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Ed speak



LOTUS IS WELL ON ITS WAY TO starting its next chapter. A chapter that will concentrate on ending the era of petrol-engined road cars and ramp up its plan to be a 150,000-cars-a-year electric vehicle manufacturer. And it will be funded by an IPO to cash in on its \$5.4billion valuation. If you followed Aston Martin's IPO you might be reaching for the popcorn in preparation for this latest

British icon aiming for the stars.

There is, however, more fabric to Lotus's future that stitches its plans together. Since Geely bought its 51 per cent stake in 2017, £500million has been invested in Hethel, and a design centre in Coventry, an R&D facility in Frankfurt and a state-of-the-art factory in Wuhan have all been established. So too have partnerships with technology firms, investment in software and a boldness and confidence that is a long way from the dark days of Jean-Marc Gales trying to keep the lights on and interested buyers on the hook. These investments are often talked about pre-IPO; rarely are they actually up, running and delivering before the big day.

The product strategy is solid, if a little predictable (and for diehard Lotus fans hard to swallow). The Eletre SUV is

already on the road, the Emeya GT arrives this summer and is a model any Audi e-Tron GT or Porsche Taycan owner will be familiar with thanks to its low-slung, four-door GT design and proportions.

A smaller Porsche Macan-sized SUV will join them both on the Wuhan production line from 2026 ('Type 134' will be revealed later this year), with the £75,000 'Type 135' sports car arriving in 2027 following its '25 reveal. The latter will be built at Hethel where the Emira currently lives. What of the Evija? That should, according to CCO Mike Johnstone, be finished and ready this year.

Lotus's switch to fully electric is, on the one hand, to be expected from a brand with a parent company originating from China. But without wishing to sound like an old crusty, it is one that lacks innovation, something Lotus has always prided itself on. EVs have their place; they work for some, frustrate others and aren't the sole solution to our problems. And it's companies such as Lotus we would normally look to to find those solutions. Its future has never looked stronger, but I worry that the Lotus Geely has saved won't be the Lotus we need.

Stuart Gallagher, Editor-in-Chief @stuartg917

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Driven

by JOHN BARKER PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

MST Mk1

The MST Mk1 is a brand new, 50-year-old, road-going rally car. It looks the business, but does it deliver? Strap yourself in...





INALLY, THERE'S CLEAR ROAD IN FRONT, a ribbon of asphalt dipping and diving across a rugged lump of rain-lashed Welsh landscape. I'm very glad to be here and, as the tachometer climbs past 5000rpm, it feels as though the car is too, the 2-litre Cosworth BDG pulling clean and strong with a hollow bark that rally fans of all generations will recognise. And it just keeps pulling, past 7000, then 8000, with nape-prickling urgency, the sound as familiar, compelling and confident as Freddie Mercury holding a high note. Straight-line grip and traction are remarkably good, too, considering that those deep-dish 13-inch Minilites are shod with Kumho trackday tyres, and well-used ones at that. The quick-rack front end jinks the car brightly into turns and the combination of soft damping,

limited-slip diff and six-link live axle keeps the back end hooked up and driving us forward.

Of course, Mk1 Escorts are famous for going sideways, and in my mind's eye I'm already lining up a couple of corners further down this road, but gusting winds are lashing the side windows with rain and in places the road looks more like a river. Suddenly, the steering goes light and the car is understeering straight on towards the scenery. Just before the wheels touch the grass, the nose snaps back, avoiding an excursion that would be both embarrassing and expensive, because this car, which is officially not a Ford Escort, costs from £138,000. Maybe I'll back off a bit and wait until the rain does the same.

This is not a Ford Escort because it has been built from scratch with brand-new parts by MST

‘The damping becomes appreciably more taut as you work up through the settings’



(also known as Motorsport Tools), hence the 71 plate. MST was started by Carwyn Ellis about 15 years ago and grew out of his passion for rallying, initially supplying tools. Ellis was into Escorts, so started supplying parts and then moved into building rally cars for customers. Then, about five years ago, all the parts to build a complete car became available and MST decided to go all in, investing in the jigs to construct a whole shell from new components. Then they built up a car and learned, with a bit of trial and error, how to get it through IVA (Individual Vehicle Approval). That meant they could register it as a new car.

‘The Mk2 came first. That was our mule, to prove the concept, to prove that we could get it through the IVA,’ says Ellis. To achieve approval required a collapsible steering column, a catalyst-equipped exhaust, side repeaters, no sharp edges on the interior ‘and a few other bits and bobs’. That was in 2020. ‘The minute we got that new plate on it, we posted some pictures online and it all went crazy. It just took off from there.’

They’ve now delivered five cars and have orders for another 30, mostly Mk1s. Both models incorporate all of the Group 4 motorsport mods,





as many Escort rally cars would have had in period. 'They're all Group 4 because although most of them are road cars, people want that rally look,' says Ellis. 'They want a rally car on the road.'

'Usually, they had the car back in the day or their father had one, or they remember Roger Clark. So they've got that in their head. Now they're a bit older, they've got a bit more money and they've decided that's what they want.' Escorts are surprisingly popular with the younger generation, too, says Ellis, because of the YouTube antics of Irish rallyman Frank Kelly, because the late Ken Block had one and because they're still so big on the historic rallying scene.

Why is the Mk1 more popular? 'There are more Mk2s out there. Mk1s are rarer and have more character,' says Ellis. I agree. There's a Mk2 in the workshop, also beautifully finished in solid red with 13-inch gold Minilites, but to me the Coke-bottle profiled, bubble-arch Mk1 is much better-looking and perfectly stanced. I absolutely love how it sits nice and low and how those wide Minilites – 8x13in at the front, 9x13in at the rear, shod with plump, 235/45 Kumho V700s – sit just right in the arches. Of course, MST can fit 'two-up, two-down' Cibié

Above and left: MST Mk1 is constructed from entirely new components and can be optioned and painted to the customer's individual taste, including a choice of engines, from period-correct BDG twin-cam to 2.5-litre Duratec

spotlights – and mudflaps the size of doormats – but this clean look is just how I'd have mine.

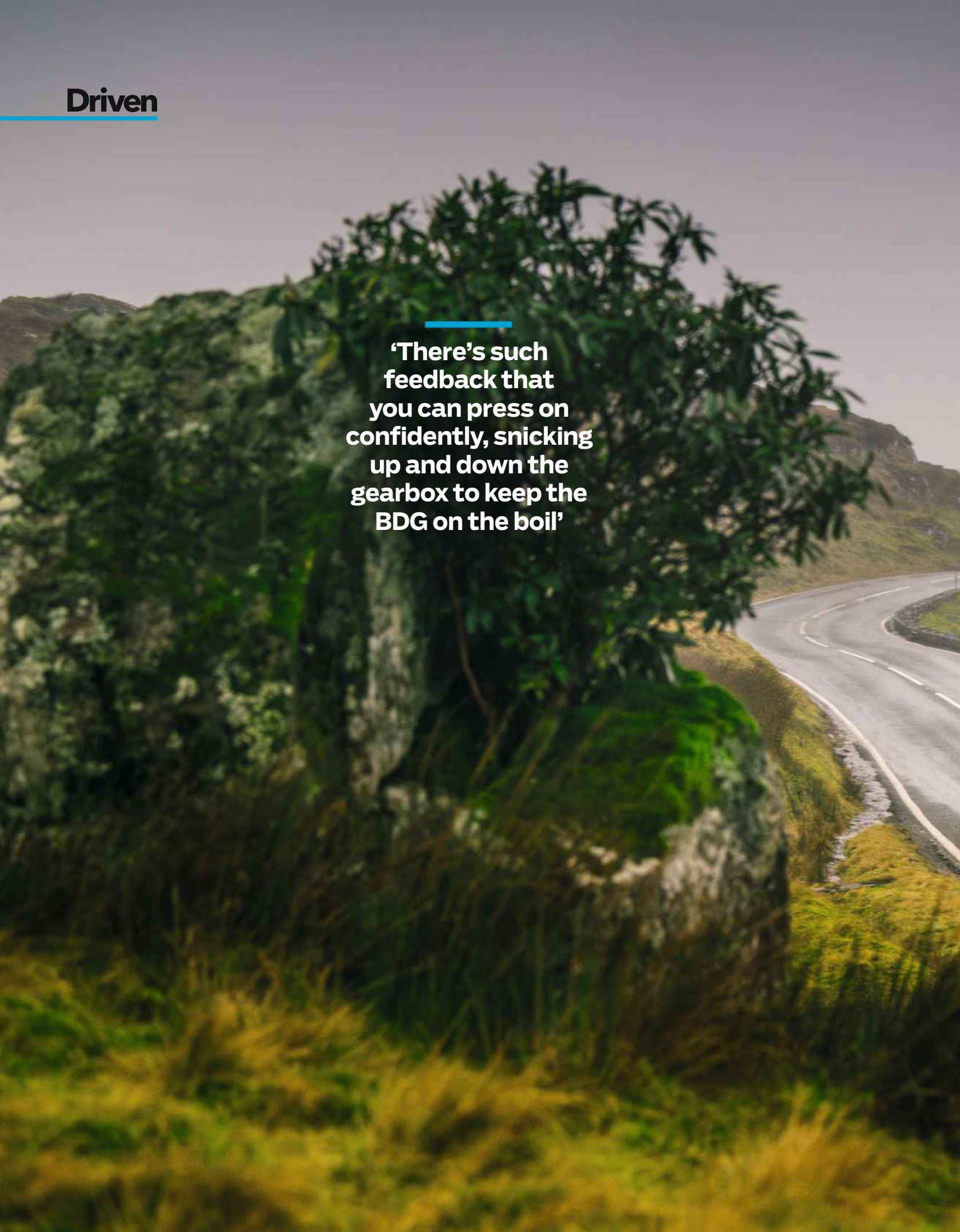
Ellis knows that customers who are paying £140k or more demand quality. The paint is faultless, the shutlines are crisp and tight, the chrome is shiny as newly minted silver and the doors shut with a solid thud. 'All the mechanical stuff, it's well developed, tried and tested in motorsport, so it's just the refinement really – the finish, the interior trim.'

MST offers a number of drivetrain options. The Mk1 demonstrator is largely Ellis's ideal spec, running a period-correct 2-litre BDG hooked up to an aluminium-cased, five-speed, Type 9 gearbox built by Tracsport. The BDG, evolved from the legendary BDA, is quite a pricey option at £25k. The standard-fit engine is a 2.5-litre Ford Duratec, a crate engine from the US that's good for 200bhp and can be upgraded to 225, 250 or 270bhp. It offers a bit more torque than the BDG and comes with a Mazda MX-5 six-speed 'box, which sounds a very road-friendly combo.

At the other end of the scale is the Millington Diamond engine, evolved from the Cosworth YB from the Sierra RS Cosworth. Without a turbo, the all-aluminium 2.5-litre four delivers a potent 330bhp, or 350bhp in 2.7 spec. It can be coupled to a six-speed sequential gearbox, which is the hardcore choice and probably a bit much for the road because the dog gears require a very positive shifting style.

The Mk1 looks like a tarmac special, yet it has lots of suspension travel; among the many modifications incorporated in the shell are much roomier rear wheel-wells. Other Group 4 mods include turrets for rear coilovers (replacing separate leaf springs and dampers), box sections for the additional axle links, a wider transmission tunnel, numerous strengthening gussets and lots of seam welding. A roll-cage conforming to either current MSA or FIA historic standards can be welded in before the roof goes on. Each shell takes a pair of skilled metal workers four weeks to build, paint takes even longer and the build time for each car is around six months.

Drop into the driver's bucket and your surroundings are familiar but different. The dash is the same shape you'd expect but leather-covered



**‘There’s such
feedback that
you can press on
confidently, snicking
up and down the
gearbox to keep the
BDG on the boil’**

and with a cluster of bespoke dials in the usual pattern but with MST logos. There are multiple steering wheel and bucket seat choices and bespoke trim options too, this Mk1 sporting the optional leather and faux suede interior in black and grey, with diamond-stitched roof lining and luggage shelf behind the seats. It's crafted by an ex-Bentley trimmer, no less.

Where it notably diverges from original Ford is in the centre console area. 'The centre consoles are 3D-printed,' says Ellis. 'We've sort of kept the original design but then added our own gauges, the radio and an electric parking brake.' The latter is another item for IVA. But fear not, for nestled between the seats there's a traditional handbrake, hydraulic, of course.

You could be fooled into thinking that the BDG is breathing through a pair of twin-choke Webers. Turn the key and the starter churns for maybe a second longer than you expect before the

engine fires and settles to a slightly edgy idle. It's fuel-injected so the low-rev reluctance is probably down to the cams, even though these are the 'soft' option in BDG terms, as this is intended primarily as a fast road/trackday car.

Once you've got the measure of the slightly grabby, heavy-duty clutch plate, the Mk1 is happy enough to trundle along in the mostly urban traffic as we make our way from MST's base in Pwllheli on the Llŷn Peninsula in north Wales, towards some of our favourite roads in Snowdonia. The weather is grim from the off, so I'm glad of the heated front screen, though it's a surprise how much traction the Mk1 finds... or perhaps how little torque the BDG has. Give it a bootful below 4000rpm and not much happens, the BDG not really that interested. The 10,000rpm tachometer seems to confirm this reluctance, with all of the markings up to 4000rpm crammed into the first inch of the dial. They're generously spaced

thereafter, the markings turning red at 8500rpm, though the limiter doesn't call time until a stonking 9000.

Another reason the Mk1 doesn't easily break traction is that it has TracTive adjustable dampers which, appropriately, are set to their softest settings, giving a supple, rounded ride. Below the Sony head unit there's a smaller touchscreen that allows you to adjust the settings, including roll and pitch, on the fly. The damping becomes appreciably more taut as you work up through the settings, so the interface would be convenient for the regular trackday goer who doesn't want to crawl under the car.

A feature I'm particularly impressed by is the power steering, which I'm guessing really comes into its own in the dry because those wide semi-slicks are steered through a quick rack that gives a crisp 2.4 turns lock-to-lock. An electric motor on the column combines with wheel speed sensors



so that the assistance bleeds away as the speed goes up. It's not the sharpest, most connected steering at low speed but it makes the Mk1 easy to gather if, say, you push into a small roundabout, feel the front understeer, decide to give the throttle a stab and are surprised by a sudden snap of oversteer...

When you finally get clear of town, the assistance drops and the steering picks up useful weight. The gearing feels ludicrously short in general driving, with the tach showing 4500rpm at 60mph (in true rally-car fashion, top speed is just 120mph) but it makes more sense when you're finally on the sort of roads the Mk1 was designed for. With the BDG keening to 7 or 8000rpm, you really feel the low kerb weight – even in all steel, the Mk1 is just 960kg. Treacherous patches of standing water apart, it feels right at home in these conditions. A little roll helps keep the wheels in touch with the road and the now nicely weighted steering gives such a positive feel and such feedback that you can press on confidently, snicking up and down the gearbox to keep the BDG on the boil. The brakes need a bit of a shove because they're not servo-assisted, but you can lean into them with confidence and the car

feels planted, poised and effective, making great progress and building your confidence.

When we finally arrive at one of the corners I've been looking forward to, I'm in the right gear with the revs at 6000 or so. Lift off slightly, feel the weight transfer, jab the throttle and the Mk1 assumes the attitude, back kicked out, opposite lock applied and the blaring BDG in the powerband with plenty of revs left to ride out the slide. It feels so naturally balanced, so settled and calm, you can't help grinning. If you've ever watched an Escort flowing through a forest stage, on opposite lock seemingly forever, rooster tails of gravel spraying from the rear, throttle apparently stuck at about 9000rpm, a tiny homage such as this is a moment to savour.

I love this car. Is it worth upwards of £138k? An order bank of 30 cars answers that. Also, as someone who, 20-odd years ago, spent £35k building a one-off Capri with a cage, Group 4 suspension and a 300bhp engine (but a V8), for road and trackdays, I can testify that desire can override any rational notion of value for money.

For me, this MST Mk1 needs a couple of refinements. Outside you get that distinct, clear, twin-cam bark but on the inside at certain speeds

there's a bit more commotion, resonances which I guess are down to solid mountings of the drivetrain or suspension. I know it's a rally car made with genuine rally car bits, but if it's intended as a road car I think it should be a bit more couth. Carpets and headlining, power steering and adjustable damping don't detract from the experience, so I'd like a bit more refinement. And decent demisting to go with the heated screens too.

I'd really like to drive it in the dry because, well, I'd really like to drive it when there isn't a storm raging, and also because I suspect there's almost too much grip at the back with those wide, sticky Kumhos and that maybe the sweet spot for a road car is the torquier, 270bhp Duratec. But if you want the authentic experience that the look of the MST Mk1 promises, you want the period-correct engine under the bonnet. I can still hear that BDG now. ✕

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 2000cc **Power** 250bhp @ 9000rpm
Torque 180lb ft @ 6000rpm **Weight** 960kg (265bhp/ton)

0-62mph N/A **Top speed** 120mph

Basic price £174,000 (£138,000 with Duratec)

+ Gorgeous looks, superb finish, that engine

- Could be even better with refinement

evo rating ★★★★★

Opposite: for the full period effect you need the BDG twin-cam; options on this car include TracTive active suspension (£7200) and the bespoke, full-leather interior (£11,400)







by JAMES TAYLOR

MG4 XPower

MG's sales-smash electric hatchback gains a 429bhp twin-motor version – but it's not as much fun as it sounds

THE LAST TIME THE MG XPOWER BRAND name featured in a test in **evo** it was on the SV-R: the Peter Stevens-styled, Qvale Mangusta-based, V8-engined super-GT run by Rowan Atkinson in a Fast Fleet long-term test. Shortly before that, XPower branding also featured on MG-badged BTCC cars and Le Mans prototypes. Heady, if financially tumultuous (and slightly surreal), days.

The present-day MG brand is sailing on smoother financial waters, with the Chinese SAIC-owned marque enjoying an unlikely rebirth as a purveyor of long-warrantied, competitively priced family cars. And an EV specialist: the MG4 five-seater, all-electric hatchback is one of the most affordable electric cars on the market and fast becoming ubiquitous on the roads. It's the budget Tesla Model Y.

Now the XPower name is back, MG Motor UK having created this new high-performance version of the 4. Performance really is high, too. Whereas the regular MG4 has a single rear motor with either 168,

200 or 243bhp (depending on trim), the XPower gains a second, 201bhp motor at the front, making it all-wheel drive. With the rear motor at 228bhp, the totals are 429bhp with 443lb ft of torque. This gives some brutal on-paper acceleration figures: 0-62mph in 3.8 seconds, 0-30mph in 1.7. And a still-competitive price of £36,495. A lot of power for the money. That's cheaper than a base-model VW ID.3 (£37,430). On the other hand, it's £9500 more expensive than the entry-level MG4 SE.

The XPower's WLTP-rated range is 239 miles. However, on the way to and from our photoshoot we were seeing the estimated range deplete at a rate that suggested closer to 160-180 miles from a full charge. The weather was very cold, which naturally doesn't help battery life and also necessitated driving with the heater working away, but nonetheless, this was not a confidence-inspiring drive for one prone to range-anxiety.

Seeing the indicated range drop nearly as quickly

as the car accelerates is enough to put you off putting your foot down. When you do, however, it is a very quick car, no question. But straight-line performance is the XPower's biggest strength. Sadly it's not as much fun in the corners.

The new front motor contributes to torque steer and steering corruption when you put the power down. The motors' front-to-rear torque split is variable, and there's torque vectoring by braking too; if you get on the power hard you can feel the systems at work, but it's not a smooth sensation. The rear suspension feels quite soft in relation to the front – as you accelerate, the weight balance shifts rearward and you get the impression of the MG4 sitting down on its rear suspension – suggesting it's been set up with a deliberate understeer balance for safety, given its potent power and torque.

These observations should be taken with the caveat of the very cold temperatures, around 1deg C for the majority of the test, so the road



'The on-paper figures are brutal: 0-62mph in 3.8sec'

surfaces were far from grippy. Nonetheless, the XPower's handling balance does indeed tend toward understeer. It's there on turn-in but all the more pronounced under power; feeding the power in as you would in most conventional performance cars generally leads to the front washing out. Instead, the MG4 does its best work when you get it stopped, turned and fired out of the corner in a straight line, with the electronic systems preventing wheelspin. It's not an elegant car to push hard.

It's much more enjoyable and engaging at seven-tenths, loping along and making smooth, swift

progress. It is a hot hatch in which it's possible to cover ground point-to-point very quickly. Driven in such a way, though, its £9500 price premium over the regular MG4 begins to make less sense.

Aside from the additional motor, changes over the standard car include the aforementioned torque vectoring by braking software, an electronic differential lock, altered anti-roll bars, wider Bridgestone Turanza tyres on 18-inch wheels and larger brakes (with caliper covers that make them look bigger than they really are). The orange calipers and gloss black trim on the lower body are the main visual changes, along with the option of XPower-specific green paint, as applied to this test car.

The suspension is stiffened (more so at the front than the rear) but not lowered compared with the regular MG4, and it's a high-riding car visually. Ride quality is a curious mix; a little pattery in the way it deals with minor surface roughness and small bumps, but relatively smooth in the way it deals

with larger bumps and controls the body over crests. It's not entirely at ease with bumps under load; hit a ridge mid-corner and there's a sense of the body continuing to move after the bump has passed.

No doubt an MG SV-R wouldn't see which way this car had gone. But the MG4 XPower isn't as fun as its on-paper attributes suggest. A conventional combustion-engined hot hatch would be more entertaining and, you sense, a regular MG4 would most likely be a more enjoyable (and efficient) driving experience too. The XPower's power-to-price ratio is phenomenal, but it's neither a rewarding hot hatch nor the best MG4. ❌

Motors 150kW front, 170kW rear **Power** 429bhp
Torque 443lb ft **Weight** 1800kg (242bhp/ton) **0-62mph** 3.8sec
Top speed 124mph **Basic price** £36,495

➕ Power-to-price ratio

🇬🇧 Does its best work in a straight line

evo rating ★★★★★

by JAMES TAYLOR

Land Rover Defender 130 V8

The longest version of the Defender is now available with a 5-litre supercharged V8. It's not the version you need, but it might just be the one you want

DELUGES ACROSS MOST OF THE SOUTH of England would normally be bad news for a car launch. We're in Somerset, where waterlogged fields have spilled onto the roads and the reflections of hazard lights from stricken cars dance on floodwater. Perfect PR for Land Rover's latest Defender variant, which takes all before it in its stride, then a hard right off the tarmac before continuing unimpeded off-road across Exmoor.

So far, so Defender. But all the splashing and wading is accompanied by a rich burble overlaid with a whiff of supercharger whine. This is the new V8-powered long-wheelbase Defender; the Land Rover Defender 130 V8 P500 to give it its full title.

It's a variant that's able to offer the unusual proposition of one cylinder for every seat. Land Rover already offered a V8-powered version of the shortest five-or-six-seater Defender 90 and the longer seven-seat 110 but now it's the turn of the longest, eight-seater 130. In the shorter Defenders the V8 develops 518bhp; in the 130 it's been downtuned slightly to a still-strapping 493bhp.

Whilst V8-powered Range Rover models have latterly used a 4.4-litre engine sourced from BMW, the Defender uses the long-established 5-litre supercharged AJ-V8, as employed in older Range Rover Sport and SVR models and Jaguars including XKR, F-type and Project 8. Production of said





engine has now ceased. There's plenty of stock (some of which is saved for end-of-line F-type production), but it will eventually run out.

Official 0-62mph time is 5.7 seconds, a few tenths slower than the lighter, more powerful 110 but still quick for a car that weighs 2670kg and measures more than 5.3m in length. Oh, and averages less than 20mpg. It's not very 2023.

The 130 V8 is available in only two colours: grey or Bond-baddie black. More black too for the grille housing, badging, privacy-glass windows, chequerplate panels on the bonnet (which are plastic, disappointingly) and the whopping 22-inch wheels. Another external clue that it's a 5-litre V8 rather than the six-cylinder D300 diesel or P300/P400 petrol Defender is quad exhaust outlets below the side-hinged tailgate.

They make a nice burbly sound, although a relatively muted one from inside the cabin. It's certainly less vocal than some older Range Rover SVR models, which sounded like an entire Goodwood Revival grid had been squeezed under

the bonnet. Nor, being honest, does it feel enormously quick – how could it, given its size and weight? It's far from slow, though, and feeling 450lb ft push this humongous car down the road at an unlikely rate of knots is highly addictive.

The eight-speed transmission's shifts are smooth in auto mode but can be rather abrupt on the paddles. I find the brake pedal rather sensitive, especially while wearing chunky outdoor boots – as many owners surely will. Best brake early: it's a lot of car to slow down, especially on all-season tyres. And, predictably, a far from athletic one in corners. That said, it does drive tidily given its sheer bulk and its remit of being capable off-road as well as on. It certainly handles no less neatly than *evo*'s recently departed Defender 110 D300 long-term.

Compared with the 110 V8, the 130 has slightly stiffened front springs, and likewise the front and rear anti-roll bars. The damper valving is unchanged but all of the software calibration is unique, to allow for the spring and bar changes.

Electronically height-adjustable air suspension is standard on 130-spec Defenders, and the V8 rides well, considering the 22-inch wheels. You don't get tossed around much for such a tall car with a high centre of gravity.

The Defender's dynamics are more impressive off the road rather than on. The 130 V8 can off-road very nearly as well as other Defenders; a 90 or 110 has less bulk and better departure angles, of course, but the 130 can still get over challenging terrain. It retains other models' low-range transmission mode, electronically controlled differentials and Terrain Response 2 software. With the air suspension raised, there's 290mm of ground clearance. We scramble down steep, rain-ravaged slopes using the 'look-Mum-no-feet' hill descent control, and the car lopes over collapsed surfaces that wouldn't be particularly easy to clamber over on foot.

Launched concurrently with the V8 is another new Defender 130 variant, the five-seater Outbound, which exchanges the rearmost seats for an enormous rubberised cargo bay. It's available with the D300 diesel engine only. And, whisper it, that's probably the engine that suits the Defender the best. Being rational, a 5-litre supercharged V8 is not an engine the Defender needs. But it is a charismatic powerplant for a charismatic car. The 130 V8 is an enormously likeable (as well as plain enormous) creation.

An enormously expensive one, too. It costs £117,485 on the road, versus £85,135 for a P400 petrol in Defender X-Dynamic HSE trim. The Defender 90 V8 costs £109,515 and the 110 V8 £112,285. But it's not the sort of car that's a rational purchase. With the P500 engine, the biggest car in the Defender line-up is the biggest character, in all weathers. **X**

Engine V8, 5000cc, supercharged **Power** 493bhp @ 6000-6500rpm **Torque** 450lb ft @ 2500-5500rpm
Weight 2670kg (188bhp/ton) **0-62mph** 5.7sec
Top speed 149mph **Basic price** £117,485

+ Full of personality; can still off-road
- Enormous weight, emissions – and price

evo rating ★★★★★



by IAN EVELEIGH

BMW M2 automatic

Is it madness to spec an M car with an auto 'box when a manual option is still available? Perhaps not...

THE MANUAL GEARBOX IS NOW SUCH AN endangered species that you can almost imagine David Attenborough narrating its knife-edge existence in whispered tones. So BMW's decision to put a stick and three pedals in the latest iteration of its entry-level M car is an act of conservation to be applauded, right?

Well yes, of course it is. And with this likely to be the last time a manual shift is offered in an M car, there's all the more reason to tick that £1200 option box on the configurator. But if you're even remotely open to the idea of using paddles instead, the G87 M2 equipped with BMW's Sport Automatic Transmission makes a compelling case for itself.

While the paddleshift version of its F87 predecessor used a dual-clutch transmission, the G87 employs a torque-converter. As you'd expect given the significant amount of shared hardware between the current M2 and its bigger brothers, it's the same eight-speed ZF unit you'll

find in the M3 and M4. The fitment of a torque-converter in those models raised a few eyebrows when it was first announced, but those same eyebrows soon lowered again when the unit was experienced in action and it was discovered that quick and smooth shifts were the order of the day, consigning to history the abruptness of the old DCT that could sometimes unsettle the rear axle.

It's the same story in the M2 – but with added verve. Brake for a corner and the 'box immediately starts dropping down through the ratios to get you in the ideal gear for the apex. It's much more eager in this respect than in the M3/M4 Competition, to the point where you initially think you've accidentally engaged a sportier mode. But no, this is with the engine still in Efficient and the slowest shift-speed option selected.

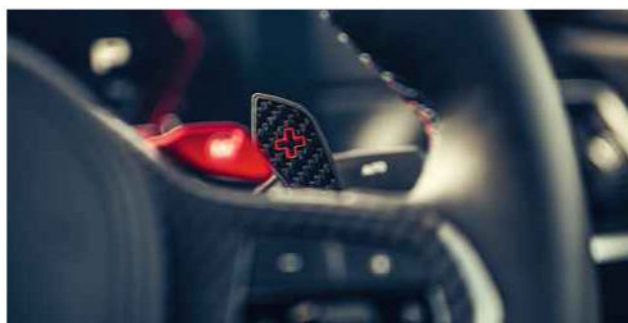
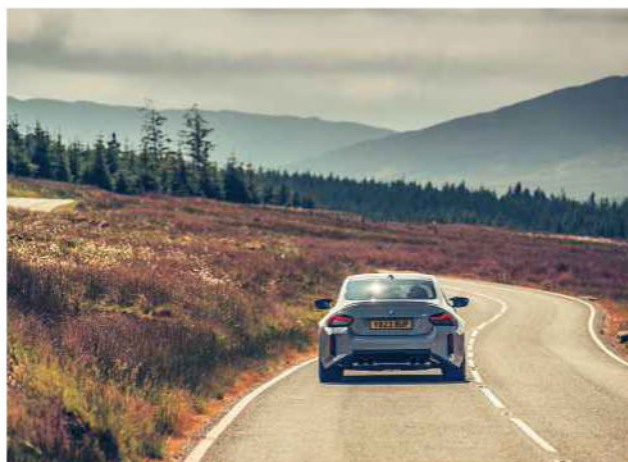
A couple of corners later and you realise those downchanges come at almost exactly the same points where you might manually instigate shifts to

inject some life into a more lethargic auto 'box. It's as if the M2 wants to continually remind you that it's a sports car and would like to be driven like one.

Occasionally, usually when exiting a roundabout in second, it can seem *too* eager, holding on to the gear for too long, like it's goading you to hoof it along the next straight. But generally, during day-to-day driving, it's in the 'right' gear almost all of the time, not one that feels like it's being forced upon you to benefit fuel economy. (Speaking of which, over several days of similar driving in the two versions of the M2, we recorded averages of 24.5mpg in the auto, 24.0 in the manual.)

The Drivelogic rocker on the gear selector gives access to two even-keener tunes that favour lower gears and avoid the top ratios, but not stubbornly so should you settle at a cruise. The top mode also thumps the upshifts home, giving an impression of urgency but also feeling a touch contrived.

Take control with the paddles and it's good



‘The auto feels more focused on fully committed driving’

news here too. The ‘box responds promptly and dependably to requests, and the wheel-mounted paddles have a generous length, a pleasingly textured contact patch and a just-so action – not requiring an exaggerated pull, but also not like operating a basic switch. Whether you classify the paddles’ carbonfibre front and red, rubbery rear as ‘sporty’ or ‘chintzy’ will depend on your taste.

The twin-turbo 3-litre straight-six engine has the same 454bhp and 406lb ft of torque as in the manual car, and the same characterful growl that encourages you to reach for the upper regions

of the rev range. With shorter ratios and quicker shifts, 0–62mph is done and dusted in 4.1sec, two-tenths quicker than with the manual. There’s a 25kg weight penalty with the auto, but with the manual M2 already up at 1700kg, the extra kilos barely make a dent in the power-to-weight ratio and can’t be detected. Elsewhere it’s business as usual: same alluring over-engined feel, same eye-widening turn of pace, same mild disappointment at how big this ‘small’ M car has become.

Should the manual M2 be left to its inevitable extinction, then? Not so fast. It may not have an all-time classic shift, but its lever can be moved cleanly and accurately around the gate. Switchable automatic rev-matching can take the strain out of higher-rev downshifts if you’re not in the mood for heel and toe, and it’s an easy transmission to use in traffic, too, the clutch always engaging smoothly, the car happy to creep along in first gear without baulking. More significantly, the manual

gives the M2 a different character, more muscle car-like, as you work deliberately through the ‘box and feel more inclined to linger in a single gear through a sequence of turns, savouring more of the rev range. By comparison the auto G87 feels more modern, more technical, more focused on fully committed driving at every opportunity.

Honestly, you could make a strong argument for spec’ing your M2 with either transmission. Gun to my head? I’d take the manual – by a whisker. But if you opted for the auto, I’d still think you’d made a great choice. ✕

Engine In-line 6-cyl, 2993cc, twin-turbo
Power 454bhp @ 6250rpm **Torque** 406lb ft @ 2650–5870rpm
Weight 1725kg (267bhp/ton) **0–62mph** 4.1sec
Top speed 155mph **Basic price** £65,830


✚ A great auto ‘box with an up-for-it attitude
✚ You’ll be missing out on the last M manual shift

evo rating ★★★★★

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

Nissan Z Nismo

The latest Z car has had a Nismo makeover, with a reworked chassis and aero, more power – and an auto 'box. It's still not coming to Europe, but are we missing out?

 THE NISSAN Z ARRIVED IN 2022 WITH BARELY A murmur. After a mini furore surrounding the Z Proto concept in 2020 – a time when any diversion was welcome – the production model seemed to arrive and then disappear into the ether. Some of that can be attributed to the fact that the cool new 3-litre twin-turbocharged V6 coupe wasn't destined for Europe, but even when we visited the US nobody seemed to be talking, thinking or dreaming of the new 400bhp Nissan Z. The general consensus was curt and slightly devastating. 'Not as good as a Supra' just about covered it.

Well, now there's a hotter and, according to Nissan, 'track-ready' Z deserving of our attention. It's called the Z Nismo and has a lot of the right stuff. Compared with the standard car there's only slightly more power – 420bhp at 6400rpm, with 384lb ft of torque (up 34lb ft) from 2000 to 5200rpm – but the cooling, chassis, aero and braking are completely reworked. Nissan claims the much bigger front splitter and canards combine with a larger rear spoiler and redesigned rear bumper to create downforce, plus there are some delightfully geeky but highly niche declarations, including that the Z Nismo uses 'the thinnest honeycomb mesh of any Nissan production car' for its grille to reduce drag and improve cooling.

Refreshingly, the Nismo uses fixed-rate dampers. The bodies of these are bigger to improve consistency of performance and they're more aggressive than those of the standard car. There are also revised anti-roll bars, stiffer springs and modified bushings for greater accuracy and control. The tyres are excellent Dunlop SP Sport Maxx GT600s (as used on the GT-R) and the Z has a pretty decent footprint with 255/40 R19s and 285/35 R19s fitted front and rear respectively. Brakes are by Akebono with four-piston calipers on the front paired with 381mm discs, and a two-piston set-up at the rear with 350mm discs. The chassis also features additional bracing with front and rear strut braces and underfloor enhancements, too. Like I said, all the good stuff.

The bad stuff is potentially fatal, however. Firstly, the Z Nismo is







heavier than the standard car, which was already heavier than the pretty tubby 370Z that it replaced. Rather incredibly, this simple front-engine, rear-drive two-seater coupe comes in at 1680kg. Not actually that far off the heinously complex oversized, four-wheel-drive 2+2 that Nissan also makes and isn't exactly known for its Lotus-like qualities. The next issue is that the Nismo, which on paper could be the slightly old-school, roughneck driver's car we all crave, is only available with a nine-speed automatic gearbox.

