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These figures were obtained after the battery had been fully charged. The All-New MG4 EV and MG5 EV are battery electric vehicles requiring mains electricity for charging. There is a new test for CO₂ and electric range figures. The electric range shown was achieved using the new test procedure. The figures shown are for comparability purposes. Only compare CO₂ and electric range figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. 7 year warranty for up to 80,000 miles. T/C's apply. *Price applies to the MG3 Excite with standard paint. Models shown: The All-New MG4 EV with Volcano Orange premium paint £33,190 on the road. The MG HS Exclusive with Black Pearl Paint £26,540 on the road. The MG ZS Exclusive with Battersea Blue Paint £20,840 on the road. The All-New MG5 EV Long Range Exclusive with Cosmic Silver Paint £34,040 on the road.

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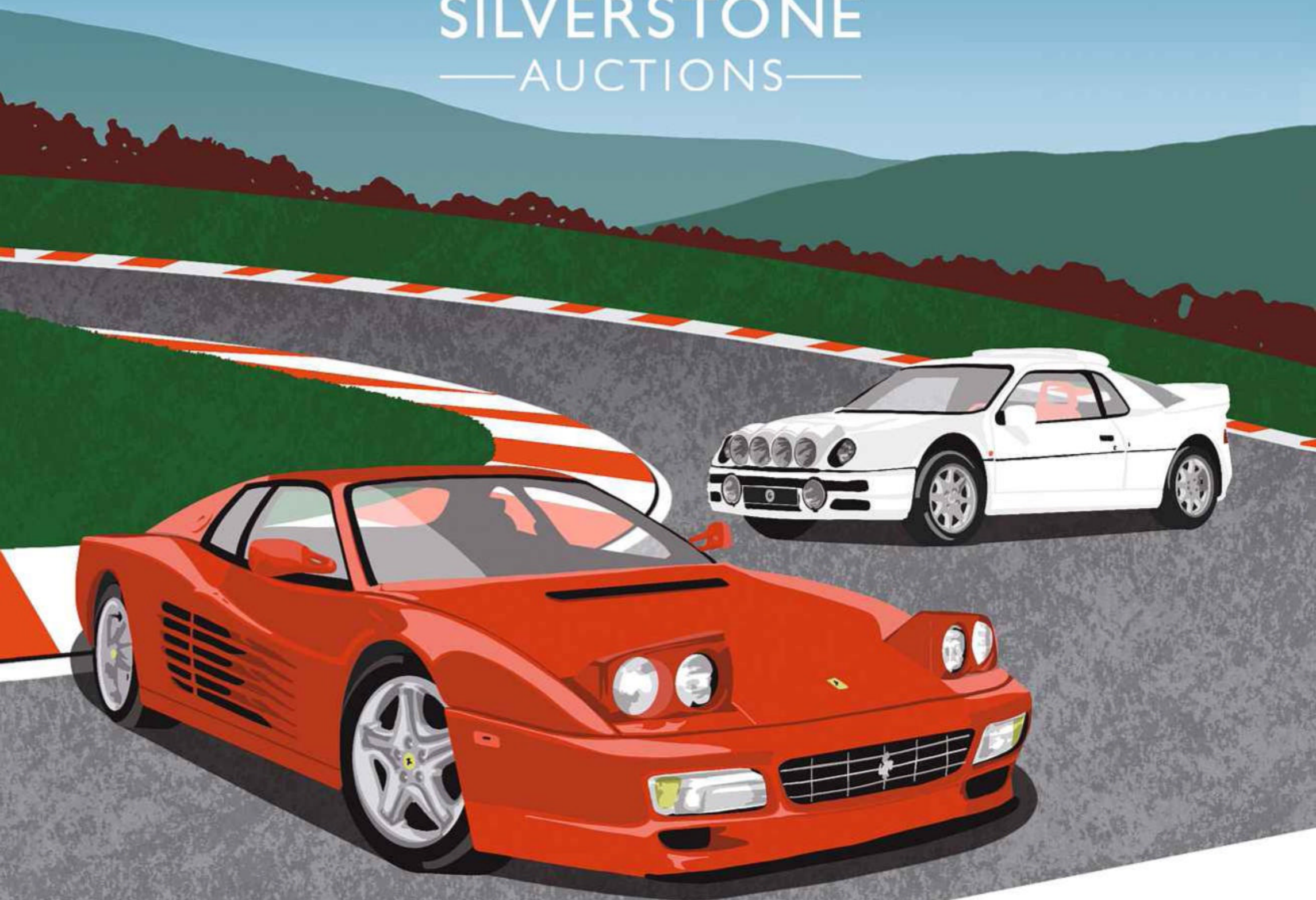
DEAD ON ARRIVAL

The story of the original Panther Solo – the affordable two-seater sports car that might just have been a benchmark for its kind. But can you guess what killed it?



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EDITORIAL

020 3900 1901

eds@evo.co.uk

www.evo.co.uk

evo, Autovia Limited, 48 Charlotte Street,
London, W1T 2NS, United Kingdom

EDITOR

Stuart Gallagher

MANAGING EDITOR

Ian Eveleigh

ART EDITOR

Rich Browne

DIGITAL NEWS EDITOR

Jordan Katsianis

SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Aston Parrott

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Sam Jenkins

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

John Barker
Jethro Bovingdon
Henry Catchpole
Richard Meaden
Richard Porter
Steve Sutcliffe

GROUP WEB EDITOR

Steve Walker

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Steve Fowler

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Stephen Dobie
Simon George
Adam Towler
David Vivian

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Dean Smith

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Jonathan Baker
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Ed speak



IN PERFORMANCE CAR TERMS, 2022

saw a torrent of hardcore new metal, and that torrent shows no signs of abating in 2023. BMW's M2; Alfa Romeo's 100th birthday supercar present to itself; Aston Martin's new DB11; a new McLaren, because there's always a new McLaren; AMG-engined Emiras; the Corvette Z06; an SUV with a Ferrari V12 in its snout, and a 911 with a dose of the Audi All-Roads – all will be landing in the UK this year. As will a new Mustang, updated AMG A35s

and 45s and a new Lamborghini Aventador.

They are all also, pretty much without exception, either sold out or limited-run specials or priced at a level to make a banker wince (or all of the above). New, genuinely affordable driver's cars have become an endangered species, and I don't think that's going to change, well, ever. We know this, you know this, but why is it so?

Essentially, when a car manufacturer tells you that no one wants a £30k-or-less hot hatch, sports car or coupe, what they actually mean is they can't make enough profit from selling you one to cover their core priority: ramping up their EV roll-out as quickly as possible regardless of the cost. And with manufacturers betting the house on selling the same volume of electric cars in a tenth of the time that it has taken them to sell the equivalent number of IC-engined cars, the high-price specials make more sense, but are no more palatable.

The only option for OEMs is to build ICE and electric vehicles simultaneously. No transition time, no phased switchover or structured shift, just a deep, penetrating cut to anything that doesn't meet the required profit margin and a steely-eyed focus on what delivers the highest return as quickly as possible.

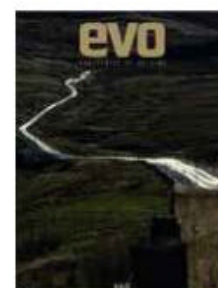
Which begs the question: what is the industry going to do when it's run out of high-profit ICE specials but still needs the cash flow to pay for the EVs consumers increasingly view as emotionless white goods purchases based on cost rather than valued emotive purchases?

Stuart Gallagher, Editor @stuartg917

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ADVERTISING

020 3900 1901

ads.evo@autovia.co.uk

48 Charlotte Street, London, W1T 2NS

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING

Steve Machin

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

Ciaran Scarry

ACCOUNT MANAGER

Demi Meredith

demi_davies@autovia.co.uk

020 3890 3731

SENIOR OPERATIONS MANAGER

Kerry Lambird

SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER

Daniel Stark

CLIENT SALES MANAGER

Pierre Clements

pierre_clements@autovia.co.uk

020 3890 3902

ACCOUNT MANAGER

Miles Taylor

miles_taylor@autovia.co.uk

020 3890 3989

DIRECT MARKETING MANAGER

Hannah Charlton

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

GROUP PROJECT MANAGER Avril Donnelly

LICENSING & SYNDICATION

SYNDICATION CONTENT MANAGER Nicole Creasey

PUBLISHING

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF PUBLISHING Sarah Perks

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL Amrit Baidwan

AUTOVIA LIMITED

EXECUTIVE CHAIR James Tye

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EVO WORLDWIDE

Australia Jesse Taylor

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Email nicole_creasey@autovia.co.uk

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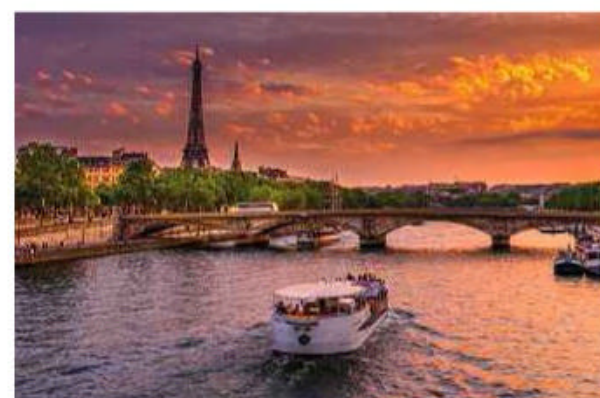
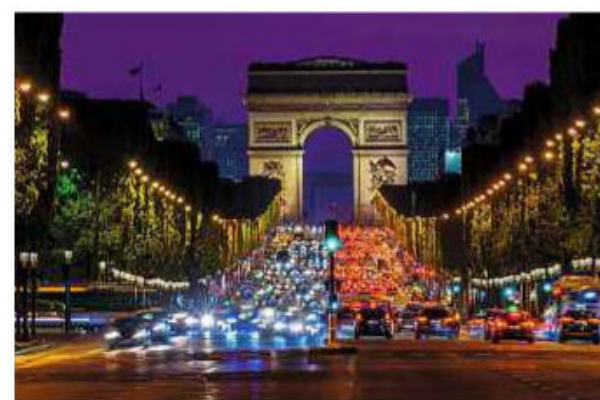


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EVENTS

Driven





by RICHARD MEADEN PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

Alpine A110 R

Lighter than ever and with a new track focus – but no increase in power – can this ultimate A110 justify its £90k price tag?



LESS IS MORE. AT LEAST THAT'S THE gospel we preach when it comes to sports cars. Right now, there's no better example of this minimalist mantra than the Alpine A110, for at a time when hybrid-powered SUVs are approaching 3 tons and BMW M3s are getting on for 2 tons, this delicate and delectable machine can tip the scales at a barely believable 1102kg.

Such skeletal mass seems nothing short of miraculous, but Alpine has pushed things even further with the new track-focused A110 R, trimming that figure down to 1082kg in the pursuit of performance. It's testament to the famous French marque's fastidious approach that such weight savings have been made on an already featherweight car. Indeed, the only heavyweight part of the A110 R is its £89,990 price tag, but even this is a bullish indication of the fervent following that exists within Alpine's growing global fanbase.

The formula for the A110 R's impressively shredded physique is a high-fibre diet. Carbonfibre to be precise, the expensive and

exotic material being employed extensively across new and highly effective aero parts, plus the bonnet, roof, engine cover (meaning there's no rear window), seats and even the wheels. The resulting look is reminiscent of the Weissach Pack offered on Porsche's RS models, with large areas of unpainted bodywork giving the normally chic-looking A110 a suitably skunkworks vibe.

Unashamedly aimed at circuit use, Alpine describes the R as an A110 that's 'dedicated for the track and useable on the road'. For context, it describes the A110 S as 'sporty on the road and credible on track'. It's an important distinction, because it frames the R as a car that promises to be scintillating around a racetrack but possibly compromised on the street.

The chassis upgrades certainly speak of a car targeting outright pace, with coilover suspension that uses ZF dampers, Eibach springs (10 per cent stiffer and now employing main and helper springs for the first time in order to save some weight) and new bump stops made by BASF.



With 20 clicks of combined bump/rebound damper adjustment and ride height settings that drop the R by 10mm for road use and 20mm for track, there's plenty of scope for set-up tweaks. Completing the hardware changes are stiffer anti-roll bars front and rear (by 10 and 25 per cent respectively), plus a set of sticky semi-slick Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres wrapping those carbon rims, which themselves save 12.5kg in total.

Given its track bias there's a similarly extensive aero upgrade, with a new front splitter, side skirts, rear wing and diffuser upping the downforce levels and altering the aero balance. This balance has been shifted rearwards to aid high-speed stability, while drag has been reduced by the integration of air intakes in the carbon bonnet amongst other wind-cheating mods.

Top speed is 177mph, up 6mph over the A110 S, with 0-62mph arriving in 3.9sec, 0.3sec sooner. The 320mm Brembo brakes are the same as those fitted to the A110 S and GT, but cooling has been improved by 20 per cent thanks to some neat (and patented) airflow management that reduces peak disc temperatures by up to 90deg C. The ESP system has been tuned to suit the R's





**‘There’s a confidence
about the R that
gives you tremendous
encouragement’**

increased grip levels and altered balance, while the carbonfibre wheels – made with a more repeatable, less laborious industrialised manufacturing process than that used for many such items and handled by aerospace supplier Duqueine – feature bonded structural facings (don’t call them wheel trims!) that differ from front to rear axle, each design optimised for cooling and reduced drag.

Inside it’s a blend of familiar A110 design and dedicated R items. Foremost amongst the latter are the Sabelt single-skin carbon seats. Featuring strategically positioned pads attached with Velcro, they are very supportive and – perhaps surprisingly – extremely comfortable. Six-point harnesses are also standard. Few things boil the contents of my bladder faster than race belts in road cars, especially when there’s no inertia reel fitted as an alternative, but I’ll concede they’re a statement of intent and bring added safety for track use.

Perhaps the biggest area of contention is the 1.8-litre 296bhp turbocharged four-cylinder engine, as it’s the same unit used by the A110 S and GT and is one of the few areas of the R to remain unchanged. Alpine rightly contends that efficient performance through lightweight

Left: carbon seats are a highlight of the interior and save 5kg each, contributing to a 34kg overall saving compared with an Aero Kit-equipped A110 S. **Above:** Racing Matte Blue paint, as worn by the Alpine A522 in F1, adds £6000

construction and slippery aerodynamics is integral to the brand’s DNA, but reading between the lines if it weren’t for the punitive CO2-related tax applied to high-performance cars in France, you sense the R would have had its wick turned up to further boost its performance and sweeten the substantial price hike.

Driving on a racetrack tends to suck the speed out of all but the most powerful cars. Sadly, it proves to be the case with the A110 R. Given the launch venue is Jarama, near Madrid, this is a little surprising, as it’s not an expansive 21st-century circuit evolved for modern slick-and-wings race cars. Built in the late 1960s and designed by the late John Hugenholtz – who also penned Suzuka and the original Zandvoort circuit – Jarama’s compact layout lends itself to street cars thanks to a sinuous mix of corners, sizeable gradient changes, a long, swooping main straight and plenty of big braking areas. The new Alpine doesn’t feel lost here, but it

does feel a little lacking between the corners.

Balance-wise the A110 R is resolutely stable. If anything it’s too keen to run its nose wide in slow- and medium-speed corners. Fast corners are its forte, but it seems that in controlling the A110’s tendency to roll into oversteer, and trimming out the front-end downforce so it’s not too pointy in high-speed corners, the R has sacrificed the playfulness of its siblings without gaining the kind of aggressively grippy front end that would feel like a fair trade.

It took every trick in the book to make it slide for our photos, and while that’s overly reductive in terms of measuring the R’s capabilities, it does point to a car that’s very prescriptive in the way it wants to be driven. Given its commitment to delivering a definitive trackday experience, not to mention the abundant character of the base car, the R feels a bit one-dimensional.

A little over an hour from Jarama are some great routes that wind through the Sierra de Guadarrama. I’ll confess to some trepidation as we drive out of the circuit, as the tone of the press conference suggested the A110 R might have prioritised lap times over on-road prowess. Given

**‘Rare and exotic
with admirable
authenticity, it’s got
true star quality’**



it's not quite the weapon we'd hoped for on track, that could make for a double disappointment.

It doesn't take long to realise the unease might have been misplaced, for despite the obvious increase in spring rates, damping control and resistance to roll, there's an underlying pliancy that suggests the R will shine on decent roads. Better, whatever the road on which you're driving, be it motorway or mountain switchbacks, the R feels more of an event; special in unexceptional circumstances and more charismatic when experienced away from the singular challenge of a racetrack.

Once we reach the mountain roads the R ups its game, feeling keener and more energised than any A110 before it. Unlike a circuit, where you can rapidly find and ultimately breach the limit of grip and have the space and freedom to accelerate through the gears with everything the R can muster, the public road presents more fleeting

opportunities to uncork its performance and feel it come alive.

With greater body control and grip the R revels in direction changes, its appetite for apices matched only by the enthusiasm with which it surges between corners and the self-assured way in which it dives into braking areas. There's a confidence about the R that gives you tremendous encouragement, and a deftness of touch that provides sensory confirmation that this is indeed a lightweight sports car that's far from light on feel. Few if any new cars on sale today feel quite like this.

These Spanish roads are smoother than British equivalents – then again so are most mogul fields – so we'll still have to reserve final judgement until we try an A110 R in the UK. What's important to remember is that those ZF dampers offer a broad range of adjustment. We drove with them set on 9 clicks, which leaves 11 more to play with before the

Above: extra grip but no extra power means moments like this are rare. **Right:** wing blade is shared with the A110 S, but new uprights place it higher and further back

R is in full soft. This bodes well for our shamefully bumpy A- and B-roads back home.

Away from the racetrack the powertrain is more enjoyable, too. With a little over a ton to propel, 296bhp and 251lb ft equate to healthy power- and torque-to-weight ratios, and because road driving sees you spending more time in the meat of the midrange you get to enjoy the carefully optimised – but not synthesised – soundtrack that has a pleasingly gutsy growl under load and exhales through a new 3D-printed twin-wall tailpipe.

The fruity paradiddle of pops and bangs on the overrun can get tiresome if you're on a road that has you repeatedly on and off the throttle, but as turbocharged four-cylinder engines go it's characterful enough. Just don't spend too long



considering the kind of engines £90k can buy you access to on the used market.

Pace-wise you never feel truly pinned into the seat when accelerating through the gears, but on the kind of road that sees you working between 30mph and, ahem, a little shy of three-digit speeds, the A110 R romps along very nicely indeed, the firm brake pedal encouraging you to brake late and deep and the snappy DCT gearshifts punching up and down the ratios with crisp urgency. It's in these moments that the R driving experience really crystallises.

As well it needs to, for the A110 R is big money, especially if you do the £-per-bhp maths. You can buy plenty more bang for your buck new or used, but if you love purity and obsessively detailed engineering then there is much to celebrate in this car. Rare and exotic with admirable authenticity and an unmatched kerb weight, it's got true star quality.

Does it deliver on its promises? If you approach it with your eyes open then yes, but also no. This is a very particular take on the track-focused sports car, one that majors on the cumulative effect of marginal gains and demands you look beyond raw performance and dry-mouthed thrills.

If you have plenty of hours in big-power machinery and enjoy the palm-moistening challenge of managing mass and balancing grunt against grip, then the A110 R isn't for you. It's too well within itself and won't deliver the fireworks you're after. What it delivers in abundance is transparency and precision, which in turn gives you immense confidence and huge reserves of chassis performance to explore. It's a zero-jeopardy track car that flatters less experienced hands yet will also carry serious pace if you are happy to drive to its limits.


Ironically it shines more brightly on the road, where the tighter body control and increased sharpness make it a dazzling partner, whether the road is fast and flowing or tight and technical. It's a more cerebral sports car, one that excels under braking and loves stringing sequences of turns together as only a car liberated from the limitations of inertia can.

Yet ultimately, no matter how obsessive the engineering and impressive the weight savings, they can't compensate for a powertrain that could do with a bit more go. Clever tweaks to the exhaust and induction system have brought more breadth and volume to what you hear – especially under load – but there's no ignoring it lacks aural sparkle. The chassis and aero improvements are meaningful, but it's crying out for the engine performance to stretch it.

On the positive side, being so light the A110 absolutely makes the most of what power and torque it has got, but this makes it impossible not to imagine it with more. I have no doubt many owners of the R will resort to aftermarket tuners to do just that; UK-based Life110 offers a 280lb ft remap (an increase of 29lb ft) while Litchfield goes further with 306lb ft and an accompanying 10bhp lift. Each makes a meaningful difference, largely because you can take most corners a gear higher, but you shouldn't have to take a car like this to a tuner in order to realise its full potential.



Unfortunately for Alpine, in getting the basic A110 so right, any deviation from that perfect recipe inevitably steers away from the sports car sweet spot it has come to call its own. The R is

admirably true to the company's long-standing ethos of finding speed through efficiency and will undoubtedly have tremendous appeal to those for whom less really does equal more. But in an age where bhp and lb ft are the dominant currency, unchanged power and torque outputs are a hard sell. Especially when the price premium is £28,000 over an identically powerful A110 S or GT.

Ultimately the R leaves us conflicted. By tightening its focus and sharpening its dynamics Alpine has elevated the A110 on-road driving experience to a new level. But if you judge it on its racetrack performance – where it was designed to excel, after all – it is less of an event. We still love the A110 and admire the R for what it represents, but despite the meticulous approach and compelling cool factor, it's a car for purists and brand fanatics only. 

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1798cc, turbocharged
Power 296bhp @ 6300rpm **Torque** 251lb ft @ 2400-6000rpm
Weight 1082kg (278bhp/ton) **0-62mph** 3.9sec
Top speed 177mph **Basic price** £89,990

evo rating ★★★★★

 Stays true to the Alpine philosophy
 Falls short on track with no power hike

Above right: carbon engine cover means no rear view, so the glass partition between passengers and engine is swapped for a lighter aluminium item, too







by DAVID VIVIAN

Maserati GranTurismo Trofeo

Maserati is enjoying a resurgence, led by the eCoty-winning MC20 supercar. The new GranTurismo shares a detuned version of its magnificent twin-turbo V6, but does it have the same magic?

NCCE TARNISHED, MASERATI'S FAMOUS name is shiny again. The MC20, our reigning eCoty champ, turns out to be a mid-engined marvel for the ages, while the first new-generation GranTurismo to break cover, all 750bhp of whispering electric Folgore, has brought sexy to a mostly rather sterile EV sector. Facing a reputational fightback as well as the market's baked-in challenges from the long-established Teutonic hegemony, Maserati still has it all to do but is proudly hauling itself back to a state of grace and, just as importantly, a place of relevance.

Following a back-slapping fest for the MC20's makers, protecting momentum is clearly key, and while the Folgore is necessarily a banker for an electron-dependent future, it's the all-new,

all-wheel-drive, petrol-powered, twin-turbo V6 GranTurismo that will either establish a post-MC20 hit factory to satisfy well-heeled and style-savvy speed lovers or be the good but rather troubled second album. Tough act to follow, the MC20.

Tamer of the two new GranTurismo models and named after its birthplace is the Modena, though with 483bhp and 442lb ft, it's hardly in danger of having sand kicked anywhere near its chiselled features. More **evo**-centric, however, is this, the 542bhp and 479lb ft Trofeo. I've been allocated one with a blazing saffron paintjob for my day in the Italian sunshine, which I reckon must shave at least half a second from the claimed 3.5sec 0-62mph time. Not so fanciful if my neck muscles are a reliable witness, although





that particular confrontation happens a little way down the road...

It's understandable that Maserati prefaces the introduction of its new car with a reminder that GranTurismo isn't just a badge but a defining philosophy stretching back 75 years to the 1947 A6 1500, a milestone it bullishly touts as the first ever grand tourer. Certainly a generous bonnet with a rakish coupe profile was the original recipe and, in essence, nothing much has changed, though things are a bit more complex today, not least structurally, where the new GranTurismo's advanced, lightweight aluminium/steel hybrid construction leaves the previous-generation GranTurismo, dropped in 2019, looking distinctly porky and ancient.

Indeed, Maserati's affable head of design, Klaus Busse, is keen to look beyond the rigidity, weight and performance benefits and calls the GranTurismo's expansive and artfully contoured aluminium bonnet a masterpiece that should be hung on a museum wall and appreciated as a sculpture. I'm tempted to ask why the long carapace. It's all about proportion, of course, but also to accommodate the low-slung front-mid





Above and left: GranTurismo feels terrific on the hill roads around Vallelunga; twin-turbo V6 makes 542bhp in Trofeo form – but it actually feels like more than that

positioning of the mildly sanitised and detuned MC20 twin-turbo Nettuno V6 and eight-speed ZF auto. Denuded or not, it's what we've come to Rome to bond with.

'Purity is important,' Klaus says, circling the sensational-looking limited-run (150-off) matt silver Trofeo PrimaSerie special edition parked in the launch hotel's courtyard as we congregate for dinner and a chinwag in the evening's fading light. Perhaps a little over-egged for some tastes, it features thin red rim trims for its 20- and 21-inch wheels and similar outlining for the badges but is otherwise largely standard on the outside.

Klaus moves to the front. 'The bonnet cut line has been rolled round to the side with the clamshell design,' he says, 'while the MC20-style grille and vents and very low nose express the common design DNA.' The aesthetic bond is certainly tight.

There is a lot of bodywork – the GranTurismo is a surprisingly large car that appears even

larger being so close to the road – but none of it looks superfluous. It can't come as a surprise, Klaus suggests, that in addition to all the computer-aided design and precision lasers, some of its modelling has benefitted from the touch of human hands.

'Clean construction and amazing proportion,' he continues, placing store by the dash-to-axle ratio, measured from the centre of the front wheel to the leading edge of the door. He might as well be explaining Elon Musk's co-ordinates to get to Mars. Point is, all the dead clever stuff is invisible unless you're a car designer. For the rest of us, the GranTurismo Trofeo is simply a stunningly handsome car.

And not as cramped as you might think on the inside. A snug four-seater but a four-seater nonetheless – though somehow I don't think Klaus, who must be six-six, would pass the sitting-behind-himself test. If he could, he'd conceivably have enough headroom, though.

Perhaps the packaging's most effective move is the way the centre line of the roof doesn't notably slope towards the rear screen – thus ensuring headlining and hairdo

'The GranTurismo Trofeo is simply a stunningly handsome car'

stay an unlikely inch or so apart – yet, with the eye drawn by the shape of the side window graphic, the profile still looks outrageously sleek. Four adults, drop-dead gorgeous style and supercar performance. Always the blueprint, according to Klaus.

Next morning we're due at the nearby Vallelunga race circuit to have a quick thraap, if that's the right made-up word, in the Folgore. Vallelunga has quite a long pit straight and so at least one opportunity to bury the accelerator and keep it there for long enough to log a subjective G reading against which to judge the Trofeo's MC20-derived performance a little later.

Even as a static exhibit, I'm finding it a struggle not to be irrationally seduced by 'my' Trofeo. Sitting in the driving seat doesn't



exactly invite a rush of hard-nosed objectivity, despite what might be regarded as a catalogue of ergonomic missteps. The steering wheel – not too big, tactile, nicely judged rim – hosts a swarm of switchgear only a well-rehearsed owner could love. Selecting Drive, to bring the steering wheel paddles into play, requires pressing the most innocuous-looking black button you’ve ever seen, lost in a row up on the dash. And the inevitable angled touchscreen, which to be fair isn’t at all bad, can’t help but attract unfavourable comparisons with those found in Mercs and BMWs, which are an order of magnitude better. As ever, Italianate isn’t necessarily the same thing as totally sussed. Come to think, I guess I wouldn’t want it to be.

So yes, a few character-establishing foibles. Look beyond those and the cabin is a wonderful, architectural cocoon of rakish angles and classy materials with good-looking seats that get the compromise between comfort and support spot-on and, for me at least, an ideal, low-slung driving position. I doubt a Bentley Continental GT could provide a more luxurious glove fit. And I love the fillets of so-called ‘3D carbonfibre’ cutting across the neatly tailored and layered leather door trims like holographic dado rails.

There won’t be a chance to stretch the Trofeo’s legs until we’re through the heavily trafficked towns and villages that surround Valledlunga and into the countryside, but there’s

‘It feels more rapid than the electric Folgore and vastly more exciting’

no question the Maserati is uber-chilled on a light throttle, short-shifting like a bored McLaren 720S on Mogadon, the slow, soft timbre and feel of the twin-turbo V6 hollow and guttural, an object lesson in how to sound mean while conserving energy. Despite the extra weight of the all-drive underpinnings, the double-wishbone front/multi-link rear suspension can do supple and tender, too, at least with the drive modes pegged back to the default GT setting, saving Sport for the more open stuff further along the route.

Slowly at first, the hills become less distant and the clearer roads call for a raised tempo. The improving conditions are met with a modest, almost disdainful uptick in delivery from the Trofeo which, curiously, has lulled me into a kind of terminal mooch I’m in no hurry to leave. Instead, I find myself content to tap into the motor’s massive flexibility, which seems to build from nowhere on a breath of throttle.

There’s scant danger of mistaking the big



Above: still clearly related to the previous GranTurismo, but now incorporating cues from the MC20 supercar, new GT couldn’t be anything other than a Maserati.

Right: seats offer superb blend of comfort and support

Maser for a Toyota GR86. I’m not being goaded into going for it, barely able to resist the rich indulgence of the dynamic treasures that await. And I’m neither surprised nor bothered. The GranTurismo is a big, heavy car and has felt it ever since leaving Valledlunga: wide, meaty of helm, grippy rather than nippy, not what Bruno Mars might call dripping in finesse. I’ve assumed, wrongly as it turns out, that in true grand touring fashion, it’s yearning for the odd 130mph autobahn sweeper or maybe a jaunt that takes in Monaco for breakfast and Modena for dinner. All effortlessly within its compass, of course.

Strange how things can change in a blink. Suddenly ahead, straight tarmac tapering to



a tree-fringed vanishing point. No traffic at all. Now the temptation is too much... time to wake up. Sport mode snatched, the ZF 'box kicks down maybe three ratios and the Trofeo, well, the Trofeo goes seriously nuts. It feels more rapid than the Folgore and vastly more exciting. The seemingly exponential surge when the turbos, F1-tech dual combustion chambers and torque-converter transmission hook up under full throttle makes the linear, gearless thrust of electric as recalled at Vallelunga plain anti-climatic. Just like the MC20 at eCoty, the GranTurismo Trofeo feels as if it has far heavier, harder fists than its quoted output would suggest. It isn't as raw or wild but the two cars have never felt closer.

The brakes need to be good and they are because, blue touchpaper lit, the Trofeo is clearly up for what happens next. As the road opens up, the direction changes come thick and fast. Helm

feel focuses, responses sharpen, the all-drive chassis hunkers down and keys in. The Trofeo begins to corner with a verve and balance that belies its size and near two-ton weight. Grip is frankly heroic.

The best GTs have always been special. They can do it all, even if sometimes you have to dig to uncover their buried gifts. The GranTurismo Trofeo, expected to cost around £160,000 once right-hand-drive UK pricing has been finalised, is the same. The difference is, the deeper you dig the better it gets. ✕

Engine V6, 2992cc, twin-turbo **Power** 542bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 479lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1795kg (307bhp/ton)
0-62mph 3.5sec **Top speed** 199mph

Basic price c£160,000 (est)

✚ Gorgeous looks, stunning performance, capable chassis
 ✖ Feels its weight, needs space to come alive

evo rating ★★★★★



by STUART GALLAGHER

Vauxhall Astra GSe

Vauxhall's new hybrid-powered Astra range-topper looks the part. Don't be deceived...

T HIS IS PEAK HOT HATCH.' THE message from John Barker arrived after he had just returned from pitting Honda's new Civic Type R against its key rivals (see page 54). I won't 'do a Barker' and give the result away here, but suffice to say that Honda, Hyundai and Audi are working overtime to create memorable final flings for those who worship the tripod cornering technique. So where does Vauxhall's new Astra GSe sit within the heights of (nearly) affordable hot hatches? Er, some way back from the summit, pretty much back at base camp.

There are some good elements to the Astra GSe (Grand Sport Electric, in case someone asks), such as the Mark Adams design that brings the strongest visual identity to the brand since, well, quite some time ago. Possibly ever. Distinctive, sharp and confident, it gives the Astra a four-square stance that draws you in.

And imagine how much better it would look if it wasn't painted Avis rental white.

However, Adams has stated that Opel/Vauxhall wanted to avoid 'a boy racer looking car' and once the good first impression starts to subside you can't help but long for a little more drama. Not FK8 Civic Type R levels of brashness, but elements that would mark the GSe out from a regular Mk8 Astra. Although there's a good reason for the clean, fuss-free design: efficiency.

While the GSe isn't a fully electric Astra (that's a couple of years away) it is a hybrid and one that chases tax benefits as much as driver appeal, so its design efficiency extends to 18-inch wheels that pay homage to the Monza GSE but worship at the altar of low drag and minimal turbulence. It's all in a bid to maximise the range of the powertrain, which consists of the Stellantis group's 1.6-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine, 12.4kWh battery and single electric motor.

It's the same powertrain that Peugeot fits to its 308 GT (the two cars share the same platform, too), which means 178bhp from the petrol motor and 108bhp of electrically generated power. As is the way when electric meets petrol, you can't simply add both power figures together to reach a juicy 286bhp. Rather, the GSe peaks at 222bhp, with 265lb ft of torque. In a car weighing a hefty 1703kg, that means a power-to-weight figure on a par with a 2005 Fiesta ST...

You can probably deduce from those numbers that the GSe is more SEAT FR than Cupra, or Volkswagen GTI with the 'I' prized from its tailgate. Not a great deal happens after applying the throttle. There's some noise from the 1.6-litre motor and some whirring from the eight-speed Aisin automatic gearbox (of course there's no manual) but not much in the way of forward momentum,



which can be a bit of an issue if you commit to overtaking something.

The fact that there's no option to keep the gearbox in manual mode when you use the steering wheel-mounted paddles (the gearbox reverting back to auto as quickly as possible, which is about the only thing the GSe does do quickly) adds to the frustration. And you are frustrated because the Astra is equipped with a decent chassis.

Lower by 15mm compared with a regular model and with a set of Koni's Frequency Selective Dampers fitted, there's a high level of body control and a fluidity to how it works the road. You sense some serious chassis tuning has been undertaken, which makes the fitment of a set of Michelin Primacy 4 tyres another source of frustration.

Selected to help the GSe travel 40 miles on electric power and therefore make it eligible

for eight per cent benefit-in-kind tax, those tyres trip it up at the first decent corner. There's nothing to work with via the steering, which despite claims of a nine per cent increase in responsiveness feels incredibly slow, and what you do 'feel' are the front tyres waving the white flag as soon as a few degrees of steering angle have been applied. Combined with rather feel-free brakes, you quickly wind everything back and settle for enjoying the refinement rather than hunting for the thrills.

As a hot hatch, the GSe doesn't so much miss the mark as tumble by unnoticed. Which is a disappointment, because the Astra is a good car on many levels. It's smart looking, the interior works well with a blend of screens and physical buttons, and the AGR seats are an ergonomic delight. However, at £40,550 it's also not cheap (that money buys you a good, used BMW M340i xDrive Touring if you don't need a new car).

Above: interior looks good, feels good and works well, while the chassis flows along nicely over a mix of roads. Unfortunately, along with the powertrain, it's been optimised for efficiency rather than driving thrills

The biggest frustration is that it feels like a car no one was prepared to push to find its peak, which is a missed opportunity when there's a 300bhp dual-motor hybrid powertrain in the family that could have been fitted. Unfortunately the management view was that the work required to install it wasn't worth the rewards. On this evidence, that was the wrong call. ✕

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbocharged, plus 81kW electric motor **Power** 225bhp **Torque** 265lb ft **Weight** 1703kg (132bhp/ton) **Top speed** 146mph **0-62mph** 7.5sec **Basic price** £40,550

+ Polished dynamics, neat looks, quality materials throughout
- Let down by lacklustre drivetrain and lack of performance

evo rating ★★★★★



by STUART GALLAGHER

Porsche Macan T

The T-spec 911 is the best Carrera you can buy, so does the same letter applied to the Macan also mark out a new range high point?

PORSCHE'S MACAN REMAINS A BENCHMARK small SUV. It's not a car to flutter the hearts of **evo** readers, nor will it be the first choice for one of those drives we all lock away to be resurfaced when someone asks why driving matters. But like Alfa Romeo's Stelvio it is a vehicle that's clearly been engineered and developed by those prepared to go the extra mile and create a car worthy of the heritage its badge carries.

Even in its twilight years – the Macan was launched nine years ago and has nearly 12 months to go before its all-electric replacement arrives – it still sets the benchmark for ride and handling, body

control and feedback, and feeling like a Porsche hot hatch rather than a flat-footed crossover. As a daily to accompany something more exciting in the garage, a Macan is a wise choice.

Although, it does depend on which Macan we're discussing. Anything with a six-cylinder turbo engine will see you right; they're all seven-speed PDK equipped but the mix works well and the pace and performance match the expectations. We'd go for a GTS but an S is just fine, too. We wouldn't walk on by a used diesel either. Which leaves the four-cylinder petrol models.

When launched in 2014 the four-cylinder Macan



was rarer than an order slot on a GT3 RS. You could have one, but wouldn't you prefer a six-cylinder Porsche to one powered by a VW Golf GTI engine? It turns out that a great many customers did. In recent years that's changed, with the EA888-engined Macan's entry-level attractiveness being pushed by Porsche. To the extent that another trim has been added, the T.

Its 2-litre four-cylinder single-turbo engine remains unchanged from the base Macan's, with 261bhp and 295lb ft available to haul 1865kg around with the aid of a seven-speed double-clutch gearbox and four-wheel drive. However, the T does have the Sport Chrono Package as standard, adding drive modes, Sport Response (which, at the push of a button, heightens the engine and transmission's responses for 20 seconds) and launch control. Adaptive damping is also standard and the car sits 15mm lower and gains a selection of exterior trim finished in Agate Grey. For all of these extras, Porsche charges a premium of £5000.

So far so good. The less good bit is that, like the

regular four-cylinder Macan, the T could be politely described as lacking the performance befitting of a Porsche. Regardless of the drive mode selected the throttle response is a little glacial to say the least, the seven ratios working overtime to shuffle around the power and fill in the torque shortfalls. It is, frankly, a little breathless, and even when up to speed it's quite slow to respond to any requests for some more get up and go. With the power-to-weight ratio of a well-endowed supermini but none of the lightweight pep, it's not hard to understand the performance challenges the T faces.

Which is a shame because all the other strong attributes of the Macan are there in abundance. It steers with a directness no rival can touch, its body control feels more Golf GTI than jacked-up crossover and it exudes the damping quality and polish that Porsche's engineers tirelessly slave over to perfect.

Compared with today's £50,000-plus hatchbacks (the Macan T is £55,800) there's a quality about its interior that a Golf R can't get

'Compared with the Macan S, the T doesn't get out of the starting blocks'

close to and a sense that you are in something a cut above the volume sellers – even though the Macan accounted for more than a third of all Porsche sales last year with over 88,000 examples sold. However, compared with the Macan S, the T doesn't get out of the starting blocks.

For an additional one-thousand pounds you can buy a six-cylinder Macan S, and you get far more for your money than an extra pair of cylinders. It's more powerful by a sizable 114bhp, has 88lb ft more torque, and despite weighing an additional 65kg is considerably quicker, too. Not just against the stopwatch but in every situation that's relevant to road driving. And while it may be thirstier than the four-pot T by a margin of 2mpg, the S's larger reserves of performance result in you driving it in a calmer, more efficient manner, but no slower.

It's incredibly rare for Porsche to drop the ball but the Macan T feels like a model conceived in a creative ideas session by people who haven't grasped what makes a Porsche a Porsche. After the scintillating brilliance of the 911 Carrera T, the Macan T feels like an opportunity missed to have some fun with the petrol models before they are replaced with battery-powered equivalents. Because even if you only buy it for the kudos of owning a Porsche, the Macan T isn't going to provide you with the experience you are expecting. ✖

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbocharged
Power 261bhp @ 5000-6500rpm **Torque** 295lb ft @ 1800-4500rpm **Weight** 1865kg (142bhp/ton) **0-62mph** 6.2sec
Top speed 144mph **Basic price** £55,800

✚ All the usual Porsche dynamic qualities

✖ With none of the performance

evo rating ★★★★★

by RICHARD PORTER

Ford F-150 Lightning

The electric version of America's best-selling pickup is a 580bhp modern-day muscle car



KEEN STUDENTS OF AMERICAN TRUCKS will know this is not the first time Ford has used the Lightning badge on an F-150. The first generation of 1992 had a 5.8-litre, 240hp V8, while the 1999 sequel came with a 5.4-litre V8, supercharged to 360 horsepower. With their single cabs and none-more-'90s bodykits, they were pure and simple hot-rods, losing some of their trucky utility but vastly increasing their ability to lay elevens outside the local diner. This, the third-generation Lightning, is not like that. It comes with a practical double cab. There are no tacky 'sports' trimmings. And there's no V8 because, third time around, with the Lightning name co-opted into being a low-level pun, this is a pure EV.

There is one piece of common ground with its predecessors, mind you. In basic form it makes 452bhp, the extended-range model tested here has 580 horsepower, and both versions serve up the same mighty 775lb ft of torque. So this Lightning is still a hot-rod. In fact, it's the most powerful

F-150 ever made, besting even the petrol-snorting faux-Baja Raptors.

Not that you'd know it at first acquaintance. Prod the start button, clunk the surprisingly old-fashioned gear selector into D and off you go, smoothly and decisively, that rich torque output getting things moving in a pleasantly effortless but far from violent way. The throttle calibration is pretty gentle so you don't crick your passengers' necks with a drag-strip take-off, but if you get the boot down, holy cow this 5.9-metre-long unit can shift, rearing its nose, even weaving slightly as the torque twists at the sinews of the chassis and paws insistently through the front wheels. It's delightfully stupid and stupidly delightful. At every stop light, this thing is primed to meter out rough justice to Mustangs and Camaros, as long as the road is straight, of course. Throw in some corners and the dragster becomes a truck again.

Underneath is a separate chassis, adapted from piston-engined sisters to take a battery

pack between its rails, and though some elements sound promising, such as the near 50/50 weight distribution and an independent rear axle rather than the beam 'n' leafs of normal F-150s, it's unsurprising to learn this is not a sports car. The steering does a decent job of responding but it's low-g geared, better to suit the suspension's lumbering demeanour. Going in hot quickly sees grip evaporate from the front end, especially on sun-baked Californian tarmac. Little wonder when, in this top-spec Platinum trim, the F-150 Lightning weighs an alarming 3.1 tons. Good for momentum-powered regen braking down hills, bad for most other things.

But to drive the Lightning like a sports car is to miss the point. This is a modern muscle car, brutally quick in a straight line. The only thing missing is a V8 backbeat. There is a fake engine sound that pipes through the speakers but it's better to turn it off. That way you can embrace the quiet smoothness of an EV along with that effortless and enormous torque, which gives the car an endearingly easy-



going nature. Enjoy the silence, enjoy the huge, comfortable seats, enjoy the decent stereo, enjoy the ride which, though a little restless by monocoque standards, is very good for a truck.

Another thing to enjoy is the absolute everyday utility of the thing and the genuine five-adult spaciousness of the cabin, all ported directly from other F-150s. What the Lightning adds to the mix is a huge front boot, the 'Mega Power Frunk' in Ford marketing speak, giving you 400 litres of secure storage in the place where other F-series trucks keep their engines. You can sling shopping in there or, as it's plastic-lined and has drain holes in its floor, you could theoretically chuck in a load of wet gravel.

With the optional tow package the Lightning can also pull over four-and-a-half tons, though tests by American media suggest this will have a catastrophic effect on range. If you're not hitched to a trailer, however, claimed range is 230 miles with the standard 98kWh battery, 320 miles for the 131kWh extended-range version, knocked down

to 300 in this fully loaded Platinum model. Real world for the latter seems closer to 200-250 miles, though a lengthy high-speed freeway drive will see the range-o-meter falling faster. You're punching a lot of air out of the way, after all.

As such, the Lightning won't suit all Americans, but, crucially, there's many for whom it will. Cruise the sprawling suburbs of large US cities and you'll see pickups on every third driveway because, truth is, the modern double-cab pickup is America's family car of choice. And, if you're not in the business of regular 1000-mile road trips with a trailer on your tail, this Lightning could fit your life as nicely as an Explorer or Grand Cherokee, with the added practicality of being able to sling more stuff in the back for a weekend camping in the mountains.

Clearly, this has piqued the interest of many Americans, because when the new Lightning went on sale 200,000 people ordered one and Ford had to stop taking reservations. But soon it will be able to deliver 150,000 electro trucks a year. The F-series

Left and above: Lightning is as tough and versatile as any truck, but in Platinum spec you get plenty of luxury touches including leather seats and a huge touchscreen

has been America's best-selling pickup for 46 years; in 2022 they sold just over 650,000 of them. If, in future, almost a quarter of them are EVs, that's quite a shift away from internal combustion.

You can see the appeal. The F-150 Lightning blends the utility of a good truck with the relaxed smoothness and hearty wallop of a good EV. Better yet, it has a burly and thoroughly likeable personality that makes it just about the most charismatic EV in the world. ☒

Motors Two, 430kW total **Power** 580bhp
Torque 775lb ft **Weight** 3130kg **0-60mph** sub-4sec
Top speed 112mph **Basic price** \$98,769

+ Friendly and useful

- Big and heavy

evo rating ★★★★★

IGNITION

NEWS, INTERVIEWS, TECH AND EVERY NEW CAR THAT MATTERS

Radical man!

Having celebrated its 25th birthday, Radical is in rude health – with no plans to go electric, as sales and marketing director Dan Redpath explains



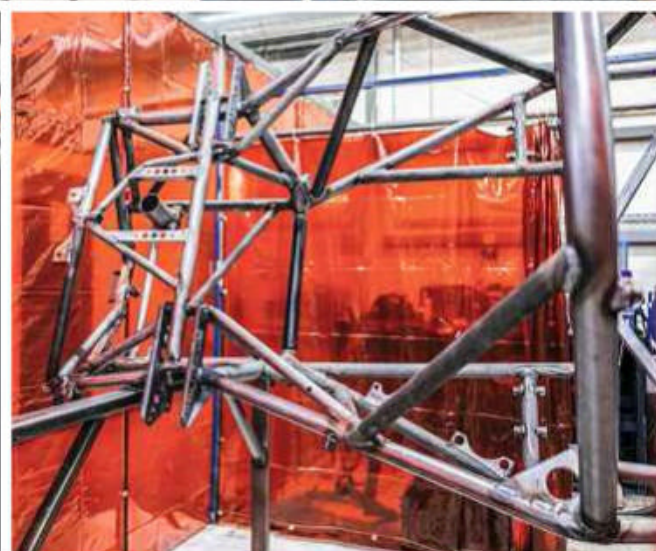


B ACK IN 2005, A VAST NEW SWATHE OF car enthusiasts became aware of the Radical brand for the first time when the firm's SR8, driven by Michael Vergers, set a new Nürburgring Nordschleife production car lap record of just 6min 55sec. Four years later, with **evo**'s own Roger Green riding shotgun, Vergers drove a 460bhp SR8LM from Radical's factory in Peterborough to the Ring and lowered that time to 6min 48sec, a record that would stand for eight years (**evo** 136). It was a contentious record because the SR8LM – and the SR8 before it – were road-registered via the UK's single vehicle approval process rather than being fully type-approved production cars. But as a means of promoting the Radical name, it worked a treat.

