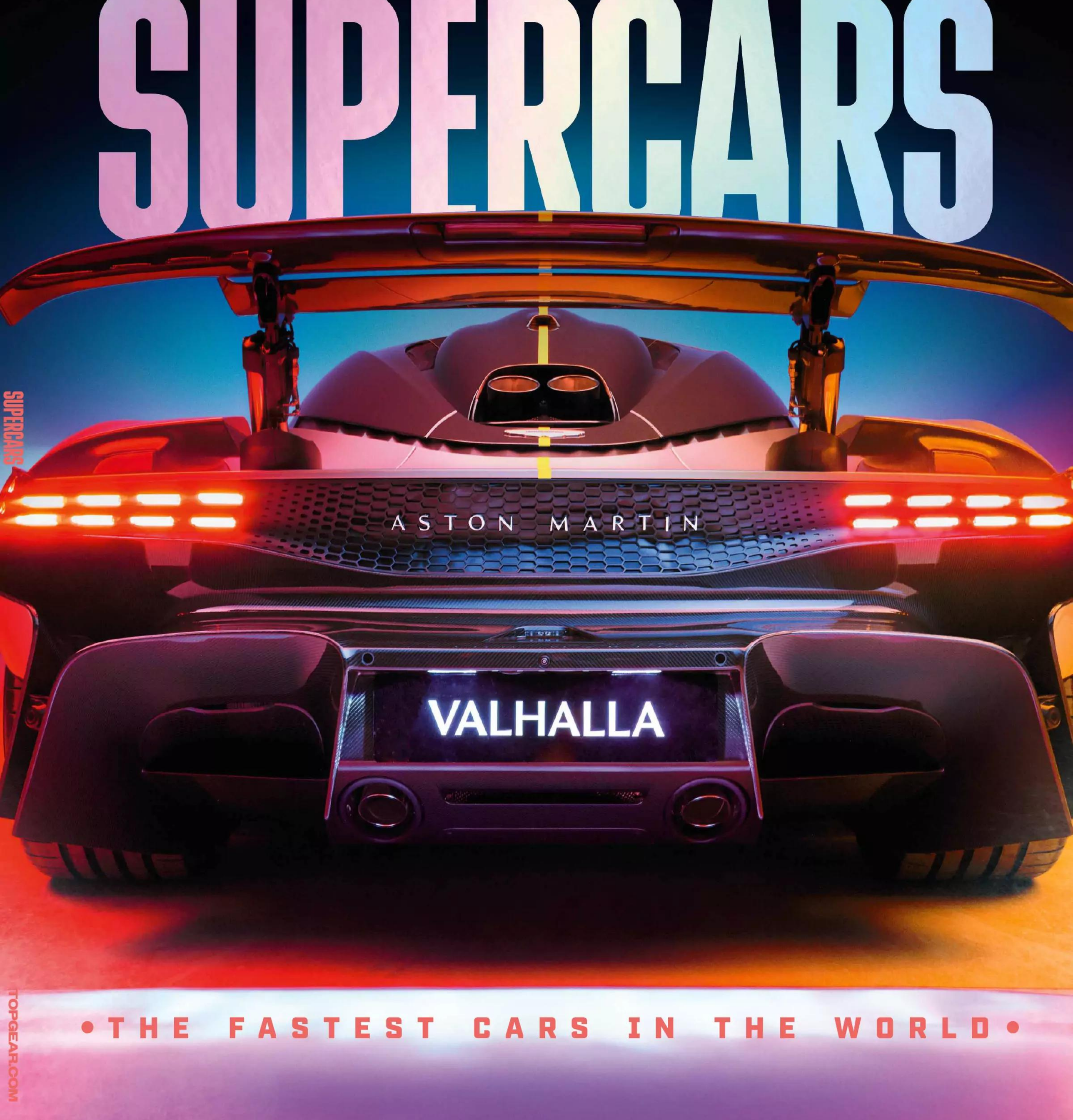
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I GOT OUT OF THE 1,578BHP BUGATTI BOLIDE and thought, "Yeah, that is quite rapid, but..." It turns out the McMurtry Spéirling has a lot to answer for, not least the fact it appears to have ruined me for other fast cars. It is, unquestionably, the fastest car I've ever driven. But then so it should be, given it obliterated an F1 car's Dunsfold lap time. It needed Stig to extract that, but with no skill needed to launch it off the line, I was able to discover what it's like to hit 100mph from a standing start in 2.61 seconds. And do so while sitting in something the size of a bathtub.

Memorable, it turns out, which is why other massively fast cars are now struggling to make an impression on me. But there's so much more to supercars than speed alone. The McMurtry was like dropping a Mentos into a Coke bottle – it fizzed explosively, but it's hard to know how hard the electrons are having to work. Not so when air and petrol combust inside cylinders. I referred to the quad turbo W16 in the Bolide as the 'king of engines'. I stand by that. Where other hypercars yowl and shriek, here's one that imitates a distant volcano. It's a deeper, more primal experience.

The W16 dies with the Bolide, but it's being replaced by a V16 – ha! – while elsewhere exotic, exciting engines continue to thrive. Yeah, electric does speed, but there's a reason the only other electric car that's gained entrance into these pages is Lotus' remarkable Evija. For better or for worse, us car enthusiasts continue to be wedded to internal combustion.





Ollie Marriage
HEAD OF CAR TESTING



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THE TOP GEAR

SUPERCAR MOMENTS

01

Marc Philipp Gemballa Marsien

WHO TOM FORD **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

You'd think that bombing around dunes in a 580k, one of only 40, modified Porsche under the paternal gaze of the man who came up with the project would give you anxiety, but after about three minutes, you're laughing and trying to get the RUF-tuned engine to boost you up a sand dune like some sort of 959 Dakar remake. This is the Marc Philipp Gemballa Marsien, and it's basically a 911 Turbo S with adjustable rally suspension, all carbon bodywork and 830bhp. And it makes mincemeat of pretty much any surface. But the thing here is the confidence with which it tackles off road. It's armoured underneath, but you really can fling it about and bounce it off stuff without it falling apart – testament to how it's been built. It's one of those cars that you keep on having 'just one more go'...

02

Ford GT Mk IV

WHO JETHRO BOVINGDON **PHOTOGRAPHY** DAVE BURNETT

The dirty secret about track tests of racecars is that usually the manufacturer is in damage limitation mode. Yes, they want you to experience the full shock and awe… as long as that only takes about three laps. Ford Racing and Multimatic couldn't have been more different. "We'll get you out on used tyres first," began the briefing. "Get to know it. Cycle up through the power modes and once you're absolutely happy we'll put on stickers (brand new slicks) and you'll get four or five laps with the car at its maximum potential." Needless to say driving the sinfully gorgeous, 800+bhp GT Mk IV with such enlightened hosts was unforgettable.

03

Ferrari 12Cilindri vs Aston Martin Vanquish

WHO JETHRO BOVINGDON **PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

Usually the reality of a video or magazine shoot is a lot less dreamy than the finished output. It's awesome fun, don't get me wrong, but very often just out of frame the real world looms large. Yet when we brought these two together, everything was just as heavenly as it looked. The road draped over the Gran Sasso region was jaw dropping. Traffic light and enthusiastic even when the Aston's tyres were ablaze (Italians don't do indignation when other people are having fun with cars). And the cars were utterly wonderful, too. I can't give you any behind the scenes insight. It really was just as dreamy as the pictures suggest.





04

Porsche GT3 RS vs McMurtry Spéirling drag race

WHO ROWAN HORNCASTLE

The Porsche GT3 RS is emphatically not a slow car. In fact, it's one of the rare cars even the querulous natives of the internet agree is blisteringly fast. Well, until you put it up against a McMurtry Spéirling, that is. Last summer, Ollie Marriage and I decided to drag race the two together in the name of 'context'. What unfolded wasn't so much a race as an outright obliteration. Despite a perfect start and impeccable computer controlled gearshifts, the GT3 RS was left like I launched it in 'Park'. Ollie – in the baby British Batmobile – shot off like a firework, hitting 0-60mph in 1.38secs. It literally looked unbelievable. So much so, the onboard footage has garnered over 28 million views on Instagram. Go check it out now, you won't regret it.

05

Aston Martin Valkyrie AMR PRO

WHO ROWAN HORNCASTLE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

We're in Stig's secret subterranean lair. With no speed cameras and no neighbours, this is the perfect place to make a lot of noise. And that's exactly what we did. Welcome to *TopGear Tunnel Run*, a project that took us many, many months to take from a silly idea in our heads to a *TopGear* YouTube series. But boy it was worth it. It was a simple concept, a seven part celebration of the old school sounds of combustion. Because as sensible, silent EVs take over, the future of cars might be AC/DC... but it's hardly rock and roll. Whereas an Aston Martin Valkyrie AMR PRO flat out in a really, really long (we're talking nearly two miles) and really, really dark, eerie railway tunnel buried deep in the heart of Northamptonshire is pretty cool. And not just because it never gets above 10°C down there.

06

Kimera Evo37

WHO OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** LEE BRIMBLE

My favourite driving experience of 2024. OK, the location helped, high up in the Gran Paradiso national park with some of the most bewitching Alpine mountainscapes I've ever seen. Some of the narrowest, sketchiest roads, too. But the Kimera. Well, we had three other restomods along too, but this was a step above. Genuinely one of the most exciting and thrilling cars I've ever driven, and unarguably one of the best looking, it's also yet more evidence that you don't need an orchestra of cylinders to make a memorable engine. Four will do. Provided it's topped up with added turbocharger *and* supercharger. What a thing, just so good. Straight into my dream garage you go.







07

Boss Level Part 2

WHO OLLIE MARRIAGE
PHOTOGRAPHY GREG PAJO

Car company CEOs are very astute people. They understand the power of perception, of what damage a PR disaster can inflict, so the golden rule is never be seen driving someone else's car. Unless *TG* asks very nicely, apparently. Because that's exactly what happened when we got Mate Rimac, Christian von Koenigsegg and John Hennessey to rock up to Sonoma. Seeing them hop gleefully between each other's cars goes down as one of the highlights for me – especially when Mate shoved Christian in the passenger seat of a Nevera because "I want to show you how it drifts". This is a new breed of car boss.



08

Ferrari F80

WHO JACK RIX
PHOTOGRAPHY MANUFACTURER

Thought A-levels were stressful? You should try presenting a video on the first new Ferrari hypercar for 11 years. Ferrari wouldn't let us have any information on probably the most complicated car ever made until an hour before our 20 minute filming slot. I sweated my way though attempting to explain the fiercely complicated aero, suspension and hybrid powertrain and had to be honest I found the broad flat shape a bit... meh. I stand by that assesment, as well as my conclusion that despite Le Mans winning links, a V6 isn't special enough when you're asking £3.1m. Of course, that could all change when we drive it...

09

Aston Martin Valour

WHO OLLIE KEW
PHOTOGRAPHY MARK FAGELSON

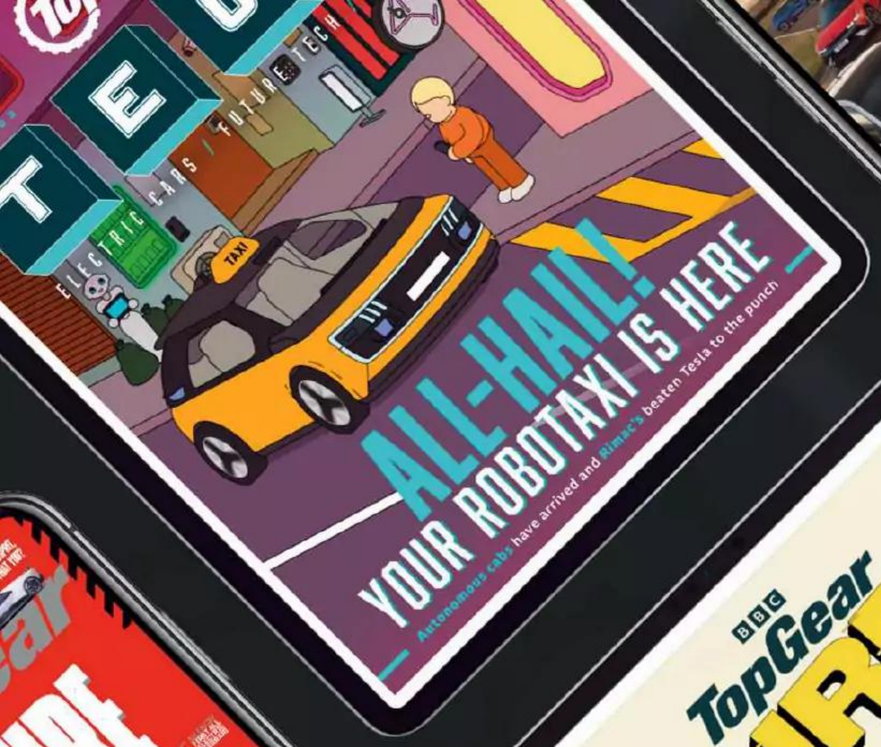
Funny thing about analogue supercars: the world goes DEFCON 1-ga-ga when Pagani, Gordon Murray or even Porsche reveal a fresh limited run unicorn that's founded upon a manual gearbox. But the Aston Martin Valour? Perhaps it's a victim of Aston's success. In the old days we had to savour the scraps that passed for 'new' Astons. Since we tested the Valour we've driven a new Vantage, Vanquish, seen the Valiant and the Valhalla is imminent. When a factory is churning out spectacular new metal at such a rate, no wonder a 705bhp stick shift beast gets shunted out of the headlines pronto.

10

Aston Martin Valkyrie

WHO JETHRO BOVINGDON **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

It pays not to prejudge. Before Speed Week my feeling was the Valkyrie would break down. A lot. Adrian Newey doesn't do compromise and Aston sweated blood just to bring this thing to life. Temperamental is just a part of the deal. And it is loud. Painfully, hideously, barbarically loud. But in every other way it's truly, life affirmingly, mind bogglingly brilliant. The chassis is sublime and supple, the engine as precise and violent as a samurai sword and the intensity of the experience is simply overwhelming. On a narrow, damp Spanish road the Valkyrie is pure magic. And reliable, too.





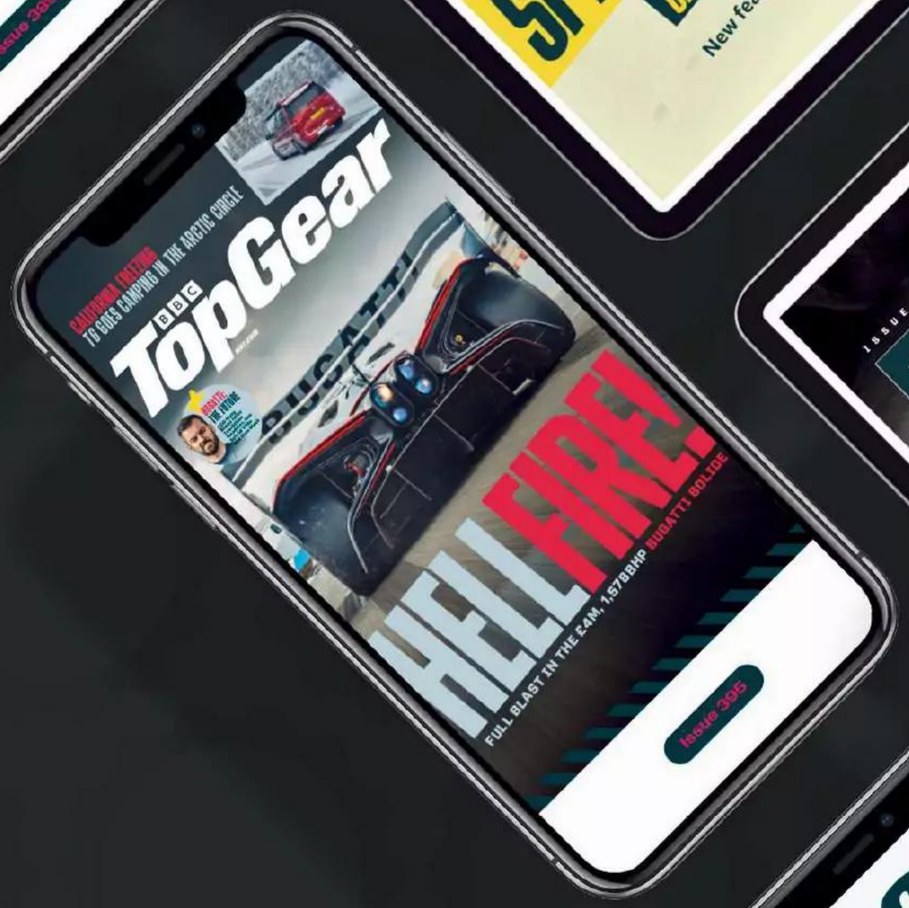




















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GONE IN

1.38 SECONDS



The Spéirling isn't just a car, it's a technology revolution. Strap in, it's going to be a hell of a ride

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE
PHOTOGRAPHY MARK RICCIONI

"That's not a car, it's a cheat code," whispers our sound recordist Andrei. He's the only one able to talk. The rest of us have been rendered silent. Somewhere in the distance a fast receding blue speck flits out of sight.

There is no revolution in car design any more, goes the common thinking. Everything is incremental. A nudge more power, a tweak more downforce, a modest uplift in speed and grip. A gradual evolution of specification. Balls to that. You want radical? Welcome to the age of the fan.

I've never seen or experienced anything like the McMurtry Spéirling. Never driven a faster car, either in a straight line or around corners. In one package McMurtry has created a machine so bizarre it accelerates like a dragster, turns like an F1 car. Better than an F1 car in slow corners. No other car has ever – or probably will ever – do what this one does to low speed corners. Which is turn them into high speed corners.

Which is what happened at Hammerhead. The slowest corner on the *TG* track, complete with awkward braking, a flick left then hard right, now appears to be some sort of Scalextric corner. Maybe I shouldn't have gone to watch Max Chilton warming the shrunken Batmobile up, because the spectacle is a head scrambler. It's so fast through the frame of my vision, moving at blurry superhero speeds, that all I can think when I'm left looking at the dirty brown rooster tail of its wake is "How am I ever going to do that?" The problem isn't just mine. The silence that followed his passage was also "How do we film or photograph something that moves so fast?".


651
MOLICEL

We've all watched the Goodwood hill record. And then watched it again because we must've had YouTube on 1.5x speed first time round... 39.08secs. And that was in the first gen car. This gen Spéirling Pure is faster. To give it some perspective, that Goodwood run was 2.5secs faster up the hill than any F1 car has ever been, getting on for a second quicker than the next fastest, VW's ID.R Pikes Peak.

Another car I've been lucky enough to drive. A car that gave me G-LOC in corners – the stuff that fighter pilots have *g* suits to combat. That car loomed in my thoughts in the run-up to driving the Spéirling. I've never forgotten it. Not just for the outlandish grip, but the way it span all four slicks from a standing start. Later the rear drive only McMurtry will sear off the line significantly faster and without a wisp of tyre smoke. How does it do that?

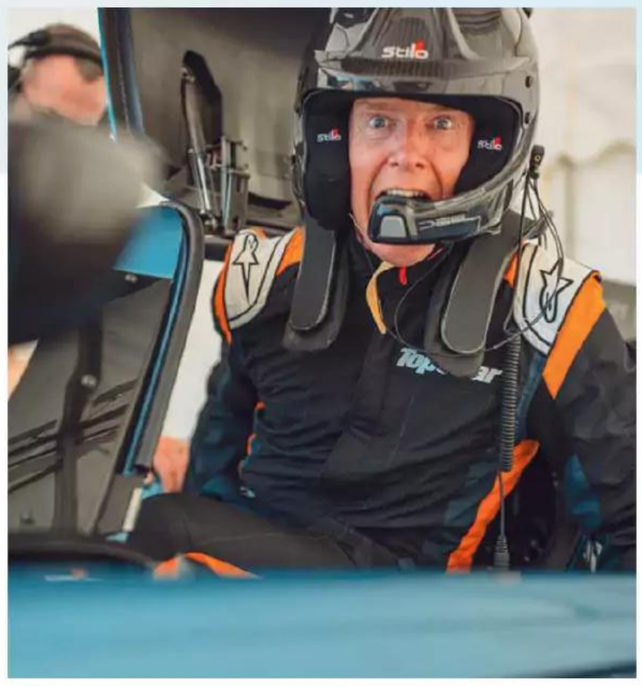
The Spéirling's secret is in how it separates drag from downforce. In conventional racing cars one is a corollary of the other – the more downforce you have the more drag – increasing fuel consumption, limiting acceleration and so on. Ideally you want the downforce that gives the tyres more grip, but you don't want the drag. Welcome to the crux of F1 aerodynamics. Where suction fans are nothing new. Remember Gordon Murray's Brabham BT46B? That was in danger of dominance, so it didn't last. Fans (the spinning type, not the flag waving ones) have never been allowed back in. But physics hasn't changed, the tech still works. Fit it to a road car? The fans are there to create suction, which means they have to suck against something, and if that something is a regular road with drain covers and potholes full of loose stones, well, you can see the limitations. Just ask Carlos Sainz Jr.

But if you can't use it for racing, and it's impractical for the road, what do you do with this miracle force? Well, wait for track only hypercars to become a thing and design something utterly unique. For starters it's tiny, thigh high and shading the same amount of ground as a 1960s F1 car, designed that way to make the smallest possible hole in the air. Shorn of the dive planes, spoilers and aero flicks everyone else uses, it's less brawny and aggressive. Cute, almost. If it didn't have the conventional rear wing you might almost think it was designed as an efficiency test bed, more akin to VW's XL1. That wing, by the way, wasn't there originally, but helps move the centre of grip rearwards, meaning you'll get friendly understeer rather than scary oversteer.

I'm not allowed to see what goes on underneath – 16 patents have been already granted, with more in the pipeline. Most of the sensitivity is around the skirt (especially the membrane that touches the surface) and the filtering system. The Spéirling, after all, is basically a giant self-contained bagless vacuum cleaner.

I get on my hands and knees and have a closer look. A patch directly under where the driver sits, and roughly the same

The wind changed while Ollie was driving the Spéirling and now he's stuck like that



dimensions, is in contact with the ground. Within it McMurtry's CEO, Thomas Yates (an ex-F1 engineer, like many of his colleagues), tells me that ducts run up on either side, the air drawn through filters in the flanks that stop the grit, twigs, leaves and stones being machine gunned out the neat little exhaust ports in the rear end. The two fans that are arguably more the heart of this car than the twin electric motors that drive the wheels are high up behind the driver and spin at up to 23,000rpm. Turn them on and the Spéirling will easily stick itself to the ceiling. Standing still.

That's the trick here. The downforce, up to 3*g* of cornering force, is there all the time. And in every direction. Start to slide or spin in a winged car and the air is no longer travelling over the aero elements as the designers intended. Go backwards and you've got lift, with horrifying consequences. But if something goes wrong in the Spéirling... "Just nail the brakes," I'm told. "You'll come to a stop in a couple of car lengths."

Nevertheless I'm intimidated by its reputation, by the radical engineering. I stand there in my race togs, dripping with leads and cables, feeling like an astronaut headed to the launch pad, and try to imagine what it's going to be like and... well, it's a head scratcher.

But I never thought it would be a laugh. And it genuinely is a proper hoot. It doesn't even take me long to get used to the forces before I'm hurling it into Chicago – usually a 50mph entry – at well over 70mph, and roaring with laughter. It takes me a while to puzzle it out. Partly it's that the Spéirling is so alien, so far beyond anything else that my existing references are broadly irrelevant. Partly it's because the size, weight, suspension and steering inspire confidence. But it's why they inspire confidence that's key – and that's due to the downforce. Which is utterly consistent.

