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RGT

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FACTORY-TUNED
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**BENTLEY
CONTINENTAL GT**
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M POWER: DESERT ICE
MB QUART ROCKS BMW'S FAVORITE CHILD

**STEALTH
MODE:**
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RADAR DETECTORS
AND JAMMERS



PROJECT R GT

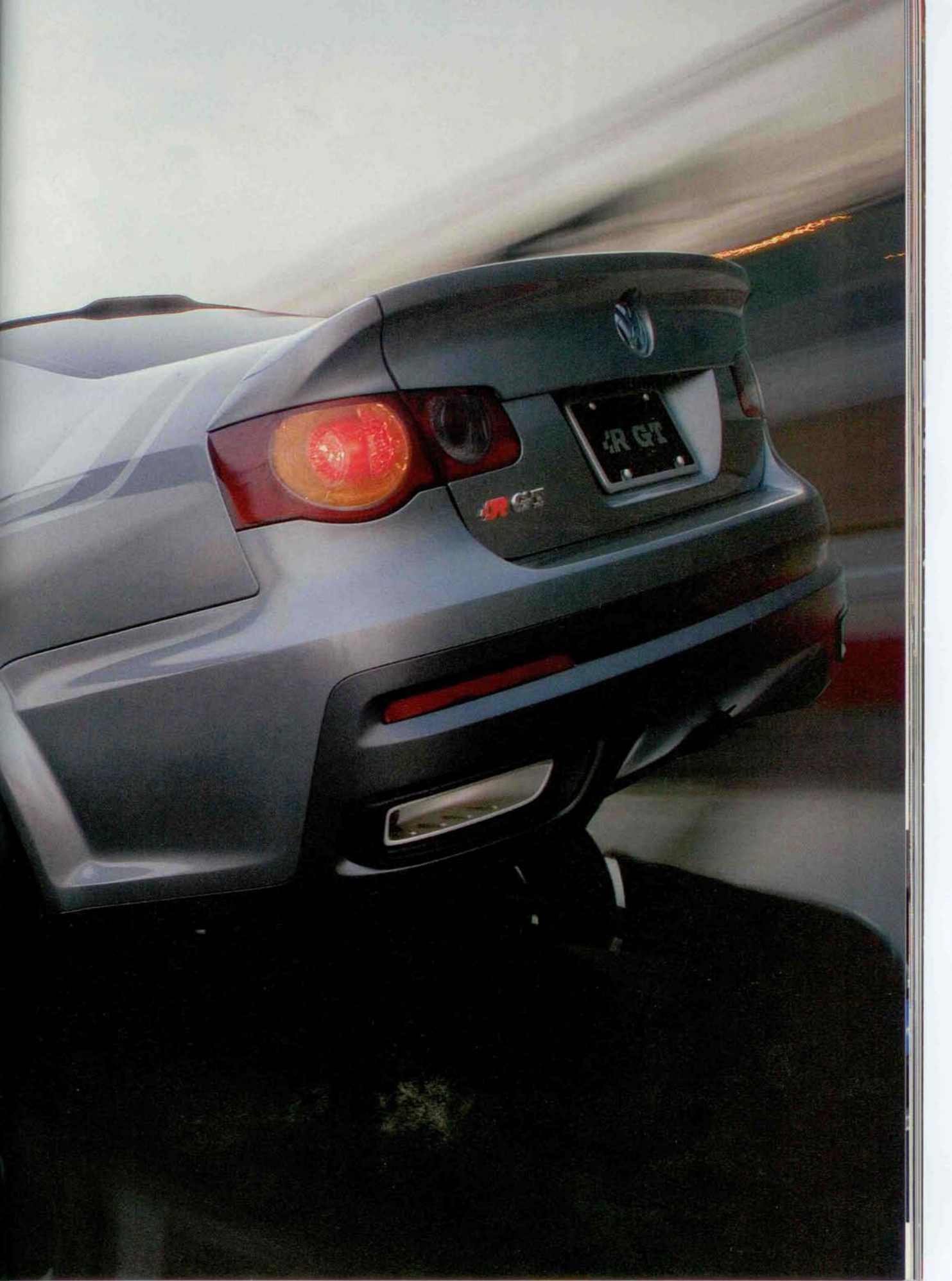
A TANTALIZING GLIMPSE INTO VW'S
PERFORMANCE FUTURE? OR JUST A TEASE?

