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CORSA VXR



TOTAL VAUXHALL

ISSUE 9
JANUARY
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BO NIELSEN

PROPER BO!

We join Time Attack Champion Bo Nielsen for a near 1000-mile roadtrip spanning five countries for testing at two of the world's best racing circuits. It were proper epic, I tell thee!

Words & Photos: Steve McCann

Road trips of any sort never seem to run smoothly. Where there are people, cars and hundreds of miles to cover, problems are inevitable. However, little did we know just how many obstacles would be thrown in our way on the quest to reach the Nürburgring and Spa to shakedown Bo's incredible re-vamped Astra VXR for the 2011 Time Attack series. It would test us all individually and as a team but we battled hard to ensure the highs cancelled out the lows.



DAY ONE Thursday 31st March →

Bo spent the day making the finishing touches to the Astra. Drastic changes have been made since the 2010 season, meaning it was a real last-minute job to have the car ready. Sign-writing was the last task and it was late evening before it was done, so there was a three-hour delay before I got picked up at Gatwick airport where the road trip officially began!

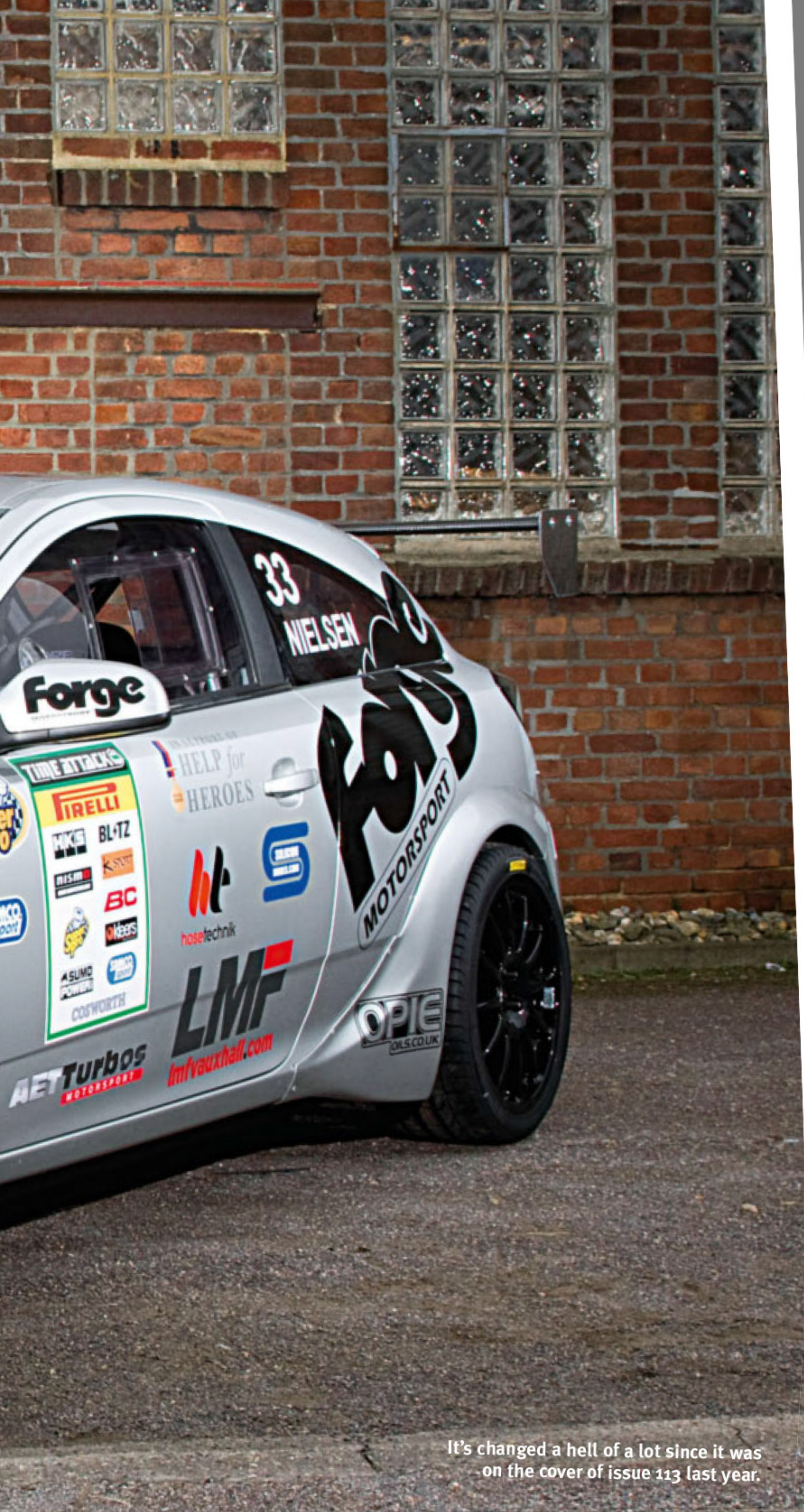
★ 23.30 Gatwick to Ashford ★ 55 miles

Bo finally arrived to collect your caffeine-filled correspondent at Gatwick, driving a fully loaded 2.5 TD VW van to tow the Astra. Arron was tucked up behind in his blue VXR with Cliff as passenger. Already the Astra was causing quite a stir as bemused air passengers emerged expecting taxis and buses but instead found a full-blown race car facing them. Leaving the confused commuters behind, we set off for the Ashford Premier Inn.

