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Lancia Delta integrale Group Test

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FIVE PRIME EXAMPLES OF LANCIA'S FINEST ARE
CHECKED OUT ON AUTO ITALIA'S TEST TRACK

Test by Simon Park / Photography by Michael Ward





Isn't it about time we had a collective noun for a group of Lancia Delta integrales – a 'rally', perhaps? Obvious, but appropriate. The thing is, they have a strong herding instinct, like wildebeeste in the Serengeti. They pop up mob-handed all over the place throughout the summer, then gallop from London to Brighton for their traditional end-of-season bout of mutual nuzzling and grooming, before turning in for the winter.

We were fortunate enough to waylay this particular rally after the Brighton beano and before its hibernation. Our aim was to compare a few variously-modified cars, all the work of Aldermaston-based specialists Auto Integrale. Originally there were only going to be three, but the herding instinct was just too strong. (It's a safety-in-numbers, anti-predator thing – with wildebeeste it's lions, for these guys it's Mitsubishi's...)

So here they are, all five of 'em. All are wide-bodied *Evoluzioni* – two Evo 'Ones' and three 'Twos' – and they range from pretty hot to scorching. They're a testimony to the esteem in which Lancia's last

great rally car is still held well over a decade on. Punch 'integrale tuning', or somesuch, into your web search and your brain will be reeling within minutes. Testing five cars back to back has a similar effect – by the time I was driving number four, memories of number one were becoming hazy.

In part, that was due also to the first four cars, at least, feeling quite similar despite their different specs. But that's actually a tribute both to Auto Integrale and to Lancia. To improve on the standard product you can only enhance its existing virtues, since there are precious few vices to eradicate. And enhanced they all are, with at least 30 per cent more power than standard and various modifications to, principally, suspension and brakes.

The preparation and condition of all the cars was superb, reflecting the passion and dedication of their meticulous owners. Perhaps not surprisingly, they were generally reluctant to discuss costs – it's a surefire way to get the wife demanding a new kitchen, or some similar frippery – but this sort of all-round performance doesn't come cheap. ➔



The Black Car – 1992 Evo 1, J428 LPX

Gareth Davies had wanted an integrale since he was a lad, and acquired this black Evo 1 a couple of years ago. He uses it principally for track days, and the interior reflects this – it's the only one of the five with a full FIA roll-cage, racing harness and no back seat.

Assessing the first car in a test like this is a bit like the old pinning-the-tail-on-the-donkey-blindfold game. All the familiar integrale characteristics were there – and welcome – but what else? Well, it's probably the noisiest of the five, for a start. The 270bhp engine is delightfully raucous, the chatter from the wastegate downright manic.

ABOVE: Owned by Gareth Davies, this car is used principally for track days
RIGHT: Evidence of the big UK turnout for Lancia's Turin centenary meeting



Auto Integrale's Keith Turner couldn't explain it, but reckoned it could be airbox-related.

It all adds to the drama, and there's plenty of that when you let fly. Like all of them, except Keith's own yellow monster, a bigger Garrett T38 'hybrid' turbo, with greater airflow and less exhaust back-pressure, has replaced the standard T34 in the interests of top-end power. Some lag is to be expected, therefore, but by 3,000rpm you're well on boost and flying (1.4 bar, but adjustable for each gear via the neat Apexi AVC-R controller).

I'm not totally convinced of the benefits of the short-throw gearshift – the first three cars were so-equipped – but it was oh-so good to use an integrale steering wheel again. The flawless weighting and vivid feedback were as brilliant as ever. The ride felt stiffer than I remember, and the later cars confirmed this; but it's a small price to pay for terrific chassis poise. Our test track's first corner – an epic, endless 180 degree left-hander – always tells you a lot about your mount, and on the day a line of cones (yup, even here)





created a funnel effect on the approach to the final apex which intensified the information.

I expected understeer, but Gareth's car just hunkered down and tracked through like a slot-racer. It was the tautest of the two cars equipped with RS Racing coil-overs, with perfect balance and endless grip. Through the serpentine infield section – where extreme gradient changes come as thick and fast as the tight bends, and often at the same time – it was just as tidy and predictable. The cage will have helped, adding stiffness and reinforcing, dynamically as well as visually, the car's track-day credentials.

The Repsol Car – 1995 Evo 2, L3 HOU

No, it isn't the real thing, but you have to look closely to tell. JP Lihou is a passionate *integralista* and organiser of the London to Brighton run. He's also a good friend of

ABOVE: The car looks standard but sounds spectacular with its raucous 270bhp engine and chattering wastegate. A hybrid Garret turbo is fitted

Mike Rimmer, whose ex-Carlos Sainz, Repsol-sponsored Group A car we featured in Issue 105. Mike lent JP the car for him to replicate with this Evo 2, and the result elicited compliments from ex-Lancia team boss Giorgio Pianta, no less. But isn't it a bit like a red rag to The Bull? JP says he's never been stopped. Yet.