Because the truism for amateurs like me is that you never quite know where you are with regular downforce. The faster you go the more of it there is, but where are you on that sliding scale? Do I need to go looking for more of it? Or is that a bad idea? What happens as it bleeds off under braking? Will the wheels lock? What's going to come unstuck first? It's all rather complex and you find yourself

"I FEEL LIKE AN ASTRONAUT HEADED TO THE LAUNCH PAD"

At the start or crossing the finish? Hard to tell, it all happens so quickly

Fun fact, Ollie had to go on a strict diet of water and celery for a month to fit in here

ROCKET SCIENCE

MORE McMURTRY PUB AMMO



BIGGER BOOTS

THIS IS THE SECOND GEN Spéirling, the Pure and it's grown from the first prototype. Now 80mm wider overall, with off the shelf slick tyres 50mm wider all round – 270s at the front, 300s at the rear

GROWING PAINS

IT'S STILL A PROTOTYPE AND it will change before it reaches production. The wheelbase will be increased 80mm to liberate space for a 100kWh rather than a 60kWh battery, and free up some storage space behind the driver

A GOOD AIRING



THERE IS CONVENTIONAL USE of aerodynamics – not just the rear wing, but a front splitter and inlets to channel air to cool the brakes and motors. Underneath, some air is channeled around the suction skirt

PILING ON THE POUNDS

SECOND GEN PROTOTYPE WEIGHS JUST over a tonne, but the final car is likely to climb to over 1,200kg. Not as light as you expected? Blame the batteries rather than the full carbon construction. Still, name us another EV that only weighs a tonne. We'll do it: the Dacia Spring. Which has a max of 64bhp



RECORD HOLDER

THE SPÉIRLING HOLDS THE Goodwood hillclimb record at 39.08secs, and is the fastest car ever around Dunsfold, beating the Renault R24 F1 car by 8.1secs with a time of 55.9secs



RACE READY

ALTHOUGH INTENDED FOR amateur use, the Spéirling features full racecar tech, including an F1-style rear crash structure. There's a lot going on at the back: fan exhaust, charging port, and a rearview camera

FAN CLUB

FIVE OTHER CARS THAT SUCKED



BRABHAM BT46B

Won the Swedish GP in 1978, then withdrawn by team boss Bernie Ecclestone (to the fury of Gordon Murray). The only F1 car with a 100 per cent win record



McLAREN F1

The F1's twin fans were more subtle than the T50's. Same principle though: enhanced downforce without the need for a big bookcase wing, causing wasteful drag



CHAPARRAL 2J

The fastest refrigerator ever? American racing outfit Chaparral was first to experiment with the alchemy of ground effect skirts and fans, as early as 1967



ARIEL AERO-P ATOM

Aerodynamic Efficiency Requirements and Optimisation Project was a one-off, but we reckon with *TG* maths and a visit to a DIY store, we could knock up a replica

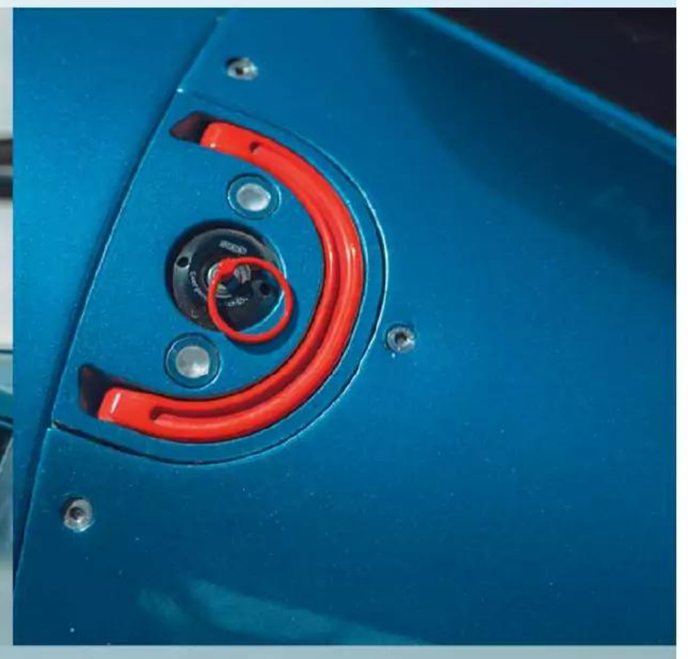


RED BULL X2014

Courtesy of *Gran Turismo* and Adrian Newey, Red Bull's X2010 and updated X2014 concepts both feature huge rear fans to glue these spaceships to the track



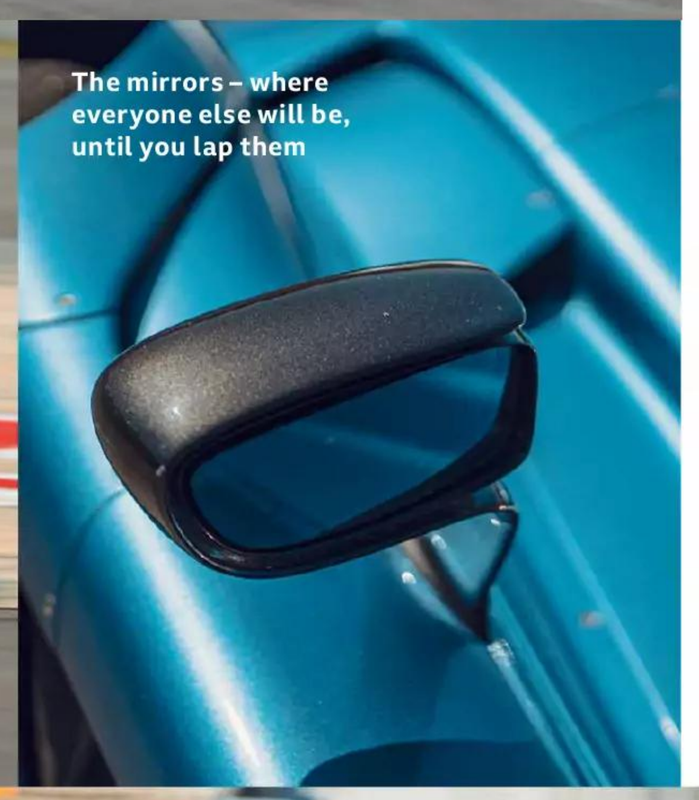
Cupholders need work, Ollie spilled his flat white on that last run







The mirrors – where everyone else will be, until you lap them







“THE SPÉIRLING IS AN ODD THING TO CLIMB ABOARD”

doing a lot of mental gymnastics while driving. But here it’s simple: 3*g* at any speed, through any corner.

And your internal gyroscope gets up to speed on what that feels like pretty quickly. And it feels good. You know how grippy a go-kart is, and yet how soon you acclimatise? Well, it’s the same here, now all you’ve got to worry about is processing the rate everything is coming at you.

Let’s take a breath and rewind. Because it’s an odd thing to climb aboard. The door aperture is small, and I need someone to help with the harnesses because there isn’t a great deal of wriggle room and I want those belts done up tightly. The doors, containing LMP1 crash structure plinths, are closed hemming me in. The windscreen wraps tightly. There’s barely room for a GoPro. It should be claustrophobic, yet the view out, though confined by the close set wheels, is decent. Now it’s quiet and I have the calm voice of an engineer in my ear, I settle. The last instruction before the capsule door shuts and I whisper “God speed” into my helmet is a reminder not to wander too far off line where a few manhole covers and brutal surface changes lie. It’s super simple to drive – there are two pedals, two paddles and two key knobs. Electric motors engaged, fans off, it pulls away effortlessly.



I’ve already decided the best way to get to know the Spéirling is by slaloming up and down the runway, just getting a feel for the grip. The two rotary controls operate motor power and fan speed, the idea being that you ramp up through GT3-comparable speeds, to LMP1 and finally F1. Making the Spéirling a three in one destroyer of motorsport reputations. The fans spool up to 10,000rpm initially. It’s not quiet, a constant jetlike whistle. You expect it to vary with speed, but of course it doesn’t. But you feel what it does instantly. Sucked to the surface, body roll lessens, the steering weights up, the Spéirling becomes firmer, sharper and yet more stable and planted. A few minutes of this and I’m driving it like a hot hatch, it’s playful and engaging, the grip already immense.

Next step: LMP1. Now it gets serious. Set fans to 18,000rpm, power to something ferocious. And yet because there’s more grip than thrust, I’m happy searching for the limits. A couple of times I manage to make it squirm by overdoing it into corners, but its behaviour when the slicks finally give out is natural. It’s just the rate everything comes at you that’s dizzying.

HOW FAST IS FAST?

WE UNDERSTAND DOWNFORCE THESE days. We mainly understand that cars look better with wings, whether they're necessary or not for road cars is another matter. Anyway, Porsche's 911 GT3 RS is about as sophisticated as road legal wings get – 409kg of downforce at 125mph, 860kg at 186mph. We've timed 0–60mph in 3.14secs. Yet thanks to the extra drag caused by pulling that great wing through the air, even with its DRS enabled, it's actually slower above 100mph than Porsche's junior version, the Cayman GT4 RS. Follow Through is Dunsfold's fastest corner, where the Porsche's downforce is most switched on. Through there the GT3 RS pulls 117mph and peaks at 1.77*g*. That's immense. The McMurtry is up over 140mph, pulling pulling a peak of 3.39*g*.



BBC TopGear

STIG LAPS



BACK IN 2004 THE RENAULT R24 F1 CAR BECAME THE first and, until now, only car to get round the *TopGear* test track in under a minute. It's time of 59.0secs had remained unbeaten for over 20 years. Until McMurtry's tiny wheeled racing boot came along: 55.9secs later it was all over. A three second victory margin is a lifetime in lap terms, even against an old F1 car, with the Spéirling's advantage really telling through low speed corners. So there we are, F1 teams of the world (and Alpine in particular). You know where we are. Come and have a go.



ACCELERATION FIGURES

When I drove the GMA T.50, it gave me the answer to the question I get asked more than any other, "What's the best car you've ever driven?" Suddenly I had an answer. Now I have another, this time for "What's the fastest car you've ever driven?" It's the Spéirling, by a country mile. And because we could, we lined the Porsche up against the original, record-breaking Spéirling.



Maybe that's why I start laughing when I hit maximum attack, the 23,000rpm and 1,000bhp F1 mode. The thrust is unbelievable, it sticks like a suction cup and yet despite the terrifying rate everything comes at me, I've always got the brakes. They are every bit as brain scrambling as everything else. Fat slicks carrying 2,000kg of downforce send claws into the tarmac. I have never braked anything like as late for Hammerhead. Or as little. The left/right flick flack happens as fast as my hands can turn the now heavy, heavy steering. It's absurd. Almost an out of body experience because nothing else is able to do what this does. Inside I am the superhero. At one point I chase the GT3 RS around, toying with it. It's flat out, yet barely moving and I'm thinking, "Ha! Puny weakling, I will now destroy you as easily as squashing an ant". And I do, screaming off into the distance, leaving it choking on the dusty memories of my passage. And I realise two things: 1) never has speed and approachability been better blended and 2) given ultimate power, I'd handle it badly.

The drag race between the two is equally hilarious. On the first run I forget to rest my head back and receive a one-inch punch when the flag drops, smacking my helmet back. It pulls 2*g* off the line, hits 60mph in 1.38secs, 100mph in 2.61secs. It accelerates like a flicked pea.

It's all completely ludicrous. I've driven so many dizzyingly rapid cars, but nothing has ever smashed the limits so far into the distance as this. And yet it's connected and engaging. It's a happy little car, this rocketing roller skate, never tries to show you how fearsome its performance is, just takes you along for the ride. It's captivating.

The question is what do you do with it? Track days, I suppose. I mean, it's gonna be like *Out Run* out there as everyone spools towards you. The likelihood is that many of the 100 being built will be converted to road use in some capacity. With that in mind, it feels too much like a racer at the moment. The cabin needs a cleaner aesthetic, to feel more akin to other hypercars. That's the audience it's going for.

Me? I survived. You'd survive too. Sometimes I had to rest my head through corners, but that's what the plinths are there for. And you don't *have* to go flat out. But you find yourself wanting to. Giving yourself over to the grip. We've said grip is dull, but not when it's this exuberant, this riotous, this exhilarating. It can push you as hard as you could ever want to be pushed. Welcome, then, to the wonderful world of the McMurtry Spiérling.



Watch the historic lap here...

***First gen Spéirling used for drag race is limited to 148mph (the Pure raises that to 190mph), but rate of acceleration saw it push past that on momentum alone**
****It had been sitting on the limiter at 148mph for 2.7 seconds as it crossed the line**

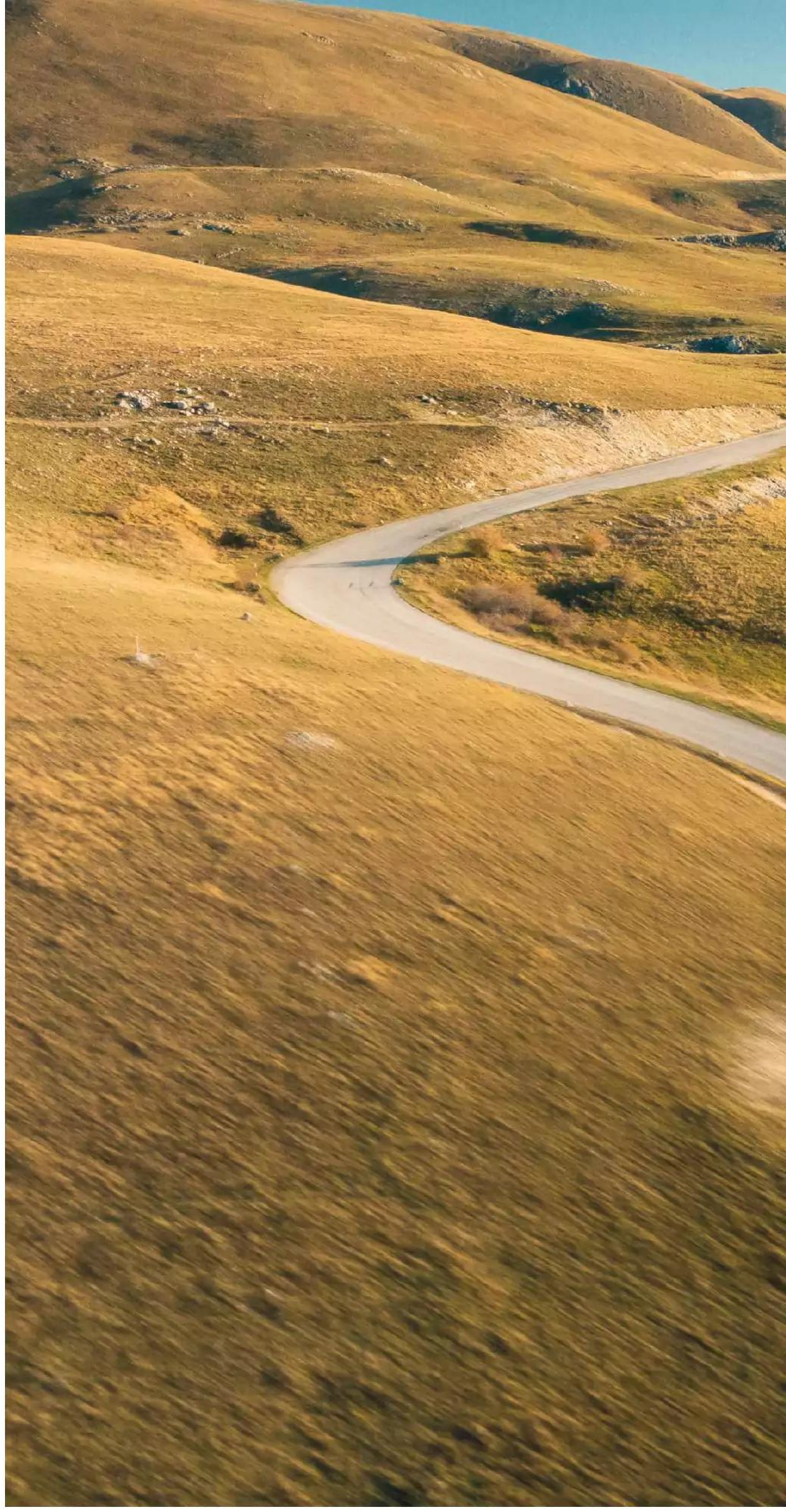
KING OF THE HILLS

You wait for one 800+bhp super GT, then two rock up at once. It’s the Aston/Ferrari showdown we’ve all been waiting for...

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON

PHOTOGRAPHY JONNY FLEETWOOD





Winter is coming. That's what they say. The doomed tone has grown darker with every passing year. In the quest to reduce emissions there are fines levied, new generations of EVs launched to save us from ourselves and a trail of closed factories. Hot hatches once thrived and now they're an endangered species. Sports cars are built in tiny numbers not because of demand but so as not to hurt fleet average emissions. Supercars have gone hybrid or electric just to survive. And are dying in the process. The cold, bleak outlook is scarier than a White Walker soaring overhead on a freshly reanimated dragon.

And yet today the sun seems warmer than usual. Italy seems even more beautiful. The Gran Sasso massif shimmers and the rolling hills and plains it oversees are lush greens and vivid yellows. The days might be short this time of year, but they are a wonder to behold. Did I mention the roads? Bumpy and weather beaten in places but flowing, varied and wonderfully challenging. Empty, too. Winter can wait. The long summer around these parts is hanging in there.

It's the perfect location for our two protagonists. Cars that have emerged from the deep freeze of Euro 7 requirements and the stuttering march towards an electric future completely unscathed. Here we are with two brand new super GTs, each powered by 12 cylinders in a vee formation, unencumbered by heavy batteries and electric motors and exemplifying the cherished days of excess and indulgence. If they weren't so bloody fast and enthralling I might even pause to shed a tear.

What a grudge match. Aston Martin Vanquish versus Ferrari 12Cilindri. Although, to be honest it doesn't really feel like a contest. As time goes on the idea that cars like this are deadly rivals fades... I imagine Ferrari engineers nodding in appreciation that Aston Martin has developed an all new 5.2-litre twin-turbocharged V12 engine for the Vanquish. Just as I'm sure that Aston's staff look on at the Ferrari's normally aspirated 6.5-litre that revs to 9,500rpm and tip their hats in tribute. Perhaps they compete for the same audience, but to me they're almost brothers in arms. Don't worry, we will choose a winner but my intention is to enjoy these moments rather than just agonise over which one is best.

Living in the moment shouldn't be hard. Just look at these cars. The Vanquish – now with an 80mm longer wheelbase and even more finely sculpted lines – is classically beautiful yet conveys a raw energy. Rarely has elegance looked so, well, horny. It's indecent. The mechanical ingredients promise to match the aesthetic, too. That new engine produces a fulsome 823bhp and 738lb ft, delivered through an eight-speed automatic transaxle with integrated e-diff to the rear wheels. Bespoke new Pirelli tyres are said to focus on ride comfort, noise insulation and traction.

The previous model, the DBS Superleggera, leaned heavily on its traction control and was wickedly overpowered but could also feel

“AS TIME GOES ON THE IDEA THAT CARS LIKE THIS ARE DEADLY RIVALS FADES”

like the chassis wasn’t a match for the engine’s bloodcurdling stonk. So as well as the carefully developed tyres, there’s also a new torque management system which tweaks and tailors the engine’s power curve not only by gear, but also depending on whether you’re in Wet, GT, Sport or Sport+ mode. It costs from £330,000.

The Ferrari is different. It very definitely channels the untouchable and classical Daytona with the distinctive front light treatment, but the proportion and detailing is more provocative. Less beautiful, certainly. However, the shape does come together in person and on the road it has a retro sci-fi presence that’s hard to resist. Even in Hangover Pee Yellow. Or Giallo Montecarlo as it’s called in Italian.

Pour over the spec sheet and in-depth press kit and the Ferrari continues the sci-fi theme. It has magnetic dampers, Side Slip Control 8.0, an eight-speed dual clutch gearbox and e-diff, Active Torque Shaping, Virtual Short Wheelbase 3.0 (rear wheel steering), ABS-Evo, active aerodynamics and lots more besides. But, of course, all of this is to deploy, enhance and celebrate the main event,

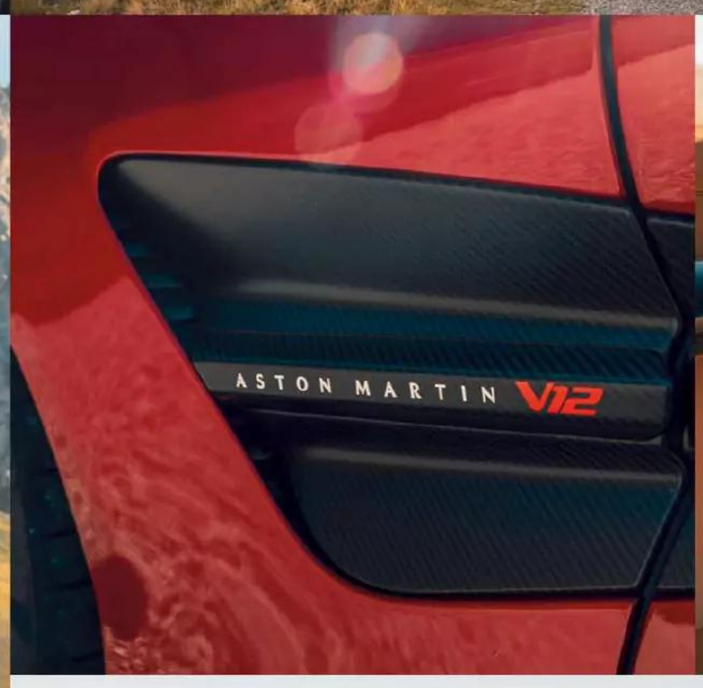


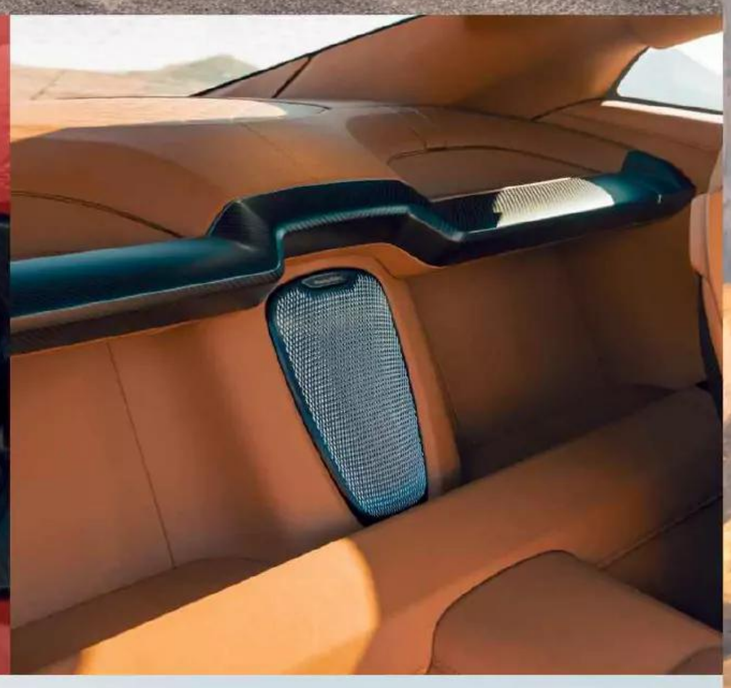
You think it’s a selfie, but he’s actually just spotted a rare bird



By happy accident, Jethro seems to have wandered into a Bob Ross painting











V12 or not, In this scenario cowpower trumps any number of horsepower







a 6.5-litre V12 of ferocious potency. The ultimate iteration of the F140 family, which started with the Ferrari Enzo back in 2002, it produces 819bhp at 9,250rpm and 500lb ft at 7,250rpm. The 12Cilindri is a lot. Of everything. Customers will far exceed the starting price of £336,500.

Yet, on first acquaintance Maranello's new dynamic monument to the wonder that is the V12 engine – the bedrock of the entire Ferrari legend – is strangely subdued. We sneak away from the hotel early, trickle through town and have a short blast on the autostrada before heading up towards Gran Sasso. The Ferrari rides rather beautifully and it's so quiet. At UK motorway speeds there's the hum of tyres, a little rush of wind noise around the top of the windscreen but almost no engine noise at all. You'd be hard pressed to guess this car is powered by a V12 in this environment.

No doubt some of this is due to particulate filters and other legislation, but the murmurs that Ferrari has tried to shift this car's character from the wild old ways of the 812 Superfast to a more GT oriented experience are ringing very true. From the ride quality to the calmer steering response, the reduction in aural stimulation to the less rabid power delivery, the 12Cilindri is a different animal to its predecessor. The 812 Superfast was a red-blooded supercar in a refined GT shape. It followed the old ways with its front engine/rear drive layout but was as sharp, uncompromising and wild as anything on four wheels. Perhaps the 12Cilindri will reveal this side later, but I can't pretend I'm not slightly crestfallen that you have to go looking for what was once so vivid and ever present.

On similar roads, the Vanquish is refined, too. It doesn't ride with quite the same grace and it feels a bigger, slightly more intimidating machine. But the Vanquish's direction of travel is the exact opposite of the 12Cilindri's. It's taken a hugely charismatic, monstrously powerful but slightly blunt GT predecessor and honed its responses to deliver a much more supercar sharp driving experience.

The end result is immediately enchanting. The Vanquish has retained the unstoppable force vibe that only the best front engined GT cars can summon but there's very clearly a new edge and a greater clarity to the dynamics. Around town the V12 is ever present – there's ample refinement but the complex, cultured and smooth delivery is unmistakable – and when joining the autostrada the Vanquish sounds thrilling, angry and pure despite having two turbochargers. Picture how you might expect something like a Pagani Utopia to sound. That's the Vanquish. Exotic, expensive and slightly outrageous.

It's a wonderful place to be, too. The Ferrari is simple and has a certain chic elegance to the interior, but its bones still feel more supercar than GT. I love the low scuttle and the way the front wings frame the road. There's a real sense of focus. However, the Aston counters with a much more palpable sense of craftsmanship. The materials are more sumptuous, the detailing more meticulously considered. Plus, the Aston's mix of touchscreen and physical buttons is vastly better than the 12Cilindri's arrangement, which has backed off from the hell of the SF90/296 GTB haptic-only UI with the addition of a central touchscreen, but remains a frustrating compromise. By the time we reach the foothills of the Gran Sasso national park, the Aston is proving irresistible.

