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Model featured is an all-new PEUGEOT 5008 SUV Allure with Emerald metallic paint, a Black Diamond Roof and Advanced Grip Control®. Visit Peugeot.co.uk for more information. Information correct at time of going to print.



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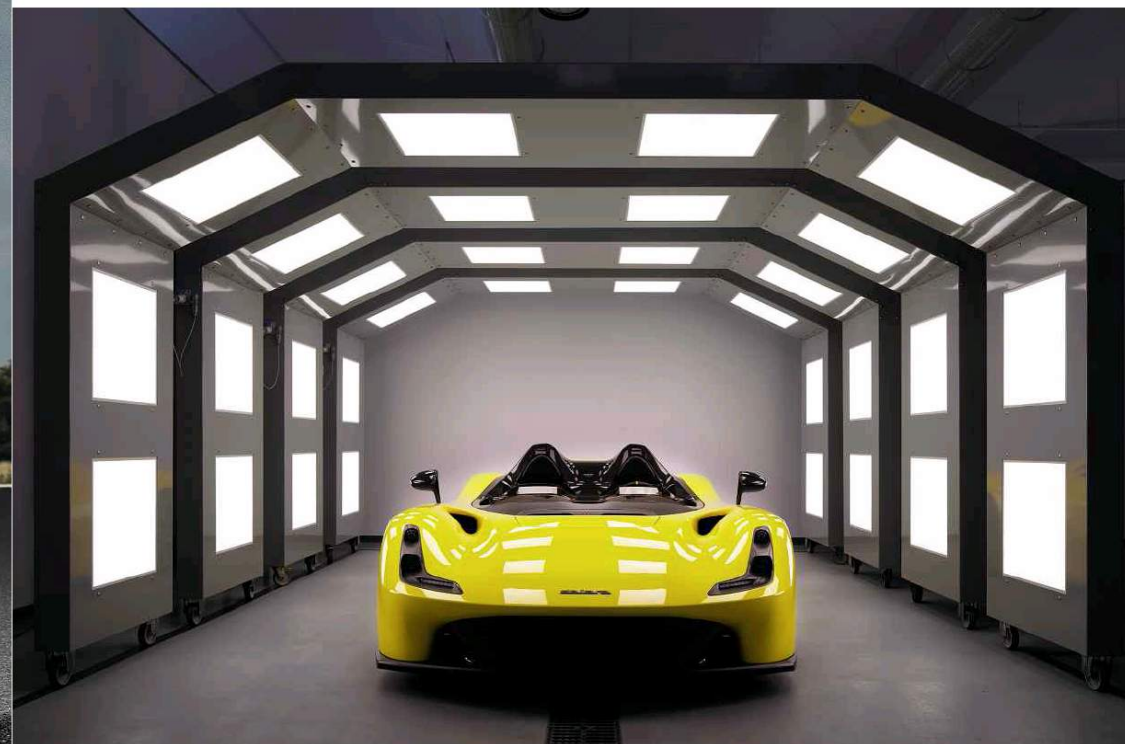


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evo
CAR OF THE YEAR



Ed speak

WELCOME TO OUR CAR OF THE YEAR EDITION.

You'll notice it's a different kind of eCoty to those we have conducted in the past, and there are a couple of reasons for this. First and foremost, we've taken on board your feedback asking for eCoty to be more inclusive and to recognise a wider spread of performance cars.

Therefore, while previously we have gathered only the best cars launched in that calendar year, this time we've opted to select the very best from every sector represented in The Knowledge, and for the first time we've also included cars that have been on sale for longer than 12 months. It's always struck us as peculiar that we would select a car for eCoty because it was new rather than it being the best in its class.

The result of these changes is that we can now name the best performance cars on sale today in each category, from supermini to supersaloon, hot hatch to hypercar and sports car to supercar and, of course, we also reveal evo's overall Car of the Year.

eCoty also brings to a close another fascinating year in the evo calendar. We've seen old hands such as Porsche and Ferrari continue to deliver the thrills at the higher echelons of the performance car charts, and McLaren continue its chasing game to establish itself as a thoroughbred contender – something I personally feel it has achieved. And, of course, there's Lamborghini, which despite succumbing to the call of the SUV still produced cars as scintillating as the Huracán Performante.

Away from the supercars, Honda delivered a belter with the new Civic Type R and Hyundai rocked the establishment with its sensational i30 N. Lotus's unstinting efforts resulted in some of the finest sports cars to come out of Hethel for a generation, while BMW M rediscovered its mojo with the revised M4. And, last but not least, Alpine has delivered on some huge promises with the A110. All in all, a good year.

And 2018 looks set to deliver more of the same. We'll drive the new Aston Martin Vantage, the 911 Carrera T, McLaren's opinion-splitting Senna and Jaguar's wild Project 8. Will Toyota's new performance sub-brand deliver? Our drive of the Yaris GRMN next month will provide the answer. With plenty more first drives, road and track tests, and epic drive stories lined up for 2018, we'll continue to put you behind the wheel of the most thrilling cars we can get our hands on.

On behalf of all of us at evo, thank you for your continued support, all good wishes for the festive season and here's to another great year of enjoying the thrill of driving.

Stuart Gallagher, Editor @stuartg917

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McLAREN SENNA • DALLARA STRADALE • LAMBORGHINI URUS • DAKAR

briefing



STILL WANT THAT VALKYRIE?

Spirit of F1 legend evoked
for brutal, 789bhp, road-
legal trackday special, the
most extreme McLaren yet

by STUART GALLAGHER

WE KNEW IT AS PROJECT 15. We knew it would be the next model to sit under McLaren's 'Ultimate Series' banner, and we knew it had the potential to be the ultimate road-legal, track-focused hypercar. Well, now it has broken cover. What you're looking at is the lightest, quickest and most outlandish road-going machine McLaren has ever created, and it's called Senna.

This is not a P1 successor. It's not the forthcoming 'BP23', with its F1-echoing central driving position. The Senna is McLaren's special. It is also the most extreme machine yet to emerge from Woking. With a shape dictated primarily by function, it looks more like an LMP endurance racer than it does a road car. But it will wear number plates (the front



plate is mounted beneath the nose via a removable bracket for when you go on track), it will live in your garage – and it will more than likely redefine what is a seriously fast road car.

Built around MonoCage III, a further evolution of the structure that underpins the 720S, this third-generation chassis is the strongest McLaren has produced, and features a solid carbonfibre bulkhead that saves 18kg (it can also have a glass panel installed so you can see the 789bhp twin-turbocharged V8 over your shoulders). Every body panel is carbonfibre and as light as possible. Each front wing, for example, weighs just 600 grams compared with the 2kg items fitted to a 720S, contributing to an overall dry weight of 1198kg, which is 85kg less than the already super-light 720S.

Aerodynamics have dictated much of how the Senna looks. While the McLaren teardrop shape is still present when viewed from above, the sleek and

uncluttered design language we have come to know has been cut, slashed and reshaped in the name of aero efficiency, and the result is a functional brutality.

The front splitter features active devices to direct air through, over and under the car as required. The intakes ahead of the rear wheels feed both the engine and the active rear wing with their required cooling and aero. The Gurney flaps positioned on top of the rear wings and ahead of a series of stepped louvres direct air away from the rear deck and along the side of the body.

When the chassis is in Race mode, that body lowers itself to cover the tops of the rear wheels. The single-piece double diffuser at the rear is a first for a road-legal car, while the double-element rear wing is plain outrageous. It sits 1.2 metres from the road when the car is stationary, and when driving it continually adjusts to optimise downforce and aero balance, and also functions as an air brake.

The suspension features the latest evolution of the variable stiffness and ride-height technology first seen on the P1. The engineers have further developed the RaceActive Chassis Control II system (RCC II), primarily to work with the increase in aerodynamic loads that will be forced through the chassis. For the Senna, the system now features a Race mode in addition to the Comfort, Sport and Track options we've become accustomed to. In Race, the hydraulically connected dampers switch to their stiffest setting and the ride height drops by 50mm.

Power comes from an enhanced version of the current M480TR twin-turbo 4-litre V8, as fitted to the 710bhp 720S. According to the company, every component within was examined to see if it could be made lighter or more efficient. The result is the most powerful internal combustion road car engine McLaren has built, with peak figures of 789bhp (800 PS) and 590lb ft, driving through a

“The sleek design language has been cut, slashed and reshaped in the name of aero efficiency”



Above, from left: gear selector panel moves with seat; interior has been kept as simple as possible to minimise weight – hence lots of exposed carbonfibre; bucket seats can be specified with leather or Alcantara trim



Right: louvres atop the rear wings release hot air from the engine bay and around the radiators without the airflow affecting the wing's operation. **Far right:** glass panels in the doors are an option

recalibrated version of the familiar seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox.

Behind the nine-spoke, centre-lock alloy wheels (which are equipped with McLaren-specific Pirelli P Zero Trofeo Rs) are specially developed carbon-ceramic discs that reach their peak operating performance at a temperature 150 degrees lower than McLaren's 'regular' ceramics. They are also lighter, but do take seven months to manufacture instead of one...

'Functional' is how best to describe the interior. Carbonfibre and Alcantara are the materials of choice, and there are a number of neat touches to mark the Senna out as something special. The door release is moved to a panel above your head, along with the starter button and Race mode selector, while the gear selector, launch control and hazard warning light switch are fixed to the driver's seat and move fore and aft with it.



And the name? For this, McLaren has collaborated with the Ayrton Senna Institute, which provides education opportunities for underprivileged children and young people in Brazil, and will make a contribution to the institute for each £750,000 Senna sold. Also, the final build slot of the sold-out run of 500 was auctioned for £2million, with all proceeds going to the institute.

Further technical details on the Senna will be revealed later in 2018, but right now it looks like Aston Martin's Valkyrie won't have things all its own way.

SPECIFICATION

Engine	V8, 3994cc, twin-turbo
Transmission	Seven-speed dual-clutch
Power	789bhp
Torque	590lb ft
Weight (dry)	1198kg
Power-to-weight (dry)	669bhp/ton
0-62mph	c2.7sec (est)
Top speed	c210mph (est)
Basic price	£750,000
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Resistance is futile

Lamborghini has launched its super-SUV and – while we should be appalled – all the signs are it's going to be some machine



YOU WANT TO BE OUTRAGED BY the new Lamborghini Urus, don't you? I know I do. But I'm not sure what we can justifiably get riled up about. For a start, this isn't even Lamborghini's first SUV, that accolade going to the Countach-engined LM002 of 1986.

It can't be the slightly difficult-to-pronounce name, either, because compared with Gallardo and Murciélago it's easy to get an Anglo Saxon tongue around Urus (it's 'oo-rus' rather than 'you-rus', by the way).

What about the fact that it uses hardware found elsewhere in the Volkswagen group? Underneath, the Urus is very similar to the new Porsche Cayenne Turbo: it has the same three-chamber air suspension that allows varying spring rates and a 90mm difference in ride height, the same electromechanical anti-roll bars, adaptive dampers, rear-wheel steering and torque-vectoring rear differential. It even has the same 4-litre twin-turbo 'hot-V' V8, although in the Urus it puts out 641bhp and 627lb ft of torque, which is 98bhp and 59lb ft more than the Porsche.

But then the Gallardo and Huracán have shared DNA with contemporary Audi R8s. As Maurizio Reggiani, Lamborghini's chief technical officer, says: 'It's clear that we've used some components that can come from the group – like we did in the past. What makes the difference is the software; the calibration is the result of development that we did here in Sant'Agata. Our car is completely different from all the others.'

Of course, the way the Urus behaves will change depending on which driving mode it's in. As with other Lamborghinis, it has the ANIMA (Adaptive Network Intelligent Management) system, with Strada, Sport and Corsa modes. However, the SUV gets three extra off-road-specific settings labelled Terra, Neve and Sabbia. These translate to land, snow and sand. A further Ego mode allows the driver to mix and match their favourite chassis, engine, steering and gearbox settings.

That gearbox, incidentally, is an eight-speed torque-converter automatic – yes, just like in the Cayenne – and is mated to a centre differential that by default sends 60 per cent of drive to the rear axle and 40 to the front, but can send up to 70 per cent to the front or 87 per cent to the rear depending on conditions or the driver's desires. 'If you want to drift, you can do so really easily,' Reggiani promises.



“Ego mode allows the driver to mix and match their favourite chassis, engine, steering and gearbox settings”

Above and left: despite sharing underpinnings with the Cayenne Turbo and Bentley Bentayga, the Urus could only be a Lamborghini

Although all-wheel drive is nothing new for a Lamborghini, turbocharged engines and automatic gearboxes are – and already they're proving contentious. But Lamborghini CEO Stefano Domenicali isn't too worried: 'Of course some people will say "it's not a Lamborghini". But just listen and you will understand. Just hear the engine, the sound, and you will feel it is a Lamborghini.'

Reggiani explains why it was necessary to go with a turbocharged engine: 'When we made a product profile, we recognised that talking about an SUV – a car that must be able to go off-road – it was more and more fundamental to have a high

level of torque at low rpm. Otherwise you cannot climb, you cannot go on the sand. For this reason, the only physical dynamic machine that can release a high level of torque at low rpm is the turbo engine.'

The biggest fear is that the Urus's forced-induction powertrain will open the floodgates to turbocharged Lamborghini supercars. But Reggiani quashes such a suggestion: 'When it's possible, we will stay with naturally aspirated. In a super-sports car, this is part of the DNA.'

Critics may be placated by the very un-SUV and very Lamborghini-like performance figures being claimed for the Urus: 0-62mph in 3.6sec and a top speed



of 189mph. That's half a second quicker to 62 than was quoted for the Gallardo when it was launched in 2003, and just 3mph slower flat-out.

Its performance is made even more incredible when you learn that the Urus weighs just shy of 2200kg. But Reggiani claims there's good reason for its heft. 'In terms of weight, we are in the range of 2.1 to 2.2 tonnes. But it's also the fact that we prefer to put in some more kilos in order to have rear-wheel steer. In the end, some technical solutions were able to compensate for more of the weight that we add in.'

At least the brakes, even if they are gigantic (440mm-diameter front discs with ten-piston calipers and 370mm rear discs with six-piston calipers) don't significantly add to the Urus's weight, being carbon-ceramic in standard.

Whatever the origins of its underpinnings, there's little doubt that the Urus looks like a Lamborghini. Its nose is pointed and jagged like every post-Reventón Lamborghini's and the lines behind the rear arches kick up in a similar manner to the those of the Huracán and Aventador. There's even a hint of the LM002 in the shape of the arches, while the wheels that fill them range from 21 to 23 inches in diameter. Subtle it's not, but then it is a Lamborghini.

Inside, whereas the Audi infotainment system in the Huracán looks like it's



Above: there have been four-seater Lamborghinis before, but none have the head- and legroom offered by the Urus; deliveries are due to start in the spring, and prices are expected to begin at around £165,000

been added as a hasty afterthought, in the Urus the Volkswagen group switchgear, screens and stalks look perfectly integrated. There are plenty of details to make it unique, though. The gear selector and driving mode switches shaped like aircraft control levers in the centre console are the most obvious. This also houses the firm's trademark starter button, hidden underneath a fighter-plane-style flip-up red cover.

It's even pretty spacious inside, headroom for passengers in the rear being far better than the car's silhouette would

suggest. And in a way it's this practicality that's the most outrageous thing about the Urus. Yes, turbos and automatics are controversial for a Lamborghini, but in a world where both have already infiltrated many previously pure performance marques, they're hardly anything to get worked up about. However, the fact that there isn't anything really shocking about the Urus, that Lamborghini – a company whose very modus operandi is to be rebellious and provocative – has made an SUV that is, well, vaguely acceptable; now that's scandalous.



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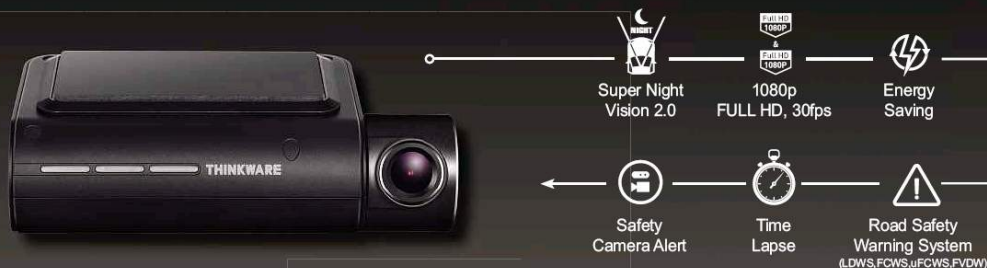
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NEW METAL

by COLIN GOODWIN

briefing



Dallara Stradale revealed

Racing car maker unveils first road car: lightweight, 400bhp Ford-powered, and perfect for trackdays

WE LAST MET GIAN PAOLO Dallara 15 years ago. We'd travelled to Dallara's Varano de' Melegari factory just outside Parma to talk with him about his part in the development of the Lamborghini Miura (evo 047): a fascinating tale, told by one of the nicest and most charming people I've met in the car world. His two heroes of engineering, he told us, were Alec Issigonis and Colin Chapman. 'One day,' he said, 'I would like to make a modern-day version of the Lotus Seven.'

That day has come. On his 81st birthday, Dallara was presented with the first production Dallara Stradale, the eponymous racing car manufacturer's first ever road car. It's a project the company has been working on for decades, though development has often stalled while it concentrated on work for outside clients, such as developing the Alfa Romeo 8C and producing the tub for the 4C.

The Stradale showcases Dallara's expertise in composites and its skills in aerodynamics. At its heart is a carbonfibre tub, to which are attached front and rear subframes. At the back of the car there's a transversally mounted 2.3-litre

Ford EcoBoost turbocharged in-line four and a six-speed manual transmission. The engine produces a claimed 400bhp, considerably more than standard, thanks to reworked software and a new exhaust.

The car has no doors because, firstly, it saves weight, and secondly, it has allowed Dallara to run ducts through the bodywork that feed cold air – via interestingly shaped intakes on the front bodywork – to the engine's air intake and intercooler. The engine itself is cooled by a front-mounted radiator. Dallara is proud of the Stradale's dry weight of 855kg but even more chuffed with a maximum of up to 820kg of downforce, produced almost entirely by front and rear venturis and the otherwise perfectly flat floor, at the car's claimed 170mph top speed.

Options include a rear wing, without which the downforce is slightly reduced; when it isn't fitted, a small 'reverse Gurney flap' on the front venturi reduces front downforce to maintain the aerodynamic balance front to rear. That maximum figure also depends on having the optional adjustable suspension that allow the car to be dropped, at the press of a button in the cockpit, by 8mm.

If you've gone for the full aero effect, you might also want to order the oil pressure accumulator, which acts as a sort of emergency dry sump to maintain oil pressure under the Stradale's extreme cornering forces, which can exceed 2G.

The price of the standard car is a whopping 155,000 euros plus taxes. Dallara also offers a windscreen (16,600 euros) to replace the standard aeroscreens, a targa-style frame roof (7700 euros) and a pair of top-hinged canopy doors (7300 euros) that turn the Stradale into a very attractive coupe that reminds me of my Corgi Dino 206 SP.

Low weight, simplicity and manual steering: the Lotus ingredients are all there. Trouble is, Lotus itself can supply a similar package for well under half the price. It won't give you that amazing downforce but then, for many of us, fun on road and track is not about massive cornering forces. That said, four Stradales have already been delivered and production for 2018 is spoken for, with customers including Jean Alesi. The company plans to build only 600 examples, which, at ten chassis a month, will take five years.



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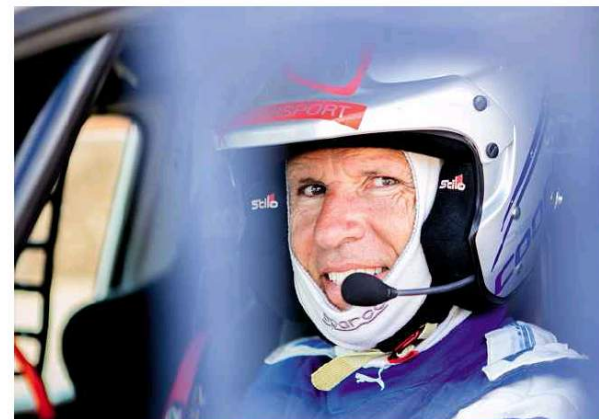
Xavier Foj: the greatest Dakar driver you've never heard of

We meet one of the most successful off-road racers of all time and veteran of no fewer than 27 Dakar rallies

WHAT DOES A MAN WHO IS officially a legend look like? You might expect some sort of leviathan, a character striding straight out of the pages of a DC Comic. But Xavier Foj is a relatively diminutive 58-year-old. He's clearly physically fit (he doesn't smoke or drink) but, weighing around 63kg, standing 170cm tall in his Sparco racing boots and with grey hair cut short, he looks more like an architect. Which he is.

Foj is one of just six inductees into the Dakar Legends club. Names such as Peterhansel, Roma and Despres are relatively well-known to anyone with even a passing interest in the most famous of rally raids, but Foj is hardly recognised outside his native Spain. Yet he has competed in 27 Dakar rallies, winning his class twice, standing on the class podium nine times and completing the rally for 13 consecutive years. He hopes 2018 will be number 14.

He first competed in the rally in 1991, using a truck from the family limestone quarry near Barcelona. He continued in the T4 category initially (three times as a co-driver) but has since settled largely on the T2 category for series production vehicles, using a Toyota Land Cruiser. We recently caught up with him to discuss his Dakar highs and lows.



What do you remember of that first Paris-Dakar in 1991?

The immensity of the desert. At that time there was no GPS. And sometimes you lose the tracks and are alone, nobody's there. You ask the co-driver, are you sure we are going in the good direction? They check the road book. Yes. When we arrive at the horizon... the same immensity again. Nobody's there. Eventually you find the tracks and you arrive at the point, but the immensity of the desert was the most impressive thing. Because if you are lost, you are lost. You feel so little.

Why do you say the stages are harder in South America than Africa?

January is summer in South America so there are some days where it is 45 or 50 degrees [Celsius] outside. Inside the car, much more. Also the altitude: 3000, 4000, 5000 metres. The engine doesn't work, a lot of people don't work, so you have to take it easy. The stages are also much faster because there are more very good cars and very good tracks and much more assistance, because it's easier to do assistance. So, in the stages it's worse, but in the bivouacs, in the liaisons there is everything: gas stations, tarmac, hospitals, spare parts. You live better.

What's the biggest challenge with the T2 category?

The biggest challenge is to drive fast and not break anything. You can't change or repair anything, from front differential, rear differential, gearbox, transfer, turbo, engine... This is a real production and marathon race.

Do you have a particular type of terrain that you enjoy?

Nowadays, you only enjoy the Dakar when you finish! I have skills on the dunes, but I don't enjoy.

Why is it difficult starting further back in the field?

When the trucks arrive [and overtake] they rip the piste more than half a metre deep. And they are wider than you, so you have one wheel on top [and one in a rut]. A lot of truck drivers are crazy. They barge you off the piste. They overtake hors-piste, too, because they have the power, the big wheels, the suspension... After that you can see nothing [because of the dust] so you have to stop.

What was your worst Dakar moment?

The worst was when a biker died in my lap. It was in 1997 and I was in a racing Unimog. I had seen a bike and the biker was not there. After 50 metres I saw some colours in the bush. He was lying there breathing harshly with open eyes. When the doctors arrived they cut all his clothes and I was helping, but after 40 minutes the doctors said, he is dead. Forty-two years old. Married. Child. It was his dream to take part in the rally.

You are a Dakar Legend, but do you have any heroes?

Peterhansel. He is very clever. He wins the stage he has to win. Also his skills as a biker are incredible but he is not a biker that becomes a driver, he's a real driver.

The 2018 Dakar begins on 6 January.

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INBOX

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Self-destruction

The car industry is ruining the car industry! To substantiate this claim, here are some facts about the cars featured in the Driven section of *evo* 243.

Average weight: 1899kg

Average power: 480bhp

Average price: £98,355

Two of the six 'cars' were SUVs and only one of them had a manual gearbox, or is even available with one. Except it isn't available at all, because it's sold out! (The VXR8 GTS-R [above].)

Which brings me to Exhibit B: why is it that on the rare occasion a car manufacturer actually bothers to make a proper drivers' car these days, it will be astronomically expensive and sold in tiny numbers? This results in them being snapped up by wealthy collectors, who lock them up with ten miles on the clock in a humidity-controlled garage. No doubt this doubles their value immediately, but it defeats the purpose of them being created in the first place. It also leaves the people who would actually like to drive one of these unicorns feeling like our secret crush just copped off with the village idiot.

Given that the average new performance car appears to be a £100k, two-ton, 500bhp, automatic SUV that I can't even buy if I wanted to (which I don't), I think I'll simply browse the classifieds and find myself a lightweight, manual car, with power you can actually use on the road. The fact I could get all of this for 90 grand less is quite incredible, don't you think?

Matt Westby

A Pug is for life...

Fantastic to read about Adam Towler's additions to the Fast Fleet (*evo* 243), especially his Peugeot 205 GTI 1.9. I've owned my Alpine White 1.6 GTI [above] since I was 18 (17 years ago!). In that time a lot has changed – jobs, partners, houses, other cars, etc – but one thing that hasn't is my love of this little car.

When I bought it I was living with my parents. I desperately wanted a Miami Blue 1.9 but couldn't afford to buy one, let alone insure it. I remember my father saying almost word for word what Adam's parents said – '1900cc is too big an engine for such a small car!' – but he's a petrolhead too and after test-driving a few (dodgy) 1.6s was as smitten as I was.

I eventually saved enough to buy my car. It was my daily driver throughout my 20s and eventually became a toy for holidays, shows and trackdays. It has now covered 117,000 miles. Just like Adam's car. It's done the whole Route Napoléon, climbed the Col de l'Iseran to 2770 metres, been to Le Mans, the St Bernard Pass, the Peugeot Museum in Sochaux, up Prescott Hill Climb and round Rockingham and Castle Combe. It's even been used as a wedding car by my cousin in Bordeaux.

I don't think I will ever get rid of it – nothing I've driven comes close in terms of smiles per mile.

Chris Hughes, Cornwall

Mis-S2K-en

As a Honda S2000 owner, I read with interest Richard Meaden's 'Icon' piece on said car (*evo* 243).



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Vant-ageing point

ASTON MARTIN ACHIEVED ITS GOAL OF making the DB10 look like a shark for *Spectre*, but I think it may have missed the mark with the new Vantage. It looks more koi carp than tiger shark. It certainly has the 'fish lips' thing going on; you know, when celebrities or WAGs go that step too far with the fillers...

Maybe the design team spent most of their time on the rear of the car, which is spot on: the lights, the ducktail spoiler and the defuser all look great.

But it's definitely not the beauty it once was. I know Aston wanted more aggression to appeal to a new market, but a bit too much of the elegance that set its cars apart has been lost.

One thing that's for sure is that the new Vantage won't age as well as the previous model.

KL

The Letter of the Month wins an MHD watch

The writer of this month's star letter receives an MHD CRI watch worth £300. Designed by British car designer Matthew Humphries, the CRI captures the style of '60s and '70s motoring chronographs and is limited to an edition of just 500 pieces.

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INBOX



However, there are a couple of points I would agree to disagree with him on: 'cramped' and the driver being 'perched a little too high'. Hmm... I'm 6 foot 2 and at my 'winter weight' (actually an all-year-round couple of stone too heavy) I fit in the S2K fine.

The driving position is perfect – just sit in one, close your eyes and reach for where you think the steering wheel should be and you will instantly find it. Then reach for where you'd ideally want the gearstick to be and it will fall straight into your hand.

Could I suggest a follow-up article with an S2000 that's had some modifications to address Richard's issues with the chassis and the lack of low-end torque – both of which, incidentally, I would agree to agree with.

Paul Roberts

The UK is OK

I'm afraid I disagree with Richard Meaden's column about declining driving standards in the UK (evo 242). I think we are actually a pretty considerate bunch.

As a sales rep (ducks for cover) I do 40,000-50,000 miles per year in a car and on a motorcycle and think that UK standards are much better than those in many other countries.

I will add a caveat though: during the week! Monday to Friday is a whole different story to the weekend. On Sunday evening you'll see superminis tailgating at 90mph-plus in the fast lane!

Paul Brown

IAM-ing higher

Having just read Richard Meaden's column on driving standards, I have to say I wholeheartedly

agree that those in the UK have dropped. I am in a position to have seen the decline from a police perspective, starting in 1989, becoming a response driver in 1993 and then Class 1 Advanced in 1996. You soon get a different perspective of standards when you are on a run in an armed response vehicle from one side of London to the other. It's scary.

Now, I might have put this down to in-car entertainment and mobile phones reducing the attention of drivers, but recently the culprit became crystal clear: the instruction that people are receiving and the tests they must pass are not fit for purpose.

The evidence: My wife volunteered me to help some newly qualified drivers at her place of work. The first could not park, and a ten-minute drive showed she could not steer without the car snaking across the road, could not brake or change gear without giving me whiplash, and had no concept of positioning or dealing with roundabouts. Two two-hour sessions gave her the confidence she needed, opened her eyes to the pleasure of driving and also solved that initial parking issue. It is truly worrying that the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency is willing to accept such low standards.

My daughter is soon to take her test. However, her Instructor is an ex-colleague, a Class 1 Advanced driver, and at this point she is well beyond what her test requires. I will then pay for her to do Pass Plus and an IAM course, a skid-pan course (if I can find one), plus some high-speed driving. Unfortunately she has inherited



her father's love of cars and speed, but she will at least know how to do it correctly and safely.
Stuart Elliott

McLaren madness

Excellent drive story with the McLaren 720S [above left] (evo 242). It really gave a visceral taste of what it must feel like to drive such a beast of a car on amazing roads in Italy. One thing that resonated in particular was the description of the 'life-affirming' drive that led Adam Towler to not want to drive like that again during the same day.

It's not in the same league as the 720, but I owned two 997 Turbos that could deliver incredible adrenaline hits on the right roads in the right conditions. I can remember times when I had the same feeling described by Adam. However, not only did I not want to drive like that again for some time because I needed a brain rest, but more due to the crazy custodial speeds involved.

This is the reason that I now look for cars that can give up their thrills at 60 per cent of those speeds. The problem is that year-on-year new sports cars continue to hit harder, sooner and easier, pushing their maximum-attack thrills further out of sensible reach and frequency...

Gilbert Strachan

Flat-out

I couldn't agree more with John Pearson (Inbox, evo 243) about what constitutes the thrill of driving. A few years back I was driving your favourite car of the first 200 editions (a 997.2 GT3 RS) on one of your favourite routes (the evo Triangle) and, obviously,

was having a ball. Then I suffered a puncture.

Bugger, I thought, that's my weekend ruined. Especially when the car was trawled off and I was left with a not-exactly-evo courtesy car – a diesel Vauxhall Meriva [above left]. I muttered to myself about my distinctly First World problem and set off back home along the same B-roads I had enjoyed so much in the Porsche.

In its own way, the drive back was as memorable as the earlier drive in the opposite direction. I had a chance to actually enjoy the scenery (it was less blurry) and just appreciate the joy of driving on those wonderful roads.

evoness is indeed all around us if we'd care to look.

Nigel Arnold

Porsche pedantry

Putting Americans right on pronunciation can be an exercise in futility. Like Richard Porter (column, evo 242), I once tried to educate an American on how to pronounce 'Porsche', but I tried to do it via email.

I doomed my efforts from the outset by telling my American pal that 'Porsche' should be pronounced the same way as the name of the female character in Shakespeare, meaning Portia.

He came back with: 'But she was called Juliet and there has never been a car called Juliet.' Unfortunately this led down a winding lane of digression, discussing Alfa Romeo Guiliass and Guiliettas until I forgot what I was trying to achieve and lost the will to continue.

He still says Porsch.

Lee Thickett, Sheffield

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Audi RS4 Avant

A super-estate favourite is back, with a torquy V6 and a new demeanour. But are these changes for the better?

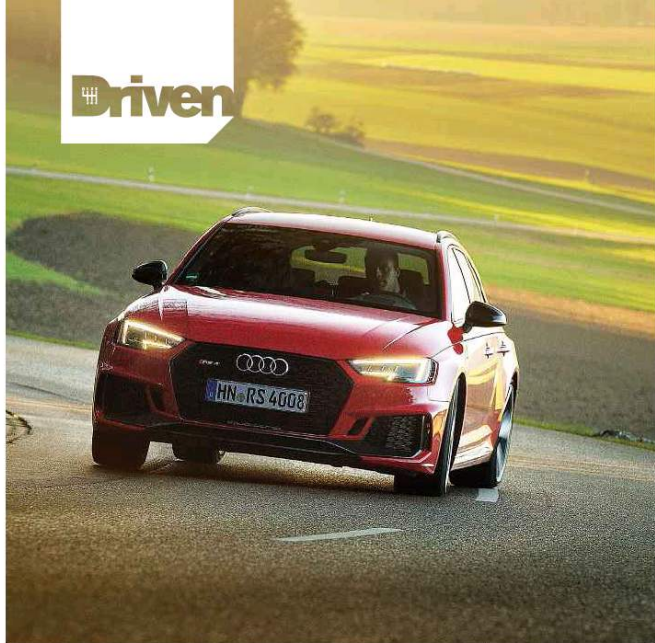
Photography by Dean Smith

TO STEAL CRASSLY FROM RADIOHEAD, THERE should be no alarms and no surprises with the new Audi RS4 Avant: we've already driven the same mechanical package in the RS5, after all. Then again, that may not be such a bad thing, because there's the same irrepressibly eager 2.9-litre twin-turbo V6, that fast-acting and rear-biased four-wheel-drive system with its Sport Differential on the rear axle, and the replacement of the old twin-clutch 'box with a more conventional eight-speed torque-converter. It's a package that has left us enamoured with the RS5, although not, it must be said, on initial acquaintance.

However good the RS5, it's inevitably the RS4 that generates the most anticipation. That's what a certain amount of tradition can do for a car, and in the RS4's case it has effectively annexed the super-estate market with a thoroughness verging on default status, even if the actual quality of the cars, away from the myth, has sometimes been patchy.

The latest version has most in common with the 'B5' original of 2000-2002. For a start, it's powered by a turbocharged V6 of under 3 litres displacement, no longer a rev-hungry V8, and once again it will only be available in the estate-car body style. However, one aspect it shares with all its forebears is that it is a natural looker – it seems no one can do fast estates quite like Audi Sport. With our test car's lustrous Misano Red paint, deeply dished optional 20-inch milled aluminium wheels and those familiar box arches, you won't be mistaking this RS4 for a 2.0 TDI A4 Avant. Ever.

Climb into the driver's seat and you'll find the cabin either pleasingly functional or drearily predictable. It's an A4, of course, and as rational, upright and upstanding in its Germanic delivery as you'd expect, yet at the same time there's a keen sense that what matters has been executed ruthlessly well. Your hands grasp a delectable, flat-bottomed, Alcantara-covered wheel, while the gear selector is similarly clad; admittedly, the Alcantara is an option in both cases, but the sports seats are standard, and have moveable bolsters and an extendable base cushion for a snug embrace. The driving position, for me at least, is without fault.



Left: as handsome as ever... Below: Alcantara wheel optional but oh-so desirable. Bottom: torquey twin-turbo V6 packs a massive punch



Thumb the starter button and the V6 fires through the optional (£1200) sports exhaust with the same extrovert whoop as an RS5, but then quickly quiets and idles away with a subtle murmur of considerable depth. Prime Comfort on the Drive Select and tug the gear selector down to D and the car moves away with oily ease, riding with a suppleness completely alien to RS products prior to recent times. Whenever the road's topography gets lumpy there's a clear sensation of the Dynamic Ride Control dampers (a £2000 option) using up their full stroke to combat unwanted movement, rather than of the car fighting the road in aggressive retaliation.

It's at this precise moment that the path ahead forks two ways towards your ultimate view on the RS4. Feel bitter about the lack of a charismatic, rumbling V8? Dislike the effortless steering, the softer ride, the sheer normality of it all? You'll probably be in the same camp of people who also have issues with the latest RS5. But if this sounds like an enticingly comfortable and useful means of extremely rapid everyday transport then read on, because plenty of that is in store, and a lot more besides.

We're driving 'our' RS4 in a bright but

freezing Bavaria, and hence it's shod with winter tyres – always a squidgy mask over a car's true dynamic personality. Also having an influence, hopefully for the better, are those upgraded dampers and wheels, plus carbon-ceramic brakes (£6000). The wheels save 8kg over the other optional 20-inch rim (19-inch forged wheels are standard), while the carbon-ceramics are another 8kg trimmed. Those two options alone equate to a 16kg saving in unsprung mass, something not to be sneered at in spite of the inevitable additional cost.

It is possible to mooch around in the RS4 all day long and only access a fraction of its performance, but inevitably the temptation to floor the throttle soon proves too strong. Do so and you'll discover a notably more natural voice than in the RS5, a richer, more authentic tone, but with the same chesty snuffles and thuds through the exhaust system when the revs die back down below 3000rpm. Thankfully, the distant artillery from the tailpipes is relatively random in its delivery.

A sudden input of throttle and the RS4 reveals its haymaker: a massive surge of acceleration violent enough that a pre-emptive squeeze of the right-hand paddle is necessary if you're not to tag the limiter in

second gear when driving in manual mode. Whatever the revs, the V6 seems to simply explode into action, surely a benefit of its 442lb ft torque peak being developed from an impressively low 1900rpm.

Ultimately, the RS4's dynamic edge is stymied by those winter tyres, but it seems relatively safe to assume that it'll be a staggeringly quick cross-country device in the style of its coupe relation, only with vastly increased load and passenger space. Turn-in is immediate and positive, and the effects of the Sport Differential at the rear are blatantly obvious, because under full power it'll even adopt a few degrees of slip at the rear. It never feels blunt, flat-footed or one-dimensional, the ceramic brakes are tireless, and the gearchange is crisp enough, although occasionally lacks the bite of the old twin-clutch alternative. I'd relish a long journey of varied driving in this car.

All of which means the new RS4 may not be the sort of car you'd spring out of bed early on Sunday morning to drive, but I'm struggling to think of a more desirable daily driver for an 'evo type' with the usual commitments and requirements of everyday life.