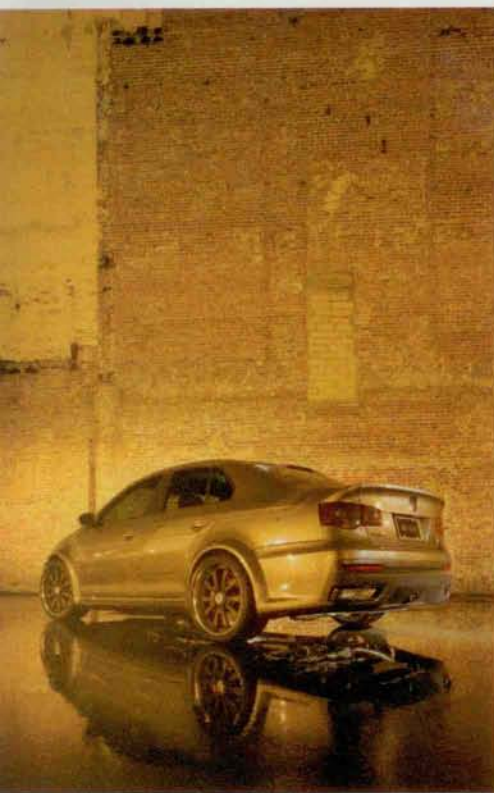
✦ by Andrew Walker
photography by Brian Konoske
and Les Bidrawn



SEMA, 2005: The baritone roar of 1000 horsepower reverberated throughout the hall, and the sweet stink of combusted race gas permeated the atmosphere. Surprisingly, this automotive *sturm und drang* came from a pair of Volkswagens, unlikely platforms, it would seem, for such unbridled exhibitions of ultra-high performance.

But it was VW's first official appearance at the world's most important showcase of aftermarket parts and accessories, and the company was determined to make a memorable impression. To showcase the potential contained within its production car technology, Volkswagen of America designed a truly astounding trio of ultra-high-performance project vehicles, dubbed Project R GT, and they turned the heads and opened the eyes of industry insiders with their skillful blends of style and performance. Combining the artistry of VW's California design studio under the direction of Derek Jenkins, a mix of VW's best passenger vehicle technology and the aftermarket wizardry of HPA Motorsports, the three project vehicles—Jetta R GT, Passat R GT and Touareg R GT—are beautiful and bold statements... but of what?





PROJECT R GT

Do they indicate a sincere step in an exciting new direction? Will we see a Passat 3.6 4MOTION DSG in America? Will the Jetta be offered with 4MOTION? How about an R36? Where do the twin turbos fit in? When can you buy a Touareg fitted with 21-inch wheels like you can in Europe?

Those questions and more remain to be answered. But we're heartened to see that VW is seriously studying the American market, and its hardcore enthusiasts, like never before. And we're thrilled to see VW preparing an offensive of new products that will, we believe, re-ignite the love affair that began with the GTI. There have been rough patches through the ensuing years, but VW's upcoming vehicles, new leadership and renewed respect for our peculiarly American motoring needs all point to a very exciting future. If product planning were up to us, of course, we'd see the R GTs and more in VW's American showrooms, and soon. For now, though, let's be content to savor the brilliant concept and execution of the Project R GT vehicles, but let's also congratulate Volkswagen for remembering and honoring the long association with U.S. driving enthusiasts that began with the GTI in 1983. May it thrive into the future.



