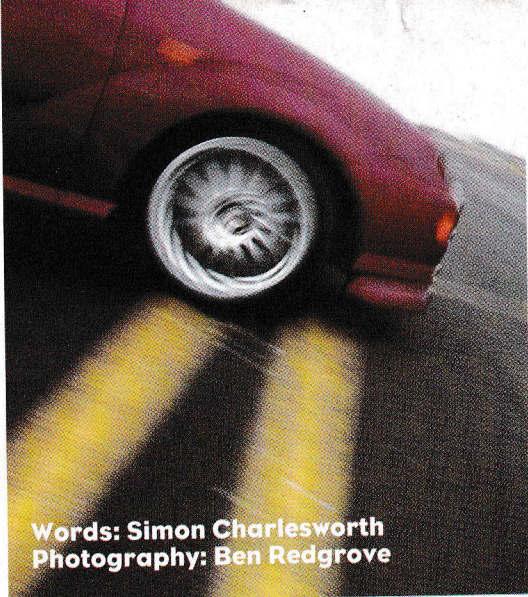




Words: Simon Charlesworth
Photography: Ben Redgrove

A turbo Ford hatch? It may sound familiar but the T190 is unlike anything that's worn the blue oval before.

Labelling a turbocharged Ford hatch as a 'first' in *Fast Ford* is controversial as well as potentially frightening. You see it's guaranteed that minutes after it goes on sale, the scary people will start pounding away at their typewriters...

'Dear *Fast Ford*, I'm writing in about your T190 story — what the hell is that Charlesworth on? Is he stupid or has he forgotten about all those Escort RS Turbos..?'

If you were thinking about writing something similar — don't — save yourself the cost of a stamp because *Fast Ford* isn't *Points Of View* and I'm not Anne Robinson.

Marketing types would describe the Focus T190 as 'exploiting a niche within the B-sector market' but we're not suits, so we'll tell you how it is. In brief, this car is a first for people who want an affordable, fast and classy Ford hatch. Granted, the Focus is the Escort's replacement but that's where any comparisons with RS Turbos should end.

The last time I drove a standard MkV Escort I was disappointed. Punting the Escie into an evil cambered, bumpy, double-apexed bend was so unpleasant that a mate was convinced we were going to die. We didn't, but we left our contribution to upholstery design all over the front seats.

Buzz forward to my first Focus drive and it's harder to imagine a bigger difference between two hatches from the same company. If you don't believe me, fling a bit of bullie around your local dealer and take one for a test-drive. It isn't just the way the car drives or its styling, it's the build quality — now it's more '90s VW than '70s BL. In short I like the Focus a lot — it just needs a bit more power.

The only problem is, despite showing concepts labelled Focus R and Focus Cosworth, nothing's happening at Ford. How do we know this? It's because the team responsible for the T190, fronted by David Paveley, took this car to the Ford big Cheddars to see if they were interested.

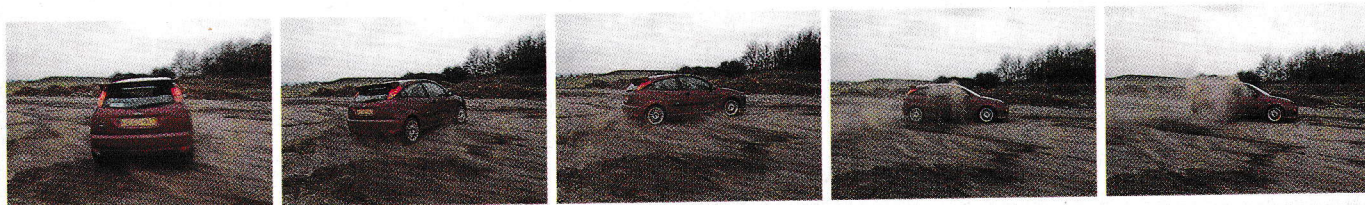
The result? Nothing. By all accounts they liked it but the car was at odds with the Focus's image. The marketing men think all Escort RSTs are driven by spotty 15-year-olds living in old caravans and they don't want these people associated with their new baby. Ouch.

After this meeting which Dave recalls as "sheer frustration", the dealer-backed team decided to go it alone and launch their own car.



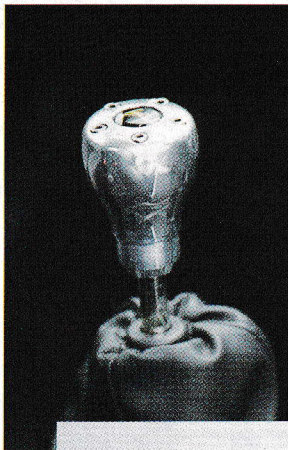
Rushing Revolution



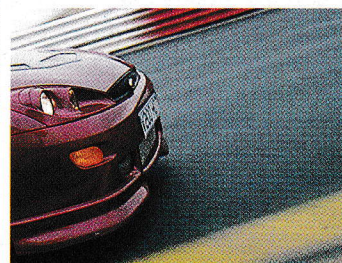


A couple of spoilers, Morette lamps, painted sills and a 25 mm suspension drop give the Focus T190 a big helping of attitude.





