



## Peugeot 308 GTi by Richard Hawken



I was in a very fortunate position recently – I was offered the new 2018 Peugeot 308 GTi to drive for a few weeks, *you know just to see what it was like*. As a professional level racing driver (yes, I have a day job too), I am more **used to driving Porsche than Peugeot**, so I was **hugely excited** to see what the new generation of Peugeot was like; particularly as the last time I drove one was about 25 years ago – a **1.9 205 GTi** – a car I loved tremendously. So, what about the 2018 308 GTi? A GTi in a safety, anti-emissions mad world – surely it would have to be a **very watered-down** version of the windowmakers of yesteryear, right? **WRONG this car is flipping insane!** Insane **enough to worry the best of the best** hardcore GTi hot hatches. So, has Peugeot aimed its sights deliberately at VW? Fellow Petrol-heads listen up, *(in a whispery voice)* this thing is **good!**

### HERITAGE

Gentleman and ladies of a certain vintage will remember how good the Peugeot 205 Gti was back in the late 1980s and early 1990s. If you had one, you **were a driver**, a **cool kid** and a **brave one** at that. More 205 GTis ended their lives **backwards into a hedge** than any other car of the era lucky enough to be called a mnemonic of Grand Tour Injection. I very nearly went backwards through a hedge in one a few decades ago, (sorry mum) if it wasn't for a bit of motorsport experience in my teens the back of the blue 1900cc 205 GTi would have been redecorated with leaves and branches – such was the **snap lift-off oversteer** – *lethal in the wet*. I still think the 205 GTi is solely responsible for exorbitant insurance rates Gti's attract today.

Peugeot also has an incredibly **long and successful motorsport history** from World Rallying to Endurance racing. Sportscars, Le Mans, Touring Cars and even in Formula One. You name it **they've done it**.

## So, the 308 GTi in 3 words? “Seriously Good Fun”



## MILLBROOK

The top speed of the 308GTi has officially been **clocked at 154.7mph**. From a 1.6...surely not? So, I took the car to **Millbrook Proving Ground** to see what the top speed really is. And it's not like I did the test on an empty tank of fuel and one driver, **I was three quarters of a tank full** and took **2 hefty mates** with me with me who also wanted to see what the new breed 308 was like.



