

Road Test Yearbook 1993

Every car we've tested this year



Road Test Yearbook 1993

Every car we've tested this year



AUTOCAR
.....& Motor.....

P4 The fastest, heaviest and longest

Jeff Daniels analyses the facts and figures from this year's cars

P8 Leading from behind

Andrew Frankel wonders whether Ferrari's 348 is really better than a 246 Dino

The cars

- P12** Alfa Romeo
- P13** Aston Martin
- P14** Audi
- P16** BMW
- P20** Chrysler
- P22** Citroen
- P24** Daihatsu
- P25** Fiat
- P26** Ford
- P30** Honda
- P31** Hyundai
- P32** Isuzu
- P32** Jaguar
- P34** Land Rover
- P34** Lexus
- P35** Mazda
- P36** Mercedes
- P39** Mitsubishi
- P40** Nissan
- P42** Peugeot
- P45** Porsche
- P46** Range Rover
- P46** Renault
- P48** Rolls-Royce
- P48** Rover
- P52** Saab
- P53** Seat
- P54** Subaru
- P55** Toyota
- P57** TVR
- P58** Vauxhall
- P64** Volkswagen
- P66** Volvo
- P67** Westfield

ANDREW FRANKEL, ROAD TEST EDITOR

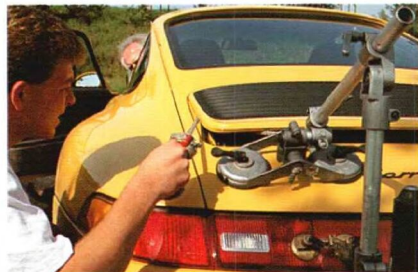


Welcome to the 1993 Road Test Year Book. Though you will find it written in our usual impartial hand, you will notice it contains a liberal dose of a motoring commodity that's been spread too thinly in recent yearbooks.

Excellence. This will go down as the year in which the motor industry stopped treading in old, worn footsteps, kicked itself up the backside and got back to the business of producing cars with innovation and flair.

And the result is that we have had the pleasure of testing more plain good cars in the last year than in any we can remember.

This was the year Ford leap-frogged an entire class as its Mondeo replaced the Sierra; it's the year the Fiat Cinquecento went on sale and started, at last, to take



Attaching Correvit to new 911 (top); Seat's transformed Ibiza

the budget car buyer seriously and it's the year the PSA-group put a strangle hold on the Escort class as its Peugeot 306 joined the Citroen ZX. At the other end of the scale, 1993 proved to be not only the year the US got serious about supercars, but also put one on sale here, the Chrysler Viper. And it was this year that the road test department bagged its proudest prize yet after a five year chase: the world's one and only road test of the Jaguar XJ220.

There was disappointment (you should read Gavin Conway's lament on Renault's failure to put its Twingo on sale here opposite), and huge fun as Stephen Sutcliffe explains. But as James Thomas will tell you, there's still

much more to come next year.

And as all these fine new cars raise class standards, so we will therefore raise our expectations of them.

You and the manufacturers whose cars we assess can expect the tests you'll read over the next year to be tougher and hit harder than ever before. I hope you would expect no less from us.



Hatch will widen 3-series appeal

GAVIN CONWAY

Chances are better than even that Renault's terrific Twingo would have been our 'Car of the Year' but for one sad fact; it isn't on sale in the UK.

Renault is being coy about when a right-hand drive version of the supermini will sneak into the UK and, quite frankly, it can afford to be. The Twingo has been a sales hit in its home market, running second only to the Clio; that means there is no pressure on Renault to look for new



markets to soak up production.

And that's a shame because the Twingo is not only terrifically space efficient and fun, it's also the most characterful thing on four wheels since the Moggie Minor. Did I mention the 45mpg economy around town? Or the £6500 we paid for our own one.

Latest intelligence says that even if Renault gave the go-ahead today, it would be mid-1996 before Twingos went on sale here. But you don't have to wait that long. Just hop to France and get one. We did.



JAMES THOMAS

This was the year that brought us the Jaguar XJ220, BMW 325tds, Chrysler Viper, Ford Mondeo and Fiat Cinquecento. Not a

bad collection, eh?

So what will we be enthusing about this time next year? For me, and I suspect a lot of you, an unequivocal set of performance figures on the McLaren F1 makes a fascinating goal, while closer to the ground, the Sierra Cosworth-replacing V6 four-wheel-drive Mondeo certainly gets the juices flowing.

We will have the Punto from Fiat, a facelifted Fiesta from Ford and even a hatchback version of the BMW 3-series.

Will we finally get our hands on TVR's AJP V8 engine and will it appear in an all-new Tuscan supercar or the existing Griffith?



How will the re-skinned Ford Granada fare against the completely new Vauxhall Carlton and will the updated BMW 7-series surpass the Mercedes S-class?

Finally, will 1994 see the renaissance of Alfa Romeo? With a brand new Spider, the 133 (to replace the 33) and an exciting new coupe, there's potential aplenty.

Next year will be fascinating year, there's no doubt about that.

STEPHEN SUTCLIFFE

The XJ220 through Wales I will never forget, for a variety of reasons. Same goes for the Viper on the Mille Miglia and the

Maserati Barchetta around Varano in the wet with a little man called Oscar Larrauri at the wheel.

Covering 2326 miles in 24 hours in a 1.6-litre Ford Mondeo, thereby completing our 12,000 miles in a week marathon with a little over 90 seconds to spare, won't slip my mind in a hurry, either. Yet nothing sticks in my mind more strongly than the journey from Le Mans.

We'd been sensible with our four supercars for days but in the end temptation had its way. We looped back through Germany to try some serious high speed running. The autobahn was empty (it was 1am) and dry and I didn't lift in the 911 3.6 Turbo until the digital speedo read 181mph.

The thing that sticks in my mind, though, is the three sets of headlights in my rear view mirror doing exactly the same thing. It must have looked spectacular.



12,000-mile Mondeo marathon
17 November 1993 Autocar & Motor 3

Reaching the performance pinnacle

This could be the last year that performance outranks economy. Jeff Daniels number crunches our latest batch of new cars

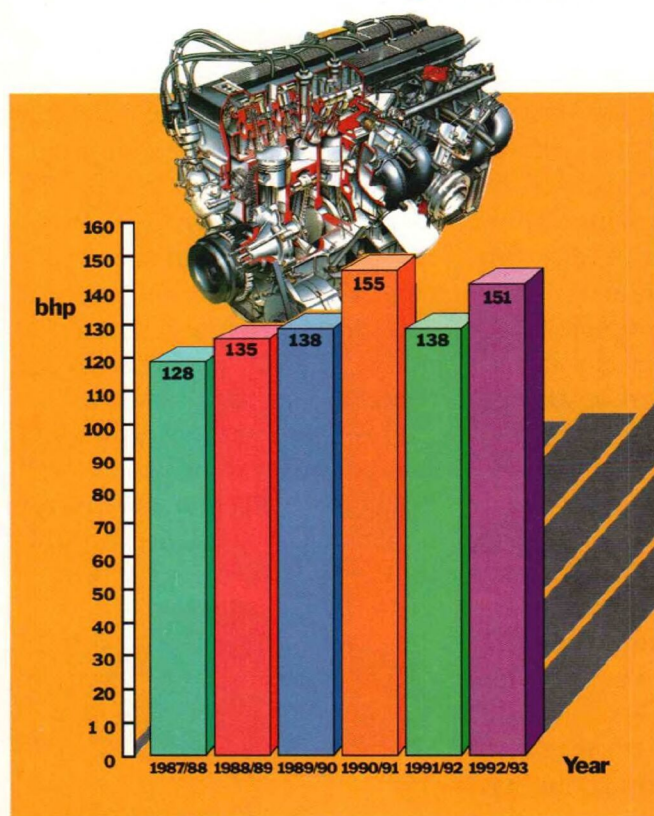
ANALYSE THIS YEAR'S ROAD TEST results and see what trends emerge, they said. This year, it can't be a tidy, orderly process for two reasons: firstly, the road test 'yearbook' is coming to you rather more than a year after the last one, and contains

more than a year's tests; and secondly, no comparable analysis was carried out last year for reasons too complicated to explain.

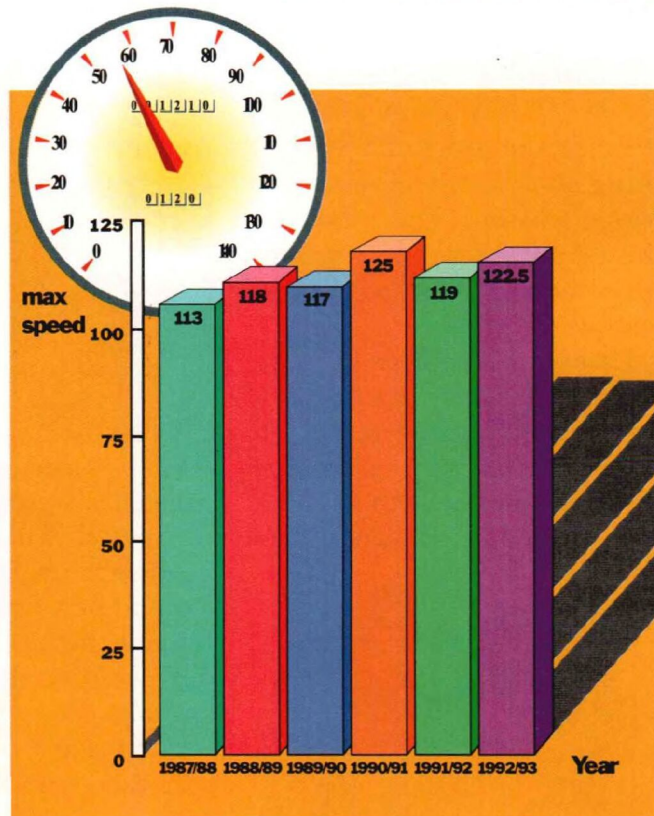
However, this year's analysis throws up a series of figures too interesting to be left in isolation. Reaching up to the archive

shelf, I pulled down the 1990 yearbook, covering the 1989/90 tests, to see what three and a bit years had done to car performance, apart from introducing new and tougher emissions standards. I was at least encouraged to find that the number

Bhp Power up but not quite heady heights of two years ago



Max speed We're over the 120mph mark again. Step forward XJ220...



of cars tested was almost the same: 104 in that book, 105 in this one (I had to do the analysis before the last few results came in).

One interesting thing is that the overall averages of all the tests haven't shifted as much as you might expect when looking at some of the individual cars. Jaguar XJ220, Aston Martin Vantage, Chrysler Viper, Porsche Carrera; a big group of heavy, thirsty luxury cars is surely enough to make this past year the fastest, but the least economical on record? Yes and no.

The fastest, certainly, but still only 5mph faster on average than three years ago; the results notched up by a few very quick cars are soon swallowed up by the mass of more 'ordinary' ones, even though over half of this year's cars reached or exceeded 120mph. As for economy, this year was more than 1mpg better on average, even though its most economical car didn't do quite as well (in 1989/90 the Citroen AX 1.4 RD diesel recorded 54.7mpg). But far more of this year's cars bettered 30mpg, exerting a powerful influence on the overall average.

1993's average car

Capacity	2.3 litre
Weight	1283kg
Bhp	151
Torque	160lb ft
Top speed	123mph
0-60mph	10.0sec
Consumption	26.6mpg

Acceleration? Yes, better. In the standing-start dash, 10.0sec plays 10.6sec, not quite what you would expect from a year in which a remarkable 12 cars did 7sec or quicker to 60mph. But again it shows how the quicker ones get swallowed up by the mass, no matter how quick they are. Acceleration was certainly helped by a significantly bigger 'average engine' (2339cc against 2190cc), but just as certainly not by the higher average test car weight (1283kg against 1233kg).

When it comes to specifications, some interesting trends emerge. Anyone who still says the six-speed manual gearbox is a nonsense should look at the six to have passed through our hands in the past year. And we know there are more six-speeders to come, including the smallest one yet, in a 1.1-litre Fiat Punto. There were two five-speed units and two CVTs, among the 18 automatics we tested — expect to see more of both before long.

Eight diesels compared with seven, and all but one of those a turbo diesel. And who, even three years ago, would have foreseen a diesel car with a 134mph maximum speed and 8.8sec to 60mph? There were only 13 turbocharged cars in all, compared with 15 three years ago, and only six of those had spark-ignition engines. Despite the flurry of interest in low-pressure turbos designed for flat torque curves rather than high peak power, more engine designers seem to have opted for 16 valves.

Today, the layout is so common that ►

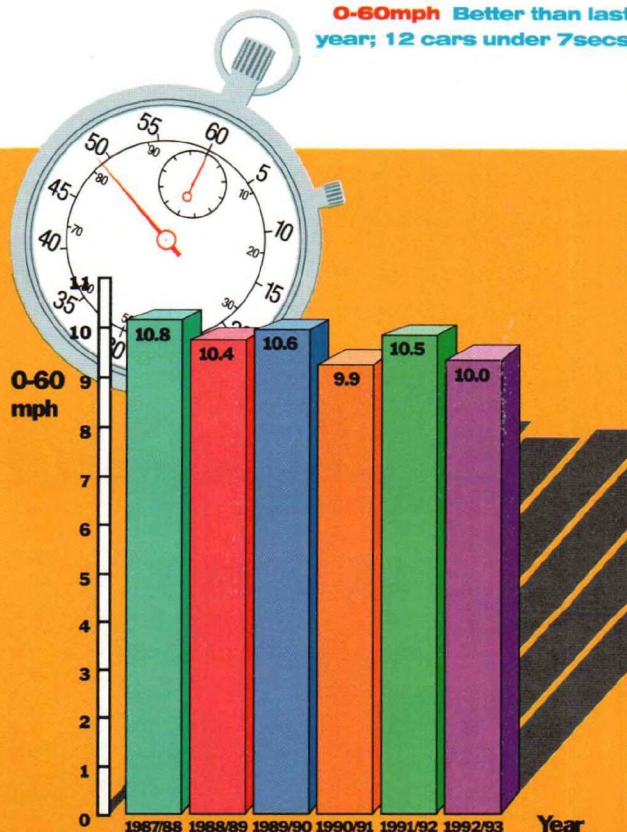
How 1992/3 compared with 1989/90

CARS TESTED	1992/3	1989/90
	105	104
Average engine size (cc)	2339	2190
under one-litre	4	2
over three-litres	18	11
Average kerb weight (kg)	1283	1233
under 1000kg	16	-
over 1500kg	22	-
Average max speed (mph)	122.5	117.3
highest	213	165
number over 120	57	46
Average 0-60mph (sec)	10.0	10.6
number under 10 sec	60	49
Average overall mpg	26.6	25.4
number over 30mpg	31	19
number under 20mpg	20	22

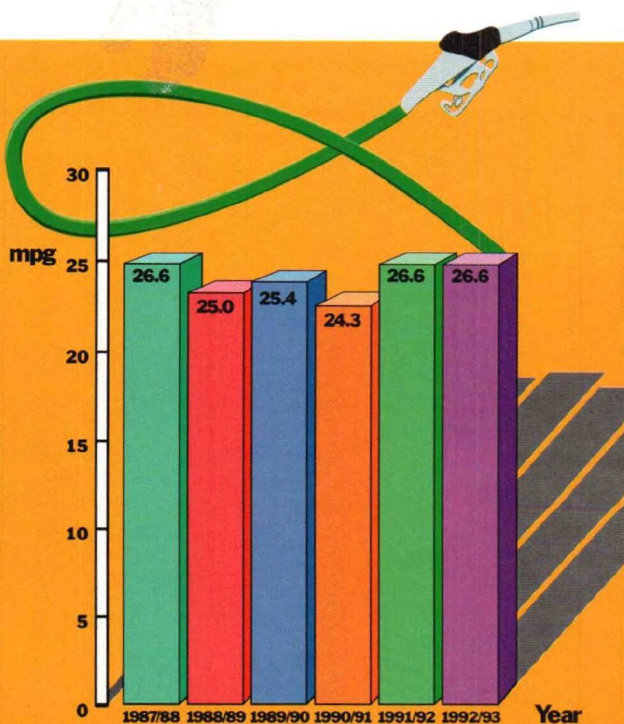
SPECIFICATIONS

Six-speed manual gearboxes	6	0
Five-speed manual gearboxes	81	81
Automatic	18	19
Diesel	8	7
Turbocharged	13	15
Four-wheel drive	9	19

0-60mph Better than last year; 12 cars under 7secs



Mpg Despite supercars, economy still high — as good as six years ago!



◀ it's hardly worth counting any more. Altogether there were 11 V8 engines, plus a V10 and a V12. But interestingly, in a year when there was a lot of technical interest in the V6, there were only nine such engines (compared with eight in-line sixes). There was a sprinkling of five-cylinder engines from Volvo and Audi, and a lone three-pot.

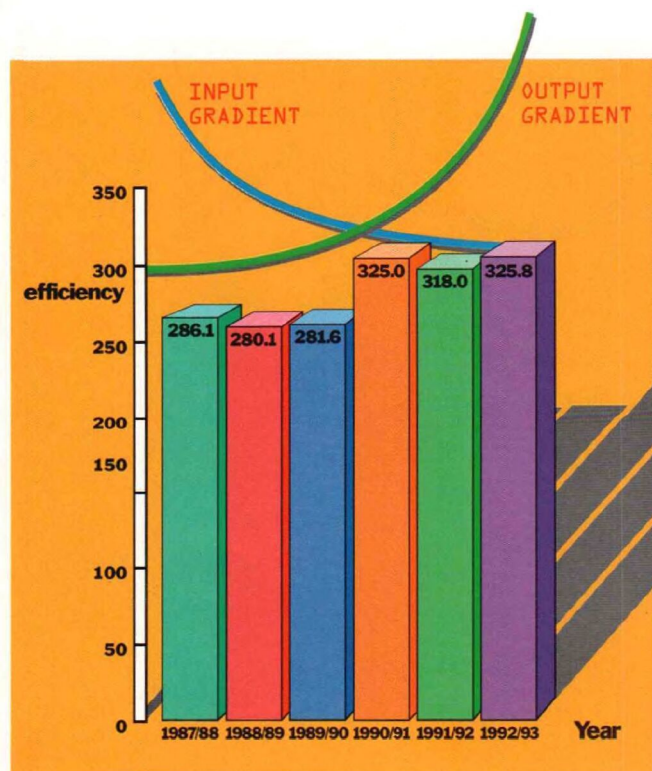
Crunch time for four-wheel drive: only nine tested, compared with 19 three years ago. Of this handful six were 'proper' off-road-ers, leaving only three strictly road-going 4wds. It's really beginning to look as though this argument has been won by traction control, simplicity and weight-saving, and never mind being able to exploit all your performance all the time.

Predictions for next year? You can still hope for the high points. The McLaren F1 may challenge the Jaguar XJ220's performance figures, though we would hope for better economy. The Aston Martin DB7 will probably prove a better all-round performer for the real world than the gas-guzzling Vantage.

But there will be more emphasis on economy next year. It's inevitable, given the kind of mass-production car which seems most likely to reach us (Fiat Punto, new VW Polo, for instance). It's terribly easy to say, and be proved wrong, but this year's crop could turn out to be some kind of high-performance pinnacle, with 1993/94 turning in an 'average' car which is lighter, smaller-engined, slightly slower but a good deal more economical. ■

The extremes of 1992/3

Efficiency Good economy and high top speeds bump up '93 rating



Biggest Chrysler Viper, 7997cc

Engine size



Smallest Daihatsu Mira, 685cc



Highest Aston Martin Vantage, 550bhp

Power



Lowest Fiat Cinquento, 41bhp



Highest Rolls-Royce Silver Spur II, 2430kg

Kerb weight



Lowest Westfield ZEI, 680kg

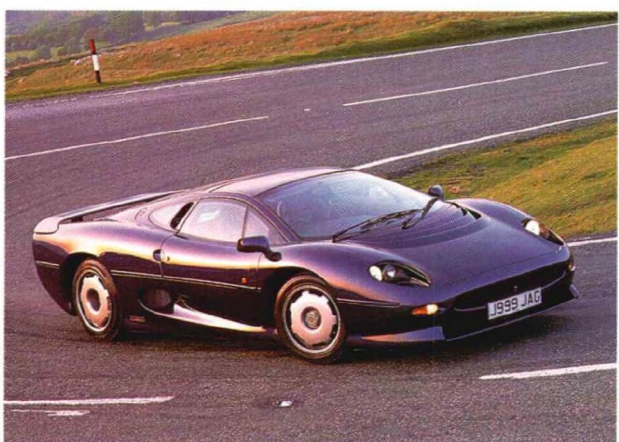


Fastest Jaguar XJ220, 3.6sec

**Acceleration
0-60mph**

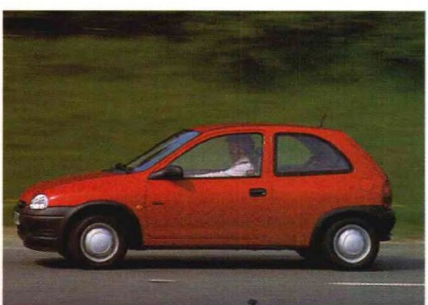


Slowest Subaru Vivio, 21.1 sec



Highest Jaguar XJ220, 213mph

**Maximum
speed**



Lowest V'hall Corsa E-drive, 79mph



Best Peugeot 106XR, 46.7

Overall mpg



Worst Aston Martin Vantage, 11.6

What price

The thrilling 348tb is a modern Ferrari in every sense of the word. So why does Andrew Frankel prefer its 20-year-old ancestor, the Dino?



progress?



As views go, you're going to find this tough to beat. In the distance I can see the tail and flank of a scarlet Ferrari 348tb, cranked over and squatting down on its fat, offside rear tyre as it goes hard at yet another 90mph curve. In the foreground, to the left and right rise the two curved wings of my Dino 246GT and right in front of my eyes is the rev-counter needle. Right now it's flicking past 7000rpm as I pull the steel gear-lever back towards me and down to third.

I can't hear the 348, nor can I hope to stay with it through the bend. But as I angle the three-spoke steering wheel towards the curve, bask in the richness and volume of the sounds seeping through the bulkhead behind me and the four Ansa tail-pipes beyond, it scarcely seems to matter. I know I'm having more fun and he, the 348 driver, knows it too.

If I actually owned the 246 it would be about now that I'd allow an expression of smug satisfaction to play across my face. As it is, I have only borrowed it from the Autodrome in London's Knightsbridge for the day and it's neither fun nor smugness plastered across my mug: it's worry. Worry about why I was enjoying the Dino so much more, worry about what Ferrari has been doing for the last 20 years and *big* worry about what the hell all those motoring journalists who heralded each intervening car between the 246 and 348 as an improvement thought they were talking about. Still does worry me a bit, that.

Odd, isn't it? No-one would lunge from the driving seat of a Mondeo for the keys to a Cortina but each time we returned to the Ferraris, it was invariably the older car's insides both drivers headed for. It takes time to work out why.

The causal link between the two is short

and direct. Both come from an impeccable line of small, Pininfarina-styled, mid-engined Ferraris available in both closed and targa forms with small Vee-formation, four-cam engines. Over the years the powerplants have grown in stature, the 348 boasting one litre, 100bhp and two cylinders more than the 2.4-litre, 195bhp, V6 246GT. Now the 348 takes you into the rarified realm of the 170mph supercar while there are Vauxhall Cavaliers and Rover 200s out there now which would blow the doors off the Dino.

Yet there is much in the Dino's engine which would leave even a hardened 348 driver weak at the knees. The way it revs for starters: always loud, complex yet mellow at idle, itching with promise in the mid-

range and explosive past 6000rpm. It's also safe to just a shade under 8000rpm, long after the 348 would have unceremoniously introduced you to its rev-limiter. Don't misunderstand me — the 348 has one of the finest-sounding engines you'll hear these days but with fuel injection where there used to be three twin-choke Webers, catalysts where once there was free-flowing exhaust, it's now more Kiri Te Kanawa than Janis Joplin.

Next is the unpalatable fact that I can drive the 246GT much closer to its limit, delve deeper into its handling honeypot than I ever would with the 348. Driving a 348 hard cross country is essentially a one way street: you tell the car what you want it to do, it does it. If you are a mere mortal,



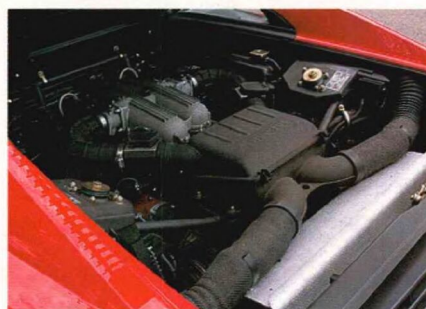
Tall tyres bring Dino's limits within reach, but it won't leave you stranded



No mistaking those Dino curves
10 Autocar & Motor 17 November 1993



The engines are in the same place...



...but Dino (top) has carbs, 348 a cat



Evocative '70s feel to 246GT cabin



Airy 348 cockpit is pure Ferrari

you do not slide it around, you avoid its phenomenally high limits.

The Dino's limit is not vastly higher than, say, a Renault Clio 16v and because it rides on tall 205/70 tyres, not short-sided 245/45s, you not only receive arc-lit warnings of the impending limit. But you can approach it safe in the knowledge that you will need neither the skill of Senna nor divine intervention to save you should you get into trouble. Instead you exploit the Dino's wonderful steering and throttle response, remembering the fact that, in the past 20 years, Ferrari has singularly failed to build another mid-engined car with such impeccable on-limit manners. In fact, as far as my memory of similarly configured cars is concerned, only the original Toyota

MR2 and the Panther Solo are as docile.

So is this what makes me prefer the Dino? I doubt it, though it unquestionably plays a part. Is it then because the Dino rides better than the 348, was more accommodating for tall people, had better instruments and an infinitely finer gearbox? No. Okay, the knockout: Autodrome will sell you this bodily tidy Dino with its rebuilt engine for almost exactly half the £73,878 list price for a 348tb. Still unconvinced? I don't blame you.

The real reason is actually quite simple: the Dino needs you as much as you need it. Abuse it and it will break, leave it in the rain and it will rust. Like all loved-ones, it will sometimes let you down but that won't stop you caring for it — quite the opposite.

And that's the point: you'd never use second gear when it was cold, you'd never extend the engine until the oil temperature needle had moved off its stop; in a 348 you just might because you know, deep down, it doesn't really matter. It won't rust if you leave it out, nor will it break if abused. Truth is, it hardly needs you at all, much like a Mondeo doesn't need you. You feel less involved, left out even, which is just what you want in a Ford and absolutely not what you want in a Ferrari.

That's not Ferrari's fault. The people who work there now are as in love with the cars they make now as their predecessors who built the Dino were. It was not their choice to pollute their cars with emissions equipment and they could not stop firms like Honda producing ultra-efficient rivals with which they had to compete or die.

But the truth is, the 348 now has a raft of mid-engined rivals with which it must compete; back then the 246 had none. It existed alone as the smallest, but brightest jewel in Ferrari's crown; a car which through its peerless beauty and pedigree possessed a character so strong it couldn't help but let a little rub off on its owner.

And the same is true today. See a 348 in the street and almost anyone could be driving it from the middle-aged who couldn't afford a Ferrari when young to the well-heeled young who think it's the only thing to be seen crawling past the beach clubs of the South of France. There is, of course, every chance there's a seriously appreciative driver behind the wheel who owns it because there is still no-one else who makes sports cars quite like Ferrari.

See a Dino and there's no doubt. Its driver will understand this wondrous car, care more about it and how it goes than anything it might say about him or her. And unlike too many who own 348s, they will deserve each other. ■

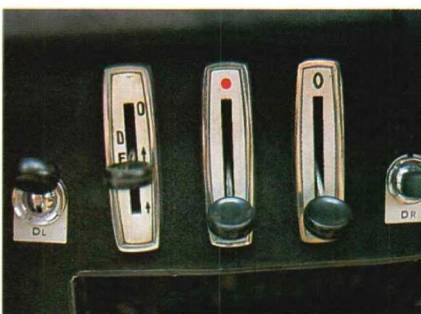
Autodrome can be contacted on 071 235 6666



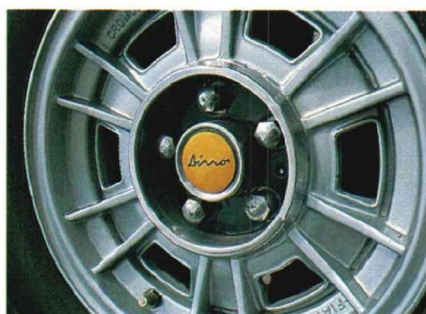
The 348 has impeccable road manners; tell it what to do and it'll do it



Some things never change. Dino...



Ventilation system, Dino-style



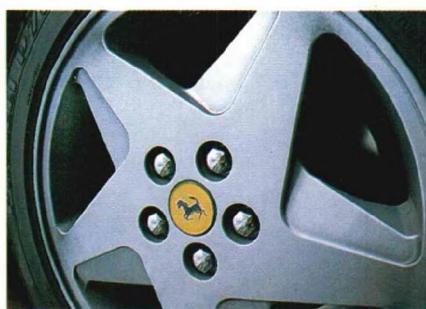
Lovely, 20-year-old alloys on 246



... and 348 share gear lever gate



'90s controls are push-button affair



Modern wheels cleaner in design

Alfa Romeo 155 1.8 Twin Spark



For Entertaining engine note, good rear seat space
Against Handling compromised on rough surface, frenetic cruiser

Verdict ★★★ Sounds great, goes well

A couple of healthy dips into the Alfa Romeo 155's marvelously responsive throttle gives the initial impression that this is an enthusiasts' saloon. The follow up is only slightly less convincing.

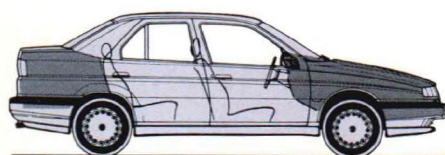
No question that the Alfa's exhaust note is a rasping, over-run popping, good time companion to better than average performance; top speed is an impressive 123mph and 0-60mph comes up in 10.3sec. The Alfa's 121lb ft of torque helps dispatch the 50-70mph sprint in a quick 12.1sec which is a better result than just about anything else in the class. It's not that surprising a result, though, as the Alfa is geared for just 21.1mph per 1000rpm in top gear; you'll pay for quickish performance with a rather frenetic cruising gait.

The Alfa handles well enough, with sharp turn in, good grip and plenty of feed back. But point it at roughly surfaced roads and it goes all fidgety and loses composure.

The Alfa's driving position, though a bit of a fiddle to adjust, is a tolerably comfortable compromise. Space to the rear of the cabin is particularly good.

The Alfa doesn't deliver entirely on its sporting promise, but it definitely has heart.

cc	1773
max bhp	129
max lb ft	121
max mph	123
0-60 (sec)	10.3
30-70	9.7
1/4 mile	17.9
30-50	8.5
50-70	5.8
Overall mpg	26.2
Touring mpg	27.8
mpg/1000 rpm	21.1
Weight (kg)	1205
Tested	17.3.93
Price now	£13,750



Alfa Romeo 155 Cloverleaf 4



For Performance, grip, precise steering
Against Fuel consumption, turbo lag, driving position, lhd only

Verdict ★★★ Integrale performance without the handling

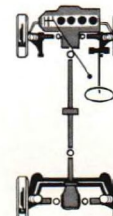
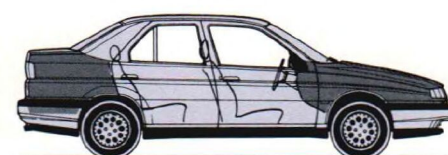
A available to special order and in left-hand drive form only, this Cloverleaf is currently the fastest Alfa you can buy in the UK. Underneath the subtly skirted 155 body you'll find basically the drive-train and chassis of the four-wheel drive Lancia Integrale 16v, although there are differences.

For instance, the two-litre 16v engine is slightly detuned to develop 'only' 190bhp and 219lb ft of torque and a Ferguson-type viscous coupling distributes the twist motion front to rear. Performance — and there's lots of it — is delivered with a fair proportion of turbo lag with most of the shove arriving at the far side of 3000rpm.

Short gearing plays its part as well helping the car to return some sensational overtaking ability (30-50mph in fourth in 5.3sec, 50-70mph in top in 5.6sec). A price must be paid at the petrol pumps though; we managed to cover only 16.3 miles on every gallon.

Somehow the chassis has lost the Integrale's sharpness and the driving position is distinctly Alfa but if you're looking for the closest thing to the all conquering Alfa touring cars, this is it.

cc	1995
max bhp	190
max lb ft	219
max mph	139
0-60 (sec)	6.7
30-70	6.4
1/4 mile	15.2
30-50	5.3
50-70	5.6
Overall mpg	16.3
Touring mpg	21.8
mpg/1000 rpm	21.7
Weight (kg)	1296
Tested	13.1.93
Price now	£22,010



Alfa Romeo 164 Super



For Glorious engine, class-leading performance, looks, stylish interior
Against Torque steer, awkward driving position

Verdict ★★★★★ Fabulous V6 overshadows faults

Big news of the revised 164 range — which includes a mild facelift of the gorgeous Pininfarina lines — is a firecracker of a 24-valve three-litre V6. A rousing 210bhp and 199lb ft torque is the power behind the punch to floor its rivals: when you start talking 0-60mph in 7.4secs, 30-70mph in 6.8secs and a 147mpg top speed, BMW 525i owners will flinch.

And that's before you've mentioned the hair-trigger throttle response, the creamy smoothness all the way to the red line and the sweet-shifting, short throw gearbox.

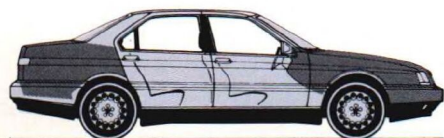
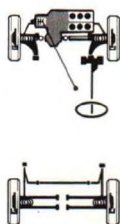
Of course, all this ability comes at a price. At £25,100, the Super is no longer the bargain of the big executive market.

Fine tuning the front suspension and fitting new Pirelli P700 rubber has improved the notorious torque steer somewhat, but the front can still become wayward under hard acceleration. The chassis, though, is still as exploitable and enjoyable as ever.

The facelift also brings a far more effective interior with a redesigned and much easier to use fascia and reshaped seats that are a tad compromised.

