

➤ VOLKSWAGEN R GTI



THE BEST GTI YOU'LL NEVER OWN

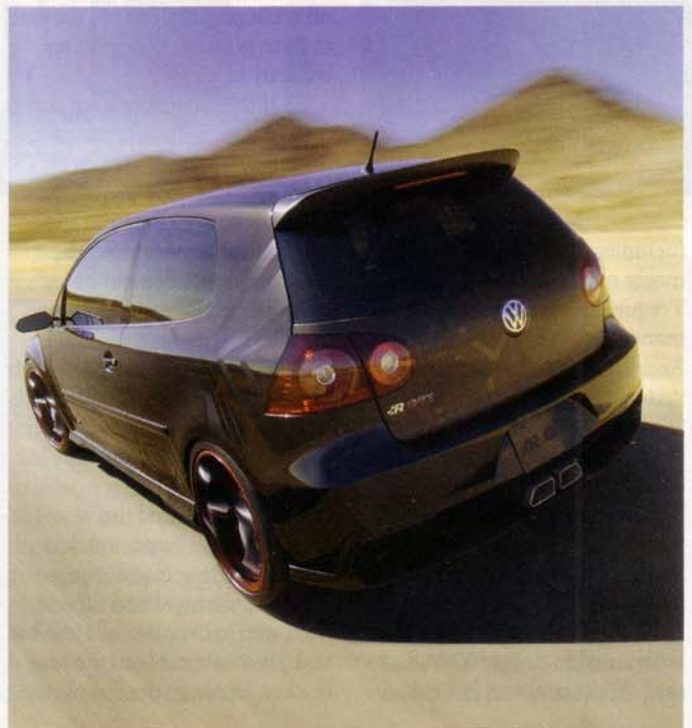
**VW'S R GTI SEMA SHOW CAR IS
SUPERB TO DRIVE, BUT YOU CAN'T**

**STORY BY MARK VAUGHN
PHOTOS BY BILL DELANEY**

➤➤ THE MAGNIFICENT R GTI is easily the nimblest and most fun-to-drive Volkswagen ever built. Volkswagen's Design Center California and APR of Auburn,

Alabama, lightened it up and added huge twists of horsepower and torque.

The weight loss came from a carbon fiber hood, front fenders, rear hatch and everything else except the roof, doors and rear quarter-panels. Lighter forged wheels and lighter suspension





➤ MORE PHOTOS OF THE R GTI AT AUTOWEEK.COM/SEMA

components combine with the carbon fiber to shave 150 pounds off the curb weight.

Add as much as 400 hp under the hood, thanks to an APR-installed Garrett turbo with twice the stock airflow, and you have a recipe for incredible performance. To get all that power to the ground, Derek Jenkins, of VW, added a Quaife limited-slip, widened the front track by 50 millimeters and installed meaty 265/30 Michelin Pilot Sport Cup tires on 19x9-inch rims.

Driving it is a delightful blend of pain and pleasure, mostly pleasure. The H&R RSS Club Sport coilovers were just as brutal as the set of prototype Club Sport Coilovers we experienced three years ago on an H&R Acura RSX Type-S ("Slammin' Speeder," May 19,



Looks great, and it's oh so much fun to drive, but the R GTI is not for sale.



2003). They bounce and crash over the slightest suggestion of a road ripple, but the payoff is cornering so quick you have to reset your internal steering computer to drive.

Lowering the car and cramming those big wheels and tires into the wheel wells without adding desert-racer fenders left little room for suspension travel, so the coilovers don't have much room to do their job. That

adds to the jarring ride quality. But the whole time we drove it, we never once felt or heard a tire scrape a fender. Try doing that with an average aftermarket setup.

The power? Hoo man, VW says 60 mph comes up in 4.8 seconds. While you do have to wait for the turbo just long enough after each shift to remember there is a turbo there, once it comes on, the car

launches smoothly and speedily.

Braking is even better, with 12.9-inch front discs stopping the R GTI from 60 mph in a respectable 116 feet, which isn't world record territory, but it felt much better than stopping with the stock brakes.

After our drive in the R GTI, we sped down a twisty road in designer Jenkins' own personal GTI for comparison. He had a set of H&R coilovers, but they were much more daily-driver oriented. Thus, his GTI understeered considerably more, and its braking response was noticeably longer; turn-in felt like a Buick freeway cruiser (but only in comparison to the R). Power was still good in the stock GTI but, *mein gotte*, you can't argue with 400 hp.

So what could possibly be wrong with this *fahrvergnügen* fantasy? You can't get it, for one thing. While VW has garnered much press for its Moonraker, you can't buy anything that VW has shown at SEMA yet. The only thing planned for retail availability is some of the body kit from last year's SEMA Passat, which should arrive soon. The R GTI and the rest amount to mere taunting.

VW says we can expect to see production versions of some cars inspired by its SEMA specials in two or four more years, but for now, it's just fantasy show cars like this one.

We'll take the abuse. Maybe VW knows that when it comes to such fantasies, we're just a bunch of happy masochists. 🍌