This is a frankly baffling decision. Especially when you consider that the standard car is available with a six-speed manual 'box and the modestly increased power and torque don't appear to be the deciding factor behind this strategy. Nissan actually went with the auto as it felt buyers would be intensely focused on lap times and so saving a few tenths was worth the price of foregoing the satisfaction of a manual gearshift. With a Porsche GT3 RS this is a reasonable conclusion to reach. But when developing a slightly more focused version of a traditional sports car platform with its roots very much in everyday fun? It seems almost a dereliction of duty. In the US, there has also been some outrage over the 'sticker price' of \$64,990. That's more than the new, similarly track-biased, 500bhp Mustang Dark Horse or





a 3-litre Toyota Supra (382bhp in US form), and about comparable with a BMW M2.

Despite these misgivings, and the fact that the latest Z car shares so much with the ancient 370Z beneath the skin, I find the Nismo an exciting prospect. To me it looks fantastic and whilst I accept that it's built on the bones of an old car, the idea of a brawny, rear-drive coupe with more than one eye on track performance and a bit of Nismo fairy dust sprinkled liberally on top sounds deeply appealing. It's very easy to throw stones at the Z, but as a more exotic M2 rival that's slightly lighter (absurd but true), much more cohesive in terms of design and isn't trying to be all things to all people through a million different driver modes, it could hit an unlikely sweet spot. Let's see...

My first impressions of the car are on the West Circuit of California's Thunderhill Raceway. It's not exactly Spa but the two-mile configuration packs plenty of varying challenges. There are two very fast chicanes, some nice elevation changes, a lovely off-camber blind right that's not quite flat, and not too much scope for absolute disaster in the run-off areas. So I click the drive mode up from Standard, through Sport and into Sport+. This essentially works on the engine response, gearbox programming, steering, stability control and sound, as the dampers are fixed. Nissan says it's quicker with the ESC in Sport+ mode than disengaged entirely.

'You can really attack the track and reach for every bit of power available'

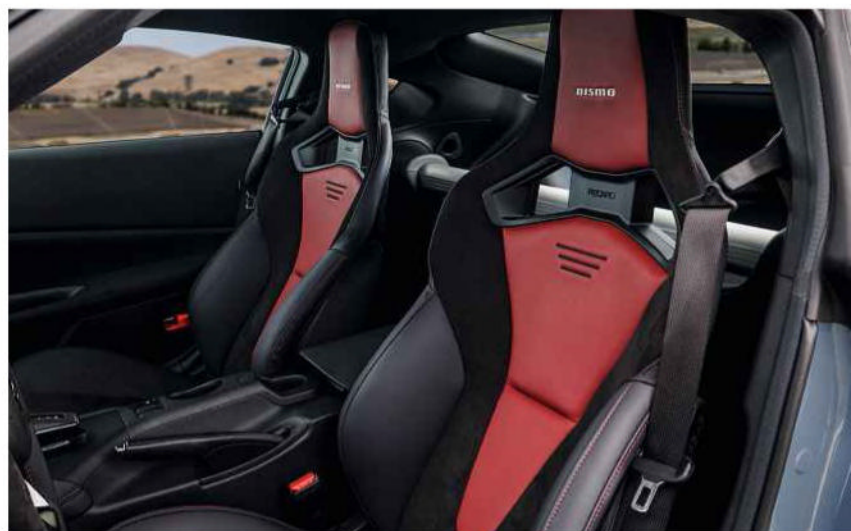
Before I even roll into the pitlane the Nismo feels about as I'd hoped. Despite carry-over architecture from the 370Z the environment is just fresh enough. The displays and overall feel are certainly a generation or two behind, say, the latest M2, but I'm not so sure that's a bad thing. There are some slightly cheap-feeling plastics and the stalks are very 350Z, but the touch points that count are Alcantara-trimmed, the Recaro seats offer great support and the driving position is excellent. The 3-litre twin-turbo V6 starts with a familiar big-lunged noise but immediately it feels smoother than the characterful but coarse naturally aspirated engine of the 370Z. Rolling out onto the circuit the steering is quite heavy but feels very taut in its responses and the chassis has a lovely oiled-yet-tight feeling. Already it feels sharper than any Z car I can remember.

As the circuit unravels, the gearbox is a bit of a frustration. Despite being upgraded with unique

clutch packs and new software that's said to reduce shift times by 50 per cent, the 'box isn't a match for the M2's automatic, let alone a really good dual-clutch set-up. In manual mode it requires anticipation on upshifts to avoid hanging on the limiter and downshifts never quite arrive when you ask. Perhaps this could be masked if the engine was sharp and intense, but it's actually rather forgettable. The brawny feel at idle and low speeds never quite transforms into a fiery, energetic delivery. The Z Nismo is fast but the turbocharged V6 doesn't crackle with excitement. Oh dear. Is the Z about to show me why it disappeared into nothingness back when the standard car was launched?

The answer is, surprisingly, a resounding no. For whilst the engine and gearbox are effective rather than inspirational, the chassis balance, braking, steering and the ability to overlap so many different requirements is top notch. The Z Nismo is rather brilliant on a track. It instils immediate confidence thanks to the steering – which is perhaps a shade too weighty but feels so well located (the steering rack has stiffer bushes) and offers an unhurried, measured accuracy. Those GT-R-style tyres have tremendous bite and the Nismo has a fine balance between urgency and control. An M2 is more responsive but then folds into understeer more quickly or, more likely, lights up into oversteer. The Nissan

Driven





is certainly more calculated and a little less exciting, but such is the grip that you can really attack the racetrack and reach for every bit of power available. So the experience starts out as smooth and perhaps a little too controlled, but it can ramp up quickly, right to the point where you're really punching in steering inputs and braking late and deep with minimal delay before getting back on the power.

The really impressive thing is that the Nismo rarely gets wrong-footed. It soaks up kerbs in one fluid bite, the brakes remain consistent and there's so much traction to lean on. Of course, you can make the Nismo slide in the old Z-car ways, but it prefers to be driven pretty neatly, with just a small amount of angle on corner exit and without the rear tyres spinning up too much faster than road speed. Perfect for trackdays where lurid angles will quickly get you black-flagged. The traction control is also expertly calibrated and – as promised and rather depressingly – is able to deliver slightly quicker laps than driving completely unassisted, unless you have the touch of Charles Leclerc. It really does feel like a very well-sorted and brilliantly

'It feels like a very well-sorted and brilliantly optimised platform'

optimised platform with a lovely consistency to all of its controls and an addictive balance.

On the road, much of the good stuff remains and some of it is amplified. The steering, ride quality and body control once again take centre stage and the Z Nismo feels polished but with just enough edge to ensure it's exciting even at low speeds. Sadly, the engine is a constant source of, well, not much. It's a power unit but never really rises up to make itself a thrilling part of the package. The automatic gearbox, if anything, is more annoying. Simply put it inserts a fuzzy, slightly inconsistent layer between driver and car that seems all the more tragic when you're not enjoying the full potential of what

the chassis can offer. It's crying out for a manual gearbox or even a super-sharp dual-clutch system.

So, the Nissan Z Nismo is in parts superb, in parts deeply frustrating, but overall an intriguing and impressive proposition. It doesn't quite fizz with energy, which is certainly in part due to the weight it's carrying, nor does it feel as fast as a BMW M2 or as nimble as a Porsche 718 Cayman. However, it counters with excellent composure and balance, a bit of Japanese oddness mixed with some California cool, and there's almost a restomod-style appeal, too. Far from its ageing roots being a hindrance, I can't help but think they're something of a bonus. The Z Nismo is a six-speed manual 'box away from being really rather special. Remember how Toyota listened and gave us a manual Supra? Nissan, now it's your turn... **x**

Engine V6, 2997cc, twin-turbo **Power** 420bhp @ 6400rpm
Torque 384lb ft @ 2000-5200rpm **Weight** 1680kg (254bhp/ton)
0-62mph 4.5sec (est) **Top speed** 157mph **Basic price** \$64,990

evo rating ★★★★★

- + Chassis shines brightly with poise and balance
- Automatic only; weight; still not available in the UK

IGNITION

NEWS, INTERVIEWS, TECH AND EVERY NEW CAR THAT MATTERS

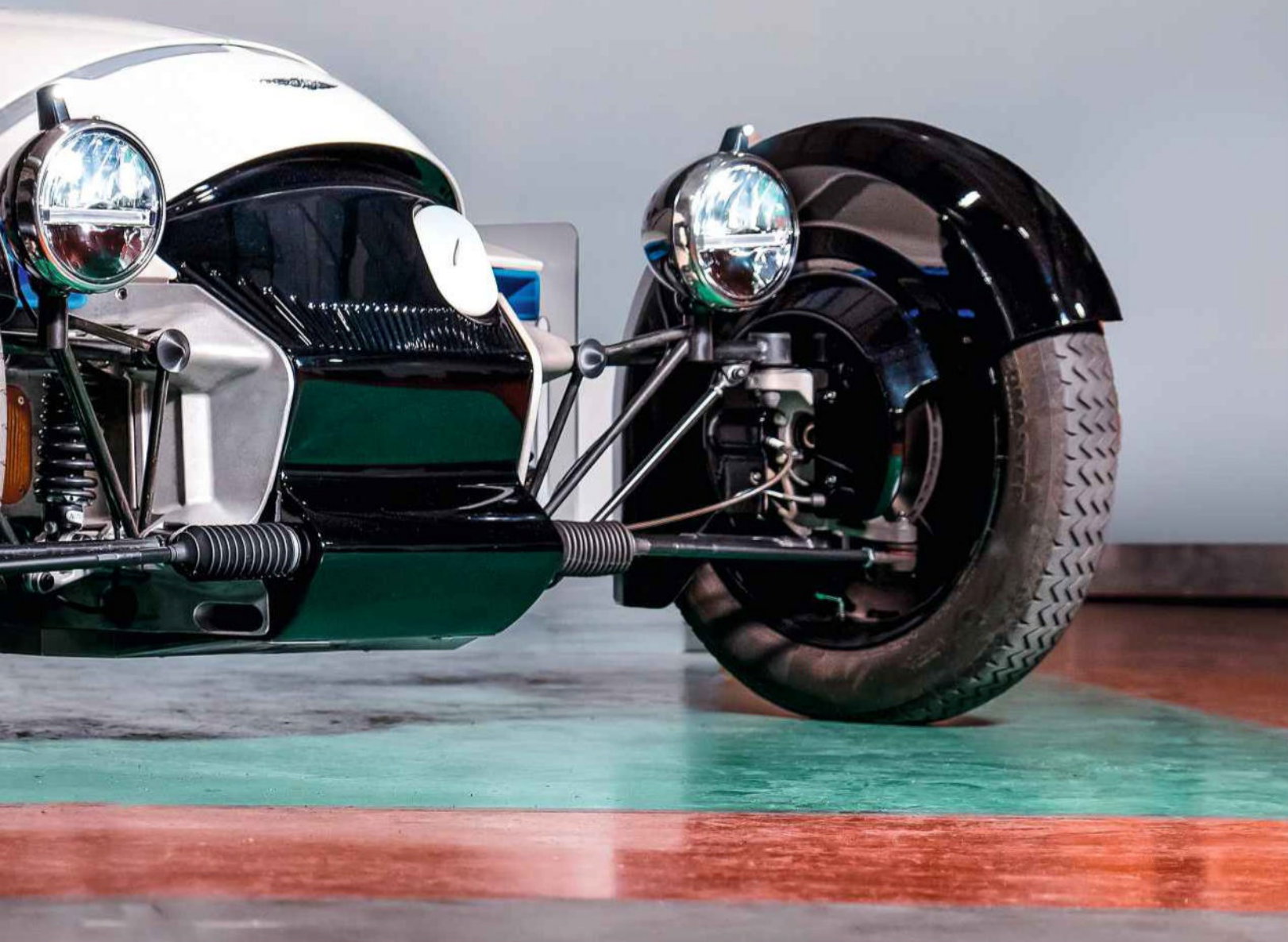


Triple threat

This experimental electric version of Morgan's Super 3 promises to be more exciting to drive than the three-cylinder petrol car. We find out why

T HIS IS THE XP-1, AN ELECTRIFIED VERSION of the Super 3 three-wheeler that Morgan launched last year with a 1.4-litre, three-cylinder Ford engine under the bonnet. As its name suggests, XP-1 is very much an experimental prototype, but as Morgan CTO Matt Hole talks us around it, it's clear it has been put together with a level of EV expertise you might not expect to find at the UK's most traditional sports car company. Perhaps equally importantly, given Morgans are meant to be fun, it's also clear the team that built it has a passion for driving.

At a glance it looks just like a regular Super 3, but as well as having a 100kW battery in the nose instead of the Ford triple, a motor in the tunnel and an inverter where the fuel tank would be, the project



has generated a number of other developments. These include much improved aerodynamics, the coefficient of drag dropping from 0.65 to 0.45, and a new chassis set-up. The chassis changes are not significant in themselves but the dynamics philosophy they help deliver is, because the handling will be more involving to compensate for the lack of gearshifting with the EV drivetrain.

'The most important thing in developing Morgan EVs is that we try and make them as lightweight as we possibly can, from an electrification perspective,' says Hole, 'and that we retain a level of them being fun to drive. They're the key elements. That does rely on having detailed requirements, knowing exactly what you want.'

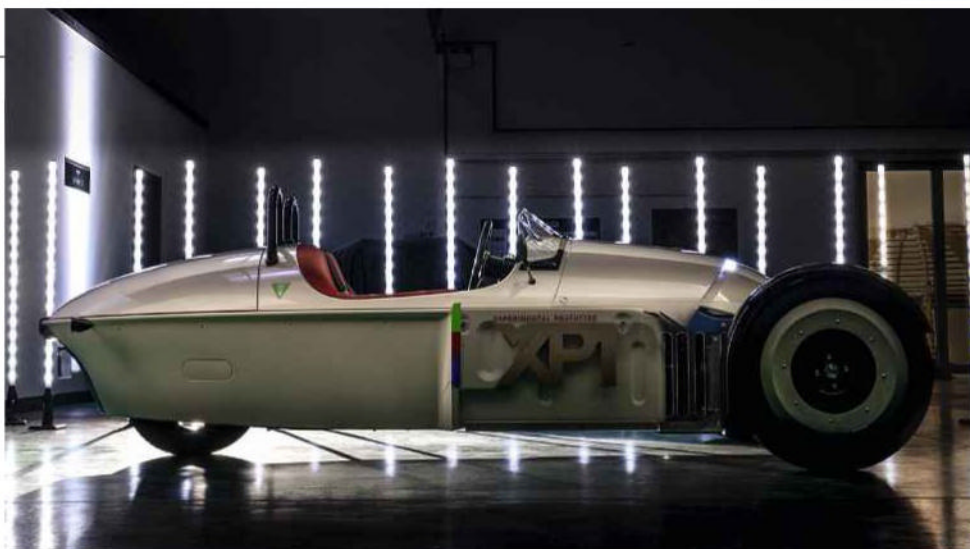
When we visited Morgan 18 months ago (*evo* 299) to see how it intends to cope with the planned 2030 phase-out of new internal combustion engine cars, Hole had just been appointed to his role overseeing design and development. It's hard to overstate what a significant signing he is. Before joining, Hole had worked for 15 years at Drive System Design, developing electrified propulsion systems for most of the major OEMs and also supplying the analysis tools to help them develop and refine their EVs. He was a founder of the business and a shareholder, but he'd always had roots in the area.

'Joining Morgan was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,' he explains. 'I'm used to innovating in small teams and we have that here at Morgan, so the environment is very similar. My first year was getting an understanding of how Morgan works, improving quality and initiating some new models, one of which expands the Morgan portfolio, and the last six months has been starting the electrification journey and creating the first EV.'

That's where Hole's vast knowledge and experience can be brought to bear. Morgan could have outsourced the project or bought in an electrical architecture, but it didn't want to inherit the constraints of someone else's design. 'We need to pick and choose the right parts and become

master integrators. This project has basically been all about developing new skills and experience. We've built toolchains off the back of this project, software tools that allow us to develop and model the entire propulsion system for an EV, including all the thermal management systems. We can model performance events, predict range and take blocks from any manufacturer around the world, take efficiency maps, performance maps for an engine, an inverter, model different battery chemistries and try and understand from

Right and above: interior is similar to the Super 3's, but the instruments are new and bespoke; a 30 per cent reduction in drag helps increase range and efficiency for the EV



a cost and performance perspective what's the best compromise.

'Our toolchain has allowed us to pick a really cost-effective motor, a really cost-effective inverter, put them together and get the performance and efficiency that we were looking for. And then it's allowed us to do some work on the motor control itself to get some of the dynamics in the response that we're looking for. We've also tuned the motor and inverter sound on the dyno, augmented the natural sound. Some think it sounds like a *Star Wars* Podracer. Throttle demand shifts the amplitude, so you get audible feedback.'

XP-1 is comfortably under 700kg, compared to 635kg dry for the ICE-engined Super 3, and while it's heavier, the EV has twice the torque. A little extra weight in the nose helps with the dynamics too, says Hole. 'With no gears to change, what we've tried to do is give your brain something else



to do, to manage it down the road, including how it delivers the torque to the single rear wheel.'

The prototype has been running for about three months. 'It's already incredibly fun to drive,' says Hole. 'This is the bit of the project I'm emotionally attached to because I just love driving. I'm the first one to take the keys.'

The lead on dynamics is Tony Kiss, who comes to Morgan from Aston Martin. 'He has a very strong background in ride and handling, has done a lot of concept development work at Aston Martin and is also a very keen racer,' says Hole. 'He's really transforming the way we're approaching the chassis. His experience has been invaluable.'

There was no desire to change the front tyres – those tall, slim, bespoke Avons – and there was no need either, because a few small changes to the front geometry has given a more positive turn-in. The car also uses Nitron dampers. 'It's a really high-

quality damper that we can have valved exactly how we want,' says Hole. 'We've found that we can get a bit of extra spring rate for better turn-in without losing ride comfort.'

'What we are trying to do is introduce a small amount of rear slip. You drive it a little bit like you might ride a motorcycle, so you basically drive it into a corner quite hard, it turns very keenly, there's a little bit of slip from the rear and you boot the throttle out of the corner and you have to manage the grip of the rear. If you drive it normally, it'll behave quite normally, but get it by the scruff of the neck and it moves around quite easily.'

'We're working on the balance, managing the breakaway with throttle control and tyre characteristics. Calibrating the EV drivetrain and pedal map ourselves, we can make the connection between the throttle and rear wheel do pretty much whatever we want, give it whatever characteristic

we want. And we have guys out in Spain at the moment with four different rear tyres to play with, three from new suppliers.'

Currently there's no production deadline for an electric Super 3. XP-1 is purely experimental, a research and development project. The current drivetrain is oversized, because it's simpler to downsize than upscale, and the Felten-supplied battery isn't the right type for production, but the results and the amount of learning are already very impressive.

Is an electric Super 3 what the market wants? It wouldn't cost a great deal more, says Morgan, but if it was set to be simply an electric version of the ICE car you'd have reason to be sceptical. However, with a dynamic strategy that makes the EV sound even more fun to drive than the existing three-wheeler, there's suddenly a lot more reason to be interested. ✕



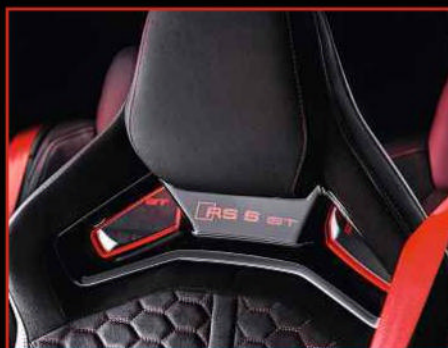
RS6 GT honours racing icon

Dramatic new treatment inspired by wild 90 Quattro IMSA GTO

AS BMW'S M5 TOURING DRAWS NEAR, Audi has taken its flagship RS6 estate to the next level. Built to celebrate Audi Sport's 40th year, the RS6 GT takes inspiration from the legendary 90 Quattro IMSA GTO of the late '80s with bespoke design touches, chassis upgrades and a tweaked powertrain.

Limited to 660 units, the GT adopts a bold new look with (optional) Audi Sport heritage livery and bespoke bodywork fitted on the R8 line at Audi's Böllinger Höfe facility. The carbonfibre bonnet is the first on a production Audi, its unpainted sections a nod to the GTO racer. The front bumper is entirely new, featuring a deeper, lower central intake and a larger splitter, painted gloss black to create the illusion of a lower, wider car. Even the front wings are newly sculpted from carbonfibre, featuring GTO-inspired vents aft of the wheels to reduce air pressure and improve brake cooling.

A new rear bumper continues the illusion of a wider stance, with the bootlid now flush with the bumper, eliminating the overhang of the regular RS6. Other changes include a new, more aggressive diffuser (complete with central rain light), the removal of the roof rails and the inclusion of a large roof-mounted spoiler from 2020's RS6 GTO concept.



The RS6 GT uses the same 621bhp twin-turbo V8 as the current Performance model, but with its eight-speed automatic transmission tweaked for sharper shifts. A 15kg reduction in weight knocks the 0-62mph sprint back a tenth to 3.3sec, with a 188mph top speed courtesy of the standard-fit RS Dynamic Plus package.

Taking a page out of the RS4 Competition's book, Audi Sport has fitted coilover suspension, dropping the ride height by 10mm with three-way adjustability. The spring rate has seen an increase, and the anti-roll bars are 30 and 80 per cent stiffer front and rear respectively. Standard-fit carbon-ceramic brakes sit

behind bespoke 22-inch forged aluminium wheels.

Inside, virtually every surface is covered in black Dinamica microfibre, including the new, carbonfibre-shelled RS bucket seats, which are unique to the GT (for now), saving 2kg apiece. There's an engraving in the piano-black centre console trim denoting which of the 660 examples you're in.

Price will be in the region of £180,000, a £65,000 increase over the regular car. Just 60 of the 660 will come to the UK and will be available in three colour schemes: Arkona White Heritage as pictured, Mythos Black and Nardo Grey. Order books are open now, with deliveries set to begin in late spring.



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‘THE FRONT WINGS ARE NEWLY SCULPTED FROM CARBONFIBRE, FEATURING GTO-INSPIRED VENTS’



Jez Coates

Vehicle engineer

Having helped the Caterham Seven survive and thrive for over 20 years, Jez Coates now works with a very different kind of vehicle. Here he discusses his roles past and present, and his enviable car history

by JOHN BARKER PORTRAIT by ASTON PARROTT

FOR MANY YEARS, CATERHAM CARS WAS based on a modest industrial estate at Kennet Road, Dartford, and we'd go there to meet technical director Jez Coates and go for a blast in the latest version of the Seven that he and his team had created. Today we've driven to a modest industrial estate on the outskirts of Coventry to meet Coates, but while the setting has a familiar feel, the company he now works for is rather different. Aurigo is, among other things, an emerging force in the autonomous EV market and Coates, the firm's chief engineer, runs a Tesla Model 3. That seems a long way from the lightweight, whipcrack Seven, but the skill set that Coates honed in his 23 years at Caterham matches the requirements of this part of the company remarkably well.

Coates, now 67, was brought up in the small market town of Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria. 'I've always been into cars,' he says. 'I remember when I was six or seven on holiday with my parents being driven around Rome seeing how many Fiat 500s I could count before I saw another car.' His first taste of driving came in an Austin A35 that had belonged to his grandmother and then his brother. 'It failed its MOT so he discarded it. I patched up the rust holes with body filler and chicken wire and learned to drive. I'd have been 15 or 16. We had a bit of a driveway, about 100 yards long, so I could get up to third gear and then throw on the anchors. Brakes is a rather optimistic word to use with regard to the A35. I rolled that 17 days after my 17th birthday. I think I was 25 before I owned a car that I didn't roll.'

Like many teenagers, Coates wasn't sure what he wanted to do. 'One day I had an epiphany. I thought: somebody's got to design cars and I'm fascinated

by cars. So I applied for a job at JRT [Jaguar Rover Triumph], a sponsorship. The letter I got back was like opening a Howler from *Harry Potter*. After berating him for the lateness of his application it suggested he try Leyland Trucks, down the road in Lancashire. He did and found himself quickly accepted and in receipt of a decent grant, which he quickly converted into a Lotus Elan S3 and, almost as quickly, into a £1400 overdraft.

In the '70s Leyland Trucks was still a vast and significant company and the scope of the training Coates got there on breaks from uni was fantastic. 'Every two weeks you'd do a different department, so the breadth and depth of understanding of how an engineering organisation works was just brilliant.'

Coates eventually found himself working in the test operations department. This took him to some far-flung places but the most memorable experience was working with London Transport on a replacement for the iconic Routemaster bus. 'The management got exasperated with London Transport in terms of what they wanted,' he recalls, 'They'd say, "We want it to be just like a Routemaster, but not a Routemaster." Eventually, Leyland said: "Well, if this bloody Routemaster is so fantastic, send one up and we'll put it through a full set of tests." So this antique bus turns up and I get the job of testing it. And, of course, it's bloody fantastic: brilliantly engineered, beautifully made and really fit for purpose. So I'm a Routemaster fan.'

Although he owned a '67 Elan, Coates really wanted the '73 version and so started buying bits from ads in *Motoring News*. Somehow he ended up with a couple of big-valve heads and put one up for sale, which prompted a call from David Wakefield at Caterham Cars. A deal was struck and Coates offered





to drop it in because his girlfriend lived in Maidstone. 'It's funny how these things happen, isn't it?' he says.

Caterham was hungry for twin-cam cylinder heads because very soon after Graham Nearn had acquired the rights to the Seven from Colin Chapman, Lotus lost the tooling for the twin-cam head. At this time, 1983, Caterham was building about 80 cars a year, most for Japan, and they wanted the twin-cam engine. Delivering the head, Coates plucked up the courage to say, 'If you're looking for a keen young graduate, give me a shout.' The phone rang the next day and so Coates moved from Leyland Trucks in Leyland, Lancs, to Caterham Cars in Caterham, Surrey. 'I was employee number 14,' he recalls. 'Unofficial title: general management dogsbody.'

An early shift in the business was prompted by a rival, Westfield Sportscars. 'They gave us a massive kick up the arse when they went into selling the Seven in kit form because there was a huge market for it. We had to react, so I masterminded how we did it, built a bill of materials and generated part numbers for everything. Until then we didn't have part numbers. Or a computer. We got up to 761 kits in a year before settling down to about 480 a year.'

It was getting ever harder to buy the bits that the Seven had been inherited with, so Caterham had to start re-engineering it to keep it going. The Ford live axle died, was replaced by the axle from the Morris Ital, and then that died too. 'We had a meeting down the pub and decided to do a de Dion axle because some very early Sevens were de Dion. It was also less complicated than fully independent – a man's got to know his limitations etcetera...

'We got better at keeping the car in production and moved on to thinking: we could do this, we could do that... Being very commercially minded, I understood how Graham ticked. I'd say, "We want to do this and it'll pay back in less than a year." So we'd do things like our own wheels; tooling's not massively expensive but you can sell them for a big premium because it's bespoke and lighter than anything else.'

One-make racing proved to be a significant part of the business, yet it started in a rather off-hand way. 'There was a Colin Chapman Memorial race at Brands Hatch in '83 and Graham said, "We need to go for this." There were 12 cars on the grid; I think we owned eight of them – we'd all got race licences. That was the start. Then we put some race regs together and ran three classes for BDAs, twin-cams or crossflows in various states of tune, and that began to get some traction.'

What really helped the racing take off was 'The Alex Hawkridge Experience'. Hawkridge was a seriously well-funded individual who interpreted every rule to his advantage. 'He absolutely cleaned up in Class A and completely pissed off everyone else. We'd had 17 cars in Class A; the following season, we had four.' Coates created a strict, watertight (affectionately known as the 'whips and bondage') set of regulations to ensure it was driver versus driver and it promoted such great racing that Seven championships sprang up around the world.

'I got to 120,000 miles in the Lotus Carlton before it ran out of second-gear synchro'

In the early '90s the venerable but pensionable Ford Kent engine was joined by more modern units from Vauxhall and Rover, which led to a bunch of new models including the HPC and the JPE – the Jonathan Palmer Evolution, powered by a 250bhp Vauxhall 'red top'. 'I absolutely loved creating new versions of the car but I never lost sight of the fact that you needed to do the grungy stuff as well. We were always trying to make the car easier to build with less tools and less people. We got to the point where only six guys in the factory built 480 cars a year.'

Then came the 21. 'We had confidence that we could deliver things, and Graham was always worried that the Seven would be legislated out of existence or that customers would suddenly realise that this funny little car was noisy and uncomfortable.' Certainly, the automotive world was advancing inexorably, as evidenced by Coates' company cars. 'I shouldn't say it but, God, I've got good taste in company cars. Dave Wakefield was very Ford orientated so my first was an XR3i. Dreadful car.' This was followed by a Peugeot 205 GTI ('lovely car, so capable'), an Esprit Turbo ('really disappointing; toasted your luggage, massive turbo lag'), an Integrale ('lovely drivetrain but left-hand drive') and, incredibly, a Lotus Carlton.

'Vauxhall wanted all the Caterham senior team in Vauxhalls and I managed to get a Lotus Carlton, L212 MAU. It was very, very good value for money and much loved. I got to 120,000 miles and it ran out of second-gear synchro. You couldn't buy parts, a new gearbox was £7k, so we flogged it for £13k. Then I had an E34 M5, six-speeder with Nürburgring suspension, which was its downfall; we kept having to replace leaky dampers. So I moved on to an E39 M5. I've still got one.

'The idea with the 21 was to build a Caterham that looked like a proper grown-up car, that had more practicality. However, I got carried away; I was too protective of it, doing it in my barn at home with Iain Robertson, our in-house Royal College of Art-qualified designer. Eventually we went "Ta-da!" and gave it to sales and they said, "Well, it's more difficult to get into than a Seven and the windows don't go up and

down." I'm still very proud of the 21 but I made some mistakes, and then Lotus launched the fantastic Elise. Game over. The engineering of the Elise doors cost more the entire 21 project. So close but no cigar.'

The bounce-back car was the Superlight. 'This time we brought the whole company with us. We held a meeting, invited all the staff, told them what we planned to do and invited suggestions. Superlight took the Seven all the way back to Chapman – "add lightness" – and led to the R500, R400 and R300. Possibly our finest hour. The R500 is the same weight as a Series One but it's got six times the power and 50 per cent more gears.'

Coates still had a desire to make a more useable Seven, 'a more forgiving and capable version for the less talented', and managed to broker a deal with Multimatic to make an independent-suspension car, the CSR. 'They did it for almost nothing and must have spent a fortune, but they got very good coverage in *evo* and I genuinely feel it was one of the things that elevated their status. From an engineering point of view, it was very, very satisfying.'

However, in 2005, before the CSR was ready for production, the Nearn sold Caterham to a venture capitalist company. 'VCs have their own rules of engagement. Once I'd been pumped for knowledge I got invited to leave. It obviously rocked my confidence. I didn't want to work for TVR or Ginetta and couldn't see my skill set fitting Aston Martin or JLR, so I bumbled around until I met Nic Strong and did the Zolfe Orange. Okay, it's another commercial failure – the recession took us down – but we built about ten cars and I enjoyed it.

'Then at a Niche Vehicle Network meeting I got talking to Dave Keane from Aurigo, a supplier to Caterham, and he said, "I'm about to win a project. I need somebody to run it. Would you like a job?" The traditional side of the business is making wiring looms but in 2013, when I joined as chief engineer, the owners decided to build the capability to engineer whole vehicles and we've won a number of contracts to build and deploy autonomous vehicles. There's been an explosion in start-up companies trying to bring new product and a hell of a lot of them can't work out how to make anything. We've done ten vehicles in ten years. Ten years ago, I thought I didn't have a useful skill set, now I'm tempted to think I've got a unique skill set.'

A big chunk of Coates' day job is EV-related but back at home he has a tasty collection of ICE cars. As well as the E39 M5 he has an E46 M3, a Lotus Elan Sprint 5, an Aston Martin Vantage V12 S seven-speed manual and a couple of special Caterhams. 'I've got a unique CSR with a 250bhp, R500 Evo K-series engine rather than the "boat anchor" – sorry, the standard Ford Duratec – and I'm currently trying to massage the Zolfe's Mazda drivetrain underneath the last-ever 21.' You can take the man out of Caterham... ❧

Clockwise from right: Caterham 21 – here in aluminium-bodied prototype form with Lotuses Seven and Eleven – is a project Coates remains proud of; racing in the works Caterham Vauxhall; Lotus Carlton a company car highlight; Coates-developed R400 finished 7th in the 2002 N24; rebuilding his Elan; Austin A35 his first car; Integrale another company car





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* Sailun Atrezzo ZSR, published in August 2021 on autobild.de.



Hyundai high and low

In response to your hot hatch megatest, I also love my Hyundai i20 N, and you can easily get rid of the daft heavy steering in the Custom mode.

I differ from your testing team in finding both the body control and bump absorption poor. (Perhaps the roads are smoother in the nether regions of this sceptred isle?) I can't wait for Bilstein to produce my favourite B6 dampers for the i20, as they have told me they will, but unfortunately not when. KW will supply coilovers but with another 10mm drop I don't want, along with probably even stiffer springs.

Chris Stacey

Overlooked GTs

I completely agreed with Jethro Bovingdon's column about GTs going away (*evo* 318) and had a tinge of sadness myself at the demise of the continent-croser that also engages the driver.

Then an hour later I was filled with rage at the epic forgotten heroes of the class. The Mercedes SL and Bentley Continental must be recognised as the ultimate refinements of the GT concept.

The SL55 did epically poorly in *eCoty* last year, but *evo* leans to the sporting side of things so the car's touring ability holds it back. Personally I feel the SL defines the category and has for years provided the example for others to follow.

The Continental, meanwhile, provides a four-seat option that is largely disregarded due to the image of the car. It is easy to see it as too soft, but again we want a GT to be softer than a true sports car.

In the end I feel a GT is a compromise between sporting



ability and long-distance comfort, and that compromise should be celebrated. We shouldn't lament that it does neither job as well as purpose-built cars.

Allen Lloyd, Montana, USA

The price is wrong

I have just read Jethro's column about the decline in popularity of GTs. I agree with his statement about no one wanting to buy a GT anymore. However, I believe this could be due to the price of those GTs that are still being produced. The Maserati GranTurismo, for instance, in electric and petrol variants, is just too expensive, starting from around £130k.

It's a different situation in the second-hand market. Here these fossil-fuelled, large-engined chariots become affordable, and if you can endure others frowning at you when planet Earth is mentioned, driving an older GT puts a smile on your face they just would not understand.

I own a 2007 Maserati GranTurismo and drive the 100-mile round trip to the office in it most days. How many supercar or hypercar owners get the chance to do this?

A friend of mine owned two Ferrari Californias but is now out of the market for another similar GT from the Ferrari stable due to the pricing and the marque's steer towards producing supercars.

It's a shame. I'm a dinosaur and have finite time to enjoy the GTs still on the road, but I will own and drive them probably until they reach Band Z in the road tax rate table. But that's a subject for another day!

Richard Ahern, Northampton



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Gone but not forgotten

WITH REFERENCE TO THE FOUR CARS THAT MADE IT through to the final of *evo*'s comparison of all the available new hot hatches (issue 318): Two of those cars only seat four people (the Toyota GR Yaris and Honda Civic Type R). One has consumption in the low 20s mpg (Mercedes-AMG A45 S). The other simply repeats the formula for a successful front-drive hot hatch that was established some years earlier by the Mk3 Renault Mégane RS 275 Cup-S /Trophy (Hyundai i30 N).