This is home territory for the Ferrari, though. Lighter (by a substantial 214kg at 1,560kg dry with lightweight options fitted), more compact, weaponised with that incredibly trick rear wheel steering that works on each side independently and a dizzying array of electronics, this is where Ferrari's super GT effortlessly becomes



There's no smoke without tire, as the old saying goes. Or is it something about smoke and wing mirrors? Anyway, both cars great out of a hairpin



"THE ASTON HAS A MORE PALP



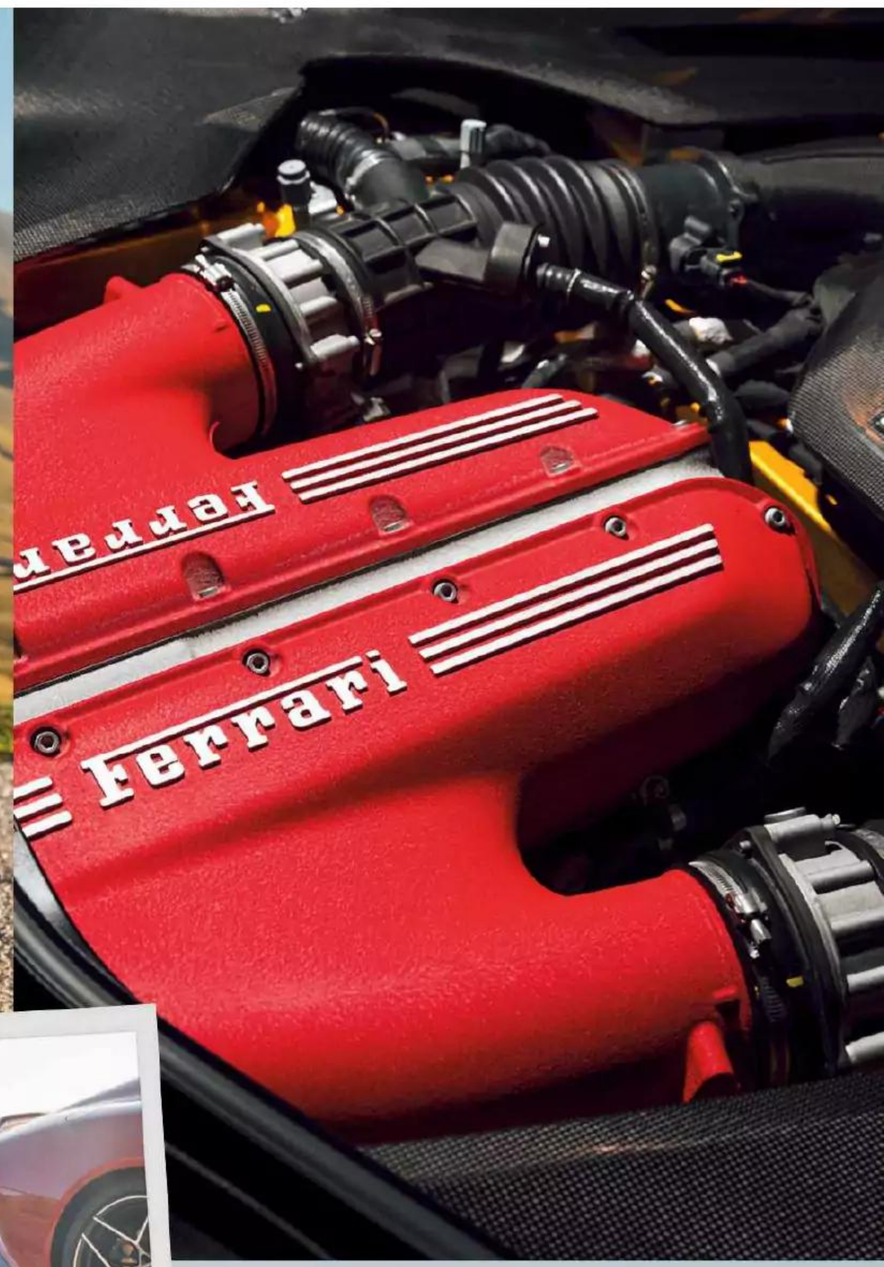
ABLE SENSE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP”


ASTON MARTIN
“WHAT A WAY TO HURTLE THROUGH THIS STUNNING LANDSCAPE”

Good job we've got satnav, this is how that bloke died in *Jurassic Park*









Great view, but if this was England there would at least be a burger van



very, very super and leaves Aston's feeling out of its depth. That's the way it's always been.

It is utterly magical. As the road rises, bunches up and then flows across this landscape, the 12Cilindri ups its game. It feels bizarrely small and light, the gearbox is an instrument of absolute precision, and the car manages to feel extremely alert and responsive but still calm and intuitive. It takes a matter of moments to twist the manettino into Race or even CT Off mode, such is the confidence the 12Cilindri breeds. The electronics, coupled to the engine's stunningly accurate and linear power delivery, allow you to revel in the natural balance. You can sense how far back the V12 is pushed in the chassis by the turn-in response and incredible resistance to understeer. There's fantastic traction too, helped by the fact there are no turbochargers giving a huge boost of torque. But there's still the small matter of 819bhp to play with. Like oversteer? You'll like the 12Cilindri. And you'll love the subtlety of the e-diff and stability and traction control systems. What a way to hurtle through this stunning landscape.

And yet I'm not getting the pure, unbridled joy that I did from the old 812 Superfast. The savagery is missing. The breathless response. The sharp-edged noise and even the eye widening, brain scrambling performance. The 12Cilindri is faster than an 812 Superfast. But it never feels as manic. It would be wrong to say that the 12Cilindri has been dumbed down as this is such a high quality, beautifully resolved car. But considering it's named after its engine, there's no question that the V12 is less central to the whole experience than it once was. In pursuing a more rounded proposition, some of the magic has been suppressed.

It's almost as if Aston Martin sensed this opportunity was coming and threw everything at the Vanquish to capitalise. Even so, there are some ways in which the Vanquish is comprehensively beaten by the Ferrari. The eight-speed gearbox, for example, is a very good auto box. But it feels treacly compared with the Ferrari's razor sharp dual clutch. The brakes have a longer travel and offer less consistency than the 12Cilindri's, and the big Aston doesn't quite match the outright agility of the deft Ferrari.



"EXPLORING ITS OUTER LIMITS IS A THING TO RELISH AND FEAR EQUALLY"

Yet none of it matters. The Aston is outrageous. Unstoppable. Its 5.2-litre twin-turbocharged engine has phenomenal response and torque, but also builds to a fearsome crescendo. The Vanquish is so fast that you don't just mindlessly pin the throttle. Ever. You squeeze it, mete out the performance as best you can and, occasionally, dare yourself to actually reach for the rev limiter. Very few cars feel this rampant and yet the sheer straight line theatre is matched by a chassis blessed with remarkable traction and balance. The killer factor over the Ferrari is that the Vanquish has just the right amount of edge to make exploring its outer limits a thing to relish and fear in equal measure. It's mannered but not tamed or sanitised.

On these spectacular roads the suspension is at its best in the middle setting, everything else ramped up to Sport+. Disable the stability control and you unlock an adjustable traction control system that works like a volume control for wheel slip. It defaults to 5 and you can turn it down for more intervention, or dial it up for more excitement. Levels 7 and 8 still attempt to refine your inputs but allow enough slip for tyre smoke. One more click and you're on your own. I would recommend it. But only after a long period of acclimatisation and – if you're really lucky – the certain knowledge that this isn't your car or your Pirellis.

Driven unshackled, the Vanquish is quite an extraordinary thing. It doesn't shrink like the Ferrari but its character and venomous performance make it grow in stature. It's an odd feeling. You're intimately involved in the process of making the Vanquish move but also get to look on in awed wonder. Swept along by the performance on offer, agog that you can hustle and cajole a car this big and powerful with such economy of movement and stunned that its poise remains even under the most intense scrutiny. It's phenomenal. Truly. A car built around the virtues of a V12 engine but determined to do so much more than pay homage to tradition. It is more of an event than the Ferrari. More alive. More joyous. More optimistic. It's also a landmark for Aston Martin. Let's hope this is the start of a long, hot summer for this often troubled company.

A RECKLE



DEVIL

SS

Farewell, V10, this is the new Lamborghini Temerario, a 907bhp V8 hybrid. A worthy Huracán successor, or a misstep from the Italian firm?

WORDS VIJAY PATTNI
PHOTOGRAPHY WILSON HENNESSY

LOPMENT?

“WE HAD TO DECIDE YEARS AGO, TO DO SOMETHING

FROM SCRATCH,



EXCEPTIONAL, COMPLETELY NEW"



How best to follow up one of the most successful Lamborghini supercars ever built? Ditch its key USP. Make it more... comfortable. Spin the *Random Fighting Bull Name Generator* wheel.

This is the follow up to the Huracán: welcome to the new Lamborghini Temerario, a car that replaces the transcendental, nat-asp V10 for [shudders] a battery, three electric motors and a turbo V8. It's also a car that claims a new found focus on comfort.

Perhaps it should have been named *The Tempest*, because swapping one of the finest free breathing V10s of the modern age for a hybrid V8 and more comfort suggests hell truly is empty, and all the devils are here. At least if you're a Lamborghini enthusiast.

One of whom is the boss, of course. "The Revuelto is a big success," Stephan Winkelmann says. "We have three years of orders in-house. The fact it's a plug-in hybrid is very much accepted." He points to this new Temerario – that follows the Urus SE V8 hybrid – as "closing the circle of hybridising all the line-up".

Of course, the V10 was the stuff that dreams were made of. "I have to admit I loved the car because of the engine," he says about the Huracán's banshee wail 5.2-litre that originally started its service in 2003's Gallardo (another hugely popular Lambo). So why ditch one of its key USPs, especially now the Audi R8 has departed leaving the 10-cylinder all to Lambo's bullfighting hands and, as Winkelmann admits, having already done an outstanding job?

"We had to decide years ago, from scratch, to do something exceptional, completely new," he adds, noting how the Temerario's ambitions for outright power wouldn't have "been feasible" with the old nat-asp V10.

What's past then, is past. At the Temerario's heart sits a brand new – like, completely fresh, from the ground up, not pinched from The Empire – twin-turbo 4.0-litre, flat plane crank V8. This twin-turbo V8 produces 789bhp on its own, between 9,000rpm and 9,750rpm, on its way to a 10,000rpm red line. Ten. Thousand. RPM. From a turbo V8.

Add said turbo V8 to the three electric motors – one between engine and gearbox, two on the front axle – a 3.8kWh lithium-ion battery and an 8spd dual clutch gearbox, and you're looking at 907bhp and 590lb ft of torque. A fair whack over what the V10 Huracán in Evo guise could manage (631bhp). Zero to 62mph? 2.7secs. Top speed? 211+mph. Noise? Lambo reckons it's "immense".

There's a special connection between the V8's banks that enhances the sound depending on engine speed, and a smoothed pipe routing from manifold to tailpipe, the latter positioned in such a fashion to add sharpness. The result? Well, over to the boss.

"The sound is incredible," Winkelmann says. "It has to be recognisable as a Lambo," he adds, pointing to the distinctive shrieks given off by the Aventador and then Revuelto's V12, and of course, that old V10. Lamborghini reckons the vibrations sent to the frame by the eight-pot's flat plane crank create a complete, all embracing sensory experience – vibrations that ratchet up with intensity depending on your chosen velocity.

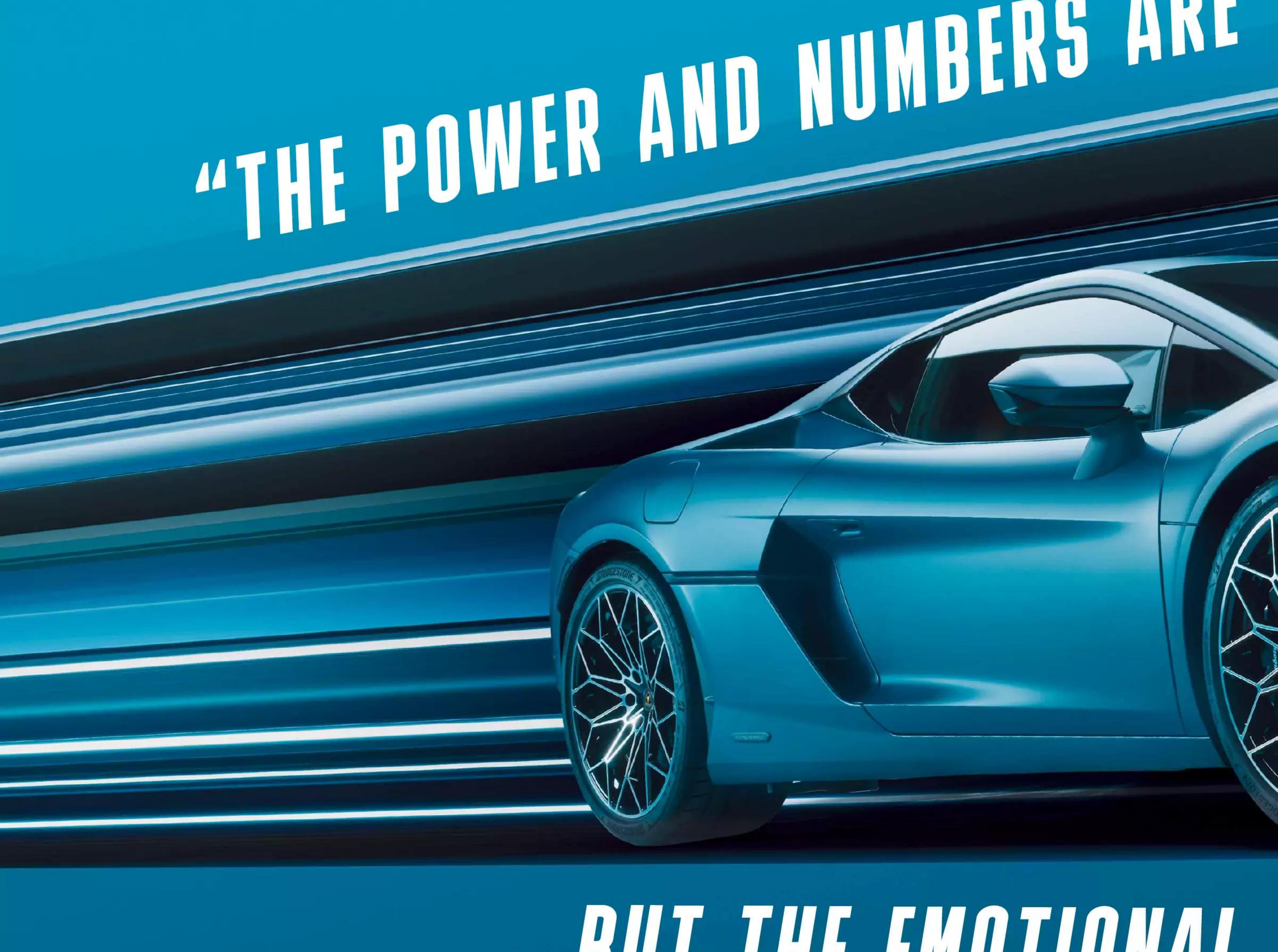
"It should always be raw and noisy, and you should feel the vibration of the steering wheel. This is what we want. This is the emotional part," Winkelmann continues.

It also promises to maintain the high-progression linearity that made the Lamborghini V10 famous – to "give even more push at low revs", says Winkelmann – while also capitalising on the bounteous torque and top end punch that comes from modern turbocharged powerplants. Such force, reckons Lamborghini, "is usually only seen in racing engines". It also says this new heart is without equal in the world of street legal supercars.

So it is not, by any stretch, a slow, ponderous limousine posing as a supercar. "We will not compromise on the sportiness,"

"AT THE TEMERARIO'S HEART SITS A BRAND NEW TWIN-TURBO 4.0-LITRE V8"

"THE POWER AND NUMBERS ARE



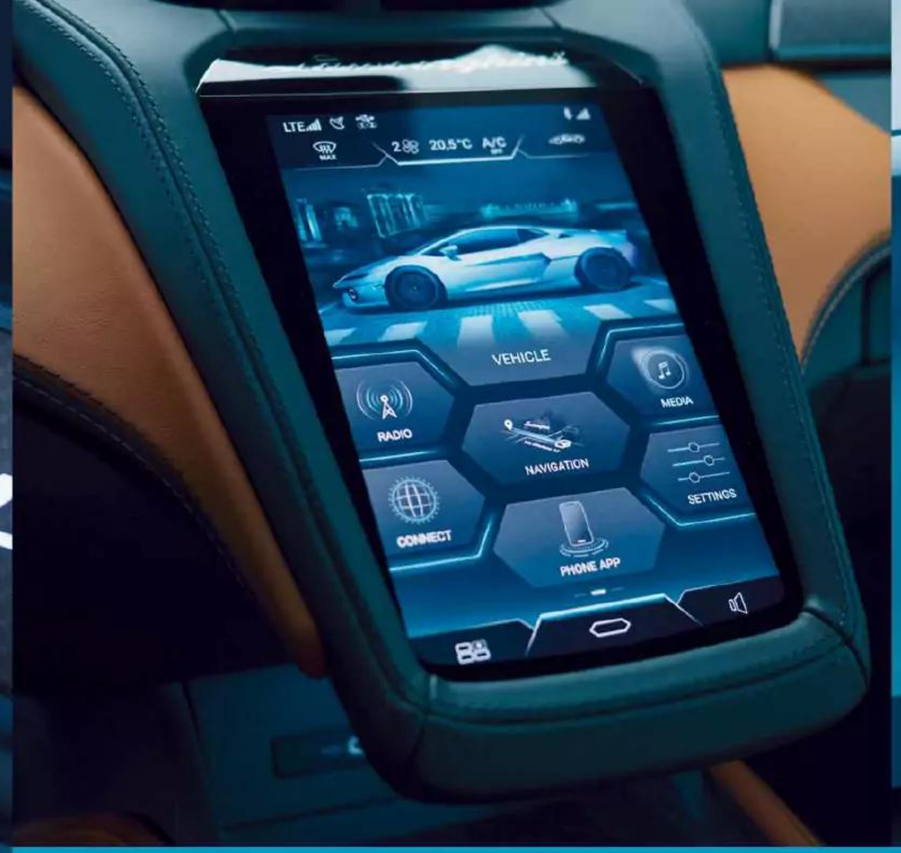
BUT THE EMOTIONAL

ONE INSIGHT,



FEELING IS MORE IMPORTANT"







New Lambo is now plug and play – a car truly worthy of the phrase



Snazzy cheese grater engine cover can't disguise the demotion from V10 to V8





Good news! Larger cabin means those with big noggins or inflated egos can fit easily

Winkelmann says. But don't worry, Lamborghini is adamant that while the Temerario's V8 will give delight and do its best to shake your dentures free, it will do so gently.

"The roominess for sure is also one of the design elements," Winkelmann says, pointing to the Temerario's new found passion for being... comfortable. A *comfortable* supercar?

"A supercar in my opinion should be developed in a way that when you go on the racetrack, how you're feeling in the car and the comfort, [the car] has to help you to be a better *you*," Winkelmann says. "And if it fits like a glove, then we have achieved it. It's not about going on the highway for 500 miles and not feeling it at the end of the day. This is not the target."

At its heart is an all-new spaceframe made entirely from aluminium, with hydroformed extrusions, and an increase in the number of hollow castings with thin closed inertia sections. For those without degrees in mechanical engineering and materials sciences, the result is simple: the spaceframe is now less complex, allowing weight to be optimised. It's some 20 per cent stiffer than the outgoing spaceframe of the Huracán, but it's also heavier overall – Lamborghini claims a dry weight of 1,690kg.

Into this longer aluminium spaceframe comes a brand new cabin said to provide unprecedented levels of comfort, beginning with the headline act: more headroom, both to accommodate taller drivers but also if you want to wear a racing helmet. There's more luggage space (112 litres). Then comes a pair of low slung, 18-way adjustable 'comfort' seats that are heated and ventilated (there's the option of carbon fibre double shell items that wrap around you), and the use of carbon, leather and Corsatex microfibre.

It's all built around a pilot interaction philosophy, offering a 12.3in digital instrument cluster for the driver, a 9.1in display for the passenger, and a central 8.4in display. Even the graphics were designed specially by Lamborghini.

"If I drive the cars of the 1960s and 1970s," Winkelmann says, "when you have to do more than one lap... you feel it. Now, I'm not a racecar driver, but I'm used to going racing, and I'm used to driving multiple laps, so for me this is important." He notes how additional headroom "is comfort", space being the ultimate luxury of course, but that such an approach "is not diminishing the approach of the sportiness of the car".

Managing this delicate balancing act between hardcore Nürburgring charger and city slicker is a raft of different modes that change the Temerario's personality, from Città (FWD, fully electric), Strada, Corsa and a new Drift mode. Indeed, there's onboard telemetry, a dashcam, augmented reality navigation and something called a Memories Recorder.

And it is a delicate balance. "When we speak about top speed and acceleration, it's part of the DNA of the brand," Winkelmann says. "There will be a point in time when the acceleration is so instant, that if you do it repeatedly, you will feel sick. There are some cars you don't feel comfortable doing it often."

What won't change, says Winkelmann, is the ability to charge around a circuit. "The responsiveness, the lightness, this is something which we will constantly continue to work on. The power to weight ratio is more and more the key to success."

Another key, of course, is it needs to *look* like a proper Lamborghini. And you'd be hard pushed to apply any other badge on the bonnet of the Temerario. Lamborghini is unsurprisingly immensely happy with its achievements, pointing out the "unmistakable character lines" that pay homage to its earlier cars.

Though it's a proper clean sheet design, it certainly pays homage to the Huracán and Gallardo, while a new set of hexagon daytime running lights meld both old worlds and new. Sweep back across the body and you'll fall into the exposed engine bay, before being lifted right back to that spoiler that of course plays a fundamental role in the Temerario's aero.

From the company that pioneered novel new ways of directing air over, under and around its cars, there's naturally plenty of work going on here, all working towards high speed stability, increased cooling performance and maximum braking efficiency.

Those DRLs are in fact aero elements. The roof has a concave profile that directs air towards the rear spoiler. The underbody gets vortex generators for optimum flow towards the diffuser. Overall, it's said to be 103 per cent more aero efficient than the Huracán Evo, and 158 per cent more with the Lightweight pack.

Yup, it's being offered in two guises, with the LW pack geared more towards circuit driving. It's as you'd expect: a carbon-fibre splitter, carbon-fibre underbody panels, CFRP side skirts, CFRP rear hood, Gorilla Glass, and a further Carbon pack that sees the rear diffuser, mirror caps and air intake covers in... carbon. All in, this sheds 12.7kg and increases the aero capacity by 56 per cent.

"The power and the numbers are one insight," Winkelmann says, "but the emotional feeling is important." Indeed. Even the name is weighted with it. "Temerario is the name of a fighting bull that fought in 1875, and Temerario means fierce, courageous." Just how fierce and courageous remains to be seen.

"YOU'D BE HARD PUSHED TO APPLY ANY OTHER BADGE ON THE BONNET"



No car seeks to blend performance and art quite like a Pagani. The Utopia pushes both to the absolute limit

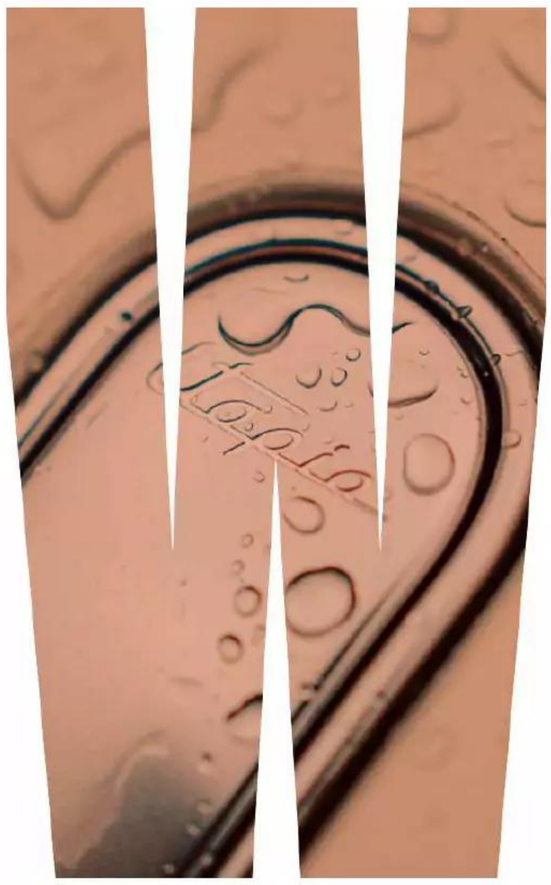
WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI




GJ 560FL
Utopia

“IT’S ALL ABOUT THE ART, THE SCULPTURE, THE LUXURY”





Where to start? It's a toss up between wing mirror and gearbox. And the weather come to think of it. But let's go with the initial plan and tell you about the side mirror. Because look at it. It's more steampunk street lamp than functional item. Wonderful, but needlessly elaborate.

Welcome to the world of the Pagani Utopia – a Jules Verne fever dream for the 23rd century. Done with the mirror? Then have a look at those bonkers carbon wheel spats, the brake calipers like bronze knuckle dusters, the elegant slivers of aluminium, the leather buckles, the roof portholes. It's a 1930s vision of the far future, Flash Gordon's motor conveyance. Pagani likes to claim its cars perfectly balance art and science, but I walk around it convinced it's all about the art, the sculpture, the effortless luxury, certain that functionality has been willingly overlooked, that Pagani has let the weight swell.

And then I drove it.

The ride is supple and composed, the Utopia calm in my hands, the clutch easy, the motor tractable, the manners polished. Later in the day I'll discover how sharp and fizzy the twin turbo V12 is, that there's an animal contained within. Later still, the roads will finally dry out giving the Utopia a chance to demonstrate its eager, tenacious front end, suspension finesse and rampant, explosive, exponential acceleration.