ED'S NOTE:

Thirty-five years ago, a little magazine called *VW Greats* covered the burgeoning aircooled Volkswagen scene. The name was later changed to *VW & Porsche* and finally *European Car*. Obviously our roots with VW are deep. We consider VW family and have a sort of "unconditional but tough love" towards them. Like the VW enthusiasts, we have stuck by Volkswagen for better or worse, in sickness and in health and when their cars were good and not-so-good. That Volkswagen is recognizing its fans is a good thing. That they have come to SEMA packing heat is even better. It's our fervent hope that this is the start of a new era, a time when VW cars will once again symbolize the quintessential European hot rod. If you can't already tell, we're excited. Bearing that in mind, we were very concerned diving these cars. If something happened before their big debut, well, it would really suck. Therefore, if my diving impressions seem somewhat topical, it's because I drove gently, occasionally prodding the mid-to-upper limits, but it was mostly quite sane. The bumper is these cars were built to be hammered—we'll wait till after the show for that. We managed to get into all three cars, squeezing our time between shooting photos, talking with the designers and wrangling a cantankerous Madagascar scorpion (long story, don't ask).

The first thing you'll notice about this trio is their distinctive sound. It's akin to a sustained, rolling growl, much lower than a standard VR6. Select first gear, roll off the line and the fun

starts before 2300 rpm. If you equate "fun" with all hell breaking loose, this is your setup. Boost builds so rapidly it's easy to ping off the rev limiter in the first three gears. And unlike many aftermarket force-fed engines, the power is linear and unrelenting. If there's a curve in the

powerband, we could not feel it. We've been fans of the HGP twin-turbo systems since HPA brought one across the pond nearly two years ago. We'd always believed if VW was to do the same, this is the way it would be. According to Group Product Strategy Director Stephan Liske, Dr. Bernhard

(Volkswagen Brand Group Chief) was curious as to how the R32 would handle such newfound power. Obviously reliability and drivability were major concerns.

"Dr. Bernhard and I took a twin turbo R32 out for a quick spin," Liske recalled. "I figured we'd be back in 10-20 minutes at best. About four hours later, Dr. Bernhard was still at it. He was having a really





good time. I don't think he wanted to go back to the office."

Told ya it was good.

We'd like to think that Dr.

Bernhard's enthusiasm is indicative of where the company is heading (or at least a direction). When people who love to drive start calling the shots, good things tend to happen.

"We get so caught up with just selling cars that we forget to have fun with them," Liske said. "This whole project has been about enjoying what we build to the fullest. Yes, it's been challenging, but the entire team likes playing with cars, driving them hard. I think our hearts are in the right place."

Anyway, back to the drive. When we describe a car as "ripping through the gears" it's more of a figure of speech. However, in this case, these Volkswagens do indeed rip. Again, it's the sound that is so unusual, something akin to tearing a bolt of high-octane canvas (if there was such a thing). And carve this into memory: DSG is good. DSG is great. I will get the DSG transmission in my next car. We've said it before and we will say it again: DSG is better than a manually

shifted gearbox. You will be faster, smoother and more focused on the task at hand. Moreover, downshifts are punctuated by a pronounced "blaaaaat." That alone is worth at least half the admission price.

Our test track was Horse Thief Mile, a serpentine stretch of pavement above the big track at Willow Springs in Rosamond, Calif. The course was supposed to emulate a typical Euro-style road course, something like Nordschleife. However, its elevation changes and challenging corners were deemed too dangerous for public use, hence, it's sat there unused for several years. Parts of the track had been washed out while others were coated with a fine layer of silt.

Luckily, these VWs were equipped with 4MOTION drivelines, a system built specifically for this kind of environment. Although I was prepared for an Audi-like experience, these cars have a more visceral feel, more raw if you will. And unlike a standard R32, the propensity to oversteer seem greatly reduced. No, I did not throw these bad boys slideways at 100 mph but I've driven enough cars to quickly

shakedown their character. Ultimately, these Volkswagens offered a singular driving experience, a mixture of both the best front-hookers and the vaunted Sport Quattro of yore.

HPA's association with KW Suspension yielded underpinnings some 35%-40% firmer than the factory rates. Cornering on the Passat and Jetta is flat and precise and allows you to carry intense speeds. My approach was "fast in, apply brakes, slide a bit and power out." Not exactly the ideal method but given the huge power on tap, I looked like a star.

