell.'

SUMMARY

A year ago our research would have read very differently. Everything was booming and many, both dealers and buyers, were coming into the business with a view to making a quick quid.

Today, while few can agree on what exactly is going to happen, many see 2016 as a year of correction, and that can't be a bad thing. There may well be reluctance in certain sections of the marketplace to lower prices for fear of starting an avalanche effect, so some values will possibly remain artificially high. A complete bursting of the bubble seems unlikely unless global events or a major shift in interest rates come into play, but one strong message seems to be that certain cars may have peaked, while others remain a canny investment for the future with room to grow.

EVO VIEW

STUART GALLAGHER

The latest auction results and online searches for **evo** cars both nearly new and old can make for depressing reading. That you now need £100,000 to buy our current Car of the Year – the Porsche Cayman GT4, which retailed at £64,000 – tells you all you need to know about what's wrong with the market. Or, for some, what's right about it.

Expert view



ROB JOHNSON

Classic & Sports Finance

'The speculators have moved out as the market has slowed and the enquiries we're getting now are the good old-fashioned buyers shopping below £100,000. The past two years have been a feeding frenzy, with people saying, "If I don't get one now I'll be priced out." Buyers now are far more educated, asking exactly what is meant by a "restoration" and who carried out the work. There is some smoke and mirrors going on with prices, which we know because we see the actual invoices. It's common for people to approach us and overvalue their cars by £25,000.'

classicandsportsfinance.co.uk
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MARK DONALDSON

Mark Donaldson Ltd

'Next year will be a test of owners' sincerity. Investors will leave if growth tapers off: people used to buy classics to have fun rather than with an expectation of financial gain, but that has changed. In 2016, more cars coming on the market should allow buyers to be more discerning. The industry has always moved at a comfortable pace, but people have been buying cars without even an inspection in a rush to acquire one. However, the recent trend is one of caution, with even Ferrari 550 prices tailing off. Moreover, many people have been putting the price up based on one sale; maybe that was the only buyer around at that price level...'

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McLAREN PRODUCTION INCREASED

The Woking-based supercar manufacturer has taken on another 250 staff to meet increasing demand, brought on by the success of recently launched models like the 570S and 675LT. Adding a second shift effectively doubles the company's current production capacity.



NEW OWNER FOR PININFARINA

Indian car manufacturer Mahindra has bought a 76 per cent stake in Pininfarina. Like other Italian design and coachbuild specialists Italdesign, Bertone and Zagato, Pininfarina has been struggling financially for some time, and it's hoped that the buyout has secured a future for the company.



INSURANCE COSTS SET TO RISE IN 2016

comparethemarket.com has revealed that it expects the average insurance premium to rise by £50 (to a total of £567.90) this year. After a period of falling premiums for most, the implementation of an increased insurance premium tax and a rise in premiums in general have been blamed.

We've heard of a few GT4 owners who had secured orders, saved everything they could to pay for it and, on the day of collection, were offered, by the supplying dealer, £20,000 over list price for their new car. For some, that return on investment was impossible to ignore, but how long before they own the car of their dreams again?

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61	AVENTADOR LP700-4 Volcano Orange/Black Stitched Orange, Sat Nav, R'Camera, Sports Exhaust, Gloss Black Alloys, 8,000m FSH, As New.....	£224,950
06	MURCIELAGO ROADSTER E-GEAR Black Metallic/Black, Sports Exhaust, Hercules Alloys, Folding Mirrors, Good Spec, 21,000m FSH, Stunning	£119,950
13	FF Canna Di Fucile/Charcoal E/Seats , Sat Nav, Carbon Fibre Interior, Rear DVDs, R'Camera, Privacy, Shields, 20" Dark Painted Alloys, Massive Spec, 8,000m FSH.....	£174,950
07	599 GTB FIORANO F1 Blu Tour De France/Crema E/Seats, Carbon Fibre Interior, BOSE, Ceramics, Parking Sensors, Red Calipers, 38,000m FSH, Excellent Condition Throughout	£99,950
11	458 ITALIA Grigio Silverstone/Rosso Hide, Sat Nav, Carbon S/Wheel With LEDs, AFS, Upgraded Hi-Fi, 21" Alloys, Big Spec, 7,900m FSH, As New.....	£144,950
59	430 SCUDERIA LHD Grigio /Black & Red Leather, Carbon S/Wheel With LEDs, Racing Livery, Shields, Red Calipers, 400km Vat Q, Perfect.....	£189,950
09	430 SCUDERIA LHD Azzuro California/Grey Alcantara, Carbon S/Wheel With LEDs, Racing Livery, Shields, Grigio Painted Alloys, Yellow Calipers, Good Spec, 24,000m FSH	£119,950

PORSCHE

05	CARRERA GT Silver/Ascot, Sat Nav, Full Fitted Luggage, Just Serviced, 7,000m, Immaculate Throughout.....	£550,000
NEW	991 GT3 RS White/Black Alcantara R/Seats, Carbon Interior, Ceramic Brakes, Lifting, Delivery Miles, UK Supplied, Available Today.....	£POA
15	991 TURBO PDK Jet Black/Carrera Red, H/Seats, PCM, Phone, Sport Chrono, Turbo S Alloys, Chrome Surrounds, Red Calipers, 3,600m, As New	£112,950
03	996 GT3 CLUBSPORT Silver/Black Racing Seats, Front & Rear Roll Cage, Air Con, Radio, CD, Special Features, 21,000m, As New	£69,950
07	997 C4S CAB TIP Midnight Blue/Black E/Seats, PCM, Navigation, BOSE, S/Exhaust, 19" Turbo Alloys, GT3 Front Spoiler, P'Tronic, 36,000m, Great Condition.....	£32,950
13	PANAMERA DIESEL PLATINUM EDT White/Stone Grey, PCM, Phone, Bi-Xenons, Privacy, 20" Turbo II Alloys, High Spec, 40,000m FSH, Excellent Condition.....	£47,950

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16	MULSANNE SPEED V8 Dark Sapphire/Linen, Premier Specification, Sunroof, Rear DVDs, R'Camera, Veneered Picnic Tables, 2015 Registered, Huge Saving – Cost Over £300,000 New, 900m.....	£174,950
13	CONTINENTAL GTC V8 'MULLINER' Dragon Red/Black Stitched White, Piano Black Veneer, Power Boot, R'Camera, 21" Propeller Alloys, 5,000m, 1 Owner.....	£99,950
13	CONTINENTAL GT V8 Glacier White/Black Ventilated & Massage Seats, Sat Nav, R'Camera, Power Boot, 21" Alloys, Good Spec, 4,000m, As New	£89,950
08	CONTINENTAL GT SPEED Beluga Black/Black M'Seats, Sat Nav, Bluetooth, Piano Black, Power Boot, Good Spec, 45,000m FSH	£49,950
04	ARNAGE R Silverstorm/Cotswold, Sat Nav, Sunroof, Mulliner Spec, Emblems To Waistrails, Jewel Filler Cap, Good Spec, 14,000m FSH, Exceptional Condition.....	£39,950

OTHERS

65	MERCEDES-BENZ AMG GT-S Silver/Black & Red Nappa, Comand, Sports Exhaust, AMG Ride Control, 10 Spoke Alloys, Big Spec.....	£112,950
64	AUDI R8 5.2 V10 PLUS S'TRONIC Matt Sepang Blue/Black Milano, Sat Nav, R'Camera, Bang & Olufsen, Carbon Sigma Blades, Cost New £140,000, 5,000m	£89,950
13	AUDI R8 4.2 FSI Estoril Blue/Black Hide, Sat Nav, R'Camera, Silver Blades, Good Spec, 11,000m FSH, As New.....	£69,950
09	ASTON MARTIN DBS AUTO 2+2 Storm Black/Black, Sat Nav, Bang & Olufsen, Piano Black Veneer, 20" Diamond Turned Alloys, Sports Exhaust, 40,000m FSH, Excellent Condition.....	£72,950
14	RANGE ROVER SPORT 3.0SD HSE DYNAMIC Corris Grey/Black, Sat Nav, Panoramic Roof, Remote Boot, 21" Diamond Turned Alloys, Massive Spec, 28,000m FSH.....	£57,950

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USED RIVALS: HOT HATCHES OF THE MID-2000s

by Adam Towler



VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo
Power	197bhp @ 5100rpm
Torque	207lb ft @ 1800-5100rpm
Weight	1336kg (150bhp/ton)
0-60mph	6.7sec (tested)
Top speed	145mph (claimed)
On sale	2004-2009
evo rating	★★★★★

'I BOUGHT ONE'

'I think it's unrivalled as an everyday performance car: practical for small families, very comfortable, great to look at yet not too flash. Inside it's smart. Mine has the optional DSG 'box, which is good around town. The performance is great and it's even cheap to run.' **Steve Thompson**

EXAMPLES



2006 £5975
Sheffield Car Centre
A stealthy Mk5 GTI in silver with five doors and 92,000 miles. Equipped with the standard manual 'box.

RUNNING COSTS

'These are great cars, with better build quality than the Mk6. The fuel-pump cam bucket wears and should be regularly checked, especially on modified cars, and the DSG mechatronics can occasionally fail, resulting in a large bill. Dampers and bushes will be tired on older cars, but there are no corrosion issues. Note that Edition 30 and Pirelli special editions have the stronger engine and bigger turbo.'

Matt Walker, volkswagenracing.co.uk

THE CREAM OF TURBOCHARGED hot hatches from ten years ago are now available from £5000, with each of these cars offering 150mph-ish performance and tremendous versatility. For the money, nothing else really comes close.

No one could quite believe that VW had responded to the soulless Mk4 Golf GTI with a car that brought back the best of the originals. Painless to run, it's the sensible

choice here without ever being boring.

Ford gave the Mk2 Focus 'ST' performance with a charismatic in-line five-cylinder motor, and it's both the car's ace card and Achilles' heel. Sonorous but thirsty, torque-rich but weighty, just keep an eye on the coolant level.

The Astra VXR is the wild one: uncouth over certain surfaces and with an image not to all tastes, but there's no denying its manic turbocharged performance.



FORD FOCUS ST

Engine	In-line 5-cyl, 2522cc, turbo
Power	222bhp @ 6100rpm
Torque	236lb ft @ 1600-4000rpm
Weight	1392kg (162bhp/ton)
0-60mph	6.7sec (tested)
Top speed	150mph (claimed)
On sale	2005-2010
evo rating	★★★★☆

'I ordered mine in 2005 and still have it today after 83,000 miles. It's been a great car, with the only issues being an alternator, a battery and a reversing-light. Power is excellent, comfort perfect. I get 22-24mpg in town but at least 35mpg on a run. As soon as I saw it, I knew I wanted it.' **Dean Borg**



2007 £6995
MCR Specialist Cars
A three-door car in ST-2 spec. It has 79,000 miles on the clock and is finished in subtle Sea Grey.

'Front lower-arm rear bushes are a common issue. Look for wear on the inside of the tyres. Listen also for knocking driveshafts. Replacement is not a big job but the parts are expensive at upwards of £500. The engine block can crack between the bores – it has all the signs of a blown head gasket. A "block mod" is available, but it's not a complete fix. Not much goes wrong though really.'

Stuart Millican, focusrparts.co.uk



VAUXHALL ASTRA VXR

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
Power	237bhp @ 5600rpm
Torque	236lb ft @ 2400rpm
Weight	1393kg (173bhp/ton)
0-60mph	6.7sec (tested)
Top speed	152mph (claimed)
On sale	2005-2011
evo rating	★★★★★

'I bought my VXR in standard specification, and it was a lot of car for the money. It's actually a much better car than it's perceived to be – once you've given it a more progressive throttle map, a set of lowering springs and added a rear anti-roll bar. I've also fitted a limited-slip diff.' **Stephen Crane**



2009 £6993
1st Choice Cars
An Astra in this colour always looks more like an Opel OPC product, and this 88,000-miler looks smart.

'There are obvious things to look for, and not-so-obvious ones. A misfire requires a new coil pack and spark plugs to fix, at £100, and uneven power delivery is usually an air-mass meter, at £150. A noisy gearbox is actually a worn-out diff bearing, and costs £1500. LSD 'boxes prevent this happening. Just run away from induction kits and aftermarket dump valves: both will decrease power.'

John Thorne, thornemotorsport.co.uk

THE EVO CHOICE

The Focus's charismatic in-line five gives it that hint of Audi Quattro burble, but sadly, like the Ingolstadt icon, the Ford can't mask the weight above its front axle. The ST has aged well and in subtle blacks and greys is a great sleeper, but that lack of chassis finesse is too much for us.

The Astra VXR may not have an engine with the character of the ST's, but it counters with superior chassis composure, which is why we put it on a par with the Focus ST in a six-car hot hatch test back in 2007 (evo 102). The Vauxhall was never a class-winner, but it was always a strong alternative.

VW really did pull the rabbit out of the hat with the Mk5 Golf GTI, breathing new life into its most famous model. It's not only because the Mk5 GTI is a perfect all-rounder that it gets our vote, but because it's one of the greatest hatches of a generation. **Stuart Gallagher**

BUYING JOURNEY

From 205 GTI to E46 M3, an **evo** reader charts his envy-inducing car ownership history



DANIEL LINDSAY
NORTH LONDON



5th VW Scirocco 2.0 TSI

'It has been DMS chipped and has a Milltek exhaust system, so it's as quick as an R, but totally stealthy. It handles nicely, is cheap to run but has never really excited.'

