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2013 #4
APRIL



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INSIDE



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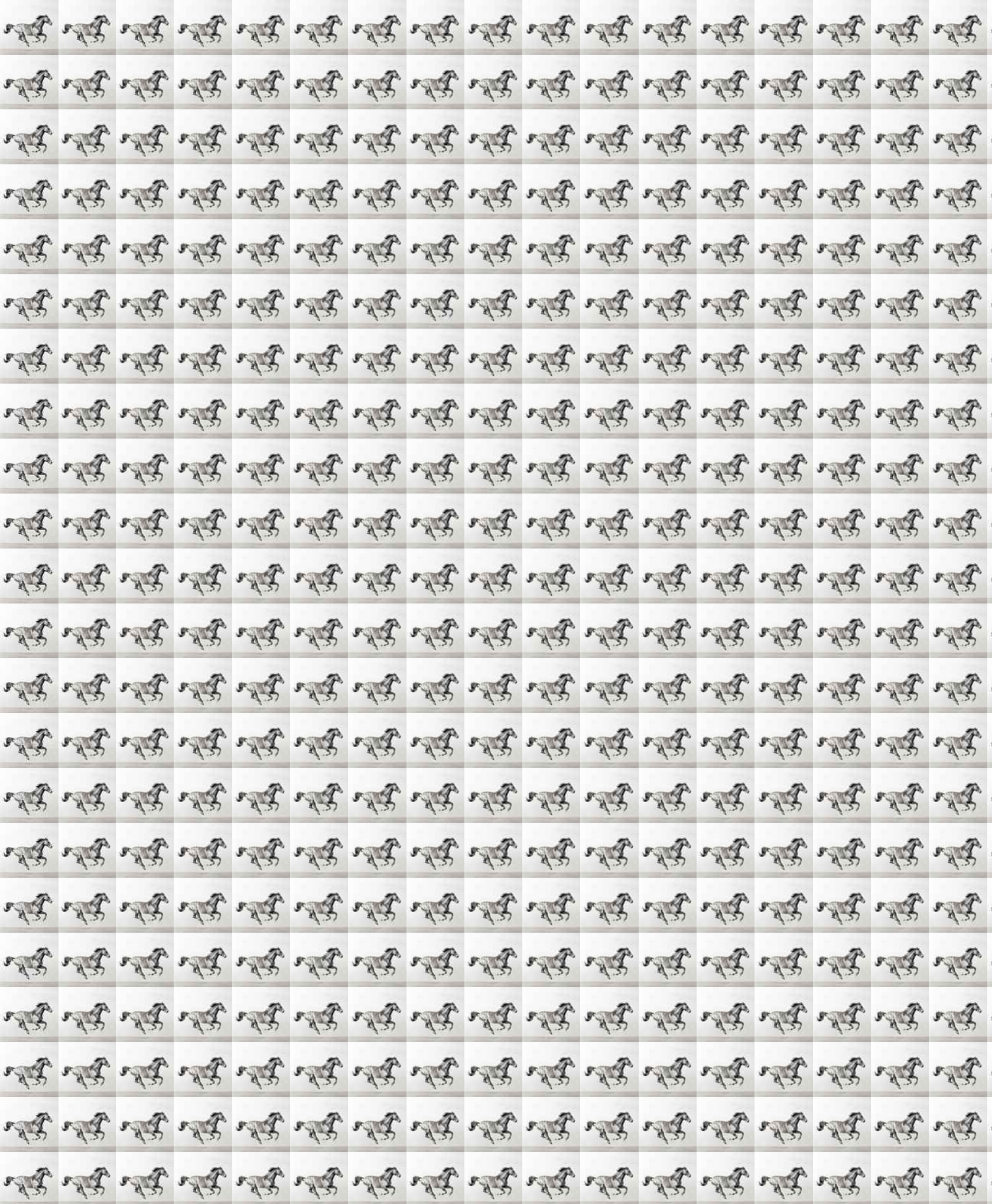


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APRIL 2013

Ed Speak

'The hot hatch reflected the 1980s spirit of hedonism and carelessness'

W

WE LIVE IN A COUNTRY WHERE THE HOT HATCH IS AS MUCH a part of our motoring culture as string-back driving gloves, Stirling Moss's wit, and Lotus's woes. We embraced that particular genre of car like no other country did. Even the French – originators of the legends that are the 205 GTI, the Renaultsport range and the Citroën AX GT – can't claim to adore the pocket rocket quite like us Brits.

It all goes back to the 1980s, when hot hatches were brilliant but flawed. They were cars of little cohesion, vehicles that melded the small (chassis) with the big (engine), and the stable (grippy tyres) with the unstable (lift-off oversteer).

It's extraordinary to think that manufacturers would engineer cars that demanded such high levels of skill from the driver. And not the Gilles Villeneuve sort of car control skill, because by the time you'd got it wrong it would take more car control than the entire Villeneuve family possessed to rescue it. Nope, I'm talking judgment skill here – the skill of knowing at what speed to enter a corner. Cars like the 205 GTI granted the driver many opportunities to visit the limits of grip on the road, but few opportunities to rescue it; don't believe anyone who says that an '80s torsion-beamed hot hatch will not spit you into a ditch backwards should you get it wrong. They can and do.

And of course we Brits loved this in the '80s, in the same way we loved champagne, coke-fuelled yuppiedom and crashing red Porsches. The hot hatch reflected the spirit of hedonism and carelessness that ultimately led us to recession and war. Yes, the hot hatch was the cause of all the evil that was to occur in the '90s.

I'm getting carried away, of course, and if you're reading this in another country, I can understand why you might be thinking us Brits are a bit delusional for having such a love for the hot hatch. Indeed, if you're reading this in the USA, where I'd imagine it's difficult to admit to liking speedy subcompacts, you might rightly feel like emailing me (nickt@evo.co.uk) and pleading with me to stop including these cars in the pages of *evo*. 'Enough already', etc, etc.

What I say to you is: come over to the UK and get yourself one of the cars in the extreme hatches test on p52 and take it to the *evo* Triangle. I guarantee you'll be sold, because hot hatches work *beautifully* in the UK; small enough to thread down the skinniest B-roads, but fast and involving enough to make you question whether cars twice the value deliver any more thrills.

Intriguingly, the two new hottest hatches we tested in this issue – the A1 quattro and the Mini GP – displayed almost 205 GTI levels of tail-happiness on the track. The key here is ESP. With ESP switched on, the cars behaved themselves, but it was Lairyville with it off. It's only a theory, and as I've shown with my 'hot hatches were the cause of all evil in the '90s' theory, you may not want to give it much attention, but my theory is thus: the safety net of ESP is allowing manufacturers to engineer hot hatches more like their '80s cousins, so that when you switch it off, you awake the latent drivers' car within. Recession and war can't be far off. Oh, hang on...

Nick

Nick Trott Editor



Across the evo universe this month

PERFORMANCE CARS FOR SALE

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Head to evo.co.uk/shop to take advantage of some great deals on books, DVDs, clothing, trackdays and more

iPAD EDITION

evo's interactive version won Best Motoring Title at the Digital Magazine Awards. See more at evo.co.uk/ipad

EVO TOURS

evo has joined forces with Petrolhead Nirvana to offer some fantastic driving tour deals. See p148 for more details

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'As we wind our way up into the hills, the true brilliance of this car starts to emerge'



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When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

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Some people still assume that this magazine is all about Mitsubishis. This test won't do anything to dissuade them

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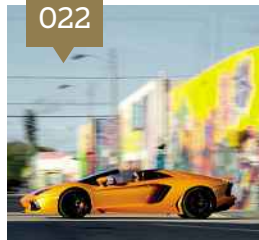
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News, new metal, investigations, interviews, technology and more...

Mini goes massive

First look

The low-down on one of next year's star cars

BMW prepares third-gen Mini for 2014 launch. Three-pot engines, MPVs and 240bhp Works models planned

Words: Mike Duff Rendering: Jan Kamenistiak

MINI IS SET TO dramatically expand its model range and its array of performance derivatives with next year's launch of the 'F56'-generation car.

Despite familiar styling, the new car is set to share much of its under-skin architecture with BMW's forthcoming range of front-drive models. The F56 will be powered by a range of three- and four-cylinder engines and although most of the emphasis is predictably on sharpening the new cars' environmental credentials, we've been assured by Mini bosses that performance versions are considered a vital part of the mix – including a successor to the freshly launched Works GP hatchback (which features

in our group test on page 52).

Every existing Mini variant will be replaced, including Coupe and Roadster, but BMW has also approved even more bodystyles, with the next-gen car spawning five-door hatchback and four-door saloon versions. The Clubman estate will also gain a second rear-hinged door for rear passengers in place of the odd one-sided arrangement of the current car. It's even likely that we'll see a fully fledged MPV before the end of the F56 model cycle.

Insiders have also hinted that we may see more names from Mini's pre-BMW history returning – although a pre-existing trademark means 'Traveller' won't be among them.

The only real hole in the plan is the 'mini Mini' that was apparently





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ALFA 4C READY FOR PRODUCTION

Italian sports coupe set for 237bhp and £50k-plus price tag



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FLYING SPUR UPDATE

Lighter body, new look and eight-speed 'box for Bentley four-door



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JAGUAR JOINS THE YOUTH CLUB

Brand director reveals F-type is attracting younger buyers



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F1 2013 ACCORDING TO TIFF

Needell picks winners and losers ahead of the new season

previewed by the Rocketman concept a few years ago. We're told BMW has got cold feet at the prospect of selling a car smaller than the three-door hatchback. 'We did the business case for it,' Mini boss Kay Segler told *evo* in a recent interview. 'Having a smaller car with a lower price but the same substance as a normal Mini hatch just wouldn't work.'

That's a shame, but what's more important is that Segler confirmed that the growth in models will bring an equal increase in emphasis on the faster versions. Most petrol-powered versions of the F56 Mini are set to switch to a radical new 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbo engine, which will match the power range of the existing 1.6-litre four – 120bhp to around 160bhp – but dramatically



cut emissions. This will power the mainstream versions of each body variant, including the warm Cooper and the hot Cooper S. But above this, the full-on John Cooper Works versions are likely to use a 2-litre four-cylinder version of the engine, which will also be fitted in BMW's front-driven 1-series, with a potential power range up to 240bhp.

'We believe there is space to have more performance in John Cooper Works cars,' Segler told us. 'There is market demand for that – and when there is demand then we will try to build the cars to match.'

And at the pinnacle of the F56 range, Segler said that we're almost certain to see another version of the mad Works GP hatchback – a car that we've digitally rendered here. This will be powered by an even higher-output version of the JCW engine and will be a strictly limited edition.

'The GP is an icon, and it will always be a limited edition,' Segler told us. 'Once you do a car like that as a limited edition then I think you pave the way for the future. You need to be consistent in your thinking or customers might get confused.'

Segler is equally adamant that the GP will only ever be a hatchback: 'Everybody knows what the GP stands for – a car at the end of the life cycle, the cream on the cake. There's no reason to change that.'

With the current GP having been designed to take the Nürburgring front-wheel-drive lap record, you can guarantee that the mk3 will be

'The GP is an icon, and it will always be a limited edition'

Kay Segler, SVP, Mini

even quicker, possibly using a proper limited-slip diff to marshal its efforts. The BMW UKL platform that the F56 sits on also supports all-wheel drive, so it's even possible that we'll see a 4wd version of the Mini hatchback.

The existing Countryman and Paceman will continue alongside the F56 Mini for several more years before replacement. But Mini insiders have admitted to *evo* that the current cars don't offer the sort of dynamic experience that buyers expect from the Mini badge – and especially not the sort of 'go-kart' handling that the company's marketing department loves to bang on about. We're promised that their replacements will be far closer to that spirit.

Mini has become a massive success in recent years, somewhat to Munich's surprise. When the first BMW-era Mini emerged a decade ago, the project had been left semi-detached by the collapse of the company's disastrous Rover merger. But now the brand is considered vital to BMW's plans for world domination.

That's very good news for the Cowley assembly plant in Oxford, which will be receiving £500million of investment to ready it for the F56. BMW has also bought the former Nedcar factory at Sittard in the Netherlands, last used to produce Mitsubishi Colts, to act as a satellite for Cowley and to increase capacity still further. Considering that BMW made 240,000 Minis last year, it's clear that ambitions for the third-gen BMW Mini are even bigger. ✉

Mini hits



R50 Cooper S

The star of the early BMW Mini range – 168bhp and proper supercharger whine



R56 John Cooper Works

The car that gave the mk2 BMW Mini the personality it deserved: fast and fun

Mini misses



Countryman

Too big, too heavy and not enough fun to be a true exemplar of the Mini brand



Roadster

Cheapo roof, wobbly chassis and odd looks means it fails to justify price tag

evo comment

BMW KNOWS THAT its plans to dramatically expand Mini sales can't mean producing dull cars. Senior executives have privately acknowledged that some recent Mini models haven't been as good as they should have been – and we're promised the F56 models will deliver an uncompromised driving experience. Let's hope so.





Alfa 4C gets real

Production version of Italian sports coupe unveiled. Design remains faithful to 2011 concept

Words: Mike Duff

THE WAIT IS OVER. You're looking at the production version of the Alfa Romeo 4C. And the good news is that Alfa seems to have succeeded in delivering on almost all the promises of the original concept car.

That 4C concept was one of the stand-out stars of the 2011 Geneva motor show. The mid-engined sports coupe came as a massive surprise – Alfa hadn't dropped any hints about it prior to the show – but it seemed to promise a brave new direction for the company. Two years on, the

technical spec of the finished version, which will be formally unveiled at this year's Geneva show in March, sticks commendably close to the concept in terms of both styling and mechanical layout.

To save you the time, we've already strained our eyes comparing these pictures to those of the concept. The only significant external change is to the front lights, with the production car getting different one-piece mouldings with 'projector'-style xenon lamps and five LED running lights per unit. The rear lights have also been redesigned slightly and

there are now fog and reversing lights too, plus discreet US-style marker lights on the wheelarches. Those tweaks aside, it's the same car.

The mechanical package is also as previously reported, with a transverse four-cylinder turbocharged engine. The 1.7-litre motor is based on the '1750 TBI' engine in the Giulietta Cloverleaf hatchback, but with an aluminium block in place of the Giulietta's thin-wall cast-iron block, saving a claimed 25kg.

The engine also gets direct injection and a clever 'scavenging' system to eliminate turbo lag, and

'THE KEY TO THE LOW KERB WEIGHT HAS BEEN LIGHTWEIGHT CONSTRUCTION'

it drives the rear wheels through a version of Alfa's 'TCT' six-speed dual-clutch gearbox.

Although an exact power figure hasn't been released yet, internet leaks have suggested the motor will produce 237bhp. Applying that to Alfa's promise of a car weighing 'less than 4kg for every 1bhp', that

355bhp and 40mpg promised for Merc's first hot hatch

PICTURES OF THE new Mercedes A45 AMG have been released ahead of its unveiling at the Geneva motor show.

Mercedes' first hot hatch looks as we expected following *evo's* ride in a prototype late last year (issue 178), with a butched-up bodykit, a lowered

stance and a nicely reworked interior.

Power comes from a transverse 2-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol engine, and at 355bhp it gives one of the highest-ever specific outputs for a road car: 177.5bhp/litre. That's accompanied by 332lb ft of torque,





Left: front light clusters are among a tiny number of revisions since original 4C concept aired two years ago



suggests that the 4C will tip the scales at 950kg – just 100kg more than the 850kg originally claimed for the concept.

The key to hitting such a low kerb weight has been lightweight construction around a carbonfibre monocoque – a first for a car in this segment – with the engine and front suspension mounted to this on aluminium subframes. There are double wishbones at the front and MacPherson struts at the rear. Alfa's trademark 'DNA' driving mode selector has also been fitted, with an additional 'Race' mode added specially for this car.

Production of the 4C will start this summer, with the car set to be built in the Maserati factory in Modena. Pricing has yet to be confirmed, but we've heard that the price tag is going to be over £50,000, making the 4C more expensive than the new Porsche Cayman S (which you can read about on page 90).

You can also be confident that both a roadster model and a more hardcore 'Stradale' version will follow further down the line. **X**



Left: hidden rear door handles give a three-door look, but Clio 200 is five-door only

New RS Clio: bigger, lighter, faster

1.6-litre turbo engine brings more torque. Electronic diff standard

Words: Mike Duff and Stephen Dobie

RENAULT HAS FINALLY confirmed full details of the new Renaultsport Clio 200 ahead of its launch later this year. Just in time, too – we're driving it in the next issue!

We've already told you that the new Clio switches to turbocharging, with a 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine in place of the previous car's naturally aspirated 2-litre unit. It will also only be available with a six-speed double-clutch gearbox. And yet, despite the

extra tech, stretched dimensions and five-door bodyshell (no three-door will be offered) it's 36kg lighter than the previous car, tipping the scales at 1204kg. The 0-62mph time of 6.7sec is 0.2sec faster than before, and the top speed of 143mph is 2mph faster.

The new engine is set to transform the driving experience compared to the outgoing 200's rev-happy motor. Peak power remains the same – 200PS converting into 197 British-spec bhp – but there's much more torque lower down the rev range. The new car's 177lb ft is available from 1750 to 5500rpm, in contrast to the old 200's peaky 159lb ft at 5400rpm.

There's more good news under the skin with a comprehensive mechanical makeover. The Renaultsport gets unique calibration for its electric power steering and a proper suspension uprating – we're told the rear anti-roll bar is 60 per cent stiffer than that of the standard Clio. The dampers incorporate hydraulic compression stops – common in rallying, but said to be a production-car first – while there are also bigger brakes, including

320mm-diameter discs up front.

The car also gets what's described as an electronic 'RS Diff', which attempts to replicate a mechanical LSD by using the brakes to redistribute torque across the front axle. As before, a firmer 'Cup' chassis will be offered, making the Clio 3mm lower and 15 per cent stiffer, and also coming with a quicker steering rack and 18in Dunlop Sport Maxx tyres.

There are active driving modes too – Normal, Sport and Race – the latter keeping the gearbox in manual mode and killing all traction and stability control. A seemingly more gimmicky feature is the 'R-Sound app', which electronically replicates the noise of various other cars – including the Alpine A110 and Nissan GT-R – using the in-car entertainment system.

The only detail missing is pricing, but Renault insiders hint at the £19,000 mark when sales begin in April. **evo** has also learned that Renault plans to offer a warm Clio GT later in the year, combining a Renaultsport-tuned chassis with a 1.2-litre turbo petrol engine and the same twin-clutch 'box. **X**



with power sent to all four wheels via a standard-fit six-speed twin-clutch 'box. We're promised 0-62mph in 4.6sec, a limited 155mph top speed, and 40.9mpg combined. Probably not at the same time, though.

There's still no official word on pricing, but we're told you'll have to pay around £35,000 when the car hits the UK in July. It'll be the priciest A-class ever, but also the cheapest 350bhp car on the market. **X** **MD**

Limited-edition C63 joins the 500bhp club

MERCEDES HAS ALSO released details of another limited-edition C63 AMG.

The 'Edition 507' has a 500bhp version of the standard AMG's 6.2-litre naturally aspirated V8 – 49bhp more than the standard car – thanks to forged pistons and a lightweight crank similar to those in the SLS. It also gets an aluminium bonnet with two



Above: piston and crank upgrades have boosted the C63's 6.2-litre V8 to 500bhp

large openings for additional cooling. 19in cross-spoke alloys are unique to the car, and buyers can also specify 'Magno Platinum' matt paint.

The 0-62mph time is cut from the 4.4sec of the standard car to 4.2, with top speed limited to 174mph. Coupe, saloon and estate versions will all go on sale later this year. **X** **MD**



More power and new look for Flying Spur

Bentley saloon gets 616bhp for 2013. Revised body 50kg lighter

Words: Mike Duff

BENTLEY HAS GIVEN its Continental Flying Spur saloon a surprise major remodelling.

The changes are considerably deeper than those made to the equally venerable Continental coupe and GTC cabrio last year. With new doors and an entirely different back end, the Spur looks like an all-new car. The four-door version of the Continental has always been a minority taste in Europe, but it's become a big hit in China – perhaps explaining why so much attention has been given to its refresh.

The updated car is now 50kg lighter, features a composite bootlid and an aluminium front end, and is powered by a 616bhp version of the familiar 6-litre W12 engine (up 64bhp). It also gets the new eight-speed ZF automatic 'box to improve both acceleration and economy. The claimed 4.3sec 0-60mph time is impressive for something that still weighs 2475kg, as is the 0-100mph time of 9.5sec. The official 19.2mpg is less so; even the similarly vast Rolls-Royce Ghost manages 20mpg. Of course, fuel economy is unlikely to be a deal-breaker for potential Flying

Spur buyers – and the car is also set to get the more frugal Audi-Bentley V8 later on. A Speed version is also a near-certainty.

The car's core architecture and wheelbase are unchanged, but the front and rear tracks have been widened slightly. Underbody revisions include a new undertray to improve acoustic shielding and airflow, the drag coefficient dropping from Cd 0.31 to Cd 0.29. As before, there's no active aero – impressive considering the 200mph top speed. Spec tweaks include an optional multimedia system with twin 10in rear screens.

Bentley insiders admit that the firm missed a trick by not giving the Continental GT and GTC a bigger visual makeover when they were revised last year. The Conti clan will have to survive until 2017, when all-new models will be built on the VW Group's 'luxury' MSB platform. This new Spur goes on sale later this year, at a likely similar price to the outgoing model, which is £133,200 basic. ❌



Two years to Bentley SUV

EXP9F given top priority. £140k price tag expected

Words: Mike Duff



BENTLEY'S NEW BOSS, Wolfgang Schreiber, has confirmed that the development of the company's first SUV remains his top priority – and that we can expect to see Crewe's luxury off-roader debut in 2015.

Although reaction to the styling of the EXP9F concept Bentley showed at last year's Geneva motor show was mixed, Schreiber says that the logic behind the car remains unassailable. 'It fits perfectly into our brand,' he told *evo*. 'Thirty per cent of Bentley customers already have an SUV, and I think we can also get new customers

because we will be creating a new segment that does not currently exist: the luxury SUV.'

Bentley's off-roader is being developed on the same platform as the next-generation Porsche Cayenne and Audi Q7. It will be priced at around £140,000 and will be powered by Bentley's W12 engine, with possible V8 and hybrid versions later. Schreiber has, however, ruled out a diesel for now (see *evo* 180).

A successful Bentley SUV will also help subsidise other activities – including its return to racing. ❌

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www.nissan.co.uk/juke

All prices include first registration fee and road fund licence. Information correct at time of going to print. Nissan Motor (GB) Ltd, The Rivers Office Park, Denham Way, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire WD3 9YS.
Fuel consumption figures for Juke range are: URBAN 28.8-48.7mpg (9.8-5.8L/100km), EXTRA URBAN 47.1-67.3mpg (6.0-4.2L /100km),

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Jaguar feels ten years younger

F-type leads plans to attract new buyers; lower-priced models on the way

Words: Mike Duff

JAGUAR HAS DEFENDED the emphasis that it is placing on the launch of the new F-type, with brand director Adrian Hallmark telling *evo* that the roadster is set to dramatically lower the average age of Jag buyers.

'Jaguar without the F-type is like Porsche without the 911,' Hallmark told us. 'The F-type is set to be the keystone in the arch. The history of the company is founded on sports cars and sporting character, and to have the brand missing a true sports car has been a real problem.'

'We know the F-type will bring a completely different enthusiast and completely different customers to the brand. We saw that in early analysis of US deposit-payers; they're ten years younger than the average Jaguar driver – in their mid-40s rather than their mid-50s.'

Hallmark was also keen to respond

to criticism that Jaguar has been focusing too much engineering effort on the F-type, saying that it is part of a detailed model plan that will fill many of the gaps in the company's portfolio.

'We're a small company,' he said. 'Audi, BMW and Mercedes all sell between 1.3 and 1.6 million units a year. We were at 54,000 last year, so I don't think we'll be catching up any time soon. But the headroom is plentiful. Leveraging the XF and XJ will give us growth and we've already filled lots of gaps with the offer of new engines and four-wheel drive.'

'But we know our long-term growth has to come from lower-priced products that we don't sell today. I wouldn't call one of them an X-type replacement, but it will be a car in that same segment. We know that kind of car is something we have to do.'



'THE NEW F-TYPE IS PART OF A MODEL PLAN THAT WILL FILL MANY OF THE GAPS IN JAGUAR'S PORTFOLIO'

Campaign to save the Hales

Road test stalwart faces bankruptcy after race car damage dispute **Words:** Mike Duff

AN ONLINE APPEAL has been launched to help Mark Hales, the journalist, racer and sometime *evo* contributor who faces bankruptcy after losing a court case over damage to a racing Porsche 917.

Hales was sued by the car's owner, David Piper, after the engine was over-revved while being track tested.

Around £40,000 of damage was caused and Piper pursued Hales for the costs, with the case heard at the High Court. Hales said the engine was over-revved accidentally when the car jumped out of gear, while Piper claimed the damage was due to driver error and that the car was loaned on 'bend it, mend it' understanding.

The court found against Hales, leaving him liable for around £120k, plus his own legal fees. He now faces bankruptcy and the possible loss of his house. Plans are afoot for a series of fundraising events to help Mark, but in the meantime, information on the appeal can be found at www.savethehales.com





LET THERE BE LIGHT...

It's F1 open season as Vettel pursuit begins

Needell nails his colours to the mast. Look away now, Jenson fans...

Words: Tiff Needell



IT APPEARS THAT my campaign last year to can the 'can' has fallen on deaf ears. The media is at it again: page after page of 'Why Button *can* be world champion again', etcetera, etcetera. But *will* he? That's what I want my experts to tell me, but they don't. So, after some reasonably successful predictions last season, here's what my crystal ball foresees for F1 2013.

I doubt many of you are going to like my prophecies because, while there is no doubt Jenson Button *can*, I don't think he will. McLaren seems to try too hard these days, obsessed with every detail right down to the ever-present sponsored hats. Too much self-imposed pressure isn't healthy and one disappointing result will take the wind out of Button's sails – and let Sebastian Vettel steal his fourth straight title. The second period of German F1 domination

looks like continuing and Vettel may go on to eclipse the records of the now re-retired Michael Schumacher.

Mind you, with so few rule changes, this will be the most competitive year ever. In 2012 eight of the 12 teams either won a race or came close to winning one and, with the promise of Toro Rosso in testing, that could be nine out of 11 this year.

'THE SECOND PERIOD OF GERMAN F1 DOMINATION LOOKS LIKE CONTINUING'

While Vettel and Button duke it out for the title, Mark Webber will pick up another win or two, but he'll move on at the end of the year to make way not for either of the Toro Rosso boys, but Portuguese sensation António Félix da Costa from the Formula Renault 3.5 series. Meanwhile, McLaren recruit Sergio Pérez will struggle; he's not the best of qualifiers and will too often be stuck in the lower half of the top

ten and trapped on the same tyre strategy. But his time will come.

Sadly, Ferrari won't be the second best team this year, and won't even be the third. Consistent points scores won't be enough and while Fernando Alonso will win a race or two, the team will soon begin to concentrate its efforts on its new V6 turbo engine for next year. But there will be tears

of joy as Felipe Massa bows out of Formula 1 with a home win in his last Grand Prix in Brazil in November.

The third-best team will be Lotus, with both Kimi Räikkönen and Romain Grosjean taking turns on the top step of the podium but lacking the consistency to fight for the title. They'll have to fend off the challenges of Ferrari as well as the multitude of midfield teams snapping at their heels – Mercedes in particular.

Lewis Hamilton is the fastest driver over a single lap and his qualifying prowess will launch his new Mercedes a lot further up the grid than it deserves to be – and carry him to at least one win. But we won't know if

his move to Mercedes was a good one until the 2014 season gets underway. What we will know, however, is that Nico Rosberg's days are numbered...

The best of the rest will again be Sauber with Nico Hülkenberg joining the list of winners... before heading to Mercedes for 2014. Young Esteban Gutiérrez has proven he deserves to be there with two GP2 main-race wins last year, but I wish Kamui Kobayashi was still in that seat...

Williams won't repeat its emotional return to the winner's circle this year but both Pastor Maldonado and Valtteri Bottas will have their moments fighting for podiums, while Force India and Toro Rosso will also be part of an incredibly tight midfield battle. Unfortunately Jules Bianchi will further dent Paul di Resta's reputation as he matches his pace before heading to Ferrari to replace Massa, while Daniel Ricciardo and Jean-Eric Vergne will have some good days – but not enough of them.

Almost as exciting will be the battle at the back between Caterham and Marussia. Each team's drivers had to bring funding to get their seats, but that's the way it is nowadays and each deserves his moment in the F1 spotlight. ❧





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Every new *evo* car that matters, rated

This month

LAMBORGHINI AVENTADOR ROADSTER

⊕ 690BHP ⊕ 0-62MPH IN 3.0SEC
⊕ REMOVABLE HARD-TOP
⊕ SAME 6.5 V12 ⊕ £294,665

p22



AUDI R8 V10 v PORSCHE 911 C4S

⊕ 190MPH+ 4WD COUPES HEAD-TO-HEAD
⊕ POWERKIT TAKES 911 TO 424BHP
⊕ FACELIFTED AUDI DOES 0-62 IN 3.9SEC

p28



JAGUAR XFR SPEED PACK

⊕ 5-LITRE SUPERCHARGED V8
⊕ 503BHP ⊕ £2750 UPGRADE
RAISES TOP SPEED TO 174MPH

p32



MERCEDES E63 S AMG 4MATIC

⊕ 577BHP ⊕ 0-62MPH IN 3.6SEC
⊕ TWIN-TURBO 5.5-LITRE V8
⊕ 590LB FT ⊕ £80K

p34



NISSAN JUKE NISMO

⊕ FIRST OF NEW NISMO RANGE
⊕ 197BHP ⊕ £19,995

p36



FORD FIESTA ECOBOOST 125PS

⊕ 123BHP FROM 3-CYLINDER ENGINE
⊕ CLAIMED 65.7MPG ⊕ £15,445

p38



The test team

evo's road testers have been around the block a few times to say the least. If you need proof, this month we reveal the first car they reviewed:



HARRY METCALFE Editorial director

Our illustrious leader started with a bang, testing a TVR Cerbera for *Performance Car* circa 1993



NICK TROTT Editor

His first launch was for a Vauxhall Vectra. In 1999. At the biggest 18-hole mini golf course in Denmark



MIKE DUFF Motoring editor

Duff remembers his first launch well – the BMW 7-series diesel he tested never went on sale in the UK



HENRY CATCHPOLE Features editor

Check *evo* 079 to see Henry's first review, back in 2005 – a scathing critique of the Smart ForFour Brabus



JETHRO BOVINGDON Contributing editor

Jethro started his distinguished road test career with an unforgettable joint MG ZR/ZS launch in 2001



RICHARD MEADEN Contributing editor

Dickie began his road-test adventures in 1989 with a BMW 525i SE/Ford Scorpio/Rover 45 group test



DAVID VIVIAN Contributing road tester

Some 35 years after David tested the Chevette HS2300, there are still 36 of them left on the roads of Britain

Driven



📍 **Test location:** Homestead-Miami Speedway, Florida **GPS:** 25.45338,-80.40953

Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4 Roadster

With a removable roof and 50kg extra, can the convertible outshine the coupe?

Photography: Lamborghini



L

LET'S CUT TO THE CHASE.

When you slam the Aventador Roadster's scissor door closed after a long drive, blip the remote and walk away, your overall sense of wellbeing is off the scale. You grin like an idiot, chuckle spontaneously and plot a way of doing the drive all over again.

Why? Because Lamborghini, for all the arguably overwrought visual drama, bull

iconography, vocal histrionics and dodgy merchandise, does pure driving emotion like few, if any, others. It has a highly developed understanding of its customer base, and while its modern range – including this Aventador Roadster – has its flaws, Lamborghini unfailingly targets the heart of the car enthusiast and fires an arrow straight through it.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Lamborghini, and its current flagship car, the

Aventador, has a 15-month waiting list. Some 1274 examples have been delivered since mid-2011 – itself a feat when you consider last year's earthquake in northern Italy affected production. A total of 922 Aventadors were delivered in 2012 alone – more than twice the number of Murciélagos sold in that car's best-selling year (2007).

According to Lamborghini, 2007 was the high watermark for super sports car sales. But



'Despite what you may have read, the Aventador is not a pussycat to drive'

when the crash came in 2009, sales in this market dropped by 40 per cent. Speaking to *evo*, Lamborghini boss Stephan Winkelmann said the firm weathered the storm because of 'balanced distribution and the fact that more than 70 per cent of [our] sales occurred outside of Europe'. Rather oddly, he said this while absent-mindedly stroking the flank of an Aventador. The man clearly loves his Lambos.

The European market never recovered from the '09 crash, while the US and Asia-Pacific regions are showing signs of growth, so America is expected to take the highest share of Aventador Roadster production, with Asia-Pacific countries, and Singapore in particular, continuing their love affair with the brand. But the UK, interestingly, could be the second strongest territory for the car – a literal island of hope in a tragically flat European market.

So, on to the main event: the newest Lamborghini, the car the Sant'Agata executives

proudly call 'the most extraordinary series production Lamborghini ever built'. Say hello to the (deep breath) Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4 Roadster.

The wildly theatrical styling, described by designer Filippo Perini as 'origami sculpture', finds few critics in these parts. Modern, edgy and Area 51-militaristic, the Roadster has valet parking attendants leaping in front of us in Miami, begging us to park in front of their hotel ('you can have a free meal, free accommodation, girls – whatever you want'). Never had that on a press launch before...

The removable two-piece hard-top roof is made from carbonfibre, RTM (Resin Transfer Moulding) and forged composite – the latter material one that Lamborghini has pioneered with Callaway, the golf club manufacturer.

The roof weighs 6kg and takes three or four minutes to remove and place in the nose compartment. I managed to squeeze in a soft

travel bag with the roof panels installed in the front. Good job, then, that the 'customer doesn't care about utility' according to Winkelmann.

Structural stiffness is rated at 22,000Nm when open and 24,000Nm when closed, compared with 35,000Nm for the coupe. That appears to be a disproportionately large gap, but on track at the Homestead-Miami Speedway the Roadster's structure feels rock-solid and the trick inboard pushrod suspension seems uncontaminated. The carbon-ceramic brakes are less convincing, however; on track we are allowed four-lap stints, by which point the pedal has gone soft. Ultimate braking performance seems unaffected, but the same cannot be said for your confidence.

The track experience dominates this review as the road driving in Florida amounts to little more than swerving valet parkers on Ocean Boulevard, but it's clear that the Aventador Roadster is every bit as rabid as the coupe. In



Specification

Engine	V12, 6498cc
CO2	370g/km
Power	690bhp @ 8250rpm
Torque	507lb ft @ 6500rpm
0-62mph	3.0sec (claimed)
Top speed	217mph (claimed)
Basic price	£294,665

many ways it's more impressive than the last coupe we tried, thanks to some MY13 updates.

At 1625kg the Roadster carries 50kg more than the coupe, but you don't feel it. Our test car is fitted with bigger wheels than those we've experienced before on the coupe (an optional combo of 20in on the front, 21in rear) with larger tyres (255/30 and 355/30 respectively), which means that any added push at the front caused by the extra weight is offset by a sharper turn-in. The Aventador darts into corners, aided by a wonderfully linear steering response.

Despite what you might have read elsewhere, the Aventador is not a complete pussycat to drive. The weight of the engine is noticeable, and while the mass is better contained than in Lambos of old, you still need to be respectful of the Aventador's size and performance. The control feedback – which is generally light and direct – lulls you into overdriving the car; you can and do feel like wringing it out fully at every

opportunity rather than building up to it like the Murciélago. Get it wrong and the Aventador feels clumsy and leaden. Get it right and it feels hardwired to the road. Either way, the fact that it responds positively to skilled driving is a good thing in our book.

The high-compression (11.8:1), short-stroke (76.4mm), variable-valve, 6.5-litre 12-cylinder engine is a triumph, and new-for-2013 improvements such as cylinder deactivation and stop/start add to the Roadster's already impressive repertoire. The revs flare like a whipcrack and the thrust is relentless all the way through to peak power (690bhp) at 8250rpm – a piston speed of 21 metres per second. It's difficult to ignore the comparison with the Ferrari F12's 6.3-litre V12, an engine that its maker claims delivers 730bhp at an identical amount of revs.

Top speed is 217mph (identical to the coupe) and 0-62mph is achieved in a claimed 3sec dead

– 0.1sec slower than the coupe. But the car feels even faster than this, such is the noise from the 60-degree V12: a searing shriek that cuts right to your emotional and physical core. Curiously, if you road-tested the car with the roof fixed in position and the transmission in its default Stradale mode, you'd wonder what all the fuss is about. But lower the tiny rear glass section (which drops like a guillotine) and select Sport or Corsa, and the volume, detail and impact of the engine note rises exponentially. It raises goosebumps like no other road car I know.

The four-wheel-drive Haldex IV transmission and seven-speed paddle-shift single-clutch automated-manual gearbox cope with the engine performance impressively. Low-speed manoeuvring is easy and clutch take-up is progressive even in the heaviest and hottest of traffic situations.

An electronic clutch varies the torque distribution, but in general driving conditions



Above: removing the roof adds a new dimension to the Aventador. **Right:** huge 400mm carbon-ceramic discs sit behind the front wheels; LHD cars have better pedal position; 6.5 V12 sits beneath glass panels



the split is 30/70 front-to-rear in Stradale, 10/90 in Sport and 20/80 in Corsa. Lambo's R&D director, Maurizio Reggiani, confidently explained to *evo* that he prefers the car in Sport mode: 'It is ultimately slower than Corsa over a lap, but you can have more of this...' he said, holding an imaginary steering wheel, crossing his arms and smiling.

The transmission calibration has also been tweaked for 2013 to smooth the shift action. At low speeds it feels silkier than on the last Aventador we tried, but while there's a noticeable softening in Corsa mode, it still threatens to dislodge a vertebra during full-bore upshifts. Downshifting and rev-matching, however, are nigh-on perfect.

In all driving modes, understeer is the

harbinger of the limits, signalled by a pushing of the nose and weight releasing from the steering. It's at this point that the differences in the chassis modes make themselves clear. In Stradale you simply wait for the car to compose itself and plant the throttle as hard as you can to recover any lost speed. In Sport, a similar hard throttle application rapidly turns understeer into oversteer that you'd better be quick to catch. In Corsa, the car finds pretty much the same traction as Stradale, but with less steering angle required to keep it on course. Sport, as Reggiani predicted, is the most entertaining mode, allowing enough opposite lock on exit to make you feel like you are in control of the car, but not so much that you find yourself constantly fighting the Roadster's bulk.

After a full morning on the Homestead track (including a full banked turn on the oval plus a tight infield section), the Aventador has proved itself to be well balanced, capable and insanely fast. But there is a nagging feeling that it's a little one-dimensional. You tend to drive up to its limit, but not on or over it. The car performs at its best when you are stitching corners together with one unbroken line, rather than a muddled series of inputs, corrections and counter-corrections. For the driver, this means you focus on braking and turn-in points – the mathematics of driving – rather than going for a seat-of-your-pants, chuck-it-in-and-gather-it-up approach. If this is what you crave, a Ferrari 458 should be your weapon of choice.

Again, our road drive was frustratingly



‘The Aventador Roadster is a total and immersive supercar experience, more so than the coupe’

Verdict

- ⊕ Sensational engine and styling
- ⊖ A wee bit on the thirsty side

evo rating: ★★★★★



IPAD EXTRAS

Check out the iPad edition of **evo** for more pics of the Aventador Roadster
Search for 'evo interactive'

restricted, but we know from experience that the Aventador is much better as a fast-road car than it is as a track weapon. Indeed, there are few more capable, more balanced and more indomitable ground-coverers at any price. In Roadster form the chassis would appear to be uncorrupted by the extra weight and loss of rigidity over the coupe, and it would be a surprise indeed if the carbonfibre monocoque exhibited any flex on our harsh British roads.

The driving position is adequate, although the pedals on right-hand-drive cars are more uncomfortably offset than on left-hand-drive versions. The steering has a long reach adjustment for those (like me) who like the wheel to sit close to the body. I find the TFT display a little gimmicky, but can't fault its

clarity, while the Audi-derived switchgear is predictably high-quality.

Visibility is fine and you soon get used to double-checking the over-the-shoulder blind spot when overtaking. The rear-view camera makes parking relatively simple: well, if you don't crack under pressure from the crowd that gathers whenever you stop, that is...

There is little doubt that the Aventador Roadster is a total and immersive supercar experience, certainly more so than the coupe. If you can handle the attention and the noise, the open-top car is the default version, provided you can afford the extra £40,000 it commands. In terms of price, I'm going to go out on a limb and say that the Aventador (both Roadster and coupe) are extremely good value.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, with such a long waiting list the car is likely to command a premium for quite some time. Secondly, can you think of another new car that gets close to delivering this type of speed and drama for the money? A McLaren 12C Spider offers comparable performance, but it is intentionally not the extrovert that the Aventador is. In relation to the used market, the Aventador Roadster sits neatly below the Ferrari F50 (at around £400,000) and on a par with the Porsche Carrera GT (circa £250-350k). Intriguingly, all three have carbonfibre chassis and all three have open tops.

Hmm. I can sense a uniquely **evo** group test coming on... ✉

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)



📍 **Test location:** B660, Cambridgeshire, UK **GPS:** 52.35903,-0.40750

Porsche 911 C4S Powerkit v Audi R8 V10

Two German sports coupes battle it out for
4wd supremacy. Can the Powerkit-equipped 911
outperform the more powerful R8?

Photography: Dean Smith



T

TO BE OPEN, HONEST AND frank, this is not the perfectly straightforward four-wheel-drive sports coupe twin test that it might seem. For a start one of these cars is on winter tyres and one is on summer rubber. Then there's the small issue of whether we have chosen the correct Audi R8 for this comparison. On price, a new Porsche 911 Carrera 4S fitted with Powerkit and carbon-ceramic brakes (like this car) is closer to an R8 V10, but on power it's identical to an R8 V8. Tricky. You could call it either way. After weeks of little sleep, a few lightly regulated fistfights and much agitated pondering amongst the *evo* staff, we've ended up plumping for a newly facelifted R8 V10. It's not as easy as it seems this job...

In the Racing Yellow corner we have a 911 with ticks in two extremely expensive option boxes. Smelling salts at the ready... The carbon-ceramic brakes cost an eye-watering £5787, while the Powerkit is a staggering £9388. The former seems a slightly unnecessary outlay unless you're going to spend a lot of time on track, because the standard cast-iron brakes are more than capable of coping with fast road driving and the occasional bit of lappery. The Powerkit looks, on the face of it, even more of a frippery when you work out that you are paying nearly £313 for every horsepower you gain. To save you reaching for the Casio, the output of the 3.8-litre flat-six rises by just 30bhp to 424bhp. Torque remains unchanged at 324lb ft.

However, delve a little deeper into the Powerkit option and you'll find that it includes a sports exhaust and the Sport Chrono package that comes with dynamic engine mounts, which would add £2856 on their own. You'll also be reassured by the fact that the engine changes amount to more than a mere ECU remap. There are reworked and polished intake ports, a reprofiled intake cam and a new variable resonance intake manifold. To combat the extra heat produced, an additional central radiator has also been fitted.

All this still leaves it some way behind the 518bhp R8 V10 on paper, but in reality the performance gap seems much more slender. The V10 is immensely strong and undoubtedly has the edge, but the Porsche's massaged flat-six revs with such alacrity

Specifications

Porsche 911 C4S Powerkit		Audi R8 V10
Flat-six, 3800cc	Engine	V10, 5204cc
234g/km	CO2	346g/km
424bhp @ 7500rpm	Power	518bhp @ 8000rpm
324lb ft @ 5600rpm	Torque	391lb ft @ 6500rpm
4.4sec (claimed)	0-62mph	3.9sec (claimed)
191mph (claimed)	Top speed	197mph (claimed)
£97,347	Basic price	£112,675

'The R8 glides slickly from one apex to the next'



Above left: clock atop the dashboard means this C4S is fitted with the Sport Chrono pack. **Above centre:** R8's driving position is much lower than the 911's

that it feels mighty close. Both engines do their best work when they're sprinting for the limiter, the R8 really surging as it reaches 6000rpm and the 911 almost fizzing through its last 1000rpm. The one area where the Porsche has surprisingly but definitely got the upper hand, however, is the sound. Even without the sports exhaust switched on, the 911 yowls in an unfettered way that makes the curiously muffled R8 seem a little lacking in aural sparkle.

But no sooner has the Porsche got its bluff nose a fraction in front than the Audi tugs back at your emotions with its seating position and gearshift. Low and laid back, the ankle-height view out of the R8 feels pure supercar, especially next to the more upright Porsche. Likewise, while the 991 has the gimmick factor of a seventh ratio in its manual 'box (which makes changing between sixth and fifth an odd experience) and a clever rev-matching system like that found in a 370Z (essentially an automatic heel and toe), it can't beat the seductively tactile delight of slicing around the R8's open metal gate.

On chassis dynamics, honours are fairly even. The R8 has the lighter steering, which initially fills your hands with a feeling of guiding the car in a clean and calm manner, pouring it into

corners and gliding slickly from one apex to the next. Push harder and the weight of the V10 behind you starts to muscle in on the cornering attitude so that you can feel like you're struggling to keep the nose tucked into the corner. You can happily overcome this by getting on the power early, and the R8 feels wonderfully controllable driving hard out of a corner, but you can only really do this on well-sighted bends.

By contrast, the 911 feels more mobile through every phase of a corner. There's a fair bit of squirm in this car because of its winter tyres, but the weighting and feel of the steering is still much more consistent than the Audi's. Also, this C4S doesn't have the optional roll-reducing Porsche Dynamic Chassis Control and without it you can really feel and manipulate the archetypal 911 weight balance much more, which is fun. Ultimately the 911 gives you a bit more confidence to attack every corner and then

adjust the car's balance subtly or gratuitously through every phase of it.

What we have here are two five-star cars capable of prickling the hairs on the back of your neck within yards and continuing to entertain you for years. Both are brilliant and there are myriad valid reasons why you might pick one over the other, but for us the 911 just takes the win. Steep though it is, the Powerkit really is worth the money, imbuing the 3.8 with the same addictive top-end pizzazz that we love in the base 911's smaller 3.4-litre engine.

Would this twin test result have been any different if we'd chosen an R8 V8? It might have been even closer (we maintain that the V8 handles better than the V10) but I doubt it would have been different. Of course it wouldn't do any harm to get the two together on summer tyres in Wales in a couple of months to find out... ❌

Henry Catchpole (@HenryCatchpole)

Verdict

Porsche 911 Carrera 4S Powerkit

Audi R8 V10

⊕ Fast, furious and fun ⊖ Looks ordinary next to the R8

⊕ Real supercar feel ⊖ We still prefer the V8

★★★★★

★★★★★

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Test location: B662, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.4033, -0.41473

Jaguar XFR Speed Pack

Supersaloon gets a new eight-speed auto gearbox, plus the option of a 174mph top speed
Photography: Dean Smith



W

WHAT PRICE BRAGGING rights? Well, if you're a Jaguar XFR customer, the price is precisely £2750. How so? Because that's how much extra

you have to pay for the Speed Pack option, which raises the top speed limiter of Jaguar's M5 rival from 155mph to 174mph.

That might not seem to make a whole heap of sense in a nation hamstrung by motorway speed limits and plagued by local authority camera 'vangelantes' lurking in lay-bys, but there's still a certain kudos to having a four-door supersaloon that's capable of topping the national speed limit by more than 100mph.

Not that its name suggests it, but there's more to the Speed Pack than simply, er, speed. For starters it brings a more assertive look thanks to revised aerodynamic addenda to aid stability at that elevated new V-max. The new front splitter and rear wing don't go to the excesses of the recently unveiled XFR-S, but they do inject a bit more attitude into the already handsome and distinctive XFR's styling. Indeed this could be the optimum XF, at least in terms of looks.

Jaguar also claims the suspension has received some mild tweaks, but you wouldn't know it from the driver's seat. The engine is no more powerful than the regular XFR's at 503bhp with 461lb ft of torque, but it doesn't exactly want for performance so that's no hardship. Unless your day-to-day wheels are a McLaren 12C, you wouldn't think the XFR tardy.

The biggest change in the car's character is not due to the Speed Pack, but actually thanks to the introduction of ZF's eight-speed automatic transmission to the XFR for MY13. Compared to

Specification

Engine	V8, 5000cc, supercharged
CO2	268g/km
Power	503bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	461lb ft @ 2500rpm
0-60mph	4.7sec (claimed)
Top speed	174mph (limited)
Basic price	£68,130

the old six-speed car (and indeed to the XKR-S I live with as part of *evo's* Fast Fleet) this XFR has plenty of added zip and sweeter, more responsive up and downshifts.

With all that supercharged torque, the 5-litre V8 was always adept at bridging ratios, but now it's always in the meatiest part of the curve, so the shove in your back is always immediate and impressive. You also get 'Intelligent Stop/Start', so you're not burning through quite so much petrol (officially it contributes to an 11 per cent reduction in the EU Combined figure), but the XFR remains a thirsty beast.

If there's a downside to this car it's that the new gearbox makes progress feel quite busy, and there are simply too many gears to work through when you're using the paddle-shifters. I've generally lost interest by sixth, and it feels faintly absurd to have another two gears to go. Braking from speed into a tight corner has you batting on the left-hand paddle like a morse code operator. That's not a particular criticism of the Jaguar, as the same is true in any of the other eight-speed cars we've driven lately.

Is the Speed Pack worth having? If you only drive in the UK and don't stand in the pub



telling people how fast your car is then almost certainly not. But if you drive in Europe, and more specifically Germany, I'd suggest £2750 is a small price to pay for the pleasure of annoying M5 and E63 drivers on the Autobahn.

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)

Verdict

- 🚗 Bashes BMWs on the Autobahn
 - 🇬🇧 There are no Autobahns in the UK
- evo rating:** ★★★★★



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📍 **Test location:** Cava, Spain **GPS:** 42.32528, -1.60552

Mercedes E63 S AMG 4matic

The fast luxury saloon arms race continues, as Mercedes plays its trump card of an E63 that's quicker to 62mph than a Gallardo...

Photography: Mercedes

JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, the consensus among makers of plush, high-performance estates and saloons was that 500bhp represented a natural high water mark for the genre. It was the amount of power that would deliver all the visceral rush required for an adrenalin-soaked life. Progress henceforth would come in pared kilos and subtler forms of technology.

Of course, they always say that, but you just have to look closely at their eyes for the inward smile. There is no category called 'mutual restraint' in a pack of Top Trumps and, for the time being at least, the manufacturer that holds the whip hand is Mercedes. I say for the time being because Audi, an enthusiastic player of the game, isn't denying rumours that it's preparing a 'Plus' version of its RS6 Avant with around 600bhp. That earns it the glory of trumping and thumping its power-crazed rivals, including

Specification	
Engine	V8, 5461cc, twin-turbo
CO2	242g/km
Power	577bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque	590lb ft @ 1750-5000rpm
0-62mph	3.6sec (claimed)
Top speed	155mph (limited)
Basic price	see text

the estate version of the E63 S 4matic saloon featured here. This is all particularly ironic, as it was an engineer from Audi that first alerted me to the '500's enough' thinking gripping the industry. Trends change, basic instincts don't.

In any event, there was never much prospect of Mercedes' AMG division keeping a lid on it. I can only assume that the famous 'Hammer' name – a pet sobriquet for AMG's first steel-balled E-class from nearly 30 years ago – is

being held in reserve for some future E-class in case it one day has to smite an Audi or BMW that has lost all sense of perspective.

But for now, Mercedes' new 577bhp E63 S is the baddest predator in town, holding a breezy horsepower advantage over the BMW M5, Porsche Panamera Turbo S and Jaguar XFR-S, as well as the regular E63 (which, at 549bhp, is now as powerful as the previous-generation car with the now discontinued Power Pack option). That's backed up with a far from ticklish 590lb ft of torque; to put that into perspective, the M5 and XFR-S can muster only 501lb ft apiece. It means 0-62mph in 3.6sec if you go for this four-wheel-drive 4matic version of the S (not imported to the UK in right-hand drive because of packaging issues, but available as a left-hooker if you ask nicely). Yes, that's 0.1sec quicker than a Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4.

In the inexplicable absence of a rear-drive E63 S for us UK types to try at the refreshed E-class launch in Spain, the choice was between a regular rear-drive E63 or the S 4matic, so we drove both. The E63 felt heroically rapid, more than reasonably comfortable and remarkably composed under the duress imposed by wanting to wring the last ounce of violence from AMG's mighty twin-turbo 5.5-litre V8. The shock was how much less impressive it seemed after driving the E63 S 4matic.

Naturally, transferring 531lb ft of torque to the road via the rear wheels has its challenges – never more obvious than on the faster, bumpier sections of the test route where big throttle inputs were treated to constant, power-quelling interventions from the stability and



Above and opposite: all E-classes have received a mild facelift. **Above right:** 5.5-litre V8 produces 577bhp



'The S 4matic feels lighter and lither than the regular E63'

traction electronics unless they were disabled. Unshackled, of course, the E63's rear rubber is yours to burn at will, and it boggles the mind to imagine the size of the smoke stacks the rear-drive S could generate with 590lb ft. But applying all that torque to the same roads in the 4matic S simply resulted in a hugely rewarding sense of hard-wired connection between the angle of the throttle and the degree of force burying your spine in the backrest. Switching off the electronics had minimal effect: the conversion of power to pace just seemed less lossy in the all-wheel-drive car.

For both E63 models, Merc's 4matic system gives you a fixed and heavily rear-biased 33/67 torque split, with the addition of a locking rear diff for the S to really nail that extraordinary 0-62mph stat. It's a figure that goes some way to mitigating the comparative tardiness, by today's standards, of Merc's Speedshift MCT seven-speed paddle-shift auto. The chassis uses steel coils at the front and self-levelling air struts at the rear and there are three settings

for the electronic damping: Comfort, Sport and Sport Plus. And the ESP electronics have been given some torque vectoring duties to enhance agility and reduce understeer.

