An icon turns 50: spotlight on the Golf GTI at the Bremen Classic Motorshow

PUBLISHED JAN 27, 2026
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A look back at the first generation: In 1976, the first Golf GTI turned the sports car world upside down

- Production hero meets rally toughness: Volkswagen Classic is presenting two faces of the Golf GTI in Bremen from 30 January to 1 February 2026

spotlight on the Golf GTI at the Bremen Classic Motorshow

The Golf GTI is the compact athlete for all situations in life. With more than 2.5 million units produced, it is a true success model. To kick off the anniversary year, Volkswagen is presenting two vehicles from the first generation at the Bremen Classic Motorshow: a Mars Red Golf I GTI from 1979 and a Brilliant Black Golf I GTI from 1983 in the original rally patina.

A success story since 1976. When the Golf GTI came onto the market in 1976, nobody suspected that the 81 kW (110 PS) compact sports car with the red frame in the radiator grille, black wheel housing extensions and the legendary golf ball gear knob would quickly become the world’s most successful compact sports car. Initially, only 5,000 units were planned. But dealers already sold ten times as many vehicles in the first year. A total of 461,690 first-generation Golf GTIs were produced.

And it is the first generation that Volkswagen Classic will be showcasing as a duo at the Bremen Classic Motorshow: one in shining Mars Red, the other bearing the marks of its successful rally racing – with its black paint finish still recognisable under the patina. This is exactly what has characterised the Golf GTI for five decades: it is the compact athlete for all situations and lifestyles.

LeJog as the ultimate test of toughness

1,500 miles (around 2,400 kilometres) across the UK in just four days – from Land's End on the southwest coast of England to John O'Groats in the far north of Scotland. Not a sporty excursion, but probably one of the toughest classic car rallies in the world. Off the main roads, over hill and dale, through countless streams – and not even in an off-road vehicle, but a near-production VW Golf I GTI from 1983.

With a short wheelbase and sufficient power, the compact sports car felt visibly at home on the winding forest and country roads of Britain. The traces of the wear and tear are as clearly visible as the fun the GTI had on its journey. And it is now standing at the Volkswagen Classic trade fair stand in the same condition in which it saw the chequered flag in Scotland.

Right next to it is a second Golf GTI from 1979, shining in bright Mars Red. A first-generation GTI, in a condition rarely seen today. The remarkable performance of the Volkswagen with a top speed of up top to 182 km/h can be surmised even when it is standing still. Already back then, it left behind it numerous sports cars and coupés that easily cost over 10,000 German marks more.

Key information for a visit: Both Volkswagen Golf GTIs will be on display at Stand D08 in Hall 5 at the Bremen Classic Motorshow from 30 January to 1 February 2026. Volkswagen Classic will be present here together with Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles Oldtimer, Audi Tradition and the Autostadt Wolfsburg, who will make it possible to experience automotive history first-hand. The exhibition is one of the most important events for classic vehicles at the start of the year and traditionally attracts interested visitors from all over Europe. Around 50,000 visitors are expected.

GTI press releases and GTI stories. Further information, texts and image material on all GTI models can be found at https://www.volkswagen-newsroom.com/en/50-years-of-gti-2026-20018

Press release distributed by Wire Association on behalf of Volkswagen, on Jan 27, 2026. For more information subscribe and follow us.

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