

Fourth gear

LONG-TERMERS & PAST BLAST



APR SEMA VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI

STORY CURT DUPRIEZ PHOTOS SCOTT DUKES

GOLF BALLS

APR takes a swing at tuning crown with 302kW Golf

At the end of a guided tour of Audi Performance and Racing's impressive Auburn, Alabama, premises, I'm guided into a room at the rear where the tuning company's pride and joy – its mascot – sits quietly in one corner to greet me. Now, your average Golf GTI is hardly an extraordinary object to behold, but APR's SEMA GTI

clearly ain't ordinary. Plump in its swollen Oettinger bodywork and dressed in warpaint fit for 24 hours at Le Mans, the three-door hatch hunkers low over the concrete floor, wearing juicy 19-inch BBS RS-GT rims that threaten to explode from the arches at any moment.

The APR rep rattles through the specs. He's past the bit about the swivelling Hella prototype headlights and onto the part detailing how the one-off wheels

boast a Porsche off-set to clear the massive four-piston monobloc Alcon brakes and 350mm two-piece floating rotors. And I'm thinking: yep, okay, interesting...

Still, a drum roll, blowing trumpets, dancing girls – some fanfare should've introduced the moment he drops the statistical bombshell. But no, he just blurts out, deadpan, in mid stride.

"It makes a bit over 300kW and 515Nm," he says.



"IT MAKES A BIT OVER
300kW AND 515NM" ...
I ALMOST FALL OFF
MY CHAIR



INTAKE



TURBO



ENGINE



MANIFOLD



AUDIO



EXHAUST



SPRINGS



BRAKES



WHEELS



\$40,000

I almost fall off my chair in hysterical laughter.

"In ideal conditions (add slick tyres, wing, prayer, etc) it'll do mid-11s on the strip," he adds.

Jeez, stop it, I can't breathe...

I laugh because the GTI still uses the factory-derived 2.0-litre TFSI donk that's massaged via rocket science, or black magic, or something. I laugh because it still channels grunt through the front hoops, and because a chunk of my right brain suggests to any other rational part listening that much beyond, say, 200kW and 400Nm would transform a front-driven road car into a flailing, uncontrollable, and ultimately short-lived mess for all involved.

And I'm laughing because APR are handing their possessed little bastard over to me for three days in America's south to do, well, whatever takes my fancy. "So, do I climb in and turn the key," I ask, "or just pull a pin and throw it?"

That the turbo four-banger pulls the numbers – a whopping 200 old-school horsepower per litre – is an achievement in itself. The GTI spent 12 months as R&D test bed for APR's Mark V engine power-up kits, and makes its glory figures using a Stage 3+ Turbo kit (\$9500), Quad Exhaust/ECU system (\$2495), and Intercooler Upgrade (\$2200). It's all off-the-shelf, bolt-on gear. In fact, walk in off the street with

a blank cheque and APR could build you an identical GTI, as virtually everything (bar the wheels) is available from the company's comprehensive catalogue. There's one catch, though. APR reckons about 280kW is pushing the friendship with the engine's corrods, so stronger items have been installed on this demo car.

So far, so good bit of car porn. But for all the pub bragging rights on offer, the reality is that heavily modified cars rarely stack up to the sum of their juicy parts out in the real-world bump and grind.

From the moment I hit the road in the GTI, the laughter stops. Throughout 72 hours of road-

tripping, sight-seeing, shopping, dinner appointments, and, of course, white-knuckled race-circuit theatrics, the Golf proved to be the sort of grin-inducing experience that leaves your jaw muscles aching. I lost count of the moments where I'd switch it off, climb out, and then stare at it in the silent awe reserved for those motoring experiences where talent far out-strips expectation.