1st Peugeot 205 GTI 1.6

'This taught me so much about how great a car can feel. Like many, it chewed me up and spat me out on a greasy road with some brutal lift-off oversteer.'



1991

2006



4th BMW E46 M3

'It was an itch I had to scratch, and the engine was just a marvel. Ultimately it had to go as the mileage was going up and big repair bills worried me.'



evo view

When you learn to drive in a Mk2 Golf GTI, the path to **evo** enlightenment is surely just around the next corner. And so it proved for Daniel, who soon bought a new 205 GTI 1.6 and enjoyed three thrilling years before oversteering into a taxi.

What Daniel describes as 'dull-ish' company cars followed, although a BMW 3-series Compact, Alfa Romeo 146 and a Focus ST170 are vastly preferable to a bog-standard Vectra with a dog-eared road atlas on the parcel shelf.

Caterham provided his entertainment in this era, starting with a Roadsport in 1996 before moving to a Superlight, which he clearly adored. A very early Mazda RX-8 also arrived around this time, before both cars gave way to one of Munich's finest – the M3 – with its 'marvel' of a straight-six power unit. A Cooper S Clubman was a rather left-field deviation, while for the past six years the tweaked Scirocco has provided pace, if not wild excitement.

Tell us about your buying journey. Email eds@evo.co.uk

1999

2nd Caterham Superlight

'You could do anything in this car and nobody wanted to race you apart from bikes. With no windscreen, a VHPD exhaust kit and Tillett seats, it was incredible.'



2003

3rd Mazda RX-8

'I've always liked unusual cars and this was another great one in my opinion. Yes, it had faults and always returned only 19mpg, but even today they look great, are practical, and handle well.'

What's next?

'I have an Audi RS3 on order. Originally I was thinking of a 911, 370Z or an Audi S3. I play golf and have a son, too, so need space. The S3 was sensible but didn't feel special. Likewise I knew the Golf R was great but commonplace. Then I saw the RS3 and it looked very naughty. I've ticked all the good options, including the sports exhaust.'

Tip

It's simple, Daniel: you need another Caterham to go with the RS3; 360R or 420R.

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BUYING GUIDE: TOYOTA GT86/ SUBARU BRZ 2012-PRESENT

The GT86 and its BRZ twin offered something refreshingly different in 2012. Four years on, how do they stack up as a used buy?

by Peter Tomalin



JOURNALISTS, EH? WE BANG ON ABOUT the dearth of naturally aspirated, front-engine, rear-drive cars with modest grip, and when we finally get one (or rather two), all we do is find fault. It's true our initial review, part of which is reproduced here, was less than glowing. Admittedly the BRZ on test was slightly hamstrung by its auto gearbox, but we also criticised the rather lacklustre engine. Even the handling came in for flak. Others, though, raved about the little Toybaru, and we've since recognised that, with a few well-chosen mods, it can indeed be the drivers' car it always wanted to be.

The first thing to know is that the BRZ and GT86 are essentially the same car, although, out of the box, the Toyota has softer springs at the

front and stiffer ones at the rear, promoting extra playfulness over the Subaru's keener turn-in and extra stability. It must be galling for Subaru, whose hardware underpins both cars, that its own version is outsold in most markets. In the UK, the ratio is almost ten to one.

The Subaru boxer engine, in this case a naturally aspirated 2-litre with a Toyota fuelling system (featuring both direct and port injection) sits well back and low down in the chassis to aid agility and drives the rear wheels via a choice of conventional six-speed manual or six-speed paddleshift auto gearboxes, with a Torsen mechanical limited-slip diff and switchable VSC three-mode stability control as standard. In fact you got plenty of standard kit for the £24,995 list price (the auto was

£1500 more), including 17-inch alloys, bi-xenons, dual-zone air-con, Bluetooth and LED daytime running lights.

The TRD (Toyota Racing Development) special edition was introduced in March 2014 at a steep £31,495 for the manual. It was chiefly a cosmetic exercise, though its bigger, 18-inch alloys and Yokohama Advan Sports in place of the regular car's Michelin Primacy eco tyres brought a newfound edge to the handling.

For 2015MY Toyota introduced a number of variants, including the heavily bewinged Aero (an extra £2500) and the entry-level Primo (£2500 less than the regular car at £22,495). We'd be happy with a regular GT86/BRZ. Just think of it as the starting point...

CHECKPOINTS

ENGINE

The flat-four is pretty much bombproof, experts agree. Mark Gillam of tuning specialist Abbey Motorsport says there have been a few minor issues: noisy high-pressure fuel pumps, oil leaks from the rear of the driver's side cylinder head, a misfire under load that's cured by an updated engine map. 'All should be covered by the

five-year warranty,' he advises, 'though they are getting tougher on cars that have had forced induction.'

While reliability isn't generally a problem, power delivery is – particularly the dip in the torque curve at around 4000rpm. 'More a valley of death,' grimaces Iain Litchfield of Litchfield Imports. A remap, possibly together with a freer-breathing intake and exhaust, will

help here, while adding up to 20-30bhp and a shot of character. Many remaps come with extra goodies like throttle-blips on downchanges. EcuTek is widely regarded as one of the best.

Then there are the various forced induction options. 'If you do a lot of track work and want to hold a drift, you really need the extra power,' says Iain. Both Litchfield and Abbey

Motorsport favour superchargers over turbos, as they put less stress on the engine and don't overwhelm the rear tyres. Around 300bhp is a safe bet. 'We've done 35 to 40 conversions so far and not had any problems,' says Mark Gillam. 'The thing is, it was built as a tuner's car.'

TRANSMISSION

The automatic gearbox is best avoided –

despite the paddles behind the wheel, it's an old-style slushbox and the manual is much better suited to the character of the car. Both the manual gearbox itself and the clutch are proving robust, even on tuned cars. On some cars the gearshift can baulk going into second, especially when cold. It's possible to improve the shift with an oil change and/or clutch adjustment.

SUSPENSION, STEERING, BRAKES

Various suspension packages and wheel and tyre upgrades are available. 'It kind of lurches in and out of oversteer in standard form, but it can be made much more benign and predictable,' says Iain Litchfield. 'Ditching the standard eco tyres is probably the best upgrade you can



Left: Subaru's BRZ is the lesser-spotted of the pair. **Right:** check driver's seat side bolster for wear. **Bottom:** flat-four engine proving reliable



make, followed by springs and anti-roll bar.' Abbey's Mark Gillam warns against over-tying a car that hasn't been tuned, but for a tuned car, stickier rubber is essential. He also recommends a Hunter four-wheel alignment. Standard brakes are fine for road driving, even with up to 300bhp, though it's not unusual for them to squeal – a change of pad compound usually fixes it.

BODY, INTERIOR, ELECTRICS

Look out for rust bubbling up at the bottom of the quarter-light pillar on both front windows. Paint chipping is common, as is water in the rear light clusters.

The driver's seat side bolster is prone to wear, and many cars suffer annoying rattles. Anything emanating from within the dash is likely to be tricky to fix.

RIVALS

MAZDA MX-5

The MX-5 has been delivering simple rear-drive fun for a quarter of a century. £15k buys a 2013 Mk3.5 2.0i Sport Tech Nav: 158bhp, 0-60mph in 7.6sec.

NISSAN 370Z

Another naturally aspirated front-engine, rear-drive coupe. Just two seats, but the Z's big V6 gives 323bhp and 0-60mph in 5.3sec. £16k buys a 2009/10 GT.

PORSCHE CAYMAN

With c£16k to spend on a coupe, it's awfully hard to ignore the pert Porsche. It'd be a basic 2.7 (241bhp, 0-60mph in 5.9sec) from around 2007, but that'd be fine by us.

INFORMATION



GT86/BRZ

Engine	Flat-four, 1998cc
Max power	197bhp @ 7000rpm
Max torque	151lb ft @ 6400-6600rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual (six-speed auto optional), rear-wheel drive, LSD
Weight	1240kg (BRZ: 1230kg)
Power-to-weight	161bhp/ton (BRZ: 163bhp/ton)
0-60mph	7.6sec (claimed)
Top speed	140mph (claimed)
Price new	£24,995 (2012)

PARTS PRICES

(Prices from lancastercambridge.toyota.co.uk. Tyre price from blackcircles.com. All prices include VAT but exclude fitting charges)

Tyres (each)	£76 (OE Michelin Primacy), £73.38 (Dunlop Sport Maxx RT)
Front pads (set)	£162
Front discs (pair)	£136.80
Damper (front)	£202.11
Clutch kit	£177.14
Spark plugs (set)	£158.83

SERVICING

(Prices from toyota.co.uk, including VAT. Service due every 12 months or 10,000 miles, whichever is sooner.)



Intermediate	£179
Full	£299
Full+	£579 (60k miles: all fluids, filters, plugs, etc)

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FORUMS, ADVICE, EVENTS

gt86ownersclub.co.uk
gt86.org.uk
subarubrforum.com
ft86club.com

INDEPENDENT SPECIALISTS/TUNERS

litchfieldimports.co.uk
abbeymotorsport.co.uk
fensport.co.uk

CARS FOR SALE

usedcars.toyota.co.uk
usedcars.subaru.co.uk
classicandperformancecar.com



'I BOUGHT ONE'

IAN GROVES

'I've had my GT86 for a little over three years and 40,000 miles. When I bought mine in September 2012, GT86s were a rare sight, and I still don't see many of them on the road. I rather enjoy the relative exclusivity.

'I'd previously had a TVR Griffith and a Nissan 350Z GT, both having bags more grunt but also being less practical and – it turns out – less fun. After the TVR and the Nissan, the Toyota is way more useable. The rear seats may be small with restricted legroom but at least they're there, and the boot's a good size. With the rear seats folded flat it's remarkable how much you can fit in there.



'In 40,000 miles the car has barely missed a beat, except for the failure of a coil pack, which was replaced free of charge under the five-year warranty. Servicing has been reasonable and painless, mpg averages low-to-mid 30s with over 40 on a run, and it costs me less than £200 a year to insure.

'I have the obligatory upgraded exhaust and remap, which has released a little more power and improved driveability. The main difference is minimising the

infamous "torque dip" and adding a little more torque throughout the range, as well as a few fancy tricks like full-throttle gearchanges and the auto-blip on downchanges.

'It's not the fastest car in the world, and is probably not quick enough for some, but once you forget the stats and meaningless comparisons and just enjoy driving the thing, you and the car come alive. I can easily lose a few hours driving around the Brecon Beacons or the Cotswolds, maybe encouraging a little wiggle from the rear as I accelerate away from the bends. It's fun and rewarding, and I love it now as much as I did on the test drive back in July 2012.'

WHAT WE SAID



BRZ v MÉGANE 265 v MX-5 v 370Z, JUNE 2012

'My heart sinks when I discover our BRZ is fitted with the optional six-speed auto, but I'm not going to let that spoil these first moments with the car. What counts for now is the lovely steering wheel, the big central rev-counter with red ink absent until 7500rpm and the legs-outstretched sports-car vibe.

'There's no baritone boxer warble, just a light, pattery fizz from the twin exhausts. Other first impressions are overwhelmingly positive. The electric power steering is beautifully weighted and it directs a chassis of tangible rigidity and control. The biggest surprise is that the ride is actually very firm. It doesn't crash and bang but it does bobble and tug over every little surface ripple. What you should know up front is that this car is not a wild oversteerer. Not in the dry, at least...

'On unsighted corners where you can't fully commit, it does feel underpowered, as you tend to drop out of the powerband. Below 5000rpm it doesn't feel as feisty as the MX-5, let alone the Nissan [370Z] and Renault [Mégane 265 Trophy]. Instead you must wind it out to 7500rpm, then hustle it along above 5000rpm at all times.

'The BRZ does much brilliantly but you really have to work hard to reveal its magic. It needs more power – or a wet surface – to fulfil its obvious and tantalising potential.' (evo 170)



IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

2012 (62) GT86 £15,950

10,632 miles // red with red/black trim // manual // one owner // Bluetooth // heated seats
sytner.co.uk



2014 (14) GT86 £18,946

6682 miles // automatic // paddleshift // blue/black cloth // 17in alloys
petervardycarstore.com



2014 (14) GT86 TRD £20,956

17,217 miles // manual // white with black leather // limited edition // heated seats // dual climate
evanshalshaw.com



WHAT TO PAY

£?
£15k+

Both models are actually resisting depreciation pretty well. Very few cars have yet dipped below £15k, which is a realistic starting point for higher-mileage privately advertised 2012 examples. Up to £17k gives you a wide choice of 2012/13 cars with low miles and full histories, including from within the official dealer network. Options worth looking out for include leather/Alcantara trim with heated front seats (£1600 when new) and Toyota's 'Touch and Go' infotainment system and satnav (£750).



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MODEL FOCUS: RENAULTSPORT MÉGANE

Renowned for their sweet chassis, a well-specced RS Mégane is always in demand

by Adam Towler



EXPECTATIONS WEREN'T OVERLY high when the Mégane Renaultsport 225 arrived in 2004, as the Mégane I – even with Clio Williams power – hadn't quite hit the mark. In this larger class of hatchback Peugeot had ruled the roost with the 306 GTI 6/Rallye, but in a post-Mk1 Focus RS landscape the 225's specification and meaty 2-litre turbo power nevertheless marked it out as a formidable contender. That it didn't initially fulfil its potential can now almost be seen as something of a Renaultsport trademark, the car then being fine-tuned to perfect pitch with successive variants.

