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# wheels

Comparison

AUDI A3 SPORTBACK 2.0T FSI  
BMW 120i SPORT  
MG ZS 180  
RENAULTSPORT MEGANE 225  
VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI

## Revenge of the GTI

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WORDS NATHAN PONCHARD PHOTOS HELMUT MUELLER + EASTON CHANG





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ECADES of disappointment end here. It takes just five minutes of hard driving to discover that Volkswagen's all-new Mk5 Golf GTI is far beyond the mediocre efforts of all its predecessors (never-sold-here, 1976 original excepted). It's the first Golf GTI sold in this country that goes as hard as it looks and, more importantly, actually fulfils your expectations of the badge.

But is the best Golf to wear those three magic capital letters the best small/medium hot hatch in Australia?

Audi, too, has re-entered this combative arena, wielding largely the same tools as the GTI. The new A3 Sportback 2.0T FSI shares its platform, suspension and driveline with the hero Golf, but it's packaged differently, drives differently, and looks substantially different.

Mounting a challenge from way beyond leftfield is MG's new ZS 180 – included here before MG Rover bit the dust. Ours is a sedan, not the dated-looking hatch available overseas, mixing Honda-derived underpinnings with Rover's own KV6 engine and a newly facelifted MG body. The ZS's lineage might date back 10 years, but its muscular visual appeal helps shunt it straight into 2005. Likewise its reputation for involving handling.

Next, the inimitable 1 Series. It's BMW's first-ever Golf-class competitor, and, as the only small rear-driver in its sector, it holds a sizeable theoretical dynamic advantage over highly powered, front-wheel-driven adversaries. But the Sport-kitted 120i comes with a relatively high pricetag rather than high power.

Rounding out GTI's key rivals is Renaultsport's Megane 225. With twin central tailpipes,

intimidating front chin with cavernous air intake, and delightfully lurid metallic-orange paintwork of our test car, the saliva starts to flow even before depressing its start/stop ignition button. But beyond its boosted Clio 182 engine, does the 225 share its baby brother's dynamic talents?

Given a long, straight road, the Renaultsport Megane certainly has the grunt to slaughter every rival here, as well as the odd lamb or two. As the only car to crack a sub-15-second quarter (14.96sec), the Megane 225 is bloody quick, although it isn't easy to get off the line in full-bore launches. It requires dexterous throttle control to avoid smoking the front tyres. But the Megane proves reasonably proficient at transferring all that power once on the move, no doubt helped by stability control that, if switched off, engages automatically above 50km/h.

Hit 2500rpm on its awkward-to-read tachometer and thrust swells massively, the Megane charging past its three-grand torque peak (a fat 300Nm) and hauling with unburstable energy until force dissipates quite dramatically above six-five. The Megane's half-second advantage over the Golf in third gear from 80-120km/h demonstrates the Renault's feral acceleration, once boost is cranking. And it sounds fast, too – a mixture of underlying edginess and lusty turbo whoosh. There's a slight delay between right-foot action and horizon-spearing re-action not evident in the torque-obsessed Golf, but few will find fault in the Renault's buttock-clenching speed, or its inertia-free six-speed gearchange.

Like the chubby Megane, the Golf GTI serves up frenzied wheelspin if fed too much throttle from standstill (ESP off). More time at the track





**Golf GTI's  
turbocharged  
2.0-litre boasts  
superb throttle  
response** and  
is absolutely  
bulging with  
torque



AUDI A3 SPORTBACK 2.0T FSI  
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## ZS's lineage might date back 10 years, but its muscular visual appeal shunts it straight into 2005

would've clocked a 0-100km/h time closer to its 7.2sec claim, but the Golf's pure acceleration numbers fail to convey the undeniable greatness of its engine, or the strength of its performance. It's about as effortless as you could ever wish for, while still rewarding a persistent right foot.