That may sound easy but what happened next would set the tone for the entire trip. After barely 15 miles, Arron pulled up with a problem - his VXR was dying to a crawling pace on the motorway. A process of elimination soon followed and Bo reckoned it must be dirty fuel. Arron tried filling up to see if it would help but the stricken VXR continued to limp all the way to the hotel. By this time it was 1.30 am and we all wanted to go to bed but instead we transformed the hotel car park into a temporary pit garage and got to work. Fortunately, Bo managed to access the tank from inside the car and poor Arron had to siphon the fuel, which inevitably meant a mouthful of unleaded. On the plus side, the fuel filter was indeed clogged with what looked like metal flakes but was easily cleared out. Problem solved but at a cost - it was 3.30 am and we had to get up at 4.15 am to head for the Eurotunnel train.

Bo investigates fuel starvation on Arron's Astra.





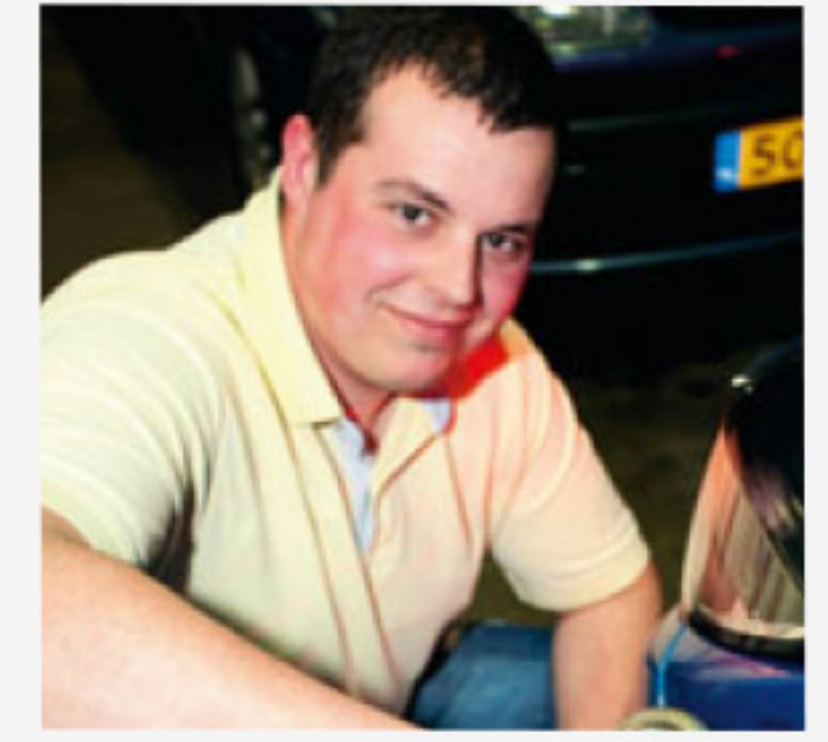
It's changed a hell of a lot since it was on the cover of issue 113 last year.

THE SQUAD...



Bo Nielsen

Danish racing driver flying the Vauxhall flag in the British Time Attack series, current FWD champion and all round top bloke!



Arron Green

Bo's friend and support crew member, and driver of the nicely tuned Astra VXR that came along on the journey.



Cliff Davis

Bo's friend and support crew member, passenger in Arron's VXR.