The Touareg required a different take as its weight came into play. Forty-two hundred pounds approaching a 90-degree corner at 80 mph caused some concern. I pretty much hit the binders full-tilt, made a complete stop, turned and gunned it. The brakes are impressive as the engine—both offer huge returns and are above mere mortals. Walter Rohrl needs to drive this car. He would know what to do. I'd bring four friends and take notes while they played the PSPs and scrolled through the integrated iPods.

Although each car made more than 400 bhp, the designers paid attention to unsprung weight.

"We contracted AVUS to build these forged wheels," said Abeng Halim, a senior VW designer. "They went from blanks to what you see now in less than three weeks. I'd like to put a set on my Eurovan."

As it turns out, Halim is a fellow Eurovan owner, and like me he fitted his car with larger wheels and performance rubber. Abeng went with 20s... what a wildman. Apparently, Eurovan owners are a fairly tight-knit group. During a recent VW-sponsored consumer clinic, 20 people were thrown into a room, all of them unaware of who the others were. The term "Eurovan" came up and bonds were instantly forged.

"These folks had no idea who the other people were and yet they had this unusual but strong bond. We find that interesting," Halim said.

As stated above, Volkswagen is something like family to us. Apparently we're not the only ones who feel this way. Let us hope the family album grows more exciting in the coming years.

VW JETTA RGT



This street-and-track special is a stunning example of transforming base metal into a precious alloy. Once it was a standard 2005 Jetta with 2.5-liter engine, six-speed automatic gearbox and front-wheel drive, but now that it's been blessed with a highly massaged 550-bhp, twin-turbocharged, European-spec R32 powertrain, modified twin-clutch DSG transmission and VW's 4MOTION all-wheel drive, all wrapped by aggressively contoured bodywork that looks at home on the street or track, it demanded a new badge. Inspired by the success of the R32, the RGT nomenclature stands for the ultimate expression of Volkswagen's core quality: fun to drive.

Chief designer Derek Jenkins said he wanted to bring European authenticity to the project, where each enhancement would be tied directly to a more involving, more dynamic driving experience, where "bling" would be used only in creation of a bigger bang. Painted a smoke gray with silver "ghost" graphics, the Jetta RGT was purposely subdued in hue, leaving it up to the car's forms to suggest its function. Screaming graphics or computer-generated riots of color would have been inappropriate to the RGT's spectacular technology. Even though it's far more aggressive looking with the new front and rear bumper fascias, side rocker panels, rear spoiler and muscular fender flares, the race-ready design speaks volumes about the car's capabilities without being shrill.



Jetta RGT crouches on huge 9.5x19 custom-built forged aluminum modular Avus wheels with DTM-style center locks, wrapped by 265/30-19 Michelin Pilot Sport 2 ultra-performance radials—and that's just in street trim. When the Jetta arrives at the track, the integrated AP Racing air jacks can be deployed to quickly mount race wheels and rubber: 9.5x19-inch. Avus DTM-spec center lockers and 265/30-18

Michelin Pilot Sport Cup competition radials. Continuing the theme of a car that bridges the gap between street and track, the team fit a KW three-way-adjustable FIA Competition race suspension and huge Brembo racing brakes. The fronts are comprised of WRC tarmac-spec, one-piece-billet, eight-piston calipers with 380x32mm rotors; the rears are four-piston calipers gripping 330x32mm rotors.

The completely redone interior was also designed for cruising or competition, though its four R32 Recaro race buckets, six-point integrated roll cage, Stack F1-style ST8600 digital display and Schroth Profi II ASM harnesses suggest where the car would feel most at home. Black leather, black Alcantara and matte carbon-fiber trim form handsome interior complements to the nondescript yet elegant grays of the car's exterior.

