

Bugatti Veyron

16.4 Grand Sport

For \$2.1 million, you can strap into the throne of the car kingdom.

text and photography by Nigel Moll





WE MISSED THE ROAD FOR KEY AIR AT Waterbury Oxford Airport in Connecticut, and the subsequent U-turn in a church parking lot could have been a metaphor for seeking redemption for tooling around in the most powerful, most expensive production car in the world. I half expected to hear a voice from on high as we did our 180 in front of the house of worship: “You couldn’t just drive a Prius?” Not today, sorry. Heaven can wait.

Bugatti has sold about 300 Veyrons since it introduced the car in the dim-distant good times of 2006, and this 1,001-hp, \$2.1 million two-seater remains firmly ensconced on the throne of the car kingdom, five years and one grim recession later. The throne has actually elevated some, since Bugatti recently upped its own ante with the 1,200-hp Veyron Super Sport, which commands \$2.9 million. The car I was driving was a 1,001-hp open-top Grand Sport.

I met my chaperone for the half day I had the car, Bugatti “factory pilot” Butch Leitzinger, deep in Veyron territory at a marina-side hotel in Greenwich, Conn., a community where the mighty oak of deep-rooted old money still stands proud, unbowed by the tempest. At one point, as we navigated our way among the fortress dry-stone walls standing guard for mansion after mansion, we were stalked by an elegant woman looking right at home at the wheel of a Maserati Quattroporte and surrounded by her wide-eyed, pointing, beaming brood of youngsters. She stayed on our tail through countless lefts and rights, and the angel on one of my shoulders agreed how good it felt to share the Veyron’s existence on a public road. The fork-tail on the other shoulder goaded, “Dump the kids, schweedart;



I've only got this thing till two o'clock." Landscape crews grinned and hoisted their thumbs. One fellow leaned out of his truck's cab and yelled at us to make sure we had the roof on because rain was coming.

The market for the Veyron dipped between mid-2008 and the middle of last year. "People had the money then but they were reluctant to show it," noted Leitzinger, "but it's bounced back in the past year."

The Bugatti Web site will tell you most of what you want to know about this car's specifications, and the broader Internet a bunch more you don't in the form of myths and fictions ("Dude, the tires are \$25,000 each!!" Actually, a set of four runs about \$35,000, according to Bugatti, which advises owners to plan on spending \$25,000 a year on maintenance.)

The Veyron's specs (*see page 62*) are impressive indeed but what the numbers cannot tell you is how docile and tractable the car is in stop-start commuter traffic on the rough blacktop of I-95. The W16 does not have aggressive cams, so the Veyron is anything but the monster its specs suggest when you're closing the gap to the stationary car ahead at a walking pace. It's remarkably unremarkable.

British Concorde project boss Sir George Edwards, replying to a passenger aboard the SST's first airline service flight who had noted with surprise that the experience felt no different from flying on any other airliner, said, "Yes, that was

the difficult part." So it was with the Veyron, too. The DSG double-clutch seven-speed paddle-shift manual transmission can take much of the credit for the Veyron's drivability; indeed, without it the Veyron could not exist as a production car drivable by anyone with some right-foot discipline, some sense of self-preservation and a couple of million bucks lying idle in a sock drawer. A foot-pedal clutch would require so much clamping force to harness 1,001 hp as to be impractical for pleasurable driving. VW owns Bugatti, and Leitzinger emphasized that the Veyron underwent and passed the same torture testing every other car in the VW stable goes through, for a supercar with staying power.

