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EVO 7 DOUBLE TEST

EVO

Welcome to the grip zone, a place where a terrier-like hold on the blacktop rewrites the handling rule book. Welcome to the world of the Evo VII

Story and photos by Martin Donnon



I could understand the look of concern on Hocking's face. After all it was his baby, all fresh and new, with liberal coatings of plastic on the trim and little foot protectors to stop any Japanese wharf dross getting on the mats. I promised we wouldn't rev it too hard and, indeed, the tach needle rarely saw the angry side of 6000rpm. The beauty of the whole deal, however, is that to have ridiculous fun in an Evo VII you don't have to rev it hard anyway. As for Hocking, who else would loan a pair of journalists his own

personal Evo with under 30km on the clock ...

Having driven a Mäkinen before, I knew what to expect. Pitch the car hard into a corner and there is no sudden twitch sideways as you get back on the throttle, no lightening of the steering input and nothing translated up through the fingertips or SOTP (Seat of the Pants). There is simply no doubt about how the Evo is going to come out of the corner.

You might expect the Mitsubishi's self-correction attempts to be similar to the active

rear diff control in the R34 GT-R, but nothing could be further from the truth. While the GT-R allows the tail to kick fractionally sideways, then lets you feel the torque channelled through to the front in the form of stiffened steering input, the Evo does something completely different.

The best way to describe the Mitsubishi chassis smarts is that they transmit a slight 'jacking' effect. Get the Evo heeled hard over in a neutral, slightly understeering stance, scrubbing the outside front tyre hard, and it's literally as if

CLUB 7



someone had placed a trolley jack under the inside rear to make the front turn. It all happens very quickly, and quite naturally, but if you're used to driving conventional chassis vehicles then you can definitely feel it.

Obviously the car's corner heights aren't really changing. It's just the impression you get from the shifting differential preload and bias. This is the AYC (Active Yaw Control) and ACD (Active Centre Differential) doing their computer-controlled thing. They give even the most

moderate of drivers an incredible electronic safety-net, which literally begs you to explore the outer edges of the envelope. Does it eventually bite? Probably but, to be honest, we didn't push the car hard enough to find out.

A common enemy of all-wheel-drive tarmac platforms is slow speed understeer. To give Mitsubishi their due, this has been mostly dialled out of the latest Evo incarnation. Barreling into a tight hairpin, it's easy to trail-brake hard on the anchors, while turning in sharply, from there it's

only between you and the tyres grip on the road surface. Stomp the throttle as early as you dare and the only issue will be keeping a hold on your line at the corner exit. Sure, there is understeer present, but much less than in any other four wheel drive system of this type. In any case, this is preferable to the slow-speed power-on oversteer of the GT-R. Put simply, on very tight twisting roads, a stock Evo VII would decimate any of the GTRs I have ever driven - and that includes some heavily tuned examples. ►



For the most demanding 'steerers', Mitsubishi has given three selectable levels of 4WD bias, all chosen from a switch marked 'Tarmac', 'Gravel' and 'Snow'. This switch is a direct input into the ACD computer and alters the basic torque split of the 4WD system. 'Tarmac', as you would expect, gives the most rear wheel drive bias, while 'Snow' allows a more pronounced front drive effect. Since our test day was bright and dry we simply left the switch set for 'Tarmac' and enjoyed the Evo's handling neutrality.

Adding to the awesome tarmac-chewing of the Evo VII is the powerful Brembo braking system, carried over from the outgoing VI. Knowing that scrubbing-off speed can be done at ridiculous corner entry points, and that all four wheels are going to scrabble out on the exit, there is the perception of being totally bulletproof behind the tiller. It's an immensely enjoyable experience. There is no lengthy period of testing before you feel at one with the chassis – you find yourself pushing hard almost immediately.

The engine, however, is a bit of a mixed bag. Gone is the dramatic thrust the Makinen provided as it came onto boost. It's been replaced with a strong linear surge of torque, which in practice makes the car much faster point to point. This linearity of power delivery can leave one with the feeling of being left a little short-changed – a bit like sitting down at a five-star dinner and seeing

all those artsy-fartsy little servings dished up on a huge plate – where's the steak? We liked what we tasted of Evo VII power, but the overriding feeling is that, just like Oliver, we could have had some more. (Please Sir...)

