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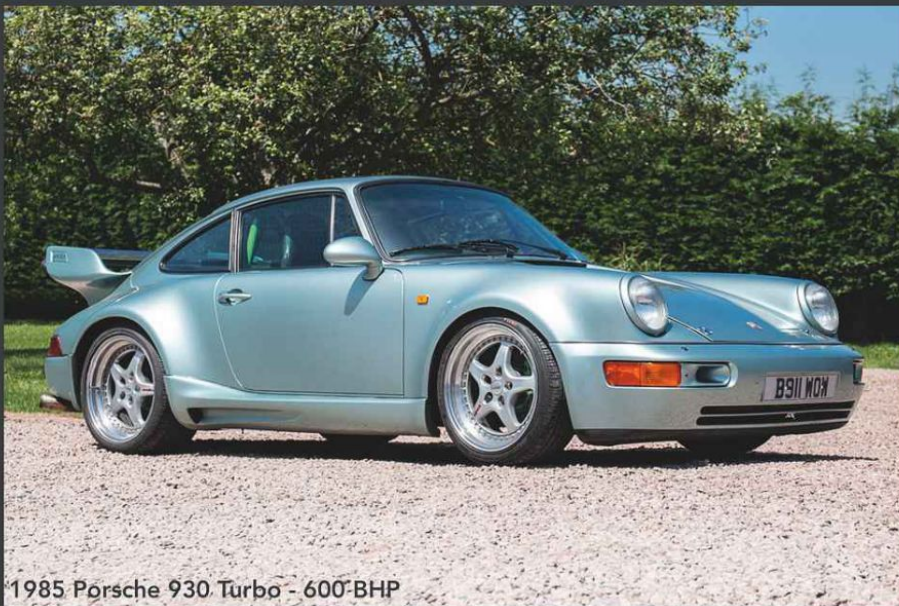
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That time Richard Meaden had to get a McLaren F1 sideways on the road, and our then relative newbie photographer Aston Parrott had to capture the moment. No pressure

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Bedford Autodrome

Ed speak



THE USED CAR WORMHOLE IS THE EVO READER'S

nemesis. Calculating the hours spent – no, not wasted – clicking and flicking through the classifieds is a number no one needs to know anything about other than it was all time very well spent.

Dreaming, fantasising, scheming and then borrowing someone's fag packet to work the man maths out on is a pastime far more productive than, say, watching Extreme E wreak havoc across some of the most fragile landscapes on Earth in order to raise awareness of just how

fragile these landscapes are.

Used car purchases are also more emotive than new ones. Actually, that's not strictly true because buying new is still special for some, but it's becoming a faceless transaction, one devoid of emotion, lacking the anticipation expected when buying something that you have invested so much of your time in researching, so much time sourcing the right car just for you. Selecting option packs and a monthly repayment plan isn't quite the same.

The thrill of the chase has never been so gut-wrenchingly uncomfortable as when you're in the process of buying a used car. It's a unique experience. Losing hours on new-car configurators is a good way to avoid watching the Monaco Grand Prix, but it's not the same as comparing physical cars that actually exist and could potentially be parked outside your house within the next few hours.

Used car purchases, especially those that are more indulgent than they are necessary, are also more personal. More often than not there's a backstory, a compelling reason and a justification that makes sense to the likes of you and me. Actions that make us all think, 'You know what, I should do that too,' when a friend or colleague takes the plunge. After all, life is too short to drive boring cars but it's also long enough to regret doing so.

Now, will you excuse me while I refresh the Lotus Elise classifieds pages and delete the quote for the new kitchen.

Stuart Gallagher, Editor @stuartg917

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Driven

by ADAM TOWLER PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

Aston Martin Vantage F1 Edition

With more power, more grip and more control, this new special edition is the best current-generation Vantage yet

NOPE, I'M NOT SOLD ON THE WING. Or the wheel design, and neither the mix of gloss carbon, satin paint and matt stripes, or those modish diamond-cut wheels. Oops, did I say that out loud? Sorry. Unintentional. These things are entirely subjective, of course. You may feel differently, and you're entirely free to do so. But 'F1 Edition' – really? The obvious conclusion is that this is a special edition timed to coincide with Seb and Lance's weekend wheels turning green. As manufacturers struggle to shift expensive new high-performance cars, every opportunity has to be capitalised upon to shift more metal.

Actually, while your cynicism might point you

in that direction, the above really is not the case; I can only encourage you to read on, because this is one special edition that definitely needs to be glowing angrily on your radar.

The F1 Edition has its basis in the work Aston Martin has undertaken to create the 2021 Safety and Medical cars for F1. The latter is a conscientiously developed DBX, the former a Vantage with both higher performance and endurance for what is a very demanding role once you get into the nitty gritty of the mission statement. We'll be talking more about those cars in a future issue, but off the back of them comes the F1 Edition road car, which according to Aston's head of performance, Matt Becker, is





much more than just a 'wings and stripes' job; rather it is an attempt to push the performance of the Vantage without going so far as to exchange war paint with a 911 GT3. Aston boss Tobias Moers wants the company to launch more model derivatives, to give customers more choice, and to create a hierarchy for buyers to aim for in the longer term. And I wouldn't mind betting that there's also tacit acknowledgement that the company's recent model blitz resulted in cars like the DB11 and Vantage being positioned too closely together, neither one successfully dominating the GT sector or taking the sports car fight to the likes of Porsche's 992 and Audi's R8. The F1 Edition is a chance to give the Vantage a sharper set of claws.

When Becker tells you that the base of the steering column has been pinned to remove a vestigial amount of compliance that was originally engineered into it, you know this is going to be an interesting car. The thinking during the Vantage's development back in the middle of the previous decade was that a GT car didn't

'It feels like a fundamentally different Vantage in the first 50 yards'

necessarily need to inform you about the road's surface all the time. But a genuine sports car should, and so it has gone. The front spring rate is the same as before, but the bump stops are stiffer for more support, while there's also been a 30 per cent increase in the low-speed rebound damping. Chasing that crucial steering precision has also led to the front shear panel – effectively a tray underneath the suspension that also has the effect of tying everything together – doubling in thickness.

At the rear, the spring rate is up 10 per cent and the compression damping by 20, while the bushing on the upper control arms is 20 per

cent stiffer. The goal was to vertically support the car more, and to improve the tyre's contact patch with the ground. Talking of which, the F1 runs on Pirelli P Zeros in a 21-inch diameter for the first time; Moers was keen to avoid fitting a track-focused tyre but at the same time was looking for a significant drop in the car's Ring lap time. Paying such close attention to empirical measurement at that cathedral of fascination has usually been an anathema to Aston Martin, but the times they are a-changin' and Becker's team has responded in kind. Modifying the P Zero's compound led to them overheating, but the reduced sidewall of the 21-inch size led to an increase in lateral stiffness that brought an improvement without a compound change. The overall grip increase is small, but the plateau of available grip and the subsequent drop off is much broader, in the wet or dry, than the smaller rubber. The lap time now stands around 7min 30sec, in case you were wondering – a 15-second improvement over what the standard Vantage can achieve.



Say what you like about the new rear wing, but the combination of it and a new front splitter, dive planes and underbody additions mean that the Vantage has gone from a car that at its maximum velocity produces a small amount of front lift and 40kg of downforce at the rear, to one that has 60kg of downforce over the front axle and 150kg at the rear. Sure, you're not likely to feel the full force of that very often as an owner, but the increase in stability should be noticeable at lower velocities and it's nice to know the F1's looks aren't just for show.

The final change for your extra £17,600 outlay over a regular Vantage – the F1 Edition starts at £142,000 – is a small tickle for the powertrain, with peak power rising a nominal amount from 503 to 527bhp. Torque remains the same at 505lb ft, but this peak is held for longer with a view to making the engine more drivable, even if Aston's official acceleration and top speed figures are unchanged at 3.6sec and 195mph. And that ZF eight-speed auto (there's no seven-speed manual option for the F1 Edition,

but given our views on the quality of that shift perhaps on this occasion it's not the end of the world) has had some subtle development, too, because the aforementioned big boss felt the engineered-in jolts between ratios in the more aggressive settings were a bit passé, and that drivers would prefer a clean shift that was as fast as those Wellesbourne-based engineers could make it, like they do at Weissach. They've also included some clever software that means the 'box is much less likely to refuse a downshift when braking hard from speed, as it can now foresee that revs and wheel speed will match by the time the action is implemented – particularly beneficial during track driving.

So as you can see, the F1 Edition is far from a light makeover, and, frankly, even if I wasn't aware of all of the above, it would still be patently obvious that it was a thorough job, because

Above: F1 Edition gets unique interior trim, combining black leather with grey Alcantara, plus stripes and stitching in a choice of lime green, black, grey or red

this feels like a fundamentally different and far more appealing Vantage even in the first 50 yards. Sure, all the things that have always been loveable about this car are present, from the low-slung driving position to the sinister snarl of the V8 and its instant pick-up. But you only need to nudge the steering wheel left or right to sense a calmness and fluidity to the way it responds that simply isn't there in the standard car. The modifications may sound as though they've made this a more demanding machine along with a more involving and ultimately rewarding one, but just as the ride quality of the F1 Edition is far from compromised – I think I actually prefer its accurate and direct composure when dealing with surface irregularities – so the precision of its steering makes it an easier car to drive at all speeds. Becker was chasing linearity of response and he and his team have succeeded admirably: it's an easier car to place on the road than the standard Vantage, and one that begs to be positioned down to the last millimetre, almost goading you to up your own game as you drive.

Driven





Suddenly the Vantage doesn't seem so wide and intimidating, the effects of sitting low in its bathtub-esque cabin negated by the driver's increased confidence. The Warwickshire lanes close to Aston's HQ are narrow but I'm rarely giving it a second thought, instead wishing they continued threefold so I could really get in a groove, relishing the way you can thread the car along such roads with a real sense of purpose.

The second really obvious difference to before is how little seems to be going on at the rear axle. Becker admits the standard car can get a little busy when attempting to deploy all that V8 grunt on uneven surfaces, but instantly I notice how the rear suspension no longer seems to be locked in a push-me-pull-me tussle with the torque being transmitted via the rear driveshafts. Again, it's just so much more confidence inspiring because rather than the battle forcing its way to the front of your mind, you're now free to listen to the subtler messages about grip and impending slip that the car is trying to tell you.

In the dry the F1 Edition has surprisingly strong traction, despite its turbo-fed V8 and traditional front-engine, rear-wheel-drive layout, but when the limit of grip is exceeded it feels natural to let the rear overspeed slightly on the edge of a slide. I find myself driving with the ESP safety net off just on the off-chance a hooligan moment suddenly materialises – again, not something I'd have been particularly inclined to bother with before. Another small tweak that's helped in this regard is the adoption of an additional damper between the gearbox mount and the car. The team tried harder mounts but found the subsequent deterioration in NVH unacceptable in a car that's supposed to retain most of its GT credentials, but the damper helps to soak up the momentum of the transaxle in rapid direction changes, and there's no denying the newfound composure at the rear.

There's also a greater sense of sophistication to the powertrain as well, which doesn't feel radically different from before, naturally, but just feels like the standard car after a high-protein shake and successful morning bowel movement. It's peppy, fluid and energetic, as well as doing all the rumbly, low-down torquey stuff you'd expect, and the new shift strategy is a masterstroke because it adds a lovely layer of gloss to the powertrain. A torque converter can't match a twin-clutch transmission for ultimate speed and that sense of precision we all crave, but just as with the steering, I no longer find myself questioning its



Above left: new rear wing contributes to a significant increase in downforce. **Far left:** wheels are 21-inch items for the first time; brake discs remain cast-iron

Driven



attributes because it feels authentic, and the realisation that I'm constantly driving it on the paddles rather than letting the 'box sort it out itself is a further reflection that this is a Vantage that wants to be driven with spirit and enthusiasm.

It's still a car with that weighty, almost British muscle car feel to how it goes about its business, but then that's no bad thing – the Vantage has always been its own character, as distinct from a Porsche, a McLaren or even something like a Bentley Continental GT as it's possible to be, yet within the same sphere of attractive coupes with major league performance. Yet for me, this car is a game changer for Aston Martin. Regular readers

Left: Racing Green, Jet Black and Lunar White are the colour options, each available with a gloss or satin finish. **Below left:** twin-turbocharged V8 gains 24bhp

'It's easily the best Vantage I've driven, probably the most sorted Aston in years'

will be aware that our history with the current Vantage is patchy: the early cars we drove simply weren't up to scratch, either through design and/or poor set-up on the day, and while later examples drove much better (and would have fared a lot better in that initial group test where the Vantage slumped to a minor position), it's a car that has continued to split opinion within our editorial team. I think it's fair to say editor

Gallagher fell for the example he ran on our Fast Fleet last year, whereas I admired it, but didn't covet it, enjoyed the idea of it more than the actual driving of it. The F1 Edition changes all that. It's easily the best Vantage I've driven, probably the most sorted Aston Martin I've driven in years, and if this is a sign of where the company is going with its cars then the future deserves to be very bright indeed. You can order one with either a coupe or roadster body, and it also comes in other colours, too. I feel an eCoty entry on the cards... ☒

Engine V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo **Power** 527bhp @ 6000rpm

Torque 505lb ft @ 2000-5000rpm

Weight (dry) 1530kg (350bhp/ton) **0-62mph** 3.6sec

Top speed 195mph **Basic price** £142,000

➤ Brilliantly hones the Vantage recipe

➤ Looks won't be for everyone

evo rating ★★★★★



by STUART GALLAGHER PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

Ferrari Portofino M

Roma upgrades bring a welcome new verve to Ferrari's entry-level drop-top

YOU'VE PROBABLY FORGOTTEN ABOUT the Portofino, what with the F8 arriving, the 296 GTB (see page 30) soon to join it, the Roma doing a strong impression of an Italian Aston Martin, and the launch of the 1000-horsepower SF90. But the Portofino is still integral to Ferrari, still a lynchpin in the journey for those who have promised themselves a car from Maranello one day. It remains the model that opens the door to a brand. Rival firms wish they could have a slither of its success. And now it's gained the Modificata treatment in the form of a rather considerable Roma-inspired reworking.

With the Roma being based on the Portofino's platform it was only a matter of time before the open-top car received the technical upgrades that the coupe has been equipped with since its launch last year. Chief amongst these are the adoption of the new eight-speed dual-clutch gearbox and the full suite of manettino settings (although these remain bespoke to the Portofino to take into account its additional 100kg of kerb weight and different weight distribution). Ferrari's latest adaptive dampers are also fitted, while the 3.9-litre turbocharged V8 gains 19bhp for a Roma-matching 611bhp (the increase would be twice that were it not for the need to fit gas particulate filters).

Despite being an entry-level model, the Portofino M has true supercar levels of performance. There's a sharp bark to the V8 when it catches, but once it's through its warm-up cycle the tone settles with a heavier-than-expected beat, swapping the metallic-edged precision of the F8's tone for a more traditional V8 burble. It's enough to prickle

your senses and wipe away a layer of cynicism that Ferrari's 2+2 might lack the depth of talent we expect from Maranello. Five miles further on and another layer evaporates as you settle into the controls, learn their weights and begin to look a little deeper into the Portofino M's talents.

Left in Comfort mode the ride is GT supple, and with the roof closed only a hint of wind noise at the C-pillar and the occasional squeak from the exquisite interior leather distracts from the engine's soundtrack. If, after 300 miles behind the wheel, you were asked to immediately cover the same distance again, you'd happily slip into the cockpit and do so.

Peak torque is quoted as 560lb ft from 3000rpm, but as is the Ferrari way each of the eight gears has its own torque curve, with higher gears delivering their peak at higher engine speeds, so there's a calm climb through the ratios rather than the sensation of a Herculean force shoving you at the horizon with every throttle application, regardless of the applied pressure. The new eight-speed gearbox, an adaptation of the unit also fitted to the SF90 hypercar and which took Ferrari four years to develop, is much better suited to the V8's power and torque delivery than its seven-speed predecessor, which could be indecisive in auto mode when you wanted clarity and precision.

However, with the full range of five manettino settings available, it's only a matter of time before you click the dial around to Sport, depress the button that knocks the dampers to 'bumpy road', and set the gearbox to manual to find out just how serious the updates are.

'Very' is the answer. There's added tension to





the Portofino now. The throttle moves with more freedom, the revs zinging around the dial with an F8 level of ferocity as the V8 primes itself.

It may be an entry-point Ferrari, but let off its leash its 611bhp still makes light work of propelling over 1600kg across the surface at a mesmerising pace. Refreshingly the engine enjoys revs, so you're not constantly crashing into the limiter or focusing on when to pull the right-hand paddle rather than enjoying the road. Shift lights on the top of the steering wheel fill your peripheral vision and the engine note switches tone just as quickly as they illuminate, preparing you for your obligations.

The suppleness of the ride that makes the Portofino M a relaxed GT in Comfort mode is traded for more body control in Sport, the car cornering with an unexpected flatness. But it's not an easy machine to read the harder you push, something that's not helped by Ferrari's direct and quick steering, which suits the nature of the mid-engined and V12 models but feels at odds here. The initial turn-in is too quick, making it harder to place the car precisely in a turn than you want it to be, and on

some surfaces there's a glassy layer to the action that sows a further seed of doubt in your mind. For a car that isn't all about performance, despite having it in abundance, you can't help but think a slower steering ratio would be more appropriate.

You can learn to work with the directness of the steering wheel, and the immediacy with which the Portofino finds its line, and with less haste and a calm approach there's a sweet spot to be found where the performance can be made to match the car's more natural wish to flow with the road rather than slice it up like a salami.

As Adam Towler discusses later in this issue, the convertible supercar offers a strange paradox. They're heavier and dynamically handicapped, and while their performance is rarely impacted over their coupe counterparts, fully exploiting it with the roof down can be a rather loud and uncomfortable experience (the Portofino suffers from poor wind

deflection with the roof down). And yet in today's world of ever more constraints and spying eyes they also offer a different take on the driver's car, one that operates across a wider window, providing a more detailed exposure to what's around you.

The Portofino M doesn't offer the violent thrust of a 911 Turbo S Cabriolet or the razor-sharp precision of a McLaren 720S Spider, but it also doesn't trade driver satisfaction for ultimate indulgence as Bentley's Conti GT Convertible does. It does, however, strike an appealing and compelling balance in the middle ground between both camps, which goes a very long way to explaining why it appeals to so many. On this showing, it's hard to see this appeal waning anytime soon. ❌

Engine V8, 3855cc, twin-turbo **Power** 611bhp @ 7500rpm
Torque 560lb ft @ 3000-5750rpm
Weight 1664kg (373bhp/ton) **0-62mph** 3.5sec
Top speed 199mph **Basic price** £175,345

➕ Bolder looks, usability matched to supercar performance

❌ Lacks the passion of the best Ferraris

evo rating ★★★★★

Above: bulging air intakes and slashes in the corners of the front bumper help mark out the M from its predecessor; new front seats feature air-scarf heating



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Honda Civic Type R Sport Line

Our Type R prayers have been answered! You can now order the FK8 without *that* rear wing

WHAT TOOK THEM SO LONG? FOR ALL THE brilliance of the FK8 Civic Type R, there has always been one sizeable stumbling block preventing many from signing up to monthly payments for one of the most accomplished hot hatches of this generation.

Cartoonish in proportion and aesthetically offensive to many, the sizeable aerodynamic device fixed to its tailgate rarely escaped mention when it came to this fifth iteration of the Civic Type R. It seems that what worked for Ford and the Escort RS Cosworth in 1992 found few fans on a Honda in 2017.

evo was torn over it too, pouring praise and lavishing plaudits on the Civic every time we drove

it, revelling in its mesmerising chassis, left short of breath by its turbocharged four-cylinder engine, beguiled by its six-speed gearbox... but appalled by the ridiculousness of that wing and left conflicted by a car we wholeheartedly would recommend but always felt self-conscious driving, especially those of us old enough to be offered Covid jabs before the clocks went forward.


Yet judging a car on a single piece of aero design felt wrong, so we presented the get-out-of-jail-free caveat of beauty being in the eye of the beholder and moved swiftly on to how fluid the FK8's steering felt, and why the diff's locking rate and integration were among the best we

had ever experienced on a front-wheel-drive car.

Or we'd quickly divert your attention inside and point out the sublime Recaro seats and ergonomics that felt as well sorted, if not better, than those of performance cars costing many multiples of the Civic's mid-thirty-thousand-pound price tag. Yes, we'd mention that the entertainment system was a bit shonky compared to those of European rivals, yet while it wasn't cutting edge, it was still intuitive to use and also had precisely zero impact on the driving experience. That wing did, though, occupying the rear-view mirror like a Peterbuilt 281 chasing you across the Mojave desert.

Not that it distracts you too much from the





experience of driving the bewinged Type R, though, as it's a car that's flooded with feel and packed with performance, the latter available across such a wide board thanks to the 2-litre four's blending of the best of turbocharged torque with the visceral punch of Honda's famed VTEC technology. The revs build instantly, pulling consistently as the tachometer sweeps around the dial and the engine note takes on that distinctive metallic tone that sounds like the valve gear is going to fire itself out of the air intake positioned at the top of the bonnet.

Then there's the gearshift so crisp that the tearproof alloy gearknob is rarely left alone, your

'It's a car that's flooded with feel and packed with performance'

hand drawn to it in the anticipation of having to move it around the tight, mechanical gate. Truth is, the engine doesn't need constant gearchanges with 295lb ft available from 2500rpm, but so

sweet is the shift, so rewarding each change, that you can't help but go up and down the 'box for the sake of it. Even when stationary at a set of traffic lights you can't leave it alone. Yet another example of why manuals matter.

We like the Type R. We like how it drives, how its enthusiasm for fun is infectious no matter your mood when you fall into the driver's seat. Its control weights are too good for a car at this level, which sounds an absurd thing to write, but there are premium sports cars from more established and traditional sports car manufacturers that don't offer such precise weighting as this humble Honda hot hatch.



We like how the chassis pivots around its midpoint to provide such a balanced approach when the straight ends and the corners appear. The grip across the front axle feels otherworldly at times, so sharp and precise in how it locks onto a line and hauls itself through any apex, the rear mobile enough that there's no need for provocation to get it to follow. When the mood takes you, the Type R leaves you in awe of its ability to entertain and enthrall you better than any hot hatch that doesn't replace its rear seats for a roll-cage.

And now you can buy it without the rear wing. Sorry it's taken 700 words to state what is clearly obvious from the images, but I thought all of the aforementioned was worth clarifying. The new model is called the Sport Line and it's the Type R for those who prefer the subtle approach to hot hatch design. Well, subtle for a Civic Type R.

So the wing's gone, replaced with a smaller fixed spoiler. But that's it, the rest of the Civic's pugnacious Type R look remains largely unchanged, introducing a balance to the car that's lost when the overbearing larger aero device is fitted. Painted

Above: without the wing, the Type R loses some of the visual bulk to the rear quarters of its body. **Right:** interior is calmed down with black Recaros instead of the standard car's garish (to some eyes) red items

Polished Metal Metallic (grey to you and me) like our test car, it almost looks sophisticated.

Upon closer inspection you may notice that the 20-inch wheels and bespoke Continental SportContact 6 tyres have also gone, in their place a set of 19-inch alloys and Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S tyres developed to Honda's needs. The tyre profiles have risen from 30 to 35 to compensate for the smaller rims, and there are new bushes for the suspension too. And to further tone down the looks, the red pinstripes are absent from those new wheels and the side skirts, while the Recaros are now black rather than red. Price-wise the £35,400 Sport Line sits halfway between the entry-level Type R (£34,415) and the GT version (£36,415), but keeps the latter's dual-zone climate control, wireless charging, parking sensors and satnav.

If you've not driven a wild-winged Type R, you'll think the Sport Line a knockout achievement. In this trim it's still leagues ahead of almost anything that could be considered a rival. Every positive still applies, although if you've experienced a regular Type R you might detect a five per cent drop off in outright ability, but that's about it. And in return you get an improvement in ride quality thanks to the Michelin's softer sidewall and the reduced unsprung weight from the smaller wheels. Overall the car is 10kg lighter, the removal of the rear wing offset by the additional sound insulation fitted.

It's still an intoxicating driving experience, then; one of the best available regardless of the



price point, in fact. But Honda's FK8 Civic Type R has never failed to impress from behind the wheel, and in Sport Line trim it no longer offends from the outside. ❌

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbocharged
Power 316bhp @ 6500rpm **Torque** 295lb ft @ 2500-4500rpm
Weight 1395kg (230bhp/ton) **0-62mph** 5.8sec
Top speed 169mph **Basic price** £35,400

➕ Same Type R performance, more grown-up look

❌ Er, the infotainment system's not great.

evo rating ★★★★★

#GODO



Watch-wearers of the world – unite!

When Karl Marx told the world's workers they had nothing to lose but their chains, he could have been talking about the original proletarian mode of transport: the bike. Coincidentally, cycling was the inspiration for the new C63 Sealander Elite chronometer. Not only does the smart pop-out crown stop it digging into your wrist when you're riding, but the super-light titanium case makes it effortless to wear. Though Karl would have surely loved these utilitarian features, we think its sleek design is more 'Wiggins' than 'Marx'.

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IGNITION

NEWS, INTERVIEWS, TECH AND EVERY NEW CAR THAT MATTERS

Ferrari's V6 hybrid

All-new 296 GTB puts the emphasis on driving enjoyment and continues Ferrari's move to an electric future

by JORDAN KATSIANIS



THIS IS THE 296 GTB, FERRARI'S LATEST mid-engined supercar, with a brand new plug-in V6 powertrain, compact aluminium chassis and a fresh new look. Don't mistake the first Ferrari V6 road car in decades for a junior Dino-style entry-level model, though, because with a combined power output of 819bhp and a price point expected to be the thick end of £230,000 when it reaches customers in March 2022, it's anything but.

With a key mantra to be the most engaging and enjoyable Ferrari to drive, it doesn't have to chase ultimate top speed or acceleration times in the same way as its SF90 hybrid big brother. It also differs from the more expensive SF90 by having its drivetrain power the rear wheels only, doing without an electrically driven front axle, thus removing weight, inertia and complexity from the package.

Yet performance is hardly compromised, with 0-62mph in 2.9sec, 124mph in 7.4sec and a top speed of 205mph. It laps Fiorano in 1min 22sec, 3sec behind the SF90 and only 2.3sec behind the LaFerrari.

Weighing 1470kg dry, it's 100kg lighter than the SF90, but 140kg heavier than the V8-engined F8 Tributo – the 296 GTB sits between the two in Ferrari's line-up. It's also 75kg heavier than the carbon-tubbed McLaren Artura, which has a similar V6/electric powertrain, albeit producing 138bhp less. Despite its hybrid tech, the 296 is 46mm shorter, 21mm narrower and 19mm lower than the F8, and 50mm shorter in the wheelbase. This reduction in size is in part thanks to the smaller V6 engine, which is mounted 50mm lower down in the chassis.

In a similar vein to the SF90's Assetto Corsa pack, the 296 GTB can be specified with an Assetto Fiorano package (expected to cost around £25,000), which reduces weight by a further 12kg thanks to extended use of carbonfibre inside and out, a composite rear screen and carbonfibre bucket seats. The pack also includes revised aero and race-derived dampers from Multimatic – replacing the standard magnetic units – while a further 7kg can be lost with carbon wheels.

Now, for the full technical rundown, turn the page.



Above: 296 GTB is Ferrari's first mainstream electrified offering, following the LaFerrari and SF90 'halo' hybrid hypercars

AERO

In a departure from most recent mid-engined Ferraris, the 296 GTB uses an active aero device not to manage drag but to generate extra downforce. A LaFerrari-style active rear wing sits concealed beneath the trailing edge of the rear deck between the rear lights when not in use. When active, the wing produces up to 100kg of additional downforce at 155mph, contributing to a maximum of 360kg in high-downforce configuration with the Assetto Fiorano package. Thanks in part to clever underbody aero, even in low-drag configuration the car is said to deliver more downforce than previous comparable models.

CHASSIS

The 296 is underpinned by the most compact mid-engined Ferrari chassis in a generation, 50mm shorter in the wheelbase than the F8 Tributo. The car's centre of gravity is 10mm lower than the F8's, and the structure is a massive 60 per cent stiffer too, all to the benefit of agility. The construction is of aluminium rather than the more *de rigueur* carbonfibre as found in rivals from McLaren and indeed the Maserati MC20, with double-wishbone suspension at both ends and Ferrari's impressive magnetorheological dampers. There's also the usual suite of electronic aids, including Side Slip Control.

DESIGN

Ferrari claims to have redefined the identity of the mid-engined berlinetta with the 296, citing its shorter wheelbase, muscular wings, visor-style windscreen, prominent flying buttresses and near-vertical rear screen. The new aesthetic draws inspiration from the 1960s 250 LM – particularly in the sinuously muscular rear wings, rear screen and Kamm tail – but also takes elements, including the wraparound front windscreen, from strictly limited edition models such as the J50 and the one-off P80/C. Combined with a low scuttle and relatively deep glasshouse, the effect is to slim down the side bodywork, which aside from the single air intake is otherwise largely free of complex surfacing.

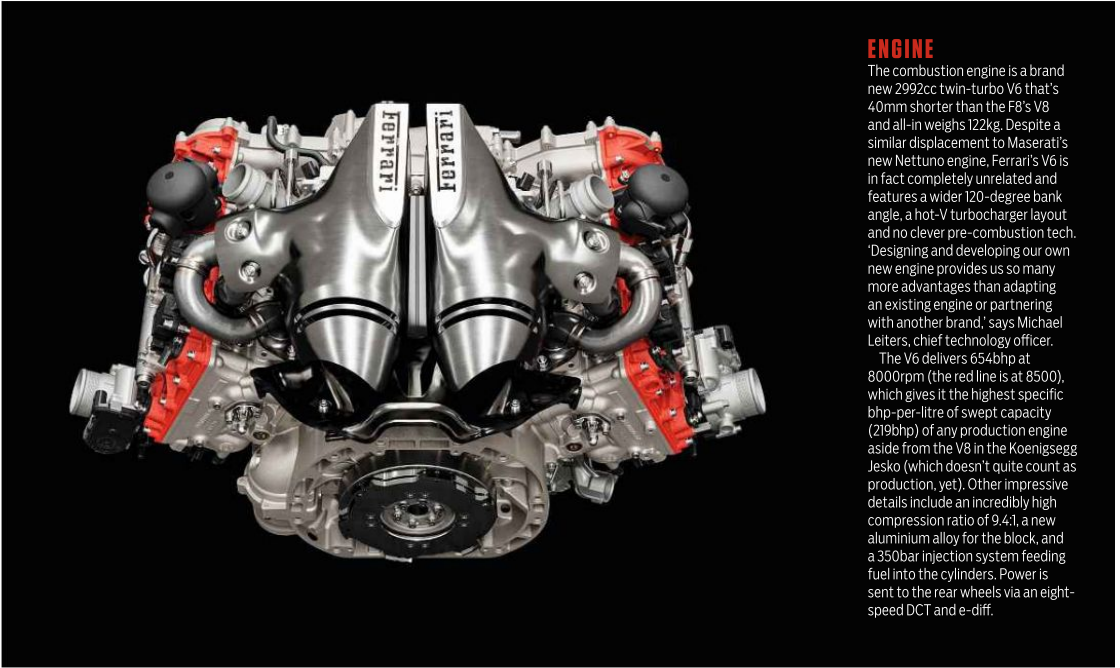


Above:

Muscular haunches and 250 LM-style buttresses set 296 apart; retracting rear aerofoil is stowed between the tail lights

ELECTRIC MOTOR/BATTERIES

The rear-mounted electric motor adds 165bhp and 232lb ft of torque to the mix, giving a total combined power figure of 819bhp at 8000rpm, with 546lb ft of torque available at 6250rpm, and making the 296 GTB significantly more powerful than McLaren's 681bhp Artura. The electric motor is connected to the engine via its own clutch pack, capable of disconnecting it entirely from the combustion engine in EV mode, and is fed by a 7.45kWh battery pack that sits beneath the cabin floor. The 296 GTB can be driven for up to 15.5 miles on electric power alone. The motor and battery weigh 22kg and 77kg respectively, the latter a 2kg saving over the identically sized pack in the SF90.



ENGINE

The combustion engine is a brand new 2992cc twin-turbo V6 that's 40mm shorter than the F8's V8 and all-in weighs 122kg. Despite a similar displacement to Maserati's new Nettuno engine, Ferrari's V6 is in fact completely unrelated and features a wider 120-degree bank angle, a hot-V turbocharger layout and no clever pre-combustion tech. 'Designing and developing our own new engine provides us so many more advantages than adapting an existing engine or partnering with another brand,' says Michael Leiters, chief technology officer.

The V6 delivers 654bhp at 8000rpm (the red line is at 8500), which gives it the highest specific bhp-per-litre of swept capacity (219bhp) of any production engine aside from the V8 in the Koenigsegg Jesko (which doesn't quite count as production, yet). Other impressive details include an incredibly high compression ratio of 9.4:1, a new aluminium alloy for the block, and a 350bar injection system feeding fuel into the cylinders. Power is sent to the rear wheels via an eight-speed DCT and e-diff.



INTERIOR

The cockpit follows the lead of the SF90 Stradale with a largely digital interface that sees most conventional controls replaced with touchpads plus screens that only spring into life when the Start Engine button is pressed. As with other Ferraris, the passenger gets their own display of key data.



1 | evo trackdays

FOLLOWING A COVID-ENFORCED hiatus in 2020, the **evo** trackday programme has returned, starting with two glorious days at Goodwood. With strong demand for all our events this year, we are currently in discussions to add additional dates to the 2021 calendar, so stay tuned to evo.co.uk/evotrackdays for the latest announcements.



2 | Porsche 911 range updates

THE 992-GEN 911 RANGE EXPANSION continues, with not one but two new derivatives being announced this month. The GT3 Touring (pictured) is one, following the success of the 991.2 by taking a GT3, removing the rear wing and introducing new design elements to soften its appearance. It's available with a PDK 'box this time, in addition to the usual six-speed manual.

A new 911 GTS has also been revealed, bridging the gap between Carrera and GT3/Turbo models with a 473bhp version of the Carrera's 3-litre twin-turbo flat-six, rear- or all-wheel drive, the choice of either PDK or seven-speed manual transmission, and GTS-specific calibrations for the suspension, brakes and powertrain.

3 | GranTurismo goes fully electric

MASERATI HAS QUIETLY CONFIRMED that its next GranTurismo will drop its initially proposed combustion engine and only be offered with an electric powertrain. It means Maserati's most long-lived model will be the first to adopt pure electrification entirely, in the process directly rivalling the Porsche Taycan and Audi e-tron GT.

Unlike the German twins, the new GranTurismo will feature a total of three electric motors – one on the front axle and two on the rear, allowing full torque vectoring on the rear axle. The car's electrical powertrain will also run on a cutting-edge 800V circuit, giving it super-fast charging capability from public rapid chargers, if you can find one...

4 | Audi RS3

AUDI IS YET TO OFFICIALLY REVEAL its new RS3 hyper-hatch, but it has disclosed some key facts, including confirmation that the horsepower war between the RS3 and the Mercedes-AMG A45 S has reached a ceasefire. Although, when it comes to the chassis, it's now an all-out dogfight.

So while the engine remains the same 2.5-litre turbocharged in-line five with 394bhp, key chassis changes such as the adoption of a torque-vectoring rear differential as in the A45 S (and new Golf R), and a far more aggressively tuned front axle (with increased negative camber, wider track and optional Pirelli Trofeo R rubber) might finally have turned what has always been a rather blunt instrument into something a good deal sharper.

5 | BMW in LMDh

BMW HAS ANNOUNCED IT'S GETTING back into the endurance racing game, confirming it'll join the LMDh series in American IMSA rounds from 2023. The new racer will join Porsche, Audi and Acura in the LMDh class, but is yet to be confirmed for European rounds of the FIA WEC, where it would battle Hypercar class contenders from Toyota, Alpine, Peugeot and Ferrari.

As with all LMDh racers, BMW will build on a regulated chassis and technical package, but will be responsible for the combustion component of the powertrain. And while a return to Le Mans might be in the balance, there's sure to be more than a few endurance racing fans within the team hoping to see their car fight it out on the Mulsanne straight.

Aston Martin AMR-C01

Simulator rig is the next best thing to actually racing

THERE HAVE BEEN A PLETHORA OF new Aston Martins in recent years, and there have also been some products that stretch the brand into entirely new areas – the speed boat, the motorcycle – but here's one that doesn't feature an engine or even move under its own power. It's a sim rig, or a gaming rig, or however you want to describe the apparatus of virtual driving, a hobby/sport/training tool that understandably has grown massively in popularity over the past 18 months. If you can't drive or race for real, then this is probably the next best thing.

