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CONTENTS

6 OPEL MANTA B
Buying the stylish and great to drive evergreen alternative to the Mk3 Ford Capri.

12 FORD ANGLIA 105E/123E
Sort the wheat from the chaff when it comes to choosing the best example of the 'all-new' Anglia.

18 VOLVO AMAZON
The rugged 120-series Volvo is a great choice and hugely practical. Be sure to follow our buying tips, though.

24 MGB GT
Has this most versatile of classics withstood the test of time? We take to the road in one to find out.

30 JAGUAR X300
Posh, great to own and now silly cheap. What's not to like?

32 RENAULT 5
It's one of Europe's longest-lived superminis, you know. Here's how to pick the best.

38 FORD CONSUL/GRANADA
This '70s gem marked a new direction for Ford at the time. But what are they like to drive today?

46 DATSUN 240Z/260Z
Sleek, quick and reliable – this stylish coupe has always enjoyed a strong following. We have the knowledge you need to buy a great one.

52 VOLVO 240
Here's what to look for when buying Volvo's hit classic.

58 MORRIS MARINA
We take a prime example of this no-nonsense Morris for a drive.

64 MG T-TYPE
They're rising in value but do your homework before buying.

70 WOLSELEY 15/60
We roadtest the solid and dependable Farina-styled BMC.

76 MGC
Familiar, but very different under the skin. Here's what to look for.

82 LEYLAND PRINCESS
How to buy the best often overlooked and now rare classic.

88 MAZDA RX-7
Buying the first generation rotary-engined pioneer.

94 LAND ROVER DEFENDER
Land yourself one of these hard as nails future classics.

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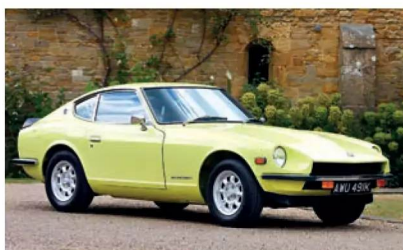
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WELCOME

There's never been a better time to buy a classic car; there's specialists aplenty, owner's clubs galore and the low price of parts and insurance all make the attraction of owning an older car difficult to resist.

Furthermore, in most cases you'll be able to carry out general maintenance yourself, on your driveway, so you'll be saving money while you enjoy the pleasures of ownership!

Of course it's difficult to cover every classic in one publication, but what we've done here is try to cater for as many automotive tastes and needs as

possible. In short, you'll find something for everyone inside, from practical estates and convertibles to classic icons like the MGB GT and everything in between. The one thing they all have in common is the fact they're oozing with character, surprisingly usable, rewarding to own and guaranteed to turn heads wherever you go.

From buying guides to road tests, there's all the expert information and advice you'll need to get yourself behind the wheel of your dream classic in 2025 – so read on and be inspired!

Ian Cushway

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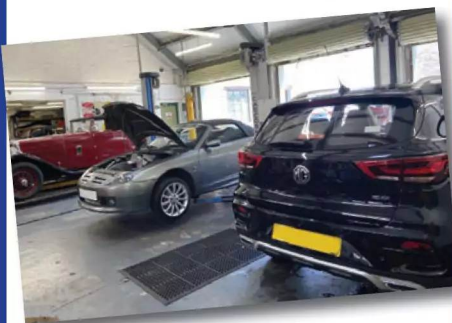


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UNSUNG HERO

The Opel Manta B boasts a fine mix of style and performance to rival the evergreen Mk3 Ford Capri. Here's how to buy a great example.

WORDS: **CHRIS RANDALL**

The first model to bear the Manta name dates from 1970, but it's the second-generation range that interests us here. Launched in 1975, it was effectively a Mk1 Vauxhall Cavalier Coupe or Sportshatch with an Opel badge, sharing that car's range of modestly-powerful four-cylinder engines.

It served up a decent helping of style, but the version that many enthusiasts remember best is the B2 that appeared in 1982 and lasted until the Manta's demise six years later.

