

Trailer Thrash



Without SUVs selling fast, there would be no supercars. Time to find out which manufacturer makes the best of both worlds

WORDS: TOM FORD / PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK RICCONI

A £160,000-plus Lamborghini with a 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 and 641bhp. Carbon-ceramic brakes, 23in alloy wheels, an Anima selector to flick between Strada, Sport and Corsa modes, four-wheel steering and active stability control, optional Pirelli Corsas for track work. Launch control, obviously. And a towbar.

I beg your pardon?

Yup, leaf through the specifications of the Lamborghini Urus and you will discover, as a quirk of its shared heritage, it can come equipped with the fixings to tow an Eddis Buccaneer. Or a trailer filled with grass clippings set for the local recycling centre, a situation likely to atomise the rearguard on first application of decent throttle, like a hot-air balloon basket strapped to the bottom of Falcon Heavy. In fact, pretty much any mundane use of an Urus towball feels a little... implausible. Like finding a convenient carrying handle on a bomb. Why does a Lamborghini have a towbar? What *would* you tow with a Lamborghini super-SUV? Unless you have a pressing need to yank a trawler into dry dock, or drag the Moon from orbit, there's a delicious amount of overkill here, the kind of thing that makes you wonder if anyone makes track tyres for trailers.

But then it dawned like the yawn of a lazy cat – the most appropriate thing to tow with a Lamborghini would be *another Lamborghini*. The ultimate single-manufacturer rig. You can see



AMG G63/ AMG GT R



If this were a track day, I'd have nailed it from the start. Let's be honest, any public circuit event is essentially a competition both on track and off it, and the points scoring starts when you rock up in the paddock. Why? Because your rig is a rolling articulation of intent, and while poling up in a polar white G63 towing a Magno green road-going version of the F1 safety car might not win any awards for subtlety, it definitely makes a statement.

There are many good things about total Mercedes-ness. With both vehicles powered by AMG's guttural, 577bhp twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8, both sound like angsty thunder, and there's torque aplenty from both, the G63 using its higher 627lb ft output to pull the GT R and trailer with nonchalant ease – so unstressed that at 30mph in fifth gear, it'll drop down to four-cylinder economy mode. In fact, I win just with the tow car, the seating position and all-round, square-cornered visibility of the G making it incredibly easy to position on the road. The transformed interior transporting the G-Wagen from gussied-up military vehicle to a modern, connected and incredibly relaxing place to spend time. **CT**

NOMAD/ ACE



Hands up who didn't read the brief properly? I admit the Ariel Ace is a superbike, not a supercar, and the Nomad is an off-road buggy thing, not an SUV, but in terms of combining speed, utility and wetting-yourself-with-laughter, I'm standing by my decision. It's not like the Nomad can't do the schoolrun. In fact, it's probably several minutes faster than an RRS SVR because you can turn hard left through the nearest hedge, traverse a field at 70mph then leap the fence on the other side, arriving at the school gates covered head to toe in cow dung. Then when the surface is more... tarmacky, little comes close to the Ace. More living sculpture than transport, it's lavished with the same microscopic attention to detail you get with the Atom. Details like a matching dash console to the company's cars, a mighty 175bhp Honda V4 engine and carbon-fibre wheels. But it's not cheap – starting at £20k, or £32k for the one I was clinging onto at the track. However, in today's company that's a bargain. My pairing, then, is smaller, cheaper, lighter, faster and more fun than anything else here. Any arguments? Good. JR



Once again, no one had invited the Michelin Man along, but there he was



how we got on, on page 76. But one thing led to another and a few other towball options were discovered. Very fast towball options, for a different kind of drag race. The kind of things that beg for a *TopGear* shakedown of the most OTT tow rigs in existence.

Which is how I come to be driving a Porsche with seven axles, 14 wheels, an engine in the front and one in the rear, 14 cylinders and 1,055bhp. Mind you, next to me, editor-in-chief Turner is casually piloting a Merc with 16 cylinders – a pair of identical 4.0-litre V8s – the same 14 wheels and 1,154bhp. Tom Harrison has 1,159bhp, Ollie Marriage has turned up with “something like” 1,050 horsepower and enough wing to humble Boeing, and Jack Rix has missed the memo completely and speared off into an intellectual space all of his own.