Adam Towler (@AdamTowler)

Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V6, 2894cc, twin-turbo	444bhp @ 5700-6700rpm	442lb ft @ 1900-5000rpm	4.1sec (claimed)	155mph (limited)	1715kg (263bhp/ton)	£61,625

Very 'real world' fast; comfortable, useable; tough looks Some may feel it lacks character and drama; pricey with options

evo rating ★★★★★

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Volkswagen Polo GTI

The Golf GTI's push upmarket should give its little brother the opportunity to shine. Does it take it?

THE VW POLO GTI HAS ALWAYS struggled to make its mark on the hot hatch landscape. Stuck in the shadow of the more illustrious Golf, there's a sense that the smaller car has been deliberately held back so as not to risk stealing its big brother's limelight, that it's a model that's about the show rather than the go.

Now, however, there is hope for the Polo, because the Golf's relentless push upmarket has created a gap in VW's line-up for something more youthful and fun. It also can't have escaped the attention of Wolfsburg's top brass that cars such as the (deep breath) Peugeot 208 GTI by Peugeot Sport and Ford Fiesta ST have proved to be surprisingly successful. The result is that this all-new Polo GTI is claimed to be the most playful and driver-focused yet – a car that uses the clear

air between itself and the Golf to set out a more entertaining agenda.

The initial signs are encouraging, chiefly because the latest, sixth-generation Polo is underpinned by the same MQB platform that supports the larger Golf. Mounted to this is thoroughly reworked suspension that's 15mm lower than the standard Polo's and comprises struts at the front and a torsion beam at the rear (the Golf's multi-link system is too bulky and expensive for the smaller car). The springs are 38 per cent stiffer at the front and 39 per cent firmer at the rear, while there are also thicker anti-roll bars and uprated passive dampers. Drivers wanting even more keen dynamics can order the 'Sport Select' set-up that features two-way adaptive dampers, a thicker front anti-roll bar and tougher steering arms and rear axle mountings.

Under the bonnet is the tried and tested EA888 2-litre four (no downsizing here – take note, Ford), tuned to deliver a respectable 197bhp and a healthy 236lb ft of torque. Yet while VW claims the six-speed DSG-equipped Polo GTI (a manual version doesn't arrive until the middle of 2018) will rattle off the 0-62mph sprint in just 6.7sec, it never feels quite as quick as its rippling torque figure and relatively low 1280kg kerb weight suggest. There's plenty of muscle at low speeds and the unit relishes a workout, pulling cleanly, crisply and with a satisfyingly rorty rasp all the way to the red line, but it feels a bit flat in the mid-range, particularly in third gear and above, where the ratios are absurdly tall for a hot hatch – sixth is a continent-crossing 35mph per 1000rpm.

And it's not just the ratios that cause concern, because while there's nothing

technically wrong with the DSG (there's some jerkiness when moving away, but it shifts smoothly in auto mode and swaps cogs with lightning speed when you use the steering-wheel paddles), its virtually seamless changes sap the sensation of speed and remove a crucial layer of driver interaction. Unforgivably, it also shifts up automatically when the engine hits its limiter, even in manual mode.

What about that uprated chassis, then? Initial impressions are good: when tootling around, the Polo benefits from almost perfect control weights and a taut yet composed ride – on our adaptive damper-equipped car at least. Push harder and there's strong bite from the front tyres and a definite sense that the rear axle is taking its share of the load; on the smooth and snaking roads of our Spanish test route, the VW felt planted and poised, allowing you to cover ground exceptionally quickly.

Yet there's something just a little clinical about the way the Polo goes about its business, and after just a few corners you feel you've got the measure of the GTI. The steering is quick and precise but there's only the bare minimum of feedback, while that grippy chassis doesn't want to get expressive. Lifting the throttle will tighten the car's line, but there's no sense of the puppy-like agility you get in the 208 GTI. And while you can



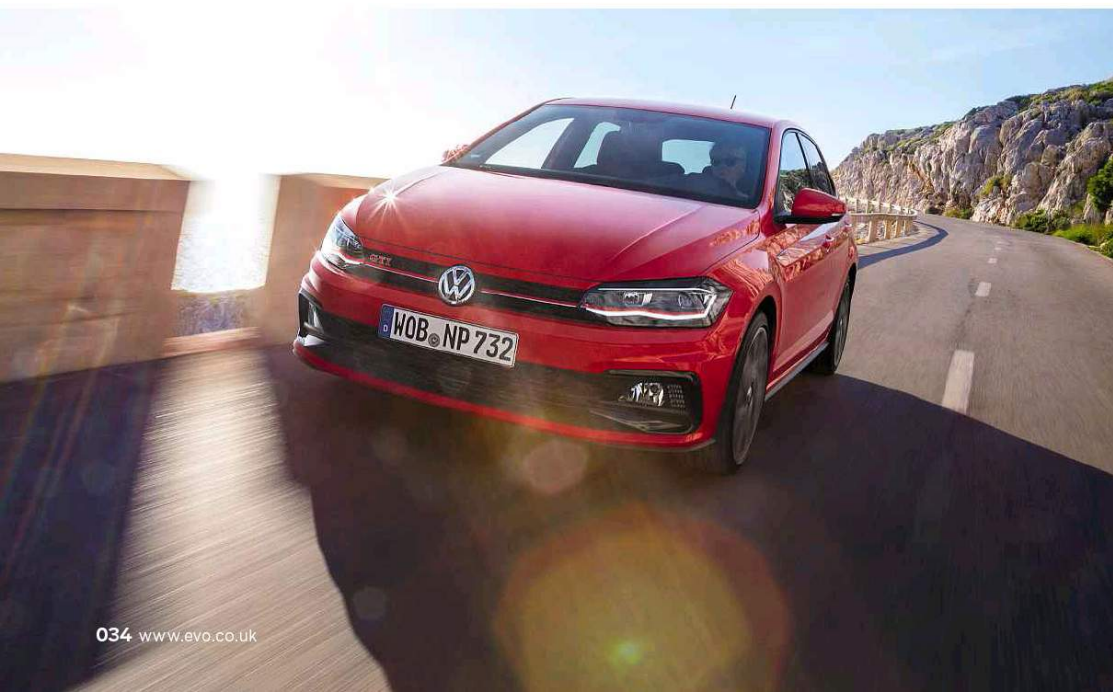
sharpen the throttle, add artificial weight to the steering and fractionally firm up the dampers with the driver mode settings, the Polo's benign character remains to the fore.

The standard XDS 'differential' is also no substitute for the real thing. You can feel it nibbling away at the front brakes as it keeps the nose tucked in, but with the ESP in its Sport setting (you can't turn the systems off completely) the inside wheel simply spins power away out of slower turns.

There's no doubt the new Polo GTI is faster and far more composed than its predecessor

but, despite VW's claims, it still feels as though it is playing understudy to the star. If you can't afford a Golf GTI, or don't need its extra space, then the Polo is a fine alternative, right down to its red stripes, checked seat trim and cut-above perceived quality, while few small cars are as comfortable and easy to live with. But, for keen drivers, it falters. The really frustrating thing is that there's a fine car lurking somewhere underneath. So, VW, what about a 'Performance' version with more power, closely stacked ratios and the Golf's trick diff?

James Disdale



Above: Instruments are now fully digital; dash also features a touchscreen infotainment system. **Left and right:** exterior is almost as grown-up as big brother Golf's, but funky DRLs give it a lift



Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo	197bhp @ 4400-6000rpm	236lb ft @ 1500-4400rpm	6.7sec (claimed)	147mph (claimed)	1280kg (156bhp/ton)	£21,500 (est)

Decent performance; mature ride and handling balance

Currently only with DSG; tall gearing; lack of driver involvement

evo rating ★★★★★



SEAT Leon Cupra R

With 306bhp and a chassis retuned for sharper responses, can the latest Leon prove that the Cupra brand still has its mojo?

SEAT'S HIGH-PERFORMANCE CUPRA arm has become something of a conundrum. A decade ago, the sporting Spanish sub-brand was a byword for fast and affordable fun. Fast-forward to the present day and it's all, well, a bit of a muddle. The rot set in with 2017's Leon Cupra 300, which had 296bhp (up 10bhp) but lost the option of the hardcore Sub8 pack. Then we were told there would be no go-faster version of the new Ibiza. Yet against this backdrop was the revelation that SEAT was allowing Cupra to go it alone as a dedicated performance brand. This was good news, until we learnt the first model to be born under the new regime would be based on the Ateca SUV.

With this in mind, what do we make of the new Leon Cupra R? On paper, it appears

to answer many of the criticisms levelled at the standard Cupra, which has lost its edge in the face of hugely talented rivals such as the Honda Civic Type R and Hyundai i30 N. There's more power, revised suspension and an aerodynamically tuned bodykit. You can even spec Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres, which is always a sure sign a car means business.

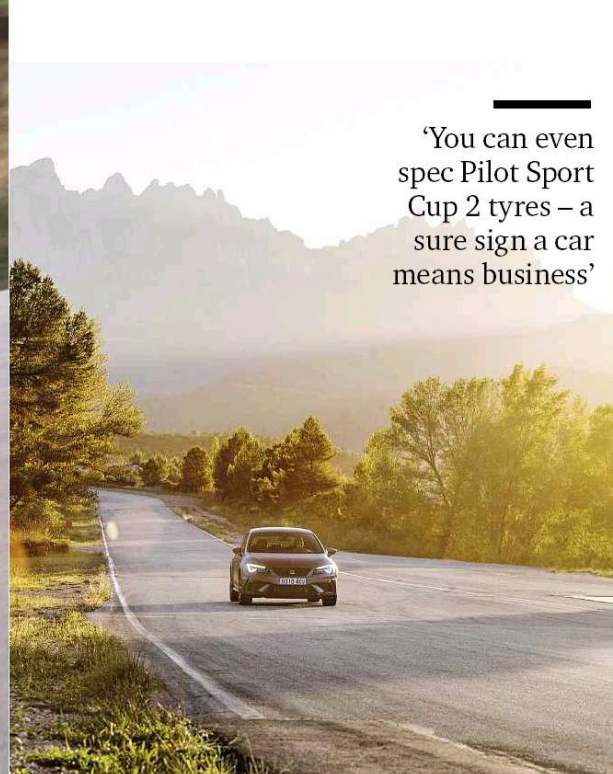
So far so good, but there is a catch – SEAT is building just 799 examples, of which only 24 will come to the UK, and most of those are already sold. Oh, and even if you can get your hands on one, you'll have to fork out an eye-watering £34,995. So is there anything we can learn from a car that you can't really buy?

One thing's for certain – the R looks the part. There's a deeper front bumper, complete with a more functional carbonfibre

splitter, a large tailgate spoiler and extended wheelarches that cover a 20mm wider track. There are also plenty of copper-coloured trim inserts, which you'll either love or loathe.

There's more copper inside, plus a pair of high-backed bucket seats and some new dials. As with many high-performance limited-run specials, there's Alcantara for the wheel and gearlever, but this Leon is no stripped-out track special, as wireless phone charging, heated seats and the latest infotainment system all feature – luxury rather than lap times is the emphasis here. It's practical too, curiously only being offered as a five-door.

There are further promising signs under the skin. At the front, the strut suspension gets more negative camber (2 degrees rather than 1.3), while the electrically assisted steering has been recalibrated for faster response. Also treated to a remap are the adaptive dampers, which now work across a wider bandwidth, while 370mm front discs (up from 340mm) are clamped by four-pot Brembo calipers. Finally, the only transmission option on right-hand-drive cars is a six-speed manual, although Rs sold in other markets can also be ordered with the six-speed paddleshift DSG.



'You can even spec Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres – a sure sign a car means business'



Far left: revised chassis works better the faster you go. **This page:** full battledress outside, acres of Alcantara inside, and lots of copper accents – copper being Cupra's new brand colour

in Normal mode (there are also Sport, Cupra and Individual, where you can pick and mix your diff, throttle and damper settings), and it also responds more quickly. On the dry and smooth Spanish tarmac of our test route, the SEAT's nose clung on gamely during turn-in, helping to boost confidence, while its electronically controlled differential delivered impressive traction – although on the few bumpy surfaces we encountered there was some subtle tugging from the front wheels when accelerating hard. As you'd expect, the Michelins' hold on the warm tarmac was stupendous – in the dry, in most corners your bravery will run out before the grip.

The revised dampers deliver decent comfort at low speed, yet go faster and there's far better body control: where the standard car gets a bit discombobulated, the R feels tied-down and precise. In fact, the only thing that interrupts your flow is the brakes, which suffer from an overserved action, meaning smooth stopping requires delicate footwork.

Overall, the R is a big improvement on the regular Cupra, and if SEAT could make these changes to the standard car without raising its price, the gap between it and the Civic Type R would become much narrower. However, SEAT bosses say that this won't happen. So instead we'll have to take some solace in the fact that, despite the apparently rudderless direction of the Cupra brand, given the opportunity its engineers haven't lost their touch for making engaging and entertaining cars. **James Disdale**

Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Price
In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo	306bhp @ 5800-6200rpm	280lb ft @ 1800-5700rpm	5.8sec (claimed)	155mph (claimed)	1378kg (226bhp/ton)	£34,995

⬆️ Sharper handling, better body control, strong performance ⬆️ High price, limited availability

evo rating ★★★★★

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Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio

We love the Giulia Quadrifoglio; will Alfa's hot SUV also win our hearts?

YOU ONLY NEED TO SKIP AHEAD TO eCoty to see how highly we regard Alfa Romeo's comeback car, the Giulia, and not only in 503bhp Quadrifoglio guise, because the Veloce and Super are pretty special, too. But a D-segment saloon will only take a car maker so far; in the 21st century you need an SUV, and the Stelvio is Alfa's offering.

This range-topping Stelvio Quadrifoglio is pitched squarely at Porsche's Macan Turbo. It has the 503bhp 2.9-litre twin-turbo petrol V6 and eight-speed auto gearbox from the Giulia Quadrifoglio, the only change to the drivetrain being the addition of Alfa's Q4 four-wheel-drive system. In normal mode it's 100 per cent rear-wheel drive, reacting to sensors monitoring grip and slip levels to determine how much drive needs to be directed to the front, up to a maximum of 50 per cent.

The pumped body boasts short overhangs and a four-square stance emphasised by the discreet extensions to the aluminium wheelarches. The same material is used for the bonnet, doors and tailgate, plus the double-wishbone front and multi-link rear suspension. Its use also explains the Stelvio's 95kg weight saving over a Macan Turbo.



It's compact inside, but also well-finished, with hand-stitched leather, carbonfibre and Alcantara covering the standard sport seats – or the excellent carbon-shelled Sparco buckets that are available as an option.

With the Giulia's mechanicals carried over, it's little surprise that the Stelvio drives equally well. The V6 responds instantly and above 3000rpm piles on speed relentlessly, the ZF 'box whipping through the gears. That's if you haven't chosen to change gear yourself with the exquisite aluminium paddles, which you really should. You should also turn the DNA-Pro dial to Dynamic or Race mode. The former sharpens the throttle and gearchanges, cracks the exhaust up an octave and slackens the ESP; the latter turns everything off and injects

a double shot of espresso. In either mode, body control is taut, the steering quick, direct and honest in its feedback, if a little mute when you want to commit.

Cross-country, this Stelvio reacts, drives and rewards more like a 500bhp hot hatch than an SUV. With the nose hooked up, it squats on its rear haunches and drives itself out of a corner with a punch to worry many an M- or AMG-badged car. On a less than perfect surface, the rear Pirelli P Zeros can be forced to relinquish their grip, allowing you to drive harder from the grip, allowing you to drive harder from the way in and use the grip to make up the pace on the way out. Or spec the optional P Zero Corsas.

The rise of the SUV is unstoppable, and, while most are fit for purpose, few are a treat to drive and fewer still offer a genuine thrill. In fact until now there's only really been Porsche's Macan GTS. Well, now you can add the Stelvio Quadrifoglio to that (very) short list.

Stuart Gallagher (@stuartg917)

Specification

Engine	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V6, 2891cc, twin-turbo	503bhp @ 6500rpm	442lb ft @ 2500rpm-5000rpm	3.8sec (claimed)	176mph (claimed)	1830kg (279bhp/ton)	£65,000 (est)

➤ Goes every bit as well as the Giulia Quadrifoglio ➤ Needs optional P Zero Corsa tyres to give its very best

evo rating ★★★★★



RICHARD MEADEN

The old Lamborghini was like no other car company; it would never have built the Urus

WHEN I WAS A KID, I WAS FASCINATED BY Lamborghini. Specifically the Lamborghini Countach. This was partly down to learning its name was derived from a Piedmontese swear word (what impressionable small kid doesn't love a bit of legit profanity?), but it was mostly down to the crazy looks and Top Trumps-winning specification.

There was also an air of mystery to Lamborghini that made the company and its cars seem all the more fantastical. In the days before Google, Twitter and YouTube, the folklore surrounding Lamborghini was spread via a kind of osmosis. Mostly via the pages of motoring magazines such as *Motor* and *Car*.

And what tales they were. The tractor maker motivated by his dislike of Enzo Ferrari and dissatisfaction with the cars from Maranello. Models named after fighting bulls. A mysterious Kiwi engineer called Bob Wallace, who created hardcore experimental cars such as the Miura Jota in his spare time, then tore off down the autostrada until they threatened to take off. The Espada's party piece of accelerating from walking pace to V-max in one gear. Barry 'BR33' Robinson. The LM002. And, of course, my treasured die-cast Marzal.

Thus steeped in geek mythology, I burned to drive or even ride in a Lamborghini. The wait was long, but thankfully the gods smiled upon me and I landed a job as a motoring journalist. Given I'd spent my school years reading and re-reading *Car* magazine's 'Convoy!' story, where Mel Nichols recounted bringing a Countach, Silhouette and Urraco back from the factory to the UK, I was never going to have a normal job. But to find myself learning my craft alongside those who had worked through those *Car* magazine glory days somehow cemented my spiritual connection to Sant'Agata. I had to get there.

The moment came in 1996 and it couldn't have been more perfect. The car was the Diablo VT Roadster. No, not a balls-out SV, but it was a Diablo and it was just for us – a private gig for *Performance Car* magazine, not an orchestrated launch. The informality of those pre-Audi days was obvious when Valentino Balboni met us from the airport. It continued when we arrived at the factory and were told to wait *cinque minuti*. An hour and several rocket-fuel espressos later, we were led to the service department, where the car was waiting for us in the sunshine.

I've driven many Lamborghinis since, but apart from spending a day on classic Appennine roads in a Miura SV (once again with Balboni for company) for an early *evo*, nothing has come close to that first visit. Of the current crop, the Huracán Performante has an abundance of fire and brimstone, but the cars and the company are too accessible, too damned reasonable. Press access should rely on a little black book of factory or importer contacts and a preparedness to spend fruitless days waiting while the test car is finished. Buying them should require more than just money. Driving them should demand a level of skill, hand-eye guile and a pinch of madness. Nowadays Lamborghinis flatter their drivers rather than frighten the bejesus out of them.

Not that Lamborghini is alone in this – most of the once-exotic, eccentric and esoteric family-run marques have gone too mainstream. Ferrari has been consistently building truly sensational cars since the turn of the century, but since the departure of Luca di Montezemolo the company has traded hot-headed charisma for cold-hearted corporate governance.

There are flashes of Lamborghini's free-spirited approach in McLaren's Super Series cars, but the true spirit of Lamborghini lives on in marques such as Paganì and Koenigsegg – true artisanal supercar builders with the founder's name above the door and an aversion to racing. But still they don't seem to resonate in the way Ferruccio's efforts did. Simpler times, cooler cars.

And the Urus? I'm no fan, but I think it's the vulgar and somewhat tepid manifestation of a wider malaise at Lamborghini. Namely this once-maverick supercar maker has become a slave to sales targets and made to conform. When Audi took control, we feared that in saving Lamborghini it would also ruin it, though the cars initially proved those fears unfounded. My beef with the Urus is that, of all the major players in this sector, Lamborghini owned the intellectual and emotional rights to building an outrageous SUV. Yet what's been done with that unique authenticity and heritage? Squandered on a derivative model that shuns a wholly excessive V12 and genuine weapons-grade purpose for vital organs shared with an Audi and a Bentley.

There was a dread inevitability about what the Urus would be. Now it's here, the inexorable demystification of Lamborghini is finally complete – less raging bull, more marketing *cazzate*.

@DickieMeaden



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



RICHARD PORTER

Treating cars as investments is nothing short of wrong-headed, reckons Porter

MY CAR INSURANCE RENEWAL CAME THROUGH last week. My shoulders sagged and a long sigh escaped from my face. Anyone peering into my kitchen window might have assumed it contained a deflating sex doll staring at an envelope. I hate insurance renewal time. 'Dear Mr Porter, We realise you haven't used your insurance however we believe you might have seen an accident in the last year so we're increasing your premium by 87 per cent.'

But no. For another year's cover, my current insurance company wanted to increase my annual payment by just nine extra pounds. This seemed quite reasonable and, being busy and lazy, I would have simply said yes. Except that I've recently done one of those things that makes you feel more grown up: I've found a proper insurance broker, one that lets me talk to the same person every time rather than locking me into a spiral of pressing 1 to speak to yet another script-reading stranger with a Welsh accent. For Midlife Crisis Car 2, which you can read about on page 120, the broker had already sorted a good deal. Perhaps they could work their magic for Midlife Crisis Car 1, the Land Rover Defender Heritage I tried to justify to you, or possibly myself, back in *evo* 220. The good thing about the broker is that they already have my details and in order to get some quotes on the Land Rover they had just one question: what's it worth?

Well now, I know what I paid for it. And I also know it's generally assumed that these last-of-the-line, limited-edition Defenders have crept up in value. That became clear as soon as the Solihull production line shut down. Shortly afterwards I heard of two people with cars just like mine who moved them on in order to trouser a reasonable profit. For a brief moment I wondered if I should do the same. After all, how often do you buy a new car and then discover that it's gone up rather than down in value? Yea, yea, pipe down 911 R people – we know, we know. But then I realised, if I sold my Land Rover then I wouldn't have my Land Rover anymore. And I like my Land Rover. So that thought went away, and I got on with enjoying my life bouncing around in a retro-coloured piece of 1950s farm equipment.

'What's the point of a car if you're not going to use it? If your biggest thrill is thinking about how much money it's making, you probably just need to sell it'

But now the broker wanted a value. So I went online to have a look at similar cars for sale. And what I found was quite a shock. I won't be so vulgar as to share actual prices here, but suffice to say there are people out there putting some very stiff numbers against Heritage Defenders. Whether they're fetching those amounts, I don't know. But if they're getting even close, these old trucks have gone up quite a lot in percentage terms. And this means I'm facing one of those situations that would rightly earn a First World Problems hashtag on Twitter: I've got a car that's becoming too valuable to use.

At the time of writing there are a couple that are leggier than mine and are still up for daft cash, but in general the cars for sale seemed to have tiny mileages, which means people are

stashing these things away. That's what you're supposed to do with cars of rising worth. Don't expose them to extremes of temperature or moisture or direct sunlight and for heaven's sake, don't drive them.

Cold logic says that my car is now too valuable to use and should be preserved in time so that the only thing that moves is its theoretical sale price. Well I'm sorry, but screw that logic and the limited-edition horse it rode in on. What's the point of a car if you're not going to use it? If your biggest thrill is thinking about how much money it's making, you probably just need to sell it. Because in truth, there's no such thing as a car that's too valuable to use. So my Defender is going to remain parked on the road and driven around the streets of London or taken for another run up to the damp bit of farmland where we film *The Grand Tour*. I'm going to keep stuffing the kids in the back and letting the dog drool on the floor. I'm even okay with the moment a few weeks ago when TV's James May managed to spill tea on the passenger seat. Yes, every one of these things is probably chipping a few quid off the value but I get a pleasure from using the car that I don't get from a theoretical dream of appreciation. Anyway, Defenders are better with a backstory and a bit of patina.

If you really want an investment, buy some art. If you'd rather have a car then use it. So sod the notion of it being too valuable to use; I'm going to keep driving my Defender and nothing can stop me. Apart from, perhaps, a sky-high insurance renewal.

@sniffpetrol

Richard is *evo*'s longest-serving columnist and the script editor on *The Grand Tour*

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TED KRAVITZ

Robert Kubica is making a comeback from a supposedly career-ending accident. But should he?

HERE'S A FUN CHALLENGE: TRY DRIVING ONE-handed. If you drive a manual this experiment will be as short-lived as it is stupid. (It's stupid whatever you drive and is not to be done seriously anyway, but you're smart enough to know that already.) However, if your car has an automatic transmission of some sort, it is at least possible. Now, if you're right-handed, use your left hand. Go to your favourite B-road and try to be precise, at the speed limit and in control, through corners with a bit of loading. And when you're through the corner, use that hand to go into the system menu and change the language to Greek. Pretty hard, isn't it? By now, presuming you haven't ended up in a hedgerow, put your other hand back on the wheel and spend the rest of your journey considering how much tougher this would be if you were driving a Formula 1 car.

That's the task facing Robert Kubica as he attempts an F1 comeback nobody thought was possible. Even his insurance company had paid out: they concluded the injuries Robert sustained in a rally accident in 2011 were undoubtedly career-ending.

But they weren't. Through sheer bloody-minded determination, while ignoring physical pain and requiring copious emotional grit and frankly, balls, Kubica is back. The Pole has got to the point where he was able to drive the current Williams-Mercedes FW40 at the post-season test in Abu Dhabi to within split seconds of its able-bodied drivers who'd had a whole year's worth of experience with the car.

Overcoming a physical limitation is tough for anyone – as Frank Williams himself knows well – but what Kubica has achieved so far, and the progress he's made as his body and brain relearn how to drive with his limitations, is astonishing given everything else he's had to deal with in daily life. Robert's right arm and hand are pretty much immobile and his right leg and hip are still not at full strength following multiple operations.

Despite this, at the recent Autosport Awards, Kubica looked in great shape. If I'm honest, he appeared older than his 32 years – a few more grey hairs on the temples, a few fewer hairs altogether up top. But the sparkle in the eye was still there. On

stage he talked of how he was in better shape physically than in 2010. 'I have to work much harder now – I was a lazy guy in the past,' he half-joked, adding that 90 per cent of his driving ability is just as it was in 2010.

What's happened to that last 10 per cent is, of course, the clincher. At the test, Robert lapped to within nine-tenths of a second of Felipe Massa's best effort in qualifying. Impressive, one would have thought, given he's not yet back up to speed and how unfamiliar he was with the 2017 Williams. But since then Kubica's lap times have been picked over by journalists sucking their teeth at data that appears to show that he's not as good as he used to be. Hello? He's only got one useable arm, for Pete's sake. Come on...

Although that does lead to the valid question of whether the whole thing is a good idea at all. Just because Robert Kubica can come back doesn't necessarily mean he should. He will have to work hard to prove himself up to the job in pressure environments, have to satisfy fellow drivers he'll be able to control his car in all weather conditions so that he won't be a danger to them, and also convince himself any further accident wouldn't pose additional risks to his health. All tough to do.

But if he wants to come back and Williams are happy to have him, why shouldn't he try? Kubica's isn't just a great story because it's unprecedented in

Formula 1; for Robert, a return to racing would grant a second chance at his life's purpose – putting right the tragedy of a career cut short before its time. So what if he's a tenth or two off? It might cost him a place in qualifying but there'll be nobody better in a crazy race where experience can win a Grand Prix. Let's face it, Williams are not going to be quick enough to win races on merit so you might as well have a smart driver on board as well as one with an amazing story to wow the sponsors.

On balance, then, you'd have to say it's worth it. It's not as if some mediocre driver was attempting a comeback: Kubica was (is?) world champion-level quality. If he secures the Williams drive, great. But if he gets this close only to fail? That would be just as tragic as what happened seven years ago on the Ronde di Andora.

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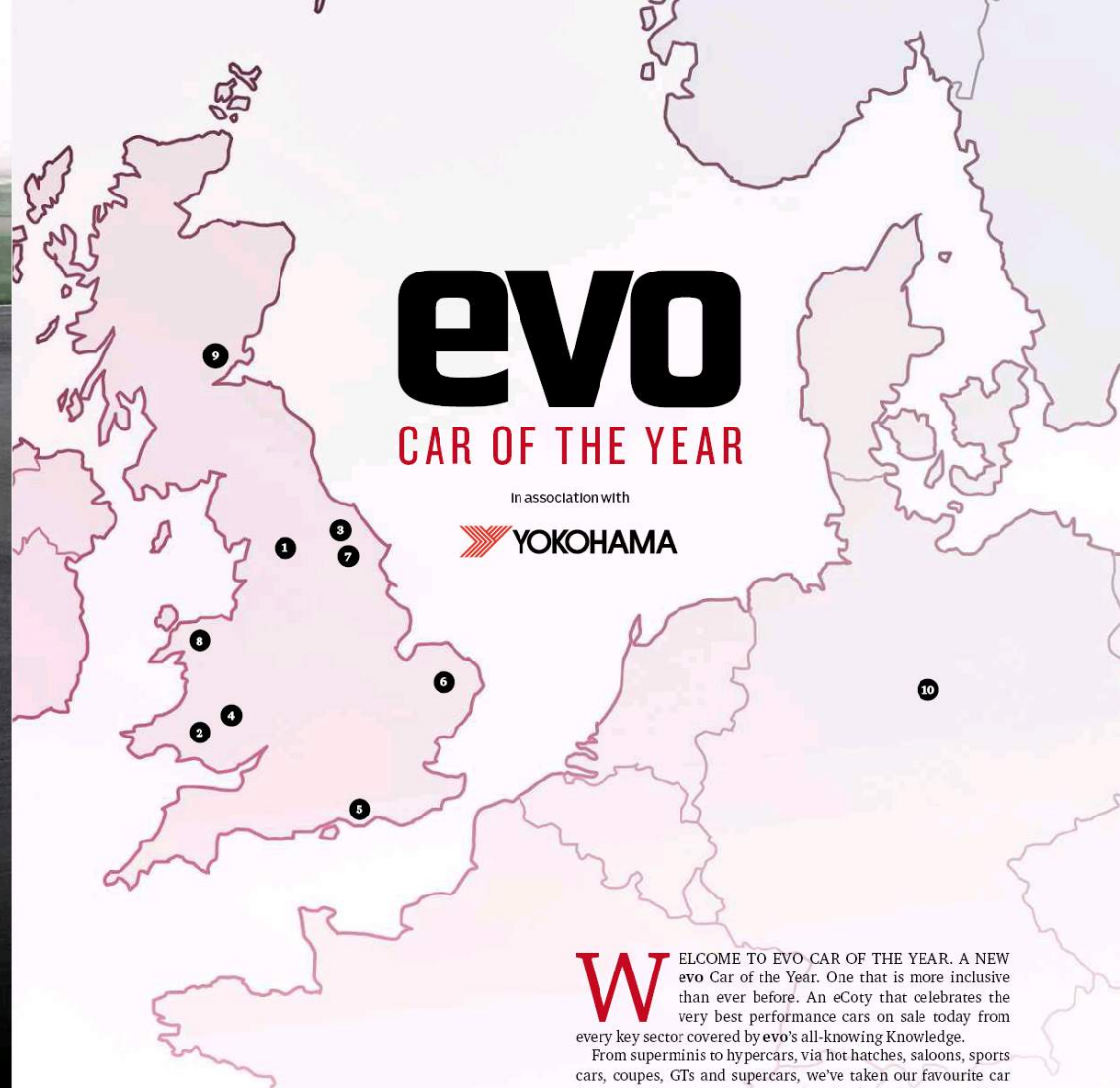
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CAR OF THE YEAR

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WELCOME TO EVO CAR OF THE YEAR. A NEW evo Car of the Year. One that is more inclusive than ever before. An eCoty that celebrates the very best performance cars on sale today from every key sector covered by evo's all-knowing Knowledge.

From superminis to hypercars, via hot hatches, saloons, sports cars, coupes, GTs and supercars, we've taken our favourite car from each class to roads that put them in their element, enabling them to show exactly what they're capable of, and we've travelled thousands of miles across the length and breadth of England, Scotland, Wales and, er, Germany to do so.

Unlike previous years we haven't restricted ourselves to considering only new cars launched during the last twelve months. As we see all too often, the latest arrivals aren't always an improvement over the established class leader. In addition, for a car to be eligible for consideration, you must be able to place an order for one, and not need to be a 'special' customer to do so. In other words, no unobtainium.

Over the following 40 pages we drive, dissect, discuss and deliver the verdicts that outline why our ten choices are the best of the best. Then we crown one evo Car of the Year.

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evo
CAR OF THE YEAR

SUPERMINI

PEUGEOT 208 GTi by PS

Compact, potent and with a highly adjustable chassis, this further-honed version of the 208 GTi is the best supermini you can buy

by ADAM TOWLER | PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

O PEN THE DRIVER'S DOOR ON THE Peugeot 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport and you'll see red. I don't mean metaphorically – the Lilliputian steering wheel and its correspondingly weird relationship with the instrument binnacle still split opinion, but they're hardly offensive. No, I mean literally, if you look down, on the floor. The 208 doesn't have red carpets like those glorious GTi classics that emerged from the Mulhouse plant years ago, but it does at least have scarlet carpet mats, and you'd be right to read something into that link with its past. This is a Peugeot hot hatch with plenty of the old fire smouldering in its sump.

After years of underachieving, Peugeot – or specifically Peugeot Sport – is back on form, and not just with this 208 but with the 308 by PS, too. Sure, the smaller car's supremacy in its class has in part been bequeathed to it by the disappearance of Ford's Fiesta ST, and a lull in the competition before the arrival of a new ST, the forthcoming Polo GTi and the imminent Toyota Yaris GRMN. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to lay all of the Peugeot's glory at the absence of others: it fought valiantly against the fast Ford favourite, and more than a few of us at *evo* would have picked the 208 over the Fiesta, given the choice.

So just what is it that makes the 208 special? One thing that isn't working for us is painting the car two different colours. OK, so some may well be seduced by the 'Coupe Franche' paintjob, but most of the *evo* team aren't. It's a gimmick the car really doesn't need and is a pain to keep clean. The black half also has the texture of medium-grade wet-and-dry paper. Horrid. David Vivian sums it up best: 'It's always a pleasure to see an excellent

EVO CAR OF THE YEAR: SUPERMINI



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car's potential fully realised, so it's a shame you feel as if you have to apologise for the Chav-inspired paint scheme and, as ever, wonder why you have to look over the top of the steering wheel to see the instruments.' You're stuck with the steering wheel but, happily, you don't have to go two-tone: other, single-colour options are available.

But what's important with the 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport are the mechanical changes that elevate it above the standard 208 GTi launched in 2012. Yes, power and torque are up, from 197bhp and 203lb ft to 205bhp and 221lb ft, but these small hikes are not the main event here, merely a useful extra kick when required. Those outputs are further enlivened by shorter gear ratios and then deployed through a Torsen-type limited-slip differential for much improved traction. (The basic 208 GTi has recently adopted the same engine and gearing, but not the diff.) A great GTi has never been about raw speed alone, but the 0.3-second reduction in the 0-62mph time – down to 6.5sec – is welcome enough, ensuring the little 208 is more than able to keep up with most of the larger hot hatches in a straight line.

However, it's the chassis that was always going to be where this car stands or falls, and it only takes a glance down the spec sheet to see that Peugeot Sport has taken the brief seriously. The front and rear track are wider by 22mm and 16mm respectively, the front anti-roll bar is softer while the springs are 30 per cent stiffer at the front but 80 per cent stiffer at the rear. The ride height has been lowered by 10mm, and the dampers are much more specialised items than those fitted to the standard car. Picture it in your head and it's clear there's a much greater contrast between the front and rear axles, encouraged by revised geometry, that should see the tail wagging the dog in a more traditional Peugeot hot hatch fashion. A set of Michelin's finest Pilot Super Sports completes the dynamic makeover.

There is a road in the Yorkshire Dales near where most of these images were shot on which the 208 feels borderline perfect. It's a reasonably narrow road, although still with a centreline, defined by violent gradient changes that wouldn't be out of place on a theme-park ride. There are few straight sections of any real note, but there are lots of corners, and many happen on, or immediately after, numerous crests and hollows. Unseasonably, the sun has been out most of the day, and there's still plenty of heat left in the road's surface. I genuinely find it hard to believe that there's a faster, more deft, more perfectly suited vehicle with which to tackle this stretch of asphalt.

Not once do I yearn for a single extra horsepower: the Peugeot pulls with real gusto from very low revs but has the top-end energy that's so vital in a small hot hatch. Its diminutive size is a real boon – a confirmation that, actually, a great hot hatch is not all about genuine downforce, Ring lap times and having 300bhp-plus. The 208 scythes between the low stone walls with plenty of room to spare either side of it, allowing the driver to choose their own cornering line, rather than being a mere prisoner between an unyielding barrier of hard rock and a painted white line.

There is tremendous cornering grip, to the point where I make a mental note to check if the tyres haven't been swapped for a set of Cup 2s. The diff is a work of wonder, allowing the chassis to resist understeer and cutting engine output wastage to zero. But even more than that, it's the willingness of the 208's rear axle to play an active part in cornering, and the sheer agility of the car, that makes this supermini a special driving experience. For every mile on the M1 that you might curse the insistent rebound rates of the dampers, your faith is repaid three times over when the road gets interesting.

Viv is very impressed, which always says a lot: 'It amply rewards commitment, tilting you towards a full-on groove in

'IT'S THE SHEER
AGILITY OF
THE CAR THAT
MAKES IT A
SPECIAL DRIVING
EXPERIENCE'

Left: red floor mats are a neat nod to hot Pugs of yesteryear; awkward wheel/dials relationship is less likeable. **Top left:** brakes are upgraded Brembo items. **Right:** nimble chassis gives you plenty of options in the corners





PEUGEOT 208 GTi by PEUGEOT SPORT

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo
Power	205bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	221lb ft @ 3000rpm
Weight	1160kg (180bhp/ton)
0-62mph	6.5sec (claimed)
Top speed	143mph (claimed)
Basic price	£23,550
evo rating	★★★★★

which poke, purchase and body control combine in a really satisfying way. If you're looking for a narrow band of supreme ability, the Pug nails it. It's a junior hot hatch that feels completely "on it".

And then there's our young resident hot hatch fan Will Beaumont, the custodian of this particular 208 on our Fast Fleet: 'It relishes being thrown into a corner, and its balance and hyper-reactive nature give you so many options on the way through. A small lift here, a tweak of the steering there; a little dab of the brakes can trim your line or send it sideways, or you can instantly neutralise any rotation with the throttle.'