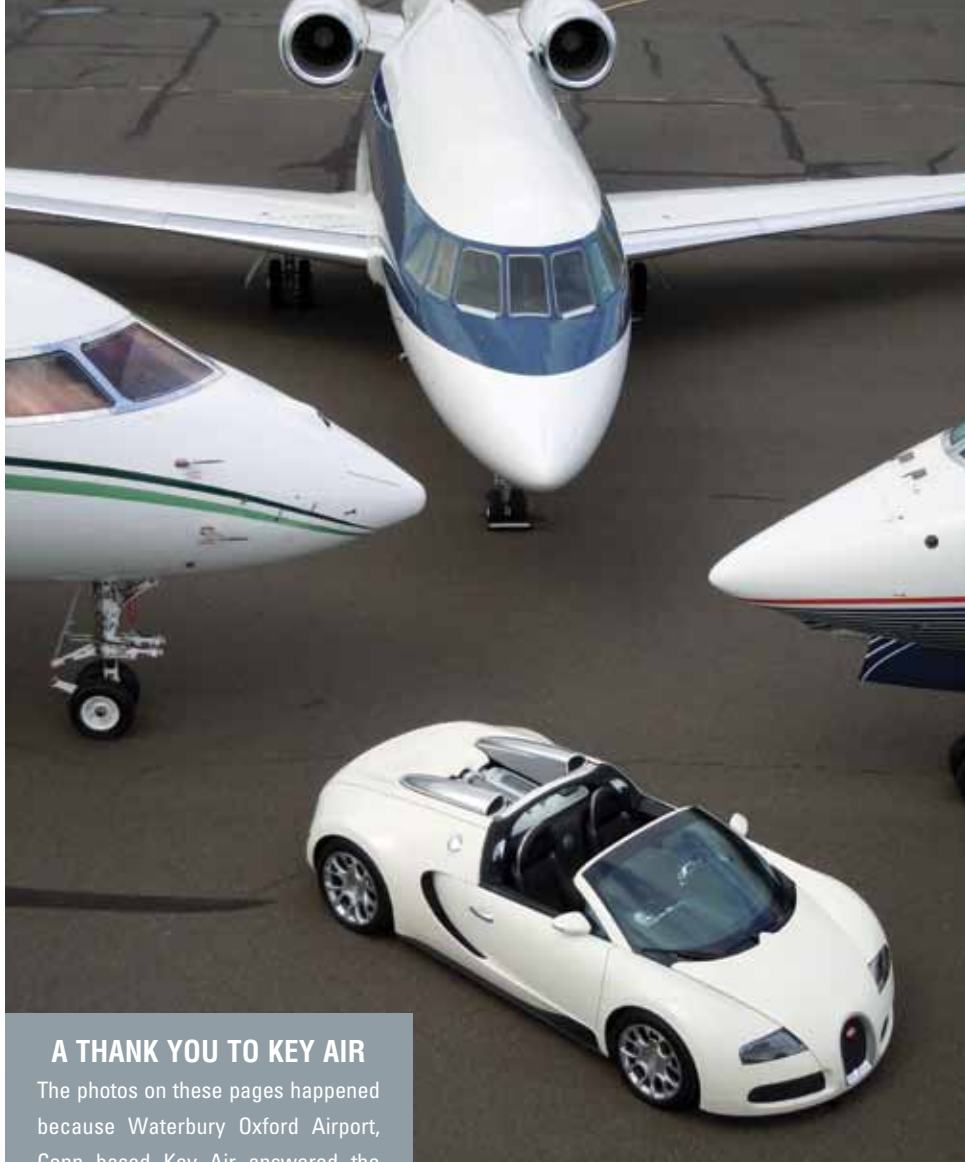
PUSHING HARD ON THE VEYRON'S GAS PEDAL and holding it there changes everything. Suddenly this production car is alone in the stratosphere of automotive superlatives. Last year, Ferrari lent me a 599 Fiorano HGTE for a few days and I was able to savor its 612 hp and 448 ft-lb to 130 mph on my farmer neighbor's driveway. That indisputably good car sprints to 62 mph in 3.7 seconds. The Veyron does the sprint to 62 a full second more quickly. One second doesn't mean a whole lot when you're in the six- to seven-second band, but shaving a thousand milliseconds off the clock this low on the dial is an immense gain.

