Can a modified turbo-diesel Golf really challenge the pace of a petrol engine version? We took a pair of tweaked Mk4s to the test track to find out

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Petrol versus turbo-diesel Golfs – which is quicker? It's a question that's been bugging us on *The Golf+* magazine, and with good reason, because Wolfburg's oil-burners have been getting increasingly pacey, to the level where they should be nip and tuck in the performance stakes with their petrol drinking cousins.

In the early days diesel Golfs were boring, smoky and slow, but the real turning point was the introduction of the Pumpe Duse engine with the Mk4 Golf. This new high pressure diesel pump technology was a breakthrough as it allowed the use of a new style of injector, one that could be machined to tighter tolerances, which allowed for finer fuel atomisation. That in turn meant a better, more complete 'burn' within the combustion chamber, which allowed VW for the first time to throw more fuel into the engine while avoiding the dreaded soot. More fuel meant that the engines could run more turbo boost to unleash more power, so as the technology was perfected, Golf Mk4 TD power outputs climbed from 115, to 130, then 150bhp. In comparison the Mk4 petrol engined Golfs also became more powerful than their predecessors, boasting 150bhp in base 1.8T guise, then reaching 180bhp in the later GTI versions.

So while the petrol engined cars grabbed the headlines with their horsepower figures, not only were the diesels catching up in the horsepower league, but they had a real ace up their sleeves – torque. Always the trump card of turbo-diesel engines, torque has unfortunately always been the poor cousin in the glamour stakes to horsepower.

People tend to forget that it's torque and not brake horsepower that actually accelerates a car.

Understanding the difference between the two can be a tad tricky. Concepts like twisting forces, motions and radii enter the