

New car news



FORD GTX1

You can now turn your Ford GT into a roadster with an officially approved conversion that mirrors GT40 history

Ford's GT is one of the most desirable and practical supercars. And having had the good fortune to have driven one last summer from London to Maranello (*Octane*, issue 29), the thought crossed my mind; 'why doesn't Ford offer a roadster version?' Seems that I wasn't the only person sharing that thought; Kip Ewing, a senior engineer on the Ford GT team, had the same idea and, after presenting it to Ford's management, got the approval to turn fantasy into reality.

Ewing turned to Mark Gerisch, a metal bender who makes his living decapitating Rolls-Royce Phantoms and rendering them into convertibles at his Ganaddi Design facility in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Gerisch not only took a hacksaw to Ford's £120,900 (\$141,000) supercar but developed a novel five-piece removable roof panel and, starting this July, he will offer it as a £22,000 (\$38,000) option. What Ford GT owner wouldn't want the pleasure of working on his or her tan at close to 200mph?

While the purists may cry foul, a roadster version of Ford's GT isn't without precedent. In 1965 the last five original series Ford GTs built (before production of the later GT40s started) were originally configured as roadsters. The best known, the original X-1, was driven by Bruce McLaren and Chris Amon before returning to the US and winning the 1966 Sebring 12-hour race, with Ken Miles and Lloyd Ruby handling the driving chores.



With Sebring in mind, Gerisch invited *Octane* to go for a 1000-mile joyride from Houston to Orlando, where the car was scheduled to appear at a series of events leading up to the 2006 race. This would also mark the anniversary of its namesake's victory 40 years ago.

We had to make the trip *sans* top. The prototype roof, which had first been seen at the SEMA Show in November, was back in Green Bay being used as a template for the production top. The centre T-section comes in two pieces. When removed, the front section stores behind the seats, the stripe acting as a stylistic waterfall which helps integrate it. The rear T-section goes into the forward luggage compartment. The remaining two pieces, which are essentially the tops of the original doors cut into the roof of the coupé, are placed down behind each seat.

The GTX1 impresses in so many ways but the almost complete absence of cockpit turbulence, even at speeds over 80mph, is particularly amazing. It was so quiet with the roof out that we were able to audition the high-powered Sony audio system featuring the Drag and Drive MEX-1GP (US price \$350). Drag and Drive is a 1GB detachable faceplate that hooks up to your PC, Mac or laptop via a USB port. The idea is you then drag your MP3 or WMA files from your hard drive to the faceplate's internal flash memory. Very, very clever, just like the GTX1.

Driving the GTX1 is just like any GT, only better. First there's the undeniable appeal of the roofless configuration. More pragmatic is the advantage when parking (as if one would ever park it between two econoboxes at the mall). Because the coupé's doors are cut into the roof, it is almost essential for ingress and egress to open the doors fully: the conversion from GT to GTX1 addresses this little dilemma.

All I know is, if I were lucky enough to win the lottery and be in the position to actually afford a GT of my own, before taking delivery it would be shipped to Genaddi Design for the GTX1 conversion. The transformation to GTX1 makes Ford's contemporary GT truly complete.

For those of you who have already been lucky enough to see your numbers come up, you can contact Mark Gerisch by calling +1 920 242 9156 or you can log on to www.gt1.com.
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