

# GLOBAL WARNING

**THIS IS THE GREATEST  
SUPERCAR EVER BUILT  
IN AUSTRALIA. IT'S FASTER  
THAN A FERRARI, LIGHTER  
THAN A LOTUS AND CHANGES  
GEARS LIKE AN F1 CAR.  
AND IT'S OURS. AUSTRALIANS  
ALL, LET US REJOICE**

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PHOTOGRAPHY: GRAEME NEANDER**





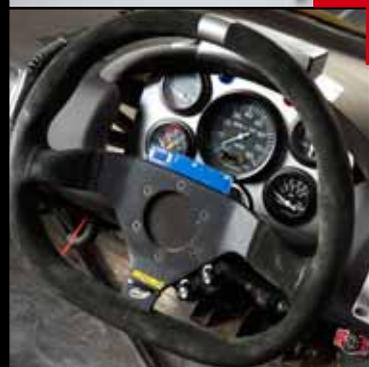
***“The white one steps in, tightens his belt and closes the door. He selects first and disappears in a cloud of smoke”***



Batman rued the day his address was published on the net



Supercar features body made of chocolate. Fact



**M**OST SUPERCAR BRANDS ARE named after the men who made them. Pagani, Lamborghini, Ferrari, Porsche – they all carry the names of their egotistical founders. But while that might be fine in Europe – where that sort of self-indulgence is as disturbingly common as bad pop music and worse haircuts – it’s unlikely to happen in Australia, where being a flog is less socially acceptable.

That’s why Victorian Matt Thomas didn’t call the supercar he’s developing the “Thomas”. He named his cutting-edge machine, which could soon hand out an ass whoopin to those pretentious Euro brands, after a hairy gold-miner from Gippsland.

“I saw this historical photo of old miners in a book about the mining town of Walhalla. They looked like original Aussies with big handlebar moustaches and one of them was named Joss,” Thomas said. “It just fitted and I liked that it wasn’t trying to sound Italian or anything – like Florio or something like that.”

It could have been called Bruce or Bevan for that extra Aussie touch, but as first names go, Joss seems pretty fitting. Besides, the only name you’re going to think of saying when you actually drive this car is that of God. Or possibly that of his son.

Yes, after more than a decade of blood, sweat and man tears, his car is finally getting close to becoming a production reality. And, believe it or not, Thomas is

**“The mid-mounted engine is making a sound like hill tribe people banging hard on the roof with stone hammers”**

letting *TopGear Australia* take the wheel of the test mule that will soon grow into his dream supercar.

It’s a rough-as-guts prototype, closely related to the concept car he revealed at the 2004 Melbourne Motor Show, and is substantially different to the more aggressive and way more advanced monster the Joss team is currently working on in its Cheltenham studio.

Driving the matte black Joss on the tram-tracked streets of Melbourne is one of the strangest experiences I’ve ever had. And the coolest. With my colon just millimetres from the bitumen, I’m rumbling along in a stealth prototype which is clearing traffic like an Abrams tank in Uruzgan province. Even with a car bra big enough to support Katie Price and a cunning spattering of white triangles designed to hide its lines, the people jostling for a better look can tell this is special.

People in South Melbourne usually pay more attention to their fringes than cars, but the Joss is causing them to stare like the world is coming to an end.

Maybe that’s because it does sound like an impending apocalypse, thanks to the 328kW, 6.8-litre GM-based, but locally developed, V8 mounted just behind me.

Every time I back off the throttle it burbles and pops, sounding less like overrun and more like the battle for Stalingrad. And the concrete-and-glass shop fronts only make it louder. And scarier.

The mid-mounted engine, which sits inches from my vital organs, is making a sound like hill tribe people banging on the roof with stone hammers. As soon as I go easy on the accelerator, it lights up the unburnt fuel. This old-school pushrod engine was inserted back into the mule for our test drive. The production car will be propelled by an as-yet unspecified European-sourced V8 with, Thomas says: “more than 370kW”.

The five-speed, Porsche-sourced transaxle gearbox with the shifter attached to the right side of the cabin will also be replaced by new manual ’box made by Albins, which





***“The massive tyres initially fail to grip the moist tarmac. But when they do, things go all blurry”***



has just won the contract to supply all gearboxes for the next generation of V8 Supercars from 2013.

But the Joss transmission will have an extra ingredient, something called Zeroshift technology. Honda is rumoured to be running a manual version of the cunning new system on its MotoGP race bikes because it does away with the normal cut to the torque on gear changes.

The Zeroshift system has a special selector that holds two gears, with only one in operation. Special sliders move across, dropping one gear and selecting the next instantly. Thomas says it will be faster than any gearbox around today. It will certainly be better than the gearbox in the prototype, which is clunkier than the robot dance. Brute force is required to get it to go into reverse.

It might be a bit rough, but this prototype is still the business. Out of Melbourne and onto a decent stretch of country road, which is predictably wet, I have a stab at the throttle. The massive 300mm-wide tyres initially fail to maintain their grip on the moist, coarse chip tarmac. But when it hooks up things go all blurry, like when the captain of the Starship Enterprise is late for a date with that chick with the three breasts from *Total Recall*.

On the strip, it managed to go from 0-100km/h in just 3.0secs and pulled 1.5g going from first to second gear. Thomas says the production car will be 0.2 seconds quicker again and should smash a top speed of 360km/h.

