

FAST LANE

FEBRUARY 1990 ■ £1.80

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First Tests



DENMARK: DK£53.00. GREECE: Dr£730.00. HOLLAND: DFL10.50. SINGAPORE MS\$11.90. SPAIN: Ptas620.00. USA: \$5.00.

GOLF G60

ROAD TEST

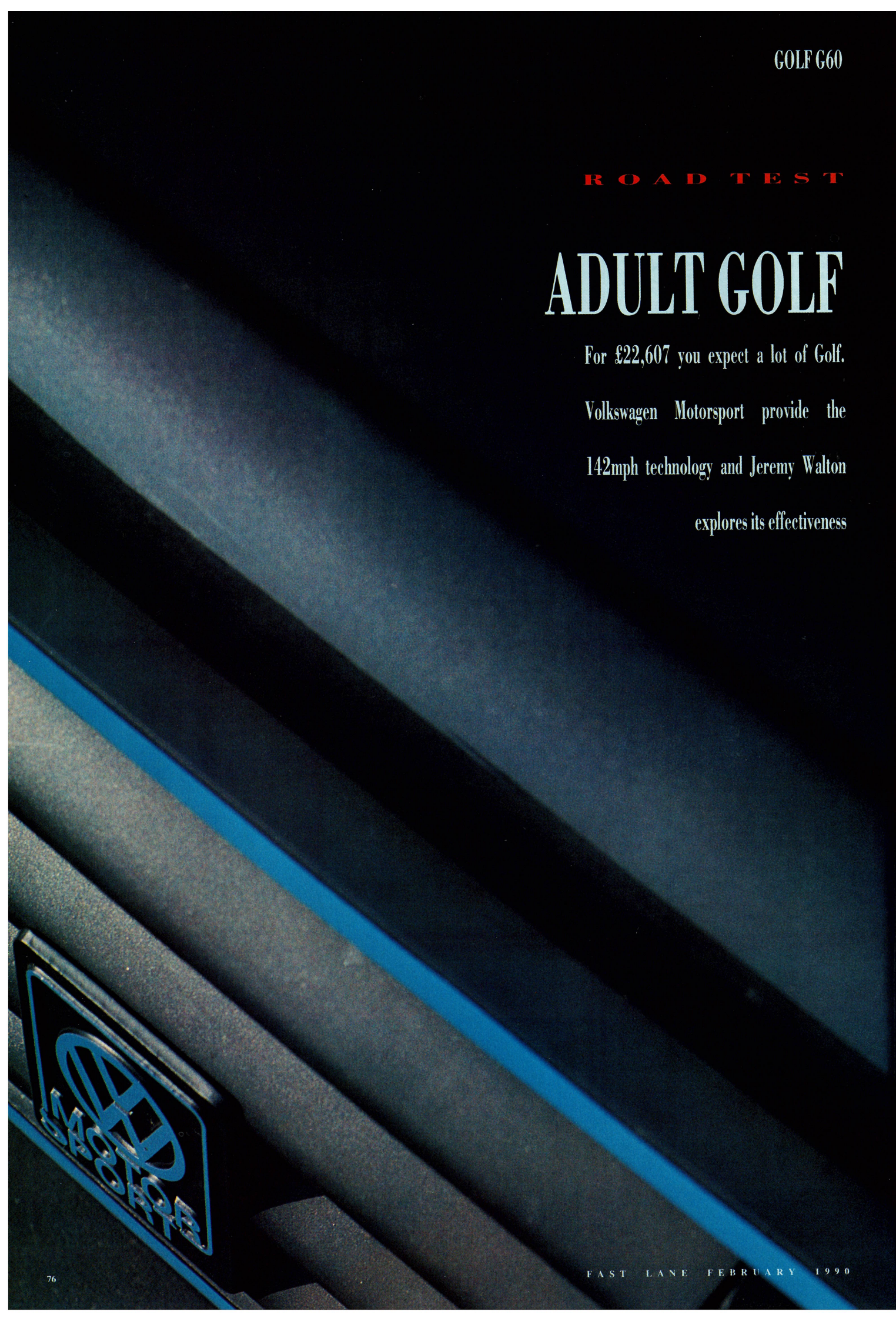
ADULT GOLF

For £22,607 you expect a lot of Golf.