As a strong rival to the popular Mk3 Capri, the sight of rally legends like Russell Brookes and Jimmy McRae charging through the forests cemented

the sporting Opel in the mind of many a car fan. Powered by overhead-cam 1.8 and cam-in-head fuel-injected 2.0-litre engines, the Manta offered buyers a choice of hatchback and coupe body styles that featured a body kit and spoilers for added kerb appeal.

Top dog for many, however, was the GT/E that arrived in 1982. By the



time the Manta B bowed out in 1988 – outlasting the Capri in the process – a total of 557,698 had been built. And while it's the Ford that often makes the headlines now, the Opel's strong following is well-deserved. So, if you're tempted to join the Manta crew, what should you be looking for?

BODYWORK

It seems that the earlier German-built cars are better at resisting corrosion than later ones produced in Belgium, but even with that in mind any prospective purchase will need careful checking. You'll need to examine all of the usual rot spots, including the wings and wheelarches, door bottoms, valances and sills, and pay close attention to screen and sunroof surrounds. If the latter's drain holes are blocked, it can lead to rust deeper within the structure.



We're not finished yet, as the battery tray, fuel tank (on the hatch – it's less exposed on coupes), floorpan, footwells, chassis rails, jacking points and bulkhead could all be pretty frilly by now and so require proper scrutiny. Don't skimp on the checks as major restoration can become a time-consuming and costly affair, although there is good news.

Sourcing replacement panels and repair sections isn't quite as difficult as you'd think, although some are a bit pricey, with a genuine front wing costing more than £400. According to the Opel Manta Owners' Club, the situation has improved in recent years. German specialist, Dr Manta, is a good place to start, but the

club is having some parts remade, such as roof skins and rear panels. It can also point you in the right direction when it comes to finding bits for the body kit that featured on the facelifted B2 models; some sections are harder to source than others, but they are out there if you search. It's worth checking where the plastic addenda attaches, though, as bubbling could point to worse problems beneath.

Assuming rot isn't a major problem on the car you're considering, then spend time checking the condition of exterior trim and light units – you can source secondhand parts, but the more complete and undamaged the items are on the car you buy, the better.



ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

This generation of Manta used a wide variety of engines in varying capacities and power outputs, although the smaller units resulted in somewhat modest performance. The larger cam-in-head (CiH) motors are the better bet if you want the go to match the show, with the injected 2.0-litre's 110bhp making for a genuine 120mph machine.

These engines are also considered to be pretty bulletproof, and well-maintained ones should cover 100,000 miles before a rebuild is due. But whichever one you're considering, it's going to need checking for the usual signs of wear and neglect, from exhaust smoke and oil leaks to head gasket failure and a cooling system that's past its best. Some have a cambelt that needs changing at 30,000 miles (a straightforward job with easy access) while the rest have a timing chain that gets noisy at higher mileages. Replacement isn't difficult, though, and all the parts needed are available.

Depending on age and engine, fuelling is by GM Varajet carburettor or Bosch fuel-injection; while rebuild kits are available for the former, any problems with the latter will likely need

professional attention.

As for transmissions, the four-speed 'box used on earlier Mantas isn't inherently weak, but may be suffering from the usual effects of age and mileage; a test drive will reveal any gear selection

issues or worrying noises. The five-speed Getrag unit used after 1982 is very strong and rarely gives trouble unless abused, and parts are available if a specialist rebuild is needed.

The alternative for those wanting a





more relaxed approach was a GM TH180 three-speed automatic. While not the last word in responsiveness, it's not known to be troublesome. Just check for sluggish or jerky gear shifts and for blackened or burnt-smelling fluid. Lastly, listen out for a noisy back axle and for vibration caused by worn propshaft joints.

SUSPENSION, STEERING AND BRAKES

Given the Manta's mainstream underpinnings, there was nothing complicated in the suspension department, with wishbones and coil springs up front and a live axle at the rear. It was simple but effective and the set-up just needs a thorough prod around mounting points to unearth any corrosion and a check for tired dampers, springs and bushes. The latter can be upgraded to polyurethane items for added sharpness, but original items are available, as are all the other parts you might need for an overhaul. It's easy enough to do on a DIY basis, too.