The GTI impresses from the moment you grasp its funky leather-and-metal gearknob, blag first in its slick-shifting six-speed gearbox, and squeeze on its metal-plated accelerator pedal. Its turbocharged, direct-injection 2.0-litre boasts superb throttle response and is absolutely bulging with torque – 280Nm flat from 1800 to 5000rpm, with instant punch available from as little as 1500rpm – to the point where you can tromp the throttle in sixth and genuinely believe you're in fourth. Acceleration is exceptionally strong right across the rev range, and the GTI sounds great when extended, too – less whooshy than the turbocharged Renault, with more urgent induction rasp and generally purer, less thrashy acoustics. After years of disappointingly dull four-cylinder engines, Volkswagen has made amends at last with the new GTI's immensely enjoyable drivetrain.

Likewise Audi. The 2.0T FSI A3 Sportback's boosted four is identical to the GTI's, but, thanks to its dual-clutch DSG sequential transmission, it's a tad quicker off the line, and exhibits more exhaust crackle – on both overrun and when shifting gears. In normal driving, as the DSG slices through its six ratios, the A3 produces a curious blurring sound from its rear pipes – almost like it's passing wind with each gearchange. But load up the DSG tranny on the brakes at standstill for a full-bore acceleration run and the A3's pause-and-fart propensity disappears. Instead, it rams home gearchanges in one beautifully

slick and seamless surge – maximising its thrust while performing all throttle-control work itself. And brilliantly. However, despite handy steering-wheel paddles and a highly effective Sport mode, the DSG upshifts at redline and is really more suitable as a (great) alternative to a torque-converter auto. In a hot hatch, you want driver involvement, not nerdy tech. Good as the DSG is, a manual is still preferable, as the Golf proves.

Matching the VW/Audi pair for performance, somewhat surprisingly, is the V6-engined MG. Despite packing only five gears, it pulls well from low revs (although asks for 3000rpm to really start hauling) and sounds keen – the 2.5-litre V6 feeling impressively strong right to its seven-grand ceiling, while avoiding uncouth torque steer, even in the wet. The MG gets its power down well, and shows that age is all in the mind by always remaining calm under pressure while slurping surprisingly little juice. Its gearshift isn't bad, either, if a little weighty in its movement and matched to a clutch with a high take-up point.

The BMW finishes a distant last for performance. Its naturally aspirated Valvetronic 2.0-litre four feels dull in comparison with its turbocharged rivals, lacking their low-down torque, and sounding relatively unexciting (raspy exhaust note apart), even though it's very smooth, if not particularly quiet. It'll rev happily to 6600rpm (as you'd hope), but winds out in such a linear fashion that you find yourself almost drumming your fingers waiting for redline to arrive. The 120i requires plenty of left-arm work (and right-foot pressure) to deliver, and, while it's hardly a slug and is economical, you can't help but wonder how great it would be with one of BMW's always-splendid sixes jammed up front.

But take a detour from straight bitumen,

and the 1 Series recovers its performance credibility. Strike a corner in the BMW and there's no reason to slow down, so outstanding is its chassis. We've said it before, but the 1 Series is a fantastic handler, one of the true greats of its time. Because it's so much sweeter than its front-drive rivals in terms of tingly, corruption-free steering and textbook chassis balance, the 120i's lacklustre engine feels even more disappointing in light of the car's dynamic prowess.

You can literally drive it flat-out everywhere, performing lovely little oversteer drifts exiting corners – and that's with Sports suspension and fat-tyred 18s. You point and the 1 Series darts there – without delay and, importantly, without any nervousness. Plus, the Bee-Em supports its fine dynamics with excellent brakes, top-notch refinement, and a sporty, low-set driving position. If only it rode with something approaching suppleness, especially in town.

The MG gets close to matching the BMW's supreme balance. Front drive it may be, but the ZS 180 has tremendous front-end grip – biting and turning in with more assurance than it has any right to, while enjoying delightful mid-corner throttle adjustability and crisp,



### Relations

MG ZS derived from 1992 Honda Dornan – the Concerto's replacement. Has decent double-A-arm

suspension and strong Rover V6, but cheap interior and poor refinement date it.