Steve McCann

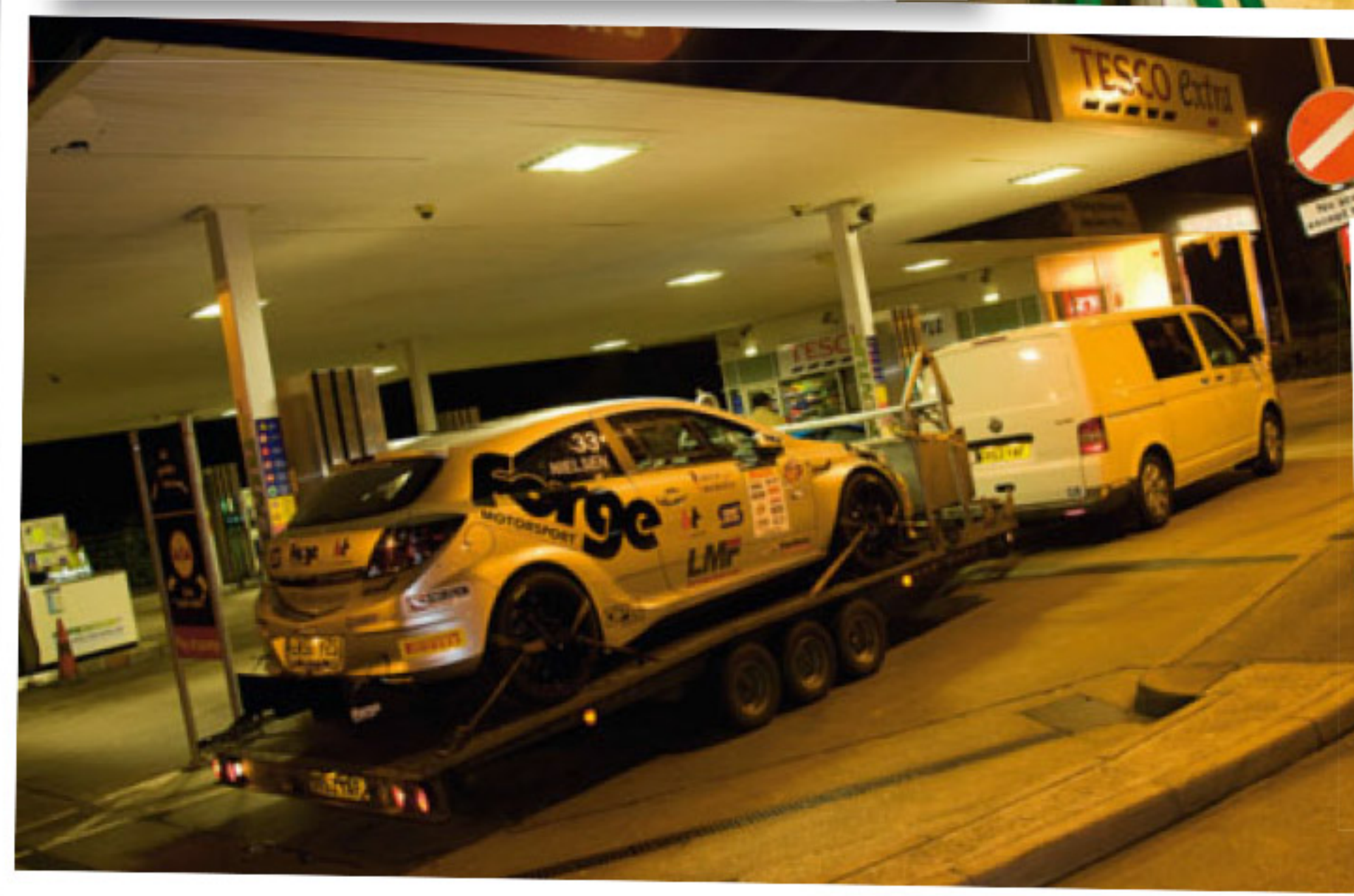
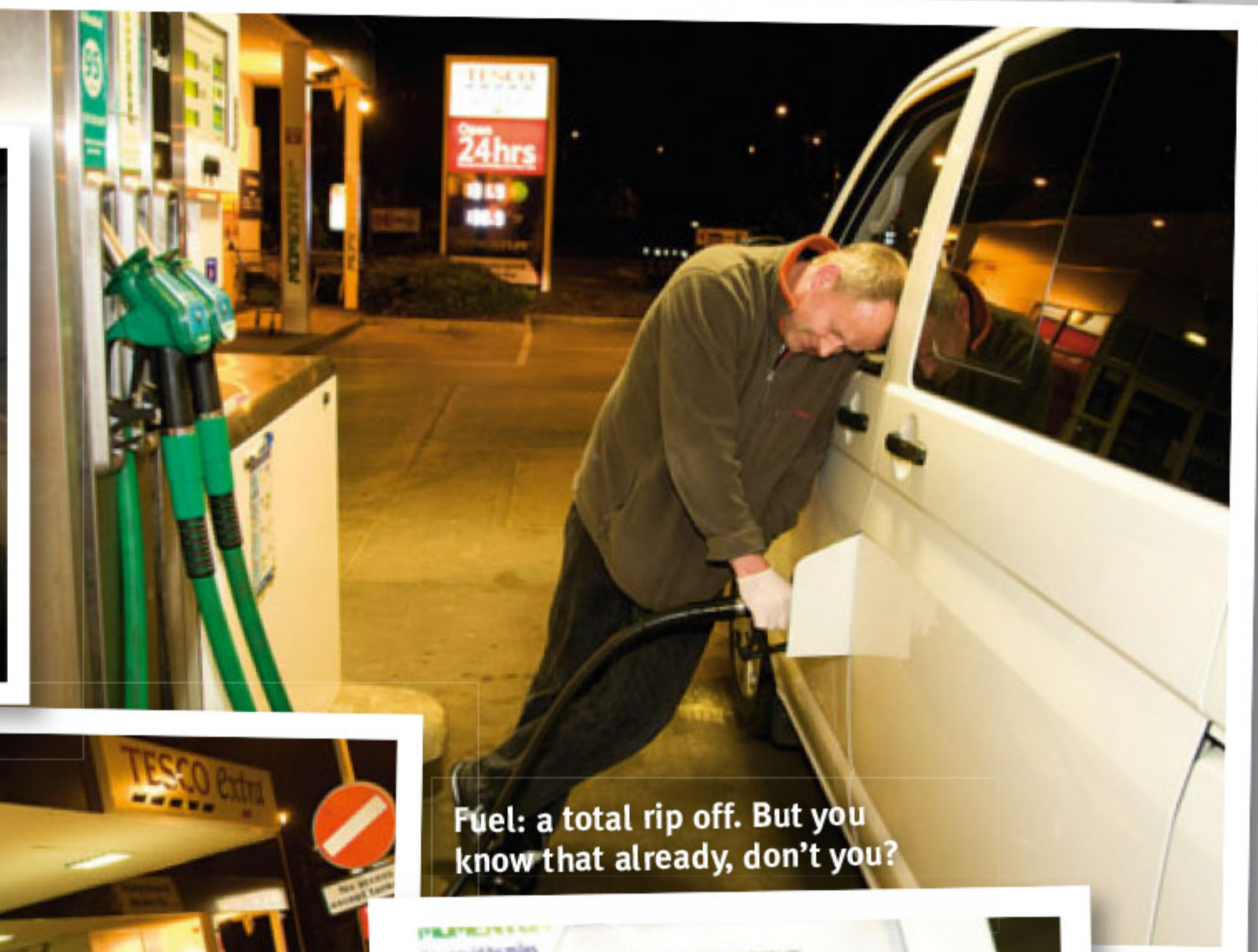
Total Vauxhall photographer/writer. I was damn lucky to be given the job of hitching a lift with Bo and the team for the purpose of this report! Thanks Dougie!