We have become a rolling affront to efficiency, each ridiculously powerful sports SUV towing a racier product of the same manufacturer, on a massive, gleamingly galvanised trailer. And the list is properly bizarre, and utterly brilliant: Porsche Cayenne Turbo mated to GT3 RS, Mercedes-Benz G63 allied to AMG GT R, Land Rover SVR wedded to Jaguar Project 8. Then comes a Bentley Bentayga V8 towing Bentley's newest GT3 racer (of which there will be a full test in the next issue) and Ariel's sort-of SUV Nomad towing an Ariel Ace motorbike. Which just goes to show you can't trust Ollie Marriage or Jack Rix to play by the rules.

Of course, the towball option on most of these things is more likely to be used as a mounting point for a carrier for some obscenely expensive carbon-and-diamond-dust pedal bike, but on first impressions, people are missing out not towing with upwards of 500bhp. Because, unsurprisingly, it is really, joyously easy. Even with the biggest of race trailers on the back – except for the Nomad, which we'll get to later – every single tow car here makes short work of pulling their respective charges. Which they should, really, seeing as the least powerful of them (the Range Rover Sport SVR) still musters well north of 500lb ft. In fact, our traditional-type tow cars all feature forced-induction V8 engines, manage 62mph in 4.5 seconds or less and have top speeds on the very far side of illegal. When towing, therefore, they act like there really isn't much holding them back at all. Which isn't true, because these are the kind of rigs you need to pass a test to drive, or be suitably old to have the correct licence for.

The trailers themselves are Brian James T-Transporters, essentially a five-grand-plus-VAT triple-axle race trailer without a shell. The high-end way to transport something precious and car-shaped. With a hydraulic bed-tilt and proper space, they hold up to 3,500kg, weigh around 900kg and haul pretty much anything you can imagine – the only disadvantage being that they are not small, and you'd better be pretty confident on the reverse. According to the DVLA, in the UK, if you passed your driving test before 1 January 1997, you can drive with one on your car, as long as the combination of vehicle and trailer doesn't exceed 8,250kg MAM (maximum authorised mass). Post '97, you're limited to a trailer of 750kg (towed by a vehicle up to 3,500kg) or a heavier trailer, as long as the total rig weight is no more than 3,500kg. Otherwise, you're looking at the official trailer test. And things get heavy quickly when you're talking big SUV+trailer+sports thing. The Mercs, in combination, weigh in at over five tonnes (G63 at 2,560kg, GT R at 1,630kg, plus the 900kg trailer), the Range Rover and Project 8 just under five, the Bentleys – even with the 'lightweight' racer – 4.6 tonnes. The lightest, Jack's decidedly not



When CT and Wook started hitching up this trailer, they both had a full head of hair



BENTAYGA/ CONTI GT3



At what point does a car and trailer become a necessary licence upgrade? Bentleys are heavy. I wanted the Bentayga as my towing weapon for the simple reason that I suspected it would be masterful at it. But the thought of hooking it up to a Conti GT? Someone pass me the HGV regulations, 'cos that's a whole lot of tonnage.

But, ah, Bentley has a GT3 racing programme, and nowhere in Wook's statute of rig limitations does it say no racing cars. This is excellent. I bet Charlie and Wook were thinking they were going to rule the track with the AMG GT R and 911 GT3 RS. Not. A. Hope.

And the tractor unit up front? That might be no way to speak about a £160k Bentayga V8, but I don't particularly like the looks or what it stands for. However, I do like what it does, namely towing brilliantly. Smooth, silent, effortless, no Range Rover Sport-style clonks rattling back from trailer through towbar, just easy oomph. And when I reach the pitlane, jaws will drop. If we have the Bentayga to thank for enabling Bentley's full-house GT3 racing programme, then chalk me up as a convert. **OM**

OEM towball-shod Nomad and Ace bike, weighs just over a tonne, bike trailer included. Told you he was cheating.

