

Fazcination
R1 DVD Series
Motorvision
MVD (<http://mvd2b.com/>)

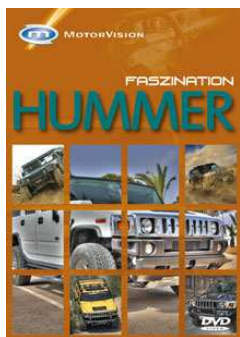
Reviewer: Bob Estreich

German with alternate English voiceover

OK, I may have been just a little bit wrong. In recent reviews I have complained about the bland, boring cars forced on us by the motor companies – egg-shaped, boring styling, unexciting. This series of German DVDs shows a range of vehicles that spans the wildly fast to the wildly impractical, but they are all individuals and in many cases FUN. They may not all be the stuff of Jeremy Clarkson’s dreams, but there are some cars in the series that will appeal to everybody.

The Hummer

This is not egg-shaped. It is not fast. The Hummer 1 is ridiculously wide, heavy and thirsty. Only its designer would call it attractive and he would be lying. It is “as aerodynamic as the north face of the Eiger”, and its price (100,000 Euros) would bankrupt a small country. With a weight of 3.5 tonnes unloaded it really needs its 160 litres of petrol tank to get it to the next service station – its fuel consumption is around 30 litres per 100 km.



It is a military vehicle meant for off-road work like the old Jeep it replaces. It has a high ground clearance and its topheaviness makes it a little unstable at highway speeds. The Hummer is big, thirsty, slow, and not known for its cornering ability, so naturally the Germans race



The Hummer



Shut Up, I Know How to Drive !

them. Uwe Zierbus and his long-suffering wife Bettina plus a team of truly dedicated mechanics are the Hummer Racing Team. The DVD follows their fortunes as Uwe sets out to win the German OffRoad Championship. Bettina navigates them around the course and points out the dangerous sections where it may be necessary to slow down. Uwe ignores her, preferring a “foot flat to the floor” approach in his driving. As a result bits of the Hummer break. It is not indestructible, at least not in Uwe’s hands.

With the release of the Hummer 2 a bit of common sense began to show through. It is narrower, lighter and a little less thirsty. Steel doors were no longer optional (canvas doors were standard on the Hummer 1, replaceable with armour plate doors). The interior finish was less like a tractor and catered more for comfort.

The Hummer 3 continued the move to a more rational size. The “baby” Hummer is almost usable on the road – it’s still tall but at least on the highway it doesn’t take up two lanes.

Being a sports commentator can be a difficult job if you are a young attractive female. People play jokes on you. “I was promised a test drive in a powerful car...” says one girl, looking at the huge Hummer 2 that she is going to take up a 45 degree slope, then bring back down again. She does a surprisingly good job of it under tuition, showing that the Hummer may not be as intimidating as it looks.

Geiger Cars in Munich have produced the ultimate Hummer. Their 200,000 euro “UberHummer” is fitted with a beefed-up 7.2 litre motor that takes it from 0 to 100 kmh in 6.5 seconds. Its 28-inch wheels give it enough ground clearance to drive over obstacles like a Mercedes. Chrome is its main decorative theme. What oil crisis?

Finally the documentary gives us a comparison between the Hummer and the Toyota Cruiser. The comparison is inconclusive. The Toyota,

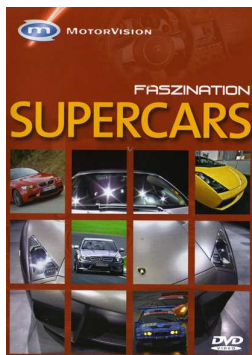
with its long history of development, is more comfortable and less thirsty off road. The Hummer is better finished and more modern-looking. It is also three times the price of the Toyota.

Supercars

This documentary is definitely the stuff of Jeremy Clarkson's dreams. Most of the footage is from various time trials and race meetings around Europe, where the car tuning companies can show off their work. Europe has many companies whose aim is to tune (we would say "hot up") a standard car. 0-60 kmh times between 3 and 4 seconds are almost compulsory. So are top speeds well over 300 kmh. Tuning an engine up to 700 horsepower or beyond is a goal that some tuners can reach. Twin turbochargers, V12 engines, carbon fibre or titanium parts are common. Any accident is going to be very expensive.

We visit Eurospares, a spare parts company that specialises in used parts for supercars. Many drivers can barely afford to buy their dream car and the petrol for it so in the event of an accident they will try here first. It is also used by those who just want to get their car back on the road as soon as possible rather than wait for new parts from the manufacturer. There is something rather sad about a Ferrari being dismantled for parts like a Christmas turkey.

There are many famous names and cars featured in this documentary – the BMW M3 is teamed against the Mercedes C63 AMG, there is the Ferrari Enzo, Pagani Zonda (from another tuning firm), and the Audi Quattro S1. The extras even give us a ride in the McLaren F1 GTR.