Its position as the enthusiast's choice is one it has held on to almost permanently since. Even just recently, under extreme pressure in these

pages from the new Honda Civic Type R and SEAT Leon Cupra Ultimate Sub8 (see *evo* 215), the RS Mégane III still offered an unbeatable combination of performance, authenticity and handling finesse.

Today there's a Mégane RS for a vast range of budgets, with early cars available for as little as £2000. Mick Pittman at Renault specialist Diamond Motors (diamondmotors.net) reckons there are only a few things to watch over standard Mégane II issues.

'The timing-belt change is £420 including the water pump,' he says, 'and while the gearboxes are good, you do need to watch the dual-mass flywheels. Make sure the steering self-centres and the gearlever feels fluid and self-centres, otherwise the cable set or selector needs replacing.'

Expert view

STEVE MURR at R-SPORT CARS

'Early cars, even the Trophy, range from high-milers at just over £2000 to 60,000-milers at £4000. The first-edition F1 car, the 225 F1 Team, is very popular, however, and only 149 were imported – just four in black. There are some very nice refinements on these and also a numbered plaque, so if you can find a sub-50,000-miler you'll pay up to £6000, which is overlapping with the R26.

'The 230 F1 Team R26 is great value for money. Cars with 70,000 to 90,000 miles go for £4500-5000, with up to £6000 covering off lower-mileage red, black and blue cars. Liquid Yellow and Glacier White cars will be over £6000 as these are the most desirable colours, while popular options are the full decal pack, xenon headlamps and the Lux pack. History, minimal mods and Michelin tyres are all sought after, and a high-spec yellow car with 40,000 miles can make £8250.

'The R26.R is appreciating. The cage and titanium exhaust are must-have options, with high-mileage cars available from £17,000. With the 250 [pictured above right], Recaro seats are a must and the Cup pack and xenons are good news. Prices start at £9000 for something decent, whereas 2010-11 cars will go for £10,000-13,500. It really is all about the spec with these.'



SERIAL BUYER

MIKE DENT

Mike Dent has owned seven Renaultsport Méganes, so fits our definition of a 'serial buyer' pretty well. He began with a five-door Mégane 225 in Midnight Blue 11 years ago: 'I suppose this one was my least favourite, just because it was more family-biased, but it was a great car and made me fall in love with Renaultsport.'

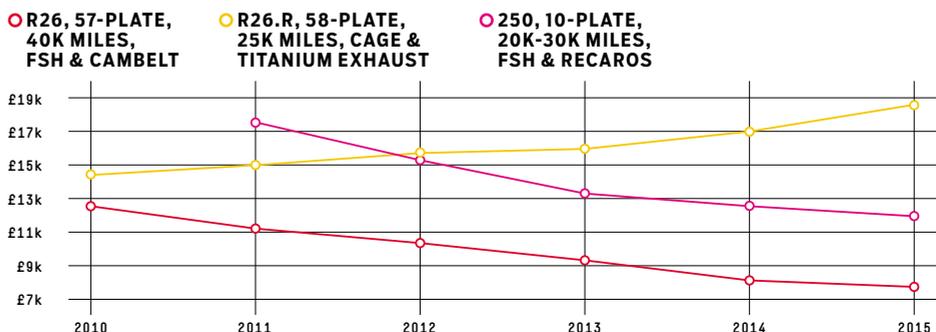
From there it was three R26s in a row, first with a new 07-plate car in Liquid Yellow, then a new Glacier White car, and finally a black one. Mike's fifth Mégane was an R26.R in rare Racing Blue. 'The moment I saw that car I got tingles. The combination of blue, black and red with a carbon bonnet sounds wrong, but it looked amazing. Poking the plastic back windows was fun, hanging the shirts for work on the roll-cage, strapping yourself in, throwing the car around corners and not sliding around in the seat.'

Mike bought another, in fact, but not before buying a new Mégane III RS 250 – 'a great everyday car'.

'You don't buy a hot hatch to save money,' Mike notes, 'but I don't think I've owned a car long enough for faults to occur. Nothing beats a blast in the country over amazing roads.'

Trends

Data supplied by R-Sport Cars





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911 2.4 S (LHD)

Light Yellow • Black Leatherette Sport Seats • Manual Gearbox • 15" Fuchs Wheels • Side Oil Filler Cap • Porsche Certificate of Authenticity • 1972 (K)
£249,995



911 Carrera RS (993 LHD)

Grand Prix White • Black/Grey Dual Tone Leather Bucket Seats • Manual Gearbox • 18" Split Rim Wheels • 58,240 km (36,400 miles) • 1995 (N)
£249,995



911 Carrera RS (964 LHD)

Maritime Blue • Triple Tone Leather Bucket Seats • Manual Gearbox • 17" Magnesium Cup Wheels • 93,656 km (58,195 miles) • 1992 (J)
£209,995



911 2.0 S (LHD)

Silver Metallic • Black Half Leather Sports Seats • Manual Gearbox • Professional Restoration • Blaupunkt Radio • Matching Numbers • 1968 (F)
£174,995



911 GT2 (996)

Polar Silver • Black Leather Sport Seats • Manual Gearbox • Porsche Ceramic Composite Brakes • Sports Exhaust • 20,892 miles • 2003 (03)
£144,995



911 GT2 (996)

Arctic Silver • Black Leather Bucket Seats • Manual Gearbox • Porsche Ceramic Composite Brakes • Rear Roll Cage • 48,992 miles • 2002 (02)
£119,995



911 Carrera 4 GTS (997 GEN II)

Carrera White • Black Leather Sport Seats • PDK Gearbox • Sport Chrono Pack with Sport Plus • 18,019 miles • 2012 (12)
£64,995



911 Carrera 4 S (997 GEN II)

Meteor Grey • Black Leather Seats • Manual Gearbox • 19" Carrera Sport Wheels • Touchscreen Satellite Navigation • 35,238 miles • 2011 (60)
£49,995



Boxster S (981)

Basalt Black • Black Leather Sport Seats • PDK Gearbox • 20" Carrera Classic III Wheels • 14,757 miles • 2013 (13)
£44,995



911 Carrera 2 S (997 GEN II)

Basalt Black • Black Leather Seats • Manual Gearbox • 19" Carrera S II Wheels • Switchable Sports Exhaust • 27,756 miles • 2009 (09)
£43,995



911 Turbo (996)

Polar Silver • Dark Blue Leather Seats • Tiptronic S Gearbox • 18" Turbo II Wheels • Electric Sunroof • 61,383 miles • 2002 (02)
£39,995



Boxster (981)

Agate Grey • Black Leather Sport Seats • Manual Gearbox • 20" Carrera Classic III Wheels • DAB Radio • 26,114 miles • 2013 (63)
£34,995

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SHOULD YOU KEEP IT?

Mini Cooper S (R53)



If you can't face selling your car, take a look at the latest options to upgrade and improve it instead **by Antony Ingram**

BUY A BRAND NEW MINI COOPER S and its turbocharged 2-litre engine will produce 189bhp. Such outputs are seen as a bare minimum for hot hatches these days, which makes the 168bhp maximum of the original R53-generation Mini Cooper S seem a little feeble.

Luckily, power gains are simple to achieve. Cambridgeshire-based specialist 1320 (1320.co.uk) do a Stage 1 Performance Pulley package

for £312. It includes an 11-17 per cent smaller supercharger pulley (depending on the owner's choice), plus the belt, new plugs, a health check and a dyno run. With a 15 per cent smaller pulley (any smaller and other upgrades are advised), owners have seen more than 180bhp at the wheels.

A set of Michelin Pilot Super Sports to replace the OEM runflats would complement the upgrade nicely. They cost £424.04 from blackcircles.com.

Aftermarket news



NOVITEC HURACÁN N-LARGO

German tuner Novitec has increased the visual drama of the Huracán with its N-Largo bodykit. It adds 120mm to the width of the standard car with new panels that are made from carbonfibre. A supercharger also boosts power to 848bhp from the stock 602bhp.



BBR MAZDA MX-5

BBR has already turned its attention to the all-new MX-5. A £495 'Super 160' upgrade adds at least 20bhp to the 1.5-litre car and has taken BBR's demonstrator to 158bhp. A 'Super 175+' pack does a similar thing for the 2-litre car, while £1995 yields 190bhp, with a new intake, manifold and exhaust.



OVERFINCH DEFENDER 40th

Just five, individually numbered examples of Overfinch's anniversary Defender will be made. Inside are leather Recaros, while outside there's a set of 18in alloys, a special aluminium fuel cap and Overfinch bonnet lettering. The 2.2-litre diesel remains standard.



GABURA V8 18

Is BMW's i8 just a little too economical for you? Tuner Gabura Racing Technologies has turned it from a mid-engined hybrid into a front-engined, 4.4-litre V8 supercar. The V8 is capable of developing nearly 800bhp. The company says it's likely to cost around £550,000.

NEXT MONTH

ANALYSIS

Gas guzzlers: petrol prices are down, so we identify the pick of the fuel-hungry evo cars.

USED RIVALS

'90s coupe heroes: Volkswagen Corrado VR6 v Fiat Coupe 20V v Ford Puma 1.7.

BUYING GUIDE

Maserati Quattroporte: V8 power, Italian style – what could possibly go wrong?

MODEL FOCUS

Lotus Esprit V8s: the last of the Esprits are some of the best, but what are their prices doing?

'Why I kept it'

DAVID HASSAN

SUBARU IMPREZA
WRX UK300 PPP

'I bought my WRX UK300 four years ago after reading an Impreza "specials of specials" feature in an old issue of *evo* [issue 034, August 2001]. You gave the thumbs-up for the UK300, so after that I was on the web and bought one over the phone from a guy in Suffolk.

'A week later I was in Scotland to pick up my brother and fly to London, having started out from my home in Norway. After we collected the Impreza – in February – I left it in my brother's garage until the winter was finished in Norway. I simply couldn't bring the car home until the roads were snow-free in the mountains.

'It was some wait, those few months. I went back to Scotland in May and drove the car to Newcastle for the ferry to Amsterdam then headed back to Bergen. The roads are mega over here, with high mountain passes and forests. The Subaru is perfect for them.

'My UK300 is my daily driver, so it's also my delivery car. I produce and deliver my own brand of birch-sap wine, called Bjork. I sell it to all the best places in Sweden – five-star hotels, Michelin-starred restaurants and so on. You can't get ten boxes of 12 bottles in a 911, can you?

'From home in Bergen to my birch farm in Sweden is 500 miles. I love to drive at night on empty roads and have three high-powered spotlights on the front to try and avoid the moose. I really use the Subaru to the full.

'It's an honest car: simple, fast on boost, magic. It just gives and gives. I'm all over Sweden and Norway with it in all weathers. It is a supercar in the truest sense of the word. I won't sell it.'

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2014 Porsche Panamera 3.0 Diesel, Black, Cream Leather **£56,995**



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2013 Mercedes-Benz E250 CDI AMG Sport Convertible, White, 16,000 Miles **£26,995**

2010 Audi A5 S-Line Convertible, White, Leather.....	£13,450	2012 Mercedes-Benz E200 Petrol Avantguard, Grey, 31,000 Miles.....	£17,995
2013 Audi A6 3.0 Litre Diesel Twin Turbo, Black, High Spec, 42,000 Miles.....	£25,995	2012 Mercedes-Benz E200 Petrol Convertible, Black, Leather, 30,000 Miles.....	£21,995
2013 Audi Q5 2.0 TFSI Petrol Highline Auto, Black, 14,000 Miles, VAT Qualifying.....	£27,995	2015 Mercedes-Benz E220 Diesel SE Auto, 9,000 Miles, Choice of Colours.....	From £24,995
2015 Aston Martin Vanquish Volante 60th Edition Unique, 1 of 6 cars.....	£345,000	2014 Mercedes-Benz E250 Sport AMG Line Saloon Auto, Black, 9000 Miles.....	£26,995
2013 Bentley Continental Coupe W12 Speed, Black, Leather, Only 5,000 Miles.....	£109,995	2011 Mercedes-Benz S300 Hybrid LWB, Black, 500 Miles, VAT Qualifying.....	£79,995
2012 Range Rover Sport Overfinch 3.0 SD V6 HSE, White, 17,000 Miles.....	£44,995	2011 Mercedes-Benz S350 LWB, Petrol, Silver, 52,000 Miles.....	£24,995
1979 Mercedes-Benz 450 SL Auto, Met Grey, Restored Vehicle, Stunning Car.....	£26,995	2011 Mercedes-Benz S350 LWB Petrol, Silver, Black Leather, Panroof, V/High Spec....	£26,995
1979 Mercedes-Benz 450 SL Auto, Met Red, Checked Cloth Interior, Hard Top.....	£24,995	2014 Mercedes-Benz S350 LWB, White, Leather, 8,000 Miles, VAT Qualifying.....	£49,995
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2/3 APRIL	DUNLOP MSA BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP	BRANDS HATCH	30/31 JULY	DUNLOP MSA BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP	SNETTERTON
16/17 APRIL	BRITISH GT AND BRDC F4 CHAMPIONSHIPS	BRANDS HATCH GP	5-7 AUGUST	MCE INSURANCE BRITISH SUPERBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP	BRANDS HATCH GP
30 APRIL - 2 MAY	MCE INSURANCE BRITISH SUPERBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP	OULTON PARK	6/7 AUGUST	BRITISH GT AND BRDC F4 CHAMPIONSHIPS	SNETTERTON
7/8 MAY	BLANCPAIN GT SPRINT SERIES	BRANDS HATCH GP	27-29 AUGUST	MCE INSURANCE BRITISH SUPERBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP	CADWELL PARK
20-22 MAY	MCE INSURANCE BRITISH SUPERBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP	BRANDS HATCH	9-11 SEPTEMBER	MCE INSURANCE BRITISH SUPERBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP	OULTON PARK
28/29 MAY	MASTERS HISTORIC FESTIVAL	BRANDS HATCH GP	10/11 SEPTEMBER	BRITISH TRUCK RACING CHAMPIONSHIP	SNETTERTON
28 & 30 MAY	BRITISH GT AND BRDC F4 CHAMPIONSHIPS	OULTON PARK	1/2 OCTOBER	DUNLOP MSA BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP	BRANDS HATCH GP
4/5 JUNE	DUNLOP MSA BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP	OULTON PARK	14-16 OCTOBER	MCE INSURANCE BRITISH SUPERBIKE CHAMPIONSHIP	BRANDS HATCH GP
11/12 JUNE	AMERICAN SPEEDFEST IV	BRANDS HATCH	5/6 NOVEMBER	BRITISH TRUCK RACING CHAMPIONSHIP & FIREWORKS	BRANDS HATCH

