

1. Graham Goode Racing Ford Focus ST300



GGR are a well-known, and well-respected name in the UK tuning industry, especially where the blue oval badge is concerned.

For those who live underground, boss Graham Goode was a Cosworth-powered touring car hero in the '70s and '80s – and it's this race to road tuning pedigree GGR customers tap into.

This is GGR's latest demo car – a Focus ST; the latest, lairiest, hairy-chested, bright orange offering from Ford. And this normally 225bhp motor is now equipped with a claimed 303bhp/303lb ft engine conversion; extracting every last drop of performance potential from the Volvo-sourced five-cylinder, 2.5-litre Duratec engine. The £2395 + VAT conversion is quite simple, but extensive and immaculately presented, nay factoriesque in feel.

I really wanted to love this car, but the experience of driving it quickly has sucked all the love away

Away from the boosted-up, Bluefin ECU remapped engine, GGR have also added a number of chassis upgrades. The first, and undeniably the greatest of these, is the huge AP Racing big brake kit; 362mm x 32mm vented discs with six-pot callipers, Ferodo DS2500 pads and Goodridge braided lines. Pure braking brilliance.

The chassis is also honed for handling with 25mm Eibach lowering springs, a GGR wheel alignment and a set of enormous (to house the beefy brakes) Sparco 19-inch split rims with 235/35x19 Toyo Proxes T1-R tyres, for added traction.

First impressions, based on the car's clean, but high-impact exterior, are excellent. The car looks superbly in-your-face and suitably hot hatchy. And GGR, adding the wheels, low profile rubber and smart Magnex tail pipes, have enhanced the ST's already purposeful looks. And GGR's under-bonnet work is a work of art. It is all so darn neat, which is phenomenal, given the amount of re-shuffling, bespoke manufacturing and R&D conducted here.

But it's not all good news. Mainly, because of Ford. The standard seating position is terrible, with a capital T. This is the position of a shopping trolley – high up and on, not in the seat. You do not feel connected to the car. And I haven't even turned a wheel yet. Here goes.

The engine sparks into life with a lovely five cylinder hum, and we're off – but not as fast as I thought we would be. Jesus, this car is heavy. Really heavy. A big hot hatch no-no in my book. And this lardy weight, combined with vague steering feedback and that awful driving position make what I thought would be a huge fun car into a minor let down, sadly.