DAY TWO Friday 1st April ↓

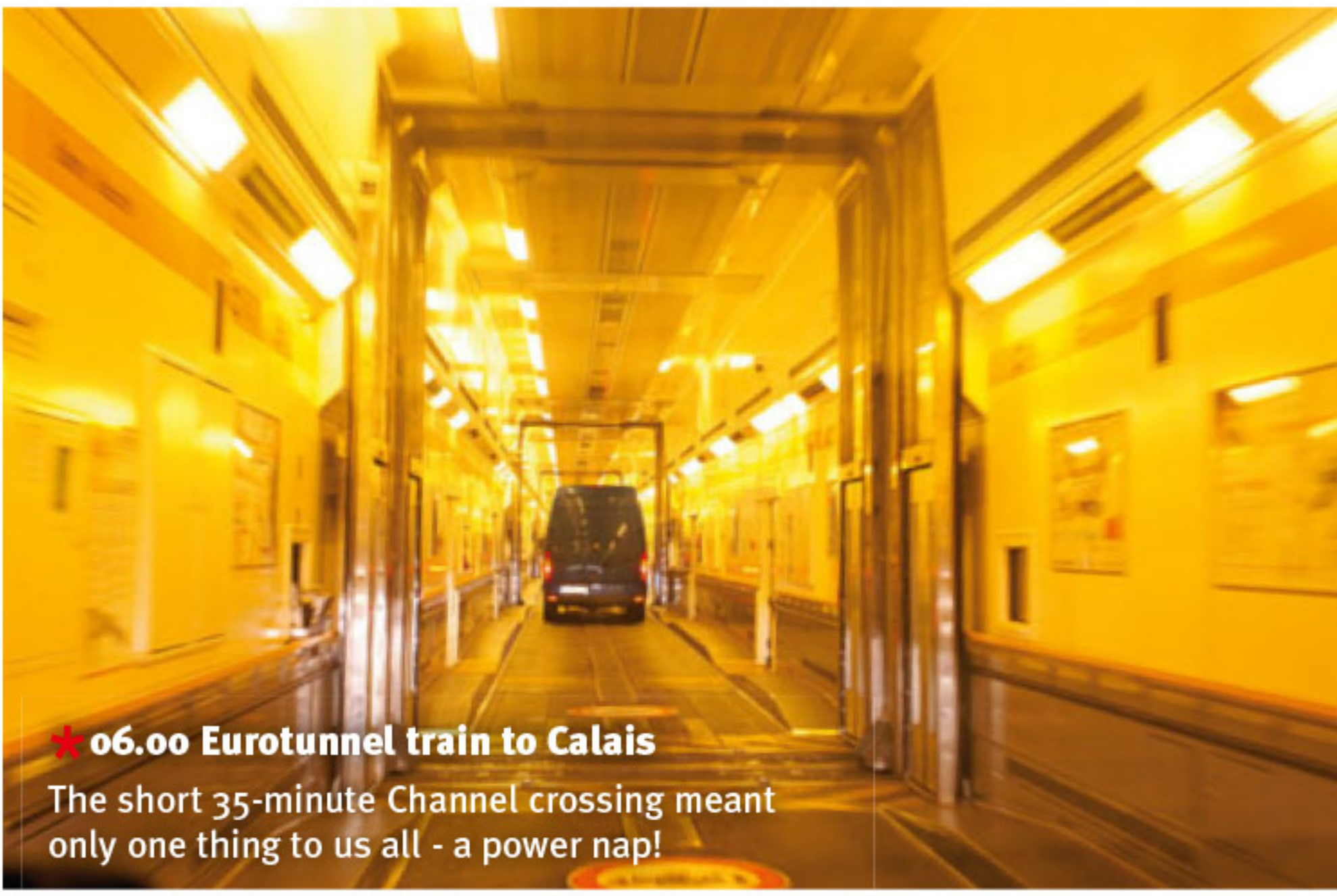
★ 04.30 Ashford to Eurotunnel terminal

★ 55 miles to 78 miles

After barely 45 minutes in our hotel rooms, we set off for the Eurotunnel terminal to check-in for the 5.30 am Le Shuttle departure. Even this short journey had its drama though as, having being distracted by Arron's VXR problems, Bo hadn't realised the van was running on fumes! A mad dash followed to find a service station, fill up and get to the terminal in time. We made it, just! But they put us on the 6 am instead meaning there was time for a ridiculously early breakfast!



BO NIELSEN



★ 06.00 Eurotunnel train to Calais
The short 35-minute Channel crossing meant only one thing to us all - a power nap!

★ 08:00 Calais to Marl, Germany ★ 78 miles to 348 miles

With the clocks set forward an hour, we embarked on the most gruelling section of the road trip, a whole 270 miles through France, Belgium and Holland before reaching Germany. We stopped a couple of times for fuel and caffeine top ups but finally reached EDS after four-and-a-half hours. It was remarkably trouble free for a change, other than the van windscreen taking a massive stone chip that almost had Bo and I diving for cover!



