



LIFESTYLE

TIM BARNES-CLAY

Motoring

# Tim tests it



If you have testosterone coursing through your veins, you probably like cars – even if you can't quite express why. They make us feel free and they can be huge fun and, of course, they're downright useful. Young or old, family man or single, bald or long-haired hipster, guys tend to dig motors. But we're not going to analyse it too much right now. We're just going to get right down to the nuts and bolts with *Sorted's* motoring editor Tim Barnes-Clay and the cars he's been test-driving lately.

## Audi RS 3 Sportback

As the most powerful hot-hatch in series production, the second generation Audi RS 3 Sportback is capable of giving supercars a complex.

The RS3 is powered by a bonkers-quick turbocharged five-cylinder engine that beats fellow German, the Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG. The Audi's 2.5-litre engine pumps out 362bhp, allowing for a 0-62mph sprint time of just 4.3 seconds – and

a potential top speed of up to 174mph.

The car gargles and crackles at the best of times, but everything is taken up a notch when you select Dynamic mode via the Drive Select system. This opens the flaps in the sports exhaust system – an option that is a must-have. Next, move the auto gear selector into Sport, stamp on the gas and the sound the Audi makes is like Thor having a bad day.

Without a doubt, the engine and gearbox are perfectly harmonised. →

**“STAMP ON THE GAS AND THE SOUND THE AUDI MAKES IS LIKE THOR HAVING A BAD DAY.”**





## “THE AUDI FEELS WELL AHEAD OF ANY OTHER VEHICLE IN THE PREMIUM HOT-HATCH MARKET.”

The even-speed dual-clutch S tronic 'box punches its way through the cogs quickly, cleanly and crisply. This adds to the car's

ability to be alert and precise at all times. In fact, the Audi feels well ahead of any other vehicle in the premium hot-hatch market.

Being an all-wheel-drive (AWD) motor, the RS3 will lose a little grip from the front wheels when pushed to the edge, but you have to be driving crazily fast for it to start playing up.

The Audi's sporty suspension can feel a bit firm, but that's the price you pay if you want balance and a feeling of security at speed. Indeed, the RS3 is brilliantly controlled at any rate of knots, and long sweeping bends are the car's strong point. Tilt the nose in, shift the weight to the outside wheels and the renowned Quattro AWD system ensures there's gargantuan grip to be had, enabling you to increase the speed on the way out.

Inside, the cabin is functional but it's also marvellously refined. The materials used, and the solid fit and finish are exactly what Audi aficionados will love and expect. The interior is a comfortable and pleasurable place to be, and then there's the Audi multimedia interface (MMI) media system that is one of the finest around.

The RS3 Sportback is not inexpensive, and there isn't a lot of room for adults in the back, but it is a staggeringly quick road car that will handle track days. It will also leave you with a big grin, no matter where you drive it.

## Škoda Octavia vRS 230 Estate

The Škoda Octavia vRS Estate looks great with its massive alloys, red brake callipers, lowered suspension and twin exhaust pipes.

The 230 version is particularly special because it's the hottest Škoda in the line-up. Put it this way, I know the model is appreciated by the 'boys in blue' in some areas for a couple of key reasons: it's good value for money and fast.

Powering the petrol-powered, direct-shift automatic gearbox (DSG) variant of the car is a turbocharged 1984cc, 226bhp (or 230ps, as the '230' denotes) engine. It propels the Škoda from 0–62 mph in 7.1 seconds and on to 150mph. What's more, it can deliver an average mpg of 43.5.

The sporty Octavia's leather steering wheel is chunky, the switchgear is nicely damped and the cabin is well-appointed with lots of padding on the dash. Gun the engine, and the twin tailpipes emit a deep 'thrum' on idle – that's the first real indication that this is no ordinary Škoda. Slip into gear and the car is like a dog straining at its lead – it wants to unleash its energy. However, it's capable of behaving like any standard family

estate if you're not too heavy with your right foot around town.

Heading out of the 'burbs, the Octavia vRS really starts to show its true colours. Hit the gas and the car dashes to the legal limit before you know it. It's fun getting there as well. It's comfortable, smooth and the easy-to-use cruise control keeps you on the right side of the law on motorways.

The Octavia Estate is very practical, too. It has an enormous load area with plenty of pegs and netted areas to keep your luggage secure and compartmentalised. The front passenger area provides lots of legroom and the rear seats are good for two adults.



**“THE FASTEST VERSION OF THE V40 CROSS COUNTRY COMBINES DECENT DRIVING DYNAMICS, INTERIOR COMFORT AND A RUGGED PERSONALITY WITH EXCELLENT SAFETY TECHNOLOGY.”**



## Volvo V40 Cross Country T5

The fastest version of the V40 Cross Country combines decent driving dynamics, interior comfort and a rugged personality with excellent safety technology.

It has a more rugged style than the standard V40 and is distinct to the sports styling of the R-Design model. It features a number of unique details that include: silver roof rails; contrasting front bumper, honeycomb mesh grille and upright day-running lights; sculpted sills and contrasting rear bumper with integrated skid plate.

In T5 guise, the 1969cc, four-cylinder, 16 valve, turbocharged petrol unit delivers 241bhp, with 62mph from standstill arriving in a rapid 6.1 seconds. The relatively wide car will go onto 130mph and it stays planted on the road and around bends, thanks to a four-wheel

drive system. This also means the Volvo will handle more than just tarmac. That's handy if you ever need to tackle the odd rutted dirt track or mud-covered field.

