



# 7000 Horsepower in Seven Days

Here at AutoSpeed we drive a vast range of cars - and nothing proves it more than our recent editorial trip to Sydney. Across seven days we pedalled 22 different vehicles having a total output of around 7000 horsepower! So what were some of these vehicles like to drive? Which ones left us cold and which ones blew us away? Well, we're gonna tell you...

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Driving everything from a Hyundai Getz to a Dodge Viper RT/10!

Words by Michael Knowling, Pix by Julian Edgar

### Furious Fours

The standout four-cylinder performers of our seven day drive-fest were sourced through MRT Performance and, not coincidentally, each one was tuned using EcuTeK software.

The car that really surprised us was a current MY06 Subaru WRX equipped with a relatively mild MRT power-up kit. Nothing particularly groundbreaking in terms of mods but, jeez, the result was brilliant. Forget typically laggy Subaru turbo engines, this engine had the punch of a late-model Saab or Audi at low revs and continued to make good power to around 7000 rpm. It was responsive, wonderfully flexible and damn fast in the cut-and-thrust of normal driving. A great example of effective turbo matching and an intelligent engine tune.

We also drove a tarmac-spec STi rally car that (aside from having a 'light switch' clutch that embarrassed us on a couple of occasions!) had tremendously useable performance. No, it wasn't as responsive as the MY06 WRX but we loved the way it just kept pouring on speed and the assurance that came from the well tuned Whiteline suspension and semi-slick tyres. It didn't take much imagination to see this car doing well in tarmac events.

On the other hand, a day earlier we'd driven the Whiteline-owned P25 project car and came away a bit disappointed. The suspension had firmer than usual springs that (even with the dampers set near their softest) gave an unsettled and harsh ride. And, curiously, the much-hyped 2.5-litre engine also failed to hit the mark. It seems likely the stop-and-photograph type driving conditions brought out the worst of the top-mount intercooler (aka heat-sink).

And then there were the Evo Lancers. Ahhh, the Evos...



We had the opportunity to drive two Evo 9s - one completely stock and another example equipped with subtle power up mods from MRT. Unfortunately, the stock car had less than 100km on the odometer but it became apparent that the engine (despite now having MIVEC) is pretty 'old school' in its torque delivery. But there's nothing old school about the handling! Even on a wet road, the E9's electronic AWD system lets you drive f-a-r beyond normal limits. In MRT-modified guise (with an EcuTeK reprogram and high-flow exhaust), the second E9 pulled strongly through the top-end and showed improved flexibility but, still, there wasn't much happening until the turbo was awake. This was also our first close-up look at the interesting Vortex Generators that are available as an option across the trailing edge of the Evo 9's roof.

Breaking up the WRX/STi and Evo Lancer monotony (gee, life's tough!) were a 'grey' Japanese import Toyota Caldina and a Holden Astra Turbo. The Caldina is another one of those Japanese market cars that you can't help wonder might've sold well in Australia.

Based on a Corolla flopan, the Caldina wagon packs a 3S-GTE turbo engine kicking out 190kW. Combine that with constant AWD and optional stability control and you've got a very practical vehicle that has the potential to run very fast very safely. The stability control does a great job reducing understeer when pushed hard through a large roundabout. But the engine? Well, it's another old school little-engine-with-big-turbo combo. It goes well when up on boost but, unfortunately, the bottom-end just isn't there - in one instance, the Caldina struggled to keep up with a Magna V6... An interesting beast, nonetheless.

Probably the most newsworthy drive of the week was at the wheel of Whiteline Suspension's Holden Astra Turbo which is now equipped with an adjustable stability control system. This, as far as we're aware, is a world first in terms of aftermarket development - nobody else offers an adjustable stability control module to alter vehicle handling. The result? Well, it was a mixed bag and you'll just have to wait to read our full article!

