



TOPCAR

TORQUE TALK

OUR
IN-DEPTH
MOTORING
REVIEW

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Russian tuners are almost unknown outside the Motherland, but one company has gone global.

92 | MAFETY

TORQUE TALK

*Motoring author, racing driver and photo-journalist
Ian Kuah reports on the TOP CAR STINGER*



SIXTYY | 93



TOPCAR

TORQUE TALK

Just as in other countries all over the world, car tuning and customisation in Russia encompasses enthusiasts from two extremes: those who crave power and speed, and those who just like to cruise.

The really hard-core speed junkies take part in the popular Moscow Unlimited 800+ event, a side-by-side standing mile drag race for standard and modified supercars held on the very long runway of the Vnukovo-1 Airport runway. There are two categories: Fastest car over one kilometre, and fastest car over one mile. While this event is not about trading pit stops, honour is most definitely at stake.

The counterpoint is aftermarket customisation with the conventional blend of body styling, wheels, suspension and special interior. While most of the well-known German tuners are represented in Russia through local partners, there is also a small but vibrant homegrown customising industry that caters to the specific tastes of Russian clients.

Depending on social class and higher education, the taste of a Russian client can be either similar to or radically different from that of European as well as Arab and Far Eastern customers. Thus it is important that a local tuner or customisation specialist be able to

meet their client's needs with a total understanding of what is expected in terms of style, materials and colour.

For instance, Russia is the only market where crocodile leather is a popular material for car interior. I have personally seen several Russian-owned Bentleys and Mercedes in Marbella and Monaco with dashboard top rolls and other interior trim made from real or imitation crocodile skin.

However, mimicking German tuners with homegrown body styling and interior, but with a local twist, is far from where Russian car customisation begins and ends. In the former Soviet Union, new



TOPCAR

TORQUE TALK

cars and spare parts were relatively scarce, although not to anything like the extent they are in Dubai.

During the communist times, the wealthy and well-connected could always get imported cars and service support, but the average person had to put their name down for a Lada and wait several years. Needless to say, spares for the local machinery were also hard to come by, and you were advised to remove the windscreen wiper blades when you parked on the street.

It was no wonder then that the best motor engineers and mechanics from the former Soviet Union countries exhibit world-class ingenuity and creativity, as they often had to make from scratch what was not readily available.

That ingenuity was allowed to shine on the world stage after the Berlin Wall fell, with a very special one-off car from a Moscow-based company called Adelvel that briefly became the darlings of the international press.

A bespoke coachbuilder whose fanatical pursuit of exclusivity for their wealthy clients meant that they only ever made one of everything, Adelvel created their iconic Volga V12 Coupe from a stretched, widened and modified GAZ 31 Volga saloon shell, underpinned by the mechanicals and interior from a latest GAZ31.

Sadly, Adelvel no longer exists, as there was apparently a problem with their overseas investor after the debut of the convertible version of this car in 2004. But the vision and talent that made these and other unique cars possible showed the world that the Russians play second fiddle to no one in this business.

Also Moscow-based, Top Car is a bit more conventional in their approach to tuning, using current Porsche models as the canvas on which they place their distinctive stamp.



SOCIETY | 95



TOPCAR

TORQUE TALK

Rather than being a coachbuilder for affluent business depends on finding high-net-worth individuals as patrons, Top Car is organized along the lines of German Porsche tuner like Gemballa and TechnArt, but with a unique Russian twist.

The man behind Top Car's Oleg Ignorov, whose very successful advertising company in Moscow is his core business. A passionate car enthusiast, Oleg originally set up a company in 2003 to represent Gemballa in the Russian Federation.

"As much as I loved (saw Gemballa's) designs, I was frustrated by exotic supplies and other issues," he explained. "It was at that point that I decided the only way to make the business work properly was to establish my own brand and control the supply chain from A to Z," he said.

Top Car was founded in August 2004 to do precisely this, and under Oleg's watchful eye, has gone from strength to strength. "We had a 15th Anniversary party at this year's Moscow Motor Show, where our Moscar and PTV Turbo conversions debuted," he said proudly.

The Top Car concept took a lot of planning and organization before it became a reality, but with the Gemballa experience, and his advertising and media awareness behind him, Oleg had

a pretty good idea of all the potential pitfalls, as well as what was required to create a slick operation.

"I brought together a team of designers and engineers who now do everything from start to finish," said Oleg. "Today, a decade down the line, we have almost 75 staff, 40 of whom are specialists in designing and crafting the special interiors that our clients are increasingly demanding."