The C01 is a genuine carbonfibre monocoque that's the work of Curv Racing Simulators, a business run by Aston Martin works driver Darren Turner, which keeps the link to the brand strong. That's further bolstered by the fact that the C01 was styled by the Aston Martin design team, the firm's creative chief Marek Reichman saying: 'I can picture the AMR-C01 in the most beautiful of residences as a sculptural work of art in its own right.'

It's certainly a lovingly crafted object, and being carbon, it's fairly easy to move around compared to the traditional metal alternative. The driving position has been moulded on that of the Valkyrie hypercar, and having tried it out (that's the C01, not the Valkyrie, as of yet sadly)



it does make you feel securely in the zone for a bit of Assetto Corsa (the software of choice for Curv, although the company can and does work with others).

There's only one screen (as opposed to multiple screens arranged in a row to give you the semblance of a panoramic view out of the cockpit), no virtual reality set-up and no platform movement, which may lead you to feel that the price, akin to a brand new BMW M3 at £57,500 plus VAT, is a little steep. But in that case the AMR-C01 is almost definitely not for you. This is a plaything for those that already have multiple examples of real Aston Martins in the garage, and want their 'luxury games rooms' to stay on brand. You can have the C01 trimmed and painted how you wish – to match your favourite Aston Martin, possibly. For the rest of us, the dining table will probably have to suffice for now.



WATCHES



Nezumi Tonnerre

€314 nezumistudios.com

New from Stockholm-based Nezumi, this distinctive but classically styled chronograph is modestly sized and offered with four different dial designs.



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€899 bugatti-smartwatches.com

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Julian Thomson

Automotive designer

Starting out sketching cars in his schoolbooks, Julian Thomson has gone on to work on many an iconic automotive shape – and has owned his fair share too

by BRETT FRASER
PORTRAIT by ASTON PARROTT

NOT ALL CAR DESIGNERS ARE DIEHARD car enthusiasts. But rather like fat chefs, you're more inclined to look favourably upon those whose passion for their chosen profession extends beyond the nine-to-five. Julian Thomson, most famously the designer of the Lotus Elise S1 and who has helped steer the reinvention of Jaguar's styling for the past 21 years, is completely immersed in car culture, outside and inside of work.

He sketches cars and sees them into production; he appreciates our automotive past and contemplates its future; he owns a wholesome stable of interesting cars, modifies them, restores them and drives them often; he frequently attends car events and takes pictures of what he sees – whole cars and design details – for his own entertainment. He even claims to be an early adopter of the trackday movement: 'Back in the early '80s my mates and I hatched a plan in the pub. Someone had discovered you could rent the Goodwood Circuit for £125, plus another £125 for an ambulance. We worked out that if we got 25 people together, it'd cost us a tenner each.

'In the event only three of us turned up in our crappy cars – me in my Fiat 124 Spider and two friends, one in a Lancia Beta Monte Carlo and the other in his Alfa Giulia Spider. So we had the whole of Goodwood for the day and went round and round and round until our cars blew up! We were pioneers of the trackday thing.'

Thomson's interest in cars doesn't stem from any family influence – 'My mum drove a Mini van, my dad a Bedford minibus' – but from an early age it was all-consuming. 'The margins of my school exercise books were covered in little sketches of cars and this was very much to the detriment of my school work,' Thomson confesses. 'And me and my brothers used to make Airfix, Revell and Monogram plastic car kits; we were pretty keen on taking them apart and inventing our own cars from the bits.'

They may not have been car folk, but Thomson's parents were very supportive of his drawing. 'They encouraged us to draw as much as we possibly could. My father spent the majority of his working life as head scientist of The National Gallery in London and was passionate about art. But he actually didn't believe you could teach it; he thought that art was a natural talent that you were born with. He wasn't keen on art school. He thought it was better just to keep drawing.'

And Thomson did. Mainly cars. With the goal of becoming a car designer. Back in the early 1980s, however, the only sure-fire route to becoming such a thing was to take the Royal College of Art's Automotive Design qualification, a postgraduate course. Knowledgeable souls advised the teenage Thomson that the best path to get to that point was via an engineering degree. 'It was very, very difficult,' he admits, 'because I was still academically appalling, dismal.'







The engineering course wasn't without highlights, however. For instance, there was a three-month work placement at Rardley Motors, a Ferrari specialist. 'This experience cemented my love for Ferraris,' beams Thomson. 'We had all sorts of cars through the workshop, including a 250 GTO that this guy had just paid £125,000 for – we were outraged at the price. There was another guy who had an ex-Le Mans Daytona that we drove on the roads around Hindhead with straight-through pipes.'

But it was an internship at Ogle Design that suited Thomson's career ambitions much better, and simultaneously demonstrated to him the importance of making good contacts. In 1980 the then 17-year-old had entered a competition in a motoring magazine to design a new MG, winning himself a highly commended prize in the (over 18s) adult category. At the prize-giving he met Ogle Design's Tom Karen (designer of the Bond Bug three-wheeler and original Reliant Scimitar). 'At Ogle Design I learnt how to draw properly, learnt the technique for designing cars.'

Ogle's tuition proved invaluable. 'After I'd finished the engineering degree I put together a portfolio and presented it to the Royal College of Art,' recalls Thomson. 'I thought I'd done OK, but later discovered that the course sponsors – Ford, Chrysler and Austin Rover – had had a fight about who was going to take me on. Turned out I was the top choice. So after struggling academically for years, I was going to the Royal College of Art to learn how to draw cars – I couldn't believe it.'

Meanwhile Thomson had been making his way through some interesting cars. He learnt to drive in his mum's Renault 5 GTL, then bought a second-hand Alfasud 1.2 Ti which 'reverted to soil' very quickly. A Fiat 127 Sport followed, and after that the 124 Spider that he still has in storage, then a 131 Mirafiori Sport that he greatly enjoyed. His buying choices were all heavily influenced by the outcomes of road tests in *Car* magazine.

As Ford was his sponsor at the RCA, Thomson did his internship at the company's design studio at Dunton, where the designer assigned to mentor him was Ian Callum, who was to become his friend and later his boss for many years at Jaguar's design studio. Thomson graduated from the RCA in 1982 and observes: 'Back then there were really only two colleges in the world turning out car designers – the RCA and the Art Center in Los Angeles. Between them they produced fewer than 25 car design graduates a year, so we all got very good jobs. These days there are hundreds of graduates from many colleges globally.'

Although Ford in the early 1980s had a very swish design studio, work didn't pan out quite how our newly qualified car designer had envisaged. 'That myth you hear about car designers stuck doing things like door handles and not really contributing to the battle plan? It was a bit like

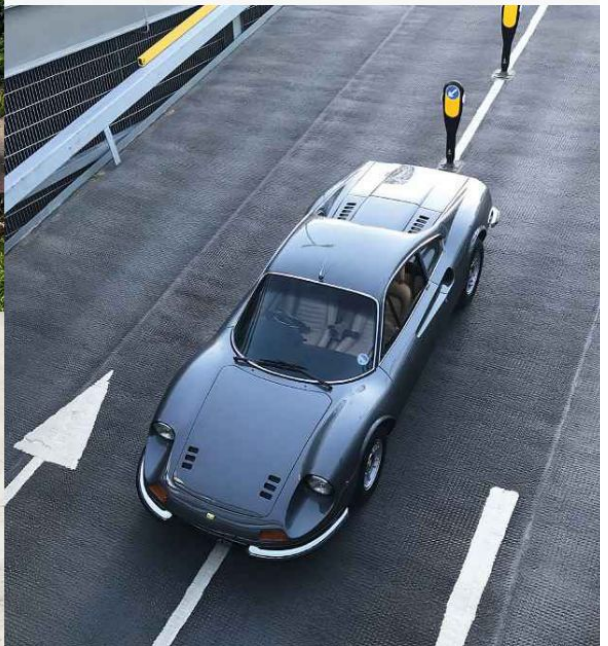
that,' he sighs. 'One bored afternoon I counted the number of strip lights on the ceiling – 928 of them, which I remember because of the Porsche.'

Out of hours, Thomson's motoring landscape was looking brighter. After an original Ford Fiesta XR2 and a VW Golf GTI had sparked a life-long fascination with hot hatches, in 1985 he was fortunate enough to receive an inheritance. Rather than stick it in a building society, he bought a £13,000 Ferrari 246 Dino. Good man. And because a housemate was Lord Brockett's brother, he was able to 'borrow' the then peer's personal Ferrari mechanic, Jim, to check over the Dino and get it running properly. 'Although the classic car scene back then wasn't what it is now, it was an unusual thing to have,' reckons Thomson. 'People in the know realised it was a cool car, but to the rest it was just an old car.'

Insufficiently challenged at Ford, Thomson again experienced the value of contacts. 'My old college tutor, Peter Stevens, approached me about setting up Lotus Design, so I went to Norfolk. I arrived for my first day and they'd rented a Portakabin for us to design in, and the back half was yet to be delivered! To this day I wonder why I wasn't shocked but I thought it was great. It was Lotus.

'I loved working there. At Lotus you got

Above: Thomson garage includes Sport 160, RB5, Trophy and EP3 Type R. **Clockwise from right:** C-X75 among his numerous projects with Ian Callum at Jaguar; Dino was bought in 1985 for £13k, E28 5-series is shared with his son; Elise sketched during a recent Zoom meeting raised £3k for charity; Fiat 124 Spider from his college years is now 'absolutely rotten'; more sketching, this time Jaguar history in the form of the XJR-9; Dino again, now resprayed a 1970s Ferrari *grigio*



to know everyone; you got to know all the different disciplines. You knew the people in manufacturing, ride and handling. I became very good friends with Roger Becker and his son Matthew – there were so many great friendships I made there. My first big break was doing a show car for Isuzu [Lotus Engineering was a design consultancy, amongst other things] called the 4200R, highly acclaimed at the 1989 Tokyo motor show.'

After several years at Lotus, during which time Stevens departed and the company's ownership changed from General Motors to Romano Artioli's Bugatti, Thomson was promoted to head of Lotus Design. And then came the Elise. 'The Elise was the Lotus I'd waited around so long to do. Everyone else on the team was the same. It was the perfect window in time: the right group of people, all the right age, the same interests and passion for sports cars, that's why the car is so pure.'

'We were all so passionate about doing it. That's how we managed to cut so many corners – I can't believe we made a car so impossible to get in and out of. Yet all the people who worked on it were young and didn't have back problems. As for the roof taking 15 minutes to put on – you were lucky we gave it one at all!'

Despite huge pride in his creation, Thomson didn't own an Elise while he was at Lotus, but he did enjoy a succession of Esprits, endured a chain of Vauxhall Astra company cars, and satisfied his hot hatch lust with a Renault 5 GT Turbo. He later bought the last Elise S1 off the production line but felt so self-conscious at that time about driving a car he'd designed, he swiftly sold it. He came to his senses 15 years later and bought himself an S1 Sport 160. 'It's very unruly at low revs but then comes alive, banging and popping, noisy and visceral.'

A yearning to once more be back in the big car company league drove Thomson into the arms of Volkswagen-Audi as director of exterior design in the group's studio in Barcelona. 'It was almost like going back to school,' states Thomson, 'and I worked for VW, Audi, SEAT and Bentley. It was really good fun and got the juices flowing, but I did miss working with friends. I've always been a creative guy who loves interaction and throwing ideas around, so in 1999 when Ian Callum offered me the opportunity to work with him at Jaguar in the Advanced Design studio, I took it.'

'Ian and I had nearly 20 years of fun working together: he was never really a boss, he was always like a friend. We'd design stuff together and it was so enjoyable, all those great cars we did redefining the brand.' That roll call includes



'I AM STILL JUST SCRIBBLING ON THE BACK OF ENVELOPES – ALWAYS WILL BE'

the R-Coupe, RD6, C-X75, C-X17 (F-Pace) and I-Pace concepts, the production XK, XF, XJ, XE and F-type, the Land Rover LRX concept (the inspiration for the Range Rover Evoque), and even a concept for a computer game, the Vision Gran Turismo.

A succession of XJR and XFR company cars kept Thomson amused during his years at Jaguar – as director of design for the past couple, following Callum's departure – but only after leaving the company in 2021 has he owned his own Jaguar, an XK120 FHC bought in the States with the help of Jaguar Classic. The Dino remains in his stable, as does the much-neglected 124 Spider and the Elise,

and he attributes the rest of his current collection in part to **evo's** influence – a Renault Sport Clio Trophy, a Subaru Impreza RB5 and the latest Honda Civic Type R ('I like the fact it's so great to drive that that overcomes its challenging looks'), while his girlfriend has a Porsche 997 GT3, and his son an E28 BMW 5-series in which he has a half share. Thomson also helped design the 2001 Honda Civic Type R while at Lotus, and his passionate belief that you should own cars you designed means that a track modified example also shares garage space.

At the time of writing, Thomson is exploring a number of employment options and is extremely upbeat about the future of motoring and car design, albeit in a different form to today. He still marvels at the good fortune of his career to date. 'I like designing cars because I like colouring-in, essentially. I am still just scribbling on the back of envelopes, and always will be. I can't believe that someone has permitted me to go off and turn my schoolboy drawings into real cars, and paid me to do it. It's what I was doing as a child and I'm still doing it as an adult. I am very lucky in that respect, still stunned that I'm allowed to do it.' ❧

Above: Thomson sketch from 2020 shows the evolution of the Jaguar sports car family line, from 1950s XK (bottom), via E-type (middle) to the facelifted F-type (top), which was launched during his stint as the firm's design director



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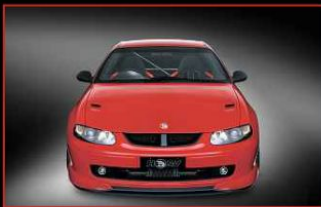
DOA: HSV HRT 427

This racing-inspired 7-litre Holden Monaro garnered more than enough interest for its limited production run to sell out. But sadly the sums didn't add up

THE HOLDEN MONARO OF THE 2000S was always an *evo* favourite, what with its hearty V8, slithery chassis and the likeable demeanour of a laid-back cartoon bear. In 2002, however, Holden Special Vehicles announced a plan to put some firecrackers up the bear's bottom. The crux of its idea was the installation of a 560 horsepower, 7-litre dry-sumped V8 based on the one from the Corvette C5R racer, but the mods didn't end there.

The super-Monaro also featured an aggressive weight-saving programme, partially achieved by ditching unnecessary items such as the air-con, stereo, back seats and airbags, and partly by making more of the machine's vital parts from magnesium and carbonfibre, including a bespoke carbon bonnet with additional ventilation to keep the big V8 cool. Inside, the new car got a half cage, racing seats and a Sparco wheel, while underneath there were AP Racing brakes with floating discs and a reworked chassis that ditched the regular Monaro's front struts in favour of double wishbones. In case you were wondering where Porsche got the idea from.

As you might guess, much of this effort was to dovetail with a motorsport programme, in this case Holden's entry into the Australian Nations Cup Championship with a racing Monaro, the 427C,



which used the same 7-litre engine. A road-going version would help to fend off complaints that the organisers had relaxed the 'production-based' rules for the home team by allowing them to upgrade from the weedier 5.7-litre LS engine from lesser Monaros. The HRT 427 (Holden Racing Team, 427 cubic inch engine) was shown off at the 2002 Sydney motor show, officially as a concept, though Holden was quick to give away that it was intending to build and sell 50 examples.

When an Aussie car mag was given a go in the running prototype it enthusiastically noted its ability to light up its back tyres in gears higher than first while adding that vigorous use of revs had the exhaust 'yodelling like a bastard'. As you might guess, excitement for the HRT 427 was running high Down Under and HSV dealers quickly took more

than 80 deposits, easily accounting for the entire production run and then some. Unfortunately, when the cold, clammy hand of accountancy took a grip, even this wasn't enough. Having announced that the car would cost a chunky 215,000 AUD (around £85,000), Holden then realised that even this wasn't a viable price for such a bespoke machine and it was set to lose a packet on every example. In June 2003 the company decided against such fiscal foolishness and gloomily announced that the HRT 427 was cancelled.

Three 427C racers had already been built and enjoyed great success, notably winning the 2002 and 2003 Bathurst 24 Hours and taking 12 wins in the Nations Cup across the 2003 and 2004 seasons before the series gave way to the Australian GT Championship, where a tougher stance on road-going relatives ruled the 7-litre Monaros ineligible to compete. The original HRT 427 show car was kept by Holden while the sole road-legal running prototype has seemingly spent the last 13 years being bounced between wealthy Australian car collectors.

Other Australians thirsting for a street-legal 7-litre Holden had to wait until 2008, when HSV announced the W427, a four-door saloon fitted with the 7011cc 503bhp V8 from the contemporary Corvette Z06. Just 137 were sold.





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Too soon?

Great interview with Tobias Moers (evo 287). He definitely seems to have been parachuted into Aston Martin at the right time and has rightly cut down the size of the firm's infrastructure and put a proper business plan in place. He is also right to push the exclusive models of the Valhalla, the Valkyrie and the Speedster, as a luxury brand of any kind needs super-desirable products such as these. I'm sure he can capitalise on the heritage and will promote the marque in a much more stylised way to attract the customer base it is looking for.

That being said, I am worried that he wants to only produce electric platforms after 2025. This only gives him four years to sell the volume of DBXs and Valhallas etc needed to make the profit Aston Martin desperately needs to make. Even the mighty VW says only 25 per cent of its European sales will be solely electric by 2025 and most car manufacturers currently stand with only around four per cent of their sales being electric.

If anyone should shout about petrol-engined sports cars, shouldn't it be Aston Martin?

David Pyne, Berkshire

The final countdown

I write this letter fresh from reading through issues 285 and 286 and in the midst of a hunt for a new car.

Reading articles about so many models that are already, or soon will be, in some way downsized, hybridised or fully electric really hammered home how little time it feels we have left to enjoy internal combustion engines. A wave of panic washed over me as, one article at a time, I read about AMG's



downsizing, Bentley's retiring of the W12, Ferrari's 'final' naturally aspirated V12 application sans electrification, Lotus's electric future... the list goes on.

With just eight and a half years to go to mandatory electrification of new cars, as a life-long car enthusiast I suddenly feel as though I'm in a race against time to tick tens of boxes, with everything from a Renault Sport Clio (cliché, I know) to a V12 on the list.

Time to hit the classifieds with the more sensible requirements toned down. At least for the next eight and a half years.

Matt Schatten, Chelmsford, Essex

E-fuel for thought

Following on from your comments about Bentley's plans to support internal combustion engines cars post 2030 (Ed Speak, evo 285), there is another area to consider.

There are over 300million ICE vehicles in Europe at present, quite a number to replace. The question is what should they be replaced with to reduce CO2. The answer isn't as straightforward as might be thought. The Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) has identified that in the C-segment the vehicle that has the lowest whole-life CO2 (not just CO2 at the point of use) is a gasoline engine vehicle using 100 per cent renewable energy (the analysis includes BEV).

It must also be noted that, disappointingly, research into internal combustion engines has reduced as a result of the looming ban on this technology. Even worse, there is potential to leverage greater ICE efficiency with e-fuels due to



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Excess all areas

OKAY, I'M OLD AND OLD SCHOOL. I REMEMBER READING *Cars and Car Conversions* and then *Performance Car* before progressing on to *evo*. However, the huge size, massive power and ridiculous costs of many of the cars featured in your pages of late are making them completely irrelevant to all but a privileged few, not to mention irrelevant on most of our finest roads.

The £140k, 626bhp, 1825kg BMW M5 CS; the £5million, 836bhp Aston Martin Victor; the £117k, 616bhp, 2320kg Porsche Taycan Turbo Cross Turismo... are these cars really made for driving?

I'm happy with my lightly modified 30th Anniversary Mazda MX-5. £25k new, cheap to run, insure, maintain and modify. I can revel in country B-roads (on which it easily fits), wringing the sweet little naturally aspirated motor to the red line on every precise manual gearchange, working to carry every possible mph onto the next straight, feeling the little car move under me on its skinny 205-section tyres – and loving every second!

Is it just me, or am I missing something?

Peter Jaggs

The Letter of the Month wins a Straton watch

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INBOX



the higher octane number that can be facilitated.

Thank goodness the leadership of Porsche and Bentley has the wisdom to champion these fuels. They now need to be developed for mainstream use, so that we can all be trusted to make the correct technology choices and express our powertrain purchasing preferences. Being incentivised and encouraged to move in a particular direction when that particular direction is not the lowest overall CO2 option is somewhat less than optimal, and outright banning the lowest CO2 option is illogical.

Steve Rawson

GT class

Thank you for the article on the Prodrive 550 Maranello (evo 286). I was at Le Mans in 2005, a couple of years after the 550's class win, by which time the GT1 focus was on Aston Martin's DBR9 and Chevrolet's Corvette C6.R – a battle that ended sadly for us British fans.

However, by coincidence my only surviving photo of the trip is of the Russian Age Racing 550 blasting up the pit straight on Saturday afternoon (above). It would eventually finish 5th in class, and the car continues to race across my desktop background, so now my car-mad son knows it well too, having used the computer for his home schooling in lockdown. I am delighted that we have both had the opportunity to read the details and history about this amazing car.

Nick Frost, Wimbledon

Faking it

Another month, another Ferrari 250 SWB pastiche (evo 286). I am sure the people at RML are very talented engineers, but I do wonder why they need to produce something like the

250 Short Wheelbase. Are they not brave enough to produce a car of their own design? Would they not be ideally suited to producing their own 21st century Elise, or even taking on Gordon Murray? Instead they are planning to present an overstuffed, overblown rehash of an iconic car.

Perhaps there is a market for a handful of these machines. I have no doubt there will be some people willing to stump up for the perceived halo of having a 'special' car, but would these people happily also wear a shirt emblazoned 'Hey everyone, I wear a fake Rolex, fake Gucci loafers and carry a fake Louis Vuitton handbag!?' Isn't this effectively the same thing?

My small voice in the wilderness won't stop this happening, but maybe the good people at RML will think next time before chopping up some defenceless 550 Maranellos (a great enthusiast's Ferrari as it happens) and maybe find a bit of courage to do something different and special.

Andrew Stevens

Fighting the systems

The car industry has gone mad. We are supposed to be using less energy and are sacrificing the joy of naturally aspirated ICES to achieve this, yet at the same time we are building ever heavier and more powerful cars.

They are filled with useless features and fakery. Who wants soggy steering and throttle-response settings, especially if they are mandatory with the comfortable damping mode? Why the embarrassment and irritation of fake vents, diffusers and exhaust sounds?

We are drowning in electronics that are supposed to increase convenience and safety yet make everything more complex and obscure, and infuriate with their interference,



vibrations and beeping. They are also potentially deadly.

I recently bought a Civic Type R, my first new car in ten years. The Type R has superb controls and dynamics, but recently, upon attempting to overtake a slower car, the Honda's witless brain decided I was going to rear-end said car and applied the brakes. There I was, on the wrong side of the road, being braked instead of accelerating, until the electronics finally realised there was no longer a car in front and released the brakes. Thankfully there were no other cars around to get tangled up in the confusion, but it's easy to see how such an unexpected interruption could escalate into a more serious situation.

Perhaps there is a place for such technology in nannying drivers even less sentient than their cars, but you should at least be able to switch it off. This is not possible in the Type R despite it being a focused driver's car.

I also own a 997 GT3 RS 4.0 and I will never buy a newer supercar, because with the clinical pursuit of technological superiority none will be as visceral and involving.

Unless I can find a company that can decommission electronic 'safety' systems I will now look to the past for practical cars too. There is no room for two drivers in one car.

Hal Walter

Hatch of the day

I've just picked up a nearly new 128ti and I have to say every review I read and watched, especially this magazine's, was spot-on in terms of what this car brings as a brilliant hot (medium-hot?) hatch from BMW.

I traded in a C43 Estate, my much-loved and very fast load lugger, but I'm not looking back. I'd say that for someone on a middling budget who

is looking for a great driver's car that meets most of the *evo* checklist (OK, except for a manual gearbox option), the answer could well be a 128ti.

It's a bit of genius engineering and a refreshingly different proposition.

Chris Barker

Sliding standards

I fully agree with Nick Elworthy's letter (*evo* 286). You are not setting a good example. Showing pictures of drifting on a public road only encourages others to try it. You may be blessed with watchers posted to ensure the road is clear but the law would see it as driving dangerously. Likewise on track. You have the advantage of booking a track for your sole use, but drifting on a public trackday would be seen as dangerous and you would be thrown off the circuit.

In your response you claim you would be 'remiss not to report how [a car] behaves with the systems both on and off'. But the recent pictures of the 911 GT3 and the Alfa Giulia GTAm are more than that: they are blatant drifting for the sheer pleasure of it.

evo is no longer about 'the thrill of driving'. You are using your privileged position to enjoy 'the thrill of drifting', something your loyal subscribers either don't want to do, or are not in a position to try. Maybe it's time to change the tagline of your magazine.

Chris Parker

Silver scream

I see that Adam Towler misses silver wheels (Golf R Performance Pack, Driven, *evo* 286). Pity he can't go back five Golf generations, as he could then try running a VR6 with the standard BBS wheels. That should cure him of his nostalgia. I used to have to bulk-buy toothbrushes...

Ian MacDonald



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RICHARD MEADEN

The sounds of internal combustion will be greatly missed, says Meaden

SUMMER. SEASON OF SUNSHINE, BARBECUES, beautiful light evenings and the distant sound of high performance petrol engines drifting on the breeze. Perhaps I'm odd (don't feel compelled to answer that), but ever since I can remember I've always enjoyed the distant sound of a fast car or motorbike being wrung through the gears. There's just something about hearing that solitary, piercing soundtrack that tickles people like us.

Don't get me wrong, if you lot came hammering by my house for hours on end I'd be stood outside shaking my fist and complaining to Jeremy Vine, but the odd pack of superbikes or the occasional sports car? I don't have a problem with it. In fact, as Mrs M will wearily attest, I take considerable nerdy pleasure from informing her what I think said car or bike was. Not just the marque, but the model, and in the case of the cars, whether it's manual or paddleshift.

It just so happens that the village in which we live happens to be within earshot of a popular set of bends. At this time of year this means I can pretty much set my watch by the first few bikes, which yelp their way from the nearest market town at 6pm or thereabouts and scratch up the lefts and rights before howling off into the distance. I'm not a biker, but I reckon I can identify most brands just from the soundtrack, from the deep whack of a Ducati V-twin and the sharp turbine drone of a Triumph triple to the fireworks of a barely silenced BMW S1000. In the absence of the Isle of Man TT races, the brief flurry of noise is a welcome bit of two-wheeled excitement.

There are some four-wheeled regulars, too. The R35 GT-R with its nasal V6 yowl. The five-pot Focus ST with its Quattro-like warble and WRC-style *pop-bang* remap. The hard-driven 911 GT3 (997 or maybe 991, I can't quite decide) and the Caterham with the most glorious induction noise. Most come by once or twice a day, each driver revelling in up- and down-shifts, chasing the throttle and enjoying every moment of their drive home. At the most basic level it's just good to hear people enjoying their cars.

Sound – like certain aromas – is a powerful emotional trigger. Not always in the way you'd expect. For instance, in the context of noise nuisance complaints to race and test tracks, it's often the screech of tyres, not roaring engines, that provides lawyers with the strongest argument for enforcement action by the council.

Apparently it's down to psychoacoustics, which in the case of squealing tyres is associated with the immediate prelude to a car crash. This sparks an evolution of the primal fight-or-flight response, complete with a flood of adrenaline and thudding heart. Handy when we lived in caves and feared being eaten by sabre-tooth tigers; less welcome if you're quaffing a gin snifter in your garden.

I'm pretty sure my trained ear can swiftly differentiate between a crash outside my house and a hapless punter spinning a mile away on a trackday, but I don't question the reality of psychoacoustics. Though in my case it's the shriek of a 911 GT3 race engine hammering down the Nürburgring's start-finish straight that trips me out. Why? Because that raucous and unmistakable sound became engrained on my psyche during a decade of racing in the VLN and N24. That noise meant I was in the pitlane and most likely experiencing a high state of alertness/blind terror. To this day when I hear a modern 911 race car my heart beats faster and my guts start to twist.

In a less unsettling way, sounds have left imprints on my memory that are every bit as vivid as anything I've seen. A decade ago when I was competing at the Bonneville Speed Week with Skoda UK I can recall standing at the side of the long course – a seven-mile stretch of groomed salt – where the really quick stuff would run at 300 or maybe even 400mph.

The cars were a very long way away when they began their runs, but blown V8s producing several thousand horsepower tend to make quite a noise. Watching a small black speck tracking across the horizon at ever-increasing speed is dramatic enough, but when you factor-in the weird disconnect which comes as a result of sound travelling slower than light it's a wholly surreal scene. The hard, unrelenting drone of a streamliner hauling a colossal top gear is something you never forget.

In this nascent EV Age, the uniquely evocative noise produced by a high-revving ICE is soon to be on the endangered list. Driving cars has been a massive part of my life for more than 30 years, and right back in early childhood my love of cars was rooted in the wondrous and uniquely potent sounds (and smells) of internal combustion. I have a feeling that long after we've come to terms with the one-dimensional nature of the EV driving experience it will actually be the voices of long-lost 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12-cylinder engines that we will come to miss the most.

'Sounds have left imprints on my memory every bit as vivid as anything I've seen'

@DickieMeaden

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



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RICHARD PORTER

Researching dull facts has led Porter to make an interesting discovery

LAST YEAR, DURING THE DEPTHS OF lockdown, I staved off boredom by publishing a slim volume of wilfully boring car trivia so that other people could stave off boredom by reading about boring things. Yes, I know it's a strange logic, but there we go. The book sold quite well and because of that, and because 2020's Age of Boredom really did go on a bit, I knocked up a sequel later in the year, mopping up some of the residual dullness I'd forgotten to include in the first one.

Compiling these books wasn't actually too difficult because for years I've been like a nerdish fact magpie, plucking up extremely arcane car trivia wherever I've come across it and stashing it away for future use. Whenever a tasty fact presented itself I'd grab it, whether I was thumbing through car mags, bumbling about the internet, or interviewing the chief designer from a major car company when the head of door handles came in and accidentally said something no one else in the room found interesting. That last one never actually happened but I still live in hope.

The second biggest challenge in making a book out of this was interpreting some of these years-old notes, because what seemed like a perfectly lucid aide-memoire in 2011 was now 'MONDEO WINDOW LET BUCKET(?)' scrawled in the corner of an old notebook, like a mad crossword clue with an oversized asterisk next to it. If the fact was retrievable from the squishy grey thing between my ears, that was okay. From that direct source I was able to remember why Jaguar engineers once installed a home-grown V8 and the suspension from an XJ40 in an old 3-series, or which other car company engineered the Panda four-wheel-drive system for Fiat, but when it came to interpreting the moments when I'd physically recorded something to save my brain the bother, that's when the trouble arose. Which is how I found myself staring at a scrap of a French receipt with 'Logo made (poss) glass' scribbled on it, or wondering why there was a note in my phone from 2014 that simply read 'Montego wind/lin'.

With these things figured out, or not, the next most time-consuming thing was cross-checking the facts as best I could. I was confident many from my memory were pretty solid and not available elsewhere, such as my vivid and certain recall that a JLR engineer once told me about a very specific durability test that

involved a two-litre bottle of Coke. Other facts, however, needed some of the details colouring in, and this led me to the most time-consuming part of putting together dull car trivia books: falling inexorably down internet wormholes and losing an entire morning to inconsequential nonsense, all because you were trying to find out for certain if Charles Leclerc's mum really does cut David Coulthard's hair. She does, by the way.

From these relentless plunges into the nerdish end of the internet ocean, however, I've discovered something that, unlike my books, is actually quite interesting. Sometimes when trying to double-check some especially obscure fact I'd have to infiltrate the online car chat of countries I don't live in, where they speak languages I don't understand. To do this I'd resort to the uncanny

powers of Google Translate and, though its rendering of unfamiliar tongues into English obviously isn't perfect, it's damn well good enough to get a decent sense of what's going on. One day I'd be all over Russian websites trying to pin down the bizarre back story as to why police and KGB agents in Soviet times had Ladas with Wankel rotary engines. The next day I'd be rummaging around in Spanish forums seeking additional information about that time SEAT fought a court battle against former ally Fiat using a full-size Ronda hatchback and a large bucket of yellow paint.

But the interesting bit is what I found as I sniffled about the internet like a very dull truffle pig. Because it turns out that a Spanish car chat, even through the lens of automatic translation, is pretty much like a British one. So is a Russian car chat, or an Italian one, or a French one, or a Turkish one. People ask questions, others give answers, there's a delight in sharing knowledge, in trying to be helpful and in passing on links to places of record (which was bloody useful to a man making a book of car bore facts). People bicker and get shirty with those they perceive to be ignorant or partisan, or not partisan enough, or just plain incapable of using the search function. But by and large they chat, and they chat enthusiastically and intelligently, drawn together by the bond of a mutual passion. And that, especially in the depths of a pandemic, was strangely comforting. We're all the same at heart and we're all just people who like cars. To realise this was as nice as discovering that people can be so absurdly bored that they'll buy a slim volume of extremely boring car trivia.

**'I'd be all over
Russian websites
trying to pin down
why KGB agents
had Ladas with
Wankel engines'**

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Richard is an author, broadcaster and award-winning writer of short autobiographies

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JETHRO BOVINGDON

Jethro's bought a supersaloon. But you'll never guess what it is...

LAST MONTH'S EXPOSURE TO THE outrageously capable and wildly exciting BMW M5 CS was a brilliant reminder of just how desirable supersaloons can be. I don't fully understand why big saloon cars overstuffed with power and tied-down until they focus more on performance than luxury are quite so intoxicating, but from E28 M5 to Mercedes 500E, from Lotus Carlton to Lexus GS F, from E63 to Porsche Panamera GTS, they somehow exude glamour, barely concealed aggression, bulletproof toughness and a sort of ice cold killer aura.

The bulletproof part needn't mean mechanically bulletproof. It's more the sense that you could crash one through a bank vault, steal the contents and drive out again with little more than a few scuffs. It's funny how a subtly flared wheelarch, deep-dish alloy and a bonnet that bulges where it once lay flat can heap so much attitude onto a familiar shape, isn't it? Imagine for a second you could become a character in the Disney Pixar *Cars* franchise. You'd be a supersaloon, wouldn't you? Some sort of badass double agent called Ripley Guns with a voice so deep it'd shake the cinema like a Top Fuel dragster on launch.

Well, I bought a supersaloon. Only, somehow, I ended up with something not particularly super. Nor that good to drive. I suppose it's pre E28 M5 (just), pre that formula for a saloon car with all the power and most of the control of a sports car. However, it is cool. And gangster. And impossibly rare. Beloved of dictators, Mafioso bosses and Rocky Balboa. The personal transport of Idi Amin, Mugabe and lots of other very bad people. Can you guess what it is yet? Yes, I am now the proud owner of a Maserati Quattroporte III built in 1984, finished in *argento* with *naturale* leather (we would call it 'tan') and fitted with the classic quad-cam Maser V8, here with 4.9 litres, 280bhp and 308lb ft. You can trace the engine's ancestry to the 450S that Fangio drifted to victory in the 1957 Sebring 12-hour and christened 'The Bazooka'. Hurrah. Driving through a three-speed auto. Oh.

Why did I buy this car? I do not know. My next unnecessary purchase was going to be a supersaloon, but I'd accepted that it would have to be an E60 M5. I know they're a nightmare. I know I'd inevitably wish it to be stolen to avoid the next big bill. But the heart wants what the heart wants. And mine yearns for that 5-litre V10 and the magical chassis that slips and slides so perfectly, the

unique and strange concoction of serene balance and rampant, voracious rev-hungry. I'd even started looking for one with a manual 'box on my travels to the US. As an aside, used cars are so much more expensive in the US. Which is odd considering that new cars are generally so much cheaper to buy or lease.

You know what are not expensive in America? Bloody Quattroporte IIIs. It was purchased for an upcoming episode of *Top Gear America* at my behest, but I knew I'd have to buy it once we'd finished filming. Assuming it didn't have a huge mechanical failure in the meantime. I first got to see it – peeling clearcoat on the bonnet, riding low on sagging suspension – outside a casino in Vegas. Set against the shiny, wholly artificial opulence of The Strip, the Maserati's intrinsic glory pierced through the fading details.

The brutalist shape by Giugiaro, the supercar highlights like the Campagnolo alloys and, of course, the Trident badge represent perfectly the endless turmoil of this brand that will forever play out like some kind of automotive Greek tragedy. It looked sort of rubbish, but sort of incredible and impossibly esoteric.

To drive? Well, here's the thing. The QP III weighs over 2000kg and its chassis is definitely 'sporting' rather than sporty. But it does have double wishbones up front and a multi-link rear – plus twin dampers for the rear axle (so it's basically a Delta S4, right?) and inboard disc brakes. It's just such a curious thing. The aluminium-block V8 is cool, too. Especially as it's fitted with four two-barrel carbs, which snort and snaffle and, occasionally, sing. It's not especially fast, body roll is pretty much out of control and the three-speed 'box is, of course, useless for fast driving. And yet the Quattroporte makes me smile and actually is way more nimble than it looks. This big old bus flows. The brakes even work pretty well!

