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Ed speak

I HAVE SOME GOOD NEWS REGARDING AN ITALIAN car manufacturer that doesn't reside in Maranello. It would appear that, 12 months on from its international launch, Alfa Romeo's Giulia is doing the numbers in the showrooms.

According to recent figures released by JATO Dynamics, the four-door saloon ranked fourth in Europe's Jan-Feb 2017 sales charts for the snappily titled Premium D-Segment. Its 12 per cent market share put it behind only Audi's A4 (18 per cent), BMW's 3-series (22 per cent) and Mercedes' C-class (31 per cent). Of the 31,254 total sales in this segment, 3900 were Giulias, the Alfa leapfrogging more established models such as Jaguar's XE (9 per cent), Volvo's S60 (4 per cent) and Lexus's IS (3 per cent). Although, when you include estates and coupes in the figures too, the saloon-only Giulia ranks seventh. Not that this is likely to sway Alfa's decision not to add an estate to the Giulia lineup, unfortunately.

Yes, I know discussing Premium D-Segment market share is as thrilling as watching the F1 circus trot around Sochi, but this is the first indication for a generation (if not longer) that Alfa is heading in the right direction. Hopefully the Giulia's sales performance, and that of the Stelvio SUV, will give Alfa both the impetus and the funds to continue this success, because we all like to read good news about Alfa Romeo.

Those of you who keep a keen eye on who's who at **evo** will notice a newcomer this month – Adam Towler, who joins as our deputy editor. An **evo** contributor for the last three years in a freelance capacity, Adam's been a reader since issue one, so knows exactly what you, the reader, expect. Welcome, Adam.

Adam's switch from freelance to staff is the opposite of road test editor Dan Prosser, who leaves us to embark on a freelance career. We thank him for his insatiable appetite to deliver the very best stories. From all at **evo**, the very best of luck, Dan. ✕

Stuart Gallagher, Editor ————— @stuartg917

'It's the first indication for a generation that Alfa is heading in the right direction'

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Go Further



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PORSCHE GT3

The 991.1-generation 911 GT3 dominated its rivals on both road and track. Now it's been further honed with more sophisticated suspension, improved aero and a 500bhp 4-litre flat-six. The real question, though, is has Porsche made the 991.2 GT3 any more rewarding to drive? We head to the UK's best road and track to find out

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FINAL FRAME

Sometimes no words are required – we pick a photograph that has given us pause to reflect this month

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briefing



TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

by ANTONY INGRAM

**MG's E-Motion concept
previews 4-seconds-to-60mph
all-electric coupe costing £30k**

IF IT'S BETTER TO BURN OUT THAN to fade away, then Neil Young would have appreciated MG Rover's efforts to sustain itself before finally running out of cash back in 2005. In the preceding years the ailing brand dug enough pennies from the cracks of a Longbridge sofa to turn a bunch of geriatric saloons and hatchbacks into a surprisingly appealing range of sporting models, culminating with the barmy Mustang-engined, rear-drive ZT and the ugly but rapid SV coupe.

The brand's reintroduction to the UK in 2011 as MG Motor, under Chinese owner SAIC, has proven less successful. China's roads are full of new-age MGs, but outside its home country you'd be forgiven for forgetting the brand exists – fewer than 3000 MG 6 hatches and saloons hit the UK's roads between 2011 and the model's disappearance in 2016, and while the MG 3 supermini and GS crossover are better efforts, neither is a common sight.

It's unlikely that a new MG-badged GT would be

a big seller either, but at the Shanghai motor show in April that's exactly what the company unveiled. Known as the **MG E-Motion (1)**, the concept is the brand's first true performance car since the SV and is set to hit the road in production form in 2020. And unlike the SV, MG is promising a low price: bosses are suggesting a figure of under £30,000.

It's hard to say which of the car's many facets is more remarkable: that the E-Motion is a seriously good-looking object, that the £30k price tag will somehow allow the masses access to a fully electric sports car, or that it's happening at all.

The styling is certainly sleek, with hints of Mustang in profile and a dash of Mazda to the front end. The concept sits on SAIC's new modular electric-vehicle platform, and a range of 300 miles is mooted – along with a 0-62mph acceleration time of 'under four seconds'.

As for whether it will happen – and whether it will come to the UK if it does – we'll have to wait to find out. Either way, it's more appealing than **Jaguar's** latest effort. Despite our hopes that downsizing is falling out of fashion (Briefing, *evo* 233), the British company still has a few rounds left in the clip – four, specifically – launching a **four-cylinder F-type (2)** at the recent New York motor show. The car's 2-litre Ingenium-branded unit produces 296bhp and,

predictably, Jaguar promises lower emissions and better fuel economy – though we'll believe that when we experience it. With an eight-speed auto it gets to 60mph in 5.4sec, which is only three tenths behind the howling, 335bhp V6 auto... But still you just wouldn't, would you?

Also featuring a downsized engine, although one that's slightly more acceptable given it's a 409bhp 3.5-litre V6 with twin turbochargers, is the **Lexus LS F Sport (3)**. Lexus has finally ditched V8s with its latest S-class rival, but the appeal still grows in sporty F Sport trim, with subtle tweaks to the styling and Lexus Dynamic Handling four-wheel steering, already used to impressive effect on the smaller GS F and F Sport.

No such downsizing nonsense for the folks at Dodge, who blitzed the Big Apple with the 828bhp, 6.2-litre supercharged V8 **Dodge Challenger SRT Demon (4)**. It's designed for drag racing but, remarkably, it's still fully road-legal. Expect every model sold to engulf itself in a fug of rubber particles from its Nitto NT05R drag tyres – before hitting 60mph in 2.3sec and clearing the quarter-mile in 9.65sec. Maybe life under Trump won't all be bad.

The Shanghai show was a little more sensible than New York, though it did have the new **BMW M4 CS (5)**, which sits between the 444bhp M4 Competition Package and the sold-



“
A range of 300 miles is mooted – along with a 0-62mph time of under four seconds
”



out 493bhp GTS. The CS is capable of lapping the Nürburgring in 7min 38sec, which is 22sec quicker than the regular 425bhp M4 can manage. The use of carbonfibre for the bonnet, roof, front splitter, rear diffuser and driveshaft snips 35kg from the kerb weight (now 1505kg), while the twin-

turbo in-line six gets 454bhp and is mated exclusively to a DCT 'box. The 0-62mph dash takes 3.9sec (0.2sec quicker than a regular DCT M4) and the top speed is capped at 174mph. Firmer suspension keeps the body in check and there's also a set of new (and gorgeous) alloy wheels.





The rest of the show was something of an SUV-fest, with a series of lofty concepts from the Volkswagen Group. **VW** itself previewed the **ID Crozz (6)**, the third model in its burgeoning electric concept lineup, while **Audi** and **Skoda** fielded electric, coupe-style SUV concepts in the shape of the **e-tron Sportback (7)** and the **Vision E (8)** respectively.

Meanwhile, Geely subsidiary **Lynk & Co** launched its production **01 (9, overleaf)** – an infotainment-packed crossover based on the upcoming Volvo XC40. It'll be sold worldwide, features a lifetime warranty and will be sold online only. Your smartphone will be its key – allowing you to lend your car to others via an app.

Mercedes-Benz broke the high-rise trend with its **Concept A Sedan (10, overleaf)**, a sleek styling exercise previewing an upcoming A-class-based saloon. It's a little shorter and taller than the existing CLA but also a little wider, and probably won't serve as a CLA replacement – Mercedes sees a niche in the range for a proper compact saloon, rather than a four-door coupe. It looks great – design boss Gorden



by ANTONY INGRAM

“Your smartphone is its key – allowing you to lend your car to others via an app”



Wagener is keen to cut unnecessary creases from future models, and the Concept A is much more cohesive as a result.

While the Concept A is likely to hit the road in some form or other, **Renault** continues to stretch reality with the **RS 2027 Vision (11)**, one possible future direction for F1.

Pictures don't do it justice – on the floor in Shanghai (and it really is almost on the floor) the 2027 Vision was stunning, the highest point on the car sitting barely above the tyres. It also features a fighter-jet-style canopy, one of several cockpit safety measures that may well appear in F1 in the coming years. The concept

is actually all-wheel drive, pairing a mid-mounted turbocharged V6 with a pair of electric motors for 1341bhp – or one megawatt of power. It only weighs 600kg too.

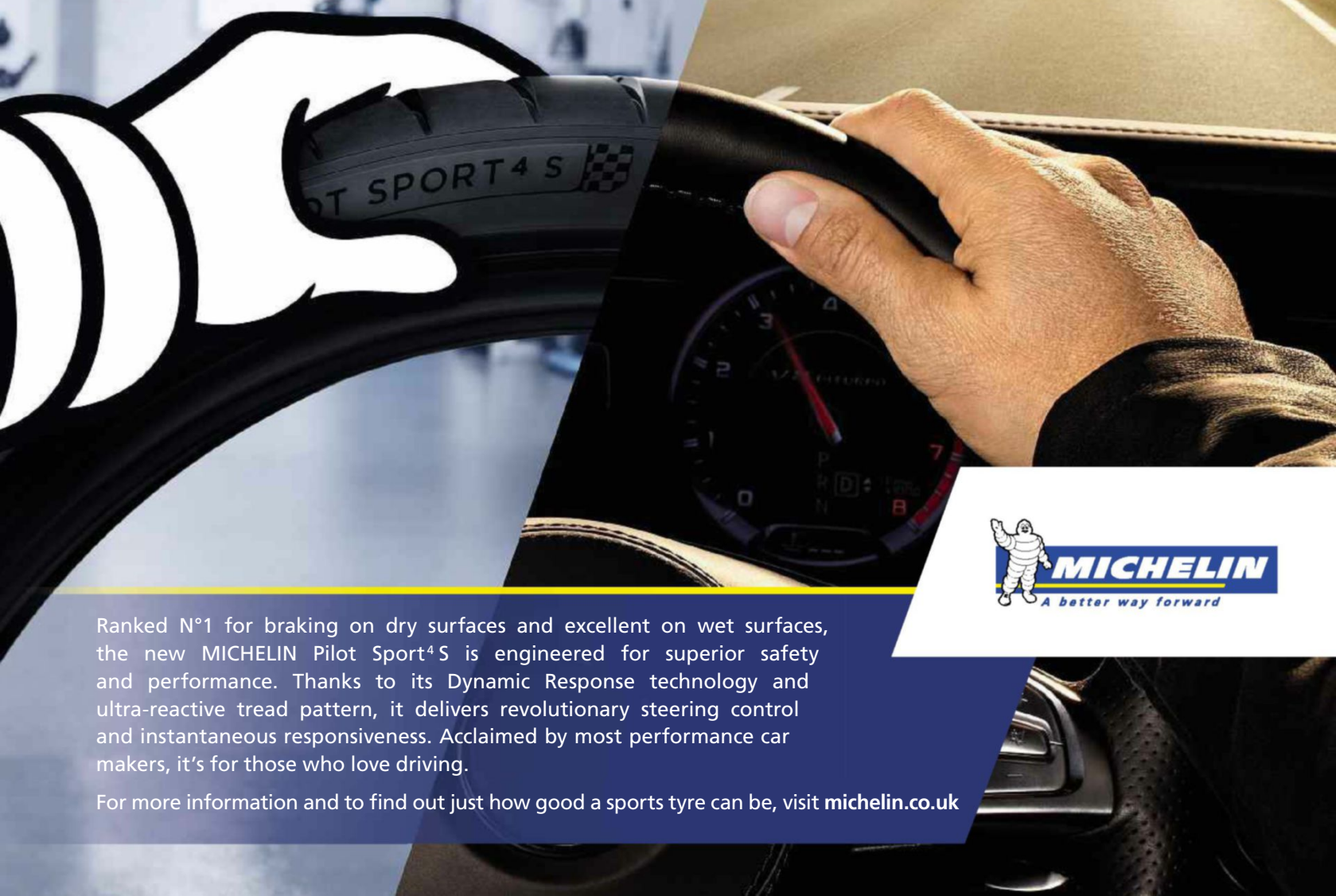
Back to the road and the present day, and **Lotus** has launched a limited-run **Exige** called the **Cup 380 (12)**, coming in at a breezy

1057kg and a hefty £83,000.

More affordable but still offering a high fun factor is **BBR's** latest take on the **Mazda MX-5 (13)**. The Stage 1 turbocharged package costs £4995 fitted, and lifts power to 248bhp at 7150rpm. A 235lb ft torque output should provide a lively drive; a five-second 0-60mph time is the claim.



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How do you divide your time between the needs of Formula 1 and Formula E?

Formula E is more work than you'd think, because the series is growing and we're already planning for the changes this year. F1 too this year is going to be busy for me – I think I will eventually have to choose either one or the other.

Could Formula E become the more important sport?

We need to keep the concept and the magic of Formula E, such as the city circuits, while welcoming more constructors and keeping budgets stable – and always put the money into the development of the technology. If we do that, the sport will always grow. F1 is different. As Renault, it's good to have a connection with the product for marketing. I don't think we can predict what's going to happen in the next ten years, but look at what we're doing at the [Shanghai] show [with the RS 2027 Vision F1-car concept]. We'll always keep atmospheric engines, but maybe we can make the hybrid technology simpler and less costly in the future.

Have 2017's changes moved Formula 1 in the right direction?

I think so – we have a bigger audience, a good show with Liberty [Media]. Ferrari is more competitive, and with more competition you have good races. But maybe for 2021 we could move the regulations on a few more steps, and attract a younger audience. More information, more connectivity – try some new ideas.

TALKING TO...

Alain Prost

The future of Formulas 1 and E, as seen by the team manager for Renault in FE, adviser to Renault F1 and four-time F1 champion

Does Formula 1 consult you, given your history in the sport?

I do talk to Ross [Brawn]. You can't say, 'I want that, I want that...' You have 10, 20, 50 elements, and not everybody will agree on everything. The problem in F1 is that if you change a technical rule, it often does not work because the sporting regulations haven't changed. I have a good vision of what we had in the past, what works, what did not work. There are a few things we could do that may work very well.

I cannot go into details, but the vision is to have more power, lighter cars... and for me, less aero. More priority on mechanical grip,

and more freedom with tyres. Let them have three compounds per weekend, but make the choice free. Even if they want to mix and match – let them do it. It opens up the strategy. And if you have much more power, less downforce, you put more emphasis on the driver.

Is it frustrating that F1 hasn't yet reduced aero to improve the racing?

That's why people sometimes have to listen to our generation. I will never say it was better in my day, but they need to understand why it was different. It was difficult to overtake, it was difficult to follow a car, but the car itself was more difficult to drive – you'd make mistakes, and miss gears. But in other ways it's still difficult today – more screens to study, higher downforce.

Have you had the opportunity to drive a modern Formula 1 car?

I have driven a Lotus, and a Red Bull. They're more sophisticated, but you have much less feeling in these cars than you had in the past. When you braked or steered in my time, the car would pitch, or roll. I never liked the Williams active car in 1993... It was a fantastic car, but I used to set up the car myself with the engineer, and the active car changed that. It changed the handling, too – sometimes in a fast corner it was easier to go flat, rather than lifting. I got used to it, but it did not suit my driving style.

When you retired from F1 did you think you'd still be involved in it in 2017?

I didn't know. When I retired I didn't know what I was going to do! But that's my life. I always just follow my ambitions. Even if it's sometimes a bit difficult, I still have the passion for what I do.

And finally, what do you drive?

A Porsche 911, but day-to-day I have a Renault Espace. It's good to have a passion for cars, but when you've driven in F1, very little compares!

“ You have much less feeling in modern F1 cars than you had in the past ”



TECH

Exhausts: the Aftermarket

It's no longer just about making more noise – the aftermarket-exhaust industry has come such a long way that even big-name car makers now queue up for its wares

by Brett Fraser

EXHAUSTS AND THE aftermarket: why bother? Manufacturers now expend tens of thousands of hours and millions of pounds developing their performance cars to a high state of tune, and the exhaust system is critical to that process. Can the aftermarket really do better?

Well, the aftermarket exhaust industry has come a long way since the days when it simply created nice shiny systems out of stainless-steel tubes, said they'd last forever and give you lots more horsepower, and ensured they made plenty of noise to drown out the sound of often empty promises. Reputable aftermarket firms today have to comply with EC regulations concerning sound levels, exhaust-gas emissions and manufacturing

standards, and employ university-educated engineers to operate sophisticated design software to create their products.

The goal of any aftermarket exhaust system is, you'd think, to hurry the exhaust gases away from the combustion chambers quicker than the original-equipment (OE) system can manage. The faster the exhaust gas is evacuated, the sooner a fresh fuel-air mix can be injected, and the more power and torque can be produced. To this end, aftermarket systems try to follow a neater, straighter path from manifold to tailpipe, and courtesy of more laborious and costly bending and welding processes, the internal surface of their pipework is smoother, for unimpeded gas-flow. They also feature expensive high-

flow catalytic converters, and their silencers breathe more freely.

And yet few aftermarket manufacturers make a song and dance about power-increase claims, even those such as the Slovenian maker Akrapovic, or the UK's Milltek Sport, both of which are also heavily involved in motorsport. Akrapovic does mention a 14bhp boost to the power output of the BMW M2 by using its replacement

downpipe and sports cat, but you have to read a long way through the product description to discover that fact. It's as though the industry is nervous that any increases may not be repeatable.

QuickSilver's managing director, Paul Goddard, is equally coy about highlighting power improvements, and claims his clients have other priorities. 'Customers with expensive sports cars tend to be



“It’s as though the industry is nervous that any claimed power increases may not be repeatable”

extroverts with an emotional attachment to their cars,’ he says. ‘To them, sound quality is critical; their car is already quick enough. So our systems are tuned to emphasise and amplify the aural sensations of the exhaust. Sound helps you judge your car’s performance.’

That last comment is particularly pertinent in an era where downsized engines with turbochargers are being criticised for weak aural performance – the Porsche 718 series is a prime example. Aftermarket silencers can help restore some of the roar emerging from the tailpipes, and turbocharged engines can respond well to aftermarket downpipes used in tandem with sports cats, with (again, largely unspecified) improvements to power and torque.

The increasing popularity of ‘switchable’ exhausts, which allow cars to meet noise constraints in urban areas but achieve the full banzai out on the open road, are testing the ingenuity of aftermarket

engineers. Not least because the controls for these systems can be deeply interlinked with the rest of a car’s electronics. Milltek is working on a valve arrangement that opens progressively rather than turning on and off, and QuickSilver has developed a system of ‘balance’ pipes that are brought into play depending on engine speed and throttle opening, creating a smoother change in tone (DB11 system pictured, left). Meanwhile, Akrapovic has put control of valve-switching in the fingertips of the driver, with a wireless push-button.

Whereas stainless-steel systems were once the preserve of the aftermarket, they’re now far more commonplace as an OE fitment, so the aftermarket has had to move on to new things. Stainless steel does still feature in their brochures but is of higher-grade metal, while the tubes themselves feature thinner walls to reduce weight. In recent years, though, titanium has come to the fore for lightweight systems, spearheaded by Akrapovic, which has an in-house titanium foundry (and whose Ti hardware for the Ferrari 488 GTB is pictured above).

Titanium yields massive weight savings, particularly for silencers – a titanium silencer for the Audi R8 can trim 30kg from a 45kg OE item.

The technology and experience available to the major aftermarket-exhaust manufacturers have now caught the eye of mainstream car makers, some of which are calling in this outside help. Porsche, for instance, had Akrapovic develop the OE system for the 997 GT3, and Volkswagen recently announced a collaboration with the company for a titanium sports exhaust for the Golf R – it’s 7kg lighter than the standard system. Akrapovic is also a motorsport partner to BMW and collaborated with Audi on its World Endurance Championship campaign. QuickSilver, Milltek and others also have manufacturer motorsport connections.

So, the industry has turned full circle, with the aftermarket makers now not merely being tolerated by car manufacturers, but in some instances being embraced.



City Concours stars revealed

An impressive list of attendees is announced, and there are more to come



A MOUTHWATERING CAST of cars for a new concours event in central London is taking shape. Visitors to the City Concours, to be held on 8-9 June on the lawn of the Honourable Artillery Company and in association with *evo*'s sister-magazine *Octane*, had already been promised a successful Le Mans D-type from 1957 and one of eight Touring Superleggera Disco Volante Spyders. However, we now

know that many more treasures from road and track will put in an appearance.

As you'd expect, the 1960s will be well represented, with a Lamborghini Miura, a Ferrari 250 GT Pininfarina Coupe and the ultra-rare trans-Atlantic mash-up that is the Iso Grifo (V8 by Chevy, mechanicals by Bizzarrini, styling by Giugiaro) among the entries. Cars from the following decade are

no less impressive, and a Porsche 911 Carrera 2.7 RS is set to star alongside a Lancia Stratos HF Stradale. So far just one machine has been drafted from the 1980s – a Ferrari 288 GTO – but more cars from that era will surely follow.

One of only 25 Porsche GT1 Straßenversions – the barely road-legal mid-engined 911 that allowed the company to go after the McLaren F1 in sportscar racing

– will also go on display, joined by Bugatti's EB110 Super Sport and a Jaguar XJR-15. A Maserati MC12 Corsa will carry the road-racing theme into this millennium, where the so-called Holy Trinity of hybrid hypercars awaits alongside Pagani's Zonda F and a Lexus LFA.

Visit evo.co.uk for our special two-for-one ticket offer (just £35 for the pair) and 20 per cent off breakfast and lunch packages.

WATCHES: REISSUES



Hamilton Intra-Matic 68

Price: £1930
From: hamiltonwatch.com

Back in 1968, in the dying days of its pre-Swatch Group era as an American manufacturer, Hamilton launched a pair of chronograph watches imaginatively called Chronograph A and Chronograph B. The 'A' had a white dial with black subdials, the 'B' the inverse, and it's the latter model being reprised here. It's been modernised, too, its case growing from 36mm to 42mm in diameter and its automatic movement offering an impressive 60-hour power reserve.



Le Jour Mark I

Price: from \$2000 (c£1600)
From: lejourwatches.ch

Before it disappeared without trace in the mid-1980s, French firm Le Jour sold a number of handsome chronographs. They were in fact made by Heuer, and in many cases were identical to Heuer models but for the logo. Now Le Jour is back with a new watch that recalls one of those vintage pieces. It has a 42.5mm case, is powered by the trusty ETA Valjoux 7750 automatic movement (just like the original) and comes in seven different colour schemes.



TAG Heuer Autavia

Price: from £3900
From: tagheuer.com

Just over a year ago, TAG Heuer asked its fans to vote for their favourite 1960s Autavia model. The winner, the 'Rindt' Autavia – so nicknamed because one was worn by Austrian F1 champion Jochen Rindt – has now been treated to a reissue. The new version has the same black and silver colour scheme and a classic Heuer logo (no 'TAG'), but with a modern, 42mm case, up from the original's 39mm. It's available on a leather strap or with a steel bracelet.

Like watches? Read *Chrono*, the digital watch magazine for iOS and Android, available **FREE** inside the *evo* app.



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WEC 6 Hours of Silverstone

HAVING QUALIFIED ON THE FRONT ROW OF THE grid, Toyota's pair of TS050 Hybrids were in a strong position to win the 2017 World Endurance Championship's opening round, at Silverstone in April. It wasn't to be that simple, though. The two cars fought for the lead throughout the opening third of the six-hour race until the no. 7 car, being driven by former F1 star Kamui Kobayashi, returned to the pits with a mechanical fault. Rain during this elongated stop then caught the Japanese driver unawares when he rejoined the race and he subsequently left the track momentarily at Vale.

The no. 7 car's misfortunes weren't over yet, either. Three-time WTCC champion José María López later came off at Copse, and hard. The shunt removed most of the Toyota's front bodywork, but López managed to limp the car back to the pits for the team to get it into shape and, remarkably, back into the race.

There was drama for the no. 8 Toyota, too, as it lost the lead to one of the Porsche 919 Hybrids with less than 30 minutes to go. Toyota driver Sébastien Buemi (also ex-F1) fought back to retake the lead, however. Porsche's cars placed second and third, while the ill-fated no. 7 Toyota finished 23rd.



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'Boxing clever

May I take this opportunity to 100 per cent disagree with Andrew Lally (Inbox, **evo** 234) on his views regarding manual versus PDK gearboxes on the 991.2-generation Porsche 911 Carrera GTS? For track work I'd choose PDK every time, for the speed and accuracy of change as well as the ability to keep both hands on the wheel. And speaking as the owner of a manual 991, for the road the involvement of the manual makes for a far more satisfying experience than PDK.

On track I drive a supercharged Elise and the manual 'box is the one weak point of that car.

Guy Hubball



The Acceleration Factor

Comparing the Bugatti Chiron with the Tesla Model S (both in **evo** 235) highlights the irrelevance of 0-60mph times in describing the true performance of today's supercars. Advances in automotive technology (tyres, dual-clutch gearboxes, hybrid-electric powertrains, all-wheel-drive systems) have rendered the humble 0-60 time obsolete, unable to discriminate between levels of performance that in reality are rather different.

What is needed is a more nuanced approach, able to capture the immense reach of modern supercars while still providing a valid comparison for less exotic machinery. I suggest **evo** adopts the Acceleration Factor, a metric that records the number of seconds for which a car can sustain an average acceleration of more than 10mph per second.

Sounds complicated, but it's not. The Toyota GT86 gets to 50mph in 5 seconds and so scores a 5. The Mini JCW does 60mph in 6 seconds and scores a 6. The Ford Focus RS, 80mph in 8 seconds – that's an 8. BMW M2: 100mph in 10 seconds – guess what, that's a 10. Porsche 911 Carrera S: 120 in 12. Honda NSX: 140 in 14, and so on.

While the Chiron and the Tesla may share a 0-60 time, the Acceleration Factor tells the real story: 20-plus plays 12.

Rob Davis



Dark matter

I always enjoy Richard Porter's off-the-wall views of motoring, and his concerns about car colours (Petrolhead, **evo** 235) nearly, but not quite, hit on a bugbear of mine. I reckon colour *is* a problem with modern cars, but not on the outside. It's the inside that causes me to denigrate the imagination of car designers. Or maybe it's the buyers or car retailers who take the easy way out.

I despair at the sombre interiors of most modern cars, which seem to be black, plus black, with black 'highlights'. A case in point is the Volkswagen Golf R. A great car, but look at the interior [above] – it may be well designed and built, but it's got all the excitement of a funeral in January. When you have a car and use it, what do you spend your time looking at? I know, the road! But what's always in view? It's not the outside of the car, but the inside.

When I buy a used car, the inside colour to me is more important than the outside. Black is an automatic



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Worth the weight?

IT'S A LOVELY LOOKING THING, THE NEW ALPINE, BUT I already know that the road test is going to have a 'but...' in it. Engineer David Twohig says he lost sleep over a 500g weight saving (**evo** 234), yet this car has a seven-speed dual-clutch transmission! Now, I'm no engineer, but I'm pretty sure your average dual-clutch 'box is heavier than a manual, yet a manual won't even be an option. It's as if Renault has forgotten why it got hammered for its last hot Clio and hasn't learnt.

Come on, Renault. You said you couldn't make the Clio RS16 because the factory would be at capacity building the A110, but now we've seen its spec sheet and a collective heart sinks. Everyone was going mad for the RS16 because it had that stonking engine and manual gearbox from the Mégane, addressing the issue that made the Clio 200 Auto the dunce of the class, so we know you can do it. Listen to the people. Read the motoring press. See what the used prices of 911 Rs are. At least give us a bloody option! If you really do prioritise fun over figures, prove it.

Mark Yardley

The Letter of the Month wins an Aviator watch

The writer of this month's star letter receives an Aviator Airacobra P45 Chrono. Inspired by the pilots' watches of the 1940s, it has a 45mm case, a Swiss-made quartz movement, and SuperLuminova indexes for outstanding legibility.



Peter Jackson
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INBOX



'no'. The paler the better, and assuming the outside doesn't clash, I'll go with it. It's amazing how many people say how nice the pale interiors look and then get into their black motorised mausoleums! Why?

Chris Rayner

Further inspiration

I thoroughly enjoyed John Koenig's letter (Inbox, *evo* 235) regarding the new McLaren 720S headlamps being inspired by the Eagle spaceship from the TV show *Space 1999*. However, I venture to suggest an earlier influence: the Ferrari 156 'Sharknose' Formula 1 car of 1961 [pictured above]. Just don't tell McLaren...

Justin Pressland, Esher, Surrey

Forward thinking

The latest 911 GT3 looks wonderful and one can expect it to be the best yet, as Andreas Preuninger says (*evo* 234). But how many times have we seen this said on your pages over the years, and is not each generation of 911 really pretty much the same as the others? It looks like what it is: an evolution of the 1960s car, however far it has progressed (and regressed, at least as far as driver involvement goes).

Contrast this with the McLaren 720S, which is so cutting-edge new and distinctive in appearance and engineering. It is the first modern car to excite me and make me want to open my wallet in a very long time and that is down to the boldness of its design, the use (but not misuse) of technology and its apparent integrity (form and function etc).

If the over-familiar and tired design of the 911 is the EU, then perhaps we can hope that the 720S foretells a

bright future for Brexit Britain, at least as far as cars are concerned!

Andrew Beverley

Track Pack attack

I read Dan Prosser's review on the McLaren 570S Track Pack (*evo* 235) and I did enjoy it, but I have a problem with the car: the £16,500 premium! To be honest, most people who are going to buy a 570S are not going to use it on track. If you want to do trackdays, you don't take your £160k supercar. You take a track toy, like a Caterham or a Lotus. Alternatively, you have a hot hatch, or a cheap upgraded car. Then you can have your supercar (570S) and a more practical or track-orientated vehicle. Simple.

I understand that the McLaren is excellent to drive and a great car, but is it necessary? The standard 570 already has five stars. And really: 25 kilograms saved? My little cousin weighs that much. Sit him in the passenger seat and all that carbon, all that extra money is gone.

On the subject of good value cars, in Market Analysis in the same issue you asked for our fantasy £50k, three-car garages. Mine would be a Ford Focus RS Mk1 (£14,000), an E90 BMW M3 (£20,000) and a Caterham Seven Roadsport 125 (£16,000).

Jamie Dilnot

Fifty-grand fantasy

Fantasy garage? My favourite version is ten cars for £100k, but playing by your 'three cars for £50k' rules and going with what I can currently find in the classifieds, my garage would be as follows.

The hardcore car would be a Ginetta G40R (£20,950). It falls between a Caterham and an Elise in usability, ticking the 'What's one of those?' and the handling boxes.



The utility vehicle would be a Touareg, specifically the R50 V10 (£18,450). It'd be good for carrying people, I could fit a bike rack to it, and it would serve for the Costco trips, moving stock for work and visiting customers. But mostly I want it for the torque and feeling of power.

And the crazy barge would be a Lancia Thema 8.32 [above] (£9000). I've never driven one but have sat in them and I love the opulence. I have driven Thema Turbos and like those, but of course it's about the badge.

Total cost: £48,400. Which of course leaves nothing like what's needed for the work necessary on the Lancia, but hey, this is a fantasy, and there would always be the option of a cheaper Touareg...

Simon Rockman, Finchley, London

Fifty-grand reality

Here's my £50k three-car garage, and it's a real one.

First up is the Ford Focus S-max Titanium Sport 240. OK, it's not a hot hatch or an investment proposition, but I actually rate it. It covers all the bases, from the tip run (king-sized bed and mattress with room to spare) to road trips on the NC500, four-up with luggage and bike rack. It'll often be fully loaded with kids if my wife has to use it for a school-related trip. It's not got the handling or performance of a hatchback, but with 237bhp it will still surprise people at the lights.

Second is my 2008 E92 BMW M3. I'm not sure it's grown on me as much as my old E46 did and I still rate the latter as the better-looking car, but that V8 makes up for it.

Third is a Westfield Megablade. An absolute riot of a car, running a late 1000cc Honda Fireblade engine and all



the standard Westfield luxuries, i.e. no weather gear, sound proofing, heating, ABS, servo-assisted brakes or power steering – just pure driving.

Taking the prices from my outlay at the point of buying each car, the total comes to £48k. I've got a car for all seasons and every occasion in that lot. The M3 has some possible keeper value (manual 'box, 18-inch wheels, just 23,000 miles). As for the others, who cares! One is the daily driver the other is the nice-weather fun car.

Brian Simmons

Mirror mystery solved

In your latest Fast Fleet report on the Audi R8 Spyder V10 (evo 235) you mention that the car's passenger-side door mirror doesn't always tilt downwards when reverse is selected. It may help to know that the auto-tilting function only works when the mirror selector knob is in the position for adjusting said mirror. If the tilt function is failing when the knob is in the correct position, however, then you definitely have a problem.

Bill Doherty

A kind offer

I enjoy your long-term tests and am following with interest how you are getting on with your fleet. I was so sorry to learn that you are struggling with the R8 Spyder's fixed-back seats [above] (evo 234), so I propose a solution. Selflessly, I am prepared to offer you my very comfy and well-used Audi A8 to waft around in, and I will suffer the pain of the R8 for the duration of your stewardship. No, don't thank me, I hate to think of you suffering, so it's the least I can do.

Robert A Bill, Moultsford, South Oxfordshire



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PREVIEW DRIVE

BMW M5 (F90)

The covers don't come off
BMW's latest supersaloon
until September, but we've
already sampled its power –
and its new drivetrain





CORNER ONE: GET ON the throttle early at the apex, a few degrees of slip-angle from the rear, an almost undetectable squirm from the nose, an easing of the steering angle but little more. Slingshot acceleration. Smirk. Yeah, that's quick.

Tap the screen.

Corner two: on the throttle early again, the fabulous sensation of a generously loaded supermarket trolley arcing into a drift around the hairpin of the condiments aisle; smoking Michelins. This is the same car. A clever car. They call it 'two cars in one'.

They also use the word 'inevitable'. 'They' being BMW M boss Frank

van Meel and vice president of engineering Dirk Häcker, who are discussing one key fact about the new M5: it's four-wheel drive.

While it's probably true that BMW can no longer resist the call from certain markets to power both axles, it's the ongoing power-race against rivals that means deploying such prodigious performance through only the rear wheels has become increasingly unrealistic. Yet BMW, much like AMG with its new E63 (Driven, *evo* 231), has gone all-wheels-driven in its own way.

The M5s that await us at BMW's Miramas testing facility, not far from Marseille, are scruffy prototypes disguised with camo-swirls. We will

henceforth know this car as the F90 (M-cars now get their own type number), and while it doesn't take much imagination to visualise the appearance of the finished article, harder to see are details such as the carbonfibre roof, the sunken centre-section of which continues the same styling motif as the bonnet.

Under that bonnet lies a new generation of the familiar 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8, now with higher injection pressure, redesigned turbos and new cooling and oil-supply systems. It's connected to an eight-speed Steptronic gearbox, not an M DCT twin-clutcher. A backwards step? Not at all, according to Häcker, who says the ultimate performance

of the torque-converter is virtually indistinguishable from the twin-clutcher. He says it also holds an advantage when you're just ambling around, doing what M5 drivers spend most of their time doing. For the same reason, the rear subframe is now attached to the body with bushes, not solidly mounted: M has tried to broaden this car's appeal.

'The car had to feel like a rear-wheel-drive car, but with a bit more traction,' is van Meel's succinct summary of the project brief. To achieve that, the engineers have adopted and developed existing components – the Active M diff from the M3/M4 and the transfer case from the M760i, which allows the



‘Initial signs are that the new M5 is surprisingly agile for a car of its size’

Below: carbon-ceramic brakes will be an option on the new M5, and are identified by gold-painted brake calipers. **Bottom:** turn stability control off and you're given a choice of three modes, including one for rear-drive antics

power to be sent to both axles – and combined them with new software in a single, integrated control module.

The transfer case, situated behind the M5's gearbox, contains an electronically controlled clutch that sends power via a driveshaft to the differential at the rear. At that point, new carbonfibre clutch plates can distribute torque from zero up to 100 per cent on either side. Meanwhile, another driveshaft runs up to the front axle where there's an open diff. For the first time, one ECU looks at every input: steering, throttle and braking from the driver, plus yaw, lateral, longitudinal and wheel-slip data from the car. It knows what's happening before you do.

The cleverest part of the drivetrain is the centre diff, as its clutch can be anything from locked totally open, making the car rear-wheel drive, to completely closed, for a 50:50 power-split. M engineers don't like to talk torque-split percentages because the M5 deals in much more subtle, precise metering to individual wheels. So sophisticated is the M5's brain that the shuffling around of torque is said to be undetectable.

The latest 5-series (the G30) is

usefully lighter than the model it replaces, making it a good starting point for integrating around 60kg of additional driveshafts and differentials. Despite all that kit, the new F90 M5 is said to be lighter than its 1870kg F10 predecessor. Its wheels are 19 inchers as standard, with either Continental or Yokohama rubber. A 20-inch wheel shod with Michelin Pilot Sport 4s (or a Pirelli equivalent) will be an option.

All this means very little without an appreciation of the driving modes. As with so many modern cars, so much of the end result, and the labour spent during development, is attributable to the software. This new M5 has the usual Comfort, Sport and Sport+ modes that are individually selectable for the steering, throttle and dampers, and there are also three stages of tuning for the Drivelogic gearbox.

However, it's the Dynamic Stability Control (DSC) operation that really matters. With it fully on, the M5 is as four-wheel drive as it gets, although still with an emphasis on rear-driven entertainment. Move to M Dynamic mode and that becomes '4WD Sport'. This, as you



might expect, favours an even more rear-biased setup. Switch DSC off completely and you have a choice of three modes: 4WD, 4WD Sport and 2WD, all shown on the iDrive screen. The last of those is, you guessed it, entirely rear-wheel drive.

Thankfully, you need not twiddle away through these modes in iDrive (or tap the hard keys on the centre console, which include one for a new sports exhaust) like a concert pianist, as they can be preset as 'M1' and 'M2' programs, accessible via buttons on the steering wheel.

Out on track, the new M5 feels as brutally rapid as you might expect. BMW hints at a final output of around 610bhp, with in excess of 516lb ft of torque (the previous M5 was good for 552bhp and 501lb ft), but if that's the case then these are particularly well-fed Bavarian horses of noble parentage.

This is also the first M5 to feature



electric power-assistance for the steering, but it's one of M's better efforts and when lapping the wet, low-grip circuit it's possible to get a real sense of the level of adhesion available. Mainly, though, it's the car's high-speed balance that impresses, and the initial signs are that the new M5 is surprisingly agile for a car of its size. Play with the throttle mid-corner and the car's attitude subtly shifts; change direction through the fast S-bends and it locks onto its new line with dogged enthusiasm and stays with you, resisting understeer keenly.

However, it's when you get back on the power that the M5 is really interesting. Even in 4WD mode it

always feels rear-driven, and if you're greedy with the throttle on corner exit it'll adopt a very neutral attitude. It's not in the least bit intimidating, even with the DSC off. 4WD Sport mode will allow the rear to swing out given similar provocation but then pulls things straight with very little steering input required.