Instant grunt with impressive grip and handling; no wonder mud wrestler Gwyndaf Evans gives it the thumbs up.



Although the project is backed by main dealers, it would be a mistake to dismiss it as a dealer special. Far from slapping on nasty decals, sticking in a cheap sunroof and naming it along the lines of the Peugeot 106 Fart, this car has been totally engineered. Names that are scrawled all over the brochure include Mountune Engineering, Gordon Spooner Engineering and a former Ford Motorsport consultancy company, DPRS. In other words, if Ford had decided to build a fast Focus these are some of the people they would have commissioned to develop it.

The basis for the T190 is the Focus 1.8-litre Zetec with the optional Reflex pack (which includes ABS with rear disc brakes and traction control). So after you've handed over your stash, then you can start specifying your T190.

This car, V200 HOT, is the prototype car — so to give it a good caning without risking a big up-the-back-of-a-truck happening, we took it to Avon Park Raceway drag strip.

Some people will comment on the car's styling but those in the know will keep their traps shut. Those twin front lamps are needed for more light during big-speed night driving, the bonnet vent keeps things cool without the need for a new bonnet and the tough carbon fibre front bumper assembly helps grip by providing downforce with minimum drag.

At the back that rear wing helps to push the car on to the tarmac at speed, with the vertical

end-plates helping straightline stability. You may not find its looks turn you on but you've got to appreciate that this car puts engineering function ahead of any styling gimmicks.

Lift the bonnet and this methodical engineering is in here too. You notice the blue hosing but that's about it: the engine installation specified by GSE looks totally factory.

The 1.8-litre Zetec motor has been left as Ford intended, which not only makes the conversion easier but also keeps costs down. "We wanted to disturb the Ford engineering as little as possible while keeping it consistent with good performance," says Roger Allen of Mountune Engineering, who were responsible for the T190's motor (along with WRC engines and countless other motorsport lumps). So instead of strapping a big-punch blower on and then having to find a way of lowering the compression, Mountune opted for a 'low blow' turbo with integral wastegate based on the Garrett T25. Preventing this lot from getting too hot and bothered is a GSE-spec Mountune intercooler.

That was the easy part. Mountune then binned the Ford ECU because it can't be reprogrammed to sort out big power increases. Instead using a Pectel ECU and their WRC knowledge, they mapped the engine for tractable, torquey, lag-free power.

Good as the standard chassis is, it needed to cope with the Zetec's beef increase — enter GSE to develop the Sports suspension pack.

However, getting exact details of the work GSE did to the chassis is pretty hard. If you question their chassis boffin Baz Cannon, he'll talk freely about their 25 mm lowering springs and newly-rated dampers but if you ask: "Was there a lot of work carried out on the suspension geometry?" All he'll say is: "a little bit".

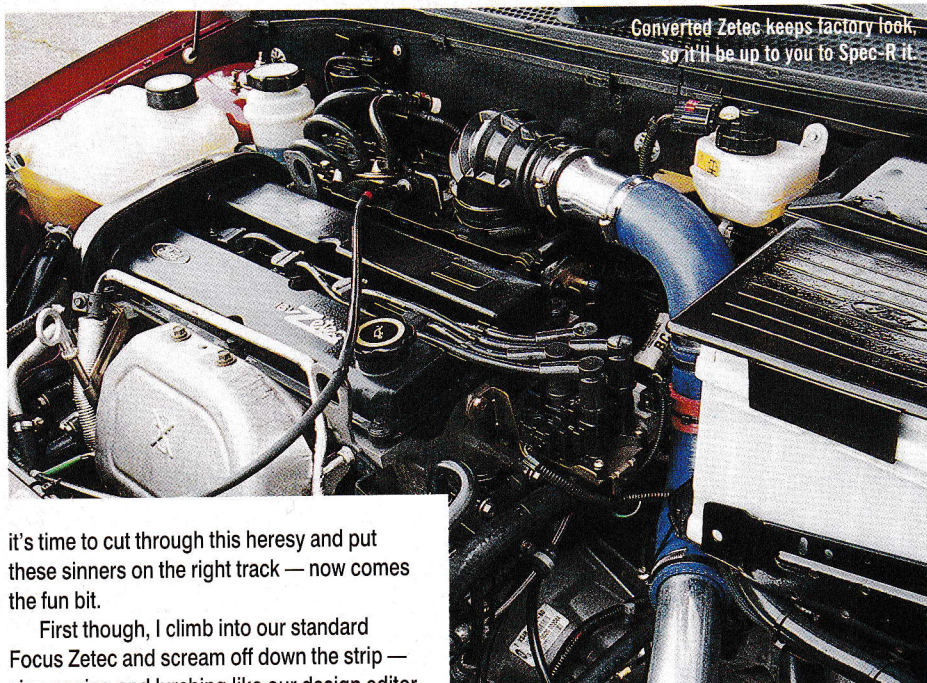
They believe they've got something special and they're keeping quiet about the secret formula. "We've worked hard matching the power delivery with the car's handling characteristics," says Baz, so we can't blame him for keeping schtum.