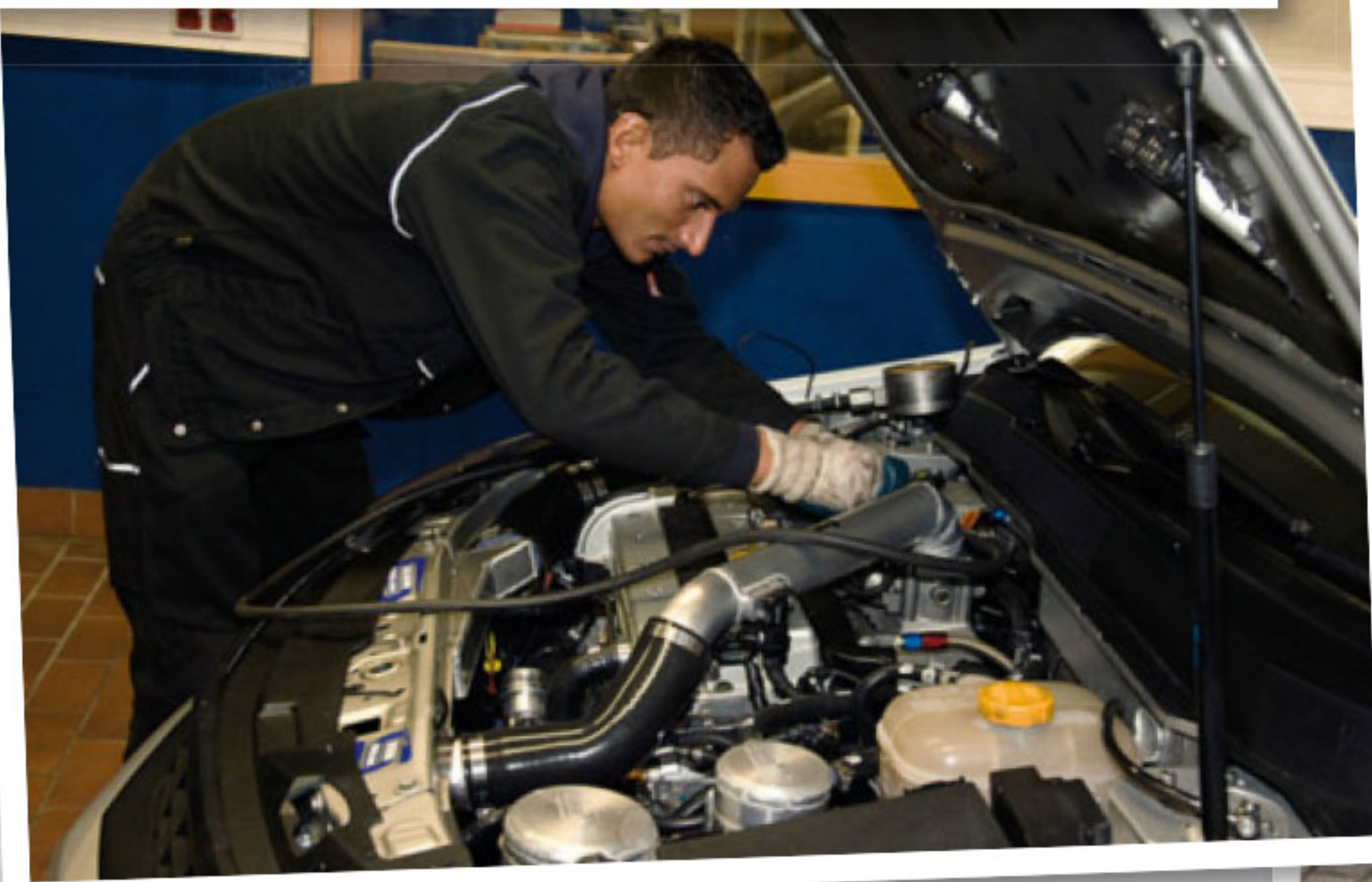
★ 12:30 EDS tuning, Marl, Germany

Many of you will be familiar with the name EDS through Regal Autosport who supply (among many other things) the EDS IPF tuning system. Well, Bo likes to come all the way to Marl and have Arno, the mastermind of the IPF system, personally tune his car. We received a fantastic warm welcome from Arno, who can only be described as a genius when it comes to electronics and mapping. His logic with Bo's car was to set it up to a balanced level where he has good power with a consistent power curve and crucially, reliability.

Thankfully, the rolling road session went smoothly and after some tweaking by Arno, the VXR was soon registering an impressive 361 PS (metric BHP). Job done! Sensibly, Arno took the opportunity to get his VXR on the rollers too, just for a power run and a valuable chat with Arno about future plans. His car

ran well and put out 284.5 PS but Arno left vowing to return at some stage for an upgrade!

