

# Two Finns, and a German...Made in Japan

"Front wheel drive?" I chuckled when Tamiya launched the Honda Civic a couple of years ago. "Racing cars don't have front wheel drive. For a racing car," I insisted, "the horsepower goes to the rear wheels, or all four. Front wheel drive is for going to Sainsburys..." I really thought, and I was not alone, that perhaps Tamiya had gone too far in their quest for scale perfection.

Removal of the bodysell provided similar amusement. It looked a little...erm... ungainly, the motor was perched precariously over the front wheels, while the rear end looked like it was being dragged along for the ride. There's an old saying in motor racing circles: "If it looks right, it generally goes right." And to be honest, the rolling chassis looked wrong. So, had Tamiya dropped a clanger?

Well, no it hadn't. Not only did the legendary Tamiya marketing machine ensure that the car stayed in the public eye, but a special class for the new 'fronteers' in the '94 Eurocup encouraged many people to try it. Popularity of the front drive cars increased as the range grew; the Ford Mondeo, Nissan Primera, Renault Clio and Vauxhall Cavalier have all been added to the Civic to ensure that the front wheel drive range is a very popular introduction to the world of R/C racing.

## A VR6 for the masses

So, what's the latest front drive car to be reproduced in miniature? It's a Golf. Surprised? No need. The Volkswagen Golf is one of the most popular cars of all time, around 17 million have been built, and it's currently the best selling car in Europe. Throw in the fact that arch rivals Kyosho already make a Golf, and suddenly it all becomes clear. But this is no Golf caddy, it's the all singing, all dancing V6 powered flier, the VR6. But is the model as good as the real thing? Read on.

## This look's familiar?

Even though the car is only front wheel drive, an awful lot of it would be familiar to anyone who has come across a 4WD touring car. The specification even sounds familiar: double wishbone suspension all round, oil filled dampers at each corner, a nylon tub chassis and a ball differential. Indeed, a number of the components are shared with the 4WD range, the most notable of which is the chassis, but the dampers, uprights, steering, wheels, and diff are all common, and well proven, parts.

As with all Tamiya cars, assembly is carried out on a spoon-feeding basis, because of this I only suffered one or two problems - a couple of parts fell from my high-chair and I had to wait for my mum to pick them up, but assembly was greatly accelerated by warm milk and rusks... Though it must be said that the instructions are never patronising - a bit like baked beans. The only tiny frustration that could occur for the beginner is assembly of the thrust-rod for the diff, which has a set of very small, begging your pardon madam, balls. The thrust rod on the F-1 range is supplied assembled in a neat metal cage, so perhaps the same could be done for the tin-tops? Let's wait and see.

## Very interesting!!!!

As previously mentioned, the rolling chassis is a curious looking affair and with the different requirements of front drive, one major aspect of the car seems very strange - steering lock. Bearing in mind that the uprights and steering components are from the 4WD range, the available lock has been dramatically reduced; but with all that weight over the front wheels, the traditional 'CAT XLS' style of 90° lock would be a little O.T.T.

The Golf, like the Renault Clio Williams, has the shorter wheelbase chassis which improves the scale appearance but, more importantly, makes the car more nimble; so it should be a firm favourite with the Eurocupsters. As the Golf is supplied as a road car, it gets the traditional treaded road tyres which, sadly, have not been the most effective on the track from past experience - but obviously changing them for a "Hop-up-Option" part is no problem.

Now for that bit you've all been waiting for, the



# Tamiya Volkswagen Golf VR6

Reviewed by Steve Rouse



Does your Golf look this good?



traditional part of every Tamiya review. (Clear throat). The Golf is supplied with a standard 540 motor and a 3-step forward and reverse mechanical speed control. These two items have now reached legendary status, and there cannot be too many people who can claim never to have used either.