Lots of road noise, but MG has best front-end grip of front-drivers – and balance that approaches 120i. Can be steered on throttle in corners, and has abundant steering feel

Megane scores for speed and mid-corner grip, but bombs with grumbly road noise and poorly weighted steering. Has no feel except kickback. Sadly, it isn't a bigger Clio 182



Golf and A3 share same turbocharged, intercooled engine...



...plus 2578mm wheelbase & multi-link independent rear end

## Same, but different

Audi and Volkswagen have been sharing platforms since 1972, but the new Golf Mk5 and A3 Sportback must be the best attempt yet at delivering two clear identities for each car. The Golf is 70mm shorter and 6mm narrower,

but 43mm taller and better packaged inside, with deeper seats and an airier feel. It's also wider-tracked – 8mm front, 13mm rear. The VW concedes 20 litres of boot space, however, and isn't as aerodynamic as the Audi. The A3's drag figure

of 0.33 lags slightly behind the Golf's 0.32, but the Audi has less frontal area (2.13m<sup>2</sup> v 2.22m<sup>2</sup>), resulting in a more slippery shape overall. The A3's CdA (drag coefficient multiplied by frontal area) is 0.70, whereas the Golf's is a claimed 0.72.

A3 slightly sharper handler than inspired Golf – rolls less, still nicely balanced, but rides harder, and dynamics not as fluid. Curiously, steering feels much lighter

A superb effort. Lacks MG's bite on turn-in, but dynamics seamlessly integrated. Has best ride/handling mix, and kills wayward Mk4 Golf R32 for body control and balance

The one to beat for handling – crisp and beautifully controlled, with great turn-in, lovely feel, gorgeous balance, and enormous grip on optional 18s







**1** Audi A3 beautifully finished, but asks extra for leather and Bose audio. Flatter seats, less headroom than VW

**2** BMW 120i cabin brilliant for two, if low-set and a challenge for rear access. Good seats, okay gearshift

**3** Nice trim, but MG's seats are average, plastics horrible, finish downmarket. ZS shows its age inside

**4** 225 lacks cool instruments and colour (orange belts apart) but has lush seating and heaps of cubbies

**5** Golf GTI the standard setter for value, comfort and style. Great wheel, lovely seats, sweet gearshift

## Inside, A3 is bloody good, but GTI borders on greatness. Cabin suggests car costs \$10K more

incisive steering. Despite its crappy old three-spoke leather wheel that's positioned too low, the MG steers well, with minimal kickback and nicely judged off-centre response. But the ZS is flawed. Its ride is sharp, and road roar and suspension noise rudely invade the cabin. The driver's leather/alcantara seat is well shaped, but the cushion is too flat, and the ZS's spongy brakes lack both feel and confident stopping force in repeated hard use.

The Renaultsport Megane is equally susceptible to criticism. Its ride is both jiggly and noisy, leading you to expect the advantage to fall in favour of its handling. Sadly, the Megane has little of the luscious poise of a Clio 182. While it corners rapidly, grips strongly and rolls minimally, its balance feels relatively inert, and the 225 can be tiring to

punt hard on a bumpy country road. Here, it bounces and bucks, the lamentable electric steering offering no tangible connection with the road, and no consistency of weighting. The Megane 225's steering stiffens just when you'd like it to turn in, and impedes driver confidence simply because you must fight it the whole time.

It doesn't improve, either, when pottering about town, proving ridiculously light and disconnected, if reasonably accurate. You acclimatise, but that's a poor excuse. If only the Megane steered as well as it braked – it boasts the biggest brake package here, with powerful Brembo calipers, lush feel and tremendous ability.

For a case study in how to tune a front-drive hot hatch, see Golf GTI. In a word, it's brilliant.

No rival can match the VW for its gorgeous mix of supple yet impressively disciplined ride quality with fluid, poised, adjustable handling. With its superbly controlled dynamics, the GTI makes its rivals feel compromised.

It flows from corner to corner, its chassis rolling slightly but always remaining squat and balanced, and its meaty steering (and fabulous-to-hold leather GTI wheel) communicates just the right amount of feedback. The turbo Golf is impressively quiet, too, with excellent road-noise suppression, and its brakes are both nicely progressive and unrelentingly powerful.

