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EIGHT-CAR SHOOTOUT



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ROAD TEST

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NEW VS USED

HALF-PRICE HEROES We test the dream cars you can afford

BMW vs Ferrari for £60k



Mini vs Volkswagen for £20k



FIRST DRIVE



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REVEALED



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Wild coupé hints at electric future

FIRST PICS, DETAILS



Merc's S-Class cabrio

Plush drop-top takes aim at Bentley

NEW WAVE OR OLD STAGERS?

A used Ferrari for the price of a new BMW? Used Jaguar or new Peugeot? And that's just the half of it. We line up four 'new vs used' contests, from £20k to £95k

PHOTOGRAPHY STAN PAPIOR



Patience is a virtue. That shiny new performance car you drooled over in our road test a few years ago may have been agonisingly unattainable back then, but while you've been busy living your life, it might have gently edged into your price range thanks to the irresistible force of depreciation.

If this feature was purely about bang for your buck, it'd be a clean sweep for our four used cars. They all outgun their new rivals in the power stakes. But it's not that simple. The latest tech, freshest styling and lower running costs could easily tempt you back towards the new car instead in each contest here.

We've come to a Cold War airfield to sort this one out. Time to reach for the big red button... ➤

MINI COOPER S VS VW GOLF GTI



NEW Mini Cooper S 3dr USED Volkswagen Golf GTI DSG 5dr (2013)

Price today	£18,840	£20,799
Price when new	£18,840	£28,895
Engine	4 cyls, 1998cc, turbo, petrol	4 cyls, 1984cc, turbo, petrol
Power	189bhp at 4700-6000rpm	258lb ft at 1500-4600rpm
Torque	206lb ft at 1250-4750rpm	227bhp at 4700-6200rpm
Gearbox	6-spd manual	6-spd dual-clutch auto
Kerb weight	1235kg	1405kg
0-60mph	6.9sec	6.5sec
Top speed	146mph	155mph
Economy	49.6mpg (combined)	44.1mpg (combined)
CO ₂ /tax band	133g/km, 21%	149g/km, 24%

Twenty grand for a hot hatch. Easy decision, no? Buy a Ford Fiesta ST and pocket some change. But there's something the Blue Oval can't deliver, and that's premium appeal. 'Premium' may be a wince-worthy word around these parts, but few are totally immune to its lure. So in a bid to have our cake and eat it, we've chosen two rapid hatches that add a layer of gloss to their go.

And it's a story of little(ish) and large. Today's Mini is far from petite, but our Volcanic Orange Cooper S is still a full 418mm shorter than the used Volkswagen Golf GTI against which it is pitched here. With three doors, the 189bhp Mini retails at £18,840. Our specced-up example costs £24,415, but choose the popular Chili Pack (highlights: 17in alloy wheels, dual-zone



Cooper S is more overt in its hot hatch visual extras

air-con, half-leather seats, switchable driving modes) instead of our car's optional extras and the price comes to £20,740.

For £20,799, you can buy an early (read 2013) Mk7 Golf GTI with 15,000 miles on the clock – comfortably within its three-year, 60,000-mile warranty. With two more doors than the Mini. And a dual-clutch automatic gearbox, adaptive damping, parking sensors and 18in wheels. Not to mention the Performance Pack that adds 10bhp for a 227bhp total, an electronically activated limited-slip differential and uprated brakes. Our Mini does have adaptive damping (a £375 option), but still, little David had better bring his slingshot for this battle.

Inside, they take wildly different approaches to 'premium', the Golf's trademark understatement clashing with the Mini's barmy architecture. Personal preference wins here, but for what it's worth, the Mini's set-up tries far too hard by my reckoning. The Wurlitzer-style coloured lighting arc around the 8.8in multimedia screen, relaying the likes of driving mode, revs or parking distance, is a case in point. But the gap in quality isn't huge. Both feel solid, with just a few more sections of hard plastic to be found in the Cooper S. The Mini has the firmer seats and more under-thigh support, but both are comfortable, and the VW's tartan →



← upholstery and slightly lower seating position work in its favour.

With four 6ft 2in occupants, both cars accommodate rear passengers without interference (although the Golf offers a couple of inches more legroom), but only the VW will seat a fifth. If the wriggle needed to access the Mini's rear seats poses a problem, £600 buys two more doors, but there's no avoiding the fact that its boot is just over half the capacity of the VW's, whether the 60/40-splitting seats are folded or not.

The Cooper S's exterior would need to wear wing-mounted water pistols to match its interior lunacy, but it still looks fairly outrageous next to the consistently restrained Golf. Effort has clearly been made to harden the traditionally cute Mini's look, resulting in some heavy-handed touches such as the pair of gobby low-level brake ducts. Still, on looks alone, you'd assume it was the quicker car.