Despite the extensive modifications, the Jetta RGT was designed to operate just like a standard production Volkswagen. As HPA's Marcel Horn pointed out, VW's narrow-angle V6 is an excellent and robust basis for performance tuning, and even when tuned to the extreme is a comfortable everyday runner as well as a



formidable weekend warrior. In the Jetta RGT, the engine has been modified with dual Garrett GT25R ball-bearing-based turbos, which feature proprietary HGP integrated exhaust manifolds and turbine housings. The fuel system was upgraded to slake the system's thirst for 100-octane gasoline, and though little needed to be done to





engine internals to accommodate the increased output (stronger conrod bearings were about it), much was done to optimize airflow and cooling, including a cast aluminum short runner intake manifold, dual 3.0-inch (70mm) ceramic-coated downpipes, dual air-to-air intercoolers and a quad bypass exhaust system that retains the stock catalytic

converters. Because the standard DSG transmission could not safely withstand the Jetta R GT's massive increase in torque (VW puts DSG's limits at 300 bhp and 350 Nm of torque), HPA worked closely with Volkswagen's engineers to develop a one-off gearbox that allows all the engine's power to reach the four wheels. It was also tuned for length-

ened gears and sportier shifts.

Marcel Horn says the Jetta R GT should be able to reach 60 mph from a dead stop in less than four seconds. Aided by 4MOTION traction and rapid-fire shifts from the DSG gearbox, it is a singular experience. The best analogy would be that of a Touring Car with the most world's nicest cockpit.





VW PASSAT RGT

What if VW wanted to build an M5 beater? What if VW wanted to embarrass Audi and its RS6? They couldn't do much better than offer us the Passat R GT, which elevates the concept of a VW Q-ship to its ultimate expression. With its 575-bhp twin-turbocharged powerplant, 4MOTION drivetrain and DSG gearbox, Passat R GT would undoubtedly command top status on the *autobahn*, but its exquisitely formed bodywork would also draw admiring looks in the world's toniest neighborhoods.

Based on a European-spec 2006 Passat with 3.2-liter V6 FSI, DSG and 4MOTION, it now sports a twin-turbocharged 3.2-liter, non-FSI V6 and modified DSG gearbox. Cloaked with new front and rear bumper fascias, side rocker panels and a rear spoiler, again drawn and developed at VW's Southern California design studio, it was painted candy white and adorned with contrasting "ghost" graphics. The Passat R GT has a "sneaky fast" elegance, punctuated by the large front intakes and dual quad exhaust pipes that form the major cues to its supercar level of performance.

The Passat R GT sits on big 9x19-inch Avus forged aluminum-modular wheels mounted with Michelin Pilot Sport2 radials, size 245/30-19. A KW Variant 3 coilover suspension was used for its more street-oriented adjustability, and the brakes are a Brembo street performance system comprised of 365x34mm discs with eight-piston monoblock calipers up front and 365x22mm discs at the rear.

Inside is a sporty ambience created by contrasts of black leather upholstery and white piano lacquer trim. The latest electronics and earth-shaking stereophonics are complemented by dual white Apple iPods situated within the center armrest and dual white Sony PSP units integrated in the seatbacks. It all looks very production-ready, and we'd love to see at the very least the body kit available along with the upcoming Passat 3.6L. Oh, and please add 4MOTION and DSG while you're at it. We suppose the 575 bhp is too much to ask for, but how about a turbo 3.6?