Oozing charm and boasting a wonderful V6, the 164 Super is car for enthusiasts.

cc	2959
max bhp	210
max lb ft	202
max mph	147
0-60 (sec)	7.4
30-70	6.8
1/4 mile	15.8
30-50	7.9
50-70	11.0
Overall mpg	23.7
Touring mpg	31.2
mph/1000 rpm	23.4
Weight (kg)	1580
Tested	21.7.93
Price now	£25,400



Aston Martin Vantage



For Crushing performance, road presence, grip, sumptuous cabin
Against Gearshift, high-speed body control, ride, economy

Verdict ★★★★★ Puts Aston back where it belongs

We were sadly underwhelmed by the Virage and Volante, but the Vantage sees Aston Martin back doing what it knows best: building the quintessentially British road burners for which Newport Pagnell was once renowned.

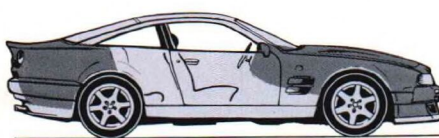
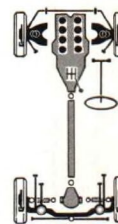
Subtlety is not part of the package. To propel two tonnes of luxury GT at speeds up to 190mph takes more muscle than even the long-serving 5340cc V8 can muster in normally aspirated form, so two Eaton superchargers are used to provide a withering 550bhp. The Vantage contemptuously dispatches the 0-100mph dash in a smidgen over 10sec. If you have to ask about consumption, you can't afford it.

To this prodigious grunt is coupled equally impressive grip, but cornering Aston's finest demands strict adherence to a slow in, fast out technique. Get this wrong and progress can become untidy.

Add crests and dips and the body begins to float; throw in ridges and potholes and the steering kicks back while the ride loses all pretence to comfort.

Yes it's a curate's egg, the Vantage — but an Aston through and through.

cc	5340
max bhp	550
max lb ft	550
max mph	—
0-60 (sec)	4.6
30-70	3.6
1/4 mile	12.9
30-50	3.9
50-70	10.8
Overall mpg	11.6
Touring mpg	14.8
mph/1000 rpm	42
Weight (kg)	1920
Tested	25.8.93
Price now	£177,600



Audi 80 2.0E



For Build quality, looks, safety, interior space
Against Wooden handling, dull steering, mediocre performance

Verdict ★★ Simply outclassed by the new competition

Competition hasn't been kind to Audi's 80. The arrival of accomplished, fresh-faced all-rounders like Ford's Mondeo and the Rover 620 is showing the 80 in a new light: over-priced and under-powered.

Where once its two-litre engine was judged to be smooth and refined, it now feels harsh and uncouth when put alongside the Rover's sweet 16-valver.

And while not so long ago we found its ride and handling to be much improved, now its steering feels wooden and numb, its body control poor when pitted against the mighty Mondeo and 600.

Even that great Audi strength of first-rate fit and finish is being matched, somewhat amazingly, by the Ford and Rover.

Traditional Audi buyers will not be disappointed. Its cabin is well-designed, it has room for four and now a boot that can accommodate all their luggage, plus the safety of anti-lock brakes and Procon Ten.

No, it's not that the Audi is a poor car, far from it. It's just that the new kids on the block are now so much better.

cc	1984
max bhp	115
max lb ft	124
max mph	118
0-60 (sec)	11.9
30-70	11.7
1/4 mile	18.7
30-50	8.6
50-70	12.7
Overall mpg	25.6
Touring mpg	34.6
mpg/1000 rpm	20.9
Weight (kg)	1265
Tested	7.4.93
Price now	£16,255

Audi 80 2.6E V6 estate



For Performance, refinement, build quality, safety and value
Against Poor front-end traction, inert steering, mixed ride quality

Verdict ★★★ A stylish way to carry cardboard boxes

Practical, handsome, fast, refined, safe, well-made and competitively priced, Audi's V6 2.6E estate has a lot going for it.

More a sporting estate in BMW 3-series Touring fashion than a true load-carrier, the Audi is still a commodious carrier. With its low rear lip, a tailgate that opens high and a two-thirds/one-third rear seat split, family-sized load carrying is easy.

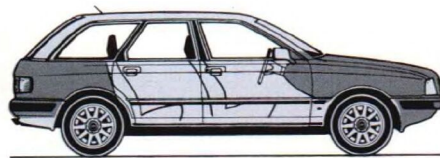
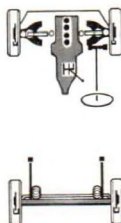
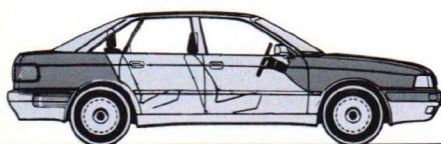
There's also ample legroom for a six-footer to sit in comfort in the rear, but a foldaway centre arm rest means anyone in the middle won't be comfortable for long.

But the Audi is more than just a load-carrier. Its new 2.6-litre V6 gives it the kind of performance that can gobble-up lesser hot hatches. And it delivers its power in an utterly smooth and seamless manner that places the emphasis firmly on refinement.

If there is a chink in this armour, it's the way in which the Audi transfers its 150bhp to the road. In the wet, the front wheels have trouble gaining traction under hard acceleration. Uncommunicative power steering also dilutes some of the pleasure.

But any owner with a family will take comfort from the Audi's Procon Ten safety system, anti-lock brakes and door beams.

cc	2598
max bhp	150
max lb ft	166
max mph	125
0-60 (sec)	8.6
30-70	9.3
1/4 mile	16.7
30-50	7.3
50-70	9.7
Overall mpg	21.3
Touring mpg	25.2
mpg/1000 rpm	22
Weight (kg)	1385
Tested	24.2.93
Price now	£20,394



Audi 80 S2 estate



For Exceptionally fast estate, the right sort of image, excellent grip
Against Not actually that good for load carrying, insurance costly

Verdict ★★★★★ Understated super estate

Is this an innocuous load carrier or a Delta Integrale challenger with enough attitude to scare off large men with tattoos? The answer is both, really. Seen from a distance, the S2 presents a profile redolent of Saturday morning middle-class errand running, but as you get closer, serious alloys shod with even more serious 205/55 tyres hint at something a little more sinister.

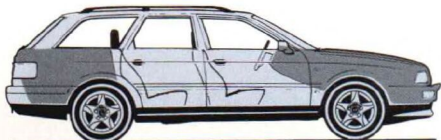
This Audi S2 estate totes an improbable 230bhp atop a four-wheel-drive chassis that delivers grip of a very high order indeed. The S2's gearbox is a six-speed unit; the Audi's shift action is positive enough, but the whole experience is marred by driveline shunt.

The fact is, here is an estate capable of 145mph and 0-60mph in an eye-popping 6.2sec. An estate, moreover, capable of getting comfortably lost among the more blatant, bewinged performance mongers.

Inside, the Audi is slightly less demure about its mission, sporting bold carbon fibre-look panel inserts and black-on-white dials.

With a power-to-weight ratio of 157bhp per tonne, a fat 258lb ft of torque and well matched gearbox ratios, this Audi puts performance in a deliciously unlikely package.

cc	2226
max bhp	230
max lb ft	258
max mph	145
0-60 (sec)	5.7
30-70	6.1
1/4 mile	14.5
30-50	6.1
50-70	6.1
Overall mpg	23.2
Touring mpg	25.2
mpg/1000 rpm	24.7
Weight (kg)	1473
Tested	17.11.93
Price now	£30,494



Audi 100 TDi



For Refinement, performance, space, range, build quality
Against Driving position, outright economy

Verdict ★★★★★ Diesel refinement at a price

A diesel car that's as smooth and refined as a petrol car. That's Audi's bold claim for its 100 TDi — the first diesel-powered car to use a six-speed gearbox. It's a claim that seems solid enough.

For starters, the 2.5-litre turbo diesel engine has vibration-reducing electronic engine mounts and more power and torque than any of its direct competitors.

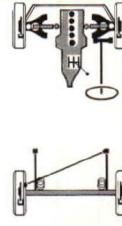
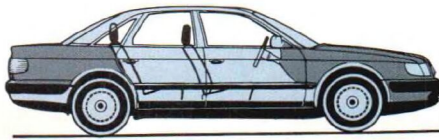
In addition, its six-speed transmission provides lazy, long-legged cruising; in sixth gear at 70mph the five-cylinder engine is turning at a leisurely 2100rpm.

And while sprinting is not the TDi's forte — an overall weight of 1525kg sees to that — the Audi's strength is its extremely wide and usable power band.

Less impressive is the TDi's 32.1mpg overall fuel consumption — no match for the Rover 825 SLD's 36.2mpg average. Much better is the 37.3mpg touring route figure, sufficient to give a 650-mile range with its 80-litre (17.6-gallon) tank.

Add in the Audi 100's traditional strengths, and you can understand its appeal; it offers more space than high-on anything in its class; it's well built; and is one of the cleanest and safest large cars available.

cc	2460
max bhp	115
max lb ft	196
max mph	121
0-60 (sec)	12.3
30-70	12.2
1/4 mile	18.9
30-50	9.0
50-70	12.4
Overall mpg	32.1
Touring mpg	37.3
mpg/1000 rpm	33.1
Weight (kg)	1525
Tested	13.1.93
Price now	£21,400



Audi V8



For Muscular performance, all-weather traction, build quality
Against Price, low-speed ride, steering, poor cabin room

Verdict ★★★ Delivers the performance but it costs

The original Audi V8 had a list of shortcomings as long as your arm. Not only was it overweight and underpowered, it was also seriously overpriced. Even its clever four-wheel-drive system and impressive safety features couldn't salvage lacklustre abilities.

Second time around, Audi focused its efforts on refining and perfecting that V8 engine and fine-tuning the chassis. To some extent, the changes are a success.

Stretching the engine capacity from 3.6 to 4.2 litres, raising output by 15 per cent to 280bhp and torque by 18 per cent to 295lb ft has given the car new vigour. It reaches 60mph from rest in 7.7sec and can deliver plenty of solid low-down muscle.

If performance was the old car's main failing, then ride and steering came a close second. While ride is now much improved, the speed-sensitive steering is reasonably accurate at best, at worst plain vague.

Pity more changes weren't made to the interior. The driver's seat remains set too high for comfort and the intrusion from the transmission tunnel still cramps legroom.

Though much-improved, the V8 stays in limbo as a less than loved and downright expensive member of the luxury car world.

cc	4172
max bhp	280
max lb ft	295
max mph	153
0-60 (sec)	7.7
30-70	6.6
1/4 mile	15.9
30-50	2.7
50-70	3.9
Overall mpg	18.0
Touring mpg	23.2
mph/1000 rpm	26.6
Weight (kg)	1825
Tested	7.10.92
Price now	£45,894
* kickdown	

BMW 316i



For Unrivalled driving experience, style, build quality
Against Price, rear room, not the grippiest

Verdict ★★★ Cheap and very cheerful

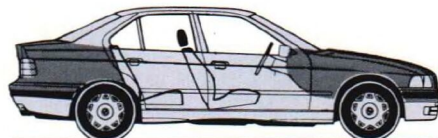
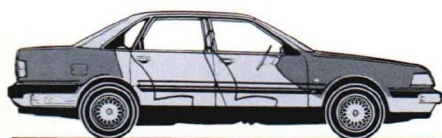
If the idea of a BMW saloon that's slower than the two turbo diesels in the 3-series range seems anathema, remember two things: this is the second-cheapest BMW you can buy, and anyway the reputation of the 3-series never rested merely with the cars' performance. Though the 316i is no flier, it is still well capable of giving its driver plenty of thrills.

It's the entry-level BMW's renowned chassis excellence which is responsible, coupled with the perfect weighting and slick action of all its major controls. Accuracy, balance and adjustability stack up with fine, communicative steering and a beautiful gearchange action to provide a level of sheer driving pleasure unchallenged in the class — even by the newer and, in the final analysis, more evenly capable Ford Mondeo.

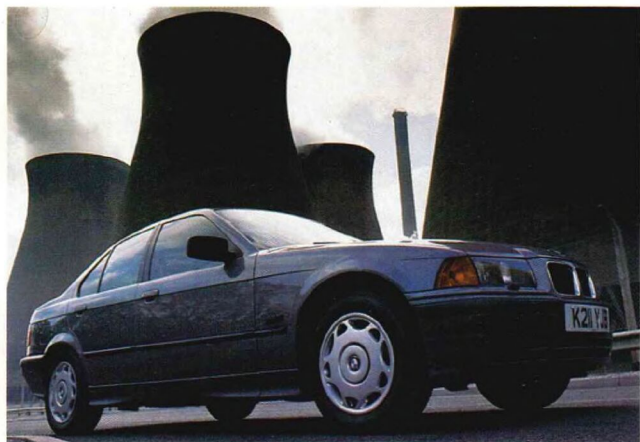
Only when you take into account more pragmatic considerations does the 316i concede ground to the opposition. Though it is one of the best built cars in its class the 3-series is also, for all practical purposes, the least spacious and commands the highest price.

Though the lone driver is unlikely to complain, those in the back just might.

cc	1596
max bhp	100
max lb ft	104
max mph	120
0-60 (sec)	11.2
30-70	11.2
1/4 mile	18.2
30-50	10.1
50-70	14.2
Overall mpg	27.8
Touring mpg	33.5
mph/1000 rpm	20.5
Weight (kg)	1255
Tested	17.3.93
Price now	£14,795



BMW 318i



For Superb chassis and steering, style, economy, price
Against Rear-seat legroom, engine noise, interior fittings

Verdict ★★★★★ Still the world's best small sports saloon

It may be facing tougher rivals with much greater frequency these days but BMW's 318i still ranks as the definitive small sports saloon on the market today, and one that still offers exceptional value for money. It proves that you don't need huge power and over-sized tyres to enjoy swift and entertaining cross-country progress.

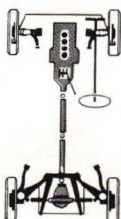
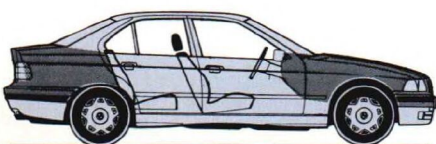
Powerful it isn't. That said, the BMW's 113bhp engine spins to its red line more smoothly than any non-counterbalanced four has a right to. But compare it with the two-litre 16-valver that powers Rover's new 620 though, and the 318's motor sounds plain noisy — not just at high revs but at any engine speed over 2000rpm.

It's the BMW's chassis though that sets it apart. Near-perfect weight distribution, gives it the ability to entertain its driver with a blend of precision and poise, yet always with an ice-cool balance under pressure.

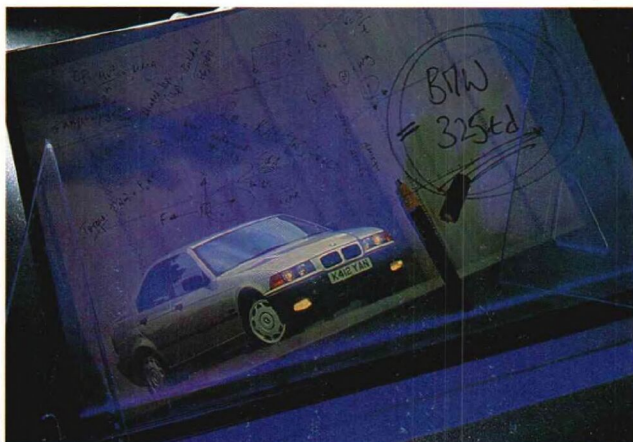
Of course, it is not all perfect. Rear-seat legroom is woefully lacking and there's a shortage of luggage space compared with rivals like the Mondeo and Rover 620, because of its fixed rear seats.

But the 318i is an immensely desirable and rewarding car and one that, thankfully, continues to be excellent value.

cc	1796
max bhp	113
max lb ft	119
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	10.2
30-70	10.2
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	8.8
50-70	12.1
Overall mpg	28.1
Touring mpg	35.1
mpg/1000 rpm	20.5
Weight (kg)	1258
Tested	7.4.93
Price now	£16,395



BMW 325td



For An extraordinary diesel achievement, gearchange, economy
Against Price, not much room in the back

Verdict ★★★★★ A truly refined alternative to petrol power

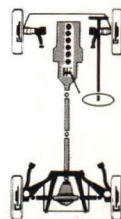
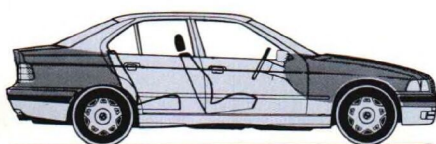
Stripped of the intercooler of the 325tds, the lesser 3-series turbo diesel falls well short of matching the outstanding 143 bhp (57bhp per litre) and 320i-busting performance of its costlier sibling, but 115bhp (46bhp per litre) still goes a long way — quite far enough to embarrass the 316i and give the 318i cause for concern.

Were this performance not delivered with such outstanding refinement, though, that achievement would not have been half so remarkable. Standing a 50p on the engine is no sleight of the advertising man's camera, and yes it does idle quietly enough to be drowned out by a nearby sprinkler. It's this mixture of power and smoothness which does the trick, making the 3-series diesels complete, no-excuse competitors to their petrol-engined equivalents.

View this in the light of the entry-level BMW's acknowledged leadership and you have an outcome more sensational still — a diesel car to run rings around many petrol ones for sheer driver entertainment.

Why BMW delayed introducing these oil-burners to the UK is hard to understand when you drive them. They are the stuff of which reputations are made, not tarnished.

cc	2498
max bhp	115
max lb ft	162
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	10.8
30-70	11.4
1/4 mile	—
30-50	9.6
50-70	—
Overall mpg	29.6
Touring mpg	39.7
mpg/1000 rpm	25.4
Weight (kg)	1335
Tested	4.8.93
Price now	£18,950



BMW 325tds



For Eye-opening performance, petrol engine-like smoothness, frugal
Against Price, rear-seat space

Verdict ★★★★★ BMW creates the first true sporting diesel

Here's a diesel car that doesn't merely match the appeal of its petrol equivalent but which surpasses it. And it's no lacklustre petrol equivalent either; rather it is the formidable 320i.

It is not a total surprise. The lesser 325td, minus intercooler and the first diesel to arrive here, had already run the 320i close. An extra 28 horses sealed the matter.

Not that BMW's 2.5-litre six-pot turbo diesel is only about power. With an intercooler it notches up an unprecedented 57bhp per litre, sufficient to match the output of the 320i's two-litre unit, but just as remarkable are economy and refinement.

Add to this smooth, muscular power-plant the sweet gearchange and handling finesse which come as standard with the 3-series and you have an oil-burner which qualifies as a genuine driver's car.

The only problem is the £22,250 price, which buys you precious little equipment other than anti-lock brakes and an airbag. Fuel savings won't claw back the £3000-plus premium over the 320i but lower maintenance costs and higher residuals eventually will. Whichever way you look at it, the 325tds is remarkable.

cc	2498
max bhp	147
max lb ft	192
max mph	134
0-60 (sec)	8.8
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	16.8
30-50	7.9
50-70	8.9
Overall mpg	31.7
Touring mpg	38.7
mph/1000 rpm	27.9
Weight (kg)	1316
Tested	13.10.93
Price now	£22,250

BMW 540i



For Superb performance, driving environment, build quality
Against Inferior body control, over-sensitive, vague steering

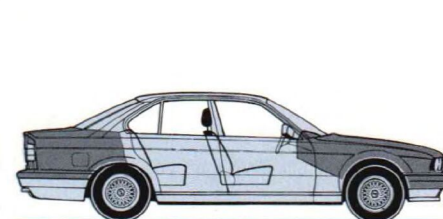
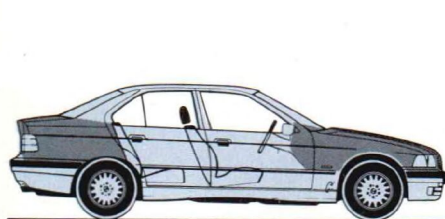
Verdict ★★★★★ So nearly the ultimate exec's tool, at a price

The first BMW V8 for over thirty years and the biggest engine yet in a 5-series: the conspicuously expensive 540i has a flag to fly. It is, predictably, a brilliant car — relaxed, refined, really quite extraordinarily fast — but there are problems. The chassis, which in everything but the latest M5 trim has never had to handle more than 211bhp, struggles with 286bhp.

Without M-Technic suspension (standard on '94 year cars), the 540i's chassis is a touch underdamped, the body control is just the wrong side of exemplary. Likewise the seamless five-speed box, the familiar mix of ZF-hard and BMW-software, doesn't seem to have been programmed to work with 295lb ft of torque as low as 4500rpm and its hunting can get irritating.

But we're nitpicking: the 32-valve V8 is one of the smoothest in the business and, with a red-line at 6250rpm, one of the most invigorating. Delete the Servotronic and go with the regular 3.1-turn power steering and you'll enjoy the most wieldy chassis there is in this class (the pay-off's a firm low speed ride). The rest? BMW values apply; supreme build, seats you and your doctor approve of and ergonomics to die for.

cc	3982
max bhp	286
max lb ft	295
max mph	149
0-60 (sec)	7.0
30-70	6.0
1/4 mile	15.3
30-50	3.4*
50-70	4.7*
Overall mpg	17.8
Touring mpg	22.3
mph/1000 rpm	31.9
Weight (kg)	1700
Tested	30.6.93
Price now	£34,950
* kickdown	



BMW 730i auto



For Sporty handling, value for money, equipment, superb cabin
Against Relative lack of performance, wind noise, tyre roar

Verdict ★★★★★ Best buy of the new 7-series pack

On paper at least, BMW's new V8 730i appears a worthy successor to the old six-cylinder 735i it replaces. In effect, you pay less money for more power. So far so good.

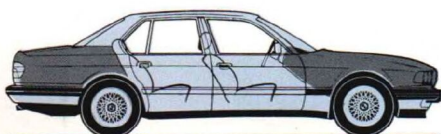
The reality though, is slightly different. While top speed is up from 137mph to 143mph, the 730i has lost close to a second in the sprint to 60mph (9.8secs compared with 9.0secs). Covering 30-70mph is also up, from 7.8 to 8.8secs.

But for those who want prestige rather than performance, this will not disappoint. Its V8 is even smoother than its four-litre stablemate, and sportier sounding as well, leaving only the Lexus LS400 to lay claim to being more civilised. And the five-speed automatic is one of the smoothest on offer.

Few big luxury saloons feel as sporting when hustled along a challenging A-road, or mask their bulk so effectively as the 730i. Its nimbleness is a rare commodity in such a car, as is the steering accuracy and weight.

The downside is a slightly knobbly ride with rather too much tyre roar and wind noise. But viewed on a value-for-money basis, the 730i is the sensible pick from the new 7-series range, offering as much equipment as the 740i for a lot less money.

cc	2997
max bhp	218
max lb ft	210
max mph	139
0-60 (sec)	9.8
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	17.5
30-50	3.7*
50-70	5.1*
Overall mpg	21.2
Touring mpg	25.5
mpg/1000 rpm	30.9
Weight (kg)	1736
Tested	20.1.93
Price now	£38,550
* kickdown	



BMW 740i auto



For Marvellous engine and gearbox, handling, cabin design
Against Jiggly ride, wind noise, soggy brake pedal

Verdict ★★★★★ The best sporting limo in town

Truth is, until late last year, if you wanted a luxury BMW but couldn't afford the 300bhp, 12-cylinder 750i, you had to make do with the 211bhp, six-cylinder 735i. Or look elsewhere.

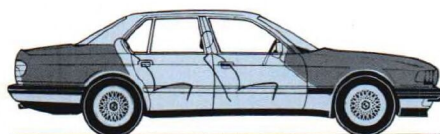
The arrival of BMW's V8 740i changes that. With a rousing 286bhp and 295lb ft of torque, it simply upstages all its rivals and even questions why anyone should pay another £9500 for BMW's flagship 750i that offers just 14bhp more.

Mated to a standard five-speed auto, the four-litre V8 provides epic acceleration. There's the growl of a pure-bred V8 which at high revs, is both loud and urgent. It reaches 60mph in a creditable 7.9sec.

And, if you want your luxury saloon to respond like a sports car, then the 740i is for you. On twisty country roads, in the wet or dry, it maintains immense poise and balance and iron body control. It's certainly not as refined as a Lexus and its knobbly ride still can't touch the giddy heights of excellence scaled by the Toyota-built saloon.

Though you'll pay less for a comparable Lexus or Jaguar, we'd try to find the extra for this V8 BMW, swayed by its wider repertoire, more sporting character and near-perfect cabin.

cc	3982
max bhp	286
max lb ft	295
max mph	146
0-60 (sec)	7.9
30-70	6.4
1/4 mile	16.1
30-50	2.7*
50-70	3.7*
Overall mpg	18.5
Touring mpg	23.7
mpg/1000 rpm	32.0
Weight (kg)	1790
Tested	16.9.92
Price now	£45,500
* kickdown	



BMW M3



For Fantastic engine, blistering performance, chassis, economy
Against Not as involving as original M3, brakes lack feel

Verdict ★★★★★ Lacks the edge of old M3, but still superb

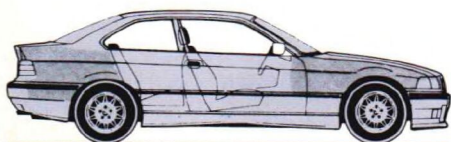
BMW's old M3 was always going to be a tough act to follow, even for the company that created it. It was swift, terrific fun but practical too, and everyone who drove it craved one.

In its attempt to go one better BMW has created a sports saloon which is faster still — blisteringly fast — and even grippier but, thanks to the substitution of an in-line six for the previous four-pot, also more refined.

Not that refinement is what etches the 2990cc M Power unit indelibly on your memory. Peak outputs of 286bhp and 236lb ft do that — sufficient to rocket the 1520kg M3 from 0-100mph in 13.1sec — coupled with remarkable flexibility and economy. The only six-cylinder to have impressed us so much is the Honda NSX's.

Only in its handling does the new M3 concede something to the old. Grip and security are peerless, the ride supple, and ground covering ability awesome. But some of the fun has gone; what was a supremely tactile experience has become more cerebral. For us, that takes the edge off what is otherwise a terrific car.

cc	2990
max bhp	286
max lb ft	236
max mph	162
0-60 (sec)	5.4
30-70	4.7
1/4 mile	13.9
30-50	5.5
50-70	7.1
Overall mpg	26.2
Touring mpg	31.5
mph/1000 rpm	22.5
Weight (kg)	1520
Tested	4.8.93
Price now	£32,450



Chrysler Cherokee 2.5 Sport



For Fun in its way, half-decent load space, equipment
Against Mediocre performance, rotten economy, cramped rear

Verdict ★★ Swaggering charm can't paper over the cracks

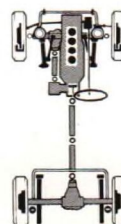
Where the Cherokee comes from there are wide open spaces, long, straight roads, rigidly enforced speed limits and bargain-base-ment gas. That at least gives it some excuse, whereas off-roaders created closer to home have little.

It has the benefit, too, of being exotic in a market sector where image is everything, of having a better load space than typical of the breed, lots of standard goodies, and a roly-poly cornering gait that is, at least initially, quite fun. It also enjoys standard off-roader attractions — if they are attractions — of a commanding view and mud-plugging capability.

The problem is that none of this can make up for the fact that the Cherokee makes unconvincing road transport. It lacks the six-cylinder punch of its four-litre brother and is just plain slow. Also it's extremely thirsty — expect more than 20mpg when you're using the performance to the full and you'll be disappointed.

Unlike the cars with which it must compete though, the Cherokee is endearing and even fun. But as an ownership prospect, a modern estate car makes much more sense.

cc	2464
max bhp	122
max lb ft	148
max mph	99
0-60 (sec)	12.2
30-70	13.6
1/4 mile	n/a
30-50	12.7
50-70	20.4
Overall mpg	17.6
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	22.7
Weight (kg)	1470
Tested	21.7.93
Price now	£15,995



Chrysler Cherokee 4.0 Limited



For Value for money, strong performance, huge equipment list
Against Poor interior space, awful dash design, jiggly ride

Verdict ★★★★★ No urban cowboy should be without one

The arrival of right-hand-drive Jeep Cherokees has punched a major hole in the traditional four-wheel drive market. Instead of this being a true Yank Tank with all the performance and handling prowess of a paddle-steamer, the Cherokee has proven to be a serious threat to the likes of Land Rover's Discovery and the Mitsubishi Shogun.

High-tech it isn't, but the Jeep's all-iron four-litre straight-six delivers a healthy 184bhp which, coupled to a smooth-changing four-speed auto, provides unbeatable performance. Equally impressive is the 18mpg-plus economy.

And its on-road handling is more akin to an ordinary family car than any off-roader. Body roll is minimal while traction, even with in two-wheel drive, is superb. To select four-wheel drive you simply tug the transfer lever without the need to slow down.

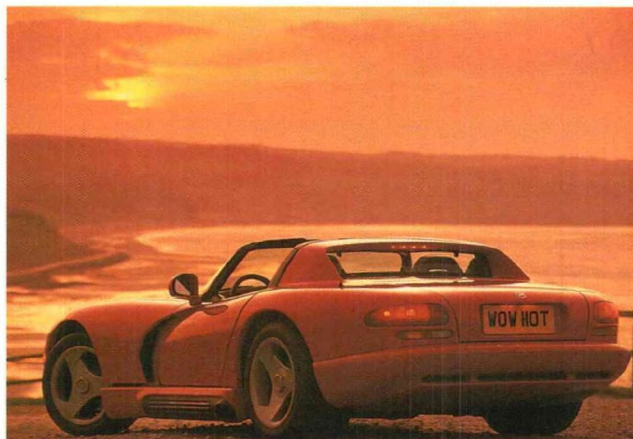
The Cherokee's major failing is its lack of interior space. While its rivals will provide room for seven, the Cherokee has difficulty in accommodating four.

But with a long list of equipment and an unbeatable price tag, it's a gift for those who want decent on-road performance with enough guts to tackle to the rough stuff.

cc	3930
max bhp	184
max lb ft	214
max mph	107
0-60 (sec)	9.5
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	17.4
30-50	3.5*
50-70	5.3*
Overall mpg	18.1
Touring mpg	20.4
mpg/1000 rpm	29.8
Weight (kg)	1682
Tested	6.1.93
Price now	
* kickdown	£18,995



Chrysler Viper



For Massive performance, grip, handling, price
Against Noise, gearchange, hood design, boot space

Verdict ★★★★★ One bite and you're hooked

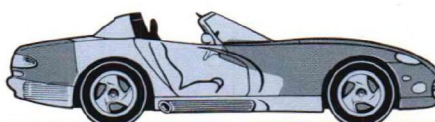
If you like your thrills raw, the Viper is for you. With its eight-litre V10 truck engine producing 400bhp and 450lb ft of torque, this all-American hot-rod packs a punch that will terminate a Testarossa, pulverise a Porsche 928.

Its acceleration is explosive; zero to 60mph in 4.6secs, zero to 100mph in 10.7secs. Floor the throttle at 30mph and you'll be cruising at the legal limit in 3.7secs — a figure that was unprecedented in the history of our production car road tests until the Jaguar XJ220 came along.

But there's so much more to the Viper than drag-strip muscle. With rear tyres that are only 2in narrower than those fitted to the back of a Formula 1 car, the Chrysler offers grip that's beyond that of any front-engined car in our experience. And not only will it hang on as well as many mid-engined rivals, it's also a lot more friendly when it does let go.

Of course, the Viper is not perfect; the drone from the V10 is tiring, wind noise is deafening, water pours in through the makeshift top and the boot space is simply pathetic. But to criticise its failings is to miss the point. Its purpose is to provide the ultimate driving pleasure. It doesn't disappoint.

cc	7997
max bhp	400
max lb ft	450
max mph	167
0-60 (sec)	4.6
30-70	3.7
1/4 mile	13.1
30-50	3.7
50-70	10.1
Overall mpg	15.0
Touring mpg	22.3
mpg/1000 rpm	50.8
Weight (kg)	1522
Tested	28.4.93
Price now	£55,000



Citroen ZX 1.8i Aura



For The best chassis in the class, outstanding value
Against Mediocre rear room, cheap-looking dash, gearing

Verdict ★★★★★ Pips a Peugeot 306 to the post

Citroen may not be the innovator it once was but it still knows a trick or two. When it equipped the ZX with corner-force sensitive, passive-steer rear suspension, it endowed the car with handling finesse that left competitors floundering.

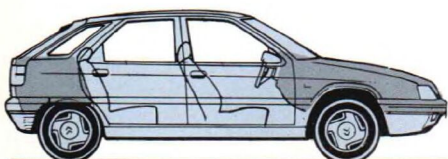
This year, though, the ZX faced a serious threat to its class supremacy with the introduction of the Peugeot 306 — a car boasting the same engine range and same rear-steer suspension, from a company with a renowned expertise in ride and handling development. Given such a level playing field, many expected the 306 to be superior.

It's a testament to the ZX's peerless dynamic qualities that it didn't quite turn out that way. Although the 306 1.8 XT is a little quicker than the equivalent 1.8 Aura (thanks to shorter gearing) and has a roomier, smarter interior, point the two cars at a challenging road and you will still marginally prefer the Citroen.

It also scores over its rival in interior noise and at the pumps, where the taller gearing repays its performance penalty.

By our reckoning that just keeps the 1.8 Aura out front — but only by a neck.

cc	1761
max bhp	103
max lb ft	113
max mph	109
0-60 (sec)	11.0
30-70	12.2
1/4 mile	18.2
30-50	12.5
50-70	7.5
Overall mpg	26.6
Touring mpg	37.1
mph/1000 rpm	21.9
Weight (kg)	1070
Tested	31.3.93
Price now	£11,875



Citroen ZX 1.8i Furio



For Class-leading ride/handling, cheap to buy and insure
Against Gear ratios, refinement, cramped in the back

Verdict ★★★★★ Insurance a headache? This is the cure

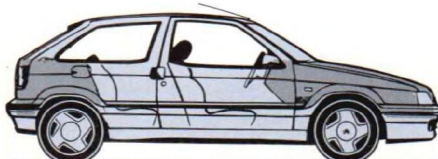
There's no escaping them; insurance-friendly warm hatches are here to stay. But in any case they're only warm because hot now means red-hot rods like the Golf VR6. Six years ago you'd have been happy with a car as fast as this one and very happy indeed if you car was this one, the 112mph Citroen ZX Furio.

It looks good on paper the Furio. The ZX has the best chassis in its class, period, and of the less than world-beating collection of engines Citroen owns, the 1.8-litre eight-valver with 103bhp and 113lb ft of torque is at least quite flexible.