Formed in 1997 by two enthusiasts, Mick Hyde and Phil Abbott, Radical is still tucked away on the same industrial estate in the north of Peterborough in the East Midlands, but these days it's a different business. 'Our customer base has changed from the early days,' says Dan Redpath, sales and marketing director, who joined from Aston Martin at the start of 2020. 'Back then it was a lad-and-dad type of product with the car in a Brian James trailer behind a Discovery, with them doing the spannering. Nowadays our customers are high net worth individuals, turning up at the track in their road cars – McLarens, Ferraris and expensive classics – while the race team brings the prepared Radical, so it's a much more turn-key affair.'

The cars have evolved steadily but are essentially true to the original concept, with tubular steel spaceframe chassis and a variety of mid-mounted, largely motorbike-derived engines, re-engineered to Radical's specification and built by Radical Performance Engines, a wholly owned subsidiary. It's been quite a journey. From building a car that would be competitive in UK clubman championships, Radical went on to create its own compact, high-revving V8 by splicing together two four-cylinder motorbike engines, set those Nürburgring lap records, build an LMP2 car that competed at Le Mans and sell over 1500 examples of the SR3, its most popular model.

However, until 2020, the company hadn't made a profit in a decade, says Redpath. 'I think it had been a very organic journey for the company,' he continues. 'The inception of the company was a smart, entrepreneurial move but it wasn't run in a conventional way. When it was good, it was very good but when it was bad, it was difficult to control.' In 2016 a new CEO, Joe Anwyll, was appointed and set about stemming the losses. 'He brought in orthodox business measures whilst recognising what we are: that we sell race cars to wealthy individuals who want to have fun.'



'WE SELL RACE CARS TO WEALTHY INDIVIDUALS WHO WANT TO HAVE FUN'

Previous pages: sales and marketing director Dan Redpath. **Above:** Redpath (centre) with technician Neil Walker (left) and our man Barker; engines and steel spaceframe chassis are all made in-house



When Covid hit in 2020, Radical was in a good shape from a business perspective. 'Our customers spend a lot of time travelling, whether it's for business or pleasure, but they found themselves grounded like the rest of us. Golf companies probably did very well; I would imagine sim companies did very well and we did really well during the tail end of 2020, managing to make a small profit. And then in 2021, we saw record production and record profit.'

Two new models were nearing completion in 2020 and the company took the decision to press on with them, which was tricky given the lockdowns, but in May an update to the SR3, the SR3 XX, was launched and the SR10 was ready by the end of the year.

Redpath recruited six new dealers in 2020 and another six in 2021. 'We now have 33 dealers across 21 countries and that gives us reach into



places that a 120-strong company based in the East of England couldn't get to.' These dealers – predominantly race teams that can prepare and run Radicals rather than dealers in the traditional sense – span the globe, from British Columbia in the west of Canada, through the United States, Europe, the Middle East and Asia, to Australia and New Zealand. There are 12 single-make Radical series across four continents, including the factory-supported Hagerty Radical Cup UK and the Blue Marble Radical Cup North America.

Radical describes itself as the UK's largest manufacturer of race cars, producing between 200 and 250 cars per year. 'Not all customers are racers,' says Redpath. 'A lot of them are, but some just want to do trackdays.' Crucially, not many of them want to drive their Radicals on the road – only about two in 100 are road cars. 'The road cars have always been a sort of spin-off. If you look at

the back catalogue, about ten years ago there was the road-going version of the SR3, the SR3 SL, and more recently a road-going version of the RXC, and even more recently than that the Rapture. In each instance, the race car was developed first and then adapted to be a road car, as opposed to the other way around.'

This means that while the UK's other specialist car makers are wrestling with the challenge of how they respond to the 2030 ban on petrol and diesel-powered new cars, Radical will simply stop making cars for the road. 'As things stand, Radical would not do electric,' says Redpath. 'We would retain a combustion engine and the main reason for that is because our cars are designed to be exhilarating, exciting and visceral, and we don't believe that's possible with an EV powertrain, because of the mass and lack of character.'

'There's more to come with the EV story,' he

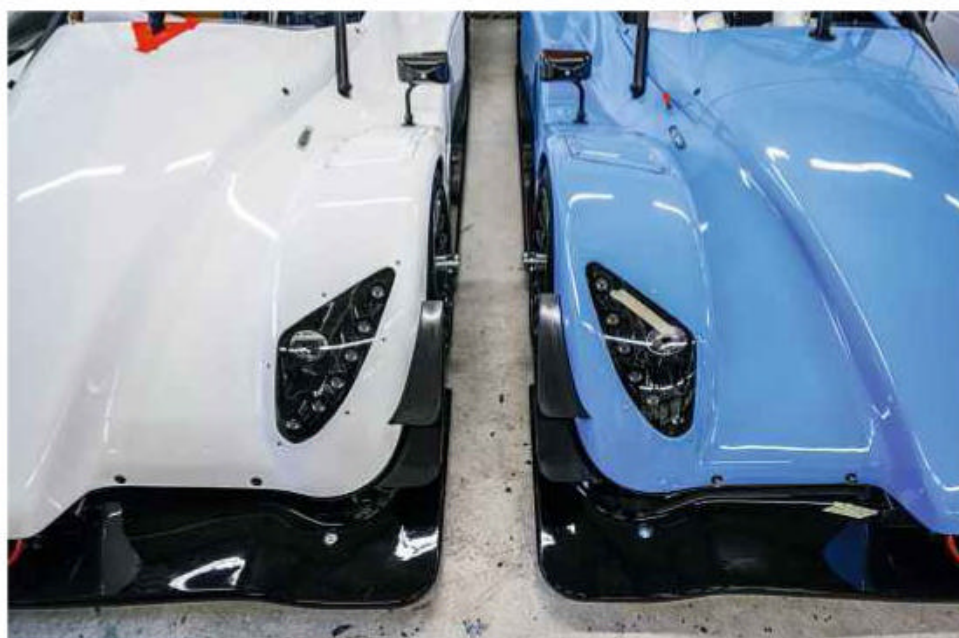
says. 'In my view, the "exam paper" was given to the industry already half answered. It was "Give us zero emissions but – in brackets – it must be EV." They should have missed out the brackets and let the engineers figure out how to do zero emissions.' He reckons the infrastructure for us all to run electric cars isn't there and says that for many sectors, including farming and shipping, electric just won't work because it doesn't offer the range or the number of hours required. 'Those big, multi-million-pound earth-movers work around the clock, so if they need to be taken off line to be plugged in, then all of a sudden the running costs shoot up. There are other segments of the industry that have big motives to pursue other net-zero fuels that I believe will cascade down into road cars.'

'For us, the immediate, attractive option

is biofuels because we can retain combustion engines and the exhilaration and excitement that comes with them.' A few months ago, Radical launched the SR3 XXR, its first car with an engine configured to run on advanced biofuels. This has largely been a process of proofing the fuel system of the engine – the 1500cc, Gen 5, RPE four-cylinder unit – against ethanol. The XXR also has a fuel composition sensor to detect different percentages of ethanol, so customers can switch between high-octane gasoline and biofuels with up to 85 per cent ethanol content. Peak power is up from 226 to 232bhp but largely because RPE has taken the opportunity to improve cylinder head flow, lighten the conrods and rework the engine and gearbox mapping.

Through RPE, Radical produces bespoke engines with four, six or eight cylinders, offering from 182bhp to 654bhp, but it's the 1340 and 1500cc versions of the RPE 'four' that account for by far the greatest volume. They power the SR1 and SR3 models and account for 70 per cent of Radical engines. RPE's version of the Ford 2.3 EcoBoost fitted to the Rapture (360bhp) or SR10 (425bhp) represents 20 per cent of sales while the most potent engines, the 2.7-litre RPE 'Macroblock' V8 (411bhp) fitted to the SR8 and the RPE V6 twin-turbo (500-654bhp) fitted to the RXC models together make up the last 10 per cent.

Some specialists intend to make ICE cars for as long as they are permitted to, but Caterham is already predicting that supplies of engines will dry up well before 2030. Redpath is coy about Radical's arrangements, saying only the company will be 'very well supplied' into the next decade. Radical has been building its own Macroblock V8 with a flat-plane crank for almost 20 years now and could probably manage a whole engine if necessary, but its arrangement with Suzuki suits it very well.



'BIOFUELS ARE ATTRACTIVE BECAUSE WE CAN RETAIN COMBUSTION ENGINES'

Right: SR3 XXR is Radical's first biofuel-ready car. **Above:** two years after its launch, the 425bhp SR10 has just received an XXR upgrade, including revised aero. **Below right:** teaser of forthcoming R25



To celebrate its 25th anniversary, Radical has announced a new model, the R25, and teased it with an illustration. The car is currently in development and should be ready later this year, while 2023 will also see the second running of the Radical World Finals. The inaugural event was held at Spring Mountain, a private racetrack in Las Vegas, late last year, and attracted Radical racers from championships around the world. 'Customer feedback was incredible so it's something that will be in the diary towards the end of this year,' says Redpath. The company has also tracked down the SR8 LM that set the Nürburgring lap record back in 2008. 'The current owner lives in Ireland, so we're talking to him about borrowing the car for some events this year,' says Redpath. Hopefully it'll be driven to some of them too – seems only right! ☒



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Lawrence Tomlinson

Chairman, Ginetta Cars

The Ginetta boss tells the stories behind his enviable car collection, his class win at Le Mans and how he bought a car company

by JOHN BARKER PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT & ALAMY

SOME OF US COLLECT SCALE MODELS OF the cars that we've owned, though if we had the means, quite a few of us would love to collect them for real. In part that's what I'm looking at right now: an eclectic group of a 3-litre Capri S, Audi Quattro and Escort RS1600, all from Lawrence Tomlinson's formative years. The upper floor of this garage space houses clusters of cars that reflect Tomlinson's later passions. Tucked away at the back are four Le Mans race cars – three TVRs and a Panoz – while at the front are some tiny and rare Ginettas that represent the early history of the sports car company he bought in 2005.

'I wouldn't say I'm massively passionate about cars, just cars,' says Tomlinson, 'I like mechanical things, I like fixing things.' Tomlinson was born in Batley, West Yorkshire, in the mid-1960s. His mother packed biscuits at Fox's and his dad was a wagon driver. 'He was sort of a mechanic by necessity. He had a small haulage company, the trucks were always breaking down, so you kind of learn that you've got to keep things going. I've been quite good at just keeping things going, really.'

Alongside the Capri, Escort and Quattro is a pristine 'flares and chairs' De Tomaso Pantera GT5. 'My poster car as a lad,' explains Tomlinson. One car missing from this curated collection is a '60s Ford Consul Classic, the first car he drove. It had been his grandad's and for years had languished in a garage falling apart around it. Young Tomlinson played in it before having the idea of trying to get it going. 'It had been sitting so long the fuel tank was full of rust, so I got a one-gallon container and just screwed it to the roof.' The 1500, pre-crossflow engine eventually fired up and Tomlinson drove the gravity-fed Classic around the fields, adapting to the lack of rear brakes.

'Eventually, it died. We left it there. By that time I was riding trials bikes and had a KT 250 Kawasaki. Kick Start was on the telly and they used to do

things like riding over cars, so I put a couple of pallets either side of the Classic and then just fired the bike up, over and back. So that was good fun. I was still only about 14 or 15.'

More motorbikes followed until he was at college. 'My parents said if I didn't get a motorbike they'd buy me my first car. It was this Jago Jeep, a kit-car Jeep, which was a bit of a fixer-upper. No doors, no roof, but it was great. Ironically, it had the 1500 Ford engine in it and I think we ended up using some of the bits off the Classic.'

Tomlinson did business studies for one year then mechanical engineering. A Mk1 Escort 1100 replaced the Jago and then he bought a Ford Zodiac. 'It was a tank of a thing. Like having an American car. Somebody had replaced the thirsty V6 with a Perkins diesel. It was just horrific, wouldn't pull the skin off a rice pudding. In the end I just left it somewhere.'

Sponsored through college by Wellman Bibby, a manufacturer of power transmission couplings, Tomlinson did well enough for them to back him through university too. 'I worked for them during the holidays so I was earning. So I bought 3-litre Capri S, '79 on a T... in beige. You can't have it all. It did have those Recaro fishnet headrests, though, so it was the dog's.' But the car that blew him away dynamically was the Mk1 Escort RS1600. 'It was one of the first cars I drove that I thought was amazing. It was a revelation, even though the twin-cam had blown up so the owner had fitted a Duratec or whatever was available. Might even have been a 1500,' he laughs.

There was then a long hiatus as far as interesting cars were concerned as Tomlinson applied his business rather than his mechanical training, developing a substantial, innovative care home operation. His comeback car was a Quattro, first a 90, then the real deal, an Ur-Quattro. 'I was lucky; I'd made a few quid. It was blue, a good-looking car, but it had been clocked and had turbo issues. I got





LE MANS
2007

PANOZ

81

LM GT2



it fixed and swapped it for a diesel Range Rover and had a TVR Griffith 430 as a second car – a perfect combination. Then I had a Tuscan. I got it from Nigel Kemp at Harrogate Horseless Carriages, who used to organise trackdays for his customers. I'd never been around a racetrack. My instructor was a Tuscan Challenge racer called Bob Sands. Uncle Bob. Magic Bob. I had no idea what I was doing. I was driving sideways more than I was forwards but I had decent car control. It was Bob who got me into racing.'

Not only did Sands set Tomlinson on a path to Le Mans, he also introduced him to Ginetta. 'On my 38th birthday, Bob had arranged for me to take part in a Ginetta race. So I played golf in the morning, flew myself up to Croft and met Martin Phaff, who owned Ginetta at the time. Lovely bloke, so enthusiastic: "Happy Days Racing". He sees this guy arrive in a helicopter, rubs his hands together and opens up the Ginetta corporate hospitality, which is your bags in the back of a seven-and-a-half-ton Ford Cargo.'

'There were some quite good teams with Ginetta at the time so he could have spent a pound or two and let them run me, but he'd prepped the car himself... and forgotten the bonnet pins. Second lap round, at about 100mph the bonnet lifted and ripped off. I just saw this white flash and thought: bloody hell, is this racing? Is this what happens? I look in my mirror and I can see this thing like a box kite, still going up.'

Undeterred, Tomlinson did a season in Ginettas, some Radicals, met Nigel Greensall who would become his mentor and teammate, and did British GT and a couple of Tuscan races. 'Then, 23 months later, I was on the starting grid at Le Mans.'

The year was 2004, the car was the TVR T400R. 'It was a great car, but with a 4-litre straight-six it just wouldn't develop the power that was needed for GT2. We won at Spa in 2005, which was TVR's first ever international win, but we won because it was foggy and chucking it down and we had a great chassis. We developed the engine and got more power but we made it unreliable. So for 2006 we looked at the Panoz, which had a huge and totally reliable donkey. At Le Mans, we knew we could get an extra lap out of the car on fuel if we ran slightly slower, and that's how we won the GT2 class. In those days, it wasn't pro and am, so you pitted yourself against factory Porsches with drivers like Marc Lieb.'

Tomlinson had tried to buy TVR from Peter Wheeler. 'In GTs you have to start with the base car, so I thought if I buy the manufacturer, I can make what I like and I'll have a base model that I don't have to modify as much. I'm massively into vertical integration and control of the process. I'd more or less agreed a deal with Peter before [Nicolai] Smolensky arrived and paid much more than I was able to pay. Which was great for Peter and the family.'

'Phaffi sold me Ginetta in 2005 after the TVR deal fell through. In some ways it was a blessing because

'23 MONTHS AFTER MY FIRST RACE, I WAS ON THE GRID AT LE MANS'

I was starting with pretty much a blank sheet of paper; in effect I bought a race series plus the history, the back catalogue and a great badge. I've tried to be true to the marque and we do still build lightweight British sports cars.

'I think a lot of people think we're two men up north in a shed with a whippet,' he says. Nothing could be further from the truth. Damon Hill opened Ginetta's spacious factory in Garforth, near Leeds, in 2007, and in 2017 Ginetta bought Blyton Park circuit in Lincolnshire for testing and customer demos. Tomlinson's other businesses support Ginetta, meaning that it is unencumbered with the burden of breaking even or turning a profit. 'About 100 people work here full time building about 100 cars per year. We used to build more but now we do higher-value cars. One thing Peter [Wheeler] said to me was: "Don't look back, don't design in the past; design for the future. Be innovative and do the things you want to do. Put your mark on it."'

He's certainly done that. In some ways, Ginetta under his direction is like it was in its early years, majoring on competition cars, and Tomlinson has enjoyed being instrumental in creating those cars. Ginetta Juniors, 'a piece of Phaff brilliance', now has grids of rigorously identical, 100bhp coupes piloted by drivers as young as 14 delivering nail-bitingly close racing. 'One of the things people have forgotten about motorsport is that it's about the show. It's about getting crowds to circuits and enjoying it.'

Le Mans has featured again too. In 2009, Tomlinson went with an LMP1 car, the petrol-powered Ginetta-Zytek 09S. 'None of the petrol cars could touch the diesels,' he says. It was the last time he competed at Le Mans and he still has the car. He finally hung up his gloves in 2016 after winning the Britcar prototype championship. More recently, Ginetta built and developed an LMP1 for the 2018/19 season and, in conjunction with the ACO, an LMP3 car. 'We did the LMP1 knowing it's an absolute money pit. There's no commercial reason to do LMP1 other than if you're going to get the LMP2 franchise, which allows you to do LMDh. We were promised

that if we did LMP1 and the LMP3, we'd have an LMP2... but that didn't happen. The main reasons people do things are either if they make money for you or if they make you happy, and this did not so we stopped LMP1. But it's an amazing car.'

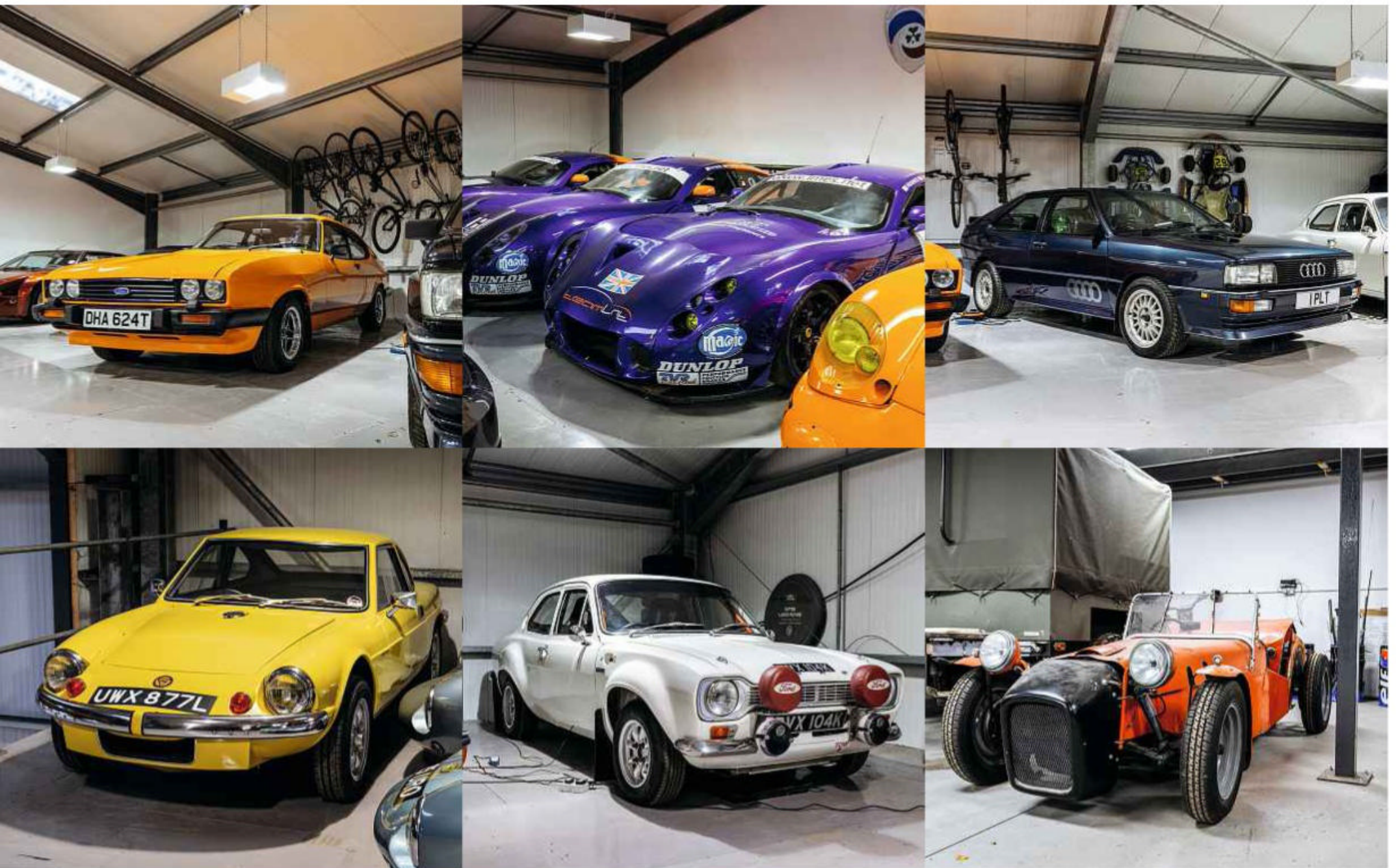
Tomlinson's road car is a Tesla. He reckons that eventually most people will be driving EVs but he thinks ICE cars will survive in much smaller numbers, in much the same way horses did after the motor car took over. He reckons the hardcore that remain will be used for sport and gathering for shows and the like. Ginetta is already future-proofing, designing and developing parts that are becoming harder to get, like gearboxes, hydraulic power-steering racks and even its own all-alloy V8. 'I think the engine is the heart of the car and having your own V8 is a really nice thing to have.' This billet-blocked engine will probably find its way into Tomlinson's road-going supercar, the Akula, a front-engined, rear-drive all-carbon design that concentrates all the major masses between the axles.

Heritage gets a look-in too. In 2019 Tomlinson announced that Ginetta would build a number of 'remastered' G10s, a car that saw off the formidable E-type on its debut at Brands Hatch in 1965. It weighed 900kg and had a 4.7-litre Ford V8 but homologation difficulties meant that only around three were made in period. The G10 'RM' will be analogue and original in look but otherwise modern, with a 500bhp V8.

Original Ginettas in Tomlinson's collection include the G4 that Graham Hill drove for *Practical Motorist* magazine in the issue that came out on the day he was born. 'It's got the twin-cam in it, independent rear suspension and weighs under 500 kilos, so it's properly nippy.' Behind it is the G12. When the G4 couldn't handle any more power, Ginetta created the G12, one of the first mid-engined sports cars. It cleaned up until the opposition caught on and caught up. There's also a G15 coupe, the popular Imp-engined road car launched in '67. It's incredible how far the Walklett brothers who formed Ginetta came in such a short time; downstairs Tomlinson has the unrestored remains of the company's first 'production' car, a G2, a Lotus 6-like kit car introduced in 1958.

Is there an ambition to collect all the G numbers? 'No,' says Tomlinson, 'because like all car manufacturers of nearly 65 years there's some real stinkers.' He's right. The Walkletts made some beautiful cars but also designed and built the Ford Zodiac motorhome, thankfully a one-off. 'That's the killer,' says Tomlinson. 'I thought I might buy it.' If it turns out its V6 has been swapped for a Perkins diesel, it may prove irresistible. ✕

Previous page: Tomlinson with his Graham Hill-tested Ginetta G4, and surround by Le Mans class-winning GT2 Panoz, De Tomaso Pantera and 1979 Ford Capri 3.0 S. **Opposite, from top row:** Capri in full; trio of Team LNT TVRs; Ur-Quattro; Ginetta G15; Escort RS1600; Ginetta G2; Ginetta-Zytek 09S LMP1 entry in the 2009 Le Mans 24 Hours





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Feeling hot, hot, hot

I mangled opening the **evo** envelope this month and all I could see was the issue number: 306. Memories of that wonderfully tactile Peugeot GTi flooded back to me but my thoughts soon turned to the widely reported decline of the hot hatch. Then I collected my co-ordination and opened the envelope further and was presented with a Civic Type R flying sideways through the frame.

Flicking through the magazine, absorbing the pictures and picking my starting point, there was an RS3 sliding in the opposite direction and a sideways Golf R. Lovely! Then, to my delight, there was Richard Porter's newly acquired Panda 100HP in Fast Fleet.

The hot hatch may have changed in the 25 years since the 306 GTi was king, but the class is still in rude health, with something for everyone, be it power or handling. And with AMG's new C63 S E Performance showing that, with a little electric help, it can get 671bhp from a 2-litre four-pot, perhaps some hot hatches will soon get even hotter?

My thoughts are on the up. Thank you for the issue.

Nick Frost

Addicted to Pug

As a new subscriber to **evo** I was incredibly excited to have a real-life magazine arrive through my letterbox. All of the trademark **evo** staples made me happy: beautiful photos, great-looking roads and words so well formulated I knew exactly how disappointed I'd be if I bought a Golf R '20 years'.

But it was Jethro's column on his addiction to used-car classifieds that really got me. As a kid I would always read my dad's copies of *Classic &*



Sports Car or Practical Classics, Retro Cars, Autocar and more. My first port of call in every magazine was the back pages, to see what rusty heap of Italian misery my pocket money or Dad's bank account would allow.

I ached for a Lancia Thema 8.32 or a Fiat 124 Coupé. Now, as these and all other interesting cars built before 2001 reach prices I may never be able to afford, I've decided to get ahead of the curve and buy an investment while it's still relatively cheap.

Like Jethro, I'd sit next to my wife for hours while she showed me what puppy we should have and I looked through the usual online portals to see what car I could buy that would tick as many boxes as possible: fun, good-looking, relatively interesting, and the potential to look after me better than my savings account does. For the longest time it was going to be a Panda 100HP, but decent ones are getting expensive and hard to find. I've had several Alfas, including a GTV and a Twin Spark 156, but there is no such thing as a cheap, headache-free Alfa.

Then, after much searching, I finally found it: a Peugeot 306 Rallye with bags of history, funky Rallye stickers and enough chassis rot to keep me occupied for ages. And I am absolutely smitten. My addiction reached a new high and paid off.

I just hope I can stay interested for long enough that Lancia Themas don't suddenly become worth £3.5k and I have to explain to my wife why the French Bulldog is going to have to wait.

Ben Sawyer

CAMRC

Anyone remember the beer market in the '70s? I'm sure some **evo** readers do. Conglomerates such as Allied



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Fuelish things

I WOULD REALLY LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR THE ARTICLES about efuels (issues 271, 285 and 306). My physics/engineering background has enabled me to read, research and then compile my own analysis of the best way to achieve net zero carbon emissions and I've been deeply concerned by the blinkered push towards battery EV and the government's misguided focus on zero emissions from the 'exhaust'.

If we didn't have a carbon-driven climate-change threat and all we needed to do was clean up our air, this would be appropriate, but the message being conveyed that battery EV is the best way to reduce net carbon is just wrong. As I'm sure you understand, the issue with carbon-driven climate change is that so many processes are not cyclic but linear, meaning carbon is taken from the earth and transferred to the atmosphere. Efuels are the best cyclic solution I have seen so far.

The government and much of the media seem to think that if carbon-based gases come from the exhaust, it must be bad. Yet an E100-fuelled vehicle surely adds less carbon to the atmosphere from its birth to death than an equivalent battery EV that uses more carbon in its manufacture, runs on electricity made from around 40 per cent carbon energy and also requires more carbon to dispose of its materials at end of life?

Please keep talking about this subject to help keep the pressure on for other fuel options to be considered for the long term.

Nigel Davy

The Letter of the Month wins a Straton watch

The writer of this month's star letter receives a Straton Yacht Racer Quartz watch worth £259. Designed to be a fun everyday chronograph that doesn't break the bank, it offers 10ATM water resistance and is available in six different colour schemes.

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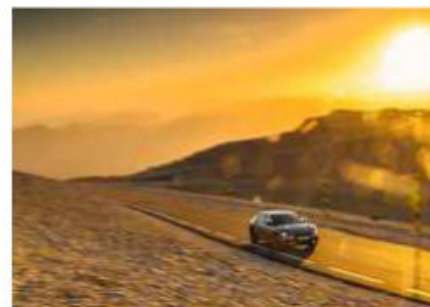


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INBOX



Breweries talked about ‘progress’, which translated as maximising profits through standardised output, large-scale brewing, easy transport and long shelf life. Marketing departments loved it: one beer brand, one campaign, lots of noise. But the beer was dreadful; characterless, fizzy and bland.

Luckily, a group of people decided this was not good enough and The Campaign for Real Ale was born. It saved the traditional brewing industry by waking up the consumer and pointing out they were being conned by intensive marketing of a rubbish product. The fact we now have almost 2500 independent brewers in the UK is thanks, in part at least, to CAMRA.

What has this to do with cars? The EV is being hailed as ‘progress’ and I totally agree that we need to reduce drastically our consumption of fossil fuels. But progress needs to cover a lot of bases, so it was with some dismay that I read the **evo** review of the latest EV offering from Kia. A 2.2-ton car so wide that car parks have to be treated with great care and trepidation to avoid marking its 22-inch rims or the extremities of its gargantuan bodywork. A car that is doubtless fizzy with a gazillion electric bhp, but devoid of the depth, character and charm that motoring enthusiasts crave.

Of course, it’s not just Kia. Every manufacturer has jumped on the EV bandwagon, some say purely to comply with environmental legislation, but, again, the marketing departments must love it. It makes their lives so easy. A couple of YouTube videos of the latest electrobarge toasting an Aventador off the line and there is your campaign on a plate, created for free, by someone else. Brilliant! Let’s go to the pub, guys!

To a car enthusiast this is about as

acceptable as keg beer is to a real-ale drinker. I have driven fast electric cars and the initial rush of acceleration is very impressive but, like keg beer, one dimensional and ultimately unsatisfying.

So, car manufacturers, why not turn your enormous engineering expertise into creating (at least some) affordable and available cars with **evo**ness again? Stop being dictated to by lazy marketing departments who just want to stick meaningless bhp/kW and 0-62 numbers on a page, virtue-signal the green credentials of electricity and call it a campaign. And **evo** journalists, stop falling for this nonsense. If anyone can influence the market, it’s you. Step up to the plate.

Campaign for Real Cars anyone?

David Acton

Have we fallen for the ‘nonsense’ or are we sampling the fizzy contents of the EV keg so you don’t have to? – SG

uCoty

Just read eCoty and loved it – the stuff dreams are made of. But only dreams. For those of us with average incomes, mortgages and kids, none of 2022’s contenders (with the exception of a ten-year-old, high-mileage GR86 with ‘some’ service history) will ever be parked on the driveway.

So can I suggest uCoty: Used Car of the Year? Pick a year, probably one somewhere between the early ‘80s to mid-‘00s, and select eight cars made that year that are now available below £15k. Then tell us which is best so we can do more than just dream.

Admittedly, I could buy a classic car mag instead of **evo**, but I want to know what these cars are like to drive on the limit on great roads, not how to rebuild their engines.

Matt Jem, Devon

Watches

Three new racing-themed chronographs



**Casio Edifice
ECB2000MFG**

\$399 casio.com

A collaboration with *Initial D* creator Shuichi Shigeno, this new Casio bears the logo of his latest street-racing manga series, *MF Ghost*. Its red and black colour scheme references the Toyota GT86 that's the four-wheeled star of the series, while the dial and underside of the strap are marked with the Japanese characters used to represent the sound of screeching tyres in the comic.



**Cuervo y Sobrinos
Gran Premio De Cuba**

£3370 cuervoysobrinos.com

Although short-lived and soon controversial, between 1957 and 1960 there were three Grands Prix held in Havana. This new chronograph from Cuervo y Sobrinos celebrates the inaugural running of the race on the streets of Havana, close to where the brand was founded in the late 1800s. Just 162 examples will be made, to match the race distance in miles of the 1957 event.



**TAG Heuer
Monza Flyback
Chronometer**

£11,450 tagheuer.com

The Monza is back – and it's had an extensive makeover. Its case (last seen in black stainless steel) is now carbonfibre, while the colourful new dial is skeletonised. Visible through it is an updated movement incorporating a 'flyback' function, allowing the timer to be reset and restarted with a single push of a button – ideal for accurate lap timing.



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22.05.2023 (Mon)	Zandvoort
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06.06.2023 (Tue)	Spa-Francorchamps
04.07.2023 (Tue)	Spa-Francorchamps
27.07.2023 (Thu)	Nurburgring Nordschleife
10.08.2023 (Thu)	Spa-Francorchamps
11.09.2023 (Mon)	Spa-Francorchamps
12.09.2023 (Tue)	Spa-Francorchamps
02.10.2023 (Mon)	Dijon Prenois
03.10.2023 (Tue)	Dijon Prenois
04.10.2023 (Wed)	Magny-Cours
09.10.2023 (Mon)	Spa-Francorchamps
10.10.2023 (Tue)	Spa-Francorchamps
11.11.2023 (Sat)	Spa-Francorchamps

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RICHARD MEADEN

Meaden recalls some of the hair-raising road trips from early **evo**

EVO'S IMMINENT 25TH ANNIVERSARY HAS GOT me reminiscing about the magazine's formative years. Between 1998 and 2001 we spent much of our time heading south through Europe, aiming for the Côte d'Azur, or crossing the Alps and dropping down through the lakes and into Italy for various launches, factory visits and drive stories. These were happy, innocent days, free from the pressures of feeding a website and social media. Better still, traffic policing was far more analogue than digital, which fostered the unshakeable belief that, once on foreign soil, speed limits were very much open to interpretation.

Issue 001 saw us start as we meant to go on – myself, Stuart Gallagher (then a fresh-faced staff writer) and photographer Gus Gregory embarking on a mission to take our recently purchased Ur-Quattro 20V to Umbria for the launch of the Mk1 Audi TT. Looking back, it was quite a flex for an unpublished magazine, rocking up at one of Audi's most important product launches in a classic Quattro we'd bought just a week previously.

Once the comparison had been completed, Stu flew home, leaving Gus and me to drive back in the warbling warhorse. Stu mistakenly took Gus's passport along with his own, but we only discovered this midway through Italy. Gus didn't take it well. Worse, our homeward trip was on the last Friday in July, when all of Italy knocked-off for its summer holidays. It took us ten hours just to reach Mont Blanc.

We emerged from the tunnel like a bullet, smashing the length of France in suitably spirited fashion. Progress was briefly interrupted somewhere north of Dijon when an electrical fire broke out in the Quattro's glovebox, but having extinguished it at the side of the autoroute we ploughed on. I finally fell into bed 24 hours after leaving Umbria.

Two other Italian jobs stand out. The silliest was when Gus, myself and John 'Gnasher' Hayman all squeezed into a Jaguar XKR coupe and drove to the Maserati factory, where a 3200GT awaited us. Just days from deadline, this was a true smash-and-grab cover story, the three of us plus all of Gus's camera kit and, as I recall, an aluminium stepladder shoehorned into the Jag for a non-stop blast to Modena. We arrived at the Viale Ciro Menotti plant at an ungodly hour on Saturday morning and, after grabbing some low-quality shuteye, shuffled zombie-like to the

security office to collect the Maser's keys, immediately heading into the hills for a full day of driving and photography before returning the Maser that evening and heading straight back home.

Not wishing to hog the driving, I selflessly volunteered to crawl into the back of the XKR, leaving Gus and Gnasher to battle torrential rain as we aquaplaned towards Calais. Some hours later I was rudely awoken as if from some feverish cheese dream. It was the dead of night and Gus was by the car, roaring like a wounded bear, kicking the crap out of a fuel pump that had just swallowed his bank card. Meanwhile, a clearly relieved Gnasher was simultaneously drawing heavily on a cigarette and peeing exuberantly into the shrubbery fringing the deserted Swiss service station. It was then that I spotted a bemused and understandably sheepish cashier huddled in his small glass-fronted booth, hoping not to be noticed.

The second was when photographer Andy Morgan and I took a Chrysler Viper GTS from the UK to Modena to meet up with the rest of the **evo** gang for the now-legendary issue 022 cover story, 'The Test'. Andy hadn't got much experience of unwieldy left-hand-drive kit, so I handled the drive to Folkestone. It also made sense for me to do the first stint in France. Come our fuel stop I was still feeling okay, so I committed to a third stint. By the time we reached Switzerland it was the early hours of

the morning and had been pissing with rain for the last hundred miles. I was shot but Andy was understandably reluctant to make his Viper debut in a deluge, so after brimming the tank and slugging back some gruesome truckstop coffee, I resumed driving.

I was still driving when the sun came up and we crossed the border into Italy at somewhere approaching the Viper's V-max. Hours later, having got hopelessly lost almost within sight of the hotel, we arrived looking like we'd been subjected to a Special Forces hazing. By contrast, having flown out the day before, the rest of the gang had finished a leisurely breakfast and were raring to collect the Zonda C12, Diablo 6.0 and a pair of Ferraris. Next day, while arranging the cars for the cover static, a bleary-eyed Andy reversed the 996 Turbo into a ditch. With its nose pointing skywards we all piled on the stricken Porsche like feral rally fans, mercilessly cheering the chronically fatigued Morgan's misfortune while see-sawing the 911 free. The car was fine but I'm not sure Andy ever fully recovered. Luckily for him, we rarely mention it.

'Progress was interrupted when an electrical fire broke out in the Quattro's glovebox'

@DickieMeaden

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

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RICHARD PORTER

The hire car lottery landed Porter with America's best-selling saloon

IT WAS A COLD AND WET DECEMBER DAY when I touched the ground at Phoenix, AZ, a Hertz booking ahead of me. There's little as casually exciting to the car-minded person as the hire car lottery and the knowledge that, for some freewheeling rental companies, 'Ford Focus or similar' could lead inexplicably to a De Tomaso Pantera. In this case what I'd paid for was 'Toyota Camry or similar' so you can imagine my disappointment when I got an actual Toyota Camry.

If you're in the UK you might remember the Camry as the kind of understated machine driven only by Toyota dealer principals and local Rotarians and which was relaunched in 2019 after a 14-year absence only to disappear under the crashing waves of overwhelming disinterest. In the US it's rather different because the Camry is one of the bedrocks of the national fleet. So while America's best-selling vehicle by a mile is the Ford F-series, and Toyota's own RAV4 has now become American's favourite non-pick-up, among sedans the Camry reigns supreme. Last year alone they sold almost 300,000 in the US, a sales total barely bettered by the UK's entire '22 top ten put together. So, after the initial rental desk disappointment, I became curious: what do millions of Americans see in the Camry?

Well, to start with it's not a bad-looking car. Previous-generation Camrys melted like cheap margarine into the motoring landscape and, while ubiquity means the current one is unnoticeable on the average American street, it does feel like some effort has gone into the styling, from the beaky nose to the fake rear diffuser. The A-pillar diverges at the top in a cack-handed way most cars manage to avoid and the funny pressed line on the D-pillar only makes sense on upscale models with a contrast roof but, overall, it's not ugly at all. The interior works well too, what with its clear dials and E-Z-2-use buttons. I would describe it as un-annoying, and mean that as a compliment.

Your modern rental-spec Camry comes with the 2.5-litre four that makes some horsepower and sounds wretched above 3500rpm. Fortunately, it's library quiet at lower revs and the eight-speed auto is determined to keep it there while changing gear so cleanly you begin to wonder if it has gears at all. There's also a Sport button, the pressing of which causes a significant

change in whether or not the letter S displays within the instruments. The paddles behind the wheel deliver an equally low-key effect, to the extent that, while steadily driving in a straight line, I decided to see how many gears I could change before feeling any difference. It was about five. It's therefore best if you let the car take care of itself.

You might wonder how the Camry handles, and here I can say with confidence: I don't know. There are no twisting ribbons of B-road within the grid pattern streets of greater Phoenix but I can tell you that when it comes to turning off one long, straight road into another long, straight road it's deeply fine.

In other words, the Camry is brilliant. I'm not joking. It has a job to do, and that job is to be the transit system for millions of

Americans, all of whom rely on the car as the only way to get around. You drive to work, to the supermarket, to the movies, to your kids' soccer practice, to the bowling alley, to the golf-a-rama, to the store again because you forgot to buy mustard. You're in your car a lot. And in these circumstances a 911 GT3 or Civic Type R might become irritating. You need a car, but less so. Conversely, a 1989 Lada Samara wouldn't be enough. You need something that's excellent at being unobtrusive without being crap, and can arrive on your drive, box fresh, for \$380 a month. That's the Camry. It doesn't ride with

the buttery suppleness of a Phantom but it's plenty comfortable enough for the job in hand, neither good nor bad. And that's a hard trick to pull off across pretty much the whole damn car. It would be easy to sneer at its like-driving-but-less-so ethic, but for plenty of punters in the US that's what's needed.

Here at **evo** we worry about the turn-in and tip-in. The columnists either side of me sometimes can't sleep for worrying about tread shuffle. But for many people that's not a problem. And in that context you can see why the Camry is popular. It does the job so well, and yet asks so little, it frees your mind from having to worry about it. Goes, stops, great a/c, unlikely to break down. Which means you can carry on with your life. Think about your kids' education, think about your health, think about your job, think about the economy, the ballgame, the future. But don't think about your car. Because your car is a Camry. This is the world it serves. And it's damn good at it.

'You might wonder how the Camry handles, and here I can say with confidence: I don't know'

@sniffpetrol

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



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JETHRO BOVINGDON

Form a more intimate relationship with a car? Er, no thanks, says Jethro

A

CAR, ACCORDING TO THE OXFORD ENGLISH Dictionary, is 'a road vehicle powered by a motor (usually an internal combustion engine), designed to carry a driver and a small number of passengers'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the mobile phone has a different definition. 'A phone that does not have wires and works by radio, that you can carry with you and use anywhere.' Maybe they haven't been to Wales. Anyway, there's also a distinction for a smartphone. 'A mobile phone that also has some of the functions of a computer, for example the facility to use apps and the internet.'

As you can see, the car and the mobile or smartphone are not the same things. So why do car manufacturers want – so badly – to design phones? Touchscreens, augmented reality, apps, connectivity... the list goes on. The latest concept to signpost this weird obsession is the BMW i Vision Dee. That's DEE derived from Digital Emotional Experience. It was launched at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas recently and showcased not just the Neue Klasse platform – upon which a whole host of ICE, hybrid and EV models will be created from 2025 – but also a clear design direction for BMW's near future. Inside and out.

The buzz around BMW's new emosh-mobile was very, very buzzy. 'Paint that changes colour! Woaaaaohooo. 'Full-width head-up display with augmented reality!' OMG, sign me up! Not much substance, though. Instead we got all sorts of strange, slightly creepy language that doesn't seem to mean much at all. For example, and this is a quote from BMW's own website: 'She's a digital companion that interacts emotionally with you and accompanies you on a journey between physical and virtual reality.' Hmmm, okay. Sounds a bit sex doll-y but perhaps I'm missing the point. Maybe if I read down a bit...

'Through dialogue a natural and emotional relationship between human and vehicle is developed.' Oh dear Lord. What is happening here? Maybe BMW engineers are just very lonely people? I'll spare you the rest but suffice to say, 'Her headlights and closed BMW kidney grille form a uniform physical-digital (phygital) surface on which she visually expresses her emotions through animated facial expressions.' PHYGITAL. Oh fugital off, guys. The car – for it is a car, I believe – can also display

your own personal avatar on the side windows to the rest of the world as you're driving along. In order that people know the fantasy appearance you've created in order to have fantasy intimacy with your car.

Anyway, once I stopped being sick in my mouth I realised that the great innovation appears to be augmented reality. Swipe right on BMW's 'Mixed Reality Slider' and you'll get more and more info projected on the windscreen. That big piece of glass you traditionally look through in order to see the road, pedestrians, other vehicles and buildings. The highest setting allows you to enter a 'fully virtual world'. It's immersive. It's intuitive. It's digital. But with intimacy. You follow the flights of birds to find your way, for example. There's probably more but the clunky VR microsite (Joytopia – I promise I'm not making this stuff up) was too painful to navigate.

The over-riding idea seems to be that as we use our phones as portals to new experiences, to see faraway and wonderful places or just to doomscroll and feel bad about our mundane lives whilst everyone else seems to be partying in Miami or configuring another GT3 Touring, then we must want our cars to give us the same experience. Of course, there are fundamental flaws here. We mostly have an 'immersive' experience with our phone when we're sitting on the sofa and can't find much to watch on TV. When we're bored in a queue at the supermarket. That sort of thing. Not when we're in control of a two-ton vehicle around other cars, people and ever-changing dynamic situations.

The smartphone is a means of absent-minded virtual escape, whereas the car is real and requires attention and concentration. It's also a means of real, genuinely joyful escape. Seriously, who wants augmented reality beamed onto a windscreen?

There's a bigger problem, too. Car manufacturers have so far proven hopeless at creating tech that effortlessly enhances your life. Except the car itself. Think about it. When was the last time your phone required you to get lost in menus to turn off a feature that's invasive and pointless? And then, inexplicably, forced you to do the same thing every single time you picked it up? It doesn't happen. Phone companies are brilliant at making phones. Car makers are not. Stick to what your good at. And to BMW, a plea. Stop asking us to have sex with your cars. It's inappropriate.

'The i Vision Dee can display your own personal avatar on the side windows as you drive along'

@JethroBovingdon

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

by JOHN BARKER PHOTO

CIVIC RE



The all-new FL5-gen Civic Type R is here, and expectations are sky-high. Waiting for

GRAPHY *by* DEAN SMITH

CCEPTION



it are the rapid and capable Golf R and Audi RS3 and the brilliant Hyundai i30 N

IT'S DAY ONE, WE'VE BARELY driven the cars, and yet there's a growing feeling of inevitability about this test. We've set up our weighing equipment in one of the PalmerSport garages at the Bedford Autodrome, just next door to the **evo** office, and editorial assistant Sam Jenkins is running the test cars back and forth. When he arrives with the new Civic Type R he says: 'Wow... that feels like a hot hatch made by Porsche!'