And 2WD? A riot. Or a handful. It's brilliant fun on a test track with someone else's tyres, but if you just wanted to get home fast on a wet night in November... Well, at least now you can go for 4WD mode.

Two cars in one, then, and a thorough re-imagining of the M5. We can't wait to drive the finished car. ☒

Adam Towler (@AdamTowler)



Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V8, 4.4 litres, twin-turbo	c610bhp @ n/a	>516lb ft @ n/a	<3.5sec (claimed)	155mph (limited)	c1850kg (335bhp/ton)	£78,500 (est)

➤ Thuggish power with a versatile powertrain; promisingly agile ☒ Don't expect it to be cheap; we haven't had a proper drive yet



Lotus Elise Sprint 220

Lotus has shaved another 26kg from the Elise Sport and dusted off the famous Sprint nametag in celebration. But is the result worth the premium?

Photography by Aston Parrott

A LOTUS WEARING THE Sprint badge has to be pretty special. Step up close to the Elise Sprint and you'll see that it is, with an impressive amount of high-quality, gloss-finish carbonfibre lavished on it. The engine cover is made entirely from the lightweight material, as is the roll-hoop cover and the vented bonnet panel. Swing open the door and there's more of it on the sills; you'll also spot the open linkage for the gearshift and a blanking plate where a radio head-unit should be.

It looks like a comprehensive weight-saving programme and it is, though some of the measures that help the car to its impressive kerb weight are general improvements enjoyed by other models in the new Elise lineup. 'Sport' is the standard Elise trim level and those models also benefit from the open gear linkage and integral weight reductions, including the revised, lighter front clamshell and new-look rear panel with only two round tail lamps.



So making the Sprint even lighter requires more exotic solutions, hence the lovely carbon parts.

The headline weight you may have seen for the Sprint is 798kg, which gets the car back onto the same page as the original Elise of 20 years ago. This figure is for the non-supercharged, 134bhp, 1.6-litre Sprint, not the Sprint 220 tested

here, and the sub-800kg figure has been made possible by lighter parts and a bit of technical limbo-ing; 798kg is a 'racing' dry weight, that's to say the weight of the car with all of its vital fluids, such as engine oil, brake and clutch fluids, but an empty fuel tank.

The Sprint 220 is identical to the 1.6 Sprint apart from its engine and

weighs about 50kg more. Its version of the Toyota in-line four is a 1.8-litre and comes with a supercharger: it's this and the associated plumbing and radiators that account for the extra mass. Its dry weight is 851kg and its with-fuel kerb weight 878kg, which, however you slice it, is still not a lot for a car that packs 217bhp.

In addition to those lovely carbon panels and a polycarbonate rear screen that save a total of 6kg, the Sprint also comes with a lithium-ion battery (saving 9kg), carbon shell seats (6kg) and forged alloy wheels (5kg) for a total saving over the Sport 220 of 26kg, or about three per cent. Hence why the claimed acceleration figures are the same: 0-60mph in 4.1sec.

If you struggle to get into an Elise with the roof on, you might appreciate the 10mm drop that the lovely (optional) carbon sill finishers bring; their dimensional accuracy allows them to be fitted closer to the extruded aluminium beneath. The slim seat is comfortable



**'It looks like a
comprehensive
weight-saving
programme,
and it is'**

and supportive and (optionally) is matched with Alcantara door casings and fascia trim, with contrasting yellow stitching.

Thumb the starter button and the engine assumes an unexpectedly sonorous idle. Lotus says that it has spent a lot of time on the sound and boldly states that it has created 'the best sounding four-cylinder car in production'. It's certainly one of the most characterful fours, with a lovely, rounded bass quality that gives it an almost retro feel, as if it's breathing through carbs. It's a very willing engine too, its strong pick-up helped by the lower mass and well-chosen gearing that means there's always a solid response.

Unexpectedly for a car that sells on being lightweight, the steering is rather heavy, particularly at parking speeds. In the dry the chunky, Lotus-tuned Yokohama Neovas (175/55 R16 front, 225/45 R17 rear) give immense grip, especially when they're warm, and the Sprint feels balanced and slingshots into and out of corners like a race car. The quality of the road surface hardly seems to matter because, as ever, the ride is very impressive. Not only is it remarkably supple but there is no bump-thump noise either, which helps give the dynamics a very satisfying sense of quality. There's really no surface it can't neutralise, although the front



tyres can be distracted by cambers on heavily crowned B-roads.

In the damp the traction control can be quite busy, which is not unexpected given the combination of the torquey engine, short gearing and low mass. Turn off the traction control and the weighty steering can feel like it's restricting your options a little, asking for a fair bit of muscle to react to small kicks of the tail on the exits of corners. You wouldn't expect the sporty tyres to be great in the rain, yet the Sprint is wonderfully benign on soaking asphalt, the breakaway being very gentle and the supercharged engine allowing



Top: a lightweight it may be, but the Sprint's cabin is classy; exposed gear linkage a neat touch. **Above:** forged alloy wheels save 5kg over regular cast items

'Lotus states it's the best sounding four-cylinder car in production'

precisely measured power delivery to make things rewardingly smooth.

The engine has quite an open-pipe sound in the mid-range, and the note thins out to a slight crescendo ahead of a soft limiter, there for if you miss the shift lights in the centre of the rev counter. Cruising can be a little wearing though, as the motorway speed sets the engine close to its boomiest point, 3000rpm, and there's no radio to resort to.

With the Sprint, Lotus has worked hard to make a light car even lighter, and the buyer has to show quite some commitment too: the Sprint is £5000 more expensive than the Sport, and all of the items that make it a Sprint are optional on the Sport. It's a rewarding, involving car but that iconic badge comes with a heavy price. **X**

John Barker (@evoJB)



Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1798cc, supercharged	217bhp @ 6800rpm	184lb ft @ 4600rpm	4.5sec (claimed)	145mph (claimed)	878kg (251bhp/ton)	£44,300

+ Makes the most of its lightness **-** Heavyweight price

evo rating ★★★★★

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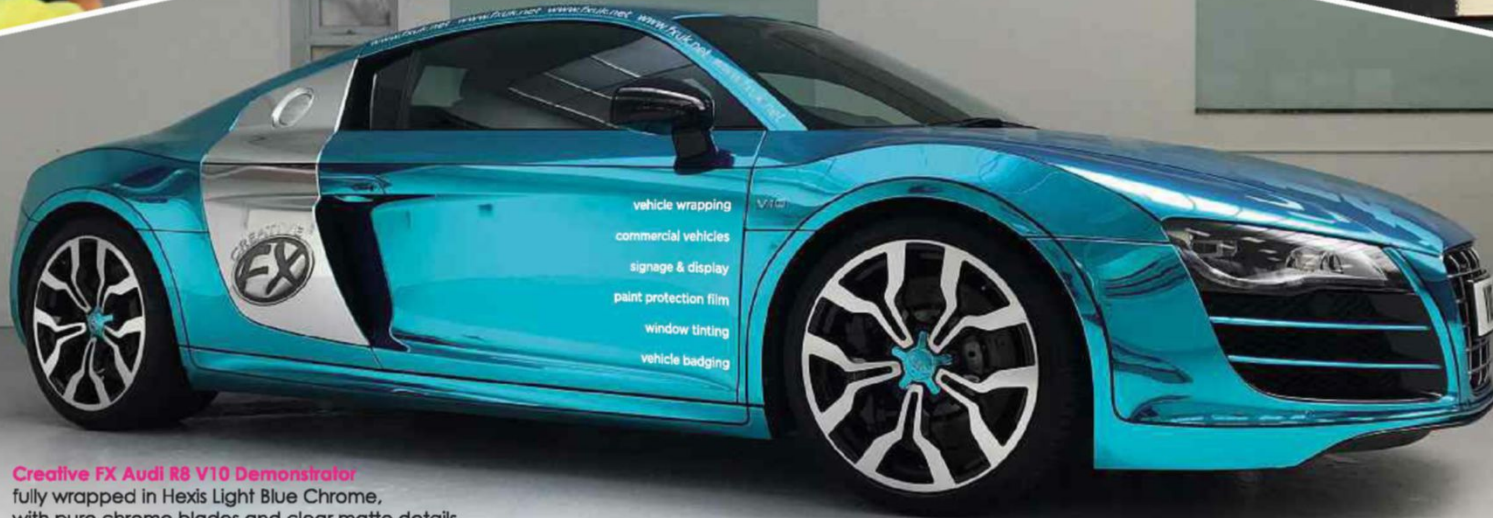
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Mercedes-AMG E43 4Matic Saloon

With a 395bhp V6 in an E-class body, does the E43 deserve the AMG badge?



A AUDI DOES IT, BMW TOO, and now Mercedes-Benz is romping up the inside to join its German rivals in a race to fill the Niche Gold Cup. And after backing its AMG C and E-class thoroughbred stallions with a 4-litre, hot-vee twin-turbocharged V8, Stuttgart's largest automotive stable has turned its attention to training its E-class to become a two-thirds AMG champion in the guise of the E43.

Available as a saloon or estate, the E43 has been bred to take on Audi's S products – specifically the lesser-spotted, 444bhp S6 – and BMW's forthcoming 540i Performance. You could also line up Jaguar's new 375bhp XF S in the stalls, too.

To the untrained eye the E43 looks for all intents and purposes little different to an E63. Its nostrils are less flared, but its brake discs are 360mm in diameter, with four-piston calipers up front, just like its big brother. There's the smallest of aero devises on the trailing edge of the bootlid, a pair of exhausts made to look like a quad setup, and 19-inch diamond-cut alloy wheels (wearing a Continental SportContact 6 shoe) to complete the look.

Inside, a range of options allows you to craft a fine interior. The steering wheel is chunky and flat-bottomed, the seat nicely bolstered,

'There's an even spread of torque and power well matched to the nine ratios'

but like many larger Mercedes models the latter positions the jockey a little too high in the saddle.

Beneath the AMG dressage is a very non-AMG-like engine. The 3-litre twin-turbocharged V6 isn't built in Affalterbach, but it has been upgraded there and had a pair of larger turbochargers fitted, resulting in peak outputs of 395bhp and 383lb ft of torque. Mated to a nine-speed automatic gearbox (not the AMG Speedshift 'sport automatic' found in the E63), the E43 is only offered with four-wheel drive with a rear-biased 31:69 torque split.

There's little roar from the E43's tail when you press the start button, more of a mechanical whirr and a bit of a whine from its nose. It's a big contrast to the theatre of an E63's start-up procedure – a little too much of a contrast for us. The standard sports exhaust needs to work harder.



E43s are equipped with air suspension and AMG Dynamic Select as standard, the latter allowing you to switch between Eco, Comfort, Sport, Sport+ and Individual settings to alter the throttle, steering, suspension and gearbox shift maps. Selecting Individual and configuring Sport for the engine, gearbox and steering (to add some weight to push against if nothing else) and leaving the air suspension in comfort feels a good sweet spot. It gives the engine and gearbox a sharper response and the chassis a level of control, refinement and precision you'd expect from a car in this class.

The powertrain works well, with an even spread of torque and power well matched to the nine ratios on offer. There are times when, gearbox left in Drive, it hangs on to revs longer than you expect, presenting an engine sounding a little coarse for comfort, so it's best to run up and down the

ratios using the paddles mounted to the back of the steering wheel.

Unfortunately, the E43's only grey area is the engine. It just doesn't feel athletic and energetic enough to deserve an AMG badge. It's quick, ish, but it doesn't provide the step above regular E-class models that you'd hope for, probably due to the car being just that little bit too heavy (1765kg) for this motor. Whereas the C43 feels alert and alive with plenty of AMG DNA running through it, the E43 can leave you a little flat and wanting more. Come off the reins, however, and the E43 improves markedly, the car better suited to a seven-tenths approach that still keeps it ahead of the field, albeit some way off the thoroughbreds it's inspired by.

The E43 is far from a hot favourite, then, but it's still worth an each-way bet in our book. ☒

Stuart Gallagher (@stuartg917)

Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V6, 2996cc, twin-turbo	395bhp @ 6100rpm	383lb ft @ 2500-5000rpm	4.6sec (claimed)	155mph (limited)	1765kg (227bhp/ton)	£57,275

+ All the benefits of the current E-class with some of the AMG look and performance - Requires more AMG performance

evo rating ★★★★★☆



Porsche Macan Turbo Performance Package

It's fast, but is it a better choice than the sublime Macan GTS?

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE the words 'My Macan Turbo isn't fast enough' drifting past the cappuccino maker of a Porsche Centre, and yet here, for another £5524, is an official way of making Porsche's sports-car-on-stilts offer even more genre-busting performance.

In essence, a Performance Package-equipped Macan Turbo squeezes the most power and torque yet out of the M46-series V6, with 434bhp and 442lb ft of torque, the latter from 1500 to 4500rpm. These are small but notable increases over the standard car (394bhp, 406lb ft) and enable nearly half a second to be chopped from the 0-62mph time – now 4.4sec – while the 169mph top speed is up 4mph. The additional output is achieved via more aggressive camshafts and an ECU remap, and is combined as standard with the otherwise optional sports exhaust.

Porsche has also upgraded the stopping power by specifying larger, 390mm discs on the front, gripped by six-pot calipers. In addition, the PASM variable damper setup has a 15mm lower ride height – a configuration shared, incidentally, with the Macan

'Does anyone actually need an SUV to accelerate this quickly?'

GTS – and the Sport Chrono package is also now included as standard.

There are only three blanking plates left on the switchgear-festooned centre console of our test car, which is always a reliable pointer to spec-sheet indulgence from the Porsche press office. Sure enough, a Turbo Exterior Package (four grand's worth of LED headlamps, 21-inch wheels and various black trim pieces), carbon-ceramic brakes and air suspension inflate the £69,505 list price to nearly £86,000.

Does the Performance Package car feel faster than the standard Macan Turbo? While it surely does, the differences aren't huge – particularly when viewed in the context of a kerb weight of nigh-on two tons. That flat torque curve is evident in the linear delivery of the engine, but the V6 also



now has plenty of energy towards the red line, accompanied by a strident, hollow, curiously monotone howl that gains volume, bass and burbles when the sports exhaust is switched on.

The Macan Performance Package is ferociously quick; you sense uncomfortably so at times for other road users. Does anyone actually need an SUV to accelerate this quickly? Of course not. But having said that, when this Macan is surging relentlessly through one of the intermediate gears, piling on speed with so little strain and the turbos gently hissing, it's easy to conclude that yes, yes you really do. It stops as well as it goes, too, but given this car has the superb ceramics fitted, it's not possible to say how the uprated cast-iron discs perform.

Nevertheless, what makes this Macan special is not how fast it is, but the manner in which it drives. It feels different from even the usual pseudo-sporty SUV suspects, from its low-set driving position to its genuine agility and surprisingly rear-biased handling setup.

In fact, you soon learn that applying the power early in a tight turn will set the tail wagging, and while the front axle quickly pulls the car straight, it's the kind of exuberant behaviour that feels completely alien to begin with, given the driver's immediate surroundings. The air springs fitted to this car do a decent job of controlling the mass of those 21-inch wheels and smoothing away the effects of their minimal sidewalls, but they also add a sense of remoteness to the experience that the more incisive and transparent conventional setup should avoid.

Which is why, for now, our favourite Macan remains the more rewarding, better balanced, 355bhp GTS, and even an extra 40bhp for the Macan Turbo doesn't change that. However, if we ever get to sample it in its purest Performance Package form, we may very well think differently.

Adam Towler (@AdamTowler)

Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V6, 3604cc, twin-turbo	434bhp @ 6000rpm	442lb ft @ 1500-4500rpm	4.4sec (claimed)	169mph (claimed)	1925kg (229bhp/ton)	£69,505

+ Staggeringly quick, hugely capable **-** Do you really need this much power? Very pricey

evo rating ★★★★★

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Birds BMW M235i

Photography by Aston Parrott

Tuner's upgrade package aims to create a modern-day E30 M3 – with 390bhp



AFTER 38 YEARS IN business – a good many as sole UK importer of Hartge's tuning parts – there isn't much that Bucks-based Birds BMW doesn't know about the inner workings of the Bavarian brand's dynamic make-up, or how to modify the company's myriad suspension and damping setups for the peculiar demands of Blighty's bobbly blacktop.

Perhaps the most intriguing 'dynamic package' it currently offers is for the M135i and M235i, cars we love for their outstanding turbocharged straight-six engines and stonking performance. Nevertheless, they fall a little flat in the chassis department, not least by failing to put their 321bhp to the most effective use. Birds' demonstrator is an M235i and the mission, according to Kevin Bird, is to 'provide the driver with the best possible combination of ride, handling and traction attributes for fast and safe road driving'.

Identifying the M235i's principal problems as the absence of a limited-slip diff and the inability to smear the rubber of both rear tyres more or less evenly on the tarmac when that lusty powerplant is being exercised, Birds' main weapon is a component that's become synonymous with its business: the Quaife ATB differential. At a stroke, the thinking goes, three



irritants vanish. No more need for management-pegged power in the lower gears when the beans are deployed from a standstill, no more inner-spinner when punching out of a tight bend, and no more hyperactive traction control, either.

Next on the hit-list are ride comfort and body control, which Birds considers sub-par whether or not Electronic Damper Control (EDC) is fitted. Kevin Bird reckons EDC is worse – too soft in Comfort for medium speeds, too hard and crashy in Sport. 'Even if it worked,' he says, 'why do you have to press a button to get the car to handle properly?' So Birds offers its own springs and Bilstein dampers with custom-spec valving. The front track is also eased out and there are changes to the front and rear geometry to improve stability.

Kevin Bird has a soft spot for the



E30 M3 and reckons this Birds B2 Dynamics Package matches the E30 for body control and traction. In fact, this M235i demonstrator has had a remap to take it within touching distance of 400bhp and underline the superiority of the Quaife diff.

During development, which involved input from ex-sportscar racer James Weaver, significant efforts were made to contain body roll without resorting to beefier anti-roll bars, and while acknowledging their potential for biasing the chassis away from understeer, Weaver's preference for the road was to use damper tuning to control the body instead. That said, anti-roll bars to Birds' own spec are an option for those wanting a stiffer, sportier feel with less understeer, although they're not fitted here.

The first impression is one of sheer thrust, the way this Quaife-

'There's thumping torque and urgently delivered top-end power'

equipped M235i simply hooks up and goes. The meaty engine responses are sharp without being edgy and delivered without the faintest hint of reactive nerves from the chassis. Although the helm answers inputs alertly and accurately, it filters out the rigours of bumpy roads with poise. There's a huge amount to like, here: true responses and acutely resolved feedback; thumping torque and urgently delivered top-end power.

The abiding impression is of tautly controlled suppleness that makes the suspension's indifference to mid-bend disturbances all the more gratifying. Customers can opt for the complete £9643 package (which includes the engine remap, the Quaife-diff Dynamics Package, 18-inch wheels and tyres, and anti-roll bars) or cherry pick as they wish. **✖**

David Vivian (@davidjvivian)

Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Conversion price
In-line 6-cyl, 2979cc, turbo	390bhp @ 5800rpm	n/a	4.1sec (est)	155mph (limited)	ci450kg (c273bhp/ton)	£9643 (see text)

+ Traction and poise to exploit the extra power **-** Full kit isn't for the faint of wallet

evo rating ★★★★★



RICHARD MEADEN

Perhaps more evidence of his advancing years, Meaden confesses to a growing passion for convertible motoring. At least he still has the hair for it...

HERE'S A QUESTION FOR YOU: HAVE YOU owned a convertible car? I'm not talking dedicated sports cars like Caterhams or Elises, or even MX-5s, as they're all great and meant to be roofless. I mean a Roadster, Spider, Speedster, Volante, Cabriolet or any other fresh-air version of an otherwise tin-topped model.

Even asking such a question in the gung-ho pages of *evo* feels like I'm broaching a taboo subject. One that risks you marking my card as an effete charlatan and a traitor to the cause of rock-hard suspension, Nürburgring lap times and tyre-shredding oversteer.

Yet the truth – unsettling for me and, perhaps, unpalatable for you – is I rather enjoy roofless cars. Not all of them, but quite a few. That's confusing and contradictory I'll admit, but hopefully goes some way to you giving my confession a sympathetic hearing. Some of you might even come out in my defence...

I don't get soft-top hatchbacks, though. Nor do I like the idea of saloon-based soft-tops. I'm not sure I get metal folding roofs either. I'll also concede there have been some heinous crimes committed in the name of open-top motoring over the years. Whoever signed-off on the E30 M3 Convertible should be shot, as should those who bought them. Similarly I still feel my teeth splintering at the memory of the abomination that was the B7 Audi RS4 Cabriolet. Saloon? Yes! Avant? Double yes! Cabrio? Hell no! Likewise, I still can't countenance 911 Cabriolets of any flavour, though perversely I would entertain a Targa. Go figure.

And then there's the rise of the diesel convertible. Apart from the abominable PT Cruiser Convertible, is there anything sadder than an open-top oil-burner? As Colonel Kilgore never said in *Apocalypse Now*, 'I love the smell of NOx and carcinogenic particulates in the morning. It smells like desperation. Or a cheap lease deal.'

Some years ago I ran a Jaguar XKR-S Convertible on *evo*'s Fast Fleet. I'll admit my inner cabriophobic purist grimaced at the prospect. Largely because anti-convertible sentiment had been drummed into me by much of the motoring media I'd consumed in my impressionable youth. I also knew it would provide endless amusement for former *evo* contributor Jethro Bovingdon, who took great delight in snorting with derision when he saw me drive it with the roof down. Which was a lot more often than I would

have predicted prior to living with the car. It helped that the year I had the Jag included a properly hot summer, but I recall the winter was a hard one. I should know – I was living in a caravan on a building site at the time. Funny thing was I'd feel just as inclined to drop the roof on a cold, frosty morning, or one of those cloudless days after heavy snowfall, as I did on a scorching summer's day. The pleasure, and the sense of occasion and connection, weren't temperature dependent.

It sounds like a terrible cliché to cite the heightened sights, sounds and smells that come with open-top driving as a source of sensory pleasures denied those cocooned in their coupes, saloons or hatchbacks. But, like most clichés, that's only because it's true. The Jag wasn't a great drivers' car, but it was characterful, memorable and genuinely enjoyable. I'm sure I liked it more because it was a convertible; I have a suspicion the coupe would

have focused me more on the XKR-S's lack of feel and traction. Not having a roof just seemed to suit it to a tee.

Maybe the sun's gone to my head, but of 2017's new models I have the major hots for the Aston Martin Vanquish S Volante (just imagine the noise of that V12!) and the AMG GT C, which looks absolutely stunning. I wouldn't have one over an AMG GT R, but I suspect it's a more desirable and enjoyable machine than the regular GT.

Pagani's Huayra Roadster looks utterly sensational. Likewise I think I'd choose an Aventador SV Roadster over a regular model, and I'd be sorely tempted by a 488 Spider despite my reservations about metal roofs on convertible cars. Lower down the ladder I'm certain I'd have a Boxster over a Cayman. At least before Porsche stuck that gruff flat-four in them. I'd even have a job deciding between a 981 Boxster Spyder or the venerated Cayman GT4. Sorry – I'll get my coat.

Madness? Maybe. But as high-performance cars become ever more powerful, capable and exploitable in a world less and less tolerant of speed, I think I'm finally starting to crave ways of injecting fun and engaging my senses without feeling compelled to drive at crazy velocities. I love a hardcore hot hatch, supersaloon, Speciale or RS just as much as the next man, but perhaps it's time to consider that, far from being softcore, the elusive thrill of driving is more readily accessed with the roof down. ☒

'Whoever signed off on the E30 M3 Convertible should be shot. The buyers too'

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RICHARD PORTER

Take dignity, and discard. Then add smugness and blend with no logic whatsoever. Yes, it's Porter's recipe for a truly silly car

THE ASTON MARTIN RAPIDE AMR IS A ludicrous car. You've probably seen it, crouching on oversized alloys with a strident stripe up its middle and an extra 50 horsepower under its bonnet, all things the most sedate of Astons does not need in its old age. No one has driven a Rapide and thought it should have a front splitter and a noisier exhaust. If I were being cruel, I'd say that no one's driven a Rapide full stop, which is why you rarely see them around. But you'd certainly spot the AMR version because it crushes any quiet dignity under an awkward desire to be cool, like a 50-something man becoming a bit too enthusiastic about Instagram. No, I'm afraid the Aston Martin Rapide AMR is a completely preposterous car. And I want one very much indeed.

There's a simple reason for this; it's because it's silly. In quiet moments I find myself going online and having another look at it. I like to imagine turning up to smart country hotels in it and watching them trying to keep a straight face. I picture my three-year-old's expression as I use it to collect him from nursery. I think he'd particularly enjoy the lime-green interior detailing. I know I do, especially the way they've extended it to the interior of the cup holder. It's a silly detail, but silly details are a vital part of silly cars.

Conversely, you can't make a silly car by half-heartedly adding these touches. You could put a dayglo cupholder innard into a Porsche 911 GT3 and it would not make it silly. The 911 GT3 is a very good car, but it's not a silly one. It's too po-faced and polished. In the course of its development, a great many clever people in branded fleeces have furrowed their brows and come home late to their families, and they didn't make all that effort to come up with something silly. The 911 GT2, on the other hand, is almost silly, simply because it has that slight sense of boggle-eyed lunacy about it. The latest 911 Turbo S is getting there, too, in a way that no 911 Turbo has before. Mostly, however, its silliness comes from an astonishing ability to pick an implausibly distant object and bring it towards you at a speed that your brain struggles to process. But it's not truly silly. Neither are any current Ferraris silly because they, like the

GT3, are too balanced, too technical, too likely to draw you into a very earnest conversation about lap times. And silly cars are never about lap times.

A silly car has to be incongruous and unnecessary. Its glory comes from the fact that it exists in a world that never asked for such idiocy. Hence, the silliest current Porsche is the 562bhp Cayenne Turbo S. It's also why the silliest BMW of recent times was the M Coupe. AMG Mercs used to be silly, but they've become so familiar that the incongruity of silly has been erased. Except in the GLS63 SUV, which must give its occupants an eerie facsimile of achieving positive Gs inside Westminster Abbey, and the enduringly idiotic G63, which is an exceedingly silly car as well as an extremely crap one.

In the world of silly, that doesn't matter. Silly is about the kind of cars that, if they were people, would have a wry smile on their face as they fell backwards off a roof into Burt Reynolds' swimming pool while dressed as a duck. They're out for a good time, all the time. Which brings me to the one-time kings of silly, Lamborghini. I'm sad to say, this is a company that has lost its silly mojo. The Huracán simply isn't a silly car, and while the Aventador might seem a bit silly, there's a sense that it's merely going through the motions, pretending to be a daft sod while secretly thinking about calling its personal trainer. The Countach and the Diablo,

they were properly silly cars, yet even they pale into magnolia sensibleness compared with Lamborghini's defining moment of silliness, the LM002. Now there's a car that had everything you need for maximum silliness: an oversized engine, ludicrous looks, and absolutely no logical reason to exist. It set a benchmark of silly, the like of which I doubt we'll see again.

But in the meantime, we'll make do with what we have. Because while I generally favour an understated car, if you're going to have something that attracts attention, that doesn't take itself too seriously, that seems to fly in the face of all logic and, precisely because of that, seems completely, brilliantly, middle-finger-flippingly bad to the bone, you need a car that is unashamedly silly. Which is why I want a Rapide with a lime-green stripe up it. ❧

**'A silly car
has to be
incongruous.
Its glory comes
from the fact
that it exists
in a world that
never asked for
such idiocy'**

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TED KRAVITZ

Flights to and from races can be a real drag, but at least TV crews and journalists don't have to dress in a corporate travel uniform

I T'S THE WORST FLIGHT OF THE YEAR. SUNDAY night, Sochi, Russia, to London Luton. One hundred and fifty engineers, a few drivers and around 20 TV people are crammed into an Airbus A320. If this plane goes down, Formula 1 will be in very serious trouble.

It's late. Everyone has been up since 7am, driven to the track, briefed, prepared, raced, celebrated or commiserated, debriefed, packed up and hefted bags onto coaches bound for the airport. The flight is meant to take off at 9pm, but in Russia, scheduled (and especially chartered) departure times tend to be optimistic estimates. After the first Sochi Grand Prix in 2014 the authorities cancelled all take-off slots before immediately reopening them for sale to the highest bidder. There's an apocryphal story about Niki Lauda pushing fistfuls of dollars across a Russian aviation official's desk in an attempt to get back his original slot and be allowed to leave. On that occasion the team bosses got away first, while our charter dropped to the back of the queue. We got home at 4am.

Even if the take-off slots aren't cancelled and resold, there's always some delay because of a slow-pumping fuel bowser, or a horse on the runway, or the entire air corridor being shut down so President Putin's Ilyushin Il-96 can depart.

We wait. UK-based drivers sit on departure-gate floors, leafing through reams of data from the day's race with their engineers. Channel 4 and Sky Sports crews mingle to gossip about interviews, features or how each called the race. Others peruse the duty-free shops, remembering that they'd promised to pick up a set of nesting Babushka dolls for the kids. Eventually, gone 10pm, the plane takes off. It lands, nearly five hours later, at Luton, just after an easyJet A319 from Ibiza and an EL AL 737 from Tel Aviv. Skeleton border-control and baggage-handling crews are swamped.

By this point F1 team personnel's nerves might be frayed, but their clothes are not. That's because of their specially designed travel uniforms – typically jeans or chinos with crease-proof polo shirts or jumpers, embroidered with a subtle logo visible to the eagle-eyed. If you are eagle-eyed and happen to be hanging around Heathrow or Gatwick on a Wednesday before a race, why not try guessing who works for which team? It's harder than you might

think: McLaren isn't all in grey while Force India has a continental style the like of which you'd expect from Renault.

The concept of travel kit first came about in the 1980s when F1 travel days were, effectively, colossal drinking binges that usually ended in mechanics being turned away at the aircraft door for being too drunk, engineers being arrested on arrival for in-flight shenanigans or drivers going AWOL for days with someone they'd just met in first class. Team managers reasoned that if the public could identify them, staff would have to behave. It's no fun these days, of course. Travel clothes are now a marketing must, to represent sponsors and achieve 'consistency of presentation and a fixed standard of attire in public spaces'.

One team easy to identify is Ferrari. Not only does everyone sport a jacket with prancing horse blazer badge, but they also lug around bright red suitcases and backpacks. These not only feature a logo, but also a number. The boss gets 001, the drivers their race number (Sebastian Vettel's bag has 005 on the side, Kimi gets the plum 007), the technical director 008, and so on in a vague order of seniority. British-based teams also number their suitcases (much easier to spot at baggage reclaim than looking for a name tag), but they assign the numbers randomly so as to avoid any stress over who gets the lower number.

Also avoiding stress – as far as being absent from the Monaco Grand Prix – will be Fernando Alonso, attempting instead to win the second race of the 'Triple Crown', the Indianapolis 500 (he's already won Monaco, twice). A few things on this. You've got to have a good car and some big cojones to win at Indy and Alonso has/will have both. He'll do Le Mans in 2018 and could well win that, too. But in F1, the future isn't so bright. Fernando can see the writing on the wall. Not much is happening in a hurry at McLaren Honda, there doesn't appear to be a seat free for him at Mercedes (unless Lewis Hamilton retires), Ferrari or Red Bull next year, so job satisfaction can only be found in other categories of motorsport.

That's the tragedy of Alonso's talent, wasted these last three years. His roving quest to be the 'most complete driver in the world' will light up the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and the Circuit de la Sarthe, while putting F1, and his achievements in it, in the shade. ❌

'After the first Sochi GP all take-off slots were cancelled before reopening to the highest bidder'

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FORD

The Ford GT has waged a successful war against the motoring establishment on track, but the new road-going version faces a much tougher battle

by STEVE SUTCLIFFE

FORD GT

ALMIGHTY?



'The question is then, is it as good to drive as it is to look at?'



IT WOULD BE ALL TOO EASY to introduce Ford's new \$450,000 supercar with endless references to yesteryear, because we all know where the story for the Ford GT began... Henry Ford tries to buy a Ferrari with which to compete at Le Mans in the 1960s, Enzo rudely rebuffs him, Henry builds his own version of a Ferrari to do the job. It's called the GT40 and with it he humbles Ferrari. The end.

Except there's an intriguing new story doing the rounds about the birth of the latest Ford GT, and it only recently came to light at the car's launch in the US. Initially Ford wasn't going to build a new GT at all, it seems. Instead it wanted to return to Le Mans with a Mustang, and to then create a road car off the back of the racing project to market the Mustang globally.

For one whole year, it transpires, Ford tried and failed to come up with an über-racing Mustang to take on the 911s, Corvettes, Ferraris and Astons that compete at Le Mans each year. At the same time it tried to craft a road-going version to coincide with the Le Mans project to celebrate the company's 50th anniversary of its victory at the famous 24-hour race.

And then something called Project Silver happened.

After a year Ford reached the painful realisation that the car they'd been attempting to engineer had begun to bear no resemblance whatsoever to a road-going Mustang. Which meant the marketing would never work. So the idea of going back to Le Mans with a Mustang was canned and replaced with a top-secret skunkworks project – Project Silver – to build an all-new GT to take endurance racing, plus a corresponding road car to go with it. And thus, at the end of 2013, the idea for an all-new Ford GT was born.

The road car we're driving here has been a while coming since then, to the point where some cynics have already accused it of being mildly off the pace beside cars such as the McLaren 720S (page 78), especially when the Ford's price tag is half as much again as that of the McLaren. So perhaps the best way to tee-up the left-hand-drive-only GT is to remind you of some key facts about it, just in case you think it's already old news. In no particular order the important specification details for the low-slung Ford go like this...

Engine: 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 with 647bhp at 6250rpm and 550lb ft at 5900rpm. Dry weight: 1385kg. Gearbox: seven-speed dual-clutch with paddleshifters. Bodysheet and tub: both in carbonfibre. Brakes: carbon-



ceramics all-round. Wheels: 8.5 x 20in at the front and 11.5 x 20in at the rear, forged alloy as standard, or carbonfibre in the same sizes for quite a few quid extra. Tyres: Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2s, 325/30 at the rear, 245/35 up front. Performance? Zero to 60mph in 2.8sec, top speed 216mph. Drives modes? Five, catering for how you like your car set up and in what conditions you're driving it.

So, we've covered all the headline stuff. And impressive it is, too. But what really is the new Ford GT all about? Why has Ford spent so much money developing a car with such limited sales potential when there are so many other cheaper but potentially even quicker cars it could have chosen to compete with in 2017? The answer is brand building, pure and simple. And from an engineer's perspective, wouldn't you rather be working on a knee-high supercar than yet another mass-produced muscle car, however iconic it might be?

The aim of the racing version has unashamedly been to win at Le Mans and then to succeed in the World Endurance Championship, and in both arenas the GT has comprehensively fulfilled its potential. But the role of the road car is to headline Ford's new 'Ford Performance' sub-brand by showcasing all sorts of new technologies

that will eventually filter down to its other fast road cars. Including, potentially, the more widespread use of carbonfibre and the development of Ford's EcoBoost engine technology.

So the GT is a halo car and even the briefest glimpse of it in the flesh will confirm its divine status. It's achingly beautiful to look at from any angle but at the same time deeply purposeful, as well as also being technically pleasing on the eye. Even beside a LaFerrari it wouldn't get swamped from a styling perspective.

The question is, then, is it anywhere near as good to drive as it is to look at? Mostly, yes, but in some ways no. Let's talk about the good bits first, of which there are many, best of which, arguably, is the chassis. With a full carbonfibre tub at its core and inboard pushrod suspension at either end, the GT is fundamentally light and extremely stiff. Its carbon-ceramic brakes are huge, while the digitised springs, dampers and differential are extremely clever in their design and operation, and unusually light in their construction.

So all the right ingredients are present and correct to ensure that it's a proper weapon on track, and in that environment this makes the GT feel, well, very much like the racing car that it is. Ford essentially designed the

Far left: GT looks dramatic on the road, and feels as wide as it looks. **Top:** anodised, vented paddleshifters are a wonderful detail. **Above:** there's a lot of car behind the driver, but not much air between arches and tyres when Track mode is selected



Left and below: cabin has the look of a 1970s concept car. **Bottom, left to right:** rear wing at rest and extended; butterfly doors require substantial hinges...



racer first then legalised it for the road, and on the move that's just how it feels. The steering is heavy but ultra-direct, even just ambling along a pit lane for the very first time. The throttle response is instant and massive, even in Sport mode. There is a Track mode too, in which the suspension stiffness goes up by 100 per cent, but we'll come to that in a moment.

Even in the first few feet of travel the GT feels incredibly alive beneath your backside, in a way only proper racing cars do. The suspension is compliant but very stiff in its feel, and supremely controlled in its response, and you soon discover the braking power is immense. The noise from the twin-turbo V6 engine, and the acceleration it can so readily generate, are also deeply racing car in feel and delivery. At low revs it sounds grainy, angry, industrial, and not especially pleasant. But as the revs rise past 2500rpm the sound changes, the acceleration gets much stronger as the V6 homes in on its torque peak – which is basically flat between 3200 and 5800rpm – and the cumulative effect is utterly dramatic.

And then there's the way the gearbox operates, slicing up or down through the ratios with a speed and precision that you couldn't hope to replicate with a third pedal and conventional gearlever. After five laps in the GT driven at

a reasonable lick, all but the most skilful drivers would probably want to calm down a bit and have a rest, so much grip does it generate through the corners, down the straights, in the traction zones, everywhere. And after another five laps you would definitely need a lie down to have a good think about what this car is doing, how it is doing it, and how you can get even more out of it. Which is where the Track mode comes in.

To engage this you need to come to a complete stop, flick a switch on the steering wheel and then, *thump*, the thing drops instantly by 50mm, reducing the overall ride height above the ground to just 70mm. So you go out in it again and that's when the monster that lies at the heart of the Ford GT reveals its true being. In Track mode the GT doesn't feel any faster in a straight line – because it isn't – and nor do the gearchanges feel any more aggressive than they do in Sport (in which you get anti-lag, by the way). But the turn-in response, the body control, the perception of grip and, most of all, the subjective power of the brakes (weirdly) all go to another level again.

Now the way the GT stops for and turns into corners becomes a little ridiculous, frankly. You also notice the absence of weight that it carries, and the pure precision this lends it everywhere. In Track mode it is fair to say



'It's epic to drive on a track
because it's a race car at heart'

that the GT is utterly spectacular to drive. In fact, it feels quite a lot like a full-blown racing car, a fact that even its creators admit is not all that far from the truth.

So what's the problem with the Ford GT? And what are the aforementioned not-so-incredible aspects of the way it drives? OK, here goes... And sorry about this Ford, but I suspect that in your heart of hearts you know what's coming here anyway... On the road the GT feels and sounds a bit rough around the edges, a touch uncouth, and just not as refined mechanically as you might expect.

