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RANDY POBST
“FEELS QUICK AND REFINED UP TO 80 PERCENT, BUT STUMBLES INTO FUN-SAPPING TERMINAL UNDERSTEER AT THE LIMIT, WITH INSIDE WHEELSPIN AND EVEN SOME HOPPING AT THE FRONT.”

Volkswagen GTI



The Practical (Fun) One

Meet the obvious oddball. Although its 2.0-liter turbo sends power to the wrong set of wheels (as assistant road test editor Carlos Lago quipped), and it's a figurative brick in a group of rolling wedges, with enough seats for a family of five, the Volkswagen had to be included, mostly for two reasons. First, it met our pricing criteria, and second—and most important—it's a blast to drive.

As it is, the GTI stands 8.8 inches taller than the MX-5 and stretches 16.4 inches shorter than the Mustang. Its dimensions

make for an upright seating position in the adjustable buckets, which are covered in retro plaid. Some liked the seats; others, like our pro racer Pobst, wanted more cushion and lateral support. All-around visibility is excellent and only the Mazda with its top stowed offers fewer blind spots. The GTI's simple black interior contains all the key must-haves, plus a very stylish, thick-rimmed flat-bottom steering wheel that associate online editor Benson Kong labeled "bulky." The interior is attractive, no-nonsense, and, unique in this group, very practical.

Four passengers can ride along, with a relatively gigantic 15.2 cubic feet of gear in the cargo bay to hold all their stuff.

With 200 horses and a stout 207 lb-ft onboard, plus one of the smoothest dual-clutch gearboxes in the business, the GTI is the third quickest to 60 mph with a time of 6.1 seconds. The distinct BRAAP! BRAAP! that accompanies every über-quick DSG upshift is hugely addicting, especially when tracing squiggly paths.

As the sole front-driver of the group, the GTI lacked the handling finesse of the others. It disliked being pushed hard



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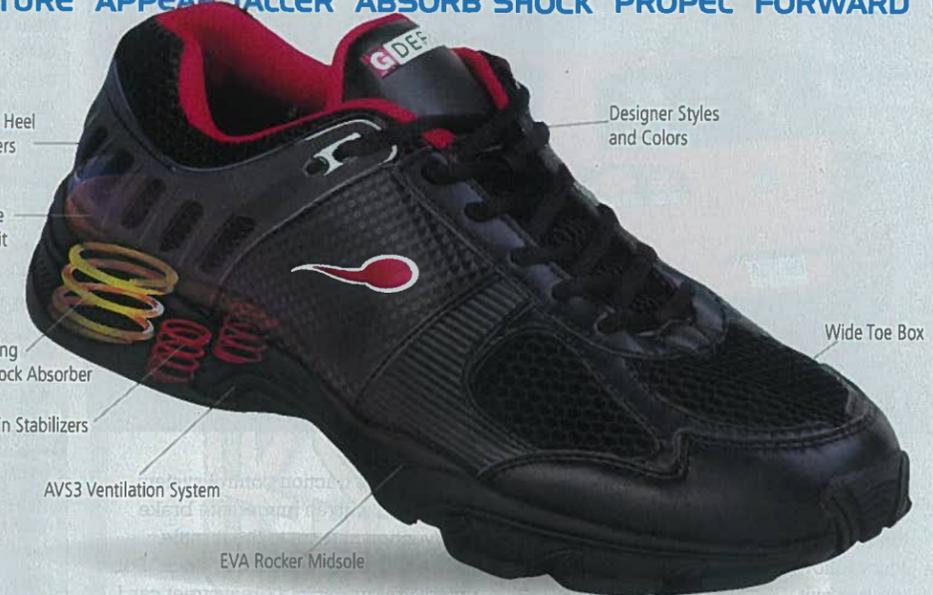
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CARLOS LAGO
“THE BEST GRAND TOURING CAR HERE. IT WOULD MAKE MANY PEOPLE HAPPY FOR LONG DISTANCES AND DAILY DRIVING.”



into corners and tended to plow, thanks to an unfavorable 62/38 front/rear weight distribution. It preferred a calmer, eased entry followed by an aggressive mash-the-gas exit.

Wrote Kiino: "It doesn't like to be pushed like the others. You have to be less aggressive, at least on turn-in. That said, the GTI is a fun, great car for launching out of exits. You can really feel the FWD pulling you out of turns. On more open corners, it feels really planted and has nicely weighted steering. And I really love the DSG in Sport mode with its intuitive downshifts."

On the Streets, the GTI drew praise as a great 8/10ths car. It performed best when not pressed to its physical limits. If thresholds were met or surpassed, an

undefeatable traction control system intervened with an immediate brake intervention and cut to the throttle.

