

Underlined



by Ian Lamming

Magnificence

HERE'S a red stripe, well it's more like piping really, on the interior door and at night it glows a rosy hue.

It matches the one on the front which underlines the honeycomb grille and sinister lights. It's an unashamedly go-faster stripe but that just about all that tells you that this particular Golf is iconic.

There's the badge of course, if you have sharp eyes, twin tailpipes and big hot-hatch alloys, otherwise this latest generation GTI is subtle and tasteful with less than obvious styling cues which have an effect greater than the sum of their parts.

There are more than one or two Golfs on our roads yet somehow the GTI manages to stand out despite its muted and understated styling. That has to be the strength of the brand and it is what gives the Golf GTI its timeless charm.

Come to think of it when you spot a Golf GTI, no matter how old or which model it is, it still looks appealing.

And if you think they look good then you need to have a drive of one too because they are and remain a revelation.

The latest guise is no exception thanks to a 220PS motor and the simply stunning automatic gearbox, fans will recognize as the DSG.

I have said it before but the six speed DSG, quite simply, is the best automatic gearbox of any car at any price.

It changes in an instant banging home the next ratio like a Formula 1 thoroughbred. It really is like no other. You simply can't help using the paddle shift to blat up and down the box like a grand prix hero.

Accelerate hard West on to the dual carriageway; breathe upon the fierce brakes to turn left along a B road and head for the Dales; brrr, brrr, brrr, round the hairpins and across the moors.

Then the other trump card comes into play, the sublime suspension which eats the countryside's undulations for breakfast and laughs in the face of moorland potholes.

It is just so controlled and comfortable yet sharp and exhilarating; I really don't know how VW does it.

Then it is time to hit the motorway and the GTI impresses this time with its relaxed and cossetting nature and a fuel consumption figure of 42.6, which is pretty incredible for something this swift.

In town the DSG comes into its own again allowing for efficient movement through the traffic and the large boot copes with as much shopping as you would care to throw its way, because this is one sports car that is as practical as a... well... a Golf.

But the final leg is along fast sweeping A roads showing off the GTI in its best light because it loves the open road, is a supreme over-taker and driver's delight.

There are so many cars in our showrooms today, some on the face of it more radical, but what the Golf possesses is a level of class unsurpassed by the opposition. No wonder it is underlined in red.

Fact File

VW Golf GTI

Engine: 2.0

Power: 220PS

0-62mph: 6.5 secs

Top speed: 151mph

Combined miles per gallon: 44.1

Transmission: six speed auto DSG

Insurance: 29

CO2 g/km: 148