It works on a racing circuit (the S 4matic is quicker than the rear-driver by almost 1sec around Hockenheim) and it works on the road, too. Despite its 70kg weight penalty, the S 4matic gives the impression of being lighter and lither than the regular E63. It turns in more keenly and with less initial understeer, its responses feel cleaner and more alert, and the electro-mechanical steering, while just as short of genuine feel, is pleasingly a little crisper. It all helps make 577bhp – delivered with a true, unmolested V8 war cry that simply drowns out the acoustically enhanced efforts of some rivals – a genuine thrill to exploit.

In common with the rest of the E-class range, the AMGs now get softer-edged but more aggressive styling, extra kit, lower consumption and emissions, enhanced lighting and more driver-aid tech. The standard steel brakes are

great but the optional carbon-ceramics feel just as good underfoot. Mercedes UK has moved quickly to evaluate the viability of bringing the LHD E63 S 4matic to the UK and, happily, will make the necessary provisions through the dealer network if you'd like to buy one. Even at around £80,000, it looks like a bargain to me.

In a market influenced by the persistence of Audi's 'quattro' philosophy, even BMW is being forced to sell four-wheel drive as a performance additive rather than an all-season safety net. But with the E63 AMG S 4matic, Mercedes has stolen the initiative. This side of a supercar, it's the most potent four-wheel-drive fix of all. ☒

David Vivian

Verdict

☒ Crushing all-weather pace, tech, handling

☒ Left-hand-drive only

evo rating: ★★★★★

Test location: Montserrat, Catalonia, Spain
GPS: 41.59105, 1.83746

Nissan Juke Nismo

Nismo sub-brand makes its official UK debut with a sporty mini-crossover

Photography: Nissan

I FIRST BECAME AWARE of Nismo because of an advert in this very magazine. It was 1999, the height of the grey import fever, and the ad in question had a picture of a bright red R33 Skyline GT-R with '400R' written down its flanks and the coolest wheels I'd ever seen. I didn't know much about it or Nismo, but what a car. And what a name. Nismo seemed exciting and exotic, and ever since I've wondered why Nissan has left the Nismo (Nissan Motorsport, naturally) name to languish in relative obscurity outside of Japan and the hardcore gaming community.

Well, somebody at Nissan felt the same and a full range of Nismo variants will soon hit the UK. What's kicking it all off? The Juke Nismo. Yes, *that* Juke. This is a new, accessible version of Nismo, a world away from the fearsomely expensive home-market Z-tunes and S-tunes. Later in 2013 we will see a more extreme Juke Nismo RC, but for now the Nismo name signifies a modest 10bhp boost (compared to the regular range-topper) for the 1.6-litre turbo engine to 197bhp, some 18in wheels, suspension lowered by 10mm and seats with suede trim. It costs from £19,995 in front-wheel-drive, six-speed-manual guise. For £22,195 you can opt for a four-wheel-drive version with torque vectoring, a multi-link rear axle (instead of the humdrum torsion beam) and, sadly, a CVT 'box. Here we're trying the front-driver, which is expected to be the biggest seller.



I have to admit I'm not a fan of the Juke's pudgy look, but the Nismo styling additions are a real improvement, if not exactly aggressive. Hop inside and you're greeted by superbly supportive seats and a steering wheel and gearshifter covered in Alcantara. The engine sounds flat and dull but the performance is strong – it feels faster than its claimed 0-62mph time of 7.8sec.

However, what really strikes you is the balance of weight and response in the controls and the quality of the damping. Immediately the Juke Nismo feels like a car developed by people who understand how that subtle interplay defines a car's character. It's easy to jump in it and drive fast or slow: the gearbox is fluid and precise, the brakes have excellent feel, the pedals are well placed for heel-and-toeing and the steering is light but accurate. You can tweak the steering weight and throttle response too, but it feels pretty spot-on in its 'Normal' set-up.

The bad stuff? Well, this is no Clio RS – there's more body roll, less overall grip and plenty of wheelspin if you really try to lean on the chassis hard. It feels like an eight-tenths car. Try to find some magic at the limit and you'll

be disappointed. There's not much throttle adjustability and it tends to become a bit scrappy. The ESP never fully disables either, so progress is often clumsily reined in just when you think you're starting to make everything click.

But that 218bhp Juke Nismo RC is on the way, with a tighter focus and great claims about track performance. A quick drive in a prototype on a narrow coned course suggests it'll sound much better and ramp up grip, response and performance significantly. Until then, the Juke Nismo remains a quirky hot hatch that doesn't quite have the teeth to thrill. ❌

Jethro Bovingdon (@JethroBovingdon)

Specification

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo
CO2	159g/km
Power	197bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	184lb ft @ 2400-4800rpm
0-62mph	7.8sec (claimed)
Top speed	134mph (claimed)
Basic price	£19,995

Verdict

- ➕ More than the sum of its parts
 - ➖ Not enough to add up to a pukka hot hatch
- evo** rating: ★★★★★

Above: upgrades are modest, but the Juke Nismo is still fun.
Left: lowered suspension aids response; seats and steering wheel get Alcantara treatment



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mazda.co.uk/mx-5

The official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the Mazda MX-5 range: Urban 25.4 (11.1) - 28.8 (9.8), Extra Urban 45.6 (6.2) - 50.4 (5.6), Combined 35.3 (8.0) - 39.8 (7.1). CO₂ emissions (g/km) 188 - 167. Retail sales only, subject to vehicle availability for vehicles registered between 01.12.12 and 31.03.13 at participating dealers. T&Cs apply. *0% finance available on all Mazda MX-5 models. Finance subject to status, 18s or over. Guarantee/Indemnity may be required. Mazda Financial Services, RH1 1SR. Model shown: Mazda MX-5 2.0 Sport Tech, OTR from £21,495. Model shown features optional Pearlescent paint (£495). OTR price includes VAT, number plates, delivery, 12 months' road fund licence, first registration fee, 3-year or 60,000-mile warranty and 3 years' European roadside assistance. Test drives subject to applicant status and availability. Details correct at time of going to print. Not available in conjunction with any other offer unless specified.



Test location: B645, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.31480, -0.54583

Ford Fiesta EcoBoost 125PS

New 1-litre engine saves on road tax and (supposedly) petrol, but can it deliver excitement?

Photography: Dean Smith

YOU CAN'T HELP BUT BE intrigued by car manufacturers' latest trend of lopping cylinders off their mainstream engines. Fiat was first with its two-cylinder 'TwinAir' unit, and last year Ford launched its three-cylinder, 1-litre EcoBoost engine. It punches out a very healthy 123bhp and 125lb ft of torque in its top state of tune, with 148lb ft available for up to 30 seconds on overboost. Ford's 2-litre petrol engines were rated at 130bhp and 130lb ft just ten years ago, which gives you some idea of the progress the company has made with engine technology.

There are 79bhp and 99bhp versions of the lightweight 1-litre available too, but it's the top-spec one we're testing here in this new Fiesta, where it enables a 0-62mph time of 9.4sec and a claimed top speed of 122mph, giving the car all the makings of a bit of a sleeper.

When you see the new Fiesta for the first time you assume Ford subcontracted the styling to Aston Martin, because the front grille looks so similar to that of an Aston. But that's where the similarities end, because the quality of the interior plastics aren't even up to the standard of the Fiesta's main European rivals. Where Ford has spent the money is on equipment; Sony DAB audio is standard, as is air con, Bluetooth and the programmable MyKey system, which allows parents to restrict things like top speed, audio volume or the ability to disable ESP when the car is started with their child's key.

Bring the three-pot engine to life and its sound is more refined than the TwinAir's off-beat warble. As you move away it's obvious that this is indeed a very refined unit, comparable to the best four-cylinder engines out there. I'm pleasantly surprised by the amount of urge available too. Spinning up the turbo is absurdly easy and you revel in the instant surge of torque.

Our test car is a Titanium version, which is a shame, as this engine is also available in a Zetec S model that gets sports suspension and sports seats. But the ride and damping here are still class-leading and a world away from the choppiness of a Mini or a Fiat 500. The steering is very direct too, although little information about what's happening at road level makes it through to the wheel. Brake feel isn't great either, with too much pedal travel; the brakes also fade quickly when pushed, which might be down to the rear being fitted with drums.

But it's the feisty engine that dominates affairs, and as you spin it towards its 6500rpm limit, a delicious three-pot growl fills the cabin. Driven like this, though, economy takes a dive and I only averaged 33.5mpg over my regular commute – barely half the claimed 65.7mpg.

The only options on our test car are metallic paint and a spare wheel, but the OTR price still comes to £16,265. The chassis is terrific and this new engine is a belter, but at that price the feel-good factor from the rest of the car should be better. Others can do it, so Ford should too. ❌

Harry Metcalfe (@harrym_evo)



Above: damping is top notch, while 1091kg kerb weight helps make this 123bhp Fiesta a lively thing; CO2 emissions of 99g/km mean it's VED exempt, too

Specification

Engine	In-line 3-cyl, 999cc, turbo
CO2	99g/km
Power	123bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	125lb ft @ 1400-4500rpm
0-62mph	9.4sec (claimed)
Top speed	122mph (claimed)
Basic price	£15,445

Verdict

- 🔲 Three-pot engine surprisingly feisty
 - 🔲 Hard to justify premium price
- evo** rating: ★★★★★

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Watches

A nod to road racing, a fashion designer's Land Rover tribute and the Veyron of watches

Words: Simon de Burton

Watch tech

High-frequency escapements



The watch world's equivalent of 'rpm' is 'bph', which stands for 'beats per hour', otherwise known as vibrations per hour. The term refers to the the number of times that the escapement assembly – the part of the movement that converts power from the mainspring of the watch into regulated timekeeping – oscillates back and forth.

A standard escapement oscillates at 28,800bph, a speed which enables an acceptable level of accuracy and a high level of reliability. But if you can up the speed of the escapement, you can achieve better 'performance', which means a greater degree of accuracy in this case.

It's well known that quartz movements are leagues ahead of mechanical ones for precision – even average-quality quartz movements operate at a consistent 32,768bph – but the race is on to create even faster mechanisms. One of the leaders in the field is TAG Heuer, which made the £85,000 Mikrotimer 100 with an escapement that runs at 3.6million beats per hour, meaning the chronograph hand makes ten rotations of the dial every second!

The downsides of higher oscillating speeds, however, are increased energy use, more wear and tear and greater fragility. But if Enzo Ferrari had balked at such trifling issues, we'd never have had those glorious V12s, would we?

1 TAG Heuer Carrera Calibre 1887 Jack Heuer

Price: £5265 From: tagheuer.com

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Carrera, one of the best-loved driving watches ever made. Jack Heuer named it after the Carrera Panamericana, having heard about the cross-Mexico road race from racing legends Ricardo and Pedro Rodriguez. The Carrera was unveiled in December 1963 and has since spawned numerous variations in three-hand and chronograph forms. This 50th anniversary special has a 12 o'clock winding crown, a case based on the Mikrogirder concept watch and TAG Heuer's 'in-house' 1887 movement.

2 Ralph Lauren RL67 Automotive Chronograph

Price: £12,300 From: ralphlaurenwatches.com

As well as owning several valuable classic cars, style guru Ralph Lauren also keeps a humble Land Rover in his collection. It took pride of place on his stand at this year's SIHH watch show in Geneva and it's the most mint and original example you're ever likely to see. This new, olive green version of the wooden-dialled Automotive Chronograph was allegedly inspired by the rugged looks of said Landy. The hefty price of the watch is partly accounted for by the lovely Jaeger-LeCoultre movement hidden inside.

3 Parmigiani Fleurier Bugatti Super Sport Rose Gold

Price: £250,000 From: parmigiani.ch

Aimed at Veyron owners and priced accordingly, Parmigiani's exotic timepieces designed to complement the Bugatti supercar first appeared back in 2004. Inspired by the traditional side-mounted drivers' watches of the 1920s and '30s, the piece is an impressive example of micro-engineering with its 36mm by 50mm teardrop-shaped case containing a lateral, hand-wound movement of 333 components. The mechanism can be seen through six sapphire crystals and the dial is positioned so that it can easily be read while driving. Just 30 examples will be made.

Now & Then



NOW TW Steel Dario Franchitti edition Worn by: Dario Franchitti

IndyCar star and *evo* columnist Dario Franchitti can no doubt afford a host of high-end watches, but he's stayed loyal to the Dutch-based TW Steel brand founded by petrolhead Jordy Cobelens in 2005. His role as a TW Steel ambassador has resulted in a range of special editions: this one has an automatic movement and costs £595.



THEN TAG Heuer S/EL Worn by: Ayrton Senna

The S/EL (for sports/elegance) launched in 1987, Senna favouring the combined analogue/digital version with a brown leather strap. He wore it during his sixth Monaco GP win, in 1993, later giving it to McLaren mechanic Ron Pellatt. The watch was sold at Bonhams for €48,000 in 2007 and is now in the TAG Heuer museum.



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Vehicle shown is the Ford Focus ST 3 with optional privacy glass and ST Style Pack available at extra cost.
The Sweeney © Exponential (Sweeney) Limited. Film artwork © Entertainment One Ltd 2012.



Go Further

Insider

by HARRY METCALFE



evo's editorial director finds that it's not just younger drivers suffering from car insurance rises

THE MOTOR INSURANCE INDUSTRY IS getting more sophisticated by the day. This is thanks to the widespread adoption of highly intelligent computer modelling capable of calculating an insurance premium based not only on your personal details but on the claims record of the model of car you want to insure. Working out a premium used to be a simple matter of looking at what insurance group your car fell into, where you lived and whether your occupation was closer to that of a nightclub owner (bad) or a country vicar (good). But those days are long gone and today a multitude of information is used to calculate every premium.

In many ways, you could argue that this is a good thing. For example, I'm lucky enough to live in an area of the UK with a low crime rate and as I haven't made a claim for many years, my insurance premiums are pretty reasonable. But if you're a 17-year-old lad in south London who fancies owning a two-seater convertible, all this clever computer modelling doesn't really help you. What hasn't been so widely reported, though, is the effect the number-crunching is having further up the automotive scale, where the cost of insuring some supercars has shot up.

The trouble with ultra-low-volume supercars is that when one is involved in a crash bad enough to result in a hefty insurance claim, it instantly gets a poor crash rating by the system and anyone owning the same model is in for a shock come renewal time. That's exactly what's happening to McLaren F1 owners after Rowan Atkinson crashed his back in 2011. Not only was the final claim for repairing his car close to £1million, but McLaren charged £45,000 just to do the estimate! Insurance companies weren't impressed and, as a result, I've heard of insurance premiums climbing to around £15,000 for a 1500-mile policy on a road-specification F1 – way higher than it was only a few years ago. It's the same story with other hypercars, for which premiums are rising dramatically due to increasing values and a recent spate of tragic accidents.

And behind the scenes, there's another storm brewing. The insurance industry has taken a general dislike to the new generation of hypercars, the thinking being that they're simply too fast for the road and the chances of them being shunted by inexperienced owners is therefore higher than ever before. A friend of mine is about to add a Pagani Huayra to his collection and a quick phone call to his insurance broker resulted in a quote for £17,000. If my sources in the insurance industry prove correct,

then owners of the new Ferrari Enzo, Porsche 918, super-Veyron and McLaren P1 will be seeing similar amounts of cash drain from their accounts. It seems a crazy amount of money to me, and while you could argue that anyone buying an £800,000 supercar should be able to afford it, paying that sort of insurance premium is still painful. The reason insurance companies have taken this stance is because these new superstars all have top speeds well over 220mph, feature flamboyant bodywork fashioned out of tricky-to-repair carbonfibre and are crammed full of expensive but easily damaged technology. Many are also only repairable at the factory, removing any scope for an alternative (better) quote.

But on the other hand, the cost of insuring classic cars is dropping because classics are rarely driven in the winter or at

'The insurance industry has taken a general dislike to the new generation of hypercars, the thinking being that they're simply too fast for the road'

high speeds, and very rarely crash. If they do, then they're easily repaired because they're generally made of metal, which can be replaced relatively cheaply or tapped back into shape. Looking at my insurance premiums for 2013, had I kept my Zonda then I would have paid £4500 for the year, whereas my Lamborghini Countach costs just £300. That sounds like a bargain until you discover that insuring my Lamborghini Espada is £90! But even that isn't the cheapest car I've ever insured: to add my 1983 Range Rover Classic on to my fleet policy there was 'no charge' – two words I rarely hear when talking to my insurance broker... It's no surprise, then, that classic car prices are taking off.

What I find equally fascinating is how (relatively) inexpensive it is to insure cars like the McLaren 12C and Ferrari 458. Both have top speeds well over 200mph and 0-100mph times around 6sec, yet the cost of insuring one is around £1400 a year. That might seem a lot of money but it's actually a bargain and is another reason why the rush to buy the latest hypercar is slowing. So it's not just teenagers that are getting kicked by insurance premiums – it's their hypercar-buying dads as well. ❏



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Petrolhead

by RICHARD PORTER



evo's longest-serving columnist is anguished by great cars going uncared for by their owners

I **IT SITS THERE LOOKING SLEEK, LOW** and every bit as gorgeous as it did when it occupied my childhood dreams in the 1980s. From the pop-up headlights at the pointy end to the Rover SD1 lamps at the back, it's a wonderful thing and it pains me to say that, in the year or so I've lived in this area, I haven't seen it move once. Why would you own a Lotus Esprit and then just leave it undriven in the same spot, out on the street in London?

I've thought about knocking stridently on the doors of the surrounding houses to find out whose car this is and demanding to know why the ruddy hell they never drive it. I've even wondered if I could report it to the council as an abandoned vehicle and go through the due process to adopt it for myself. It's just that, whenever I have such thoughts, I remember a chap I know who found a shabby Lotus Eclat in a lay-by, went through months of waiting to establish that no one else wanted it and filled in a ton of paperwork to become the legal owner. He eventually had it trailered back to his lock-up whereupon he realised that what he now had was a garage full of knackered scrap he didn't really want or need.

So let's not get carried away here. I don't necessarily want my local Esprit for myself, but I do want to see it being cared for in a manner that befits such a car. The same is true of a Range Rover that lies slumped by a main road not far from here. It's an early example of the outgoing model and, if it was in good fettle, it'd still look pretty smart. Unfortunately, it's not in good fettle at all. The driver's side front tyre is completely flat, the paintwork is covered in an unsavoury patina of road scum and moss, and the whole thing is starting to resemble an abandoned potting shed. Yet I look at it and think that, with a bit of spit and polish, it could be a really nice car. It's not exactly worthless either, so what could possibly possess someone to allow it to get into that state?

I also feel the same about an old-shape Jaguar XKR that lives near my house. At least this particular car moves every now and again, but its bodywork never feels the caress of a sponge, its paintwork is gathering moss and the interior is thick with a manky dandruff of negligence. I know that keeping a car spotless at all times is pretty much impossible, and attempting to do so may suggest an OCD and an irritating obsession with the word 'detailing' that you might want to get looked at. But the other extreme is just as bad, especially when the car in question is a desirable one. If you subjected an animal to such wanton neglect

and abuse someone would, quite rightly, come round and take it off you. And that's given me an idea: The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Cars.

Under my new proposal, if you suspect a colleague or neighbour isn't taking care of their motor you can ring a special hotline and our team of dedicated car protection officers will come round to assess the situation. Allowed an inch-thick layer of crud to build up on the paintwork? Haven't had it serviced for over a year? Absolutely no idea what the tyre pressures should be or when you last checked them? Perhaps you're not really cut out for this machine, sir...

In such a situation our trained counsellors will come round with stern words and some Vauxhall Corsa brochures, whilst

'If you subjected an animal to such wanton neglect and abuse someone would, quite rightly, come round and take it off you'

the car you should have taken better care of will be looked after by one of our foster drivers, who will clean it, service it and never use more than 3000rpm until the oil is warmed up. After a suitable rehabilitation period, it will then be re-homed with a sympathetic new owner.

The RSPCC will also intervene in other cases of vehicle-related abuse. Bloke next door bought an E46 M3? Good for him. He's just fitted it with LED daytime running lamps and smoked rear lights? We're on our way...

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Cars will be there to save nice cars from such fates, as well as protecting them from neglect and cruelty by intervening where necessary to ensure good cars are never left to rot on the street. It's a win-win situation that relieves owners of cars they thought they could handle but then grew bored of, whilst ensuring those who are in a position to care for such beasts can have access to them. That's the genius of the RSPCC.

And remember, we promise that we will never put a healthy Lotus down. ❧



Model shown is a Porsche Cayman S at £51,724 including 20-inch SportTechno wheels, Bi-Xenon lighting system with Dynamic Light System (PDLS), 12 months road fund licence and first registration fee.

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The new Cayman models are the distillation of a Porsche bloodline 60 years in development. Illustrious forebears such as the 550 Coupé and 917 Le Mans winner harnessed the benefits of the mid-engined layout to deliver success both on and off the race track. Of course, these icons of the past also help us to engineer our future.

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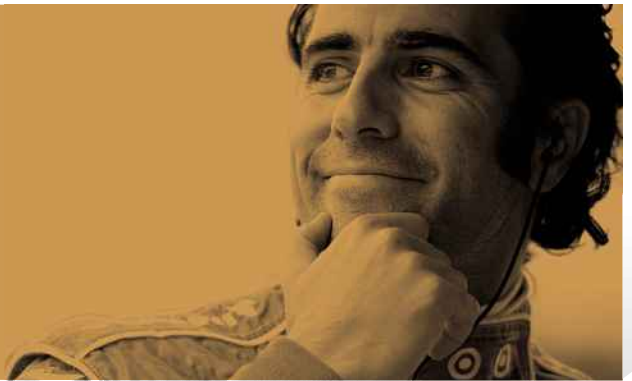


PORSCHE

Official fuel economy figures for the Porsche Cayman Range in mpg (l/100km): Urban 23.2-24.8 (12.2-11.4), 40.9-44.8 (6.9-6.3), Combined 32.1-34.4 (8.8-8.2), CO₂ emissions: 206-192g/km.

Champ

by DARIO FRANCHITTI



The three-time Indy 500 winner and four-time IndyCar champ describes his favourite road cars

EVERYONE WANTS SOMETHING different from a car, and I respect that. Some people want a car that's pin-sharp, others something with a lot of horsepower. Ultimately this means that a car one person loves, another person will find to be a load of crap.

I don't do trackdays; that's because track driving is my job and nothing is going to give me the thrill I get from my 'company car'. Therefore, road driving is very important to me, and what I want from a road car is very important too. Ultimately, it's not only the connection with the road surface but also the feeling of being on the limit of the car's capability that gives me a buzz.

I've spent my whole life searching for speed on the racetrack, and in that process 'feel' serves a very different purpose. In a race car, you use feel to detect a shift in behaviour or balance – it's a tool to gather information. Then you use this information to identify improvements, whether it's damper settings or suspension geometry. Sometimes you use feel to back-up or dispute something when the computers are telling the team one thing and you are detecting something else...

Ultimately, the result against the stopwatch is all that counts – and not the enjoyment you get behind the wheel. Sometimes the two are in sync, but if not, then speed wins. After all, the team is not interested in your driving pleasure.

Over the years I've developed a tolerance for oversteer simply because I've had to. It made me quicker, but at first I just couldn't deal with it. You can't tell your engineers how you want a race car to behave if it makes you slower – the search for speed can sometimes take you in a direction you might not like.

Away from the track, a road car that gives me a sense of being connected is what puts a smile on my face, and a truly exceptional car is one that brings all those key elements together – feel, drama, throttle response, steering response, balance, the control weights.

Of the cars I own, the F40, Carrera GT and the 911 hot rod are exceptional. Take the F40; yes, there are the looks and the fact that I had a poster of one on my bedroom wall, but even walking up to it fills me with excitement. Add this to the way you can manipulate the engine, and how you can keep the boost close to the boil, and the precision, and the grip, and the feedback – it all comes together in one exceptional package. The F40 is not an easy thing to drive. You've got to plan ahead and it's a handful, but when I come out of it, no matter if I've driven it for 10 miles or 100, I'm energised.

The Carrera GT is in that category, but at a higher rate because it's a more modern car. You can really haul arse in it, but if you take

any liberties you'll be in trouble. It has all that connection, all the thrills, and you need to be disciplined to drive it.

And the 911 hot rod? I love that little car. It only weighs 975kg but it's got 330bhp and a short-ratio 915 'box. In second and third it lights the rear tyres, so you have to pay attention! The first time I drove it was almost like flying a helicopter. It just does everything you think about. You know exactly what's going on through the steering or your bum. When you push too hard, you can feel the balance change – whether it's understeer or oversteer – and then you can play with it.

And here are the two most important things: firstly, truly exceptional cars like the 911 leave the decisions up to you. And secondly, the 911 – and the F40 and Carrera GT – allow you to feel the connection with the road more of the time. Some cars,

'Over the years I've developed a tolerance for oversteer simply because I've had to'

and a lot of modern cars, don't necessarily do that. Take the 911 GT3 RS 4.0, for example: what an absolutely epic car. But for me and where my limits are, I've got to be driving at ridiculous speeds to get a thrill out of it. It's the same with the 458, and the McLaren 12C, for that matter. The guys who tested the 12C need their heads rebooting – and that upsets me because I wanted it to be good. Sadly, the 12C just feels numb to me.

An increase in feedback should not be directly proportional to an increase in speed. Modern cars are getting better and better, so to get that feeling of connection you have to be driving at ludicrous speeds. The really exceptional cars deliver the thrill not at ten-tenths of their capabilities, but from four- or five-tenths. The McLaren F1 is one of those cars. I wish I'd bought one instead of a bloody aeroplane, but I needed that for work...

Modern cars are getting faster, grippier and more stable. But I only want those characteristics in a race car. It seems to me that a trend is developing where road cars are being engineered to behave like race cars – but the truth is that driver enjoyment is way down the list of priorities for a racer. If we go down that route, it's a slippery slope for those who love road driving.

It'll take a brave car company to say 'sod the Nürburgring lap time, sod the 0-60mph and the top speed – let's focus on feel and connection'... ❌

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 DMS 335I "AS QUICK AS AN M3 ON THE ROAD" EVO MARCH '09
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997 TURBO/S 3.8 INC PDK » 611BHP
 997 TURBO 3.6 » 625+ BHP
 997 GT2 RS » 670+ BHP
 996 TURBO/GT2 » 600+ BHP
 997 CARRERA GTS » 439+ BHP
 997 CARRERA S PDK » 400+ BHP
 997 CARRERA S » 376+ BHP
 997 CARRERA » 348 BHP
 997 CARRERA PDK » 368 BHP
 997 GT3 3.6 » 436 BHP
 996 3.6 » 344 BHP
 BOXSTER 3.4S » 336+ BHP
 CAYMAN S » 342 BHP
 CAYENNE GTS » 440 BHP
 CAYENNE TURBO 4.5 » 565+ BHP
 CAYENNE TURBO 4.8 » 578+ BHP
 CAYENNE TURBO S 4.8 » 600+ BHP
 CAYENNE DIESEL » 305 BHP
 PANAMERA TURBO » 600+ BHP
 PANAMERA DIESEL » 305 BHP

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 AMG 55 KOMPRESSOR » 600+ BHP
 C63 AMG » 530+ BHP & DE-LIMIT
 SL63 AMG » 560+ BHP & DE-LIMIT
 RE-MAP AND LOWER ABC SUSPENSION
 CL600 BI-TURBO » 580+ BHP
 S500 2008 » 411+ BHP
 SLK55 AMG » 389 BHP & DELIMIT
 SLK 350 » 328 BHP
 200K » 205+BHP
 C220 CDI (W204) » 210 BHP
 280 /300 CDI V6 » 257 BHP
 320 CDI V6 » 274 BHP
 350 CDI V6 » 312 BHP
 420 /450 CDI V8 » 358 BHP
 63AMG 5.5V8 TURBO » 600+ BHP & DE-LIMIT

BMW:

M5 V10 » 548+ BHP 205 MPH
 X5M / X6M » 618 BHP & DE-LIMIT
 M3 E90/92 » 445+ BHP & DE-LIMIT
 M3 E46 » 370 BHP & DE-LIMIT
 1M » 400+BHP & DE-LIMIT
 F10 M5 » PLEASE CALL
 F10 535I » 370+ BHP
 F10 DIESEL MODELS » PLEASE CALL
 335I/135I/ X6 » 378+ BHP & DE-LIMIT
 123D » 252 BHP
 330D E90 » 296+ BHP
 325D E90 » 285 BHP
 320D E90 » 209 BHP
 330D E46 » 260+ BHP
 730D » 290+ BHP
 X5 4.0D / 740D » 358 BHP
 X5 3.0D » 278 BHP
 X6 50i » 500+BHP
 535D/335D » 344 BHP
 X5 SD » 344 BHP

EXOTIC & MISC:

FERRARI CALIFORNIA » 487 BHP
 FERRARI 599 » 660+ BHP
 FERRARI 430 » 525 BHP
 GALLARDO » 546 BHP
 LP560 » 608+ BHP
 LP640 » 707 BHP
 MURCIELAGO LP670SV » 715 BHP
 MASERATI GRANTURISMO/QPORT » 438 BHP
 GRANTURISMO S / MC » 479+ BHP
 AUDI RS6 V10 » 700+BHP & DE-LIMIT
 AUDI R8 V10 » 602+BHP
 AUDI B7 RS4/ R8 » 439 BHP & DE-LIMIT
 AUDI RS5 » 475 BHP & DE-LIMIT
 AUDI RS3/ TTRS » 405 BHP & DE-LIMIT
 AUDI Q7 /A8 4.2 TDI » 387 BHP
 AUDI (ALL MODELS) 3.0TDI » 298 BHP
 AUDI S3 / GOLF R » 317 + BHP
 RANGE ROVER 3.6 TDV8 » 338 BHP
 R ROVER SPORT 3.0D INC2012 » 305 BHP
 R ROVER SPORT 2.7D » 240 BHP
 R ROVER EVOQUE DIESEL » 245 BHP
 R ROVER EVOQUE PETROL » 300+ BHP
 BENTLEY CGT / F-SPUR » 630 BHP
 BENTLEY GT SPEED » 680+ BHP
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Inbox

What's dug up your car park this month?



Letter of the Month

Venom needs its own sting

I had to put pen to paper to praise Richard Meaden's piece on the Hennessey Venom GT (evo 180) – such powerful writing that reflects the sheer lunacy of those stats and leaves us in no doubt as to the potency of this new kid on the block.

Given the glowing review, it seems a huge shame that Hennessey missed the opportunity to give the car a visual identity of its own instead of simply reworking the looks of the Exige. Imagine what it could have looked like with some Group C influences combined with American brawn.

And seeing as most reviews of American performance cars end in disappointment and very unfavourable comparisons to their European cousins, I'm beginning to wonder if Lotus should be getting more than a little credit for this car.

Andrew Haine

The star letter wins a Road Angel Gem safety camera & blackspot alert device worth £129.99



The Road Angel Gem automatically updates its safety camera database as you drive and allows users to share the locations of 'live' camera vans and changed speed limits.

ROAD ANGEL™

An internet warrior writes

I was a little shocked at Richard Meaden's pop at internet posts and YouTube comments regarding the Hennessey Venom GT.

I think Mr Meaden forgets that for many of us 'internet warriors', forming an opinion of a hypercar in our heads is the closest we'll ever get to driving one. I understand that it must be frustrating for a seasoned car tester to read 'reviews' by people that have never driven a car, but we love performance cars as much as you do, so please let us have our little bit of escapism. Next time you step into a hypercar to form your opinions, spare a thought for those of us who can only do so by imagination.

And by the way, bombing the Venom up and down a runway then pootling it around some backroads is not the way to disprove 'cyber detritus' about the Venom being rubbish in corners.

Dean Roscoe

Firstly, apologies for any personal offence caused. It wasn't my intention. I merely wished to draw attention to the extraordinary amount of BS that gets spouted online about cars such as the Venom GT. Unfortunately the internet appears to compel everyone to have an opinion, even if, as in the case of cars like the Venom GT, that opinion happens to be baseless. Much like your assessment of our test, which neatly proves my point about vociferous opinion often being based in ignorance – RM

Ferrari fightback

Why on earth did Richard Porter describe the Ferrari 400 as 'comically dreadful' in his column (evo 180)?



Above left: Peter Vaughan's ex-Chris Evans Ferrari 412 – an underrated car, he reckons. **Above right:** next GT3 could be as great as the 997.2 version (see 'The future is bright')

Clearly he has never had the pleasure of driving a good one, but it goes further than that.

The 400 and its 412 successor were the last cars to use the great Colombo V12; in effect, they had an improved Daytona power unit. As for the styling, the late, great LJK Setright described this Ferrari as 'one of the few most beautiful, and one of the two most elegant bodies ever to leave the lead of Pininfarina's pencilling vision'. Better still, a 400 was once the daily driver of a certain Enzo Ferrari!

I recently traded in my 328 GTS after seven happy years to own a late 412 manual (one of 24 built – rarer than a 250 GTO!). They are currently around a fifth of the price of a 330 GT and that can't last – as the last V12 developed under Enzo himself, they are sure to go up.

And they should, because they are magnificent GT cars; elegant, quick and utterly captivating. Mine was previously owned by Chris Evans, and if a 412 is good enough for a man who has owned 288 and 250 GTOs, as well as a 250 California and 246 Dino, I think it should be good enough for Richard Porter!

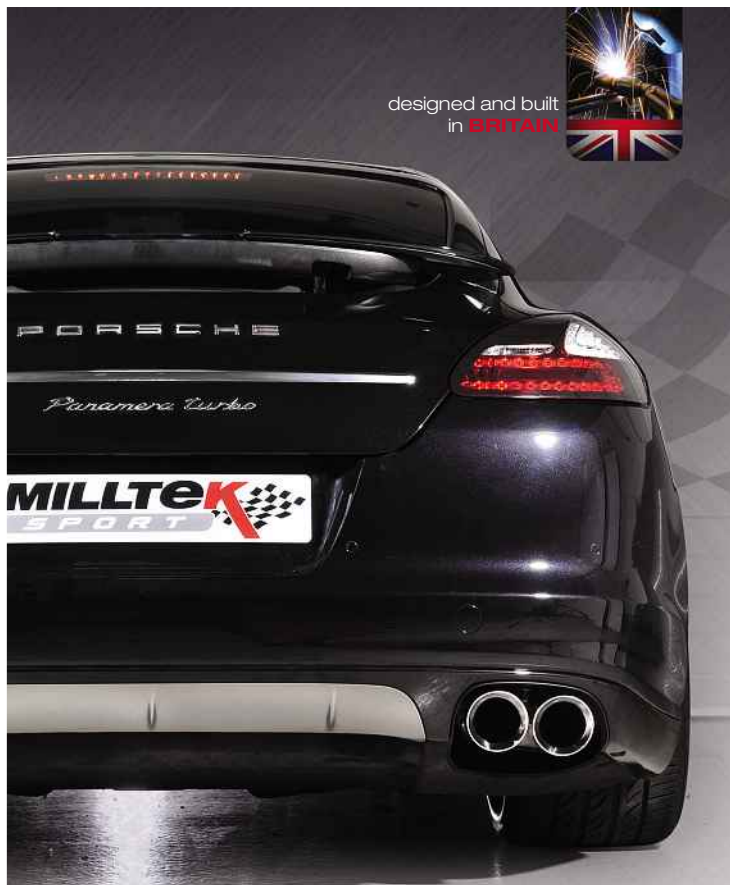
Peter Vaughan

The future is bright

I'm not sure that Jethro Bovingdon has anything to worry about when it comes to the 'End of an Era' cars (evo 179). It's easy to assume that the next generation of such focused models will deliver the enthusiastic driver a diluted experience, but it's probably untrue and history says the opposite is more likely to be the case.

Those same engineers that were trying to excite us have not given up; they are still there trying even harder to excite us. Humans' best endeavours come when we





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Above left: Jim Valcarcel thinks we shouldn't have bothered reviewing the GT500.
Above right: Toyota GT86 costs just £16,000 – if you live in Dubai (see 'GT86 is great')



are stretched and challenged, and that extends to car design and engineering. Just think how many of the greats were built on little to no budget, or by 'after hours' clubs, or as very specific tools to prove a point; all overcome legislation/engineering challenges to earn their reputations.

Also, us consumers still want that raw, spine-tingling feeling from our fun cars, and that leads to sales and profits. It took Renault a few years with the 197/200, but it got there, as will Toyota with its new GT86.

So have a little faith: celebrate the ones that have gone before, but demand more from the future. Those engineers are still exceeding the challenges, and their bosses still want anyone's money.

Mark Jackson

Leave off the Yanks

Jethro Bovingdon's articles are always interesting and I read his Shelby GT500 Mustang feature (*evo* 178) with some interest.

Now let me say this first: I do not own an American car, and have purchased many European cars in the past. I currently own a Porsche 997.2 GT3 and a Mini Clubman S. So despite being an American, I think that a car like an Aston, Porsche or Ferrari will pretty much always be more desirable than, say, a Corvette or Mustang, despite having owned examples of both in the past.

But why oh why do British magazines such as your own continue to do reviews on American cars? They can all be summarised into a few words: 'rubbish, can't handle, poorly made, can't handle, poor steering, can't handle, did I mention that it can't handle?'

Please stop doing reviews on any American cars in the future. You all think American cars are crap. Always have, always will. We get it. So please do us all a favour and save the paper that is wasted on articles about American cars. Having said that, thank you for such a fine magazine.

Jim Valcarcel, Sedona, Arizona

For the record, we don't think American cars are crap – not all of them, anyway. We've awarded four and a half stars to both the Corvette C6 and Z06, for example, and we've enjoyed other,

less powerful Mustangs too. Sadly the GT500 just didn't hit the spot for us – Ed

GT86 is great

I've just moved to Dubai from the UK and have taken delivery of a Toyota GT86. Having just passed 750 miles I couldn't be more pleased with it.

Prices of cars here are comparable to the UK in most cases, but with the 86 I'm not so sure. I picked up a new black, manual car with exhaust finishers, satnav and 16in rims for 95,000 dirhams, which is a shade over £16,000. I agree that the UK price of £25k is a bit on the steep side, but at £16k it suddenly becomes a bargain like the Clio RS. There are quite a few GT86s on the roads over here and maybe that's why – as well as the fact that the BMW M135i is almost double the price of the Toyota here.

I think you need to look at what the GT86 is rather than what it isn't. I sit in it looking up at Golf GTIs as if they're 4x4s. Peering over the descending nose, the two raised Maserati-esque arches simply look cool. The seats hug with comfort and the driving position couldn't feel more ideal if it tried. The finish is relatively solid and it genuinely feels a special place to be for a petrolhead. With the utmost respect for excellent German engineering, I don't always notice M135is pass by.

I'm not big on modifying cars, but a GT86 with a well-designed Stage 1/2/3 kit would make for an exciting long-term plan.

Daniel Cocks

Keep taking the tablets

I have to take issue with the letter of the month in *evo* 179. Owning the latest vehicle is in no way a demonstration of one's passion for all things automotive.

evo regularly features great cars from the past, but does this mean it has no passion for automobiles? No. It simply means that regardless of age, cost and image, there have been remarkable cars since the automotive industry began.

As for cars being like tablets and mobile phones, let's see if people lust after an iPhone in 30 years' time in the same way I long for a Countach now.

Sam Ibitson, Telford



From the forums: community.evo.co.uk

Thread of the month

M135i

'Are cars too fast?'

I will probably get shot down in flames, but since driving the latest purchase – the clue's in my username – I am starting to think that in the UK you'd have more fun wringing out an old-style hot hatch. Is 200bhp plenty to keep you entertained?

JIMMY CHOO

Only if it's light.

ORANGE COLA

And has massive suspension travel to cope with the potholes.

NOTORIOUSREV

No.

DR. (TBC) ALEX

What he said. The more the merrier.

RJW

I think it's the rules/laws that have taken some of the enjoyment out of driving. I have an E34 M5 as a weekend car but you need some space to enjoy it. I have been considering something smaller/less powerful to get my kicks.

P7ULG

It's human nature to always be looking for more. I would prefer torque and handling to bhp. I personally can't see much point in galactic top speeds, other than when playing Top Trumps.

INTEGRALE_EVO

No. I spent a couple of weeks driving a 140bhp hatch, and I'm now happy to be back in something with a considerable power to weight advantage. And I don't seem to have an issue being able to push the accelerator all the way down in the faster car. Ok, you don't sit there at full throttle for as long, but the acceleration is more entertaining than pressing the throttle and waiting for the rev counter to swing around.

LOGANMOTOR

I enjoy slow, light cars. I enjoy heavy, powerful cars. I enjoy any combination of either as long as it's interesting. I enjoy the fact that I have those options to choose from.

M135i

I'm not saying the M135i isn't great fun, but you do tend to get to very high speeds relatively quickly. Chucking my old AX GT around used to be great fun too, but that only weighed as much as twenty Marlboro.



Thread of the month wins a Jorg Gray chronograph

The originator of the best **evo** forum thread wins a fabulous Jorg Gray chronograph. Jorg Gray has quickly become one of the world's most sought-after brands and is found in fine jewellery stores throughout the UK.

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Some like it

by RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY by
DEAN SMITH

HOTTER

H

HOT HATCHES HAVE BEEN A HIGH-performance staple for almost as long as the mid-engined supercar. So, while we can all fantasise about owning Ferraris and Lamborghinis, the not-so-humble hot hatch has allowed generations of regular Joes to experience brilliantly resolved, genuinely exciting and truly special cars.

Tellingly, even those fortunate enough to afford poster car exotica (that's Harry, in case you were wondering) also get their kicks from pint-sized front-wheel-drive fizzers.

It's therefore a source of constant delight to me that the hot hatch breed continues to thrive. Better still, advances in engine, tyre and electronic technology means they've been getting hotter and more extreme. And more varied too, thanks to divergent philosophies that have led some brands in the pursuit of power as others chase the noble cause of increased performance though reduced weight. Throw in the freedom afforded by low-volume runs of factory-built skunkworks specials and you find that the hot hatch is enjoying a golden age.

This much is abundantly clear to me as I meet **evo** staffer Stephen Dobie, 'fresh' from his three-day drive back from the new Mini John Cooper Works GP's international press launch in Portugal. I should state up front that I'm not a big fan of the regular JCW Mini, thanks to its loose and ragged on-limit handling. Despite this, it's hard not to fall in love with the notion of a factory-built Mini that's so committed to speed – and





Extreme hatches



Nürburgring lap times – that it jettisons the rear seats and runs coilover suspension. I'm not so sure about the graphics, but there's no arguing with the intent or the anorexic 1140kg kerb weight of this ultimate go-faster Mini.

My run home from the rendezvous with Dobie takes all of ten minutes, but as the route includes four roundabouts, two motorway slip roads and a short squirt of country lane, at least eight of those minutes involve me driving like a complete tit. It's an intense, manic dash that leaves me ever so slightly punch-drunk. It's certainly a thrill, and the GP immediately feels more deliberate and targeted in its edginess than the regular JCW, but a few doubts swirl around with the adrenalin. Will it be too much?

We're heading for the right place to find out, for not only do we have a day put aside for road testing on the uniquely challenging tarmac of north Lincolnshire, but we also have a day booked at Blyton Park, venue for last year's eCoty track battles. It's safe to say that owners of extreme hot hatches such as the Mini GP – and the three rivals that will be waiting for it – are going to fancy the occasional trackday, so our on-limit findings and flat-out lap times will be as revealing as they are fun to extract.

THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE FACING

the Mini GP is apparent as soon as we arrive at Blyton. For there, parked in no particular order, are the magnificent Renaultsport Mégane R26.R, the muscular, matt black Ford Focus RS500 and the pert new Audi A1 quattro. Together with the Mini, they represent the four rarest and most specialised hot hatches of recent years. It's going to be quite a fight.

With the cars washed and Dean Smith's shutter finger getting itchy, we head out onto the roads. Despite my general hatred of race harnesses in road cars I'm magnetically drawn to the Renault. Some cars have an aura about them and this is one of them; purposeful but not OTT, considered but not contrived, it has the same air of seriousness and purpose as a 911 GT3 RS. The same credibility too, thanks to its Renaultsport pedigree and front-drive Ring lap record (now beaten – by the Mégane Trophy). It's bizarre to think that Renault UK struggled to sell its allocation of R26.Rs, especially as they're now appreciating in value.

Once you drop into the carbon Sabelt seat and slam the door, the interior feels sparse but special. There's a blanking plate where there once was a radio, but there is air conditioning, which always comes as a surprise to me. There's more road noise and the exhaust resonates in that cavernous space behind the seats, but that big red roll-cage never fails to raise a smile when you look in the rear-view mirror. It's an evocative driving environment, but it's still the palpable lightness of the car when you're moving that's most impressive.

My favourite hatchback: Renaultsport Clio Trophy

THE RECIPE FOR creating a hot hatch is simple: find an innocent-looking car your mum might be interested in, install the most powerful engine you can, beef up the suspension and brakes accordingly, add a pair of decent seats and *voilà!*

My Clio Trophy began life as Renault's press car. It won the 'real world' leg of eCoty 2005, giving it a pass to mix it with the big guns in the 'surreal world' class on the Route Napoleon. It was here, whilst chasing a Lamborghini Gallardo SE in

the Trophy, that I realised it could well be the ultimate hot hatch of all time. So I pulled over, called Renault HQ and bought the car on the spot.

That was over seven years ago now and I still love it to bits. I think its blend of razor-sharp throttle response, revvy engine, small dimensions, agility and bargain price have never been bettered. That's why it has permanent residence status in my garage.
Harry Metcalfe



Above: Harry was so impressed with the Clio Trophy on *evo* Car of the Year 2005, he bought the test car



‘FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME, AUDI HAS CREATED A DRIVERS’ CAR THAT DELIVERS’

The electric power steering feels a little dead and is too light for the first few miles, but improves once the lightly treaded Toyo 888 tyres come up to temperature. The brakes are sharp to your first input – I suspect that’s due to more aggressive pad material in this case – but the throttle response, clutch and gearshift are all sweetly uniform, so you gel with the controls without having to really dial yourself in.

The ride is much more pliant than you’d expect, thanks to Renaultsport’s famous decision to soften the suspension a little to work in closer harmony with the R26.R’s reduced mass. That was a stroke of genius as it ensured this clearly track-focused car works brilliantly on the road. The way it finds so much bite yet



still feels fluid and light on its tyres is unique, as is its sparkling blend of agility and benign on-limit handling. You have to recalibrate your brain to just how much corner speed it can carry, but it feels involving and rewarding whether you’re at five-tenths or ten.

The engine is the least inspiring aspect, for it’s not very characterful or potent, but it has a workmanlike charm to the way it goes about its business, and the optional titanium exhaust adds a welcome full-throttle rip to the soundtrack. Besides, 227bhp and 229lb ft tend to feel more impressive when there’s just 1220kg (125kg less than the regular R26) to propel.

The flipside of this modest power and torque is tremendous traction and no torque steer,



'WITH NO TORQUE STEER, YOU NEVER FEEL AS THOUGH YOU'RE

which means you never feel as though you're squandering forward motion or fighting with the car. It's totally in line with the R26.R's purist approach and cements the feeling that it makes the absolute most of what it has. Far from diminishing its impact, time seems to have made this radical Renault even more special.

It now seems appropriate to switch into the other benchmark car to get a complete picture of what the new breed has to live up to. I was never quite sure about the RS500's matt black wrap when it was new and I'm even less convinced now, but we shouldn't let this fashion faux pas

cloud our judgement on what remains one of the hardest hitting hot hatches ever made.

In concept and execution it's the polar opposite of the R26.R, being immensely powerful but a bit of a lard-arse at the best part of 1500kg. Still, with 345bhp and 339lb ft to lob it down the road, the Ford comfortably eclipses the Renault's power-to-weight ratio, with 239bhp per ton versus 189bhp per ton for the Mégane. That's enough to achieve a 12.7sec 0-100mph time and 165mph top speed: serious numbers for a hatchback.

Like the exterior, the interior lacks the spartan

chic of the Mégane, but there's a commensurate uplift in practicality, not least because it has rear seats and a contained luggage compartment. The driving position isn't ideal as you sit high in the seat, and I'd forgotten the right-hand squab bolster's ability to inflict eye-watering pain if you 'straddle' it as you drop into the seat!

If anything can turn your anguished frown upside down it's the sound of the RS500's 2.5-litre five-cylinder turbo engine. Smooth and musical where the Renault's is prosaic and humdrum, the Focus sings a rousing song full of snorts and warbles, with the odd pop or bang



Top: Mini weighs in at £12k less than the Audi. **Top right:** roll-cage contributes to the Mégane's 'track' feel. **Clockwise from left:** AI motor is muted in sound department; Mini GP only gets extra 7bhp on regular JCW; mundane turbo engine is Mégane's one flaw; 345bhp turbo five-cylinder helps compensate for RS500's hefty weight. **Far right:** snow delays start of track action





SQUANDERING FORWARD MOTION OR FIGHTING WITH THE R26.R'

for good measure. The note hardens under load as if to amplify the sense of building boost and intensifying acceleration, followed by the inevitable vibrato of wheelspin as the front tyres submit to all that torque.

It sets the tone for what can only be described as good-natured rough and tumble between you, the RS500 and whatever piece of road you're on. For all its brute force and F-117 war paint (or should that be war vinyl?), the Focus feels playful. It takes a while to get your head around how to best exploit the handling balance, but once you understand that the reactive initial turn-in can soon become a bit understeery, you learn to bring the tail into play early as a neutralising influence. With confidence you can get bolder with your corner entry, sliding the tail then getting back on the throttle to pull the car straight. You really need to turn the ESP off to make the most of the RS500's expressive handling, but it's far from inert with the electronic safety net in place.

Compared to the Mégane's, the RS500's brakes are initially more progressive, but you do feel the extra mass when charging into a tight corner. The steering lacks the linearity of the Renault's, and there's a very real sense that Ford has tried hard to create steering and suspension geometry that can somehow absorb the torque steer. It succeeds to a degree, but hard acceleration always sends the nose meandering from left to right. It's not violent, but it always

feels like you're correcting the deflective forces of a constantly changing crosswind. After a while it becomes second nature, but it remains a mild irritation.

The mk2 Focus RS holds huge appeal, but it also feels like it places the simple thrills of accelerative fireworks ahead of the cerebral satisfaction of precisely dissecting a challenging road. That makes it exciting, especially with the RS500's extra 45bhp, but how much long-term satisfaction you derive from its mild waywardness depends on whether you like a car that dances to your tune or its own.

FOR SHEER CURIOSITY VALUE ALONE, the A1 quattro is impossible to resist. Until now the A1 has been the designer handbag of the Audi range, at least in the eyes of performance-focused people like us. But when Audi's engineers indulged themselves with a game of 'What if...?', the result was a limited-edition, left-hand-drive-only flight of fancy with all-wheel drive and a 253bhp 2-litre turbo engine packed into Ingolstadt's Mini rival.

Just 333 of these intriguing machines have been built, with only 19 coming to the UK. At a list price of £41,020 it's a crazy proposition on



**'THIS IS A RARE
HIGH-PERFORMANCE
AUDI INDEED, BECAUSE IT
HAS PLIANCY, SUBTLETY
AND COHESION'**



every rational level, yet when you see it sitting before you like some latter-day Delta Integrale, man maths begins to kick-in. In typical Audi fashion it's a brilliantly sharp-looking and cohesively designed machine, with just enough muscle to hint at what lies beneath, yet not so much that it could be accused of being try-hard. And those wheels are just perfect.

Inside it feels worth every one of those £41,020, with lots of soft, supple black leather and the usual soft-touch Audi plastics. For some reason I wasn't expecting a gearstick (shows how much attention I paid to those early pre-production drive reports!) and I'm not sure whether I'm pleased or disappointed. At 1420kg the A1 quattro isn't exactly light in this company, but it does highlight the extra weight the 47kg-heavier Focus is carrying. Perhaps that's why Ford went with front drive and not the all-wheel drive rumoured back in the day.

Things get off to an infuriating start thanks to the A1's stupid key, which has nowhere to live other than in your pocket or the cupholder. One day someone will invent a small slot in the steering column, into which you push the key and twist to start the engine. Wouldn't that be amazing? But I digress. In typical Audi four-cylinder fashion the engine is as vocal as a Trappist monk, with not so much as a burble on tickover. Given the specialised nature of the car, that's a bit disappointing.

So my first impressions are of a premium, high-quality hot hatch, but one that falls some way short of being extreme, at least in the mould of the other three cars in this test.



Above: Mini's rear cross brace has no structural purpose, it merely ensures luggage stays in the rear.

Below: Audi's six-speed manual shifts quickly



That's a real shame, for you'd have thought, or at least hoped, that given the pricing and low production numbers Audi could have created something really rather wild, and still sold them ten times over.

Nevertheless, it rapidly becomes apparent that this is a rare Audi indeed; not simply by dint of the ultra-exclusive production run, but because it's a high-performance Audi that has pliancy, subtlety and cohesion to its damping, steering and general demeanour. Because it's so compact, the fact you're sitting on the 'wrong' side is less of an issue than you might expect. If anything it only serves to reinforce the sense that this is a 21st-century Integrale.

The engine has that typical VAG four-cylinder turbo trait of delivering a big slug of response early in the throttle's travel, as if to suggest there's more poke than there actually is. But instead of fading with revs, the little A1's motor sings to 7000rpm. The gearshift isn't the most mechanical in feel, but it'll snap through the gate as quickly as you can move your arm. The brakes are a bit too keen to bite, which is annoying, but you can drive round it if you make a conscious effort.

Favourite hatch: 205 GTI



WHILE I COULD talk about my beloved 2001 Mini Cooper (15-inch wheels, no air-con – the RS/Rallye of new Minis I like to think. Almost unsaleable), I also foster huge affection for the Peugeot 205 GTI. My first rally car was a 1.6 and I adored it. On gravel, lift-off oversteer was ever-present and the torsion beam rear end would buckaroo wildly over bumps, but it was brilliant. Slow, but brilliant.

As part of an evo 'Grand Challenge' I also did a

lot of miles in a Miami Blue 1.9. Same long and indistinct gearshift, but much torquier than the 1.6, I frequently found myself taking it home in preference to much more expensive machinery.