On the track, at maximum attack, all the fizzles and vibrations and noises, most of which are down to the carbonfibre tub, simply aren't an issue because everything is focused on going faster, including the driver. But on the road they start to irritate. And after a long time behind the wheel I suspect they'd drive you round the twist.

Conversation is only just about possible at 50mph, so much din is there on the move. At 70-80mph it's so loud inside the cabin you need to shout to be heard by a passenger. The GT also feels very wide and very big out on the public road, intimidatingly so on occasions. And the fuel range is borderline hopeless with a 16.8mpg combined figure and a 57.5-litre tank. Call it 200 miles.

Twenty years ago all of this would have been fine, and the GT's brawny rawness would have been deemed perfectly acceptable. Appealing, even, in a macho kind of way. But things have come a long way in terms of supercar useability during that time, and in 2017 the GT is nowhere near its more obvious rivals in this respect. It also has a boot that is smaller than tiny.

The ride, on the other hand, is actually not bad on the road, as long as you select the Comfort setting for the electronic dampers. But then there are other issues surrounding the brakes, which under light loads become difficult to modulate smoothly, the steering, which suffers from kickback on rougher surfaces, and even the engine noise, which is always very loud indeed, can't be dialled back in any way, and has a lack of refinement to it in the mid-range that, again, you simply never notice on the track.

Bottom line: the Ford GT is an epic car to drive on a track because fundamentally it's a racing car at heart. No question about that. But on the road it's only so-so. Whether this will matter one iota to the 1000 owners who will take delivery of this extraordinary car over the next three years is probably not worth debating, however. Chances are, they won't care at all. ☒

Ford GT

Engine V6, 3497cc, twin-turbo

Power 647bhp @ 6250rpm

Torque 550lb ft @ 5900rpm

Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

Suspension, front and rear Double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Carbon-ceramic discs, 394mm front, 360mm rear

Wheels 8.5 x 20in front, 11.5 x 20in rear

Tyres 245/35 R20 front, 325/30 R20 rear

Weight (dry) 1385kg

Power-to-weight (dry) 475bhp/ton

0-60mph 2.8sec (claimed)

Top speed 216mph (claimed)

Basic price \$450,000 (£350,000)

On sale First 500 sold out, second 500 orders open 2018

evo rating ★★★★★

REINVESTED

Damn-near perfect on road and track, the 991-gen GT3 needs no introduction. Now it's back, faster and tighter than ever, so has the best become harder to beat?

by DAN PROSSER

PHOTOGRAPHY by
ASTON PARROTT

THE LITTLE BLUE LIGHT WITHIN THE instrument display tempers your enthusiasm. So do the still-hard front tyres, which scud lightly across the cold road surface as you pull out of the hotel car park. The fat rear tyres too, which slip a degree until the electronics catch them. When a car is as hyped as the new Porsche 911 GT3 – when the guy who oversaw its development, and has been integral in every other GT3 before it, has declared it the best one ever – the first urge you feel when at long last you get to drive it, after countless months of spy photos and studio shoots and motor show reveals, is to pull the damn pin and set the thing off.

But the engine and gearbox are cold. The tyres have no heat in them and the roads up here in Snowdonia are still slick with morning dew. So you exhale deeply to try and force the anticipation to drift away, willing your shoulders and legs to relax into the bucket seat. You'll have to wait just a little longer. But as you pass the national speed limit sign on the edge of town and ease the GT3 cautiously up to 60mph, you already know so much about it. You're starting to understand just how good it is.

The steering, for one thing, feels superb. You may only have guided the car through a handful of sweeping bends, but right away you know how direct it is and how precisely it allows you to place the car on the road. You've felt the small wheel rim chatter lightly in your fingertips as the cornering forces have built gently and waned away. You're so impressed by the steering in those first few moments, in fact, that you've already declared it the best, most intuitive electrically assisted setup you have ever encountered.

And then there's the provenance. You try to stay objective and assume nothing, but it doesn't get you very far because you know oh-





so well this new GT3 is the latest in a long line of completely brilliant sports cars, themselves developments of an already sensational machine. And you know Porsche's Motorsport department doesn't get this stuff wrong.

You've only driven it a mile or two and you haven't once stretched the engine beyond 3000rpm. But you know it already. The new 911 GT3 is some kind of wondercar.

The technical details might well be familiar to you by now, but they bear repeating because there are three or four very significant headlines that demonstrate how different this new GT3 is to the version that came before it; that show it's no half-hearted midlife refresh. The engine, for instance, is no longer a 3.8-litre flat-six but a 4-litre. It's a heavily reworked version of the unit found in the GT3 RS and 911 R, combining the power output of that engine – a conservative 493bhp – with the head-spinning 9000rpm red line of the 3.8 in the 991.1 GT3.

This is also the first GT3 available with a choice of transmissions, Porsche having reintroduced a manual option after switching exclusively to PDK on the previous model. The six-speed manual might well be the purists' choice, but it won't arrive until a little later in the year so the car we're testing today has the latest seven-speed twin-clutch item.

Andreas Preuninger, Porsche's head of GT cars, and his team have worked hard on the chassis too, retuning the dampers and fitting helper springs on the rear axle for the first time. The aerodynamics, meanwhile, have been honed so expertly that the car now produces 20

per cent more downforce than before with no increase in drag. The overall downforce figure – 155kg at top speed – is now a match for the 997-generation GT3 RS.

The little blue light has disappeared. The needle in the engine oil temperature display has climbed halfway through its arc and the tyres feel malleable now, warm enough that they can press into the road surface rather than slip across it. It's time to pull that pin.

With 339lb ft at 6000rpm compared with 324lb ft at 6250rpm, the new 4-litre engine is more torque-rich than the old 3.8, but it's the area beneath the torque curve, rather than the peak output, that makes the real difference. Open the throttle from 2500rpm and the thing just starts to pull, even in third and fourth gears. It may well be a high-revving, normally aspirated motor, but it's got muscle. The car accelerates like an overloaded freight train freewheeling down a sharp descent, picking up speed gradually at first, the pace then building exponentially as the engine passes 5000rpm, the sense of panic the same as the thing starts to run away from you as though you'll never stop it. Then the engine note hardens at 7000rpm and the rev-counter needle explodes around the dial, engine speed rising so quickly and ferociously you swear something is about to blow up. Over the final dash to 9000rpm it sounds like a bandsaw cutting through stone, and the intensity of the delivery doubles while the acceleration becomes unbearable.

If you aren't quick enough on the draw, the engine will crash into its rev limiter, the freight

train colliding with the foot of a mountain. Pull the gearshift paddle just as the needle nudges against the '9', though, and the upshift is savagely quick. Then it all happens again. There's a drama and intensity right at the top end that makes the old 4-litre in the GT3 RS and 911 R feel like a soft and fluffy turbo unit. This new motor is much stronger throughout the rev range than the 3.8 too, but whereas this engine explodes over the final 2000rpm, the smaller unit did so over a more concentrated, more intoxicating final 1000rpm.

I adore the chuntering from the flywheel at idle and low speeds, the *thud-hiss* from the gearbox pneumatics as you pull for a gearchange. The whole car drips with purpose and the PDK transmission is more responsive and more immediate than ever.

This particular car is fitted with the no-cost Clubsport package, which adds a rear roll-cage, a fire extinguisher and a six-point harness for the driver. It's also got optional carbonfibre bucket seats (£3324), which are brilliantly supportive and also very comfortable, even after several hours on the road. The smaller, 360mm GT steering wheel, meanwhile, is a big improvement on the 380mm item in the previous GT3, which always felt unnaturally large, giving the impression you were heaving the car from one corner to the next. The smaller helm actually makes the car feel more nimble.

In fact, the entire steering system is so well executed that you soon forget you're using a complex mechanical apparatus – one that includes rear-axle steering – to guide the car.



'The GT3 accelerates like an
overloaded freight train freewheeling
down a sharp descent'



‘Once the Michelin Cup 2
tyres are warm, they
find so much grip on a
dry road you’d swear
you were on slicks’

Left: GT3 now sports a
higher rear wing, along with
a redesigned front apron
and ram-air intakes above
the engine; yellow calipers
denote fitment of optional
carbon-ceramic brakes



It's so precise and so well weighted that you just seem to think the car through corners rather than consciously steer it. There is feedback too, and the sense of connection it affords you to the front axle gives you so much confidence. You're never left guessing how much grip the front tyres might find.

There's the same radiant quality in the damping, just as there is in every Porsche Motorsport product. In fact, the PASM damping is so effective that it feels less like the car is riding on springs, dampers, wheels and tyres and more like it's sitting on a thin pocket of compressed air, somehow making it feel both strapped down to the road surface and floating half an inch above it. There's pliancy and such brilliant body control that you can drive any given road as though it's two-dimensional, stretching out before you and twisting one way to the other, but completely flat, without bumps, potholes, compressions or crests.

It goes on. Once the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres are warm they find so much grip on a dry road that you'd swear they were racing slicks. Not once in 250 hard miles do I feel the car understeer, and only when the road surface really bucks and weaves hard, sending the car skywards just as I stand on the throttle pedal, do I see the orange traction-control light blink.

Traction is one of the Porsche 911 GT3's ace cards. That's not at all unusual for a car that slings its engine right out over the rear axle, but with its helper springs – which give a few millimetres of plush suspension travel before the main springs begin to compress – this new GT3 finds traction where just about every other

rear-wheel-drive car would scabble for grip. The rear end is so beautifully composed now.

On the roads of Snowdonia, the drivetrain, steering and chassis all come together to deliver the most complete performance car driving experience of any car on sale. In the way it picks apart a weaving road such as the B4391 between Bala and Ffestiniog, the new GT3 is almost impossible to criticise, but it's also enthralling on an emotional level. The intensity of the soundtrack, the rawness of the power delivery and the tactility of the steering – of the entire chassis – mean it connects with you, drawing you so close to it that you're almost removed from the real world for a moment.

With evening coming, I put the pin back in and head down from the hills, and this gentle run gives me time to contemplate the GT3. I said it was almost impossible to criticise, but I'm struggling to find any flaw at all. I would prefer a manual gearbox, but that's simply a case of ticking a different box on the order form. Philosophically, I think a car of this kind should move around a little beneath you rather than being glued to the road; you should be able to play with the balance, perhaps use the power to bring the rear axle around. With its composed rear end and vast cornering grip, you're taking enormous liberties to make the GT3 behave like that. But only in quiet contemplation does that thought occur. Out on the road, I didn't wish for any more playfulness.

So the new Porsche 911 GT3 is without vice as a road-going performance car. Perhaps we'll unearth some desperate shortcomings at Anglesey's Coastal Circuit.

Porsche 911 GT3 (991.2)

Engine Flat-six, 3996cc

Power 493bhp @ 8250rpm

Torque 339lb ft @ 6000rpm

Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch (option), rear-wheel drive, limited-slip diff

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

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

Brakes Carbon-ceramic discs (option), 410mm front, 390mm rear

Wheels 9 x 20in front, 12 x 20in rear

Tyres 245/35 ZR20 front, 305/30 ZR20 rear

Weight 1430kg

Power-to-weight 350bhp/ton

0-62mph 3.4sec (claimed)

Top speed 197mph (claimed)

Basic price £111,802

On sale Now

evo rating ★★★★★







Above and top: Michelin Cup 2 tyres offer the kind of immense traction that really helps when you're trying to nail a lap time; when they exceed their optimum temperature, it's time to explore the car's handling limits (top left)

as you brake – hard! – for the hairpin from the 9000rpm limiter in third gear.

The Banking hairpin is one of those damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't corners. It's all too easy to try and brake that little bit later, carry a fraction more speed to the apex, or lose your patience when waiting to get back on the power. You might make a fractional gain here or there, but they are nothing compared to the compounded losses you'll see all the way down the next straight if you get greedy. But, if you're too timid, you'll also lose precious tenths.

Traction is fabulous, even with the electronic aids switched off. The drive this GT3 finds is immense, punching through second and third gears before a shift to fourth and some delicate throttle and steering inputs on the way into Church. Just like Turn 1, it's about finding the sweet spot between a nip of oversteer on turn-in and gentle understeer as you pour on the power.

The rush along the curving straight into the uphill approach to Rocket is a big thrill, the compression taken *just* flat out at an indicated 140mph, before standing on the brakes and batting down into second gear for the tight left-right complex. The table-top plateau ruthlessly exposes any over-optimism on the brakes, but once you've got the nose pointing at the crucial left-hand apex, it's a case of squirting the throttle then pinning the nose on the brakes for the right-hand horseshoe before powering out and slightly uphill for the awkward Peel.

Slightly too quick for second but fractionally too slow for third, I opt for the shorter gear, punching out towards the exit kerb and pulling for third as the corner opens out over the crest. The GT3 feels poised and ultra-quick as that rearward weight bias helps it dig in and drive forwards with absolute conviction.

The downhill braking area for Corkscrew ties most cars in a knot. You might expect the 911 to find it particularly tricky, but the tail never quite wags the dog. At least so long as you're prepared to give a little on the way in, knowing there's more to lose than there is to gain. The tighter right-hand element is all about setting yourself up for the exit and not letting the gradient and gravity trip you up.

All that remains is a final blast of throttle in second before attacking the last corner, where the GT3 is happy to carry useful speed on turn-in then finds strong front-end grip matched with solid traction as it screams through second and third gear to cross the line.

The result? A 1:13.4. To save you the effort of checking our league table (p168), that's two-tenths quicker than both the 991 GT3 RS and Turbo S and a second behind the 918 Spyder.

That Porsche has squeezed more pace from an already highly optimised package isn't surprising. The fact this pace comes with more detailed feel, greater progression and more entertainment is the real triumph. This GT3 is sensational, and sensationally effective. ☒

A scenic view of a winding road through a forest. A large white 'N' logo is overlaid on the upper half of the image. The road curves to the right, and a metal guardrail is visible on the left. The background is filled with green trees and foliage.

N POWER

by STEVE SUTCLIFFE

PHOTOGRAPHY by GUS GREGORY

*Hyundai plans to rattle the hot hatch
establishment with its 290bhp i30 N.
We drive the impressive prototype*





‘Hyundai has created a car that rides and handles brilliantly on UK roads’



THE INTRIGUINGLY NAMED N-CAR PROJECT is the reason Hyundai managed to persuade BMW's M division boss to jump ship and spend the rest of his working life in Korea. Because at the time (early in 2015) Albert Biermann was having a ball at BMW. Having masterminded everything from the M3 GTR's outrageous victories in the American Le Mans Series to the production of numerous road-going M3s, M5s and M6s, he was very much The Governor at BMW M and had no reason whatsoever to leave.

Until he met the chairman of Hyundai, Chung Mong-koo, who offered the 59-year-old German a blank sheet of paper, a very big pay package, and the promise that he could do anything he liked with the top-secret N-car project – so long as the results were thoroughly spectacular.

‘In a way it's a hobby, not a job,’ says Biermann of his new role, and about the prototype i30 N we're sitting in. As he speaks, we are ambling along the M23 in it, having just spent the day on one of my all-time favourite roads near Beachy Head, just outside Eastbourne.

The car itself looks hilarious, festooned with heavy disguise, inside and out. It draws looks of bewilderment everywhere it goes, but never more so than on a busy UK motorway in southeast England.

Why a hobby, I enquire, rather than a job? ‘Because a hobby is something you do for pure pleasure,’ replies Biermann. ‘When you do things you enjoy, you always do them better, with more passion, more commitment, more focus. And I am very committed to making this car – and the ones that will follow – absolutely as good as I possibly can.’

So what exactly is the so-called N-car project, and what specifically is the prototype N-car we're sitting in right now like to drive?

The N in the name stands for two things: one, the Namyang proving ground in Korea where Biermann and his team are based, and secondly for the Nürburgring, as in the Nordschleife, where Hyundai has a huge new testing centre. It's there that much of the i30 N's development has taken place. In time there will be a whole series of N Hyundais, in much the same way that there are already a whole series of BMW M-cars, Mercedes AMGs and so on.

As for the car itself, it's a surprisingly focused, extremely well sorted, and hugely rapid hot hatchback that's powered by a 290bhp 2-litre turbocharged engine, with a front-wheel-drive chassis that Biermann is already pretty pleased with at this stage. And so he should be.

Think Renault Sport Mégane with some Mk1 Focus RS thrown in for good measure and you won't be a million miles away. And although the i30 N won't hit UK showrooms until next year, its development is all but complete. Having said that, the only reason we've been invited by Biermann to drive it so far ahead of its launch is that he and his team want to make sure the thing rides and handles properly in the UK, potentially the car's biggest single market. They wanted an impartial opinion, so asked for *evo's*.

And the opinion is: don't worry, lads. Because you've created a car that rides and handles brilliantly in the UK. For a first serious effort at a first serious hot hatch, it's not a long way short of extraordinary. There's real meat and precision to its steering, fantastic brakes, a lovely fluidity to its damping and body control (so long as you select the right mode, which we'll come to in a second), and decently nutcase performance in a straight line.

Biermann claims 0-60mph in 6.0sec, but if anything it feels quicker than that. I'd say sub-six to 60 and around 13sec to 100mph. It puts all that grunt down on the road with a pure kind of precision that is rare, if not unique, amongst powerful front-drive cars. It's the e-diff, torque



vectoring and some very trick electronic dampers that we have to thank for this – their calibrations can be dialled up or down depending what sort of road you're on. Which is why we ended up at Beachy Head (although our snapper went to Germany to shoot the car).

I've been driving across this road for decades and have yet to find a car that can genuinely unpick it. There are off-camber corners in places that cause even the best set-up chassis to heave and, sometimes, just give up completely and allow a car to thump into its bump-stops. Plus there's a long straight followed by a series of S-bends where the surface is so bumpy, and the cambers so severe, you'd be hard pushed to keep a 911 on the road at only a little bit more than the legal limit.

So when I got the call from Mr Biermann, asking where we should go, I thought Beachy Head road, especially as we couldn't go more than an hour and a half from London. It was foggy when we arrived, which spoiled the views somewhat, but Biermann knew we'd come to the right place. I drove the car, he drove the car, we then talked about the car, and apart from a few minor points, we agreed it was where it needs to be to work well on British B-roads.

I confess, I was surprised by how good it was, how composed over this most evil of roads, and how bloody quick it was across the ground, period. Admittedly they've resurfaced the road in a few key places, but it's still a mighty test of any car's fundamental chassis abilities: the i30 N tore my road to pieces.

But... it did need to be in the right settings to do so. Because as is the way nowadays, there are numerous drive modes to choose from, here via buttons on the steering wheel. The fruitiest of these has an N logo on it and puts the engine, e-diff and electronic dampers into their most aggressive settings and relaxes the ESP and traction control. And in this mode – which is basically a trackday setting – the N's ride did become a bit ridiculous for the Beachy Head road. Best

thing is, though, you can tailor each and every individual component separately to suit your preferences or the road conditions.

'And when you turn the traction control off,' insists Biermann, 'it stays off, completely. I hate it when you think you've turned something off but you haven't, and I absolutely refused to have a system like that in this car. So when it's off, it's off, and the rest is all down to the driver.'

Eventually we set the prototype N to the slighter softer Sport rather than Race damper setting – executed with a mere press of one button on the wheel – but with everything else set to max, and that's where the N's sweet spot seemed to lie. For the Beachy Head road, at least.

On another road, on another day, you might want to dial in a bit more TC, dial out some of the throttle urgency, and maybe have a touch less aggression from the diff to reduce the rabid turn-in response. The beauty is, it's all up to you, and in each of its individual settings you really do notice a difference through your backside and fingertips.

So how about things like the gearchange, the seats, the driving position and the overall refinement levels on the move; where are they all at on the i30 N at this stage? Again, pretty much signed off and, again, pretty damn good.

The six-speed manual 'box has a nice auto-blipping mode on downshifts. But it also has a touch of the regular saloon-car feel to its shift action, in that the throws are quite long for a car that otherwise has so much urgency to its controls. When I bring this up during the debrief later, Biermann says he agrees and asks his team to shorten the shift 'by at least ten per cent'.

There's nothing wrong with the driving position, though. It's absolutely spot-on with the wheel, pedals, buttons and gearlever all just where you'd want them. The seats, too, are pretty good, even if they aren't quite as aggressive in their support as you'd expect in a car this focused. During another debrief later on, Biermann gets

quite agitated about this with his team of engineers, some from Korea, some from Germany. Apparently the idea of a full bucket seat was discussed at one point during the N's development, to be badged up with Hyundai WRC logos to 'make a solid, logical connection between the N-car project and our [very expensive] WRC programme'.

'So what happened to this idea?' asks Biermann. 'Because Steve is right, the seat could be more supportive.'

'We'll get it sorted,' comes the mumbled response from one of the engineers. At this point I start to feel a bit sorry for these poor people, who continue to get a roasting over all sorts of other minor points that Biermann wants tweaking before the production roll-out. But then that's what Hyundai is paying him for: to make a difference. And, as ever, that difference is always in the details.

The last of which takes me completely by surprise, but also blows me away. On our way back from Beachy Head we stop off at the Longcross test track near Woking, because Biermann wants to know what I think of the car's behaviour on, and ideally beyond, the limit before the final debrief. So we turn everything off and I bung it through the track's handling course a couple of times, with Biermann doing his best to sustain a smile in the passenger seat. And I discover a car that will oversteer quite beautifully if you lift off at the right moment, but which comes back from ridiculous angles when you get back on the throttle.

**'I discover a car
that will oversteer
quite beautifully
if you lift at the
right moment'**

The i30 N is very well sorted in everything it does, except in one very minor way. It's not exactly a common driving technique and takes a bit of practice, but when on a track in a front-drive car with this much power and torque (well over 256lb ft, they say) I like to turn off the traction control but tickle the brakes on the way out of corners while still applying plenty of throttle. Why? Because by doing this you effectively become your own traction control system, but you can *only* do it if the car's ECU allows full power while you're applying the brakes. A lot of cars won't permit this, including the prototype i30 N. No self-administered traction control system possible.

So I ask Biermann why not. He gets what I'm on about, is familiar with the technique himself and then says: 'We can change it, that's easy. And we will, because even if it only matters for a few really keen drivers, then it matters.' He then fires off a text.

Right at the end of our final debrief, the point about the ECU not allowing left-foot braking comes up. The chief engineer says: 'We've already fixed it. I got Mr Biermann's text, sent it to an electronics guy at the factory and he's already rewriting the codes to allow the brake to be used at the same time as the throttle.'

In my world, that's black magic. In Albert Biermann's world, it's the way you get things done. I suspect the i30 N could turn out to be a proper little rule-breaker. And if a front-drive hot hatch with 290bhp fails to float your boat, wait until I tell you about the 385bhp, all-wheel-drive, eight-speed dual-clutch version that's in development... ☒



Hyundai i30 N

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 2-litre, turbo

Power 290bhp @ n/a rpm

Torque >256lb ft @ n/a rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive, limited-slip diff

Weight c1250kg

Power-to-weight c236bhp/ton

0-60mph 6.0sec (claimed)

Basic price TBC



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McLAREN 12C v 650S



A bright orange McLaren sports car is driving away on a winding road that stretches into the distance. The road is flanked by dry, grassy hills under a clear blue sky. The car's license plate is 'Y56 W56'.

‘HOW DIFFERENT CAN THEY ALL BE?’ ASKED A CAR-SAVVY friend, nodding at the brace of glowing orange McLarens but referring to the extended range. To be honest, I’ve had to do my homework. Back in 2011 I drove the original, the MP4-12C, and arriving back for my second stint at *evo* magazine I find there are swarms of the blighters. There are ‘Sports Series’ and ‘Super Series’ and ‘Ultimate Series’, but to the untrained eye they all look pretty much the same. During this test three people will ask if the 650S (the more orangey one) is the £866,000 P1...

Dive into the technical specs and you’ll find that beneath their unstressed skins, Sports and Super Series cars are created from the same essential ingredients: a carbonfibre tub, double-wishbone suspension all-round and a 3.8-litre twin-turbo V8 with a seven-speed dual-clutch transmission. Their skins differ, Sports being sheet-moulded compound, Supers carbonfibre, and so do their chassis: Sports models have physical anti-roll bars while Supers have ‘Proactive Chassis Control’, McLaren’s cross-linked active damper system that replicates the effect of physical anti-roll bars in cornering but leaves the wheels unlinked in a straight line for ride comfort. Outputs, meanwhile, ranged from 533bhp (540C) to 666bhp (675LT) before the 720S landed, and prices from £126,000 to £285,000, but when they’re all unmistakably supercars, you can’t blame people for not knowing one from another.

It’s a relief that the latest Super Series car, the 720S (see page 78), has an

by JOHN BARKER

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

YESTERDAY’S WORLD

They’re all but indistinguishable to casual observers and it’s a similar story on the spec sheets, so what progress, if any, did McLaren make when it created 650S from 12C? And what does the new 720S need to improve?



all-new look to bring some definition to the range. The 720S is the successor to the 650S, itself the successor to the 12C (the less orangey one) and thus a descendant of McLaren's original multi-tasking supercar, the MP4-12C. It's been quite a journey, and to find out just how far the Super Series has come and if there's a discernible evolutionary trajectory, we've brought the 650S and 12C, both here in Spider form, to some of our favourite roads.

When McLaren announced the MP4-12C it boldly declared that it wasn't going to compete with the established marques, it was going to teach them a lesson. In some ways it did, and the speed with which McLaren has established its credibility and expanded its range to fill numerous supercar niches is extraordinary. There has, of course, been learning and development along the way; few complex products arrive on the market, enjoy success and retire years later completely unchanged, whether they are vacuum cleaners or supercars. The MP4-12C was no exception: it quickly became simply the 12C, and even in the first months of production, there were changes afoot.

We included the MP4-12C in eCoty 2011, based around the Portimão circuit in Portugal, and the car came with an unusual accessory – a chunk of the McLaren development team. They continued to fettle it during the test. Each day we'd borrow it for photos and driving and each day the dynamics were clearly not right. The steering lacked feel and was too light, and the handling and ride were an odd concoction; the ride was remarkably – arguably unnecessarily – cossetting

for a supercar, but the handling suffered for it, being oddly detached from the road and prone to mild diagonal pitch sensations. Until, that was, on the final day, when whatever tune the engineers settled on was squirted into the dynamic-control module and the car was instantly, vastly improved.

In fact, it was so good that had it been like that from the start it might have stolen the win from the 911 GT3 RS 4.0. The suspension still neutralised awful, broken road surfaces, and the MP4 passed noiselessly over bumps and dips that ground bits off the undersides of the Ferrari FF and RS Porsche, but now you were connected to the car and road. Now you could exploit its ability and unleash more of its near-600bhp power more of the time, guide it confidently, revelling in the superb driving position and the panoramic view afforded by the wide, low-scuttled screen.

Right there and then, the MP4 felt like the new kind of supercar McLaren had promised us. That's to say, a car that could cross a continent in comfort and then tear around a racetrack as fast as anything else. Except that back then it still felt a bit weird around Portimão's challenging crests and curves. Oh, and every time you used the carbon-ceramic brakes the bite was so sudden you risked headbutting the steering wheel. And there were a few other issues too, including the Android-based IRIS infotainment system, which remained blank for the duration of the test.

Six years on, McLaren has clearly never let up on development. That said, if you're not McLaren-savvy, five minutes in the car park will save much frustration later,

Above right: interiors are hard to tell apart (650S is on the far right, if you're struggling), but both cars offer a driving position that is among the very best in supercar-dom, even if you do have to clamber over the very wide sill of the carbon tub to get to it



‘The 650S doesn’t merely cope with this road, it smoothes it out, fills in the dips’





because the switchgear is not always intuitive. Indeed, there's plenty of opportunity for the 720S to move the human-machine-interface (HMI) experience on... Touchscreen but with hard key access? That's the navigation system. Want to adjust the clock? That's hidden in a stalk-activated submenu in the instrument cluster, not in the long Settings menu on the touchscreen. And the door-mirror adjuster? It took me an hour to find it on the move. It's tucked behind the wheel, lit red and marked 'P' – for the parking mode, obviously.

I've always been irked by the mode switches for handling and powertrain, too, because they look cheap and because you can't simply dial up the mode you want. Oh no, they don't work unless you press the 'Active' button first, like a game of Simon Says. But I think I've figured that now. More later.

I feel fully acquainted with the dynamics of the 650S having driven it the best part of three hours north. The first thing that strikes you is how supple the ride is, how well it isolates you from the vagaries of the road surface and enables effortless long-distance coverage. There's still plenty of MP4-12C DNA in the ride. The last 40 minutes to the car park at Blakey Ridge on the North York Moors have been particularly invigorating, especially the road that heads up from Hutton-le-Hole. This has pocked surfaces, abrupt crests and flat, unsighted apices. The 650S doesn't merely cope with this road, it smooths it out, fills in the dips and neutralises impacts. True, you can occasionally sense the MP4's foibles in slightly odd reactions or movements, but switch the handling to Sport and these are reduced to trace effects, so you feel

confident to let the big-lunged, turbo'd V8 breathe deep.

It's a light-sounding engine like the Ferrari 488's V8, the flat-plane crank synchronising power strokes, resulting in a sweet, four-cylinder-like note. It's unmistakably turbocharged, more in the dizzying way the power and torque expand and escalate than for any response lag – there's a moment before it gets going, but the slick dual-clutch gearbox is brilliantly responsive. McLaren says the biturbo motor is good for 641bhp (650 PS) and I don't doubt it: the first time I stabbed the throttle to the stop, the intensity of the acceleration was shocking. The power piled in so hard and the rear tyres hooked up so completely that I imagined their sidewalls buckling like they do on dragsters, a sensation fostered by a hint of squirm from the rear.

Less than 20 minutes after parking up, the 12C arrives, giving us a chance to play spot the difference. This 12C is one of the last from 2013 and a McLaren 50th anniversary car too, so it has a big spec. This includes 650S-matching ceramic brakes behind slightly different design alloys that wear 650S-size Pirelli P Zeros: 235-section at the front, 305 at the rear. There's also a redesigned front apron that brings increased downforce. Overall the design is more conservative than the 650S, but this limited-edition car looks much more supercar-like than the original MP4. To me, the MP4 looked too much like an identikit supercar created for an insurance advert, but McLaren's design boss Frank Stephenson put that right on later models, replacing the plain headlamp design with small arcs imitating the company badge.

Above: the 650S Spider (leading) is 'crazy fast', says Barker, but if your 12C happens to have the factory engine upgrade that took power from 592bhp to 616, then it'll stay with the newer car without much trouble.

Right: the 650S, which borrows the front-end styling of the P1 hypercar, feels sharper through the corners, however

It's even more difficult to tell the 12C and 650S apart from the inside, though. A red badge here, coloured stitching there... In fact, the most significant advantage the 650S has is that it comes with DAB radio. Still, there'll be a distinct difference in the way they drive, won't there?

Well, yes, but this 12C is more like the 650S than the MP4. This shouldn't be a surprise because McLaren carried on developing the car and offered upgrades to customers of early cars. All of them are enjoyed by this last-of-the-line 12C, including the engine upgrade that raised the original MP4 output of 592bhp to 616bhp. And rather unexpectedly, between 6000 and 8000rpm, this 12C feels very nearly as crazy fast as the 650S.

There is clearly much shared character between these two cars, but it only takes a couple of miles to realise that there are lots of differences, too. And after a couple of days, the depth and detail of the improvements incorporated in the 650S show an understanding of what makes the car more exploitable and enjoyable. This is evolution. Project forward and you can see where the 720S needs to improve to move the Super Series on again.

The unexpected initial suppleness of the 650S is unexpected softness in the 12C, and while this gives the 12C the feeling of greater isolation from surface imperfections, it comes with some shake over sharper bumps – the slight aftershock when a damper doesn't deal with a bump positively. There's also an exaggeration of the odd effects

felt in the 650S, namely unexpectedly free longitudinal and diagonal body movements, and even switched to Sport chassis mode, the 12C doesn't sharpen up. It's almost as if the car is air-sprung. As a result, you feel a little less comfortable exploiting the brutal, dramatic power delivery.

Another contributor to the 12C's less hurried feel is its steering, which demands less effort and is less abuzz with feedback. To be honest, a lot of what comes through the wheel of this 650S is noise rather than useful feedback, so that's no loss, but the lack of instant response is. Turn the wheel in the 12C and there's a moment where nothing happens, almost as if the suspension needs to see some roll before it can react.

Not that the lack of physical roll bars in any way limits the absolute cornering ability of either car. Lateral grip and traction are extraordinary; traction especially so given the kick the twin-turbo V8 can deliver and the lack of a limited-slip diff. The way these cars stick in corners, the lateral G they create, makes me wary of turning off the traction control. When strong grip is broken mid-turn, the force a turbo engine is working against is gone and it can spool up double-quick, which means more power and more wheelspin and a wild slide where a moment before there was order.

The 650S corners so flat and so hard that it honestly doesn't feel like it is ever going to break traction, even with the thump of 500lb ft of torque arriving at the seriously loaded rear tyres. I select Track handling and powertrain modes, lighting up the traction-off warning symbol, and after a few more



‘The 650S corners so hard it honestly doesn't feel like it is ever going to break traction’

McLaren 650S Spider

Engine V8, 3799cc, twin-turbo
Power 641bhp @ 7250rpm
Torque 500lb ft @ 6000rpm
Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive, Brake Steer
Weight 1468kg
Power-to-weight 444bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.0sec (claimed)
Top speed 204mph (claimed)
Price new £215,250 (2014)
Price now £140,000+ (coupe £110,000+)

evo rating ★★★★★

McLaren 12C Spider

Engine V8, 3799cc, twin-turbo
Power 616bhp @ 7500rpm
Torque 443lb ft @ 3000-7000rpm
Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive, Brake Steer
Weight 1473kg
Power-to-weight 425bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.3sec (claimed)
Top speed 204mph (claimed)
Price new £195,500 (2011)
Price now £140,000+ (coupe £140,000+)

evo rating ★★★★★



runs I reckon I've found the spot to snap the throttle open for a slide. I brace and go for it but there is no jab of opposite lock required. Instead, the engine goes *BAAARRRP!* – an ignition cut torques down the V8 momentarily to maintain traction. TC not completely turned off, then. I'm just fine with that...

It's now that I realise the logic behind the 'Active' button nestled between the two mode toggles. It's not like the manettino on a Ferrari, but more akin to the M button on BMWs in that you can pre-program various vehicle settings, say Track handling with Sport powertrain performance, and a press of the Active button gets you there.

As well as being more dynamically composed than the 12C, there are other areas where the 650S is superior. While both iterations of the twin-turbo V8 are thrillingly inertia-free and rev-hungry, the 650's has a stronger mid-range pick-up and so gets the car accelerating sooner. It's also less vibratory and sweeter-revving, and smoother at idle, too. Ambling into town, both cars get heads turning before they heave into view – they have that supercar sound quality, that depth, that unmistakably potent growl. The 650S, with its optional sports exhaust, has a superb extra layer of sound, a hint of traditional but race-bred V8 that adds greatly to the sound quality, like good seasoning enhances flavour. There's more turbo chuff in the 12C, but perhaps it's just more audible because there's less tailpipe content.

These are different experiences, then. The 12C has come

a long way since its early MP4 days, drifting slightly from its original mission statement, becoming a little sharper, a little less cossetting, and all the better for it while still offering a uniquely McLaren take on the supercar theme. The 650S moves the idea on in what seem initially to be mostly subtle ways, but which longer exposure reveals are significant. It may not look that different, but the sportier edge to its dynamics and the fine-tuning that have gone into the 650S make it a much more satisfying and complete supercar.

There are things that would improve both cars and which are, therefore, things that the new 720S will hopefully address. As already mentioned, HMI is one, and a related issue that the new car appears to have addressed is the positioning of the gear-selector buttons on the central console: in the 12C and 650S to get to them you have to do an impression of a T rex. The 720S's have moved further forward and hopefully are slicker to use than those of the 650S, which are more responsive than the 12C's going from D to R and vice versa, making three-point turns less stressful. Manoeuvring from cold, both 12C and 650S can feel like they have slipping clutches, with lots of revs for not much movement, so improvement here would be welcome.

However, the greatest improvement McLaren promised us with the 720S was not Ferrari-beating shove but the best-ever execution of its Proactive suspension, with superior comfort *and* handling precision. Does it deliver? Let's find out. ✕

Above: McLaren moved the game on in small but significant ways when it morphed the 12C into 650S. Will it be the same story from 650S to new 720S, or will it be a far larger leap forward?

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SOUL

by JOHN BARKER

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

SEARCHING

*We've seen it in the studio, visited
it on a show stand, but now it's time
to try McLaren's new 720S and find
out if it delivers on its promises*

W

E'RE NOT EXACTLY IN FERRARI'S BACK YARD BUT we are in its neighbourhood. In a red supercar. Which is kind of bold. So too is choosing Rome at 8am on a Monday morning as the starting point for the launch of any new car, let alone a 710bhp supercar, what with all the traffic and the generous variety of crappy surfaces its roads throw up.

The cockpit of the 720S is an oasis of calm, however. The excellent visibility and sense of space McLarens are noted for is enhanced on the new car by even slimmer pillars and glazed roof-cum-door panels, and the ride is doing its customary outstanding job of quietly neutralising the often crumbly and ruckled asphalt passing beneath the 720's wheels. Meanwhile, the new 4-litre version of the twin-turbo V8 is barely stirring, the shifts are as slick as ever and there seems to be less clutch slip from cold than on previous cars. It's a good start.

In the metal – that's superformed aluminium rather than the 'composite' of the 12C and 650S – the 720S is a more complex sculpture than it appears. The clean, flowing, almost globular profile hides a cornucopia of ducts and vents and scoops, the main one being a fat channel hidden behind the top edge of the waist running from the A-pillar to the tail of the tapered glasshouse. Dip a hand into that channel, squeeze the microswitch pad that unlatches the dihedral door and gently pull upwards. The doors cut into the roof, making them effectively gullwings and enhancing access, and their geometry is such that they swing out 155mm less per side than the 650S's doors, which is useful in tight spaces.

There's lots of talk about the 'eye sockets' of the 720, yet at a glance it still looks like a McLaren, in the same way that you can identify at distance the rump of a modern Lamborghini, or decide if the car coming towards you is a real Caterham Seven or a replica. It's the positioning of key features such as the lights and the shape and depth of the glasshouse. The best angle for me is the rear three-quarters; I love the way the haunches swell and round and fit closely over the fat rear wheels, and how you

Below: the 720S's rear end may not be elegant, but its multi-faceted graphic is becoming a McLaren hallmark; rear wing remains flush to the bodywork when not required (or requested) for extra downforce



'THE BEST
ANGLE IS THE
REAR THREE-
QUARTERS;
THE WAY THE
HAUNCHES
SWELL AND FIT
CLOSELY OVER
THE FAT REAR
WHEELS'



can see the gearbox casting and some aluminium suspension components through the gappy slats below the numberplate.