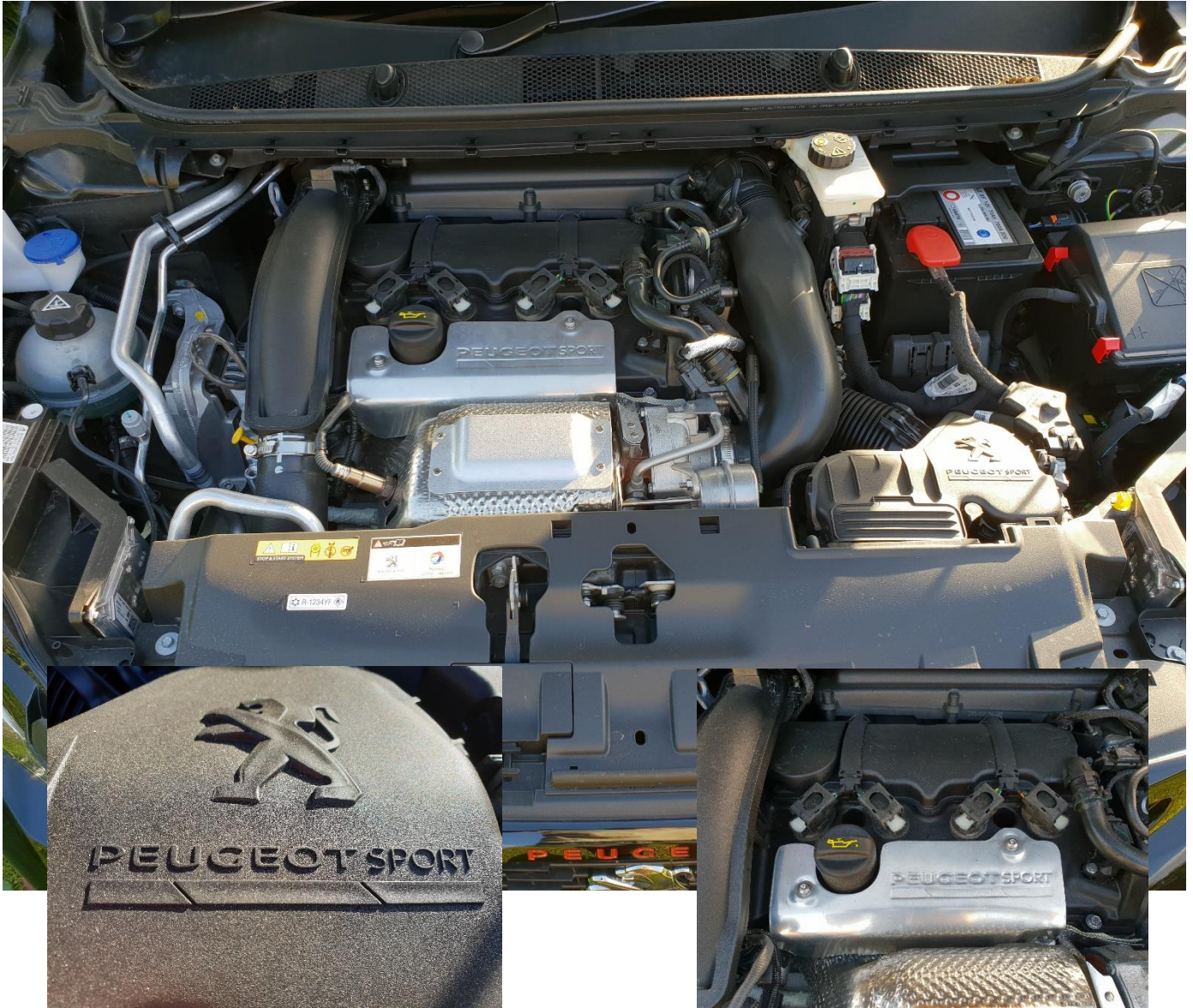
Crash helmets on (rules at Millbrook over 130mph) we set out on the bowl. Given how quickly the car accelerates I was **expecting 140mph**, but I was astounded as it **passed the 140mph mark with relative ease**. So 145mph must be it; nope through that and **still pulling – holy moly this thing is fast**. 150mph approached us and the car felt stable on the top lane of the 35-degree banking. Owing to the fact it is a slight corner caution needs to be exercised on running the car too long on the bowl as can lead to excessive tyre wear so we kept it to just 3 laps. **150mph came and went** with relative ease. In fact, it wasn't until the 308 hit **155mph that it stopped accelerating** – so, the car is capable of more than 155mph; the only reason we weren't quicker is the 155mph European limit "agreement" amongst manufactures that cars won't go faster. Must be to stop bragging rights and hooligans rejoicing in the fastest hot hatch. I would estimate unrestricted the little **1.6 308GTi would have hit nearly 160mph**, perhaps more. **Hats off to Peugeot and a huge round of applause for that herculean achievement** from a 1.6 engine.

So how did they achieve it? let's have a quick look under the skin.



## ENGINE

The 308 Gti's engine, a 1.6 turbo is **very spritely and delivers plenty of punch** in both normal and sports mode. Peugeot Sport's influence has given the car modifications normally seen in race engines, such as **forged pistons, strengthened con-rods** and hefty crankshaft retaining bolts. The engine that was previously seen in the RCZ-R has been tuned to deliver a much more **useable torque curve**; believe me it's **very useable**.



I still debate though whether the car actually delivers more power in driver induced **Sport Mode which adjusts mapping** or whether it just makes more of a song and dance about it. Either way, I love it, delivering plenty of **smiles per mile**. Mated to the **close ratio 6 speed gearbox** which I have to say is perfectly suited to the engine. Changing gear just before 6500rpm **throws the engine into the steepest upward part of the torque curve** extracting the most performance. The shift also offers plenty of gate feel, though the gear knob occasionally feels over engineered and a bit clumsy. Whatever speed you exit a corner, the car is ready to deliver a **punch in the back** as it unleashes its 243lb ft of torque from the blower [turbo] and **275bhp through the front wheels**. It's enough to propel the 308 from 0 to 60 in under 6 seconds – in the real world, **I got it nearer to 5.7s** at Millbrook.



