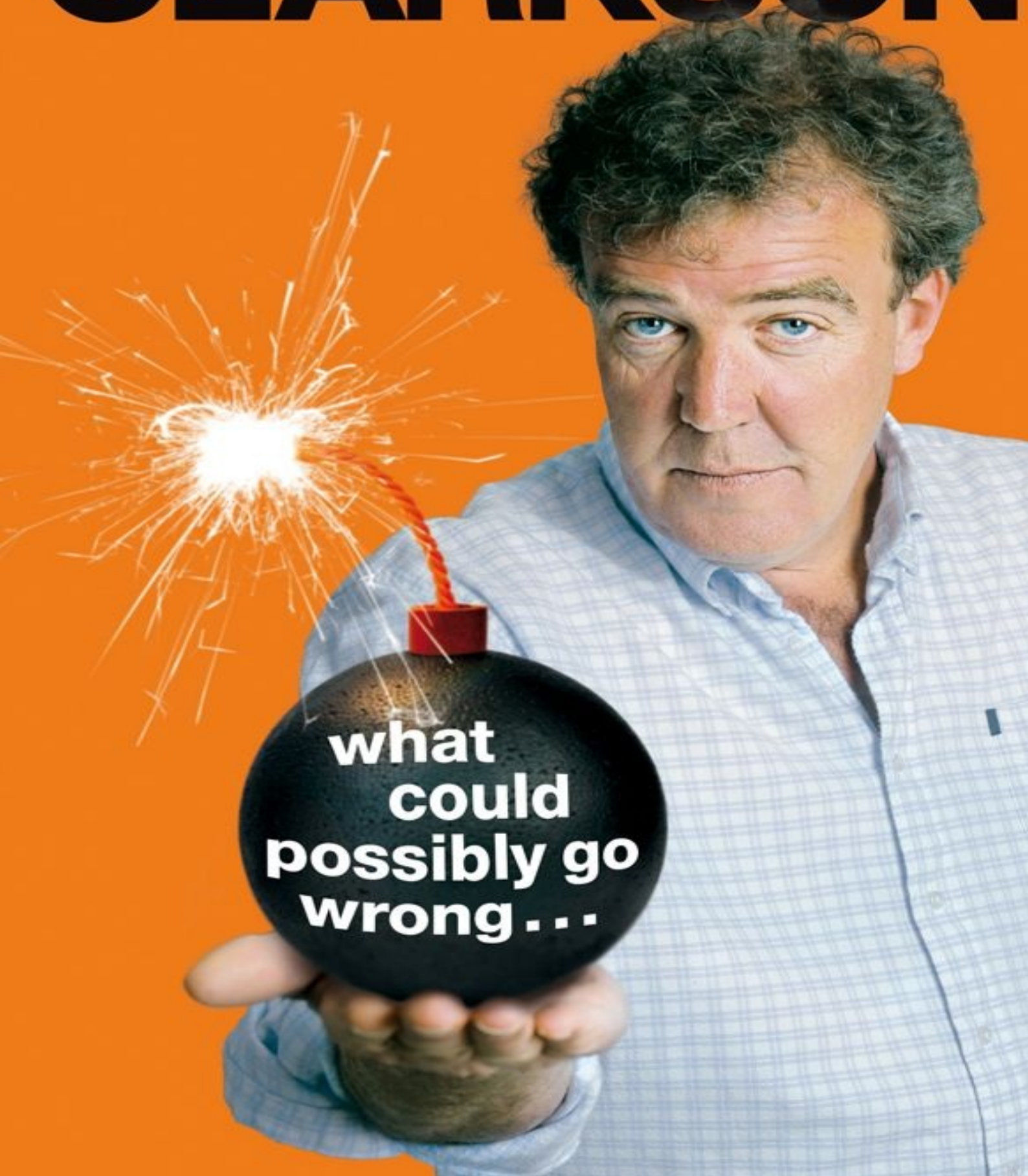
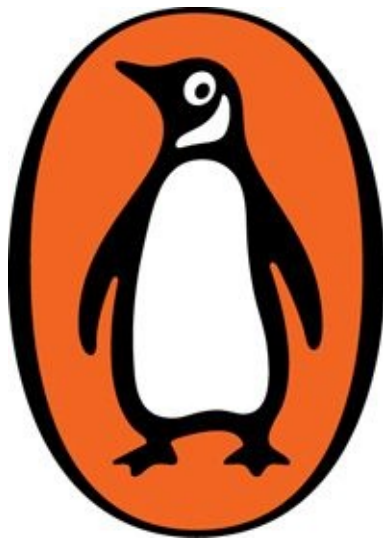


THE NO.1 BESTSELLING PHENOMENON

CLARKSON



what
could
possibly go
wrong...



what could possibly go wrong ...