Having said all of the above, the 208 isn't perfect. The engine is all but inaudible at times, and together with its occasionally soft throttle response makes attempting a heel-and-toe downchange particularly vexing. An odd driving position only exacerbates the problem, as Will concurs: 'The pedals are too close and you almost push down on them rather than flex your heel, while the steering wheel is too far away and almost totally obscures the dials – for me at least.'

A day later, a different road and different weather, and the 208 begins to struggle. Blasting across the moors in driving rain, it feels too stiff, the steering a bit nervous, the finesse from working the controls smoothly hard to come by. It's still a very rapid little device, but it requires a firm hand to stop it going wayward. Yet overall this is a terrifically desirable hot hatch: small but practical, relatively frugal, and most of all a car created by people with an obvious passion for enthusiastic driving. Forthcoming contenders will need to work hard to dethrone our favourite supermini.

SUPERMINI HIGHLY COMMENDED

AS IT STANDS, THE PEUGEOT 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport effectively sits in a class of one. Yes, there are cars such as the Mini Cooper S and JCW, but they've become a little too bloated and 'upmarket' to be considered true superminis. Then there's the latest SEAT Ibiza, which gets no spicier than an FR with 148bhp and won't be joined by a Cupra. It's a similar story over at Skoda, where plans for a vRS variant of the current Fabia have sunk without trace.

Yet the go-faster supermini isn't dead yet. Unfortunately the new Volkswagen Polo GTi falls somewhat short of the Peugeot's mark (see page 34), but we're full of

hope for the **Toyota Yaris GRMN** (below left) following our drive of a prototype (evo 239). Also debuting in 2018 will be the latest version of an old evo favourite, the bantamweight **Suzuki Swift Sport**.

However, the most eagerly anticipated supermini newcomer is the next **Ford Fiesta ST** (below). It's being treated to some big changes, the most notable of which is a downsized three-cylinder engine. It's also rumoured to feature adaptive dampers and configurable driver modes, but if it can retain the giant-slaying performance and grin-a-minute handling of the last one then it could be a real corker. **JD**



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evo
CAR OF THE YEAR

HOT HATCH

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

by JOHN BARKER

PHOTOGRAPHY by MALCOLM GRIFFITHS

*Capable, engaging, useable, practical
and good value – few hot hatches are as
complete as the Civic Type R*

NO ONE IS UNMOVED BY THE CIVIC. IT'S as brash and bold as the Golf R is subtle and demure. With its mahoosive hoop spoiler, it's like a throwback to the days when Imprezas and Evos ruled the practical performance car world. Kids go nuts for its lairiness, but some grown-ups who can choose a £30k fast hatch simply won't consider the Honda because of how it looks.

Which is a great shame because in doing so, they deny themselves one of the great fast hatch experiences. We rate the Golf R very highly, and we like the Focus RS too, but the Civic Type R transcends them; it is astonishingly good, not simply in what it does but how it feels and, ergo, how it makes you feel.

The Type R drives like all the spoilers and body extensions and scoops say it will – like a track car. Its steering is direct, slack-free and beefy, its chassis has a tautness that suggests a bias for smooth, warm asphalt, and its brakes bite right from the top of the pedal. All of which makes it sound like everyday comfort and usability has been sacrificed for that record front-wheel-drive Nürburgring lap time, right?

Wrong. Over your first few miles of craggy B-road, the Civic treads so deftly, so calmly, that you can't help but smile; you are witnessing something remarkable, something that will stay with you. The last time this happened for me in this class was when I drove the Renault Sport Mégane R26.R, and it was for the same reasons: wonderfully engaging and precise handling and a superb ride. Like the Mégane, the Civic makes every drive a joy, any corner an opportunity to experience a little magic.



Top: great seats, great steering, great gearshift – there's so much that feels so right from the Civic's driver's seat. **Above and right:** exterior styling is perhaps a little less easy to love, but if you're not a fan, we urge you to look beyond it

'I love how the chassis is never fazed yet isn't aloof,' says deputy editor Adam Towler. 'It steers really well, puts its power down cleanly, and even the brakes are exemplary. It's a great example of how the Ring can be a positive influence.'

Quite. Commit the Type R hard to a warm, dry corner and you'll feel it slice immediately for the apex – no response lag, no tyre slip – and if you then give it full throttle it will simply accelerate. No wheelspin, no widening of the line and absolutely no corruption through the steering wheel. It is amazing. And the turbo engine is a gem, too, managing to sound and feel like a gutsy naturally aspirated in-line four with a thrilling top end.

The stripped-out R26.R delivered incredible grip with the help of slick-like (and noisy) trackday tyres, but the Honda uses regular Continentals. Super-low-profile SportContacts, granted, but they work pretty well in the cold and wet. And this Honda has all the space and kit you could wish for, and it's refined, too. In fact, as a family car the only thing it lacks is a belt for the middle seat in the back.

'What I love most of all about it is the way it can be so many things, sometimes all at the same time,' adds Towler. 'That's the essence of a great hot hatch for me, and is what lifts the Type R above more specialised examples like the Mégane and Golf Clubsport S.'

Road test editor James Disdale agrees: 'Even a short drive will leave you open-mouthed at what Honda has managed to squeeze out of what is essentially a humble family hatchback. Yet ability doesn't come at the expense of character because the Type R is as fun as it is fast. Bullseye!'

The seats are superb and low slung, the gearshift snappy, the pedal spacing spot on, the throttle response pretty good. And it never lets up, ruthlessly exposing weaknesses in the opposition that you didn't realise were there. In our Supertest (evo 241)

it had little trouble beating the fancied Focus RS and the SEAT Leon Cupra 300, trouncing them on both road and track.

Remarkably, there is no Type R department at Honda like there is AMG at Mercedes or M GmbH at BMW. The credit for this car goes to project leader Hideki Kakinuma and the small team he hand-picked from the business. And one of the reasons this model is more complete than the last is that this time the Type R team was in on development of the base Civic from the start.

Managing editor Ian Eveleigh drove the previous-generation Type R as a long-term test car: 'I had worried that the FK8, with its aim to be more useable, might wipe away some of the character of the more raw FK2, but not a bit of it. The rough edges have been polished away – not least the overly harsh ride – but it's actually made for an even better driving experience.'

Polished is just the word to describe the Civic. It's not just what this Type R does but how it does it that makes it so compelling. It feels like it has been obsessively developed and honed to great depth by people who know what they are doing and exactly what they want to achieve. This exceptional level of finesse is a quality shared by all evo five-star cars, and it's amazing that you can enjoy such rare brilliance as this price point.

'It's remarkably good value,' says Towler. 'For £31k you get a car that will nudge 170mph, stay with just about anything on the road, look after the novice driver but involve the experienced, feel completely at home on a trackday without so much as a tweak of anything, seat four in comfort, offer a generously sized boot, be entirely useable every day...'

It's such a complete package that you wonder how Honda does it for the money. Dynamically, the Golf R is also very polished, and the Focus RS is more powerful and entertainingly oversteery, which can be fun. But by some margin the mad-looking Civic is the daddy. So good, in fact, that you'd be mad to ignore it.

HOT HATCH HIGHLY COMMENDED

AMONG THE MANY GO-FASTER family machines are a couple of standout performers in the form of the Volkswagen Golf R and the **Hyundai i30 N** (below). While the presence of the former here will come as no surprise, the inclusion of the latter is likely to raise a few eyebrows. Yet as we discovered in evo 241, the superheated Hyundai is something of a revelation. Grippy, poised and hugely entertaining, the i30 N is a serious piece of kit that deserves your attention. If it was a little less flabby on the scales and had an engine with a heftier punch (it

currently has 271bhp in Performance Package spec), then the N could have toppled the Honda.

By contrast, the **VW Golf R** (below) is a very different type of hot hatch. Subtle looks, four-wheel drive and a suave image mean the grown-up Golf doesn't immediately shout about its potential. Yet while it speaks softly, the R carries a very big stick. Its 306bhp 2-litre engine is positively punchy, but it's the cast-iron composure and unflappable poise across switchback B-roads that really highlight that this is a car tinged with greatness. **JD**



HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1996cc, turbo
Power	316bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque	295lb ft @ 2500-4500rpm
Weight	1380kg (233bhp/ton)
0-62mph	5.8sec (claimed)
Top speed	169mph (claimed)
Basic price	£30,995
evo rating	★★★★★





evo
CAR OF THE YEAR

SPORTS SALOON

ALFA ROMEO GIULIA VELOCE

by DAVID VIVIAN

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

With 276bhp and a talented chassis, the Giulia Veloce brings a good dose of the Quadrifoglio's magic to a wider audience

WHAT IT IS TO BE AN ITALIAN car maker. A blithe disregard for consistency has to figure and Alfa Romeo knows this better than most. Over the decades the Milanese-born marque – these days based in Turin – has lurched between lovely and lamentable with equal facility and, in the 4C, managed to combine both extremes in one car. Then again, through much of the nineties and noughties nearly all Alfas were defined by a shifting palette of unresolved talents that hinted at past glories but somehow ended up being mediocre. None of which, of course, necessarily precludes a hike to the sun-kissed uplands of rival-vanquishing excellence. But for an underachieving brand that had taken great gulps from the well of goodwill, the Giulia Veloce isn't just a return to form but simply stunning.

With 2016's 503bhp, twin-turbocharged V6 Giulia Quadrifoglio, Alfa gave notice that it was back and, against the odds, selling a car that could stick it to the German supersaloon hegemony. In some ways, this year's four-cylinder Veloce is still more rewarding, a purer steer that drives an even bigger wedge between itself and the tautly Teutonic, speedy-by-the-numbers competition. It effectively plugs the gap between the regular 197bhp petrol Giulia and the properly ballistic range-topper but, in truth, is a masterful compromise, offering a decent chunk of the Quadrifoglio's straight-line performance and aesthetic presence (if, sadly, not its baritone



singing voice) for two-thirds of the price. Perhaps most remarkably of all, it also brings elements of chassis behaviour you'd swear had been lifted from the McLaren and Lotus playbooks.

Not unconnected is the Veloce's comparatively lean 1429kg weight, a motive burden released from the need to carry the Quadrifoglio's beefed-up underpinnings and fat boots. Moreover, the turbocharged 1995cc in-line four puts less weight over the front axle yet still delivers a muscular 276bhp at 5250rpm and 295lb ft of torque at just 2250rpm. With ratios chopped and swapped by a notably swift and smooth eight-speed torque-converter auto, that's 62mph in 5.7sec on the way to a top speed of 149mph. Enough for most circumstances.

And just about perfect for the ridiculously entertaining road that heaves, flicks and swoops across the North York Moors between Kirkbymoorside and Castleton. Hang in there on a traffic-free day and it's a wild ride, a ruthless test of suspension compression and rebound composure over rapidly fluctuating surfaces and cambers. The Veloce is up for the challenge, too, feeling collaborative and willing to indulge. It doesn't do spikey. It doesn't do hunkered down. It doesn't do grip-and-whoa. And, with no perceptible throttle lag, it doesn't feel turbocharged. Rather, the Veloce's impressive pace is born of terrific low- and mid-range powertrain flexibility (if no great desire to rev out), supple yet precisely controlled damping, consistency of grip and at least a few degrees of ESP-metered adjustability around an inherently neutral balance – though, regrettably, it's impossible to turn off the ESP completely to see how the chassis fares in extremis.



'NO MERC OR BMW FEELS SO SIMULTANEOUSLY FEISTY AND FINESSED. AND THE GAP WIDENS WHEN YOU CONSIDER THE RIDE QUALITY'

Clockwise from right: 'DNA' drive-mode controller allows damping to be set independently; 18-inch wheels help ride quality (19s are optional); aluminium gearshift paddles a joy to use; 'Q2' badging indicates fitment of the optional limited-slip differential



ALFA ROMEO GIULIA VELOCE

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1995cc, turbo
Power	276bhp @ 5250rpm
Torque	295lb ft @ 2250rpm
Weight	1429kg (196bhp/ton)
0-62mph	5.7sec (claimed)
Top speed	149mph (claimed)
Basic price	£38,260
evo rating	★★★★★



'That's a no-no,' complains deped Adam Towler but, otherwise, he gets the Giulia Veloce immediately, and loves the fact that, for once, he isn't driving a sports saloon from Stuttgart or Munich. 'You feel it the moment you climb into the car,' he says. 'It's the driving position, the simple interior. All right, the engine isn't exactly exuberant, but it's still far sweeter than anything the Germans can do with four pots and a turbocharger.'

'Move off, and the real differences show. It's just so fluid and supple. It doesn't have to scream "I'M SPORTY!" at you every second of a journey to prove it's a proper sports saloon. And that suppleness just doesn't come at the expense of handling proficiency, because the Veloce is every bit as capable – no, make that *more* capable – than the competition. This is a car that you can really drive hard, and it always feels light, up on its toes, willing to change direction and game for more.'

To begin with, the direct steering can seem disconcertingly light given its about-centre responsiveness and the front end's eager turn-in. But you soon come to appreciate and lean on the helm's accuracy and trust its subtle but finely resolved feedback. No Merc or BMW feels so simultaneously feisty and finessed. And the gap widens when you consider the quality of the Alfa's ride, which, as Adam discovered, is exceptionally fine by any standards, let alone for a car with such gifted handling. It is uncanny. The only other cars I can think of capable of amassing serious speed on this kind of road with such a polished fusion of pliancy and control come from Lotus and McLaren, and it really doesn't get any better than that. Braking power is formidable, too, even if the rather numb pedal feel makes it harder than it should be to modulate the pressure to a silky stop, especially when the pads are cold.

Staff writer Will Beaumont is another unthrilled by the engine's reluctance to rev, but is beguiled by the overall driving

experience nonetheless: 'The chassis is so supple, absorbing every nasty bump or pothole that appears. But although the suspension's compression seems soft, there's surprisingly little roll – it responds attentively to the fast steering – and rebound is firm enough to keep the body controlled over crests. You'd think the differences in character between bump and rebound would make the chassis feel disjointed and unpredictable, but far from it. It's never knocked off line by road imperfections, yet it's always alert.'

There are a few caveats, but we all agree that the Giulia Veloce looks and feels as if it benefits from all the special parts and effort that went into creating the terrific Giulia Quadrifoglio. It may lack that model's charisma and mighty performance, but that doesn't stop it being the best all-round sports saloon you can currently buy.

SPORTS SALOON HIGHLY COMMENDED

THERE'S AN ARGUMENT THAT THE Mercedes-AMG C43 is one of the best-kept fast four-door secrets. Living in the shadow of the raucous C63, it often gets overlooked, yet drive one and you'll discover a saloon with abilities that run deep. It'll also arguably show a C63 a clean set of Michelin when the conditions are less than ideal thanks to its 4Matic all-wheel drive enabling you to make the most of the 362bhp turbo V6. It's a discreet, comfortable and

practical daily driver, yet that AMG magic is never far from the surface.

The sleek and sophisticated Audi S4 plays its cards even closer to its chest. Its 349bhp turbocharged V6 is a potent performer, while quattro traction allows you to exploit every last drop of horsepower, but you have to work harder for rewards with the Audi, which only starts to come alive when you put some serious load through its chassis.

evo
CAR OF THE YEAR

SUPERSALOON

ALFA ROMEO GIULIA QUADRIFOGLIO

by JAMES DISDALE

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

*A saloon with the passion and performance
of a supercar: the Quadrifoglio completes
a stunning double for Alfa*

HOW MANY TIMES HAD WE BEEN THERE? How many times had we listened to the hype, crossed our fingers and dared to believe that, yes, the new Alfa Romeo was going to be the one: the one that signalled the triumphant return of this once glorious brand after decades in the doldrums? Too many times, is the answer.

And yet, when Alfa revealed that it was reviving the Giulia name for its new compact saloon, we all felt that familiar feeling of hope rising once again. Then it was revealed that it would be rear-wheel drive, and there would be a 503bhp Quadrifoglio version. This had to be it. Finally Alfa was going to deliver the sort of car that its rich back-catalogue so desperately deserved. For once, we weren't disappointed.

So what's so good about this Alfa? For starters, just look at it. Compared with the aggressive and steroidal contenders from BMW M and Mercedes-AMG, the subtly enhanced Giulia strikes the perfect balance of style and sporting intent. Look closely and you'll find plenty of neat details, including the black mesh bonnet vents, the quad exhausts and, of course, the gorgeous enamel cloverleaf badges on the front wings. To make the most of the Giulia's curves it really needs to be finished in Competizione Red with silver wheels, as pictured here. That's not an opinion – it's a fact.

The Alfa's claim to greatness is bolstered when you climb aboard. The driving position is reminiscent of a McLaren's, as you sit behind a virtually upright wheel (thin-rimmed and exquisitely contoured) while adopting a race car-style straight-legged posture. Then there

EVO CAR OF THE YEAR: SUPERSALOON



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are the optional carbonfibre-shelled Sparco front seats, which are as good to look at as they are hugely supportive. Glance ahead and you'll spot the carbonfibre weave in the trailing edge of the bonnet – another indicator that this Alfa is something special. The same lightweight material is also used for the bootlid, roof and propshaft, while the wings and door-skins are aluminium.

Philippe Krief, the engineer behind Ferrari's 458 Speciale, had a hand in the Giulia's development, and it doesn't take long before you see and feel his influence. There's the bright red starter button that sits on the steering wheel and the huge metal gearshift paddles that are linked to a slick and speedy eight-speed automatic gearbox. Then there's the steering itself, which is extremely quick, with little more than a quarter of a turn needed for most roundabouts and junctions. The ride is supple, too, just like a Ferrari's in its bumpy road setting.

After the stiff-legged gaits of the Alfa's German rivals, this easy-going nature is welcome on the long drag along the M4 to our photo location in the Brecon Beacons. As is the Giulia's effortless performance, the twin-turbocharged 2.9-litre V6 (Ferrari-based – although neither side likes to talk about it) propelling the Giulia forward with a muscular and lag-free delivery. There's no sense of inertia – simply squeeze the throttle an inch to pick off slower traffic at will. It's not the most charismatic-sounding of engines, but on a long, three-lane schlep I'll take reticent over raucous any day.

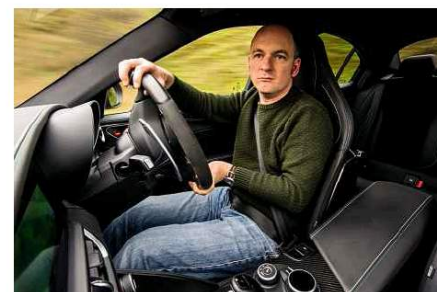
Leaving the monotony of the motorway and pointing the Alfa's curvaceous nose towards mid-Wales reveals another side to its character – one that's surprisingly easy to access. As editor Gallagher has mentioned in his Fast Fleet reports (it's his

'THE GIULIA FEELS ALIVE AND CONNECTED ON THESE SINUOUS AND UNDULATING WELSH ROADS'

car we've snaffled for the pictures, so it'll be a case of 'steady as she goes' on the mountain roads if I'm to avoid a P45), switching between the Giulia's driver modes is a piece of panettone. The seemingly infinite variations of engine, steering, throttle and damper settings of its rivals are nowhere to be seen. Instead there's the straightforward DNA rotary controller, which gives you a choice between Advanced Efficiency, Natural, Dynamic and Race, each one ramping up the damper stiffness, throttle sharpness and steering weight (you can also manually override the damper settings for a softer ride while in the more aggressive modes). And that's it. No multiple buttons to press and none of the endless pick 'n' mix combinations to choose from.

Even in Natural, the Giulia feels alive and connected across these sinuous and undulating Welsh roads. The steering is light, but it delivers just enough useful feedback, and once I've got used to its electrifying rate of response, I'm soon trusting the messages it sends, all of which are telling me there's limpet-like front-end grip. Traction is impressive, too, and the adaptive dampers soak up bumps while keeping body movements well in check, meaning the Alfa glides over these roads with a rare fluidity.

Switch to Dynamic and things get a little more serious. The



ALFA ROMEO GIULIA QUADRIFOGLIO

Engine	V6, 2891cc, twin-turbo
Power	503bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque	443lb ft @ 2500-5500rpm
Weight	1620kg (315bhp/ton)
0-62mph	3.9sec (claimed)
Top speed	191mph (claimed)
Basic price	£61,595
evorating	★★★★★

Above: twin-turbo V6 has Ferrari in its DNA and it shows, with lag-free response and a torrent of power as revs rise. **Left:** steering is super-quick and gives just enough feedback to build confidence

engine note changes to a deeper timbre, the dampers tense up, there's greater heft to the wheel, the stability control takes a step back and the throttle becomes more alert. Now the Alfa picks these roads apart with some real intent. It never bullies the tarmac into submission; it simply feels taut, responsive and very, very fast. There's more freedom to use the combination of quick steering, quick gearshifts and the prodigious poke of the engine to tweak your corner-exit trajectory with the throttle, too.

Now twist the DNA knob around to Race and the ESP's shackles are removed completely and the dampers are at their stiffest – although on these roads it's just a little too firm, so they need knocking back to 'mid'. Yet there's nothing to fear from the electronically unfettered Alfa, because the transition from grip to slip is so progressive, while that wrist-flick rack makes light work of any waywardness. And while the Giulia will play the lairy lout, its electronically controlled differential prefers to drive out of the corners as quickly as possible – sideways is the slow way, as any racer will tell you.

The Alfa's not perfect, mind. That twin-turbo engine serves up blistering pace, but it doesn't have the soundtrack to match. Its bassy woofle at idle and muted roar when extended add a little drama, but I long for the cry of the company's iconic Busso V6s. And while the optional carbon-ceramic brakes serve up stupendous stopping power when warmed through, they're as snatchy as a tired toddler when taking it easy.

But these niggles can't dull our immense affection for the glorious Giulia, the supersaloon that's shot through with the soul of a supercar. Welcome back, Alfa Romeo – the wait has been agonising, but oh-so worth it.

SUPERSALOON HIGHLY COMMENDED

THIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST closely fought sectors and, given the brilliance of the mechanically identical M4 Competition Package, its four-door **BMW M3** cousin was unlucky not to take the honours. It's the suspension upgrades that are the key to smoothing out the somewhat uneven appeal of the M3, giving it the approachable and engaging handling that the spikier standard car lacks. This means you can push the Competition Package M3 hard without the nagging feeling that it'll spit you off in a fit of poorly telegraphed pique. The artificially enhanced engine-note remains, but the 444bhp straight-six's scorching

pace makes it easier to live with. And you can still have a manual gearbox.

The **Mercedes-AMG E63** also came close to topping the Alfa, thanks in no small part to its masterpiece of a twin-turbo V8 – few production units are finer. We plumped for the standard 563bhp car over the 603bhp S because its talents are more rounded and, much as it brings on fits of schoolboy giggles in the right environment, the S's Drift Mode is largely irrelevant given the four-wheel-drive set-up allows you to oversteer with the best. You can get either E63 as an estate, too, which instantly makes them ten per cent cooler. **JD**





evo
CAR OF THE YEAR

SPORTS CAR

LOTUS ELISE SPORT 220

by COLIN GOODWIN

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

The ingredients for a great sports car have never really changed – low weight, keen responses, pure driver enjoyment – and the 220 combines them to perfection

HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S TWENTY-ONE years since I drove out of Hethel's gates in a Series 1 Elise that I was to spend the next 50,000 miles and two years driving. It never conked out, never failed to get from A to B, and never stopped entertaining me while doing so. It went to the Ring. It took a toddler and myself camping in France. I damned nearly lived in the thing.

Much has happened at Lotus since. Changes of owners and bosses, fantasy model plans and a steady stream of Elises, Exiges and Evoras with a baffling array of names: Cups, Sprints, GTs, Sports and a host of numbers denoting power or power-to-weight. Sometimes you forget that Lotus still makes a simple Elise. It's called the Sport and there are two versions: one with a naturally aspirated 134bhp 1.6-litre engine and the other with a supercharged 1.8 that produces 217bhp (220PS).

The weight has gone up over the years but the Sport 220 still weighs only 904kg, which compared with just about everything else on the road is still pretty light. An S1 would have needed 175bhp to match its power-to-weight ratio of 244bhp per ton.

Step into the 2017 Elise and you can see where some of the



Where you can feel the weight, compared with an S1 or early S2, is in the steering. It's surprisingly heavy when you're parking but also when you're feeling for front-end grip or correcting a slip with DPM off. Still, a quick ride in an Alfa Romeo 4C Spider in these conditions would put into perspective how sweetly the Lotus steers and handles (and how the Alfa doesn't).

You should by now have picked up a certain whiff of nostalgia emanating from these pages. As John Barker says: 'There's a wonderfully retro feel about this Elise, in all the right ways. It's light like most modern cars aren't, sounds enthusiastic, and the gutsy engine flings it effortlessly down the road. Of course, you get grippy handling, a great ride and there's a solid, quality feel too. This is a great Elise.' Retro is an obvious word to use but it's an unfortunate one because it implies old-fashionedness. Actually, sports cars should never have gone away from the original blueprint of low weight, accurate steering with accurate feedback, supple suspension and overall simplicity.

'Twenty-one years on and no one has matched the Elise in terms of undiluted driving enjoyment,' says Gallagher. 'It feels as refreshingly brilliant as it did when we first drove it, only now every area has been improved upon.'

This Elise is the opening statement in the case against ever-more-powerful supercars. It's impossible to avoid using the clichéd argument that this Lotus has all the performance that you need today. Writing about a car like the McLaren 720S gives

Left: gearshift now one of the best around; exposed selector mechanism is a nice touch; carbonfibre sill covers reduce weight by 0.8kg and make the door aperture slightly bigger, too. **Below:** stability control kept busy in these conditions

extra weight has come from. Compared with my old S1, the Sport 220 is like a limousine, with (optional) carpets, smart trim and electric windows, although compared with most modern cars, the little Lotus is still on the spartan side. Truth is, I fancy a little bit more comfort than I did 21 years ago and I suspect many customers would say the same.

No air-conditioning, of course, and certainly no infotainment. There's a simple head unit in the Sport, into which you can plug your musical source of choice, but I would be happy with the stripped-out Sprint version's blanking plate. The options list is pretty comprehensive and includes most of the parts required to turn a Sport into a Sprint, including forged alloys and a lithium-ion battery. And, if you really want to blow some cash, a £4000 titanium exhaust system, though that'd hurt on a car that already costs £39,300. One option that's really worth a look is the carbonfibre sill covers. It's not so much that they look cool, but their strength means that they are fitted closer to the extruded aluminium chassis underneath them and that reduces sill height by 10mm. Unless you're a 12-year-old gymnast, every bit of help to get into an Elise when the roof's up is always welcome. They are another £1200, mind.

The Sport 220's power-to-weight ratio is perfect. The entry-level car's power is a bit too modest and the next Elise up from the 220, the Cup 250, has more than you need. Not surprisingly, the 220 is fast, but what's particularly impressive is how good its engine feels. For a modern four-cylinder it also sounds fantastic, almost as if it's drinking and breathing through a pair of DCOEs.

The power delivery has an old-fashioned flavour to it, too, the characteristic way a supercharged engine feels as if it's got

'TWENTY-ONE YEARS ON AND NO ONE HAS MATCHED THE ELISE IN TERMS OF UNDILUTED DRIVING ENJOYMENT'

a larger cubic capacity rather than simply more power. So the power builds seamlessly and, with gearing that is perfectly matched, thrust out of corners or when overtaking is impressive. Lotus's open-gate gearlever is a big improvement on previous shifters and sexy enough to not need a surround or gaiter, which saves a few grams. Editor Gallagher goes further: 'The new gearshift is one of the best in the industry,' he says, 'right up there with Porsche's six-speed manual, as fitted to its GT road cars.'

On a fantastic blast around Sussex for the photographs, the weather is dreary and wet with plenty of leaves on the road. What's impressive is how Lotus's DPM (Dynamic Performance Management) stability control manages the breakaway and recovery in such a smooth way. It lets you feel that the car is moving but brings it back in gently without a sharp cut in power.

Both the Sport and the lighter, more focused Sprint are fitted with Yokohama Advan Neovas, 175 section on the front and 205s on the back, which have a surprising amount of grip in the wet. That said, DPM is still busy today. In the dry, the grip is prodigious and, on the public road at least, sliding about is unlikely.



an opportunity to use some new adjectives and expletives, but in the back of your mind there's always the thought: 'But what's the point of all this performance?' At least there is in my mind.

It's not just the Sport 220's realistic performance that appeals, there's also its modest dimensions. It's so easy to place on the road and position for corners. The sight of a van or large car coming the other way on a country lane doesn't bring with it the clenching of the wheel and worried focusing of the eyes that you experience in over-wide sports cars like a Jaguar F-type. Time spent in this car has been a tonic. A glorious relief from a life that these days is spent writing endlessly about SUVs and listening to nonsense spoken about self-driving cars.

The Lotus Elise Sport 220 shows not only how it used to be done, but how it should still be done.

LOTUS ELISE SPORT 220

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1798cc, supercharged
Power	217bhp @ 6800rpm
Torque	184lb ft @ 4600rpm
Weight	904kg (244bhp/ton)
0-62mph	4.6sec (claimed)
Top speed	145mph (claimed)
Basic price	£39,300
evo rating	★★★★★

Above right: almost plush compared with very early Elises, but still wonderfully spare and driver-focused compared with most modern sports cars. **Right:** forged alloys look great; stopping power boosted by AP Racing twin-pot front calipers



SPORTS CAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

WHERE DO YOU START WITH THE **Abarth 124 Spider**? The retro-themed matt-black bonnet alone would be enough to earn it a place on any eCoty shortlist, as would the rasping note from its quartet of tailpipes. Yet these additions are just the tantalising starters to the main course, which is the Italian roadster's ability to smear a massive grin across your face every time you climb behind the wheel. No matter what the time or place, the rear-wheel-drive Abarth's transition from grip to slip at even modest speeds makes it more fun for more of the time than almost any other car. Its torquey turbocharged four-cylinder motor plays its part here, allowing

you to alter your angle of attack almost at will. A snappy gearshift and brisk performance complete the laugh-out-loud package.

If you get your kicks from precision and outright performance, then the exquisite **Lotus 3-Eleven** will be right up your favourite B-road, or circuit. There are road and race versions but, with their open cockpits and aggressive aero, both look and feel like pukka motorsport refugees. That impression is only enhanced on the move, where scalpel-sharp handling and an almost non-stop flow of information make the low-slung Lotus one of the fastest and most absorbing machines ever to grace tarmac. **JD**



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CAR OF THE YEAR

COUPE

BMW M4 COMPETITION PACKAGE

by JAMES DISDALE

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

*Transformed into the car it should have
been from the start, this reworked M4 is
now the pick of the coupe bunch*

THERE MUST BE DAYS WHEN THOSE AT BMW's M division wish the E30 M3 had never seen the light of day. That boxy slice of '80s motoring perfection is rightly regarded as one of the best drivers' cars ever made, but it's also been a millstone around the neck of any subsequent compact saloon or coupe wearing the M badge. Heavier and lacking the original's competition pedigree, these later machines were great, but not always the greatest. There was often a caveat or two that kept them from being considered among the pantheon of all-time performance car heroes.

And in the case of the F82 M4, the critics had a point. When it landed in 2014, it was the first two-door 3-series to ditch the M3 tag and, most shockingly, it abandoned natural aspiration in favour of turbocharging. With its muscle-ripped bodywork, gaping vents and tuggish stance, the F82 was the most convincing looking 'small' M-car since the E30, but that forced-induction motor meant it flattered to deceive.

Performance wasn't a problem – 425bhp and 406lb ft saw to that. It was the brutal torque delivery that really upset the applegart, often overwhelming a chassis and steering set-up that weren't the greatest communicators. Driving the M4 with any sort of intent in slippery conditions was often a journey into the unknown as the car would break into wild wheelspin and snap-slides at the merest drop of a throttle pedal.

Case closed on the M4, then? Not so fast. Since its launch, BMW

EVO CAR OF THE YEAR: COUPE



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has constantly tweaked the M4 (and the M3 saloon), culminating in this, the 2018 Model Year M4 Competition Package.

A big part of the M4's redemption can be traced to that Competition Package, which runs to stiffer springs, recalibrated adaptive dampers, a remapped rear differential and 20-inch alloy wheels. Power is also increased, by 19bhp, but the muscle-bound torque peak remains unchanged. In isolation, these changes don't look like a lot, but in combination with the M division's relentless fettling, they combine to make the M4 something of gem.

This was highlighted most vividly during our first Supertest (evo 240), where the BMW dusted both the new Audi RS5 and the Mercedes-AMG C63 S. And this wasn't a skin-of-the-teeth victory; it was an emphatic trouncing.

From the moment you get behind the wheel of this M4, you know you're going to be firm friends. You sit low, in a deep bucket seat that holds you in all the right places, while the chunky three-spoke steering wheel feels great in your hands. Prod the starter button and the 3-litre straight-six snarls encouragingly into life, while blipping the throttle elicits a deep mechanical growl that, though still synthetically enhanced via the stereo's speakers, sounds far more authentic than before. Even at low speeds, the car sends out all the right messages. As contributing editor John Barker notes: 'Get rolling in the M4 Competition Package and there's a graininess to the ride and a tactility through the wheel that suggests lightness and connection.'

Start to work the car harder, though, and its qualities shine through with almost dazzling brilliance. That turbocharged engine is a corker, for starters. There's still lots of low-down torque ready to unsettle the chassis at the flex of your right foot, but it's more predictable and progressive than before, which allows you to make the most of the prodigious performance. It pays to push on, though, because the engine revs with an almost naturally aspirated enthusiasm, getting stronger and stronger as it howls towards the 7000rpm red line.

Yet it's the suspension tweaks that have played the biggest part in the M4's turnaround in fortunes. Combined with near-perfect weight distribution (front to back and side to side), the result is a beautifully judged handling balance. Put some real load through the BMW's chassis and it rewards like nothing else this side of a dedicated sports car. The leaf- and grime-smears east-coast roads used for our eCoty shoot would have brought me out in a cold, clammy-handed sweat in the original M4, but in the



BMW M4 COMPETITION PACKAGE

Engine	In-line 6-cyl, 2979cc, twin-turbo	0-62mph	4.2sec (claimed)
Power	444bhp @ 7000rpm	Top speed	155mph (limited)
Torque	406lb ft @ 1850-5500rpm	Basic price	£62,080
Weight	1560kg (289bhp/ton)	evorating	★★★★★

Top left: cabin gets the basics right, and is home to improved engine noises. **Above right:** chassis is beautifully balanced, power delivery now far more progressive



Competition Package I'm drawn into hustling it with the level of confidence you'd normally reserve for a hot hatch.

The steering still lacks that final degree of feedback, but it's meatily weighted, precise and connected to a front axle that bites with real conviction. The strong grip allows you to lean hard on the front, while the combination of a far more predictable rear end and smoother power delivery allows you to trim your line at will on the throttle. The damping is pretty much spot-on, too. The low-speed ride is firm but never uncomfortable, while upping the pace reveals tight body control that allows you to attack crests, dips and sudden bumps with real conviction, never fearing the car will be knocked off line or run out of answers.

As seems to be the fashion these days, there are virtually limitless combinations of driving settings to choose from, and, like Alice falling down the rabbit hole, you can lose yourself in a bewildering world of almost endless set-ups. Yet find your perfect combination (I settle on Normal for steering and damping, Sport for the throttle) and you can program it into one of the steering wheel's two 'M' shortcut buttons to access the BMW's talents the instant the road ahead opens up.

As deputy editor Adam Towler concludes: 'It's completely bemusing that this is based on the same M4 that used to be such a disappointment. The Competition Package car couldn't be more different, to the point where I felt entirely comfortable driving around in it with all the stability systems switched off, enjoying the challenge of measuring out the engine's delivery, but not fearing the unexpected.' It really is that good, the M4 Competition Package. In fact it's good enough to mention in the same breath – whisper it – as the E30 M3.

COUPE HIGHLY COMMENDED

YOU HAVE TO DIG DEEP TO DISCOVER what makes the **Audi RS5** a bit special, but it's worth the effort because, when you really work it, the RS5 proves to be one of Ingolstadt's best efforts in years. It's not as expressive as the M4, granted, but the tightly controlled, precise and agile RS5 can cover ground with devastating alacrity. You expect the traction from the quattro four-wheel drive, and even the torso-crushing thrust from the 444bhp 2.9-litre biturbo V6, but it's the quality of the damping that really leaves its mark, the Audi dispatching every bump, crest and compression with an

unshakeable self-assurance. And yet at the touch of a button it turns into a silky-smooth grand tourer that fits effortlessly into the daily grind.

The **Porsche 911 Carrera GTS** is a more single-minded coupe, its niggly ride and aural backdrop of road noise and gravelly flat-six a constant reminder that you're here to drive. And you'll want to, because this is the best series-production 911 you can buy. Its electrically assisted steering is one of the best set-ups yet, the scintillating acceleration barely lags behind a 911 Turbo's, and the outrigger engine still delivers a unique handling balance. **JD**



PORSCHE MACAN GTS

by JAMES DISDALE | PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

Porsche has defied the sceptics – and several of the laws of physics – with an SUV that really does handle and perform like a hot hatch



PUT SIMPLY, THE MACAN TURNS the SUV rules of engagement on their head. Up until now, most have been so dynamically compromised, Porsche's larger Cayenne included, that a drive in one caused your heart to sink faster than the fuel gauge in an AMG G63. Not the Macan, and particularly not in GTS guise.

It all starts with the driving position, which despite the raised ride height gives the sense that you're hunkered low in the car, helping create an impression of an instant connection with the tarmac. Then there's the steering, which has more than a hint of the weight and response of a 911 or Boxster. There's plenty of bite on turn-in, too, the Macan locking tenaciously onto your chosen line and clinging on gamely all the way to the exit. Four-wheel drive means there's lots of traction to fire you up the next straight, yet the rear-biased set-up delivers surprising adjustability, particularly when the surface is slippery – out of slower corners you can even indulge in some bouts of subtle oversteer showboating.

