



Hatch tricks

Dieter Losskarn drove two new hatchbacks back to back. The Audi A3 Sportback was predictably efficient, but it was the more radical Hyundai Veloster that got him all aquiver – and even quoting Paris Hilton



Family politics always dictated that the Golf was made for the masses, with the Audi A3 as the more refined brother. But that relationship has changed. The latest Golf VII is such a premium product that there's no longer much difference between the siblings. They're priced similarly, so how do they differ in driving dynamics? Well, there might be tiny differences in road-holding or bump-jumping, but I'll leave this to my more fine-tuned motoring writer colleagues to debate endlessly.

Nowadays a car is primarily a lifestyle product. It is a statement. And you definitely don't want to be boring. You want to be different. That's why the amazing Land Rover Evoque is such a huge success. I drove one again recently, green with 20-inch chrome wheels, and I was thrown by how visually striking the car really is.

The Germans' reaction is now evident. While BMW's 1-Series is no great shakes, its seventh Mini is at first glance an Evoque that has been put through the wash too hot. Same roofline, same style – just a bit smaller. I still can't understand why BMW, with some seriously sexy automobiles in its line-up, can build such a bland-looking car as the 1-Series, or worse, the X1. An X1 should look like a smaller X6. But I'm not a designer or brand marketing consultant.

Back to the new Golf and the new A3 Sportback. They are both without a doubt

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Cockpit contours

High-tech interior with MMI interface



Buckets of beauty

S-Line trim adds sports seats with diamond stitching



Space to boot

1200 litres of usable space



premium products in the C-segment and great value for money. But by trying to keep the heritage, bloodline, DNA or whatever their designers call it, they made the new editions rather boring. They don't rouse emotions. No stirring of the soul, blowing of the mind or even catching of the breath.

Mercedes-Benz, once the most conservative of the German manufacturers, showed that you can break tradition by going bold, even radical. Its new A-Class is an absolute looker.

Similarly, the new Hyundai Veloster has taken a sharp turn for the better. You look at it the first time and something happens – it's got instant street cred. It also has a rather unusual and unique three-door arrangement. One plus two – one door on the driver's side, two on the other. The passenger door has a concealed handle. It's aimed at younger buyers, with a blue-backlit touch-screen and cool motorcycle-inspired interior that more than matches the aggressive exterior. And soon the current 1.6-litre petrol engine will be complemented by a turbo-charged 137kW/265Nm version, once again stirring up emotions in the hot hatch segment.

In conclusion, I am going to quote Paris Hilton, a first for me: 'The only rule is don't be boring, and dress cute wherever you go. Life is too short to blend in.'

Media matrix

Premium sound, Bluetooth and a rearview camera



Dialled in

Boy-racer-friendly electro-luminescent lighting



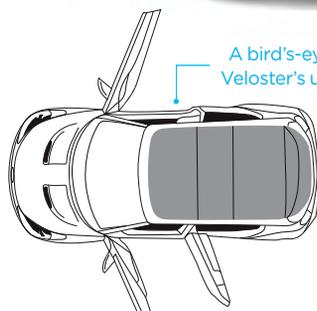
Powerhouse

1.6-litre 4-cyl mated to a 6-speed manual or 6-speed DCT



AUDI A3 SPORTBACK

POWER 1.8 TFSI 4-cyl; 132kW and 250Nm
PERFORMANCE 0-100km/h in 7.3 secs; Top speed 231km/h
CLAIMED FUEL 5.6l/100km
BASE PRICE R339 000



A bird's-eye view of the Veloster's unique 3 doors

HYUNDAI VELOSTER

POWER 1.6 GDI 4-cyl manual; 103kW and 167Nm
PERFORMANCE 0-100km/h in 9.7 secs; Top speed 201km/h
CLAIMED FUEL 8.4l/100km
BASE PRICE R259 900

Extreme driving fun – on and off the beaten track

BMW X6 M50d

I always liked the X6. Now, I love it. A subtle facelift improved its looks even more. But the real surprise is under the hood – a straight-six hi-tech jumbo diesel with three turbochargers working in unison. I have never experienced oil-burner power like this before. The brisk acceleration, tremendous torque and even the sound are mind-blowing. It doesn't feel like a diesel at all – more like a potent V8. And the car is a very comfortable cruiser – ideal for long, non-tiring cross-country trips. The über-power plant is paired with a super smooth eight-speed ZF automatic gearbox.

The X6 is permanently all-wheel driven and it has a fairly high ground clearance. Unlike the new Porsche twin-turbo V8 diesel or the new Range Rover, there is no off-road package available – but the four wheels offer perfect grip on wet roads and gravel. Being a diesel, the two-ton sports car's fuel consumption is surprisingly low. This is coupled with an 85-litre fuel tank, another great long-distance advantage. Of course, for all this, there is a price to pay – but I've never had more fun consuming a mere 7.7 litre/100km. – DL

POWER 6.0 litre tri-turbo 6-cyl diesel; 280kW and 740Nm

PERFORMANCE 0-100km/h in 5.3 secs; Top speed 250km/h

CLAIMED FUEL 7.7l/100km

BASE PRICE R1 057 000



MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS ALL4 COUNTRYMAN

It's a Mini, Jim, but not as we know it.

For starters, the Countryman is the first Mini to have an all-wheel drive (All4) system that automatically redistributes torque as conditions demand. Also new is the turbocharged four-cylinder engine with direct fuel injection and overboost. Throw in the aggressive body contouring, 18-inch alloy wheels with twin-spoke design, red brake calipers and double-barrelled slanting pipes and you'll be right to conclude that this Mini has an unmistakable racing focus – and strong off-road potential.

Being a JCW-badged Mini, the steering and sports suspension inspires confidence – even when the driver takes a wider-than-customary cornering line at Pretoria's Gerotek circuit. The car easily absorbed the bumps from the rough stuff and was back on the track with minimal fuss (despite what the co-driver may have thought).

On tar the ride is more comfortable. The six-speed gearbox (with optional steering wheel shift paddles) generates 160kW of power for a top speed of 225km/h. Inside the racing cockpit, the familiar big speedometer on the centre stack is there, but possibly for the last time as the layout is rumoured to be changing. Two

rear individual leather bucket seats add to the sleek design and luxury feel. There's plenty of leg room, and visibility all round is fine despite the sloping roof design.

It was left to 11-time Dakar rally winner Stéphane Peterhansel to demonstrate how a Mini all-wheel drive could handle in the rough. He took jurnos on an intense lap of the twisty, rock strewn off-road Gerotek course in his Dakar-winning vehicle, a heavily modified version of the Countryman. Off-road potential confirmed. **GG – CT**

POWER 1.6-litre twin-scroll turbocharged 4-cyl; 160kW and 260Nm (300Nm on the overboost)

PERFORMANCE 0-100km/h in 7.0 secs; Top speed 225km/h

CLAIMED FUEL 7.1l/100km

BASE PRICE R434 800 (manual)