The flatter torque curve is really the result of a dramatic reduction in lag, but the more gradual build-up of thrust somehow gives the impression of not enough grunt. The change comes from a smaller turbine housing than found on the VI, which brings the power on much lower in the revs, beefs up the low-rpm torque, but gives a slightly lifeless and thrashy experience when approaching the rev limiter. It could be considered part of the Evo character though, as there is no need to continually wind out to the limiter to get the best from it. Rather, you keep the rpm down, short-shift aggressively and sail on the meaty torque curve between corners. It's an easy proposition with the slick gearbox and evenly-weighted clutch and other controls.

Where the Evo won't deliver is the interior, which is devoid of any character. Save for the instrument cluster, with its big, clearly marked dials, there's nothing that really pleases the eye. Plastics are cheap, and look it. It's here more than anywhere else (thankfully) that the Evo shows its Cedia sedan roots. There's not even a factory stereo to help you pass the time on those long freeway hauls. The answer is simple – don't

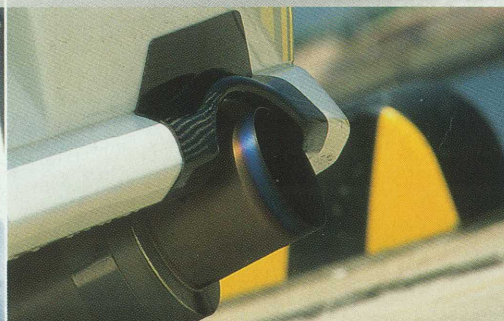
take the freeway. Take the backroads and let the engine/chassis combination do all the entertaining. It's more than capable of keeping the driver amused ... indefinitely.

Imagine, then, a track-bred version of the Evo VII, specifically set up for club sprints and optimised solely for attacking the tarmac. We did and then, before our eyes, it materialised – the circuit battle champion of Kyusu in the form of the Prime Garage Evo VII. Forget about massive turbocharger kits with roaring external wastegates and laggy, unresponsive tuning. The style of the car is more Group N than Group A. This car, regularly driven in anger by a middle-aged gent, is razor-sharp. It retains a lot of factory engineering but is tuned far beyond the stock car's 280ps – Prime claim that their modification process has freed the Evo mill up to the tune of another 100ps. They also claim to have removed over 100kg of weight from the body.

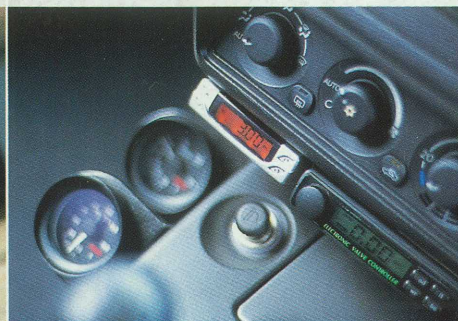
Strapping into the seat, there was no mistaking the harder edge of this car. Gone were the fully-packed, sound-deadening mufflers. Instead there was naked, metallic note and a car that literally throbbed and buzzed away cammily at idle. The twin-plate clutch was monster-heavy (comparatively speaking), and somehow the steering seemed to have lost some of its assistance. Must have been the semi-slick footwear.



If the road turns to gravel, or it starts snowing, then press the ACD button to switch between 'Tarmac', 'Gravel' and 'Snow' 4WD settings



Titanium exhausts are super light and endow the Evo with a ferocious bark



The track car allows you to dial up the boost and hang on. We used 1.6 bar, and came away mightily impressed



Plasticky and poorly-equipped, interior isn't the friendliest. Luckily you spend most of your time concentrating on the road ahead



In an interesting aside, it was the race car that had the aftermarket stereo. Don't think we bothered turning it on though

Like a flashback to Evo III days, this VII had none of the road car's low-down torque. In fact under 3000rpm it was quite doughy. Once the revs climb it makes up for this, literally hammering you back into the seat. You have to reach forward to snatch the next gear and, once more, the boost gauge climbs to 1.6 bar. For the first time in our day-long driving bonanza the output of the engine was starting to match the chassis. We liked it.

