

**SCAN ME TO SEE
THE VIDEO**

You may have noticed that strange square codes have started to appear in *TopGear* magazine. Scan them using a QR app on your smartphone and they'll transport you to a world of sound and vision. Let us know what you think. Enjoy



This month



IT'S AMAZING HOW quickly 1200bhp concentrates the mind. It's also amazing how quickly it compresses 30 miles of arrow straight desert road into a point just in front

of previously long-distant mountains. They appear like a slap in the face, shunted forward in a rush. It doesn't help that the V8 behind me is roaring madly, topped off with induction and turbo noise that sounds like Lord Vader having a panic attack.

We're dealing with the weapons grade turbo power, and the results are... shocking. The Hennessey Venom GT is the fastest accelerating car I have experienced - and if you're sitting in Molsheim polishing a world speed record, best put the Bugatti-branded duster down. The Americans are coming, and the phrase 'superpower' just took on a whole new meaning. Pat Devereux tries to shake off a 100-proof adrenalin rush and write something lucid about the two fastest cars in America on page134.

But forced induction remains a theme; every car on the cover sports a turbo. Including - whisper it - the new BMW M5. It may have incensed the purists, but is it still a legend? We hand the keys to James on page116, and then Ollie Marriage referees the title bout: new BMW M5 vs Mercedes E63 AMG. Stigness ensues.

The new Mini Coupe has a turbo too, though it forces air into a more prosaic 1.6-litre. Still fun though, and laying down its strange, backwards baseball cap-wearing gauntlet to the TT and RCZ on page144.

Conclusion? Turbos are here to stay. They offer car makers efficiency-plus-power. But as we head towards the end of the line for atmospheric aspiration, we're witnessing the birth of the new state of the art turbo generation. An era that will see the most powerful, efficient engines ever created.

A 200g/km, 2000bhp V8 anyone?
Enjoy the issue.

Charlie Turner
Editor-in-Chief



HOME OF THE BRAVE

Strap in, say a little prayer and hold on – the Ultimate Aero and Venom GT are about to give you the ride of your life...

Words: Pat Devereux Photography: Anton Watts



I'M THINKING AS FAST AS I CAN, but it's just not fast enough. Out here, 1,800m up in the arid Nevada desert on a dead-straight road, everything's happening very quickly and I'm struggling to understand what's going on. I've just slotted the Hennessey Venom GT into fifth gear at around 180mph, pushed the throttle to the floor and the small, Alcantara-clad steering wheel is now wildly thrashing from side to side in my sweating fists.

I keep my foot down, hoping the car will straighten itself out, but a split-second later the monstrous 6.2-litre twin-turboed motor unleashes another huge, whistling wrecking ball of power and, as the speedo needle flashes past 200mph, I realise something truly unbelievable is happening: the little yellow car, still accelerating faster than a bullet, is producing so much torque that both rear wheels have broken traction and started to spin. What the...?

Easing back on the throttle, the turbo wastegates burst open and the Venom GT instantly regains its composure, like a bulldog that has just bitten your arm off then fallen asleep. Unlike me. I can't quite believe what just happened. I've driven pretty much every supercar on sale over the past 25 years, but not one of them has accelerated anything like the Venom. Not the Bugatti Veyron. Not even the Shelby Supercars Ultimate Aero, which I stepped out of just a few minutes before the run in the Venom. It wasn't even close. Partly because the SSC was sick, as we would later discover, but also because the Venom is so monumentally savage in its delivery.

We are out here in Nowhere, NV, en route to the start of the Silver State Classic Challenge in Ely. It's a cross between a time trial and a race over 90 miles of closed public road, with a host of super and very un-super cars taking part. There are classes

for different average speeds ranging from 95mph up to the 180mph and Unlimited class. And it's as much about timing as speed.

Both of those are on our mind, as we are staging something of a challenge of our own. Now that Bugatti has raised the bar on the world-record top speed for a production car, and taken the Veyron's performance to the sticky edge of its envelope, the job of bringing it back to the US lies at the feet of one of these two proud-to-be-American companies: tuner extraordinaire Hennessey Performance and hypercar manufacturer Shelby Supercars.

On paper, their approaches look very similar. Both of them run hugely turboed bespoke V8 motors producing more than 1,200bhp and over 1,000lb ft of torque. Each weighs around 1,270kg. Claimed 0-60mph figures are 2.78secs for the Ultimate Aero and 2.5secs for the Venom GT. Top speeds are still theoretical at this point, but SSC claims 273mph ☺



"I'VE DRIVEN PRETTY MUCH EVERY SUPERCAR ON SALE OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS, BUT NOT ONE OF THEM HAS ACCELERATED ANYTHING LIKE THE VENOM GT"



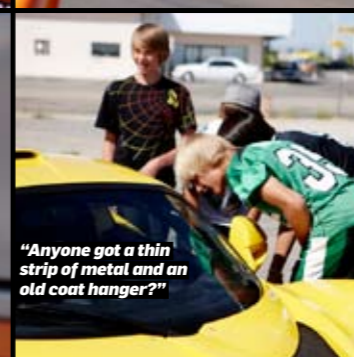
Didn't he used to be a lot bigger than that...



