

S 1000 RR takes on Supercar

A series production S 1000 RR recently went 'head to head' against a £150,000 V8 Ariel Atom Supercar for the UK's most popular motoring programme on television. Attracting around seven million viewers per episode – and around quarter of a billion worldwide as it is shown in more than 100 countries – Top Gear is the number one show for 'petrolheads' and focuses almost exclusively on cars. However, the success and reputation of the RR attracted the attention of the producers, who insisted that it should be included in a 'head to head' race against the phenomenal 475hp Ariel Atom.



On paper, at least, it didn't look a fair fight. The Ariel Atom 500 is no ordinary car. It weighs just 550kg, has a 3000cc V8 engine that can rev to 10,500rpm and outputs a staggering 475hp. It accelerates from 0-100km/h in 2.3 seconds and 0-160km/h in just 5.4 seconds. This makes it the fastest accelerating production car in the world. Top speed is more than 170mph (270km/h) and it costs £150,000. Only 25 are being made, most of which have already been sold.

As for the completely standard RR, although it costs less than 10 per cent of the value of the Ariel Atom, it's still a leader in its class. Its 999cc four-cylinder engine outputs over 190hp, it screams all the way up to 14,200rpm, its top speed is allegedly faster than the Ariel, and with a wet weight of around 206.5 kg with Race ABS, it has the best power-to-weight ratio in the litre sports bike class.

The Top Gear test track is laid-out around Dunsfold Aerodrome in Surrey, south-east England and is designed to test cars to their very limits. One of the show's highlights is to see how fast various cars can lap the circuit. Up until this point, the lap record was held by the fastest road-legal car in the world – the million pound Bugatti Veyron Super Sport – at 1:16.8 seconds, in



front of various Porsches, Lamborghinis, Ferraris, Maseratis and other exotic marques.



For this particular challenge though, it was a ‘head to head’ around the course that includes a range of slow and technically challenging corners, to fast sweeping bends. Many top drivers have tried this circuit including F1 legends Michael Schumacher, Jenson Button, Rubens Barrichello and ex-world champions Nigel Mansell and Damon Hill, but the driver of the Ariel Atom wasn’t revealed until after the race was over.

For the S 1000 RR, British Superbike EVO Champion Steve Brogan was chosen to challenge the 550kg supercar, which is powered by two 1300cc motorcycle engines which have been bored out and turned into a V8. For Top Gear director Andy Wilman, having a quality rider on board the RR was paramount to the hugely popular BBC Top Gear show’s credibility.

“We wanted this showdown to be as real and close as possible, so using a professional racer to ride the bike made perfect sense,” he said.

Brogan, the 2010 BSB-EVO champion, was lined up to race the 999cc, 193hp stock road bike around the legendary Top Gear test track against the £150,000 Ariel Atom V8. Having dominated the BSB-EVO class on a race-spec RR, Brogan was the natural choice to take on the supercar which costs more than ten times as much as the stock RR.



In a neck-and-neck race around the famous circuit, viewers of the show, which aired on Sunday 23 January on the BBC2 channel, saw Brogan mount a fantastic challenge to the Ariel, leading throughout the lap until the penultimate corner, when the mystery driver overtook Brogan and then used the massive braking power of the Ariel to make the corner safely and cross the finishing line first! The driver of the car in fact turned out to be racing driver and former Top Gear presenter Tiff Needell!

That said, it was an extremely close call between

the RR and the Ariel, and Steve Brogan did fantastically well on the notoriously bumpy circuit, where four-wheeled stability is a definite advantage. “I had a lot of fun filming with Top Gear. I had a few laps in a car then it was out on the stock S 1000 RR,” he said. “We got some good weather when we filmed it in October and the track was nice and dry so I could push hard. I turned the traction control off as I wanted to use some wheelspin in the corners. The car was very quick – it had more than double the horsepower of the bike – but the power-to-weight ratio was in my favour, so it was a fair race. I rode hard, it was very close!

Interestingly, when the show’s anonymous test driver ‘The Stig’ did his usual power lap of the Top Gear Test Track to see how the Ariel Atom 500 compared to the best ever lap times previously set; he managed a time of 1:15.1 – a new lap record. This beat the £1.7 million Bugatti Veyron Super Sport into second place by a staggering 1.7 seconds!