

Pics: Paul Harner

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**Y**ou've just got to smile when you go to meet two guys named Linus and Rodney. Turns out that Linus was actually named after the Snoopy character, though on the day we saw his gorgeous Mk3 Golf VR6 together with brother Rod's equally delectable Mk4 Turbo, he claimed to have left his security blanket at home.

We checked the boot, and all that was in there was a bass box and an amp, so I guess he was telling the truth. When they're not clowning about or winding each other up about who has the faster/better/cooler Golf, Linus and Rodney earn an honest living from the family business of designing and importing fashion and leisure wear.

That's why they look so hip without really trying. Linus works on the design side while Rodney is at the sharp end of sales. Their dad, who runs the business, is also into cars and has had a succession of 911s, so it came naturally for the two sons to get into cars, too. And naturally, there's more than a hint of sibling rivalry here.

Rodney is the elder brother and as soon as he could drive, he dived straight in and got himself a Golf 16v Mk2. He's been a fan ever since, although there was a brief flirtation with a yellow M3 convertible before he saw the error of his ways and bought the silver 1.8T you see here in all its glory. Linus also cut his teeth on Mk2 Golfs before getting all serious and grown up with this knockout 'charged-up' VR6.

16in Antera rims, Goodyear rubber



Vortech supercharger pumps this 2.8 VR6 to a chuffing great 250bhp



When bought as a low-miler, the engine was standard but the body wore the Vortex styling kit and had already been lowered. It had half-decent alloys but they weren't to his taste, so on went 16-inch Anteras. Linus also fitted a Remus back box and a twin headlamp conversion to add to the custom look.

Most of us would be happy with this set-up, but Linus felt that a little power exploitation would now be in order. It all came about when Linus couldn't help noticing a certain ad within the pages of *The Golf* that suggested a visit to Nik Saran could result in an upgrade to 250bhp.

To reach this satisfying state of affairs, all he had to do was to part with a few grand and give up his car

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for three days.

For some time, Nik Saran has been converting VR6s with the US-made Vortech supercharger. It's a relatively straightforward bolt-on conversion, with the belt-driven 'charger mounted driven off the crank pulley. There's no intercooler here so the carbon-fibre ducting is relatively simple too, but it's still an ingenious piece of engineering because there's very little under-bonnet space to play with.

The Vortech conversion involves a re-programmed ECU chip to make the fuelling and ignition compatible with the extra charge mixture and output. The cost is a cool £3877 but the benefits are a bhp hike from 170bhp to 250bhp, and a huge jump in performance.

"I was very impressed with the VR6 even in standard form, but Nik has done a really good job and I'm pleased as punch with it. What I like about the conversion is that you don't tamper with the engine. But now to me the car's complete. I plan to keep it a long time and I consider the money is definitely well spent. Every time I drive it there's a big smile on my face," he says.



**Twin lamps and personalised plate**

While all this was going on, Rod had been swanning around in his 270bhp M3. So when he shopped it in for a Golf 1.8T Mk4, it was perhaps unsurprising that his new steed seemed like a limp dish-rag in comparison with the Beemer's endless grunt. Worse, he had to endure the constant barracking of his little bruv taking the mick about its paltry 150bhp.

Something had to be done about that. Enter SBG Sportstek. As well as importing Oettinger and



**Above: Number plates help bros remember who's who. Below: Inside a smart Mk3**

Projectzwo tuning and styling conversions for the VW/Audi range, these guys work their special magic on the works-supported Seat Ibiza F2 rally cars, so they know a thing or two about the craft of making cars go faster – check out last month's cover car.

Rod was impressed with their Daventry workshop and, after a chat about what could be done, he had no hesitation about booking his 1.8T in for major surgery. The result is a power boost from 150 to 230bhp and a top speed of 150mph.

Like the supercharger job on Linus' car, the Oettinger turbo conversion fitted by SBG is a bolt-on job with the basic engine and gearbox remaining intact and with barely a finger laid on it. The extra power comes from fitting a larger



KKK/Oettinger turbo unit with a matching ECU chip to provide more fuelling and optimised ignition.