Yet it's the Macan's body control that really has you scratching your head at the physics-defying magic that Porsche has weaved into the springs and standard adaptive dampers. In its sportiest setting, the GTS feels taut and composed, resisting roll in a way nothing this tall – or heavy – should be able

SUV HIGHLY COMMENDED

WE'D ALWAYS PREFER A FAST estate, but of the SUVs out there the **Jaguar F-Pace** is worthy of mention as it feels more agile and engaging than its height and weight would suggest. The **Porsche Cayenne** is good, too. It's still a big old bus, but handles well and is impressively refined. **JD**

PORSCHE MACAN GTS

Engine	V6, 2997cc, twin-turbo
Power	355bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	369lb ft @ 1650-4000rpm
Weight	1895kg (190bhp/ton)
0-62mph	5.2sec (claimed)
Top speed	159mph (claimed)
Basic price	£55,158
evorating	★★★★★

to. Sharp crests and compressions are shrugged off with disdain, while mid-corner bumps are steamrollered into submission. No, it's not delicate or even that involving, but there's a curious satisfaction to be had from driving a 1895kg SUV that'll dust most hot hatches on a testing B-road.

The Macan can live with these pocket rockets on the straights, too, its turbocharged 355bhp 3-litre V6 allowing it to cover the 0-62mph sprint in just 5.2 seconds. Granted it's not the most charismatic-sounding engine, even with the added crackle of the optional sports exhaust, but the combination of 369lb ft of torque from just 1650rpm and the effortlessly quick and smooth eight-speed PDK transmission mean it can cover ground alarmingly quickly. It's only when slowing down that the Macan's mass really starts to tell. The standard iron-disc set-up is powerful and benefits from a beautifully weighted and progressive pedal action, but the strain shows after repeated stops.

Driven with a little more restraint, the Porsche slips easily into your daily routine. It's comfortable and refined, with an interior that's spacious and exquisitely finished. In this context it's not hard to fathom the current fashion for SUVs. Ultimately, at **evo** we'll always plump for a fast estate if performance and practicality are what's required, but if only an SUV will do, the Macan GTS is really the only option if you still want to enjoy the drive.



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Fuel economy figures l/100km: Urban 13.7, Extra Urban 8.0, Combined 10.1. CO₂ emissions 234 g/km. MPG figures will be published on [lotuscars.com](https://www.lotuscars.com) as soon as available. Performance results may vary depending upon the specification of the particular vehicle, environmental conditions, driving style and other factors.

MPG figures are obtained from laboratory testing and intended for comparisons between vehicles and may not reflect driving results. Published MPG figures and performance results are intended for comparisons between vehicles only. Verification of performance results should not be attempted on public roads. Lotus recommends that all local speed and safety laws must be obeyed and safety belts worn at all times.



evo
CAR OF THE YEAR

GT

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

by STEVE STUTCLIFFE

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

Fresh out of the box, Bentley's all-new Continental GT has cruised past its rivals to become the best GT on sale.

SO THERE WAS THIS PUB I USED TO frequent – whenever I had an interesting car on test, basically – and it was run by a delightful old bloke called Derek Bover-White, who used to fly Hurricanes during the Second World War. He was a complete car nut. He had a V12 XJS with a manual gearbox and a silly exhaust, and an XK150S among other toys, and all sorts of people who were into cars would turn up at his pub, The Anchor at Barcombe Mills in East Sussex, for a natter – about anything, really, but mostly about the burning of petrol.

One day, one of Derek's oldest mates was due to arrive in what Derek claimed was 'the most beautiful car in the world'. 'You wait, you'll see...' said Derek.

And when this chap eventually rolled up later that afternoon, the entire pub went out to see what he was driving – an early 1950s Bentley Continental, whose pristine, dark blue bodywork had been hand-made by HJ Mulliner. Sparkling in the sun that day as we all chatted, it was indeed one of the most beautiful cars I'd ever seen, or have ever seen since.

Which explains, to some extent perhaps, why I was so disappointed by the reinvented Bentley Continental GT when it first appeared in 2003. This was the first car to come out of Bentley since VW took charge, and although it had all the right on-paper credentials to blow the rest of the GT-car world away, in reality it was a bit of a blunderbuss. It was heavy, clumsy to drive and, to my eyes, not especially beautiful, and I never quite connected with it as a result.

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

Engine W12, 5950cc, twin-turbo
Power 626bhp @ 5000-6000rpm
Torque 664lb ft @ 1350-4500rpm
Weight 2169kg (29.3bhp/ton)
0-62mph 3.7sec (claimed)
Top speed 207mph (claimed)
Basic price £156,700
evo rating ★★★★★

Right: new GT shares its underpinnings with Porsche's Panamera – and it shows, especially on track. **Below right:** cabin's blend of traditional Brit craftsmanship and modern touchscreen tech is beautifully done



'A FANTASTIC HIT OF POWER OVERSTEER IS A RATHER WONDERFUL THING TO EXPERIENCE IN A BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT'

Scroll forwards 14 years to the present day, however, and we have a brand new Bentley Continental GT, and not only does it look about ten times lovelier than the car it replaces but it drives rather beautifully as well. If anything, in fact, it drives even better than it looks, and there is one very obvious reason why.

Crucially, and unlike the previous Continental GT, the new car is based not on the underpinnings of a humble Volkswagen but those of a Porsche – specifically those of the excellent Panamera. And unlike last time, when Bentley's engineers were effectively given hand-me-down parts and told to do whatever they could with them to turn a Phaeton into a Continental, this time they were involved in the car's creation right from the word go.

It's now over five years since they first sat down with their counterparts from Weissach and started work on the new car,

and this time they were able to build the car, literally, from the ground up, shaping its hardware the way they wanted.

The result is a GT of quite astounding all-round capabilities. On the one hand the new Bentley is notably more comfortable and refined than the last one, with a sense of genuine majesty to the way it flows across the terrain, as if it were some kind of mobilised gentlemen's club. You almost feel like lighting a cigar when you're driving it, so soothing is the ride, so serene is the car's gait, even when the road surface is far from perfect.

And the interior merely adds to the overall effect. It's a place of rare quality, and of exquisite design and craftsmanship. This car might cost the very thick end of one hundred and sixty thousand pounds but, inside, it feels more like a million dollars. Yet at the same time there is every conceivable piece of contemporary technology you could ever wish for, all of it integrated into a cabin that looks, feels and even smells like an impossibly expensive hotel room. True, space in the back seats isn't great but, well, do you really care about what those in the back think when you're at the wheel of a Continental GT?

There's another side to the new GT, though, one that will take you completely by surprise, and that's how tidy it is when you reach for the button marked Sport and decide to drive it with a bit more gusto. In the old car you'd do so for perhaps two minutes and then think better of it, because there wasn't much point in driving it hard – for the simple reason that there wasn't much fun to be had while doing so. The level of control simply wasn't there in relation to the car's weight.



In the new GT, however, it is extraordinary how much poise there is when you start to fling the car around. The fact that it weighs only 76kg less than before – meaning it still strains the scales at well over two tons – must be largely ignored, because the computer-controlled air suspension does a quite phenomenal job of controlling the car's mass.

In addition, Bentley has configured the four-wheel-drive system to allow *much* more torque to flow to the rear axle this time; in Sport mode, in fact, just 17 per cent of the power and torque goes to the front. So if you then switch the stability control system off and bury the throttle out of a corner, you will, and do, get a quite fantastic hit of power oversteer. Which is a rather wonderful thing to experience in a Bentley Continental GT, for all sorts of reasons.

And last but by no means least, it's also quick, the new GT. As in teeth-clenchingly so. The 6-litre twin-turbo W12 is an all-new motor, even to the point that it has a different firing order to make it smoother but also sportier in tone than the old one. But the fact that it develops 626bhp, and a whopping 664lb ft between 1350 and 4500rpm, is arguably what matters most – because this is sufficient energy to send the GT to 62mph in 3.7sec and on to a top speed of 207mph. And once again this is a faintly hilarious thing to experience in a car that weighs 2169kg and wears a Bentley badge on its nose.

At last, it seems, the Bentley Continental has been properly replaced. By a car that will, at times, take your breath away. Just like the one from the 1950s did, back in the day.

GT HIGHLY COMMENDED

IF YOU VISUALISE YOURSELF spearing across the Continent with Monaco you're behind the wheel of a Ferrari. Maranello has been a GT master ever since the Daytona first started shrinking long distances in 1968. Today it's the **GTC4 Lusso** (below) that flies the fast four-seater flag for Ferrari, with a choice of naturally aspirated V12 or twin-turbo V8 under the long, long bonnet. In reality there's virtually nothing between the two for outright performance, but when you're paying

this much for the privilege you might as well go the whole hog (or horse), and stomp up for that glorious, howling V12. The V12 also gets four-wheel drive, so it can do the annual ski-run to the Alps, too.

We were sorely tempted by the luscious **Lexus LC500** (below), which looks like it has driven straight off a show stand and is powered by an achingly good 5-litre V8. But the ride is just too firm for a true GT. The same is true of the **Aston Martin DB11**, which looks and sounds the part but is dynamically patchy. **JD**





evo
CAR OF THE YEAR

SUPERCAR

McLAREN 720S

by ADAM TOWLER

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

McLaren could have built a 650S evolution: a little lighter, faster, more capable. Instead, it produced something truly extraordinary

WHAT DOES THE SUPERCAR of 2017 need? Performance, naturally. Colossal, mind-bending performance of the magnitude that separates it from the merely fast with the appropriate insouciance. That's a given. I mean, have you seen how fast a hot hatch is these days? Yet that's just the start. It also needs a blend of track-ready dynamic performance and everyday-use comfort, mixed with a deftness of touch Fred Astaire would have aspired to: Ring-attack war paint smeared on one moment, ambling down to the shops the next.

We demand that it looks low, broad and sexy, comfortable in the role of Instagram doyen; an object of desire for adolescents everywhere, but also sophisticated enough for those with the actual means to fund such a purchase; able to make brazen, purposeful exhaust noise yet be surprisingly frugal at cruising pace. Yes, it's tough being a supercar in 2017.

An Audi R8 V10 has all of those qualities. A McLaren 650S had them, too. They're both good cars – real modern-era supercars – but there's more, much more, to capturing the supercar zeitgeist of 2017. Some of it is quantifiable, other elements forever tantalisingly hazy in their definition.

Having said all of that, I think I know of a car that can take on that formidable mantle. A car that causes people to chase it on foot through the streets just to keep it in the centre of their camera's viewfinder. One that's so fast it rips past the adjective 'exciting' and injects 'fear' back into the mix of a genre that had developed into something just a little too comfortable, predictable and electronically regulated. A car that breaks new



ground, visually and in dynamic terms. A car that – as ludicrous as it sounds – is actually something of a bargain at £218,020.

Like many of you, I suspect, the first time I saw a McLaren 720S, I wasn't sure. Those official images revealed a car that was ruthlessly high-tech, modern, different. Its form and, in particular, its lack of a recognisable 'headlight' weren't necessarily easy on the eye. It was challenging.

But it's good to be challenged, in all walks of life. It's what keeps things interesting. The genius of McLaren's approach is not to create merely a faster, more capable 650S, but to push itself much further forward, to take the hard road. A 650S 'evolution' would have been a great car, and would have easily taken the fight to the Ferrari 488 GTB. A bit more power, a bit less mass, a bit more swoop to the by-then familiar swoopy McLaren styling, and plenty of that 675LT venom brought into the mix, too. Job done, time for a brew down Woking way.

It doesn't feel as though McLaren did that. Speaking to the designers and engineers earlier in the year, there was much talk of everyone pushing each other, of setting targets and worrying about how they could actually be achieved a bit further down the line. 'We backed each other to get the job done,' was one phrase heard. Of course, you can never really be sure if this isn't all PR-induced nonsense, and the cynic in me filed it away in the 'we'll see about that' category, but they were right, and it was real.

Because what McLaren has achieved is nothing short of sensational. Some car companies spend years trying to establish a visual identity and still find it infuriatingly elusive. But in just six short years McLaren Automotive has gone from the largely anonymous 12C to a portfolio of cars that are clearly 'McLarens', and never more so than with the 720S. Spend time with this car and I challenge you not to be captivated by the crisp lines and execution of its panelwork, the extravagance of the details, the weird and wonderful collar of an air channel around the cockpit. You may even grow to love the eye sockets, as I do now.

Sit in one and you'll be even further enamoured. With nearly 360-degree vision thanks to the innovative see-through C-pillars, it's easier to place in traffic than a BMW 3-series. It's such an event to sit in as well: all exotic shapes and carefully selected materials, enveloped by a canopy straight off a fighter plane.

Once on the road you may ask yourself how it's possible that it rides better than quite a few luxury GTs. Some, conversely, may also wonder why it's a bit quiet, and sounds rather flat. The 720S proposition isn't about theatricality during the everyday – you'll need a Lamborghini for that. But get past this and you'll discover a car that's everyday-biddable, but also that has another side to it that wants to rear your face off. Road test editor Disdale sums up the 720S's chameleon-like personality: 'You expect it to be staggeringly fast, but what really leaves an impression is just how accessible the performance is, and how easy it is to live with. The ride is good, you can see out of it and the driving position is as close to perfect as you'll get. This is one very special car.'

To truly understand what it's like having 710bhp in a reasonably light car, you need to turn off all the elaborate electronic nanny-ing and then accelerate at full force. It's only then, with the rear Pirellis frantically battling to keep their purchase on the road, the hydraulically assisted steering writhing subtly in your palms, and the motor headbutting the limiter with a ferocity that never wanes, that you fully appreciate the true potency of this car; the kind of potency that equates to 0-100mph in just over five-and-a-half seconds, and an Anglesey lap-time second only to a P1 shod with Trofeo Rs. That alone makes it a worthy supercar of the year: factor-in all its other qualities and it's nothing less than a game-changer.



Above: everywhere you look on the 720S, you find more details that captivate. **Left:** the way it combines civility with savagery is remarkable even for McLaren

SUPERCAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

THE 720S HAS RAISED THE BAR TO an incredibly high level in a class that was already brimming with over-achievers, but the best of the rest are still very, very good indeed – and they're led by the Ferrari 488 GTB. There were quite a few naysayers when Ferrari forced induction on what was a heavy update of the sublime 458, but the results are staggering. There's performance everywhere and the turbo set-up is so good you'd swear the 3.9-litre V8 was naturally aspirated. Then there's the chassis, blessed with a rare balance and transparency, allowing you to exploit every last ounce of grip. Yet this is a supercar you can

live with every day, so smooth is the ride and so slick are the controls.

At the other end of the spectrum is the **Lamborghini Huracán Performante**. This is a supercar of the old school, with a huge, naturally aspirated V10, shattering soundtrack and cartoonish looks (though we're not sure about the gold wheels or the Forged Composites trim, which looks like the imitation marble used in cheap kitchens). While appearances suggest it will chew you up and spit you out, in reality the Lambo is approachable and poised – once you've plucked up the courage to breach its incredibly high limits. **JD**



evo
CAR OF THE YEAR

HYPERCAR

BUGATTI CHIRON

There are supercars, there are hypercars and then there's the Bugatti Chiron. No other car has ever combined so much luxury with such unimaginable potency

by RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

CAN YOU EVER HOPE TO BE OBJECTIVE about the Bugatti Chiron? Less of a name and more of a superlative-in-waiting, the Chiron was born to be the new benchmark by which all other hypercars would be judged. So, now that the dust has settled on what was unquestionably one of the drives of 2017, what do we

make of this utterly extraordinary new Bugatti?

Well, inevitably, and despite making it a much warmer, more tactile and more entertaining machine, those numbers remain impossible to ignore: £2.1million before taxes; 16 cylinders; 8 litres; four turbos; 1479bhp; 1180lb ft; zero to 124mph in 6.5sec; restricted top speed of 261mph; unrestricted top speed of 280mph. Even in a world inured to outrageous figures, the stats are mind-blowing.

Reading those numbers is one thing; understanding what they actually mean and how they feel in action is quite another. So think on this. By any sub-supercar standard, the outgoing Bentley Continental GT V8 is a properly fast car. The Chiron has an engine double the size kicking out roughly three times the power, yet has a fraction less weight to lug about. Ridiculous? Absolutely. But that, my friends, is the point.

Still the Chiron is an easy target for scorn and cynicism. Right up until the point when you spend some time with it, that is... Inside and out, it's much more in-her-face than the Veyron, but still unmistakably a Bugatti. It does the Lockheed Martin-meets-luxury thing brilliantly, thanks to a bold mix of unashamed theatrics, pure architectural lines and brutal functionality. It's clearly not a car derived from motorsport DNA, but that somehow

EVO CAR OF THE YEAR: HYPERCAR



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creates a bigger wow factor in a sector dominated by quasi road-racers and trackday headbangers.

Leaving the colossal motor partially exposed is a lovely touch carried over from the Veyron. It's like a display case containing a piece of precious sculpture. The docked tail and extensive use of mesh is explicit evidence of the furnace-like heat that needs to be extracted from the engine bay, yet the monolithic arc of machined alloy that forms the full-width tail light is pure art. Such are the glorious contradictions that this car comprises.

The Chiron doesn't conform to regular supercar or hypercar rules. The motor pulses and rumbles rather than yelps and howls. It's genuinely comfortable to sit it. The fit and finish are fabulous,

'IT CHANGES YOUR PERCEPTION OF SPEED. IT WARPS YOUR MIND'

the hi-fi crystal clear and completely immersive. And, if you can get beyond the heart-thumping realisation that you're in a Chiron, it drives with the ease of the aforementioned Bentley.

Is there a sense of connection? Yes, there is. Albeit one that's finely filtered, clear and uncorrupted. It's very much a digital car in this regard, but you have an accurate sense of what each corner is doing. You can feel the Chiron working beneath you as you power it through a corner or brake hard after devouring a straight. There's a sense of life and energy – immense forces being tamed and channelled into the tarmac. It remains well-contained and hugely confidence-inspiring, and there's enough warmth and tactility to make a bond with the machine, even if it stops well short of outright exuberance.

And the legendary straight-line performance? Honestly, winding the Chiron up to 236mph – the first of its two speed limiters – is no more effort than hitting the 155mph limiter in a BMW M4. It doesn't just get there, it gives the electronic limiter a headbutt. If anything it feels more impressive the faster you go, sixth and seventh gears feeding that relentless, runaway feeling of a big airliner in the final few seconds before take-off. Except, of course, you're going faster and the car is being pushed into the ground with the same insistence that an Airbus claws at the air.

It's this combination of remarkable efficiency and remorseless violence that's most shocking, and Bugatti at its best. An



BUGATTI CHIRON

Engine	W16, 7993cc, quad-turbo
Power	1479bhp @ 6700rpm
Torque	1180lb ft @ 2000-6000rpm
Weight	1995kg (753bhp/ton)
0-62mph	<2.5sec (claimed)
Top speed	261mph (limited)
Basic price	c£2.5million
evorating	★★★★★

Above left: the ultimate white-knuckle ride, and all in the lap of luxury.

Above and left: sculptural details bring a new layer of drama to the Bugatti aesthetic

altogether different kind of performance. One that seems genuinely inexhaustible and makes a P1 or LaFerrari feel flaccid – the Chiron hefting you towards the horizon in an unbroken rush while the others huff and puff through the gears.

Speed takes on a different meaning in this car. It'll hustle through corners with the best of them, but it's what it does as you begin to straighten the wheel and squeeze the throttle that's breathtaking. Given a suspension of traffic laws, you could easily and repeatedly breach 200mph. Not just on an empty motorway with a long run-up, eyes out on stalks and palms sweating, but on an average A-road. Maybe even a B-road. In a Chiron, the biggest challenge is not unleashing its performance.

No words come close to genuinely expressing what it is to have such unimaginable and totally deployable performance at your behest. It completely changes your perception of speed. What's possible, what's reasonable, what's marginal and what's plain stupid. It warps your mind.

So, having driven it, what do I make of the Chiron? I suppose the better question is, if I had the means, would I like to own one? My answer? 'Hell, yes!' But driving it begs another question, namely could I trust myself with one? My answer to that is an equally emphatic 'Hell, no!'

This possibly reveals more about my own weaknesses than those of the car, but it also gets to the heart of the matter. The Chiron isn't alone in being fundamentally too fast to put to meaningful use on the public road, but, despite its improved levels of involvement, its ability to go obscenely fast remains the defining experience. That's why although it is unquestionably one of the cars of the year, it's not *the* car of the year.

HYPERCAR HIGHLY COMMENDED

IT MAY BE A CLICHE, BUT THE Bugatti Chiron essentially sits in a class of one. There are machines that can match or, depending on who you believe, exceed its performance, but none that can equal its incredible blend of talents.

The **Pagani Huayra** (below) arguably comes closest, certainly when it comes to drama and craftsmanship. Dripping with exotic materials and featuring exquisite detailing, otherworldly looks and a heavily fettled and turbocharged AMG 7.3-litre V12, the Pagani definitely hits all the right notes. It's breathtakingly fast and will stir your soul, even on a trip to the

shops. Yet as with rivals such as the 278mph (277.87mph to be precise)

Koenigsegg Agera RS, the Huayra is essentially a bespoke creation that will be built in button numbers for owners to squirrel away, only to be brought out for special occasions.

So for a real rival to the Chiron we'll probably have to wait for the **McLaren BP23** (below) to arrive in 2019. Aping the three-seater layout of the iconic F1 and rumoured to be packing a 1000bhp punch, the big Mac is also being developed with everyday useability in mind. If any firm can upstage Bugatti, we reckon it'll be the wizards at Woking and their BP23. **JD**



Above: the Chiron couldn't be anything other than a Bugatti



McLAREN 720S

Just seven short years after the company was founded, McLaren Automotive has claimed its first evo Car of the Year title. Here's why it is so deserved

by STUART GALLAGHER | PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

TWELVE MONTHS, HUNDREDS OF TEST CARS, hundreds of thousands of miles driven – all whittled down to ten class winners and one evo Car of the Year.

Over the last seven years the McLaren Automotive journey has been a flat-out ride to the top. The hurdles it hit in the early days with the MP4-12C have been cleared and the company's expansion has been nothing short of remarkable. Since 12C morphed into 650S, the Super Series range has feared nothing the establishment has sent its way, and the 720S is the culmination of this confidence, ability and desire to be the best.

Throughout the year the 720S has proved its credentials at every opportunity. From our first drive back in May (evo 236), contributing editor John Barker concluded: 'The new generation Super Series McLaren is astonishingly, effortlessly fast, and remarkably efficient. You can cover ground at unbelievable pace in complete control, and yet feel oddly unexcited.' Damning with faint praise? Slightly. But with more exposure, more time behind the wheel and more superunleaded fed into its 4-litre V8, the 720S came to us more, got under our skin and proved to us why it's worthy of the 2017 crown.

A 2000-mile road-trip (evo 242) had deputy ed Adam Towler convinced: 'Precision is, for me, the 720's defining characteristic, but by no means its only one. Completely absorbing, frighteningly intense, life-affirming, but not inherently scary – everything the car does is defined by absolute precision.'

Steve Sutcliffe described the 720S as an intense experience when it came to extracting a lap time from it (also issue 242): 'Insane. Absolutely, brilliantly insane.' For evo's new road test editor, James Disdale, it was equally enthralling: 'It'll cause no more sweat on the commute than an executive saloon, but find the right road to fully explore its potential and you'll experience the biggest hit of undiluted adrenaline this side of a base jumper.'

For me the 720S is all of the above, but it's also what it says about the company, how far it has come and, perhaps crucially, what is yet to follow. The 720S is the product of a manufacturer that hasn't changed its focus on wanting to build the most exciting, thrilling and best performance cars it can despite any obstacles it has faced along the way. McLaren Automotive has defined itself as one of the greats, and in the 720S it has created the best of the best: evo's Car of the Year. ✖

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The NSX factor

by ANTONY INGRAM

PHOTOGRAPHY by MARK RICCONI

The current Honda NSX is a brilliant machine, but could its US origins prevent it gaining the iconic status of its ancestor? Driving both in Tokyo – and spending time with people who live and breathe the original – should provide the answer

FOR JUST A MOMENT I'm fourteen again, staring at the distinctive trapezoid tail lights of a Honda NSX.

Six small oblongs illuminated behind a band of red polycarbonate, joined by an extra sliver of LED light emanating from the trailing edge of the integrated spoiler with every tap of the brakes. I can just about hear the growl of its twin tailpipes over the mechanical gnashing behind me, reverberating off the long walls of every tunnel on Tokyo's seemingly endless ribbons of expressway.

The reverb disappears as we emerge onto long raised stretches of road between monolithic apartment blocks, punctuated by the occasional flicker of light from an occupied room. Now and then we scythe across the metal span of a bridge, skyscrapers and a lone Ferris wheel lining the horizon as orange fades into hazy purple. In my head it's a screenshot from *Gran Turismo*, rendered in 3D and with perfect clarity, one that takes me back

to those evenings spent with PlayStation controller in hand, racing my brother to the finish line (and generally losing).

Right now, from my vantage point in the current NSX, the power advantage is all mine. But I've no idea where I'm going, and there's not a single character I recognise on the satnav screen as it chirps back to me in a kawaii anime-girl voice: 'Massugu itte, shing de hidari ni magatte kudasai.' Quite. Arigatou gozaimasu, but I think I'll just follow. On a different day, though, 573bhp would put me just a pedal-squeeze away from dominating the Bayshore Route Grand Prix...

Such are the fruits of two and a half decades of progress. The latest NSX is a bona fide supercar in all but bonnet emblem, where its predecessor only just scraped that definition – even if it did drop a dollop of wasabi into whatever it was that complacent European manufacturers were dining out on at the time. Porsche 964s and Ferrari 348s are appreciated today as characterful dips back into the history of their respective manufacturers



'The new car feels smooth and seamless, but still isn't quite as cool as the early-'90s icon slinking along in front'



Above: Tokyo locals give the new car a resounding thumbs-up, but what's the view of hardcore NSX enthusiasts? **Left:** a visit to renowned NSX tuning and time attack specialist Advance Garage should prove revealing on that score

– not to mention decent investments – but Honda's all-aluminium, VTEC-engined arrival revealed them as unsophisticated anachronisms, relics from a time when flaws were considered an acceptable compromise for their performance.

The first NSX was lightweight, compact, and thoughtful. It's become a cliché to say it was little more taxing to drive than a contemporary Civic, but it remains true. The steering is light, if not quite so friction-free and direct as a modern sports car's, the forward visibility astonishing. By current standards, it's also tiny, mainly in width. The analogue instruments are legible, the seats comfortable, and you can get in and out of it without having to clamber over a massive sill or through some dihedral-

hexadecimal-logarithmical porthole.

Today's NSX must work harder to compete: 991s and 488s (and R8s and 570Ss) aren't just blisteringly fast but everyday-useable. Supercars without compromise, just as the first NSX was back in 1990. Porsche, Ferrari and others have taken Honda's USP and paired it with the heritage and showroom appeal that even their flaky ancestors never lacked.

Today's approach is different, and New Sportscar eXperimental seems even more appropriate now than it did back then (actually, today it's New Sports eXperience, but we're sticking with the original backronym, thanks), with hybrid technology to assist the NSX's twin-turbocharged V6, all-wheel drive, torque vectoring, and nine-speed dual-clutch

gearbox. Big power, big torque, and big sophistication, plus a cabin that keeps the original's simplicity while incorporating the necessary modern kit, and a sense of compact useability, even in Tokyo's tightest streets, to body-shame a 991.

But the new NSX is hiding a dirty secret to those of us who grew up with a JDM schooling thanks to *Gran Turismo* and *Tokyo Drift*: it's American. Its creases are the work of Acura's Michelle Christensen and engineering was led by Ted Klaus; both American. The concept was first revealed at Detroit in 2012 and the production car debuted at the same show in 2015. It's built not in Tochigi, like the original, but in Marysville, Ohio.

Car fans in Tokyo are either unaware of its American heritage or aren't bothered.



Above: our man Ingram (on the right) chats to Advance proprietor Masa and early NSX owner Blake. **Left:** not much front luggage space with either car. **Below:** beautifully clear dials of early NSX



Parked up earlier, near the Kanda River – cheekily in front of Toyota's headquarters – the new NSX attracted just as much attention as its ancestor. A businessman in a tailored brown suit stopped by to compliment the cars in broken English. I motioned as to which might be his choice – old or new? He pointed to the red car.

Blake Jones, owner of the older, Brooklands Green Pearl model in front and writer for car culture website *Speedhunters*, is also making positive noises when we park up on the other side of one of Tokyo's many tollbooths (whose operators offer encouraging noises of their own each time we pull up). He tells me how fantastic the new car looks in his rear-view mirror. Not as good as his car looks above my squared-off wheel, I suspect, but he has a point.

The new NSX's long gestation and numerous show appearances mean it's a

familiar shape now, but on a crisp late-October morning in Tokyo the NSX cuts a striking form. That might be down to the Valencia Red Pearl paintwork, or it might be the small oblong Japanese numberplate up front, which photographer Mark Riccioni has already noted improves the look of everything from the humble Honda Jazz to the evo-kryptonite Prius.

As with the original, the new car is surprisingly compact in the metal. It sits waist-high, and has the unmistakable proportions of a supercar. The details of one, too, from the multi-element LED headlights and the mid-mounted V6 visible through the rear glass, to the mirrors out on stalks and the buttresses rising above the vents in the rear wings.

But while one NSX owner might be impressed on first acquaintance, we have bigger sakana to fry. Blake is leading me to Advance Garage, one of thousands of

tuning firms dotted across Japan and a particular specialist with the original NSX, building time-attack cars capable of lapping Tsukuba Circuit in under a minute – serious speed for a street-legal vehicle. Our choice of venue may not be unrelated to Blake's desire to swap a manual transmission into his automatic example in the near future.

There's a little more highway to cover first, and it's a mixed bag. At Tokyo's languid traffic velocities, the new NSX is on hybrid duty, six-pot kicking in and out with throttle input, saving fuel at every opportunity. I appreciate the sentiment – it seems appropriate in a country where even the cheapest cars feature mild-hybrid tech and the dirt and clatter of diesel engines is largely absent – but Honda's latest V6 isn't as sonorous as before and at low cruising revs the sound is nothing more musical than a mechanical

thrash. As with so many hybrids, petrol power feels like the weak link.

Blake, familiar with the roads, decides it's time to step up the pace. Thank God sixty-odd isn't the norm here. I've no intentions to join the Midnight Club, but Tokyo's glassy-smooth asphalt and race-track-cambered turns invite a much faster flow. Bigger numbers begin to show on the TFT speedometer, and higher revs on the concentric tach. Now the NSX feels happier. Sounds a bit more like a supercar – not a wail or a bellow, but purposeful, almost tuneful. Makes amusing turbo chuffing noises under heavy throttle and on the overrun. Still feels smooth and seamless. Still isn't quite as cool as the early-'90s icon slinking along in front.

I clock the cars before I see the garage itself. Parked out on the street is a third-generation Mazda RX-7 wearing a few choice modifications and a glossy coat

of black paintwork. Hidden behind is an S15 Nissan Silvia – a shape never sold in the UK – and up on the kerb is one of Advance's most famous project cars, the yellow 'Flatout' demo NSX. The shop has owned it since 1997, originally buying it to develop parts of its own, and its visual distinctions include some faired-in headlights from a later car, a wide, custom bodykit, and a set of staggered Rays wheels tucked under the arches. Through the rear Plexiglas are visible six velocity stacks for individual throttle bodies, helping towards a naturally aspirated 340bhp or so. Before I've even pulled up, proprietor Masa walks out with a big grin and motions me to park at a jaunty angle in front of the open entrance.

By Japanese standards, the Advance workshop is sizeable, but it's still cosy enough that cars are perched on lifts not just to be worked on, but to allow

space beneath to fettle other customer projects. A silver NSX is parked front and centre, also wearing a wide bodykit and a sizeable diffuser, while in front are two more, the first silver, with a pearlescent white example dangling its wheels above. To the side is a Bayside Blue metallic R34 Skyline GT-R waiting for R35 brakes, while up on the ramps are a Legacy and a 370Z hiding a serious-looking roll-cage and carbonfibre body panels. Little is for decoration; Advance customers use their cars on track. Several boast stickers from the nearby Fuji Speedway.

I want Masa's take on the new car, but first he wants his mechanic to try it. I give him the thumbs-up. These guys are used to actual handbrakes and manual gearboxes, so I have to gesture towards the small circle marked D/M and the handbrake switch behind it. He then pulls away silently, which must be a



'As with the original, the new car is surprisingly compact. It also has the unmistakable proportions of a supercar'



HONDA NSX (1990)

Engine V6, 2977cc

Power 270bhp @ 7300rpm
(252bhp @ 6800rpm with auto 'box)

Torque 209lb ft @ 5400rpm

Transmission Five-speed manual (four-speed auto option), rear-wheel drive

Tyres 205/50 ZR15 front, 225/50 ZR16 rear

Weight 1365kg

Power-to-weight 201bhp/ton

0-60mph 5.7sec (claimed)

Top speed 168mph (claimed)

Price new £52,000 (1990)

evo rating ★★★★★

HONDA NSX (2017)

Engine V6, 3493cc, twin-turbo,
plus 2 x 36bhp front electric motors, and
47bhp rear electric motor

Power 573bhp (combined)

Torque 476lb ft @ 2000rpm (combined)

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

Tyres 265/35 ZR20 front, 325/30 ZR21 rear

Weight 1776kg

Power-to-weight 328bhp/ton

0-62mph 2.9sec (claimed)

Top speed 191mph (claimed)

Basic price £144,765

evo rating ★★★★★

novelty for Advance's neighbours. After a spin around the block, Masa hops in and does the same. They're all smiles. 'It's fast!' they beam. Masa says one of his customers has a new NSX, but they only do basic maintenance on that, and it's the first time either has had a drive. Up goes the (front) bonnet, revealing a chaotic space full of wires, hoses and subframes – not unlike the old car – then the rear clamshell pops and Masa stares past the pokey luggage area at the mostly-hidden V6. They peer and prod away, and Blake conveys their occasional message of approval.

But is it a proper NSX? They aren't so sure. With good humour but a hint of exasperation, Masa explains that it doesn't feel like the old car. Neither to drive, nor in spirit. In fact, he says, it feels American. You don't really need to rev the engine, he notes, the implication

being that big, low-down torque (thanks to the electric motors) is a very American characteristic. Realistically, it also has a bit too much power for crowded Japanese roads. Great on track, he supposes, but not something you can exploit like you can with the original car.

Blake nods. 'For the price I paid for my NSX, you can get a used R35 Nissan GT-R in Japan,' he says. 'But that just doesn't appeal to me.' Everyone here – including myself, I concede – prefers the more accessible but also more involving performance of the earlier car. One word comes up over and over in conversation, and it's a word I understand as the western motoring lexicon is absorbed into Japanese: digital. At the time, the original NSX might have seemed inorganic next to some of its more boisterous rivals, but by modern standards – even considering steering that feels quite numb at lower

speeds – the old car feels more like a living object next to the new NSX's clinical, digital approach.

Would Advance Garage ever modify the new NSX? Some of Japan's more visually orientated tuners have already tackled it, and the turbocharged engine certainly lends itself to even bigger numbers. Masa shakes his head. They've worked with the original NSX since the mid-'90s but, to him, the new car feels like an interloper. A remarkable supercar and, like the original, an impressive technical achievement. But not really an NSX.

I mull on this as Blake and I head to the Daikoku-Futo parking area to get a few last photographs. On Tokyo's looping network of expressways, roads highlighted in sodium vapour orange, the videogame vibes are stronger than ever. Street signs flicker and perfectly painted road markings reflect vividly in the LED headlights' glow, the early NSX still dancing, howling through every tunnel.

Back when *Gran Turismo* debuted in 1997, it felt like a game that only Japan could produce. Impossibly detailed, idiosyncratic, slightly geeky. It nevertheless won worldwide acclaim, changing the way people thought about and developed racing games. The latest in the franchise, *Gran Turismo Sport*, is a highly impressive, more refined, more bombastic product, with global ambitions in the face of stronger rivals. The parallels are clear. As with *Gran Turismo*, the NSX's Japanese roots are beginning to fade. ☑

With thanks to Blake Jones.

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by JOHN BARKER

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

SLIDE ORDER

BMW's new M5 has gone four-wheel drive – but with the option to switch it to rear-wheel drive. It also has almost 600bhp on tap. The upshot: power oversteer, and lots of it. But is this enough for it to retake its supersaloon crown?



THE NEW M5 DOES sideways better than any previous generation, which might seem an odd accolade given that the F90 is the first ever all-wheel-drive M5. It wears no badges announcing the move, even though in engineering terms it's one of the biggest changes in the model's history, and maybe that's because at the push of a button (two pushes, actually) it can be rear-drive only. All the better to drift the rear tyres into oblivion...

This feature is a novelty only if you're unaware of one of the F90's main rivals, the similarly all-wheel-drive Mercedes-AMG E63 S, which was first to market with a rear-drive option. This is the car the new M5 stands toe-to-toe with, the BMW's biturbo V8 having been boosted by 40bhp to 592bhp (600 PS), and its price tag in the UK have risen to a shade under £90k. (The AMG has 603bhp and costs £87,375.)

The styling changes over the previous model are subtle but reap big rewards, the

sixth-generation car looking smaller, more rounded, a bit more like a current M3. The rear wheels sit a bit further out in their arches, giving the car a more pumped look, like M5s of old, and one of the reasons is that while the old model relied on standard 5-series steel suspension parts, the new one has bespoke aluminium items, which help wheel control and thus handling precision.

This new M5 may be based on the shell of a regular 5-series, but here the roof is carbonfibre. BMW claims it increases torsional rigidity as well as bringing the more obvious benefit of lowering the car's centre of gravity. It can even be specified in lacquered bare carbon.

The interior is much revised compared with the old M5's, with new TFT instruments and a much tidier switch layout on the centre console. But what catches the eye is a new pair of mini paddles, bright red and marked 'M1' and 'M2'. They are the configurable 'M' mode switches, and their colour is appropriate given the dramatic shift in handling characteristics you can summon with

them. As well as being able to select from the usual steering, suspension, engine and gearshift sportiness settings, along with having DSC on or off, you can now switch to rear drive. So you could go from all-wheel drive with stability control on, to rear drive with stability off, which is why you are prompted to confirm your request with a second push.

Starting off with everything in the mildest settings, and in AWD, the M5 is refined and decently comfortable. At a cruise, and even with the optional M Sport exhaust, the engine is mostly a background murmur, which you can electronically enhance with a press of the exhaust button on the centre console. This introduces more bass tones, which can be a little heavy after a while, though not for rear-seat passengers; the sound is piped in through the speakers mainly for the benefit of the driver. And while we're considering those in the back, the ride there is rather abrupt at times, even in the most cosseting suspension setting, and road noise is more intrusive. The new M5 is marking itself out as a driver-orientated car.