There needs to be a point to this column, doesn't there? I just wanted to write about my Maserati. What a fantastic thing to be able to say! 'My Maserati.' Anyway, I guess the point is that the Thrill of Driving comes in many shapes and forms but, strangely, is so often found in big, heavy supersaloons. Perhaps that's a small comfort to people like us as manufacturers launch into an EV future where sports cars of less than 1300kg will simply be consigned to history. Handled correctly, weight isn't always an enemy that can't be defeated. Just ask anyone who's driven an M5 CS. Or, indeed, an old Maserati Quattroporte. But mostly the CS.

'It looked sort of rubbish, but sort of incredible and impossibly esoteric'

@JethroBovingdon

Jethro has been writing for **evo** for more than two decades and is a host on *Top Gear America*



Welcome to the first of three contests to find the greatest hot hatch on sale today. Round 1 sees the new Mk8 Golf R take on the brilliant Civic Type R and ballistic AMG A45 S

SECONDS OUT

BY JOHN BAKER, PHOTOS BY ANDREW PARROT





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HAT'S THE BEST HOT HATCH CURRENTLY ON SALE?

We have a few firm favourites but recently we've driven some great newcomers, so we reckoned it was time to find out definitively. This is the first of a trio of group tests that will establish the best from each class before we bring the very finest together for a final, best of the best, winner-takes-all shoot-out. Will it be the new Hyundai i20 N or Toyota GR Yaris? The new Cupra Leon or BMW 128ti? Or will it be the new Volkswagen Golf R, which here takes on two of our current favourites, the formidable Honda Civic Type R and the ballistic Mercedes-AMG A45 S?

If you love driving you also love hire car lottery – the thrill of arriving at the airport rental car desk not knowing what you're going to get. It's a bit like that with an *evo* group test, except that when dep ed Adam Towler calls to say what's being delivered to you for the start of the test, you're a guaranteed winner. 'Civic Type R,' he said. Bingo! Get in! Mind, if he'd said AMG A45 S I'd have been just as happy. And, to be honest, as the writer of this test I probably should have started with the new Golf R but, hey, logistics.

The Honda will do very nicely because it's the pre-test favourite. Probably. It was mightily impressive at eCoty 2020, holding its own against many cars that were much more powerful and expensive. It's a car of exceptional focus yet somehow not at the expense of everyday useability. It's only 'probably' the pre-test favourite because we've never pitched it against the Mercedes-AMG A45 S. The AMG was great on eCoty 2019 and sets the bar for hot hatch performance, its 2-litre, turbocharged engine delivering a thrilling 415bhp, which it deploys effortlessly through all four wheels. It's also a car you could use every day, perhaps even more easily than the Civic Type R thanks to its paddleshift dual-clutch transmission and even more cossetting ride.

You can never underestimate a fast Volkswagen Golf, though. The new flagship Mk8 Golf R could be the absolute sweet spot, treading the perfect line between these two highly accomplished rivals by combining the potency of the Honda with the four-wheel-drive ability of the Mercedes, topped with lashings of traditional Golf strengths and understated flair.

First, though, the Civic. From how it looks inside and out you might expect a raucous experience. In fact, while you feel hard-wired into the Civic through its incredibly precise, slack-free controls, it's also comfortable, reasonably refined and rides remarkably well.

The default drive mode is Sport and it's fine for almost every situation, though there's Comfort if you'd like the ride a little freer and 'R' if you want a sharper throttle and firmer ride. After a relaxing three hours heading north on the A1, Sport mode was also acceptable for the increasingly challenging road jinking cross-country to the rendezvous near Alston.

This is where the Honda shines brightest. Terrific steering feel and response allows you to roll your wrists and clip every apex with pin-point accuracy, yet while the front end has seemingly limitless grip it doesn't make the rear skittish. Superb damping gives it terrific poise and soaks up anything that comes its way, but what really tells you that this Civic has been obsessively honed is the brake pedal feel. It draws





attention to itself simply by being outstandingly good: slack free, responsive and exceptionally easy to modulate. It's as integral to the outstanding dynamic performance as the grip or damping.

I find the Mercedes and Volkswagen in a car park high above the rolling, green hills of Weardale. Still buzzing from the drive, I hop out, look back and see again why the Type R has been a non-starter for so many. I totally get it. It's a riot of go-faster ideas and dubious details. Having just added another brilliant drive to the many that have gone before, I'm long past caring how it looks, but for those still struggling, the new, wingless Sport Line version (see page 26) might be the solution.

Quick Golfs have long been the default choice of those who want to make good progress without attracting attention. The new Golf R gives you a 2-litre turbo engine with a Honda-matching 316bhp but here driving all four wheels and, optionally, with a rear-biased drift mode. There's no manual gearbox option, though, and the entry price of the R is a shade over £39k, compared with around £34k for the base Civic and a little over £51k for the base AMG A45 S.

The Golf's extra drive modes come with the 'R Performance Pack' (£2k) that also adds a bigger rear spoiler and these handsome 19-inch alloys. Surprisingly, switchable damping is also an option – only £785, but still – while the other big-ticket extra fitted to this car is the Akrapovic titanium exhaust. This gives you four tasty tailpipes and a 7kg weight saving but costs an eye-watering £3100 and helps push the price of this Golf R to close to £48k.

Sure, it's no Civic, but the Mk8 is not a great-looking Golf. It looks chunky in the cabin section and adding bigger alloys and a bulkier tailgate spoiler doesn't sort it. The Mercedes, then? Nope. Our test car's bland maroon paint makes the shape look as old as it is, and going for the 'Plus' model (over £57k) gets you forged alloys, a bolt-on Richard Grant tailgate spoiler (ask your grandad) and front wing 'canards'. The non-Plus A45 S is much less fussy but then also looks for all the world like an AMG Line A180 costing £20k less.

The Golf looks sharp from the inside and feels good, the steering wheel a little more sculpted than the Civic's but not to the detriment of feel, while the driver's seat has good shape and support. It doesn't take long for the switchgear and the HMI in general to get irritating, though. First off, why is the start button silver, square in shape and integrated into the centre console ahead of the stumpy gear selector (which works well)? Towler sees me looking puzzled and, having driven the Golf a couple of times, wanders over to show me an important bit of set-up – finding the touchscreen slider for the adjustable damping. I'm grateful because it would have eluded me and I'll be needing it.

The engine fires up with a promising, slightly fruity four-cylinder note. As in the Honda, the default mode is Sport but the feedback is more like Comfort; the steering lacks weight and feel, the engine is muted and throttle response is dull with a surprising amount of dead travel, so it feels like you're chasing the power rather than it being given up freely.

The fast track to livening things up is the illuminated blue 'R' button on the steering wheel. Instantly you have the crisp throttle you expected and there's more engine noise too, but not from those four big-bore, satin-finish tailpipes. Instead, it's piped in through the cabin speakers and it sounds like a

From top: this Golf has the R Performance Pack, which costs £2k and adds the rear spoiler and those handsome 19-inch alloys, as well as some additional driver modes



**'THE DEPTH OF
POLISH TO THE
WAY THE CIVIC
IS ENGINEERED
IS AWESOME'**



Porsche... but not a good-sounding one. In fact it sounds just like a 718 Cayman flat-four, with a Beetle-ish, off-beat thrum at idle, and even the quite random overrun pops are unconvincing, not so much rolling thunder as slamming cupboard doors. Apart from that weight loss I've honestly no idea what the pricey Akrapovic system contributes.

Right from the off there are suggestions that the chassis doesn't have the sort of control you'd expect of a fast hatch, and as the pace picks up those suggestions become uncomfortable realities. I'm following Towler in the Honda along the stretch of road I arrived on earlier and I can see the increasing confidence with which the Civic is being driven, as my confidence in the Golf diminishes. The surface gets busier and the Golf becomes less settled, bobbling over bumps that don't trouble the Type R.

Even when I've wound the damping almost all the way up, the Golf still doesn't feel composed or comfortable and, as the pace picks up a bit more, it's really struggling, not just dynamically but in performance too. It's got more gears than the manual Honda and uses them snappily, but its extra weight tells against it on the straights as well as in the corners; both the Volkswagen and Mercedes weigh 1550kg to the Honda's 1380kg.

Towler is really in the groove now; I'm seeing less of the Civic's brake lights. The Golf is now out of its comfort zone and I'm just bullying it to keep up. The steering wasn't connected or sharp at modest speeds and with a lack of bite and grip from the Bridgestones it has become comically



approximate. I'm turning in yards before I should and the nose is scrubbing wide like I'm driving in the wet. It feels as though the front end is heavy with mass, like the old VR6-engined R32, especially as it thuds into bumps in a way that suggests there's insufficient suspension travel.

By the time we pull up at the photo location my hands are hot and sweaty. Not because I've been out of my own comfort zone but because somewhere along the way I managed to hit the heated steering wheel button. It could be worse; on this road this morning Towler managed to hit the R button, setting the suspension back to Comfort... He's all smiles now, though. 'Earlier the Golf crumbled here but just now the Civic... the Civic blossomed. The depth of polish to the way it's been engineered is awesome.'

On this showing, the Golf R appears to have received a very light touch from Volkswagen's chassis engineers. I was hoping for more agility courtesy of its four-wheel drive, given that it can send power to the back end for its 'drift' mode. There are plenty of hoops to go through to engage this mode and after what I've just felt I'm not sure why you'd bother going through the rigmarole.

'This example doesn't feel as well resolved as the non-Performance Pack car we first tested,' muses Towler. 'Maybe this one has had a particularly hard life, but at times I wondered whether it was broken. I really dislike the steering, which has no feel at all and a bizarre dead zone around the straight-ahead, and there appears to be very little influence from the rear axle to aid turn-in,



so it often feels very nose-led and stodgy when asked to change direction. What's more, the journey up showed that there's little joy in simply gliding along swiftly at six or seven tenths, either.'

After the cloth comfort of the Honda and Volkswagen's driver's seats, slipping into the leather embrace of the Mercedes feels initially like dropping into a wingback Chesterfield armchair. The surroundings aren't exactly gentleman's club but are, as ever, interesting. The overall feeling in the Golf is tidy if a touch sombre, the Civic is a riot of red and black like an '80s hot hatch, and the

Above and left: every aspect of the Honda's hardware has been honed fastidiously, not least its superb brakes; its looks, though, remain as divisive as ever

A45 is an unexpected and strikingly chintz blend of satin-finish metal and piano black.

Drive the Mercedes for five minutes and you'd say that the 415bhp A45 is more like the Golf than the Civic. Its steering is light on feel and so lacks the direct, connected sense of the Honda, while the ride is free and soft-edged in the key-on, default setting. But the longer you spend at the wheel and the more roads you tackle, the more the AMG A45 shifts to the right, closer to the Civic.

It can feel all of its 1550kg straight after the Honda. Through a scenic, difficult sequence of dips and cresting corners where even the Type R feels under pressure, the AMG feels floaty and heavy. Not unlike the Golf, then, but after a couple of passes you realise the key difference is that the nose of the A45 hooks up and the car is eager to turn. Crank up the damping to tie everything down (and save your preferences to the easy-access Individual mode via the mode switch hanging off the steering wheel) and it's better. It's never going to cut and thrust like the rapier-sharp Type R but it has other tricks up its sleeve.

The irony of the Mercedes product strategy is that when you upgrade to the 'Plus' version of the A45 S, as well as getting all the aero addenda and lighter, forged alloys, you also get a full-length glass sunroof. All that weight, up high, just where you don't want it. If this had been presented as a non-negotiable by the Honda marketing

department, I suspect that Kakinuma-san, the engineer who heads up Civic Type R development, would have tendered his resignation.

So here's the thing. Despite the sunroof, in the right mode the A45 is very effective down a demanding road, and – listen out for the irony claxon – partly because it feels as though most of the weight is slung low between the axles. While steering feel and feedback aren't great compared with the Civic, after a few miles you realise that its turn-in is every bit as willing and its resistance to understeer as complete, as much because the chassis is set up to turn as it is a consequence of outstanding mechanical grip.

You quickly learn to trust the A45 S, to believe that its front Michelins will grip and the rear will willingly pitch in to help make the apex, so it soon feels natural and consistent and brilliant. Fully embrace it and you'll discover that in the right corners, when you keep the power on, the tail will eventually edge out into a progressive oversteer slide. Armed with this experience you can then set about using the Merc's significant 100bhp advantage to lock onto and hunt down that lairy Japanese hatchback.

Feeling the kick of the A45's ludicrously potent in-line four and hearing it howl to the red line highlights another opportunity that the Golf completely fails to take: an enthusiastic delivery and engine note. The sound of the Civic's in-line four working hard and peaking (prompting

Volkswagen Golf R

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1994cc, turbo **Power** 316bhp @ 5200rpm
Torque 310lb ft @ 2100-5350rpm **Weight** 1551kg **Power-to-weight** 207bhp/ton
0-62mph 4.7sec **Top speed** 155mph (limited) **Basic price** £39,295
evo rating ★★★★★



an upshift) is integral to the experience, and the Mercedes' engine is also thrillingly raucous hauling hard, with succinct pops when you upshift early on full throttle.

Towler describes the Mercedes engine as a force of nature, but reckons the Honda almost has the measure of it. Certainly, despite different dynamic styles, this pair can cover the ground at a similar pace. 'The concept of a rear-wheel-drive hot hatch is an alien one for most of us, but that's how the A45 feels,' says Towler. 'There's not much steering feel but I like the light, oily action of the rack, yet it's the sense of balance and how the car pivots around that tells you the most about what the A45 is doing. Once you're comfortable with this it's hugely exploitable; you can get on the power so early in a corner it's unbelievable...'

In the company of this pair, the Golf R doesn't feel finished, dynamically. It lacks grip, thuds into bumps and is easily deflected from what is already an approximate line. On great driving roads it's all at sea. The Honda takes apart a great road with exquisite precision and makes you feel good. In the Golf R you feel like you're trying to beat the road into submission with an inflatable hammer.

Thing is, if you simply liked the idea of having the fastest Golf and only used its full performance in a straight line every now and then, it would still fall short. Not because it doesn't feel as fast as its rivals, or sound fast, or even because there's so little feel or engagement, but because the whole

time you'd have to put up with the most awful HMI. There's so much wrong with it there isn't the space here: clusters of switches with ambiguous markings, cheap-feeling haptic steering-wheel switches... but probably the one detail that sums it up is that the touchscreen 'home' button isn't the universally adopted symbol of a house, it's just a square. It feels like a system designed by someone sitting idly at a desk who has never driven a car.

An easy win for the Honda, then? In many ways, yes. It's fast, involving – its six-speed gearbox is a joy to use – and it rises to and conquers every challenge with aplomb thanks to a remarkable dynamic reach that includes everyday and long-distance comfort. It's an amazing driver's car at an astonishingly good price. It's just a shame that, to some, it looks so cheap.

The Mercedes is impressive too, once you've dialled into it. 'The A45 was the slow burner in this test,' says Towler. 'Aesthetically it's a hard car to love. I'd rather be associated with the Type R's image because at least that feels more authentic somehow.' At first you wonder how the A45 is going to exploit over 400 turbocharged horsepower. It feels soft and heavy and you think it won't see which way the Civic went, but it exploits the agility and traction of its four-wheel drive to superb effect. It's a special thing, and if there's room in the hot hatch final for a best of the rest, it's in with a strong shout. ❏

Honda Civic Type R

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1996cc, turbo **Power** 316bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 295lb ft @ 2500-4500rpm **Weight** 1380kg **Power-to-weight** 233bhp/ton
0-62mph 5.8sec **Top speed** 168mph **Basic price** £34,415
evo rating ★★★★★

Mercedes-AMG A45 S

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1991cc, turbo **Power** 415bhp @ 6750rpm
Torque 369lb ft @ 5000rpm **Weight** 1550kg **Power-to-weight** 272bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.9sec **Top speed** 167mph **Basic price** £51,235 (£57,235 Plus)
evo rating ★★★★★



EMIRA: A



The Emira is the most significant new Lotus since the original Elise. We take our

by STUART GALLAGHER PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

NEW ERA



first detailed look at the new car – and the impressive new facility that will build it

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E'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE; MANY times before. We've waited for the new dawn, for the rebirth to deliver the bright future. We've waited for the next new owner to release the potential that others have failed to do, for the latest high-profile hire to recruit his high-profile mates before scurrying away on discovering just how hard running a car company actually is. It's why news of how Lotus is going to turn itself around always generates a disproportionate amount of column inches in relation to

the success that any of the aforementioned achieve.

So why is it different this time? What makes this Lotus reboot any different from the last half dozen? Two factors: Geely, and the people – led by Matt Windle – that it has invested in to get the job done. And while the Emira is the result of the remarkable journey Lotus has been on since the Chinese giant bought its controlling stake in 2017, it's the detail that's been sweated to deliver the new, two-seater, mid-engined sports car that suggests Lotus is finally in a position to make good on its promise.

Emira is a home-grown Lotus, designed, developed and built at Hethel by a team that is expanding by the day – 200 additional staff have been recruited directly to deliver the new car. It will be offered with two engine options. The first is the venerable 400bhp 3.5-litre supercharged V6 sourced from Toyota and

mated to a choice of six-speed manual and automatic gearboxes. There will also be a 350bhp 2-litre, turbocharged four-cylinder engine, the same engine in fact that you will find in AMG's pugnacious A35 hatchback and, as in the Mercedes, available only with a dual-clutch transmission.

Lotus did look within the Geely group for a suitable four-cylinder engine but the work required to make it appropriate for the Emira didn't add up, and neither did Lotus designing, developing and building its own engine. So the company went to Mercedes (Geely chairman Li Shufu owns a 9.96 per cent stake in Daimler) who duly obliged – and signed up as a technical partner for future projects, too.

Both powertrains will be installed in a new bonded aluminium chassis produced at Lotus Advanced Structures in Norwich. This 27,000 square metre facility will also fabricate everything from the Emira's fuel tank to its wishbones – in fact every component possible, down to the smallest bracket, a process that will allow unprecedented quality control for a Lotus, a key requirement if the new £60,000 sports car is to be the global success the company needs it to be.

Home to the Emira will be a brand new 12,000 square metre production hall unlike anything else seen at Hethel. Any thoughts of converting or combining the existing production halls, currently building the last Elise and Exige models, was a non-starter. 'We needed to do it this way,' explains Matt Windle as we stand in what will become the Emira's birthplace. 'This is what we needed to do to survive.'



Previous investment at Hethel barely kept Lotus alive, keeping the lights on and the sports cars trickling out of the factory at the end of each month. 'With this investment, this new production hall, our new paint shop, and all the new infrastructure across the site, we will go from building 40 cars a month to 25 a day on a four-day week, with our new logistics partner coming every day to collect cars rather than us rushing around at the end of the month to make sure we fill the transporters.'

Windle is like a kid in a toy shop as he shows *evo* around the developing Hethel site. The new automated production hall is the focus, but he's equally proud of how Lotus is now able to provide its loyal existing employees and every new recruit with a 21st-century working environment. Those responsible for Emira production will overlook the line from their elevated open-plan office on one side, with the famous Hethel test track visible behind them on the other. All staff benefit from a new canteen and can park their cars in a car park that no longer resembles a battlefield. Small changes, but they make a big difference to morale. 'Let's be honest, it's been tough working for Lotus and many have heard the promises of a new start too many times,' says Windle. 'This time, whether it's the new canteen or the Emira production line, I hope they can see that change is happening and that it's for the long term.'

For new recruits, it sets the tone of the company. It's not about what hours am I working, where will my desk be. It's about being flexible, being where you need to be, what are the benefits of being at Lotus. We're creating an environment that

people want to be part of so they can perform at their best.'

The long term for Lotus means electrification, with the Emira the last new internal combustion engine sports car to be born at Potash Lane. With Evora production already ended, Elise and Exige production concludes in November when the two halls will be consumed by the demands of building Lotus's sole sports car. One has already started the transformation, with Elise and Exige production now only occupying the old mechanical line; what was the trim line is being converted to a sub-assembly hall, with the first robots and automated components being installed and plugged into the mains as Windle guides us around. When Elise and Exige production comes to an end, their production hall will be transformed into another automated sub-assembly facility. The existing paint shop will also be skipped and converted into a state-of-the-art body panel storage facility, with an all-new paint shop in the final throws of being finished ahead of the Emira's launch.

Everywhere you turn there is a hive of activity to ready the Emira's new home. Validation prototypes numbers two and three (the early Evora-based prototypes that have been used until now are nearing the end of their working lives) are sitting waiting for their bumpers to be painted before they embark on their respective test programmes. The high-voltage electrical system required to feed the production lines is online; a new one-way system to prevent gridlock around Hethel when components arrive and finished cars leave is being finalised; a new IT system connects Lotus to the outside world. Every



'IT'S RARE FOR A CAR TO CAUSE A SHARP INTAKE OF BREATH, BUT THAT'S THE EFFECT THE EMIRA HAS'



Below and right: Emira artfully blends elements of Lotuses past, present and future but makes its own clear design statement, inside as well as out

building, new and old, is in the process of being painted; even the test track tyre barriers are being cleaned.

This forensic level of detailed scrutiny is all designed to make Lotus the most efficient it has ever been, which in turn should bring profitability and thus sustainability and survival.

Production will treble but the workforce will increase by only 50 per cent thanks to the efficiencies being put in place, and none of it at the expense of quality: Lotus is confident that the Emira will be the highest quality production car it has ever built, while retaining the bespoke appeal of a British sports car.

Which leads us to the Emira itself. It's rare for a new car to cause a sharp intake of breath, which then requires a moment to steady yourself, but that's the effect the Emira has the first time you see it. To those of us normally blasé about this sort of stuff, the Emira is a real breath of fresh air. Identifiable as a Lotus of today but very much a link to the Lotus of tomorrow.

It's the dimensions that take a moment to process. It's longer and wider than both Alpine's A110 and Porsche's Cayman, but lower than both, giving it a more squat and muscular stance, though with a longer wheelbase than either its proportions are spot-on. In the isolation of a photo studio it looks more mature than those rivals, too, which will surely help Lotus span the customer demographic currently enjoying an A110 or Cayman and those looking to step up from either but not able or prepared to go down the more expensive super-sports car route offered by the likes of Aston Martin, Porsche and McLaren.

There are hints of Evija in the surface detailing, but Russell Carr and his team have navigated a fine line when it comes to linking this series-production sports car to the £2million electric hypercar. Striking intakes in the front bonnet and upright LED headlights link tomorrow's direction with today's signature Lotus design elements in the form of a trio of openings in the front bumper. In profile, the creases, ducts and surfacing are simple but effective in providing the Emira with a taut waistline and a new, clearly defined look. The rear three-quarter buttresses rise into the roofline, itself running seamlessly into the engine cover, and the rear blends Evija-style vents with a clean design that combines function (exhausts and diffuser) with form, and without giving the impression that the Emira's innards are trying to make a break for freedom.

It's an athletic design rather than an aggressive one, but one that's cohesive and confident, a design you feel McLaren will take one look at and think: 'Bugger, Lotus has designed the car we wanted the Artura to be.' There are no active aero devices fitted to the Emira, a result of the engineering philosophy that has been applied to the car; instead, passive downforce is generated across the front and rear axles at all speeds, increasing accordingly as the pace picks up.

Inside is functional rather than revolutionary, with a traditional less-is-more Lotus approach to everything from the seats to the new TFT instrument display. The floating transmission tunnel is reminiscent of an A110's, but that's no bad thing, and V6-engined cars fitted with the manual gearbox retain the exposed gear linkage introduced on Lotus's outgoing models. It's an interior that feels comforting without being







Left: in-line four-cylinder and V6 engine options will be offered; cabin takes Lotus to a new level in terms of ergonomics, tech and useability

claustrophobic, serviceable without being spartan, and a clear ergonomic success. Having the road race towards you through the wraparound screen can't come soon enough.


The Emira has the widest track of any Lotus road car that's gone before.

There are double wishbones at each corner, and it will be offered with two suspension settings: Touring and Sport, the latter available as part of a Lotus Driver's Pack that stiffens the damping and lowers the ride height. Hydraulically assisted steering is retained, while the brakes consist of drilled discs with six-piston calipers for the front and four-pots for the rear.

Twenty-inch wheels are fitted front and rear, with a 245/35 tyre on the front axle, 265/30 on the rear. Goodyear's Eagle F1 Supersport is the standard rubber fitment with Michelin's Pilot Sport Cup 2 available as part of the Driver's Pack.

Away from the traditional driver-focused attributes that make

a Lotus a Lotus, there is also a raft of technology to bring the new offering thoroughly into the modern age, from auto-dimming mirrors to launch control and the electronic safety systems that are a must for any global car. The reason many gave for not buying a Lotus – specifically, being too pared-back – appears to have been addressed with the Emira. It's also been designed and developed to be a useable sports car, which means luggage space for more than a spare face mask and a door bin that can swallow a drinks bottle. Small details, big improvements.

Some will dismiss the Emira as a final throw of the dice in a game few are interested in playing for much longer, but this is just the beginning of the 21st-century Lotus story, with more derivatives planned and the capacity and capability to deliver more of what the customer wants rather than what the factory is capable of producing. It may be the last petrol-engined Lotus but the new dawn has only just begun to break at Hethel, and this time it looks set to herald a genuinely bright future. Expect people in Dieppe, Stuttgart, Gaydon and Woking to start taking a lot more notice of what's going on in Norfolk. 

HEAD TO HEAD AGAINST ITS RIVALS

	ALPINE A110S	CAYMAN S	EMIRA	CAYMAN GT5.4.0	EMIRA 3.5
Engine	4-cyl, 1798cc, turbo	4-cyl, 2497cc, turbo	4-cyl, 1991cc, turbo	6-cyl, 3995cc	6-cyl, 3456cc, supercharged
Transmission	6-speed DCT	6-speed man/7sp PDK	8-speed DCT	6-speed man/7sp PDK	6-speed man/6-speed auto
Power	288bhp @ 6400rpm	345bhp @ 6500rpm	360bhp @ TBC	394bhp @ 7000rpm	400bhp @ 7000rpm (est)
Torque	236lb ft @ 2000rpm	310lb ft @ 2100rpm	300lb ft @ TBC	310lb ft @ 5000rpm	315lb ft @ 3500rpm (est)
Weight	1114kg	1355kg	1405kg (min)	1405kg	1405kg (min)
Power-to-weight	263bhp/ton	259bhp/ton	260bhp/ton (est)	285bhp/ton	289bhp/ton (est)
0-62mph	4.4sec	4.6sec	4.5sec (est)	4.5sec	4.0sec (est)
Top speed	161mph	177mph	170mph (est)	182mph	180mph (est)
Price	£57,140	£53,030	<£60,000	£64,480	£70,000+





R E A R R

The classic Range Rover is the latest vehicle to get the restomod treatment,



by RICHARD MEADEN PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

A N G E D !

thanks to a special collaboration between Bamford and Bishops Heritage

WITH THE INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE NEARING the end of its protracted death march, and more and more car brands announcing EV-only near-future strategies, the emotional and aspirational shift towards classic cars with modernised manners and enhanced performance grows ever stronger. As a result, where once the notion of a restomod sat firmly on the periphery, it now occupies something approaching the centre ground, providing those with the requisite cash a straight choice between brand new stock showroom offerings and something far more interesting and individual (and those less flush with folding something to dream of owning).

Of the latest restored and revitalised classics currently competing for our attention, this rather special Range Rover is an unlikely yet very appealing outlier. The product of a collaboration between cult timepiece customisers Bamford Watch Department and long-established Land Rover and Range Rover specialist Bishops Heritage, the Bamford X Bishops Heritage Limited Edition is a fusion of the latter's time-served expertise in restoring and modifying Land Rovers and Range Rovers and the former's trademark monochrome aesthetic and A-List following.

Limited to a run of just ten examples, each BxB Range Rover is built to order by Bishops and incorporates a full restoration along with mechanical and cosmetic enhancements, with Bishops sourcing sound examples of the classic two-door Range Rover in right- or left-hand drive according to customer requirements. The example here is based upon a 1992 car, and all ten will be built around the late, two-door, classic-shaped Rangey built between 1989 and 1993.

As with all high-end restomods, the time, expertise and bill of materials required to complete each project means the resulting asking price will seem eye-watering to some of you. But when you learn that perfectly restored standard examples of the earliest 'Suffix A' models are pushing £150k, it perhaps makes the £175,000 (plus VAT) asking price for the Bamford Bishops Heritage Range Rover a little easier to swallow.

Looks-wise, it remains very much true to the original Range Rover, which is a good thing in our book as you don't want to mess with such an iconic piece of design. Modern LED headlights and black Bowler 18-inch alloys are the most explicit clues to the BxB not being a common or garden Rangey, but the square lines remain uncorrupted and are complemented by flawless Santorini Black paintwork. The dark window tints aren't for everyone, but if you're familiar with BWD's signature treatment of classic Heuer, Rolex and Zenith watches, the blackout effect is very much a Bamford look.

If you associate two-door Range Rovers with utilitarian interiors, or even the traditional luxury ambience of a later Vogue model, the BxB is a startling departure. The seats in particular are an homage to 1960s racing cars, with eyelets creating a distinctly GT40 vibe. Upholstered in a mix of Nomex and supple leather, they make a bold statement that's alien to most people's perception of the classic Rangey, but very much in line with the performance enhancements that Bishops makes to the powertrain and chassis, which are considerable.

With 470bhp courtesy of a Chevrolet LS3 engine, the BxB is really not messing about. Retaining permanent four-wheel drive with a two-speed transfer box, there's also a rear limited-





slip differential and a six-speed torque converter automatic transmission, both to enhance response during enthusiastic driving and retain the ability to cruise comfortably on the motorway. The engine installation is impressively tidy and features detailing consistent with the rest of the car – that’s to say some neat logos and sparing use of Bamford’s trademark blue, which is also found on the brake calipers and discreet exterior badging and even informs the tone of the backlighting for the dashboard instruments.

Chevrolet engine swaps in Range Rovers are nothing new. In fact you could say that in dropping an LS motor into the engine bay Bishops has executed a retro restomod, but the combination of engine, transmission, chassis mods, far better brakes, Michelin’s finest Pilot Sport SUV rubber and Bamford’s distinctive design theme elevates this 21st-century remake beyond any period Chevy-powered examples from back in the day.

How you respond to the results depends entirely on whether you’ve had any prior experience of early Range Rovers. If you haven’t you’ll be taken aback by how small the original model is, and by how connected to what’s going on you feel. Where today’s Range Rovers cosset and isolate you in a wafty, super-luxury driving environment packed with technology, the classic model is a much more mechanical device. Its bluff shape also generates more wind noise, but it’s worth noting the BxB is impressively devoid of the squeaks or rattles that regular classic Rangies tend to have in abundance.

In an unexpected way this Rangie is much more of an old-school sports car in soundtrack and spirit. The V8’s presence is always felt and never unwelcome. From the pleasingly off-beat





idle that lends the car a palpable pulse, to the mellow burble it emits with mild throttle openings and the good old-fashioned Hollywood car chase soundtrack when you really open the taps, this high-rise hot rod has a big and boisterous heart.

Such a surplus of power and torque means you can make effortless progress, a gentle squeeze of the throttle tapping into an impressively elastic seam of low and mid-range acceleration. But when you explore the last 30 per cent of the throttle's travel the mood shifts, with easy-going flex switching to eye-widening punch. The transmission can be a little slow to kick down – torque converter 'boxes didn't always behave like today's snappy, paddle-shift autos – but there's much to enjoy about the way this thing romps along on full noise.

Corners. Not something classic Range Rovers were designed to revel in, but something Bishops has ensured the BxB can attack with some gusto, thanks to Bilstein Ride Control electronic dampers that can be switched between pillowy soft and something approximating to firm, though all things are relative. Body roll has been largely eradicated from today's performance cars, but despite the fitment of front and rear anti-roll bars it's still very much a part of the BxB's repertoire. Fear not.

It takes getting used to, especially from the elevated driving position, but once your internal gyro compensates for the angle of lean, the seat of your pants registers plenty of grip and a surprising degree of poise and balance. It's more like a big '90s hot hatch in the way you can massage the weight transfer into and through a corner, so not only do you know where you are with it but you can make it tighten its line and even slide its tail on a closed throttle. It's great fun and quite unlike anything else you'll drive today.

Braking-wise, the BxB has more than enough stopping

power to contain its impressive appetite for straight lines, thanks to the latest disc technology and six-pot front and four-pot rear calipers. There's decent feel from a firm pedal, and there's progression too, so you can make nuanced inputs with confidence and finesse. It confirms that despite what you might expect, this Rangie has what any decent performance car has; that's to say a considered and nicely delivered consistency to the way it steers, stops and goes.


Where does it fit within the firmament of restomods? Well, it doesn't go as far in terms of complete re-engineering as those darlings of the scene Alfaholics, Eagle or Singer, but then you wouldn't expect, need or want a classic Range Rover to be clad in carbonfibre or hand-formed aluminium. Still, when I drift off into one of my regular Lottery win daydreams I can readily imagine a Bishops Range Rover sitting next to my GTA-R 290 or Singer DLS.

Inevitably, given the very particular nature of this car's specification, much of the BxB's appeal and desirability depends on whether you harbour any desire (secret or otherwise) for old Range Rovers, and of course, whether you appreciate the Bamford aesthetic. If you do, then the driving experience will only make you want it more. The performance is vivid, its delivery joyously rude when you really uncork it, but more than civilised enough when you simply want to cover some miles or mooch around town. And if you don't dig the Bamford vibe? Like all bespoke car builders, Bishops can accommodate private commissions.

If you owned classic Rangies back in the day, or have always hankered after one but never taken the plunge, this limited run from Bamford Bishop offers as strong a case as any of the more overt evo-centric restomods. And for the price of today's more over-the-top high-end SUVs, this leftfield choice is a far more imaginative proposition that should be on your radar. 🚗

**'WITH 470BHP
COURTESY OF A
CHEVROLET LS3 V8,
IT REALLY ISN'T
MESSING ABOUT'**





by PETER TOMALIN
PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

THE ART OF SPEED

Motorsport-related art usually plays it safe. Terry Ross's radical sculptures are among the rare exceptions



TERRY ROSS DOESN'T DO WORTHY OIL PAINTINGS OF Stirling Moss driving a classic Aston Martin or Ferrari at Goodwood. 'Everyone does those, and if I can't do something original, then I don't want to do it at all,' he says. So Terry's art is art with attitude and a poke in the eye for the traditionalists. If it were a car, it would be doing doughnuts on the Duke of Richmond's front lawn.

His signature sculptures are instantly arresting, the forms, the compositions and the colours a joyful assault on your eyeballs. But look more closely and there's just as much joy – and humour, and poignancy – in the tiniest details. One of his sculptures shows pre-war British ace Dick Seaman (no titting at the back) arm-wrestling his mighty Mercedes W125. Look closely and you'll see the tyre-tracks are made up of hundreds of miniature swastikas.

When you spot them it's slightly shocking, but then if you know your motor racing history you'll know that the Mercedes and Auto Union teams of the 1930s were indeed backed by the Nazis. Although, according to Terry, modern-day Mercedes high-ups were not amused when the piece was displayed at the Festival of Speed... 'Everyone from Mercedes came piling in,' he relates. 'They were shuffling around a bit and didn't look very happy, but there wasn't much they could do about it!'

His art is often about telling a story and challenging the viewer, but humour is important, too. When he produced a sculpture of James Hunt's title-winning McLaren, the trails from the wheels were slivers of mid-70s beer cans, Marlboro cigarette packets and clippings from era-correct *Playboy* and *Penthouse* mags. 'I loved all that "Sex: breakfast of champions" stuff,' says Terry.

'It was a series of three. One of them was bought as a birthday present for a chap, but when he got it he didn't like the saucy bits. So I reluctantly agreed to change it. But then I thought "Sod it", and I did one for myself and it was a complete collage of tits and bums and booze and fags, just outrageous. And I took it to Goodwood and the guy's brother-in-law bought it, I think to wind him up.'

Many pieces capture a precise moment in time – the exploding rear tyre on the Belgian-entered Ferrari 250 LM that cost its crew victory in the 1965 24 Hours of Le Mans; the moment Jo Siffert missed a gear at 225mph at 2am on the Mulsanne in the Gulf-liveried 917K in 1970 and blew the engine to smithereens. Much of Terry's art captures artistry at the wheel, too – Jim Clark holding his Lotus in a perfect drift; Gilles Villeneuve catching the tail of his Ferrari with an instinctive flick of the wrists...

This is art with a story to tell. But it never takes itself too seriously, and when you meet the guy who created it, you understand why. He's Terence Ross on his business cards and on his website, speed-still.com – 'but everyone calls me Terry, in fact my mum used to call me Tel', he laughs as he welcomes us to his home studio in his native south London on a sunny June day.