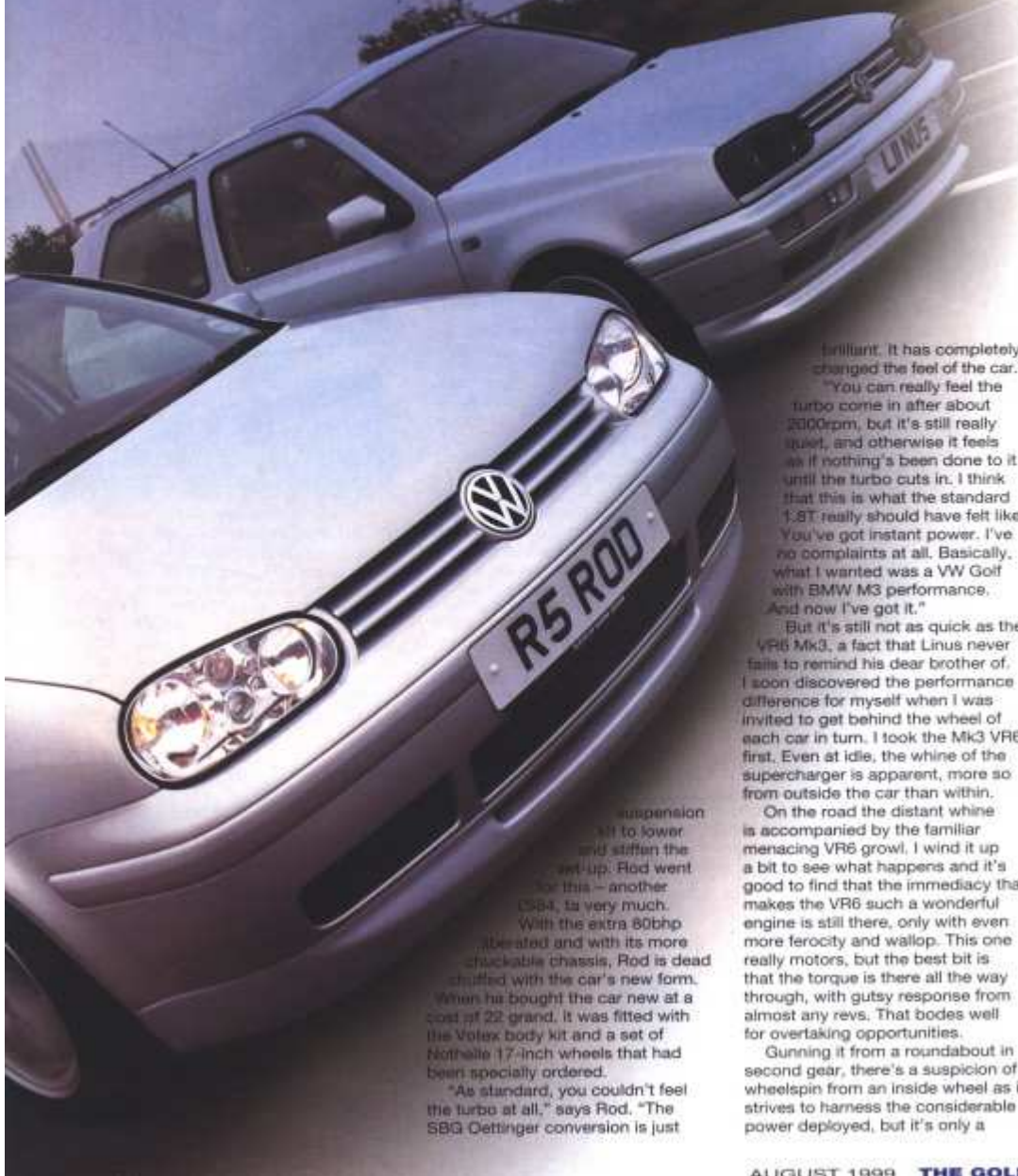
A sports exhaust system, a set of harder plugs and mods to the intake arrangement complete the conversion. This little lot lightened Rod's wallet to the tune of £4289. With the extra performance, SBG strongly recommended a sports

**Oi, Linus, who's the fat midget in the passenger seat?**





# A Bridge Two Far



brilliant. It has completely changed the feel of the car."

"You can really feel the turbo come in after about 2000rpm, but it's still really quiet, and otherwise it feels as if nothing's been done to it until the turbo cuts in. I think that this is what the standard 1.8T really should have felt like. You've got instant power. I've no complaints at all. Basically, what I wanted was a VW Golf with BMW M3 performance. And now I've got it."

But it's still not as quick as the VR6 Mk3, a fact that Linus never fails to remind his dear brother of. I soon discovered the performance difference for myself when I was invited to get behind the wheel of each car in turn. I took the Mk3 VR6 first. Even at idle, the whine of the supercharger is apparent, more so from outside the car than within.

On the road the distant whine is accompanied by the familiar menacing VR6 growl. I wind it up a bit to see what happens and it's good to find that the immediacy that makes the VR6 such a wonderful engine is still there, only with even more ferocity and wallop. This one really motors, but the best bit is that the torque is there all the way through, with gutsy response from almost any revs. That bodes well for overtaking opportunities.

Gunning it from a roundabout in second gear, there's a suspicion of wheelspin from an inside wheel as it strives to harness the considerable power deployed, but it's only a

suspension kit to lower and stiffen the set-up. Rod went for this - another US\$4,125 very much. With the extra 80bhp liberated and with its more chuckable chassis, Rod is dead chuffed with the car's new form. When he bought the car new at a cost of 22 grand, it was fitted with the Votex body kit and a set of Nothelle 17-inch wheels that had been specially ordered.

