

FUEL TEST- BP ULTIMATE

FUEL FOR LIFE

FUEL IS FUEL – OR IS IT? YOU CAN NOW FILL UP WITH PREMIUM FUEL ALMOST EVERYWHERE, BUT IS IT ACTUALLY ANY BETTER? WE PUT BP’S ULTIMATE PETROL TO THE ULTIMATE TEST – A TRANS EUROPEAN BLAST IN A FLEET OF PERFORMANCE CARS TAKING IN SOME OF THE CONTINENT’S GREATEST RACE TRACKS....



If you’ve never given much thought to the fuel in your car’s tank, then you’re not alone. Most people think that way – and you can’t blame them. Every forecourt in the land claims to be able to sell us petrol or diesel that is ‘greener’, prolongs the life of our engine and gives us more performance and better economy. Yet we treat such protestations with a very large pinch of salt, fill up with what’s cheapest and carry on our way.

That may be fair enough but we thought it was time to put at least one such ‘premium fuel’ to the test. The first we chose was BP’s Ultimate, offered in both petrol and diesel forms. Does the extra you’ll pay for this merely buy you a warm and fuzzy sense of well being or a really quantifiable performance advantage? A trans-continental blast in a fleet of supercars as part of our ‘Performance Car of the Year’ test offered the perfect opportunity to find out.

With a Porsche 911 C2S, a BMW M5, a Mitsubishi Lancer EVO IX 320, a Lotus Exige, a Mercedes SL65 AMG and a Nissan 350Z GT4 as our rather enjoyable mobile test beds, we departed first to Hanover and Continental Tyres’ Contidrom test facility. Here we replicated the in-gear acceleration times with a Lotus Exige and logged 4.9 seconds on BP Ultimate and 5.1 seconds on 95RON. Not such a dramatic change as with the diesel car but the 0-100mph figure came down from 13.6 seconds to 13.1, enough to put clear blue sky between a car running on BP Ultimate and one that, well, isn’t. Over the course of a lap at the Nurburgring, conservative estimates put the time saving at over two seconds.

Beginning to be convinced, we spent some time going over BP’s own findings after developing Ultimate, a fuel they claim was created as a result of an extensive and rigorous testing programme lasting more than 18 months. A total of 62 vehicle models were used for long term fleet tests, ranging from the small to large engine capacities and covering the latest models, as well as vehicles that that have been in the market for many years. The protocol for testing was carefully developed so as to be representative of the experience of motorists switching to these new fuels from conventional regular fuels.



BP were particularly interested to know the benefits of using this special fuel from new, compared to ordinary alternatives and used independent laboratories to find out, with further tests in their own facilities in the UK and Germany. The fleet testing was conducted over significant mileages, because the loss in performance from ordinary fuels is a gradual process, and the performance benefits of a fuel like this will inevitably increase with time.

To make sure that the results stood up, the testers operated the vehicle for several thousand miles on standard fuel and measured performance. The vehicles were then switched to BP Ultimate and the performance was again measured. This aimed to show the immediate benefits of this better quality fuel, but the vehicles were subsequently run for a further distance (as much as 10,000 miles in some cases) to also see how the benefits of the premium fuel grew with time.

It turned out that the fuel delivered 50 per cent more cleaning power compared to regular unleaded and prevented 97 per cent of the inlet valve deposits that can form when using typically low grade supermarket style fuels. This makes an appreciable difference to performance. Many of today's cars are built with enormous attention to detail paid to the way fuel is burnt. A slight degradation in the way the fuel enters the combustion chamber can have a very marked effect on the car's responsiveness. This is especially true of the latest common rail diesel engines and BP Ultimate is the first performance fuel that caters also to the growing percentage of diesel-engined cars on sale today.

Our long term Jaguar S-TYPE 2.7 diesel has become the mobile test rig for this diesel fuel. After carrying out back to back performance and noise tests using standard diesel and BP Ultimate, we discovered that in-gear acceleration (the best way to accurately measure engine responsiveness) was noticeably sharper. The figures churned out by the laptop were illuminating. Accelerating from 30-70mph when running on conventional diesel fuel detained us for 9.3 seconds but when running on Ultimate the increment was dispatched in 8.9 seconds.

Almost half a second can mean the difference between a safe, comfortable overtaking and a 'will-it-won't-it' cold sweat. With an octane rating of 55 compared to 51 for normal diesels, the performance advantage was only to be expected. Noise was measured when revving the engine to 4,000rpm on a stationary car with a bonnet mounted microphone. When running on BP Ultimate the measurement was 0.4 decibel lower – not much but when manufacturers go all out for refinement it is certainly good to have.

Performance Car of the Year was a great way to evaluate the performance benefits of a fuel like this and our experiences with our long term cars are further proving BP's longevity claims for the fuel. We'll continue testing and keep you up to date on our findings. In the meantime, next time you pull into a BP station and fill up with what's cheapest, we'd suggest you give the Ultimate pump a second look....