The real sadness is that Renault no longer sells the model that satisfies all these criteria in a positive way – seats five, 30-plus mpg and a demon on trackdays. That car was the Mégane RS Trophy (Mk4).

I feel Renault's mistake was leaving the development of the near-perfect version so late in the lifecycle of the model. The suspicion-rousing four-wheel-steer actually makes it more agile round many tracks than the much-vaunted Type R. And furthermore, it looks much better than the Type R...

Nick Harry

The Letter of the Month wins a Straton watch

The writer of this month's star letter receives a Straton Vintage Driver worth £290. With automotive-inspired styling, the Vintage Driver was Straton's first ever model. It has now been reimagined and rereleased for 2023 in six different colours.

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INBOX



Grand designs

Jethro Bovingdon's column on the travails of the GT car brought to mind something I've been idly mulling recently. While we've been agonising over the survival of the hot hatch and sports car in an EV world, have we been missing the perfect application for EV technology in the grand tourer?

Many of the compromises of an EV platform surely fall away for this kind of car. Size and weight are an expectation rather than a problem; razor-sharp handling can be tuned out happily in return for whisper silence and brutal overtaking shove. It seems to me that the three classic Jaguar principles of space, grace and pace should be the stock-in-trade of an EV.

The luxury manufacturers, Porsche in particular, seem fixated on five-door practicality and the SUV in their electric future, but surely there is space in the same world for a big, beautifully styled, long-range coupe. A modern 928 perhaps? Well, I can always dream.

Dave Tickle

Analysing electric

Whatever the natural preferences of petrolheads (I'm one), BEVs are inevitably taking over and, environmentally speaking, so they should. But why are we still obsessing over 0-60? A friend demonstrated to his spouse and mine how full throttle in his I-Pace felt – and likely wished he hadn't. As pure power now becomes relatively easy to have and almost impossible to exploit off-track, driving should be about feel – brakes, most importantly steering, even buttons and switches. Maybe **evo** should start giving test cars an overall 'feel' rating?

Another thing – noise. You guys like a sporty, loud exhaust, but for most people driving is about more than a

few minutes on track or a couple of hours in wildest Wales. Lamborghini Aventadors are noisy at sub-30mph speeds; I drove past a GMA T.50 on the M1 recently and even at 50mph it seemed intolerably ear-aching even across three lanes. (Fab driving position, though!) If I'm driving 150 miles to a trackday, I want to get there without being deafened. I'd be quite happy (and less of a police-magnet) travelling purposefully and near-silently.

Finally, batteries. One car maker guarantees 70 per cent of the original charging capacity after eight years of life. How about at ten years? Will cars just be scrap at that age, battery replacement costs being too high? How do ICE engines compare? Also, Hertz is reducing its BEV fleet due to very high repair costs, so how much is a new battery out of warranty or after a prang? We should be told!

Adrian Butcher

Rubber bullet

I note Jethro's reference in his Corvette E-Ray review to the 'weird' 1ft rollout used for US acceleration tests (**evo** 318). I agree it is odd and seems an arbitrary way to judge accelerative performance. However, all 0-60 tests are unscientific in as much as different cars are generally sporting different rubber and are tested on different surfaces.

Whilst I concede that it may be an impossible ask, until manufacturers opt for the same tyres and conditions, comparative tests of acceleration are at best illustrative.

As an example, I'd back my Suzuki Vitara on winter tyres to out-accelerate a Cup 2-shod Porsche GT3 on a snowy incline every day of the week...

David Coombs, Corby, Northants

Watches

This month's most intriguing newcomers



**Dan Henry
1972 Maverick**

\$350 danhenrywatches.com

Debuting a few years before the blockbuster sequel with the same name, Dan Henry's Maverick resurrected the '70s-style blacked-out tool-watch – a look favoured by Tom Cruise's character in both *Top Gun* movies. Costing a fraction of the price of vintage examples, the original Maverick quickly sold out, so now it's back, with some subtle updates, for a second run.



Nodus Canyon

£950 noduswatches.com

US motoring journalist Matt Farah is best known for his *Smoking Tire* podcast and YouTube channel, but he's also an avid watch collector, which is how he came to design this piece with LA-based microbrand Nodus. The 'Canyon' name is a reference to Farah's favourite Angeles Crest Highway and Big Tujunga Canyon Road test routes, and the Sunset Orange dial colour the accompanying SoCal skies.



**Bulgari Aluminium
Gran Turismo**

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Bulgari has become the first non-automotive brand to create a digital concept car for the *Gran Turismo* video-game series. The wedge-shaped barchetta is inspired by the watch brand's 'Aluminium' range and, as you'd expect, has some very eye-catching instruments. Their look has been passed back to this special-edition watch, offered with a yellow or anthracite dial.

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RICHARD MEADEN

Meaden recalls the most dangerous trip he's ever made – in a Porsche SUV

LIKE THEM OR LOATHE THEM, OUR COLLECTIVE infatuation with cars such as the 911 Dakar and Huracán Sterrato is taking us on a somewhat unsettling yet unexpectedly refreshing tangent in the otherwise predictable upward trajectory of the contemporary high-performance car.

Champions of the genre – especially those in the UK – rightly point to their greater suitability for our increasingly dilapidated roads. I can't help feeling that the rise of these novelty models is motivated chiefly by the manufacturers' desire to find fresh ways of liberating large sums of money from high net-worth customers. Still, if there's one thing these rough-and-tumble playthings do expose, it's that to some extent we're all suckers for cars that promise adventures well beyond the prescribed path from turn-in through apex to exit.

Professionally and philosophically, I feel more aligned with the purpose and purity of a GT3 RS than the playfully puerile appeal of a Dakar. That said, if you tossed me the keys to the latter I'd be grinning like the Cheshire Cat. But then I do have form when it comes to off-road Porsches, having driven a specially prepared Cayenne across the world's largest single landmass.

An endurance event like no other, the TransSyberia Rally was a 5000-mile, 14-day competitive trek from Moscow to Ulaanbaatar. As we brace for Cold War 2, it seems crazy to me that I drove a Cayenne (sporting large Union Jacks for added jingoism) through Red Square, up and over the ceremonial start ramp, before turning left at the river Moskva and heading east until arriving in the Mongolian capital two weeks later.

I'm not sure anyone had heard of the TransSyberia Rally before Porsche effectively hijacked it, after quietly scoping it out in 2006 with a pair of Cayenne Ss. With factory programme engineer Jürgen Kern amongst the crew, the near-standard Porsche SUVs scored an impressive 1-2 finish, paving the way for a high-profile assault the following year in a fleet of special Transsyberia Cayennes built by the Motorsport Department.

Bought by Porsche's international territories, who were 'invited' to support the effort, the enforced uptake saw the 2007 event dominated by a phalanx of Cayenne Transsyberias. Amongst them a Porsche GB car crewed by yours truly and Silverstone Porsche Experience Centre off-road specialist Neil Hopkinson.

The Cayennes were very cool pieces of kit. Mechanically close to standard, the main changes were a locking centre diff and lowered final drive for punchier acceleration. Sporting a hugely robust roll-cage, partially stripped interior, hefty underbody skid plates, intake snorkel, jerry cans, spare wheels, navigation equipment and a GPS tracking system with emergency medivac locator, the SUVs also carried our provisions, clothes and tents.

To say I was outside my comfort zone is a huge understatement, but the driving was epic. Special stages of more than 300 miles were commonplace. Siberia has some of the most amazing driving roads you'll ever see, and Mongolia is like being transported to another planet. Even the transit days presented their own challenges. One day, shortly after leaving Moscow, we drove for 700 miles with nothing but birch trees to look at.

Perhaps inevitably the event was plagued with problems. Out in the wilds we would regularly get stopped by Russian officials who would fleece us for cash. Special stages were cancelled and the road books were sketchy. Rumour has it a large Mil helicopter that had been chartered to provide immediate medivac support crashed the week before the rally. In hindsight it was the most dangerous thing I've ever done (search 'Porsche Cayenne Transsyberia crash 2007' on YouTube to see how gnarly it could be), but at times it was also the most exhilarating.

The GB effort ended prematurely when a large hidden rock near the finish of a particularly tough Mongolian special stage breached the sump guard and split the oil pan. Indeed, so many Cayennes impaled themselves on the same crag that the Porsche service crew (who drove an amazing eight-wheel-drive MAN support truck) ran out of new sumps. It was the best part of 24 hours before PCGB's Cayenne was fitted with a MacGyvered sump, by which time we were effectively out.

Purists will hate me for saying this, but survivors from that original batch of 26 Motorsport Department-built Transsyberia Cayennes are now among the rarest of all factory-built competition Porsches. Which may partly explain why ever since those long days on the Russian steppe I've harboured dark fantasies about what would now be termed a restomodded Transsyberia-style Cayenne. Weird? Probably. But with half-decent early Ss in the classifieds for less than £5k, the notion of building a Dakar-beater for Dacia Duster money is oddly appealing. Crowdfunder project, anyone?

'We'd regularly get stopped by Russian officials who would fleece us for cash'

✉ @DickieMeaden

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



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RICHARD PORTER

Porter's not a fan of the boss, but reckoned it was time he tried a Tesla



WHAT'S YOUR FEELING ABOUT THE BOSS OF Ford? Got a particular view about the person who runs Kia or whoever sits in the top job at BMW? No, me neither. Now what about the man in charge of Tesla? You know, *that* man. Everyone has an opinion about *him*. Some seem to think he's a genius because he's shown the world that electric cars don't have to be wretched quadricycles and he claims one day we'll live on Mars. Conversely, plenty of people regard him as a self-promoting dilettante and accuse him of everything from misleading the stock market and hawking empty promises to amplifying the ugliest undercurrents of social media and being the reason every Tweet now gets an instant five likes from scantily clad ladies whose biogs say they're 'looking for love'. These poor women, they must be terribly lonely. And cold.

Frankly, I'm not a fan of *that* man. Maybe in real life he's kind and witty and always remembers your birthday, but his public persona is far from endearing. I don't like the way he seems increasingly keen to boost unsavoury conspiracies. I don't like the very public tantrum he had over advertisers leaving his social media site. I don't like how he ditched a globally recognised name for that site and replaced it with a bland nonsense that sounds, at best, like it sells something smutty.

I don't like the way he had a hissy fit and called that cave diver a 'pedo'. I don't like when he posts messages where he seems desperate to sound clever and scientific by using words like 'delta' but actually comes off like that insufferable lad in *American Pie* who fancied Stifler's mother. And I don't like the way he insists on giving on-stage presentations with the flat-footed awkwardness of someone too powerful and fragile to take guidance on how not to sound like an American tourist slowly grasping for the pronunciations on an Italian restaurant menu.

That's my personal view on *that* man. I don't like his style. But what about his cars? Apart from the original Roadster, I hadn't tried them because, years ago, I worked on a well-known TV show and *that* man took us to court, twice. And lost, twice. So I assumed that when it came to *that* man's car company, I was on the naughty list and so never asked to borrow one. They're everywhere now, of course, often being driven quite badly

because they seem to appeal to people who have no interest in cars and therefore no interest in driving or being good at it. Maybe they're people who've fallen for *that* man's arrant nonsense about 'self-driving' and mistakenly believe they no longer have to do anything as old-fashioned as looking through the windscreen. *That* kind of car is clearly selling well but it never seemed made for the likes of us.

Then, at the end of last year, two things happened. Firstly, I realised that my supercharged, L322-shape Range Rover was slowly bankrupting me with its hearty taste for unleaded and I began hankering for an everyday EV. Secondly, *that* car company began running a very tempting offer on its most popular model. So, out of idle curiosity, I went to a dealer and took a test drive. The raw numbers were tempting, as was the lure of the dedicated

charging network, but the car itself? That was the really interesting bit.

I'd always assumed *that* company made state-of-the-art tech and then installed it in crudely constructed tin boxes where the metal was there only to keep the enormous touchscreen dry. And given some of the panel gaps I've seen, I'm not even sure about that. If you'd told me their best-selling car had some cheap and terrible suspension, a transverse leaf spring or something, I'd have believed you.

Turns out it actually has a double-wishbone front end and multi-link rear. And this might go some way to explaining the most shocking thing about *that* car from *that* company: it's not crap. I

assumed it would be saggy and baggy and crashy and cacky and, actually, it's none of those things. Weirdly, it's quite dynamic. I wouldn't say it's the last word in delicately nuanced handling, but it somehow dodges that full-belly feeling of most EVs, with quick, meaty steering and loads of grip. I could take a notch more softness in the ride but otherwise it's a perfectly nice car to drive. In fact, it's quite amusing. Plus, as you'd expect, the tech is great. Putting the wiper settings on the touchscreen is daft, I grant you, but the rest of it works beautifully.

And so, reader, I bought one. Well, leased it. The deal was just too tempting to resist. More importantly, the car was so much better than expected. For what I need, it'll serve me well. I still don't much care for *that* man. But I'm surprised to find that I do rather like his cars.

'I assumed it would be saggy and baggy and crashy and, actually, it's none of those things'

✉ @sniffpetrol

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



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JETHRO BOVINGDON

As his son approaches driving age, Jethro recalls his own misspent youth

HE STANDS ON THE PRECIPICE. A LIFETIME OF thrills and (hopefully minor) spills ahead, and yet he barely knows it. My son is 16 and a year from now should be a fully fledged driver. True freedom awaits. Previously impossible dreams become simply choices made in the moment. Will he drive to the south of France on a whim? I doubt it. But he could. A bit like having a car that does 180mph, the real power is knowing the potential rather than fully exploiting it at all times. I'm excited for him. Is he excited? It's hard to tell, to be honest. Does he want to drive? 'Yeah.' Is he thrilled at the prospect? 'I dunno. I suppose.'

Although this apathy is completely alien to my own experience as 17 approached, I think I understand it. Old, crappy, decomposing cars were still a part of the landscape back then. My older brothers had Escort Mk2s in various shades of primer and rotting Capris. Every weekend involved a trip to the scrap dealer (lovingly referred to as 'Toothbrush' as his teeth were in a similar state to many of the cars in his charge) for spare parts. We once sold him a freshly crashed Toyota Starlet for £5. And even then he didn't want it. Although insurance was already a bit of a nightmare, there were cheap, almost-free cars pretty much everywhere you looked.

Adventure always seemed so close, too. There was no such thing as Cars and Coffee, no mass-organised events like those at Bicester Heritage, and I was never into the whole *Max Power* cruise thing. So, it was just bombing around country lanes in small groups, finding empty industrial estates when it snowed or just trying to skid around the gravelly car park for a nearby old steam railway that never seemed to be running. Handily, said car park was a large, oval-shaped area with two islands of trees and foliage at either end. For obvious reasons it became known as the 'Figure of 8'. It's still there today, but one end has been blocked off and at the entrance gates there are, of course, cameras monitoring the flow of traffic.

Surveillance really is everywhere for new drivers, isn't it? Every car park abandoned at the weekend as offices or warehouses closed used to be a relatively safe playground. Now, they're mostly locked up and/or covered by the unblinking stare of CCTV. And even if they weren't, the chances are my son will be required to have a 'black box' monitoring his every move just to make the

insurance affordable. The old sport of skidding around away from the general public until the noise of a distant siren (which would never have anything to do with our motoring misdemeanours) spooked everyone is long gone.

I should be happy. And a big part of me is reassured by all this stuff. I love my kids and I want them to be safe and responsible. The thought of them careering around as a passenger just as one of their friends runs out of talent is terrifying. I remember several trips on a Sunday morning to rescue cars from ditches or fields. I don't want to repeat those journeys today. And yet... I do want my son to feel the pure freedom of having access to a car. I want him to equate driving with fun. To understand the thrill of being fully immersed in the simple act of controlling a vehicle. Albeit one

with airbags and crumple zones and ABS. It's a fine line between encouraging responsibility and ripping youth away from the young and I have no idea how to navigate it. However, I do wish that it was my issue to grasp and try to solve, rather than one completely handed over to enforcing technology.

Of course, all is not lost. There are trackdays, driving courses, karting and a host of other ways to ensure my kids see cars as more than a means of transport and driving as more than a means to an end. Smarter, safer ways than skidding around a dark car park or heading up to the M45 to max out whatever piece of crap happened

to be lying around that week. Plus, the freedom I associate with driving and the possibilities it offers are independent of car control and speed and all that other wonderful, terrible stuff.

So, he doesn't really know it and the world tries ever harder to take it away, but my son truly does stand on the edge of something special. I'm excited to see where it takes him. Will he ever wait on the far side of a humpback bridge in the dead of night, heart pounding, cold breath curling into the darkness, with the sound of a friend's wrung-out CVH Ford engine and dim yellow headlights hammering towards him? Maybe not. Is he missing out on the sight of the impending spectacular jump and the horrible impact of a landing marked by the sound of smashing glass, screeching metal and a shower of sparks and shrapnel? Absolutely. The Escort survived to fight another day. Just. My love of cars took another spike towards the stratosphere. Hopefully he'll find a more sensible way to truly understand the Thrill of Driving.

'I want my son to feel the pure freedom of having access to a car, to equate driving with fun'

✉ @JethroBovingdon

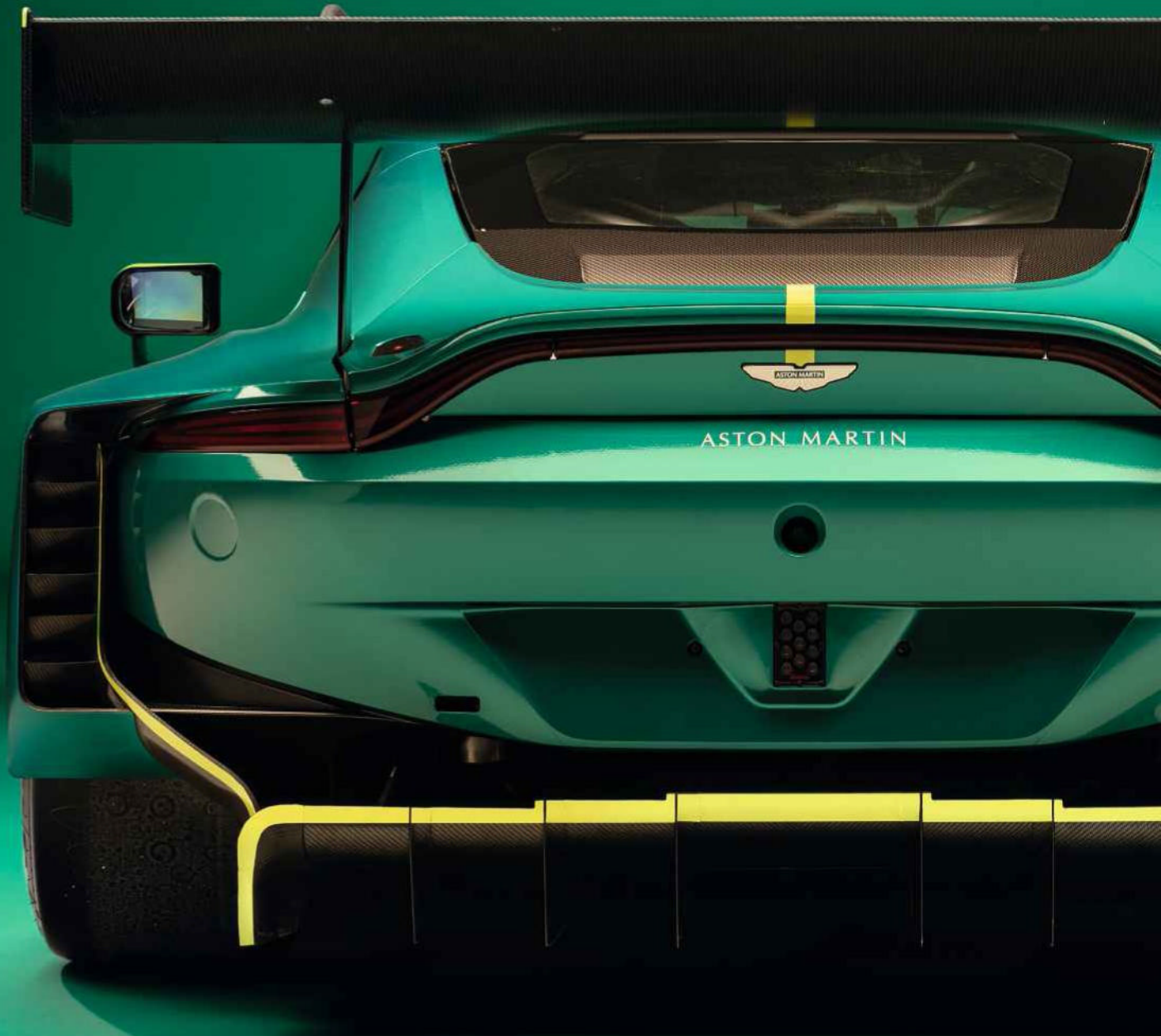
Jethro has been writing for **evo** for more than two decades and is a WEC pitlane reporter for Eurosport

VANTAGE



Aston Martin isn't holding back with its new Vantage

U N B O U N D



road car and GT3 race car. We examine both

by JETHRO BOVINGDON & YOUSUF ASHRAF PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

A

FULL TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION for the new Vantage drops into my inbox a couple of days before I get to see it in the raw. I think I know what to expect. A decent hike in power. A few less kilos. A bit more intensity in all areas and some much slicker interior tech. As it turns out, I am very wide of the mark. In fact, I'm not sure anyone has guessed quite the scale of the evolutionary step the Vantage is taking. Not so much a facelift as a metamorphosis from sports car to supercar.

The power figure leaps out. Even though we're all enlightened enough to know that power in and of itself is not a key metric for measuring a driver's car, here it feels like a statement. The previous Vantage had 503bhp. The hardcore F1 edition bumped that up to 527bhp. These are pretty big numbers. However, Aston Martin no longer deals in pretty big numbers. The new focus on performance demands class-leading power and power-to-weight. Aston's new entry-level sports car has 656bhp and does 202mph with 0-60mph in 3.4sec. Gulp. It will cost around £165,000, a substantial increase of £23,000 over an F1 Edition but around £15,000 less than a Porsche 911 Turbo S.

Taken at face value it would appear that the Vantage story has taken a completely new direction, then. The look, which we'll come on to, is evolutionary, but the dynamic performance has

taken a fascinating and radical route. And yet attributes and performance director Simon Newton is clear that the Vantage is still authentically Aston Martin. 'If you think of Vantage as the epitome of an Aston front-engine rear-drive car, it is still true to that. We never wanted the new car to be over-controlled, too heavily damped or over-assisted. Essentially, we wanted it to be fun to drive.'

Perhaps sensing my scepticism that the engineers could simultaneously up the power by more than 30 per cent and make the Vantage easier, more fluid and more accessible, Newton continues by addressing the fears that you might share, too. 'Don't think that because we've got all that power it's now like an AMG product, for example,' he begins. 'It's very much true to Aston. It still breathes with the road and it still has that fun-to-drive character. The difference is we've raised the performance capability around that identity.' A Vantage as we know it, then. Only elevated to a new performance high and, we're assured, offering greater entertainment, adjustability and balance through a combination of re-engineered hardware and more sophisticated driver-assist systems.

So, the 4-litre twin-turbocharged V8 now offers 656bhp and 590lb ft from just 2750rpm. However, that's just the start. At the core of the new Vantage is a heavily revised bonded aluminium structure. At the front there's a repositioned (and stronger) cross member, which has been moved rearwards to increase the mounting-point stiffness for the double-wishbone front suspension. This is said to also improve off-centre steering feel.



Time and again the words 'feel', 'feedback' and 'transparency' are associated with every upgrade.

To further tie the structure together is a more substantial upper engine or strut brace, plus new shear panels front and rear and another bracing bar between the rear suspension turrets. Aston Martin claims that the Vantage benefits from a 29 per cent increase in stiffness under cornering load at the rear, but Newton provides a little more insight. 'At the simplest level, when you drive a car with better structure, it just has a greater sense of integrity,' he begins. 'It feels more isolated from all impacts, because all the ride inputs are better reacted, and there's no sense of shake. In terms of dynamics, tying the front of the car together better means when you steer, the load from the tyre doesn't just displace the front of the car laterally, it moves the car as a whole. The improvements at the rear support that and help with the speed of rear-axle response. And that means you can work it harder laterally. So, when you steer, you can switch the dampers quicker and get more of a reaction.'

Those dampers he mentions are new, too. As with the DB12, the Vantage adopts Bilstein DTX adaptive units, which are a much more powerful tool than the previous hardware and are also used on the Porsche 992. 'They have such a range of damping forces available, meaning you can have clearly differentiated modes. So, in the DB12 they're great for comfort but then the dampers stiffen up very effectively and very, very quickly. That's very much carried over to the Vantage, where the speed of response is even more powerful in a dynamic sense.'

You can sense his excitement as Newton expands on the character of the new car. 'It is exploitable and likes to be driven in slip, as we call it,' he says through a wide grin. 'The Vantage is very comfortable with a good amount of angle on the car. And when you want to drive it precisely you can. It's very much fun-orientated. It takes all the really good stuff from the F1 Edition and propels it to the next level.' Perhaps even more importantly, Aston Martin claims it's more accessible, too. Partly that's down to ever more refined driving modes and a new variable traction control system, similar to that fitted to the AMG GT R or, more recently, so brilliantly deployed in BMW M products.

In fact, the electronic sophistication of the new Vantage appears to have taken a similarly game-changing leap, powered by a new 6D-IMU, or Inertial Measurement Unit, for its Active Vehicle Dynamics control system. Taking information from the powertrain, the braking system and the e-diff (new to the Vantage and following the lead of the DB12) and monitoring surge, heave, sway, roll, pitch and yaw, the AVD has a huge amount of information from all six axes to precisely and more imperceptibly utilise the ESP system. The new Vantage defaults to Sport mode, but also offers Sport Plus, Track, Individual and Wet modes. The traction-control system is activated by disabling ESP. It defaults to position 5; dial it up to 9 to remove the traction control or down to 1 for much tighter reins depending on conditions and driver confidence.

From the elimination of a rubber NVH coupling in the steering column to the bespoke Michelin Pilot Sport S 5 tyres

● ● ● ● ●
**'NOT SO MUCH A FACELIFT AS A METAMORPHOSIS
FROM SPORTS CAR TO SUPERCAR. ASTON'S
NEW ENTRY-LEVEL CAR DOES 202MPH'**



Right: larger turbos and a host of internal changes have liberated 30 per cent more power from the AMG-sourced V8, taking peak outputs to 656bhp and 590lb ft

– measuring 275/35 R21 at the front and 325/30 R21 at the driven wheels – to the shorter final drive and new shift strategy for the ZF eight-speed gearbox, it feels like a forensic, perhaps inspired reinvention. Of course, it helps that the Vantage is more handsome, too. The mean,

squinty lights are gone and the car looks much better resolved. It's all new to the A-pillars, there are new (and structural) side sills, while wider rear arches help contain those massive rear tyres and make the Vantage 30mm wider across its haunches. Great for the aesthetic but there is a slight concern that it could feel a bit *too* wide. To give you context, the new Aston is 145mm wider than a 992 GT3 RS...

There are other concerns, too. At Gaydon, the DB12 is adored and spoken about with pride and awe. I'm yet to try Aston's new 'super-tourer' but the general feeling on eCoty was that it was skewed too far towards pure sports car. Could the Vantage suffer a similar case of tunnel vision? Maybe, but my personal fear is that it won't go far enough. To really succeed I think it needs to embrace its inner hooligan and offer something very different to the incredibly capable but slightly muted 911 Turbo.

Yet, while it's always healthy to read press material with a hearty dose of scepticism and to understand that the engineers are essentially talking about their own brand-new baby, it's hard not to be impressed by the Vantage. Especially when you drop into the driver's seat, in this case an optional carbonfibre bucket. If the power is up 30 per cent and the chassis and electronic

sophistication has striven to match that leap, then the quality, design and just sheer sense of specialness in here are every bit as impressive. Perhaps more so. The low-slung, high-shouldered driving position is familiar, but the rest of the environment is a whole new world. In simple terms, it's bloody lovely.

Functional, too, by the looks of things. For whilst there's a 10.25-inch touchscreen, there are also physical buttons for things like the stability control system, dampers, exhaust and – praise the Lord – f*@king Lane Assist (not Aston Martin parlance, but commonly used around these parts). The start button also has a collar around it, which you twist to toggle between the driver modes, as per the DB12. It feels deliciously tactile. With that and the gorgeous leather, sharp, architectural lines and lovely sense of restraint, the Vantage's interior certainly feels fitting even at the lofty asking price.

Of course, for us at least, the Vantage's mettle will be proven at speed on challenging roads. We'll even forgive it a few 'hand-crafted' foibles if the dynamics stack up and it proves a credible rival to cars as accomplished as the 911 Turbo. That's the key. The game has moved on so fast since the current Vantage's launch in 2018; Aston Martin itself has been through some tumultuous comings and goings at all sorts of management and engineering levels and, perhaps, philosophies have been muddled as a natural consequence of the shifting sands. The Vantage appears to be single-minded and intensely focused on performance and entertaining dynamics, but the real test is yet to come.

Newton relishes the prospect. 'We needed to develop and amplify the character of an Aston,' he says. 'Whilst giving it credibility in a world where its competitors are as competent







Left and below: cockpit is much improved and features next-gen infotainment first seen in the DB12; exterior sees return of the Aston side-strake

as 911s. It's sophisticated, widely talented, and the delta between old Vantage and new Vantage is every bit as big as the power output suggests. It's really a huge amount of fun.'

That word, 'fun', seems almost trite but I'm heartened by how often Newton uses it. How he describes the

Vantage's behaviour 'in slip', the flexibility of the e-diff – which can go from fully open to fully locked in 135 milliseconds for launch control and reacts in 60 milliseconds in dynamic cornering – the focus on cooling and braking performance necessitated by the much greater power output. There's a real sense of harnessing new 'dynamic modifiers' in order to achieve something timeless: a sports car that's as thrilling to drive as it is to look at.

Of course, I had to ask. Seeing as the Aston Martin Valour, which has similar torque to the Vantage, features a six-speed manual gearbox, why isn't it available here? The answer involves a lot of stuttering from the engineers, some flat denials from the PR in attendance and then a bit more stuttering. 'Well, a lot of work,' says Newton. Then there's a cough. Something about the US market demanding automatics for the 'base car', before a mildly panicked look towards the PR department for an official steer. 'It definitely won't happen,' I'm assured. Even though the appetite for special, bespoke, engaging sports cars – the very thing the Vantage should epitomise – seems boundless? Even though the strapline for the press material is 'Engineered for Real Drivers'? The PR is unmoved. 'No. Absolutely not.'

It seems a strange decision to me. An open goal missed. But even if the 'base' Vantage isn't ever offered with a manual 'box, it seems highly unlikely there won't be a special model somewhere in its future with a row-your-own option. I push the

point one last time. So there's not a prototype running around with a manual gearbox fitted right now? Eyes dance around furtively. 'Erm...' The silence is nicely drawn out. 'No.' I'd call that a definitive yes, wouldn't you?

The prospect of a six-speed Vantage is mouth-watering and would send out a clear message that Aston Martin really does want to appeal to real enthusiasts. Already the Vantage is a deeply exciting proposition. There's a real sense that nothing has been held back, that the Vantage has been unleashed. It's a very Ferrari-style approach, in fact. Forget hierarchy and worrying too much about leaving something on the table for the inevitable future F1 Edition. Just build the best version of the Vantage possible from the outset. Which makes sense when you remember who now sits in the big chair at Gaydon...

The new Vantage has timing on its side, too. It's not that long ago that the idea that a traditional front-engine, rear-drive sports car, one without even a hint of electrification, could thrive and capture the imagination of buyers seemed absurd. But the world isn't running away from great driver's cars at all. In fact, it's turning back towards them with increasing passion and appreciation. And once the shock of that amazing power figure starts to subside, once you begin to look at the detail work that's gone on to create a much more stable, stiffer platform with faster, more consistent reactions and a greater depth of ability, it's easy to conclude that the Vantage might just be the perfect car at the perfect moment for Aston Martin. We await the first drive with great anticipation.

Aston Martin Vantage

Engine V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo **Power** 656bhp @ 6000rpm **Torque** 590lb ft @ 2750-6000rpm **Weight** 1605kg (dry) **Power-to-weight** 358bhp/ton (dry) **0-62mph** 3.5sec **Top speed** 202mph **Basic price** c£165,000







**'THE VANTAGE IS A DEEPLY
EXCITING PROPOSITION.
THERE'S A REAL SENSE THAT
NOTHING'S BEEN HELD BACK'**





F THE NEW VANTAGE IS THE CAR TO STEAL SALES

from the Mercedes-AMG GT and Porsche 911, this is the one to rub doors with them. Say hello to the new, battle-ready Vantage GT3, Aston's answer to the Mercedes-AMG GT3, Ferrari 296 GT3 and Porsche 911 GT3 R.

The Vantage GT3 will join that eclectic mix of road cars-cum-racers at various GT championships this year, including the World Endurance Championship, GT World Challenge and IMSA, and of course at Le Mans. Its predecessor was a force of nature in the GT3 and GTE classes, taking 52 class wins since its debut in 2018 – including highlight-reel victories at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Daytona and Spa. The new car has been comprehensively re-engineered in every aspect to continue that success, harnessing the technical might of Aston Martin Performance Technologies, which encompasses the firm's Formula 1 programme.

Theoretically, it shouldn't be any faster than the old one. GT3 racing adheres to strict Balance of Performance regulations to ensure parity across the field, which is part of the reason why such a varied field of cars can fight so closely. This means that developing a new challenger isn't merely a case of bolting more performance to it, but making that potential easier to access across a wider range of conditions. The ultimate lap time might be similar, but the improved consistency can shorten overall race time considerably. This is precisely what Aston Martin aims to achieve with the Vantage GT3.

CHASSIS, BODYWORK AND AERODYNAMICS

Aero performance is king in GT3 racing. Ultimate downforce isn't the primary goal – FIA regulations put a cap on this – but creating a stable aero platform gives the driver confidence and can be instrumental in preserving tyre life. To that end, the new Vantage GT3 gets new bodywork from nose to tail to work the air more effectively while referencing the design of the new road car on which it's based.

The new bodywork has been designed using CFD and makes use of the road car's larger front grille aperture to feed more cooling air to the brakes. The front end is a one-piece clamshell made from carbonfibre (the repair cost doesn't bear thinking about), and a quick-release system enables rapid replacement of the nose and splitter in the pits.

The front splitter is shorter than that of the previous car, which shifts the aero balance rearwards and reduces pitch sensitivity. Louvres protrude above the front wheelarches to release high-pressure air and add downforce, balanced out by stacked vents in the rear arches, a rear diffuser and a swan-neck-style wing.

According to Aston Martin Racing's head of performance, Gustavo Beteli, the old car needed stiff suspension tuning to control dive under braking and maintain a consistent aero platform, but the new Vantage can operate within a wider range of set-up parameters. 'We wanted to make the car more stable under braking,' he says. 'Working heavily on damper tuning, we have found a much better balance with the new car so we can generate the downforce without compromising the suspension set-up. The result is much-improved progression and greater stability in all conditions.'

The road car's aluminium structure forms the basis of the GT3 car, with a steel roll-cage and pneumatic jack system installed for competition. Suspension is by double wishbones front and rear with five-way adjustable dampers and adjustable anti-roll bars, with a huge range of set-up options to tailor the car for different tracks, conditions and driving styles.

The wheels are forged 18-inch items with centre-lock nuts for rapid tyre changes at the end of a stint. Alcon supplies the Vantage's braking system, which comprises six-piston front calipers and four-piston units at the rear and includes a driver-operated bias controller. Without any ballast, the GT3 weighs 1265kg, an enormous 340kg less than the road car.