Pinned hard through the same corners as the road car, the track-modified derivative displayed similar, yet far more aggressive behaviour. The Tein suspension was totally unsympathetic in terms of bump and rebound - rock-hard would be a simpler way to put it. This only served to highlight the tenacious grip of the car though, and rather than that uncanny 'jacking' effect, the Prime car steered a little like a forklift ... in the most flattering sense. Such was the pin-point sharpness of the steering it felt like the back wheels were changing the chassis direction for you. Being gentle on the tiller inputs, and keeping the power applied hard, had the lightweight Evo scrabbling and rocketing away from the apex - the flick of small stones spraying the underguards was like music to our ears. It's not hard to see why an Evo VII is currently the fastest car around Tsukuba circuit (namely the HKS car).

Straight-line performance was also breath-

taking. I only attempted a couple of passes (hey, it wasn't my car!) and recorded an indicated best of 12.22 seconds. I'm sure it could sneak into the 11s with more practice.

Launching the Evo is much different to a GT-R. You don't hold your foot flat and dial up the rev limiter before stepping off the clutch - that results in way too much wheelspin. Instead you balance the load up the clutch at around 4500rpm and then

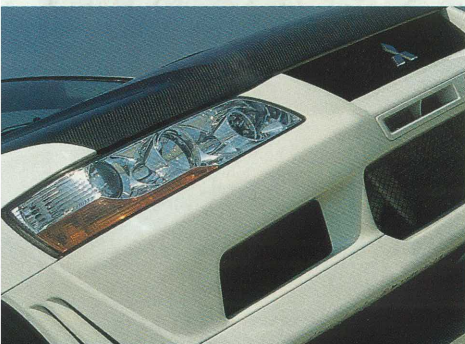
unit, but capable of higher gas flow. Camshaft timing also comes in for some attention with 264-degree inlet and exhaust cams freeing up the engine's top end, enabling it to make serious power up to 7500rpm. With remapped factory management to optimise the system for high-octane Japanese race fuel (110+), and the titanium exhaust we mentioned before, that's all you need for 400ps.

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feed the handbrake and clutch at the same time.

How did Prime go about making such a responsive and track-capable car? Simple really. The engine is optimised rather than heavily modified, with the standard turbocharger being retained, but fitted with a slightly larger turbine housing. This is easy as the turbo is based on a TD06, so there are plenty of alternative housings around. Prime also refabricate the exhaust manifold. Their version is dimensionally similar to the factory

The transmission of the Mitsubishi is spookily stock, with only the addition of a twin-plate OS-Giken clutch to cut any potential weak points. Bodily the Evo is also close to factory, save for the carbon fibre bonnet and boot lid. There is also some additional venting in the front bar to provide air passage to the oil cooler. Giving some aero tuning is the GT-style rear wing which, depending on the circuit in question, can be tilted for different amounts of downforce. Both Theo and I scrabbled for the



Carbon bonnets are a must-have on any Evo



Brembo stoppers are stock on an Evo VII



After our first short stint the yellow Evo showed 33km on the clock



4G63 mill is starting to get a little long in the tooth now, but gets within 10Nm of the larger RB26DET



This prime garage-modified Evo VII engine looks remarkably stock, but still offers some 100ps over the factory car

FACT FILE

Vehicle:	Mitsubishi Evo VII	Transmission:	5sp manual, 4WD, ACD, AYC
Year:	2001	Brakes:	263mm front Brembo four-piston 252mm rear two-piston
Engine:	2000cc DOHC 4G63 turbo	0 - 100km/h:	4.8 seconds
Comp:	8.8 : 1	0 - 400m:	13.0 seconds
Power:	206kW @ 6500rpm	Price: (Aus)	\$80,000 +
Torque:	383Nm @ 3500rpm		
Weight:	1400kg		

keys of this car whenever they were on offer and, to be quite blunt about it, the Prime Evo was the most capable all-round road and track car we drove during our trip.

According to Hocking-san, there are already a couple of Evos in the country [Australia that is] which he has shipped in for compliance under the new SEVS scheme. The examples he has transported are all near new, low kilometre, stock cars. When fully complied and ready to go they should weigh in some \$20K - \$30K less than a Skyline GT-R of the same vintage. If you can overcome any sort of inbuilt bias towards the fabled Godzilla, open your receptors to this beautifully balanced and responsive little car, you won't make a mistake.

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Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful
than a Shinkansen. Meet Super Hocking Desu,
a man who has made Japan his oyster

Trepidation is the overwhelming feeling when standing at the train terminal (Kokura in Kyushu), suitcase rollers straining under the load of cameras and assorted Japanese survival items. Will your guide show up? After all, you only ever met him on email and it's surprising sometimes how friendly typed words can materialise into a harsher, less inviting reality. The big question was: Would he show?

