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Volkswagen DRIVER

£3.75

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ROAD TESTS • HERITAGE • SPORT • TUNING • TECHNOLOGY • DIY

NEW R32 DSG



**FASTER THAN BEFORE:
154 MPH, 0-60: 5.8!**





ELAINE CATTON

STATESIDE

FOR THE last 42 years, US tuning enthusiasts have had been getting together in Las Vegas to ogle the latest that the specialists have to offer at the annual aftermarket show run by SEMA (Speciality Equipment Manufacturers' Association).

The Volkswagen brand has been a major feature of the show since the very start, with the infinitely flexible Beetle platform offering endless scope to high and low-budget tuning enthusiasts alike. However, while VWoA is a long-standing indirect supporter of the show, it has never actually had its own stand there – until November 2005 that is.

As the first European brand ever to participate with its own stand at the SEMA Show, VWoA decided that the time was right to afford appropriate recognition to the key role played by the tuning sector in its US brand image. 2005 also had the added benefit of seeing some key new models arrive in the US market, and where better to get those tuning taste buds a-tingling with the wondrous potential of said new Veedubs. So, this year the VW stand was positively bursting with tantalising titbits, the most inspiring of all being three R GT models developed jointly by Volkswagen and tuning specialist HPA Motorsports.

VWoA set the group's California design studio and HPA the following questions:

What if Volkswagen's R concept of high performance, as presented in the R32, could be magnified into 'supercar' proportions?

What if Volkswagen's rich crop of technology could be distilled into a more potent mixture?

What if its narrow-angle V6 powerplant, 4Motion all-wheel drive and DSG transmission were to be blended to blow away the world's most discerning performance enthusiasts?

What if Volkswagen's designers had no other goal except to turn their visions into sculptures of composites and metal?



550 bhp Jetta R GT – designed to 'drop hints' to the tuner market

And what if an R GT series of vehicles were to be built, to act as dream-makers, as forerunners, perhaps, to a line of factory-bred ultra-high-performance specials?

There's no word on how much these guys were given in order to answer these questions, but answer them they did in the form of the Passat R GT, the Jetta R GT and the Touareg R GT.

The Jetta R GT started out as a 2005 150 PS 2.5-litre front-wheel-drive Jetta. However, by the time the HPA team had dropped a twin-turbo, twin-intercooled 550 bhp variant of the 3.2-litre V6 into the engine bay, added modified versions of the DSG transmission and 4Motion all-wheel drive, a KW FIA GT 3-way coil-over race suspension and a WRC-spec Brembo braking system, I dare say there would have been little left untouched on the performance spec sheet.

While the HPA lads were doing their stuff, the design guys were busy running up a new party frock to set heads turning for our girl-next-door Jetta. The exterior was kitted out with smoke grey paintwork and graphics, new front and rear bumper facias, side panels and a bespoke rear spoiler, while the interior was reworked with the weekend racer in mind. Encased within the protection of the integrated roll cage are Recaro race buckets, Schroth harnesses and a fuel cell for race safety, with an F1-style Stack electronic gauge cluster, and plenty of black leather, Alcantara and carbon fibre for the obligatory super-nasty racing look.

The whole lot was then rolled out on 9.5 x 19-inch Avus alloys clad in huge Michelin Pilot Sport2 rubber, with the capability to switch to 9.5 x 18 mono-block DTM-spec Avus wheels and Michelin Pilot Sport Cups should a track outing come into question.

The Passat was treated to a similar makeover, starting out with a 3.2-litre V6 FSI with DSG and 4Motion. This time, however, HPA kept the engine and running gear, adding a twin-turbo conversion package featuring dual exhaust manifolds, each carrying a Garrett GT25R ball-bearing turbocharger. Charge cooling is optimized by twin intercoolers,

and the exhaust gases pass through a quad bypass emissions system that retains the stock catalytic converters. The resulting combination pushes out 575 bhp!

For the Passat R GT, the design studio opted for a typically American white colour scheme that only a mother can love. Although developed specifically for the Passat R GT, VWoA has indicated that elements of the body kit may soon appear as part of the genuine Volkswagen parts portfolio.

The Touareg completes the set, with a similar conversion package applied to its V6 power plant to give it 500 bhp. Although the track tweaks were also made to its suspension and braking set up, the visuals were given more of an 'urban cruiser' treatment than a pure racer look. This time the studio went with a more classic silver finish (thankfully!), and added an Apple iPod and Sony PSP for fun. Not before seen in the US, the body kit used was supplied by VW Individual in Wolfsburg from their European product range.

VWoA has had all three R GTs on the track for testing, but has yet to release performance specs. At the time of writing, the Jetta and Passat were also being prepared to appear at the two New Year mainstream auto shows in LA and Detroit.

For VWoA, the R GTs are an opportunity to gauge reaction from the tuner market to their own ideas on how best to customise their new VW models. It would also be fair to describe the project as an attempt to lead the tuner market. Naturally, a manufacturer believes that it knows best how to tap into the potential of its products, and by dropping hints to the tuner market, it may succeed in steering the movement away from some of the nastier outcomes of do-it-yourself tinkering.

Alongside the R GTs, the Volkswagen stand at SEMA was also graced by a couple of more realistic customising projects, in the shape of a Passat 2.0T and a Jetta 2.0T, each adorned with a comprehensive array of 'Genuine Volkswagen Accessories', from body kits to sports suspension springs and interior add-ons. Fine, they may not have been quite in the R GT category but, for those of us who don't happen to have our own design studio to help us out on the styling mods, it's a start. 🇩🇪

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