



accepted norm of today: it's soft, has slow, unassisted steering and weedy 175/70 tyres, but what it loses in outright grip, it gains in feel. This is still a precision instrument and there's fun to be had exploiting its dynamic limitations. You can reach that place where the throttle becomes as important a directional tool as the steering while still travelling at sane speeds. And, of course, you can revel in its clear, faithful and fun reactions.

Only the brakes disappoint. Having driven these cars before, I'd expected them to be bad, but the 15 years since my last encounter had dulled the memory. By modern standards the stopping power is slight and the pedal feel abysmal: it is the only area in which the car feels its age.

Suitably enriched with the DNA of one of the 10 most important cars ever built, I swapped Golf for Lupo to see if the strands I believed I'd identified on that first Lupo encounter really were those of its distinguished ancestor.

The match was 100 percent. The principle of driving pleasure through light weight and precision has survived intact. Yes, the Lupo weighs the same as the Golf, thanks to special aluminium panels being used for its bonnet, doors and wheel arches, making it a featherweight in 21st-century terms. And this means less mass to accelerate, retard and change direction. Which means it will hit 60mph from rest in an excellent 7.7sec and reach an adequate 120mph.

Best of all, however – and this is where it is most redolent of the Golf – is the fact that it has no single star quality supported



**Golf's brakes the only downside**

by a merely able cast; the engine, chassis and steering are not merely superb in their own and individual rights, they also interact to provide an open road fluency that's rare in a front-drive hatchback of any price. The fact that all this is available for under £13,000 is near miraculous.

What is the significance of this? There are several factors and among the more obvious are that VW is building great driver's cars again – if you're looking for a cheap hot hatch and don't need the room, the search ends here. For me, however, its significance is rather greater.

It is a strange facet of this job that the more cars you drive, the fewer you want to own. You'll like some, respect and admire others but how many would you spend your own money on? If I test 100 new cars in 12 months, it's a vintage year if I actually want four of them. So far this year there have been just two. The BMW M3 was one and this Lupo is number two.

Off-hand, I can think of no more telling praise than that. ●



**Lupo's cabin contrasts starkly with Golf's; both functional, though**

**Factfile**

|                            | <b>VW Lupo GTi</b>                                     | <b>VW Golf GTi Mk1</b>                             |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| <b>How much?</b>           | £12,980  | £3890  |
| <b>On sale in UK</b>       | Now  | 1977-1984  |
| <b>How fast</b>            |  |  |
| <b>0-60mph</b>             | 7.7sec   | 8.3sec   |
| <b>Top speed</b>           | 120mph   | 112mph   |
| <b>How thirsty</b>         |  |  |
| <b>Urban</b>               | 28.2   | na   |
| <b>Extra urban</b>         | 53.3   | na   |
| <b>Combined</b>            | 0.4  | na   |
| <b>How big</b>             |  |  |
| <b>Length</b>              | 3527mm   | 3815mm   |
| <b>Width</b>               | 1822mm   | 1610mm   |
| <b>Height</b>              | 1460mm   | 1410mm   |
| <b>Wheelbase</b>           | 2323mm   | 2398mm   |
| <b>Weight</b>              | 975kg  | 975kg  |
| <b>Fuel tank</b>           | 34 litres  | 41 litres  |
| <b>Engine</b>              |  |  |
| <b>Layout</b>              | 4 cyls in line, 1598cc                                 | 4 cyls in line, 1781cc                             |
| <b>Max power</b>           | 125bhp at 6500rpm                                      | 112bhp at 5800rpm                                  |
| <b>Max torque</b>          | 112lb ft at 3000rpm                                    | 109lb ft at 3500rpm                                |
| <b>Specific output</b>     | 78bhp per litre  | 63bhp per litre                                    |
| <b>Power to weight</b>     | 128bhp per tonne                                       | 115bhp per tonne                                   |
| <b>Installation</b>        | Front, transverse, front-wheel drive                   | Front, transverse, front-wheel drive               |
| <b>Bore/stroke</b>         | 77/87mm  | 81/86mm  |
| <b>Made of</b>             | all aluminium  | iron block/alloy head                              |
| <b>Compression ratio</b>   | 11.5:1   | 10.0:1   |
| <b>Valve gear</b>          | 4 valves per cylinder, dohc                            | 2 valves per cylinder, sohc                        |
| <b>Ignition and fuel</b>   | Electronic ignition, multi-point fuel injection        | Breakerless ignition, mechanical fuel injection    |
| <b>Gearbox</b>             |  |  |
| <b>Type</b>                | 5-speed manual   | 5-speed manual                                     |
| <b>Ratios/mph per 1000</b> |  |  |
|                            | 1st 3.51/5.2   | 1st 3.5/5.3  |
|                            | 2nd 2.11/8.9   | 2nd 2.1/8.5  |
|                            | 3rd 1.44/12.7  | 3rd 1.4/12.6                                       |
|                            | 4th 1.08/20.6  | 4th 1.1/16.0                                       |
|                            | 5th 0.89/20.6  | 5th 0.9/19.9                                       |
| <b>Suspension</b>          |  |  |
| <b>Front</b>               | Struts, lower wishbones, coils, anti-roll bar          | Struts, coils, anti-roll bar                       |
| <b>Rear</b>                | Torsion beam axle, trailing arms, coils, anti-roll bar | Torsion beam axle, semi-trailing arms, coils       |
| <b>Steering</b>            | Power assisted rack and pinion, 2.8 turns lock to lock | Unassisted rack and pinion, 3.3 turns lock to lock |
| <b>Brakes</b>              |  |  |
| <b>Front</b>               | 256mm ventilated discs                                 | 239mm ventilated discs                             |
| <b>Rear</b>                | 232mm plain discs                                      | 180mm drums  |
| <b>Wheels and tyres</b>    |  |  |
| <b>Size</b>                | 6.5Jx15  | 5.5Jx13  |
| <b>Made of</b>             | Cast alloy   | Cast alloy   |
| <b>Tyres</b>               | 205/45 VR15  | 175/70 HR13  |

**Lupo's smaller capacity twin-cam beats the Golf on outright power**



THANKS TO TIM NOTTER AND THE GTI CLUB