The 205 has always just felt right to me. Smaller, cooler and more French than a Golf, there's something insatiable about the way they drive that encapsulates the fun and freedom of a hot hatch.

Henry Catchpole



If there's a growing sense that this car is too civilised and mainstream in its behaviour to be regarded as a truly extreme hot hatch, the way it covers ground goes a long way to make up for its lack of edge. For the first time in a long time (recent R8 Plus not included) Audi has created a drivers' car that delivers, albeit in a mature, mainstream fashion. There's depth to the damping, and measured wheel and body control that's been sorely missing in the RS Audis for far too long. It would be nice if the A1 quattro could be teased into some more interesting shapes through second- or third-gear corners, but it's still a very satisfying and extremely rapid cross-country machine.

If you're looking for an antidote to the Audi's relentlessly sensible delivery, then the two-seater Mini GP is the shot in the arm you need. As I discovered on first acquaintance, it's a loopy little thing. The specification is very serious indeed, with every key area of the car enhanced over the regular JCW. Central to these changes is the suspension, which employs adjustable coilovers that drop the car by 20mm at the front (where there is also increased negative camber) and 15mm at the rear. Six-piston calipers grip bigger 330mm front brake discs and the wheels (half an inch wider) are wrapped with special Kumho Ecsta tyres. And at the back, the diffuser is said to reduce rear lift by 90 per cent!

The 1.6-litre turbocharged engine has had a slight ECU tweak to liberate another 7bhp, lifting peak power to 215bhp, with 206lb ft of torque. The Mini GP continues with the JCW's electronic limited-slip differential, but this now has a new intermediate mode, dubbed 'GP', which doesn't limit power quite so aggressively, giving you more freedom. At £28,790 it's a chunky £6k more than the regular JCW, but on the evidence of the spec sheet alone, this limited-edition model (2000 cars worldwide) is the closest thing to the R26.R any other brand has had the balls to create.

It is possible to drive the GP slowly, but it'll take Herculean levels of self-control to do so. Its super-responsive controls egg you on relentlessly, while the firm, fidgety ride is pretty uncompromising. The engine is sharp and vocal, impressively punchy too, with a strong delivery and an addictive top-end rush. The gearshift sounds a bit clunky, but actually feels quick and accurate in use. The big brakes, meanwhile, are a little too responsive to initial light pedal pressure.

The big question mark hangs over the steering. For starters, the rim of the wheel itself is too fat, which makes you feel a bit ham-fisted before you've even begun. Like all Minis, the response is ultra-alert, but in the GP everything has been ramped all the way up to 11. Combined with aggressive torque steer and

My favourite hatchback: Mini Cooper S Works GP

MY FAVOURITE hatch is the Clio V6, but it's disqualified here for having its engine in the wrong place. Of the conventional hot hatches, I have a massive soft spot for the mk1 Mini GP.

The stats are still impressive today: 215bhp, 6.5sec to 62mph and a top speed of 149mph.

On the road, few cars could be so exploited to the maximum – and generate as much fun doing it – as the GP. I remember one

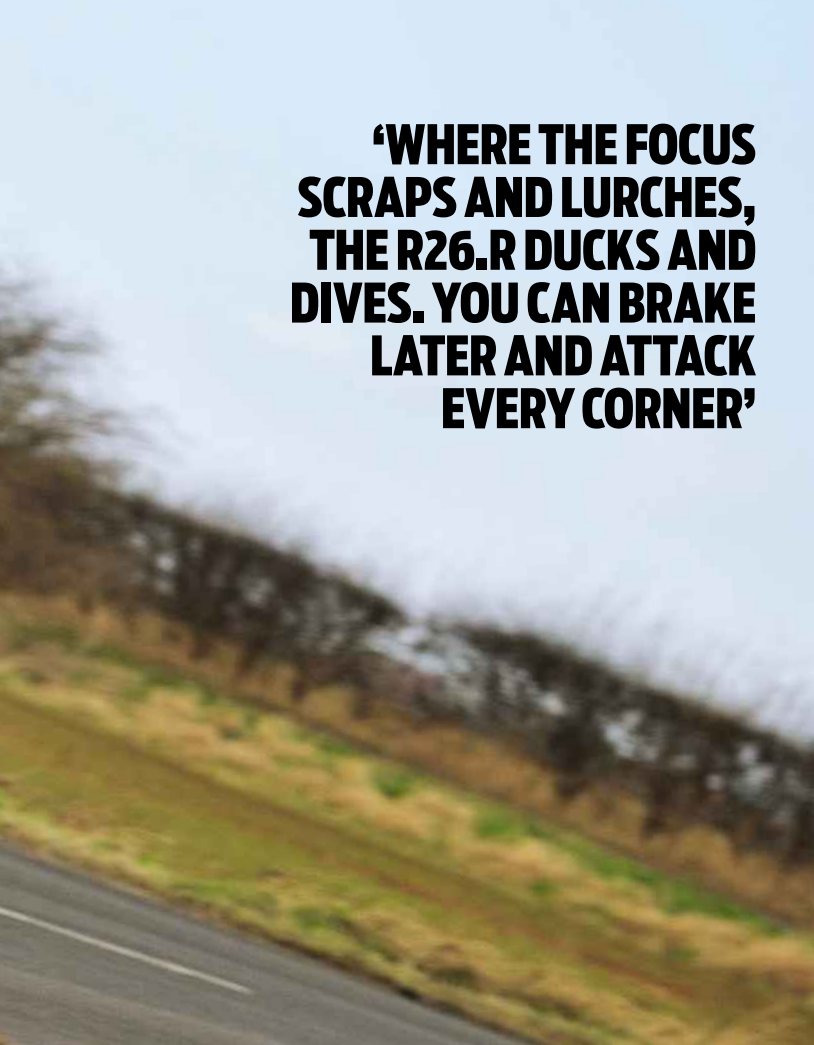
drive vividly – a searing cross-country blast where the GP zipped and darted from one corner to the next, supercharger screaming and driver laughing his head off.

At the end, buzzing with adrenalin, I phoned Mini and asked to buy the car. But, unlike Harry with his Clio, I just couldn't afford it. One day I'll own one – it's the closest Mini has got to building a CSL.

Nick Trott



'WHERE THE FOCUS SCRAPS AND LURCHES, THE R26.R DUCKS AND DIVES. YOU CAN BRAKE LATER AND ATTACK EVERY CORNER'



a startling sensitivity to anything that might deflect the wheels from your chosen course, it has the car equivalent of ADHD. Cambers, ruts, white lines, ley lines, you name it: the Mini GP will want to have a sniff of it.

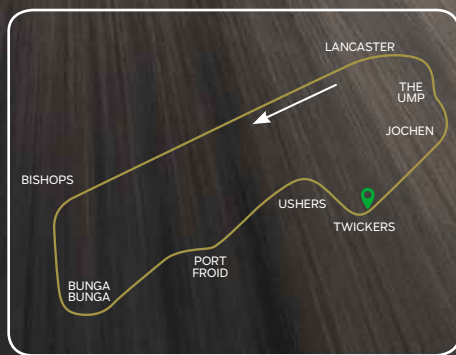
The result is a car that's very keen to tug you this way and that, be it under power or on the brakes. Because there's no sneeze factor in the steering you can easily exacerbate things with excessive inputs, even though you only feel like you're twitching your wrists. As ever, the Sport button only makes things more intense, firing a jolt of amphetamines through an already wired system. On the plus side the traction and stability controls are less intrusive and more effective, maintaining some sense of order without calling in the fun police at the first sign of wheelspin or oversteer. Disable it and all I'll say is you'd better be on your mettle.


It all makes for a wild ride at times, but if you can force yourself to calm your inputs down, even as you find yourself in the midst of the Mini's dynamic maelstrom, you can extract a truly thrilling driving experience. Where the Audi makes grown-up progress, the Mini kicks and punches like a toddler's temper tantrum on wheels. Most of the time I'd hate this kind of delivery, but there are moments when the GP is just about the most exciting front-drive car you can imagine, angry and urgent like a wasp in a tin. In the context of this test, that scores highly.

Right, from top: A1 is only available in left-hand drive; giant central speedo still dominates Mini GP's interior; basic Mégane comes sans radio; Ford's black motif continues inside



Blyton Park



 **Start/finish** Distance: 1.5 miles

The Track

PROOF THAT MOTHER NATURE HAS a sense of humour, or that Audi's marketing budget is truly biblical, comes in the form of significant overnight snow. We can almost hear the four-wheel-drive A1 quattro laughing from the corner of the car park. Thankfully the sun rids Blyton Park of its crystalline coating, and after some wheel-to-wheel laps with the original hoonigan, Tiff Needell, (see evo.co.uk for our video Track Battles) the circuit is dry and ready for timed laps.

Audi first. That sense of smooth, revvy power

and generous mid-range torque that was so welcome on the road endures on track. The A1 pulls strongly out of the corners, convincingly exploiting third gear where you'd expect to need second. Traction is almost total, with only the slightest slip from the front wheels through Bunga Bunga and the awkward, 90-degree Ushers and Twickers turns.

The brakes really are impressive, finding extra bite as you bury the pedal at the end of the long back straight. With the ESP disabled and the freedom to work to and beyond the limits of grip, the A1 reveals a fun, exploitable and adjustable balance through the fast right-left-right direction changes at Port Froid. You really can take liberties, and while it's obviously

not a trackday special, it's genuinely able and entertaining. That said, I doubt its 1:11.2 lap will remain a benchmark for long.

The RS500 is a much bigger beast in which to attack Blyton. When the front wheels are pointing straight, that mighty engine punches you between the corners, but it's easy to waste time from apex to exit if you're greedy with the throttle. The RS is quite soft on track too, and you feel it lean on its outside front tyre as soon as you turn in. A lift of the throttle will tighten your line and cock an inside-rear wheel, but that weight transfer sends even more load to the outside front, so you find yourself see-sawing your way through low- and medium-speed corners in a search for front-end traction.



Left: Mini and Renault both have a track bias. **Above:** Ford's inside-rear lifts when coming off the throttle. **Below:** Audi's balance is impressive

'FREE FROM THE BUMPS AND CAMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ROAD, THE MINI FEELS MORE PLANTED'



The Ump exposes the Focus's reluctance to make rapid direction changes, but the balance through high-speed transitions is loose, so you need to be quick with corrective lock and remain committed to the throttle. Nevertheless the RS500 posts a stonking 1:09.4.

The R26.R feels great on the road, but this is its natural habitat. After working some temperature into its tyres it's apparent that the Renault is a gifted track car. It's not so much the extra bite from those Toyos as the precision and consistency with which you can drive the Mégane to its limits. Where the RS scraps and lurches, the R26.R ducks and dives. You can brake later and attack every corner of every lap.

If it has a weakness, it's a lack of power and

torque. At Blyton that means a V-max deficit down the long back straight between Lancaster and Bishops (we bypass the Wiggler chicane for our laps) and a little lack of punch out of Bunga Bunga and Twickers. Many owners address this with an engine remap to 260bhp, which must make a big difference. Still, even in standard form, it aces the Focus with a 1:08.9.

Like the R26.R, the Mini GP has been honed to thrive on track. Free from the bumps and cambers of the public road, the Mini feels more planted, although it's very oversteery until the Kumhos get warm, at which point it suddenly finds its feet with terrific front-end bite and brilliant stability at the rear. As on the road, it makes dizzying direction changes, slicing

Lap times	
Mini John Cooper Works GP	1:08.7
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	1:08.9
Ford Focus RS500	1:09.4
Audi A1 quattro	1:11.2

through the Ump like a slalom skier.

The brakes are epic, as is the speed with which you can hurl the GP into corners. It moves around a bit under braking, and traction isn't quite as strong as the Mégane's, but it always finds meaningful forward motion, and you can attack with conviction. This is one angry little car. Quick too, at 1:08.7. Impressive stuff.

The Verdict

ALL FOUR OF THESE CARS ARE extreme in their own way. But which wins? If your name's Harry Metcalfe, it's the A1 quattro. That thud you just heard was my jaw hitting the ground. Still, we'd best hear him out: 'OK, it costs way too much, but it's beautifully screwed together, lots of fun, super-quick across the ground and you could use it every day.'

I get where HM is coming from – it's a hugely impressive and very enjoyable car – but an extreme hot hatch? No way. It either needs to wear an S1 badge and cost at least £10k less, or have another 50bhp and a heap more attitude. As it stands, the concept is undoubtedly extreme but the execution is so polished it feels like it should be in series production.

Polished or mainstream are not words I'd use to describe the Focus RS500. Like that mate who always has a few too many drinks then gets involved in a fight, you know things are always going to get out of hand. It's a wild, yobbish creation, but it goes like stink and sounds epic. Ultimately its weight, propensity for exaggerated transitions from understeer to oversteer and traction issues make it feel like a blunt instrument in this company. Fun but flawed, it shares third place with the A1 and – in the context of this test only – gets demoted by half a star from its regular five-star rating.

The Mini GP is a grower. At first it feels too hyped-up, too aggressive, too contrived. Then you have a mad few miles in it and you're absolutely buzzing. It really takes some hanging on to on tricky tarmac, and is undoubtedly too much for some roads and some tastes, but it's this brazen commitment to a totally

uncompromising style of performance that is the core of its appeal. In a test of extreme hatches, this puts it ahead of the softcore Audi and the confused Ford.

That leaves the R26.R. Harry loves Renault hot hatches but has never been a fan of this car. A relative lack of power and a kerb weight that doesn't quite reflect its carbon-this and plastic-that construction are semi-valid gripes, but I (and most of my *evo* colleagues) contend that the end result is about as sublime as a front-drive car can get. The way it excels on track yet copes so well with even the most lumpy roads reveals its true dynamic depth, and the way it wrings every last molecule of pace from a modestly powerful engine is magic. It has feel and poise wrapped in a package of such purity it deserves that inevitable comparison to a GT3 RS. The Mini GP runs it close, but the R26.R remains without peer. **X**

Specifications

MINI JCW GP

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbo
Power	215bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	206lb ft @ 2000-5100rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive, electronic differential lock
Front suspension	MacPherson struts, adjustable coilovers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension	Multi-link, adjustable coilovers, anti-roll bar
Brakes	330mm ventilated front discs, 280mm solid rear discs, ABS, EBD
Wheels	7.5 x 17in front and rear
Tyres	215/40 R17 front and rear
Weight (kerb)	1140kg
Power-to-weight	192bhp/ton
0-62mph	6.3sec (claimed)
Top speed	150mph (claimed)
Basic new price	£28,790
Value today	n/a
Rating	★★★★★

RENAULTSPORT MÉGANE R26.R

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
Power	227bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque	229lb ft @ 3000rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
Front suspension	MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension	Torsion beam, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes	Ventilated discs, 312mm front, 300mm rear, ABS, EBD
Wheels	8 x 18in front and rear
Tyres	235/40 R18 front and rear
Weight (kerb)	1220kg
Power-to-weight	189bhp/ton
0-62mph	6.0sec (claimed)
Top speed	147mph (claimed)
Basic new price	£23,815 (2008)
Value today	£16-17,000
Rating	★★★★★

AUDI A1 QUATTRO

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo
Power	253bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	258lb ft @ 2500-4500rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, four-wheel drive, ESP, EDL
Front suspension	MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension	Four-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes	Ventilated discs, 312mm front, 272mm rear, ABS, EBD
Wheels	8 x 18in front and rear
Tyres	225/35 R18 front and rear
Weight (kerb)	1420kg
Power-to-weight	181bhp/ton
0-62mph	5.7sec (claimed)
Top speed	152mph (claimed)
Basic new price	£41,020
Value today	n/a
Rating	★★★★★

FORD FOCUS RS500

Engine	In-line 5-cyl, 2521cc, turbo
Power	345bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	339lb ft @ 2500-4500rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
Front suspension	MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension	Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes	336mm ventilated front discs, 302mm solid rear discs, ABS, EBD
Wheels	8.5 x 19in front and rear
Tyres	235/35 R19 front and rear
Weight (kerb)	1467kg
Power-to-weight	239bhp/ton
0-62mph	5.6sec (claimed)
Top speed	165mph (claimed)
Basic new price	£35,750 (2010)
Value today	£30-35,000
Rating	★★★★★



A dark Mini car is shown from a low angle, driving up a grassy hill. The scene is set at sunset or sunrise, with a bright, golden light source behind the car, creating a strong silhouette and lens flare. A large, leafless tree stands in the background to the right. The overall mood is dramatic and emphasizes the car's performance in a natural setting.

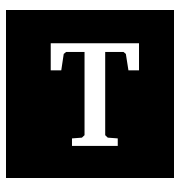
**‘A BRAZEN COMMITMENT TO A TOTALLY
UNCOMPROMISING STYLE OF PERFORMANCE
IS THE CORE OF THE MINI’S APPEAL’**



ALL GROWN UP

by MIKE DUFF | PHOTOGRAPHY by MATT HOWELL

Prefer your fast hatchbacks a little bit more mature? We pitch BMW's M135i against Scirocco R, Mégane 265 and a 292bhp Focus ST to find out which is the best premium hatch



THE ONLY REALLY predictable outcome when you try to look into the future of cars is that you'll make yourself look an idiot.

You might fluke it, of course: singing the praises of what turns out to be a mega new car before you've driven it, or spotting 2019's F1 champ at your local kart track. But you're more likely to produce the sort of howler that hindsight brings back to hang around your neck. Like predicting that the Alfa Romeo 156 GTA would be the stand-out performance saloon of a year (2001) that would also bring the E46 BMW M3. Yes, I did that. I really did.

So it's at risk of producing some derisive laughter if you're re-reading this copy of *evo* in years hence that I'm going to attempt some more crystal ball-gazing. I predict that, in a few years' time, we'll look back on the BMW M135i as one of those game-changing cars.

Not only is it one of the better products to emerge from M division in recent years, and a finalist in last year's eCoty over the BMW M6 on the back of that, but it's made the corporate lives of any company trying to sell a senior hot hatch nigh on impossible.

However you cut it, the M135i offers a huge amount of bang per buck. BMW launched it under the £30k barrier. And although the company has since, unsportingly, stuck another £560 on the price, that still means a three-door manual like the one you see here costs £30,555 before haggling. This for a car with a turbocharged six-cylinder engine, 316bhp, a 5.1sec 0-62mph time and the promise bestowed by that discreet 'M' badge. What's not to love?

Put it another way: how hard has it become for even the most silver-tongued VW sales operative to get anyone to sign up for a Scirocco R? The top-spec version of Volkswagen's coupe-hatch has always sold slowly in the UK, but the M135i makes it look silly. With a four-cylinder turbo four, front-wheel drive,

'IT'S SERIOUSLY QUICKER THAN THE STANDARD ST, THE TRACTION CONTROL LIGHT FLASHING IN THIRD'

261bhp and a 6.0sec 0-62mph time, it loses on every Top Trumps category. Yet it costs £31,135 – or £32,535 with DSG, as on our test car.

Not that every argument can be reduced to money, of course. Which is why the M135i must also meet and beat our resident hatchback champion – the Renaultsport Mégane. A bit of spec-shuffling last year led to the 'standard' RS being promoted to the spec of the former Trophy model, meaning 261bhp from the familiar 2-litre turbo four. And, if you're prepared to forego the toys and sample it in basic 'Cup' form, it's yours for £25,245. Bargain.

That leaves the wildcard: the Focus ST. Or, more precisely, an ST with a difference, and not just that of a blue-and-white paint job that makes it look like a 1980s British Gas van. Ford has chosen to pitch the ST at the cheaper end of the segment, meaning it's below these rivals on both price and power. And with Ford yet to decide whether or not to do an RS version, we've opted for a rival from left-field – this 'Stage One' tuned version from renowned Ford-fettlers Superchips. A sports exhaust and a mild remap boost it from the standard car's 247bhp to 292; the rest of the car is unchanged. The mods cost £1414, and even added to a new ST this is still the cheapest car here, at £23,409 all in.



FOR THIS STORY, WE'VE PICKED A very appropriate playground – the quiet corner of the map where Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire collide. A perfect mix of fast and sweeping with tight and cresty makes this one of the best places I've found to put a wannabe hot hatch through its paces. And, with Henry Catchpole on hand to lend his critical opinion, we know the test will be suitably testing.

I arrive in the Scirocco, unshaken but also unstirred. It's a couple of years since I last drove an R, and I'd almost forgotten how effortlessly it manages the business of going quickly. It's supple and refined on the motorway, the ultra-quick changes of the DSG 'box and the turbocharged engine's linear pace helping to forge a path. But it's never a car that shouts about its supposed status as VW's performance hero. From the outside, only unique alloys and a deeper front grille – which Henry likens to Mark Webber's jawline – distinguish it from the standard TSI. And from the driver's seat, the R-ification is similarly restrained – blue instrument needles in place of the red ones of lesser versions is pretty much the limit.

Yet you can't help but be impressed by the way the VW keeps its composure when asked to deliver pace. Even with Henry nibbling at its back bumper in the Mégane, the VW is making unruffled progress in a way that makes me wonder if these serrated local roads have been resurfaced since I was last here; with the dampers in their firmest 'Sport' setting there is no floating and no crashing.

But this is not a car that draws you in to the business of driving it quickly. The steering is low-g geared, the assistance is light and messages from the front are muted. Grip levels are huge: faster corners are just dispatched, and even in slower ones the chassis finds impressive grip considering its lack of a limited-slip differential. VW's 'XDS' traction control system redistributes torque laterally as the front end runs out of grip, and it actually kills understeer pretty well. But as with the rest of the car, the end result is a

digitally synthesised driving experience. You find yourself almost longing for some good old-fashioned torque steer.

It's time to stretch legs and swap cars, and Henry is already raving about the Mégane. Again. 'Getting on the throttle mid-corner and feeling the diff pull you round is like witchcraft,' he says. 'It's utterly addictive.'

Perhaps so, but I'm saving the Mégane until later. Instead I opt to swap into the Focus that **evo's** newest signing, designer Will Beaumont, has been driving. 'It's, um, interesting,' reckons Will, from behind an uncharacteristically pallid complexion. And within a couple of hundred yards I've found out why.

I've already driven the ST from Superchips'





Above, from left: Mégane has great seats, but cabin can seem cheerless; Scirocco feels more upmarket inside; interior of Superchips Focus is unchanged from standard





The first 'M' hatchback



I'M NOT SURE what they were drinking at BMW when the Z3 M Coupe was signed-off, but they've not touched a drop since. More's the pity, for it revealed a maverick spirit that should be given freedom more often.

The styling retains much of its shock value to this day, and a good example – preferably one with the later 325bhp 'S54' motor – is still a vivid machine to drive. That 3.2-litre six revs to the stars and is blessed with exceptional throttle response and a searing soundtrack to match.

Dynamically it takes a

while to dial into, simply because you sit way back, almost over the rear axle. Consequently you need to be on your game to drive a Z3 M Coupe to its limits, especially in the wet. But it was always a special car, however fast you drove.

Today average examples represent terrific value, while the best command increasingly serious money. The fact we'll never see its like again will doubtless be a relief to those who never got on with its looks, but I have nothing but fond memories of M division's moment of madness.

Richard Meaden

HQ to the office, and on wide A-roads it felt amusingly rapid, with a noticeable increase in performance over that of the standard car, but keeping the Ford's fundamental character intact. But on this rougher tarmac – which the Scirocco's magic dampers had smoothed out, rather than Oxfordshire's roads department – keeping the ST on track is a constant battle.

On the plus side, it's seriously quicker than the standard ST, with enough boost to keep the traction control light flashing in third and sometimes even fourth gear on the bumpy tarmac. If we had a straight line to head down it would be epic – but linear vectors are in fairly short supply on the B4507, and on the bobbling surface the ST's front end is scrapping with every bump and battling every contour, the steering tugging this way and that as the power searches for grip. On the narrow roads that skirt the famous White Horse, where safe progress requires inch-perfect accuracy, it feels wide and unwieldy at speed. It's certainly exciting – like walking an energetic dog at the top of a cliff.

When we stop so that snapper Howell can set up the next shot, we discover another possible reason for the Focus's never-ending battle for traction: some fairly comical rubber on those equally comical blue alloys. Autogrip P308s,

apparently. The suspicion is that it may be less of a handful on its standard Goodyear Eagles.

Henry is equally unmoved by the Scirocco: 'It's just a bit dull, isn't it? All the ingredients are there and they all work well together, but it doesn't make me want to drive it.'

With that, he gets into the M135i, and I climb into the Mégane, bringing us to the crux of the test, and once on the move, it's quickly evident that we are definitely in Mégane country. They should put up a sign. Within a couple of miles it's clear that you'd be hard-pressed to find any car, regardless of budget, that feels more at home on these roads. Or one capable of carrying such pace over them.

At first, the Mégane feels over-firm. Renaultsport likes firm suspension settings and the 265 is no exception, engaging rougher surfaces in close-quarters combat as the Cup springs and shocks work together to defuse the bumps in real time. Unlike the Scirocco, there's no give to it and no attempt to roll with the road's punches. But although the overall effect is a vigorous spinal massage, the steering remains uncorrupted and traction uninterrupted.

And that makes the 265 a spectacularly easy car to place on the road; pick a line and the Mégane does its best to stick to it. Even better,



'THE BMW'S ENGINE IS THE STAR POWERPLANT HERE – SMOOTH, SNARLY, LAG-FREE AND HAPPY TO REV'

when grip starts to fade – a message relayed unambiguously through the fat rim of the steering wheel – there's that diff to help you out, pulling the front end deeper into the corner when most cars would be giving up. With the ESP deactivated you can bring the back end into play, too, easing the throttle, or overlapping braking with turn-in, to feel the mass shifting and the car tightening its line.

OK, so it's not quite perfect. The Renault's engine is effective but lacks character beyond its induction roar under full throttle. The light gearchange makes it easy to swap between ratios quickly enough to keep everything boiling, but I've always felt it lacks a bit of weight. Oh, and for some reason Renault persists in having an odd 'kick down' click at the bottom of the throttle travel (it allows you to override the driver-selectable speed limiter, apparently). But these are niggles.

Henry is almost as impressed by the BMW. 'It's challenging the Mégane for top honours,' he suggests. 'The steering doesn't quite tell you as much so you have to take a leap of faith where the Renault tells you everything. And it would benefit from a proper LSD.'

It does have two more cylinders than the other challengers, though. It's also the most powerful



Clockwise, from above: Mégane and Scirocco have 261bhp; Superchips ST gets 292bhp; M135i's six-cylinder has 316bhp



car here, and it drives the opposite set of wheels to the other three. Yet, for all the difference in approach, it's impressive how close the Mégane and the M135i end up in terms of the speed they can carry across difficult country.

The BMW's engine is the star powerplant here, no question. It's smooth, snarly, lag-free and happy to rev. It's as responsive at 1500rpm as it is when the tacho needle homes in on the 7000rpm red line. This is the first time I've sampled the manual, and I instantly prefer it to the frenetic eight-speed auto. The six-speed

behind the electric assistance – and an ability to play the front and back ends off against each other. Like lesser 1-series, the M135i doesn't feel rear-driven unless you want it to – the seemingly foolproof stability control means you can hoon it like a front-drive hatch without worrying about the back making an unwanted bid for freedom. And in Sport Plus the system allows enough slip to make things interesting, without being alarming.

Yet despite its extra power and on-paper acceleration advantage, the Beemer can't quite

LIGHT IS FADING AND BRAKES ARE ticking as we regroup for tea and medals. There's no dispute that the Ford finishes last – the Superchips conversion is a worthwhile upgrade, but it will take more than just power to get the Focus on a par with these rivals. 'I hope that's not as close as we get to an RS version,' says Henry. Quite.

Nor is anyone voting for the Scirocco. There's no doubt that it's a great way to cover ground without breaking sweat, but it's not a car to fill you with the thrill of driving.

Separating the Mégane and the M135i is where it gets harder – borderline impossible, in fact. For all the overlap, these are cars from different galaxies; your preference really is going to depend on what you value the higher.

'If you're looking for the most sophisticated, best quality hatch then the BMW wins hands down,' is Henry's considered verdict. 'The Mégane is rawer and would be more tiring to live with – but it's the best drivers' car here.'

He's right. Both of these cars are brilliant at what they do. The Mégane is indeed still the class of the field, and it's six grand cheaper. But the BMW remains a real performance bargain and is barely less talented than the 1M Coupe that's still five grand more expensive used. Any other manufacturer putting a similar rival into the market – Mercedes with its forthcoming A45 AMG, for example – is going to have to produce something exceptional. ❏

'THE MÉGANE IS STILL THE CLASS OF THE FIELD, BUT THE BMW IS A REAL PERFORMANCE BARGAIN'

leaves you feeling more in control and gives the big engine a chance to fill its lungs.

The chassis is great, too. The Adaptive M Sport suspension, with its range of associated settings, is a £515 option, but unlike in some of the 135's fully fledged M-car sisters, the tech doesn't take over the driving experience; you never feel like you're out of the loop in the M135i in the way you sometimes do in an M5 or M6. The dampers struggle with today's road surfaces in Comfort mode, but selecting Sport or Sport Plus imposes discipline.

The steering isn't as direct or responsive as the Mégane's, but there's genuine feedback

match the Mégane's pace over today's roads. In part that's because of the steering, but it's also due to that lack of a proper limited-slip diff. When it does get to the edge of adhesion, the electronics struggle to replicate the locking effect that gives the Mégane its ultimate edge; the Beemer will go sideways if you want, but it won't find more grip doing so.

Following the Renault gives a fascinating chance to see it flex its muscles. On straights the BMW has the edge under power, and the two are perfectly matched on braking. But in a fast right-left-right sequence, the 265 finds another couple of yards at every apex.

Specifications

	BMW M135i	RENAULTSPORT MÉGANE 265 CUP	VOLKSWAGEN SCIROCCO R	SUPERCHIPS FOCUS ST
Engine	In-line 6-cyl, 2979cc, turbo	In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo	In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo	In-line 4-cyl, 1999cc, turbo
Power	316bhp @ 5800rpm	261bhp @ 5500rpm	261bhp @ 6000rpm	292bhp @ 5800rpm
Torque	332lb ft @ 1300rpm	265lb ft @ 3000-5000rpm	258lb ft @ 2500-5000rpm	332lb ft @ 2100-4400rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, ESP	Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive, limited-slip diff, ESP	Six-speed DSG automatic (option), front-wheel drive, ESP, XDS	Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive, ESP, TVC
Front suspension	MacPherson struts, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension	Multi-link, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar	Torsion beam, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar	Multi-link, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar	Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes	Ventilated discs, 340mm front, 345mm rear, ABS, EBD	340mm ventilated front discs, 290mm solid rear discs, ABS, EBD	345mm ventilated front discs, 310mm solid rear discs, ABS, EBD	Ventilated discs, 320mm front, 272mm rear, ABS, EBD
Wheels	7.5 x 18in front, 8 x 18in rear	8 x 18in front and rear	8 x 18in front and rear	8 x 18in front and rear
Tyres	225/40 R18 front, 245/35 R18 rear	225/40 R18 front and rear	235/40 R18 front and rear	235/40 ZR18 front and rear
Weight (kerb)	1425kg	1387kg	1352kg	1362kg
Power-to-weight	225bhp/ton	191bhp/ton	196bhp/ton	218bhp/ton
0-62mph	5.1sec (claimed)	6.0sec (claimed)	5.8sec (claimed, with DSG)	5.4sec (estimated)
Top speed	155mph (limited)	158mph (claimed)	155mph (claimed)	160mph (estimated)
Basic price	£30,555	£25,245	£32,535	£23,409
Rating	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆



METRO SEXUAL

by HENRY CATCHPOLE | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

A much-derided British Leyland hatchback was used as the basis for one of the most extreme hot hatches ever made. Nearly 30 years after its creation, does the Metro 6R4 still have the power to excite and amaze?



Metro 6R4

***'Just a handful of miles have passed
under this car's wheels since it emerged
from the Austin Rover Factory in 1986'***



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THE LITTLE BLACK

tumbler with the white numbers reads 002467. Frozen in time. Just a handful of miles have passed under this car's wheels since it emerged from the Austin

Rover factory back in 1986. It's never even had a cambelt change (which is a bit worrying as that's what scuppered so many of its ilk while flat-out in deep forests where you couldn't see the wood for the spectators). And yet, in a few seconds' time, the numbers are going to start rolling over once more. Because I'm going to realise a dream and drive a Metro 6R4.

And this is no ordinary 6R4 either. This is quite probably the most original one in the world. Just 200 of these 'road cars' were built to satisfy Group B homologation rules, along with another 20 rally cars in full International spec to take on the mad Lancias, Peugeots and Audis on the stages. But most of the 200 were also turned into rally or rallycross cars to tackle various amateur championships. There are stories from Austin Rover employees, which may or may not be apocryphal, that the full quota was never even built. When the FIA visited to inspect the batch of 200, cars were allegedly wheeled into one end of the building at Longbridge, inspected, then wheeled out the other end – at which point their hastily applied numbers would be changed and the cars wheeled round the outside of the building and put back in the queue.

According to a small plate behind the front offside turret, this is 6R4 number 179. It belongs to Malcolm Leggate, who is a farmer in Lincolnshire, a former tin-top racer and also father of former BTCC racer Fiona Leggate. He has owned the car since 2000, when he bought it for £23,500 (some £26,500 less than they were advertised at when new, although the price then was definitely negotiable), and he's done just 500 miles in it since. It hasn't been driven for seven months prior to our arrival. Normally I'd think this lack of use was sacrilegious, but this car is so low-mileage and such a piece of history that it's somehow almost acceptable.

When we turned up at the farm this morning, we had a cup of coffee with Malcolm while he showed us various bits of paperwork for the car (he even changed its registration from A6 RAU – which read A 6R4 U – back to the original one you see here) before he took us a few miles to where he keeps it. Even hidden under its cloth cover it looked incredible, with the material propped over the rear wing like a tent and creating the most bizarre silhouette. Taking the material off was more tantalising than any unveil at a motor show, first revealing the mustard yellow front valance, then the shiny bare metal snow shovel of a front wing, and so on until the whole crazy caricature was standing in front of us.

It looks as wide as it is long as it is tall – as though it was hewn from a cube. Photographer Dean Smith says he thinks it's ugly. I disagree. Film-maker Sam



Above, from top: Leggate's 6R4 is barely used; exposed fuses add to rally feel; keys are standard Austin Rover items, as are the rear lights



'The three of us agree that it is the most

Riley says it resembles a Transformer (robot in disguise). The three of us agree that it is the most purposeful car any of us has ever seen.

We wheel it out into the sunlight, being careful to push only on the metal and not on any of the glassfibre bodywork. It feels surprisingly heavy for a car that only weighs around 1000kg, but that's mostly because it wears such wide rubber. Then Malcolm disappears to a meeting and we're left alone to photograph the details, with strict instructions not to start it. Unclipping the bonnet, I find a glorious lack of anything in the front of the car other than a couple of driveshafts and a large diff. The swappable plates on the top of the suspension struts read 'Middle Castor', highlighting that these cars really were sold as 'ready to rally'.

Moving round the car I notice the sharp fins on the outside of the front arches (you don't see them in profile) and can just about make out

the Metro door hiding behind all the additional scoops and boxes. It's more or less the only large piece of a standard Metro that was retained. At the back you can't help but wonder at the height of that wing, but lower down it looks almost as though there is a valance missing just below the rear number plate where the subframe is exposed, like the car's wandered out with its skirt tucked into its knickers.

Lift up the rear hatch on its struts and you're presented with the 3-litre V6, which is basically a naturally aspirated XJ220 engine. What you actually see is the front of the engine, because the gearbox end is in the middle of the car with a prop running forward to the viscous centre diff (produced by Ferguson Fabrications, the company that made the only four-wheel-drive F1 car). The engine is set slightly to the left, with a jackshaft running down the right-hand side of the sump to the rear diff, so that the two

rear driveshafts are of equal length.

In testing, Austin Rover used a Rover V8 with two cylinders hacked off it, but the final double overhead cam-per-bank V6 was designed by David Wood (formerly of Cosworth) and was claimed to be the first engine designed specifically for a rally car. At the time it was the naturally aspirated loner in a field of forced-induction motors, but the thinking had been that an NA engine would give a broader, more useable spread of torque and also wouldn't suffer from the overheating problems that were the bane of early turbo motors.

Sadly, all that thinking was done in 1981, when British Leyland Motorsport first started working with Patrick Head at Williams GP Engineering. By 1985, when a 6R4 first hit the international stages, the rival turbo cars' cooling and lag problems had been largely solved and the power they were producing



purposeful car any of us has ever seen'

far outstripped any flexibility advantages the Metro had. But that's another story.

Many 6R4 engines have been tweaked, but this one is un-molested, right down to its standard air filter. Also evident in the back of the car is the roll-cage, which extends discreetly forward along the sides of the aluminium roof and down the A-pillars. Another slow walk around reveals that although the car is wonderfully crazy, it isn't perfect. I hesitate to conjoin the words 'slap' and 'dash' but one of the front lights is very wonky, and although there's reportedly an impressive 137ft of welding (compared to four in the standard Metro), it's not the neatest I've ever seen – it's as if they were in a rush to get it finished...

AFTER A COUPLE OF HOURS, MALCOLM returns, and once Dean's got his last couple of static photos, we're ready to go out on the road.

Amazingly, the Metro fires first time... then dies... then fires again. After a minute of gently blipping the throttle it can be left warming up on its own, with the revs flaring and dying to an inconsistent beat. Several minutes later, a steady idle indicates that all the temperatures are up and things are running smoothly inside the V64V engine (the name stands for V6 with four valves per cylinder).

Malcolm drives first for a few of the photos and then it's my turn. It's been mercifully dry all day (Malcolm wasn't keen to take the car out in the wet) but there's a wickedly cold wind gusting across the vast open fields of Lincolnshire, and it threatens to snatch the door from my grasp as I open it and take a big stride across the wide side skirt. I'm in. It's a tight fit and I appear to be considerably angled towards the centre of the car, while the incongruous grey leather steering wheel feels like it's sitting

in my lap, but to my great relief I know I'll be able to drive it.

The seat is squashily padded and rather comfy, although it is a typical old bucket (that sounds derogatory but isn't meant to be) in that it securely grips your hips but not much else. As I look around there are bizarre juxtapositions such as the standard little Metro gearknob with a new dogleg five-speed shift pattern glued onto the top. There's also a phalanx of fuses next to a cigarette lighter and the dials look terribly suburban... except for the fact that the rev counter goes all the way round to 10,000.

As you glance out of the windscreen while you're getting comfy, all you notice are the two bulging bumps on the bonnet. Look in the door mirrors and your eyes are instantly drawn to the enormous side scoops. You feel like you're sitting in one big cartoon. Insert and twist the electrical cut-out, turn the ordinary

Metro 6R4

Rover key a couple of clicks, pump the throttle once, then turn the key all the way to spin the engine behind you into raucous life. With an exploratory prod of the clutch pedal you discover that it's got a short travel and requires quite a bit of leg muscle. Left and back for first, revs, clutch slowly up to its surprisingly high biting point and we're away. I'm driving a 6R4.

Things like the Mégane R26.R and the Mini GP are quite extreme as road cars go. Most people would get in them and comment on the firm ride and, certainly in the Renault, a lack of creature comforts. But they are soft,

'This is a car designed purely with competition in mind and sanitised it is not. Thirty seconds in and I love it already'

mollycoddling, barely tepid hatches compared to the 6R4. Comparing them is like that awkward moment where you spend five minutes regaling someone at a party with a story about the epic two-mile run that you did the previous day (1.7 miles, actually, but you think your GPS is out), before asking if they exercise much and discovering that they've just completed their 29th Ironman triathlon (but struggled on the swim so didn't quite dip under nine hours). In the mental Metro it's so loud that once you're moving, conversation is not just difficult, but impossible. Five mpg (yes, five) is normal. Use it in the summer months and within ten minutes you'll be drenched in sweat due to the heat soak from the engine. This is a car designed purely with competition in mind and sanitised it is not. Thirty seconds in and I love it already.

While the turbo cars might have had a performance advantage, the Metro captured

people's hearts with the noise of its V6. Watch period footage and, particularly while the cars are still out of sight, you'll notice that the others are noisy and have their distinctive chuffings and whistles, but only the Metro buzzes the stirrup bone in a truly skin-tingling fashion. Not that the soaring musicality of the engine is really in evidence as we pull up at a junction. At low revs, the noise inside the car is a violent cacophony of grumbling diffs and an almost gutturally agricultural engine. Like so many competition cars, the way the noise swells with the lightest brush of the little throttle pedal is conducive to stalling, because it sounds like you're adding thousands of revs when it's barely even hundreds. Thankfully I've been caught out in the past and learnt my lesson, so manage to shudder away without silence descending.

I'd love to tell you at how many revs the sound changes from thrashing to soaring. I'd



guess at about 4k, but I'm concentrating too hard on not driving into one of the massive drainage ditches (that are doing a remarkably good impression of those in Kielder) to notice. Suffice to say that when the V64V gets into its stride, the distinctive bark is absolutely glorious and the thin piece of Perspex between our backs and the engine is about as much use as a chocolate exhaust. It's a potentially magnificent way to go deaf.

In this standard trim the engine has 250bhp, but with hotter cams and a six-throttle-butterfly intake manifold, the works cars revved past 10,000rpm and put out over 400bhp. Interestingly, though, with 225lb ft the Clubman cars had just 27lb ft less torque than the full-bore International cars. Certainly OJO is still mighty quick with its short rally gearing punching you forwards eagerly, but you can tell that the engine has got even more to give, with an almost artificial ceiling to the revs just when you think they might break free again and step up another level.

LIKE SO MUCH OF THE MINOR ROAD network round here, the section of tarmac that we're on is single-track, but apart from a few telegraph poles there's nothing rising higher than a badger's back, so you can see for miles. Despite the low mileage and lack of use, Malcolm isn't precious about letting the 6R4 be driven properly, encouraging me with unambiguous hand signals to use all the revs in each gear. Given the battle to manhandle it into reverse, the shift between the first three gears is surprisingly good, with quite a short throw to the spindly lever and a nicely positive engagement, although fourth proves rather trickier for some reason.

As I get into a bit of a rhythm and start carrying more speed into a couple of corners, so the brakes become more crucial, and the first time I go for them in earnest is a worrying moment. Although they're fundamentally strong, they're also stone cold, unassisted and in need of a disconcertingly sustained heave from my right leg to slow our headlong approach to the '90 left, don't cut'. For all its big wings and box arches, the Metro remains a very small car (as the head of Austin Rover's motorsport division John Davenport said, 'a small car makes a small track look bigger'). You can feel the short, foursquare footprint as you dart into corners, all the wheels seeming to move as one and at once; it is wonderfully reactive but you can instantly understand how this could also translate into it spinning like a top.

The torque split is 35/65 front/rear, and although I'm not about to try anything heroically stupid, the short wheelbase again makes it very obvious and the 6R4 drives hard out of bends with a slight squat and with the



Above: with the 3-litre V6 in the back, the front of the 6R4 houses little more than driveshafts and the front diff



Clockwise, from above left: optional 17in rims; extinguisher just in case; tyre pressures on Post-it; tiny throttle pedal



'I raced one' – Tiff Needell

I LOVE YOUTUBE. Instantly I'm back in 1988, reliving my brief Rallycross career in one of Will Gollop's Metro 6R4s, Murray Walker urging me on at every turn: 'Faan-tastic!'

The 6R4 was one of the lightest and nimblest cars in the field but there was one drawback – it wasn't turbocharged. While this gave it the most beautiful throttle response, it left it struggling in a straight line, especially on the mad dash to the first corner of the short, intense races. Gollop's V6 would rev to 10,000rpm, but the problem was knowing whether it related to wheelspin or real speed, and changing up too soon got you engulfed by the pack of turbo cars.

The Brands layout was great fun and, having survived the nervous Knife Edge, it was the flick out of Hoppy's Drop back onto the tarmac track that created the longest, curving, opposite-lock powerslides ever. Hard on the brakes, even on the loose, you couldn't believe the stopping power. That car had everything – except a turbo. Which is why Will added one for the next season.





'I'm elated to have driven a 6R4, to have sat in the centre of all that noise and crazy bodywork as it hurtled down the road'



rear tyres carrying the majority of the load. Equally you can feel the drive to the front wheels corrupting the steering and the whole car tends to tug and wander over cambers, so you can never give it anything less than your full attention.

Coincidentally, it is almost exactly 30 years since the first prototype 6R4 was driven by the legendary Tony Pond (who would later take a factory 6R4 to third place on the 1985 RAC Rally) on an airfield in Oxfordshire. He was quoted in the final sales brochure as saying: 'The car is very easy to drive – and very fast at only eight-tenths. You would not need to be a top class driver to win with it.' I can only dream of such luxuriantly moustachioed talent as the incredible Pond, but even so I think there might have been just a suggestion of a scrap of marketing hyperbole hidden in the 'very easy to drive' bit.

I can barely imagine the effort it must have taken to drive one over the many days and many

Left: rights to the the V64V engine (which made over 400bhp in rally spec) were sold to Tom Walkinshaw, who later turbocharged it for the Jaguar XJ220

miles of a world championship tarmac rally like Corsica. If I ever get to drive a 6R4 again I'd love to try one on gravel, as I can imagine the controls would be lighter and the diffs would work in a more obvious way. Although it still wouldn't be easy, I think it might feel more at home (in my mind it will be sideways and spitting stones into the undergrowth).

For now, though, I'm just elated to have driven a 6R4 at all. To have sat in the centre of all that noise and crazy bodywork as it hurtled down the road. To have felt like I was stepping so perfectly back in time to 1986. To have watched the numbers on the tumbler notch up a few more miles. ✕



Specification

MG METRO 6R4 CLUBMAN

Engine V6, 2991cc

Power 250bhp @ 7000rpm

Torque 225lb ft @ 6500rpm

Transmission Five-speed manual, four-wheel drive, limited-slip diff

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, adjustable anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Struts, lower wishbones, coil springs, dampers, adjustable anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs, 304mm front and rear, hydraulic handbrake

Wheels (standard) 8 x 15in front and rear

Tyres 225/45 ZR15 front, 245/40 ZR15 rear

Weight (kerb) 1000kg

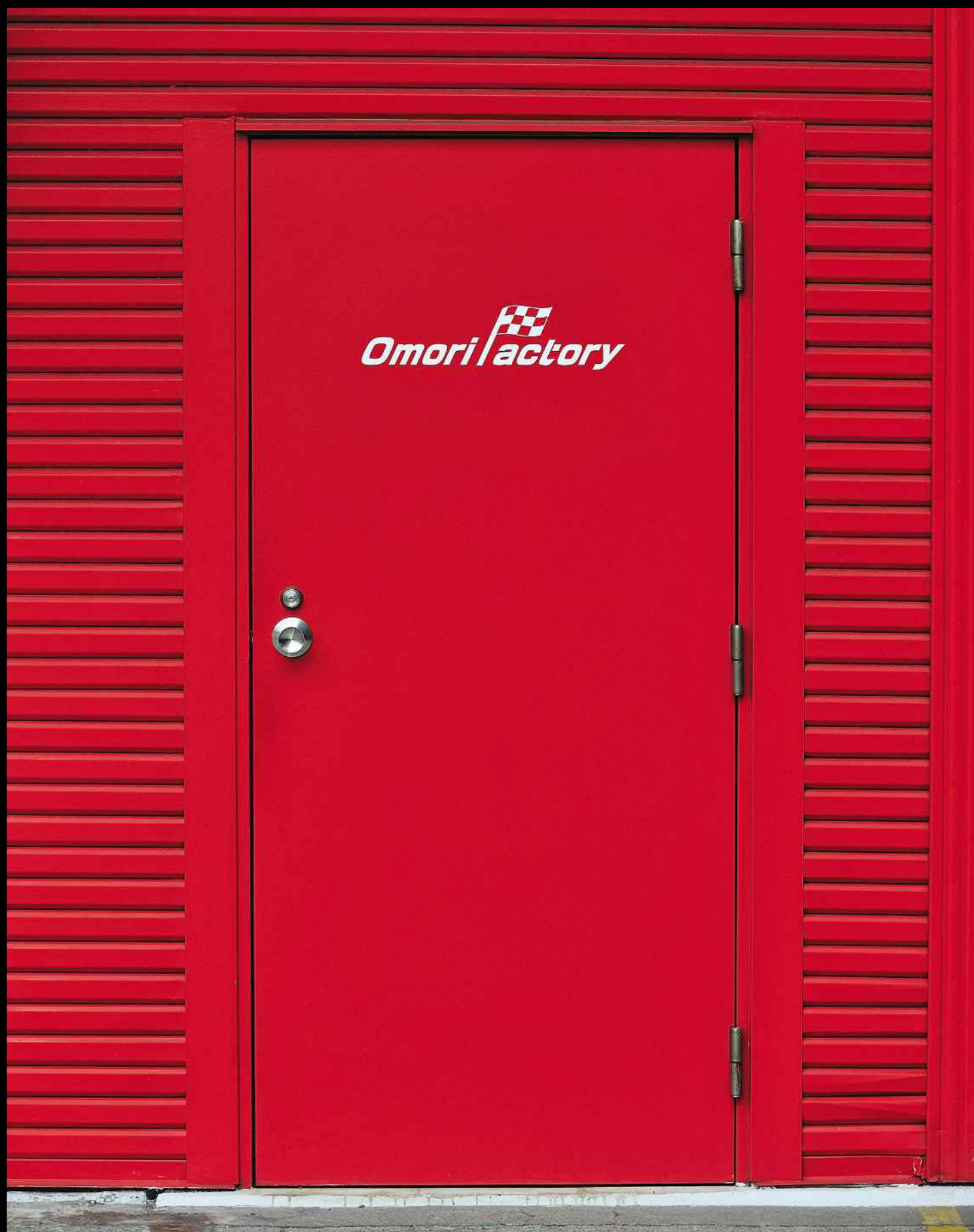
Power-to-weight 254bhp/ton

0-60mph 4.5sec (estimated)

Top speed 140mph (estimated)

Price new £50,000 (1985)

evo rating: ★★★★★



Behind this door lies the legendary Nismo factory...

...and four decades of Japanese automotive heritage. evo takes a look around Nissan's famous Omori Factory before it closes for good – and examines the role that the UK will be playing in future Nismo products

by RICHARD MEADEN and MIKE DUFF | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH



FIRST-TIME VISITORS GO TO THE PLATE

glass door on the main street, but true Nismoheads know that it's behind the mysterious red door down the side street where the good stuff happens. Wearing a white 'Omori Factory' logo, complete with a small waving chequered flag, crossing this threshold is akin to walking through the pearly gates if you're into your Skyline GT-Rs.

Omori Factory is the home of Nismo, Nissan's world-renowned motorsport division. It might not look it from the outside, but this non-descript office block in the Omori district of Tokyo is every bit as significant as, say, Porsche's Motorsport Department in Weissach. Or should I say *was* as significant, for by the time you read this story – indeed just a few days after we fly back to London – the hallowed Omori Factory will have closed its doors for the last time.

You might imagine there would be some kind of emotional ceremony to bring four decades of touring car, GT, rallying, rally raid and 24-hour endurance racing history to a close. Instead the factory's contents are being quietly packed up and taken away, to be relocated to Nismo's new state-of-the-art headquarters on an industrial estate in Yokohama. It feels like a rather melancholy moment to visit, but we're not complaining, for invites to take a glimpse inside this mysterious, legendary place are rare indeed.

So what is Omori Factory, and why is it so sacred? As you'd expect, there are many reasons, but the most culturally significant is its place in Skyline GT-R folklore. Not just its role in developing the GT and touring cars, but as the birthplace of the greatest road-going GT-Rs of all, like the ultra-rare R33 400R and near-mythical R34 Z-tune.



Proof of this enduring link with old-school Skylines comes in the form of the unmistakable pulse of an idling RB26-powered model, big-bore exhausts sending tremors and low-frequency vibrations through the ground floor. Throughout the day numerous GT-Rs arrive for tuning work, servicing, or just a photograph outside the bright red workshop doors. For your average GT-R owner, the drive-in workshop is the heart of Omori Factory, for it's here that Nismo will bestow greatness on your car, be it an R32, R33 or R34 GT-R, the current R35 GT-R or even a 370Z.

It's a mark of how seriously Japanese owners take their ageing Skyline GT-Rs that they still form the backbone of Omori's tuning business, a decade or more since the RB26 straight-six made way for the new VQ twin-turbo V6. Speak



'YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE THE PASSION, EXPERTISE AND OBSESSIVE ATTENTION TO DETAIL



Top: the JR Motorsports GT-R that Michael Krumm took to the FIA GT world title in 2011; cars use a lift to make their way up and down the seven-storey building. **Above:** scale models built to run in the wind tunnel. **Above left:** Skyline turbos glow red hot during testing. **Left:** engine test bed computers ensure perfect performance

to any of the technicians and they all go misty-eyed over the RB26 engine, talking in reverential tones about the performance it could deliver, and its unique character. For them it will always have sacred status.

There's an endless array of RB26 build options, from basic refreshed engines to big-bore 2.8-litre motors built to endurance specification so that they can deliver more than 500bhp day in, day out, lap after lap. Even if you're not a GT-R geek, you have to admire the passion, expertise and obsessive attention to detail that exists within the people who work here and the cars they create.

Across the side street from the main building are some storage units, which are being emptied prior to the move to the new HQ. Inside is an absolute treasure trove of rare Nismo parts. There are spare wheels and tyres for an extraordinary range of machines, including – somewhat unexpectedly – the Primera GT that won the BTCC title in 1999. Doors from old Japanese Super GT cars, complete with brown scorchmarks from the side-exit exhausts, sit propped against the wall, while a stack of clear plastic boxes reveal dozens of neatly packed race suits from bygone seasons.

Back in the main building, once you head up from street level it's easy to see why Nismo is moving, for this is not an ideal home for any race team, let alone one with the size and importance of Nissan's motorsport department. Originally an office block, Omori Factory is spread over seven storeys,



THAT EXISTS WITHIN THE PEOPLE WHO WORK HERE AND THE CARS THAT THEY CREATE'



fed by a central car-sized lift. It's not unusual to hear the doors ping open and an R35 GT-R Super GT car to be pushed out like it's the most natural thing in the world. This curious place has been the heart of Nissan's racing activity since before Nismo was formed, with many of the most experienced technicians still here after more than 30 years' service. It's about as far removed from Ron Dennis's Tracy Island-style McLaren Technology Centre as you can possibly imagine, and all the cooler for it.

