



# For the LOVE of cars



It has been a busy time for car launches, and *Sorted's* motoring correspondent, Tim Barnes-Clay, has been driving a selection of motors around Europe, ranging from new models to mid-cycle updates. Here's his pick of the crop.

## Audi R8 V10 Plus

The new Audi R8 V10 Plus sits at the pinnacle of a two-model outfit, supported up by a less heady 'standard' V10. The engine is shared with the unbridled Lamborghini Huracán churning out 602bhp. 0-62mph is done in a bullet-out-of-a-muzzle quick 3.2 seconds and you can press on to a top speed of 205mph. Gloriously insane? Of course.

A seven-speed S tronic gearbox is standard in all V10 models. The fast-shifting dual-clutch transmission features an ingenious launch control function that provides the best possible traction when the car flexes

its muscles and takes off.

During the car's media launch in the South of France, I experienced the might of the V10 Plus' output, first-hand. It momentarily thumps you back into your seat when the Audi's clout is unleashed via the Quattro all-wheel drive system. And the sound of the car is almost as seductive as its looks.

Even at moderate speed there's a deep, multilayered, glorious rumble. But hit the R8's 'Sports Exhaust' button and you get a gratifying crackling and popping on the downshifts. The growl is animalistic, and intensely satisfying for any petrolhead's ears.

A car's ability to accelerate quickly and reach a searing top speed is, inherently, considered necessary. However, it's the handling dynamics and talent to drive briskly through the bends, that make for a spine-tingling driving experience. And that's where the £134,500 R8 V10 Plus delivers.

The new Audi will turn your mind to marmalade on the straights and it'll make your liver quiver on B roads. But what it does best is go around corners quickly with the ultimate stability – and that, of course, is what every auto aficionado hungers for. →



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## Mini Clubman

The £24,455 Cooper S Auto is easily the most gratifying to drive out of the new Clubman range. At the Mini's media launch on the roads surrounding San Sebastian in northern Spain, the most powerful petrol drove go-kart-like on the straights – just as a Mini should. It's a shame the slightly pulpy suspension can drizzle on your chips in the corners, with body roll kicking in if you enter the twisty bits too hard. But that can be forgiven, because the Cooper S generates more than enough pull to keep you cheery.

189bhp can be squeezed from the S' 2.0 litre turbocharged four-cylinder power unit, and with the eight-speed auto box, zero to 62mph in 7.1 seconds is easily achievable. Top speed is 142mph. Even though these figures might make the car sound ravenous for fuel – it's not. With the superb automatic gearbox you can officially get an average of 48.7mpg out of the Clubman – and the CO2 emissions are 134g/km, meaning

road tax is a trifling £130 per annum.

The state-of-the-art 2015 Mini Clubman is a gargantuan step up from its forerunner, and it puts right pretty much everything that was awry. The Clubman now has

more doors, better space, good looks, and it really is exciting to drive. The Cooper S version is especially guaranteed to bring a grin to the face of anyone who slips behind its wheel.



**“THE 18-INCH ALLOYS APPEARED SATISFYINGLY SIZEABLE AGAINST ITS MEDIUM-SIZED, MUSCULAR BODY.”**



## Peugeot 308 GTi

Everything about the new £26,555 Peugeot 308 GTi is so electrifying – right from the minuscule, sporty steering wheel to the grip the car has around corners. I really feel Peugeot is back on track with its contribution to the hot-hatch market.

My test car looked superb cloaked in a metallic 'Magnetic Blue' paintjob, combined with dark leather effect and Alcantara sports

seats. The 18-inch alloys appeared satisfyingly sizeable against its medium-sized, muscular body, and its double chrome tailpipes looked 'the dog's'.

On starting the engine, the 1.6-litre turbo petrol lump, pinched from the RCZ-R sports coupé, has a willingness to rev, and once you engage first gear and take off, you know this car is not your usual motor. For a start, the gearshifts feel precise and jaunty, and the motor is

eager – it's like a hound straining at its lead until it can find an open stretch. Then, when you do find a suitable uncluttered bit of road, you can set the 308 GTi free. That's when it sits back on its haunches for a moment before launching into a scorching attack on the asphalt. The 248bhp is certainly apparent and 0-62 mph arrives in just 6.2 seconds, climbing where legal (German autobahns calling?) to 155mph. →

## BMW X1

Driving the all-new BMW X1 at launch in Spain, it quickly became apparent how capable the compact sport utility vehicle (SUV) is.

On the inside, it strikes a balance between driver focus and practical elegance. The flat surfaces of the instrument panel and centre console controls are angled towards you, helping you to concentrate on the driving experience.

The rear seat bench comes with a split/folding backrest and the boot is big enough to swallow a washing machine. There are loads of convenient touches, too. For example, the car can hold a one-litre water bottle in each of the four doors. There are also tie down points and nets peppered around the cabin – and all cars come with an automatic hatchback.

Behind the wheel, the xDrive versions offer loads of grip. The steering is exact and there's little lean noticeable, even when negotiating sweeping bends. I drove



X1s fitted with a manual and an automatic gearbox, but auto is best if you're looking for a relaxing drive to work, or if you're on the school run with, say, three kids in the back.

The 20d is expected to be the

most popular X1. This version will sprint from 0-62mph in 7.6 seconds and will do 57.6mpg, while emitting only 128g/k of CO<sub>2</sub>. The new BMW X1 went on sale in the UK in October 2015, priced from £26,780.

**“ALONG WITH ITS CLASSY IMAGE, IT WILL SERVE ANY SENIOR MANAGER WHO ‘LIVES ON THE ROAD’ EXTREMELY WELL INDEED.”**



## Audi A4 Saloon

Compared with the previous model, the new Audi A4's dimensions have grown, but its weight has been reduced significantly.