The result is a delight to drive. This ZX has poise, balance, fluency and finesse in reserve. The performance, however, doesn't quite match it — a well-driven XR3i will leave the Furio behind. Citroen's choice of gear ratios are to blame, with a huge gap between first and second and ponderous acceleration in second.

But at £11,095 and insurance premiums in group 11 to pay, Citroen's scheming pays off. Infuriating gearing apart, you'll put up with 10sec-plus 0-60mph for the sense of satisfaction this ZX can still give you on a challenging road.

cc	1761
max bhp	103
max lb ft	113
max mph	112
0-60 (sec)	10.7
30-70	11.1
1/4 mile	18.0
30-50	11.4
50-70	12.3
Overall mpg	26.6
Touring mpg	37.1
mph/1000 rpm	21.9
Weight (kg)	1075
Tested	2.12.93
Price now	£11,095



Citroen Xantia 1.8i SX



For Superb ride, solid build, overall refinement, theft protection
Against Dated engine, poor performance, not frugal enough

Verdict ★★★ More than a BX, not quite a ZX

Compared with Citroen's inspirational ZX, the Xantia has 'caution' written all over it. But then to have built a radical, potentially controversial Mondeo rival would have been too great a risk.

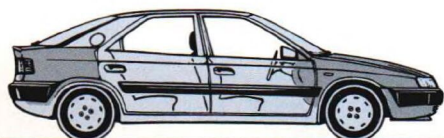
The Xantia, however, is much more than a bland 'new' BX. Its appearance is fresh and modern, its character is richer and more sophisticated. And no one can fault its spacious five-seat interior, impressive build and high level of theft protection.

What lets the side down is the Xantia's ageing eight-valve engine. Not only does it inflict the Citroen with dull performance, it also becomes noisy and gruff-sounding when revved. It is only averagely frugal, too.

But the mediocre mechanicals are more than made up for with a quality of ride that is unparalleled in this class. Not only is it impressive when coping with motorway surfaces, it is equally adept at absorbing city street ruts and potholes.

There's little to complain either about the Xantia's price tag. No, all the car really lacks is a better engine and the ability to involve its driver on the road more. In such a tough class, however, that's the difference between a hit and a very near miss.

cc	1761
max bhp	103
max lb ft	112
max mph	115
0-60 (sec)	11.9
30-70	12.1
1/4 mile	18.4
30-50	7.9
50-70	12.5
Overall mpg	26.7
Touring mpg	36.3
mpg/1000 rpm	20.6
Weight (kg)	1231
Tested	19.5.93
Price now	£13,295



Citroen Xantia 1.9 TD VSX



For First-class refinement, handling and ride, looks, gutsy engine
Against Sensitive brakes, flawed ergonomics, average economy

Verdict ★★★★★ Surprise, surprise, another great diesel

No car manufacturer has done more to popularise the diesel engine in the UK than the PSA group, and none of its cars more than the Citroen BX diesel. This Xantia takes over, charged with carrying that unrivalled tradition to a new generation of family car buyers.

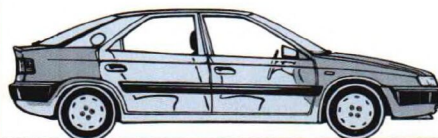
The 1.9-litre 92bhp turbo diesel is the same unit fitted to the Peugeot 405 STD, and as so often, these two stablemates are each other's strongest competition. Of the two, the Xantia is usefully the cheaper.

Refinement is the VSX's strong suit, a quality to be found in both powertrain and chassis. This is a very quiet diesel indeed, and one which is delightfully smooth to drive thanks to perfectly chosen gear ratios, a sweet gearchange and forgiving clutch.

Hydractive II suspension is what sets the VSX apart from the £2000 cheaper SX, and it repays the investment handsomely. Not only does it corner fast and flat and dismiss broken blacktop but it also provides tactile information about the road surface entirely missing from the lesser model.

Average economy and featherweight brakes are small minuses; the Xantia is a front runner that will take some catching.

cc	1905
max bhp	92
max lb ft	148
max mph	111
0-60 (sec)	13.4
30-70	15.3
1/4 mile	19.3
30-50	9.6
50-70	12.3
Overall mpg	32.0
Touring mpg	44.5
mpg/1000 rpm	25.3
Weight (kg)	1221
Tested	8.9.93
Price now	£15,995



Daihatsu Mira



For Capable handling, easy to park, rarity value
Against Price, performance, noise, luggage space

Verdict ★★ A high price just to be different

Novelty value is surely the only reason anyone would spend £6500 on a Mira. This tall and narrow-waisted Japanese mini-car may turn heads out on the streets, but on paper it makes little sense.

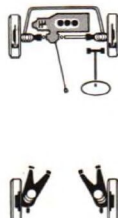
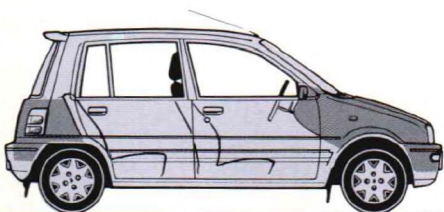
Consider that for almost £1500 less, you could buy a Fiat Cinquecento which, almost without exception, does everything better than the Mira and has considerably more style. For a bit more, you could buy a highly-acclaimed Nissan Micra or Peugeot 106.

Powered by a three-cylinder, 847cc engine, the Mira offers little in the way of performance. It takes a leisurely 21sec to reach 60mph and runs out at 82mph. It's not even super-economical, averaging just over 40 to the gallon and at anything other than tickover, the Daihatsu is plain noisy.

But kept to its natural habitat of city streets, the Daihatsu make you smile with kart-like steering responses. And thanks to compact dimensions and tight turning circle, no parking space is too small.

But the car's narrow stance takes its toll on interior space, particularly shoulder room and with the rear seats in place, luggage space is minimal.

cc	847
max bhp	40
max lb ft	48
max mph	82
0-60 (sec)	21.1
30-70	27.9
1/4 mile	21.9
30-50	14.8
50-70	38.4
Overall mpg	40.5
Touring mpg	50.0
mpg/1000 rpm	18.4
Weight (kg)	683
Tested	3.2.93
Price now	£6395



Daihatsu Charade 1.3 GLXi 5dr



For Ride quality, engine refinement, fuel economy, boot space
Against Plain interior, ordinary in-gear performance, quite pricey

Verdict ★★★ Deserves to do well despite the price

This, the fourth car to carry the Charade name, is one of the most important in Daihatsu's history. If the company is to build on the tiny number of cars it brings to the UK, then the Charade, fighting in the highly competitive supermini sector — has to be a hit.

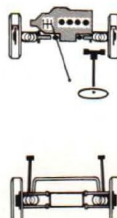
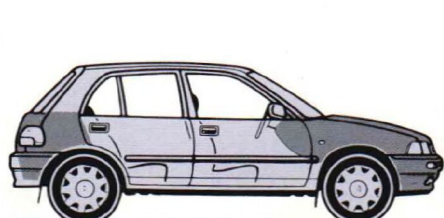
A tactic Daihatsu has not employed is to offer the Charade at a bargain price. Standard-fit power steering has to be taken into account, but even so well-established competitors like the Fiat Uno 1.4ie S and Vauxhall Corsa 1.4i GLS are usefully cheaper. Clearly Daihatsu believes it can compete on merit.

The peaky nature of the single-cam 16-valve powerplant means the 1.3 GLXi lacks a little in-gear flexibility, but the engine's refined, free-revving nature and a positive gearshift are compensations. What's more, enthusiastic use is not penalised in heavy fuel consumption.

Ride quality is superb, and the handling, aided by the power steering, is sprightly despite only modest grip. Rear seat room rates only average, but the driving position is first-class and there's a large boot.

All of which adds up to no class win, but a package definitely worthy of success.

cc	1296
max bhp	84
max lb ft	77
max mph	103
0-60 (sec)	10.8
30-70	11.4
1/4 mile	18.0
30-50	11.4
50-70	20.1
Overall mpg	35.6
Touring mpg	47.9
mpg/1000 rpm	21.4
Weight (kg)	841
Tested	4.8.93
Price now	£9520



Daihatsu Charade 1.6 GSXi 3dr



For Outstanding wet weather grip, good fuel economy
Against Expensive compared with the opposition, dull interior

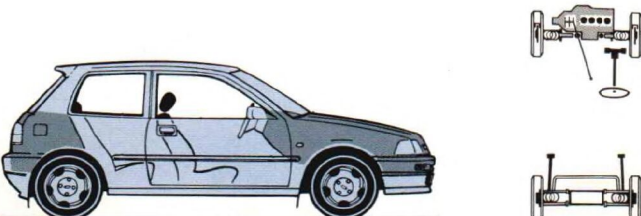
Verdict ★★★ Great fun but no Clio RSi

Building on the solid basis provided by humbler Charades, the GSXi aims to scale the dizzying dynamic heights mapped out by Renault's Clio RSi and Peugeot's 106 XSi. Again Daihatsu reckons its product equal to the challenge without assistance from a tempting price tag — measured up against its peers it looks distinctly expensive, in fact, particularly as it is not exactly brimming with equipment.

With the aid of some carefully selected gear ratios the GSXi sprints with the pack, but does not deliver its performance with the same smooth, fuss-free willingness of the 1.3-litre powerplant. Above 4500rpm the 1.6-litre unit rates as distinctly harsh which, slick gearchange notwithstanding, can deter you from making the most of it. Fuel economy is first-rate, though.

Handling and ride are less competitive, falling significantly short of the hugely impressive Renault. In the wet the GSXi scores with a remarkable level of grip, but it cannot match the inspirational quality of the RSi or its bump-smothering ride.

In other respects — accommodation, build quality, safety, noise — the fastest Charade just about holds its own.



cc	1590
max bhp	105
max lb ft	99
max mph	111
0-60 (sec)	9.5
30-70	9.6
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	8.9
50-70	12.6
Overall mpg	32.0
Touring mpg	40.3
mph/1000 rpm	20.0
Weight (kg)	875
Tested	2.6.93
Price now	£10,850

Fiat Cinquecento SX



For Price, packaging, looks, handling, ride and refinement
Against Nasty gearchange, poor front seats

Verdict ★★★★★ If you're looking for a baby star, start here

The budget car class has a shining new star. Fiat's Polish-built Cinquecento captures all the charm and style of a Mini, but adds the all-round ability and efficiency of a street-smart modern hatch. And all this at a price that should have customers queuing up.

As a city car, the Cinquecento reigns supreme. It is stylish, well-designed and has that elusive quality of making you feel good just to be on board.

The design of its pushrod 899cc engine may be long in the tooth, but the now fuel-injected unit has the ability to make the Fiat feel much livelier than performance figures suggest. The only disappointment is the obstructive gearchange.

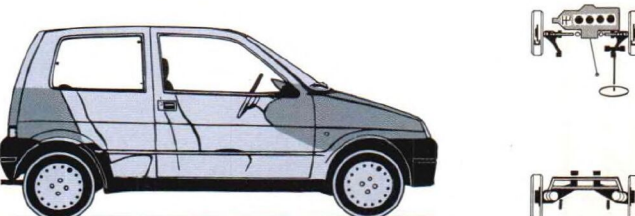
The engine is quiet, surprisingly refined and averages 42 miles to a gallon, making it one of the most frugal petrol cars around.

On the streets, the Cinquecento feels nimble and agile. With a turning circle of just 8.8m and light, responsive steering, the Fiat will use spaces you'd normally ignore.

Inside, there's space for four average adults to sit in comfort, though the front seats lack under-thigh support.

Until Renault decides to sell its Twingo in the UK, this Fiat is the baby to beat.

cc	899
max bhp	41
max lb ft	48
max mph	83
0-60 (sec)	20.3
30-70	24.9
1/4 mile	21.8
30-50	15.1
50-70	29.3
Overall mpg	42.1
Touring mpg	46.1
mph/1000 rpm	17.9
Weight (kg)	727
Tested	9.6.93
Price now	£5416



Fiat Tipo 16v 3dr



For Characterful engine, bargain price, fun when pushed
Against Poor fuel economy, dated cabin, unimpressive build

Verdict ★★★ Flawed fun

Fiat's combatant in the two-litre 16-valve, three-door hot hatch market is not the fastest in its class, nor is it the best handler. Neither can it match the build quality or first-rate packaging of rivals like the Vauxhall Astra GSi 16v and VW Golf GTi 16v.

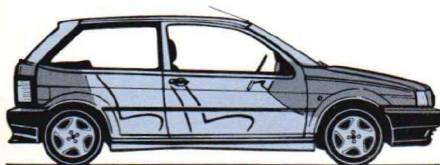
Take a look at the three manufacturers' price lists, though, and suddenly the Tipo 16v's attraction becomes clear — it undercuts the Vauxhall by £2086 and the Volkswagen by a massive £2304. Even though it lacks standard anti lock brakes, it is the bargain in its class.

It also has strong attractions beyond the showroom, despite being outgunned by its costlier competitors. As any Italian performance car should, it has character in abundance.

Beginning with the engine which, although it won't reel in the horizon with quite the alacrity of the Astra or Golf, sings such a sweet song that the others sound tone deaf.

On skinnier tyres the Tipo runs out of grip sooner and does not display such fine damping control, but it does offer the skilful driver a level of entertaining adjustability that even the Golf struggles to emulate.

cc	1995
max bhp	142
max lb ft	135
max mph	134
0-60 (secs)	8.1
30-70	7.8
1/4 mile	16.4
30-50	8.2
50-70	11.1
Overall mpg	26.7
Touring mpg	33.2
mph/1000 rpm	20.6
Weight (kg)	1160
Tested	13/10/93
Price now	£13,694



Ford Fiesta XR2i



For Quick across country, strong engine, great grip
Against Frightening insurance costs, heavy steering

Verdict ★★★ Too much insurance for too little car

Ford's junior hot hatch may have invented the category but in recent years it has found itself beleaguered by capable and mostly superior competitors.

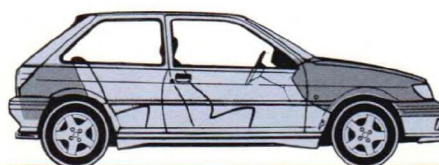
Had word reached the criminal classes that the XR2i is no longer the pocket rocket of choice, that would at least have relieved the car's crippling insurance costs. Unfortunately for Ford, the XR2i remains the target of thieves who don't know any better — hence swingeing group 14 insurance whereas competitors rate only 11.

Although not the fastest in the class, the XR2i is certainly no slouch. Torque is the 1.8-litre Zetec engine's strong suit, and has the added advantage of minimising use of the vague and sometimes baulky gearchange.

Thanks to relatively fat tyres the Ford also grips impressively, making it a quick car on fast roads. In real roller coaster conditions, though, it cannot match the cornering finesse of the Renault Clio RSi and Peugeot 106XSi, and rides less well too.

Braking is up to class standards as are build quality, passive safety and interior space, but tyre rumble is intrusive. And the unassisted steering is heavy, too.

cc	1796
max bhp	105
max lb ft	113
max mph	116
0-60 (secs)	9.4
30-70	9.3
1/4 mile	17.1
30-50	6.0
50-70	9.1
Overall mpg	29.0
Touring mpg	36.0
mph/1000 rpm	19.1
Weight (kg)	974
Tested	2/6/93
Price now	£10,495



Ford Escort 1.6i Ghia



For Fine ride, brakes, solid build, economical, well equipped
Against Poor performance, stodgy gearchange, ugly facia

Verdict ★★★ Twice the car it was before

Let no one tell you Ford never listens. Seemingly hours after a shock wave of criticism greeted the arrival of last new Escort, Ford engineers were back at their drawing boards. With the unveiling of Escort II last autumn, scarcely a complaint from critic or customer has gone unaddressed.

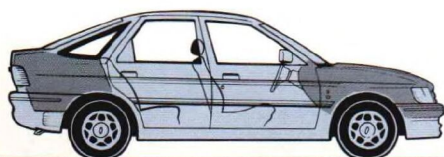
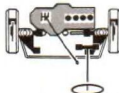
While the new Escort's love-it or hate-it nose and oddball tail were specifically designed to drag the car out of anonymity, Ford's attention went much deeper. Under the bonnet, for the first time, was a 1.6-litre twin cam, 16-valve Zetec engine. The suspension incorporated revisions first seen on the XR3i. Power steering became standard.

The end result is laudable. Ford has turned a lame duck into a real contender. And much of the transformation is down to the revised chassis. Cornering is now much sharper and crisper, the ride is now well-damped and genuinely excellent.

Add to these qualities, the Escort's spacious interior, its additional safety measures and improved build quality and it has become the car it should always have been.

Relative sloth apart, the Ford is now, for the first time, able to look class-leaders like the Citroen ZX and VW Golf in the eye.

cc	1597
max bhp	90
max lb ft	99
max mph	111
0-60 (secs)	11.9
30-70	12.4
1/4 mile	18.6
30-50	11.3
50-70	17.5
Overall mpg	30.7
Touring mpg	38.1
mph/1000 rpm	22.6
Weight (kg)	1140
Tested	21/10/92
Price now	£11,960



Ford Escort XR3i



For Quite spacious, well built and finished, ride quality
Against Very expensive to insure, unexciting to drive

Verdict ★★★ Grippy but unrewarding insurance nightmare

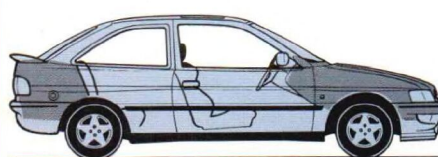
As with Ford's junior hot hatch, so with the senior one: like the XR2i, the XR3i sets out with a crippling handicap courtesy of the insurance companies. While a competitor like Citroen's ZX Furio finds itself in insurance group 11, the hapless Ford is saddled with group 15. So even if it were a more inspiring car to drive than the Citroen, it would have a big insurance millstone round its

Not that XR3i is as rewarding; far from it. It outdoes the Frenchman in performance - although a 0-60mph time of 9.9secs is hardly quick - and returns better fuel economy as well. But in ride/handling balance, the ultimate arbiter of a sporting car's success, it falls crucially behind.

Grip is not the problem but rather the fashion in which it is deployed. Without the benefit of the Citroen's passive-steer rear suspension, the Ford is a carhorse beside a Derby winner. Its reflexes are slower, its adjustability less pronounced, its steering mute - in short, it's not much fun. And it rides less well into the bargain.

Refinement, cabin space, build quality and side impact protection claw back some of the lost ground, but not enough.

cc	1796
max bhp	104
max lb ft	113
max mph	118
0-60 (secs)	9.9
30-70	10.0
1/4 mile	17.4
30-50	8.9
50-70	13.6
Overall mpg	29.0
Touring mpg	33.0
mph/1000 rpm	22.5
Weight (kg)	1130
Tested	2/12/92
Price now	£12,710



Ford Mondeo 1.8i GLX 4dr



For Clarity of design, ride and handling, interior, ergonomics
Against Not enough room in the back, quite thirsty

Verdict ★★★★★ The state of the mid-size saloon art

The Mondeo is Ford showing the world just what it can do when it really tries. And for those manufacturers who were expecting the Sierra replacement to be as mean-spirited and second-rate as the Escort, it must have come as a profound shock.

By letting engineers, not marketing men, have the last say in the product, Ford has shot from the bottom to the top of the class in one leap. And this 1.8-litre version is absolutely the best of them all.

Dynamically, it scarcely puts a foot wrong with a chassis which leads the field both for its ride quality and its handling which manages the rare trick of proving both safe and entertaining. Its engine is no crowd puller, it's true, but at least provides reasonable performance and quiet cruising.

Inside, if you can forgive its lack of rear headroom, you'll find a cabin packed with sensible, attractive ergonomics, up-to-date-minute safety equipment and the finest seats and driving position in the class.

The result is a car that bludgeons its rivals into submission with an act that's the most complete, capable performance we've yet seen from a mid-size saloon. A year ago, we wouldn't have believed it.

cc	1796
max bhp	113
max lb ft	116
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	10.4
30-70	10.5
1/4 mile	18.0
30-50	8.6
50-70	14.5
Overall mpg	27.8
Touring mpg	28.4
mph/1000 rpm	21.8
Weight (kg)	1310
Tested	17.3.93
Price now	£13,550

Ford Mondeo 2.0i GLX 4dr



For Terrific handling, great ride, brakes, economy, equipment, price
Against Lack of ultimate rear space

Verdict ★★★★★ Mondeo rules the roost

For anyone seeking mid-sized motoring, it does not get any better than this. Ford's front-drive Mondeo is a revelation; a car that takes on the might of BMW and wins through a combination of exceptional design, first-rate build and sheer all-round ability.

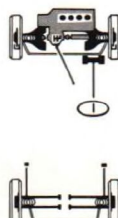
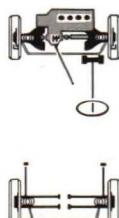
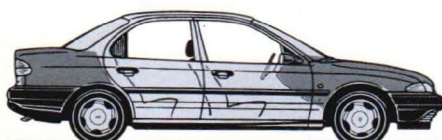
Here is a car that simply feels right; from the uncluttered lines of its body, to the driving enjoyment it provides to anyone behind its wheel. After the lamentably ordinary Escort, this is inspired.

And it is the Mondeo's ability to provide real driving enjoyment that sets it apart. It is a car that can entertain and excite without making high demands on a driver's skill. Whether it's driving along a streaming road or a snaking country lane, the Ford maintains cool, iron-fisted control.

While the Zetec will never match the uncanny smoothness of the Honda unit that's fitted to the rival Accord and Rover 620, it is a lively performer with a crisp urgency in the mid-range. It's economical too.

Inside, it is comfortable, reasonably spacious and offers a driving position that is unbeatable. With driver's airbag, seatbelt pre-tensioners, power steering and sunroof, it is also the best-equipped in its class.

cc	1989
max bhp	134
max lb ft	133
max mph	129
0-60 (sec)	9.6
30-70	9.1
1/4 mile	17.6
30-50	7.9
50-70	12.0
Overall mpg	27.2
Touring mpg	35.3
mph/1000 rpm	21.5
Weight (kg)	1290
Tested	7.4.93
Price now	£14,095



Ford Mondeo 2.0i GLX estate



For Big load space, fine handling and ride, build quality, equipment
Against Overly short gearing, noisy engine, thirsty

Verdict ★★★★★ As good as the hatch and saloon

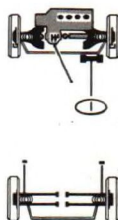
The estate version of Ford's Sierra replacement begins with the enviable advantage that the saloon on which it is based is itself a class leader. In remoulding it as a load carrier, Ford's engineers have not squandered that important head start.

Which is not to say that the Mondeo 2.0 GLX estate is without weaknesses. Excess weight is a significant one, meaning that even with the torquey Zetec engine, short gearing is required to achieve competitive performance. Were the Zetec as refined as it is willing that would be less of a problem, but above 5000rpm the engine is plain harsh. Rapid progress in the Mondeo is therefore not as unruffled as it should be.

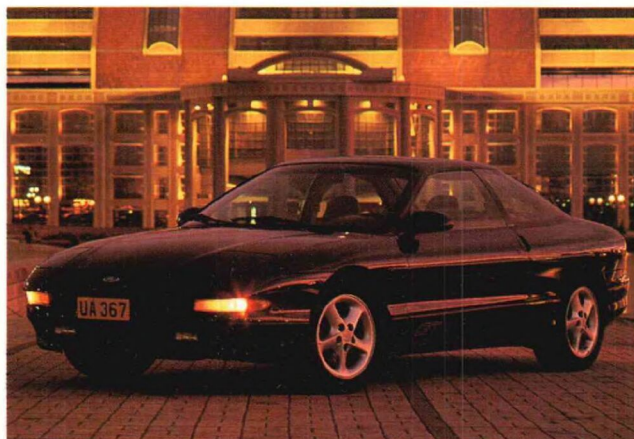
Another casualty of the short gearing is fuel consumption. Particularly when set against the figures achieved by the faster Toyota Carina, the Ford looks positively gluttonous. Our test car was more than 5mpg adrift overall, and that would make a big difference in running costs.

What tips the balance the Mondeo's way is its inspired dynamics, a cavernous load space, good equipment level and fine build. There is no better handling, better riding estate car in this class.

cc	1989
max bhp	134
max lb ft	133
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	9.7
30-70	9.5
1/4 mile	17.4
30-50	11.6
50-70	11.7
Overall mpg	26.3
Touring mpg	26.6
mpg/1000 rpm	19.4
Weight (kg)	1395
Tested	28.7.93
Price now	£15,120



Ford Probe GT



For Great shape, strong brakes, terrific grip, slick gearbox
Against Short gearing, poor refinement, hard ride

Verdict ★★★ Looks good, doesn't go quite so well

It's not often that a major maker dares offer an US-designed car in Europe, but without the Probe, Ford would have been entirely unrepresented in the newly invigorated coupe market that, ironically, it once dominated with the Capri.

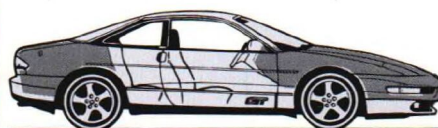
In many respects the svelte Probe has impressive credentials — strong performance, heroic grip and powerful brakes — to complement its eye-catching good looks, but pitched into the backyard of the V6 Vauxhall Calibra and the VW Corrado it has its work cut out.

In acceleration it shades the Calibra due to its shorter gearing, but the Corrado makes it eat dust and still turns in better economy figures. Round corners it counters with tauter body control than the Vauxhall and stronger dry road grip than even the VW, but in truth it's no fun to drive at the limit; sudden understeer intrudes unannounced. Its stiff suspension also crashes and bangs through potholes.

Brakes are marvellous — fade-free and with excellent feel — but on the motorway tyre rumble and the short gearing mean too much noise.

Not a sports car to sink the Corrado nor a tourer to topple the Calibra, right now the Probe falls uncomfortably between stools.

cc	2497
max bhp	164
max lb ft	160
max mph	134
0-60 (sec)	7.9
30-70	8.0
1/4 mile	16.2
30-50	8.9
50-70	9.5
Overall mpg	23.8
Touring mpg	n/a
mpg/1000 rpm	20.6
Weight (kg)	1274
Tested	22.9.93
Price now	£20,000 (est)



Ford Maverick 2.4 GLX 3dr



For Refinement, economy, driver environment
Against The usual off-roader failings

Verdict ★★★ The best of a bad bunch

Credit where credit's due: this is a Nissan with a Ford badge. Ford only supplies extra sales clout — it was Nissan that conducted and paid for the development and now builds the Maverick (along with its own Terrano II) in Spain.

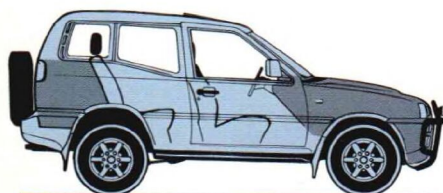
A key design aim was to close the gap between off-roaders and normal cars, and that has been realised — to an extent. Sit in the Maverick, forget how high you are off the ground, and you could believe you are sitting in a regular road car.

Its ergonomics and trim are not standard mud-plugger. Refinement, too, is above the off-roader average. The 2.4-litre engine manages only leisurely performance, but at least it is relatively smooth.

Still, you can't confound the laws of physics. Build a vehicle this high and short, and it will have dreadful aerodynamics, hence the lousy economy, even though the Maverick is less culpable than others. Add a high centre of gravity, and however canny the suspension design, you have compromised cornering and braking.

Cosmetically, the Maverick may be more like a road car than its peers, but under the skin it's still nowhere near.

cc	2389
max bhp	123
max lb ft	145
max mph	99
0-60 (sec)	12.3
30-70	13.5
1/4 mile	n/a
30-50	10.0
50-70	17.7
Overall mpg	18.5
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	21.7
Weight (kg)	1640
Tested	21.7.93
Price now	£19,200



Honda Accord 2.0i LS



For Outstanding engine, fine ride, extremely refined, space
Against Not involving to drive, cheap-looking interior

Verdict ★★★★★ An obedient servant

Honda's new Accord does everything it's asked to do.

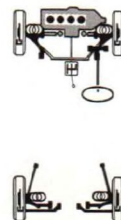
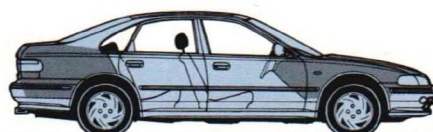
It has class-beating performance and an engine of distinction; it's also remarkably refined and operates with an uncanny smoothness. It's a delight to drive — at modest speeds at least, the car turns into corners swiftly and accurately. And even when pressed hard, it hangs on well in all weather and is never less than stable, faithful and predictable.

Honda's decision to engineer softness into the Accord's chassis has also paid off; the car makes a convincing claim to having the best ride in its class. And the new Accord is one of the most spacious cars in its sector, easily capable of making the cabin of the BMW 3-series or an Audi 80 look cramped.

So why isn't the Accord the best in its class? That's down to details — like the cheap-looking interior trim and the poor quality plastics used in the cabin.

And the Honda is neither cheap enough to meet the fearsomely able new Mondeo head-on, nor sufficiently polished to capture the sense of occasion so prevalent every time you open the door of a BMW 318i. Nevertheless, the Accord is a fine car.

cc	1997
max bhp	131
max lb ft	131
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	9.2
30-70	9.1
1/4 mile	17.0
30-50	8.5
50-70	12.1
Overall mpg	26.4
Touring mpg	35.5
mph/1000 rpm	21.7
Weight (kg)	1286
Tested	24.3.93
Price now	£15,145



Honda Prelude 2.2i VTEC



For Best four-cylinder engine in production, handling, grip, style
Against Cramped in the back, uninspiring facia, tyre roar

Verdict ★★★★★ Great to look at, better to drive

There's no shortage of athletic coupes competing for the performance gold medal. VW's Corrado VR6, Rover's 220i Turbo and Vauxhall's Calibra Turbo 4x4 are among the swelling list of hard-chargers around.

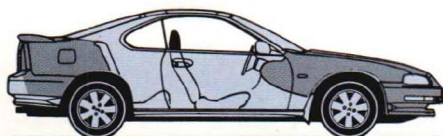
To lead this kind of pack, though, a car has to offer great looks, superb handling and Titan performance. Honda's 2.2i VTEC Prelude offers them all.

Its 183bhp engine with variable valve timing is the best four-cylinder engine in production. It offers as much sparkle at low revs as there is up near the red line. While response is enthusiastic from just 2000rpm, it's at more than 5000rpm that the extra power liberated by VTEC explodes into life.

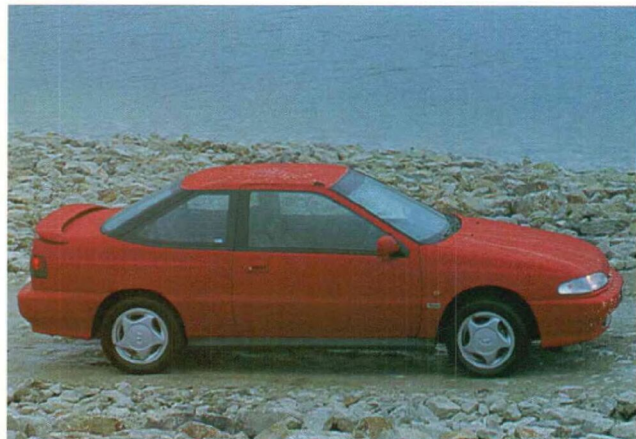
On demanding back lanes, the Prelude's tight body control, whip-crack steering responses and heroic brakes, make it probably the most capable, secure, grippy front-wheel-drive coupe in production.

If there's a weakness, then it's the Honda's lifeless steering. Accurate, it is; informative, it is not. And there's little praise for the cabin's ugly facia and tight rear seat legroom. But this is all that keeps the Prelude from the top slot, which is currently occupied by the Corrado.

cc	2157
max bhp	183
max lb ft	156
max mph	139
0-60 (sec)	7.5
30-70	6.4
1/4 mile	15.3
30-50	8.6
50-70	8.6
Overall mpg	24.6
Touring mpg	33.6
mpg/1000 rpm	18.0
Weight (kg)	410
Tested	27.1.93
Price now	£20,750



Hyundai Scoupe MVTi



For Lively performance, fine economy, generous equipment
Against Disappointing chassis, poor wet-road traction, noise

Verdict ★★★ Good-value Scirocco successor

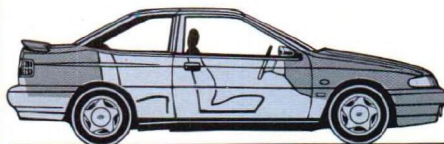
Ever since Volkswagen dropped the Scirocco back in 1991 there hasn't been an obvious choice at the budget end of the sports coupe market. But that changed when the much-improved Scoupe MVTi arrived on the scene, powered by a turbocharged version of the Korean company's new in-house 1.5-litre 'Alpha' engine.

Using Garrett's tiny new T15 turbocharger, the Hyundai's engine delivers its 114bhp with enthusiasm. While it sprints to 60mph from rest in 9.1sec, flexibility is the Hyundai's strongest asset. Throttle response is super-sharp and turbo lag virtually non-existent. Pity though, that the engine sounds so gruff when extended.

Not all is rosy with the car's road manners. Stiffened springs and dampers have given the Scoupe a harsh ride, while the engine's torque and poor traction make it too easy to provoke wheelspin in the wet.

Inside, the well-equipped cabin is spacious for a small coupe, but it's no match for a sporting hatch. But anyone looking for a cheap coupe as an alternative to a hot hatchback should consider the Scoupe. Its price and specification make it the Scirocco's natural successor.

cc	1495
max bhp	114
max lb ft	127
max mph	120
0-60 (sec)	9.1
30-70	8.7
1/4 mile	17.0
30-50	7.5
50-70	9.4
Overall mpg	28.6
Touring mpg	42.6
mpg/1000 rpm	20.5
Weight (kg)	1013
Tested	17.2.93
Price now	£10,999



Isuzu Trooper 3.2 V6 lwb



For Great value for money, performance, chassis ability
Against Conservative styling, poor gearchange, dated instruments

Verdict ★★★★★ One of the most able off-rovers you can buy

No longer the rudimentary workhorse, the softer, more rounded Trooper has been transformed into a fully-fledged recreational off-roader offering something many rivals don't: real value for money.

There's now a sophisticated 24-valve 3.2-litre V6 under that bonnet which, with 174bhp, makes the Trooper the most powerful off-roader this side of the Range Rover. And that longer, wider and taller body rides on a chassis with coil springs instead of agricultural leaf springs at the back.

The transformation is obvious from start up. A mellow V6 burble brings a sense of class and sophistication that no Trooper has ever enjoyed before. And it's powerful, launching the off-roader to 60mph in just 10.9sec. Take to the hills and the Isuzu is in its element, forging effortlessly over terrain that would have grounded or bogged down its predecessor. It's also an accomplished on-road performer, providing its occupants with a smooth ride and high refinement.