Unfortunately for Audi, the GTI makes the A3 2.0T Sportback seem a little hit and miss. In its favour, the four-ringed five-door is stiffer-suspended than the VW, sitting flatter in corners and delivering excellent grip on



**AUDI A3 SPORTBACK 2.0T FSI****Performance**

Power to weight: 110kW/tonne

Speed at indicated 100km/h: 97

**Speed in gears**

- 1 53km/h @ 6500rpm
- 2 86km/h @ 6500rpm
- 3 127km/h @ 6500rpm
- 4 172km/h @ 6500rpm
- 5 220km/h @ 6500rpm
- 6 236km/h @ 5900rpm\*

**Standing-start acceleration****0-60km/h:** 3.5sec**0-80km/h:** 5.1sec**0-100km/h:** 7.3sec**0-120km/h:** 9.9sec**0-140km/h:** 13.3sec**0-160km/h:** 17.1sec**0-400m:** 15.3sec @ 151km/h**Rolling acceleration: Drive****80-120km/h:** 4.9sec

Track: Oran Park, dry. Temp: 15°C.

Driver: Nathan Ponchard

\*Estimated or manufacturer's claim

**BMW 120i SPORT**

Power to weight: 87kW/tonne

Speed at indicated 100km/h: 96

**Speed in gears**

- 1 52km/h @ 6600rpm
- 2 91km/h @ 6600rpm
- 3 137km/h @ 6600rpm
- 4 185km/h @ 6600rpm
- 5 217km/h @ 6300rpm\*
- 6 203km/h @ 5000rpm\*

**Standing-start acceleration****0-60km/h:** 4.1sec**0-80km/h:** 6.3sec**0-100km/h:** 9.3sec**0-120km/h:** 12.8sec**0-140km/h:** 16.9sec**0-160km/h:** –**0-400m:** 16.6sec @ 139km/h**Rolling acceleration: 3rd/4th/5th/6th****80-120km/h:** 6.7/8.8/10.6/12.9sec

Track: Oran Park, dry. Temp: 15°C.

Driver: Nathan Ponchard

**MG ZS 180**

Power to weight: 105kW/tonne

Speed at indicated 100km/h: 96

**Speed in gears**

- 1 59km/h @ 6800rpm
- 2 102km/h @ 6800rpm
- 3 144km/h @ 6800rpm
- 4 182km/h @ 6800rpm
- 5 225km/h @ 6200rpm\*

**Standing-start acceleration****0-60km/h:** 3.5sec**0-80km/h:** 5.3sec**0-100km/h:** 7.3sec**0-120km/h:** 10.3sec**0-140km/h:** 13.4sec**0-160km/h:** 17.7sec**0-400m:** 15.4sec @ 151km/h**Rolling acceleration: 3rd/4th/5th****80-120km/h:** 5.3/6.6/9.6sec

Track: Oran Park, dry. Temp: 15°C.

Driver: Nathan Ponchard

**RENAULTSPORT MEGANE 225**

Power to weight: 121kW/tonne

Speed at indicated 100km/h: 98

**Speed in gears**

- 1 59km/h @ 6500rpm
- 2 96km/h @ 6500rpm
- 3 133km/h @ 6500rpm
- 4 176km/h @ 6500rpm
- 5 229km/h @ 6500rpm\*
- 6 236km/h @ 5550rpm\*

**Standing-start acceleration****0-60km/h:** 3.5sec**0-80km/h:** 5.0sec**0-100km/h:** 7.1sec**0-120km/h:** 9.3sec**0-140km/h:** 12.3sec**0-160km/h:** 15.4sec**0-400m:** 15.0sec @ 158km/h**Rolling acceleration: 3rd/4th/5th/6th****80-120km/h:** 4.0/5.1/6.9/8.9sec

Track: Oran Park, dry. Temp: 15°C.

