

CLASSIC DRIVER

A night out around town with the ultimate unicorn hypercars

Lead

Every once in a while there’s a moment when you have to pinch yourself to check that what you’re seeing is real. Thanks to DK Engineering, I just had one of those moments...



For a brief few years in the late 1990s, the GT1 category sparked into life with a series of homologated road cars tearing up the world’s best racetracks. For one night only, DK Engineering bought together three of the most desirable GT1 road racers for a late-night drive.



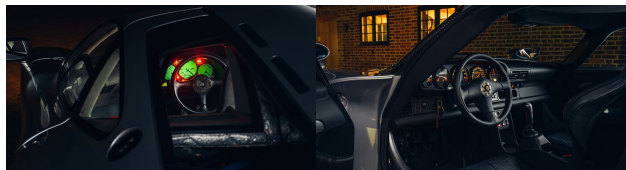
Having dominated the BPR Global GT series, the McLaren F1 GTR took overall victory at the 1995 24 Hours of Le Mans – in fact, it took four of the top five places. A total of 28 F1 GTR race cars would be built, along with 65 road cars simply called the F1.



Next up would be the Porsche GT1. Instead of taking a great road car and turning it into a racer like McLaren did, Porsche exploited the rulebook, building a race car and making a road-legal variant for homologation purposes. Part 993, part 962, the Porsche GT1 *Straßenversion* significantly moved the game on and with less than 25 cars in existence, you’d be lucky to ever spot one on the road.



Completing our trio (and single-handedly responsible for killing off the GT1 series with its formidable dominance) is the Mercedes CLK GTR. Even though the GT1 class was cancelled in 1999, Mercedes-Benz still had an obligation to build the required cars. Of the 26 in total, just 20 coupes were made, sharing the grille, headlights and rear lights of the standard CLK road car. At the time, it was the most expensive production road car ever built, selling for \$1,547,620.



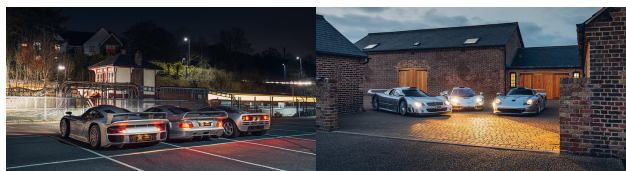
Tonight, though, these three silver unicorns have come together for a brief moment to celebrate the peak of wild, street-legal racers. I ask James Cottingham of DK Engineering just how long this has taken to come about. “About 18 months,” he says. “We’ve been following the market closely and just kept missing things, and then the Porsche GT1 came up. I just happened to be in a position where I could do a deal. It was one of those things, I realised how many people were interested in the sale of such a car, in comparison to other deals you do, and so the search was on to find a McLaren and a CLK.”



Now, if we’re going to be really pedantic, we could point out that the McLaren should really be a GTR, but in these circumstances I think some flexibility is allowed when it comes to bringing together cars like this. But where do you find a McLaren these days, apart from maybe in the Classic Driver Market? James continues: “These cars are rarely advertised. People tend to, and should, rely on their “go to” advisor. Last year there were rumours of a McLaren F1 available on the other side of the world, it had been offered around a lot, I just sort of set it as a target to go and try to buy the car directly and get it back to Europe and under control; it turned out to be a relatively straightforward process thanks to the great network we have around the world, our intimate knowledge of how to transact these sorts of deals and the actual seller’s trust in DK’s ability to deliver on their promises.



"In the middle of all of that, suddenly the CLK GTR came along. I'd said to a couple of friends of mine that long-term, I'd love to have a CLK. I thought it'd be a really good car to buy and something to have for a while. Looking at everything else, they seem like great value for money. I mentioned it to a couple of people and two months later out of the blue, I got a call from a friend: "A car's come up."



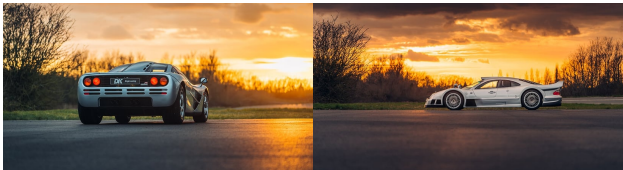
Prowling around the streets late at night, the Mercedes is the car that grabs your attention, both visibly and audibly, it just has so much presence. Perhaps the McLaren is the car you can't help but take home with you for a long-term relationship, but for one night of fun, it's pretty hard to find a reason not to pick the CLK GTR for its outrageousness. The Porsche GT1, much like the 918, sits in the middle of this trio. Parked alone, it looks wild. Inside, it's classic Porsche; there's a familiarity that instantly puts you at ease. I could drive this car home without giving it a second thought.



The CLK GTR was sold as fast as it arrived, with DK Engineering's Christmas booklet generating an enquiry that couldn't be turned down. By the time you read this, the car will be in the United States with its lucky new owner. Similarly, the Porsche GT1 was swiftly sold to a lucky collector in Hong Kong. Before our late-night drive-out, we met at Millbrook proving ground for the car's first shakedown since its thorough recommissioning, which included minor sympathetic paint work, a retrim, a full mechanical restoration and an engine rebuild.



For James, the CLK GTR is also the one he'd choose for just one special drive. "I don't get to use cars that often, and as you know, if I am using them, it tends to be in a racing environment. So there's something about the CLK GTR being so two-fingers-up to everything that always puts a smile on my face."



Pulling up to the petrol station with these three unicorns glowing in the fluorescent light, you feel bad choosing a particular car; they all have their place in motorsport history and individually they set new benchmarks for how extreme a road car could be. At a time when new hypercar rules have been established for Le Mans, perhaps we're on the verge of another golden age of racing cars that end users can relate to.



Not many people could pull this trio together for a photo shoot. In fact, to my knowledge I have never seen these three models together in one place. While DK Engineering made its name as the 'go-to' restoration house for '50s and '60s Ferraris, it has very much evolved into a company that can now offer a full service to its global list of clients. Maybe there's time for just one last sit in the CLK GTR before it gets put away...

Gallery

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