

performance CAR

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SPECIAL REPORT

**Performance
tyres tested**

*Seven rivals,
one winner*



ALPINA B10 BI-TURBO

Just who does make the world's fastest saloon?



BLOWING HARD

Inside the ultimate Golf GTi

Take a GTi 16V, add
a supercharger and
4wd, and the Golf
is ready to go
Integrale chasing.

By John Barker

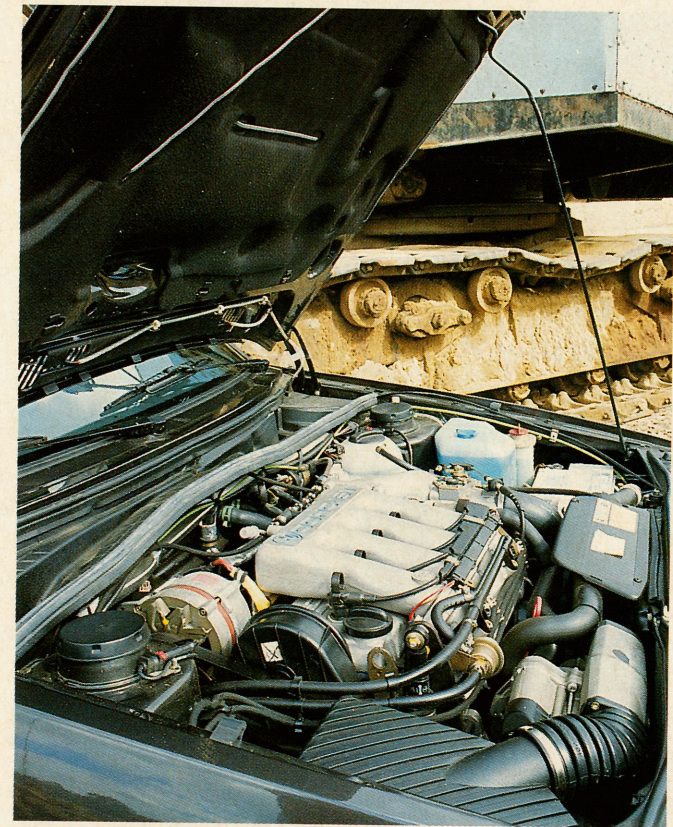
In my book, a car maker that builds a Passat Estate capable of giving a hard time to a BMW M3 along the *autobahn* has a devilishly irreverent and immensely appealing sense of humour. Freud, were he still alive, could probably base a complete character analysis on this one admission. I wonder, though, what he would make of the soon-to-be distraught M3 driver, roused from his 80mph day-dreaming by a flash of the Passat's lights.

As the tale goes, the M3 driver dropped a couple of cogs and floored the throttle, expecting an ego-comforting 'I've made it, you haven't' glow of satisfaction at seeing the shrinking image of the Passat in his mirror. What a shock it must have been to see its image still there, as large as before. Fourth — Passat still there — fifth, flat out at an indicated 160mph — Passat bored, flashing its lights again.

He pulled over and watched the Passat 'C' Estate waft past, all of its engine's 300bhp earning its keep.

The company responsible for the M3 driver's gaping jaw is Volkswagen Motor

VW GOLF GTi G60



● Supercharger is mated to 16V for first time; result is 210bhp



● Seats are retrimmed in leather, helping push price to £21,500

BLOWING HARD

Sport AG, an independent and partly self-financing concern working closely with the factory but with an open brief. The Passat is one of its current projects. The first to be signed off is the Golf that you see on these pages.

What am I bid for a black, five-door Golf with a loud set of BBS alloys? In Germany, not much; the world and his dog has one. In the UK, even less; it's only available in left-hand drive and doesn't even have spot lamps and spoilers like a proper fast Golf. All it has is blue striping around the grille and a couple of small badges that say VW Motor Sport... oh, and a 210bhp supercharged engine, four-wheel drive, anti-lock brakes and full leather interior. In short, it's a Volkswagen Golf Integrale.

Were it a Japanese car of the early 1980s, the simple 'Golf' decal on its rump wouldn't be nearly enough. Its badging would stretch from one edge of the tailgate to the other, declaring: Volkswagen Golf GTi 16V G60 Syncro ABS Motor Sport Limited Edition. In all probability, passers-by would simply think that its owner had a friend in the parts department of the local VW dealership.

In fact, VW Motor Sport has friends in the engineering department at Wolfsburg who looked the other way while it rifled the parts bins, filling its bag as if at some technical pick 'n' mix.

The starting point of the stealth Golf is a workaday five-door painted bodyshell — hence the simple badging — with the Syncro floorpan. The 1.8-litre, 16-valve GTi engine is dropped in and the G-lader mechanical supercharger bolted on and plumbed in. This is the first time the combination has been available. Until now only the eight-valve motor has benefited from the G60's boost.

With slightly different camshafts and a set of up-geared pulleys for the G-lader, the Motor Sport 16-valver develops a whopping 210bhp. That's more than an Integrale and very nearly as much as a 4x4 Cosworth. Naturally, such a prodigious output couldn't be left to the front wheels to deal with, and the torque-adjusting Syncro four-wheel system lends its help. When the front wheels start to spin, the central viscous coupling locks up to send drive to the rear. This it does with a varying degree of success, as we found on the road and, later, at the test track.