That's not the case: the Golf reaches 60mph 0.4sec sooner, in 6.5sec. But the gap is less than you might expect, given the (admittedly 170kg heavier) VW's 20% power advantage. The Golf's 2.0-litre turbo four needs to be worked but, past 3000rpm, momentum builds strongly all the way to the 6750rpm limiter. There's a fair amount of lag, though, and you couldn't call the noise it makes anything more than slightly sporty.

Shirking pocket rocket conventions of low capacity and high revs, the Mini has the same

engine size and configuration as the VW, but it employs them altogether differently. It pulls well from a mere 1750rpm and yields a tasty sweet spot at 4000-5000rpm before tailing off at higher revs. There's less lag and a louder, racier sound. Both engines are quiet at a cruise – a state into which each car settles nicely.

The gearboxes on offer are, of course, chalk and cheese. VW's six-speed DSG is, as always, blindingly slick, whether mopping around town, chasing auto shifts up the rev range or overriding with the paddle shifts. In the drivetrain's Sport mode, the otherwise clinical operation of the gearbox gains a little fun, with blarting upshifts and blipped downshifts. The latter also feature in the Mini's rev-matching six-speed manual gearbox, whose shifts feel slightly synthetic but can be executed quickly.

Both cars skip a bit over low-speed lateral ridges (even with dampers in Comfort mode) but it's the Golf that gains more pliancy with pace. The Mini's ride becomes a bit reactive as speeds climb, but not unsettlingly so and far less than its bouncing predecessor. This means that you can comfortably goad the engine along B-roads, where the steering – overly light in Normal mode but artificially heavy in Sport – tightens at the top of second and third to reassure you that you're at the helm of a little front-drive nutter. Its turn-in is marginally the sharper of the pair, and although it leans a bit through



You get a greater sense of immediacy driving the Mini



Golf feels a little subdued even when you drive it hard

corners, it feels utterly stable in doing so, the front wheels gripping gamely.

On the same roads, the Golf's steering is nicely weighted in Sport mode (which, unlike in the Mini, is fully separable from drivetrain and chassis settings), but you feel quite isolated from the speeds you're generating. Yes, the GTI is rapid across country, but the engine and gearbox – and the fancy diff that seems to unprogressively chime into action during cornering – leaves me a little cold next to the more visceral, gung-ho, have at 'em Cooper S. And that's just the spirit that we want – nay, need – from our hot hatches. Your sensible hat says the boot is too small and shies away from the over-egged styling, but the new, larger Mini is a respectably practical car, and shouldn't a hot hatch look a bit rowdy?

You can pick up a three-door manual GTI without the performance extras from about £18,000. That would be a closer call. But I'd still take the Mini.

RICHARD WEBBER



Interiors reflect their dynamic characters: VW's (on left) is restrained, Mini's characterful; both have a quality feel

BMW M4

VS FERRARI 612 SCAGLIETTI



NEW BMW M4 DCT	USED Ferrari 612 Scaglietti HGTS (2006)
Price today	£59,550
Price when new	£59,550
Engine	6 cyls in line, 2987cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power	425bhp at 5500-7300rpm
Torque	406lb ft at 1850-5500rpm
Gearbox	7-spd dual-clutch automatic
Kerb weight	1572kg
0-60mph	4.1sec
Top speed	155mph
Economy	34.0mpg (combined)
CO ₂ /tax band	194g/km, 33%
	£62,990
	£187,745
	V12, 5748cc, petrol
	540bhp at 7200rpm
	434lb ft at 5250rpm
	6-spd automatic
	1870kg
	4.4sec
	196mph-plus
	13.6mpg (combined)
	475g/km, 37%

A tantalising match-up, this one. It's rare that Maranello and Munich face off on equal terms, but here we have it: a pair of 2+2, front-engined, rear-wheel-drive super-coupés from BMW and Ferrari costing around £60,000 apiece.

The Ferrari 612 Scaglietti (2004-2011) cost more than £210,000 by the end of its tenure, but this left-hand-drive, HGTS Pack-equipped 2006 example is for sale by VVS UK in Cranbrook Common, Kent, for £62,990. After only 18,000 miles, it has shed £125,000, but that's for someone else to worry about, because their loss gives us a full complement of 12 glorious, V-mounted, naturally aspirated cylinders to pitch against the M4's mere six.

But the M4 makes the most of those six cylinders, eking out 425bhp from its twin-turbocharged 3.0 litres. Indeed, it's a proper techfest under the M4's skin, with switchable modes for the dampers, engine, optional dual-clutch automatic gearbox and electric power steering, as well as a carbonfibre-reinforced plastic driveshaft. The car charges to 60mph in 4.1sec yet returns a remarkable 34.0mpg combined.

