

Test location: Bruntingthorpe, Leicestershire, UK GPS: 52.50320, -1.11505

Milltek VW Golf GTI

Tuning specialist boosts Mk7 Golf to 312bhp with raft of upgrades

Photography: Dean Smith

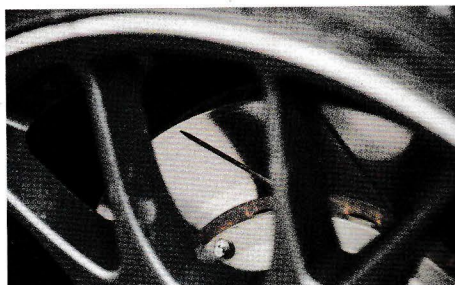


YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE (OR pity) a company that decides to tune a car as complete and polished as the new Mk7 Golf GTI. It is one of the best all-round performance packages a realistic amount of money can buy. Granted, it's not the most exciting hot hatch out there, but in truth it never has been. To try and give it some teeth would be to totally miss the point. Wouldn't it?

All of which explains why the prospect of this Milltek Golf GTI fills me with a certain amount of dread. Don't get me wrong, the idea of 312bhp and 332lb ft (up 85bhp and 74lb ft on a Performance Pack GTI) is compelling to say the least, but when it comes with aftermarket suspension, a turbo-back exhaust with a high-flow sports catalyst, bigger wheels and tyres and VW Racing brakes, it smacks of trying to turn a Golf into a Ford Focus RS.

So imagine my surprise when, decals aside, Milltek's Mk7 – to our knowledge the first in the UK to receive seriously uprated performance – turns out to be an extremely well-judged machine. Looks-wise, it sits a modest 15mm lower and has its arches filled by 19in BBS 'CH' alloys shod with 235/35 Dunlop Sport Maxx tyres. This suits the GTI, adding attitude without going too far, but it comes at a price: £1920 for the rims and tyres, and a more affordable £570 for the Eibach springs and front/rear anti-roll bar kit (the standard dampers are retained).

Behind the BBS wheels lurks Volkswagen Racing's six-pot brake kit, complete with 352mm floating front discs. Again it's a sizeable investment at a little over £2000, but adding so much power and torque would leave the



standard brakes uncomfortably stretched, especially if you occasionally venture on track. This being Milltek's test and development car it naturally features the company's 3in turbo-back exhaust system, complete with Cerakote Black tailpipes for a more contemporary look. It's a very impressive system that finds around 20bhp and gives the GTI a slightly beefier exhaust note without unpleasant boom at urban or motorway speeds. At £1924 it'll have you befriending your bank manager, but the all-stainless steel system has been extensively tested and carefully developed so that it's lighter than the standard exhaust and fits perfectly, with no clonks or clearance issues. If you've ever experienced the misery of an ill-fitting aftermarket system, you'll appreciate Milltek's attention to detail.

Ironically the ECU work, which is where the biggest power gains are found, is one of the cheapest elements of the car, the Shark Performance/DTUK system (which uses a piggyback ECU to get around the Mk7's currently 'uncrackable' management system) costing £695. When installed in conjunction with the Milltek exhaust, it makes a significant difference to the GTI's performance. Where the

standard car goes flat above 6000rpm, this one pulls hard and smooth to the red line. In fact it has more muscle everywhere, particularly from 4500rpm onwards, making the Golf a mighty point-to-point tool on give-and-take A-roads.

The suspension mods trade a little compliance for a greater sense of connection and more enthusiasm for attacking driving. The brakes don't have quite the progression, feel or response of the OE items, but that's largely down to the pad material. However, there's no dead travel nor any squeaking, so you don't lose any refinement and the upside is that there's greater outright power when you get further into the pedal.

Meddling with a Golf GTI could so easily end in disaster, but this effort is thorough, sympathetic and enjoyable. Crucially, it's not trying to be too hardcore, preferring instead to retain much of the GTI's civility so that you have a hot hatch that's still a better all-rounder than anything else in the class. The only difference is that it now has the performance to tempt you out of your Focus RS or Astra VXR. ✕

Richard Meaden (@DickieMeaden)

Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo
CO2	n/a
Power	312bhp @ 5100rpm
Torque	332lb ft @ 4600rpm
Performance	5.9sec (estimated 0-62mph), 160mph (est)
Weight	1351kg (estimated) (163bhp/ton)
Basic price	See text

evo rating: ★★★★★

- Intelligent package of upgrades delivers big performance boost
- Significant money to spend on an already premium hot hatch