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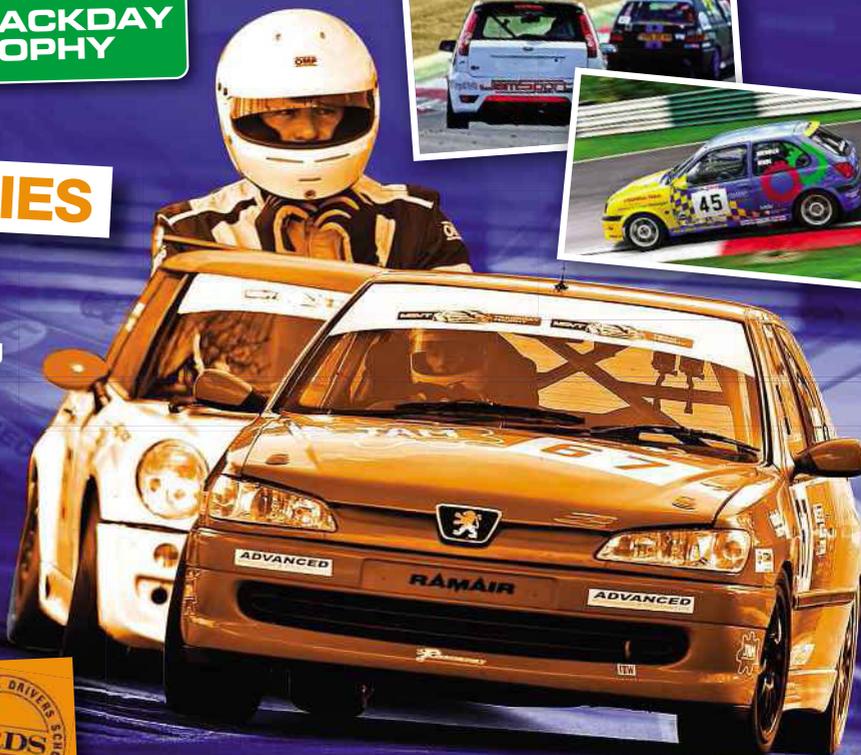
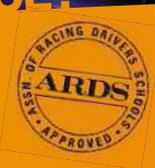
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Knowledge

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	★★★★☆
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	211 R	£24,900	4/1984	228/6000	213/1600	1315kg	176	5.8	-	155	162	40.4	+ Compliant and engaging chassis; quick, too - Looks dull without options	★★★★☆
Audi A1 quattro	181 R	73	4/1984	253/6000	258/2500	1420kg	181	5.7	-	152	199	32.8	+ Polished 253bhp all-wheel-drive A1 - Just 19 for UK, Porsche Cayman price	★★★★☆
Audi S3	188 R	£30,640	4/1984	296/5500	280/1900	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 RS3 Sportback	210 D	£39,950	5/2480	362/5500	343/1625	1520kg	242	4.3	-	155	189	34.9	+ Addictive noise, lighter on its feet than its predecessor - Still a shade sensible	★★★★☆
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	212 R	£31,325	6/2979	321/5800	332/1900	1430kg	228	5.1	-	155	188	35.3	+ Powertrain, noise, chassis, price - M235i looks nicer, and has an LSD on its options list	★★★★☆
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	3/998	68/6000	68/3600	790kg	87	14.2	-	98	103	61.4	+ Full of character and insurance-friendly - Insurance friendly power	★★★★☆
Citroën Saxo VTS	020 R	97*-03	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	935kg	130	7.6	22.6	127	-	34.9	+ Chunky, chuckable charger - Can catch out the unwary	★★★★☆
Citroën 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	★★★★☆
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	★★★★☆
Fiat Panda 100HP	132 R	06*-11	4/1368	99/6000	97/4250	975kg	103	9.5	-	115	154	43.5	+ Most fun per pound on the market - Optional ESP can't be turned off	★★★★☆
Fiat Punto Evo Sporting	141 D	£13,355	4/1368	133/5000	152/1750	1155kg	117	8.5	-	127	129	50.4	+ Great engine, smart styling - Dynamics don't live up to the Evo name	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST	207 R	£17,545	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	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST Mountune	213 R	£18,144	4/1596	212/6000	236/2750	1088kg	198	6.4	-	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 - Growth up compared to Twingo/Swift	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta Zetec S Mountune	213 R	08*-13	4/1596	138/6750	150/2500	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 - Scrapy 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	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST	119 R	05*-10	5/2522	222/6000	236/1600	1392kg	162	6.7	16.8	150	224	30.4	+ Value, performance, integrity - Big engine compromises handling	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST Mountune	137 R	08*-11	5/2522	256/5500	295/2500	1392kg	187	5.8	14.3	155	224	-	+ ST takes extra power in its stride - You probably still want an RS	★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	195 R	09*-11	5/2522	300/6500	324/2300	1467kg	208	5.9	14.2	163	225	30.5	+ Huge performance, highly capable FWD chassis - 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	★★★★☆
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	216 R	£29,995	4/1996	306/6500	295/2500	1378kg	226	5.7	-	167	170	38.7	+ Great on smooth roads - Turbo engine not as special as old NA units; styling a bit 'busy'	★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R (FN2)	102 R	07*-11	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	158	6.8	17.5	146	215	31.0	+ Looks great, VTEC more accessible - Steering lacks feel, inert balance	★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R Championship 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 the 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 (EP3)	075 R	01*-05	4/1998	197/7400	145/5900	1204kg	166	6.8	16.9	146	-	31.7	+ Potent and great value - 'Breadvan' looks divide opinion, duff steering	★★★★☆
Kia Proceed GT	217 D	£23,605	4/1591	201/6000	195/1750	1448kg	143	7.3	-	143	171	38.2	+ Fun and appealing package - Soft-edged compared to rivals	★★★★☆
Lancia Delta Integrale	194 R	88*-93	4/1995	207/5750	220/3500	1300kg	162	5.7	-	137	-	23.9	+ One of the finest cars ever built - Demands love, LHD only	★★★★☆
Mazda 2.1 S Sport	132 R	£13,495	4/1498	102/6000	101/4000	1030kg	107	10.4	-	117	135	48.7	+ Fun and funky - Feels tinny after a Mini	★★★★☆
Mazda 3 MPS	137 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	★★★★☆
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	★★★★☆
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 John Cooper Works (F56)	211 R	£23,050	4/1998	228/5200	236/1250	1200kg	193	6.3	-	153	155	42.2	+ Fast, agile, super-nimble - OE tyres lack outright grip	★★★★☆
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'	★★★★☆
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	★★★★☆
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	★★★★☆
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 (R53)	077 R	02*-06	4/1598	168/6000	155/4000	1140kg	143	7.8	19.9	135	-	33.6	+ Strong performance, quality feel - Over-long gearing	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper S Works GP (R53)	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	★★★★☆
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	★★★★☆



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Our Choice

Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy. This generation of Mégane has got better and better with every update, and the 275 is simply sublime. Optional Ohlins dampers and Cup 2 rubber (taken from the Trophy-R) aren't essential, but improve things even further.



Best of the Rest

The Golf R provides a more grown-up but still hugely entertaining alternative to the Mégane, while its relative, the SEAT Leon Cupra 280, is a real buzz, especially with the Sub8 pack (left) and sticky tyres. The Fiesta ST Mountune is our pick of the smaller hatches.