Before we left, Arno gave us a tour of EDS which turned out to be a labyrinth of rooms for many things! There was far too much to describe here so look out for a full company profile feature coming soon.



★19:00 Marl to Nürburg
★348 miles to 478 miles

Finally, we set off for Nürburg. Until now, most of the miles were racked up on motorways but this section was more A and B roads, meaning a longer journey. By the time we reached the Hotel Nordschleife at 10.00 pm we were all feeling a bit burst but the lure of food and beer saw us dump the bags and immediately descend upon a local restaurant.



★22:30 Pizzeria Giulia

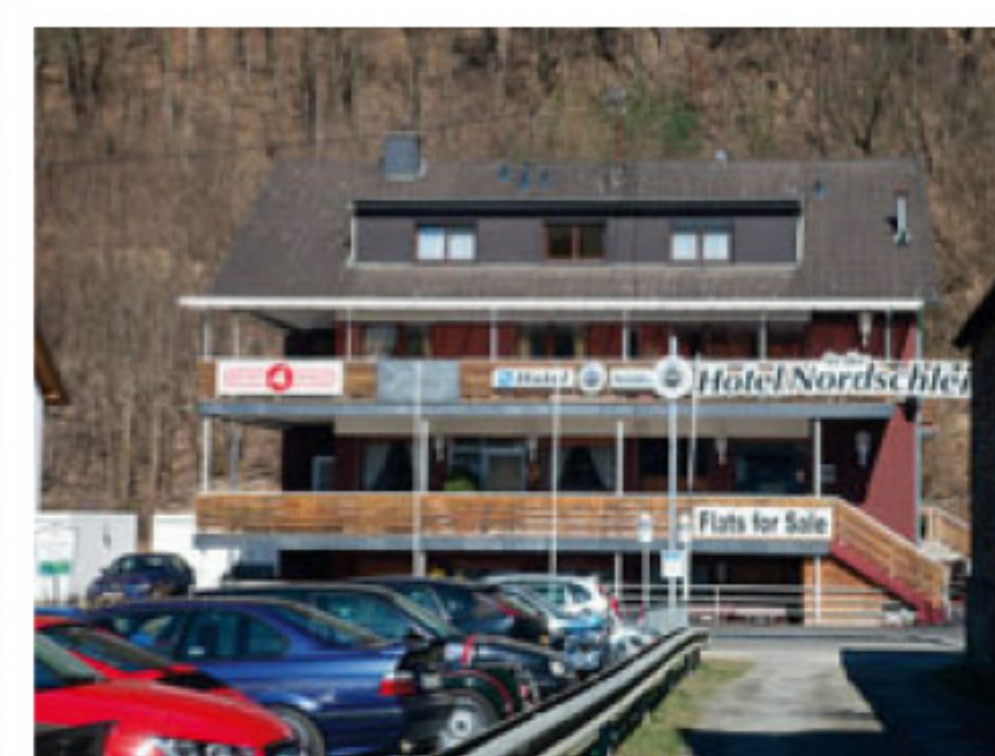
After what seemed a never-ending day, we all settled down for some decent grub and quality German beer! Thankfully, we were not disappointed, as the steaks were served thick, rare and bloody while the beer hit the spot! Arron even had the energy to chat up the waitress who didn't speak a word of English. It was a fine way to round off our unique April Fool's day!