On paper, it's the feeblest of the five, with 'only' around 250bhp; but it felt barely, if any, slower than Gareth's car, with very similar power characteristics. It was certainly quieter though, and a bit 'softer' all round. The immaculate interior, beautifully trimmed in blue 'Primma' material (a smart, heavy-duty alternative to Alcantara), is pretty much standard, and the high-backed seat was way more comfortable.

So it was softer, yes, but reassuringly sure-footed nonetheless. It was the only car not wearing Yokohama boots, but the Toyos were just as impressive. The more compliant ride was still allied to excellent body control, and rock-solid ➔





ABOVE: JP Lihou's Evo 2 is convincingly dressed up to look like the ex-Carlos Sainz Group A car. It looks mean but was actually the least modified of the group

composure round the outer circuit's ultra-fast bends. In the twisty section, braking downhill into tight bends, in particular, produced noticeably more understeer, but no great drama. And I was mighty relieved JP hadn't replicated, too, the original's bloody-minded straight-cut 'dog box'...

This car has Öhlins coil-overs, as opposed to Gareth's RSR items. But definitive comparisons between the two are hard to validate, given all the variables involved – as the next car would vividly illustrate. Keith reckons there's little

between them on the road, and so it seemed to me. Ride height, camber and stiffness are equally adjustable on both, but the Öhlins set-up, with its oil and gas-filled dampers, is more temperature-sensitive than the gas-only RSR alternative, and dearer by about £600. But it would, nonetheless, be Keith's choice for heavy competition use.

The Red Car – 1992 Evo 1, J842 JKO

We're well into a subtle theme-and-variations now. Michele Papiro's red Evo 1 reminded me of my own (erstwhile) near-identical car – until I drove it. The most standard-looking of the five, the lustrous red paint actually conceals a heavily strengthened, seam-welded shell, incorporating a diff cradle and rear strut brace. Michele, whose integrale affliction took hold after watching the 1989 RAC Rally, does a few

BELOW: The fabulous red paintwork on Michele Papiro's car covers a heavily strengthened and seam-welded shell, diff cradle and rear strut brace



track days with it and plans to add an Auto Integrale four-point front brace in due course, as well as upgrading the engine further with high-lift cams and a MoTeC management system. It does your head in, all this stuff...

With around 270bhp at the moment, performance felt predictably close to the first two – similar initial lag, followed by the same wallop mid-range and a top end that's giving off its heroic best once you've passed 6,000rpm. Where steering and brakes are concerned, you'd be hard-pressed to get a fag paper between any of them so far. Excellence is a given.

The surprise here came in the form of roll angles. We're back with RSR suspension now but, with settings far softer than the black car, this one struggled to cope with high cornering forces, the fat Yokos even chafing against the arches several times per lap. Clearly, some extra stiffness is available via the easily-accessible adjusters, and the planned front strut-brace will help, too. Mind you, it did have the supplest ride.





The Martini Car – 1993 Evo 2, K844 HAO

It's the right one – *the* classic Delta livery, done here, like the works' cars, by Publismais of Turin. It's also the only one of the 'rally' to retain standard suspension, albeit with similarly modified brakes. Owner Mark Rapson plans to upgrade to RSR coil-overs when the piggy bank's replenished but, meanwhile, this promises to be interesting, given the healthy 280-odd bhp already ensconced under the bonnet.

So, just how much do you gain from a substantial investment in after-market springing? Frustratingly, at this point we were denied access to the challenging infield section

of the track (it was closed off for the exclusive use of someone further up the pecking order) which makes a conclusive answer pretty difficult. Driving it, by chance, straight after Michele's softly set-up car muddled the waters further.

But there clearly was a certain flabbiness compared with the first two – a generally looser feel hard to ascribe to any particular function. Which is why enhancement, rather than a radical re-think, is all the integrale requires. Slightly less body control, a bit of 'float', more understeer, yes – but

Mark's Martini was a reminder of just how good these last Deltas were straight out of the box.





And it was having to cope with 30 per cent more power than standard from an engine which, despite an intermittent misfire, pulled as hard as any so far. Curiously, its braking felt sharper than even the red and black cars, which were similarly equipped with the larger, 343mm front discs.

The Yellow Car – 1994 Evo 2, L178 HHO

So much for the antipasti – here's the meat course. Keith Turner's own car is an altogether more extreme machine. Stripped to a bare shell, it was sand-blasted, seam-welded and rebuilt without either ABS or air-con. Its Öhlins suspension is virtually identical to JP's Repsol car, but it's the engine that makes the difference.