"As standard, you couldn't feel the turbo at all," says Rod. "The SBG Oettinger conversion is just

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*Below: Spotless Mk4 interior. Above: Smooth corners thanks to Göttinger suspension*



momentary lapse and then we're whanging up through the gears and catapulting for the next roundabout that seems to have appeared damned fast.

Fortunately, the big TarOx discs and the grippy Goodyear Eagles are up to the job of hauling us back down to sensible speeds and the car snicks left-right-left and back on course again the other side. That

**Votex body kit adds class**



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neat manoeuvre underlines how well tied down is this chassis with the lowered and uprated suspension.

It's noteworthy that despite the increased power and grip and the lowered suspension, there's no trade-off in other ways. It still responds brilliantly to throttle inputs and retains more than acceptable ride suppleness despite tightly controlled body roll. No banging of tyres against bodywork either. Top marks.

With reluctance, I hand back the keys, but I'm cheered by the thought of driving Rod's 230bhp Mk4. This level of specific output from a mere 1.8 engine is hugely impressive. We're talking nearly 128bhp per litre, after all.

And yet, as we tool around at low revs to give the engine a chance to reach proper operating temperature, it's clear that this engine is as mild-mannered as can be and just as smooth as silk. Come to that, the whole car feels silky smooth and oh-so refined after the Mk3, itself not exactly Neanderthal in nature.

Maybe the 1.8T's civilised character and greater weight was responsible for it feeling nowhere near as accelerative as the VR6. That said, it can still cover ground with deceptive efficiency. There's no increase in either noise or harshness to warn you that the



*Above: Turbo-tastic Mk4. Below: 17in Nothelfers*



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## A Bridge Two Far

rodine is fast approaching and, given its head, those gearchanges come up with alarming speed.

Quick as it is – and don't forget we're talking a huge improvement over the stock 150bhp engine – this car has one or two minor niggles when compared with Linus' VR6 monster. First, there's a momentary lapse from flooring the throttle to when strong power begins to thrive.

You wouldn't call it turbo lag exactly – this conversion is too sophisticated for that – but it's there nonetheless. There's also a slight jerkiness and hesitation that comes about as you lift off in preparation for an up-change. It doesn't happen in normal driving, but is noticeable when you're going for it.

Both of these traits are simply part of the character of a turbo engine, caused by the momentary delay as the turbine accelerates and the expulsion of boost when the throttle is lifted. That's the way it is.

So the Sportstek 1.8T is quick, it's refined and it's very smooth. And with the Oettinger suspension and plenty of rubber on the ground, it sticks to the road too. Both cars feel well balanced, with fine security and poise, but again the Mk4 (with its less extreme lowering) feels less solid on the road and its steering is slightly less crisp.

Both cars work well and are a compromise between all-out action and user-friendly refinement. The smooth and quiet Mk4 is the one for a long motorway haul. It suits Rod very well, with his requirements for long-distance refinement.

It would be easy to argue that these high power Golfs are both great, and to say that neither one is better than the other because they're so different in character.

Personally, I don't care for all that sitting-on-the-fence nonsense. I'll stick my neck out and say that, given the choice, I'd choose the 'charged-up' VR6. Not only does it look meaner, but it gobbles tarmac

quicker, it gets your juices running sooner, and it just feels that bit more tuned-in to the demanding driver.

In comparison, the Mk4 Turbo seems slightly sterile – filter-tipped low-tar against the VR6's hand-rolled coarse shag, if you follow my drift. Eat your heart out Rod – Linus has you licked on this one. Of course, he already knows that, which explains why he no longer needs that security blanket. ■

### Comparisons

	'charged VR6	1.8T upgrade
Conversion cost	£3877	£4289
BHP increase	80bhp	80bhp
%age power increase	47%	53%
£ per bhp increase	£48	£53

The Knowledge

#### Supercharged Mk3 VR6

**ENGINE**  
VR6 2.8, 250bhp. Vortech supercharger by Nick Saran

**CHASSIS**  
Lowered springs (unknown make). TarOx big disc conversion by SBG Sportstek.  
**Wheels:** 16in Antera wheels.  
**Tyres:** Goodyear Eagle F1 205/45ZR16

**STYLING**  
Votex body kit. Twin lamps.

#### Oettinger Mk4 1.8T

**ENGINE**  
230bhp, 1.8T engine with Oettinger turbo conversion

**CHASSIS**  
Oettinger suspension, 30mm lowered. **Wheels:** Nothelle 17in. **Tyres:** Pirelli P7000 225/45ZR17

**STYLING**  
Votex styling kit