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Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Black Series

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Kia Pro_Cee'd GT Tech

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Audi SQ5 3.0 BiTDI quattro

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Subaru Forester 2.0 Lineartronic XT

You can't play bumper cars, but the bouncy castle's brilliant
Volvo V40 T5 R-Design Lux

Drives on water and raises Lazarus in 4.1 seconds
Aston Martin Vanquish Volante

By the same author

Motorworld

Jeremy Clarkson's Hot 100

Jeremy Clarkson's Planet Dagenham

Born to be Riled

Clarkson on Cars

The World According to Clarkson

I Know You Got Soul

And Another Thing

Don't Stop Me Now

For Crying Out Loud!

Driven to Distraction

How Hard Can It Be?

Round the Bend

The Top Gear Years

Is It Really Too Much To Ask?

The contents of this book first appeared in Jeremy Clarkson's *Sunday Times* column. Read more about the world according to Clarkson every week in *The Sunday Times*.

For pity's sake, Fritz, please stop fiddling

MINI Countryman Cooper S ALL4

After much careful consideration over the festive season, I've decided that God is almost certainly a German. He created the world and festooned it with all sorts of unusual creations, none of which he liked very much. So then he killed them off and started again. Then he didn't like that lot either, so he turned all the dinosaurs into birds and gave one of the apes opposable thumbs.

Geologically, he's never satisfied. Originally, he placed Scotland in the south Pacific, but he obviously thought the feng shui was wrong, so he moved it to a spot in the middle of what we now call the Atlantic ocean. Then he didn't think the world should have Scotland at all, so he buried it under what has now become South America.

And then he thought that actually England looked a bit lonely sticking out of the top of France, so he dug up Scotland again and placed it on the top of Northumberland, like a jaunty, lopsided hat. And then he decided that England shouldn't really be joined to France any more, so he created the English Channel.

Today, he's decided that the Himalayas should be a bit taller and that there really is no point to Greece, or any of those silly low-lying islands in the middle of the Pacific. And he's realized that the polar bear is so ugly and vicious that it has no place in his toy box.

He fiddles with the weather, too. At first, he thought it should be a hot and steamy planet but then he thought that, actually, it ought to be extremely cold. He's still fiddling today, which is driving all the eco-loonies insane. Just as they think it's getting hotter, the whole of Europe gets covered in snow.

Germans are the same. Give them a country and they want the one next door as well.

There is an upside to this, though. When a German creates something excellent, he does not go home to celebrate with a glass of beer. No. He goes straight back to his office so that he can set about making improvements. In Germany, being better than everyone else isn't good enough. You have to be better than yourself.

They even do this with their wine. Having created the liquid perfection that is Niersteiner Gutes Domtal, they went back to the drawing board and decided that the only way to make a better wine would be to add flecks of gold leaf. So they did. How brilliant's that? Wine that glitters under the lights. Stunning.

Things are very different in Britain. Prince Charles, for instance, thinks the world would be a better place if all progress had stopped in about 1952. And every planning department is run by people who want Britain to look like the front of a Dorset chocolate box. If God were English, your route to work would be blocked every morning by a brontosaurus.

Red telephone boxes were a prime example of this. They were useless and smelt of urine, and you could die of hypothermia before the pips even began. But there was a huge furore when someone – probably a German – suggested they should be updated. Change? Here? In Britain? Are you mad? We are a nation that puts *The Two Ronnies* on every Christmas, even though one of them is dead.

This attitude really doesn't work and it especially doesn't work in the car industry. When the first

Range Rover came along in 1970, everyone could see that it was very excellent indeed. So the team responsible for designing it was sent home and the model soldiered on, with almost no changes at all until 1994. By which time it was a relic.

There's a similar problem with the Land Rover. The car you buy today is pretty much the same as the car you could have bought after the war. Can you imagine BMW doing that? Designing a car and then keeping it in production for sixty years? It's inconceivable.

But when it comes to resting on your laurels, the crown must go to Alec Issigonis. He made the Mini, which in the late 1950s was an inspired design, and then he decided to leave it alone for ever. Occasionally someone would nail a bit of wood to the side, and they once changed the radiator grille, but, fundamentally, it just kept on rolling down the production line, powered by an engine that could trace its roots back to a time when Scotland was off the coast of South Africa. It would still be soldiering on today, had BMW not arrived on the scene and said, 'For you, Tommy, the warhorse is over.'