He's a proper car guy. Owned and spannered hot-rods and American muscle-cars in the '70s and '80s, once dropped a 350 Chevy V8 into a TR6, 'because it had to be done!'. These days he's mellowed, a little – his garage is home to a brace of immaculate M3s – E30 Evo 2 and AC Schnitzer E46. 'The toys' as he calls them. In the front garden, in a Carcoon, is a 1965 two-door GT Cortina that he's owned for 35 years, though he's considering selling it because he doesn't do so much spannering himself these days and it doesn't get the regular exercise it needs.

As a young man, Terry fancied a career designing cars, so after studying graphic design at uni he managed to get onto the MA automotive design course at the RCA. 'I was there for eight weeks!' he laughs. 'I'd spent the whole eight weeks drawing door handles. Meanwhile a couple of friends had gone into advertising and when I'd meet them for a drink they were clearly having a lot more fun!'

So he quit the design course for advertising and stayed in it for 20 years, rising to creative director for a major agency, working with the likes of Bailey, employing a young Charles Settrington (now better known as the Duke of Richmond) as a photographer, and drinking espressos in Charles Saatchi's kitchen.

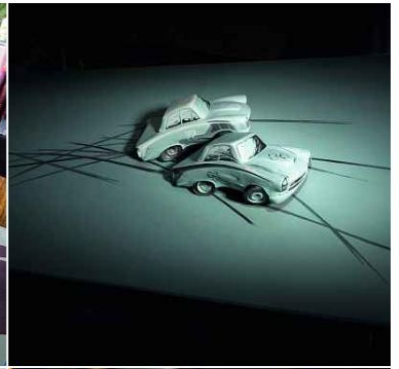
'Anyway, I got the wrong side of 40 – or maybe it was the right side – and thought "What the hell am I doing?" And I thought about starting a car magazine, one that would have been very much picture-led – this was about 20 years ago, long before



**'THIS IS ART
WITH A STORY TO
TELL. BUT IT NEVER
TAKES ITSELF
TOO SERIOUSLY'**



Left, right and below:
250 LM's exploding rear tyre,
café racer, Dick Seaman
and Senna McLaren show
the unique style of Terry
Ross, pictured below with
recent works based on Gilles
Villeneuve, 917K at Le Mans
and Carrera RSR at Daytona





**'IF I COULDN'T DO
IT HOW I WANTED
TO DO IT, THEN I
WOULDN'T DO IT AT
ALL' - TERRY ROSS**



Left and below: Hunt's McLaren (far left) on an appropriate background; Jim Clark Lotus drifting; distractions in the loo at Terry's home studio; Jaguar D-type study features a thin red line representing the lives lost at the '55 Le Mans



The Road Rat – and it was going to be called *Marque* and I'd planned the content for six issues. But when I showed it to the distributors they said "You can't do that", because I was designing covers without cover lines. And if I couldn't do it how I wanted to do it, then I wouldn't do it at all. Meanwhile I'd started playing around with clay...'

Remember *Speed Freaks*? Model cars as caricatures, chunkily sculpted with cartoonishly shortened and widened bodywork and impossibly distended alloys? *Speed Freaks* was Terry's first venture into sculpting cars and it was a massive success, tens of thousands sold all round the globe. And then after about seven years he knocked it on the head – for a variety of reasons but mostly because he was losing control of the way they were produced – and considered his next move.

'It's a cliché to say I followed my dreams, but I wondered: "What would happen if I started doing big stuff?" So I did the Rossi piece [the multiple MotoGP champion hanging off his Repsol Honda, previous pages], and that got me into the summer exhibition at the Royal Academy, and I realised I could do "art" art.

I wouldn't be where I am today without *Speed Freaks*, he notes. But the pieces he produces today – under the *Speed/Still* banner – are on another level, made in much smaller runs of three, four or five examples, with much more hand finishing. They're 'proper' works of art, combining sculpting and painting. But they're still terrific fun, with a thrilling sense of movement and energy. Pressed for influences, Terry cites the French photographer Lartigue, whose iconic panning shot of an early racing car, distorted by the lens he was using so that the wheels appear elliptical and forward-leaning, has a similar feel of speed captured in a moment.

'I'd describe my stuff as more graphic than realistic – that's down to my background as an art director – but they have to have a level of authenticity. The people who buy them are petrolheads first; the art appreciation comes second.'

So how does the creative process work? 'First comes the idea, often from something I've read, then usually a sketch or two. Then I'll do a maquette – a sculpture in miniature to see if it works – then I go big. It normally takes me 4-6 weeks to sculpt each model, using the wonderfully named Super Sculpey polymer clay, which is soft like plasticine. Then I stick it into the oven to harden, and that creates the master. Next I take it to a guy who creates the casts – normally not more than half a dozen – which are marble resin, and then the paint starts to go on. Each one I paint is unique, whether it's the colours, or sometimes the numbers on the cars – whatever it is, no two pieces are the same.'

Particularly tricky shapes might be cast in several parts and then pinned together with brass pins. The backing boards are MDF with beefy brackets and the finished pieces are wall-mounted by being slotted onto screws. The price for a typical piece is around four grand, with shipping costs on top. 'Which can be a lot,' Terry admits, 'but you really can't cut corners there.'

He can count a number of big names among his customers. A new study of Rossi will be going to the man himself. 'The Villeneuve piece, I ended up selling two of the three that I sold to other Formula 1 drivers, which kind of reinforces the point that everyone thought he was good, not just us mere mortals.'

He produces prints and huge back-lit images too, but the sculptures are still the bulk of his output and the pieces for which he's best known. He usually shows a selection of his latest work at the Festival of Speed, but this year he has decided to open his home studio for private viewings by appointment from July 4-17.

Current works in progress include a triptych based on the Ferrari 330 P4 that came second at Le Mans in 1967. 'The idea is three versions of the car on three separate backgrounds representing three stages of the race – 8pm Saturday, midnight and 8am Sunday.' Meanwhile he's reading about Fangio's road-racing exploits in saloon cars in his native South America in the days before he came to Europe. 'The lunacy of it! People were dying like it was a war – he was killing his co-drivers like you wouldn't believe and he had so many lucky escapes himself.

'So that's in the background, but then I think "Fangio, no. Everyone does Fangio". And I don't want to go down the same road as everybody else...' Knowing Terry, somehow I doubt there's any danger of that! ❧

For more examples of Terry's work and to arrange a viewing, visit speed-still.com.



PHOTOGRAPHY
by MATT HOWELL

LIVING THE DREAM

Why now is the time to buy the car you always promised yourself – and enjoy it while you can

IT'S HARD NOT TO BE A TOUCH GLOOMY ABOUT THE prospects for the kind of cars and the sort of driving that people like us have always enjoyed. The days of internal combustion are numbered; electric power is the future; downsizing, turbocharging and hybridisation have already changed the very nature of modern performance cars, while multiplying layers of electronics leave us ever further removed from the simpler thrills of driving.

At some point in the not-so-distant future, performance might well be capped, road speeds limited by GPS, and road positioning determined by radar. If big tech gets its way, cars will eventually be self-driving. And, in the shorter term, as politicians look to persuade us out of our ICE machines and into air-conditioned battery-packs, expect hikes in excise duty and fuel taxes to nudge us in the right direction (and add much-needed loot to government coffers).

But there is another way of looking at all of this. Now might just be the time to go out and buy the used car you always promised yourself. That's what the three chaps on the following pages did – and their stories might just inspire you to do the same.

MERCEDES-BENZ C63 AMG ESTATE

evo's Sam Jenkins is just 22 years old and remarkably this 6.2-litre 480bhp super-estate is the first car he's actually owned

THIS CAR GOES BACK TO THE VERY ROOTS OF MY automotive obsession. Of course, mid-engined exotics were always hard to ignore, but the W204 Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG was where my passion for cars truly began. Its arch rival, BMW's E92 M3, was similarly appealing to the pre-teenage me, but the combination of the AMG's thunderous soundtrack and the fact that it was related to the SLS supercar fired my imagination like nothing else.

The W204 took the hot saloon/wagon formula to the next level, its gargantuan powerplant significantly more potent than that of any of its rivals – for some perspective, with the Performance Pack Plus (PPP) option, the 480bhp produced by its 6.2-litre V8 is more than even today's G80 M3.

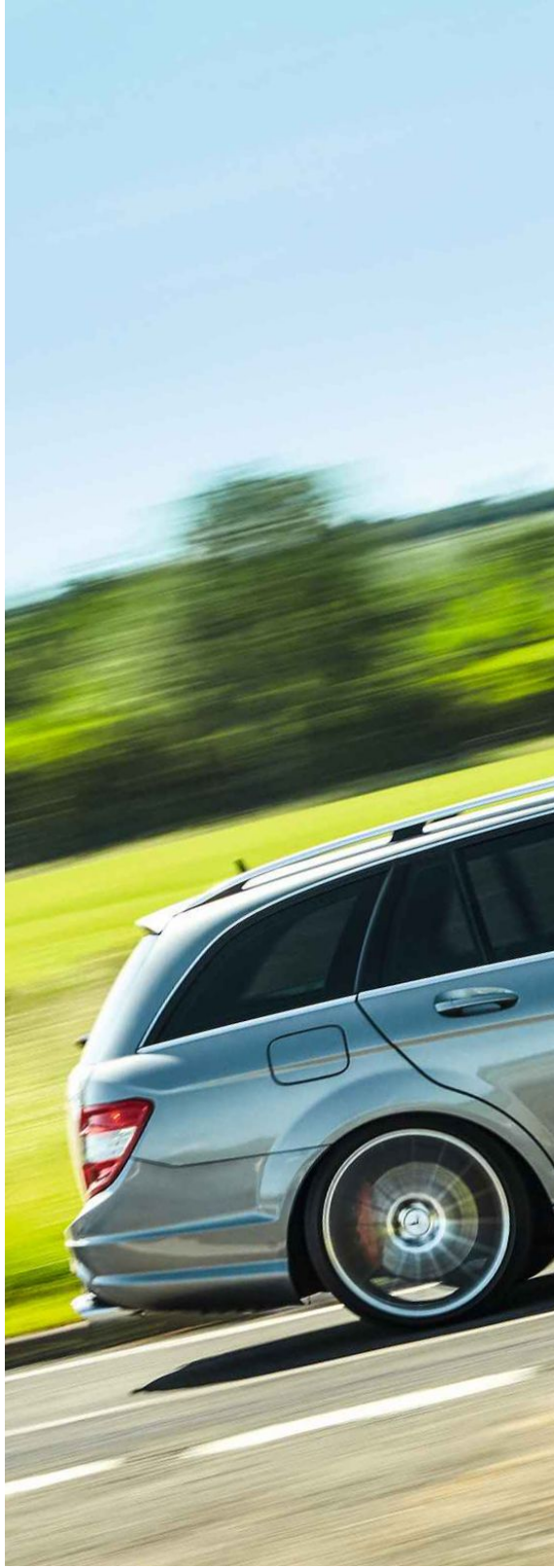
Granted, it lacks some of the dynamic ability of its Munich rival and suffers from Mercedes' lacklustre interior design of the time. Its modern-day counterpart is undoubtedly capable, too, but as the other two cars in this feature suggest, it's rather hard to resist the pull of a naturally aspirated V8.

Thanks to an incredibly fortunate set of circumstances, just over a month ago I was able to scratch my decade-long itch with the purchase of a C63 Estate. Though I had been set on a facelift car, the combination of a low 45,000-mile odometer reading, those glorious silver 19-inch multi-spoke wheels and the desirable PPP option meant I just couldn't let this Palladium silver 2010 example go.

The facelift interior is much more modern and the switch from a seven-speed torque converter to a sharper MCT also plays to the advantage of more recent cars. That said, the C63's highly addictive downshift barks are most definitely still present, while manual upshifts are more than brisk enough. The exterior design is significantly more aggressive on pre-facelift cars, too, and the bumper design has also proven to be more effective at providing cool air for the V8 – the more restrictive facelift bumper has caused some owners temperature issues.

Just shy of £23,000 is what I paid, but the £50,753 list price makes scary repair bills a real possibility. Noisy lifters and rattly camshaft adjusters are some of the most common issues, with head bolt failure also experienced in early cars. Fortunately my late pre-facelift example received revised items from the factory and has run without any major problems so far. Though a non-issue to some, the ability to play music through anything other than the radio is currently unavailable – even endless forum searches have offered no solution. In exchange for a healthy quantity of fuel, though, the throttle pedal offers plenty of auditory stimulation...

But why on earth – and *how* on earth, you may be wondering –





**'WHEN I WAS
QUOTED £700
FOR INSURANCE,
I REALISED MY
DREAM CAR WAS
WITHIN REACH!'**



did I purchase a C63 as what is technically my very first car (yes, really). Covid-induced working from home and a move back to the family abode eliminated the cost of living in London, and with little to spend money on during lockdown I was able to scrape together the funds. I did spend months pondering whether it would be more appropriate to use this sum for something a little more sensible. Any 22-year-old of sound mind would jump at the opportunity to get on the housing ladder, and rightfully so, but that can be done at any time... The ability to run a 6.2-litre V8 estate emitting the same amount of carbon as a LaFerrari probably has numbered days.

The other question I'm always asked is how I manage to insure it. Perhaps I'm odd, but even in my teens I spent hours on comparison websites in the hope of one day finding a reasonable quote for my dream car. For quite some time the figures exceeded the value of the car, before dropping to a few thousand once I reached my 20s. It wasn't until I turned 22 and received a mind-boggling reasonable quote of just over £700 that I realised a C63 was within reach.

As for running costs, access to a steady stream of test cars allows me to use it purely as a weekend car, keeping mileage and fuel bills to a minimum. Predictably, though, resisting the urge to drive it daily during the first month of ownership proved harder than I'd imagined. I can't deny that the C63's value plays its part, too. Though it's impossible to predict future values, prices do appear to be trending upwards, perhaps due to the rarity of what it represents. BMW dropped its

glorious, naturally aspirated S65 V8 with the launch of the F80 M3 in 2014, with Audi and Mercedes following suit in 2015 – Germany hasn't offered a single road-going NA V8 in over half a decade.

Of course, other super-estates are available, but the W204 C63 has something very special up its sleeve. The M156 V8. Unlike its Mercedes-built predecessor, the M113K, the M156 was the first V8 built from the ground up by AMG. Despite its 6208cc displacement, the 63 name pays homage to Mercedes' very first production V8, the 6.3-litre M100. AMG opted for a naturally aspirated set-up, ditching the supercharger of the M113K to create one of the world's most powerful NA V8s at the time of the C63's launch.

Lift the double-ridged bonnet to its unique vertical position and you'll find a rather attractive engine bay, itself a rarity today. What made this particular car so desirable to me was its darkened intake manifold, representing the use of the forged pistons from the SLS's M159 unit, new connecting rods and a lightweight crankshaft, all courtesy of the aforementioned PPP option. Combined with an ECU tweak, these changes liberated an additional 30bhp for a total of 480bhp at 6800rpm.

Peak torque of 443lb ft comes at a refreshingly high 5000rpm too, encouraging frequent climbs to the 7200rpm red line. With a slight increase in weight, 0-62mph comes a tenth later in the estate than the saloon at 4.5sec, with top speed lifted to 174mph through the PPP option.

A helping of Alcantara on the steering wheel also comes as part of the package, while red calipers signify the use of an uprated 360mm, six-



Left and above: mighty M156 was one of the last naturally aspirated engines before the new wave of turbos; PPP version makes a cool 480bhp

piston front brake set-up with aluminium hubs designed to improve heat management. Though less impressive than some of today's mammoth brake packages, the C63's large drilled and slotted discs have drawn more comments than just about anything.

So good is the M156 that Mercedes-AMG still uses a derivative of it more than a decade after its launch, swapping the road-going AMG GT's 4-litre twin-turbocharged eight for the naturally aspirated, dry-sump M159 in its GT3 racers. With a 2-litre four-cylinder C63 looming on the horizon, the M156 might just go down as one of the finest road car engines ever produced. Well, in my mind at least.

Purchasing a near-500bhp rear-drive AMG as my first car could be considered ludicrous. Running costs and the potential for a surprise bill are a scary thought, but the potential for missing the window to own my dream car was far scarier.

Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Estate (PPP)

Engine V8, 6208cc Power 480bhp @ 6800rpm Torque 443lb ft @ 5000rpm
 Weight 1780kg Power-to-weight 270bhp/ton 0-62mph 4.5sec Top speed 174mph (limited)
 Basic price new £50,753 Values today £15,000-£25,000

evo rating ★★★★★



**'THE WAY THAT
NATURALLY
ASPIRATED
ENGINE REVS,
IT'S FANTASTIC.
AND THE NOISE!'**

FERRARI 458 ITALIA

Steve Rockingham has owned some iconic road and rally cars, but never a genuine slice of mid-engined exotica – until now

I'M A LUCKY FELLA, I REALISE THAT. EVEN BEFORE I picked up the Ferrari at the end of the spring, I'd owned a string of great road cars and some truly iconic rally cars, too. I didn't have many car-related itches left unscratched, but there was one. I'd never owned a truly exotic mid-engined Italian supercar.

I wasn't convinced I needed one in my life – until evo's Adam Towler, an old mate who often gives me a steer on what to add to my stable, came on the phone. He knew I was considering a 458, but sensed I was wavering. 'Just do it!' he said. 'You won't regret it.' So, what's the verdict two months later? Was he right?

Before we get to that, a quick bit of background. To begin at the beginning, my love of cars came not so much from my dad – although as a chartered accountant he had a succession of nice cars, mostly Rovers and then one of the very first Range Rovers, which was just the coolest thing when I was a kid in the early '70s – but more from my grandfather, who was massively into cars. As a youngster I'd always be out in the garage with him and he'd show me how to change the oil and plugs and so on. Even now I do quite a lot of the servicing on all of our cars.

Meanwhile one of my parents' neighbours was into rallying and he'd take me out on road rallies and we'd do some marshalling, and then at 14 I started navigating – it was the earliest age you could hold a competition licence! Eventually we'd start doing the odd stage rally and pretty soon I was completely hooked.

Then at 17 I got my first car, an Alfasud, which was just a cracking little car – five-speed gearbox, disc brakes all round, made a great noise, handled like it was on rails – and it almost fizzed away in front of your very eyes. I realised my thousand-pound investment wasn't going to last very long if I didn't get out of it, so I sold it and bought an Escort RS2000. That was when the fun really started. As well as using it for work and shopping I was also rallying it, but now as a driver. I had RSs for years.

Work-wise, I trained as a quantity surveyor. My first company car in my mid-20s was a Peugeot 205 GTI, which was pretty cool, and that led to various other cool road cars – RS Turbo, Sierra Cosworth, E36 M3 saloon... Eventually I started my own construction company, which has allowed me to indulge my passions for both road cars and rallying.

I first caught the collecting bug when an ex-Stig Blomqvist Lotus Sunbeam came on the market and I managed to get it for a figure you could only dream about today: £17,000. That was my first works car. After that I bought an ex-works Triumph TR7 V8, which I still have to this day. And in a moment of madness I bought an ex-Colin McRae Ford Focus World Rally Car, which I used for a few events,



but it's a really difficult car to run: so complicated and so expensive – way out of proportion with the fun you were having. Never mind fuel at £4 a litre, how about £250 for an oil filter, or £12,000 for a clutch!

Next I bought an ex-McRae Impreza WRC, the 1998 Rally of Portugal winning car. I had so much fun with that. It's a car anyone could drive and it actually makes you look like you know what you're doing. I've also got an ex-Tommi Mäkinen Impreza – the car in which he drove his last rally – and a Group A Peugeot 309 GTI that Richard Burns did the '91 RAC Rally in, I believe his first factory drive.

So I've managed to build up a nice little collection. And I still drive the rally cars, though more often in demos these days, including the rally stage at the Festival of Speed. They're like a ticket to all the best events.

Road cars have included a Ford RS200, an M5 V10 Touring, which was just fantastic, and I've currently got a Gen 1 997 GT3 RS in orange – I wanted green but I couldn't find one, but otherwise it's just about perfect!

And then I started thinking about a Ferrari. I've never had a Ferrari before and it was just one of those boxes you really need to tick.

I'd noticed that 488 prices were coming down, while 458s were staying pretty much level, but the 458 just looked prettier to my eyes, and the naturally aspirated engine was important, too. The last naturally aspirated Ferrari V8 had to be the one to have.

I think it might become a bit like the F355 – they were 'the one to have' for years. I haven't bought it as an investment, but if it doesn't lose

a lot, that would be great. In the end, though, I just really fancied one!

So I trawled through all the ads, as you do, and looked at a couple of cars at main dealers, but they didn't have quite the right spec. I wasn't hung up about having a red one, or a Spider, but it did have to be the right colour/trim combination – I wanted a dark interior – and the right options.

Then a couple of months ago I spotted this 2015 car at Tom Hartley's and I loved how it looked in *Ganna di Fucile* ('gunmetal' in English, and apparently an old Ferrari racing colour) while the spec was awesome: front axle lift, carbon driver's pack, which includes the LEDs on the steering wheel, full leather, carbon splitters and back panel, shields, sports exhaust, just about everything you could want. And just 7800 miles and one owner. It would have been a £230,000 car new; I paid £160,000 for it, which included a warranty, and it's still under the Ferrari service plan, which runs for seven years, so it's got at least another service in there.

I did toy with the idea of a McLaren, but I heard a few stories about things going wrong with them. And as soon as I drove the Ferrari I just fell in love with it. There's something lovely about that naturally aspirated engine. The way it revs, it's just fantastic. And the noise! It's almost worth it for that alone.

It's a similar thing with the GT3 RS. I had thought that one would be so much better than the other that it would be obvious which to keep,



Left and above: the last naturally aspirated series-production Ferrari engine, and (above) owner Steve Rockingham settles into his work

but in fact they're so different I can justify keeping them both. They're probably not far apart on outright performance, and in fact the Ferrari is a bit more civilised and easier to drive, but having something supercar-shaped is definitely a novelty: the GT3 RS is still relatable to other 911s, whereas the 458 Italia is genuinely exotic and different.

I'm 58 now, and I've decided it's all very well working yourself into the ground, but life is for living. I'm lucky enough to be fit and active – touch wood – but I know it won't always be so easy for me to jump in and out of cars like these, so I'm making the most of it while I can.

The Ferrari won't do a huge mileage – special days out, events, maybe the odd road trip. But it will be used and enjoyed – sometimes just going out and having a drive for the sheer hell of it. Somehow I can't imagine doing that in a Tesla.

Ferrari 458 Italia

Engine V8, 4497cc **Power** 562bhp @ 9000rpm **Torque** 398lb ft @ 6000rpm
Weight 1485kg **Power-to-weight** 384bhp/ton **0-62mph** 3.4sec **Top speed** 202mph
Basic price new £169,545 **Values today** £110,000-£160,000

evo rating ★★★★★



R100 AMV

ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE

*A big birthday was just the excuse
Peter Tomalin needed to buy the car
he'd always promised himself*

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO TAKE SOMETHING MOMENTOUS to prompt you into buying the car of your dreams. But, in my case, it did. Within the space of roughly 12 months I'd lost both my parents and was about to turn 60. Which are the kind of events that make a chap reflect on life and re-order his priorities. And, after due reflection, pretty near the top of mine was buying an Aston Martin. What had been a daydream now felt like an imperative.

My dad had almost bought an Aston once, a DB6, back in the early '80s, but it slipped through his fingers – and then values went through the roof. He'd missed his chance. I decided to take the plunge and, if things didn't work out, at least I could bore my grandchildren by telling them how I once blew the family fortune on an Aston Martin. A far bigger regret would be looking back in five or ten years' time and wishing I'd done it when I could. So, with a modest but very welcome inheritance, I started looking.

I'd decided it would be an early Gaydon-era car, either a DB9 or a V8 Vantage. A DB7 V12 Vantage would have been another option, but the more modern underpinnings of the 'VH' cars swung it for me. Both DB9 and V8V are pretty much at the bottom of their depreciation curves (or at least that's what I'd convinced myself), with well cared-for examples widely available between £30,000 and £35,000.

You don't have to pay even that much. You can find plenty of either, but Vantages especially, for less than £30k, usually either private sales or through non-specialist dealers. Many of these are good, well-maintained cars, but equally many will have been run on a limited budget with less than fastidious attention to servicing. Which gives significant potential for financial ruination. So if you're looking at cars in the £25k-30k bracket, make sure you do your homework – there's plenty of good advice out there on various forums and on YouTube from the likes of Aston indie Bamford Rose. If you don't feel confident assessing a car yourself, many specialists provide an inspection service for a few hundred pounds that should flag up any looming issues, though there are, of course, no guarantees.

Except, that is, when you take the second option: pay a few thousand more and buy from either an official Aston dealer or a well-regarded specialist, knowing that the car will have been thoroughly checked and will carry a warranty for at least the first year. Being an Aston virgin and something of a coward, I knew this was the right course for me.

Next step was to drive examples of both. The DB9 is a fine GT and an undeniably beautiful car; it has a more spacious, more



**'YOU CAN
ENJOY THE V8'S
PERFORMANCE
WITHOUT WAVING
YOUR LICENCE
GOODBYE'**

sumptuous interior, and – its trump card – it has that wonderful 5.9-litre V12 engine. The V8V is more than decently quick, even the early 4.3, but the big twelve is on another level: utterly effortless performance with a soundtrack that's positively symphonic.

The Vantage is slightly more sporting in its dynamic make-up; its shorter body overhangs, slightly firmer suspension and – not least – the fact that its engine is set lower and further back in the chassis, mean it feels that bit more sucked down to the road, that bit more agile through a sequence of bends. The V8 isn't as torquy as the V12, but its boisterously vocal soundtrack encourages you to rev it right out. A modern turbocharged sports car would blow it away, but it means you can enjoy the full reach of the VH V8's performance all the way through the lower gears without waving your licence goodbye.

And that was the other thing in the Vantage's favour: all early V8Vs are manuals when the vast majority of DB9s are autos with paddles: manual Nines are like hen's teeth and command a substantial premium today. And I really liked the idea of a manual gearbox. While the shift in the Vantage isn't the best – blame the remote linkage to the rear-mounted 'box – it does give you another tangible connection to the car, and its heavy, mechanical feel is evocatively redolent of Astons of the past. As a long-time Aston fan, I like that.

I was being drawn inexorably towards a Vantage, and then I spotted a new arrival amongst the stock of Warwickshire-based specialists McGurk Performance Cars: an early 2006 car in rare Toro red with

Phantom grey leather, 40,000 miles, five former keepers (the only minus point) but well known to John McGurk and his team, since they'd serviced it for the last six or seven years and sold it twice before.

Knowing it probably wouldn't stick around for long, I drove across to the showroom a couple of days later. And it did look absolutely terrific. The nose and the leading edge of the rear arches had a light freckling of gravel chips, but nothing serious; the door edges, handles and around the mirror supports (usually the first areas to suffer corrosion) all looked bubble-free; the clutch felt fine; there was no sign of oil leaks from the timing cover, and John assured me the rear subframe had only the usual superficial rust (gasket replacement, clutch renewal and subframe refurbishment being the biggest potential drains on your savings with these cars). Boasting a full service history, it had clearly been cherished by each of those previous owners.

The asking price was £32,850, so with the kind of brutal haggling that Alan Partridge would have been proud of, I hammered John McGurk all the way down to £32,500. He didn't stand a chance. But a service and fresh MOT would be included and John offered to refurb a wheel that had a slight nerf to the rim. I was happy with that.

I picked it up the day before my big birthday. It was a gloriously sunny spring day and the drive home to Cambridgeshire was one of the highlights of my motoring life. That was three months ago and there hasn't been a single moment of regret since.

According to John McGurk, values of early Vantages (and DB9s) had



Left: early Gaydon Vantage has 4.3-litre V8; it's decently quick and makes a terrific noise. Manual 'box adds another welcome shot of involvement

been gradually drifting downwards for a number of years, but from early 2020 they started to harden again and the best cars have even edged up by a few per cent over the last 12-18 months.

That's a nice thought. But, honestly, it hardly crept into my reckoning. Because there are some things you just can't value in pounds sterling. When I open the curtains in the morning and see the V8 Vantage sitting on the drive, it puts a soppy smile on my face; when I fire up the rowdy V8, I break out into a broad grin, and every drive genuinely does feel like an event.

My parents would have understood. 'You are,' as my mother often told me, 'a long time dead.' And, as my father often said, with slightly less profundity but no less feeling: 'I should have bought that bloody Aston Martin.'

Aston Martin V8 Vantage

Engine V8, 4281cc Power 380bhp @ 7000rpm Torque 302lb ft @ 5000rpm
 Weight 1570kg Power-to-weight 244bhp/ton 0-60mph 4.8sec Top speed 175mph
 Basic price new £79,995 Values today £25,000-£35,000

evo rating ★★★★★



CONCLUSION

IT'S SURELY NO COINCIDENCE THAT ALL THREE OF the cars featured here are naturally aspirated; slightly more of a coincidence that they're all V8s, but actually that's not so surprising. Each of those engines is, as you'd expect, very different in nature to the next, from the C63's thumping, torque-rich 6.3 to the 458's screaming flat-plane-crank 4.5, but what they have in common – beyond their abundant power and keen throttle response – is a wealth of what we call character. Soul, if you like. These engines are living, (fire) breathing entities, the absolute heart of each of these cars. One thing's for sure: you won't get any of that from a battery pack.

Of course, other engine configurations are available. Yowling in-line fours, howling sixes (straight, bent and flat), even 10- and 12-cylinder cars are all out there waiting for you. We've focused here on three particular models, but we've barely scratched the surface of what's available in today's marketplace. E46 M3s and E39 M5s,

996 and 997-gen Porsche 911s, Audi R8s and B7-gen RS4s, Imprezas and Evos, Elises, Exiges and Esprits, RS Clios and Méganes, F430s and Gallardos – there really is something for all tastes and all pockets.

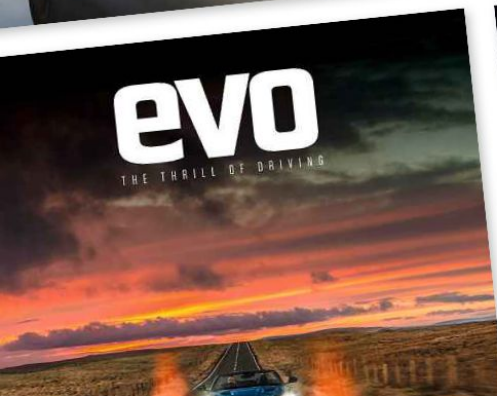
In time, cars like these will become a dwindling resource; restrictions on their use may well follow. But the underlying message here is a positive one. Their days may ultimately be numbered, but they're still going to be around to enjoy for many years to come; these and literally dozens of other great cars that pulse with red-blooded vitality.

As long as you're prepared to be realistic about the running costs, and unless you're planning to drive them into the centre of London (and why in God's name would you?) there really aren't any prohibitive penalties for their use. For the time being, at least.

Which leaves only two questions. What are you going to buy – and what are you waiting for? ❧



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An aerial photograph of a dirt road winding through a forest. A large cloud of dust is kicked up from the road, creating a dramatic, hazy atmosphere. The road is dark and textured, with visible tire tracks. The surrounding forest is lush and green, with sunlight filtering through the trees.

LIFE THROUGH A LENS

JUSTIN
LEIGHTON

After 15 years photographing major world events, often in high-risk conditions, Justin Leighton turned his hand to automotive photography - with outstanding results. Here he tells his story and selects some of his favourite images

by RICHARD MEADEN



T'HE SOUND OF KALASHNIKOV COCKING is always a bit of a worrying sign.' No, this is not typical Life Through A Lens fare. But then we're talking to Justin Leighton, a man who most definitely is not your typical automotive photographer.

For an intense period of some 15 years between the mid-to-late '80s and the turn of the millennium, Leighton forged a career as one of the world's most highly regarded reportage photographers. Often heading into war zones and places of political unrest, his award-winning work documented the extremes of the Balkan conflict, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the first Gulf War, seeing him capture images that symbolised defining moments of the late 20th century.

So how did Leighton become a photographer? 'Well, I can tell you why, but I've got no bloody idea how!' he confesses. 'It just sort of happened. I left school when I was 15. I was one of those bright kids who took ages to read or write anything. I was frustrated and, to be honest, probably a bit gobby. So I got on a train and came to London, where I worked all kinds of weird jobs – including cleaning autopsy rooms – and lived in a semi-squat, eventually becoming a photographer when I was 17 or so. The strangest thing is I wanted to be a writer, not a photographer.' Definitely dodged a bullet there, Leighton.

'A mate of mine, Adam LeBor, was setting up an open-access youth magazine called *Fairly Serious Monthly*, and I ended up being the picture editor. I'd spend a fortune getting images from Magnum Photos. We lasted for about six issues, and we were selling reasonably well. It was ahead of its time really, because it was very much internet-style citizen journalism, with young people talking about their lives from a first-hand perspective. It was brilliant in lots of ways.'

By this stage Leighton had started taking his own images. Storytelling remained his goal, but through pictures not words. News assignments provided the biggest draw, including trips to Russia in the mid-to-late '80s. As he explains, it was working in areas of unrest and conflict, or merely situations with



911 rally car drone shot
(previous pages)

'Porsche Newsroom sent me to Walters Arena to shoot a rally-prepped Tuthill 911. I had a ride in it and I was blown away. The overhead angle was something fresh back then, and it told the story: a lovely old 911, gloriously sideways and on the gas all the way round a hairpin.'

Tricycle on Bonneville (above)

'This was on a *Top Gear* shoot with Bentley. We were hanging around as the sun came up,

and this guy whizzed past. He was heading out to check the salt. It was a case of swing round, lift the camera up and shoot. I think I got three frames. Completely unplanned, but one of my favourite images.'

Soldier with rifle (right)

'This was in Romania during the revolution in '89. There was gunfire at our hotel, so, of course, I went running towards it. We were pinned down by sniper fire for about half an hour. I don't speak Romanian,

he didn't speak English, but we were both young kids feeling a bit scared. We shared a cigarette afterwards.'

Mercedes-AMG GT R (far right)

'This was for Mercedes. Scotland always extracts a payment from photographers – mostly in grey hairs, because the weather is invariably terrible. This particular day had been a washout, then we got this sunset. We had about four minutes to shoot front and rear tracking. Fraught, but so worth it.'







Concorde and Porsche 917 (top left)

'We shot this in the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm Museum in Somerset. Concorde was surrounded by other aircraft, which we couldn't move, and the image had to be released first thing the following morning. The 917 was positioned in literally the only spot we could squeeze it into. My retoucher then had to remove all the other aircraft digitally.'

Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow and northern lights (left)

'This was an Octane job with Harry Metcalfe. We were in

northern Norway, inside the Arctic Circle, and had been trying and failing to get a shot with the northern lights, then some locals told us we'd be in luck. We parked up and stood there freezing to death when right on cue the sky began to swirl. Truly one of those magical, epic things. Right place, right time.'

Fall of the Berlin Wall (top)

'I was 22 and was in Berlin for the *Sunday Telegraph* and a few other magazines. The regime was tottering and in collapse. Everyone was turning up and taking a pickaxe or whatever they

could to just hack away at this hated symbol. It was spontaneous. I didn't think much of it at the time, but the punk really symbolised that moment.'

McLaren F1 in the rain (above)

'I got into trouble for this. We had the F1 for a *Ramp* magazine shoot. We probably should have scrubbed the job because the weather was so bad, but I thought, "You never see these cars in the pissing rain," so we carried on. I think they had kittens, but that car in those conditions made a unique shot.'

an edge, that both forged his photography skills and an independent spirit.

'I've always been freelance. I've never had a contract with anyone in my life. Those early trips to Russia got me a few "ins" with papers such as the *Guardian* and *Mail on Sunday* before I got picked up by the *Telegraph*. I just found I could do it – taking pictures at demos and places where some not very nice things were happening.

'I was drawn to it because I was idealistic. I thought that if you exposed the things that were happening and if you told people's stories then maybe it'd give them half a chance to have a voice and maybe lead a better life. That was my driving force for years. The thing with being a photographer is you can't do it from the hotel bar. You have to be there, in the thick of it. Ultimately that takes its toll.

'I'd been in a few scrapes when things got fruity, but I always believed that if you can talk to people and you've got a bit of luck, chances are everything will be fine. That said, sometimes things aren't fine. Mates of mine haven't been so lucky. In the end I decided I didn't want to subject myself to it anymore.

'When I came back I was floundering around for a bit. I'd split up with my wife. My lovely house in Spitalfields was gone, all those trappings of a successful, international photographer, gone. I had a one-year-old son. My head was a bit messed up. It wasn't great.'

Appropriately for someone who had always had a love of things automotive, and for whom four wheels had often saved him from potentially dicey situations, cars proved to be Leighton's personal and professional salvation: 'I have some great friends, and it was through one of them that an opportunity came up to take photographs for a newspaper motoring column. This would have been in the mid-noughties. I didn't really know what I was doing, but shooting cars really seemed like a good fit for me. I managed to build the start of an automotive portfolio. It was a bit ropey to be honest, but I got commissioned by Charlie Turner at *Top Gear* to shoot the three nutters on the TV show jobs – I think he knew they wouldn't faze me – and I also got a job from *evo*. I just went from there, really.'