If so, that means the Aussie Joss would accelerate faster than the McLaren MP4-12C, Ferrari 458 Italia, Porsche GT2 RS and be a dead-even match for the all-wheel drive Lamborghini Aventador.

Deep in the enclosed cockpit it feels like you are sitting in a Formula Ford open wheeler, but the soundtrack is different – the brutal noise emanating from behind is just like a V8 Supercar. The note must carry across the washed out hills because when I pull up for a rest, the man in white has suddenly appeared. That's the Stig.

I've given up trying to work out how he knows when we are out driving awesome performance cars, popping up like some kind of apparition. I flick up the scissor door and wriggle out without the slightest hint of coordination. The white one steps in, tightens his belt, closes the door, selects first and disappears in a cloud of white smoke... much like David Copperfield, only cool.

As the Joss scorches off into the distance, I can now hear how good it sounds from the outside. We have plenty of warning that he's heading back, too. But how fast he comes though the bend is really something. The Joss just slices through the corner without a hint of body roll or any kind of discomfort from the cornering effort.

When the thunder passes, Thomas explains the production car will be even better balanced and lighter. The prototype is a steel spaceframe with a composite plastic shell, whereas the body and chassis of the next car will be mostly made from carbon fibre. Exotic materials like titanium will be used for the bits the suspension doesn't support (what nerds call unsprung mass) which should help it feel even more nimble.

After an hour, we realise the Stig isn't coming back for a while. He must like it. Instead, we head to the Joss office and workshop facility back in town. ☺

Joss presented a scale model of the production car at the Australian International Motor Show last July, but Thomas lets me peek at a full-size clay model the team is working on. It is a far more dramatic design than the original car, with arresting lines, and it features more details. There will be a large fixed wing, which is kind of hard to do in clay, and Thomas says the unique high-mounted exhaust pipes will also stay, because they actually help with the aerodynamics by pumping the exhaust under the wing plane.

It all sounds pretty complex, especially for a company that hasn't produced a car before, but I wouldn't write the Joss crew off. The guys working on the car are all involved in the automotive industry and have experience in Formula One, V8 Supercars and Le Mans.

Thomas knows a fair bit about aerodynamics himself, having worked for the Stewart F1 team from 1996.

"I came up with a design for wing mirrors I said would increase the top speed by three kilometres per hour, and I had to prove it. I got the job," Thomas said.

He has worked for several carmakers in either design or clay modelling in Australia and Europe. But after work hours, Thomas still pressed away at his dream to build his supercar – something he has been doggedly determined to do for decades.

"I just always believed I was going to make a supercar," he says. "I knew it was going to happen."

This belief goes back a long way, when the gawky 15-year-old Thomas hunted down the director of the Melbourne Motor Show with his designs of a supercar he said would draw bigger crowds. His first supercar certainly caused a sensation at the 2004 event.

**"Joss is building the first pre-production models - we should be able to drive one a year from now"**

After showing off the car, Thomas was inundated with orders and, more importantly for his new venture, offers of the investment he'd need to make it a reality.

One by one the finance offers fell through until the whole deal hinged on a big-talking bloke who promised a massive amount of money that would be enough to bankroll the entire project.

"It got to the point the guy asked for our bank details and said the money would come through the next day. We had our doubts, but we were like rabbits in the headlights, we just needed the money."

Unsurprisingly, it never materialised and by 2006, the Joss project appeared to be rooted. Thomas left Victoria for a job at BMW in Munich, but was given new hope when a well-placed enthusiast offered to restructure his firm so it could properly source investment for a tilt at a new car.

"Every day I would get a roll of paper and ride my bike to a park where I'd sit on a park bench at lunchtime and draw sketches," he says. "I was designing all the parts, down to each nut and bolt."

Joss is now back on track, and Thomas' dream is getting agonisingly close to reality. I have one last look at the beautiful clay model and try and visualise it tearing around a race track. My imagination will have to do for now, but Joss is currently building the first of two pre-production models that we should be able to drive in anger about one year from now, before work starts on the customer cars.

Sadly, they won't be cheap so don't bother calling unless you have \$580,000 burning a hole in your pocket.

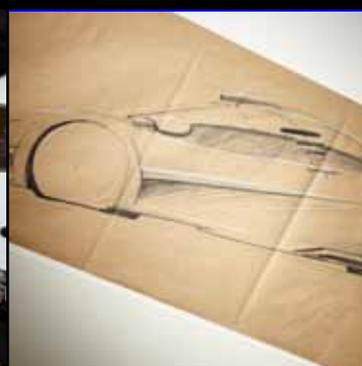
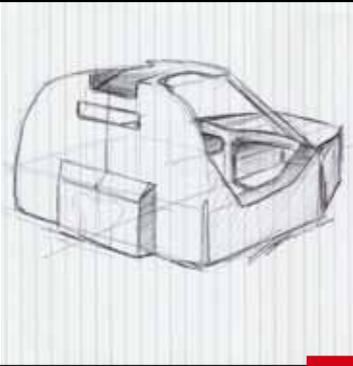
That seems like an awful lot, but when it comes to supercars, you have to pay to play. And they wouldn't be special if everyone had one, would they? Or you could just borrow someone else's for a tyre-mauling blast.

Now, that reminds me, where has the Stig got to? 📺





Features V8, sleek styling...and it can see dead people



**"You. Shall. Not. PASS!"**