Unfortunately, the Germans' obsession with self-improvement is now starting to get a bit silly, because in addition to their original Mini, and the various derivations of that, we now have the convertible, which is fine, and the Clubman, which is fine too, providing you are impervious to its looks and don't want to see out of the back. But sadly we also now have the Countryman. And that's not fine at all.

First of all, it has four doors, seating inside for five and a large boot. This has been achieved by making the car much bigger. So it's not really a Mini any more, is it? At 13½ feet in length, it's a third longer than the Issigonis original and should really be called the Maxi. Or maybe the Twinset.

There's another problem, though. BMW's first effort looked good, and still does, whereas the Countryman looks absolutely stupid. It's like a Mini that's been putting on weight for a part. It doesn't look cool or interesting or practical. It looks fat.

Of course, you might not care about how it looks or what it's called. Fine. But I bet you will care about the cramp it gives you when you drive it in traffic. It's the second Mini on the trot that has done this to me, come to think of it, and you will definitely care about how easy it is to stall, and how hard it is to get going again thanks to the stop-start eco-gadgetry that shuts down the engine whenever you're stationary.

To make matters worse, it's not especially nice to drive. The ride's not bad but the steering is nervous, the dashboard is bonkers and you feel like you're sitting on it rather than inside it. I arrived everywhere late, exasperated, looking silly and with a lightning bolt of pain in my left shin.

On the upside, the Countryman is available with four-wheel drive. It's a simple system that would be flummoxed by the weather we had recently but would get you up and down a farm track easily enough. The thing is, though, that the model I tested – a Cooper S – costs more than £22,000. And that makes it about £3,000 more than the similarly powered Skoda Yeti.

Don't be a snob about this, because the Mini isn't a Mini and the Skoda isn't really a Skoda. It's just a Volkswagen. More pointedly, the Mini is terrible and the Yeti is surprisingly good.

And on that note, can I just wish you all a very happy and exciting new year.

2 January 2010

No nasty surprises in this gooey confection

Audi A7 Sportback 3.0 TDI quattro SE

Well, there we are. 'Public transport' was a very interesting social experiment, but after the debacle of last year, it's probably in everyone's best interests if we all agree it simply doesn't work.

Let us take the trains as a prime example. As we know, they all grind to a halt whenever it is too warm or too cold or too autumnal, but of course the problem is much bigger than that. A railway locomotive is extremely expensive. I don't know how much it would cost to buy one, but I'm guessing that it would be several hundred pounds.

Then you have the rolling stock – and I do know that each carriage costs more than £1m – and the mile upon mile of track that need to be linked and monitored and governed. Just maintaining it costs £2 billion a year. The upshot of all this is very simple. Divide the total cost of the railway network by the number of people who want to use it, and the average price of a ticket should be about £4m. Soon if what we're hearing is correct, it will be.

I realize, of course, that in theory a high-speed train linking the north and the south of Britain is a fine idea. But since it needs to cross at least five Tory constituencies, it will never happen. And nobody would be able to afford to go on it, even if it did.

Then we have air travel. In principle this should work quite well, but the concept has unfortunately been hijacked by busybodies who now insist on taking photographs of your gentleman sausage and confiscating your toiletries every time you want to go somewhere. This doesn't work. And it doubly doesn't work when planes are now grounded by everything from a bit of weather to a volcanic burp near the Arctic circle.

This leaves us with buses, and oh dear. They really don't work at all because they are simply too full of diseases and knives. No, really. The next time a bus goes by, have a look inside, and I guarantee that the passenger – there's never more than one – will not be the sort of person you would allow within 500 feet of your front door.

I accept that in rural areas the elderly and the infirm need to get to the post office, but why send a supertanker round to their village five times a day? Nobody needs to go shopping that often. Why not send a small Transit van round once a week? Or, better still, why not give those who cannot drive an internet and let them do it all online?

So, we're all agreed that whether you want a pint of milk from the shops or a holiday in the south of France, the car is better, safer, cheaper, faster, more comfortable and less annoying to others. Plus, nobody pats your breasts before you set off and you don't emerge at the other end of the journey with deep vein thrombosis, diphtheria, a knife in your eye and no luggage.

Of course, there are many annoying things about using the roads. Interfering governments have decided, for instance, that the amount of tax you pay should depend on the composition of the gas coming from your tailpipe. This means that cars will soon have to have two motors. One to move you about and one to assist on hills. Even Ferrari is going down the stupid hybrid road.

Then there are the speed limits. For some reason our government thinks that motorway travel

should be undertaken at no more than 70 mph, because that was a safe speed when your dad's Ford Anglia had drum brakes. I know. Ridiculous. But there we are.