Leighton quickly found his niche in travelogues – 'It's always about the story' – and established an expansive style that, were it not for the cars, could happily grace the pages of *National Geographic*. His style has also found favour with car manufacturers, the more enlightened brands keen to capture something beyond the hardware.

Unsurprisingly, Leighton remains a wanderer at heart. 'If you asked me what my

ultimate job would be it would always be a road trip. It's going somewhere. It's going exploring. Getting in a car – doesn't have to be fancy – with a good writer and a bag of Haribo and going somewhere.

'Even when I was doing news, I used to love the trip more than the event itself. Travelling through the mountains between Iran and Iraq in a Series IIA army Land Rover, for instance. Cars are a great leveller. You've got a common language and a shared passion. I remember James May saying to me when they were in Damascus, he'd walked out to get a pack of cigarettes and a cab driver wound his window down and shouted out at him, "Oh, look. Captain Slow!" And that's wonderful. We're not adversaries. We're not different. We share a common humanity, and cars bring that out in us.'

For someone who has made a living as a freelance photographer for more than three decades, Leighton still derives pure and simple pleasure from taking photographs: 'I've got more qualifications for operating chainsaws and rifles than I have for cameras, so it's a constant source of wonder and amusement to me that I still earn a living from taking pictures. I still wake up every day thinking I might have to get a proper job.'

Because of his route to shooting cars, Leighton's choice of equipment is ruthlessly pared back: 'I started off with film, so I had a Nikon FM and an FE, plus three lenses: a 28mm, a 50, and a very fast 135, which I had a 1.4 converter on. Oh, and a bag of Kodak Tri-X 400 film. And that was it. I loved those Nikons. Still have them, actually. I'll never part with them.'

'I shoot on Sony now. They're amazing professional tools – 25 frames per second is crazy – but I don't feel any emotional attachment to them. I shoot most of my stuff on a fixed 40mm lens, with zooms for panning. I went through periods of throwing equipment at staff, but now if it's a big marketing or ad job I just hire the extra kit I need. My mantra when I speak to students is "Don't buy gear. Buy books." I basically taught myself everything I know from looking at and reading about great images.'

So what's Leighton's tip for the perfect four-wheeled adventure? 'I think I'm essentially quite chaotic, but I do plan trips in a certain rudimentary way. I just need to have some sort of overarching plan. I know where I want to start off and I know where I'd like to end up. The trick is recognising it's the bit in the middle where the magic happens.' ❧



AMG Project One (top)

'I was sent to a secret location and had three hours to prep for capturing an image of the ultra-secret Project One in the minute or so window between it coming out of where it was hidden and being put in a transporter. The engineers made it very clear my photograph was of no importance to them. Pressure with a capital P.'

Decorated tree (above)

'I couldn't find this tree again even if I wanted to. It was on a

massive US road trip with the then-new Mustang. It's just one of those bizarre, beautiful things you see on long journeys. To be honest had I not got a picture of it it could have been a dream, you know?'

Lotus Esprit (top right)

'Another trip with Harry Metcalfe, this time to the Italian Alps. It was just before the first Covid lockdowns, so the last road trip I did. It was a pretty hectic shoot, but I love the feeling in this picture. You wouldn't set out to have that

shadow slicing across the car, but it adds impact. A perfect imperfection.'

Coast-to-coast drive (right)

'This was taken for Mercedes-Benz UK during an event in which media drove G-wagens coast-to-coast across Scotland, completely off-road. The start was near Inverness and the finish near Ullapool. I ran across the moor in pitch dark to get this image, which is unusual for me, as generally I reserve running for when I'm being chased or shot at.'



by HENRY CATCHPOLE

BARN STORMER





Emerging from an unassuming barn in Oxfordshire, the restomodded 911s of Theon Design have their own niche in the world of remastered Porsches. We drive the company's latest creation to find out what makes it different





TURNING OFF THE MAIN ROAD, I WONDER if there are any farms left in this part of the world that are actually purely concerned with farming. Are there any cow sheds or grain stores with their originally designated contents? Any stables sheltering horsepower of the hoofed variety?

The phrase 'barn find' usually conjures up an image of an old Ferrari, Bugatti or Aston that has spent decades doing service as a chicken coop or a trellis for some brambles. But these days, barns are just as likely to reveal something shiny and new, whether it be a complete car or some finely crafted component thereof. So much knowledge and expertise is being put to work in unassuming buildings across the country. No big signs, no fancy receptions, just magnificent feats of manufacturing hidden away behind roller-shutter doors. I suspect The Grey Barn will be a great example. But first I've got to find it

The narrow driveway meanders through fields for over a mile and I begin to wonder if I've made a wrong turn, but eventually some buildings heave into view. A farmhouse. Some offices. Some agricultural equipment. Ah, The Grey Barn, tucked away in a corner. The unassuming home of some of the most beautiful restomod 911s you're likely to see. The home of Theon Design.

Adam Hawley is the very affable man behind the company. You could call him the founder or managing director, but that makes him sound aloof and detached and proprietorial, and he's none of those. He's wonderfully enthusiastic, quick to praise the work of others and keen to emphasise that the cars produced here are a team effort.

However, for all that, this is a company born out of Adam's personal project car. He graduated from Coventry University with a degree in Transport Design and then went on to spend over 15 years designing concept cars and production cars for the likes of BMW and Jaguar Land Rover. But in that time he also did design work on powerboats and on Airbus A380s, the largest passenger jets in the world. He has a real interest in architecture too. He has always loved 911s, though, and when the opportunity came he decided to put his design skills into creating his own dream version of a 911.

When it was finished he was astonished by the reaction. Everywhere he went he would be stopped and asked about it, to the point where he thought 'there's probably a business in making more of these'. And no one was more enamoured of the car than his own young son, Theo. Barely old enough to stand he would spend hours in the driver's seat playing with the steering wheel. So, when the company needed a name, Theo became Theon.

Today, the cars that emerge from the workshop in Oxfordshire are all the descendants of that original car. They are based on 964s and after the donor car has been taken back to bare metal and put on a jig, the work can begin. The new bodywork for the rear panels is hand beaten over machined wooden formers that have been precisely created from Adam's 3D computer models to ensure a perfect fit. That's if you're having a steel-bodied car, of course, because carbonfibre is also an option. In fact the bumpers and spoiler on this car are carbon.

There are obvious changes, such as the long hood, but the devil, as always, is in the detail. Adam has always hated the square reflectors stuck on the back of early 911s, so he has integrated a sleeker design into the new valance that frames the quad exhausts (which evoke a Turbo) and made them into foglights as well, just for good measure.



On the engine cover, the metal 'Theon' badge has been designed to mimic an early 911 badge, with the bars joining the letters.

If the car has a sunroof and it's being removed then the whole roof is removed and replaced with an early roof with the vents at the top of the rear screen. A high-level brake light is then subtly hidden in there. Adam describes the mirrors as a concept car design made practical for the road. Machined from aluminium they're inspired by those on Porsche's own 2018 Speedster concept and are electrically adjustable.

Inside, Adam has taken ideas from other Porsches, so while it looks different, it retains a family feel. The armrests, for example, take inspiration from a 356. The door releases are from a late '60s/early '70s 911 but flipped around and moved up. Out of sight, behind the door cards, everything is yellow chromate so that it's back to the '70s style. Any welding is done the classic Porsche way.

The list goes on. Whether ultimately visible or not, there is a sense that the whole car has been treated as though it will be viewed with X-ray glasses. And the really extraordinary thing is that this feels like a product that has been honed and developed over years and many iterations. But this is only the third car that Theon Design has produced. The first went to Germany and this is the second one destined for Hong Kong – HK002.

But it's not going there just yet. First, thanks to its kind owner, I get to have a go.

Walking up to those swollen arches on a sunny day with the key in your hand is a good feeling. The car looks purposeful, but there remains a friendliness to those soft curves and that face. And despite the obvious increase in width, it remains a small car by modern standards. Just right for our roads.

Pull the little lever tucked inside the handle and feel the release in the mechanism as the door opens. Although on aesthetic grounds I wouldn't choose the Recaro Sportster CS seats (there are other options), they nonetheless feel like old friends as I sink down into them. The small Nardi steering wheel initially seems a bit of a stretch and the offset pedals take a moment to fall under foot, but the cabin remains delightfully intimate: that upright dash, the spread of five green-on-black dials, the windscreen – all so much closer than in a modern car.

Turn the key and the engine catches easily. A gentle blip of the throttle reveals a weighty action, while the clutch pedal is very light. The six-speed gearbox is from a 993 and the action of the relatively stubby lever is precise and smooth. No baulking, no notchiness, just a relatively light, easy action.

There is a real smoothness to the engine too and a lovely torquiness at lower revs, which makes it wonderfully useable. Cruising along for the first few miles it doesn't feel like the flat-six is constantly goading you. You can tell it will rev willingly when asked, but it can happily do relaxed and unhurried. Because the exhaust system is switchable, you can leave it in a slightly more docile setting to fit this more subdued mood too. It's still vocal enough that people in gardens in sleepy villages will look up, but they won't scowl and mentally draft a letter to the parish council.

As with most things Theon, there are options with the engine. Displacements from 3.6 to 4 litres are offered, as is supercharging. This car has a 3.8-litre, naturally aspirated engine with 371bhp and 298lb ft of torque, which is ample for a car weighing just 1248kg with a full tank of fuel.

The beautiful flat-six is the work of Nick Fulljames, and with its independent throttle bodies, flowed and ported heads, bigger valves, Mahle barrels and pistons, Carrillo rods and a lightened,



**'IT'S THE CHARACTER
OF THE ENGINE THAT
REALLY RAISES
A SMILE'**





balanced bottom end, it is every bit the heart of the car that you want it to be. There is the air of a civilised race engine about it, which I think is fabulous. The performance certainly gets your attention, but it is the character of the engine that really raises a smile. A crackling, rasping edge to the familiar, deep soundtrack lends the Theon a slightly raw edge, but with none of the lumpy recalcitrance of a true competition car. And although it can be civilised, if you switch the exhaust to its more raucous mode and then go chasing the glorious top end you get a brilliantly unfettered sound, complete with genuine reports on the overrun as you back off.

So enjoyable is the engine, it almost doesn't matter what the car does in the corners. In fact it's quite a modern-feeling 911 when you thread it through a set of bends. Don't get me wrong, you still know the engine is in the back and you still get that lovely sense of weighted traction on the way out of corners, but there is much more turn-in grip from the front than I was expecting.

It makes more sense when you hear that Theon claims a near 50:50 weight distribution (presumably with that full tank of fuel in the nose) thanks to the old, heavy power steering and air conditioning units that sat on top of the engine being replaced with new, lighter, more efficient electric items that now nestle low down in the nose. The ride height is also lower than on a 964 RS and the suspension is KW Variant 3 all round, set up by Centre Gravity.

The sheer amount of grip available both inspires confidence and also makes you want to tread with a little caution as you push harder, wary of how progressively that grip will be relinquished at the limit and how quickly you might need to add corrective lock. Having said that, through a fast, open right-hander that leads immediately into a tighter, slightly rising left-hander, the Theon deals with the weight transition in the middle with aplomb. Go

through again, attack the left-hand portion this time, get on the throttle early and you can really trust the rear, feeling it subtly smearing the Michelins across the tarmac, helping to steer you through the last third of the corner.

Such is the grip that you'd need a track to really investigate the limits, but it's easy to get into a flow on the road. As long as it's relatively smooth, that is, because the ride height feels a little too low on some of the UK's more cruelly cambered and broken tarmac. Potholes and bigger bumps sometimes elicit thumps and jolts that, although expected, are just a little too harsh. Interestingly, Theon has just teamed up with Tractive to fit an adaptive suspension kit to the next build, and I think this could be an excellent solution, giving the suspension that same breadth of ability as the engine.

There are of course a couple of Nellies in the room. Firstly, the price. It seems like a universal rule that restomods are expensive, and with prices starting at £300,000, this is no exception. However, you can certainly see where the work has gone in. It is also about half the price of the second elephant in the room: a Porsche 911 reimagined by Singer.

Both are based on 964s and both, at a glance, have a very similar look. Interestingly though, Hawley believes that Theon's ethos is actually more closely aligned with Ruf's. I would say that there is more original Porsche retained in this car than one from California in which everything, right down to the indicator stalks, has been given a twist. I think there is plenty of room in the market for both.

There are in fact only plans to produce 25 of this particular style of car, so it will remain exclusive (and there may yet be some original 964s left in the world). And, being the enthusiastic designer he is, you can tell Adam is already thinking about the next Porsche project for Theon Design. No doubt some sketches exist. Whatever it is, it will be exciting to see what emerges from The Grey Barn in the future. ☑

Far left: screen for a reversing camera hides folded under the dash until required; audio system is Bluetooth controlled and a magnetic charging pad can hold a phone to the dash as if by magic



Theon Design 911

Engine Flat-six, 3.8 litres **Power** 371bhp
Torque 298lb ft **Weight** 1248kg **Power-to-weight** 302bhp/ton
0-62mph <4.2sec (est) **Top speed** 160mph+ (est)
Basic price £300,000+
evo rating ★★★★★



MACHIN



by ADAM TOWLER

PHOTOGRAPHY by ANDY MORGAN

WIND

ES

Convertibles add weight and reduce stiffness, though they can be undeniably seductive. But do they make any sense with supercar levels of performance? The McLaren 720S Spider and 911 Turbo S Cabrio should provide the answer

T'S TIME FOR A CONFESSION. ONE OF THE MOST enjoyable drives I've ever had in a Porsche 911 was at the wheel of a convertible variant. There, I've said it.

It was a 997.1 Carrera S Cabriolet and I drove it to and from that year's Le Mans 24 Hour race. (I'm so sorry.) The weather was scorchio for the whole few days, the racing thrilling and the atmosphere brilliant. My tent fitted in the front 'boot' and the rest of my stuff was jammed into the rear seats (the good old 911 made everything so easy). I took the scenic route for part of the drive down, and tooling gently around the French countryside to visit different parts of the circuit during the race was just heavenly, particularly at night when the warm evening air lapped lazily around the cockpit to the soft 'tap, tap, tap' of suicidal French insects meeting their maker on the windscreen.

I just loved it. Can I ever be forgiven?

Because that's the thing about convertibles, isn't it? Particularly those based on a monocoque structure. They're a compromise. Heavier, less rigid, a poorer platform for a car's suspension to work from – liking them is effectively tantamount to admitting that driving isn't at the top of your list of priorities. For those of us who have bought into everything this magazine stands for, that's an uncomfortable truth we don't necessarily want to ally ourselves with. And what does lie at the top of that list if not driving? Being seen more readily by others for the benefit of one's ego? Most of the factors that attract people to convertibles aren't things that we'd generally want to admit to.

You know how it goes: there you are, trawling the classifieds, looking at old BMW M3s (again). E46s to give you that uneasy feeling that you've missed the boat already; E36s to confirm that the ship has already called into port on a different continent. And the first thing you do is filter out the 'cabs', because, well, that's not really an M3, is it? It's a cabriolet, not a car for people like you and me...

And yet convertibles clearly do have great appeal, even in a climate well known for its grey, rainy days. To help us nail that appeal, we have here two stellar examples of the

breed, the McLaren 720S Spider and the Porsche 992 Turbo S Cabriolet. Open sports cars don't get much more powerful, ostentatious or opulent than this pair – or more divergent within their overall niche.

Yes, we could compare them, and I feel duty bound to indulge in that at some point in this piece, but in reality it's a fairly fruitless pursuit. You may even be able to write the conclusion for me now, but just in case you can't, here's a brief summary of how I reckon it's going to go: the McLaren has all the drama of a supercar, its tub structure offering open-air vivacity for little compromise, but the Porsche is more dependable, more useable, and almost equally as fast for less money. We shall see...

It's certainly true that some cars make the transition better than others. You wouldn't necessarily want a 911 GT3 convertible for laps of the Ring and Spa (even if those who have driven a 991 Speedster tell me it's actually very good), but there are particular cars where the conversion to a roofless experience actually sits very naturally with their overall demeanour. One example is the Lamborghini Huracán Evo Spyder that we drove back in *evo* 267. At first glance this seemed like everything that was wrong about the modern supercar, neatly wrapped into a package covered in £12,000 worth of optional orange paint. It weighed 120kg more than the coupe version, which took it to 1542kg 'dry', a classic Italian supercar manufacturer's tactic for hiding the true comparable weight of their cars. What's the betting that with a few options one of those 'junior' Lambos doesn't tip the scales at 1.7 tons...

In fact, I ended up driving that Huracán around in the rain with the top lowered and loving every second. Sure, I'm certain I looked like a complete berk, but the workings of that incredible V10 felt so close it was as if each piston stroke was a heartbeat. Meanwhile a summer thunderstorm enhanced the distinctive aroma of freshly mown lawns and wild country meadows, and the rush of the slipstream made the Spyder feel 50 per cent faster than I was actually travelling – and therefore 50 per cent less illegal than the speeds at which I might otherwise have been tempted to drive – but also usefully whipped the rain droplets over my head and behind. It was the full, 360-degree cinematic experience, immersive in the extreme, and it completely removed me from everything else that had gone on that day. This was pure escapism, in spite of the Spyder feeling a bit portly, ever so slightly wobbly at times, and probably rubbish for a trackday.

And, more than anything, that's what convertibles give us: a chance to be closer to the environment that we're passing through, whatever or wherever that may be. When you're driving in a car open to the elements it's amazing what you hear that would otherwise be smothered. The snap of a twig under a tyre; the shout of voices in the park; the distinct chirpings of individual birds.

To be truthful, that sort of detail does rather get lost in the all-enveloping roar when you're travelling in the 720S, so accelerative is this 710bhp projectile. Be brave or foolish enough – and persistent enough – to disengage the ESP and, as you feel the full, nanny-free force of the twin-turbo V8 it's an urgent reminder that cars like this are too fast for the road, however feeble it may sound to say it. The V8 needs a few

Below and right:

both 720 and 992-gen 911 were designed from the outset to include a convertible in the range, but the McLaren reaps the advantages of being a carbonfibre tub design









revs and a moment to really spin up to full potency, but its top end is completely brutal, mixing fear and excitement into a potent cocktail that often flirts with the line that separates enjoyment and unsocial unease. The twin-clutch 'box can fire home ratios as fast as any out there, and the unassisted steering remains a thrillingly chatty partner on the move. The Spider-specific MonoCage II-S tub does without the usual overhead spar, the roll-over protection instead provided by a pair of distinctive carbon structures that project from each rear corner, all of which should mean there's no compromise to the Spider's dynamics other than that caused by the 49kg of additional weight due to the roof mechanism. The 'dry' weight figure is quoted as 1332kg, the DIN as 1468kg, which frankly makes a mockery of the aforementioned Lambo.

I'm not sure the conversion is completely without drawbacks though. When we first drove the Spider in Arizona (evo 285) it seemed to lack the integrity of the coupe in spite of McLaren's claims, and, while subsequent cars have felt much more 'together' than those early builds, it just doesn't quite – and we're talking by tiny amounts here – have the pure, uncorrupted responses of the coupe. Or maybe it's all just in my head because I know their structures are actually different. Whatever the truth of that, the McLaren still mixes sublimely sophisticated ride control with the ability, as we so often say, to feel like a grown-up Lotus Elise, and I never tire of the brilliant driving position with its commanding visibility and perfectly placed control points.

Yep, if you're after a drop-top that offers a 100 per cent authentic supercar experience, along with the kind of raw performance that feels like it wants to rip your face off, then

it's hard to beat the 720S. The styling divides opinion, but I happen to think it looks more individual, futuristic and handsome with each passing day, and there's no denying that it's a wildly exciting car. It is, though, still very much one about speed – exaggerated in the open version. It might steer better than the Huracán Spyder, but most of the time that twin-turbo V8 sounds nothing better than purposeful. That's the thing about open cars: they amplify different sensations and encourage alternative desires. I'd readily give away 300bhp for a tuneful engine and a manual gearbox in a convertible.

It's a gruff-sounding turbo motor and a twin-clutch gearbox for the 911 Turbo S Cab too. And let's face it, no one needs a Turbo S if they want a 911 Cabriolet – in the context of what you want from a convertible, a standard Carrera offers all the turbo-fed performance that you could ever need, and ticks every other box, too. So this car is a ludicrous indulgence, and yet it knows it and sits quite comfortably in its own skin. It's utterly undemanding most of the time, and whereas that's an issue for us in the coupe 911s, where we're looking for that inspiring driving machine, here I find I'm a lot less bothered, instead smirking away at the ability to marshal into action a small thermo-nuclear device carried out back more or less whenever I feel like it.

There's no getting away from the fact that the Turbo S is a real, err, porker. Its 1710kg DIN figure seems particularly absurd given that it's a 911, but then in the metal it does look an absolute monster of a car, from the 21-inch rear rims to the deep body sides and the sheer girth from one rear haunch to the other. Once inside – and after you've learnt your way around the myriad switches and the giant screen – it's a lot

Opposite and above: both cars have massive carbon-ceramic brakes as standard; the Porsche in particular needs them – it's no lightweight at 1710kg (compared with a hardly sylph-like 1468kg for the McLaren)

less intimidating, and you soon realise that the cornerstone to the car's character – as has always been the case with 911s – is its sheer useability. It may well be a £170,000 supercar but you just jump in and drive, not really giving any more thought to it than that.

Indeed, in its default mode it feels almost sleepy, with only a hum from the engine as it quickly shuffles up the ratios. So much so that it's easy to forget there's 641bhp and, more to the point, 590lb ft of torque under your right foot. Twiddle the mode wheel and the Turbo S springs to attention, suddenly delivering great gusts of propulsion that suck in the horizon at a terrific rate. Its power-to-weight ratio is obviously inferior to the McLaren's, and it lacks the top-end fury possessed by the British car, but there's something about the way the Porsche's flat-six delivers its low-down torque that makes it equally amusing, sometimes even more so. You can imagine it pulling comedy wheelies down the road like a cartoon car, the front tyres pawing away in the air.

Thankfully they remain in contact with the ground, because when the corners do arrive they come at you very quickly indeed. At which point you become extremely grateful for the standard-fit carbon-ceramic brakes because there's suddenly the sense of a lot of mass travelling very quickly; that the brakes are up to the task of hauling it down from high speed is testament to their brilliance, but unlike other 992 models there's a sense here that the damping needs to be ratcheted up into Sport to keep the weight in check. Do so and you can

hustle the Turbo down a good B-road, working to make it flow rather than its progress being a series of giant torque spikes and massive bouts of retardation.

Is it fun? Sort of. It's a novelty. The warm evening air is kept largely in check around the cabin, and the exaggerated whooshes, hisses and gasps of the heavily blown 'six' are the aural accompaniments – not exactly an operatic soundtrack, but not one without its own appeal either. No, it's not as rigid as the coupe, despite the work Porsche did during the 992's engineering phase to ensure the open version wasn't a floppy embarrassment. The art of reinforcing a monocoque structure sliced open has progressed immeasurably over the past couple of decades, and cars like the 992 Cabriolet no longer feel like a very poor relation, but yes, if you're looking for the best 992 to drive, this certainly isn't it.

Instead, it's about playing to its strengths – taking your kids out in the back for a thrilling blast of slipstream air, or squeezing in some mates for a run to the pub. It's about using a 641bhp 911 as a daily driver (prior experience and internet hearsay suggests you'd have to be a much more patient soul to attempt this in the 720S, which doesn't inspire the same sort of confidence) and feeling like an extra from *Miami Vice*. It may not be my 'thing', but the more time I spent with the car, the more I could see the appeal of it. And that's the point with the majority of convertibles: logic suggests they're inferior machines, but when has logic ever held an important seat at the table of car enthusiasm? ❌

Porsche 911 Turbo S Cabriolet

Engine Flat-six, 3745cc, twin-turbo Power 641bhp @ 6750rpm
Torque 590lb ft @ 2500-4000rpm Weight 1710kg Power-to-weight 381bhp/ton
0-62mph 2.8sec Top speed 205mph Basic price £170,410

evo rating ★★★★★

McLaren 720S Spider

Engine V8, 3994cc, twin-turbo Power 710bhp @ 7250rpm
Torque 568lb ft @ 5500rpm Weight 1468kg Power-to-weight 491bhp/ton
0-62mph 2.9sec Top speed 212mph Basic price £242,000

evo rating ★★★★★





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Autocar 5/10/18



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9/10

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Top Gear 13/10/18

9/10

"The throttle response is astonishing... one of my favourite three cars of the year"

@Drivenation_ 5/10/18



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FAST FLEET



NEW ARRIVAL

Audi RS e-tron GT

It's time for *evo* to dip a long-term toe into electric-car waters as Audi's first battery-powered RS joins our fleet



WE KNEW THIS DAY WOULD COME. For the first time in *evo*'s 22-year history, there is an EV on the Fast Fleet. And if any model is to lead the electric-car charge in our long-term pages, one with 637bhp and a 0-62mph time of 3.3sec is probably a good place to start.

So what we have here is an Audi RS e-tron GT, the more powerful and more expensive of the two e-tron GT variants that Audi simultaneously introduced earlier this year (the other is called simply 'e-tron GT', no 'RS'). More than that, our Kemora Grey RS is in top-level Carbon Vorsprung trim, which takes the RS's £111,900 basic price to a cool £133,340. Now that is an astonishing amount of money, but so highly specced is the Vorsprung that save for a £5100 set of carbon-ceramic brakes,

£950 for metallic paint and £350 for a body-colour 'grille', there's not a single further option that can be ticked. Of those, only the metallic paint is selected on this car, taking its total price to £134,290.

Fitted equipment includes (deep breath) 21-inch wheels, adaptive air suspension, heated, cooled, massaging and electrically operated sports seats, a Bang & Olufsen sound system, a head-up display, night vision, matrix LED headlights with the 'Frickin' Lasers' – we could go on. To earn that Carbon Vorsprung name, it's also got the full roster of gloss carbonfibre for the mirrors, door trims and dash, which are joined by a full carbon roof that replaces the lesser GT's glass item, making the already pretty dark cabin feel even more so.

The big questions we'll be asking over



p131 Alfa Giulia Quadrifoglio



p133 Volkswagen T-Roc R



p136 Audi S3 Sportback



p138 Vauxhall Insignia GSi



the coming months are how engaging is an electric car to live with and, at this moment in time, how practical too? That latter question partly explains why I've been the first to pocket our e-tron's key. Some – OK, most – of my colleagues currently suffer from a lack of charging facilities, whereas from my inner west London base this isn't an issue, thanks to the very useful 5.5kW charging points built into street lamps dotted around the borough.

So far, despite an official WLTP range of 283 miles, each full charge has shown a predicted range of between 230 and 250 miles, depending on the weather. My 130-mile, mostly motorway round trip to **evo** Towers and back will generally eat through a matching number of miles in displayed range, leaving me with 100 or so left at the end of the day. So for me a daily charge is a necessity.

From a cost perspective, when charging through the magic street lamps the current rate is 24p per kWh, which means to recharge the batteries

'We'll be asking how engaging is an EV to live with, and how practical too?'

back up to full from around 100 miles of remaining charge will cost somewhere in the region of £15. From purely a cost-per-mile perspective, this compares to around £25 for the same trip in a petrol car capable of a 'real world' 30mpg and running on standard unleaded at the average national cost. So the Audi is indeed cheaper to run, although there can be huge variation in by how much depending on where and how it is charged.

Putting cost to one side, my first EV 'ownership'

experience is already teaching me to think more carefully about where and when I travel. If I have errands to run or friends or family to visit in the evening, I know I'd better not deviate onto more interesting roads for that day's commute, just to make sure I have that comfortable 100 miles of remaining range to work with later in the day. What's worse, though, is if there's an overnight stay away from home without the opportunity to steal some electricity, as this can mean my 130-mile office run the next day requires a charging stop.

The reality of exactly how good electric cars are in a purely environmental sense is also something I think about, and indeed spent most of my university dissertation trying to figure out. I'm no EV sceptic, but I am a realist, and the reality of running an electric car while considering its holistic environmental impact is something that needs to be spoken about before the world runs into all sorts of new issues. The line between being a driving enthusiast and thinking



Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio

The Alfa's tyre-eating antics make trackdays an expensive pastime

about my own environmental footprint is difficult to judge, too – and how I wish to approach it is through data, not a PR or government minister's press release. I'll share some more thoughts on this another time.

Beyond all this, the e-tron GT also has to justify its RS badge in the driving stakes, but for now I feel I've drawn a long straw in terms of the relative ease with which an electric car has fitted into my routine. Initial chats with my colleagues suggest their experiences might not be quite so seamless, so it'll be an interesting few months to see how we all get on with Audi's new flagship performance EV. Let's see how we go...

Jordan Katsianis (@JordanKatsianis)

Date acquired June 2021 **Total mileage** 3360 **Mileage this month** 1071 **Cost this month** £0 **mi/kWh this month** 2.7

IT'S BEEN A BUSY MONTH FOR THE Alfa. It returned to the firm's press garage for attention to some light car park damage, and after a general check over also received a fresh set of Pirelli Corsas. There wasn't much wrong with three of the incumbents, but the nearside front had been badly mauled after a recent trip to Anglesey Circuit. A hard day's trackday driving? No, not exactly. Editor Gallagher swore that it had only done three laps as a tracking car while shooting the Giulia GTAm for the cover of issue 286, but looking at the chunks of rubber worn away from the outer shoulder, and more distressingly, the obliteration of the next band of rubber inside that, could such carnage have possibly been inflicted so quickly?

Anyway, with the Quadrifoglio back and fighting fit, it was with much excitement that I headed to Goodwood for *evo*'s first trackday of the year (or for two years, in fact, for obvious reasons). The Giulia felt monstrously fast – it'd hit 145mph on the back straight after Lavant, but the soft springing that makes it such a lovely road car means the body control is a little loose, even with the dampers in Race mode, and in Goodwood's long, fast corners there was just a little squirm and imprecision. Having said that, the brakes – iron, not ceramic on our car – held up very well, in spite of the high ambient temperature.

So far, so good, so you can imagine my surprise in the paddock when I ambled around to the nearside front and found a Pirelli Corsa mashed to oblivion, just as had happened at Anglesey. In just 15 minutes and under ten laps of track driving – not even pushing that hard as I was still reacquainting myself with Goodwood's wickedly fast curves – the Giulia had destroyed another front tyre. It had also drunk a good third of a tank of superunleaded. Gulp. Literally.

A drinking habit to rival Oasis in the mid-'90s is one thing, but we just can't go on throwing new Pirellis on the Alfa only for these exceptionally low tread-wear-rated boots to be ripped apart like lemmings. The Giulia Quadrifoglio isn't a trackday tool, granted, but we're not expecting it to lap all day long without protest. It would just be nice to do a few laps without wreaking such havoc, and that shouldn't be too much to ask for such an overtly sporting vehicle.

We've still got a couple of months left with the Alfa and there are more trackdays before it goes back, so I'd like to see if we can try it on a different tyre to find out if we can instil some endurance into its capabilities. If you've tried a different tyre on your Giulia Quadrifoglio, do let us know.

Adam Towler (@AdamTowler)

Date acquired January 2021 **Total mileage** 5400 **Mileage this month** 1728 **Cost this month** £1233.80 (tyres) **mpg this month** 21.1



Aston Martin DBX

A busy month for our Aston SUV confirms its excellence at playing the GT

A COMBINATION OF GOOD WEATHER, A lifting of some restrictions and a flurry of activity from the industry has seen **evo's** Fast Fleet cars pressed into more action in the last month than some managed throughout 2020. And the DBX has seen its fair share of that action.

Bedford Autodrome, Snetterton, Silverstone, Hethel and Goodwood have all had a visit from JYD, so too Aston's Gaydon HQ (where it crossed paths with the one-off Victor). It's even had its first run to an airport, and the main thought I had following our initial drive in the DBX – that it is Aston's best GT car – has only been confirmed further.

There are core attributes that go a very long way to back this up. Ergonomically it offers you a blend of feeling an integral part of the car without the sense of being fixed rigidly in place with no room for adjustment. The latter is fine when you're heading for the braking zone at Cope, less so when you're faced with a three-hour slog around the London orbital.

Cabin noise is quieter than I remember from

'It has a precision and agility that a car of its genre has no right to'

last year's launch vehicles, and some of this can be attributed to ever-tightening noise and emission regulations. There's still an all-exhaust-flaps-open burble when the 4-litre goes through its cold-start procedure, but once that is complete, serenity descends. Thereafter any blare or roar from the V8 and its exhaust is authentic and natural, if a little muted thanks to the double-glazed windows. And do you know what? I don't miss the fake, 'over the top noise for the sake of it' noise that certain other cars generate. It all seems a bit unnecessary to me.

Where the DBX also continues to impress is in how agile and nimble it is when you need it to be. Yes, it swallows miles, people and their belongings

without blinking, but it's when the route becomes interesting that you have to remind yourself of the type of car it is and that it shouldn't really be able to do what it's just done. Which invariably is grow a pair of horns and monster a challenging road with a level of competence, precision and agility that a car of its genre has no right to do.

Without fail in any other performance SUV you point it down a good road once and tell yourself not to bother doing so again, so underwhelming are the majority at utilising their performance in a credible fashion. Where they once perhaps impressed, the DBX simply embarrasses them into retreat.

DBX life is all rosy, then, but there have been some other discoveries this past month, too. The rear luggage shelf doesn't retract so needs removing and storing if you need to load the boot with a photographer, a dog crate or anything else bulky. And staying with the boot, it took me the best part of four weeks to find the internal release for the tailgate, hidden away as it is in the (very useful) centre console storage tray.



Volkswagen T-Roc R

Crossover or hot hatch? The T-Roc R meets the new Mk8 Golf R

THE AFTERNOON IN THE ASTON Martin V12 Speedster hadn't gone entirely to plan; no roof, rain and cameras is a recipe that's about as unpalatable as a Letitia Cropley sandwich (good to get an obscure *Vicar of Dibley* reference in early, I'm sure you'll agree). Sam Riley – videographer extraordinaire and previously of this parish – and I had required every last possible minute with the Aston to get what we needed. But now, back in the T-Roc R, I was running late for an evening appointment to have my arm punctured by a lovely member of the NHS.

Carry speed, keep the steering inputs small, and the T-Roc R feels good. Through sweeping bends it moves all-of-a-piece, nicely neutral through the apex. You just want to set it up a fraction early for corners to make sure the nose is turned in. Despite being a bit loftier than a hatchback, it keeps its roll in check and there is a surprisingly short-wheelbase feel to it. You also have that fractionally better view over the hedges and verdant verges. Unsurprisingly, it's very like the old Golf R, with which it shares much of its componentry. It's good. But it could be better. The new Golf R is better.

I compared the T-Roc R to the new GTI Clubsport a couple of issues ago and much of what I said there obviously applies to the new Golf R as well. The older-style interior of

the T-Roc R is easier to use and I think there is a nicer weight to the steering. However, the T-Roc could really use the Mk8 Golf's new 4Motion with R-Performance Torque Vectoring.

Driving the two Lapiz Blue machines back-to-back, it was instantly obvious how much better the new Golf gets into a corner, but it was the ability to then get on the throttle early in the corner that really made the difference. The new, torque-vectoring rear differential can send up to 100 per cent of the available torque to the outside rear wheel in a corner and this allows you to start accelerating and opening the steering where you would be maintaining lock and hesitating on the throttle in the T-Roc. It's particularly appreciated in tighter corners, but whatever the radius, the Golf definitely feels more agile.

There's nothing wrong with the way the T-Roc punches out of corners, though. It's a gruffer, slightly rougher sounding engine than in the Golf, but it still surprises me how hard its 296bhp shoves the little crossover up the road. Certainly plenty quick enough to get me to the vaccination centre on time.

Henry Catchpole (@HenryCatchpole)

Date acquired December 2020 **Total mileage** 6838 **Mileage this month** 92 (I've been on holiday) **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 28.6

I've also asked Aston Martin if I can fit a set of the lighter Sport design wheels to help the low- to medium-speed ride, which can be caught out on surfaces you'd expect it to smother. As the driver you tune into the frequency, although there are times when you can be surprised by an unexpected jolt, but passengers pick up and comment on it early in a journey.

With nearly 4000 miles now covered, the V8 is well run-in, with economy improving on longer runs to settle in the mid 20s (short runs are its nemesis and getting out of the teens is a pipe dream). I've also discovered that when the fuel range drops so low it no longer registers a '0' but you keep going for another 20-odd miles, 90 litres can be added to the 87-litre fuel tank...