Beautiful Supercars

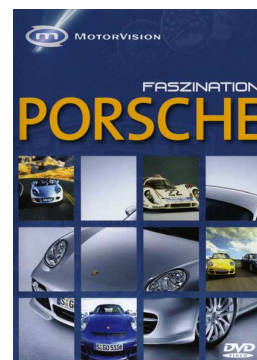
And as for the 300+ kmh Volkswagen Golf....?

With so many cars to study a number of points become obvious. The first is that these cars are almost universally impractical. A (small) driver and a packet of sandwiches is all that could fit into some of them. At least two are so impractical that they cannot be road registered in Europe and a Ferrari is so loud that it won't be registered anyhow. Another point is that the majority are simply ugly, from the BMW's "spectacle" radiator grille that was ugly when it was first designed and hasn't got any better since, to the assorted Ferraris that look like a failed origami exercise in folded metal. Painted red, of course. Many of these cars are simply expensive impracticality wrapped in mystique. Part of the mystique is the exclusive nature of some of the cars, like the Ferrari FXX – you had to be offered one by Ferrari. You won't see any American supercars in this doco. They are just too affordable. Perhaps this is just a little parochial?

Watching them race is like watching tyrannosaurs fight – it looks spectacular but you know they are all going to become extinct in the end, killed by rising fuel costs and their own inability to adapt. Somehow, though, even the hottest Hyundai will never match their style.

Porsche

From Dr Ferry Porsche, son of the Volkswagen designer Dr Ferdinand Porsche, the Porsche was an attempt to put some sort of sporty feeling back into post-war cars. He succeeded surprisingly well considering his first 1948 model 356 was based largely on Volkswagen parts. The marque is still going strong today. It has now reached the status of a cult car and this DVD follows the development of the various models. It gives almost a model-by model description, and it is amazing how many early Porsches are still in use, lovingly maintained by their owners.



Motor racing has always been a strong part of Porsche's development strategy. Racing puts extra stress on the car but shows up any problems with the car's balance and engineering.

The storyline follows the progress of a Porsche



A very early Porsche.

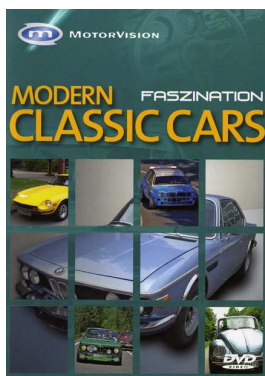
Cayenne 4 wheel drive in the Trans-Siberia Rally. Held in some of the roughest country in the world, this is a test of reliability and endurance as much as speed. The scenery is spectacular, too.

The classic Porsche 911 series, still in production in its later versions, comes in for detailed description. It was the first 911 that really made Porsche's reputation. Its racing wins gave it respectability way beyond what it had already achieved and its almost legendary reliability in the rallying world enhanced this.

One thing I liked about the DVD is the avid collectors who say their piece about their favourite car. Through them I can come to understand the passion of the Porsche enthusiast.

Modern Classic Cars

This is always a controversial area. If you ask an American what is a classic car you will get the Chevy Corvette, the Model T Ford, the Ford Mustang and so on. In Australia you would have the Falcon GTHO, Torana GTR-XU1, or FJ Holden. In Europe with their greater number of manufacturers there is a far wider range to choose from.



This DVD selects a number of cars that are no longer produced but are destined to become classics of their time. Some are not the original manufacturer's model but ones that have been modified by a tuning firm. Some of the cars are surprising selections.

Who would have thought of the Volkswagen Golf 1 GTi as a classic? Yet, viewing the DVD



Classic VW Cabriolet

and listening to the owners, it makes sense. The BMW 3.0 CSi is well on its way to being a classic by itself but the Alpina-tuned version has that extra something that makes it rare and desirable even now. But the Volkswagen Cabriolet convertible?

I was surprised to find the Datsun 240Z in there. It is recognised in America as an up-and-coming classic, but in Europe??? Yet, it too has its fans. The little "rice rocket" was seen as a poor man's Ferrari. It never attained that legendary status but it is still appreciated for what it did achieve and it marked the start of the production of sports cars from the huge Japanese factories.

The DVD is held together by the story of a group of enthusiasts trying to restore an elderly BMW 02 back to track racing condition. As they fight their way through years of rust and neglect we get a good picture of the problems facing a restorer. Parts are always a problem. Rebuilding the body may mean making up whole new panels. Finally there is that proud moment when it makes its first public appearance at the Classic Trophy race at the Nurburgring..

Once again it is the restorers and collectors who fill in the details. They are happy to talk about their passion for a particular car. You can't help sharing some of that passion as they do everything they can to "help the cars avoid a dignified retirement".

The DVD series is a little unusual. It doesn't spend all its time looking backwards and longing for the "good old days". We get a good picture of post-War car development, we see a lot of oddities and rare cars and we explore some of the extremes of car design. With fuel prices going upwards constantly these cars are going to disappear from the roads and become static museum pieces, but at least for a while longer it is good to see them in their natural environment.