DAY THREE Saturday 2nd April ↓

★11:00 Hotel to Nürburgring ★478 miles to 484 miles

After a much needed sleep and breakfast, we prepared for the short drive to the Nürburgring entrance. It was a scorching day and the plan was to visit the 'Ring for the VLN endurance race, have a look around and get on track after the race was finished. So decided we would leave the van behind and drive to the circuit in the race car as it was technically road legal! Even in these surroundings, the Astra really stood out on the road and I couldn't wait to have a proper passenger ride when it hit the track.



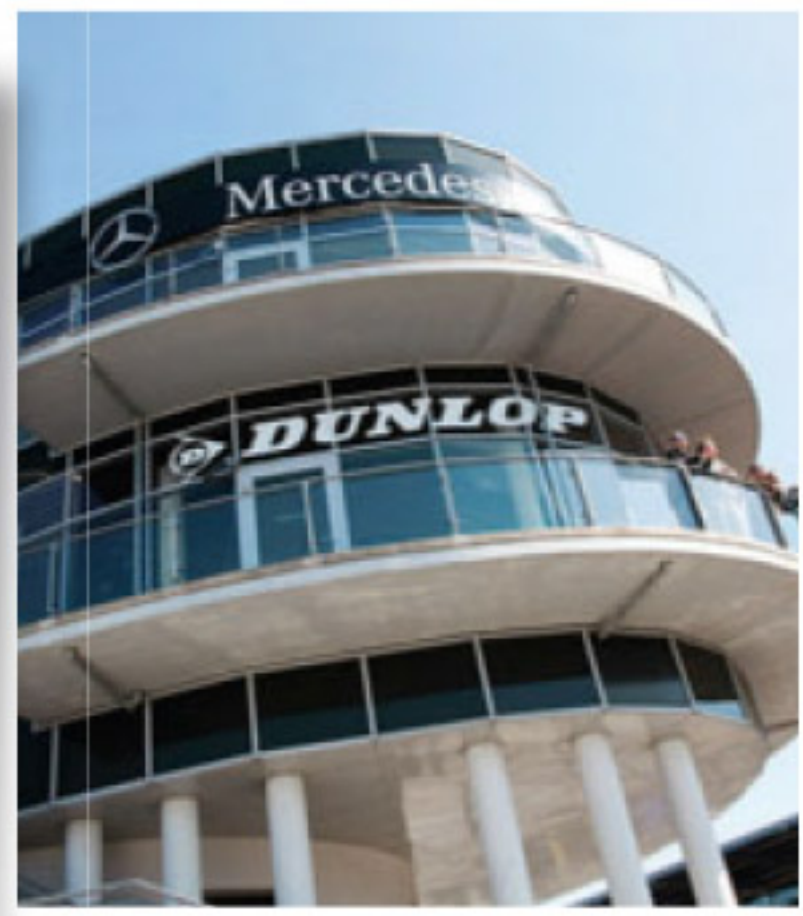
The EDS team - that's Arno on the right.



Wonder if there's a damsel in distress up in that tower there?



BO NIELSEN



★12:00 VLN Westfalenfahrt endurance race, Nürburgring

After parking both VXR's in the public car park, we entered the F1 part of the circuit for the opening round of the VLN series. Nothing prepares you for the scale of this race as around 200 cars take to the grid. Yes, that's not a misprint, 200 cars are split into three groups for staggered starts then hundreds of drivers share the exhausting four-hour battle! Just as impressive is the quality of the cars and level of public access. The grid is open to all so you can get up close to the cars and drivers before the action begins and that includes everything from the Porsche, Aston Martin and Merc supercars to the Corsas and Clios. We didn't have the time or language skills to chat to the Opel competitors but there were three Astras and one Corsa representing our favourite marque.

After an hour or so, we left the F1 entrance to drive to another spectator spot around the circuit, stopping briefly to visit the famous Dorint Hotel situated right alongside the starting grid. Many a famous driver has stayed here and the hotel is full of memorabilia and a few cars, such as an F1 car hanging above the restaurant bar and even a Trabant in the lobby! It was all going well, but things were about to take a nasty twist...