Stuart Gallagher (@stuartg917)

Date acquired April 2021 **Total mileage** 3917 **Mileage this month** 2340 **Cost this month** £0 **mpg this month** 21.9



Ford Focus ST Estate

What do you really get with an audio upgrade? Here's the answer

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED HOW MUCH work goes into one of those in-car sound systems bearing the logos of a well-known audio brand? I know I have, and my cynical side has sometimes questioned if those little logos, perhaps with some fancier speaker grilles and an extra dollop of bass, might be just about all you get.

Take our Focus's B&O system, for example. It's standard on the ST, or a £550 upgrade on lesser Focuses. What does such a relatively modest sum actually buy you? To find out, this month I spoke to Stefan Varga, senior acoustic engineer at Harman, and the pair of ears behind the Focus's B&O system.

'One of our biggest requirements is the addition of a centre speaker and a subwoofer,' explains Varga, immediately making my theory look a little unstable. 'It's important to us to cover the whole frequency range that humans can hear – 20 Hz to 20 kHz – and the subwoofer covers the lower end of this. A two-way system in the front and back [i.e. a tweeter and a midwoofer in each door] then covers the rest of the audible range, while the centre speaker in the dash gives us a wider sound stage.'

Some of these components are unique to the Focus, too: 'The subwoofer was specially created so that it would meet our performance requirements but also not lose too much trunk space. So we designed it to fit inside the spare wheel, and there's a different version for cars with the puncture repair kit.'

The physical upgrades are only the start, though. Next the equipment is electronically tuned to suit its home: 'We get prototype cars at our lab throughout the model's development stage, and we spend several weeks working with them. There's an objective part to our tuning, where we do measurements with microphones, but there's a lot of subjective work as well. I sit in the car for a long time listening to music. We also have a reference room to ground ourselves, where we can listen to a piece of music then go back to the car to compare. Then at a later stage we use Ford's test track to perform measurements at different speeds, so we can compensate for vehicle noise and engine noise.'

Hundreds of music tracks are tested, and Varga is keen to point out that you shouldn't need to adjust the system to suit what you are playing: 'We

make sure that all music styles sound as the artist intended. That's why you won't find "Rock" or "Pop" settings in the car. This is totally outdated.' So Treble, Mid-range and Bass sliders are all you get, although Varga suggests you shouldn't need to touch these either. And sure enough, I've noticed that I haven't felt inclined to do so on our ST, which suggests it must sound 'right' from the off.

The real eye-opener, though, is just how deep the tuning work goes: 'Each version of the Focus gets its own specific tuning – the four-door [which isn't sold in the UK], the five-door and the wagon. The four-door has a much smaller cabin than the estate, for example, so you'll have a different resonance. Even the left- and the right-hand-drive cars get different tuning, because the car isn't a 100 per cent mirror, so there's always something we can refine.'

Varga admits that perhaps only a trained listener would be able to notice the subtle changes at this level, but the fact they are still implemented – even for an upgrade costing just a few hundred pounds – speaks volumes. Consider my cynical side silenced.

Ian Eveleigh

Date acquired February 2021 **Total mileage** 2546 **Mileage this month** 482 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 31.0



Toyota GR Yaris

Barker gets his turn in our Yaris, heading straight to his favourite bends

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE DRIVING a car along a road you know really well. I drove the GR Yaris at Anglesey Circuit and in the Scottish Borders on eCoty last year, and earlier this year had a blat in Litchfield's 300bhp example, running his Nitron suspension set-up, on freezing, damp Gloucestershire roads (see Driven, *evo* 285). Yet the chance to wang our long-termer through my go-to series of bends was irresistible and rewarding.

Despite its diminutive size and moderate weight, the Gazoo'd Yaris feels as chunky as it looks and as hefty in control weights as you'd expect of a car engineered for the extreme demands of the World Rally Championship. The turbocharged 1.6-litre triple is a real character, blessed with a deceptively lazy-sounding, three-cylinder draw but the sort of punch that usually comes from a much bigger displacement. It delivers a massive, near-instant hit from low revs and doesn't seem to let up, while the steering has a brawny heft, the clutch too, and the deliciously weighty six-speed shift feels like it's been borrowed from a V12 Aston.

It was a warm, sunny day when I arrived at my favourite bends and I chucked it in with a bit in reserve and was amazed when it hung on like its

Michelin were made out of gum. Turn-in isn't razor sharp but get back on the throttle and there's no slip at the front, no slip at the rear, all 257bhp hooked up and hauling you through, your ribs pressed into the side bolsters as you nail every apex. If you want, it can tackle the challenge staying on its side of the road through the whole sequence, giving the experience a Scalextric-like quality. The only squealing comes from amazed passengers.

There's so much grip that on the road the drive mode function is redundant, just as the Gravel and Snow settings on the Mitsubishi Evo were. In terms of dynamic character, the GR Yaris feels unlike an Evo or Impreza, mostly because it's on a wheelbase so much shorter, though the softer front end and warbling engine align it more with the Subaru. The other difference is that it doesn't feel settled on the sort of gnarly back roads you expect to feel like home to a rally refugee, the ride a little thumpy.

I managed to squeeze my bike in one weekend but there's not much rear passenger room. My two younger boys (one 6ft tall, the other 5ft 10in) had a row about who was going in the back, though they both loved it generally.

The Yaris attracts all the right attention and is



richly entertaining in everyday use, particularly the engine. At times it feels obvious that there's a hefty flywheel smoothing out the three cylinders, but then it responds snappily to the throttle and it'll change gear as fast as you can shift. Surprisingly, the GR can also be reasonably economical too if you're just stroking along in high gears using the ready torque. Only the 6000-mile service intervals would give you pause about racking up big miles.

John Barker (@evoJB)

Date acquired December 2021 **Total mileage** 4176 **Mileage this month** 506 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 29.1



END OF TERM

Audi S3 Sportback

Our 306bhp, four-wheel-drive hot hatch has departed. Did it manage to leave a lasting impression?

T HERE COMES A MOMENT WHEN AN EVO Fast Fleet car's time is up and you get to reflect on the photoshoots, trackdays and adventures that it has been on. When a bright cyan Audi S3 Sportback arrived in the *evo* Towers car park late last year, I hoped it would be able to deliver a whole bunch of such memories to look back fondly upon, and with the 'quattro weather' of winter rapidly approaching, this four-wheel drive, 306bhp Audi looked like it would be an ideal everyday performance car too, so I didn't hesitate to grab its key.

From the outside, the S3 certainly made a strong impression. Admiring comments from both neighbours and strangers were common, and I can see why. Our car's Turbo Blue paint (a £575 option) was quick to grab your attention and was complemented by the glinting metal trim, quad exhausts and the sharp new styling overall.

Inside, the driving position was spot on and

the seats some of the most comfortable I've experienced, but the rest felt like a lift out of the VW Group's pick 'n' mix box, which ultimately made it feel a bit flat compared with the cabins of rivals such as BMW's M135i and Mercedes-AMG's A35. I also had an ongoing battle with the driver-assistance tech, the lane assist function feeling crude (so I nearly always switched it off) and the false alarms from the Pre Sense collision-warning system being a frequent source of distraction.

More worryingly, the digital dials were a bit temperamental, occasionally disappearing altogether and leaving me without a speed readout. A surprising success, however, was the fake five-cylinder engine noise pumped into the cabin. I'm not usually a fan of such things, but Audi has done a great job in this case, allowing the S3 to tick all of your noise hooligan boxes from inside the car without annoying the rest of the street.

The arrival of Lockdown 3 just a few days after

I first got behind the S3's wheel meant that it was initially restricted to mostly mundane journeys, but as a car about town it was absolutely in its element, proving remarkably easy to live with. When a valid opportunity arose, it was clear that the S3 handled 'fast' very well, too. Through corners its grip proved immense and the steering incredibly accurate, especially with a bit of added weight in Sport mode. Meanwhile the passively damped suspension coped well with notoriously imperfect fenland B-roads, acceleration was impressive (0-62mph in 4.8sec is the official figure) and braking sharp and precise. Indeed it was everything you would expect from an Audi. In fact some might say it was a bit too 'Audi' – that is to say extremely capable but, as we predicted in our first drive back in *evo* 279, rarely delivering laugh-out-loud entertainment. It's where the likes of AMG's A35 and even the less-powerful and front-drive-only Hyundai i30 N hold a distinct advantage.

A track test only cemented these thoughts.



Cupra Formentor 310

How the Formentor is ploughing its own crossover furrow

WHAT HAVE A DOUBLE-GLAZING salesman, a guy in my local chip shop, a petrol station cashier, and three lads in a Corsa got in common? Answer: they all wanted to know more about our Formentor this month – all within the space of just a few days, in fact.

When I nabbed our Cupra from its regular keeper, Aston Parrott, I hadn't expected this level of attention. I was curious to try the Formentor, mainly to get a feel for what these newfangled non-SEAT Cupras are all about, but my own disinterest in crossovers had blinded me to just how much other people admire them. The feedback for this one was all positive, too. Well, except when it came to its Cupra badge, which was likened to the logos associated with Transformers, Spectre and the Predator range of gaming PCs. It seems most people can't see that it's actually a pair of interlocking Cs. (That is what it's supposed to be, right?)

For me, it was the Formentor's interior that made the strongest first impression. Where so many cabins make you feel like you're sitting inside a black box, this one's Petrol Blue leather, copper trim, matching stitching and colourful pinstripe lighting lift the ambience significantly.

To drive, I could really do without the Lane Assist switching itself back on every time you start

the car, even if you've only, say, stopped for petrol. The gearbox's reluctance to drop a gear to aid acceleration when in D is a drag in general driving, too, and inevitably if you switch to S it cruises through 30mph zones with the engine revving away in too low a gear.

I've got nothing but respect for the reach of the adaptive dampers, though, which offer 15 (fifteen!) levels, starting three notches softer than Comfort and ending three firmer than Cupra. Set it somewhere in the upper half of this range and the Formentor controls its mass well. You're always aware of the extra height and weight, and, unsurprisingly, it lacks the ultimate agility and particularly the eagerness to turn in that you'd get with a good hot hatch, but it'll romp along a B-road at a remarkable lick, and doesn't feel out of its comfort zone while doing so.

However, call me old fashioned, but I still prefer my performance cars to sit a little closer to the asphalt, and to benefit from the inherent advantages that come with that, so I'd still plump for a hot hatch over something like the Formentor. But if crossovers are your thing, there's plenty to appreciate here.

Ian Eveleigh

Date acquired January 2021 **Total mileage** 5090 **Mileage this month** 1883 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 28.6

Flinging the S3 around the Bedford Autodrome, as a relative newbie to trackdays I was impressed. However, deputy editor Adam Towler was less so, labelling the experience as 'forgettable'.

If I'm being honest, now the S3 has gone I think he might have a point. While I enjoyed my time with it, and admired its all-round abilities on the road greatly, I can't say that it left me with a vast bank of memorable moments that will stick with me. In truth, while the S3 is a car that is unlikely to disappoint paid-up members of the Audi fan club, for the rest of us there are simply too many rivals that are capable of delivering more.

Richard Browne (@washlander)

Date acquired December 2020 **Duration of test** 6 months **Total test mileage** 4500 **Overall mpg** 29.0 **Costs** £0 **Purchase price** £41,200 **Value today** £36,300



Vauxhall Insignia GSi

Under closer scrutiny, the GSi's chassis continues to impress

NOT SO MANY MILES THIS MONTH, but those I have driven in the GSi have been on more entertaining roads. It's given me a chance to try the different dynamic modes, and to drive with and without the selectable 'Twinstar' all-wheel-drive system engaged.

Working through Normal, Tour and Sport modes is less than dramatic. It's all very mild-mannered in the first two, while the step up to Sport does elicit a welcome and noticeable increase in powertrain response and tautness in the damping. I'm used to firmly suspended cars, so Sport tends to be my default as there's still plenty of pliancy. There's also Competition, which relaxes the stability control thresholds, but – I suspect – was really used as a kind of cheat code for Opel's test drivers to wring the best possible Ring time from the car.

The overall polish of the Insignia's chassis remains impressive. Vauxhall/Opel must have spent a fortune to achieve such a sense of completeness. There's something reminiscent of turn-of-the-Millennium Ford models like the Ka, Mk1 Focus and Puma in the way it feels so poised at speeds and on roads you perhaps wouldn't expect mainstream cars to shine.

This ride/handling is backed up by excellent Brembo brakes, with potency and pedal feel that are both spot-on. What the GSi lacks is

a powertrain to do all of this justice. There's little in the way of character, but it's the lack of poke that's the main issue. It's one of those cars that feels like it should have something meaningful in reserve, but when you go looking for what you imagine to be the remaining 40 per cent of its performance you find there's actually a fraction of that left to explore.

Perhaps that shouldn't come as a surprise when there's only 228bhp and 258lb ft propelling a large, 1710kg saloon. It's hauling itself out of the corners where the GSi comes undone, because it simply doesn't have enough grunt to do much more than gain momentum.

And that all-wheel-drive system? There's an uptick in the way the Insignia rotates into corners but, in the dry at least, I'm not convinced it's worth the added weight and complexity. At least not with such modest torque to transmit. It just backs up my theory that Opel's engineers hacked the company's procurement system and went on a spending spree. If only they'd managed to sneak a better engine by the CO2 counters...

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)

Date acquired April 2021 **Total mileage** 2705 **Mileage this month** 701 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 28.1

BMW M550i

Cars have come a long way since the Morris Minor...

A LONG-ISH TRIP WITH A DECENT cross-country element was the main event for the M550i this month, and both the car and I relished it. I was heading to Ambergate, Derbyshire, on a sunny day for the opening of the Great British Car Journey (see last month's Ignition), and the 90-mile drive took in a large swathe of handsome, rolling, Leicestershire countryside and a bit of M1.

I've settled on Adaptive as the best damper setting. It does what it says, seemingly never quite as loose as Comfort but not as rigidly firm as Sport, and so it keeps the big BMW's bulk most comfortably in check. I'd like more steering feel but in this mode the M550i feels better poised for making brisk progress, and as a consequence the occasional burst of mighty V8 to despatch dawdlers doesn't come like a bolt out of the blue. It's still shocking in its ferocity, mind.

Soothed by subtle seat cooling and delighted, as ever, by the outstanding quality of the Bowers & Wilkins sound system, I arrived at GBCJ after two hours relaxed and fresh, and surprised that the M550i had returned just over 30mpg.

GBCJ offers the opportunity to 'Drive Dad's Car' and the contrast with the 5-series was acute. I'm old enough to have driven a fair few of the cars available but I'd never tried a Morris Minor. It was a delight in its steering and basic rightness, and as remarkable for its lack of equipment and go as the M550 is for its abundance of both.

Back in the BMW the run home was as satisfying as the run out and the tankful of fuel eventually lasted 440 miles and came in close to 30mpg. Remarkable, really.

John Barker (@evoJB)

Date acquired January 2021 **Total mileage** 7156 **Mileage this month** 1577 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 29.1





Ford Escort Mk2

The build of a new rally-ready engine begins – complete with a twist

JUST TO RECAP, THE OLD ENGINE WAS knackered. So I've bought another one. Or rather I've bought the starting point for another one. It's still a 2-litre, four-cylinder Pinto, but this time a later '205' version. It was £500 on eBay, which is pretty good value and unlike most of them it hadn't just been ripped from a Transit, left for a few years and then advertised as 'ran when removed'. The seller, Peter, had unblemished feedback and professed that he sold the engines as a hobby rather than to make money. When my friend Paul and I went to pick up the Pinto, it was clear Peter was very much an enthusiast. The Cortina at the back of his house was as immaculate as his eBay rating.

Now that we have an engine, we're going to get rid of most of it. In between building his lovely Land Rovers, David at ACH SV has stripped it down and the head is now going off to have a Stage 3 conversion done by Connaught in Kent. Before that could happen, however, it needed a new inlet manifold, and that needed to be designed and manufactured, because this engine won't be running on carburettors...

As I've mentioned before, Paul works at MoTec and a while ago he tentatively suggested doing something a bit different with the Escort. So, it's being converted to electronic fuel injection using the individual throttle bodies from a 2015 Yamaha R1 superbike. Part of me really wanted to keep the engine on carbs because I like the traditional look and feel of them, but this solution should bring a whole host of benefits. For a start it should look and sound pretty cool, but the options it will give in terms of road and stage maps for both reliability and performance are the big reasons for heading down this route. It will allow a lot more control over the engine and hopefully make it much more useable between rallies as well as

'Now that we have a replacement engine, we're going to get rid of most of it...'

more exciting on them. I think it should be fun.

Anyway, Paul found a company in West Yorkshire called DanST Engineering, and although they hadn't done a manifold with these specific throttle bodies before they were happy to manufacture one. So, Paul sent the throttle bodies out to them and a couple of weeks later the manifold (pictured above, attached to the cylinder head) came back in the post. For £240 it seemed like a bargain to me, given the work involved. Paul and David (who is notoriously fussy about, well, everything) both seemed impressed too, running fingers round the insides of the pipework like I do when I want the last bit of jam from the jar.

I haven't seen the rest of the car for a while, but I think I'm going to be let loose with a heat gun to remove the decals before too long (it's about all I can be trusted to do). That way it can be resprayed a nice new shade of... actually I won't give that away just for now. Suffice to say it should look good with the gold wheels.

Henry Catchpole (@HenryCatchpole)

Date acquired August 2011 **Total mileage** Unknown **Mileage this month** 0 **Costs this month** £500 (engine), £240 (manifold) **mpg this month** n/a

ESSENTIALS

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For petrolheads, car keys are essential to unlock the thrill and joy of driving – whether you own a Honda Civic or a Bugatti Chiron. Heel Tread is now offering the perfect driving partner for you (and your keys) with this selection of eye-catching keychains. There are seven different designs to choose from, including special Spitfire, GTI and Quattro patterns. They can be purchased individually, but if you're struggling to make a choice then why not snap up several in a special multipack?

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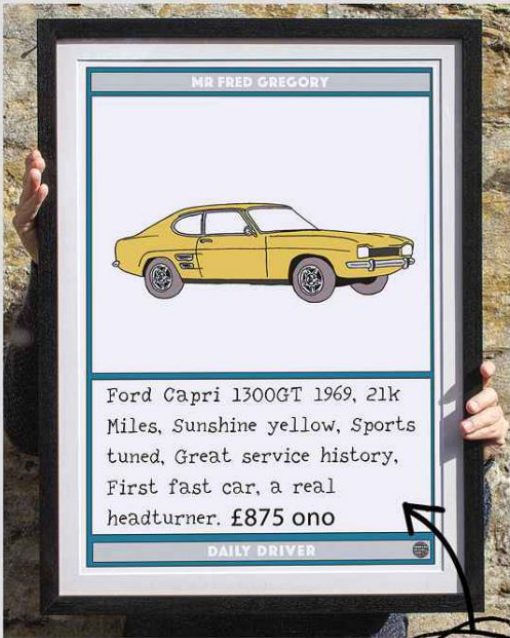
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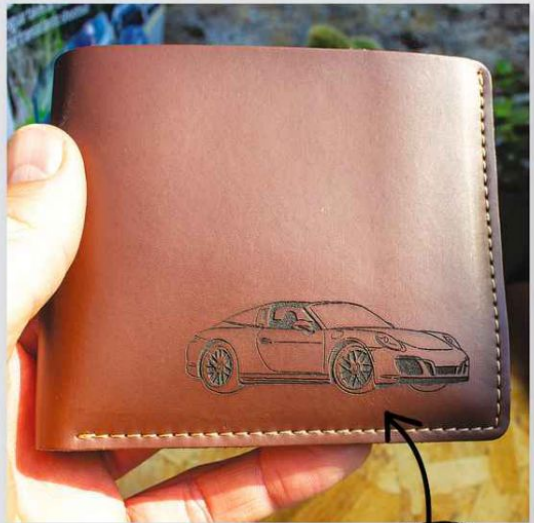


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The Knowledge

RATINGS

★ = Thrill-free zone ★★ = Tepid ★★★ = Interesting ★★★★ = Seriously good ★★★★★ = A truly great car

+ = new entry this month. Cars in italics are no longer on sale. **Issue no.** is for our most recent major test of the car (D = Driven, T = Driven Too, I = Ignition, F = feature). Call 0330 333 9491 for back issues. **Engine** shows details of the car's combustion engine, or for BEVs the total output in kW of the car's electric motors. **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 (i.e. with fluids but without a driver), but where the manufacturer only quotes a 'dry' weight (i.e. 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 (tested)** and **0-100mph (tested)** figures could be with either a manual or automatic gearbox/DCT.

SUPERMINIS / HOT HATCHES



OUR CHOICE

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



BEST OF THE REST

The **Toyota GR Yaris** (left) is just the kind of performance car we've been praying would get made, while the **Audi i20 N** and **Ford Fiesta ST** offer more affordable supermini fun. The **Renault Mégane RS** has a strong B-road appeal, especially with the non-Cup chassis, and the **Hyundai i30 N** is an intriguing and impressive alternative to the usual suspects.

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE (As tested on road)	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT	0-62/100 SEC	0-60/100 MPH	0-100/100 MPH	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
Abarth 595 Competizione	256	£21,995	4/1368	178/5500	184/3000	1035kg	17.5	6.7	-	140	★★★★★	
Abarth 595 Essence	264	£25,295	4/1368	178/5500	184/3000	1044kg	17.3	6.7	-	140	★★★★★	
Abarth 695 Biposto	205	74-18	4/1369	187/5500	184/3000	997kg*	19.1	5.9	-	143	★★★★★	
Alfa Romeo 147 GTA	187F	03-06	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1360kg	18.5	6.0	15.5	133	★★★★★	
Audi A1 40 TFSI	256	£24,470	4/1984	197/6000	236/1500	1260kg	15.9	6.5	-	155	★★★★★	
Audi S1	246	74-18	4/1984	228/6000	273/1600	1315kg	17.6	5.8	-	155	★★★★★	
Audi A1 quattro	264	73	4/1984	253/6000	258/2300	1420kg	18.1	5.7	-	152	★★★★★	
Audi S3 Sportback	279D	£38,475	4/1984	306/5450	295/2000	1500kg	20.7	4.8	-	155	★★★★★	
Audi RS3 Sportback	256	£46,285	5/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1510kg	26.5	4.1	-	155	★★★★★	
Audi S3	188F	13-20	4/1984	206/5500	280/1800	1395kg	21.6	5.2	12.5	155	★★★★★	
Audi RS3 Sportback	221F	75-18	5/2480	362/5500	343/1625	1520kg	24.2	4.3	5.6	155	★★★★★	
BMW 120i	283	£18,875	4/1998	261/4750	295/1750	1445kg	18.4	6.1	-	155	★★★★★	
BMW M135i Drive	271	£36,430	4/1998	302/5000	332/1750	1525kg	20.1	4.8	-	155	★★★★★	
BMW M235i xDrive Gran Coupé	214	£37,595	4/1998	302/5000	332/1750	1570kg	19.5	4.8	-	155	★★★★★	
BMW M135i	212	72-15	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1430kg	22.8	5.1	5.2	155	★★★★★	
Citroën DS3 1.6 THP	142	70-15	4/1598	154/6000	177/1400	1240kg	12.6	7.3	-	133	★★★★★	
Citroën DS3 Racing	153	71-12	4/1598	204/6000	203/2000	1240kg	16.7	6.5	-	146	★★★★★	
Citroën AX GT	195	87-92	4/1360	85/6400	86/4000	722kg	12.0	9.2	-	110	★★★★★	
Cupra Leon e-Hybrid	280	£34,495	4/1395	242	295	1596kg	15.4	6.7	-	140	★★★★★	
Cupra Leon 300	287F	£35,030	4/1984	296/5300	295/2000	1418kg	21.3	5.7	-	155	★★★★★	
DS 3 Performance	222	76-18	4/1598	205/6000	221/2000	1175kg	17.7	6.5	-	143	★★★★★	
Fiat Panda 100HP	273	06-11	4/1368	99/6000	97/4250	975kg	10.3	9.5	-	115	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta 1.5L Eco	251	£18,440	3/998	138/6000	133/1500	1144kg	12.3	9.2	26.4	125	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST	259	£20,700	3/1497	197/6000	214/1600	1187kg	16.9	6.5	-	144	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST Performance Edition	269	£26,495	3/1497	197/6000	214/1600	1187kg	16.9	6.5	-	144	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST	207F	73-17	4/1596	197/5700	214/2500	1088kg	18.4	6.9	18.4	137	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST200	253	76	4/1596	212/6000	236/2500	1068kg	19.8	6.7	-	143	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	123	08-13	4/1596	118/6000	112/4500	1045kg	11.5	9.9	-	120	★★★★★	
Ford Fiesta ST	075	05-10	4/1999	148/6000	140/4500	1137kg	12.2	7.9	-	129	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (MK4)	267F	£31,995	4/2361	216/5500	310/3000	1433kg	19.6	5.7	-	155	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (MK3)	207	75-18	4/1999	247/5500	265/2000	1362kg	18.4	6.5	-	154	★★★★★	
Ford Focus ST (MK2)	119	05-10	5/2522	222/6000	236/1600	1392kg	16.2	6.8	16.8	150	★★★★★	
Ford Focus RS (MK2)	246	75-18	4/2261	345/6000	347/2000	1547kg	22.7	4.7	4.9	12.6	166	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS Edition (MK3)	240	78	4/2261	345/6000	347/2000	1547kg	22.7	4.7	-	166	★★★★★	
Ford Focus RS (MK1)	195	09-11	5/2522	300/6500	324/2300	1467kg	20.8	5.9	5.9	14.2	163	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS500 (MK2)	256	70-71	5/2522	345/6000	339/2500	1467kg	23.9	5.6	5.6	12.7	165	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS (MK1)	207F	02-03	4/1998	212/5500	229/3500	1278kg	16.9	6.7	5.9	14.9	143	★★★★★
Ford Escort RS Cosworth	271	92-96	4/1993	224/6250	224/3500	1275kg	17.9	6.2	-	137	★★★★★	
Ford Puma 1.7	095	97-12	4/1619	123/6300	116/4500	1044kg	12.0	9.2	8.6	27.6	122	★★★★★
Ford Racing Puma	262	00-01	4/1619	153/7000	119/4500	1174kg	13.2	7.9	7.8	23.2	137	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R (FK8)	281	£32,820	4/1996	316/6500	295/2500	1380kg	23.3	5.8	5.9	12.6	168	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R Limited Edition (FK8)	281	£39,995	4/1996	316/6500	295/2500	1333kg	24.1	5.8	-	168	★★★★★	
Honda Civic Type R (FK2)	227F	75-17	4/1996	306/6500	295/2500	1378kg	22.6	5.7	5.4	12.4	167	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R (FK2)	102	07-11	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	15.8	6.6	6.8	17.5	146	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R Mugen (FK2)	248	09-11	4/1998	237/8300	157/6250	1233kg	19.5	5.9	-	155	★★★★★	
Honda Civic Type R (EP3)	287	01-05	4/1998	197/7400	145/5900	1204kg	16.6	6.8	16.9	146	★★★★★	
Honda Civic Type R (EK9)	210	97-10	4/1595	182/8200	118/7500	1040kg	17.8	6.8	-	135	★★★★★	
Hyundai i20 N	285	£24,995	4/1591	201/5500	203/1750	1196kg	17.2	6.7	-	143	★★★★★	
Hyundai i20 N	19-20	£25,295	4/1998	247/6000	279/1500	1160kg	17.9	6.4	-	155	★★★★★	
Hyundai i30 N Performance	267	£29,495	4/1998	271/6000	279/1750	1429kg	19.3	6.1	6.6	14.9	155	★★★★★
Hyundai i30 Fastback N Performance	269	£29,995	4/1998	271/6000	279/1750	1441kg	19.1	6.1	-	155	★★★★★	
Kia Ceed GT	267	£25,850	4/1591	201/6000	195/1500	1386kg	14.7	7.2	-	143	★★★★★	
Kia ProCeed GT	259	£28,135	4/1591	201/6000	195/1500	1438kg	14.2	7.2	-	140	★★★★★	
Kia ProCeed GT	217	73-18	4/1591	201/6000	195/1500	1350kg	14.3	7.3	-	150	★★★★★	
Lancia Delta HF Integrale Evoluzione II	271	93-94	4/1995	212/5750	232/2500	1340kg	16.1	5.7	-	137	★★★★★	

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE (IN THOUSANDS IN INR)	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB/FT/RPM	VELOCITY	BHP/TON	0-100KPH (SECS)	0-100MPH (SECS)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
Mercedes-AMG A35	267F	€35,970	4/1991	302/5800	295/3000	1480/km	207	4.7	-	155	• A formidable A-to-B-driver - Some front-drive rivals are more fun	
Mercedes-AMG A45 S	284F	€50,570	4/1991	415/6750	369/5000	1550/km	272	3.9	-	167	• A 21st-century reincarnation of late-'90s Imprezas and Evos - It costs \$50k	
Mercedes-AMG A45	221F	€5-18	4/1991	376/6000	350/2250	1480/km	258	4.2	3.9	155	• Tremendously fast - But not a true great	
Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG	194F	€12-35	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1480/km	244	4.6	4.3	10.6	155	• Blisteringly quick everywhere - Not as rewarding as some slower rivals
Mini Cooper (F56)	254T	€17-35	3/1499	134/4500	162/1250	1085/km	125	7.9	-	130	• Driving a slow car fast - Driving a car on Union Jack tail lights	
Mini Cooper S (F56)	268F	€20,925	4/1998	189/4700	221/2250	1195/km	161	6.8	-	146	• Feels dry and alive at moderate speeds - Loses its composure when you push harder	
Mini John Cooper Works (F56)	271F	€23,950	4/1998	288/2200	336/1250	1295/km	193	6.3	-	153	• Fast, agile, nimble - Chassis lacks sparkle found in previous JCWs	
Mini John Cooper Works GP (F56)	280F	€33,095	4/1998	302/1750	332/1750	1325/km	244	5.2	-	164	• Street-fighter looks, illustrious predecessors - Better at style than its substance	
Mini John Cooper Works Challenge (F56)	237F	€6-17	4/1998	228/5200	236/1250	1215/km	91	6.3	-	152	• A more hardcore JCW - The ride could be considered a title too hardcore	
Mini Cooper (R56)	185F	€9-14	4/1998	120/6000	118/4250	1075/km	113	9.1	-	126	• Brilliant ride and composure: could be all the Mini you need - 'You'll still buy the S'	
Mini Cooper S (R56)	149F	€6-14	4/1998	181/5500	177/1600	1140/km	161	7.0	7.0	142	• Like the Cooper, but with added shove - Google 'Mini death rattle'	
Mini John Cooper Works (R56)	184F	€8-14	4/1998	208/6000	206/2000	1160/km	182	6.9	7.2	167	148	• A seriously rapid Mini - Occasionally just a little unruly
Mini John Cooper Works GP (R56)	231F	€9-14	4/1998	215/6000	206/2000	1160/km	188	6.3	-	150	• Brazenly raucous - Too much for some roads and some tastes	
Mini John Cooper Works Coupé (R58)	164F	€11-15	4/1998	208/6000	206/2000	1175/km	180	6.3	-	149	• The usual raucous Mini/JCW experience - But wearing a backwards baseball cap	
Mini Cooper S (R53)	077F	€2-06	4/1998	168/6000	155/4000	1140/km	143	7.2	7.8	199	135	• Strong performance, quality feel - Over-long gearing
Mini Cooper S Works GP (R53)	262F	€6	4/1998	215/7100	184/4600	1090/km	200	6.5	-	149	• Storming engine, agility - Almost too mannered for a road racer	
Nissan Juke Nismo RS	208D	€5-17	4/1618	235/6000	206/3600	375/km	166	7.0	-	137	• Quirky character and build styling - Not a match for a sukka hot hatch	
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 2)	273F	€7-98	€1587	103/6200	97/5000	865/km	127	8.8	-	121	• Bargain-to-frills thrills - Not as much fun as original 1.3	
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 1)	095F	€4	1996	104/9400	100/7000	826/km	123	10.6	-	118	• Frantic, thrashy fun - Needs casing to extract full potential	
Peugeot 106 GTi 16v	034F	€7-04	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	950/km	128	7.4	-	127	• Fine handling supermini - Looks a little	
Peugeot 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport	254F	€5-18	4/1998	205/6000	221/3000	1160/km	180	6.5	-	143	• A brilliantly focused small hatch - Obscured dials	
Peugeot 208 GTi	184F	€12-16	4/1998	191/5800	203/1700	1160/km	173	6.8	6.8	179	143	• Agile chassis works well on tough roads - Could be more involving
Peugeot 205 GTi 119	195F	€8-9	4/1905	130/6000	119/4750	910/km	145	7.6	-	124	• Still scintillating after all these years - Brittle build quality	
Peugeot 308 GTi by Peugeot Sport	245F	€30-745	4/1998	256/6000	251/2000	1205/km	224	6.0	6.0	138	155	• A great entertainer with a crackler of an engine - Tiny steering wheel obscures the dials
Peugeot 306 GTi 16	020F	€3-01	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	124/km	140	7.9	7.2	201	140	• One of the great GTis - They don't make them like this any more
Peugeot 306 Rallye	095F	€6-9	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1163/km	146	7.8	6.9	192	137	• Essentially a GTi for less - Limited choice of colours
Peugeot Sport Triango 133	175F	€8-13	4/1598	131/6750	118/4400	1050/km	127	8.7	-	125	• Renault Sport experience for pocket money - Optional Cup chassis gives bounce	
Renault Sport Clio 200 Auto	194F	€8-18	4/1618	197/6000	177/1750	1204/km	166	6.7	6.9	139	143	• Faster, more refined, easier to drive - We miss the revvy NA engine and manual box
Renault Sport Clio 200 Trophy	229D	€6-18	4/1618	217/6000	206/2000	1204/km	183	6.6	-	146	• Willing chassis - Awful/paddleshift gearbox	
Renault Sport Clio 220 Cup	247F	€9-13	4/1998	197/1700	159/5400	1204/km	166	6.9	6.6	167	141	• The hot Clio is its best - They don't make 'em like this anymore
Renault Sport Clio 197 Cup	115F	€7-09	4/1998	194/7250	158/5550	1240/km	161	6.9	-	134	• Quick, polished and capable - Not as much sheer fun as R12 Cup	
Renault Sport Clio 182	066F	€4-05	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1110/km	165	7.1	6.6	175	139	• Took hot hatches to a new level - Flawed driving position
Renault Sport Clio 182 Cup	187F	€4-05	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090/km	168	6.9	-	139	• Full of bells, fantastic value - Sunday-market upholstery	
Renault Sport Clio Trophy	262F	€5-06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090/km	168	6.9	6.6	173	140	• The most fun you can have on three (sometimes two) wheels - Only 500 made built
Renault Sport Clio 172 (Phase 2)	034F	€1-03	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1110/km	156	7.2	7.1	200	138	• Poised, predictable, fast - Lacks aggression in the wet
Renault Sport Clio 172 Cup	046F	€2-03	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1070/km	171	6.9	6.5	177	138	• Bargain old-school hot hatch - Nervous in the wet, no ABS
Renault Sport Clio 172 (Phase 1)	146F	€0-01	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1030/km	167	7.2	6.6	182	138	• Brilliantly accomplished - Imperfect driving position
Renault Clio Williams	233F	€3-96	4/1998	148/6100	126/4500	989/km	153	7.8	7.6	208	134	• One of the best hot hatches ever - Can be fragile
Renault 5 GT Turbo	255F	€7-91	4/1997	118/5750	122/3000	855/km	140	7.3	-	120	• Clio Williams' grand-daddy - Few unmodified ones left	
Renault Sport Clio V6 255	277F	€3-05	6/2946	257/1700	221/4650	1400/km	182	5.8	-	153	• Supercar drama without the original's edgy handling - Uninspired interior	
Renault Sport Clio V6	029F	€9-02	6/2946	222/6000	221/3750	1410/km	164	6.6	5.8	170	145	• Pocket supercar - Mid-engine handling can be tricky
Renault Megané RS (280)	267F	€8-20	4/1998	276/6000	288/2400	1407/km	199	5.8	6.3	146	158	• Outrageous grip and agility - Cup chassis option doesn't do its composure any favours
Renault Megané RS 300	283F	€33,560	4/1998	296/6000	295/2400	1443/km	209	5.7	-	158	• Combines the more potent engine with the softer chassis than - But now it's a fully auto	
Renault Megané RS Trophy	267F	€31,995	4/1998	296/6000	295/2400	1419/km	212	5.7	-	162	• A RS with knobs on - Unforgiving ride can make it feel all at ease on trickier roads	
Renault Megané RS Trophy-R	280F	€31,455	4/1998	296/6000	295/2400	1306/km	230	5.4	-	163	• An absolute beast on track - Too much of a beast on the road	
Renault Sport Megané 275 Cup S/Nav 275	223D	€6-18	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1394/km	198	5.8	-	158	• The same engine as the Trophy-R - They don't make it anymore	
Renault Sport Megané 265 Cup	185F	€12-15	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387/km	191	6.0	6.4	168	158	• A hot hatch benchmark - Cupholder could be better positioned
Renault Sport Megané 275 Trophy	212F	€4-15	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1376/km	200	5.8	-	159	• Another cracking Trophy model - Stripped-out Trophy-R is even more thrilling	
Renault Sport Megané 275 Trophy-R	231F	€4-15	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1297/km	212	5.8	-	158	• As absorbing as a 911 GT3 RS on the right road - Too uncompromising for some; pricey	
Renault Sport Megané 250 Cup	139F	€9-12	4/1998	247/5500	251/3000	1387/km	181	6.1	6.1	146	156	• Fantastic chassis... - partially obscured by re-worked maturity
Renault Sport Megané dCi 175 Cup	199F	€7-09	4/1995	173/3750	265/2000	1470/km	119	8.3	23.5	137	• A diesel with a genuinely sporty chassis - Could take more power	
Renault Sport Megané dCi 230 Cup Team R26	195F	€7-09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1345/km	171	6.5	6.2	160	147	• The car the R26 is based on - F1 Team sticks in dubious taste
Renault Sport Megané R26 R	276F	€8-09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1220/km	189	6.0	5.8	151	147	• A true hot hatch great - Two seats, plastic rear windows
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	225F	€6-18	4/1998	189/4300	236/1450	1185/km	162	6.7	-	146	• Quick, competent, refined, and manual only - Not exciting enough	
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	183D	€8-10	4/1998	189/4300	236/1450	1259/km	144	6.9	-	142	• Punchy engine, unflappable DSG - Lacks engagement, DSG only	
SEAT Leon Cupra 200	267F	€6-20	4/1984	286/5400	280/1950	1356/km	274	6.2	-	155	• Agile, transparent and easily overlooked - Can feel rather plain	
SEAT Leon Cupra R	244D	€8	4/1990	306/5800	280/1800	1378/km	226	5.8	-	145	• Sharper handling and better body control - High price and limited availability	
SEAT Leon Cupra	105F	€7-11	4/1984	237/5700	221/2200	1375/km	175	6.4	-	153	• Great engine, composure - Doesn't have the adjustability of the old Cupra R	
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146D	€10-14	4/1990	178/6200	184/2000	1218/km	148	7.3	-	139	• Clever twincharged engine and DSG box - Do you homework on the reliability of the engine	
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk1)	077F	€3-07	4/1986	130/4000	229/1900	315/km	100	9.6	-	127	• Fun and frugal hot hatch - A little short on steering feel	
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk4)	281D	€29,815	4/1984	242/5000	273/1600	1445/km	170	6.7	-	155	• A capable Q-car for the masses - Engine lacks character	
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk3)	187D	€9-17	4/1984	217/4300	258/1750	1345/km	164	6.8	-	154	• Quick, agile, roomier than a Golf - Ride is harsh for what could be a family car	
Skoda Octavia vRS 245 (Mk3)	250F	€7-20	4/1984	242/5000	258/1600	1370/km	179	6.6	-	155	• A credible, entertaining performer - You won't get out of bed at 4am to drive it	
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk3)	267F	€17,249	4/1373	139/5500	170/2500	975/km	144	8.1	7.6	201	130	• Composed and brisk - Adjustability and character have been diluted
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk2)	128F	€5-17	4/1998	156/6000	168/4400	1044/km	127	8.8	-	139	• Still a great pocket rocket - Not quite as anarchic as the original	
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk1)	122F	€5-11	4/1986	137/6800	109/4800	1033/km	121	8.9	-	124	• Entertaining handling, well-built - Lacking in steering feedback	
Toyota GR Yaris	282F	€29,995	3/1618	257/6500	265/3000	1280/km	204	5.5	-	142	• A proper homologation special - More Subaru Impreza than Mitsubishi Evo	
Toyota Yaris GRMN	254F	€8	4/1998	209/6800	184/5000	1135/km	187	6.3	-	143	• Appealingly feisty supercharged special - Artificially stiff; they only made 400	
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	211F	€4-18	4/1998	202/5800	206/1900	1278/km	161	6.8	-	143	• Best to be wrong out - You'll need the £240k Performance Pack	
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154F	€7-14	4/1998	189/5850	192/1980	1166/km	165	7.2	-	140	• Looks snazzy, punchy engine - Lacks feel, uncouth compared with rivals	
Vauxhall Corsa VXR Nurburgring/Clubsport	164F	€11-13/14	4/1998	202/5750	206/2250	1166/km	176	6.8	-	143	• VXR gets more power and a limited-slip diff - But they come at a price	
Vauxhall Astra GTC VXR (Mk2)	207F	€2-18	4/1998	276/5500	295/2500	1475/km	190	6.0	-	155	• Loony turbo pace - Lacks the Renault Sport Megané's composure	
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk1)	102F	€5-11	4/1998	237/5600	236/2400	1393/km	173	6.4	6.7	167	152	• Fast and furious - Lacks a little composure and precision
Volkswagen Up GTI	713F	€16,320	3/999	115/5000	147/2000	995/km	115	8.8	-	122	• Infectious appetite for fun - City car roots are still there	
Volkswagen Polo GTI	034F	€9-14	4/1998	123/5500	112/3000	1038/km	120	8.2	8.9	30.1	127	• Looks, performance, chassis - Lacks the fizz of the 160 GTI
Volkswagen Polo GTI	244D	€22,005	4/1998	191/4400	236/1500	1272/km	157	6.7	-	147	• Decent performance, mature ride and handling - Lacks driver involvement	
Volkswagen Polo GTI	214F	€5-17	4/1998	189/4200	236/1450	1197/km	160	6.7	-	146	• Smooth and brassy - Fiesta ST is more engaging	
Volkswagen Polo GTI	154F	€10-14	4/1990	178/6200	184/2000	1184/km	153	7.4	-	142	• Modern-day Mk1 Golf GTi gets twin-clutch DSG - It's a little bit bland	
Volkswagen Golf GTI (Mk8)	279D	€33,525	4/1984	242/5000	273/1600	1429/km	172	6.4	-	155	• An alluring blend of the best GTI ingredients - The competition is stiffer than ever	
Volkswagen Golf GTI Clubsport (Mk8)	283F</											