Only the cabin draws criticism. The driving position is too upright and instruments look old-fashioned. But there is no shortage of seating space: even with the rear seats in place, it's a generous load carrier.

cc	3165
max bhp	174
max lb ft	192
max mph	102
0-60 (sec)	10.9
30-70	11.6
1/4 mile	18.0
30-50	11.0
50-70	20.2
Overall mpg	17.1
Touring mpg	22.3
mph/1000 rpm	24.5
Weight (kg)	1950
Tested	7.10.92
Price now	£20,149

Jaguar 4.0 Sovereign



For Strong performance and economy, chassis composure, cabin
Against Wind noise, restricted driving position

Verdict ★★★★★ The best XJ6 yet

You have to look hard to spot the changes made at the end of last year to the XJ6. A new spoiler on the outside, new controls for seats and air conditioning and a driver's side airbag. Not much, it would seem, to fend off BMW's V8 7-series or the Lexus.

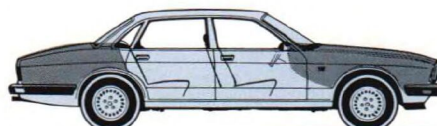
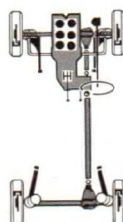
But the changes are more than skin deep. Continued development and honing makes this the best and most accomplished XJ6 to date. Take the engine, for instance. Jaguar will only admit to fitting revised camshafts to reduce noise. Yet from the moment you turn the key, you know something quite fundamental has been changed. At idle, it sounds smooth and sophisticated and when called on to race round to the red line, there is a roar of approval where once there was only grudging tolerance.

It feels more sprightly too, thanks in part to the four-speed ZF automatic 'box, now recalibrated to improve shift quality. Of course, not all is perfect. Despite new and very comfortable seats with more versatile electric controls, it lacks legroom for those much over 6ft.

But without doubt, the XJ6 remains one of the best-value — and most desirable — luxury cars on the market today.

cc	3980
max bhp	223
max lb ft	278
max mph	141
0-60 (sec)	8.2
30-70	7.2
1/4 mile	15.9
30-50	3.0*
50-70	4.2*
Overall mpg	19.6
Touring mpg	28.1
mph/1000 rpm	28.3
Weight (kg)	1810
Tested	28.10.92
Price now	£39,800

* kickdown



Daimler Double Six



For The return of the Coventry V12, gearbox, ride quality, price
Against Ultimate refinement, space, on the limit handling

Verdict ★★★★★ The first and the best real Jaguar for years

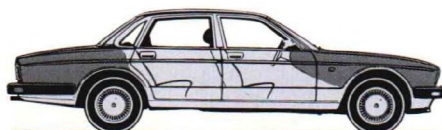
In years to come, we'll say the Daimler Double Six/Jaguar V12 was the car with which Jaguar turned the corner. The marriage, finally, after a tempestuous, six-year on-off relationship, of the XJ40 and Jaguar's greatest engine — now on parade in 318bhp six-litre guise — is a successful one.

Jag's V12 and the revised GM400 box are a killer act. Quieter than a BMW, smoother than a Rolls-Royce, they transform the XJ6. Release the brake on an XJ12 and you'll feel pulled forward by a vast bungee that's attached to the horizon you're heading towards at a not inconsiderable speed: it's pure Browns Lane.

But there's more to this car than just performance. The V12 brings life to the XJ40's chassis, gives a purpose to the J-gate shifter, makes the interior — now better built than ever — seem part of the package and not just through-the-window dressing.

It's not a perfect package. Cars like the S-class can cope, at speed, with surfaces that would reduce the Jag to a crawl, and it's the same story with the handling; where the Merc is blithely holding on, the Jag is fighting for grip. But there's a £20,000 difference in price, and a difference in character that's nothing short of priceless.

cc	5944
max bhp	318
max lb ft	342
max mph	155
0-60 (sec)	6.8
30-70	6.5
1/4 mile	17.3
30-50	3.6*
50-70	4.5*
Overall mpg	14.0
Touring mpg	19.3
mph/1000 rpm	26.8
Weight (kg)	1985
Tested	5.5.93
Price now	£54,000
* kickdown	



Jaguar XJ220



For Devastating performance, unrivalled chassis ability
Against A shade expensive, lousy rearward vision

Verdict ★★★★★ Might just be worth £403,000

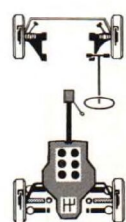
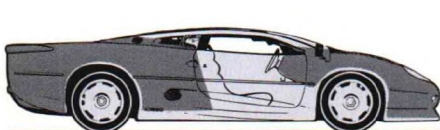
This is the car against which any future supercar must be measured; for sheer speed, beauty and limitless ability, the XJ220 sets a standard that will take a Herculean effort to top.

But it isn't just the raw data that impresses — 0-100mph in 7.9sec and a top speed of 213mph — but the incredible fact that the fastest road car ever tested by this magazine is also a friendly car to drive, invested with a superb gearchange and a marvelously tractable engine as well as a driving position that is among the best in the supercar league. The cabin itself is an airy and comfortable place to spend time.

The handling is simply incomprehensible at first experience; even for the highly experienced, little can prepare you for the reality of just how high the cornering limits are, just how fast the XJ220 can be driven in safety. Simply, this is the best handling supercar we have ever driven.

But the XJ220 is not without its compromises; the boot is practically useless and backing the thing up is a nightmare because of the limited rearward vision. It is also rather expensive. Overpriced? Just five minutes in the big Jag would soften the hardest cynic.

cc	3500
max bhp	542
max lb ft	475
max mph	213
0-60 (sec)	3.6
30-70	2.7
1/4 mile	11.7
30-50	5.8
50-70	6.4
Overall mpg	13.8
Touring mpg	19.1
mph/1000 rpm	28.1
Weight (kg)	1456
Tested	23.6.92
Price now	£403,000



Land Rover Discovery 3.9i V8 5dr



For Good gearbox, driving position, versatility, sharp handling
Against Vague steering, wind, tyre, transmission noise

Verdict ★★★★★ Nearly a credible alternative to a luxury saloon

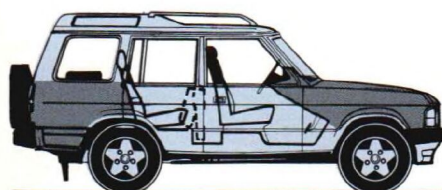
Slotting the 3.9-litre version of the venerable pushrod V8 in place of the 3.5 gives the Discovery twenty per cent more power but only a modest five per cent improvement in performance. No matter, 230lb ft of torque is more important to its driveability making it a more relaxing drive than before. Especially if you opt for the £1150 ZF four-speed automatic gearbox, making this the most expensive Discovery you can buy.

While you're at it, we would also recommend going for the £408 'Freestyle Choice' option, especially if you intend to keep your Discovery on the tarmac most of the time. This includes front and rear anti-roll bars and fatter 225/70 tyres which tidy up the handling nicely.

As for the 'box, it makes a fine fist of slurring smoothly between the ratios and is willing to kick down into third for reasonably swift overtaking.

And, of course, original Discovery values run deep like the cavernous interior with its twin sunroofs and myriad of storage pockets. That commanding driving position takes some beating, too. A light right foot is essential, though — the 3.9 loves the taste of unleaded.

cc	3947
max bhp	180
max lb ft	230
max mph	105
0-60 (sec)	12.9
30-70	13.4
1/4 mile	n/a
30-50	5.1*
50-70	8.3*
Overall mpg	17.0
Touring mpg	23.0
mpg/1000 rpm	26.6
Weight (kg)	1927
Tested	10.11.93
Price now	£21,494
*kickdown	



Lexus GS300



For Very high specification, grip, stunning build, brakes
Against Unexceptional handling, small boot, low-speed ride

Verdict ★★★★★ BMW breathes again

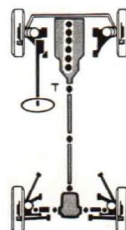
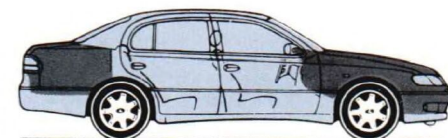
The second car to carry the Lexus name sets its sights a little lower than the LS400. This time the target is not the 7-series BMW (or its Jaguar and Mercedes competitors) but the 5-series. But by any estimation, that's a nut that's still harder to crack.

As far as looks, value, and build quality go, the GS300 is a chip off the LS400 block. No car in this class feels more magnificently put together, though anyone expecting its three-litre straight six to touch the legendary smoothness and refinement of the four-litre unit in its big brother will be disappointed.

So far, so familiar. Unaccountably, though, the excellent ride quality of the LS400 has somehow been squandered. Toyota claims that the increased low-speed fidget is because of a more sporting suspension set-up, but that doesn't quite wash. Though the GS300 has a stable, grippy chassis, it still falls short of its BMW target in involvement and adjustability.

Inside the airy cabin, it wins for rear leg and headroom, loses for dash ergonomics but safety and equipment are first rate. Even so, the Lexus gives best overall to the charismatic BMW.

cc	2997
max bhp	209
max lb ft	202
max mph	139
0-60 (sec)	9.4
30-70	8.4
1/4 mile	17.1
30-50	3.7*
50-70	4.6*
Overall mpg	21.0
Touring mpg	27.4
mpg/1000 rpm	23.3
Weight (kg)	1630
Tested	27.10.93
Price now	£31,950
*kickdown	



Lexus LS400



For Astonishing refinement, build quality, price
Against Lack of kudos, undistinguished looks, poor seats

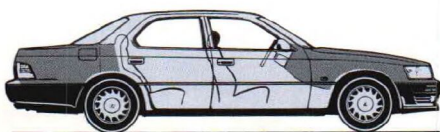
Verdict ★★★★★ No longer the best but still magnificent

Even for mighty Toyota, creating from scratch a top-rank saloon to challenge Jaguar and Mercedes was a daunting undertaking. That the Lexus LS400, when it appeared, gave all the established marques a nasty shock is testament to the thoroughness of Toyota's approach and the resources it brought to bear.

Refinement is the keynote in this sector and here the Lexus is second to none. The combination of its whisper-quiet V8, creamy four-speed automatic transmission and pacific ride put it at the top. If a magic carpet quality is your overriding priority, look no further. Likewise if you demand impeccable build quality at a bargain price.

But there are chinks in the armour. The car's ho-hum styling you might forgive, even like; its uncomfortable front seats and lack of room in the rear are more difficult to ignore. And if you enjoy spirited driving, you will find the LS400 a less enthusiastic partner than its opponents from Jaguar, BMW and Mercedes. Small alterations to the suspension have suppressed the float which once interrupted hurried progress, but still the car cannot tackle challenging roads with the aplomb of its peers.

cc	3969
max bhp	241
max lb ft	258
max mph	147
0-60 (sec)	8.3
30-70	7.1
1/4 mile	16.3
30-50	n/a
50-70	4.1*
Overall mpg	19.7
Touring mpg	23.7
mph/1000 rpm	27.1
Weight (kg)	1763
Tested	5.5.93
Price now	£42,023
* kickdown	



Mazda Xedos 6 2.0i V6



For Distinctive styling, superb smoothness and refinement, value
Against Poor steering, driving position, lacks dynamic coherence

Verdict ★★★★★ Perilously close to a 3-series BMW

Of the flood of good-looking cars to have emerged from a revitalised Mazda in recent years, the Xedos is in many ways the most significant. Beneath those good looks there needs be considerable ability if Mazda is to slug it out with BMW.

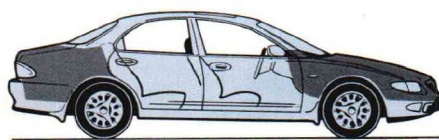
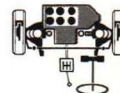
Initial impressions are very good. Though the two-litre, 24-valve V6 has to be operated in the upper half of its 7000rpm rev band to achieve any urgency, it is fabulously tractable and smoother even than Bavarian sixes. It also returns better fuel consumption figures.

Sadly, the transmission lets this inspiring unit down somewhat. Gearchange action is delightful but an abrupt clutch and some shunt spoil stop-start progress.

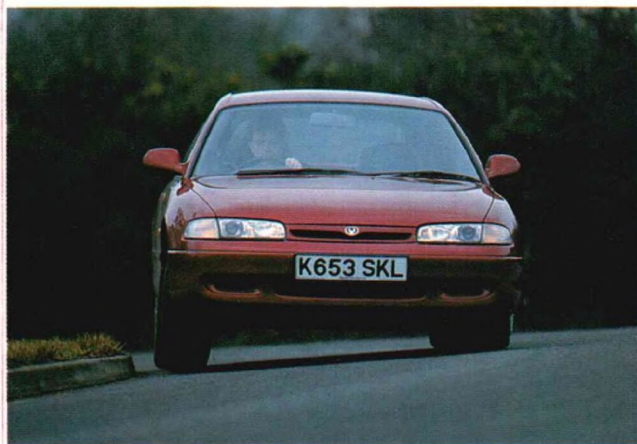
Belying its 626 underpinnings, the Xedos proves a taut, willing handler, compromised only by a lack of agility and lifeless power steering. The standard anti-lock brakes are first class and the ride pliant.

If only the driving position and major controls were better, then the whole car would gel as a tool for the enthusiast. As things stand, though, the impressive Xedos lacks that final edge of sophistication to plunge a dagger into the 3-series' heart.

cc	1995
max bhp	145
max lb ft	129
max mph	132
0-60 (sec)	8.2
30-70	8.3
1/4 mile	16.4
30-50	8.4
50-70	11.8
Overall mpg	25.5
Touring mpg	30.0
mph/1000 rpm	21.1
Weight (kg)	1218
Tested	10.6.92
Price now	£19,240



Mazda 626 1.8i GLX 5dr



For Class-topping performance, slick gearshift, looks
Against AWOL steering, modest grip, firm ride

Verdict ★★★ A solid enough mid-fielder

To stand out in today's fiercely competitive mid-range family saloon market a car needs have a rare spread of abilities. To lead in certain areas but trail in others is a sure-fire recipe for being, on balance, an also-ran.

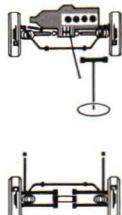
Mazda's 1.8-litre 626 falls plumb into this trap, albeit only when measured against class-leading all-rounders like the Ford Mondeo and Peugeot 405.

The 626's strongest suit, surprisingly, is its performance. As a sprinter it easily sees off all its major rivals (0-60mph in 9.6sec, 30-70mph through the gears in 9.8sec), some of them by an embarrassingly large margin. Partly thanks to a high fifth gear, it also fares well at the pumps.

So far so good, but the 626's dynamic superiority is not held where the tarmac is less than fenland flat. Though its handling is never less than competent and foolproof, it suffers from below-average grip and the least communicative steering in the class. It also has the stiffest ride. So on challenging roads which the Mondeo and Peugeot eat up, the Mazda develops indigestion.

Assessed in isolation, the 626 comes across as a capable, solid performer. But viewed in context, it's falling behind.

cc	1840
max bhp	105
max lb ft	116
max mph	119
0-60 (sec)	9.6
30-70	9.8
1/4 mile	17.3
30-50	14.0
50-70	15.0
Overall mpg	32.1
Touring mpg	35.6
mpg/1000 rpm	24.4
Weight (kg)	1192
Tested	17.3.93
Price now	£13,495



Mercedes C180 Classic



For Ride, failsafe handling, build, interior space, brakes, safety
Against Price, none too spritely, low equipment level

Verdict ★★★★★ A superb achievement. Watch out BMW

Tentry-level C-class competes grille to grille with a car which, until now, has swept all before it: the BMW 318i. There's no shirking the confrontation: the new Merc has to at least equal the 3-series or things look bleak for it.

Begin the comparison with performance and the C180 does not make the best start. Top speed may be comparable, but getting there takes much longer. From rest the C180 is 1.0sec adrift by 60mph, 2.7sec by 100mph, and lags by 1.0sec in the crucial 30-70mph overtaking benchmark.

It makes a strong comeback, though, in handling and ride, falling short of the BMW only in entertainment and turning the tables on it with standard-setting ride absorbency. The C180's anti-lock brakes are better too, and, in contrast to the C220, it also comes out ahead in refinement.

Add in superior rear accommodation, equal equipment and the traditional Mercedes hallmarks of top-class build quality and passive safety and, all told, the two German heavyweights emerge with honours even.

You'd be thrilled to bits with either but though we'd rather drive the BMW, we'd also rather own the Mercedes.

cc	1799
max bhp	120
max lb ft	125
max mph	120
0-60 (sec)	11.2
30-70	11.2
1/4 mile	18.0
30-50	15.5
50-70	16.2
Overall mpg	26.8
Touring mpg	30.8
mpg/1000 rpm	18.1
Weight (kg)	1222
Tested	20.10.93
Price now	£17,600



Mercedes C220 Elegance



For Looks, build quality, best ride in this class, handling
Against Coarse engine, modest performance, expensive

Verdict ★★★★★ All the right Mercedes values, bar the engine

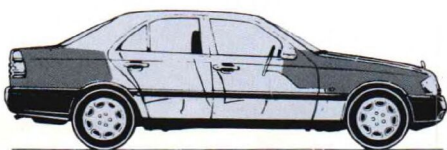
The world's oldest car maker, is at a crucial point in its history. As the direction of the company is reassessed and the European recession bites hard, the job of the new C-class is to hold the fort.

Which it does in familiar, evolutionary fashion, whatever the revolution to come. Although available in a wider, gaudier range of styling options, the C-class upholds established Mercedes priorities of unimpeachable build, unsurpassed safety and understated engineering excellence.

The chassis is first-rate. With double wishbone front suspension derived from the S-class and a 190-style multi-link set-up at the rear, it combines class-leading ride quality with unflappable body control and immensely stable, secure cornering. A little more incisiveness would not go amiss, but then the Elegance does have the range's least sporting suspension settings.

Space within the new body is impressive although the standard equipment level is miserly as usual. What lets the C220 down, sadly, is its uninspiring four-pot engine, which compounds leisurely performance with disappointing harshness. But for this undistinguished powerplant, the C220 would be class champion.

cc	2199
max bhp	150
max lb ft	155
max mph	130
0-60 (sec)	9.5
30-70	9.4
1/4 mile	17.5
30-50	3.6
50-70	5.8
Overall mpg	24.9
Touring mpg	32.5
mpg/1000 rpm	23.7
Weight (kg)	1328
Tested	8.9.93
Price now	£21,500
* kickdown	



Mercedes E280



For Powerful, economical new engine, ride and refinement, safety
Against Driving position, rear seat legroom, poor traction

Verdict ★★★★★ Growing old with grace and style

For 300E, now read E280. Instead of three-litre power for Mercedes-Benz's mid-range W124 model, there's a more-efficient, and more powerful, 2799cc twin-cam, four-valves-per-cylinder 'six' riding beneath that star.

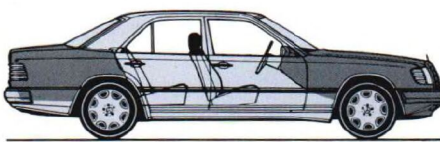
Surprisingly, the E280 is no swifter than its forebear, despite the 8bhp increase. A surprise but hardly a disappointment. It will still sprint from rest to 60mph in 8.1sec and pass 100mph in 22.1sec. Seated behind that over-sized wheel, it feels faster.

Few engines are smoother than this six. Likewise the automatic 'box, which comes close to perfection. The main reasons for the new units, though, is improved economy and reduced emissions. Judging by the 22.2mpg the E280 returned in our test, it looks like the money was well-spent. Drive it gently and you could realise 30mpg, a fine result for such a large and fast car.

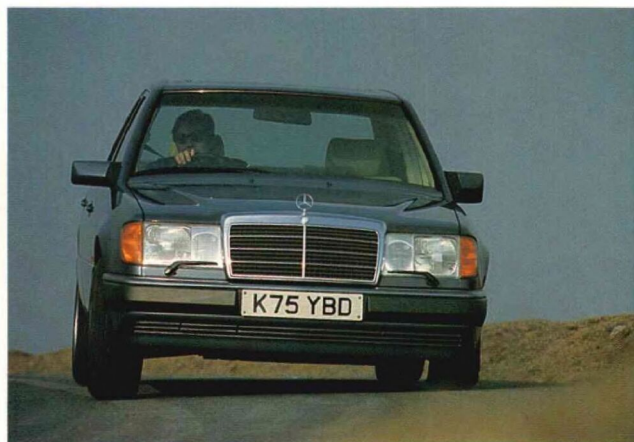
With an unchanged chassis, the emphasis here is once more on comfort and smoothness rather than driver enjoyment. And with no changes inside, the interior design is beginning to show its age.

BMW's may be better to drive, but is there a better saloon to live with long term than this for under £30,000? We doubt it.

cc	2799
max bhp	197
max lb ft	199
max mph	138
0-60 (sec)	8.1
30-70	7.7
1/4 mile	16.3
30-50	3.1
50-70	4.6
Overall mpg	22.2
Touring mpg	29.2
mpg/1000 rpm	23.6
Weight (kg)	1471
Tested	9.12.92
Price now	£28,950
* kickdown	



Mercedes E320



For Smooth gearbox, potent engine, good handling and ride, build
Against Expensive and poorly equipped, oldish body

Verdict ★★★★★ One of the most desirable in its class

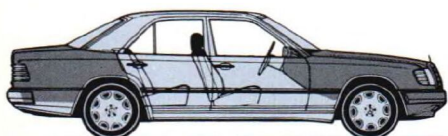
Even though the W124 saloon has been around for eight years, it remains one of the most desirable cars in its class; with a silken 3.2-litre straight six producing 220bhp residing under the bonnet, this E-class is, bar the left-hand drive only E500, the most desirable of all.

Those who need convincing of the E320's performance credentials need only witness a 0-60 time of 7sec and top speed of 142mph. And those figures were obtained on a car fitted with Mercedes Benz's four-speed automatic 'box.

The Mercedes handles, too, especially when fitted with the £1100 Sportline handling package which consists of lowered, stiffened suspension, and alloy wheels riding on 205/60 tyres. It's well worth it; an E320 so equipped handles with superb assurance, complemented by beautifully weighted steering.

But even in the face of sterling residual values, the E320 could hardly be called good value for money. On a car costing in excess of £30,000 it is galling in the extreme that Mercedes expects yet more money for simple items like a basic sound system and metallic paint.

cc	3199
max bhp	220
max lb ft	228
max mph	142
0-60 (sec)	7.0
30-70	6.5
1/4 mile	15.4
30-50	3.9
50-70	5.5
Overall mpg	18.4
Touring mpg	21.5
mph/1000 rpm	23.3
Weight (kg)	1544
Tested	30.6.93
Price now	£35,100



Mercedes SE500



For Refinement, chassis control, interior, safety, build
Against Unappealing shape, expensive

Verdict ★★★★★ The greatest saloon in the world

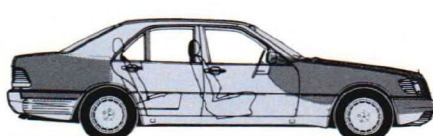
Until you actually go for a long ride in a 500SE, it's hard to see what it is which earns it, without the slightest doubt in our minds, the title of being the finest saloon money can buy.

You can point to the fact that a Lexus is as mechanically refined, that a Jaguar has a more special interior, that a 7-series is more fun to drive and that all are much cheaper, but you cannot say that any one of these is a better car.

Mercedes' skill is not to excel in any one area (though there's none to touch its build quality) merely to be pulverisingly able in all. That might make it a little soulless but the busy executive with 500 miles ahead and not a lot of time to complete it will be the first to forgive this. Machine-tool it may be but when it really comes to it, in those conditions where you need safety, comfort and speed above everything else, there is no touching this Mercedes.

Add to that the presumption of a 200,000-mile life expectancy without major mechanical defect and the pure sense of occasion present every time you open the garage door and you can see why, even at £63,000 before the extras, it's worth every penny

cc	4793
max bhp	326
max lb ft	354
max mph	155
0-60 (sec)	6.8
30-70	5.7
1/4 mile	n/a
30-50	n/a
50-70	n/a
Overall mpg	17.0
Touring mpg	22.0
mph/1000 rpm	25.0
Weight (kg)	1730
Tested	5.5.93
Price now	£63,300



Mitsubishi Galant 2.0i V6 4dr



For Silky smooth engine, refinement, economy, value for money
Against Uninvolving handling, lifeless steering, drab interior

Verdict ★★★★★ Sensible car that lacks soul

Mitsubishi's Galant presents a powerful argument for the sensible motorist. At under £18,000, it offers a wealth of equipment wrapped up in a body that, from most angles, looks fresh and exciting. And it comes with one of the most flexible and refined two-litre powerplants on sale.

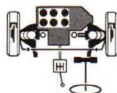
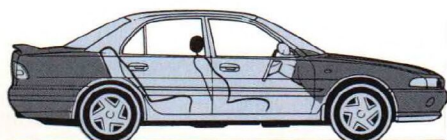
But anyone seeking a car that is more than just sensible is likely to be underwhelmed by the Galant. It needs a chassis that entertains and informs, and steering that communicates more effectively.

For the traditional Mitsubishi buyer, though, the car's exceptional smoothness and refinement from its jewel-like V6 will prove an irresistible draw. It revs to a heady 8000rpm with none of the buzzy vibration that plagues most four-pot units; it hustles the car to 60mph in a respectable 8.7sec; and offers impressive flexibility.

Add to this its excellent fuel economy, spacious accommodation, an impressive list of standard equipment, first-class build quality and traditionally high resale values, then the Galant makes a great deal of sense.

But for those seeking a more satisfying car to drive are likely to find a lack of soul.

cc	1996
max bhp	147
max lb ft	132
max mph	128
0-60 (sec)	8.7
30-70	8.6
1/4 mile	16.7
30-50	8.5
50-70	11.9
Overall mpg	26.5
Touring mpg	36.5
mph/1000 rpm	19.6
Weight (kg)	1260
Tested	5.12.93
Price now	£17,919



Mitsubishi Space Wagon 2.0i GLXi



For Sparkling performance, price, car-like manners
Against Wallowy handling when loaded, dull interior

Verdict ★★★★★ The seven-seater hot hatch

Forget about MPVs being big on space and small on driving pleasure. Mitsubishi's Space Wagon offers performance to terrorise many a hot hatch, handling finesse that leaves many so-called sporting cars as dots in its rear view mirror. And at just £14,689, it's one of the best motoring bargains around.

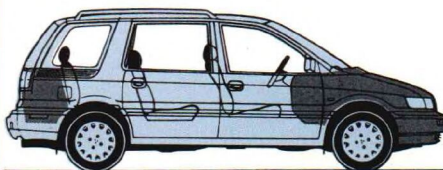
While many of the MPVs currently on offer take the big and bulky approach, the Space Wagon is more car-like in dimensions and appearance. Think of it as a taller estate car and you'll get the picture.

With three rows of seats, there's space for seven in reasonable comfort, though the third row is best suited for youngsters. For the driver, the bucket-like seat is unusually side-hugging and supportive.

Put a two-litre 132bhp engine in any bodyshell that tips the scales at just 1360kg and you can guarantee lively performance. That lack of bulk also ensures reasonable fuel economy. But start to load-up the Mitsubishi and handling suffers; it rolls and wallows on bends and floats over crests.

But for the buyer who's looking for minivan carrying capacity but prefers not to feel as if he's driving a van, the Space Wagon is the perfect compromise.

cc	1997
max bhp	132
max lb ft	130
max mph	112
0-60 (sec)	9.3
30-70	8.9
1/4 mile	17.2
30-50	7.9
50-70	11.5
Overall mpg	27.4
Touring mpg	32.8
mph/1000 rpm	21.4
Weight (kg)	1360
Tested	10.2.93
Price now	£14,689



Nissan Micra 1.0 LX 3dr



For Refinement, space, economy, impressive build, looks, gearchange
Against Dull steering response, lack of fun factor

Verdict ★★★★★ Superminis don't come better than this

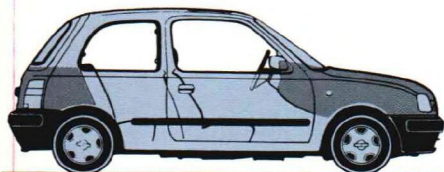
Don't be fooled by the cute looks and Micra badge; Nissan's new baby must be taken entirely seriously. If you're in the market for a small hatch, it deserves attention as much as any Fiesta, Metro, Clio or 106.

Bigger inside and out than the car it replaces, the Micra has been designed to appeal to European tastes more than any Japanese car to date. Yet it hasn't cast aside its traditional virtues — it's still dead easy to drive, and dead easy to own.

It may not be the quickest in its class, but its crisp throttle response, allied to perhaps the slickest, most rewarding gearchange we've come across in a supermini, help it feel brisker than it actually is. And when it comes to a thirst for unleaded, the Micra's 49.9mpg touring figure questions why anyone should turn to diesels for economy.

The Micra is an impressive all-rounder: spacious, comfortable and well equipped. You simply will not find a better-built small car than this. It is unlikely you'll find a quieter one either. If the Micra lacks anything, it is a little excitement. But this won't be high on the list of priorities of most one-litre buyers.

cc	998
max bhp	55
max lb ft	58
max mph	92
0-60 (sec)	15.0
30-70	17.4
1/4 mile	20.0
30-50	12.0
50-70	23.3
Overall mpg	37.7
Touring mpg	49.9
mpg/1000 rpm	18.2
Weight (kg)	840
Tested	9.12.92
Price now	£7595



Nissan Micra 1.3 CVT 5dr



For Smooth transmission, cruising refinement, build quality
Against Uninspiring handling, unsupportive seats

Verdict ★★★★★ The perfect city car

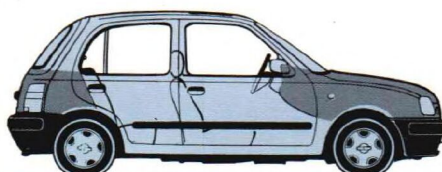
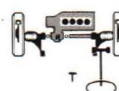
For the past four decades, the concept of CVT — or continuously variable transmission — has seemed perfectly suited to the demands of a city car. But until this year, no car maker has been able to achieve the refinement and smoothness to tempt many buyers from a conventional automatic.

That was before Nissan's innovative N-CVT system, with an electro-magnetic powder clutch in which metal powder progressively magnetises to form the drive to the clutch. N-CVT offers a smoothness and fluidity that no other system has previously achieved. At idle, there's no 'creep' when the selector is in 'D'. Power is fed in progressively, allowing the car to move away as smoothly as a conventional automatic would.

As a city car, the Sunderland-built Micra scores in plenty of other areas. Power steering is optional and with a tight 9.9m turning circle, the Nissan always feels light and nimble out on the streets.

Inside, the Micra's driving position is splendid; you sit high and enjoy excellent all-round vision, while the steering wheel (tilt adjustable) and transmission selector fall perfectly to hand.

cc	1275
max bhp	75
max lb ft	76
max mph	99
0-60 (sec)	12.7
30-70	13.2
1/4 mile	19.2
30-50	4.7
50-70	9.3
Overall mpg	34.4
Touring mpg	38.0
mpg/1000 rpm	n/a
Weight (kg)	850
Tested	3.3.93
Price now	£10,195



Nissan Primera 2.0 SLX estate



For Well-shaped load space, crisp handling, steering and gearshift
Against Ordinary performance, ride, handling when fully loaded

Verdict ★★★★★ A good car worried by better competition

Nissan's Primera was, until just recently, one of our favourite mid-range saloons. It is still a capable and entertaining car to drive, but it's no longer a top drawer candidate, especially with superb newcomers like Ford's Mondeo to contend with.

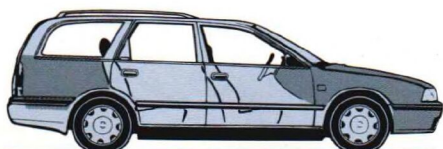
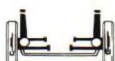
Although the Primera estate remains good enough to see off younger challengers like the Toyota Carina, it again gives second best to the Mondeo.

Not that it goes down without a fight. It matches the Mondeo for performance, betters it on fuel economy and remains a redoubtable handler. Around corners unladen, it and the Ford trade points. Put a load in the back, though, and the Primera slips behind. It also isn't as good at smoothing out road irregularities, particularly when empty.

As a load carrier, the Primera is also wanting. Although its load space is well shaped, the Ford's is significantly larger.

On passive safety, too, the Primera is beginning to show its age; side impact bars will be added in 1994, but standard seatbelt pre-tensioners and a driver's airbag keep the Ford in front.

cc	1998
max bhp	116
max lb ft	122
max mph	120
0-60 (sec)	9.5
30-70	9.8
1/4 mile	17.3
30-50	8.2
50-70	11.7
Overall mpg	28.0
Touring mpg	29.9
mpg/1000 rpm	21.1
Weight (kg)	1200
Tested	28.7.93
Price now	£14,205



Nissan Primera 2.0 SLX 4dr



For First class handling, sweet revving engine
Against Looking a little dated beside newcomers

Verdict ★★★★★ Still tough to beat

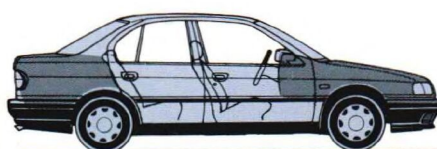
Perhaps not quite the shining star it was now that upstarts like Ford's Mondeo have arrived, the Primera is nonetheless a remarkable achievement. From the expected high quality of build to the now surprisingly familiar Japanese promise of good value for money, the Primera is an utterly convincing all-rounder.

Multi-link rear suspension endows the Primera with responsive and enjoyable handling without making it uncomfortable over bumpy stuff. The two-litre engine doesn't let the first-rate chassis down either, with an eagerness to rev that rewards the enthusiast.

Nissan hasn't been completely niggardly with the specification in SLX guise; electric windows, door mirrors and sunroof, central locking and tilt wheel are all standard. Not quite so impressive is the Primera's safety profile, with driver's airbag and seat-belt pre-tensioner absent at roll call.