As it is VC-based, Syncro is not as effective at evening out the braking effort as some 4wd systems, so three-channel Bosch ABS is fitted. Completing the mechanical package are firmer springs and dampers and those seven inch, split-rim BBS alloys shod with 195/50 VR 15 Continental Super Contact rubber. With the body black, as all 70 examples are, the deeper front air dam, wheel arch brows and tailgate spoiler blend in unobtrusively.

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for the horizon on a
relentless wave of
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distance-shrinking
acceleration**

Inside, the regular seats and door casings are re-trimmed in supple black leather. As with the exterior, it's subtle enough to go unnoticed by passers-by. Yet even in this, the ultimate Golf, £21,500 worth, there still aren't enough gadgets to occupy all the switches; headlamp height adjustment and seat heaters are added, leaving three blanks.

Turn the key and the engine grumbles into life and settles to a peculiar tickover that is distinctive of the supercharged VW 'four'. There's the beat of four cylinders plus a second, out of phase mumbling that



● **VW Motor Sport badges and blue striping give the game away**

sounds like the idling of another Golf nearby.

All but the very best turbocharged engines have a noticeable step in their delivery which is exhilarating but can also be tiresome when all you want to do is go reasonably briskly. The G-lader is different; it pumps up the torque curve right through the rev range, giving a consistent throttle response and a build-up of urge similar to that of the un-boosted engine to which it is attached.

Thankfully, in the Motor Sport Golf's case that is not quite true. The 16-valve GTi engine is normally drowsy at low revs and thrillingly energetic when it gets above 5000rpm, but with the G-lader its delivery is transformed into one solid push from 2000rpm to the red line. Peak torque of 186lb ft arrives at 5000rpm and 210bhp is delivered at 6500rpm.

Despite its double-four rumble, the unit is very smooth and immensely tractable. Plant the throttle in first or second and the steering wheel writhes as the front tyres struggle to contain the flood of torque. It seems that the Syncro system can't quite keep on top of the situation but after this momentary lapse it gets down to business and the engine's rising output is translated into clean forward motion.

With little drama, the Golf hits out for the horizon on a relentless wave of torque, each ratio picking up perfectly from the one before to create rapid and seamless distance-shrinking acceleration. The quality of the engine is not matched by the quality of the gearchange, however, which is loose and bumpy just like any Golf.

Another Golf peculiarity is retained; a mild bobbing of the nose which suggests that the springs have got out of phase with the road. In the Motor Sport car, this tendency is more pronounced and occasionally combined with diagonal flex, apparent by small shakes of the windscreen. The five-door shell may be a good visual wheeze but its rigidity is a bit suspect with Motor Sport springs and dampers taking road shocks. They are lower and slightly firmer than the regular GTi's but don't spoil the ride to any great degree. The slight loss of suppleness can probably be attributed to the 50 section tyres.

Drive hard into a corner expecting Integrale style reactions and you'll be disappointed; the Golf's Syncro system simply isn't that sophisticated. Although it keeps the car's nose from slurring wide in a haze of wheelspin, it doesn't recreate the Lancia's adjustability. But drive the Golf as your instincts tell you — slow in, fast out — and its benefits are readily apparent; the car rockets out from the apex, all 210bhp in harness. The power-assisted steering, well-gearred at 3.1 turns across locks, writhes a little as the front wheels dig in and haul the Golf off to the



● **Golf's Syncro system is effective but lacks fine responses of Integrale; slow in, fast out brings best results**



● **Wheelarch brows, tailgate spoiler and BBS alloys are subtly applied**

next corner.

And haul they will. At the test track, the Syncro system's delayed responses seemed to help the car get away cleanly and the gearchange proved lightning fast. With a brief chirp of wheelspin from the front tyres, the Golf leapt off the line to hit 30mph in just 2.3 seconds, 60mph in an Integrale-matching 6.4 seconds and 100mph in just 16.7. On the way, it passed

the quarter-mile post in 14.8 seconds which again puts it on a par with the Lancia.

There might have been more to come; these figures relate to the second and third standing start attempts which were a vast improvement on the initial 6.9-second run. At the fourth attempt, with a few more revs dialled up, the Syncro's viscous coupling leapt more swiftly into action than

it ever had before and sent a fatal dose of torque to the rear differential. There was a loud crack, the diff casing split and hypoid gear oil sprayed onto the exhaust, filling the rear view mirror with smoke.

The in-gear times had already been recorded and make impressive reading. If you want evidence of the supercharged engine's consistent delivery, take a look at these statistics: in fourth gear, none of the 20mph increments between 40 and 90mph takes more than 6 seconds. Change up to top and none will take more than 8 seconds. For reference, the benchmark 30-50mph acceleration test in four gear occupies 6 seconds dead, while 50-70 in top takes 7.5. Of course, you could always use third gear for both and see them despatched in a mere 3.6 seconds.

But given its partially drained rear differential, it didn't seem like a good idea to savour Motor Sport Golf's tremendous performance in the few miles from the track to Volkswagen's UK headquarters. To other traffic it was behaving just as an innocuous-looking Golf ought to. ○

Performance

0-60mph	6.4secs
0-100mph	16.7secs
¼ mile	14.8secs
30-50mph, 4th	6.0secs
50-70mph, 5th	7.5secs
Max speed	139mph
Overall fuel consumption	17.7mpg