What does that gain feel like? In a word, unreal. It's

The Veyron Buyer

Who would spend two or three million bucks on a car? It's a small but broad gamut, spanning the guy who puts only low triple-digit mileage annually on each car in his collection to the devil-may-care enthusiast who drives his Veyron to Starbucks. Every buyer except one, so far, has been male, and the demographic is predictably lofty: typically mid-40s to early 50s, net worth \$200 million, owns 15 cars and puts about 1,500 miles on the Veyron in a year, according to Bugatti U.S. market manager John Hill. The Veyron market thus far has been split about equally among North America, Europe and the Middle East. —N.M.





A THANK YOU TO KEY AIR

The photos on these pages happened because Waterbury Oxford Airport, Conn.-based Key Air answered the call with gusto when we sought a suitable location for the Veyron shoot. The operator secured permission from the owners of the G450, Global 5000 and Falcon 2000LX seen here—three of the 22 aircraft that Key Air manages—and **BJT** thanks the Key Air crew for its time, ramp and hangar facilities.



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a giant leap closer to the catapult launch of an F/A-18 off the deck of the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, which will forever remain my benchmark for fore-and-aft acceleration—zero to 170 in less than three seconds. Like the supply of nuclear-generated steam behind the cat-shot, the supply of power from the Veyron's W16 seems limitless and you have to recalibrate your expectations. Pushing the pedal to the floor for three or four seconds on most cars, even the 599, produces an anticipated and, to varying degrees, exhilarating sensation, but no amount of pre-drive briefing prepares you for the first time you floor the Veyron.

I will never admit in print to how far the speedometer needle traveled around its dial, or on what small ribbon of the North American continent it did so, but unexpectedly The Moment presented itself, and my factory pilot recognized it too. I had goosed the Bugatti on a mild uphill gradient and opened up a big gap from the Z4 that was intent on sniffing its scent glands. As we crested the hill, the road swept down toward a flat portion and up again on the other side, with not a car or a predator's lair to be seen anywhere on either side of the central divide for the better part of a mile.

This time I kept my foot pushed to the floor, and

BUGATTI VEYRON 16.4 GRAND SPORT STATS

Engine:	W16, 7,993 cc, quad turbo, 64 valves
Engine output:	1,001 hp @ 6000 rpm; 922 lb-ft @ 2200 to 5500 rpm; redline 6500 rpm
Transmission:	Seven-speed DSG double-clutch automated manual, 150-millisecond shifts
Curb weight:	4,387 lb
Power loading:	4.4 lb/hp
Top speed:	253 mph
Zero to:	60 mph: 2.48 sec 124 mph: 7.3 sec 186 mph: 16.7 sec
To zero from:	62 mph: 2.3 sec/105 ft 253 mph: <10 sec
Fuel capacity:	26.4 U.S. gal
City/highway (EPA):	8/15 mpg
Test average:	Not measured
Test tires:	Michelin Pilot Sport Pax front 265-680ZR500A rear 365-710ZR540A
Price as tested:	\$2.1 million

Source: Bugatti

the heavy locomotive noise from behind morphed into a rising turbine wheeze and whistle as the four turbochargers spooled up and the wastegates cracked ajar. The thrust was savage, fierce and relentless, and a nano-glance at the horsepower gauge showed it to be pegged at 1,001. The whole sensation was afterburner-like in its unstoppable shove and in its turbine noise, and the ride was rock solid from a machine suddenly flexing muscles designed to do just this sort of lunge.

Leitzinger had forewarned me, but lifting my foot off the gas at [censored] mph produced a result as unanticipated as flooring it. It had no appreciable braking effect, despite the barrage of air against which the car was pushing. That's how slick the body and the wheel bearings are. The moment I touched the brake pedal, however, the rear wing deployed out and up 55 degrees into its airbrake position, and with further pressure on the pedal the speed simply vanished—no fuss or drama.

Why buy one of these cars? More to the point, if you can do it without personally going the way of Lehman Brothers, why not? Everything else is simply not a Veyron. ■

Nigel Moll welcomes comments and suggestions at: nmoll@bjtonline.com.