The human-machine interface has improved, to a degree. The central screen is now more smartphone-like, with swipeable aspects, but before being cleared for take-off we are diligently taken through the ins and outs of the switchgear and modes, which takes a good five minutes. The pre-flight also includes a rundown of the options fitted to 'our' car, which include the lovely exposed-carbonfibre A-pillars – a visual reminder that the tub is now even stiffer as it includes the screen hoop. This carbon option (a snip at £3990 on a £208k car) also gets you the less impressive mottled or marbled carbon finish to the rear cabin pillars and the exposed front wheelarch liners. Leave the box unticked and the whole lot is sprayed black.

With a chunk of roof now door, getting in is a bit easier if you're tall, although it feels a little less graceful with the (optional) slippery carbonfibre finisher that acts like a slide for your trousered seat. Once you've landed, the steering wheel looks familiar but everything else is new. There's a much more driver-orientated feel to the 720's cockpit, with the centre console angled towards you and the gear-selection switches better positioned and now finished in satisfyingly tactile knurled aluminium, as are the mode-control toggle switches. This particular car has leather and Alcantara trim with swatches of red, and with some of the unusual curves and

surface interplays it has a real concept car look about it.

Manual seats are standard but we have electric adjustment; the 720S has a great driving position with superb all-round visibility. It's interesting that McLaren has renamed the most relaxed mode for both Handling and Powertrain to Comfort from Normal. There's also a fourth mode – a default start-up setting that's a bit racier than Comfort but not as focused as Sport, to get the point across that this is a serious bit of kit.

Comfort is what we select for the rush-hour commute: the breadth of ability conferred by Proactive Chassis Control (PCC) has been extended by the addition of 12 more sensors and another ECU, and over the worst of these roads the 720 is remarkably supple. There's an underlying composure, a confidence in its poise that suggests the foibles that have characterised the Super Series cars from the start have finally been expunged. There has always been an element of prediction in PCC, says chief test driver Chris Goodwin. The system has never simply responded to damper inputs but has pre-emptively responded to throttle, steering and brake inputs. Now, thanks in part to newly fitted hub sensors, PCC II knows exactly what's going on at each wheel and selects the appropriate whole-vehicle response.

It's having your cake and eating it: PCC II can keep the car pitch-balanced under heavy braking or acceleration loads and deal with the high-frequency inputs of, say, tarmac ripples at

the same time. It's claimed to endow the 720S with P1-level braking performance and to get P Zero Corsa cornering forces out of the standard Pirelli P Zeros.

This exploitation of the cross-linked suspension system has been the goal of a PhD research project that's been running for five years. 'I don't understand it,' admits Goodwin, 'and there's no way anyone could look at the components of the system and reverse engineer it.'

We'll have the chance to push the limits at nearby Vallelunga racetrack later and also to try out a new feature, VDC – Variable Drift Control. This is designed to allow customers who would like to drive their car on the limit to do so without things getting out of hand. As confidence and experience build, the amount of slip allowed can be increased. The track will also help with our general assessment too, because even clear of Rome's suburbs the roads offer limited opportunities to get into a rhythm.

On those sections where you can, the 720 proves to be a terrifically planted, confident car with minimal degrees of roll and pitch, and requiring greater steering effort than the 650S. McLaren is one of the few companies that still uses HPAS (hydraulic power assisted steering), foregoing the couple of per cent fuel economy gain for EPAS (electric power assisted steering) for what it believes are benefits in feel and precision. In truth, the best EPAS systems are pretty much comparable now, but there is an innate rightness about the 720's steering, an on-centre connection feel and a linearity of response that are spot-on.

Tickle the throttle and the 720 scurries forward urgently to a multitude of air-handling hisses from the plumbing of the V8's twin-scroll turbos. For smoothness and refinement, the 4-litre version of the flat-plane-crank V8 just edges the 3.8-litre in the 650S. It's said to share fewer than 60 per cent of its parts with the 3.8 and maximum power has

risen from 641bhp to 710bhp (720 PS).

Delivery is quite similar, with a strong pick-up in the mid-range that gradually escalates to a monster push in the back at the limiter at around 8200rpm. If anything, the greater chassis control seems to neutralise the effect of the extra power and torque, so that the 720S isn't any more thrilling than the 650S. It's partly down to the noise too. McLaren talked about 'raising the emotional connection' but the 720 does not deliver an engaging engine note. There's an underlying tight-sounding rumble, but the harder you work the engine, the greater the intensity of the hiss of its turbos sucking and blowing – there's little character to enjoy.

Sure, a V8 with this crank arrangement is never going to deliver a complex note like a Ferrari V12 or even a Lamborghini V10, but the 720 lacks even the character of the 650S with the sports exhaust. There is a sports exhaust option for the 720 and it comes complete with an engine-induced noise generator for the cabin. However, arriving at the circuit we find journalists who have been unwittingly driving cars that already have it fitted looking to try a car with the optional exhaust...

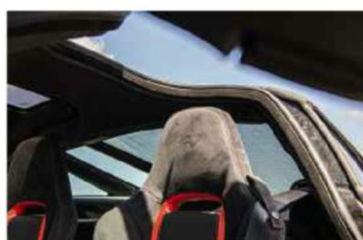
Vallelunga has one epic corner that tests both car and driver, and appropriately it's called Curva Grande, but there's also a useful number of slower, tighter, well-surfaced corners that will be ideal for playing with the drift mode. Most cars feel slower on the wide expanses of a racetrack, but not the 720S. It seems to do the opposite, getting quicker the more gears you pull and the faster you go.

We're in Sport mode, which adds pressure to the suspension system for firmer control, and committing it to Curva Grande at gradually increasing speeds reveals superb composure and neck-straining grip. The limit and the momentum you're carrying is revealed more by the braking zone after; if you don't get the car straight before jumping



Left: exposed carbon on the A-pillars is a £3990 option; cabin is comfortable and surprisingly airy. **Right:** infotainment system improved over that of the 650S. **Far right:** larger door apertures improve cabin access, especially for tall occupants

'MOST CARS FEEL SLOWER ON THE WIDE EXPANSES OF A RACETRACK, BUT NOT THE 720S. IT SEEMS TO DO THE OPPOSITE'



on the brakes it'll take attitude, the rear shouldering out a little. Commit the car hard to a turn and there's a mild amount of front-end push that's not as well communicated through the steering wheel as you'd hope, but the car harnesses the torque well for a fast, clean exit.

Turn the mode toggles all the way round to Track and there's an obvious transformation: the instrument panel rotates through 90 degrees to reveal the essentials in its slimmer edge. Me, I prefer the standard dash because it shows the tyre pressures. Suspension pressure goes up again but there's also a quite distinct shift in agility, the car now much more eager to turn. And that, officer, is how I came to be applying a stab of opposite lock in the middle of the Curva Grande... Goodwin reveals that the optimum lap is with the Aero button pressed to raise the rear wing for downforce through the faster turns at the start of the lap, then wing down everywhere else.

In the slower turns, the added agility more than compensates for the front-end push in Sport mode, the 720 rotating into the apex on the brakes. Exploiting this by getting on the power early requires that you loosen the stability control: on the 650S each mode had its own stability setting, but these have been decoupled on the 720. A press of the ESP button gets you ESP DYN – dynamic – and in Track mode you can also initiate drift mode. The VDC screen allows you to set the drift angle



from modest to hero. But I find it hard to get a neat transition from turn-in to drift exit, or to get a neat, sustained slide. There's a lot of grip and you can't simply turn in, nail the throttle and expect the car to catch the slide and hold it there. After a few different approaches I manage a couple of neat-ish slides, but VDC isn't the drift-made-easy mode I was expecting.

I wouldn't turn off the ESP entirely, though. My sense from the 12C and 650S has been that it could all get out of hand pretty quickly. And so it proves. Cheekily turning it off at a slow corner, the nose tucks in, I give it some gas, there's a bit of a delay while the boost builds and then – even though I'm ready for it – boost arrives and I'm not fast enough with the lock or trimming the throttle, and we spin quickly.

Back on the road, the final test for the 720S is one of our own making: we've spent so long on photography that we're tight on time to get back to the airport. We therefore select the most direct route and it turns out to be two lanes wide but with endless twists and turns and a variety of lumps, bumps and cambers. The 720 clinically dissects this tricky road; no slip, no slide, just grip and go. There are a couple of underbelly scuffs but otherwise it deals with everything thrown at it, though I find it less stressful to short shift and use the V8's ample torque rather than rev it out. At the end of the road, we have halved the satnav's estimated time to cover its length.

In a way, it sums up the 720S experience. The new generation Super Series McLaren is astonishingly, effortlessly fast, and remarkably efficient. You can cover ground at an unbelievable pace in complete control, and yet feel oddly unexcited. The lack of a thrilling engine note doesn't help. The new 4-litre V8 isn't as exciting as the Ferrari 488's similar engine, and the same can be said for the general experience. The 720S is a very capable supercar and would surely prove a painless thing to do a great number of miles in. Yet it doesn't feel like many of those miles would etch themselves into the memory. In this respect, there is, of course, an echo of the original MP4-12C...

'YOU CAN COVER
GROUND AT AN
UNBELIEVABLE
PACE AND YET
FEEL ODDLY
UNEXCITED'

McLaren 720S

Engine V8, 3994cc, twin-turbo

Power 710bhp @ 7250rpm

Torque 568lb ft @ 5500rpm

Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive, Brake Steer

Suspension, front and rear Double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, Proactive Chassis Control II

Wheels 9 x 19in front, 11 x 20in rear

Tyres 245/35 R19 front, 305/30 R20 rear

Weight (dry) 1283kg

Power-to-weight (dry) 562bhp/ton

0-62mph 2.9sec (claimed)

Top speed 212mph (claimed)

Price £208,600

evo rating ★★★★★



Interviews

by ADAM TOWLER



Rob Melville

CHIEF DESIGNER

'We wanted the 720S to look like it was doing 200mph when standing still'



OUR DESIGN PHILOSOPHY COMES FROM how McLaren started off with Bruce, was born on the track, and essentially that's about everything for a reason. In the years I've been here we've taken that basic principle and turned it into a design statement: "Great design tells a great story." By that we mean you can look at our cars and understand how they work; it's authentic, not just a trend.

'Below the statement we have our design pillars. There's "Everything for a Reason": every material, every profile earns its place. Next is "Always Brave". That's about the culture of the company, how we're comfortable with taking risks early in a project. There's "Perfect Proportions" and "Truth to Materials", and then "Functional Jewellery". That means we can't "decorate" the car. If we need a piece of trim to finish a panel off then fine, but we don't add things unnecessarily. Finally, there's "Technical Sculpture". The P1, for example, has many layers.

'Next we have our look and feel principles: "Shrink Wrapping", where we've showed the muscles and athleticism of the car by shrinking the panels over the mechanical package; "Layering", something we started on P1, unpeeling areas of the doors, exposing the ducts, so you could see the visual story; and "Visibility" – our cars are about feeling connected with the environment.

'With the 650, P1 and then 570, we created a family face, but we knew with 720S it was the right time to take that bold step and break a few of the rules on volumes and proportions. We wanted a great stance and proportions,

a tight, teardrop cabin; for it to look like it was doing 200mph when standing still.

'The key question is how you guide air around the car. Starting at the front, we have the "eye sockets", feeding air to the low-temperature radiators and giving the car an iconic face. Move around to the side and we had to ask the question: how do you cool a 710bhp engine with no visible side intakes? So we decided to unpeel the door, creating a feature called the gills that allows us to separate the high-energy air flowing over the front shoulder and draw it down into a deep duct. At the same time, the turbulent air off the front wheel gets tucked into the body sides.

'We've taken the doors up and over into the roof like on the F1, so the opening is wider and when they're open they're closer to the body than on the other cars. At the rear, the shrink wrapping is very evident and the wide rear shoulders are really exotic.

'From inside, the glass C-pillar and super-skinny A-pillar give us this 360-degree visibility, enabled by the carbonfibre MonoCage II. That's also allowed us to put 210 litres of luggage space in the rear and 150 litres at the front.

'Once again we've designed the interior around the driver for perfect ergonomics. The controls are now closer to the fingertips, and with the display folding away it has allowed us to de-clutter the dash and give us this command-style driving position, leaving the driver with just the key info. We wanted the car to have a bespoke, human feel, in a modern way, where you can really see the passion of the people who worked on it.'

Mark Vinnels

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT



IVEN WE WERE GOING TO INCREASE the power, the last thing we wanted to do was increase weight. That's where the aero came from – how could we make the car more efficient, particularly around the cooling. We knew that with 710bhp the thermal output of the engine was increasing, but we didn't want to increase the size of the radiators and add more coolant because of weight. From the P1 we knew the door ducts were extremely efficient for airflow, but this is the world's most complex door: we're brave, we supported the idea without [initially] completely understanding the solution.

'There are big changes to the engine. It needed a relatively small increase in capacity – 3.6mm on the stroke – but the crank, cylinders, heads and intake manifold have been changed and we've done a lot of work to minimise inertia in the turbos. There are changes to the chargecoolers as well, and we've moved to 16 injectors to achieve the breadth of performance and accuracy necessary to meet the emissions regulations.

'We are completely obsessed with steering feel. We considered an electric rack for all of two seconds – there's so much friction and inertia it dumbs the steering down. Our cars can have huge tyre sidewall stiffness as our kinetic suspension is so compliant, giving us great feel from the tyre's contact patch.

'One thing we've learned since the 12C is that a supercar is an emotional, exciting experience – it's not just about pure numbers. We're about making it fun and engaging. Some things are theatre: we don't need to illuminate the engine, but it looks good and everybody loves it. We also spent time on the intake and exhaust noise for a beautiful harmonic response, trying to achieve a crescendo where the noise encourages the driver to continue to rev the engine.'

'We considered an electric steering rack for all of two seconds'

Haydn Baker

VEHICLE LINE DIRECTOR, SUPER SERIES



REMEMBER WRITING DOWN THE targets for the new car and there were some gasps initially, but everything we set out to do we've achieved and even exceeded in some areas.

'One of the first decisions was to have no side intakes, but that made the cabin tighter, and it had to be no less roomy than the 650S. Yet despite the car being narrower, the interior dimensions are bigger. It's a beautiful place to be and more opulent, with Bridge of Weir leather and machined-from-solid materials: the car is not just about dynamic feel, but engagement. From the moment you open the door it welcomes you in. We've looked at ways we can supplement that [feeling], so for example, we have an app called Variable Drift Control – it's all about heightening the involvement with the car.

'One thing we're particularly proud of is the 100-0mph distance of under 30 metres. We have all new brakes – lighter, too – to complement the dynamics and the power.' ✕



The McLaren logo, featuring the word "McLaren" in a white, italicized sans-serif font, with a stylized wing-like graphic element to the right.

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Official fuel consumption figures in UK mpg (l/100km) for the McLaren Super Series 4.0L (3,994cc) petrol, 7-speed Seamless Shift Dual Clutch Gearbox (SSG): urban 17.1 (16.5), extra urban 38.2 (7.4), combined 26.4 (10.7). Official combined CO2 emissions: 249g/km. The efficiency figures quoted are derived from official NEDC test results, are provided for comparability purposes only, and might not reflect actual driving experience.

VW GOLF GTI v GTE



Leading the charge

Volkswagen is committed to an electric future, and to get us used to the idea it has created a hybrid hot hatch, the Golf GTE. But could it really tempt us out of the latest Golf GTI Performance?

by WILL BEAUMONT

PHOTOGRAPHY by
BARRY HAYDEN



T

THERE ARE RUMOURS THAT, in the not too distant future, the Golf GTI – the hot hatch staple by which all others are measured – will become fully electric.

Purists and diehard Golf GTI fans will fervently object to the concept, but to ease us into such a radical development, VW has produced the GTE: a part petrol, part electric hot hatch. Here, in its facelifted and updated 'Mk7.5' form (the white car in these pictures), is it good enough to tempt the more progressive car enthusiast away from buying the petrol-powered norm? VW's refreshed Golf GTI Performance (the red car) is the ideal yardstick to help us answer such a question.

The GTE's drivetrain comprises a 75kW (101bhp) electric motor that slots between a 148bhp 1.4-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol engine and a six-speed twin-clutch gearbox that sends drive to the front wheels. The result

is respectable, if not astounding, with peak combined outputs of 201bhp and 258lb ft of torque, and a 0-62mph time of 7.6sec. As well as boosting the GTE's performance, the electric motor also allows the hybrid to drive 31 miles without resorting to the petrol engine. That distance is only achieved if its batteries (mounted beneath the rear seat) are fully charged, which you do by plugging the GTE into the mains via a socket behind the front badge.

It's not the hardware or figures that suggest that the GTE is more than just an ordinary hybrid; its shared bodywork and GTI-like details write the biggest cheques. Its purposeful stance, rear spoiler and deep front bumper mean the GTE looks every bit the typical hot hatch. Inside, its sporting intentions are less overt, with little more than some bright blue stitching around the steering wheel to add sparkle to the plain-looking but high-quality interior. This sense of class continues as you pull away, the electric



Top: blue grille accents, C-shaped DRLs in the air intakes and a different wheel design among the subtle clues that mark out the GTE. **Above:** orange cables under the bonnet hint at electric propulsion

Volkswagen Golf GTE

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1395cc, turbo, plus 75kW electric motor

Power 201bhp @ 5000rpm

Torque 258lb ft @ 1500-3500rpm

Weight 1540kg

Power-to-weight 133bhp/ton

0-62mph 7.6sec (claimed)

Top speed 138mph (claimed)

Basic price £30,635

evo rating ★★★★★

motor spurring you along silently while the controls and ride give an overriding sense of solidity.

Ordinarily, it's disappointing when the petrol engine of a hybrid car sparks into life – hybrid hypercars notwithstanding. There's usually a nasty bark of a weedy motor accompanied by a lurch as the two power sources unwillingly work together to maintain momentum. The GTE, on the other hand, seamlessly feeds the internal combustion engine into play; it's so gradual and unobtrusive it's as if the engine starts just one cylinder at a time so you're barely aware you've woken it.

The hybrid Golf's aptitude at transitioning between electricity and petrol almost makes you reluctant to engage its sportier mode, but press the 'GTE' button alongside the gearlever and the car uses both of its motors to increase performance rather than improve efficiency. This hardly transforms the GTE, though: it accelerates in a purposeful rather than shocking manner, just as it does in its more efficient default mode. The most notable difference is a more pronounced synthetic rumble from the engine and through the speakers.

You do sometimes feel the instant shove that's typical of cars with part-electric or fully electric power, but in the GTE the sensation is rare. Because the electric motor sits between the engine and the gearbox, you often have to wait for the DSG 'box to shuffle into a lower ratio to feel the true performance on offer, and such acceleration is less impressive if there's a delay before it's deployed. However, if you select the correct gear manually and apply the throttle when the engine's revving between 2500 and 3000rpm, being very careful not to encroach into the kickdown stage of the accelerator's travel, you do get that sudden electric boost. So many elements need to slot into place before you can experience this, though, that trying to utilise it while tackling a twisty road is impossible.

But then the GTE's chassis, while competent, doesn't encourage spirited driving, so punchy, instant acceleration seems less of a necessity. A touch too much roll means a certain amount of slack needs to be taken up before the GTE wants to change direction. It suits a more relaxed driving style, to which it responds in a fluid manner.

Overcome that urge to drive sedately and an interesting characteristic is unveiled. The energy recuperation that occurs the moment you lift off the throttle works like very aggressive engine braking, so coming off the accelerator abruptly when you've got steering lock applied can unsettle the rear of the car. Not in an immediate or snappy way; instead the rear begins to arc slowly around before the stability control – which cannot be disabled – cuts in and straightens things out. Ordinarily such tight restraints would be frustrating, but rather than manifesting themselves as useful adjustability to correct your line, the GTE's on-limit tendencies feel more like a slide that might build into something not so easily managed without a helping hand from the electronics. The GTE, then, leaves plenty of room for the GTI to shine.

The GTI Performance's turbo 2-litre four-cylinder engine is much more typical of a modern hot hatch. It's 242bhp – up 15bhp from the old Performance Pack GTI, and from the latest regular GTI too – is also much closer to par than the GTE's output, as is its 6.2sec 0-62mph time.

As with its exterior styling, the GTI's interior is almost identical to the GTE's, but where there is blue in the

hybrid the petrol gets splashes of red. The real differences between the two emerge the moment you start driving. The GTI simply can't match the part-electric Golf for low-speed comfort; the ride is more fidgety and the thrummy engine noise – effectively the same sound as the GTE's engine in its performance mode, albeit lower in pitch – is frankly annoying once you've become accustomed to the serenity of electric propulsion.

However, the GTI is much better suited to an environment outside towns and cities, and at the first hint of a corner it shows how much more lithe and alert it is compared with its hybrid brother. The quoted weight for the GTI is 228kg lighter than the GTE's, and you can feel the benefit in the GTI's willingness to change direction.

This lack of mass means that, despite the GTE's supposedly instant torque, which only an electric motor can provide, the GTI responds more enthusiastically to throttle inputs. It pulls really hard as you exit a corner, and its standard limited-slip diff allows you to get on the power very early. The way the GTI drives is much more

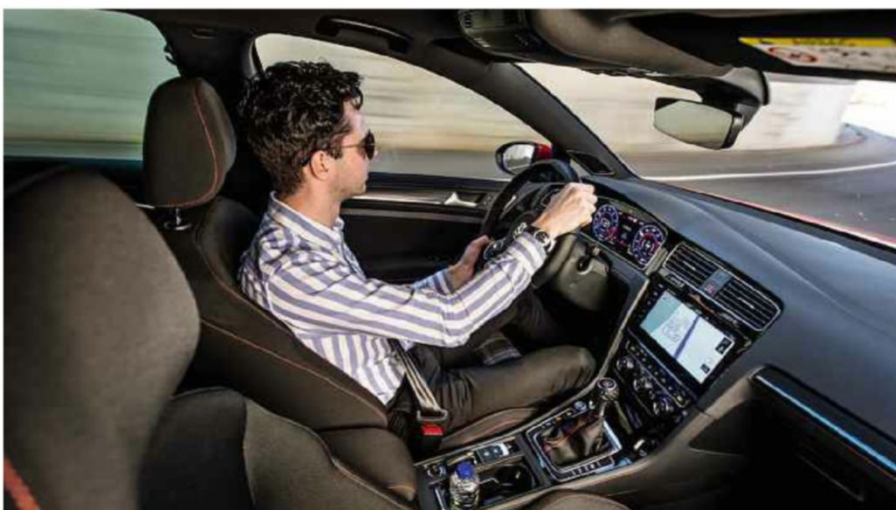
'You do sometimes feel the instant shove that's typical of cars with electric power, but in the GTE the sensation is rare'

transparent than the GTE and that sensation is multiplied by its manual gearbox, not even an option on the hybrid.

The simplicity of its drivetrain, predictability of its chassis and the alertness of its responses make the GTI a much more natural car to drive at pace, but where the GTE starts to squirm and writhe, the conventional hot hatch shows no signs of letting you see its wild side. Really pushing the GTI doesn't open up a layer of intimacy with the car, and neither the throttle nor even trail braking seem to allow you any access to more malleable, engaging behaviour. It remains resolutely stable, a commendable attribute, but not one that endears it to those who like to feel they have an influence on a car's attitude.

The GTI is a better and more credible performance car than the GTE, but it has been left behind by the current crop of hot hatchbacks in terms of pure fun. Rivals now possess some of the most eager, aggressive chassis setups of any cars on sale, and at any price. As a result, they're some of the most demanding yet entertaining and satisfying cars you can get behind the wheel of.

Some of those cars have been Golf GTIs, too. As VW itself has helped pushed the hot hatch genre up to its stratospheric heights with the Clubsport Edition 40 and Clubsport S, it seems an inconceivable oversight not to have instilled some of the character from those (now defunct) models into this updated GTI Performance. And if it could also add some of that to a future GTE, a desirable electric hot hatch may be closer than we think. ☒



Volkswagen Golf GTI Performance

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo

Power 242bhp @ 5000rpm

Torque 273lb ft @ 1600-4300rpm

Weight 1312kg

Power-to-weight 187bhp/ton

0-62mph 6.2sec (claimed)

Top speed 155mph (limited)

Basic price £29,280

evo rating ★★★★★

Above left and middle: cabin is well made and comfortable, if a bit dour; unlike the GTE, the GTI is also available as a three-door. **Above:** turbo 2-litre is smooth but lacks the power of some rivals



RELATIVE STRANGER

A hybrid hot hatch isn't the only performance variant Volkswagen has developed for its new Golf. Say hello to the first ever factory-built Golf race car

by WILL BEAUMONT



THE SAYING GOES 'WIN ON SUNDAY, SELL ON Monday', the idea being motorsport prowess helps shift road cars. But this concept hasn't really been necessary for the VW Golf, and the GTI has certainly never needed a high-profile race car to boost its popularity. Nevertheless, here is a Golf race car to sprout from its rear window and a set of arches with a gargantuan wing.

It's called the Golf GTI TCR, that would shame a World Rallycross car. It's called the Golf into a proper So why, 40 or so years into its life, has VW made the Golf into a proper race car? Well it's not to sell more road cars. What Volkswagen is looking to sell is the Golf GTI TCR itself – to anyone who wants one. Designed to be bought by individuals and race teams for £80,000 to £93,000, it can be campaigned in any of a number of global race series. More of a 'sell on Friday, win on Sunday' mentality, then.

As the car's name suggests, Volkswagen has built its racing GTI to comply with the FIA-approved TCR (Touring Car Racing) regulations. TCR cars use the same engine and basic suspension architecture as the production cars on which they're based, and there are currently 12 TCR championships around the world, plus TCR classes in the likes of the VLN Endurance Championship and the Nürburgring 24 Hours. TCR rules share many similarities with those for GT3 racing, but with the intention of making it a much cheaper category to compete in. The most significant resemblance is the 'balance of performance' system, which limits a car's capability and speed if it's significantly faster than its opponents. Not only does this keep the racing close, but it also negates hugely expensive development to improve a car's performance.



We're at the tight, twisting and oh-so-wet Castellolí circuit, an hour from Barcelona, to get a taste of what the TCR offers. With its small suede steering wheel, tiny digital dash, bucket seats and latticework of roll-cage, the GTI TCR wants for no further motorsport addenda. Strapped tightly into the driver's seat, you feel like an integral part of the car, sensing through your entire body every movement it makes. With no slack in the chassis and seemingly no roll either, the response to each and every tweak of the wheel is instant.

The downside of being so connected to the car is that you can really feel the TCR's engine; it's rough, industrial and revving it to its 6200rpm limit is an ear-aching chore. But it is functional. It produces 345bhp – 103bhp more than the road-going GTI Performance – thanks to a Golf R turbocharger and a freer-flowing air intake. Weighing 1285kg including driver, the TCR feels more potent than any regular GTI.

The TCR also comes with a choice of gearbox: a race-spec sequential transmission or, as fitted to this example, the same seven-speed DSG found in the GTI Performance, with a few minor tweaks. With no clutch to master, and smooth, quick, fuss-free changes, the DSG simplifies the TCR driving experience. Before long you feel completely at ease behind the wheel.

The only element that feels unnatural is the brake pedal. It's firm and doesn't have the instant effect the engine and steering have over the car. The knowledge that there's no

ABS makes you reluctant about giving the pedal a more serious jab, but when you muster the confidence to really stand on it, you realise the front end's turn-in grip is matched when trying to stop. Despite what the pedal's firmness might suggest, there's plenty of travel, so you can be extremely accurate about just how hard you want to brake.

Exiting a corner isn't as easy to judge, as the engine is easily capable of overwhelming the front tyres and, with no traction control, the wheels spin coming out of tighter turns. A flare of revs on the exit of the left-hand hairpin requires a lift of the throttle to regain grip before trying again. It's sometimes necessary to try multiple different pedal positions before the tyres hook up.

The TCR is very approachable, allowing you to overstep the mark, make mistakes and even slide the car. It reacts in a predictable manner and is easy to manipulate and correct. Growing confidence in the way it behaves, combined with surroundings such as these, makes you feel like a proper touring car driver, encouraging you to seek out every kerb and have the Golf bouncing onto two wheels. At no point does it feel out of its depth; the way it absorbs the inputs without being thrown off line highlights its suitability for gruelling series such as the VLN.

As an entry point to production-car racing, it's a very good place to start, which begs the question: what took you so long, VW? ❌

Above: the Golf GTI TCR proves surprisingly confidence-inspiring for a race car, especially in wet conditions.

Below: engine is largely standard, the rest of the TCR largely race car





Raising

by DAVID VIVIAN

PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH



Hell

Mercedes-AMG's brutally fast GT R impressed us on the smooth roads and track at its launch in Portugal earlier in the year, but can those skills translate to the kind of the tough tarmac we enjoy in the UK? Time to find out



**'It looks as if it
eats small animals
when it's not
tearing chunks of
distance out of
the road ahead'**



THE A4059, SOUTH WALES. THE BEST

bit between the A470 and A465. What a road. Unfortunately, it's just over 250 miles from my home in Whitstable, Kent, so by the time I get there – specifically to the broad lay-by where there's a van selling coffee and three Welsh cakes for £1.50 – Dean Smith and Anthony Ingram have already completed most of the photography. I say 'unfortunately', what I mean is 'great'. Dean lobs me the key to the GT R with an expression I've come to read as 'fill your boots'. At least, I think that's what it says.

Before that – although to be clear here, I can't wait to fill my boots – a few facts and stats. A seriously tweaked and honed version of Mercedes' son-of-SLS supercoupe, the GT R is currently hardcore central for AMG. With a starting price of £143,245, it has to square up to a host of hard nuts and high-tech overachievers, not least the latest Porsche 911 GT3 (see page 56), which seems intent on establishing itself as a new high watermark in the drivers' car arena. Handily, the GT R is arguably the perfectly calibrated counterpoint to the Porsche.

It's low, wide, artfully swollen, artfully retro (obvious nod to the 300 SL racer that won the Panamericana road race in Mexico in 1952 at the front) and looks as if it eats small animals when it's not tearing chunks of distance out of the road ahead. Its signature Green Hell paint presumably alludes to the fact that it has lapped the Nürburgring in 7min 10sec, which, if not quite in Porsche 918 Spyder sub-7 territory, bests those other Dwayne Johnson-grade front-engined, rear-drive muscle cars, the Viper ACR and Corvette ZR1.

Such a feat is not achieved through muscle alone, although the GT R has plenty. There's an additional 74bhp for the hand-built 4-litre V8 over the version in the not-exactly-underendowed GT S, bringing the total to 577bhp. The detailed engine work, including revised turbos, reworked exhaust ports and a lighter flywheel, also promises an improved throttle response. In addition, the GT R is 15kg lighter than the GT S, giving a very respectable 377bhp per ton power-to-weight ratio. Porsche's latest 911 GT3 manages 350bhp per ton. Mercedes claims 0-62mph in 3.6sec, which is swift rather than shattering but... a note from the valleys, here: don't get too hung up on that, this thing's mind-warplying rapid.

All that power gets plenty of backup. Most interesting is four-wheel steering, which can alter the rear toe angle by 1.5 degrees. Then there's the active aero panel beneath the engine that automatically lowers 40mm at 75mph (50mph in Race mode), reducing front-axle lift. The redesigned suspension comes with wider tracks (by 46mm front, 57mm rear), and there's a nine-stage traction control that should appeal to skidding novices and connoisseurs alike who want to fully exploit the dynamics of the adjustable coilover spring/damper units and standard Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres of immodest width.

Back on the A4059, the way the GT R delivers slaps of gravity and destroys distance is wrecking normal frames of reference to a soundtrack of concussive savagery. I'm straining to remember why I never really liked the SLS. Maybe it was those heavy gullwing doors, a sense of mass and bulk that never quite dispersed. This is very different: just massively, insanely addictive. For anyone expecting a tech-dense Teutonic twist on the good-old-fashioned front-engined, rear-drive muscle-car formula, the execution seems to have invoked some kind of fast-track fantasy that takes you immediately to a point just past your wildest dreams. I've honestly never driven a car



‘I’ve honestly never driven a car that engaged so many senses all at once’

Below and top right: the GT R’s broad bodywork is liberally pierced with ducts and vents for both aerodynamics and cooling; it needs plenty of each.
Right: empty Welsh roads give the freedom for the full, intense GT R experience

that engaged so many senses all at once, nor one that took the notion of instant gratification quite so literally.

Not only does the GT R seem to get faster the faster it goes, its acceleration becomes more resolute, aurally arresting and iron-fisted. Roll-on pace is faintly absurd, overtaking over almost before it’s begun. There’s no stretchiness in the GT R’s power delivery – no lag, no surge or winding up towards an obvious peak. The engine and gearbox seem almost precognitively reactive, as if there’s a predictive algorithm sensor taking a feed from the merest hint of movement from your right foot. The upshot isn’t just sensational throttle response but precisely scaled acceleration, a force that moves in perfect unison with the arc of the pedal and the hairs on the back of your neck.

The driving position in the cabin is low, cosy and intimate, the seat reassuringly snug, the steering wheel good to grasp. The view down the sharply sculpted bonnet is inspiring. After a pause to let some sheep cross the road, I settle back in behind the wheel and feel thankful for the clear space ahead. Once again, the car connects and locks with the surety of meshing gears and sustains the hardcore intensity all the way to heavily-limbed adrenaline soak.

Gasp and gulp-inducing as the GT R’s performance is, its chassis is a modest work of genius. There are some fast bends on the A4059 and some of the tight ‘n’ technical variety, too. Body roll is almost non-existent, the exceptionally quick helm’s natural sense of flow and precision a swift confidence-builder. The complex topography of British tarmac isn’t – big relief – a barrier to entry, either. The GT R’s firm springs and expansive rubber don’t even seem to exact any kind of penalty on ride comfort – at least not in the light of the truly stupendous grip, traction and stability on offer.

There’s none of the GT S’s worrisome edginess. Kill the power mid bend and the tail stays nailed to the tarmac. The meanest Merc feels as if it can pull well over 1 G in longer turns, and teasing up the torque in the sharper ones it’s easy enough to fuse formidable traction with a degree of tail-out attitude, depending on how much ‘slack’ you’ve dialled into the nine-stage traction electronics. Midway feels about right. The power and resistance to fade of the optional carbon-ceramic brakes are just as impressive.

Just like the humblest AMG, the A45, there are four powertrain-chassis modes: Comfort, Sport, Sport+ and Race. With the A45, the incremental jumps point towards an entertainingly manic conclusion; with the GT R things just feel progressively more epic. I love this layer-cake approach, especially the way the exhaust theatrics on the overrun have distinct sonic characters, ranging from discreetly muted pops in normal, to distended detonations you can almost feel travelling down the exhaust pipes in Race, the mode that also adds an air-renting pistol-shot to full-throttle upshifts. Naughty but not as eventually annoying as the cackling spits and bangs you get with a Jaguar F-type.

As the day winds on and more of the Brecon Beacons gets to hear that bone-drilling howl, I’m more sure than ever the GT R is a car I can instinctively trust. It makes fast easy, stripping away the cause and effect concerns that would haunt the nine-tenths pilot of a Ferrari F12tdf. It’s gun-it-and-go raised to a supernatural level. Momentum and mass seem perfectly synchronised, the car’s potential feels uncannily accessible; there’s a tremendous sense of precision and immediacy in everything it does and a wonderful, exploitable balance. Boots well and truly filled.





AGAINST THE CLOCK

MILLBROOK

by ADAM TOWLER



Mercedes-AMG GT R

Engine V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo **Power** 577bhp @ 6250rpm **Torque** 516lb ft @ 1900-5500rpm **Transmission** Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential **Front suspension** Double wishbones, coilovers, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **Rear suspension** Double wishbones, coilovers, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **Brakes** Ventilated carbon-ceramic discs (option), 402mm front, 360mm rear **Wheels** 10 x 19in front, 12 x 20in rear **Tyres** 275/30 ZR19 front, 325/30 ZR20 rear **Weight** 1555kg **Power-to-weight** 377bhp/ton **0-62mph** 3.6sec (claimed) **Top speed** 198mph (claimed) **Basic price** £143,245

evo rating ★★★★★

S **SELECT 'RACE' MODE AND** make sure the ESP is off. With your left foot firmly on the brake pedal, fully depress the throttle. 'Race Start' flashes up in the central display and the revs flutter around 5000rpm, V8 coughing and popping, the sense of pent-up energy painfully apparent. Linger and the launch control will abort; pull the paddles and you can adjust the launch revs, though you'll wish it would respond quicker.

After the drama of the pre-flight setup, the launch itself is almost an anti-climax: side-step the brake pedal and there seems to be the faintest pause while some electronic brain registers that yes, you really do want to do this. Then you're off, the long bonnet rising up, 60mph passing by 3.3 seconds later.

The upshift to second is automatic, the change instantaneous, the ignition crack between gears and the general V8 machinations plain rude; 150mph passes after 16.1 seconds, and only then does the acceleration become a little more comfortable.

There is no wild wheelspin, no smoke. After each run the oil temperature peaks above 100C, the gearbox up to 94, but down to 94 and 88 respectively within a minute, time after time. No sweat. ❌

ACCELERATION (from standstill, in seconds)

Speed (mph)															
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130	140	150	
0.4	0.9	1.4	2.0	2.6	3.3	4.1	4.9	5.9	7.1	8.4	9.9	11.6	13.6	16.1	

BRAKING (100mph to standstill)

Distance (metres)															
80	82	84	86	88	90	92	94	96	98	100	102	104	106	108	
85.4m (4.0sec)															

QUARTER-MILE

Time (seconds)															
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
11.3sec (128.4mph)															



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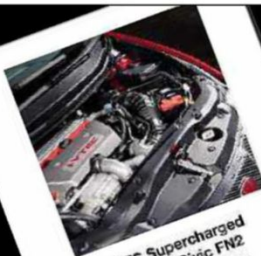
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Market

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ANALYSIS JAPANESE CURIOS

Skylines and NSXs may have gone stratospheric in price, but there's a subset of great Japanese drivers' cars that can still be had for much less.

evo investigates three options

by Adam Towler

WE'RE BECOMING INCREASINGLY FAMILIAR with Japanese metal featuring on the classic car and investment scene. Unsurprisingly, the Honda NSX and Nissan Skyline GT-R have led that movement, but there's a second wave of Japanese performance classics that are experiencing a revival in interest and values, and they include some of the more attainable favourites of the era: the Mk4 Toyota Supra, the FD-generation Mazda RX-7 and the Honda S2000.

Arriving in 1993, the Mk4 Supra was one of that select band of Japanese performance cars that really changed the global perception of what the nation's manufacturers could offer. In fact, the advanced Supra, with its active aero (a retractable front spoiler) and serious twin-turbo power, must have caused more than a few rival brands a headache. Imagine if you were Porsche trying to flog the ageing 968 in the middle of a recession and the Supra suddenly landed. ➔

'Next year, when early Mk4 Supras become eligible for importation into the US, expect prices to soar'

As it was, the Supra was a slow seller in the UK, largely for the same reasons the NSX and RX-7 were: brand equity. We tend to forget today just how much the market has matured, but back then a Japanese performance car with a price tag not far removed from those of European offerings was a hard sell.