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 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 by Peugeot Sport	216 R	£21,995	4/1598	205/5800	221/1750	1185kg	176	6.5	-	143	125	47.9	+ The most focused small hatch on sale - Nearly £4k more than a Fiesta ST Mountune
Peugeot 306 GTi 270	215 D	£28,250	4/1598	266/6000	243/1900	1205kg	224	6.0	-	155	139	-	+ A very capable hot hatch... - ...that lacks the sheer excitement of the best in class
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 Auto	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 220 Trophy	213 R	£21,780	4/1618	217/6050	206/2000	1204kg	183	6.6	-	146	135	47.9	+ Improves on the 200 Auto - Still not a match for previous-generation Renaultsport Clios
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	1100kg	165	6.6	17.5	139	-	34.9	+ Took hot hatches to a new level - Flawed driving position
Renaultsport Clio 282 Cup	187 R	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.5	-	139	-	34.9	+ Fantastic chassis... - ...partially obscured by new-found maturity
Renaultsport Clio Trophy	200 R	'05-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.5	17.3	140	-	34.9	+ Full of beans, fantastic value - Sunday-market upholstery
Renaultsport Clio 172 Cup	048 R	'02-'04	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1011kg	171	6.6	17.7	138	-	-	+ The most fun you can have on three (sometimes two) wheels - Just 500 were built
Renaultsport Clio V6 255	057 R	'03-'05	6/2946	251/7150	221/4650	1400kg	182	5.8	-	153	-	23.0	+ Bargain old-school hot hatch - Nervous in the wet, no ABS
Renaultsport Clio V6	029 R	'99-'02	6/2946	227/6000	221/3750	1335kg	173	5.8	17.0	145	-	23.0	+ Supercar drama without the original's edgy handling - Uninspired interior
Renault Clio Williams	195 R	'93-'96	4/1988	148/6100	126/4500	981kg	153	7.6	20.8	134	-	26.0	+ Pocket supercar - Mid-engined handling can be tricky
Renault 5 GT Turbo	195 R	'87-'91	4/1397	118/5750	122/3000	855kg	140	7.3	-	120	-	28.4	+ One of the best hot hatches ever - Can be fragile
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy	212 R	£28,930	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1376kg	200	5.8	-	159	174	37.7	+ Clio Williams' grand-daddy - Few unmodified ones left
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy-R	215 R	£36,430	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1297kg	212	5.8	-	158	174	37.7	+ Another cracking Trophy model - Stripped-out Trophy-R is even more thrilling
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	195 R	'12-'15	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	191	6.4	14.8	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	+ A hot hatch benchmark - Cupholder could be better positioned
Renaultsport Mégane dCi 175 Cup	119 R	'07-'09	4/1995	173/3750	265/2000	1470kg	119	8.3	23.5	137	-	43.5	+ Fantastic chassis... - ...partially obscured by new-found maturity
Renaultsport Mégane 230 FI Team R26	195 R	'07-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1345kg	171	6.2	16.0	147	-	-	+ A diesel with a genuinely sporty chassis - Could take more power
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	200 R	'08-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1220kg	189	5.8	15.1	147	-	-	+ The car the R26.R is based on - FI Team stickers in dubious taste
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	218 D	£18,100	4/1798	189/4300	236/1450	1185kg	162	6.7	14.0	155	190	34.0	+ One of the true hot hatch heroes - Two seats, plastic rear windows
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	183 D	'10-'15	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1259kg	144	6.9	-	142	139	47.9	+ Quick, competent, refined, and manual only - Not exciting enough
SEAT Leon FR TDI 184	184 D	£22,255	4/1968	181/4000	280/1750	1350kg	136	7.5	-	142	112	64.2	+ Punchy engine, unflappable DSG - Lacks engagement, DSG only
SEAT Leon Cupra 280	216 R	£27,210	4/1984	276/5600	258/1750	1300kg	216	5.8	-	155	149	44.1	+ Performance, sweet chassis, economy, comfort - Boorish engine
SEAT Leon Cupra	105 R	'07-'11	4/1984	237/5700	221/2200	1375kg	175	6.3	-	153	190	34.0	+ Serious pace and agility for Golf GTI money - The Mk7 Golf R
SEAT Leon Cupra R	139 R	'10-'12	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1375kg	193	6.1	14.0	155	190	34.9	+ 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	+ Bold car, blinding engine - Lacks the character of its rival mega-hatches
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146 D	£17,150	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1218kg	148	7.3	-	139	148	45.6	+ Cross-country pace, practicality, value - Not as thrilling as some
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk1)	077 R	'04-'07	4/1896	130/4000	229/1900	1315kg	100	9.6	-	127	-	55.4	+ Well priced, well made, with great engine and DSG 'box - Dull steering
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk3)	187 D	£23,830	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1345kg	164	6.8	-	154	142	45.6	+ Fascinatingly fun and frugal hot hatch - A little short on steering feel
Skoda Octavia vRS 230 (Mk3)	215 D	£26,350	4/1984	227/4700	258/1500	1345kg	171	6.7	-	155	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	'05-'13	4/1998	197/5100	206/1700	1395kg	143	7.3	-	149	175	37.7	+ Limited-slip diff makes for a sharper steer - It could handle more than the extra 10bhp
Subaru Impreza WRX	125 D	'08-'10	4/2457	251/5400	288/3000	1395kg	180	5.5	-	130	270	-	+ Drives like a GTI but costs much less - Green brake calipers?
Subaru Impreza STI 330S	124 R	'08-'10	4/2457	325/5400	347/3400	1505kg	219	4.4	-	155	-	-	+ An improvement over the basic WRX - Still not the WRX we wanted
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk2)	175 R	£13,749	4/1586	134/6900	118/4400	1045kg	130	8.7	-	121	147	44.1	+ A bit quicker than the STI... - ...but not better
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk1)	132 R	'05-'11	4/1586	123/6800	109/4800	1030kg	121	8.9	-	124	165	39.8	+ The Swift's still a great pocket rocket - But it's lost a little adjustability
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	211 R	£17,995	4/1598	202/5800	206/1900	1278kg	161	6.5	-	143	174	37.7	+ Enter taining handling, well built - Lacking in steering feedback
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154 R	'07-'14	4/1598	189/4200	236/1450	1166kg	165	6.8	-	140	172	38.7	+ Begs to be wrung out - You'll need the £2400 Performance Pack
Vauxhall Corsa VXR Niring/Clubsport	164 R	'11-'13/14	4/1598	202/5750	206/2250	1166kg	176	6.5	-	143	178	-	+ Looks snazzy, punchy engine - Lacks feel, uncouth compared with rivals
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk2)	207 R	£27,315	4/1998	276/5500	295/2500	1475kg	190	5.9	-	155	184	34.9	+ VXR gets more power and a limited-slip diff - But they come at a price
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk1)	102 R	'05-'11	4/1998	237/5600	236/2400	1393kg	173	6.7	16.7	152	221	30.7	+ Better than the car it replaces; loony turbo pace - Lacks RS Mégane's precision
VW Up/SEAT Mii/Skoda Citigo	171 R	£7990+	3/999	59/5000	70/3000	854kg	70	14.1	-	99	105	62.8	+ Fast and furious - Lacks a little composure and precision
VW Polo GTI	211 R	£18,850	4/1798	189/4200	236/1450	1280kg	150	6.7	-	146	139	47.1	+ Accomplished city car is dynamically sound... - ...but predictably slow
VW Polo GTI	154 R	'10-'14	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1184kg	153	6.8	-	142	139	47.9	+ Smooth and brawny - Fiesta ST is more engaging
VW Golf GTD (Mk7)	200 D	£25,765	4/1968	181/3500	280/1750	1377kg	134	7.5	-	143	109	67.3	+ Modern-day mk1 Golf GTI gets twin-clutch DSG - It's a little bit bland
VW Golf GTI (Mk7)	207 R	£26,580	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1351kg	163	6.5	-	153	139	47.1	+ Pace, fuel economy, sounds good for a diesel - Lacks the extra edge of the GTI
VW Golf GTI Clubsport (Mk7)	218 D	c£29,000	4/1984	286/5350	280/1700	1375kg	211	6.0	-	160	155	40.9	+ Brilliantly resolved - Mégane 265 beats it as a pure drivers' car
VW Golf R (Mk7)	212 R	£29,900	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1476kg	204	5.1	-	155	165	40.9	+ A faster, sharper, more entertaining GTI - Some rivals are more exciting on track
VW Golf GTI (Mk6)	172 R	'09-'13	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1318kg	160	6.4	16.5	148	170	38.7	+ A VW 'R' model you can take seriously - Mégane 275 just edges it as a pure drivers' car
VW Golf R (Mk6)	140 D	'10-'13	4/1984	266/6000	258/2500	1521kg	178	5.5	-	155	199	33.2	+ Still a very accomplished hot hatch - 207bhp isn't a lot any more
VW Golf GTI (Mk5)	195 R	'04-'09	4/1984	197/5100	207/1800	1336kg	170	5.7	17.9	145	-	-	+ Great engine, tremendous pace and poise - High price, ACC only optional
VW Golf R32 (Mk4)	087 R	'06-'09	6/3189	246/6300	236/2500	1510kg	165	5.8	15.2	155	-	26.4	+ Character and ability: the GTI's return to form - Lacking firepower?
VW Golf R32 (Mk4)	053 R	'02-'04	6/3189	237/6250	236/2800	1477kg	163	6.4	16.3	154	-	24.6	+ Tractor's great and you'll love the soundtrack - We'd still have a GTI
VW Golf GTI 16v (Mk2)	195 R	'88-'92	4/1781	139/6100	124/4600	960kg	147	7.9	-	129	-	26.6	+ Charismatic - Boomy engine can be tiresome
VW Golf GTI (Mk1, 1.8)	095 R	'82-'84	4/1781	112/5800	109/3500	840kg	135	8.1	-	112	-	36.0	+ Still feels everyday useable - Very hard to find a standard 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	+ The car that started it all - Tricky to find an unmolested one
													+ Good-looking, desirable Volvo - Lacks edge of best hatches. Avoid auto

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Our Choice

BMW M5. The turbocharging of BMW's M-cars met with scepticism, but the current M5's 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 feels a perfect fit. It's a brutally fast car, and there are clever (and useable) adjustable driving modes. 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. If you must have an SUV, take a look at BMW's X6 M or Porsche's Macan Turbo, Macan GTS or Cayenne GTS.

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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Alpina D3 (E90)	120 R	'08-'12	4/1995	211/4000	332/2000	1495kg	143	6.9	-	152	-	52.3	+ Excellent chassis, turbodiesel oomph - Rather narrow powerband	★★★★★
Alpina B5 Biturbo	149 D	£75,150	8/4395	533/5200	538/2800	1920kg	282	4.5	-	198	244	26.9	+ Big performance and top-line luxury - Driver not really involved	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Audi S4 (B8)	166 D	£39,600	6/2995	328/5500	324/2900	1685kg	198	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	+ Great powertrain, secure chassis - The RS4	★★★★★
Audi S4 (B7)	073 D	'05-'08	8/4163	339/7000	302/3500	1700kg	206	5.4	-	155	-	-	+ Effortless V8, agile handling - Lacks ultimate finesse of class leaders	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (B8)	216 R	'12-'15	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1795kg	251	4.5	10.5	174	249	26.4	+ Looks and sounds the part, thunderously fast - Unnatural steering, dull dynamics	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B7)	088 R	'05-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1650kg	255	4.5	10.9	155	-	-	+ 444bhp 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	214 R	'94-'95	5/2226	315/6500	302/3000	1595kg	201	4.8	13.1	162	-	18.0	+ Storming performance (thanks to Porsche) - Try finding one	★★★★★
Audi S6	091 D	'06-'11	10/5204	429/6800	398/3000	1910kg	228	5.2	-	155	299	22.4	+ Even faster, and discreet with it - Very muted V10	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C7)	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	★★★★★
Audi S8 Plus	217 D	£97,700	8/3993	597/6100	553/2500	1990kg	305	3.8	-	155	229	28.2	+ Fantastic drivetrain, quality and refinement - Dynamic Steering feels artificial	★★★★★
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 RS - High centre of gravity	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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 Bentayga	217 D	£160,200	12/5950	600/5000	664/1350	2347kg	260	4.0	-	187	296	21.6	+ Sublime quality, ridiculous pace, capable handling - Inert driving experience, SUV stigma	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Bentley Mulsanne Speed	210 D	£252,000	8/6752	530/4200	811/1750	2610kg	206	4.8	-	190	342	19.3	+ Characterful; superb build quality - A bit pricey...	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
BMW 435i Gran Coupe	203 D	£41,865	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1685kg	194	5.5	-	155	174	34.9	+ Superb straight-six, fine ride/handling balance - 335i saloon weighs and costs less	★★★★★
BMW M3 (F80)	211 R	£56,590	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1520kg	284	4.1	8.6	155	204	32.1	+ Looks, performance, practicality - Body control on rough roads; engine lacks character	★★★★★
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 528i 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 (E60)	129 R	'04-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1755kg	289	4.7	10.4	155	-	19.6	+ Close to being the ultimate supersaloon - SMG gearbox feels old-tech	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E39)	110 R	'99-'03	8/4941	394/6600	369/3800	1795kg	223	4.9	11.5	155	-	-	+ Magnificent V8-engined supersaloon - We'd be nit-picking	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E34)	110 R	'92-'96	6/3795	340/6900	295/4750	1653kg	209	5.9	13.6	155	-	-	+ The Godfather of supersaloons - The family can come too	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E28)	182 R	'86-'88	6/3453	282/6500	251/4500	1431kg	200	6.2	-	151	-	-	+ The original storming saloon - Understated looks	★★★★★
BMW M6 Gran Coupe	190 D	£98,145	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	216 D	£64,525	6/2993	376/4000	546/2000	2190kg	155	5.3	-	155	173	42.8	+ Straight-line pace - Driving experience identical to standard X5, despite the M badge	★★★★★
BMW X6 M	212 D	£93,080	8/4395	567/6000	553/2200	2265kg	245	4.2	-	155	258	25.4	+ Big improvement on its predecessor - Coupe roofline still of questionable taste	★★★★★
BMW X6 M	134 D	'09-'15	8/4395	547/6000	502/1500	2305kg	241	4.7	-	171	325	20.3	+ Fast, refined and comfortable - But it definitely lacks the M factor	★★★★★
BMW 750i	174 D	£71,575	8/4395	449/5500	480/2000	2020kg	226	4.7	-	155	199	-	+ Well specced, impressively refined - Lags far behind the Mercedes S-class	★★★★★
Brabus Bullit	119 R	€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	★★★★★
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth	-	'86-'90	4/1993	204/6000	204/4500	1220kg	169	6.2	-	143	-	-	+ Road-going Group A racecar - Don't shout about the power output!	★★★★★
Honda Accord Type R	012 R	'98-'03	4/2157	209/7200	158/6700	1306kg	163	6.1	17.4	142	-	29.4	+ One of the finest front-drivers of all time - Lack of image	★★★★★
Infiniti 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	★★★★★
Jaguar XE S	213 D	£44,865	6/2995	335/6500	332/4500	1590kg	214	4.9	-	155	194	34.9	+ Great chassis; neat design - V6 loses appeal in the real world	★★★★★
Jaguar XF S (2015MY)	214 D	£49,945	6/2995	375/6500	332/4500	1635kg	233	5.0	-	155	198	34.0	+ Outstanding ride and handling balance - Engine lacks appeal	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR-S	208 R	£79,995	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1800kg	306	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	1892kg	291	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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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	1744kg	247	4.7	10.9	173	270	24.4	+ Shockingly good Lexus - The M3's available as a (second hand) UK four-door too ★★★★★
Lotus Carlton	170 R	'91-'93	6/3615	377/5200	419/4200	1658kg	231	4.8	10.6	176	-	17.0	+ The Millennium Falcon of saloon cars - Every drive a work-out ★★★★★
Maserati 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 ★★★★★
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 ★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	141 R	'08-'12	8/4691	433/7000	361/4750	1990kg	221	5.1	-	177	365	18.0	+ The most stylish supersaloon - Slightly wooden brakes, unforgiving ride ★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte	085 R	'04-'08	8/4244	394/7000	333/4500	1930kg	207	5.1	-	171	-	17.9	+ Redefines big-car dynamics - Don't use auto mode ★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	113 D	'07-'08	8/4244	396/7000	339/4250	1930kg	208	5.5	-	167	-	-	+ Best Quattroporte chassis so far - More power wouldn't go amiss ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.5-16	185 F	'89-'92	4/2498	201/6750	177/5500	1360kg	147	7.2	-	142	-	24.4	+ M-B's M3 alternative - Not as nimble as the Beemer ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLA45 AMG	186 D	£42,270	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1510kg	239	4.6	-	155	161	31.0	+ Strong performance, classy cabin - Priced 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 fearsome - Lacks the ultimate finesse and response of the C63 S ★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 Estate	216 R	£61,260	8/3982	469/5500	479/1750	1710kg	279	4.2	-	155	196	33.6	+ Much more fun than it looks - Gearbox dim-witted at low speeds ★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 S	211 R	£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 ★★★★★
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	1765kg	228	5.2	-	155	-	23.7	+ Furiously fast, commendably discreet - Overhadowed 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 ★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG E63 S	208 R	£84,710	8/5461	571/5500	590/1750	1795kg	327	4.1	-	155	229	28.8	+ Effortless power, intuitive and approachable - Dim-witted auto 'box' ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W212)	165 R	'11-'13	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	1765kg	298	4.2	-	155	230	28.8	+ Turbo engine doesn't dilute E63 experience - Sometimes struggles for traction... ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W212)	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 (W211)	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, cossetting ride - Speed limits ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG L	191 D	£119,835	8/5461	571/5500	664/2250	1995kg	294	4.4	-	155	237	27.9	+ Monster pace - Average steering feel ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG S	199 D	£86,500	8/5461	571/5500	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 SL63 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 SL63 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 GLE63 AMG S	218 D	£94,405	8/5461	571/5500	560/1750	2270kg	258	4.2	-	155	276	23.9	+ Stonking pace, extreme refinement - Feels remote ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz GLE63 AMG S Coupe	213 D	£96,555	8/5461	571/5500	560/1750	2275kg	258	4.2	-	155	278	23.7	+ Subtler than an X6 M - More force than finesse ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz ML63 AMG	176 R	£87,005	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... ★★★★★
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	150	256	26.2	+ Evo gets twin-clutch transmission - Not as exciting as it used to be ★★★★★
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 ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-340	088 R	'05-'07	4/1997	345/6800	321/4600	1400kg	250	4.3	10.9	157	-	-	+ Gives Porsche drivers nightmares - Points, Lots of ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX MR FQ-360	181 R	'05-'07	4/1997	366/6887	363/3200	1400kg	266	3.9	-	157	-	-	+ Well-executed engine upgrades - Prison food ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII	055 R	'03-'04	4/1997	276/6500	289/3500	1410kg	199	5.1	-	157	-	-	+ The Evo grows up - Brakes need beefing up ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII MR FQ-300	057 R	'03-'05	4/1997	305/6800	289/3500	1410kg	221	4.8	-	157	-	20.5	+ Extra pace, extra attitude - Extra money ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII	031 R	'02-'03	4/1997	276/6500	282/3500	1360kg	206	5.0	13.0	140	-	20.4	+ Terrific all-rounder - You tell us ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo 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' ★★★★★
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 ★★★★★
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 ★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo S	159 D	'11-'13	8/4806	542/6000	590/2250	1995kg	276	3.7	-	190	270	24.6	+ Pace, excellent ergonomics - Steering feel, ride ★★★★★
Porsche Macan 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 GTS	217 D	£55,188	6/2997	355/6000	369/1650	1895kg	190	5.2	-	159	212	30.7	+ Handles like an SUV shouldn't - Still looks like an SUV ★★★★★
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 - Not a match for a proper sports saloon ★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2, V6)	211 D	£72,523	6/3604	434/6000	442/1600	2110kg	209	5.2	-	163	228	28.3	+ The driver's Cayenne... but why would a driver want an SUV? ★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2, V8)	173 D	'12-'15	8/4806	414/6500	380/3500	2085kg	202	5.6	-	162	251	26.4	+ Dynamically the best SUV of its era - At two tons, it's still no sports car ★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk2)	212 D	£93,574	8/4806	513/6000	533/2250	2185kg	239	4.5	-	173	261	25.2	+ Remarkable performance, handling, completeness - Vague steering, dated engine ★★★★★
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	212 D	£95,150	8/5000	542/6000	501/3500	2335kg	236	4.5	-	162	298	21.7	+ Characterful drivetrain; genuine off-road ability - Not a match for its rivals on the road ★★★★★
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	-	158	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 ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX GB270	109 D	'07	4/2457	266/5700	310/3000	1410kg	192	5.2	-	143	-	-	+ Fitting final fling for 'classic' Impreza - End of an era ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STI	090 R	'05-'07	4/2457	276/6000	289/4000	1495kg	188	5.3	-	158	-	25.9	+ Stunning to drive - Not so stunning to look at ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB320	105 R	'07	4/2457	316/6000	332/3750	1495kg	215	4.8	-	155	-	-	+ Fitting tribute to a rallying legend - Too hardcore for some? ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX STI PPP	073 R	'03-'05	4/1994	300/6000	299/4000	1470kg	207	5.2	12.9	148	-	-	+ A Subaru with real edge - Bit too edgy in the wet ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza Turbo	011 R	'98-'00	4/1994	215/5600	214/4000	1235kg	177	5.4	14.6	144	-	27.2	+ Destined for classic status - Thirsty ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza PI	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 ★★★★★
Tesla Model S Performance	196 R	'14	310kW	416	442	21							

