

DRIVEN: JETTA R GT—VW'S 550HP CONCEPT

500HP: BMW 325i CONVERTIBLE TURBO

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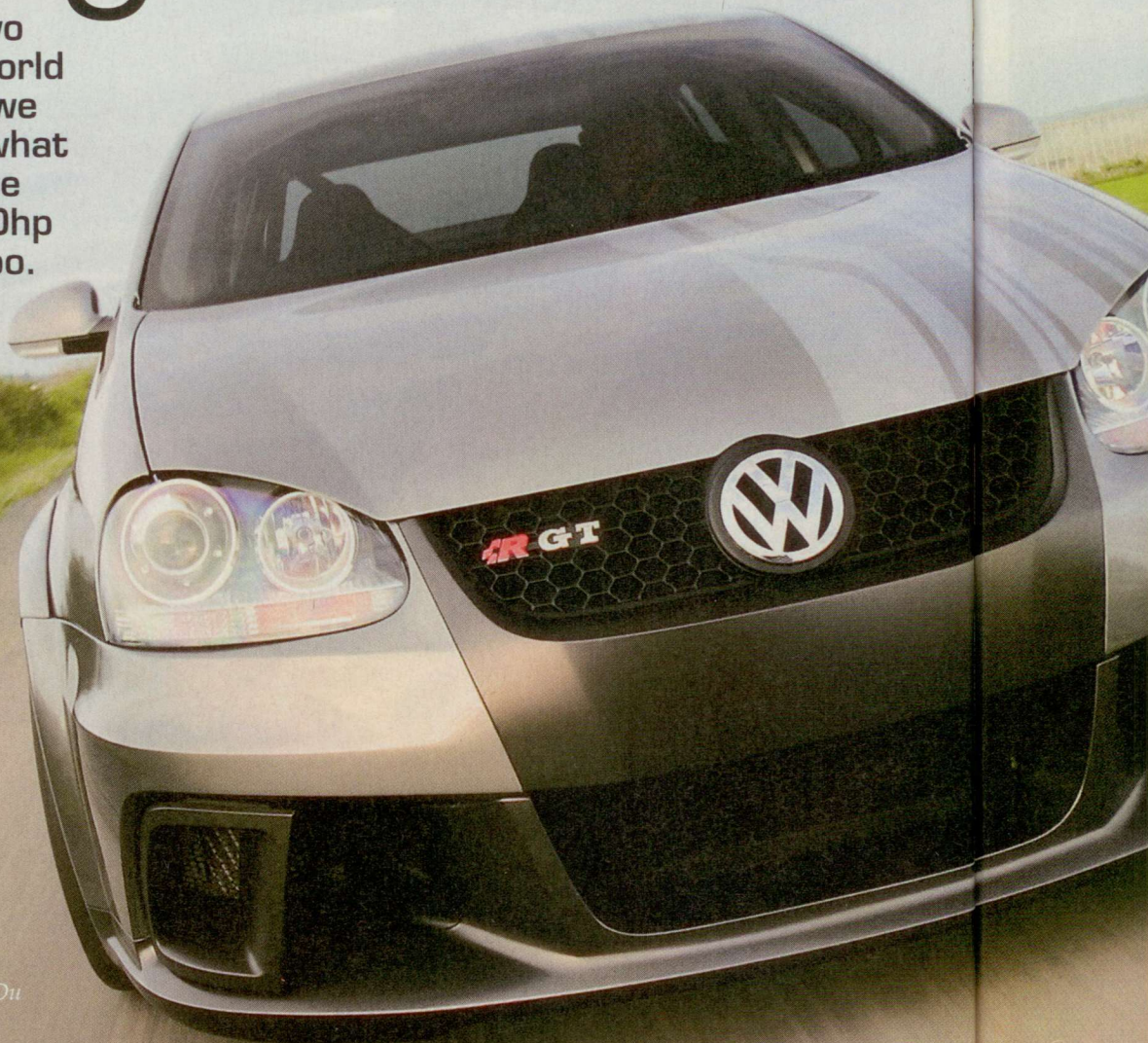
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# Driving the Jetta R

As one of only two magazines in the world to drive this car, we can finally tell you what it's like behind the wheel of VW's 550hp Jetta R GT bi-turbo.