Just the one, high-spec version of the Mk4 Supra was sold in the UK, with a 325bhp twin-turbo 3-litre straight-six and the choice of a manual or automatic gearbox. As with most Japanese cars there were many more variants on the home market (and, in this case, the US too), so you can also find non-turbo sixes and targa roofs, but we're focusing on the twin-turbo cars here.

Mk4 Supra prices have been on the rise of late. Although the model wasn't sold in the UK after 1996, it continued in production until 2002, with a significant facelift in 1997. Post-'97 cars with VVTi engines and a six-speed manual 'box are the most sought-after. Expect to pay more than £35,000 for a nice import, with autos in the high-£20,000s. Next year, when the earliest Mk4s reach 25 years old and become eligible for importation into the US as classics, expect prices to soar again. In the UK, companies such as Newera (see Expert View) will currently sell you a freshly imported pre-'97 twin-turbo manual Supra for around £16,000, but these earlier models are becoming thin on the ground.

Anthony Woolford, who owns three UK Supras, can confirm the growth in prices for UK cars. He bought his first, an auto, in 2008 for £7500, and would expect that car to now be worth up to £20,000. His best, a rare manual car in red, recently attracted an offer of £35,000 – which he declined. 'Four years ago the naturally aspirated cars were as low as £1500, but now even they can be had from £4500,' he says.

'However, parts are getting scarce and much more expensive recently.'

The FD Mazda RX-7, the last generation of RX-7 to date, has also been finding increasing favour of late. Built from 1991 all the way through to 2002, and powered by a twin-turbocharged 1.3-litre rotary engine, it's one of those cars that everybody needs to drive at some point. There are many models and variants, but Newera can supply an imported '93-'95 car with up to 45,000 miles for around £13,000. Later examples can reach £17,500 or more, while the run-out editions – the Spirit R and Type R Bathurst R – can command up to £40,000 if they're in perfect condition. Think at least £30,000 for a decent Spirit R – if you can find one.

That rotary engine puts many people off, but as specialist LC Rotary (see Expert View) confirms, with regular maintenance there's no need to worry. And with the engines easily tuned to 350bhp (255-276bhp is standard), the car weighing just 1284kg and with superb weight distribution, there's every reason to give an RX-7 a try.

Finally, there's the Honda S2000, which doesn't lend itself to importation

from Japan as plenty were sold in the UK. For so long very affordable, prices are now beginning to firm up, with £10,000 required for something smart and the best cars sitting in the high teens. Never the easiest car to drive on the limit, the appeal of that very special high-revving, 237bhp four-cylinder VTEC engine cannot be denied.

Above: Mk4 Supra put the frighteners on Porsche when it arrived in 1993, yet while rated by the press, it struggled to sell in the UK. **Below:** S2000 is a far more common sight, with demand growing





Top: we drove an FD RX-7 in issue 226, and praised its 'beautifully neutral balance'.

Above left: Honda's VTEC screamer makes 237bhp from only four cylinders.

Above: Mazda's little rotary needn't be trouble. **Left:** all UK-spec Supras featured a twin-turbo straight-six

EXPERT VIEW

MIGUEL VARELLA

Newera Imports

'Supras are going up in value. In the US, the best can be \$100,000. The Japanese love the post-'97 cars and they're very hard to find for sale. However, one thing that's nice about the Mk4 Supra is that mileage doesn't seem to matter so much – the engines are so strong.'

'The RX-7 is a lovely car – it's my favourite actually, and I've had one since 2000. They're not unreliable at all if you check the oil regularly and let them heat up and cool down gently. The key is to buy a good one and have someone look after it who really understands the cars, including the right oil to use. The engine is tiny

and sits back in the chassis, while there's double-wishbone aluminium suspension and a very light kerb weight by modern standards.'

'There were a lot of changes over the years: cars from 1996 onwards had more solenoids for the boost control, for example, and RS and RZ models have 17-inch wheels to allow for bigger brakes.'

'As for the Honda S2000, I also think these are fantastic cars, but there isn't much demand to import them into the UK. The prices are climbing a little bit, so think £10,000 for a respectable import and up to £25,000 for the very best. People say that's not worth it in the UK, but then there's no salt or crud on the underside of the Japanese cars.'

LEWIS CORPS & REECE SHERWOOD

LC Rotary

'RX-7s have jumped in price in the last year. Just three years ago we were buying average cars for £3500; these days a decent car with a single-turbo conversion can be £8000-10,000, and a nice twin-turbo model can be £10,000-12,000. Overall, prices range from £6000 to £16,000, with specials a bit more.'

'The FD is a really robust car – it's made from good metal that was well treated at the factory. We'll have one on the ramp next to, say, an RX-8 and even though the RX-7 is much older, it will be far less rusty. There are no common rust spots on them and we

can often still get all the bolts undone on them underneath.'

'As long as the oil is changed regularly, along with the coil packs, an engine should last for 150,000 miles. The issues start when people don't top up the oil, and bearings and seals then wear. People are scared of the rotary engine, but while there are horror stories, it's no different to any other car. We say an everyday driver should have an oil change at 3000-5000 miles, while for a weekend car it should be 6000 miles or annually.'

'Anyone interested in an RX-7 should definitely get the engine compression-tested pre-purchase: it doesn't just tell you about the seals, but also about the health of the bearings.'

SUMMARY

There's diversity in this trio: the big, bad super-GT that is the Supra couldn't be more different from the nimble thrills of the Mazda and Honda, both of which are blessed with characterful engines.

All three have lived through long periods where their appeal was based largely on their affordability for the performance on offer and their ability to be tuned. Inevitably, that means the stock of standard cars has shrunk, so buyers looking to experience what they were like when new have to be prepared to pay accordingly; an RX-7 Spirit R can now cost more than it did from the factory, for instance. That said, these Japanese cars are potential investments that you can also enjoy driving.

THREE TO BUY



2000 MAZDA RX-7 TYPE R

£23,895

This gorgeous RX-7 Type R currently resides in Japan but is available for import. A sports exhaust and a remapped ECU raise power from 276 to 340bhp. Other modifications, including an aero kit, total £11,000.

NEWERAIMPORTS.COM



2006 HONDA S2000

£12,990

A late-model UK car in Nürburgring Blue Metallic with a black hood, it also has a striking all-blue interior. This car has covered just 39,000 miles from new in 2006 and comes with a full service history.

911BOX.CO.UK



1995 TOYOTA SUPRA

£17,000

One of the official UK cars, this silver N-reg example has completed 75,000 miles with a full Toyota service history. The fact that this car is in almost completely standard spec (there's just an HKS cat-back exhaust) might help you overlook the automatic gearbox.

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evo reader Hamish Dowlen's outstanding buying history

THE CARS

- 1993 **Austin Mini Metro 1.0 (1987)**
- 1997 **Peugeot 309 SRi (1988)**
- 1998 **Saab 9000 (1987)**
- 2002 **BMW Z3 2.8 (1998)**
- 2004 **Audi A6 4.2 Avant (2000)**
- 2006 **Alpina B10 V8 (E39) (2000)**
- 2010 **BMW M535i (E12) (1980)**
- 2011 **Alpina B3 S Convertible (E46) (2004)**
- 2012 **BMW M635 CSi (1986)**
- 2012 **Renault Sport Mégane 225 (2005)**
- 2012 **Mercedes 450 SEL 6.9 (1977)**
- 2015 **Porsche 911 Turbo (996) (2002)**
- 2016 **Mercedes 500 SL (R107) (1981)**

Porsche 911 Turbo (996)

'Undoubtedly the most exciting car I've ever owned. I spent a long time researching which variant of the 911 to purchase and ultimately concluded that the 996 Turbo is one of the best-handling versions, with that awesome Mezger engine and acres of power in every situation. The whole package feels like a car that could have been made yesterday and is built with unrivalled attention to detail and quality. I have owned this for two years now and am struggling to imagine what could replace it.'



AN ORIGINAL MINI METRO KICKED OFF Hamish's driving career, just as it did for so many kids who reached their late teens in the 1980s. A Peugeot 309 SRi came next, but the thrills from the staid-looking but talented hatch were short-lived as it was rear-ended by a JCB.

A (much safer) Saab 9000 followed and was succeeded by the first of Hamish's beloved BMWs – a 2.8-litre Z3. Four years later came an E39 Alpina B10, then a BMW M535i, then another Alpina in the form of an E46 B3 S, which was 'a fantastic cruiser

with one of the creamiest engine sounds – a perfect example of everything Alpina does well'. The M635 CSi was a disappointment, though, particularly the handling, which isn't an accusation you'd level at the RS Mégane 225 it shared a garage with.

Today, Hamish's classic collection consists of his M535i and a Mercedes 450 SEL, plus the recent acquisition (with two friends) of a Mercedes SL R107 for 'lazy driving around town and hopefully a mid-to-longer-term modest investment return'. His modern classic is the mighty Porsche 996 Turbo.

BMW M535i (E12)

'This was my first classic car, having been a lifelong BMW fan. It is a real handful of a car but drives so beautifully. It's hard to imagine how it must have felt to drivers back in 1980 when it came onto the market. I've had various restorative works done to bring it into fine working order, and it has now covered 180,000 miles. I took it to the Austrian Alps and back last summer without it skipping a beat. It's now a very rare sight on UK roads and I understand there are fewer than ten still in use in the country.'



Mercedes-Benz 450 SEL 6.9

'This car is *the* classic I had wanted to own, ever since I was a passenger in one owned by a friend's dad in the mid-'80s. I realised even then that it was something incredibly special. The absurdity of its 6.9-litre V8 engine and its proportions are a complete anachronism in 2017, and that's why I love it so much. It has had its problems, and is eye-wateringly expensive when it goes wrong, but it is a dream to drive and confuses young drivers when it smokes away from the lights leaving many modern cars standing. It's currently having a major hydraulics and bodywork restoration.'

WHAT NEXT?

'I have a few on the list. A classic Citroën SM, DS or even a Series 1 CX would be fun and quirky. In terms of modern, fast cars, an Alpina B5 would be more than sufficient in most situations. Otherwise, a Ferrari may need to feature at some stage in my car history. Depending on budget, a 550 Maranello is probably the one that I find most appealing.'

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Buying guide



NISSAN 350Z (2003-2009)

Nissan's mini muscle car is ageing nicely and offers simple pleasures from just £5000. Is it all too good to be true?

by Peter Tomalin

IT'S 15 YEARS SINCE NISSAN LAUNCHED THE 350Z AND writing these words makes me feel rather nostalgic. Not just because I used to run a Zed on the Fast Fleet, but because we're unlikely to see its like again. Who today would launch a small coupe with a brawny, 276bhp 3.5-litre V6, manual gearbox and indulgent rear-wheel drive, all for the price of a basic TT?

In fact, the 350Z was launched first in Japan and the US, and it was a year later, in the late summer of 2003, that we finally got the European-spec model, its suspension reworked by the team at the Nissan Technical Centre Europe, based at Cranfield, Bedfordshire. So good was this setup that Nissan adopted it for all Zs from that point forward.





CHECKPOINTS

ENGINE

The original engine is known as the DE. This was revised in 2006, when the power went from 276 to 296bhp, then comprehensively re-engineered to make the 309bhp HR version that ran from 2007.

Scott Fairman at Abbey Motorsport says the HR was greatly improved, both in terms of performance and robustness. The main issue with the early engine is that it burns oil. Because the catalytic converters do such a good job, you might not spot smoke from the exhausts, but check anyway.

The piston rings are the weak spot. By the time the oil light comes on, damage has probably been done. Abbey is gearing up to supply complete exchange engines, the cost expected to be £4000-5000. Most Z engines burn at least some oil, so the first thing to check is the oil level and, if you're buying privately, quiz the owner.

Exhausts split near the junctions with the cats, so listen for blowing. A replacement back-section can be a grand or more.

The biggest service is at 54,000 miles and costs around £500.

TRANSMISSION

Clicking from the rear axle is a common issue with the driveshaft joints. It shouldn't require replacements – many owners have found that unbolting the shafts, greasing the splines with heavy-duty grease and torquing the nuts back up cures it. It's a fairly simple task that a competent home mechanic can do, or a quick job for a specialist.

Clutch replacement is likely to be one of the major expenses you'll face – a clutch kit and flywheel are around £600, with labour adding a couple

of hundred to that, so beware any juddering or slipping. With typical use they should last around 40,000 miles.

SUSPENSION, STEERING, BRAKES

Knocking from the front suspension almost certainly means the bushes in the lower compression arms need replacement. It's a common issue. Genuine Nissan bushes are around £250 per side, plus about an hour or so's labour, but many owners take the opportunity to upgrade to poly bushes, which last longer and also

sharpen the handling. If the car is fitted with OEM 18in wheels, the tyres should be 225/45 front and 245/45 rear, evenly worn across the tread. Most experts recommend sticking with the OE Bridgestones.

BODY, INTERIOR, ELECTRICS

No serious rust issues as yet. Check the A-pillar and around the edges of the windscreen for any signs of rust, which could indicate a bodged windscreen replacement.

Check the doors don't drop when you

open them. Conversely, the windows should drop slightly on opening. On the coupe, check the hatchback opens cleanly and the struts support it easily – and that the boot is completely dry. If the fuel-filler cap doesn't ping open, it could mean an actuator has failed. Also check the headlight lenses are clear.

Interiors are fairly hard-wearing – only the driver's seat bolster might show much wear – so be suspicious of a tatty cabin. Check all the warning lights go out – ABS and airbag lights could require costly rectification.

In the UK it was keenly priced at £24,000 for the basic model, though most buyers forked out the extra £2500 for the GT Pack, which included an uprated Bose hi-fi, cruise control and electrically adjustable heated leather seats. A further £1000 added the Z's signature forged 18-inch Rays alloys, which not only looked good but saved 4kg per corner.

In March 2005 the Roadster arrived, and three months later came the limited-edition GT4. It boasted an extra 20bhp, lifting peak power to 296bhp, and though peak torque was slightly down, it had a flatter torque curve, so it felt more muscular through the rev-range. For £29,500 you also got a colour choice of black or retina-searing Ultra Yellow Pearl, unique Rays alloys and (full nostalgia-mode engaged) a gift-box containing a PlayStation 2 console and a copy of *Gran Turismo 4*. Just 176 were

sold in the UK, but the uprated engine was carried over to the regular Z for the 2006 model year.

The biggest round of changes, though, came for 2007. The V6 was re-engineered, the new HR (for High Response) unit revving to a heady 7500rpm and feeling good for every one of its 309bhp – we recorded 0-60mph in 5.5sec. The process of reducing the weighting of the steering, clutch and gearshift that began with the 2006 car was also continued, making this the sweetest of the lot.

As more new cars are powered by small-capacity turbo engines joined to paddleshift gearboxes, a big, lusty, naturally aspirated V6 driving the rear wheels through a manual 'box is surely only going to seem more appealing. There are too many Zeds around for values ever to really fly, but well-cared-for cars are edging upwards. Here's how to bag a good one.



WHAT TO PAY

It's possible to pick up a Z for as little as £4000, but this end of the market is largely populated by imports, modified cars and autos. Good UK cars start at around £5000 privately, with those from dealers from around £6000 for high-milers.

A really pristine low-miler with just one or two owners is anything from £8000 to as much as £10,000 – more for a GT4. And remember, you pay less road tax (currently £305) for a car registered before 23 March 2006. After that date, it's a hefty £535.

The car pictured here is a 73,000-mile UK example from 2004, with a full Nissan service history. It's currently for sale at Chilham Sports Cars in Kent, priced at £6595. Call 01227 731924.



Above: solid interior wears well, so beware cars with tatty trim. **Left:** lightweight Rays alloys were a £1000 option; Brembo brakes were standard on all UK cars. **Below:** 350Z's naturally aspirated 3.5-litre V6 went from 276bhp to 309bhp – all are robust, but early iterations can burn oil



INFORMATION

SPECIFICATION (HR VERSION IN BRACKETS)

Engine	V6, 3498cc
Max power	276bhp @ 6200rpm [309bhp @ 6800rpm]
Max torque	268lb ft @ 4800rpm [264lb ft @ 4800rpm]
Transmission	Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, LSD
Weight	1525kg [1532kg]
Power-to-weight	184bhp/ton [205bhp/ton]
0-62mph	5.8sec claimed [5.5sec tested, 0-60mph]
Top speed	155mph [limited]
Price new	£24,000 [£26,795]

PARTS PRICES

Prices from abbeymotorsport.co.uk. Tyre prices from blackcircles.com. All prices include VAT but exclude fitting charges.

Tyres (each)	£110.77 front, £130.18 rear [Bridgestone Potenza S001]
Front pads (set)	£70
Front discs (pair)	£150
Clutch	£240
Exhaust catalyst	£580
Exhaust (cat-back)	£839

SERVICING

Prices from abbeymotorsport.co.uk, including VAT. Prices for HR engine in brackets. Service due every 9000 miles or 12 months, whichever is sooner. Order is P1, P2, P1, P3, then repeat.

P1 service	£185 [£185]
P2 service	£265 [£304]
P3 service	£320 [£359]
Spark plugs (due at 54,000 miles)	£128 [£227]

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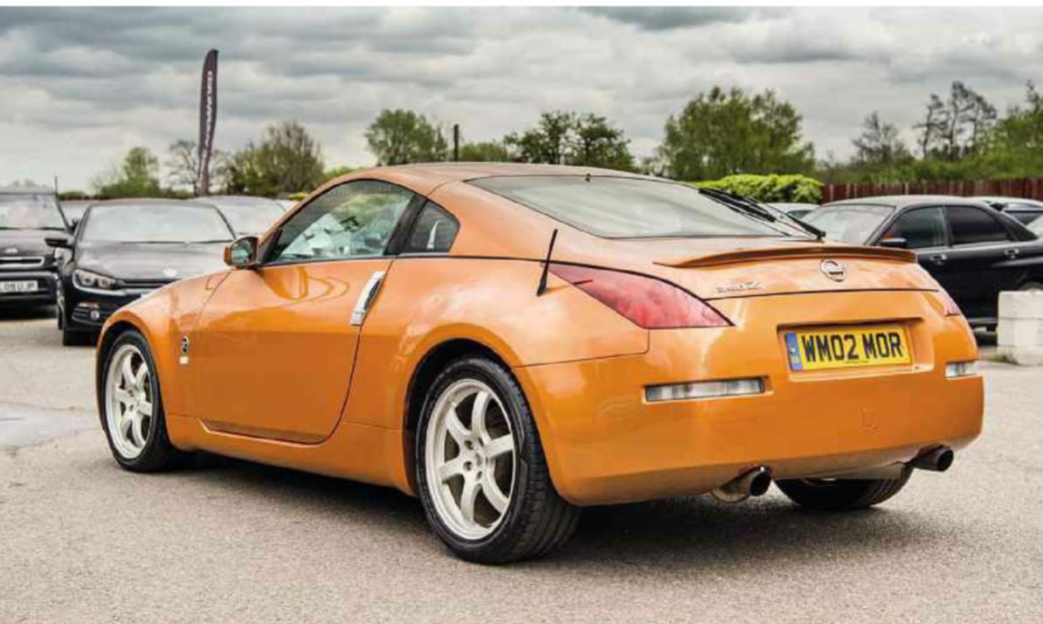
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'I BOUGHT ONE'

GRAHAM EVELEIGH

'I bought my 05-plate 350Z from a Nissan dealer in 2009 with 36,000 miles on the clock. They'd serviced it many times over its life so I was comfortable with its provenance. It's the base model – there were plenty of GT-spec cars on the market but I was determined to get one in blue or black. The chunky silver door handles make colour selection important.

'I've covered about 35,000 miles in it since – everything from trips to the shops to long journeys. In town I get around 23mpg, but elsewhere I can get more than 30mpg. I'm lucky in not having an in-town commute – with extended stop/start driving, the clutch can become tiresome, but find a good B-road and all is forgiven.

'I've done one trackday and

it was great to throw the car around as the Z's grip is so good on the road that it's rare to be near its limits. The one failing on the trackday was the brakes, which didn't stand up to the repeated punishment. They will definitely need upgrading before any more trackdays.

'It's been very reliable. Only a flat battery has stopped it from running, which was when I discovered the 350Z uses a special battery not widely available. There's an intermittent issue with a throttle-housing sensor that causes the engine light to come on, but it usually goes out after a few days. A replacement is over £1000, so it's a quirk I live with! And the boot-release often doesn't pop the boot up enough to clear the latch, so it takes two hands

to open – press the release and lift at the same time. It's a common problem.

'I have thought about replacing my Zed, but then a trip on an empty country road comes along and I gel with it again. It's a car you really have to hustle to get the most out of; it's definitely more muscle car than nimble sports car. But it's very rewarding, and it still looks great. Walking up to it in the car park on a sunny day, the 350Z still looks modern. That makes me hold off selling it, too.'



IN THE CLASSIFIEDS



2003 (53) 350Z GT
£6680

80,000 miles, UK-spec car, Azure Blue with black leather, Rays alloys, Cobra exhaust, recent clutch
evo-motors.co.uk



2006 (56) 350Z GT
£7985

84,000 miles, 296bhp engine, black with tan leather, excellent history, last owner since 2011
greenwingmotors.co.uk



2009 (09) 350Z ROADSTER
£9950

40,000 miles, GT Pack, red with black leather/black hood, full service history, just serviced
vgs-cars.co.uk

WHAT WE SAID



FIRST DRIVE, SEPTEMBER 2003

'It's responsive, poised and, best of all, it all feels natural and effortless in the way that only rear-drive cars can. Turn into a corner and the steering and roll-rates feel perfectly matched; grip is strong and the suspension puts you in touch with the road but isn't dictated by it, smothering large and small bumps with equal effectiveness. Even in the damp you have to be quite determined to loosen the tail, and when you succeed it remains tidy and eminently catchable.

'The steering, which initially feels artificially heavy, soon feels natural, and is partnered by a precise gearshift that is feelsome in a way only a lever stuck directly into the 'box can be.

'The V6 sounds fabulous mooching around, though its performance is a bit, well, unexciting. Perhaps it's deceptively potent, its gutsiness disguised by the linearity of its delivery. At £24,000, the 350Z meets the 180bhp Audi TT head-on and undercuts the Alfa GTV V6 and BMW 325Ci, while being significantly more powerful. It's got to be the first choice of the serious driver.' – **evo** 059

RIVALS

AUDI TT (Mk1)

Between £4000 and £5000 gets you a pristine 222bhp first-gen TT quattro. A little more buys the excellent 237bhp Sport, or if you want even more brawn, the 247bhp 3.2-litre V6 quattro.

BMW Z4 (E85)

As with the 350Z, the Z4 is available in both coupe and roadster forms. The 3.0 version has 261bhp and pleasing – if not completely thrilling – rear-wheel-drive dynamics. From around £8000.

TOYOTA GT86

In some ways the closest modern equivalent to the 350Z, the GT86 and its Subaru cousin have less power (197bhp) but a similar driver-focused ethos and rear-wheel drive. From around £11,000.

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MODEL FOCUS TVR TAMORA & T350

THESE DIMINUTIVE TVRs HAVE OFTEN lived in the shadow of their more glamorous Tuscan, Cerbera and Sagaris relations. However, with an engine – the Speed Six – from the same family and a better-sorted chassis (than early Tuscons, certainly), they hold serious appeal.

The drop-top Tamora (pictured above) was one of TVR's less successful efforts during the later Wheeler years, but then it did have some very big tyre tracks to fill, following on from the Chimaera. Arriving in 2001 as the company's entry-level model, the Tamora used the 3.6-litre version of TVR's homegrown, naturally aspirated straight-six engine. With 350bhp and weighing just over a ton, it can reach 60mph from rest in 4.5 seconds and has a claimed, although possibly not proven, top speed of 175mph.

Small of stature but with a real firecracker of an engine, these head-turning TVRs are rather tempting. Here's the low-down

by Adam Towler

Perhaps the Tamora's sawn-off rear styling put some people off when it was new, but today it is your route into a great Speed Six TVR if you're at the lower end of the pricing structure, with plenty of choice in the low-to-mid-£20,000s.

The T350C (below), as its name implies, is a coupe based on the Tamora. Originally developed as a one-make racing car, the attractive body was the fruit of many hours in the MIRA wind tunnel. The T350 begat the Sagaris (2005), but it's also a very fine car in its own right, and values today reflect this. No longer can a T350 be picked up at a bargain price, with most now holding firm in the £30,000-40,000 bracket. The targa-roof T350T commands a slight premium, and while it's no heavier than the T350C it can generate considerable wind noise.



EXPERT VIEW

JASON CLEGG

Str8six

'The Tamora was introduced in 2001 and facelifted in 2003. The back end was a bit of an off-day for the TVR styling department and not everyone likes the look of the car, but it's lovely to drive – a great practical sports car that's stable at speed, easy to drive and doesn't fidget around like a Mk1 Tuscan can.

'The T350 appeared late in 2002, and a year later TVR brought out the T350T with the targa roof. By mid-2004 there was a Mk2 T350T, with better roof fasteners and a stiffened roof to try to cut down on wind noise. You can improve them, but you'll never get them quiet. As usual with TVR, the later the build, the better. In the end, TVR put Tuscan seats in the T350, which were better as they didn't rub on the roll bar in certain positions.

'Most cars had the 3.6-litre Speed Six engine, but a few were to Red Rose spec. That meant a blueprinted version of the 3.6-litre engine, the brakes from the Sagaris and a big-bore exhaust. However, that engine was labour-intensive, so after a while TVR started to put a 4-litre engine in for Red Rose spec. There were even fewer Tamora Red Rose cars.

'The ultimate T350s were the Red Rose Lightweights. You needed to be a friend of Peter Wheeler or senior management to get one. They had a lighter body made out of Vinylester, not glassfibre like the standard cars. Probably only 15 were made, at most.

'Today, you'll be looking at prices in the mid-teens for a dog of a Tamora, up to the very best cars at £35,000. The T350 tends to start in the mid-£20,000s, with nice ones at around £35,000 and a perfect Red Rose Lightweight costing up to £50,000. Targas are worth £2000 to £3000 more than coupes as they're rarer.

'On Tamoras, be careful about what seat coverings it has. Leather is the best, and the entry-level vinyl is acceptable, but the "Bison" option is terrible – it shrinks and has an awful finish, so you want a big discount if the car has it.

'Otherwise, a good maintenance record is crucial, and definitely check the chassis, even if corrosion is relatively rare on these. It's desirable if the engine has had updates such as the ones we do at Str8six, but by the time these cars were made, TVR was getting on top of the engine issues and a 2005/06 car should be fine.'

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H11 AII	£1500	BEV 495	£1500	C0 6503	£2100
L500 AJM	£695	606 BEV	£595	P23 COB	£595
N28 AJN	£595	B878 BEV	£595	170 COB	£695
N121 AJP	£595	W2 BEK	£1300	N31 COL	£2500
Y6 AJR	£1200	P23 BEK	£595	K70 COL	£1900
N29 AJR	£595	N24 BEK	£695	J666 COL	£1300
N27 AJS	£895	B7 5870	£1100	B763 COL	£795
P23 AJS	£595	667 BFR	£895	I29 CON	£795
GR AKH	£595	BH2 24	£795	N21 CON	£695
J4 AKP	£595	B11 6908	£795	R123 CON	£595
P21 AKY	£695	F11 BUB	£595	N21 COR	£1300
J44 AKY	£1600	B12 97	£695	R21 COR	£795
P21 ALB	£595	BL 632	£3400	R21 COS	£895
N16 ALF	£595	442 BLG	£895	R23 COS	£595
V29 ALF	£595	877 BME	£895	N31 COS	£2500
L888 ALF	£595	W6 BMH	£595	D20 COX	£1200
R24 ALI	£595	P3 BMH	£695	134 COX	£1100
R29 ALP	£595	P19 BMW	£895	L44 COX	£695
P21 ALS	£895	W26 BMW	£795	V9 CPR	£795
N123 ALS	£595	249 BMW2200	£795	VR CRL	£695
P23 ALX	£795	N23 BOB	£1200	D6 CRT	£595
N29 ALX	£695	P24 BOB	£1300	G5 CRW	£595
J11 ALX	£895	K100 BOB	£1100	BI CSC	£595
P24 ALY	£595	Y333 BOB	£595	D2 CSB	£595
N26 AMB	£595	N21 BON	£695	K7 CSL	£795
P321 AMB	£595	N95 BON	£595	J7 CUT	£595
J333 AMB	£595	G12 BON	£1200	S40 CUT	£595
P24 AMC	£795	P23 BOO	£695	L9 CWS	£595
R29 AME	£595	P121 BOO	£595	35 CY	£4300
W5 AMF	£595	K3 BOV	£695	299 DA	£3200
N99 AMH	£595	W18 BOV	£695	9718 DA	£1500
R23 AMH	£595	P23 BOX	£895	N23 DAD	£595
K55 AMH	£695	M66 BOX	£795	S1 DAL	£595
P25 AMP	£595	C2 BOY	£595	J19 DAL	£595
N21 AMS	£595	X55 BOY	£595	N28 DAN	£1600
P121 AMS	£795	V3 BRD	£695	P31 DAN	£1200
N26 AMY	£1500	K3 BRE	£695	F477 DAN	£595
P21 ANA	£595	P11 BRO	£595	K1 DAP	£695
K666 ANA	£595	R123 BRY	£795	K11 DAP	£595
R23 AND	£795	673 BRY	£1900	P25 DAR	£595
P25 AND	£895	B5 8072	£1400	N27 DAS	£595
W700 AND	£595	BSK I53	£695	P27 DAS	£695
R28 ANE	£595	A3 BSM	£595	N28 DAV	£895
N23 ANG	£595	573 BSM	£1300	D89 DAV	£595
P24 ANG	£595	BSV 469	£795	R11 DAW	£595
W6 ANH	£695	I7 BU	£4500	A18 DAW	£895
N21 ANI	£595	M44 BUD	£595	D4 76M	£795
N21 ANK	£895	D6 BUG	£1300	P21 DYM	£695
N21 ANL	£895	C8 BUG	£1200	4155 DYM	£1700
P15 ANN	£1500	C20 BUG	£895	N29 DDY	£895
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H80 ANN	£1400	R21 BUL	£595	N21 DEB	£695
E766 ANN	£795	853 BUR	£1600	B12 DEB	£1400
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N321 ANS	£895	A4 BUX	£795	N26 DEE	£1100
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P21 ARC	£595	1985 CA	£2700	R21 DEL	£595
R25 ARC	£595	R24 CAB	£595	P26 DEL	£595
P31 ARD	£695	H2 CAD	£895	N28 DEL	£595
E8 ARG	£695	F11 CAD	£795	324 DEL	£1900
R27 ARM	£595	P24 CAD	£595	R24 DEM	£595
D12 ARM	£595	D11 CAF	£595	N23 DEN	£1200
N21 ARN	£595	N27 CAL	£795	P22 DEN	£1300
D6 ART	£1200	CAM 12A	£1900	S22 DEN	£895
P21 ART	£795	N27 CAM	£795	P900 DEN	£795
R21 ART	£795	P123 CAM	£695	K9 DES	£1200
N28 ART	£595	S19 CAN	£595	L66 DES	£895
P28 ART	£695	W3 CAP	£895	DEE 775	£695
A55 ART	£895	C22 CAR	£795	D10 DEV	£1400
C55 ART	£595	G68 CAR	£695	P23 DEV	£895
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P31 ASH	£1400	R500 CAR	£595	1400 DEV	£595
J505 ASH	£695	P29 CAS	£595	DEZ 789	£595
B600 ASH	£1100	N31 CAS	£595	2619 DE	£1100
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N700 DUC	£695	FAZ 292	£695	N21 HAM	£595	T23 JER	£595	Y5 KMG	£595	P23 MAD	£795	7426 MU	£1500	A6 PMG	£695
953 DUN	£795	L6 FEB	£595	R25 HAR	£695	R29 JER	£595	59 KN	£4500	P24 MAD	£895	P21 MUL	£695	B5 PMH	£595
W81 DUN	£795	FEE IIS	£1500	S222 HAR	£595	K99 JER	£595	N21 KOL	£595	P27 MAD	£695	640 MUM	£695	X4 PMW	£795
X321 DUN	£695	R24 HAY	£695	R24 HAY	£695	R24 JES	£1400	C1 KOS	£695	W8 MAH	£695	X40 MUM	£795	L2 PMS	£695
472 DUN	£2500	R29 FEN	£595	R29 FEN	£595	P25 JES	£1300	KP 8655	£1700	W77 MAH	£595	S99 MUM	£595	97 PN	£3800
B3 DOT	£895	C1 HAW	£595	C1 HAW	£595	C7 JES	£595	790 KPF	£595	R26 MAH	£795	B13 MUR	£695	P5 PNH	£695
W50 DOT	£595	52 HE	£4100	JES 735X	£695	B166 JES	£595	3730 KR	£1600	R26 MAH	£595	W29 MUR	£595	G5 PNT	£595
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J9 DRC	£695	P24 HEL	£795	JIL 343	£795	P23 KVL	£595	P23 KVL	£595	R77 MAL	£795	67 NAR	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
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N21 DUN	£695	31 FR	£4200	I418 HJ	£595	P24 ILB	£595	A20 LAD	£895	P123 MAT	£1200	P25 NAY	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
R24 DUN	£595	FRE 545	£795	K1 HJG	£595	JM 1444	£3000	J97 LAD	£595	K222 MAT	£1100	89 ND	£4500	PEI PPY	£1500
P24 DUN	£595	D3 FRY	£1500	D3 HUM	£595	N21 IMB	£795	C91 LAK	£695	S14 MAH	£595	N40 NDOY	£695	PEI PPY	£1500
D22 474	£615	595	£3333 F	37 HN	£4300	N28 JMC	£795	P23 LAM	£595	R23 MAW	£595	N28 NDY	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
DX 474	£141	£3400	N28 FUN	23 HO	£4500	N29 JMH	£595	N24 LAN	£1500	N23 MAX	£1300	T70 NDU	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
DI DYP	£895	III VF	£3800	P21 HOH	£895	P23 JMR	£695	R28 LAN	£595	R27 MAX	£1500	N12 NDUY	£795	PEI PPY	£1500
845 E	£5300	FW 8041	£1400	P27 HOG	£795	P121 JMR	£595	N21 LAS	£595	S29 MAX	£1500	X6 NEE	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
52 EA	£4300	384 FVC	£695	W60 HOG	£695	N28 JMS	£595	R321 LAS	£595	P31 MAX	£1400	N31 NES	£695	PEI PPY	£1500
N31 EAN	£595	P23 GAB	£595	T21 HOL	£595	P24 JMW	£695	B5 LAW	£1400	MA2 G46	£595	P9 NET	£1200	PEI PPY	£1500
EB 72	£3300	R29 GAL	£595	F27 HOP	£895	W9 JNS	£595	G62 LAW	£595	Y7 MCB	£595	74 NET	£4200	PEI PPY	£1500
W7 EBB	£1900	N31 GAL	£695	N25 HOP	£695	P10 JOE	£1800	S80 LAW	£595	R25 MCH	£695	R21 NEV	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
831 EBY	£1100	V4 GAM	£695	R27 HOP	£595	R21 JOE	£1700	P25 LEA	£595	R24 MCC	£695	P31 NEY	£895	PEI PPY	£1500
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T20 EDD	£595	R321 GAV	£795	W4 HUG	£595	C922 JON	£895	D9 LEN	£1300	P30 MCH	£595	49 NN	£3700	PEI PPY	£1500
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P24 EEL	£695	B7 GDS	£695	M47 HYA	£1750	G18 JOY	£1500	V29 LEN	£795	E20 MCR	£595	N21 NNO	£1500	PEI PPY	£1500
N31 EEL	£2500	V7 GEB	£595	HE 5574	£795	R28 JOY	£1300	N333 LEN	£595	R27 MEG	£595	44 NNS	£1900	PEI PPY	£1500
89 EFC	£595	N23 GEE	£595	909 IAL	£1600	243 JOY	£2300	LEN 408	£1500	N23 MEL	£595	A71 NOS	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
87 EF	£4700	R321 GEE	£595	E198 IAB	£695	E3 JPD	£695	R25 LEO	£595	A92 MEL	£1300	NOS IIA	£795	PEI PPY	£1500
200 EJ	£3500	M2 GEF	£1500	P27 IAB	£595	M5 JPC	£695	J7 LER	£695	P121 MEL	£1100	300 NP	£3800	PEI PPY	£1500
E18 EY	£695	W0 GEF	£795	P23 IAC	£1300	85 JRC	£795	B5 LES	£1700	W800 MEL	£695	L7 NSH	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
286 EYJ	£795	N21 GEF	£695	T777 JAC	£1100	P28 IJR	£595	P5 LES	£1700	Y1 MES	£695	P27 NUT	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
600 EJX	£595	R26 GEF	£595	M10 JAD	£695	N25 IRS	£595	TIO LES	£1100	P24 MES	£695	R31 NUT	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
EKU 76	£895	GEF 385	£2900	K8 JAF	£695	JS 4862	£3600	A16 LES	£1200	S5 MET	£895	477 NVO	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
6977 EL	£595	N24 GEM	£895	T55 JAG	£1200	N3 JFS	£595	N23 LES	£595	Y3 MEW	£795	270 NY	£3200	PEI PPY	£1500
N31 ELE	£2500	P27 GEM	£795	K66 JAG	£595	H8 JST	£695	P90 LES	£795	T2 MGF	£695	R28 OAK	£595	PEI PPY	£1500
N21 ELE	£595	GEM 31Y	£895	X30 JAG	£895	J3 JTH	£595	F12 LES	£595	X2 MGF	£695	J5 OCT	£695	PEI PPY	£1500
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C20 ELM	£595	GE0 IR	£2300	R26 JAM	£595	P21 JUN	£595	300 LEX	£3300	G4 MGW	£595	N26 OLF	£695	PEI PPY	£1500
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THE ROUND-UP

New motoring products that have caught our eye this month



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lego.com

McLaren asks £208,600 for its 720S. For roughly 1/16,000th of that you could have its Lego equivalent. Also included is a designer minifigure complete with design-studio desk and drawing board, and the car is in the right colour, too: McLaren Orange. Available from 1 June.



PRINT

Sound Stories – Walter Röhrl's Audi

£600

rachaelclegg.com

Sound Stories is a collection of artwork by Rachael Clegg, replicating the sound profile of classic race cars and motorcycles in colours appropriate to their liveries. This painting depicts Röhrl's Quattro at San Remo in 1985; another represents Stefan Bellof's 6:11.13 Ring lap in 1983.



BOOK

Toyota MR2 Coupe & Spyders

£35

veloce.co.uk

Now in its second edition, Brian Long's book on Toyota's mid-engined sports car comprehensively covers every generation, from the model's debut to the end of production in 2007. The book is packed with images, design sketches and data tables, making it a valuable resource.



RC CAR

Tamiya Ferrari F12tdf

£149.99

hobbyco.net

The F12tdf is among the most extreme road cars Ferrari has ever produced, and the reactions required to control it are similar to those needed to hustle this radio-controlled Tamiya replica. It sits on the TT-02 chassis, which does give it one advantage over the real car: four-wheel drive.