As we progress floor by floor, we encounter more and more bizarre, breathtaking sights. On one level we walk round a corner to find Nissan's Daytona-winning Group C/

Top: it's not just GT-Rs... a 370Z sits amongst the customer cars being lovingly worked upon in the Omori workshop.

Above, from left: various engines in-build; springs ready for fitting; Nismo heirlooms include overalls from four-time Formula Nippon champion Satoshi Motoyama

IMSA car in pieces, its iconic blue, white and red bodywork still bearing the scars, cracks and tyre swirls from its 24-hour battle. Behind it sits a GT3-spec R35 GT-R test and development car, engine removed and a new aero kit plain for all to see.

In the engine room we find literally dozens of RB26 powerplants in various states of completion, parts laid out in meticulous rows on metal benches. Alongside them are a couple of early 2-litre straight-six motors from the holy Hakosuka ("boxy Skyline") cars of the late 1960s and 70s, their triple carburettor assemblies providing an old-school contrast to the LMP2 V8s that also occupy shelf space.



Above: yellow car is a Nismo 400R, a 400bhp version of the R33 Skyline, developed at Omori Factory. **Right:** 500bhp R34 Z-tune is super-rare (only 19 were built) and another Omori production. **Below:** building is full of scraps of history and personal effects

'THE FUTURE BECKONS, BUT NISSAN HAS BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO ERASE ALL TRACES OF THE PAST'

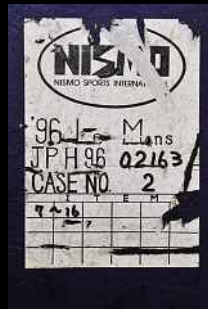
Restoration of Nissan's historic motorsport collection also takes place here – at the moment there's a beautiful mid-engined R380 sports car from the '60s (think Japanese Chevron B8) being painted in the spray booth. At every turn you trip over something amazing and unexpected. Outside the carbon composite workshop sits an exquisite wind tunnel model of the R35 GT-R Super GT racer. Five minutes later we're looking at one of the real things, a squad of technicians stripping and cleaning the brakes, while another team tends to a Nismo Leaf. Just for fun we take a ride in the car lift, emerging onto the roof to discover a car park, in one corner of which sits a standard R32 GT-R road car.

It's a strange, quirky place to run a brand like Nismo, but it's a great place too. When quizzed on their feelings about moving to a new 'home', the old-timers who have spent the entirety of their careers at Omori Factory are wistful, but also positive. They're almost a part of the fabric of this weird and wonderful building, yet they readily concede the working environment will be better and more productive at the new HQ. And for them, working better means creating faster cars.

It's hard to imagine the all-new 21st-century facility ever acquiring the same charm as the old one, but it's an essential step in the reinvention and revitalisation of Nismo. The future beckons, but Nissan has been careful not to erase all traces of the past. The name of this all-new Nismo headquarters? Omori Factory of course. **RM**

WHILE NISMO REMAINS ONE OF NISSAN'S PRIZED possessions in Japan, British engineers are set to play an increasing role in producing the sub-brand's road-going performance models for the European market.

That's down to the quiet but continued success of the Nissan Technical Centre Europe (NTCE), a sprawling complex in Cranfield, near Milton Keynes. It's probably the



most important bit of the British motor industry that you've never heard of, having led development of Nissan's European models since 1991 and now employing 640 people. When Nissan in Japan decided it would be necessary to get local input into the development of its Nismo models for Europe, Cranfield was the first place it turned to.

Cranfield has previous experience with performance Nissans, including some work on the European specification of the GT-R and, back in 2003, helping to optimise the Nismo handling pack that was offered on the 350Z. The idea of producing a Nismo version of the Juke (driven in this issue – see page 36) was first floated in Cranfield in February 2011, with development properly starting in December that year. Cranfield was in constant dialogue with Nismo's engineering team in Japan throughout, and it was the first time that engineers outside Nismo's core team had been allowed to work on one of its road cars.

Nismo is run as a separate business within Nissan, with its own management team. This enabled it to cut out some intermediate levels of bureaucracy and to deal directly with the specialised team of British-based engineers on the Juke, many of whom had previous experience working on other hot hatch projects. We're told that this is seen as being the model for future collaboration, with Nismo's senior executives keeping a very close eye on anything that wears the company's branding.

This also creates an interesting situation for the wider Nissan-Renault empire, as it now has two separate teams working on the development of performance derivatives in Europe – NTCE in the UK and Renaultsport in France. That's a dynamic that's likely to get increasingly intense as both organisations work on cars built on shared architectures. The recent Juke RC prototype has already demonstrated a keen appetite for an even hotter Nismo Juke, which could result in the start of an arms race. Let's hope so. **MD**

Swiss movement, English heart



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CAYMAN BITES BACK

by RICHARD MEADEN

PHOTOGRAPHY by
DEAN SMITH

The Porsche Cayman impressed dynamically in the past, but struggled to carve its own niche. Armed with the new Cayman S in Portugal, we discover that could all be about to change...

A

AS YOU KNOW, IT'S customary with first-drive tests like this to save the verdict until the end, but frankly I can't wait that long so here it is. The new Cayman S is sensational. And I mean sensational.

After two days driving brilliant Portuguese hill roads and lapping the epic Portimão race circuit, I'm totally smitten. To be honest, this instant infatuation has taken me rather by surprise. Not because I expected the Cayman to be anything less than a fine car, but because the previous-generation model was a lesson in how terrific ability doesn't always generate a

commensurate level of desirability. This time it's love at first drive.

If that sounds harsh on the old car it's not meant to, but there's no doubt that it never quite managed to win the hearts and minds of Porsche buyers in the same way the Boxster and, dare I mention it, the 911. That never made it a bad car – quite the opposite, in fact – but still the Cayman has suffered from something of an identity crisis, not helped by the inevitable 'poor man's 911' and 'girl's car' labels glibly applied by anyone who hadn't driven one.

This, then, is the Cayman's moment, or at least that's how it feels when I first clap eyes on one in the Portuguese sunshine. We've all seen the pre-launch press images, but until you

stand next to one and appreciate the stance, proportion, detailing and all-round rightness of the design, it's hard to credit just how desirable it really is. Where the first two generations could look great from some angles and awkward from others, this car looks beautiful from every direction. It has greater muscle tone and physicality, yet remains appealingly curvy. It's subtle, but far from anonymous. Sitting on the optional 20in Sport Techno wheels fitted to our test car, it looks fabulous.

It's just as special inside, with high-quality switchgear and a design that looks and feels premium without resorting to gimmicks or try-hard styling. As ever, you can quickly find a perfect driving position and the view both

Porsche Cayman S





‘When fully committed to a fast corner, outright grip is huge’

ahead and behind is wonderful, thanks to the graceful rise of the front wheelarches through the windscreen and the rounded haunches reflected in the door mirrors. There are some nice details too, such as the brushed aluminium luggage divider, which looks like a strut brace and contains engine oil and coolant fillers at either end. The adaptive rear wing lifts higher and deploys at a steeper angle than that of the Boxster, giving it an effective area that’s 40 per cent larger. Every area of this car has been scrutinised and had attention paid to it.

Extensive use of aluminium in the Cayman’s body structure means a 40 per cent increase in torsional rigidity and a decrease in kerb weight by as much as 30kg, down to 1320kg in the case of the Cayman S. Engine outputs are increased, slightly (up 10bhp in the 2.7-litre version to 271bhp, and up 5bhp to 325bhp in the 3.4-litre S), but both motors have more generous power curves, so they produce more power than the old engines across the rev range.

We won’t get to drive one on this launch, but the 2.7-litre base model promises to be an absolute screamer, being the first Cayman to have an engine that exceeds the 100bhp/litre specific output mark – just – with 100.1bhp/litre. Of course, this being a modern high-performance car, these increases come despite reductions in fuel consumption and emissions

of up to 15 per cent. The Cayman S equipped with a PDK ’box enjoys a CO2 rating of just 188g/km. Not bad for a 170mph+ sports car.

Ah yes, the eternal PDK versus manual transmission argument. At the risk of *evo* becoming the King Canute of the motoring media, refusing to accept the rising tide of paddle-shift cars even as we drown in them, I opt to sample both the PDK and manual models. The former is incredibly capable. Effortless when you wish to be lazy, intense when you’re up for it, there’s no doubt Porsche has now nailed the double-clutch ’box. The problem is that I still like a stick, especially when it’s connected to Porsche’s sweet-shifting six-speed unit rather than the knotty seven-speeder in the 991. As a downshift throttle blipper now comes as part of the Sport Chrono option package I want to try it even more. Fortunately Porsche knew we were coming, so it brought a solitary three-pedal car for the Flat Earth Society to drive.

A quick glance down the specification of this test car suggests it’s the most *evo* Cayman S you’re ever likely to get. That’s a manual with Sport Chrono, Dynamic Transmission Mounts and downshift blipper, PCCB brakes (bigger front discs, more rigid calipers and a greater pad area), Porsche Torque Vectoring (PTV) with a mechanical limited-slip differential, sports exhaust and those 20in Sport Techno rims. It

also has Porsche Communication Management (PCM) and a full leather interior. It all adds around £12k to the basic list price of £48,783. Don’t get me wrong, £60,000 is serious money, but as we’re about to discover, the Cayman S is a very serious car.

We start from the official Porsche dealership in Faro and head for the hills near Monchique and a network of roads we got to know so well during eCoty 2011. Blissfully quiet, combining endless variations of corners linked by generous straights and surfaced with everything from

Above: grip is enough to pick up inside wheels in hard cornering. **Below:** seven-speed PDK ’box is available, but we still love the six-speed manual



EU-funded billiard-table quality tarmac to crumbling old-school Portuguese asphalt, they're challenging, revealing and brilliantly entertaining.

One of the first things that strikes you about the Cayman is that although it has film star looks and sports car stats, it's incredibly practical. With hatchback access to a generous rear luggage area, plus another capacious boot beneath the bonnet, it'll swallow piles of bags. It's also extremely comfortable and easy to drive, with short overhangs and a compact footprint. If you're much over 6ft tall you'll also be pleased to hear the new-generation platform's 60mm increase in wheelbase creates a more spacious interior than in the old model.

As we wind our way up into the hills, the true brilliance of this car starts to emerge. Both the front and rear tracks are wider (40mm and 12mm respectively) but the overall width of the car remains the same. Together with the longer wheelbase, the track increases ensure the Cayman feels planted to the road, with excellent lateral and longitudinal stability and an agility-enhancing 46/54 weight distribution front-to-rear. Like the Boxster, the Cayman has electric power-assisted steering. Both cars' set-ups have a more natural feel than the 991's, but I'd venture the Cayman's is the best of the three. On dry roads you know exactly where you are in terms of available grip, and that confidence remains even when the road is slick with rain.

You can carry extraordinary speed across

the ground, slicing through transient curves without fear of short-tempered mid-engined twitchiness. When fully committed to a fast corner, outright grip is huge, as you can see from the cornering shot showing the Cayman almost picking up both inside wheels (see left). But what's really special is that through medium- and low-speed corners, while there's plenty of grip and stability to lean on, you can still slide the car if you wish, using the PTV and mechanical limited-slip differential to enjoyable effect. Rare is a car that has such poise and natural balance, yet allows you to adjust its attitude so readily and accessibly.

The engine and six-speed manual gearbox are superb, the former revving its heart out while the latter's half-dozen perfectly spaced ratios always feel ideally matched to the power and broad torque delivery of the 3.4-litre flat-six. The clutch and shift are light and precise, so not only is it a pleasure to change gear, it gives you an added layer of tactile connection to the car. It might be unfashionable to say so, but I'd willingly sacrifice a tenth of a second of 0-62mph performance (5.0sec plays 4.9 for the PDK car) to have this greater sense of satisfaction. Ultimately, and perhaps for the first time in a Porsche, the choice is now made purely on personal level, rather than because one is markedly better than the other. Long may that choice continue to be available.

If you opt for the manual transmission, I suspect you will do so because you enjoy the

The benchmark



UNTIL THE ARRIVAL of the new 981-generation Cayman, the undoubted high point of Porsche's mid-engined coupe model line was the 987 Cayman R. With more power to propel less weight, the R adhered to a time-honoured Porsche recipe of increasing a car's focus without compromising everyday useability.

The result remains very special. Light, agile and with a satisfying sense of minimal inertia and a lightness of touch across all but the roughest tarmac, it ramps up the feeling of connection without going to the extremes of a 911 GT3.

At 1295kg, it's lighter than the new Cayman S and at 325bhp has 4bhp more, so it retains a slight power-to-weight advantage. It's also a slightly more compact and intimate machine to sit in, but the downsides include a body structure appreciably less rigid than the new model. It also feels a much cheaper car and the stunted fixed rear wing is not a visual triumph.

On track, where the Cayman R was designed to shine, its lightness pays dividends, and it has a more naturally exuberant style than you might expect, oversteering on turn-in if you brake late and deep. The interesting thing is that the new Cayman S appears to possess the same dynamic repertoire on track, only with more grip and greater natural pace. What a car.

RM



Porsche Cayman S



process of heel-and-toe downshifts, but I still guarantee that you'll love the throttle-blipper function that's activated in Sport Plus mode. Much like the system Nissan fits to the 370Z, it is uncannily good, perfectly matching engine and road speed with a surgical stab of revs as you move the gearlever through the gate. This is disabled if you make that final step and switch off the PSM stability control with Sport Plus active, thus proving Porsche understands keen drivers better than any other brand.

With the sports exhaust option the Cayman sounds truly spectacular, howling like a banshee under load and lighting a string of firecrackers on the overrun. If there's a criticism it's that the exhaust can be a bit boomy when you're not on maximum-attack, but if you switch the exhaust back into its quiet setting the problem is sorted. Likewise you have a choice of PASM suspension settings, but to be honest there's such civility and controlled pliancy to the damping even in the firmest Sport Plus mode that you'd never complain about the ride quality. Considering the 20in rims, low-profile tyres and the state of some of Portugal's roads, that's incredibly impressive and bodes very well for the UK's equally variable tarmac.

By the time we return to the hotel, I'm utterly blown away by the Cayman's depth and breadth of ability, and by just how engaging and addictive it is to spend time with. The last new car that impressed me this much was, ironically enough, the 997 Carrera GTS, and that turned

out to be arguably the best all-round 911 of the modern era. I retire to bed trying to decide what colour Cayman S I'd choose and how I can find a way to afford one. It's a fitful night's sleep.

The following morning we head for Portimão and the rip-roaring roller-coaster ride that is the Autodromo Internacional do Algarve. Perhaps understandably, Porsche isn't allowing free lapping. Instead it assembles us in groups of four cars, line astern behind a pace car. Ordinarily this would be massively frustrating, but when you have Walter Röhrl on point duty, you're guaranteed a bit of excitement. With the four chase cars working a bit like a pursuit team in the vélodrome, we each take it in turns to sit on Walter's bumper. He's masterful at judging the pace, just easing the tempo up until he sees the lead chase car fall behind. Of course, the longer you can stick with him the faster he'll go. Given he's in a 991 (desire for the unfair advantage clearly remains strong in former World Rally champions), that means very fast.

It's brilliant fun, if a little hairy at times, especially as Portimão is littered with blind brows and unsettling crests, and the surface is damp in places. The Cayman is exceptionally well balanced, just fading into the mildest understeer through the fastest corners and staying neutral through the slow- and medium-speed turns, unless you tweak it on corner entry by trail-braking or a lift of the throttle just before you turn in.

As on the road, the Cayman is completely

Above: S deals with bumps well, even on optional 20in rims.

Below: rising rear wing is more steeply angled than Boxster's. **Bottom:** buttons for rear wing, exhaust and stop/start



transparent, free from malice and utterly malleable to your inputs. Consequently you can absolutely wring its neck for a lap time, sacrifice ultimate corner speed in the pursuit of some recreational oversteer, or wind things back a little and cut clean, consistent laps. It's easy to see how it managed a 7:55 lap of the Nordschleife. However you choose to drive it, the Cayman S feels completely happy. If you spend most of your annual mileage on the road, but fancy the odd trackday now and again, I can't think of many cars that would fulfil your criteria more effectively or enjoyably.

What's more, loathed as I am to admit it, the Cayman S finally justifies that infuriating rhetorical question so beloved of the motoring press: 'Still want that 911?' Part of me still believes it's as big a nonsense now as it's always been. There may well be some enlightened individuals who put their spending power aside and weigh-up the Cayman and Carrera on their relative merits. But I'm pretty certain those with the cash to comfortably afford a new 991 will not torture themselves with the same value judgements as someone who is stretching to buy its 'lesser' mid-engined sibling.

Then again, if you were to ask me which I'd choose, I'm not sure I could give you an answer. In the past I'd have said 911 without hesitation, but now it's too close to call; at least when answering from the unbiased position of having driven both, but possessing the means to afford neither. That's a victory in itself for the Cayman, and surely depressing news for any brand wishing to steal some of its market share. If 2013 delivers another new car I want quite so badly, it will be a remarkable year. The Cayman has come of age. ☒

Specification

PORSCHE CAYMAN S

Engine Flat-six, 3436cc

Power 321bhp @ 7400rpm

Torque 273lb ft @ 4500-5800rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip diff (optional), PTV (optional)

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, PASM dampers (optional)

Rear suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, PASM dampers (optional), anti-roll bar

Brakes Vented and drilled carbon-ceramic discs (optional), 350mm front, 299mm rear, ABS, EBD

Wheels 8 x 20in front, 9 x 20in rear (optional)

Tyres 235/35 ZR20 front, 265/35 ZR20 rear

Weight (kerb) 1320kg

Power-to-weight 247bhp/ton

0-60mph 5.0sec (claimed)

Top speed 176mph (claimed)

Basic price £48,783

On sale Now

evo rating: ★★★★★



'However you choose to drive it, the Cayman S feels completely happy'

Aston V12 Zagato in Scotland



by HENRY CATCHPOLE

PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

*Armed with Britain's finest supercar,
the Aston Martin V12 Zagato, evo
assesses whether an obscure Scottish
route is the nation's ultimate road*

BEST *of* BRITISH



Aston V12 Zagato in Scotland

E

EVERYONE HEADS

to the west coast of Scotland. Even James Bond. It's quite understandable – the lure of a drive across Rannoch Moor, down

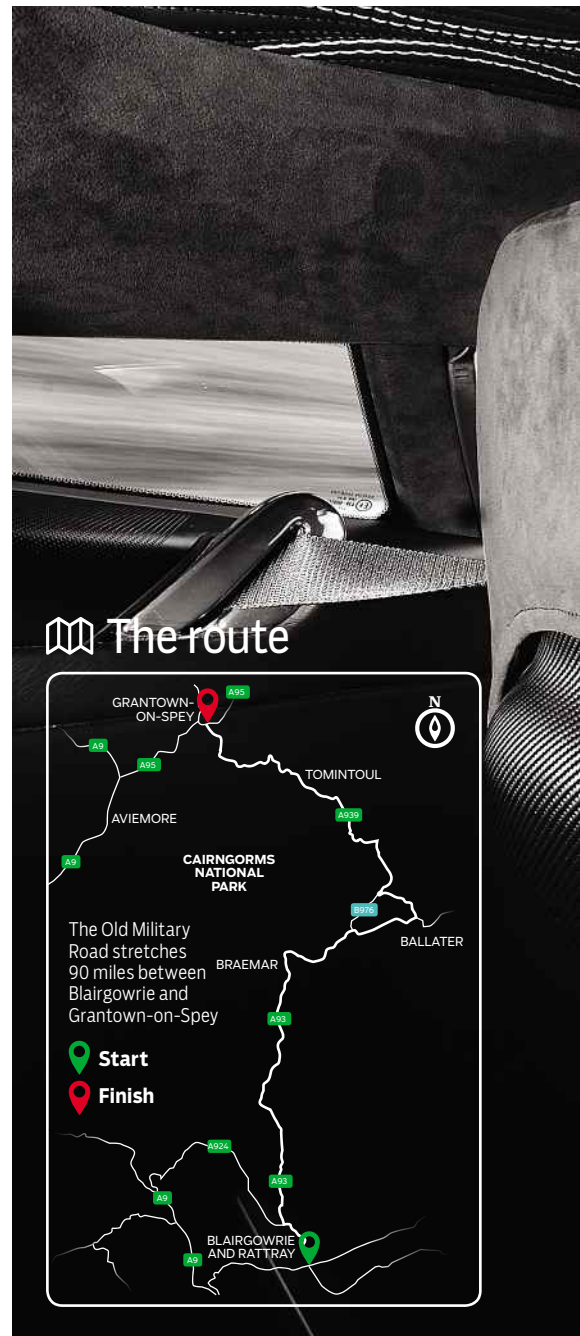
through Glen Coe and onwards over the sea to the magical Isle of Skye is as powerful as a dram of un-watered Talisker. But when photographer Dean Smith and I reach the top of the M74 in a couple of hours' time, we're going to ignore the temptation of the A82 and head east instead. It'll be dark as we go past Stirling and we'll probably hit Perth at the end of rush hour, at which point most of the traffic that's going north will join the A9 towards Inverness. But not us. We've got our sights set on the Old Military Road, nestled away in the bosom of the Cairngorms – a road that doesn't seem to attract much attention, but which might just be the best in the country.

And what to take to such a stretch of tarmac? Something with bodywork beautiful enough to complement the scenery, a soundtrack majestic enough to fill a valley, and simple dynamics sumptuous enough to get the best from the road. I give you *evo's* favourite British supercar: the Aston Martin V12 Zagato. With a V12 squeezed into a short wheelbase, rear-wheel drive, passive dampers, 510bhp and a manual gearbox all wrapped up in imaginatively tailored carbonfibre and aluminium, it seems absolutely perfect for the job.

At the moment I'm still settling into the Zagato, enjoying those first few hours drinking in surroundings that are currently unfamiliar, but which will start to feel like home over the next two December days. So far I love the wavy stitching of the headlining, but I'm baffled by the radio and satnav, which seem to be controlled by a range of unconnected little buttons tumbling down the sweeping carbon centre console. Not that there's much need for the radio when the road does anything remotely interesting, because the Zagato's V12 is capable of providing ample aural entertainment. It's just nice to have *Test Match Special* for company.

Ah yes, company. Normally on these adventures I have the grumbling bulk of Dean Smith in the passenger seat of whatever wholly impractical car we've decided to thrash across a mountain range. Right now his iPod would usually be providing Gangnam Style amusement, and the fumes of the Red Bull that he seems to mainline would be widening my eyes and making me shake in the same way that passive smoking might make me wheeze. But Smith took one look at the Zagato's boot this morning and decided that there wasn't enough room for his camera gear. Admittedly it's not much more than a Hobbit's closet (must be a thing about achingly pretty cars – the Alfa 8C was even worse), but I still think he could have wedged a lens and a daft hat in there, and a tripod wrapped in a couple of spare pairs of long johns would definitely have fitted behind

'THE OLD MILITARY ROAD IN THE CAIRNGORMS DOESN'T SEEM TO ATTRACT MUCH ATTENTION, BUT IT MIGHT JUST BE THE BEST IN THE COUNTRY'



Above: huge 5935cc V12 is shoehorned into a tightly packed engine bay. **Opposite page:** Zagato gets unique trim

the seats. He could have even cuddled a couple of flashes on the passenger seat. But instead he's currently sitting about 50 yards in front of me in his long-term Audi RS4 Avant. Odd choice.

Loping up the motorway with a stride almost as comically long as my own, the Zagato is an exceedingly relaxing car. One of its differences over a standard V12 Vantage is that the awkwardly angular lump of a gearknob has been replaced with a much nicer, smaller Alcantara-covered item. It lets the weighty but satisfyingly positive shift action shine much more brightly, but sixth gear is so wonderfully flexible that there's no need to change down on a motorway and you simply ooze along, a blissful slug of torque only ever a prod away.

Blairgowrie is dark and bitterly cold when we arrive. Dean leaves me in a dodgy-looking car park to guard the wheels while he goes to investigate the promising-sounding Royal



Hotel. He returns just as I'm starting to get nervous, announcing that he's secured us bed and breakfast for the princely sum of £33. It's fair to say that we're not staying in the main wing of the hotel.

After barricading the cars into a dark corner round the back of the Royal, we head in search of food in a pub and then perform a late-night raid on a 24-hour Tesco to stock up on provisions for the following day. 'Provisions' turns out to include a snow shovel, which Dean spots. I don't think we'll need it, but I feel compelled to buy it because I know that if I tell him to put it back we'll inevitably find ourselves with a car up to its wing-mirrors in powder and Dean muttering 'I told you so' like a scolding housewife.

IT'S MINUS FIVE WHEN WE WALK outside at 6.30 the following morning. Fortunately the hotel's corridors were about



minus four, so the shock's not too great, but as the cold, dry air invades the nostrils it still sends a shuddering shiver right through me, which eventually settles somewhere around my liver. The cars are still there, which is a relief, and I manage to reverse out without hitting the low concrete wall, which is even better (the rear-view camera's image of the ground isn't much use, and all you can see out of the shallow rear window is the carbon wing).

There's not going to be a lot of navigating involved today; we're simply continuing north on the A93 and then turning left onto the A939 just before Ballater. At first there's nothing too special about the road. There's no traffic, but every so often small squares of warm yellow light from farms and cottages pierce the darkness, showing that we're not in the wilds just yet.

The Aston's headlights aren't as bright as I'd

Aston V12 Zagato in Scotland



like, but they're spilling enough illumination onto the way ahead for us to see that we're travelling along a road flanked by stone walls and avenues of deciduous trees. With its short overhangs and tightly wrapped body, the Zagato looks neat and compact and it feels exactly like that to drive, but the road is sufficiently wide that you'd feel perfectly comfortable in a more expansively sprawling supercar. At one point a section of black and white Armco appears, signalling a couple of good corners, but even these are fast sweepers that don't really necessitate a change down,

other than to enjoy a gratuitous blip of revs.

If you don't change down, the V12 emits a deep gargle at low revs, the sort of voice that speaks of a large swept volume and mountain-moving torque. But as it spins faster and faster so it takes on a snarlier, harder edge, building with every revolution until it's developed into a full-on Le Mans race engine war cry. Arguably this sounds best on blipped downshifts, where the revs flare up with surprisingly little inertia.

This far north, dawn takes an awfully long time to emerge in winter (she's a lazy so-and-so), but with every passing minute the sky is

gradually shaking off the night and the hills on the horizon are becoming darkly silhouetted against an inky blue. The Alba Blue Zagato blends in perfectly. We drive through Bridge of Cally and I vaguely remember hiring boots and planks there to go and spend an exceptionally cold day hurtling through a blizzard down a mountain when I should have been writing my dissertation. That was at least ten years ago and my student wheels were somewhat less glamorous than the Aston, yet I still remember the drive to and from Glenshee being terrific (my passengers probably remember



Top: the Old Military Road was originally built after the Jacobite rising of 1745. **Left:** Zagato caked in dirt, just the way Catchpole likes it. **Above left:** Pirelli SottoZero winter tyres useful in the snow. **Right:** Zagato's panels are carbon and aluminium

it as being horrific), so I'm hoping nothing's changed in the past decade.

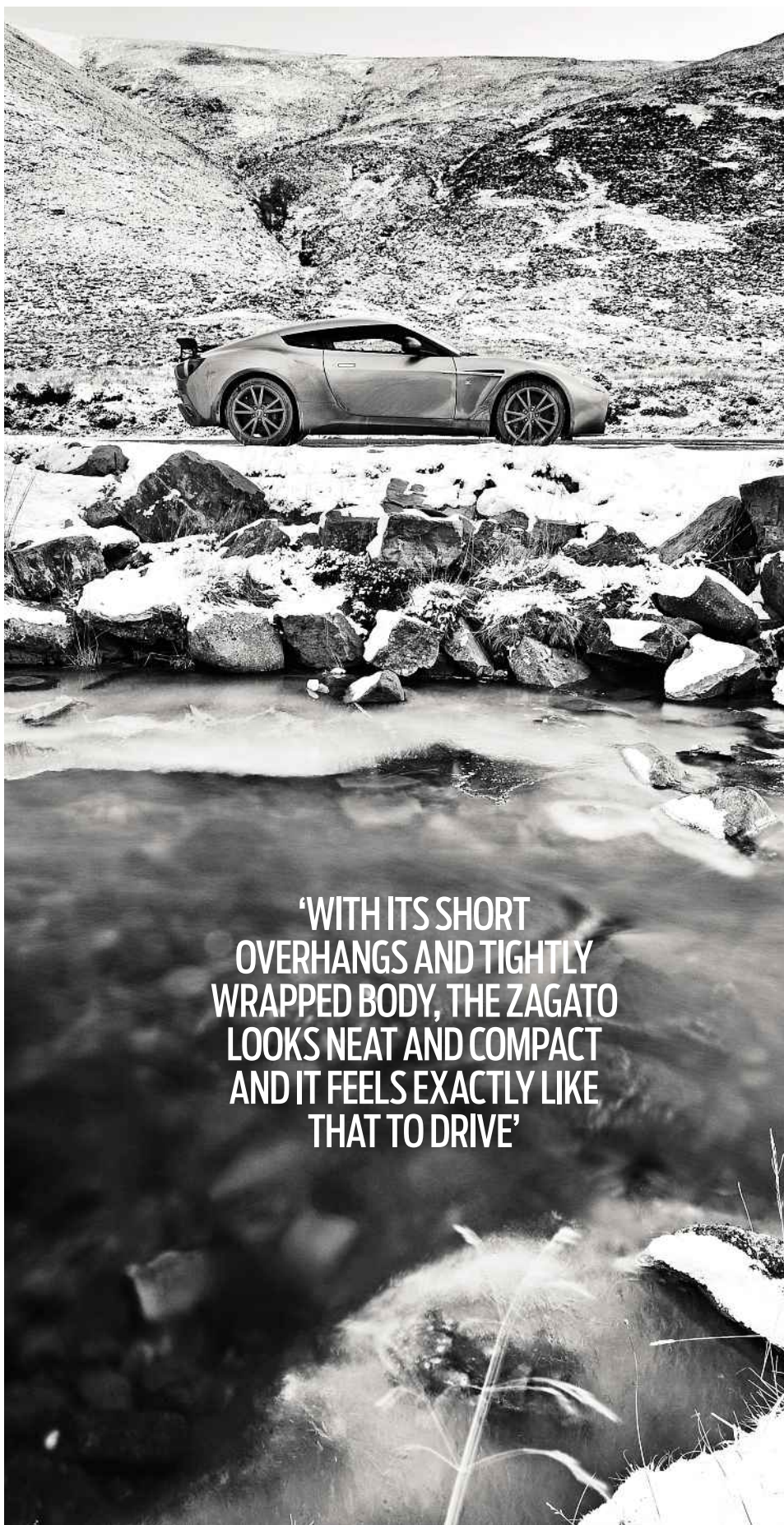
Rounding a corner, the view down a valley suddenly reveals an appreciably bigger snow-capped peak in the distance. The fields and verges seem to be whiter here too. Then almost without warning, the road changes from long straights and smoothly flowing corners to a roller coaster of second- and third-gear twists, turns and yumps. It's like the tarmac has suddenly taken inspiration from the knotted bit in the middle of your headphone wires. Despite the big engine in its nose, the Zagato is beautifully balanced through here and turns in with more deftness than you might expect. It means that you quickly feel at ease with the chassis even if it's difficult to use large chunks of the 510bhp and 420lb ft on the cold surface.

Once out the other side, there is no doubt that we've arrived in the Cairngorms. Snow poles mark the sides of the road and we're heading up the final climb to the Glenshee ski station. The V12 notices the incline in the same way that Frank Bruno would think he was being tickled by a punch from Willie Carson, but back in 1905 this was seen as a real test for man and machine – so much so that several of the cars in the Scottish Automobile Club Reliability Trial struggled even to make it up to the start line. No times were ever actually published for the climb – presumably to avoid embarrassment – and it wasn't used again until 1924.

It's worth struggling to the top though, purely for the drive down the other side. Here it feels like you're descending into the very heart of the mountains as they close in all around. After a couple of miles I pull into a lay-by to wait for sunrise. It appears to arrive just a couple of minutes later but this actually turns out to be the unfeasibly bright xenons of Dean's RS4, which pulls in next to me. By way of breakfast we tuck into our supermarket sweep from the previous night and take in our surroundings as the light seeps into the sky.

The snow is not yet quite the thick, 15-tog duvet covering that it will eventually become and the hillsides are a monochrome patchwork with the heather and scree poking through. We're not alone up here either; the queer clucking chuckle of red grouse can be heard quite close by and there are a few snow hares about too. Then just as we're setting up a photo, *CRACK!* A single report echoes round the valley like the upchange from an S2000 rally car. Dean and I instinctively look up and see three or four deer charging across the skyline ridge of the hill nearest to us. Someone's stalking.

Just before 9am, the sky turns appreciably pink through chinks in the cloud, so we count this as sunrise and take a couple of photos to celebrate. Some of you will disagree, possibly quite strongly, but Dean and I happen to think that supercars look better when they're dirty.



**'WITH ITS SHORT
OVERHANGS AND TIGHTLY
WRAPPED BODY, THE ZAGATO
LOOKS NEAT AND COMPACT
AND IT FEELS EXACTLY LIKE
THAT TO DRIVE'**

Aston V12 Zagato in Scotland



**'IT'S WORTH STRUGGLING TO THE TOP FOR THE DRIVE DOWN THE OTHER SIDE.
HERE IT FEELS LIKE YOU'RE DESCENDING INTO THE VERY HEART OF THE MOUNTAINS'**





Not just in need of a wash after driving through a couple of country puddles, but streaked, caked and baked with hard-won grime, wearing their miles like a badge of honour. There was a white (underneath the dirt) Aventador at Donington recently which was clearly used every day and it looked absolutely fantastic. That's why, after seeing the slipstream stripes of salt around the nostrils and noticing just how easily its bluff rear end collected filth in a 70mph vortex, we decided to leave the Zagato dirty for this shoot.

It has absolutely nothing to do with bare hands rinsing sponges in buckets of water in sub-zero temperatures...

The road continues along a valley floor, running in sympathy with the meanderings of the River Clunie, which looks like a gin and tonic in motion, with beautifully clear water running over icy lumps just below the surface. The Zagato is on season-appropriate Pirelli SottoZeros but this produces its own challenges, as there is appreciably more

squirming under braking as you lean on the big carbon rotors and the tail can start to feel very light. Perhaps less surprisingly, the back end is moving around easily under power too, helped by the road surface. In my experience the Scots are fantastic at gritting their roads properly, but the thick red ribbon of grit laid on the tarmac means that at times it feels closer to a forest rally stage than a tarmac one. It's quite fun if you like that sort of thing and the Zagato seems quite happy to move about, gliding around

Right: encounter with a PistenBully 200 is a surprise treat for Catchpole; small Alcantara gearknob aids change action on six-speed manual; intricate Zagato stitching; Christmas present for Catchpole Senior



**'THE ZAGATO SEEMS
QUITE HAPPY TO MOVE
ABOUT, GLIDING AROUND
AS IT SKATES ACROSS THE
SURFACE OF THE ROAD'**

as it skates across the surface of the road. It's only when you remember that this is a limited-edition £396,000 piece of automotive sculpture that it seems faintly ridiculous.

We hit civilisation in the form of Braemar and then very nearly hit a moss-green Skoda Fabia, as the owner has decided he can't be bothered to de-ice the windows and so pulls out of the side road with all the vision of a mole in a sleep mask. To be honest he was a bit unlucky, as it's not exactly a busy road at this time of

year and he could probably have tackled the junction utterly unhindered in any of the 20 minutes either side of our arrival. Nonetheless it was a heart-in-mouth moment as Czech hatchback seemed destined to be conjoined catastrophically with Italian coachbuilding.

The Gleaner garage in Braemar offers one of the few chances to refuel that we'll encounter along our route, and although the Aston's tank is still three-quarters full, the temptation of a Scotch Pie (contents meaty but unidentified) is

too much to resist; it's delicious.

The section of road that follows is quite different, as the big vistas are suddenly hidden from view by a dark barrier of pines and silver birches on either side of the road. I imagine it's a bit like running from the open expanse of the pitch at Twickenham back into the players' tunnel. Without the distraction of views you focus even more on the road, which is still fast, flowing and well surfaced. There are probably a few too many straights to make this section



Aston V12 Zagato in Scotland

really engaging in something like a hot hatch, but they let the Aston run through a couple of gears and stretch its legs. There's a little slush now and again just to keep things interesting, and although I've mostly left the DSC (Dynamic Stability Control) in its more relaxed 'Track' setting, it's worth saying that even with it fully engaged the system is so beautifully unobtrusive that it doesn't spoil proceedings.

BALMORAL CASTLE AND ITS 49,000 acres are the private property of the Queen and they lie halfway along our route. They are also right next to the Royal Lochnagar distillery (this Royal being slightly more official than our hotel the night before), where I stop briefly to buy my father's Christmas present. Unusually for a distillery, it's actually quite an attractive set of dark stone buildings, and I could happily stay here for hours sniffing the heady aromas. But the winter sun is scurrying between horizons and time is pressing, so it has to be a fleeting visit.

Once back on the main road, fourth gear has barely been tickled when the indicators are on and we're swinging left off the A93 just before Ballater. We're continuing north on the A939, which is a much narrower and snowier road than we've encountered so far and so our pace inevitably slows a little. The reward, however, is stumbling into an almost impossibly fairytale winter wonderland scene with a beautiful single-arch stone bridge (I do like a good stone bridge), which is exaggeratedly humpbacked like a whale breaching from one bank of the river to the other. The Zagato's rounded snout

'IN MY OPINION, THE OLD MILITARY ROAD IS THE MOST SUSTAINED STRETCH OF DECENT DRIVING YOU'LL EVER FIND ON OUR SHORES'

appears to be heading heavenwards and the windscreen fills with sky as we go over it, and then seemingly just around the next corner the road opens out again, spreading back into two lanes as it climbs away from the tree-lined valley and onto an impressive expanse of windswept Scottish moorland.

It's a glorious few minutes driving across this open section, and as we head back down onto a long straight, the landscape in the rear-view mirror is turning softly golden. I feel sure that we must be nearing the end of the road

Specification

ASTON MARTIN V12 ZAGATO

Engine V12, 5935cc

Power 510bhp @ 6500rpm

Torque 420lb ft @ 5750rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

Front suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, monotube dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Double wishbones, dual-rate coil springs, monotube dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated carbon-ceramic discs, 398mm front, 360mm rear, ABS, EBD

Wheels 9 x 19in front, 11 x 19in rear

Tyres (winter) 235/40 R19 front, 275/35 R19 rear

Weight (kerb) 1680kg (estimated)

Power-to-weight 308bhp/ton

0-62mph 4.2sec (claimed)

Top speed 190mph (claimed)

Basic price £396,000

On sale Now

evo rating: ★★★★★



now and that the mountains are behind us, but there's still 25 miles and another ski resort to go. It's as we're climbing back up again that we encounter the first hairpins of the journey and it's impossible to resist having a bit of a play in the Aston as the road snakes back and forth. It's also when it begins snowing.

'Do you want to swap, mate?' It's a question that gets asked quite a lot when I'm driving desirable cars that clearly aren't mine. Never before though have I answered 'Yes!' and scrambled out of the car with a massive grin on

my face. We've reached Lecht and the Zagato is parked beside a PistenBully 200. I've been fascinated by piste-bashers since I was shorter than one of their caterpillar tracks. The chance to sit in one is too good to miss.

Like this Zagato, it turns out to be left-hand drive, but the view out is somewhat more commanding and I have a suspicion that the lever to my right has nothing to do with anything so mundane as gears. I'd love to charge off up the mountain and smooth some snow, but Dean is insistent that we have more photos to do and



more miles to drive. Next time...

From the Lecht ski station the A939 sweeps down towards the small grey village of Tomintoul and then on towards Grantown-on-Spey, assuming you ignore the signs to the Glenlivet distillery off to the right. Although the light is fading fast the road is still fantastic, and is possibly the best section yet. My favourite corner is a left-hander that rises all the way to its apex then falls a little after it. With the Zagato loaded up and holding a constant throttle, you get a smidgen of oversteer just over the crest

purely through the rear wheels unweighting.

By the time we reach the fuel station in G-on-S, there are 84 miles between the Zagato and Blairgowrie, and as I stand in the freezing cold with super unleaded sluicing into the tank I'm wondering if I've just driven the best road in the UK. Yes, Glen Coe might be a touch more dramatic and North Wales might be a fraction more testing on a chassis, but in my opinion the Old Military Road is certainly the most sustained stretch of decent driving you'll find on our shores. I'd love to drive back down it,

but with the snow falling more heavily Dean suggests we play it safe and stick together back down the A9. The fuel nozzle clicks off, the numbers stop spinning on the pump and I replace the lovely aluminium filler cap, before heading in to pay. To pay... Oh dear.

I pat my pockets and make a phone call before shouting through the snow to Dean and asking if he minds paying for this tank and heading back down the A9 on his own. It appears I've left my wallet in the Royal Lochnagar distillery. And there's only one way back to it... ❌

EVOLUTION



SNOW LIES PILED AT the edges of the road and, occasionally, a big pool of slush flows right across. But the car hardly seems to notice. There are chirrups and whooshes. Gravel loosened by a winter of heavy frosts is being ripped up by the tyres and flung at the underbody, while great head-snapping waves of turbo boost fling the car

across the ground at an astonishing rate. This is the classic Mitsubishi Evo experience that I knew today would bring. But I didn't expect to find it in this car. This is where it all started, the original Evo, and with it now being 21 years of age I'd just assumed it would feel relatively soft, warm-hatch quick and rather dull. I couldn't have been more wrong. The speed, agility and control it exhibits are quite extraordinary.

I'm salivating at the prospect of trying the

best of the breed back-to-back, but we're on dangerous ground here. Naming the 'Best Evo Ever' is like opening a shipping container of worms. Do you get all 12 generations together (the Mäkinen is really a 6.5 and the 8 also made a half-step with the MR)? Do the stripped-out RS models or the more sophisticated GSR versions represent the best of the breed? Or perhaps the halfway-house RSII cars? Then there's the nutty Zero Fighter edition...

of the *SPECIES*

The Mitsubishi Evo has progressed through ten versions (some argue more) in two decades. But which is the best? We find out

by JETHRO BOVINGDON | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH



It's a delightfully geeky but horribly complicated world. In the end we chose to go down the GSR route, reasoning that the spookily effective Active Yaw Control rear diff was hugely significant in the Evo's history and was never fitted to the RS models (they used tougher plated differentials), which were built to be converted into Group N rally cars. There are also many more GSRs out there to choose from if you're looking at buying one.

We had to have an original Evo. It was launched in 1992 and set the mould for the generations to come: transverse 2-litre, four-cylinder, DOHC, turbocharged and intercooled 4G63 engine, permanent four-wheel drive, MacPherson strut front suspension with a multi-link set-up at the rear and a humdrum four-door body, with vents for the bonnet and a high-rise rear wing. It produces 247bhp and 228lb ft, and weighs 1240kg.

The II and III were developments of this platform, power rising around 10bhp with each generation along with chassis and aerodynamic improvements, all being homologated for Group A competition. However, we've skipped those mildly tweaked versions and jumped straight to the IV. By now (1996) the Evo is starting to look pretty wild, and this generation also introduces Active Yaw Control, an electronically controlled rear differential that

Greatest Mitsubishi Evos





can actively split torque from side-to-side to create a yaw moment and reduce understeer. Nowadays lots of premium manufacturers herald their 'torque vectoring'. The Evo was there over 17 years ago. Power is up to 276bhp and 260lb ft, weight to 1350kg.

Our next contender is the most celebrated of all: the Evo VI Tommi Mäkinen Edition, also known as the 6.5. It was built to celebrate the great man's fourth consecutive WRC title, in 1999, and benefitted from a faster-responding titanium turbo, a front strut brace, suspension 10mm lower than the standard VI and the quicker steering rack from the RS model. This is the ultimate 'classic' Evo before a whole new generation, based on the new Lancer Cedia body style, was introduced with the VII. New variants came thick and fast on this platform and we've chosen the very last Evo powered by the stalwart 4G63 engine to represent them: the IX MR in FQ-360 specification, meaning it has a wholesome 366bhp and 363lb ft, albeit weighed down by 1400kg.

Lastly we have the much-maligned Evo X. We had great hopes for this car when it was launched, but somehow it didn't quite hit the spot. Mitsubishi tried to broaden the Evo's appeal but forgot that its absolute focus was what made it so special in the first place. That said, the limited-edition FQ-400 version brought much of the aggression back, with wider tracks, stiffer and lower suspension and the small matter of 403bhp and 387lb ft. We'll ignore for the moment that it was a not insubstantial £49,999 when new.

Above: Evo quintet were put to the test on the B4351 near Bala. **Left:** rare Mäkinen Edition and basic-looking Evo I

SO TO THE EVO I. GOD, IT looks ordinary, doesn't it? Narrow and upright, it's a world away from the romance of the blistered-wheelarch Lancia Delta Integrale. Inside it's worse, all shiny plastic and cheap-looking instruments. It feels like a hire car from 1990 and even the cool period Recaros can't lift the depressing environment. There aren't even any extra boost or oil temperature gauges to give you a clue that this is a little bit special. Don't worry though. It is.

Twist the key and the four-cylinder engine does that reluctant Evo churn and then catches and settles to the classic deep blare. It's not a particularly tuneful noise, but it does sound urgent. The five-speed 'box is immediately familiar: pure and mechanical, and the shifter almost seems to get sucked into gear with just a little guiding pressure. On these coarse north Welsh roads the ride is much more supple than that of later Evos that I know and love, and the damping and structure feel looser than you might expect, too. However, when you really ask the suspension to work, it rises to the occasion, smothering bumps efficiently and keeping the wheels firmly in touch with the ground.

Only the steering lets the side down. It's not as quick as the later cars', so you don't get that instantaneous response from the front tyres, and it kicks back quite badly if you hit a bump mid-corner. No matter, because like every Mitsubishi Evo, this is a car you steer as much with the throttle and brake pedal as you do the steering wheel. Every lift, every squeeze of the brakes has an immediate and accurate effect on

How the Evo evolved

EVOLUTION I October 1992

Power 247bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 228lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1240kg

EVOLUTION II January 1994

Power 256bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque 228lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1250kg
Evolution Wider tyres, longer wheelbase, wider tracks, longer damper struts

EVOLUTION III August 1995

Power 266bhp @ 6250rpm
Torque 228lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1260kg
Evolution Higher compression ratio, new turbo compressor, larger front air dam, deep side skirts, new rear wing

EVOLUTION IV August 1996

Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 260lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1350kg
Evolution All-new chassis, engine/box turned 180 degrees, twin-scroll turbo, lighter pistons, metal head gaskets, Active Yaw Control

EVOLUTION V January 1998

Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 274lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1360kg
Evolution Group A regs maximised with wider tracks, bigger bonnet vents, twin-plane rear wing, 17in wheels, four-piston Brembo front calipers with 320mm discs, inverted suspension struts

EVOLUTION VI January 1999

Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 274lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1365kg
Evolution Minor styling revisions due to new WRC regs, forged aluminium suspension arms, extra spot-welding for increased rigidity

EVO VI MÄKINEN March 2000

Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 275lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1365kg
Evolution New titanium turbocharger, 10mm lower suspension, faster steering rack, 17in Enkel alloy wheels

EVOLUTION VII March 2001

Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 282lb ft @ 3000rpm **Weight** 1400kg
Evolution New Lancer Cedia chassis, electronically controlled multi-plate clutch, active centre diff (ACD) with Tarmac, Gravel and Snow settings, hollow camshafts

EVOLUTION VIII January 2003

Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 290lb ft @ 2500rpm **Weight** 1410kg
Evolution New six-speed gearbox, Super Active Yaw Control introduced to double torque transfer capability, carbonfibre spoiler

EVOLUTION VIII MR Feb 2004

Power 282bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 294lb ft @ 2500rpm **Weight** 1400kg
Evolution Aluminium roof, new Bilstein dampers, lighter BBS forged alloy wheels, improvements to turbo and cooling

EVOLUTION IX MR March 2005

Power 282bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 289lb ft @ 2500rpm **Weight** 1400kg
Evolution MIVEC variable valve timing, lower rear springs, refined S-AYC

EVOLUTION X March 2008

Power 290bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 300lb ft @ 2500rpm **Weight** 1560kg
Evolution All-new chassis, 4B11 engine, optional 'SST' twin-clutch 'box or five-speed manual. Super-All Wheel Control uses S-AYC, Super ABS and Active Stability Control

Greatest Mitsubishi Evos

the balance, trimming understeer and even encouraging lovely slow-motion oversteer that hangs the car in stasis, waiting for you to use the power or steering to pull it straight.

Couple this remarkable agility and adjustability with an engine that gets going at about 3500rpm and climbs with ever-increasing savagery to well over 7000rpm and you have a car that is devastatingly fast across the ground. This particular Evo I is running around 280bhp but you'd swear it was more, and the whistling, chirruping turbo sound effects are pure WRC. To be honest I'm absolutely shocked by its performance, speed and playfulness. An Integrale wouldn't see which way this thing went on a challenging road and nor would something like an E30 M3. Harry Metcalfe later admits to working pretty hard to keep in touch in the 403bhp Evo X. Did I mention this car is currently for sale for £2500? Incredible.

The Evo IV has much to live up to after the riotous original. It certainly looks the part, and knowing that it has that clever Active Yaw Control rear differential in place of a viscous LSD, I'm expecting it to step closer to having the incredible turn-in response of later Evos but retain some of the original car's suppleness. There's certainly a much keener sense of purpose when you climb in and clock the huge wing in the mirror and settle into a deeply bolstered seat. The interior feels more modern but it remains a place of function rather than detail. The chunky-rimmed three-spoke Momo wheel feels great, though, and when that engine buzzes through the cabin, you know you're in for a treat.

There are already evident threads of continuity in the IV that will run through all of the cars: the sheer breadth of the power band and the way the engine revs out to the limiter with real freedom, the fantastic accuracy of the gearbox and the excellent braking feel, and – the key quality – the malleability of the chassis balance. The IV ramps up steering response, reduces steady-state understeer and adds a little power-on oversteer on corner exit. Grip is also improved, despite the modest 205/55 R16 Bridgestone Potenzas, but that unique up-on-tiptoes feeling is amplified

'The IV is a car that makes you want to brush up on your left-foot braking skills, just so you can experience every facet of its abilities'

HOW THEY COMPARE



Mitsubishi Evo I

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1997cc, turbo

Power 247bhp @ 6000rpm

Torque 228lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission Five-speed manual, four-wheel drive, centre viscous coupling unit, rear limited-slip diff

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes 276mm ventilated front discs, 260mm solid rear discs, ABS

Wheels 6.5 x 15in front and rear

Tyres 195/55 VR15 front and rear

Weight (kerb) 1240kg

Power-to-weight 202bhp/ton

0-62mph 5.1sec (claimed)

Top speed 112mph (limited)

Price new n/a (grey import only)

Value today £1500-2500



Above: original Evo had 247bhp in standard form – a big number in the early '90s, and plenty when combined with a kerb weight of just 1240kg



Mitsubishi Evo IV

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1997cc, turbo

Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm

Torque 260lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission Five-speed manual, four-wheel drive, centre viscous coupling unit, AYC rear differential

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs, 276mm front, 284mm rear, ABS

Wheels 6 x 16in front and rear

Tyres 205/55 R16 front and rear

Weight (kerb) 1350kg

Power-to-weight 208bhp/ton

0-62mph 5.5sec (claimed)

Top speed 112mph (limited)

Price new n/a (grey import only)

Value today £4000-6000



Top: Evo IV had more aggressive looks, largely to homologate components for the rally car; the Evo IV took four wins in the 1997 WRC





Mitsubishi Evo VI Mäkinen

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1997cc, turbo

Power 276bhp @ 6500rpm

Torque 275lb ft @ 2750rpm

Transmission Five-speed manual, four-wheel drive, centre viscous coupling unit, AYC rear differential

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs, 263mm front, 252mm rear, ABS

Wheels 7.5 x 17in front and rear

Tyres 225/45 ZR17 front and rear

Weight (kerb) 1365kg

Power-to-weight 205bhp/ton

0-62mph 4.6sec (claimed)

Top speed 150mph (claimed)

Price new £32,995 (2000)

Value today £6000-10,000



Above: Mäkinen's engine is restricted to 276bhp – a 'gentlemen's agreement' maximum figure designed to appease the Japanese government of the era



Mitsubishi Evo IX MR FQ-360

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1997cc, turbo

Power 366bhp @ 6900rpm

Torque 363lb ft @ 3200rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, four-wheel drive, front LSD, Active Centre Diff, Super-AYC rear diff

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs, 320mm front, 300mm rear, ABS, EBD

Wheels 8 x 17in front and rear

Tyres 245/40 R18 front and rear

Weight (kerb) 1400kg

Power-to-weight 266bhp/ton

0-62mph 3.9sec (claimed)

Top speed 157mph (claimed)

Price new £34,529 (2006)

Value today £15,000-17,000



Above: carbon fibre vortex generators above rear window improve the airflow towards the rear of the car and the sizeable spoiler (below)



Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo

Power 403bhp @ 6500rpm

Torque 387lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission Six-speed manual, four-wheel drive, Super All Wheel Control (ACD, AYD)

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs, 365mm front, 343mm rear, ABS, EBD

Wheels 8.5 x 18in front and rear

Tyres 235/45 ZR17 front and rear

Weight (kerb) 1560kg

Power-to-weight 262bhp/ton

0-62mph 3.8sec (claimed)

Top speed 155mph (limited)

Price new £49,999 (2009)

Value today £32,000-34,000



Above: the FQ-400's 403bhp '4B11' engine is the most powerful fitted to any factory iteration of the Evo – and it's still just 2 litres in capacity





‘If you examine the detail within the Evo IX MR, you

and the IV still responds faithfully to driver inputs. It’s a car that makes you want to brush up on your left-foot braking skills just so you can experience every facet of its abilities, and it flows with poise where the earlier car would be kicking through the steering and demanding greater concentration to avoid understeer.