Words: Greg Emmerson, Sam Du  
Photos: Sam Du

**P**erhaps more than any other magazine on the planet, we did our utmost to bring you the full story on VW's 2005 SEMA show cars. We announced their arrival, discussed their implications, talked to the designers and have finally been able to drive one of them.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment for all concerned in VW's first visit to SEMA was that its display cars weren't running prototypes. The short time available and ambitious specification meant the cars unveiled weren't fully operational.

Since then, HPA Motorsports, which was contracted to perform the mechanical work, has been beavering away in its Vancouver, Canada workshops to have them running. And we arrived the day before they were shipped to Germany to sit in a cold warehouse.

As you'll read in next month's issue, we

were visiting HPA's Mk5 R32 bi-turbo but it experienced technical problems when we arrived to photograph it, so permission was obtained from VW for us to drive the Jetta R GT.

In all honesty, this was the car we wanted to drive. Its widebody styling and 550hp powerplant made it a tantalizing prospect, so we strapped Sam into the driver's seat and sent him off to play. You can read his experiences below, but let's familiarize ourselves with the concept.

The plan was for VW to storm SEMA '05 with a trio of show-stoppers to get everybody talking. On that front we can report it was mission accomplished. The Jetta was our favorite because it was the boldest of the three cars; each had a 3.2 litre VR6 with HPA's twin-turbo system, four-wheel drive and DSG transmission. Externally the Touareg was based on an existing Votex body kit, the

Passat was a production-orientated styling exercise that spawned the Votex body kit we exclusively revealed in et 7/06. The Jetta, however, pulled no punches.

It was a widebody with aggressive spoilers and ducts that screamed performance. The Avus wheels were pushed out to each corner with huge Brembo brakes squeezed underneath. Inside, there were four individual Recaro seats and a rollcage. The car also featured air jacks at each corner and a fuel cell in the trunk since its designers had aspirations for it to be a weekend racer.

SEMA '05 was also the first time we'd seen the new ghost graphics that you can expect to see again on the GTIs at SEMA '06. Insiders tell us the cars won't be as radical as the Jetta R GT, so what you see here really is a unique piece of VW history.

So that was the hype, but could the car live

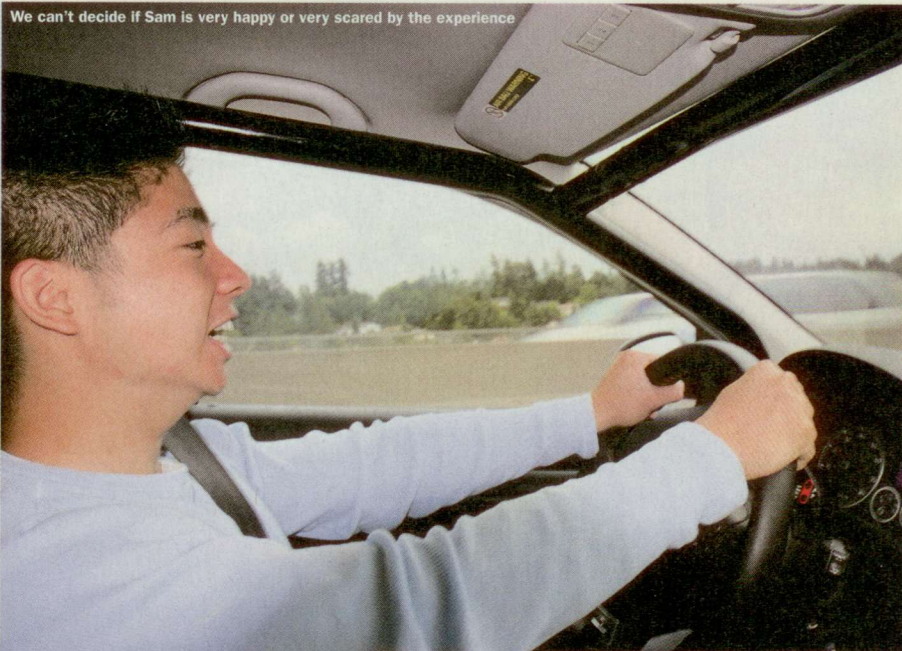
up to expectations now's the time and see if the