Colour me unsurprised. The feel of the major controls in the previous FK8 model was superb and in our first drive of the new FL5 in the last issue, Dickie Meaden concluded that Honda's obsession with the incremental improvement of everything driver-centric had delivered again. He liked the looks, too. I was able to forgive the FK8's styling because of the way it drove, but for Dickie and a chunk of potential customers it was a deal-breaker.

This new model appears wider and lower but crucially less overblown visually, its 'floating' rear spoiler more subtle and the detailing less riotous and gratuitous. It's also better in the metal than pictures, sitting very nicely on its wide tracks, fat wheels and tyres filling its bespoke, BMW M2-like bulging arches. The results of the weigh-in are a surprise. Not that the Audi RS3 saloon is the heaviest of the group at 1597kg with the Volkswagen Golf R '20 Years' edition next on 1529kg, but that the Honda, despite its size, is lighter than the Hyundai, the i30 N 1465kg and the Type R 1437kg. The last FK8 we weighed was 1409kg.

The new Civic is considerably more expensive at £46,995 – the FK8 was around £33k – and only a little more powerful at 324bhp but it's well equipped and the only options are paint colours. The celebratory Golf costs £48,250 but comes with most of the kit you'd want to add to the basic R, though not adaptive damping (£850), while tweaks lift the power to 328bhp. We'd have preferred an RS3 Sportback but the saloon is mechanically identical with its 394bhp in-line five and four-wheel drive, there's only 5kg difference between them, and at £56,230 the four-door is only marginally more expensive. Bargain of the bunch is the i30 N at £34,595. There were minor cosmetic and HMI upgrades a couple of years ago but the well-judged package with its 276bhp engine continues largely unchanged. If it ain't broke...

We're heading north for the Pennines and Hadrian's Wall, some four hours away. Most of it will be on the A1 but there's a little bit of interest at either end, so I take the Civic. Settle into the high-backed, deeply bolstered driver's seat, take a look around and it's clear that the quality of this model is a cut above the FK8. As it should be. It's a chunky price increase but before I've done a mile or breached 40mph, my





objection to the price is already evaporating. There's such a tangible feeling of quality, of engineering polish about the new Type R that in this respect it's on another level compared with even the sublime FK8. The steering's weight, rate and response convey confidence and control, and there's lovely feedback through the slim, Alcantara-covered rim, while with the alloy gearlever sitting comfortably in your palm, the slick, short-throw gearshift feels instinctive.

The new Type R quickly makes you feel like you're a relaxed, accomplished driver; precision comes easily, in an unhurried fashion. We've banged on about the brake feel of Civics before and the new car's is even better, with response from the top of the pedal and a weight and progression that helps make your first heel-and-toe downshift as sweet as you could wish. That proud moment is undermined a little by the realisation

that there's a very good, automatic rev-match system but, in reality, the brake feel and the pedal spacing are so good it takes little practice to be as good as the software.

Right now it's dry, bright and bitingly cold and the roads are white with salt. Carry speed into a large, empty roundabout, turn in keenly, lean on the front and get on the power and the front end pushes back. There's minimal body roll and the encouraging sense that the front is absolutely pinned, and not at the expense of the rear. The Civic feels all of a piece, hooking up securely when the hammer goes down and jinking through the roundabout with minimal fuss. Wow. I haven't driven the others and already the test feels won. Thanks for coming, etc.

Twenty minutes later, it's game on again. I've been looking forward to a particular bit of B-road I know well and which



regular readers would recognise from photoshoots, relishing creaming the Civic through its sequence of well-sighted bends. So I'm quite unprepared for the uncomfortable lurching over undulating tarmac before we even get there. Dynamically, the Civic is unravelling beneath me, its suspension unyielding, its rear kicked up. I've driven countless cars over this road and it's one of the strongest reactions I've experienced. Thing is, we're heading for roads that are similarly challenging.

Had we stuck to A-roads, the Honda would have continued to build its lead as we headed north. In Type R fashion, its cockpit features bright red seats, belts and carpets but it's a step up from previous models in design and quality. The stylish, honeycomb metal grille that spans the fascia cleverly disguises the air vents, though it does draw your attention to the increased width. Simple, clear dials in a configurable dash

are complemented by user-friendly HMI, including a central screen with a volume knob and two major buttons that give haptic feedback, so you can find them without looking and know when you've pressed them. Good stuff.

DAY TWO DAWNS DARK AND WET. I DECIDE TO STICK with the Honda for the 'commute' to the first location to get a feel for it in less than ideal conditions. I'm tucked up behind the Hyundai as we clear Hexham and begin to hack across country, and the Civic is coping well in Comfort mode. Feels potent, too. The engine is turbocharged but has the characteristics of a naturally aspirated engine. Low down, boost and torque build quickly but not explosively, but keep the throttle open and the delivery builds to a thrilling climax, a series of shift lights and a beeper adding to the excitement.



**'KEEP THE TYPE R'S
THROTTLE OPEN AND THE
DELIVERY BUILDS TO A
THRILLING CLIMAX'**




Traction is pretty good, too, a little over-speeding permitted to give a sense of the grip available, so why can't I get anywhere near the Hyundai? Ahead, its bright red brake lights pierce the gloom, the air crackles with overrun pops like small arms fire, and it snicks into another tight, wet turn. In search of greater composure, on the next straight I find and press the R button. It's a mistake: the dampers firm up and the Civic starts to jolt against the lumpy, glistening asphalt. I back off and toggle back to Comfort.

Digital news editor Jordan Katsianis looks happy and relaxed when he hops out of the i30 N, and when I hop out of it 20 minutes later, I look the same. The Honda and Hyundai share some similarities, the first being that they both have low-slung driving positions, the second that they both sound quite 'open' – tyre noise and gravel ping suggest less sound deadening – but the main thing they both have is steering that brims with feel and feedback.

Initially I thought the Hyundai was a bit noisy and a bit bumpy but it starts in Sport, which opens up the tailpipes and tightens up the dampers. Select Normal and you have

a very easy-going fast hatch. A fast hatch that doesn't have the highest quality interior, sure, but it costs £35k, not getting on for £50k. It's not short of features though; its drive modes include 'Custom' that brings up a spider's web graphic that allows you to set a number of parameters including damping, eLSD and exhaust note. But here's the thing: this is all tinkering around the edges because this is an intrinsically well-sorted fast hatch with a baked-in level of connection and engagement that makes any drive entertaining and rewarding. It starts with the steering, which has feel and directness, and extends to the chassis, which is responsive and transparent in its performance. You know where you are with this car at all times.

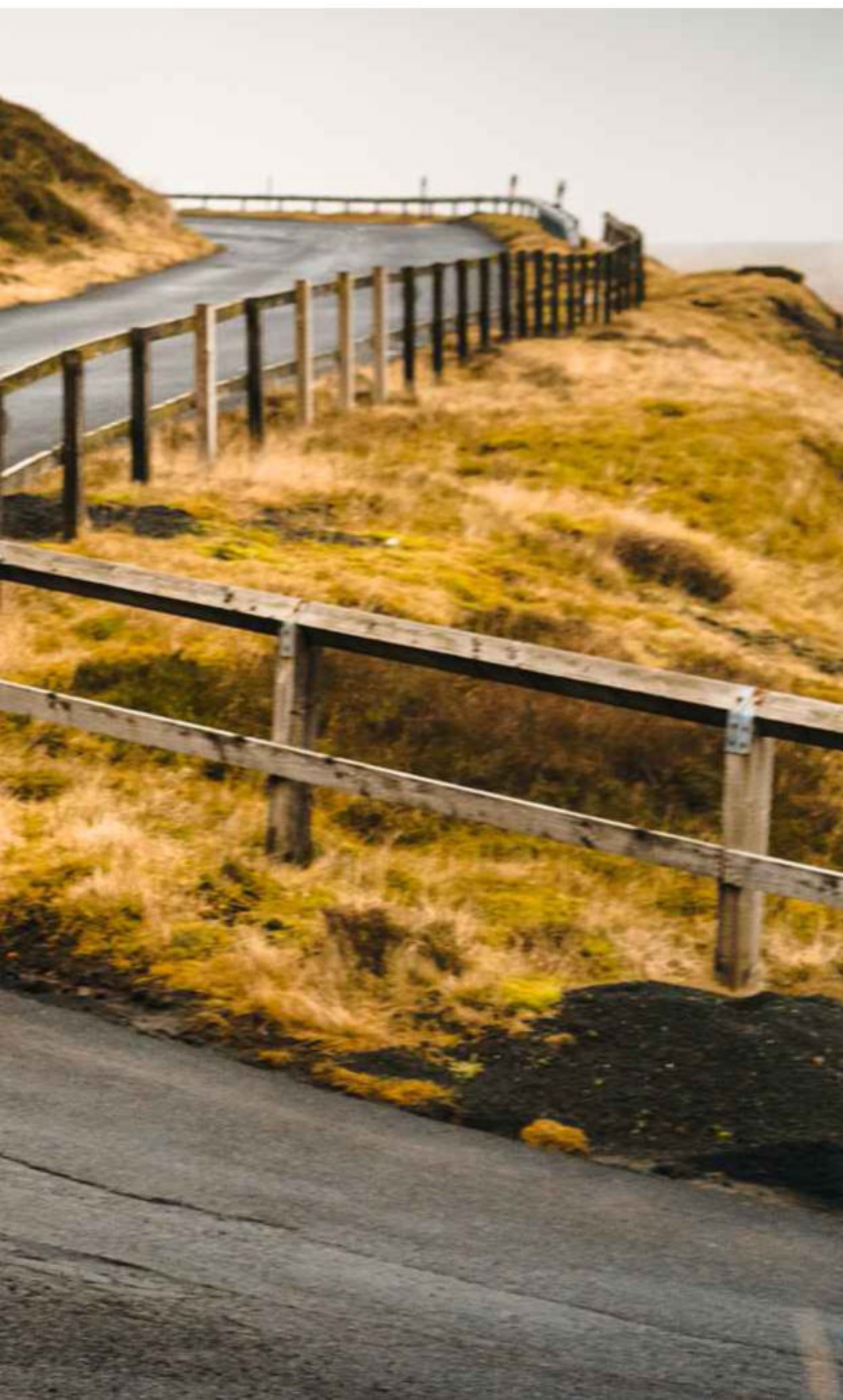
It's properly punchy and fast, too, despite having 'only' 276bhp, and the manual gearshift is snappy and great to use, with rev-matching to make up for sub-optimal pedal spacing. All of this shouldn't come as a surprise; after a series of group tests to find the best hot hatch of 2021, we crowned the i30 N the champion. Even up against the new Civic, it shines bright as a brilliant hot hatch.

A dynamic photograph of an Audi RS3 driving through a large puddle on a road. The car is dark blue or black, splashing water high into the air. In the foreground, the side of a white car is visible, partially cut off by the frame. The background shows a hilly landscape under a dramatic, cloudy sky at dusk or dawn. The text is positioned in the upper right corner.

**‘THE RS3’S WARBLE
CONJURES IMAGES
OF UR-QUATTROS
BLATting THROUGH
FOREST STAGES’**

**‘THE HONDA AND
HYUNDAI BOTH
HAVE STEERING
THAT BRIMS
WITH FEEL AND
FEEDBACK’**





Regular **evo** contributor Peter Tomalin has just climbed out of the most powerful car here, the 2.5-litre, near-400bhp Audi. ‘Switched straight from the Golf to the RS3 and immediately felt like I was stepping up a division,’ he says. ‘The damping’s so much meatier, it’s properly quick, more incisive on turn-in, and it’s got immense traction that really drives you through the corners and fires you onto the next straight. I love the feeling of the rear coming into play too.’ I think we can say he’s a fan.

Jordan has just got out of said Golf and says it’s better than the last R he drove, which is good to hear. We came up here with the original Mk8 and it was bamboozled by the roads and annihilated by the FK8 Civic (**evo** 288). In the same shade of blue, the 20 Years edition looks almost identical, differentiated only by ‘20’ logos on the B and C-pillars, though if you choose white you get blue wheels. It’s soon apparent that there has been some worthwhile fettling of the drivetrain, though first you’ve got to make your peace with the dreadful HMI. Within a mile on a twisty road you’ll unintentionally turn on the heated steering wheel and probably change drive mode as your hands roll over the haptic switches on said steering wheel.

After the Civic or i30, the Golf’s steering initially feels numb and there’s not enough damping, so the front wheels feel a bit loose, distracted as they unload over bumps and crests, while sharp bumps punch through. It doesn’t help that the Golf feels taller and so sits you higher. Press the blue R button (intentionally) and the car is transformed, with firmer, more consistent damping and more front-end positivity thanks to an uplift in steering weight. Yet despite having on-demand four-wheel drive and a drift mode, the Golf feels more front-driven, more nose-centric, than the Honda or Hyundai.

All of these cars have a drive mode that lets you mix-n-match characteristics such as damper firmness, steering weight and exhaust noise, but experimentation reveals that on these often gnarly roads, the optimum settings for the Golf are provided by Sport. It’s the Goldilocks setting. Almost. Just go for the Race engine setting for response and a bit more noise (not the fake warble that was piped through the speakers in the previous Golf R) and it feels punchy, the DSG shifts much snappier than before.

Peter has bagged the Hyundai for the drive back to base and I’m going to tail him in the RS3. Audi has made some fine looking wheels for its RS models but these fancy 19s make the little saloon look like a GLX rather than an RS. Fire it up, though, and the five-cylinder warble instantly conjures images of Ur-Quattros blatting through forest stages. Yet engine aside, the RS3 feels so tame, so vanilla in key-on mode, the only aggression coming from the ludicrously intrusive lane keeping assist. For the feeling that you’re getting what you’ve paid for, you need to invoke RS mode.

In an instant the engine has its voice and response, the chassis feels planted and you can get on with the business of driving. As much as an illustration of how stiff the Honda is, the firmest damping in the RS3 is about the same as Comfort mode in the Civic. It does feel well controlled so you can exploit the performance, yet there’s





**‘OUR RENDEZVOUS
POINT IS ON AN
UNUSUALLY SMOOTH,
FLOWING BIT OF
PENNINE B-ROAD’**



a layer of refinement that keeps you from feeling fully a part of the action. The steering is accurate and with the dampers toughened up you can guide it precisely, but there's still not much to tell you what grip there is. The road is twisting and challenging and I'm jealous of Peter in the Hyundai.

The Audi is properly quick and sounds glorious but the DSG shifts are a bit stodgy. Traction is phenomenal so you find yourself getting on the throttle earlier and earlier, and while the Honda overspeeds its wheels when its engine hits big, the Audi seems to have already shared some of the torque with the rear axle. As with the Golf, you can select an oversteer mode, RS Torque Rear. In the Golf it all feels a bit fraught, in the RS3 more an extension of its dynamics, though on this car we couldn't always access the mode for some reason.

The i30 N doesn't need a special mode to feel agile and engaging. It looks sorted from where I'm sitting and Peter has found it very much to his taste. 'Coming to this after the two Germans, it feels like it's fairly fizzing with energy. Its chassis has a loose-limbed feel, its steering is alive with sensations and you've got a really sweet-shifting manual gearbox to play with. Add a rorty engine with plenty of vim and a saucy soundtrack and it's just an absolute hoot. Yes, the interior feels a bit low-rent in this company, and it can get a little ragged in extremis, but I love it.'

NEXT MORNING I MAKE SURE I HAVE THE HYUNDAI key. It's a straightforward, no-nonsense hot hatch, executed brilliantly. You know where you are with it at all times. Well, almost all times. Our rendezvous point is on an unusually smooth, flowing bit of Pennine B-road and I'm revelling in the i30's enthusiasm to drop into cambered turns and scrub off speed to make the apex. Then into one I'm a tad ambitious and the tail edges out. Opposite lock goes on and off before I've even thought about it. I can't say I didn't know where the limit was...

Naturally, I want to try the Honda here too. The Hyundai has great feel but the remarkable quality of the Honda's steering – the quality of all its controls in fact – is apparent within yards. And it's faster, its acceleration more aggressive, its grip stronger, its roll control tighter. You spy a very late apex and take aim, the car drops into the shallow dip all-of-a-piece, barely smudges wide as the lateral and compression loads hit and you clip that apex. It's astonishing. The balance, the composure, the lack of roll, the lack of drama. I strikes me that it feels more like a Super Tourer than a hot hatch.

After two such engaging cars, the lack of connection in the Golf is glaring. What's going on at the front wheels remains a mystery, so while you guide the Civic and i30 with an easy precision, ticking off every apex, progress in the Golf is disappointingly less precise. It's a fast car, building torque very quickly so that by 2000rpm there's grip-bothering grunt, and the urge is delivered in a very linear manner. The DSG is very good too, but it robs the driver of another interaction. In this test it's a

Left, from the top: everything about the Type R feels honed and polished to a fine sheen, including its delightfully tactile gearshift; Audi's 2.5-litre five sounds ace, but car needs RS mode to really come alive; Hyundai's sweet gearshift brings another layer of interaction, while Golf R is improved but still fails to truly engage the driver

distant fourth. ‘If you drove it in isolation you’d think it was perfectly OK – apart from the awful HMI, obviously,’ says Peter. ‘It’s well built, comfortable and quick. It’s just when you jump into any of the others that you realise what’s missing, and that’s true excitement and engagement.’

Third is the RS3. It’s a cut above the Golf; lower slung, with greater poise, more agility and fantastic traction – very Quattro. And in sound too, of course, with that charismatic, five-cylinder brogue. ‘The slightly stodgy steering robs it of a little edge, as do the surprisingly ponderous gearchanges,’ says Peter, ‘but there’s still lots to enjoy and it’s rabidly quick point to point.’ That’s true, but it’s not enough when you come up against two of the best hot hatches ever made.

It’s almost five years since Hyundai launched the i30 N and it’s still a great drive, illustrating how well its engineers understood the brief, and how well they delivered on it. ‘The i30 N is the moral victor,’ says Peter. ‘I reckon you’d have more fun more of the time in this than

any of the others; it’s intimate, transparent and thoroughly engaging.’ It is a remarkable car, a hot hatch in the classic sense, a car that’s fun when you’re dawdling and brilliant when you’re pushing on. ‘Every time, I got out of it with a grin on my face,’ says Jordan. It makes everything else here look too expensive.

OK, not quite everything. The Civic Type R oozes star quality and feels special the moment you drop into the seat and then gets even better once the wheels are rolling. Sure, it looks expensive compared with the FK8 but the feel of its steering, brakes, gearshift and even its throttle are exquisite and of a quality rarely found at any price. And it’s thrillingly fast, ridiculously grippy and unshakeably composed... on the right road. Its undoing is difficult, undulating asphalt: it’s simply too stiff for some of our roads. Both Peter and Jordan felt it was like the Cayman GT4 RS on eCoty, just not as extreme. And yet all three of us would take it over the Hyundai, because it feels so very special and, on the right roads, extraordinarily good. ✕

Audi RS3

Engine In-line 5-cyl, 2480cc, turbocharged **Power** 394bhp @ 5600rpm **Torque** 369lb ft @ 2250-5600rpm **Weight** 1570kg (1597kg as tested) **Power-to-weight** 255bhp/ton **0-62mph** 3.8sec **Top speed** 155mph **Basic price** £56,230 (saloon)

evo rating ★★★★★☆

Honda Civic Type R

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1996cc, turbocharged **Power** 324bhp @ 6500rpm **Torque** 310lb ft @ 2500-4000rpm **Weight** 1429kg (1437kg as tested) **Power-to-weight** 230bhp/ton **0-62mph** 5.4sec **Top speed** 171mph **Basic price** £46,995

evo rating ★★★★★★

Hyundai i30 N

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbocharged **Power** 276bhp @ 5500-6000rpm **Torque** 289lb ft @ 2100-4700rpm **Weight** 1419kg (1465kg as tested) **Power-to-weight** 198bhp/ton **0-62mph** 5.9sec **Top speed** 155mph **Basic price** £34,595

evo rating ★★★★★★

Volkswagen Golf R

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbocharged **Power** 328bhp @ 5200rpm **Torque** 310lb ft @ 2100-5500rpm **Weight** 1555kg (1529kg as tested) **Power-to-weight** 214bhp/ton **0-62mph** 4.6sec **Top speed** 168mph **Basic price** £48,250 ('20 Years')

evo rating ★★★★★☆





PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

RESTO MAD!



*Re-engineering a 996 Carrera
with a 991 engine and a chassis
to match made no financial sense
whatsoever, and Jethro Bovingdon
couldn't be happier*

IT STARTED WITH A LITTLE MISFIRE. My Porsche 996 was in daily service at the time and it idled beautifully, delivered strong mid-range torque, didn't burn a drop of oil and sounded great. But at about 6500rpm it would stutter and go flat, then labour to the red line. I changed coil packs, lambda sensors and all the easy, little stuff. The misfire lessened slightly but it was still there. It was annoying but not disastrous. So I soldiered on for a few busy weeks and several hundred miles, a sense of dread hanging over me but optimism, too. How could it pull like a train in the mid-range if there was something seriously wrong?

Of course, there was something seriously wrong. Something that would require a strip-down to fully diagnose. At which point you're into a rebuild and the slippery slope to financial ruin. But then options open up, and so many of them for 996 owners thanks to the entire industry that's grown up around repairing some of the maladies of the M96 engine. The most prolific engineering company repairing, enlarging and improving these engines is Hartech, based in Bolton, Greater Manchester. A 3.7-litre upgrade with Nikasil cylinder liners seemed a good plan. Then I decided the impossibly rare 3.4-litre M96 with the optional X51 Powerkit would suit my needs more. Less torque but more revs. Porsche Classic could help... but the price was eye-watering.

This was all happening back in 2018. That must be, what, eight prime ministers ago? Nobody had even heard of Covid. However, some things never change. So, as plans were formulated and then crumbled away one after the other, I called Iain Litchfield. I trust Iain; I know he's as honest as they come. I also love his high standards and passion for engineering. So I sent my Porsche to Litchfield and embraced financial ruin with a much bolder new plan. Fit a 3.8-litre direct-injection flat-six from the 991.1 Carrera S into my often abused but always cherished 996 Carrera. The car arrived at its new temporary home in May 2020.

And now it's back. Just like that. I collected it on 3 November 2022 and in so many ways it's a completely different car. There are some really cool upgrades quite apart from the new engine. For example, it has rose-jointed RSS Tarmac Series suspension arms, new KW Clubsport coilovers, Eibach hollow anti-roll bars, refurbished brake calipers with new discs and Pagid RS pads,

and it's been resprayed at Litchfield and then protected with the latest Gyeon PPF by Ti22 Vehicle Services. The OZ Racing wheels are now finished in 'Weissgold'. It's never looked better or had so much good hardware underneath it.

There are new seats, too. Made to order by Corbeau, they have the high-winged GT3 look I wanted and the reassurance of being built by a proper company instead of being unknown eBay 'fakes'. I've even had the seat cushions trimmed by the good people at Workshop 5001 in Los Angeles. Their first car, 'No1', was a gorgeous Nardo Grey '73 911 with a 3.4-litre engine, steel wheels and a deep-seated star quality. I drove it back in 2017 and fell for it in a big way. Its custom tartan trim looked fantastic, too. Now I have a little bit of Workshop 5001 in my own 911 'hot-rod'.

Dropping into the driver's seat, so much is familiar. You sit really low, backside skimming the road surface. However, unlike in the 991 or 992 GT cars, which share that sensation, the 996 doesn't sprawl out around you. It feels compact in every dimension. I love the slim feel of the gearshifter, too. Even if it seems to be mounted a little too low and the throw itself is quite long. The steering wheel needs a wider range of adjustment, so you have to choose between having your legs bunched up or the wheel a half-stretch away. It's a good reminder that I need to order the dished Momo Mod 07 steering wheel as used in the 996 Cup cars. So much has gone into the mechanical transformation of this car that the interior is very clearly a weak spot. The black leather is worn – shiny in parts and scuffed in others. It used to really bother me but doesn't seem quite so important now.

So, the Carrera – can I call it the 996.3, or maybe the Litchfield Type 38? – still feels like my car. But the changes come thick and fast from hereon in. Turn the key and the new direct-injection 3.8-litre flat-six bursts into life. The noise is tighter, more highly strung and less breathy than the sometimes slightly flatulent-sounding M96 engine. It helps that this car has a simply gorgeous exhaust created by a genius in this field, Elliot Cuthbert-Brown of Elweld Fabrications.

My brief to Elliot was 'not too loud but with flames', but luckily Elliot is rather more serious. 'I'd suggest using some of the space provided by losing the heavy, unwanted side silencers and creating a long-run set of headers. These can connect to a rear box with a crossover to balance the banks. A bit like a GT3 system,' he said. I nodded, sagely. Then left him to experiment for weeks with various configurations.

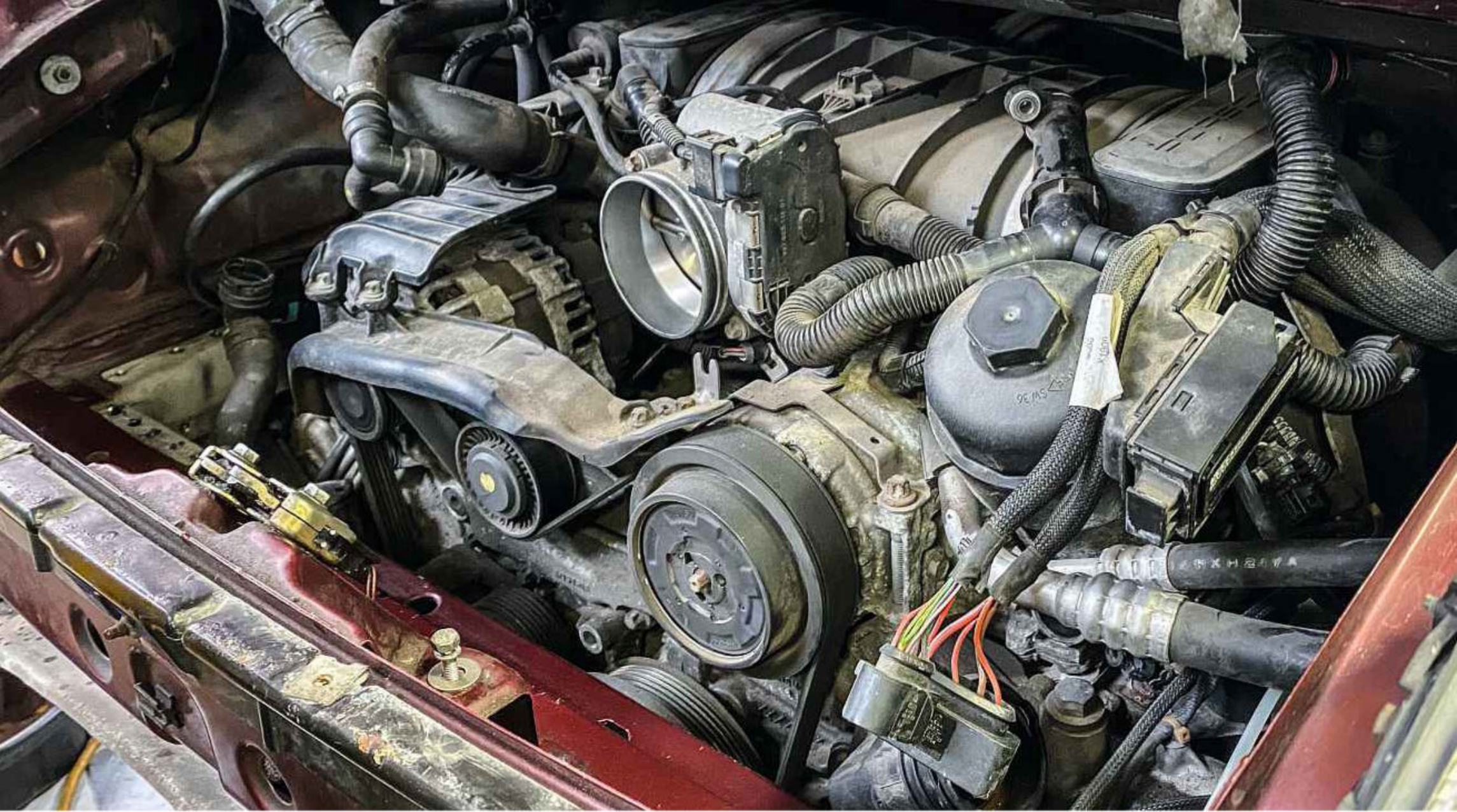
Elliot takes up the story: 'We decided to use 321 stainless for the headers as the engine temps didn't warrant the use of Inconel and we could still reduce the overall weight by manufacturing the tube from flat sheet, 1mm thick. By routing the manifolds up into the wheelarch we achieved an equal longer primary length to help increase torque at lower revs. This was then linked to proper merge collectors and back down to the rear silencer section. ASNEX titanium is a good way to go here, as we can shed some weight right at the back of the car.'

The final, gloriously serpentine system is outrageous and cost roughly what I paid for the entire car back in 2013. It is art, pure and simple, and creates drama even at idle. My 996 now shimmies with that flat, fast-paced note familiar from modern Porsche GT cars. So much more exciting than a 996 Carrera but slightly more

Below and right: body prepped for repaint; undergoing testing on a rolling-road; completely bespoke new exhaust; and the old 996 engine complete with heavy, unwanted side silencers







‘THE SERPENTINE EXHAUST SYSTEM COST ROUGHLY WHAT I PAID FOR THE ENTIRE CAR IN 2018’

mannered than an early, gravel-gargling 996 GT3. And that’s just the start...

There are other differences of note; less dramatic, perhaps, but extremely pertinent to the feel and dynamics of the car. For example, the physical throttle pedal is from the donor 991 Carrera S (my car had a cable throttle) and its travel feels maybe 25 per cent shorter. It’s literally years since I last drove the 996 but it immediately clashes with my muscle memory. No complaints about the throttle response, though. There’s a slightly less organic feel than previously, just as there would be comparing the old car’s set-up with a 991 or 992’s, but I’m already used to it and response remains extremely accurate. Such is the performance on offer now that it seems even quicker to respond, in fact.

Another huge change is the adoption of a 996 Cup electric steering pump, as there was no way to run a hydraulic pump from the new engine. Lighter and without the usual power-scavenging traits of a hydraulic pump, it seems the perfect solution. However, you play around with the feel of 996 steering at your peril! It’s such a highlight of the car. Luckily, most of the texture has been retained and although the steering requires less effort it’s still worlds better than a modern ePAS system. I’d like to investigate a way to slightly reduce the assistance as it’s clearly set up for slicks and lots of camber. If we can do that then I’m confident the full 996-spec steering sensation will return undimmed. My car might be ‘finished’ but Litchfield really wants to keep honing it over the coming weeks and months, so this is one area we’ll look at.

As speeds rise, the quality of the work already completed is tangible. As mentioned, the 996 now rides on KW Clubsport coilover suspension, which features 16 clicks of rebound adjustment, plus separate high- and low-speed bump adjustment. In conjunction with the new suspension arms it’s a pretty hardcore set-up. Too much? I don’t think so. Whilst the ride is firm there’s an almost spooky ability to round-off nasty bumps, and just when you think the car might bottom or thwack against the bump-stops, it just glides onwards. However, really big compressions are an issue and I think it’s linked to the adjustable Eibach anti-roll bars. At the moment it’s catching too much air and the transition from the smooth control of the dampers to suddenly being flung upwards can be disconcerting. It’s another area we need to play around with.

I am trying to be really objective about this stuff, just as I would be with a new car. Maybe more so. Hence the little quirks or faults that I’m highlighting. In the main, the 996 is



Opposite: 3.4-litre 996 motor (top) replaced by 3.8 from 991 Carrera S, taking peak power from 296 to 386bhp. **Above:** the project team: Jim Cockayne, Dan Cook, Stuart McPherson, Scott Cheshire, Scott Morgan

absolutely fantastic. The engine is a free-breathing monster and I suspect there’s even more to unlock. Litchfield utilised a sophisticated motorsport ECU, the Syvecs S12, in order to make all the old analogue systems work with the 991 digital architecture and that meant mapping the engine completely from scratch. There was no ‘base’ map to work from and tweak and so the process was intense. Dan Cook, who mapped the car and spent weeks working on deeply frustrating issues such as making the air-conditioning work through the Syvecs, has done a terrific job and the 996.3 makes 386bhp at 7425rpm and 308lb ft at 5875rpm. For reference, the discarded 3.4 was claimed to produce 296bhp at 6800rpm and 258lb ft at 4600rpm. The 9A1 engine is a little lighter and that incredible exhaust has helped, too, so with a full tank of fuel the 996.3 weighs 1367kg (Porsche claimed 1320kg for the 996.1).

For me the biggest highlight is the OEM+ feel of the car. It is wildly faster than before but the chassis doesn’t feel



overpowered. The suspension is much more track-capable and sophisticated than the previous (and already very good) Bilstein PSS9 set-up, but the car still works well on the road and, although there's more road noise thanks to the rose-jointed arms, the car wouldn't be a bind at all on a long journey. Maybe to somewhere in Germany, for example. It's certainly much more useable and quieter than, say, a new GT4 RS.

Okay, okay... so what about that engine and the effect it has on the chassis? Well, it really just exaggerates all that's so good about the car already. The 996 is such a small and relatively light car and that encourages a much more exuberant driving style on the road than you could ever adopt in a new GT3. You can float it into corners on the brakes, feel the rear start to break away and then tidily gather it up or prolong the angle. With so much smooth, accurately delivered power, it feels like you have endless options and that you can explore them on British roads without constantly thumping over catseyes or veering over the centre line. It's just so controllable.

Having said that, I have had to adapt my driving style. Whilst the 996 now has 991 Carrera S power, it doesn't have 991 Carrera S levels of grip and traction. In damp or wet conditions the car is much more likely to shimmy under full power in a straight line in second or third gear and I

have to remember not to just flatten the throttle. There is assistance should I choose to lean on it: that amazing Syvecs ECU also has programmable traction control. The default setting is 'off' but I can hook the car up to the Syvecs Pro app on my phone and activate various levels of traction control. It's a really cool system and makes the Porsche sounds like an old F1 car, popping and crackling as power is cut to keep a precise level of slip. It's another area I'll work on with Litchfield to try to hone various settings ranging from 'my dad has to drive the car for unknown reasons' to 'I'd like to set a lap time at the Ring'.

So in summary, I am very, very happy and this story is far from over. Of course, there are those who won't get it. For very good reasons: this project makes no financial sense whatsoever; it's still not a GT3; it's 'only' a 996 and hence not as special as an air-cooled car (I disagree, but whatever); the car will never realise the value of investment. However, none of that matters to me. When my car needed either substantial work or to be thrown in the bin, I didn't feel like I had a choice. It's my 911. My first Porsche. A car that I bought in an extremely dark time in my own life to give me some joy and excitement. And now? Now, it's so much more. Thank you Iain and all the brilliant people at Litchfield. My 911 is back and, to me, it's just about perfect. To be continued... ✕

Porsche 996.3 Carrera

Engine Flat-six, 3800cc **Power** 386bhp @ 7425rpm

Torque 308lb ft @ 5875rpm **Weight** 1367kg

Power-to-weight 287bhp/ton

0-62mph c4.5sec (est) **Top speed** c180mph (est)

Left: Jethro back at the wheel after almost three years. Much has changed, including the custom-trimmed Corbeau seats. Engine and chassis upgrades work beautifully on track.
Below left: electric steering pump is from 996 Cup car







Bugatti's next hypercar will be built under the ownership of EV experts Rimac. We drive the current ultimates from both marques on the stunning roads of southern Croatia and imagine what the future might hold

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

by STEVE SUTCLIFFE

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT



WATCHING THE TAIL END OF A BUGATTI CHIRON

Super Sport squirm under full acceleration as all four of its vast tyres scrabble for grip momentarily is not, let's face it, a sight many folks will ever get to witness up close and personal, in real life. But even if you *are* fortunate enough to see a Chiron SS in full flight as it thunders its way from zero to 62mph in 2.4sec and to 186mph (300kph) in just 12.1sec, it will inevitably be a blink-and-you'll-miss-it experience, a seismic event that's already unfolded long before you've had time to focus in on the details.

Unless, that is, you happen to be sitting behind the Bugatti at the controls of a Rimac Nevera, in which case you'll have all the time in the world to drink in what happens when the Chiron's driver tries, and for half a second fails, to dump all the raw energy produced by its 8-litre quad-turbo W16 engine not-so-neatly onto the tarmac. For the record the Super Sport generates 1600 PS or 1578bhp – officially. But unofficially it's a fair bit more than that; the biggest number we'll see on its power output dial during two days of driving it will be 1611 PS, although apparently the figure 1616 quite often pops up in the display if you keep your toe in for long enough and hit a high enough speed.

Either way, it's more than the car's ESC system can cope with on roads such as those we're on today, hence the reason the Chiron goes sideways in a spectacular WRC-style launch-cum-drift when its driver – in this case one Andy Wallace – gives it the beans from a standstill. It's one heck of a thing to observe from no more than 10 yards away, even though the dust cloud kicked up by the Bugatti's spinning rear Michelins does spoil the view after a couple of seconds.

Where it all gets a bit surreal, however, is when you realise how hard the Rimac doesn't have to try to keep up with the flailing Bugatti. Give the Nevera any more than three-quarters throttle and you'd slam straight into the Chiron's gearbox, simple as that. The car from Croatia is genuinely *that much faster* when they leave the line together, and it stays that way until you're way beyond 200mph. It just disappears out of sight, never to be seen again, physically and/or metaphorically.

At which point you can't help but ask yourself a question: what the actual fudge is going on here? I mean, when did the Chiron Super Sport – still officially the world's fastest road car thanks to the efforts of Mr Wallace himself, who in 2019 clocked 304.77mph in a pre-production example without the 273mph speed limiter of the customer cars – stop leaving every other hypercar in its wake? Did something weird happen during the pandemic? Did we skip a decade somewhere in the evolution of the ultrafast car and somehow no one told Bugatti? Did a meeting take place in which the established space-time continuum got shifted to a different part of the universe? Seriously, what the heck happened, and when?

Electricity happened, that's what. Or to be more precise, some of the world's cleverest car and software engineers got together and worked out a way to make one large battery pack, four electric motors, four separate gearboxes and zillions of different algorithms combine to produce

Right: Chiron Super Sport trails the Nevera by 310bhp and 560lb ft, but counters with 305kg less mass and the soundtrack of its quad-turbocharged W16 engine (above right)



a level of propulsion that's never been seen before in a road car. By a factor of about two. They then made all this unfeasibly clever technology available under the roof of just one extraordinary car called the Rimac Nevera. And the rest, as they say, is history.


Except it's not quite as simple as that, because the same people who've just spent the last decade turning the Nevera into The Almighty Being of hypercars are now responsible for creating the next range of Bugattis as well. Which is where it all gets a bit complex, not least for the dear old Chiron Super Sport, whose petrol-powered W16 engine and conventional seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox would appear to be out of the ark compared with what's available in aisle B+ of the factory at Rimac Technology nowadays.

If you're confused by the whole 'who owns what and how' within the Bugatti-Rimac hierarchy, allow me to explain. In simple terms the Rimac Group is now the kingpin of the empire and is financially backed by an enviable collection of investors that includes Porsche, Hyundai and Goldman Sachs, to name but three. As well as helping Porsche and Hyundai develop their EVs, Rimac also does development work for all sorts of other car companies – from Koenigsegg to Aston Martin to AMG – and understandably trousers an increasingly tidy amount of money in the process. But Rimac Group also owns 55 per cent of a new company called Bugatti Rimac, the remaining 45 per cent being owned by Porsche, and this is the company that will be making Bugattis from now on.

Bottom line: the money made by the Rimac Group, including Bugatti Rimac and Rimac Technology, effectively funds the existence of Rimac Automobili – which makes the Nevera – and this is what's enabled CEO Mate Rimac and his team of 1500 or so employees to produce the world's fastest, and very probably its best, electric car.

Seemingly this has happened out of the blue, but in fact Rimac has been in business for about the same amount of time as McLaren Automotive, so maybe we shouldn't be at all surprised that the 256mph Nevera is as breathtakingly brilliant as it is, straight out of the box. Even so, it's hard not to be blown away by just how polished this car is purely as a product. How beautifully well made it is inside and out, even beside the majestically expensive-feeling Bugatti. How perfectly it rides, how sweetly it steers, how well judged its throttle and brake pedals are, and how fundamentally composed it is when you're just bumbling about in it, watching the Chiron in front rumble and gorge its way across the Spaghetti Western landscapes of southern Croatia.

And when the Bugatti gets a bit too far ahead, and photographer Aston Parrott asks you on the walkie-talkie to close the gap by a couple of hundred yards so the picture he's taking from across the valley looks better balanced, all you do is brush the Nevera's accelerator momentarily and, *whoompf*, you're right back where you need to be, nailed once again to the



**'IN THE NEVERA
YOU ARRIVE WHERE
YOU WANT TO BE
INSTANTLY. THEN
YOUR BRAIN NEEDS
A MOMENT TO
CATCH BACK UP'**





Chiron's tail. The time it takes to cover ground in this car is not measured by conventional means. Instead, you arrive where you want to be in it instantly. Then your brain needs a moment to catch back up.

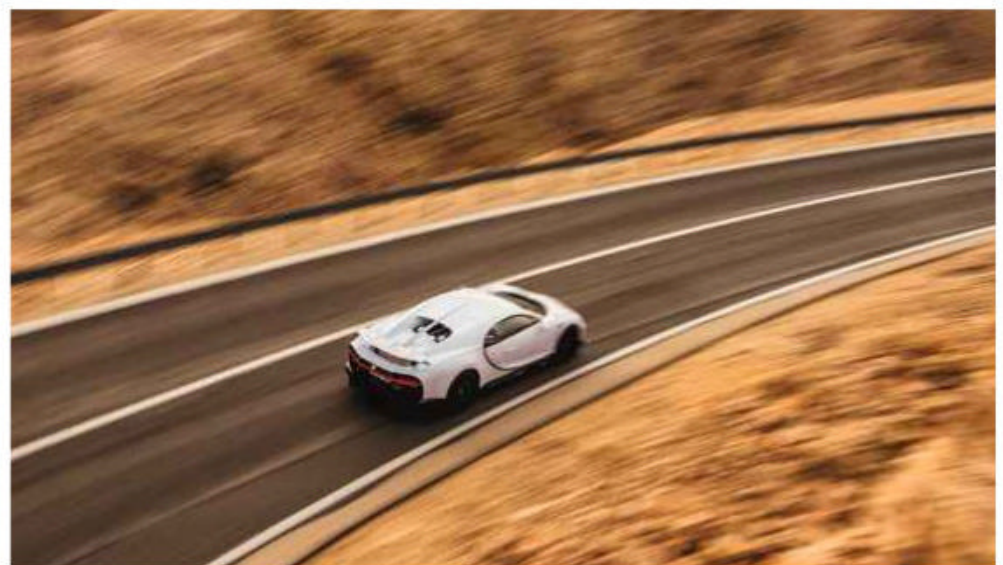
In this specific sense, the Nevera is not like any other road car I've driven before, and because there are no gearchanges as such, and not a lot of noise to accompany the almighty thrust it delivers either, it's easy to get seriously freaked out by what it can do, to simply fail to compute what's going on momentarily because the forces at work are so unusual.

The danger, of course, is that it's so quick, so punchy, you can arrive where you want to be an awful lot sooner – and travelling a heck of a lot faster – than you anticipate. On quick motorbikes they call it speed shock. But in a car that weighs 2150kg and can produce similarly violent hits of acceleration so readily, the effects are even harder to process somehow. So you really do need to think very clearly indeed – about your geographical surroundings, as well as the state of your own head – before you just open it up and try to hang on. Because if you don't, the car itself hangs on just fine but your brain, especially the bits that deal with balance and spatial awareness, does not. And for a second or so you can feel quite spaced-out as the inner workings of your mind struggle, and fail, to keep up. It's a fantastically disturbing experience the first time you open the Nevera up properly on the public road, but it's not an especially good one to encounter if, say, you're sitting behind someone who's trying to hold on to a Bugatti Chiron Super Sport that's going slightly sideways, because the recipe for disaster is ripe.

As the miles pass we'll learn more and more about what these two extraordinary cars are all about. What you can and can't get away with when driving them quickly – or slowly – on the road. How different they feel to one another in some ways, how weirdly similar in others, and why between them they represent where we are right now in the world of the hypercar, where we've been, and maybe where we're heading next.

Their prices alone will make you laugh or cry, or both. The Nevera costs around 2.4 million euros including taxes, the Bugatti 3.2 million, so call it a nice round five million in sterling for the pair. Both are four-wheel drive but, of course, only one has an engine in the traditional sense, the Nevera's propulsion instead being provided by a liquid-cooled 120kWh lithium battery pack that powers four individual electric motors via four separate gearboxes for combined totals of 1888bhp and 1740lb ft.

The Bugatti is more than 300kg lighter at 1995kg to the Rimac's 2300kg, which is quite some realisation when you look at them in the flesh. The Chiron is massive by comparison, its long tail, wider bodyshell and enormous as opposed to merely vast rear tyres exuding far more physical presence than the smaller, more compact, less ostentatious-looking Nevera. Not that the Rimac looks anything other than thoroughly intriguing in isolation. The difference is, people know exactly what the Chiron



Left: Chiron Super Sport is limited to 236mph, extending to 273mph if Top Speed mode is engaged; Nevera is limited to 219mph normally, but can be derestricted at special customer events, putting 256mph on the menu

is even from 100 metres away. The Nevera they have no clue about. Unless you happen to be in Croatia, in which case casual observers quite often drop and do the full *Wayne's World* 'we are not worthy' routine – because in Croatia, Rimac is royalty.

The same theme continues inside. The Chiron feels far bigger from behind the wheel and its cabin is much more luxurious in look, feel and even smell. This car's mix of tan and dark blue hides, and its bigger steering wheel that features the letters E and B in its centre, exude an impossibly expensive aura that's far more ostentatious beside the more business-like interior of the Nevera, which is more compact inside and features Alcantara fabrics rather than swathes of uniquely provenanced leather.

Both have great seats and fine driving positions, but the Nevera is the easiest to see out of, especially to the rear because there's no engine back there to see past. It's also easier to climb into and out of, Rimac having designed the driving position so that your knees are behind the rearmost arc of the front wheelarch – again a result of there being no conventional powertrain to package.