"The GTI is not a track car, stock," Pobst noted. "It's probably a great street car. I could feel the refinement and sense of quality in the car on my warm-up lap. Up to about 80 percent or so, this is a really sweet car to drive. But as I started to push it more and get a little more speed out of it, it understeered heavily."

Track days notwithstanding, the Volkswagen remains an excellent, sporty ride on the street. Drivers who require that their car have more than a tinge of practicality need look no further than the GTI. But when performance is paramount, they'd be well advised to keep looking. ■ **Nate Martinez**

OUR EDITORS VOTED THE GTI FIFTH, BUT ON TRACK POBST HAD IT SIXTH. "THE HARDER I DROVE IT, THE WORSE I LIKED IT."



Volkswagen GTI

POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS	
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front engine, FWD
ENGINE TYPE	Turbocharged I-4, iron block/aluminum head
VALVETRAIN	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl
DISPLACEMENT	121.1 cu in/1984 cc
COMPRESSION RATIO	9.6:1
POWER (SAE NET)	200 hp @ 5100 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	207 lb-ft @ 1800 rpm
REDLINE	6000 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	15.5 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	6-speed twin-cl auto
AXLE/FINAL-DRIVE RATIO	4.06:1 (1-4) 3.14:1 (5-6, R)/2.89:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	16.4:1
TURNS LOCK-TO-LOCK	3.0
BRAKES, F;R	12.3-in vented disc; 10.7-in solid disc, ABS
WHEELS	7.5 x 18 in, cast aluminum
TIRES	225/40R18 92H M+S Dunlop SP Sport 01 A/S
DIMENSIONS	
WHEELBASE	101.5 in
TRACK, F/R	60.4/59.7 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	165.9 x 70.0 x 57.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE	35.8 ft
CURB WEIGHT	3107 lb
WEIGHT DIST, F/R	62/38%
SEATING CAPACITY	5
HEADROOM, F/R	39.3/38.5 in
LEGROOM, F/R	41.2/35.5 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	54.7/53.6 in
CARGO VOLUME	15.2 cu ft
TEST DATA	
ACCELERATION TO MPH	
0-30	2.5 sec
0-40	3.4
0-50	4.6
0-60	6.1
0-70	7.9
0-80	10.1
0-90	12.8
0-100	16.2
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	3.0
QUARTER MILE	14.7 sec @ 95.8 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	124 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.87 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	26.3 sec @ 0.67 g (avg)
1.8-MI ROAD COURSE LAP	91.47 sec
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	2400 rpm
CONSUMER INFO	
BASE PRICE	\$24,765
PRICE AS TESTED	\$29,715
STABILITY/TRACTION CONTROL	Yes/yes
AIRBAGS	Dual front, front side, f/r curtain
BASIC WARRANTY	3 yrs/36,000 mi
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	5 yrs/60,000 mi
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	3 yrs/36,000 mi
FUEL CAPACITY	14.5 gal
EPA CITY/HWY ECON	24/33 mpg
ENERGY CONS, CITY/HWY	140/102 kW-hrs/100 mi
CO2 EMISSIONS	0.71 lb/mi
MT FUEL ECONOMY	20.2 mpg
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded premium



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04

RANDY POBST

“SURPRISINGLY BALANCED AND POWERFUL, WITH A LITTLE TOO MUCH SHIMMY SHUDDER IN THE CHASSIS AND NUMBNESS AT THE HELM.”

Ford Mustang V-6



Cheeseburger in paradise

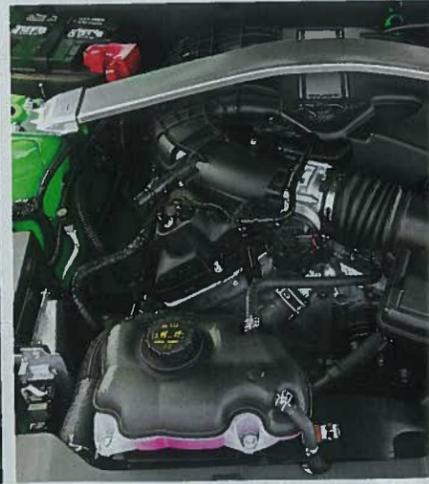
➤ Naturally, the sole Yankee in the group (we tried to secure a 312-hp Camaro V-6, but Chevy claimed not to have one in fleet) came into this fight carrying the most pounds—3511, to be exact—proving once again that America is a chubby nation. But old Red, White, and Blue can also be a fast and agile state, and despite its corpulence, the Mustang showed that it could accelerate, turn, and stop quicker than any car here. Take a gander at the spec sheet. With 0-60 mph in 5.3 seconds, quarter mile in 13.9

seconds at 100.1 (the only car to go under 14 and over 100), figure eight in 25.4 seconds, and 60-0 in 110 feet, the Mustang outperforms in every major objective test.