The V40 provides enough space for four-up, or five if you have two adults in the front and three small children in the rear on booster seats. The boot, although not massive, is decent enough to shove in everything a family might need – from a week's worth of shopping to a couple of baby buggies.

On average, the T5 can return up to 44.1mpg, so it occupies a somewhat rare place in the motor market. It's a high-riding hot-hatch with decent fuel economy, real off-road ability and honest on-road manners. Put simply, the car delivers unprecedented choice in the premium hatchback sector without compromise. →



**“IT'S A HIGH-RIDING HOT-HATCH WITH DECENT FUEL ECONOMY, REAL OFF-ROAD ABILITY AND HONEST ON-ROAD MANNERS.”**



## Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV

The Mitsubishi PHEV may look like a standard Outlander, but hiding behind the façade is the most technologically advanced SUV on the car market.

'PHEV' stands for Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle. It means the SUV can be fed by electricity from a domestic socket to power electric motors that are supported by a petrol engine.

The latest Outlander PHEV, which was unveiled in October 2015, has seen the fuel economy improved – up from 148mpg to 156mpg – while the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are down from 44g/km to 42g/km. Those ultra-low emissions mean that no vehicle tax is payable, and its electric power combined with the efficient 2.0-litre petrol engine gives an anxiety-free driving range of 541 miles.

Befitting its first-class status in the Outlander range, the PHEV is very well stacked with kit. It has 18in alloy wheels, dusk-sensing auto headlamps, touch-screen with satellite navigation and reversing camera, climate control, parking sensors and multi airbags.

The flagship GX4hs was driven for this review and the model comes with additional features such as adaptive cruise control and lane departure warning. The latter squeals at you if it detects you've drifted across the road's white dividing lines.

If you're used to a standard car, it's going to be a peculiar experience the first time you gently push the gearstick over to the right into 'D' and drive off in silence. Even sharp



**“FOR ITS GREEN, YET POWERFUL TALENTS, MITSUBISHI'S PHEV IS AN SUV THAT IS DIFFICULT NOT TO LIKE.”**

jabs of the throttle produce the same amount of hush.

The Outlander PHEV isn't rapid from a standing start, but good pulling power makes up for it once you get going. Initial acceleration suffers simply because of the heavy jumble of battery and electric motors that the regular Outlander doesn't possess.

When you need to recharge on the move, all you need to do is hit the 'Charge' switch behind the joystick, which fires up the four-cylinder engine to replenish the battery. A single charge via a power point takes just a few hours, which could cost you next to nothing depending on the time you choose to plug into the grid.

Outside, the new Outlander PHEV's styling has been fine-tuned to include LED headlights and bumpers that add a little to the SUV's length. This makes the model look lower to the ground than before. Inside, there have been fascia changes to make the car's cabin simpler and more modern.

Behind the wheel, body control is good for a SUV of this weight, as the Outlander PHEV profits from Mitsubishi's Super All-Wheel Control (S-AWC). This is a system that ensures maximum stability when cornering.

Indeed, for its green, yet powerful talents, Mitsubishi's PHEV is an SUV that is difficult not to like.

## Toyota RAV4 Hybrid

Toyota was responsible for a pivotal change in the motoring scene two decades ago with the launch of the first RAV4. It was a novel type of leisure-focused car that forged today's well-liked compact sport utility vehicle (SUV) market.

Now, the Japanese company has begun a new chapter in RAV4's success story with the launch of the first RAV4 Hybrid in the UK this year.

The model's smooth and economical powertrain merges a 2.5-litre petrol engine and an electric motor, with a further one running the rear axle to deliver electronic all-wheel drive (AWD).

The AWD ability provides excellent safety and stability when navigating low-grip terrain, and the Hybrid parades the refinement you'd envisage because of Toyota's experience with this kind of powertrain. The model's linear acceleration is satisfactory for any setting and the hybrid tech is clear-cut, demanding no special attention when driving.

There are three distinctive driving modes offered: Sport, ECO and EV. Electric-only (EV) is meant for short-range driving at subdued speeds when the battery is charged up and only works with a light right foot. ECO tempers the drive power and air conditioning for best efficiency. Then Sport opens the gate to greater engine revs and a snappier throttle reply, while decreasing power steering assistance for further road feel.

All this adds up to a class-leading economy figure of 57.5mpg, with official CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 115g/km.

The Hybrid coincides with the new RAV4 line-up, which features

### **"THE RAV4 HYBRID IS COMFORTABLE AND CLEVER - AND WILL SAVE YOU POUNDS AT THE PUMPS"**

fresh exterior styling, enhanced cabin quality, improved technology and safety features.

The frontal design creates a sturdier road presence and includes

full LED headlights. At the side, there is a more flowing look, and at the rear, the combination lamps and bumper have been altered, highlighting the car's road stance further.

The quality of the RAV4's cabin has been boosted considerably with a full-colour screen and soft-touch materials. New tech features include Toyota's 360-degree Panoramic View Monitor. This gives you sight of obstacles that would remain unseen in blind spots when using established front and rear cameras, making for safer and easier manoeuvring.

What's more, the latest RAV4's safety specification has been notably upgraded with the addition of the new Toyota Safety Sense suite of features. In addition to the Pre-Collision System, Lane Departure Alert, Automatic High Beam and Road Sign Assist tech that was also included in the new Avensis and Auris, the RAV4 further profits from Adaptive Cruise Control and a superior Pre-Collision System.

Taken as a whole, the RAV4 Hybrid is comfortable and clever - and will save you pounds at the pumps. ■

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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