This is something which also applies to the brakes, comprising a straightforward disc/drum arrangement that's more than equal to the performance on offer. All of the consumable parts are easy to source, and while you could consider some mild upgrades such as better pads, it's not really necessary.

There's little to report with the steering, too, with the unassisted rack-and-pinion system providing decent levels of accuracy and feedback. Wear in the ball joints, tracks rods or the rack itself are the only

problems you're likely to encounter, and sorting such issues won't break the bank.

INTERIOR, TRIM AND ELECTRICS

As you might expect of a car hailing from this era, the cabin is pleasingly simple. And while it doesn't feel all that sporting (the Recaro interior of the GT/E livens things up), there's nothing much to worry about in here. Tatty and threadbare seats will be obvious but a search should

unearth original-style trim material (at a cost), and there's nothing that a professional trimmer can't tackle.

The dashboard isn't known to suffer from cracks, so that's one less thing to worry about, but you'll need to assess the condition of other plastics and trim pieces as replacements will involve a hunt for secondhand parts. And that's something that also applies to the switchgear; it wasn't that robust to begin with (although





no worse than rivals in this respect), and while some stuff is out there it may prove tricky to find.

At least there are no complications such as electric windows or central locking to worry about, with the Manta's electrics being as straightforward as you'd expect. Just check that everything works; most problems will be down to the usual combination of poor earths and dicky connectors. Water ingress won't help matters, though, so check for damp carpets. If the instruments are reading incorrectly, it could be due to a failed voltage stabiliser within the panel, but it's easy and cheap to replace with a reliable electronic version. The instrument lighting can also be a bit feeble, and owners recommend replacing the bulbs with LED items; it can be done without major dismantling.

OUR VERDICT

Mention a sporting coupe from the 1970s or '80s and most thoughts will turn to the Ford Capri – and while we completely understand the appeal, it would be a shame to dismiss its Opel rival. The Manta offers arguably more understated styling – in earlier form at least – but a later GT/E has plenty of presence, plus there's a choice of hatch or coupe. Being less ubiquitous compared to the Ford may also be a plus for some enthusiasts, and let's not forget the added lustre of a rallying pedigree.

A good example will drive nicely with a pleasing blend of performance and usability, and there's nothing to fear when it comes to ownership. Yes, there's the spectre of rust, so tread carefully unless you really want a full-on restoration project, but the oily bits

are all easy to tackle for anyone that enjoys wielding the spanners. Manta owners are a knowledgeable and enthusiastic bunch too, so you won't be stuck for help and advice. If your heart's set on a classic coupe, this one deserves a closer look.

While the classifieds aren't exactly awash with Mantas for sale, there's a reasonable smattering to be found (B2 versions being the most common) and they crop-up at auction on a fairly regular basis. The coupe is the more desirable of the two body styles, so these tend to fetch more money, but it's condition that matters more than anything with these cars.

B2 models are worth the most, and values across the board have been rising steadily over the last couple of years. You can now expect to pay from £1000 to £4000 for a project, with usable cars in need of ongoing tidying commanding anywhere from £5000 to £8000 depending on the version. Budget £8000-£14,000 for a good B2 coupe, with the very best ones commanding anything from £14,000 to £25,000 (a hatch will be £6000-£11,000 less). For comparison, the very best earlier Bs span £8000-£15,000.

Considering the sums being asked for its Ford rival, we can't help thinking the Manta represents good value right now. And as more enthusiasts come to appreciate the Opel's charms, prices are surely going only one way. ●



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TUNE INTO ANGLIA

Despite no longer being the classic bargain it once was, the **Anglia 105E/123E** remains a popular choice among Ford enthusiasts.

When a car is described by its maker as 'new,' it often turns out to be little more than a facelifted version of what's gone before. But when Ford's latest Anglia (codenamed 105E) made its debut at the 1959 Earl's Court Motor Show, just about the only thing carried over from its predecessor was the name.