## Driving

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The advertisement in Surrey, BC The R GT seat installation

# R GT



(left) Stack display on steering column provides everything you need to know. Just as well 'cos the speedo and fuel gauge were not working!



up to expectations almost a year later? Well now's the time to read Sam's experiences and see if the legend is alive.

## Driving the Jetta R GT

I felt privileged to be one of the few individuals to strap on the Schroth harnesses, adjust the Recaros, slam the Brembo brakes and spool the twin-turbos of the Jetta R GT. The entire R GT lineup will soon be shipped to Germany where they will remain historic masterpieces in the Volkswagen Autostadt in Wolfsburg. With that said, I had to take my opportunity to drive the Jetta R GT.

The adventure started at HPA headquarters in Surrey, BC on a cool Tuesday afternoon. The R GT sat outside the doors of the installation bay like a hungry dog waiting to

be fed. I eagerly climbed into the car with VW's Oliver Schmidt alongside. We were taking it to the photo shoot but would grab a test drive on the way.

He opted to drive first to demonstrate the car's capabilities and limitations before I took the wheel. Firing the ignition, a muffled roar erupted from the dual exhaust tips. After warming the car we planned our route to the British Columbia countryside.

Noticing the Jetta was low on fuel, we stopped at the nearest station for some good ol' Canadian 94 octane. This was a great opportunity to watch the fuel feed through the trunk into the fuel cell via a clear tube. We eventually reached eight gallons on the meter and fuel began spilling into the carbon fiber trunk. Evidently, the tank's never been filled, so we accidentally discovered its capacity.

I also didn't realize how low the R GT sat until we entered the station. The front bumper scraped slightly, but fortunately we didn't rip anything off the unique widebody kit.

We finally proceeded towards our destination. I was eager to finish my photos in order to drive the beast back home. After a couple of hours shooting the car, it was finally driving time. I leapt into the driver's seat, started up the motor and headed down the empty country road. The power of the car wasn't that impressive at first. It was easy to drive but wasn't blowing me away. The engine didn't even rev above 1500rpm because its gears wouldn't shift. Then Oliver reminded me about a feature of the DSG transmission and its 'Sport' mode. I put the car into 'S' and the motor immediately downshifted. I was somewhat startled by the automatic revving of the engine but regained my senses



Apparently a hot drink calmed the nerves. Can you imagine using one of these to run errands?

and opened the throttle from 25mph. The power came on and gears switched instantaneously as we climbed to 120mph.

The car felt incredibly fast and had no surging problems, lag or driveline issues. The country roads weren't exactly suited for high-speed runs, so I brushed the brakes and the car slowed abruptly even though I barely put pressure on the pedal. Before I knew it, we were back cruising at the posted speed limit.