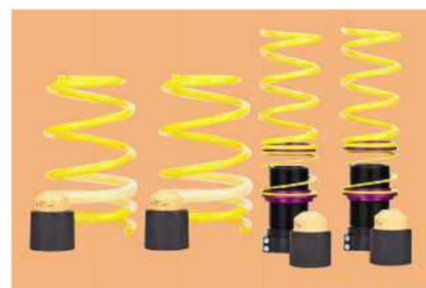
VIDEOGAME

Mario Kart 8 Deluxe

£42

amazon.co.uk

The first Mario Kart game to appear on the new Nintendo Switch console (and therefore sure to sell in huge numbers), *Deluxe* is effectively a 'port' of the Wii U version, but packed with more content and an updated Battle Mode. There's no better social videogame experience.



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Fast Fleet

THIS MONTH

PEUGEOT 308 GTi 270 by PS // LAMBORGHINI MURCIÉLAGO // BMW 2002 // MAZDA MX-5 RF //
AUDI R8 SPYDER V10 // VW GOLF GTI CLUBSPORT EDITION 40 // SKODA OCTAVIA ESTATE vRS 230 //
BMW i8 // MINI JCW CHALLENGE // PORSCHE 911 CARRERA // MERCEDES-AMG C63 S COUPE



END OF TERM

Peugeot 308 GTi 270 by Peugeot Sport

Our hot Pug's quirky ergonomics didn't detract from its zinger of an engine and sublime chassis, but should you actually buy one?

WHEN THIS FRENCH HOT hatch arrived on Fast Fleet last summer, we weren't sure how it was going to fare. For £28,695, the Peugeot 308 GTi 270 by Peugeot Sport gave us a turbocharged 1.6-litre in-line four producing 266bhp (20bhp more than the entry-level '250' model), a Torsen limited-slip differential, Michelin Pilot Super Sport tyres, 19-inch wheels, Alcon brakes, bucket seats, plenty of leather and Alcantara, a panoramic roof, a 9.7-inch touchscreen infotainment system and quite a few more goodies to boot. In fact, the only optional extra we went for was SOS assistance, which cost £240.

Impressive value for money, then. Our car also looked resplendent in its luscious, deep Magnetic Blue paint, but the spectre of the mainly

very average Peugeot hot hatches of the past decade or so still loomed large. Would the 270 live up to the legend of the firm's earlier offerings?

Its engine certainly got things off to a good start. It could act relaxed at low revs when you wanted it to be discreet, yet it was still remarkably potent, and when you wanted to unleash your inner Ari Vatanen it revealed a wild side at the top of its rev range. This was a highly strung powerplant that put out a mighty 166bhp per litre with the help of forged pistons and stronger conrods. It was a wonderful heart for a hot hatch, but it wasn't a high maintenance one, needing only one service while the car was in our possession. That came at 12,000 miles and cost £189.99.

The chassis, meanwhile, exhibited superb body control on

very demanding roads and was also pointy and aggressive, just as you'd hope for in a hot hatch at this level. It allowed for real throttle-adjustability and rewarded commitment, especially on corner entry. Then, as soon as you got on the power mid-corner, the LSD would jump to attention to haul you around and add to the speed. It enabled me to unpick roads at a fantastic rate and the car never felt remote or distant: just like other recent Peugeot Sport models, such as the 208 GTi, the 308 GTi was incredibly capable and involving.

It wasn't perfect, though. Without doubt the most talked-about aspect of the car during its nine months with us was its tiny steering wheel and how, for some, it obscured the dials that were supposed to be viewed over the top of it. For half the **evo** team it was a problem, among them contributing photographer Dean Smith, who ran the 308 for the first few months of its time with us. He couldn't (and wouldn't) stop complaining about it. However, others found they could see the dials just fine.

Me? I was in the middle. The top of the wheel blocked my view of the lower section of the instrument cluster, meaning certain speeds and revs were never visible. Not being able to see when I was travelling below 20mph or when the revs were beneath 1500rpm never particularly bothered me, but I still felt a slight sense of relief when getting into a different car with an undisturbed view of the dials.

But the foibles of the wheel-and-dials setup paled into insignificance in comparison with the frustration of not having physical controls for the radio and air conditioning. In the 308 GTi you're forced to interact with the slow-reacting central touchscreen, and it proved to be a long, attention-sapping ordeal.

I know you should just trust the climate control's Auto function to quickly adjust the temperature in the cabin on a chilly morning. Invariably, though – and it isn't just the 308 that does this – the fan would blast out cold air before the engine had warmed up, adding a wind-chill factor to an already cold



'Just like other recent Peugeot Sport cars, such as the 208 GTi, the 308 was incredibly capable and involving'



interior. And because the 308's air-con controls were so tedious to access and use, I often found myself relying on the physical vent controls to divert the air away from me. That was hardly a chore, admittedly, but I didn't feel I was really getting the benefit of the Peugeot's dual-zone climate control.

The one advantage of these controls existing within the infotainment screen was that the rest of the interior was clean and very attractive. The stylish design was backed up by a quality feel, too, except for the way the gearknob was mounted. It felt as though there was a rubber ball joint between the lever and the grip, allowing enough movement for you to roll your wrist.

When Dan Prosser tested our 308 GTi against a Mk7 VW Golf GTi in *evo* 229, he concluded that the Peugeot was the more engaging car but that its German

rival would be the one he'd want to live with. Now, I'm not saying he was wrong, but I think the 308 is that much more exciting that I'd be willing to put up with its various idiosyncrasies. It feels the more genuine hot hatch.

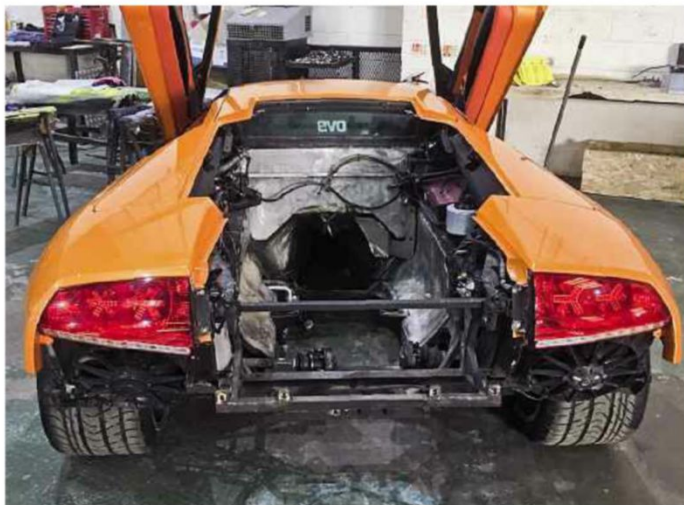
However, the real problem the 308 GTi has is that if 'exciting' is what you want from a hatch and you don't need the space of a car as big as the 308, the smaller, cheaper 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport is more fun, more of the time. And it has buttons for the heater. ❌

Will Beaumont (@WillBeaumont)

Date acquired	July 2016
Duration of test	9 months
Total test mileage	14,900
Overall mpg	33.3
Costs	£189.99 service
Purchase price	£28,695
Value today	£17,000-19,000



Top left: touchscreen was the source of much frustration. **Above:** dials were designed to be read over the top of the titchy steering wheel, though some drivers found this impossible



Lamborghini Murciélago

No, this isn't a photo from the archives – our rebuilt supercar really is without engine and gearbox again

I HAVE TO CONFESS to being a tad nervous when travelling along the 'smart' sections of the M1, with no hard shoulder, on those early journeys with the rebuilt Murciélago. The thought of being stranded there during my daily commute is my worst nightmare. There's no real reason why this should happen, of course, but driving this car after its lengthy repair following a collision with an oak tree back in 2012 has been like getting reacquainted with an ex.

A reasonable number of miles have now been added to the odometer and up until recently the car's behaviour had been exemplary. Problems have, however, arisen when third or fifth gear is selected. Occasionally, lifting off the power causes the gearlever to snap back into neutral. I thought the shift-rods might not have been adjusted correctly, which would cause such an issue. Unfortunately, unlike in a manual LP640, the first-gen Murciélago doesn't have an inspection hatch in the transmission tunnel, so to examine the gearbox there was no option other than to remove it.

Of course, that meant the V12 had to come out too, so during a quiet afternoon in 6th Gear

Experience's workshops, the tech bods had the whole shebang sitting on a trolley. A thorough inspection revealed no obvious fault, so a call was made to Lamborghini Manchester to have them double-check the gear selections using a special tool for just this purpose. I've a sneaking suspicion that there may be something bent, stemming from the crash. We'll find out soon.

On a more positive note, the parts that were on back-order have now arrived. These include the headlining and various underbody panels that are relatively small but sting the wallet to the tune of £600-plus each. I've wimped out on running the car with the Tubi sports exhaust, though, I'm afraid. With the full back-box and tips setup, the sound – especially when cold – had been frightening the horses in a nearby field and also set off the neighbour's dogs. So I've refitted the factory back-box but kept the Tubi tips. It's a good compromise. Now it only sets off the dogs. ☒

Simon George
(@6gearexperience)

Date acquired	September 2004
Total mileage	260,233
Mileage this month	1103
Costs this month	£2200 – see text
mpg this month	15.0

BMW 2002

Beaumont finds a novel suspension solution for his road-racer restomod

A AS OBSESSED AS I AM with buying immaculate bits of trim, nothing matches the unbridled joy of fresh performance parts. Yes, moving on to the 2002's suspension meant I could finally indulge in some go-faster bits.

First, though, I had the car's subframes, along with some other suspension components that I'll be reusing, sand-blasted and painted. The parts were first covered with an undercoat of anti-corrosive primer before being finished with a topcoat of paint, which is less brittle than a powder coating.

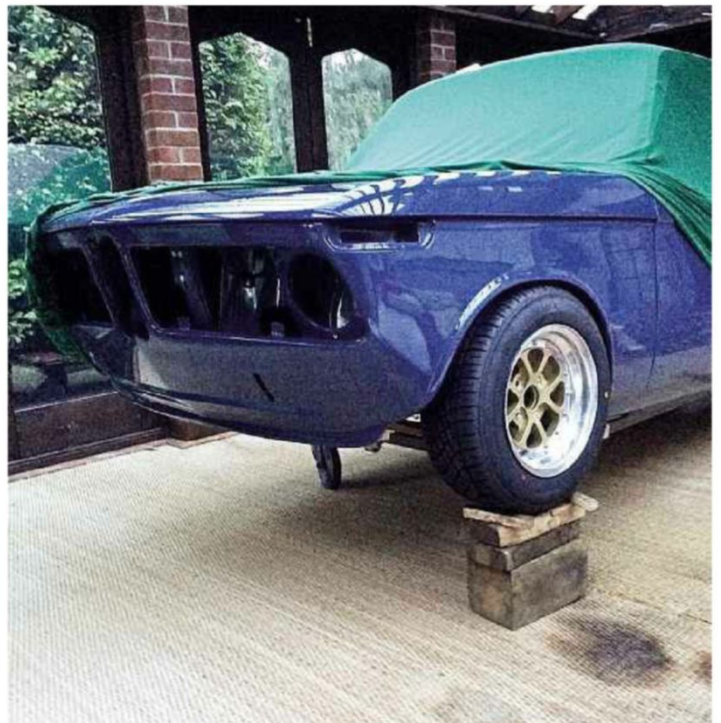
I started gathering together the new suspension parts at the perfect time, as Powerflex has only recently added a full set of '02 bushes to its range. I didn't get everything from Powerflex, however, as I'll be refitting the non-standard anti-roll bars I had on the car before, and they have their own bespoke bushes.

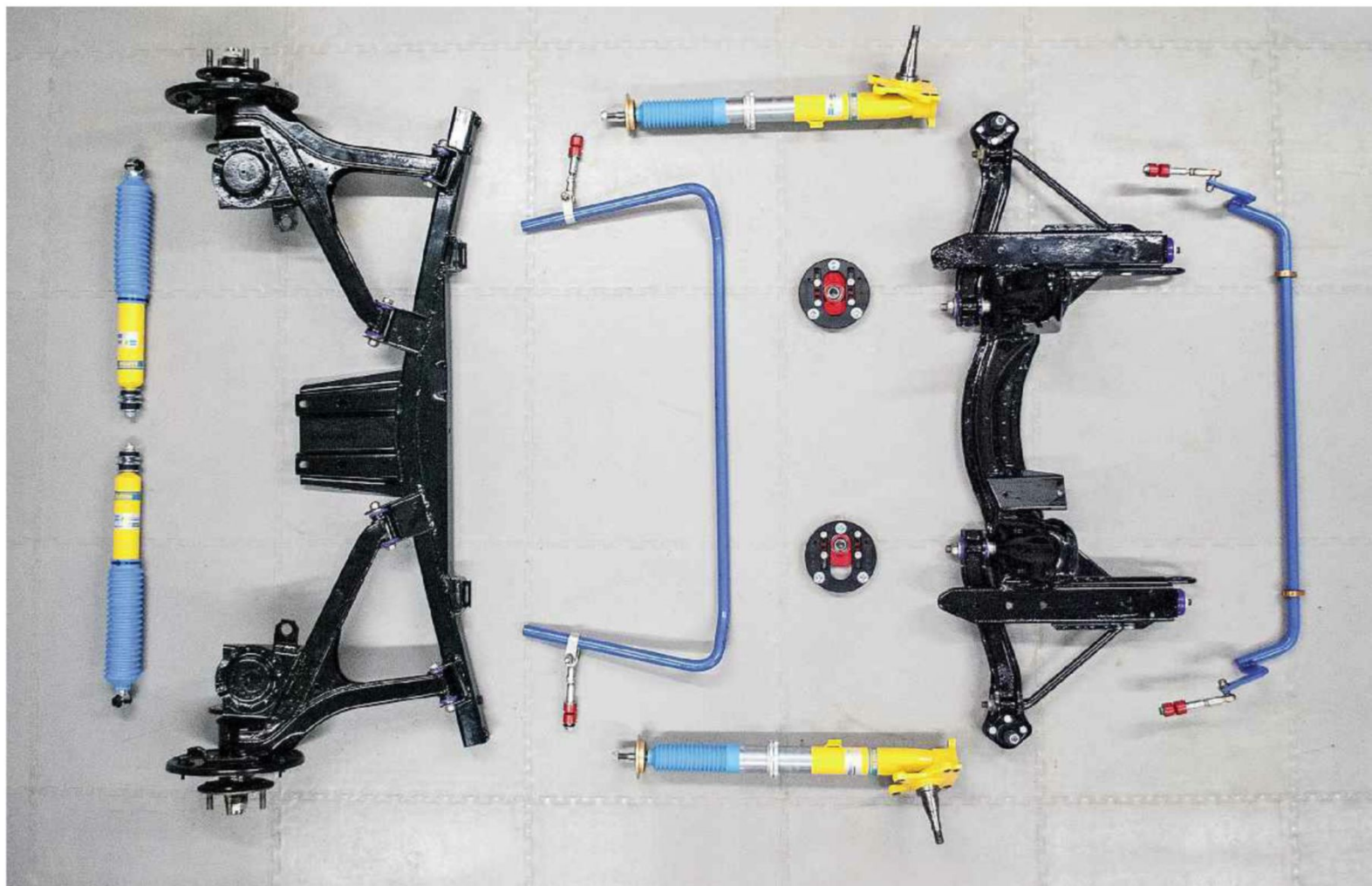
Fitting the polyurethane bushes was a doddle. The only issue was

that when I tightened the outer-control-arm bolt, the bush twisted out of line. Try as I might, I simply couldn't keep it straight as the bolt turned. In frustration, I torqued up the nut and bolt then wiggled the control-arm up and down. To my relief the bush worked its way into place. Otherwise it was plain sailing. This is the first time I've installed poly bushes and I can't imagine ever wanting to fight and manhandle conventional rubber ones again.

I bought new springs to lower the front of the 2002 before the restoration started, but they barely made a difference. To avoid wasting more cash on numerous sets of front springs, I've chosen a more economical solution (at least that's what I've been telling myself) that has involved sending the front struts to Bilstein to be converted into a basis for adjustable coilovers.

You can't buy coilovers for '02s because the cast hub carrier is integral to the tubular upright, so you need to hack away at and modify





the struts to make them height-adjustable. So I sent off some bare front struts and eight weeks later got back some very yellow inverted monotube dampers with adjustable spring platforms. Perfect.

The split-rim Image wheels I'll be fitting are an inch smaller in diameter than the Minilites previously used. This means the plates I installed to gain some negative camber at the front axle would now foul the insides of the wheels. So to allow the car to still run a slight amount of negative camber, rather than what seems like positive camber with the standard setup, I'll be using a set of adjustable

Above: the 2002's meticulously planned suspension assembly is almost complete. **Above left:** Powerflex bushes now securely in place. **Far left:** Image wheels will replace previous Minilites

'I sent off some bare front struts and got back some very yellow inverted monotube dampers with adjustable spring platforms'

top mounts from Gaz. They're made from billet aluminium, with a pillow ball-bearing upper mount. There's no rubber, meaning there's nothing to absorb small vibrations, so they're going to be noisier than the standard items, but in a car with a full roll-cage, coilovers, race seats and harnesses, they'll be fine.

You may have noticed that there is one big omission from this setup – something fundamental for suspension to work. Springs. But as I won't be mounting anything onto the car just yet, they can wait. ❌

Will Beaumont
(@WillBeaumont)

Date acquired	July 2008
Total mileage	146,050-ish
Mileage this month	0
Costs this month	£1920 Bilstein struts, £143 bushes, £180 top mounts
mpg this month	n/a



VW Golf GTI Clubsport Edition 40

VWs have a reputation for being solidly built, right? That's what we thought, too

I HATE SQUEAKS AND rattles in a car. I find them distracting when I'm trying to enjoy driving, though not as distracting as those half-drunk bottles of water my colleagues leave wedged under the passenger seat of every test car they drive, and which break free the moment you reach a decent stretch of road and then roll around the passenger footwell like some kind of budget G-meter. It's as if cup holders and door pockets had never been invented. Anyway...

At least when I know where the squeak or rattle is coming from I can try to ignore it. But when I can't identify the source, there's always a nagging doubt: what if something really important is working itself loose? That's exactly what's been bugging me about the noise – half creak, half squeak – that's been coming from somewhere in the Edition 40's front end for several weeks now. It can usually be heard below 30mph, whenever there's a

sharp input to the suspension (rough tarmac, speed bumps, etc).

Prodding and poking the dash, wheels, suspension, exhaust and everything within reach under the bonnet revealed nothing at first, but when the noise grew in volume – and dented my confidence even further – another session on my hands and knees eventually revealed that the front bumper was to blame. It seems to be firmly attached, but push down on it and, sure enough, there's the noise. Only wet weather puts a stop to it, presumably by providing some lubrication.

This irritation has added to a nagging feeling I've had about our Golf for some time now: that it feels a little bit like a car that was built on a Friday afternoon. There's also the chattering from the trim near the top of the driver's door card (push it with a finger to silence it for five minutes), the bit of carpet that refuses to stay tucked under the rubber seal around the driver's door frame, and



'When the noise grew in volume, it dented my confidence even further'

the headlight washer jet that never returns flush to the bodywork (also cured by a push with a finger).

Bad luck? Quite possibly. But I can't help but compare this experience with that of the SEAT Leon Cupra long-term I ran a couple of years ago. It had a similar chassis, similar power, an interior that didn't feel significantly cheaper and – crucially – no build-quality issues whatsoever. At least the Edition 40 has its limited-edition appeal, but when it's sold out and the hottest Golf GTI available is the Mk7.5 Performance version with 242bhp – for pretty similar money to the now-296bhp SEAT – justifying choosing the VW would be harder than ever for me. ☒

Ian Eveleigh

Date acquired	October 2016
Total mileage	9055
Mileage this month	917
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	32.9

Audi R8 Spyder V10

Vandalised in Bristol and thrown into an impromptu comparison test with the new 911 GT3 – it's been a tough month for our Audi



WITH THE WEATHER having turned a corner, the R8 Spyder is really coming into its own. In fact, it's only with the sun shining and the temperatures up a few notches that I've realised just how much of the Spyder experience I've been missing out on for the past few months. I'm not one of those militant roof-off-regardless types who'll happily cruise along top-down in any weather just as long as they've got a woolly hat on. Call me a softy, but I prefer the roof up in the rain.

Anyway, I've never felt more affection for KP66 GMV than I did a few weeks ago in sunny north Wales. Once we'd finished photographing the new Porsche 911 GT3 for this very issue (turn to page 56), I had some time to enjoy the Audi on what is probably my favourite road in the country: the B4391 that runs between Bala and Ffestiniog.

Now, there aren't many cars that would feel particularly competent on a road like this one immediately after

you've driven something as focused and accomplished as the GT3. And yes, the R8 wasn't as grippy or as precise or as well controlled as the Porsche, but in the grand scheme of things, I have to say it was damned impressive along that stretch of blacktop. For a roofless car it is very good to thread along a bucking, winding road.

In fact, with the sports exhaust in full show-off mode and the big, 533bhp V10 howling away, the R8 was stunning. The list of new cars I'd rather have been driving at the time was a very short one indeed.

Not everybody is as enthusiastic about the Spyder as I am, though. I came back to it one morning recently after it'd been parked by the side of a quiet road in Bristol to see some moron had smashed the driver's window. There was no evidence they'd actually reached into the car, so it was simply a case of mindless vandalism. Audi dealt with it swiftly and returned the car within a few

days, sending a 'replacement' Spyder in the meantime (it was cover for a photoshoot we had already planned for last month's issue, I should add, not a courtesy R8!).

That Daytona Grey Spyder had the standard seats, rather than my car's (£3000) Recaro buckets, which gave me another chance to think about which is the better option. The standard seats don't drop down quite as far as the Recaros, which means headroom can be tight with the hood up, and neither do they push back far enough from the pedals for taller drivers. With their wide range of adjustment they are more comfortable over long journeys, however. Neither seating option, it seems, is quite perfect. ✕

Dan Prosser

Date acquired	November 2016
Total mileage	9120
Mileage this month	1020
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	22.3

'The list of new cars I'd rather have been driving at the time was a very short one'



Mazda MX-5 RF

Sure, the targa-style roof looks superb, but does it make the back-to-basics MX-5 better to live with?

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I'M writing this doped up on vitamin D after the first few genuinely warm, sunny days of the year, but living with our Mazda MX-5 RF is proving really rather pleasant.

The Retractable Fastback itself has to take some credit for this. It's not, admittedly, quite as nonchalant as the manual soft-top in the regular MX-5, where flipping the roof down or up is the work of seconds. The car is not as quiet when the roof is down, either. The regular drop-top can be a bit more blustery, but the compromised aerodynamics of the RF's targa-style roof mean anything over 50mph creates a miniature hurricane around the buttresses.



The theatre of the roof itself isn't something you can appreciate from the driver's seat, so you don't get much of a kick from the mechatronic ballet behind your head, either. The result is easy to appreciate, though. Noise aside, the cabin still feels cosy on colder days, but there's enough wind-rush to enhance the sensation of speed. And when that weird glowing orb finally emerges, there's nothing quite like getting unfettered access to it rather than sitting in the gloomy pillbox cabin of, well, any modern car that isn't a convertible.

Roof-up refinement is better than it is with the standard soft-top MX-5, too. This might sound like a tedious thing to read in the pages of

'Bumps that shudder through the car while there's a gap above your head disappear with the panel in place'

evo, but it makes a huge difference in the real world when you have longer distances to cover or Bedfordshire is doing its best impression of *The Poseidon Adventure*.

There is a bona fide **evo** benefit too, in the form of extra structural stiffness with the roof up. Bumps that shudder through the car while there's a gap above your head seem to disappear with the panel in place. I still maintain that the best (and best-looking) MX-5 would have a fixed roof

Date acquired	February 2017
Total mileage	4156
Mileage this month	1157
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	45.6

and an E-type-style glazed fastback, but as compromises go, the RF gets pretty close to the mark.

With the drivetrain, too. Already everything seems to be loosening up, the gearchange of the six-speed manual 'box losing its notchiness but keeping its tactility and precision, and the 2-litre, 158bhp in-line four freeing up towards the red line. I've a sneaking suspicion Mazda has been tweaking the MX-5's steering behind the scenes, too. This system is not as talkative as that of the GT86 driven in issue 234's twin-test, but I'm sure it feels more natural than those of the first few Mk4 MX-5s I drove, and indeed of our previous long-termer.

Given most of this month's miles have taken place at motorway pace, the RF is also proving remarkably frugal. A light kerb weight, natural aspiration and a high compression ratio don't just make for a compelling drivers' car, they also make a mockery of downsizing and turbocharging in terms of real-world economy. Again, not immediately relevant to the Thrill of Driving, but jolly useful when you're trying to save for a house deposit and still want a few quid left over for slowly improving your *other* MX-5... **X**

Antony Ingram (@evoAntony)



Ford Focus ST Estate

evo's art director takes 'ownership' of our controversial fast Ford estate



GIVEN THAT THIS IS A CAR with 'corporate purchase' writ so very large across its outer being, you have to admire Ford for stuffing the Focus ST Estate's inner soul with such a surprising amount of feisty rage.

After all, there can't be too many high-flying reps out there clamouring for nearly 250bhp beneath their right loafer. So Ford could just have adorned the Focus with all the relevant ST finery and not gone so wild with the power output. Oh, and the torque, all 265lb ft of it. It might have been better with less.

Am I suggesting it has too much power? The car's previous keeper, Antony Ingram, thought as much. The ST fair shoots down the road, but you get the sense from the writhing steering wheel and the

small, darting changes of direction away from the one you'd ideally like to be heading, that the engine is trying to break free from the car (the fidgety chassis doesn't help here). I've learnt that cross-country you'll go almost as quickly and far less frenetically if you surf along on the torque, revs swelling and ebbing between 2000 and 4000rpm.

Another reason for riding the torque is that our car's gearchange feels as though the synchros are weak. The gearlever moves lifelessly across the gate and then seems to baulk momentarily before selecting the ratio. When we've got a spare moment we'll drop by a Ford dealer to find out if this is an endemic problem or specific to our ST.

On the subject of frustrations, the infotainment system... Given how

much we all interact with electronics these days, it's astonishing that Ford has made such a hash of it. Spelling out a destination on the satnav, for instance: you can stab your finger at the screen and nothing happens. Then nothing happens again. And again. And again. Just as you're giving up, the screen responds to your second prod. So you have to begin again, because spelling out your destination really needs that first prod to come good before moving on to the second.

It's as though Ford spent all the ST's development budget on the engine and couldn't afford to bring the rest of the car up to scratch. With small improvements to the steering and ride, you could brand it a tearaway: I could live with that. **✖**

Rob Gould (@RobGould72)

'Ford could just have adorned the Focus with ST finery and not gone so wild with the power output'

Date acquired	November 2016
Total mileage	14,226
Mileage this month	1175
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	29.5

BMW i8

London-dwelling **evo** columnist Richard Porter is in the perfect position to say if the i8 can hack it in town



Mini JCW Challenge

The editor of **evo**'s online sister-publication *Classic and Performance Car* nabs the keys to our most hardcore hatch

JUST HOW EXTREME IS too extreme? I've always thought that there's something refreshingly honest about the focused specification of the Challenge, so when several members of the **evo** team described the car as being 'a tad too firm', I was itching to borrow it for a bit.

As a machine built using knowledge gained from Mini's eponymous one-make race series, it doesn't muddy the waters with unnecessary compromises. This is no marketing-led sticker special – it feels like a hardcore track car from the very first turn of the wheel.

I first sampled the Challenge on a cold, wet evening. The Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres combined with the ultra-stiff suspension setup didn't provide much in the way of grip, but the car's balance and poise were so fundamentally *right* that after about five miles I was sold.

This wasn't a great surprise as I've had some great drives in Minis over the years. A late-night dash back from north Wales in our old R56 GP long-termers springs to mind. More recently, I enjoyed a few days in an original, 2001 R50 Cooper. This first incarnation of the modern Mini was taut, agile and – even with a

'Yes, it is too firm on some roads, but when you're having so much fun, who cares?'

comparatively measly 114bhp – a real lark when driven enthusiastically.

Over subsequent days with the Challenge the weather became warmer and the roads drier, which in this Mini means grip. An absolutely staggering amount of tarmac-rippling adhesion, in fact. This Mini's incredibly pointy front end means you can position the car with pinpoint accuracy when driving into a bend, while the aggressive limited-slip differential allows you to use the Cup 2s to their maximum all the way from turn-in to corner exit.

You find yourself carrying ever more speed, but the car is so well balanced that even at sane levels it's beautifully adjustable on the throttle. Lumps and bumps can be uncomfortable – even punishing at times – but it takes something particularly nasty to actually

ELECTRIC CARS MAKE A lot of sense in London. And since that's where I live, the editor suggested I run around in his semi-electric i8 for a few weeks.

From a distance, the i8 seems a bit wide, low and conspicuous for everything that driving in the capital entails, by which I mean nipping down rat-runs, thudding over speed bumps and making rude gestures at van drivers who have just taken exception to your car and noisily called you a *WAN'AHHHH!* But after some time with the BMW, this turns out to be wrong, at least on the first two points.

In fact, the i8 is a good city car. It's not as wide as it might seem, the view out is decent, and the ride is very acceptable over the ruts of the city streets. It's a very pleasant way to get around town, especially when purring on electric power, balm-ing you with the smugness of emitting no local pollution and allowing you to feel as futuristic as the i8's brilliant, Batman styling suggests.

Of course, it's not perfect. The battery is very small and fails to last the distance on even a nine-mile commute around the North Circular (BMW claims an electric range of 22 miles), forcing the three-cylinder petrol engine to cut in. Sometimes it

does this with an unseemly juddering and a *putt-putt* beat as if there's an old fairground generator behind you, though on other occasions it sounds like the fantastically frenzied heart of an old Daihatsu Cuore Avanzato.

Either way, the juggling of petrol and electric is sometimes jerky and this, along with the small battery, can make the i8 feel like the first-gen kit that it is. Oh, and thanks to those showing-off doors, getting in is a trust exercise in falling backwards while getting out forces you into an uncool, semi-foetal stumble.

'It's a very pleasant way to get around town, balm-ing you with the smugness of emitting no local pollution'



Left: i8's small battery means regular charging is needed. **Below:** Porter exhibiting the lack of grace required to get out

Date acquired	November 2016
Total mileage	11,452
Mileage this month	1219
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	35.5



Yet none of this diminishes the delight of driving a car that feels as if it's from the near future. I love the looks, the modernity, and the chance to slither about on electrical power, something you can't do in a 911 or R8. Of course, when you get out of town and stick it in Sport mode it's not quite as sharp as those cars, but it's still extremely good fun and has more sides to its character.

The BMW i8 might sometimes feel like a work in progress, but it's still a tremendous thing, and even living in the city, perhaps *especially* living in the city, I'd have one in a heartbeat. It isn't perfect, but it has a quality we want from all cars: it's interesting. ✕

Richard Porter (@sniffpetrol)

unsettle the Challenge. Yes, it is too firm on some roads, but when you're having so much fun, who cares?

So the JCW Challenge is a rather serious bit of kit, then, but it's also hugely enjoyable to drive, even when you're travelling at mundane speeds. And fun should be the name of the game here, shouldn't it? Minis are supposed to make you smile, and spending time in this car certainly put a broad grin on my face.

It's just a shame that it's taken something this extreme to bring the entertainer out of the F56-generation Mini, a car that in its various other guises has so far failed to properly excite us. The Challenge proves that the Mini DNA is still there – it just takes something very focused to find it. ✕

Matthew Hayward
(@evoMatthew)



Date acquired	July 2016
Total mileage	7233
Mileage this month	824
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	29.4



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Porsche 911 Carrera

Transforming a classic performance car's ride and handling is an involved process, but boy is it worth the effort

A COUPLE OF MONTHS ago my Carrera received something of an overhaul. A massive suspension overhaul, in fact, comprising new anti-roll bars, new bushes, new Öhlins spring-and-damper units, new track-rod arms and new drop links. An involved job (see *evo* 234), but the original components were getting on for a quarter of a century old, so were well overdue for a refresh.

Now that the car is out on the road, however, the benefits of the new hardware, and of the geometry being spot-on, are clear. Most noticeable is that the thicker, H&R anti-roll bars keep the body far, far flatter through bends. Throw in the effects of the new track-rod arms and the set of fresh bushes and the 993 responds to steering inputs more enthusiastically than I've ever experienced. Hunkered-down and solid: that's how the car now feels.

Unsurprisingly, the Öhlins kit has had similar results. Previously

if I drove the 993 at a decent pace across a section of British B-road I'd need to keep my eyes peeled for potholes and any rough patches of tarmac. It wouldn't take much to nudge the car off-line and the shockwave a pothole could send into the body was enough to keep me awake at night. Now the chassis is much more fluent, working *with* the surface of the road instead of being bullied by it. The suspension also sends plenty of feedback from the front – crucial in a 911 of this vintage – so not only is the car more capable but I'm also more confident behind the wheel. Bonus.

Key to the dampers' performance is their Dual Flow Valve technology. This acts as a high- and low-speed blow-off valve for the damper fluid, keeping movements beautifully smooth, and you can adjust the compression and rebound characteristics to suit your individual needs. In all honesty, though, the default setting feels just right for



Above: finding the perfect settings for adjustable dampers can take time, but Parrott reckons his Öhlins DFV dampers are nicely calibrated straight out of the box

most roads, so I'll wait for a trackday before altering it.

With the new suspension a real success, there remained one last piece of the handling puzzle to put into place: tyres. Worn Pirelli P Zeros meant new rubber was non-negotiable, so I now have four new Continental SportContact 2s fitted. I didn't want to go too extreme (Michelin Cup 2s, for example) but still desired a tyre that offered better outright grip and feedback than the Pirellis, and in these respects the Contis have a good reputation among 911 owners, and so far I'd have to agree with that opinion.

So, new tyres and suspension for the car; newfound confidence for me. Roll on the summer. ☒

Aston Parrott (@AstonParrott)

Date acquired	April 2016
Total mileage	79,234
Mileage this month	377
Costs this month	£540 (four tyres)
mpg this month	29.9

Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupe

The C63 can do plenty of clever tricks, but not all of them are in keeping with our 'thrill of driving' ethos

WITH OUR SIX-MONTH anniversary approaching fast as I write, it's almost time for me to bid the C63 S farewell. Much like the car itself, that time has gone extremely quickly. There's normally a getting-to-know-you phase with long-termers, but I felt immediately at home with the AMG, and we've got on famously ever since (the 503bhp V8 certainly helps).

With the racing season well under way, I've been using the Benz to ferry me to various race meetings and tests, which means lugging a massive kit bag around containing my fireproof clothing,

crash helmet and box-set of Racing Driver Excuses. Often it proves too big to stash in the boot of a car, so ends up riding shotgun strapped in the passenger seat, but the C63 swallows the bag easily. Impressive stuff from a smallish coupe.

The rear seats are less capacious. Indeed, I can count on the fingers of one hand the times anyone has ventured into the back of the car. Headroom and legroom are at a premium, even for me, so while I'd be fine in there for shorter journeys, it's really only habitable for pre-teen kids. Or in my case, a few coats and the odd empty crisp packet.

Perhaps because I've started racing again, my need for speed is being more readily sated. With the AMG's natural motorway gait being some way above the national speed limit, I've been using the electronic speed-limiter more frequently. It's a useful safeguard that still keeps me engaged with driving, unlike the adaptive cruise-control, which I tried once then vowed never to use again. That's not because it's a bad example of the technology, but because it totally disconnects



me from the process of driving and makes me feel uncomfortable.

Similarly, the lane-departure and collision-warning systems are things I prefer not to use. Two bits of modern technology I do quite like are the subtle red warning light that illuminates when you're creeping too close to the car in front and the blind-spot warning lights in the door mirrors. The latter don't stop me turning my head, but they do provide a valuable additional layer of safety without actually intervening or annoying me.

With just a few weeks left to enjoy the C63 S before it goes back to Mercedes, I want to make the most of every mile I drive. When a car is as entertaining as this big-hearted Benz, it would be a travesty to let the computers have all the fun. ✕

Richard Meaden

(@DickieMeaden)

Date acquired	October 2016
Total mileage	7981
Mileage this month	1829
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	24.4



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THE KNOWLEDGE

🔴 = new entry this month. * = grey import. Entries in italics are for cars no longer on sale. **Issue no.** is for our most recent major test of the car (D = Driven, R = Road test or group test, F = Feature, FF = Fast Fleet). Call 0844 844 0039 to order a back issue. **Price** is on-the-road including VAT and delivery charges. **Engine** is the car's main motor only – additional hybrid tech isn't shown. **Weight** is the car's kerb weight as quoted by the manufacturer. **bhp/ton** is the power-to-weight ratio based on manufacturer's kerb weight. **0-60mph** and **0-100mph** figures in bold are independently recorded, all other performance figures are manufacturers' claims. **CO2 g/km** is the official EC figure and **EC mpg** is the official 'Combined' figure or equivalent.

