

Road cars t



Power mania has put today's saloons ahead of yesterday's supercars. And it's not over yet, says **Damon Hill**

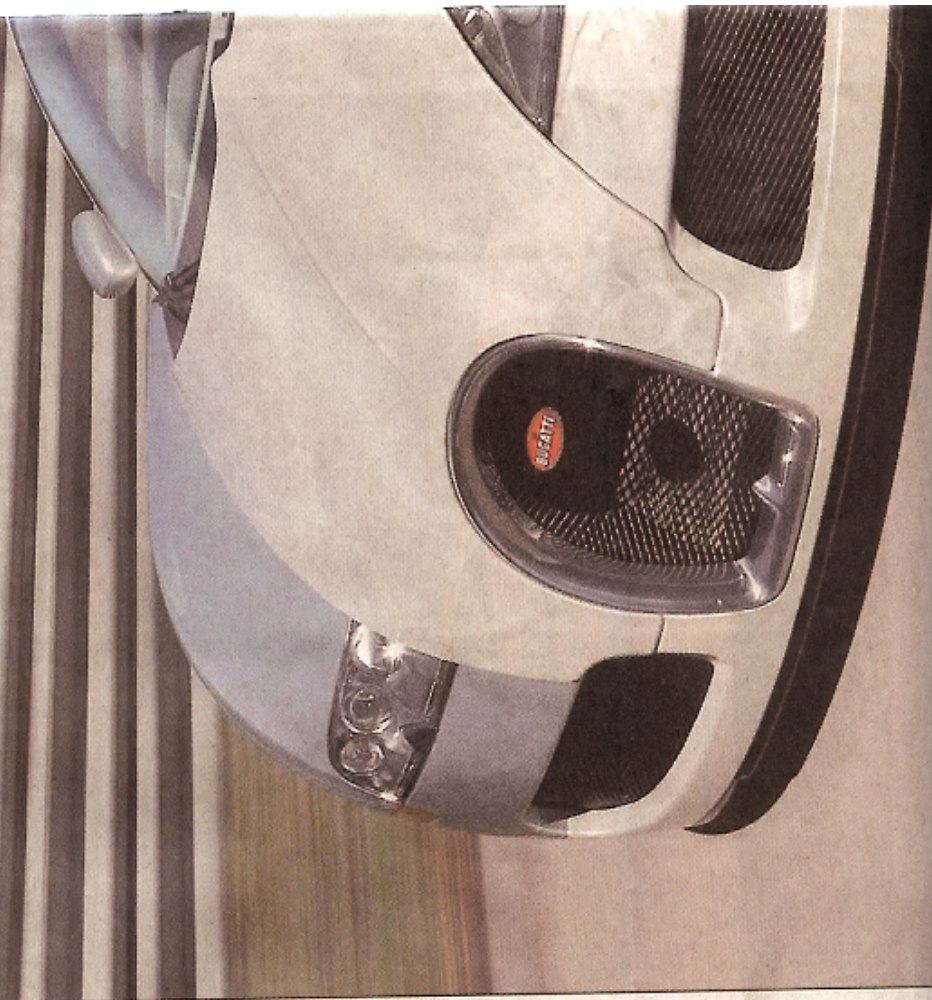
Ten seasons ago I won the Formula One world championship driving a Williams-Renault FW18. Its 3 litre V10 engine produced around 800bhp and, at the faster circuits such as Hockenheim and Monza, it would push me through the air at about 215mph. Compared with any road car around at that time, the FW18 was as a missile is to a moped.

At the start of each F1 season I'd climb back into the car for the first test, drive onto the track and think: "This is just ridiculous." The power of those things was simply overwhelming. But then you'd do a few laps, acclimatise, and after a day or so you'd be pushing for more and you'd convince yourself your toaster had more power. To the F1 driver there is no such thing as "enough power", and until an F1 car can spin its wheels at any speed, in any gear and on any part

In 1992 Jaguar produced the 542bhp XJ220. This car was so fast that not only did Martin Brundle drive one on a banked track at 217mph but my old team-mate David Coulthard would have won his class at Le Mans in one had he not been disqualified over a technicality. In the meantime the Bugatti name was exhumed by a wealthy Italian industrialist called Romano Artioli and slapped on the nose of the rather ugly but undeniably potent 552bhp EB110 GT. But the one we were all waiting for was the McLaren F1. This was a car designed by Gordon Murray,

who had already created F1 world championship winners for Brabham and McLaren and was now having a go at a road car. It was like nothing else ever to bear a tax disc. It had 627bhp, would hit 60mph in 3.2sec and would not stop accelerating until it was doing 240mph.

It had a few high-profile crashes — the burnt-out remains of one of the prototypes still lies buried in the Namibian desert — and most of





The all-conquering Bugatti Veyron is faster than a Formula One car

One family estate now has as much power as the fastest road car in the world 18 years ago

against even James Hunt's F1 car, the Bugatti would not see which way it went. Even so, I find it astonishing that a mere road car, albeit one costing £810,000, will not only accelerate as fast as an F1 car — at least until around 60mph — but has more power too: even Fernando Alonso's Renault doesn't have 1000bhp.

And the inevitable effect of all this power at the top end of the market is that everything else gets dragged along in its wake. Many of the cars used by my P1 Club have power outputs that were the stuff of dreams just a few short years ago — the 550bhp Ford GT, the 571bhp Lamborghini Murcielago and the BMW M5, which has an "M" button that boosts the bhp by about 100 up to

507bhp, are just three of the more powerful ones on offer. Perhaps more amazingly still, Mercedes now offers a standard estate car — the E 55 AMG — with 476bhp, which is about the same power as the Ferrari F40 had in 1987. That's the stage we've reached: a family estate now has as much power as the fastest road car the world had ever seen 18 years ago. Imagine an estate with 1000bhp and top speed of 250mph. Sounds ludicrous? At this rate we'll be there by 2025.

Details of P1 membership and the club's fleet (with a combined 17914bhp) can be found at www.p1international.com or by calling 01372 374 400

ever to be put on sale. A racing car for the road with outlandish looks and a savage kick, it turned real men into gibbering wrecks with one flex of the accelerator. Hugely significant, not least because it was the last model to be launched in Enzo Ferrari's lifetime



PORSCHE 959

In its era, a technological tour de force, with a 450bhp engine, a six-speed gearbox and an ultra sophisticated four-wheel drive system. Most famous, probably unfairly, for not quite doing 200mph (it was good for 197mph), the car represented Porsche at its creative and practical best. When it first appeared it was the fastest car in the world, yet would cruise the highways of Europe at ludicrous speeds with all the reliability of a VW Golf. A performance landmark

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