On start-up the Chiron's engine makes the earth move ever so slightly, and it's a magnificent thing to experience. It's not an overtly loud noise but it is a highly complex one, a series of screams and whooshes underscored by a base rumble from somewhere deep within its guts, indicating that the warming of fluids and god knows what else is taking place. It sounds like doom, and beside it the Nevera, well, it just starts. The only indication that it's ready to go is visual and comes in the form of three small horizontal lights that illuminate along its flanks. These also tell you which driving mode it's in: Range, Cruise, Sport, Track or Drift. Only in Drift do the lights glow orange (rather than blue) so that's obviously the one to be seen in when you roll up outside the yacht in Monaco, just to show your audience what a superhero you truly are behind the wheel.

On the move, the Bugatti is the more comfortable car initially, although you can switch between drive modes in the Chiron, too, in order to sharpen or soften its dynamics accordingly. Your options are more limited though, and range from 'EB' to 'Autobahn' and 'Handling' and in each instance the car goes into a completely different dynamic set-up, with even the ride height altering to make it either more slippery or more stable at speed.

The difference is, in the Nevera the modes affect the car's personality at all speeds, making it either more playful or more benign (or just more efficient) depending on what sort of mood you're in, and what kind of road you're driving on. And the changes happen instantly, the moment you rotate the magic button in the middle of the centre console. In the Chiron the modes are predominantly there to make the car more stable at high speed, not necessarily more fun, to a point where Wallace isn't keen on me driving





it on motorways in anything other than Autobahn mode because the stability isn't as optimised for the conditions in EB or Handling.

It also takes a good couple of seconds for each mode to fully engage, there are that many hydraulic motors in the Chiron, each one needing to do its thing to set the wings and ride height levels to the desired points. It feels quite clumsy beside the Nevera in this respect, which simply snaps between modes in milliseconds, albeit with a physical thump from behind as the big rear wing either deploys or retracts into the rear bodywork depending on which mode you've selected.

On the move the Nevera feels immediately smaller, more agile, quieter and more urgent than the Bugatti – quite a lot more urgent to be honest. Which is a quite ridiculous thing to become aware of when the other car you are talking about has nearly 1600bhp. But truly, this is the way it is. Yet

once you get past the pure intimidation factor, the way the Chiron shrinks on the move is amazing, and after a while you realise you can drive it far harder than you thought possible so long as there's the space in which to operate, mainly because it controls its inertia so very well. Plus it has a massive amount of grip.

You can push and sometimes even party a bit with the Chiron, and it doesn't bite, doesn't get wild. Instead it flows from corner to corner on a tsunami of torque and poise, its thunderous sequentially turbocharged W16 engine providing you with a constant source of temptation. It will fire you out of any corner and down any straight with three times more energy than you'll ever need, or sometimes even want.

I also love the way its seven-speed gearbox picks off gears so cleanly and so fluidly whenever you squeeze the upshift paddle, no matter how many revs are showing. Same on

Below: Nevera may lay claim to being the world's fastest production EV, but it's not all about straight-line speed, as a foray into the car's Drift mode demonstrates





the way back down, when it's just really nice to be able to downshift on the way into corners, to be able balance and guide the car more accurately under deceleration, even though the Chiron's vast brakes are more than capable of slowing it down all on their own. It's the complete opposite of the Nevera in this respect, in which you rely solely on the power of the brakes to dump speed on the way into a corner, there being no gears with which to downshift. This is one of the few aspects that elevates the Bugatti beyond the Rimac subjectively when you swap between the two.

But here's the thing, here's the crunch. However charming and majestic and stupefyingly fast the Chiron is

in isolation – and it is still an insanely fast and lovely thing to drive – it is nowhere beside the Rimac dynamically. Not even in the same universe. The Nevera can go round corners, accelerate along straights, stop for corners, generate traction on the way out of them, turn into them, sit cleanly and feel perfectly balanced in the middle of them in a way that the Chiron can't even contemplate. Yet it also feels more engaging, more communicative and just more alive beneath your hands and backside at the same time. Often by quite some margin.

Fair enough, you can't just top-up the Nevera with electricity as readily as you can a Chiron with petrol, as

Bugatti Chiron Super Sport

Engine W16, 7993cc, quad-turbo **Power** 1578bhp @ 7050-7100rpm

Torque 1180lb ft @ 2250-7000rpm **Weight** 1995kg

Power-to-weight 651bhp/ton **0-62mph** 2.4sec

Top speed 273mph (limited) **Basic price** c£2.8m

evo rating ★★★★★



we discovered when we ran them both dry at the end of day one and had to Google-search where the nearest fast-charge station was. But the next morning all it took was a 40-minute drive to a 98-octane-equipped gas station that also had a fast charge point on its forecourt. The Bugatti took five minutes to fill at a cost of well over £100; the Nevera took 19 minutes to recharge and cost less than a third of that. And both cars were good for another 300 or so miles from that point.

In many ways, the Rimac Nevera makes the Bugatti Chiron Super Sport feel like a dinosaur. Don't shoot the messenger, as they say, but the message is clear: petrol

is now over when it comes to ultimate performance cars, at least as the sole means of propulsion. I'm not sure how comfortable I feel about writing that, but there it is nonetheless.

However, having said that, a mixture of the two – petrol and electricity – could be the holy grail for a car like the Chiron's replacement. Imagine a hypercar powered by a charismatic and high-revving W16 that didn't have turbos but, instead, used a full-blown EV powertrain not unlike like the one that propels the Nevera to add some more spice at the other end. A lot more spice. Now that really would be something else... ✕

Rimac Nevera

Motors 2 x 220kW front, 2 x 480kW rear

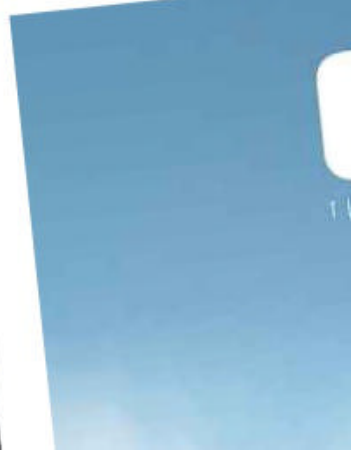
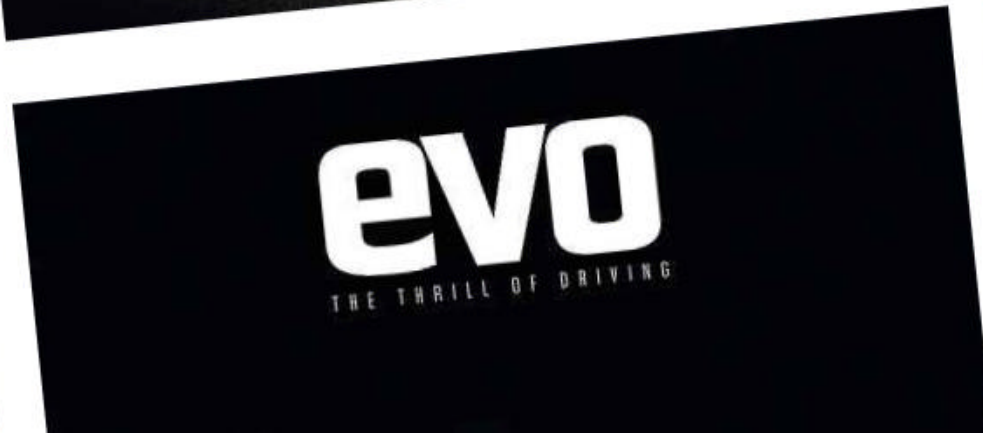
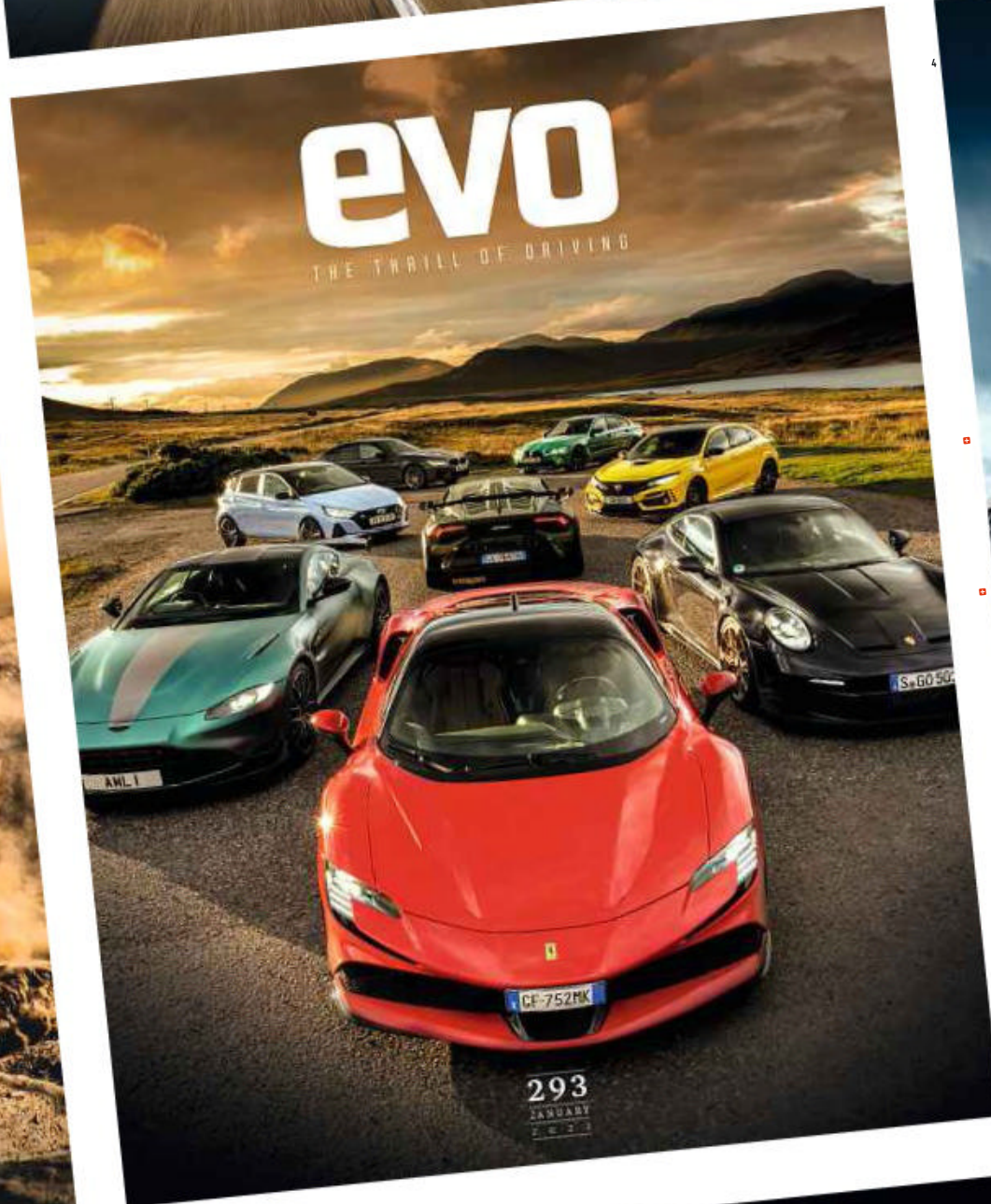
Power 1888bhp **Torque** 1740lb ft **Weight** 2300kg

Power-to-weight 834bhp/ton **0-62mph** 1.97sec (with 1ft roll-out)

Top speed 256mph **Basic price** c£2.1m

evo rating ★★★★★







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An aerial photograph of a vast, arid desert landscape. The terrain is covered in light-colored sand with subtle ripples. A prominent feature is a large, circular sand dune formation on the right side, characterized by numerous concentric ridges and a dark, shadowed interior. To the left of this formation, there is a small, dark, star-shaped structure, possibly a well or a small building. In the lower right quadrant, a small, dark, rectangular object, likely a tent or a small building, is visible near the edge of the circular dune. The overall scene is desolate and expansive.

by RICHARD
MEADEN

ICE

An aerial photograph of a bright green car drifting on a frozen lake. The car is positioned in the center of a large, circular, dark track made of many overlapping tire marks. The surrounding ice is a light, textured grey. In the upper right, a straight track leads to a junction where the circular track begins. A few small figures of people are visible near this junction. The overall scene is a high-angle, wide shot of a winter sports activity.

BREAKER

The world record for the longest continuous vehicle drift on ice stands at 3.87 miles. Can **evo** beat it - and in an electric car to boot? We take to a frozen Swedish lake in a Skoda Enyaq iV vRS to find out

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KIDDING AROUND IN CARS IS SOMETHING WE

do rather a lot of here at **evo**. It's not big and it's not clever, but as anyone who has done it knows, it's bloody good fun. So, when Skoda UK called to see if we fancied heading to northern Sweden for a crack at beating the existing record for the longest continuous vehicle drift on ice, we packed some thermals and headed north.

There are several different records for drifting. The outright distance record of 374.17km (232.5 miles) was set by Johan Schwartz driving a BMW M5 (for eight hours!), while the EV distance record of 43.646km (27.1 miles) was set by Wei Pengda in a Zhiji L7. Both records were set on wet steering pads. The fastest drift is held by Masato Kawabata in a 1380bhp rear-wheel-drive Nissan R35 GT-R, who achieved 30 degrees of slip angle on a bone-dry Dubai runway at 189.5mph. There's even a record for the fastest vehicle drift while steering with a foot...

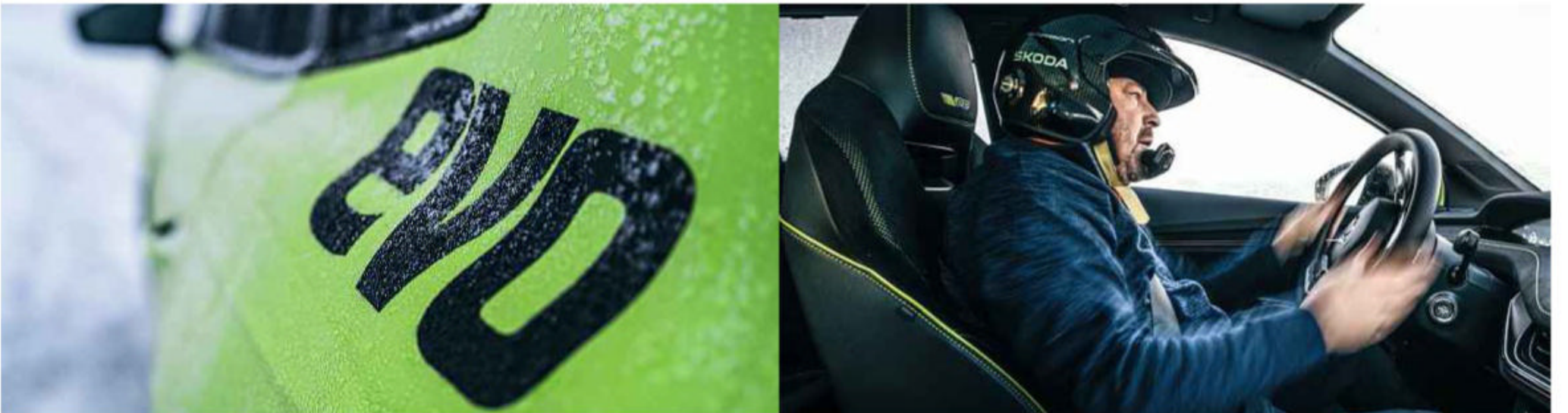
The record we're attempting to beat was set in China in 2022 by Wang Dongjiang, who slid his Subaru WRX for 6.231km (3.87 miles). Until now no one has attempted the ice drift record in an EV, so as we'll be using Skoda's Enyaq iV vRS electric SUV, all being well we'll be claiming an outright record and establishing a new EV record in the process.

It goes without saying that it's easier to make any car slide on ice, but it's much harder to stop it sliding too, with mistakes taking longer to correct and more likely to end in a spin or the car straightening up. To comply with Guinness World Records rules the ice can only be cleared of snow and not treated or improved in any way. As we're using a frozen lake and not a frozen steering pad, the surface will be rougher and more variable, but in common with all ice-record surfaces it will deteriorate during the course of the record attempt.

The ice lake we're using is located in the aptly named Frösön, near the city of Östersund. We're piggybacking a Skoda international media event, so there are numerous handling courses and slaloms ploughed into the snow-covered lake for visiting journalists. Our drift circle is tucked to one side, off-limits to all but us.

We don't have limitless space in which to carve out the drift circle, but it's down to us to decide upon the diameter of the central circle. We opt for 60 metres, with a cleared track width of approximately 10 metres beyond that. Think of it as the perfect roundabout: slippery, deserted and ours for a week.

Left and right: Enyaq iV vRS is Meaden's steed for the record attempt; listing at £52,670 it can do 0-62mph in 6.5sec (on asphalt) and has a WLTP range of 321 miles (which should be plenty)





***‘THERE’S NO ROOM FOR MISTAKES OR LAPSES
OF CONCENTRATION FOR MILES ON END’***



Once the circle is cut, Guinness World Records requires the diameter of the inner circle to be measured by a qualified surveyor, as it's this which dictates the distance travelled with each lap completed. My schoolboy maths is a bit rusty, but with a circumference of 188 metres, this means I'll need to complete 34 laps to beat the outright continuous ice drift record. Guinness World Records has also said 27 laps (5km) will establish a brand-new record for EVs.

Before we can make our attempt we need to get a feel for the Enyaq vRS. With a motor on each axle giving all-wheel drive, it has 295bhp and 339lb ft at its disposal. In normal use it will only use the more powerful rear motor, but hard acceleration or loss of traction engages the front motor too, the amount of torque each axle deploys being continually adjusted based on information from wheel-speed, yaw and steering-angle sensors. EVs give instant torque, which should be very useful, but throttle response and the speed and extent to which each axle provides drive will be critical in how predictable and consistent the Enyaq is when drifting. We also need to take into consideration the fact that once it's below 80 per cent charge, the amount of power on tap will be gradually derated as charge depletes. With no testing possible prior to arriving in Sweden there's going to be a lot to learn.

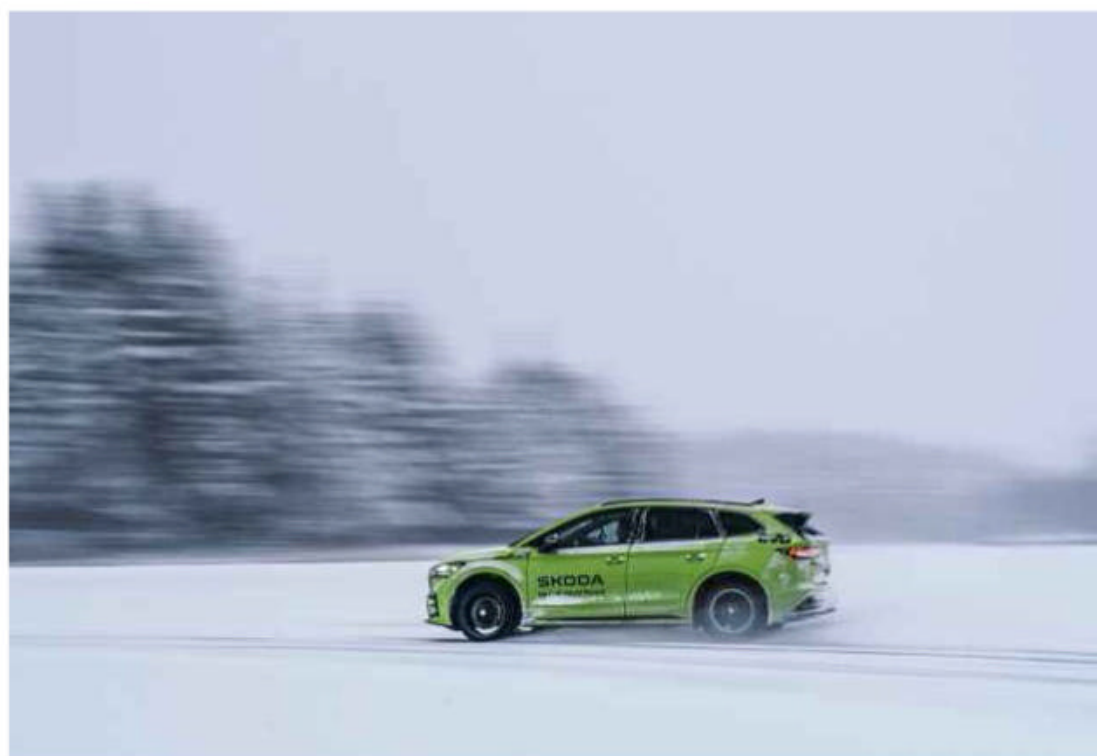
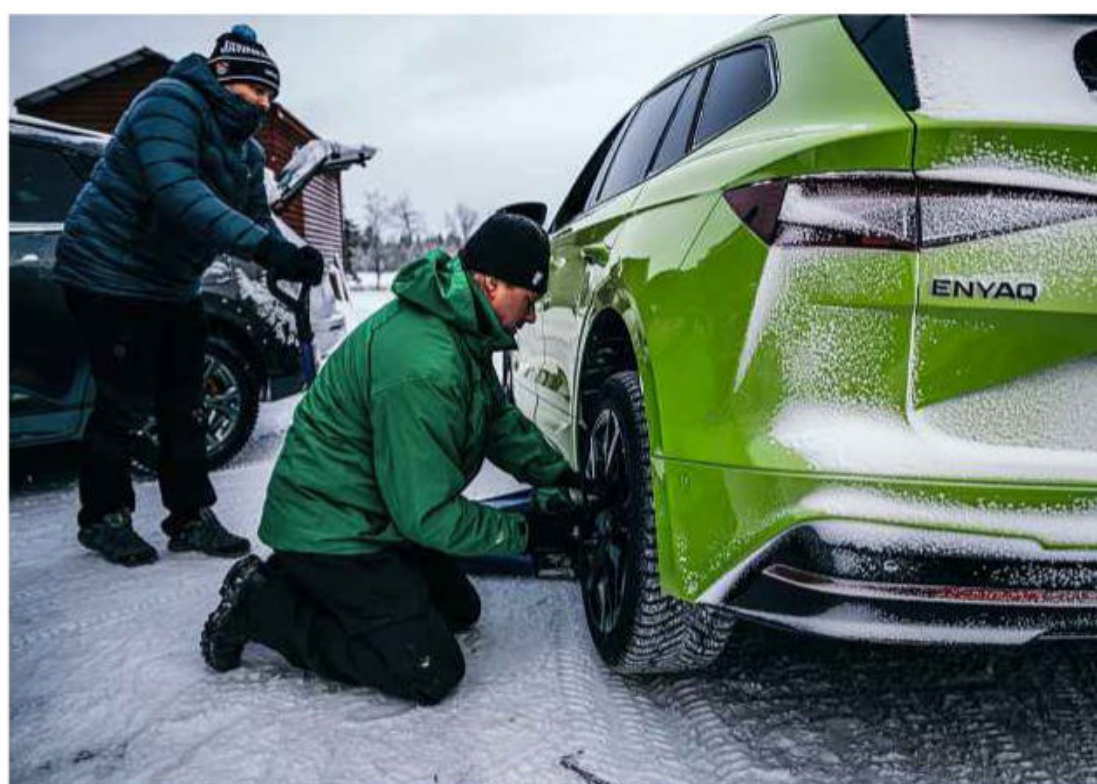
We have two cars at our disposal. Aside from the factory digging into the ESC system and giving us the option to switch it off, both are bone stock. We have a choice of three different tyres: regular Nokian winters, plus two types of studded tyre, namely a 255/45 R20 Nokian Hakkapelitta 10 EV, which has 300 2mm studs per tyre, and a 245/35 R20 Däckproffsen 'event tyre' that's a Michelin base tyre modified for winter rallies and as such is fitted with 600 fang-like 5mm studs.

We are free to mix-and-match tyres in order to find the best balance of grip and slip. The regular winters are easy to rule out, as they find little or no purchase on the sheet ice. The most aggressive of the studded tyres provides immense grip and traction. So much, in fact, that the Enyaq doesn't want to settle into a tail-led drift. In the end we find fitting these on the front and less aggressive Nokian studded tyres on the rear works a treat.

I'll confess that when the ice-drift project was mooted my first thought was 'How hard can it be?' Once we begin to practise, the answer to my flippant rhetorical question is 'very'. Not because of any issue with the Enyaq, as it loves to slide. Likewise, our circle is just about the perfect size – tight enough to get big angles on modest throttle, but with enough track width to let the car settle into a wider line or for a stomp on the throttle to pull it out of a potential spin. However, where you might expect ice to be consistently slippery, the drift circle's grip levels are decidedly variable. The darker patches – which hint at the fathoms of icy water that lie just 30cm beneath the Enyaq's tyres – are incredibly slick, whereas the whiter areas are comparatively grippy. There's also the dusting of powder snow to factor in, plus the increasing amount of ice granules thrown across the surface by the clawing action of the aggressively studded front tyres. Repeated lapping scars and scores the ice, with shallow concentric corrugations akin to motorway lorry ruts gouged out by the Enyaq's flailing front and rear wheels.

There's clearly much to learn about how the track will evolve, but the hardest bit to manage is myself. It's one thing to slide around for fun, quite another to initiate a slide knowing it must remain unbroken, with no room for mistakes or lapses of concentration for miles on end. As the practice runs get more serious the pressure manifests in stiff arms and jolty inputs, which is the last thing you

Top left: 34 laps of the 60-metre-diameter circle are needed to land the record. **Above right:** combination of different studded tyres front and rear provides optimum grip levels for maintaining the drift





Above: Meaden and Skoda UK PR Pietro Panarisi celebrate a successful early run, and there's better yet to come... **Opposite:** the record-attempt team receive their certificate from Guinness World Records' Jack Brockbank

want if you're to keep a sliding car smoothly balanced. After half a day of increasingly demoralising practice the best I manage without a run-ending mistake is 11 laps. Stunt driver extraordinaire Paul Swift is on hand to offer help and guidance, but at the rate I'm going he could well be drafted to salvage Skoda's pride. I'm increasingly consumed by dark despair.

Thankfully Jack Brockbank, the man from Guinness World Records, doesn't arrive until tomorrow night. He'll be with us for two full days on the ice, during which time he will hopefully witness and verify us beating the records. We can only make three attempts per day with him in attendance, but we've also had it confirmed that so long as attempts made when he is not present are documented with overhead drone footage, GPS data from the car and detailed trackside notes taken by independent drift judge David Kalas, we can also submit these for him to look at.

After a sleepless night we return to the lake on Tuesday morning. Days are short on the ice, with the sun rising reluctantly at 9am and dropping behind the pine trees before 3pm. There's no time to waste. We charge the Enyaqs each night at a friendly local's heated garage, then make the short journey to the lake, trying – and largely failing – to resist wasting precious battery energy hooning along the quiet, snow-covered roads.

We spend the morning making repeated attempts on the

record. I'm gradually getting dialled into the car, tyres and surface, but it still feels fiendishly tricky to get close to a record-breaking number of laps. With frustration building and morale dropping, we retire to the lunch tent, where I seek solace in a steaming plate of moose meatballs and potatoes. It clearly does the trick because immediately upon our return to the lake I manage just shy of 35 laps before spinning into the snow. Guinness World Records only counts full laps, so this means a count back to 34 – exactly the number we need to beat the existing record. It's unofficial until Brockbank's validation, but Kalas reckons the run was good. Fingers crossed.

Wednesday is our first day with Brockbank in attendance. Having considered yesterday's video footage, GPS data and Kalas's report, he's satisfied the 34-lap run is indeed a new record. The release of pressure is immense and should set us up nicely for our first three attempts in front of Brockbank. Sadly, they're a washout, my best effort yielding a promising 29 laps before deteriorating track conditions, worn rear studs and a frazzled head lead us to call it a day.

With filming work scheduled for Friday's final stint on the ice, Thursday is our last chance to meaningfully extend the record distance. I sit impassively in the Enyaq trying not to get myself in a stew while the now familiar ritual of drone prep, radio chatter and Skoda personnel getting to their respective action stations goes on around me.

With everyone poised it's down to me to say when an attempt starts. There seems little point in wasting time or chewing up the crisp morning ice with warm-up laps, so after issuing a rather terse 'Let's just get on with it, shall we?' message over the radio, I give the Enyaq a generous amount of throttle and kick it sideways.

The first few laps are a bit edgy before I find a rhythm that works with the grippier-slipper-grippier-slipper cadence of the ice circle. I've vowed not to try and count the laps, likewise I don't want a running total over the radio as it only adds pressure. I just need to keep going for as long as I can and focus only on what the car is doing, searching for a zen-like state in which my throttle and steering inputs become predictive rather than reactive.

Sliding round in circles does odd things to your head. The Enyaq feels happiest at big drift angles. It lessens the chance of the car straightening up on the grippier bits of ice, but the flipside is there's only a little over a quarter turn of lock left to play with before hitting the stops. Weirdly, the longer you spend sliding, the more your inner ear tries to compensate, creating the sensory illusion you're going in a straight line even though you're looking out of the side window. It's not exactly entering the Matrix, but it certainly skews your inner gyroscope.

The run is building nicely, helped by the gnarled ice feeling crisp from overnight temperatures of -12deg C. Somewhere around the midway point my mind starts to drift (no pun intended), and the inevitable small error leads to a major scare as the Enyaq runs wide and slides endlessly on an ultra-slippery section of ice. We're almost going backwards with full right lock

and throttle pinned, front axle *juuust* clawing us back under control just before the tail digs into the outside snowbank. It's enough to snap me from my trance, the next ten laps or so much tidier as I adjust my lines to hunt for fresher pieces of ice.

When the end comes it's a lame half-spin. I'm gutted, but pretty sure we've exceeded Tuesday's record-setting 34-lap total, though by how much I have no idea. After an agonising pause the radio barks into life: 'Record attempt ends at 11.05am with a total of 39 laps.' **YES!**

It's not official until Brockbank says it is, so I get out of the car and pace nervously around the ice track while he reviews the drone footage and discusses the run with Kalas. After what feels like an age, whoops from the far side of the drift circle confirm that the 39-lap run – all 7351.344 metres or 4.568 miles of it – is indeed a new record.

Like most of the capers Guinness World Records is called to witness, it was a rather daft thing to do – though nothing compared to the farthest distance to blow a pea (84 feet and 11.28 inches, in case you're wondering) – but it was a surprisingly difficult challenge and huge fun. I have no doubt someone will go on to beat it, but that's what records are for.

Doing it in an EV was definitely trickier than using an analogue all-wheel-drive ICE car, but somewhat unexpectedly I think it means more as a result. Skidding around in circles is a brilliantly trivial pursuit, but in a small yet significant way, successfully setting a new record in an Enyaq vRS points to a future in which EVs can and will be honed to better satisfy enthusiasts like us. ❌





ESTATE

by JETHRO BOVINGDON PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

OF PLAY



Last month we enjoyed BMW's new M3 Touring on the roads where it was developed with the people who developed it. Now it's time for it to take on tough UK tarmac and the current fast-estate leader, Audi's RS6 Avant

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NWITTINGLY, THE DAY BEFORE we shoot the Audi RS6 Avant and BMW M3 Competition Touring on the rolling roads that thump and yump over the North York Moors, I remind myself just why the fast estate car is such a special concept. My first sight of the RS6 is at 6am. It's shrouded in thick ice and the air is so cold that my clothes crackle as I walk

towards it. A few minutes later I'm thawing in heated seats and pointed towards Brands Hatch, some 100 miles south. The miles accrue easily and the 4-litre twin-turbocharged engine slips almost silently into the background. It's just the start of a very RS6 sort of day.

The track is perilously slippery but the Audi barely notices. It's acting as fast chase vehicle, photographer and video team taking turns to lie in the boot to capture an old race car with 900bhp or more. Once I've removed the baby seat, of course. The Group C car tiptoes where the RS6 claws and I'm pretty sure the Audi would give it a real run for its money in these conditions. Then, when the sun sets and the temperature plunges again, I head north. Way north, to Kirkbymoorside, a solid 250 miles away, taking in the hell of rush hour M25 and mile upon mile of oddly dilapidated A1. It's after 10pm when I arrive, fuelled by burger and McFlurry, and the last 20 miles or so are cross-country, straights punctuated by bursts of tight corners. The big Audi morphs from refined cruiser to relentless, unstoppable force and delivers me to the hotel feeling remarkably fresh. I almost wish there was another hour to run.

Right: RS6 is best with Dynamic Ride Control, but even on the standard air suspension it still sets a cracking pace

This is a formula that Audi has mastered over the years. Perhaps the line of RS Avants hasn't always been the sharpest or most nimble, but to cover ground quickly, effortlessly and with a kind of all-powerful, indomitable gait they're just about perfect. Then there's the look. Musculature barely contained within the sheet metal and occasionally bursting through in the form of bulging arches. Like a superhero trying hopelessly to blend in amongst civilians. Audi can be a cold and slightly misunderstood company and not even the brilliant R8 seems to truly stir up passion, but people love the RS6 and RS4.

Of course, the real dream is to capture this long-striding performance and appealing utility and marry it to genuine driving excitement. The RS6 has homed in on this target in recent times and, with the new RS4 Competition, Audi is clearly on a mission to hit that elusive and potentially game-changing bullseye. So it's ironic that with the first UK-registered RS4 Comps just weeks away from landing, BMW's first ever M3 Touring has already arrived. We've been waiting for this car for decades and now it's here, quietly drumming its fingers on the table and asking the RS4 Competition what's taking so long. Think of this test as a taster of what's to come, then. The RS4 Comp will have its day but first the M3 Touring has to get past the RS6. All 592bhp of it.

In the cold, dim light of a winter's morning these two cars aren't traditional rivals. Eight cylinders in a vee versus six running straight, 592bhp plays 503bhp, £102,940 of full-sized estate meets a smaller, more focused £80,550 five-door. However, the point of this test is that Audi's biggest, baddest estate car defines the breed. It is the breed. To become the new champ will take more than dynamic brilliance. The







M3 Competition Touring needs a sprinkling of the magic that makes the RS6 so achingly desirable and satisfying over thousands of miles in all weathers, loaded to the gunwales and streaked with road grime. We can't do all of those miles in the next couple of days, but the road grime won't be a problem. The remnants of snow and ice line even the lower-lying roads and as we climb up onto the moors the surface is in turn dry and salty, wet and muddy or covered in fresh snow and slush.

I stick in the Audi and once it's warmed through can enjoy other facets of its character. Notably that 4-litre twin-turbo V8, which not only sounds delightfully thunderous but has the rare ability to always have something in reserve. Even when you think you're really travelling, there's another few millimetres of throttle travel to explore. Crack it open still further and even greater performance floods in. Unstoppable and, seemingly, bottomless. The eight-speed 'box doesn't quite punch-in shifts, but such is the torque and the scale of the delivery that not having that physical 'sporty' signifier isn't an issue. The RS6 flies.

Oddly, it also feels slightly old-fashioned, though in some ways this is A Very Good Thing. The RS6 actually has buttons to control things like the heater. Halle-f*cking-lujah. How has the entire industry shifted to a solution that is less efficient and more dangerous? Anyway, that's an issue for another time. But there are other areas that date the RS6. Chiefly, the driving position. There's a slightly strange relationship between the steering wheel, seat and pedals that makes the car feel oddly cramped despite being so cavernous. You sit low and can bring the wheel in nice and tight, but your legs are caught in no-man's land between outstretched – sports car style – and more upright, as in a more luxurious car. I've never noticed it before but the driving position does fundamentally make you slightly ill at ease.

This particular car is fitted with the standard air suspension. As such the ride is quiet and mostly very good, although as with all cars with air springs the RS6 can skitter over smaller ripples and lumps, but there is a penalty in terms of agility, body control and just a sense of focus compared with a car with the optional Dynamic Ride Control, which uses coil springs and interlinked dampers to resist roll, pitch and dive. At speed and as the forces ramp up, these fast, ragged roads can make

the RS6 feel a touch remote and betray its sheer mass. At over two tons there is a hell of a lot of momentum to contain and at times the suspension is really reaching to keep things under control.

So, the onslaught of power and the challenge of these roads is enough to stretch the RS6 to the limit. It never fully cracks, though. Playing with the Individual setting allows you to ramp up the dampers, the torque-vectoring diff and the response of the engine but leave the steering in its lightest (and most natural) setting, and whilst the big Audi does want for a bit of precision there's nothing wrong with the balance at road speeds. The front clings on gamely and on corner exit you can feel that diff sending drive to the outside rear wheel for just the merest suggestion of oversteer. Try to provoke much more and things get a little clumsy, the RS6 understeering first, then swinging into a sort of messy, momentum oversteer. I know the DRC-equipped car is much more immediate and precise, but there's no questioning the effectiveness of the RS6.

The M3 Touring is no flyweight. BMW claims a DIN kerb weight (with fluids and a 90 per cent full fuel tank) of 1865kg and on our scales with a full tank this car – sporting carbon-ceramic brakes and the lighter bucket seats – registers 1858kg. By comparison the RS6 comes in at 2188kg. A yawning 330kg difference. To be honest it feels like more. Much more. Immediately, the BMW makes it clear that it has a very different take on the ultimate fast estate car formula. The Audi tries with all its might to balance effortlessness and refinement with an underlying steely core, whereas the BMW simply embraces its inner sports car. There's more road noise but more connection, the ride isn't as polished but steering response is in a different league. It takes ten yards to know this isn't M rocking up in Audi's patch and gently upping the ante. In fact, you needn't even be moving if the carbon bucket seats are specified. There is no emulation here. It's a different animal. And does it have a bite...

There is a huge amount of adjustability built into the M3 but even if you simply hop in, start up the vocal straight-six and pootle away with the dampers in their softest setting and the drivetrain set to 'Efficient', it quickly becomes apparent this experience is going to be a treat. There's a lovely sense of precision to everything the BMW does and although it is clearly a smaller and slightly more raucous car than the Audi, the

Opposite: M3 Touring can't match the RS6's outright power, but it's a far nimbler and more playful car



quality of the dynamics shines through. Hit the set-up button down by the gear selector and a menu pops up in a simple grid formation and allows tailoring of engine, chassis, steering, brake feel, the M xDrive (the Touring is only available with four-wheel drive) and the ten-stage traction control system. It might seem like overkill, but the presentation is so simple and so accessible that playing around on the fly is actually rather fun.

You could say that about the M3 in general. The Swiss-cheese carbon buckets are silly, but raise a smile. The new curved touchscreen and dash display is yet another example of buttons being abandoned, but the retro graphics look great, there are knowing little nods to the past, like the depiction of an M1 for the tyre-monitoring system, and the UI itself even works quickly and intuitively. And just as with the coupe or saloon, when you disable the traction control you can access a full rear-wheel-drive mode, too. Why would you do such a thing when the 4WD Sport setting is so wonderfully resolved? Fun, I suppose. Is that such a bad thing?

Today, we don't bother. The roads are perilously slippery and a prod of the DSC button allows me to select the more permissive MDM mode for the stability system and then 4WD Sport (the car defaults to the standard 4WD mode on start-up and requires MDM to go into 4WD Sport). I prefer Sport for

the steering as it's just a shade too light and vague in Comfort, and on these flowing roads Sport for the suspension provides the best compromise between absorbing the ravaged surface and keeping the body in check. Of course, you can have two favourite settings accessible via the M1 and M2 buttons on the steering wheel, so after the first week or two of ownership you'd never worry about all the options again.

So yes, there's a marked drop-off in refinement here. The Touring is perfectly useable but there's more road noise thrumming back through the interior. Where the air-suspended RS6 lopes, the M3 Competition nibbles at the surface. It feels busier and less impervious. However, pretty much as soon as you up the pace meaningfully, everything flips on its head. The BMW is simply in a different league when it comes to agility, control and entertainment. I think the real point of difference is that whilst the RS6 can be *persuaded* to attack a road, the M3 *wants* to get stuck in. It's locked on line, with wonderfully sharp and consistent responses and manages to combine unbelievable grip and traction with a really playful, nimble balance. It might weigh 1858kg but it has the manners and traits of a smaller, lighter car.

As the hours slip by and the miles accrue, the M3 Competition Touring gets more and more impressive. At times, I genuinely



BMW M3 Competition Touring

Engine In-line 6-cyl, 2993cc, twin-turbo **Power** 503bhp @ 6250rpm
Torque 479lb ft @ 2750-5500rpm **Weight** 1865kg (1858kg as tested)
Power-to-weight 274bhp/ton (claimed weight) **0-62mph** 3.6sec
Top speed 155mph (limited) **Basic price** £80,550

evo rating ★★★★★

forget it's an estate car at all. Quite how this pretty substantial Touring manages to feel smaller and more capable than the recently launched M4 CSL is a bit of a mystery. The fact I'm driving it alongside the much bigger RS6 might explain that feeling to a certain extent, but I think fundamentally the G8x M3 and M4 work best with the superb xDrive four-wheel-drive system and when their focus is primarily road rather than track. There's such wide-ranging capability here, and the way this M3 refuses to understeer and then exhibits the most gorgeously progressive manners when the straight-six is fully unleashed is something really special.

The engine? It lacks the ultimate head-spinning power and creaminess of the Audi's, but the 3-litre twin-turbo is angrier, the throttle response is sharper and the very short intermediate gears heighten the feeling that the M3 is a smaller car than it really is. It's like sprint gearing on an old JDM-import Subaru Impreza. Would the M3 feel even more exciting with a dual-clutch gearbox? I suspect so. But as automatics go, this is a very, very good one. Aggressive when required but extremely refined at a canter. It's another positive compared with the overly aggressive tuning in the CSL that feels contrived and slightly clumsy.

It speaks volumes that I've slipped into comparing the

Touring with an M4 CSL rather than the RS6. Quite simply it decimates the Audi as a driver's car. Sharper, more communicative, possessed of greater control and a much more immediate, adjustable and exciting chassis, it comes alive as the Audi checks out. Of course, there's always an alternative point of view. The Audi is more comfortable, quieter, it flies under the radar, offers more space and makes hundreds of miles disappear as if by magic. It remains one of those deeply desirable cars that would make life just that little bit happier every single day. If you own a couple of sports cars already and want a flexible, fearsomely fast and handsome family car, the RS6 is king.

However, not all of us can be so lucky. So, let's say you want sports car thrills every single day plus some very welcome versatility. Suddenly the M3 Competition Touring xDrive looks nothing short of irresistible. You might think a 3-series Touring specced to over £100,000 is just silly. Perhaps it is. Then again, why not think of this car as a 911 Turbo for when the kids won't fit in those tiny rear seats anymore. Framed like that, you could almost say that the first ever M3 estate isn't bad value at all. And I haven't mentioned the grille, have I? Funnily enough, I didn't notice it even once after my very first drive. There can be no greater recommendation than that. ✕



Audi RS6 Avant

Engine V8, 3996cc, twin-turbo **Power** 592bhp @ 6000rpm **Torque** 590lb ft @ 2050-4500rpm **Weight** 2075kg (2188kg as tested)
Power-to-weight 290bhp/ton (claimed weight) **0-62mph** 3.6sec
Top speed 155mph (limited) **Basic price** £102,940

evo rating ★★★★★

by STEVE SUTCLIFFE

DESERT





STORM!

What's the most fun you can have off-road? Porsche purists might scoff, but the 911 Dakar is an absolute riot and sacrifices little or none of its 911-ness



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OW MUCH OF A PURIST do you have to be to be accepted into The Club? And does it even matter if you don't adhere to a set of rules that were most likely defined by a collection of opinionated individuals who you've probably never

met, and whose opinion might not matter a whole lot anyway?

Thing is, most self-anointed purists will tell you that rules exist merely to be broken, and if that's true then the Dakar – heretic as it will no doubt be regarded by some – is surely one of the most intriguing new 911s of the last 30 years.

Think about it. Ever since Dr Ulrich Bez reinvented the 964 and turned it into the 993 almost one third of a century ago, Porsche has crafted the 911 into a sports car with an extraordinary breadth of ability while maintaining its credibility, despite there being a version to suit seemingly anyone with an interest in fast cars. You want a track-focused monster? Buy a GT3. You want a track-focused monster with the aero of a single-seater racing car? Buy a GT3 RS. You want transcontinental cruising civility mated to even more straight-line thunder than you get with a GT3? Buy a Turbo S.

And so it goes on, down past the excellent new Carrera T, all the way south to the basic rear-wheel-drive Carrera, which sits so confidently at the bottom of the top table. The sheer depth of the 911's appeal is pretty breathtaking in 2023. Yet, at a stroke, Porsche has broadened its appeal even further still, by introducing the go-anywhere, do-anything 911 Dakar.

What we are talking about here is a 911 that's based heavily on a regular GTS (same engine, gearbox, four-wheel steering, four-wheel drive, brakes and fundamental suspension design) but also happens to be able to cross deserts and climb mountains. It's so capable in the dirt, it could even appeal to the sort of punters who might normally only consider a seriously hard-edged 4x4.

But does this make the Dakar a heretic, or is it just another slick piece of commercial engineering on Porsche's behalf, one that will earn it even more respect from the people who know their onions while pocketing the company yet more cash courtesy of those who perhaps don't?

The answer is a fair bit of both, because while the Dakar might look like a cynical piece of marketing given that Porsche has limited the production number to just 2500 units – thereby guaranteeing it a stampede of wannabe owners with £173,000 to send in their direction before options – it also happens to be a brilliant car to drive. One that feels every inch like a 911 except for the fact that you sit several inches further away from terra-firma. This lends it a frankly bizarre but very real element of all-terrain ability – so much so that Porsche says it can go pretty much anywhere a Cayenne can, which is impressive but also a bit spooky when you experience it first-hand in the middle of the Sahara.

But then let's face it, if you expect anything less than a very good car indeed from Porsche nowadays, seemingly whatever its remit, you haven't been paying attention for the last 10 to 15 years. Other than the four-cylinder 718 – which Porsche was instructed to build by VW anyway – the company hasn't put a foot wrong for a very long time indeed, and the Dakar does little to blot that copybook. It's just an excellent addition to an already world-beating range of cars – assuming you can look beyond the fact that some of the people who will buy it may have more money than sense.

So what do you get for £173,000, and how does the Dakar differ from the GTS on which it's based? Well, the first thing to know is that the price rises by a further £18,434 if you want the Rallye Design package, which brings a range of different decals that celebrate the original 1984 911 Dakar's liveries. To give you some idea what sort of people this car is selling to (or rather, has sold to, since all 2500 have now gone) more than 70 per cent of orders have been for fully stickered-up cars.

Beneath whatever skin you end up specifying, the Dakar rides 50mm higher than a GTS and can be raised electronically



by a further 30mm for maximum ground clearance. Its arrival and departure angles are the same as a Cayenne's, which means it can climb over or away from the same size obstacles.

Although its suspension is fundamentally unchanged from a GTS's, with struts at the front and a five-link axle at the back, the springs are longer and have been softened considerably, while the dampers are also beefier and feature 'Dakar-specific tuning' (they are still adjustable via the PASM system but with new modes that include Rallye and Offroad in place of Sport Plus and Individual).