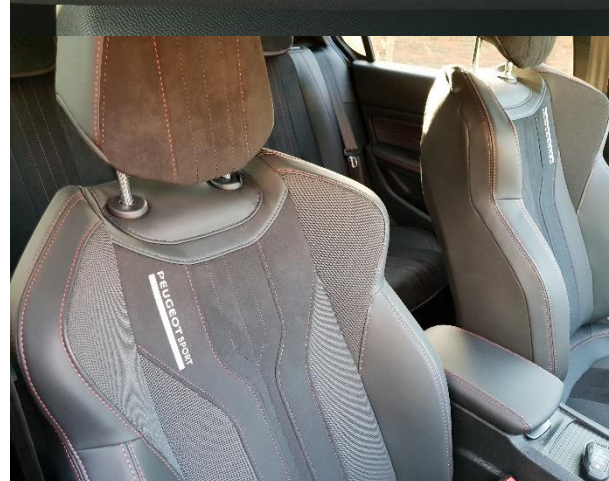


## INTERIOR

When you step into the 308 GTi for the first time you're immediately met with **quality befitting an Audi or BMW**. Alcantara and leather sports seats with red stitching, **D shaped steering wheel** with centre red line, aluminium trim everywhere including the gear stick (more on this later) – **it smacks of German quality** with a big thumbs up from fussy old me.

The **interior is great, neat and very tidy** thanks largely to landscape tablet sized screen in the centre of the dash that controls all features for A/C, media/audio, navigation system, telephone [which connects via Bluetooth] and settings for the car. This has allowed **Peugeot to rid the dash of antiquated knobs levers and buttons** which let's face it, are ugly in any car, **even a Pagani**. Whilst I have no supporting statistics I would imagine doing away with all that clunky plastic has saved production cost and weight too.

The seats are amongst **some of the most comfortable I have sat in**. They offer fantastic mid and upper torso support, plus the subtle wings at the top hold your shoulders in snugly during a little speedy cornering. The importance of all this will become apparent when we discuss the chassis. Despite being emblazoned with Peugeot Sport if I didn't know better I **would think Recaro had leant over** the shoulder of the seat designer during preliminary sketches. I love the stand-out red stitching too.





**The seats hug you like your favourite beanbag** but with levels of grip necessary in a car that handles this well (more on that later). Standard trim includes those fab bucket styled seats with massager and height adjustment. The only drawback is with a driver of 190cm (as I am) to position the seat correctly restricts leg room for occupants in the rear of the car.

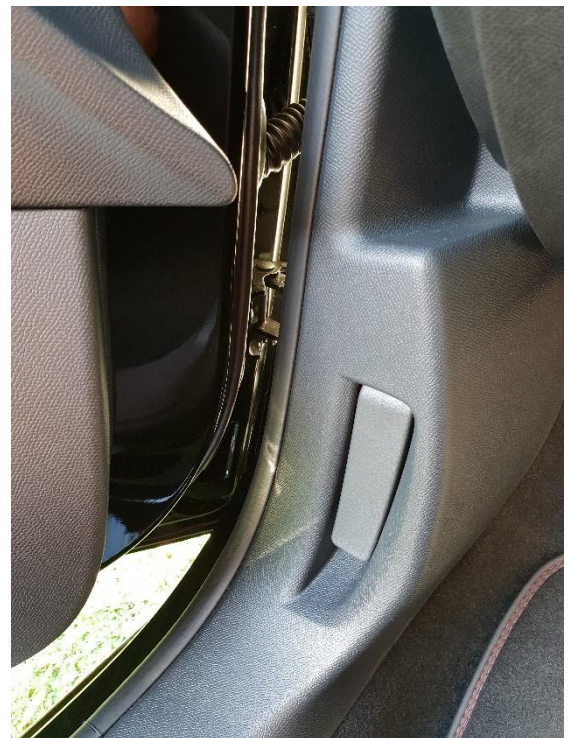
First thing I do in any car is lower the seat to the floor – *habit*. **Steering position is surprisingly good**, though I did always feel I would like the steering wheel further out. Having raced touring cars for many years achieving the 45-degree elbow angle for the archetypal driving position has always been a goal in any sporty road car. Sadly, the 308GTi doesn't quite extend far enough out for my liking however, that certainly **doesn't dampen the driving experience**.

Visibility from the driver's seat is good, even as far back as I sit. Some of the dash instrumentation is obscured by the top of the steering wheel, something Peugeot must have noticed during production/design and not just in the GTi either. Saying that speed and RPM are both easy to see. It's the mini LCD screen in the middle of the dash that's difficult to see.....**so what in this car your eyes should be on the road as it passes.....quickly**.



Bonnet release location is nice feature, **hidden away neatly in the door frame** and inaccessible once the N/S door has been closed...I thought initially of a nice security feature, but then how many times have you heard of a bonnet release being pulled mid-drive?