However, there’s no mistaking the extra weight of the IV. It doesn’t feel as rabid as the original car in a straight line (admittedly this car is completely standard and the original has been tickled) and, even with the Active Yaw Control, you sense the weight in fast transitions. As an all-rounder it’s a much better car than the first Evo, but perhaps I expected a bigger leap. Some of the wildness has also been dialled out to make way for greater control. Perhaps that’s why the Evo IV delivered Mäkinen four rally wins and the WRC title in 1997...

The Evo VI Tommi Mäkinen Edition is a step

change. It looks wider and lower, and no surface seems to have been untouched by aero additions or bodywork tacked on to stretch over bigger wheels and tyres. It is a brutally beautiful thing and if you think it’s a tad OTT, then remember this is a car born out of competition – if only the WRC gave car buyers something quite so extraordinary these days. It’s a real privilege to drive this particular example, number six of 250 official UK cars, which belongs to Mitsubishi UK and arrived at our offices with just over 200 miles under its bright white Enkei wheels. In deference to its gentle life on display we vow to drive it as hard as we dare. Tommi wouldn’t have it any other way.

The Mäkinen is 13 years old but has a feel that is much more modern. The ride is firmer and the damping more tightly controlled, but it’s certainly not harsh once up to speed. More importantly, that hyper-agility that I remember

so clearly has arrived in style. The quicker steering isn’t jumpy but the rate of response is fast and pinpoint accurate. Understeer is never an issue at all and the AYC feels more aggressive in pinning the front tyres on line and edging the rear just a few degrees wide as you commit to the throttle. Some people find AYC’s operation synthetic, but I love the agility it brings. It’s an intense but cohesive experience.

Everything you touch seems to have been honed until its operation is smooth and seamless, from the steering to the Brembo brakes. Even Harry, who wasn’t a huge fan of Subarus and Evos in their heyday, has grown to respect and enjoy the Mäkinen, ‘It’s just so effortless to get performance out of,’ he says. ‘The clutch has a lovely elasticity, the brakes are so right and the smoothness of the steering... It’s just stunningly capable.’ That’s really the point – the Mäkinen doesn’t beat you up with an unyielding ride or



Left: Evo IV offers more control than original. **Top left:** Mäkinen feels surprisingly modern. **Above:** IX MR is particularly malleable to a driver's tastes. **Top right:** characterless engine spoils the X

find that not so much has changed from that first Evo'

bash the road into submission. It glides over the surface, digging in to find grip but breathing with the wicked lumps and bumps so that you can use all of its performance all of the time. And the view out over the bonnet vents, the vast stanchions for the wing in your mirrors... it just feels special. The Mäkinen deserves its status as a Mitsubishi icon and looks like stunning value at under £10,000 for a nice example.

The IX MR FQ-360 is faster, angrier and even more agile than the Mäkinen. By now the Evo has a six-speed 'box, Super-Active Yaw Control using a planetary gear set with a greater torque transfer capacity, and MIVEC variable valve timing. Let's just say it's tooled up and ready for a scrap. The steering is lighter and faster, body control is even tighter and the ride is a fair bit stiffer, too. The result is immense turn-in agility and a frankly astonishing economy of input required to blast across these wet, freezing

roads at breakneck speed. However, if you examine the detail, you find that not so much has changed from that first Evo. There's more feel through the steering and sharper response, but the overwhelming sense remains that this is a car built to cover ground very quickly and at the total mercy of the driver's preferred style. Very few four-wheel-drive cars feel so alive.

At something close to its full potential on deserted roads across a snow-dusted Welsh mountain, the MR is pretty extraordinary. Some people find the Evo's gravelly engine a bit characterless, but I love the way it builds and builds with ferocious determination. It's the perfect partner to the freakishly agile chassis. Mostly it just soaks up the power and takes you exactly where you point it, but get that left-foot braking going and the MR allows you to slide into and out of faster corners, all four wheels ripping at the surface with no opposite

lock required. It's a magical feeling and the MR probably delivers those highs more often than even the Mäkinen, which is saying something. The six-speed 'box has a stringier, less satisfying action than the old five-speeder, but in every other way you can feel the progress made from Mäkinen to IX MR.

Sadly the X, even in its ultimate FQ-400 guise, isn't capable of replicating those thrills. Sure, it's mighty fast across the ground, the steering is crazily responsive, and grip and traction are superb. It will even do the signature neutral-steering Evo four-wheel drift, but somehow all the detail and most of the joy is gone. The new 4B11 engine is deathly dull and no amount of fireworks popping and crackling from the exhaust can hide that. The steering is fearsomely fast but almost completely devoid of feel and the suspension really struggles to deal with sudden mid-corner bumps or big

Greatest Mitsubishi Evos

compressions under braking, sending the car pitching and weaving when you expect rock-solid stability.

It's the accuracy and consistency that's disappeared and suddenly all those elements that gel so completely in the Mäkinen and IX MR seem to clash and fight for your attention. The fluidity is missing, with attention-grabbing but frustrating edginess in its place. Harry puts it best: 'It's just a different animal. Completely different. And not in a good way.'

IT'S DISAPPOINTING THAT THE EVO line ends in relative disappointment, but it can't take the shine off this group of simply brilliant drivers' cars. Three weeks after driving them,

I'm still in awe of the original Evo's dazzling speed, and shocked (and delighted) that the early cars are so affordable. I just hope some survive intact and in relatively standard form, because they deserve to be remembered amongst the likes of the Integrale and E30 M3 – great homologation specials.

Some people will never understand the appeal of a prosaic Japanese tin box with spoilers and vents tacked on, but if you love the simple business of driving and bringing out the best in a car then any Evo is a fantastic challenge and a great entertainer. Furthermore, time has done little to dent their outrageous speed and ability – and that's a rare thing indeed. I'd love an early car with around 320bhp for sheer

unexpectedness, a Mäkinen for its completeness and a IX MR for when I fancy going really fast. However, if I had to choose one, it would be red and have Tommi's signature on the bonnet. ✕

Thank you...

To the Lancer Register (lancerregister.com), where we sourced most of the cars, and Jan Karunaratne, Darren Kember and Neil B for loaning us their I, IV and IX MR models respectively. If you want to buy the Evo I, email quicksilver.messenger.services@gmail.com. You'll find the Evo IX for sale on forsale.evo.co.uk. Thanks also to Fusion-Motorsport.co.uk, who specialise in Japanese performance models and maintain the Evo I, and kindly delivered it to us.

'Time has done little to dent their outrageous speed and ability – and that's a rare thing indeed'



EVO X FQ-400
evo rating: ★★★★★

EVO IV
evo rating: ★★★★★

EVO VI MÄKINEN
evo rating: ★★★★★

EVO I
evo rating: ★★★★★

EVO IX MR FQ-360
evo rating: ★★★★★



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Fast Fleet

Living with evo's long-term test cars

From XJR-15 to 190E, evo's Fast Fleet is the biggest and most comprehensive long-term section in the business. This month...

BMW M135i
by Henry Catchpole
Features editor



This month: Catchpole gets the key to an eCoty favourite
Favourite feature: I love the fact the M135i has a normal handbrake. Much easier than button-operated electronic nonsense



PAGANI ZONDA
by Harry Metcalfe
Editorial director



This month: The Zonda is sold on and Harry bids it farewell
Favourite feature: Maximum torque on a Ferrari Enzo is 485lb ft – my Zonda produced that at a mere 1200rpm. I'm going to miss that



JAGUAR XKR-S
by Richard Meaden
Contributing editor

This month: Snow causes no problems for the fast Jag
Favourite feature: The nostrils in the leading edge of the bonnet. They set it apart from the regular XKR and add real aggression



ALFA ROMEO GIULIETTA
by Rob Gould
Art director

This month: Summer tyres make for heavy going in the white stuff
Favourite feature: The DNA switch. It transforms the Cloverleaf from a sensible family car into a hot hatch with serious pace



VAUXHALL ASTRA VXR
by Jethro Bovingdon
Contributing editor

This month: Bovingdon starts to see what the Astra is capable of
Favourite feature: The limited-slip differential. Without it the VXR would be a bit of a nightmare



MERCEDES C63 AMG
by Nick Trott
Editor

This month: Trott plays 'fastest finger first' on the centre console
Favourite feature: Has to be the carbonfibre front splitter. You don't get one of those on an M3...



RENAULT TWINGO 133
by Ian Eveleigh
Production editor

This month: The French supermini takes on a long everyday commute
Favourite feature: The way the tyres are stretched taut across the black 17in alloys. It sets the tone for the whole car perfectly



MERCEDES 190E 2.5-16
by Mike Duff
Motoring editor

This month: Duff kicks off some long-awaited repair work
Favourite feature: The moment the engine gets past 4000rpm and does a good impression of a Honda VTEC shifting cams



NISSAN NAVARA
by Sam Riley
Film-maker

This month: Riley compares the Outlaw to its American rivals
Favourite feature: The 3-litre V6 diesel engine. It makes the Navara a hell of a lot quicker than it looks



JAGUAR XJR-15
by 'SSO'
Contributor

This month: The Secret Supercar Owner on Jaguar's '90s road-racer
Favourite feature: The XJR-15 has the coolest, most focused cockpit of any supercar. It's a temple of carbonfibre



RENAULT CLIO WILLIAMS
by Stephen Dobie
Staff writer

This month: The to-do list for the classic hatch grows ever longer
Favourite feature: The extra dials atop the dash. Fitting oil level, temp and pressure gauges shows its intent compared to lesser Clios



PEUGEOT 106 RALLYE
by Richard Meaden
Contributing editor

This month: The raw French hatch emerges from hibernation
Favourite feature: The white Michelin steel wheels. Cheap and cheerful, yet do so much to define the look of the car



AUDI RS4 AVANT
by Dean Smith
Staff photographer

This month: The 'knocking noise' mystery is solved
Favourite feature: The 4.2-litre naturally aspirated V8 with its red line at 8250rpm. It's absolutely exhilarating



RANGE ROVER EVOQUE
by Mike Duff
Motoring editor

This month: The Evoque has an argument with a tree
Favourite feature: The plump, comfortable airbags – including one thoughtfully provided to protect your knees



LAMBO MURCIÉLAGO
by Simon George
Contributor

This month: Crash repair work begins with a session on a jig
Favourite feature: Hard to say at the moment. At least its current looks make it tricky to trade it in for an Aventador...



Also on the evo fleet: Ferrari F40, Ferrari F50, Mazda MX-5 mk2, Maserati GranTurismo, Lamborghini Countach, Ford Escort RS2000, Aston Martin DBS, Nissan GT-R, Lamborghini Espada, Alfa Romeo Mito, Ferrari 430 Scuderia, Lotus Elan, Lamborghini LP640, Range Rover, Ferrari 458 Italia. **Coming soon:** Hyundai Veloster Turbo

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NEW ARRIVAL

BMW M135i

It harassed hypercars on our recent Car of the Year test, but can the littlest M-car also impress day-in, day-out?

OVER THE LAST EIGHT years I have run some wonderful but also extremely impractical long-termers. A couple of Caterhams and, most recently, the Morgan spring to mind. It was fun trying to use them as my only everyday transport and they are the sort of cars that make you feel vividly alive. And that's good.

But I admit that I sometimes crave a car that will just fit into my life. An automotive Swiss army knife that won't require a top lip soup-strainer to keep the cold out. A car that will cruise long motorway miles in comfort and accept enough stuff in the back for a muddy weekend away, but also be able to hang on to the coat tails of a Pagani down a road in the Scottish Borders. I give you... the Audi RS4 Avant.

Sadly, Dean Smith's got that and has hidden the keys (I wouldn't want it anyway, the steering's rubbish), but I think I've got something

Driver's log

Date acquired January 2013 **Total mileage** 1472

Mileage this month 461 **Costs this month** £0
mpg this month 29.3

even better. I fell for the BMW M135i on the 2012 eCoty test (*evo* 177); that drive chasing Jethro in the Huayra, launching the small BMW over crests and into corners as the Pagani's rump squatted and hunted for traction is one of my happiest memories of last year. But was that just a holiday romance? Was I slightly gaga when my eyes met the BMW's LED corona rings across a crowded loch-side car park? Without a hypercar to harass, will this 1-series be as inspiring on the day-to-day merry-go-round that I happily call normal life? The next six months will decide.

This isn't the same car, of course. This is a more practical five-door with its Dakota leather interior finished in the rather spicy shade of Coral Red. Key dynamic options include Adaptive

M Sport suspension (£515) and the eight-speed 'Sport automatic transmission' (£1600), which reduces the 0-62mph time to 4.9sec and raises the claimed combined consumption to 37.7mpg. I suspect one of those figures might be easier to achieve than the other...

On this particularly well-specced car there's also cruise control and rear parking sensors (£360 as part of the 'driver comfort' package), heated seats (£265), a visibility package incorporating adaptive xenons, dimming mirrors and rain-sensing wipers (£450), a media package that has Bluetooth, BMW Assist, voice control and BMW's excellent satnav (£1995) and is then topped off with a DAB tuner (£295 and which I'm a big fan of) and internet (£95 and which I'm not sure when I'll use). And yet all this heated, automated wonderment costs £37,680, just over £1000 less than my Morgan. It's going to be a very plush six months. ✕

Henry Catchpole (@HenryCatchpole)

'Chasing a Huayra, launching the 1-series over crests and into corners, is one of my happiest memories of last year'



Pagani Zonda C12S

Harry has sold his Italian brute, evoking memories from six years of supercar adventures



END OF TERM

S

SO C12 UFO HAS A NEW owner thanks to luxury car dealer Tom Hartley Jr, who did a superb job in securing the right buyer. The great news is that the new owner is an avid *evo* reader based in Hong Kong who intends to keep the car in the UK so he can use it when he's on one of his regular European jaunts. But the question I keep being asked is: why on earth did I sell it?

The first thing to remember is that when I bought the Zonda back in June 2006, the only other cars in my garage were the Clio Trophy, the Lotus 340R and the Elan Sprint. The Pagani was the maddest car purchase I'd ever made, but at its 'bargain' £227,000 asking price I managed to convince myself that I'd be mad not to go for it. Even my bank manager agreed it was a good idea, on the condition he got a ride in it...

My first year with the Zonda was crazy, as I made a point of driving it as much as possible and the miles piled on quickly... until the clutch

Driver's log

Date acquired June 2006 **Duration of test** 6 years and 7 months **Total test mileage** 17,907 **Overall mpg** 18.5
Costs £48,997.02 (£8698.50 servicing, £27,972.77 brakes, £11,808.75 'F' gearbox, £517 rear tyres) **Purchase price** £227,000 **Sale value** £435,000 **Appreciation** £208,000

started playing up. I'd come to a stop with the clutch pedal pressed down, but then the clutch would suddenly engage and the only way to stop would be to turn the engine off. Not ideal. Pagani was mortified I'd had any sort of problem and, after several false starts, it replaced the clutch and gearbox with uprated items from the Zonda F. A few months later, things got even better when Pagani decided to fit the ultimate steel brake and suspension set-up (which required bigger wheels to clear the mighty six-pot calipers) at a discounted rate, as a goodwill gesture for all the grief I'd suffered earlier. Life was what you might describe as sweet.

It stayed sweet too, because from then on the

Zonda was a dream to live with and delivered some truly memorable drives. I once covered 1100 miles in a day, including an unforgettable high-speed blast across Germany. I never saw more than 200mph on the speedo – the needle made very slow progress past 180 due to the amount of downforce. The flipside was that the Zonda's stability at speed made cruising at 160mph on an Autobahn feel almost normal.

Another fond memory was when we pitched the Zonda against the Veyron, Carrera GT and Enzo (*evo* 096). The Veyron was quicker, but it was the Zonda's instantaneous throttle response that stood out: nothing else there could match it, despite the Zonda lacking bhp at the very top end. Then there was the time I chased the beautiful Zonda HH flat-out on some of Sardinia's best roads. Having a perfect view of that car howling along as fast as I ever want to travel on a public road was magical.

So why sell? There were several reasons, starting with the fact that I had owned the car





Above left: Henry had a go. Below left: Zonda F-spec clutch release bearing. Below right: taking on supercar giants



Jaguar XKR-S Convertible

Meaden was prepared for the snow, and wonders why others weren't

'Now seems like the right time to let someone else enjoy this Zonda'

for over six years and had done everything I ever wanted to do in it. I also now have several more exciting cars in my garage, such as the Countach, the Espada and the 550 Barchetta, and having grown up with cars that needed regular fettling to keep on the road, I mourned the lack of 'fiddle factor' on the Zonda; you could say it was almost *too* perfect for me. Finally, the Zonda's running costs kept climbing, as did the car's value. It seems odd to grumble about rising values, but I always factor in the cost of the money tied up in a car to the overall running costs and on the Zonda, it was getting silly.

Assuming an annual value of three per cent, it came to £13,000 per year alone. Add in the hefty insurance premium (£4500), a service (the last one was £4950) and last year's repair to the

ABS (£4200) and the Zonda had the potential to cost me well over £20k a year before turning a wheel. A similar calculation on the Countach came out at a much more palatable £5249 per year. It seems wrong to treat a car as special as a Zonda with hard-nosed business sense, but it was increasingly difficult justifying to my family why I was spending so much money on a car I hardly used.

So after 18,000 unforgettable miles and having found a very excited new keeper, now seems the right time to let someone else enjoy this Zonda. I'm sure he's going to, because it's a very special car and fully deserving of its legendary status. Goodbye C12 UFO – it's been fun knowing you. ✕

Harry Metcalfe (@harrym_evo)



From far left: collecting the Zonda back in 2006; trackday at Spa; brake upgrade (this is a rear disc) necessitated 20in wheels; car got plenty of use on driving events across Europe

I 'IF WINTER DOES HAVE A snowy or icy sting in its tail, the Jag now has a fighting chance of coping.' I'd never fancied myself as a long-range weather forecaster, but as the snow fell, my sign-off from last month's Fast Fleet update seemed eerily prophetic.

Having moved to the middle of nowhere last summer, and having since lived in a caravan while the old wreck we fondly refer to as The Meaden Project is painstakingly renovated and extended, the Jag has had to negotiate a long section of private lane and largely ungritted country road each day. Were it on its regular Pirelli P Zero Corsa rubber I'd never have got to the sanctuary of gritted tarmac, but with its SottoZero winter tyres the XKR-S has been pretty much unstoppable. Given its 502lb ft of torque from just 2500rpm, that amazes me.

I know winter tyres are an expense most motorists would prefer to do without, but as 'snow socks' are less than £50 there's really no excuse for getting stuck. Having witnessed the country grind to a humiliating halt yet again, after what amounted to a pretty ordinary snowfall, I can't believe that as a nation we continue to be so ill-prepared and apathetic towards winter driving. ✕

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)

Driver's log

Date acquired September 2012 Total mileage 6462

Mileage this month 474 Costs this month £0

mpg this month 18.6



Above: snow outfoxed the Giulietta. **Below:** Gould struggled to find the benefit of using All-Weather mode

Alfa Romeo Giulietta Cloverleaf

Winter troubles have failed to dim Gould's enthusiasm for his Italian hatch

I I THOUGHT JANUARY'S 'snowpocalypse' would allow me to have a bit of fun in the Giulietta and test out its handling limits. Suffice to say, in three inches of snow, I found them quite quickly. Sadly, the Alfa's 'All-Weather' mode proved about as useful as a one-legged man in an arse-kicking contest, with the front wheels frequently scrabbling for what little traction they could find. At one point, with the wheels juddering intermittently, the car flatly refused to budge from a stationary position and I had to resort to rocking it back and forth until it managed to find the tiny bit of grip needed to limp away. My partner in her little Citroën C1 wondered what all the fuss was about as she potted off. Oh, the humiliation.

Then I found some footage on YouTube of a Giulietta handling perfectly in the white stuff. Cue me, mouth agape, watching it drift with ease through Swedish snow as if it were the bastard offspring of a Saab 96 driven by Erik 'on the roof' Carlsson...

To be fair, my struggle was due in large part to the tyres – standard summer items – and is



in no way a true reflection of the ability of the car (or me!), which has so far proved excellent, especially when the roads are dry.

Perversely, I've decided to leave the car in Dynamic mode. With its heavier steering, it's helped me to better gauge the feel of the car as it reaches the limit of its traction. And you have more fun to boot. Curiously this doesn't seem to have a disastrous effect on the economy either. How strange is that? ☒

Rob Gould (@robould72)

Driver's log

Date acquired December 2012 Total mileage 4949
Mileage this month 926 Costs this month £0
mpg this month 27.9

Vauxhall Astra VXR

Bovingdon's looking forward to getting to know the VXR better – just as soon as the conditions are right...

I IT'S TAKING QUITE A WHILE to get to know the VXR. I picked it up shortly before Christmas and then spent the holidays driving the family Space (the most noble of MPVs, no arguments). Then, just as I was about to reacquaint myself with the spiky Astra, we had a huge dump of snow.

To be honest, the VXR wasn't really cut out for it; in fact I couldn't even get it up the gentle slope of my road for a few days. Some time later, when I managed to free it, I discovered that the electric handbrake had no sense of humour whatsoever. So I parked it again.

Since then, I've just been driving to airports in it or using it for the occasional school run. I love the nuclear-powered heated seats, the chunky looks and the sheer grunt of the thing, although I hate the incredibly jumpy throttle response away from rest and the fact that just looking at the centre console gives me a migraine. I also secretly love that when you start it from cold, it gives you maximum noise for about two minutes before settling down to an EU-friendly idle. It reminds me of the BMW 1M, which can't be a bad thing.

Next month, I'm planning to clock up substantially more miles and hopefully I'll be able to start really getting under the skin of the VXR. ☒

Jethro Bovingdon (@JethroBovingdon)



Above: busy centre console bothers Bovingdon

Driver's log

Date acquired July 2012 Total mileage 11,795
Mileage this month 1246 Costs this month £0
mpg this month 27.3



Left: C63 coped well with the snow. **Above:** rotating the shift mode selector has become second nature

Mercedes C63 AMG Coupe

Editor Trott managed to turn a B-road diversion into a Hamilton-style blast – with a little help from his ingrained set-up habits

I **IT WAS A RELATIVELY BORING** drive home. The satnav shouted a traffic alert and redirected me via the B660. Yep, the good old B660. But as I escaped the traffic, it happened...

Rather oddly, I managed to configure the car just how I like it for B-road blasting without really knowing it. My right hand moved to adjust the seat forward for that closer-to-the-wheel rally-driver position, then my left hand flicked the rotary selector for the gearshift mode around to 'M' (for Manual) before sweeping upwards to select Sport, loosening

the traction control. Finally, my right thumb hit the hi-fi mute button on the steering wheel and my left forefinger pulled the downshift paddle.

This all happened in a flourish of hand activity John McCririck would have been proud of, and it was done without looking at the controls – a reflection not only on how I've bonded with the C63 but also how often I've carried out this procedure. No wonder the rear tyres have taken a pasting over the last ten months...

I'm never going to be an F1 driver (through age, you understand...) but the way I've learnt how to click, sweep and prod the Mercedes'

controls to activate my preferred driving settings does mean I can pretend to be one. And the resulting blast down the B660 was as brilliant as ever; Sport mode generates enough slip to allow you to correct with opposite lock, but not so much that you disappear into a bush backwards. At the end of it, I reversed the hand and arm flourishes and reset the car into the 'normal' configuration. Fantastic.

In other news, the C63 remained my daily driver throughout the recent snow dump that blighted the UK. The Dunlop Winter Sport 3D tyres worked superbly – I can't praise them highly enough. ☒

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Driver's log

Date acquired April 2012 **Total mileage** 18,539
Mileage this month 1024 **Costs this month** £0
mpg this month 20.8

Renaultsport Twingo 133

Far away from the sporty driving it's made for, the French supermini holds its own on the daily grind

W **WHEN OUR TWINGO FIRST** arrived, I mentioned that one of the biggest challenges it would face would be the 85-mile round-trip that is my daily commute. Given a choice, few people would choose a car this small for such a task, fewer still one as hard-riding as the 133 with the Cup chassis. So, six months in, how is it coping?

Well, the ride quality certainly won't have Jaguar retuning its spring and damper rates any time soon, but I've found it entirely bearable. It perhaps helps that my usual journey to work starts with 20 minutes of country roads that

are perfect Renaultsport territory, but even on the rather more tedious dual carriageway bit that follows, I hardly give the firm ride a second thought these days. My brain and my backside have obviously recalibrated...

The Twingo has no sixth gear, so at a mid-70s cruise the engine hovers just below 4000rpm (and returns mid-30s mpg-wise), yet it isn't intrusive. Road noise is far more likely to attract your attention, but even that's nowhere near as bad as the 370Z I ran last year, and the stereo easily drowns it out without sounding strained. And like many small cars these days, this Twingo isn't short of kit; air-con, cruise control, a speed limiter, a USB connection for iPods and the like and Bluetooth are all standard.

Most revealingly, I haven't once found myself dreading the thought of getting into the Twingo for the drive home, no matter how long the day in the office, or how dark or wet the evening. That's come as a surprise, and a nice one, too. ☒

Ian Eveleigh



Above: a good stereo and plenty of equipment help make the Twingo entirely useable as a commuter car

Driver's log

Date acquired August 2012 **Total mileage** 8383
Mileage this month 720 **Costs this month** £0
mpg this month 34.3

Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.5-16

Duff's campaign to get the classic saloon back on the road started with some basic TLC

I I THOUGHT THAT MY PROMISE to use the 190E more in 2013 would be one of my more easily achieved new year's resolutions. I was, of course, wrong.

First the weather stepped in, delivering what seemed closer to a Siberian winter than January in Oxfordshire. This brought the first issue, other than the likely inability to find traction – road salt. As anyone who owns a 1980s Merc will know, the legendary over-engineering of the era didn't get anywhere near rust-proofing. And with a few bubbles already showing on the 190E's wings and bulkhead, I had to have a fairly stern word with myself: the whole point of this car is to be used and – if necessary – repaired and patched up afterwards. It's a £6000 Mercedes, not a Pagani Zonda...

The Merc itself had different ideas. Unlocking it revealed a flat battery (to be fair, it had been stood idle for a couple of months). So I jump-started it and left it running to recharge the battery and defrost. Taking this opportunity to scrape ice off the windscreen, I closed the driver's door to hear, about five seconds later, the unmistakable *thunk* of a 1990s alarm system locking the doors with the key in the ignition. Cue a frantic search through the house for the spare. Having reopened the door I stopped the engine only to find, when I tried to restart it, the battery was still flat. And therefore dead.

So it was new battery time, which led to the next slight issue: the arctic temperatures had frozen the old battery to its tray. So I had to jump the car again and leave it idling for 20



Above: 190E starred in the wintry weather – once it got going. **Below:** 23-year-old Merc has sprouted rust in places



minutes until there was enough under-bonnet heat to thaw everything out. By this point, only stubbornness was keeping me going, but £66.14 and a visit to the local factors later, the new battery was installed and working.

And the 190E proved itself to be something

of a star in the tricky conditions. Old cars seem to cope better with snow than newer ones: the Merc could find traction where a new VW Golf span its wheels impotently. But conditions were too tricky to put the Cosworth-developed 2.5-litre engine through its paces, as even on gritted, ice-free roads, the 'diff locked' light flashed a constant warning.

Still, I'm glad I blew the (frozen) cobwebs off the 190E – and I've already got some proper driving challenges lined up for it this year. ❌

Mike Duff

Driver's log

Date acquired May 2012 **Total mileage** 157,250
Mileage this month 65 **Costs this month** £66.14 (new battery) **mpg this month** 23-ish

Nissan Navara

A recent visit to the States has got Riley questioning the size of his Navara



T THE PICKUP TRUCK IS A HUGE slice of Americana. Never has this been more apparent to me than when I shot our Hennessey Venom video last month.

Texas, 'the pickup state', is littered with Yank tanks on every freeway, highway, driveway and forecourt, and a pickup is as ubiquitous a sight as a baseball cap or a diner. From the Dodge Ram 1500 to the Chevrolet Silverado, the common theme is that they are *big*, and not just in physical presence. Powerful too: the Ford F150 Raptor (pictured) has a 6.2-litre V8, and after Hennessey got its hands on one, the twin-turbo unit was firing out 810bhp!

My Outlaw seems like a toddler next to these giants. You can buy the Navara in the US, where

it's called the Nissan Frontier and is classed as a mere compact pickup. This American cousin often gets a beating for lack of space in the rear section of the cab and I have to agree. You don't want your shopping sloshing around the load bed so I resort to using the rear seats as a boot, but the space seems to disappear in no time.

I know everything is bigger in the States, but it did make me wonder if the Navara actually may be too small... ❌

Sam Riley (@samgriley)

Driver's log

Date acquired July 2012 **Total mileage** 11,792
Mileage this month 766 **Costs this month** £0 **mpg this month** 27.1

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Jaguar XJR-15

The Secret Supercar Owner has been for a Sunday drive in his 450bhp British race car for the road

Photography: Dean Smith

Above: XJR-15 carries true racing looks. **Below left:** cockpit is trimmed simply in carbon and Kevlar; wide sill makes entry and exit tricky. **Below middle:** just 50 road cars were built



OVER THE COMING months I'm going to try to provide a few observations on the inhabitants of my garage, starting here with the big blue cat. I have owned this Jaguar XJR-15 for two and a half years now. I don't remember how it caught my eye, but after a bit of research on the car, I was intrigued; the fact that the XJR-15 was the first carbonfibre-tubbed road car certainly helped drive my interest.

In many ways, owning a Ferrari F50 – my favourite car – led me to the XJR-15. Ferrari's objective with the F50 was to produce a road car that was as close to an F1 car as possible. The XJR-15 began with a similar brief, that of creating a Group C sportscar for the road, with the Le Mans-winning XJR-9 used as a base.

Both cars deliver brilliantly against those original briefs, but while Ferrari incorporated as much F1 technology as possible into the F50, JaguarSport built the Group C car and adapted it into the XJR-15 for road use. This results in a very different driving experience.

From the moment you swing the ultra-light carbonfibre door open, there is nothing routine about driving the Jag. Getting in requires

'From the start, there is nothing routine about driving the XJR-15'

squatting on the sill and sliding your legs under the steering wheel while you drop your torso sideways into the driver's seat. The driving position is offset towards the middle of the car and the pedal box feels almost dead-centre.

Four-point belt pulled tight and ear protectors on, it's time to bring the beast to life. Turn the electrical system on, flip the toggle for the ignition and begin cracking the starter motor over until oil pressure reaches 2bar. At that point the injectors and fuel pump get switched on and the starter is cranked one more time. All 12 cylinders fire in an angry, subsonic boom.

Now the engine must be warmed up by holding it at 2000rpm until the water temperature reaches 80deg C. Once that's done, depress the carbon clutch and apply a decent amount of right foot to begin moving. At 5000rpm, rock the rifle bolt-like gearshift back into second and keep on accelerating;

this is when the XJR-15 really comes alive. The steering is very precise, while the big AP Racing brakes provide impressive stopping power, even by today's standards. The fact that the XJR-15 tips the scales at just 1050kg certainly helps.

I took the XJR-15 down to Goodwood on a Sunday morning recently – a run that suits the car nicely. The first part is mostly motorway, which allows you to stretch its legs nicely before hitting the twisty bits. Anything under 50mph is second-gear territory for the 6-litre V12, but other than a few towns where you have to roll through slowly in first gear, the rest of the road down is fast and flowing. Handling, despite the rumours, is excellent, with huge levels of grip. Roll in the corners is non-existent and the ride quality, while firm, is not bad at all.

With only 50 built, the XJR-15 will never be a common sight, but it's heartening to see more and more coming out of collections and being put back on the road. It's where they belong. **Secret Supercar Owner** (@SupercarOwner)

Driver's log

Date acquired July 2010 Total mileage 1376
Mileage this month 63 Costs this month £0
mpg this month Next question, please...

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Renault Clio Williams

The Willy is in need of a little attention. Problem is, co-owner Dobie can't decide where to start...

HAVE YOU EVER MADE A to-do list for your car? This month I've learned that it's a dangerous idea. While the Williams is far from a 'project car', its second-hand nature means there's a variety of areas that could use a little attention. And once you start mulling one thing over, so it starts to snowball out of control...

The rear spoiler is shedding its paint and requires a respray. There's still a mildly butchered alloy wheel from a visit to a tyre fitter last year. New windscreen wiper blades are needed. I'd quite like a less antisocial exhaust. The screenwash continues to dampen the nearside-rear footwell carpet rather than travelling the full distance to the back window. And there's still no stereo, something I said I'd fit in the Clio's second-ever Fast Fleet report. Thirty issues ago!



Above: paint is starting to flake off the Clio's rear spoiler, and one of its gold-painted alloys needs tidying up too

After a disappointingly dormant 2012, some substantial miles are also on the Clio's task list, including the Highlands road trip I promised it last autumn and a Renaultsport trackday or two. Therefore a good service and a new set of tyres probably wouldn't go amiss at some point, too.

What to spend my money on and when is a head-spinning juggling act, especially for a master of indecision like myself. And that's half the fun of owning a car like this. The only bill that is certain will be when the road tax elapses at the end of February... ☒

Stephen Dobie (@evoStephenDobie)

Driver's log

Date acquired August 2010 **Total mileage** 92,679
Mileage this month 203 **Costs this month** £0
mpg this month n/a



Above: Meaden's old Peugeot 106 is back on the road, and proving itself to be as reliable as ever

Peugeot 106 Rallye

All the hot hatches in this issue inspired Meaden to bring the Rallye out of hibernation

IT'S BEEN FAR TOO LONG since I last spent time in the Rallye, but when you inhabit the weird world of motoring journalism it's often hard to find the time to drive your own cars. Especially when it's freezing cold and your 'work' car has 542bhp and a heated steering wheel. Ahem.

French hot hatches can be notoriously sensitive creatures, so after such a prolonged period of inactivity I wasn't expecting the Pug to play ball when I went to exhume it from its icy grave. Oh ye of little faith! It fired first time and settled into a smooth idle.

To be honest I'm continually amazed at how reliable the Rallye has been. Okay, so it let me down not long after I bought it (back in the snowy winter of 2009) thanks to a dodgy fuel pump, but it has run without so much as a hiccup ever since. Admittedly I did throw some money at it in the first few months, but that was as much to restore its precision and increase its performance a little as it was to build-in some reliability. In all three respects it was money well spent.

Driving some of the hottest hatches of all time in this issue has reaffirmed my belief that hot hatch ownership is a rite of passage for a petrolhead. In all honesty I'm probably too old for a noisy 106 with white wheels and go-faster stripes, but as the Rallye never fails to remind me, a great driving experience is as ageless as it is timeless. ☒

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)

Driver's log

Date acquired March 2009 **Total mileage** 59,882
Mileage this month 298 **Costs this month** 0
mpg this month 32.8

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Lamborghini Murciélago

Work to repair the Lambo after its recent accident began this month with a spell on a chassis-straightening jig

THE SCREECHING OF an injured Murciélago being dragged backwards onto a flatbed trailer is not a sound I wish to hear again soon. But on the bright side, the Deerhunter was about to embark on the first stage of its return to the tarmac: having its badly twisted chassis straightened after its heavy shunt late last year.

The good chaps at Lamborghini Manchester pointed me in the direction of Midlands-based prestige accident repairer Chartwell. Approved by Lambo, McLaren and Ferrari for major repair work, it has the necessary equipment and expertise to take on the task of pulling everything back straight and true.

If there is one thing I've learnt in the past month or so, it's that repairing today's supercars with their myriad of composite materials is a fine art. Rocking up to Chartwell with the Murciélago on the aforementioned trailer, things got off to a great start when a white overall-clad reception committee were waiting to lend a hand getting the Lambo into their aircraft hangar-sized facility.

I'd asked if I could spend a morning a few days later seeing how the process of straightening a chassis was actually carried out. With my request granted, a week or so later Bruce Milburn of Chartwell explained the complicated task of mounting the Murciélago to a 'Globaljig'. The first job was to calculate just how far the chassis was twisted; it transpired

the impact had not only compressed the chassis but forced it upwards, kinking the windscreen surround. Not great but, I was assured, still correctable. Next, an exploded diagram of precise data provided by Lamborghini was used to attach the jig to the car. Using various locating points, this stage took a few days in itself but had to be meticulously completed in order for the jig's five-ton force to be applied correctly over another couple of days until the car returned to its original tolerances.

In the meantime, we itemised the new parts required and things turned out better than first thought. A front offside wing was a must as the original had been smashed to bits; a replacement is around £3000. Thankfully we could repair the front bumper/spoiler and as a replacement was over £9000, that was welcome news. Mechanically it was suspension parts needed in the main; both an upper and lower arm (about £4k together), a replacement damper (£3k), a steering rack (£3k) and finally a windscreen (a stinger at £6000 – a coach windscreen is half this price!).

Someone recently suggested I should change the Deerhunter's nickname to 'Trigger's broom'. I'm beginning to see why... ☒

Simon George (@6gearexperience)

Driver's log

Date acquired September 2004 Total mileage 258,098
Mileage this month 0 Costs this month £3500
(chassis straightening) mpg this month 0

Audi RS4 Avant

A surprising conclusion to the mystery of the German estate's knocking noise

T'HEY ALL DO THAT, SIR' was definitely not the response I was expecting from Audi after it took our RS4 for two weeks to investigate the pesky knocking noise. The official line from Audi's press office is that the noise coming from the front end is caused by the dampers fitted to the current RS4 and RS5 models – and that they're supposed to sound and feel like that!

In my defence, I doubt anyone would expect a £63k car to have a knocking noise as standard, and the fact that my local dealer initially diagnosed a suspension issue made me feel less embarrassed. Still, with its clean bill of health I can finally start to lean on the front end into corners without the fear of something collapsing. ☒

Dean Smith (@evoDeanSmith)

Driver's log

Date acquired September 2012 Total mileage 9947
Mileage this month 4313 Costs this month £0
mpg this month 22.0

Range Rover Evoque

The treacherous winter conditions claimed a victim on our Fast Fleet...

OUR EVOQUE HAS HAD A severe tree overdose. The combination of the sudden deep-freeze and good old-fashioned driver error led to me pretty much destroying the front driver's-side corner after I slid off an ice-covered bend. It was one of those accidents where I had about three seconds to contemplate the tree I was going to hit, and zero ability to do anything about it.

The Evoque nearly stopped – the impact was at no more than 15mph – but it still triggered both airbags and the driver's knee-bag. The front wing was peeled back and the lower suspension arm snapped clean. 'You won't be the last,' said the recovery truck driver. It wasn't much consolation. ☒

Mike Duff

Driver's log

Date acquired March 2012 Total mileage 16,220
Mileage this month 554 Costs this month £0
mpg this month 32.5

Market Watch

Insights into the used-car market with Harry Metcalfe

Market Watch



TURNING JAPANESE

The strength of the pound against the yen may bring the Toyota GT86 into more affordable territory

YOU PROBABLY DON'T keep regular tabs on currency movements, but if you did, you'd know the pound is on the move against the Japanese yen at the moment, and this should be good news for UK car buyers.

Over the last six months, the pound has strengthened against the yen by 17 per cent, so new Japanese cars should become cheaper in the UK by a similar amount. But is it happening? Well, I've noticed a couple of delivery-mileage Toyota GT86s offered at £21,875 – a decent discount on the £24,995 list price and nearer where we hoped they'd be at launch last summer. Check Auto Trader and you'll see over 100 GT86s on offer and nearly all of them are ex-dealer demos priced either side of £24,000 (depending on mileage), but I still think that's too chunky and prices have to come down further before they will start to sell in the volumes Toyota hoped for.

With delivery-mileage GT86s now under £22,000, that values 5k- to 10k-mile examples well under £20,000 in my book, but because the GT86 was overpriced at launch, they're not there yet. They'll get there eventually, and with plenty of tuning companies launching tasty upgrades, I can see the GT86 getting the cult following the car deserves.

Meanwhile, the pound has been wilting against the euro, dropping nearly ten per cent in recent months. That makes any car bought in euros pricier, so the trickle of LHD cars coming into the UK from Europe (German Ferraris in particular) is bound to slow. The other effect a weak pound can have is a rise in exports of British cars, but with most European markets pretty flat at the moment, I can't see this happening until the pound falls further. Watch this space...

Harry Metcalfe
Editorial director



Auction Watch

Historics at Brooklands sale offers big opportunities for fans of classic Porsches

Historics at Brooklands' first sale of the year takes place on March 9, and has attracted a number of Porsche 911s. Of these, two particular examples look like top buys.

The striking white 3.0 Carrera RSR replica seems good value at £25-30,000. Due to the rarity and price of genuine Carrera RS models, ownership is impossible for the majority, but building faithful replicas from lesser 911 models is perfectly achievable. This example started life as a 1975 2.7, and now has a rebuilt 3.2-litre engine from the late 1980s, genuine steel wide arches and that famous ducktail spoiler. A car like this would easily cost more than the top estimate to build from scratch.

Prefer something more original and somewhat newer? A black 911 is a sure winner in the looks department, and thanks to a set of original Viper Green wheels, this particular 1990 964 Carrera 2 from 1990 really stands out at £14-18k. It's fitted with an automatic gearbox, which might put some off, but this Tiptronic unit was notably ahead of its time, and the car has been well looked after by the current owner. With 75,000 miles on the clock, it's below average for a 911 of this age too.

There has been a rise in the number of Porsches appearing for sale recently, and Historics' auction director Edward Bridger-Stille believes interest is growing due to this year's 50th anniversary of the 911, and also because the 911 is hugely reliable and a great daily-driver.

There are also a few interesting Ferraris: a low-mileage 1989 Testarossa (24,730 miles) could be yours for £45-55k and if you're feeling brave you could pick up an unfinished Dino 308GT4/360 Modena hybrid project – the idea being to shoehorn the modern Ferrari's engine into the classic's engine bay – for £21-25k.

Matthew Hayward (@octaneMatthew)



Above: white Carrera RSR replica could be the closest you'll ever get to owning the real thing for £30,000



Above: Viper Green wheels make this 1990 964 Carrera stand out – and it could sell for as little as £14,000

Trader chat

Neil Henderson, founder, The Hairpin Company
www.thehairpincompany.co.uk



'Everyone wants the best these days. They spend more time looking at the history file than they do at the actual car and if some little detail isn't right, it has a dramatic effect on the value.'

'Take the 1973 Porsche 911 2.7 RS I have in stock, for example. It's chassis 0687 and was originally supplied to an Italian buyer who owned it through to 1979. It's perfect in every way, but he must have had an engine failure during this period and the engine crankcase was replaced with an identical unit nine numbers away from the original engine's number. It makes absolutely no difference to the way the car drives, but rather than this 2.7 RS being worth £300,000, I'm offering it for £225,000.'

'It's the same story with a BMW M3 Sport Evo I have in stock. It's in excellent condition, but it's up for £45,000 because it's covered 93,000 miles. That's a huge reduction – a near-identical 12,000-mile example sold for £80,000 recently.'

'I think Ferrari Dinos look expensive but this has helped push up the price of other Ferraris, particularly the Daytona. I have a fibreglass-bodied 308 GTB in at the moment. It drives beautifully, it's completely original and at £75,000, looks reasonable value.'

Ask the expert



Q Married life now means that I require an estate car for around £15,000. I have to be mindful of a big commute, otherwise an RS4 would be perfect. My head says a Skoda Octavia vRS diesel is the sensible option, but having previously owned a fantastic Impreza GB270 wagon, I don't think it'd be enough of a buzz. What else should I consider?

Hugh Powell

A There's lots of choice at this price point. If an RS4 is a dream choice and you have happy memories of an Impreza GB270 wagon, I'm guessing it's the thought of changing to an oil-burner that is hurting the most. The good news is that everybody else thinks diesel is the

only answer and, as a result, values of petrol-powered estates are on the floor.

A BMW 325i M Sport estate (pictured) would be my first choice and they're reasonably priced, from around £13,000 with under 60,000 miles. BMW 525i Tourings are priced at a roughly similar level, and would be better if you're looking for more interior space. The Mercedes C280 Sport estate is a slightly off-radar choice, but it's even more practical than the two BMW wagons and has a reputation for being bulletproof.

If you want the RS4 feeling without the bills, why not try the Audi S4 Avant? Examples from 2007 with 60,000 miles on the clock are within your budget, but their mpg probably isn't thanks to being powered by a thumping great 4.2-litre V8. It does sound good though... **HM**

Just looking

The pick of the classifieds this month



Mercedes SLR McLaren Roadster

£195,000

Joe Macari Performance Cars, London

www.joemacari.com, 0208 870 9007

Remember the Mercedes SLR McLaren? Such a supercar heavyweight when it was launched, but its contemporary rivals – the Ferrari Enzo and Porsche Carrera GT – are recalled much more fondly.

Perhaps the talents of its less surreal successor, the SLS, are partly to blame. Yet given the choice, would you rather spend 195 grand on a brand-new drop-top SLS, or this far glitzier (and barely used) SLR?

Its turbine alloy wheels, F1-style nose and side-exit exhausts give it the bona fide supercar look, yet its Crystal Laurus Silver paint and Silver Arrow Red leather interior ensure it stays the right side of classy.

Registered in 2007, this SLR Roadster is a one-owner car and has covered just 3800 miles. It also has a full McLaren service history. How extrovert are you feeling?

Stephen Dobie (@evoStephenDobie)



Mini Cooper S GP Works

£12,850

Sytner Mini Sunningdale, Berkshire

www.sytner.co.uk, 0845 481 2104

Like the look of the new Mini GP in this month's issue? Well, if you've managed to squeeze into the UK's 200-car allocation, you'll need nearly £29,000. And if not, delivery-mileage examples are currently demanding a ten per cent premium...

The budget choice, then, is the GP's ancestor. With the same name and a broadly similar exterior makeover, it can be bought for less than a new Swift Sport. Its

1.6-litre supercharged engine possesses the same 215bhp as the new Mini GP's turbocharged unit, but serves it up with a heap more character.

It also has a proper limited slip-diff (the new car has an electronic set-up) and the cachet of being built by Bertone in Italy rather than rolling off the same line as Mini Ones. A very cool car, and values appear to be stabilising. **SD**

Fantasy garage: £30,000 challenge

This month, motoring ed Mike Duff has just £30k to find an '80s hot hatch, a 911 with over 300bhp and something with a V8 – all from the classifieds at forsale.evo.co.uk



Peugeot 205 GTI

£4995

Always my favourite '80s hot hatch – and values are on the rise. Five grand looks reasonable for this lovely 58,000-mile 1.6-litre series 1.



Porsche 911 (996) Carrera 4

£12,950

Values of 996s continue to slide, and there are some real bargains out there. This one's done just 64,000 miles and has a full history. It's silver, too.



Bentley Mulsanne Turbo

£11,990

And something completely different... I love the idea of blasting around in this primordial beast. 8mpg is the slight downside.

Market Watch Special

Hints and tips to get ahead of the game when buying or selling

Valet insight: preparing a car for sale



How appearances and honesty can make or break a sale

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT when it comes to selling cars. So firstly, ensure your advert is clear, well-informed and honest (see advice, below right). The internet makes everyone an expert these days, so don't think the person turning up to part with their hard-earned won't have done their homework.

Ensure the car is as clean as it can be; a professional valet can transform a car and can add hundreds or even thousands of pounds to the value. Dealers frequently suggest to me: 'Give it a quick tart-up and make it look pretty.' That's not good. A cheap valet can look, smell and feel terrible and could lose you a punter.

Make sure the windscreen doesn't have any nasty chips in it and that the tyres (including the spare) aren't close to wearing out. Seriously

consider replacing pedal rubbers, floor mats and, if creased, the tax disc holder. It's also worth putting spare oil, anti-freeze and screenwash neatly in the boot, as it will suggest mechanical sympathy.

Collect as much history on the car as you can find – invoices, receipts, MOTs, tax discs – and file them in a folder in chronological order. This will all improve the buyer's opinion of how you've cared for the car during your ownership.

It also helps to be friendly, approachable and open with the buyer. Introduce them to the car as if it's been your soulmate and walk them around it highlighting relevant points about spec and accessories. People won't hand money over to someone they don't trust, so your presentation is as crucial as the car's. ❌

Richard Tipper (@perfectionvalet)

What to look out for when buying a car



So you've scanned the classifieds, found the car of your dreams and arranged a viewing. What next?

If the seller is genuine, expect the car to be ready for inspection as soon as you arrive. If it's hiding under a cover or sitting unloved in a corner, alarm bells should start to ring. Assuming it's not, the first job is to have a good look around for any obvious defects: paint overspray, kerbed wheels, unusual tyre wear, etc.

Next, look the buyer in the eye and ask: 'Is there anything I should know before I take a closer look?' Some sellers crumble at this point and spill the beans on crash repairs and engine blow-ups, and that's when you walk away. Next, insist on looking underneath, as it's amazing how much you can learn by doing so. A garage should have a car lift handy but if you're buying privately, take a trolley jack and look for rust, crash damage and oil leaks.

Finally, look at the history for regular specialist servicing and check that the mileage records add up. One-owner cars are worth more as the history should be complete. Once you're happy (a test drive is essential!), it's time to make a bid and see what happens... ❌

Harry Metcalfe (@harrym_evo)

Writing an advert

Simple text and a pretty picture can help hugely



The secret to a good car advert is to keep it simple. As you write, consider what a buyer would want to know.

Firstly, cover the basics: make, model, age, colour and mileage. Plus points, like a full service history or desirable extras, should be put high up in the description, but you shouldn't feel like you have to list everything. Use a spell-checker and avoid flowery language.

Pictures are also vital: we buy with our eyes. Make sure the car is clean and take it somewhere pretty to shoot it; you'll be amazed how classy a nice background can make a car look – see above for how to get that wrong... ❌

Mike Duff

Inspection equipment

Found a car to buy? Don't forget to pack your kit



Knowledge is the first item you should take with you. Reputable buying guides can be found online – start with evo.co.uk and also check forums.

Your essential kit should include a set of overalls, for obvious reasons. A digital camera is useful to take shots you can review later. Use the flash too; it will reveal more than you think. Take both an inspection lamp and a pen-light, and make sure both have fresh batteries. A magnet will help you seek out filler, while a dentist's mirror can help you see around corners. Also take a screwdriver to probe bodywork (but be careful and ask the seller for permission) and don't forget your glasses if you wear them!

Finally, take a mate (ideally a knowledgeable one) and trust their view. Second opinions are vital. ❌

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

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2012 '12' Elise Liquid Blue, Touring Pack, Leather, Performance Pack, Ex Demo.....	£24,489
2008 '08' Elise SC Startlight Black, Touring Pack, Black Leather, Black Alloys	£24,489
2012 '12' Elise Club Racer Rare Example! Matt Black, SuedeTex, Comfort Pack, 6-Speed	£24,989
2010 '10' Elise SC MY10 Startlight Black, Touring Pack, A/C, Sports Exhaust, TRD Intake	£27,489
2013 New Elise S Supercharged MY13 New, Solar Yellow, Touring Pack, Black Style Pack, A/C.....	£38,989

EVORA

2010 '10' Evora Storm Titanium, Black Leather, Sport Pack, Sports Ratio Gearbox, Xenons, Reversing Sensors.....	£35,989
2011 '11' Evora Starlight Black, Black Leather, Tech Pack, Sport Pack, Sports Ratio Gearbox, Xenons.....	£36,989
2012 '12' Evora S IPS Ex Demo, Motorsport Black, Black Leather, Red Stitching, Tech Pack, Premium Sport Pack, Reversing Camera	£52,989

PRESTIGE

1999 Maserati 3200GT Pearl Blue, Luxury Blue Leather, Grey Alcantara Headlining, A/C, Electric Seats	£11,989
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Combined Fuel Economy Elise Range 37.5 [7.5] - 45.0 [6.3] Exige S 28.0 [10.1] Evora Range 28.7 [9.9] - 31.4 [9.0] CO₂ emissions [g/km] Elise Range 175 - 149 Exige S 236 Evora Range 229 - 210. [Prices do not include delivery charges, PDI, first service, number plates, first registration fee, road fund licence, fuel for any other on the road charges] or any other costs. Please contact your authorised Lotus dealership for further information. Prices are effective from 14th February 2012.]

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LOTUS EXIGE S1

2000 W reg. 14,000 miles only with FSH. The car is in New Aluminum with black cloth seats, blue alcantara sills and removable steering wheel. 180 BHP conversion, sports exhaust, AP competition clutch, ultra close ratio 0.046 gear train, quick shift, dynamic suspension dampers, Eibach springs, AP ventilated discs with Pagid RS14 pads, standard seat belts and Wilens 4 point harnesses, radio, Yokohama A048R tyres. The body work, interior, wheels etc are virtually unmarked. **£32,500**



LOTUS ELISE 111S

31,000 miles only. Recent cambelt service, Quartz bodywork with black leather interior, Aircon, Kenwood radio/CD. Alloy indicator stalks and gear lever gate, sports exhaust, ITG induction kit, Armafend and protected. An excellent example. **£13,950**



LOTUS 340R

2001 - 51 reg. No.336 Just 11,000 miles from new. 190 up-grade. Carbon wings and 4 point harnesses. Oil cooler kit. Firefox titanium exhaust. Track pack springs and adjustable Konis. Fantastic car. **£27,950**



LOTUS ELISE S3

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LOTUS ELISE S2 SPORTS TOURER

Lotus Elise S2 Sports Tourer 03 53. Atlantic Blue with blue hood with tan leather interior, electric windows, central locking Momo removable steering wheel, Blaupunkt Bluetooth radio/CD. A good example **£12,750**



LOTUS ESPRIT S3

Lotus Esprit S3 D REG 63,000 miles genuine from new with an excellent service history. Glacier Blue with dark blue leather interior, air con and factory glass roof. The last owner has owned the car since 1990 and has done a wonderful job of keeping the car original and in superb condition hence this is not the usual tatty example. The car will have a cambelt service and 12 months MOT when sold. This is not a car to miss. **£16,500**



LOTUS ELAN SPRINT DHC

Lotus replacement chassis. All the right bits for fast road use and touring events. TT exhaust including manifold, large radiator, adjustable suspension, solid drive shafts. Excellent yellow paintwork. Fully serviced and MOT'd with lots of history. **£32,500**



LOTUS ELAN +2S D.H.C

Lotus Elan +2S 130/5 D.H.C not to be confused with the normal standard conversion. This has been completely re-engineered and totally restored to exacting standards by the previous owner. One of the very best and ready for 2013 summer? **£24,950**

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Buying Guide

Lotus Evora



2009-

Overview

The 'practical' Lotus, with a sublime chassis and up to 345bhp. All from just £30k

Words: Peter Tomalin

THE EVORA WAS a big deal for Lotus. The biggest investment in the company's history, a car conceived to go head-to-head with the likes of Porsche's Cayman and 911 with no excuses needed. With a 276bhp Toyota 3.5-litre V6, Lotus's proven aluminium chassis technology and world-leading ride-and-handling know-how, it promised junior-supercar dynamics. And with more refinement and the option of two-plus-two seating, it also promised to take the Lotus brand to a whole new audience. Projected sales were 2000 a year worldwide.