There are countless other problems, too, but despite everything, the car is still good. The car still works. There is still no alternative. It's just a question of deciding which one to buy. There was a time when Audi made cars only for German cement salesmen, but in recent years it has decided to make a car for absolutely everyone in the world. There's the Q5, the Q7, the R8, the A1, the A3, the A4, the A5, the A6, the A8 and now the A7.

I'll let you into a little secret at this point. They are all the same. Oh, they may look a bit different and some are bigger than others, but in essence they are all made from the same components.

Think of it this way. Cakes, buns, Yorkshire pudding and pancakes all look and taste different but they're all made from the same thing. That's how it is with Audis. Flour and eggs mixed up in different ways to create twenty-one different cars.

At first you think Audi may have actually tried something radical with the A7 because it has an all new platform. But then you learn that this platform will be used in the next A6. It's the same story with the engines and the four-wheel-drive system and all of the interior fixtures and fittings.

However, the engineers can make a difference by fiddling with the steering and the suspension setup, and I must say that in the A7 they have. This does not feel like an Audi. It feels better. The ride is beautifully judged, the handling is lovely and the steering is spot-on. It's not a sports cake but it's not a Yorkshire pudding either. It's just right, in fact, for the fiftysomething chap who wants a stylish hatchback that doesn't break his spine every time he goes over a catseye. Although, when I say stylish ... it isn't, really. The back looks as though it's melted and the front is just sort of Audi-ish. Mind you it must be said that it does have an enormous boot and loads of room in the nicely trimmed cabin for four. Not five, though. There is no centre rear seatbelt.

Apart from this oversight – which is bound to have been the result of a marketing meeting at which someone stood up and said, 'Zer is no such sing as ein sporty car mitt five seats' – the only problem is the positioning of the accelerator pedal. The car may be able to keep going when the weather would rather it didn't, thanks to four-wheel drive. But if you are wearing the sort of shoes that enabled you to get through the snow to the car in the first place, you will end up pressing the brake pedal every time you want to go faster.

Despite this, and the melted rear, the A7 struck me as a good car. A bit heavy, perhaps, but good nevertheless. Until I checked out the prices. A top model dressed up to the nines will set you back a massive £91,500. The model I drove, a 3-litre turbodiesel with a seven-speed double-clutch gearbox and four-wheel drive, is the best part of £50,000. And I'm sorry, but it simply doesn't feel worth this much.

Yes, it's big and striking and practical and – we're told – extremely safe, but underneath, it's just eggs and flour. And for £50,000 you could do better. The Mercedes CLS springs to mind. So, too, does the Jaguar XJ.

It's nice to have the choice, though. Because that's what you didn't ever get with the failed experiment that was public transport.

9 January 2010

Oh yes, take me now, Lady Marmalade

Citroën DS3 Racing

Over the past few years, the sort of people who find recycling exciting have predicted the end of the internal combustion engine and said that 2011 will herald the bright new dawn of silent, zero-emission electric motoring, where no one dies and town centres actually look like the models architects make when applying for planning permission.

There's no doubt, of course, that many car manufacturers are working hard on hybrids – which are normal, petrol-engine cars that have a second, electric motor to keep the rule makers in Brussels happy. But pure electric cars? I don't see their Blu-ray/VHS/Sky moment until someone commercializes a hydrogen-based system for recharging the batteries. And that's not going to happen in 2011. Or 2012. Or any time in the foreseeable future.

What I do see happening in 2011 is car makers peeping from behind the terrifying double-dip curtain of financial uncertainty and presenting us with a flurry of machinery that will keep the disciples of internal combustion as happy as if they'd landed the role of 'chauffeur' in a French porn film.

Aston Martin, for instance, will present two new cars this year. One, called the Cygnet, is a 1.3-litre version of the Toyota iQ. Engineered solely to keep the average fuel consumption figures of the Aston range down – and therefore the Euro law makers happy – it will be treated as a joke. The other will not.

It's the One-77, which is made from carbon fibre, has a hand-built V12 and boasts a top speed of 220mph or more, making it by far the fastest production car Aston has made. The only trouble is that it will cost £1.2m, which is a lot.

Lamborghini is also planning a limited-edition, mega-money car for 2011 and, because it doesn't have to worry about average fuel consumption figures – Lambo is owned by Volkswagen, which makes the Polo – it will be a replacement for the Murciélago.

That, however, will be overshadowed by the new McLaren. Named MP4-12C – or OCD for short – it will have a twin-turbocharged 3.8-litre V8 that develops 592 horsepower. So, with a price tag of just £168,500 – about half what McLaren charged for its last car and around a fifth of the price of the one before that – it will be less expensive and more powerful than the Ferrari 458. I can't imagine it will be better but who knows.