NEW ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE GT3



ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

As in the road-going Vantage, Mercedes-AMG's 4-litre twin-turbocharged V8 lies at the heart of the racer – albeit further back in the chassis to optimise weight distribution. In the GT3 car it gains a pair of bespoke Borg Warner turbochargers and electric wastegates, and breathes out through an Akrapovič exhaust system. If you've been lucky enough to witness the old car (or the Mercedes-AMG GT3) thundering past the grandstands at Silverstone or Spa, you'll know just how spine-tingling this engine sounds in race trim. In its base tune it generates 536bhp and 516lb ft of torque, but these outputs can be raised via an adjustable boost controller.

In common with all other GT3 challengers, the Vantage is rear-wheel drive, and it swaps the road car's eight-speed torque-converter gearbox and e-diff for bespoke motorsport components. The transmission is a six-speed sequential unit built by Xtrac and uses a multi-plate motorsport clutch made by Alcon, sending drive through a mechanical limited-slip diff with adjustable preload. As with the road car, there's a carbonfibre propshaft, but it's bespoke due to the repositioning of the race car's engine further back in the engine bay.

COCKPIT

Cover the badge on the carbonfibre steering wheel and you'd be hard pressed to know that you were in an Aston Martin at all, such is the extent of the GT3 car's modifications. That fancy new switchgear and HMI system? Gone in favour of a no-nonsense carbon dash with big, foolproof controls to adjust primary functions such as mirror position, air conditioning and the external rain light. The road car's beautifully formed metal air vents have also been binned for simple plastic items that you might recognise from a 20-year-old supermini – there's no room for decoration here.

And yet, some elements are genuinely beautiful. The steering wheel, for instance, is an F1-style oblong with moulded rubber grips and rotary dials that sit just where your thumbs rest. It's festooned with Skittle-like buttons for everything from the

radio controls to the on-board drink system to the pitlane speed limiter, that last one with a plastic guard to avoid what would be an embarrassing accidental press while out on circuit.

Set behind the steering wheel is a digital motorsport dash, flanked by a tablet-sized screen that displays a feed from the Vantage's rear-view camera. To aid the driver's awareness in close-quarter battles, Bosch has developed a radar indicator system to help avoid collisions with other cars – similar to the sort of thing you might find on an online racing simulator. Expect plenty of adjustment in the Kevlar bucket seat, steering column and floor-hinged pedal box to accommodate drivers of different shapes and sizes.

TESTING

The Vantage GT3 is geared as much towards paying amateur drivers as it is seasoned professionals, and Aston has carried out an extensive development programme to verify its brief as a fast yet forgiving machine. This included a 30-hour track session last year with Aston Martin works drivers and amateur racers at the wheel, both groups reporting that the car was a noticeable step on from its predecessor.

'The feedback from drivers who have tested it has been overwhelmingly positive,' says lead engineer Beteli. 'Especially the amateur racers, who have been able to achieve lap times that are much closer to the pros. Now we need to go racing!'

The truth is, the new Vantage GT3 has already been racing. At the 24 Hours of Daytona last month, Aston's partner team Heart of Racing finished fourth in the GTD Pro class with the new Vantage GT3, which was partially disguised to look like the old model. The team's second Vantage ran into an electrical issue on lap 329 before retiring, but valuable data was gained about the new package. 'We were in a pretty good place at that time but had some misfortune with the issues with the car and had to retire,' said driver Roman De Angelis. 'It is kind of a shame but we learned a lot about the car.'

Aston Martin predicts that up to 30 Vantage GT3s will be actively competing by the end of this season. Don't expect them to look quite this pretty for long... ❏



by ADAM TOWLER

PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

SUBARU IMPREZA RB5 & MITSUBISHI EVO VI





ICONS

Enemies both on
the stages and off,
Mitsubishi's Lancer Evo VI
and Subaru's Impreza
RB5 were high points in
the history of rally-bred
homologation specials



I'M PAYING FOR MY FUEL IN ONE OF THOSE enormous, newly built petrol stations; the type where the shop is bigger than some small supermarkets. As I tap to pay I glance out onto the forecourt and there, on an otherwise deserted row of pumps, is the RB5. I stop and stare, and then gawp some more, and not just because it's a hero of a driver's car that I just happen to be holding the key for.

Actually, the one thought that strikes me over all others is how compact and how amazingly inoffensive it looks. This is, you'll recall, the ultimate everyman sports saloon, the folk hero turned boy-racer dream; the bad boys' car, the ram-raider, the uninsurable, the menace to society. Yes, it may now be viewed largely as a covetable modern classic, but it's still a car with a massive, overarching reputation. And yet... its 17-inch Speedlines don't come close to filling the arches, I can see daylight underneath the car, such is its lofty ride height, and not even that wing can make it look intimidating by the standards of today. We've become accustomed to cars sporting gaping (and often fake) black mouths that plaster their frontages like giant decayed teeth in a grimace, tiny slivers of rubber surrounding enormous and intricately styled alloy wheels, and an air of general thuggery backed up by ludicrously high power numbers. By comparison, the dear old Scooby is amusingly effete, but simultaneously a surge of adrenaline flits around my stomach, and a snug embrace of nostalgia wraps invisibly around me.

It's the RB5 that I drive first, because I collected it from its owner – none other than current GM advanced design director and ex-Jaguar man Julian Thomson. He's owned it for quite some time, purchasing it for a sum that makes me shudder with jealousy given the state of the current market. It's a nice, presentable example, but it's no garage queen, having accumulated just over 100,000 miles. Crucially, it'll give us the full-fat RB5 experience, because it features the WR Sport upgrade pack, which in period was also available for any UK-spec Impreza Turbo 2000.

Talking of which, just what was an RB5? For starters, it had little to do with Richard Burns, whose initials it carried. Or perhaps more accurately, Richard Burns had little to do with it. The Englishman had signed for Subaru at the beginning of the 1999 WRC season (a homecoming, as he'd driven for Prodrive with great success in the early '90s), defecting from arch-rivals Mitsubishi, where he had contested the 1998 WRC in an Evo V infamously badged as a 'Carisma' for marketing purposes. He admitted when interviewed at the RB5's launch that he hadn't had a hand in setting the car up; instead it was a marketing special edition, with the '5' signifying the number on the door of his Impreza WRC99 that year. Some 444 were sold, each one with a numbered plaque. Julian's is a late build, number 435.

That's not to say that the RB5 was just a paint job, however – although the Blue Steel colour was new in the UK (it's actually the JDM 'Cool Grey' hue). In addition, the RB5 gained Alcantara trimming on the inside, with grey 17-inch Speedline alloys (shod with slightly wider 205/45 ZR17 Pirelli P Zero tyres), a short-shift gearbox







and intriguingly, a solid rear bulkhead. PIAA rally spot lamps were fitted in the front bumper, with RB5 covers. All of this was on top of the '99 model-year revisions to the Turbo 2000 in general, which brought a revised grille and front bumper, a taller rear wing, four-pot front brakes with bigger discs and a height-adjustable driver's seat.

What livened things up considerably was if the WR Sport box had been ticked on the order form, because this brought additional performance via a new air filter, exhaust, intercooler pipework and ECU remap, lifting power from 218bhp with 214lb ft of torque to 237bhp and a much more sturdy 258lb ft at 3500rpm. It was easy to tell if an RB5 had been given this Prodrive treatment because the standard rear wing was replaced by a high-rise job sourced from the JDM STI Version 5 model. What wasn't included – and this can be confusing – was the Prodrive suspension upgrade kit, which was also an option for the Turbo 2000, consisting of Prodrive valved dampers and stiffer springs with a lower ride height. These were a dealer-fit option. From reading back through old issues of *evo* it seems like the famous T47 JOP press car (still alive and kicking somewhere) didn't have this suspension upgrade.

So the stage is set for a battle as familiar as whether to add jam or cream first to a scone, because you've probably noticed by now the presence of the Great Foe: namely a Mitsubishi Evolution. Bristling with all that shogun warrior sharp-edged intent, the Evo VI brings every bit as much baggage to this encounter as the Subaru. You may also be thinking that this contest is a little apples and oranges, because it's asking a lot of a UK Impreza – even a 'tuned' one – to go into battle against a full-fat JDM homologation special like the Evo. In some ways perhaps a fairer opponent from Fuji Heavy Industries would have been a WRX STI V5, or to keep a UK theme, the Prodrive-developed P1, both cars also packing the regulation-defined 276bhp, as per the Evo.

Then again, the RB5 has always been one of our favourite Imprezas to drive on UK roads, so I'm not expecting it to have any problems holding its own. I've had the good fortune to drive many GC8 (classic shape) Imprezas over the years, but never before an RB5, yet I know I'm going to love it even before I've got 50 yards down the road, and in my experience it's usually thus with a great driver's car. What feels special at below 20mph usually feels special when you're on it, and the RB5 is no exception: it's a car that rewards being driven well, and the more precise you are with your inputs, the better it gets. The short-shift mechanism of the five-speed 'box is so satisfying, requiring a confident but still light touch to effortlessly flick between ratios, and while there's so much that's admirable about the modern crop of turbocharged engines, with their any-time, any-rev power delivery, the fact that you can pad around in the RB5 off boost is actually a real pleasure. There's a soothing, almost soporific quality to the classic offbeat boxer engine, and without the blower on stream you

Left and above left: 17-inch wheels and 45-profile tyres were the order of the day for four-wheel-drive homologation specials in '99

**'THE MORE PRECISE YOU
ARE WITH YOUR INPUTS,
THE BETTER THE RB5 GETS'**







can make quiet, conservative progress, just drinking in the sensations of being back in an Impreza.

As urban roads give way to main routes, it's time to pick up the speed, and you soon realise that once there's over 3000rpm on the rev counter the Impreza surges forward. This is that swollen peak brought by the Prodrive modifications, and it gives the RB5 a solid punch not out of place in more modern performance machinery. Unlike its more frantic JDM STI brethren, the RB5 is all done by 7000rpm, and while today I won't rev it as high as that out of respect for its owner, neither does it feel like I'm missing out by not using the entire rev range. The RB5 is happiest mining that mid-range grunt.

Our root to a rendezvous with the Evo is a long and boring one, and reveals the reality of lengthy drives in the Impreza. With nothing but dull A-road ahead the mind wanders to other aspects of Impreza life, such as how the RB5's towering rear wing neatly manages to perfectly dissect my rear vision, rendering what's behind a mystery. The disarmingly simple, low-rent-plastics interior is an alien environment to those weaned on modern cars, and the driving position is a little high for my tastes. GC8 Imprezas are the sort of car where you know about every mile you've travelled at speed, and while it's possible to zone out on long drives it'll never be a soothing, refined journey. Thankfully, the roads of rural Leicestershire are about to get a lot more exciting, and there's another car waiting to snatch my affections.

The Evo, brought along by long-term **evo** reader Ben Bradley, is of the VI GSR variety. It's a UK car in as much as it was registered new in the UK from grey importers Park Lane back in 1999, and has only had three owners since. It's probably fair to say it's currently a little crispy around the edges – as Evos often are these days (and **evo** writers too, probably) – but it's clear it's found a place in Ben's heart and there are plans to sort out what needs doing in the future. It wasn't until the '6.5', otherwise known as the Tommi Mäkinen Edition, that the Evo arrived in the UK in a semi-official capacity, and only later with the third-generation cars – the 7, 8 and 9 – that things became more official still. This was still the era when Mitsubishi UK was at war with the grey importers, and an updated model seemed to appear in the pages of an embryonic **evo** magazine almost monthly.

Trying to work out the Lancer parentage of certain Evos is almost as complicated as trying to explain the inner workings of its Active Yaw Control rear differential. But put simply, Evos 1 to 3 use one generation of Lancer shell, 4 to 6 the bigger, boxier body, and 7 to 9 another bigger body again. The Evo X is a completely different car, and neither does it use the famous 4GA engine of its forebears...

The Evo in rallying didn't really hit its stride until the advent of the 3, which Tommi used to pip



incumbent champ Colin McRae to the 1996 title. The 4 was an altogether more modern-looking and aggressive beast, which in GSR form introduced the aforementioned AYC electro-hydraulic rear diff – and it duly delivered on the stages by helping Mäkinen to a second title in a row, which would eventually run to four in a row. The 5's blistered arches enabled a wider track, more rubber on the road and beefier Brembo brakes, while its gaping front improved cooling, but the visual effect was to make this the first one with a really exotic air to it. Interestingly, the VI was never actually in the original product plan but came about because the FIA changed the regulations for the 1999 season (requiring smaller wings). For that matter, the 6.5 began life as a marketing 'stickers' edition, but the engineers saw the opportunity to further refine the car with a view to improving the aero for the rally cars.

But back to the VI. To really understand where this car came from we need a little additional context. When Mitsubishi unveiled the Evo IV for the 1997 season it was sticking to what it knew in so much as it declined to take up the new-for-that-year World Rally Car rule set. Whereas under Group A rules some 2500 examples of the new Evo had to be built as road cars, a World Car was based on simply the bodyshell of a model that 25,000 had been made of. From there, the basic engine block had to be on sale somewhere in a manufacturer's range, but turbocharging and four-wheel-drive hardware, not to mention aero devices, could all be unique to the rally car. The idea was simply to encourage more manufacturers to join the party, without requiring them to go to the time and expense of developing and marketing niche performance road cars. As **evo** readers, we all know how we feel about that...

What's more confusing is that rivals Subaru were early adopters of the new rules with the Impreza WRC, but the transformation was nowhere near as stark as with something like the new Peugeot 206 WRC or SEAT Cordoba WRC, because the Japanese firm was already selling a two-door, turbocharged Impreza with a big wing on the back in the form of the WRX STI Type R series of road cars. To add an extra dose of confusion into the mix, a year later it brought out a limited run of road cars with wide-arch bodywork that closely aped the look of the rally car (although they weren't quite the same). Christened 22B, these were a celebration model for 40 years of the company and in no way homologation specials.

The VI's rally career lasted until partway through 2001, when the Tommi Mäkinen Edition version was finally retired for a World Car based on the VII (the Lancer Evo WRC) – a car that proved something of a disaster over the following couple of seasons, and from which the Ralliart team never really recovered, even with the advanced VIII-based Lancer WRC04/05. As such, for rally fans, the VI generation remains very much the real deal, the last generation of pure 'rally special'.

This fact alone gives it a certain aura when you walk up to the driver's door. The Toyota GR Yaris has kept

Left: high-rise rear wing signifies that this RB5 has the Prodrive power uplift to 237bhp; the standard 218bhp RB5 wore a lower, hoop-style wing



**'THE EVO WANTS TO
TURN QUICKLY, THE REAR
SCRIBING ITS OWN LINE'**

the flame flickering for more reasonably priced homologation specials, but there's something incredibly uncompromising about the Evo that's like catnip for a car enthusiast. 'They just don't make cars like this any more' may be a tired cliché, but it's still a perfect summary of the brutally purposeful Mitsubishi. To understand it, you need to forget it's based on some dreadfully sub-par Lancer, a car that passed almost completely unnoticed by most people on this planet, and focus instead on the fact that this is a car built purely for driving – and driving quickly. The VI engine featured revised pistons and con rods for the 4G63 motor over the V, along with revised cooling. The aero changes not only improved stability at speed, but with an offset number plate the flow of air into the engine bay was greater. The body was strengthened, the suspension revised and a new design of OZ wheels featured. In Japan there was the more lavishly trimmed (relatively speaking) GSR model and the more basic and stripped-out RS, which did without the trick AYC diff but featured a titanium turbo.

The Evo's Recaros are even better than the Subaru's own-brand seats, and I've always thought that the interior – while

very basic – is just a little more sophisticated in its design. The engine turns over with a lazy chirrup and then fires with a zing, all of it a soundtrack every bit as recognisable as the Impreza's to an educated ear. And if the RB5's short-shift 'box is direct, then the Mitsubishi's is even more mechanical and precise in feel.

Normally an Evo would explode forwards in the mid-range, its long-stroke inline 'four' devouring air and gulping fuel from its pathetically small tank, but Ben's car isn't altogether happy today and doesn't really hit its stride until nearly 6000rpm is on the dial, then lunging with the familiar intensity for the red line. That certainly means the chassis has an easier time of it than normal, but the basics are very much still readily apparent. The steering is very accurate and remarkably unfiltered, immediately showing the Impreza's up for being a little light and woolly around the dead ahead. The feedback through the slim steering wheel is more consistent than the Subaru's too, but the biggest difference is how they feel on the road. The Evo is on its nose – you might call it 'pointy'. It wants to turn quickly, the rear scribing its own line not quite with the hyper-agility of later versions but still with a flightiness that brings to mind a ballerina



Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VI GSR

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1997cc, turbocharged Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 275lb ft @ 3000rpm Weight 1360kg Power-to-weight 206bhp/ton 0-60mph 5.4sec
Top speed 150mph Price new £30,995 (1999) Value today From £22,000
evo rating ★★★★★

standing on the ends of their toes. It's permanently on full alert. As we drive over the Rutland hills, dropping into small valleys and then climbing up the other side, the VI wants to have fun.

Unfortunately, having fun isn't quite as automatic as the car and road combination surely promises. It is a bitterly cold day, the visibly icy roads compounded by a thick, slimy layer of mud on nearly every corner left by tractors as they criss-cross the farmland of this rural locale. It's a bit like skating, and the Evo is a live wire; some corners it hooks up gloriously, others it's understeering and then oversteering in the same corner as the grip level plummets without warning.

It's not the Evo's fault, for it affects the Impreza just the same, but jumping into the Subaru really highlights the differences between the cars. With the Mitsubishi's hard frown in my rear-view mirror (well, it would be if I could see anything going on back there) I pick up the pace as much as I dare. The RB5 is so different, so obviously more four-wheel drive, the sensation much more of all four corners

of the car scrabbling for grip and clawing at the surface. It doesn't have the Mitsubishi's agility, but it does have a wonderfully natural gait, amazing traction and, of course, an engine you can never tire of. Just one rip through the rev range has a beaming smile plastered all over my face.

Our two old warriors cover ground at pace, if not with quite the same determination as an **evo** group test in the late '90s. The gap between them ebbs and flows, one car gaining through a sequence of bends, the other clawing it back in a different place. When the road is clear I toggle the RB5's front spot lamps and the grey, slippery road glows in a cone of light, the rally vibes gloriously strong.

If you want me to call a winner then I'm going to disappoint you, because I'm certainly not about to split them. Like two geriatric F1 drivers racing to the TV room in an old folks home, this pair will be trying to outdo each other until the end of time: red versus blue; Burns and McRae versus Mäkinen. You may prefer one over the other, but I think most will appreciate both. They remain two of the finest driver's cars ever created. ✕



Subaru Impreza RB5 WR Sport

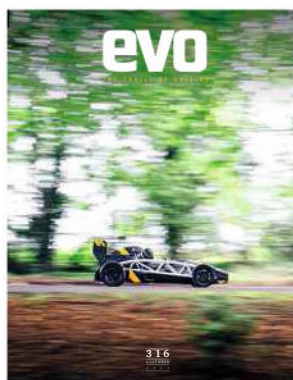
Engine Flat-four, 1994cc, turbocharged **Power** 237bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 258lb ft @ 3500rpm **Weight** 1235kg **Power-to-weight** 195bhp/ton **0-60mph** 5.2sec
Top speed 144mph **Price new** £27,545 (1999) **Value today** From £17,500
evo rating ★★★★★

THE THRILL OF DRIVING
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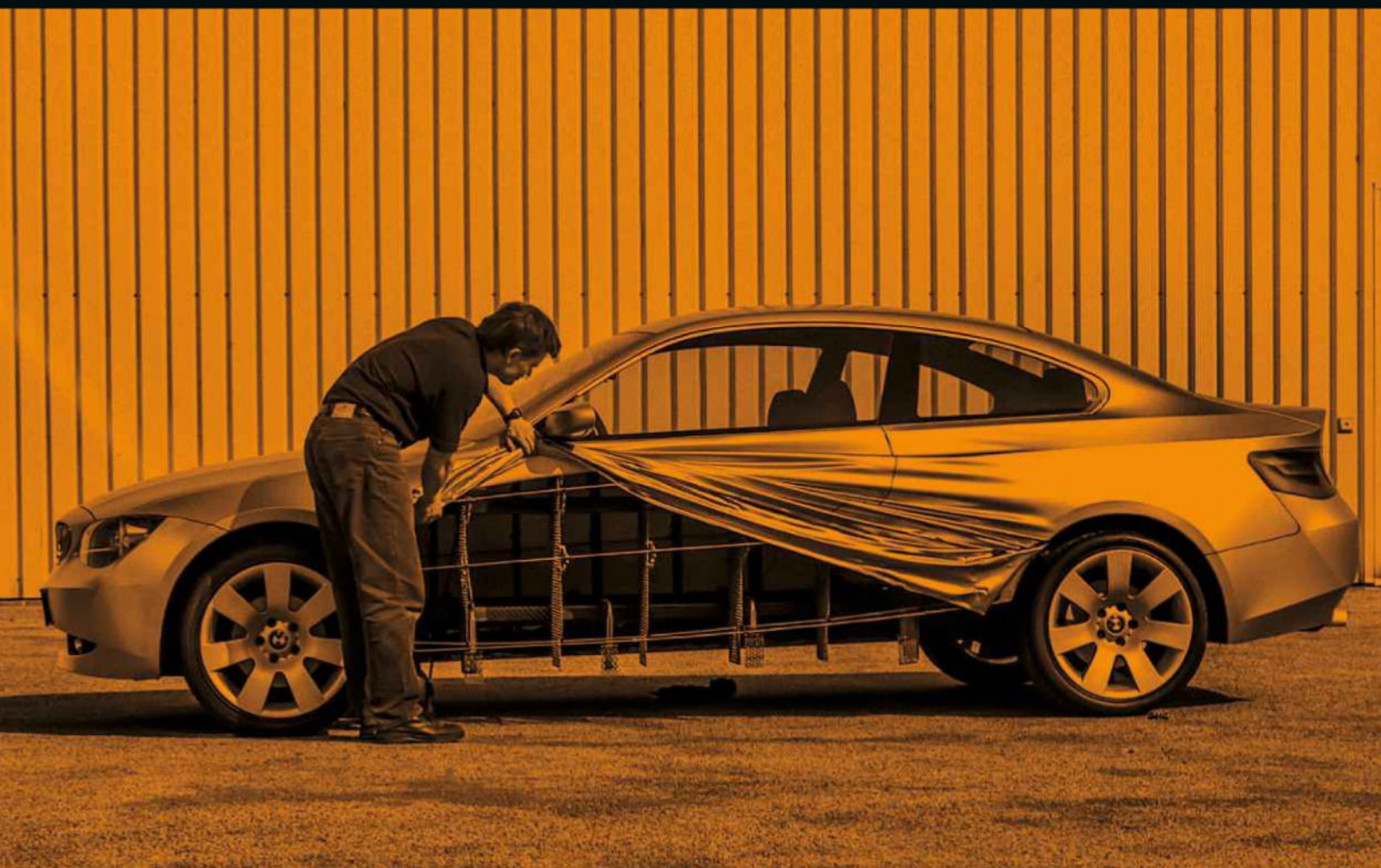


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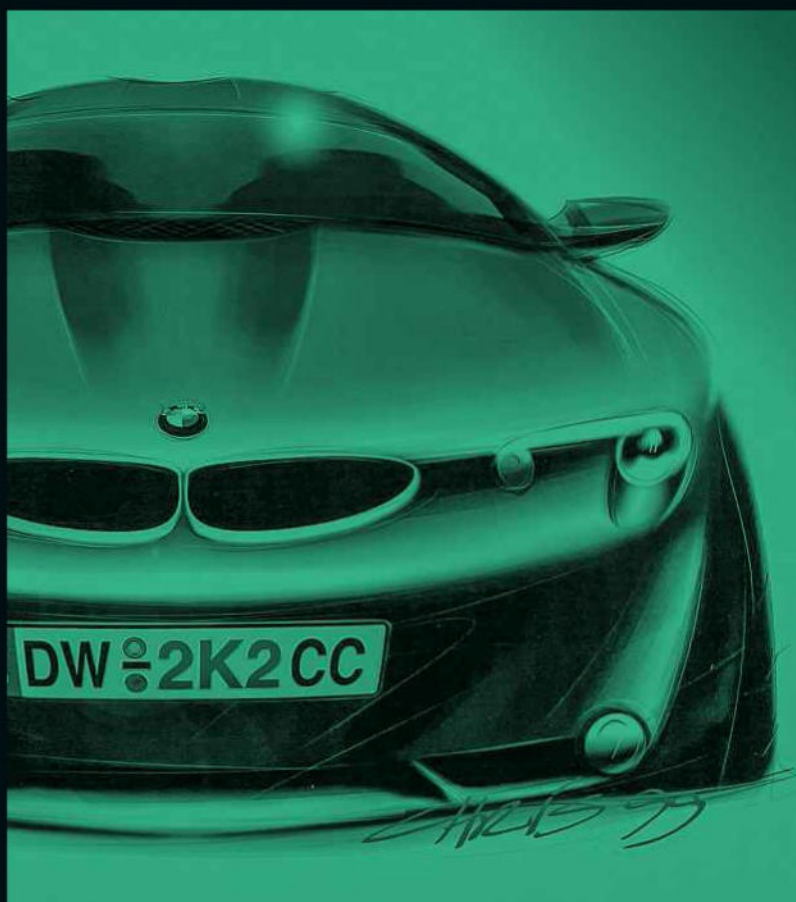
ACCESS



For every BMW model that reaches the showroom, there are numerous prototypes and concepts that have existed only behind the scenes – until now

by STEVE SAXTY

ALL



AREAS

HIS *SECRET FORDS* BOOKS LIFTED THE lid on countless fascinating Ford road car projects that never saw the light of day. Now Steve Saxty has turned his attention to BMW.

In *BMW by Design*, Saxty unearths the stories behind some of the brand's most iconic models, as well as many more that never made production. Over the coming pages the author shares some of his favourite discoveries – along with a host of previously unseen images – to provide an insight into some of BMW's design greats.



The road to the 1-series

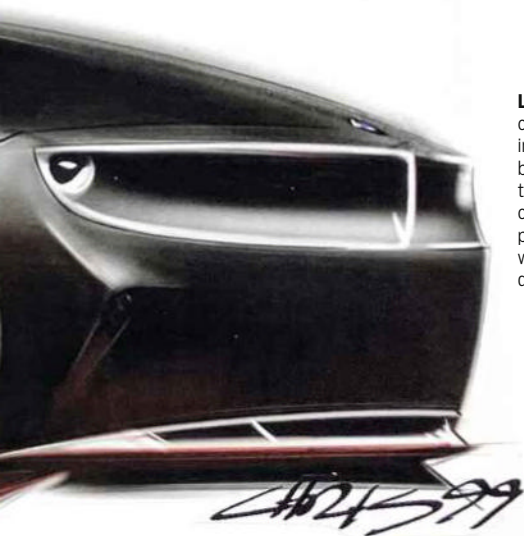
THE BMW 1M COUPÉ HAS ALWAYS BEEN an icon-in-waiting, but I hadn't realised what a fascinating backstory it had. The idea kicked off in the mid-'90s as a skunkworks project – to reinvent the much-loved BMW 2002. I had only seen one photo of it but knew a number of people who worked on the project, codenamed 2K2 (a 2002 for the year 2002). Although lacking the overtly retro look of the Z8 or BMW Mini, designer Andreas Zapatinas conceived a 2002-style car featuring the shark-nose front of a classic '70s BMW. It went nowhere until engineer (and 2002 owner) Ralf Langmeier asked design boss Chris Bangle if it could be used for a novel manufacturing idea he'd had.

The clever concept was to reskin the 3-series Coupé with a lightweight composite body and strip it of heavy, expensive components such as the bonnet gas struts and hi-fi to bring it in under 1000kg. Designer Thomas Plath updated Zapatinas' design and the car was built into a fully drivable runner. To my delight, I found that the car still existed, and the team behind it were still – 20 years later – so passionate about their stillborn 2K2, even though it never made production.

Instead the idea mutated into the first-gen 1-series. The marketing people insisted it was launched as a hatchback, even though designer Chris Chapman conceived his 1-series as a coupe, effectively a son-of-2K2. The 1-series Coupé followed the hatch and eventually led to the 1M Coupé. Here is the CS1 show car, revealed as a convertible so that nobody could guess the roof shape and four per cent smaller in every dimension to trick showgoers into thinking the production car was going to be a tight fit.



**'THE SHOW CAR
WAS REVEALED AS
A CONVERTIBLE SO
NOBODY COULD GUESS
THE ROOF SHAPE'**



Left and below: 2K2 concept, shown here in sketch form, would be resurrected for the 1-series; CSI show car previewed the production 1-series, while keeping some details up its sleeve



Send in the clown shoe

THE STORY BEHIND THE '90S Z3 COUPÉ is delightfully romantic. The Z3 was intended to be made as a four-cylinder-only convertible to compete with the MX-5, but engineer Burkhard Göschel wanted a six-cylinder M-powered car with stronger coupe bodywork. He turned to design boss Chris Bangle who loved the idea, and so three designers submitted ideas and one by junior M designer Markus Syring was selected.

Back in summer last year, Markus told me he had a huge folder of his work that had not been seen, 'for when you write the *Secret BMWs* book, Steve'. Amongst them were Markus's Z3 Coupé sketches and we got chatting. 'We couldn't justify the extra cost for the coupe of a unique body side pressing from A-post to rear fender just to incorporate the Hofmeister kink you see here,' he told me. 'Instead, production cars had a unique rear fender that, like the roadster's, was a bolt-on panel that mated up to the C-pillar.'

The rear lights were also changed for the coupe. 'I got a call summoning me to the Aschheim test track where they had a prototype running,' Marcus says. 'And there's little me, in my mid-20s, with Dr Göschel and Dr Reitzle. They asked me what I thought about the carryover roadster rear lights on the coupe prototype and I said that they looked like a squashed hamburger. Reitzle turns to me and says: "OK – you've got two million Deutsche Marks; change it!"'

Stories like this strike a chord with me, and I'm not alone; one morning my book designer, Adrian Morris, sent me a WhatsApp: 'Look, I just bought a Z3 because of that chapter!'

Below: one of Markus Syring's sketches for the Z3 Coupé; BMW's signature 'Hofmeister kink' in the C-pillar was eventually ruled out for cost reasons







There's more than one way to skin a car

I HADN'T EXPECTED PEOPLE TO GET SO misty-eyed over Gina. When it was revealed in 2007, the fabric-bodied car seemed, well, a bit strange. BMW was already moving on from the contorted 'flame surfacing' of the early 2000s, yet here was a car with twisted fabric surfaces. What I hadn't realised was that it dated back five years earlier to 2002 and left far more of a mark on BMW than any of us knew at the time.

Like all the best ideas, it was born in a bar where a lady – named Gina, of course – was twirling fabric as part of her dance act. The idea was alluring: what if car bodywork could be made from fabric? It's not as daft as it sounds; fabric is lighter than metal, it doesn't need expensive tooling and, of course, it's highly flexible, permitting shapes, features and folded surfaces impossible in a solid material.

When I started my research, I was given a huge trove of images: 'Gina-generators' used to create fabric-surfaced shapes of dashboards and zip-up covers for under-bonnet components. Perhaps most amazing were two photos of an E93 coupe using Gina-style fabric surfacing that was a genuine proposal for the late-2000s car. These images revealed a drivable machine based on a Z8 prototype.

There's one Gina legacy that did reach production: the Z4 M Coupé featured a modified bonnet that distinguished the M version from regular Z4 models. Here, two creases were added along the length of the bonnet using a robotic sweep of a tool that scribed them into the metal. Before Gina, such thinking would have required a far more expensive stamping tool to achieve the same result.

Left: 2007 'Gina' concept was one of the more remarkable show cars we've seen in recent years. **Above:** fabric surfacing was also used for a drivable E93 proposal



Evolution of the sketches

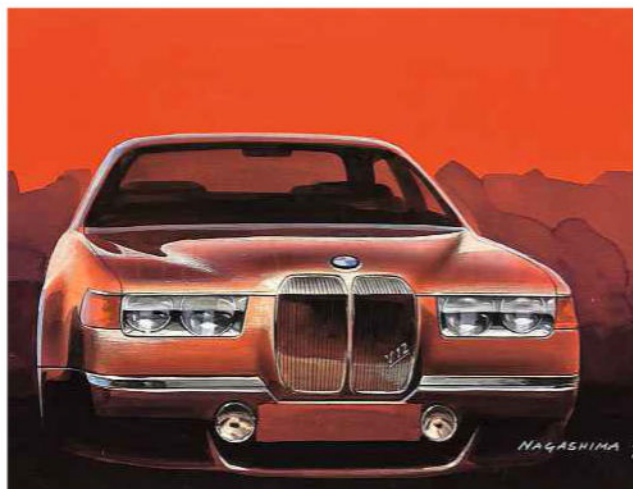
ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT TASKS IN completing a book – apart from selecting the cover and writing the intro – is to find a powerful image to open Chapter 1. I knew what I wanted: to please the classic enthusiasts and owners of modern BMWs equally. The answer was to find a matching pair of design sketches from the '70s and the near-present. The throbbing orange BMW 2002 was the perfect choice, pairing it with an almost perfectly complementary blue and orange sketch of the 2002 Hommage from a few years ago. That way readers could see the contrast between the draughtsman-like precision of the '70s compared to the digitally colour-saturated images of today.

The 2002 was drawn by Manfred Rennen, who joined BMW in the mid-'60s and worked as a stylist for over two decades. His rendering shows every detail, right down to the screws on the wheelarches, the whole thing brought to life on vivid orange Canson paper.

Other sketches in the book reveal further techniques, such as the depiction of the Z1 as a stripped-to-the-bone roadster, drawn in the mid-'80s by Stefan Stark. For this, Stark used chalk and marker on vellum paper. 'My intention was to come up with a dynamic and beautiful atmosphere, the sort of vibe you get when you drive out of a rain shower back into the sun,' he says.

The M8 convertible was drawn by its designer Jacek Peplowski. 'I painted rather than sketched it,' he says, 'while trying to capture the mechanical muscles lurking beneath the skin, ready to deliver the car's performance. The colours were inspired by late evening visits to the Californian desert, where sunset displays an incredible range of tones. And the car... it's almost as though its presence would heat up the environment to a sun-like temperature.'

Clockwise from top left: Manfred Rennen's sketch of the 2002, Jacek Peplowski's M8 painting, and Stefan Stark's rendering of a pared-back Z1



The eternal quest of the 9-series

SOMETIMES I FELT LIKE I WAS WRITING a thriller laden with plot twists as the decades passed, car designs lived and died, and the designers and execs came and went. One of the recurring themes was BMW's eternal quest to fill the yawning space above the 7-series and below the Rolls-Royce models – call it the 9, or even the 11-series space. It's no mystery why BMW would want a presence in that £170k-£300k price range, for that's exactly where Bentley sits.

In the mid-'90s BMW began its tie-up with Rolls-Royce/Bentley to supply V8 and V12 engines. At the same time, the design team began thinking about how a more premium 7-series might look in the 2000s. Above is designer Joji Nagashima's idea for an upmarket V12-powered BMW, long before Rolls-Royce became a BMW brand.

After BMW acquired Rolls-Royce the product planners began thinking about a premium platform that could underpin a super high-end BMW and a more affordable Rolls-Royce. The Concept Coupé, slated for production under the codename F05, was to have spawned a premium BMW coupe, convertible and four-door. Sadly, the production version of this stunning one-off show car by current Kia design boss Karim Habib was cancelled after the economy crashed in 2008.



