



Golf 1600+GTI makes a... 2-LITRE BEATER

GTI's a performance potion. Volkswagen's taken the two-door 1600, added some spicy ingredients to the engine and running gear, and brewed an elixir that turns Golf into a giant killer. Mike McCarthy reports after playing a round or two, or 15.



"OO-WHEE... stop it, I like it."

"Stop or I'll scream..."

Talk about Freudian slips. I'm not sure why those particular little excerpts should have been the ones to pop into mind as I finally drew off the track, bloop-blooped along pit lane and let the engine die. But pop they did, and summed up my feelings just fine anyway.

I'd been circulating Oran Park raceway in the Chris Heyer/Lennox Motors Golf GTI, a very promising newcomer to Production Touring racing, and it was one of the most difficult things I've ever done... not

the driving but trying to make my next lap the last. A while earlier, even when rapping away from the pits, I'd thought the session would need only a couple of laps for me to settle into the car and track, and a few more circuits to get the picture of how the GTI goes and feels. But by the time I'd done that I was hooked.

Every time I came sweeping up out of BP, running hard in third and snicking into top with the straight inviting me on, there was no way I could bring myself to take the GTI in. Pandora's box had opened, I'd found a superb little track toy, and I was

addicted. Nine laps, 10 and 11. Chris gave me the thumbs-up from the pits and the needle in my conscience eased enough to let me squeeze in another lap, two, and perhaps one more. C'mon, do it now, use some willpower, otherwise you'll be out here till the tank runs dry. And at that I managed to say *when*, but only after deliberately slowing very early and taking BP at a loping canter.

It might be stating the obvious, but the Golf GTI is a delightful car. It goes hard and runs true. That much was clear after only a couple of enthusiastic laps. The remainder were spent simply enjoying it. The GTI behaves so impeccably that I can't recall impressions other than good ones; the effervescent exhaust note tingling your ears, the sheer bodily force of the invisible giant hand pressing against you through the turns, the almighty grip of the slick racing tyres, the finely accurate steering never needing more than an almost imperceptible touch of correction at the throttle or wheel, the sparkling responsiveness of the engine, and the sure confidence with which the brakes can be used anywhere, anytime.

It all adds up to a car that's



McCarthy gets cockpit drill from Chris Heyer. Interior is standard Golf aside from roll cage, six-point harness, fleecy seat cover and oil pressure gauge.



beautifully balanced in every department, a total package, one which easily justifies the openly optimistic enthusiasm of Chris Heyer and Lennox Motors. It's also showing bright promise of developing into a leading contender in its class which is open to models up to two-litre capacity. Even at this early phase of its career the GTI has the measure of rival Escort, Alfa Romeo and BMW models and is keeping the Dolomite Sprints honest. As Chris told us - "As we learn more about fine-tuning the GTI's engine and handling, the only way we can go is faster".

There's no doubting the VW's potential. It should have first fired in anger at the Hardie-Perodo 1000 but by race eve the 2500-made homologation still wasn't endorsed to official satisfaction, which meant reverting to standard Golf specs, including a well-worn and knowingly suspect engine which didn't last the distance.

Tardy homologation confirmation meant the Adelaide round was also missed. But the GTI broke its duck at

GTI engine has different head (flat face with bowl-in-piston chambers) and Bosch K-Jetronic petrol injection, produces 82 kW (110 bhp DIN) at 6100 rpm in stock form. Heyer's does even better with modified camshaft and extractor exhaust.

Surfers and qualified fourth fastest in class, behind Dolomite Sprints. Gremlins struck after a few laps and from there on the clutch refused to disengage. Though slowed on that account, Heyer finished sixth in class.

The problem was traced to oil entering the clutch from a cracked gearbox casing; thought to be an isolated instance as the fault hasn't been reported among Golf GTIs and Sciroccos racing overseas. But when next racing (at Oran Park) the clutch played up again, despite which the GTI was eighth across the line for a third or fourth (depending on a dispute over first) in class. This time the clutch had failed because there wasn't a GTI plate on hand to replace the oil-soaked original, and the non-standard facings used proved unsatisfactory. Now, with suitable linings aboard, the clutch problem should be cured and the GTI able to show its true mettle. Aside from the clutch, the car has been remarkably free of other bugs which often affect new racers.

Though the GTI adapts so readily to the track that it gives the impression of beings tailor-made for the job, it's essentially a road car, albeit an obviously sporty one.

The heart of the GTI is a special engine which uses the stock Golf block and bottom-end but not much else. The cylinder head is a Heron-type unit with a flat face and bowl-in-piston chambers. The inlet valves are much larger than standard, while the exhausts lead to a bigger manifold and two-into-one header. The carburettor is replaced by Bosch K-Jetronic petrol injection, a relatively simple yet effective system using constant feed, electric-pump pressurisation and a mechanical metering unit. The GTI engine also includes a thermostatically-controlled oil cooler and is complemented by a different clutch/flywheel assembly, 3.7 to 1 final drive ratio (3.9 to 1 stock), stronger half-shafts and tougher constant-velocity joints.

The standard Golf engine claims 56 kW (75 bhp DIN) at 5600 rpm. The GTI changes boost the output to a rousing 82 kW (110 bhp DIN) at 6100 rpm but the engine remains smooth and tractably flexible.

Volkswagen puts the stock Golf's top speed at 160 km/h (99 mph) and credits it with an 0-80 km/h (0-50 mph) acceleration time of 8.2 seconds, whereas the GTI runs to 182 km/h (113 mph) and hits 0-80 km/h in just 6.5 seconds. As allowed under racing rules, Chris Heyer's GTI goes a bit further. And a bit faster. It uses a modified camshaft and extractor exhaust, and doesn't mind being buzzed beyond 8000 rpm.

Volkswagen's chassis tweaks include increased track, wider wheels (with 175HR13 tyres on the road version), lowered suspension, stiffer springs, re-rated dampers, ventilated front discs and anti-roll bars at both ends. Lennox Motors intends marketing GTI suspension bits for local Golfers. Aside from the fatter tyres and reduced height, the GTI is visually identified by its badges, wheel arch flares and deeper (than standard) front bib. As we said, a total package.

Of course the big question now is: Will the road GTI be released here? We know dealers are asking for it and Volkswagen Australia's seriously weighing the pros and cons. We also know that if the GTI arrives it won't be cheap but it will be welcome.

GTI has stronger driveline and ventilated front discs.

