

BBC
Top Gear
M A G A Z I N E



Story: Anthony ffrench-Constant

FANCY A RUN DOWN TO BRIGHTON, DARLING?

A pleasant weekend with your loved one – a picnic, a breath of sea air and a stroll along the prom. Or, rather, a ton-plus blast down it in a deranged Audi RS2. Pack your trunks, it's the Brighton Speed Trials



Photography: Norman Lomax

Recent visitors to Brighton may be gently perplexed at the presence of an arrow-straight, palm-width black line running for exactly 440 yards down the middle of that timeless seafront promenade, Madeira Drive.

This is not, as you might suspect, the work of some beret-clad, avant-garde artist aiming, with the aid of a poorly executed beard, a four-inch Harris paintbrush and minimal imagination, to stiff the Tate Gallery out of a quick £200,000. It is, in fact, the work of the appropriately named Derek Furlong, who created this kinetic masterpiece armed

with nothing more than a Suzuki GSX-R1100 Turbo and a pair of testicles the proportions of which would even put a certain swagger into the stride of an African bull elephant.

For it is here, on one day of every year since 1905 (with minor lapses accredited to bureaucratic whinging) that aimlessly wandering couples with ears glowing red from the biting summer breeze, sharing a bag of scalding hot grease containing salt, vinegar and the occasional chip, and sporting a pair of green-hued, rock-ingesting children expressing their avowed intent to be violently sick at any

moment, are brushed unceremoniously aside. Black bin liners adorn the 30mph signs and a bewildering array of two- and four-wheeled machinery, from the laughable to the lethal, assembles. Today, the Brighton and Hove Motor Club plays host to the Brighton Speed Trials; the oldest competition in the British motor sport calendar. And we're there to leave our own black lines on Madeira Drive.

It all started innocently enough. Get birded-up, bung the luggage, the picnic hamper and the dog into the back of the Audi shooting brake, and tool off to the south coast for a long and, with luck,



Just the job for giving the vinaigrette a gentle shake, the Audi RS2 will take you, your beloved, your large, hairy dog, two passengers and all the cucumber sandwiches and chilled champers you could possibly need, anywhere you like at speeds of up to 163mph. It doesn't look exactly pastoral in screaming mental blue, but it wouldn't have the same scary effect if it came in Barbour jacket green



gently smutty weekend. All, however, is not what it seems. Firstly, it's not really my dog; secondly, this is no ordinary Audi and thirdly (but don't tell the missus) this is no ordinary weekend.

Schizophrenia, the dictionary tells us, is 'behaviour that appears to be motivated by contradictory or conflicting principles'. In which case, the Audi RS2 should seek out some serious psychiatric help immediately. On the one hand, it's a genuine estate car. Furthermore, permanent four-wheel drive is just the ticket if one wishes to avoid the embarrassment of bogging down, right in front of that frightful Mrs Ponsonby-Sorbet whilst collecting the young ladies from the season's soggyer gymkhanas.

The interior is beautifully finished and the standard specification includes air conditioning, a six-speaker stereo radio/cassette with CD auto-changer and electric everything.

On the other hand... Well, the RS2 goes just about as quickly as anything with four wheels that you're likely to come across on the road and it stops, wet roads or dry, as abruptly as a fly on the windscreen. It's not that the RS2 isn't entirely happy trundling about at school run speeds but, rather, I defy anyone to climb into its kidney-hugging Recaro sports seats, finished, like the rest of the interior, in leather and retina-numbing blue Alcantara to match the exterior, cast their eyes over the neatly laid out dashboard with its swanky white dials, switch on, and not go like an absolute loon at all times, all over the place.

It is so incredibly easy to drive quickly, that no driver alive could possibly be entirely happy in this car unless hunting through the six speed box in search of the requisite revs to extract maximum boost from the KKK turbocharger, with the sort of monotonous regularity more usually associated with the daily consumption of 'Alpen' breakfast cereal. My only concern was whether the RS2 would behave in a similar manner to its Quattro cousins in giving little indication of the approaching limits to its, albeit phenomenal, grip until I had transcended them, and was in the hedge.

The best thing about this car, though, was that the missus loved it. So secure did she feel that the thorough dissection of all other traffic as we headed south towards the coast was accompanied by wholesome giggling rather than the more usual gritted-teeth cacophony of 'please slow down' noises.

The weekend began, as weekends should, with a quiet picnic in the country. These days, searching for a genuinely secluded picnic spot in the South of England can take fractionally longer than the entire allocation of daylight hours available, even by RS2. Settle almost anywhere, and the instant you've unpacked all the goodies a badly maintained farmer will appear from nowhere toting a superbly maintained twelve-bore. You will be encouraged to "Git of moi laand". You will acquiesce.

We are lucky, however, and quickly settle into the traditional English picnic pursuits of keeping the dog's hooter out of the hamper, ensuring that there is an even spread of ants over everything edible, and thrashing wildly at itinerant wasps with those pages of the newspaper that have not already been blown clear into the next county.