As for the brakes, the callipers and discs are standard but the pads are made from different materials — so it looks like posing down the pub is out. Of course you can still point out that lovely big rubber which is smeared all over your 17 in alloys.

Now that the engineering lesson's over, the real question is does it all work? It's all very well for Dave to say things like, "it's nice and comfortable with little lag and lots of torque" or that it's "an enjoyable drive" but I'm still sceptical.

In the bible it's written that front-drive cars understeer, turbos lag and front-drive turbo cars torque-steer like bastards. So





Converted Zetec keeps factory look, so it'll be up to you to Spec-R it

it's time to cut through this heresy and put these sinners on the right track — now comes the fun bit.

First though, I climb into our standard Focus Zetec and scream off down the strip — zig-zagging and lurching like our design editor on half a pint of Shandy Bass. Only by driving like a complete git would it understeer, lose grip or drift all four wheels — and with that brief spell of brutality over, I was even more impressed with the Focus than before.

Now it's the turn of the T190. Hoof meets throttle and we're moving, traction control light remains off and we're doing more speed than a crowd of washed-up '60s musicians.

Surprise — there's no lag, just a big slab of torque and a huge pile of boost. Foot on clutch, the wastegate gives a double-barrelled chatter and the stick goes up a gear enabling me to go boost surfing again.

Like what you see? The standard T190 starts at £21,900 but the car tested is fitted with some optional extras, so for details of options pricing and spec call one of the following dealers:

Stuart Griffiths
Dagenham Motors
Tel 0181 3624517

Malcolm Pritchard
Brooklyn Ford
Tel 01527 521212

Brendon Young
Hendy Ford
Tel 01703 271271

Justin Manley
Gwynndaf Evans Motors
Tel 01341 423441

Rob Chapman
Jennings Of Gateshead
Tel 0191 4607464

Thanks to Avon Park raceway near Stratford-on-Avon for their help with our photo shoot. Their 2000 drag racing calendar kicks off in April and you'll find more details on 01986 788114.

Now I'm not just high on speed but I'm in danger of overdosing — however there's not much left of the strip now and unless I want to burst on to the nearby airstrip and T-bone a Cessna, it's time to slow down. Instead of being gentle, I stamp on the brakes and the T190 returns to a standstill without any aggro.

I get back on the power and the surrounding landscape becomes blurred once again. Hauling on some serious lock things get circular, as the buckets grip against the G-force. The T190 forgets the biblical script — this is where the front should scrub wide in a huge shriek of understeer, but despite trying several times, all I can manage is a slight murmur from the front Michelins and I have to give up before dizziness makes my breakfast do an encore.

When I've recovered, I return down the strip, giving it so much abusive zig-zag treatment that if the T190 was cute and furry, I'd be on the RSPCA's wanted list. Again nothing, just shed loads of grip and plenty of feedback from the acid-sharp steering. Even after roaring up and down the twisty tarmac access roads, I can't make this turbocharged front-driver misbehave — it's too good.

Yet, I'm still not totally convinced. I really need to test that reliability claim. There's only one thing for it, I need to borrow the T190 for a comprehensive, scientific long-term test: about 12 months should do. So what are my chances, Dave? Dave...?



Fast Ford

TECH SPEC

FOCUS T190

ENGINE

1796cc Zetec 16-valve with revised Pectel ECU management, T25-based turbo with integral dump valve, GSE-specced inter-cooler and revised exhaust system

TRANSMISSION

Standard five-speed gearbox and traction control

SUSPENSION

GSE 25 mm lowering springs with GSE dampers

BRAKES

Front: ventilated discs. Rear: solid discs

WHEELS & TYRES

17x7 in silver multi-spoke alloys with 215 Michelin Pilots

BODY

Twin Morette front light, front carbon fibre bib spoiler, carbon fibre bonnet vent and rear spoiler. Black sills colour-coded to match body colour.

INTERIOR

Custom-spec leather trim including sports front bucket seats. Alloy gearknob