At this level, only high-quality carbon-fibre will do for the aerodynamic styling components, he explained. "We make these in Russia so that we can keep a close eye on quality. However, the raw materials come from Western European sources like Germany and Luxembourg, who produce the best automotive grade carbon-fibre."

Of course using the best materials is of little consequence if the fit and finish of the parts is not also world class. "That is why we spare no expense to ensure that our tolerances are as exact as possible," Oleg continued.

"We use a state-of-the-art laser dimensioning machine on an actual car to get its measurements down to a

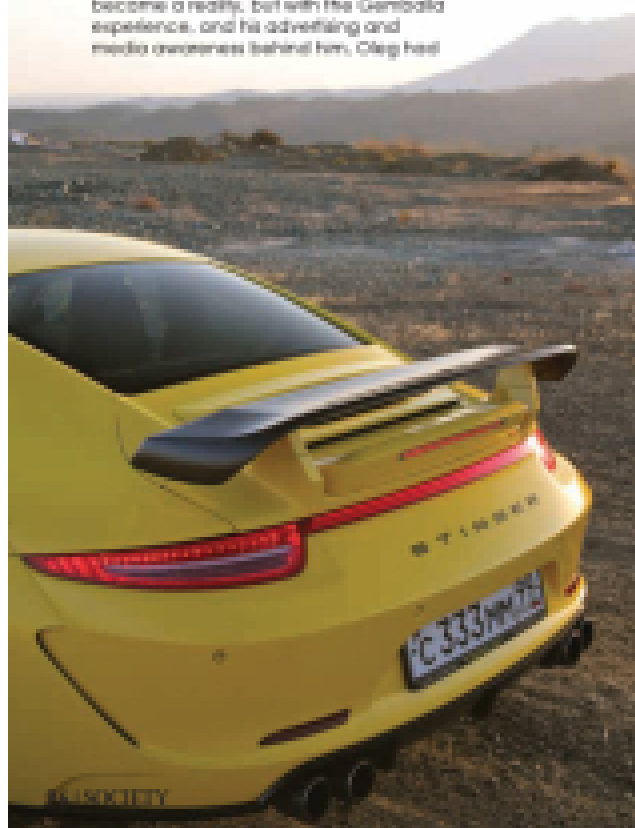
fraction of a millimetre. These readings form the basis of our prototype parts and the subsequent moulds," he explained.

As a former concours judge, I tend to pick up flaws in fit and finish very easily. However, the aero kit on the yellow Top Car PTV Carrera S stood up to close examination when I first examined it outside Top Car's recently opened HQ in Matveevo, Spain.

To my mind, this is a great achievement as it is a very difficult three-dimensional puzzle to create wheel arch extensions that complement, both visually and physically, the complex compound curves of the PTV's sensuous lines.

The finished article has a sense of flair that makes the Carrera look more purposeful, like a home version of the RSR racecar for the road. Most importantly, it captures the Porsche PTV essence.

Central to this tougher look, are the big wheel arch flares whose lines and contours suit the PTV perfectly. At first glance, they are reminiscent of the 990 GT2 drives, but save the distinctive quick release attachment bolts. The deeper front spoiler and new rear valances continue this philosophy, with character



TORQUE TALK



and detailing that harmoniously blends with the rest of the conversion.

These visual cues alone give the styling strong Porsche connotations, underlining how Top Car's style is underlined the original design philosophy and go with the flow rather than trying to impose a conflicting design language on the base car. Judging by their equally successful takes on other Porsche models like the Macan and 911 Turbo, the critical part of good aftermarket styling is a consistent top Car trademark.

Used properly to show its presence as a structural material, naked carbon-fibre can be used to emphasize a design theme. Unfortunately, it tends to be used by many tuners as a decorative material, which rather defeats the material's intrinsic physical properties of high strength and low weight.

Oleg had come over to Marbella from Miami during my visit, so I had the chance to interview him face-to-face. He grabbed a Singer front wheel arch off the showroom wall and handed it to me to demonstrate how little it weighs, as well as to show me the fine surface quality of this unpainted panel.

As applied to the whole car, the carbon-fibre Singer body kit weighs no more than around 10kg, but the extended front spoiler lip and TechArt rear wing are able to significantly reduce lift over the front and rear axles at speed.

All the carbon-fibre parts of the Singer aero kit, which include the front bumper/spoiler, bonnet, wheel arches, side-skirts and rear bumper are normally colour-coded to the bodywork.