Bo and Luke had changed over the years



Coffee + 2,487bhp of supercar = an interesting combo



"Anyone got a thin strip of metal and an old coat hanger?"





Great Scott, these cars seem to be able to corner. Crazy!

All it needs is a gentle prod with your big toe and it comes alive



Venom GT and UA show off their bulging, er, horsepower

Speedo (left) is nothing to do with us. Blame whoever's not here

(its previous world-record run was 257.4mph) and Hennessey 2mph more – 275mph at the 7,200rpm redline in top gear (sixth). Both have a Cd of around 0.35.

In the rare metals and carbon fibre they are made of, though, they couldn't be more different. The Ultimate Aero is definitely from the Nineties – classic, low, flat and wide school of supercar design, inside and out. All the bodywork is carbon fibre, there are two huge intakes on the front of the rear wheelarches and it has its own party piece – twin pop-up air brakes that emerge at an angle from the top of the rear wings.

Inside the quilted leather cabin of the UA, behind the flip-up doors, it feels like you've stepped back in time. The steering wheel is offset and angled to the left, there is a row of simple gauges on the dash and the handbrake is in a reach-behind-your-back position on the transmission tunnel. If you were blindfolded before you sat in the car, when the blinkers came off your first guess would probably be Lamborghini Diablo.

By comparison, if you did the same thing in the Venom GT, you'd say Lotus Exige. And you'd be right to do so as that's exactly what most of it is. The wheel has been

replaced by a detachable racing unit, there's a boost gauge in front of the gearstick and a new carbon cowl around the shift mechanism. Other than that, and some tasteful splashes of Alcantara, it's all Hethel minimalist.

Unlike the exterior, which plays all sorts of tricks with your eyes. Because we are all used to seeing that familiar Lotus face and thinking 'small sports car', that's your first impression. But whip out a tape measure and you'll find the carbon-fibre-bodied Venom is almost a metre longer than an Exige, with a 600mm longer wheelbase. It's actually 180mm longer than the SSC.

While we're talking dimensions, it's also worth introducing the concept SSC Tuatara, as this is the car that will really do the talking for SSC next year now that the production run of 16 Ultimate Aeros is finished. We've already drooled over its Castriota-designed form before, but we wanted to get all three cars together so you can see it in context of the before and after. It's going to be packing a new 9,400rpm, 1,340bhp engine under those be-winged carbon-fibre haunches, and there are a number of still-secret details which makes Jerod Shelby quietly confident he'll be in with a shout for the world's fastest car.

Not that ultimate speed is only what the Tuatara is going to be about. Handling will be the central story at launch. "When we come out it's going to be Nürburgring first," says Shelby. "We are working with Michelin on a tyre rated for a new world record of speed. We'll be the first ones to have that. But it's also a tyre that we feel very confident we can use to break the Nürburgring record for our type of car."

The SSC taking the record, he says, was as much a branding exercise to get the world's attention. Now he has it, he plans to deliver a car in the Tuatara that earns a place in the supercar halls of fame for being as slick at changing direction as it is over the measured mile. The timing of the Tuatara's appearance right after the Bugatti Super Sport broke the SSC's record? Pure coincidence, he says.

"When Bugatti broke that record, we had already started on the Tuatara," says Shelby. "They broke the record in July; in August, we were in Monterey unveiling the Tuatara to some private clients. So that was one month after they broke the record. Immediately, the press said, 'Ooh, this is SSC's answer to their record.' All of a sudden it showed us everyone out there thinks that top speed is all we do."

"NOW BUGATTI HAS RAISED THE BAR ON THE WORLD-RECORD TOP SPEED, THE JOB OF BRINGING IT BACK TO THE US LIES AT THE FEET OF THESE TWO COMPANIES"



Just a few miles on a gently winding road in the Ultimate Aero shows that isn't the case. The suspension is well sorted, the steering accurate and the aero at speed does keep it nailed to the road. It's the engine that is somewhat disappointing on this one. Before driving the Venom it feels fast, just not supercar fast. Rowing it through the gears, the turbo wastegates twittering away in mechanical surround sound, the speed builds rapidly to about 150mph, but then disappointingly starts running out of puff.

We are at 1,800m here, so we don't expect full power, but we all agree that this feels way off the claimed 1,200bhp it should be channelling through the rear wheels. Turns out later we were right. A dyno inspection showed that a stone had become lodged in one of the turbo wastegates, which sliced 280bhp off peak power. So the total on offer is around 900bhp.

Which is about the same as the Venom GT on the lowest of its three settings (Near

Death). The other two take it to 1,000bhp (Death) and then the full-house (Certain Death) 1,200bhp. You can toggle between the three modes using a small button on the steering wheel, but I suggest you don't unless the traction control is hooked up. Which it clearly isn't on our car, as the 200mph tank-slapping wheelspin demonstrated quite clearly. The Venom makes almost every other car this side of a V8 Ariel Atom feel slow. You want numbers? A Bugatti Veyron takes a scant 24.2 seconds to hit 200mph from rest. The Venom GT takes just 15.3.

