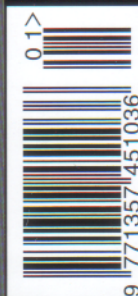


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January 2002  
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## Tweaked Fiat 20v Turbos Triple Test

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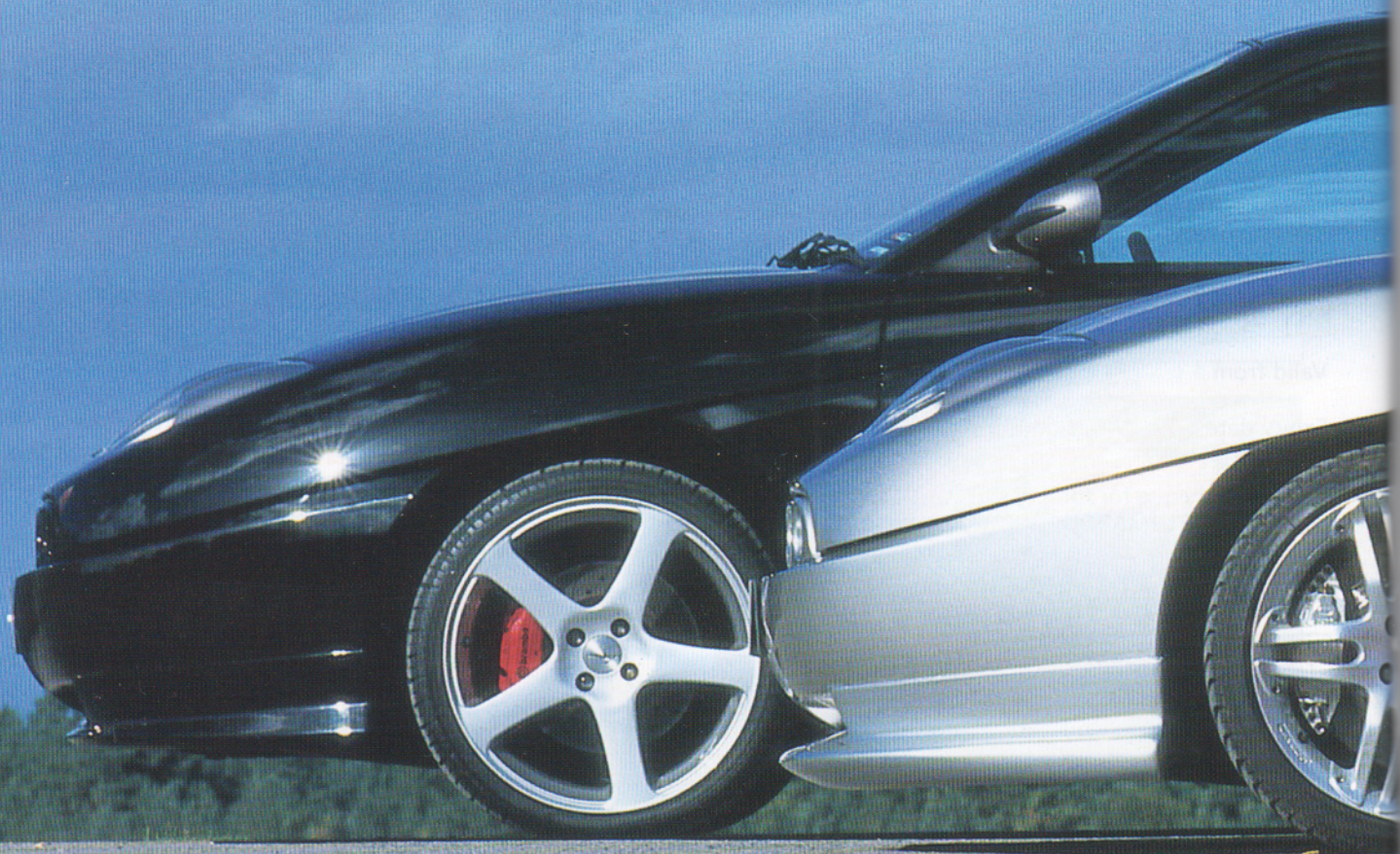
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# Super Cool

THE 20V COUPE  
TURBO MAY BE THE  
FASTEST EVER FIAT  
ROADCAR, BUT YOU  
CAN MAKE THEM  
GO EVEN FASTER

## Limited Edition Fiat Coupes

WORDS: TONY SOPER PHOTOS: MICHAEL WARD



**H**ere at Auto Italia we really like the Fiat Coupe. Its 1995 United Kingdom launch surprised and delighted many, and drew new customers to Fiat. It also heralded a renaissance of aesthetic design, which became as important to Fiat's 1990s models as dynamic ability. Croma Turbos and Strada Abarths may have shifted quicker than the Taliban out of Kabul, but they also looked about as stylish as their beards.