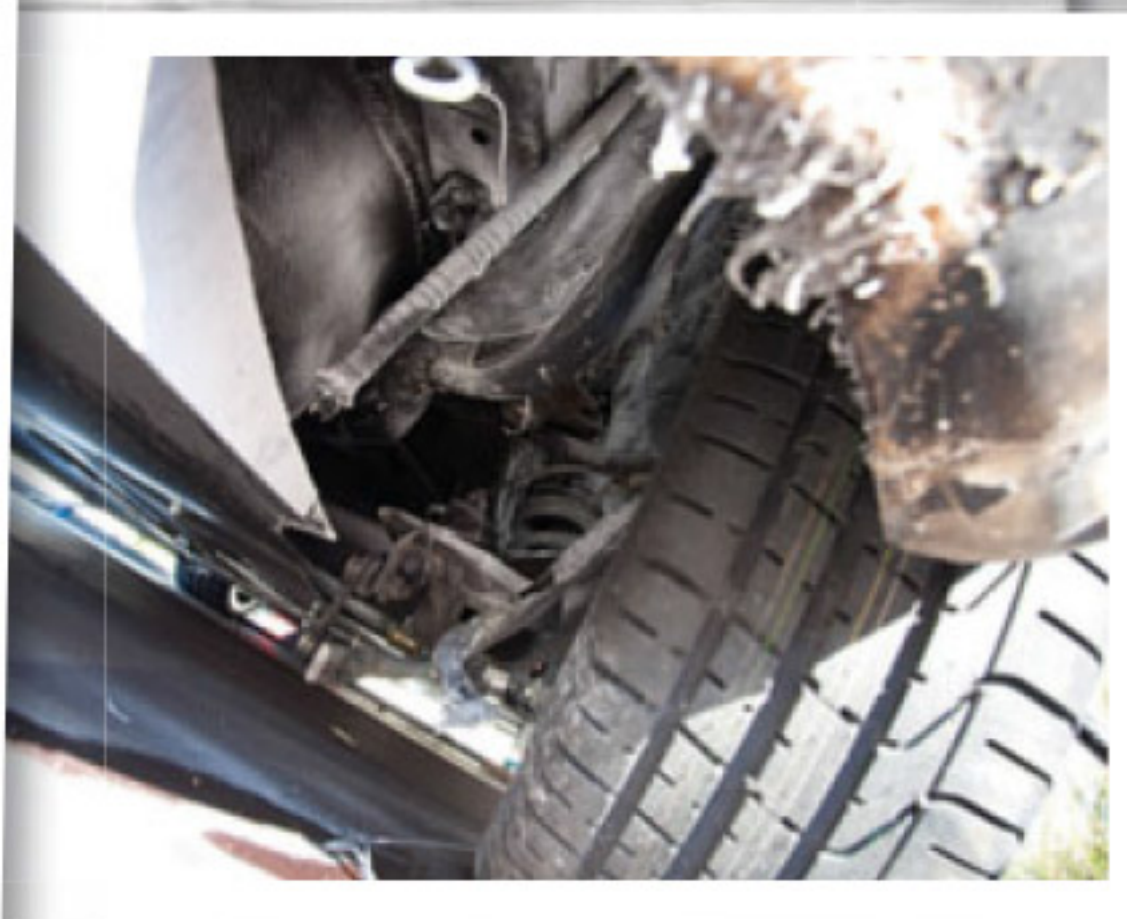
★14:15 'I think we have to get out'

As we strapped ourselves back into Bo's Astra to find another viewing spot, we were barely back on the road for a minute when the cabin suddenly filled with smoke. However, it was a busy narrow road, with barriers on each side meaning it was difficult to find somewhere to stop immediately. But the situation rapidly became serious as I spotted it was coming from around the fuel filler area. Hearing the fire crackling pretty loud, I was already unbuckled and opening my door while Bo gently brought the car to a stop, calmly saying, 'I think we have to get out.' 'No shit!' I thought, as I scrambled out the door almost upside down! Talk about understatement! Bedlam then followed for a good few minutes as we desperately tried to put it out while at the same time debating how close to get. Arron pulled up behind and threw his foam extinguisher to Bo who emptied it to no effect. We then began chucking water on to the car to at least try to contain the flames. We had run out of options as Arron sped off to a nearby garage for an extinguisher but the flames were increasing and we really feared the whole car was going to burn out in front of our eyes. Then, from nowhere, a passing driver leapt out and gave Bo the smallest extinguisher you've ever seen. Amazingly, with one quick blast it was out, proving how vital it is you have the correct type of extinguisher on hand. On this occasion, it was powder that did the trick so bear that in mind if you're buying one of these things!

Just as we had it under control, Arron returned with an extinguisher he had to steal from a local garage! Then, a few minutes behind him, two fire trucks appeared. The first unit leapt out, hoses in hand, rushing towards the car but seemed pretty disappointed when we stopped them and told them the fire was out. The police joined in too but fortunately they were happy with Bo's paperwork and let us get the trailer to recover the car and be on our way.



There's few worse feelings than watching your car catch fire!



★16:30 Parts hunt ★484m to 510m

After inspecting the damage, it was not clear how exactly the fire had started, but fuel from the filler or breather seemed to have ignited somehow, maybe from the exhaust shooting a flame. The side of the car was fire damaged but other than that, the only part needing to be replaced was the original plastic fuel filler that had melted completely. Many a driver would have simply headed back home at this point but not Mr Nielsen. Despite all the garages and dealers being closed, he was determined to find a way to repair the car and make it onto the Nürburgring and Spa circuits so went hunting for parts. Would he make it in time? Tune in next month to find out...

TO BE CONTINUED...