

THE GENER

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ACTION GAME



The third-generation Focus RS says a lot about how the hot hatch market has moved on in the 21st century. And for Pumaspeed, the game's only just begun...

Perspective is a funny thing. Many elements of everyday life that are commonplace today would have seemed utterly inconceivable as recently as twenty years ago. The ability to live-pause your TV, the availability of proper coffee in McDonald's, virtual-reality that doesn't look like Nightmare, Skype, the prospect of leaving the EU, contactless

payments, the fall from grace of all those 1970s celebs - the world of 2016 is unrecognisably peculiar when you view it through a 1990s filter.

...and this is particularly true of the hot hatch market. Think about it - back then, the notion of forced induction was still a pretty novel thing; Ford were leading the charge with the RS Escorts and Fiestas, Renault

had boosted their cheeky little 5, MG were shouting 'Me too!' with the ugly-duckling Maestro, but it was a far from everyday proposition to the man on the street. Owning a turbo used to be a badge of honour, proof that you prized horsepower above all else; nowadays everything's turbocharged and it's all about emissions, but the new wave of 21st century hot





R-Sport intercooler paves the way for future performance upgrades

“Pumaspeed, like the eponymous big cat, pounced on the new RS as soon as it rolled out of the factory”

hatches is taking that revered crown back and jamming it belligerently upon its proud head. The new Focus RS, for example – its engine is bullishly named ‘EcoBoost’, it’s got boost right there in the title. That’s a statement.

The fact that the stock, factory Focus RS has 345bhp is pretty eye-watering too. We’re becoming complacent about the abundance of horsepower these days, but it wasn’t all that long ago that being part of the two-hundred-club, driving a car with something north of 200bhp, was something to crow about in the pub. 345bhp really is quite a lot. Back in the Nineties, that’s the sort of power you’d have found in an Aston Martin DB7 or a TVR Cerbera, and today they’re shoehorning that manner of thrust into a car that’ll happily chauffeur your grandma to the Lyons Corner House. Mad.

The horsepower wars are like a red rag to a bull for the aftermarket, of course. For as long as there have been fast cars, there have been tuners making them faster, and the spiralling figures of the modern world are

throwing this into sharp focus. When Nissan launched the GT-R back in 2007, for instance, they claimed it was ‘untuneable’, in that it was so mechanically perfect. And look what’s happened to that – have you ever seen a standard one in the wild? And so it goes with the new RS: while the world’s motoring press collectively drops its jaw at the massive power figures, the drift mode, the hyper-intelligent chassis, you people out there in the *Fast Ford* sphere are just rubbing your hands together with glee, a wry smile on your face as you consider the potential.

That’s certainly what Pumaspeed have been up to. Like the eponymous big cat, they pounced on the new RS as soon as it rolled out of the factory; the RS may have only been around five minutes, but their new company demo car shows that there’s no time to be wasted in making this fast machine faster.

The firm requires little introduction to many, but here they are in a nutshell: “Pumaspeed have been running for over ten

TECH SPEC

FOCUS RS

ENGINE

2.3-litre EcoBoost four-cylinder turbo, R-Sport induction and crossover kit, R-Sport intercooler, R-Sport underboost kit, MAXD Stage 1 map, Scorpion downpipe, Milltek cat-back exhaust system

POWER

370-375bhp (estimated)

TRANSMISSION

Mk3 RS MMT6 AWD gearbox

SUSPENSION

Pumaspeed/Eibach lowering springs

BRAKES

RS Brembo 4-pots with 350mm discs (front), 302mm discs (rear)

WHEELS & TYRES

8.520in Zito ZS05 with 235/35R20 Nexen N5000 tyres

EXTERIOR

Nitrous Blue, Pumaspeed decals

INTERIOR

Stock Focus RS







“It’s spent a lot of time under development with our in-house fabrication team”

years and specialise in performance tuning for Fords,” explains resident power guru Simon. “We cover everything from Zetec S models all the way up to the RS; we produce many of our own parts, and supply quality components from around the world.” Their work speaks for itself, naturally – numerous Pumaspeed builds have appeared on these pages, with their parts and advice influencing countless more.

“It made sense for us to get a new RS in,” Simon shrugs, nonchalantly. “Being the latest RS model, we required a development car for our new hardware.” There’s a glint in his eye here, though – sure, he has to toe the company line and be sensible and grown-up about it, but you can tell that his inner child

is bouncing off the walls at the sheer silliness of the Focus. It just has that effect on people.

Pumaspeed have been pretty forthright in their endeavours too. “It’s spent a lot of time under development with our in-house fabrication team,” Simon confirms, and the spec list reveals all manner of upgrades. The lower-slung ride height is thanks to a set of bespoke springs, developed by Pumaspeed in conjunction with Eibach, to optimise the factory setup. And it’s under the bonnet where the real magic happens...

That shouty EcoBoost motor – the same that you’ll find in the new Mustang, incidentally, although it’s more powerful in the Focus – has been treated to an R-Sport induction and crossover kit as well as a



New 20in Zito alloys offer a subtle styling tweak without straying too far from Ford’s forged wheel design



Scorpion downpipe and Milltek cat-back exhaust system to free up a few horses. An internal combustion engine is basically just a big air pump, after all, so improving the inhalation and exhalation is the best place to start. Upgrading the intercooler provides further gains, and the fellas had initially felt that the turbo kick just wasn't old-school enough (see, they're Nineties at heart too) so they handed it over to the brainboxes at MAXD to give the ECU a tickle. MAXD had previously had oodles of fun tuning the Mustang EcoBoost, so it wasn't too much of a leap to reapply their developments to the rortier Focus RS application, and voila: an extra 25bhp-odd, a further 75lb ft, and the hard-boosting feel was brought to the fore.

"The whole car was torn to pieces to identify its weak spots and find where there was room for improvement," Simon enthuses. "With this round of upgrades we're estimating a peak power figure of around 370-375bhp, and you can think of this as just Stage 1 – we have Stage 2 and 3 developments pencilled in for the near future." Indeed, they've already got a fresh new hybrid turbo ready and waiting to go on, which should hopefully ease them down the road to a reliable 420bhp+. "Obviously

those figures are a guessing game at this stage," he laughs, "but the RS has the same 'swan neck' restricting flow as the ST250, so it's not unfamiliar territory." The tacit implication here is that things are about to get very raucous indeed, and given Pumaspeed's keen focus on quality and longevity, this won't be a simple pursuit of peaky, temperamental power – it'll be a holistic showcase of everyday-exploitable lunacy coupled with factory-standard practicality. Which, with this Stage 1 development of course, it already is.

The company's final flourish at this stage sits beneath the arches. While the RS is hardly lacking in visual drama, a set of 20in rims is the cherry on the cake here. And that brings us neatly back to where we came in. Remember the wheel-size arms race of the 1990s, where everyone was scrambling to get the biggest diameter possible squeezed under their bursting-at-the-seams corners? Suddenly 6x19in wheels were on every fashion-forward Nova on the scene. But 20in was the stuff of a madman's dream. Today, though? They fit in just perfectly with the MK3 RS – much like everything else about this car, it's all been turned up to eleven. And it looks like today, Pumaspeed are the ones with their hands on the dial. 📌



The RS sits perfectly on 20in Zito alloys combined with Pumaspeed springs