A two-litre non-turbo Fiat Coupe is a delightfully balanced all rounder while the turbo cars offer just a little more performance than the chassis is comfortable with, resulting in licence-losing ragged edge behaviour which you just can't help, but which is so much fun. The Coupe still looks cutting edge, its relative exclusivity ensures that one's perception is not dulled by familiarity as, say, the mass market Ford Focus – but for some

that's not enough. Modern Fiats are now a credible choice for discerning cruisers and customisers looking for something different from the usual Max Power fodder of Fords, Vauxhalls, Beemers, and Vdubs.

The quest for individuality is almost as old as the car itself, when well-heeled purchasers

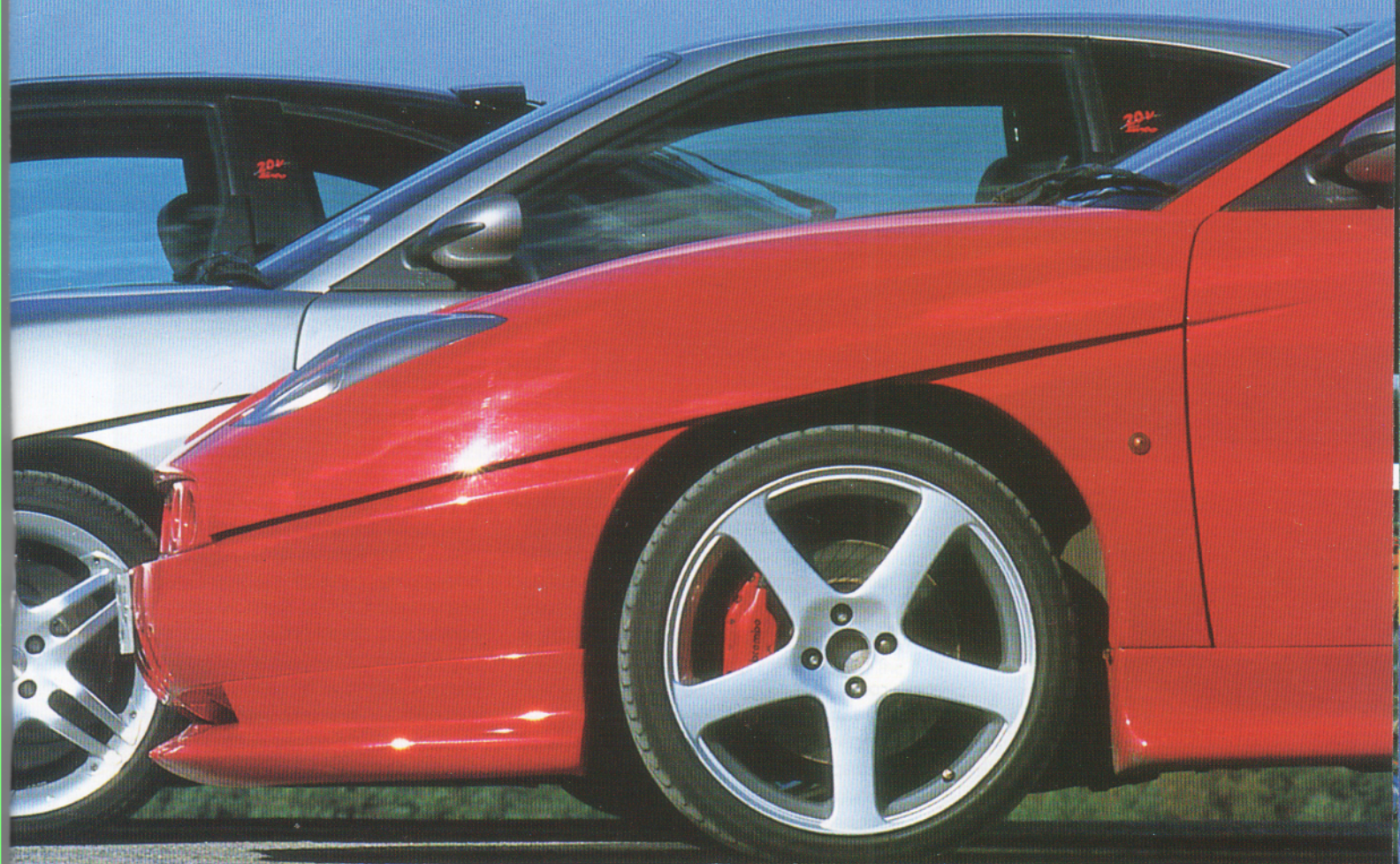
States throbbed to the sound of stripped down roadsters or '55 Chevys with blasting V8s. Most Europeans had to wait until after the postwar austerity years before car ownership became widespread but predictably we followed suit in the swinging '60s. Many glass fibre specialists were spawned, culminating, via