Above and below left: mid-'90s vision for how a super-premium BMW could look, and the later Concept Coupé

Right: author Steve Saxty (left), book designer Adrian Morris (right) and BMW design director Adrian van Hooydonk (centre) with Steve's three-book BMW design history

Orange is the new black

THERE ARE TWO REASONS WHY THE three-book set of *BMW Behind The Scenes* has a bright orange cover. When I met Adrian van Hooydonk, I quickly discovered that BMW's chief designer is – like all his team – an enthusiast for car books and, in particular, car book design. One Tuesday night over dinner, Adrian asked me: 'Do you think your book designer would be willing to fly over and chat? How about Thursday?'

This was when I asked: 'So what colour should we make it?' The tall Dutchman replied: 'Orange, of course!' And he went on: 'I really do like orange by the way, not just because I'm from Holland! Even one of my classic BMWs is that colour.' Adrian has a dry sense of humour, so I wondered how serious he was until one of the designers told me: 'I once tried to draw my ideas up in orange, but Adrian is too smart for that and he knew exactly what I was up to!'

The other story around the colour orange goes back decades and is one I'm pleased to have discovered. Paul Bracq is the legendary BMW design chief from the early '70s; when we discovered a load of his work that had never been seen in print, I made contact with him. One of his most celebrated creations is the E25 Turbo show car from 1972, with a ruby red body with volcanic orange front and rear bumpers. The red was the same colour as his Porsche 356, but the orange? It was inspired by the French Air Force trainer jets outside his old studio, painted with Day-Glo orange 'safety paint'. When they started using orange stickers, Paul asked for the unused paint, which eventually became an iconic BMW colour.





From V10 to i8

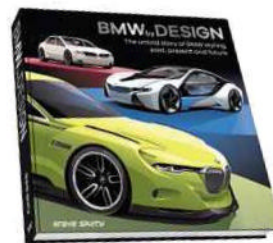
WERNER HAUMAYR IS ONE OF THE most senior people in BMW Design. One day we were chatting away, and he laughed: 'I reckon that every day there's someone in this place sketching away designing an M1 under their desk. You could do a book on the M1s we never made!'

Werner is probably right. One of the revelations in *BMW by Design* is Project I16, the never-seen version of the Vision M Next that was 95 per cent production-ready as a 2023 latter-day supercar.

The car pictured above, on the other hand, did break cover. It's the M1 Hommage – but not as we know it. The 2008 show car was revealed in a throbbing red colour, was made of solid resin, and the whole project was completed in just four months. How did the design team do it? Today it's more common, but 16 years ago it was a radical idea to sketch a design digitally and then

mill it out of a giant block of foam. That's why this car is white – it was made from Styrofoam and was used to evaluate the design at full size within weeks of getting started.

The M1 Hommage was intended to hit the road; I was given engineering drawings for it to put in the book, showing where the engine would have gone. And what an engine it was, nothing less than the legendary F1-derived V10 motor fitted to the contemporary M5. Perhaps sadly for fans of M-powered sports cars, the project went no further – the V10 was too tight a fit in the M1 Hommage without a major redesign. And when that redesign came, BMW changed direction and responded to critics who said it should make more eco-friendly cars – the result was the hybrid-powered BMW Vision EfficientDynamics that spawned the hybrid i8. ❌



***BMW BY DESIGN** tells the story of the company's design department, its stylists and the cars they have created, across the decades. The book can be purchased on its own for £79.95, or as part of **BMW Behind The Scenes**, a three-book set that also features **BMW's Hidden Gems**, revealing untold stories and unseen BMWs, plus **BMW Art by Design**, which takes readers through a gallery of design sketches, narrated by the BMW designers that drew them. Go to www.stevesaxty.com/bmw*



by JAMES TAYLOR

911

HEAV

What's more exciting than a 911 GT3? A racing one. Or two of them. This year Porsche's 911 GT3 R will tackle Le Mans, and its GT3 Cup car will race on six separate continents. We drive them both



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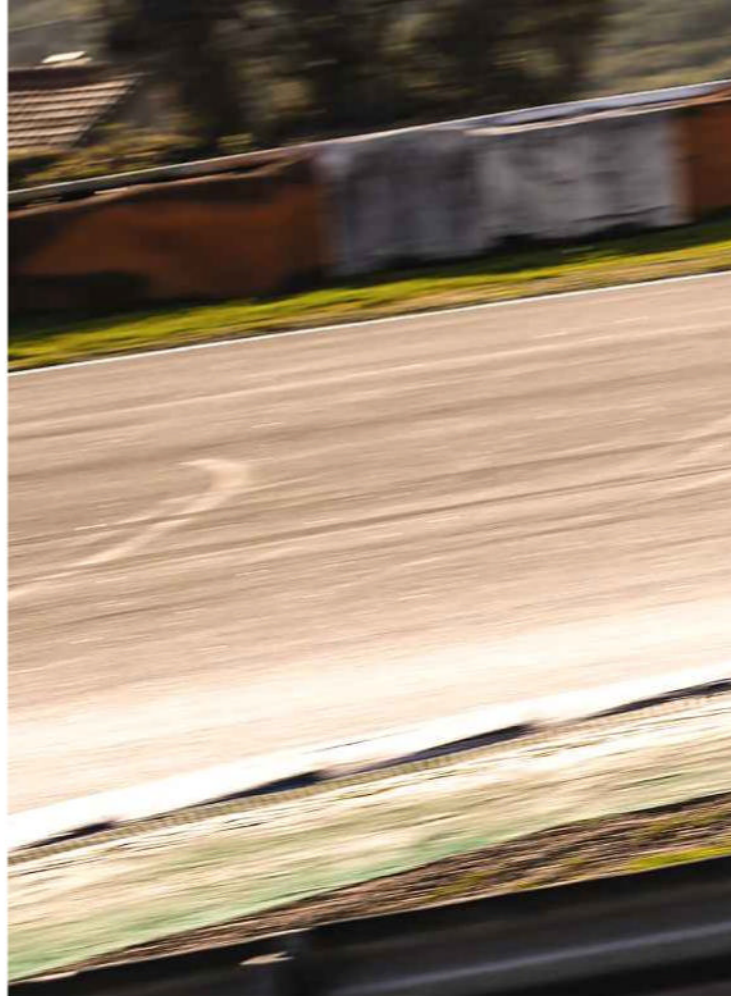
THERE'S AN ATMOSPHERE TO Estoril. Not an electric, dramatic one, more a semi-sleepy, half-forgotten one. The hotel close to the circuit's gates that in a previous life would have been heaving with patrons during Portuguese Grand Prix weekends is abandoned. The track within the gates, half an hour's drive from Lisbon, is faded but still smart; packed with history without feeling like a museum piece. I really like it here. F1 last visited in 1996; MotoGP in 2012. But it's still an active circuit, and a well-maintained one, used nowadays for various racing events, car launches and testing.

Today is a bit of a blend of all three. In the pitlane is a contingent of engineers from Porsche Motorsport and two different, equally immaculate, racing 911s. It's a timely moment to test both of them: this year the new LMGT3 racing class replaces the more costly GTE category in the World Endurance Championship, meaning GT3-spec racing cars will now race at Le Mans, in the hands of private teams. Among them will be a pair of Porsche 911 GT3 Rs, just like the stunning blue/lime-green car here.

The Porsche Supercup, meanwhile, has just celebrated its 30th birthday: the Formula 1 support race championship for identical race-spec 911s kicked off in 1993. The domestic Carrera Cup championships around the world, which use the same 911 GT3 Cup car, have been running for far longer, starting with the original Carrera Cup Germany series in the '80s. On an average in-season weekend, at least five Carrera Cup championships are running around the world, with around 80 cars in action across multiple continents, including Europe, Asia, North and South America, Australia and the Middle East. One of the closest-fought is the Carrera Cup GB, supporting the British Touring Car Championship.

Since 1990, more than 5000 – five *thousand!* – dedicated 911 Cup cars have been built, from the first 964-based cars through to today's 992 generation. The gold car here is exactly the 5000th car built. Following racing action as the VIP guest car in the Supercup (the driver name stickers in the windows show that it was last raced by ex-F1 driver Timo Glock) it will shortly go on permanent display in the Porsche museum. But not before *evo* has had a stint behind its wheel.

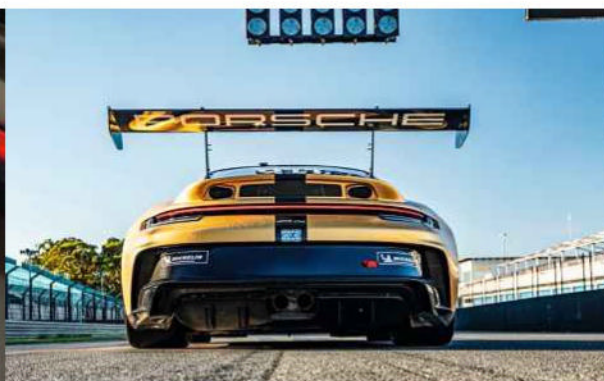
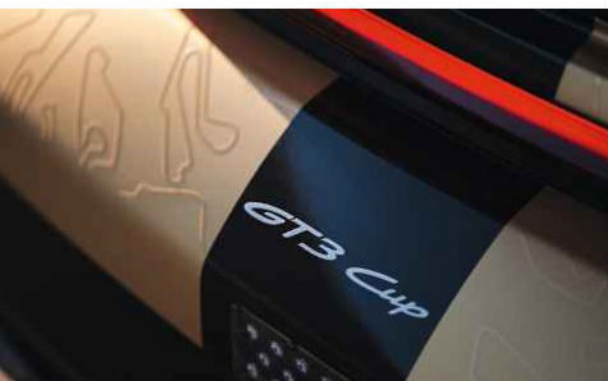
'It's built on the same production line as 911 road cars at Zuffenhausen,' explains the car's project leader Jan Feldmann, who was involved in the 992 GT3 Cup car's creation from 'Minute One' (although he stresses that many people at Porsche's Flacht centre developed the car: 'It has many fathers,' he says). The 992 Cup will shortly begin its third season of racing following its introduction in 2022. Feldmann's





**'THE 911 CUP DEFINITELY LOOKS
LIKE A JUNIOR GT3 RACING CAR.
THE R IS THE SENIOR ONE'**





Porsche 911 GT3 Cup

Engine Flat-six, 3996cc **Power** 503bhp @ 8400rpm
Torque 346lb ft @ 6150rpm **Weight** 1260kg (approx)
Power-to-weight 406bhp/ton (approx) **Price** £177,900+VAT

evo rating ★★★★★

'THE CUP IS A BARELY SILENCED, HOWLING RACING CAR THAT DRIVES EXACTLY THE WAY IT LOOKS'

enthusiasm – and that of the rest of the Porsche motorsport team – for the Cup car is palpable. 'A lot of my heart is lost in this car,' he grins.

'It's different from engineering a more technologically complex car such as the GT3 R,' he adds, nodding toward the wider, giganta-winged endurance racer. 'The Cup car has to be built many, many times.' At full capacity, Porsche is building five a day, he explains. 'But that brings the cost down,' he adds. In the UK, a Carrera Cup car costs around £180,000 – similar money to a 911 Turbo S road car. Before tax, that is; racing cars are invariably sold sans VAT, and 911 Cup car sales are prioritised for race teams over individuals.

Compared with the previous 991 Cup car, which had a reputation as a challenging machine to get the best from, Porsche has worked to make the 992 a more forgiving car on the limit, with a wider track and greater downforce. In response to customer demand, it's also allowed for the car to be fitted with traction control as an option, in addition to ABS. The top Cup championships – including the Supercup – run with neither system. 'If you learn to race with no TC and no ABS, you *know* how to drive a car,' Feldmann says. 'And if you are at the front in these cars, you are probably going to do well in your career.' Since Carrera Cup alumni include a few overall Le Mans 24 Hours winners, such as Nick Tandy, he has a point.

One other noteworthy feature in response to customer feedback: it's easier to install a passenger seat, for teams to give passenger rides to guests and sponsors. Something we're about to get a taste of. The distant shriek of the gold car out on track turns to a nearby growl as it rumbles down the pitlane and hits its marks. Behind the wheel is Danish driver Bastian Buus, 2023 Supercup champion (the youngest champ yet, at 20 years old), who's been warming the car up. Our first experience of it will be from the passenger seat.

It's an eye-opening introduction – quite literally. Watching the GoPro footage back later, I see my eyes widen momentarily where I'm waiting to see where the braking point is for one of Estoril's quicker corners, only to discover there isn't one. Or not much of one at any rate. The Cup car's limits – particularly in terms of entry speed – are far higher than I'd expected.

Time to find out for myself. Having squeezed through the roll-cage and into the driver's seat, the sense of quality is impressive. This racing car feels better built and more smartly finished than some mass-production road cars I've sat in. Bodysells used for Cup cars have one difference versus 911 road cars – they're entirely painted

inside as well as out, so if a team needs to remove any plates or panels, it always looks neatly uniform. 'We had to teach the robots to reach further inside the car to do it,' Feldmann says. This is definitely a German car.

There's a wide range of adjustment for the cut-down steering wheel's column – getting drivers of all heights comfortable in the car was another design goal for the 992-generation car – but once the safety net is clicked into place and the lightened door clicked shut, there's the typical GT racing car sense of being buried low inside the shell. And the car feels big: the GT3 Cup uses the wider bodysell from the 992 Turbo as part of its quest for greater stability. And stability is something this car has in spades, I'm about to discover.

A hiss of air as the car is released from its in-built pneumatic jacks and sets its slick tyres down on the ground. Click the right-hand paddle into gear (the Cup car uses a six-speed sequential dog-ring gearbox, running through a racing differential, a big weight saving over the road car transmission) and use the clutch pedal to pull away. Clutch take-up is light and smooth, not a switch like some racing cars. Any half-hearted application of the throttle in the lower gears is punished with a nodding-dog jerk through the driveline; better to bury the accelerator and let the car sit smoothly on its 60kph pit limiter. I've already braced my neck muscles when I release the limiter at the pitlane stripe, but my head still hits the restraint as the GT3 Cup catapults forward.

Its 4-litre, 503bhp engine is based on that of the standard GT3 road car rather than the RS model. The sound it makes is deliciously savage. Combined with the whine of the straight-cut gears, there's an extra serrated edge to the six horizontal cylinders thrashing away behind you that isn't there in the road car. This car also uses the shoutier Supercup exhausts, which take advantage of the relaxed noise regs at Grand Prix weekends. Earplugs are essential.

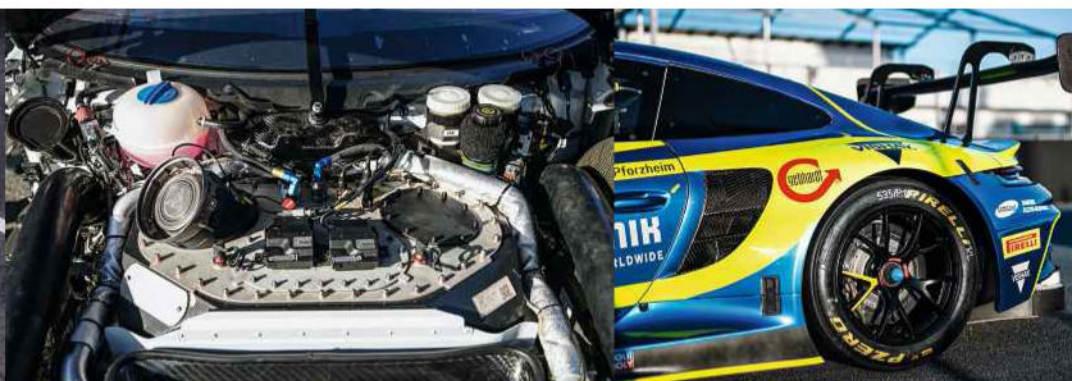
The way it stops is as exciting as the way it goes. You might need a little tweak of the wheel here and there to trim its line if you're hitting the four-piston Brembos hard enough to trigger the ABS, but the car is remarkably stable. And feel and feedback through the pedal is fantastic. In fact that's what defines the car – feel and feedback. You're so in touch with what's going on that the GT3 Cup's limits feel very approachable.

On Porsche's recommendation (or polite request, given the car's provenance), we're running with both TC and ABS on, but it's only when you really lean on the throttle out of Estoril's first-gear bus-stop chicane that you see blue lights winking on the dash, letting you know you've triggered the TC. Within a couple of laps you're happy to leave your braking as late as you dare from 160mph or so for the 120-degree Turn One, knowing there's an electronic ABS cushion to lean on should you need it. But the feel through the pedal is so precise that you rarely need to rouse the electronics. In the dry, at least.

For all the GT3 Cup's stability and approachability, you're really driving it; correcting the steering for weight transfer in all stages of the corner, choosing a line to suit the rear-biased weight distribution and finding time on (and off) the brakes. The driver makes the difference (suffice to say, I'm a good bit slower than Bastian). Above

Porsche 911 GT3 R

Engine Flat-six, 4194cc **Power** 557bhp (est)
@ 8000rpm (est) **Torque** 400lb ft (est) @ 6000rpm (est)
Weight 1250kg (approx, depending on BoP)
Power-to-weight 453bhp/ton (approx) **Price** £435,500+VAT
evo rating ★★★★★



'IN THE GT3 R, YOU FEEL THE DOWNFORCE. THE SPEED YOU CAN ROLL INTO CORNERS IS ABSURD'

all, it's *fun*. Not all racing cars are; they're there to do a job. But, perhaps due to this car's inherent shared DNA with the 911 road car, it's as enjoyable as a pure sports car around Estoril. More so, in fact, because it's a barely silenced, howling racing car that drives exactly the way it looks. Another design goal for the 992 Cup after the 991, incidentally; Porsche wanted it to *look* more like a racing car, after some customers commented that the 911 GT3 RS in their garage looked meaner than the race car parked alongside it. With its wider body and more prominent aero, the 992 Cup definitely looks like a junior GT3 racing car.

NOW FOR THE SENIOR ONE. THE GT3 R ISN'T BUILT on the 911 production line, and although it incorporates elements of the road car's structure, regs allow it to mutate the 911's overall dimensions. It's more than two metres wide, and the rear wing is so huge that to take a picture of the car on my phone, I need to take two, then three steps back to fit it all in. The 992 GT3 R made its debut last year and, compared with the previous 991 GT3 R, the engine has been enlarged to 4.2 litres. It's still a naturally aspirated flat-six, and the whole thing is tilted forward by 5.5 degrees, making space for a longer diffuser. In GT3 racing, downforce is all-important.

As an aside, I have to confess it's a little discombobulating to talk about two different cars called a Porsche 911 GT3, only one of which competes in a category called GT3 racing. So, as much to get it straight in my own head as to patronise anyone reading this, the GT3 Cup is named after the 911 GT3 road car (and shares some components with it). The GT3 R is a more bespoke, but still road-related, racing car built to GT3 regulations to be sold to customer teams and race against GT3 cars from other manufacturers. All manner of GT racing organisations around the world allow GT3 cars to enter, from the British GT Championship to the German DTM, to the Spa and Nürburgring 24 Hours to, from this year on, the WEC. (Appropriately/confusingly, the 911 GT3 road car was also originally named after an earlier iteration of the GT3 racing class.)

Given that GT3 racing is all about pro drivers teamed with amateurs, one of the goals for the 992-gen GT3 R was to possess easier handling at the limit, as well as look after its tyres better in long stints. To that end, weight distribution has moved forward a little, and both track and wheelbase have increased for a more stable footprint – similar goals to those set for the 992 Cup car.

Inside, while the digital screen behind the wheel is the

same as the Cup's, there are a good few other differences. The seat stays put while the pedal box slides to establish your driving position. In the centre of the dash is a rear-facing camera, to help spot lunging prototypes lapping the GT3 field in endurance races. Everything feels more substantial; more serious.

You pull away by clicking a clutch paddle: there are only two pedals, and the brake is neatly positioned to suit both left- or right-foot brakers more easily than the Cup car's production-spec pedalbox. Exiting the pits is a smoother experience, and that extends to how the GT3 R drives across the board.

I thought the Cup car rode the kerbs well, but the GT3 R is like a limo. For what looks like a rock-hard racing car on the outside, there's a reasonable amount of body roll. And for a car wearing such enormous slick tyres, it's very communicative: as in the Cup, you feel exactly what's going on. What's more, you feel the downforce, even in the slow stuff. The speed you can roll into corners is absurd – and addictive.

As is the braking. I'm leaving my braking point for Turn One at the end of Estoril's long pit straight later than in the Cup car, yet every time it could have been later still. The brakes don't *feel* as nice as the Cup car's: the pedal has a long travel, and there's what feels like a momentary pause when you hit it hard (the merest fraction of a fraction of a second, but which feels like a long time at the end of a sixth-gear straight), perhaps while the ABS assesses the situation and distributes force accordingly. But my goodness does it get the car stopped.

It still feels like a 911 in terms of weight transfer; unlike with the 911 RSR that ran in the now-discontinued high-tech GTE class, Porsche doesn't have the luxury of making this car mid-engined. But it's intuitive, confidence-inspiring and, again, fun. I'd expected to enjoy the GT3 Cup more than the GT3 R – the Cup is more of a wrestling match, more of a car you *drive* in a traditional sense. But there's something about the GT3 R. You can take lines you can't take in the Cup. You can carry entry speed that seems impossible. As amazing as the Cup car is, this is five steps beyond.

I don't want to stop driving it. But a longer test in a GT3 R is an unlikely dream. Motorsport insiders reckon one kilometre in a GT3 R costs about €45. Which means my five laps of Estoril set Porsche back about €940. But to put the 'cheaper' running costs of GT3 versus GTE in perspective, the 911 RSR's gearbox alone cost €125,000.

As we leave Estoril's paddock to its semi-slumber, both cars are circulating, the GT3 R's slightly deeper, more resonant note offset by the zingier Supercup car's soprano pipes. The GT3 R blew my mind but the GT3 Cup is the car that would equip a serious professional driver with the skills to extract the maximum from it.

It's also left me with even greater respect for **evo's** 2023 Car of the Year winner, the road-going 911 GT3 RS. Thanks to the magic of active aero, it can lap as quickly, or quicker in certain circumstances, than the GT3 Cup car can on slicks. Given that the Cup car has just recalibrated my understanding of entry speeds and stability (before the GT3 R shifted the goalposts once more), that achievement seems even more astounding than ever. ❏

KEEPING THE FAITH

by RICHARD PORTER

evo has kept faith with the thrill of driving for 25 years now, but which car makers continue to show the same devotion to the cause?

AS BON JOVI SANG ON THAT HIT OF THEIRS THAT'S NOT THE ONE THAT everyone knows, oh, we've got to keep the faith. And for the past 25 years that's exactly what **evo** has done, hinged around the simple premise that, above all, we seek the thrill of driving. But while **evo** itself has a proud quarter century of keeping the faith for people who crave that thrill, not all car makers have maintained such dedication. So, as **evo** celebrates in the year of its big two-five, let's take stock of the car company landscape and see which well-known names have followed, or stepped off, the path of righteousness.

At the top of the tree there's no doubt that faith has been maintained in the devotion to the driving thrill cause. At **Ferrari**, for example, the last 25 years have seen the 430 Scuderia and the 812 Competizione and the glorious 458 Speciale. And while you might turn your nose up at today's Purosangue, you can't deny that most Ferraris are still deeply thrilling things, just as they were two and a half decades ago. Most **Porsches** too, and there are more to choose from because 25 years ago they didn't make the Cayman GT4 or the 911 Carrera T or the left-field 911 Dakar. Obviously they didn't sell the Cayenne, Macan and Taycan either, but generally we can conclude that the belief is strong within Weissach. As for **Lamborghini**, 25 years ago the thrill came from trying to keep a Diablo pointing the right way without soiling your undercrackers, whereas now the faithful can enjoy the genuine talents of a Huracán Tecnica without involuntarily yelping nine Hail Marys in a row.

Lotus is a more troubling case. When **evo** was born it was rooted in the simple yet delightful pleasures of the Elise and its derivatives, and no one had the faith burning more brightly within its corporate soul. Except maybe Caterham. Now the Elise is dead and **evo** has some reservations about the dynamics of the Emira, never mind the fundamentals of the Eletre and the Emeya. Needs must when it comes to shifting units and heading towards where the world is going, but is Lotus losing a little of its faith in the process? That's one



to revisit in 25 years' time. And how to judge **Maserati**, a company that always seems keen to be faithful in principle? Well, God loves a trier. See also **Jaguar**, which has served us sharper cars in recent years, notably the F-type and the sensational Project 8, but is about to undergo a hard reset for the EV age. We'll see how that pans out for faith seekers.

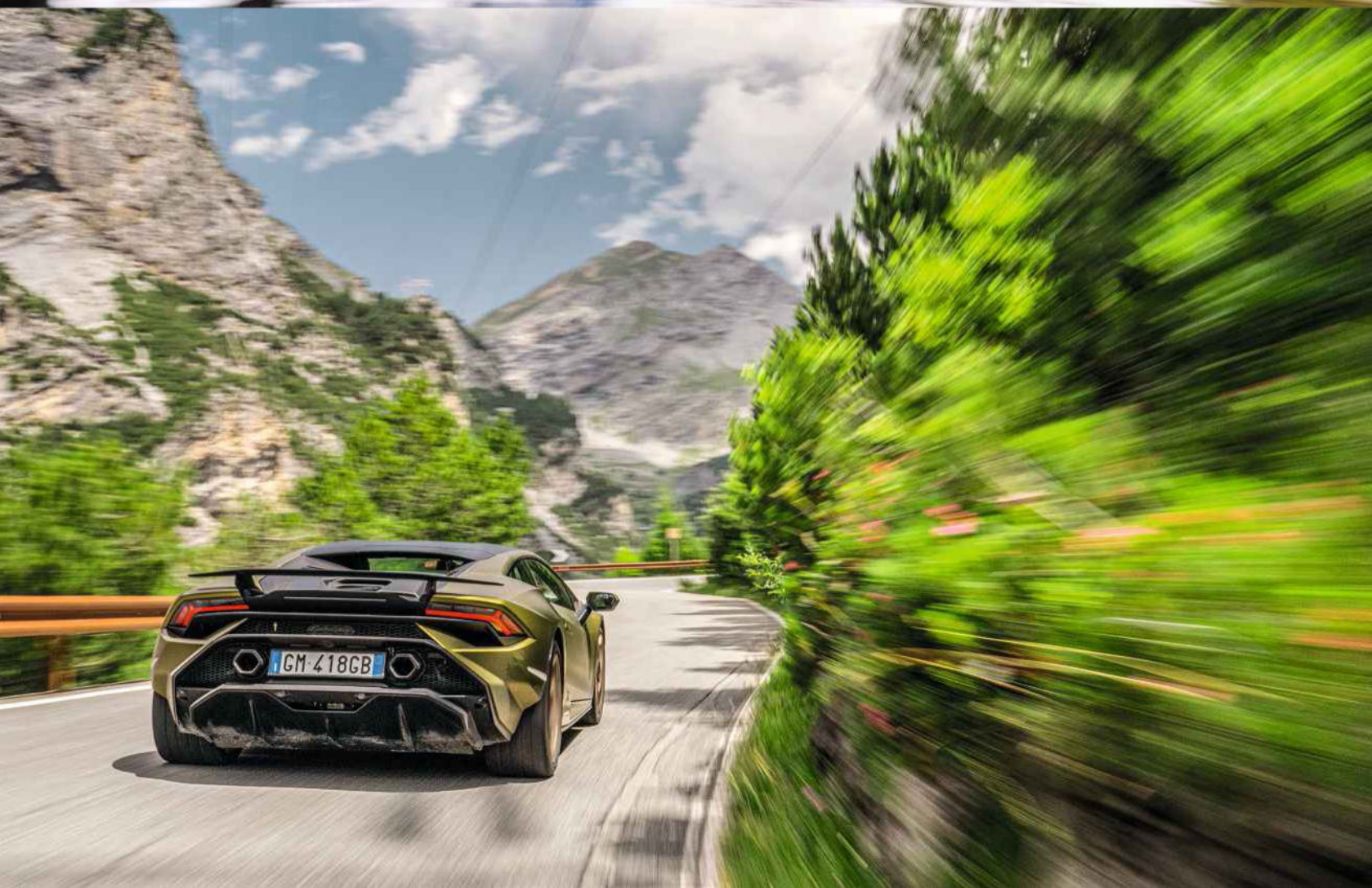
In the last 25 years the church of **evo** has been well served by **BMW**. In 1998 they were selling the E36 M3 and two years later replaced it with the fabulous E46 version, which sat alongside the cracking E39 M5. But even the un-M versions of BMWs had a fundamental goodness to them if you liked driving. Some of that natural talent has ebbed away from the normal stuff but you'd be hard pressed to drive the recent M5 CS and argue that the M department was anything less than fully faithful to the **evo** cause. As for **Audi**, theirs has always been a strange devotion, often based on entertaining sledgehammers, and you can still find some of that brand of faithfulness in various RS-badged cars, but with the death of the R8 a little bit of faith is lost. The increasingly V8-less AMG range raises the same concern with **Mercedes**. But at least both companies give the impression they're still trying. And that's not something you could say with total confidence about the car makers of France...

Clockwise from above: BMW's M5 CS, Honda's Civic Type R, Mazda's MX-5 and Nissan's Z are all products of manufacturers who remain steadfast in their commitment to the thrill of driving

When **evo** started, **Peugeot** was making the wonderful 306 GTI and 106 Rallye. It lost its way after that, then offered a glimmer of hope with decent GTIs in the 208 and 308 ranges, only to dash that hope by deleting these cars without successors. Today its vaguely sporty offering is the not-entirely-successful 508 PSE. **Renault** is almost as guilty, culling the terrific Renault Sport versions of the Clio and Mégane to leave only the glorious Alpine A110 as evidence that the faith still burns within its Parisian Technocentre. If you want to see a full French faith evaporation look to **Citroën**, which once delighted those of an **evo** mind with the hilarious VTS-badged versions of the Saxo and Xsara. In 2024 it sells nothing that would give you that thrill.

Many miles away in Japan, the faith seems to burn more brightly. **Nissan**, for example, may not make any more of those unassuming but amusing Almera GTIs and Primera GTs of 25 years ago, but the new Z shows it's not given up on driving thrills and, after more facelifts than Simon Cowell, the GT-R is hanging on in there too. Just a shame that, right now, neither is sold in the UK. **Honda** doesn't offer a platter of thrills in its Euro range but the ongoing brilliance of the Civic Type R shows the faith is there and even its dreary SUVs can't kill it, while **Mazda's** devotion to the MX-5 demonstrates an understanding of







driving thrills, even if those spicy MPS models elsewhere in the range are now just a distant memory.

Then we come to **Toyota** where, we might argue, the faith burns brighter than ever. When **evo** arrived we were just about to get the third-generation MR2 and that enjoyably lightweight iteration of the Celica, at the time signalling a new focus on driving thrills. Twenty-five years on and there's the GR Yaris and the GR86 on the slate, plus the BMW-based Supra. Toyota knew, and still knows, about the thrill of driving. It just doesn't see the need to waste it on, say, the Yaris Cross.

We've seen companies keep the faith and lose the faith, but what about companies that in the last 25 years have found the faith for the first time? **Hyundai**, for example. At **evo**'s birth it was showing signs of trying with the blobby Coupe, but now there's no questioning the South Koreans' faith with the brilliant i20 N and i30 N. They've even brought that belief to the EV world with the impressive Ioniq 5 N. If only sister company **Kia** had been able to keep up the impressive level of worship it hit with the delightful and now sadly departed Stinger.

If a relative newcomer like Hyundai can show great devotion, it's a shame a stalwart like **Fiat** can't do more beyond the funny but flawed Abarth versions of the 500. Sadly, the days of the Panda 100HP or the '90s Coupé seem

Clockwise from left: Lamborghini Huracán Tecnica, Porsche 911 Dakar, Toyota Supra, VW Up GTI and Ferrari 812 Competizione – all staying true to the cause

long gone and Fiat's entire belief system seems pinned on kettle-shaped little hatchbacks with increasingly farty exhausts. Or kettle-shaped little electric hatchbacks with a speaker to fake the fartiness.

Volkswagen is no stranger to a bit of sound fakery either and its idea of what constitutes a thrilling drive has at times tested the faithful, as anyone who tried a non-turbo Mk4 Golf GTI will attest. But the resurrection of the Golf GTI from the Mk5 onwards has restored our belief in VW's faith and occasional gems like the Mk7 Golf R and the Up GTI show the faith can be strong. They're even promising GTI goodness in future EV ranges and if, like Hyundai, they can see that through with actual thrills, then truly they are believers.

So, what of **Ford**? There's a company that has seemed consistently faithful ever since **evo** arrived into a world that contained the Puma, the Mondeo ST200 and the sweet-driving original Focus. To this day, even a basic Fiesta remains a wonderful way to get from A to B with a big grin on your F, and the ST version is an absolute hoot. We just have to hope that as Euro Ford kills its hatchback babies and puts its hopes on SUVs and EVs, the faith can be maintained. Because, to quote once again the Reverend Jonathan Bon Jovi, Lord, we've got to keep the faith, ooh yeah, ooh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah [instrumental break].

FUNDAMENTALLY EVO



JOHN BARKER

Why I admire... Caterham

I FIRST DROVE A CATERHAM SEVEN IN 1987. It had a Ford 1.7-litre Kent engine on twin-choke carburettors and flowing front wings that acted like umbrellas, but the intensity of the driving experience was extraordinary. It was raw and loud and exhilarating like it should have

been illegal, yet once I'd acclimatised to the noise, the buffeting and the explosive performance, I realised that the Seven was brilliantly responsive, agile and controllable. And so small that you could thread it down lanes and still play with power oversteer. The Seven of today is no different, just better finished and, if you want, even more potent.

Caterham got the rights from Lotus in 1973 and developed the Seven first out of necessity to keep it in production and then to improve it. For me, the Rover K-series cars remain the high spot, with the original Superlight the pinnacle – six-speed 'box, limited-slip diff and 135bhp. The R300, R400 and R500 Evo were brilliant, but in a 400kg car, 135bhp is as much as you need.

Yet Caterham was stalked by the fear that the Seven would go out of fashion or be legislated out of existence and created the 21 and, later, the wide-bodied, independently suspended CSR. We covered the CSR's development extensively in **evo** and it was a great car, tangibly more capable. We had an amazing time racing one at Spa (pictured above). But the 103bhp K-series that I raced for a season back in '92 was just as absorbing and entertaining and every Seven long-termer we've run has had the standard chassis. It's simply more exciting, more challenging, more visceral.

That's why the 'original' Seven hasn't just survived, it still thrives, selling in the hundreds each year and providing thrilling one-make racing for racers and spectators around the world. The Seven was a winning formula when Colin Chapman created it in 1957, and an astonishing 67 years later, thanks to Caterham, it still is.



JAMES TAYLOR

Why I admire... Lotus

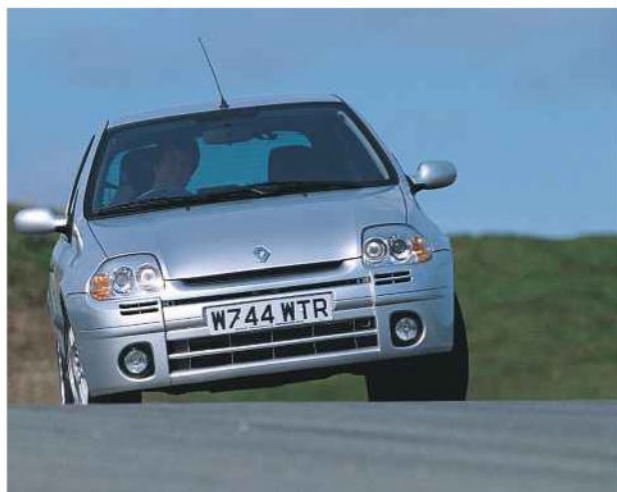
THERE'S SOMETHING MAGICAL ABOUT LOTUS. Not only in the way the cars drive (though that's some pretty powerful witchcraft) but in the affection and passion it kindles in people. Not least those at the Hethel headquarters of Lotus Cars and Lotus Engineering. There are

long-life Lotus team members who've been through multiple eras of the brand: different owners, different bosses, different challenges, but their passion for the cars and the marque itself never fails to shine through.