It didn't work out quite like that. When the Evora went on sale in early autumn 2009, it looked pricey for the performance – not helped by the 450 Launch Editions only being available fully optioned-up, inflating the basic £47,500 to a bracing £59k. Sales were steady at best – around 400 a year in the UK at their peak, with a similar number going overseas.

The Evora was considerably more refined and habitable than an Elise or Exige, and dynamically it hit the bullseye. The supercharged S version launched in September 2010 lifted power to 345bhp. Definitely worth having is the Sports Pack (standard on the S), which adds drilled brake discs and a Sport button that sharpens the throttle and relaxes the ESP. Ditto the Sport Ratio (close ratio) gearbox. Also worth seeking out are the Tech Pack (nav, Bluetooth, reversing sensors, cruise, iPod connector) and the Premium Pack (full leather trim, reversing camera, improved ICE, and xenons – although this pack became standard in 2011).

Now that you can pick up a 2010 Evora for not much more than £30K, it's starting to look seriously tempting.

CHECKPOINTS



Clockwise from top left: 'Intelligent Precision Shift' auto is a torque converter; optional rear seats are of limited use; Toyota engine reliable; expect 25-30mpg

What to look for

Engine

The good news – and no real surprise – is that the Evora's Toyota-sourced V6 is proving robust and reliable. Our guides here are Jamie Matthews, Lotus sales manager at specialist Bell & Colvill, and owner and model expert Justin King, and both report no major recurring issues with the Camry-derived engine. As Justin points out, most Evoras since the Launch Editions should still be under factory warranty. Partly for that reason, few are tuned, though many owners have gone for a decat, while the Lotus sports exhaust is a popular upgrade.

Transmission

Although the Toyota manual gearbox itself is almost entirely trouble-free, gear linkage cables are a known problem area, and there can be big differences in feel from car to car, so it's worth trying a few. Vague, loose shifts on early cars were often replaced under warranty, though some replacements later became stiff and obstructive. Adjustments can be made to improve the shift, but it's a costly job as it involves removing parts of the interior, so it's vital to check thoroughly on a test drive. The IPS (Intelligent Precision Shift) automatic clearly avoids these problems, although as it's actually just a torque converter, it won't match the speed and precision of the best double-clutch paddleshift 'boxes.

Suspension, steering, brakes

This is where the Evora really excels, so anything less than first-rate performance should arouse suspicion. The steering should feel precise and beautifully connected, the ride supple, and the car should pull up straight and true under braking. Out of kilter geometry has a considerable effect on the way the car feels. Kerbed wheels should put you on your guard, while heavily worn edges to the tyres could point to hard track use. Rear tyres in particular are pricey – £200 a corner.

Body, interior, electrics

The bonded aluminium chassis is in three parts, which means that unlike the Elise/Exige, damaged sections can be replaced. No rust issues with the composite body, but check for even panel gaps. There were a number of service bulletins on early cars, covering door handle mechanisms, air-con condensers, door-pin opening, gear-cable rattles and water ingress. Check the service record for these fixes. Inside, due to the rather awkward access, the leather sill coverings, door speakers and dash bottom can all get scuffed. The seat leather on pre-MY12 cars is of poor quality and prone to wear.

What we said

Evora 2+2, July 2009



Above: Evora beat both Cayman S and Farbio GTS350 in this 2009 group test

'From the moment its wheels start turning, the signs are that it's something really rather special. Even before I reach the end of the hotel driveway, the quality of its steering and damping have made an impression.

'I was worried that the Evora might feel wheezy, sluggish and tail-heavy. Not a bit of it. A few miles up the road, right foot stretched and steering and brakes exercised, it's looking more and more like Lotus has created a truly remarkable car.

'Yes, there's that smooth, gutsy V6 behind, yet dynamically the Evora feels light and responsive like an Elise. It's some trick to pull off, endowing the car with the urge and silky soundtrack of a 3.5-litre V6 but mounting it and tuning the chassis in such a way that its mass appears no greater than that of a four-cylinder.

'Lotus has taken everything that's good about an Elise – the clarity of steering, the supple ride and the effortless agility and precision – and allowed them to headline in a bigger, higher-quality package... the Evora is irresistible.' (evo 132)



Above: Evora is a rare sight out on the roads – another good reason to consider one



Above: cabin is more homely than an Elise's; check the leather on the seats for wear

'I bought one' Justin King

'A good all-rounder was what I was after. Something special, quick and trackable, but also useable. The 911 was the obvious choice but I wanted something a bit more unique. I tried the Evora and I knew instantly it was the one for me. The handling really is second to none. It feels just as at home on track as on a Euro jaunt thanks to the interior comfort and superb Recaro seats.

'I bought mine new from Murray Motors in Edinburgh, who have looked after it since and are the best garage I've had the pleasure of dealing with. I still remember the salesman wincing when I specced Chrome Orange, as most were the more subtle silver or black shades.

'I've owned it almost three years now and have done four trackdays in it, including the Nürburgring. The rear

seats are next to useless for anyone over 4ft, although I have squeezed three passengers into it for a few miles. The satnav unit is a bit of a fiddle, but OK once you're used to it. I get 25mpg in mixed driving, 30 on a good run.

'The Evora is the longest I've ever owned a car. It really is a fantastic all-rounder, and I'm genuinely struggling to find something to replace it with.'

In the classifieds



2010 Evora 2+0

⊕ 65,000 miles ⊕ Laser Blue, black leather ⊕ ex-Lotus management ⊕ FLSH ⊕ Sports and Tech packs ⊕ www.albico.net

£25,995



2010 Evora 2+0

⊕ 23,000 miles ⊕ Graphite Grey with Paprika leather ⊕ Tech Pack, Premium pack and Sports Pack ⊕ www.castlesportscars.co.uk

£32,950



2011 Evora S 2+2 (MY2012)

⊕ 12,698 miles ⊕ Autumn Bronze ⊕ IPS ⊕ Tech and Premium packs ⊕ Pioneer multi-media ⊕ www.lotusnewcastle.co.uk

£47,000

The rivals

Porsche Cayman S

A brilliant car, but feels heavy and just a little blunt after the Evora.

Nissan GT-R

Not an obvious rival, but when the Evora was launched you could buy the bonkers-quick GT-R for the same money.

BMW M3

It's impossible to ignore the E92 M3, with its high revving 4-litre V8, fine chassis and Evora-trumping practicality.

DATA

Specifications

Lotus Evora (S version in brackets)

- ⊕ Engine V6, 3456cc (supercharged)
- ⊕ Max power 276bhp @ 6400rpm (345bhp @ 7000rpm)
- ⊕ Max torque 258lb ft @ 4700rpm (295lb ft @ 4500rpm)
- ⊕ Transmission Six-speed manual or six-speed auto, rear-wheel drive
- ⊕ Weight 1382kg (1430kg)
- ⊕ Power-to-weight 203bhp/ton (245bhp/ton)
- ⊕ 0-60mph 5.6sec (4.6sec)
- ⊕ Top speed 162mph (172mph)
- ⊕ Price new (2010) £48,550 (£57,550)

Parts prices

(Parts prices for Evora manual, prices from Bell & Colvill, Leatherhead. Tyre prices from blackcircles.com. Prices include VAT but not fitting)

- ⊕ Tyres (each) £113.26 front, £209.30 rear (Pirelli P Zero)
- ⊕ Front pads (pair) £170.49
- ⊕ Front discs (pair) £167.95
- ⊕ Front damper £278.10
- ⊕ Exhaust (cat-back) £1113.90
- ⊕ Clutch £418.75 (cover/plate)
- ⊕ Oil filter £29.86
- ⊕ Air filter £35.89
- ⊕ Set of spark plugs £107.57

Servicing

(Prices for Evora manual, from Bell & Colvill, including VAT. NB: discounts given to customers who purchase their Evora through Bell & Colvill)

- ⊕ Yearly (without hydraulic fluid change) £429.91
- ⊕ Yearly (with hydraulic fluid change) £511.79
- ⊕ Major service (36,000 miles, with fluid) £683.75

What to pay

Very few Evoras have yet dropped below the £30k mark – the only one we found was extremely high mileage. So £30k is generally the starting point for a 2010 car with average mileage – 2009 cars are rare and were also fully specced. Speaking of which, the Tech, Sports and Premium packs all add £s, as do rear seats. Supercharged S versions start at around £37k.

Useful contacts

- ⊕ thelotusforums.com (forums, advice)
- ⊕ seloc.org (Lotus Enthusiasts Club)
- ⊕ lotustalk.com (forums, advice)
- ⊕ scottishelises.com (community)
- ⊕ pistonheads.com (forums, sales)
- ⊕ forsale.evo.co.uk (sales)

Thank you

Jamie Matthews at Bell & Colvill, and Justin King.

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2011/60 Evora S (MY12) 2+2, Racing Green, 14K	£46990
2010/10 Evora 2+0, Graphite, Cocobolo, Tech/Sport/Premium, CR, 15K.....	£32990
2009/59 Evora 2+2, Titanium, Paprika, Tech/Sport/Premium, CR, 16K.....	£32490
1997/R Esprit GT3, Nautilus, Black Leather, Air, Roof, 38K	£18490
1977/R Esprit S1, Orange, Tartan, Fully Restored, just stunning	£SOLD
1977/S Esprit S1, White, Tartan, Fully Restored, again – stunning.....	£39990
1978/T Esprit S1, Red, one to recommission, great basis	£15990
1978/T Esprit S2, Red, Marcasite and Leather, an excellent example	£15990
2008/58 Elise SC JC Type 25, BRG/Yellow Stripe, 11K	£26990
2000/W Elise Sport 160 SVA, Aluminium, Hardtop, 1 owner, 9K	£18490
2000/X Elise Sport 160 SVA, Black, 2 owners, 20K	£SOLD
2001/Y Elise Sport 160 SVA, Black, great specification & condition, 37K.....	£17490
2000/W Elise 111S S1, Mustard, As new, 2400 miles, the best available.....	£SOLD
2009/59 Elise S, Starlight Black, Black Alloys, Level 2 exhaust, 15K	£18990
2000/ X Exige S1, Azure, Magnolia, 177 BHP, standard, 32K	£25990
1973/M Elan +2S/130, Yellow, Black, beautiful older restoration. Lovely.....	£16990
2002/02 Porsche 911 C4S (996) Manual, Seal Grey, Black Leather 75K.....	£18990
2006/06 Porsche Boxster S (987) Manual, Basalt, Sand, Big spec 48K	£16990

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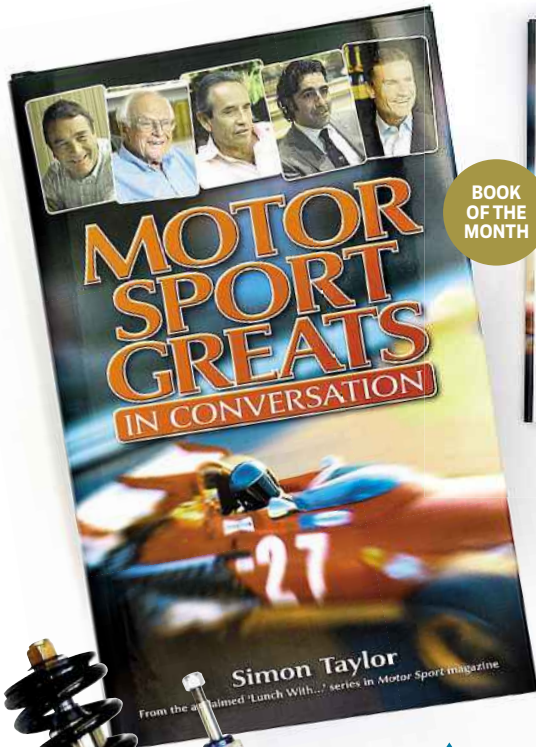
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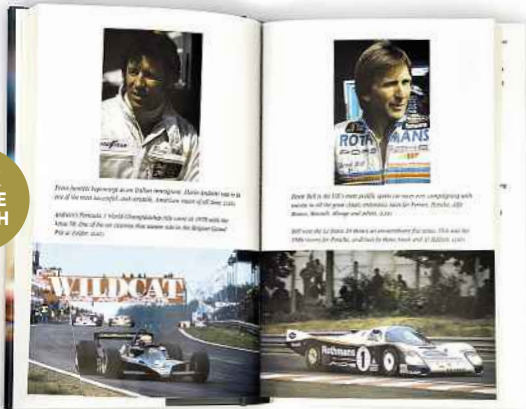
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1 A collection of 24 long interviews, originally published in *Motor Sport* magazine, with some true legends of racing both past and present. Among those interviewed by author Simon Taylor are seven F1 world champions (including Damon Hill and Nigel Mansell), famous car constructors and designers such as Roger Penske and Gordon Murray, and even *evo*'s newest columnist, Dario Franchitti. It's a riveting and revealing read.

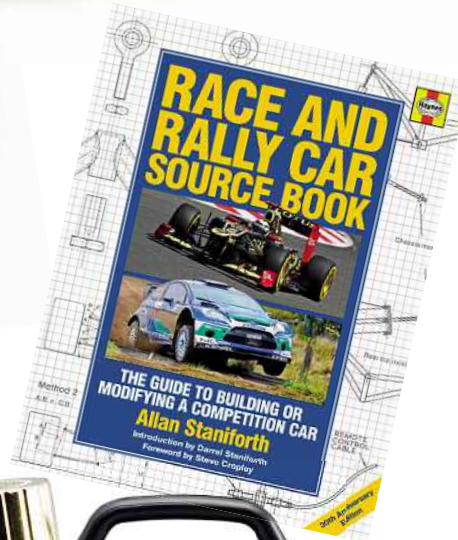
Book Race and Rally Car Source Book

£25 haynes.co.uk

2 If you're planning on building a car for competition, this book by Allan Staniforth is the one you need. Originally written in 1983 but updated for the modern day, it delves into the minutiae of car preparation, from suspension geometry to downforce. It also features dozens of case studies, including the infamous Brabham F1 'fan car' from 1978.



1



2
3

Car care Mer Ultimate Shine Polish

£9.99 halfords.co.uk

3 Mer is a popular German brand of car care products not necessarily well known in the UK. Usable on all colours and all paint types, this Ultimate Shine Polish offers protection against a wide array of threats, including snow, frost and even UV light. The polish works on wet surfaces as well, so there's no need to dry panels before you start work.



Performance

Gaz BMW E30 3-series Monotube Coilover Kit

£1440 (set) gazshocks.com

4 Having catered for hordes of racing E30s in the past, Gaz Shocks has now released a set of monotube coilovers suitable for road use. Offering quicker reaction times and a weight saving, the kit is covered by Gaz's standard two-year warranty.

evo Essentials Top 3: T-shirts

Ferrari Manettino

£25 t-lab.eu



The tiny dial is synonymous with modern Ferraris. The one on this shirt is helpfully switched to 'Race' mode.

Twingo Supercup

£17.24 redbubble.com



If there really was a race series for Renaultsport's smallest creation, we hope it'd be as chaotic as this tee suggests.


1971 Sebring

£27.99 gearboxgifts.com



Vic Elford, a great racing all-rounder, won the Sebring 12 Hours with Gérard Larrousse in this beautiful Porsche 917K.

T-SHIRT OF THE MONTH




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A+B	155 GPB £2,850	57 JMB £1,699	88 MH £12,000	OUI 1 £16,500
AADA 7 £8,600	GR 1 £POA	5 JMW £8,250	MOY 8 £5,750	9 OW £11,500
ADP 92 £3,800	85 GS £6,950	4 JNA £4,495	MS 55 £26,500	1 OXX £12,999
ADS 17 £5,500	YES1 GUN £12,450	JNW 854 £1,850	1 MT £175,000	10 PAS £6,500
K2 AJB £2,750	H 88 £26,500	12 JON £18,500	3 MYX £1,995	PCC 7 £8,200
ALM 52 POA	I14 PPY £3,500	JON 99 £22,500	5 NAT £19,800	PCM 300 £2,800
AMY 60 £8,995	HLC 1 £21,500	JPS 14 £POA	NAT 7S £9,500	1 PF £130,000
370 ANP £1,499	4 HM £22,000	JSR 5 £POA	NAT 7Y £12,500	PJC II £8,950
ATC 1 £39,500	HOT 15H £6,250	333 JT £6,500	1 NBR £23,500	PNH 42 £2,800
BEN 1F £5,950	HOT 80Y £7,500	JVG 49 £1,699	7 NJ £15,995	R+S
13ET £19,995	I+J	K+L	N+O	6 RAH £6,500
BL 3540 £2,750	IEZ I £10,500	477 KM £4,250	NJH 723 £3,450	RB 17 £17,500
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Y35 BOS £1,995			17 NR £5,400	7 RJF £6,995
C+D				9 RJT £4,995
1 C £POA				ROS 50 £279,000
CAT 1 £150,000				ROY4L £33,000
CAX 70N £2,995				RRG 1 £31,500
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FM 111 £7,995	1 JGV £12,500	92 MB £9,999	OI IO £199,000	V+W+Y
FP 3 £23,500	16 JH £16,995	MCC III £7,950	OKT 1 £14,750	VKE 5 £4,950
2 FT £37,500	888 JJ £6,500	MEE 5S £2,995	800 00 £12,950	W4 CKY £9,850
1 FY £90,000	JJ 8681 £2,995	MF 9 £34,500	000 1E £6,995	1 WOL £19,500
G+H	JKD 77 £5,600	2 MGE £7,450	1 ORF £13,500	101 XZ £4,995
6 ERS £POA	7 JM £POA	MGM 1 £27,900	1 OSL £POA	9 YH £11,500
GMA 71 £3,300	40 JM £POA	2 MGN £6,900	OTW 425 £1,399	7 YN £10,000

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1
Tyre
Dunlop Sport BluResponse
From £38 excluding fitting
www.dunlop.eu

1 It's 125 years since Dunlop invented the pneumatic tyre, and the company has marked this anniversary with a new tyre that promises to combine performance with economy: the Sport BluResponse.

There's no getting away from the EU tyre labels introduced last November, and the BluResponse uses much of the technology developed for its recent conceptual 'AA' design (top grades for fuel economy and wet grip).

The new tyre has a heat-dispersing compound and optimised construction to reduce rolling resistance. It is also an average 1.5kg lighter than the outgoing Sport FastResponse. The result is a 30 per cent reduction in rolling resistance over its predecessor – worth around five per cent in fuel economy.

The BluResponse also borrows technology from the ultra-high-performance Sport Maxx RT for the compound, which, combined with deep lateral grooves in the asymmetric pattern, gives what independent testing found was sector-leading wet grip. The end result is that most tyres in the 52-size range will have a B grade for fuel economy and A for wet grip.

Our limited test at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi backed up the wet handling rating, with the BluResponse clearly having better grip than the more progressive Michelin Energy Saver+ comparison tyre. The new Dunlop was also impressive on a dry track, with sharp steering response supporting the maker's claim that it had not just concentrated on meeting the label criteria in developing the tyre.

The range, on sale now, covers 14-17in rims and primarily H and V speed ratings (up to 130 and 150mph).

Kim Adams (@cargadgetguru)



2
Car care
Autoglym Leather Cleaning Range
From £6.49 www.autoglym.com

2 After 10,000 miles in my Audi RS4 Avant long-termer, my foraging through foliage for photo spots had left its leather seats caked in Lord knows what. Thankfully, Autoglym came to the rescue with a range of products that restored the leather to almost showroom spec.

I applied the Leather Cleaner (£6.49) to each seat with a polishing cloth, wiping off the residue with an Aqua-Dry chamois (£8.99). Then some Leather Care Balm (£9.99) was rubbed in with a Hi-Tech Interior Microfibre cloth (£7.99), leaving the seats so clean that I'd have to go potholing to get them back into their old state...

Dean Smith (@evoDeanSmith)

3
Footwear
Geox James G2232B
£130 www.dolce-shoes.com

3 Spending time in New York with my mate Gary, he wanted to go shopping. I hate shopping, but I did have holes in my shoes...

Gary is in the shoe business, so he dragged me to a Geox shop. 'They breathe but don't leak,' he said. What was he on about? I'd never heard of them, but they looked nice, were lightweight and fitted the budget, so I bought them.

Watching the next F1 race, what did I spot on the side of the Red Bulls? Such is the power of advertising...

Tiff Needell (@tiff_tv)



4
Tyre
Yokohama Advan Sport V105
From £87.76 excluding fitting
www.yokohama.co.uk

4 Japanese tyre maker Yokohama has a new flagship tyre at the top of its range – the Advan Sport V105. It replaces the popular, long-running V103 as the company's ultra-high-performance road tyre and outperforms its predecessor in pretty much every possible area.

The V105 has a matrix sidewall construction developed from Yokohama's World Touring Car Championship rubber. It increases rigidity without needing extra reinforcement, making the new tyre around four per cent lighter than the V103. The WTCC tyre also provides the basis of the compound, which includes oil from orange peel to improve surface adhesion, particularly in the wet. The asymmetric tread bucks current trends with a narrow fourth longitudinal groove added to the popular three wide channels to give sharper dry handling.

There are 36 sizes in the initial range and the vast majority of them have been given the top A rating for wet grip. As you would expect with larger, wider tyres, the fuel ratings are less impressive – mainly E and F (on a scale where G is the lowest rating).

In tests held as part of the launch at the Ascari Race Resort in Spain, the new tyre was clearly a step up from the V103, with improved grip and control in the dry and significantly better wet braking performance.

The V105 currently covers 16-20in rims with 24 more sizes being added throughout this year. It already has original equipment status for Mercedes-Benz, with ten marque-specific 'MO' (Mercedes Original) sizes available. Prices for the V105 are the same as for the outgoing V103.

Kim Adams (@cargadgetguru)



5
Video camera
GoPro Hero3 Black Edition
£359.99 www.gopro.com

5 GoPro's tagline pretty much sums it up: 'The world's most versatile camera.' I struggle to imagine an activity or event that you couldn't capture with a GoPro Hero3.

As evo's film-maker I use GoPros all the time. With a huge range of mounts, clamps and add-ons available, I can attach them almost anywhere on a car and have them up and running in no time, capturing 'the thrill of driving' from perspectives that no other camera could hope to obtain.

The latest model, the range-topping Hero3 Black Edition, is the best yet, with a fully waterproof housing, built-in Wi-Fi and the ability to make 4K video (four times the quality of HD) and slow-motion in full HD quality. All this from a device that is 30 per cent smaller and 25 per cent lighter than its predecessor, the Hero2.

Our Hero3 experience hasn't been entirely plain sailing, though – ours has crashed a handful of times performing various actions, but GoPro assures us that there is a firmware update that will put a stop to that.

For evo, the GoPro isn't just a fun gadget. These mini action cameras are an essential part of our video kit, and I'd certainly struggle to do my job without them.

Sam Riley (@samriley)





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Trips & Travel

The best destinations to visit in your car

Great drives: Tizi n'Tichka pass, Morocco



Start point: 31.58526, -7.88406 (south-east of Marrakech)

The road: The N9 from Marrakech to Ouarzazate

Great for: Anything you've managed to get through Moroccan customs



YOU MIGHT HAVE looked at the location of this drive, thought 'that's as attainable as a Veyron on finance' and been tempted just to turn the page. Africa seems a bit remote, I know, but don't dismiss it. I reckon you could do it with a week's holiday: a couple of days to drive to the south of Spain, an hour's ferry journey from Tarifa to Tangier, a day to Marrakech, a day driving over the Atlas Mountains then three days back to Blighty. It would be epic, but worth it.

The Tizi n'Tichka – the N9 south from Marrakech over the High Atlas – is spectacular long before you reach the squiggling stretch near the summit (the bit in the picture above). There's much more vegetation for the first part and the mountains are only a hazy outline, when you can see them at all, but there are always corners to enjoy and scenery to gawp at. Once you're over the summit you can tell that you're heading towards the Sahara as the land gradually becomes more arid and expansive.

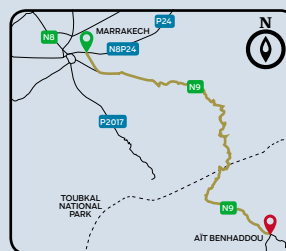
If you choose to follow the route that Dean Smith and I did in the McLaren in issue 173, you'll now need to head towards Agadir to the west on the crazy-long straights of the N10, eventually looking out for the narrower and much more dangerous Tizi n'Test pass back over the Atlas to Marrakech. Or you could simply turn round and drive back along the Tichka again.

Fuel should be available in Ouarzazate at the southern end of the Tichka, and again along the N10, but it's best to start each pass with a full tank. Be reassured, however, that the Moroccans are a friendly bunch and, amazingly, there is also excellent mobile phone reception at even the remotest parts of the route. As for what car to take... well, if you can't lay your hands on a 12C, then I reckon the road surface, particularly on the Test, would suit an early Impreza.

Henry Catchpole
Features editor



The route



Start **Finish**
Distance: 115 miles
Time: 3 hours

Where to stay

Marrakech is the place to be. We stayed at La Maison des Oliviers (www.lamaison-desoliviers.com), which is a couple of miles south of the hustle and bustle of the city, just off the P2017 (down a rather rough track). It was genuinely lovely, had parking, Wi-Fi and felt like a steal at €54 a night B&B.

Watch out for

Police and goats in trees. The former may well try to extort money from you for various reasons. Generally, after a bit of haggling, the price will fall to an acceptable pittance and it's easiest just to pay up. The goats will be in Argan trees, eating the leaves. Just to clarify, the police won't be in trees. That would be weird.

Reader road trip Elan Valley adventure

Early one Monday morning my friends and I set off for the Elan Valley, six of us split across three cars – an Audi A1 S-line, a Corsa VXR and my new Panda 100HP.

The first day was spent blasting across the Brecon Beacons, stopping for lunch and a boat trip. Later we found a stunning but seemingly uncharted road with views of the Black Mountains in the distance. We soon found ourselves flying up to the summit to take in the spectacular views.

The next morning we went in search of the Elan Valley. That day will stick in my memory forever for the fantastic sights and great laughs we had driving around what seemed to be our own private playground.

On our final day we took the road that



splits off towards The Devil's Bridge – a superb stretch that seemed exactly right for our three hatchbacks.

In all, the trip was a great success. Apart from on the motorway stints the Panda kept up, despite its power deficit. Best of all, I found I had truly 'clicked' with my new car.

Matt Hyde

Email your road trip story to henryc@evo.co.uk

Events calendar

MARCH

3 March
Goodwood Breakfast Club
www.goodwood.co.uk

7-17 March
Geneva motor show
www.salon-auto.com

17 March
The Fast Show, Santa Pod
www.thefastshow.com

14-17 March
Formula 1: Australian Grand Prix, Melbourne
www.grandprix.com.au

23 March
The Masters Historic Festival, Oulton Park
www.oultontpark.co.uk

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Database

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

Key **+** = new entry this month. * = grey import. Entries in italics are for cars no longer on sale. **Issue no.** is for our most recent major test of the car (D = Driven, F = Feature, R = Road test or group test). You can order back issues where still available - call 0844 844 0039. **Price** is on-the-road including VAT and delivery charges. **Weight** is the car's kerb weight as quoted by the manufacturer. **bhp/ton** is the power-to-weight ratio based on manufacturer's kerb weight. **0-60mph** and **0-100mph** figures in bold are independently recorded, all other performance figures are manufacturers' claims. **CO2 g/km** is the official EC figure and **EC mpg** is the official 'Combined' figure or equivalent.

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
Abarth Punto Evo	149 F	£16,852	4/1368	161/5500	184/2250	1155kg	142	7.9	-	132	142	47.1	+ Attractive and fun - Needs the Esseeuse power upgrade ★★★★★
Abarth 500 Esseeuse	129 R	£17,207	4/1368	158/5750	170/3000	1035kg	155	7.2	20.4	131	155	43.5	+ A properly fun, old-school hot hatch - Limited numbers being imported ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Mito Cloverleaf	149 F	£18,755	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1145kg	149	7.5	-	136	139	47.1	+ Great MultiAir engine, impressive ride - Not as feisty as we hoped ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulietta 1.4 MultiAir	144 D	£20,505	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1290kg	134	7.8	-	135	134	48.7	+ Has the equivalent VW Golf covered - An Alfa for your head, not your heart ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo Giulietta Cloverleaf	144 D	£25,510	4/1742	232/5500	251/1900	1320kg	179	6.8	-	150	177	37.2	+ Shows signs of deep talent... but should be more exciting ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 147 2.0 Lusso	01-09	4/1970	150/6300	134/3800	1270kg	120	9.3	-	129	-	31.7	+ Fantastic looks, engine and handling - Build quality still lacking ★★★★★	
Alfa Romeo 147 GTA	053 F	03-06	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1360kg	185	6.0	15.5	153	-	23.3	+ Focus RS pace without the histrionics - Slightly nose-heavy ★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 145 Cloverleaf	95-01	4/1970	150/6200	138/4000	1200kg	127	8.0	-	129	-	32.1	+ Fiery engine, individual appeal - Ape-like driving position ★★★★★	
Aston Martin Cygnet	159 D	£30,995	4/1329	97/6000	92/4400	920kg	107	11.8	-	106	116	56.5	+ Necessary - Evil ★★★★★
Audi A1 1.4 TFSI S Line	021 R	£21,270	4/1390	182/6200	184/2000	1190kg	155	6.9	-	141	139	47.9	+ Audi's Mini rival is an accomplished thing - But not a hugely fun one ★★★★★
Audi A1 quattro	168 F	£41,020	4/1984	253/6000	258/2500	1300kg	198	5.6	-	152	-	-	+ Extreme AWD hatch, 253bhp - Just 19 for UK, Porsche Cayman price ★★★★★
Audi S3	106 R	£31,065	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1455kg	183	5.6	13.6	155	198	33.2	+ Very fast, very effective, very... err, quality - A little too clinical ★★★★★
Audi RS3 Sportback	156 F	£39,930	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1575kg	216	4.5	-	155	212	31.0	+ Above, with added five-pot character - Again, see above... ★★★★★
BMW 125i M Sport	176 D	£26,070	4/1997	218/5000	228/1350	1420kg	156	6.4	-	155	154	42.8	+ Performance, price, running costs - Dull four-pot soundtrack ★★★★★
BMW M135i	173 D	£29,995	6/2979	316/5800	332/1400	1425kg	225	5.0	-	155	188	35.3	+ Powertrain, noise, chassis, price - Odd styling, steering lacks feel ★★★★★
BMW 123d M Sport	122 R	07-11	4/1995	201/4400	295/2000	1420kg	144	6.5	17.4	148	138	54.3	+ Economical and no slouch - Doesn't feel special enough ★★★★★
BMW 130i M Sport	106 R	05-10	6/2996	261/6650	232/2750	1450kg	183	6.1	15.3	155	-	34.0	+ Fantastic engine - Suspension can still get a little boingy ★★★★★
BMW 325i Compact	031 F	01-05	6/2494	189/6000	181/3500	1480kg	130	7.1	-	147	-	31.7	+ Terrific engine, chassis, price - Looks a bit geeky ★★★★★
Citroën C1/Peugeot 107/Toyota Aygo	126 F	£7,995+3	3/998	68/6000	68/3600	790kg	87	14.2	-	98	103	61.4	+ Full of character and insurance-friendly - Insurance friendly power ★★★★★
Citroën C2 GT	064 R	04-05	4/1587	108/5750	108/4000	1027kg	107	8.7	-	121	-	-	+ Appealing and affordable homologation special - Inert steering ★★★★★
Citroën Saxo VTR	013 R	97-03	4/1587	100/5700	100/3500	920kg	110	9.3	-	116	-	36.7	+ VTS poise, half the insurance group - Cramped pedals ★★★★★
Citroën Saxo VTS	020 R	97-03	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	935kg	130	7.6	22.6	127	-	34.9	+ Chunky, chuckable charger - Can catch out the unwary ★★★★★
Citroën DS3 1.6 THP	142 F	£16,800	4/1598	154/6000	177/1400	1240kg	126	7.2	-	133	155	42.2	+ A proper French hot hatch - Petrolheads might find it too 'designed' ★★★★★
Citroën DS3 Racing	153 D	£23,100	4/1598	204/6000	203/2000	1240kg	167	6.5	-	146	149	-	+ Faster, feistier version of above - It's six grand more than a Clio Cup ★★★★★
Citroën Xsara VTS	98-04	4/1997	167/7000	142/4750	1190kg	143	8.0	-	137	-	33.6	+ Citroën's GT-6 - Missing one gear and a bit of handling polish ★★★★★	
Fiat Panda 100HP	132 F	06-11	4/1368	99/6000	97/4250	975kg	103	9.5	-	115	154	43.5	+ Most fun per pound on the market - Optional ESP can't be turned off ★★★★★
Fiat Punto Evo Sporting	141 D	£14,500	4/1368	133/5000	152/1750	1155kg	117	8.5	-	127	129	50.4	+ Great engine, smart styling - Dynamics don't live up to the Evo name ★★★★★
Ford Sportka SE	084 R	03-08	4/1597	94/5500	100/4250	934kg	102	9.5	-	108	-	37.2	+ Big fun in a little package - Could handle even more power ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	123 D	£14,545	4/1596	118/6000	112/4050	1045kg	115	9.9	-	120	134	48.7	+ Genuinely entertaining supermini - Grown up compared to Tingo/Swift ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta Zetec S Mountune	132 F	£16,000	4/1596	138/6750	125/4250	1080kg	130	7.9	-	120	134	48.7	+ As above, with a fantastically loud exhaust... - if you're 12 years old ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	020 R	00-02	4/1596	102/6000	107/4000	976kg	106	10.2	-	113	-	38.2	+ Better than you'd ever believe - No-one else will believe it ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST	075 D	05-08	4/1999	148/6000	140/4500	1137kg	132	7.9	-	129	-	38.2	+ Great looks, decent brakes - Disappointing chassis, gutless engine ★★★★★
Ford Fiesta ST185 Mountune	115 R	08-11	4/1999	185/6700	147/3500	1137kg	165	6.9	-	129	-	-	+ Fiesta ST gets the power it always needed - OTT exhaust note ★★★★★
Ford Focus 1.6T Zetec S	165 D	£20,695	4/1596	179/5700	199/1900	1333kg	136	7.8	-	138	139	47.1	+ The fastest, keenest Mk3 Focus yet - The MK1's sparkle is still absent, though ★★★★★
Ford Focus ST (Mk2)	172 R	£21,995	4/1999	247/5500	265/1750	1362g	184	6.4	-	154	169	-	+ All-round cracking hot hatch. Good value, too - There's a bit of torque-steer ★★★★★
Ford Focus RS500	152 F	10-11	5/2522	345/6000	339/2500	1467kg	239	5.6	12.7	165	225	-	+ More power and presence than above - Pricey (and all sold!) ★★★★★
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	139 R	09-11	5/2522	300/6500	324/2300	1467kg	208	5.9	14.2	163	225	30.5	+ Huge performance, highly capable fwd chassis - It could be the last RS... ★★★★★
Ford Focus ST Mountune (Mk1)	137 R	08-11	5/2522	256/5500	295/2500	1392kg	187	5.8	14.3	155	224	-	+ ST takes extra power in its stride - You probably still want an RS ★★★★★
Ford Focus ST (Mk1)	119 R	05-10	5/2522	222/6000	236/1600	1392kg	162	6.7	16.8	150	224	30.4	+ Value, performance, integrity - Big engine compromises handling ★★★★★
Ford Focus RS (Mk1)	053 R	02-03	4/1998	212/5500	229/3500	1278kg	169	5.9	14.9	144	-	-	+ Some are great - Some are awful (so make sure you drive plenty) ★★★★★
Ford Escort RS Cosworth	157 F	92-96	4/1993	227/6250	224/3500	1304kg	176	5.8	-	143	-	24.5	+ The ultimate Essex hot hatch - Ultimate trophy for tea leaves ★★★★★
Ford Puma 1.7	095 F	97-02	4/1679	123/6300	116/4500	1040kg	120	8.6	27.6	122	-	38.2	+ Everything - Nothing. The 1.4 is worth a look too ★★★★★
Ford Racing Puma	016 F	00-01	4/1679	153/7000	119/4500	1174kg	132	7.8	23.2	137	-	34.7	+ Exclusivity - Expense. Standard Puma does it so well ★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R Mugen	144 F	09-11	4/1998	237/8300	157/6250	1233kg	195	5.9	-	155	-	-	+ Fantastic on road and track - There'll only be 20, and it's a tad pricey... ★★★★★
Honda Civic T-R C'ship White	126 D	09-10	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	158	6.6	-	146	-	31.0	+ Limited-slip diff a welcome addition - It's not available on standard car... ★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R	102 R	07-11	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	158	6.8	17.5	146	215	31.0	+ Looks great, VTEC more accessible - Steering lacks feel, inert balance ★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R	075 R	01-05	4/1998	197/7400	145/5900	1204kg	166	6.8	16.9	146	-	31.7	+ Potent and great value - Looks divide opinion, duff steering ★★★★★
Lancia Delta Integrale	011 F	88-93	4/1995	210/5750	220/3500	1350kg	158	5.7	-	137	-	23.9	+ One of the finest cars ever built - Demands love, LHD only ★★★★★
Mazda 2.15 Sport	132 F	£12,995	4/1498	102/6000	101/4000	1030kg	107	10.4	-	117	135	48.7	+ Fun and funky - Feels tinny after a Mini ★★★★★
Mazda 3 MPS	137 F	£23,395	4/2261	256/5500	280/3000	1385kg	188	6.3	14.5	155	224	29.4	+ Quick, eager and very good value - The steering's iffy ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz A250 'amg'	173 D	£28,755	4/1991	208/5500	258/1200	1445kg	146	6.5	-	149	148	46.3	+ Mercedes builds a proper hot hatch - But denies it a manual gearbox ★★★★★
MG ZS 180	035 D	10-11	6/2497	175/6500	177/4000	1235kg	144	7.3	-	139	-	29.7	+ Well-sorted chassis, characterful engine - Image: looks like a 45 ★★★★★
Mini One	013 F	£13,460	4/1598	97/6000	113/3000	1070kg	92	10.5	-	116	127	52.3	+ Perfect power-to-grip ratio - HUGE speed, slow car ★★★★★
Mini Cooper	167 R	£14,900	4/1598	120/6000	118/4250	1075kg	113	9.1	-	126	127	52.3	+ Still desirable - Steering has lost a little feel ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S	149 F	£18,180	4/1598	181/5500	177/1600	1140kg	161	7.0	-	142	136	48.7	+ New engine, Mini quality - Lacks old car's direct front end ★★★★★
Mini Cooper SD	158 D	£18,870	4/1995	141/4000	225/1750	1150kg	125	8.0	-	134	114	65.7	+ A quick diesel Mini with impressive mpg - But no Cooper S alternative ★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works	154 R	£22,455	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1160kg	185	6.5	-	148	165	39.8	+ A seriously rapid Mini - Occasionally still a little unruly ★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works Coupe	164 R	£23,800	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1165kg	181	6.3	-	149	165	39.8	+ The usual raucous Mini JCW experience - But with a questionable 'helmet' roof... ★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works GP	178 D	£28,790	4/1598	215/6000	206/2000	1140kg	192	6.3	-	150	165	39.8	+ Sophisticated and satisfying on track - We've yet to try it on the road ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S Works (Mk2)	111 F	07-08	4/1598	189/6000	199/1750	1130kg	170	7.6	18.0	145	-	-	+ Cracking hot Mini, until the JCW - Expensive with option packs included ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S Works GP	144 F	06	4/1598	215/7100	184/4600	1090kg	200	6.5	-	149	-	32.8	+ Storming engine, agility - Tacky styling 'enhancements' ★★★★★
Mini Cooper S (Mk1)	077 R	02-06	4/1598	168/6000	155/4000	1140kg	143	7.8	19.9	135	-	33.6	+ Strong performance, quality feel - Over-long gearing ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Colt Ralliart	132 F	£14,229	4/1468	147/6000	155/3500	1060kg	141	7.4	-	131	161	40.9	+ Price, handling, performance - Its looks are a little odd ★★★★★



Official fuel consumption for the All-New Volvo V40 R-Design in mpg (l/100km): Urban 25.0 (11.3) - 70.6 (4.0), Extra Urban
 * Business users only. Rentals are based on vehicles with metallic paint. Examples exclude VAT and are based on non-maintained contract hire with an initial payment of 6 monthly rentals, followed by 35 monthly rentals, with Not available with other promotions. Volvo Car Leasing Contract Hire is provided by Lex Autolease Ltd, trading as Volvo Car Leasing, incorporated and registered in England with company number 1090741 & registered office



Our Choice

Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup. After the mild disappointment of the Clio 197, Renaultsport got the Clio back to its very best with the 200 Cup – a cracking small hot hatch more than capable of chasing down supercars on eCoty 2009 for a top five finish.



Best of the Rest

The RS Mégane is the Clio's more mature but still thrilling big brother, while the new Focus ST is great fun – and good value. If you're on a tighter budget, the Renaultsport Twingo 133 Cup and Suzuki's second-gen Swift Sport (left) are beltlers.

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

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating	
Nissan Sunny GTi-R	'92-'93	4/1998	220/6400	197/4800	1269kg	176	6.1	-	134	-	25.1	+ Nissan's Escort Cossie - Make sure it's a good one	★★★★★	
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 2)	'97-'98	4/1587	103/6200	97/3500	865kg	121	8.8	-	121	-	34.0	+ Bargain no-frills thrills - Not as much fizz as original 1.3	★★★★★	
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 1)	095 F	'94-'96	4/1294	100/7200	80/5400	826kg	123	9.3	-	118	-	35.6	+ Frantic, thrashy fun - Needs caning to extract full potential	★★★★★
Peugeot 106 GTi 16v	034 R	'97-'04	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	950kg	128	7.4	22.2	127	-	34.9	+ Fine handling supermini - Looks its age	★★★★★
Peugeot 205 GTi 1.9	095 F	'88-'91	4/1905	130/6000	119/4750	910kg	145	7.9	-	124	-	36.7	+ Still scintillating after all these years - Brittle build quality	★★★★★
Peugeot 306 GTi-6	020 R	'93-'01	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1215kg	139	7.2	20.1	140	-	30.1	+ One of the great GTIs - They don't make them like this any more	★★★★★
Peugeot 306 Rallye	095 F	'98-'99	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1199kg	141	6.9	19.2	137	-	30.1	+ Essentially a GTi-6 for less dosh - Limited choice of colours	★★★★★
Peugeot 309 GTi		'89-'92	4/1905	130/6000	119/4750	985kg	134	8.3	-	124	-	28.2	+ 205 GTi in drag, cheap - Who wants a cheap drag queen?	★★★★★
Renaultsport Twingo 133	175 R	£13,565	4/1598	131/6750	118/4400	1050kg	127	8.6	-	125	150	43.5	+ Renaultsport experience for pocket money - Optional Cup chassis gives bouncy ride	★★★★★
Renault 5GT Turbo	123 F	'87-'91	4/1397	120/5750	122/3750	831kg	146	7.8	-	120	-	28.4	+ Clio Williams' grand-daddy - Most have been thrashed	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup	154 R	£17,120	4/1998	197/7100	159/5400	1204kg	166	6.6	16.7	141	190	34.5	+ The hot Clio is back to its best - Why the long face?	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 197 Cup	115 R	'07-'09	4/1998	194/7250	158/5550	1240kg	161	6.9	-	134	-	33.6	+ Supercar, polished and capable - Not as much sheer fun as 182 Cup	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 182	066 R	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1110kg	165	6.6	17.5	139	-	34.9	+ Took hot hatches to a new level - Flawed driving position	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 182 Cup	074 D	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.5	-	139	-	34.9	+ Full of beans, fantastic value - Sunday-market upholstery	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio Trophy	095 F	'05-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.6	17.3	140	-	34.9	+ Most fun you can have on three wheels - Just 500 were built	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 172 Cup	048 R	'02-'04	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1011kg	171	6.5	17.7	138	-	-	+ Bargain old-school hot hatch - Nervous in the wet, no ABS	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio V6 255	057 R	'03-'05	6/2946	255/7150	221/4650	1400kg	182	5.8	-	153	-	23.0	+ Supercar drama without the original's edgy handling - Uninspired interior	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio V6	029 F	'99-'02	6/2946	230/6000	221/3750	1335kg	175	5.8	17.0	145	-	23.0	+ Pocket supercar - Mid-engined handling can be tricky	★★★★★
Renault Clio Williams	095 F	'93-'96	4/1988	148/6100	126/4500	981kg	153	7.6	20.8	121	-	26.0	+ One of the best hot hatches ever - Can be fragile like an Integrale	★★★★★
Renault Mégane GT Tce 180	154 D	£21,690	4/1998	178/5500	222/2250	1320kg	137	7.7	-	139	178	36.7	+ Rides & steers well - Not much cheaper than car below, lacks its sparkle	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	173 R	£24,825	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	191	6.0	-	158	190	34.4	+ More power than before; chassis still superb - Not a lot	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Trophy	170 R	£27,820	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	191	6.0	-	158	190	34.4	+ Hot Mégane gets more power and fwd Ring record - A pricey upgrade	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	139 R	'09-'12	4/1998	247/5500	251/3000	1387kg	181	6.1	14.6	156	190	34.4	+ Fantastic chassis... - partially obscured by new-found maturity	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	157 F	'08-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1220kg	189	5.8	15.1	147	-	-	+ One of the true hot hatch heroes - Two seats, flatted rear windows	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 230 R26	102 R	'07-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1345kg	171	6.2	16.0	147	-	-	+ Best hot Mégane... until the R26.R - F1 Team stickers in dubious taste	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane dCi 175 Cup	119 R	'07-'09	4/1995	173/3750	265/2000	1470kg	119	8.3	23.5	137	-	43.5	+ A diesel with a genuinely sporty chassis - Could take more power	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 225 Cup	087 F	'05-'09	4/1998	222/5500	221/3000	1345kg	167	6.5	-	147	-	32.1	+ Good value and plentiful - You gotta like big backsides	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane Trophy	087 F	'05	4/1998	222/5500	221/3000	1355kg	166	6.7	17.3	147	-	32.1	+ Mega grip and traction - Steering needs a touch more feel	★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza FR 2.0 TDI	144 F	£16,340	4/1968	141/4200	236/1750	1245kg	115	8.2	-	131	123	60.1	+ More fun than the petrol FR, manual 'box option - Almost as pricey as the Cupra	★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	139 R	£19,905	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1172kg	154	6.9	-	140	148	44.1	+ Funky (especially in Bocanegra trim), economical - The FR's a better driver	★★★★★
SEAT Leon FR+	163 D	£21,940	4/1984	208/5300	206/1700	1334kg	158	7.2	-	145	170	38.7	+ As quick as a Golf GTi 5dr but £4K cheaper - Pre-VW's completeness	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R	139 R	£25,995	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1375kg	193	6.1	14.0	155	190	34.9	+ Bold car, blinding engine - Lacks the character of its rival mega-hatches	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra	105 F	'07-'11	4/1984	237/5700	221/2200	1375kg	175	6.3	-	153	190	34.0	+ Great engine, composure - Doesn't have adjustability of old Cupra R	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra 20v T	020 R	'00-'06	4/1781	178/5500	173/5000	1322kg	137	7.7	-	142	-	33.2	+ Terrific value - Lacks sparkle of very best hatches	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R 225	067 R	'03-'06	4/1781	222/5900	206/2200	1376kg	164	6.9	-	150	-	32.1	+ Cross-country pace, practicality, value - Not as thrilling as some	★★★★★
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146 D	£16,915	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1218kg	148	7.3	-	139	148	45.6	+ Well priced, well made, with great engine and DSG 'box - Dull steering	★★★★★
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk1)	077 F	'04-'07	4/1896	130/4000	229/1900	1315kg	100	9.6	-	127	-	55.4	+ Fascinatingly fun and frugal hot hatch - A little short on steering feel	★★★★★
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk2)	163 F	£20,330	4/1998	197/5100	206/1700	1395kg	143	7.3	-	149	175	37.7	+ Drives like a GTi but costs much less - Green brake callipers?	★★★★★
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk1)	032 D	'01-'05	4/1781	178/5500	173/1950	1354kg	135	7.9	-	146	-	35.3	+ Remarkably fun and capable - Cabin quality	★★★★★
Smart Fortwo Brabus	110 D	£15,000	3/999	97/5500	104/3500	780kg	126	9.9	-	96	119	54.3	+ Telling people you drive a Brabus - Them realising it's not a 720bhp S-class	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STi CS400	146 R	£49,995	4/2457	395/5750	400/3950	1505kg	267	4.6	10.7	155	-	-	+ Cosworth kudos. Fastest hatch we've tested - Pricey. Lifesless steering	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX	125 D	'08-'10	4/2457	251/5400	288/3000	1395kg	180	5.5	-	130	270	-	+ An improvement over the basic WRX - Still not the WRX we wanted	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STi 330S	124 F	'08-'10	4/2457	325/5400	347/3400	1505kg	219	4.4	-	155	-	-	+ A bit quicker than the STi... - but not better	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk2)	175 R	£13,499	4/1586	134/6900	118/4400	1045kg	130	8.7	-	121	147	44.1	+ The Swift's still a great pocket rocket - But it's lost a little adjustability	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport	132 R	'05-'11	4/1586	123/6800	109/4800	1030kg	121	8.9	-	124	165	39.8	+ Entertaining handling, well built - Lacking in steering feedback	★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154 R	£18,900	4/1598	189/5850	192/1980	1166kg	165	6.8	-	140	172	38.7	+ Looks snazzy, punchy engine - Lacks feel, uncouth compared with rivals	★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR Nürburgring	164 R	£22,295	4/1598	202/5750	206/2250	1166kg	176	6.5	-	143	178	-	+ VXR gets more power and a limited-slip diff - But it's over £3K more expensive	★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra GTC 1.6T SRI	164 D	£20,215	4/1598	178/5500	169/2200	1393kg	130	7.8	-	137	168	39.2	+ Three-door Scirocco rival looks good, drives well - Pre-VXR petrol engines lack zing	★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk2)	173 R	£26,995	4/1998	276/5500	295/2500	1475kg	190	5.9	-	155	189	-	+ Better than the car it replaces. Loony turbo pace - Lacks RS Mégane's precision	★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra VXR	102 R	'06-'11	4/1998	237/5600	236/2400	1393kg	173	6.7	16.7	152	221	30.7	+ Fast and furious - Lacks a little composure and precision	★★★★★
VW Up/SEAT Mii/Skoda Citigo	171 F	£7630+	3/999	59/5000	70/3000	854kg	70	14.1	-	99	105	62.8	+ Accomplished city car is dynamically sound... - but predictably slow	★★★★★
VW Lupo GTI 6-spd	036 D	'00-'05	4/1598	125/6500	112/3000	978kg	128	8.3	-	127	-	38.2	+ Looks, performance, snappy gearshift - Lacks fizz of 106 GTi	★★★★★
VW Polo GTI	154 R	£18,935	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1184kg	153	6.8	-	142	139	47.9	+ Modern-day mk1 Golf GTi gets twin-clutch DSG - It's a little bit bland	★★★★★
VW Golf GTD (Mk6)	133 D	£24,650	4/1968	168/4200	258/1750	1329kg	128	8.1	-	138	134	55.4	+ Punchy performance and good economy - Not as much fun as the GTI	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk6)	172 R	£25,650	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1318kg	160	6.4	16.5	148	170	38.7	+ Still a very accomplished hot hatch - 207bhp isn't a lot any more	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI Edition 35	168 F	£27,560	4/1984	232/5500	221/2200	1318kg	179	6.5	-	154	189	34.9	+ The pick of the Golf hot hatch range - Nearly £28K before a single option...	★★★★★
VW Golf R (Mk6)	140 D	£31,435	4/1984	266/6000	258/2500	1521kg	178	5.5	-	155	199	33.2	+ Great engine, tremendous pace and poise - High price, ACC only optional	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk5)	102 R	'05-'09	4/1984	197/5100	207/1800	1336kg	150	6.7	17.9	145	-	-	+ Character and ability: the original GTI is back - Lacking firepower?	★★★★★
VW Golf R32 (Mk5)	087 F	'06-'09	6/3189	246/6300	236/2500	1510kg	165	5.8	15.2	155	-	26.4	+ Tractor's great and you'll love the soundtrack - We'd still have a GTI	★★★★★
VW Golf R32 (Mk4)	053 F	'02-'04	6/3189	237/6250	236/2800	1477kg	163	6.4	16.3	154	-	24.6	+ Charismatic - Boomy engine can be tiresome	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI 16v (Mk2)		'88-'92	4/1781	139/6100	124/4600	1111kg	127	8.0	-	124	-	28.8	+ Arguably the best all-round Golf GTI ever - We'd be splitting hairs	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk1)	095 F	'82-'84	4/1781	112/5800	109/3500	840kg	135	8.1	-	112	-	36.0	+ The car that started it all - Tricky to find an unmolested one	★★★★★
Volvo C30 T5 R-Design	122 R	'08-'12	5/2521	227/5000	236/1500	1347kg	165	6.6	16.9	149	203	32.5	+ Good-looking, desirable Volvo - Lacks edge of best hatches. Avoid auto	★★★★★

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Our Choice

BMW M5. The turbocharging of BMW's M-cars met with scepticism, but the new M5's 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 feels a perfect fit. It's a brutally fast car, and there are clever (and useable) adjustable driving modes. It looks cool, too. The best big saloon is now even better.