Volkswagen Motorsport provide the

142mph technology and Jeremy Walton

explores its effectiveness



ROAD TEST

"It's a bit like trying to drive an understeering 2CV and a violently upset Porsche 911 — simultaneously"

PICTURE A five-door Golf GTi. Replace red inlays with blue and badge it "Golf VW Motorsport" in the same shade. Pack it with every advanced technology feature a lhd Volkswagen can provide, from Teves Electronic ABS to syncro 4x4. Combine some engine elements in a mix 'n' match set that sees the company's unique G-Lader supercharging thrust the dohc 16v unit into the 200bhp class.

Rippling with unaccustomed mid-range 16v brawn, you have the basics of a Golf G60 Limited that has been timed independently to 142mph; a decorous hatchback that set back 70 German owners the equivalent of £22,607 last summer, "all sold even before the first car came on the market" in the words of freshly relocated Volkswagen Motorsport.

Moving "just around the corner" from their old light industrial estate premises outside Hanover has given Volkswagen Motorsport spacious resource to tackle the most diverse workload I have encountered from any motor manufacturer's sports department.

There were five extraordinary reminders of the department's previous interests in fabricating twin engined cars, including the Pikes Peak Golf that boasted two KKK turbocharged 16v engines of 326bhp at 7,300rpm. After "twinning" the Golf, Jetta and Scirocco, the management sees no active future in either that system or turbocharging, but does not deny that the turbo route has brought them "the strongest single engine Golf we have made: 330bhp . . . But we must always compete with supercharged cars now, that is policy."

That turbo test car looked a little sad behind a massive intercooler that bridged its grille-less gap twixt headlamps. Elsewhere, the factory competition arm is getting on with the job of preparing the slightly undersize (to gain a regulation weight advantage) 1.8-litre G60 motor for the rigours of meeting Lancia, Toyota and Mitsubishi.

Managing Director Klaus-Peter Rosorius says of plans to contest the 1990 World Rally Championship with a supercharged (this time an eight-valve unit) G60 Rallye: "The Volkswagen board does not give us enough money to blitz the series in a Lancia or Toyota way. The G60 must not just be the basis for a rally winner, but also a good road car. Our ambition is simply to demonstrate the performance of VW cars, not to win in F1 or Group C: after all, Volkswagen makes cars for the people, not competition drivers."

For the G60 limited edition, the 1990 Rallye Golf contributed "the complete front of the car,

the new gearbox, the big radiator and larger wheel arches." All derive from the Group A challenger, but no quattro-style extensions are fitted to the accommodating arches which house BBS 6.5x15 alloy wheels and 195/50 P600s.

Unfortunately, the five-speed gearbox is based on the clonky cable unit of the Passat, but VW Motorsport plans a six-speed unit for the works rally cars in the longer term; sextuplet ratios remain a vital fashion item amongst leading World Rally Championship contenders.

Lying on the floor, to gain grubby insights to editorial policy, is a common posture among freelancers. Grovelling beneath the limited edition VW emphasised just how much fabrication effort had gone into making this outwardly meek and mild proposition.

Besides chunky suspension arms to support the activities of MacPherson struts and strut, cross-beam and trailing arms, the exhaust system is a 4-2-1 masterpiece. One that diverges into a Y section carrying twin catalytic converters and exiting in a twin outlet exhaust. Also visible was the all-disc braking system (only the fronts ventilated) with Teves ABS electronic circuitry.

An engine assembly area is already operational in the uncompleted refurbishment that is VW Motorsport's new HQ, and there you could see that each 16v with supercharging was hand-built. Intensive labour goes into making the belt drive dohc cylinder head capable of absorbing pressurised mixture and igniting super grade unleaded fuels. Compression is down to 8.8:1 from 10:1 and camshaft profiles are switched to the non-catalytic converter profiles that normally assist in the production of 139bhp at 6,100rpm.

Remaining at 1,781cc the G60 16v unit yields 210bhp at 6,500rpm and 186lb ft of torque at 5,000rpm, the latter a mighty 50percent boost in maximum pulling power.