MAKE & MODEL	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	£19,090	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	£33,055	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 Giulietta QV	199 D	£28,330	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	★★★★☆
Audi S1	211 R	£25,595	4/1984	228/6000	273/1600	1315kg	176	5.8	-	155	162	40.4	+ Compliant and engaging chassis; quick, too - Looks dull without options	★★★★☆
Audi Al quattro	181 R	£3	4/1984	253/6000	258/2500	1420kg	181	5.7	-	152	199	32.8	+ Polished 253bhp all-wheel-drive Al - Just 19 for UK, Porsche Cayman price	★★★★☆
Audi S3	188 R	£13-16	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1395kg	216	5.4	12.5	155	162	40.4	+ Lots of grip and one of the best-sounding four-pot turbos - Still a little too clinical	★★★★☆
Audi RS3 Sportback	221 R	£15-16	5/2480	362/5500	343/1625	1520kg	242	3.6	-	155	189	34.9	+ Addictive five-cylinder noise; monster pace - Chassis not exactly playful	★★★★☆
Audi S3	106 R	£6-12	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1455kg	183	5.6	13.6	155	198	33.2	+ Very fast, very effective, very... er, 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	+ Very fast, very, effective, very... er, quality, with added five-pot character - A little too clinical	★★★★☆
BMW 125i M Sport	176 D	£27,060	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	£32,010	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1430kg	228	5.2	-	155	188	35.3	+ Powertrain, noise, chassis, price - M235i looks nicer, and has an LSD option	★★★★☆
BMW 130i M Sport	106 R	£5-10	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 Saxo VTS	020 R	£9-10	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	£8-12	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	£10-15	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	-	+ A faster, feistier DS3 - Not as hardcore as its 'Racing' tag suggests	★★★★☆
DS 3 Performance	222 D	£20,495	4/1598	205/6000	221/3000	1175kg	177	6.5	-	143	125	50.4	+ All the right ingredients - Undercooked	★★★★☆
Fiat Panda 100HP	132 R	£6-11	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	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST	207 R	£17,545	4/1596	197/5700	214/2500	1088kg	184	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 hatchbacks made even better - Badge snobbery	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST200	225 R	£22,745	4/1596	212/6000	236/2500	1088kg	198	6.7	-	143	140	46.3	+ Massive fun - Mountune version offers the same power for considerably less	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	123 D	£8-13	4/1596	118/6000	112/4050	1045kg	115	9.9	-	120	134	48.7	+ Genuinely entertaining supermini - Grown up compared to Twingo/Swift	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST	075 D	£5-10	4/1999	148/6000	140/4500	1137kg	132	7.9	-	129	-	38.2	+ Great looks, decent brakes - Disappointing chassis, gutless engine	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST TDCi Estate	219 D	£23,295	4/1997	182/3500	295/2000	1488kg	124	8.3	-	135	110	67.3	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets ragged when really pushed	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST	207 R	£22,745	4/1999	247/5500	265/2000	1362kg	184	6.5	-	154	159	41.5	+ Excellent engine - Scrappy when pushed	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST Mountune	187 D	£23,940	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	£5-10	5/2522	222/6000	236/1600	1392kg	162	6.7	16.8	150	224	30.4	+ Value, performance, integrity - Big engine compromises handling	★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk3)	229 R	£31,250	4/2261	345/6000	347/2000	1524kg	230	4.7	12.4	165	175	36.7	+ Torque-vectoring 4WD brings new sensations to hot hatch sector - Needs to be driven hard	★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	195 R	£9-11	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 (Mk2)	181 R	£10-11	5/2522	345/6000	339/2500	1467kg	239	5.6	12.7	165	225	-	+ More power and presence than regular Mk2 RS - Pricey	★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk1)	207 R	£2-10	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	£2-96	4/1993	224/6250	224/3500	1275kg	179	6.2	-	137	-	-	+ The ultimate Essex hot hatch - Unmodified ones are rare, and getting pricey...	★★★★☆
Ford Racing Puma	128 R	£0-01	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	227 R	£30,000	4/1996	306/6500	295/2500	1378kg	226	5.4	12.4	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	£7-11	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 Champ'ship White	126 D	£9-10	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 (EP3)	075 R	£1-05	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	£20,205	4/1591	201/6000	195/1500	1359kg	143	7.3	-	150	170	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	£15,995	4/1498	102/6000	101/4000	1030kg	107	10.4	-	117	135	48.7	+ Fun and funky - Feels tiny after a Mini	★★★★☆
Mazda 3 MPS	137 R	£6-13	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-AMG A45	221 R	£39,995	4/1991	376/6000	350/2250	1480kg	258	3.9	-	155	162	40.9	+ Tremendously fast - But not a true great	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG	194 R	£12-15	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	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper (F56)	194 D	£15,485	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	£18,840	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, nimble - Chassis lacks sparkle found in previous JCWs	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works Challenge (F56)	224 R	£32,000	4/1998	228/5200	236/1250	1215kg	191	6.3	-	152	155	42.2	+ A more hardcore JCW, honed with help from evo! - Just 100 being built	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works Coupe (R58)	164 R	£11-15	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	£9-14	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	£6-14	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 John Cooper Works (R56)	184 R	£8-14	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)	231 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	£2-06	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	£6	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	£21,995	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	★★★★☆
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	225 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 308 GTi 250 by Peugeot Sport	223 R	£26,855	4/1598	246/6000	243/1900	1205kg	207	6.2	-	155	139	47.1	+ A very capable hot hatch... - ...that lacks the sheer excitement of the best in class	★★★★☆
Peugeot 308 GTi 270 by Peugeot Sport	229 R	£28,890	4/1598	266/6000	243/1900	1205kg	224	6.0	-	155	139	47.1	+ Thrilling and engaging on smooth roads - A real handful on bumpy ones	★★★★☆
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	★★★★☆

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Leaderboard: Porsche 911 GT3



OUR CHOICE

Volkswagen Golf R. The Mk7.5 Golf R continues the Mk7's trick of being the answer to just about every automotive question, combining four-wheel-drive security with impressive pace and a truly engaging driving experience. It's both classy and classless, and there's even an estate version.



BEST OF THE REST

If the Golf R is too mature to appeal, try the Ford Focus RS (pictured), or if front-drive is your thing, consider the Golf GTI Clubsport Edition 40 or SEAT's Leon Cupra 300. Amongst the smaller hatches, the Fiesta ST Mountune just edges the Peugeot 208 GTI by Peugeot Sport.

MAKE & MODEL	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 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	★★★★★
Renault Twingo GT	231 D	£13,755	3/898	109/5750	125/2000	1001kg	111	9.6	-	113	115	54.3	★ Nippy performance - Less fun than a rear-engined Renault Sport-fettled car should be	★★★★☆
Renaultsport Twingo 133	175 R	'08-'13	4/1998	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	£20,445	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	229 D	£22,425	4/1618	217/6050	206/2000	1204kg	183	6.6	-	146	135	47.9	★ Willing chassis - Awful paddleshift gearbox	★★★★☆
Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup	195 R	'09-'13	4/1998	197/7100	159/5400	1204kg	166	6.6	16.7	141	190	34.5	★ The hot Clio at its best - They don't make it anymore	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 197 Cup	115 R	'07-'09	4/1998	194/7250	158/5550	1240kg	161	6.9	-	134	-	33.6	★ Quick, polished and capable - Not as much sheer fun as 182 Cup	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 182	066 R	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1110kg	165	6.6	17.5	139	-	34.9	★ Took hot hatches to a new level - Flawed driving position	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 182 Cup	187 R	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.5	-	139	-	34.9	★ Full of beans, fantastic value - Sunday-market upholstery	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio Trophy	231 R	'05-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.6	17.3	140	-	34.9	★ The most fun you can have on three (sometimes two) wheels - Just 500 were built	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 172 Cup	048 R	'02-'04	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1011kg	171	6.5	17.7	138	-	-	★ Bargain old-school hot hatch - Nervous in the wet, no ABS	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio V6 255	231 R	'03-'05	6/2946	251/7150	221/4650	1400kg	182	5.8	-	153	-	23.0	★ Supercar drama without the original's edgy handling - Uninspired interior	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio V6	029 R	'99-'02	6/2946	227/6000	221/3750	1335kg	173	5.8	17.0	145	-	23.0	★ Pocket supercar - Mid-engined handling can be tricky	★★★★★
Renault Clio Williams	233 R	'93-'96	4/1988	148/6100	126/4500	981kg	153	7.6	20.8	134	-	26.0	★ One of the best hot hatches ever - Can be fragile	★★★★★
Renault 5 GT Turbo	195 R	'87-'91	4/1397	118/5750	122/3000	855kg	140	7.3	-	120	-	28.4	★ Clio Williams' grand-daddy - Few unmodified ones left	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Cup-S	223 D	'16	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1394kg	198	5.8	-	158	174	37.7	★ Cup chassis, LSD, the same engine as the Trophy-R - Could be too hardcore for some	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane Nav 275	-	'16	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1394kg	198	5.8	-	158	174	37.7	★ A more luxurious 275 - Cup chassis is an option	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	195 R	'12-'15	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	191	6.4	14.8	158	174	37.7	★ A hot hatch benchmark - Cupholder could be better positioned	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy	212 R	'14-'15	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1376kg	200	5.8	-	159	174	37.7	★ Another cracking Trophy model - Stripped-out Trophy-R is even more thrilling	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy-R	231 R	'14-'15	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1297kg	212	5.8	-	158	174	37.7	★ As absorbing as a 911 GT3 RS on the right road - Too uncompromising for some; pricey	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	139 R	'09-'12	4/1998	247/5500	251/3000	1387kg	181	6.1	14.6	156	190	34.4	★ Fantastic chassis... - ...partially obscured by new-found maturity	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane dCi 175 Cup	119 R	'07-'09	4/1995	173/3750	265/2000	1470kg	119	8.3	23.5	137	-	43.5	★ A diesel with a genuinely sporty chassis - Could take more power	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 230 FI Team R26	195 R	'07-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1345kg	171	6.2	16.0	147	-	-	★ The car the R26.R is based on - FI Team stickers in dubious taste	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	231 R	'08-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1220kg	189	5.8	15.1	147	-	-	★ One of the true hot hatch heroes - Two seats, plastic rear windows	★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	225 R	£18,100	4/1798	189/4300	236/1450	1185kg	162	6.7	-	146	145	45.6	★ Quick, competent, refined, and manual only - Not exciting enough	★★★★☆
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	183 D	'10-'15	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1259kg	144	6.9	-	142	139	47.9	★ Punchy engine, unflappable DSG - Lacks engagement, DSG only	★★★★☆
SEAT Leon Cupra 300	234 R	£29,840	4/1984	296/5900	280/1800	1300kg	231	5.7	-	155	158	40.9	★ Already potent Cupra gets yet another 10bhp - The Mk7.5 Golf R	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra 290	227 R	'16-'17	4/1984	286/5900	258/1700	1300kg	224	6.4	13.4	155	156	42.2	★ Serious pace and agility for Golf GTI money, now with an extra 10bhp - The Mk7 Golf R	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra 280	220 R	'14-'15	4/1984	276/5600	258/1750	1300kg	216	5.8	-	155	149	44.1	★ Serious pace and agility for Golf GTI money - The Mk7 Golf R	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra	105 R	'07-'11	4/1984	237/5700	221/2200	1375kg	175	6.3	-	153	190	34.0	★ Great engine, composure - Doesn't have adjustability of old Cupra R	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R	139 R	'10-'12	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1375kg	193	6.1	14.0	155	190	34.9	★ Bold car, blinding engine - Lacks the character of its rival mega-hatches	★★★★☆
SEAT Leon Cupra R 225	067 R	'03-'06	4/1781	222/5900	260/2200	1376kg	164	6.9	-	150	-	32.1	★ Cross-country pace, practicality, value - Not as thrilling as some	★★★★☆
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146 D	'10-'14	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1218kg	148	7.3	-	139	148	45.6	★ Well priced, well made, with great engine and DSG 'box - Dull steering	★★★★☆
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk1)	077 R	'03-'07	4/1896	130/4000	229/1900	1315kg	100	9.6	-	127	-	55.4	★ Fascinatingly fun and frugal hot hatch - A little short on steering feel	★★★★☆
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk3)	187 D	£24,230	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1345kg	164	6.8	-	154	142	45.6	★ Quick, agile, roomier than a Golf - Ride is harsh for what could be a family car	★★★★☆
Skoda Octavia vRS 230 (Mk3)	215 D	£26,350	4/1984	227/4700	258/1500	1345kg	171	6.7	-	155	142	45.6	★ Limited-slip diff makes for a sharper steer - It could handle more than the extra 10bhp	★★★★☆
Skoda Octavia vRS TDI 4x4 (Mk3)	223 D	£27,590	4/1968	181/3500	206/1750	1475kg	125	7.6	-	142	129	57.7	★ Four-wheel drive tightens the vRS chassis - Diesel and DSG only	★★★★☆
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk2)	163 R	'05-'13	4/1998	197/5100	206/1700	1395kg	143	7.3	-	149	175	37.7	★ Drives like a GTI but costs much less - Green brake calipers?	★★★★☆
Subaru Impreza STi 330S	124 R	'08-'10	4/2457	325/5400	347/3400	1505kg	219	4.4	-	155	-	-	★ A bit quicker than the STi... - ...but not better	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk2)	175 R	£13,999	4/1586	134/6900	118/4400	1045kg	130	8.7	-	121	147	44.1	★ The Swift's still a great pocket rocket - But it's lost a little adjustability	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk1)	132 R	'05-'11	4/1586	123/6800	109/4800	1030kg	121	8.9	-	124	165	39.8	★ Entertaining handling, well built - Lacking in steering feedback	★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	211 R	£18,125	4/1598	202/5800	206/1900	1278kg	161	6.5	-	143	174	37.7	★ Begs to be wrung out - You'll need the £2400 Performance Pack	★★★★☆
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154 R	'07-'14	4/1598	189/5850	192/1980	1166kg	165	6.8	-	140	172	38.7	★ Looks snazzy, punchy engine - Lacks feel, uncouth compared with rivals	★★★★☆
Vauxhall Corsa VXR N'ring/Clubsport	164 R	'11-'13/'14	4/1598	202/5750	206/2250	1166kg	176	6.5	-	143	178	-	★ VXR gets more power and a limited-slip diff - But they come at a price	★★★★☆
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk2)	207 R	£27,850	4/1998	276/5500	295/2500	1475kg	190	5.9	-	155	184	34.9	★ Better than the car it replaces; loony turbo pace - Lacks RS Mégane's precision	★★★★☆
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk1)	102 R	'05-'11	4/1998	237/5600	236/2400	1393kg	173	6.7	16.7	152	221	30.7	★ Fast and furious - Lacks a little composure and precision	★★★★☆
VW Up/SEAT Mii/Skoda Citigo	171 R	£8275+	3/999	59/5000	70/3000	854kg	70	14.1	-	99	105	62.8	★ Accomplished city car is dynamically sound... - ...but predictably slow	★★★★☆
VW Polo GTI	211 R	£19,125	4/1798	189/4200	236/1450	1197kg	160	6.7	-	146	139	47.1	★ Smooth and brawny - Fiesta ST is more engaging	★★★★☆
VW Polo GTI	154 R	'10-'14	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1184kg	153	6.8	-	142	139	47.9	★ Modern-day mk1 Golf GTI gets twin-clutch DSG - It's a little bit bland	★★★★☆
VW Golf GTI (Mk7.5)	233 D	£27,865	4/1984	227/4700	258/1500	1289kg	179	6.4	-	155	145	44.8	★ Still the most capable all-round hot hatch - Should be more thrilling	★★★★☆
VW Golf R (Mk7.5)	235 D	£32,310	4/1984	306/5500	280/2000	1408kg	221	5.1	-	155	148	44.1	★ Outrageous yet accessible performance - Manual gearshift isn't the best	★★★★☆
VW Golf GTD (Mk7)	200 D	£26,955	4/1968	181/3500	280/1750	1302kg	141	7.5	-	143	114	64.2	★ Pace, fuel economy, sounds good for a diesel - Lacks the extra edge of the GTI	★★★★☆
VW Golf GTI (Mk7)	229 R	£28,515	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1276kg	173	6.5	-	153	139	47.1	★ Brilliantly resolved - Lacks the punch of newer rivals	★★★★☆
VW Golf GTI Clubsport Edition 40 (Mk7)	230 D	£30,935	4/1984	286/5350	280/1700	1300kg	224	6.3	-	155	162	40.4	★ A faster, sharper, more entertaining GTI - Some rivals are more exciting on track	★★★★☆
VW Golf GTI Clubsport S (Mk7)	229 R	'16	4/1984	306/5800	280/1850	1285kg	242	5.8	12.8	165	172	38.2	★ Runner-up at EVO Car of the Year 2016 - Only 400 built	★★★★★
VW Golf R (Mk7)	220 R	£31,685	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1401kg	215	5.2	12.4	155	165	39.8	★ A VW 'R' model you can take seriously - Mégane 275 just edges it as a pure drivers' car	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk6)	172 R	'09-'13	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1318kg	160	6.4	16.5	148	170	38.7	★ Still a very accomplished hot hatch - 207bhp isn't a lot any more	★★★★★
VW Golf R (Mk6)	140 D	'10-'13	4/1984	266/6000	258/2500	1446kg	187	5.7	-	155	199	33.2	★ Great engine, tremendous pace and poise - High price, adaptive dampers optional	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk5)	195 R	'04-'09	4/1984	197/5100	207/1800	1336kg	150	6.7	17.9	145	192	35.2	★ Character and ability: the GTI's return to form - Lacking firepower?	★★★★★
VW Golf R32 (Mk5)	087 R	'06-'09	6/3189	246/6300	236/2500	1466kg	170	5.8	15.2	155	257	26.4	★ Traction'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	★ 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	★ Good-looking, desirable Volvo - Lacks edge of best hatches. Avoid auto	★★★★☆

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Driven

Tajima Rimac Pikes Peak car



Head-to-head

Mégane Trophy v Golf R



Unwrapped

Alpine A110



Driven

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OUR CHOICE

Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio. At last, an Alfa Romeo we can love not just for its badge, for the noise it makes and for being Italian, but because it's a great car. In fact, the Giulia Quadrifoglio is a saloon car that feels like a sports car – and thankfully that sports car isn't a 4C.



BEST OF THE REST

Mercedes-AMG's new E63 S 4Matic+ (pictured) has set the bar high for the next M5, while Porsche's Panamera Turbo feels good for its 7min 38sec Ring time. Move down a size and the Mercedes-AMG C63 S is a highly desirable package, although some may prefer the more focused feel of BMW's M3.

	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 Giulia 2.0 Turbo Super	234 D	£31,180	4/1995	197/5000	243/1750	1429kg	140	6.6	-	146	138	47.9	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio	229 R	£59,000	6/2891	503/6500	443/2500	1524kg	335	3.9	-	191	198	40.3	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Stelvio	234 D	£35,000	4/1995	276/5250	295/1750	1660kg	169	5.7	-	143	-	-	★★★★★
Alpina D3 Biturbo (F30)	192 D	£47,950	6/2993	345/4000	516/1500	1585kg	221	4.6	-	173	139	53.3	★★★★★
Alpina B3 Biturbo (F30)	188 D	£57,450	6/2979	404/5500	442/3000	1630kg	252	4.3	-	190	177	37.2	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide S	201 D	£147,950	12/5935	552/6650	465/5500	1990kg	282	4.2	-	203	300	21.9	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide	141 R	10-13	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1990kg	240	5.2	-	188	355	-	★★★★★
Audi S3 Saloon	192 D	£32,330	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1430kg	210	5.3	-	155	162	26.4	★★★★★
Audi RS3 Saloon	235 R	£46,000	5/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1515kg	264	4.1	-	155	188	34.0	★★★★★
Audi S4 (B9)	225 D	£44,000	6/2995	349/5400	369/1370	1630kg	218	4.7	-	155	166	38.7	★★★★★
Audi S4 (B8)	166 D	08-16	6/2995	328/5500	324/2900	1705kg	195	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (B8)	216 R	12-15	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1795kg	251	4.5	10.5	174	249	26.4	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B7)	231 R	05-08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1650kg	255	4.5	10.9	155	-	-	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B5)	192 R	00-02	6/2671	375/6100	325/2500	1620kg	236	4.8	12.1	170	-	17.0	★★★★★
Audi S4	214 R	94-95	5/2226	315/6500	302/3000	1595kg	201	4.8	13.1	162	-	18.0	★★★★★
Audi S5 Sportback	233 D	£47,000	6/2995	349/5400	369/1370	1660kg	214	4.7	-	155	166	38.7	★★★★★
Audi S6	091 D	06-11	10/5204	429/6800	398/3000	1910kg	228	5.2	-	155	299	22.4	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C7)	203 R	£79,505	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1935kg	290	3.6	8.2	155	223	29.4	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant Performance (C7)	224 D	£86,420	8/3993	597/6100	553/2500	1950kg	311	3.7	-	155	223	29.4	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C6)	116 R	08-10	10/4991	572/6250	479/1500	2025kg	287	4.3	9.7	155	333	20.2	★★★★★
Audi RS7 Avant (C5)	052 R	02-04	8/4172	444/5700	443/1950	1865kg	242	4.8	11.6	155	-	19.3	★★★★★
Audi S7 Sportback	208 R	£84,485	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1920kg	292	3.9	-	155	229	28.8	★★★★★
Audi S7 Sportback	171 D	£64,380	8/3993	414/5000	406/1400	1945kg	216	4.6	-	155	225	-	★★★★★
Audi S8 Plus	217 D	£98,395	8/3993	597/6100	553/2500	1990kg	305	3.8	-	155	229	28.2	★★★★★
Audi RS Q3	206 D	£46,120	5/2480	335/5300	332/1600	1655kg	206	4.8	-	155	203	32.1	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur V8	200 D	£132,800	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2342kg	217	4.9	-	183	254	25.9	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur V8 S	230 D	£142,800	8/3993	521/6000	502/1700	2342kg	226	4.6	-	190	254	25.9	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur	185 D	£154,900	12/5998	616/6000	590/1600	2400kg	261	4.3	-	200	343	19.0	★★★★★
Bentley Bentayga	217 D	£162,700	12/5950	606/5000	664/1350	2365kg	258	4.0	-	187	296	21.6	★★★★★
Bentley Mulsanne	178 F	£229,360	8/6752	505/4200	752/1750	2610kg	197	5.1	-	184	342	19.3	★★★★★
Bentley Mulsanne Speed	235 D	£252,000	8/6752	530/4000	811/1750	2610kg	206	4.8	-	190	342	19.3	★★★★★
BMW 340i M Sport Touring (F31)	228 D	£41,635	6/2998	321/5500	332/1380	1615kg	202	5.1	-	155	158	41.5	★★★★★
BMW M3 (F80)	211 R	£56,605	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1520kg	284	4.1	8.6	155	204	32.1	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E90)	123 R	08-11	8/3999	494/8300	295/3900	1605kg	262	4.9	10.7	165	290	22.8	★★★★★
BMW M3 CRT (E90)	179 R	11-12	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1580kg	285	4.4	-	180	295	-	★★★★★
BMW M5 (F10M)	208 R	11-16	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1870kg	300	4.3	-	155	232	28.5	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E60)	129 R	04-10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1755kg	289	4.7	10.4	155	-	19.6	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E39)	110 R	99-03	8/4941	394/6600	369/3800	1795kg	223	4.9	11.5	155	-	-	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E34)	110 R	92-96	6/3795	340/6900	295/4750	1653kg	209	5.9	13.6	155	-	-	★★★★★
BMW M6 Gran Coupe	190 D	£95,665	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1875kg	299	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	★★★★★
BMW M760Li xDrive	233 D	£132,310	12/6592	602/5500	590/1550	2180kg	281	3.7	-	155	294	22.1	★★★★★
BMW X5 M50d	191 D	£65,240	6/2993	376/4000	546/2000	2190kg	155	5.3	-	155	173	42.8	★★★★★
BMW X6 M	212 D	£93,100	8/4395	567/6000	553/2200	2265kg	245	4.2	-	155	258	25.4	★★★★★
BMW X6 M	134 D	09-15	8/4395	547/6000	502/1500	2305kg	241	4.7	-	171	325	20.3	★★★★★
Cadillac CTS-V	148 R	£67,030	8/6162	556/6100	551/3800	1928kg	293	3.9	-	191	365	18.1	★★★★★
Cadillac CT6	226 D	£69,990	6/2997	411/5700	409/2500	1950kg	214	5.7	-	149	223	28.2	★★★★★
Honda Accord Type R	012 R	98-03	4/2157	209/7200	158/6700	1306kg	163	6.1	17.4	142	-	29.4	★★★★★
Infiniti Q50S Hybrid	195 D	£39,995	6/3498	359/6800	402/5000	1750kg	208	5.1	-	155	144	45.6	★★★★★
Jaguar XE 2.0d AWD	227 D	£33,825	4/1999	178/4000	317/1750	1615kg	112	7.5	-	140	123	60.6	★★★★★
Jaguar XE S	213 D	£44,865	6/2995	335/6500	332/4500	1635kg	208	4.9	-	155	194	34.9	★★★★★
Jaguar XF S	214 D	£49,945	6/2995	375/6500	332/4500	1710kg	223	5.0	-	155	198	34.0	★★★★★
Jaguar XF S Diesel	219 D	£49,945	6/2993	296/4000	516/2000	1750kg	172	5.8	-	155	144	51.4	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR	181 D	09-15	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1800kg	284	4.8	10.2	155	270	24.4	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR-S	208 R	13-15	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1800kg	306	4.4	-	186	270	24.4	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ 3.0 V6 Diesel	148 D	£58,690	6/2993	271/4000	442/2000	1835kg	150	6.0	-	155	167	46.3	★★★★★
Jaguar XJR	191 D	£91,755	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1875kg	294	4.4	-	174	270	24.4	★★★★★
Jaguar F-Pace 3.0 V6 Supercharged	222 D	£65,275	6/2995	375/6500	332/4500	1884kg	202	5.1	-	155	209	57.7	★★★★★
Land Rover Discovery Sport	205 D	£32,395	4/2179	187/3500	310/1750	1863kg	100	9.8	-	117	159	46.3	★★★★★
Lexus GS F	221 D	£69,995	8/4969	470/7100	391/4800	1790kg	267	4.6	-	168	260	25.2	★★★★★
Lexus IS F	151 R	07-12	8/4969	417/6600	372/5200	1714kg	247	4.7	10.9	173	270	24.4	★★★★★

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	ISSUE NO.	PRICE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT	BHP/TON	0-60MPH	0-100MPH	MAX MPH	CO2 G/KM	EC MPG	EVO RATING	
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, ride lacks decorum	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte GTS	226 D	£110,405	8/3798	523/6800	479/2250	1900kg	280	4.7	-	193	250	26.4	+ Still pretty - Off the pace dynamically	★★★★★
Maserati Levante Diesel	221 D	£54,335	6/2897	271/4000	442/2000	2205kg	125	6.9	-	143	189	39.2	+ Impressive blend of ride and handling - Diesel performance is mild for a Maserati	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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 - Pricy 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	31.7	+ An aggressive and focused sports crossover - Low on driver interaction	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C43 4Matic Estate	228 D	£45,250	8/2996	362/5500	383/2000	1660kg	222	4.7	-	155	181	35.8	+ Incredibly fast and composed - Difficult to engage with	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63	209 D	£59,800	8/3982	469/5500	479/1750	1640kg	291	4.1	-	155	192	34.5	+ Fast and feelsome - Lacks the ultimate finesse and response of the C63 S	★★★★★
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	1635kg	228	5.2	-	155	-	23.7	+ Furiously fast, commendably discreet - Overshadowed by M3 and RS4	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG E63 S 4Matic+ (W213)	231 R	£87,745	8/3982	603/5750	621/2500	1880kg	326	3.4	-	155	203	31.7	+ Fast, refined, effective and fun - At nearly two tons, it's not 911 nimble	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG E63 S (W212)	208 R	'13-'16	8/5461	577/5500	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	+ Indulgent chassis, brilliant engine, now with an extra 1lbhp - 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	577/5500	590/1750	1995kg	294	4.4	-	155	237	27.9	+ Monster pace - Average steering feel	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG S	199 D	£86,500	8/5461	577/5500	590/1750	1795kg	327	4.1	-	155	231	28.5	+ Remains quick and characterful - Dated gearbox, no four-wheel drive option in the UK	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	178 R	'11-'14	8/5461	518/5250	516/1700	1795kg	293	4.2	-	155	231	28.5	+ Monster performance, 549bhp an option - Not as desirable as a Bentley or Aston	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	099 R	'06-'11	8/6208	507/6100	464/2650	1905kg	270	4.5	-	155	345	19.5	+ Beauty, comfort, awesome performance - M5 has the edge on B-roads	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz GLE63 AMG S	218 D	£94,405	8/5461	577/5500	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	577/5500	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	155	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	1400kg	221	4.8	-	157	-	20.5	+ Extra pace, extra attitude - Extra money	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII	031 R	'02-'03	4/1997	276/6500	282/3500	1360kg	206	5.0	13.0	140	-	20.4	+ Terrific all-rounder - You tell us	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI Tommi Makinen Edition	231 R	'00-'01	4/1997	276/6500	275/2750	1365kg	205	4.6	-	150	-	-	+ Our favourite Evo - Subtle it is not	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo	227 D	£113,975	8/3996	542/5750	568/1960	1995kg	276	3.6	-	190	212	30.4	+ Searing pace with body control that's a real step up; superb rear wing, too - Still very heavy	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera GTS	208 R	'11-'16	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	'10-'16	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	'13-'18	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	444/6500	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 SDV8	222 FF	£84,350	8/4367	334/3500	546/1750	2359kg	144	6.5	-	140	219	33.6	+ A brilliant long-distance machine - Doesn't live up to the 'Sport' branding	★★★★★
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	

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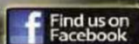


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OUR CHOICE

Lotus 3-Eleven. It may not be groundbreaking but it is hugely exciting. The V6 sounds fabulous and the open linkage on the manual gearbox looks fantastic. A circuit is obviously its natural habitat but it has surprisingly civilised road manners, so you could happily drive to and from a trackday in it.



BEST OF THE REST

Jaguar's F-type (pictured) impresses in most forms, and we'd defy anyone not to be charmed by Aston Martin's V8 or V12 Vantage S Roadsters. Unsurprisingly, you won't find a duffer in Lotus's Elise and Exige Roadster ranges, and the same goes for Caterham's evergreen Seven.

	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 124 Spider	225 D	£29,850	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1060kg	161	6.8	-	143	148	44.1	+ Predictable and fun rear end - Vague and lifeless front end	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 4C Spider	223 R	£60,255	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	★★★★★
Alpina B4 Biturbo Convertible	227 D	£62,950	6/2979	404/5500	442/3000	1840kg	223	4.5	-	187	186	35.3	+ A great GT - Not as exciting to drive as the numbers may suggest	★★★★★
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	205 R	£64,800	4/1998	350/8400	243/6100	550kg	647	2.6	-	155	-	-	+ Remarkable balance, poise and pace - Pricey	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 245	113 D	'08-'12	4/1998	245/8200	155/5200	500kg	498	3.2	-	150	-	33.0	+ The Atom just got a little bit better - Can still be a bit draughty...	★★★★★
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	451/5750	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	'05-'15	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1815kg	263	4.6	-	190	368	18.2	+ Consummate cruiser and capable when pushed - Roof-up wind noise	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS Volante	133 D	'09-'12	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1810kg	286	4.3	-	191	388	17.3	+ A feelgood car par excellence - It's a bit of a heavyweight	★★★★★
Audi TTS Roadster	207 D	£41,085	4/1984	306/5800	280/1800	1450kg	214	5.2	-	155	169	38.7	+ A serious proposition, ranking close behind a Boxster S - Coupe still looks better	★★★★★
Audi TTS Roadster	122 D	'08-'14	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1455kg	187	5.6	-	155	189	34.9	+ Effortlessly quick - Long-term appeal open to question	★★★★★
Audi TT RS Roadster	133 D	'09-'14	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1510kg	225	4.7	-	155	212	31.0	+ Terrific engine... - is the best thing about it	★★★★★
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 Continental 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	★★★★★
BMW Z4 sDrive 35i M Sport (Mk2)	186 D	£43,005	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1505kg	204	5.2	-	155	219	30.1	+ Looks, hard-top versatility, drivetrain - Clumsy chassis is upset by ragged surfaces	★★★★★
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 Roadster	091 R	'06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1410kg	244	4.8	-	155	-	23.3	+ Exhilarating and characterful, that engine - Stiff suspension	★★★★★
BMW M Roadster	002 R	'98-'02	6/3246	325/7400	258/4900	1375kg	240	5.3	-	155	-	25.4	+ Fresh-air M3, that motor, hunky looks - M Coupe drives better	★★★★★
BMW 435i Convertible	194 D	£45,680	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 M4 Convertible (F83)	202 D	£61,145	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1750kg	247	4.6	-	155	213	31.0	+ As good as fast four-seat drop-tops get... - but still not as good as a coupe or saloon	★★★★★
BMW 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	205 R	£19,710	4/660	80/7000	79/3400	490kg	166	6.9	-	100	-	-	+ The fabulous Seven formula at its most basic - Gets pricey with options	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 270	219 R	£23,795	4/1596	135/6800	122/4100	540kg	254	5.0	-	122	-	-	+ Feisty engine, sweetly balanced, manic and exciting - The temptation of more power	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 310R	227 D	£24,995	4/1596	152/7000	124/5600	540kg	286	4.8	-	126	-	-	+ Intense and exciting - Sticky tyres limit the amount of throttle adjustability	★★★★★
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	223 R	£30,795	4/1999	210/7600	150/6300	560kg	381	4.0	10.3	136	-	-	+ It's the one we built for ourselves - Trickier on the limit than lesser-powered Sevens	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 620S	220 D	£44,995	4/1999	310/7700	219/7350	610kg	516	3.4	-	155	-	-	+ Ludicrous, near-620R pace, with added habitability - Well, 'habitable' for a Seven...	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 620R	187 R	£50,795	4/1999	310/7700	219/7350	572kg	551	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	4/1596	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	4/1596	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	'09-'06	4/1796	230/8600	155/7200	460kg	510	3.6	8.8	146	-	-	+ The K-series Seven at its very best - No cup holders	★★★★★
Ferrari California T	229 D	£155,254	8/3855	553/7500	557/4750	1729kg	324	3.6	-	196	250	26.9	+ Turbocharged engine is a triumph - Still places daily useability above outright thrills	★★★★★
Fiat 124 Spider	228 R	£19,545	4/1368	138/5000	177/2250	1050kg	134	7.5	-	134	148	44.1	+ It's an affordable Italian(ish) sports car - Lacks Italian brio	★★★★★
Honda S2000	118 D	'99-'09	4/1997	237/8300	153/7500	1260kg	191	6.2	-	150	-	-	+ An alternative and rev-happy roadster - The Boxster's better	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type Convertible	186 R	£56,260	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	£66,260	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	-	£92,310	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 SVR Convertible	230 D	£115,485	8/5000	567/6500	516/3500	1720kg	335	3.5	-	195	269	25.0	+ Huge performance - Unpleasant soundtrack; unsettled on bumpy roads	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type Project 7	212 R	'15	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 - Price	★★★★★
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 Sport	-	£32,300	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	866kg	157	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	+ 1.6-litre Elise is light and fantastic - Smaller engine could put some off	★★★★★
Lotus Elise Sport 220	-	£39,300	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	924kg	239	4.2	-	145	173	37.7	+ Epic grip and pace - £39k for an Elise?	★★★★★
Lotus Elise Cup 250	224 R	£45,600	4/1798	243/7200	184/3500	931kg	265	3.9	-	154	175	37.7	+ Quickest Elise yet - Prioritises grip over adjustability	★★★★★
Lotus Elise 1.6 Club Racer	183 R	'11-'15	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	852kg	160	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	+ Even lighter, even more focused - Are you prepared to go this basic?	★★★★★



MERCEDES-BENZ E55 AMG

The E55 stepped out of the M5's shadow when it got a 469bhp supercharged 5.4-litre V8. Here's what David Vivian thought

The soft-edged V8 burble acquires a nape-tingling edge and resonant bellow as the acceleration grows more intense. The chassis, with its air suspension and variable damping, treads a deft line between loose-limbed suppleness and accurate body control. With the aid of

ESP and traction electronics, the E55 can make quite stupendous progress on twisty roads. In fact, it's so fast you begin to question if the increasingly intense game of Top Trumps currently engaging Germany's premium car manufacturers is spiralling rapidly out of control.

'Hit the ESP defeat button and a bit of smoky sideways action isn't out of the question, though it isn't as much fun as it would be in an M5 or S-type R. But then it doesn't feel as if Mercedes has optimised the E55 for that style of driving, anyway. Either way, I'm not complaining.'

ISSUE 050, DECEMBER 2002

KW clubsport

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	ISSUE NO.	PRICE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT	BHP/TON	0-60MPH	0-100MPH	MAX MPH	CO2 G/KM	EC MPG	EVO RATING	
Lotus Elise S Club Racer	189 D	13-15	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 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 S18	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 (SI)	235 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 Exige Sport 350 Roadster	221 R	\$55,900	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1125kg	312	3.7	-	145	235	28.0	+ An Exige with added sunny-day appeal - A Boxster would be more practical	★★★★★
Lotus Exige Sport 380 Roadster	231 R	\$67,900	6/3456	375/6700	302/5000	1110kg	343	3.5	-	178	242	27.2	+ Like the 350 Roadster, but faster and even purer - A Boxster would be more practical	★★★★★
Lotus Exige S Roadster	186 R	13-15	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1166kg	301	3.8	-	145	235	28.0	+ Like the hard-top Exige S, but more road-friendly - 981 Boxster S is a better all-rounder	★★★★★
Lotus 3-Eleven	220 R	\$82,500	6/3456	410/7000	302/3000	925kg	450	3.3	-	174	-	-	+ A fantastically exciting Lotus - If not exactly a groundbreaking one	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven	126 R	07-11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	720kg	267	4.3	-	140	-	-	+ Not far off supercharged car's pace - Pricey once it's made road-legal	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven Supercharged	123 R	07-11	4/1796	252/8000	179/7000	670kg	382	3.8	-	150	-	-	+ Impressive on road and track - Not hardcore enough for some	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	138 R	09-11	4/1796	266/8200	179/7200	670kg	403	3.7	-	155	-	-	+ evo Track Car of the Year 2009 - It's a 76-grand Lotus with no roof	★★★★★
Lotus 340R	126 R	00	4/1796	190/7800	146/5000	658kg	293	4.5	12.5	126	-	-	+ Hardcore road-racer... - ...that looks like a dune buggy from Mars	★★★★★
Lotus Elan SE	095 R	89-95	4/1588	165/6600	148/4200	1022kg	164	6.7	-	137	-	21.0	+ Awesome front-drive chassis - Rather uninvolved	★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio	142 D	\$98,940	8/4691	434/7000	332/4750	1980kg	223	5.2	-	177	337	19.5	+ As good to drive as it is to look at - Lacks the grunt of some rivals	★★★★★
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 i15 (Mk4)	230 F	\$18,495	4/1496	129/7000	111/4800	975kg	134	8.3	-	127	139	47.1	+ Lightest MX-5 since the Mk1 - Lacks intensity	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 2.0 Sport Nav (Mk4)	228 R	\$23,695	4/1998	158/6000	147/4600	1000kg	161	7.3	-	133	161	40.9	+ Brilliant basic recipe - The desire for stiffer suspension and more power	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 RF (Mk4)	234 R	\$23,095	4/1998	158/6000	147/4600	1045kg	154	7.4	-	134	161	40.9	+ Drives just like its soft-top brother - Significant wind noise with the roof down	★★★★★
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 i18i (Mk3)	091 R	05-09	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1080kg	108	9.3	-	122	-	-	+ Gearchange, interior - Lost some of the charm of old MX-5; dubious handling	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 i18i (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 i16 (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-AMG SL C43	222 D	\$45,950	6/2996	362/5500	383/2000	1520kg	242	4.7	-	155	178	26.2	+ Twin-turbo V6 well-suited to baby roadster - But also highlights the chassis' age	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK 55 AMG	186 R	12-15	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 GT-Ronic auto box, uneven dynamics	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Cabriolet	226 D	\$68,115	8/3982	501/5500	516/1750	1850kg	276	4.1	-	155	208	31.7	+ A born hooligan - Body flex takes away some control	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG SL C63	228 D	\$114,115	8/5461	577/5500	664/2250	1770kg	331	4.1	-	155	234	28.0	+ Effortless performance - Needs more involvement to go with the pace	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT C Roadster	235 D	\$139,445	8/3982	549/5750	502/1900	1678kg	332	3.7	-	196	259	24.8	+ Drop-top version of arguably the best AMG GT yet - Road noise can get wearing	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL 500	169 D	12-16	8/4663	429/5250	516/1800	1710kg	255	4.6	-	155	212	31.0	+ Wacky performance, beautifully engineered - Lacks ultimate sports car feel	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	171 D	12-16	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	13-16	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	177 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 SL65 AMG	071 D	04-10	12/5980	604/4800	737/2000	2035kg	302	4.1	-	155	-	-	+ Gob-smacking performance - Gob-smacking price	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Roadster	167 R	12-14	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1660kg	345	3.7	-	197	308	21.4	+ Loses none of the coupe's talents - But (understandably) loses the gullwing doors	★★★★★
Morgan 3 Wheeler	198 R	\$31,140	2/1976	82/5250	103/3250	525kg	159	6.0	-	115	215	30.3	+ Quirky, characterful, brilliant - Can become a two-wheeler if you push too hard	★★★★★
Morgan Plus 8 Speedster	202 R	\$71,140	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1000kg	368	4.2	-	148	282	23.3	+ Fantastic old-school roadster experience - Gets unsettled by big bumps	★★★★★
Morgan Plus 8	171 R	\$86,345	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1100kg	334	4.4	-	155	256	25.7	+ Hilarious mix of old looks and new mechanicals - Refinement is definitely old-school	★★★★★
Morgan Aero SuperSports	145 R	\$128,045	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.2	-	170	-	-	+ It's an Aero 8 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 718 Boxster	224 D	\$41,739	4/1988	296/6500	280/1950	1335kg	225	5.1	-	170	168	38.2	+ Chassis as good as ever - Four-cylinder's tuneless din would be hard to live with	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Boxster S	222 R	\$50,695	4/2497	345/6500	310/1900	1355kg	259	4.4	9.8	177	184	34.9	+ Still sensationally capable - Turbo four-cylinder engine lacks appeal of the old flat-six	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (981)	172 R	12-16	6/2706	261/6700	206/4500	1310kg	202	5.4	-	164	192	34.5	+ Goes and looks better - Shame about the electric steering	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (981)	186 R	12-16	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	14-16	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)	2123 R	15-16	6/3800	370/6700	310/4750	1315kg	286	4.5	-	180	230	28.5	+ The fastest, most rewarding Boxster yet - Feedback trails the Cayman GT4's	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (987)	161 R	05-12	6/3436	306/6400	265/5500	1355kg	229	5.3	-	170	223	29.7	+ Second-gen Boxster's as brilliant as ever - It's a typically Porsche redesign	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	188 R	10-12	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1275kg	252	5.0	-	166	221	29.1	+ Lighter, more driver-centric Boxster - Collapsed-broly roof not the most practical	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (986)	070 R	99-04	6/3179	256/6200	229/4600	1320kg	200	5.7	-	164	-	26.9	+ Added power over the non-S Boxster is seductive - Very little	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Renault Sport Spider	231 R	\$66-99	4/1998	148/6000	136/4500	930kg	157	6.5	-	131	-	-	+ Rarity, unassisted steering - Heavier than you'd hope; disappointing engine	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Dawn	222 D	\$250,000	12/6592	563/5250	575/1500	2560kg	223	4.9	-	155	330	20.0	+ Effortless driving experience - Driver involvement not a priority	★★★★★
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	-	175	-	-	+ 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	+ Gruff diamond - A few rough edges	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220	023 R	00-04	4/2198	145/5800	150/4000	875kg	168	5.6	-	136	-	34.4	+ Absurdly good Vauxhall - The badge?	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220 Turbo	066 R	03-05	4/1998	197/5500	184/1950	930kg	215	4.7	-	151	-	-	+ Nothing comes close for the money - Marginal everyday usability	★★★★★
Vuol 05	220 R	\$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	★★★★★

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OUR CHOICE

Porsche 911 Carrera GTS. Super-agile, ultra-responsive and very rewarding to drive, the 991.2-generation Carrera GTS is everything a 911 should be. It even has the best steering yet in a 991 Carrera. Just make sure you order the two-wheel-drive, manual coupe version.