'All the power is definitely present and correct, the hit instant and monstrous, the push relentless'



Above: 4.4-litre biturbo V8 from previous F10-gen M5 now makes extra 40bhp, lifting total to 592bhp; AWD traction means 0-62mph takes a mere 3.4sec

Nothing wrong with that. From the front seat, which is reasonably comfortable and supportive, setting the suspension to Sport ties the body movements down nicely, so that the nose doesn't lift so strongly when you step on the throttle and unleash all 592bhp. Gunning it away from a rolling start, all the power is definitely present and correct, the hit instant and monstrous, the push relentless, seemingly undimmed by upshifts. The 'box is now an eight-speed Steptronic auto, which is better suited to the xDrive four-wheel-drive system and gives a greater span of gears than the seven-speed DCT of the previous M5, helping the economy numbers, apparently. The shift speeds are not too dissimilar, says BMW.

On smaller roads, even before you've pressed any buttons, you're aware of the mass of the latest M5 and, as a consequence, the size of it, too. In the past I've found the choice of steering settings

on M-cars ranges from 'a bit heavy' to 'waaay too heavy' to 'fetch me a crowbar' but, guiding the M5 along warm, sinuous, Portuguese roads, the Comfort setting feels a bit light. Selecting Sport gets the car in the right frame, and you can never have too much engine response (probably), so that's wound up to Sport Plus. Instantly the car comes alive, the V8's note edgier, its delivery snappier.

Encouraged, you press the car into a few corners and the steering is... not quite there. A few more corners and you realise that although the weighting is good and the chassis responsive, the steering lacks a real feeling of connection and the reassurance that brings. It's not totally numb, but with the pace the M5 is capable of and the prospect of some rear slip to play with, you'd like to feel better connected with the car.

In theory, the weight distribution of the new M5 should be worse, more nose-heavy, than the previous model, given it carries the weight of a front diff and driveshafts. It doesn't feel like that, probably because the rear suspension control is very good,



'So where does the sixth-generation car fit in the pantheon of M5s?'

which helps driver confidence. The overall handling balance is of a high standard, with a real sense of agility when you jink the car through a series of twists. It already feels like most of the drive is going to the rear, and mostly it does, though BMW chassis dynamics engineer Jorg Weidinger says the system can proactively send power to the front, anticipating drive requirements at the exit of a corner.

It's not long before curiosity gets the better of me. Buttons are pressed and the M5 is soon a rear-driver. And a pretty tidy one, too. DSC is disabled (you have no choice about this in rear-drive mode), and after a couple of runs through an inviting uphill, second-gear corner, ambition sees the rear slip mildly sideways and stay there for a few yards before wheel speed and car speed synchronise again. Next time through with more enthusiasm, the tail stays out longer. Further up the hill, when the car is straight, hard on the power, there's a bit of squirm as the limited-slip differential actively juggles drive between the rear tyres to find traction.

Later, bagging our opening shot at Estoril circuit, there are glorious powerslides to be had, the V8 providing more than enough torque to kick the tail out on entry, with enough left under your right foot to dictate the line and degree of slip for the whole of third gear, which will take you around the long 180-degree hairpin at the heart of the infield section. Right here, right now, the F90 is a proper M5, no question.

So, back on that road, what happens with traction off but four-wheel drive engaged? The surprise is that the initial kick-out at the rear is as strong, and the slew is maintained as long too, but there's then a more stable, settled feel to the car further up the incline. It's as though the AWD system takes a few moments to respond to the slip at the rear before sending drive to the front wheels, which then help pull the car forward and give a satisfying sense of stability. More efficient? For sure. As much fun? No. Cheaper on tyres? A bit.

But the upshot is that, in all-wheel drive,



the new M5 is as agile and engagingly rear-drive in feel as you could wish. If you still want a safety net, the halfway-house MDM mode provides it, stepping in to ensure things don't go too far. Unless you want to do burnouts or really test your oversteer skills, you can give two-wheel drive a miss.

So where does the sixth-gen car fit in the pantheon of M5s? The first three are

BMW M5 (F90)

Engine V8, 4395cc, twin-turbo

Power 592bhp @ 5600-6700rpm

Torque 553lb ft @ 1800-5600rpm

Transmission Eight-speed automatic, four-wheel

drive (switchable rear drive), Active M Differential

Front suspension Double wishbones, coil springs,

adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Multi-link, coil springs,

adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs, 400mm front,

396mm rear, ABS, CBC, EBD, DBC

Wheels 9.5 x 19in front, 10.5 x 19in rear (20in option)

Tyres 275/40 ZR19 front, 285/40 ZR19 rear

Weight 1855kg

Power-to-weight 324bhp/ton

0-62mph 3.4sec (claimed)

Top speed 190mph (with Driver's Package)

Basic price £89,640

On sale Now

evolution rating ★★★★★

Above right: individual drive-mode set-ups are now activated via two small, red, additional paddles. **Top left:** standard wheels are 19in, but most are sure to have these optional 20in rims

five-star cars: the E28, the square-rigged, original supersaloon, powered by the M Power straight-six and irresistible; the E34, still handmade, powered by an even more potent six and with even better handling; and the E39, chunkier but handsome and oh-so driveable with its 400bhp V8. Then things went a bit off: next was the E60 with its snorty V10 and woeful, single-plate paddleshift 'box, followed by the F10, the first turbocharged M5, with a slick DCT but rather soulless biturbo V8 and capable but not always engaging handling.

Which group does the new M5 sit with? It's certainly a lot of fun, whether in two- or four-wheel drive, and the uprated V8 has gained character as well as horsepower. It works well with the eight-speed Steptronic auto, too, helping it nail the duality trick – suave around town, hoonigan away from it. And yet... the missing pieces are sufficient steering connection and feel and, still, a properly entertaining engine character. It's a great car but not an instant, top-drawer, iconic M5.





Above: having ancestors like the brilliant – and eminently slideable – E39 brings its own pressure

Why it's tough being the new M5

Iconic forebears, a pointless party trick, an enemy within... the F90 has its work cut out, reckons Adam Towler

LIFE ISN'T EASY FOR THE NEW M5. How so? The M5 badge remains the solid gold standard for supersaloons: it's the model with all the history, the prestige. This latest F90 M5 has a 592bhp twin-turbo V8, a chassis developed by an M division that, if very recent evidence is to go by, is getting back to its best, and combines the undoubted benefits of all-wheel-drive traction with the ability to be rear drive and ESP-free on demand. What more could anyone possibly want? My relative apathy suggests quite a bit more (or should that be less?), and here's why.

The new M5 is under pressure from all sides, not least the weight of history. Its distant, E28-based ancestor invented the genre by blending supercar performance with the quality, specification and space of a luxury saloon. It was raw and visceral, yet useable and comfortable in equal measure – pretty much what you'd expect when you dropped the M1 supercar's straight-six into a well-appointed rear-drive saloon with semi-trailing-arm rear suspension, and all long before the advent of traction control.

Part of my problem with the F90 is that its main USP – the ability to switch from four-wheel drive to rear drive at the push of a paddle – is something that Mercedes-AMG beat it to some months ago when it launched the formidable E63 S. Moreover, I'm not actually convinced that this ability is anything more than a gimmick designed to keep journalists happy on press launches with access to deserted race circuits. Remember, this is a near-two-ton car that can only be rear drive with all electronic safety systems turned off (as is the case with the AMG); the potential for BMW-approved body shops to build up a backlog of work seems high.

And therein lies the nub of the issue. It's one thing to slide a 400bhp E39 M5; perhaps even easier to get a 335bhp E34 M5 on narrower rubber to move around, but how relevant is it in the new car? And will many owners really take to a trackday in the new M5? My experience of a pre-production F90 and earlier M5s suggests they're far too big and heavy to be seriously considered for anything of that nature.

Even the headline 600 PS output seems

likely to elicit a shrug these days. Beyond a certain level – debate at leisure what that might be – it's all academic anyway: it can't really be enjoyed on the public road. On the upside, it's good to hear that the F90 still feels rear driven even with all four wheels working: it's just a shame it doesn't offer more of the connection we crave when pressing on.

But perhaps the new M5's biggest headache comes from within, and the latest MY18-spec M3 in Competition Package form. Unlike back in the day when hot 3-series were, well, small, and the 5-series was, er, bigger, there's plenty of room in a current M3, unless you want to chauffeur adults around, and the boot's a fair size, too. It's too early to say if the M3 outpicks its bigger brother, but I strongly suspect it's more fun to drive. And then there's the sound. There may be an engineering reason why the M5's V8 still sounds flat – reducing lag, apparently – but the straight-six sounds better.

All of which leaves me wondering where the new M5 fits in. Undeniably a good car, I await its arrival in the UK to see if and where it can carve its own niche.

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by STEVE SUTCLIFFE

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

ALPINE STAR

*Every once in a while, a new car comes along that absolutely blows us away.
The Alpine A110 is one of those cars, and our world has a new superstar*



'The key factor, right from the very beginning, was lightness'

TO BEGIN WITH, THE ALPINE A110 was quite a long way wide of the mark in terms of where it needed to be to take on the Porsche 718 Cayman. And that has always been Alpine's core mission with the A110. In the early days, though, it was a bit ropey beside its arch nemesis from Germany.

How do we know this? Because we drove an early prototype of the A110 well over a year ago now, having been invited to do so by Alpine's Dutch boss Michael van der Sande and his amiable team of mostly French engineers. We spent two days driving it and talking with its creators, finding out exactly what Alpine's intentions were with the car.

They said they wanted to build a sports coupe in the vein of the original A110, one that would be lighter, more agile, faster and just plain better than a 718 Cayman. But we got on the plane home at the end of those two days wondering if Alpine wasn't about to make a rather large, rather expensive mistake with the new A110.

To be honest it didn't ride that well, didn't steer too sweetly, made a not-especially-nice noise and had a dual-

clutch gearbox that didn't change gear too brilliantly, either. Just over a year ago the A110 was, to be brutally frank, nowhere near the Cayman.

Scroll forward to May 2017, however, and we were invited to drive the A110 again; this time two pre-production prototypes that had, according to chief engineer David Twohig, been transformed compared with the cars we'd sampled six months earlier. The gearchange had been heavily reworked, as had the steering and suspension, while the exhaust note had been 'well and truly fixed', said Twohig. And he was right. The pre-production A110 was a very different car. A much better car.

Pretty much all of the wrongs had been righted. The 1.8-litre turbocharged engine had become much sweeter in its delivery, while the ride, handling, brake feel, steering and exhaust note had all become far more refined, but also far more sporting in tone. The second time we drove the A110 – again for two days straight on both road and track and in wet and dry conditions – we got back on the plane thinking it was every inch a rival for the 718 Cayman. It



Left and top: unfussy interior, carbon-shelled bucket seats and mix of leather and Alcantara strike just the right sporting note. **Above:** Brembo brake callipers; launch edition has 18in alloys

was all but ready, we reckoned, to take on the world, because van der Sande and his team had, we felt, delivered a near-perfect lightweight alternative to the Porsche.

And now here we are again, this time – and at last – driving a full production-spec version of the car that will come to the UK in the second quarter of 2018, tested here in launch Première Édition trim, alongside the rest of the world's motoring press. Excited? You bet.

Verdict? Having spent the equivalent of a week driving the A110 now, in various guises and at various stages of its evolution, I'm prepared to swallow hard, take a great big brave pill and come right out and say it – I genuinely think the A110 is a nicer, sweeter and just better car to drive than a Porsche 718 Cayman.

Blimey. So there you have it, but where on earth do we go from here? Right back to the beginning, I guess, in order to try to explain how van der Sande and his small but perfectly formed team of enthusiast designers and engineers have managed to create such a fantastic car in the first place.

It started, as most of the best plans do, with just one simple idea – to recreate the

spirit of Alpine's cars of yesteryear, and specifically the original A110, by building a two-seat, rear-drive coupe almost entirely from aluminium, with the engine behind the driver; a car that would be very light, very agile, and would punch well above its weight in terms of performance relative to its power. And the key factor, right from the very beginning, was its lightness.

Which is why the Première Édition A110 you see here (of which there will be just 1955 examples, the number marking the year in which Alpine was formed, and all of which are already sold) weighs just 1103kg, and that's with fluids and fuel, not a dry weight. In the fullness of time there will be two regular production models: Pure and Légende. The Pure version will be lightly stripped out and should therefore weigh slightly less, while the Légende will have things like satnav and a high-end stereo as standard and weigh perhaps 15-20kg more.

Either way, we are talking here about a car that weighs around 230kg less than the lightest entry-level Cayman. Only once this sinks in do you begin to understand what the new A110 is all about. Because



'Instantly the A110 feels nimble, delicate, intimate in its responses'

once you get that, once you realise just how light it actually is, everything else about it begins to make perfect sense.

This includes its high-quality but unashamedly uncomplicated interior. Whatever spec it comes in, there's enough inside the A110 to keep you intrigued, fascinated even, including a TFT instrument cluster and a pair of brilliantly supportive, ultra-lightweight carbonfibre seats made by Sabelt. But there are precisely zero frills. Nothing inside the A110 isn't functional in some way, and the view out of it is also exceptional in all directions for a mid-engined car. You climb in, shuffle your bum right down into the seat, run your palms over the part-suede, part-leather steering wheel, register that there's a pleasant whiff of leather throughout and think: this is tidy, this is good. This is, in fact, very good indeed.

And despite its relatively tiny dimensions – at 4180mm long, 1798mm wide and just 1252mm high, it's more compact than the Cayman in every way – the A110 doesn't feel small or cramped inside. MD van der Sande is a towering 6ft 7in and he fits, just, even with a crash helmet on, so for anyone of remotely regular proportions there is plenty of room in which to operate. Not that the A110 feels in any way clinical on the move, anything but...

Press the starter button and there's a distinctive, surprisingly loud burst of noise from behind before the 249bhp, four-cylinder turbo engine settles to a meaningful burble at idle. In Normal mode, which is the default on start-up, the digital instrument display contains a speedo and rev-counter that are identically sized, but if you then select Sport by pressing a small red button on the right-hand side of the wheel, the display changes and the rev-counter becomes more dominant, which is a nice touch. And if you then press and hold the red button for a couple of seconds the display changes again as Track mode engages, and then it's all about the tacho. In all modes, however, the clarity of information on display is excellent, unusually so for any car, but especially one that's made in France (and in Dieppe specifically).

Engage first gear via the right-hand column-mounted paddleshifter – there is, shock-horror, no manual gearbox option for the A110; instead you get a dual-clutch semi-auto, like it or not – and from the moment it starts to move, the A110 somehow feels right. It also feels immediately light on its feet, with a refreshing absence of inertia, not just via the light but feelsome electric power steering but through the seats as well. Instantly the A110 feels nimble, delicate, intimate in its responses. It feels, dammit, bloody marvellous, in a way that most modern sports cars, which weigh what they do because they're festooned with so much stuff that they don't really need, absolutely cannot replicate.

And when you put your foot down, it goes, properly. Perhaps more importantly still, it also sounds good. Raspy and sporting and quick, far more so than the flat-four-engined 718 Cayman. There's a touch of lag in the higher gears but that's OK. In fact, it adds to the A110's appeal in a curious kind of way because turbocharged cars that have a bit of lag actually feel more exciting when they start to go. So when the torque arrives, it does so in a rush, and you feel as though you need to hold on tight to the reins just to keep up. Subjectively this makes the A110 feel a whole lot quicker than its equivalent Cayman in terms of pure acceleration, and the vastly more appealing noise it makes simply rubs salt into the wound.

The numbers support this, too, Alpine claiming a 0-62mph

Left: almost entirely aluminium construction means A110 weighs just 1103kg – and that really shows, right from the moment you start driving

'It flows across the ground and breathes with the road the way the best Lotuses do'



Alpine A110 Première Édition

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1798cc, turbo
Power 249bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 236lb ft @ 2000-5000rpm
Transmission Seven-speed dual-clutch, rear-wheel drive
Front suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, passive dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, passive dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes Ventilated discs, 320mm front and rear
Wheels 18in front and rear
Tyres 205/40 ZR18 front, 235/40 ZR18 rear
Weight 1103kg
Power-to-weight 229bhp/ton
0-62mph 4.5sec (claimed)
Top speed 155mph (limited)
Basic price €50,000
On sale Première Édition sold out; Pure and Légende versions from July 2018
evo rating ★★★★★



time of 4.5sec (a PDK Cayman takes 4.7sec with launch control, a manual Cayman 5.1) and a top speed electronically limited to 155mph. Just guessing, I'd say the 0-100mph time is somewhere around the 10-11sec mark, and because it's so light it doesn't burn much fuel in the process – officially 46.3mpg for the combined cycle and a mere 138g/km for emissions.

The gearbox works fine but isn't a highlight. It's fast, efficient, decent, but not mind-blowing, even though the auto-blips on downshifts are well executed and there are some nice crackles to be heard on the overrun in Sport and Track modes.

The three driver modes – Normal, Sport and Track – deliver their own characteristics for the throttle, gearbox, exhaust, traction control, stability control and e-diff all becoming fruitier as you scroll your way up through them. But not the dampers. These are passive items, so stay the same in all modes, which proves just how confident Alpine's chassis engineers are in their core product.

And it's the chassis that really steals the show. With a classic set-up of double



unequal-length wishbones at each corner, a super-lightweight aluminium body to carry around and a strong, stiff and again ultra-lightweight aluminium frame at its core, the A110 has all the right ingredients to deliver ride and handling greatness. But, even so, the way it flows so cleanly across the ground, 'breathing' with the road in the same way that the best Lotuses have done over the years, still comes as a delightful surprise.

The steering is light, delicate and accurate, but also delivers genuine feel through the rim. As a result, you feel you can place the A110 with almost millimetric precision, while having total faith in the front end because the turn-in response is so crisp, without being hyper-reactive.

At the same time the tail is also beautifully controlled, and very well balanced relative to the front-end bite. And while all that's going on, there's a fundamental composure to the ride that

provides the A110 with a unique sense of maturity, a feeling of control but also a highly unusual level of calm. On any road it feels comfortable and refined but also sharp and incisive, all at the same time. As a combination it really is some achievement, and not just for a first-time effort but for any car, from any manufacturer.

The fact that the A110 is also fun and playful and deceptively fast to drive on a track, where it can be held in big, long drifts when it's slippery, despite not having a mechanical differential, almost feels like a bonus, especially when you consider that there will be a faster, stiffer, lighter, more track-focused version in 12 months' time. But then the A110's real genius is that it can do brilliant things on both road and track already, even in its launch form. It might even be a risk to mess with what is clearly a winning formula.

Either way, the Porsche Cayman at long last has a true (blue) rival on its hands, a car that looks great in the metal – and out on the public road – and drives even better than it looks. A car that wears its Alpine badge with pride, and deservedly so. ✕

HOW TO TURN A ROUGH DIAMOND INTO A WORLD-BEATING PERFORMANCE CAR

WE DROVE THE A110 AT TWO DISTINCTLY different stages of its development. The first time was towards the end of 2016, and to be honest we weren't massively impressed by what we found. Which was basically a car that needed a lot of polish administering to make it even remotely competitive with a Porsche Cayman. The steering wasn't quite there in terms of feel or precision, the paddleshifters for the dual-clutch gearbox lacked definition and the shift itself felt turgid as a result.

There was more. The exhaust note wasn't quite right and there was too much travel on the brake pedal and a bit too much lag from the turbocharged engine. We relayed all of this without any sugar-coating to Alpine's enthusiastic engineers and specifically to chief engineer David Twhig, who took it on the chin and basically said: 'Trust me, I know we're not there yet but we will get there eventually, because we know where we need to end up.'

Six months later we went back to try the A110 again, this time on both road and track near Lyon, and the weather chuckled it down for most of our stay. But this time pretty much everything about the A110 had been improved. Hugely so.

Alpine MD Michael van der Sande was there, as was Twhig and his two main assistants, Renaud Hantz (powertrain) and Terry Baillon (chassis). We spent two days howling around in two different pre-production A110s plus a Megane Trophy R as a reference for how quick the A110 was.

The answer to that was 'very'. The A110 could drop the Trophy R easily, on road or track, but that wasn't the main issue. What mattered was that the A110's gearchange was much better, much snappier, its chassis and steering in particular had finally hit their sweet spots, the brakes felt far crisper and the power delivery now had an edge to it that wasn't there before. One of the cars we drove had the old-spec paddles, the other the new spec, and the difference was chalk and cheese. Otherwise, both cars were pretty close to production specification bar a few quality issues, and they both drove quite beautifully, on road and track.

I came away thinking that van der Sande and his team might just have a world-beater on their hands, and, having now driven the full production version, I'm quietly confident that Alpine, with perhaps just a tiny bit of help from evo, has delivered just that.

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Buying guide

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PORSCHE 911 CARRERA & CARRERA S (997) 2004-2011

In early S form it was our 2004 Car of the Year, and today prices start below £25k, but it's essential to approach this 911 with caution
by Peter Tomalin



THE FIRST THING WE NOTICED when the new Carrera went on sale in September 2004 was the lights. Design boss Harm Lagaay wanted to re-establish the 911's identity after the economically enforced similarity of the 996-generation version and the original Boxster. So out went the last vestiges of the fried eggs and in came oval lamps that harked back to the earlier 993-generation 911, along with an overall look that was broader, cleaner, chunkier, tighter.

Another key change was a choice of two engines. The basic Carrera got a 3.6-litre 321bhp version of the water-cooled flat-six from the outgoing 996. For the Carrera S – instantly identifiable by its quad exhaust tailpipes – it was mildly updated, bored out to 3.8 litres and delivered a wholesome 350bhp.

Chassis-wise, there was a Sport variant, which was 20mm lower, stiffer, and came with a limited-slip diff. Then there was PASM or Porsche Adaptive Suspension Management, with its adaptive damping, standard on the S and an option on the basic car. Other new tech included variable-ratio steering as standard, and an optional Sport Chrono pack which, in addition to a dash-mounted stopwatch, came with a Sport button that sharpened throttle response, loosened the PSM stability control and tensed the damping.

So the new car was more sophisticated than any 'regular' 911 we'd seen before – and more capable, too. Stable, poised, with fewer than ever of the old, scary 911 handling traits. But still fun and engaging.

All-wheel-drive Carrera 4 and 4S versions arrived in November 2005 and

there were also Targas and Cabriolets, but it's the rear-drive Carreras we're focusing on here, and the next major development came in late 2008 with the launch of the second-generation 997.

The gen-2 engine was completely new, now boasting direct injection and VarioCam Plus valvegear, and power was up – 340bhp for the Carrera, and 380bhp for the S, cutting its 0-60mph time to the low-4s. The optional Tiptronic auto was replaced by a nifty twin-clutch PDK 'box.

A gen-2 S has become the 'one to have', but any 997 is a truly great car, blending genuine everyday useability with real driver engagement. Scare stories about the engines in early cars have deflated values, so there are bargains to be had. You just need to know what you're potentially getting into.

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CHECKPOINTS

ENGINE

There are lots of scare stories on the internet, but the first thing to understand is that gen-1 and gen-2 cars have completely different engines. Most problems are with gen-1s and, according to Grant Pritchard, MD of leading independent Hartech, a lot have been exaggerated. 'It has really depressed prices,' he says. 'The gen-1 engine does have shortcomings, but if you understand and can work with them, they're good value cars – and fantastic to drive.'

The weak spots are crankshaft bearings, timing chains, the intermediate shaft bearing and cylinder liners. 'Some issues are mileage-related,' says Grant. 'Crankshaft bearings wear over time, and cylinders become more oval, but this tends to be from 90,000 miles upwards.'

More random issues are timing chains that snap – 'very rare, but it does happen' – and IMS bearing failure, which is more

common 'but nowhere near as common as internet chit-chat suggests'. From late 2005, Porsche doubled the size of the bearing, which helped considerably.

The biggest gen-1 issue is scoring of the cylinder bores. The problem was the material used – Lokasil – and the only fix is replacing the cylinder liners with a harder-wearing replacement. Clues to scored bores include excessive smoke on start-up and blackened tailpipes. A number of specialists offer checks by endoscope, but scoring could start at any time. So if you're looking for a gen-1 car, either buy one that's had a rebuild by a specialist, or keep funds in reserve – from around £6k up to about £10k to replace all six liners and do the crank bearings and chains at the same time.

'We advise buyers to factor-in the probability that they are going to have to rebuild an engine at some point,' says Grant. 'If you've done that and picked up

a car for £25k, it's not such a drama. It's people who stretch themselves to buy a car for £22k who finish up in trouble...'

Meanwhile you can reduce – but not remove – the risk by lowering the operating temperature of the engine by installing a low-temp thermostat and using high-quality low-friction oil.

Gen-2 cars (from late 2008) have a much better reputation. One of many changes was a switch from Lokasil to Alusil for the cylinder material, another was doing away with the intermediate shaft, and the crank was redesigned, too. 'Overall gen-2 engines are massively more reliable,' says Grant, 'though we are starting to see some issues with higher mileage cars. Personally, I would have a contingency fund even for a gen-2.'

TRANSMISSION

'All the transmissions – manual, Tiptronic, PDK – are very strong in our experience,'

says Grant. 'We very rarely see any problems.'

SUSPENSION, STEERING, BRAKES

'All of these things wear, just as they would with any performance car,' says Grant, 'and gen-1 dampers are getting prone to corroding now, but you've got to remember some of these cars are 13 or 14 years old. On high-mileage cars we often find the suspension is getting a little tired, so you may be looking at renewing dampers and bushes.'

BODY, INTERIOR, ELECTRICS

'No significant corrosion issues as yet. Even on early cars, it's usually just things like exhaust fixings,' says Grant. The grilles at the front tend to suck in damp leaves and other crud, which leads to corrosion of the air-con condensers and coolant rads. Some owners fit fine-mesh inserts to prevent ingress.

Aboveleft: engine is your main area of concern with 997 Carreras, particularly first-gen examples. **Above:** body work should be corrosion-free. **Below:** PCM infotainment system adds value



INFORMATION

SPECIFICATION (997.2 Carrera S)

Engine	Flat-six, 3800cc
Max power	390bhp @ 6500rpm
Max torque	310lb ft @ 4400rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual (seven-speed PDK option), rear-wheel drive
Weight	1425kg (271bhp/ton)
0-62mph	4.7sec [claimed]
Top speed	188mph [claimed]
Price new	£72,698 (2008)

PARTS PRICES

Genuine Porsche parts for 997.1 Carrera S from design911.co.uk. Tyre prices from blackcircles.com. All prices include VAT but exclude fitting.

Tyres	£190.80 front, £242.80 rear (Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S)
Front pads	£263.31 (set)
Front discs	£414.96 (pair)
Damper	£650.43 (single, PASM)
Clutch kit	£408.31 (manual)
Sports exhaust	£1698 (including cats, DesignTek)
Spark plugs	£138.38 (set)
Oil filter	£24.92

SERVICING

Prices from hartech.org, including VAT. Annual service recommended.

Minor	£282
Intermediate	£420
Major	£780

WARRANTY

Repair bills for the 997 Carreras can be huge. The table below shows the average repair costs for the top five major faults alongside the price of buying peace of mind with a warranty from Warrantywise.

Average engine repair	£13,000
Average multimedia repair	£2704
Average clutch repair	£2153
Average electrical repair	£1017
Average cooling repair	£974
Warranty (per month)	£78.77

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WHAT TO PAY

You can find gen-1 Carreras for as little as £20k, but they're usually high-mileage Tiptronic with multiple owners and patchy histories, best approached with caution (and a hefty contingency fund for the bills that will almost inevitably follow). Manuals and early Ss start at around £23k, but we reckon £25k-30k is a realistic budget for a sound car.

Wide bodies, the Sport chassis, Bose,

PCM infotainment, Sport Chrono and sports seats (and PASM dampers on basic Carreras) all add value.

Gen-2 cars are considerably more expensive. Expect to pay £35k+ for a Carrera with low-to-average miles. The gen-2 S is particularly strong, with even high-milers commanding up to £40k. Around £40k-45k should buy a good car with average miles and full history.

'I BOUGHT ONE'

RICHARD PORTER

'I blame the birth of our daughter. Babies spend most of their time sleeping, so you have a lot of time on your hands, which is a very dangerous thing. So back in the summer I started looking at 911s. I've always wanted one, and I just thought: "I know we've just had a baby, but if not now, then when?"

'I found this car at RSJ in Slough. It's a 997.2 C2S PDK in Porsche nerd terms. I did look at a manual as well, because that's what people like us are supposed to do, but this felt like the right car – right colour, Sport Chrono pack, upgraded stereo. It also has a retro-fitted sports wheel with proper paddles: so much more satisfying than buttons. Mine's got the mild sports seats, not the full hardcore ones. I still thought they might be a bit hard but the longer you sit in them the comfier they get.

'It's got so much depth. It works really well as an everyday car: around town, PDK is brilliant. Then you get out of town, stick it in Sport Plus, and it's just wonderful. It's also the last 911 with hydraulic steering and the more you drive it, the more you realise how



WHAT WE SAID



997.1 CARRERA S ROAD TEST, AUGUST 2004

'Third gear selected, I floor the throttle. With the instantaneous response of a big-capacity engine with low-inertia internals, the 997 punches forward with tremendous force, engine note hardening with effort, steam-hammer torque melding with vibrant top-end zing. No normally aspirated 911 has ever felt this muscular.

'Resisting the temptation to fiddle with the damper settings and Sport and PSM buttons at first, and with confidence and speed building, grip levels are clearly huge.

'Switching the dampers into their firmer setting, the difference is subtle but perceptible, with more incisive turn-in and a more detailed stream of feedback flowing through the steering wheel. Engaging Sport is the final piece of the puzzle, providing an electronic shot of adrenaline through the 997's systems, sharpening its response further.

'The Carrera S shines a little brighter as each stage is phased-in. The bond might take a little longer to form, but the rewards are still there for the taking.'

– evo 070

RIVALS

BMW M3 (E92)

A high-revving 414bhp 4-litre V8, 0-62 in 4.8sec (155mph limited maximum), and a brilliant rear-drive chassis, especially with the Competition Package. High-milers from £20k; best examples £30k-35k.

MASERATI GRANTURISMO

Striking and accomplished GT, with a 399bhp V8; 0-62 in 5.2sec and 177mph maximum (434bhp S even quicker). Ran from 2007 to 2017, so plenty to choose from, with good ones from c£30k.

ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE

Aston's answer to the 911, just about to end production after 12 glorious years. From £30k for an early 4.3 (380bhp, 0-62 in 5sec, 175mph), £40k-plus for 4.7 (420bhp, 4.8sec, 180mph).



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ABT AUDI RS6 POWER R

Abt Sportsline unleashes the mighty RS6 Avant Performance's 200mph potential

NOT ALL TUNING COMPANIES ARE equal. While plenty make great modifications and tease out impressive power figures, and many take over manufacturer warranties, very few have such a close relationship with the original manufacturer that they get access to a car before its release and can offer an upgrade as soon as it goes on sale. One such tuner is Abt Sportsline.

The Bavarian company can trace its history all the way back to 1896, when blacksmith Johann Abt fitted a device to a horse-drawn carriage that allowed it to be converted into a sledge when it snowed. Later it became an agent for Horch and then Audi, but it wasn't until the late '60s, when another Johann Abt, grandson of the founder, started racing and offering upgraded parts, that Abt turned from a dealership to a tuning firm, too. It made its reputation increasing the performance of Golfs and Audi 80s by enlarging engine capacities, adding better-flowing exhausts and upgrading the suspension. And, right to this day, the core of its work has remained VW Group products.

Which brings us to Abt's take on the Audi RS6 Performance. Even though the big, 4-litre twin-turbo V8-powered estate



Above: 725bhp makes short work of 200mph; sadly, winter tyres kept us to 170mph (or 275kph)

was always going to be a niche offering, it was crying out for someone to liberate it from its OEM shackles. Not that the standard car is underpowered – with 597bhp and 553lb ft of torque, it certainly isn't – but its top speed is limited to a measly 155mph or, optionally, 174mph. Once Abt has finished with it, however, that increases to 200mph – a much more appropriate V-max and no longer sitting at the same speed as every hot hatch or mid-range saloon on the autobahn.

Rather than just removing the limiter to get the Avant to hit the double ton, Abt has increased the engine's power to 725bhp and torque to a massive 678lb ft. It might be one of the more sophisticated tuners but, like all the others, it knows how to dazzle with big numbers!

These monster outputs are achieved by adding Abt's own separate ECU, a high-pressure fuel pump and a bespoke Akrapovic titanium exhaust system with a pre-muffler replacement pipe. Total cost: 20,000 euros plus taxes. The car we drove was also equipped with a set of Abt 21-inch diamond-cut wheels. Sadly they were fitted with Dunlop SP Winter Sport 4D tyres that limit top speed to 170mph (275kph). Frustrating when you know the car's full capabilities; even more so when you discover just how easy it is to reach 170mph on a derestricted autobahn: only a short gap in traffic and you shoot from UK cruising speeds, past where the regular limiter would be and on to the tyre's top speed in a matter of seconds.

The RS6's refined interior rather muffles the exhaust. And the extra power isn't easily detectable at lower speeds and on B-roads – not a surprise when the standard car is so fast – but it does make it feel lighter; the car responding more eagerly when you touch the throttle.

Abt's upgrades probably don't make much sense if you don't have frequent access to derestricted autobahns or take part in top speed events on old airfields. But if you do, well, you know who to call.

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Market

BUYING JOURNEY

Renault 5 highs and 911 lows feature in the ownership history of evo reader Chris Owens

IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT CHRIS HAS BEEN unlucky with his cars. He's made some enviable choices over the years, but hasn't been rewarded with reliability. Tales of snapped gear linkages in a Renault 5 GT Turbo and catastrophic issues with an MG F ('Every major component was changed at least once') might not be great surprises, but as we'll see, Chris has had trouble with premium cars, too.

THE CARS

VW Polo Coupe (Mk2)

VW Polo (hatchback, Mk2)

Vauxhall Astra GTE

Renault 5 GT Turbo

Renault Clio 16V

MG F (VVC)

Mazda MX-6

Porsche Boxster S (986)

Audi S4 Cabriolet (B6)

Porsche 911 Carrera S (997)

Audi TTS (Mk2)

Porsche Boxster S Sport Edition (987)

Kia Cee'd Sportwagon CRDI

Volvo V40 D4

Audi S1



Reliability woes haven't diluted his enthusiasm, though. His fond memories of even the cars that let him down have meant he's returned to those marques, simply because they provide the noises, the speed and the excitement he looks for in a car. Having recently gone through a spell with some decidedly ordinary models, he's now edging back towards more exotic machines again.

RENAULT 5 GT TURBO

'This was my first new car. It was in Tungsten Grey Metallic and I loved it. The wallop from the fizzy 1.4-litre engine when the turbo kicked in at about 3000rpm was addictive. The handling was decent too, and the gearbox was slick. Even to this day it's probably my favourite car ever, even if it did have a few minor problems. I replaced it with a Renault Clio 16V. That looked lovely in black and was theoretically better in every way than the 5GT, but it just wasn't as much fun to drive.'



PORSCHE 911 CARRERA S (997)

'My 986 Boxster S was a fabulous car, but in 2006 I finally fulfilled my dream of owning a 911. As well as PASM dampers it was fitted with the sports exhaust; the sound was awesome, especially echoing off stone walls down country lanes or when changing down in tunnels. However, the car was really unreliable: warning lights often came on and there were problems with oxygen sensors, the gear linkage and the rear main seal. A few years later I owned a 987-generation Boxster S Sport Edition and I actually preferred it to the 911. It was sublime.'



AUDI S1

'Despite being the cheapest of the three Audis I've owned, the S1 is easily the best. I came very close to buying a Fiesta ST instead, but the added power and refinement of the S1 won me over. I think it looks much nicer than the Ford too. The grip is incredible, regardless of the conditions, and it has decent steering and fluid handling too. On top of that it returns more than 40mpg on a motorway run. I've been pretty pleased with it so far, but I've mullered over a Revo Stage 1 tune. It goes like stink as it is, though, so I haven't felt it necessary yet.'

WHAT NEXT?

'I will have to scratch my Porsche itch again at some stage and I really fancy a 981-generation Boxster GTS or a Cayman GT4. I don't like the idea of a new four-cylinder Porsche – I'd miss the howl of the flat-six. However, I am also still trying to persuade myself that performance cars are stupidly expensive to run and that I should invest more in my pension instead, but I suspect my heart will overrule my head again soon!'

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2007 PORSCHE 911 CARRERA 4S (997)
3.8L RHD 49,600 miles

£ 36,950



Our 997 Carrera 4S is truly a stunner. The Porsche aero pack adds a redesigned front splitter and bumper whilst adding a GT3 style rear wing, giving it a more aggressive appearance. The aero pack compliments this car especially due to the wide body rear end of the 4 wheel drive 911s.

2013 PORSCHE CAYMAN 2.7L (981)
2.7L RHD 36,940 miles

£ 31,950



Our 981 Cayman 2.7 is finished in Guards Red and is suspended on the 20" Carrera Classic Alloy wheels with Porsche coloured crested centre caps. These are shod with a matched set of Pirelli Pzero N rated tyres and look stunning. The Vehicle also has the Cayman S twin exit sports exhaust that finishes off the looks of the car.

2003 PORSCHE 911 TURBO TIPTRONIC (996)
3.6L RHD 48,235 miles

£ 44,950



Our 996 Turbo is in fantastic condition and a credit to its previous Keepers. This example presents well finished in Arctic Silver Metallic with black perforated memory leather seats and Alcantara headlining. The car also has the extended leather to the dashboard and doors and has the desirable and rare sunroof option.

1969 PORSCHE 911E
2.2L LHD 74,580 miles

£ 150,000



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£ 52,950



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3.3L LHD 49,818 km

£ 109,950



The last Evolution of the 'Original' Turbo Features an enlarged engine capacity of 3.3 Litres. Superior brakes and even more luxury. For the very last year of production the 930 Turbo was fitted with the G50 5 speed gearbox. This example is one of these extremely desirable and collectible last year cars.