Today, from the outside looking in at least, the picture at Hethel is unclear. Since Geely took Lotus ownership in 2017, its funding has enabled the Emira sports car (above), which looks a million dollars and caught the world's attention (and plenty of deposits) on its debut. We're still yet to drive a fully representative production-spec version, however, and likewise the Evija electric hypercar (which costs rather more than a million dollars).

Geely's focus is primarily on Lotus's new, EV start-up chapter, building upmarket SUVs and saloon cars in Wuhan. If that mission achieves its targets, it would in theory lend a strong footing to the future of Lotus sports cars, but Hethel has gone on record as saying the Emira will be its last combustion-engined car (though it may create niche projects such as the recently revealed Type 66 Can-Am tribute). There will be electric Lotus sports cars, although the joint venture announced with Alpine in 2021 to produce such a car was cancelled last year. 'Twas ever thus: Lotus has sailed on choppy waters before, and the longest-serving members of its team have seen it all. They always keep the faith, and perhaps we should too, despite recent announcements. Because there's magic at Lotus. And it would be wrong for the Emira to be a full stop rather than a comma at the end of one of the greatest sports car stories ever told – and arguably the most **evo** automotive marque there's ever been.

Leaving aside the likes of Ferrari and Porsche, which are the brands our road testers have personally admired most over the years for their commitment to the cause?



RICHARD MEADEN

Why I admire...Renault Sport

THE NAME MIGHT FEEL LIKE A MILLENNIAL phenomenon, but you can trace Renault Sport's origins back to 1976, when Renault decided to rationalise its competition activities and stop Alpine and Gordini from bickering. Now, some 48 years later, the final Renault Sport model has

ceased production and Renault's motorsport activities are back under the Alpine banner.

It sure was good while it lasted. In fact, for a golden period between 1998 and 2015, Renault Sport could basically do no wrong, launching the sub-brand with the feisty Phase 1 RS Clio 172 (above) and knocking it out of the park with each successive iteration.

After 2015, the less-than-stellar Clio IV failed to respond to the RS treatment (largely, but not solely, due to the lack of a manual gearbox), but the RS Méganes continued to carry the flame, the most extreme versions morphing into caged, two-seater lightweight exotics. What united all those cars was the sense that they were designed, engineered and honed by people who looked for the same qualities we do, not to mention a continuity that ensured a consistent level of excellence.

That's how Renault Sport set the bar for 21st-century hot hatchbacks, and while others showed fleeting flashes of brilliance – the first and second-gen Mini GPs, for example – none can boast the same modern-day legacy. Not for nothing would we regularly liken these RSs to Porsche's dynasty of water-cooled RS 911s.

I was very downbeat when it became clear Renault Sport was done and dusted, but a recent visit to Alpine's key production facilities revealed that many of the people who made those brilliant hot hatches have stayed to hone the next generation of electric driver's cars. As someone who frequently despairs at where things are headed, this is a beacon of hope. After everything they have given us, we should keep the faith. The king is dead; long live the king!



JETHRO BOVINGDON

Why I admire...Toyota

THE TOYOTA MR2 ROADSTER WAS LAUNCHED A matter of months before I joined **evo**. It looked a little bit gawky, but my favourite road testers of the day said it was something pretty special. A lightweight and precise little sports car that – almost shockingly – could be mentioned in the

same breath as an Elise. That Mk3 MR2 (above) has never gained the recognition it deserved but I'd soon discover for myself that it really was a brilliantly tactile, superbly balanced and deft little car. Toyota had some magic sauce...

It's gone missing plenty of times over the years. The Corolla T-Sport was the only long-term test car **evo** has ever sent back, simply because we couldn't find anything good to say about it. But despite spewing out millions of cars-as-appliances, Toyota has always had the capacity to surprise, from that little MR2 all the way up to the scintillating Lexus LFA, a car everyone here would sacrifice limbs and close relatives to own.

The latest Toyota driver's cars are, perhaps, the most impressive of all. Not only because they have sparkling dynamics, but because Gazoo Racing products swim against the tide and have proven beyond doubt that cars focused on entertainment and excitement can be a commercial success in a sea of uninspiring crossovers. In Europe in 2023, Toyota sold more Gazoo Racing models (GR86, Yaris and Supra) than cars in the Prius family. Over four thousand GR86s found eager buyers and the Yaris GR total reached nearly 2500. And many more customers were lined up ready to commit...

Product manager of the GR Yaris, Patrick Scheeler, admits the demand even caught them by surprise. 'We are really pleasantly surprised... it's a unique product and asset for us,' he says. 'It's also attracted a lot of new customers to Toyota.' From roadsters to the most left-field supercar ever built, and now GR86 to Yaris GR, Toyota's commitment to the cause should not be underestimated. ☒

BIG

Everything about them is supersize, from their kerb weights to their power outputs to their price tags. But they're also hugely enjoyable – and quite different in character. So which provides the bigger thrill, Aston Martin DBX707 or Ferrari Purosangue?

by RICHARD MEADEN PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

TIME







THE DBX707 AND PUROSANGUE ARE THE CARS we should hate. At least according to the lazy and predictable narrative. Too big, too brash and too far removed from the heart of their respective brands, they take the supercar in dubious and distasteful directions.

In seeking to define that most contentious of all high-performance segments, Aston Martin and Ferrari have entered a fraught field of battle. One that forces them to confront the challenges of applying their well-defined and fiercely protected values to cars that could be seen as the antithesis of everything they stand for. It is their Cayenne moment, but with more to lose.

We've had a little time to become accustomed to the DBX. In fact Aston toyed with the idea of an SUV-like product for decades, the first evidence of which was AML's Lagonda concept of 2009, which pioneered the notion of

a luxurious, high-performance V12-powered 'LUV'. Lack of resources and somewhat shonky styling ensured Ulrich Bez's prescient vision never entered production, but it undoubtedly paved the way for the DBX.

Ironically, the DBX Concept of 2015 was much closer in look to the Purosangue than the more conventional SUV that ultimately entered production.

Well received from its launch in 2018, it was when the DBX evolved into the 707 that it truly found its niche, expressing Aston Martin's shifting emphasis towards class-leading performance and a more overtly sporting character across all its models. More tasteful than the Lamborghini Urus (what isn't?) and more tactile than the Cayenne GT Turbo, the DBX707 is rightly regarded as the current ultimate super-SUV.

The Purosangue takes things a step further. It would



readily depose the DBX from its throne, if only Ferrari described the Purosangue as an SUV. Crossover seems to undersell it, but TFFDFSF – ‘The First Four Door Four Seat Ferrari’ – is a bit of a mouthful. Perhaps a better acronym will commend itself by the end of our test. Here’s hoping.

But then how do you describe a car that appears to exist at the point where *la dolce vita* and *Top Boy* collide? Classically Italian yet unflinchingly contemporary, it has the uncanny knack of looking equally at home – or equally out of place – wherever you happen to put it. And that, in a nutshell, is its genius.

Haters will say it’s a Nissan Juke for the UHNW crowd, but in a way that’s a pretty accurate description, for it disrupts in much the same fashion. What’s beyond question is that few cars garner more curiosity or positive attention from a wider range of people. It resonates at a different frequency to pretty much anything else on the road.

When it comes to occasion and theatre, the Purosangue pulls out all the stops. The powered suicide rear doors are a bit Insta-fabulous, but there’s no arguing with the spectacle they create, nor the appeal of the interior they reveal. A lesson in minimalist lines with maximum impact, it really is a special place to be. Some of the HMI remains fiddly (the haptics on the steering wheel can be infuriating) but the level of technology and the way it is presented knocks the ageing DBX infotainment for six. This summer’s upgrade to a DB12-spec system can’t come soon enough.

Nevertheless, a plusher and more conventionally welcoming interior means the DBX has strong appeal. The craftsmanship is more obvious, the ambience warmer. There’s also the added practicality of a loftier driving position, better visibility and a load space your dog will thank you for being loaded into. The DBX is more aligned with family duties, then, whereas the Purosangue can claim to be a more practical Ferrari, but is still an exotic at heart.

The fundamental differences in the exterior and interior design of each are mirrored in the hardware that underpins them. The DBX relies on a hotbed version of AMG's familiar 4-litre twin-turbo V8. Good for 697bhp, it makes for a hugely muscular machine. One that can't quite muster the power of the Purosangue's searing front-mid-mounted 715bhp 6.5-litre V12 but out-slugs it thanks to 663lb ft delivered between 2600 and 4500rpm compared with the Ferrari's 528lb ft at 6250rpm.

Both send their motivation to all four wheels, the Ferrari via an unconventional transmission that combines an eight-speed dual-clutch transaxle with a crank-driven PTU (power transfer unit) for the front axle. The PTU is a two-speed unit, plus reverse, and features parallel wet clutches to send drive to the front wheels with torque-vectoring capability. The four-wheel-drive system is operational from first to fourth gears, but from fifth to eighth the Purosangue is purely rear-driven.

The DBX is more straightforward but still biased towards delivering dynamic handling. Using AMG's nine-speed Speedshift gearbox, the 707 has sharper shifts and higher torque capacity thanks to a wet clutch system instead of a normal torque converter. Drive is distributed via the standard DBX's electronically controlled clutch-based four-wheel-drive system, which can send up to 100 per cent of torque to the rear wheels, with the added precision and control of an electronically locking rear differential with a shorter final drive ratio.

Suspension-wise the Purosangue pioneers Ferrari Active Suspension Technology. Developed with Multimatic, the basic premise is for the dampers to not only do away with the need for anti-roll bars, but actually counter body roll, pitch and dive. To achieve this, each damper has its own electric motor driving gears connected to a ball screw that applies force to propel or brake the piston's movement within the damper. In the development phase Ferrari actually made the Purosangue lean into corners, but in the end opted for active suspension programming that feels more natural.

The DBX is less innovative but shares the same focus on controlling roll to increase response and mitigate the effects of all that mass. Suspension is double-wishbone at the front and multi-link at the rear, controlled by a recalibrated version of the regular DBX's multi-chamber air suspension system with



**'YOU GEL WITH
THE 707 AS
YOU WOULD
A GREAT HOT
HATCH. SOUNDS
RIDICULOUS,
BUT IT'S TRUE'**

re-valved adaptive dampers and recalibrated active anti-roll bars. Like the Purosangue, the DBX707 has massive carbon-ceramic brakes as standard, which on this car – our former Fast Fleet long-term – sit within optional 23-inch wheels.

Weight-wise there's not much between the two, each tipping the scales at the best part of 2.3 tons with full tanks. Not that it seems to impact their pace, as both will breach 190mph and hit 60mph from a standstill in a fraction over 3sec. These are fast cars and no mistake.

The Ferrari is a fascinating experience. The driving position is lower than you expect, but the car sits a little higher. It creates a juxtaposition that takes a little getting used to. Similarly, the car's responses require some acclimatisation. There's absolutely zero slack in any of the controls and, because the response is so pure and intense, every single input is translated directly and immediately. Crucially it's not exaggerated, but it does require measured inputs to deliver its best.

As for those super-trick dampers, they're little short of voodoo. Enter a compression and you feel the Purosangue yield, but it catches itself seamlessly and in a fraction of the time the DBX takes. It's the same with body roll, your initial steering input translated into direct lateral



load, which is absorbed, controlled and contained in equally short order.

My fear was it would feel too flat, too hard and unyielding and not give you any sense of how hard you're working in the car and what you have to lean on. What you get is just enough sense of building force or load, then very rapidly the car settles. Once you get dialled in you find your decision-making is happening more quickly because the car is giving you the answers almost immediately.

Far from feeling too aggressive and snappy, the way in which you can lean on the traction control, or indeed drive it without traction control, is very special. The breakaway is a little earlier than you might expect, but it's also less abrupt, which means the window in which you have to steer the car with the throttle is greater. Combined with the fact that you have more progressive throttle control from the naturally aspirated engine means you can really drive it like a supercar rather than a super-SUV.

The Aston is more conventional and therefore approachable, largely thanks to steering and chassis balance that are reminiscent of what Lotus used to do, with a special blend of linear response and well-judged weight. As a result you quickly form a tight bond with it, revelling in the way you can place it accurately while enjoying the ability to play with the way it rotates into corners, and the angle at which it exits them. It's an absolute riot when you want it to be.

The V8 is a monster. So much angrier and more expressive (and impressive) than in the regular DBX, it has mighty, instant shove that the Ferrari simply can't live with. The Speedshift gearbox is a much more responsive partner than in the standard DBX, too. It doesn't quite have the snap of the Ferrari's DCT, but because that has been toned down a little compared with an 812, the gap isn't as great as you'd imagine.

Really clog it through the gears along a decent stretch of road and the 707 feels more like a 747, the relentless thrust absolutely hurling you between the corners like a jet down a runway. It's shockingly quick at times and sounds like a modern-day muscle car, but there's always enough braking and cornering capability to keep things in check.

You definitely get the sense the 707 is more readily up for it than the Purosangue, which needs to be worked harder and more deliberately to deliver the full scope of its performance, and has clearly been tuned to be cool, calm and collected as a default. Aside from the lack of luggage space and overly



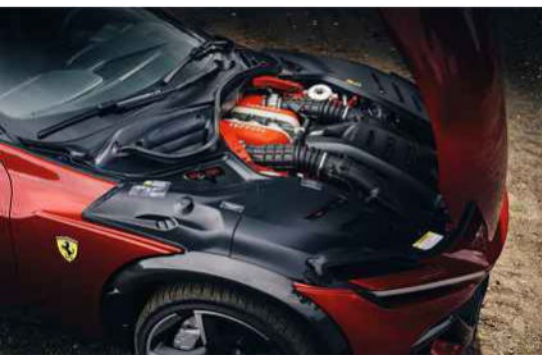
**‘YOU CAN
DRIVE THE
PUROSANGUE
LIKE A
SUPERCAR
RATHER THAN
A SUPER-SUV’**

fiddly HMI, the subdued soundtrack is also a little disappointing. It could be a little more expressive without being shouty.

Switching between the pair is a real test of your ability to adapt to different response and handling characteristics. Drive the Ferrari after the Aston and it feels overly sharp and immediate, but soon the precision and the sense of zero slack take over. Conversely, when you get back into the DBX it feels softer-edged and less precise, but once you compensate with grander gestures and earlier inputs, you gel with it as you would a great hot hatch. And yes, I know that sounds ridiculous, but it's true.

Perhaps fittingly, given that both marques are competitors in F1, you could say that the DBX, the Purosangue and the customers they attract are the showroom equivalent of Liberty Media's reinvented F1. That's to say disrespectful of tradition, too focused on the show and deeply unsettling for the old guard. Oh yes, and highly lucrative. Specced as a customer would, a DBX707 is going to cost the thick end of £220,000 (our long-termer had a £247,00 list price). And the Ferrari? £400k isn't beyond the realms of possibility if you like carbonfibre and fancy paint. And still they're sold out for the next three years.

Where do I stand in the SUV debate? Well, as a man of a certain age I occasionally find





Aston Martin DBX707

Engine V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo **Power** 697bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 663lb ft @ 2600-4500rpm **Weight** 2245kg
Power-to-weight 315bhp/ton **0-62mph** 3.3sec **Top speed** 193mph
Basic price £198,000 **Price as tested** £247,775

evo rating ★★★★★

Ferrari Purosangue

Engine V12, 6496cc **Power** 715bhp @ 7750rpm
Torque 528lb ft @ 6250rpm **Weight** 2033kg (dry)
Power-to-weight 357bhp/ton **0-62mph** 3.3sec **Top speed** 193mph
Basic price £313,120 **Price as tested** £411,619

evo rating ★★★★★

myself leaning towards a Ferrari FF or suave Aston Shooting Brake, but the road tester in me would be lying if I suggested the Purosangue did anything other than knock the quirky-cool FF into a cocked hat.

The DBX gets the very best driving experience from the conventional SUV format, and for that it deserves generous applause. It shouldn't be possible to make a car of this size, weight and lofty centre of gravity so poised and such fun to hustle, yet it romps down a brilliant piece of road like it's the most natural thing in the world. Just as the Rapide S was the sleeper of the range back in the day, so the DBX707 is Aston's unlikely hot rod.

The Purosangue is a genuinely mind-blowing machine. Completely unique in how it looks and what it does, it shows what Ferrari can accomplish when it fully commits to stepping outside of its comfort zone. Unfortunately for Aston Martin, it also demonstrates how far a brand with the Prancing Horse in its cross-

hairs needs to go if it is to truly transform aspiration into achievement.

Outliers within their respective model ranges, the Purosangue and 707 are as exceptional at what they do as any supercar or thoroughbred GT. Provocative and thought-provoking in equal measure, their breadth of abilities present an uncomfortable challenge to those who instinctively resist change. Fortunately, a truly special driving experience awaits those of us willing to embrace something new.

The DBX is hugely enjoyable and genuinely special, but the Purosangue is a game-changer. The way it controls its mass, deploys its performance and dissects a challenging road is genuinely befuddling, thanks to pin-sharp steering and dazzling rate of turn paired with next-level pliancy. Topped with a towering V12 powertrain from the gods, it could only be a Ferrari, yet it feels like no other Ferrari I have ever driven. ☒

evo

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FAST FLEET



NEW ARRIVAL

Porsche 911 Carrera GTS

In GTS spec, with a manual gearbox and lightweight options, could our new 992 prove to be the perfect 911 daily driver?



p117 Alfa Romeo Giulia Veloce



p120 Porsche 911 Carrera (996)



p121 Audi S8



p122 BMW M4 Comp xDrive

THE FIRST DRIVE IS IN GRIM CONDITIONS. THERE IS NO HORIZON: THE SKY BLENDS into the ground in one continuous wall of murky grey. The wipers can only just keep up with the sleet-infused stair rods that are steadily hammering down.

Pulling away from a parking space at the journey's start, the front tyres skate and judder. That's a typical 911 trait; the steering geometry's Ackermann effect often makes the front wheels scud a little against the tarmac when you're using a lot of lock at low speeds, but this time it's also because the surface beneath the front rubber is stone cold and slimy. The data cluster on the digital instrument panel shows the engine's oil temperature in single digits. I imagine it gummy and thick like treacle, and the transmission likewise: the manual gearbox is reluctant to slip into second gear so I skip straight to third.

Not entirely perfect conditions for the first drive in a dream sports car. And yet this 911 immediately feels at ease; in its element in the elements. Good all-round vision helps you



keep track of the car's four corners, but you sense them just as strongly. You know exactly where you are with this car, as if you've been driving it all week rather than for a few minutes. This particular Carrera GTS is rear-wheel drive, but it has buckets of traction. And there's so much easy, low-down torque it can pull high gears without bother. Oddly, this first taste of **evo**'s latest Fast Fleet addition is perhaps an even better showcase for the car than if it were in sunshine on clear roads.

What exactly is this new long-term, then? The current 911 range can be a dizzying thing to comprehend, with 17 Carrera variants alone listed on Porsche GB's website at the time of writing. The Carrera GTS starts at £122,000, compared with £97,000 for the base 380bhp Carrera (the entry point to the 911 range), £105,700 for the lightened Carrera T and £110,000 for the 444bhp Carrera S.

The GTS uses the same 2981cc twin-turbo flat-six engine as other Carreras, albeit with more power and torque – 473bhp and 420lb ft respectively. The

turbochargers are different from those in the base Carrera, and it runs higher boost pressure than the S and gains a different flywheel to handle the higher torque.

Past GTS-spec 911s have been based on other Carrera models with choice picks from the options list fitted as standard. This generation takes some of its suspension componentry from the 911 Turbo (as per the fabled 996 Carrera 4S), albeit with additional helper springs at the rear. Its adaptive dampers are retuned for the GTS's weight and weight distribution, and it sits 10mm lower than a standard Carrera. As I discovered during that first journey, you need to take extra care over speedbumps as it's easy to scrape the nose, and I've quickly learned to drive over them diagonally as an extra precaution. (A front axle lift system is available as a £1965 option.)

The brakes too are from the Turbo, with six-piston calipers and 408mm discs at the front, four-piston/380mm at the rear. Carbon-ceramics,

a £7269 option, aren't fitted here. So far the regular cast-iron brakes feel more than up to the job.

From the outside, the GTS can be told apart from other Carreras by its darkened headlights and black trim, a theme that's repeated in the interior. There's lots of faux-suede 'RaceTex' trim in there, including on the nicely tactile-feeling steering wheel. This car also has colour-contrast stitching, seatbelts and embroidered headrests along with extra carbon trim as part of the pricey £3233 GTS Interior Package.

You get a choice of wheels, from either the Carrera S, Turbo S or 718 Spyder RS, all measuring 20 inches at the front and 21 at the rear. Our car has the Turbo S wheels finished in satin black.

The GTS can be had with manual or PDK transmissions, coupe, cabriolet or Targa bodies and rear- or all-wheel drive. Our car is in very **evo** form: a rear-drive, manual coupe. The manual gearbox is the same seven-speed unit available in the Carrera S, but with a slightly shorter stick for a snappier shift. Once warmed up (which doesn't take long), it's



Alfa Romeo Giulia Veloce

Sunday morning's been calling

THE SUNDAY MORNING TEST MUST BE one of the simplest barometers of a car's appeal. If you feel inclined to get out early on a Sunday, to enjoy some favourite roads before the garden centre fanatics start bumbling around and the speed camera vans pitch up, chances are the car's a good 'un.

When I took a turn in our Giulia for a few days recently, I didn't particularly expect it to be one of those cars. But after a few short local drives in it, I found my mind being changed.

I'd clearly underestimated the Veloce, written it off as 'not a Quadrifoglio' and because it has 'only' 276bhp. What I'd half forgotten is how light it is. With a claimed kerb weight of 1429kg, it's not as heavy as your instinct tells you a mid-size saloon will be, especially these days. And the result is a power-to-weight ratio slap-bang in decently rapid hot hatch territory. Think i30 N or Focus ST.

But here, of course, you've also got rear-wheel drive. And while, as we may have mentioned once or twice, you can't switch off the stability control and throw some shapes on corner exit, you can still enjoy the sensations of a car being pushed rather than pulled, of uncorrupted steering, of both axles working to balance the car through a turn.

On the right kind of twisty-turny B-roads – the kind that would suit a hot hatch, funnily enough – it can make for a genuinely absorbing drive. So much so that the 90-minute drive I headed out for during my weekend with the Giulia ended up becoming twice that.

The Sunday Morning Test? The Giulia passes.

Ian Eveleigh

Date acquired August 2023 **Total mileage** 7547 **Mileage this month** 689 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 28.8

lovely, with a short throw and a strong, spring-loaded action and cleverly calibrated gates that make it difficult to wrong-slot.

This car's all the more **evo** as it's fitted with the Lightweight Package. Costing £6834, it deletes the rear seats along with some of the sound-insulation, fits thinner glass and a lightweight battery, and adds different, more aerodynamic underbody panelling. It also includes rear-wheel steering, which ironically adds a little weight, of course. Total weight saving is 25kg, taking the kerb weight below 1500kg. Some of that saving comes from the carbon-shell bucket seats, which would normally be a £4356 option on their own (and the rear-steer £1830). I find their fixed-back position slightly uncomfortably bolt-upright and they pin my shoulders in a little, but they look terrific and may prove great for track work; the 911 already has a bit of track time booked in its diary. If you don't mind giving away a couple of kilos, you can get the Lightweight Package with regular

electric sports seats in place of the buckets.

With the aforementioned options plus Ice Grey metallic paint (£2207), a parking camera system (£533), Bose surround sound (£1152) and a number of other options besides, this car totals £139,333.

Older GTS models have felt like a Carrera S with a sweet dusting of options, rather than a 911 with a personality all of their own. Spec'd as it is, this car feels more like the latter. It's going to be fascinating to get to know it properly, and find out if it could be a more affordable (and available) alternative to a GT3 – or if a Carrera S with a carefully chosen set of options would actually be a more useable alternative. Whatever happens, it's aced its audition.

James Taylor (@JamesTaylorEVO)

Date acquired December 2023 **Total mileage** 2092 **Mileage this month** 871 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 23.3



Caterham Seven evo25 & Mazda CX-60

They sit at the extremes of our current fleet, so does that make one the ideal yin to the other's yang?

I S THIS THE PERFECT TWO-CAR GARAGE? Well, no. Of course not. But... having these two cars for the past month or so has been pretty illuminating and an interesting experiment. If you want to test the theory that a completely bonkers 'recreation' type car and a sensible set of everyday wheels is the way to go, then a Mazda CX-60 fitted with a diesel engine and a 560kg Seven with adjustable dampers and sticky tyres ticks each box perfectly. So, would the Mazda crush my soul and the Caterham remain unused? Or would one make the other seem so much more appealing?

Things started badly. My kids describe the Mazda as 'The Matrix car'. As in, I am now part of the system. Blindly doing the same things as everybody

else and ticking off the days as my life and freedom slowly ebb away. Pretty profound. I get what they mean. The CX-60 is about as unremarkable as it gets. Whilst Mazda has made an effort to create proportions that suggest a front-engine, rear-drive layout (even though this particular CX-60 is four-wheel drive) and a shape to convey 'noble strength', the end result is all but invisible.

I guess you could squint and argue it's some sort of neo-brutalist design with its flat sides and feeling of mass and density. Convinced? Nor me, but at least I tried. The interior is much better. The materials are high quality and the considered, minimal shapes and structures feel a little more special. Even so, it does seem a shame that the

most inventive, textured and interesting interiors seem to be reserved for EVs. Why is that? In short, the CX-60 could do with sparkling dynamics to lift it out of the mire of, well, Matrix mediocrity.

There's no denying the muscularity of the 3.3-litre in-line six-cylinder, which shuns downsizing and instead focuses on 'right-sizing'. Mazda says a bigger engine with incredibly efficient combustion is less stressed and more economical. The fact it sounds more interesting and more expensive is a nice by-product of that philosophy. It punches hard, copes easily with the mass of the CX-60 and certainly elevates the driving experience a few notches. If only the gearbox was as smooth and cultured. It's fine most of the time but when cutting between



'sailing' and re-engaging to accelerate, the whole car shudders. For a car that should be about easy progress, the CX-60 can feel a bit lumpy at times.

It's inspiring, though. There have been many cold, wet, dark days where usually I might not summon the commitment to drag my legs through the narrow door aperture of the Caterham, wipe down all the windows on the inside, coax the engine to life and hold it at 3000rpm for 90 seconds or so just to get it to idle, then wrestle with frigid harnesses to strap myself in. But, with the CX-60 taking the strain of all the family stuff and being so practical, I definitely need the tonic of the Seven for pure thrills. And it delivers completely. Every single time.

I absolutely love this **evo** edition. The 210bhp 420 engine is sharp and provides wicked performance, the adjustable dampers from the 420 Cup add a bit of intrigue and fun as you settle on a set-up and are so easy to adjust, and, as ever, the chassis balance and sense of connection is sublime. In terms of

performance, the challenge provided to the driver, intensity, feedback and sheer entertainment, the Caterham is working at levels that most supercars could only dream of achieving. Every journey provides a laugh-out-loud moment and about a million little chuckles. It's amazing.

The bad stuff? Well, the clutch-stop bent slightly and the pedal snagged on it, leaving me stranded in a dark, cold train station car park. However, once I knew the problem it was a two-minute job to remove the stop and get going again. One very wet day the indicators stopped flashing. They're fine again now. Oh, and I wish it had a six-speed 'box as I've been doing quite a few long journeys in this little buzz-box. Otherwise, no complaints. I suppose a bigger fuel tank might be useful, too. As a driving experience it's just so good, though. Any little issues fade away. The heater is magic, too.

Overall, the Mazda is left to do what it does best. The grunt work of real life. It's not glamorous

or exciting, but it has a massive range and fits many humans and all the stuff they like to carry around. I just wish it felt a little more connected, that the lane change assist wasn't so aggressive that it feels like you're performing an elk test (it's also a pain to switch off) and that visually it was as interesting as the six-cylinder diesel engine is to operate. I'd also like to fit a tow bar to make use of all that torque. The Ring is a long way in the Caterham, after all.

Jethro Bovingdon (@JethroBovingdon)

CATERHAM SEVEN evo25

Date acquired August 2023 **Total mileage** 3013 **Mileage this month** 670 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 22.9

MAZDA CX-60

Date acquired November 2023 **Total mileage** 4971 **Mileage this month** 1173 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 41.3



Porsche 911 Carrera (996)

Testing of the 991-engined '90s 911 continues with a high-speed autobahn run and laps of Spa

IT'S BEEN SO, SO LONG. FIRST IT WAS A bit sick. Then it was a lot dead. Then it might get a new X51-spec 3.4-litre M96 from Porsche Classic. Then it might not be dead after all. Then it definitely was still dead. And that was before anybody had even thought of sticking the 3.8-litre direct-injection engine into my 996 to create something entirely different. So to be rolling out of Litchfield with a packed bag in the front luggage compartment, a Eurotunnel confirmation email on my phone and a slot at a Circuit Days event on the mighty Spa circuit seemed completely surreal. Scary, too. This trip was designed to see if the 996.3 could do all the things a 911 should be able to do: big miles, big speeds, plenty of laps and then a nice, easy drive home.

Confidence was high. Let's say medium-high. Litchfield does impeccable work but this is still very much a prototype vehicle. Everything works and shakedown saw very little fettling required. (By now

I'd already done lots of road miles in all sorts of weather and even ventured out onto Goodwood circuit at a brilliant **evo** trackday.) However, 1000 miles or so in a couple of days on road, track and autobahn is really upping the ante.

I'm not sure I've ever seen so much rain. From the moment we leave Tewkesbury until stopping in Blankenheim, Germany – not far from the Ring and a nice, derestricted autobahn – the 996's wipers are set to max and Europe seems to be slowly sinking into the sea. It's a monotonous, slightly depressing experience and throws up one more modification I must investigate: new headlights. The standard 996 items are not up to the job, especially when you've been spoilt with modern LEDs. Anybody know of a good conversion kit?

The next day doesn't really dawn. It's just apparent that black has gradually become a flat, uniform grey. The roads are damp but the

rain has abated at last. Our aim is to get to Spa by lunchtime and sneak in some laps, but first to do some high-speed running on the autobahn just to see how the car behaves. To check pressures and temperatures and just to feel the car out a bit. The Syvecs ECU allows me to log all the data and I can send it back to Litchfield for interrogation, too. Miraculously, the traffic parts as if by magic and I can run the 996 out to the limiter in sixth...

God, it's noisy in here. And the car feels small and narrow. Great in that it cuts so easily through the air, but after the stability of, say, an M5, GT-R or any brand-new supercar, the 996 doesn't half bob around. The front feels light, too. It's not scary, but it does rather focus the mind. Yet over about 160mph the car seems to settle and confidence grows. The surface has patches of damp but is mostly dry and the Yokohamas seem keyed in to the surface. So, I push on. Past 165, easily through 170 and 175mph. Even at 180mph the 996 is



pulling really nicely, but then, as the engine spins to over 7000rpm, the power starts to soften. Litchfield has (wisely) fitted a soft limiter in sixth that's pulling back power ahead of the 7400rpm cut-out. This was precautionary (plus, they probably didn't expect a top-speed run so early in the car's rebirth!), but even so the 996.3 achieves over 190mph on the speedo, 186mph on the VBox, or a true 300kph. We'll be back to slip through 190mph soon.

Spa is dry when we arrive. For about 20 minutes. Then the rain howls in. The 996 is a blast, so easy to slide around and so agile. However, the set-up feels too extreme in the wet (ironically it had felt a bit soft for the one or two dry laps) and the rear slides as soon as I even look at a corner. Fun, but not very informative about what's next for the chassis. We'll be back and praying for a dry day. Anyway, 186mph and not blowing up is enough for me on this first foray into Europe.

Jethro Bovingdon (@JethroBovingdon)

Huge thanks to circuit-days.co.uk

Date acquired May 2013 **Total mileage** 152,438 **Mileage this month** 1248 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 23.6



Audi S8

It's got the handling chops to match its Ronin-fuelled reputation

HOW MUCH OF THE S8'S LONGEVITY can be put down to its starring role on a French alpine pass 25 years ago? Would the current, fourth-generation D5 model still be on Audi's price list had that nitrous-powered dark green example not whacked a Peugeot 605 and Citroën XM? It didn't need the nitrous, did it? And does the world need super-limos or are they simply transport for our silver-screen escapism? Logic points to 'no we don't', but logic and car choices rarely align.

A regular A8 does much of what our S8 does. It might lack the pure exec-limo magic of an S-class, but it also avoids the coldness BMW's 7-series always wears to stop you getting to know it. Audi has shaped its aluminium machine into a limo that does the limo bit to an exceptionally high standard while also carving it a personality that gives it more of a distinctive feel than perception suggests. The S8 amplifies this further still.

You already know about the interior quality. What impressed me while I ran KY73 OTZ for a spell recently was how well it drives, not only as something to waft in, but how it adapts to so many different situations, and much of this is down to the tech bolted to it.

Such as rear-wheel steering. This is nothing new. Ferrari has already taken it further by implementing individual rear-wheel steering on the 812 Competizione, but while Audi hasn't gone to those lengths, the S8's RWS has been

calibrated beyond an aid to negotiate tight parallel parking manoeuvres and tricky entrances into hotel car parks. No, this doesn't mean it shrinks around you to become an RS3, but the sense of connection between both driven axles as the S8 removes its cufflinks and rolls up its sleeves makes you appreciate just how far Audi has gone to lift it above the norm.

The front is more than happy to dive into a corner and the rear will react instantly to provide a balance and sense of togetherness where once such cars pushed their snouts to the outside of any corner, leaving their tails far behind. It feels agile where you expect lethargy, direct in places where you expect underwhelming dynamics.

Being an S rather than an RS product means the 8 doesn't possess the snarling nature of its more famous family members. And it's better for it, because it remains as subtle and smooth to drive as it is to look at. Its 563bhp V8 never feels strained, making for one of those cars that is exactly what you need when you have 2000 miles to cover in a month. With new examples starting to appear with over £20,000 off their retail price, too, the S8's appeal strengthens further still.

Stuart Gallagher (@stuartg917)

Date acquired September 2023 **Total mileage** 4962 **Mileage this month** 2212 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 24.6



END OF TERM

BMW M4 Competition xDrive

As our four-wheel-drive M4 departs, we have an answer to the 'Is it worth £100k?' conundrum

THE M4'S QUAD TAILPIPES HAVE PULLED away from the **evo** office car park for the last time, and I feel really quite melancholy to see it go. Some cars you don't miss when they've gone, no matter how good they were; I knew from early on this wouldn't be the case with the M4.

It's been a lovely car to live with: as a long-distance tourer, as a commuting carriage, as a weekend getaway car, as a truly rewarding driver's car and even an occasional track car.

As mentioned in previous reports, I'm not crazy about the way it looks (though its design has grown on me a fair bit) and I felt a bit self-conscious about the borderline ostentatious image it presents to the world. But I loved the M4 for what it is and what it can do, rather than what it looks like.