And we mustn't forget the sweet little E46 BMW 325ti that the owner insisted we drive. Fitted with an Infinitas SK Stage One centrifugal blower kit (which we'd never heard of, let alone seen before!) the Beemer took a few revs to start flying but, once there, it went very well. Unfortunately, the gearing was too tall for our liking and, despite adaptation of M3 paddle gearlevers for the auto transmission, it took a conscious effort to get the engine into its rpm sweet-spot. Big Porsche brakes were a suitable finishing touch to this classy little number.

Other four-cylinders driven during the seven days of madness include a Hyundai Getz 1.4 press car, a GC-series STi with plenty of APS bits and a GD-series STi with plenty of MRT bits. Oh, and we also managed to squeeze in a test drive of a Saab 9-5 which we were potentially interested in buying - a bit dull after driving some of these beasts!

## Screamin Sixes

Not surprisingly, the Ford XR6 Turbo dominates the six-cylinder category. The lengthiest drive we scored was in the Silverwater Automotive Services (SAS) XR6T ute which has received a direct ECU reprogram. With an air intake, injectors, valve springs and a shorter diff ratio, the SAS ute is an absolute weapon that was constantly on the verge of losing traction. A real speed machine. But pull up at the lights and it idled beautifully with no extra noise or vibration - an incredible achievement considering where Ford six-cylinder performance was only a few years ago...

MRT has also branched out into XR6 Turbo modification and, again, we had the opportunity to drive a couple of examples they'd had a hand in. The boosted 4-litre six showed great performance along with terrific refinement (even though induction noise was slightly more than we like).

There are also a couple of interesting Nissan six cylinders worthy of mention. The first was a Japanese import Stagea powered by a RB25DET and with constant AWD. This machine floored us with its cornering prowess - it simply flew through corners at death-defying speed. A rival for the handling of the Evo 9? Almost. Although not up to same level of performance, we also admired a 1987 Nissan 200ZR. The 200ZR is essentially a Z31 300ZX except with a RB20DET straight six under the bonnet. In its era, this would've been a stunning car. The RB-series engine gave remarkable smoothness but with very low boost pressure (perhaps due to a problem) it was hardly a fireball. The IRS also danced around alarmingly thanks to its worn bushes.

Also driven were MRT's Ford Territory with upgrade springs and swaybars (which cornered much flatter than factory) and a standard BF Falcon.

## Big Bangers

Now we're torquin'! On the final day of our seven day trip (just when we thought we'd driven everything we were going to) the opportunity arose to slip behind the wheel of a Bentley Turbo R and Dodge Viper RT/10. Ohhh, boy!

The Bentley was real an eye opener. Forget any notion that this is a truly high-performance luxury saloon - in reality, it's an old fashioned interpretation of a luxury car that, due to its mammoth weight, needs a huge amount of grunt to get moving. Thankfully there *is* a pretty healthy serve of grunt on tap from the turbocharged 6.75-litre V8 - almost 300kW and an eye-watering 750Nm of torque! Initial research reveals the blown Bentley should be able to hit 100 km/h in around six seconds - but we can only imagine that's down a very steep hill. Oh, and the steering... we thought quarter-of-a-turn slop was abolished decades ago.

And the Viper?

Well, this is a car that lives up to its reputation - it's brutal, outlandish and makes no apologies. With eight litres of V10 muscle in its nose, the Viper knows nothing of flat-spots or turbo lag – you just stick your foot into it at any revs and tense your neck muscles! The long bonnet lifts heavenward, the exhaust bellows and before you know it, it's time to haul the hefty shift lever into another gear. The engine – despite its humble origins – is revvy and a real delight.

Sure, it has flaws – like the windscreen header rail is directly in your line of sight and the side-exit exhaust blows hot gas on your feet when stepping in/out - but at least it does everything it's supposed to. A top-line Porsche will show it the meaning of the word "finesse" but that doesn't take anything away from the Viper. This is truly an exciting modern muscle car – and it now has its fangs in us!

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