Those who have travelled in Japan will instantly understand. It's a foreign place in more ways than just the spoken or written word. The culture gap is immense and, even if you can speak the lingo, getting your point across is often far from simple. Theo was starting to pace as the constant bustle of a busy train terminal unfolded around us. He was late by several minutes now, and thoughts of making the four-hour Bullet Train trip back to Osaka were starting to cross my mind. At least I vaguely knew my way around that city.

Then, out of nowhere, he materialised. Walking, half running, a wiry figure dressed in designer shorts and a baseball top emerged from the crowd. He couldn't greet us instantly as he was involved in a constant rap of Japanese on his Keitai Denwa (mobile phone). Instead he motioned toward us with his hand: a kind of 'come on, let's go' movement. You've heard the saying: time waits for no man? Well, Hocking doesn't wait for time.

He greeted us on the run, started grabbing our bags, and hustled towards his double-parked van. The rest of the week was pretty much like that.

Theo, being a fit bugger, had no problem sticking with Hocking in the 35-degree heat and sopping-wet air. The same didn't go for me. Under the weight of cameras and other photo-guy bits and pieces, I struggled, and sweated like a waterfall. Mark Hocking, an expat Adelaide boy, prides himself on his briskness; in fact, he shared with us his personal pearl of wisdom, "The faster you move the more you get done". I would add "and the more you sweat" to that maxim.

How did we come to be Hocking's guests then? Well, though few realise it, this man is the buyer behind some of the bigger names in the Australian importing scene. His portfolio is huge, with highlights such as purchasing and

sending a brand new R34GT-R N1 to Australia. How did he get his hands on this? Simple, he marched down to the Nissan dealer and negotiated with them. It's impossible to adequately explain the command of the language and culture required for this type of undertaking.

He lives for the auctions, and has a keen eye for getting the 'right' cars. He doesn't buy scrap-pers, he doesn't buy accident-damaged/repairs cars, he only buys straight, genuine mileage stuff because he simply doesn't need the hassle. His techniques at auctions are covered later in this issue, but you haven't seen anything till you have laid eyes on the 'crazy gaijin' zipping in and out of the lots on his GoPed motorised scooter.

Then there's the small matter of meeting challenges. This guy literally thrived on any crazy request we threw at him. Having been to Japan a few times, I figured that I could stump him. Driving past a workshop, somewhere we had never been before, I spied an 'off its nut' twin-turbo Supra. "Wouldn't mind having a drive of that one, mate" was the casual challenge. Delica vans simply weren't designed to pull a handbrake turn and bounce between the traffic like this one did.

Never having met these guys before, Super Hocking went straight into attack mode, with the Nihon bubbling forth like the seasoned pro that he is. Within minutes the young tuner was handing over the keys to his workshop-display Supra. One he had just finished spending 19 million yen modifying. We drove it gratefully (and carefully).

Theo and Hocking also delighted in 100m sprints and one-armed push-up competitions. It never stopped. Theo left Japan a physical wreck (but, as he insists, the winner).

The frantic pace of Hocking's world was ideal for us, though. Never have we achieved so much in just one week, either here or in Japan. Everything was on a tight time schedule, and everything was pretty much pre-organised. There was no stopping for a quick chat, or time to sit in bars. Hocking doesn't see this as productive behaviour. Instead we spent every moment gathering more amazing (and exclusive) material for your enjoyment.

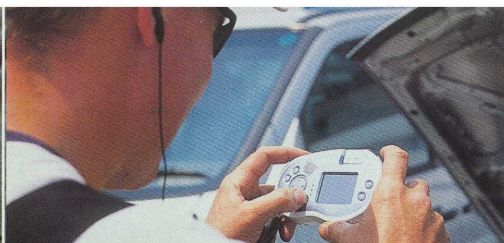
All here at **HPI** would like to thank Mark Hocking for our most memorable trip to Japan yet. Next time, it's chin-ups.