Others on the **evo** team who spent time with YC72 FUB have made the very valid point that it can't totally disguise its weight – this is a 1.8-ton, 4.8m-long car after all – and always feels big and

heavy to some extent, with some of its switchable modes for drivetrain and dampers geared around mitigating its mass. And it is big enough to rule out smaller parking spaces, which was a pain in urban driving. But I honestly didn't mind the M4's weight in the way it felt on the road. I quite liked its solid, muscle-car feel, and it never felt clumsy. Agile, in fact. I just love this car's front end. So positive, so resistant to understeer.

And so fast, the M4. In-gear acceleration from the 503bhp, 479lb ft 3-litre twin-turbo straight-six is laugh-out-loud instant. But the car was never edgy or peaky or difficult to drive. It could be a relaxed tourer when you wanted it to be, and I loved its ride quality with the adaptive dampers set to their softest setting. The optional M Carbon bucket seats, while a pain to clamber into and out of, are superbly comfy when you're in them and the M4 is a great long-distance car. It returned mpg in the mid-to-high 20s in regular

driving, and could break into the 30s on a long run.

The interior was a smartly finished, tight-panel-gapped, high-quality vault to sit within. An easy one to get to grips with interface-wise, too. The (one generation old) iDrive system was intuitive to use and far less distracting to navigate on the move than most cars' infotainment set-ups. Including the one found in BMW's more recent models: I'm glad the M4 didn't have the less-buttons, more-complication latest-generation iDrive interface.

The boot was usefully big and although the rear seats were no more suitable for adults than those of most 2+2s, they could fold flat, making the M4 a relatively practical car – though it should be, given its expansive exterior dimensions.

It's a big car for big money: £85,375 basic when we started this test, £86,665 at the time of writing. And our car, with options including Frozen Portimao Blue paint, carbon-ceramic brakes, laser headlights and extra carbonfibre trim (plus a fair few other



additions) topped £105,000 as tested.

Writing the opening report, I wondered aloud if it could really feel like a car worth more than £100k. In terms of perception, the jury's out. Like Dickie Meaden, who pondered the same question when he drove the car in its initial weeks on the fleet, I struggle conceptually with the idea of an M3 (albeit a two-door one) that costs six figures. But in terms of how it feels to drive, how adeptly it can turn its hand to every situation, I would have to say that it does back up its price. It's as thrilling as many sports cars and a better GT than many grand tourers, BMW's own M8 included. And with £10,000+ discounts being offered for unregistered examples, the justification only strengthens.

All-wheel-drive M4 Competition xDrive or rear-drive, £2855-cheaper M4 Competition? You don't feel like you're missing out on tactility in the xDrive car; it's so heavily rear-biased that it still feels predominantly like a rear-wheel-drive car in

character. By the same token, I didn't feel I was missing out much on grip in a rear-wheel-drive M4 Comp I spent a good few miles in a couple of years ago, but that was mostly in fair weather. If I were going to choose an M4 to drive in foul weather, I'd obviously plump for the xDrive one. Tyre-wise, our M4's Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S rubber lasted impressively well, especially considering the car was driven with enthusiasm on the road and did a good few laps at Goodwood.

I am still in awe of how well the BMW coped with Goodwood, a fearsomely quick track that puts heavy loads through a car. I was braking a good margin earlier than the M4 is capable of, to look after the brakes for the drive home and the remaining months of the loan, but the carbon-ceramic system never felt anything less than mighty on road or on track, despite the car's 1775kg (as a minimum) kerb weight. And even leaving a margin for brake and tyre wear, the M4

Comp got around Goodwood's 2.4 miles very deftly: balanced, eager and stonkingly fast in both straight-line pace and corner speed.

I knew I'd miss it even before it was gone. Mind you, the 911 Carrera GTS that has joined the fleet in its place (see p114) has softened the blow somewhat. For all the M4's brilliance – and I believe it really, truly is brilliant – a lighter, lower, more communicative 'real' sports car will always have the edge on something engineered around a saloon platform. But this M4 comes bloody close. For me it's absolutely a five-star car and I loved every minute with it. I think many of you would, too.

James Taylor (@JamesTaylorEVO)

Date acquired July 2023 **Duration of test** 6 months **Total test mileage** 4060 **Overall mpg** 25.5 **Total costs** £0 **Price when new** £105,500 **Value today** £67,985

by STEVE

by YOUSUF ASHRAF

BEST BUYS

HOT HATCHES

THE BEST HOT HATCHBACKS ARE GIANT KILLERS. IT seems unfathomable that a Honda Civic could nail itself to the rear bumper of a Lamborghini Huracán, but something about the tenacity of a hot hatch seems to evaporate any gulf in performance to more expensive, more powerful machines. They're bred on the kind of pockmarked roads that don't favour supercars and deliver a level of interaction and excitement that belies their humble beginnings. It's no wonder that hot hatches have been a staple of this magazine – and our Car of the Year tests – for the last 25 years.

Granted, some of the latest models have entered a new stratosphere for price, but the used market is awash with greats at a fraction of the cost. As little as £6000 could buy a family-friendly **evo** favourite such as the Mk5 Volkswagen Golf GTI, while it's possible to get a genuine **evo** hero for well under £30,000. Read on for a shortlist of our second-hand picks.



HONDA CIVIC TYPE R (FK8)

A true hot hatch great, for half the price of the current model

THE AGE OF THE £50,000 HONDA CIVIC TYPE R IS upon us, and while the stunning new FL5 model goes quite some way towards justifying its price tag, it's hard to overlook its predecessor for sheer value. After all, the latest Type R is an evolution, rather than a complete overhaul, of the FK8 version, a car which stood out as the most involving hot hatch of its era – and one that can now be bought for as little as £24,000.

Despite its size – it's wider than a BMW 3-series – the Type R feels as much like a sports car as it does a hot hatch. Its enthusiasm to thread itself along a road is simply infectious. The wide, flat platform almost gives the impression of a Super Tourer, and the FK8 emanates with precision and nuance without feeling hyperactive; even at speed, you simply pick your line and it follows your commands implicitly. The intensity builds as you approach the limit, and you feel wired into the car as it hops over bumps and claws grip from the surface beneath you. Six years on from launch, the FK8 is so much more absorbing – and more capable – than many newer offerings.

Honda's 316bhp 2-litre turbo motor is also one of the best of its kind, with clean, muscular responses and a mighty top-end rush. Disappointingly, the engine sounds muted and ordinary from inside, with much of its voice muzzled by the turbocharger (later FK8s arrived with an artificial engine sound generator for this reason). Aftermarket induction kits can liberate some more turbo flutter and intake bark, but well-designed systems cost upwards

of £450 and often require an engine remap to make best use of the new hardware. Still, the standard six-speed manual is a delight to use, and completes what is one of the best engine and gearbox pairings of any modern hot hatch.

Honda's iterative approach to development saw the FK8 updated in 2020 with subtle changes to the brakes, chassis and cooling set-up to elevate the package further. What the facelift didn't bring, however, was freedom to alter the car's drive modes, which remains one of the most frustrating elements of the FK8. In maximum-attack +R mode the engine response is crisper and more urgent, but it's impossible to pair this with the more relaxed steering and damper settings for road driving. Even so, given the inherent deftness of the Civic's chassis and controls, it's still deeply rewarding within these preset parameters.

The leap in showroom price between the FK8 when new and the latest FL5 means that used values have held strongly for the former, and while post-2020 models are sweetest of the lot (particularly in lightweight Limited Edition guise), the fundamental strengths of the car span across all versions. Being built to withstand repeated track use, the Type R hasn't proven to suffer from any major mechanical issues if well maintained, although some owners have reported graunching gearshifts when rushing through the six-speed 'box.

The cheapest FK8s start from around £24,000, rising to £29,000 for a tidy facelifted model with low mileage.



Specification

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1996cc, turbo **Power** 316bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 295lb ft @ 2500-4500rpm **Weight** 1380kg
Power-to-weight 233bhp/ton **0-62mph** 5.8sec **Top speed** 168mph
Price new £30,995 (2017-21) **Value today** From £24,000

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI (Mk5)

It got the GTI back on track, and still shines today

THE MK5 GOLF GTI WAS PIVOTAL FOR THE FUTURE of Volkswagen performance cars. Following the lacklustre Mk3 and blunt, flat-footed Mk4, the GTI badge was in desperate need of a renaissance, and the Mk5 burst through the gloom in 2005 as one of the finest everyday performance cars of its time. It recaptured the understated brilliance that defined the Mk1 and Mk2, and while more exciting hot hatches have come and gone since, few blend seamless usability with honest, analogue fun quite as well as the Mk5 GTI.

The Golf nails the basics before you've even turned a wheel, the seat mounted low and holding you firmly at the sides, the steering wheel extending far out to meet you. Everything feels easy – mundane, even – at low speeds, and while it doesn't provide the immediate gratification of a Mégane R26.R, there's depth to the GTI as you dig deeper into its abilities. The EA113 turbocharged four-pot feels organic and effervescent, delivering its 197bhp with an enthusiasm that's missing from some present-day hot hatches. Sure, a modern supermini would have no trouble keeping pace with a Mk5 today, but the Golf makes you work for its full potential rather than serving it on a plate. Thankfully, the gearshift is free and easy across the gate, making it effortless to find a rhythm with the engine.

The chassis is the star, though. Being softer-edged than some contemporary rivals, there's scope to hustle the Golf and really work all four tyres at road speeds, using weight transfer to bring

the car alive. You can lean on it all the way through a corner with the inside-rear tyre skimming the surface, at which point the GTI is energised and responsive to your inputs; adding throttle settles the rear, while a gentle lift pivots the car around the apex. This isn't a point-and-shoot hot hatch, but one where the driver can make a difference, and that certainly couldn't be said for the Mk4.

Better yet, decent Mk5s cost around half as much as a brand-new Volkswagen Up today. Plentiful supply means the used market is highly competitive, and it's possible to score a GTI with sensible mileage for just £6000. The Mk5 has also proved to be reliable nearly two decades on since launch, but mechanical niggles can emerge through years of use and abuse. The EA113's turbo dump valve uses an electronically controlled rubber diaphragm to release charge air back into the intake system, and these diaphragms can be prone to splitting; this leads to a loss of power and can be identified by a warning light on the dashboard. We'd also go for the six-speed manual rather than the DSG, not only for a more interactive driving experience, but also to avoid potential issues with the automated 'box. They're generally reliable if maintained correctly (an oil change is required every 40,000 miles), but some suffer with odd shifting behaviour and jerky changes.

Finally, it's worth checking for worn suspension bushes and broken springs if you're considering a higher-mileage car – upgraded aftermarket components are readily available, but be warned that some stray too far from the fluidity of the original set-up.



Specification

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo Power 197bhp @ 5100rpm
Torque 207lb ft @ 1800-5100rpm Weight 1336kg
Power-to-weight 150bhp/ton 0-62mph 7.3sec Top speed 146mph
Price new £19,995 (2004-09) Value today From £6000

BMW M140i

Six cylinders, rear-wheel drive – and ripe for tuning

JUDGED PURELY ON THE BASIS OF ITS MECHANICAL specification, it's hard not to be seduced by the BMW M140i. With a longitudinal straight-six powering the rear wheels, it's a car that flips the modern hot hatch formula on its head, sharing some of its core components with the original M2. The execution wasn't quite as spellbinding as that recipe might suggest, but the M140i delivers a highly distinctive, indulgent driving experience that can be elevated further with careful modifications.

The turbocharged B58 packed a serious punch when the M140i arrived in 2016, and its 335bhp output still puts it ahead of today's Mk8 Volkswagen Golf R and FL5 Honda Civic Type R. Naturally, we'd choose the standard six-speed manual gearbox rather than the eight-speed ZF automatic, for while the knuckly, rubbery shift isn't one of the world's finest, it seems the most fitting way to drive what is a performance car of the old school, one that can give an F87 M2 a serious headache in the right state of tune.

BMW understandably left performance and ability on the table when developing the M140i to keep a suitable margin to the full-fat M cars. It was always quick, but the M140i felt wayward and disconnected at times, particularly in standard trim without a limited-slip differential. Thankfully, certain aftermarket specialists have developed chassis and engine upgrade kits to tap into the platform's latent potential, one of which is Birds. With Bilstein dampers and Eibach springs developed by former BTCC driver James Weaver, the Birds suspension package

simultaneously gives the M140i more compliance at speed while dramatically improving control, working with a Quaife ATB diff to deliver far more exploitable handling. Combine this with a power uplift to 424bhp, and a Birds-fettled M140i is a true force of nature.

These upgrades come as part of the Birds B1-430 package, which costs £5198 fully fitted. That sounds like a lot in the context of the £15,000 or so that it'll cost you to bag a used M140i, but more reasonable when you consider that the significantly less powerful M2 starts from around £25,000.

Its six-cylinder, rear-drive layout means the M140i isn't the most cavernous of hatchbacks inside, but the five-door version is eminently useable and no more taxing to drive than a standard 1-series. That it delivers a kick that can frighten most sports cars is all the more impressive.

Of course, the very nature of the M140i as an accessible, powerful, rear-wheel-drive performance car means that more than a few have skimmed barriers and clattered kerbs during their lifetime. Look out for signs of accident damage, misaligned panels and poor repairs before you buy, and ensure you budget for the M140i's appetite for rear tyres when driven in anger. The front radiator vents don't have mesh protection, which can result in stone-chip damage and coolant leaks, while factory-spec oil filters have been known to break down over time, so regular servicing is advised. Otherwise, the mechanicals are well-proven and robust, adding to the appeal of this unconventional hot hatch option.



Specification

Engine In-line 6-cyl, 2979cc, turbocharged **Power** 335bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 369lb ft @ 1520-4500rpm **Weight** 1445kg
Power-to-weight 236bhp/ton **0-62mph** 4.8sec **Top speed** 155mph
Price new £31,875 (2016-18) **Value today** From £15,000

FORD FOCUS RS (Mk1)

The first RS of the 2000s is a classic full of character

DRIVE A POORLY SET UP MK1 FOCUS RS AND FORD'S motorsport-grade hot hatch will tumble in your estimations. That was certainly the case for **evo** when we drove early examples in period; where was the finesse, effortless speed and composure this WRC-inspired halo model promised? With Sachs dampers, wide-track suspension and a Quaife limited-slip diff, the specification was mouth-watering, but the result was a scruffy, unruly car on the road. Sometimes...

Two decades on, having driven a few carefully maintained examples on modern tyres, the RS has cemented itself as a true **evo** icon. Its blend of interaction and ability is addictive in the context of today's effortlessly exploitable four-wheel-drive megahatches. You just need to make sure you buy a good one.

The Focus RS doesn't need to be moving to announce its intentions. It comes from a time when the best specialised performance cars didn't look or feel mass produced. The RS's swollen bodywork, ground-hugging stance and Sparco bucket seats scream homologation special, even though it wasn't one in a traditional sense. Instead, it was merely inspired by the Focus RS world rally car of the time, with 70 per cent of its components either new or reworked. A heavily modified 2-litre Duratec motor sits at the heart of the RS, with new pistons, forged conrods and a Garrett turbocharger lifting power to 212bhp, all of which is sent to the front wheels.

Rather than moulding to your driving style, the Focus RS relies on careful technique to deliver its best. Tuck the nose in, get the car settled and it's simply a question of how committed you can

be to the throttle. Get it just right and the Quaife differential pulls the nose onto your chosen line as the motor flurries towards the 6500rpm red line, but if you're too eager on the power the front wheels will begin to scramble around – a useful measure of how hard you're working the chassis.

There are certainly more powerful, more competent hot hatches out there, but the Mk1 RS has a unique flair and charisma that makes every drive special. It can also lay claim to being one of the very first superhatches. The trouble is, its relative rarity (2147 examples came to the UK) and the provenance of the RS badge have catapulted it to modern classic status, with prices to match.

A useable RS with reasonable mileage will set you back upwards of £20,000, but as we said earlier, it's a car that varies dramatically depending on maintenance and set-up. It's worth accounting for decent tyres, fresh suspension components and geometry correction in your budget, or else you might not uncover the car's full potential. At worst, you'll wonder why you've spent FK8 Civic Type R money on a raggedy old Focus.

Another potential issue is rust. Even well-kept RSs can hide rotten secrets behind those plastic sill cover extensions, so have a look underneath for signs of structural corrosion or poor repairs. The floor pans and jacking points should be solid unless you fancy your chances with a welding gun, and replacements aren't available for the bulging RS-specific front and rear wings. Find a tidy example, though, and the Mk1 Focus RS should be no less demanding to own than other hot hatches of the time, while also being immune to depreciation. ✖



Specification

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbocharged
Power 212bhp @ 5500rpm **Torque** 229lb ft @ 3500rpm
Weight 1278kg **Power-to-weight** 169bhp/ton
0-60mph 5.9sec **Top speed** 144mph
Price new £19,995 (2002-03) **Value today** From £20,000



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Cadwell Park	Sunday 3rd March	£179
Anglesey GP	Sunday 10th March	£199
Spa-Francorchamps	Friday 22nd March	SOLD OUT
Spa-Francorchamps	Saturday 23rd March	SOLD OUT
California Run	Sat 20th – Sat 27th April	SOLD OUT
Nürburgring	Monday 29th April	SOLD OUT
Nürburgring	Tuesday 30th April	SOLD OUT
Anglesey GP	Monday 6th May	£229
Croft	Monday 27th May	£269
Navarra	Monday 10th June	£299
Navarra	Tuesday 11th June	£299
Riviera Adventure	Fri 21st – Tue 25th June	£2600
Nürburgring	Monday 1st July	SOLD OUT
Oulton Park	Wednesday 10th July	£329
Anglesey Coastal	Monday 15th July	£179
Donington Park GP	Wednesday 24th July	£329
Thruxton	Monday 29th July	£199
Cadwell Park	Sunday 18th August	£229
Anglesey GP	Monday 26th August	£229
Alpine Adventure	Fri 6th – Tue 10th September	£2600
Snetterton 300	Monday 16th September	£199
Anglesey Coastal	Monday 23rd September	£179
Nürburgring	Monday 14th October	£649
Spa-Francorchamps	Tuesday 15th October	SOLD OUT
Spa-Francorchamps	Wednesday 16th October	SOLD OUT
Zandvoort	Monday 21st October	£499
Anglesey GP	Saturday 2nd November	£139
Spa-Francorchamps	Friday 8th November	£329
Nürburgring	Monday 11th November	£399
Donington Park	Sunday 24th November	£199
Oulton Park	Friday 6th December	£149
Anglesey Coastal	Saturday 7th December	£139

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- EVO Magazine ★★★★★

"It's so much more composed with the springs and dampers combining beautifully to deal with everything that's thrown at them."

- BMWCar Magazine ★★★★★

"The result is a car damn near as quick and exciting as the M2 Competition and, whisper it, more balletic on the road."

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The Knowledge

RATINGS

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

⬆ = new entry this month. Cars in italics are no longer on sale. **Issue no.** is for our most recent major test of the car (D = Driven, 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

Honda Civic Type R. Improving upon its already phenomenal FK8 predecessor, the FL5 Type R feels special from the moment you drop into its driver's seat, then on the move offers feedback of a quality rarely found at any price. Its looks shouldn't be a hurdle this time around, either.



BEST OF THE REST

The **Hyundai i30 N** (left) is a thoroughly engaging hot hatch in the classic mould, and costs considerably less than the Civic Type R to boot. The **Mercedes-AMG A45 S** matches a ludicrously potent in-line four with a genuinely involving four-wheel-drive chassis, or if it's affordable supermini fun you want, look no further than the **Hyundai i20 N**.

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE ON TEST (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	2019-22	4/1368	178/5500	184/3000	1035kg	-	175	6.7	-	140	★★★★★
Abarth 695C	318 F	£28,375	4/1368	178/5500	184/3000	1090kg	1153kg	166	6.7	-	140	★★★★★
Abarth 695 Biposto	205 F	2014-18	4/1369	187/5500	184/3000	997kg*	-	191	5.9	-	143	★★★★★
Abarth 500e Turismo	314 D	£38,795	113kW	152	173	1410kg	-	110	7.0	-	96	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 147 GTA	187 F	2003-06	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1360kg	-	185	6.3	6.0	153	★★★★★
Audi A1 40 TFSI	256 D	2019-22	4/1984	197/6000	236/1500	1260kg	-	159	6.5	-	155	★★★★★
Audi S1	316 F	2014-18	4/1984	228/6000	273/1600	1315kg	-	176	5.8	-	155	★★★★★
Audi A1 quattro	264 F	2013	4/1984	253/6000	258/2500	1420kg	-	181	5.7	-	152	★★★★★
Audi S3 Sportback	279 D	£44,175	4/1984	306/5450	295/2000	1500kg	-	207	4.8	-	155	★★★★★
Audi S3	188 F	2013-20	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1395kg	-	216	5.2	5.4	155	★★★★★
Audi RS3 Sportback	292 D	2021-23	5/2480	394/5600	369/2250	1570kg	-	255	3.8	-	155	★★★★★
Audi RS3 Sportback	256 F	2017-21	5/2480	394/5850	354/1700	1510kg	-	265	4.1	-	155	★★★★★
Audi RS3 Sportback	221 F	2015-16	5/2480	362/5500	343/1625	1520kg	-	242	4.3	3.6	155	★★★★★
BMW 128ti	318 F	£37,375	4/1998	261/4750	295/1750	1445kg	1481kg	184	6.1	-	155	★★★★★
BMW M135i xDrive	318 F	£41,845	4/1998	302/5000	332/1750	1525kg	1584kg	201	4.8	-	155	★★★★★
BMW M135i	212 F	2012-15	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1430kg	-	228	5.1	5.2	155	★★★★★
Citroën DS3 1.6 THP	142 F	2010-15	4/1598	154/6000	177/1400	1240kg	-	126	7.3	-	133	★★★★★
Citroën DS3 Racing	153 D	2011-12	4/1598	204/6000	203/2000	1240kg	-	167	6.5	-	146	★★★★★
Citroën AX GT	195 F	1987-92	4/1360	85/6400	86/4000	722kg	-	120	9.2	-	110	★★★★★
Cupra Born 230 (77kWh)	-	£41,975	170kW	228	229	1875kg	-	124	7.0	-	99	★★★★★
Cupra Leon e-Hybrid	280 D	£40,160	4/1395	242	295	1596kg	-	154	6.7	-	140	★★★★★
Cupra Leon 300	318 F	£40,680	4/1984	296/5300	295/2000	1429kg	1505kg	210	5.7	-	155	★★★★★
DS 3 Performance	222 D	2016-18	4/1598	205/6000	221/3000	1175kg	-	177	6.5	-	143	★★★★★
Fiat Panda 100HP	273 F	2006-11	4/1368	99/6000	97/4250	975kg	1028kg	103	9.5	-	115	★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST (Mk8)	259 F	2018-23	3/1497	197/6000	214/1600	1187kg	-	169	6.5	-	144	★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST Edition / Performance Edition	292 F	2021-23	3/1497	197/6000	214/1600	1187kg	-	169	6.5	-	144	★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST (Mk7)	207 F	2013-17	4/1596	197/5700	214/2500	1088kg	1193kg	184	6.9	7.4	137	★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST200 (Mk7)	309 F	2016	4/1596	212/6000	236/2500	1088kg	-	198	6.7	-	143	★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST (Mk6)	075 D	2005-08	4/1999	148/6000	140/4500	1137kg	-	132	7.9	-	129	★★★★★
Ford Focus ST Performance (Mk4)	318 F	£37,650	4/2261	276/5500	310/3000	1433kg	1424kg	196	5.7	-	155	★★★★★
Ford Focus ST Edition (Mk4)	294 D	2021-21	4/2261	276/5500	310/3000	1433kg	-	196	5.7	-	155	★★★★★
Ford Focus ST (Mk3)	207 F	2015-18	4/1999	247/5500	265/2000	1362kg	-	184	6.5	-	154	★★★★★
Ford Focus ST (Mk2)	119 F	2005-10	5/2522	222/6000	236/1600	1392kg	-	162	6.8	6.7	150	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS (Mk3)	246 F	2015-18	4/2261	345/6000	347/2000	1547kg	1569kg	227	4.7	4.9	166	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS Edition (Mk3)	246 D	2018	4/2261	345/6000	347/2000	1547kg	-	227	4.7	-	166	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	195 F	2009-11	5/2522	300/6500	324/2300	1467kg	-	208	5.9	5.9	163	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS500 (Mk2)	256 F	2010-11	5/2522	345/6000	339/2500	1467kg	-	239	5.6	5.6	165	★★★★★
Ford Focus RS (Mk1)	312 F	2002-03	4/1998	212/5500	229/3500	1278kg	-	169	6.7	5.9	143	★★★★★
Ford Escort RS Cosworth	271 F	1992-96	4/1993	224/6250	224/3500	1275kg	-	179	6.2	-	137	★★★★★
Ford Puma 1.7	095 F	1997-2002	4/1679	123/6300	116/4500	1041kg	-	120	9.2	8.6	122	★★★★★
Ford Racing Puma	262 F	2000-01	4/1679	153/7000	119/4500	1174kg	-	132	7.9	7.8	137	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R (FL5)	318 F	£49,995	4/1996	324/6500	310/2500	1429kg	1439kg	230	5.4	-	171	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R (FK8)	288 F	2021-21	4/1996	316/6500	295/2500	1380kg	1409kg	233	5.8	5.9	168	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R Limited Edition (FK8)	293 F	2017-21	4/1996	316/6500	295/2500	1333kg	-	241	5.8	-	168	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R (FK2)	227 F	2015-17	4/1996	306/6500	295/2500	1378kg	-	226	5.7	5.4	167	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R (FN2)	102 F	2007-11	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	-	158	6.6	6.8	146	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R Mugen (FN2)	248 F	2009-11	4/1998	237/8300	157/6250	1233kg	-	195	5.9	-	155	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R (EP3)	287 F	2001-05	4/1998	197/7400	145/5900	1204kg	-	166	6.8	6.8	146	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type R (EK9)	210 F	1997-2000	4/1595	182/8200	118/7500	1040kg	-	178	6.8	-	135	★★★★★
Hyundai i20 N	318 F	£26,530	4/1591	201/5500	203/1750	1190kg	1238kg	172	6.2	-	143	★★★★★
Hyundai i30 N	318 F	£35,710	4/1998	276/6000	289/1950	1491kg	1458kg	198	5.9	-	155	★★★★★
Hyundai Ioniq 5 N	317 D	£65,000	448kW	641	546	2235kg	-	291	3.4	-	161	★★★★★
Hyundai Kona N	291 D	2021-23	4/1998	276/5500	289/2100	1510kg	-	186	5.5	-	149	★★★★★
Kia Ceed GT	267 F	2017-20	4/1591	201/6000	195/1500	1386kg	-	147	7.2	-	143	★★★★★

MAKE & MODEL

	ISSUE NO.	PRICE OR YEARS ON SALE	ENGINE CVL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (claimed)	WEIGHT (tested)	BHP/TON	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	318 F	£45,915	4/1991	302/5800	295/3000	1480kg	1620kg	207	4.7	-	155	+ Swift point-to-point; more engaging than a Golf R - Some front-drive rivals are more fun	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG A45 S	318 F	£63,285	4/1991	415/6750	369/5000	1560kg	1622kg	271	3.9	-	168	+ A 21st-century reincarnation of late-'90s Imprezas and Evos - It isn't cheap	★★★★★
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	£22,935	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	£26,490	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)	318 F	£32,755	4/1998	228/5200	236/1450	1245kg	1327kg	186	6.3	-	153	+ Fast, agile, nimble - Chassis lacks sparkle found in previous JCWs	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works GP (F56)	280 F	2020-21	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	120/6000	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	★★★★★
MG4 Trophy	312 D	£32,495	150k W	200	184	1685kg	-	121	7.7	-	100	+ Value for money - Don't expect any thrills	★★★★☆
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	1476kg	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 / RS Trophy	298 F	2018-21	4/1798	296/6000	310/4400	1443kg	-	209	5.7	-	158	+ More potent and capable than ever - Auto only; Trophy's ride can be unforgiving	★★★★★
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 FI 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 - FI team stickers in dubious taste	★★★★★
Renault Sport Mégane R26.R	315 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 Octavia vRS (Mk4)	281 D	£34,875	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)	318 F	£24,270	4/1373	127/5500	173/2000	1025kg	1019kg	126	9.1	-	130	+ Light, lively, honest and engaging - Warm rather than hot, and a bit basic inside	★★★★☆
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 adjustable 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	318 F	2020-22	3/1618	257/6500	265/3000	1280kg	1280kg	204	5.5	-	143	+ 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	+ Begs to be wrung out - You'll want the Performance Pack upgrade	★★★★★
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 GSe	318 F	£41,450	4/1598	222	265	1703kg	1657kg	132	7.5	-	146	+ Polished dynamics, neat looks - Lacklustre hybrid drivetrain and lack of performance	★★★★☆
Vauxhall Astra/GTC VXR (Mk2)	207 F	2012-18	4/1998	276/5500	295/2500	1475kg	-	190	6.0	-	155	+ Loony turbo pace - Hasn't got the precision of a Renault Sport Mégane	★★★★★
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	2018-23	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	£29,945	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)	310 F	£39,575	4/1984	242/5300	273/1600	1458kg	1460kg	169	6.2	-	155	+ Makes light work of most roads; easy to live with - The competition is stiffer than ever	★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf GTI Clubsport (Mk8)	318 F	£42,030	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)	318 F	£44,310	4/1984	316/5600	310/2100	1553kg	1506kg	207	4.7	-	155	+ 316bhp, four-wheel drive, understated flair - Not a particularly charismatic steer	★★★★★
Volkswagen Golf R '20 Years' (M													

MAKE & MODEL

Volkswagen Golf R (Mk6)
Volkswagen Golf GTI (Mk5)
Volkswagen Golf R32 (Mk5)
Volkswagen Golf R32 (Mk4)
Volkswagen Golf GTI 16V (Mk2)
Volkswagen Golf GTI (Mk1, 1.8)

140 D 2010-13 4/1984 266/6000
259 F 2004-09 4/1984 197/5100
087 F 2006-09 6/3189 246/6300
053 F 2002-04 6/3189 237/6250
195 F 1988-92 4/1781 139/6100
224 F 1982-84 4/1781 112/5800

258/2500 1446kg
207/1800 1336kg
236/2500 1466kg
236/2800 1477kg
123/4600 960kg
109/3500 860kg

187 5.7 - 155
150 7.3 6.7 146
170 6.5 5.8 155
163 6.6 6.4 154
147 7.9 - 129
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?
+ Rivals the Macan GTS - Needs optional P Zero Corsa tyres to give its very best
+ 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

The first ever **BMW M3 Touring** (left) is everything we hoped it would be, and its saloon sibling is highly desirable too. 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	313 F	£47,759	4/1995	276/5250	295/2250	1429kg	-	196	5.7	-	149	+ Supple and satisfying - 'By wire' brakes not the most reassuring underfoot	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio	287 F	£78,195	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	316 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	£87,195	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	★★★★★
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 DBX	277 D	£175,500	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	£193,500	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	307 F	£54,620	5/2480	394/5600	369/2250	1570kg	1597kg	255	3.8	-	155	+ Improved chassis makes the RS3 a contender at last - Engine and gearbox hold it back	★★★★★
Audi RS4 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	2019-23	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	£71,545	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)	314 F	£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 S6 (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	2007-19	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	£75,970	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	£73,270	6/2967	342/3850	516/2500	2020kg	-	173	5.1	-	155	+ Diesel suits the S6 ethos - Poor low-end engine response	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C8)	307 F	£114,890	8/3996	592/6000	590/2050	2075kg	2188kg	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 Performance	313 D	£118,545	8/3996	621/6000	627/2300	2065kg	-	306	3.4	-	180	+ Effortless point-to-point speed - Hard to find the sweet spot in the settings	★★★★★
Audi RS e-tron GT	284 D	£119,950	495kW	637	612	2347kg	-	276	3.3	-	155	+ A fine GT - Range not up to touring	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur V8	283 D	£175,100	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	£180,400	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 (W12)	272 D	2020-21	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 a W12 - Car feels its weight; engine sounds dull	★★★★★
Bentley Bentayga S	301 D	£197,300	8/3996	542/6000	568/2000	2416kg	-	228	4.5	-	180	+ The best Bentayga to drive - Far from the most elegant Bentley	★★★★★
Bentley Mullanne 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 M235i xDrive Gran Coupé	274 D	£43,385	4/1998	302/5000	332/1800	1570kg	-	195	4.8	-	155	+ Quick, with an able chassis and quality cabin - Just not that exciting	★★★★★
BMW 330i M Sport (G20)	257 D	2019-23	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 Touring (G21)	309 F	£60,700	6/2998	369/5500	369/1900	1795kg	-	209	4.6	-	155	+ As fast as your family wagon needs to go - You still want an M3 Touring, don't you?	★★★★★
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 Competition Touring xDrive (G81)	314 F	£80,550	6/2993	503/6250	479/2750	1865kg	1858kg	274	3.6	-	155	+ Feels smaller and more capable than the CSL - Less refined than most super-estates	★★★★★
BMW M3 CS (G80)	317 F	£115,900	6/2993	542/6250	479/2750	1765kg	-	312	3.4	-	188	+ Pure sports car approach to chassis upgrades - Not quite as special as the M5 CS	★★★★★
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 i5 M60 xDrive	318 D	£97,745	442kW	593	605	2305kg	-	261	3.8	-	142	+ Immense ability - Doesn't feel special or involving	★★★★★
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	2021-22	8/4395	626/6000	553/1800	1825kg	-	349	3.0	-	189	+ evo Car of the Year 2021 - Erm, there are 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 i7 xDrive60	310 D	£110,545	420kW	536	546	2640kg	-	206	6.1	-	149	+ A great EV limo - An S-class is better	★★★★★
BMW XM	309 D	£148,060	8/4395	644	590	2710kg	-	241	4.3	-	168	+ Stunning high-speed cruising ability - Heavy and clumsy	★★★★★
BMW Alpina D3 S Touring	286 D	£66,000	6/2993	350/5500	538/2500	1935kg	-	184	4.8	-	167	+ A serious bit of off-roading kit; price includes a season of rallies - Just 139bhp per ton	★★★★★
BMW Alpina B3 Touring	281 D	£80,700	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	★★★★★
BMW Alpina B4 Gran Coupé	311 D	£79,900	6/2993	488/5000	538/2500	1890kg	-	262	3.7	-	187	+ Exclusivity, refinement, pace - Slightly aloof in terms of involvement	★★★★★
BMW Alpina B5 GT	313 D	£124,000	8/4395	625/5500	627/3500	1980kg	-	321	3.2	-	205	+ Mighty road-biased performance - Size, weight	★★★★★
BMW Alpina B8 Gran Coupé	314 D	£140,300	8/4394	612/5500	590/2000	2100kg	-	296	3.4	-	201	+ Nails its luxury-GT brief - Not as driver-focused as some other Alpinas	★★★★★
Bowler Defender	312 D	£141,600	4/1984	296/5500	295/1500	2165kg	-	139	6.7	-	119	+ A serious bit of off-roading kit; price includes a season of rallies - Just 139bhp per ton	★★★★★
Forer Raptor	309 D	£58,900	6/2956	288/5500	362/2300	2454kg	-	119	7.9	-	111	+ Character, on-road civility, off-road capability - Not living near a desert	★★★★★
Ferrari Purosangue	308 D	£313,220	12/6496	715/7750	528/6250	2033kg*	-	357	3.3	-	193	+ Drives like a Ferrari should - Not as practical as rivals or as desirable as other Ferraris	★★★★★
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 - There aren't many good ones left	★★★★★
Jaguar XE 300 Sport	313 F	£43,500	4/1998	296/5500	295/1500	1651kg	-	181	5.9	-	155	+ Fluent handling; 4WD grip and security - Would really come alive with more power	★★★★★
Jaguar XE SV Project 8	316 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	★★★★★