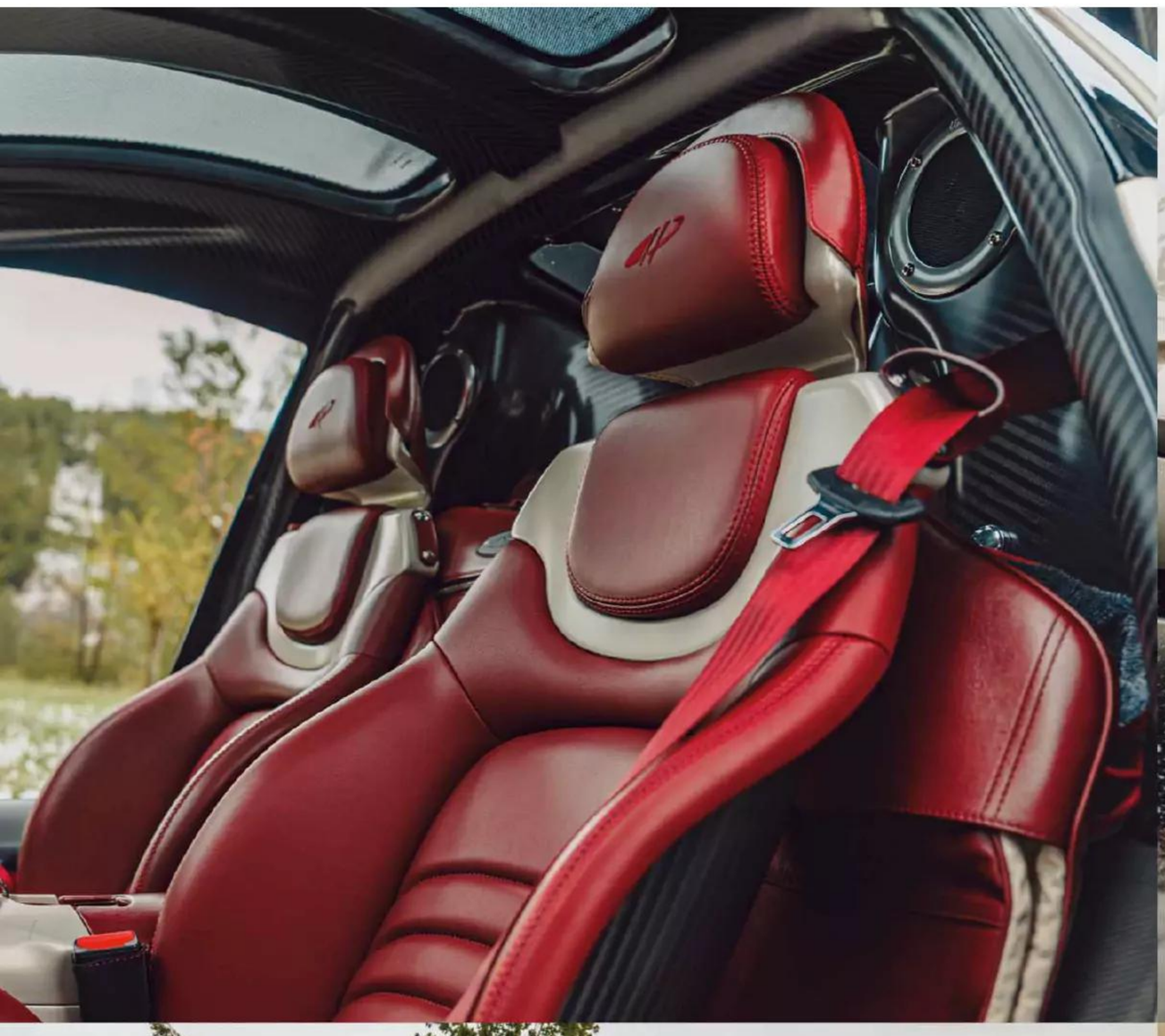
Those mirrors. There's no wind noise. No flex at speed. They're well positioned for visibility, the reflective area is big and, when you park, they pivot on gorgeous aluminium base plates, twisting in to make themselves slightly less vulnerable. They work flawlessly. They're still perfectly useful in the thumping rain and thick spray I'm currently enduring. But we've got it easy. Cars coming the other way are shedding snow from their roofs. I call a halt to my plan to head further and higher – £2.2 million cars whose only contact patches with the already treacherous surface are track focused, ready chilled Pirelli Corsa tyres needed to be afforded plenty of respect. Already

there have been spits of wheelspin as 811lb ft of torque bombardment is hurled at the traction control's defences.

They're robust I'm pleased to report and like I said, I'm not phased because the Utopia is fluent. I'm goading the accelerator because I'm comfortable with it already. And this despite having to wrestle with a manual gearbox. That's right. No tricks or special technology here, this is a three-pedal Pagani. With a seven-speed gearbox that starts with a dogleg and is four planes wide. I've driven Astons with this gear layout and wished for an auto (you can have this as an auto if you want, but only 25 per cent of owners are). I'm not going to say this has been developed by choirs of angels and divine intervention, but the shift is far sweeter and lighter than it has any right to be. And I swear Horacio and his merry band of artisans have done something very clever with the self-centring – it seems to intuitively pause momentarily on the second/third plane when you're in low gears.

I've been looking down at the gearlever as we've headed for the hills. Not because I'm struggling to negotiate its maze, but to watch the lever row back and forth, view the linkages, see it slide and glide through the open gate. It's a work of – yep, you guessed it – art. And engineering. And science. And collaboration. Because the gearbox itself comes from British company Xtrac, previously seen supplying the GMA T.50.

This is a very different car. That's taut, direct and snarling. This is more relaxed and flamboyant. Both are hugely occupying cars to drive, the T.50 for the tactility of its controls, the Utopia for the tactility of your surroundings. It's like driving a baroque theatre. No matter what's happening outside, where you're driving or what the weather's like, your peripheral vision flutters and dances with whirring dials, preposterous air vents, ornate metalwork, levers and leather, carbon and toggles.

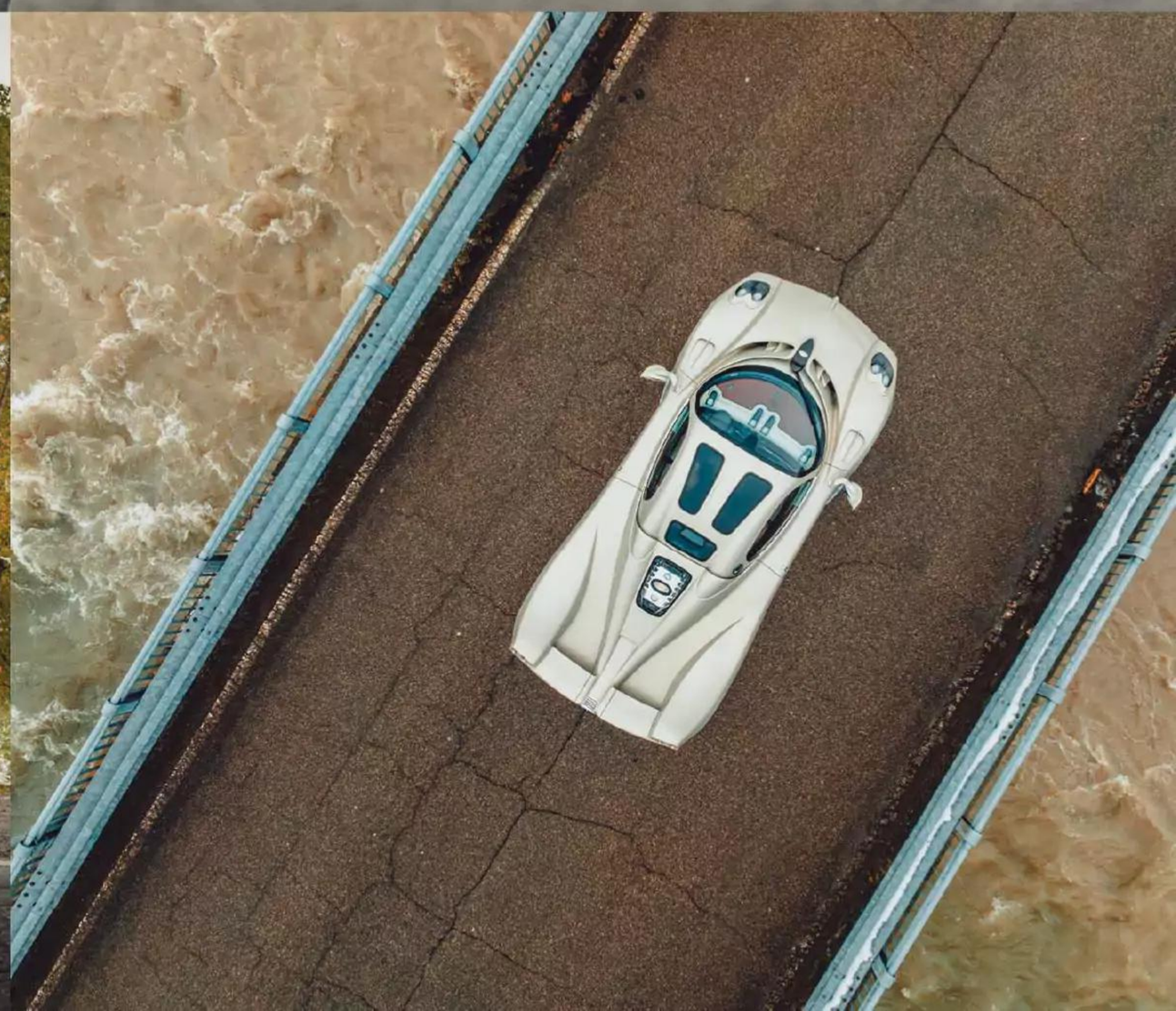




Oh how Ollie must have laughed when he saw snow was forecast



Hit a button on the key marked peacock mode and this happens



Horacio Pagani is not a follower of Marie Kondo. Every inch of the cockpit has something to draw your eye, tease your senses, distract and compel. It is cluttered with luxury. Drips with decadence. Is it all a bit much? Occasionally, yes, but it's never frustrating, it's not like having to battle with a touchscreen. There is a single screen, elbowing its way to prominence between the two glorious main dials. I kind of wish it wasn't there but, operated by clickwheel, it does pack masses of functionality (including CarPlay) into not much real estate. Ergonomically it's wonderful. The seat cossets, the driving position is just so, there's masses of steering adjustment and it's easy to position the car on the road despite the heavily curved windscreen. You can even see a little bit out the back through the craftily positioned mirror and window.

Mostly though, the Utopia's cabin is like being inside a watch mechanism, seeing needles and dials and levers flick about, what influence your inputs have on the car. It's a more mechanical, connected experience than I expected because so much is on display. Usually mounted on a metal plinth. Pretty much every bit of metal you can see was machined from aluminium billet by Pagani itself. Some 777 components across the whole car. The steering wheel started life as a Cheddar truckle sized 47kg lump, machined over 30 hours down to 1.7kg. As ever these back stories only enrich the experience.

It's the same outside, you want to get up close and pore over it, learn what's been done and why. But when you step back, the news isn't so good. The Utopia isn't pretty, the front end is fussy, the glass area looks a bit sunken and hooded. I do love the rear though, with that low centre deck, the rear wing elements forming the oval shape of the Pagani logo, the rear lights that hover in the Zondaesque heat extractor housings.

But Paganis have always been a little overwrought, bordering on fussy. It's what helps make them so charismatic and distinct to look at.



Physical buttons galore, exquisite craftsmanship and one teeny screen. Heaven

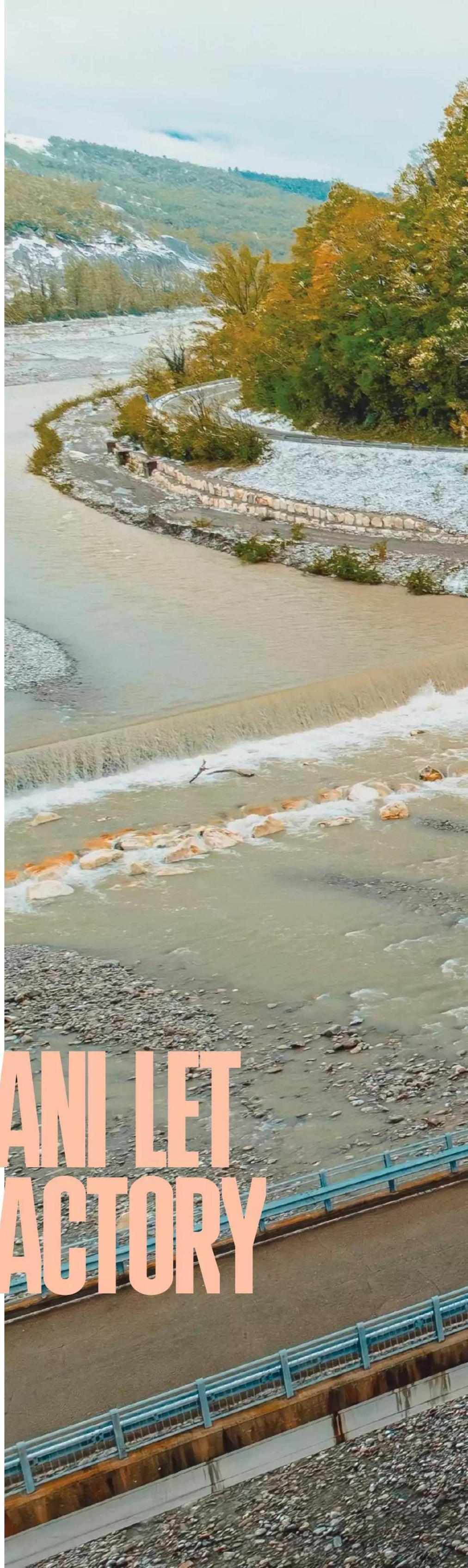
And remember, they're built in such low volumes, are in such demand (all 99 initial Utopias were spoken for a year before anyone knew what it looked like) that Horacio is free to cut loose, design what he likes. There's no need to follow fashion or current trends when your clients trust you to give them something they'll love.

Rain puddles either side of the centre exhaust, trembling to the V12's bass beat. The basic AMG sourced 6.0-litre engine is carried over, but it's changed a lot since the early days of the Huayra, where the turbos made it breathy and robbed it of music and character. Don't worry that it only revs to 6,700rpm. This is an object lesson in how to create drama and excitement without revs. Up these hillside roads I climb and the engine is sharp, reactive, I can sense how light the pistons and crankshaft must be from how eagerly it responds before the turbos get going. They introduce themselves quietly, predictably, but when they start whistling brace yourself because that's when the runaway reaction starts, this whumping impact of bottomless torque forcing itself on only 1,340kg of mass. The first few times my brain can't keep up, so I find myself lifting off, giggling, relieved it's over.

Deep bass thrum, fizzing turbos and an insistent howl give it a brutal background theme, overlaid by the V12's smooth howl. The effect is at once soothing and alarming. It's much the same to drive, although that's principally due to the anti-hypercar conditions. To be honest I'm amazed Pagani let me out of the factory gates this morning. There are puddles around that could see the Utopia doing a passable impression of Captain Nemo's submarine.

I get away from the valley by heading up the tight, pitted SP26. In places the whole road is collapsed and slumping off the hillsides and it's the nearest I get to removing the Utopia from its otherwise broad comfort zone. The diff is tight around hairpins, traction is easily overcome, the nose is occasionally sniffy for cambers. But the sense of driving something richly rewarding and fabulously tactile is overwhelming.

Even if you can pick 'faults'. I've put that in inverted commas as I'm sure this is exactly the car as Pagani intends. The steering has a fast rack, turns quickly and precisely into corners, but isn't the last word in writhing feedback. Similarly the gearshift is ever so slightly rubbery and



"I'M AMAZED PAGANI LET ME OUT OF THE FACTORY THIS MORNING"

Is that the wailing V12 or Ollie complaining about the weather again?

Standard Pagani steampunk gearlever present and correct

"THE UTOPIA NEVER LOSES WHEN HURLED FORWARD

Would you order your £2.2m hypercar in hearing aid beige? Discuss



At the end of the shoot, Ollie had enough vouchers for a set of crystal tumblers

the Brembo brakes only show their teeth once you're properly into their travel. I'm convinced this is because Pagani wants the Utopia to relax its driver, to make them feel in control, not have them tense and edgy because they're bombarded by signals. So it filters the signals. Not too much, just enough to remove intimidation and fidget from the equation.

When the roads did finally start to dry, it was like opening the door to a new world. The detectable rigidity of the Carbo-Titanium and Carbo-Triax (I'm not making these words up) tub contrasts detectably with the sure control and compliance of the adaptive Tractive suspension. It never loses its sense of calmness, even when being hurled forward with outright violence. It means the Utopia never feels nervy or highly strung – not what you'd have thought by looking at it. Very rarely do I feel the need to press the Super Soft button on the dash, where in most Ferraris it's the first thing I look for. As with all else the Utopia does, it rides expensively, luxuriously.

It's easy to think of the Utopia as a trinket, a play thing. But this is a fully globally homologated hypercar. It's been endlessly crash tested, put through the WLTP emissions process (18.7mpg and 342g/km in case you're wondering), passes California's stringent regs. Pagani is rightfully proud of that, it's a reminder that the engineering has been as lovingly crafted as the design. That's what we see – all most of us will ever get to experience. But what's been true of Pagani ever since the Zonda first showed up 25 years ago is that it knows exactly how to create soulful, magical, special cars.

This, putting all else aside, is a driver's hypercar. It just delivers its thrills across a wider band than most. A Bugatti Chiron is as beautifully assembled as this, but way heavier, less thrilling and alert. The T.50 takes that side much further but lacks the Utopia's sense of theatre. Ultimately, each is a distillation of the people who created it and you could argue that where supercars are about driving, hypercars are about offering more levels to their 'performance'. Because this is not just about speed and numbers. Here you need to think about performance as artistic expression: the Utopia isn't about driving performance, it's about the performance of driving. It's something it does above and beyond any rival. And viewed that way, this new Utopia is the hypercar's hypercar. A utopia indeed. With steampunk wing mirrors.

TESTER'S NOTES



In the 1970s the Lotus test drivers used to 'pop' from the factory to the south of France for the weekend to put the latest car through its paces. We decided to do the same, albeit with a little more 'pop'

WORDS JASON BARLOW **PHOTOGRAPHY** OLGUN KORDAL

APPROVED




GALZIN
BAGUETTE
Galzin
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A024 GLV



Is everything that's ever been filmed now available on YouTube? Apparently so. Including a very much of its time behind the scenes documentary charting the development of the 1970s Lotus Elite and Eclat. Everything is browny beige and you can practically smell the cigarettes and political incorrectness. Chief engineer Tony Rudd is a laconic presence throughout, and resembles a potential third Ronnie (ask your parents). On a specific packaging issue, he notes that "one solution was to breed a special race of passengers, but we rejected that as taking too long". Woke was a way off.

Rudd and fellow Lotus alumnus Mike Kimberley often thought nothing of taking a prototype on a long haul roadtrip. They'd leave the Hethel HQ, near Norwich, on Friday and head to the French Riviera or Rome, returning to their desks no later than Monday lunchtime. A real world sign-off, and the sort of automotive buccaneering that worked back when the gendarmerie had a more *laissez faire* attitude.



“IT HAS ROUGHLY THE IMPACT OF A METEOR THAT’S CRASH LANDED INTO EARTH”

Which got us thinking. Why not channel some of that spirit for *TopGear*’s exclusive first road drive in the Lotus Evija? We’ve certainly waited long enough for the opportunity. The Evija broke cover in July 2019, so it rivals those other moonshot cars, the Aston Martin Valkyrie and Mercedes-AMG One, in terms of gestational challenge and hubris. It’s actually been in production for a while now, built to exacting standards in the same building in which the fabled Lotus Carlton came to life a generation ago.

So we admire the fact that the Evija exists at all. Particularly as, at time of writing, it’s the *only* new electric hypercar of the past 12 months, and that surely tells its own story. With a power output of 2,011bhp (or 1.5 megawatts if you prefer), the Evija can claim to be the most powerful production car in history (well, until we get a go in the Koenigsegg Gemera, Rimac Nevera R or Hennessey F5 Venom Evolution) and it looks a million dollars. Trouble is, it costs roughly three times that, so the finished car arrives with some baggage. It also arrives with no space for any *actual* baggage, such are the extremes the design and engineering team have gone to. The perfect car for a 1,000 mile plus roadtrip, then, in true *TG* style.

And just look at it. Designed by a team led by the indefatigable Russell Carr, it has roughly the impact of a meteor that’s crash landed into Earth. Not bad for something the world’s had six years to get used to. We often invoke a car’s sculptural qualities when dissecting its design, but this one actually calls to mind Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth. High minded reference points for a machine whose form is uncommonly intelligent, as well as dramatic. Check out the 93kWh battery pack in the assembly facility and then marvel at how Lotus has packaged it, in the middle of the car rather than underneath, including all the power modules. Then look at the tunnels either side of it, expanses of space that help the Evija’s aero efficiency but also cement

“WITH THIS MUCH FIREPOWER, IT’S BEST TO EASE INTO THINGS”



its status as perhaps the most singular looking road car that is currently available.

Speaking of road, it’s time to hit it. And we do actually have a plan. Our destination is Nice, on the Côte d’Azur, but as well as paying homage to that 1970s Lotus test route, we’ll be dropping by a few places of note on the way – including Reims and the Circuit de Charade (locations of Lotus GP wins for Jim Clark and Jochen Rindt). It’s Wednesday lunchtime by the time we leave, and we’re booked on a plane home on Friday night. This is a distance and deadline to focus the mind.

With this much firepower at your command, it’s best to ease into things. A combustion engine may be conspicuously absent but the Evija still immediately floods your senses. Thanks to its configuration, you sit low like you do in a conventional sports car. It’s relatively easy to get in and out of, and user friendly once ensconced. The design team fought to include what they call ‘Becker points’, prominently rising front wings (named after legendary Lotus test driver Roger Becker). There’s a central spine in the windscreen where the huge wiper parks itself, but you don’t notice that after a while. And the F1-style steering wheel, which could have been a clumsy affectation, is actually effective. (Although not actively better. Turns out you can’t reinvent the wheel.)

Out onto the A11, we head towards London. There are five drive modes on this thing, and escalating amounts of power and driver connection. Range is likely to become our default for reasons we’ll get into, but it’s also the one in which the car feels most inauthentic. It’s wrong to talk in terms of throttle feel – the right pedal is more accurately in charge of torque demand – but it feels a bit sludgy in Range. City is sharper, Tour better still, but it’s impossible to resist trying Sport on the arrow straight road through Thetford forest. Now we have 1,257lb ft of torque to experiment with, an unholy amount of energy, and enough to send the car warping forward in a way that makes the Millennium Falcon engaging hyperdrive look like Del Boy’s three wheeler. It’s an unusual sensation and an impressive single digit in the face of physics, but also risky assuming you don’t want to end up behind bars. Or get battered round the head by your passenger. In truth, this sort of velocity isn’t a wholly pleasant experience, but the rate of acceleration and the way it sustains it is phenomenal.

The Evija’s battery is supplied by Coventry firm Hyperbat, the cells from American supplier Molicell. The battery pack alone weighs 718kg, about the same as an entire Lotus Elise S1. The Evija doesn’t move like one of those, but nor does it feel like an Elise with a hippo strapped to its roof. It uses an 800V architecture, there are two motors within each electric drive unit on the front and rear axles, and two gearboxes. So all four wheels are driven independently, for an algorithmic dynamic bandwidth to boggle the mind. Marshalling this amount of power is a ferocious challenge. Remember, the parameters are set by the four bits of rubber on the corners of the car (bespoke Pirelli Trofeo Rs). Around 85 per cent of components are from UK suppliers.

Lotus has worked hard to imbue this awesome looking machine with the character, sensation and vibrations we take for granted in a combustion engined supercar. This much is apparent as we stop for our first charge, at Thurrock services in Essex. The Evija’s EDUs – electronic drive units – emit an organic whine, deliberately unfiltered. It’s a noise you don’t notice so much on the track because you’re focused on not crashing. But at motorway speeds it’s a different matter, not least because the noise is naggingly insistent at 75mph. More soundproofing might be the order of the day.

And more range. Lotus claims 195 miles (WLTP) on a full charge, which is some way short of the early claims that we heard for the Evija. It’s also some way short of reality, because you’re mindful of not straying too far from Zap-Mapped rapid chargers, and also of not running the battery too low. Depleted cells are unhappy cells. Which means we’re stopping with about 25 miles left, a pretty slender margin of comfort, and a scant two hours and 116 miles after we set off. A pattern may be set here...

At least we find a vacant and functioning 350kW charger at Gridserve’s facility that sits close to the Dartford crossing, and we’re on our way about 15 minutes later. Mind you, the price is seriously spicy: 85p per kWh means that getting the Evija back to its modest full charge costs £54.

The Channel tunnel next, where a busload of Czech schoolkids can’t believe their eyes. It’s a reminder that cars like this have a role to play as entertainment, something the Evija’s brilliant design fully enables. The dihedral doors are pure concept car theatre. You can open them from the outside using the key fob or close them using a button on their under side. If you’re inside, there’s a button for each door on the roof header. Trouble is, they have a mind of their own and can become rather irritating. What would Colin Chapman think? Simplify and add lightness, that was his thing. The key lives in a little pocket in the centre console and its transponder demands that it sits in a specific way. Another mild frustration. A rearview camera and pop out side cameras add a techy dimension and ease the drama of reverse parking. Judging distance is still stressful, though.

Especially given the Evija’s exotic construction. It’s made entirely of carbon fibre, chassis, body panels and all, including the front subframes for total integrity and structural rigidity. The cockpit sits well within its bodywork, a layout that evokes early 1970s endurance racers, a generation that holds every car designer spellbound. There’s a complex race bred inboard suspension, codeveloped by Multimatic. That includes a Formula One-style ‘heave’ damper to absorb the effect of the Evija’s considerable downforce – an unbelievable 1,680kg at the car’s 217mph vmax – while its overall aerodynamic properties are dictated by the air flowing not just over and under it, but also through it, as we’ve seen.