Driver: Nathan Ponchard

**VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI**

Power to weight: 114kW/tonne

Speed at indicated 100km/h: 95

**Speed in gears**

- 1 57km/h @ 6500rpm
- 2 91km/h @ 6500rpm
- 3 129km/h @ 6500rpm
- 4 173km/h @ 6500rpm
- 5 219km/h @ 6500rpm
- 6 235km/h @ 5900rpm\*

**Standing-start acceleration****0-60km/h:** 3.7sec**0-80km/h:** 5.3sec**0-100km/h:** 7.6sec**0-120km/h:** 10.0sec**0-140km/h:** 13.5sec**0-160km/h:** 17.1sec**0-400m:** 15.4sec @ 152km/h**Rolling acceleration: 3rd/4th/5th/6th****80-120km/h:** 4.4/5.4/6.9/8.5sec

Track: Oran Park, dry. Temp: 17°C.

Driver: Nathan Ponchard

identically sized Continental rubber, and it doesn't move around quite as much as the GTI, (subtly) proving a little sharper and more precise in its throttle adjustability. But it doesn't feel as fluid, either, with lighter, less-connected (if still impressively accurate) steering, and a terser ride quality that, while still quiet and well-damped, isn't as absorbent as the VW's. And where every control in the GTI feels seamlessly integrated, the A3's steering feels at odds with its tighter handling, and its brakes are a little over-servoed, if still immensely powerful.

The story continues inside – the A3 bloody good, the Golf bordering on greatness. Jumping from one to the other, you notice that the Golf's seats (both front and rear, with funky tartan-esque upholstery) are deeper and more

supportive, and that its headroom is greater. Plastics quality, however, is slightly inferior. But the GTI effect on the Golf's cabin is all good: plenty of colour, gorgeous blue-lit GTI dials with a 300km/h speedo, super-cool flat-bottomed steering wheel, lovely aluminium pedals and those superb seats. The Golf is the only car with rear-seat vents, has proper door grips, great armrests and excellent leg- and kneeroom in all seating positions, and it boasts a large boot. For a \$39,990 base price, the GTI is staggeringly well equipped, its cabin suggesting the car costs \$10K more, despite no leather (a \$2990 option).

The Audi is more expensively finished inside, but its black-on-light-grey colour scheme is a bit too sombre, and its gauges and steering wheel are regular-issue A3. Leather isn't

standard, either, despite its \$7660 premium over a DSG-equipped GTI, and the Audi's seats are both flatter and less supportive than the GTI's – particularly in the rear. There's no rear-seat centre armrest, or rear map pockets, or front-seat lumbar support, or a front armrest. For \$50K, you'd expect stuff like this to be standard, not extra. But the A3 remains a roomy, competitive package. Its boot is huge – larger than the Golf's – and its in-cabin refinement is equally hushed. It's just that the VW does it noticeably better.

The Renault lacks the rear-seat room of the Audi and VW, despite having a longer wheelbase, but its (optional) leather seats are thickly padded and beautifully trimmed, with subtle orange stitching and perforations. For clever practicality, the Megane scores



AUDI A3 SPORTBACK 2.0T FSI  
 BMW 120i SPORT  
 MG ZS 180  
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 VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI

## 120i boasts standard-setting dynamics, but finishes a distant last for performance

with decent-sized front in-floor bins, large (if plasticky) door bins, and flip-up door armrests for CD storage. For design, it's refreshingly unusual, too: aircraft handbrake; all-glass roof (optional); metallic-orange seatbelts; keycard ignition. In the Not-So-Impressive list, Renaultsport merely wraps leather over the normal Megane's wheel, and the 225's digital climate control is dreadful, struggling desperately to keep the cabin cool in mild 20-degree weather. The Megane's optional six-CD stereo sounds average, too, and its boot is only moderately sized. Thankfully, it does include a full-size alloy spare – the only car here to do so.