For a start, its flexible around-town behaviour and polished driveability is nothing short of astonishing. It pulls cleanly from idle without any lag, the turbo spools hard and quickly, and a smooth, creamy wave of torque swells from 2000rpm up through

The bastard child of a zebra and the A-Team van doesn't fail to make an impact



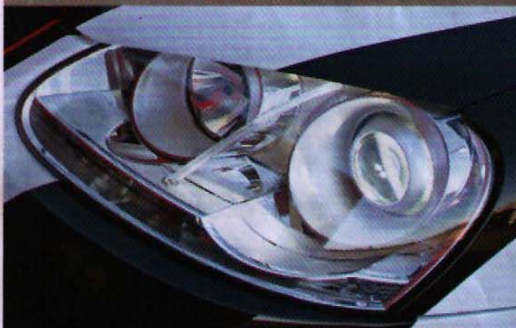
Hot Tuner



Hella's swivelling headlights. Bling!

Stock tartan seats gone, R32's easily compensate

Blacked-out rego plate for that extra cop-bait touch



the mid-range to a tunefully crisp, metallic throb from the dual exhaust. Part-throttle response in the meat of the torque is amazingly supple – it doesn't buck or pig-root like, say, a Lancer Evo. Even at a highway cruise, languishing in fifth or sixth, it just surges forward with every right foot twitch. In fact, delivery is so V8-like down low that you'd expect its fast-spooling nature to turn flat and breathless in

the top-end. Not bloody likely. The wave of force crests from 4000rpm to cut-out with solid and spike-free thrust, pinning you hard into the retro-fitted R32 buckets. Acceleration is fierce – at 217kW-per-tonne, this Hell Hatch has almost twice the power-to-weight of the stock three-door GTI. As you'd well expect, the cut-slick Michelin Pilot Sport Cups cry freedom quite easily, but the

linear throttle response makes it easy to sniff out traction's limits. Even when you sink the boot in hard, the aftermarket Quaife LSD masterfully regulates torque between the driveshafts. The net effect is that the tyres scabble for adhesion in unison and, although the nose shimmies a bit under full-noise wheelspin, it doesn't wander off-line either at straight ahead or when you're trying to hold a clean corner-exit trajectory at warp six.

Perhaps it's VW's engineering. Or the diff tuning. Or the engine's silken delivery. Or all three combined. But there's bugger all torque-steer. And I mean less than a standard Mazda 3 MPS or Megane F1 R26. Bloody amazing.

And the surprises keep on coming. The six-speed manual is stock and still feels fresh, despite the R&D abuse it's endured. And ARP's Spec Stage 3+ aftermarket clutch is weighty, yet progressive, and effortless to use. The jury's out on whether a DSG system could cope with extra herbs – APR

hasn't tried one yet. Should a GTI owner wish to play guinea pig, APR Australia boss Guy Harding offers a sobering thought: a new replacement DSG 'box costs around \$16K, should something inside decide to go 'pop'.

The first real sign of compromise is the suspension. The two-way adjustable Koni 1150 coil-overs are set low and with firm spring rates. Flung around the Road Atlanta race circuit, or through backwater Alabama's pimple-free roadways, the chassis is taut, sits flat, points accurately and confidently, and has manic road-holding. But the springs don't feel quite matched to the compliant damper settings necessary for the painted-on Michelin rubber. It crashes through on sharp bumps, and the chassis isn't at all happy if asked to suddenly exercise its meagre suspension travel mid-way through a high-speed sweeper.

That said, the handling package does wonders for the steering feel. The sticky, low-profile rubber and





HEAVY BREATHING

How to make a mountain from a molehill

● Horsepower costs, so screwing a hefty 302kW and 515Nm from VW's 2.0-litre TFSI engine isn't for the fiscally challenged. But you get a lot for your dough.

The Stage 3+ Turbo System includes an APR-modified Garrett 2891R ball-bearing turbocharger, uprated fuel injectors and fuel pump, cast-aluminium induction and pressure piping, silicon

inlet and pressure hoses, and an exhaust manifold made from exotic Inconel material. The kit is designed as a straightforward bolt-on affair, with no internal engine modifications necessary.