Underneath the car are a series of stainless steel panels that protect the Dakar's innards from unwanted intrusions, be they desert rocks or unusually high kerbs on the King's Road. The sills are also made of metal to increase their thump-ability while the glass is thicker and stronger too. To offset this, the bonnet is made from carbon composite and appears to weigh less than air, while the rear seats have been ditched to help offset the weight gains. Overall, Porsche has managed to keep the weight down to 1605kg, which makes the Dakar just 10kg heavier than a PDK Carrera 4 GTS. Impressive given how much more robust it is – and indeed feels – on the move. Oh, and if you really fancy yourself as the next René Metge you can also specify £2091 worth of roll-cage.

As standard, the 911 Dakar rides on bespoke Pirelli Scorpion All Terrain Plus tyres – 245/45 19s at the front, 295/40 20s at the rear. Summer, winter and all-season tyres have also been homologated, but considering the Dakar has lapped the Ring in 7min 56sec on its standard knobbles – with a top speed limited to 149mph – you can't help but wonder if summer tyres are even necessary.

Climb inside and it all feels instantly familiar. Same dials, same instruments, same big central touchscreen that you get in a GTS. The seats are full-blown buckets of the type you get in a GT3, with the same fixed uprights. And since there are no seats in the rear, also *à la* GT3, when you're underway the cabin has that same soundscape in which stones generate more noise than normal as they ping into the rear wheelarches.

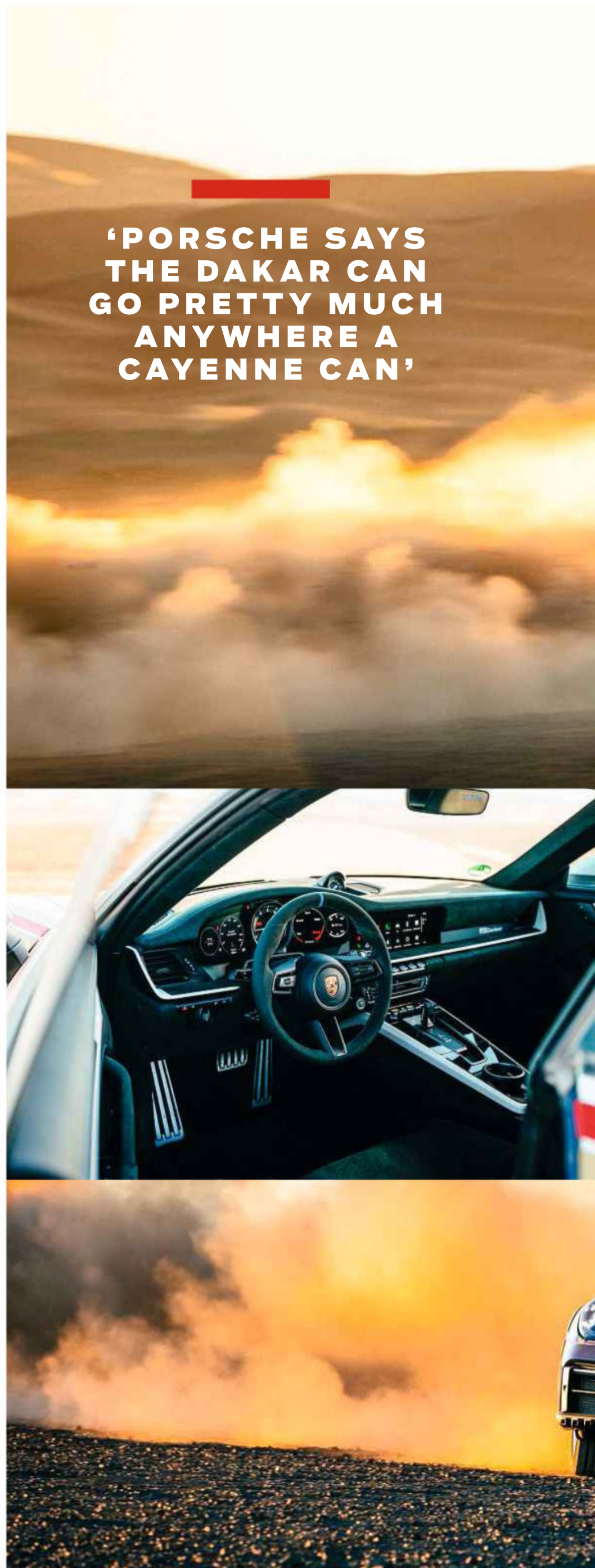
On a regular piece of road (i.e. not yet in the desert) the Dakar feels decently refined and properly quick: the 3-litre twin-turbo flat-six and eight-speed PDK gearbox offer the same amount of thrust and snap as a GTS, with 473bhp and 420lb ft being enough to fire it to 62mph in a claimed 3.4sec and to 100mph in 7.8sec. It also has an unusually smooth ride in any of its five drive modes (Wet, Normal, Sport, Rallye and Offroad) yet on the move it has more aural character than a GTS due to its decreased sound insulation. Basically it's just louder and sounds more old-school 911, which is great; the reduction in outright grip from the All Terrains and the extra noise they generate kind of adds to the effect.

Limiting the top speed to 149mph has nothing to do with the gearing, by the way, which is exactly the same as in the GTS. Instead, Porsche had to knock it back digitally because with its softer springs and increased ride height the Dakar has very different roll and yaw characteristics at high speed, so 149mph it had to be. No big deal, because what you get in return is a smoother if slightly noisier ride on normal roads plus a gigantic increase in possibilities when you venture off road.

In our case this means turning left pretty much at the end of the runway at Errachidia airport in Morocco, not far from the border

Right: Dakar is based on the 911 GTS, but with a beefed-up underside and the ride height raised by 50mm (with another 30mm of clearance available at the touch of a button). Interior, too, is closely related to that of the GTS but without the rear seats, while options include a roll-cage package (far right)

**'PORSCHE SAYS
THE DAKAR CAN
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CAYENNE CAN'**





with Algeria, then heading straight into the desert for two days, sometimes driving on the exact same roads the original 911 Dakar traversed when it won the famous rally in 1984.

It's true that for much of the time this does feel like a well-oiled marketing exercise, what with our ten-car support crew for just four Dakars, plus the police checkpoints, a sub-support crew from Pirelli and even some mobile khazis and drinks stations along the route. But, beyond the hype, the actual ground we cover during two days is seriously vicious in places and the Dakar, well, it just copes. It keeps going. And when some enormous sand dunes appear in the windscreen for a while, it entertains. It is, in fact, bloody hilarious.

Not to the point where a Mitsubishi Pajero or some such would get stuck while the Dakar sails majestically into the sunset. It's good but it's not *that* good. But the terrain is still naughty enough in places to make a Range Rover Sport driver probably think twice before saying no thanks. Yet the Dakar never misses a beat and doesn't even suffer a single puncture. When all is said and done that's mightily impressive from a car that can also lap the Ring in under eight minutes using the exact same tyres.

It helps, of course, that the 911 GTS is already a rather well-made piece of kit, to the extent that even Porsche's own test drivers were somewhat flummoxed when they

started working out what it could and couldn't do off-road in order to determine what needed to be re-engineered. By all accounts they fully expected it to fall to bits, but it didn't. In the end, all they had to do was raise it, beef up the underside, lengthen the springs, rewrite the PASM to include a couple of new rough-road settings and that was about it. Whack some decals on the side, drop the top speed to make sure it doesn't fall over on the autobahn and, hey presto, the car that was first discussed internally at Porsche in 2013 but was sidelined because no one thought it would sell, has become a reality ten years later.

However cynical it may appear on the surface, in reality the Dakar is no less than another great 911. In the right circumstances it's an absolute blast. In many ways it's one of *the* great 911s because it can take you to places that no production 911 has ever been able to before. It expands both your and the car's horizons without diluting the model line's core appeal – once you extract it from the predictably dramatic desert backdrop in which it was introduced to the world's press.

So although the Dakar will be ridiculed by some (and met with awe by others) there's no getting away from the fact that, judged in isolation and ignoring the hype, it's just a really cool car. A great car, no less. ☒

Porsche 911 Dakar

Engine Flat-six, 2981cc, twin-turbo **Power** 473bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 420lb ft @ 2300-5000rpm **Weight** 1605kg **0-62mph** 3.4sec
Top speed 149mph **Basic price** £173,000

evo rating ★★★★★



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FAST FLEET



Lamborghini Murciélago

289,000 miles in and a major catastrophe befalls the Fast Fleet Murciélago. With a six-figure bill to repair it, has it finally reached the end of the road?



THE DEAFENING SHRIEK OF A Lamborghini V12 destroying itself isn't something I wish to ever hear again. After the gut-wrenching realisation that this would be gigantic money to fix, it also began to dawn on me that, given my Murciélago's colourful history, it might just be time to close the curtain on it for good and strip it down for parts.

Long-standing **evo** aficionados may remember the big Lambo regularly appearing in these pages from 2005 to 2018. Back in 2004 it was the first Murciélago to be delivered by Lamborghini Manchester and one of the few with a manual 'box. Within weeks of it poking

its short snout out of the showroom, it was earning its keep on track as a driving experience supercar, clocking up a huge mileage over the next seven years.

The 8000-odd paying drivers over that period enabled me to hang on to the car despite the eye-watering running costs, which included forking out for nine clutches, three engine rebuilds and a nut-and-bolt restoration after a devastating high-speed crash in 2013. That two-year rebuild meant there was actually little left of the Murciélago that made its way down the production line at Sant'Agata, so its nickname of Trigger's Broom became more apt than ever.



p120 Skoda Superb Sportline



p123 Volkswagen Arteon R



p124 Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG



p126 Peugeot 208 GTi by PS



Since retiring from circuits, SG54 LAM has led a more sedate life, albeit one that has still seen it traverse Scandinavia in the winter and enjoy summertime trips to every country in Europe and a few more beyond. Its last major outing was a 3000-mile tour of Scandinavia in 2018, since when its owner has been busy building Britain's Biggest Model Railway, meaning its fat Pirellis have spent more time resting on a barn floor than they have exploring unfamiliar asphalt.

Fast forward to January 2022 and the barn doors opened for the 289,000-mile Murciélago to get a fresh MOT. As later Lamborghinis have acquired more wings, scoops and splitters, Luc Donckerwolke's 2001 design has aged stunningly well to these eyes. And it seems I'm not alone: out on the road again, the Murciélago was provoking the same positive reactions it always has. Its 6.2-litre V12 still delivered a kick, too, and with its Tubi Style exhaust bolted back on, the notes from the rear reminded me why I first fell in love with this supercar.

Later that day, with a 15th ticket on the passenger seat, I began my journey home and was soon joining the northbound M1. It's here where things very rapidly took a turn for the worse when the artic in front swerved suddenly to avoid an obstacle in lane one. I wasn't so lucky. Before I could even lift off the loud pedal the Lambo struck a folded stepladder with a massive bang, the jolt from the impact enough to cause the Andrea Bocelli CD I'd been playing to fly out into the cabin like Oddjob's frisbee bowler hat. As bits of orange carbonfibre hit the windscreen, the car leapt over the ladder with sufficient force for my head to brush the roof, and with the needle now bouncing off the rev limiter the Lambo landed violently before finally grinding to a halt on the hard shoulder.

The sight of a wounded orange Murciélago soon slowed the M1 to a car park, but fortunately



recovery came sooner than I'd feared and by 10pm we were both home via a flatbed Iveco, leaving me enough time to fill out the Zurich Private Clients online claim form that evening.

I was pleasantly surprised by a 9.15am call the very next day from ZPC's Gwen Rodaway to reassure me another flatbed was inbound. This time the destination was Manchester-based Lloyds Autobody, specialists in repairing all the high-end marques. Chris Greenwood was the contact there and as soon as the patient had been admitted he called to explain the procedure and promised an update after an initial assessment had been made.

In the back of my mind I'd expected the bill to fix the Murciélago to come to the best part of £10k, but it turned out I was way off the mark. When Chris called back to talk me through the estimate he listed a new bumper at £18k, front

splitter at £8k and side sills at £6k each, and that was just for starters. With paint and labour we'd be knocking on the door of £40,000. Even so, Chris was hopeful he'd get the thumbs-up from my insurer to start work within a week or so. As it happened, ZPC's assessor accepted the estimate and gave the go-ahead the very next day.

Three months and several regular updates from Lloyds later and the Murciélago was ready for collection. Inside Lloyds' premises it looks more like a laboratory than an accident repair centre, and I'd been led to a quiet corner where an incredibly pristine Arancio orange Lamborghini sat waiting for me. Clearly a whole lot of meticulous attention had been paid to the entire car, not just the affected front end, to expertly blend the new pearl paintwork with the older paint on the rest of the car. Not since September 2004, when it had just 64 miles on the odometer, had I ever seen it look this good.

Setting off for home, I noticed the V12 lacked a bit of enthusiasm, but what concerned me more was an 'odd' exhaust note that started about 20 miles in. Putting it down to the car not being driven for three months, I parked my worries and put the Murciélago to bed.

The next morning I set off on a planned trip to Windsor for a charity car event, and it was when crossing the Tinsley Viaduct on the southbound M1 near Sheffield that I heard the first sign of real trouble coming. A high-pitched squealing from behind gradually increased in urgency until a metallic clattering took over. As I was now on a section of 'smart' motorway with no hard shoulder, I was urging the Murciélago out loud to hang on just another seven miles to get us to Woodall Services and safety. With three miles to go and the oil pressure now dropping, the noises from behind sounded like tools in an empty cement mixer. Fortunately for me, the Lambo made it to the main car park at the services before limping to a stop.

This time rescue was a long time coming, as no flatbeds wide enough to carry a Murciélago were available, so it was late Saturday evening when a very poorly Lambo was winched down the ramp back into the barn.

Sunday was spent trying to figure out how a front-end collision with an object had resulted in the mid-mounted V12 imploding. An almost second-by-second description of the accident to a friendly Lamborghini technician resulted in

a likely theory: whilst the rev limiter protects the V12 from over-speeding, the violent deceleration of spinning airborne Pirellis during the hard landing could well have broken a valve stem, leading to catastrophic engine damage.

Monday morning saw me on the phone to ZPC again, and whilst I didn't voice my opinions as to the cause of the V12 destroying itself, Rodaway didn't hesitate in sending out the cavalry once again, this time to take the Murciélago to see its old friends at Stockport-based Lamborghini Manchester.

An initial assessment that included a boroscope examination of the internals (the supercar equivalent of a camera up your rectum) confirmed the worst possible diagnosis: smashed valves, bent pistons and more damage besides. The cure? A new V12 – or an extremely comprehensive rebuild on the existing one. My heart sank through my boots.

Given the potentially huge cost involved, ZPC understandably wanted a second opinion and appointed a specialist engine firm to confirm the damage was related to the accident. Within a few days the answer back was positive and the search was on for a new or remanufactured V12.

Luck was on my side as Sant'Agata's own parts department had just such a lump in stock. That'll be £75,000, please. Just a week later and Lamborghini Manchester's technicians were busy prying open a large wooden crate. It wasn't all plain sailing once the old V12 was winched

out, though, as it became apparent that tiny metal filings had contaminated the catalytic converters, oil cooler, oil lines and even the clutch plate. Work paused a while as authorisation was sought for these additional parts and yet more labour – which added another £30k to the final bill. Three weeks later and the newly engined Lambo landed back at Lloyds Autobody to be super-detailed once again.

A year on from the accident and SG54 has a completely new lease of life. In fact it's tempting to suggest that colliding with a stray stepladder was the best accident the Lambo has ever had. It now has way more punch than before the incident and the car as a whole feels noticeably nimbler too. I've now shelved any ideas of parting company with it; aside from anything else, to place a value on it, given its history, would be nigh on impossible.

As for insurance companies, up till now I've never been a fan, having seen them wriggle out of more claims than I care to remember in my experiences with them as a landlord. In this case Zurich Private Clients did the complete opposite. They could have argued about the engine damage but instead stepped up to the mark. That's one huge claim and I'm grateful. 300,000 miles is back on the cards.

Simon George

Date acquired September 2004 **Total mileage** 289,381 **Mileage this month** 230
Costs this month £173,663 (see text)
mpg this month 10.0





NEW ARRIVAL

Skoda Superb Estate Sportline Plus

4WD, huge carrying capacity and 0-62mph in 5.3sec – is our latest Skoda the perfect sleeper?

I SEEM TO BE HAVING A SEVERE CASE OF déjà vu, as having only just said goodbye to our Kodiah vRS, I now find myself in another big Skoda, this one a Superb Estate Sportline Plus. I've sampled quite a few fast Skodas since starting at **evo** back in 2014 and this model and spec has the potential to be the best yet.

Let's start with the powertrain. Our new arrival has the 2-litre petrol engine, which produces a very respectable 276bhp and is mated to a seven-speed DSG transmission and four-wheel drive, resulting in a surprisingly quick 0-62mph claim of just 5.3 seconds. To give that figure some context, a Golf GTI Clubsport, which has 20bhp more but no 4WD, takes three tenths longer for the same benchmark. Paired with the optional Dynamic Chassis Control, this will hopefully allow KY22 VNH to offer the perfect blend of relaxed motoring with a claimed 33.1mpg alongside the ability to keep some of the more exotic metal in sight while out on **evo** photoshoots.

Sportline Plus trim brings a pair of excellent Alcantara sports seats with silver diamond stitching, plus a leather 'super-sport' steering wheel that also features silver stitching. To further press home that this is the sportiest model in the Superb line-up, you also gain dashes of 'carbon optic' material around the cabin, while the dynamic interior lighting changes colour each time a different drive mode is selected. The top-spec Columbus satnav is also included, complete with a giant 9.2-inch touchscreen display and Wi-Fi. Hopefully it will prove more reliable than the same system fitted in our Kodiah did...

The exterior gets gloss black accents all round, including the front grille, side strip, window surrounds, door mirrors and badges. I really like the design as a whole and love the road presence of the estate model, but I think I would have preferred Skoda's classic Race Blue metallic paint rather than our car's Velvet Red metallic. Still,

'Hopefully it will offer both relaxed motoring and the ability to keep exotic metal in sight'

much rather bright red than yet another boring grey, black or white car on our roads.

That paint is a £790 option and is joined by 19-inch Supernova black alloy wheels (£170), the Winter pack (a whopping £850 for heated seats front and rear) and a panoramic sunroof that added £1295 but will make my life much easier when I need to do car-to-car tracking shots with a colleague at the Skoda's wheel. I'm sure it'll also be lovely for the two weeks of sunshine us Brits get every year. A must-have option was a space-saver spare wheel (£205 and



far preferable to a can of foam), while a few other additions, including the aforementioned DCC (£755), take the total up from £44,330 basic to £52,295. Yup, a £50k+ Skoda.

That price tag puts our Superb in the ballpark of numerous other large estates, including Peugeot's 508 SW PSE (355bhp), BMW's 530e SE Touring (288bhp), Audi's A6 Avant 45 quattro S-line or Black Edition (261bhp) and, as joined our fleet last month, VW's Arteon R Shooting Brake (316bhp). I'll be interested to see if our Skoda can justify its place amongst such competition over the coming months and miles.

Aston Parrott (@AstonParrott)

Date acquired December 2022 **Total mileage** 1311 **Mileage this month** 811 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 29.6



Fiat Panda 100HP

Modern Aygo X or classic Panda? Depends on the temperature...

WHEN THE PANDA 100HP WAS contemporary there were lots of very small cars, from CIs and Twingos to 107s and Kas. Today those models are no more, but not every car maker has given up on a sub-supermini model. Toyota, for example, announced a new Aygo last year, no longer a co-pro with Peugeot/Citroën though still made in the same Czech factory as its predecessors. Except it's not just an Aygo, it's an Aygo X, the new suffix marking a shift towards faux-SUV styling in an attempt to skate to the puck.

You'll see from the pic above that it looks pretty chunky next to my weeny Panda, though the Aygo's bulk is exaggerated by the 18-inch wheels that are standard on all but the base model. And I suspect it's those big wheels that make the little Toyota a bit bumpy at times. In fact, in some circumstances I think it has a worse ride than the Panda, never a car famed for its Phantom-like pillowyness. The Panda's biggest problem is that it's bouncy, but the way it deals with individual holes and humps in the tarmac isn't terrible, while the Aygo is less bucking bronco but too firm over small imperfections, which makes it seem restless in a different way.

That aside, the Toyota isn't bad to drive but there's more raw, unfiltered joy to be had from

the Fiat. It's got a stronger, more eager engine, a nicer gearshift, and it's more satisfying to bung into corners. The Aygo X is a perfectly nice thing, but for sheer silly small-car smiles the 15-year-old Panda has it beaten.

Of course, in other areas the Toyota wins out, especially over my particular Panda. It has wireless CarPlay, for example, where my Fiat has a broken radio. And it has a working heater where, I discovered with dismay this month, my 100HP does not. Turns out you lose a certain amount of driving pleasure when trying to fire the sparky little Panda down a backroad dressed in six layers, a ski jacket and thick gloves. Most likely the problem is down to the failure of a flap within the climate control, the official fix for which is a new heater box. Fitting this would be a dash-out job, in turn demanding the removal of the doors, and since that's way beyond my DIY skills it would cost me pretty much what I paid for the car. But there might be another solution. And it's not to buy an Aygo X. Watch this space...

Richard Porter (@sniffpetrol)

Date acquired September 2022 **Total mileage** 104,998 **Mileage this month** 91 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 37.8



Maserati Ghibli Trofeo

The opportunity to spend time with this characterful Italian supersaloon is an offer you can't refuse

IMAGINE THE MASERATI MC20 OF supersaloons. Unique, understated, deeply esoteric and characterful but underpinned with dazzling dynamics that match or even exceed those of the nearest rivals. A quieter, more discreet BMW M5 CS that exudes confidence and class and a bit of sun-dappled mafioso murderous cool. Well, the Ghibli Trofeo is most definitely not that car. It's pretty cool, that's for sure. However, this is a car hopelessly outclassed by the aforementioned M5 CS or, for that matter, an M5 Competition or AMG E63. If all three started a lap of the Nürburgring at the same time, the two Germans would be lapping the Maser by Brunnchen. If it was wet it would be more like Hatzenbach. A true mafia-style bloodbath.

And yet over the course of a few weeks on cold, greasy roads in Northamptonshire I rather grew to like the big Maser. In truth, it doesn't feel like a proper supersaloon. There just isn't the body control, the agility nor the ultimate grip and traction. Instead it's a bit of a cruiser that happens to have a wicked turn of speed and an amusing taste for gratuitous, chronic and, at times, unexpected wheelspin and oversteer.

So every journey becomes a curious juxtaposition of mellow wafting laced with sudden bursts of heart-thumping adrenaline. The Ghibli Trofeo is many things but you could never accuse it of being boring.

The engine is really rather wonderful. When summoned, the 3.8-litre twin-turbocharged V8 delivers monster torque and a deliciously snarly top-end. The noise isn't digitally mastered like an AMG engine's nor as smooth and revvy as the M5 motor, and the slightly less polished character feels very Maserati-appropriate. As does the oddly, um, idiosyncratic way certain things work. For example, the heated steering wheel symbol is on the left-hand side of the touchscreen, just next to the heated seat control for the passenger seat. You'd think flipping those graphics for right-hand drive wouldn't be too difficult, but I suspect there was an important cup of coffee to drink that day. Or an emergency cigarette situation.

Perhaps a few days were skipped on the chassis side, too. In Normal mode the ride is pretty good but the Ghibli does feel heavy and tends to float between bumps. Sport is better but the ride feels fidgety and unsettled. Corsa brings more noise and throttle

response but now the car feels oddly brittle; body control is much better contained but the equilibrium is easily shattered and the Trofeo shimmies and shakes over the road surface. You can drive through these issues and find pretty good balance, but in cold, greasy conditions there's just not the feel and fluidity to really drive hard. You sense that moment when the car just slithers wide is never too far away.

Writing all that down reminds me that I shouldn't like this car at all. But I do. Could I recommend it over one of the more conventional rivals?

I don't think so. It's just too far off the pace in too many areas. Yet there's character and warmth in abundance, a sense of occasion and, most of all, it just puts a smile on your face. I'd happily look after it for another few weeks. Supersaloons are just the best invention ever, aren't they?

Jethro Bovingdon (@JethroBovingdon)

Date acquired November 2022 **Total mileage** 12,025 **Mileage this month** 701 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 23.1



BMW M240i xDrive

A Swiss breeze sees our 369bhp 2-series win another admirer

THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS OFTEN result in a bit of a switcheroo between Fast Fleeters. This festive season Jethro B and I swapped our respective steeds, JBoV needing a big four-door to ferry his in-laws about, while I needed something that could cope with a big trip and a bit of snow on a pre-Christmas trip to my own in-laws in Switzerland.

I thought seriously about taking the Maser, but there's no way it would have coped with snow and ice. With its xDrive all-wheel drive, the M240i was just what I needed.

I'd hoped to get some winter tyres, or at least some all-seasons fitted prior to the trip, but sizing and supply issues thwarted me. Plenty of tyre brands do the correct sizes, but few if any offer a full range in the UK. My only option was buying some snow socks; less than ideal, but better than nothing.

As it transpired, we left the UK during an especially cold snap, with the ambient temperature reading -8.5deg C. Ironically this was the lowest figure we'd see throughout our trip, despite our destination being in the mountains overlooking Sion. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little bit relieved that a lack of snow and ice spared us from tobogganing our way down (or scrabbling our way up) the steep driveway to the in-laws' chalet, but a little bit of me is sad we didn't put the M240i's xDrive system to the test.

On the long autoroute run I kept the car in Eco mode. I know, I know. But it's good fun to see what you can lift the average mpg to, as well

as encouraging a gendarme-friendly pace on quiet roads that would otherwise prove all too tempting. The best we saw was 39.4mpg, though this dropped to 36 for the round-trip. Pretty good for such a lusty turbocharged six-cylinder.

Comfortable seats, excellent infotainment and that silky powertrain made the trip effortless, but the Lane Assist was really infuriating. If only you could switch these bloody systems off and keep them off, rather than having to redo it after every stop. They truly are a blight on the modern driving experience.

Once back home I had some fun short drives that highlighted the M240i's compact feel and big-hearted performance. This car is unusually responsive to dynamic mode changes, with everything coming to life as you work into the more aggressive settings. Once into the Sport and Sport+ modes it feels like a different car, with so much more urgency, character and response. It still feels like a BMW even though it's all-wheel drive, and feels more fun than an RS3.

I think we're all guilty of being blinded by the star quality of the M2, but its little brother is one of the more interesting, impressive and discreetly potent cars I've driven in a long while. The heated steering wheel is pretty nice, too.

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)

Date acquired June 2022 **Total mileage** 11,974 **Mileage this month** 3371 **Costs this month** £48 (snow socks) **mpg this month** 34.3

VW Arteon R Shooting Brake

The mystery of missing coolant

DASHBOARD WARNINGS. IF YOU'RE A Volkswagen veteran, they're something you're used to. Some you know are temporary (Driver Assist being unavailable), some are scary (instruments and infotainment powering off to darkness), some cause momentary panic (a tyre pressure being 0.1 bar off what it should be), but most are orange in colour and easily batted away, then ignored or put down to the weather.

It was when I was literally 'driving home for Christmas' that I was hit by a new kind of warning: a deafening scream unlike anything I'd heard before in a VW, accompanied by some serious-looking red graphics and the words 'COOLANT ISSUE. PULL OVER IMMEDIATELY. CONSULT OWNERS MANUAL'. I think, for once, it wasn't bluffing. Best not ignore.

Luckily I was close to home, so once the engine had cooled, I popped the hood and looked at the coolant tank, which was empty. Despite advice from a drunken uncle to 'use some water from the iron', I bought the official VW Group coolant to top it up, which thankfully saw the warning go away.

The level hasn't changed since, so I'm not sure how it ended up low in the first place. However, as this isn't our first VW Group car to have coolant issues in recent months – our Kodiaq vRS needed a new hose after its level fell – I'm now keeping an eye out for leaks. In the meantime, how do you turn off that orange screenwash warning again?

Richard Browne (@washlander)

Date acquired November 2022 **Total mileage** 12,349 **Mileage this month** 889 **Costs this month** £13 (coolant) **mpg this month** 35.1





Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Estate

An LSD installation, new geo and a shakedown at the Ring saw 2022 end on a high for our V8 wagon

LAST YEAR WAS FILLED WITH ROAD TRIPS, modifications and lofty fuel prices, and all the while the C63 ownership experience has continued to exceed my expectations. Of course, with the car now having covered just shy of 10,000 miles since I took on ownership, it hasn't been completely plain sailing...

Given its relatively low overall mileage and my somewhat obsessive maintenance habits, I hadn't given much thought to MOT day. As I'd hoped, there were zero advisories, but the nasty surprise was an ageing suspension-arm ball joint that rendered it a failure. Perished rubber wouldn't usually be an expensive fix, but the only way to replace it for OEM was to buy an entire suspension arm for almost £500. There's the first AMG-branded bill, then.

In more positive news, the Quaife limited-slip differential has finally moved from beneath my desk to between R55 AWP's rear wheels, courtesy of the excellent team at Suspension Secrets. It transpired

that its installation was a little more involved than I'd expected, as although the differential itself caused no issues, extracting the casing proved to be what can only be described as a faff. Various bolts put up a fight and an ABS pick-up ring gave up the ghost in the process, disabling the car's stability systems – right before a Nürburgring road trip I had planned. Thankfully, though, some back and forth saw a new part installed just in time.

The differential wasn't the only reason for my Suspension Secrets visit, with their 'fast road' geometry set-up also applied. Front camber adjustment isn't possible on the W204 C63 without additional hardware, but tweaks to rear camber and toe have dramatically improved traction, with considerable improvements to mid-corner stability too. Combined with the LSD, the C63 is on a new level entirely and proving far more capable than I'd imagined possible.

All the above work was put to the test on the

trip to Germany, covering over 1500 miles and lapping the Nürburgring during a heatwave without a single issue. As well as being great on the Ring, the car performed flawlessly on the surrounding Eifel roads, tackling hairpins with precision and filling the hills with the glorious sounds of M156 V8. Single-digit mpg figures and heat-derived caliper paint flaking were the only downsides, but I'll take both as an achievement.

On the autobahn and even Belgium's corrugated roads, I couldn't have asked for a much better companion. Wonderful refinement, comfortable seats and the ability to cruise effortlessly at triple digits make the C63 an incredible road-trip tool. The traffic conditions didn't allow for a test of its quoted 174mph top speed (a mere 152mph was all I managed), but 2023's trip is already in the works...

On my return, R55 AWP received a service at AMG specialist MB Automotive, with a transmission service improving the driving experience further still. Part-throttle shifts are now significantly smoother,



even completely cold, with full-throttle upshifts much snappier than before.

Elsewhere, a new airbag has been fitted courtesy of a Mercedes-Benz recall, while the sliding cup-holder cover and surrounding plastic trim, all of which had seen some abuse over the years, have been replaced with fresh items to give the cabin a subtle lift.

Petrol prices are still making it a tricky sell, but on the drive to Germany and other recent long runs, the C63 has achieved over 26mpg. It's hardly sipping V-Power, but it's certainly not as ruinous as I was once led to believe.

Sam Jenkins (@evosamj)

Date acquired May 2021 **Total mileage** 54,097 **Mileage this month** 1807 **Costs this month** £2145 (see text) **mpg this month** 17.0



Cupra Born 230

EV charging woes hit home as our Born ventures further afield

IF YOU DROVE A LONG DISTANCE IN AN EV during the recent holiday period, chances are you have an opinion about the state of the public charging network in the UK. Of course, everyone's experience is different, but generally speaking, it's not great.

I won't go into how and why the system at large doesn't work – that's a job for the *Daily Mail* or your Twitter feed – but the Christmas break will have reiterated to many why we're still a long way off being able to support a wholesale adoption of electric vehicles on these shores.

For our Born, I depend entirely on the public charging network as I don't have any off-street parking. With my typical and admittedly narrow usage pattern, I'm glad to report that this works quite well. I rely almost exclusively on the Ubitricity network, which is a collection of 5.5kWh charging points that are usually integrated into streetlamps and operated via your phone after scanning a small QR code displayed at the site. It's simple to use: there are no memberships, no RFID cards and no freestanding electrical interfaces to worry about.

It's not a fast charge, but this doesn't usually matter to me as I tend to charge overnight, and there are so many charging points around London that access isn't a problem either. Almost every second lamp post in my immediate few blocks has a point installed, with more being added every month – the latest being three

metres from my front door, which is handy.

It's not quite the bargain it once was due to the rise in energy prices, though. Ubitricity currently charges 45p per kWh as long as you avoid the peak period of 4pm to 7pm, where it's 75p per kWh. For our Cupra, which has been averaging around 3 miles per kWh, this equates to 15p per mile, which is only around 5p per mile less than a serious hot hatchback such as a VW Golf R or Honda Civic Type R can manage on a longer run with current unleaded prices.

But when I escape London for any length of time, this reliability and consistency quickly diminishes. My holiday break took me to Oxford, so hardly the most remote of locations, yet access to public charging was useless. There wasn't a single charging point within walking distance of my location, and very few public points at all to be found outside the city centre.

So maybe there's something to learn here. As well as an expansion of high-speed charging points on motorways, it feels like another piece of the infrastructure that's currently missing is slower, simpler points in much greater quantities around high-density areas.

Jordan Katsianis (@JordanKatsianis)

Date acquired August 2022 **Total mileage** 5263 **Mileage this month** 375 **Costs this month** £0 **mi/kWh this month** 3.0

Peugeot 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport

A switch to some fresh and more appropriate rubber uncovers a bigger concern

WHEN I BOUGHT THE PEUGEOT LAST YEAR, it came on a matching set of tyres – often rare in the world of used cars. But those tyres were old Nankangs, beginning to look a wee bit worn up front. I made a mental note to switch them for something more in keeping with the 208's focus with reasonable haste.

But that soon plummeted down the priority list, the car's amusing balance – namely its love of lift-off oversteer that I was so enamoured of in early press cars – feeling exaggerated by its non-OEM rubber. In the dry, the car was deft and alert. In the wet it could border on the cartoonish.

An ever-quickenning slow puncture nudged replacement tyres back into view as autumn arrived, though, and my search for a new set was swift. I'm a stickler for originality (ignore the fact I've upgraded the dampers to Bilsteins...) and so Michelin was the first brand on my mind, the GTi by Peugeot Sport wearing bespoke Super Sports when new. Those are no longer available in the BPS's 205/40 R18 size, but the French firm's Pilot Sport 4 is considered a strong alternative. Tyre tests in this magazine have rated Pilot Sport variants well in the past and I've had highly positive experiences with the PS4 on recent performance cars, chiefly the Toyota GR86. I promptly ordered a set (which come in at £712.76 on Blackcircles.com as I write).



This is where the tale twists. Or more precisely, my front nearside wheel. It turns out the slow puncture wasn't emanating from tyre damage, but a buckled wheel rim. I'd put the car's very slight pull to the left down to a tracking issue, one that's surely inevitable when a car is so stiffly sprung and aggressively cambered and our roads so beaten up. Something to simply tolerate, in other words. Alas it proved much pricier to fix; my local tyre fitter reckoned a repair wasn't feasible, so I promptly limped the car home to hit the phones for a replacement.

I ended up ordering a brand-new wheel directly through Peugeot, the only place the BPS edition's

unique satin black alloy could be found quickly. Sourcing it was simple but delivery less so, its journey from France seemingly scuppered by customs issues and postal delays. It also significantly swelled the cost of what was otherwise a routine tyre replacement.

Several weeks later, with one new alloy and four new tyres finally fitted, the GTi was back in action and somewhat better than before. The Michelins were fitted during December's biting cold snap, so their first few dozen miles were covered in temperatures well below zero and thus very cautiously. Just about every journey I've made since has been in some degree of wet conditions, but the way I can now put power down – wringing out every last benefit of the BPS's tenacious Torsen LSD – is a notable step on. The rear axle seems more politely behaved, but given too many of my miles remain very functional ones, that's no clanging criticism. It does make me want to get the 208 on track to better explore its newly attuned limits, though...

Stephen Dobie (@stephen_dobie)

Date acquired April 2022 **Total mileage** 41,771

Mileage this month 734 **Costs this month** £1309.72 (see text) **mpg this month** 42.1





Jaguar F-Pace SVR

Our super-SUV falls momentarily ill, but is quickly back to its best

THE SVR HAS HAD A STUMBLE. Don't worry too much though, our 'used' long-termer hasn't snapped a crankshaft or really disgraced itself. It simply had a small hiccup as we closed in on the 30,000-mile mark.

The first I knew about it was when the 'check engine' light appeared. I hadn't noticed anything untoward, but after logging the fault with Jaguar and awaiting their response I started to pay particular attention to how the powertrain was working. To begin with I could detect nothing, but then one day at cruising speed on the motorway I noticed a slight pulse in the engine's delivery despite my right foot not wavering on the pedal. Then I began to feel – or was I imagining it? – all sorts of odd things: a sudden tremor at idle, or a slightly poorer response to the throttle. It was at this point that I also noticed the trip computer's average economy readout was looking rather grim. A pang of guilt came over me, recalling how I'd extolled the SVR's surprisingly reasonable fuel economy in these reports recently, and now here it was struggling to reach 20mpg...

Of course, all was not well, as diagnosed by Jaguar Assistance tech Liam, who turned up promptly once the call was made, plugged in his laptop and discovered that the oxygen sensor on the second bank had failed. Hence the misfire

and, with the closed loop of engine control broken, the very rich mixture. The part was ordered, and on his return a couple of days later was fitted in 15 minutes on the driveway.

So once again all is good in the world of the big Jaguar. I did think I was going to have to have a little additional whinge about the infotainment sometimes unexpectedly disconnecting from my phone, but it transpires that may be more to do with my ancient lead than the Jaguar...

Unfortunately, the aforementioned contact with Coventry was also an opportunity for them to confirm that the SVR's days with us are numbered. I reckon we'll have put the best part of a further 10,000 miles on it in the six months it's been in our possession. That it feels virtually the same as a brand new one is entirely to its credit, and while its frugality only really kicks in on longer trips (you'll be doing well to get a 25mpg average just pottering around), its cultured but muscly V8 is such a star attraction that I find myself magnetically drawn towards this car. If only Jaguar made more models in this vein.

Adam Towler (@AdamTowler)

Date acquired July 2022 **Total mileage** 28,701 **Mileage this month** 1301 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 22.1

Ford Puma ST

Why acclimatisation is essential to get the best from the Puma

WHAT AN ASTONISHING ENGINE the Puma's 1.5-litre triple is. Its three-cylinder beat makes it sound relaxed, lazy almost, but it delivers ludicrously strong torque seemingly from tickover. It's a remarkable example of how far turbocharging has come, and yet it was another reason why it took me far longer than I expected to drive the Puma smoothly. The first couple of times I drove it I felt clumsy, like a novice driver; the steering has more response and self-centring than I like or seems necessary so the car felt jumpy, while the brakes had too much dead travel and then a strong bite point.

Two weeks later, I've adapted. My steering inputs are now slow and small, I lean gently into the brake pedal and I squeeze the throttle and ride the torque, shifting gears less frequently and in an unhurried fashion. Around town the Puma is now calm; tamed, if you like. I now feel I'm in the right place to start interrogating the handling, which strikes me as odd because there was a time not so long ago when you could jump in any Ford and feel at home within a few hundred yards. They rode and steered sweetly and all their major controls were beautifully judged, so you felt like you were driving with finesse. Any driver did. This was Ford's USP under Richard Parry-Jones and it was applied to Ka, Focus, Mondeo and the original Puma of course. A sprinkling of that would make the current Puma so much more satisfying.

John Barker (@evoJB)

Date acquired April 2022 **Total Mileage** 10,011 **Mileage this month** 1040 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 36.6





Audi TT RS

Its tech is no longer state of the art, but it's got ease of use nailed

INSTRUMENTS WITH HUNDREDS of possible display combinations. A touchscreen that's infuriating to operate because the natural movements of a car mean you're forever accidentally brushing the wrong option. A touch-sensitive button on the end of a steering-wheel spoke that your palm sometimes catches when you make a turn, activating something you didn't want activated. The TT has none of these things, and is very much all the better for it.

Instead there are real buttons that go 'click' when you press them and rotary controls that go 'tick-tick-tick' when you turn them. As for screens, there is just the one: the so-called Virtual Cockpit. When it debuted in 2014 – on the TT, no less – it initially seemed like Audi swerving the expense of fitting two screens to some of its models, but in fact it proves you don't really need a faux iPad glued to the middle of your dashboard.

It's funny how something that was cutting edge just eight or nine years ago now seems almost old-fashioned. So simple, too. There are essentially just two 'looks' to flick between: either large speed and revs dials with a small info panel in the middle, or small dials out to the sides to maximise the space for whatever's in between – perfect for the nav map or Apple CarPlay/Android

Auto. But the overall style and layout stay broadly the same regardless, which keeps it at-a-glance understandable all the time. The graphics may lack the whoosh and sparkle we're used to seeing these days, but instead they're just really bloody legible, which is actually just really bloody nice.

Less nice are the shift paddles attached to the back of the steering wheel. They're bigger than some Volkswagen Group items, extended by an additional section of silvery plastic, but I'd swear this makes them sound even worse when you operate them. Genuinely, on occasions I have avoided using them when I've had a passenger on board, lest their embarrassingly plasticky 'clack' be heard. It's simply not a sound that belongs in a £70,000 car and once again has me wondering why a manufacturer hasn't included a set of premium metal paddles on the options list for £400. You'd tick that box without hesitation.

Thankfully, when you're driving alone they're but a small blot on an otherwise neat and driver-focused interior that's ageing remarkably well.

Ian Eveleigh

Date acquired July 2022 **Total mileage** 4997 **Mileage this month** 1185 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 27.8

Mazda MX-5 2.0 GT Sport Tech

It's our little winter wonder

IT'S MY FIRST WINTER WITH AN MX-5, and although a rear-drive sports car wearing summer tyres perhaps isn't the most sensible option at this time of year, it's proving to be a loyal companion. Slick roads and sub-zero temperatures had me concerned the Mazda might be less than friendly, but that couldn't be further from the reality.

Admittedly, as I write I've managed to avoid snow and ice, but the MX-5 still deserves credit for remaining predictable and enjoyable to drive. Our car is fitted with the optional lowering springs and Bilstein dampers, but its spring rates remain surprisingly low, which must be a contributory factor here.

With a sensible displacement, the speed at which the MX-5's engine comes up to temperature is also rather pleasant after the Fast Fleet C63. Despite its fabric roof, the Mazda's small cabin warms up quickly too, and although this particular car lacks a heated steering wheel, its powerfully heated seats compensate nicely.

With VX22 KHE now nearing 6000 miles, the 2-litre Skyactiv-G four-cylinder feels noticeably slicker than it did six months ago, revving more freely and offering marginally stronger low-end torque. Its six-speed 'box also remains one of the finest I've sampled, with a short, satisfying throw that simply never gets old.

In fact, our MX-5 as a whole only seems to improve with each drive, its dynamic quirks and sheer simplicity providing an experience you'd struggle to find elsewhere. Thankfully the kind folk at Mazda don't need it back for a while yet.

Sam Jenkins (@evosamj)

Date acquired July 2022 **Total mileage** 5795 **Mileage this month** 542 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 43.7



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RARE BEASTS

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- BMWCar Magazine ★★★★★

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★ = 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, F = feature). **Engine** shows details of the car's combustion engine, or for BEVs the total output of the electric motors in kW. **Weight (claimed)** is as quoted by the manufacturer, with a manual gearbox if offered. In most cases this figure is to DIN standards, i.e. with fluids, including a 90 per cent full fuel tank, but without a driver. However, where only a 'dry' weight is quoted (i.e. without any fluids) this is indicated by *. Note that a dry weight makes a car's power-to-weight ratio (bhp/ton) appear more favourable. **Weight (tested)** is our measurement of a test car, with all fluids, including a full tank of fuel, but no driver. Note that test cars may be equipped with options that increase their weight. **bhp/ton (claimed)** is always calculated using the manufacturer's weight figure. **0-62mph (claimed)** is the manufacturer's figure, with a manual gearbox where offered. Our **0-60mph (tested)** figures could be with either a manual or automatic/dual-clutch transmission.

SUPERMINIS / HOT HATCHES



OUR CHOICE

Hyundai i30 N. Clearly developed by a team that knows what makes a great driver's car, the i30 N has edged ahead of the traditional middleweight hot hatch favourites thanks to a refreshing honesty and simplicity that makes it more engaging than the competition at any speed.



BEST OF THE REST

The **Mercedes-AMG A45 S** (left) maximises the potential of its ludicrously potent in-line four with an all-wheel-drive chassis that provides genuine involvement, while the latest **Audi RS3 Sportback** offers more than just impressive stats too. For affordable supermini fun, look no further than the **Hyundai i20 N** and **Ford Fiesta ST**.

