



# SIXY

We knew it would be good, but we hardly dared hope it would be quite this good. Peugeot's 306 GTI-6 is, quite simply, the biz

# MUTHA



The classic 1.6 and 1.9 205 GTIs, the ugly but brilliant 309 GTI, the manic 106 Rallye and the pin-sharp 306 XSi and S16. All terrific drivers' cars, with the sort of grab-it-by-the-scruff thrashability that gives us PC chaps all sorts of wonderful stirrings in the trouser department. And now, just when we thought our button flies were safe, Peugeot has unleashed another Levi-ripping hot hatch. The 306 GTI-6.

Built as a replacement for the range-topping 306 S16, the GTI-6 is Peugeot's contribution to the hot hatch revival. And a quick scan of the Pug's vital stats is enough to work even the most jaded hot-hatcher into a lather. With a smoother, more powerful 167bhp engine, and a close ratio six-speed gearbox added to the outgoing S16's already juicy spec, the GTI-6 is one of those cars you just can't wait to thrupe within an inch of its life.

Though a degree of restraint has been practised with the exterior (only the alloys have changed), you'll be hard-pressed to hold yourself back once you get behind the wheel. Dark leather and Alcantara trimmed seats hold you in place like Velcro, while the driving position and well placed pedals only egg you on further.

Words Richard Meaden  
Photography Kenny P

The boys at Volkswagen may believe they invented the GTI, but I'll bet when you think 'hot hatch', the name Peugeot slams into your subconscious quicker than a hatchback into a hairpin. Yep, there's no denying it: when it comes to the definitive shopping trolley turned supercar, Peugeot has always had things sussed.

Its roll of honour is second to none.



The badge and the new alloys tell you this Pug's a bit special. Just wait till you drive it...



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*Below: exploiting the, er, handling repertoire. Leather and Alcantara seats (right) hug your body like a suede-lined wet-suit*



soundtrack back to the beginning. Perfect.

The secret is the closely spaced gearing, and the wider, more generous spread of power and torque. With sixth being just a tad taller than fifth in the old 'box (21.5mph per 1000rpm, to be precise) the remaining five cogs are packed tighter than a tin of sardines. All this makes for an addictive experience. You never find yourself floundering between gears, even on the twistiest of roads. Third is terrific for medium speed bends, and the high 7500rpm limit means you can usually hang onto it before leaping on the brakes for the next corner.

The truth is, with so many well matched gears to choose from, you can tailor your cog-swapping to suit just

about any corner you're likely to come across. Even when you find a really awkward sucker, of the tight, uphill, armful-of-lock variety, the 306 copes admirably. Just at the point when you wonder if first gear would have been a better choice, the extra low-end torque lugs you out of the corner, picking up where the S16 would have bogged down.

Unfortunately for Peugeot, this added flexibility and smoothness isn't reflected in the performance figures. While a top whack of 137mph is more than adequate, a 0-60mph time of 8.5secs isn't particularly impressive. Well, stuff the figures, that's what I say. For one thing, the GTI-6 isn't a flimsy, bare necessities kinda car. Peugeot realises that hot-

**Shift down three gears and nail it. At once the 306 changes character, from refined mile-eater to boisterous road-racer.**



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## SPECIFICATION

Engine	In-line four, 1996cc, 16v
Max power	167bhp @ 6500rpm
Max torque	142lbft @ 5500rpm
Top speed	137mph
0-60mph	8.5sec
Insurance group	15
Fuel economy	32.3mpg
Date on sale	Now
Basic price	£16,675



*If this isn't a damned good looking hatchback, I'll eat one of Mark Walton's hats*

▷ hatchers now have more sophisticated tastes. Most of them are going to be old gits for a start, which is why it comes with air conditioning and other heavyweight creature comforts. But never mind. Stretch its legs on the open road and your enthusiasm isn't likely to be dampened by an unexceptional 0-60mph time.

Although it's been all-hands-on-deck in the powertrain department, Peugeot's chassis engineers have been allowed to rest proudly on their springs. The S16's chassis was as sharp as a tack, and arguably the best facet of the car, so it's not surprising that nothing has been altered on the GTI-6. No other hot hatch has the magical combination of pointy, confident turn-in, unflappable traction and exhilarating mid-corner adjustability. After a brief period of familiarisation, you really do feel you can do anything with it.

Peel in smoothly, or plunge in aggressively, the Pug responds to your specific desires. It's nimble in the extreme, and adaptable too, allowing you to drift cleanly, all-of-a-piece through fast fourth or fifth gear curves, or use some lift-off oversteer to flick the tail around tight second-gear switchbacks. The great thing is you get so much feedback that it's easy to exploit the 306's wide handling repertoire to the full. The steering sends detailed information about the road surface, and wriggles gently over mid-curve bumps. The brakes are precise and linear in their action, and the ride quality

is firm but fair. Driving the GTI-6 involves more than just your sense of touch, though. You can hear when you're close to the limit, a gentle scrabbling, followed by a distant rumble as the grippy 195/55 Michelin Pilots gnaw at the tarmac.

However, entertainment like this doesn't come cheap. At £16,675, the GTI-6 is an expensive piece of kit. An awful lot more than rivals from Alfa and Nissan, in fact, and right up there with the Golf GTI 16V. The group 15 insurance rating sweetens the pill somewhat. Still,

if you're going to get a bank loan, you may as well get a big one...

You certainly won't regret it. From the moment you fire the Pug up, to the moment you reluctantly leave it to tick and ping away the heat of a good thrashing, you'll be driving the best new hot hatch money can buy. Inspirational at 10/10ths, refined and comfortable at 6/10ths, the GTI-6's strength comes from its depth and range of abilities. Buy one, and you'll have a bloody good time, all of the time. 🍀

