

MOVEMENT | TRANSPORTATION

Missing Link

—*Bentley Continental GT3-R*

WHEN ONE of the staunchest car brands in the business announced a return to racing in 2012, the following thought crossed more than a few minds: “Bentley used to build race cars?” Yes, it’s true: the British brand from Crewe was a regular on the circuit, starting a few years after the company was formed in 1919. In fact, its early days were marked with considerable success. Bentley cars were in competition at the legendary 24 Hours of Le Mans from 1923 to 1930, winning overall in 1924 and again from 1927 to 1930. This period was the era of the Bentley Boys, a group of well-heeled enthusiasts who continue to be mythologized to this day. These wealthy playboys were affiliated exclusively with the Bentley brand, which was known for both speed and style.

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the era of seemingly frivolous pursuits such as racing had passed. The carmaker suffered as well, eventually falling into the hands of rival Rolls-Royce in 1931, an untenable situation for true Bentley aficionados rectified by the VW Group purchase in 1998. Three years after that, Bentley was back at Le Mans, securing a third-place finish with the EXP Speed 8 Prototype. In 2002, the Bentley EXP Speed 8 finished fourth at Le Mans, a frustrating step backwards. But a year later, a new prototype race car, the Bentley



Speed 8, took first and second place overall. Just over a decade down the road, the manufacturer has returned to competition with the Bentley Continental GT3 and a road-going GT3-R.

The standard Continental GT V8 showcases a twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8, an eight-speed automatic transmission, and all-wheel drive. With 500 horsepower underfoot, it’s a powerful and rapid form of transport. Based on the GT V8, the GT3 weighs over 1,000 kilograms less, in part the result of stripping away all that gorgeous wood, leather, and chrome. It also sports a different drivetrain: a six-speed sequential racing gearbox is linked to a rear-wheel drive system. In two seasons of racing, the Bentley Continental GT3 has already proven a winner. The factory race team competes in the Blancpain Endurance Series in Europe and finished second in the

championship this year. In North America, the Bentley Team Dyson Racing finished sixth in the Pirelli World Challenge GT Championship.

Now, with the 2015 Bentley Continental GT3-R, the missing link between the GT V8 and the GT3 has been unleashed. Based on the Bentley Continental GT, the GT3-R also powers ahead with the twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8 engine; in this application, the engine has been massaged to generate 572 horsepower. Although this is a step up from the base version, it’s also less than some other road-going versions of the Continental. Yet, the GT3-R is the fastest production Bentley in history—a zero-to-100 kilometres per hour sprint time of 3.7 seconds and top speed of 332 kilometres per hour is proof. Compared to the Continental GT V8, the GT3-R features a more aerodynamic front fascia, a fixed rear wing, and a vented hood, all constructed of lightweight carbon fibre. To slash weight even further, the back seat has been removed, the interior panels are made of carbon fibre, the 21-inch wheels are lightweight alloy, and the exhaust is made of titanium. All told, the GT3-R is 100 kilograms lighter than the GT V8.

Out on the open road, the GT3-R turns heads like few cars can. The white-and-green paint treatment lifted directly from the GT3 is likely the main culprit. The wheels and rear wing might bear some of the responsibility. Perhaps the diabolical exhaust note is the guilty party. Or maybe it’s the fact that this Bentley is so much fun to drive, it’s hard to keep speed in check. This fantastic car has a shockingly low production run; only three were earmarked for all of Canada—one per Bentley dealership—and all three were gone long ago. Somewhere, the Bentley Boys are smiling again.

—Mark Hacking