VW PASSAT RGT

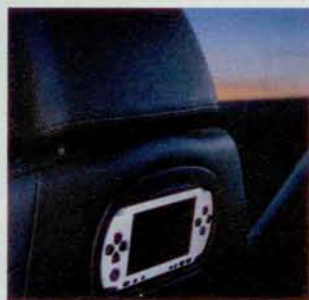
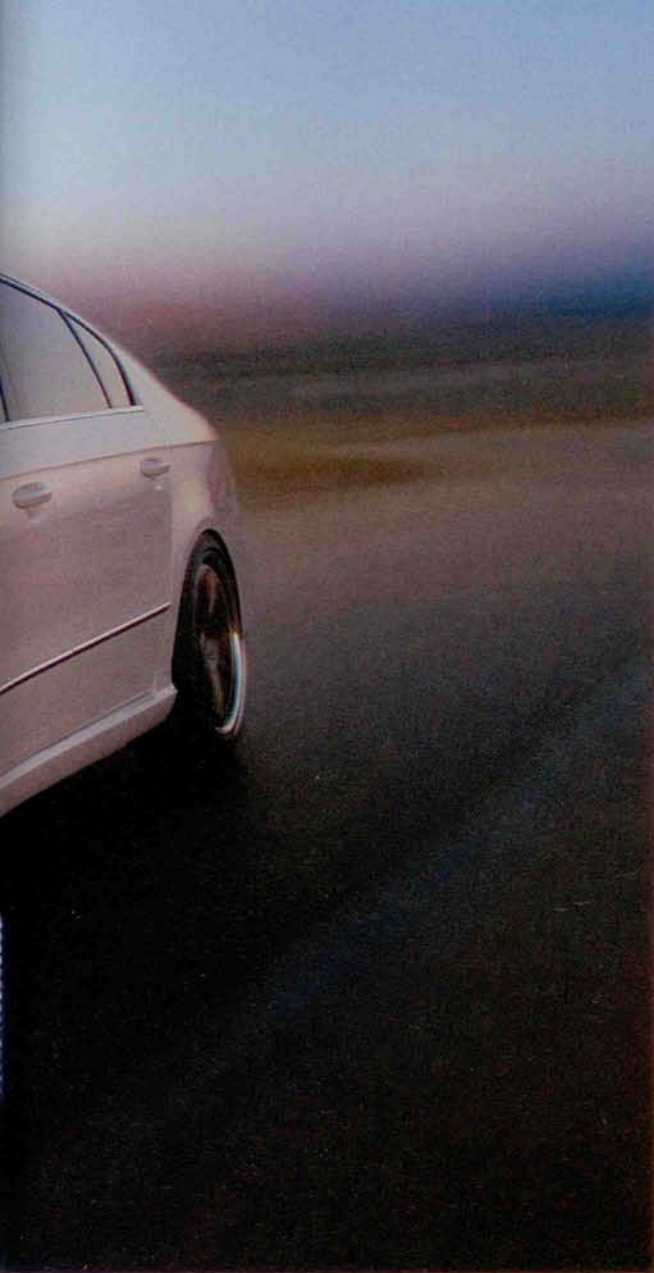
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VW TOUAREG R GT

It's difficult to call the Touareg R GT the "mildest" of the three project cars, considering it has a 500-bhp, 3.2-liter, twin-turbocharged MPI V6 under the hood, but it's the only one of the three R GT projects not to have been fashioned a bespoke body for the SEMA Show. This 2005 Touareg still looks especially stylish, however, due to its factory-offered Volkswagen Individual body kit, 10x22-inch custom-built forged aluminum monoblock Avus wheels and 295/30-22 Michelin Diamaris radials.

The interior sports a VW Individual W12 package with front sport buckets and black leather upholstery with suede centers. Bugatti spun aluminum trim, dual black Apple iPods in the cupholders, and dual black Sony PSPs in the seatbacks give it a distinctive, retro-modern touch. Schroth quick-fit harnesses were also fitted for added security during high-speed *autobahn* runs or track sessions. Yes, track sessions. We'd love to get the Touareg R GT on the track against the Porsche Cayenne Turbo and Jeep Cherokee SRT. The R GT's KW Variant 3 coilovers and Brembo performance brakes certainly would be up to the challenge.





Endgame

What will Project R GT mean after all the hoopla dies down? Do these vehicles represent empty dreams, or do they mark a turning point in Volkswagen's history? We are optimistic. The gulf between the factory's offerings and the desires of the American enthusiast may not have been bridged at this year's SEMA Show, but now at least we are speaking the same language to each other across that rapidly shrinking gap.

Finally, listen to the advice Derek Jenkins gave to an appreciative crowd. "Let VW know how you feel about these cars," he said. Scream loudly enough, he hinted, and bits of R GT will soon be showing up on the production line. So start screaming. ☘