2004 PORSCHE 911 CARRERA GT3 (996 MK2)
3.6L RHD 40,600 miles

£ 69,950



Since its launch in 1999, enthusiasts recognised immediately that the GT3 reignited the flame of the much missed RS model. Named after the FIA Group GT3 and built to homologate the 996 for the Porsche cup, this new high performance Porsche variant was virtually a turn-key racer yet flexible enough to be used as a daily driver.

2016 LOTUS ELISE S CUP
1.8L RHD 2,911 miles

£ 37,950



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2015 ALFA ROMEO 4C
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THIS MONTH

MINI JCW CHALLENGE // LEXUS RC F // AUDI RS5 // NISSAN GT-R //
SKODA SUPERB // FORD FOCUS ST ESTATE // FORD MUSTANG V8 CONVERTIBLE //
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END OF TERM

MINI JCW Challenge

This most hardcore Mini to date was developed with help from *evo*. After 12,000 miles with one, we look back at what made it so special – and also so polarising



'Yes it was firm, but that uncompromising ride really allowed you to work the sticky tyres'



Above: damper stiffness was adjustable through a range of 'clicks'. **Above right:** engine itself lacked character, but its exhaust didn't. **Top:** driving position could be adjusted to perfection. **Left:** one last blast on some great roads

Date acquired	July 2016
Duration of test	14 months – with a six-month gap
Total test mileage	12,201
Overall mpg	27.6
Costs	£563 tyres
Purchase price	£32,000
Value today	£25,000–30,000

THERE WERE SOME SMALL THINGS that I really liked about our Mini John Cooper Works Challenge. That you could change gear without the cruise control automatically pausing. That when you disabled the stop/start system it remained off, even for your next journey. That the automatic wipers stayed on automatic even if you did a single wipe. That the simple radio had physical buttons and dials rather than a touchscreen.

But as useful and as pleasing as those aspects were day-to-day, the Challenge was at its best when driven on great roads. So it made sense to give it a proper send-off by taking it to some of our favourite roads in Wales.

Like every iteration of 'new' Mini so far, the Challenge felt so right before it had even turned a wheel. The ergonomics were brilliant: the seat could go low, the steering wheel

could be pulled out and angled to the perfect position, the gearknob atop the tall-looking lever was close to your left hand, and the pedals were nicely spaced for heel-and-toe downchanges. Ironically, the Challenge could rev-match for you, and the only way to disable the automatic throttle blip was to turn the stability control fully off, but that was something you could do without worry thanks to the huge amount of grip from the chassis and the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres.

The Challenge's control weights were excellently judged, too. I particularly liked the heavier steering in Sport mode, as it helped calm my steering inputs so I didn't overwork the alert front end. It also made the throttle feel more urgent, helping with heel-and-toeing even further, and added some juvenile pops and bangs from the exhaust. These could

be made even louder thanks to the system's switchable element – a Bluetooth-enabled flap controlled by a canister-like button in the cabin – at which point the car sounded like it had anti-lag. The noises were obnoxious, over the top, and so entertaining. They also gave the engine some much-needed character: the 228bhp 2-litre turbocharged four-cylinder was smooth and torquey and made the Challenge properly fast, but it was also not that keen to reach its disappointingly low, not-quite-6500rpm rev-limiter.

But even if this Mini had the most exciting engine imaginable, it's still the chassis that would have been the most memorable part of the car. The most contentious, too. Yes it was firm, but that uncompromising ride really allowed you to work the sticky tyres. When the road was dry it felt as if you could amplify

a tyre's grip as you put pressure onto that corner of the car, almost like you were driving through layers of rubber until you found the tyre's super-soft core. On cold tarmac, or over wet patches like those I encountered on my farewell drive, it was less confidence-inspiring, and the stiff chassis meant the tyres didn't transmit an awful lot of information before they let go. In fact, you only really knew the grip levels once the car had already broken away, but because I tweaked our Challenge's chassis to suit my driving style, it at least reacted in a predictable and manageable way.

By experimenting with our car's set-up I learnt that there was enough adjustment in the suspension and the Nitron dampers for it to be tailored to your tastes – making it either edgier or safer, depending on what you preferred – but not enough to dramatically

alter the car and make it feel like a totally different animal. Sadly, at a Mini Challenge trackday at Brands Hatch, a Nitron engineer told me that, rather than giving advice on specific track and road settings, they'd actually just been encouraging owners to adjust their car's set-up for the first time. It seems most of them hadn't touched the dampers at all since buying their car, let alone found their preferred settings. That's a real shame, as it wasn't until I played around with the damper stiffness, ride height and tyre pressures that I started to really fall for the car.

Not everyone at *evo* was won over by the Challenge, though, not even the Challenge running on my settings. And even though I did enjoy it, I have to agree that it was too stiff. Not too stiff to be fun, not too stiff to live with (for me, anyway), but if the suspension

had been softer the car would have worked on a wider range of roads and, potentially, been even more entertaining more of the time. Maybe a solution would be to have softer dampers and springs with stiffer, or adjustable, anti-roll bars.

But I still thought our Challenge showed signs of pure brilliance far more often than it was frustrating. (The only time it really frustrated me was when it spent six months back at Mini waiting for the production-spec dampers to arrive to replace our car's prototype units.) Whether it was perfect or not, the Challenge proved one thing: that the current Mini can be fun – something even the regular JCW version has struggled with. If it's a taste of what to expect from the next GP, then we should be very excited indeed.

Will Beaumont (@WillBeaumont)

Lexus RC F

Would the keeper of our RS5 swap it for its Japanese rival?

BOTH ARE FOUR-SEATER SPORTS coupes, both cost a touch over £60,000 and both have 400-and-something bhp. Both are also currently on our fleet, so it made perfect sense for Dickie Meaden and me – respective custodians of *evo*'s Lexus RC F and Audi RS5 – to swap cars for a couple of weeks to find out what we thought of each other's long-termer.

Looks-wise, the RC F was already a winner for me. I've seen a few on the road and they always grab my attention. Much as I love the styling of 'my' RS5, and its own ability to turn heads, I suspect it relies too much on its unusual Sonoma Green hue for much of its impact, whereas, to these eyes at least, the angular Lexus stands out in any colour.

By contrast to its exterior, I found the RC's interior rather disappointing. The seats look funky but the driver's chair felt awkwardly high even on its lowest setting, and perhaps because of this I never managed to get truly comfortable in it. (A five-hour schlep from Cambridgeshire to Somerset was a real fidget-fest as a result.) Meanwhile, the old 'designed with a set square' cliché sprang to mind every time I looked at the dash or centre console, too much of which appeared as if it had been transplanted in from an older model that I couldn't quite place. The presence of a CD player (remember those?) suggested that maybe it had. The RC must surely be amongst the last cars on sale to have one, and this perhaps explains why the infotainment system had no idea how to present my USB stick full of MP3s in an even vaguely useful manner.

But who needs MP3s when you have a naturally aspirated V8 that sounds as good as the RC F's? It's a fabulous reminder of what we're missing out on with the proliferation of downsized, turbocharged engines, and while the twin-turbo V6 in the RS5 slaughters it for mid-range punch, extending the RC F beyond 3500rpm and right round to 7000rpm or so delivers an aural joy the Audi can't get anywhere near. It's frustrating, then, that responses to the Lexus's shift paddles – lovely metal items that completely shame the Audi's hollow, plasticity efforts – are sometimes a bit sluggish and occasionally completely ignored, even in full manual mode.

Also frustrating is the lack of steering feel – it utterly destroyed my cornering confidence on damp roads – but the ride, on the other



'It made perfect sense for us to swap cars to find out what we thought of each other's long-termer'

hand, is another highlight. It can't quite match the magic-carpet quality of the Audi in its softest setting, but it offers a brilliant blend of comfort and control that works at any speed and copes with even the roughest surfaces.

It's safe to say that I found the RC F to be a car of contrasts: I loved the ride, the engine and the looks, but the steering, the gearbox and elements of the cabin dented the car's usability and desirability. A recent brief encounter with the RC's new bigger brother, the LC500, proved that Lexus is capable of delivering better steering, a responsive gearbox and a genuinely elegant interior. If the RC F had these, I'd have been far more reluctant to swap back to the Audi. As it was, I was more than happy to have the RS5 back in my life.

That's my tuppenceworth, anyway. Now let's see what Dickie thinks...

Ian Eveleigh



Above: RC F's seats look cool, but Eveleigh found them uncomfortable and their position too high

Date acquired	August 2017
Total mileage	5177
Mileage this month	821
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	22.4

Audi RS5

And would our RC F's custodian contemplate the opposite swap?

IT'S ALWAYS FUN WHEN THE FAST Fleet contains two rivals. When it's a pair of big, ballsy coupes like the Audi RS5 and Lexus RC F it's especially good. Judging by the countless images *Ev* posts of the Audi on Instagram, I knew he was smitten with the Sonoma Green machine, and to be honest I don't blame him, for it looks fantastic. Besides, when you drive a blue/purple RC F you're not in a position to question the aesthetics of another's car.

There's much to like and enjoy about the RS5. In isolation it's more than quick enough, sounds good, and is fun to fling through corners. It's even got some feel, so

the experience isn't just about grip, traction and straight-line stonk. Actually I was really surprised by how mobile the RS5's tail feels when you turn-in. It's got a level of agility that borders on the edgy, at least until you learn to trust it. Most un-Audi-like.

However, living with the RC F means you view the RS5 through a slightly quirky prism; one that changes your outlook on what this kind of car is about. And once you've had your eyes opened to there being another way, what once felt like the benchmark now seems predictable. I'd never describe the Audi as ordinary, but in a sector dominated by German marques, it is very much a variation on a familiar theme.



Above: both Meaden and Eveleigh agreed that the RS5's twin-turbo V6 had the least aural character

Date acquired	August 2017
Total mileage	9519
Mileage this month	910
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	25.9

Yes, there are things about the Audi that I wish I could take back with me to the Lexus. Some of that steering feel would be welcome – now there's something you never thought you'd hear! – and the low-end torque of the turbocharged V6 really punts you out of corners with conviction. On balance I think I'd take the infotainment system, too, as it just works that bit more intuitively. Cons? Well, the doors feel and sound a bit flimsy when you shut them, and the engine just doesn't have the charisma of the RC F's V8: sadly downsizing applies to the RS5 engine's character as well as its capacity. It didn't seem that economical, either, so I'd question the point.

All things considered I'm very happy to be living with the Lexus and not the Audi. I suppose you'd expect me to be loyal to 'my' car, but I don't feel that loyalty is misplaced. It feels more solid and better put together, the engine is more exciting and exotic, the styling is more individual, and the character of the car deeper and more complex once you get to know it. The steering's a bit glassy at low speeds and there's not that immediate sense of urgency and alertness you get in the Audi, but I'm enjoying peeling back the layers. What I've found feels more authentic and less contrived than the RS5.

In the time I spent with the Audi it got plenty of looks and quite a few unsolicited comments. All were to do with its green paint. The Lexus also gets attention and people feel compelled to ask about it, but the conversation is one born out of impressed curiosity about the car as a whole. I enjoyed my flirtation with the RS5, but I was very pleased to be reunited with the RC F. It's not to everyone's taste, but that's a big part of its appeal, at least to those of us who get it.

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)



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Nissan GT-R

A Quattro encounter throws a spotlight on some shortcomings of our modern-day supercoupe

COMPARING THE GT-R WITH AN original Audi Quattro 20V recently (evo 242) provided me with a decent plateful of food for thought about the newer car, and I've been grazing on it quietly ever since. Because without wishing to sound in any way ungrateful about temporary GT-R ownership, I came away from my day with the two cars thinking some strange new thoughts about the Nissan, not all of which were/are entirely positive.

For one, I drove back home in the GT-R thinking it was both bigger and heavier than it really should or could be. I also twigged for the first time ever that its packaging – specifically the amount of space it offers on the inside relative to the amount of real estate it occupies on the outside – is completely and utterly ridiculous. Plus the quantity of fuel it quaffed on the day was faintly absurd beside that of a near-30-year-old Audi Quattro.

And yet... I remain entirely smitten by the GT-R. Not just by how it drives or by how quick it is (i.e. mentally), or by what it sounds or looks like, but by it as a thing, period. Which is a bit weird considering how badly it was shown up by the Quattro when we put the pair back-to-back. But then sometimes logic simply has no place in an argument, and I think ultimately that's why I like the GT-R so very much.

Logically, after all, this 1752kg, 562bhp, £84,000 car makes almost no sense whatsoever if you really stop and think about it. Yet in reality I reckon I like the GT-R more than any other car I've ever run on a long-term basis. Every time I park it and walk away from it I absolutely have to turn round and give it another look. Every time I drive it I hear new sounds as it warms up, feel new

things happening beneath my backside as the ambient temperature gets colder at this time of year, and think slightly different thoughts about it as a result. And every time I put my foot down in it on a quiet bit of road, or out of a roundabout onto a dual carriageway, I get a massive hit of adrenaline as it catapults me towards the horizon.

Restraint is therefore a crucial ingredient if you drive a GT-R, because without it – without a sizeable dose of it, in fact – you would end up behind bars very quickly indeed. And I rather like that aspect of GT-R ownership. You know what it can do. You know how mad

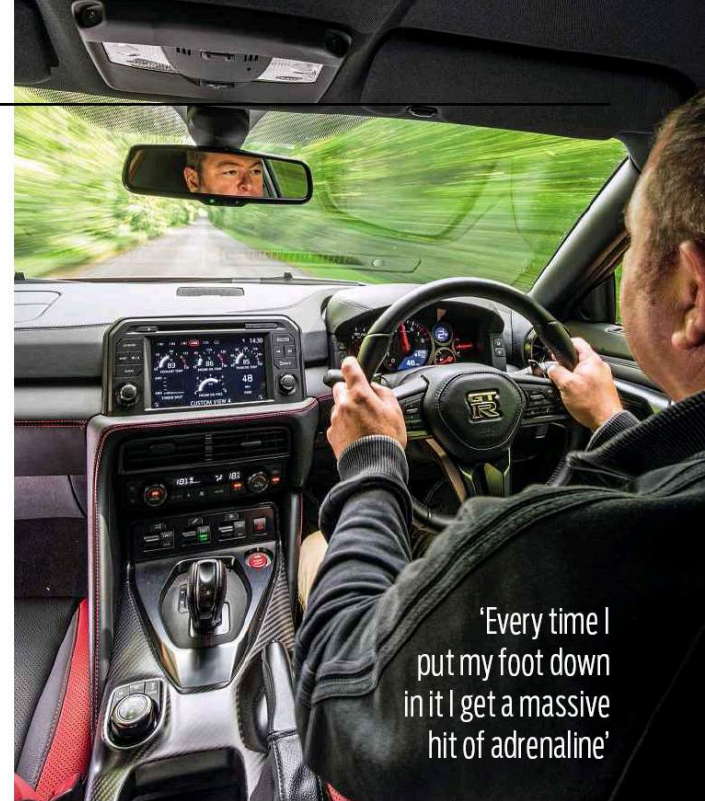
it can be. But for most of the time you let it be, content in the knowledge that it's there if needed, if you fancy it.

And then every once in a while you let rip in it and it blows your mind. Completely.

I guess it's all about the potential in the end.

Steve Sutcliffe

Date acquired	July 2017
Total mileage	8108
Mileage this month	1103
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	19.0



Left: 1990s Audi Quattro can teach today's GT-R a thing or two, but the latter car still utterly beguiles with its remarkable abilities



Skoda Superb SportLine 4x4

It may be inconspicuous, but you shouldn't always judge a book by its cover

I'M NOT SURE OUR SKODA SUPERB could look much more boring. It's not a bad-looking car per se, but it's so sensible with its practical ride-height and three-box shape, and its grey paint only makes it blend into the background even more. It's almost too discreet, as if it's trying so hard to go undetected that it's ended up looking like an unmarked police car.

I understand that muted tones are perfect for a photography car – so it's less obvious in reflections in tracking shots – but this Superb's lack of glitz and aesthetic aggression mean it's hardly a tantalising prospect. So when the Skoda's duties as camera car on last month's M2 v RS3 shoot were complete, and logistical reasons meant that I'd be driving it home and for the best part of a week thereafter, it was hard to be appreciative.

Things don't get much better on the inside. It's pleasantly designed, everything is where you'd expect it to be and it's all solidly built. There's masses of room too, and what seems like hundreds of handy cubby holes and pockets. But there's nothing sexy about it; there's just acres of black plastic and some flat, unsupportive seats – also in black. The closest you get to anything remotely stirring are the wheel-mounted gearshift paddles, but they're also finished in black plastic as if to temper any soupçon of excitement.



Above and left: Superb's design and – in this case especially – colour palette major on being unobtrusive

The ordinary looks and monotone colour palette lower your expectations, as if preparing you for disappointment. And that makes what the Superb is actually capable of a huge surprise. It's fast and offers lots of grip, yet when the road is slippery it can also display a degree of adjustability that's big enough to require you to have your wits about you.

After hundreds of miles on motorways and B-roads, it's hard not to appreciate how the Superb goes about making progress. You don't fall for it or love it, but it's deeply effective and a very natural thing to pedal along briskly in – far better than its looks would have you believe. A glance at the spec sheet reveals why it's a bit more fun than you expect: a 276bhp engine and a set of adaptive dampers aren't

the usual preserve of an ordinary saloon.

Okay, okay, so the Superb isn't going to tempt anyone out of an M2 or an RS3, even though it's significantly cheaper than either. But the muscular bodywork, big wheels and plethora of exhaust pipes of the Audi and BMW shout loudly about their abilities and speed. As great as they are, there is something to be said about slipping under the radar and delivering some surprise, Superb-style.

Will Beaumont (@WillBeaumont)

Date acquired	September 2017
Total mileage	6025
Mileage this month	1275
Costs this month	£60
mpg this month	28.2

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END OF TERM

Ford Focus ST Estate

Fast, fun, but flawed: we had a love-hate relationship with the Focus

YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT THAT FAST, petrol-powered compact estate cars would represent a decent little earner for car makers. Affordable, practical, quick and fun, these machines are surely manna from heaven for keen drivers who don't want to be slowed down by a growing family. Yet when our Focus ST first drove up to **evo's** offices just over a year ago, it could count only the SEAT Leon ST Cupra and Skoda Octavia vRS Estate as real rivals – the Golf R Estate is also out there, but with a price tag five grand north of the ST's, it's in a very different league.

With so few competitors and an attractive asking price (£26,515 basic, or £28,565 for our generously equipped ST-3), the Ford should have a clear route to success, yet after spending 12 months with one it's clear the on-paper promise is a little uneven in reality. Our ST Estate had a number of custodians in

its time with us, and each ended their stint with tales of a fast but flawed machine.

There was certainly nothing wrong with the performance from the turbocharged 247bhp 2-litre, which pulled strongly from almost any revs and in any gear. It sounded the part, too, with a purposeful throatiness that was reminiscent of the characterful five-pot used in the previous-generation machine. The occasionally notchy six-speed manual gearbox also played its part, its shift quality improving markedly when you upped the pace and were swapping cogs with greater urgency.

Yet this effervescence was also the car's undoing, often proving too much for the chassis. Ripped and rippled roads were kryptonite to the ST, which suffered from epic torque-steer. Head down a rutted or heavily cambered section of tarmac and the

front end took on a mind of its own, tugging this way and that as it sniffed imperfections like a demented bloodhound locked onto a scent. Ford proved that it could eliminate this behaviour with the Revoknuckle-equipped, front-wheel-drive Mk2 Focus RS, so it's a shame this technology didn't filter down to the cheaper Mk3 ST.

What made this waywardness really frustrating was that there was otherwise a decent chassis under the Focus's practical body. The variable-ratio steering rack was quick and well-weighted, and the car was agile, too, even with the extra metal hanging over the multi-link rear axle – like the best hot hatches, the Ford felt as though it was pivoting around your hips, and it was particularly good through rapid changes of direction. It was also remarkably throttle-adjustable, allowing you to alter your angle

of attack at will. Less ragged roads helped tame the tug from the front wheels, while tenacious front-end grip, helped by one of the best brake-operated torque-vectoring set-ups in the business, allowed you to get on the power earlier than you'd expect in a car with no limited-slip differential. And, as with all the best Ford models, the ST benefited from perfect control weights that made it easy to drive for the novice, yet just rewarding enough for enthusiasts.

When you weren't out for some fun, the Focus slipped easily into the daily grind. The ST's interior is starting to look dated when compared with the slick and handsome cabin of a VW Golf, and the infotainment system's occasionally laggy responses caused more than the odd curse, yet the standard Recaro front seats were hugely supportive and very comfortable, if set a little high, making the



'What made this waywardness really frustrating was that there was a decent chassis under the Focus's practical body'



Left: Focus proved its long-distance credentials with several trips to far-flung race circuits; infotainment system's occasionally laggy responses caused mild irritation; main bugbear was rampant torque-steer on less-than-smooth roads



Ford an effortless long-distance express.

Dickie Meaden was the last 'owner' of our Focus and used it for numerous cross-continental trips to far-flung racetracks, each time returning with praise for the car's decent comfort, refinement and effortless sixth-gear urge. Only the firm ride caused any complaints, with broken surfaces, potholes and ridges sending crashes and thumps shuddering through the structure – this firmness played a big part in the ST's ragged handling when the going got rough.

Practicality was a strong suit, with decent head- and legroom in the back and a useful 472-litre boot, which swallowed everything from pushbikes to all the provisions needed for family camping trips. The cabin itself was crammed with handy cubbies and thoughtful storage. And, of course, when you looked past the racy bodykit, it was still a Focus, meaning

Date acquired	October 2016
Duration of test	12 months
Total test mileage	23,005
Overall mpg	31.1
Costs	£299 two tyres
Purchase price	£30,985
Value today	£18,500

it was solidly built (except for an occasionally rattly tailgate) and cost buttons to run: apart from a set of front tyres and filling it with fuel, the Ford rarely troubled our wallets.

Could we recommend a Focus ST Estate? It's certainly not without its charms, and on the right road it's a hoot. If you can secure a decent discount on one, then it's worth considering. However, the competition, limited though it is, delivers most of the Ford's fun without its foibles.

James Disdale

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Ford Mustang V8 GT Convertible & Mazda MX-5 RF

Our two convertibles are worlds apart in so many ways, but they also have a few things in common...

TO THINK OF CONVERTIBLES AS summer vehicles only is to miss out on some of the year's more beautiful and immersive drives. Restrict top-down driving to the warmer months and you don't get to experience the hiss of tyres against a damp road surface, the sensation of a cool gust on your face as your toes and hands are smothered in heated air, and the evocative views of a landscape lit all day long by a low-hanging sun.

Our soft-top Mustang might be more appropriate for Route 66 than the A66, but it's proving far from unpleasant as the autumn colours fade. Part of that is down to the heated seats (they're cooled too), but the Stang's big V8 has to take some credit.

It could be the cool ambient temperatures, or maybe it's the bedding-in effects of our first few thousand miles with the five-point-oh, but our long-termer has perhaps the healthiest-feeling engine of any current Mustang I've driven so far: it's as happy pulling its overdrive sixth gear from 1000rpm as it is brawling its way to the red line in second. The manual gearbox continues to be fantastic, too, with a satisfyingly hefty movement, though sadly the brakes are a bugbear. In the conversion from left- to right-hand drive, great pedal feel has been traded for a grabby, over-servoed action with the sole merit of good stopping power.

Coincidentally, my usual long-termer's brakes aren't at their best right now either. A summer of trackdays seems to have finally taken its toll, giving the MX-5 RF's stoppers a slightly mushy feel. The throttle is as snappy as ever, though, and the gearshift has mellowed with miles, making it even more satisfying to use than it was when new.

There are, strangely, other similarities between the Mazda and the Mustang besides their roofless nature and front-engined, rear-drive layouts. The first is something that few owners of modern cars are likely to experience elsewhere – ownership camaraderie. Pass a similar model going the other way and you'll often get a flash of the lights or a thumbs-up. With the Mazda it seems to happen regardless of generation – I've had several Mk1 owners raise their pop-ups in greeting – and the Mustang is still a rare enough sight on UK roads that you can be sure that each and every owner is a kindred spirit.

The next is a feeling that neither car is really at its happiest being hustled. And that's not meant negatively. The most enjoyable driving in each is done a few notches back from maximum attack, where you can enjoy their tactility and sensations of speed without the sweaty palms and heart-in-mouth moments. In the Mustang particularly. While it's undoubtedly the quicker of the pair, that

V8 is an appealing companion even if it's just rumbling away to itself in a queue of traffic.

And both feel very much like products of their respective countries, which is increasingly attractive as vehicles are pulled towards the homogenous black hole of pseudo-premium crossoverdom. The Ford is big and brash, slightly unsophisticated but bustling with character and open-road vibes; the Mazda is compact and technical, but also ornate in its details and considerably designed.

Given each is priced not a million miles from the dozens of hot hatchbacks you might consider instead, they're both compelling alternatives to the mainstream performance options. Whatever the weather.

Antony Ingram (@evoAntony)

FORD MUSTANG V8 GT CONVERTIBLE

Date acquired	September 2017
Total mileage	7720
Mileage this month	711
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	21.1

MAZDA MX-5 RF

Date acquired	February 2017
Total mileage	11,699
Mileage this month	192
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	44.7



Volkswagen Golf GTE

Our VW's trick headlamps are an antidote to longer nights

I MENTIONED THE GOLF'S CLEVER adaptive LED headlamps in a previous report, but it's only now the winter nights are drawing in that the set-up's brilliance has really started to hit home. There have been some outstanding safety advances over the past few decades (ABS, ESP, airbags – the list goes on), but I truly believe this type of matrix headlamp ranks with the very best.

It's when they're left to their own devices that they, and excuse the pun, really shine. Simply twist the rotary light controller to 'auto', flick the stalk for main beam and then let the sensors do the rest. Once activated thus, the system's ability to effectively 'mask off' oncoming traffic or vehicles that you're following, yet still fully illuminate the verges and empty stretches of tarmac ahead, is uncanny. These extra pools of light give you earlier warning of pedestrians, cyclists, animals or potholes that would otherwise be lurking in the gloom, so boost your confidence and leave you less tired after a long night-time stint behind the wheel.

Crucially, you can also drive more quickly

and safely after dark, the lamps' ability to light up more of the road leaving you less reliant on educated guesswork. And when there are no other cars about, the main beam is both incredibly bright and has an impressively long reach. I'm not going to make any fatuous comparisons to a lamp-pod equipped WRC car, but they leave most other production-car units in the shade.

Yet what's really remarkable about these lights is how infallible they are – in thousands of night-time miles I've not once been angrily flashed by another motorist who's been temporarily blinded by the VW's beams. If you're about to order a Golf, then I'd recommend the first option box you tick is for the £1285 Dynamic Light Assist (£310 if, like the GTE, LED lamps are standard). The set-up really is that good.

James Disdale

Date acquired	August 2017
Total mileage	8240
Mileage this month	1152
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	49.7

DS 3 Performance

How would the DS 3 fare on a driving weekend in Wales?

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE DS 3 Performance? The marketing angle and densely packed equipment list suggest a warm hatch with premium overtones, but the massive brakes, sticky tyres and limited-slip differential suggest something altogether more intense. In trying to fill different niches with just the one car, is the little DS a jack of all trades or a master of none? This is a question that we've been struggling to answer in the *evo* office, and as the new keeper of our DS 3, I'm hoping I can help illuminate an answer.

Part of its role will be as my London-based daily driver, so that means mundane tasks must be undertaken in the arena of suicidal Deliveroo scooters, obnoxious bus drivers and emergency trips to Whole Foods if I run out of avocados. But keen to delve into this DS 3's true dynamic ability, one of the first things I did with it was take it on a recent driving weekend in Wales with a few colleagues and friends.

In some illustrious company car-wise, the DS 3 displayed impressive capability, although this seemed to emanate from its high-spec components and not necessarily its core chassis – reflecting what we found on track at Rockingham last month. On tight and knotted roads, the front-led grip balance inspired a good amount of confidence, even if the steering did not.

But by stubbornly hanging on to the tail of more exotic machinery, the DS 3 fulfilled its brief on the first date. Let's see if the good impressions continue.

Jordan Katsianis
(@JordanKatsianis)

Date acquired	May 2017
Total mileage	5962
Mileage this month	429
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	38.2



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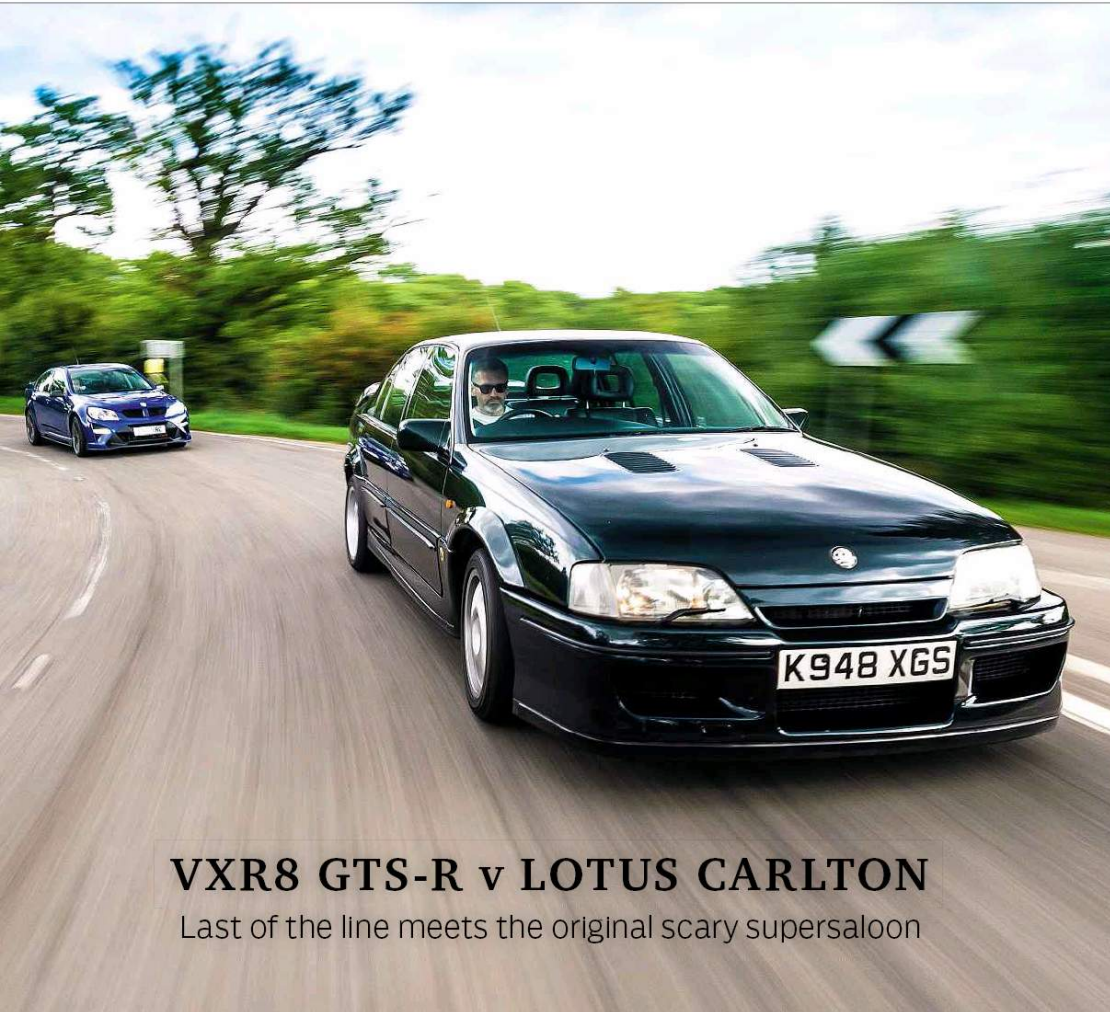
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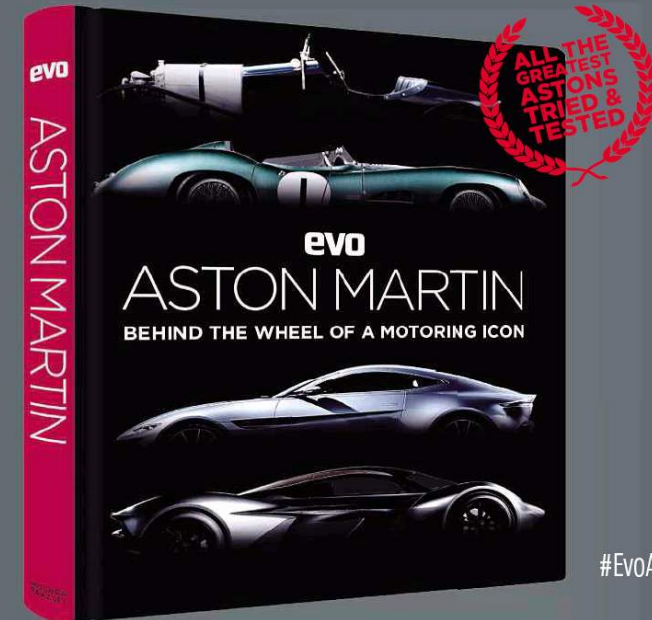


VXR8 GTS-R v LOTUS CARLTON

Last of the line meets the original scary supersaloon

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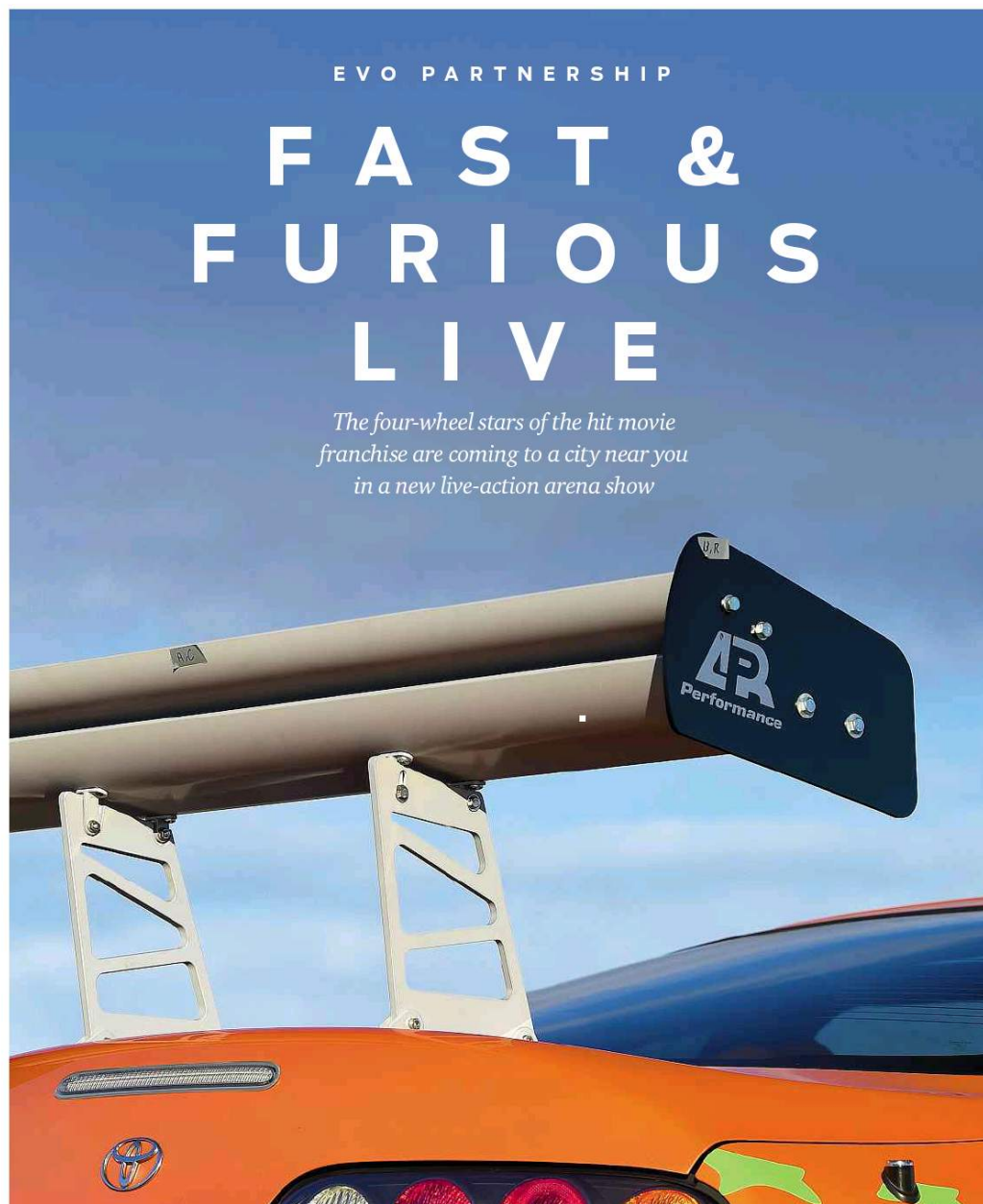
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THE NEW BOOK OUT NOW



Left: Toyota Supra 'ten-second car' starred in the original *The Fast and the Furious* movie. **Clockwise from above left:** three-seater Flip Car tossed British police Astras in *Fast & Furious 6*; green Challenger did a parachute jump (obviously) in *Furious 7*; jet-powered Ice Charger appeared in the eighth film, *The Fate of the Furious*

THE FAST & FURIOUS MOVIE franchise is about to leap from screens and into a live arena show. Officially opening on 19 January 2018 at the O2 Arena in London, with preview shows in Liverpool the week before, the show will then tour a further 14 countries over the course of the next nine months, with further dates to be released.

evo recently went behind the scenes with the show's drivers, choreographers and producers to get a sense of what fans of the films can look forward to at the tour's many dates.

The show is the brainchild of Rowland French, who has developed a unique skillset in what he calls 'live automotive theatre' and whose CV includes the Top Gear Live arena production. During its four-year gestation, French has

developed a new storyline for Fast & Furious Live, but one with plenty of recognisable scenes that fans will be able to relate back to the film series.

Showgoers can expect to see their favourite cars from the franchise, such as the Dodge Charger ice-racer and the V8-powered Flip Car, and where the actual movie cars were unable to be sourced, replicas have been made. Chris Burns, head of vehicle procurement and lead stunt driver, explained that of all the cars he had to build, it was, amazingly, the three black Honda Civic coupes from the opening sequence of the first film that were the most challenging. 'It is hard enough to find cars like three identical solid Honda Civic coupes,' he explained, 'but finding the parts required to turn them

into the cars you recognise from the screen is even harder.'