Once we’re in France, the odyssey can really begin. The Evija’s interior echoes the exterior design, in the sense that it’s defined by





Enjoy this screen, because you'll be seeing it a whole lot



They were mostly just surprised at a Brit going abroad in this economy





That longing look? Think he just spotted a nearby petrol pump

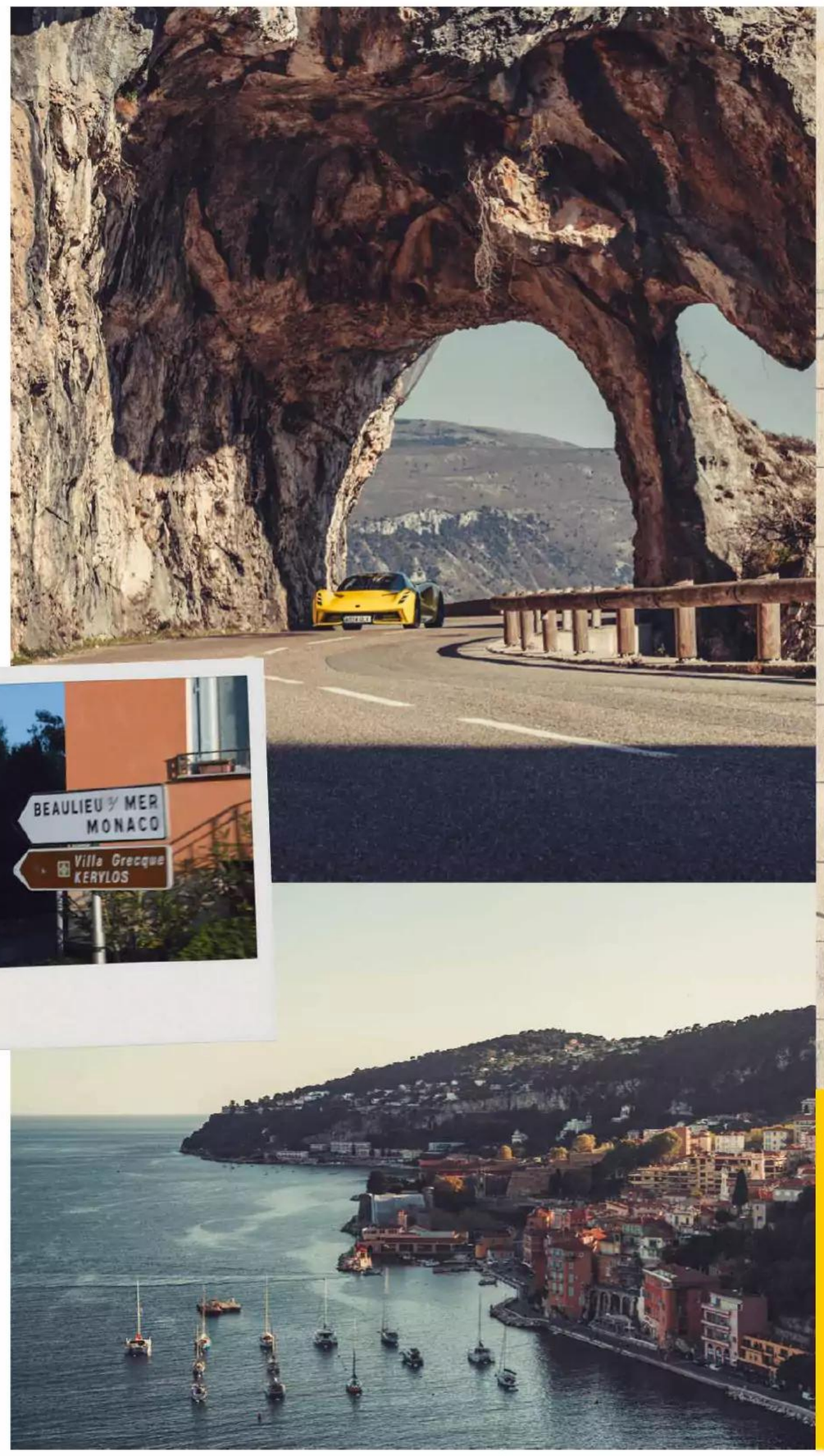

EVIJA
LOTUS
LOTUS



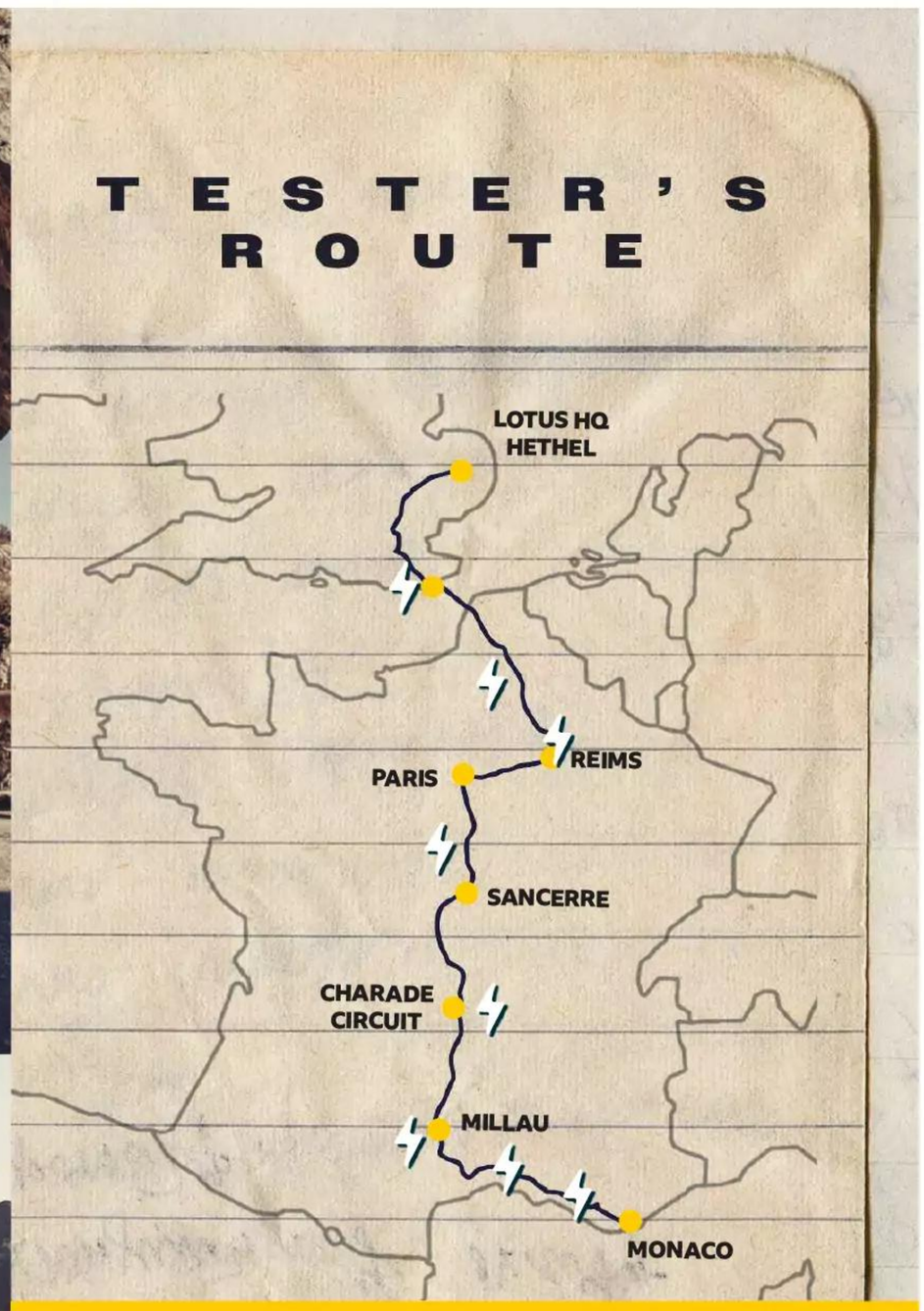




"IT'S BIGGER THAN ANYTHING CHAPMAN ENVISAGED, BUT STILL FEELS LIKE A LOTUS"







We leave the company's Hethel HQ on Wednesday morning bound for the French Riviera. We use the Channel Tunnel and push on to Reims. This was the scene of various F1 triumphs for Lotus, including Jim Clark's win in 1963. Then we head southwest towards the Circuit de Charade, a track aiming to become the world's first fully sustainable motorsport venue. From there, we overnight in Millau – home to the amazing viaduct over the Tarn gorge – and go south through Cévennes and Provence before winding up our journey in the Côte d'Azur. Beaulieu-sur-Mer, in fact, home to the Hôtel Métropole, an old school showbiz destination. We fly home...

what's missing as much as by what's actually there. A refreshingly simple instrument binnacle sits on top of a carbon fibre exoskeleton, while a slender central spine – known as the 'ski jump' – houses a series of hexagons, each one triggering a different function. It's more concepty thinking made real, and it mostly works, the function graphics coolly backlit. Until it stops working, that is. The AC glow disappears just as the weather heats up outside, and the indicators literally go on the blink.

France is well served by rapid chargers, which is a good thing because we're going to see a lot of them. Lotus reckons potential owners won't do the crazy distance we're attempting, but a real world range of about 150 miles is surely chocolate teapot stuff in terms of utility. We're not exactly blasting between *péages* either, although when the self restraint goes out the window the car shrinks distance like few other things out there. Hyper powerful electric cars are like time machines or teleportation devices.

We skirt round Paris and pick up the A77 and then N7 through the Loire valley past Sancerre and Nevers. Charging stops five and six happen somewhere around here, the Evija's 1.6 miles per kWh energy consumption and suboptimal range distinctly hampering progress. It's also suffering repeated software glitches – we have a couple of engineers following us and they basically have to do the equivalent of a hard reset on a few occasions. I'm later told it's because I'm leaving the car in Sport mode when I should be flicking back into City configuration. Surely it should be able to absorb this? There is also a slight pause before the Evija unleashes all its horsepower in Sport, the electric vehicle equivalent of turbo lag perhaps, a gathering of thoughts as a zillion lines of code zoom around the mainframe. The pause is swiftly forgotten once you're at full tilt, but it should be seamless and instantaneous.

Our second overnight stop is in Millau, on the edge of the Cévennes national park, just the right side of midnight. Phew. There are two reasons for coming here. The first is to travel across (and beneath) the Millau viaduct, the world's tallest bridge at 343m, an engineering wonder of the world that was designed by the UK's very own superstar architect Norman Foster and opened in 2004. It spans the

glorious Tarn gorge, used 290,000 tonnes of steel and concrete in its construction, and is held up by 1,500 tonnes of steel cable. This remains engineering at its most dazzling even 20 years on. It was constructed to relieve traffic congestion towards the Mediterranean, but ironically we dive off it and head east along the N107 instead.

What a road this is – that's the second reason for coming here – and what a machine the Evija reveals itself to be in arguably its natural habitat. It's bigger and heavier than anything Chapman and co ever envisaged but crucially still feels like a Lotus. It's actually close to the McLaren 750S, the best car I drove in 2024, in terms of steering feel and linearity of response. Interestingly, the Evija's steering is also electrohydraulic rather than fully electric, and there's no regen on the braking, the big Lotus relying instead on carbon ceramics supplied by Brembo. It settles into a remarkable rhythm, the hydraulically operated, retractable rear wing and DRS finessing the aero and stabilising everything. Despite its vast complexity, there's a delicious purity to its responses.

There's magic here, no question. But charging for the umpteenth time and closing in on our destination, as many questions remain as there are answers. The world, we know, is refusing to fall in love with the vastly horsepowered hyper EV. This is an automotive genre that's frankly pretty silly, at least until the battery tech serves up twice the energy density in a package that comes in at half the current weight.

Lotus also remains suspiciously coy about how many Evijas have found homes, but at £2.4m it's unquestionably a tough sell. After 48 long hours at the wheel, the jury is still out. It's mesmerising to look at, fast as hell, and handles spectacularly. But the motors are noisy, the range barely adequate, and the software issues 21st century incarnations of traditional Lotus, shall we say, foibles. The company reckons some Evijas will end up part of big collections, destined to be a static masterpiece and state of the art techno flagship. But the technology is moving fast and a Lotus, more than most other cars, exists to be driven. After 1,000 demanding miles, and for various disparate reasons, this one doesn't go quite far enough.

"AFTER 48 LONG HOURS AT THE WHEEL THE JURY IS STILL OUT"



Modern supercars are so good natured that they can cope with anything, right? How about a driving test at the toughest driving centre in the country?

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE PHOTOGRAPHY JONNY FLEETWOOD

MIRROR. SIGN

AL. REVUELTO.

TIME FOR THE EMERGENCY STOP.

I check my mirrors and, as instructed, pull over on the left-hand side of the road for the pre-briefing. I check my mirrors again. Can't be too careful. "I'd now like you to perform an emergency stop. When I raise my hand and say 'stop', I want you to..." While my examiner talks, I'm dimly aware of a figure swaggering out of the Best One opposite. A pair of heavy knees appear at the window, then a dripping ice cream and finally a face. It's having to stoop a long way down.

What's the etiquette now? Are you allowed to interact with a member of the public during your driving test? Aren't I under exam conditions? Since the car is safe, handbrake on and in park, I decide it's OK to engage. I lower the window. There's a slurp, then, "Tha' is f**king sound, man". He's not wrong, is he? A Lamborghini Revuelto kitted out like a BSM Corsa. I mean Lambo's 1,000bhp hybrid was going to cut enough of a dash around here without a cladding of L plates, but if you really want to set somewhere alight without breaking a single rule of the road...

So how hard is it to pass your driving test in a supercar? Something with scissor doors, a woeful turning circle, speed bump scraping ride height and approaching zero rear visibility? That's what I'm here to find out. My companion is Lamborghini's mightiest machine, the brand new Revuelto, complete with an 814bhp 6.5-litre V12 topped up to 1,001bhp by three e-motors, for 0–62mph in *not today you don't* and a top speed of *straight to jail via test fail*. It also has a nose lift. That'll prove very important. And surprisingly inadequate.

And I'm in Speke, just south of Liverpool, chosen for no other reason than the most important one: it has the lowest pass rate of any driving test centre in the UK. Double jeopardy then. And apologies to any local learners who weren't aware of this. Although given the way test bookings are at the moment, you'll be travelling to Dover for your test anyway. And won't be taking it until 2028.

Now, a point of order to clear up. There's nothing on the DVSA website that specifically says you *can't* take your driving test in a Lamborghini Revuelto. However, if you tried you'd be turned away because, like the Smart Fortwo, Toyota iQ and Mini Convertible (among other flagrant rule breakers unlucky enough to have triggered the authorities), all-round visibility isn't good enough.

Everything else about it complies, as far as I can work out. There are no warning lights showing, I've got more than 1.6mm of tread on each tyre, I've fitted an extra interior mirror (for what it's worth), checked passenger seatbelt and headrest, established that the Revuelto is capable of over 62mph and attached L plates. And a roof sign for good measure. I want people to get the message. And yes, I do already hold a full UK driving licence. Have held it longer than anyone else at *TopGear* in fact. Or phrased another way, no one is more distant from their test pass than I am.

All I need now is a driving examiner. Step forward Aman Sanghera, driving instructor for over a decade, whose Clearview Driving channels on social media have over 1m followers. Normally found occupying the passenger seat of a Merc A-Class alongside a nervous learner, today she's in a supercar alongside an overconfident middle-aged man, both of whose kids passed first time out and are desperate for him to fail. I'll try not to let anyone down.

The waiting room at Speke driving test centre. You know this place. It's just like the one you went to. Or the one at the doctor's surgery. Or the police station, I suspect. I clearly wouldn't know. Bland noticeboards pinned with 'helpful' guides, carpet tiled floor, leaflets in holders, phone numbers to call, some cheap chairs and absolutely nothing comforting, welcoming or supportive. You can smell the panic, taste the fear. Memories come flooding back. I failed my test first time round. Overconfident, that's what I remember the examiner telling me. I broke a speed limit, failed to indicate before changing lanes – and then, after getting out of the

Drifting? No problem, but show Ollie a waiting room and he's in bits

Memorising the whole car park pays off for the numberplate test

We're not saying that Ollie thought his test was a shoo-in, but he did stop halfway through the test to buy a few celebratory ice creams from the local corner shop







car, furious, asked the examiner what satisfaction he got from failing people. I regretted it instantly, and remain deeply ashamed about it three decades on.

I watch from across the car park as the first batch of examinees arrive. I recognise their stiff steps and distracted looks, brains bulging with Highway Code rules and regs. They arrive with their instructors and 10 minutes later depart with high-vis clad examiners. Having first done the eyesight test. Oh God. I'm at the stage of life where my eyesight is changing fast, and my visits to the optician have not been keeping pace. Reading a numberplate at 20.5 metres... is still, it turns out, a doddle. Phew.

And we're rolling. Or rather shuffling. I practiced all the way up here yesterday, wheel drily passing through my hands, and hated it. The Revuelto has light, direct steering and a refreshingly small, thin-rimmed steering wheel. Not too much lock needed, plenty of



space for frantic hands above thighs and below header rail. No Lamborghini has ever been better suited to a driving test. Left out of the test centre and I can't see why Speke endures a 27 per cent pass rate. Wide, lightly trafficked road. Then right, and into learner armageddon. Roadworks across a roundabout, then immediately left into narrow terraced streets. I'm so distracted by parked cars, the playground to my right and potential balls bouncing into the road that I completely miss the first (unmarked) speed bump. *Ker-schrissk* goes the front splitter. Aman yelps in horror, I jolt in fear – is failing to negotiate a speed bump an automatic failure?

The Revuelto's steering wheel contains four rotary controls and 16 buttons. Plus another eight or so on the back. One of these does the nose lift. Dare I risk a look down? Going to have to, another speed bump looms. My left thumb fumbles then finds it. We crawl over, suspension joltingly stiff. The next road appears to have been bombed. I have to go so slowly I start to wonder if driving tests have a time limit. It's topped off by a speed bump that goes toe to toe or rather lip edge to chin splitter with the nose lift and wins. *Ker-schrissk*, again.

We doddle a few left and rights, and then, at the precise moment a kid on an e-bike, phone aloft, comes flying into my blind spot, the V12 fires. I did see him, promise. He gets a tank slapper on and attempts to arrest his swift progress towards a mini-roundabout by putting his feet out. Christ on a bike. Yes, I think it might be actually given the way he's attempting to get off and walk at 25mph.

I'd obviously been in electric mode until now. Let's call it three miles of stealth. Now the broadcast is aural as well as visual, and I'm bemoaning whatever dirt Lambo must surely have on the legislators that allows it to make the Revuelto this rowdy. People start stepping out of houses before we get there. People with cats snaking around

The minor fault for failing to place the L plate dead centre was just mean









Interestingly, Gwen Stefani also failed her test here, then wrote hit song 'Don't Speke'

"I MISS A SPEED LIMIT CHANGE AND SAIL BLITHELY ONWARDS AT 26MPH"

their ankles and curious dogs poking between legs. Toddlers on scooters might follow, I might get early emergency stop practice.

And when we do stop, people slither into sight, one or two at first, then multiplying like cells in a petri dish. They don't even seem that disappointed on discovering I'm not a 17-year-old Everton superstar. The car's the star. Which is a problem during a driving test. Over the shoulder checks are mostly full of people's crotches, phones wave in my periphery, imploring voices demand revs. The Revuelto, I need to point out, is behaving immaculately. It moves lightly, easily at low speed, the twin clutch box effortlessly shuffles its ratios, hill starts are a doddle when the handbrake releases automatically. Excellent news if you're a Knightsbridge dweller with one on order. Without spelling it out, Speke is not Knightsbridge. However, my ice cream slurping chum did spell it out. "It's f**king dodgy round 'ere, youse had better watch yerselves." Friendly like, but not so much that I wanted to ask him why he wasn't in school.

The Revuelto fluffed the emergency stop, by the way. I'd forgotten to engage max downforce and didn't have enough heat in the carbon ceramics and tyres, so it juddered and surfed to a halt from 25mph. Next up was one I had been waiting for. Pull over to a kerb on the opposite side of the road and reverse two car lengths. The rearview mirror is rightly more concerned with giving you a view of the V12, and while the side mirrors do a passable job, I'd worked out a better method: open the door and lean out. I could just about see round the rear tyres and it did make it a doddle to ensure I didn't kerb a precious alloy. I'm not sure Aman saw it the same way.

Despite that, the set pieces are fine. These are the things you've rehearsed, the examiner won't put you in a tricky situation, so you go through the same pattern. It's the regular stuff that tests you, the bus coming the other way in the distance, the confusing paint on the road, the delivery van that lurches out of a side turn, awkward angled junctions, the who gives way to whom streets.

That's not where I fail. I fail with three majors. Fail properly in other words. I miss a speed limit change and sail blithely onwards at 26mph. I don't check my blind spot enough, nor do enough checks when pulling away after the emergency stop. Leaning out the car door to reverse? Not an automatic fail, but failing to check the mirror on the other side at all while I was reversing made it a failure.

Can't blame the car for much of that, because ground clearance aside, the Revuelto didn't put a foot wrong. Actually, what am I saying, the steering wheel indicators with a separate button to cancel them are sodding irritating, and trying to actually fit the 2,033mm wide (not including mirrors) supercar in a test bay for the reverse park was a genuine squeeze that needed a second stab. Just as well, or that would have been another fail.

What makes Speke so challenging? According to Aman and the other instructors and examiners I spoke to, it's a combination of narrow streets, awkward, closely stacked junctions and some confusing road markings. Want a tip, learners of Speke? Head to Montrose in Scotland and its 74.8 per cent pass rate. Two days after my test the Driving Instructors Association published a story that claimed Speke is now only the second toughest place to pass. Swindon now holds the crown. Nah, I'm not off for another attempt, I'm just thankful this one wasn't legally binding.

THANKS TO DVSA, IAN GUY, SPEKE DRIVING TEST CENTRE, AND AMAN SANGHERA AT CLEARVIEW DRIVING

MAC

From Vision GT to visceral reality, the V10 Solus GT is a lightweight, single seat hit of pure violence. You’re on your own, Jethro...

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON PHOTOGRAPHY GREG PAJO

MONO







1 Jethro spent three months in training for this very moment. On his PlayStation, that is **2** Lovely track and all that, but if you're a real gazillionaire, you'd have one of these at home **3** No real purpose to exposed front suspension, but it's pretty cool all the same **4** Any final words, Jethro?





Today I am top dog.

We're at COTA in Austin, Texas – a state of the art F1 facility – and there are people and cars everywhere, lavish hospitality and film crews and Bruno Senna and a McLaren MP4/4 and MP4/5 making ears bleed as they warm through in a pit garage. The MP4/4 won 15 of 16 F1 races back in 1988 driven by Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost and, obviously, has irresistible star power. It draws those attending this 'Pure McLaren' event like bees to honey. These are McLaren's best customers. Those racing in their one-make series, or buyers of the Ultimate Series cars or their track-only hypercars. There are 20 Sennas gathered in the paddock including some road registered Senna GTRs, plus P1s and the wild 720S GT3X.

In other words, I am among my people. Ultra high net worth individuals. Which is why today, I am top dog, as I'm here to drive McLaren's newest track only project, the Solus GT. In fact, the real top dog is The Triple F Collection, which has kindly allowed us to drive its Solus GT, finished in Gulf colours. These guys have all the hypercars and are officially my new favourite people.

A ground up project with no romance attached to it, the Solus has nothing whatever to do with the current McLaren road or racecars, has an engine outsourced from a supplier with no history attached to McLaren and looks like pretty much nothing else. Don't get me wrong, the prospect of driving a 935kg single seater with a bespoke carbon fibre chassis, extreme aero and a naturally aspirated 5.2-litre V10 that revs to over 10,000rpm is mouth watering. But what exactly is the Solus GT?

The aesthetic grew out of a project started way back in 2010 by McLaren's former designer Rob Melville, which was then adapted into the Vision GT virtual racer for the *Gran Turismo* video game series in 2017. Customers in the real world liked what they saw and the Solus was suddenly a live project. The surfacing was handled by Tobias Sühlmann – who has since been appointed chief design officer at McLaren Automotive – and McLaren enlisted the help of KW Special Projects as technical partner. It seems strange that a company making carbon fibre supercars, F1 cars and with MSO – a division set up to create bespoke and often wild options for clients – needs another company to build the Solus GT, but maybe that's just me.

Having said that, there's no denying the purity of engineering here. Suspension is by double wishbones with inboard dampers connected via pushrods at the front and pullrods at the rear and torsion bars. Again, all good F1 or LMP-style practice. The chassis is carbon fibre, of course, and all laid up by hand just like an F1 car rather than the more 'mass produced' resin moulding technique used for, say, a 750S.

The Solus also uses its unique 5.2-litre V10 (manufactured by Judd but developed in partnership with McLaren) as a stressed member of the chassis. Just like in, well, you know the rest... The engine choice is fascinating. The Vision GT concept used McLaren's twin-turbo V8 in combination with electric motors on the front wheels, but in the real world the programme quickly shifted focus from road relevance and hybrid technology to an absolute focus on lightweighting and linear response.

McLaren claims the Solus weighs 935kg, delivers 829bhp in Race mode (858bhp with airbox ram effect) and with Goodyear slicks from an LMP2 car should deliver lap times comparable with the latest Le Mans Hypercar class.

Owners get a proper seat fitting at the factory, the steering wheel is based off Lando's F1 item and it seems extreme in every sense. However, I'm also told it's intended to be easy to drive and a great platform for customers to "learn and grow with".

The V10 needs prewarming for 45 minutes before it's even started and it's hooked up to tubes and pumps when I arrive at COTA. The garages are spotless. Engineers in McLaren uniforms are doing things that seem important with laptops and tools. Everyone is chirpy enough but my imposter syndrome ramps up yet again.

The Solus GT looks stunning. Small and organic but with such presence. With the canopy pushed forward in the open position the sense that I'm about to step into uncharted territory is palpable and pretty intimidating. Two other people will drive this car today – one is a current IndyCar driver, the other a former Le Mans class winner. And Bruno Senna is on hand for any advice I might need, too. Is it too late to get my mum to write a sick note? Getting in is easy. Step over the bodywork onto the seat, then support yourself on the sides of the cockpit and slide into the hot seat. The driving position is reclined but doesn't seem as extreme as the Aston Valkyrie and the pedals and steering wheel have plenty of adjustment.

Ahead is a thick Halo-style spar of carbon fibre with a rearview screen attached to the top and the curved canopy still some way off into the distance. It's pushed back into position by one of the crew and suddenly the central driving position and that unbroken windscreen make perfect sense. What a view!