You want more evidence that the economy's recovering and batteries are on the back burner? Well, there's going to be a convertible version of the epic Mercedes SLS and a long-wheelbase option for the Rolls-Royce Ghost. Then we have the new Porsche 911, which will be exactly the same as every other 911, and a hardcore derivative of the car most Formula One drivers use when their sponsors and engine suppliers aren't looking – the Nissan GT-R.

In the real world, BMW is working on yet another version of the Mini – it'll be a two-door coupé. There will also be a handsome-looking new 6-series and a £40,000 M version of what BMW calls the 135 coupé, even though it's actually a saloon.

Never mind the muddle, though; this is one of the cars I'm most looking forward to driving, partly because I reckon the standard car is already the best model in the BMW line-up and partly because, with a twin-turbo, 335-horsepower straight six and a straightforward front-engine, rear-drive, no-styling, no-nonsense approach, it will be a genuine successor to the simple M cars of old.

I'm also looking forward to the new Mercedes SLK, although I'm a bit alarmed that industry insiders are saying it'll be a more hardcore experience than the 'soft' outgoing model. Having owned an SLK 55, which I sold because it was way too uncomfortable, I am a bit worried that the new car might not have any suspension at all.

Strangely, though, in this sea of wholesome goodness, the car I've been anticipating with the most eagerness is Citroën's DS3 Racing. I realize that this is like booking a table at the Wolseley in London and then looking forward most of all to the bread rolls. But the fact is this: when the sun is shining, I like a simple two-seater convertible most of all, but when it isn't – and this is Britain, after all – the type of car that I most enjoy driving is a hot hatchback. And the DS3 Racing is about as hot as hot hatches get right now.

You might argue that the optional paint job, with checks on the roof and all sorts of slogans and symbols that would only make sense if they were splashed on the deck of a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, is a bit stupid. But I disagree. They're a laugh. I even like the warning above the petrol filler cap. 'Caution. Attention', it says. And why not?

Inside, it's just as bonkers, with a bright orange dash, a carbon-fibre steering wheel and epic seats that would be more at home, you feel, in an F-22 Raptor.

After a period in which car makers have looked backwards for inspiration – I'm thinking of the new Beetle, the new Mini, the new Chevrolet Camaro, the new Ford Mustang and the new Fiat 500 – it comes as a refreshing change to find Citroën has decided to face the other way, while taking inspiration from both the US navy and Airfix. Mind you, I suppose that if Citroën had looked backwards, we'd have ended up with a reborn 2CV. And no one this side of the *Guardian* wants that.

I realize, of course, that looks and style are a matter of taste and that some of you may find the Racing garish and idiotic. But without wishing to sound childish, this is my review and I really like it.

However, it would all be for nothing if its body were writing cheques its engine could not cash. Well, let's get one thing straight from the off. It's not, as the name would suggest, a racing car. It's just a DS3 with a few racing-style bits and bobs added into the mix. That said, it's powered by a 204-horsepower version of the turbocharged 1.6-litre used by BMW until recently in the Mini, so it'll do 146mph. And thanks to a lower ride height, a wider track and firmer dampers than the basic DS3, it handles crisply, too.

Yes, there's a fair bit of torque steer and I will admit that the Renault Clio 200 Cup is a tad more dynamic. But the Citroën is more comfortable and less noisy and, of course, every time you see your reflection in a shop window, you will feel like you're on the bridge of the *USS Dwight D Eisenhower*. Whereas when you see a reflection of yourself in a Renault, it's just a reminder that you will soon break down.

In short, I loved the DS3 Racing as much as I thought I would. I loved driving it. I loved looking at it. I love the feeling now that it's parked outside my house and I can use it for a trip to town this afternoon. It is a car that's excellent to drive but, more importantly, it's a car that makes me feel

happy. And, of course, because it's a hot hatch, you get all the fun as well as a big boot, folding rear seats and space inside for five.

Issues? Well, the adjustment on the seat is so crude that you either drive sitting bolt upright or flat on your back, and I must say, for a whopping £23,100, I would have expected a few more toys. When you are paying BMW 3-series money for a small Citroën, the least you would expect is satnav.

The worst thing, though, is that to bypass costly legal tests, Citroën has declared the Racing a 'low volume' car and will make only 1,000. Just 200 will come to Britain. On the upside, there is a loophole in the law that allows Citroën to make a modification to the engine that no one will notice and that lets the company make 1,000 more. Get your name down early, but don't be surprised to find you're behind me in the queue.

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