The show will also incorporate the latest audio and visual technology, complementing the spectacular driving scenes with state-of-the-art 3D projection and striking LED-clad cars.

UK TOUR DATES

Liverpool, Liverpool Echo Arena (preview shows), 11-12 January 2018
London, O2 Arena, 19-21 January 2018
Sheffield, Sheffield Arena, 27-29 April 2018
Newcastle, Metro Radio Arena, 6-8 April 2018
Manchester, Manchester Arena, 13-15 April 2018
Birmingham, Birmingham Arena, 20-22 April 2018
Belfast, SSE Arena, 4-6 May 2018
Glasgow, SSE Hydro, 11-13 May 2018

Ticket prices from £42. VIP packages also available. For more information and to buy tickets, head to fastandfuriouslive.com



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ESSENTIALS

THE ROUND-UP

New motoring products that have caught our eye this month



SUNGLASSES
Porsche Design P'8478
£380
porsche-design.com

Automotive branding on wearable accessories doesn't always work, but Porsche Design's iconic P'8478 sunglasses have stood the test of time, being as cool now as they were in 1978. With a titanium frame and interchangeable lenses, they're the best way to rock a '70s Le Mans look.



CALENDAR
Endurance 2018
£45
drew-gibson.co.uk

A new year means it's time for a new calendar, and motorsport photographer Drew Gibson's annual offering remains amongst the best. Set in a massive A2 format, it features a collection of spectacular images from the 2017 sportscar season and is limited to just 150 units.



GAMING WHEEL AND PEDALS
Thrustmaster T300 RS GT Edition
£299.99
thrustmaster.com

To mark the launch of *Gran Turismo Sport*, the latest instalment in the *Gran Turismo* franchise, this special-edition force-feedback steering wheel features GT branding and is accompanied by adjustable metal pedals – just the thing for perfecting your man-cave heel-and-toe action.



MOBILE PHONE ACCESSORY
IKEA Vitahult
£20
ikea.com

Just picked up a new car with inbuilt wireless charging, but stuck with an old iPhone that doesn't support it? IKEA, of all places, offers an inexpensive yet handy cover that will fix that problem for you. The only possible catch is that it's only available in white.



R/C CAR
Tamiya Porsche 934 Black Edition
£249.99
hobbyco.net

To celebrate the success of its first radio-controlled Porsche 911 in 1976, Tamiya released a limited-edition 934 Black Edition, which has become arguably its rarest model. Now, 40 years later, it is doing it again, so please excuse us while we get our credit cards out.



BOOK
BMW: Art Cars
£30
amazon.com

Since 1975 BMW's art cars have been provoking reactions from art and automotive critics alike. This 200-page hardcover gallery book by BMW cultural manager Thomas Girsth tells the story behind the first 17, from Alexander Calder's 3.0 CSL to Jeff Koons' M3 GT2.

RATINGS

● = new entry this month. Cars in italics are no longer sold. **Issue no.** is for our most recent major test of the car (D = Drive/F = feature). Call 03330 333 9491 for back issues. **Engine** is the car's combustion engine only – electric motors aren't shown. **Weight** is as quoted by the manufacturer for the car in basic spec, e.g. with a manual gearbox. In most cases this is to DIN standards (ie with fluids but without a driver), but where the manufacturer only quotes a dry weight (ie without fluids) this is indicated by * . Note that a dry weight will make the car's power-to-weight ratio (bhp/ton) appear more favourable. **0-62mph (claimed)** is the manufacturer's 0-62 figure, with a manual gearbox where offered. Our **0-60mph** and **0-100mph (tested)** figures could be with either a manual or automatic/DCT gearbox.

SUPERMINIS / HOT HATCHES

Honda Civic Type R. Building on the promise shown by the short-lived FK2 version, the new FK8 Type R is a more rounded proposition – and is all the better for it. It's outrageously fast on all kinds of roads, edges ahead of its rivals on track, offers oodles of interaction and is practical to boot.



If you can't stomach the Civic's styling, the classy **VW Golf R** may be more up your street – there's even a handy estate version. The new **Hyundai i30 N Performance Package**, meanwhile, makes a intriguing – and impressive – alternative to the usual suspects. From the smaller hatches, we'd choose the **Peugeot 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport** (left).

Spitfire engine, stilllooks great... Favours fun over finesse
Engineered like a state-of-the-art product... Desirable extras make this a £50k city car
Great Multi-Link engine, impressive ride... Not as feisty as we hoped
Still looks good, and now it's got the 4C's engine, Priority, and it has more rewarding rivals
Shows signs of deep talent... .. should be more exciting
Mk1 Focus RS pace with the 1160ccs... Lightly, smoothly-heavy
Compact and engaging chassis design... too... Looks dull without options
Polished 253bhp all-wheel-drive... All... just for 10, Porsche Cayman prices
Hugely quick point-to-point... Sometimes speed isn't the best ally and end-all
Lots of great gear for the money... Still all the fun to the clinch
Adequately fine-cylinder nose, monster pace... Chassis not really playful
Very fast, very effective, the... quality... All-time too clinical
Very fast, very effective, very... equal with added five-pole character... All-time too clinical
Performance, price, running costs... Dull four-pot soundtrack
Pace, compact size suits UK roads well... Lack the precision of the best performance car
Powertrain noise, chassis... Mk291 looks nice, and not as designed
Fantastic engine - Suspension can't stir up all that ailing
A proper feeler for hat... But... it's not
A fancy, feisty DS3... Not as hardcore as its 'Racing tag' suggests
Chucky, chuggable chugger... Can catch out the unwary
Makes terrific use of 85bhp... Feels like it came from paper
All the right ingredients... Undercooked

M&E & MODEL	SCORE	PRICE (\$K)	ENGIN CYL/VOL	SPEED MPH	0-60 SEC	1/4-MILE TIME	WHEELS INCHES	9-0-100 ACCEL	9-0-100 TIME	9-0-100 G-Force	MAX ACC.	EVO RATING		
Alabart 595 Competizione	106	D	\$30,890	4/1368	174/2500	184/3000	103/93k	075	6.8	-	140	+ Spirited engine, stilltooks great - Favours fun over finesse	★★★★★	
Audi RS6 Bispoto	205	F	\$33,055	4/1696	187/3500	184/3000	99/91k	101	5.0	-	143	+ Engineered like a true AB product! - Desirable extra make this a 550k city car	★★★★★	
Audi RS6 Avant	169	F	\$29,748	4/1696	187/3500	184/3000	103/93k	101	5.0	-	143	+ Great MTRaido car, lots of space, good looks	★★★★★	
AFA Romeo Giulietta Veloce/QV	190	M	\$29,675	4/1402	237/2570	251/2000	120/9k	162	6.0	-	150	+ Shows good, and now it's got the C&E engine - Pricey, and has more rewarding rivals	★★★★★	
Aita Romeo Giulietta Veloce/QV	144	D	10-14	4/1402	232/2500	251/2000	120/9k	179	6.8	-	150	+ Still looks good, deep talent...but should be more exciting	★★★★★	
Aita Romeo 147 GTA	187F	G	03-06	4/1376	247/2620	224/400	136/6k	165	6.3	6.0	155	+ M1 FOCUS RS pace without the heftions - Slightly nose-heavy	★★★★★	
Audi S1	218	F	\$25,540	4/1984	228/2600	237/1600	195/9k	107	5.8	-	155	+ Compliant and engaging chassis; quick - Looks no load without options	★★★★★	
Audi Al quattro	181F	F	4/1984	233/2600	260/2500	142/30k	188	5.2	-	152	+ Polished 2.8hp all-wheel-drive A1 - Just 10 ft UK Porsche Carrera GT	★★★★★		
Audi S3 Sportback	200	F	\$44,300	2/1600	232/2500	251/2000	120/9k	205	5.0	-	150	+ Happy quickie for the 21st century - Good-looking but lacks the edge	★★★★★	
Audi S3	188F	F	13-16	4/1984	264/2500	260/2500	129/9k	216	5.2	12.5	155	+ Lots of ground and one of the best-sounding four-piston - Still a bit too clinical	★★★★★	
Audi RS3 Sportback	221F	F	15-16	5/2480	362/2500	343/225	152/9k	242	4.3	3.6	155	+ Addic the five-cylinder noise monster pace - Chassis not exactly playful	★★★★★	
Audi S3	106	F	06-12	4/1984	261/2600	261/2500	155/9k	183	5.7	5.6	136	155	+ Very fast, very effective, very, or quality - All-time too clinical	★★★★★
Audi RS3 Sportback	156	F	10-12	5/2480	335/2500	332/2600	157/9k	216	4.6	-	155	+ Very fast, very effective, very, or quality with added five-pot-carrier - All-time too clinical	★★★★★	
BMW i25M Sport	116	F	\$28,940	4/1907	221/2500	229/1400	140/9k	161	-	-	155	+ Performance, price, running costs - Dull four-pot soundfice	★★★★★	
BMW i16M	132	F	02-05	6/2070	335/2500	369/1500	144/3k	236	4.8	-	155	+ Pace, compact seats suits UK roads well - Likes the precision of the best performance cars	★★★★★	
BMW i16M	202	F	12-15	6/2070	332/2500	369/1500	144/3k	238	5.2	15.2	155	+ Powerful, nice, chit - L225 looks real, and it's a 1500rpm	★★★★★	
BMW i20M Sport	121F	F	06-10	6/2096	261/2600	221/1500	150/9k	161	6.3	15.3	155	+ Fantastic engine - Suspension can't still get a little bumpy	★★★★★	
Citroen DS13.1 THP	142F	F	10-15	4/1508	154/6000	177/400	124/9k	126	7.3	-	133	+ A proper French hot hatch - Retrobeats might find it too designed	★★★★★	
Citroen DS13 Racing	103	F	11-12	4/1508	204/6000	203/2000	124/9k	167	6.5	-	146	+ A faster, feistier DS3 - Not as hardcore as its 'lacing' leg suggests	★★★★★	
Citroen Saxo VTS	100F	F	03-03	4/1587	120/6000	107/2000	92/9k	130	8.7	22.6	127	+ Chunky, chunkable car - Can catch out the unwary	★★★★★	
Citroen AXI VTS	105	F	87-92	108	85/6400	86/4000	72/2k	120	9.2	-	110	+ Makes use of 550hp - Feels like it's made from paper	★★★★★	
Citroen ZX	222	F	\$24,148	4/1508	160/6000	221/2000	157/9k	177	6.5	-	143	+ All bright legends, chit - L225 looks real, and it's a 1500rpm	★★★★★	
Fiat Panda 100HP	122F	F	06-11	4/1568	199/6000	197/2500	97/9k	103	9.5	-	115	+ About as funny as small cars get - Optional ESP can't be turned off	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST	207	F	13-17	4/1568	107/2500	294/2500	108/8k	164	6.9	74	88.4	137	+ Chassis, price, punchy performance - Have you heard of Mountune?	★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST Mountain	233	F	13-17	4/1568	212/2600	236/2750	108/8k	168	6.4	-	140	- One of the best mid-sized hatches made even better - Badge snobbery	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST200	225F	F	16	4/1568	212/2600	236/2750	108/8k	168	6.7	-	143	+ Massive Fun - They're made 4000	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	123D	F	08-13	4/1568	186/6000	120/4000	104/5k	115	9.0	-	129	+ Generally enter lasting fans - Renault Sport Tingo and Suzuki Swift are even more fun	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta Zetec S Mountain	188	F	08-13	4/1568	186/6000	120/4000	104/5k	115	9.0	-	129	+ About more go, go, go, faster, faster, faster - 120 ft 12 year old	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST	105	F	05-08	4/1568	148/6000	104/500	113/9k	132	12.9	-	129	+ Great looks, decent brakes - Disappointing chassis, surface engine	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST185C Mountain	115F	F	08	4/1568	185/6000	147/2500	113/9k	165	6.9	-	129	+ Fiesta ST gets the power it always needed - Off-track noise	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST TDCi Estate (Mk3)	230	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	207	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	207	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	187D	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	187D	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	187D	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	187D	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	187D	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	187D	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-	135	+ Performance not sacrificed at the altar of economy - Gets lagged when really pushed	★★★★★	
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Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	187D	F	02/06	4/1991	202/2600	265/2000	148/8k	124	8.3	-				

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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 BEST

If you prefer your fast saloons German, consider the **Mercedes-AMG C63 S** or its more focused rival, the **BMW M3**. Moving up a size, the **Mercedes-AMG E63 S 4Matic+** (left) is relentlessly rampant but has finesse too, while the **Porsche Panamera Turbo** runs the E63 close and feels good for its 7min 38sec Ring time.

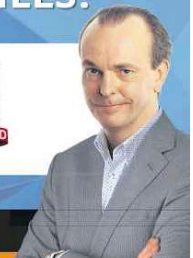
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Lotus 3-Eleven. It may not be groundbreaking but it is hugely exciting. The 410hp supercharged V6 sounds fabulous and the open linkage on the manual gearbox looks fantastic. A circuit is its natural habitat but it has surprisingly civilised road manners, so you could happily drive it to and from a trackday.



BEST OF THE REST

The **Abarth 124 Spider** (left) is capable of putting a big smile on your face at sane speeds, and we'd defy anyone not to be charmed by an **Aston Martin Vantage S Roadster** in V8 or V12 form. Unsurprisingly, you won't find a duffier in the Lotus **Elise** and **Exige Roadster** ranges, and the same goes for the **Caterham Seven**.

MAKE & MODEL	SEAT NO.	PRICE	ENGINE CYCLES	HP/PS	LB FT/HP	WEIGHT	HP/TON	0-60 SEC	0-100 SEC	0-150 SEC	0-200 SEC	0-300 SEC	0-400 SEC	0-500 SEC	0-600 SEC	0-700 SEC	0-800 SEC	0-900 SEC	0-1000 SEC	0-1100 SEC	0-1200 SEC	0-1300 SEC	0-1400 SEC	0-1500 SEC	0-1600 SEC	0-1700 SEC	0-1800 SEC	0-1900 SEC	0-2000 SEC	0-2100 SEC	0-2200 SEC	0-2300 SEC	0-2400 SEC	0-2500 SEC	0-2600 SEC	0-2700 SEC	0-2800 SEC	0-2900 SEC	0-3000 SEC	0-3100 SEC	0-3200 SEC	0-3300 SEC	0-3400 SEC	0-3500 SEC	0-3600 SEC	0-3700 SEC	0-3800 SEC	0-3900 SEC	0-4000 SEC	0-4100 SEC	0-4200 SEC	0-4300 SEC	0-4400 SEC	0-4500 SEC	0-4600 SEC	0-4700 SEC	0-4800 SEC	0-4900 SEC	0-5000 SEC	0-5100 SEC	0-5200 SEC	0-5300 SEC	0-5400 SEC	0-5500 SEC	0-5600 SEC	0-5700 SEC	0-5800 SEC	0-5900 SEC	0-6000 SEC	0-6100 SEC	0-6200 SEC	0-6300 SEC	0-6400 SEC	0-6500 SEC	0-6600 SEC	0-6700 SEC	0-6800 SEC	0-6900 SEC	0-7000 SEC	0-7100 SEC	0-7200 SEC	0-7300 SEC	0-7400 SEC	0-7500 SEC	0-7600 SEC	0-7700 SEC	0-7800 SEC	0-7900 SEC	0-8000 SEC	0-8100 SEC	0-8200 SEC	0-8300 SEC	0-8400 SEC	0-8500 SEC	0-8600 SEC	0-8700 SEC	0-8800 SEC	0-8900 SEC	0-9000 SEC	0-9100 SEC	0-9200 SEC	0-9300 SEC	0-9400 SEC	0-9500 SEC	0-9600 SEC	0-9700 SEC	0-9800 SEC	0-9900 SEC	0-10000 SEC	0-10100 SEC	0-10200 SEC	0-10300 SEC	0-10400 SEC	0-10500 SEC	0-10600 SEC	0-10700 SEC	0-10800 SEC	0-10900 SEC	0-11000 SEC	0-11100 SEC	0-11200 SEC	0-11300 SEC	0-11400 SEC	0-11500 SEC	0-11600 SEC	0-11700 SEC	0-11800 SEC	0-11900 SEC	0-12000 SEC	0-12100 SEC	0-12200 SEC	0-12300 SEC	0-12400 SEC	0-12500 SEC	0-12600 SEC	0-12700 SEC	0-12800 SEC	0-12900 SEC	0-13000 SEC	0-13100 SEC	0-13200 SEC	0-13300 SEC	0-13400 SEC	0-13500 SEC	0-13600 SEC	0-13700 SEC	0-13800 SEC	0-13900 SEC	0-14000 SEC	0-14100 SEC	0-14200 SEC	0-14300 SEC	0-14400 SEC	0-14500 SEC	0-14600 SEC	0-14700 SEC	0-14800 SEC	0-14900 SEC	0-15000 SEC	0-15100 SEC	0-15200 SEC	0-15300 SEC	0-15400 SEC	0-15500 SEC	0-15600 SEC	0-15700 SEC	0-15800 SEC	0-15900 SEC	0-16000 SEC	0-16100 SEC	0-16200 SEC	0-16300 SEC	0-16400 SEC	0-16500 SEC	0-16600 SEC	0-16700 SEC	0-16800 SEC	0-16900 SEC	0-17000 SEC	0-17100 SEC	0-17200 SEC	0-17300 SEC	0-17400 SEC	0-17500 SEC	0-17600 SEC	0-17700 SEC	0-17800 SEC	0-17900 SEC	0-18000 SEC	0-18100 SEC	0-18200 SEC	0-18300 SEC	0-18400 SEC	0-18500 SEC	0-18600 SEC	0-18700 SEC	0-18800 SEC	0-18900 SEC	0-19000 SEC	0-19100 SEC	0-19200 SEC	0-19300 SEC	0-19400 SEC	0-19500 SEC	0-19600 SEC	0-19700 SEC	0-19800 SEC	0-19900 SEC	0-20000 SEC	0-20100 SEC	0-20200 SEC	0-20300 SEC	0-20400 SEC	0-20500 SEC	0-20600 SEC	0-20700 SEC	0-20800 SEC	0-20900 SEC	0-21000 SEC	0-21100 SEC	0-21200 SEC	0-21300 SEC	0-21400 SEC	0-21500 SEC	0-21600 SEC	0-21700 SEC	0-21800 SEC	0-21900 SEC	0-22000 SEC	0-22100 SEC	0-22200 SEC	0-22300 SEC	0-22400 SEC	0-22500 SEC	0-22600 SEC	0-22700 SEC	0-22800 SEC	0-22900 SEC	0-23000 SEC	0-23100 SEC	0-23200 SEC	0-23300 SEC	0-23400 SEC	0-23500 SEC	0-23600 SEC	0-23700 SEC	0-23800 SEC	0-23900 SEC	0-24000 SEC	0-24100 SEC	0-24200 SEC	0-24300 SEC	0-24400 SEC	0-24500 SEC	0-24600 SEC	0-24700 SEC	0-24800 SEC	0-24900 SEC	0-25000 SEC	0-25100 SEC	0-25200 SEC	0-25300 SEC	0-25400 SEC	0-25500 SEC	0-25600 SEC	0-25700 SEC	0-25800 SEC	0-25900 SEC	0-26000 SEC	0-26100 SEC	0-26200 SEC	0-26300 SEC	0-26400 SEC	0-26500 SEC	0-26600 SEC	0-26700 SEC	0-26800 SEC	0-26900 SEC	0-27000 SEC	0-27100 SEC	0-27200 SEC	0-27300 SEC	0-27400 SEC	0-27500 SEC	0-27600 SEC	0-27700 SEC	0-27800 SEC	0-27900 SEC	0-28000 SEC	0-28100 SEC	0-28200 SEC	0-28300 SEC	0-28400 SEC	0-28500 SEC	0-28600 SEC	0-28700 SEC	0-28800 SEC	0-28900 SEC	0-29000 SEC	0-29100 SEC	0-29200 SEC	0-29300 SEC	0-29400 SEC	0-29500 SEC	0-29600 SEC	0-29700 SEC	0-29800 SEC	0-29900 SEC	0-30000 SEC	0-30100 SEC	0-30200 SEC	0-30300 SEC	0-30400 SEC	0-30500 SEC	0-30600 SEC	0-30700 SEC	0-30800 SEC	0-30900 SEC	0-31000 SEC	0-31100 SEC	0-31200 SEC	0-31300 SEC	0-31400 SEC	0-31500 SEC	0-31600 SEC	0-31700 SEC	0-31800 SEC	0-31900 SEC	0-32000 SEC	0-32100 SEC	0-32200 SEC	0-32300 SEC	0-32400 SEC	0-32500 SEC	0-32600 SEC	0-32700 SEC	0-32800 SEC	0-32900 SEC	0-33000 SEC	0-33100 SEC	0-33200 SEC	0-33300 SEC	0-33400 SEC	0-33500 SEC	0-33600 SEC	0-33700 SEC	0-33800 SEC	0-33900 SEC	0-34000 SEC	0-34100 SEC	0-34200 SEC	0-34300 SEC	0-34400 SEC	0-34500 SEC	0-34600 SEC	0-34700 SEC	0-34800 SEC	0-34900 SEC	0-35000 SEC	0-35100 SEC	0-35200 SEC	0-35300 SEC	0-35400 SEC	0-35500 SEC	0-35600 SEC	0-35700 SEC	0-35800 SEC	0-35900 SEC	0-36000 SEC	0-36100 SEC	0-36200 SEC	0-36300 SEC	0-36400 SEC	0-36500 SEC	0-36600 SEC	0-36700 SEC	0-36800 SEC	0-36900 SEC	0-37000 SEC	0-37100 SEC	0-37200 SEC	0-37300 SEC	0-37400 SEC	0-37500 SEC	0-37600 SEC	0-37700 SEC	0-37800 SEC	0-37900 SEC	0-38000 SEC	0-38100 SEC	0-38200 SEC	0-38300 SEC	0-38400 SEC	0-38500 SEC	0-38600 SEC	0-38700 SEC	0-38800 SEC	0-38900 SEC	0-39000 SEC	0-39100 SEC	0-39200 SEC	0-39300 SEC	0-39400 SEC	0-39500 SEC	0-39600 SEC	0-39700 SEC	0-39800 SEC	0-39900 SEC	0-40000 SEC	0-40100 SEC	0-40200 SEC	0-40300 SEC	0-40400 SEC	0-40500 SEC	0-40600 SEC	0-40700 SEC	0-40800 SEC	0-40900 SEC	0-41000 SEC	0-41100 SEC	0-41200 SEC	0-41300 SEC	0-41400 SEC	0-41500 SEC	0-41600 SEC	0-41700 SEC	0-41800 SEC	0-41900 SEC	0-42000 SEC	0-42100 SEC	0-42200 SEC	0-42300 SEC	0-42400 SEC	0-42500 SEC	0-42600 SEC	0-42700 SEC	0-42800 SEC	0-42900 SEC	0-43000 SEC	0-43100 SEC	0-43200 SEC	0-43300 SEC	0-43400 SEC	0-43500 SEC	0-43600 SEC	0-43700 SEC	0-43800 SEC	0-43900 SEC	0-44000 SEC	0-44100 SEC	0-44200 SEC	0-44300 SEC	0-44400 SEC	0-44500 SEC	0-44600 SEC	0-44700 SEC	0-44800 SEC	0-44900 SEC	0-45000 SEC	0-45100 SEC	0-45200 SEC	0-45300 SEC	0-45400 SEC	0-45500 SEC	0-45600 SEC	0-45700 SEC	0-45800 SEC	0-45900 SEC	0-46000 SEC	0-46100 SEC	0-46200 SEC	0-46300 SEC	0-46400 SEC	0-46500 SEC	0-46600 SEC	0-46700 SEC	0-46800 SEC	0-46900 SEC	0-47000 SEC	0-47100 SEC	0-47200 SEC	0-47300 SEC	0-47400 SEC	0-47500 SEC	0-47600 SEC	0-47700 SEC	0-47800 SEC	0-47900 SEC	0-48000 SEC	0-48100 SEC	0-48200 SEC	0-48300 SEC	0-48400 SEC	0-48500 SEC	0-48600 SEC	0-48700 SEC	0-48800 SEC	0-48900 SEC	0-49000 SEC	0-49100 SEC	0-49200 SEC	0-49300 SEC	0-49400 SEC	0-49500 SEC	0-49600 SEC	0-49700 SEC	0-49800 SEC	0-49900 SEC	0-50000 SEC	0-50100 SEC	0-50200 SEC	0-50300 SEC	0-50400 SEC	0-50500 SEC	0-50600 SEC	0-50700 SEC	0-50800 SEC	0-50900 SEC	0-51000 SEC	0-51100 SEC	0-51200 SEC	0-51300 SEC	0-51400 SEC	0-51500 SEC	0-51600 SEC	0-51700 SEC	0-51800 SEC	0-51900 SEC	0-52000 SEC	0-52100 SEC	0-52200 SEC	0-52300 SEC	0-52400 SEC	0-52500 SEC	0-52600 SEC	0-52700 SEC	0-52800 SEC	0-52900 SEC	0-53000 SEC	0-53100 SEC	0-53200 SEC	0-53300 SEC	0-53400 SEC	0-53500 SEC	0-53600 SEC	0-53700 SEC	0-53800 SEC	0-53900 SEC	0-54000 SEC	0-54100 SEC	0-54200 SEC	0-54300 SEC	0-54400 SEC	0-54500 SEC	0-54600 SEC	0-54700 SEC	0-54800 SEC	0-54900 SEC	0-55000 SEC	0-55100 SEC	0-55200 SEC	0-55300 SEC	0-55400 SEC	0-55500 SEC	0-55600 SEC	0-55700 SEC	0-55800 SEC	0-55900 SEC	0-56000 SEC	0-56100 SEC	0-56200 SEC	0-56300 SEC	0-56400 SEC	0-56500 SEC	0-56600 SEC	0-56700 SEC	0-56800 SEC	0-56900 SEC	0-57000 SEC	0-57100 SEC	0-57200 SEC	0-57300 SEC	0-57400 SEC	0-57500 SEC	0-57600 SEC	0-57700 SEC	0-57800 SEC	0-57900 SEC	0-58000 SEC	0-58100 SEC	0-58200 SEC	0-58300 SEC	0-58400 SEC	0-58500 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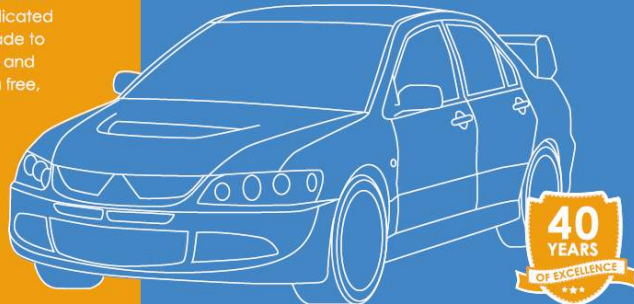
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HIGH PERFORMANCE INSURANCE

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE	ENGINE CVT/C	HP/PS	0-100 s	WGT kg	TOP SPD mph	0-50MPH s	0-60MPH s	0-100MPH s	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
Audi S5	233F	£47,875	6/2995	349/5400	369/1370	1619kg	220	4.7	-	-	155	• Chassis rewards commitment... but doesn't offer a challenge. Plain engine, too	★★★★☆
Audi RS5	240F	£62,900	6/2994	444/7000	442/1900	1655kg	273	3.9	3.6	9.0	155	• Lighter, quicker, makes green paint look good... Lacks the character of the old V8	★★★★☆
Audi RS5	206F	£10-16	8/4163	444/8250	310/4000	1754kg	263	4.5	-	-	155	• Brilliant engine and improved chassis... Lack of suspension travel, inconsistent steering	★★★★☆
Audi R8 V8	226F	£7-15	8/4163	424/7000	310/4500	1560kg	276	4.6	4.1	9.9	188	• A true 911 alternative... Exclusivity comes at a price	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT	243D	£156,700	12/5960	626/5000	664/1350	2169kg	293	3.7	-	-	207	• Astonishing agility for such a big, heavy car... Thirst	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT V8	178F	£12-17	8/3993	500/6000	480/1700	2220kg	229	4.8	-	-	188	• A proper driver's Bentley with decent economy... W/2 suddenly seems pointless	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT V8 S	204F	£13-17	8/3993	526/6000	502/1700	2220kg	238	4.5	-	-	192	• An even better driver's Bentley... Fast weight makes its presence felt in harder driving	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT	821F	£13-17	12/5998	560/6000	586/1700	2384kg	257	4.5	-	-	198	• New 2.0thmuffler comfort... Weight W/2's thrust	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT Speed	204F	£12-17	12/5998	633/5000	620/2000	2354kg	286	4.1	-	-	206	• Desirable meets exclusivity and performance... We'd still have the V8	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental Supersports	234D	£17	12/5998	700/6000	750/2050	2205kg	323	3.5	-	-	209	• Massive performance, surprisingly agile... Styling and soundtrack far from discreet	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT 3-R	203D	£14-17	8/3993	572/6000	518/1700	2120kg	274	3.8	-	-	170	• The best-handling Continental of its generation... Expensive, it still weighs 2120kg	★★★★☆
BMW 1-series M Coupe	188F	£11-12	6/2970	335/5000	369/1500	1495kg	228	4.9	-	-	155	• Character, turbo pace and great looks... Came and went too quick	★★★★☆
BMW M240i Coupe	229D	£35,885	6/2998	335/6800	369/1520	1470kg	232	4.8	-	-	155	• Adjustable and plenty of fun... Lacks finesse and precision	★★★★☆
BMW M235i Coupe	225F	£4-16	6/2979	323/5800	332/1300	1525kg	224	5.0	5.2	12.7	155	• Powerful, chassis looks sleek... Limited-slip drive, no traction, not standard	★★★★☆
BMW M2	243F	£46,430	6/2979	365/6500	369/1450	1495kg	248	4.5	4.5	-	155	• More progressive chassis balance than the M4... Feels unsettled on rough tarmac	★★★★☆
BMW 440i M Sport Coupe	233F	£43,430	6/2998	321/5500	332/1380	1540kg	212	5.2	-	-	155	• Almost too-powerful engine... Doesn't feel special enough to drive	★★★★☆
BMW M4	218F	£58,365	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1560kg	277	4.3	-	-	155	• Ferociously fast... A handful on less-than-perfect or less-than-bone-dry roads	★★★★☆
BMW M4 Competition Package	240F	£62,080	6/2979	444/7000	406/1850	1560kg	289	4.2	4.4	9.2	155	• The car the M4 always should have been... Not so good on 20in wheels	★★★★☆
BMW M4 CS	237D	£89,130	6/2979	454/6250	442/14000	1580kg	292	3.9	-	-	174	• The first M4 you could enjoy on any road, in any conditions... It ain't cheap	★★★★☆
BMW M4 GT3	227F	£6-17	6/2979	630/6250	442/4000	1570kg	332	3.8	3.7	8.0	180	• Vast improvement on lesser M4s... Sold should be given its price	★★★★☆
BMW M4 (E20)	206F	£7-13	8/3999	442/8100	295/3900	1580kg	266	4.8	4.3	10.3	155	• Fends off all of its rivals... except the cheaper 1-series M Coupe	★★★★☆
BMW M4 GT3 (E20)	232F	£10-11	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1530kg	295	4.4	-	-	190	• Highly exclusive; one of the most focused M-cars ever... Good luck trying to find one	★★★★☆
BMW M3 (E46)	066F	£10-17	6/2245	338/7000	260/5000	1495kg	230	5.2	5.1	12.3	155	• One of the best BMWs ever... Runner-up in eCoty 2001... Slightly artificial steering feel	★★★★☆
BMW M3 CS (E46)	209F	£10-17	6/2245	338/7000	260/5000	1495kg	230	5.2	-	-	155	• CSL dynamics without CSL price... Looks like the standard car	★★★★☆
BMW M3 CS (E46)	209F	£10-17	6/2245	338/7000	273/4900	1485kg	260	4.9	5.3	12.0	155	• Still superb... Changes from the automated single-clutch box are... a bit... sluggish	★★★★☆
BMW M3 Evolution (E36)	144F	£96-98	6/2301	319/5200	280/2250	1515kg	215	5.5	5.4	12.8	158	• Performance thrives... Never quite as good as the E30	★★★★☆
BMW M3 (E30)	105F	£89-90	4/2302	212/8750	170/4400	1165kg	185	6.7	6.7	17.9	147	• The best M-car ever... Prices have got out of hand	★★★★☆
BMW Z4 M Coupe	097F	£6-10	6/2245	338/7000	260/4900	1420kg	262	5.0	-	-	155	• A real driver's car... You've got to be prepared to get stuck in	★★★★☆
BMW M Coupe	005F	£98-103	6/2245	321/7400	261/4900	1375kg	237	5.3	-	-	155	• Quick and characterful... Lacks finesse	★★★★☆
BMW M3 (F30)	218F	£95,590	8/4305	552/6000	501/1500	1850kg	303	4.2	-	-	155	• Mighty ability, pace, technology... You'll want the Competition Package upgrade, too	★★★★☆
BMW M5 (E63)	106F	£10-10	10/4090	500/7750	384/6100	1635kg	311	4.2	4.8	10.0	155	• A awesome GT, awesome sports car... SMG gearbox now off the pace	★★★★☆
BMW i8	201F	£106,310	3/1409	357/5800	420/3700	1485kg	244	4.4	-	-	155	• Brilliantly executed concept; sci-fi looks... Safe dynamic set-up	★★★★☆
Chevrolet Camaro Z/28	210F	£74-76	8/7008	505/6100	488/4800	1733kg	298	4.2	-	-	178	• Scarily sharp engine, great chassis really... Feels very stiff on UK roads	★★★★☆
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray (C7)	197F	£63,295	8/1612	460/6000	485/4600	1406kg	312	4.2	4.4	9.4	180	• Performance, chassis balance, supple ride... Body control could be better	★★★★☆
Chevrolet Corvette Z06 (C7)	227F	£90,445	8/1612	650/6000	650/3600	1598kg	413	3.7	-	-	196	• Mind-boggling raw speed, surprisingly sophisticated... Edgy when really pushed	★★★★☆
Ford Mustang 2.3 EcoBoost	222F	£33,645	4/2261	313/5500	310/3000	1655kg	192	5.8	-	-	155	• Ninety per cent as good as the V8... Missing ten per cent is what makes the Mustang	★★★★☆
Ford Mustang 5.0 V8 GT	225F	£38,095	8/4091	401/6500	391/4250	1711kg	243	4.8	4.8	11.6	155	• Looks, noise, performance, value, right-hand drive... Comes undone on rougher roads	★★★★☆
Honda Integra Type R (DC2)	200F	£96-100	4/1797	1878/6000	139/7300	1108kg	173	6.7	6.2	17.9	145	• Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever... Too raw for some	★★★★☆
Infiniti Q50S Sport 3.0T	128D	£43,135	6/2991	400/6400	350/1600	1794kg	226	5.0	-	-	155	• Impressive tech... Electronic systems reduce feeling of involvement	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-Type Coupe 2.0i 4x300PS	239D	£40,000	4/7007	296/5500	295/1500	1525kg	197	5.7	-	-	155	• Turbo four-cylinder engine sounds good... But it lacks trip-end nerve	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-Type Coupe 3.0 V6 340PS	204D	£52,265	6/2995	335/6500	332/1500	1567kg	217	5.7	-	-	161	• Drop-dead looks, brilliant chassis, desirability... Engine lacks top-end flight	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-Type Coupe 3.0 V6 380PS	211D	£63,015	6/2995	335/6500	330/1500	1584kg	241	5.5	-	-	171	• Exquisite style, more rewarding (and affordable) than roadster... Scrappy on the limit	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-Type R Coupe AWD	227D	£90,860	8/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1730kg	318	4.1	3.5	8.1	186	• Better than the rear-drive R in the wet... Less involving in the dry	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-Type SVR Coupe	224D	£110,880	8/5000	562/6500	516/3500	1705kg	338	3.7	-	-	200	• A marginally better drive than the AWD R... Not by enough to justify the extra outlay	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-Type R Coupe (AWD)	218F	£74-77	8/5000	542/6800	501/3500	1650kg	334	4.2	-	-	186	• Looks, presence, performance, soundtrack... Bumpy and bossy	★★★★☆
Jaguar XKR	168F	£99-14	8/5000	503/6000	440/2500	1753kg	292	4.8	-	-	155	• Fast and incredibly rewarding Jag... The kids will have to stay at home	★★★★☆
Jaguar XKR-S	226F	£71-14	8/5000	502/6000	440/2500	1753kg	292	4.8	-	-	155	• Faster and wider than regular XKR... The F-Type R Coupe	★★★★☆
Lexus RC F	226F	£61,300	8/4060	470/6400	391/4800	1765kg	271	4.5	-	-	168	• Great looks, noise, sense of occasion... Too heavy to be truly exciting	★★★★☆
Lexus LC 500h	241D	£76,595	6/3456	354	n/a	1985kg	181	5.0	-	-	168	• Excellent comfort and refinement; fine chassis... Hybrid system hurts the fun factor	★★★★☆
Lexus LC 500	231D	£76,595	8/4060	470/7100	398/4800	1935kg	247	4.7	-	-	168	• Glorious engine, rewarding chassis for a GT car... Numb steering, messy ergonomics	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija Sport 350	217F	£55,900	6/3456	445/7000	265/4000	1758kg	312	3.0	-	-	170	• Further honed Evija with vastly improved gearshift... Still not easy to get into and out of	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija Sport 380	219F	£60,900	6/3456	375/6000	302/5000	1108kg	343	3.7	-	-	178	• Intense, absorbing and brilliantly capable... Perhaps not as easy to get into and out of	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija Sport 380	240D	£83,000	6/3456	375/6000	302/5000	1105kg	345	3.6	-	-	175	• An absolute riot; feels worth the high price tag... Limited bald numbers	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija Cup 430	243D	£99,800	6/3456	430/7000	325/2600	1093kg	400	3.3	-	-	180	• The ultimate Evija... Isn't cheap	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija S (V6)	209F	£12-15	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1176kg	298	3.8	-	-	170	• Breath-taking road-racer; our joint 2002 Car of the Year... Gearshift not the sweetest	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija S (S2)	105F	£66-71	4/1796	218/7800	158/5500	1308kg	238	4.3	-	-	148	• Light weight with a hefty punch... Uninspiring soundtrack	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija (S1)	200F	£10-11	4/1796	192/7800	145/6000	1780kg	247	4.6	-	-	138	• Looks and goes like an Elise racer... A fast lacking in refinement	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija 400	216F	£72,000	6/3456	400/7000	302/3500	1395kg	291	4.2	-	-	186	• Evija excitement levels take a leap... Gearbox still not perfect; punchy pricing	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija Sport 480	230F	£82,000	6/3456	410/7000	310/3500	1325kg	314	4.2	-	-	190	• Even lighter and sharper Evija... Engine and gearbox behind the best at this price	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija GT430	243F	£112,500	6/3456	430/7000	325/4500	1290kg	336	3.8	-	-	190	• Genuine race-car feel on the road... It ain't cheap, just 60 being made	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija	183F	£99-15	6/3456	276/6400	258/4000	1382kg	203	5.1	5.6	13.6	162	• Sublime ride and handling... Our 2009 Car of the Year... The Evija S	★★★★☆
Lotus Evija S	168F	£10-15	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.8	-	-	172	• A faster and better Evija... But one which spurs with the Porsche 911	★★★★☆
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	189F	£93,145	8/4060	454/7000	383/4250	1890kg	265	4.8	-	-	186	• A real sense of occasion to drive a wonderful engine... Rather long in the tooth	★★★★☆
Maserati GranTurismo MC	200F	£100,340	8/4060	454/7000	383/4250	1873kg	266	4.7	-	-	187	• As above but with knobs on... Those knobs don't make it feel any younger	★★★★☆
Maserati GranTurismo	114F	£7-17	8/4244	399/7000	339/4750	1880kg	216	5.2	5.5	12.7	177	• Striking, accomplished GT... Doesn't spike the pulse like an Aston or 911	★★★★☆
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	193F	£11-17	8/4060	454/7000	383/4250	1800kg	266	4.5	-	-	188	• Brilliant blend of road racer and GT... Gearbox takes a little getting used to	★★★★☆
Mazda RX-8	122F	£3-11	8/4060	228/8200	156/5500	1429kg	162	6.4	6.5	16.4	146	• Never mind the quirkiness, it's a great drive... Wafer-thin torque output, the sty	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG C43 4Matic Coupe	223F	£47,605	6/2996	362/5500	383/2000	1660kg	222	4.7	-	-	155	• Fast and instilled with a real sense of quality... Not enough emphasis on fun	★★★★☆