Plastics are of a pleasing quality around the high impact areas of the door frame, sills, boot etc, but are much better quality where obvious with an almost soft touch feel to them you'd find in a VW. **Use of leathers and alcantara is generous for a car costing from £29,000** with the seats (must be by Recaro?) are just brilliant offering grip and support where needed. A real geek feature I love, is when the Sport button is pressed which unleashes the 1.6 turbo's full potential the dash clocks turn devilishly red (see below right) Additionally, a clever microphone system on the air intake system **amplifies induction noise** into the speakers at a pre-set tone and volume. It's actually quite effective for an amplified sound and gives the car a real **sense of speed and aggression**. Question I still have though, **is the car any quicker in Sport?** Perhaps a psychological effect as it definitely sounds quicker, but in reality, after 1000 miles, I am yet to be convinced.





## BODY STYLING

The aero department worked hard to “shape it like a bullet” 10 points for remembering the film I borrowed that from. Everything at the front **joins and fits nicely** without nasty gaping gaps to create unwanted drag...rubbers seal the front end up to form an almost completely solid shape – **quality one is more used to seeing in a German car**. The door mirrors are subtle and shaped to **minimise coefficient drag**, the wipers park beneath the bonnet scuttle when not in use (UK weather). The A-pillars on the windscreen help to channel the air over the roof onto the boot spoiler and thanks to a front splitter (coloured in red of course) helping create a low-pressure area under the car - the slower



air creates a **positive downforce helping high-speed cornering and grip**. There are bits of Le Mans car in here you know. The front grille is a real design feature too. If you look as I do at a car you will see a massive open mouth gulping in gallons of air to **lower the charge temperature for the turbo** via the intercooler, but also to cool the engine. The great thing is it does it with style, a sort of artistry in design, yet fully functional. Above the grille Peugeot is engraved in red into the top with the Chrome Lion firmly out on display letting hot hatch owners in front (if they ever are) the 308 means business. **Not sure why they just didn't write “move over” in reverse writing on the front.**





## WHEELS/TYRES

I am **obsessed with tyres**. Well it's the only thing that keeps us on the road in not much more than 4 sized 11 shoe prints....yes really that's it. **Peugeot you chose well sirs**. Michelin Pilot Sport 235/35/ZR 18 tyres are some of the **best road rubber money** can buy (but definitely not the cheapest). Just to be clear, even though they are the control tyre on the Porsche 911 Carrera Cup car that I race, I am not associated with the company in any way....but Michelin if you need my number....I just tend to say it as I see it and **these tyres are ace**. For an all-weather tyre they offer incredible **straight-line acceleration, predictable cornering** and assuredness through hefty amounts of wheel feedback. Part of the success of the tyre is 35% of it is just **solid rubber** with a blade width line cut out.



## CHASSIS

Peugeot have created a real drivers' car in the 308. **Corner turn in for a FWD with CV joints** and a transversely mounted engine is incredible. The **steering ratio** has been thought about very carefully, which has then lead to **stiff damper** decisions followed by a stroke of **genius with the tyre selection** to prop it all up. Occasionally you feel like you've turned in too quickly, but the chassis is compliant and balanced so deals with the change of direction with a healthy portion of obedience.

Slow Surrey pot-holed roads could make the car edgy and fidgety, partly down to a 60% increase in front spring rates and 100% rear versus the standard car, a much **thicker anti-roll bar and 11mm lower all round**. The 308 GTi also boasts a more **track focused toe out and negative camber** (told you I was a geek). Rarely does a rewarding, taut drivers' car meet with squidgy comfort. Don't get me wrong, we are not talking harshness, or bounce, it's all quite well contained and a jolly old nice place to be on a long journey as we did.

The design of the wheels is sporty with plenty of vents to dissipate heat from the 4 pot callipers and 380mm front discs. The matt grey and black work so well together, but are susceptible to the odd bit of "wife styling" from those anything less than a paranoid parker – like me.





What I do like is how the boffins have positioned heavy components such as the battery back against the bulk head, behind the front axle line. Even the washer bottle sits back there. The bulk head incidentally connects both struts across the car offering a strut brace support....*smart*.

## BOOT

Who the hell cares? But 470 litres as you asked.

## BRAKES

Peugeot Sport 4 Pot front brake callipers mated to large 380mm vented discs **pull the 308GTi up in super-quick time**, and with a certain confidence when **braking eye-poppingly late into a corner** (there's that grip thing again). But the brakes are not invasive or over powered. They are more progressive with a good sense of feel....and, if you're a left foot braker, it doesn't dump all the torque out the wastegate like a certain German car I could mention...you can tell that really annoys me, can't you?