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING
Abarth 595 Competizione	256 D	£21,985	4/1368	178/5500	184/3000	1035kg	-	175	6.7	-	140	+ Spirited engine; still looks great - Favours fun over finesse ★★★★★☆
Abarth 595 Esseesse	264 D	£25,295	4/1368	178/5500	184/3000	1044kg	-	173	6.7	-	140	+ A bundle of fun if you're in the mood for it - Dynamically dated; expensive ★★★★★☆
Abarth 695 Biposto	205 F	2014-18	4/1369	187/5500	184/3000	997kg*	-	191	5.9	-	143	+ Engineered like a true Abarth product - Expensive for a city car ★★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo 147 GTA	187 F	2003-06	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1360kg	-	185	6.3	6.0	153	+ Mk1 Focus RS pace without the histrionics - Slightly nose-heavy ★★★★★☆
Audi A1 40 TFSI	256 D	£24,470	4/1984	197/6000	236/1500	1260kg	-	159	6.5	-	155	+ Capable - It's no S1 replacement ★★★★★☆
Audi S1	246 F	2014-18	4/1984	228/6000	273/1600	1315kg	-	176	5.8	-	155	+ Compliant and engaging chassis; quick, too - Looks dull without options ★★★★★☆
Audi A1 quattro	264 F	2013	4/1984	253/6000	258/2500	1420kg	-	181	5.7	-	152	+ Polished 253bhp 4WD A1 - Just 19 came to the UK, with a Porsche Cayman price ★★★★★☆
Audi S3 Sportback	279 D	£38,475	4/1984	306/5450	295/2000	1500kg	-	207	4.8	-	155	+ Less one-dimensional than its predecessor - Breaks little new ground ★★★★★☆
Audi S3	188 F	2013-20	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1395kg	-	216	5.2	5.4	155	+ Lots of grip and one of the best-sounding four-pot turbos - Still a little too clinical ★★★★★☆
Audi RS3 Sportback	292 D	£55,230	5/2480	394/5600	369/2250	1570kg	-	255	3.8	-	155	+ Improved chassis makes the RS3 a contender at last - Engine and gearbox hold it back ★★★★★☆
Audi RS3 Sportback	256 F	2017-21	5/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1510kg	-	265	4.1	-	155	+ Hugely quick point-to-point - Sometimes speed isn't the be-all and end-all ★★★★★☆
Audi RS3 Sportback	221 F	2015-16	5/2480	362/5800	343/1625	1520kg	-	242	4.3	3.6	155	+ Addictive five-cylinder noise; monster pace - Chassis not exactly playful ★★★★★☆
BMW 128ti	290 F	£33,885	4/1998	261/4750	295/1750	1445kg	-	184	6.1	-	155	+ Strong showroom appeal - Lacks precision ★★★★★☆
BMW M135i xDrive	271 F	£38,440	4/1998	302/5000	332/1800	1525kg	-	201	4.8	-	155	+ Strong performance, monster 4WD traction - Engine lacks character ★★★★★☆
BMW M235i xDrive Gran Coupé	274 D	£39,315	4/1998	302/5000	332/1800	1570kg	-	195	4.8	-	155	+ Quick, with an able chassis and quality cabin - Just not that exciting ★★★★★☆
BMW M135i	212 F	2012-15	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1430kg	-	228	5.1	5.2	155	+ Powertrain, noise, chassis - M235i looks nicer, and has an LSD option ★★★★★☆
Citroën DS3 1.6 THP	142 F	2010-15	4/1598	154/6000	177/1400	1240kg	-	126	7.3	-	133	+ A proper French hot hatch - Petrolheads might find it too 'designed' ★★★★★☆
Citroën DS3 Racing	153 D	2011-12	4/1598	204/6000	203/2000	1240kg	-	167	6.5	-	146	+ A faster, feistier DS3 - Not as hardcore as its 'Racing' tag suggests ★★★★★☆
Citroën AX GT	195 F	1987-92	4/1360	85/6400	86/4000	722kg	-	120	9.2	-	110	+ Makes terrific use of 85bhp - Feels like it's made from paper ★★★★★☆
Cupra Leon e-Hybrid	280 D	£34,495	4/1395	242	295	1596kg	-	154	6.7	-	140	+ Steers and handles neatly; tax-friendly - Can't decide if it's a hot hatch or a Prius rival ★★★★★☆
Cupra Leon 300	290 F	£35,575	4/1984	296/5300	295/2000	1415kg	-	213	5.7	-	155	+ More agile than a Mk8 Golf Clubsport - Not as confidence-inspiring; forgettable looks ★★★★★☆
DS 3 Performance	222 D	2016-18	4/1598	205/6000	221/3000	1175kg	-	177	6.5	-	143	+ All the right ingredients - Undercooked ★★★★★☆
Fiat Panda 100HP	273 F	2006-11	4/1368	99/6000	97/4250	975kg	1028kg	103	9.5	-	115	+ About as fun as small cars get - Optional ESP can't be turned off ★★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST	259 F	£21,655	3/1497	197/6000	214/1600	1187kg	-	169	6.5	-	144	+ Highly talented, with real depth to its character - Can get wrong-footed on bad tarmac ★★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST Edition / Performance Edition	292 F	£28,770	3/1497	197/6000	214/1600	1187kg	-	169	6.5	-	144	+ Like the regular Fiesta ST, but with added composure - How much?! ★★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST	207 F	2013-17	4/1596	197/5700	214/2500	1088kg	1193kg	184	6.9	7.4	137	+ Chassis, price, punchy performance - Have you heard of Mountune? ★★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST200	253 F	2016	4/1596	212/6000	236/2500	1088kg	-	198	6.7	-	143	+ Massive fun - They only made 400 ★★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	123 D	2008-13	4/1596	118/6000	112/4050	1045kg	-	115	9.9	-	120	+ A very entertaining supermini - Renault Sport Twingo and Suzuki Swift are even more fun ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST	075 D	2005-08	4/1999	148/6000	140/4500	1137kg	-	132	7.9	-	129	+ Great looks, decent brakes - Disappointing chassis, gutless engine ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST (Mk4)	267 F	£31,995	4/2261	276/5500	310/3000	1433kg	-	196	5.7	-	155	+ A return to form - Lacks the poise and precision of the very best ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST Edition (Mk4)	294 D	£35,785	4/2261	276/5500	310/3000	1433kg	-	196	5.7	-	155	+ Elevates the Focus ST from its underdog status - Needs a better engine and steering ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	207 F	2015-18	4/1999	247/5500	265/2000	1362kg	-	184	6.5	-	154	+ Excellent engine - Scrappy when pushed ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST (Mk2)	119 F	2005-10	5/2522	222/6000	236/1600	1392kg	-	162	6.8	6.7	150	+ Value, performance, integrity - Big engine compromises handling ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk3)	246 F	2015-18	4/2261	345/6000	347/2000	1547kg	1569kg	227	4.7	4.9	166	+ Torque-vectoring 4WD brought new sensations to a hot hatch - Needs to be driven hard ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS Edition (Mk3)	246 D	2018	4/2261	345/6000	347/2000	1547kg	-	227	4.7	-	166	+ Front limited-slip differential brings more precise handling - Pricey and still heavy ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	195 F	2009-11	5/2522	300/6500	324/2300	1467kg	-	208	5.9	5.9	163	+ Huge performance, highly capable FWD chassis - Body control is occasionally clumsy ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS500 (Mk2)	256 F	2010-11	5/2522	345/6000	339/2500	1467kg	-	239	5.6	5.6	165	+ More power and presence than regular Mk2 RS - Pricey ★★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk1)	207 F	2002-03	4/1998	212/5500	229/3500	1278kg	-	169	6.7	5.9	143	+ Some are great - Some are awful (so make sure you drive plenty) ★★★★★☆
Ford Escort RS Cosworth	271 F	1992-96	4/1993	224/6250	224/3500	1275kg	-	179	6.2	-	137	+ The ultimate Essex hot hatch - Unmodified ones are rare, and pricey ★★★★★☆
Ford Puma 1.7	095 F	1997-2002	4/1679	123/6300	116/4500	1041kg	-	120	9.2	8.6	122	+ Revvy engine, sparkling chassis, bargain used prices - Rusty rear arches ★★★★★☆
Ford Racing Puma	262 F	2000-01	4/1679	153/7000	119/4500	1174kg	-	132	7.9	7.8	137	+ An affordable exotic - Corroding rear arches ★★★★★☆
⊕ Honda Civic Type R (FL5)	306 F	£46,995	4/1996	324/6500	310/2500	1429kg	-	230	5.4	-	171	+ Still at the top of its game - It's a large car by usual hatchback standards ★★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R (FK8)	288 F	2017-21	4/1996	316/6500	295/2500	1380kg	1409kg	233	5.8	5.9	168	+ One of the greatest hot hatches ever - Its looks are challenging for some ★★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R Limited Edition (FK8)	293 F	2021	4/1996	316/6500	295/2500	1333kg	-	241	5.8	-	168	+ Terrifically capable, blisteringly quick, still practical - Standard FK8 is a better road car ★★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R (FK2)	227 F	2015-17	4/1996	306/6500	295/2500	1378kg	-	226	5.7	5.4	167	+ Great on smooth roads - Can be punishing on less-than-smooth roads ★★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R (FN2)	102 F	2007-11	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	-	158	6.6	6.8	146	+ Looks great, VTEC more accessible - Steering lacks feel, inert balance ★★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R Mugen (FN2)	248 F	2009-11	4/1998	237/8300	157/6250	1233kg	-	195	5.9	-	155	+ Fantastic on road and track - Only 20 were made, and they're a tad pricey... ★★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R (EP3)	287 F	2001-05	4/1998	197/7400	145/5900	1204kg	-	166	6.8	6.8	146	+ Potent and great value - Duff steering ★★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R (EK9)	210 F	1997-2000	4/1595	182/8200	118/7500	1040kg	-	178	6.8	-	135	+ Sublime early incarnation of the Type R recipe - Good ones are thin on the ground ★★★★★☆
Hyundai i20 N	293 F	£24,995	4/1591	201/5500	203/1750	1190kg	-	172	6.2	-	143	+ A serious threat to the Fiesta ST - Ride can be a bit thumpy ★★★★★☆
Hyundai i30 N	292 F	£33,745	4/1998	276/6000	289/1950	1419kg	1477kg	198	5.9	-	155	+ A brilliant, thoroughly developed hot hatch - Its engine isn't the most charismatic ★★★★★☆
Hyundai i30 Fastback N Performance	269 F	£29,995	4/1998	271/6000	279/1750	1441kg	-	191	6.1	-	155	+ As above, but with a fractionally more mature ride and soundtrack - As above ★★★★★☆
Hyundai Kona N	291 D	£35,395	4/1998	276/5500	289/2100	1510kg	-	186	5.5	-	149	+ Unexpectedly tight chassis - Worthy of a better engine ★★★★★☆
Kia Ceed GT	267 F	£25,850	4/1591	201/6000	195/1500	1386kg	-	147	7.2	-	143	+ Feels like a detuned i30 N - Lacks personality ★★★★★☆

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
Kia ProCeed GT	259 D	£28,135	4/1591	201/6000	195/1500	1438kg	-	142	7.2	-	140	+ Flexible engine, handsome shooting brake body - It's warm rather than hot	★★★★☆
Lancia Delta HF Integrale Evoluzione II	271 F	1993-94	4/1995	212/5750	232/2500	1340kg	-	161	5.7	-	137	+ One of the finest cars ever built - Demands love, LHD only	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG A35	267 F	£43,440	4/1991	302/5800	295/3000	1480kg	-	207	4.7	-	155	+ A formidable A-to-B device - Some front-drive rivals are more fun	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG A45 S	288 F	£60,628	4/1991	415/6750	369/5000	1550kg	-	272	3.9	-	167	+ A 21st-century reincarnation of late-'90s Imprezas and Evos - It costs £50k	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG A45	221 F	2015-18	4/1991	376/6000	350/2250	1480kg	-	258	4.2	3.9	155	+ Tremendously fast - But not a true great	★★★☆☆
Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG	194 F	2012-15	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1480kg	-	244	4.6	4.3	155	+ Blisteringly quick everywhere - Not as rewarding as some slower rivals	★★★☆☆
Mini Cooper (F56)	254 D	£17,635	3/1499	134/4500	162/1250	1085kg	-	125	7.9	-	130	+ Driving a slow car fast - Driving a car with Union Jack tail lights	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper S (F56)	268 F	£20,925	4/1998	189/4700	221/1250	1195kg	-	161	6.8	-	146	+ Feels darty and alive at moderate speeds - Loses its composure when you push harder	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works (F56)	211 F	£25,950	4/1998	228/5200	236/1250	1200kg	-	193	6.3	-	153	+ Fast, agile, nimble - Chassis lacks sparkle found in previous JCWs	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works GP (F56)	280 F	£33,895	4/1998	302/1750	332/1750	1255kg	-	244	5.2	-	164	+ Street-fighter looks, illustrious predecessors - Better at style than it is substance	★★★☆☆
Mini John Cooper Works Challenge (F56)	237 F	2016-17	4/1998	228/5200	236/1250	1215kg	-	191	6.3	-	152	+ A more hardcore JCW - The ride could be considered a little too hardcore	★★★★★
Mini Cooper (R56)	185 F	2009-14	4/1598	160/6000	118/4250	1075kg	-	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)	149 F	2006-14	4/1598	181/5500	177/1600	1140kg	-	161	7.0	7.0	142	+ Like the Cooper, but with added shove - Google 'Mini death rattle'	★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works (R56)	184 F	2008-14	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1160kg	1228kg	182	6.9	7.2	148	+ A seriously rapid Mini - Occasionally just a little unruly	★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works GP (R56)	231 F	2013-14	4/1598	215/6000	206/2000	1160kg	1178kg	188	6.3	-	150	+ Brazenly hyperactive - Too much for some roads and some tastes	★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works Coupé (R58)	164 F	2011-15	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1175kg	-	180	6.3	-	149	+ The usual raucous Mini JCW experience - But wearing a backwards baseball cap	★★★★★
Mini Cooper S (R53)	077 F	2002-06	4/1598	168/6000	155/4000	1140kg	-	143	7.2	7.8	135	+ Strong performance, quality feel - Over-long gearing	★★★★★
Mini Cooper S Works GP (R53)	262 F	2006	4/1598	215/7100	184/4600	1090kg	-	200	6.5	-	149	+ Storming engine, agility - Almost too mannered for a road racer	★★★★★
Nissan Juke Nismo RS	208 D	2015-17	4/1618	215/6000	206/3600	1315kg	-	166	7.0	-	137	+ Quirky character and bold styling - Not a match for a pukka hot hatch	★★★☆☆
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 2)	273 F	1997-98	4/1587	103/6200	97/3500	865kg	889kg	121	8.8	-	121	+ Bargain no-frills thrills - Not as much fizz as original 1.3	★★★★★
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 1)	095 F	1994-96	4/1294	100/7200	80/5400	826kg	-	123	10.6	-	118	+ Frantic, thrashy fun - Needs caning to extract full potential	★★★★★
Peugeot 106 GTi 16v	034 F	1997-2004	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	950kg	-	128	7.4	-	127	+ Fine handling supermini - Looks its age	★★★★★
Peugeot 208 GTi by Peugeot Sport	254 F	2015-18	4/1598	205/6000	221/3000	1160kg	1195kg	180	6.5	-	143	+ A brilliantly focused small hatch - Obscured dials	★★★★★
Peugeot 208 GTi	184 F	2012-16	4/1598	197/5800	203/1700	1160kg	1210kg	173	6.8	6.8	143	+ Agile chassis works well on tough roads - Could be more involving	★★★★★
Peugeot 205 GTi 1.9	195 F	1988-91	4/1905	130/6000	119/4750	910kg	-	145	7.6	-	124	+ Still scintillating after all these years - Brittle build quality	★★★★★
Peugeot 308 GTi by Peugeot Sport	245 F	2015-18	4/1598	256/6000	251/2100	1205kg	1316kg	224	6.0	6.0	155	+ A great entertainer with a cracker of an engine - Tiny steering wheel	★★★★★
Peugeot 306 GTi 6	020 F	1993-2001	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1214kg	-	140	7.9	7.2	140	+ One of the great GTis - They don't make them like this any more	★★★★★
Peugeot 306 Rallye	095 F	1998-99	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1163kg	-	146	7.8	6.9	137	+ Essentially a GTi 6 for less dosh - Limited choice of colours	★★★★★
Renault Sport Twingo 133	175 F	2008-13	4/1598	131/6750	118/4400	1050kg	-	127	8.7	-	125	+ Renault Sport experience for pocket money - Optional Cup chassis gives bouncy ride	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio 200 Auto	184 F	2013-18	4/1618	197/6000	177/1750	1204kg	1294kg	166	6.7	6.9	143	+ Faster, more refined, easier to drive - We miss the revvy NA engine and manual 'box	★★★☆☆
Renault Sport Clio 220 Trophy	229 D	2016-18	4/1618	217/6050	206/2000	1204kg	-	183	6.6	-	146	+ Willing chassis - Awful paddleshift gearbox	★★★☆☆
Renault Sport Clio 200 Cup	247 F	2009-13	4/1998	197/7100	159/5400	1204kg	-	166	6.9	6.6	141	+ The hot Clio at its best - They don't make 'em like this anymore	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio 197 Cup	115 F	2007-09	4/1998	194/7250	158/5550	1240kg	-	161	6.9	-	134	+ Quick, polished and capable - Not as much sheer fun as 182 Cup	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio 182	066 F	2004-05	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1110kg	-	165	7.1	6.6	139	+ Took hot hatches to a new level - Flawed driving position	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio 182 Cup	187 F	2004-05	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	-	168	6.9	-	139	+ Full of beans, fantastic value - Sunday-market upholstery	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio Trophy	262 F	2005-06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	-	168	6.9	6.6	140	+ The most fun you can have on three (sometimes two) wheels - Only 500 were built	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio 172 (Phase 2)	034 F	2001-03	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1110kg	-	156	7.2	7.1	138	+ Poised, predictable, fast - Lacks aggressive edge	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio 172 Cup	048 F	2002-03	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1011kg	-	171	6.9	6.5	138	+ Bargain old-school hot hatch - Nervous in the wet, no ABS	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio 172 (Phase 1)	146 F	2000-01	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1035kg	-	167	7.2	6.6	138	+ Brilliantly accomplished - Imperfect driving position	★★★★★
Renault Clio Williams	233 F	1993-96	4/1988	148/6100	126/4500	981kg	-	153	7.8	7.6	134	+ One of the best hot hatches ever - Can be fragile	★★★★★
Renault 5 GT Turbo	255 F	1987-91	4/1397	118/5750	122/3000	855kg	-	140	7.3	-	120	+ Clio Williams' granddaddy - Few unmodified ones left	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio V6 255	294 F	2003-05	6/2946	251/7150	221/4650	1400kg	-	182	5.8	-	153	+ Supercar drama without the original's edgy handling - Uninspired interior	★★★★★
Renault Sport Clio V6	029 F	1999-2002	6/2946	227/6000	221/3750	1410kg	-	164	6.6	5.8	145	+ Pocket supercar - Mid-engined handling can be tricky	★★★★★
Renault Mégane RS (280)	267 F	2018-20	4/1798	276/6000	288/2400	1407kg	1464kg	199	5.8	6.3	158	+ Outrageous grip and agility - Cup chassis option doesn't do its composure any favours	★★★★★
Renault Mégane RS 300	298 F	2020-21	4/1798	296/6000	310/4000	1443kg	-	209	5.7	-	158	+ Finally combined the Trophy's more potent engine with the softer chassis - Auto only	★★★★★
Renault Mégane RS Trophy	267 F	2018-21	4/1798	296/6000	310/4000	1443kg	-	209	5.7	-	158	+ An RS with knobs on - Unforgiving ride can make it feel ill at ease on trickier roads	★★★★★
Renault Mégane RS Trophy-R	280 F	2019-21	4/1798	296/6000	295/2400	1306kg	-	230	5.4	-	163	+ An absolute beast on track - Too much of a beast on the road	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane 275 Cup-S/Nav 275	223 D	2016	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1394kg	-	198	5.8	-	158	+ The same engine as the Trophy-R - They don't make it anymore	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane 265 Cup	195 F	2012-15	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	-	191	6.0	6.4	158	+ A hot hatch benchmark - Cupholder could be better positioned	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane 275 Trophy	212 F	2014-15	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1376kg	-	200	5.8	-	159	+ Another cracking Trophy model - Stripped-out Trophy-R is even more thrilling	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane 275 Trophy-R	231 F	2014-15	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1297kg	-	212	5.8	-	158	+ As absorbing as a 911 GT3 RS on the right road - Too uncompromising for some; pricey	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane 250 Cup	139 F	2009-12	4/1998	247/5500	251/3000	1387kg	-	181	6.1	6.1	156	+ Fantastic chassis... - , partially obscured by new-found maturity	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane dCi 175 Cup	119 F	2007-09	4/1995	173/3750	265/2000	1470kg	-	119	8.3	8.3	137	+ A diesel with a genuinely sporty chassis - Could take more power	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane 230 F1 Team R26	195 F	2007-09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1345kg	-	171	6.5	6.2	147	+ The car the R26.R is based on - F1 Team stickers in dubious taste	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane R26.R	276 F	2008-09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1220kg	-	189	6.0	5.8	147	+ A true hot hatch great - Two seats, plastic rear windows	★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	225 F	2016-18	4/1798	189/4300	236/1450	1185kg	-	162	6.7	-	146	+ Quick, competent, refined, and manual only - Not exciting enough	★★★☆☆
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	183 D	2010-15	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1259kg	-	144	6.9	-	142	+ Punchy engine, unflappable DSG - Lacks engagement, DSG only	★★★☆☆
SEAT Leon Cupra 290	267 F	2016-20	4/1984	286/5400	280/1950	1356kg	-	214	6.0	-	155	+ Agile, transparent and easily exploited - Can feel rather plain	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R	244 D	2018	4/1984	306/5800	280/1800	1378kg	-	226	5.8	-	155	+ Sharper handling and better body control - High price and limited availability	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra	105 F	2007-11	4/1984	237/5700	221/2200	1375kg	-	175	6.4	-	153	+ Great engine, composure - Doesn't have the adjustability of the old Cupra R	★★★★★
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146 D	2010-14	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1218kg	-	148	7.3	-	139	+ Clever twincharged engine and DSG 'box - Do your homework on the reliability of the engine	★★★★★
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk4)	281 D	£29,815	4/1984	242/5000	273/1600	1445kg	-	170	6.7	-	155	+ A capable Q-car for the masses - Engine lacks character	★★★★★
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk3)	187 D	2013-17	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1345kg	-	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)	250 F	2017-20	4/1984	242/5000	258/1600	1370kg	-	179	6.6	-	155	+ A credible, entertaining performer - You won't get out of bed at 4am to drive it	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk3)	267 F	£17,249	4/1373	138/5500	170/2500	975kg	-	144	8.1	7.6	130	+ Composed and brisk - Adjustability and character have been diluted	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk2)	175 F	2012-17	4/1586	134/6900	118/4400	1045kg	-	130	8.7	-	121	+ Still a great pocket rocket - Not quite as adjustabie as the original	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk1)	132 F	2005-11	4/1586	123/6800	109/4800	1030kg	-	121	8.9	-	124	+ Entertaining handling, well built - Lacking in steering feedback	★★★★★
Toyota GR Yaris	299 F	'20-'22	3/1618	257/6500	265/3000	1280kg	1280kg	204	5.5	-	142	+ A proper homologation special - More Subaru Impreza than Mitsubishi Evo	★★★★★
Toyota Yaris GRMN	254 F	2018	4/1798	209/6800	184/5000	1135kg	-	187	6.3	-	143	+ Appealingly feisty supercharged supermini - Artificial steering; they only made 400	★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	211 F	2014-18	4/1598	202/5800	206/1900	1278kg	-	161	6.8	-	143	+ Begg to be wrung out - You'll need the £2400 Performance Pack	★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154 F	2007-14	4/1598	189/5850	192/1980	1166kg	-	165	7.2	-	140	+ Looks snazzy, punchy engine - Lacks feel, uncouth compared with rivals	★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR Nürburgring/Clubsport	164 F	2011-14	4/1598	202/5750	206/2250	1166kg	-	176	6.8	-	143	+ VXR gets more power and a limited-slip diff - But they come at a price	★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra/GTC VXR (Mk2)	207 F	2012-18	4/1998	276/5500	295/2500	1475kg	-	190	6.0	-	155	+ Loony turbo pace - Lacks the Renault Sport Mégane's precision	★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk1)	102 F	2005-11	4/1998	237/5600	236/2400	1393kg	-	173	6.4	6.7	152	+ Fast and furious - Lacks a little composure and precision	★★★★★
Volkswagen Up GTI	273 F	£16,320	3/999	113/5000	147/2000	995kg	-	115	8.8	-	122	+ Infectious appetite for fun - City car roots are still there	★★★★★
Volkswagen Lupo GTI	034 F	2001-04	4/1598	123/6500	112/3000	1038kg	-	120	8.2	8.9	127	+ Looks, performance, chassis - Lacks the fizz of the 106 GTI	★★★★★
Volkswagen Polo GTI	244 D	£22,005	4/1984	197/4400	236/1500	1272kg	-	157	6.7	-	147	+ Decent performance; mature ride and handling - Lacks driver involvement	★★★☆☆
Volkswagen Polo GTI	211 F	2015-17	4/1798	189/4200	236/1450	1197kg	-	160	6.7	-	146	+ Smooth and brawny - Fiesta ST is more engaging	★★★★★
Volkswagen Polo GTI	154 F	2010-14	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1184kg	-	153	7.4	-	142	+ Modern-day Mk1 Golf GTI gets twin-clutch DSG - It's a little bit bland	★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf GTI (Mk8)	279 D	£38,320	4/1984	242/5000	273/1600	1429kg	-	172	6.4	-	155	+ An alluring blend of the best GTI ingredients - The competition is stiffer than ever	★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf GTI Clubsport (Mk8)	290 F	£40,655	4/1984	296/5000	295/2000	1461kg	-	206	5.6	-	155	+ Super-effective - But not as exciting as you might hope	★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf R (Mk8)	288 F	£42,850	4/1984	316/5200	310/2100	1551kg	-	207	4.7	-	155	+ 316bhp, four-wheel drive, understated flair - Chassis lacks the control you'd expect	★★★☆☆
Volkswagen Golf R '20 Years' (Mk8)	306 D												

MAKE & MODEL

ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH
140 D	2010-13	4/1984	266/6000	258/2500	1446kg	-	187	5.7	-	155
259 F	2004-09	4/1984	197/5100	207/1800	1336kg	-	150	7.3	6.7	146
087 F	2006-09	6/3189	246/6300	236/2500	1466kg	-	170	6.5	5.8	155
053 F	2002-04	6/3189	237/6250	236/2800	1477kg	-	163	6.6	6.4	154
195 F	1988-92	4/1781	139/6100	123/4600	960kg	-	147	7.9	-	129
224 F	1982-84	4/1781	112/5800	109/3500	860kg	-	132	8.2	-	114

EVO RATING

+ Great engine, tremendous pace and poise - High price, adaptive dampers optional	★★★★★
+ Character and ability; the GTI's return to form - Lacking firepower?	★★★★★
+ The traction's great and you'll love the soundtrack - We'd still have a GTI	★★★★★
+ Charismatic - Boomy engine can be tiresome	★★★★★
+ Still feels everyday useable - Too many have been modified	★★★★★
+ The car that started it all - Tricky to find an unmolested one	★★★★★

SALOONS / ESTATES / SUVs



OUR CHOICE

Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio. It may be a four-door saloon, but the Giulia Quadrifoglio oozes with all the passion, verve and spirit you'd hope for from an Italian sports car, feeling truly exotic in a way its rivals can't match and bringing real joy to every journey. Bravo, Alfa!



BEST OF THE REST

If the Alfa is the car your heart would choose, the **BMW M3 Competition** (left) is the choice of your head. Need something a size larger, or just want to bag something with a V8 while you still can? The **Audi RS6 Avant**, **BMW M5 Competition** and **Mercedes-AMG E63 S** (saloon or estate) provide a trio of strong options.

Alfa Romeo Giulia Veloce	244 F	£40,595	4/1995	276/5250	295/2250	1429kg	-	196	5.7	-	149	+ Supple and satisfying - Engine reluctant to rev	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio	287 F	£67,030	6/2891	503/6500	442/2500	1620kg	-	315	3.9	-	191	+ If Ferrari built a saloon (really) - Lacks the final polish of German rivals	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulia GTAm	286 F	2021	6/2891	533/6500	442/2500	1580kg	-	343	3.6	-	186	+ A sensational saloon car with a truly infectious character - It's a bit pricey	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio	244 D	£79,819	6/2891	503/6500	442/2500	1830kg	-	279	3.8	-	176	+ Rivals the Macan GTS - Needs optional P Zero Corsa tyres to give its very best	★★★★★
Alpina D3 S Touring	286 D	£55,950	6/2993	350/5500	538/2500	1935kg	-	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	1865kg	-	248	3.9	-	186	+ A richer, smoother drive than an M-car - Little different to an M340i at low speeds	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide	141 F	2010-13	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	201 D	2013-19	12/5935	552/6650	465/5500	1990kg	-	282	4.4	-	203	+ Oozes star quality; gearbox on 2015MY cars a big improvement - It's cosy in the back	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide AMR	261 D	2019-20	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	277 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	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBX707	297 F	£189,000	8/3982	697/6000	663/2600	2245kg	-	315	3.3	-	193	+ Monster power, but a rounded performer too - It still weighs 2.2 tons	★★★★★
Audi RS3 Saloon	299 F	£56,230	5/2480	394/5600	369/2250	1575kg	-	254	3.8	-	155	+ Improved chassis makes the RS3 a contender at last - Engine and gearbox hold it back	★★★★★
Audi RS3 Saloon	243 F	2017-21	5/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1515kg	-	264	4.1	3.6	155	+ Mini RS4 looks; stonking pace - Not the most involving driving experience	★★★★★
Audi S4 Avant (B9, diesel)	266 D	£50,910	6/2967	342/3850	516/2500	1825kg	-	190	4.9	-	155	+ Effortless performance, well-judged chassis - Diesel power isn't to everyone's taste	★★★★★
Audi S4 (B9, petrol)	225 D	2017-19	6/2995	349/5400	369/1370	1630kg	-	218	4.7	-	155	+ Strong response and delivery - Chassis feels softer than before	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (B9)	282 F	£67,465	6/2894	444/5700	442/1900	1745kg	-	259	4.1	-	155	+ Very 'real world' fast - Some may feel it lacks character and drama	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant Competition (B9)	304 D	£84,600	6/2894	444/5700	442/1900	1745kg	-	259	3.9	-	180	+ Corsa tyres and manually adjustable coilover suspension - Not as hardcore as it sounds	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (B8)	216 F	2012-15	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1795kg	-	251	4.7	4.5	174	+ Looks and sounds the part, thunderously fast - Unnatural steering, dull dynamics	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B7)	250 F	2005-08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1650kg	-	255	4.7	4.5	155	+ 414bhp at 7800rpm! And there's an estate version too - Busy under braking	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B5)	192 F	2000-02	6/2671	375/6100	325/2500	1620kg	-	236	4.9	4.8	170	+ Effortless pace - Not the last word in agility; bends wheel rims	★★★★★
Audi RS2	214 F	1994-95	5/2226	315/6500	302/3000	1595kg	-	201	4.8	4.8	162	+ Storming performance (thanks to Porsche) - Try finding one	★★★★★
Audi S5 Sportback	233 D	2017-19	6/2995	349/5400	369/1370	1660kg	-	214	4.7	-	155	+ More capable than you think; strong V6 engine - Gearbox frustrating in auto mode	★★★★★
Audi RS5 Sportback	264 D	£72,095	6/2894	444/5700	442/1900	1720kg	-	262	3.9	-	155	+ High-speed composure - Flat-footed on more technical roads	★★★★★
Audi S6 Avant (C8)	263 D	£65,250	6/2967	344/3850	516/2500	2020kg	-	173	5.1	-	155	+ Diesel suits the S6 ethos - Poor low-end engine response	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C8)	272 F	£98,280	8/3996	592/6000	590/2050	2075kg	-	290	3.6	-	155	+ Power, poise, build - Needs Dynamic Ride Control suspension to be at its best	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C7)	203 F	2013-18	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1935kg	-	290	3.9	3.6	155	+ Performance, foolproof powertrain, beefy looks - Feels a bit one-dimensional	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant Performance (C7)	224 D	2015-19	8/3993	597/6100	553/2500	1950kg	-	311	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	2008-10	10/4991	572/6250	479/1500	1985kg	-	293	4.5	4.3	155	+ Was the world's most powerful estate - Power isn't everything	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C5)	258 F	2002-04	8/4172	444/5700	413/1950	1865kg	-	242	4.6	4.8	155	+ The ultimate estate car? - Numb steering	★★★★★
Audi RS7 Sportback	268 D	£100,055	8/3996	592/6000	590/2050	2065kg	-	291	3.6	-	155	+ Surprisingly agile and involving - Sometimes feels its weight	★★★★★
Audi RS e-tron GT	284 D	£113,915	4/95kW	637	612	2347kg	-	276	3.3	-	155	+ A fine GT - Range not up to touring	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur V8	283 D	£160,200	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 Hybrid	295 D	£168,000	6/2894	536	553	2505kg	-	217	4.3	-	177	+ Silent refinement at its best - V6 not as refined as you'd expect	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur	272 D	£177,800	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	2016-19	8/3993	521/6000	502/1700	2417kg	-	219	4.9	-	190	+ Old-school approach to comfort and luxury - Old-school tech	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur	185 D	2013-18	12/5998	616/6000	590/1600	2475kg	-	253	4.6	-	199	+ For those who still want their Flying Spur with a W12 - Car feels its weight; engine sounds dull	★★★★★
Bentley Bentayga V8	247 D	£179,600	8/3996	542/6000	568/1960	2388kg	-	231	4.5	-	180	+ More enjoyable than the W12 - A top-end Range Rover is still more polished	★★★★★
Bentley Bentayga S	301 D	£187,800	8/3996	542/6000	568/2000	2416kg	-	228	4.5	-	180	+ The best Bentayga to drive - Far from the most elegant Bentley	★★★★★
Bentley Mulsanne Speed	279 F	2014-20	8/6752	530/4000	811/1750	2685kg	-	201	4.9	-	190	+ The last Bentley with the 'six-and-three-quarter' - We won't see its kind again	★★★★★
BMW 320d xDrive M Sport (G20)	262 D	£41,255	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)	257 D	£40,645	4/1998	254/5000	295/1550	1470kg	-	176	5.8	-	155	+ Feels like a 3-series once more - Harsh and unsettled ride	★★★★★
BMW M340i xDrive	270 D	£40,900	6/2998	369/5500	369/1850	1670kg	-	225	4.4	-	155	+ Very fast and refined - Limited driver appeal	★★★★★
BMW i4 M50	296 D	£63,905	400kW	536	586	2215kg	-	249	3.9	-	139	+ A compelling daily EV - Heavy and expensive compared with an M340i	★★★★★
BMW M3 Competition (G80)	293 F	£76,115	6/2993	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 Competition xDrive (G80)	292 D	£78,425	6/2993	503/6250	479/2750	1780kg	-	287	3.5	-	155	+ Four-wheel drive doesn't spoil the fun - There's a slight weight penalty	★★★★★
BMW M3 (F80)	266 F	2014-20	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1560kg	-	277	4.3	4.1	155	+ Looks, performance, practicality - Body control on rough roads; engine lacks character	★★★★★
BMW M3 Competition Package (F80)	237 F	2016-19	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	2018-19	6/2979	454/6250	442/4000	1585kg	-	291	3.9	-	174	+ Improved chassis and mid-range urge - Cost over £20k more than an M3 Comp Pack	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E90)	123 F	2008-11	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1605kg	-	262	4.9	4.9	165	+ Every bit as good as the E92 M3 coupe - No carbon roof	★★★★★
BMW M5 (F90)	244 F	2017-20	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	£109,615	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)	297 F	21-22	8/4395	626/6000	553/1800	1825kg	-	349	3.0	-	189	+ evo Car of the Year 2021 - Erm, there's only two rear seats?	★★★★★
BMW M5 (F10)	208 F	2011-16	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	2004-10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1755kg	-	289	4.7	-	155	+ Close to being the ultimate supersaloon - SMG gearbox feels old-tech	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E39)	268 F	1998-2003	8/4941	394/6600	369/3800	1795kg	-	223	5.3	4.9	155	+ Magnificent V8-engined supersaloon - We'd be nitpicking	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E34)	110 F	1988-95	6/3795	335/6900	295/4750	1725kg	-	197	5.8	4.9	155	+ The Godfather of supersaloons - The family can come too	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E28)	258 F	1984-88	6/3453	282/6500	251/4500	1431kg	-	200	6.1	-	156	+ The original storming saloon - Understated looks	★★★★★
BMW M6 Gran Coupé	190 D	2013-18	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	2017-20	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	★★★★★
Genesis G70 Shooting Brake 2.0T Plus	265 D	£40,700	4/1998	241/6200	260/1450	1717kg	-	143	6.4	-	146	+ Striking looks, quality interior - Lacklustre engine; dull and unresolved handling	★★★★★
Honda Accord Type R	012 F	1998-2003	4/2157	209/7200	158/6700	1306kg	-	163	7.2	6.1	142	+ One of the finest front-drivers of all time - Convincing your friends of that	★★★★★
Jaguar XE P300 AWD	262 D	£40,180	4/1997	296/5500	295/1500	1690kg	-	178	5.7	-	155	+ Fluent handling; 4WD grip and security - Auto 'box saps sportiness	★★★★★
Jaguar XE SV Project 8	269 F	2018-20	8/5000	592/6500	516/3500	1745kg	1793kg	345	3.7	3.5	200	+ Beautifully controlled and amazingly agile - They only made 15 in Touring spec	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR	181 D	2009-15	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1800kg	-	284	4.7	4.8	155	+ Brilliant blend of pace and refinement - Doesn't sound as special as it is	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR-S	208 F	2013-15	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1800kg	-	306	4.6	-	186	+ XF turned up to 12 - Tyres aren't cheap	★★★★★
Jaguar XJR	191 D	2014-17	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1875kg	-	294	4.6	-	174	+ Hot-rod vibe, fine cabin - Opinion-dividing looks	★★★★★
Jaguar F-Pace SVR	262 D	£78,165	8/5000	542/6000	501/2500	1995kg	-	276	4.3	-	176	+ A great candidate for SVO's attentions - It's still an SUV	★★★★★
Jaguar I-Pace HSE	251 D	£74,395	294kW	394	513	2208kg	-	181	4.8	-	124	+ Impressive chassis and point-to-point pace - Range anxiety and hefty kerb weight	★★★★★
Kia EV6 GT	306 F	£62,645	430kW	577	546	2200kg	-	266	3.5	-	162	+ Shows glimmers of character - Becomes more one-dimensional the harder you push	★★★★★
Kia Stinger GTS	242 D	2018-22	6/3342	365/6000	376/1300	1780kg	-	168	4.7	-	168	+ Playful handling, deep-chested performance - Engine lacks soul, steering lacks feel	★★★★★

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CV/L/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
Land Rover Defender 110 (P400)	273 F	£90,195	6/2996	394/5500	406/2000	2388kg	-	168	6.4	-	129	+ A great off-roader - If off-roading is your thing	★★★★☆
Lamborghini Urus	249 F	£177,417	8/3996	641/6000	627/2250	2200kg	-	296	3.6	-	190	+ A freakish manipulator of physics - But also rather one-dimensional	★★★★☆
Lamborghini Urus Performante	304 D	£209,000	8/3996	657/6000	627/2250	2150kg	-	310	3.3	-	190	+ Gains a notable dose of athleticism - It's hard not to question the point of it all	★★★★☆
Lexus IS F	151 F	2007-12	8/4969	417/6600	372/5200	1714kg	-	247	5.2	4.7	173	+ Shockingly good Lexus - The M3's available as a four-door too	★★★★☆
Lotus Carlton	292 F	1990-93	6/3615	377/5200	419/4200	1658kg	-	231	5.4	4.8	177	+ The Millennium Falcon of saloon cars - Every drive is a work-out	★★★★★
Lucid Air Dream Edition P	298 D	\$170,500	1000kW	1111	1025	2360kg	-	478	2.5	-	168	+ An EV that engages the driver - Sacrifices ultimate handling for a longer range	★★★★☆
Maserati Ghibli Trofeo	290 D	£118,645	8/3799	572/6750	538/2250	1969kg	-	295	4.3	-	202	+ Subtle performance elegantly delivered - It's quite expensive	★★★★☆
Maserati Grecale Trofeo	305 D	£95,950	6/3000	523/6500	457/3000	2027kg	-	262	3.8	-	177	+ Rapid and accomplished - Lacks character and ultimate flair	★★★★☆
Maserati Quattroporte S	184 D	2013-18	6/2979	404/5500	406/1750	1860kg	-	221	5.1	-	177	+ Tempting alternative to V8 - Feel-free steering, ride lacks decorum	★★★★☆
Maserati Quattroporte GTS	226 D	2016-18	8/3798	523/6800	479/2250	1900kg	-	280	4.7	-	193	+ Still pretty - Off the pace dynamically	★★★★☆
Maserati Quattroporte Trofeo	287 D	£134,285	8/3799	572/6750	538/2250	2000kg	-	291	4.5	-	203	+ An alluring alternative to the German defaults - How much?!	★★★★☆
Maserati Quattroporte S	137 F	2008-12	8/4691	425/7000	361/4750	1990kg	-	216	5.4	5.1	174	+ A QP with the bhp it deserves - Grille is a bit Hannibal Lecter	★★★★☆
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	141 F	2008-12	8/4691	433/7000	361/4750	1990kg	-	221	5.1	-	177	+ The most stylish of supersaloons - Slightly wooden brakes, unforgiving ride	★★★★☆
Maserati Levante Diesel	221 D	2016-20	6/2897	271/4000	442/2000	2205kg	-	125	6.9	-	143	+ Impressive blend of ride and handling - Performance is mild for a Maserati	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG A35 Saloon	271 F	£41,660	4/1991	302/5800	295/3000	1495kg	-	205	4.8	-	155	+ Fun when you want it to be, secure when the heavens open - Others are even more fun	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG CLA 45 S Coupé	273 D	£60,965	4/1991	415/6750	369/5000	1600kg	-	264	4.0	-	167	+ Speed, ability and involvement - CLA35 offers a similar experience for less outlay	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG E63 S Estate (S205)	278 D	£61,965	4/1991	415/6750	369/5000	1630kg	-	259	4.0	-	155	+ Same stellar performance and involvement as the A45 - See above	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG C43 Saloon (W206)	301 D	£64,110	4/1991	402/6750	369/5000	1690kg	-	242	4.6	-	155	+ Hugely accessible performance - Sterile steering, some transmission jerkiness	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG C63 S E Performance Estate	306 D	c£90,000	4/1991	671/6750	638/5250	2115kg	-	322	3.4	-	168	+ Hybrid tech works brilliantly... - ...but brings excess weight	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG C63 Saloon (W205)	209 D	2015-20	8/3982	469/5500	479/1750	1640kg	-	291	4.1	-	155	+ Fast and feelsome - Lacks the ultimate finesse and response of the C63 S	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG E63 (W213)	216 F	2015-20	8/3982	469/5500	479/1750	1710kg	-	279	4.2	-	155	+ Much more fun than it looks - Gearbox dim-witted at low speeds	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Estate (S205)	282 F	2015-21	8/3982	503/5500	516/2000	1670kg	-	306	4.1	-	180	+ One of the finest all-round compact performance cars - Baffling array of driver settings	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG (W204)	288 F	2008-14	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	-	277	4.5	4.4	155	+ Monstrous pace and extremely engaging - Same-era M3 is just a little better...	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz C55 AMG (W203)	088 F	2004-08	8/5439	367/5250	376/4000	1635kg	-	228	5.2	-	155	+ Furiously fast, commendably discreet - Overshadowed by M3 and RS4	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.5-16	185 F	1989-92	4/2498	204/6750	177/5500	1300kg	-	159	7.5	-	146	+ M-B's M3 alternative - Not as nimble as the Beemer	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG E63 (W213)	242 D	2018-20	8/3982	563/5750	553/2250	1875kg	-	305	3.5	-	155	+ More rounded than the E63 S - Could be a little too discreet for some tastes	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG E63 S (W213)	286 F	£116,995	8/3982	604/5750	627/2500	1935kg	2085kg	317	3.4	3.4	186	+ Fast, refined, effective and fun - At nearly two tons, it's not 911 nimble	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG E63 S Estate (S213)	272 F	£118,995	8/3982	604/5750	627/2500	1995kg	-	308	3.5	-	180	+ As above - It's even heavier than the saloon, and five metres long	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GT63 4-Door Coupé	274 F	2019-20	8/3982	577/5500	590/2500	2025kg	-	290	3.4	-	193	+ Does the same as the S for less - Takes up plenty of road	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GT63 S 4-Door Coupé	269 F	£150,440	8/3982	630/5500	664/2500	2045kg	-	313	3.2	-	196	+ Agile and immensely quick - Lacks the coupe GT's drama	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W212)	187 D	2013-16	8/5461	549/5500	531/1750	1770kg	-	315	4.2	-	155	+ Power, response and accuracy in spades - A little lacking in originality	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG S (W212)	208 F	2013-16	8/5461	577/5500	590/1750	1795kg	1971kg	327	4.1	-	155	+ Effortless power; intuitive and approachable - Sluggish auto 'box	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W212)	165 F	2011-13	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	1765kg	-	298	4.4	-	155	+ Turbo engine didn't dilute the E63 experience - Sometimes struggles for traction...	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W212)	134 D	2009-11	8/6208	518/6800	465/5200	1765kg	-	298	4.5	-	155	+ Indulgent chassis, brilliant engine - Steering still vague	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W211)	096 D	2006-09	8/6208	507/6800	465/5200	1765kg	-	292	4.5	-	155	+ Brilliant engine, indulgent chassis - Vague steering, speed limits	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	052 F	2003-06	8/5439	469/6100	516/2650	1760kg	-	271	4.7	4.8	155	+ M5-humbling grunt, cossetting ride - Speed limits	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG S63 L (W222)	246 D	2013-20	8/3982	604/5500	664/2750	1940kg	-	316	4.3	-	155	+ Performance doesn't come at the expense of luxury - But pure driving thrills do	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG EQS 53	299 D	£157,160	-	649	700	2605kg	-	253	3.8	-	155	+ Refinement - The non-EV S-class	★★★☆☆
Mercedes-AMG GLC 63 S Coupé	253 D	£94,270	8/3982	503/5500	516/1750	1945kg	-	263	3.8	-	174	+ Unquestionable performance - Lacks adjustability and engagement	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GLE 63 S	218 D	£120,725	8/5461	577/5500	560/1750	2270kg	-	258	4.2	-	155	+ Stonking pace, extreme refinement - Feels remote	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GLE 63 S Coupé	213 D	£130,000	8/5461	577/5500	560/1750	2275kg	-	258	4.2	-	155	+ Subtler than an X6 M - More force than finesse	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG G63	250 D	£164,550	8/3982	577/6000	627/2500	2485kg	-	236	4.5	-	137	+ Vastly improved chassis, fabulous engine - Dynamic ability still limited	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-300 SST	118 F	2008-14	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1590kg	-	185	4.5	5.2	155	+ First Evo with a twin-clutch transmission - Not as exciting as its predecessors	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-330 SST	134 F	2008-14	4/1998	324/6500	322/3500	1590kg	-	207	4.4	-	155	+ Great engine and gearbox combo - It still lives in the shadow of the Evo IX	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-360	122 D	2008-14	4/1998	354/6500	363/3500	1560kg	-	231	4.0	-	155	+ Ridiculously rapid Evo - A five-speed gearbox?!	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	181 F	2009-10	4/1998	403/6500	387/3500	1560kg	-	262	3.8	-	155	+ Most powerful factory Evo ever... - ...about X grand too much when new	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-340	088 F	2005-08	4/1997	345/6800	321/4600	1400kg	-	250	4.2	4.3	157	+ Gives Porsche drivers nightmares - Points. Lots of	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX MR FQ-360	181 F	2005-08	4/1997	366/6887	363/3200	1400kg	-	266	4.0	-	157	+ Well-executed engine upgrades - Prison food	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII	055 F	2003-05	4/1997	276/6500	289/3500	1410kg	-	199	5.1	-	157	+ The Evo grows up - Brakes need beefing up	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo VIII MR FQ-300	057 F	2003-05	4/1997	305/6800	289/3500	1400kg	-	221	4.9	-	157	+ Extra pace, extra attitude - Extra money	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Evo VII	031 F	2002-03	4/1997	276/6500	282/3500	1360kg	-	206	5.1	5.0	140	+ Terrific all-rounder - You tell us	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI Tommi Mäkinen Edition	271 F	2000-01	4/1997	276/6500	275/2750	1365kg	-	205	4.6	-	150	+ Our favourite Evo - Subtle it is not	★★★★★
Peugeot 508 SW PSE	286 D	£56,465	4/1598	355	383	1875kg	-	192	5.2	-	155	+ A hybrid worth considering - But only if someone else is paying	★★★★☆
Polestar 2	280 D	£46,450	300kW	402	487	2048kg	-	199	4.7	-	127	+ A credible Tesla alternative - Avoid the super-hard-riding Performance upgrade	★★★☆☆
Polestar 2 BST Edition 270	306 D	£68,990	350kW	469	501	2146kg	-	222	4.4	-	127	+ Adjustable Öhlins dampers great for track But surely this is a road car?	★★★★☆
Porsche Panamera GTS	279 D	£110,700	8/3996	473/6500	457/1800	2040kg	-	236	3.9	-	181	+ The most engaging Panamera - Still a heavy old thing	★★★★☆
Porsche Panamera 4S E-Hybrid Sport Turismo	298 D	£105,830	6/2894	552	553	2240kg	-	250	3.7	-	182	+ Retains Porsche's core DNA - The Panamera GTS and Taycan also exist	★★★★☆
Porsche Panamera Turbo S E-Hybrid Sport T.	272 D	£149,100	8/3996	671	627	2325kg	-	293	3.4	-	192	+ Shows some Stuttgart magic in the corners - It weighs 2.3 tons!	★★★★☆
Porsche Panamera GTS	208 F	2011-16	8/4806	434/6700	383/3500	1925kg	-	229	4.4	-	178	+ Vivacious V8, entertaining balance - Feels light on performance next to turbocharged rivals	★★★★☆
Porsche Panamera Turbo S	159 D	2011-13	8/4806	542/6000	590/2250	1995kg	1996kg	276	3.8	-	190	+ Pace, excellent ergonomics - Steering feel, ride	★★★★☆
Porsche Taycan (Performance Battery Plus)	283 D	£78,049	350kW	375	-	2130kg	-	179	5.4	-	143	+ Half the price of a Taycan Turbo S - Less is less	★★★★☆
Porsche Taycan GTS Sport Turismo	294 D	£105,500	380kW	510	-	2310kg	-	224	3.7	-	224	+ One of the best performance EVs yet - Charge anxiety	★★★★☆
Porsche Taycan Turbo Cross Turismo	287 D	£118,500	460kW	616	-	2320kg	-	270	3.3	-	155	+ A convincing and crushingly capable crossover - Needs big roads	★★★★☆
Porsche Taycan Turbo S	267 D	£140,000	460kW	616	-	2295kg	-	273	2.8	-	161	+ Straight-line oomph will leave you in awe - Inadequate EV infrastructure	★★★★☆
Porsche Macan	259 D	£50,800	4/1984	242/5000	273/1600	1795kg	-	137	6.7	-	139	+ Lighter engine makes for sharper handling - The Golf R Estate	★★★★☆
Porsche Macan S	257 D	£56,800	6/2997	349/5400	354/1360	1865kg	-	190	5.3	-	157	+ Great for an SUV - Every positive still needs to be suffixed with 'for an SUV'	★★★★☆
Porsche Macan GTS	244 F	2016-18	6/2997	355/6000	369/1650	1895kg	-	190	5.2	-	159	+ Handles like an SUV shouldn't - Still looks like an SUV	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne S (Mk3)	253 D	£75,800	6/2894	434/5700	406/1800	2020kg	-	218	5.2	-	164	+ Impressive surface-coated brake tech - We'd rather have it on a sports car	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk3)	243 D	£110,240	8/3996	542/5750	568/1960	2175kg	-	254	4.1	-	177	+ Huge performance, surprising agility - It's still a two-ton-plus SUV	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne Turbo Coupé	263 D	£112,970	8/3996	542/5750	568/2000	2200kg	-	250	3.9	-	177	+ As good to drive as the regular Cayenne - Swooper roof adds thousands to the price	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne Turbo GT	290 D	£147,510	8/3996	631/6000	627/2300	2220kg	-	289	3.3	-	186	+ A car this big and heavy shouldn't drive this well - It's still big and heavy	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2, V6)	211 D	2015-17	6/3604	434/6000	442/1600	2110kg	-	209	5.2	-	163	+ The driver's Cayenne... - ...but why would a driver want an SUV?	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2, V8)	173 D	2012-15	8/4806	414/6500	380/3500	2085kg	-	202	5.7	-	162	+ Dynamically the best SUV of its era - At two tons, it's still no sports car	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne Turbo S (Mk2)	184 D	2010-17	8/4806	562/6000	590/2500	2235kg	-	255	4.1	-	176	+ More power and torque than a Zonda S 7.3 - In an SUV	★★★★☆
Range Rover Sport P530 First Edition	303 D	£116,190	8/4395	523/5500	553/1800	2430kg	-	219	4.5	-	155	+ Does effortless speed and luxury very well - Not quite so good at the 'sport' bit	★★★★☆
Range Rover P530 Autobiography	298 D	£134,875	8/4395	523/5500	551/1800	2585kg	-	206	4.6	-	155	+ Quieter and more capable - Heavier and more expensive	★★★★☆
Rolls-Royce Ghost	280 D	£265,420	12/6749	563/5000	627/1600	2490kg	-	230	4.8	-	155	+ Unrivalled luxury and refinement - Still better to be driven in than to drive	★★★★☆
Rolls-Royce Phantom	054 F	2003-17	12/6749	453/5350	531/3500	2560kg	-	180	5.7	-	149	+ Rolls reinvented for the 21st century - The roads are barely big enough	★★★★☆
Subaru WRX STI S209	272 F	2020	4/2457	341/6400	330/3600	1580kg	-	219	4.9	-	162	+ That old Impreza magic is alive and well - Only 209 were built, and only for America	★★★★☆
Subaru WRX STI	253 F	2014-18	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1534kg	-	196	5.2	-	158	+ Still has its moments - Something of an anachronism	★★★★☆
Subaru Impreza STI ('Hawkeye')	090 F	2005-07	4/2457	276/6000	289/4000	1495kg	-	188	5.3	-	158	+ Stunning to drive - Not so stunning to look at	★★★★☆
Subaru Impreza WRX STI PPP ('Blobeye')	073 F	2003-05	4/1994	300/6000	299/4000	1470kg	-	207	5.4	5.2	148	+ A Subaru with real edge - Bit too edgy in the wet	★★★★☆
Subaru Impreza Turbo ('Classic')	011 F	1993-2000	4/1994	215/5600	214/4000	1235kg	-	177	5.8	5.4	144	+ Destined for classic status - Thirsty	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB5	187 F	1999	4/1994	237/6000	258/3500	1235kg	-	19					