Unsurprisingly, it's the G-Class, Range Rover and Bentley that immediately feel the most comfortable with a loaded trailer, mostly to do with the inherent weight of the tow car. With a big trailer, some mass to the tow vehicle really does help, and although the Cayenne isn't bothered – the GT3 RS being relatively light in this company – it just doesn't feel as dense and solid as the other three. Rolling around the *TopGear* test track in a wholly unscientific test of performance, the Range Rover bellows blue murder – it's by far the loudest thing here, including the sports cars – the G63 emits a kind of saw-toothed burble and the Bentley, even in V8 format, feels a bit like an EV, solid torque and church quiet. The Cayenne is relentlessly efficient and surprisingly rapid once it gets going. But they all, without pause, tow like absolute champions, stop

like they aren't connected to anything at all, and provide neat little reversing cameras that allow you to hook the rigs up solo. This matters if you have to do such things regularly.

Diving childishly into Hammerhead, you can feel the weight and momentum of the combinations trying to force you wide. But, to be quite honest, the only real issue with towing using a massive sports SUV is that you completely forget you have a trailer on the back and start firing down the motorway. And every time you look in your rear-view mirror and see a sports car nailed to your back bumper, it can be... unsettling. Even the Nomad, the only manual tow car here, feels docile enough, and that's with the less solid single-bike trailer (and higher centre of gravity) of the Ace strapped to the back.

Inevitably, once the various rigs are deconstructed, things get faster and braking distances reduce considerably. Jack careers off on the angular Ace, wrestling with a 1,200cc V4 and



173bhp on a bike that weighs just 230kg and looks unerringly like the artistic scaffold of the Nomad that delivered it. The GT3 RS and Project 8 spear off together, the 9,000rpm flat-six free-breathing howl of the 911 undercut by the bassy thrum of the XE's supercharged V8. Corners are taken via wildly different lines, the Porsche neatly sliding, the Jaguar bullying its way through with just a smidgen of oversteer and four-wheel-drive corner-exit punch, while their respective attendant SUVs do their thing. It has to be said, although the Range Rover Sport SVR is hilariously theatrical – mostly due to that noise – and surprisingly flat through corners, nothing here swivels around a track like a Cayenne Turbo. It's more like a 911 than you'd believe. After that, the Mercs seem to be content on their own, the same song sung at slightly different pitches, the new G63 night-and-day capable compared to the old G-Wagen – albeit like watching a tower block attempting a lap time, the AMG GT R lazily setting fire to its rear tyres as it arcs around it. It's all lightly hilarious and eminently pointless.

Or is it? Because the weird thing is, whatever brand association you have, whatever innards they might share, there's a definite feeling from each of the products that they come from a specific manufacturer, even though the products are polar. And we're not necessarily just talking about switchgear and styling. Both Porsches are clinical, nimble and utterly self-possessed. The Jaguar/Land Rover

products are loud, entertaining and slightly brutish. The Mercedes brawny, muscular and hewn. Even the Bentleys feel of a piece, engineered into a place all of their own, and the Ariels could only be from that manufacturer, even though they are, both conceptually and literally, completely different things.

There is, therefore, a serious point to be made here. And it's about diversification. When discussing the idea of a tow-rig feature, it became clear that there were several manufacturers capable of fielding cars from very different sectors, neatly demonstrating the need for marques to offer a broad range of vehicles to remain successful. A manufacturer will not survive on extremity alone, and yet needs the 'halo' cars to inject the kind of brand awareness that drags people in. Think about the Porsche Cayenne – a car widely ridiculed by traditional enthusiast media at the time of launch in 2002, for not being a "proper Porsche". No matter how capable it was as a standalone SUV, it offended those who felt kinship with the traditional ideology of the brand. And yet... And yet, the Cayenne over three generations and 16 years of production has undoubtedly propped up the production of the RS models everyone loves, indirectly given birth to the bewinged specials that adorn bedroom walls. If history is to tell us anything, it's that the Cayenne hasn't spoiled Porsche's sports car offering, it has preserved it.