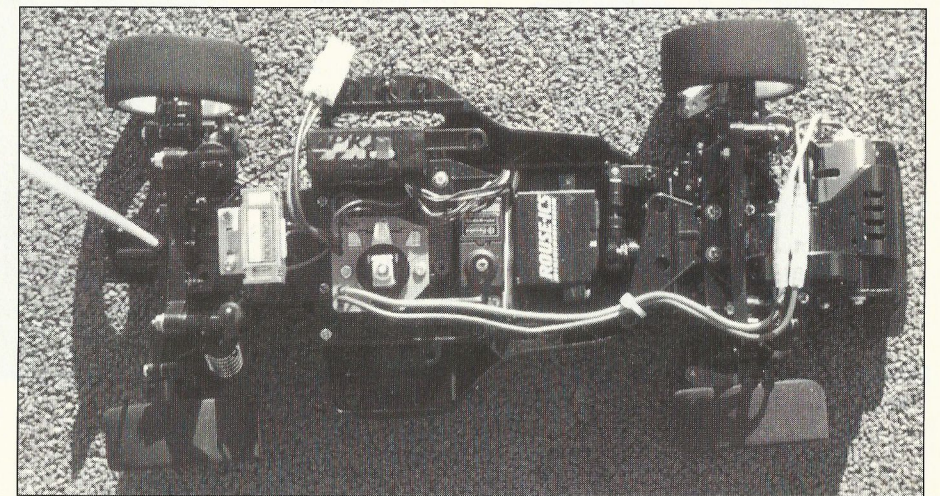
## Paint time...Rally style

Right then, the bodysell. Whereas the Clio body tends to lose the plot a little at the back, the Golf is perfectly proportioned throughout, and I reckon it looks great, but then again I own a real Golf, so I wouldn't say that, wouldn't I? The standard colour scheme is that of a road car but, pleasant enough though it is, I thought a more exciting livery would do the car more justice.

How about a rally car?

The colour scheme of the Golf you see here is the Sony/Colour Concept GTi 16v that was used on the RAC rally in November. Two Golfs are also entered in the Mobil 1/ Top Gear British Rally Championship this year in these colours and, with two 'Flying Finns' driving, they could win it. I must, at this point, say thanks to all at SBG Sport at Daventry - where the cars are prepared - for providing a car that I could crawl over with my camera. The stickers, incidentally, were made by ex-Eurocup star Neil Collins on his computer: these days Neil spends his Sundays recovering from Saturday night instead of racing, cheers Neil.

As has become the norm from Tamiya, the body is covered in protective film, and the masks for the windows are also included. This means that if you have a monotone livery, even the painting process is foolproof... oops, I've just dropped my rattle. Incredibly, the sticker sheet



has two sets of windscreen wipers, for left or right hand drive... And here's a comforting thought for all those who have ever screamed and gnashed their teeth because of air bubbles in the stickers: the front cover of the Golf instruction manual shows a car with some very prominent air bubbles - so don't worry.

## Drive Time

Driving the car really is a strange experience, my initial reaction was one of extreme surprise as the car disobeyed convention almost to the nth. degree. But, after a little thought, I realised that this is exactly how a full size Touring or Rally car would behave on the track. Let me explain.

If you charge into a corner a little wide with a rear or four wheel drive car, a quick stab of braking will tighten the line and tidy things up; but the same action with FWD results in an even wider line, and more lost time. This is because a FWD car brakes only on the front wheels, and doesn't have a handbrake to rescue it. The other big difference is in the event of a sideways moment; rear drive dictates that a slight lift off the power should bring the tail back into line. The opposite is true of FWD: keep the power on and it all goes straight again. Strange.

## A very familiar layout

## Track Test

The Golf was tested at Bedworth using two motors. At the B.R.C.A Touring car event a stock motor was installed and, in damp conditions with slick tyres, all of the FWD nuances were apparent. But, by the end of the day I was starting to get the hang of it and my performance became fairly respectable - compared with the other three cars present, that is. Then I was disqualified for having the wrong motor... £3 too expensive, aaarrrrggghhh... The real test was provided by a 14 turn motor, Tekin 411, K.O servo and SCRCs. Blimey, Its all a bit wild, but with a bit of discipline it can be rather fast, and my main problem was wheelspin from the rubber tyres. I have driven a Clio with foam tyres and a modified motor over the twists and turns of Stafford, and I was seriously impressed; so don't be afraid to experiment.

So there you have it; with a FWD you may not win all of the time, but it will teach you a whole new driving technique and it costs less than £100. So as Quentin Wilson would say on Top Gear, it's flash without the cash...

Many model shops will sell you a Golf, but not if you're wearing a paisley shirt.