The parts left in unrequited carbon-fibre are the

front splitter, the lower part of the side skirts, rear diffuser, and the rear wing. You can of course, choose to have all these parts colour coded too, but I personally think the stock contrast works very well.

The only purely decorative parts of the kit are the vertical insert on the trailing edge of each front wheel arch, and the triangular pieces under the daytime running lights that give the illusion of larger air intakes.

I commented on the stock interior in the yellow show car, one of the first to be built and hurriedly shipped to Marbella



for the opening of the new showroom. "Wealthy Russians love the individual interior we create that can cost up to 30,000 euros depending on materials," Oleg explained. "It would have been a waste to feel that a prospective buyer did not like the one in our test car, so we decided to leave this as a blank canvas until the car is sold."

Sitting on its America-made 4.5i and 10.5u x 21-inch ADV1 forged alloy, steel with 268/302821 and 308/302821Michels, the car sits at stock height

because it lacks the H&R fully adjustable suspension kit that normally goes with this conversion.

On the other hand, considering the numerous large speed bumps that litter this part of Spain, looks apart, this is probably no bad thing for the driver's sanity. But once again that choice will be left to the client.

Oleg also told me that Top Car is in the process of making their own forged alloy, which will be far more bespoke than these off-the-shelf offerings. They are the Russian dealer for the world famous Akrapovic titanium exhausts, and use Brembo brakes if a client should want upgraded anchors.

As Oleg lives in Miami, where Top Car's US Headquarters is situated, he sought an engine conversion specialist who could do a good job with no comebacks.

The kind of customer who buys a Top Car conversion wants more power with no downsides, so exotic tuning with displacement increases for naturally-aspirated cars, and huge power outputs that has reliability and engine life of the turbocharged models are a definite no-go area for Oleg.

After a negative experience with a German tuner, Top Car has settled into a comfortable relationship with Champion Motorsport in Pompano Beach, Florida. Champion's background with the Audi and Porsche factory ALMS race teams has given them legendary status in the aftermarket tuning world, and their drive for perfection in quality and reliability are exactly what Oleg was looking for in his search for a technical partner.

Champion has a nice conversion for the Carrera model, which consists of BMC free flow air filter, GMAC software for the ECU and fuel without. The conversion



TOPCAR

TORQUE TALK



delivers about 30hp and 38Nm (28 ft lb) of peak torque, with low-end torque gains of as much as 54Nm (40 ft lb). Throttle response and soundtrack and also improved.

While this is a really good result for a naturally-aspirated motor, the really big power gains remain the province of the Turbo and Turbo S conversions. The Akrapovic titanium system that Top Car sells in Russia works equally well in lowering back-pressure, and save additional weight from that critical area in the tail. However, the test car just had Top Car's fluted end pipes that fit to the stock exhaust silencer.

Moscow, Miami, Monaco and now Marbella. Purely by coincidence, top Car's dealerships are all placed in cities or towns beginning with M that happen to have a high concentration of wealth. Certainly, exotic spots like Miami, Monaco and Marbella are where the typical Top Car customer usually has a second or third home.

A lover of fine wrist watches as well, Oleg commissioned a limited, numbered edition of 55 special Top Car watches from Hublot earlier this year. As watch manufacturers of the calibre do not collaborate with just anyone, this is a good indication of Top Car's standing.

Ten years is an eternity in the motor industry, but top Car has come a long way in that time. Russia no longer exports the car of its miserable state run auto industry, but in the aftermarket tuning and customisation business, Top Car can hold its head up high with standards of design and quality that match the best of its world famous German and American rivals.

Local Dealer: Top Car, Centre de Negocier, Puerto Banus



TOPCAR

PDF export 000065
From Russia with Love

FINEST AUTOMOBILES



FINEST LUXURY HOMES

IMMO CAR GALLERY THE REAL ESTATE GALLERY

New S-Class Coupe



Come for a test drive!



F IMMO GALLERY

Avenida Pablo Ruiz Picasso
29670 San Pedro Alc ntara
Tel: 952 799 363
info@finnocargallery.com
www.finnocargallery.com



F Immo Gallery

F WORKSHOP

Poligono La Ermita, Calle Cubre 24
29600 Marbella
Tel: 952 898 979
contact@finnocargallery.com
www.finnocargallery.com

F CAR GALLERY

Avenida Pablo Ruiz Picasso
29670 San Pedro Alc ntara
Tel: 952 799 360
contact@finnocargallery.com
www.finnocargallery.com



F Immo Car Gallery

<http://www.finnocargallery.com/es/en/visit-gallery>
click here for more photos