Best of the Rest

Mercedes' AMG department is on a roll right now: the 6.2-litre C63 is superb as either saloon or estate, likewise the newly turbo'd E63 (left), which is only narrowly shaded by the M5. Lexus's tail-happy IS-F remains a wonderfully alternative choice too.

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

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Alfa Romeo 156 GTA	045 F	'02-'06	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1410kg	180	6.3	-	155	-	23.3	+ Noise, pace and individuality - Front-drive chassis can't keep up	★★★★★
Alpina D3		£31,650	4/1995	211/4000	332/2000	1495kg	143	6.9	-	152	-	52.3	+ Excellent chassis, turbodiesel oomph - Rather narrow powerband	★★★★★
Alpina B5 Biturbo	149 D	£75,045	8/4395	500/5500	516/3000	2040kg	265	4.7	-	191	-	-	+ Big performance and top-line luxury - Driver not really involved	★★★★★
Alpina B5 S	118 D	'07-'10	8/4398	523/5500	535/4750	1720kg	309	4.5	-	197	-	23.0	+ Quicker and more exclusive than the E60 M5 - Suspension has its limits	★★★★★
Alpina B7	134 D	£94,845	8/4395	507/5500	516/3000	2040kg	252	4.5	-	174	-	-	+ Massive performance and top-line luxury - Feels its weight when hustled	★★★★★
Alpina B7	085 R	'05-'08	8/4398	500/5500	516/4250	1950kg	261	4.8	-	186	-	-	+ Alpina makes a mad, bad 7-series - Over-cautious traction control	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide	141 F	£149,995	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1990kg	240	5.2	-	188	355	-	+ Better than its DB9 sibling - More a 2+2 than a proper four-seater	★★★★★
Audi A4 2.0 TFSI quattro	105 F	'07-'10	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1710kg	246	4.6	-	155	-	20.6	+ 414bhp at 7800rpm! - Everyone thinking you're married with kids	★★★★★
Audi S4 (Mk3)	166 D	£38,665	6/2995	328/5500	324/2900	1685kg	198	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	+ Great powertrain, secure chassis - The new RS4 is here now...	★★★★★
Audi S4 (Mk2)	073 D	'05-'08	8/4163	339/7000	302/3500	1700kg	206	5.4	-	155	-	-	+ Effortless V8, agile handling - Lacks ultimate finesse of class leaders	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (Mk3)	173 D	£54,925	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1795kg	251	4.6	-	174	249	26.4	+ Looks, value, quality, noise, balance - Harsh ride, unnatural steering	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (Mk2)	088 F	'06-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1650kg	255	4.5	10.9	155	-	-	+ A leap on for fast Audis, superb engine - Busy under braking	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (Mk2)	105 F	'07-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1710kg	246	4.6	-	155	-	20.6	+ 414bhp at 7800rpm! - Everyone thinking you're married with kids	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (Mk1)	024 R	'00-'02	6/2671	375/6100	325/2500	1620kg	236	4.8	12.1	170	-	17.0	+ Effortless pace - Lacks finesse. Bends wheel rims	★★★★★
Audi RS2	101 F	'94-'95	5/2226	315/6500	302/3000	1595kg	201	4.8	13.1	162	-	18.0	+ Storming performance (thanks to Porsche) - Try finding one	★★★★★
Audi S6	091 D	'06-'11	10/5204	429/6800	398/3000	1910kg	228	5.2	-	155	299	22.4	+ Even faster, and discreet with it - Very muted V10	★★★★★
Audi RS6	124 D	'08-'10	10/4991	572/6250	479/1500	1985kg	293	4.5	-	155	331	20.3	+ Looks and drives better than estate version - M5 still looks tempting	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant	116 F	'08-'10	10/4991	572/6250	479/1500	2025kg	287	4.3	9.7	155	333	20.2	+ The world's most powerful estate - Power isn't everything	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant	052 R	'02-'04	8/4172	444/5700	413/1950	1865kg	242	4.8	11.6	155	-	19.3	+ The ultimate estate car? - Numb steering	★★★★★
Audi S7	171 F	£61,695	8/3993	414/5000	406/1400	1945kg	216	4.6	-	155	225	-	+ Looks and drives better than S6 it's based on - Costs £8000 more	★★★★★
Audi S8	164 D	£77,900	8/3993	513/5800	479/1700	1975kg	264	4.1	-	155	237	21.7	+ Quicker and much more economical than before - But still underwhelming to drive	★★★★★
Audi S8	088 D	'06-'10	10/5204	444/7000	398/3500	1940kg	232	5.1	-	155	-	21.4	+ V10 engine, ceramic brakes, fantastic gearbox - Light steering	★★★★★
Audi Q7 V12 TDI	124 D	£100,370	12/5934	493/3750	737/1750	2635kg	190	5.1	12.2	155	298	25.0	+ Undeniably quick, relatively economical - A tad ostentatious	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Flying Spur	080 D	£133,200	12/5998	552/6100	479/1600	2475kg	226	4.9	-	195	396	16.6	+ Performance, wonderful interior - Have you seen petrol prices?	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Flying Spur Speed	141 F	£150,900	12/5998	600/6000	553/1750	2450kg	250	4.6	-	200	396	16.6	+ 600bhp; surprisingly fun handling - Could look a bit more like it goes	★★★★★
Bentley Mulsanne	178 F	£225,900	8/6752	505/4200	752/1570	2585kg	198	5.1	-	184	393	16.7	+ Drives like a modern Bentley should - Shame it doesn't look like one too	★★★★★
Bentley Arname R	048 F	'02-'08	8/6750	400/4000	616/3250	2585kg	157	6.9	17.1	155	-	13.7	+ Twin-turbo thrust, limo-like ride - It's a bit heavy	★★★★★
Bentley Arname T	096 D	'06-'08	8/6751	500/4200	737/3200	2585kg	196	5.2	-	179	-	14.5	+ Still able to impress - Something of an anachronism	★★★★★
BMW 320d	168 F	£28,080	4/1995	181/4000	280/1750	1495kg	123	7.4	-	146	120	61.4	+ Fleet-friendly new Three is economical yet entertaining - It's a tad noisy	★★★★★
BMW 328i	165 D	£29,060	4/1997	242/5000	258/1250	1430kg	172	5.8	-	155	149	44.8	+ New-age four-pot 328i is great all-rounder - We miss the six-cylinder soundtrack	★★★★★
BMW 330d M Sport	180 D	£36,610	6/2993	254/4000	413/2000	1540kg	168	5.6	-	155	129	57.6	+ Great engine, fine handling, good value - Steering confuses weight with feel	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E90)	123 R	'08-'11	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1605kg	262	4.9	10.7	165	290	22.8	+ Every bit as good as the M3 coupe - No carbon roof	★★★★★
BMW M3 CRT (E90)	179 F	'11-'12	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1580kg	285	4.4	-	180	295	-	+ Saloon chassis + weight savings + GTS engine = best E90 M3 - Just 67 were made	★★★★★
BMW 335i M Sport (E90)	134 F	'05-'11	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1535kg	200	5.6	-	155	196	31.0	+ Stunning drivetrain, controlled chassis - Looks a bit steady	★★★★★
BMW 528i	164 D	£33,610	4/1997	242/5000	258/1250	1710kg	144	6.2	-	155	152	41.5	+ Four-pot 528i is downsizing near its best - You'll miss the straight-six sound effects	★★★★★
BMW 535i SE	141 D	£38,940	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1685kg	182	6.1	-	155	185	34.9	+ New 5-series impresses... - But only with all the chassis options ticked	★★★★★
BMW 5 (F10M)	165 R	£73,040	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1870kg	300	4.3	-	190	232	28.5	+ Twin-turbocharging suits all-new M5 well - Can feel heavy at times	★★★★★
BMW M5 Touring (E60)	105 F	'07-'10	10/4999	500/7750	383/6100	1780kg	285	4.8	-	155	-	19.3	+ Brilliant at ten tenths - Feels slightly clumsy when pottering	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E60)	129 F	'04-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1755kg	289	4.7	10.4	155	-	19.6	+ Close to being the ultimate supersaloon - SMG gearbox feels old-tech	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E39)	110 F	'99-'03	8/4941	394/6600	369/3800	1795kg	223	4.9	11.5	155	-	-	+ Magnificent V8-engined supersaloon - We'd be nit-picking	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E34)	110 F	'92-'96	6/3795	340/6900	295/4750	1653kg	209	5.9	13.6	155	-	-	+ The Godfather of supersaloons - The family can come too	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E28)	110 F	'86-'88	6/3453	286/6500	250/4500	1431kg	203	6.2	-	151	-	-	+ The original storming saloon - Two handfuls in the wet	★★★★★
BMW X5 xDrive 40d SE		£47,440	6/2993	302/4400	442/1500	2110kg	145	6.6	-	147	198	37.7	+ Handling, comfort, refinement - Looks like a big X3	★★★★★
BMW X6 xDrive 50i	118 D	£57,880	8/4395	408/5500	442/1750	2190kg	186	5.4	-	155	292	22.6	+ Stunningly good to drive - Will you want to be seen arriving?	★★★★★
BMW X6M	134 D	£82,190	8/4395	547/6000	502/1500	2305kg	241	4.7	-	171	325	20.3	+ Fast, refined and comfortable - But it definitely lacks the M factor	★★★★★
BMW 750i	174 D	£71,340	8/4395	449/5500	480/2000	2020kg	226	4.7	-	155	199	-	+ Well specced, impressively refined - Lags far behind the Mercedes S-class	★★★★★
Bowler EXR S	180 F	£186,000	8/5000	550/6200	461/2100	1800kg	310	4.2	-	155	-	-	+ Outlandish all-terrain supercar - Vast suspension travel takes some getting used to	★★★★★
Brabus Bullit	119 F	£330,000	12/6233	720/5100	811/2100	1850kg	395	3.8	-	217	-	-	+ Seven hundred and twenty bhp - Three hundred thousand pounds	★★★★★
Cadillac CTS-V	148 F	£72,381	8/6162	556/6100	551/3800	1928kg	293	3.9	-	191	365	18.1	+ It'll stand out among M-cars and AMGs - But the novelty might wear off	★★★★★
Chrysler 300C SRT8	096 D	'06-'11	8/6059	425/6000	420/4800	1965kg	220	4.9	-	168	337	20.2	+ Looks, supple ride, composed chassis - Too much understeer, slow 'box	★★★★★
Chrysler 300C 5.7 Hemi	088 D	'05-'08	8/5654	340/5000	387/4000	1910kg	180	6.2	15.1	155	-	23.3	+ Gangster chic - Ginsters suspension	★★★★★
Ford Mondeo 2.0T Titanium		£23,045	4/1999	200/6000	221/1750	1581kg	128	7.9	-	144	184	35.8	+ Terrific chassis, sweet engine - People will still want an Audi	★★★★★
Ford Mondeo ST220	043 D	'02-'07	6/2967	223/6150	204/4900	1550kg	146	6.8	-	151	-	27.7	+ Muscular engine, fine chassis - Hotted-up repmobile image	★★★★★
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth 4x4		'90-'93	4/1993	220/6250	214/3500	1305kg	159	6.6	-	144	-	24.4	+ Fast and furious - Try finding a straight one	★★★★★
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth		'86-'90	4/1993	204/6000	204/4500	1220kg	169	6.2	-	143	-	-	+ Roadgoing Group A racecar - Don't shout about the power output!	★★★★★
Honda Civic Type-R*	108 D	'07-'10	4/1998	222/8000	158/6100	1252kg	180	5.9	-	150	-	-	+ Screaming engine, razor-sharp chassis - Specialist import only	★★★★★
Honda Accord Type-R	012 R	'99-'03	4/2157	209/7200	158/6700	1306kg	163	6.1	17.4	142	-	29.4	+ One of the finest front-drivers of all time - Lack of image	★★★★★
Infiniti M37S	150 D	£40,625	6/3696	316/7000	265/5200	1765kg	182	6.2	-	155	235	27.7	+ Stands out from the crowd - Not as involving as some rivals	★★★★★
Jaguar XF 3.0 V6 Diesel S	145 D	£41,855	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1695kg	162	5.9	-	155	159	47.1	+ Sweet handling plus diesel economy - But we'd still have the R	★★★★★

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

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cv/lcc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100 mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating
Jaguar XF Sportbrake 3.0 V6 Diesel S	177 D	£44,355	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1695kg	153	6.1	-	155	163	46.3	+ Looks and drives better than the saloon - Pity there's no Sportbrake R... ★★★★★
Jaguar XF 3.0 V6 Supercharged	178 D	£47,550	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1695kg	201	5.7	-	155	224	29.4	+ Fast, comfortable, refined - Bland engine, poor economy compared to diesel V6 ★★★★★
Jaguar XFR	165 R	£65,380	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1800kg	284	4.8	10.2	155	270	24.4	+ Brilliant blend of pace and refinement - Doesn't sound as special as it is ★★★★★
Jaguar S-type R	048 R	'02-'07	8/4196	400/6100	408/3500	1800kg	226	5.3	-	155	-	22.5	+ Fine dynamics belie <i>olde worlde</i> looks - Auto-only, and no LSD ★★★★★
Jaguar XJ 3.0 V6 diesel	148 D	£56,260	6/2993	271/4000	442/2000	1700kg	162	6.0	-	155	167	46.3	+ A great Jaguar - But not as great as the Supersport... ★★★★★
Jaguar XJ Supersport	163 F	£91,735	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1795kg	285	4.7	-	155	270	24.4	+ Superb handling, monster performance - Opinion-dividing looks ★★★★★
Jaguar XJR	054 R	'03-'09	8/4196	400/6100	408/3500	1665kg	244	5.0	-	155	-	23.0	+ Genuine 7-series rival - 2007 facelift didn't help middle-aged image ★★★★★
Jaguar XJR 4.0	018 R	'00-'03	8/3996	370/6150	387/3000	1775kg	211	5.6	13.5	155	-	21.9	+ Matchless grace, extraordinary pace - Not much space ★★★★★
Lamborghini LM002	016 F	'86-'89	12/5167	450/6800	369/5200	2700kg	169	-	-	130	-	-	+ Craziest 4x4 ever, Countach V12 - Craziest 4x4 ever... ★★★★★
Lexus IS-F	151 R	£58,350	8/4969	417/6600	372/5200	1714kg	247	4.7	10.9	173	270	24.4	+ Shockingly good Lexus - The M3's available as a (second hand) four-door too ★★★★★
Lotus Carlton	035 F	'91-'93	6/3615	377/5200	419/4200	1658kg	231	4.8	10.6	176	-	17.0	+ The Millennium Falcon of saloon cars - Every drive a work-out ★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte S	137 R	£87,400	8/4691	425/7000	361/4750	1990kg	216	5.1	12.1	174	365	18.0	+ Finally, a QP with more bhp - New grille a bit Hannibal Lecter ★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte GTS	141 F	£94,350	8/4691	433/7000	361/4750	1990kg	221	5.1	-	177	365	18.0	+ The most stylish supersaloon - Slightly weaker brakes, unforgiving ride ★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte	085 F	'04-'08	8/4244	394/7000	333/4500	1930kg	207	5.1	-	171	-	17.9	+ Redefines big-car dynamics - Don't use auto mode ★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte GTS	113 D	'07-'08	8/4244	396/7000	339/4250	1930kg	208	5.5	-	177	-	-	+ Best Quattroporte chassis so far - More power wouldn't go amiss ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.5 16		'89-'92	4/2498	197/6750	177/5500	1360kg	147	7.2	-	142	-	24.4	+ M-B's M3 alternative - Not as nimble as the Beemer ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG	151 R	£56,545	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1730kg	264	4.4	9.7	160	280	23.5	+ Monstrous pace and extremely engaging - M3's just a little better... ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz DR520	148 D	'10-'11	8/6208	513/6800	479/5000	1730kg	301	4.1	-	187	-	-	+ C63 AMG goes feral - Just try finding one: only 20 were made ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C55 AMG	088 R	'04-'08	8/5439	367/5250	376/4000	1635kg	228	5.2	-	155	-	23.7	+ Furiously fast, commendably discreet - Overshadowed by M3 and RS4 ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	165 R	£74,895	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	1840kg	286	4.2	-	155	295	28.8	+ New turbo engine doesn't dilute E63 experience - Priority options ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	096 D	'06-'09	8/6208	507/6800	464/5200	1840kg	280	4.5	-	155	-	19.8	+ Brilliant engine, indulgent chassis - Vague steering, speed limits ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	052 R	'03-'06	8/5439	476/6100	516/2650	1760kg	271	4.8	10.2	155	-	21.9	+ M5-humbling grunt, cossetting ride - Speed limits ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG		'98-'02	8/5439	354/5500	390/3000	1730kg	219	5.5	-	155	-	23.0	+ Dragster disguised as a limo - Tyre bills ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG	148 D	£112,890	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2115kg	257	4.5	-	155	244	26.9	+ Massive torque, massively reduced emissions - Massive car ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S65 AMG	098 F	£164,230	12/5980	604/4750	737/2000	2260kg	272	4.4	-	155	334	19.8	+ God's own supersaloon - Unholy price and thirst ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	178 F	£81,800	8/5461	518/5250	516/1700	1870kg	281	4.4	-	155	231	28.5	+ Monster performance, 549bhp an option - Not as desirable as a Bentley or Aston ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	099 F	'06-'11	8/6208	507/6100	464/2650	1905kg	270	4.5	-	155	345	19.5	+ Beauty, comfort, awesome performance - M5 has the edge on B-roads ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz ML63 AMG	176 R	£82,995	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	2270kg	232	4.7	-	155	276	23.9	+ Great engine, surprisingly good dynamics - £85k buys a Boxster and an ML350... ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz G63 AMG	172 D	£123,115	8/5461	537/5500	560/2000	2475kg	220	5.3	-	130	322	-	+ It exists, epic soundtrack - Ancient chassis, silly price ★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz G55 AMG	092 F	'04-'12	8/5439	476/6100	516/2650	2550kg	190	5.2	-	130	378	17.8	+ Thuggishness, anti-style statement - It's a bit silly ★★★★★
MG ZT 260 V8	068 F	'03-'05	8/4601	256/5000	302/4000	1680kg	155	6.5	16.3	155	-	21.5	+ Lovely woolly V8, well-sorted rear-drive chassis - Thirst ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-300 SST	118 F	£31,349	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1590kg	185	5.2	13.9	155	256	26.2	+ Evo gets twin-clutch transmission - Not as exciting as it used to be ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-360	122 D	£38,559	4/1998	354/6500	363/3500	1560kg	230	4.1	-	155	328	19.9	+ Ridiculously rapid new Evo - A five-speed gearbox?! ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-300		'08-'12	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1560kg	189	4.7	-	155	246	27.4	+ The Evo grows up - Perhaps just a little too sensible? ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-330 SST	134 F	'08-'12	4/1998	324/6500	322/3500	1590kg	207	4.4	-	155	256	-	+ Great engine and gearbox combo - It still lives in the shadow of the Evo IX ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	138 F	'09-'10	4/1998	403/6500	387/3500	1560kg	262	3.8	-	155	328	-	+ The best Evo X so far... - ...about X grand too much when new ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-340	088 F	'05-'07	4/1997	345/6800	321/4600	1400kg	250	4.3	10.9	157	-	-	+ Gives Porsche drivers nightmares - Points. Lots of ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX MR FQ-360	103 F	'05-'07	4/1997	366/6887	363/3200	1400kg	266	3.9	-	157	-	-	+ Well-executed engine upgrades - Prison food ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII	055 F	'03-'04	4/1997	276/6500	289/3500	1410kg	199	5.1	-	157	-	-	+ The Evo grows up - Brakes need beefing up ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII MR FQ-300	057 R	'03-'05	4/1997	305/6800	289/3500	1400kg	221	4.8	-	157	-	20.5	+ Extra pace, extra attitude - Extra money ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII	031 F	'02-'03	4/1997	276/6500	282/3500	1360kg	206	5.0	13.0	140	-	20.4	+ Terrific all-rounder - You tell us ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII RS Sprint	041 D	'02-'03	4/1997	320/6500	327/6200	1260kg	258	4.4	-	150	-	-	+ Ruthlessly focused road weapon - For the truly committed ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI RS Sprint	011 F	'99	4/1997	330/6500	323/3000	1255kg	267	4.5	11.8	145	-	-	+ Lighter, keener, quicker than regular Evo - A little uncompromising ★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI Makinen Edition	128 F	'00-'01	4/1997	276/6500	275/2750	1365kg	205	4.6	-	150	-	-	+ Still one of our favourite Evos. Exclusive, too - Import only ★★★★★
Porsche Panamera S	165 R	£78,221	8/4806	394/6500	369/3500	1770kg	226	5.6	-	177	293	22.6	+ Great cabin and typically fine Porsche chassis - Only a mother could love its looks ★★★★★
Porsche Panamera GTS	168 D	£90,409	8/4806	430/6700	383/3500	1920kg	228	4.4	-	179	251	26.4	+ Sharper chassis, more urgent and vocal V8 - A BMW M5 is £17k less... ★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo	137 R	£103,807	8/4806	493/6000	516/2250	1970kg	254	3.6	8.9	188	270	24.6	+ Fast, refined and dynamically sound - It still leaves us cold ★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo S	159 D	£122,623	8/4806	542/6000	590/2250	1995kg	276	3.7	-	190	270	24.6	+ Pace, excellent ergonomics - Steering feel, ride ★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2)	173 D	£67,147	8/4806	414/6500	380/3500	2085kg	202	5.6	-	162	251	26.4	+ Dynamically the best SUV on sale - At two tons, it's still no sports car ★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk2)	144 D	£86,896	8/4806	493/6000	516/2250	2170kg	231	4.7	-	173	270	24.6	+ Greener, faster, better - Odd rear styling, numb steering ★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk1)	104 F	'06-'10	8/4806	494/6000	516/2250	2355kg	213	4.7	11.4	171	-	19.0	+ Appears to defy physics - Still cracks mirrors at 50 paces ★★★★★
Range Rover Evoque Si4	160 D	£39,995	4/1999	237/6000	251/1900	1670kg	144	7.0	-	135	199	-	+ Striking looks, sporting dynamics - Hefty price, and petrol version is auto-only ★★★★★
Range Rover Sport V8 Supercharged	135 D	£67,295	8/5000	503/6000	461/2000	2590kg	200	5.9	-	140	348	19.0	+ Thumpingly fast and hugely comfortable - It's no Cayenne in the corners ★★★★★
Range Rover SDV8	180 D	£78,095	8/4367	334/3500	516/1750	2360kg	144	6.5	-	140	229	32.5	+ Lighter, more capable, even more luxurious - Diesel V6 model feels more alert ★★★★★
Range Rover V8 Supercharged	134 D	'09-'12	8/5000	503/6000	461/2000	2710kg	189	5.9	-	140	348	19.0	+ Fast, comfortable, luxurious - Big, heavy, thirsty ★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Ghost	140 D	£200,500	12/6592	563/5250	575/1500	2435kg	235	4.7	-	155	317	20.8	+ More sporting, more affordable Rolls-Royce - But it still costs £200,500 ★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Phantom	054 F	£285,200	12/6749	453/5350	531/3500	2550kg	181	5.7	-	149	377	18.0	+ Rolls reinvented for the 21st Century - The roads are barely big enough ★★★★★
Subaru WRX STI	151 D	£26,995	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1505kg	200	5.1	-	158	243	26.9	+ Fast Subaru saloon is back (now with £8K off) - Blue paint and gold wheels aren't ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX STI S206 *	167 D	£45,000	4/1994	316/6400	318/3200	1470kg	218	4.5	-	155	-	-	+ The best current Impreza - Japan only, and it's sold out there... ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX GB270	109 D	'07	4/2457	266/5700	310/3000	1410kg	192	5.2	-	143	-	-	+ Fitting final fling for 'classic' Impreza - End of an era ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STI	090 R	'05-'07	4/2457	276/6000	289/4000	1495kg	188	5.3	-	158	-	25.9	+ Stunning to drive - Not so stunning to look at ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STI Spec C *	084 D	'05-'07	4/1994	320/6730	311/3500	1350kg	240	4.3	-	157	-	-	+ Lighter, faster, fiercer - The need for self-restraint ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB320	105 F	'07	4/2457	316/6000	332/3750	1495kg	215	4.8	-	155	-	-	+ Fitting tribute to a rallying legend - Too hardcore for some? ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX STI PPP	073 F	'03-'05	4/1994	300/6000	299/4000	1470kg	207	5.2	12.9	148	-	-	+ A Subaru with real edge - Bit too edgy in the wet ★★★★★
Subaru STI Type RA Spec C *	067 F	'03-'05	4/1994	335/7000	280/3750	1380kg	247	4.3	11.1	160	-	-	+ Best Impreza since the PT - Lost its throbbly flat-four voice ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WR1	067 R	'04-'05	4/1994	316/5800	310/4000	1470kg	218	5.3	13.1	155	-	-	+ Most powerful official UK Impreza until RB320 - Spec C is better ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza Turbo	011 F	'98-'00	4/1994	215/5600	214/4000	1235kg	177	5.4	14.6	144	-	27.2	+ Destined for classic status - Thirsty ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza PI	067 F	'00-'01	4/1994	276/6500	260/4000	1283kg	219	4.9	13.3	150	-	25.0	+ Ultimate old-shape Impreza - Prices reflect this ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB5 (PPP)	011 F	'99	4/1994	237/6000	258/3500	1235kg	195	5.0	14.1	143	-	-	+ Perfect blend of poise and power - Limited numbers ★★★★★
Subaru Impreza 22B	011 F	'98-'99	4/2212	276/6000	265/3200	1270kg	220	5.0	13.1	150	-	-	+ On paper, the ultimate - On the road, too uncompromising ★★★★★
Subaru Forester STi *	087 F	'05-'08	4/2457	320/5800	330/3500	-	-	4.8	-	150+	-	-	+ Undercover fun, gutsy engine - Lacks ultimate edge of an Impreza ★★★★★
Vauxhall Insignia VXR	163 F	£33,480	6/2792	321/5250	321/5250	1810kg	180	5.6	-	155	249	26.6	+ Highly



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Our Choice

Audi R8 Spyder. The Spyder boasts supercar looks, presence and performance, yet you really could drive one every day. And while the V10-engined car makes the more spine-tingling noise, the lighter and even more agile V8 version gets our vote.



Best of the Rest

Despite its electrically assisted power steering, the mk3 Porsche Boxster is brilliant, while the Mazda MX-5 is best for budget rear-drive fun. For the ultimate thrills, choose a Caterham R300 or an Ariel Atom, though Morgan's 3 Wheeler (left) is a curious alternative.

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

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
AC MKVI GT	135 D	£93,500	8/6162	437/4800	431/4800	1000kg	444	3.9	-	162	-	-	+ Cobra charm with a modern twist - It's priced against some strong rivals	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 8C Spider	161 R	'09-'11	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1675kg	273	4.5	-	181	-	-	+ Beauty meets beast. They hit it off - Good luck trying to buy one	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3.5 Supercharged	180 D	£38,000	4/1998	310/8400	169/7200	550kg	573	2.7	-	158	-	-	+ As mad as ever - Rain	★★★★★
Ariel Atom Mugen	165 F	£55,000	4/1998	270/8300	188/6000	550kg	499	2.9	-	150	-	-	+ Perfect engine for the Atom's chassis - Only ten being made	★★★★★
Ariel Atom V8 500	165 F	£146,699	8/3000	475/10,500	284/7750	550kg	877	3.0	5.8	170	-	-	+ An experience unlike anything else on Planet Car - £150K for an Atom	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3.245	113 D	'08-'12	4/1998	245/8200	155/5200	500kg	498	3.2	-	150	-	33.0	+ The Atom just got a little bit better - Can still be a bit draughty...	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	138 F	'09-'12	4/1998	300/8200	162/7200	550kg	554	3.3	-	155	-	-	+ It's brilliant - It's mental	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 2.300 Supercharged	123 R	'03-'09	4/1998	300/8200	162/7200	550kg	554	3.3	-	155	-	28.0	+ Makes your face ripple - ...like Clarkson's	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 1	015 F	'99-'03	4/1796	125/5500	122/3000	496kg	256	5.6	18.0	115	-	-	+ Amazing styling, huge fun - As practical as a chocolate teapot	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster	130 F	£98,995	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1710kg	250	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	+ Sportiest, coolest drop-top Aston in years - Lacks real teeth	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vantage S Roadster	161 R	£110,700	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1690kg	258	4.6	-	189	299	21.9	+ Sounds amazing, looks even better - Still not the best drop-top in its class	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage Roadster	175 F	£150,000	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1760kg	294	4.4	-	190	-	-	+ As good as the coupe, with amplified V12 rumble - Just a smidgen shakier	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB9 Volante	150 D	£138,150	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1815kg	263	4.6	-	190	368	18.2	+ Consummate cruiser and capable when pushed - Roof-up wind noise	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS Volante	133 D	£190,812	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1810kg	286	4.3	-	191	388	17.3	+ A feel-good car par excellence - It's a bit of a heavyweight	★★★★★
Audi TT S Roadster	122 D	£37,715	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1455kg	187	5.6	-	155	189	34.9	+ Effortlessly quick - Long-term appeal open to question; not cheap either	★★★★★
Audi TT RS Roadster	133 D	£47,820	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1510kg	225	4.7	-	155	212	31.0	+ Terrific engine... ..is the best thing about it	★★★★★
Audi TT Roadster (Mk1 225bhp)	016 R	'00-'06	4/1781	225/5900	206/2200	1395kg	164	6.9	20.0	150	-	30.4	+ Winner on the King's Road - Trails Boxster on the open road	★★★★★
Audi S5 Cabriolet	130 D	£45,895	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1875kg	178	5.6	-	155	199	33.2	+ Gets the S4's trick supercharged engine - Boring on dull	★★★★★
Audi RS5 Cabriolet	179 D	£68,960	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1920kg	235	4.9	-	155	249	26.4	+ Pace, looks, interior, naturally aspirated V8 - Not the last word in fun or involvement	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Cabriolet	094 D	'06-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1845kg	228	4.9	-	155	-	-	+ That engine - Wibble wobble, wibble wobble, jelly on a plate	★★★★★
Audi R8 Spyder V8	161 R	£96,595	8/4163	424/7900	317/6000	1660kg	259	4.8	-	186	337	19.6	+ Dynamically outstanding, sounds terrific - V10 sounds even better	★★★★★
Audi R8 Spyder V10	152 F	£117,710	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1720kg	306	4.1	-	194	349	19.0	+ Looks and sounds sensational - It's the most expensive Audi ever	★★★★★
BAC Mono	176 R	£89,940	4/2261	280/7700	206/6000	540kg	527	2.8	-	170	-	-	+ The most single-minded track car available - That means no passengers...	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GTC V8	168 F	£136,250	8/3933	500/6000	487/1700	2470kg	207	4.9	-	187	254	25.9	+ Still arguably the world's best topless GT - Still no sports car	★★★★★
Bentley Conti Supersports	147 D	£182,100	12/5935	621/6000	590/2000	2395kg	263	3.9	-	202	388	17.3	+ Fast, capable and refined - Coupe does the Supersports thing better	★★★★★
Bentley Conti GTC Speed	131 D	'09-'11	12/5998	600/6000	590/1750	2485kg	245	4.5	-	200	396	17.0	+ A great convertible just got better - Optional carbon brakes a necessity	★★★★★
Bentley Azure T	140 D	'09-'11	8/6761	500/4200	738/1800	2695kg	188	5.2	-	179	465	14.5	+ Two-and-a-half-ton sunbed - Cheaper Conti GTC a much better drive	★★★★★
BMW Z4 sDrive 20i (Mk2)	164 D	£29,480	4/1997	181/4800	199/1250	1470kg	125	6.8	-	142	159	41.5	+ The Z4 has grown up... ..and got fat	★★★★★
BMW Z4 sDrive 35i (Mk2)	130 D	£39,430	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1505kg	204	5.2	-	155	219	30.1	+ As above, with more power - Not as much fun as it used to be	★★★★★
BMW Z4 3.0si (Mk1)	094 D	'06-'09	6/2996	265/6600	232/2750	1310kg	205	5.7	-	155	-	32.9	+ Terrific straight-six - Handling not as playful as we'd like	★★★★★
BMW Z4 M Roadster	091 R	'06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1410kg	244	4.8	-	155	-	23.3	+ Exhilarating and characterful, that engine - Stiff suspension	★★★★★
BMW M Roadster	002 F	'98-'02	6/3246	325/7400	258/4900	1375kg	240	5.3	-	155	-	25.4	+ Fresh-air M3, that motor, hunky looks - M Coupe drives better	★★★★★
BMW 335i SE Convertible	102 D	£41,710	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1735kg	177	5.8	-	155	205	32.1	+ Looks good, great to drive, fantastic engine - A bit shaky	★★★★★
BMW M3 Convertible (E93)	119 D	£58,785	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1810kg	232	5.3	-	155	297	22.2	+ M DCT transmission, pace, slick roof - Extra weight blunts the edge	★★★★★
BMW M3 Convertible	035 D	'01-'06	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1655kg	207	5.3	-	155	-	23.3	+ That engine - Gets the wobbles on British B-roads	★★★★★
BMW M6 Convertible	098 D	'06-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1930kg	264	4.8	-	155	352	19.2	+ Composure, grip, power, comfort - Steering lacks feel at low speed	★★★★★
BMW Z8	026 R	'00-'03	8/4941	400/6600	369/3800	1585kg	256	4.8	11.1	155	-	14.4	+ M5-powered super-sportsster - M5's more fun to drive	★★★★★
Brooke 260 Double R	094 F	£34,995	4/2261	260/7500	200/6100	550kg	480	3.9	-	155+	-	-	+ Fast, dynamic, well built - No roof, looks not for everyone	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Classic	068 F	£17,495	4/1397	105/6000	95/5000	540kg	198	6.5	-	110	-	-	+ The Caterham experience starts here - It's pretty raw	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Roadsport 125	105 F	£22,995	4/1595	125/6100	120/5350	539kg	235	5.9	-	112	-	-	+ New Ford-engined model is just great - Bigger drivers need SV model	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Roadsport SV 175	140 D	£30,995	4/1999	175/7000	139/6000	555kg	321	4.8	-	138	-	-	+ The Caterham for everyday use, R300 engine - Loses intensity of R300	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Z4	165 F	£24,495	4/1595	140/6900	120/5790	520kg	273	4.9	-	120	-	-	+ One of the best Caterhams is less than £20K... ..if you build it yourself	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Supersport R	180 D	£27,995	4/1999	180/7300	143/6100	535kg	342	4.8	-	130	-	-	+ The best road-and-track Seven yet - Impractical, noisy, uncomfortable	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Superlight R400	105 F	£35,995	4/1999	210/7800	152/5750	525kg	406	3.8	-	140	-	-	+ R400 reborn with (lots of) Ford power - Slightly hesitant low-rev pick-up	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Superlight R500	123 R	£42,495	4/1999	263/8500	177/7200	506kg	528	2.9	-	150	-	-	+ Better power-to-weight ratio than a Veyron - Until you add the driver	★★★★★
Caterham CSR 260 Superlight	094 F	£44,995	4/2261	256/7500	200/6200	565kg	460	3.8	-	155	-	-	+ Brilliant for high days, holidays and trackdays - Wet Wednesdays	★★★★★
Caterham Levante	131 F	£115,000	8/2398	550/10000	300/8500	520kg	1074	4.8	8.2	150	-	-	+ Twice the power-to-weight ratio of a Veyron! - Not easy to drive slowly	★★★★★
Caterham 7 Superlight R300	150 F	'09-'12	4/1999	175/7000	139/6000	515kg	345	4.5	-	140	-	-	+ Possibly all the Caterham you need - They're not cheap	★★★★★
Caterham 7 R300	068 F	'02-'06	4/1796	160/7000	130/5000	500kg	325	4.7	-	130	-	-	+ Our 2002 Trackday Car of the Year - Not for wimps	★★★★★
Caterham 7 R400	068 F	'03-'06	4/1796	200/7500	150/5750	490kg	415	3.9	-	140	-	-	+ Race-car with a number plate - Your missus will leave you	★★★★★
Caterham 7 R500	068 F	'99-'06	4/1796	230/8600	155/7200	460kg	510	3.6	8.8	146	-	-	+ Fine for the Nürburgring - Hard work around the Bullring	★★★★★
Caterham 7 R500 Evolution	069 F	'04	4/1998	250/8000	190/4000	460kg	552	3.9	8.1	150	-	-	+ Madder than Mad Jack McMad - Er, it's a bit mad	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette C6	083 D	£56,816	8/6162	430/5900	424/4600	1460kg	300	4.3	-	186	316	21.2	+ Corvette performance - Convertible dynamics, electronics	★★★★★
Ferrari California	171 D	£152,116	8/4297	483/7750	372/5000	1705kg	290	3.8	-	193	299	-	+ Revised with sharper performance and dynamics - We'd still take a 458 Spider	★★★★★
Honda S2000	118 D	'99-'09	4/1997	237/8300	153/7500	1260kg	191	6.2	-	150	-	28.2	+ An alternative and rev-happy roadster - The Boxster's better	★★★★★
Jaguar XK 5.0		£71,430	8/5000	380/6500	380/3500	1621kg	238	5.3	-	155	264	25.2	+ Basic XK gets extra power... ..but loses some of its GT refinement	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR	130 F	£84,930	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1725kg	296	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	+ Gains Jag's fantastic new V8 - Loses sporting ground to its main foes	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S	167 F	£103,430	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1725kg	319	4.2	-	186	292	23.0	+ Loud and mad; most exciting Jag in years - It's also the most expensive in years	★★★★★
Jaguar XK	089 F	'06-'09	8/4196	294/6000	303/4100	1635kg	183	6.6	-	155	-	25.0	+ Every bit as good as the XK coupe - 294bhp still only just enough	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR		'06-'09	8/4196	414/6250	413/4000	1705kg	247	5.0	-	155	-	-	+ First Jag sports car for years - Overwrought detailing	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR	004 F	'97-'06	8/3996	370/6150	387/3600	1750kg	215	5.4	12.8	155	-	15.6	+ Hurricane-in-the-hair motoring - A danger to toupees everywhere	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow	138 F	£49,482	4/1984	237/5500	229/2000	790kg	305	3.8	-	137	-	-	+ Mad looks; real quality feel - Heavier and pricier than we'd hoped	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow R	165 F	£64,850	4/1984	295/5500	295/3300	790kg	379	3.6	-	144	-	-	+ Sharper handling, more power - Pity it's not even lighter, and cheaper	★★★★★
Light Car Company Rocket	104 F	£46,000	4/1002	143/10500	77/8500	406kg	358	4.4	-	145	-	35.0	+ Single-seater style, speed - Old Formula Fords cost £5K	★★★★★
Lotus Elise 1.6	144 D	£29,050	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	876kg	155	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	+ New 1.6 Elise is light and fantastic - Smaller engine could put some off	★★★★★
Lotus Elise 1.6 Club Racer	159 R	£28,450	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	852kg	160	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	+ Even lighter, even more focused Elise - A touch pricey for a stripped-out Elise	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S	172 R	£37,150	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	924kg	239	4.5	-	145	175	37.5	+ New supercharged Elise boasts epic grip and pace - £37K before (pricey) options...	★★★★★

PAST master

Gumpert Apollo S Issue 110, November 2007

When this hardcore German supercar arrived in the UK, Richard Meaden tried it at the Bedford Autodrome

'The twin-turbocharged Audi V8 in the 690bhp S version of this no-frills road-racer has a devastating punch. It's an otherworldly sensation: harder and more violent than the Zonda, yet smoother and more controlled than a Koenigsegg. Whatever you've stepped out of, the Apollo will feel insanely rapid.

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

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Lotus Elise R	068 F	'04-'11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	860kg	223	5.6	13.9	150	196	34.4	+ Most thrillsome Elise yet - Blaring engine note	★★★★★
Lotus Elise SC	131 F	'08-'11	4/1794	218/8000	156/5000	870kg	254	4.5	11.4	148	199	33.2	+ All the usual Elise magic - Supercharged engine lacks sparkle	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S1.8	104 F	'06-'10	4/1794	134/6200	127/4200	860kg	158	6.3	18.7	127	-	37.2	+ Brilliant entry-level Elise - Precious little	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S2 111S	049 F	'02-'04	4/1796	156/7000	129/4650	860kg	197	5.1	-	131	-	40.9	+ A genuinely useable Elise - Air-con? In an Elise?	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S2 Sport 135	040 D	'03	4/1796	135/6200	129/4850	726kg	189	5.4	-	129	-	-	+ One of our fave S2 Elises - Brakes need more bite and pedal feel	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S2 Sport 190	044 F	'03	4/1796	190/7800	128/5000	710kg	272	4.7	12.1	135	-	-	+ Fabulous trackday tool - Pricey	★★★★★
Lotus Elise S1	126 F	'96-'00	4/1796	118/5500	122/3000	731kg	164	6.1	18.5	126	-	39.4	+ A modern classic - A tad impractical?	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven Supercharged	123 R	'07-'11	4/1796	252/8000	179/7000	670kg	382	3.8	-	150	-	-	+ Impressive on road and track - Not hardcore enough for some	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	138 F	'09-'11	4/1796	266/8200	179/7200	670kg	403	3.7	-	155	-	-	+ evo Track Car of the Year 2009 - It's a 76-grand Lotus with no roof	★★★★★
Lotus 2-Eleven	126 F	'07-'11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	720kg	267	4.3	-	140	-	-	+ Not far off supercharged car's pace - Pricey once it's made road-legal	★★★★★
Lotus 340R	126 F	'00	4/1796	190/7800	146/5000	658kg	293	4.5	12.5	126	-	-	+ Hardcore road-racer... ..that looks like a dune buggy from Mars	★★★★★
Lotus Elan SE	095 F	'89-'95	4/1588	165/6600	148/4200	1022kg	164	6.7	-	137	-	21.0	+ Awesome front-drive chassis - Rather uninvolving	★★★★★
Lotus Elan Sprint	126 F	'71-'73	4/1558	126/6500	113/5500	720kg	178	6.6	-	122	-	-	+ Sensational chassis, properly quick - Affording a mint one	★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio	142 D	£98,250	8/4691	434/7000	332/4750	1980kg	223	5.3	-	176	358	18.3	+ As good to drive as it is to look at - Lacks the grunt of some rivals	★★★★★
Maserati GranCabrio Sport	161 D	£102,615	8/4691	444/7000	376/4750	1980kg	228	5.1	-	177	377	19.5	+ Looks, performance, cruising ability - Brakes could be sharper	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i SE		£17,990	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1155kg	109	9.9	-	121	167	39.8	+ Basic MX-5 offers ESP-less fun - But you'll probably want the 2.0's power	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 2.0i Sport Tech	170 R	£21,135	4/1999	158/7000	139/5000	1173kg	144	7.6	-	132	181	36.2	+ Handles brilliantly again - Less than macho image	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk3 vi)	091 F	'05-'09	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1155kg	108	9.3	-	122	-	-	+ Gearchange, interior - Lost some of the charm of old MX-5s	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk2)	017 R	'98-'05	4/1839	146/7000	124/5000	1065kg	140	8.6	-	123	-	32.5	+ Affordable ragtop don't get much better - Cheap cabin	★★★★★
Mazda MX-5 1.6 (Mk1)	131 F	'89-'97	4/1597	115/6500	100/5500	971kg	120	9.0	-	114	-	-	+ The original and still (pretty much) the best - Less than rigid	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK350 Sport	161 R	£44,725	6/3498	302/6500	273/3500	1465kg	209	5.5	-	155	167	39.8	+ Best non-AMG SLK yet - Still no Boxster-beater	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	171 D	£54,965	8/5461	416/6800	398/4500	1690kg	195	4.5	-	155	195	33.6	+ AMG SLK is quicker and more economical than ever - Should be sharper, though	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	087 F	'05-'09	8/5439	355/5750	376/4000	1575kg	229	4.9	-	155	-	23.5	+ Superb engine, responsive chassis - No manual option, ESP spoils fun	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG Black	110 F	'07-'08	8/5439	394/5750	383/3750	1495kg	268	4.9	11.2	174	-	-	+ AMG gets serious - Dull-witted 7G-Tronic auto box, uneven dynamics	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL500	169 D	£80,000	8/4663	429/5250	516/1800	1800kg	242	4.6	-	155	212	31.0	+ Wafly performance, beautifully engineered - Lacks ultimate sports car feel	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	171 D	£112,000	8/5461	530/5500	590/2000	1770kg	304	4.3	-	155	231	-	+ Monster performance, lighter than before - Still heavy, steering lacks consistency	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	117 D	£106,820	8/6208	518/6800	464/5200	1970kg	278	4.6	-	155	328	20.0	+ More focused than old SL55 AMG - Lost some of its all-round appeal	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL55 AMG	070 F	'02-'07	8/5439	493/6100	516/2650	1955kg	256	4.6	10.2	155	-	-	+ As fast as a Murciélago - Not as much fun	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG	071 D	'04-'10	12/5980	604/4800	737/2000	2035kg	302	4.1	-	155	-	-	+ Gob-smacking performance - Gob-smackingly pricey	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Roadster	167 F	£176,895	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1735kg	330	3.7	-	197	308	21.4	+ Loses none of the coupe's talents - But (understandably) loses the gullwing doors	★★★★★
Mini John Cooper Works Convertible	130 F	£24,850	4/1598	208/6000	206/1850	1230kg	172	6.9	-	146	169	38.7	+ A manlier Mini cabrio. As hardcore as the hatch... ..which is still better	★★★★★
Morgan 3 Wheeler	177 R	£25,000	2/1990	80/5300	103/3250	525kg	155	6.0	-	115	-	-	+ Quirky, characterful, brilliant - Unnatural brake feel; you'd better not be shy	★★★★★
Morgan Plus 8	171 R	£82,500	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1100kg	334	4.4	-	155	-	-	+ Hilarious mix of old looks and new mechanicals - Refinement is definitely old-school	★★★★★
Morgan Aero SuperSports	145 F	£126,900	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.2	-	170	-	-	+ As above, with a V8 and targa top - It's proper supercar money	★★★★★
Morgan Aero 8	105 F	'02-'08	8/4799	362/6300	361/3400	1100kg	334	4.5	-	170	-	25.2	+ Awesome sound, view over bonnet, dynamics - Awkward-looking rear	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z Roadster	143 F	£32,050	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1554kg	213	5.5	-	155	262	25.2	+ The Zed's old-school character remains intact - Its purposeful looks don't	★★★★★
Nissan 350Z Roadster	104 F	'04-'09	6/3498	309/6600	264/4800	1600kg	196	5.8	-	155	-	24.8	+ Drives just like the coupe - But doesn't look as good	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (Mk3)	172 R	£37,589	6/2706	261/6700	206/4500	1310kg	202	5.4	-	164	192	34.5	+ Goes & looks better; cleanest Boxster ever - Steering now electric to help cut CO2	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (Mk3)	169 D	£45,384	6/3436	311/6700	265/4500	1320kg	239	5.0	-	173	206	32.1	+ Boxster steps out of 911's shadow - But gets 911's less appealing new steering	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (Mk2)		'05-'12	6/2893	252/6400	214/4400	1335kg	192	5.9	-	163	221	30.0	+ Second-gen Boxster's as brilliant as ever - It's a typically Porsche redesign	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (Mk2)	161 R	'05-'12	6/3436	306/6400	265/5500	1355kg	229	5.3	-	170	223	29.7	+ As above, but with more power - Lighter steering than before	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster Spyder (Mk2)	140 F	'10-'12	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1275kg	252	5.0	-	166	221	29.1	+ Lighter, more driver-centric Boxster - Collapsed-brolly roof not practical	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster (Mk1)	049 F	'99-'04	6/2687	228/6300	192/4700	1275kg	182	6.3	-	155	-	29.1	+ Still an impeccable sports car - Very little	★★★★★
Porsche Boxster S (Mk1)	070 F	'99-'04	6/3179	260/6200	228/4700	1320kg	200	5.5	-	164	-	26.9	+ Added power is seductive - As above	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S Cabrio (991)	171 R	£89,740	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1465kg	273	4.6	-	187	229	29.1	+ All-new open 911 drives just like the coupe - Which means the same artificial steering	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera GT Cabrio (997)	161 R	£85,249	6/3800	402/7300	310/4200	1515kg	270	4.7	-	190	242	27.4	+ The best 911 drop-top you can buy - Lacks glamour of an R8 Spyder	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabrio (997)	139 D	£118,015	6/3800	493/6000	479/1950	1645kg	305	3.8	-	194	275	24.1	+ Absurdly quick and capable drop-top - We'd still take the coupe	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Speedster	152 D	'10	6/3800	402/7300	310/4200	1540kg	265	4.4	-	189	242	27.0	+ Rarity, quality, head-turning styling - More collectors' than drivers' car	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabrio (996)	060 F	'03-'05	6/3596	414/6000	413/4600	1700kg	250	4.7	-	185	-	-	+ Faster than you'll ever need it to be - Just the image thing again	★★★★★
Radical SR3 SL	174 F	£69,850	4/2000	300/6000	265/4000	795kg	383	3.0	-	161	-	-	+ Our 2011 Track Car of the Year, and it's road-legal - You'll need to wrap up warm	★★★★★
Radical SR8LM	138 F	£88,000	8/2800	460/10,500	260/8000	680kg	687	3.2	-	168	-	-	+ Fastest car around the Nordschleife - Convincing people it's road legal	★★★★★
Smart Roadster Brabus	067 D	'04-'07	3/698	101/5600	96/2500	895kg	115	9.8	-	121	-	54.3	+ Feisty engine, growly soundtrack - Slow paddleshift gearbox	★★★★★
Tesla Roadster	131 F	£87,945	AC motor	248/4500	273/0-4500	1283kg	196	5.0	14.3	120	-	-	+ If this is the future, it's going to be fun - Limited range, high price	★★★★★
Toniq-R Duratec	102 D	£23,500	4/1999	193/6500	174/4500	550kg	357	4.5	-	140	-	-	+ Very good value, well built, and lots of fun too - No roof, no windscreen	★★★★★
Toyota MR2	078 F	'00-'06	4/1794	138/6400	125/4400	975kg	141	7.2	21.2	130	-	38.2	+ Tight lines, taut dynamics - Minimal luggage space	★★★★★
TVR Tamora	070 F	'01-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1050kg	338	4.5	-	160	-	-	+ Well-sorted soft-top TVR - Awkward styling	★★★★★
TVR Tuscan Convertible	091 R	'05-'07	6/3996	365/6800	315/6000	1100kg	337	3.8	8.1	195+	-	-	+ Spirit of the Griff reborn - Over 195mph? Really?	★★★★★
TVR Chimaera 5.0	007 R	'93-'03	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.6	-	167	-	26.4	+ Gorgeous noise, tarmac-rippling grunt - Details	★★★★★
TVR Griffith 4.3	068 F	'92-'93	8/4280	280/5500	305/4000	1060kg	268	4.8	11.2	148	-	-	+ The car that made TVR. Cult status - Mere details	★★★★★
TVR Griffith 500	009 R	'93-'01	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.8	11.2	167	-	22.1	+ Gruff diamond - A few rough edges	★★★★★
Ultima GTR	017 R	£45,500	8/6300	534/5800	528/4800	990kg	548	3.9	8.2	204	-	-	+ Turns the Mi into the Mulsanne - You'll have to build it yourself	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220	023 R	'00-'04	4/2198	145/5800	150/4000	875kg	168	5.6	-	136	-	34.4	+ Absurdly good Vauxhall - The badge?	★★★★★
Vauxhall VX220 Turbo	066 R	'03-'05	4/1998	197/5500	184/1950	930kg	215	4.7	-	151	-	-	+ Nothing comes close for the money - Marginal everyday usability	★★★★★
Westfield Megabusa	036 F	£24,450	4/1298	175/9800	102/9000	430kg	413	3.7	-	140	-	-	+ Bike-engined road-rocket - Not big on practicality...	★★★★★
Westfield 1600 Sport Turbo	140 D	£26,500	4/1598	195/5850	170/2000	650kg	305	4.7	-	142	-	-	+ Very quick and composed - Expensive, and a little on the heavy side	★★★★★
Westfield XI	078 D	'04-'10	4/1275	65/6000	72/3000	498kg	132	8.5	-	120	-	-	+ Old-school charm - Old-school power	★★★★★
Westfield XTR4	068 D	'01-'10	4/1781	220/5500	184/5000	542kg	413	3.6	-	160	-	-	+ Mini-Le Mans racer - You wouldn't want to drive it there	★★★★★

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Terms and Conditions: 1.This free prize draw is open only to UK residents aged 18 years or over. 2.Register your interest in the Superturismo GT Grigio Corsa with an authorized OZ retailer between February 1, 2013 and April 30, 2013 (the "Offer Period") to be automatically entered into the prize draw to win two places to visit the exclusive Lotus F1 Technical Centre. Only enquiries made during the relevant Offer Period will be considered eligible for entry into the competition. 3.No purchase necessary. 4.Only one entry per household. Duplicate entries will not be accepted. 5.Two winners per authorised OZ retailer will be selected at random from all the entries received during the Offer Period. The random prize draw will be conducted as soon as is reasonably practicable (which OZ Racing Ltd. in its sole discretion shall decide) after expiry of the Offer Period. The winner will be notified by either telephone or email within 10 days of the draw. 6.Prizes must be taken as stated and cannot be deferred, transferred given or sold to someone else. There will be no cash alternative. 7.The judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 8.Entrants must provide full details as required, and comply with all rules to be eligible for the prizes. No responsibility is accepted for ineligible entries or entries made fraudulently. 9.OZ Racing Ltd. Limited will not be liable for any damage, loss or disappointment suffered by any person taking part or not being able to take part in the prize draw. 10.Entrants will be deemed to have accepted these rules and agree to be bound by them when entering the competition. 11.Winners may be required to take part in additional publicity. 12.These rules are governed by the laws of England and Wales if you are resident in England or Wales or by the laws of Scotland if you are resident in Scotland. 13.The promoter for this prize draw is OZ Racing Ltd., registered office: O.Z. RACING LTD UK, Lowfields Way Lowfields Park, Elland, West Yorkshire, HX5 9DA, 7th Floor, United Kingdom.