It's the only one of the five to use a more modern, roller-bearing GT30 turbo, which Keith has adapted for the integrale. With an external wastegate, it spins up far faster than the T38, and is more compatible with the Apexi boost controller. Keith has his set to deliver a maximum 1.6bar in third and fourth gears, and we're talking 345bhp at around 5,000rpm, and 330lb ft of torque – at the moment. Keith is planning a re-map, and 400bhp.

Half way round the first left-hander I begin to wonder why. You mean this isn't quick enough? The extra 70-odd ➔



ABOVE: Power unit has a healthy 280bhp, which is 30% more than standard
LEFT: Eye-catching Martini livery. Is this the ultimate colour scheme?



Lancia Delta integrales are an endangered species, with many parts either obsolete or in the process of becoming obsolete. If you need any advice on sourcing parts one of the UK's major specialists is Tanc Barratt.

Mr Barratt said: "We are the buffer between being able to use your car or not being able to use your car. Our business is to make it possible for owners to keep driving and enjoying their integrales."

Tanc Barratt takes on service work to complete restoration, diagnostics, integrale engine rebuilds, engine upgrades, transmission rebuilds, suspension upgrades, as well as being one of the major parts specialists supplying the UK and further afield.

● For more information visit
www.tancbarratt.co.uk
or call (01299) 266355.



bhp are all too evident approaching the apex 'funnel', and the front end starts to run wide. It was almost bound to, with this much oomph. The turbo's characteristics are easy to see, feel and hear, the boost gauge and rev counter needles' surging parabolas tracked, in parallel, by a dense whine from the T30, each change-up punctuated by the hissing, spitting wastegate.

The Group A cams noticeably liven-up the engine's top end, too, and it seemed happy to sail well beyond 6k with

ABOVE: Auto Integrale's own car was bound to be something special and it is. The modern roller-bearing turbo produces 1.6 bar to provide a huge 345bhp

gusto – not that it's necessary. But everything happens quicker here, an attentive right foot now needed to adjust the car's trajectory through the curves without losing boost pressure. Cornering requires more concentration, and a generally rather tighter line, but the reward is staggering speed with the same basic sure-footedness of the earlier cars. There's a hard edge and a focus here which the others lack – barely exploitable to the full on the road, but perfect for track days.



There are worse ways to spend a day than driving cars like this. Keith's own machine is a no-compromise blast, but you'd probably be happy enough with the performance of the first four, all of which would make very civilised A to B transport. In the real world, in the right hands, nothing this side of a well-peddled Evo VIII or M3 could live with them. You've got a lot of options (a glance at the chart shows what a mix-and-match job this is), but the Repsol car was a nice compromise, and would do me fine – painted a nice, subtle red. **ai**



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THE MAIN MODS

	Car 1	Car 2	Car 3	Car 4	Car 5
	Black (J428 LPX)	Repsol (L3 HOU)	Red (J842 JKO)	Martini (K844 HAO)	Yellow (LI78 HH0)
Engine:	Garrett T38 turbo (1.4 bar); larger, front-mounted intercooler; Apexi AVC-R boost controller; Auto Integrale tubular manifold; fast road cams; approx 280bhp	Garrett T38 turbo (1.2 bar); Techno 2 tubular exhaust manifold; approx 250bhp	Garrett T38 turbo (1.2 bar); larger, front-mounted intercooler; Apexi AVC-R boost controller; Auto Integrale tubular exhaust manifold; approx 280bhp	Garrett T38 turbo (1.2 bar); Auto Integrale tubular exhaust manifold; approx 280bhp	Garrett GT30 turbo (1.6 bar max, see text); external wastegate; larger, front-mounted intercooler; Apexi AVC-R boost controller; Group A cams; 345bhp; Cat removed
Transmission:	Lancia short-shift gearchange	As Car 1	As Car 1	standard gearchange	As Car 4
Suspension:	RS Racing coil-over units front and rear. Height and camber adjustable	Öhlins coil-over units front and rear. Height adjustable	As Car 1	standard Evo 2	As Car 2
Brakes:	Alcon floating discs, 348mm (front); Tarox switchable ABS	Alcon floating discs, 323mm (front); std rear switchable ABS	As Car 1 discs, 311mm (rear);	As Car 1 std rear discs	As Car 2, no ABS 282mm rear discs
Wheels:	Speedline alloy, 7.5 x 17;	Compomotive alloy,	As Car 1	As Car 2	As Car 1
Tyres:	Yokohama Paradis	7.5 x 17; Toyo Proxes	Yokohamas	215/40 VR17	215/40 VR17

Note: the two wheel types may look identical, but the (magnesium) Speedlines are £350 each, while the (aluminium) Compomotives are a relatively paltry £165. You pays your money . . .