The A4 is a leader in its segment also in terms of noise levels. There is generous space and the smooth lines emphasise the width of the interior, too.

I drove the new A4 3.0 TDI Saloon model, and the way it handles shows

it has made a great leap forward. The suspension and steering filter out disturbances, such as an uneven road surface, but communicate important information such as increases in lateral forces and tracking. This performance is based on the redeveloped five-link axles and the electromechanical power steering. They lay the foundation for the dynamic handling and first-class ride comfort while also reducing fuel consumption.

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on the 3.0 TDI are only 134g/km, and even though 0-62mph is completed in a rapid 5.3 secs and top speed is 155mph, an average of up to 55.4mpg can still be teased from the tank. This means the all-new Audi A4 is made for mile-munching and so, along with its classy image, it will serve any senior manager who 'lives on the road' extremely well indeed.

You can expect to fork out £38,950 for a 3.0 TDI 272PS Quattro S-tronic.

## Honda Civic Type R

We have waited five years, but it's been worth it because the fresh Honda Civic Type R has set new standards in the high-performance front-wheel drive hatchback segment.

The 0-62mph run is covered in just 5.7 seconds – making it the

fastest accelerating performance front-wheel drive hatchback – and top speed is a class-leading 167 mph.

The styling changes that are unique to the Civic Type R give the car an aggressive, purposeful stance, and it also has a new '+R' button that increases the response of various chassis and drivetrain

systems. This means the behaviour of the car is firmer and more agile for high-performance handling.

The result is an even more intense driving experience, ideal for the track and sure to be appreciated if you're a genuine hot-hatch enthusiast. The Type R is on sale now with a price-tag starting from £29,995.



## Toyota Avensis Saloon

Not so long ago, the Avensis looked bland and, more often than not, had a 'minicab for hire' sign glowing from its roof – but now the latest model is handsome enough for people to stop and ask what it is.

I had this happen a couple of times with the mid-range £23,155 2.0 D-4D Business Edition saloon I had on test. In fact, one guy asked if it was a Lexus. "Not far off," I said. He was amazed the car was a Toyota. All

this is because the car has been given new styling, more equipment and cleaner engines to further appeal to business users.

On the road, the 2015 Avensis is one of the best commuting machines out there. It glides over bumps and eats up motorway miles without any effort at all. The Toyota is no slowcoach either, possessing a 0-62mph time of 9.5 seconds and a top speed of 124mph. The dials and switches on the dash and on the steering wheel are very

clear and simple to use, and the six-speed manual gearbox which was fitted to my demo model is smooth and a doddle to operate.

The seating position is high, but comfort is top-notch, helped by an exceptionally effective electric lumbar support system. OK, the featherweight steering can be a little less than successful at communicating what's going on beneath the wheels, but it makes driving easy – especially when weaving through traffic or parking. →

**"IT GLIDES OVER BUMPS AND EATS UP MOTORWAY MILES WITHOUT ANY EFFORT AT ALL."**



## Updated Subaru XV

Subaru continues to pull its weight in many areas – particularly in the SUV and crossover segments.

My £26,995 diesel-powered XV 2.0 SE Premium demo car came with Subaru's six-speed manual transmission. The gear change is smooth and accurate, although the clutch is a bit heavy. The car stands out by benefiting from permanent all-wheel drive as standard. It also boasts the highest ground clearance and is among the lightest vehicles in its class, aiding its genuine off-road ability, while a low centre of gravity enhances on-road handling.

Recently, changes to the XV's suspension have resulted in a smoother, more compliant ride, but without sacrificing any of the stability that the model is renowned for. 0-62mph is achieved in a decent 9.3 seconds and top speed is 123mph.

However, among the most important improvements is a revised cabin, which now features better-quality materials and an all-new touchscreen infotainment and navigation system. The 7.0-inch touchscreen display allows smart phone-style control, with a swipe and pinch function for map displays.

A decent electronic power steering system helps the drive by giving good stability and feel. There's a nice weight about the steering, too, giving you the confidence to manoeuvre swiftly and precisely.

## Mercedes-Benz CLA-Class Shooting Brake

The Mercedes-Benz CLA-Class Shooting Brake's exterior's progressive appearance is reflected inside. On the 220 CDI Sport model I drove, all trim surfaces are galvanised in silver shadow, resulting in a cool-to-the-touch metallic finish. The instrument panel incorporates five large round vents and there's a prominent free-standing display screen that features a black piano lacquer-look front panel with a flush-fitting silver frame.

In the back, the seats are cramped for adults and not even the best fit for two child seats, but my nine and six-year-old coped without too much squabbling. On the plus side: the load space is good for this type of car.

On the road, the CLA 220's turbocharged four-cylinder diesel engine astounds for most situations. 0-62mph arrives in 8.3 seconds and the maximum speed is 142mph. The car has superb grip when pushed through corners and its seven-speed automatic transmission soars and drops excellently under pressure. Especially noteworthy is the



Mercedes' direct steer system, which offers detailed feedback in comparison to conventional power steering.

Safety hasn't been passed over, either, with numerous driving assistance systems offering support and reducing your workload behind

the wheel. Standard-fit features including sleepiness detection and radar-based collision prevention assist with adaptive brake assist, which helps to protect you from impacts from a speed of only 4mph. This model tested is priced from £30,625. ■

Tim is an experienced motoring writer with a background in radio and TV journalism. He puts his pedal to the metal each issue with his must-read car reviews. Visit [carwriteups.co.uk](http://carwriteups.co.uk).

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