

★ DISPATCHES

FIRST DRIVE

VOLKSWAGEN GTI Mk V

Kicking asphalt on the Côte d'Azur

by Robert Hallstrom

I tap the brake, downshift to second and throttle through rounding the Grand (formally Loews) hairpin with, if not the same precision of an F1 racecar, certainly with the goodness of its technology. Approaching the downhill stretch, which leads to Portier corner, I throttle up and again brake for the bend, looking for the correct turn-in point. As I correct for the straight, I take a moment and marvel at the mega-yacht-lined marina. My co-driver and course navigator says, "Step on it." I oblige and proceed to paddle shift through third and fourth with rapid abandon. Track conditions are perfect; it is mid-day, the sun is shining and suddenly everything goes dark as we motor through the tunnel. My co-driver cracks his window and smiles. "Listen to that," he says. It's the sound of VW's



turbocharged 2.0-liter GTI at 6800 rpm echoing off the tunnel walls. Though pale in comparison to the ear-deafening scream of an F1 engine at 18,000 rpm, it's a wonderful sound nonetheless. The location? A breath taking section of Monte Carlo's famed Grand Prix circuit. My co-driver? None other than new VW of America boss Adrian Hallmark. We're on hand for the international launch of VW's fifth-generation GTI. Can a test drive possibly get any more challenging?

Hardly. Can there be a better setting? Not a chance.

While we did make a partial lap on the historic course, most of our time was spent on equally carefully calculated, albeit less traveled roads throughout the Côte d'Azur.

As stated, the car features VW's already popular turbocharged 2.0-liter FSI direct injection powerplant with 200 bhp, 21 hp more than the outgoing 1.8T and on par with the 2.8-liter VR6 from the same departing model. Mash the throt-



tle and those horses hit the road with loads of torque for hearty acceleration. For those die-hards who prefer rowing their own, a sporting six-speed manual comes standard. The car also gets an optional six-speed DSG automated manual with Tiptronic and Sport modes. This is the package we tested this time around, as we had already spent time in the manual several months prior.

I must admit, as much as I prefer a manual gearbox, especially for more

sporting driving, the DSG quickly removes any feelings of lost love. In fact, the DSG not only improves the performance dynamics, it

actually adds to the overall driving experience. Not just because of the race-inspired paddles, which are certainly fun, but for the

super smooth gear changes. Upshifts transfer in a blink of an eye. Ditto for matched-rev downshifts. Conveniently, it also allows you to drop into either full automatic or Sport mode. It's a marvelous package and well worth the \$900 or so investment. VW predicts half of all GTI customers will request the option. They'll be happy to know their car will also come equipped with a nice dead pedal so their clutch foot doesn't get lonely.

Initially introduced State-



INCOMING... GO AHEAD AND SPILL IT...

Drivetrain Loss

What formula or percentage is it that you use to determine whp from bhp on front-wheel-drive cars?

Brian
via the Internet

Calculating wheel horsepower from brake horsepower is not a simple equation. Percentages of drivetrain loss can range usually from 15-25% loss for manual transmissions and 20-30% for automatics. The best way to determine the formula for your specific vehicle is to put it on a dyno. Another option would be to locate a few dyno charts of your vehicle to determine the average wheel horsepower. Once you determine the average wheel horsepower, take the stock brake horsepower rating, subtract wheel horsepower and then divide by the stock brake horsepower. For example:
$$(BHP-WHP)/BHP = \text{Drivetrain Loss \%}$$

Which M3?

I am a soldier in the U.S. Army National Guard recently deployed to Iraq. With the money I am going to save over the next year and a half or so, I am thinking of buying an E36 M3 to sit beside my Audi Coupe Quattro in the driveway when I get home. I'm wondering about the differences between the 3.0-liter and the 3.2-liter E36. I know the 3.0 has shorter gearing and OBD-I; the 3.2, taller gearing and OBD-II. Is there a difference in reliability between the 3.0 and 3.2? Newer is better to me unless the 3.0 has performance advantages to change my mind.

Davis
via the Internet

The essential differences between the 3.0-liter 1995 M3 and the 3.2-liter 1996-1999 M3 are the engine, on-board diagnostic systems, and the suspension. Starting in 1996, the M3 received a 3.2-liter engine in conjunction with the OBD-II emissions control

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side in 1983, the GTI was received with great enthusiasm. Not long after, it was credited as the first affordable "pocket rocket," which later helped usher in a new segment of hot hatchbacks. In those days, a feisty 90-hp, 1.8-liter fuel-injected motor powered the car. The first GTI also sported blackout trim with red accents and sport seats.

Similar blackout treatment with red accents has returned on the latest offering. So has the exuberant driving experience thanks to a fully independent, sport-tuned suspension, a first for the GTI. The car will sit 0.4-inches higher (same as the Golf V) than its European counterpart due to U.S. 5-mph bumper restrictions. This unfortunately leaves a larger fender gap than we'd like, even with the optional 18-inch BBS alloys. A little aftermarket tweaking will easily remedy this for those who prefer a more hunkered-down look. As far as the ride, however, I couldn't imagine a better balanced setup. It's not overly rough, nor too soft. It's certainly more poised for performance, but not at the sacrifice of comfort. This is a car you can drive every day and never grow tired or dread imperfect road surfaces.

As with all VW models from the past few years, the interior layout and design are more strong points. When positioned behind the flat-bottom, ergonomically contoured three-spoke leather steering wheel—which I may add is quite possibly the best steering wheel I've ever held—you feel as if you're sitting in a car positioned at a much higher price point. All of the controls and surfaces from the dash down to the center console and along the door panels look and feel well engineered. Even the shiny bits are real aluminum, not a cheap synthetic. The comfortable and well-bolstered seats further refine the cockpit and driver experience. Standard seats come upholstered with cloth, including a retro-inspired plaid color scheme, or they can be trimmed in subtle leather as an option.