The interior offers a fine driving position with a multi-adjustable driver's seat with lumbar support and a height adjustable steering wheel. It's a versatile cabin, as well, with split rear seats opening up a cavernous load space and a low loading lip at the boot.

cc	1998
max bhp	116
max lb ft	122
max mph	121
0-60 (sec)	9.4
30-70	9.3
1/4 mile	17.1
30-50	8.0
50-70	12.3
Overall mpg	29.3
Touring mpg	36.7
mpg/1000 rpm	21.3
Weight (kg)	1181
Tested	25.11.92
Price now	£13,625



Nissan Serena 2.0 GSX



For Attractive cabin, space in rear seats, ride fully laden
Against Highish price, mediocre economy, love-it or hate-it looks

Verdict ★★★★★ Puts people in high places

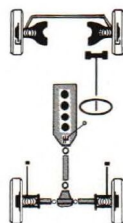
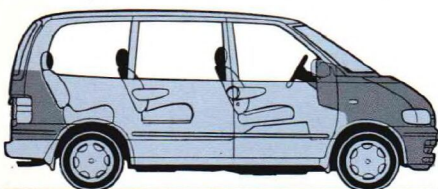
By creating what amounts to a two-storey car, with the running gear in the lower deck and passenger accommodation upstairs, Nissan has been able to make its Serena one of the most spacious people carriers on the market.

Climb in the back and you'll find, among a host of luxury car comforts, a pair of swivelling 'captain's chairs' as middle seats (the cheaper SLX comes with seven seats) and split rear seats that can be folded down into a makeshift bed. The driver's own seat is comfortable, supportive and height-adjustable, though to reach it you first have to climb up a couple of feet and then haul yourself over the wide sill. It's as if you were climbing into a small truck.

The punchy two-litre Primera engine sits under the front passenger's seat and provides energetic performance. It is particularly eager at low revs, crisp in the mid-range and respectably clean and unflustered near the red line.

Particularly impressive is the way the Serena handles with all six seats occupied. There's little in the way of body roll and it resists the temptation to float over crests and thump over ruts.

cc	1998
max bhp	106
max lb ft	125
max mph	106
0-60 (sec)	11.3
30-70	12.0
1/4 mile	18.7
30-50	14.8
50-70	12.1
Overall mpg	22.1
Touring mpg	29.9
mpg/1000 rpm	20.2
Weight (kg)	1560
Tested	10.2.93
Price now	£18,125



Peugeot 106 1.4 XRD 3dr



For Economy, space, refinement, looks, excellent ride quality
Against Gearing too high, poor motorway performance

Verdict ★★★ High gearing makes it hard work

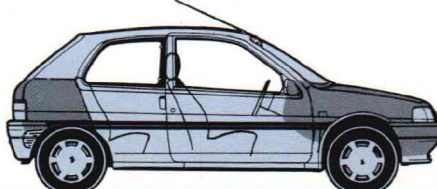
As theories go, Peugeot's 106 XRD should be the best small diesel in the world. It has one of the best designs of any small car and, in the 1360cc TUD, it has the best small diesel engine. But the Peugeot gearbox lets the side down because its ratios are too high.

It is easy to see Peugeot's thought process; high gearing promotes both economy and refinement. However, this move so dents the 106's performance that you actually spend most of the time in fourth, negating the benefits of a high fifth gear. Floor the throttle at 50mph in top and it takes more than half a minute to reach the motorway limit. The Metro diesel is 6.6sec swifter and the AX diesel is a massive 12.8sec ahead.

If you're prepared to sacrifice performance for economy — which most diesel buyers are — the 106 is a winner. We averaged 46.7mpg overall and a remarkable 60.0mpg on our touring route.

Less impressive are its road manners; without the front anti-roll bar of the petrol 106, it leans more into corners, and without the power-assisted steering, parking manoeuvres are hard work.

cc	1360
max bhp	50
max lb ft	61
max mph	85
0-60 (sec)	17.9
30-70	20.7
1/4 mile	21.2
30-50	14.1
50-70	31.9
Overall mpg	46.7
Touring mpg	60.0
mpg/1000 rpm	22.6
Weight (kg)	842
Tested	20.1.93
Price now	£8030



Peugeot 106 1.4 XSi 3dr



For Direct steering, sharp chassis, good looks
Against Ultra-short gearing, very buzzy engine

Verdict ★★★★★ Still great, but unseated by Clio RSi

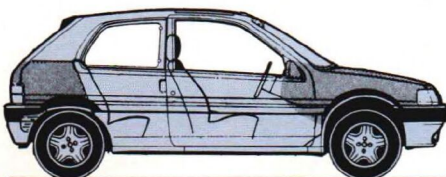
If you are in the market for a hot hatch and prioritise good looks and handling above everything else, then the Peugeot 106 XSi is tailor-made for you.

Four insurance groups beneath the Fiesta XR2i, it provides more fun and earns more envious stares than the Ford driver would believe possible. With a peppy, if painfully loud engine, super-short gearing and the kind of chassis responses that only well-sorted French hot hatches seem able to provide these days, it is a convincing solution to the problem of trying to enjoy motoring in a cheap, practical car.

Where it falls down is its inability to transport you over long distances with reasonable refinement. Though it rides well, the amount of sheer engine noise it generates at even a modest motorway cruise gets on your nerves after a bit.

Until recently, this would not have been enough to deny it the title of the best luke-warm hatch. But as manufacturers flee spiralling insurance premiums, new and impressive competition is appearing all the time. And of those we've seen so far, one, the Renault Clio RSi, now offers as much driving pleasure as the 106 without the pain. The king has lost its crown.

cc	1360
max bhp	100
max lb ft	89
max mph	117
0-60 (sec)	9.7
30-70	9.1
1/4 mile	17.5
30-50	7.9
50-70	11.1
Overall mpg	29.8
Touring mpg	34.0
mph/1000 rpm	17.7
Weight (kg)	985
Tested	2.6.93
Price now	£10,495



Peugeot 306 1.4XL



For Superb ride, spacious interior, fine handling, build quality
Against Heavy to park without power steering

Verdict ★★★★★ The family hatchback keeps getting better

Were it not for the remarkable qualities of Citroen's ZX, we would be applauding the British-built Peugeot 306 as the new leader of the family hatchback pack. Instead, it comes a very close second. We'd pick the Citroen for its ability to involve the keen driver that little bit more.

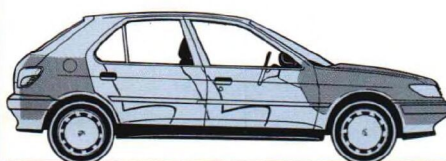
But for those who value space, a brilliant ride and fine economy, the 306 will not disappoint. And in what's becoming a common trend, here is another car that comes with a low-spec level and the least powerful engine in the range, yet in overall terms is the most complete version.

In 1.4 XL guise the 306 offers lively performance with particularly good low and mid-range response from its 75bhp fuel-injected engine; a frugal thirst for fuel; and a ride that is little short of outstanding.

It wins accolades, too, for the way it handles itself on the road, offering the driver an uncommon amount of feedback for the price. That said, we'd strongly recommend paying for the optional power steering which makes light work of parking.

Search for other criticisms and you're clutching at straws. This is an excellent car.

cc	1360
max bhp	75
max lb ft	83
max mph	103
0-60 (sec)	12.9
30-70	13.8
1/4 mile	19.1
30-50	10.4
50-70	16.8
Overall mpg	32.3
Touring mpg	47.8
mph/1000 rpm	20.6
Weight (kg)	1020
Tested	21.4.93
Price now	£10,270



Peugeot 306 1.8 XT



For Ride and handling, spacious cabin, cheap insurance group
Against Thirsty, engine noise

Verdict ★★★★★ Boring to look at, excellent to drive

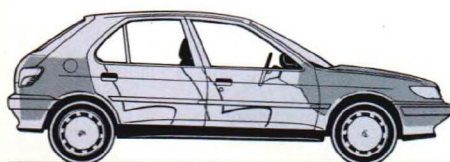
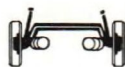
Roomier, prettier and a lot less money to insure than the mechanically similar Citroen ZX 1.8 Aura, this 306 vies for the title of Britain's best hatch.

It may look like just another French hatchback but the 306's qualities run deep, none more so than its super sharp chassis (with passive rear steer) and well weighted power steering. Power comes from the PSA group's stalwart four-cylinder single-cam engine (which is actually rather noisy and technically behind the times) which gets on with the job rather well with the help of quite short intermediate gear ratios.

Better than the strong performance is the truly excellent ride quality which goes hand in hand with first-class body control. Peugeot has made a better job of packaging the 306 than Citroen has with the ZX although the plain interior isn't the last word in style and those extended interior grab handles take some getting used to.

All that really stands in the 306's way is the equivalent ZX which is slightly cheaper but better equipped. We also think the Citroen handles in a slightly more progressive way but, in truth, we're only splitting hairs.

cc	1761
max bhp	103
max lb ft	113
max mph	114
0-60 (sec)	10.2
30-70	10.1
1/4 mile	17.5
30-50	7.2
50-70	10.4
Overall mpg	25.0
Touring mpg	35.3
mpg/1000 rpm	21.3
Weight (kg)	1080
Tested	31.3.93
Price now	£12,270



Peugeot 306 1.9 XRdt



For Outstanding economy/performance mix, ride and handling
Against Plain interior

Verdict ★★★★★ The best affordable diesel there is

The Peugeot 306 XRdt is simply the best affordable turbo diesel car you can buy (the BMW 3-series diesels are punchier and more refined but also a lot more expensive).

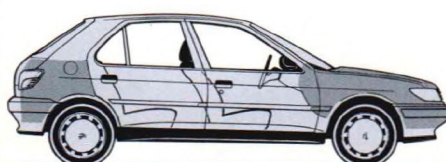
Those in contention include the mechanically identical Citroen ZX turbo diesel which, although marginally cheaper than the Peugeot, is not as spacious and not quite as well built.

Here you have the potential to cover about double the amount of miles you would in a comparable petrol 306 without sacrificing any of the performance. Why so?

Because the 1.9-litre turbocharged diesel engine is one of the best in the business — selfish enough to usually return between 39 and 44mpg but generous enough to give you roughly the real world performance of a 1.8 petrol car under the right foot.

Remember also that the 306 has a finely poised chassis, great ride quality (improved here by the extra weight of the diesel engine) and a family accommodating interior. Sounds too good to be true doesn't it? Well the interior certainly won't make you feel special and the Citroen is cheaper. There, it's not perfect.

cc	1905
max bhp	92
max lb ft	145
max mph	108
0-60 (sec)	11.2
30-70	12.2
1/4 mile	18.2
30-50	8.3
50-70	10.6
Overall mpg	39.4
Touring mpg	44.1
mpg/1000 rpm	25.3
Weight (kg)	1150
Tested	22.9.93
Price now	£12,000



Peugeot 405 1.8i GR



For Fine ride, fun handling, styling, build, security system
Against Poor performance, unimaginative interior

Verdict ★★★★★ Pininfarina and Peugeot: a great team

For a long while the Peugeot 405 ruled the class with its superb chassis and spacious Pininfarina body, but the times they are a' changin' and tough new contenders like Ford's Mondeo, Rover's 600 and Honda's Accord are moving past the ageing Peugeot.

In 1.8-litre GR guise, the 405 offers reasonable fuel economy but compromised performance. In our hands, the 405GR returned a respectable 30.4mpg but posted a less-than-impressive 10.6sec to 60mph time.

Unsurprisingly, the 405 regains some lost ground when it comes to covering twisty roads at a quickish pace. However, what is still one of the most sparkling chassis around suffered a slight dulling with the fitting of softer compression, heavier duty dampers. The payoff, though, is first-class ride quality; you'll have to find a very nasty road indeed to upset the 405's composure.

The 405GR is a well-equipped alternative, as well, with Peugeot earning points for the standard fitment of remote central locking that also activates an alarm and engine immobiliser. The Peugeot may be getting tired, but it is still good value.

cc	1998
max bhp	116
max lb ft	122
max mph	112
0-60 (sec)	9.4
30-70	11.4
1/4 mile	18.0
30-50	8.0
50-70	12.3
Overall mpg	30.4
Touring mpg	37.1
mph/1000 rpm	21.3
Weight (kg)	1181
Tested	25.11.92
Price now	£13,385



Porsche 911 Carrera



For Handling, performance, gearshift, brakes, styling, practicality
Against Engine resonance, view down nose spoiled by wipers

Verdict ★★★★★ Thirty-something and fabulous

Porsche's latest and indeed last variation on the 30-year-old 911 theme is the best ever, and more than a match for the competition. To the car's traditional strengths of performance, compactness and traction has been added the one quality it most notably lacked — fidelity.

Armchair experts used to blame the 911's rear-slung engine for its lift-off tail happiness, but they were wrong. The culprit was the semi-trailing arm rear suspension. Its replacement with a double wishbone set-up has transformed the car's handling. This new user-friendliness has not made the 911 less enthralling to drive.

Although the new Carrera is slightly slower than its predecessor, the crisp throttle response and spine-tingling wail of the flat-six are undiluted. Likewise, the tactility of the assisted steering which, thanks to reduced understeer, is now even more precise. Stability and ride have been improved, too, and the 911 is endowed with unsurpassed anti-lock stoppers.

The switchgear remains haphazard, the rear seats nominal, and our test car had a tiring cabin resonance. But so what? On the road, the new 911 sees off all comers.

cc	3600
max bhp	272
max lb ft	252
max mph	168
0-60 (sec)	5.2
30-70	4.9
1/4 mile	13.8
30-50	5.3
50-70	8.8
Overall mpg	20
Touring mpg	25
mph/1000 rpm	25.3
Weight (kg)	1370
Tested	6.10.93
Price now	£54,000 (est)



Range Rover LSE



For Huge cabin, smooth transmission, fantastic off road
Against Double-take price, wind noise, low speed ride

Verdict ★★★ Hugely flawed but utterly charming

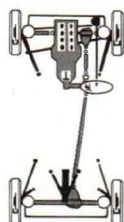
Now that you can buy a Land Rover Discovery with the 3.9-litre version of its V8 engine and automatic transmission you might think the reasons for spending more money for a less spacious Range Rover were increasingly questionable.

Land Rover has realised this and now offers you the opportunity to spend much more money on a Range Rover that's much roomier even than a Discovery. It's the LSE which comes complete with an extra eight inches between the wheels, an even larger (4.2 litres) engine, traction control and air suspension. This combines with the standard fit air conditioning and leather to create the only car on sale with a decent claim to being both a luxury, executive express and an unstoppable off-roader.

Yet while almost all sales will go to those who will rarely muddy its wheels, its poor ride, wind noise and modest performance means it can never pose a dynamic threat to the likes of the similarly priced Lexus.

However, like the Porsche 911, its age has allowed it to convert its faults into charm so that now, though there has never been a Range Rover as simple to fault as this, nor has there been one as easy to like.

cc	4278
max bhp	200
max lb ft	250
max mph	110
0-60 (sec)	10.8
30-70	10.6
1/4 mile	18.1
30-50	4.4
50-70	6.4
Overall mpg	16.7
Touring mpg	19.2
mpg/1000 rpm	26.9
Weight (kg)	2079
Tested	14.10.92
Price now	£38,393



Renault Clio 1.8 RSi



For Superb chassis, torquey engine, price
Against Heavy clutch, notchy gearchange, ordinary looks

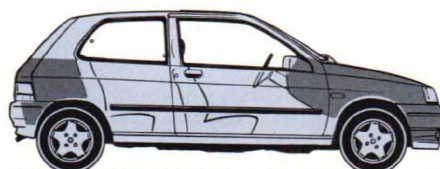
Verdict ★★★★★ Another polished fast Renault

This was the year that insurers cried enough and came down hard on the hot hatch brigade. Not to be outdone the car manufacturers, and particularly Renault, reacted and came up with less ostentatious, less powerful hatchbacks. Against other like-minded cars, the Clio RSi shows it possesses a sizeable chunk of the talent which makes the 16v car such a hit and duly took our title as the insurance-friendly hot hatch.

It seems there's no magic ingredient here, just thoroughly executed tuning of the dampers and springs and the fitment of 175/60 tyres to relatively wide 6in alloy rims. Power comes from a tweaked version of the familiar single-cam, two valve per cylinder Renault engine which churns out a respectable 110bhp but, more usefully, 114lb ft of torque which makes the little Renault fly.

Quick steering (power-assisted) completes the dynamic picture and makes the RSi feel exactly as it should — like a little go kart. Thankfully Renault's excellent RAPS combined alarm and engine immobiliser system (standard) should prevent others from piloting your pride and joy.

cc	1794
max bhp	110
max lb ft	114
max mph	117
0-60 (sec)	9.3
30-70	9.3
1/4 mile	17.0
30-50	7.3
50-70	11.3
Overall mpg	30.2
Touring mpg	29.7
mpg/1000 rpm	24.0
Weight (kg)	915
Tested	2.6.93
Price now	£10,800



Renault Espace 2.1 RT dT



For Performance/economy balance, space, versatility, handling
Against Not the most refined diesel, mediocre gearchange, pricey

Verdict ★★★★★ Never mind the noise, think of the economy

Diesel power for Renault's much-acclaimed Espace has taken a while to arrive on this side of the Channel. But as oil burners gain popularity in the UK, its arrival couldn't be more timely.

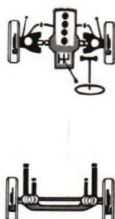
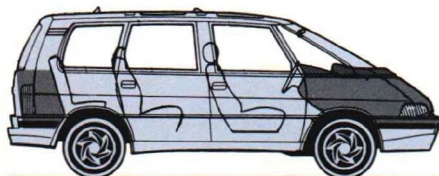
For its motive power Renault uses a turbocharged 2.1-litre, four-cylinder diesel — an 88bhp engine not seen before in this country. Compare it with the two-litre petrol Espace — itself no fireball and plagued by a particularly unpleasant motorway boom — and the diesel version starts to make a lot of sense.

With a 100mph top speed, the diesel is only 6mph slower than the petrol and in the dash from 0-60mph, it's just one second behind at 14.1sec. Add to these figures the 33.6mpg average — 7mpg better than the petrol — plus the diesel's 600-mile range, and there's no contest.

Unfortunately, the Renault engine is not the smoothest or quietest. Revved hard in lower gears, it sounds rough. But it cruises quietly at motorway speeds and delivers its power without any turbo lag.

The Espace is as good to drive as ever and is still the most efficient way of transporting seven people a long distance.

cc	2068
max bhp	88
max lb ft	134
max mph	100
0-60 (sec)	14.1
30-70	15.9
1/4 mile	19.5
30-50	10.4
50-70	13.9
Overall mpg	33.6
Touring mpg	38.2
mpg/1000 rpm	24.5
Weight (kg)	1420
Tested	26.5.93
Price now	£18,495



Renault Safrane 3.0 V6 RXE



For Refinement, good build quality, equipment
Against Poor performance, light steering

Verdict ★★ Should and needs to be better

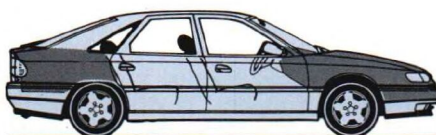
Renault has been on a roll lately, scoring direct hits here with the Clio range and mopping up on the continent with the brilliant Twingo. That's why we expected so much of the Safrane, the belated replacement for the R25.

And that's why we were disappointed with the mixed results Renault has achieved with the Safrane. With V6 power in particular, we were expecting relatively impressive performance, but this is one Renault that manages to feel even slower than it actually is. With a crippling power to weight ratio of 108bhp per tonne, the heavy Safrane gets to 60mph in 9.9sec. In fact, the old V6 R25 was a faster car.

Sloth can be forgiven if it is accompanied by entertaining handling, but the Safrane disappoints here, too. Over-light steering is joined by a chassis that simply refines out too much tactile response.

On the plus side, the Safrane is refined and in RXE trim, virtually every mod con is included. Also, the Safrane's cabin is a roomy and thoroughly enjoyable place to spend time. And the fact that this big executive sports a hatchback adds much to the big Renaults practicality and appeal.

cc	2975
max bhp	170
max lb ft	173
max mph	129
0-60 (sec)	9.9
30-70	9.3
1/4 mile	17.6
30-50 *	3.9
50-70*	5.4
Overall mpg	22.6
Touring mpg	25.6
mpg/1000 rpm	27.3
Weight (kg)	1580
Tested	11.11.93
Price now	£26,000
*in kickdown	



Rolls-Royce Silver Spur II



For Oodles of low-end torque, amazing low-speed ride, glorious cabin
Against Dated exterior, not a car to throw around, too slow

Verdict ★★★★★ There's still nothing in the world quite like it

It would be remarkable were a small British company producing 1500 cars a year to compete head on with the luxury products of large corporations like Mercedes-Benz. Rolls-Royce, despite its great history, simply does not have the resources to produce a high-tech super-limo like the S-class.

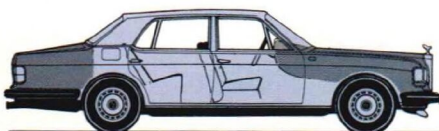
That said, it still makes cars of considerable quality and a unique charm.

What one simply does not do in a Rolls, of course, is go scurrying about like the nouveau riche in their 7-series BMWs. Do that and the Silver Spur, or the shorter Silver Spirit II, will lurch drunkenly in mute complaint. No, you should exploit the pushrod V8's massive low-rev torque, luxuriate in the featherbed low-speed ride, and on the open road settle into the car's natural loping gait. Then the driving experience though very different to its more modern rivals, is still magnificent.

While you are enjoying it, you can revel in a cabin ambience without peer. Whether viewed from the commanding driving seat or the massive rear cabin, your surroundings echo the elegance of a bygone age.

For the cutting edge of automotive development, you need look elsewhere. Just don't expect it to be quite so special.

cc	6750
max bhp	226
max lb ft	340
max mph	126
0-60 (sec)	10.4
30-70	10.2
1/4 mile	17.4
30-50	3.9
50-70	6.3
Overall mpg	14.0
Touring mpg	14.0
mph/1000 rpm	30
Weight (kg)	2290
Tested	5.5.93
Price now	£116,893
* kickdown	



Rover Metro 1.4 CVT 5dr



For Lively acceleration, good fun to drive, seat comfort
Against Jerky transmission, flawed ergonomics

Verdict ★★★★★ A great idea in an ageing but still game car

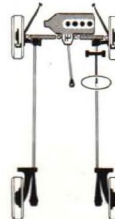
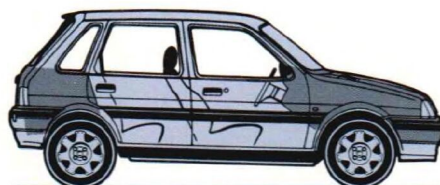
Compactness and relative cheapness make the Continuously Variable Transmission the obvious automatic transmission for small cars. In choosing it for the Metro, Rover delayed long enough to avoid the teething problems suffered by Ford and Fiat, but were powerless to do anything about Nissan which, soon after, fielded a CVT transmission in its Micra with an electronic clutch that banished the jerkiness which affects the Metro.

That said, with more power and less weight, the Metro is substantially faster than its new rival while its interactive suspension still makes the Metro one of the most amusing babies to drive in a spirited fashion.

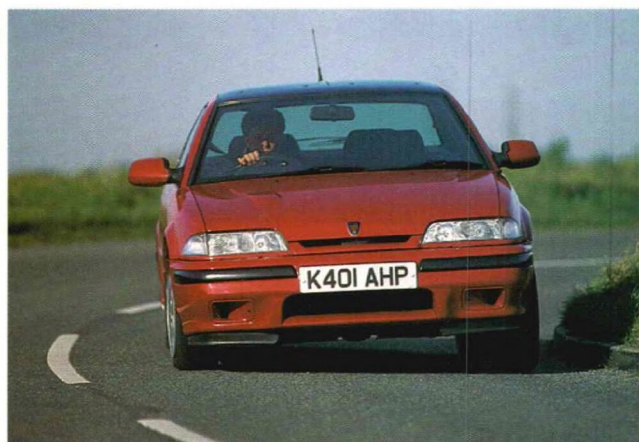
But there's no escaping the Metro's age: its in most places you look. Thirteen years ago it was fantastically space efficient, now it's just cramped. Its ride is still bouncy, its expensive and none too quiet on the motorway either.

For those who want both a decent two-pedal transmission and a lot of fun from their baby, it makes a lot of sense; others may find it a little too old and expensive to make the grade.

cc	1396
max bhp	75
max lb ft	86
max mph	100
0-60 (sec)	11.6
30-70	12.2
1/4 mile	18.5
30-50	4.3
50-70	7.9
Overall mpg	33.4
Touring mpg	45.7
mph/1000 rpm	23.6
Weight (kg)	920
Tested	1.7.92
Price now	£8670



Rover 216 coupe



For Stylish looks, value, engine, economy
Against Lifeless steering, lack of boot/rear seat space, ride

Verdict ★★★ An attractive alternative to a Calibra

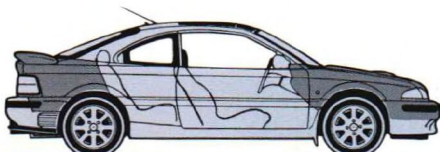
You can't accuse Rover of failing to make the most of its raw materials. The 200/400 range is available with two hatchback bodies, a convertible, a saloon, a coupe and, next year even an estate.

The best of the coupes is the Honda powered 216 pictured here which gives decent performance and great, targa-top style with fine economy without suffering either the unenthusiastic engine of the 220 or the terrible steering of the 220 turbo.

Though its engine only yields 111 bhp, its free-spinning nature takes it to 60mph in only just over 9sec while its top speed is the far side of 120mph. You have to keep the engine bubbling away with judicious use of the gearbox but such is its sweet action and willingness of the performance it liberates that this is hardly a hardship. It handles tidily, too, though anyone used to the responses of, say, a VW Corrado, will find it a little staid.

All of which, coupled with its smart and distinctive good looks, make this Rover coupe a likeable Calibra alternative if you can live without a huge rear cabin. It is certainly a worthy addition to a still blossoming range.

cc	1590
max bhp	111
max lb ft	101
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	9.1
30-70	9.2
1/4 mile	17.0
30-50	8.3
50-70	12.4
Overall mpg	31.1
Touring mpg	39.5
mpg/1000 rpm	19.2
Weight (kg)	1080
Tested	18.11.92
Price now	£14,695



Rover 220i turbo coupe



For Awesome performance, fine grip, secure handling, great value
Against Dreadful steering, mediocre gearchange, not very roomy

Verdict ★★★ Britain's cheapest 150mph car

You can sum up Rover's 220i turbo coupe in just two figures: £18,630 and 150mph. They add up to Britain's cheapest 150mph car. A car that packs such an enormous mid-range punch, it seems hard to believe that it's not being delivered from a supercar costing twice the price.

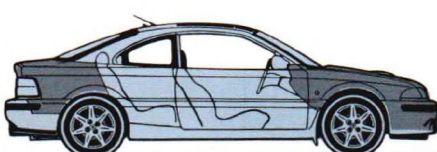
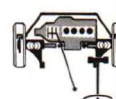
The source of all this energy is a tuned version of the two-litre, 16-valve four that powers the Rover 800 Vitesse. It produces 197bhp and a hefty 174lb ft of torque, which hustles the turbo coupe to 60mph from rest in just 6.3sec. More devastating is the way it charges from 50 to 70mph in fifth in just 7.1sec.

What is more, the Rover coupe has no problems handling its turbo power; its torque-sensing limited-slip differential is able to deal with the engine's exuberance.

But while the Rover has all the power to please, its steering is vague and lifeless, making the 220 much less fun to drive hard than many of its less powerful rivals.

The 220i may not be as well-balanced a package as the VW Corrado VR6, nor as practical as the Calibra Turbo 4x4, but it offers true seat-of-the-pants driver appeal at a price that's an outright bargain.

cc	1994
max bhp	197
max lb ft	174
max mph	149
0-60 (sec)	6.3
30-70	5.4
1/4 mile	14.9
30-50	6.2
50-70	7.1
Overall mpg	24.0
Touring mpg	34.5
mpg/1000 rpm	24.3
Weight (kg)	1199
Tested	21.10.92
Price now	£18,630



Rover MG RV8



For Strong engine, beautifully built, feels pleasantly quaint
Against Poor handling, unrefined and rather lumpy ride

Verdict ★★ Keeps the MG name alive — but achieves little else

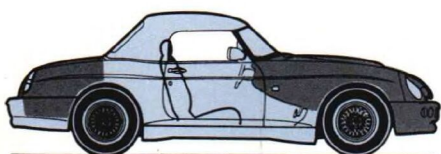
Even while it was still in production, the MGB was uncharitably but fairly described as 'arthritic'. There is no denying though, that the pretty, if not very capable, Abingdon roadster carved a position of affection in many hearts. Witness the lovingly-tended examples still plying Britain's roads.

The fact that British Motoring Heritage now manufactures 'B' bodyshells gave Rover an opportunity to tap into that continuing affection with a reborn car, modified somewhat for the '90s but not too much. Cue this leather-trimmed, V8-toting, body kit-sporting vision of what well-heeled MGB-admirers of the past might like to have in their garages now.

A £26,000 price tag is silly, but the RV8 can at least boast sprightly performance, a V8 engine note, immaculate build and a leather and walnut interior which, though hardly original MGB trim, does exude a quintessential British-ness.

But beneath the tinsel there is an old chassis with too little re-fettling. The RV8 rides ineptly and handles no better, like its forebear. This is surely not the nostalgia trip Rover intended — nor one that any but the B-be-sotted will welcome.

cc	3946
max bhp	190
max lb ft	234
max mph	136
0-60 (sec)	6.9
30-70	6.4
1/4 mile	15.2
30-50	5.5
50-70	7.7
Overall mpg	20.2
Touring mpg	26.9
mph/1000 rpm	28.97
Weight (kg)	1101
Tested	16.6.93
Price now	£25,440



Rover 416 SLi



For Enthusiastic performance, gearshift, perceived quality
Against Economy, fidgety ride, rear seat legroom

Verdict ★★★ A sporting character trying to escape

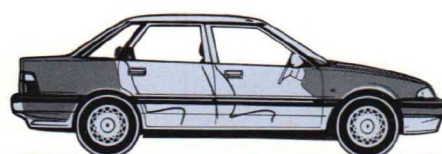
ARover will always have the edge over a Mondeo, a Cavalier or a VW when it comes to perceived quality. All that wood and stainless steel does wonders for its cars' more up-market image. Fitting a chrome grille on the 400's snout last year heightened that aura of quality.

But that outward image of restrained luxury is questioned at the first turn of the key. The 416's Honda-derived powerplant has an enthusiastic, free-revving character which makes it perform and sound more like a hot hatchback than a sedate Rover. Zero to 60mph is covered in 9.7sec and 30-70mph in 10.0sec — times that are even better than those of the more overtly sporting 216 GTi. The 1.6-litre Mondeos and Cavaliers are simply out-run.

The lively performance is carried over to road manners. The Rover takes bends calmly that would make a Cavalier lunge and lean. But this sporting character has been achieved with the sacrifice of too much ride and refinement.

It isn't as roomy as the opposition, particularly in the back, and there's no folding rear seat. But the car's dual personality should attract a following.

cc	1590
max bhp	111
max lb ft	101
max mph	112
0-60 (secs)	9.7
30-70	10.0
1/4 mile	17.4
30-50	9.0
50-70	10.6
Overall mpg	26.3
Touring mpg	42.5
mph/1000 rpm	24.0
Weight (kg)	1130
Tested	23.12.93
Price now	£12,710



Rover 620i



For Smooth engine, generous cabin space, up-market feel
Against No airbag or anti-lock brakes, indifferent handling

Verdict ★★★ A lot of class for the money

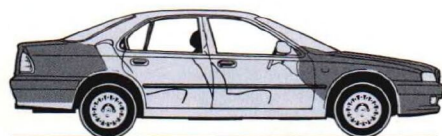
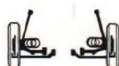
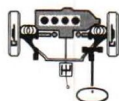
Rover's variant of the Honda Accord is all about image. British engineering input to the car's design was only consultative, leaving the Rover stylists to make all the important statements about why you should prefer the 620 to, say, a Honda Accord.

Take a gander at the spacious cabin with its deliberately up-market ambience and you begin to understand Rover's strategy. It is not designed to knock you out with dynamics or tempt you with high specification. Instead, the 620 is intended to appeal to the snob in you that says a mere Ford or Vauxhall isn't quite enough.

It's canny marketing because, judged dispassionately, the 620i is no fireball. The four-cylinder, two-litre engine is smooth and willing but there's little fun to be had extending it on challenging roads. The chassis has decent grip and damping rates are chosen for a good ride. Anti-lock brakes are an option, but not seatbelt pre-tensioners or an airbag. Such is the cost of providing that classy cabin at a competitive price.

Call it muddled priorities, but it succeeds in the showroom.

cc	1997
max bhp	113
max lb ft	127
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	10.3
30-70	10.5
1/4 mile	17.7
30-50	9.2
50-70	13.8
Overall mpg	30.5
Touring mpg	32.2
mpg/1000 rpm	20.9
Weight (kg)	1255
Tested	11.8.93
Price now	£13,995



Rover 620Si



For Stylish looks, refined engine, smooth ride, interior space
Against Lack of safety features, uninvolved steering

Verdict ★★★ Refinement is Rover's middle name

An extra four valves liberates another 16bhp from this silky smooth Honda unit and that, added to an elegant body, classy interior and first-rate build quality has produced a match for any rival in the mid-range executive class.

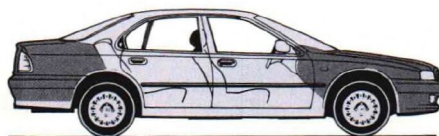
Even more impressive is the way that Rover has managed to set the 620 apart from its Honda Accord clone, giving it a visual grace and elegance the Accord lacks.

Powered by a two-litre, 16-valve engine that spins with serene smoothness, the 620 majors on refinement. From the way its suspension filters out road noise to the way its body sealing deadens any wind roar, the Rover is as quiet as you could hope.

Yet refinement isn't the car's only virtue. It's a lively performer, capable of breaking 10sec to 60mph and has sound chassis dynamics. Its keen turn-in, trustworthy steering, excellent grip and friendly chassis make it a fine companion for enjoying demanding backroads.

The Rover is not as complete an all-rounder as Ford's Mondeo 2.0i GLX or BMW's 318i, but no-one buying a 620, especially in this Si form, is going to drive away disappointed.

cc	1997
max bhp	129
max lb ft	131
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	9.6
30-70	9.3
1/4 mile	17.1
30-50	8.2
50-70	11.0
Overall mpg	25.7
Touring mpg	36.0
mpg/1000 rpm	21.7
Weight (kg)	1300
Tested	7.4.93
Price now	£14,995



Rover 623iS



For Looks, classy interior, ride quality
Against Price, lacks six cylinders, body control at speed

Verdict ★★★ Charming but ultimately too expensive

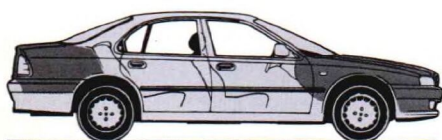
At the top end of the Rover 600 range the marketing message remains much the same as for lesser variants. An aura of quality and exclusivity is carefully calculated to set the car apart from its mundane competition.