The dual-exit Quad Exit Exhaust is a work of art: T304 stainless steel construction, CNC hangers, and high-flow catalytic converters. It also includes APR's Stage 2 ECU

calibration which reflashes the factory Bosch Motronic ECU. The exhaust, by itself, is good for gains of up to 26kW and 45Nm.

Meanwhile, the intercooler upgrade adds a further 20kW and 27Nm. It's an OEM fitment (no engine bay cutting or trimming), has cast-aluminium end-tanks and comes with silicon hoses.

Combined, the Stage 3+ Turbo

System (\$9500), stainless steel Quad Exhaust/ECU package (\$2495) and Intercooler Upgrade (\$2200) cost a cool \$14,195. And that's before you factor in brakes, suspension, LSD, fresh undies, etc.

Too rich for you? APR Oceania also offer milder upgrades for VW's 1.8 and 2.0 turbo engines. Check out www.goapr.com.au for more details.

AT 217kW/TONNE, IT HAS ALMOST TWICE THE POWER-TO-WEIGHT OF THE STOCK GOLF GTI



Power figures suggest disaster, but somehow SEMA GTI bends the laws of physics, with excellent results



THE ANCHORS FEEL LIKE THEY COULD STOP A KENWORTH

firm spring rates add a new level of intimacy to the GTI's renowned tiller precision. The extra tyre noise – and there's a quite a bit of it – is more than a fair trade-off.

The brakes are also excellent. With the balance of mods – which include an OEM-slick interior makeover featuring those Euro-spec R32 buckets, custom rear seating, full Alcantara trimming


and an in-car Streetdeck computer system – the GTI still tips the scales at under 1400kg, and the Alcon anchors feel like they could probably stop a Kenworth dead in its tracks. Even with racing pads installed, there's good, progressive bite and infallible confidence when cold.

The SEMA GTI is, if anything, a tough car to pigeonhole. Is it a serious track-weapon with almost

unbelievable road manners? Or is it a practical, easy-to-live-with, effortlessly flexible road car that's cut a deal with the devil? It's both. And it redefines a humble arse-dragger's all-round potential to a level that almost defies logic.

Thing is, it's a bit of an all-or-nothing affair. Harding and the Brisbane-based APR Oceania crew – who are currently building their own GTI monster – will gladly supply the power-up gear to create a 302kW/515Nm Mark V GTI on request, but suggest that all the supporting modifications are added to complement the engine's extra stonk and to complete the entire package. For the greater good of life, limb and bank balance, of course.

"Although they're not strictly mandatory, we highly recommend the following: an uprated clutch, the limited-slip differential, suspension work and bigger brakes," Harding says, before pausing.



"Oh... and big balls, too." 



FAST FACTS

APR SEMA VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI

BODY 3-door, 5-seat hatchback
DRIVE front wheels
ENGINE 1984cc, 4cyl, DOHC, 16v, Garrett 2891R turbo, intercooler
BORE/STROKE 82.5 x 92.8mm
POWER 302kW @ 6000rpm
TORQUE 515Nm @ 3500rpm
KERB WEIGHT 1390kg [with mods]
POWER-TO-WIEGHT 217kW/tonne
TRANSMISSION 6-speed manual
0-100km/h 5.2sec [claimed]
0-400m 11.5sec [claimed]
TOP SPEED 233km/h [factory]
SUSPENSION Koni 1150 coil-over struts, A-arms, anti-roll bar (f); multi-links, coil springs, Koni dampers, anti-roll bar (r)
LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT 4216/1759/1440mm
WHEEL BASE 2578mm
BRAKES 350mm two-piece discs, four-piston monobloc calipers (f); 286mm ventilated discs, single-piston caliper (r), ABS, ESP
TYRES 235/35ZR19 Michelin Pilot Sport Cup (f/r)
WHEELS 19 x 8.0-inch BBS RS-GT
PRICE \$70,000-\$80,000

 Tremendous all-round performance, top street manners
 Needs suspension refinement, gaudy paint scheme