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Our Choice

Porsche Boxster Spyder. The Boxster is the benchmark in its class for a good reason: it's simply a fabulous all-rounder. The new Spyder, which gets the 3.8-litre engine from the 911 Carrera S, would be our pick, but the 3.4-litre GTS and S, and even the basic 2.7, are all true five-star cars, too.



Best of the Rest

Lotus's Exige S Roadster counters the Boxster with a more focused driving experience, while the more-affordable Elise continues to defy its age. Jaguar's F-type also impresses in both V6 (left) and V8 forms, but for the ultimate thrills, get a Caterham 620R, Ariel Atom or Radical.

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 4C Spider	211 D	£59,500	4/1742	237/6000	258/2200	940kg	256	4.5	-	160	161	40.9	+ Stunningly beautiful; better steering than coupe - Still has the coupe's other foibles	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Alpina D4 Biturbo Convertible	212 D	£54,950	6/2993	345/4000	516/1500	1815kg	193	5.0	-	171	156	47.9	+ As much torque as a 997 Turbo - A diesel convertible wouldn't be our choice of Alpina	★★★★★
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 - Pricy	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 245	113 D	'08-'12	4/1998	245/8200	155/5200	500kg	498	3.2	-	150	-	33.0	+ The Atom just got a little bit better - Can still be a bit draughty...	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	138 R	'09-'12	4/1998	300/8200	162/7200	550kg	554	3.3	-	155	-	-	+ It's brilliant - It's mental	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 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	★★★★★
Ariel Nomad	210 R	£33,000	4/2354	235/7200	221/4300	670kg	365	3.4	-	134	-	-	+ Off-road capabilities make for a super plaything - No Bluetooth	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S Roadster	212 R	£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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS Volante	133 D	'09-'12	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1810kg	286	4.3	-	191	388	17.3	+ A feel-good car par excellence - It's a bit of a heavyweight	★★★★★
Audi TT S 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 TT S 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	★★★★★
Audi S5 Cabriolet	130 D	£46,170	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	★★★★★
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	'11-'15	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	★★★★★
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...	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
BMW Z4 sDrive 35i Sport (Mk2)	186 D	£63,005	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	★★★★★
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	+ Exciting and characterful, that engine - Stiff suspension	★★★★★
BMW M Roadster	002 R	'98-'02	6/3246	325/7400	258/4900	1375kg	240	5.3	-	155	-	25.4	+ Fresh-air M3, that motor, hunky looks - M Coupe drives better	★★★★★
BMW 435i Convertible	194 D	£45,680	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	★★★★★
BMW M3 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	395/3900	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	£19,710	4/1660	80/7000	79/3400	490kg	166	6.5	-	100	-	-	+ The fabulous Seven formula at its most basic - Gets pricey with options	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 270	209 R	£23,795	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	£27,795	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	214 R	£30,795	4/1999	210/7600	150/6300	560kg	381	4.3	-	136	-	-	+ It's the one we built for ourselves - Trickier on the limit than lesser-powered Sevens	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 620R	187 R	£50,795	4/1999	310/7700	219/7350	545kg	578	2.8	-	155	-	-	+ Banzai on track, yet still relevant on the road - £50k for a Seven?	★★★★★
Caterham Seven CSR	094 R	£47,295	4/2261	256/7500	200/6200	565kg	460	3.8	-	155	-	-	+ Brilliant for high days, holidays and trackdays - Wet Wednesdays	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	157/7200	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 - Pricy for a car with a five-cylinder engine	★★★★★
Ferrari California	212 D	£154,460	8/3855	552/7500	557/4750	1729kg	324	3.6	-	196	250	26.9	+ Turbocharged engine is a triumph - Still places daily usability above outright thrills	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type R Convertible	-	£92,295	8/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1665kg	331	4.0	-	186	255	26.4	+ Pace, characterful V8 - Costs £25k more than the S	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type Project 7	212 R	£135,000	8/5000	567/6500	501/2500	1585kg	363	3.9	-	186	-	-	+ Noise, performance, adjustability - Expensive, and not the GT3 rival we would have liked	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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 - Pricy	★★★★★
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	★★★★★

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Lamborghini Diablo VT 6.0 Issue 019, May 2000

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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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	103 R	'07-'11	4/1796	252/8000	199/7000	670kg	382	3.8	-	150	-	-	+ As good to drive as it is to look at - Lacks the grunt of some rivals	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	138 R	'09-'11	4/1796	266/8200	199/7200	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	-	-	+ Most far off supercharged car's pace - Pricey once it's made road-legal	★★★★★
Lotus 340R	126 R	'00	4/1796	190/7800	146/5000	658kg	293	4.5	12.5	126	-	-	+ Hardcore road-racer... ..that looks like a dune buggy from Mars	★★★★★
Lotus Elan SE	095 R	'89-'95	4/1588	165/6600	148/4200	1022kg	164	6.7	-	137	-	21.0	+ Awesome front-drive chassis - Rather uninviting	★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio	142 D	£98,940	8/4691	434/7000	323/4750	1980kg	223	5.2	-	177	337	19.5	+ As good to drive as it is to look at - Lacks the grunt of some rivals	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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 2.0i Sport (Mk4)	212 R	£22,505	4/1998	158/6000	147/4600	1000kg	161	7.3	-	133	161	40.9	+ Lightest MX-5 since the Mk1 - Lacks intensity	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 2.0i Sport Tech (Mk3.5)	212 R	'09-'15	4/1999	158/7000	139/5000	1098kg	146	7.6	-	138	181	36.2	+ Handles brilliantly again; folding hard-top also available - Less than macho image	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk3)	091 R	'05-'09	4/1998	124/6500	123/4500	1080kg	108	9.3	-	122	-	-	+ Gearchange, interior - Lost some of the charm of old MX-5s; dubious handling	★★★★★
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 SLK 350 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	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK 55 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 SLK 55 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 SLK 55 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 TG-Tronic auto box, uneven dynamics	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL500	169 D	£81,915	8/4663	429/5250	516/1800	1710kg	255	4.6	-	115	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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG	071 D	'04-'10	12/5980	604/4800	737/2000	2035kg	302	4.1	-	155	-	-	+ Gob-smacking performance - Gob-smacking pricey	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL55 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	★★★★★
Morgan 3 Wheeler	198 R	£25,950	2/1976	82/6200	269/5200	1554kg	213	5.5	-	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	-	148	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 and 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 looks - Sport suspension is very firm	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster Spyder (981)	215 F	£60,459	6/3800	370/6700	310/4750	1315kg	286	4.5	-	180	230	28.5	+ The fastest, most rewarding Boxster yet - Feedback trails the Cayman GT4s	★★★★★
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 (991.1)	183 R	'12-'15	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	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S Cabriolet (991.1)	171 R	'12-'15	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1485kg	270	4.7	-	187	228	29.1	+ Drives just like the coupe - Which means the same artificial steering	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet (997)	139 D	'07-'12	6/3800	493/6000	479/1950	1645kg	305	3.8	-	194	275	24.1	+ Absurdly quick and capable drop-top - We'd still take the coupe	★★★★★
Radical SR3 SL	174 R	£69,840	4/2000	300/6000	265/4000	775kg	393	3.4	-	161	-	-	+ Our 2011 Track Car of the Year, and it's road-legal - You'll need to wrap up warm	★★★★★
Radical SR8LM	138 R	'09-'12	8/2800	460/10500	260/8000	680kg	687	3.2	-	168	-	-	+ Fastest car around the Nordschleife - Convincing people it's road legal	★★★★★
Renault Sport Spider	183 R	'96-'99	4/1998	148/6000	136/4500	930kg	157	6.5	-	131	-	-	+ Rarity, fabulous unassisted steering feel - Heavier than you'd hope	★★★★★
Toyota MR2	187 R	'00-'06	4/1794	138/6400	125/4400	975kg	141	7.2	21.2	130	-	38.2	+ Tight lines, taut dynamics - Minimal luggage space	★★★★★
TVR Tamora	070 R	'01-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1050kg	338	4.5	-	160	-	-	+ Well-sorted soft-top TVR - Awkward styling	★★★★★
TVR Tuscan Convertible	091 R	'05-'07	6/3996	365/6800	315/6000	1100kg	337	3.8	8.1	195+	-	-	+ Spirit of the Griff reborn - Over 195mph? Really?	★★★★★
TVR Chimaera 5.0	007 R	'93-'03	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.6	-	167	-	26.4	+ Gorgeous noise, tarmac-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	★★★★★
TVR Griffith 500	009 R	'93-'01	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.8	11.2	167	-	22.1	+ Griff diamond - A few rough edges	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220	023 R	'00-'04	4/2198	145/5800	150/4000	875kg	168	5.6	-	136	-	34.4	+ Absurdly good Vauxhall - The badge?	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220 Turbo	066 R	'03-'05	4/1998	197/5500	184/1950	930kg	215	4.7	-	151	-	-	+ Nothing comes close for the money - Marginal everyday usability	★★★★★
Vuhl 05	215 D	£59,995	4/2000	285/5600	310/3000	725kg	405	3.7	-	152	-	-	+ Impressive pace and quality - You can get a more thrills from a Caterham at half the price	★★★★★
Zenos E10 S	214 R	£30,595	4/1999	250/7000	295/2500	725kg	350	4.2	-	145	-	-	+ Neutral and exploitable - Prescriptive balance	★★★★★

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Our Choice

Porsche Cayman GT4. Porsche's Motorsport department has finally been let loose on the Cayman and the result is exactly what we all hoped for. In fact it's so good it won our 2015 *evo* Car of the Year test – even despite the 991-generation 911 GT3 RS also being in attendance. Who saw that coming?