And it lets you know it every time you get behind the wheel, which is exactly what John Hennessey planned. "We wanted the Venom GT to be a challenge," he says. "It's the automotive equivalent of skiing down a double black diamond [near vertical and for heroes only] run. You risk a lot by doing it, but the buzz and sense of achievement just go on and on." And on...

If you don't already know, Hennessey and his crew of automotive alchemists knows more than a thing or two about tuning cars. He has been building warp-speed twin-turbo and supercharged Vipers and Corvettes for years and has now broadened his offer into making pretty much any fast car even faster. GT-Rs, Ford GTs, even Ferraris and Lambos, are all tuned from merely quick, to truly explosive.

The idea for the frankly satanic Venom GT came about when he was looking to take his art to the next level after a string of 0-200-0mph wins. With thinking as free as his cars' breathing, he was doodling on a napkin one night and, out of the dark recesses of his mind, came the idea to take a Lotus Exige and give it the Hennessey treatment. The Venom GT that emerged from that doodle is only about 10 per cent Lotus now – mainly the central tub plus the doors, windscreen and instruments – and the rest is pure bespoke Hennessey. ☺

HENNESSEY VENOM GT**Price:** \$1million**Engine:** 6.2-litre bi-turbo V8, 1,200bhp@ 6,500rpm, 1,155lb ft @ 4,200rpm**Transmission:** Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive**Performance:** 0-62mph in 2.5 seconds, top speed 275mph (all estimated)**Weight:** 1220kg**SSC ULTIMATE AERO****Price:** \$770,000**Engine:** 6.3-litre bi-turbo V8, 1,287bhp@ 6,075rpm, 1,112lb ft @ 6,150rpm**Transmission:** Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive**Performance:** 0-62mph in 2.78 seconds, top speed 257mph (all estimated)**Weight:** 1247kg

"THE VENOM GT HAS THREE SETTINGS. NEAR DEATH (900BHP), DEATH (1,000BHP) AND CERTAIN DEATH (1,200BHP). IT TAKES JUST 15.3SECS TO GO FROM 0-200MPH"



Try not to look at these as you go for your top-speed run...

The coat of arms of the ancient Nutter family is present and correct

Even with the 600mm longer wheelbase, that huge volcanic engine sitting at the heart of the car, and an empty weight balance of 37/63 front/rear, the Lotus handling heritage hasn't been completely lost. The steering is still fabulously direct – and adjustable for sensitivity, which might make picking fights with the steering wheel less common – and there's still enough lock to make turnarounds easy. The gearbox is the same six-speeder as in the Ford GT, but is still being finessed in the Venom GT. All forward gears slot home neatly, but reverse currently requires Herculean brutality.

Talking of which brings us to the engine again. Loosely based on a Corvette LS9 from the ZR-1 engine, with the supercharger replaced by two turbochargers, even in Certain Death mode it's still barely ticking over. According to Hennessey, it's been designed and constructed to produce

close to 2,000bhp if needed. *Two thousand?* "Oh yeah, there's plenty more in there," he says, matter of factly as we pull up at the truck stop that acts as the holding pen for the cars of the Silver State Challenge.

Looking around the hardcore-strewn truck park there are loads of interesting and unlikely cars here. Everything from a Prius, which would go on to win the 100mph class, to a very non-stock 1969 Chevy Camaro, which won the Unlimited Class at an average speed of 185.97mph. This is a special time and place for Hennessey as it's the 20th anniversary of his first-ever run in this race. In 1991 he brought his self-tuned Mitsubishi GTO here and, with no formal driver training whatsoever, blitzed the field to come first overall at an average of 168mph.

The full story will have to wait for another time as, right now, John is not focused on looking back and reliving old glories. He's

looking as far into the distance as he can, at beating the Bugatti Veyron Super Sport's world record. He knows the Venom GT can do it and, having driven it, we don't have much doubt either. The only problem for him might be the SSC Tuatara lurking in the wings. We won't know what that's like to drive until early next year, but it's promising to be extraordinary too.

If either – but preferably both – of them go for the record, we will definitely be there to watch. But in the meantime, if you want to experience the fastest car in the world right now, you know who to call. Just 29 Venom GTs are going to be built and the first six are already sold at a million bucks apiece. That means there are just 23 more chances to experience the ultimate road weapon. So, if you've got a huge pot of uninvested cash and the reactions of a fast-jet pilot, you know who to call. **127**

“HENNESSEY KNOWS THE VENOM GT CAN BEAT THE VEYRON'S RECORD. THE ONLY PROBLEM MIGHT BE THE SSC TUATARA LURKING IN THE WINGS”



Tell me again who fettled this engine...

Looks like a Lotus, is actually a raving lunatic monster

Alcantara wheel: good for hanging onto at monster speeds