Sit yourself inside the 623iS's roomy, tastefully appointed half-leather and walnut cabin and you can easily see the point. Experience its cossetting ride, strong performance and secure, if not inspiring handling, and that impression of understated sophistication is enhanced. But there is one flaw in the 623iS's claim to patrician status — it has only four cylinders.

On paper, this does not seem to matter too much. The Rover can comfortably outspurt both the V6 Vauxhall Cavalier and BMW 320i. On the road, the Honda powerplant impresses with its refinement.

But a six-cylinder engine confers more than mere kudos; it also provides effortless flexibility that even a four-pot of this calibre can't match. In-gear acceleration times confirm that the V6 Cavalier is quicker. And the well-equipped Vauxhall is well over £2000 cheaper. Suddenly the Rover's airs and graces begin to look costly.

cc	2259
max bhp	156
max lb ft	154
max mph	128
0-60 (sec)	8.8
30-70	8.7
1/4 mile	16.7
30-50	7.4
50-70	10.6
Overall mpg	n/a
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	21.6
Weight (kg)	1300
Tested	7.4.93
Price now	£19,250



Saab 900 2.0i



For Price, unmistakable looks, driving position, boot space
Against Stodgy handling, noisy, overlong gearing

Verdict ★★★ Likeable but dramatically less able than a 318i

The strengths and weaknesses of the new Saab 900 are not difficult to predict knowing its predecessor and that it rides on a floorpan that, albeit strengthened, is lifted from the Vauxhall Cavalier.

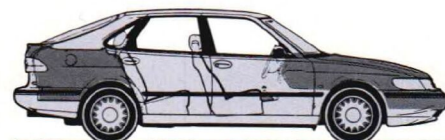
The traditional strengths of design individuality, cabin ergonomics and passive safety now have added extra versatility from split rear seats and a ski hatch. For all its aerodynamic betterment, the new 900 still looks unmistakably Saab. Inside too, where the well laid-out fascia and tunnel-mounted ignition switch also hark back to the car's origins. If nothing else, it will be a hit with old-style 900 drivers.

On the safety front, side impact beams, a driver's-side airbag and anti-lock brakes are all standard. Even more reassuring is the on-the-road crashworthiness record of the previous 900, consistently a class leader.

What lets the side down, rather badly when set against BMW and Mercedes, are the car's dynamics. Though the engine is sweet, it lacks punch, especially with its overlong gearing, while the handling has been tuned for safety to the exclusion of driver enjoyment.

When you're up against BMW's 3-series, you need to do better than this.

cc	1985
max bhp	133
max lb ft	133
max mph	121
0-60 (sec)	9.7
30-70	10.2
1/4 mile	17.6
30-50	15.9
50-70	16.4
Overall mpg	24.3
Touring mpg	30.6
mph/1000 rpm	24.9
Weight (kg)	1265
Tested	20.10.93
Price now	£15,995



Saab 900 2.3i



For Crisp performance, value, boot space, high specification
Against Dull handling and ride, notchy gears, uninspired styling

Verdict ★★★ Not for the enthusiasts but capable nonetheless

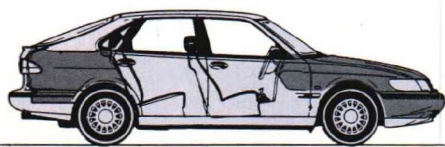
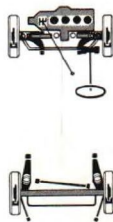
With Saab now a part of GM, the first question about the new 900 had to be: would the new owners dilute Saab's traditional distinctiveness? The body styling, cabin and tunnel-mounted ignition switch answered that — the new 900 is still a pukka Saab, despite its Cavalier underpinnings.

Question two was: could the new 900 hack it against rivals like the BMW 3-series and Audi 80? On price and performance, the 2.3i certainly has the better of both the 320i and the 80 2.0E — it undercuts them in the showroom and out-sprints them on the road. It also has an impressive roster of standard equipment, class-leading room in the rear and a large boot. Top-notch crash-worthiness is guaranteed.

The cracks begin to show is behind the wheel. The gearshift quality is below par, as is damping control. Handling up to the modest adhesion limit is safe and predictable, but otherwise insipid. Traction becomes a problem in the wet.

As a driver's car, the 900 2.3i is no match for the 320i. But as safe, sensible transport, it has its attractions.

cc	2290
max bhp	150
max lb ft	155
max mph	125
0-60 (sec)	8.7
30-70	8.9
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	8.8
50-70	13.3
Overall mpg	23.3
Touring mpg	33.1
mpg/1000 rpm	24.8
Weight (kg)	1345
Tested	18.8.93
Price now	£17,495



Seat Ibiza 1.8 GLXi 5dr



For Price, entertaining handling, performance, driving position
Against Low-speed ride, plasticky interior, no anti-theft protection

Verdict ★★★ Seat's best car to date

Styled by the the pen of Guigiaro, built on next year's VW Polo floorpan, riding on generic VW suspension and powered by a Golf 1.8-litre engine. So does the new Ibiza drive like a bitsa car? Absolutely not.

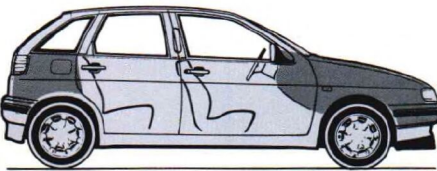
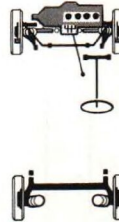
In fact it's a whole bundle of fun to drive, goes very well with the 1.8 engine and rides in a mature fashion.

It also currently occupies its own market niche thanks to some unique dimensions. Bigger than a Vauxhall Corsa but shorter than a Golf it bridges the size gap between the superminis and the lower medium (Escort-sized) cars. With a wheelbase almost as long as the Golf's (and consequently a similar amount of interior space) the Ibiza might just be 'a lot of car for the money'.

Parent company VW's influence has affected the Ibiza's crash worthiness. It has been subjected to the same 50 different crash tests as the Golf and has a special six-ring safety cage supplemented by twin side impact bars.

All the little Seat really lacks is adequate anti-theft protection, especially when the Corsa has deadlocks. Airbags will become optional next year.

cc	1781
max bhp	90
max lb ft	107
max mph	110
0-60 (sec)	11.0
30-70	11.5
1/4 mile	18.1
30-50	8.2
50-70	11.9
Overall mpg	30.5
Touring mpg	36.7
mpg/1000 rpm	21.0
Weight (kg)	982
Tested	3.11.93
Price now	£10,495



Seat Toledo 1.8 GLXi



For Outstanding value, good grip, massive boot
Against Class-trailing performance, harsh engine

Verdict ★★★ Space but not much pace

Based on a VW design but built in Spain, the Toledo might have offered the best of both worlds — German quality at Spanish prices. Trouble is, even Volkswagen's own Golf is not top of this class, so it is no surprise to find that the Toledo enjoys only the Spanish advantage: a price at least £2000 below the class average.

It seems churlish to complain in the face of such value, particularly when in certain respects the Toledo vies with the best. Its handling, for example, though not the tidiest, is founded on sheer grip to match all-comers. While on a more practical note, and despite the obvious sacrifice to rear passenger space, it boasts a cavernous boot.

But between corners and without considering its load carrying ability, the Toledo proves less of a success. In fact it trails the class in performance — top speed and acceleration — and compounds its sluggishness by having an unenthusiastic engine.

If you can afford the extra, there are faster, better damped, and more refined alternatives. If you are strapped for cash, though, you'll call this car a bargain.

cc	1781
max bhp	90
max lb ft	103
max mph	107
0-60 (sec)	12.5
30-70	13.3
1/4 mile	19.0
30-50	9.2
50-70	12.5
Overall mpg	27.5
Touring mpg	30.0
mpg/1000 rpm	21.1
Weight (kg)	1056
Tested	17.3.93
Price now	£10,695

Subaru Vivio



For Good ride, 4wd security, easy to park, coherent interior
Against Noisy, overly short gearing, performance

Verdict ★★ UK's cheapest on-road 4x4 makes little sense

If you're hunting for the cheapest on road four-wheel drive car in the UK, look no further than the Vivio. But why anyone would want four-wheel drive in a car so small and with only 43bhp under the bonnet is more difficult to explain.

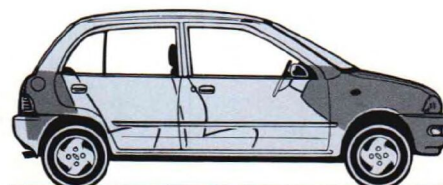
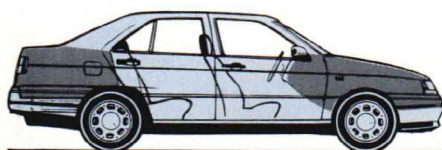
Yes, the system does offer a little extra wet-weather traction and it will cope with the odd excursion across a muddy field, but it is more a neat novelty than a truly worthwhile feature.

For £1600 less, a Fiat Cinquecento will provide you with all the small-car appeal you'll ever need. For the same kind of money as the Vivio costs, you could be driving a much more accomplished Nissan Micra or Peugeot 106.

Compared with such exalted company, the Subaru has little to boast. Its performance is leisurely, the tiny five-door requiring 17.9sec to buzz its way to 60mph from rest. Even its thirst for unleaded isn't particularly low, the car averaging only 37.4mpg.

In and out of tight parking spaces, the Vivio may have the nimbleness of a Mini, but overall it provides precious little enjoyment for the driver. It may have once made sense in Japan, but the baby Subaru is tough to justify here.

cc	685
max bhp	43
max lb ft	39
max mph	82
0-60 (sec)	17.9
30-70	22.1
1/4 mile	21.1
30-50	11.3
50-70	32.1
Overall mpg	37.4
Touring mpg	46.2
mpg/1000 rpm	13.3
Weight (kg)	740
Tested	3.2.93
Price now	£6697



Subaru Impreza 1.8 GL 5dr



For Impressive space, quality of ride, good build
Against High price, sluggish performance

Verdict ★★★ Stylishly different, but at a price

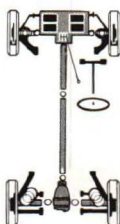
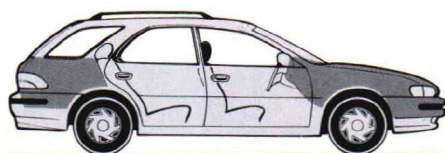
Subaru's Golf-competitor has a distinctiveness which is more than skin deep. Beneath its 'hatchstate' bodywork — half hatchback, half estate — are items of genuine novelty: a four-cylinder boxer engine and permanent four-wheel drive. This is no 'me too' offering, not by a long chalk.

Unfortunately the engine and transmission conspire to trip each other up. Although outputs of 101bhp and 109lb ft sound promising, the flat-four's best efforts are stymied by the 4wd weight penalty. As a result the Impreza barely keeps ahead of the leisurely Golf 1.8 CL, itself well off the class pace. Poor flexibility exacerbates the problem, and makes the enthusiastic engine note all the more ironic.

Unsurprisingly, the burden of the 4wd transmission also hurts fuel economy, particularly if you exploit what little performance there is.

Around bends the weighty 4wd system begins to earn its keep. Uncommunicative steering prevents the Impreza matching the Citroen ZX or Peugeot 306 for sensitivity, but the Impreza boasts impressive traction, grip and security, and its body control is good, too.

cc	1820
max bhp	101
max lb ft	109
max mph	106
0-60 (sec)	11.8
30-70	12.4
1/4 mile	18.4
30-50	10.5
50-70	19.5
Overall mpg	24.1
Touring mpg	34.4
mpg/1000 rpm	21.3
Weight (kg)	1180
Tested	23/6/93
Price now	£12,999



Toyota Corolla 1.6i Liftback



For Refinement, sweet gearchange, space, economy, fine build
Against Over-light steering, ponderous handling, poor brake feel

Verdict ★★★ The people's choice

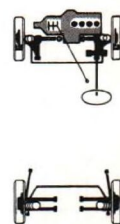
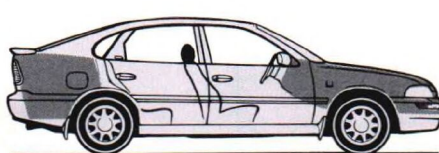
For the connoisseur of restrained progress, the Corolla 1.6i Executive Liftback — to give the car its full title — offers plenty to savour. It's safe, well-built, economical, extremely easy to drive and unquestionably reliable. Add to these qualities fine levels of refinement and ride comfort, and it's easy to see why the car is such a hit worldwide.

The new, more-rounded body is bigger and heavier too, thanks in part to the side-impact protection bars. But the Corolla's uprated 113bhp engine compensates for the extra weight. It's a lively performer, sprinting to 60mph from rest in 9.8sec, though initial progress feels leisurely.

The handling is nose-led, and predictable, but there is little to inspire or enjoy. Turn-in is sluggish and body roll pronounced. The Corolla's light but uncommunicative power steering does little to increase driving enjoyment.

Where the Toyota scores though, is in interior room. A bigger body and longer wheelbase improve space, especially in the back. For the family motorist who values relaxation above thrills, the new Corolla makes a lot of sense, though its £13,500 price means it is an expensive choice.

cc	1587
max bhp	113
max lb ft	107
max mph	117
0-60 (sec)	9.8
30-70	9.7
1/4 mile	17.5
30-50	11.4
50-70	12.3
Overall mpg	31.0
Touring mpg	32.0
mpg/1000 rpm	20.1
Weight (kg)	1078
Tested	30.9.92
Price now	£13,785



Toyota Carina E 2.0 GLi estate



For Performance, passenger space, fuel economy, easy to drive
Against Ordinary handling and cabin, intrusive wheel arches

Verdict ★★★ Effective but not loveable

For the maximum practicality combined with the minimum sacrifice to driving pleasure, the estate car reigns supreme. All the major manufacturers now offer load-swallowers which are almost as refined and road-capable as their saloon equivalents.

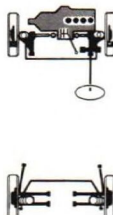
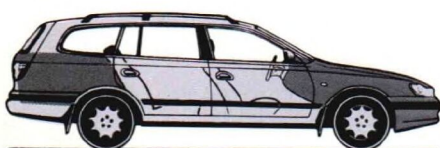
The Carina 2.0 GLi estate's problem is that the saloon on which it is based is itself undistinguished. This is a handicap that the estate variant was never going to overcome in so competitive an area of the market.

The plus points are its performance — it out-sprints its Ford and Nissan rivals, for example — and, despite this, its first-rate fuel economy. It is also quiet, a doddle to drive and competitively equipped.

Less successful are the dynamics. Not only is the Carina's handling dull and understeer-dominated, but it is prone to traction problems on wet roads and does not ride well whether laden or unladen.

The pretty exterior hides problems inside. The cabin, though spacious, is bland, while the load platform suffers intrusive wheel arches and a less than flat floor. All of which sees the Carina trailing rivals like the Mondeo. In such company, mere competence alone is not enough.

cc	1998
max bhp	131
max lb ft	136
max mph	122
0-60 (sec)	9.1
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	16.9
30-50	7.4
50-70	11.1
Overall mpg	31.6
Touring mpg	31.8
mpg/1000 rpm	22.1
Weight (kg)	1235
Tested	28.7.93
Price now	£14,814



Toyota Carina E 1.6 GLi 5dr



For Economy, grip, interior space, build
Against Lifeless chassis and steering, gloomy cabin

Verdict ★★★ Competence need not be this dull

Toyota's mid-range saloon can be summed up in one word: competence. Like an efficient secretary, it will do all you ask of it promptly and with the minimum of fuss, but don't expect it to be vivacity incarnate.

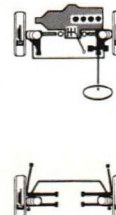
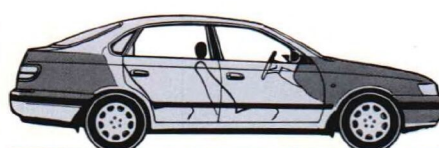
The Carina's solid virtues begin with competitive performance and class-topping economy. It can't match the Mazda 626 for sprinting ability, but it keeps station with most of its peers and then leaves them for dead at the pumps.

If interior space is your priority, the Carina E is out on its own. It not only out-accommodates all its competitors but even matches the roominess of some in the next class up. Mind you, while it succeeds in sheer enclosed volume, it fails in inviting you to enter it. The Carina E has one of the most sombre car interiors around.

As a driving machine, the Toyota is not without attractions. It has a high level of grip and is child's play to drive at the limit. But tactility and adjustability are simply not in its vocabulary, while mute steering and take-it-or-leave-it handling are.

The question is starkly simple: is a car mere transport or should it entertain you along the way?

cc	1587
max bhp	106
max lb ft	101
max mph	117
0-60 (sec)	10.7
30-70	10.7
1/4 mile	18.0
30-50	10.6
50-70	15.8
Overall mpg	33.1
Touring mpg	39.2
mpg/1000 rpm	21.9
Weight (kg)	1015
Tested	17.6.92
Price now	£13,777



Toyota Supra



For Performance, grip, chassis control, refinement, build, equipment
Against Dull steering, interior, accommodation and ergonomics

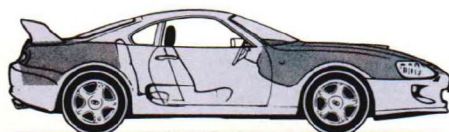
Verdict ★★★★★ Somehow less than the sum of its parts

How the Supra came to be transformed from a mediocre mid-market coupe to a lower-rank supercar is an object lesson in Japanese pride. Nissan, Mitsubishi and Mazda all had tarmac-toasting super-coupees; it was time for Japan's largest car producer to join the game and up the ante.

The bonnet scoop, ostentatious rear wing and brake cooling ducts behind the doors promise a level of performance that the twin-turbo Supra keeps with ease — boasting 0-100mph in 13.2sec and a top speed that could touch 180mph if it were not for electronic limitation. Aided by a sweet six-speed gearbox, straight-line thrills are guaranteed. The straight six only disappoints with its less-than-instant throttle response and uninteresting noise.

It is just as effective around corners. Tremendous grip and taut damping make the Supra a better point-to-pointer than even the BMW M3, although the assisted steering is too uncommunicative. Add a dull interior, with cramped rear seats, and you have a slightly uneven creation. For all its remarkable achievements, the Supra does not endear itself.

cc	2997
max bhp	326
max lb ft	325
max mph	156
0-60 (sec)	5.1
30-70	4.7
1/4 mile	13.7
30-50	3.9
50-70	7.3
Overall mpg	18.7
Touring mpg	29.0
mph/1000 rpm	28.1
Weight (kg)	1549
Tested	1.9.93
Price now	£37,500



TVR Chimaera 4.0



For Inspiring performance, fine ride/handling compromise, large boot
Against Heavy steering, gearshift and clutch

Verdict ★★★★★ The best-bred TVR yet

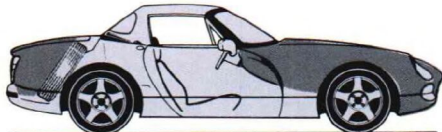
TVR's now familiar recipe of shoehorning a stonking V8 engine into a tubular steel chassis clothed in pretty, reinforced plastic bodywork has reached a new level of sophistication in recent years.

That the Chimaera, the smaller brother to the awesome Griffith, can deploy 234bhp per tonne and turn heads, even when stationary, comes as no surprise at all. That it is also spacious, exquisitely appointed and surprisingly practical, highlights the advances taking place in the Blackpool factory.

Two cases in point are the car's removable roof and capacious boot. Owners of other convertible sports cars, particularly those that are also from small manufacturers, almost expect a roof disassembly operation that shreds nerves and fingernails. Not here: TVR's targa top and soft backlight section can be erected in seconds. What's more, the stowed roof does not take up all the boot space — there is still room in that long Chimaera tail for a serious amount of clobber.

Purists dismiss practicality as irrelevant. But as you revel in the TVR's exhilarating performance and classic rear-drive handling, they do put the icing on the cake.

cc	3950
max bhp	240
max lb ft	270
max mph	158
0-60 (sec)	5.2
30-70	4.5
1/4 mile	13.8
30-50	5.0
50-70	6.8
Overall mpg	22.5
Touring mpg	28.4
mph/1000 rpm	27.5
Weight (kg)	1024
Tested	16.6.93
Price now	£26,720



TVR Griffith 500



For Unbeatable performance-per-£, looks, noise, dry-road traction
Against Tricky wet-road handling, economy, heavy steering

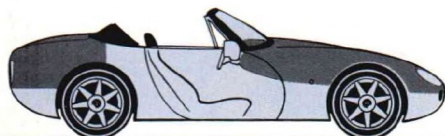
Verdict ★★★ Rude, crude... and you must be in the mood

You can construct two equally strong arguments for and against this, the fastest TVR yet.

The debate over the Griffith 500 (a five-litre, 340bhp and 350lb ft evolution of the British V8 sports car) goes like this: the 500 offers a virtually unbeatable level of performance for its price. The year has yet to end but it's unlikely the TVR will lose its title as the second most accelerative production car we tested in 1993. It was only beaten by the Jaguar XJ220. And we have yet to meet anyone who doesn't like the way the Griffith looks (mean), sounds (wild) or makes you feel (conspicuous).

All these may be essential ingredients for a sports car but, as far as we are concerned, handling is at least 50 per cent of the equation. That's where the Griffith 500 falls down. Heaps of grip and superb dry road traction mean it is a very fast point-and-squirt machine but when the heavens open, you need to be right on top of the rear end's next torque-induced squirm. If only there was more finesse, more adjustability and more feel to the chassis. As it is, you can only drive the 500 comfortably at seven-tenths.

cc	4997
max bhp	340
max lb ft	350
max mph	161
0-60 (sec)	4.2
30-70	3.6
1/4 mile	12.8
30-50	3.9
50-70	5.4
Overall mpg	16.2
Touring mpg	20.1
mph/1000 rpm	27.0
Weight (kg)	1075
Tested	27.10.93
Price now	£32,995



Vauxhall Corsa 1.2i E-drive



For Superb economy, generous interior space, great looks
Against Sluggish performance, mediocre handling, equipment

Verdict ★★★ Do you really need the economy that badly?

Vauxhall's new Corsa 1.2i E-drive can take you from Land's End to John O'Groats on a single tank. What it won't do is get you there in a hurry.

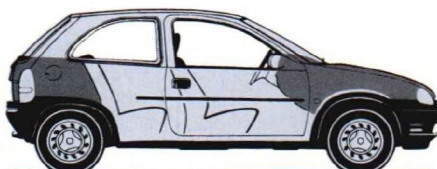
On our economy route the baby Vauxhall averaged an impressive 55mpg but the penalty comes in performance. Or lack of it. Acceleration from rest to 60mph takes a tedious 19.6sec. Flooring the throttle at 50mph in fifth and waiting for the legal limit to appear takes 36sec. And the Corsa runs out of steam at 83mph.

Driving the miserly Vauxhall is an object lesson in forward planning. Passing manoeuvres are best booked well in advance as holes in traffic tend to fill before your arrival. A gearbox that feels vague and notchy together with a steering wheel that needs 4.1 turns to go from lock to lock help foster the sense of sloth.

There is good news in the Corsa's cabin though. For sheer space, it is unrivalled in its class. It also boasts an excellent driving position, clear instruments and marvellous ventilation system.

For those who want a Corsa that's even more economical and lively, a look at the Corsa 1.5 TD is in order.

cc	1195
max bhp	44
max lb ft	65
max mph	83
0-60 (sec)	19.6
30-70	24.1
1/4 mile	21.6
30-50	18.5
50-70	36.2
Overall mpg	38.4
Touring mpg	54.6
mph/1000 rpm	24.2
Weight (kg)	843
Tested	12.5.93
Price now	£6765



Vauxhall Corsa 1.4 SRi



For Stunning shape, brilliant cabin design, safety features
Against Horrid transmission, noisy engine, modest chassis

Verdict ★★★ Nice face, shame about the legs

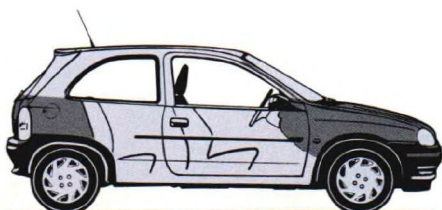
Vauxhall has redefined the shape of the small car, just as the 205 did a decade ago. It has pioneered a new path where others have merely followed in increasingly old and worn footsteps. Yet, for all its stunning visual promise, the Corsa fails to advance the dynamics of small cars by even one small step. Against the likes of the 106 and Micra, it is as backwards to drive as it is advanced to look at.

The problem lies under the Corsa's sharp suit of clothes. The single-cam, 1389cc four is the same old soldier that gave gutsy service in the Nova. In the presence of the current crop of 16-valve rivals, it is now simply too noisy and harsh.

The biggest criticism lies with the Corsa's gearbox. Not only are the ratios misguided short, but the quality of the gearchange is unacceptable. It feels soggy, vague and unwelcoming in your hand.

Add to this a chassis of no more than moderate ability and you can understand our disappointment with the striking new Vauxhall. We now know how the small car of the 21st century will look. The shame of it is, we are no closer to knowing what it will be like to drive.

cc	1398
max bhp	82
max lb ft	84
max mph	106
0-60 (sec)	11.5
30-70	11.6
1/4 mile	18.4
30-50	7.6
50-70	11.9
Overall mpg	32.3
Touring mpg	38.1
mpg/1000 rpm	18.5
Weight (kg)	883
Tested	14.4.93
Price now	£9130



Vauxhall Corsa 1.5 TD 5dr



For Economy/performance compromise, space, load versatility, looks
Against Heavy steering, ordinary chassis, lack of equipment

Verdict ★★★ The prettiest, if not the best, small diesel

You cannot complain of a lack of choice in the pint-sized diesel market — eight manufacturers offer models in this class. If you insist on the performance benefits of a turbocharger though, the field narrows.

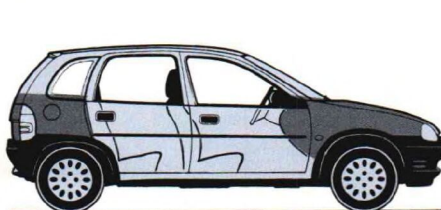
Only Peugeot currently offers a turbodiesel competitor to the Corsa 1.5 TD, and its 205 1.8 GRD is less compact.

The difference the turbo makes to the Corsa's acceleration and top speed is considerable. The 0-60mph dash is, on average, 5sec quicker; 30-70mph through the gears is 7sec faster; power and drag don't call it quits till 104mph.

What's more, this alacrity is achieved without heavy penalty at the pumps. Over 1000 hard miles our test car averaged an impressive 47mpg. Add the Corsa's good looks and class-leading internal packaging, and you have the basis of a winner.

What lets the side down is driver appeal. Nobody, it seems, can make small diesels handle like Peugeot and Citroen do. Certainly not Vauxhall, whose petrol Corsas are hardly paragons to begin with. The bicep-straining steering and the nose-heaviness ensure that the handling falls well short of French standards.

cc	1488
max bhp	66
max lb ft	97
max mph	104
0-60 (sec)	13.1
30-70	14.1
1/4 mile	19.3
30-50	11.0
50-70	15.1
Overall mpg	47.0
Touring mpg	49.0
mpg/1000 rpm	24.3
Weight (kg)	945
Tested	14.7.93
Price now	£8655



Vauxhall Corsa GSi



For Cheeky looks, performance, chassis, space, economy, safety
Against Sparsely equipped, gearchange, noisy motorway cruiser

Verdict ★★★★★ A Corsa that goes (almost) as well as it looks

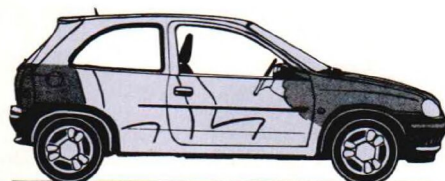
For all their strong points — pretty shape, build quality, clever packaging and fine fuel economy — the lesser Corsas have left us cold. Like so many GM cars of the past, their advanced body shapes write cheques that their humble mechanicals can't cash.

The most overtly sporting Corsa doesn't quite turn the tables, but it does present a much stronger case to the driver. The good news begins with the Lotus-developed twin-cam, 16-valve engine which, though hampered by an inept choice of gear ratios, proves willing, if sometimes noisy, performance and class-leading thrift.

The GSi's much improved chassis is imbued with impeccable on-the-limit manners. It may not be as communicative as its French rivals, but you can chuck it into corners secure in the knowledge that the innately good nature of the chassis will see you safely round without a scare. Unfortunately, the ride is not so good — it's impressive over crests and dips but ragged over longer undulations.

Further plus points are fine build and up-to-the-minute safety. If Lotus had done the chassis as well as the engine, Vauxhall could have had an unqualified winner.

cc	1598
max bhp	107
max lb ft	111
max mph	118
0-60 (sec)	8.7
30-70	8.8
1/4 mile	16.8
30-50	7.7
50-70	10.3
Overall mpg	32.9
Touring mpg	38.5
mph/1000 rpm	19.7
Weight (kg)	980
Tested	15.9.93
Price now	£11,250



Vauxhall Astra 2.0 GSi 16v



For Strong performance, build quality, value, safety features
Against Wooden handling, woolly steering

Verdict ★★★ Despite appetising ingredients, misses by a mile

Vauxhall's top hot hatch can teach even the Golf GTi 16v a trick or two in certain departments. Most surprisingly, it is better put-together and more economical; a little less unexpectedly, it is better equipped — airbag and immobiliser come as standard — while still being cheaper.

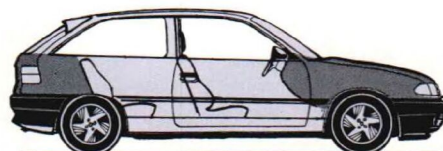
It also humbles the Golf in all-out performance. Though the two tie for top speed, it is the Astra which is significantly quicker off the mark and through the gears. In a straight line, it streaks out in front.

But add some changes of direction to the chosen path and, in what has almost become Vauxhall tradition, the GSi 16v begins to struggle. It is never less than a competent cornerer but mere competence alone, at this level, is never enough.

Inadequate adjustability is the problem. This car understeers, the only choice being by how much. Excess plough can be suppressed automatically by energising the switchable traction control, but then cornering speeds are reduced further.

Note also the feel-less steering and brakes and, despite the GSi 16v's attributes, you have a less than appetising recipe for the press-on driver.

cc	1998
max bhp	150
max lb ft	144
max mph	134
0-60 (sec)	7.5
30-70	7.4
1/4 mile	15.9
30-50	7.4
50-70	10.2
Overall mpg	27.9
Touring mpg	35.7
mph/1000 rpm	22.0
Weight (kg)	1120
Tested	13.10.93
Price now	£15,780



Vauxhall Cavalier 1.8i LS 4dr



For Value, build quality, safety features, low running costs
Against Rough engine, soggy handling, dull steering

Verdict ★★★ Way past its sell-by date

Apart from a slicker front grille and fancier tail lights, Vauxhall's latest Cavalier looks just like the last one. Peel the skin back, however, and you'll find it bursting with safety features. There are impact beams in the doors, pre-tensioned seat belts and strengthened B-pillars.

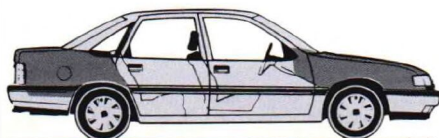
Important as these changes may be, they are hardly weapons to fight off Ford's highly-acclaimed Mondeo, Rover's new 600 and the British-built Honda Accord.

Firstly, the Cavalier can't disguise the antiquity of its powerplant. An adequate performer it may be, but it is outclassed by its new rivals. Gruff and unpleasantly noisy even under mild acceleration, the Vauxhall's 1796cc, 90bhp engine is a ruffian among sophisticates.

When it comes to handling, the Vauxhall's suspension system is effectively over a decade old. The standard power steering offers slow-witted turn-in while the chassis has a general lack of poise on anything other than straight, flat roads.

Where the Cavalier scores, however, is in price. It's also cheaper to run and insure, and will suffer low depreciation. To many, that's what really matters.

cc	1796
max bhp	90
max lb ft	107
max mph	110
0-60 (sec)	12.2
30-70	12.6
1/4 mile	18.8
30-50	11.3
50-70	18.6
Overall mpg	29.7
Touring mpg	35.5
mpg/1000 rpm	24.0
Weight (kg)	1130
Tested	23.12.92
Price now	£11,620



Vauxhall Cavalier turbo 4x4



For Great engine, performance, grip, 4wd security, safety
Against Notchy gearchange, dull steering, not much fun

Verdict ★★★ Huge performance for the money

Ignore the Cavalier Turbo 4x4 at your peril. The car that replaced the GSi 4x4 as flagship of the facelifted Cavalier range offers Escort Cosworth performance in a plain, familiar four-door saloon wrapper... and all for just a shade over £20,000.

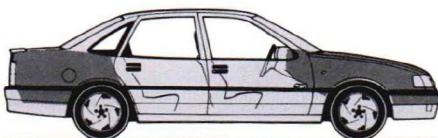
The Cavalier gets the same injection of low-lag turbo power that was administered so effectively to the Calibra Turbo 4x4 along with its six-speed gearbox.

In a straight line, the Cavalier delivers breathtaking performance. From rest, 60mph comes up in only 6.5secs and 100mph in 18.2secs. While the Escort Cosworth has a 26bhp power advantage, the Ford is only fractionally quicker (60mph in 6.2secs and 100mph in 17.4secs). And the Vauxhall's overtaking ability is no less devastating.

The only thing that stands in the way of this barrel-chested performance is the gearshift. It's plain notchy most of the time and baulks badly if you attempt to select sixth at anything more than a leisurely pace. And the car's power-assisted steering lacks real feel, particularly in press-on driving.