## **The Coupe's relative exclusivity ensures that one's perception is not dulled by familiarity**

would have their cars custom built. Henry Ford's mass production revolution may have brought motoring to the masses, but it also churned out identical clones which owners immediately wanted to personalise. A fledgling customising industry blossomed from California around the Model T and later Detroit iron. American youth in the '50s embraced cars, rock'n roll, and each other, and soon the

the beach buggy phenomenon, in today's diverse kit car and small volume manufacturing industries. British customising in the '70s was still USA-inspired with chrome wheels, jacked up suspension, and purple fur de rigueur. However, the '80s and '90s saw we Europeans find our own look, more often than not inspired by touring or GT car racing.

Which brings us to our trio of highly





individual 20-valve Turbo Coupes. These are all examples of the rare and desirable LE limited edition model. These versions offer factory fitted refinements including six-speed transmission, push button starter, Recaro seats, red brake calipers, 16" wheels, titanium detailing around the fuel filler, tail lamp bowls, door mirrors and dashboard, as well as drilled Sparco pedals and front strut brace. Each LE coupe is individually numbered on a plaque inside the car and our three cars are finished in some of the least common colours of Speed Red, Grey Moon, and Ink Black.

Ink Black is the least modified with mainly external cosmetic upgrades. Speed Red is the quickest entertainment and leisure complex you are likely to find, whilst Grey Moon sports some serious performance hardware.

### INK BLACK

Owner of this 1988 LE (number 53) is Elliot Hyames. Shortly after buying this car some 18 months ago Elliot spotted Speed Red in traffic outside Selfridges and caused chaos when he accosted the driver to demand where his body styling came from. A Cadamuro body kit consisting of front splitter, three piece adjustable rear spoiler, rear wings with side

vents, side skirts, and Maranello style bonnet with centre vent were duly obtained and fitted. Further enhancements include a free flow air filter, blue Samco hoses, Tar-Ox grooved and drilled front discs, Khan 18" wheels, Raggazoni bucket tailed exhaust, and to top it off, that registration number to remind everyone this is a 20V LE. Future plans include the L&M charge cooler and Unichip; as Elliot says "once you start you can't stop!" Driving Ink Black revealed usual Turbo Coupe characteristics with perhaps a little less grunt than the 220bhp that should be there, suggesting that the stock engine management may not be too happy with the big exhaust and air filter. Elliot's car is currently for sale, see Auto Vendo for details.

### SPEED RED

John Snook has owned LE number 12 from new and has since invested over £10K on body styling, in-car entertainment, and engine modifications. That Cadamuro bodykit with deep front spoiler, side skirts, and F50-style bonnet is complemented by engine detailing with Samco hoses and Aeroquip fuel lines, plus Tar-Ox front brake discs. Wheels are also similar to Ink Black, the 18" Khans shod with 235/35/18 Bridgestones. Engine modifications include a programmable Superchip claiming 28bhp, catalyst removal pipe claiming to release 10bhp, and a Raggazoni exhaust offering



**ABOVE** John Snook's Sony Play Station plays CDs or DVDs through the sound system  
**RIGHT** Ten-pot Tar-Ox calipers and 330mm discs make sure that 'Grey Moon' stops