How'd it do that? Power, and a lot of it. With the group's only V-6, a 3.7-liter 24-valver, the Mustang puts out a lofty 305 hp and 280 lb-ft, or 138 more horses and twice the torque compared with the Miata. But equally vital to its objective dominance were the Mustang's super-sticky Pirelli summer tires, part of the optional \$1995 Performance Package that also adds a 3.31 rear axle and

handsome 19-inch alloys. "Undoubtedly, this Mustang is a highly capable car—thank you, Pirelli," said Lago. Pobst said after hot-lapping: "Big tire advantage. The tires have a ton of grip. They feel like the slicks I run in the Pirelli World Challenge [racing series] on my K-Pax Volvo."

But while the tires and engine make a nice performance pair, the chassis doesn't quite relay their magic, and that's the biggest difference between the Mustang and the podium placers. Associate online editor Nate Martinez: "When spurring the Mustang, you end up waiting for your



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Inspired Performance

04

RORY JURNECKA
“PRACTICAL AND FUN. IF YOU CAN'T HANDLE SOMETHING SMALL LIKE THE FR-S, THIS MAKES A GREAT SPORT COUPE.”



commands to be translated into actions. There's just a ton of roll. And against the likes of BRZ, FR-S, and Miata, it feels less engaging and, ultimately, fat."

Associate editor Rory Jurnecka points out what still makes the Mustang a satisfying ponycar. "It's a different type of experience than the Subaru—not very precise or nimble—but it is fun to hammer and slide it around the course."

The next-generation Mustang, due in a couple years, is rumored to be a lot lighter than this car. We hope that rumor

becomes reality. We also hope Ford's icon finally loses its solid rear axle, as an independent setup would make the Mustang a more rewarding tool when exploring those last few tenths. With this current iteration, we experienced too many rear-end hops, skips, and bounces on the track and through the canyons.

Pobst sums up the Mustang this way: "In terms of this group of cars, the Mustang is fast and numb."

We love fast cars, but love them less when they're numb. ■ **Ron Kilno**

OUR PREMIUM-PACK V-6 COST \$30,830, BUT HAD SUPERFLUOUS ITEMS. BEST BANG FOR THE BUCK? \$22,995 V-6 BASE + \$1995 PERF PACK = \$24,990.



Ford Mustang V-6

POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS	
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front engine, RWD
ENGINE TYPE	60-deg V-6, aluminum block/heads
VALVETRAIN	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl
DISPLACEMENT	227.4 cu in/3726 cc
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.5:1
POWER (SAE NET)	305 hp @ 6500 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	280 lb-ft @ 4250 rpm
REDLINE	6850 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	11.5 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual
AXLE/FINAL-DRIVE RATIO	3.31:1/2.32:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; live axle, coil springs, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	15.7:1
TURNS LOCK-TO-LOCK	2.7
BRAKES, F;R	12.4-in vented disc; 11.8-in vented disc, ABS
WHEELS	8.5 x 19-in, cast aluminum
TIRES	255/40ZR19 Pirelli PZero
DIMENSIONS	
WHEELBASE	107.1 in
TRACK, F/R	62.3/62.9 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	188.5 x 73.9 x 55.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE	33.4 ft
CURB WEIGHT	3511 lb
WEIGHT DIST, F/R	54/46%
SEATING CAPACITY	4
HEADROOM, F/R	38.5/34.7 in
LEGROOM, F/R	42.4/29.8 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	55.3/47.8 in
CARGO VOLUME	13.4 cu ft
TEST DATA	
ACCELERATION TO MPH	
0-30	1.9 sec
0-40	3.0
0-50	4.0
0-60	5.3
0-70	7.0
0-80	8.9
0-90	11.1
0-100	13.9
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	2.6
QUARTER MILE	13.9 sec @ 100.1 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	110 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.95 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	25.4 sec @ 0.70 g (avg)
1.8-MI ROAD COURSE LAP	89.09 sec
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1750 rpm
CONSUMER INFO	
BASE PRICE	\$22,995
PRICE AS TESTED	\$30,830
STABILITY/TRACTION CONTROL	Yes/yes
AIRBAGS	Dual front, front side/head
BASIC WARRANTY	3 yrs/36,000 mi
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	5 yrs/60,000 mi
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	5 yrs/60,000 mi
FUEL CAPACITY	16.0 gal
EPA CITY/HWY ECON	19/29 mpg
ENERGY CONS, CITY/HWY	177/116 kW-hrs/100 mi
CO2 EMISSIONS	0.86 lb/mi
MT FUEL ECONOMY	18.3 mpg
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded regular

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