

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Strong on image, reliability and build quality, the Golf GTi Convertible has never had much trouble selling secondhand. Mark Bishop tracks down one that looks like it means business

SECONDHAND spotlight

Model: Volkswagen Golf GTi Convertible

Date Registered: 5/9/83

Asking price: £4995

Mileage: 68,838

Colour: White

Service history: Full, except 65,000-mile service overdue

Warranty: One year

Number of owners: Two

Dealer: Westlake Garages, 193-195 Lower Richmond Road, Richmond, TW9 4LT. Tel (081) 876 4707



Hoods tend to last well; easy to lower

SPRING IS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION for poets and songwriters, but among car dealers it's known as the time when people start buying convertibles. The first sign of daffodils sprouting on a sunny weekend generates interest in soft-tops; if the Easter bank holiday weekend is a sunny one, the trickle of showroom traffic becomes a stream.

The Volkswagen Golf GTi Convertible has long been a favourite of sun lovers. Based on the evergreen MkI Golf platform, and strengthened by German coachbuilder Karmann, it has an enduring image and a reputation for durability. Production started as early as 1979 (though early cars are badged GLi), and with almost 2000 sold annually since then, there should be plenty to choose from, with prices starting at £3000.

Though my search for a cheap VW Golf GTi soft-top started just before the psychologically important Easter weekend, time after time my calls to dealers met with the same response: "Sorry mate, it's been sold." It seems — at the cheaper end of the market, at least — that convertible Golf GTis are year-round sellers.

Open-top hot hatches are cars to be noticed in, but the all-white example on Westlake Garage's forecourt in Richmond, Surrey, was in a class of its own. A colour-coded body kit, complete with 15-inch 'mag' wheels, guarantees that A308 HPL's next owner will stand out from the crowd.

Proprietor Richard Challen agreed. "Convertibles sell as much on image as anything else. I'm wary of using the word 'Yuppie' these days, but that car is likely to sell to an image-conscious professional person, probably under 30, quite possibly female. To some people the Zender body kit looks a bit too flash, but for that one person in a hundred who goes for that sort of thing, it makes this car quite irresistible."

The car's 68,838 recorded miles were confirmed by a full service history, and I could not fault the car mechanically. Poor-quality accident repairs are a common problem with secondhand hot hatches, so I checked the bodywork carefully.

There were indications of overspray on the car's underside beneath the rear section, but signs of wear in the boot reassured me that this car had never been the victim of a rear-end

shunt, so any damage must have been fairly light.

The interior was undoubtedly the car's worst feature. The upholstery was heavily worn, particularly in the rear, and the back seats suffered mysterious, unsightly brown stains. A poke around the inside of this Golf confounds the common assumption that German cars all have hardy interiors. And as for the VW advert which shows that the only thing that squeaks in a Golf GTi is a pendant

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI CONVERTIBLE LAYOUT

Transverse, front engine, front-wheel drive

ENGINE

Capacity 1781cc, 4 cylinders in line

Bore 81.0mm **Stroke** 86.4mm

Compression ratio 10:1

Head/block Al alloy/cast iron

Valve gear ohc, 2 valves per cylinder

Fuel and ignition breakerless electronic ignition, Bosch K-Jetronic injection

Max power 112bhp (83kW ISO) at 5800rpm

Max torque 113lb ft (153Nm) at 3500rpm

GEARBOX

Five-speed manual

Ratios Top 0.912, 4th 1.13, 3rd 1.44, 2nd 2.12, 1st 3.45

Final drive ratio 3.65

SUSPENSION

Front independent strut, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear independent trailing arm and torsion beam, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

STEERING

Rack and pinion, 3.3 turns lock to lock

BRAKES

Front 9.4ins (239mm) dia discs

Rear 7ins (180mm) dia drums

WHEELS AND TYRES

6x14ins steel rims, 185/60 HR14 tyres

DIMENSIONS

Length 152ins (3815mm)

Width 63.4ins (1610mm)