What the turbo Cavalier offers is a tantalising blend of performance and practicality at an equally tantalising price.

cc	1998
max bhp	201
max lb ft	207
max mph	144
0-60 (sec)	6.5
30-70	6.4
1/4 mile	15.4
30-50	5.8
50-70	10.0
Overall mpg	23.0
Touring mpg	35.3
mpg/1000 rpm	25.3
Weight (kg)	1396
Tested	30.12.92
Price now	£20,395



Vauxhall Cavalier V6 4dr



For Smooth, classy engine, great value for money
Against Cramped in the back, chassis showing its age

Verdict ★★★★★ Lifts the Cavalier to new heights

There is something very satisfying about a well sorted six-cylinder engine. It can make almost any car seem special. Take this Cavalier, for instance.

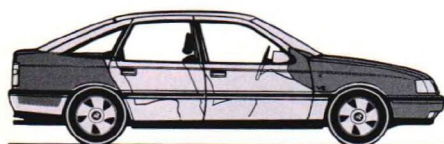
With four cylinders, it is likeable but outclassed and outdated; but with a six under the bonnet, it has what it takes to show the way home to brilliant and brand new competitors like the Rover 623iS.

This particular V6, a 2498cc, four-cam, 24-valve unit built in Cheshire, suits the Cavalier excellently. Fast and rorty when requested, it's otherwise silent and silky. With the optional auto box of our test car, it slips into its role of urbane executive with disarming ease.

That said, there are still many problems that six cylinders are powerless to cure: there's not much room in the back, the chassis is wooden and the driving position and ergonomics, while alright, are showing their age more than most.

Still, when you are talking about a car with the sophistication endowed by that engine, an impressive level of standard equipment and a list price of £16,225, it's easy to forgive it a few age-related foibles. Who'd have thought it of a Cavalier?

CC	2498
max bhp	168
max lb ft	166
max mph	127
0-60 (sec)	9.2
30-70	8.1
1/4 mile	17.1
30-50	3.4*
50-70	4.1*
Overall mpg	n/a
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	24.9
Weight (kg)	1340
Tested	7.4.93
Price now	£16,817
* Kickdown	



Vauxhall Calibra 2.0i



For Great looks, economy, interior space
Against Noisy engine under full throttle, dull chassis response

Verdict ★★★★★ Better than the 16v by far

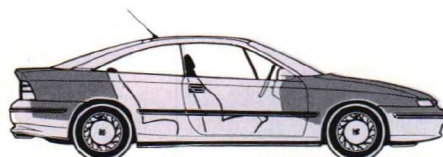
GM's biggest mistake in creating the Calibra was not equipping it with a chassis to match its looks. This is not a sports car — instead, think of it as a rather prettily remoulded family saloon.

The cramped interior of most coupes would make that a ludicrous description, but one of the Calibra's strongest assets is its packaging. It's a four seater in which the comfort of rear passengers is not sacrificed at the altar of sexy styling. Rover's 216 coupe, its obvious competitor, is nothing like so commodious.

On performance and economy, the two antagonists trade points. The eight-valve Calibra is the lesser sprinter, but gets its revenge at the pumps. Both are average handlers; Vauxhall scores points for ride quality. Effective all-disc brakes widen the gap further, as do the Calibra's superior accommodation and noise suppression — despite an intrusively gruff engine note when accelerating hard.

Ironically for Vauxhall, this entry-level Calibra is not only a 216-beater but also more evenly capable than any costlier variant bar the V6. With a top-class chassis underneath, it would be terrific.

CC	1998
max bhp	115
max lb ft	125
max mph	126
0-60 (sec)	9.5
30-70	9.8
1/4 mile	17.4
30-50	7.7
50-70	11.4
Overall mpg	29.3
Touring mpg	31.5
mph/1000 rpm	21.2
Weight (kg)	1205
Tested	12.9.90
Price now	£16,445



Vauxhall Calibra V6



For Superb packaging, potent engine, refined, high equipment level
Against Soft handling, poor gearchange

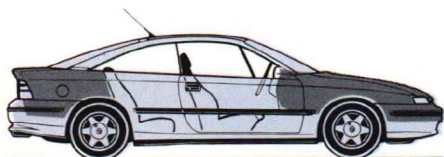
Verdict ★★★★★ The car the Calibra always should have been

With the arrival of a V6 engine, the Calibra's role has been belatedly clarified. Vauxhall has acknowledged that its shapely coupe, despite the promise of its looks, is no sports car. So the V6 gracefully bows out of further bloody encounters with Volkswagen's lithe Corrado and settles instead for being a sophisticated tourer.

Its superior packaging has never been in doubt. Unlike its competitors, the Calibra is a capable of transporting a quartet of grown-ups in comfort. With the V6, it adds pace to its space. Not that it is quite as quick as you might expect. To emphasise refinement, Vauxhall has fitted very tall gear ratios (the car will do 106mph in third), blunting performance. The gear lever is also tiresomely sticky.

Pay-off comes on the motorway, where those high gear ratios, coupled with class-topping noise suppression and ride quality, make the V6 Calibra a relaxing mile-eater. However, the soft damping betrays itself in soggy handling.

Still, with its new-found purpose in life, this is the best Calibra by far.



cc	2498
max bhp	167
max lb ft	167
max mph	143
0-60 (sec)	8.2
30-70	7.6
1/4 mile	16.5
30-50	9.3
50-70	11.9
Overall mpg	25.8
Touring mpg	29.1
mph/1000 rpm	23.8
Weight (kg)	1280
Tested	22.9.93
Price now	£19,870



Vauxhall Frontera 2.0 Sport



For Price, looks, interior space
Against Miserable performance, poor economy

Verdict ★★★ Likeable, honest all-roader

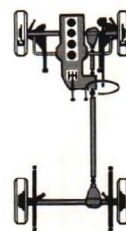
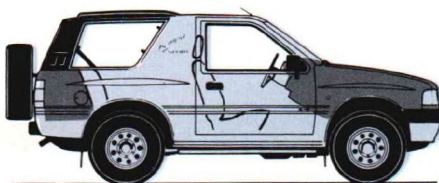
If you begin from the premise that off-roaders make any sense at all for the majority of people who buy them, at least the Frontera scores over its competitors in price and looks. Take a less charitable view, though, and even these attributes prove tenuous. For to call any off-roader cheap and attractive is, in such pricey and ugly company, damning it with rather faint praise.

This Frontera costs £13,445, which buys you four seats, not much load space, feebler performance than a 1.4-litre Fiesta (0-60mph in 13.6sec, top speed 97mph) and fuel economy, if that's the word, little superior to an S-class Mercedes.

For about the same money you could instead buy, say, a Ford Mondeo 1.8i LX estate. The Mondeo would whip the Frontera for performance, be a vastly more refined tourer, carry bigger loads and be less of a pal to the oil companies.

Of its sort, however, the Frontera makes a convincing case for itself, proving more space efficient than many of its rivals and undercutting nearly all of them on price. If you do want a car from this class, and you cannot afford the more expensive Ford Maverick, this is as good a place as any to start looking.

cc	1998
max bhp	115
max lb ft	125
max mph	97
0-60 (sec)	13.6
30-70	14.7
1/4 mile	n/a
30-50	11.7
50-70	18.5
Overall mpg	17.5
Touring mpg	n/a
mph/1000 rpm	20.6
Weight (kg)	1560
Tested	21.7.93
Price now	£13,445



Volkswagen Golf 1.8 CL



For Roomy, economical, rides well
Against Miserly equipment, stodgy handling, poor performance

Verdict ★★ A big disappointment

In its high-performance forms — the VR6 and GTi 16v — the Volkswagen Golf is still very much a force to be reckoned with. But lower down the order it has begun to look distinctly ordinary, especially against stiff competition from Citroen and Peugeot.

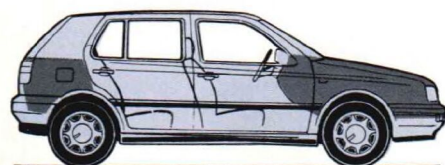
What the French cars manage to do so successfully is retain a sense of brio throughout the range. By contrast, lesser Golfs rely on stolid virtues and end up being dull to drive as a result.

For the 1.8 CL, the bad news begins with its performance. A leisurely 12.0sec to reach 60mph and 104mph top speed are not what you have a right to expect of a 1.8-litre hatchback — particularly not when the Peugeot 306 1.8 XT posts 10.2sec for the sprint and 10mph more than the CL's maximum.

Around corners things are no better. The ride/handling compromise is so biased in the direction of road isolation that a front anti-roll bar is omitted. While the French rivals entertain, the VW changes direction with stodgy reluctance.

The Golf has in its favour interior space, economy and build quality — but isn't VW motoring supposed to mean something more these days?

cc	1781
max bhp	90
max lb ft	107
max mph	107
0-60 (sec)	12.7
30-70	12.9
1/4 mile	19.2
30-50	9.1
50-70	12.9
Overall mpg	32.2
Touring mpg	34.2
mpg/1000 rpm	21.1
Weight (kg)	1084
Tested	26.2.93
Price now	£11,859



Volkswagen Golf GTi 16v 3dr



For Great handling, excellent driving position, space
Against Price, sombre cabin, uninspiring engine

Verdict ★★★★★ Not the hero it used to be, but still great fun

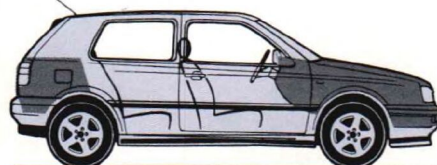
Pretenders to the GTi throne are many but none has yet deposed the Volkswagen Golf. Just as the would-be successors recover groggily from the knock-out blow delivered by the Golf VR6, in steps the new 16v to lay them out again.

It's the dynamics of the VW GTi 16v which so impress, and the fact that it is not merely clinically capable but roistering good fun. On performance alone, it isn't top of the heap. The Vauxhall Astra GSi 16v can show it a clean tailgate from a standing start and through the gears, and beats the Golf on fuel economy too.

Put the performance to work on a challenging road, though, and the Golf convincingly turns the tables. Its grip, composure and willingness to change direction leave the competition trailing. It also boasts powerful anti-lock brakes and a comfortable environment for the driver.

Noise, build and equipment levels rate only as average, and a driver's airbag — standard on the Astra — is a costly option. None of this detracts from the Golf's superiority on the road. Its reign seems set to continue at least until Peugeot launches its hot 306 in Britain next year.

cc	1984
max bhp	150
max lb ft	133
max mph	134
0-60 (sec)	8.1
30-70	7.8
1/4 mile	16.4
30-50	8.2
50-70	11.1
Overall mpg	26.7
Touring mpg	33.2
mpg/1000 rpm	21.5
Weight (kg)	1160
Tested	13.10.93
Price now	£15,998



Volkswagen Vento 1.8 CL



For Refined engine, fine chassis, space, build quality, safety
Against Highish price, low equipment, not exactly pretty

Verdict ★★★★★ Will put the wind up most rivals

No prizes are going to be awarded here for great looks. However, what VW's four-door Vento trades for its lose-me-in-a-car-park appearance, it makes up for by being one of the best all-rounders in the mid-size class.

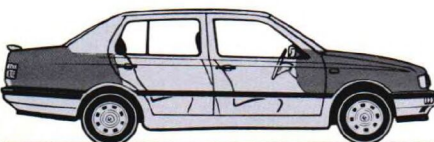
The understated Vento gets most of its strengths from using Golf underpinnings. Its fine suspension dampens unwanted interferences, while still providing enough information about what is happening at the front wheels. It rides well too, smothering ruts and humps that many luxury cars would have difficulty suppressing.

The Vento is more a lively plodder than a ball of fire. It reaches 60mph from rest in 12.2sec and goes on to a top speed of 111mph, but at the pumps, it rushes ahead of rivals, averaging 31mpg.

Inside, the VW's cabin oozes quality, while the space in the back seats and a simply enormous boot make it one of the most practical cars in the class.

Our only criticism concerns the highish price and mediocre levels of standard equipment. That may turn fleet bosses away, but private buyers should gladly pay extra for the VW's broad range of talents.

cc	1787
max bhp	90
max lb ft	107
max mph	111
0-60 (sec)	12.2
30-70	12.9
1/4 mile	18.8
30-50	9.5
50-70	11.1
Overall mpg	31.0
Touring mpg	43.7
mpg/1000 rpm	21.0
Weight (kg)	1120
Tested	23.12.92
Price now	£12,198



Volkswagen Vento 2.0 GL



For Strong performance, handling, boot space, well put together
Against Bland appearance, not for punters on a budget

Verdict ★★★★★ Only dull looks spoil a fine all-rounder

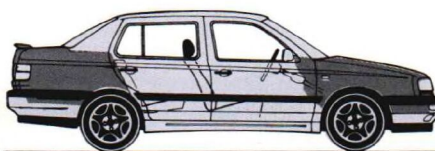
Ignore the rather dull-looking, unappealing facade, because Volkswagen's Vento is a big threat to those fleet market favourites, the Ford Mondeo and Nissan Primera. From its smooth, effortless depth of performance to the exploitable fine tuning of its chassis and its hewn-from-solid build quality, the Vento is one of the most complete cars we've come across in some time.

Unlike its predecessor, the Jetta, the Vento is much more than a Golf with a boot. It has revised rear suspension — closer in design to a Passat's back end than a Golf's — new seats, new instruments and a re-aligned level of equipment.

Using the same two-litre that powers the Golf GTi, the Vento is an enthusiastic performer. It reaches 60mph from rest in a creditable 10sec, but what elevates it from the brunt of its competitors is how fast it feels. Floor the throttle at 50mph in fifth and the Vento will be cruising at the legal limit in just 10.6sec — a full 3sec quicker than the two-litre Cavalier.

It also lists enthusiastic handling, a fine ride, a spacious and comfortable interior and low, low noise levels among its other qualities. This Vento is one of the best ways of spending £14,000 we can think of.

cc	1984
max bhp	115
max lb ft	123
max mph	121
0-60 (sec)	10.0
30-70	9.7
1/4 mile	17.5
30-50	8.1
50-70	10.6
Overall mpg	28.4
Touring mpg	36.6
mpg/1000 rpm	22.0
Weight (kg)	1099
Tested	4.11.92
Price now	£13,995



Volvo 850 2.5 GLT



For Fine engine, excellent handling, fuel economy, safety
Against Lumpy ride, equipment levels, poor value overall

Verdict ★★★ Buy the two-litre version

In the 850, Volvo has produced a real driver's car. No one argues with that. But the question is: should you pay an extra £2600 for the more powerful 2.5-litre 850 GLT when the two-litre car delivers so much?

Despite its extra muscle — the 2.5 is 25bhp and 32lb ft up on the smaller-engined car — the performance gains are minimal; you get to 60mph 0.4sec faster and go on to a top speed of 127mph, rather than 120mph in the two-litre version.

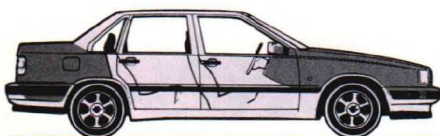
The bigger-engined car's wider alloy wheels get more of the 195/60 tyres on the road so there's more grip to enjoy, but the ride, especially at low speeds, is choppy.

Neither is the 2.5 elevated above the two-litre car with more equipment — all you get are those wider alloy wheels and the bigger engine.

Those gripes aside, we like the more powerful 850 a lot. The 2.5-litre engine is free-revving, gutsy and it has an unexpectedly sporting tone. The handling has poise and fluency, while surprisingly quick power-assisted steering allows fast and accurate changes in direction.

But we would still go for the two-litre GLT and save the money. It's 95 per cent as good as the 2.5-litre version.

cc	2435
max bhp	170
max lb ft	162
max mph	127
0-60 (sec)	9.7
30-70	8.6
1/4 mile	17.3
30-50	3.6*
50-70	5.0*
Overall mpg	25.9
Touring mpg	30.0
mph/1000 rpm	25.9
Weight (kg)	1443
Tested	4.11.92
Price now	£22,070
* in kickdown	



Volvo 850 2.0 GLT estate



For Smooth engine, driver appeal, space, fuel economy, safety
Against Leisurely performance, baulky gearshift, dull cabin

Verdict ★★★★★ A Volvo estate to be seen in

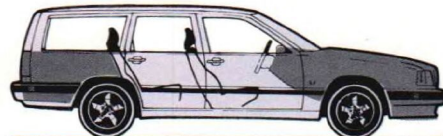
The days when sensible meant soporific and practical equalled puritanical are behind us. For indisputable proof, here is a capacious, crash-worthy, conservative Volvo estate which is also a delight to drive.

Not that it is in any way, shape or form a performance car. The five-cylinder two-litre engine developed by Porsche is smooth and rev-ready, but there is only so much it can achieve with a tonne and a half to pull about. Acceleration is modest and motorway gradients are too much for a 80mph cruise in top gear. Working the gears is hindered by a baulky shift action.

Stacked against the driver negatives are well-weighted, passably quick power steering and Volvo's passive-steer rear suspension which confers lively responses and neutral cornering. Fade-free anti-lock brakes are a plus point too, as is Volvo's emphasis on passive safety.

As a load carrier, the 850 doesn't disappoint. No styling concessions are allowed to diminish capacity, so the load platform is long, wide and high. Plain and practical rule in the workmanlike cabin too, though — an unwelcome hark-back to the bad old days.

cc	1984
max bhp	143
max lb ft	130
max mph	120
0-60 (sec)	11.0
30-70	11.1
1/4 mile	18.2
30-50	10.8
50-70	15.9
Overall mpg	26.0
Touring mpg	35.5
mph/1000 rpm	22.3
Weight (kg)	1480
Tested	7.7.93
Price now	£19,745



Volvo 850 T5 estate



For Brilliant engine, load capacity, shock value
Against Chassis not really up to the power, cheap-looking interior

Verdict ★★★ A Volvo with attitude

The 850 is going to change the way people think about Volvos for ever. Who would have thought, just a few years ago, that the latest big Volvo estate would be front-wheel drive, actually quite good looking and, strangest of all, capable of 150mph? Not us, for sure.

But the enlightened Volvo is with us now and we welcome it with open arms. The muscle-bound Swede joins a growing band of hard-hitting, no-nonsense performance estates.

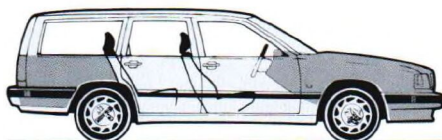
Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this hottest Volvo is the sheer savagery of its 2.3-litre five-cylinder turbo engine, which means that no fewer than 225 horses lurk inside that unassuming shell.

It is a shame, therefore, that the chassis, which is fine in the normally-aspirated version, simply finds the task of coping with all that extra power too much for it. It spoils the Volvo's chance of being judged a truly extraordinary all-rounder by offering a really inspiring drive.

That said, this Volvo is an extremely entertaining and credible contender, two compliments that we would not feel tempted to aim at its forebears.

cc	2319
max bhp	225
max lb ft	221
max mph	141
0-60 (sec)	7.0
30-70	6.2
1/4 mile	15.4
30-50	2.7
50-70	7.2
Mpg* urban	21.8
56mph	40.9
mph/1000 rpm	25.1
Weight (kg)	1420
Tested	17.11.93
Price now	£24,795

* claimed figures



Westfield ZEI



For Comes fully built, handling, performance, ride quality
Against Price, lack of refinement, poor attention to detail

Verdict ★★ A valiant but ultimately disappointing effort

With the revised type approval rules, it is now possible for small-volume car manufacturers such as Westfield to offer vehicles for sale fully built, instead of leaving the buyer to finish off the car.

Skipping the spanner work deletes some of the fun, but if you're the type who cross-threads bottle tops you won't care.

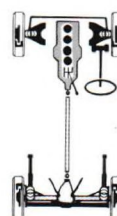
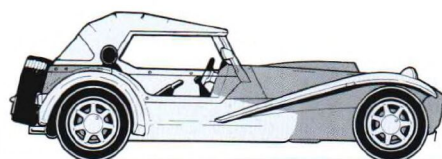
At least, not until you see the price tag. Few will want to run the ZEI as their main form of transport, but as a second car it is a rather costly indulgence.

Even though the 1.8-litre Westfield's performance is brisk — with 0-60mph taking just 7sec — the twin-cam 16-valve Ford engine is noisy and harsh at high revs.

Though there is no shortage of grip, the handling lacks the fluency of its most deadly rival, the Caterham 7. The ZEI's ride, however, is impressively controlled.

The Westfield is a likeable car and we applaud the effort that brought it into fully-built production. But, hands on our hearts, we'd have to say that enthusiasts will be better off in the better-built, vastly more attractive and faster Caterham.

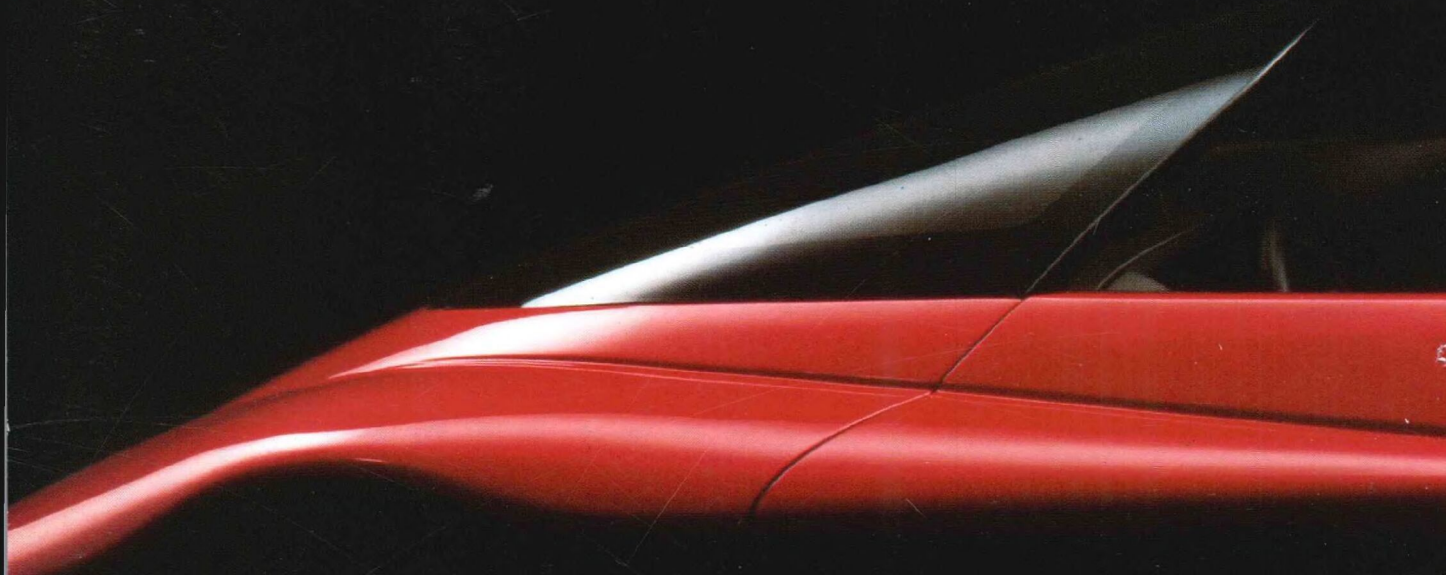
cc	1796
max bhp	128
max lb ft	119
max mph	107
0-60 (sec)	7.0
30-70	7.5
1/4 mile	15.7
30-50	8.6
50-70	15.8
Overall mpg	26.6
Touring mpg	30.9
mph/1000 rpm	22.5
Weight (kg)	680
Tested	24.2.93
Price now	£14,687



L I N E A P I N I N F A R I N A

foto G. Bellia

F O R M A



pininfarina

L A T R A D I Z I O N E D E L N U O V O

£1.35 EVERY WEEK 8 DECEMBER 1993

Britain's best car magazine

AUTOCAR

..... & Motor

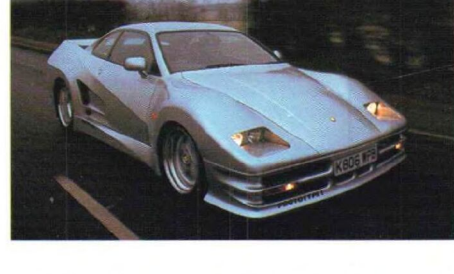
ASTON DB7



Testing Britain's newest star

Scoop!

Master Storm
and AC Ace. We
drive them both



Plus: Clio Williams road test, brilliant **Alfa 164 4x4**

the best used cars for sale **PINK PAGES**

THE NEW PROTON PERSONA

VISIT ANY JAPANESE CAR SHOWROOM AND YOU'LL EXPERIENCE THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, EXCITING DESIGNS, AND SUPERB QUALITY. BUT YOU'LL ALSO SEE ONE FEATURE THAT ISN'T SO DESIRABLE. BECAUSE, OVER RECENT YEARS, THE CARS FROM THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN HAVE BECOME THE CARS WITH THE RISING PRICES. AND THAT'S WHERE THE NEW PROTON PERSONA COMES IN. AN UP-TO-THE-MINUTE DESIGN UTILISING THE LATEST JAPANESE TECHNOLOGY AND SUPERBLY BUILT IN MALAYSIA AT PRICES THAT ARE SUBSTANTIALLY LOWER THAN THE JAPANESE COMPETITION. THE PERSONA COMES IN ROOMY 4 AND 5 DOOR BODY STYLES AND WITH A CHOICE OF TWO, RELIABLE, EFFICIENT ENGINES INCLUDING A SPORTY NEW 1.6 LITRE FUEL INJECTED, 16-VALVE UNIT. THE ELEGANT, FLOWING LINES ARE PROTECTED UTILISING GALVANNEALED STEEL FOR PROVEN CORROSION RESISTANCE. WHILST PASSENGER PROTECTION IS AFFORDED BY A RIGID PASSENGER SAFETY CELL SURROUNDED BY HIGH TENSILE STEEL AND INCORPORATING IMPACT ABSORBING CRUMPLE ZONES FRONT AND REAR, SIDE IMPACT BARS IN ALL FOUR DOORS AND, ON 16-VALVE MODELS, SERVO ASSISTED DISC BRAKES ALL ROUND, FOR PRECISE STOPPING POWER.



PERSONA 1.6 SEi

INSIDE THE PERSONA, YOU'LL FIND LUXURIOUS UPHOLSTERY, SPACE ENOUGH FOR FIVE ADULTS AND ALL THEIR LUGGAGE, PLUS EQUIPMENT LEVELS THAT INCLUDE POWER STEERING, 6-SPEAKER BLAUPUNKT STEREO RADIO CASSETTE SYSTEMS, HEIGHT ADJUSTABLE STEERING FOR ULTIMATE DRIVER COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE, TILT-AND-SLIDE SUNROOFS AND ELECTRIC WINDOWS FRONT AND REAR. THERE'S EVEN AIR CONDITIONING AND THE LATEST 4-SPEED AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION WITH POWER/ECONOMY MODES FOR GREATER FLEXIBILITY, AS OPTIONAL EXTRAS. DRIVING PLEASURE GUARANTEED.

UNIQUE 6 YEAR MECHANICAL AND BODYWORK WARRANTIES

PROTON IS THE ONLY MANUFACTURER TO OFFER THIS EXCEPTIONAL PEACE OF MIND PACKAGE. BUT IN ADDITION TO 6 YEAR MECHANICAL AND BODYWORK WARRANTIES+, WE ALSO GIVE YOU A 2 YEAR TOTAL VEHICLE WARRANTY, 2 YEARS RAC MEMBERSHIP++ AND THE PROTON SECURITY SYSTEM, MAKING IT OVER 150 TIMES LESS LIKELY THAT YOUR NEW PERSONA WILL BE STOLEN. ALL AT NO EXTRA COST. THE NEW PROTON PERSONA. EVERYTHING YOU'D EXPECT OF A JAPANESE CAR, YET AT PRICES THAT REPRESENT EXCEPTIONAL VALUE FOR MONEY. QUITE SIMPLY, EVERYTHING YOU'D EXPECT FROM PROTON.

0% A.P.R. FINANCE AVAILABLE

ON THE FULL RANGE. ASK YOUR DEALER FOR WRITTEN CREDIT QUOTATIONS.

PROTON. A RANGE OF 18 QUALITY CARS FROM ONLY £6,990

(EXCLUDING DELIVERY AND NUMBER PLATES). OFFERS UNTIL 31ST MARCH 1994.

FOR YOUR NEAREST PROTON DEALER AND A FREE INFORMATION PACK ☎ 081 812 0900. OVER 230 DEALERS NATIONWIDE

*Everything
you'd expect of a
Japanese car
with one exception.*

*The price.
£8,990 to £10,990*

proton



JAPANESE TECHNOLOGY BUILT WITH MALAYSIAN VALUE

ON THE ROAD CASH PRICES: PERSONA 1.5 GLI SALOON £9,482. PERSONA 1.6 SEi 5 DOOR £11,482. MPi 1.3 GE SALOON £7,472. INTEREST RATES AND G.B. MAINLAND PRICES CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS AND INCLUDE DELIVERY, NUMBER PLATES AND 6 MONTHS ROAD TAX. PROTON CARS (UK) LIMITED, PROTON HOUSE, ROYAL PORTBURY DOCK, BRISTOL, AVON BS20 0NH. OFFERS APPLICABLE TO FIRST OWNERS OF VEHICLES REGISTERED BETWEEN 25th NOVEMBER 1993 AND 31st MARCH 1994 AND ARE NON-TRANSFERABLE. +POWER-TRAIN WARRANTY COVERS ALL MAJOR ENGINE AND GEARBOX COMPONENTS (INCLUDING AUTOMATICS), DRIVE SHAFTS, DIFFERENTIAL COMPONENTS, FRONT HUBS AND BEARINGS. BODYWORK WARRANTY SUBJECT TO MAINTENANCE CHARGES. ++EXCLUDES ACCIDENT RECOVERY. FULL WRITTEN DETAILS AVAILABLE FROM YOUR DEALER.



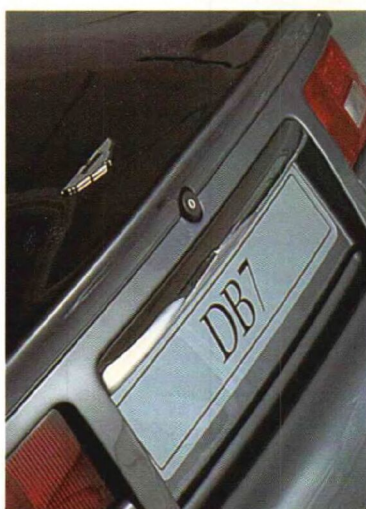
contents



Powerful Safrane Biturbo, p58



Alfa's 164 Q4 is a winner, p54



Living in Seventh Heaven, p26



New Seat convincing, p42



F1 name, F1 ability. Clio test, p46

Editor Michael Harvey
Deputy editor Mark Harrop
Road test editor Andrew Frankel
Features editor Giles Chapman
Associate editor Peter McSean
News editor Julian Rendell
European editor Peter Robinson
Editor-in-chief Steve Cropley

Deputy road test editor Stephen Sutcliffe
Deputy news editor Iain Robertson
Road testers
 James Thomas, Gavin Conway
Editor's assistant/road test co-ordinator Janet Mills

Production editor/chief sub-editor Patrick Fuller
Chief news sub-editor Allan Muir
Sub-editor Gary Watkins
News reporter Hugo Andrae

Art editor Martin Tullett
Deputy art editor Stephen Hopkins
Designer Mark Pinder
Chief photographers
 Stan Papior, Peter Burn
Researcher Brenda Richards

Technical editor Keith Howard
Grand prix editor Maurice Hamilton
US editor John McCormick
Italian editor Luca Ciferri
Japanese editor Yoshio Maezawa
German editor Greg Kable
Special correspondents Jeff Daniels, Eoin Young, Mark Hughes, John Coates

Group ad manager display Julian Chislett
Display ad manager John Constantinou
Assistant display ad manager Kate Law
Client sales manager Paul Garside

Group ad manager classified Bill Murray
Classified ad managers
 Stephanie Allister, Jo Biggs, Tony Lane

Senior group production manager Cormac Bourne
Group production manager Stuart White
Display production Barnaby Moore
Classified production
 Steve Broderick, Meurig Evans

Publishing manager Philippa Sumner
Syndication/reprints manager Charles Pierce

Special projects director Derek Redfern
Sales director Simon Daukes
Art director James Baker
Senior group editor Bob Murray
Publishing director Kevin Whitchurch
Editorial director Mel Nichols
Joint managing directors
 Eric Verdon-Roe, Patrick Fuller
Chairman Simon Taylor

This Week

Aston's Ambitions Big plans for Vantage/Volante DB7s and Vignale	4
Road Pricing Backlash against Government m'way plan for smart card	6
Renault and Volvo Split The merger is called off, Volvo boss resigns	6
Audi A8 Clear sight of the aluminium V8-engined 7-series rival	8
Bodybags Why aftermarket bodykits can immobilise airbags	11
Lotus Let Off Mercedes won't be sued for C-class 'Esprit' tag	13
Pink Pages Buy your used car in the next two weeks — or lose out	14
PLUS Robinson, Cropley, Coates, Young, sports news and your views	

Aston DB7 — the star rises

We go behind the scenes as the gorgeous coupe is readied for launch 26

Road Test

Renault Clio Williams Giant-killer is awesome on track and road 46

Features

Storm Warning We drive Lister's 200mph (claimed) supercar for four	34
Marcos's Viper Coupe The extravagant 420bhp GT Le Mans	38
500SL Beware! Drive the Ace and it's a deeply impressive package	40
Seat of Power Cordoba, Seat's booted Ibiza, is a serious contender	42
Miles Smiles How an ex-F1 racer and chassis engineer spent £7000	52
Alfa 164 Q4 Four driven wheels, six gears, oversteer — a true great	54
Renault Safrane Biturbo Great on paper, grates on the road	58
Hindsight How the Batmobile and Cortina are related	61
25,000-MILE TEST Feeling small but solid in our Nissan Micra CVT	131

Pink Pages

Road Test Results Our exclusive facts, figures and verdicts	63
Past Masters Test results and verdicts on evergreen greats	67
New Car Prices Price and essential specification of every car on sale	68
Sell Your Car Classified advertisement coupon	74
Cars For Sale 32 pages of the greatest new and used bargains	75

EDITORIAL General enquiries 081 943 5013 **News desk** 081 943 5089 **Road test desk** 081 943 5081 **Features desk** 081 943 5638
Subscriptions 0858 468888 **Back issues/test reprints** 0235 534323 **Editorial fax** 081 943 5653

ADVERTISING Classified 081 943 5050 **Display** 081 943 5030 **Production** 081 943 5060 **Advertising fax** 081 943 5672

ALL OTHER DEPARTMENTS 081 943 5000. **Telex** 8952440 (HAYMRT G)

WRITE TO 38-42 Hampton Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 0JE, Great Britain

AUTOCAR & MOTOR is published every Wednesday by Haymarket Motoring Publications Ltd under licence from Haymarket Magazines Ltd, © Haymarket Magazines Ltd 1993 **Subscriptions** Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9EF. Cheques payable to Haymarket Publishing Services Ltd. US, Canada, Mexico to Eric Walter Assoc, Box 188 Berkeley Hts, NJ07922, USA; US \$US\$150. Canada, Mexico US\$180. Tel: (US) 908 665 7811. **POSTMASTER** send address changes to US PS 038420. Second class postage paid at Berkeley Hts NJ07922. Subscription rates: Home £70; Europe and overseas surface mail £90; Middle East, Africa, India, South America airmail £190; Australia, New Zealand, Japan airmail £180. **Back numbers** Haymarket reprints, PO Box 200 Abingdon, Oxon OX14 3FG. £2.50 each. **Loose binders** (13 issues) from Evro Publishing, Dept ABC, 60 Waldegrave Road, Teddington, Middx TW11 1BL. £5.95 each or £20 for four. Allow 28 days for delivery. Circulation trade enquiries: BBC Frontline Ltd, Park House, 117 Park Road, Peterborough, Cambs PE12TR (0733 555161). Typeset by Diagraphic, EC2, and Tabloid Fotoset, N1; colour by Copeland Origination Services, EC2; printed by HunterPrint, Corby, Northants. Registered at the post office as a newspaper. Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation. Reprinting part or whole forbidden except by permission. ISSN 0955-5889.