By comparison, the 612 is old hat. It does have dual-mode adaptive dampers, but the optional self-shifter is the single-clutch automated manual 'F1' transmission, which now seems awfully long in the tooth. The steering is old-school hydraulic, too, but that'll draw more cheers for feel than jeers for the slight economy penalty.

Ah yes, economy. Although, at 4.4sec, the 612 is almost as quick as the M4 to 60mph, its combined

economy figure is 13.6mpg, dipping to 8.8mpg in town. Cringe. And the 612's CO₂ emissions mean annual road tax of £505 (or £290 if registered before March 2006). These numbers didn't matter to its first owner but probably will to its next.

You'll pay £1300 for a minor service on the 612 at official dealer Maranello Sales in Surrey, or £1600 for a major service, and a change of timing belt (due every five years) costs £2900. Independent specialist Foskers in Kent quotes £900 for a minor service, £1500 for a major one and £954 for a belt change. For the M4, it's around £320 for a minor service and £1130 for a major at Berry Heathrow BMW, but a timing chain means no expense there.

Ferrari Approved cars up to 10 years old get a two-year warranty as standard, but any example – subject to qualifying criteria of mileage, condition and history – is eligible for a Ferrari-backed warranty up to 12 years after registration. Cover costs £3120 per year on our 612, with discounts for loyalty and claim-free years. And indications are that tidy examples such as this may gently increase in value, whereas we expect the M4 to have shed around £30,000 after three years.

Originally berated for awkward styling, the 612's voluptuous looks have softened with time, contrasting with the aggressively styled M4's origami ducts, bulging bonnet and naked carbonfibre roof. The 612 has the classier cabin, too. Neither skimps on hide, but the BMW can't disguise its workaday roots and still places operability over opulence. With fewer controls to accommodate, the Ferrari manages both.



BMW gives its driver a control layout designed for ease of use and backs it with a sense of solidity and material quality



This Ferrari was originally three times the price of the BMW and it shows in the richness of its well-conceived interior



Ferrari's lines have aged well and its handling is involving

There are firm, supportive, winged seats in both cars, but you sit lower in the Ferrari, peeping over a long bonnet flanked by pointed wings that look like Batman's ears. Sitting behind someone of my own height in the M4, my knees are clear but my head is not. It's the opposite in the 612, but I'd rather splay my knees than have a bent neck. At 445 litres, the BMW's boot is the larger by 205 litres.

Both manage the quarter mile in less than 13 seconds but do so very differently. With engine and gearbox in Sport+, the M4 dispatches an indifferent first 2750rpm before torpedoing you forward, repeatedly slamming into the 7500rpm redline between blink-quick upshifts. Moderate turbo lag is exacerbated by the violence of the acceleration that follows, accompanied by an increasingly agitated induction grumble that's amplified through the speakers. It's not the most inspiring sound, but it is bellicose.

The 612 has a throaty burble at idle thanks to the HGTS Pack's sports exhaust. It pulls comfortably from 1400rpm and builds with slick linearity all the way to the 7400rpm limiter, the V12's hearty bellow gaining volume along the way. But even full-bore upshifts are painfully slow compared with the M4's. Laying off the throttle makes for smoother progress, otherwise you rock in your seat as cogs are swapped, but in auto mode you're required to second-guess the upshift points, something that's even trickier during relaxed driving. Better to use the huge metal paddles – attached to the steering column and longer in

throw and more mechanical feeling than the M4's little wheel-mounted switches. Our M4's razor-sharp £6250 carbon-ceramic discs beat the 612's steel rotors for purchase, but the Scaglietti's brakes are effective nonetheless.

Both of the Ferrari's damper modes round off the lumps and bumps of our battered roads better than any of the M4's three settings, yet, remarkably for a car weighing 1870kg, dive and roll are very well contained, aided by the HGTS-specific rear anti-roll bar. The BMW has 300kg less to stabilise but does so with such aggression that rapid B-road progress has the traction control lamp flickering as the tyres struggle to retain contact. Although the 612 is a big car for such roads, its suppler set-up makes it both more engaging and more comfortable. On a track, however, the BMW would slaughter the Ferrari. It's a matter of priorities.

The BMW turns in more sharply, but its steering feels detached next to the Ferrari's fluid, intuitive and feelsome helm. The M4's mass is front-biased, but the 612's is the opposite, and 85% of the Scaglietti's weight lies between its axles. This pays dividends through bends, the car pivoting about sweetly. Again, the BMW will carry more speed, but the Ferrari is more rewarding.

The 612 is restrained by its gearbox, but there are a handful of manual examples out there. Find one of them and the car offers a wonderfully analogue alternative to the extremely impressive yet categorically digital-feeling M4. It's what we'd do.

RICHARD WEBBER