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Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupe (W205)	240 F	£70,385	8/3082	503/5500	516/1750	1725kg	296	3.9	4.3	9.1	155	+ Mouth-watering mechanical package - Light steering, hefty kerb weight	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe (W204)	162 F	11-14	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	277	4.5	4.4	10.3	155	+ A proper two-door M3 rival - C63 saloon looks better	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black Series (W204)	162 F	12-13	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	277	4.5	4.4	10.3	155	- The C63 turned out to be - Too heavy; not as fiery as Black Series cars of old	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG Black Series	106 F	07-09	8/6208	500/6800	457/5200	1760kg	289	4.2	-	-	186	+ AMG goes Porsche-turting - Dull-witted gearshift axels the part	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E400 4Matic Coupe	234 D	£50,775	6/2096	328/5200	354/1600	1708kg	188	5.3	-	-	155	+ Good looks, classy cabin, relaxed performance - Not much here in the way of real thrills	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG S63 Coupe	205 D	£183,680	8/5461	577/5500	664/2250	1995kg	294	4.2	-	-	155	+ Thunderously fast S-class but for drivers - Lacks badge appeal of a Continental GT	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG S65 Coupe	209 D	£188,550	12/5080	621/4800	732/2000	2100kg	299	4.1	-	-	186	+ A mighty power, fabulous luxury - Nearly 500k more than the S63!	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT	227 D	£90,960	8/3082	466/6000	455/1700	1540kg	309	4.0	-	-	189	+ A true sports coupe that also does luxury - Takes time to reveal its talents	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT C	261 F	£113,260	8/3082	466/6000	455/1700	1540kg	333	3.8	-	-	193	+ Fantastic chassis, huge grip - Artificial steering feel, but downshifts could be quicker	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT C	341 D	£139,260	8/3082	466/6000	455/1700	1540kg	343	3.7	-	-	196	+ As good at being a GT as it is a sports coupe - Difficult to drive fast and smoothly	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z	204 F	£20,180	6/3696	323/7000	268/5200	1406kg	210	5.3	-	-	155	+ Quicker, leaner, keener than 350Z - Not quite a Cayman-killer	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z Nismo	209 F	£30,375	6/3696	339/7400	274/5200	1496kg	230	5.2	-	-	155	+ Sharper looks, improved ride, extra thrills - Engine lacks sparkle	★★★★★
Nissan 350Z	107 F	03-09	6/3696	309/6800	264/4800	1532kg	205	5.6	5.5	13.0	155	+ Huge fun, and great value too - Muscle-car vibe not for everyone	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2017MY)	242 D	£82,525	6/3799	562/6800	470/3400	1750kg	326	2.7	-	-	196	+ More refinement, much improved interior, still fast - Feels a touch less alert	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R Track Edition (2017MY)	229 D	£94,525	6/3799	562/6800	470/3400	1742kg	327	2.7	-	-	196	+ GT-R regains its sharpness - Getting pricey these days	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R Nismo (2017MY)	232 F	£91,525	6/3799	592/6800	481/3600	1754kg	340	2.7	-	-	196	+ Incredibly focused - Still too firm to be at its best on UK roads	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2012MY-2016MY)	238 F	12-16	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	336	2.7	3.2	7.5	196	+ Quicker and better than before - Stopping a Porsche-owning friend's call to action	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R Nismo (2016MY)	205 F	14-16	6/3799	592/6800	481/3200	1720kg	350	2.6	-	-	196	+ Manages to make regular GT-R feel impressive - Compromised by super-firm suspension	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2010MY)	125 F	10-12	6/3799	523/6400	451/3200	1740kg	305	3.0	-	-	194	+ More powerful version of the original - But they're not words apart to drive	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	152 F	08-10	6/3799	473/6400	434/3200	1740kg	276	3.8	-	-	193	+ Our 2008 Car of the Year - You won't see 20mpg often	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	241 F	09-12	6/2568	276/7000	289/4400	1560kg	180	4.8	4.7	12.5	165	+ Big, brutal, and great fun - Needs more than the standard 260hp	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R33)	196 F	07-09	6/2568	276/6800	271/4400	1540kg	182	4.9	5.4	14.3	155	+ Early proof that Japanese high-tech could work (superbly) - Limited supply	★★★★★
Peugeot RCZ 1.6 THP 200	155 F	09-15	4/5958	307/5500	202/7000	1428kg	141	7.6	7.3	18.1	147	+ Distinctive looks, highly capable handling - Could be a bit more exciting	★★★★★
Peugeot RCZ R	204 F	14-15	4/5958	266/6000	243/1900	1280kg	211	5.9	-	-	155	+ Rewarding and highly effective when fully lit - Dated cabin, steering lacks feel	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Cayman	229 D	£42,897	4/1968	296/6500	280/1950	1355kg	225	5.1	-	-	170	+ Chassis remains a dream - Sounds like a Toyota GT86	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Cayman S	230 F	£51,853	4/2401	345/6500	310/1900	1355kg	259	4.6	4.4	-	171	+ Faster and better to drive than ever - Bring earplugs	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S (981)	202 F	13-16	6/3436	320/7400	273/4500	1320kg	247	5.0	4.5	10.5	175	+ The Cayman comes of age - Ehm...	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman GTS (981)	209 F	14-16	6/3436	335/7400	280/4750	1345kg	253	4.9	-	-	177	+ Tweak to improve an already sublime package - Slightly 'aftermarket' looks	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman GT4 (981)	221 F	15-16	6/3800	380/7400	310/4750	1340kg	288	4.4	-	-	183	+ evo Car of the Year 2015 (even though the 991 GT3 RS was there!) - Second-hand prices	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S (981)	231 F	06-13	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1350kg	237	5.2	-	-	172	+ Still want that 911? Yeah, us too	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman R (987)	158 F	11-13	6/3436	325/7400	273/4750	1295kg	255	5.0	-	-	175	+ Total handling excellence - Styling additions not too fast	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (991.2)	218 F	£77,801	6/2081	365/6500	332/1700	1430kg	259	4.6	-	-	183	+ Forced induction hasn't ruined the Carrera - Purists won't be happy	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991.2)	211 F	£87,335	6/2081	414/6500	369/1700	1440kg	292	4.3	-	-	191	+ Blindly fast - You'll want the sports exhaust	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera GTS (991.2)	234 F	£95,795	6/2081	414/6500	406/2150	1450kg	311	4.1	-	-	193	+ In near-drive coupe format, it's everything a 911 should be - Not all of an rear-drive coupes	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991.1)	201 F	12-15	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1455kg	283	4.5	4.3	9.5	188	+ A Carrera with supercar pace - Electric steering robot for some facilities	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (991.1)	199 F	13-15	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1465kg	293	4.5	-	-	185	+ More satisfying than rear-drive 991.1 Carrera - Choose your spec carefully	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S GTS (991.1)	208 D	15	6/3800	424/7500	324/5750	1470kg	293	4.4	-	-	189	+ The highlight of the 991.1 Carrera lineup - Pricy for a Carrera	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991.2)	121 F	08-11	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1425kg	271	4.7	-	-	188	+ Poise, precision, blinding pace - Feels a bit clinical	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991.1)	070 F	04-08	6/3824	350/6500	295/4400	1420kg	246	4.6	-	-	182	+ evo Car of the Year 2010 - Tech overload?	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (996, 3.4)	010 F	98-01	6/3387	300/6800	258/4600	1320kg	231	5.2	-	-	174	+ evo Car of the Year 1998; beautifully polished - Some like a bit of rough	★★★★★
Radical XCR Turbo 500	204 F	16	6/6540	405/6500	407/6000	1070kg	561	2.8	-	-	185	+ Immense accessible performance - Fit, fresh and deflating lack these	★★★★★
Radical XCR Turbo 500	204 F	15	6/6436	330/6100	441/5000	1006kg	420	2.6	-	-	185	+ Huge performance, intuitive adjustability, track ability - Compromised for road use	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Wraith	205 D	£240,768	12/5992	624/5600	590/1500	2360kg	260	4.6	-	-	155	+ Refinement, chassis, drivetrain - Shared componentry lets cabin down	★★★★★
Subaru BRZ	204 F	£22,405	4/1908	191/7000	151/6400	1230kg	163	7.6	-	-	140	+ Fine chassis, great steering - Weak engine, not the slide-happy car they promised	★★★★★
Toyota GT86	234 F	£26,400	4/1908	127/6000	151/6400	1240kg	161	7.6	6.9	16.5	140	+ More fun than its Subaru BRZ cousin - Same lack of torque, poor interior quality	★★★★★
TVR Sagaris (Mk1)	237 F	84-89	4/5158	102/6000	105/5000	977kg	127	8.2	-	-	124	+ Mid-engined fun comes no more affordable - Finding a good one will take time	★★★★★
TVR Sagaris (Mk2)	237 F	95-97	6/3096	406/7500	340/5000	1078kg	383	3.7	-	-	185	+ Looks outrageous - 426bhp feels a touch optimistic	★★★★★
TVR Tuscani (Mk2)	076 F	05-07	6/3096	400/7000	315/5250	1100kg	360	4.0	-	-	185	+ Possibly TVR's best ever car - Aerodynamic 'enhancements'	★★★★★
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	004 F	98-04	6/3096	350/6800	330/5000	1130kg	315	4.4	5.0	11.4	160+	+ Accomplished and desirable - Check chassis for corrosion	★★★★★
VW Scirocco GT20 TSI/GTS	155 F	£26,050	4/1984	214/5500	258/1500	1360kg	158	6.5	-	-	153	+ Golf GTI price and performance - Interior lacks flair	★★★★★
VW Scirocco R	200 D	£30,690	4/1984	276/6000	258/2500	1426kg	187	5.7	-	-	155	+ Great engine, grown-up dynamics - Perhaps a little too grown-up for some	★★★★★

SUPERCARS

OUR CHOICE



McLaren 720S. The looks take a little getting used to, but there's no arguing with the driving experience, which blends scalpel-sharp precision with mind-boggling pace and suspension that works with the road to make it all useable. And it's faster than a P1 on track, too. An electrifying experience.



BEST OF THE REST

The **Ferrari 488 GTB** has a spectacular turbocharged V8 and the chassis to exploit it, while the **Lamborghini Huracán Performante** (left) counters with arip-roaring naturally aspirated V10. The **Lamborghini** is a corking entry-level supercar, and the latest **Porsche 911 GT3** is as great to drive as they have always been.

Aston Martin Vanquish (Mk2)	203F	£102,995	12/5955	568/6500	465/5500	1730kg	332	3.8	-	-	201	+ Much better than the DBS it succeeds, especially in 2015MY form - It's no Ferrari F12	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk2)	225F	£100,050	12/5955	595/7000	465/5500	1730kg	348	3.5	3.9	8.3	201	+ Noise, poise, drama and charm - Not as rounded as the DB11	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk1)	110F	05-07	12/5955	520/7000	425/5800	1875kg	282	4.8	4.9	10.1	200	+ Vanquish joins the supercar greats - A bit intimidating at the limit	★★★★★
Aston Martin One-77	129F	10-12	12/5955	553/8000	553/8000	1740kg	438	3.7	-	-	220+	- The engine, the looks, the drama - Geared to impress, not to be used	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10	234F	£123,330	10/5204	533/7800	398/6500	1595kg	440	3.5	-	-	198	+ All the R8 you really need - Some may balk at a manual gearbox	★★★★★
Audi R8 Spyder V10	239F	£132,020	10/5204	533/7800	398/6500	1720kg	315	3.6	3.2	7.2	197	+ Open-top even better for enjoying that V10 - Being mistaken for a posh, cramped seating	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Plus	229F	£138,330	10/5204	602/8250	413/6500	1555kg	393	3.2	-	-	205	+ Timeless drivetrain, huge performance - Needs to be driven hard to really engage	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10	181D	10-15	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	325	4.1	3.9	8.4	194	+ Real supercar feel - The V8 is cheaper, and still superb	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Plus	180F	13-15	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1570kg	351	3.8	-	-	198	+ An R8 fit to take on the 458 and 12C - Firm ride may be too much for some	★★★★★
Audi R8 GT	169F	10-12	10/5204	522/8000	398/6500	1520kg	369	3.6	-	-	199	+ Everything we love about the R8 - Not as hardcore as we wanted	★★★★★
Audi R8 LMS	224F	15	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1520kg	356	3.4	-	-	198	+ More of everything that makes the R8 great - 5-tronic transmission not perfect	★★★★★
BMW M4	110F	78-81	6/3500	277/6500	236/5000	1303kg	216	5.9	-	-	161	+ Early supercar icon - A bit under-endowed these days	★★★★★
Bugatti Chiron	235F	£25.5m	16/7993	1479/6700	1880/2000	1695kg	753	2.5	-	-	261	+ Backs up the numbers with feel and emotion - Limited top speed!	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	134F	05-11	16/7993	987/6000	922/2200	1888kg	531	2.5	2.8	5.8	253	+ Superbly engineered four-wheel-drive quad-turbo rocket - Ex. lacks luggage space?	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4 Super Sport	151F	10-11	16/7993	1813/6400	1106/3000	1838kg	654	2.5	-	-	258	+ Was once the world's fastest supercar - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport Vitesse	185F	11-15	16/7993	1813/6400	1106/3000	1900kg	640	2.6	-	-	255	+ Was the world's fastest convertible - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals	★★★★★
Bugatti EB110	178F	94-95	12/3500	552/8000	415/3750	1618kg	347	3.6	-	-	213	+ Superbly engineered four-wheel-drive quad-turbo-rocket - It just fizzled out	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	033F	99-03	8/666	638/6500	604/5000	1258kg	424	3.4	3.8	7.6	205	+ Huge pace and character - Tailquay of travails if there's rain	★★★★★
Ferrari 488 GTB	228F	£183,984	8/3902	661/6500	561/3000	1478kg	455	3.0	-	-	205+	+ Staggeringly capable - Lacks a little of the 458's sheer excitement	★★★★★
Ferrari 488 Spider	221F	£204,411	8/3902	661/6500	561/3000	1524kg	440	3.0	-	-	203+	+ All the usual 488s' thrills - but with the wind in your hair - See left	★★★★★
Ferrari 458	221F	09-15	8/4497	562/6000	398/6000	1465kg	384	3.4	3.6	8.2	202+	+ An astounding achievement - Paddle-shift not	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Speciale	221F	14-15	8/4497	562/6000	398/6000	1395kg	384	3.4	3.6	8.2	202+	+ One of the best 458s ever - Regular 458s nothing	★★★★★
Ferrari F430	103F	04-10	8/4348	498/8500	343/5250	1440kg	330	4.0	-	-	194+	+ Best build - I don't own this, but I love it	★★★★★

FROM THE MAKERS OF LAND ROVER MONTHLY

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MAKE & MODEL	SEAT NO.	PRICE	ENGINE (CV)	0-100 (s)	TOP SPEED (mph)	LB/FT/MPH	WEIGHT (kg)	BURNIN (s)	8-SPM (s)	8-SPM (s)	8-SPM (s)	8-SPM (s)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	121F	107-10	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1350kg	378	3.6	3.5	7.7	198	198	198	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Modena	163F	100-04	8/3586	304/8500	275/4750	1390kg	288	4.5	-	-	183+	183+	183+	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale	242F	103-04	8/3586	420/8500	275/4750	1280kg	333	4.1	-	-	186	186	186	★★★★★
Ferrari F355 Berlinetta	231F	104-99	8/4306	374/8250	268/6000	1350kg	281	4.7	-	-	183	183	183	★★★★★
Ferrari 612 Superfast	238F	1253/004	12/6466	768/8500	530/7000	1630kg	402	2.9	-	-	211	211	211	★★★★★
Ferrari F12 Berlinetta	180F	12-17	12/6466	768/8500	530/7000	1630kg	405	3.1	-	-	211	211	211	★★★★★
Ferrari F12tdf	230F	13/40/051	12/6262	768/8500	520/6250	1620kg	514	2.9	-	-	214	214	214	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	101F	12-16	12/5990	611/7600	448/5600	1690kg	368	3.7	3.5	7.4	205	205	205	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTD	181F	11-12	12/5990	668/8250	452/6500	1605kg	418	3.4	-	-	208+	208+	208+	★★★★★
Ferrari 575M Fiorano Handling Pack	200F	102-06	12/5748	580/7250	434/5250	1688kg	208	3.7	4.2	9.6	205+	205+	205+	★★★★★
Ferrari 550 Maranello	186F	106-102	12/5474	478/7000	420/5500	1600kg	287	4.4	-	-	199	199	199	★★★★★
Ferrari GTCA Lusso	225F	12/05	6/3800	430/430	590/5700	1609kg	360	3.4	-	-	208	208	208	★★★★★
Ferrari FF	184F	11-15	12/6262	658/8200	504/6000	1880kg	347	3.7	-	-	208	208	208	★★★★★
Ferrari 612 Scaglietti	040F	104-11	12/5748	533/7250	434/5250	1675kg	289	4.0	4.3	9.8	199	199	199	★★★★★
Ferrari LaFerrari	203F	13-15	12/6262	96/0/8000	664/6750	1574kg	613	3.0	-	-	217+	217+	217+	★★★★★
Ferrari Enzo	203F	102-04	12/5990	651/7800	485/5500	1636kg	445	3.7	3.5	6.7	214	214	214	★★★★★
Ferrari F50	186F	105-97	12/4699	531/8500	347/5500	1230kg	424	3.9	-	-	202	202	202	★★★★★
Ferrari F40	222F	8F-92	8/2308	471/7000	426/4400	1006kg	437	4.1	-	-	201	201	201	★★★★★
Ford GT	241F	14/01	6/450/000	550/5900	500/3750	1583kg	353	3.9	-	-	205	205	205	★★★★★
Ford GT	200F	104-06	8/4500	550/5500	500/3750	1583kg	353	3.9	-	-	205	205	205	★★★★★
Hennessey Venom GT	180F	11-17	8/7000	12/4/6500	1155/4000	1244kg	1016	2.5	-	-	270	270	270	★★★★★
Honda NSX	233F	15/44/765	6/3403	573	476/2000	1776kg	328	2.9	3.0	6.0	191	191	191	★★★★★
Honda NSX (NA2)	188F	107-05	6/3379	276/7300	224/5300	1400kg	196	5.7	-	-	168	168	168	★★★★★
Honda NSX (NA2)	100F	102-03	6/3379	276/7300	224/5300	1270kg	221	4.4	-	-	168	168	168	★★★★★
Infiniti L220	017F	12-14	6/4500	542/7200	425/4500	1750kg	375	3.7	-	-	213	213	213	★★★★★
Koenigsegg One:1	202F	15/2/0m	8/5065	1641/7500	1010/6000	1660kg	1002	2.9	-	-	273	273	273	★★★★★
Koenigsegg Agera R	180F	11-14	8/5032	1241/7000	885/2700	1439kg	706	2.8	-	-	273	273	273	★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCXR Edition	181F	10-10	8/4800	1004/7000	796/5600	1280kg	797	2.9	-	-	250+	250+	250+	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracan RWD	220F	15/5/400	10/5204	512/8000	307/6500	1396kg	385	3.4	-	-	199	199	199	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracan	209D	15/8/500	10/5204	602/8250	435/6500	1423kg	430	3.2	-	-	204	204	204	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracan Performante	242F	12/5/24	10/5204	631/8000	442/6500	1583kg	444	2.9	-	-	204	204	204	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP550-2	180D	10-13	10/5204	552/8000	368/6500	1403kg	398	3.7	-	-	202	202	202	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP550-2 Balboni	138F	10-10	10/5204	542/8000	368/6500	1380kg	439	3.9	-	-	199	199	199	★★★★★
Lamborghini LP570-4 Superleggera	152F	10-13	10/5204	562/8000	368/6500	1340kg	426	3.4	3.5	-	202	202	202	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo	094F	103-08	10/4/61	531/8000	376/4250	1430kg	364	4.0	4.3	9.4	196	196	196	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera	104F	107-08	10/4/61	532/8000	376/4250	1420kg	373	3.8	-	-	196	196	196	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador	184F	12/6/140	12/6/140	600/8250	500/5500	1578kg	445	2.9	-	-	217	217	217	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador S	240F	12/71/142	12/6/140	730/9400	500/5500	1578kg	471	2.9	-	-	217	217	217	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP550-2	261F	13/21/73	12/6/140	760/9400	500/5500	1525kg	493	2.8	-	-	217+	217+	217+	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murcielago LP640	092F	106-11	12/6/140	631/8000	487/6000	1665kg	385	3.8	-	-	211	211	211	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murcielago LP670-4SV	203F	107-11	12/6/140	661/8000	487/6000	1659kg	429	3.3	3.2	7.3	212	212	212	★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo VT10.0	088D	101-06	12/6/140	572/7500	478/5400	1650kg	351	4.0	-	-	206	206	206	★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo VT10.0	089F	101-06	12/6/140	572/7500	478/5400	1650kg	351	4.0	-	-	206	206	206	★★★★★
Lexus LFA	200F	10-12	12/5805	552/8000	354/6600	1480kg	397	3.7	-	-	202	202	202	★★★★★
Maserati MC12	070F	104-05	12/5808	621/7500	481/5500	1445kg	437	3.8	-	-	205	205	205	★★★★★
McLaren 540C	234F	12/6/140	8/3990	533/7500	368/3500	1311kg	431	3.5	-	-	199	199	199	★★★★★
McLaren 570S	220F	15/45/305	8/3990	562/7500	443/5000	1400kg	397	3.2	-	-	204	204	204	★★★★★
McLaren 570S Track Pack	235D	15/50/305	8/3990	562/7500	443/5000	1400kg	404	3.2	-	-	204	204	204	★★★★★
McLaren 570S Spider	239F	15/50/305	8/3990	562/7500	443/5000	1408kg	381	3.2	-	-	204	204	204	★★★★★
McLaren 720S	242F	12/6/140	8/3990	562/7500	443/5000	1408kg	381	3.2	-	-	204	204	204	★★★★★
McLaren 650S	226F	15-17	8/3990	667/7000	516/5500	1288kg	50	2.9	-	-	205	205	205	★★★★★
McLaren 675LT	228F	15-17	8/3990	667/7000	516/5500	1288kg	50	2.9	-	-	205	205	205	★★★★★
McLaren 675LT Spider	222D	16-17	8/3990	667/7000	516/5500	1288kg	495	2.9	-	-	203	203	203	★★★★★
McLaren 12C	228F	11-14	8/3990	667/7000	516/5500	1288kg	495	2.9	-	-	203	203	203	★★★★★
McLaren P1	228F	13-15	8/3990	667/7000	516/5500	1288kg	495	2.9	-	-	203	203	203	★★★★★
McLaren P1	228F	13-15	8/3990	667/7000	516/5500	1288kg	495	2.9	-	-	203	203	203	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT R	236F	15/43/260	8/3982	571/6250	516/1000	1555kg	37	3.6	3.3	7.1	198	198	198	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	190F	10-15	8/6208	563/6800	470/4750	1620kg	335	3.9	4.1	8.4	197	197	197	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Black Series	204F	13-15	8/6208	622/7400	468/5500	1550kg	408	3.6	-	-	196	196	196	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren	228F	13-17	8/5430	617/6500	575/3250	1698kg	390	3.8	-	-	208	208	208	★★★★★
Noble M600	184F	10/4/490	6/50/000	604/9000	500/5500	1698kg	591	3.5	3.8	12.7	225	225	225	★★★★★
Pagani Huayra	105F	15/5/1m	12/5800	720/9800	737/2250	1550kg	542	3.3	-	-	224	224	224	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda 760RS	170F	15/5/1m	12/7291	755/9400	575/4500	1206kg	630	3.3	-	-	217+	217+	217+	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda S 7.3	096F	102-05	12/7291	755/9400	553/4050	1206kg	441	3.7	-	-	220	220	220	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda R	186F	105-06	12/7291	62/6/850	575/4000	1206kg	447	3.6	-	-	214+	214+	214+	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda Cinque Roadster	147D	104-10	12/7291	660/6200	575/4000	1206kg	562	3.4	-	-	217+	217+	217+	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (991.2)	242F	16-16	6/3996	488/8250	324/6250	1430kg	333	3.5	-	-	196	196	196	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.2)	243F	12/07/506	6/3800	600/7000	553/2500	1400kg	471	2.8	-	-	211	211	211	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.1)	206F	16-16	6/3996	488/8250	324/6250	1430kg	333	3.5	-	-	196	196	196	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.1)	223F	15-16	6/3996	488/8250	330/6250	1420kg	353	3.3	3.0	7.1	193	193	193	★★★★★
Porsche 911 R (991.1)	220F	16	6/3996	488/8250	330/6250	1370kg	366	3.8	-	-	200	200	200	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (991.2)	182F	109-11	6/3997	420/7000	319/6250	1393kg	361	4.2	9.2	9.4	194	194	194	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (1.8 997.2)	209F	10-10	6/3997	420/7000	319/6250	1370kg	361	4.2	9.2	9.4	194	194	194	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (1.8 997.2)	187F	11-12	6/3996	488/8250	330/6250	1370kg	366	3.8	-	-	200	200	200	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.2)	204F	10-13	6/3800	611/6500	516/2250	1370kg	453	3.5	-	-	205	205	205	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (991.1)	182F	107-09	6/3800	490/7600	268/5500	1399kg	288	4.3	4.3	9.4	192	192	192	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.1)	125F	107-09	6/3800	490/7600	268/5500	1379kg	302	4.2	-	-	193	193	193	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.2)	101F	13-15	6/3800	375/7400	284/5000	1200kg	272	4.5	4.3	9.2	190	190	190	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (996.2)	104F	13-15	6/3800	375/7400	284/5000	1200kg	280	4.5	-	-	190	190	190	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 (996.2)	072F	104-06	6/3800	425/7500	273/5000	1420kg	328	4.0	-	-	198	198	198	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 (996.1)	242F	100-01	6/3800	350/7200	273/5000	1550kg	271	4.8	4.5	10.3	187	187	187	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo (991.2)	234F													

TRACK TIMES

🕒 = new this month. **Red** denotes the car is the fastest in its class on that track



ANGLESEY COASTAL CIRCUIT

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
McLaren 720S	1:11.5	242	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 (991.2)	1:13.4	230	Yes
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.1)	1:13.6	-	Yes
Porsche 911 Turbo S (991.1)	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 (2014 MY)	1:16.9	210	Yes
Mercedes-AMG GT S	1:17.0	210	Yes
Porsche 911 Carrera (991.1)	1:17.8	109	Yes
Porsche Cayman (981)	1:18.9	209	-
Aston Martin V430	1:19.1	210	-
Lotus Evija S (V6)	1:19.1	209	-
SEAT Leon Cupra 280 Sub8 (fastest hot hatch)	1:19.1	232	Yes
BMW M4	1:19.2	199	Yes
BMW i8	1:19.4	210	-
Honda Civic Type R (FK2)	1:19.5	262	-
Renault Sport Mégane Trophy 275	1:19.6	262	-
BMW M5 Competition Pack (F10M) (fastest saloon)	1:19.7	-	Yes
Audi R8 V6 (Mk1)	1:20.1	201	-
BMW M3 Si	1:20.4	262	-
Nissan 370Z Nismo	1:20.5	209	-



BEDFORD AUTODROME WEST CIRCUIT

LENGTH 1.8 miles (reconfigured May 2015; earlier times not comparable)

BMW M4 Competition Package (F82, 2016 MY) (fastest coupe)	1:23.4	240	-
Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio (fastest saloon)	1:23.6	237	-
VW Golf GTI Clubsport S (fastest hot hatch)	1:24.1	227	-
SEAT Leon Cupra 280 (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	-
BMW M3 Competition Package (F80, 2016 MY)	1:24.7	237	-
Audi RS5 (F5)	1:25.0	240	-
Renault Sport Mégane 275 Trophy-R	1:25.1	227	-
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupe (W205)	1:25.6	240	-
Honda Civic Type R (FK9)	1:26.2	241	-
Ford Focus RS (Mk3, on standard tyres)	1:26.9	241	-
SEAT Leon Cupra 300	1:27.8	241	-
Ford Fiesta ST Mountune	1:29.5	263	-
Media MKX-S 2.0i Sport (Mk4) (fastest sports car)	1:29.8	-	Yes
Toyota GT86 (fastest coupe)	1:29.9	-	Yes

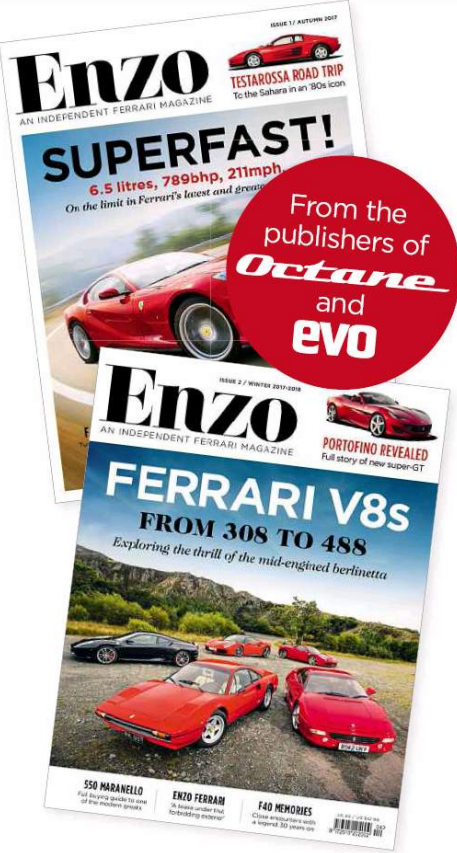


BLYTON PARK OUTER CIRCUIT

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)	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 Evija S (V6)	1:04.4	177	-
Porsche 911 Carrera (991.1)	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 GT3 (981)	1:05.5	-	Yes
Porsche Cayman S (981)	1:05.5	189	-
Caterham Seven 420R	1:05.7	220	Yes
VUHOS	1:06.5	220	Yes
Zenos E10 S	1:06.6	214	-
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black Series	1:06.9	177	-
Renault Sport Mégane 275 Trophy-R (fastest hot hatch)	1:07.3	205	Yes
SEAT Leon Cupra 280 Sub8	1:07.6	220	-
BMW M235i	1:08.7	-	Yes
Mini John Cooper Works GP (R56)	1:08.7	181	-
Renault Sport Mégane R26R	1:08.9	181	-
VW Golf GTI Performance Pack (Mk7)	1:10.3	192	-
Toyota GT86	1:12.8	177	-

THE ULTIMATE FERRARI FIX

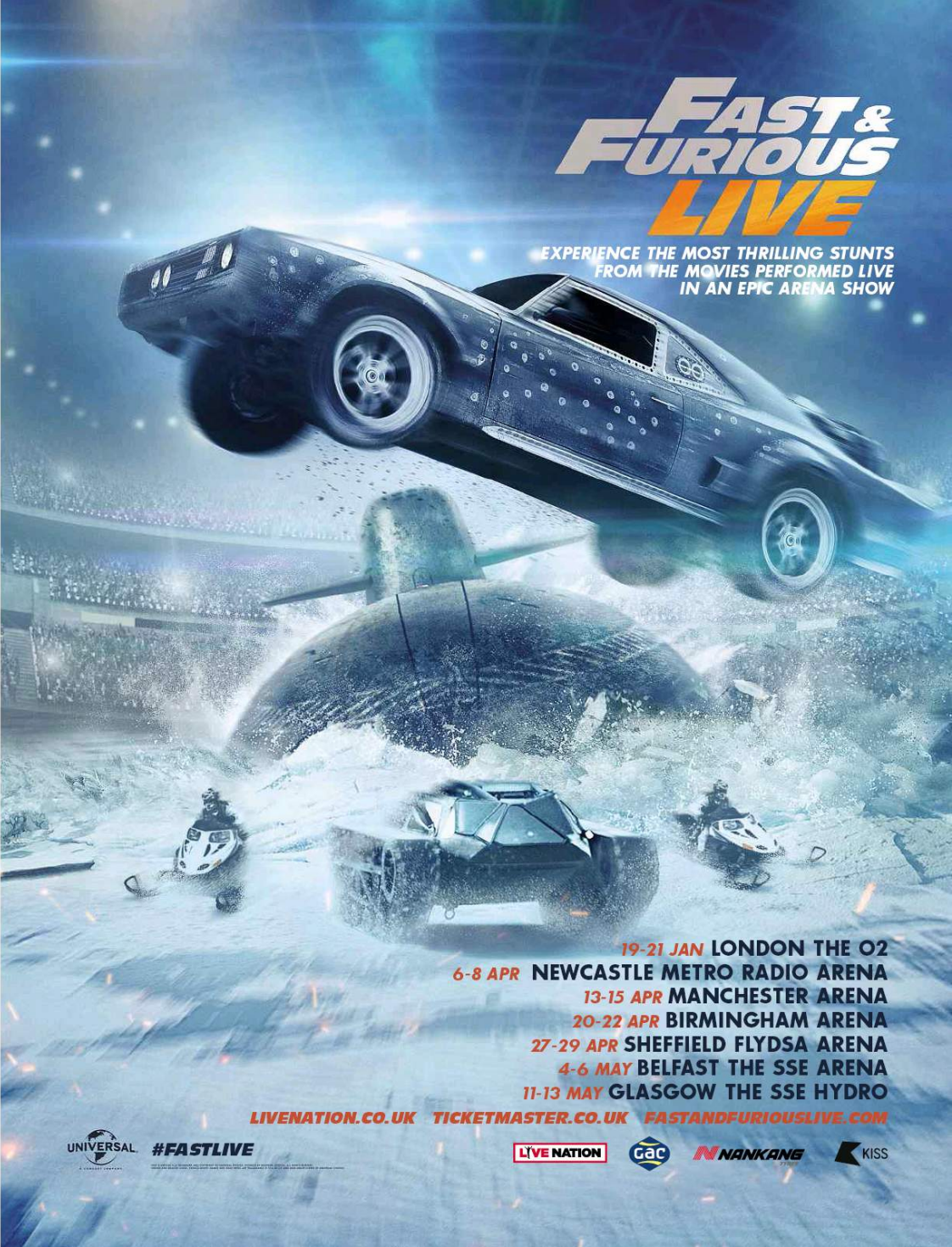


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McLAREN SENNA

McLaren revealed its latest Ultimate Series model this month, the £750,000 Senna, and while its overall look is dividing opinion, it has no shortage of exquisite function-led design details. Turn to page 13 for the full story.



Alpine Adventure



2000 mile, 6-day road tour

What's Included

- Return Eurotunnel crossings
- 5 nights luxury accommodation
- Buffet breakfasts
- Guide to the best driving roads in the Alps
- Tickets to the Austrian F1 GP
- Nurburgring lap pass
- Nurburgring high speed taxi ride in Jaguar F-type
- SVR race car (£250 supplement per person)
- Completion of event group dinner at Nurburg
- Reunion track day in the UK
- All for 2 people

Date: Thu 28 June - Tue 03 July, 2018

£2500 per car (2 people). Offer price until 1/1/18. Normal price £2800



Italian Grand Tour

2000 mile, 6-day road tour

What's Included

- Return Eurotunnel crossings
- 5 nights luxury accommodation
- Buffet breakfasts
- Guide to the best driving roads in the Alps
- Tickets to the Italian F1 GP
- Helicopter flight over the Cote d'Azur (£300 supplement per person)
- Completion of event group dinner at Challes-les-Eaux
- Reunion track day in the UK
- All for 2 people



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Great Western Run



2000 mile, 1-week road tour

What's Included

- Return direct flights
- Rental of a Ford Mustang/Chevy Camaro/Dodge Challenger
- Vehicle insurance
- Sat Nav rental
- 7 nights luxury accommodation
- Buffet breakfasts
- Helicopter flight over the Grand Canyon (£300 supplement per person)
- Admission to shooting range & firearm rental in El Paso
- Reunion track day in the UK
- All for 2 people

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