Height 55.5ins (1410mm)

Wheelbase 94.4ins (2398mm)

Weight 2128lb (966kg)

PERFORMANCE (claimed)

0-60mph 9.4secs **Max speed** 108mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION (claimed)

25.4mpg urban, 42.8mpg at 56mph, 31.7mpg at 75mph

Westlake Garages



What the trade says

THESE QUALITY German cabrios have been sure-fire retail sellers for many years, but prices have fallen away in the past year and there are more available than ever before. Prices for nice examples of all ages were very high during the mid and late '80s due to its very strong image and many 'yuppie' women who would not be seen collecting the kids in anything else.

Harder times have seen their status symbol role disappearing, but their superb build quality and mechanical excellence will always ensure a buyer at more sensible price levels.

Convertibles based on volume-produced hatchbacks are not always a success, but the Golf GTi convertible has always been in a different class to its competitors from Ford, Vauxhall and the rest, with high standards of fit and finish and a sensible and reliable hood operation which will stand up to hard use. The fact that it is still based on the Mk1 Golf shape, which last saw the light of day in 1983, has worked in its favour because the original Golf was a much better looking car than its dumpy successor and the clean lines lend themselves to the convertible treatment.

The days of sub-20per cent initial depre-

ciation have long gone and buyers of new cars can expect to lose around 37 per cent in the first year. After this, depreciation slows down considerably and actually becomes better and better with advancing age. This is, of course, for cars with reasonable mileage, good condition and service history. Abused or high-mileage examples will depreciate very heavily, though.

Regional differences are pronounced for these cars and prices for examples in the north are usually much lower than those in areas like Richmond, Surrey, where the 'flashy' test car was located.

Resplendent in white, it boasted a full body kit, with matching trim, four square headlights and 15-inch white alloys. This car was probably likely to repel more buyers than it attracted, but the old motor trade saying that "there is a man somewhere for everything" will no doubt hold true for this car.

Older versions do not generally benefit from these slightly vulgar body kit treatments and their trade value can be lower than those in original spec. Around £750 had been added to the price of this car for its customising features and it is a premium that few buyers would accept.

A mileage of 68,000 seemed to demand a price of around £4250 and only those who were overwhelmed by its appearance would think £4995 sensible. It is well for all prospective buyers of seven or eight-year-old cars to remember that originality is paramount for residual strength and purchases made more with the heart than with the head prove to be a big mistake.

John Coates

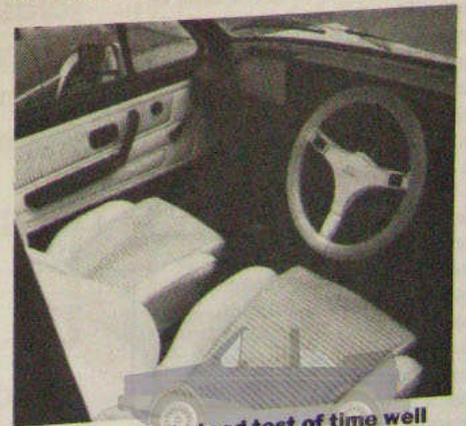
earing, I'd lay good odds that its ad agency never drove this car.

But putting these criticisms into the context of a seven-year-old car which has covered almost 70,000 miles, this striking example was in reasonable shape. But would I buy it?

Looking at it rationally, I would. Our trade expert John Coates reckons the car is priced quite keenly, and it requires little more than retrimmed seats to bring it up to scratch.

Only trouble is, I don't know if I could live with the loud body kit. The Zender make-up throws down a visual challenge to the white-socked boys in ageing Escort XR3is, making fast driving a far more stressful experience than it might otherwise be. As the salesman admitted, image is an important factor in choosing a car, and I'd prefer something more anonymous.

But if he agreed to remove the side skirts, spoilers, white wheels and angular grille as part of the deal, and restore the timeless integrity of the Mk1 Golf, I'd be very tempted. ■



Seats have not stood test of time well