You wouldn't buy a 120i if you had any sympathy for rear-seat passengers because, while the seat itself is fairly comfortable, getting in and out is more a flexibility test, and the rear of the centre console rubs against passengers' legs. The appeal of the BMW is as a two-seater, with the occasional five-up a possibility. It has proper door and overhead grips, but its front seats work best with \$2200 full-electric operation – their manual adjustment proves a little coarse for the physically sensitive. The 120i's boot is average, no better, and achieves this only by excluding a spare wheel. And while it has the full deck of airbags and electronic safety aids, its comfort/convenience equipment is fairly unremarkable.

If you liked the MG up until now, grit your teeth. Its cabin might look okay, but its plastics are bloody awful, especially the door bins and scratch-prone handbrake surround. Its dash

is hard and hollow, and many switches pre-date all high-school children. Its seats are fairly accommodating, though, despite the close proximity of the roof lining, the lack of rear kneeroom, and restricted toe room. But it's better in the rear than the Renault. The MG's voluminous boot isn't bad, either, if cheaply trimmed. What hurts most is the ZS 180's \$39,990 price, relative to its shallow equipment count (no cruise, awful stereo, cheap feel).

For that money, you could have a VW Golf GTI, and that says it all. The MG might be surprising fun, surprisingly quick, and a decent looker (considering its mongrel origins), but its cheaply finished cabin and disappointing road noise undermine its good points. Despite its great chassis and strong engine, there's no denying the narrow appeal of the ZS – especially since MG Rover has gone tits-up. We don't like to kick someone when they're down, but the feeling-its-age ZS 180 licks the wooden spoon in this comparo.

The Megane is a frustrating mix of brilliant and bloody awful. I love its looks, searing performance, great brakes, and essential difference. But the 225 lacks the fluidity of movement that makes the Clio 182 such a hero, while its steering can be obstructive on our unpredictable roads, compounding the Megane's patchy driver appeal. And, with LX pack, the 225 costs a relatively steep \$47K. You could live with it and ignore the flaws, but surely a quieter, better-handling, better-riding car was achievable?

The 1 Series is a difficult car to pigeonhole. In its

favour are standard-setting dynamics and driver communication, impressive safety credentials (like all cars here bar the MG), and a cut-above image. But the BMW 120i works best in base form – without the Aerodynamic Package bodykit, without the Sports suspension that only magnifies its firm ride, and without the 18-inch wheels.

As a two-plus-two hatch, you'd hope it performed more like a sports coupe, which it doesn't. As a BMW, it drives as well as anyone could expect, and serves up near-limitless dynamic appeal, plus quality and resale. But check out the price, son. If daddy's paying, wait for the 130i.

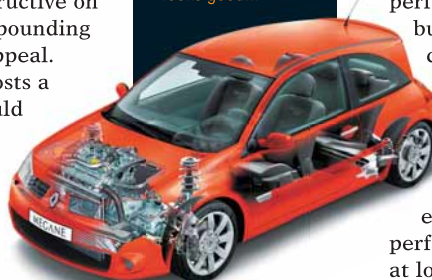
The A3 is similarly expensive, thanks to the premium demanded of its four-ringed badge, but has greater sporting appeal than the BMW, mainly because it's such a gutsy performer. The way its front wheels sometimes scramble for grip proves it can never feel as pure as the 1 Series, but in most areas the Sportback 2.0T proves Audi knows how to build a hot hatch, albeit one with relatively sober wrapping.

But the Golf GTI conquers all. At just \$39,990, the manual GTI is surely the bargain of the moment. It's a deeply impressive, hugely capable performer. It's fast and great fun, but also effortless, wonderfully comfortable and amazingly practical. It performs day-to-day tasks with aplomb, yet has enough up its sleeve to keep satisfying almost every driver's desires. It seems like eons since we drove a VW boasting performance, class and character, but, at long last, the time has come. 






### TROPHY RUN

#### Hotter Megane?

Like the Clio 182, Megane 225's strut front and torsion-beam rear end are nothing special in terms of design. But 225 doesn't get it together dynamically like its heroic little bro'. Revised Trophy version, due later this year, has much-stiffer springs, 18-inch alloys, and new electric-steering system. It certainly looks good...