Also standard on the two-door GTI is VW's "Easy Entry System," which allows rear occupants more entry space when the front seats are recessed. I say two-door because for the first time Volkswagen will also offer a four-door version, which is scheduled to hit dealer showrooms in August.

In regard to its spirited performance, a slew of technological and safety features as well as refined creature comforts, there's no question this is the best GTI to date. Some still question the car's not-so-German exterior styling, but it's agreeable to most.

I'll take mine in black, thank you.

2006 VW GTI

Base Price: TBA

Drivetrain

Transverse front engine, front-wheel drive

Engine

2.0-liter inline four, dohc, four valves per cylinder, FSI direct injection, turbocharged and intercooled

Transmission

Six-speed manual standard; Optional six-speed automatic Direct Shift Gearbox (DSG) w/ Tiptronic

Suspension

Independent front MacPherson struts w/ stabilizer bar, independent four-link rear suspension with coil springs, telescopic shock absorbers and stabilizer bar

Brakes

ABS, power assisted front vented disk brakes, rear solid disk brakes, red front and rear calipers, Electronic Brake-pressure Distribution, Hydraulic Brake Assistant

Dimensions

Length x Width x Height (in.): 166 x 69 x 58
Wheelbase: 101.5 in.
Curb Weight: 3,308 lb

Performance

Peak Power: 200 bhp @ 5100 rpm
Peak Torque: 207 lb-ft @ 1800 rpm
0-60 mph: 6.0 sec.
0-100 mph: 16.7 sec.
Top Speed: 130 mph (electronically limited)



Riding Shotgun with VW's New Boss

During the international launch of the fifth-generation GTI, I had the pleasure of driving with Adrian Hallmark, executive vice president of Volkswagen of America. He and I discussed Volkswagen's current state, its products and its future. Here's some of what he had to say. The full transcript will be posted online at www.europeancarweb.com.

ec: SEMA 2005 marked a number of firsts for Volkswagen. It was also your first day on the job. What was your overall impression?

AH: It was a great experience, really. I hadn't yet seen the R GT cars in person and was initially worried how they would come across. The response was fantastic and we're quite pleased.





ec: There are rumors of a future R series for the Jetta, Passat and other VW models, similar to BMW's M line. Will we see an R GT-inspired car on the showroom floor?

AH: We are looking at what we can do to create limited-edition niche models, perhaps not as extreme as the concept cars, but more than we currently offer. It's certainly exciting to think about.

ec: In the past few years, Volkswagen has diversified into new market segments, including moving more upscale. Has VW targeted its ideal market segments?

AH: In terms of product and market segments, it's important to expand and evolve both vertically and horizontally. The Beetle is our current entry-level model and it's been a great icon for the brand, but there's actually a very large market just below it. We need another people's car, something well below \$15,000.

ec: Conversely, sales of the Phaeton have been slow. Can Volkswagen change the way people think about spending \$75,000 or more for a VW?

AH: I believe that Volkswagen as a brand doesn't just mean an affordable car. It also means quality German

engineering, good solid styling and a real driver's experience. And that can apply at whatever price point. VW is not a zero emotion brand. It engenders something special and this is true throughout its entire model range.

ec: The GTI is now in its fifth generation and it embodies some of the best qualities of past GTIs. What's your take on the car?

AH: I love the GTI. I drove one for several months while on the board at Bentley. It makes me feel ten years younger, takes me back to the mid-'80s. But then, I've always owned VW's both new and old, including three GTIs, and this latest generation has really restored my faith. This is the first GTI in many years that has anywhere near the level of excitement I remember.

ec: What are your primary goals for the company moving forward?

AH: To renew confidence and trust in the brand. It's no secret Volkswagen has great brand awareness, but we have weaknesses in the customer's consideration of the brand. Our goal is to develop products that specifically meet the price, size and feature needs of the North American consumer while maintaining the VW brand values.



INCOMING...

system. In terms of performance, the two engines are on par with each other. However, it is clear that the 3.0-liter engine is easier to tune for more performance, owing to its OBD-I emission control system. The 3.2-liter also has problems with the EGR pump failing on a regular and consistent basis, and the problem is worse in humid climates. OBD-II in general can be problematic, because everything sets that check engine light, and you never know the problem unless you have the codes read. Aftermarket code readers leave much to be desired. The 1995 3.0-liter M3 actually had taller gearing than the 1996 and later 3.2-liter M3. The ratio is 3.15 for the 3.0-liter cars, while a 3.23 limited slip differential became standard E36 M3 fare as of 1996. BMW revised the M3 suspension in 1996, due to complaints from the briand-wafer crowd. The front suspension geometry was also revised, and the rear got stronger control arm bushings. The net result was pronounced understeer—soon to supplant neutrality as the BMW handling norm—and a somewhat softer ride front and rear.

More Shootouts Please

I've never seen a shootout among the E46 M3 tuners. I'd like to see track and drag runs as well as real world driving, and I would actually like to see separate normally-aspirated and forced induction versions. I know I'm probably not the first to ask for this, but I hope you'll seriously consider it. We need an independent, well-respected third party to separate the wheat from the chaff. There is a lot of boasting going on in this market and it's time to put up or shut up. This would be a HUGE seller on the magazine stand and I know every subscriber would eat it up.

Will Simmons
Atlanta, GA

You never know, Will. We've considered events like an M3 Challenge, but have not committed to anything yet.