BEST OF THE REST

Lower down the 911 range, the 991.2 Carrera and Carrera S haven't been ruined by the addition of turbos. Elsewhere, Jaguar's F-type R Coupe (left) is a real hoot, and we'd take a Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupe over BMW M4, while Lotus's Exige and Evora continue to offer sublime handling in all guises.

	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 8C Competizione	120 R	£7-09	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 ★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage	169 D	£84,995	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1630kg	262	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	★ 2012 upgrades keep the V8 Vantage on song - Starting to feel a little dated, though ★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage N430	218 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 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 Vantage GT8	229 R	£165,000	8/4735	440/7300	361/5000	1530kg	292	4.4	-	190	-	-	★ Enough drama to fill a Netflix mini-series - Just 150 being made ★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S	224 D	£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 (so get the manual) ★★★★★
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	£9-13	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.4	9.7	190	388	17.3	★ The car we hoped the V8 Vantage would be - Erm, a tad thirsty? ★★★★★
Aston Martin DB11	235 R	£154,900	12/5904	600/6500	516/1500	1770kg	344	4.0	8.1	200	333	19.8	★ An excellent GT - Suffers in outright handling terms as a result ★★★★★
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 DB9	178 R	£9-16	12/5935	510/6500	457/5500	1785kg	290	4.6	-	183	368	18.2	★ A great start to Gaydon-era Astons - Automatic gearbox could be quicker ★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS	142 R	£7-12	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 (Mk3)	209 R	£38,790	4/1984	306/5800	280/1800	1365kg	228	4.9	-	155	168	38.7	★ Dynamically interesting (for a TT) - Still not as interactive as a Cayman ★★★★★
Audi TT RS (Mk3)	230 R	£51,800	4/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1440kg	278	3.4	-	155	187	34.4	★ Soundtrack; tremendous point-to-point pace - A bit one-dimensional in the long run ★★★★★
Audi TT RS (Mk2)	158 R	£9-14	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1450kg	235	4.4	11.1	155	209	31.4	★ Sublime 5-cylinder turbo engine - Rest of package can't quite match it ★★★★★
Audi S5	233 R	£47,000	6/2995	349/5400	369/1370	1615kg	220	4.7	-	155	170	38.2	★ Chassis rewards commitment... - ...but doesn't offer a challenge. Plain engine, too ★★★★★
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	£7-15	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	27.0	★ A proper drivers' Bentley with decent economy - 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	230 D	£168,900	12/5998	633/5900	620/2000	2245kg	286	4.1	-	206	338	19.3	★ Desirability meets exclusivity and performance - We'd still have the V8 ★★★★★
Bentley Continental Supersports	234 D	£212,500	12/5998	700/6000	750/2050	2205kg	323	3.5	-	209	-	18.0	★ Massive performance, surprisingly agile - Styling and soundtrack far from discreet ★★★★★
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	£7-12	6/2979	335/5900	369/1500	1495kg	228	4.8	-	155	224	-	★ Character, turbo pace and great looks - Came and went too quick ★★★★★
BMW M240i Coupe	229 D	£35,090	6/2998	335/6800	369/1520	1470kg	232	4.8	-	155	179	36.2	★ Adjustable and plenty of fun - Lacks finesse and precision ★★★★★
BMW M235i Coupe	225 R	£4-16	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1455kg	224	5.2	12.7	155	189	34.9	★ Powertrain, chassis, looks, size - Limited-slip diff is an option, not standard ★★★★★
BMW M2	230 R	£44,080	6/2979	365/6500	369/1450	1495kg	248	4.5	-	155	199	33.2	★ More progressive chassis balance than the M4 - Feels unsettled on rough tarmac ★★★★★
BMW M4	218 R	£57,055	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1515kg	285	4.3	-	155	204	32.1	★ Ferociously fast - A handful on less-than-perfect or less-than-bone-dry roads ★★★★★
BMW M4 Competition Package	226 R	£60,065	6/2979	444/7000	406/1850	1515kg	298	4.3	-	155	204	32.1	★ Better tied-down than the regular M4 - Torque delivery still rather abrupt ★★★★★
BMW M4 GTS	232 R	£6-16	6/2979	493/6250	442/4000	1510kg	332	3.7	8.0	190	199	34.0	★ Vast improvement on lesser M4s - So it should be at this price ★★★★★
BMW M3 (E92)	196 R	£7-13	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1580kg	266	4.3	10.3	155	290	22.8	★ Fends off all of its rivals - ...except the cheaper 1-series M ★★★★★
BMW M3 GTs (E92)	232 R	£7-11	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1530kg	295	4.3	-	190	295	-	★ Highly exclusive, one of the most focused M-cars ever - Good luck trying to find one ★★★★★
BMW M3 (E46)	066 R	£0-07	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)	219 R	£0-07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	230	5.1	-	155	-	23.7	★ CSL dynamics without CSL price - Looks like the standard car ★★★★★
BMW M3 CSL (E46)	200 R	£3-04	6/3246	355/7900	273/4900	1385kg	260	5.3	12.0	155	-	-	★ Still superb - Changes from the automated single-clutch 'box are... a... bit... sluggish ★★★★★
BMW M3 Evolution (E36)	148 R	£6-98	6/3201	321/7400	258/3250	1515kg	215	5.4	12.8	158	-	25.7	★ Performance, image - Never quite as good as the E30 ★★★★★
BMW M3 (E30)	165 R	£6-90	4/2302	212/6750	170/4600	1165kg	185	6.7	17.8	147	-	20.3	★ Best M-car ever! Race-car dynamics for the road - Prices have got out of hand ★★★★★
BMW Z4 M Coupe	097 R	£6-09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1420kg	242	5.0	-	155	-	23.3	★ A real drivers' car - You've got to be prepared to get stuck in ★★★★★
BMW M6 (F13)	218 R	£93,150	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1850kg	303	4.2	-	155	231	28.5	★ Mighty ability, pace, technology - You'll want the Competition Package upgrade too... ★★★★★
BMW M6 (E63)	106 R	£5-10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1635kg	311	4.8	10.0	155	342	19.8	★ Awesome GT, awesome sports car - SMG gearbox now off the pace ★★★★★
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 *	220 R	£71,750	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 (C7)	197 R	£62,470	8/6162	460/6000	465/4600	1496kg	312	4.4	9.4	180	279	23.5	★ Performance, chassis balance, supple ride - Body control could be better ★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Z06 (C7)	227 R	£89,620	8/6162	650/6000	650/3600	1598kg	413	3.7	-	196	291	23.1	★ Mind-boggling raw speed; surprisingly sophisticated - Edgy when really pushed ★★★★★
Ford Mustang 2.3 EcoBoost	222 D	£30,995	4/2261	313/5500	319/3000	1655kg	192	5.8	-	155	179	35.3	★ Ninety per cent as good as the V8 - Missing ten per cent is what makes the Mustang ★★★★★
Ford Mustang 5.0 V8 GT	225 R	£34,995	8/4951	410/6500	391/4250	1711kg	243	4.8	11.6	155	299	20.9	★ Looks, noise, performance, value, right-hand drive - Comes undone on rougher roads ★★★★★
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	£6-00	4/1797	187/8000	131/7300	1101kg	173	6.2	17.9	145	-	28.9	★ Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Too raw for some ★★★★★
Honda NSX (NA2)	188 R	£9-05	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1410kg	196	5.5	-	168	-	22.8	★ The useable supercar - 276bhp sounds a bit weedy today ★★★★★
Honda NSX-R (NA2) *	100 R	£02-03	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1270kg	221	4.4	-	168	-	-	★ evo Car of the Year 2002 - Hard to find in the UK ★★★★★
Infiniti Q60S	228 D	£42,990	6/2997	400/6400	350/1600	1799kg	226	5.0	-	155	208	31.0	★ Impressive tech - Electronic systems reduce feeling of involvement ★★★★★
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 boisterous ★★★★★
Jaguar F-type R Coupe AWD	227 D	£91,660	8/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1730kg	318	3.5	8.1	186	269	25.0	★ Better than the rear-drive R in the wet - Less involving in the dry ★★★★★
Jaguar F-type SVR Coupe	224 D	£110,000	8/5000	567/6500	516/3500	1705kg	338	3.5	-	200	269	25.0	★ A marginally better drive than the AWD R - Not by enough to justify the extra outlay ★★★★★
Jaguar XKR	168 R	£9-14	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1678kg	305	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	★ Fast and incredibly rewarding Jag - The kids will have to stay at home ★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S	168 R	£7-14	8/5000	542/6000	502/2500	1678kg	328	4.2	-	186	292	23.0	★ Faster and wilder than regular XKR - The F-type R Coupe ★★★★★
Lexus RC200T F Sport	225 R	£36,495	4/1998	242/5800	258/1650	1675kg	147	7.5	-	143	168	39.2	★ Fluid ride - Lacks body control and outright grip ★★★★★
Lexus RC F	226 R	£59,995	8/4969	470/6400	391/4800	1765kg	271	4.5	-	168	251	26.5	★ Great steering, noise, sense of occasion - Too heavy to be truly exciting ★★★★★
Lexus LC500	231 D	£85,000	8/4969	470/7100	398/4800	1935kg	247	4.4	-	168	-	-	★ Glorious engine, rewarding chassis for a GT car - Numb steering, messy ergonomics ★★★★★



BMW M COUPE

Why would you?

Because it's rare, unique and enjoying a growth in demand. It has the 317bhp straight-six from the E36 M3 (or the 321bhp E46 unit in later examples), a stiffer shell than the Z3 M Roadster and a tuggish stance to complement the hot-rod mechanicals.

What to pay

£25k for a private-sale early car with 80,000-plus miles; £36k-40k with sub-50,000 miles from a dealer. Low-mileage late cars have fetched nearly £60,000.

What to look out for

Rough running and power loss could indicate a VANOS problem

(£600-900 to fix). Ensure the crankshaft bearing shells have been upgraded (around £750) – if the originals crumble you'll be looking at a full engine rebuild. Diff mounting brackets can fail, move around and rip the boot floor, so lift the boot carpet and look for cracks. (Full guide, [evo 230](#).)

SPECIFICATION ('S50' engine)

Years 1998-2002

Engine In-line 6-cyl, 3201cc

Power 317bhp @ 7400rpm

Torque 258lb ft @ 3250rpm

0-62mph 5.4sec (claimed)

Top speed 155mph (limited)

Rating ★★★★★

PAINT) (SHIELD

Protect yourself from the Asteriod Belt

Generation 2 Self Healing Protection has Arrived.

Having brought the first Generation of Self Healing Film to the UK two years ago, our Technicians have added the latest Second Generation self healing Protective technology to our Inventory.

In your intergalactic travels protecting yourself from those micro meteor impacts has never been more important. We all know respraying your ship in some far off location is a bit of a pain, much better to not have to. Best of all though wear and tear from scratches picked up in your travels is very disconcerting to the Locals; abductions go much easier when you have a scratch free shiny ship when visiting Earth.

For the best paint protection in the Galaxy drop in to planet earth and contact our specialists on 01733 390777, or fire up the Intergalactic net and warp to www.paintshield.co.uk and they will get you protected and on your way in next to no time (theory of relativity applies).



PAINT) (SHIELD

Paintshield Ltd · Unit 4 · Morley Court · Morley Way · Peterborough · Cambridgeshire · PE2 7BW
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RATINGS ★ Thrill-free zone ★★ Tepid ★★★ Interesting ★★★★ Seriously good ★★★★★ A truly great car

	ISSUE NO.	PRICE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT	BHP/TON	0-60MPH	0-100MPH	MAX MPH	CO2 G/KM	EC MPG	EVO RATING
Lotus Exige Sport 350	221 R	\$55,900	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1125kg	312	3.7	-	170	235	28.0	+ Further honed Exige, with vastly improved gearshift - Still not easy to get into and out of
Lotus Exige Sport 380	231 R	\$67,900	6/3456	375/6700	302/5000	1101kg	343	3.5	-	178	242	27.2	+ Intense, absorbing and brilliantly capable - Perhaps not an everyday car
Lotus Exige S (V6)	209 R	12-15	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 Exige S (S2)	105 R	06-11	4/1796	218/7800	158/5500	930kg	238	4.5	-	148	199	33.2	+ Lightweight with a hefty punch - Uninspiring soundtrack
Lotus Exige (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 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
Lotus Evora Sport 410	230 R	\$82,000	6/3456	410/7000	310/3500	1325kg	314	3.9	-	190	225	29.1	+ Even lighter and sharper Evora - Engine and gearbox behind the best at this price
Lotus Evora	138 R	09-15	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 - The Evora S
Lotus Evora S	168 R	10-15	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.6	-	172	229	28.7	+ A faster and better Evora - But one which spars with the Porsche 911...
Maserati GranTurismo	114 R	\$82,890	8/4244	399/7100	339/4750	1880kg	216	5.5	12.7	177	330	19.8	+ Striking, accomplished GT - Doesn't spike the pulse like an Aston or 911
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	188 R	\$91,420	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1880kg	245	4.8	-	185	331	19.7	+ The best everyday GranTurismo yet - Starting to get long in the tooth
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
Mercedes-AMG C43 4Matic Coupe	233 R	\$47,605	8/2996	362/5500	383/2000	1660kg	222	4.7	-	155	178	36.2	+ Fast and instilled with a real sense of quality - Not enough emphasis on fun
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupe	229 R	\$69,205	8/3982	503/5500	516/1750	1725kg	296	3.9	-	155	200	24.8	+ Mouth-watering mechanical package; better than an M4 - Light steering
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 E400 4Matic Coupe	234 D	\$50,775	8/2996	328/5200	354/1600	1770kg	188	5.3	-	155	189	34.9	+ Good looks, classy cabin, relaxed performance - Not much here in the way of real thrills
Mercedes-AMG S63 Coupe	205 D	\$125,595	8/5461	577/5500	664/2250	1995kg	294	4.2	-	155	237	28.0	+ Thunderously fast S-class built for drivers - Lacks badge appeal of a Continental GT
Mercedes-AMG S65 Coupe	209 D	\$183,075	12/5980	621/4800	737/2300	2100kg	299	4.1	-	186	279	23.7	+ Almighty power, fabulous luxury - Nearly £60k more than the S63!
Mercedes-AMG GT	227 D	\$98,195	8/3982	456/6000	442/1600	1540kg	301	4.0	-	189	216	30.4	+ A true sports car that also does luxury - Takes time to reveal its talents
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
Mercedes-AMG GT R	232 R	\$143,245	8/3982	577/6250	516/1900	1555kg	377	3.6	-	198	259	24.8	+ Fun and blisteringly fast; a true rival for the 911 GT3 - Could prove too stiff for UK roads
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 GT-R (2017MY)	230 R	\$79,995	6/3799	562/6800	470/3600	1752kg	326	2.7	-	196	275	24.0	+ More refinement, much improved interior, still fast - Feels a touch less alert
Nissan GT-R Track Edition (2017MY)	229 D	\$91,995	6/3799	562/6800	470/3600	1745kg	327	2.7	-	196	275	24.0	+ GT-R regains its sharpness - Getting pricey these days
Nissan GT-R Nismo (2017MY)	232 R	\$149,995	6/3799	592/6800	481/3600	1725kg	349	2.7	-	196	275	24.0	+ Incredibly focused - Still too firm to be at its best on UK roads
Nissan GT-R (2012MY-2016MY)	218 R	12-16	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 (2016MY)	223 R	15-16	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	316	3.4	7.7	196	275	24.0	+ Recreates much of the Nismo's ability, without the rock-hard ride - Interior feels dated
Nissan GT-R Nismo (2014MY)	205 R	14-16	6/3799	592/6800	481/3200	1720kg	350	2.6	-	196	275	24.0	+ Manages to make regular GT-R feel imprecise - Compromised by super-firm suspension
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	196R	99-02	6/2568	276/7000	289/4400	1560kg	180	4.7	12.5	165	-	20.1	+ Big, brutal, and great fun - Needs more than the standard 276bhp
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 718 Cayman	229 D	\$39,878	4/1988	296/6500	280/1950	1335kg	225	5.1	-	170	168	47.1	+ Chassis remains a dream - Engine feels strangled and sounds horribly harsh
Porsche 718 Cayman S	230 R	\$48,843	4/2497	345/6500	310/1900	1355kg	259	4.4	-	177	184	26.4	+ Faster and better to drive than ever - Turbo four-cylinder is utterly charmless
Porsche Cayman S (981)	202 R	13-16	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)	219 F	14-16	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)	221 R	15-16	6/3800	380/7400	310/4750	1340kg	288	4.4	-	183	238	27.4	+ evo Car of the Year 2015 (even though the 991 GT3 RS was there!) - Second-hand prices
Porsche Cayman S (987)	231 F	05-13	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	+ Blindingly fast - You'll want the sports exhaust
Porsche 911 Carrera GTS (991.2)	233 D	\$94,316	6/2981	444/6500	406/2150	1450kg	311	4.1	-	193	212	30.1	+ Everything a 911 should be - But only in rear-drive coupe form
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	15	6/3800	424/7500	324/5750	1470kg	293	4.4	-	189	233	28.5	+ The highlight of the 991.1 Carrera line-up - Pricey for a Carrera
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.2)	121 R	08-11	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1425kg	271	4.7	-	188	242	27.4	+ Poise, precision, blinding pace - Feels a bit clinical
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 GT3 (991.1)	206 R	13-16	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 (991.1)	223 R	15-16	6/3996	493/8250	339/6250	1420kg	353	3.0	7.1	193	296	22.2	+ Sensationally good to drive - They aren't all painted Ultra Violet
Porsche 911 R (991.1)	229 R	16	6/3996	493/8250	339/6250	1370kg	366	3.8	-	200	308	21.2	+ evo Car of the Year 2016 - Limited availability
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)	221 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 the brilliant GT3 - 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
Radical RXC Turbo 500R	227 D	\$201,000	6/3496	600/6700	465/4200	1070kg	561	2.8	-	185	-	-	+ Immense accessible performance - Fit, finish and detailing lacks finesse at this price
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	234 R	\$22,495	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1240kg	161	6.9	16.5	140	181	36.2	+ More fun than its Subaru BRZ cousin - Same lack of torque, poor interior quality
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

Ferrari 488 GTB. It's got a stunning turbocharged engine and the chassis to exploit it, but the 488 is also a fully rounded, three-dimensional car: civilised, refined, smooth, intuitive and beautifully built. Clearly the work of a team of engineers at the top of their game.



BEST OF THE REST

With the 540C, 570S (left) and 570GT, McLaren's Sports Series offers some corking entry-level supercars. For true supercar drama, look no further than Lamborghini's Aventador, especially in Superveloce form, though the Pagani Huayra rivals it for theatre – albeit at four times the price.

	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	
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 (Mk2)	235 R	£199,950	12/5935	595/7000	465/5500	1739kg	348	3.9	8.3	201	302	21.6	+ Noise, poise, drama and charm - Not as rounded as the DB11	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk1)	110 R	'05-'07	12/5935	520/7000	425/5800	1875kg	282	4.9	10.1	200	-	-	+ Vanquish joins supercar greats - A tad intimidating at the limit	★★★★★
Aston Martin One-77	179 R	'10-'12	12/7312	750/6000	553/7600	1740kg	438	3.7	-	220+	-	-	+ The engine, the looks, the drama - Gearbox hates manoeuvring; only 77 were made	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10	234 R	£122,450	10/5204	533/7800	398/6500	1595kg	340	3.5	-	198	272	24.8	+ All the R8 you really need - Some may hanker after a manual gearbox	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Plus	229 R	£134,520	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	'10-'15	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	'13-'15	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1570kg	351	3.8	-	198	346	19.0	+ An R8 fit to take on the 458 and 12C - Firm ride may be too much for some	★★★★★
Audi R8 LMX	208 R	'15	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 Chiron	235 R	c£2.5m	16/7993	1479/6700	1180/2000	1995kg	753	<2.5	-	261	516	12.6	+ Backs up the numbers with feel and emotion - Limited top speed(!)	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	134 R	'05-'11	16/7993	987/6000	922/2200	1950kg	521	2.8	5.8	253	596	11.4	+ Superbly engineered 4WD quad-turbo rocket - Er, lacks luggage space?	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4 Super Sport	151 R	'10-'14	16/7993	1183/6400	1106/3000	1838kg	654	2.5	-	268	539	12.2	+ The world's fastest supercar - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals	★★★★★
Bugatti EB110	078 R	'91-'95	12/3500	552/8000	451/3750	1566kg	358	3.4	-	212	-	-	+ Superbly engineered 4WD quad-turbo rocket - It just fizzled out	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	133 R	'09-'13	8/6162	638/6500	603/3800	1528kg	424	3.8	7.6	205	355	18.8	+ Huge pace and character - Take plenty of brave pills if there's rain	★★★★☆
Ferrari 488 GTB	228 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	+ All the usual 488 thrills, but with the wind in your hair - See left	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Italia	221 R	'09-'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	'14-'15	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	'04-'10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1449kg	339	4.0	-	196	-	18.6	+ Just brilliant - Didn't you read the plus point?	★★★★★
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	121 R	'07-'10	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1350kg	378	3.5	7.7	198	-	15.7	+ Successful F1 technology transplant - Likes to shout about it	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Modena	163 R	'99-'04	8/3586	394/8500	275/4750	1390kg	288	4.5	9.0	183	-	17.0	+ Worthy successor to 355 - Not quite as involving as it should be	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale	068 R	'03-'04	8/3586	420/8500	275/4750	1280kg	333	4.1	-	186	-	-	+ Totally exhilarating road-racer. It's loud - It's very, very loud	★★★★★
Ferrari 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	230 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	'06-'12	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1688kg	368	3.5	7.4	205	415	15.8	+evo Car of the Year 2006 - Banks are getting harder to rob	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTO	161 R	'11-'12	12/5999	661/8250	457/6500	1605kg	418	3.4	-	208	-	-	+ One of the truly great Ferraris - Erm, the air con isn't very good	★★★★★
Ferrari 575M Fiorano Handling Pack	200 R	'02-'06	12/5748	508/7250	434/5250	1730kg	298	4.2	9.6	202	-	12.3	+ Fiorano pack makes 575 truly great - It should have been standard	★★★★★
Ferrari 550 Maranello	169 R	'96-'02	12/5474	478/7000	420/5000	1690kg	287	4.3	10.0	199	-	12.3	+ Everything - Nothing	★★★★★
Ferrari GTiC4 Lusso	225 D	£230,430	12/6262	680/8000	514/5750	1920kg	360	3.4	-	208	350	18.8	+ Rear-wheel steering increases agility - Not as engaging as other Ferraris	★★★★★
Ferrari FF	194 R	'11-'15	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 LaFerrari	203 R	'13-'15	12/6262	950/9000	664/6750	1255kg	769	3.0	-	217+	330	-	+ Perhaps the greatest Ferrari ever - Brakes lack a touch of precision on track	★★★★★
Ferrari Enzo	203 R	'02-'04	12/5999	651/7800	485/5500	1365kg	485	3.5	6.7	217+	545	-	+ Intoxicating, exploitable - Cabin detailing falls short of a Zonda or F1's	★★★★★
Ferrari F50	186 R	'96-'97	12/4699	513/8500	347/6500	1230kg	424	3.9	-	202	-	-	+ A better drivers' Ferrari than the 288, F40 or Enzo - Not better looking, though	★★★★★
Ferrari F40	222 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	'04-'06	8/5409	550/6500	500/3750	1583kg	353	3.7	-	205	-	-	+ Our 2005 Car of the Year - Don't scalp yourself getting in	★★★★★
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	233 R	£143,950	6/3493	573	476/2000	1776kg	328	3.0	6.8	191	228	28.2	+ Blisteringly quick and brilliantly engineered - Limited range on a full tank	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ220	157 R	'92-'94	6/3498	542/7200	475/4500	1470kg	375	3.7	-	213	-	-	+ Britain's greatest supercar... - ...until McLaren built the F1	★★★★☆
Koenigsegg Agera R	180 R	c£1.09m	8/5032	1124/7100	885/2700	1435kg	796	2.8	-	273	-	-	+ As fast and exciting as your body can handle - It's Veyron money	★★★★★
Koenigsegg One:1	202 R	c£2.0m	8/5065	1341/7500	1011/6000	1360kg	1002	2.9	-	273	-	-	+ The most powerful car we've ever tested - It's sold out; we couldn't afford one anyway...	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán RWD	229 R	£155,400	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	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	'08-'13	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1410kg	398	3.7	-	202	325	16.0	+ Still a missile from A to B - Starting to show its age	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo	094 R	'06-'08	10/4961	551/8000	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 Aventador	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 - Can feel a little clumsy	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador S	233 R	£271,146	12/6498	730/8400	509/5500	1575kg	471	2.9	-	217	394	16.7	+ A more agile, more connected Aventador - Erm... expensive?	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador 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 LP640	093 R	'06-'11	12/6496	631/8000	487/6000	1665kg	385	3.8	-	211	-	21.3	+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	200 R	'09-'11	12/6496	661/8000	487/6500	1565kg	429	3.2	7.3	212	-	-	+ A supercar in its truest, wildest sense - Be prepared for stares	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago	089 D	'01-'06	12/6192	570/7500	479/5400	1650kg	351	4.0	-	205	-	-	+ Gorgeous, capable and incredibly friendly - V12 feels stressed	★★★★★
Lexus LFA/LFA Nürburgring	200 R	'10-'12	10/4805	552/8700	354/6800	1480kg	379	3.7	-	202	-	-	+ Absurd and compelling supercar - Badge and price don't quite match	★★★★★
Maserati MC12	079 R	'04-'05	12/5998	621/7500	481/5500	1445kg	437	3.8	-	205	-	-	+ Rarer than an Enzo - The Ferrari's better	★★★★☆
McLaren 540C	234 R	£126,000	8/3799	533/7500	398/3500	1311kg	413	3.5	-	199	258	25.5	+ An excellent junior supercar - The 570S is still better to drive	★★★★★
McLaren 570S	229 R	£143,250	8/3799	562/7500	443/5000	1440kg	397	3.1	-	204	249	26.6	+ A truly fun and engaging sports car - McLaren doesn't call it a supercar(!)	★★★★★
McLaren 570GT	228 R	£154,000	8/3799	562/7500	443/5000	1495kg	382	3.4	-	204	249	26.6	+ Blurs the line between grand tourer and supercar brilliantly - 570S is more involving	★★★★★
McLaren 650S	196 R	'14-'17	8/3799	641/7250	500/6000	1428kg	456	3.0	-	207	275	24.2	+ Better brakes, balance and looks than 12C; more power too - Which all comes at a price	★★★★★
McLaren 675LT	228 R	'15-'17	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 675LT Spider	222 D	'16-'17	8/3799	666/7100	516/5500	1368kg	495	2.9	-	203	275	24.2	+ Spectacularly fast; involving, too - Might mess up your hair	★★★★★
McLaren 12C	228 R	'11-'14	8/3799	616/7500	442/3000	1434kg	435	3.1	-	207	279	24.2	+ Staggering performance, refinement - Engine noise can be grating	★★★★☆
McLaren P1	228 R	'13-'15	8/3799	903/7500	664/4000	1490kg	616	2.8	-	217	194	34.0	+ Freakish breadth of ability - At its mind-bending best on track	★★★★★
McLaren F1	228 R	'94-'98	12/6064	627/7500	479/4000	1137kg	560	3.2	6.3	240+	-	19.0	+ Still the most single-minded supercar ever - There'll never be another	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	159 R	'10-'15	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	'13-'15	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	228 R	'03-'0												

TRACK TIMES

● = 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
BAC Mono 2.5 (fastest sports car)	1:07.7	229	Yes
Radical RXC Turbo 500 (fastest coupe)	1:10.5	-	Yes
McLaren P1 (on Pirelli 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
Ferrari 488 GTB	1:12.8	228	Yes
McLaren 675LT	1:12.8	228	Yes
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.1)	1:13.6	-	Yes
Porsche 911 Turbo S (991)	1:13.6	-	Yes
Ferrari 458 Speciale	1:14.2	198	Yes
McLaren 570S	1:14.5	-	Yes
Porsche 911 Turbo (991.1)	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 (991.1)	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	Yes
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	-
VW Golf R (Mk7)	1:21.6	212	-

BEDFORD AUTODROME WEST CIRCUIT

📍 **LOCATION** Bedfordshire, UK
 📶 **GPS** 52.235133, -0.474321
 📏 **LENGTH** 1.8 miles (track reconfigured May 2015; earlier times not comparable)



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	Yes
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Saloon	1:24.0	211	Yes
VW Golf GTI Clubsport S	1:24.1	227	-
SEAT Leon Cupra 290 (on optional Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres)	1:24.2	227	-
Ford Focus RS (Mk3, on optional Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres)	1:24.6	227	-
Honda Civic Type R (FK2, on Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres)	1:24.6	227	-
VW Golf R (Mk7)	1:26.1	-	Yes
Audi RS3 Sportback (2015MY)	1:26.6	-	Yes
Ford Fiesta ST Mountune	1:29.5	213	-
Mazda MX-5 2.0i Sport (Mk4) (fastest sports car)	1:29.8	-	Yes

BLYTON PARK OUTER CIRCUIT

📍 **LOCATION** Lincolnshire, UK
 📶 **GPS** 53.460093, -0.688666
 📏 **LENGTH** 1.6 miles



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
Porsche Cayman GT4	1:03.6	221	Yes
Lotus Exige S (V6)	1:04.4	177	-
Porsche 911 Carrera (991)	1:05.1	177	-
Chevrolet Camaro Z/28	1:05.1	220	Yes
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	1:05.7	220	Yes
Jaguar F-type S Convertible	1:06.5	-	Yes
Vuhti 05	1:06.5	220	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
SEAT Leon Cupra 280 Sub8	1:07.6	220	-
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	-
Toyota GT86	1:12.8	177	-

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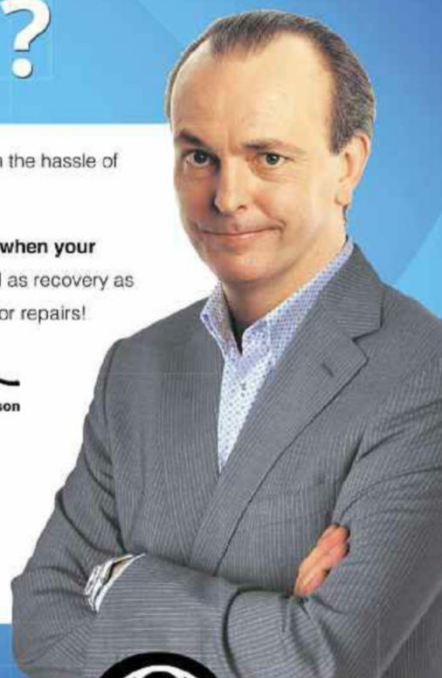
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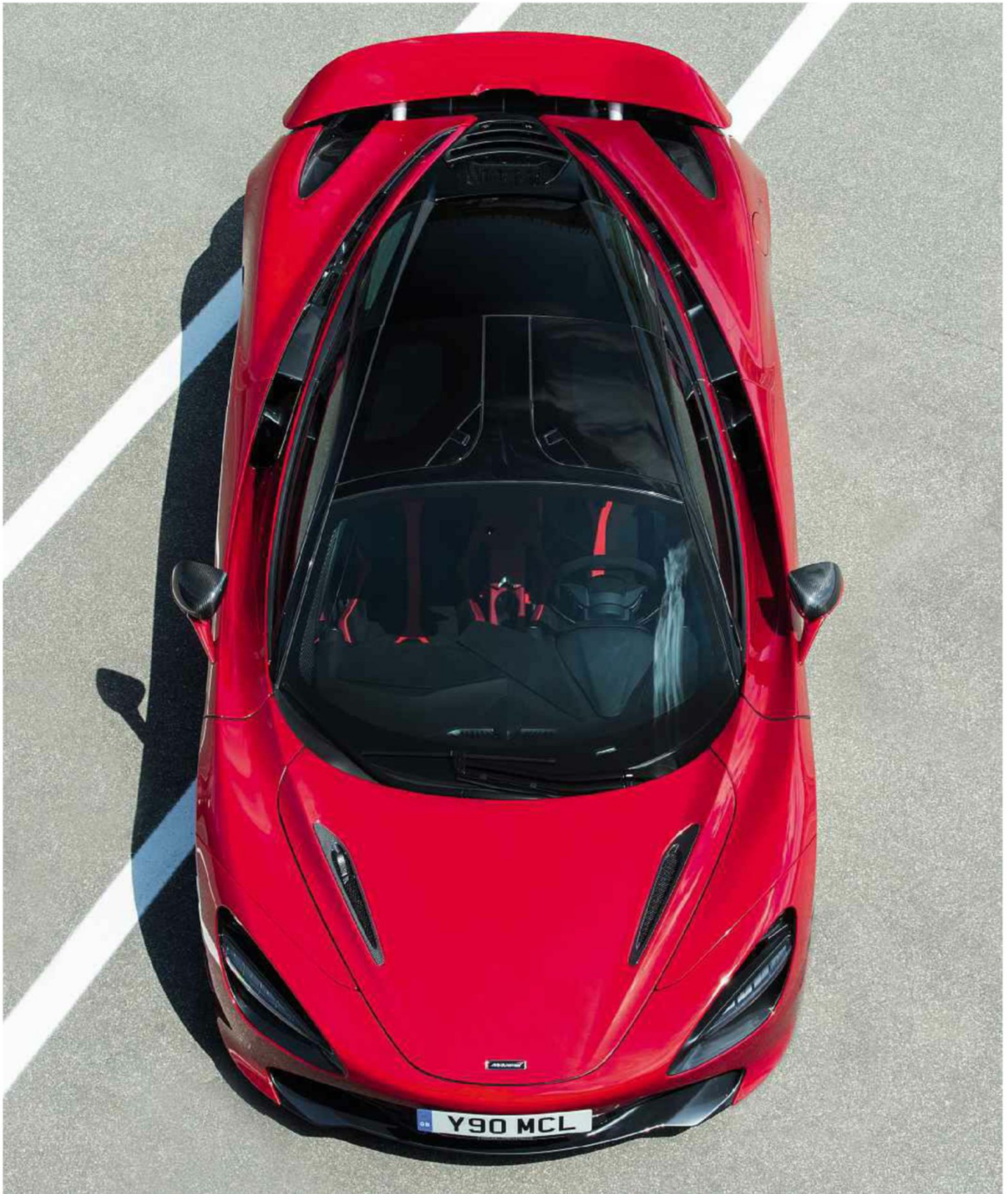
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FINAL FRAME



McLAREN 720S

An overhead view of McLaren's all-new Super Series model, revealing its teardrop-shaped glasshouse and door-top air ducting. Photographed by Aston Parrott in Rome. Turn to page 78 for the full story.

HIGH PERFORMANCE FINANCE PACKAGES

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Official fuel consumption for the SEAT Leon CUPRA range in mpg (litres per 100km): urban 31.0 (9.1) – 33.6 (8.4); extra-urban 46.3 (6.1) – 49.6 (5.7); combined 39.2 (7.2) – 42.2 (6.7). CO₂ emissions 164 – 153g/km. Standard EU Test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results.