Similarly, while Land Rover might be conceptually based in things like the full-fat Range Rover and defunct Defender, it's the

“Although the RRS SVR is hilariously theatrical, nothing here swivels around a track like a Cayenne Turbo”



CAYENNE TURBO/ 911 GT3 RS

Inspiration for my rig? Simply that original is best. And I have – without doubt – the best-handling set-up here. Some 542bhp

from the original SSUV, the Porsche Cayenne Turbo, dragging behind it 513bhp of ultimate track satisfaction in

the shape of a very green, very 9,000rpm-red-line GT3 RS. You know why things end up being clichéd? Because often, they're

the best at what they do – ubiquity really can be a pointer towards greatness. Come at me, Trailer Queens, the best is right here. TF



GT3 RS and Project 8 escape their SUV chaperones for a spot of tomfoolery



“Why can you only count to six, daddy?” “Well, one day I put my hand out the side of a Nomad...”



Call it the Hollywood feature film philosophy: always put your best bits in the trailer

RRS SVR/
PROJECT 8

In 1883, a volcano on the Indonesian island of Krakatoa went bang in a big way. The explosion was so loud that it ruptured the eardrums of people 40 miles away, and was clearly heard on islands more than 3,000 miles west in the Indian Ocean. The Jaguar XE Project 8 and Range Rover Sport SVR are louder. No question. I half-expect my colleagues to clutch at their ears in pain as I start the P8 and ease it onto its Brian James trailer. These two are all about the noise. A rude, incongruous noise that never fails to put a smile on your face, no matter the situation. Yes, they look absurd and are driven mainly by the kind of people whose houses have fake Roman columns, and maybe they aren't quite at the same level dynamically as some of my colleagues' cars (despite JLR's best efforts), but, by God, they make you laugh. And it's much easier to laugh when you're warm and dry, Mr Rix. If theatrics are your bag, then this twosome is without doubt the ultimate rig. Makes silly noises, goes silly fast, looks totally ridiculous. People will hate you for it, but you can always drown them out. TH



RR Sport and Discovery Sport that sell, and while Jaguar is traditionally famous for sports cars, spreadsheets are motivated by more prosaic offerings (even if the SVR F-Pace was unavailable for test). Even Ariel, a company famous for its singularity of purpose with the Atom, has broadened its offering to three products: Atom, Nomad and Ace, all using similar skillsets and sharing an ethos.

And that's why these cars have towballs. Not because there's a huge demand to tow a trailer down the Autobahn at 150mph, but because they are the products of modern automotive manufacturing. A place where platform sharing and parts commonality, marketing and niche-filling is part of the game you need to play to be solvent. Big manufacturers simply cannot survive on a singular product, and even an entity like Lamborghini – DNA deep in the sports car sphere – needs to produce cars that will sell, and in numbers. Ariel needed to expand on the relatively limited appeal of the Atom, and bigger manufacturers noted that many of their sports-car buyers had at least one big, expensive SUV in their fleet... and they needed a piece of that pie. The Bentayga currently makes up about half of all Bentley sales, and the Urus is already predicted to double Lamborghini's total figures, bringing with it stability and profitability. Crossovers and SUVs account for two thirds of all US car sales, and we'll see similar moves from Aston with the DBX, the release of Rolls-Royce's Cullinan later this year, and even Ferrari with its 2019/2020 "FUV".

The truth is that you can be as iconic as you like, have brand identity and equity pouring out of your ears, but if you don't sell enough cars, in enough volume, you will end up selling nothing at all. Which is how this totally pointless test turned into a serious one, and proves that we should all be glad that cars like the Lamborghini Urus have towbars. It's to secure for the future the ones that don't. **TG**

“Sports-car makers noted that many of their buyers had one big, expensive SUV in their fleet”



GTR and G-Class: very much from the 'Prince Harry and Prince William' school of brotherhood

