

Driven



by ADAM TOWLER PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

Life110 Alpine A110

Alpine's A110 was already a brilliant driver's car. Now Life110 has made it even better

ANOTHER ALPINE. A MODIFIED ONE AT THAT. AND WE'VE MADE IT the lead Driven in this month's mag. You may be thinking, 'Bit of a thin month for Driven, chaps?' Not a bit of it. When you drive something as awesome as the Life110 there's no conversation to be had about relegating a 911 Targa to second place.

This 2018 Première Édition A110 is the property of Life110, a new company specialising in the tuning of the little French sports car that has valiantly attempted to reverse the trend for heavier, faster but less satisfying performance cars. That's something we adore the Alpine for,

yet we're not blind to its flaws. So good is the rest of the car that it's easy to look past them, to desire to own an A110 in spite of them, but there's something about the steering's disconnect with the road, and the sudden, wayward on-the-limit handling, that held the A110 back to second place at eCoty 2018. Last year's 'S' model brought not only an increase in performance, but also a firmer, more tied down feel, which although it slightly reduced the standard chassis' effortless feel over poor surfaces, did inspire a little more confidence, particularly through the steering.

All of which brings us to the Life110. What instantly makes it stand out is



that it's the brainchild of vehicle dynamics consultant David Pook, formerly head of vehicle dynamics at Jaguar Land Rover's SVO branch. Pook was responsible for how the Jaguar Project 8 drove, a car that in Touring form we adored at eCoty last autumn. With over 20 years' experience in chassis tuning, he clearly knows his castor from his elbow. He's clearly passionate about the little blue car even in the form it leaves the factory, but given his skills and, as he says, the excellent range of adjustment and inherent brilliance of the platform, he was unable to resist having a play.

The core of the Life10 offering is the changes to the suspension. When

investigating the standard geometry settings, Pook found that the car was running minimal negative camber. 'In a sports car these sort of values are nothing. In fact, they're less than what you'd run in a modern saloon car,' he notes. He also discovered that A110s leave the factory with plenty of front axle toe-in, and pronounced toe-out at the rear. 'I simply cannot explain these settings,' he says. 'Running those toe values makes the car wander on the motorway at speed and in crosswinds, but also makes it reluctant to turn away from the straight-ahead. Maybe they wanted to deliberately reduce the grip and capability of the car, or it's a legacy of their



history in setting up front-wheel-drive hot hatches. I just can't say.'

With this in mind, Pook's settings focus on improving the driver's sense of connection through the steering, enabling a more positive turn-in and increasing stability, particularly at high speeds and on track. There are three geo settings available. The first is intended for use with a completely standard A110, while settings two and three – a 'road' setting and a 'fast road/track' set-up respectively – are for using with the rest of Life110's chassis mods, and it's the last of the three we're driving here. This set-up is combined with bespoke progressive-rate lowering springs developed with Eibach UK, which also drop the ride height by 16mm. So configured, negative camber on the front and rear axles is greatly increased; the car now toes out slightly on the front,

and toe-out on the rear is maintained but reduced.

The Life110's wheels are the actual type used on the A110 Cup car. Getting hold of these isn't as easy as ringing up Evo Corse, the manufacturer, and handing over the cash: the Cup cars, along with Alpine's LMP2 programme, GT4 car and now rallying efforts, are all run by French team Signatech, the official motorsport partner of Alpine. Life110 has an exclusive deal to import these wheels into the UK and orders them from Signatech in batches. They're designed specifically for the A110 right down to accepting fitment of the centre caps, they're half an inch wider and, despite being stronger to withstand impacts on the track, are only 0.6kg heavier than the optional Fuchs forged road wheels.

Look closely at the Life110 and you'll spot another part directly from Signatech: the small carbonfibre

rear spoiler, another carry-over from the competition cars. 'It took some negotiating to get this part, and it's not cheap,' recounts Pook, 'but I looked into getting my own made in the UK and it was nearly as expensive, and this wing is engineered for strength and CFD-designed to work with the A110's underbody aero. It adds 50kg of downforce at 124mph; it really helps stability, particularly on trackdays.'

Settling into the familiar surroundings of an A110, muscle memory sees me thumb into manual mode, select Sport, drive to the end of the **evo** car park, turn out the gate and... have to correct my steering input. Ah. With just a tiny increase in resistance the nose of the Alpine zaps to the right and the whole car is there almost before my brain has registered it. It's an instant confirmation that this is a 110 like no other. You can immediately tell the set-up is



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firmer, imperfections in the road a constant yet gentle dialogue describing the surface underneath like automotive braille. Roll is notably reduced, but a rise in speed returns that familiar Alpine gait, a freedom of body movement like flowing down a road on an invisible cushion of air. Best of all there's no approximation any more to the initial phase of a corner, no sense that the rear may do something unexpected in extremis, and confidence levels soar.

There's one other key component of the Life110 package and that's a remap of the fizzy little 1.8-litre 'M5P' turbo engine by DMS Automotive. The upshot is an A110S-rivalling 296bhp, along with a sturdy, and S-trouncing, 280lb ft of torque – these are increases of 47bhp and 60lb ft over the standard car, or 8bhp and the same 60lb ft over the S. Pook and DMS have tried to recreate the factory engine characteristics

Above: Eibach springs drop the ride by 16mm; 18-inch Evo Corse Sport wheels are taken from the A110 Cup race car. **Top left:** carbonfibre rear spoiler, also from the Cup car, weighs just 365g but adds 50kg of downforce at 124mph

and not dump a load of low-down grunt at the chassis, while also protecting the gearbox. On the road, the difference is greater than the numbers suggest. Now, a squeeze of the throttle sees the Alpine explode onto each straight, while in tighter corners you can simply floor it on the exit and there's enough torque to gently wag the tail while ripping forwards. So satisfying, too, is the burst of energy towards the red line.

Combine this with the chassis revisions and the true potential of the A110 is realised, not just in terms of driver connection and rewards, but also simply

in raw cross-country pace. Make no mistake, the Life110 is a locked-on sidewinder on a B-road, and it's genuinely hard to think of anything that could get away from it – perhaps even keep up with it.

What does it cost? The springs are £480, the wheels £1655, spoiler £949 and remap £990, while the geo is a free download off the Life110 website. On top of a standard A110 Pure that's money extremely well spent, for it expertly and completely realises the potential of an already fabulous driver's car. **✘**

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1798cc, turbo **Power** 296bhp @ n/a rpm
Torque 280lb ft @ n/a rpm **Weight** c1100kg (c273bhp/ton)
0-62mph c4.4sec **Top speed** c161mph **Basic price** See text

+ Remedies the standard car's shortcomings for not much outlay
+ Have we mentioned there's no manual gearbox?

evo rating ★★★★★