## DRIVING

With torquey, powerful front-wheel driven cars one tends towards mass torque steer and the 308 is no stranger to it, however the boffins have done a **good job of minimising it with a decent diff** and I'd imagine a healthy cross-shaft across the back of the engine to ensure equal length driveshafts down to the wheels. It's certainly a lot more driver obedient than certain other similar powered front drivers I've had a go in.

The **traction control is also very driveable**, not cutting in a moment too early. A few laps of the Alpine Circuit at Millbrook unloaded the NSF wheel a few times, certainly enough to induce a little wheel spin, but the cars systems, left enough room for a little play. But **dare to push the car beyond the set limit, it cleverly dumps boost and applies the brakes if needs be** to maintain safety.

Turn in is sharp largely down to more track focused alignment settings, plus the ratio on the steering rack is quick needing no more than a **half turn either way** to navigate even **the sharpest of bends**. Like most modern cars the 308GTi is equipped with electric steering (*not a fan since a BTCC car I raced in 2015 had a hissy fit and locked up on me, only to then dump a huge amount of right-hand-lock torque into the Old Hairpin at Donington resulting in a spin*). I also find it lifeless in feel. I would say the **308Gti delivers a satisfactory performance here**, but does offer more feel than most EPS systems, thanks largely to damping and low-profile tyres.

**Direction change in the car is enviable** to say the least, shod with those dirty great Michelin Pilot Sports there's plenty of grip, poise and purpose from the chassis dynamic. Turn in close to the limit warming the edges of the Michelins is a great feeling, a well-timed lift off on the entrance to a corner is sufficient to transfer enough weight forward to unsettle the rear **getting the car to rotate into corners like it's on rails**. The chassis complies without fuss. Should your bag of talent be running on empty a blip on the throttle brings the car back under control with comfort and ease, aided by that sharp steering rack.





Cabin noise is marginally higher than the competitors but certainly not intrusive enough to destroy the quality sound from the Peugeot Stereo, but also remember its testament to a lack of the biggest car performance killer – **weight**. **The Peugeot 308 Gti's** weighs in at just a supermodel svelte 1205KG.

## **NEGATIVES**

Whilst I love the 308GTi, and I genuinely think **Peugeot have rekindled a flame in me from a decade past**, there are one or two flaws in my humble opinion.

Firstly, the dash instrumentation is difficult to see when the steering wheel is set in the right position, or any position for that matter, meaning an elongated stare to see speed, revs and temperatures. Forget the centre screen completely which displays BHP and torque in use. However, as it is a driver's car, a simple heads-up display would fix this problem.

Whilst this is not a negative for me, some owners may find the **ride harsh** thanks to the low-profile tyres and sports suspension, plus to keep the weight low, there's not an abundance of sound deadening throughout the chassis either.

I love the 308 GTI's manual gearstick, honed from a single block of aluminium (maybe not) it shows, competitor quality plus is a real design piece almost reminiscent of the 1980s Alien the Predator's helmet. However, what it does is act as a temperature magnifier being aluminium. During the time I had the 308GTi the inclement UK weather was cold, wet, warm and dry. On the cold mornings the gear knob was ice block cold to touch, but manageable. However, on the hot days in direct sun the knob became untouchable it was so hot. Whilst it wouldn't burn or cause injury it was so hot it needed a cloth to engage and change gear, and I've got leathery old hands relative to a younger driver. There are however 2 recesses filled with the same sporty red paint as the dash and front splitter that accurate gear shifters can aim for which isn't going to cause burns.

## **CONCLUSION**

This is where I tip my hat to Peugeot for doing a **brilliant job on the 308Gti**. As a racer I tend to get my thrills on the race track and few cars leave me with the "wow" factor these days as they are just dare I say it, too dull and safe. Yes of course the 308GTi is safe before I leave you with the wrong idea, but it did make me say "wow".

**I absolutely loved having the car**. In fact, I wanted more long journeys in it to experience more of it. I will ignore my wife's comments that the car is dangerous, because to me it isn't. ABS, DSC, NCAP 5\*, airbags, its actually very safe. But it invokes a little fear in passengers **which means in the right hands its doing everything its meant to as a European hot hatch**.

If you can forgive the steering wheel obscured dash instrumentation, baking hot summer gear knob, synthesised induction roar and a slightly harsh road the 308 is a great car. It's either a hot hatch or a shopping car but it's also everything in between.

**So, do Peugeot have VW's Golf GTi in their sights? Damned right they do and rightly so**. This car is capable of some quite giant killing.

I would like to say a massive thanks to Marcus Neilson of Robins and Day for the fantastic experience.

Richard Hawken