“EVEN IN A FULL FACE HELMET THE FIELD OF VISION IS LIBERATING”



Steering wheel based off the shape of the one in Lando's F1 car. Canopy slides forward to allow access, fighter jet style

Got a spare, ooh, £3.3 million quid? This could be you

“THERE’S SO MUCH POWER, SO MANY REVS TO ENJOY, SO MUCH NOISE...”



The driving environment is glorious. Even in a full face helmet and restricted by a HANS device, the sheer field of vision is wonderfully panoramic and liberating, and placing the Solus will surely be so easy with the tops of the front wheels right there ahead of you. Immediately some of the trepidation melts away. Vision GT might have been a better name for this thing, after all.

The V10 is fearsomely loud in the garage – and actually drowns out even the MP4/5’s Honda V10 engine on track – but when you’re inside the Solus bubble it’s neither shockingly violent nor scary. In fact, it feels bizarrely smooth and where I’d expected the whole car to tingle and resonate due to the engine and box being bolted directed to the carbon tub, it barely tickles your backside at idle. The noise is so much nicer than the Valkyrie’s from the inside too, which is so dominated by the gear-driven cams and is deafeningly loud and deeply uncouth. So, first impressions dissipate the nerves further.

There’s no clutch – select first, give it at least 20 per cent throttle and rip out into the pitlane and slam into the limiter. The steering is light and hyper direct but feels perfectly in tune with the car’s inherent agility and even as the V10 stutters and strains against the pit limiter the Solus GT has already reassured me. It’s clearly a brand new and in some ways alien experience but somehow everything feels entirely natural. How does that work? I’ve no idea, but I’m very grateful nonetheless.

COTA is huge in scale and with some properly quick corners and incredible elevation change. Exiting the pits you head sharply uphill for a tight left hander, then plunge downhill through a fast right before climbing again over a blind brow into a left-right-left-right combination that the Solus could probably take nearly flat. I can’t summon the courage, but even at a more conservative pace the car feels sharp, supremely stable and wonderfully agile. The central driving position is fantastic, the engine’s response and reach gives the car a weightless feel, and the seven-speed sequential box rips between ratios with precision.

For somebody used to road cars – even very good ones – the instant reactions and lack of inertia are elating. Although still engaged in the familiar act of driving, most of the reference points are gone. No need for patience and managing weight transfer, everything is compressed and waste is eradicated. Action and reaction meld into one seamless movement and the GT really does set you free. Free to brake later, turn in faster and use all that power with confidence. I’m barely scratching the surface through the quickest corners, but the thrill is undiminished and it’s truly easy to believe you could grow into the Solus GT’s vast capability over (a long) time.

That IndyCar driver I mentioned earlier proves the point, as he’s not only highly impressed with the performance but feels the car is a little too on edge at the limit. For me – at a reduced pace – the traits he’s talking about are absent and it possesses a lovely, confidence inspiring balance. Gentle understeer bleeding into a high *g*, hooked up balance that feels like all four tyres are sharing the load equally. But getting to the point where the Solus is on a knife edge? That’s a journey I’d love to take.

There are glimpses – a triggering of ABS here and there, a few occasions where the car starts to slide in the quicker, longer corners as mechanical grip and aero finally start to cry enough. These fleeting moments are crucial, and make you feel like you’re exploiting the Solus rather than just watching on as an amazed passenger. The sheer accuracy ensures the driver always feels deeply involved in the act of unravelling the track. The car might have limits beyond the abilities of most, but it requires the driver’s inputs and commitment at all times.

Of course, the shrieking V10 engine is simply staggering. There’s so much power, so many revs to enjoy, so much noise once you’ve got it working hard... the Judd-built V10 was an inspired choice. Truly, it’s one of the great internal combustion engines. However, the fact it’s just one element of a balanced, cohesive package says much about the capability of the Solus GT. For a few laps at least I forget all about pretending to be one of the super rich and just imagine that I’m one of the super talented. A proper, real life racing driver.

I can see why somebody might think £3.3m is a small price to pay to live that fantasy from time to time.

Judd V10 revs to 10,000rpm, needs prewarming for 45 mins. Not ideal if you're in a hurry

As colour combos go, it's a brave one. Ah well, in for a penny in for a pound

WORDS TOM FORD **PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

SAVE THE WHALES

Since a Californian startup began reimagining 911s over 15 years ago, the popularity of restomod Porsches has exploded. Does Singer still do it best? We'll let its latest – turbocharged – creation answer that one...



IF

you were to pick a road on which to have a go in a classic Porsche 911 Turbo, it wouldn't be this one. Time has chewed hard on this landscape, leaving the edges of the B6278 ragged and cracked, cambers drooping, tumerous bumps the rule rather than the exception. It looks like the tarmac had a tantrum and left itself exhausted – any lack of suspension will get found out within metres. And let's face it, old 911 Turbos are bitey, famously unforgiving of inattention or a skills gap. It's enough to give you palpitations.

And that's not all. Although it seems appropriate that we're in a Californian car in Holliwood – the misplaced consonant equates to the North Pennines in the UK rather than America – it means weather changes like a mood, and sheep have the self preservation instincts of peculiarly woolly rocks. But as we begin, it turns peaceful. The days up here often get blown out by a scathingly cold wind that pours down the hillsides like an impending argument, and yet today we are gifted the orange and gold of summer. And it is good. As is the car. It's a Porsche 964 that's been 'reimagined' by Singer Vehicle Design in the US, stripped to its components and DNA rewritten into something else. But this time it's a homage to turbocharging, specifically the legendary 930 Turbo of the mid 1970s. Suspiciously good timing, since we're staring down the anniversarial barrel of half a century of turbocharged Porsches. But this isn't one of Singer's flashier daydreams like the DLS Turbo. It's a homage rather than a caricature. And if there's a more photogenic sports car right now, I'm not sure what it is.

It's probably a reaction to the endless triple tier wings, dive planes and fins, the peevish fluoro colours just for the 'look at me' and Insta attention, but this 911 looks spectacular in white with a few light graphics. The madness in the detail, rather than the shock value. The body is entirely carbon fibre, leaving only the doors steel to retain some thunk to the closure. The iconic details are all present and correct, but massaged and translated into a subtly more pleasant form. So you still get the basic format of the front bumper, but it's slicker and more aerodynamic. The corner bellows are now vents, the 'shark fin' side elements intakes for the rear-mounted flat six. That iconic rubbery whale tail of a rear spoiler is now carbon based, longer and taller, but there for elegant stability rather than brutal downforce. And, yes, there are LED headlights, but they're not the jazzy, twinkly nonsense that makes an old car look inappropriate. Classic Fuchs wheels but in a more modern fitment, fettled perfectly into the arches – this isn't slammed, but the stance is just about perfect. Bluntly, if tastelessness is a disease, this is the cure.

“IF THERE’S A MORE PHOTOGENIC SPORTS CAR RIGHT NOW, I’M NOT SURE WHAT IT IS”



And that’s before we get inside. As with every car Singer applies itself to, the options list is basically an exercise in choice paralysis. It’s a classic Porsche 911 interior – every 911 owner on the planet would recognise the basic layout – but reworked. You can have a stripped out version with a half cage and race belts, light on the carpet and heavy on the fixed back carbon buckets, or you can go for plump electric sports seats, sound deadening and a rear wiper, plus myriad other tweaks. Any material, every colour, brain hurting complication. But always, *always* a 911 at heart, tightened and refreshed, with Bluetooth and connectivity – albeit subtle – and aircon that actually works.

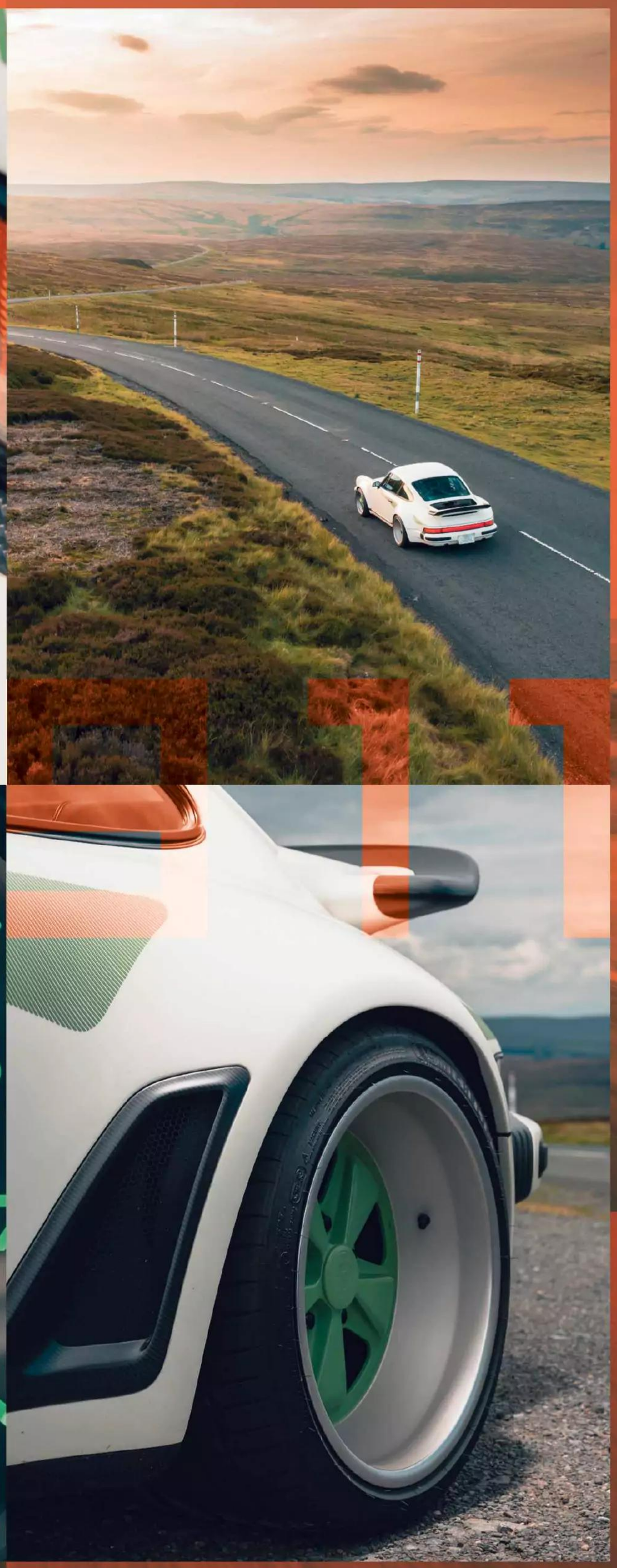
In the back is a 3.8-litre Mezger flat six from the 964 with a pair of variable vane BorgWarner turbos lifted from a 992 with outputs ranging from a basic 450bhp to 510, a similar 442lb ft for both. With weight tipping the scales at some 1,300kg depending on spec, these are not particularly lardy cars, and there’s something about picking a generous but not excessive output here rather than simply adding 750bhp for internet points. There is also a lot to be said for a little set dressing when it comes to an engine, because this is one you’d be



A 964 engine meets turbos from the 992 and the result is... generous but not excessive



Fun little game inside... can you score 30/30 on the TURBO BOOST challenge?



proud to show off to fellow car nerds. Pipework and looms concealed, intercoolers tucked into the intake plenums, it's clean enough to eat your dinner off, pretty enough to display on its own. Details. It's all about the details.

The nerves are still there though. A bare couple of days to figure out what this car is really about, on really challenging roads. So I slide the slim key into the barrel, and fire up that motor. The usual slightly industrial chunter, a heavy but manageable clutch and steering combo, and we're off. Unfortunately, the initial impression of the car is that it might be a little bit too focused. It's not soft. It picks up on enough detail to know whether a bump has an angle or radius, can identify the crowns and cambers blindfolded, reading the road through rubberised braille. It's a bit punchy. But as the speed rises, so does the refinement. It's a weird one, but the faster you go, the smoother and more agreeable it gets. That's not an excuse for driving like a lunatic, but a present reality. If you've ever seen a rally car or Trophy Truck battering along off-road with the body still and the suspension pumping away insanely below the midline, you'll have an idea. Essentially, this rethought Turbo feels like it has rally damping. And once you get used to it, it's time to start letting the engine have its head. Which is when it all gets a bit vintage scary.

Like the old Turbo there's still a bit of lag – it doesn't really get going until 3,500rpm – but instead of the classic 930's landslide, the power and torque arrives in a wave that builds through the rev range. It's so smooth that I would prefer a hard limiter to bounce off, rather than the energy sap of the soft limiter fitted to this car, but it's addictive. Brake, turn in from the forearms, early on the throttle get the boost up, hang the hell on. It'll stick, but you can't second guess it – commitment is king. And you get all of the noises. From the flat six grumble at idle to the breathy inhalation of the turbos, to the chuff and light twitter of the electric wastegates. It will pop, bang and crack, but far from being the digital operatics of the fake stuff, this is fuel and hot exhaust doing their thing. You never get the same sounds twice, you can't predict it (other than if you accelerate hard through the gears and do a big lift – it pretty much always belches then), and it's fun with a capital F. You have to drive it, mind. This one doesn't give up its edge for free.

The thing is, in a world of emotionally cheap electric speed, everything else gets put into perspective. There's a physical connection to having to drive a car well and smoothly, a dance and cadence to it. And getting it right in a car like a manual, boosted 964 Porsche 911 lends its own special flavour... from the way you address the upright steering wheel to the angle that you push the floor hinged pedals. The way the little, delicate seeming gearstick always seems to drop into the fleshy bit of your palm, the sense of the car's natural pivot being a bit further back than you might be used to. And if you have time, you start to absorb the character quirks as friendly fire.

The car handles marginally better with a full tank of fuel. Sport traction mode is best for a little oversteer feeling without too much risk. If you turn in slightly on the brakes, the front end feels more confident. If you let the steering wheel writhe in your grip on a bumpy road instead of trying to fight it, the car will work it out without input, and if you're really slamming on the brakes, the car will move around a bit. It settles, but it takes some exposure to translate the language. You don't get that in a lot of more modern supercars, whose electronic lockdown of any quirky behaviour robs them of personality,

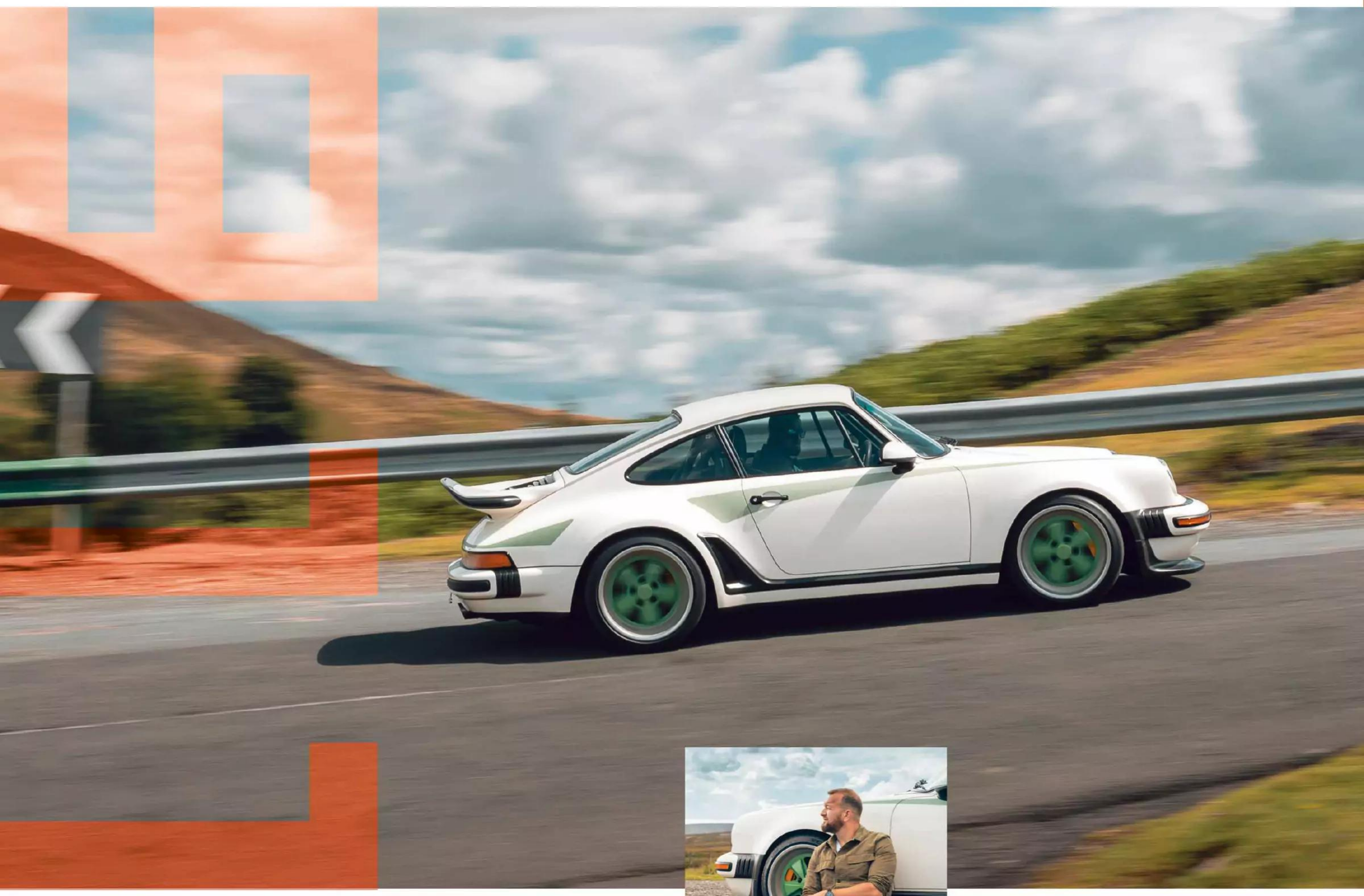
"EARLY ON THE THROTTLE, GET THE BOOST UP, HANG THE HELL ON"

"You *need* to drive it faster to get the best out of it" – not the first time we've heard that one



"PUT BLUNTLY, IF IS A DISEASE, THEN

TASTELESSNESS THIS IS THE CURE”





If you're in the market for a £1m Porsche, please ensure your shirt colour doesn't clash with the rims

and this is a car that sweats character like a cold glass of beer on a hot day. It's hard work on these back roads, but worth it. The real magic of Singer is that it has managed to enhance the Turbo experience without robbing it of its basic identity. There are wider modern tyres and suspension kinematics, steering angles and Bosch traction control and all that good stuff, but a 930 owner would be right at home. After 48 hours with this car, I only really started to scratch the surface. And I enjoyed that challenge.

There's a pleasure to it that classic car owners will recognise. Modern cars tend to require a lot of speed to be exciting, but simply stringing together a set of bends with perfect lines and sweet gearchanges – and yes, heel and toe is easy in this 911 – even if you're only going moderately quickly, is joyously satisfying. And after a couple of days of exposure, that's what comes across in the way that Singer has polished up the Turbo experience. It's more GT-ish, less racy, less committed than cars like the DLS. But in being a bit more gentle, it unfurls extra wings of ability. A DLS restoration might be much faster and shouty in specific circumstances, but this car allows you to access 85 per cent of that charm much more of the time. In a smiles per mile battle in the real world, the turbocharged car will win. This is the physical manifestation of progress not perfection.

So what's the point here? This is a faintly ridiculous $1.1 million rethink (that's £851k, not including the donor 964, shipping or taxes) which is enough to give even rich people pause for thought. It's not the fastest car in the world, hasn't got the most grip by modern supercar standards, goes underappreciated by 98 per cent of the population bar 'that's a nice old Porsche'. For most, the obvious question is whether a Porsche 911 Turbo fettled by Singer is worth roughly eight or nine times what it costs to pick up a nice original 930 Turbo. And the simple answer to that is that it's worth whatever people are prepared to pay. Singer says that there are already 300 cars on order – that's a three-year waiting list – and, even given a little wastage, that's exceptional business. So it depends on what you want and need from a car as to whether a 964 genetically engineered into a modern Turbo is for you. Ultimately, this isn't the kind of car you can justify by papery stats, efficiency indexes or even value. You wouldn't pick these roads for a go in an original 930 Turbo, but when Singer gets involved, it turns out that any road is a good one. It's not a perfect car by any means. But for me, even on these roads, on this couple of days of a sleepy British summer, it's pretty damn close.



Pork chops

Any we've missed? The number of companies willing to zhuzh up an old Porsche for you these days is bewildering. From Kalmar's rally raid conversions to Lanzante's F1 engined nutter, there's something for everyone... so long as your pockets are deeper than the Mariana Trench. What's your pick, or one of each?

01 SINGER



02 THEON DESIGN



03 KALMAR



04 GUNTHER WERKS



05 WORKSHOP 5001



06 TUTHILL



07 THORNLEY KELHAM



08 PAUL STEPHENS AUTOART



09 RUF



10 MLETZKO



11 ROCS



12 OIL STAIN LAB



13 RWB



14 LANZANTE



15 MAGNUS WALKER



16 KAEGE RETRO



17 DP MOTORSPORT



18 STRAAT



19 AUTOAKTIV CLASSIC



20 R GRUPPE



21 GPROGRAMM



PLUS:

- **KAMM**
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- **EMORY MOTORSPORTS**
- **CANEPA**
- **EVERRATI**
- **PORSCHE CLASSIC**

WORDS JACK RIX
PHOTOGRAPHY WILSON HENNESSY

VALK-KILLER

At long last, Aston Martin's cut price hypercar has arrived, and the 1,064bhp V8 hybrid son of the Valkyrie promises to give Ferrari and McLaren many a sleepless night



R2

“TRICKLEDOWN TECH FROM F1? WHY, OF COURSE!”



T

The Valhalla is a survivor. We first saw it as the filling in a mid engined sandwich at the 2019 Geneva Motor Show – Valkyrie above it, 'entry level' Vanquish below. This was also the show where former CEO Andy Palmer, on a crazed pre-IPO pump, revealed an all new fully electric Lagonda sub brand. He was given the boot a year later, along with that Lagonda monstrosity and the Maserati MC20 rivalling Vanquish... but the Valhalla rode on. In 2021 we saw a new version – now AMG V8 powered – reshaped and re-engineered under the eye of Tobias Moers. Moers made way for Amedeo Felisa in May 2022, and Felisa for Adrian Hallmark in October 2024. It's been musical chairs in the CEO's office and yet each time, and despite the Valkyrie's tortuous route to production, the Valhalla has passed scrutiny.

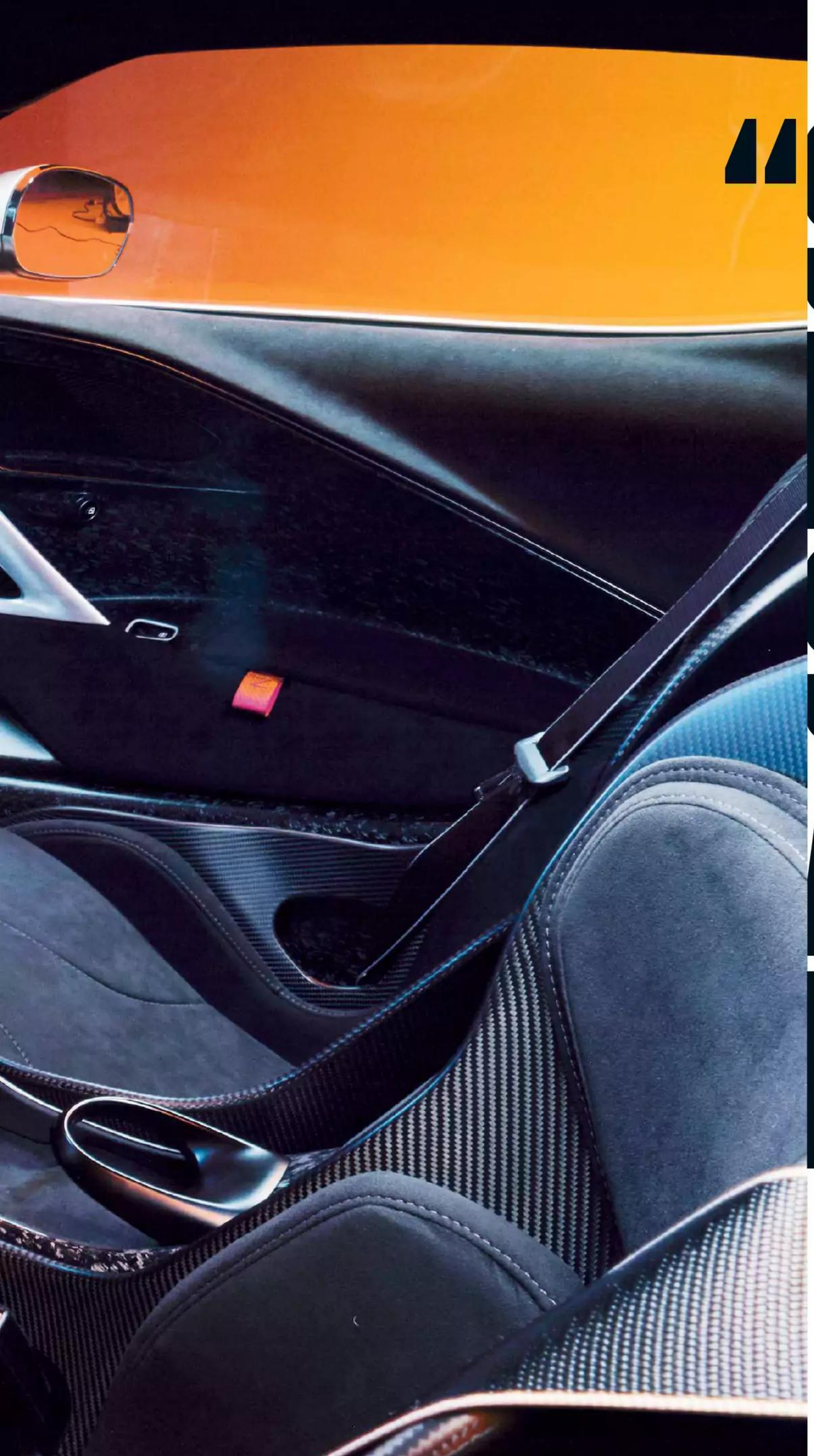
Which brings us to this, the production version, and while the path to get here was long and winding, the destination is glorious. A 1,064bhp V8 hybrid supercar/hypercar designed to deliver sledgehammer performance but without the Valk's zero compromise approach, limited to 999 units and costing £850,000 a pop. We'll get to the engineering wizardry in a moment, but for now let's dwell on that price. Measure it by the £450,000 V12 hybrid Lambo Revuelto and it's a lot of dough, but compare it with the slightly more powerful and downforce laden McLaren W1 (£2m) and Ferrari F80

(£3.1m), cars to which I'd argue the Valhalla is closer in purpose, and it's the bargain of the year.