Picnic over, we retrieve the dog from the hamper

one last time and once more set about the traffic with a vengeance. Schizophrenia has set in again.

All too soon Brighton, pressed shivering against a grey, gale-swept Channel, hoves into view. The town is heaving. It's the start of the conference season. Even the wet bit is overcrowded. It's the World Windsurfing Championships, and the sea is littered with hundreds of 'Club 18 & Dirty' beef-cakes, belting about on oversized cuttlefish bones at incomprehensible speeds.

Now is the time to come clean and explain to the long-suffering other half why she was persuaded to try Brighton for this particular weekend break rather than the Lyme Regis she had preferred. The lady is not entirely amused.

The headquarters of the venerable Brighton and Hove Motor Club comprise two arches set into the embankment at the extreme eastern end of Madeira Drive. Here we stumble across Tony Johnstone, the Clerk of the Course. After some serious, knees-bent, pleading behaviour, he kindly grants us a place in the following day's proceedings - the Speed Trials.

So. Food, and a night's lie down, then it's time to climb into some hastily-blagged racing overalls, get the car numbered and stickered up, fiddle the timing beam breaker-bar onto the Audi's nose and take on board sufficient quantities of coffee and fine fags to set me vibrating like a harp-string. Yep; pre-match nerves. Big time.

By 8.30am, Madeira Drive is awash with nefarious machinery undergoing frantic last-minute tweakings. No such bothersome behaviour with the RS2, though - Porsche prepared it earlier.

The names of Porsche and Audi have been linked before, most memorably when Ferdinand Porsche designed the all conquering Auto Union Silver Arrows. The RS2 is the result of the latest collaboration between the two.

It's based on the seriously rapid 230bhp Audi 80 Estate S2, which already has a 2,226cc five-cylinder turbocharged and intercooled engine, six-speed gearbox and four-wheel drive. But Porsche, handed this already potent unit, have indulged in some highly advanced fiddling about. The RS2 engine produces a whopping 315bhp at 6,500rpm and 302lb ft of torque at 3,000rpm, representing an absurd 37 per cent increase in power and a 17 per cent increase in torque over its 'sluggish' cousin.

To complement the RS2's blistering performance, Porsche has re-engineered its dampers and anti-roll bars, and added its own distinctive 17-inch alloys shod in 245/40 ZR17 tyres. The ruthlessly efficient, ABS-equipped brakes are Porsche-sourced, too. It's written on the cheeky red caliper housings peeking out from behind the five-spoke alloys. I caught one embarrassed admirer rummaging about between the rear wheel spokes: "Sorry," he muttered. "I thought you had an empty crisp packet wedged in there."

Audi quotes a top speed of 163mph and a 0-62mph time of 5.4secs, which is, let's face it, rather conservative of them.

In very limited time at the Millbrook test track, tarmac still soggy from a torrential thunderstorm, we posted a 0-60mph time of under five seconds. More remarkably, 0-30 took less than 1.5 seconds. This all added up to the potential of sub-14 second standing quarter mile times down Madeira Drive. I



Neat little sporty touches abound; the white clocks, the deep, foglamped spoiler, the Porsche badges and the crimson calipers peeking out from between the alloy wheels' spokes all remind you that you're not driving a normal estate car, but rather one of the fastest, grippiest, most unhinged performance cars anywhere. It just happens to have a lot of luggage space in the back. It's more like an F1 van



A U D I R S 2 L O O N

Performance			
0-30mph	1.5 secs	0-40mph	2.8 secs
0-50mph	3.9 secs	0-60mph	5.1 secs
0-70mph	7.0 secs	0-80mph	8.8 secs
0-90mph	10.9 secs	0-100mph	14.0 secs
0-110mph	17.0 secs	0-120mph	21.8 secs
0-130mph	26.8 secs	max speed	159.3 mph
standing qtr	13.8 secs	terminal speed	99.3 mph
30-50 in 3rd	4.3 secs	50-70 in 5th	5.4 secs
30-70 thru grs	5.5 secs	Braking 70mph-0	169ft

Costs			
	list price	£45,705	
Test mpg	17.7	Euromix mpg	26.8
Service int.	10,000 miles	Warranty	1 year unlimited

What you get

Central locking, radio cassette, power steering, electric windows (front & rear), sunroof, alarm, immobiliser, alloy wheels, anti-lock brakes driver's airbag yes
Radio CD option

Technical

Engine	5cyl, 20v, DOHC	Capacity	2,226cc
Max power	315bhp @ 6500rpm		
Max torque	302lb ft @ 3000rpm		
Transmission	6 sp man	Brakes	vented discs
Front suspension	MacP strut, lower wish, coil springs		
Rear suspension	Double wishbone, control arms		
Wheels	7Jx17, alloy	Dimensions L:	157" W: 67"
Tyres	Dunlop Sport 245/40 ZR17		



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