	AUDI A3 SPORTBACK 2.0T FSI	BMW 120i SPORT	MG ZS 180	RENAULTSPORT MEGANE 225	VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI
	\$49,950 / As tested \$56,300**	\$41,900 / As tested \$61,590**	\$39,990 / As tested \$39,990	\$42,990 / As tested \$46,990**	\$39,990 / As tested \$44,460**
	<b>Drivetrain</b>				
Engine	in-line 4, dohc, 16v, turbocharger	in-line 4, dohc, 16v	V6 (60°), dohc, 24v	in-line 4, dohc, 16v, turbocharger	in-line 4, dohc, 16v, turbocharger
Layout	front engine (east-west), front drive	front engine (north-south), rear drive	front engine (east-west), front drive	front engine (east-west), front drive	front engine (east-west), front drive
Capacity	1.984 litres	1.995 litres	2.497 litres	1.998 litres	1.984 litres
Bore/stroke	82.5/92.8mm	84.0/90.0mm	80.0/82.8mm	82.7/93.0mm	82.5/92.8mm
Compression	10.5:1	10.5:1	10.5:1	9.0:1	10.5:1
Power	147kW @ 5100-6000rpm	110kW @ 6200rpm	130kW @ 6500rpm	165kW @ 5500rpm	147kW @ 5100-6000rpm
Torque	280Nm @ 1800-5000rpm	200Nm @ 3600rpm	240Nm @ 4000rpm	300Nm @ 3000rpm	280Nm @ 1800-5000rpm
Redline/Cut-out	6500/6900rpm	6600/6600rpm	6800/7000rpm	6500/7000rpm	6500/7000rpm
Transmission	6-speed sequential	6-speed manual	5-speed manual	6-speed manual	6-speed manual
km/h 1000rpm	8.2/13.3/19.5/26.4/33.8/40.1	7.9/13.8/20.7/28.0/34.5/40.5	8.7/15.0/21.2/26.8/36.2	9.1/14.7/20.5/27.1/35.3/42.5	8.7/14.0/19.9/26.6/33.7/40.1
Gear ratios	3.46/2.15/1.46/1.08/1.09/0.92	4.35/2.50/1.67/1.23/1.00/0.85	3.17/1.84/1.31/1.03/0.77	not available	3.36/2.09/1.47/1.10/0.87/0.73
Diff ratio	4.06 (1st-4th), 3.14 (5th, 6th)	3.38	3.94	not available	3.94
					