"I'm probably biased, but I think the car is quite a lot more beautiful than the competition. I think when you chase higher and higher downforce numbers, the car becomes very functional looking and loses some of the elegance," says chief engineer Andrew Kay. "So even though those two competitors are higher value and higher power at the end of the day, which would you rather have in your garage? Which would you rather look at and have your friend in? I think we've got a bit of an edge there."

He has a point because the Valhalla is not downforce shy – it produces up to 600kg at 150mph, and then maintains that all the way to the 217mph top speed by bleeding it off via the DRS style hydraulic rear wing and active flap under the front splitter. Aston is pointing the Valhalla at the sweet spot between grip and drag, and targeting a balance of precision on track with proper usability on the road. We'll report back on that when we drive it, but for now by not chasing ultimate aero gains, beauty has been preserved. Case in point, you get four driving modes to pick from – EV (nine miles' range, up to 80mph), Sport, Sport+, Race – and yet the wing only raises itself up 255mm on its hydraulic rams in Race mode, at all other times it "remains stowed to preserve Valhalla's sleek and elegant profile". How very Aston.

The engine is a heavily revised version of the 4.0-litre, twin turbo, dry sump, flat plane crank V8 you'll find under the bonnet of the most recent AMG GT Black Series, producing 817bhp on its own. That's supplemented by a trio of electric motors contributing another 248bhp – two on the front axle and a third in a new eight-speed dual clutch gearbox. Quick maths: that's 1,064bhp and 811lb ft in total, not miles behind the Valkyrie (1,139bhp and 682lb ft) but then at 1,655kg dry, the Valhalla weighs 385kg more. The Valhalla counters with 4WD, torque vectoring across the front axle and an e-diff at the rear, all the modern tricks to mask weight. Top tip if you want to shave more precious grammes: eschew the standard forged aluminium wheels in favour of magnesium rims to save 12kg of unsprung mass, and then order your bodywork in naked carbon to dodge 3kg of paint.



“SKYWARDS ROTATED SEATS ADD A HINT OF RACINESS”

Strong tailwind? Open both doors for a sustainable 150bhp sail boost



Painted or not, it’ll crush 0–62mph in 2.5 seconds, which slots it neatly between the 4WD Ferrari F80 (2.15secs) and RWD McLaren W1 (2.7secs).

Trickledown tech from Aston’s F1 team? Why of course! Except, we’re not talking about some obscure titanium alloy used in a bolt to hold the numberplate on, they simply asked the F1 team to design the entire carbon tub. The result is a two part structure, a bit like an Easter egg split along the seam, where the lower section – which creates 95 per cent of the stiffness – uses resin transfer moulding and the upper section is made with a more traditional autoclave technique. Aluminium subframes are then hung off either end. Kay again: “We do use carbon fibre at Aston, but to use it to this extent, we called on F1 expertise. It’s an immensely stiff



“WHILE THE PATH

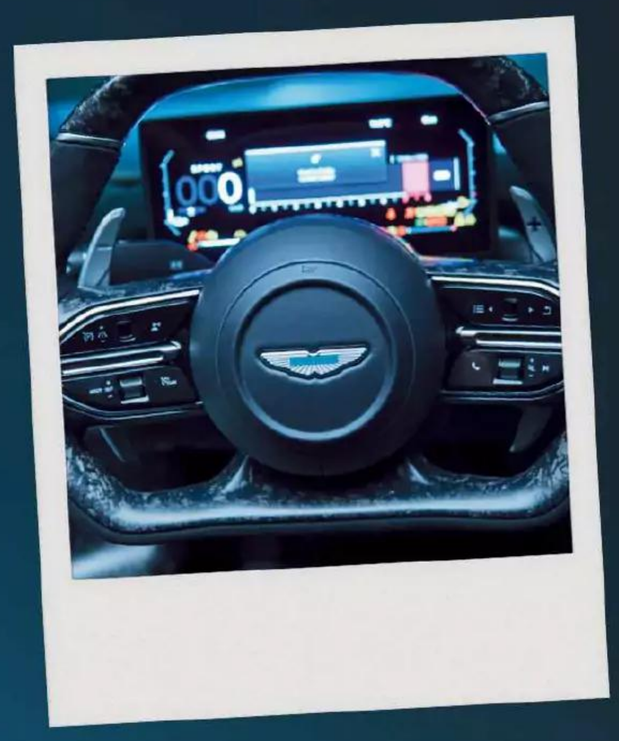
If storage is an issue, you could definitely wedge a few golf clubs in here

Bond's next car? They need to pick a new Bond first, but it's in with a shout

WAS LONG, THE DESTINATION IS GLORIOUS"

Chopped recycled carbon: highly tasteful or the devil's work? Discuss

“VALHALLA HAS THE POTENTIAL TO TURN YOUR ORGANS INSIDE OUT”



F1-inspired wheel handy if your name is Fernando Alonso, less so anyone else

structure, which makes it easy to tune the suspension because you get so little movement from the body structure."

Even so, they're not leaving anything to chance. Bilstein DTX adaptive dampers offer that wide operating window that's supposed to define the Valhalla, while the front suspension is pushrod with inboard dampers (visible through the carbon fibre clamshell just ahead of the windscreen, because why not), and the rear is a five link setup. Brakes are Brembo carbon ceramics aided by regen from the e-motors and a rear wing 'air brake' when you really stomp on it in Race. The tyres are Michelin Pilot Sport 5Ss as standard, or Cup 2Rs if you envisage taking your £850,000 Aston for regular workouts on track or live somewhere it never rains.

Some notable bits on the exterior – that roof scoop rams air into the engine and cooling system and will impress your friends, the twin trumpet exhausts are there to make noise and also impress your friends, while another pair of pipes are hidden on the inside edges of the Venturi tunnels around the back. The doors are forward hinged dihedral jobbies and there not just to impress your already very impressed friends. They move up and forwards, taking half the roof with them, which makes it surprisingly easy to scooch over the low sill and drop into the single piece carbon seats with dignity intact.

Backside installed, the interior is fairly standard in its layout – a couple of rectangular tablets behind the wheel and in the middle of the dash, an 'F1 inspired' steering wheel (by which they mean it's a bit squashed at the bottom, not riddled with incomprehensible dials and toggles) and there's even a cupholder and places to put things under the floating centre console. What's not standard is the seating position – less reclined than the Valkyrie, definitely, but still rotated skywards for more than a hint of raciness. The trim in this demo car appeared to have been vomited up by a carbon fibre cat. It's chopped, recycled and forged carbon Aston says. Spec it sparingly, we say. Finally, notable by their absence, are the noise cancelling headsets you have to wear in the Valkyrie if you don't want tinnitus for the rest of your days.

In summary, the Valhalla has the performance potential to turn your organs inside out, it looks and feels exotic and walks the line betwixt brutal and elegant with aplomb. It has more technology than a Chinese smartphone factory and if you put it in the same bracket as the Ferrari F80 and McLaren W1, it's a 'more than half price' hypercar. Surely it couldn't survive a fight with Ferrari and McLaren's finest... could it?



SCRAMBLED 'SEGG

The Koenigsegg Chimera is a one-off mashup of Agera RS, Jesko and CC850 – potent, but what exactly is the point?

WORDS JACK RIX

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN WYCHERLEY

CHIMERA:

a fearsome fire breathing monster that's part lion, part serpent and part, er, goat, according to those crazy ancient Greeks. Not sure how one of the least terrifying creatures on the planet made the cut, but from where I'm sitting the comparison is a good one. The Jesko's whipcrack V8 is clearly the flame spitting big cat, the ingenious simulated manual gearbox has to be the cunning serpent and, let's face it, I'm the goat... and not in a Ronaldo kind of way, more a weak link at the centre of a Frankenstein-style hypercar mashup. The Chimera (I'll save you the Google, it's spelled differently from the TVR Chimaera) is "like performing a heart transplant from one animal to another, but putting it in a different place", Christian von Koenigsegg explains, keeping the grisly animal analogies rolling.

What you're looking at is an Agera RS. Well, it was an Agera RS, belonging to the president of the FIA – Mohammed Ben Sulayem – who one day had an idea. Could you cram the 'big turbo' 5.1-litre flat-plane crank V8 from the Jesko, plus the CC850's trick simulated manual gearbox (that piggybacks the already trick 'Light Speed' nine-speed auto) into the more petite frame of the Agera RS? Normally this would be destined to languish at the bottom of the suggestion box for all of eternity, but when it's Christian you're dealing with there's always a chance he's up for some self-flagellation. This is a man who would replace his own organs with in-house designed and manufactured components if he could improve the efficiency and flow rate. And sure enough, he accepted the challenge, justifying it by using the Chimera as a test bed for the ongoing CC850 gearbox project.

"It turned out to be about twice as much work as I had run through in my head," Christian admits, playing down the stress bomb of his own making. "We're talking 10-year-old technology being fused with newer computer systems, screen systems and control systems. And then taking the cradle of a more modern car with an elastomeric mounted engine and transmission and putting it in a car that originally had a stressed engine and transmission, which brought with it a lot of interesting and exciting challenges." Which raises the question, why didn't Mohammed Ben Sulayem just buy a Jesko, or a CC850? "Oh, he's got both of those on order too, in fact he has a standing order for any new model we make, we just send an invoice. This is about the engineering challenge and having something nobody else does. Honestly though, it would have been easier to start from scratch."

"Yeah, my next one is getting an 11spd manual and a cassette player"



And so, after a surreal cold call from the FIA president – a big fan of *TopGear* apparently, a man of consummate taste – inviting us to sample his cut and shut project, we find ourselves at Koenigsegg's test track (a disused runway really, but with zero noise restrictions so they can run test mules and shake down customer cars 24 hours a day if required) in Ängelholm, Sweden. Our first opportunity then to try this clutch and gearshift by wire manual box that appears to have stirred something inside Christian. "A manual shift is emotional and exciting, it's celebrating the history of driving and makes the car no better than yourself. It's the perfect exoskeleton of a car from the human body. What I realised is you drive with your eyes, pre-work your clutch and slip your kiss point so you drive with a better flow. It actually improves the performance, maybe not in seconds up a mountain pass, but certainly how smoothly you can operate the car."

I concur, but in case you don't the Chimera goes one step further than the CC850: as well as full manual and full auto modes, there's also the option of using the paddles behind the wheel. All bases covered, and a strong answer to the inevitable question – why not just bolt on a regular manual? For the record, you'd also need a flywheel, which would erode one of this engine's USPs (the fact it revs like a superbike on nitrous), the powertrain would be heavier and need homologating all over again, and there are actually nine ratios in the auto gearbox it piggybacks, so the ratios corresponding to each number in the six-slot open gate can change based on the driving mode. The mental leap here is accepting that it's closer to the real thing than it seems. Your left foot is still moving a clutch pack and the gearstick is still engaging gears, they're just doing it with precision electronics rather than squeezing hydraulic fluid or physically moving metal bits.

We first approach it in full peacock mode, innards exposed, naked carbon gleaming. Knowing the torture the engineering team have put themselves through, the finish is immaculate – you'd genuinely never know the butchery that's occurred beneath. The wooden lever, exposed linkage and chromed open gate manual are particularly stunning, celebrated and perched at the heart of everything. This is an Agera RS, so slimmer and lighter than a Jesko, with smaller wheels and manual dihedral doors, but there's nothing small about the engine. We're running 1,262bhp today on regular unleaded, but juice it up on E85 and that'll jump to 1,578bhp. A few years back when I drove an early prototype of the Jesko Absolut on this very runway, I had trouble pulling the paddles fast enough to grab the next gear before we boosted into the limiter... how I'm going to keep up with a manual shifter, I'm not entirely sure.

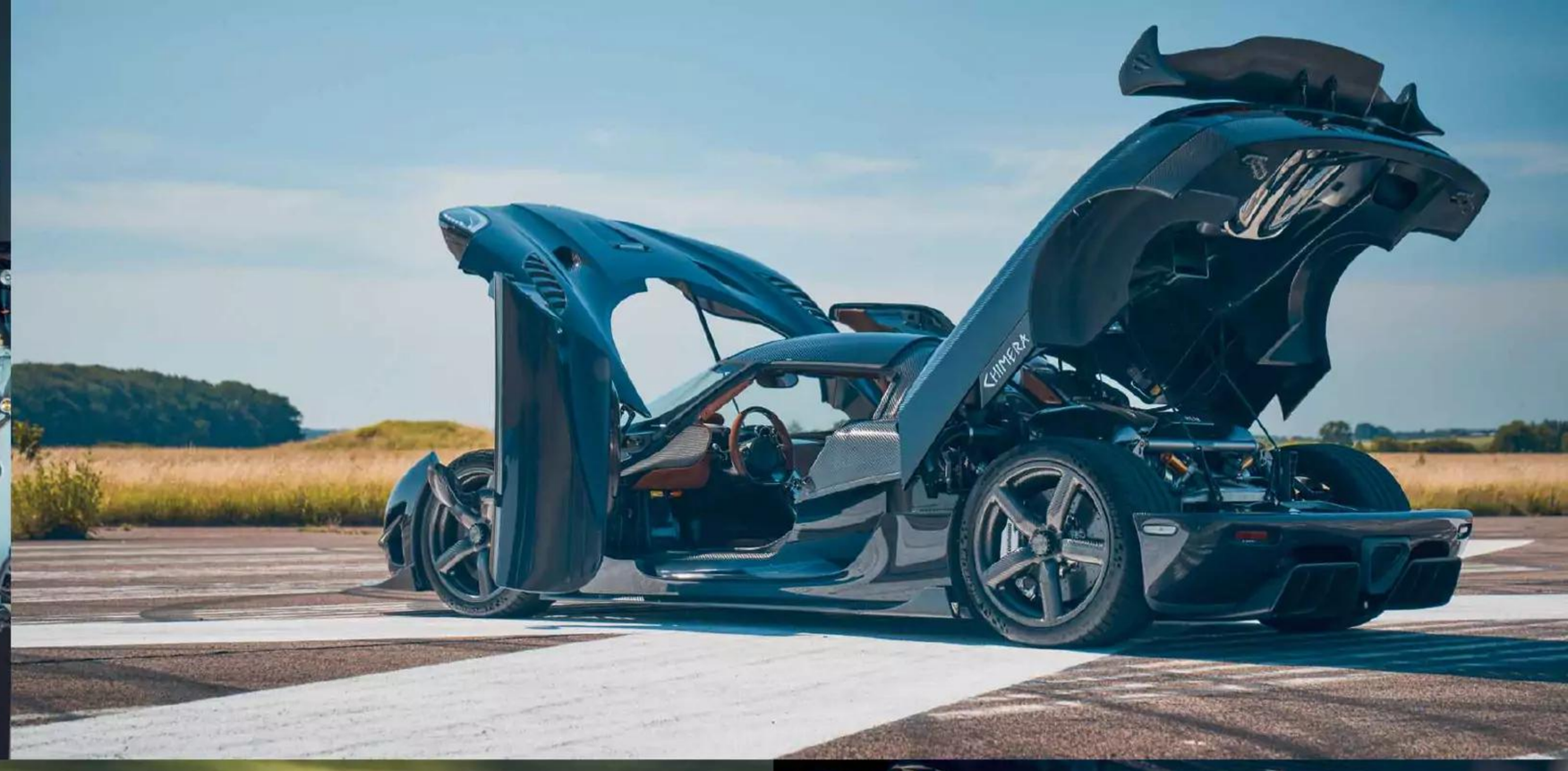
We start slow, feeling our way in with gentle speeds for photography, and already there are answers to the big question: would I know this was a simulated manual if nobody told me? While the software and functionality are brilliantly thought through – you can stall it, slip the clutch, heel and toe on downshifts, all the good stuff – there are a couple of giveaways. The bite point has to be judged more with your ears than an obvious sensation through the clutch pedal. I didn't stall it, but with such a razor responsive engine it's a constant looming possibility when moving away. The gearlever moves with a heavily sprung slickness as it clacks about the gate, but could do with more mechanical grit and a fraction more resistance to make the shift more forceful and positive. The joy of a Koenigsegg, of course, is that the cars are always in development, these are two things I'm assured are being worked on.

Once you're up and cantering though, that lack of resistance and light clutch action are a joy – letting you dip and flick about without fear of hitting the wrong slot (money shifts aren't permitted in the software of course, right now you can slot into a low gear but if the revs are too high, the computer won't give it to you. Soon there'll be a detent stopping the gearlever from going there altogether). The greatest compliment I can pay is that when tonking up and down the runway, wafting about on the road and crawling about for photography, I try the paddleshift and auto modes, but always

"I TRY THE AUTO MODES BUT ALWAYS DEFAULT TO MANUAL"

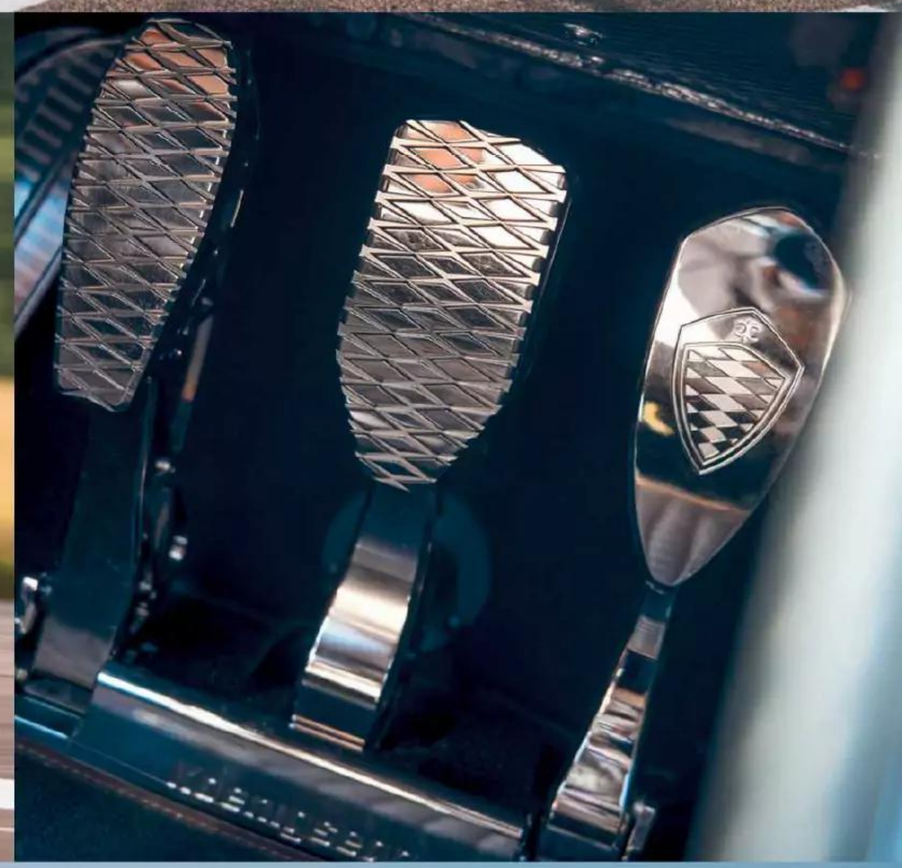
The kit car Koenigsegg was just a touch beyond Jack's capabilities

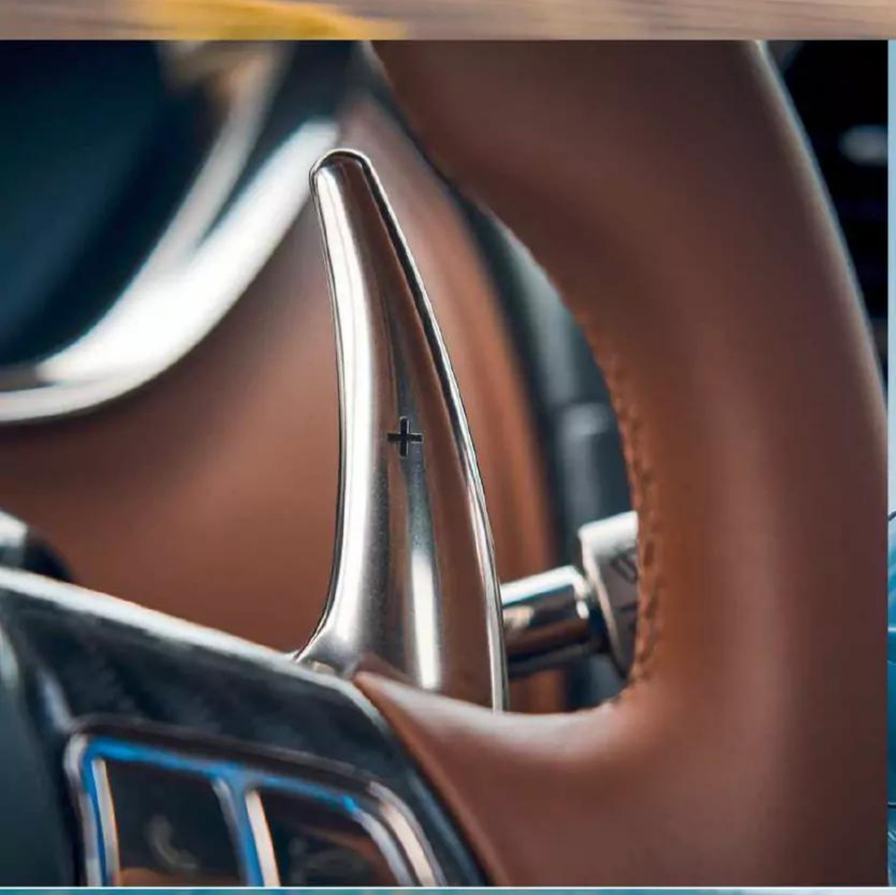




In mythology, the Chimera's fire and smoke came out the other end







Manually operated doors? What's next, a key you have to twist to turn it on? Ridiculous