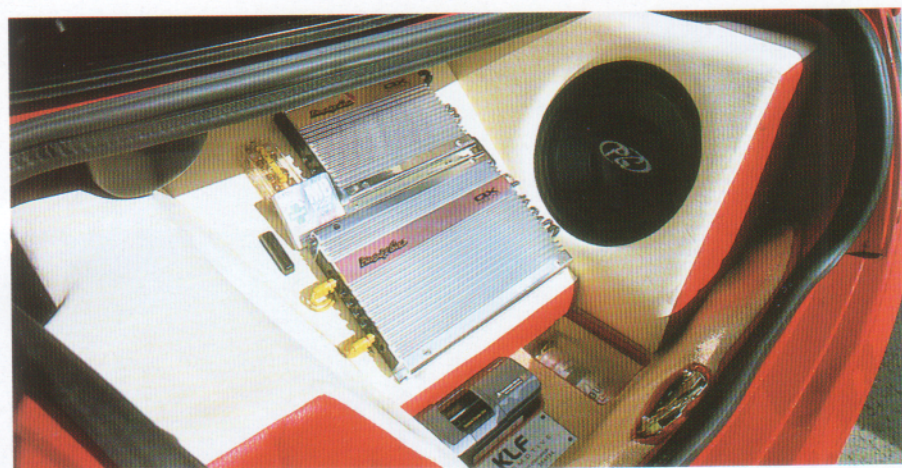
another 15bhp. This work was done for John by Millway Engineering (Tel: 01264-336344).

You know those cars that you can hear and feel before you can see them, usually they drive past your house at the weekend and make your windows rattle? Well this is one of them. KLF automotive of Andover (Tel: 01264 354734) fitted a ten speaker in-car entertainment system with two 12"

sub-woofers which completely occupy the boot as well as bass boosters located directly beneath the front seats. Pump up the volume and you get a delightful bottom massage! A Sony Play Station 2 plays CDs or DVDs through the awesome sound system and there is a wide screen Panasonic LCD monitor for the front passenger, as well as screens in each headrest for the rear passengers. Future plans include a remote control engine starter and door opening functions

Out on the track the first thing you notice is the impressive torque, this car is very strong from 3,500 to 5,000rpm, with much more urge than the standard car, but I am not sure ▶





**CENTRE** Ten speaker ICE system has two 12 inch subwoofers that fill the boot

**ABOVE** No extra work needed here as all Coupé LE interiors are already customised

that the claimed 50+ bhp is real, it feels more like 30. Whilst the very low profile 18" Bridgestones look and do the business the trade-off is compliance and the ride suffers.

## GREY MOON

Grey Moon belongs to Graham McMurdo who is registrar for the Fiat Owners Club. A 1999 LE (number 1,134), the modifications to this car are more performance oriented and were

entrusted to specialists L&M in High Wycombe. Auto Italia last tested one of L&M's fast Fiats in December 1999 and we were most impressed with their 260bhp coupe, however ultimate power was limited on that car due to inlet charge temperature. L&M now offer an engine upgrade package which is fitted to Grey Moon. This includes a custom-made charge cooler to allow higher boost, an ECU remap with electronic bleed valve, Supersprint exhaust with catalyst bypass, free flow air filter, and Samco hoses. On the outside, Grey Moon also wears some of the Cadamuro collection and the lowered (by 35mm) Eibach springs mean that it squats a little lower than our other two cars. Brakes are uprated with Tar-Ox ten pots and 330mm discs, and the car sits on 17" Momo wheels with 215/40/17 Avons.

Grey Moon immediately sounds more businesslike than the other two, the engine note with the Supersprint exhaust is more rumbling than the Ragazzoni offering. On the test track, hard acceleration sees the RaceCar logic traction control counter the frantic front wheel scrabbling that you normally get with these cars. Speed Red had good torque delivery but Grey Moon is in the next class. It pulls really hard from 2,500rpm and has superb mid-range punch for effortless overtaking. The overall composure of Grey Moon is easily the best of the bunch and the car feels safe and comfortable at high speeds. The 17" wheels offer a better ride and the lower stance means the front spoiler is working

more efficiently, this car feels much like a Ferrari 355 at speed. Pushed hard through high speed corners it struggles with understeer and for track days stiffer rear dampers would probably help, but on real roads the set-up works to perfection.

## CONCLUSION.

If you want a highly individual car these Fiat Coupés are hard to beat. There is a wealth of kit available and specialists such as L&M offer engine, brake, and suspension packages which will allow you to create the machine of your dreams. With so much on offer I am surprised that there is currently not one Fiat Coupé being actively raced in this country. ■



## L&M International 20v upgrade prices (inc VAT)

ECU remap with bleed valve	
Supersprint intake hoses	
F1 air filter	£1,435
Auxiliary charge cooler kit	
Up to 20% power increase.	£1,725
Tar-Ox discs and pads from	£520
Eibach suspension from	£335

This list is representative and can be tailored to the customers' requirements. For a full list of services for 20v and also 16v Fiat Coupés contact Craig Clark Tel: 01494 538899 or visit [www.l-m.co.uk](http://www.l-m.co.uk)

For Cadamuro bodykits contact L&M or Forza Tuning Tel: 0208 838 6320