ROADSTERS / CONVERTIBLES



OUR CHOICE

Porsche 718 Spyder. Effectively a drop-top version of the eCoty-winning 718 Cayman GT4, the Spyder shares its naturally aspirated flat-six, slick manual 'box (PDK is an option) and even its 1420kg kerb weight with its coupe counterpart, but adds the ability to enjoy it all with the wind in your hair. What's not to love?



BEST OF THE REST

The **Aston Martin Vantage Roadster** (left) bests the 911 Cabriolet for character, the **Porsche 718 Boxster GTS 4.0** is essentially a cut-price 718 Spyder, the **Caterham Seven** remains an exemplar of sports car purity across the range, while the **Ariel Atom** strips what you need for driving thrills to the bare minimum.

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
Abarth 124 Spider	256 F	2016-19	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1060kg	-	161	6.8	-	143	+ A little car with a big soul - Vague and lifeless front end	★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo 4C Spider	223 F	2015-19	4/1742	237/6000	258/2200	940kg*	-	256	4.5	-	160	+ Stunningly beautiful; better steering than coupe version - Still has the coupe's other foibles	★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo 8C Spider	161 F	2009-11	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1675kg	-	273	4.4	-	181	+ Beauty meets beast. They hit it off - Boot is useless for touring	★★★★☆
Ariel Atom 4	273 F	£39,975	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 3 245	248 F	2018-12	4/1998	245/8600	177/7200	520kg	-	479	3.1	-	145	+ Even better than its predecessors - Can still be a bit draughty	★★★★☆
Ariel Atom 3.5 Supercharged	180 D	2013-18	4/1998	310/8400	169/7200	550kg	608kg	573	2.7	-	155	+ As mad as ever - Rain	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3.5R	255 F	2014-18	4/1998	350/8400	243/6100	550kg	-	647	2.6	-	155	+ Remarkable balance, poise and pace - Pricy	★★★★★
Ariel Nomad	294 F	£33,000	4/2354	235/7200	221/4300	670kg*	-	365	3.4	-	134	+ Off-road capabilities make for a super plaything - No Bluetooth	★★★★★
Ariel Nomad R	278 F	£77,400	4/1998	335/7200	243/4300	c700kg	-	c486	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	£126,950	8/3982	503/6000	505/2000	1745kg	-	293	3.8	-	190	+ Builds on the already excellent coupe's attributes - Interior design lags behind exterior	★★★★☆
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster (4.7)	130 F	2009-16	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1710kg	-	250	4.8	-	180	+ Sportiest, coolest drop-top Aston in years - Feels dated compared with contemporaries	★★★★☆
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S Roadster	161 F	2011-17	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 Roadster	175 F	2012-14	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1760kg	-	294	4.5	-	190	+ As good as the coupe, with amplified V12 rumble - Just a smidgen shakier	★★★★☆
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S Roadster	212 F	2014-17	12/5935	565/6750	457/5750	1745kg	-	329	4.1	-	201	+ A brilliant two-seat roadster... - ...let down by a frustrating automated manual gearbox	★★★★☆
Aston Martin DB11 Volante	258 D	£159,900	8/3982	503/6000	498/2000	1795kg	-	285	4.1	-	187	+ Impressively wide range of dynamic personalities - Cabin could be better at this price	★★★★☆
Audi TTS Roadster (Mk3)	207 D	£46,360	4/1984	302/5400	295/2000	1495kg	-	205	4.8	-	155	+ Highly capable - Most will want more than 'capable'	★★★★☆
Audi TT RS Roadster (Mk3)	250 D	£55,655	5/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1530kg	-	262	3.9	-	155	+ Terrific engine... - ...is the best thing about it	★★★★☆
BAC Mono 2.5	229 F	£167,940	4/2488	305/8000	227/5500	580kg*	645kg	534	2.8	-	170	+ 3.5sec faster around Anglesey Circuit than a McLaren P1 - A bit less practical than a P1	★★★★★
BAC Mono R	302 D	£167,940	4/2488	342/8800	243/-	555kg*	-	626	2.5	-	170	+ Astonishing pace and excellent drivability - Only 40 are being made	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT Speed Convertible	291 D	£230,900	12/5950	650/5000	664/1500	2436kg	-	271	3.7	-	208	+ Very nearly as calm and controlled as the coupe - Heavy W12 impossible to disguise	★★★★☆
Bentley Mulliner Bacalar	286 F	£1.5m	12/5950	650/5000	664/1500	2384kg	-	277	<3.8	-	200+	+ A luxury cruiser that's a bit of a rebel roadster - They're only making 12, at £1.5m each	★★★★☆
BMW Z4 M40i	256 D	£49,050	6/2998	335/5000	369/1600	1535kg	-	222	4.6	-	155	+ Inherent agility and ability - Undemanding and unengaging	★★★★☆
BMW Z8	026 F	2000-03	8/4941	400/6600	369/3800	1585kg	-	256	4.7	4.8	155	+ M5-powered super-sportster - M5's more fun to drive	★★★★☆
Caterham Seven 170R	291 F	£26,385	3/660	84/6500	86/4000	440kg*	-	194	6.9	-	105	+ The lightest production Caterham yet - Could do with another 10bhp	★★★★☆
Caterham Seven 360	209 F	£33,385	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	£36,385	4/1999	210/7600	150/6300	560kg*	-	381	3.8	4.0	136	+ It's the one we built for ourselves - Trickier on the limit than lesser-powered Sevens	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 420 Cup	299 F	£54,990	4/1999	210/7600	150/6300	560kg*	578kg	369	3.6	-	136	+ Intense and rewarding - They'll soon be electric	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 620S	220 D	£48,890	4/1999	310/7700	219/7350	610kg*	-	516	3.4	-	155	+ Ludicrous, near-620R pace, with added habitability - Well, 'habitable' for a Seven...	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 620R	255 F	£53,885	4/1999	310/7700	219/7350	572kg*	580kg	551	2.8	-	155	+ Banzai on track, yet still relevant on the road - £50k for a Seven?	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 160	239 F	2013-17	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 Roadsport 125	105 F	2007-14	4/1596	125/6100	120/5350	539kg*	-	235	5.9	-	112	+ Great debut for Ford-engined model - Bigger drivers need SV model	★★★★☆
Caterham Seven Supersport	165 F	2011-14	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	2013-14	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	2009-12	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	2006-17	4/2261	256/7500	200/6200	565kg*	598kg	460	3.1	3.8	155	+ Brilliant for high days, holidays and trackdays - Wet Wednesdays	★★★★☆
Caterham Seven Superlight R500	123 F	2008-14	4/1999	263/8500	177/7200	506kg*	-	528	2.9	-	150	+ Better power-to-weight ratio than a Veyron - Until you add the driver	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R500	200 F	1999-2006	4/1796	230/8600	155/7200	460kg*	-	510	3.4	3.6	146	+ The K-series Seven at its very best - No cup holders	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray Convertible (C8)	292 D	£82,200	8/6162	475/6450	452/4500	1692kg	-	285	3.5	-	184	+ Strong V8 engine, fine value - Not as quick as we were hoping	★★★★☆
Dallara Stradale	267 F	c£162,000	4/2300	394/6200	369/3000	855kg*	-	468	3.3	-	174	+ Startling on-road performance - Can leave you feeling detached on track	★★★★☆
Elemental Rpl (2.3)	255 F	£139,800	4/2261	320	354	620kg*	-	557	2.6	-	165	+ Captivating, explosive, exploitable - Price will test your level of commitment	★★★★☆
Honda S2000	243 F	1999-2009	4/1997	237/8300	153/7500	1260kg	-	191	6.2	-	150	+ An alternative and rev-happy roadster - A Boxster's better	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-type Convertible P450 RWD	271 D	£77,460	8/5000	444/6000	428/2500	1660kg	-	272	4.6	-	177	+ Strong and flexible supercharged V8 - Steering and chassis feel mismatched	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-type Project 7	212 F	2015	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	£95,880	4/1984	281/6400	310/3200	875kg	-	326	4.1	-	144	+ Extraordinary ability, now in a more road-friendly package - Price	★★★★☆
KTM X-Bow R	165 F	£87,480	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	2011-15	4/1598	134/6800	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	2017-20	4/1798	217/6800	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	2018-19	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	878kg	-	251	4.5	-	145	+ Makes the most of its lightness - Heavyweight price	★★★★★
Lotus Elise Sport 240 Final Edition (S3)	285 F	2021	4/1798	237/7200	181/3000	922kg	-	261	4.1	-	147	+ The Elise's swansong - There will never be another Lotus like it	★★★★★
Lotus Elise Cup 250 (S3)	279 F	2016-21	4/1798	245/7200	184/3500	931kg	-	267	3.9	-	154	+ As effective, enjoyable and essential as ever - Prioritises grip over adjustability	★★★★★
Lotus Elise Cup 260 (S3)	243 F	2018-19	4/1798	250/7200	195/5500	902kg	-	282	4.2	-	151	+ Quickest Elise yet - Just 30 were built	★★★★★
Lotus Elise Sport 135 (S2)	040 D	2003	4/1796	135/6200	129/4850	726kg	-	189	5.4	-	129	+ One of our fave S2 Elises - Brakes need more bite and pedal feel	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S (S2)	104 F	2006-10	4/1794	134/6200	127/4200	860kg	-	158	6.1	6.3	127	+ Brilliant entry-level Elise - Precious little	★★★★★
Lotus Elise 111S (S2)	049 F	2002-04	4/1796	156/7000	129/4650	860kg	-	197	5.1	-	131	+ A genuinely useable Elise - As above	★★★★★
Lotus Elise SC (S2)	131 F	2008-11	4/1794	218/8000	156/5000	870kg	-	254	4.6	4.5	145	+ All the usual Elise magic - Supercharged engine lacks sparkle	★★★★☆
Lotus Elise (S1)	235 F	1996-2001	4/1796	118/5500	122/3000	731kg	-	164	5.9	6.1	126	+ A modern classic - A tad impractical?	★★★★★
Lotus 3-Eleven	220 F	2016-17	6/3456	410/7000	302/3000	925kg*	-	450	3.4	-	174	+ A fantastically exciting Lotus - If not exactly a groundbreaking one	★★★★★
Lotus 3-Eleven 430	248 F	2017-19	6/3456	430/7000	325/4500	920kg*	-	475	3.2	-	180	+ A fitting send-off for a brilliant Lotus - Just 20 were made	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven	126 F	2007-11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	720kg	-	267	4.5	-	140	+ Not far off the supercharged 2-Eleven's pace - You want the supercharged one, don't you?	★★★★☆
Lotus 2-Eleven Supercharged	123 F	2007-11	4/1796	252/8000	179/7000	745kg	-	344	4.0	-	150	+ Impressive on road and track - Not hardcore enough for some	★★★★★
Lotus 340R	126 F	2000	4/1796	190/7800	146/5000	701kg	-	275	4.5	4.4			

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
Porsche 718 Boxster	224 D	£48,400	4/1988	296/6500	280/1950	1335kg	-	225	5.1	-	170	+ Chassis as good as ever - Four-cylinder's tuneless din would be hard to live with	★★★★☆
Porsche 718 Boxster S	222 F	£58,160	4/2497	345/6500	310/1900	1355kg	-	259	4.6	4.4	177	+ Still sensationally capable - Turbo four-cylinder engine lacks appeal of the old flat-six	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Boxster GTS	249 D	2018-19	4/2497	360/6500	310/1900	1375kg	-	266	4.6	-	180	+ The best four-pot Boxster spec - Doesn't come cheap	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Boxster GTS 4.0	286 D	£68,560	6/3995	394/7000	310/5000	1405kg	-	285	4.5	-	182	+ It's got the Cayman GT4 six-cylinder, minus 200rpm - Gearshift not as crisp as the GT4's	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Spyder	272 F	£77,110	6/3995	414/7600	310/5000	1420kg	-	296	4.4	-	187	+ Essentially a drop-top Cayman GT4 - Including its long gearing	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (981)	238 F	2012-16	6/2706	261/6700	206/4500	1310kg	-	202	5.8	-	164	+ Goes and looks better than the 987 Boxster - Shame about the electric steering	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (981)	186 F	2012-16	6/3436	311/6700	265/4500	1320kg	-	239	5.1	-	173	+ Boxster steps out of 911's shadow - But gets 911's less appealing electric steering	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster GTS (981)	203 D	2014-16	6/3436	325/6700	273/4500	1345kg	-	246	5.0	-	174	+ Superb dynamics, fantastic engine, great looks - Sport suspension is very firm	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster Spyder (981)	223 F	2015-16	6/3800	370/6700	310/4750	1315kg	-	286	4.5	-	180	+ An even faster, even more rewarding Boxster - Feedback trails the Cayman GT4's	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (987)	161 F	2005-12	6/3436	306/6400	266/5500	1355kg	-	229	5.3	-	170	+ Second-gen Boxster's as brilliant as ever - It's a typically Porsche redesign	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	277 F	2010-12	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1275kg	-	252	4.9	-	166	+ Lighter, more driver-centric Boxster - Collapsed-brolly roof not the most practical	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (986)	070 F	1999-2004	6/3179	256/6200	229/4600	1320kg	-	200	5.7	-	164	+ Added power over the non-S Boxster is seductive - Very little	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet (992)	262 D	£118,800	6/2981	444/6500	391/2300	1600kg	-	282	4.4	-	188	+ Performance, handling, useability - It's no lightweight; body not as stiff as the coupe's	★★★★☆
Porsche 911 Targa 4S (992)	277 D	£118,800	6/2981	444/6500	391/2300	1640kg	-	275	4.4	-	189	+ Distinctive; driving experience is barely touched - You can't get a rear-drive Targa	★★★★★
Radical Rapture	274 F	£108,000	4/2261	360/6000	360/3500	765kg*	-	478	3.0	-	165	+ Unfiltered and utterly addictive - It's more at home on the track than the road	★★★★★
Renault Sport Spider	231 F	1996-99	4/1998	148/6000	136/4500	930kg	-	157	6.5	-	131	+ Rarity; unassisted steering - Heavier than you'd hope; disappointing engine	★★★☆☆
Rolls-Royce Dawn	222 D	£264,000	12/6592	563/5250	575/1500	2560kg	-	223	4.9	-	155	+ Effortless driving experience - Driver involvement not a priority	★★★★★
Toyota MR2 (Mk3)	258 F	2000-06	4/1794	138/6400	125/4400	975kg	-	141	8.0	7.2	131	+ Tight lines, taut dynamics - Minimal luggage space	★★★★★
TVR Tamora	070 F	2001-07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1060kg	-	335	4.2	-	175	+ Well-sorted soft-top TVR - Awkward styling	★★★★☆
TVR Chimaera 5.0	258 F	1993-2003	8/4997	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	-	307	4.4	-	167	+ Gorgeous noise, tarmac-rippling grunt - Details	★★★★★
TVR Griffith 4.3	068 F	1992-93	8/4280	280/5500	305/4000	1040kg	-	274	4.4	4.8	155	+ The car that made TVR. Cult status - Mere details	★★★★★
TVR Griffith 500	009 F	1993-2001	8/4997	320/5500	320/4000	1060kg	-	307	4.1	-	167	+ Gruff diamond - A few rough edges	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220 Turbo	066 F	2003-05	4/1998	197/5500	184/1950	930kg	-	215	4.9	-	151	+ Nothing comes close for the money - Marginal everyday usability	★★★★★

COUPES / GTs



OUR CHOICE

Porsche 718 Cayman GT4. With a naturally aspirated flat-six, a manual gearbox, extraordinary damping and fulsome 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 **Alpine A110** (left) gives the four-cylinder 718 Cayman a true rival to worry about, while the **Aston Martin Vantage** is a genuine 911 beater. The C8-generation **Chevrolet Corvette Stingray** is a lot of mid-engined V8 coupe for the money and the **Bentley Continental GT Speed** combines high-end GT refinement with highly polished handling.

Alfa Romeo 4C	209 F	2013-19	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	2007-09	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1585kg	-	288	4.2	-	181	+ Looks, exclusivity, noise, balance - Cost more now than they did new	★★★★★
Alpine A110	285 F	£49,990	4/1798	249/6000	236/2000	1102kg	1094kg	230	4.5	4.6	155	+ Fast, fun and genuinely different - If only it had a manual gearbox	★★★★★
Alpine A110 GT	304 F	£59,440	4/1798	296/6300	251/2400	1119kg	-	269	4.2	-	155	+ The Goldilocks choice in the A110 range for road driving - Trackdays	★★★★★
Alpine A110 S	268 D	£60,040	4/1798	296/6300	251/2400	1109kg	-	271	4.2	-	171	+ Firmer and faster - But not necessarily better	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vantage	280 F	£124,400	8/3982	503/6000	505/2000	1685kg	-	303	3.6	4.5	195	+ Performance that's a huge leap forward - Chassis struggles when really pushed	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vantage F1 Edition	293 F	£142,000	8/3982	527/6000	505/2000	1570kg*	-	341	3.6	-	195	+ Hones the Vantage recipe - Not the trackday refugee the stickers and spoilers suggest	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	298 F	£265,000	12/5204	690/6500	555/5000	1795kg	-	391	3.5	-	200	+ The last of its kind - Hobbled by ham-fisted handling	★★★★☆
Aston Martin V8 Vantage (4.3)	288 F	2005-07	8/4280	380/7000	302/5000	1630kg	-	237	5.0	5.2	175	+ Gorgeous; awesome soundtrack - Can't quite match a 911 dynamically	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage (4.7)	169 D	2008-16	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	2011-17	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	-	271	4.8	-	190	+ Keener engine, V12 Vantage looks - Slightly sluggish auto only	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage N430	218 F	2014-16	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	-	271	4.8	-	189	+ Malleable, involving - Never feels rampantly quick	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vantage GT8	274 F	2016-17	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	2009-13	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	-	308	4.2	4.4	190	+ The car we hoped the V8 Vantage would be - Erm, a tad thirsty?	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S	285 F	2013-17	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	2015-16	12/5935	592/7000	461/5500	1565kg	-	384	3.5	-	185	+ The GT3-style Vantage we waited so long for - Only 100 made	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB11 V8	253 D	£144,900	8/3982	503/6000	498/2000	1685kg	-	303	4.0	-	187	+ Potent and characterful engine; sharper chassis than V12 - Do we still need the V12?	★★★★☆
Aston Martin DB11	235 F	2017-18	12/5204	600/6500	516/1500	1800kg	-	339	3.9	4.0	200	+ A great GT - Suffers in outright handling terms as a result	★★★★☆
Aston Martin DB11 AMR	290 F	£174,995	12/5204	630/6500	516/1500	1795kg	-	357	3.7	-	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	2015-17	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	178 F	2004-16	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	2007-12	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1695kg	-	306	4.3	-	191	+ Stupendous engine, gearbox, brakes - Pricey; can bite the unwary	★★★★★
Audi TTS (Mk3)	261 D	£44,610	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)	249 F	£53,905	5/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1450kg	1487kg	276	3.7	3.5	155	+ Soundtrack; tremendous point-to-point pace - A bit one-dimensional in the long run	★★★★☆
Audi TTS (Mk2)	193 F	2008-14	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1395kg	-	195	5.4	-	155	+ A usefully quicker TT, with a great drivetrain - Still steers like a computer game	★★★★☆
Audi TT RS (Mk2)	158 F	2009-14	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1450kg	-	235	4.7	4.4	155	+ Sublime five-cylinder turbo engine - Rest of package can't quite match it	★★★★★
Audi S5	252 F	2017-19	6/2995	349/5400	369/1370	1615kg	-	220	4.7	-	155	+ Chassis rewards commitment... - ...but doesn't offer a challenge. Plain engine, too	★★★★☆
Audi RS5	240 F	£68,985	6/2894	444/5700	442/1900	1655kg	1799kg	273	3.9	3.6	155	+ Lighter, quicker; makes green paint look good - Lacks the character of the old V8	★★★★☆
Audi RS5	206 F	2010-16	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1715kg	-	263	4.5	4.3	155	+ Brilliant engine and improved chassis - Lack of suspension travel; inconsistent steering	★★★★☆
Audi R8 V8	284 F	2007-15	8/4163	424/7900	317/4500	1560kg	1624kg	276	4.6	4.1	188	+ A true 911 alternative - The V8 engine got dropped too soon	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8	290 F	£166,200	8/3993	542/6000	568/2000	2165kg	-	254	4.0	-	198	+ Pace, quality, polish - A bit one-dimensional	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental GT	255 F	2018-21	12/5950	626/5000	664/1350	2244kg	-	283	3.7	-	207	+ Astonishing agility for such a big, heavy car - Thirst	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT Speed	296 F	£209,900	12/5950	650/5000	664/1500	2273kg	-	291	3.6	-	208	+ Dynamically Bentley's best - A V8 Speed would be better still	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8	178 F	2012-17	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2220kg	-	229	4.8	-	188	+ A proper driver's Bentley with decent economy - Makes the W12 seem pointless	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8 S	204 F	2013-17	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	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT	152 D	2003-17	12/5998	567/6000	516/1700	2245kg	2360kg	257	4.5	-	198	+ Near 200mph in utter comfort - Weight; W12's thirst	★★★★☆
Bentley Continental Supersports	234 D	2017	12/5998	700/6000	750/2050	2205kg	-	323	3.5	-	209	+ Massive performance, surprisingly agile - Styling and soundtrack far from discreet	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT3-R	203 D	2014-17	8/3993	572/6000	518/1700	2120kg	-	274	3.8	-	170	+ The best-handling Continental of its generation - Expensive; it still weighs 2120kg	★★★★★
BMW 1-series M Coupé	277 F	2011-12	6/2979	335/5900	369/1500	1495kg	-	228	4.9	-	155	+ Character, turbo pace and great looks - Came and went too quick	★★★★★
BMW M240i xDrive Coupé	303 F	£47,515	6/2998	369/5500	369/1900	1690kg	-	222	4.3	-	155	+ A pocket GT with bulging muscles - You might balk at the bulk	★★★★★
BMW M240i Coupé	229 D	2016-21	6/2998	335/6800	369/1520	1470kg	-	232	4.8	-	155	+ Adjustable and plenty of fun - Lacks finesse and precision	★★★★☆
BMW M2	243 F	2016-18	6/2979	365/6500	369/1450	1495kg	-	248	4.5	4.9	155	+ More progressive chassis balance than the M4 - Feels unsettled on rough tarmac	★★★★☆
BMW M2 Competition	265 F	2018-21	6/2979	404/5250	406/2350	1550kg	-	265	4.4	-	155	+ A more capable and involving M2 - More expensive and heavier, too	★★★★★
BMW M2 CS	285 F	2020-21	6/2979	444/6250	406/2350	1550kg	-	291	4.2	-	155	+ evo Car of the Year 2020 - Such quality comes at a price	★★★★★
BMW M440i xDrive	282 D	£54,645	6/2998	369/5500	369/1900	1740kg	-	215	4.5	-	155	+ Punchy drivetrain with a chassis to match - That grille	★★★★★
BMW M4 Competition (G82)	292 F	£76,115	6/2993	503/6250	479/2750	1725kg	-	296	3.9	-	155	+ Accomplished and fun - Weight gain and auto gearbox look questionable	★★★★★
BMW M4 Competition xDrive (G82)	295 F	£79,775	6/2993	503/6250	479/2750	1775kg	-	288	3.5	-	155	+ Preferable to the already excellent rear-drive M4 - 4WD adds another 50kg	★★★★★
BMW M4 CSL (G82)	305 F	£128,820	6/2993	542/6250	479/2750	1625kg	1640kg	339	3.7	-	190	+ Ballistic pace, beautiful cornering balance - Whole package doesn't quite gel	★★★★★
BMW M4 (F82)	218 F	2014-19	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1570kg	-	275	4.3	-	155	+ Ferociously fast - A handful on less-than-perfect or less-than-bone-dry roads	★★★★★
BMW M4 Competition (F82)	262 F	2016-20	6/2979	444/7000	406/1850	1570kg	1645kg	287	4.3	4.4	155	+ The car the M4 always should have been - Shame everyone specs DCT	★★★★★
BMW M4 CS (F82)	254 F	2017-19	6/2979	454/6250	442/4000	1580kg	1610kg	292	3.9	-	174	+ A further-honed M4 - It ain't cheap	★★★★★
BMW M4 GTS (F82)	237 F	2016	6/2979	493/6250	442/4000	1510kg	-	332	3.8	3.7	190	+ Vast improvement on lesser M4s - So it should be, given its price	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E92)	266 F	2007-13	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1580kg	-	266	4.8	4.3	155	+ Fends off all of its rivals... - ...except the cheaper 1-series M Coupé	★★★★★



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MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
BMW M3 GTS (E92)	262 F	2010-11	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1530kg	-	295	4.4	-	190	+ One of the most focused M-cars ever - Good luck trying to find one	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E46)	266 F	2000-07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	-	230	5.2	5.1	155	+ One of the best BMWs ever. Runner-up in eCoty 2001 - Slightly artificial steering feel	★★★★★
BMW M3 CS (E46)	219 F	2005-07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	-	230	5.2	-	155	+ CSL dynamics without CSL price - Looks like the standard car	★★★★★
BMW M3 CSL (E46)	279 F	2003-04	6/3246	355/7900	273/4900	1385kg	-	260	4.9	5.3	155	+ Still superb - Changes from the automated single-clutch 'box are... a... bit... sluggish	★★★★★
BMW M3 Evolution (E36)	148 F	1996-98	6/3201	317/7400	258/3250	1515kg	-	215	5.5	5.4	158	+ Performance, image - Never quite as good as the E30	★★★★☆
BMW M3 (E30)	279 F	1989-90	4/2302	212/6750	170/4600	1165kg	-	185	6.7	6.7	147	+ The best M-car ever - Prices have got out of hand	★★★★★
BMW Z4 M Coupé	097 F	2006-09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1420kg	-	242	5.0	-	155	+ A real driver's car - You've got to be prepared to get stuck in	★★★★★
BMW M Coupé (Z3)	263 F	1998-2002	6/3246	321/7400	261/4900	1375kg	-	237	5.3	-	155	+ Quick and characterful - Lacks finesse	★★★★★
BMW M840d xDrive	260 D	£76,270	6/2993	316/4400	501/1750	1830kg	-	175	4.9	-	155	+ Refinement, old-school GT credentials - Too big to enjoy its performance often	★★★★☆
BMW M850i xDrive	256 F	£99,525	8/4395	523/5500	553/1500	1890kg	-	281	3.7	-	155	+ An impressive multi-role GT - But not a great entertainer	★★★★☆
BMW M8 Competition	272 D	£123,435	8/4395	616/6000	553/1800	1885kg	-	332	3.2	-	155	+ A fast and fine grand tourer - Lacks that true M-car fizz	★★★★☆
BMW M6 (F13)	218 F	2012-18	8/6162	460/6000	465/4600	1850kg	-	303	4.2	-	155	+ Mighty ability, pace, technology - You'll want the Competition Package upgrade, too	★★★★★
BMW M6 (E63)	106 F	2005-10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1635kg	-	311	4.2	4.8	155	+ Awesome GT, awesome sports car - SMG gearbox now off the pace	★★★★★
BMW i8	210 F	2014-20	3/1499	369/5800	420/3700	1535kg	1544kg	244	4.4	-	155	+ Brilliantly executed concept; sci-fi looks - Safe dynamic set-up	★★★★★
Chevrolet Camaro Z/28	220 F	2014-16	8/7008	505/6100	481/4800	1732kg	-	296	4.2	-	175	+ Scalpel-sharp engine, great chassis (really) - Feels very stiff on UK roads	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray (C8)	303 F	£79,300	8/6162	475/6450	452/5150	1655kg	-	292	3.5	-	184	+ Stunning achievement for the first mid-engined Vette - There's untapped potential	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray (C7)	197 F	2013-19	8/6162	604/6000	465/4600	1496kg	-	312	4.2	4.4	180	+ Performance, chassis balance, supple ride - Body control could be better	★★★★☆
Chevrolet Corvette Z06 (C7)	227 F	2015-19	8/6162	650/6000	650/3600	1598kg	-	413	3.7	-	196	+ Mind-boggling raw speed; surprisingly sophisticated - Edgy when really pushed	★★★★★
Ford Mustang 5.0 V8 GT	266 F	£41,430	8/4951	444/7000	390/4600	1768kg	-	255	4.9	-	155	+ 2018MY version gets improved dynamics - Still some way off Europe's finest	★★★★☆
Ford Mustang Mach 1	295 F	£56,995	8/4951	454/7250	390/4900	1754kg	-	263	4.8	-	166	+ A 'Mustang Plus' for Europe - It's no GT500	★★★★★
Ford Mustang Shelby GT500	292 F	£74,000	8/5163	760/7300	625/5000	1897kg	-	407	3.3	-	180	+ The power and the fury - The last of its kind?	★★★★★
Honda Integra Type R (DC2)	259 F	1996-2000	4/1797	187/8000	131/7300	1101kg	-	173	6.7	6.2	145	+ Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Too raw for some	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type P300 RWD	271 D	£54,965	4/1997	296/5500	295/1500	1520kg	-	198	5.7	-	155	+ Genuinely exploitable performance - Turbocharged four-cylinder lacks top-end verve	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-type P450 RWD	-	£70,500	8/5000	444/6000	428/2500	1660kg	-	272	4.6	-	177	+ Strong and flexible supercharged V8 - Steering and chassis feel mismatched	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type R (RWD)	218 F	2014-17	8/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1650kg	1803kg	334	4.2	-	186	+ eCoty runner-up in 2014 - Bumpy and boistrous	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type R (P575 AWD)	271 D	£98,110	8/5000	567/6500	516/3500	1743kg	-	331	3.5	-	186	+ More composed than before; now with SVR power - Eye-watering price	★★★★☆
Jaguar F-type SVR	224 D	2016-19	8/5000	567/6500	516/3500	1705kg	-	338	3.7	-	200	+ A marginally better drive than the AWD R - Not by enough to justify the extra outlay	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S	168 F	2011-14	8/5000	542/6000	502/2500	1753kg	-	314	4.4	-	186	+ Faster and wilder than regular XKR - The F-type R	★★★★★
Jannarely Design-1	279 F	£85,969	6/3498	321	274	950kg	-	343	3.9	-	135	+ Genuinely good sports car that stands out from the crowd - May be too quirky for some	★★★★★
Lexus RC F	295 F	£66,000	8/4969	470/6400	391/4800	1765kg	-	271	4.3	-	168	+ Great looks, noise, sense of occasion - Too heavy to be truly exciting	★★★★☆
Lexus LC 500	290 F	£81,750	8/4969	470/7100	398/4800	1935kg	-	247	4.7	-	168	+ Glorious engine, rewarding chassis - Lacks ultimate body control, numb steering	★★★★☆
Lister Thunder	247 D	£139,950	8/5000	666/6000	720/5940	1650kg	-	410	3.2	-	208	+ Deceptively fast reworked F-type - Never feels as ferocious as the figures suggest	★★★★☆
Lotus Exige S (V6)	209 F	2012-15	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1176kg	-	298	3.8	-	170	+ Breathtaking road-racer; our joint evo Car of the Year 2012 - Gearshift not the sweetest	★★★★★
Lotus Exige Sport 350	221 F	2016-21	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1125kg	-	312	3.9	-	170	+ Further honed Exige, with vastly improved gearshift - Still not easy to get into and out of	★★★★★
Lotus Exige Sport 380	231 F	2016-18	6/3456	375/6700	302/5000	1110kg	-	343	3.7	-	178	+ Intense, absorbing and brilliantly capable - Perhaps not an everyday car	★★★★★
Lotus Exige Cup 380	240 D	2017	6/3456	375/6700	302/5000	1105kg	-	345	3.6	-	175	+ An absolute riot; feels worth the £83k (new) price tag - Limited build numbers	★★★★★
Lotus Exige Sport 410	283 F	2018-21	6/3456	410/7000	310/3500	1110kg	-	375	3.4	-	180	+ A first-rate swansong for the V6 Exige - Didn't come cheap	★★★★★
Lotus Exige Cup 430	253 F	2018-21	6/3456	430/7000	325/2600	1093kg	-	400	3.3	-	180	+ The ultimate Exige - With a price tag to match	★★★★★
Lotus Exige S (S2)	253 F	2006-11	4/1796	218/7800	158/5500	930kg	-	238	4.3	-	148	+ Lightweight with a hefty punch - Uninspiring soundtrack	★★★★★
Lotus Exige (S1)	200 F	2000-01	4/1796	192/7800	146/5000	780kg	-	247	4.6	-	136	+ Looks and goes like an Elise racer - A tad lacking in refinement	★★★★★
Lotus Evora	302 F	2009-15	6/3456	276/6400	258/4700	1382kg	-	203	5.1	5.6	162	+ Sublime ride and handling, evo Car of the Year 2009 - The Evora S	★★★★★
Lotus Evora S	168 F	2010-15	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	-	245	4.8	-	172	+ A faster and better Evora - But one which spars with the Porsche 911	★★★★★
Lotus Evora 400	216 F	2015-18	6/3456	400/7000	302/3500	1395kg	-	291	4.2	-	186	+ Evora excitement levels take a leap - Gearbox still not perfect	★★★★★
Lotus Evora Sport 410	230 F	2017	6/3456	410/7000	310/3500	1325kg	-	314	4.2	-	190	+ Even lighter and sharper Evora - Engine and gearbox behind the best at this price	★★★★★
Lotus Evora GT410	278 F	2020-21	6/3456	410/7000	295/3500	1361kg	-	306	4.2	-	186	+ Fully immersive driving experience - V6 has its limitations	★★★★★
Lotus Evora GT410 Sport	261 F	2019-21	6/3456	410/7000	295/3500	1361kg	-	306	4.2	-	186	+ As above, without the creature comforts - Too pared back for most tastes	★★★★★
Lotus Evora GT430	246 F	2018	6/3456	430/7000	325/4500	1299kg	-	336	3.8	-	190	+ Genuine race-car feel on the road - It wasn't cheap, and just 60 were made	★★★★★
Lotus Emira First Edition	299 F	£71,995	6/3456	394/6000	310/3500	-	1486kg	269	4.3	-	180	+ Supercar looks with a sports car price - Dynamic balance is more planted than playful	★★★★☆
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	188 F	£93,145	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1880kg	-	245	4.8	-	186	+ A real sense of occasion to drive; wonderful engine - Rather long in the tooth	★★★★☆
Maserati GranTurismo MC	239 D	£109,740	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1873kg	-	246	4.7	-	187	+ As above but with knobs on - Those knobs don't make it feel any younger	★★★★☆
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	193 F	2011-17	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1800kg	-	256	4.5	-	188	+ Brilliant blend of road racer and GT - Gearbox takes a little getting used to	★★★★★
Mazda RX-7 (FD)	226 F	1992-95	2r/1308	237/6500	218/5000	1284kg	-	188	5.4	-	156	+ The high point for Mazda's rotary efforts - High fuel consumption, too	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupé (W205)	262 F	£78,078	8/3982	503/5500	516/2000	1745kg	1847kg	293	3.9	-	180	+ Mouth-watering mechanical package - Light steering; hefty kerb weight	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupé (W204)	162 F	2011-14	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	-	277	4.5	4.4	155	+ A proper two-door M3 rival - C63 saloon looks better to most	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black Series (W204)	171 F	2012-13	8/6208	510/6800	457/5200	1635kg	-	317	4.2	-	186	+ The C63 turned up to 11 - Too heavy; not as fiery as Black Series cars of old	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG Black Series	277 F	2007-09	8/6208	500/6800	464/5250	1760kg	-	289	4.2	-	186	+ AMG goes Porsche-hunting - Dull-witted gearshift spoils the party	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG S63 Coupé	251 D	£127,555	8/3982	604/6500	664/2750	1990kg	-	308	4.2	-	155	+ Near-silent progress meets full-blown riot - Don't go thinking it's a GT R	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG S65 Coupé	209 D	£188,550	12/5980	621/4800	737/2300	2110kg	-	299	4.1	-	186	+ Almighty power, fabulous luxury - Nearly £60k more than the S63!	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GT	227 D	2016-19	8/3982	469/6000	465/1700	1540kg	-	309	4.0	-	189	+ A true sports coupe that also does luxury - Takes time to reveal its talents	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GT S	216 F	2015-19	8/3982	515/6250	494/1800	1570kg	-	333	3.8	-	193	+ Fantastic chassis, huge grip - Artificial steering feel; downshifts could be quicker	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT C	241 D	2017-19	8/3982	549/5750	501/1900	1625kg	-	343	3.7	-	196	+ As good at being a GT as it is a sports coupe - Difficult to drive fast and smoothly	★★★★★
Mitsubishi 3000GT	-	1990-99	6/2972	282/6000	300/3000	1719kg	-	167	5.8	-	159	+ Looks the business - Doesn't do the business	☆☆☆☆☆
Nissan 370Z	204 F	2009-20	6/3696	323/7000	268/5200	1496kg	-	219	5.3	-	155	+ Quicker, leaner, keener than 350Z - Not quite a Cayman-killer	★★★★☆
Nissan 370Z Nismo	209 F	2014-20	6/3696	339/7400	274/5200	1496kg	-	230	5.2	-	155	+ Sharper looks, improved ride, extra thrills - Engine lacks sparkle	★★★★★
Nissan 350Z	107 F	2003-09	6/3498	309/6800	264/4800	1532kg	-	205	5.6	5.5	155	+ Huge fun, and great value too - Muscle-car vibe not for everyone	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2017MY)	242 F	2017-22	6/3799	562/6800	470/3600	1752kg	-	326	2.7	-	196	+ More refinement, much improved interior, still fast - Feels a touch less alert	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R Track Edition (2017MY)	229 D	2017-22	6/3799	562/6800	470/3600	1745kg	-	327	2.7	-	196	+ Sharper than the standard GT-R - Pricier too	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R Nismo (2020MY)	298 F	2020-22	6/3799	592/6800	481/3600	1703kg	-	353	2.8	-	196	+ Addictive performance - Track Edition gets 90 per cent there for a lot, lot less	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2012MY-2016MY)	238 F	2012-16	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	1783kg	316	2.7	3.2	196	+ Quicker and better than before - Stopping your Porsche-owning friends calling it a Datsun	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2010MY)	252 F	2010-12	6/3799	523/6400	451/3200	1740kg	-	305	3.0	-	194	+ More powerful version of the original - They're not worlds apart to drive	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	257 F	2008-10	6/3799	473/6400	434/3200	1740kg	-	276	3.8	-	193	+ evo Car of the Year 2008 - You won't see 20mpg often	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	265 F	1999-2002	6/2568	276/7000	289/4400	1560kg	1653kg	180	4.8	4.7	165	+ Big, brutal, and great fun - Needs more than the standard 276bhp	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R33)	196 F	1997-99	6/2568	276/6800	271/4400	1540kg	-	182	4.9	5.4	155	+ Early proof that Japanese high-tech could work (superbly) - Limited supply	★★★★★
Noble M400	297 F	2004-06	6/2968	425/6500	390/5000	1060kg	-	407	3.5	-	185	+ Devilishly fast - Dameson Tweaks interior	★★★★★
Polestar 1	269 D	£139,000	4/1969	592/6000	737	2350kg	-	256	4.2	-	155	+ One of the most appealing hybrids yet - It's left-hand-drive only, and jolly expensive	★★★★☆
Porsche 718 Cayman	287 F	£46,540	4/1988	296/6500	280/2150	1335kg	-	225	5.1	-	170	+ Chassis remains a dream - Sounds like a Toyota GT86	★★★★☆
Porsche 718 Cayman T	270 F	£53,870	4/1988	296/6500	280/2150	1350kg	-	223	5.1	-	170	+ A further-honed 2-litre Cayman - Flat-four soundtrack still disappoints	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Cayman S	249 F	£56,300	4/2497	345/6500	310/2100	1355kg	1449kg	259	4.6	3.9	177	+ Faster and better to drive than ever - Bring earplugs	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Cayman GTS 4.0	303 F	£68,700	6/3995	394/7000	310/5000	1405kg	-	285	4.5	-	182	+ Ninety per cent of the GT4's magic - Can feel a little too capable and polished at times	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Cayman GT4	299 F	£78,750	6/3995	414/7600	310/5000	1420kg	1460kg	296	4.4	-	188	+ evo Car of the Year 2019 - Long gearing isn't ideal for road driving	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 RS	305 F	£108,370	6/3996	493/8400	332/6750	1415kg	1460kg	354	3.4	-	196	+ Thrilling when the road suits it - Too many great roads don't	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S (981)	202 F	2013-16	6/3436	321/7400	273/4500	1320kg	1371kg	247	5.0	4.5	177	+ The Cayman comes of age - Erm...	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman GTS (981)	219 F	2014-16	6/3436	335/7400									



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MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CYL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING
Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS (992)	291 D	£120,800	6/2981	473/6500	420/2300	1560kg	-	308	4.1	-	192	+ Think Turbo-lite, with a touch of GT3 - Misses some of the subtler aspects of 911-ness ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (991.2)	218 F	2016-18	6/2981	365/6500	332/1700	1430kg	-	259	4.6	-	183	+ Forced induction didn't ruin the Carrera - Purists won't be happy ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera T (991.2)	264 F	2017-18	6/2981	365/6500	332/1700	1425kg	-	260	4.5	-	182	+ Lightweight windows, no rear seats, an LSD... - Only 5kg lighter than a basic Carrera ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991.2)	217 F	2016-18	6/2981	414/6500	369/1700	1440kg	-	292	4.3	-	191	+ Blindingly fast - You'll want the sports exhaust ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera GTS (991.2)	238 F	2017-19	6/2981	444/6500	406/2150	1450kg	-	311	4.1	-	193	+ Everything a 911 Carrera should be - Costs nearly £20k more than a basic Carrera ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991.1)	201 F	2012-15	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1415kg	-	283	4.5	4.3	188	+ A Carrera with supercar pace - Electric steering robs it of some tactility ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.2)	121 F	2008-11	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1425kg	-	271	4.7	-	188	+ Poise, precision, blinding pace - Feels a bit clinical ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.1)	249 F	2004-08	6/3824	350/6600	295/4600	1420kg	-	246	4.6	-	182	+ evo Car of the Year 2004 - Do your homework on potential engine issues ★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (996, 3.4)	249 F	1998-2001	6/3387	300/6800	258/4600	1320kg	-	231	5.2	-	174	+ The first evo Car of the Year, and it still stacks up today - Might feel a smidge dated ★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Wraith	205 D	£240,768	12/6592	624/5600	590/1500	2360kg	-	260	4.6	-	155	+ Refinement, chassis, drivetrain - Shared componentry lets cabin down ★★★★★
Subaru BRZ	248 F	2012-20	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1230kg	-	163	7.6	-	140	+ Fine chassis, great steering - Weak engine, not the slide-happy car they promised ★★★★★
Toyota GR86	305 F	2022	4/2387	231/7000	184/3700	1276kg	1280kg	183	6.3	-	140	+ The car the GT86 always wanted to be - Sold out in 90 minutes ★★★★★
Toyota GT86	286 F	2012-20	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1240kg	1227kg	161	7.6	6.9	140	+ Puts playfulness ahead of outright performance - Feels strategically hobbled ★★★★★
Toyota GR Supra 2.0	287 F	£49,495	4/1998	254/5000	295/1550	1395kg	-	185	5.2	-	155	+ Avoids the edginess of the 3-litre Supra - Lacks feel, feedback and bite ★★★★★
Toyota GR Supra	303 F	£53,495	6/2998	335/5000	369/1600	1502kg	-	227	4.6	-	155	+ Better than its BMW Z4 cousin, especially with a manual - Not better than an M240i ★★★★★
Toyota MR2 (Mk1)	237 F	1984-89	4/1587	122/6600	105/5000	977kg	-	127	8.2	-	124	+ Mid-engined fun comes no more affordable - Finding a good one will take time ★★★★★
TVR Sagaris	265 F	2005-07	6/3996	406/7000	349/5000	1078kg	-	383	3.7	-	185	+ Looks outrageous - 406bhp feels a touch optimistic ★★★★★
TVR Tuscan S (Mk2)	076 F	2005-07	6/3996	400/7000	315/5250	1100kg	-	369	4.0	-	185	+ Possibly TVR's best ever car - Aerodynamic 'enhancements' ★★★★★
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	004 F	1998-2004	6/3996	350/6800	330/5000	1130kg	-	315	4.4	5.0	160+	+ Accomplished and desirable - When it's running ★★★★★

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OUR CHOICE

Maserati MC20. A refreshing new addition to the supercar class, the MC20 is unmistakably Italian, has a wickedly brutal twin-turbocharged V6 and delivers old-fashioned excitement and emotion in spades – think F40, Edonis, Noble M600. The very deserving winner of our 2022 **evo** Car of the Year title.



