

The Missing Link?

M3 Evolution Individual (SMG)

Words and photography by John Denny

Back in the early 2000s I was a massive M3 enthusiast, and as such was especially drawn to the special edition that BMW produced at the end of the E36 production run prior to the launch of the E46 model range: The Imola Individual (affectionately known as the GT2)

I remember seeing one of these special editions in the showroom of Halliwell Jones of Chester, and finding myself rooted to the spot as I caught it taking pride of place in their well lit showroom. Since this time I have been lucky enough to own two of the special edition cars, number 1 and number 42.

Whilst being a fan of the Imola Individual I've always kept a keen eye on the history of the special edition often spending hours looking at cars for sale on the internet, and looking on websites such as Duncan Ireland's GTRegister at other owners cars. Even when I didn't actually have an Imola Individual at the time I guess the GT2 was my favourite car and although when I sold the cars I had good reason for doing so I still missed them when they had gone.

When I bought my first GT2 I got a copy the original sales brochure from the GTRegister thanks to Duncan and as any enthusiast knows it's great to have history and documentation to confirm you have something a little special.

There always was a question in my mind regarding the sales brochure because although the pictures seemed to show the Imola Individual car, class II front and rear spoilers, polished M Forged double spoke alloys, Imola Paintwork and dual tone interior, it featured a picture of the interior that had the SMG option (not available on the GT2 model). It was also missing the side airbags, Harmon Kardon speakers and electric seats. This had always puzzled me at the time but as is often the case time passed and the memories of the sales brochure faded to the back of my mind. Later on I saw an E36 M3 evolution for sale that was essentially a GT2 but featured the SMG box. At that time I never put two and two together, and being such a stickler for keeping cars as they left the factory, spending thousands returning my



past cars to standard, all I thought was "Fancy making a look-a-like to the GT2 the cheek!"

All this brings us back up to date, and to March of this year when one evening whilst performing one of my random car searches I found the same SMG Imola Individual M3 for sale at Munich Legends in West Sussex.

As I fancied a change (I know unusual for me on my second car in the three months) I contacted Mark at ML and started negotiations, and two weeks later he took my B3 in exchange and I collected my 11th E36 M3.

Must just take this opportunity to say what a helpful friendly garage I found Munich Legends to be, and the stock is of top class (interesting for a browse too) and I found Mark to be very helpfully in putting a deal together.

The car I had bought was essentially a 1998 E36 M3 Evolution coupé that was a dead ringer for an Imola individual bar the SMG option and it was also lacking some of the interior extras like Harmon Kardon, electric seats, and side airbags. It was also missing front class II spoilers, but never the less a lovely example.

It turned out the car was originally owned by BMW UK (ran by a BMW employee), before finding its way to me.

As the car was owned by BMW and was such an interesting car to me being such a similar spec to the Imola Individual I decided to do some home work. I was pleased to report that BMW customer service were really helpful.

They confirmed:

"This car was originally ordered by BMW UK to see if

the interior and exterior colours suited the model – and as they did, the Individual Edition went ahead in the UK. A total of 50 cars were produced. This car was then used as a BMW employee company car, and as it was produced before this limited edition went on sale, it is not officially an Individual Edition car."

As I had never seen an Imola Individual interior car with a SMG option, I asked BMW UK if the car I had bought could have been used for the interior picture that was used in the Imola Individual sales brochure, especially as my car has the same interior options as the interior featured, even down to the GSM phone kit, they said:

"After further investigation there is a possibility that this was indeed the car used for our interior shot due to the uniqueness of this vehicle. However, due to the age of the vehicle we have no detail of the vehicle used for this photo shoot"

Being an Imola Individual fan I was really excited to hear this, as basically though I hadn't bought a GT2 I had actually bought the car that BMW had custom configured through their Individual programme as the pre-production model prior to the Imola Individual launch.

I then tracked down the specification sheets for the car to see BMW had picked the special option paint work and interior options, even down to custom stitch work for the steering wheel, handbrake and gaiter, I was also shocked to see that the car had been ordered with other front and rear class II spoilers, and after closer inspection under the front spoiler I noticed the mounting holes from where the corner splitters had previously been mounted! I can only assume they had been damaged and removed earlier in the car's life.

I quickly replaced front splitters along with various other clips and trim that had been lost over the years of ownership, even down to the broken GSM aerial (Thanks to Paul at Halliwells again)

Looking at the car one night it suddenly dawned on me, hang on, if my car had the full GT2 spoiler kit along with the polished alloys, and its interior matched that of the sales brochure, could my car have been used for the complete brochure?



I looked again at the sales brochure pictures and noticed the car used had headlamp washers and a GSM phone aerial. Both these items can be seen on my car and I have yet to see a GT2 with headlamp washers. All this would seem to point to the fact that the car I had found was not only the test bed for the Imola Individual but the actual press car used for the sales material. To me this makes the car very special. Though BMW UK don't hold records as far back as



1998 to confirm this one way or the other they did say that owing to the uniqueness of the vehicle it very well could have been the car that was used.

Ether way I am very proud to own this piece of M3 history. A car that I would consider to be the missing link of how the Imola Individual came to be. In my opinion it also answers the question many GT2 fans have asked regarding why the Imola Individual sales brochure featured the picture of an SMG option, an option that wasn't available as part of the Imola Individual's specification.

Finally, I would again like to thank BMW UK and Halliwell Jones (Chester Ltd) for all the information they given me over the last few months regarding the car, and Munich Legends without which I wouldn't have owned the car, and of course Duncan at the GTRegister for his help and understanding in reporting information about the car on his website.