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE (IN RUS \$)	ENGINE (CV/L)	DRIVE	0-100 (s)	TOP SPEED (km/h)	WGT (kg)	DRIVE/TYRE	0-100/MPH (s)	0-100/MPH (s)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING
Volkswagen Golf GTI (Mk5)	259 F	04-'09	4/1984	197/5100	243/1750	1429kg	140	6.6	-	-	146	+ Character and ability; the GTIs return to form - Lacking firepower? ★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf R32 (Mk4)	087 F	06-'09	6/3189	246/6300	236/2500	1466kg	170	6.5	5.8	15.2	155	+ The tractor's gear and you'll love the soundtrack - We still have a GTI ★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf R32 (Mk4)	053 F	02-'04	6/3189	237/6250	238/2800	1477kg	163	6.6	6.4	16.3	154	+ Charming - Boomy engine can be tiresome ★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf GTI 16v (Mk2)	195 F	88-'92	4/1781	139/6100	123/4600	960kg	147	7	-	-	129	+ Still feels everyday useable - Too many have been modified ★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf GTI (Mk1, 1.8)	224 F	82-'84	4/1781	112/5800	109/3500	860kg	132	8.2	-	-	114	+ The car that started it all - Tricky to find an unmodified one ★★★★★

SALOONS / ESTATES / SUVs



OUR CHOICE

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



BEST OF THE REST

The new **BMW M3 Competition** (left) drives like a larger M2 Competition, the current **Mercedes-AMG C63 S** will be your last race to get one with a V8, or if it's something a size larger you're looking for, the **Audi RS6 Avant**, **BMW M5 Competition** and **Mercedes-AMG E63 S** (saloon or estate) provide a trio of strong options.

Alfa Romeo Giulia 2.0 Turbo Super	234 D	\$33,595	4/1995	197/5000	243/1750	1429kg	140	6.6	-	-	146	+ Keen engine, enjoyable handling - Firm low-speed ride ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulia Veloce	244 F	\$39,875	4/1995	276/5250	295/2250	1429kg	196	5.7	-	-	149	+ Supple and satisfying - Engine reluctant to rev ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio	287 F	\$67,195	6/2891	503/6500	442/2500	1620kg	315	3.9	-	-	149	+ If Ferrari built a saloon (really) - Lacks the final polish of German rivals ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulia GTAm	286 F	\$157,700	6/2891	533/6500	442/2500	1580kg	343	3.6	-	-	186	+ An utterly fabulous saloon car with a truly infectious character - It's a bit pricey ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Stelvio Speciale AWD	234 D	\$43,705	4/1995	276/5250	295/1750	1660kg	169	5.7	-	-	143	+ Agile feel, quick steering, attractive cabin - Engine not truly inspiring ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio	244 D	\$71,880	6/2891	503/6500	442/2500	1830kg	279	3.8	-	-	176	+ Rivals the Macan GTs - Needs optional P Zero Corsa tyres to give it very best ★★★★★
Alpine DS 3 Touring	286 D	\$55,950	6/2993	350/5500	538/2500	1955kg	184	4.8	-	-	167	+ The best fast diesel you can buy - The B3 ★★★★★
Alpina B3 Touring	281 D	\$67,950	6/2993	456/5500	516/2500	1955kg	184	3.9	-	-	186	+ A richer, smoother drive than an M-car - Little difference to an M340i at low speeds ★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide	141 F	70-'13	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1990kg	240	5.3	-	-	188	+ Better than its DB9 sibling - More of a 2+2 than a proper four-seater ★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide S	210 F	70-'19	12/5935	552/6650	465/5500	1990kg	282	4.4	-	-	203	+ Oozes star quality, sleeker than M05/AM cars a big improvement - It's cosy in the back ★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide AMR	271 D	\$194,590	12/5935	595/6650	465/5500	1990kg	304	4.4	-	-	205	+ Powertrain, performance, personality - When it goes off sale, so does Aston's 5.9 V12 ★★★★★
Aston Martin DBX	266 D	\$161,500	8/3982	542/6500	516/2200	2245kg	245	4.5	-	-	181	+ Drives nothing like an SUV - Still heavy and thirsty like an SUV ★★★★★
Audi S3 Saloon	192 F	73-'20	4/1984	306/5500	280/1800	1430kg	120	5.3	-	-	155	+ On pace a match for the original S4 - In reality much less interesting ★★★★★
Audi RS3 Saloon	243 F	\$47,310	5/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1515kg	264	4.1	3.6	8.8	155	+ Mini RS4 looks, stonking pace - Not the most involving driving experience ★★★★★
Audi S4 Avant (B9, diesel)	266 D	\$49,425	6/2967	342/3850	516/2500	1825kg	190	4.9	-	-	155	+ Effortless performance, well-judged chassis - Diesel power won't be everyone's taste ★★★★★
Audi S4 (B9, petrol)	225 D	70-'19	6/2996	349/5400	369/1370	1630kg	218	4.7	-	-	155	+ Strong response and delivery - Chassis feels softer than before ★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (B9)	282 F	\$65,700	6/2984	444/5700	442/1900	1743kg	259	4.1	-	-	155	+ Very well worth a try - Some may feel it lacks character and drama ★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (B8)	216 F	02-'15	8/1463	444/8250	374/4000	1795kg	251	4.7	4.5	10.5	174	+ Looks and sounds the part, thunderously fast - Unnatural steering, d/d dynamics ★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B7)	250 F	05-'08	8/1618	414/7800	371/5500	1650kg	255	4.7	4.5	10.5	155	+ 444bhp at 7800rpm! Drives like an estate version too - Busy under braking ★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B5)	192 F	00-'02	6/2671	375/6100	325/2500	1620kg	236	4.9	4.8	12.1	170	+ Effortless pace - Not the last word in agility, bends wheel rims ★★★★★
Audi RS2	214 F	94-'95	5/2226	315/6500	302/3000	1595kg	201	4.8	4.8	13.1	162	+ Storming performance (thanks to Porsche) - Try trailing one ★★★★★
Audi S5 Sportback	233 D	70-'19	6/2995	349/5400	369/1370	1660kg	214	4.7	-	-	155	+ More capable than you think - Strong v8 engine - Gearbox frustrating in auto mode ★★★★★
Audi RS5 Sportback	264 D	\$69,525	6/2894	444/5700	442/1900	1720kg	262	3.9	-	-	155	+ High-speed capability - Flat-footed on more technical roads ★★★★★
Audi S6 Avant (C8)	263 D	\$63,315	6/2967	344/3850	516/2500	2020kg	173	5.1	-	-	155	+ Diesel suits the S6 ethos - Poor low-end engine response ★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C7)	272 F	\$93,790	8/3996	592/6000	590/2050	2075kg	390	3.6	-	-	155	+ Power, pose, build - Needs Dynamic Ride Control suspension to be at its best ★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C7)	203 F	73-'18	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1955kg	290	3.9	3.6	8.2	155	+ Performance, footpaw powertrain, beefy looks - Feels a bit one-dimensional ★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant Performance (C7)	224 D	70-'19	8/3993	597/6100	553/2500	1955kg	371	3.7	-	-	155	+ The extra power is no hassle for the chassis - But it is a stern test of your self-control ★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C6)	116 F	08-'10	10/4991	572/4250	479/1500	1985kg	293	4.5	4.3	9.7	155	+ Was the world's most powerful estate - Power isn't everything ★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C5)	258 F	02-'04	8/4712	444/5700	413/1950	1865kg	242	4.6	4.8	11.6	155	+ The ultimate estate car - Numb steering ★★★★★
Audi RS7 Sportback	268 D	\$98,590	8/3996	592/6000	590/2050	2065kg	391	3.6	-	-	155	+ Surprisingly agile and involving - Sometimes feels its weight ★★★★★
Audi RS e-tron GT	284 D	\$110,950	4/958k	637	612	2347kg	276	3.3	-	-	155	+ A fine GT - Range not up to touring ★★★★★
Audi SQ2	261 D	\$37,395	4/1984	296/5300	295/2000	1510kg	199	4.7	-	-	155	+ Nothing - Everything ★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur V8	283 D	\$153,900	8/3996	542/6000	568/2000	2330kg	236	4.1	-	-	198	+ The best limo for those who enjoy driving - 2330kg and 5.3 metres ★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur	272 D	\$168,300	12/5950	626/6000	664/1350	2437kg	261	3.8	-	-	207	+ A limo for those who enjoy driving - Needs to lose a few hundred kilos ★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur V8 S	230 D	70-'19	8/3993	521/6000	502/1700	2478kg	279	4.9	-	-	190	+ Old-school approach to comfort and luxury - Old-school tech ★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur	185 D	73-'18	12/5948	616/6000	590/1800	2425kg	253	4.6	-	-	189	+ For those who want their Flying Spur with a W12 - Car feels its weight; engine sounds dull ★★★★★
Bentley Bentayga V8	247 D	\$136,900	8/3996	542/6000	568/1960	2388kg	231	4.5	-	-	180	+ The pick of the Bentayga range - A top-end Range Rover is still more polished ★★★★★
Bentley Bentayga	217 D	\$162,700	12/5950	600/5000	664/1350	2440kg	250	4.1	-	-	187	+ Sublime quality, ridiculous pace - Inert driving experience, SUV stigma ★★★★★
Bentley Mulliner Speed	297 F	74-'20	8/6752	530/4000	811/750	2685kg	201	4.9	-	-	190	+ The last Bentley with the six- and three-quarter - We won't see its kind again ★★★★★
BMW 320i xDrive M Sport (G20)	262 D	\$40,585	4/1995	187/4000	295/1750	1540kg	123	6.9	-	-	145	+ Brilliant mix of performance and economy - Lacks a degree of dynamic finesse ★★★★★
BMW 330i M Sport (G20)	252 D	\$40,385	4/1995	245/5000	295/1550	1470kg	176	5.8	-	-	155	+ Feels like a 3-series once more - Harsh and unsettled ride ★★★★★
BMW M340i xDrive	270 D	\$49,845	6/2998	369/5500	369/1850	1670kg	225	4.4	-	-	155	+ Very fast and refined - Limited driver appeal ★★★★★
BMW M3 Competition (G80)	287 F	\$74,815	6/2979	503/6250	479/2750	1730kg	295	3.9	-	-	155	+ As quick and capable as you'd want - Bigger and heavier than you'd like ★★★★★
BMW M3 (F80)	266 F	74-'20	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1560kg	277	4.3	4.1	8.6	155	+ Looks, performance, practicality - Body control on rough roads; engine lacks character ★★★★★
BMW M3 Competition Package (F80)	237 F	70-'19	6/2979	444/7000	406/1850	1560kg	289	4.2	-	-	155	+ The car the F80 M3 should have been from the start - Less refined at low speeds ★★★★★
BMW M3 CS (F80)	250 D	70-'19	6/2979	454/8250	442/2400	1855kg	291	3.7	-	-	174	+ The best M3 ever - A bit more expensive than you'd expect ★★★★★
BMW M3 (F80)	123 F	08-'11	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1605kg	262	4.9	4.9	10.7	165	+ Every bit as good as the E92 M3 coupe - No carbon roof ★★★★★
BMW M3 CRT (E90)	179 F	17-'12	8/3661	444/8300	324/3750	1580kg	285	4.4	-	-	180	+ Saloon chassis + weight savings = GTs engine = best E90 M3 - Just 67 were made ★★★★★
BMW M5 (F90)	244 F	70-'20	8/4395	592/5600	553/1800	1855kg	324	3.4	-	-	155	+ Fun in two- or four-wheel drive - Insufficient steering connection and engine character ★★★★★
BMW M5 Competition (F90)	282 F	\$102,325	8/4395	616/6000	553/1800	1895kg	330	3.3	-	-	155	+ Incredible performance, sharper handling - It's still a big old bus ★★★★★
BMW M5 CS (F90)	287 D	\$140,780	8/4395	626/6000	553/1800	1825kg	349	3.0	-	-	189	+ Outrageous performance, sparking chassis - A DCT would add even more sharpness ★★★★★
BMW M5 (F10)	208 F	70-'16	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1870kg	300	4.4	-	-	155	+ Twin-turbocharging suits M5 well - Can feel heavy at times ★★★★★
BMW M5 (E60)	129 F	04-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6000	1755kg	289	4.7	-	-	155	+ Close to being the ultimate supersaloon - SMG gearbox feels old-tech ★★★★★
BMW M5 (E39)	268 F	70-'13	8/4941	394/6600	369/3800	1995kg	223	5.3	4.9	11.5	155	+ Magnificent V8-engined supersaloon - We'd be nitpicking ★★★★★
BMW M5 (E34)	110 F	88-'95	6/3795	335/6900	295/4750	1725kg	197	5.8	4.9	13.6	155	+ The Gopher of supersaloons - The family can come too ★★★★★
BMW M5 (E28)	258 F	84-'88	6/2453	282/6500	251/4500	1431kg	200	6.1	-	-	156	+ The original storming saloon - Understated looks ★★★★★
BMW M5 Gran Coupé	190 D	73-'18	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1875kg	299	4.2	-	-	155	+ Enormous performance, stylish looks - Looks overpriced next to rivals, M5 included ★★★★★
BMW M760Li xDrive	233 D	\$141,750	12/6592	602/5500	590/1550	2180kg	281	3.7	-	-	155	+ More capable than you'd think strong engine - Too much of a limo to be genuinely exciting ★★★★★
BMW X5 M50d	191 D	\$74,395	6/2993	376/4000	546/2000	2190kg	174	5.3	-	-	155	+ Straight-line pace - Driving experience identical to standard X5, despite the M badge ★★★★★
BMW X7 xDrive30d M Sport	262 D	\$165,765	6/2993	261/4000	457/2000	2370kg	112	7.0	-	-	141	+ Spacious; quick enough - It's all 'make you kids cry ★★★★★
Honda Accord Type R	012 F	98-'03	4/2157	209/2700	158/6700	1306kg	163	7.2	6.1	17.4	142	+ One of the finest front-drivers of all time - Convincing your friends of that ★★★★★
Jaguar XE D180 AWD	227 D	\$36,755	4/1999	178/4000	317/1750	1650kg	110	8.4	-	-	132	+ Talented chassis gets more traction - Shame the engine isn't as polished ★★★★★
Jaguar XE P300 AWD	262 D	\$41,005	4/1997	296/5500	295/1500	1695kg	178	5.7	-	-	155	+ Fluent handling; 4WD grip and security - Auto box spins sportiness ★★★★★
Jaguar XE SV Project 8	269 F	70-'20	8/5000	592/6500	516/3500	1765kg	345	3.7	3.5	7.8	200	+ Beautifully controlled and amazingly quick - They only made 5 in Touring spec ★★★★★
Jaguar XF Sportbrake R Sport 300PS AWD	260 D	\$49,090	4/1997	296/5500	295/1500	1763kg	171	6.0	-	-	155	+ Precise, involving dynamics, unapologetic performance - It's only got four cylinders ★★★★★
Jaguar XF S Diesel 300PS RWD	219 F	\$53,485	6/2993	296/4000	516/2000	1796kg	167	6.4	-	-	154	+ Great chassis, good looks, and it's got six cylinders - It's a diesel ★★★★★
Jaguar XFR	181 D	09-'15	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1800kg	284	4.7	4.8	10.2	155	+ Brilliant blend of pace and refinement - Doesn't sound as special as it is ★★★★★
Jaguar XFR-S	208 F	73-'15	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1800kg	306	4.6	-	-	186	+ XF turned up to 12 - Tyres aren't cheap ★★★★★
Jaguar XJR	191 D	74-'17	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1875kg	294	4.6	-	-	174	+ Hot-rod vibe, fine cabin - Opinion-dividing looks ★★★★★
Jaguar XJRH75	251 F	74-'18	8/5000									

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE (in lakhs ex-manu)	ENGINE CC/CYC	BHP/BPM	LB 17/17PM	WEIGHT	BHP/TON	0-100KPH (sec)	0-100MPH (min)	MAX. MPH	EVO RATING
Jaguar F-Pace S	222D	76-78	375/6500	321/4500	188/44k	202	5.5	-	-	175	★★★★★
Jaguar F-Pace SVR	262D	275.305	8/5000	542/6000	501/2500	1995k	276	4.3	-	176	★★★★★
Jaguar I-Pace HSE	251D	574.395	294k/3500	394	513	2208k	181	4.8	-	174	★★★★★
Kia Stinger GT-Line 2.0	242D	78-20	4/1998	244/6200	260/1400	1642k	51	5.8	-	149	★★★★★
Kia Stinger GT 1.6	242D	540.495	6/3342	365/6000	376/1300	1780k	168	4.7	-	168	★★★★★
Land Rover Defender 110 (P400)	273F	675.655	6/2996	394/5500	406/2000	2388k	168	6.4	-	129	★★★★★
Lamborghini Urus	249F	539.925	6/3996	641/6500	617/2250	2200k	296	3.6	-	190	★★★★★
Lotus Evija	151F	17-12	4/4969	471/6600	372/5200	1744k	247	5.2	4.7	109	★★★★★
Lotus Carlton	258F	90-13	3/3615	377/2500	419/2400	1658k	231	5.4	4.8	106	★★★★★
Maserati Ghibli	186D	57.005	6/2979	345/5000	406/1750	1810k	194	5.5	-	166	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte S	184D	78-18	6/2979	404/3500	406/1750	1860k	221	5.1	-	177	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte GTS	226E	76-18	8/3798	523/6800	479/2250	1900k	280	4.7	-	193	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Trofeo	282D	1127.300	8/3799	572/6750	538/2250	2000k	291	4.5	-	203	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte S	137F	08-12	8/4691	425/7000	361/4750	1990k	216	5.4	5.1	121	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	141F	08-12	8/4691	433/7000	361/4500	1990k	221	5.1	-	177	★★★★★
Maserati Levante Diesel	222D	206-12	6/2897	271/4000	442/2000	2250k	125	6.9	-	143	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG A35 Saloon	271F	537.755	4/1991	302/3900	299/3000	1495k	205	4.8	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG CLA45 Coupé	273D	531.010	4/1991	415/6750	369/5000	1600k	254	4.0	-	167	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG CLA45 S Shooting Brake	278D	521.010	4/1991	415/6750	369/5000	1630k	259	4.0	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C43 Estate	228D	449.995	6/2996	363/5500	383/2000	1660k	222	4.7	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 Saloon (W205)	209D	75-20	3/3982	469/5500	479/1750	1640k	291	4.1	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 Estate (S205)	276F	75-20	3/3982	469/5500	479/1750	1704k	279	4.2	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Saloon (W205)	258T	74.258	8/3982	503/5500	516/1750	1655k	309	4.0	-	180	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Estate (S205)	282F	87.548	8/3982	503/5500	516/2000	1670k	306	4.1	-	180	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG (W204)	151F	08-14	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655k	277	4.5	4.4	97	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C55 AMG (W203)	088F	04-08	8/5439	367/2500	376/4000	1635k	228	5.2	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz R107 2.5-16	085F	89-92	4/2498	204/6750	177/5500	1300k	159	7.5	-	146	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 (W121)	242D	78-20	3/3982	563/7375	553/2250	1875k	305	3.5	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 S (W121)	286F	89.655	3/3982	604/7375	627/2500	1935k	317	3.4	3.4	74	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG E63 S Estate (S213)	272F	101.565	3/3982	604/7375	627/2500	1995k	308	3.5	-	180	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT63 4-Door Coupé	274F	79-20	3/3982	577/5500	594/2500	2025k	290	3.4	-	193	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT63 4S-Door Coupé	269F	814.855	3/3982	630/5500	660/2500	2045k	313	3.2	-	196	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W122)	187D	73-16	8/5461	549/5500	531/1750	1770k	315	4.2	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W121)	208F	73-16	8/5461	577/5500	590/1750	1795k	327	4.1	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W121)	165F	71-13	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	1765k	298	4.4	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W121)	134D	09-11	8/6208	518/6800	465/5200	1765k	298	4.5	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W121)	096D	06-10	8/6208	507/8000	465/5200	1765k	292	4.5	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	052F	03-06	8/5439	469/6100	516/2850	1760k	271	4.7	4.8	102	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG S63 L	246D	152.495	8/3982	604/5500	664/2750	1940k	316	4.3	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG CLS53	247D	176.600	6/2999	451/6100	567/1800	1905k	302	4.5	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG S	199D	74-17	8/5461	577/5500	590/1750	1795k	327	4.1	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GLC63 S Coupé	253D	685.495	8/3982	503/5500	516/1750	1945k	263	3.8	-	174	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GL63 S	218D	1108.638	8/5461	577/5500	560/1750	2270k	258	4.2	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GL63 S Coupé	213D	1181.105	8/5461	577/5500	560/1750	2275k	258	4.2	-	155	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG G63	250D	1346.490	8/3982	577/6000	627/2500	2485k	236	4.5	-	137	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz G63 AMG	172D	12-18	8/5461	537/5500	560/2000	2475k	220	5.4	-	130	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ 300 SST	178F	08-14	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1590k	185	5.5	5.2	129	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ 330 SST	184F	09-14	4/1998	324/6500	322/3500	1590k	207	4.4	-	155	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ 360	122D	08-14	4/1998	354/6500	363/3500	1560k	231	4.0	-	155	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ 400	181F	09-10	4/1998	403/6500	387/3500	1560k	262	3.8	-	155	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ 340	088F	05-08	4/1997	345/6800	321/4600	1400k	250	4.2	4.3	109	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX MR FQ 360	181F	05-08	4/1997	366/6887	363/2300	1400k	266	4.0	-	157	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII	055F	03-05	4/1997	276/6500	289/3500	1410k	199	5.1	-	157	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII MR FQ 300	055F	03-05	4/1997	305/6800	289/3500	1400k	221	4.9	-	157	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII Tommi Mäkinen Edition	031F	02-03	4/1997	276/6500	282/3500	1360k	206	5.7	5.0	130	★★★★★
Peugeot 508 SW PSE	286D	555.025	4/1598	355	383	1875k	192	5.2	-	155	★★★★★
Polestar 2	280D	446.900	300k/4000	42	487	2048k	199	4.7	-	127	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera GTS	279D	1071.880	8/3996	473/6500	457/1800	2040k	236	3.9	-	181	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo	237F	1151.100	8/3996	542/7575	568/1960	1995k	276	3.6	3.4	83	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo Sport Turismo	239D	1181.828	8/3996	542/7575	568/1960	2035k	271	3.8	-	188	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo S E-Hybrid Sport 1.2	202D	1144.930	8/3996	671	627	2325k	293	3.4	-	192	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera GT	278F	71-16	8/4806	434/6700	383/3500	1925k	229	4.4	-	178	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo	137F	70-16	8/4806	493/6000	516/2520	1970k	254	4.2	3.6	89	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo S	271F	814.806	542/6200	590/2250	599k	276	3.8	-	-	190	★★★★★
Porsche Taycan (Performance Battery Plus)	283D	874.739	350k/45	35	2130k	179	5.4	-	-	143	★★★★★
Porsche Taycan Turbo Cross Turismo	287D	116.950	460k/616	616	2220k	270	3.3	-	-	155	★★★★★
Porsche Taycan Turbo S	267D	138.830	460k/616	616	2295k	273	2.8	-	-	161	★★★★★
Porsche Macan	259D	442.060	4/1994	242/5000	273/1600	1795k	137	6.7	-	139	★★★★★
Porsche Macan S	251F	449.420	6/2991	349/5400	354/1360	1865k	190	5.3	-	157	★★★★★
Porsche Macan GTS	244F	76-18	6/2997	355/6000	369/1650	1895k	190	5.2	-	159	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne S (Mk3)	253T	572.080	6/2894	434/5700	406/1800	2020k	218	5.2	-	164	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk3)	243D	510.490	8/3996	542/7575	568/1960	2175k	254	4.1	-	177	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo Coupé	263D	510.870	8/3996	542/7575	568/2000	2200k	250	3.9	-	177	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2, Mk1)	211D	75-17	6/2864	434/6000	442/1800	2100k	209	5.2	-	163	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2, Mk1)	173D	72-15	8/4806	416/6500	380/3500	2085k	202	5.7	-	162	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk2)	212D	70-17	8/4806	513/6000	533/2250	1958k	239	4.5	-	177	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo S (Mk2)	184D	70-17	8/4806	562/6000	590/2500	2235k	255	4.1	-	176	★★★★★
Range Rover Evoque P250	261F	338.500	6/2995	246/5500	269/1300	1818k	137	7.0	-	143	★★★★★
Range Rover Sport SVR	260D	510.850	8/5000	567/6000	516/3500	2302k	250	4.5	-	176	★★★★★
Range Rover Sport Autobiography Dynamic	250T	514.425	8/4367	557/5000	516/3500	2497k	227	5.4	-	155	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Ghost	280D	1249.600	12/6749	563/5000	627/1600	2490k	230	4.8	-	155	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Phantom	054F	03-17	12/6749	453/3350	531/3500	2560k	180	5.7	-	149	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R ST 220t	271F	19-20	4/1998	345/3500	324/2000	1462k	237	4.7	-	163	★★★★★
Subaru Kobalt iRS	259F	17-12	4/1988	234/4000	369/1750	1590k	130	7.0	-	137	★★★★★
Subaru WRX STi	272F	20	4/2457	361/6400	330/3600	1890k	219	4.9	-	162	★★★★★
Subaru WRX STi	253F	14-18	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1534k	196	5.2	-	158	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STi (Hayley's)	090F	05-07	4/2457	276/6000	289/4000	1495k	188	5.3	-	158	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX STi PPRP (Bobbey's)	073F	03-05	4/1994	300/6000	299/4000	1470k	207	5.4	5.2	129	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza Turbo (Classic)	011F	93-00	4/1994	215/5600	214/4000	1235k	177	5.8	5.4	146	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza	187F	99	4/1994	237/6000	258/3500	1235k	195	6.1	5.0	141	★★★★★

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE (inc. vat)	ENGINE Cyl/CC	BHP/RPM	LB/FT/RPM	WEIGHT	BHP/TON	0-62MPH (secs)	0-100MPH (secs)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING		
Subaru Impreza P1	259 F	100-'01	4/1994	276/6500	260/4000	1283kg	219 F	4.7	4.9	133	150	+ One of our favourite Imprezas - Doesn't come cheap	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza 2.0B STI	282 F	98-'99	4/212	276/6000	268/3200	1270kg	220 F	5.0	5.0	131	150	+ The ultimate Impreza - Prices reflect this	★★★★★
Tesla Model 3 Performance	263 F	E56,490	330kW	444	471	1847kg	244	3.5	-	-	145	+ Quicker round a track than an M3 - Lap times aren't everything	★★★★★
Vauxhall Insignia VXR SuperSport	189 D	13-'17	6/2792	321/5250	321/5250	1825kg	179	5.6	-	-	170	+ A 170mph Vauxhall - Should be a more engaging steer	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX88 GTS	215 D	15-'17	8/6162	576/6150	546/3850	1834kg	319	4.2	-	-	155	+ Monster engine - engaging driving experience - Woolof interior	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX88 GTS-R	272 F	15-'17	8/6162	587/6150	546/3850	1880kg	317	4.2	-	-	155	+ Blistering performance; bursting with character - The end of an era	★★★★★

ROADSTERS / CONVERTIBLES



OUR CHOICE

Lotus Elise Sport 240 Final Edition. As the game-changing entry-level Lotus prepares to bow out after a quarter of a century, this special edition combines 237bhp with the usual low kerb weight and sublime handling to create yet another brilliantly accurate and enthusiastic Elise. We'll miss them.



BEST OF THE REST

The Porsche 718 Spyder (left) is essentially a drop-top Cayman GT4, while the **718 Boxster GTS 4.0** is essentially a cut-price 718 Spyder. **The Aston Martin Vantage Roadster** bests the 911 Cabriolet for character, while the **Caterham Seven** remains an exemplar of sports car purity whatever the model.