HPI

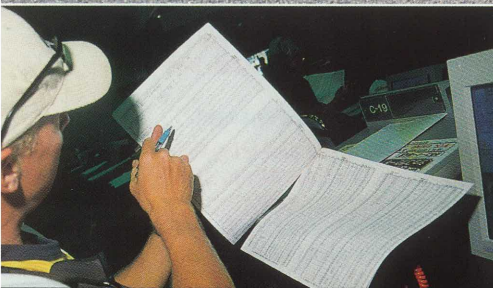
Martin Donnon



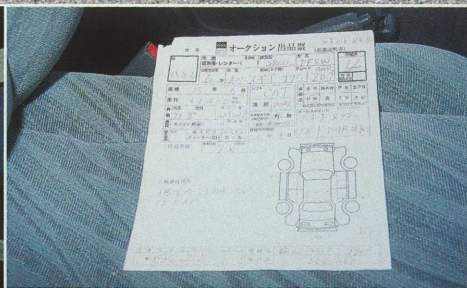
You need one of these or they throw you out



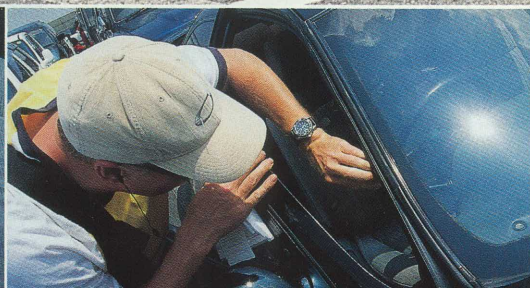
Eggy at work, ready to take the photo and email it off via the inbuilt browser



Hocking going through the reams of paper required to be allowed to negotiate for a car



An auction report looks something like this, and contains all relevant data on the car



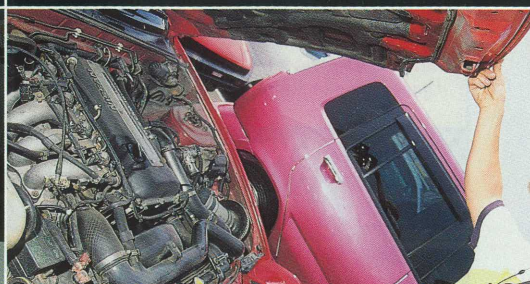
"See, if you just pull this rubber back you can spot where they've welded a new pillar into it"



Theo ponders the Hocking GoPed



Checking the computer listing first



AUCTION STRATEGY

Some insider tips on buying the best imports

Story and photos by Martin Donnon

Japanese Auctions can be daunting places for those still wet behind the ears. Full of noise, colour and life, it's easy to miss a car completely, or not realise you have just bought one. You could easily spend your day in a general state of confusion – just ask me – been there, done that.

Those insulated by the internet buffer probably wouldn't agree, but according to our man on the ground, Mark Hocking, they probably don't know any better. He says you need to be there to get the good stuff.

The only way to do the job properly at an auction is to go there with a plan, and attending this particular USS Gold Fukuoka auction at least three times a week gives Mark plenty of practice. He strategises the night before each auction event, getting a list together of what he needs to inspect for different customer orders, and then what sort of criteria he has for 'window of opportunity' targets (those rare and often highly modified cars that can pop up out of nowhere). Armed with an email to himself, which is stored on 'Eggy' (I'll explain that one soon, I promise), he dons the cross-trainers and gets ready for action.

With both Theo and I flanking him, Hocking can't follow his normal procedure of getting on the Shinkansen (bullet train), GoPed motorised scooter under one arm, and make a high-speed trip to the auctions. Rather we have to drive (in a Delica van that Mark organised for us) but don't worry, he still had the GoPed. We weren't going to slow down his frantic pace.

USS Gold is so vast that when you get to the registration area you have to catch a shuttle bus over to the main auction area (bidding rooms). A smoky pair of HiAce diesels are constantly doing the rounds, chock full of locals, all in search of automotive bargains. In the tightly packed Toyota it was some sight, with not only three big, loud gaijins, but also a folded-up scooter. They were accustomed to it though, with nary an eyebrow raised at Hocking san, as he is such a regular sight. Now, to sort the wheat from the chaff ...

The best place to start sifting through the 4000 lots on offer (on a Wednesday no less) is via the computerised stock terminals. Just like an internet search, you can enter wildcards and find all the stock pertinent to your goals. Today we were looking for Supras, Skylines and even the odd Soarer and late-model 180SX. Within minutes Hocking had them located, writing down their lot numbers on a sheet of paper and then assessing the current lot being auctioned on the overhead terminals to get an accurate idea of when they should 'come up'.