	<b>Chassis</b>				
Body	steel, 5 doors, 5 seats	steel, 5 doors, 5 seats	steel, 4 doors, 5 seats	steel, 5 doors, 5 seats	steel, 5 doors, 5 seats
L/W/H	4286/1765/1423mm	4227/1751/1430mm	4540/1727/1386mm	4228/1777/1437mm	4216/1759/1466mm
Wheelbase	2578mm	2660mm	2620mm	2617mm	2578mm
Front/rear track	1531/1515mm	1484/1497mm	1475/1465mm	1517/1521mm	1539/1528mm
Weight	1335kg	1260kg	1235kg	1361kg	1289kg
Boot capacity	370 litres	330 litres	470 litres	330 litres	350 litres
Fuel/capacity	98 octane/55 litres	95 octane/50 litres	95 octane/55 litres	95 octane/60 litres	98 octane/55 litres
Fuel consumption	10.2L/100km (test average)	9.1L/100km (test average)	9.7L/100km (test average)	10.3L/100km (test average)	9.5L/100km (test average)
Suspension	<b>Front:</b> struts, A-arms, anti-roll bar <b>Rear:</b> multi-links, coil springs, anti-roll bar	<b>Front:</b> struts, A-arms, anti-roll bar <b>Rear:</b> multi-links, coil springs, anti-roll bar	<b>Front:</b> double A-arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar <b>Rear:</b> multi-links, coil springs, anti-roll bar	<b>Front:</b> struts, L-arms, anti-roll bar <b>Rear:</b> torsion-beam axle, trailing arms, coil springs	<b>Front:</b> struts, A-arms, anti-roll bar <b>Rear:</b> multi-links, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering	power rack and pinion	power rack and pinion	power rack and pinion	electric power rack and pinion	power rack and pinion
Turning circle	10.7m (3.0 turns lock to lock)	10.7m (3.0 turns lock to lock)	11.2m (2.7 turns lock to lock)	10.4m (2.7 turns lock to lock)	10.9m (3.0 turns lock to lock)
Front brakes	ventilated discs (312mm)	ventilated discs (292mm)	ventilated discs (282mm)	ventilated discs (312mm)	ventilated discs (312mm)
Rear brakes	solid discs (286mm)	ventilated discs (296mm)	solid discs (260mm)	solid discs (306mm)	solid discs (286mm)
Tyres	Continental SportContact 2	Goodyear Eagle NCT5	Continental SportContact 2	Continental SportContact 2	Continental SportContact 2
Tyre size	225/45R17 91Y	205/45R18 86W (f), 225/40R18 88W (r)	205/45ZR17	225/45R17 94W	225/45R17 91W
	<b>Safety hardware</b>				
Active	ABS, EBD, BA, ESP, ASR	ABS, EBD, DSC, DTC	ABS, EBD	ABS, EBD, BA, ESP, TC	ABS, EBD, BA, ESP, ASR
Passive	front/side/curtain airbags, front pre-tensioner/load-limiter seatbelts	front/side/curtain airbags, front and rear pre-tensioner/load-limiter seatbelts	front/side airbags, front pre-tensioner/load-limiter seatbelts	front/side/curtain airbags, front and rear pre-tensioner/load-limiter seatbelts	front/side/curtain airbags, front pre-tensioner/load-limiter seatbelts
NCAP rating	★★★★★ (Euro)	★★★★★ (Euro)	not tested	★★★★★ (Euro)	★★★★★ (Euro)
Verdict:	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
	<div> <div>✓</div> Great drivetrain; gutsy performance; sharp handling; huge boot; quality </div> <div> <div>✗</div> Doesn't ride, sit or steer as well as a Golf GTI; no manual option; price </div> <p>           Warranty: 3yr/unlimited km            Service intervals: 20,000km            Redbook 3-year resale: 58%            AAMI insurance: \$1079            **Including metallic paint, leather, Bose sound system, aluminium roof rails         </p>	<p>           Fabulous dynamics; superb balance; edgy exhaust note; refinement         </p> <p> <b>Lacklustre engine wasted on the chassis; cramped rear seat; price</b> </p> <p>           Warranty: 2yr/unlimited km            Service intervals: 25,000km            Redbook 3-year resale: 61%            AAMI insurance: \$868            **Including metallic paint, Boston leather, bluetooth, Harmon Kardon hi-fi, sports suspension, sunroof, Kodiak silver trim, electric front lumbar, lights package, 18-inch alloys, aerodynamic kit         </p>	<p>           Surprising pace; impressive engine; grippy and adjustable handling         </p> <p> <b>Cheap and cheerless interior; flawed driving position; loud road noise</b> </p> <p>           Warranty: 2yr/unlimited km            Service intervals: see News section            Redbook 3-year resale: 63%            AAMI insurance: \$1037         </p>	<p>           Ballys engine; ballys styling; searing performance; orange belts; interior         </p> <p> <b>Awful steering; bump steer; road noise; lacks Clio 182's balance; stereo</b> </p> <p>           Warranty: 2yr/unlimited km            Service intervals: 15,000km            Redbook 3-year resale: 53%            AAMI insurance: \$1057            **Including LX pack (sunroof, 6-CD player, leather)         </p>	<p>           Engine, handling, ride, seats, room, value, interior and price all brilliant         </p> <p> <b>Front drive ultimately limits its power-down potential; GTI missed COTY '04</b> </p> <p>           Warranty: 3yr/100,000km            Service intervals: 15,000km            Redbook 3-year resale: not available yet            AAMI insurance: \$1214            **Including metallic paint, sunroof, bi-xenon headlamps         </p>