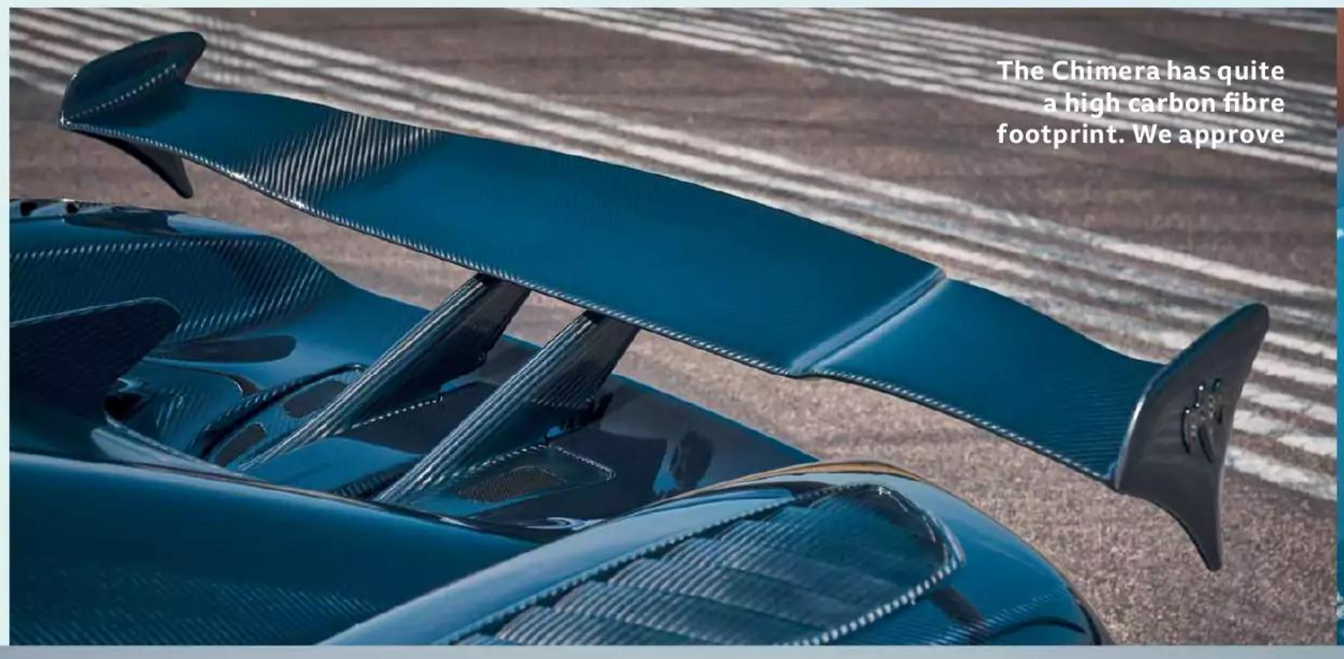








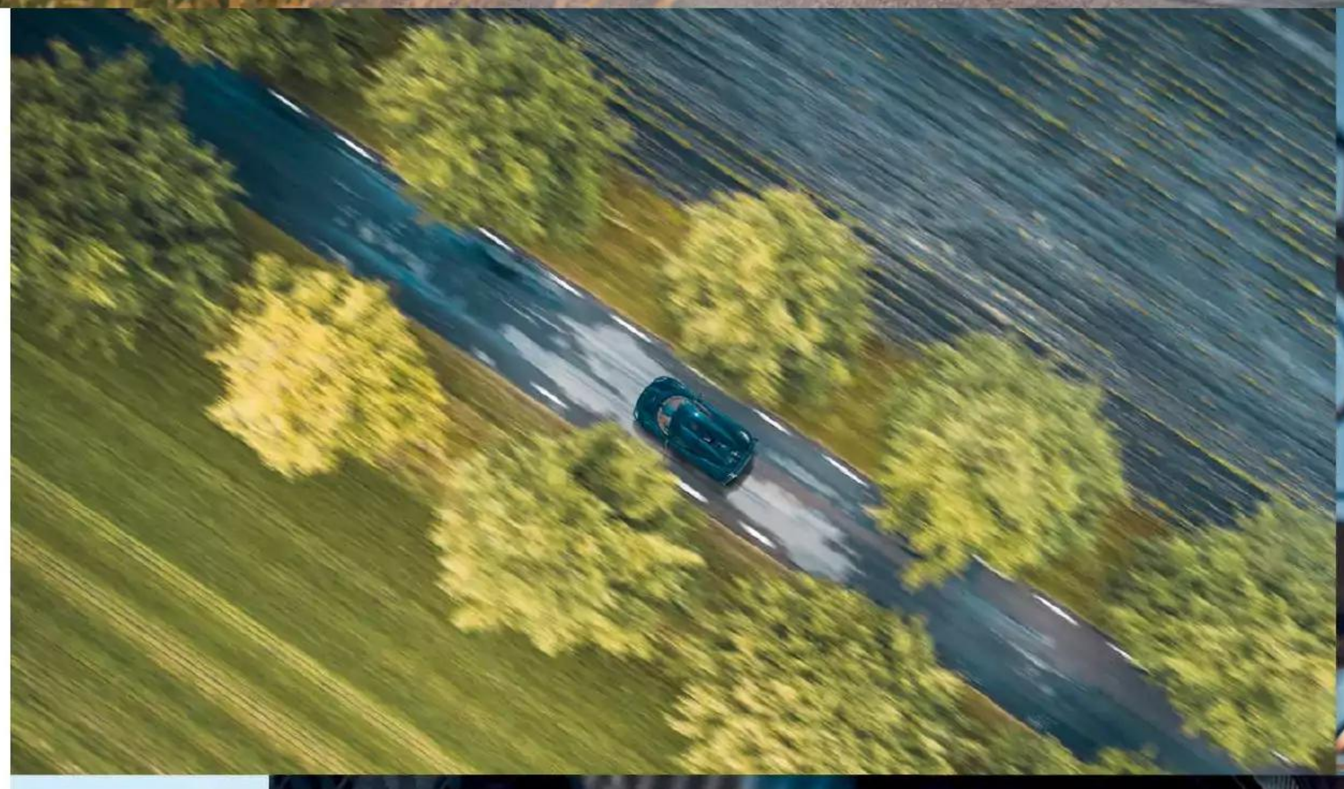
“THE CHIMERA RIPS HOLES IN THE FABRIC OF PHYSICS”

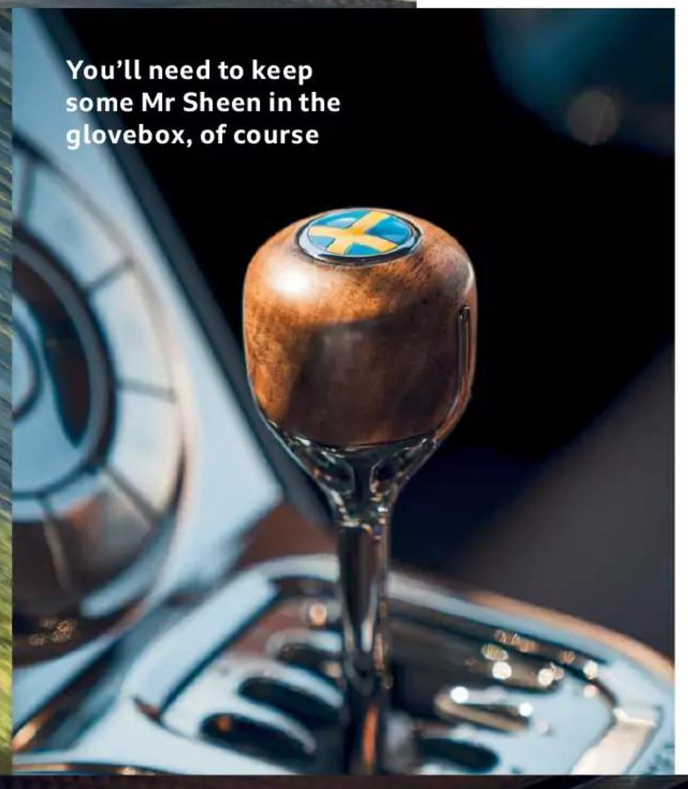


The Chimera has quite a high carbon fibre footprint. We approve









You'll need to keep some Mr Sheen in the glovebox, of course







default back to manual control. It simply makes all situations more fun, which shows just how well finessed and developed it is. It's like the fake noise pumped into a Hyundai Ioniq 5 N – you're never fooled into thinking there are actual explosions going on under the bonnet, but it enhances the driving experience nonetheless.

As if the Koenigsegg driving experience required any enhancement. Weighing around 100kg less than a Jesko, but with all the firepower, the Chimera rips holes in the fabric of physics. Leave the traction control on and it'll spit five foot flames out the back, turn it off and you're dealing with something weighing the same as a McLaren 750S, but with twice the power... and all sent through the rear tyres. The turbo rush when you keep your foot in leaves you clinging on to the wheel one handed while fumbling for the next gear. It's a wild ride that you acclimatise to eventually, but one I can only compute in short measures. The brain scramble is real, the turbo rush and V8 crack insane, the sheer supernatural force of the Chimera otherworldly.

This isn't a track, but that's not to say you can't wang it around at either end of the runway – let's call them brackets to the frightening straight line sentence in the middle. The engine has lost the Agera RS's buzzsaw harshness, but the steering is still quick, light and clean. Body roll, dive during braking and squat under acceleration barely exist too, which means you can almost forget you're in a car probably worth the fat end of £8m, and enjoy the flickability, the bottomless reserves of, well... everything.

Koenigseggs have always been brave in their engineering approach, phenomenal to look at, delivered numbers from another planet, but this project proves their dedication to the hard road. And the manual sorcery adds another dimension, a stronger connection between man and machine. A simple interaction that consumes you in the process of progress, that makes driving this ridiculously potent car rewarding, even within the speed limits on public roads, not full of straining at the leash frustration.

In a world of hypercars where the choice and performance is swelling almost as fast as the ranks of billionaires who can afford them, differentiation and exclusivity is required. And personalisation doesn't come any better than being able to work on your very own one-off science project with the maddest company of them all. Why Christian took it on when the order books are full and a new factory is about to triple his company's annual output, we'll never quite know – more reps in the engineering gym I suppose. Selfishly, I'm delighted he did. Give it up for Christian von Koenigsegg – the undisputed GOAT.

"THE BRAIN SCRAMBLE IS REAL, THE TURBO RUSH INSANE"

LAST ONE

Bugatti's legendary 8.0-litre quad turbo W16 gets one last hurrah... under the skin of a lightweight track only multimillion pound hypercar. Who said anything about going quietly?

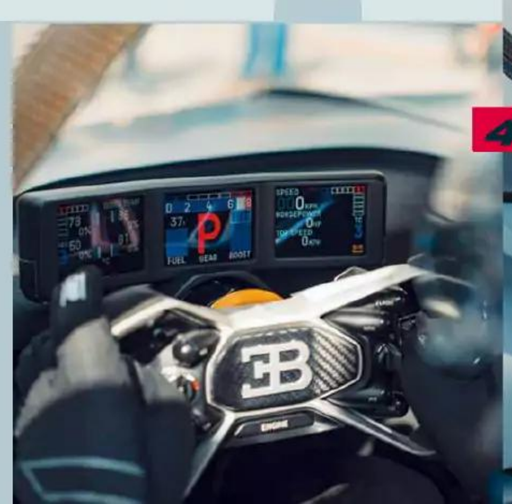
WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

BUGATTI BLAST!

1 Mechanics standing around casually? That can only mean Ollie hasn't driven it yet **2** That's 1,578bhp at full charge. Imagine the noise. No, louder than that. Like the earth's splitting apart **3** Bolide has to use wheels compatible with LMDh spec tyres, so brake discs can only be 390mm. Make up for size with F1 materials **4** That's a 3D printed steering wheel and full race instrumentation. Small screens tricky to read when W16 is in full effect









The king of engines whoomphs into life.

Definitely whoomphs. It doesn't snarl or scream, it doesn't pepper the air with fake pops, there's just a sense of a lot of air being drawn in, and then suddenly combusted deep inside. Whoomph.

This is not a new noise. It's the sound Bugatti's W16 has always made and there's nothing else like it because no one else has ever had a W16. The king of engines doesn't need to be rowdy. It communicates in another way. It's the only engine I've come across that uses the ground underneath it as a resonating surface, sending vibrations far and wide, like how a croc ripples its back in the water. You'd probably read it as a warning not to mess, and that wouldn't be a bad interpretation. Even now it's unsilenced and decatalysed, it's not so much noise that it emits as presence.

The bodywork? That makes a tad more fuss. From the sinewy snout along the raked profile to the X-wing rear end, it exudes menace. A wheeled knuckle duster, the king of engines dressed as a street fighter.

The Bolide is the most extreme Bugatti there's ever been. It's more powerful than any racing car, has to shed more energy in the course of a lap, delivers 2,900kg of downforce, 2.5*g* of cornering force, explosive acceleration force – in short it's one of the most forceful cars there's ever been. And it is the last place a W16 engine will ever call home. Now 20 years old, we'll miss it when it's gone. Other hypercar engines rev higher, shriek louder. One or two produce more power, several are more power dense, all are smaller, lighter. But just as you don't doubt the lion's claim to be king, nor do you question the W16's. All others live in its shadow.

You'd imagine quite a lot has had to be done to the quad turbo 8.0-litre for this track only version, what with all the forces it's got to deal with. Nah. It's not the engine that's had to be changed. It's the car. Because Bugatti has done something remarkable here. It's built a car that can cope.

The engine itself is pretty much as it came out of a Chiron Super Sport. Same internals, same valvetrain, pistons and conrods, even the same oil and water pumps. But how do you take a 1,578bhp, 1,179lb ft powerplant, that together with its (only lightly modified) twin clutch transmission is a leviathan weighing some 700kg, and build a track car around it?

Well, you don't start with a Chiron. Dallara built Bugatti a bespoke carbon tub to Le Mans Hypercar regulations, and from there Bugatti set about creating a car that would showcase the engine in its purest form. Because that's what's going on here. This is not a track car that happens to be powered by a W16, it's a W16 given a new dimension on track. That's a small but important distinction.

I'm at Paul Ricard in the south of France. Tomorrow four owners are turning up to drive their new cars. Today is the training day for the instructors who will sit alongside them (no thanks) and Bugatti has found a small gap for me to drive it as well. It's a busy day. Some 40 people mill around. Big boss and CEO Mate Rimac is here, so too most of Bugatti's board of directors. I spend the morning in track briefings, filling out terrifying paperwork and watching the Bolide thunder around. Bugatti has laid on a pair of GT3 RSes as track learning cars. I'm watching them howl down the main straight when I sense another movement. The Bolide is storming out of the final corner. It devours the distance to the hard charging Porsches in great chunks, rips past them under the gantry. The speed differential is colossal, but more than that there's just this sense of immense pent up aggression being released.

I think about this an hour or so later as I'm strapped into the Bolide. It's tight in here, the wheel butting up close to the A-pillar, the view out blinkered by high front arches. The 3D printed steering yoke is reassuringly solid in my hands – just as well given how hard I'm clenching it. Raindrops have just started to pepper the windscreen. I'm on slicks. Andy Wallace has the good grace not to look remotely concerned as he straps in alongside me.

"Once you've got the pit speed on, just put the throttle wide open and hold it there."

"In first gear?" I reply bemusedly.

"Yep, in first. And then at the end of the pitlane, knock the limiter off and hold on tight."

I point blank refuse. "No way. It'll spin all four wheels and I'll be straight into the barriers."

"Honestly. As long as it's got good tyre temperature, it'll hook up without a trace of wheel slip."

Whoomph. The king of engines fires. I immediately resolve not to do as I'm told, given the engine appears to be clawing its way through the bulkhead. The Bolide throbs and pulses with barely contained energy. I wincingly click the paddle for first gear, gingerly touch the throttle and

“THIS IS A W16 GIVEN A NEW DIMENSION ON TRACK”

“DESPITE THE WA
FRIENDLY, BENIGN,

AY IT LOOKS, IT'S APPROACHABLE"

“I’M SWATTED DOWN THE TRACK LIKE A SUDDENLY FLATTENED FLY”



the Bolide crawls away, docile as anything. I pull second. Barely sense the shift. Chiron vibes.

And so, once clear of the pitlane, I nail it. My world erupts. Noise. Force. Power. All of it huge. It’s all consuming, a furious, unrelenting onslaught. I brake for the first corner. There’s little heat in the brakes so they surf on. Ooh gawd. Then I turn in and the Bolide starts to slide. Gulp. Don’t forget it’s damp, Marriage. It slides through turn three. And four. And five. Bloody hell.

But by the end of the lap I don’t want to park up, I just want more. Because the Bolide moves so well. Yes it slid, but a) that was entirely my fault for getting carried away on cold tyres and a damp track, b) it was caught masterfully by the life – and reputation – saving stability control, and c) the reason I was happy pushing immediately was that the Bolide felt calm in my hands, not snatchy, but progressive.

The handling takes its lead from the motor, which delivers its power with creamy smoothness across the whole rev range. There’s no top end crescendo, just this outrageous thrust everywhere, accompanied by monstrous bass roar. It’s not sharp and zingy, the king of engines likes the power to be poured on and kept on, not fiddled with mid corner.

And the dynamics are the same. When I speak to Mate Rimac afterwards he’ll tell me, “Ultimately it’s not about lap times in this car, it needs to be engaging for our customers to drive. And many of them are not racers.” He goes on to admit that some of them aren’t even likely to drive the car at all. I understand the ‘wheeled artwork’ argument sometimes, but not here, not with this.

So despite the way it looks, it’s friendly, benign, approachable. There’s nothing tricksy about it. The steering rack is fast but not Ferrari twitchy. There’s not much actual steering feedback but it’s positive and incisive into corners and there’s loads of feel through the seat. The chassis is a great communicator. Hadn’t expected that.

But the best bit happens after the apex. And it’s not just because you get to shovel air and 102 octane fuel into the power station. It’s how all four wheels deal with the resulting torque onslaught. Because the diffs are sensational at putting the power exactly where it’s needed to maximise traction without spoiling trajectory. It’s just wonderfully flattering, makes me feel like a hero as it exits slow corners with a whiff of four wheel drift.

The twin clutch box has new ratios and final drive, better suited to sprinting up to the 236mph max. Downforce at that speed hits 2,900kg. Once into sixth at, what, 170-odd mph, I notice the acceleration let up a fraction as drag takes effect. And then there are the brakes. Early suggestions of a 1,250kg kerbweight came to naught – the Bolide is probably around 1,625kg with fluids and me on board. Yet the power means it arrives into braking zones at outrageous speeds, a kinetic energy conundrum that Brembo has solved with 390mm carbon carbon brakes that apparently feature F1 materials. And ABS. A rare, perhaps unique, combo. They’re foolproof and the stopping power hangs me in the belts every time. Ever skydived? That breath crushing feeling when the parachute is yanked? It’s that. Every corner. Mega pedal feel – I see operating temperatures up over 800°C and those outside get glowing discs.

If there’s an issue here it’s the load all of this places on the tyres. Due to high speed aero load, Michelin insists on high pressures – around 35–38psi. They’re fine there, but Wallace says grip drops away significantly when they go above that.

The long and the short of all this is that the Bolide is very harmonious. The king of engines has been matched in braking power, lateral grip, and yes, traction. On my last lap I slow down on the back straight and engage the pit limiter. It sits smoothly at 40mph in first gear and I hold it there for five seconds to let the four turbos pressurise. And then I thumb the little black button on the steering wheel to cut loose the king of engines and I’m swatted down the track like a suddenly flattened fly. I hoot with laughter, while blown away that the slicks can cope with every single one of the 1,600-odd horses without so much as a chirrup. Andy reckons it’s even more vivid than launch control from a standstill. I can believe him.

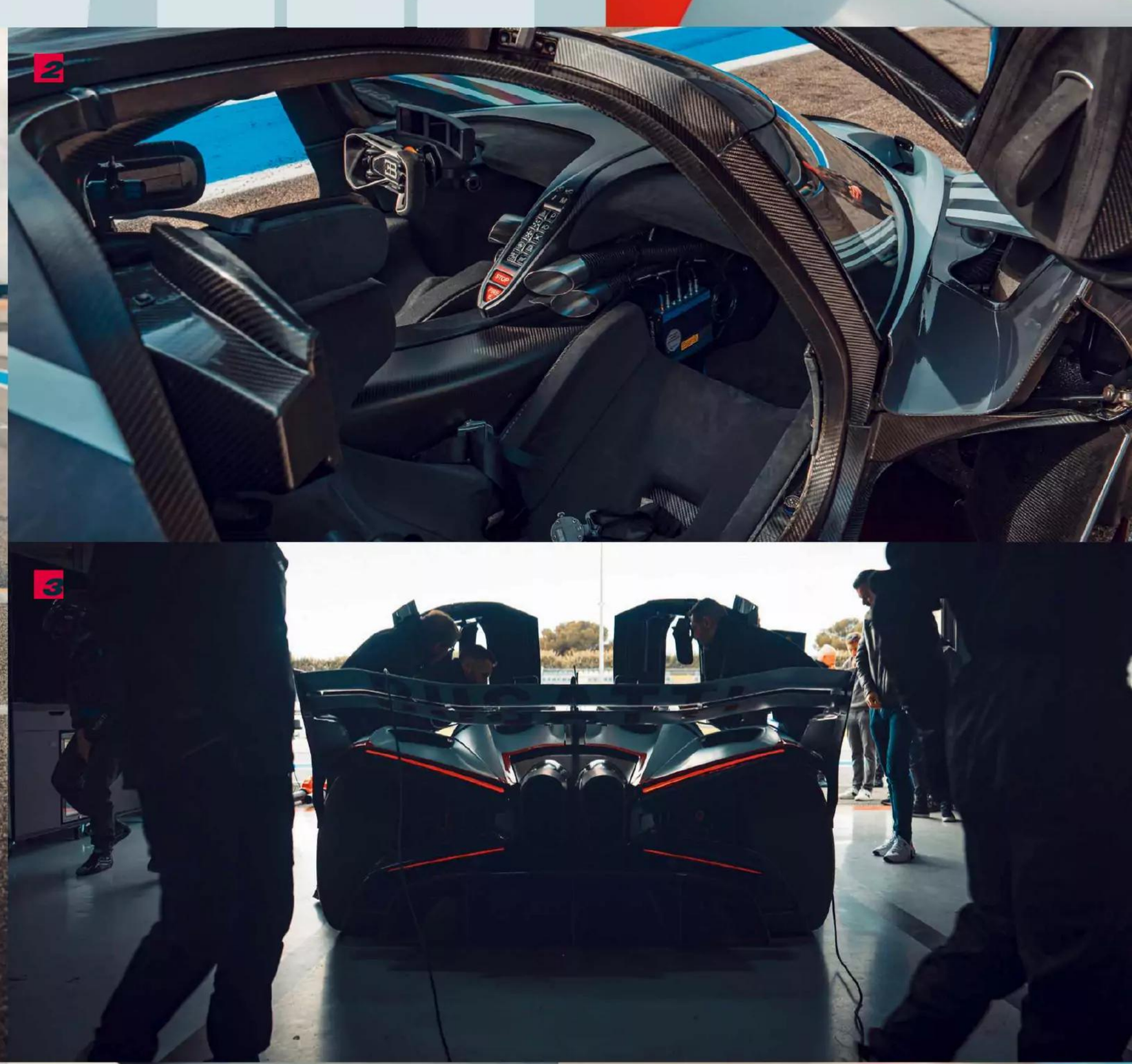
Like I said, the Bolide feels very together, each component balanced against the others. I remember thinking the same after I drove another track only hypercar – McLaren’s P1 GTR. The whole car is calm under pressure – and more than that it *feels* like a Bugatti. When I track down Mate afterwards he tells me “the hardest thing for this project was to make it a Bugatti in terms of detail and quality. Racecars are fascinating things, but they’re not Bugattis.” I’d expected to find the Bolide a racecar with a W16 shoved in. With only 40 being built I thought it would be heavily compromised, a bit of a Frankenstein’s monster.

But as Mate said, if that were the case, it wouldn’t be a Bugatti. Instead the Bolide seems to have been as rigorously developed as a Chiron by people with a very clear idea of who it’s for and what it needs to do. Ballistically fast, yes, but also polished and flattering, which gives the driver the mental capacity to enjoy and appreciate the Bolide’s centrepiece, the 16 pulsating pistons and conrods, four turbos and 64 valves that make up the world’s one and only W16 engine. The king of engines.

W16







1 When Le Mans winner Andy Wallace tells you the Bolide is the fastest accelerating car he's driven, you pay attention **2** Snug in here. Seats are part of the monocoque, wheel and pedals slide to suit **3** Bolide in its natural habitat: in a dark room, where its driver is having a lie down **4** Wouldn't know it to look at his face here, but Ollie actually had to give up his weekend to drive this. Poor guy







BBC TopGear

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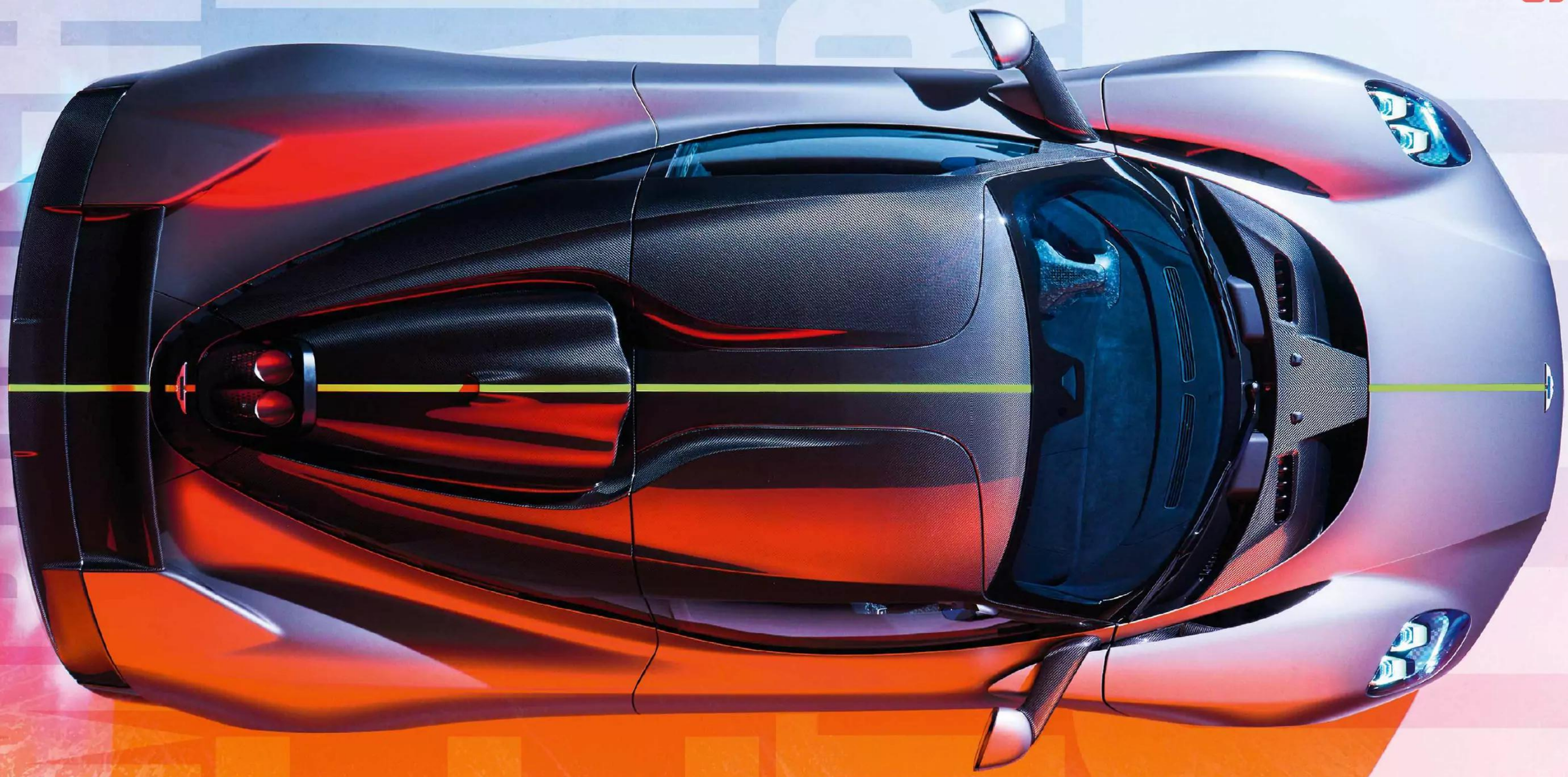


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