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Our Choice

Porsche 911 Carrera 4S. It's taken a while for the 991-generation 911 to win us round, but the C4S has done it, thanks largely to its weightier steering and sweeter balance. Don't hesitate to be tempted by the Powerkit option – it's pricey, but worth it.



Best of the Rest

The supercharged V6 Lotus Evija S (left) is a proper road racer for £53K and our joint 2012 Car of the Year. Audi's R8 just pips a two-wheel-drive 991 Carrera, and is a genuine junior supercar. We'll have ours with the V8. Alternatively, the Nissan GT-R mixes practicality with supercar pace.

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

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Alfa Romeo Brera 3.2 V6	120 F	'08-'11	6/3195	256/6300	237/4500	1532kg	170	6.9	-	155	260	-	+ Brera made better for UK roads - Steering lacking some feel	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo GTV 3.0 V6	010 F	'96-'06	6/2959	220/6300	199/5000	1406kg	159	6.5	-	150	-	24.1	+ Glorious V6 makes it a mini-Ferrari - So-so chassis	★★★★★
Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione	120 F	'07-'09	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1585kg	288	4.1	-	181	-	-	+ Looks, exclusivity, noise, balance - They're all sold	★★★★★
Alpina B3 Biturbo	108 F	£50,745	6/2979	355/5500	369/3800	1570kg	230	4.8	-	177	-	29.1	+ Alpina's M3 alternative - Too refined for some	★★★★★
Alpina B3 GT3	176 D	£66,950	6/2979	402/6000	398/4500	1535kg	266	4.4	-	186	224	-	+ Alpina's M3/GTS alternative - Auto gearbox frustrates when pressing on	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage (4.7)	169 D	£84,995	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1630kg	262	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	+ 2012 upgrades keep the V8 Vantage on song - Starting to feel a little dated, though	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S	168 R	£102,500	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	271	4.5	-	189	299	21.9	+ Keener engine, V12 Vantage looks - Slightly sluggish auto only	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	146 R	£135,000	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.4	9.7	190	388	17.3	+ The best series production car that Aston Martin makes - Erm, a tad thirsty?	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Zagato	179 D	£396,000	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.2	-	190	388	17.3	+ The looks, the noise, the way it drives - It's three times the price of a V12 Vantage	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage (4.3)	109 F	'05-'08	8/4281	380/7300	302/5000	1630kg	237	5.2	12.0	175	-	-	+ Gorgeous, awesome soundtrack - Can't quite match 911 dynamically	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB9	178 F	£131,995	12/5935	510/6500	457/5500	1785kg	290	4.6	-	183	368	18.2	+ Better than the old DB9 in every respect - Automatic gearbox could be quicker	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB9	146 D	'10-'12	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1760kg	271	4.6	-	190	368	18.2	+ Ride & handling improved for 2010 model - Rapide makes 2+2 seating pointless	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS	142 F	£180,812	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1695kg	306	4.2	-	191	388	17.3	+ Stupendous engine, gearbox, brakes - Pricey. Can bite the unwary	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB7 Vantage	010 R	'00-'05	12/5935	420/6000	400/5000	1770kg	241	4.9	11.2	185	-	18.6	+ DB7 with near-supercar pace - Handling lacks edge	★★★★★
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI	155 R	£271,140	4/1984	208/4300	258/1600	1295kg	163	6.3	15.7	152	154	42.8	+ Front-driver loses nothing to quattro TTs - Steers like a computer game	★★★★★
Audi TTS	119 D	£35,605	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1395kg	195	5.4	-	155	184	35.8	+ Usefully quicker TT; great drivetrain - Still steers like a computer game	★★★★★
Audi TT RS	158 R	£45,840	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1450kg	235	4.4	11.1	155	209	31.4	+ Sublime 5-cylinder turbo engine - Rest of package can't quite match it	★★★★★
Audi TT Sport (Mk1)	081 D	'05-'06	4/1781	237/5700	236/2300	1390kg	173	5.7	-	155	-	30.3	+ Deliciously purposeful interior, crisp chassis - Numb steering	★★★★★
Audi S5	163 D	£42,790	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1675kg	199	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	+ Supercharged V6 makes S5 cleaner and faster - Pricey once you add options	★★★★★
Audi RS5		£59,150	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1715kg	245	4.5	-	155	246	26.9	+ Brilliant engine and improved chassis - Still not as exciting as you'd hope	★★★★★
Audi R8 V8	168 R	£87,935	8/4163	414/7800	317/4500	1560kg	270	4.1	9.9	187	332	19.9	+ Finally, a true 911 alternative - Exclusivity comes at a price	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10	146 R	£109,090	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	325	3.9	8.4	196	346	19.0	+ The fabulous R8 gets a supercar engine - Looks a lot like the V8	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Plus	177 D	£124,675	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1570kg	351	3.8	-	198	346	19.0	+ More power and aggression, less weight - Firm ride may be too much for some	★★★★★
Audi R8 GT	169 F	'10-'12	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1520kg	369	3.6	-	199	-	-	+ Everything we love about the R8 - Not as hardcore as we wanted	★★★★★
Audi Quattro 20V	019 F	'90-'91	5/2226	220/5900	228/1950	1329kg	146	6.2	18.2	143	-	19.1	+ Modern classic - Buy wisely to avoid big bills	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8	178 F	£123,850	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2295kg	221	4.6	-	188	246	27.0	+ A proper drivers' Bentley with decent economy - W12 suddenly seems pointless	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT	152 D	£135,760	12/5998	567/6000	516/1700	2320kg	248	4.6	-	198	384	17.1	+ 200mph in utter comfort - Weight, thirst	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT Speed	177 D	£151,100	12/5998	616/6000	590/2000	2320kg	258	4.0	-	205	338	19.5	+ 205mph in utter comfort - Feels nose-heavy in slow corners	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Supersports	137 F	£170,100	12/5998	621/6000	590/2000	2240kg	282	3.7	-	204	388	17.3	+ A thoroughly impressive car... rather than a fun and involving one	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT Speed	115 F	'07-'11	12/5998	600/6000	553/1750	2350kg	259	4.3	-	202	396	17.0	+ Stupendous performance, fine dynamics - Weight, thirst...	★★★★★
BMW 135i M Sport	113 F	'08-'12	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1455kg	211	5.3	-	155	198	33.2	+ Fast, fun, £20K cheaper than an M3 - You really want the 1-series M Coupe	★★★★★
BMW 1-series M Coupe	158 R	'11-'12	6/2979	335/5900	369/1500	1495kg	228	4.8	-	155	224	-	+ Character, turbo pace and great looks - Came and went too quick	★★★★★
BMW 335i M Sport	095 D	£39,145	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1525kg	201	5.2	12.2	155	196	33.6	+ Eager engine, exploitable chassis - Slightly unadventurous styling	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E92)	162 R	£54,720	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1580kg	266	4.3	10.3	155	290	22.8	+ Fends off all of its talented new rivals - ...except the cheaper 1-series M	★★★★★
BMW M3 GTS (E92)	171 R	'10-'11	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1530kg	295	4.3	-	193	295	-	+ Highly exclusive, most focused M-car ever - Good luck trying to find one	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E46)	066 F	'00-'07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	230	5.1	12.3	155	-	23.7	+ One of the best BMWs ever - Slightly artificial steering feel	★★★★★
BMW M3 CS (E46)	088 F	'05-'07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	230	5.1	-	155	-	23.7	+ CSL dynamics without CSL price - Looks like the standard car	★★★★★
BMW M3 CSL (E46)	060 R	'03-'04	6/3246	355/7900	273/4900	1385kg	260	5.3	12.0	155	-	-	+ Stripped-down road-race M3 - Standard brakes barely adequate	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E36)	148 F	'93-'98	6/3201	321/7400	258/3250	1460kg	223	5.4	12.8	157	-	25.7	+ Performance, image - Never quite as good as the original	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E30)	165 F	'86-'90	4/2302	212/6750	170/4600	1165kg	185	6.7	17.8	147	-	20.3	+ Best M-car ever! Race-car dynamics for the road - LHD only	★★★★★
BMW Z4 M Coupe	097 F	'06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1420kg	242	5.0	-	155	-	23.3	+ A real drivers' car - You've got to be prepared to get stuck in	★★★★★
BMW M Coupe	005 R	'98-'03	6/3246	325/7400	258/3250	1375kg	240	5.1	-	155	-	25.0	+ Quick and characterful - Lacks finesse	★★★★★
BMW 640d	165 D	£62,080	6/2993	309/4400	465/1500	1790kg	175	5.5	-	155	144	51.4	+ Great engine and economy, excellent build - Numb steering, unsettled B-road ride	★★★★★
BMW M6 (Mk2)	178 F	£93,820	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1850kg	303	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	+ Mighty ability, pace, technology - There are more exotic badges at this money	★★★★★
BMW M6 (Mk1)	106 R	'05-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1635kg	311	4.8	10.0	155	342	19.8	+ Awesome GT, awesome sports car - SMG gearbox now off the pace	★★★★★
Chevrolet Camaro SS	148 F	£35,025	8/6162	426/5900	420/4600	1769kg	245	5.1	-	155	329	20.0	+ Looks like a Transformer made real - We'd prefer it in robot mode	★★★★★
Chevrolet Camaro ZL1*	167 D	£60,000	8/6162	580/6100	556/3800	1900kg	310	4.0	-	180	-	-	+ The most powerful Camaro yet - UK sales yet to be confirmed...	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette C6	116 D	£49,033	8/6162	430/5900	424/4600	1461kg	300	4.3	-	186	316	21.2	+ A Corvette with no apologies needed - Still left-hand drive only	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette Z06	099 F	£66,403	8/7011	505/6300	469/4800	1418kg	363	3.9	8.5	198	350	19.2	+ 8.5 to 100, brakes, price - Not quite the road-racer we expected	★★★★★
Dodge Challenger*	122 D	£40,000	8/6059	425/6200	420/4800	1877kg	230	5.2	-	160+	-	-	+ Effortlessly cool... if you live in Hazzard County	★★★★★
Ford Mustang Boss 302*	162 R	£45,000	8/4951	444/7400	380/4500	1647kg	274	4.6	10.5	155	-	-	+ Looks great and has oodles of character - LHD only, far from dynamically perfect	★★★★★
Ford Shelby GT500*	178 F	£60,000	8/5812	662/6500	631/4000	1747kg	385	3.5	-	202	-	-	+ Huge performance for the money - Putting it to use takes nerve	★★★★★
Ginetta G40 R	165 F	£29,950	4/1999	175/6700	140/5000	795kg	224	5.8	-	140	-	-	+ A race-compliant sports car for the road - Feels too soft to be a hardcore track toy	★★★★★
Ginetta G60	165 D	£68,000	6/3721	310/6500	288/4500	1080kg	292	4.9	-	165	-	-	+ Reborn Farbio GT5 boasts great engine and good looks - The ride still needs work	★★★★★
Honda CR-Z GT	144 F	£20,820	4/1497	122/6100	128/1500	1198kg	103	9.9	-	124	117	56.5	+ The first hybrid with sporting intent - No match for a good diesel hot hatch	★★★★★
Honda Integra Type-R (DC2)	095 F	'96-'00	4/1797	187/8000	131/7300	1101kg	173	6.2	17.9	145	-	28.9	+ Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Too raw for some	★★★★★
Honda Integra Type-R (DC5)*	037 F	'01-'06	4/1998	217/8000	152/7000	1250kg	176	7.1	16.7	140	-	-	+ Sharp looks, massive grip - Lost a little of the DC2's magic	★★★★★
Honda NSX	043 F	'90-'05	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1410kg	196	5.5	-	168	-	22.8	+ The useable supercar - 270bhp sounds a bit weedy today	★★★★★
Honda NSX-R*	051 F	'02-'03	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1470kg	221	4.4	-	168	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2002 - Honda never brought it to the UK	★★★★★
Hyundai Veloster Turbo	176 D	£21,995	4/1591	184/5500	195/1500	1313kg	142	8.2	-	133	157	40.9	+ The usual Hyundai value, with added fun - Styling might be too quirky for some	★★★★★
Infiniti G37S Coupe	127 R	£38,247	6/3696	316/7000	265/5200	1706kg	188	5.8	13.8	155	246	26.9	+ Softer 370Z delivers sharp-driving swing at the Germans - Bland looks	★★★★★
Jaguar XK 5.0	130 D	£65,430	8/5000	380/6500	380/3500	1585kg	244	5.2	-	155	264	25.2	+ Fine car for the likes of us - Jag buyers may not like the harder edge	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR	168 R	£78,930	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1678kg	305	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	+ Fast and incredibly rewarding Jag - The kids will have to stay at home	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S	168 R	£97,430	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1678kg	328	4.2	-	186	292	23.0	+ The most exciting XKR ever - It's nearly £100,000	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR		'98-'06	8/4196	400/6100	408/3500	1735kg	234	5.2	-	155	-	22.9	+ Extra grunt of 4.2-litre motor - Lacks feedback	★★★★★
Lotus Evija S (V6)	171 R	£53,850	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1176kg	298	4.0	-	170	236	-	+ Breathtaking road-racer; our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Doubts over Lotus's future	★★★★★
Lotus Evija S	105 F	'06-'11	4/1796	218/7800	158/5500	930kg	238	4.5	-	148	199	33.2	+ Lightweight with a hefty punch - Uninspiring soundtrack	★★★★★

POCKET buying guide

Nissan GT-R

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Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Lotus Exige Cup 260	139 D	'10-'11	4/1796	256/8000	174/6000	890kg	293	4.0	-	152	199	31.1	+ Feels like a race car, yet works on the road - Pricey for a four-pot Exige	★★★★★
Lotus Exige (series 2)	068 R	'04-'08	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	875kg	219	4.9	-	147	-	32.1	+ Highly focused road and track tool - Lacks visual impact of S1	★★★★★
Lotus Exige (series 1)	067 D	'00-'01	4/1796	192/7800	146/5000	870kg	247	4.6	-	136	-	-	+ Looks and goes like Elise racer - A tad lacking in refinement	★★★★★
Lotus Evora	138 F	£52,500	6/3456	276/6400	258/4700	1382kg	203	5.6	13.6	162	217	30.3	+ Sublime ride and handling. Our 2009 car of the year - Pricey options	★★★★★
Lotus Evora S	168 R	£61,500	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.6	-	172	229	28.7	+ A faster and better Evora - But one which spars with the Porsche 911...	★★★★★
Lotus Europa SE	127 F	'08-'10	4/1998	222/5600	221/4000	995kg	227	4.9	-	146	-	28.8	+ More of a Lotus than before - Still overshadowed by the Exige and Evora	★★★★★
Lotus Esprit Sport 350	005 R	'99-'00	8/3506	350/6500	295/4250	1299kg	274	4.3	9.9	175	-	22.0	+ Designed for track work but brilliant on the road - Limited edition	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo	114 R	£82,190	8/4244	399/7100	339/4750	1880kg	216	5.5	12.7	177	330	19.8	+ Striking, accomplished GT - Doesn't spike the pulse like an Aston or 911	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	178 F	£90,750	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1880kg	245	4.8	-	185	331	-	+ The best everyday GranTurismo yet - Starting to get long in the tooth?	★★★★★
Maserati GT MC Stradale	160 R	£110,045	8/4691	444/7100	376/4750	1770kg	255	4.6	-	187	337	19.6	+ Brilliant blend of road racer and GT - No rear seats	★★★★★
Maserati Coupe	064 F	'03-'07	8/4244	390/7000	333/4500	1680kg	237	4.8	-	177	-	17.6	+ Glorious engine, improved chassis - Overly sharp steering	★★★★★
Maserati GranSport	073 F	'04-'07	8/4244	400/7000	333/4500	1680kg	239	4.8	-	180	-	-	+ Maser Coupe realises its full potential - Very little	★★★★★
Mazda RX-8	122 R	'03-'11	2R/1308	228/8200	156/5500	1429kg	162	6.5	16.4	146	299	24.6	+ Never mind the quirkiness, it's a great drive - Stiff ride, stiff competition	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	162 R	£57,165	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1730kg	264	4.4	10.3	186	280	23.5	+ Mercedes makes a proper two-door M3 rival - C63 saloon looks better	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black	171 R	£98,765	8/6208	510/6800	457/5200	1710kg	303	4.1	-	186	286	-	+ The C63 turned up to 11 - Too heavy, not as fiery as Black Series cars of old	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG	092 D	'06-'09	8/6208	481/6800	464/5000	1755kg	278	4.6	-	155	-	19.9	+ Power, control, build quality - Lacks ultimate involvement	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG Black	106 F	'07-'09	8/6208	500/6800	464/5200	1760kg	289	4.2	-	186	-	-	+ AMG goes Porsche-hunting - Dull-witted gearshift spoils the party	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CL63 AMG	150 D	£115,660	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2060kg	264	4.5	-	155	244	26.9	+ Presence, pace, monster engine - Stiff ride, stiff competition	★★★★★
Morgan AeroMax	097 D	£110,000	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.1	-	170	-	-	+ Weird and utterly wonderful - They're all sold	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z	180 R	£29,950	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1520kg	218	5.4	-	155	248	26.7	+ Quicker, leaner, keener than 350Z - Not quite a Cayman-killer	★★★★★
Nissan 350Z	107 R	'03-'09	6/3498	309/6800	264/4800	1532kg	205	5.5	13.0	155	-	24.1	+ Huge fun, and great value too - Honestly, we're struggling	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2012MY)	168 R	£74,500	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	316	2.8	-	199	275	24.0	+ GT-R is quicker and better than ever - But over £20K more than its launch price	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2010MY)	152 F	'10-'12	6/3799	523/6400	451/3200	1740kg	305	3.0	-	194	279	23.5	+ More powerful version of the original - But they're not worlds apart to drive	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	125 F	'08-'10	6/3799	473/6400	434/3200	1740kg	276	3.8	-	193	-	-	+ Our 2008 Car of the Year, now for just £35K - You won't see 20mpg often	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	009 R	'99-'02	6/2568	276/7000	289/4400	1560kg	180	4.7	12.5	165	-	20.1	+ Big, brutal, and great fun - Very firm ride	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R33)	019 F	'97-'99	6/2568	276/6800	271/4400	1540kg	182	5.4	14.3	155	-	22.0	+ Proof that Japanese hi-tech can work (superbly) - Limited supply	★★★★★
Noble M400	089 F	'04-'06	6/2968	425/6500	390/5000	1060kg	407	3.5	-	185	-	-	+ Devilishly fast - Demon Tweaks interior	★★★★★
Noble M12 GT0-3R	070 F	'03-'06	6/2968	352/6200	350/3500	1080kg	332	3.8	-	170	-	-	+ The ability to humble exotica - Flawed driving position	★★★★★
Peugeot RCZ 1.6 THP 200	155 R	£23,595	4/1598	197/5500	202/1700	1421kg	141	7.3	18.1	147	155	42.1	+ Distinctive looks, highly capable handling - Could be a bit more exciting	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman	131 F	£39,162	6/2893	261/7200	221/4400	1330kg	199	5.8	-	165	221	30.1	+ Extra power, just as involving - Still lacks the desirability of other Porsches	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S	132 F	£47,604	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1350kg	237	5.2	-	172	223	29.7	+ Still want that 911? - Yeah, us too (even though it's the best Cayman yet)	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman R	158 R	£51,728	6/3436	325/7400	273/4750	1295kg	255	4.7	-	175	228	29.1	+ Total handling excellence - Styling additions not to all tastes	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S	097 F	'06-'09	6/3387	291/6250	251/4400	1350kg	219	5.3	12.2	171	-	26.6	+ Pure and rewarding - If they'd just move the engine back a bit...	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (991)	168 R	£71,449	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1380kg	254	4.7	-	179	212	31.4	+ 911 becomes cleaner and cleverer - But some of its character's gone AWOL	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991)	168 R	£81,242	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1395kg	287	4.4	-	188	224	29.7	+ As above, but with supercar pace - Electric steering robs it of some tactility	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4 (991)	177 D	£77,924	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1430kg	245	4.5	-	177	219	30.4	+ A touch more engaging than 2wd 991 - Still stand-offish compared to 997	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (991)	179 F	£87,959	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1445kg	277	4.5	-	185	234	28.5	+ The best 991-generation Carrera - Choose your spec carefully	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (997.2)		'08-'11	6/3614	341/6500	288/4400	1415kg	245	4.9	-	180	225	29.4	+ Faster and greener than the mk1 997 - Lost a little of the 911 magic	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.2)	121 F	'08-'11	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1425kg	271	4.7	-	188	242	27.4	+ Poise, precision, blinding pace - Feels a bit clinical	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera GTS (997.2)	152 D	'11-'12	6/3800	402/7300	310/4200	1420kg	288	4.6	-	190	240	26.6	+ Fitting finale for the 997 generation - Absolutely nothing	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.1)	070 F	'04-'08	6/3824	350/6600	295/4600	1420kg	246	4.6	10.9	182	-	24.5	+ evo Car of the Year 2004; like a junior GT3 - Tech overload?	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (996)	051 F	'02-'05	6/3596	316/6800	273/4250	1470kg	218	5.1	-	174	-	-	+ Second best 996 only to the GT3 - Very little	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (996.3.4)	008 R	'98-'01	6/3387	300/6800	258/4600	1320kg	230	4.6	-	173	-	28.0	+ evo Car of the Year 1998; beautifully polished - Some like a bit of rough	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (993)		'94-'97	6/3600	285/6100	251/5250	1372kg	211	5.2	-	168	-	25.0	+ More character than 996 - Harder work at speed	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.2)	138 F	'09-'11	6/3797	429/7600	317/6250	1395kg	312	4.2	9.2	194	303	22.1	+ Even better than the car it replaced - Give us a minute...	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.2)	152 F	'10-'11	6/3797	444/7900	317/6750	1370kg	329	4.0	-	193	314	-	+ Our 2010 car of the year - Looks and noise are slightly OTT	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 (997.2)	164 F	'11-'12	6/3996	493/8250	339/5750	1360kg	368	3.8	-	193	326	-	+ The ultimate modern 911, and our 2011 Car of the Year - Unforgiving on-road ride	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.1)	103 R	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1395kg	298	4.3	9.4	192	-	-	+ Runner-up evo Car of the Year 2006 - Ferrari 599 GTBs	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.1)	105 F	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1375kg	302	4.2	-	193	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2007 - A chunk more money than the brilliant GT3	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.2)	066 F	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1380kg	272	4.3	9.2	190	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2003 - Looks softer than previous GT3	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (996.2)	068 R	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1330kg	286	4.2	9.2	190	-	-	+ Track-biased version of above - Limited supply	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.1)	066 F	'99	6/3600	360/7200	273/5000	1350kg	271	4.5	10.3	187	-	21.9	+ Our Car of the Year 1999 - Porsche didn't build enough	★★★★★
Porsche 911 RS (993)	036 R	'95	6/3746	300/6500	262/5400	1270kg	240	4.7	11.2	172	-	-	+ Barking engine note, gearchange - Not quite hardcore enough	★★★★★
Porsche 968 Club Sport	019 F	'93-'95	4/2990	240/6200	225/4100	1335kg	183	6.1	15.7	149	-	-	+ One of the all-time greats - Lots have been driven very hard	★★★★★
Renault Alpine A610		'92-'96	6/2975	250/5750	258/2900	1420kg	179	5.4	13.8	160	-	21.0	+ Overlooked, bargain-price French 911. Try one - RS interior	★★★★★
Subaru BRZ	170 R	£24,995	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1202kg	166	7.5	-	143	159	40.9	+ Fine chassis, great steering - Weak engine, not the slide-happy car they promised	★★★★★
Toyota GT86	174 R	£24,995	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1240kg	162	7.5	-	140	181	36.2	+ More fun than its cousin (above) - Same lack of torque, poor interior quality	★★★★★
TVR 350C	057 R	'03-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1100kg	318	4.7	10.0	175	-	-	+ Looks, engine - Unsupportive seats; chassis lacks ultimate polish	★★★★★
TVR Sagaris	099 D	'05-'07	6/3996	406/7500	349/5000	1078kg	383	3.7	-	185	-	-	+ Looks outrageous - 406bhp feels a touch optimistic	★★★★★
TVR Tuscan S (Mk2)	076 R	'05-'07	6/3996	400/7000	315/5250	1100kg	369	4.0	-	185	-	-	+ Possibly TVR's best ever car - Aerodynamic 'enhancements'	★★★★★
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	004 R	'98-'04	6/3996	350/6800	330/5000	1130kg	315	5.0	11.4	160+	-	-	+ Accomplished and desirable - Check chassis for corrosion	★★★★★
Vauxhall Monaco VXR 6.0	079 D	'05-'07	8/5967	398/6000	391/4400	1677kg	241	5.1	-	180+	-	-	+ Improved chassis and steering, 180mph - Looks a bit snouty	★★★★★
VW Scirocco GT 2.0 TSI	155 R	£24,705	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1373kg	153	6.1	15.8	149	172	38.2	+ Golf GTI price and performance - Interior lacks flair	★★★★★
VW Scirocco R	138 F	£29,745	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1352kg	196	5.8	-	155	189	34.9	+ Great engine, grown-up dynamics - Looks very grown-up, too	★★★★★
VW Corrado VR6	095 F	'92-'96	6/2861	190/5800	180/4200	1237kg	156	6.2	-	143	-	29.5	+ One of the great all-rounders - A little nose-heavy	★★★★★
Wiesmann GT MF5	127 D	£150,000	10/4999	500/7750	383/6100	1380kg	368	3.9	-	193	-	-	+ Striking coupe mated to BMW M5's V10 - Steering a little light	★★★★★

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** 17.1% of drink drive accidents are between hours of 5am and 1pm (Source: Dept. for Transport, Road Accidents and Safety Annual Report 2010)
* 4 Pints of Abbot Reserve contain 14.8 units of alcohol (Source: Greene King) and each unit takes 1 hour to leave the body (Source: NHS). Therefore 14.8 hours after 9pm the alcohol will have passed from the body.



Our Choice

Ferrari 458 Italia. A huge step on from the F430 it replaced. The lack of a manual gearbox is a shame, but the scintillating 4.5-litre V8 and snappy seven-speed twin-clutch transmission result in a car that's markedly quicker than its V8 predecessors.



Best of the Rest

Pagani's awesome Huayra (left) is our reigning joint Car of the Year. Ferrari's fastest-ever road car, the F12, could pip the mid-engined 458 when we try it in the UK, while the updated McLaren MP4-12C remains tantalisingly close to greatness.

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

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
9ff GT9R	127 D	£450,000	6/4000	1120/7850	774/5970	1346kg	845	2.9	-	260	-	-	+ Above 100mph eats Veyrons for breakfast - Eats M3 dust at traffic lights
Aston Martin Vanquish (Mk2)	176 R	£189,995	12/5935	565/6750	457/5500	1739kg	330	4.1	-	183	-	-	+ A much better car than the DBS it succeeds - Shame it looks little different, then
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk1)	110 F	£178,491	12/5935	520/7000	425/5800	1875kg	282	4.9	10.1	200	-	-	+ Vanquish joins supercar greats - A tad intimidating at the limit
Aston Martin Vantage s/c	001 R	£93,000	8/5340	550/6500	550/4000	1988kg	281	4.6	-	186	-	13.1	+ Two tons of well-hung British beef - Leaden gearbox
Aston Martin Vantage 600	131 F	£98	8/5340	600/6200	600/4400	2020kg	302	4.6	11.0	190	-	-	+ A proper, full-fat Aston Martin - Running costs will be equally 'proper'
Aston Martin One-77	179 F	£110-12	12/7312	750/6000	553/7600	1740kg	438	3.7	-	220+	-	-	+ The engine, the looks, the drama - Gearbox hates manoeuvring, only 77 were made
BMW M1	110 F	£78-81	6/3500	277/6500	239/5000	1303kg	216	5.8	-	161	-	-	+ Early supercar icon - A bit under-endowed these days
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	134 F	£925,000	16/7993	1000/6000	922/2200	1950kg	521	2.8	5.8	253	-	-	+ Superbly engineered 4wd quad-turbo rocket - Er, lacks luggage space?
Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport	133 F	£141,400	16/7993	1000/6000	922/2200	1990kg	520	2.6	-	253	-	-	+ Warp speed and ferocious nose-sans-roof - Ridiculous brology/roof thing
Bugatti Veyron Super Sport	151 F	££2.00m	16/7993	1183/6400	1106/3000	1838kg	654	2.5	-	268	539	-	+ The world's fastest supercar - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals
Bugatti EB110	078 F	£91-95	12/3500	552/8000	451/3750	1566kg	358	3.4	-	212	-	-	+ Superbly engineered 4wd quad-turbo rocket - It just fizzled out
Caparo T1	138 F	£301,975	8/3499	575/10,500	310/9000	689kg	848	3.8	6.2	205	-	-	+ Absolutely staggering performance - Absolutely staggering price tag
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	133 R	£106,605	8/6162	638/6500	603/3800	1528kg	424	3.8	7.6	205	355	18.8	+ Huge pace and character - Take plenty of brave pills if there's rain
Ferrari 458 Italia	159 R	£178,491	8/4499	562/9000	398/6000	1485kg	384	3.2	6.8	202	307	20.6	+ An astounding achievement, looks fantastic - There'll never be a manual
Ferrari 458 Spider	164 D	£198,936	8/4499	562/9000	398/6000	1530kg	373	3.3	-	198	275	23.9	+ A 458 that sounds and feels more organic - Er, 4mph slower?
Ferrari F430	163 F	£104-10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1449kg	339	4.0	-	196	-	-	+ Just brilliant - Didn't you read the plus point?
Ferrari F430 Spider	095 F	£104-10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1520kg	326	4.1	-	193	-	-	+ Berlinetta dynamics, 8000rpm with the roof down - Looks?
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	121 R	£107-10	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1350kg	378	3.5	7.7	198	-	-	+ Successful F1 technology transplant - Likes to shout about it
Ferrari 360 Modena	163 F	£99-04	8/3586	394/8500	275/4750	1390kg	288	4.5	-	170	-	-	+ Worthy successor to 355 - Not quite as involving as it should be
Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale	068 R	£103-04	8/3586	420/8500	275/4750	1280kg	333	4.1	-	186	-	-	+ Totally exhilarating road-racer. It's loud - It's very, very loud
Ferrari F355 F1 Berlinetta	163 F	£97-99	8/3496	374/8250	268/6000	1350kg	281	4.7	-	183	-	-	+ Looks terrific, sounds even better - Are you kidding?
Ferrari F12 Berlinetta	174 R	£239,736	12/6262	730/8250	509/6000	1630kg	455	3.1	-	211	-	-	+ 730bhp isn't too much power for the road - We've yet to try it in the UK
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	101 R	£106-12	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1688kg	368	3.5	7.4	205	415	15.8	+ evo Car of the Year 2006 - Banks are getting harder to rob
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano HGTE	146 R	£106-12	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1688kg	368	3.5	7.4	205	415	-	+ As above, but with a bit more edge - Can be a little too edgy in the wet
Ferrari 599 GTO	161 R	£111-12	12/5999	661/8250	445/6500	1605kg	418	3.4	-	208	-	-	+ One of the truly great Ferraris - Erm, the air con isn't very good
Ferrari 575M 'Fiorano'	169 F	£102-06	12/5748	508/7250	434/5250	1730kg	298	4.2	9.6	202	-	12.3	+ Fiorano pack' makes 575 truly great - It should have been standard
Ferrari 550 Maranello	169 F	£97-02	12/5474	485/7000	415/5000	1716kg	287	4.3	10.0	199	-	-	+ Everything - Nothing
Ferrari FF	164 R	£227,107	12/6262	651/8000	504/6000	1880kg	347	3.7	-	208	360	15.4	+ Four seats and 4WD, but a proper Ferrari - Looks divide opinion
Ferrari 612 Scaglietti F1	090 R	£104-11	12/5748	533/7250	434/5250	1840kg	294	4.3	9.8	199	470	13.8	+ Awesomely capable grand tourer - See above
Ferrari Enzo	149 F	£102-04	12/5998	650/7800	485/5500	1365kg	484	3.5	6.7	217+	-	-	+ Intoxicating, exploitable - Cabin detailing falls short of Zonda or F1
Ferrari F50	064 F	£96-97	12/4968	513/8500	347/6500	1229kg	424	3.7	-	202	-	-	+ The best drivers' Ferrari - Lines lack tension
Ferrari F40	157 F	£87-92	8/2936	478/7000	425/4000	1100kg	441	3.7	-	201	-	-	+ The shape that launched a thousand posters - Er...
Ferrari 288GTO	064 F	£84-85	8/2855	400/7000	366/3800	1160kg	350	4.9	-	189	-	-	+ Painfully beautiful, rarer than the F40 - You are joking?
Ford GT	087 R	£104-06	8/5409	550/6500	500/3750	1583kg	353	3.7	-	205	-	-	+ Our 2005 Car of the Year - JC had one. Reckoned it didn't handle...
Gumpert Apollo	110 F	£275,000	8/4163	690/6300	675/4000	1200kg	584	3.0	-	220+	-	-	+ Stupendous performance, 'Apollo' - High price, 'Gumpert'
Hennessey Venom GT	180 F	£900,000	8/7000	1244/6500	1155/4000	124.4kg	1016	2.5	-	275	-	-	+ 0-200mph in 14.5sec, and it handles too - Badge snobs
Jaguar XJ220	157 F	£92-94	6/3498	542/7200	475/4500	1470kg	375	3.7	-	213	-	-	+ Britain's greatest supercar... until McLaren built the F1
Koenigsegg Agera R	180 F	£1,080,000	8/5000	1140/7100	885/2700	1435kg	807	2.9	-	273	-	-	+ As fast and exciting as your car can handle - It's Veyron money
Koenigsegg CCX	094 F	£106-10	8/4700	806/6900	678/5700	1180kg	694	3.9	7.7	241	-	-	+ Sweden's greatest supercar - Sweden's only supercar
Koenigsegg CCXR Edition	118 F	£108-10	8/4800	1004/7000	796/5600	1280kg	797	2.8	-	254+	-	-	+ One of the world's fastest cars - Spike power delivery
Lamborghini Gallardo LP550-2	176 F	£166,784	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1380kg	399	3.9	-	199	315	16.0	+ The mad rear-driven Lambo is back! - Gallardo not feeling as fresh as the 458
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	180 D	£164,444	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1410kg	398	3.7	-	202	325	16.0	+ Still a missile from A to B - Starting to show its age
Lamborghini LP570-4 Superleggera	152 F	£178,560	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1340kg	426	3.5	-	202	325	20.6	+ A reminder of how great the Gallardo is - LP560-4 does as good a job
Lamborghini LP570-4 Performante	160 F	£186,000	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1485kg	384	3.9	-	201	327	16.0	+ It's a Superleggera Spyder... that's not actually that super-light
Lamborghini Gallardo	094 F	£106-08	10/4961	513/8000	376/4250	1520kg	343	4.3	9.4	196	-	-	+ On a full-bore start it spins all four wheels. Cool - Slightly clunky e-gear
Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera	104 F	£107-08	10/4961	522/8000	376/4250	1420kg	373	3.8	-	196	-	-	+ Lighter, more agile - Grabby carbon brakes, clunky e-gear
Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4	164 R	£242,280	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1575kg	445	2.8	-	217	398	17.2	+ Most important new Lambo since the Countach - Erm... expensive?
Lamborghini Murcielago	089 D	£101-06	12/6192	570/7500	479/5400	1650kg	351	4.0	-	205	-	-	+ Gorgeous, capable and incredibly friendly - V12 feels stressed
Lamborghini Murcielago LP640	093 F	£106-11	12/6496	631/8000	487/6000	1665kg	385	3.3	-	211	-	21.3	+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes
Lamborghini MiLago LP670-4 SV	138 F	£109-11	12/6946	661/8000	487/6500	1565kg	429	3.2	7.3	212	-	-	+ A supercar in its truest, wildest sense - Be prepared for stoes
Lamborghini Diablo GT	016 F	£99-00	12/5992	575/7300	465/5500	1490kg	392	4.1	8.3	211	-	-	+ Briefly the world's fastest production car - They made only 80
Lamborghini Diablo 6.0	019 F	£100-02	12/5992	550/7100	457/5500	1625kg	343	3.8	-	200+	-	-	+ Best-built, best-looking Diablo of all - People's perceptions
Lamborghini Countach QV	162 F	£88-91	12/5167	455/7000	369/5200	1447kg	320	4.9	-	180	-	-	+ Still the definitive supercar - Visibility, pract-oh hell, who cares?
Lexus LFA/LFA Nurburgring	161 R	£352,000	10/4805	552/8700	354/6800	1480kg	379	3.7	-	202	-	-	+ Absurd and compelling supercar - Badge and price don't quite match
Maserati MC12	079 R	£104-05	12/5998	621/7500	481/5500	1445kg	437	3.8	-	205	-	-	+ Rarer than an Enzo - The Ferrari's better
McLaren MP4-12C	173 R	£176,000	8/3799	616/7500	442/3000	1434kg	435	3.1	-	207	279	24.2	+ Staggering performance, refinement - Lacks design flair
McLaren 12C Spider	177 R	£195,000	8/3799	616/7500	442/3000	1474kg	425	3.1	-	207	279	24.2	+ No discernible dynamic compromises - Requires commitment to come alive
McLaren F1	145 F	£94-98	12/6064	627/7500	479/4000	1137kg	560	3.2	6.3	240+	-	-	+ Still the most single-minded supercar ever - There'll never be another
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG Black	131 F	£109-10	12/5980	661/5400	737/2200	1876kg	358	4.0	8.1	199	-	-	+ Bonkers looks, bonkers speed - Bonkers £250K price
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	159 R	£168,395	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1620kg	335	4.1	8.4	197	308	21.4	+ Great engine and chassis (gullwing doors too!) - Slightly tardy gearbox
Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren	073 F	£104-07	8/5439	617/6500	575/3250	1618kg	387	3.7	-	208	-	-	+ Zonda-pace, 575-style drivability - Dreadful brake feel
Noble M600	178 F	££200,000	8/4439	650/6800	604/3800	1119kg	551	3.8	7.7	225	-	-	+ Leicestershire's unbelievably good attack on the supercar class - It's a bit pricey
Pagani Huayra	172 F	££820,000	12/5980	620/8000	737/2250	1350kg	542	3.3	-	224	-	-	+ Our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Engine isn't as nape-pricking as the Zonda's
Pagani Zonda 760RS	170 F	£1.5m	12/7291	750/6300	575/4500	1210kg	630	3.3	-	217+	-	-	+ The most extreme Zonda ever - The last Zonda ever (probably)
Pagani Zonda C12S	096 F	£101-05	12/7291	555/5900	553/4050	1250kg	451	3.6	-	197	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2001 - Harry's sold his long-termer
Pagani Zonda F	082 F	£105-06	12/7291	602/6150	575/4000	1230kg	497	3.6	-	214	-	-	+ Everything an Italian supercar ought to be - Choose interior carefully
Pagani Zonda Cinque Roadster	147 D	£109-10	12/7291	669/6200	575/4000	1400kg	485	3.4	-	217+	-	-	+ The best Zonda ever - Doesn't come up in the classifieds often
Porsche 911 Turbo (997.2)	140 R	£110,232	6/3800	493/6000	479/1950	1570kg	319	3.2	7.3	193	272	24.4	+ The Turbo at the very top of its game - The GT3's cheaper...
Porsche 911 Turbo S (997.2)	159 R	£125,865	6/3800	523/6250	516/2100	1570kg	339	2.9	6.8	196	268	24.8	+ As above, with more power - The GT3's even cheaper...
Porsche 911 GT2 RS (997.2)	157 F	£171,468	6/3600	611/6500	516/2250	1370kg	453	3.5	-	205	284	-	+ More powerful than a Carrera GT. Handles, too - Erm...
Porsche 911 Turbo (997.1)	094 F												

Track Times

Key + = new addition this month. **Red** denotes the car is the fastest in its class.

Car	Lap time	Peak mph	Issue no.	Conditions
Radical SR8LM (fastest car)	1:13.6	127.8	138	Dry
Caparo T1 (fastest supercar)	1:14.8	130.9	131	Dry
Ferrari 458 Italia	1:19.3	120.0	159	Dry
Gumpert Apollo S	1:19.4	120.4	119	Dry
McLaren MP4-12C (Corsa tyres)	1:19.6	121.2	159	Dry
Caterham Levante V8	1:19.6	118.6	131	Dry
Porsche 997 GT2 RS	1:19.9	122.3	158	Dry
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	1:20.1	113.2	138	Dry
Caterham Superlight R500	1:20.2	115.7	119	Dry
McLaren MP4-12C	1:20.6	120.9	159	Dry
Noble M600	1:20.8	121.8	159	Dry
Porsche 997 GT3 RS 4.0 (fastest coupe)	1:21.0	118.2	160	Dry
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	1:21.3	121.1	134	Dry
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	1:21.5	113.6	119	Dry
KTM X-Bow (300bhp)	1:21.5	112.7	138	Dry
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	1:21.7	112.1	121	Dry
Porsche 997.2 GT3 RS (3.8)	1:21.9	116.8	150	Dry
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	1:22.5	119.1	122	Dry
Brooke Double R	1:22.5	113.2	119	Dry
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	1:22.9	116.7	143	Dry
Porsche Carrera GT	1:23.3	115.2	119	Dry
Porsche 997.2 GT3	1:23.3	114.5	138	Dry
Porsche 997 Turbo S	1:23.5	117.5	146	Dry
Porsche 997 GT2	1:23.5	115.1	119	Dry
Nissan GT-R	1:23.6	113.1	119	Dry
Porsche 997 Turbo	1:24.1	113.5	136	Damp
Lotus 340R (190bhp)	1:24.2	110.0	135	Dry
Caterham Superlight R300	1:24.3	101.5	138	Dry
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	1:24.5	115.1	160	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	1:24.6	115.7	146	Dry
Porsche Boxster Spyder	1:24.7	107.7	167	Dry
Ferrari California	1:25.0	111.8	134	Dry
KTM X-Bow	1:25.0	105.0	123	Dry
BMW E92 M3 Coupe	1:25.1	109.1	162	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG Black	1:25.2	108.6	131	Dry
Audi RS5	1:25.4	108.8	162	Dry
Audi R8 Spyder V8	1:25.5	107.0	167	Dry
Porsche Cayman R	1:25.5	106.8	158	Dry
BMW M5 (F10) (fastest saloon)	1:25.7	112.0	165	Dry
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	1:25.8	110.9	146	Dry
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	1:25.9	107.5	138	Dry
BMW 1-series M Coupe	1:25.9	106.4	158	Dry
Mitsubishi Evo X RS 360	1:26.1	106.6	153	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Trophy (fastest hot hatch)	1:26.1	105.3	166	Dry
Audi TT RS	1:26.3	107.2	149	Dry
Aston Martin DBS	1:26.4	109.5	143	Dry
Porsche Panamera Turbo	1:26.5	109.2	137	Dry
Jaguar XJ220	1:26.7	111.7	131	Dry
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	1:26.8	104.9	165	Dry
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (fastest 4x4)	1:26.9	107.4	158	Dry
Lotus Evora	1:27.1	104.2	145	Dry
Nissan 370Z	1:27.1	104.0	158	Dry
Honda Civic Type-R Mugen 2.2	1:27.2	102.6	166	Dry
Porsche Panamera S	1:27.3	102.4	165	Dry
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	1:27.7	111.0	162	Dry
Lotus Elise SC	1:27.7	104.6	131	Dry
Vauxhall VXR8 Bathurst S	1:27.8	106.1	131	Dry
BMW E46 M3 CSL	1:27.8	105.4	153	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	1:27.8	103.3		
Audi RS6 Avant (fastest estate)	1:27.9	111.0	121	Dry
Jaguar XFR	1:27.9	108.1	137	Dry
Honda Civic Type-R Mugen 2.0	1:28.0	104.4	138	Dry
Lexus IS-F	1:28.1	106.4	151	Dry
Porsche Boxster S	1:28.1	105.4	120	Dry
Subaru WRX STI	1:28.3	101.6	157	Dry
Jaguar XJ Supersport	1:28.4	106.6	147	Dry
SEAT Leon Cupra R	1:28.7	102.4	162	Dry
Bentley Continental Supersports	1:29.2	105.8	149	Dry
Lotus Elise Club Racer	1:29.2	95.5	162	Dry
Maserati Quattroporte S	1:29.5	105.0	137	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	1:29.9	101.4	156	Dry
Honda NSX	1:30.1	101.3	145	Dry
Nissan 370Z Roadster	1:30.3	100.1	173	Dry
VW Scirocco 2.0 TSI	1:30.4	98.9	155	Dry
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	1:30.8	101.8	131	Dry
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk2)	1:31.4	100.9	174	Damp
Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup	1:31.9	97.2	144	Dry
Mercedes SLS Roadster	1:32.3	104.8	172	Wet
VW Golf GTI (Mk6)	1:32.4	99.3		

TRACK MAP



West Circuit facts

- Location Bedford Autodrome
- Opened 1999
- Length 1.85 miles (2.98 kilometres)
- Direction Anti-clockwise
- Left turns 9
- Right turns 6

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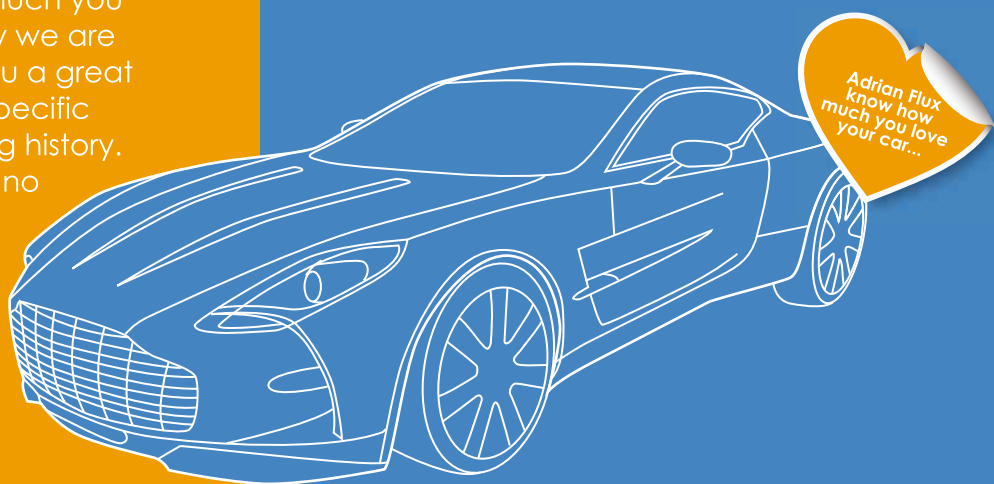
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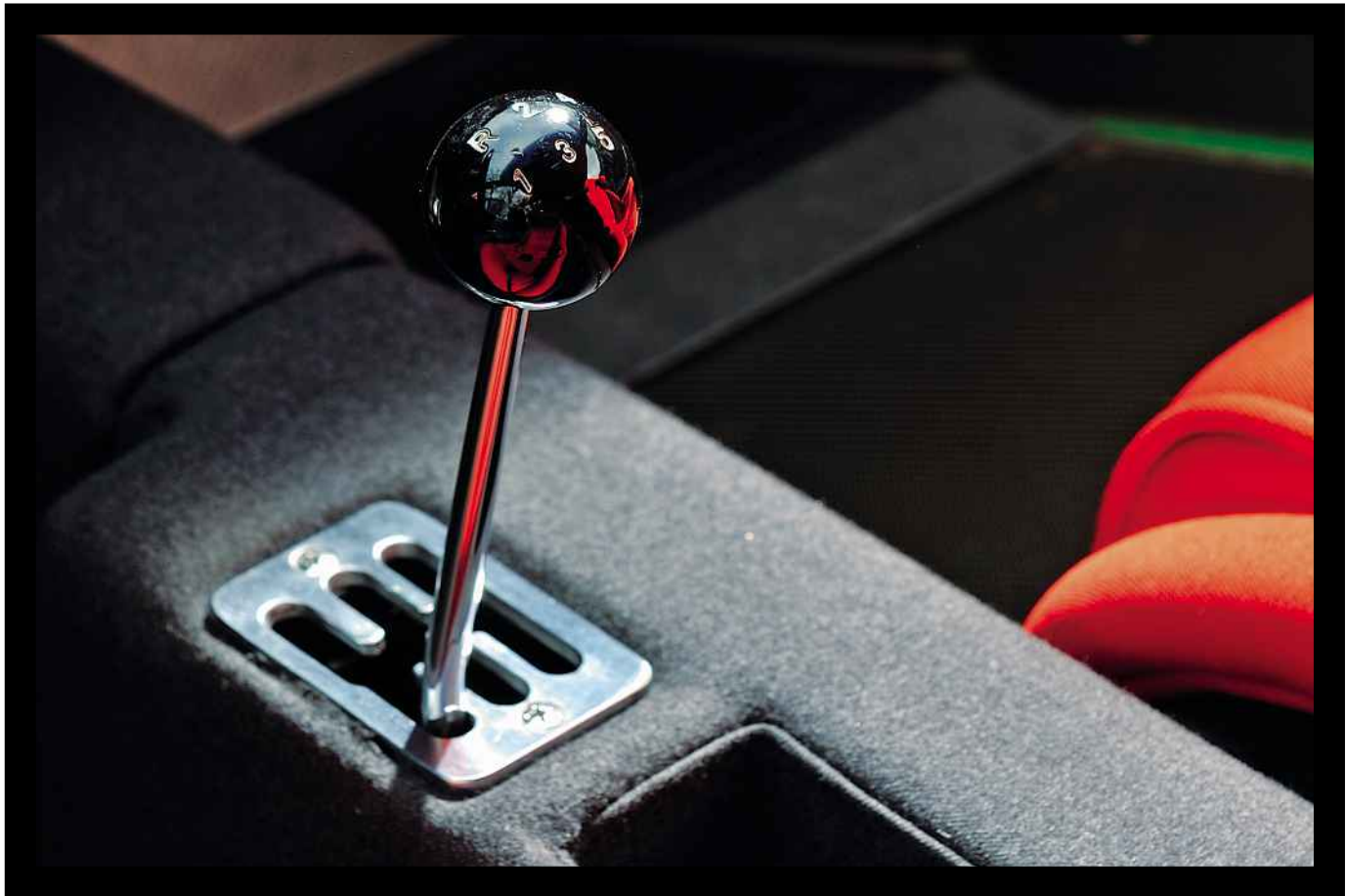


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Art of speed



Camera: Nikon D3. Exposure: 1/40sec at f/7.1 (ISO 200)

Ferrari open-gate gearchange

by DAVID VIVIAN | PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

I IN 1979, GILLES VILLENEUVE WAS HANDED A turbocharged 312T4 Ferrari Formula 1 car with a revolutionary new semi-automatic transmission to test. Its steering wheel had buttons for changing gear electronically, an experimental forerunner of the now-universal paddle-shift.

The car and Villeneuve performed faultlessly for 100 laps of Fiorano, but Gilles wasn't convinced, reporting back to Ferrari's F1 designer, Mauro Forghieri, that 'a steel shift lever will always be more reliable than electronics'. And for six years, that was that. Villeneuve had Enzo's ear, and the project was 'parked'.

Given the Canadian's natural gifts as a driver, the subtext surely had a selfish dimension. Simply pressing buttons eliminated a challenge that previously had to be mastered, favouring the less talented and eroding his advantage. Villeneuve, you always suspected, loved changing gear with 'a steel shift lever'. Just like the one in the 308 GTB he owned during his time with Ferrari: gleaming exposed metal gate, *scrape-clack* aural signature, a shift action rendered as exact as it was unforgiving by the narrow channels the gearlever had to navigate. It's been an element in Ferrari iconography as instantly recognisable and powerfully evocative as the prancing horse itself

for over 50 years. Rival Italian supercar makers embraced the aesthetic and tactile rewards of the exposed metal gate so enthusiastically that, perhaps more than any other single component, this simple piece of machined and polished metal became an emblem for the whole supercar genre.

Perhaps surprisingly, Ferrari is reluctant to claim any kind of provenance for it, other than to say it was spawned by the speed-scavenging, simplifying necessities of motorsport. Much like the car that introduced it to a slightly wider public in 1962 – the most coveted and valuable model in Ferrari's 64-year history, the 250 GTO. If its Porsche-designed gearbox moved the game on with its five forward speeds, the metal gate that defined the shift pattern endured, unchanged save for the number of slots, for the next half-century.

The 2012 California is the last Ferrari available with a manual gearbox (to special order) and thus the last to showcase the exposed metal gate. Lamborghini is ditching its metal-gate manuals, too. Both firms argue that a modern drivetrain in which every system is interconnected by a computer is no place for a manual 'box. Yet there is a symmetry in that Audi's R8, home for the very last metal open-gate gearchange, is a commercial sibling of Porsche, which supplied the cogs for Ferrari's very first. Enjoy it while you can. ❧

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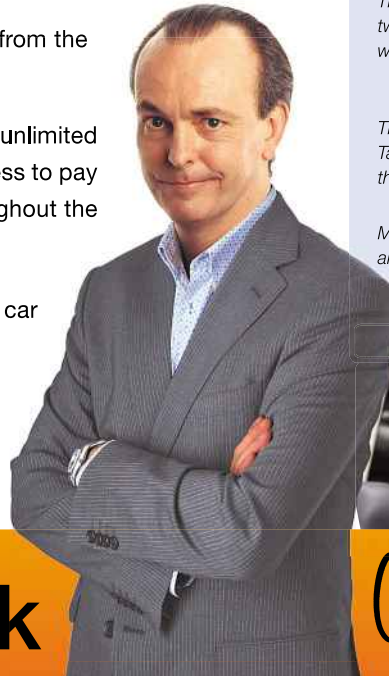


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