Visual inspection is the key. Don't worry about keyboards and screens, it's the touchy feely-stuff that allows you to separate the good cars from the, well, not so good. The 10-acre yard is divided into numbered sections. Hocking is experienced enough to know that if it's lot number 3122 you need to see, it's going to be over on the far right up against the fence somewhere.

You have probably heard of car grading before, with cars at the lots being graded in an industry-standard between 1 and 5 depending on condition. A '5' car is near-showroom with minimal kays, while '4' is a good general condition (no dents/scratches), and '3' is most typical of what you would see in a 5-year-old well-maintained car. What we didn't know though, is that an RA grading exists. These cars all look like good things, all 70 or 80 poked over in the corner, but you can't get a grading number on them. Why? Well, they aren't suitable as they have major structural damage and are therefore normally much cheaper.

Reading through the Japanese hieroglyphics, Mark was able to reveal some interesting facts about these cars. Take for example an R32 GT-R we found: 1992 model, good overall condition, white. It had both rear quarters replaced, a complete roof and one front A pillar. Hard to see at first, but, if you look hard enough, the evidence is there. Mismatched paint, dodgy wheel alignment and rear window rubbers that didn't fit gave the game away. Hocking doesn't touch such cars as he believes that once you soil your reputation with them, there is no coming back. ▶

Hiriders aren't too bad either.
Japan is a land of extremes...



Lowriders are just way cool



Making sure that Eggy gets good reception sometimes involves scaling great heights ... like when our man Hocking climbed onto the 'restricted zone' auction centre roof

He has a fairly valid point there. The temptation is great though, as they are as much as 50 per cent cheaper than a genuine, straight car. Mark recommends getting the auction report with the car when you buy it, as this tells all.

Having identified cars that he believed were suitable for purchase, it was now a matter of going back to the main office, getting the keys and giving them a test start and a more general inspection. Rather than simply rev the things, Mark puts them in gear and does the definite auction yard 'no-no' of driving them back and forwards to test the condition of the clutch and the gearbox. Modified examples often have lazy clutches and diffs if they've been thrashed excessively. Once happy, it's time for a digital photo with his 'DoCoMo Eggy', a unique camera that not only takes snaps but also has an email browser built into it.

Once the photo is taken, Mark emails it direct to his client, anywhere in the world, together with some text giving the start price and other general information (modifications et cetera). The whole process is seamless and quick, with the only customer requirement being to sit in front of an internet browser on the day of the auction. The camera will receive customer confirmation after a couple of minutes, and then the action really starts.

Like a kid in front of a PlayStation, Hocking concentrates intently on his prey, never batting an eyelid as he goes into 'thumb battle' mode. Clicking away furiously at the bid clicker, Hocking is experienced enough to realise whether he is bidding against an opponent or himself. Apparently, it's very easy to spend up to \$1000 more than you should by not reading the vibe of the bidding properly. There is a point where it's time to back off, and when a car goes higher than his customer wants to pay, Hocking simply plays it cool and waits. It's not over yet.



A lot of the time these cars get passed in (they go to 'no sell' on the board). The moment this happens, Hocking once more springs into life. Running through the crowded bidding room, he powers up the stairs and disappears into the distance. Where has he gone? Unbeknown to us there is a negotiation room at all Japanese auction houses where those who are exceptionally fluent in both written and spoken Japanese can go to and attempt to buy passed-in cars. You need to make an offer on paper, so that counts out most car-buying foreigners that have trouble speaking, let alone writing, the Japanese code.

Today he won, which for Hocking was something special. He really didn't expect to buy any cars that day, while acting as our tour guide and devoting his time primarily to that cause. It seems that he folded the only Japanese competitor he had at the negotiation table and actually managed to buy the car for his customer, and cheaper than the initial reserve. Both Theo and I were in awe of this ruthless buying display.

From there, the car was driven back to the Hocking holding yard at the docks, where the nec-



Tools of the trade. One bids for the car in the left lane, the other the right

essary paperwork (de-registration et cetera) is carried out before it finally makes its way to Australia. Even though I have been to the Japanese auctions in Osaka before, this little trip showed in a couple of hours the reality of the Japanese auction system. It's not a game where you can simply pick up a bargain by showing up. It takes a dedicated and skilled foreigner to successfully mix it up with their Japanese adversaries.

Want Hocking to find something for you? Simple, drop him a line at www.mytrading.org and he will get back to you. I know I'll be online the next time I need a car.

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