BEST OF THE REST

The **Ferrari 296 GTB** (left) and **McLaren Artura** both demonstrate how rewarding a hybrid supercar can be, the **Lamborghini Huracán STO** and **Tecnica** remind us why big-capacity naturally aspirated engines still hold huge appeal, and the current **Porsche 911 GT3** is another highly desirable addition to the celebrated model line.

Aston Martin DBS Superleggera	264 F	£225,000	12/5204	715/6500	664/1800	1770kg	-	410	3.4	-	211	+ Broad spread of talents - It's not really 'Superlight' ★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS Superleggera Volante	273 F	£247,500	12/5204	715/6500	664/1800	1863kg*	-	390	3.6	-	211	+ Dazzling looks, immense performance - Width and weight bring compromises ★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk2)	260 F	2017-18	12/5935	595/7000	465/5500	1739kg	-	348	3.5	3.9	201	+ Noise, poise, drama and charm - Not as rounded as the DB11 ★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk1)	110 F	2005-07	12/5935	520/7000	425/5800	1875kg	-	282	4.8	4.9	200	+ Vanquish joins the supercar greats - A tad intimidating at the limit ★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Speedster	287 F	2021-22	12/5204	690/6500	555/5000	c1700kg	-	c410	3.4	-	298	+ Amusing to drive; genuine depth to its development - It's not the last word in anything ★★★★★
Aston Martin One-77	179 F	2010-12	12/7312	750/6000	553/7600	1740kg	-	438	3.7	-	220+	+ The engine, the looks, the drama - Gearbox hates manoeuvring; only 77 were made ★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 RWD	273 F	2020-21	10/5204	533/7900	398/6400	1595kg	-	340	3.7	-	199	+ More affordable than a 4WD R8 - But not more entertaining ★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Performance RWD	305 F	£131,725	10/5204	562/7800	406/6400	1590kg	1640kg	359	3.7	-	204	+ Poise and polish - Newer mid-engined rivals feel sharper, faster and more capable ★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 quattro	261 F	2020-21	10/5204	562/8100	413/6300	1660kg	-	344	3.4	-	201	+ Beats the 992 Carrera - Could be the last of its kind ★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Performance quattro	256 D	£151,830	10/5204	611/8250	428/6600	1595kg	-	389	3.1	-	205	+ Stunning V10; approachable performance - Optional Dynamic steering feels unnatural ★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 GT RWD	305 D	c£200,000	10/5204	611/8000	411/6400	1570kg	-	395	3.4	-	199	+ New aggression brings out the best in RWD R8 - We need to try it on UK roads ★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 RWS(Mk2)	254 F	2017-19	10/5204	533/7800	398/6500	1590kg	1640kg	341	3.7	-	199	+ The first rear-wheel-drive Audi for 40 years - Drives largely like its 4WD counterpart ★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 (Mk2)	234 F	2015-19	10/5204	533/7800	398/6500	1640kg	-	330	3.5	-	198	+ All the R8 you really need - You can't get a manual gearbox ★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 (Mk1)	254 F	2009-15	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	-	325	4.1	3.9	194	+ Real supercar feel - The V8 is cheaper, and still superb ★★★★★
Bugatti Chiron	244 F	2016-22	16/7993	1479/6700	1180/2000	1995kg	-	753	2.5	-	261	+ Backs up the numbers with feel and emotion - Limited top speed(!) ★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	134 F	2005-11	16/7993	987/6000	922/2200	1888kg	-	531	2.5	2.8	253	+ Superbly engineered four-wheel-drive quad-turbo rocket - Er, lacks luggage space? ★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4 Super Sport	151 F	2010-11	16/7993	1183/6400	1106/3000	1838kg	-	654	2.5	-	258	+ Was once the world's fastest supercar - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals ★★★★★
Bugatti EB110	078 F	1991-95	12/3500	552/8000	451/3750	1618kg	-	347	3.6	-	213	+ Superbly engineered four-wheel-drive quad-turbo rocket - It just fizzled out ★★★★★
Ferrari Roma	290 F	£170,720	8/3855	611/5750	560/3000	1570kg	-	395	3.4	-	199+	+ Not far off being a front-engined F8 - Choosing between a Roma and an F8 ★★★★★
Ferrari Portofino M	288 D	£175,345	8/3855	611/5750	560/3000	1664kg	-	373	3.5	-	199	+ Matches useability to supercar performance - Lacks the passion of the best Ferraris ★★★★★
Ferrari F8 Tributo	281 F	£203,476	8/3902	710/8000	568/3250	1435kg	-	503	2.9	-	211	+ Ferrari's best series-production V8 ever - The hybrids are coming ★★★★★
Ferrari F8 Spider	276 D	£225,897	8/3902	710/8000	568/3250	1400kg*	-	515	2.9	-	211	+ As above, with a folding hard-top - Some may prefer McLaren's 720S Spider ★★★★★
Ferrari 488 GTB	228 F	2015-19	8/3902	661/6500	561/3000	1475kg	-	455	3.0	-	205+	+ Staggeringly capable - Lacks a little of the 458's heart and excitement ★★★★★
Ferrari 488 Pista	262 F	2018-20	8/3902	710/8000	568/3000	1385kg	-	521	2.9	-	211+	+ Searingly fast and effortlessly capable - Takes a while to fully appreciate it ★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Italia	288 F	2009-15	8/4497	562/9000	398/6000	1485kg	-	384	3.4	3.2	202+	+ An astounding achievement - Paddleshift only ★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Speciale	301 F	2013-15	8/4497	597/9000	398/6000	1395kg	-	435	3.0	-	202+	+ evo Car of the Year 2014 - If you don't own a regular 458, nothing ★★★★★
Ferrari F430	254 F	2004-10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1449kg	-	339	4.0	-	196+	+ Just brilliant - Didn't you read the plus point? ★★★★★
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	274 F	2007-10	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1350kg	1374kg	378	3.6	3.5	198	+ Successful F1 technology transplant - Likes to shout about it ★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Modena	163 F	1999-2004	8/3586	394/8500	275/4750	1390kg	-	288	4.5	-	183+	+ Worthy successor to 355 - Not quite as involving as it should be ★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale	274 F	2003-04	8/3586	420/8500	275/4750	1280kg	-	333	4.1	-	186	+ Totally exhilarating road-racer - Automated single-clutch 'box dates it ★★★★★
Ferrari F355 Berlinetta	231 F	1994-99	8/3496	374/8250	268/6000	1350kg*	-	281	4.7	-	183	+ Looks terrific, sounds even better - Are you kidding? ★★★★★
Ferrari 348 GT Competizione	274 F	1993	8/3404	316/7200	239/5000	1180kg*	-	276	5.0	-	175	+ Utterly absorbing, with exceptional dynamics - Steering a little woolly ★★★★★
Ferrari 296 GTB	305 F	£245,000	6/2992	819/8000	546/6250	1470kg*	1660kg	566	2.9	-	205	+ Indulgently powerful, responsive, makes a success of hybrid tech - It's rather pricey ★★★★★
Ferrari 296 GTS	304 D	£279,248	6/2992	819/8000	546/6250	1540kg*	-	540	2.9	-	205	+ Magical when you're in its groove - Lacks the last degree of control of the GTB ★★★★★
Ferrari 812 Superfast	275 F	£262,963	12/6496	789/8500	529/7000	1630kg	-	492	2.9	3.1	211	+ Incredible engine - Finding opportunities to exploit it ★★★★★
Ferrari 812 GTS	280 F	£293,150	12/6496	789/8500	529/7000	1645kg*	-	487	3.0	-	211+	+ A brilliant return for the front-engined V12 Ferrari Spider - There won't be many more ★★★★★
Ferrari 812 Competizione	292 F	£446,970	12/6496	819/9250	510/7000	1487kg*	-	560	2.9	-	211+	+ Phenomenally exciting - Requires plenty of respect at all times ★★★★★
Ferrari F12 Berlinetta	275 F	2012-17	12/6262	730/8250	509/6000	1630kg	-	455	3.1	-	211+	+ 730bhp isn't too much power for the road - Super-quick steering is an acquired taste ★★★★★
Ferrari F12tdf	230 F	2017	12/6262	769/8500	520/6250	1520kg	-	514	2.9	-	211+	+ Alarmingly fast - Doesn't flow like a 458 Speciale ★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	275 F	2006-12	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1690kg	-	368	3.7	3.5	205	+ evo Car of the Year 2006 - Banks are getting harder to rob ★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTO	161 F	2011-12	12/5999	661/8250	457/6500	1605kg	-	418	3.4	-	208+	+ One of the truly great Ferraris - Struggles for traction on poor surfaces ★★★★★
Ferrari 575M Fiorano Handling Pack	200 F	2002-06	12/5748	508/7250	434/5250	1688kg	-	298	3.7	4.2	205+	+ Fiorano pack makes 575 truly great - It should have been standard ★★★★★
Ferrari 550 Maranello	275 F	1996-2002	12/5474	478/7000	420/5000	1690kg	-	287	4.4	-	199	+ Everything - Nothing ★★★★★
Ferrari GTC4 Lusso T	246 D	2017-20	8/3855	602/7500	560/3000	1865kg	-	328	3.5	-	199	+ Effortless, comfortable GT - Misses the richer soundtrack of the V12 ★★★★★
Ferrari GTC4 Lusso	264 F	2016-20	12/6262	680/8000	514/5750	1920kg	-	360	3.4	-	208	+ Rear-wheel steering increases agility - Not as engaging as other Ferraris ★★★★★
Ferrari FF	194 F	2011-15	12/6262	651/8000	504/6000	1880kg	-	347	3.7	-	208	+ Four seats and 4WD, but a proper Ferrari - Looks divide opinion ★★★★★
Ferrari 612 Scaglietti	090 F	2004-11	12/5748	533/7250	434/5250	1875kg	-	289	4.0	4.3	199	+ Awesomely capable grand tourer - See above ★★★★★
Ferrari SF90 Stradale	299 F	£376,048	8/3990	986/7500	-	1570kg*	1742kg	638	2.5	-	211	+ Hugely fast hybrid-hypercar - Can feel clumsy when hustled ★★★★★
Ferrari SF90 Spider	300 D	£418,233	8/3990	986/7500	-	1670kg*	-	600	2.5	-	211	+ Mesmerising V8 with expertly integrated hybrid system - You need to pack light ★★★★★
Ferrari Daytona SP3	302 F	c£2m	12/6496	828/9250	514/7250	1485kg*	-	566	2.9	-	211	+ Epic naturally aspirated V12; sports prototype looks - We didn't get invited to buy one ★★★★★
Ferrari LaFerrari	203 F	2013-15	12/6262	950/9000	664/6750	1574kg	-	613	3.0	-	217+	+ Perhaps the greatest Ferrari ever - Brakes lack a touch of precision on track ★★★★★
Ferrari Enzo	275 F	2002-04	12/5999	651/7800	485/5500	1365kg	-	485	3.7	3.5	217+	+ Intoxicating, exploitable - Cabin detailing falls short of a Zonda or F1's ★★★★★
Ferrari F50	275 F	1995-97	12/6499	513/8500	347/6500	1230kg*	-	424	3.9	-	202	+ A better driver's Ferrari than the 288, F40 or Enzo - Not better looking, though ★★★★★
Ferrari F40	275 F	1987-92	8/2936	471/7000	426/4000	1100kg*	-	437	4.1	-	201	+ Brutally fast - It's in the dictionary under 'turbo lag' ★★★★★
Ford GT	253 F	\$450,000	6/3497	647/6250	550/5900	1385kg*	-	475	2.8	-	216	+ Everything it does on track - Too many of the things it does on the road ★★★★★
Ford GT	200 F	2004-06	8/5409	550/6500	500/3750	1583kg	-	353	3.9	-	205	+ evo Car of the Year 2005 - Don't scalp yourself getting in ★★★★★
Hennessey Venom F5	302 D	c£1.5m	8/6555	1817/8000	1198/5000	1360kg	-	1357	2.6	-	311	+ Ballistic performance; surprising drivability - Finding somewhere to do 300mph+ ★★★★★

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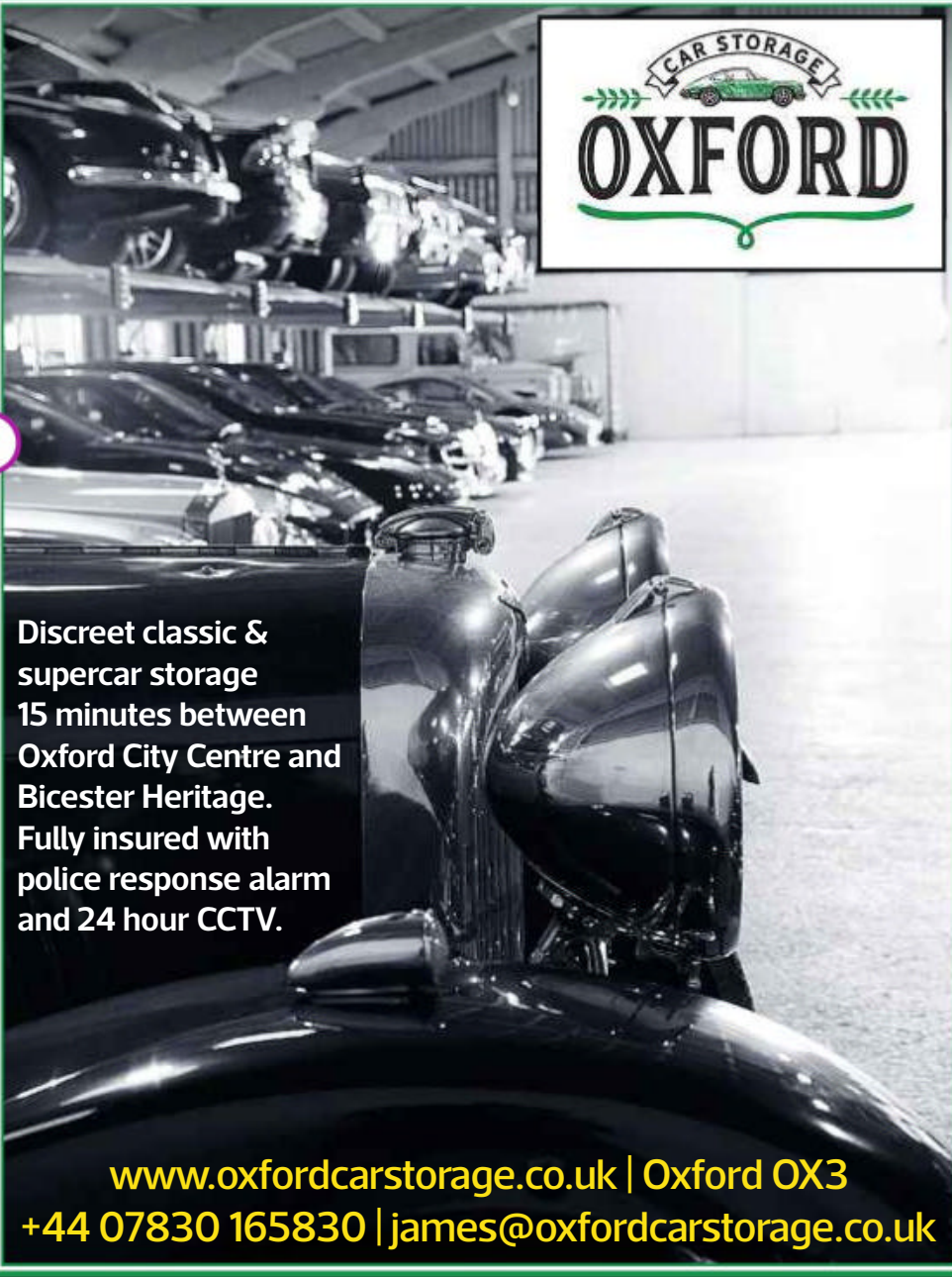
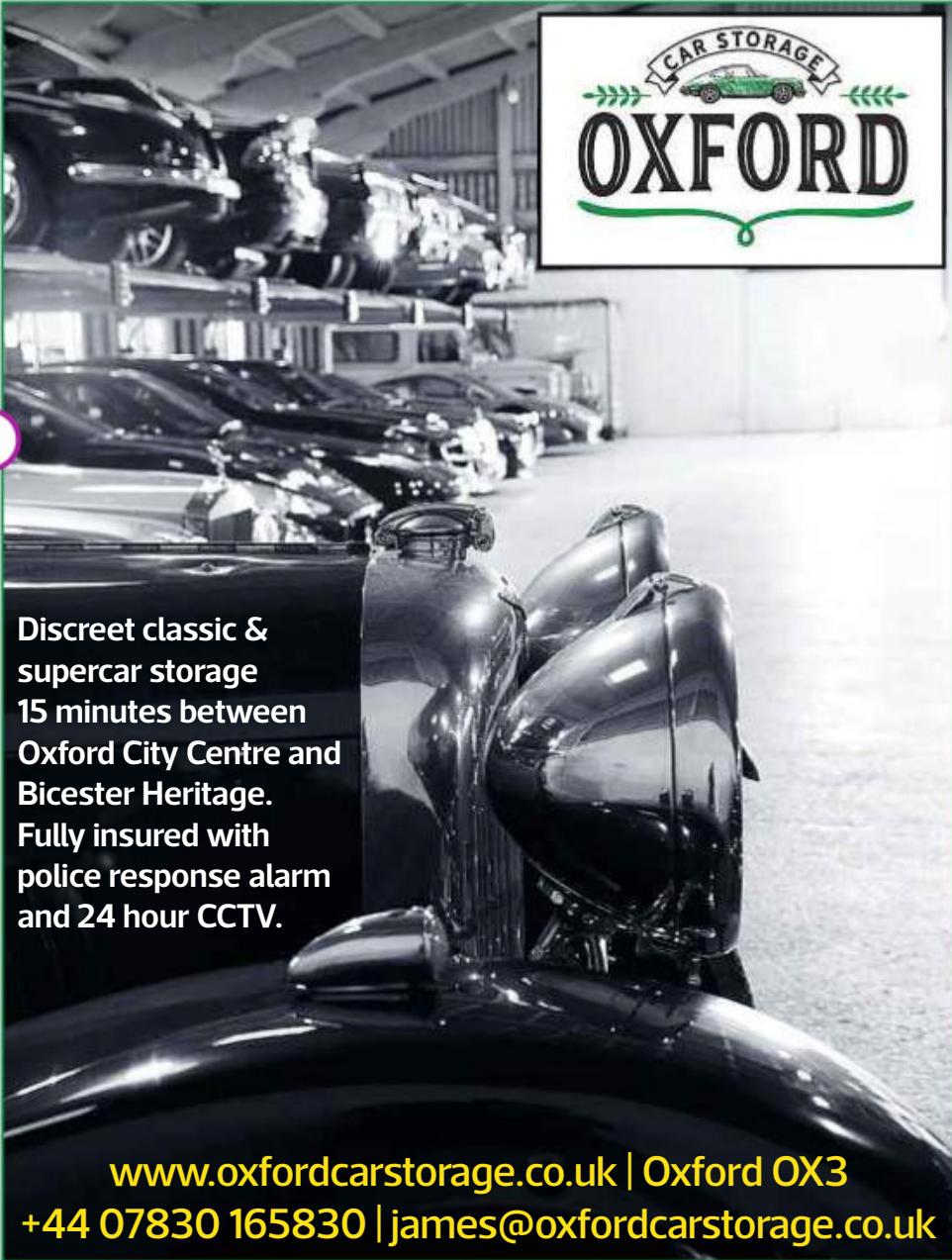
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MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CVL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	WEIGHT (TESTED)	BHP/TON (CLAIMED)	0-62MPH (CLAIMED)	0-60MPH (TESTED)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
Honda NSX	270 F	£144,765	6/3493	573	476/2000	1776kg	-	328	2.9	3.0	191	+ Blisteringly quick and brilliantly engineered - Limited range on a full tank	★★★★★
Honda NSX (NA2)	188 F	1997-2005	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1410kg	-	196	5.7	-	168	+ The original useable supercar - 276bhp sounds a bit weedy today	★★★★★
Honda NSX-R (NA2)	301 F	2002-03	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1270kg	-	221	4.4	-	168	+ evo Car of the Year 2002 - Hard to find	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ220	157 F	1992-94	6/3498	542/7200	475/4500	1470kg	-	375	3.7	-	213	+ Britain's greatest supercar... - ...until McLaren built the F1	★★★★☆
Koenigsegg One:1	202 F	2014-15	8/5065	1341/7500	1011/6000	1360kg	-	1002	2.9	-	273	+ One of the most powerful cars we've tested - We couldn't afford one	★★★★★
Koenigsegg Agera R	180 F	2011-14	8/5032	1124/7100	885/2700	1435kg	-	796	2.8	-	273	+ As fast and exciting as your body can handle - It's Veyron money	★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCRX Edition	118 F	2008-10	8/4800	1004/7000	796/5600	1280kg*	-	797	2.9	-	250+	+ One of the world's fastest cars - Spiky power delivery	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán RWD	229 F	2016-19	10/5204	572/8000	397/6500	1389kg*	-	385	3.4	-	199	+ More seductive than the 4WD Huracán - Felt like there was more to come	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán	209 D	2014-19	10/5204	602/8250	413/6500	1422kg*	1554kg	430	3.2	-	201+	+ Defies the numbers; incredible point-to-point pace - Takes work to find its sweet-spot	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán Evo RWD	281 F	£164,400	10/5204	602/8000	413/6500	1389kg*	-	440	3.3	-	202	+ The most complete Huracán yet - Prescriptive driver modes still frustrate	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán Evo	264 F	£198,307	10/5204	631/8000	442/6500	1422kg*	-	451	2.9	-	202+	+ Performante engine, trick chassis - Badly needs an 'Ego' mode for road driving	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán Evo Spyder	269 F	£218,137	10/5204	631/8000	442/6500	1542kg*	-	416	3.1	-	202	+ Drop-top driving enhances that epic V10 - Being mistaken for a King's Road poser	★★★★☆
Lamborghini Huracán Performante	242 F	2017-19	10/5204	631/8000	442/6500	1382kg*	-	464	2.9	-	201+	+ The realisation of the Huracán's ever elusive potential - Kitchen-worktop carbonfibre	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán Tecnica	301 D	£212,000	10/5204	631/8000	417/6500	1379kg*	-	450	3.2	-	202	+ The Huracán bows out on an all-time high - We won't see its like again	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán STO	301 F	£260,012	10/5204	631/8000	417/6500	1339kg*	1548kg	479	3.0	-	193	+ The Huracán's full potential finally unleashed - A touch showy, perhaps?	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP550-2 Balboni	138 F	2009-10	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1380kg*	-	399	3.9	-	199	+ Mad, rear-wheel-drive Lambo - Limited numbers	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	180 D	2008-13	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1410kg*	-	398	3.7	-	202	+ Still a missile from A to B - Feels a little dated next to some rivals	★★★★☆
Lamborghini Gallardo LP570-4 Superleggera	152 F	2010-13	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1340kg*	-	426	3.4	3.5	202	+ Less weight and more power than original Superleggera - LP560-4 runs it very close	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo	094 F	2003-08	10/4961	513/8000	376/4250	1430kg*	-	364	4.0	4.3	196	+ On a full-bore start it spins all four wheels. Cool - Slightly clunky e-gear	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador	194 F	2011-17	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1575kg*	-	445	2.9	-	217	+ Most important new Lambo since the Countach - Can feel a little clumsy	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador S	246 F	2016-21	12/6498	730/8400	509/5500	1575kg*	-	471	2.9	-	217	+ A more agile, more connected Aventador - Synthetic steering	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador SV	216 F	2015-17	12/6498	740/8400	509/5500	1525kg*	-	493	2.8	-	217+	+ More exciting than the standard Aventador - ISR gearbox inconsistent	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador SVJ	282 F	£360,000	12/6498	759/8500	531/6750	1525kg*	-	506	2.8	-	218	+ A significant step on from the SV - Have we mentioned the gearbox?	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador SVJ Roadster	268 D	£387,987	12/6498	759/8500	531/6750	1575kg*	-	490	2.9	-	217+	+ Increased exposure to that V12 - Next time it'll have electric assistance	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador LP780-4 Ultimae	300 F	£324,000	12/6498	769/8500	531/6750	1550kg*	-	504	2.8	-	221	+ The final traditional V12 Lambo - We'll never see its kind again	★★★★★
Lamborghini Sián FKP 37	284 F	£3,120,000	12/6498	808/8500	531/6750	1595kg*	-	515	<2.8	-	220	+ Our kind of hybrid - Ferociously expensive	★★★★★
Lamborghini Countach LPI 800-4	300 F	£2,000,000	12/6498	802/8500	531/6750	1595kg*	-	511	2.8	-	221	+ Retro looks, Sián supercapacitor tech - An Ultimae is a sixth of the price	★★★★☆
Lamborghini Murciélago	089 D	2001-06	12/6192	572/7500	479/5400	1650kg*	-	351	4.0	-	206	+ Gorgeous, capable and incredibly friendly - V12 feels stressed	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	275 F	2006-11	12/6496	631/8000	487/6000	1665kg*	-	385	3.8	-	211	+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	200 F	2009-11	12/6496	616/8000	487/6500	1565kg*	-	429	3.3	3.2	212	+ A supercar in its truest, wildest sense - Be prepared for stares	★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo VT 6.0	275 F	2000-02	12/5992	543/7100	457/5500	1625kg*	-	343	3.9	-	208	+ Best-built, best-looking Diablo of all - People's perceptions	★★★★★
Lexus LFA/LFA Nürburgring	200 F	2010-12	10/4805	552/8700	354/6800	1480kg	-	379	3.7	-	202	+ Absurd and compelling supercar - Badge and price don't quite match	★★★★★
Lotus Esprit Sport 350	171 F	1999-2001	8/3506	349/6500	295/4250	1299kg	-	274	4.3	-	175	+ Lotus's pukka V8-powered supercar - Weight of that V8 makes it more intimidating	★★★★★
Maserati MC20	305 F	£204,520	6/2992	621/7500	538/3000	1475kg*	1700kg	428	2.9	-	203	+ evo Car of the Year 2022 - Lacks the refinement and sophistication of some rivals	★★★★☆
Maserati MC20 Cielo	304 D	£231,885	6/2992	621/7500	538/3000	1560kg*	-	404	2.9	-	201	+ Gets you closer to that rip-snorthing engine - A tiny bit more ragged than the coupe	★★★★★
McLaren 570S	229 F	2015-19	8/3799	562/7500	443/5000	1452kg	-	393	3.2	-	204	+ A truly fun and engaging sports car - McLaren doesn't call it a supercar!	★★★★★
McLaren 570GT	261 F	2016-18	8/3799	562/7500	443/5000	1498kg	-	381	3.4	-	204	+ Blurs the line between grand tourer and supercar brilliantly - 570S is more involving	★★★★★
McLaren 600LT	257 F	2018-21	8/3799	592/7500	457/5500	1356kg	-	444	2.9	-	204	+ evo Car of the Year 2018 - There's no glovebox	★★★★★
McLaren 620R	268 F	2020-21	8/3799	611/7500	457/5500	1386kg	-	448	2.9	-	200	+ A true 911 GT3 RS rival - The GT3 RS has a more scintillating engine	★★★★★
McLaren GT	296 F	£165,230	8/3994	612/7500	465/5500	1530kg	-	406	3.2	-	203	+ Fiery performance; refinement - Don't expect a 720S to emerge on a great road	★★★★☆
McLaren Artura	305 F	£189,200	6/2993	671/7500	530/2250	1498kg	1560kg	455	3.0	-	205	+ Surreal performance and total precision - Monotone biturbo V6	★★★★★
McLaren 720S	262 F	£208,600	8/3994	710/7250	568/5500	1419kg	-	508	2.9	2.9	212	+ evo Car of the Year 2017 - Favours precision over emotion	★★★★★
McLaren 720S Spider	268 F	£242,000	8/3994	710/7250	568/5500	1468kg	-	491	2.9	-	212	+ Every bit as ballastic as the coupe - But a fraction less precise	★★★★★
McLaren 765LT	281 F	£280,000	8/3994	754/7500	590/5500	1339kg	-	572	2.8	-	205	+ Intense, extreme, insane - How much do you value your driving licence?	★★★★★
McLaren 765LT Spider	306 F	£310,500	8/3994	754/7500	590/5500	1388kg	-	553	2.8	-	205	+ Everything the 765LT coupe is and more - Including more expensive	★★★★★
McLaren 650S	196 F	2014-17	8/3799	641/7250	500/6000	1428kg	-	456	3.0	-	207	+ Better brakes, balance and looks than 12C; more power too - Which all comes at a price	★★★★★
McLaren 675LT	248 F	2015-17	8/3799	666/7100	516/5500	1328kg	-	510	2.9	-	205	+ Runner-up at eCoty 2015; asks questions of the P1 - Aventador price tag	★★★★★
McLaren 12C	264 F	2011-14	8/3799	616/7500	442/3000	1434kg	1466kg	435	3.3	-	207	+ Stagging performance, refinement - Engine noise can be grating	★★★★☆
McLaren Senna	252 F	£750,000	8/3999	789/7250	590/5500	1198kg*	-	669	2.8	-	211	+ Astounding performance, stellar presence - Only 500 being made	★★★★★
McLaren Elva	294 D	£1,425,000	8/3994	804/7500	590/5500	1269kg	-	644	2.8	-	203	+ Stupendous performance - Lacks the connection of the 765LT	★★★★★
McLaren P1	276 F	2013-15	8/3799	903/7500	664/4000	1490kg	-	616	2.8	-	217	+ Freakish breadth of ability - At its mind-bending best on track	★★★★★
McLaren F1	228 F	1994-98	12/6064	627/7500	479/4000	1138kg	-	560	3.2	-	240	+ Still the most single-minded supercar ever - The air con was a bit weak	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT R	261 D	£158,285	8/3982	577/6250	516/2100	1575kg	-	372	3.6	3.3	198	+ Fun and blisteringly fast; a true rival for the 911 GT3 - A touch showy, perhaps	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT R Pro	269 F	2019-20	8/3982	577/6250	516/2100	1561kg	-	376	3.6	-	198	+ A GT R fine-tuned for the track - A 911 GT3 RS has the edge	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series	283 F	£335,000	8/3982	720/6700	590/2000	1520kg	-	480	3.2	-	202	+ Terrifyingly fast and capable - Subtle it ain't	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	264 F	2010-15	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1620kg	-	335	3.9	4.1	197	+ Great engine and chassis (gullwing doors too!) - Slightly tardy gearbox	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Black Series	204 F	2013-15	8/6208	622/7400	468/5500	1550kg	-	408	3.6	-	196	+ Stunning engine, superb body control - Be careful on less-than-smooth roads...	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren	228 F	2003-07	8/5439	617/6500	575/3250	1693kg	-	370	3.8	-	208	+ Zonda-pace, 575-style drivability - Dreadful brake feel	★★★★☆
Noble M600	186 F	2009-18	8/4439	650/6800	604/3800	1198kg*	-	551	3.5	3.8	225	+ Spiritual successor to the Ferrari F40 - Quite a lot rarer	★★★★★
Pagani Huayra	185 F	c£1m	12/5980	720/5800	737/2250	1350kg*	-	542	3.3	-	224	+ Joint evo Car of the Year 2012 - Engine isn't as nape-prickling as the Zonda's	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda S (7.3)	096 F	2002-05	12/7291	547/5900	553/4050	1280kg*	-	434	3.7	-	197	+ evo Car of the Year 2001 (in earlier 7.0 form) - Values have gone up a fair bit since then	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda F	295 F	2005-06	12/7291	594/6150	560/4000	1230kg*	-	491	3.6	-	214+	+ Everything an Italian supercar ought to be - Looks a bit blingy next to a Carrera GT	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (992)	299 F	£135,700	6/3996	503/8400	347/6100	1418kg	1472kg	360	3.9	-	199	+ Agile, sharp and hugely desirable - Deciding if you want standard or Touring spec	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (992)	304 F	£178,500	6/3996	518/8500	343/6300	1450kg	-	363	3.2	-	184	+ Highly sophisticated and a real weapon on track - We've yet to try it on the road	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (991.2)	256 F	2017-19	6/3996	493/8250	339/6000	1413kg	1452kg	355	3.9	-	198	+ Almost impossible to criticise - Wasn't the easiest car to place an order for	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.2)	278 F	2018-20	6/3996	513/8250	347/6000	1430kg	-	364	3.2	-	193	+ Even better than the 991.1 RS - Demand exceeded supply	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 RS (991.2)	257 F	2018-19	6/3800	690/7000	553/2500	1470kg	-	477	2.8	-	211	+ A proper, angry turbocharged Porsche - 'Limited availability'	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (991.1)	206 F	2013-16	6/3799	468/8250	324/6250	1430kg	1448kg	333	3.5	-	196	+ evo Car of the Year 2013 - PDK only	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (991.1)	223 F	2015-16	6/3996	493/8250	339/6250	1420kg	-	353	3.3	3.0	193	+ Sensationally good to drive - The Cayman GT4 is even better	★★★★★
Porsche 911 R (991.1)	229 F	2016	6/3996	493/8250	339/6250	1370kg	-	366	3.8	-	200	+ evo Car of the Year 2016 - Limited availability	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.2)	182 F	2009-11	6/3797	429/7600	317/6250	1395kg	-	312	4.1	4.2	194	+ Even better than the car it replaced - Give us a minute...	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (3.8, 997.2)	248 F	2010-11	6/3797	444/7900	317/6750	1370kg	-	329	4.0	-	193	+ We named it our favourite car from the first 200 issues of evo - For people like us, nothing	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 (997.2)	274 F	2011-12	6/3996	493/8250	339/5750	1360kg	1463kg	368	3.8	-	193	+ evo Car of the Year 2011 - Unforgiving on-road ride; crazy used prices	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 RS (997.2)	204 F	2010-13	6/3600	611/6500	516/2250	1370kg	-	453	3.5	-	205	+ More powerful than a Carrera GT. Handles, too - Erm...	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.1)	182 F	2007-09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1395kg	1452kg	298	4.3	4.3	192	+ Runner-up at evo Car of the Year 2006 - Ferrari 599 GTBs	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.1)	112 F	2007-09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1375kg	-	302	4.2	-	193	+ evo Car of the Year 2007 - A chunk more money than the already brilliant GT3	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.2)	221 F	2003-05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1380kg	-	272	4.5	4.3	190	+ evo Car of the Year 2003 - Chassis a bit too track-focused for some roads	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (996.2)	068 F	2004-05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1360kg	-	280	4.4	-	190	+ An even more focused version of the superb GT3 - Limited supply	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT2 (996.2)	072 F	2004-06	6/3600	475/5700	472/3500	1420kg	-	338	4.0	-	198	+ Revisions made it even more of a star than the 456bhp 996.1 GT2 - Care still required	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.1)	266 F	1999-2001	6/3600	360/7200	273/5000	1350kg	-	271	4.8	4.5	187	+ evo Car of the Year 1999 - Porsche didn't build enough	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo S (992)	295 F	£168,900	6/3745	641/6750	590/2500	1640kg	-	397	2.7	-	205	+ More three-dimensional than recent Turbos - Requires self-restraint on	



DOA: PANTHER SOLO 1

This lightweight, mid-engined Brit came aching close to being an affordable '80s hero

CALL THE COMPANIES LIKELY TO MAKE a mid-'80s car mag cover star, you wouldn't have bet on Panther. Founded in 1972 by fashion designer and some-time saloon car racer Bob Jankel, Panther spent the '70s making a twee Jaguar SS100 replica, a faux 1930s saloon with Austin 1800 doors, a restyled Triumph Dolomite and, latterly, another fake pre-war roadster called the Lima. Most notoriously, in 1977 it created the Panther 6, a monstrous six-wheeled convertible powered by an 8.2-litre twin-turbo Cadillac V8, just two of which were made.

This zany freak show carried on until the end of 1979 when Panther ran out of money. Fortunately, soon afterwards South Korean industrialist Young C Kim visited London for a classic car auction, spotted a Lima outside his hotel and attempted to order one only to find production had halted. So he decided to buy the company.

Under new ownership Panther came up with an improved version of the Lima called the Kallista, but Kim didn't want the company to make fake '30s roadsters forever and that's where project EM-25 came in. Inaugurated in April 1983, EM-25 was to be a thoroughly modern mid-engined sports car with an avowed aim to be light, compact, affordable, and easy to live with. To prove he wasn't mucking about, Kim hired Len Bailey, one of the brains behind the Ford GT40, to

draw up the car's structure, and approached the great Italian design houses to style its aluminium skin. When their fees turned out to be off-puttingly enormous he contacted Ken Greenley, leader of the vehicle design course at the Royal College of Art, hoping to find some enthusiastic students to do his styling work on the cheap, only for Greenley himself to volunteer for the job.

In October 1984 EM-25 made its debut at the British motor show in Birmingham, now christened the Panther Solo. The UK car media whipped itself into an ecstatic frenzy at this promising newcomer, and with good reason: the targa-topped body looked great and the whole thing brimmed with on-paper promise. It had a chassis by an actual racing car engineer, it had a target price of under £10,000, and it was claimed to weigh less than 850kg, which would allow it to make the most of its 105bhp Escort XR3i engine. Better yet, Panther hinted stronger engines could follow, such as the 130-horsepower unit from the Escort RS Turbo.

**'IT LOOKED
GREAT AND
BRIMMED WITH
PROMISE'**

After the motor show, Brit car journos were allowed time in the Solo development mule and the gushing prose continued, though the car was not without problems. Engine cooling was something that needed to be addressed, as were the weirdly narrow footwells brought on by the car's radically cab-forward proportions. But the Solo's biggest problem wasn't the design, it was another car.

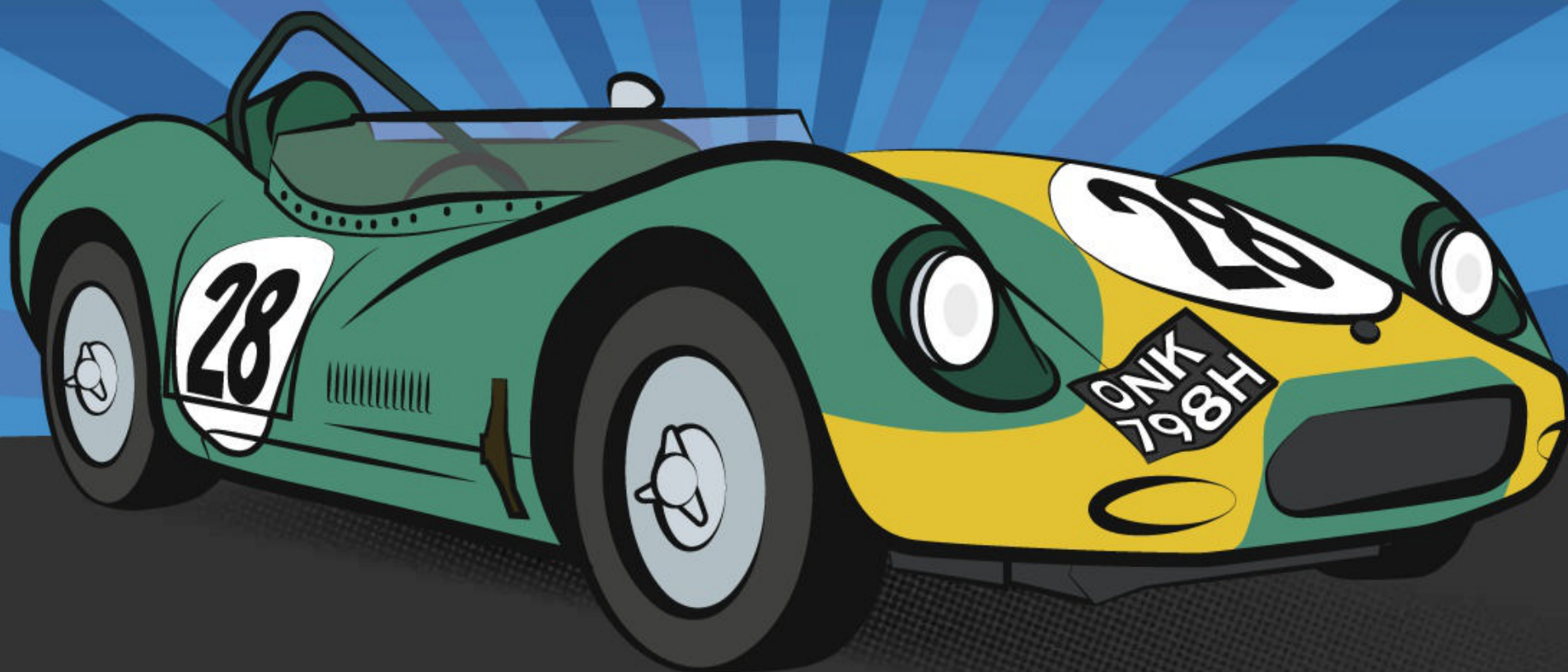
In 1985 Young C Kim was on the Pacific island of Guam when the local Toyota dealer offered him a drive in an early MR2, fresh off the boat from Japan. Here was another lightweight, affordable, 1.6-litre mid-engined sports car, already on the market and backed by the might of the Toyota corporation. Kim knew he couldn't compete. 'I drove the car,' he later explained, 'and straight after I rang up and told them to stop Project Solo.'

In fact, the project didn't stop so much as pause, regroup and head in a different direction. Greenley and his team took a chainsaw to the original Solo buck, lengthening and widening the whole thing so it could become a junior supercar. Bigger car, bigger performance, bigger price, bigger profits. Or so the theory went. But the Solo 2 that eventually went on sale in 1990 running Sierra Cosworth power and four-wheel drive in an advanced composite shell was a disaster and just a handful were sold before Panther killed it. Maybe the prettier, lighter, simpler Solo 1 was a better idea after all.

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