

Tuned Car of the Year

It's been a vintage year for smaller, specialist firms improving upon the car giants' best – and often already brilliant – efforts. **Richard Meaden** and **John Barker** recall our favourite tuned cars of 2010



RUNNERS-UP

1. VF ENGINEERING AUDI R8

Sometimes it's the more subtle tuning efforts that are the most impressive. VF Engineering's beautiful supercharger upgrade for the V8 Audi R8 is a perfect case in point. Upping the sweeter-handling R8's power to a V10-beating 548bhp and 437lb ft is genius, for it gives you the best of both worlds. Expertly installed in the UK by APS of Brackley to factory standards, its £22K very well spent.

2. 9FF GTURBO 1200

A Porsche 911 with more power than a Bugatti Veyron SS sounds impossible – unless you are familiar with Jan Fatthauer's mastery of rear-engined ballistics. With 1200bhp and 774lb ft from a 4-litre, twin-turbo version of Porsche's flat-six, the £290,000 GTurbo has 910bhp per ton. That's absurd, but then so too is a near-standard-looking 911 capable of accelerating from 190 to 210mph in 4.7sec on its way to a top speed of 243mph. Divine madness.

3. AC SCHNITZER ACS4 TURBO S

The best-looking and dynamically most impressive BMW Z4 we've driven. Based on the already potent 35is, which itself costs £45K, the full, near-£25K ACS4 conversion turns the wick up and ties the chassis down to create a 375bhp roadster with poise and accuracy and a sense that both ends are working in harmony. Brings out the sports car lurking in the Z4.

4. BBR RS380 FOCUS RS

Ford's Focus RS is already pretty extreme, but that just seems to make the tuning industry love it even more. BBR has taken the extreme theme and put a unique twist on it, increasing power to 380bhp, torque to 388lb ft (both massive figures for a front-driver) and then softening the chassis. The result is a very exciting car, one that stays just the right side of feeling too powerful, but works on bumpy roads. Neat.



WINNER
LITCHFIELD NISSAN GT-R

It's hard to imagine significantly improving on the Nissan GT-R, but that doesn't stop people trying. Just ask David Yu (Fast Fleet, p150). So when we heard that legendary Subaru tuner Iain Litchfield was working on a GT-R project, we were both excited and a little fearful.

Fabulous though Litchfield's super-quick Imprezas are, the GT-R is a whole new level of complexity and cost. Could he really improve upon one of greatest drivers' cars of the 21st century? The answer is an emphatic yes.

Built for Gérard Lopez – car fanatic, multi-millionaire 'technologist' and owner of the Renault F1 Team – the Litchfield GT-R is a masterpiece of blockbusting performance enhancements and bespoke detailing.

Lopez wanted power, and lots of it, to address the GT-R's weight issues. He also wanted the

car to function as a daily driver, so the power and torque delivery, and reliability, had to be as good as the day his Nissan left the factory. Finally, he wanted sharpened dynamics, but with the emphasis on fast-road pliancy.

Litchfield delivered in fine style, boosting the twin-turbo V6 to 710bhp and 650lb ft for absurd levels of acceleration and mid-gear thrust. He matched this otherworldly pace with 396mm Movit carbon discs and billet-machined calipers that are both hugely effective and 5kg-per-corner lighter.

Undertaking a complete, 360-degree tuning programme covering engine, brakes, chassis and styling is a daunting project, but one that Litchfield aced. The result is a GT-R that feels factory-standard in the way it functions, but NASA-spec in the way it devours any stretch of road you put in front of it. It's our kind of car, and our Tuned Car of the Year for 2010.



Right: new turbos help lift power by 232bhp and torque by 217lb ft; engine internals remain standard. Above: on-road driveability has been maintained. Below: body kit is by Mine's



'This is a GT-R that feels factory-standard in the way it functions, but NASA-spec in the way it devours a road'



WINNER