Abarth 124 Spider	256 F	16-'19	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1060kg	161	6.8	-	143	+ A little car with a big soul - Vague and Hellcat front end	★★★★★	
Audi Romeo 4C Spider	223 F	15-'19	4/1742	237/6000	258/2200	940kg*	256	4.5	-	160	+ Stunningly beautiful - Steering and coupe version - Still has the coupe's other virtues	★★★★★	
Audi Romeo 8C Spider	161 F	09-'11	8/6491	450/7000	354/4750	1675kg	273	4.4	-	181	+ Beauty meets best. They hit it off - Boot is useless for touring	★★★★★	
Ariel Atom 4	273 F	13/9875	4/1996	320/6500	310/3000	595kg	546	2.8	-	162	+ Sensory overload - Turbo engine lacks the old supercharged unit's frantic soundtrack	★★★★★	
Ariel Atom 3.5 245	248 F	18-'12	4/1998	245/8600	177/7200	520kg	479	2.7	-	145	+ Even better than its predecessors - Can still be a bit draughty	★★★★★	
Ariel Atom 3.5 Supercarged	180 D	13-'18	4/1998	310/8400	189/7200	550kg	573	2.1	-	155	+ As mad as ever - Rain	★★★★★	
Ariel Atom 3.5R	255 F	14-'18	4/1998	350/8400	243/6100	550kg	647	2.6	-	155	+ Remarkable balance, pace and pace - Pricey	★★★★★	
Ariel Nomad	248 F	E33,000	4/2354	235/7200	214/3000	670kg*	365	3.4	-	134	+ Off-road capabilities make for a super plaything. No Bluetooth	★★★★★	
Ariel Nomad R	278 F	E77,400	4/1998	335/7200	343/3000	670kg	488	2.9	-	134	+ Intriguing and effective mash-up of track car and off-roader - They're only making five	★★★★★	
Aston Martin Vantage Roadster	279 D	E126,950	8/3982	503/6000	505/2000	1628kg*	314	3.8	-	190	+ Builds on the already excellent coupe's attributes - Interior design lacks behind exterior	★★★★★	
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster (4.7)	130 F	09-'16	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1710kg	250	4.8	-	180	+ Sportiest, coolest drop-top Aston in years - Feels designed to contemporaries	★★★★★	
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S Roadster	165 F	11-'17	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1690kg	258	4.8	-	189	+ Sounds amazing, looks even better - Still not the best drop-top in its class	★★★★★	
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S Roadster	175 F	12-'14	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1760kg	294	4.5	-	189	+ As good as the coupe, with amplified V12 rumble - A little more parking	★★★★★	
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S Roadster	212 F	14-'17	12/5935	565/6750	457/5750	1745kg	329	4.1	-	187	+ A brilliant two-seat roadster... - Jet down by a frustrating automated manual gearbox	★★★★★	
Aston Martin DB11 Volante	258 F	E159,900	8/3982	503/6000	498/2000	1795kg	285	4.1	-	201	+ Impressively wide range of dynamic personalities - Cabin could be better at this price	★★★★★	
Audi TT Roadster 45 TFSI quattro (Mk3)	259 D	E37,005	4/1984	242/5000	273/1600	1455kg	169	5.5	-	155	+ Competent and stylish - Chunky weight dulls the performance	★★★★★	
Audi TT Roadster (Mk3)	207 D	E46,360	4/1984	302/5400	295/2000	1695kg	205	4.8	-	155	+ Highly capable - Most will want more than 'capable'	★★★★★	
Audi TT Roadster (Mk3)	250 T	E55,655	5/2480	394/5500	354/1700	1530kg	262	3.9	-	155	+ Terrific engine... - Is the best thing about it	★★★★★	
Bac Mono	189 F	E165,125	4/2261	305/7700	206/6000	580kg*	534	2.8	-	170	+ The most single-minded track car available - That means no parking...	★★★★★	
Bentley Mulliner Bacalar	296 F	E15m	12/19550	650/5000	664/1750	2384kg	217	<3.8	-	200+	+ A luxury cruiser that's a bit of a rebel roadster - They're only making 12, at \$1.5m each	★★★★★	
BMW 2s Drive20i	261 D	E36,990	4/1988	194/4500	236/1450	1405kg	140	6.6	-	149	+ Keen engine, communicative chassis - Could handle more power	★★★★★	
BMW Z4 M40i	256 D	E49,050	6/2998	335/5000	369/1600	1535kg	222	4.6	-	155	+ Inherent agility and ability - Undemanding and unengaging	★★★★★	
BMW Z4 M Roadster	091 F	06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	140kg	244	5.0	-	155	+ Exhilarating and characterful; that engine - Still suspension	★★★★★	
BMW Roadster	002 F	98-'02	6/3246	325/7400	258/4900	1375kg	240	5.1	-	155	+ M3 motor; hunky looks - M Coupé drives better	★★★★★	
BMW i8 Roadster	258 F	E124,735	3/1499	369/8500	420/3700	1959kg	235	4.6	-	155	+ Unique and engaging - Still more GT than sports car	★★★★★	
BMW Z8	026 F	00-'03	8/4941	400/6600	369/3800	1585kg	256	4.7	4.8	111	155	+ M5-powered super-sportster - M5's more fun to drive	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 270	219 F	E28,885	4/1596	135/6800	123/4000	540kg*	254	5.0	-	122	+ Fastly engine, sweetly balanced, manic and exciting - The temptation of more power	★★★★★	
Caterham Super Seven 1600	273 D	E33,495	4/1596	155/6800	122/4000	565kg*	243	5.0	-	122	+ As engaging as other Sevens, but more accessible - Vintage looks make at a price	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven 310	273 F	E31,385	4/1596	152/7000	120/5600	540kg*	286	4.8	-	127	+ Intense and exciting - Sticky tyres limit the amount of throttle adjustability	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven 360	209 F	E33,385	4/1999	180/7300	143/6100	560kg*	327	4.8	-	130	+ Extra power is welcome - You'll need the six-speed gearbox to make the most of it	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven 420	223 F	E36,385	4/1999	210/7600	150/6300	560kg*	381	3.8	4.0	103	36	+ It's the one we built for ourselves - Trickier on the limit than lesser-powered Sevens	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 620S	220 D	E48,890	4/1999	310/7700	219/7350	610kg*	516	3.4	-	155	+ Ludicrous, near-620R pace, with added habitability - Well, 'habitabile' for a Seven...	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven 620R	255 F	E53,885	4/1999	310/7700	219/7350	512kg*	551	2.8	-	155	+ Banzi on track, yet still relevant on the road - £50k for a Seven?	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven 160	239 F	13-'17	3/660	80/7000	79/3400	490kg*	166	6.9	-	100	+ The fabulous Seven formula at its most basic - Gets pricey with options	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven SuperSprint	247 D	18-'18	3/660	95/7000	62/5600	490kg*	197	6.9	-	100	+ Accessible limits with proper pace - You need to enjoy being exposed to the elements	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven Roadster 125	105 F	07-'14	4/1596	125/6100	120/5350	539kg*	235	5.9	-	112	+ Great debut for Ford-engineered model - Bigger drivers need SVI model	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven SuperSport	165 F	11-'14	4/1596	140/6900	120/5790	520kg*	273	4.9	-	120	+ One of the best Caterhams is also one of the cheapest of its era - It's quite minimalist	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven SuperSport R	180 D	13-'14	4/1999	180/7300	143/6100	535kg*	342	4.8	-	130	+ One of the best road-and-track Sevens - Impractical, noisy, uncomfortable	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven Superlight R300	150 F	09-'12	4/1999	175/7000	139/6000	515kg*	345	4.5	-	140	+ Possibly all the Caterham you need - They're not cheap	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven CSR 260	094 F	06-'17	4/2261	256/7500	200/6200	565kg*	460	3.1	3.8	155	+ Brilliant for high days, holidays and trackdays - Wet Wednesdays	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven Superlight R500	123 F	08-'14	4/1999	263/8500	177/7200	506kg*	528	2.9	-	150	+ Better power-to-weight ratio than a Viper - Until you add the driver	★★★★★	
Caterham Seven R500	200 F	99-'06	4/1796	230/8600	155/7200	460kg*	510	3.4	3.6	8.8	146	+ The K-series Seven is its very best - No cup holders	★★★★★
Dallara Stradale	267 F	E162,000	4/2300	394/6200	369/3000	855kg	468	3.3	-	174	+ Starting on-road performance - Can leave you feeling detached on track	★★★★★	
Elemental Rpt (2.3)	255 F	E139,800	4/2261	320	354	620kg*	557	2.6	-	165	+ Sensational, explosive, captivating, exhilarating - Price will test your level of commitment	★★★★★	
Ferrari Portofino	247 F	E166,180	8/3855	592/7500	560/3000	1664kg	366	3.5	-	199+	+ Better than the California - Not better than a DB11 Volante	★★★★★	
Honda S2000	243 F	99-'19	4/1997	237/8300	163/7500	1260kg	191	6.2	-	150	+ An alternative and rev-happy roadster - A Boxster's best friend	★★★★★	
Jaguar F-type Convertible P450	2710	E75,470	8/8000	444/6000	428/2500	1650kg	272	4.5	-	177	+ Strong and flexible supercharged V8 - Steering and chassis feel mismatched	★★★★★	
Jaguar F-type Project 7	212 F	15	8/5000	567/6500	501/2500	1585kg	363	3.9	-	186	+ Noise, performance, adjustability - Expensive, and not the GT3 rival we would have liked	★★★★★	
KTM X-Bow GT	183 D	E95,880	4/1984	281/6400	310/3200	875kg	326	4.1	-	144	+ Extraordinary ability, none in a more road-friendly package - 500cc	★★★★★	
KTM X-Bow R	165 F	E87,480	4/1984	296/6300	295/3300	816kg	369	3.9	-	144	+ Sharper handling, more power - Pity it's not even lighter, and cheaper	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise Club Racer (S3)	183 F	11-'15	4/1598	134/8000	118/4400	852kg	160	6.5	-	127	+ Even lighter, even more focused than a standard 1.6 Elise - Are you prepared to go this basic?	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise Sport 220 (S3)	244 F	17-'19	4/1798	210/8600	184/4600	904kg	244	4.6	-	145	+ Perfect power-to-weight ratio - A bit short on creature comforts	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise Sprint 220 (S3)	254 F	18-'19	4/1798	210/8600	184/4600	878kg	251	4.5	-	145	+ Makes the most of its lightweight - Heavyweight price	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise Sport 240 Final Edition (S3)	285 F	E45,500	4/1798	237/7200	181/3000	922kg	261	4.1	-	147	+ The Elise's swansong - There will be another Lotus like it	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise Cup 250 (S3)	279 F	E49,595	4/1798	245/7200	184/3500	932kg	267	3.9	-	154	+ As effective, enjoyable and essential as ever - Priorities grip over adjustability	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise Cup 260 (S3)	243 F	18-'19	4/1798	250/7200	195/5500	902kg	282	4.2	-	151	+ Quietest Elise yet - Just 30 wheelbar	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise Sport 135 (S2)	040 D	03	4/1796	135/6200	129/4850	724kg	189	5.4	-	129	+ One of our fave S2 Elises - Brakes need more bite and pedal feel	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise (S2)	104 F	06-'10	4/1794	134/6200	127/4200	860kg	186	6.1	6.3	18.7	127	+ Brilliant entry-level Elise - Air-con? In an Elise?	★★★★★
Lotus Elise III (S2)	049 F	02-'04	4/1796	156/7000	129/4650	860kg	197	5.1	-	131	+ A genuinely usable Elise - Air-con? In an Elise?	★★★★★	
Lotus Elise SC (S2)	131 F	08-'11	4/1794	218/8000	156/5000	870kg	254	4.6	4.5	11.4	145	+ All the usual Elise magic - Super-charged engine lacks sparkle	★★★★★
Lotus Elise (S1)	235 F	96-'01	4/1796	118/5500	122/3000	731kg	164	5.9	6.1	18.5	126	+ A modern classic - A tad impractical?	★★★★★
Lotus 3-Eleven	220 F	16-'17	6/3456	410/7000	302/3000	925kg*	450	3.4	-	176	+ A fantastically exciting Lotus - If not exactly a groundbreaking one	★★★★★	
Lotus 3-Eleven 430	248 F	17-'19	6/3456	430/7000	325/4500	920kg*	475	3.2	-	180	+ A fitting send-off for a brilliant Lotus - Just 20 were made	★★★★★	
Lotus 3-Eleven	126 F	07-'11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	720kg	267	4.5	-	140	+ Not far off the super-charged 2-Eleven's pace - You want the supercharged one, don't you?	★★★★★	
Lotus 3-Eleven Supercarged	123 F	07-'11	4/1796	252/8000	179/7000	745kg	344	4.0	-	150	+ Impressive on road and track - Not horrible enough for some	★★★★★	
Lotus 340R	126 F	00	4/1796	190/7800	146/5000	701kg	275	4.5	4.5	12.5	126	+ Hardcore road-racer... - that looks like a dune buggy from Mars	★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio MC	185 D	E112,400	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1973kg	234	4.9	-	179	+ Most powerful GranCabrio yet - The GranCabrio is starting to show its age	★★★★★	
Mazda MX-5 iS (Mk4)	230 F	E23,975	4/1496	189/7000	111/4800	975kg	134	8.3	-	127	+ Lightest MX-5 since the Mk1 - Lacks intensity	★★★★★	
Mazda MX-5 S (Mk4, 184PS)	268 F	E28,395	4/1998	187/7000	151/4000	1030kg	178	6.5	-	136	+ At last, a more powerful factory MX-5 - It's still no fireball		

MAKE & MODEL

ISSUE NO.	PRICE (as new)	ENGINE Cyl. Cbr	BHP/PMH	LB FT/PMH	WEIGHT	BHP/TON	0-62MPH (S)	0-100MPH (S)	0-150MPH (S)	MAX MPH	
Mazda MX-5.2.0i (Mk4)	228 F	75-18	4/1998	158/6000	1474/600	1000kg	161	7.3	-	133	
Mazda MX-5.2.0i Sport Tech (Mk3.5)	212 F	09-15	4/1999	158/7000	130/5000	1098kg	146	7.6	-	138	
Mazda MX-5.1.8i (Mk3)	091 F	05-09	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1080kg	108	9.3	-	122	
Mazda MX-5.1.8i (Mk2)	017 F	98-05	4/1839	146/7000	124/5000	1065kg	140	8.5	-	123	
Mazda MX-5.1.6i (Mk1)	268 F	89-97	4/1597	115/6000	100/5500	971kg	120	8.8	-	114	
Mercedes-AMG SL C43	222 D	14/6000	6/2996	367/5500	383/2000	1520kg	242	4.7	-	155	
Mercedes-AMG SL 63	228 D	11/6340	8/5461	577/5500	664/2250	1770kg	331	4.1	-	155	
Mercedes-AMG GT Roadster	239 F	17-19	8/3982	469/6000	465/7700	1552kg	299	4.0	-	188	
Mercedes-AMG GT C Roadster	235 D	17-19	8/3982	449/5750	501/9000	1660kg	336	3.7	-	196	
Mercedes-AMG GT Roadster	271 D	20	8/3982	572/5500	516/2100	1635kg	359	3.6	-	197	
Morgan 3 Wheeler	198 F	1984	531/140	2/1976	82/2520	1013/3250	525kg*	159	6.0	-	115
Morgan Plus Four	279 F	16/2995	4/1998	255/5500	258/1000	1013kg*	252	5.2	-	149	
Morgan Plus Six	269 F	17/2995	6/2998	335/6500	369	1075kg*	317	4.2	-	166	
Morgan Plus 8 50th Anniversary Edition	253 D	18-19	8/4799	367/6300	370/3600	1100kg*	339	4.5	-	155	
Morgan Aero 8	105 F	01-10	8/4799	362/6300	361/3400	1180kg*	312	4.5	-	170	
Morgan Aero GT	255 F	78	8/4799	367/6300	370/3400	1180kg*	316	4.5	-	170	
Porsche 718 Boxster	224 D	14/5395	4/1998	296/6500	280/1950	1335kg	225	5.1	-	170	
Porsche 718 Boxster S	222 F	15/4891	4/2497	345/6500	310/1900	1353kg	259	4.8	4.4	9.8	
Porsche 718 Boxster GTS	240 D	18-19	4/2497	360/6500	310/1900	1375kg	266	4.6	-	180	
Porsche 718 Boxster GTS 4.0	286 D	16/6340	6/3995	394/7000	310/5000	1405kg	285	4.5	-	182	
Porsche 718 Spyder	272 F	17/3405	6/3995	441/7600	310/5000	1420kg	296	4.4	-	187	
Porsche Boxster (981)	238 F	12-16	6/2706	261/6700	260/4500	1310kg	202	5.8	-	164	
Porsche Boxster S (981)	186 F	12-16	6/3436	311/6700	265/4500	1320kg	239	5.1	-	173	
Porsche Boxster GTS (981)	203 D	14-16	6/3436	325/6700	273/4500	1345kg	246	5.0	-	174	
Porsche Boxster Spyder (981)	223 F	15-16	6/3800	370/6700	310/4750	1315kg	286	4.5	-	170	
Porsche Boxster S (987)	161 F	05-12	6/3436	306/6400	266/3500	1353kg	229	5.3	-	170	
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	277 F	10-12	6/3436	316/7200	274/3750	1275kg	252	4.9	-	166	
Porsche Boxster S (986)	070 F	99-04	6/1979	256/6200	229/4600	1320kg	200	5.7	-	164	
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet (982)	267 D	10/19725	6/2981	444/6500	391/2300	1600kg	282	4.4	-	188	
Porsche 911 Targa 4S (982)	272 D	10/19725	6/2981	444/6500	391/2300	1640kg	275	4.4	-	189	
Rapide Racer	274 F	10/8000	4/2261	360/6000	360/3500	765kg*	478	3.0	-	165	
Renault Sport Spider	231 F	96-99	4/1998	148/6000	136/4500	930kg	157	6.5	-	131	
Rolls-Royce Dawn	222 D	12/6400	12/6592	563/5250	575/1500	2560kg	223	4.9	-	155	
Toyota MR2 (Mk3)	258 F	00-06	4/1794	138/6400	125/4400	975kg	141	8.0	7.2	21.2	
TVR Tamora	070 F	01-07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1060kg	335	4.2	-	175	
TVR Chimaera 5.0	258 F	93-03	8/4997	320/5500	330/2750	1060kg	307	4.4	-	167	
TVR Griffith 4.3	068 F	92-93	8/4280	280/5500	305/2000	1040kg	274	4.4	4.8	11.2	
TVR Griffith 500	009 F	93-01	8/4997	320/5500	320/4000	1060kg	307	4.1	-	167	
Vauxhall VX220	023 F	00-04	4/1298	145/5800	150/4000	875kg	168	5.9	-	136	
Vauxhall VX220 Turbo	066 F	03-05	4/1998	197/5500	184/1950	930kg	215	4.9	-	151	
Vauxhall Os	220 F	10/5995	4/2000	285/5600	310/3000	1250kg	405	3.7	-	152	

EVO RATING

- Brilliant basic recipe - The desire for stiffer suspension and more power ★★★★★
- Handles brilliantly again; folding hard top also available - Less-than-macho image ★★★★★
- Gearchange, interior - Lost some of the charm of old MX-5; dubious handling ★★★★★
- Affordable ragtops don't get much better - Cheap cabin ★★★★★
- The original and still (pretty much) the best - Less-than-rigid ★★★★★
- Twin-Turbo V6 well-suited to batteryroader - But also highlights the chassis' age ★★★★★
- Effortless performance - Needs more involvement to top with the pace ★★★★★
- An AMG GT with added fresh air - Ride and handling go slightly to pieces on UK roads ★★★★★
- As above but with more show - Road noise can get wearing on long journeys ★★★★★
- Spectacular engine engaging dynamics - Structural compromise of Roadster body ★★★★★
- Quirky, characterful, brilliant - Can become a two-wheeler if you push too hard ★★★★★
- Compelling blend of old and new - Busy, almost old-fashioned ride on bumper roads ★★★★★
- Rapid, exciting, and a bit of a hoologian - Interior could feel more special ★★★★★
- V8 performance and sound, driver involvement - Getting flies in your teeth ★★★★★
- Glorious sound, view over bonnet, dynamics - Awkward-looking rear ★★★★★
- The ultimate Aero - The last with the naturally aspirated BMW V8 ★★★★★
- Chassis as good as ever - Four-cylinder's tunefulness did well to live with ★★★★★
- Still sensationally capable - Turbo four-cylinder eng lacks appeal of the old flat-six ★★★★★
- The best four-pot Boxster spec - Doesn't come cheap ★★★★★
- It's got the Cayman GT4 six-cylinder, minus 200rpm - Gearshift not as crisp as the GT4's ★★★★★
- Essentially a drop-top Cayman GT4 - Including its long gearing ★★★★★
- Goes and looks better than the 987 Boxster - Shame about the electric steering ★★★★★
- Boxster steps out of 911's shadow - But gets 911's less appealing electric steering ★★★★★
- Superb dynamics, fantastic engine, great looks - Sport suspension is very firm ★★★★★
- An even faster, even more rewarding Boxster - Feedback trails the Cayman GT4's ★★★★★
- Second-gen Boxster's as brilliant as ever - It's a typically Porsche redesign ★★★★★
- Lighter, more driver-centric Boxster - Collapsed-bronx roof not the most practical ★★★★★
- Added power over the non-S Boxster is seductive - Very little ★★★★★
- Performance, handling, usability - It's lightweight, body not as stiff as the coupe's ★★★★★
- Distinctive; driving experience is barely touched - You can't get rear-drive Targa ★★★★★
- Unfiltered and utterly addictive - It's more at home on the track than the road ★★★★★
- Rarity; unassisted steering - Heavier than you'd hope; disappointing engine ★★★★★
- Effortless driving experience - Driver involvement not a priority ★★★★★
- Tight lines, taut dynamics - Minimal luggage space ★★★★★
- Well-sorted soft-top TVR - Awkward styling ★★★★★
- Gorgeous nose, tarmac-ripping grin - Details ★★★★★
- The car that made TVR, cut status - Mere details ★★★★★
- Performance, handling, usability - It's lightweight, body not as stiff as the coupe's ★★★★★
- Distinctive; driving experience is barely touched - You can't get rear-drive Targa ★★★★★
- Gruff diamond - A few rough edges - The badge? ★★★★★
- Nothing comes close for the money - Marginal everyday usability ★★★★★
- Impressive pace and quality - You can get a mere thrills from a Caterham at half the price ★★★★★

COUPES / GTs



OUR CHOICE

Porsche 718 Cayman GT4. With a naturally aspirated flat-six, a manual gearbox, extraordinary damping and fomsulped feedback, the second GT4 is even better than the original and laughs in the face of turbocharged engines, automatic transmissions and monster power outputs.



BEST OF THE REST

The **BMW M2 CS** (left) was our 2020 Car of the Year winner and runs the 2019 champ - the Cayman GT4 - incredibly close. The **Alpine A110** gets the regular **Porsche 718 Cayman** a true rival to worry about, the **Aston Martin Vantage** is a genuine 911 beater, and the **Lotus Evija** continues to go from strength to strength in every form.

Alfa Romeo 4C	209 F	13-19	4/1742	237/6000	258/2200	895kg*	269	4.5	-	160	* Carbonfibre tub, mini-supercar looks - Hot hatch engine, clunky gearbox	★★★★★	
Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione	120 F	07-09	8/4661	450/7000	354/4750	1585kg	288	4.2	-	181	* Looks, exclusivity, noise, balance - Cost more now than they did now	★★★★★	
Alpine A110	285 F	14/8140	4/1798	249/6000	236/2000	1103kg	229	4.5	4.6	10.8	155	Fast, fun and genuinely different - If only it had a manual gearbox	★★★★★
Alpine A110S	268 D	15/8140	4/1798	288/6400	236/2000	1144kg	263	4.4	-	161	* Better and faster - But not necessarily better	★★★★★	
Alpine A610 Turbo	273 F	91-95	6/2975	247/5750	258/2900	1420kg	177	5.7	-	166	* Finer than the contemporary 911 Carrera - Rare then, rarer now	★★★★★	
Aston Martin Vantage	280 F	12/4400	8/3982	503/6000	505/2000	1530kg*	334	3.6	4.5	91	195	* Performance that's a huge leap forward - Chassis premium when really pushed	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vantage AMR	268 F	14/4995	8/3982	503/6000	461/2000	1499kg*	341	4.0	-	195	* Manual gearbox, more-focused chassis - For a hefty premium	★★★★★	
Aston Martin V8 Vantage (4.3)	251 F	05-07	8/4280	380/7000	302/5000	1630kg	237	5.0	5.2	12.0	75	* Gorgeous; awesome sound/race - Can't quite match a 911 dynamically	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage (4.7)	169 D	08-16	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1630kg	262	4.8	-	180	* Still feels special - But also a little dated	★★★★★	
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S	168 F	11-17	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	271	4.8	-	190	* Keener engine, V12 Vantage looks - Slightly sluggish auto only	★★★★★	
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Mk30	218 F	14-16	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	271	4.8	-	189	* Malleable, involving - Never feels irremediably quick	★★★★★	
Aston Martin Vantage GT8	274 F	16-17	8/4735	440/7300	361/5000	1530kg	292	4.4	-	190	* Enough drama to fill a Netflix mini-series - Just 150 made	★★★★★	
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	264 F	09-13	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.2	4.4	9.7	190	* The car we hoped the V8 Vantage would be - Erm, a tad thirsty?	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S	285 F	13-17	12/5935	563/6650	457/5500	1665kg	344	3.9	-	205	* Amongst the best Astons ever made - Old-school automated box (so get the manual)	★★★★★	
Aston Martin Vantage GT12	214 F	15-16	12/5935	592/7000	461/5500	1565kg	348	3.5	-	185	* The GT13-style Vantage we wanted so long for - Only 100 made	★★★★★	
Aston Martin DB11	253 F	15/4400	8/3982	503/6000	498/2000	1685kg	303	4.0	-	187	* Potent and characterful; sharper chassis than V12 - Do we still need the V12?	★★★★★	
Aston Martin DB11	235 F	17-18	12/5204	600/6500	516/1500	1800kg	339	3.9	4.0	8.1	200	* A great GT - Suffers in outright handling terms as a result	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB11 AMR	269 F	17/4995	12/5204	630/6500	516/1500	1795kg	357	3.9	-	208	* A more potent, better controlled V12 DB11 - Still at its best when it isn't trying too hard	★★★★★	
Aston Martin DB9 GT	214 D	15-17	12/5935	540/6750	457/5500	1785kg	307	4.5	-	183	* More power; still has bags of character - Needs an eight-speed auto box	★★★★★	
Aston Martin DB9	188 F	04-16	12/5935	510/6500	457/5500	1785kg	290	4.6	-	183	* A great start to Gaydon-era Astons - Automatic gearbox could be quicker	★★★★★	
Aston Martin DBS	142 F	02-17	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1695kg	306	4.3	-	191	* Stunning engine, gearbox, brakes - Price; can bite the unwary	★★★★★	
Audi TT3 (Mk3)	241 D	14/4610	4/1984	302/5400	295/2000	1405kg	218	4.5	-	155	* Exceptional grip and traction - Excitement fades after the first few corners	★★★★★	
Audi TT RS (Mk3)	269 F	15/5305	5/2480	394/5850	354/1750	1450kg	276	3.7	3.5	8.7	155	* Soundtrack; tremendous point-to-point pace - A bit one-dimensional in the long run	★★★★★
Audi TT3 (Mk2)	193 F	08-14	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1395kg	195	5.4	-	155	* A useful quicker/TT, with a great drivetrain - Still steers like a computer game	★★★★★	
Audi TT RS (Mk2)	158 F	09-14	5/2480	335/5400	343/1650	1450kg	235	4.7	4.4	11.1	155	* Sublime five-cylinder turbo engine - Rest of package can't quite match it	★★★★★
Audi TT RS Plus (Mk2)	185 D	12-14	5/2480	355/5500	343/1650	1450kg	249	4.3	-	174	* Stonkingly fast cross-country - Shockingly expensive for a TT	★★★★★	
Audi S5	252 F	17-19	6/2995	349/5400	369/3700	1615kg	220	4.7	-	155	* Chassis rewards commitment... but doesn't offer a challenge. Plain engine, too	★★★★★	
Audi RS5	240 F	16/885	6/2894	444/5700	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	206 F	10-16	8/4663	444/8250	394/4000	1715kg	263	4.5	4.3	15.5	155	* Brilliant engine and improved chassis - Lack of suspension travel; inconsistent steering	★★★★★
Audi R8 V8	284 F	07-15	8/4663	424/7900	371/4500	1560kg	276	4.6	4.1	9.9	188	* A true 911 alternative - The V8 engine got dropped too soon	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8	280 F	15/5180	8/3993	542/6000	568/2000	2165kg	254	4.0	-	198	* Pace, quality, polish - Some rivals offer greater outright dynamic prowess	★★★★★	
Bentley Continental GT	255 F	15/5170	12/5950	626/5000	664/1350	2244kg	283	3.7	-	207	* Astonishing agility for such a big, heavy car - Thrust	★★★★★	
Bentley Continental GT Speed	286 F	16/6180	12/5950	650/5000	664/1500	2273kg	290	3.6	-	208	* Shows unbelieved finesse for such a big, big V8 - We need to try it on the road	★★★★★	
Bentley Continental GT V8	178 F	12-17	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2220kg	229	4.8	-	188	* A proper driver's Bentley with decent economy - Makes the V12 seem pointless	★★★★★	
Bentley Continental GT V8 S	204 F	13-17	8/3993	521/6000	502/1700	2220kg	238	4.5	-	192	* An even better driver's Bentley - Vast weight makes its presence felt in harder driving	★★★★★	



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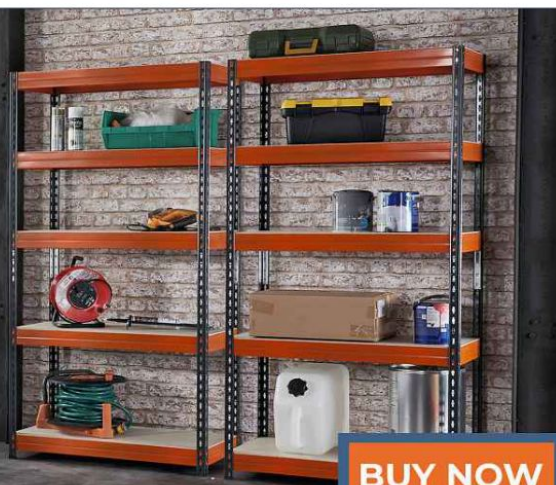
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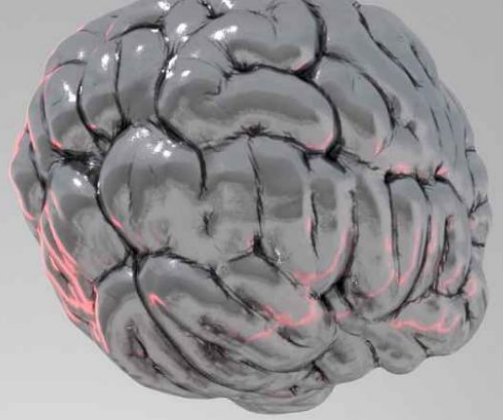


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BuyaCar Buying Guide: Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.1)

Now could be the right time to bag a 2015-16 RS, especially with help from BuyaCar

FEW CARS AT ANY PRICE DELIVER MORE excitement than Porsche's 911 GT3 RS. Whichever generation you choose the result has always been the same: a screaming naturally aspirated flat-six, a track-focused suspension set-up that still works well on the road, a body enhanced by dramatic aero additions, and a cabin that's brilliantly focused on the job of driving. Given the choice, there are few cars we'd prefer if we had a summer of trackdays and long road trips ahead of us. Other 911s are better over distance but few are more perfect at your destination.

The first 991-generation GT3 RS offered the same 493bhp power peak as its 997 4.0 predecessor, despite having a completely different engine, while

its kerb weight increased slightly to 1420kg. This was partly because the 991 was the first RS equipped with a PDK transmission rather than a manual – a nod from Porsche that the RS is as close as you're going to get to its race cars. It trimmed half a second off the 4.0's 0-62mph time, however, taking it down to just 3.3sec, while top speed remained at 193mph – 3mph less than the 991.1 GT3 due to the extra drag from the RS's significant rear wing.

If Porsche's GT3 RS models have any real flaw, it's been getting hold of them. The market in recent years hasn't been quite as barmy as it once got, but between high demand and speculators, values are hard to pin down. Still, when you consider what the latest crop of supercars can cost, and that few of

them are ultimately as engaging or entertaining as the RS, then the 2015 example we found on BuyaCar, in silver, with 13,850 miles on the clock, is one way of sidestepping the madness.

We're not about to suggest that a £2481 monthly bill is inexpensive, but a total price of £139,995 doesn't look bad for the car's abilities. That sum includes a £300 BuyaCar contribution and 6.9% APR, along with all the usual BuyaCar benefits: an HPI check, a minimum of six months' service and MOT, a 14-day money-back guarantee, plus a delivery date of your choosing.

Visit buyacar.co.uk to find the latest offers on the 991.1 GT3 RS. Figures correct at time of going to press.



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Slide show

It's the most expensive car we've ever had sideways. This is how it happened

TALK ABOUT PEAKING EARLY. ISSUE 205 (February 2015) was Aston Parrott's first cover shoot. He had only been *evo*'s staff photographer for a few months and, aged just 24, there he was in the south of France, tasked with capturing a matching pair of McLarens – an F1 and a P1.

It was a shoot that had been a long time in the organising, as you can imagine, but Aston only got the nod that he would be doing the photographs a few days before boarding the easyJet flight.

'That whole shoot was pretty crazy,' he says when I quiz him about it. 'It was December, so the days weren't long and it felt like a real rush. The road looked nice, but wasn't actually ideal for cars with so much performance and it was also really busy with traffic at certain times of day, so we had to shoot in less than ideal light a lot of the time.' Clearly, even though it was early in his career, Aston had already been well schooled in *The Photographer's Big Book of Reasons Why The Light Isn't Right*.

The photo that really stood out was indeed shot in less than ideal light, but it

was still more than good enough to end up on the subscriber's edition covers of *evo* that month. After all, it's not every day/decade that you see a McLaren F1 sideways. The man in the middle was none other than Dickie Meaden.

'It was probably a rash thing to do, but it also felt like the right thing to do,' he recalls. 'There was a certain degree of ego involved, but I also knew that if we could make it happen then it would be good for Aston and for *evo*. It would get people talking.'

'A lot of things had to be right for me to even suggest it, though. For a start I had to be sure that the owner of the car wouldn't go totally tonto if he saw a shot of his car being driven like that! Other than that, the corner felt just right and the F1 has lovely clean throttle response with plenty of torque, so that made things easier. The car looked great doing it. Really expressive.'

And expensive...

'As you get older you tend to listen to your inner voice more and trust yourself so that you don't feel the pressure. If it feels right, then it doesn't actually feel risky. If I'd tried it

once and hadn't been happy then I wouldn't have pushed it.'

Understandably though, Dickie wasn't about to repeat a multi-million-pound cornering shot more times than necessary, so Aston really had to be on his game.

'I think Dickie did it two, maybe three times,' says Aston, 'enough for me to get one front shot and one rear. Then it was straight on to the next photo. The whole shoot was so crazy that at the time I don't think this one shot even stood out that much! What I do remember, though, is you giving me a ride in the F1 back to the hotel in the evening – the sound of that engine!'

The following day, Sam Riley arrived and we did the whole shoot again for his video cameras. I remember being in quite a lot of pain while we were filming thanks to an impacted wisdom tooth that had to be removed as soon as I got back to the UK. It was also my birthday while we were out there, so everyone celebrated on the final evening. Sam was very good at getting the drinks in... while kindly putting them all on my room.

The bill when we came to check out the following morning was nearly as painful as my toothache. Thankfully there was a great shot of a sideways F1 to distract the publisher from my expenses at the end of the month.

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RS3 / TTRS (8V MK2) » 500+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
S3 / GOLF R » 378+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
3.0 BI-TDI (ALL MODELS) » 400+ BHP
RS4 B9 / RS5 2.9T » 525+ BHP

BMW

F90 M5 / M8 » 770+BHP (+DELIMIT)
X3M / X4M » 630+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
M850i » 700+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
M2 COMPETITION » 530BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
M2 » 435BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
M3 / M4 » 540+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
M5 F10/M6 » 730+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
X5M/X6M F85 » 730+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
X5M50D » 480+BHP
M140i / 240i / 340i/440i » 450+BHP
M135i / M235i » 410+BHP
120D / 220D / 320D/420D » 240+BHP
320i / 330i » 320+BHP
M340i » 470+BHP
330D / 430D / 530D / 730D » 360BHP
840D / 335D / 435D / 535D » 400+BHP

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E63S W213 » 700+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
A45 / CLA45 AMG » 430+BHP
AMG GT/GTS » 624+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
AMG GTR » 650+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
C63 / E63 / GLC63 AMG » 480+BHP
C63 / E63S 4.0T AMG » 624+BHP
C63 6.3 AMG » 530+BHP
C63 AMG 5.5 BI-TURBO (ALL MODELS) » 700+BHP
55 AMG KOMPRESSOR » 600+BHP
S65 » 780BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
SL65 / BLACK SERIES » 720BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
220 CDI (ALL MODELS) » 230BHP
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C300E » 350BHP
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VELAR 30Si6 » 420BHP
RR 4.4 TDV8 » 395 BHP
RR TDV6 / SDV6 3.0D » 305 / 350 BHP
DEFENDER 2.2 » 180BHP

PORSCHE

992 TURBO S » IN DEVELOPMENT
992 CARRERA / S » 570+ BHP
991.2 GT2 RS » 780+BHP
991 TURBO / S (ALL MODELS) » 750+BHP
991 GT3 RS 4.0 » 525/540 BHP
997 CARRERA GTS » 435 BHP
991.2 CARRERA / S - (ALL MODELS) » 500+BHP
991.2 CARRERA GTS - (ALL MODELS) » 540+BHP
997 TURBO 3,6 » 625+ BHP
997 GT2 RS » 670+ BHP
997 TURBO / S 3.8 INC PDK » 611 BHP
997.2 GT3 RS » 480 BHP
996 TURBO/GT2 » 600+ BHP
BOXSTER / CAYMAN 718S / GTS » 420+BHP
BOXSTER / CAYMAN 718 » 380+BHP
BOXSTER / CAYMAN 981 GT4 » 430+BHP
BOXSTER / CAYMAN 981 GTS » 375+BHP
CAYENNE TURBO 4.8 - (ALL MODELS) » 650+ BHP
CAYENNE 4.2 DIESEL » 450+ BHP
CAYENNE / MACAN 3.0 DIESEL » 320+ BHP
MACAN 3.0T S » 445+BHP
MACAN TURBO 2.9T » 525+BHP
PANAMERA 971 4.0 TURBO » 700+ BHP
PANAMERA 971 4.0T SE HYBRID » 800+ BHP
PANAMERA 971 2.9T HYBRID » 650+ BHP

EXOTIC / MISC

WRAITH / DAWN » 720+BHP
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FERRARI 488 » 750+BHP
FERRARI PORTOFINO » 680+BHP
FERRARI LUSSO T » 710+BHP
FERRARI CALIT » 680BHP
FERRARI F12 » 780+BHP
FERRARI 430 » 525 BHP
McLAREN MP4 / 650S » 720 BHP
McLAREN 675LT » 750BHP
McLAREN 570S » 680+BHP
McLAREN 600LT » 680+BHP
McLAREN 720S » 840+BHP
McLAREN SENNA » 875+BHP
AVENTADOR » 750+BHP
HURACAN LP610 » 650BHP
BENTLEY 4.0 T V8 » 700+BHP
BENTLEY GT W12 » 700+BHP
BENTLEY SUPERSPORT 2018 » 780+BHP
BENTAYGA V8 DIESEL » 510+BHP
BENTAYGA V8 40T » 700+BHP
BENTLEY GT 2020 V8 40T » 700+BHP
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