Best of the Rest

The 911 GT3 RS is still fabulous, of course (it came third at eCoty 2015). If you fancy something less hardcore, Mercedes' AMG GT S (left) is deeply satisfying on many levels, Aston Martin's V8 Vantage N430 and V12 Vantage S are thoroughly entertaining, and Jaguar's F-type R Coupe is a hoot.

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	£51,500	4/1742	237/6000	258/2200	895kg	269	4.5	-	160	157	41.5	+ Carbonfibre tub, mini-supercar looks - Hot hatch engine, clunky gearbox	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo BC Competizione	120 R	£70,000	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1585kg	288	4.1	-	181	-	-	+ Looks, exclusivity, noise, balance - They're all sold	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Alpina B3 GT3 (E92)	176 D	£12,713	6/2979	402/6000	398/4500	1535kg	266	4.4	-	186	224	-	+ Alpina's M3 GTS alternative - Auto gearbox frustrates when pressing on	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage	219 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 N430	168 R	£89,995	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	271	4.5	-	189	321	20.5	+ Malleable, involving, can still hold its own - Never feels rampantly quick	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S	190 R	£138,000	12/5935	565/6750	457/5750	1665kg	345	3.7	-	205	343	19.2	+ Amongst the best Astons ever made - Old-school automated 'box	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vantage GT12	214 R	£250,000	12/5935	592/7000	461/5500	1565kg	384	3.5	-	185	-	-	+ The GT3-style Vantage we've been waiting for - Only 100 being made	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	146 R	£99,131	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	£131,713	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 DB9 GT	214 D	£140,000	12/5935	540/6750	457/5500	1785kg	307	4.5	-	183	333	19.8	+ More power; still has bags of character - Needs eight-speed auto 'box	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS	142 R	£172,121	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1695kg	306	4.2	-	191	388	17.3	+ Stupendous engine, gearbox, brakes - Pricey, Can bite the unwary	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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 (Mk2)	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 TTS (Mk3)	193 R	£98,174	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	£99,174	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	£124,714	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	£95,006	4/1781	237/5700	236/2300	1390kg	173	5.9	-	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	£170,715	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	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8	178 R	£140,300	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2220kg	229	4.6	-	188	246	21.0	+ A proper drivers' Bentley with decent engine - W12 suddenly seems pointless	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8 S	204 F	£149,800	8/3993	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	★★★★★
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	212 D	£168,300	12/5998	626/6000	605/1700	2245kg	283	4.0	-	206	338	19.5	+ Desirability meets exclusivity and performance - We'd still have the V8	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
BMW 1-series M Coupe	188 R	£111,712	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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
BMW M4	218 R	£57,055	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1497kg	288	4.3	-	155	204	32.1	+ Ferociously fast - A handful on less-than-perfect or less-than-bone-dry roads	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E92)	196 R	£97,013	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	£101,711	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	£90,007	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	230	5.1	12.3	155	-	23.7	+ One of the best BMWs ever, Runner-up in eCoty 2001 - Slightly artificial steering feel	★★★★★
BMW M3 CS (E46)	088 R	£95,007	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	£93,004	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	£93,998	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	£86,900	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	£96,009	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1420kg	242	5.0	-	155	-	23.3	+ A real drivers' car - You've got to be prepared to get stuck in	★★★★★
BMW M Coupe	005 R	£98,003	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)	218 R	£92,350	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	£95,005	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	★★★★★
BMW i8	210 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	★★★★★
Chevrolet Camaro Z/28 *	216 R	£72,000	8/7008	505/6100	481/4800	1732kg	296	4.2	-	175	-	-	+ Scalpel-sharp engine, great chassis (really) - Feels very stiff on UK roads	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Z06 (C7) *	206 R	£80,000	8/6156	650/6400	650/3600	1598kg	413	3.2	-	186	-	-	+ Mind-boggling raw speed; surprisingly sophisticated - Edgy when really pushed	★★★★★
Ford Mustang 5.0 V8 GT	211 D	£33,995	8/4951	415/6500	391/4250	1720kg	245	4.8	-	155	-	-	+ Looks, noise, performance, value, right-hand drive - Image not for everyone	★★★★★
Ford Shelby GT500 *	178 R	£125,715	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	£96,000	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	£90,005	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1410kg	196	5.5	-	168	-	22.8	+ The useable supercar - 270bhp sounds a bit weedy today	★★★★★
Honda NSX-R *	100 R	£92,003	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1270kg	221	4.4	-	168	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2002 - Honda never brought it to the UK	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type Coupe	204 D	£51,260	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1567kg	217	5.5	-	161	234	28.8	+ Drop-dead looks, brilliant chassis, desirability - Engine lacks top-end fight	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type S Coupe	211 D	£60,260	6/2995	375/6500	339/3500	1584kg	241	5.3	-	171	234	28.8	+ Exquisite style, more rewarding (and affordable) than roadster - Scrappy on the limit	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type R Coupe	218 R	£85,010	8/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1650kg	334	4.0	-	186	255	26.4	+ Looks, presence, performance, soundtrack - Bumpy and boistrous	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type R Coupe AWD	217 R	£91,660	8/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1730kg	318	4.1	-	186	269	25.0	+ Better in the wet - Less involving in the dry	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR	168 R	£99,174	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1678kg	305	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	+ Fast and incredibly rewarding, Jag - The kids will have to stay at home	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S	168 R	£111,714	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	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S GT	193 R	£141,714	8/5000	542/6000	502/2500	1638kg	336	3.9	-	186	292	23.0	+ The most exciting XKR ever - Very limited numbers	★★★★★
Lexus RCF	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 Evija Sport 350	218 D	£55,900	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1125kg	312	3.7	-	170	235	28.0	+ Further honed, and with a vastly improved gearshift - Still not easy to get into and out of	★★★★★
Lotus Evija S (V6)	209 R	£125,715	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1176kg	298	3.8	-	170	235	28.0	+ Breathtaking road-racer, our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Gearshift not the sweetest	★★★★★
Lotus Evija S (S2)	105 R	£96,011	4/1796	218/7800	158/5500	930kg	238							

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Coupes / GTs

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating	
Lotus Evige (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 Evige (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 - Pricy options	★★★★★
Lotus Evora S	168 R	£63,900	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.6	-	172	229	28.7	+ A faster and better Evora - But one which spars with the Porsche 911...	★★★★★
Lotus Evora 400	216 R	£72,000	6/3456	400/7000	302/3500	1395kg	291	4.1	-	186	225	29.1	+ Evora excitement levels take a leap - Gearbox still not perfect; punchy pricing	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Maserati Coupe	064 R	'03-'07	8/4244	390/7000	333/4500	1680kg	237	4.8	-	177	-	17.6	+ Glorious engine, improved chassis - Overly sharp steering	★★★★★
Maserati GranSport	073 R	'04-'07	8/4244	400/7000	333/4500	1680kg	239	4.8	-	180	-	-	+ Maser Coupe realises its full potential - Very little	★★★★★
Mazda RX-8	122 R	'03-'11	2R/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	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupe	217 D	£68,070	8/3982	503/5500	516/1750	1725kg	296	3.9	-	155	200	24.8	+ Mouth-watering mechanical package - Might be too firm for UK roads	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG	092 D	'06-'09	8/6208	481/6800	464/5000	1755kg	278	4.6	-	155	-	19.9	+ Power, control, build quality - Lacks ultimate involvement	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG Black 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	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG S63 Coupe	205 D	£125,595	8/5461	571/5500	664/2250	1995kg	294	4.2	-	155	237	28.0	+ Thunderously fast S-class built for drivers - Lacks badge appeal of a Continental GT	★★★★★
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	216 R	£110,495	8/3982	503/6250	479/1750	1570kg	326	3.8	-	193	219	30.1	+ Fantastic chassis, huge grip - Artificial steering feel; downshifts could be quicker	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Nissan 350Z	107 R	'03-'09	6/3498	309/6800	264/4800	1532kg	205	5.5	13.0	155	-	24.1	+ Huge fun, and great value too - Honestly, we're struggling	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2012MY onwards)	218 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 Track Edition	216 D	£88,560	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	316	2.7	-	196	275	24.0	+ Recreates much of the Nismo's ability, without the rock-hard ride - Interior feels dated	★★★★★
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 impressive - Compromised by super-firm suspension	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	196 R	'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 GT0-3R	200 R	'03-'06	6/2968	352/6200	350/3500	1080kg	322	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	★★★★★
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'	★★★★★
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)	216 R	£64,451	6/3800	380/7400	310/4750	1340kg	288	4.4	-	183	238	27.4	+ evo Car of the Year 2015; the Cayman we've been waiting for - Waiting lists	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S (987)	132 R	'06-'13	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1350kg	237	5.2	-	172	223	29.7	+ Still want that 911? - Yeah, us too	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman R (987)	158 R	'11-'13	6/3436	325/7400	273/4750	1295kg	255	4.7	-	175	228	29.1	+ Total handling excellence - Styling additions not to all tastes	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (991.2)	218 R	£76,412	6/2981	365/6500	332/1700	1430kg	259	4.6	-	183	190	34.0	+ Forced induction hasn't ruined the Carrera - Purists won't be happy	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991.2)	217 R	£85,857	6/2981	414/6500	369/1700	1440kg	292	4.3	-	191	199	32.5	+ As above, but blindingly fast - You'll want the sports exhaust	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991.1)	201 R	'12-'15	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1415kg	283	4.3	9.5	188	223	29.7	+ A Carrera with supercar pace - Electric steering robs it of some tactility	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (991.1)	179 R	'13-'15	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1465kg	273	4.5	-	185	233	28.5	+ More satisfying than rear-drive 991.1 Carreras - Choose your spec carefully	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS (991.1)	208 D	£95,862	6/3800	424/7500	324/5750	1470kg	293	4.4	-	189	233	28.5	+ The highlight of the 991.1 Carrera line-up - Pricy 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	★★★★★
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 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 RS (991)	216 R	£131,296	6/3996	493/8250	339/6250	1420kg	353	3.3	-	193	296	22.2	+ Sensationally good to drive - They won't all be painted Ultra Violet	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Radical RXC	189 R	£94,500	6/3700	350/6750	320/4250	900kg	395	2.8	-	175	-	-	+ A real trackday weapon - Can't match the insanity of a Caterham 620R	★★★★★
Radical RXC Turbo	205 R	£129,000	6/3496	454/6000	500/3600	940kg	491	2.6	-	185	-	-	+ Eats GT3s for breakfast - Might not feel special enough at this price	★★★★★
Radical RXC Turbo 500	209 D	£143,400	6/3496	530/6100	481/5000	1100kg	490	2.6	6.8	185	-	-	+ Huge performance, intuitive adjustability, track ability - Compromised for road use	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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	£22,495	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1240kg	161	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	★★★★★
TVR Tuscan S (Mk2)	076 R	'05-'07	6/3996	400/7000	315/5250	1100kg	369	4.0	-	185	-	-	+ Possibly TVR's best ever car - Aerodynamic 'enhancements'	★★★★★
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	004 R	'98-'04	6/3996	350/6800	330/5000	1130kg	315	5.0	11.4	160+	-	-	+ Accomplished and desirable - Check chassis for corrosion	★★★★★
VW Scirocco GT 2.0 TSI	155 R	£26,125	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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Our Choice

McLaren 675LT. The 'long-tail' is the step forward we've been hoping for from McLaren's super-series cars, adding a real sense of involvement to the incredible pace that's been building since the 12C. In fact, the 675LT is so intense it might even make you question if you need a P1.



Best of the Rest

The Ferrari 488 GTB (left) has a stunning turbocharged engine and the chassis to exploit it. Lamborghini's Aventador offers true supercar drama, especially in Superveloce form, while the Pagani Huayra rivals it for theatre (albeit at four times the price) and was our joint 2012 Car of the Year.