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE ON YEAR ON SALE	ENGINE CVL / CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CLIMB)	WEIGHT (FUEL)	BHP/TON (CLIMB)	0-62MPH (CLIMB)	0-60MPH (FUEL)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
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	★★★★☆
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	2018-23	8/3996	641/6000	627/2250	2200kg	-	296	3.6	-	190	+ A freakish manipulator of physics - But also rather one-dimensional	★★★★☆
Lamborghini Urus S	309 D	£188,000	8/3996	657/6000	361/2300	2197kg	-	305	3.5	-	190	+ Less of a blunt instrument than the original Urus - It's still a 2.2-ton SUV	★★★★☆
Lamborghini Urus Performante	309 D	£209,000	8/3996	657/6000	627/2250	2150kg	-	310	3.3	-	190	+ Dynamically superb on track - Unexpectedly hard work on the road	★★★★☆
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	£110,900	8/3799	572/6750	538/2250	1969kg	2076kg	295	4.3	-	203	+ Subtle performance elegantly delivered - It's quite expensive	★★★★☆
Maserati Grecale Trofeo	310 D	£95,860	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 OP 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	★★★★☆
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 35 Coupé	318 D	£49,560	4/1991	302/6100	295/2500	1605kg	-	191	4.9	-	155	+ Impressive all-weather pace, classy looks - Forgettable overall driving experience	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG CLA 45 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 C43 Saloon (W206)	301 D	£64,110	4/1991	402/6750	369/5000	1690kg	-	242	4.6	-	155	+ Hugely accessible performance - Sluggish steering, some transmission jerkiness	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG C63 S E Performance Estate	306 D	£99,775	4/1991	671/6750	638/5250	2115kg	-	322	3.4	-	168	+ Hybrid tech works brilliantly... - ...but brings excess weight	★★★★☆
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 power 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	+ Refined, effective and fun - At nearly two tons, it's not 911 nimble	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG E63 S (W213)	286 F	£116,995	8/3982	604/5750	627/2500	1935kg	2085kg	317	3.4	3.4	186	+ As above - It's even heavier than the saloon, and five metres long	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG E63 S Estate (S213)	272 F	£118,995	8/3982	604/5750	627/2500	1995kg	-	308	3.5	-	180	+ Agile and immensely quick - Lacks the coupe GT's drama	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GT63 S 4-Door Coupé	269 F	£150,440	8/3982	630/5500	664/2500	2045kg	-	313	3.2	-	196	+ Can feel absolutely indomitable - Benefits of more power defeated by added weight	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GT63 S E Performance	308 D	£178,704	8/3982	831	1084	2305kg	-	366	2.9	-	196	+ Power, response and accuracy in spades - A little lacking in originality	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W212)	187 D	2013-16	8/5461	549/5500	531/1750	1770kg	-	315	4.2	-	155	+ Effortless power, intuitive and approachable - Sluggish auto 'box	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG S (W212)	208 F	2013-16	8/5461	577/5500	590/1750	1795kg	1971kg	327	4.1	-	155	+ Turbo engine didn't dilute the E63 experience - Sometimes struggles for traction...	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W212)	165 F	2011-13	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	1765kg	-	298	4.4	-	155	+ Indulgent chassis, brilliant engine - Steering still vague	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W211)	134 D	2009-11	8/6208	518/6800	465/5200	1765kg	-	298	4.5	-	155	+ Brilliant engine, indulgent chassis - Vague steering, speed limits	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG (W211)	096 D	2006-09	8/6208	507/6800	465/5200	1765kg	-	292	4.5	-	155	+ MS-humbling grunt, cossetting ride - Speed limits	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	052 F	2003-06	8/5439	469/6100	516/2650	1760kg	-	271	4.7	4.8	155	+ Performance doesn't come at the expense of luxury - But pure driving thrills do	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG S63 L (W222)	246 D	2013-20	8/3982	604/5500	664/2750	1940kg	-	316	4.3	-	155	+ Refinement - The non-EV S-class	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG EQ53 S	299 D	£157,160	-	649	700	2605kg	-	253	3.8	-	155	+ Hilarious performance and power figures - Performance isn't everything	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GLE 63 S E Performance	316 D	£108,000	4/1991	671	752	2235kg	-	305	3.5	-	170	+ Subtler than an X6 M - More force than finesse	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG GLE 63 S Coupé	213 D	£130,000	8/5461	577/5500	560/1750	2275kg	-	258	4.2	-	155	+ Vastly improved chassis, fabulous engine - Dynamic ability still limited	★★★★☆
Mercedes-AMG G63	250 D	£164,550	8/3982	577/6000	627/2500	2485kg	-	236	4.5	-	137	+ First Evo with a twin-clutch transmission - Not as exciting as its predecessors	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X FQ-300 SST	118 F	2008-14	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1590kg	-	185	4.5	5.2	155	+ Great engine and gearbox combo - It still lives in the shadow of the Evo IX	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X FQ-330 SST	134 F	2008-14	4/1998	324/6500	322/3500	1590kg	-	207	4.4	-	155	+ Ridiculously rapid Evo - A five-speed gearbox?	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X FQ-360	122 D	2008-14	4/1998	354/6500	363/3500	1560kg	-	231	4.0	-	155	+ Most powerful factory Evo ever... - ...about X grand too much when new	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X FQ-400	181 F	2009-10	4/1998	403/6500	387/3500	1560kg	-	262	3.8	-	155	+ Gives Porsche drivers nightmares - Points. Lots of	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX FQ-340	088 F	2005-08	4/1997	345/6800	321/4600	1400kg	-	250	4.2	4.3	157	+ Well-executed engine upgrades - Prison food	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX MR FQ-360	181 F	2005-08	4/1997	366/6887	363/3200	1400kg	-	266	4.0	-	157	+ The Evo grows up - Brakes need beefing up	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VIII	055 F	2003-05	4/1997	276/6500	289/3500	1410kg	-	199	5.1	-	157	+ Terrific all-rounder - You tell us	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VII	031 F	2002-03	4/1997	276/6500	282/3500	1360kg	-	206	5.1	5.0	140	+ Our favourite Evo - Subtle it is not	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VI Tommi Mäkinen	271 F	2000-01	4/1997	276/6500	275/2750	1365kg	-	205	4.6	-	150	+ A hybrid worth considering - Especially if someone else is paying	★★★★☆
Peugeot 508 SW PSE	309 F	£56,575	4/1598	355	383	1875kg	-	192	5.2	-	155	+ A credible Tesla alternative - Avoid the super-hard-riding Performance upgrade	★★★★☆
Polestar 2	280 D	£46,450	300kW	402	487	2048kg	-	199	4.7	-	127	+ Adjustable Öhlins dampers great for track but surely this is a road car?	★★★★☆
Polestar 2 BST Edition 270	306 D	£68,990	350kW	469	501	2146kg	-	222	4.4	-	127	+ The most engaging Panamera - Still a heavy old thing	★★★★☆
Porsche Panamera GTS	279 D	£110,700	8/3996	473/6500	457/1800	2040kg	-	236	3.9	-	181	+ Retains Porsche's core DNA - The Panamera GTS and Taycan also exist	★★★★☆
Porsche Panamera 4S E-Hybrid Sport Turismo	298 D	£105,830	6/2894	552	553	2240kg	-	250	3.7	-	182	+ Shows some Stuttgart magic in the corners - It weighs 2.3 tons!	★★★★☆
Porsche Panamera Turbo S E-Hybrid Sport T.	272 D	£149,100	8/3996	671	627	2325kg	-	293	3.4	-	192	+ Half the price of a Taycan Turbo S - Less is less	★★★★☆
Porsche Taycan (Performance Battery Plus)	283 D	£83,654	350kW	375	-	2130kg	-	179	5.4	-	143	+ One of the best performance EVs yet - Charge anxiety	★★★★☆
Porsche Taycan GT Sport Turismo	294 D	£111,200	380kW	510	-	2310kg	-	224	3.7	-	224	+ A convincing and crushingly capable crossover - Needs big roads	★★★★☆
Porsche Taycan Turbo Cross Turismo	287 D	£126,800	460kW	616	-	2320kg	-	270	3.3	-	155	+ Straight-line oomph will leave you in awe - Inadequate EV infrastructure	★★★★☆
Porsche Taycan Turbo S	267 D	£148,300	460kW	616	-	2295kg	-	273	2.8	-	161	+ All the usual Porsche dynamic qualities - With none of the performance	★★★★☆
Porsche Macan T	307 F	£58,400	4/1984	261/5000	295/1800	1865kg	-	142	6.2	-	144	+ Great for an SUV - Every positive still needs to be suffixed with 'for an SUV'	★★★★☆
Porsche Macan S	257 D	£59,800	6/2997	349/5400	354/1360	1865kg	-	190	5.3	-	157	+ Impressive surface-coated brake tech - We'd rather have it on a sports car	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne S (Mk3)	253 D	£77,300	6/2894	434/5700	406/1800	2020kg	-	218	5.2	-	164	+ Huge performance, surprising agility - It's still a two-ton-plus SUV	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk3)	243 D	£112,400	8/3996	542/5750	568/1960	2175kg	-	254	4.1	-	177	+ As good to drive as the regular Cayenne - Swooper roof adds thousands to the price	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne Turbo Coupé	263 D	£115,100	8/3996	542/5750	568/2000	2200kg	-	250	3.9	-	177	+ A car this big and heavy shouldn't drive this well - It's still big and heavy	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne Turbo GT	290 D	£150,500	8/3996	631/6000	627/2300	2220kg	-	289	3.3	-	186	+ The driver's Cayenne... - ...but why would a driver want an SUV?	★★★★☆
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2, V6)	211 D	2015-17	6/3604	434/6000	442/1600	2110kg	-	209	5.2	-	163	+ The ultimate Impreza - Price reflects this	★★★★☆
Prodrive P25	313 F	£552,000	4/2457	440/6000	457/3000	180kg	-	379	2.8	-	150	+ Hybrid powertrain provides a genuine benefit - Feels big and heavy, because it is	★★★★☆
Range Rover Sport P510e	309 D	£112,040	6/2996	503	516	2735kg	-	187	5.4	-	150	+ Does effortless speed and luxury very well - Not quite so good at the 'sport' bit	★★★★☆
Range Rover Sport P530 First Edition	303 D	£119,580	8/4395	523/5500	553/1800	2430kg	-	219	4.5	-	155	+ Quicker and more capable - Heavier and more expensive	★★★★☆
Range Rover Autobiography P530	298 D	£142,260	8/4395	523/5500	551/1800	2585kg	-	206	4.6	-	155	+ Unrivaled luxury and refinement - Still better to be driven in than to drive	★★★★☆
Rolls-Royce Ghost	280 D	£265,420	12/6749	563/5000	627/1600	2490kg	-	230	4.8	-	155	+ Rolls reinvented for the 21st century - The roads are barely big enough	★★★★☆
Rolls-Royce Phantom	054 F	2003-17	12/6749	453/5350	531/3500	2560kg	-	180	5.7	-	149	+ That old Impreza magic is alive and well - Only 209 were built, and only for America	★★★★☆
Subaru WRX STI S209	272 F	2020	4/2457	341/6400	330/3600	1580kg	-	219	4.9	-	162	+ Still has its moments - Something of an anachronism	★★★★☆
Subaru WRX STI	253 F	2014-18	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1534kg	-	196	5.2	-	158	+ Stunning to drive - Not so stunning to look at	★★★★☆
Subaru Impreza STI ('Hawkeye')	090 F	2005-07	4/2457	276/6000	289/4000	1495kg	-	188	5.3	-	158	+ A Subaru with real edge - Bit too edgy in the wet	★★★★☆
Subaru Impreza WRX STI PPP ('Blobeye')	073 F	2003-05	4/1994	300/6000	299/4000	1470kg	-	207	5.4	5.2	148	+ Destined for classic status - Thrifty	★★★★☆
Subaru Impreza Turbo ('Classic')	011 F	1993-2000	4/1994	215/5600	214/4000	1235kg	-	177	5.8	5.4	144	+ Perfect blend of poise and power - Limited numbers	★★★★☆
Subaru Impreza RB5 WR Sport	187 F	1999	4/1994	237/6000	258/3500	1235kg	-						

ROADSTERS / CONVERTIBLES



OUR CHOICE

Porsche 718 Spyder RS. Less of a headbanger than the Cayman GT4 RS and far less intimidating than the latest 911 GT3 RS, the 718 Spyder RS is perhaps the most immediately loveable of all the recent Porsche RS models and sees the internal-combustion-engined Boxster bow out on a high.



BEST OF THE REST

The **Ferrari Roma Spider** (left) is the car the California/Portofino always wanted to be, the **Aston Martin Vantage Roadster** bests the 911 Cabriolet for character, the **Porsche 718 Boxster GTS 4.0** is essentially a cut-price 718 Spyder, and the **Caterham Seven** remains an exemplar of sports car purity across the range.

MAKE & MODEL

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 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	£47,490	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 4R	316 D	£77,940	4/1996	400/6300	370/4500	665kg	-	611	2.7	-	170	+ None more intense - Cost of the numerous options can soon add up	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3.24S	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 - Pricey	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vantage Roadster	279 D	£131,250	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	2018-23	8/3982	503/6000	498/2000	1870kg	-	273	4.1	-	187	+ Impressively wide range of dynamic personalities - Cabin could be better at this price	★★★★★
Audi TTS Roadster (Mk3)	207 D	£56,435	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	£59,915	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	£218,000	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 Baccarat	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	£56,475	6/2998	335/5000	369/1600	1535kg	-	222	4.6	-	155	+ Inherent agility and ability - Undemanding and unengaging	★★★★★
BMW Z4	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	£32,585	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	£40,085	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	£43,585	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	£56,990	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	£64,990	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	£97,890	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	£162,000	4/2300	394/6200	369/3000	855kg*	-	468	3.3	-	174	+ Starting 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	★★★★★
Ferrari Roma Spider	315 D	£210,313	8/3855	611/5750	560/3000	1556kg*	-	399	3.4	-	199	+ Feels as good as the coupe Roma - Careful which OE tyre you choose	★★★★★
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	£84,125	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	2013-22	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	2010-22	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 IIIS (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 (SI)	235 F	1996-2001	4/1796	118/5500	122/3000	725kg	-	165	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	4.5	126	+ Hardcore road-racer... - that looks like a dune buggy from Mars	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.5 (Mk4/ND)	230 F	£25,825	4/1496	129/7000	111/4800	975kg	-	134	8.3	-	127	+ Lightest MX-5 since the Mk1 - Lacks intensity	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 2.0 (Mk4/ND, 184PS)	299 F	£30,410	4/1998	181/7000	151/4000	1052kg	1073kg	175	6.5	-	136	+ At last, a more powerful factory MX-5 - It's still no fireball	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 RF 2.0 (Mk4/ND, 184PS)	256 F	£32,310	4/1998	181/7000	151/4000	1073kg	-	171	6.8	-	137	+ As above, but with a retracting hard-top - Which adds weight	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 2.0 (Mk4/ND)	228 F	2015-18	4/1998	158/6000	147/4600	1000kg	-	161	7.3	-	133	+ Brilliant basic recipe - The desire for stiffer suspension and more power	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 2.0i (Mk3.5/NC)	212 F	2009-15	4/1999	158/7000	139/5000	1098kg	-	146	7.6	-	138	+ Handles brilliantly again; folding hard-top also available - Less-than-macho image	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk3/NC)	091 F	2005-09	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1080kg	-	108	9.3	-	122	+ Gearchange, interior - Lost some of the charm of old MX-5; dubious handling	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk2/NC)	017 F	1998-2005	4/1839	146/7000	124/5000	1065kg	-	140	8.5	-	123	+ Affordable ragtaps don't get much better - Cheap cabin	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.6 (Mk1/NA)	268 F	1989-97	4/1597	115/6500	100/5500	971kg	-	120	8.8	-	114	+ The original and still (pretty much) the best - Less than rigid	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG SL55	305 F	£147,715	8/3982	469/5500	516/2250	1875kg	1940kg	254	3.9	-	183	+ Impressive damping and 4WD - Is neither chilled-out cruiser or AMG GT replacement	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG SL63	314 D	£171,965	8/3982	577/5550	590/2500	1895kg	-	309	3.6	-	196	+ A welcome performance boost over the SL55 - Still not a stellar sports car	★★★★★
Morgan Super 3	300 F	£43,165	3/1432	118/6500	110/4500	635kg*	-	189	7.0	-	130	+ The three-wheeler gets modernised - Driving experience is still vintage	★★★★★
Morgan 3 Wheeler	198 F	2012-21	2/1976	82/5250	103/3250	525kg*	-	159	6.0	-	115	+ Quirky, characterful, brilliant - Can become a two-wheeler if you push too hard	★★★★★
Morgan Plus Four	279 F	£71,830	4/1998	255/5500	258/1000	1013kg*	-</						

MAKE & MODEL

Porsche 718 Boxster	224 D	£53,800	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	£63,800	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	£75,300	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	2019-23	6/3995	414/7600	310/5000	1420kg	-	296	4.4	-	187	+ Essentially a drop-top Cayman GT4 - Including its long gearing	★★★★★
Porsche 718 Spyder RS	314 D	£123,000	6/3996	493/8400	332/6750	1410kg	-	355	3.4	-	191	+ A hugely appealing RS for road driving - We'll never see another like it	★★★★★
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	£126,000	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	£126,000	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	214 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	★★★★☆
Toyota MR2 (Mk3)	258 F	1999-2007	4/1794	138/6400	125/4400	975kg	-	144	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-ripping grunt - Details	★★★★★
TVR Griffith 500	314 F	1993-2001	8/4997	340/5500	350/4000	1060kg	-	326	4.1	-	169	+ 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	£52,490	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	£62,490	4/1798	296/6300	251/2400	1191kg	-	269	4.2	-	155	+ The Goldilocks A110 for road driving - Trackdays	★★★★★
Alpine A110 S	268 D	£62,490	4/1798	296/6300	251/2400	1109kg	-	271	4.2	-	171	+ Firmer and faster - But not necessarily better	★★★★★
Alpine A110 R	317 F	£96,990	4/1798	296/6300	251/2400	1082kg	-	278	3.9	-	177	+ Ultimate A110 works brilliantly on the road - Falls short on track with no power hike	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vantage	280 F	£142,000	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	£159,500	8/3982	527/6000	505/2000	1570kg*	-	341	3.6	-	195	+ Honors 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 S	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 DB12	317 F	£185,000	8/3982	671/6000	590/2750	1788kg	-	381	3.6	-	202	+ Has the 'super' part of its 'super tourer' claim covered - Less of a GT than the DB11 was	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB11 V8	253 D	2017-23	8/3982	528/6000	513/2000	1760kg	-	305	4.0	-	192	+ Potent and characterful engine; sharper chassis than V12 - Makes the V12 redundant	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB11	235 F	2017-18	12/5204	600/6500	516/1500	1870kg	-	326	3.9	4.0	200	+ A great GT - Suffers in outright handling terms as a result	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB11 AMR	290 F	2018-21	12/5204	630/6500	516/1500	1870kg	-	342	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 TT S (Mk3)	261 D	£49,740	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	£58,165	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 TT S (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	£77,715	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	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT (V8)	290 F	£176,400	8/3996	542/6000	568/2000	2165kg	-	254	4.0	-	198	+ Pace, quality, polish - A bit one-dimensional	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT S	309 D	£198,600	8/3996	542/6000	568/2000	2090kg	-	263	4.0	-	198	+ Unparalleled comfort, unexpected performance - Lacks dynamic flourish of some rivals	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT (W12)	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	£219,400	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 (W12)	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	★★★★★
BMW M230i M Sport Coupé	310 F	£41,065	4/1998	242/4500	295/1600	1525kg	-	161	5.9	-	155	+ Satisfying depth of ability - Four-cylinder engine sounds workmanlike under load	★★★★★
BMW M240i xDrive Coupé	302 F	£49,225	6/2998	369/5500	369/1900	1690kg	1695kg	222	4.3	-	155	+ A pocket GT with bulging muscles - You might balk at the bulk	★★★★★
BMW M2 (G87)	313 F	£65,885	6/2993	454/6250	406/2650	1700kg	-	271	4.3	-	155	+ Still has that hot-rod feel - Also feels heavy and remote alongside some rivals	★★★★★
BMW M2 (F87)	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 (F87)	265 F	2018-21	6/2979	404/6250	406/2350	1550kg	-	265	4.4	-	155	+ A more capable and involving M2 - More expensive and heavier, too	★★★★★
BMW M2 CS (F87)	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 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 M440i xDrive	282 D	£58,330	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	£82,520	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	£85,375	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	2023	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 - Can be 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	★★★★★



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MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE ON YEAR ON SALE	ENGINE CVL/CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (CARS)	WEIGHT (TEST)	BHP/TON (CARS)	D-32MPH (CARS)	D-50MPH (TEST)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
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 I-series M Coupé	★★★★★
BMW M3 GTS (E92)	313 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 M8 Competition	272 D	£138,090	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	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1850kg	-	303	4.2	-	155	+ Mighty ability, pace, technology - You'll want the Competition Package upgrade, too	★★★★★
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)	393 F	£92,890	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 E-Ray (C8)	318 F	\$106,595	8/6162	655	595	1765kg	-	377	c2.7	-	183	+ Who knew a hybrid, 4WD Vette would be so engaging? - The Z06 is more exciting	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray (C7)	197 F	2013-19	8/6162	460/6000	465/4600	1496kg	-	312	4.2	4.4	180	+ Performance, chassis balance, supple ride - Body control could be better	★★★★★
Ferrari Roma	290 F	£174,910	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	★★★★★
Ford Mustang 5.0 V8 GT	266 F	£50,315	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	£60,315	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	\$79,420	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)	311 F	1996-2000	4/1797	187/8000	131/7300	1140kg	-	167	6.7	6.2	145	+ Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Too raw for some	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type P300 RWD	271 D	£62,235	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	-	£78,330	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 boisterous	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type R (P575 AWD)	271 D	£102,870	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	★★★★★
Jannarelli 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	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow GT-XR	310 D	€316,800	5/2480	493/6350	429/5550	1226kg	-	409	3.4	-	174	+ A real racing car for the road - A real racing car for the road	★★★★★
Lexus RC F	295 F	£76,560	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	£95,660	8/4969	470/7100	398/4800	1935kg	-	247	4.7	-	168	+ Glorious engine, rewarding chassis - Lacks ultimate body control, numb steering	★★★★★
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 GT40	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 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 i4	313 D	£81,495	4/1991	360/6600	317/3000	1446kg	-	253	4.3	-	171	+ Talented chassis - Some will miss the traditional Lotus fluidity	★★★★★
Lotus Emira V6	299 F	£85,995	6/3456	400/6600	317/3500	1457kg	1486kg	279	4.3	-	180	+ Super-car looks with a sports car price - Dynamic balance is more planted than playful	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo Trofeo	317 F	£163,470	6/2992	542/6500	479/3000	1795kg	-	307	3.5	-	199	+ Impressive dynamic bandwidth - Feels its size and weight when pushing on	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	188 F	2012-19	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1880kg	-	245	4.8	-	186	+ A real sense of occasion to drive; wonderful engine - Feels like in the tooth	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo MC	239 D	2017-19	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	★★★★★
Mazda RX-8	122 F	2003-11	2R/1308	228/8200	156/5500	1429kg	-	162	6.4	6.5	146	+ Never mind the quirksiness, it's a great drive - Wafer-thin torque output; thirsty	★★★★★
Mercedes-AMG C63 S Coupé (W205)	262 F	2015-23	3/3982	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 GT63	317 D	£164,765	8/3982	577/5500	590/2500	1895kg	-	309	3.2	-	196	+ Rights many of the old GT's shortcomings - Lacks the ultimate engagement of a 911	★★★★★
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 as being a GT as it is a sports coupe - Difficult to drive fast and smoothly	★★★★★
Mitsubishi 3000GT	-	1990-99	-	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 350Z	107 F	2003-09	6/3696	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)	315 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 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 - Demon Tweaks interior	★★★★★
Polestar 1	269 D	2019-22	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	£51,800	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	2020-23	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	£61,800	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	£73,300	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	312 F	2019-23	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	175	+ The Cayman comes of age - Err...	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman GT3 (981)	219 F	2014-16	6/3436	335/7400	280/4750	1345kg	-	253	4.9	-	177	+ Tweaks improve an already sublime package - Slightly 'aftermarket' looks	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman GT4 (981)	265 F	2015-16	6/3800	380/7400	310/4750	1340kg	-	288	4.4	-	183	+ Evo Car of the Year 2015 (even though the 991 GT3 RS	

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OUR CHOICE **Porsche 911 GT3 RS.** It's the most extreme GT3 RS yet, with looks that suggest you'd only ever drive it on the road to get it to a trackday, yet in fact it works brilliantly whatever the asphalt passing beneath its wheels – smooth or lumpy, wet or dry – and all without being intimidating. A genuinely special car

OUR CHOICE

BEST OF THE BEST

The **McLaren 750S** (left) improves upon its already mighty 720S predecessor, the **Maserati MC20** delivers old-fashioned supercar excitement in spades, the **Ferrari 296 GTB** and **McLaren Artura** show how rewarding a hybrid supercar can be, and any **Lamborghini Huracán** still has oodles of big-capacity, naturally aspirated appeal

Aston Martin DBS (Superleggera)	264 F	£238,725	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	£257,125	12/5204	715/6500	664/1800	1863kg*	-	390	3.6	-	211	+ Dazzling looks, immense performance - Width and weight bring compromises	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS 770 Ultimate	311 F	£314,000	12/5204	759/6400	664/1800	1770kg	-	436	3.4	-	211	+ Chassis refinements - We're not sure it needed the extra power...	★★★★★
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	201	+ Vanquish joins the supercar legends - A tad intimidating at the limit	★★★★★
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 lacks manoeuvring; only 77 were made	★★★★★
Aston Martin Valkyrie	308 F	£2.5m	12/6500	1139/10,600	681/7000	1270kg*	-	911	3.0	-	220	+ Unique and uncompromising - Horrendous cockpit noise	★★★★★
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-engine rivals feel sharper, faster and more capable	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 quattro	261 F	2020-21	10/5204	562/8100	413/6300	1660kg	-	349	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	-	388	3.1	-	205	+ Stunning V10; approachable performance - Optional Dynamic steering feels unnatural	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 GT RWD	314 F	£195,253	10/5204	611/8000	411/6400	1570kg	-	395	3.4	-	199	+ A brilliantly executed finale for the R8 - Not as extreme as some rivals	★★★★★
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 R8s really need - You can't get a manual gearbox	★★★★★
Audi R8 V8 (Mk1)	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	★★★★★
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 Chiron Super Sport	307 F	2021-22	16/7993	1578/7050	1180/2250	1995kg	-	804	2.4	-	273	+ Hit 304.7mph in pre-production form - Are you Andy Wallace enough to go there?	★★★★★
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	1818kg	-	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	1636kg	-	347	3.6	-	213	+ Superbly engineered four-wheel-drive quad-turbo rocket - It just fizzled out	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Z06 (C8)	310 F	£135,000	8/5463	670/8400	460/6300	1561kg*	-	436	2.6	-	195	+ Mighty engine; absorbing driving experience - Some steering feel wouldn't go amiss	★★★★★
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	★★★★★
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 F8 Tributo	281 F	2019-23	8/3902	710/8000	568/3250	1435kg	-	503	2.9	-	211	+ Ferrari's best series-production V8 ever - It's hybrids after this	★★★★★
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	315 F	2013-15	8/4497	597/9000	398/6000	1395kg	-	435	3.0	-	202+	+ eva 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	5.7	-	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 812 Superfast	275 F	2017-23	12/6496	789/8500	529/7000	1630kg	-	492	3.9	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-engine 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+	+ Alarming fast - Doesn't flow like a 458 Speciale	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	275 F	2006-12	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1609kg	-	368	3.7	3.5	205	+ eva 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 456 GT	209 F	1992-97	12/5474	436/62500	406/4500	1690kg*	-	262	5.2	-	186	+ A genuine GT supercar - Running costs	★★★★★
Ferrari SF90 Stradale	299 F	£376,048	8/3990	986/7500	590/6000	1570kg*	1742kg	638	2.5	-	211	+ Hugely fast hybrid-hypercar - Can feel clumsy when hustled	★★★★★
Ferrari SF90 XX Stradale	318 F	£673,584	8/3990	1016/7900	593/6250	1560kg*	-	661	2.3	-	219	+ Explosive, tactile and street-legal - We haven't driven it on the road yet	★★★★★
Ferrari SF90 Spider	300 D	£418,233	8/3990	986/7500	590/6000	1670kg*	-	600	2.5	-	191	+ Mesmerising V8 with expertly integrated hybrid system - You need to pack light	★★★★★
Ferrari Daytona SP3	302 F	£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	12/6496	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'	★★★★★

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MAKE & MODEL

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE NO.	PRICE ON YEAR ON SALE	ENGINE CV/L CC	BHP/RPM	LB FT/RPM	WEIGHT (KGM)	WEIGHT (LBS)	BHP/TON (CLAM)	0-62MPH (L/100)	0-60MPH (L/100)	MAX MPH	EVO RATING	
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	\$1,800,000	8/6555	1817/8000	1198/5000	1360kg	-	1357	2.6	-	311	+ Ballistic performance; surprising drivability - Finding somewhere to do 300mph+	★★★★★
Honda NSX (NC1)	270 F	2016-21	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	★★★★★
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	2020-23	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	2019-23	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 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	314 F	£212,000	10/5204	631/8000	417/6500	1379kg*	-	465	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 Huracán Sterrato	317 F	£232,820	10/5204	602/8000	413/6500	1470kg*	-	418	3.4	-	162	+ A 4x4 that's right up our dirt road - We're a bit short of desert in the UK	★★★★★
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	376/6250	1423kg*	-	364	4.0	4.3	196	+ On a full-bore start it spins all four wheels. Cool - Slightly clunky e-gear	★★★★★
Lamborghini Revuelto	316 D	£450,000	12/6499	1001	535/6750	1772kg*	-	574	2.5	-	217+	+ The old formula, invisibly assisted - Huge even by V12 Lambo standards; heavy too	★★★★★
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	2018-23	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 LP780-4 Ultimae	300 F	2022-23	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	487/6600	1665kg*	-	385	3.8	-	211	+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP700-4 SV	200 F	2009-11	12/6496	661/8000	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-snorting engine - A tiny bit more ragged than the coupe	★★★★★
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	£166,300	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 750S	317 D	£244,760	8/3994	740/7500	590/6500	1389kg	-	541	2.8	-	206	+ Superbly executed upgrade over the 720S - Interior more functional but less special	★★★★★
McLaren 720S	262 F	2017-23	8/3994	710/7250	568/5500	1419kg	-	508	2.9	2.9	212	+ evo Car of the Year 2017 - Favors precision over emotion	★★★★★
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	+ Staggering performance, refinement - Engine noise can be grating	★★★★★
McLaren Senna	252 F	£750,000	8/3999	789/7250	590/5500	198kg*	-	669	2.8	-	211	+ Astounding performance, stellar presence - Only 500 being made	★★★★★
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	2019-21	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	2021	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 (gulling 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 M500	314 F	£150,000	6/3496	506/5300	594/4000	1450kg	-	355	3.7	-	-	+ A unique take on the junior supercar - Are you comfortable with 506bhp with no ABS?	★★★★★
Noble M600	186 F	2009-18	8/4439	650/6800	604/3800	198kg*	-	551	3.5	3.8	225	+ Spiritual successor to the Ferrari F40 - Quite a lot rarer	★★★★★
Pagani Huayra	185 F	2011-22	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)	315 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	★★★★★
Pininfarina Battista	313 F	£1,960,000	14/00kW	1874	1726	2063kg	-	923	1.9	-	217	+ Fascinating weight-defying dynamics - Nausea-inducing acceleration	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (992)	299 F	£146,400	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)	317 F	£192,600	6/3996	518/8500	343/6300	1450kg	-	363	3.2	-	184	+ evo Car of the Year 2023 - A bit showy for road driving, perhaps	★★★★★
Porsche 911 S/T (992)	316 F	£321,600	6/3996	518/8500	343/6300	1380kg	-	381	3.7	-	186	+ GT3 RS engine, manual 'box, lightweight build, road-biased suspension... - Rarity	★★★★★
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 - Err...	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.1)	182 F	2007-09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1395kg	1452kg	398	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	376/7400	284/5000	1380kg	-	277	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)	315 F	1999-2											



Alfa Romeo 4C

It had stunning looks and promising hardware, but somehow the 4C didn't add up to the sum of its parts

T HERE ARE A FEW BEACHES ON THE Isles of Scilly in Cornwall that look like they could be in the Caribbean. The fine white sand is second cousin to caster sugar, tufts of Marram grass give a feeling of seclusion, and the crystal clear, turquoise water is spectacularly inviting. Which is why every year it is a rude awakening as toe meets shallows to discover that a 5mm wetsuit still feels entirely appropriate in August. It may look like St Lucia but the water is always frigid enough to shatter any illusions and remind you that you're swimming on the other side of the Atlantic.

It's the same every occasion I've walked up to an Alfa 4C. Some part of me thinks that maybe this time the driving experience will live up to the looks. Because the aesthetics really are spectacular; an Elise with more muscle and a touch more flair, a mini Italian supercar. Yes, the first miss was to replace the concept's conventional front lights with weird items that look like an insect's compound eyes, but overall it is a seriously seductive shape. Open the door and you also have the joy of seeing the weave of the beautiful carbon tub that weighs

just 52kg. So exotic. So promising. Then that engine parps into life, the steering meets a camber and you experience the dynamic equivalent of an ice bath reaching your nether regions.

We all wanted the 4C to be good when it turned up on eCoty in 2013. But it wasn't. It came a resounding eighth out of eight. In fact the gap between seventh and first was probably smaller than that between seventh (the excellent 981-generation Cayman S) and eighth.

On paper there was nothing wrong with the 1.7-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine and twin-clutch 'box, but the execution was all wrong. Outputs of 237bhp and 258lb ft were plenty in such a light car (even if the claimed 895kg dry weight might have been a little optimistic) but 'Flatulent, laggy, lethargic' were the words Dickie Meaden used to describe the delivery.

However, it was the steering that was the biggest disappointment. The promise of an unassisted rack in a world that was swiftly switching to EPAS was music to our ears at the time. But once again the reality was a let-down, not helped by a chunky, ugly wheel. 'It certainly shows

that good steering isn't achieved just by dialling back the power assistance,' said Jethro Bovingdon.

On a smooth road things were OK, but as soon as the suspension had to deal with the slightest bump the car seemed to take on a life of its own, even in a straight line. Had such things been around at the time we'd probably have likened it to an aggressive lane-keep assistance that you couldn't turn off.

We tried the 4C again in subsequent years, both as a Spider and without the optional Sport chassis, but always got out deflated. Even on track, where you might think it would all come good, the 4C failed to shine, with understeer and oversteer both in unpredictable abundance, sometimes in the same corner.

Some point accusing fingers at the geometry of the front suspension, others flag the MacPherson-strut rear as the main culprit of its problems. Its overall weight was definitely more than that tub promised. But really it always felt like the tantalisingly *bella* 4C was let down by a whole host of factors. And to rub salt in the wound, four years later Alpine's A110 would come along and show Alfa how it should have been done in the first place.

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10/07/2024 - Trackday Spa

07/08/2024 - Convoy Training Spa

08/08/2024 - Trackday Spa

09/08/2024 - Trackday Nürburgring Nordschleife

06/09/2024 - Trackday Nürburgring Nordschleife

16/09/2024 - Trackday Spa

16/09/2024 - Convoy Training Spa

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