

AUTOSPORT

EXTRA!

New
British
race
season
36 page
guide
inside

Brazilian Grand Prix Preview

Can anyone catch Senna?

'We'll be even faster this time'
says McLaren boss Ron Dennis

**Touring
cars**
TV war
breaks out





Left: Volkswagen's Golf G60 Limited lines up against Lancia's Delta Integrale 16-valve in the battle of the rally homologation specials. Right and below right: Four-wheel drive and competition-bred suspension mean high levels of grip from both cars. Bottom right: Lancia's continuing process of improving the breed has kept the Delta at the cutting edge of World Championship rallying, the single most successful car under the Group A rules that have prevailed since 1987.



As we move into the nineties the euphoria of four-wheel drive continues unabated to an extent where the entire motor industry seems to be believing in its own hype. The man in the street is convinced that four-wheel drive will supply him with more cornering grip — and that simply isn't true. Traction, yes, but grip, not necessarily.

Although unnecessary for the average British driver for 99% of his motoring, four-wheel drive is, rather like ABS, a hidden ally for the moment when potential disaster suddenly threatens.

When engine power outputs begin to exceed 200bhp then, even on dry tarmac, the extra traction available can prevent sudden loss of grip. For the skilled driver four-wheel drive can become a handicap because he is less able to alter the balance of a car by throttle control and there is some power loss.

The Lancia Delta HF 4WD has dominated world rallying since the start of the Group A regulations. Nowadays, it's called the Delta HF Integrale 16V and one of the latest cars to challenge its supremacy is the Rallye Golf of which a limited edition — ineligible for rallying — of 70 Volkswagen Golf G60 Limiteds has recently been produced.

I recently had the opportunity to compare the Golf and the Lancia around 'glorious' Goodwood.

The Lancia is the basic 200bhp Integrale, from which the rally car is homologated, but the VW is more an exercise to show what the company could have done if it had had a greater capacity to produce more 16v cylinder heads. Instead its 5000 homologation Rallyes were limited to eight valves and around 160bhp.

The Limited not only has the 16 valves, but also different camshafts, faster C-lader supercharger gearing and a re-chipped management system that pushes the power output past that of the Delta to around 210bhp. The

Limited also looks different, as the wide wheel arches are removed and a five-door bodyshell used — and you can have any colour as long as it's metallic black!

The Limited is actually the fastest production Volkswagen and it incorporates all the latest developments while retaining a discreet appearance. The 1781cc supercharged machine has a top speed of 143mph and a conservative 0-60mph claim of 7.0s running on unleaded fuel and with two regulated catalytic converters producing a meagre 19.3mpg.

The suspension and transmission are straight from the Rallye, with anti-roll bars all round,

rack and pinion steering with power assistance, ventilated discs at the front and solid on the rear with ABS as standard.

The four-wheel drive is only really 'occasional' as all the power is fed to the front wheels in conventional front-wheel drive manner. There's a free differential at the front and drive is only transmitted to the rear differential, via a viscous coupling, when wheelspin occurs at the front, causing the viscous coupling to 'tighten' and thus transmit torque to the rear.

Lancia homologated its 16-valve version of the Delta back in 1989 as part of the never-ending process of keeping ahead of the game. The 4-cylinder, twin-cam, 1995cc unit now produces 200bhp with its Garrett T3 turbocharger producing a maximum boost of 1.17bar — as opposed to the Limited's supercharged inlet pressure of 1.56bar. Top speed is 137mph but the 0-60 time is down to 5.7s — perhaps aided by the lack of catalytic converters — while the consumption is up to a more healthy 25mpg for the urban cycle.

Suspension is, again, fully independent with MacPherson struts all round, but the ABS remains an option for the brakes — again the same, with ventilated discs front and solid at the rear. Steering is also the same with power assisted rack and pinion, but now we have proper permanent four-wheel drive.

When the 16-valve was introduced, the front to rear drive split of was changed from 56/44 to 47/53 as the extra power created too much understeer.

The 53% that goes to the rear is fed into a Torsen torque sensing differential that instantly switches up to 70% of that power to one wheel as the other loses traction. Up front the differential is free but, as with the Golf, there is a viscous coupling connecting front and rear to balance any variation of grip.

I drove the Golf first, cruising over the South Downs towards Goodwood to put the little racers through their paces.

On the road it felt just like the standard GTi! At the time I didn't know that the Limited spent 90% of its time in front-wheel drive only operation so, in retrospect, the comparison is not too surprising. Both the Limited and the Integrale 16V only come in left-hand drive form, but otherwise the interior of the Golf feels identical to its front-wheel drive father.

Taut and relatively stiff, with firm 'German' seating and a good positive gearchange the Limited 'felt' good. A sporting functional car with good basic instrumentation while the Integrale felt softer with a relatively sloppy gearchange, masses of 'racing' gauges on the dashboard and brightly coloured interior. Was the four-wheel drive Golf going to lead the field as its

front-wheel drive version still sets the standard in its class?

The answer was to be no — but only just. Around the high sweep of the Goodwood Circuit (part of which is now smartly re-surfaced) the relative 'softness' of the Lancia became a relative 'secureness', while the firmer ride of the Golf turned to a nervous 'twitchiness'. This was especially noticeable under heavy braking from around 120mph where the Lancia remained stable the Volkswagen began to hop around at the rear.

Both cars reached similar top speeds and both lapped in similar times without pushing too near the limit. Interestingly, the Golf was lower geared and there was no way

you could 'feel' the four-wheel drive on either car, and I expect the Golf would have performed the same with its viscous coupling to the rear disconnected!

It's a great shame that Volkswagen wasn't able to produce the 5000 Rallyes with the 16-valve head, because by producing the Limited it has made a standard car which is virtually the equal of the standard Lancia Delta Integrale that breeds the pace-setting rally machine.

Volkswagen's proved its point, but not completed the job. The 70 Golf G60 Limiteds will make fine collectors items, but the 5000 Delta Integrale 16Vs will make fine rally winners. ■

Four wheels good...

The new Volkswagen Golf G60 Limited takes on Lancia's Delta Integrale 16V, the road-going version of the Italian manufacturers World Rally Championship winner