AUTOCAR & Motor

Founded 1895
 Vol 198 No 11 (5054)

The Autocar®, Motor® and Autocar & Motor® are registered trademarks

Hot DB7s spearhead Aston explosion

Tenfold increase in production by year 2000 ★ 400bhp DB7 Vantage ★ open-top DB7 Volante ★ Lagonda Vignale

ASTON MARTIN is poised to take the luxury sports car market by storm with a three-tier model range, a new high-tech factory and a tenfold increase in production.

A fire-breathing 400bhp version of the DB7, which goes on sale in standard tune next July, is expected

to lead the assault in 1996, followed by a convertible in 1997.

An exciting all-new Lagonda, based on Ghia's controversial Lagonda Vignale concept car, will join the DB7 and existing Virage models to complete the range in

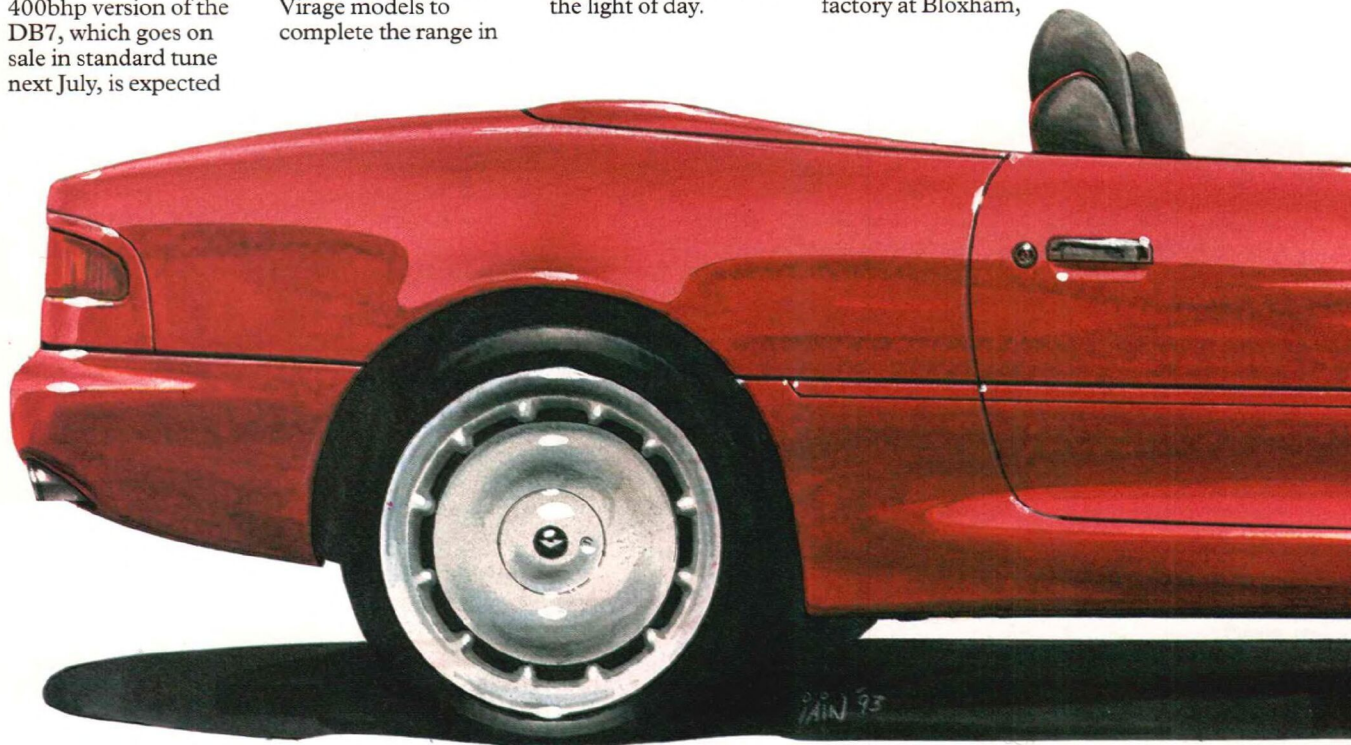
1998, boosting annual production to about 2000 by the turn of the century.

Aston is already looking ahead to a DB8 and beyond, although a rumoured mid-engined model is unlikely to see the light of day.

"We're reviewing quite a few possibilities at the moment," says Aston Martin director and TWR boss Tom Walkinshaw.

All DB7 and Lagonda models will be built at Aston's new factory at Bloxham,

Oxfordshire, leaving the labour-intensive Virage to soldier on at Newport Pagnell. The DB7 is expected to boost annual Aston production from 200 to 800 in its first year.



this week

"We have planning approval to double the size of the factory," says Walkinshaw.

Expected to carry the Vantage badge, the hottest DB7 is likely use the four-litre version of Jaguar's latest AJ16 straight six, with Aston's own 24-valve cylinder head and a single Eaton supercharger delivering more than 400bhp.

Styling changes for the DB7 Vantage are likely to be restricted to a slightly deeper, more aggressive front bumper/spoiler and larger, 19in wheels.

The second 'special equipment' DB7 will be the convertible Volante. Aston is believed to have been so encouraged by the reaction to the DB7 in the US and Far East that the original 'targa' coupe has been scrapped in favour of a full convertible.

"The market is there to sell cars in the numbers we envisage," says Aston spokesman Harry Calton.



Lagonda Vignale (top) gets go-ahead but art deco (right) ditched; will be built at Bloxham with DB7, including new Volante (below); Newport Pagnell keeps with all Virage variants



Mechanically identical to the DB7 coupe, the curvaceous £90,000 two-plus-two Volante is expected to be Aston Martin's top seller in the US.

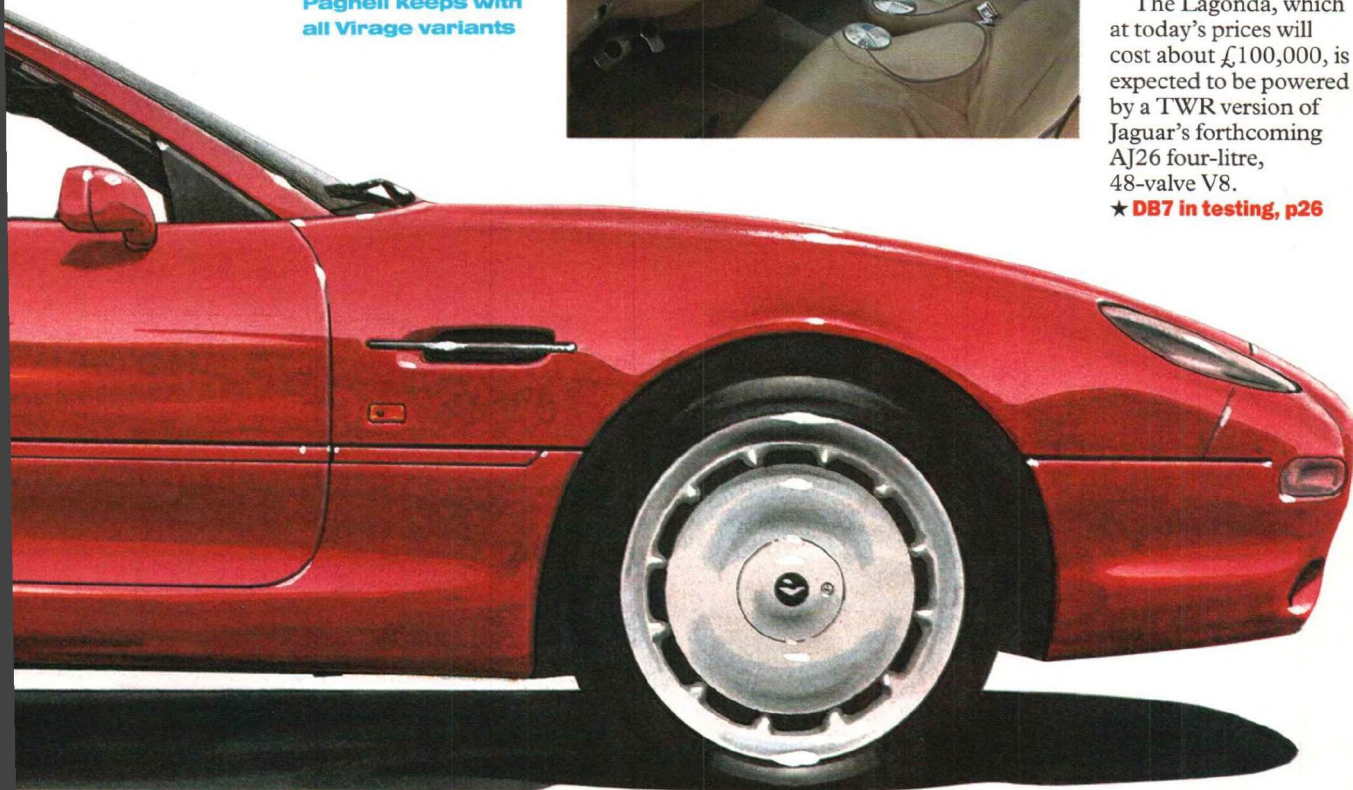
But the most surprising move is the firm's adoption of Ghia's flamboyant Lagonda Vignale as its next flagship saloon.

First displayed at this year's Geneva motor show, the Lagonda Vignale (designed by Moray Callum, brother of DB7 designer Ian) received mixed reviews, but successful customer clinics in the US have convinced Aston bosses to give it the green light for production in 1998.

The spacious new Lagonda will be developed for production by TWR using the platform and running gear of the new Jaguar XJ6 due out next year. Exterior styling will be pure Ghia but the show car's art deco interior is likely to be replaced by a conservative solution by TWR Design.

The Lagonda, which at today's prices will cost about £100,000, is expected to be powered by a TWR version of Jaguar's forthcoming AJ26 four-litre, 48-valve V8.

★ DB7 in testing, p26



DISPATCHES

GERMANY Greg Kable reports
The Vatican is among the high-profile organisations demanding answers from Heidelberg University following claims that it has used more than 200 human corpses — including those of eight children — in crash tests since 1975. Officials have defended the tests, saying data from the corpses is used to calibrate measuring devices on crash dummies and on all occasions the permission of family members had been given.

Audi plans to introduce a 2.6-litre V6 version of the stylish 80 cabriolet (right) in January. The upgraded model will replace the 2.3-litre five-cylinder cabrio and will cost slightly more at DM59,900 (about £24,000).



Faulty red light cameras are causing more than a few red faces in the transport ministry. The rogue cameras have been snapping away at law-abiding motorists, who have subsequently received a computer-generated pay-up notice. No one is saying how many of the false fines have been issued, but motorists are being urged to seek photographic evidence before parting with their money.

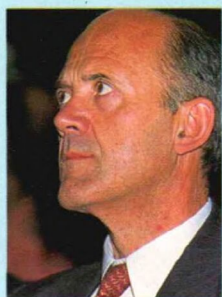
A state-of-the-art driver training and crash test centre is being constructed at the Nurburgring. The 16-acre site, funded by a consortium of German motoring organisations, is due to open in May. Among the car makers already showing interest in using the facility are Ford, Opel and Volkswagen.



Mercedes-Benz aims to make a big splash in the US with the acclaimed Vision A (left) in preparation for the arrival of its

radical new small car in 1997. Two versions of the Fiat Panda-sized concept car are heading Stateside next month; the 75bhp petrol-engined variant is bound for the Detroit show, while the electric-powered Vision A will press its zero-emissions claims at the Los Angeles show.

An independent auditor has cleared Volkswagen purchasing manager Ignacio Lopez (right) of allegations that he breached confidentiality laws in his move from GM in March. The auditor, commissioned by VW, spent two months examining the major decisions and products initiated since Lopez joined the group. VW now awaits the results of an official government audit.



Average trip to cost 30pc more by 1998

THE COST OF THE average journey could leap by up to 30 per cent following last week's Budget and the announcement that motorists are to be charged for using UK motorways.

In the Budget, the Chancellor increased the price of a gallon of fuel by nearly 14 pence and vehicle excise duty by £5 and imposed a new 3 per cent tax on car insurance.

Just two days later, Transport Secretary John MacGregor confirmed that motorway pricing will be introduced within five years.

Today, the cost of driving from London to Glasgow by motorway (in a 30mpg car running on unleaded at £2.50 a gallon) is £33.33. In 1998, £6 in motorway



tolls and the proposed annual 5 per cent fuel tax increase will push the cost up to £46.60.

Outraged motoring groups claimed that

motorway pricing would lead to "roads for the rich" and increased congestion away from the motorways.

Volvo boss quits as Renault deal dies

VOLVO PRESIDENT Pehr Gyllenhammer resigned last week following the dramatic announcement that the merger with Renault, announced just three months ago, has been abandoned.

Gyllenhammer, head of Volvo for the past 25 years, was regarded as the architect of the deal. He first approached Renault in 1987 and viewed the merger as vital to Volvo's survival into the next century.

The deal was torpedoed last week at a meeting of the Volvo board, which had twice previously approved the deal. Renault "deplored" the



Gyllenhammer: off

vote against the merger, which it described as "industrially and economically justified".

The problem lay with the French government's proposed 'golden share' after Renault is privatised early next year. With a 25 per cent stake, the government would have had effective control of the Franco-Swedish group (Renault would have owned 65 per cent).

Renault boss Louis Schweitzer claimed that the working agreements between the two companies would remain in force. The future of the new executive saloon they were developing together is unclear.

SHORT TAKES

Chrysler's Jeep

Cherokee turbo diesel will be launched in the UK at next October's Birmingham Motor Show, not in March as we stated in last week's '100 new cars for '94'. The Grand Cherokee will follow towards the end of 1995, with right-hand drive versions of the next generation Voyager MPVs due to appear the year after that.

The first Tracker-

equipped stolen car was recovered last week, just hours after its theft from outside a Surrey house. The small transmitter, hidden in the bodywork of the Ford Sierra Cosworth (surprise, surprise), was activated within half an hour and led police straight to a lock-up in Dagenham.

The 50,000th Fiesta

has rolled off Ford's new £12.9 million production line. The super-efficient, state-of-the-art single line, which carries 136 cars through 98 different assembly operations, was installed in just three weeks.

Ferrari 456GT owners

prepared to part with an extra £10,000 could buy the registration number '456 GT'. Auctioneer Christie's is offering the number as part of the DVLA's Classic Collection, which also includes 'L1 ONS', 'K1 NGS', 'JUL 1A' and 'LOG 1C'.

Mulsanne, the town at the end of the legendary straight on the Le Mans 24 Hours circuit, has honoured W O Bentley (founder of Bentley motor cars) by naming a square after him. The event was accompanied by the roar of 82 classic Bentleys from the Bentley Drivers Club.

AC confirms status as sole Cobra maker

AC CARS BOSS Brian Angliss and Cobra creator Carroll Shelby have finally settled their differences over Shelby's claim that his new 427 SCs are built around AC chassis left over from Shelby Cobra production in the '60s.

In a statement to be issued next week, Shelby is expected to acknowledge that his chassis are US built and that AC Cars is the only legitimate maker of the famous roadster.

This follows an untimely blunder by British kit-car maker RAM Automotive, which issued a press statement claiming to have been offered exclusive European rights to market the



Shelby: retraction

'genuine' Shelby 427 SCs built from new old-stock chassis and parts, complete with authentic documents — at £338,000 each.

Shelby is demanding a full public retraction, claiming that RAM's statement, which was "neither approved, condoned or a true depiction of the facts", could jeopardise the settlement with AC.

Mondeo beats Xantia to Car of the Year '94



'Car of the Year' caps great year for Mondeo

THE FORD MONDEO, WINNER OF AUTOCAR & MOTOR'S safety award, has walked away with the title of European Car of the Year 1994. Ford's newcomer romped home in first place after voting from 58 top European motoring journalists placed it 26 points clear of the second-placed Citroen Xantia.

Safety seems to dominate this year's results, with

COTY 1994 voting

Car	Points
Ford Mondeo	290
Citroen Xantia	264
Mercedes C-class	192
Vauxhall Corsa	185
Renault Twingo	174
Peugeot 306	108
Saab 900	87
Seat Ibiza	64
Rover 600	33
Honda Accord	28

the Mercedes C-class and Vauxhall Corsa both ahead of Renault's innovative Twingo.

Rover may also be disappointed to take only ninth spot for its highly praised 600 range, but some satisfaction can be had from beating its Honda Accord sister into 10th place.

AUTOCAR & Motor

Blame it on Rio is just a feeble excuse

It's difficult to know who this Government is trying to kid when it blames this latest assault on the motorist on its Rio commitment to saving the earth. Funny, isn't it, that the only way it can think of to curb mileage will also raise it billions of pounds every year.

It's the tokenism and double standards that stink. Where are the clean power initiatives? Where were the incentives for drivers to sign up for catalytic converters back in '89? No, we had better get used to it — we're going to start paying through the nose to use our cars, and it's time we got something back.

It's time, for instance, that rather than just building more and more miles of motorways (generating more money, of course) for more and more cars to get stuck on, this Government showed some imagination. Everywhere in Europe, national and local authorities are investing in better public transport, park and ride schemes, car sharing incentives, travel restrictions, zero-emissions projects. Everywhere in Europe except the UK. What can we offer? Road pricing in Cambridge.



Michael Harvey
EDITOR

The Government is alone in failing to see the threat to the freedom cars offer us, and sees instead a way of making more money.

DISPATCHES

France Graham Tearse reports
Pessimistic Peugeot/Citroen boss Jacques Calvet reckons the European car market "will not return to its 1992 level of 13.9 million sales before 1997". He warned that even this would only be possible if "governments and Brussels no longer treat the car as a cow to be milked".



French internal airline Air Inter is encouraging owners of small cars to take their baby away with them when they fly. Four Renault Twingos were stuffed between the suitcases on a recent Paris-Marseille flight to inaugurate what the airline claims is the first service in the world in which small cars (up to 3300mm long) can be transported on regular flights.

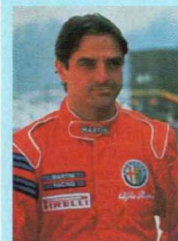
Further cutbacks in production will be made over the next two months at Peugeot's Mulhouse plant, where the 106 is built. The 22,000-strong workforce will be laid off for four days this month and for one day in January. Union officials claim half of the workforce are likely to be laid off for eight days in the New Year.

Italy Luca Ciferri reports
Lancia's Y10 mini car reaches a milestone this week when the one millionth unit rolls off the production line. Italian drivers have accounted for nearly 80 per cent of the Y10s built since it was introduced in March 1985. The 200,000 units that have been exported went mainly to Germany and France.



Tonino Lamborghini has confirmed that he is interested in taking a stake in the car company his father founded in 1962. "I hope to meet the Indonesian group that bought Lamborghini soon in order to offer them my co-operation and my advice. If they are looking for partners, I could be interested," he says. Tonino tried to get involved when Lamborghini was owned by Chrysler, but was unsuccessful.

Alfa Romeo touring car driver Alessandro Nannini (left) wants Fiat Auto boss Paulo Cantarella to attend every round of the German DTM next year — to bring him good luck. Confirming that he will again compete in the DTM, Nannini said: "This year I won only when he [Cantarella] was at the track; he is my mascot."



Aluminium Audi A8 bang on schedule

THE NEW AUDI 7-series challenger, the lightweight A8, is all set to step on to the world stage in March.

Outwardly identical

to Audi's revolutionary ASF (Aluminium Space Frame) concept car, the V8-engined A8 will be Europe's first all-aluminium production car when it

makes its March debut at the Geneva motor show. UK sales will follow in September.

Bigger than the current V8, Audi's new 5030mm flagship is

Ford fits V6 to Escort Cosworth

FORD IS SETTING its sights on the VW Golf VR6 with a six-cylinder version of its four-wheel-drive Escort Cosworth.

Engineers have managed to shoe-horn the beefy 2.9-litre V6 from the Granada Scorpio 24-valve under the bonnet of a regular Escort Cosworth to

produce an alternative to the raucous turbocharged four.

In regular tune the Cosworth-developed 24-valve engine produces 195bhp at 5750rpm (32bhp less than the turbo), but the low-rev torque advantage of the big bore V6 will ensure a quieter, more

progressive power delivery. Expect 0-60mph in under 7sec and a top speed of about 135mph.

Better still, the rally-developed four-wheel-drive chassis has the grip and poise to outhandle the best of the German front-drivers.

Despite being forced to use the shortened Sierra floorpan of the Escort Cosworth (to fit the longitudinally mounted V6), Ford is keen to maintain the Escort family face. The oval nose of the



A8 packaging has made good use of long wheelbase

expected to weigh just 1635kg — 195kg less than BMW's 5025mm 740iL and 355kg less than Mercedes' 5115mm S420.

Audi claims that its pioneering all-aluminium body and chassis structure, the fruit of a 10-year development programme with Alcoa, is 40 per cent lighter than its steel equivalent and thanks to the unique properties of aluminium. It is also infinitely recyclable.

The interior, particularly in the rear, is much roomier than that of its V8 predecessor because of a 180mm longer wheelbase, while all

passengers benefit from first-class crash protection. Audi claims that its rigid alloy frame structure acts like a racing car safety cage, reducing damage in front and side collisions.

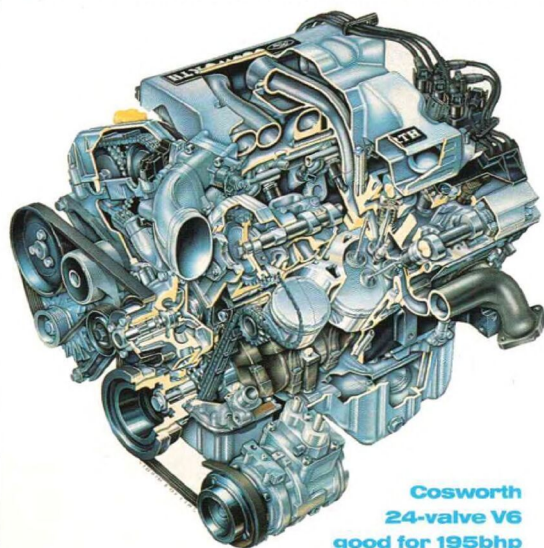
The rigid body and extensive use of light-alloy suspension and driveline components also promise class-leading handling and roadholding.

Initially the A8 will be available in four-wheel drive powered by a 280bhp, 4.2-litre V8, and front-wheel drive with a 2.8-litre V6 engine. A 250bhp 3.6-litre V8 and a new 3.4-litre direct-injection turbo diesel V8 will follow later.

Prices are expected to range from about £35,000 to £46,000.



Lightweight A8's shakedown tests on target for UK's autumn launch



Cosworth 24-valve V6 good for 195bhp

facelifted Escort is retained but the huge whale tail spoiler is dropped in favour of a smaller, more discreet affair.

Although Ford acknowledges that a V6-engined Escort may exist in prototype form, it denies that production is imminent.

But with Volkswagen selling 868 of its VR6 Golf in the UK so far this year, compared with Ford's 550 Cosworths, the case for a gutsy V6 is stronger than ever.

MY MOTORING WEEK

Life and times of the man on the move **Steve Cropley**

MONDAY

A car dealer friend reports an abruptly rising trend for business people to chop in fully loaded company cars on smaller, cheaper models ahead of punitive 1994 car taxes. Seems Mr

four-speed auto. It was far better and more refined than I remembered.

The big Swede is very quiet, rides softly but with excellent control, tracks beautifully over bumps, and has almost as much rear room as our Merc 500SE. Don't cross it off your list...



WEDNESDAY

To Hethel to learn about Lotus's unique methods of car testing. They do a lot of secret stuff with other people's cars there, but before changing anything they have to assess a subject's strengths and weaknesses, just like we do. Had a feeling there would be things they could teach us, and so it proved. A story is in the pipeline.

Started talking with suspension engineer Murray White about the subtleties of assessing cars. When you test a lot, I was saying, you can forecast accurately a car's behaviour against the clock: our men Frankel, Sutcliffe, Thomas and Conway can predict a car's 0-60mph time to within 0.1 or 0.2sec just by trundling it through the suburbs.

Murray went one better. He described times when they've changed a car's suspension rates, only to discover — as it bumped down off the ramp — that the choices weren't right. "Of course," says Murray, "you still run a full set of tests, but what you learn from that first bump is nearly always right."

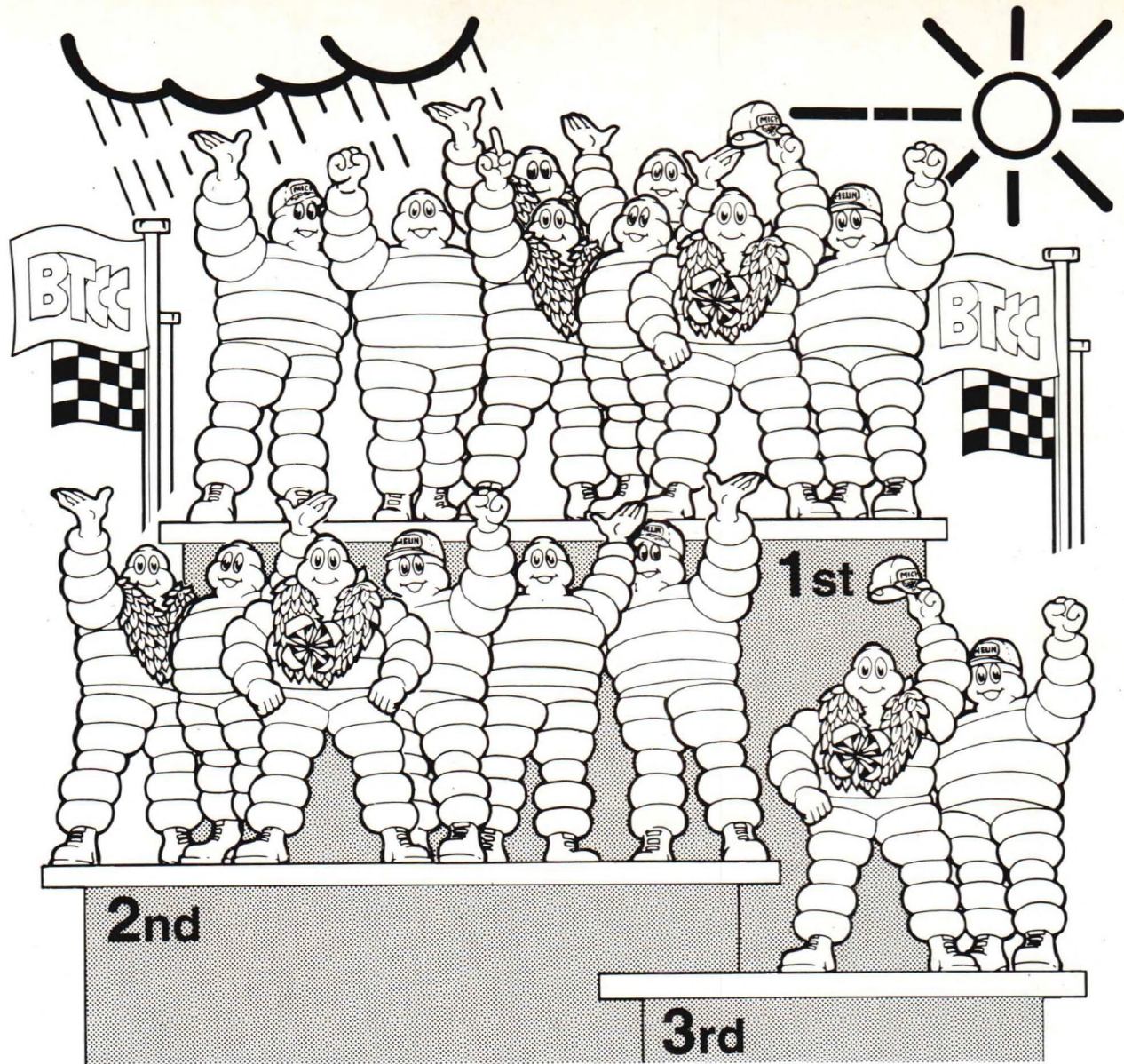
“Went to Hethel to learn about Lotus's unique methods of car testing. Had a feeling there'd be things they could teach us”

Clarke's Budget last week reminded them that Draconian days are coming.

He tells of a customer who until last month had a late-plate Granada Ghia that cost his employer £500 a month. Now he has bought his own Escort 1.3L, for which he pays £200 a month. He sets aside £100 to run it and pockets the remaining £200 — great if you regard cars only as transport. The rest of us can expect a rapid rise in supplies of enticing cars on the used market.

TUESDAY

Drove my first Saab 9000 for several years today: a saloon with 2.3-litre non-turbo engine hitched to a



Pilots' Victory Role

Sixteen podium places, including eight team and privateer wins, were notched up by Michelin Pilot equipped cars in the 1993 British Touring Car Championship - not a bad score for our first year.

Our congratulations go to the drivers and teams for their outstanding performance.

The same successful racing technology went into the development of the new Michelin Pilot range of high performance tyres, the choice for drivers of luxury, executive and sports cars.

Pilot CX, HX or SX - which of these new tyres suits your car and your style of driving? Find out now by calling the Michelin Pilot helpline free on 0800 591859.

CX  **HX**  **SX** 



MAKE SURE IT'S A MICHELIN





Body kits like this are not recommended on airbag-equipped cars

Body kits and airbags don't always mix

FASHION-conscious drivers who add bull bars and body kits to their cars may be putting their lives at risk, according to safety experts.

Cars equipped with airbags are programmed to recognise the crash performance of a standard car and may underestimate the severity of the crash if

different bumpers or spoilers are fitted.

"After-fit items like bull bars and spoilers can change the rate of deceleration and prevent detonation of the airbag," says Jurgen Klenk, head of airbag engineering at Opel in Germany.

To prevent the airbag from inflating accidentally, most modern cars are fitted

with at least two, if not three, different sensors to assess the severity of the impact. Only when all the sensors are triggered at the same time does the on-board computer detonate the airbag.

The modified bodywork only has to change one parameter of one of the sensors to prevent this from happening.



Seat has rocked the hot-hatch market by winning a group 10 insurance rating for the new Ibiza GTi — the lowest yet for such a car. Although it's powered by the same 115bhp two-litre engine as Volkswagen's Golf GTi, the Spanish contender undercuts the Golf by four groups. Even Renault's warmed-over Clio RSi is rated higher at group 11. The Ibiza's torquey eight-valve engine promises 0-60mph in about 10sec and a top speed of 121mph for a reasonable £11,250.

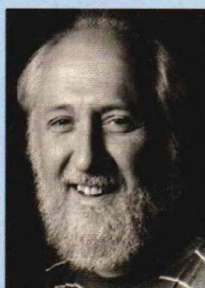
WHEELS WITHIN

Face to face with the car makers **Peter Robinson**

CORDOBA

SPAIN

Well, where else would you release a new Seat of the same name? And in case you've forgotten, Cordoba was once the name of a less-than-memorable Chrysler tank from the '70s.



“Even the usually optimistic Spaniards admitted life hadn't been easy in recent months”

Chrysler let the name slip and Seat was only too happy to use it.

Troubled Seat tried hard to ignore its financial troubles when it showed off the new Cordoba to the press, but even the usually optimistic Spaniards admitted that life hadn't been easy in recent months.

Volkswagen is insisting that the Zona Franca plant in Barcelona be closed. Seat people will tell you that this only means the assembly line and that the foundry and stamping operations will continue. But I suspect it goes further.

It means Seat must move production of the Toledo to its new Martorell factory, where the Ibiza and

Cordoba are produced. Inevitably the move — expected to take place next September — will mean the end of the current Marbella.

Seat-expected this utilitarian model to be replaced in 1996-97 by a new car, jointly developed with Suzuki. But when the Spanish peseta devalued by 36 per cent against the yen in less than a year, Seat's bean-counters worked out that the new model would have been more expensive to produce than the bigger Ibiza, so the project was scrapped.

Now Seat is looking at three substitute designs. Nothing has been signed off, but whichever is chosen will have to be engineered by VW.

It seems the new car could be the “cheap universal” model — a modern-day Beetle — which keeps surfacing in any talk of VW's future.

The car would be built by VW and Skoda, as well as Seat, but that doesn't mean producing the car in Germany, the Czech Republic and Spain. Maybe the last two, but certainly not Germany. China is a more likely choice.

Seat plans to start selling cars in Canada and Australia next year. And the US? Export director Gabriel Martin emphatically says no way.

Japan? “We'll show some cars at the 1995 Tokyo show. It's very important to be there to see if we can compete in quality and range, but Japan is only a strategic market. Nobody [from outside Japan] makes any money there.”



SOLE UNITED KINGDOM
CONCESSIONAIRES

MERIDIAN
Maserati

77 HIGH STREET, LYNDHURST
HAMPSHIRE, SO43 7PB
FOR SALES, SERVICE & PARTS
TELEPHONE: 0703 283404
FAX: 0703 282791

Maserati Ghibli. For the love of motoring.



For more information about the full range of Maserati Cars and Maserati Finance call 0703 283404.

Prices from £33,089.31 including VAT. Delivery Pack including 12 months Road Fund Licence £475.

Photo by: Andrew Yeadon - Autocar and Motor