An extensive standard equipment list ensures that this is the hatchback that weighs in like a Mercedes. At 25cwt, a permanent syncro 4x4 system (with British-patented viscous coupling), plus a hydraulic clutch are present and apparently little modified for this application. This is a surprise, since the Golf syncro has but 90bhp.

Also on the standard equipment list are: front and rear electric operation of tinted window glass, central locking, power-assisted steering, heated front seats and steel sliding sunroof. Also, the heaviest of black leathers are applied liberally to the seats, fascia and door trim zones.

You have to search hard for the cliché sound of a supercharger at work. There may be a faint whine amongst the threshing of 16 valves and the drive belts for twin overhead camshafts, or a mild 'zing' under full throttle, but such emotive music to purist ears was probably overcome by the crackling of the occupants. Once the full lunacy of this prim and proper Volkswagen with an unorthodox heart has been tapped, even a spirited run in production 16v seems tame, because you can use one gear higher than the production car for less effort and higher speed.

The engine sets the standard by its Digifant injected excellence. Not a splutter hindered our progress in, around, and possibly over the roundabouts that lay between us and a hot *autobahn*. Answering the call of derestricted carriageways,

62mph can be reached from rest in 7.4sec (yes, it is plump) whilst 112mph, about the max for a standard eight-valve GTi, takes 26.6sec. The syncro system apportioned standing start power well, with only the occasional squeak to betray the presence of 210bhp.

Having worked through the occasionally baulky gearbox, there is no doubt that second is too short and third too long for a sports application. Even a brisk shift across the gate will drop revs from 6,600 to 4,800, and second gear does not quite allow 60mph at the 6,600rpm limit, whereas third provides more than 100.

Sliding into a firm fifth, 122mph comes up at 6,000rpm, relatively rapidly. The next 1,000 revs and the 142.2mph maximum need less traffic than we encountered. It was satisfying to find that this extraordinary Golf would settle on 115mph and 5,600rpm with steady oil and water temperature readings, this on a day when ambient temperature stayed over 25degC.

You would expect the Golf to feel solid and stable on such open road habitat, but occasional patches of loose surface and a twisty forest road also failed to upset composure of steering, brakes and suspension. The steering and brakes are amongst the most attractive features, both informative and efficient. The anti-lock action is particularly well modulated, even capable of coping with occasional dust and dirt without pulling the Golf off course. A decent low-speed ride is complemented with firm body lean control under pressure.

Taking advantage of the syncro drive train firstly involves mastering that gearbox, and it has to be said that it does not like fast changes across the gate (notably second-to-third) at all. It was the worst feature of the car. My companion wondered how the syncro elements would cope with distributing power equably in low gear corners and our Editor knows that driving syncro Golfs on ice is an acquired expertise that involves anticipating when, perhaps even if, power will be diverted suddenly from its normal front-drive understeer mode to the rears. It's a bit like trying to drive an understeering 2CV and a violently upset Porsche 911 — simultaneously.

Summer conditions were not so tricky as that initial Swedish frozen lake test for the Golf syncro, but still you can feel the front running ever wider under full second gear impetus. That is followed by an uneasy shuffle to neutral handling as the rears suddenly receive a good 25-percent dose of the supremely accessible 210bhp.

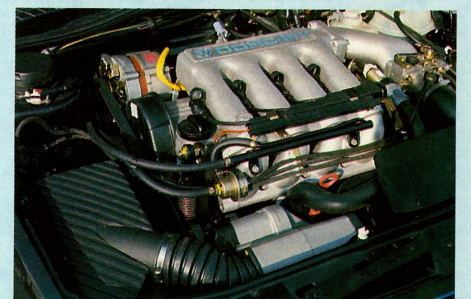
You do not get to the stage of sliding the rear wheels unless the road is consistently slippery, but the abrupt shifts in power distribution need consideration on this road car, and may yet defeat the factory Group A cars with 270bhp plus.

There are unlovely creatures, bred in the Stygian gloom of downtown Croydon, who would be tempted to take the Mr Michael out of your very presence on the street in a five-door VW with pale blue detailing. In that black and leathery cabin lie the answers to speed with supreme safety. Let's hope VW makes them available to a wider audience at lower cost, soon. Or will the Japanese understand the high-technology compact five-door mass production lessons faster, again?

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