The brakes were extremely sensitive and squeaked unless heavy pressure was applied. I also observed that the suspension was superb for cornering but too stiff for daily use. I was able to attack a few corners at high-speed and detected little body roll and no loss of traction. But for daily use the KW

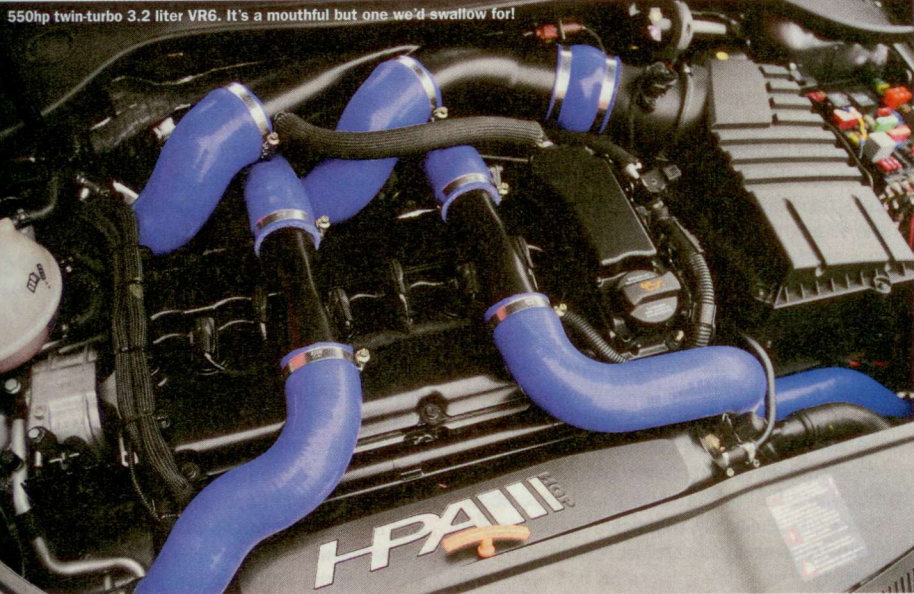
race suspension was too firm and I could feel every crack and ripple on the pavement. We need to remember that all concept cars are a compromise and aren't always expected to perform in this manner.

After 30 minutes driving the car had grown on me so I persuaded Oliver out for another session the next day. The following morning started with espresso from Starbucks and the locals gave us several odd looks as we parked. It appears they don't see widebody show cars every day!

After sating our coffee craving we drove to the industrial district where I snapped photos of the interior and engine. It was my first chance to drive the R GT on the freeway and the feeling was remarkable. The acceleration

felt strong and continuous from all speeds. I couldn't resist flooring the throttle and slamming the brakes because the car performed like a true racecar.

Eventually we made our way back to HPA and that's when we encountered our first problem. A police car was parked on the side of the road. I wasn't doing anything foolish but moments later we had his flashing lights in the mirrors. There was no shoulder or street to pull over, so I slowed and continued to drive to the next cross street. As I came to a halt and turned off the ignition, the officer bellowed instructions over the loudspeaker to place our hands on the windows. I looked over at Oliver and we were both pretty concerned with what might happen next.



550hp twin-turbo 3.2 liter VR6. It's a mouthful but one we'd swallow for!



Refuelling not so straightforward. To make space for the rear axle, the car now keeps the fuel cell in the trunk. Better not keep the groceries in there!



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At this point I wasn't sure if the car was actually legal to drive on the streets, but Oliver reassured me he'd handle it. Police backup arrived and we found three cop cars behind us with their strobes blinking. Officers approached either side of the R GT with hands resting on their holsters.

The first cop approached me. He told us we were evading him because we didn't pull over on the main road. They then continued to question the legality of the car.

That's when Oliver took over and explained in his German accent the story of the R GT. Thank goodness for that because the Canadian police were ready to lock us up. After 30 minutes of talking and background checks the police released us. They justified the stop because of the tinted windows. I wanted to document this encounter for the article and asked if it would be possible to take a photo. One of the officers gave me a nasty glare, suggested we stay in the car and proceed back to the HPA.

It's nice to know the police are so diligent wherever we travel. I was glad to escape a ticket but wish I could've captured the moment in a photo.

It's sad that we may never see the R GT again, but it'll go down in history as one of the finest VWs to grace the tuning scene. Thanks for the memories!

- Sam 



The Jetta R GT at speed - something that's never been seen before!



Sport Recaros in the front provide awesome posture

