

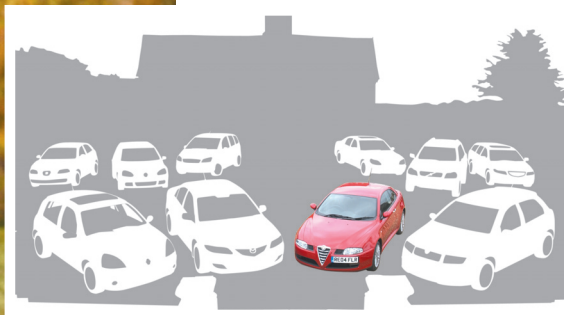


:: BEST DIESEL CONVERTIBLE/COUPÉ ::

AND OVERALL WINNER

Alfa Romeo GT

JTD



:: OVERALL WINNER ::

This has to be 2004's best advert for driving diesel. Stare into the smouldering headlamps of Alfa's scandalously pretty GT for long enough and you'll be stocking up on sangiovese and dreaming of holidays in Tuscany. It's a visual feast. But Alfas, as we all know, are all about driving...

Except you don't drive the GT so much as you actually wear it. From the driving seat, it sets up an intimate rapport with whoever's in charge. And from first gear up, the car's near-perfect balance of road-holding agility and magic-carpet ride spell smiles all round. Crucially, the most rewarding car is the cheapest – the sensational 1.9 JTD. On paper, it has a so-so 150bhp, but in reality, because it



delivers 90 per cent of its power low in the rev range, it's the most thrilling and effortless ride here within legal speed limits.

It also makes nicer noises than the 2.0-litre petrol alternative. While many diesels offer Louis Armstrong a run for his money, this is Chris Rea – a smooth growl with a hint of 20-a-day gruffness when you change up. That might sound unhealthy, but with an extra sixth gear and a subsequent fuel average of 42.2mpg, the JTD will stretch a good 10 miles per gallon further than its petrol siblings.

Standard kit for the entry-level petrol and diesels includes ABS, six airbags, cruise control, powerful CD system and a trip computer. You also get pleasant mock-suede upholstery called 'Alfatex'. But believe us, the pleasure is entirely real and that's why it's both DC's 'Diesel Car of the Year 2004' and best Convertible/Coupé.

• Full Test – Diesel Car 193 May 2004

:: WHAT WE SAY ABOUT THE ALFA GT ::

"It's got curves in all the right places. It sings like a racing car. It's refined. Alfa Romeo, you are spoiling us." Simon Hacker

::

"Classy coupé that shows just how far diesel has advanced."

Maurice Glover

::

"Who would have even dreamed it five years ago? A drop dead sexy GT with a diesel heart – and it's Italian." Zog Ziegler

::

"A car that stirs your emotions, oozing Italian flair from every pore."

Sue Baker

"Looks, engine, chassis, the Alfa has them all. Four proper seats makes a proper GT too – a classic in the making."

:: RUNNERS UP ::

:: Audi A4 Cabriolet ::

The best A4 you can buy? Dropping the 2.5 TDI engine in Audi's elegant topless A4 was a stroke of genius. First off, the convertible is brilliantly executed, with scuttle shake almost absent. The V6 diesel makes all the right noises and gives the drophead A4 adequate performance. It's a fine looking car too, hood up or down – all done at the touch of a button. One of the best four-seater convertibles you can buy.

:: Mercedes CLK ::

No diesel convertible, but the C-Class pillarless coupé comes with the option of Mercedes characterful five-cylinder 2.7-litre CDI diesel. 170bhp is enough to give the Merc decent performance, the C-Class chassis rewards enthusiastic drivers with its taut handling, while the ride quality won't disturb your passengers. It's reasonably practical too with two rear seats for smaller adults and a big boot. Above all, the CLK is a fine looking coupé with impressive build quality.

:: Renault Mégane CC ::

The Mégane walked off with our Diesel Car of the Year Award last year, and since then, the full range of Mégane body styles has emerged. Most appealing is the coupé cabriolet with its ingenious folding glass roof providing panoramic views with the roof up and open top driving at the touch of a button. The 1.9dCi diesel is the pick of the range with its gutsy performance and refinement. Brilliant concept, fun to drive.

:: VW Beetle Cabriolet ::

Take a can opener to VW's Golf IV-based Beetle and the result is shamelessly like the Karmann original. What you get is a fun four-seater, propelled by the 1.9 litre TDI engine in 100PS form. Arguably the best new Beetle, although the original's front boot provides more luggage space than the current model. Electro-hydraulic power means you won't be wrestling with the canvas top either. Standard air conditioning makes good sense with the hood up.