Supercars

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine c/y/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
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
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk1)	110 R	£183,964	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	£179,000	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
Audi R8 V10	217 R	£134,500	10/5204	602/8250	413/6500	1555kg	393	3.2	-	205	287	23.0	+ Timeless drivetrain, huge performance - Needs to be driven hard to really engage
Audi R8 V10	181 D	£105,150	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	325	3.9	8.4	194	346	19.0	+ Real supercar feel - The V8 is cheaper, and still superb
Audi R8 V10 Plus	190 R	£135,150	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1570kg	351	3.8	-	198	346	19.0	+ An R8 fit to take on the 458 and 12C - Firm ride may be too much for some
Audi R8 GT	169 F	£105,204	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1520kg	369	3.6	-	199	-	-	+ Everything we love about the R8 - Not as hardcore as we wanted
Audi R8 LMX	208 R	£105,204	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
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	134 R	£105,111	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	£105,114	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 EB110	078 R	£91,950	12/3500	552/8000	451/3750	1566kg	358	3.4	-	212	-	-	+ Superbly engineered 4WD quad-turbo rocket - It just fizzled out
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	133 R	£99,13	8/6162	638/6500	603/3800	1528kg	424	3.8	7.6	205	355	18.8	+ Huge pace and character - Take plenty of brave pills if there's rain
Ferrari 488 GTB	216 R	£183,964	8/3902	661/6500	561/3000	1475kg	455	3.0	-	205+	260	24.8	+ Staggeringly capable - Lacks a little of the 458's heart and excitement
Ferrari 488 Spider	216 D	£204,400	8/3902	661/6500	561/3000	1525kg	440	3.0	-	203+	260	24.8	+ As above, but with the wind in your hair - See left
Ferrari 458 Italia	183 R	£99,15	8/4497	562/9000	398/6000	1485kg	384	3.2	6.8	202	307	20.6	+ An astounding achievement - Paddleshift only
Ferrari 458 Speciale	203 R	£105,114	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 F430	163 R	£105,114	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	£105,114	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1350kg	378	3.5	7.7	198	-	15.7	+ Successful F1 technology transplant - Likes to shout about it
Ferrari 360 Modena	163 R	£99,104	8/3586	394/8500	275/4750	1390kg	288	4.5	9.0	183	-	17.0	+ Worthy successor to 355 - Not quite as involving as it should be
Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale	068 R	£105,114	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	£99,199	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	£241,053	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 F12tdf	217 R	£339,000	12/6262	769/8500	520/6250	1520kg	514	2.9	-	211	360	18.3	+ Alarmingly fast - Doesn't flow like a 458 Speciale
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	101 R	£105,114	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1688kg	368	3.3	7.4	205	415	15.8	+ evo Car of the Year 2006 - Banks are getting harder to rob
Ferrari 599 GTO	161 R	£105,114	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	£105,114	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	£238,697	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	£105,114	12/5474	533/7250	434/5250	1840kg	294	4.3	9.8	199	470	13.8	+ Awesomely capable grand tourer - See above
Ferrari LaFerrari	203 R	£105,114	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	£105,114	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'
Ford GT	200 R	£105,114	8/5409	550/6500	500/3750	1583kg	353	3.7	-	205	-	-	+ Our 2005 Car of the Year - Don't scalp yourself getting in
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
Honda NSX	217 R	£140,000	6/3493	565	476	1725kg	333	2.9	-	191	-	-	+ Like a baby Porsche 918 - Lacks typical Japanese character
Jaguar XJ220	157 R	£92,94	6/3498	542/7250	475/4500	1470kg	375	3.7	-	212	-	-	+ Britain's greatest supercar... - until McLaren built the F1
Koenigsegg Agera R	180 R	£105,114	8/5032	1124/7100	885/2700	1435kg	796	2.8	-	273	-	-	+ As fast and exciting as your body can handle - It's the Veyron money
Koenigsegg One:1	202 R	£105,114	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 CCRX Edition	118 R	£105,114	8/4800	1004/7000	796/5600	1280kg	797	2.8	-	250+	-	-	+ One of the world's fastest cars - Spike power delivery
Lamborghini Huracán LP580-2	218 R	£160,000	10/5204	572/8000	397/6500	1389kg	418	3.4	-	199	278	23.7	+ More seductive than the 4WD Huracán - Feels like there's more to come
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
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	180 D	£105,114	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	£105,114	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1340kg	426	3.5	-	202	325	20.6	+ Less weight and more power than original Superleggera - LP560-4 runs it very close
Lamborghini Gallardo	094 R	£105,114	10/4961	513/8000	376/4250	1520kg	343	4.3	9.4	196	-	-	+ On a full-bore start it spins all four wheels. Cool - Slightly clunky e-gear
Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera	104 R	£105,114	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 LP750-4 SV	216 R	£321,723	12/6498	740/8400	509/5500	1525kg	493	2.8	-	217+	370	17.7	+ More exciting than the standard Aventador - ISR gearbox inconsistent
Lamborghini Murciélago	089 D	£105,114	12/6192	570/7500	479/5400	1650kg	351	4.0	-	205	-	-	+ Gorgeous, capable and incredibly friendly - V12 feels stressed
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	093 R	£105,114	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	£105,114	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	£105,114	12/5992	550/7100	457/5500	1625kg	343	3.8	-	200+	-	-	+ Best-built, best-looking Diablo of all - People's perceptions
Lexus LFA/LFA Nürburgring	200 R	£105,114	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	£105,114	12/5998	621/7500	484/5500	1445kg	437	3.8	-	205	-	-	+ Rarer than an Enzo - The Ferrari's better
McLaren 570S	217 R	£143,250	8/3799	562/7500	443/5000	1313kg	435	3.1	-	204	258	25.5	+ A truly fun and engaging sports car - McLaren doesn't call it a supercar(!)
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 675LT	216 R	£259,500	8/3799	666/7100	516/5500	1328kg	510	2.9	-	205	275	24.2	+ Runner-up at eCoty 2015; asks questions of the P1 - Aventador price tag
McLaren 12C	187 R	£105,114	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	£105,114	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	£105,114	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 SLS AMG	159 R	£105,114	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	£105,114	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	£105,114	8/5439	617/6500	575/3250	1693kg	370	3.7	-	208	-	-	+ Zonda-pace, 575-style drivability - Dreadful brake feel
Noble M600	186 R	£105,114	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	£105,114	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	£105,114	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	£105,114	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	£105,114	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	£105,114	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 (991.1)	210 R	£105,114	6/3800	513/6000	524/2100	15							

Key + = new this month. **Red** denotes the car is the fastest in its class on that track.



ANGLESEY COASTAL CIRCUIT

LOCATION Anglesey, UK
GPS 53.188372, -4.496385
LENGTH 1.55 miles

Car	Lap time	issue no.	YouTube
Radical RXC Turbo 500 (fastest coupe)	1:10.5	-	Yes
McLaren P1 (on P Zero Trofeo R tyres) (fastest supercar)	1:11.2	200	Yes
Porsche 918 Spyder	1:12.4	200	Yes
McLaren P1	1:12.6	200	Yes
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991)	1:13.6	-	Yes
Porsche 911 Turbo S (991)	1:13.6	-	Yes
Ferrari 458 Speciale	1:14.2	198	Yes
Porsche 911 Turbo (991)	1:15.2	210	Yes
Aston Martin Vantage GT12	1:16.0	214	Yes
Nissan GT-R (2014MY)	1:16.9	210	Yes
Mercedes-AMG GT S	1:17.0	210	Yes
Porsche 911 Carrera S Powerkit (991)	1:17.6	201	-
Porsche 911 Carrera (991)	1:17.8	199	Yes
Porsche Cayman (981)	1:18.9	209	-
Aston Martin N430	1:19.1	210	-
Lotus Exige S (V6)	1:19.1	209	-
SEAT Leon Cupra 280 Sub8 (fastest hot hatch)	1:19.1	212	-
BMW M4	1:19.2	199	Yes
BMW i8	1:19.4	210	-
Honda Civic Type R (FK2)	1:19.5	212	-
Renaultsport Mégane Trophy 275	1:19.6	212	-
BMW M5 Competition Pack (F10M) (fastest saloon)	1:19.7	-	Yes
Audi TTS (Mk3)	1:19.9	209	-
Audi R8 V8 (Mk1)	1:20.1	201	-
BMW M135i	1:20.4	212	-
Nissan 370Z Nismo	1:20.5	209	-
Alfa Romeo 4C	1:20.7	209	-
Mercedes-AMG S65 Coupe	1:21.4	-	Yes
VW Golf R (Mk7)	1:21.6	212	-
Peugeot RCZ R	1:22.0	209	-
Toyota GT86 TRD	1:23.7	193	-
Jota Mazda MX-5 GT (Mk3) (fastest sports car)	1:24.6	193	-

BEDFORD AUTODROME WEST CIRCUIT

LOCATION Bedfordshire, UK
GPS 52.235133, -0.474321
LENGTH 1.8 miles (track reconfigured May 2015; earlier times not comparable)



Car	Lap time	issue no.	YouTube
SEAT Leon Cupra 280 Ultimate Sub8 (fastest hot hatch)	1:23.1	215	-
BMW M3 (F80) (fastest saloon)	1:23.3	211	Yes
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy-R	1:23.6	215	-
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Saloon	1:24.0	211	Yes
Honda Civic Type R (FK2)	1:24.9	215	-
VW Golf R (Mk7)	1:26.1	-	Yes
Audi RS3 Sportback (2015MY)	1:26.6	-	Yes
Renaultsport Clio 220 Trophy	1:29.5	213	-
Mazda MX-5 2.0i Sport (Mk4) (fastest sports car)	1:29.8	-	Yes
Toyota GT86 (fastest coupe)	1:29.9	-	Yes

BLYTON PARK OUTER CIRCUIT

LOCATION Lincolnshire, UK
GPS 53.460093, -0.688666
LENGTH 1.6 miles



Car	Lap time	issue no.	YouTube
Ariel Atom 3.5R (fastest sports car)	0:58.9	205	-
Radical RXC Turbo (fastest coupe)	1:00.4	205	Yes
BAC Mono	1:01.4	189	-
Porsche 911 GT2 RS (997.2) (fastest supercar)	1:01.8	204	Yes
Porsche 911 GT3 (991)	1:01.9	205	Yes
Caterham Seven 620R	1:02.1	189	-
Nissan GT-R Nismo	1:02.1	205	Yes
Mercedes SLS AMG Black Series	1:02.5	204	Yes
Pagani Huayra	1:02.5	177	-
McLaren 12C	1:02.7	187	-
Radical RXC	1:02.9	189	-
Ariel Atom 3.5 310	1:03.4	189	-
Audi R8 V10 Plus (Mk1)	1:03.4	-	Yes
Lotus Exige S (V6)	1:04.4	177	-
Porsche 911 Carrera (991)	1:05.1	177	-
Porsche 911 GT3 (997)	1:05.2	-	Yes
Porsche Boxster S (981)	1:05.5	177	-
Porsche Cayman GTS (981)	1:05.5	-	Yes
Porsche Cayman S (981)	1:05.5	189	-
Caterham Seven 420R	1:05.8	214	-
Jaguar F-type S Convertible	1:06.5	-	Yes
Zenos E10 S	1:06.6	214	-
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black Series	1:06.9	177	-
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy-R (fastest hot hatch)	1:07.3	205	Yes
Litchfield Subaru BRZ Spec S	1:07.5	189	-
Alpina B3 GT3	1:07.7	177	-
BMW M135i	1:07.7	177	-
Porsche Cayman (981)	1:07.7	-	Yes
BMW M235i	1:08.7	-	Yes
Mini John Cooper Works GP (R56)	1:08.7	181	-
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	1:08.9	181	-
Ford Focus RS500	1:09.4	181	-
VW Golf GTI Performance Pack (Mk7)	1:10.3	192	-
Audi A1 quattro	1:11.2	181	-
Toyota GT86	1:12.8	177	-
Caterham Seven 160	1:17.6	205	Yes

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Art of speed



Ford Racing Puma bodykit

by RICHARD LANE

FAMILIAR WITH THE TICKFORD CAPRI of 1982? Looking like a Group 2 machine that escaped Touring Car enslavement only moments before the sponsor livery arrived, it sported skirts and bumpers that draped provocatively to the tarmac and a blanked-off snout that gave it an unhinged demeanour. And yet despite the nefarious aesthetic and a 205bhp turbo V6, it sold poorly and was eventually killed off by the Sierra RS Cosworth, which was less expensive and even faster.

Tickford's take on Ford's pert Puma nearly 20 years later was a similar story. This time the bodykit was considerably more curvaceous, but again the car was a commercial flop. In 2000 the Racing Puma came in at £22,750, whereas a Subaru Impreza Turbo cost £20,950, was much faster, more practical and had genuine motorsport pedigree, so no contest.

In the end Ford's ambition to shift 1000 cars proved way off the mark. Just half that volume was realised while something of a Scooby infestation took root in the UK. In fact, with fewer than 200 customer orders placed and marketing executives beginning to lose all hope, one of the greatest drivers' cars ever to wear the blue oval would surreptitiously appear on Ford's company-car scheme.

Each Racing Puma started out as a standard Puma built at Ford's Cologne plant. Upon arrival at Tickford's workshop in Daventry, a 12-stage conversion took them from tasty but tame to the embodiment of attainable exotica. The 1.7-litre Zetec engine was rebuilt with a new inlet manifold, new camshafts and a sports exhaust, Sparco seats that fitted the driver like a glove were installed and 17-inch Speedline alloys bookended tracks widened by 70mm at the front and 90mm at the rear.

Then there was the bodykit, the effect of which was to transform a car that was simply cute into one that was cute in a break-your-face kind of way. With the addition of a carbon splitter and wheelarches that were flared to Alan Mann specification, no one would have guessed the Racing Puma had its roots in the humble Fiesta.

But the kit hid a dirty secret. While the front wings were hydroformed aluminium, the rear quarter panels were steel. Not only that – where the donor car's front wings went straight in the skip, the rear panels did not; Tickford merely bonded the new bodywork on over the top, which accounts for the car's surprisingly heavy kerb weight. Unforgivable? Well, yes, especially in a car that pitted a paltry 153bhp against 215/40 Pirelli P7000 rubber. It did look rather tasty, though... ❌

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