The all-new Anglia's styling was, of course, its most noticeable feature, from its controversial reverse-rake rear window to its gently sloping bonnet framed on either side by front wings that thrust the headlamps well forward, further exaggerated by well-designed brightwork. At the rear, meanwhile, a pair of tail fins with appropriately sharp rear indicators protruded from the boot line,

their length enhanced by the backward slope of the rear screen.

Under that adventurous bodywork, the changes continued. Biggest news was the announcement of a brand new over-square 997cc OHV engine, marking the start of the 'Kent' generation, a series of powerplants that would go on to enjoy several decades of success throughout the Ford line-up.



Making the most of this new engine was the Anglia's equally fresh four-speed transmission (the first time four gears had ever been fitted to a small British Ford), boasting synchromesh on all but first. Decent handling was assured thanks to the Anglia's MacPherson strut front end and leaf-sprung rear, a layout that would become familiar to other Ford buyers of the 1960s and '70s.

Only Standard and Deluxe saloon versions of the Anglia 105E were available initially, though in 1961 came the new Anglia estate and van models. The most exciting moment in the Anglia's development, however, came in 1962 with the announcement of the new Anglia Super, a more upmarket model featuring a 1198cc derivative of the Kent engine which would also find its way into that year's new Consul Cortina.

The difference was immediately noticeable, with the Super (also known

as the 123E) having its top speed boosted to around 83mph and the driving experience further improved by the adoption of synchromesh on all four gears. Aesthetics also received a lift via the Super's snazzy two-tone paintwork with chrome-trimmed side flash and matching roof colour, while inside there were thicker front seats, a padded dashboard top and the added luxury of carpeting throughout.

The same 1198cc engine could also be specified for the Deluxe saloon as well as the estate, giving Anglia buyers of the 1960s plenty of scope to choose their ideal spec. And, of course, the Anglia went on to be a major hit for Ford both in the UK and overseas, remaining in production through to November 1967,

by which time 1,083,960 examples (excluding the van) had found buyers.

Looking back on the Anglia 105E now 65 years on from its Earl's Court debut, we can appreciate just how much of a risk Ford took with its design. Given the costs involved in creating a brand new car from scratch, the company's management was brave to sign off the newcomer's unique look. But it was a risk that worked, with the Anglia becoming a major hit – and it's a car that still has a healthy following all these years later. Indeed, as with other Fords of the 1960s, demand for the Anglia over the last decade or so has seen values soaring; no longer is it a 'cheap and cheerful' option for today's first-time classic buyers.





BODYWORK

Although no more rot-prone than other monocoque saloons of the 1960s, the 105E/123E series can have serious rust issues if neglected. When buying, it's therefore essential that you're on the lookout for structural problems as well as rusting outer panels, especially as the latter can be very expensive to replace.

Starting with the structure, the inner and outer sills both sides are prone to rot, as are all four jacking points; there's also a centre sill section that's hidden but just as likely to corrode. The rear leaf spring mounts can rust through, as can the rear crossmember and boot floor. It's not unusual to find holes in the floorpans (particularly the outer corners and edges of the fronts), while the A-pillars on both sides can also rot – usually from the

bottom upwards, which eventually affects the door hinge areas.

Under the bonnet, the fitch panels and inner wings around the front struts will often have been repaired, the latter rotting from behind thanks to mud and salt collecting underneath; if repairs have been carried out to the metalwork around the strut tops, make sure they've been done to a good standard and aren't simply hiding the problem.

If the Anglia you're buying has structural issues, you'll find that reproduction repair sections are available from Ex-Pressed Steel Panels (steelpanels.co.uk), but costs can soon escalate if your shopping list is extensive. A complete boot floor will cost around £670 with the VAT, rear spring hangers are over £255 each, outer sills

are in excess of £270 a side, and the outer skin panel for the A-pillar will set you back £220 a side.

Outer panels are just as prone to rust, with the front wings being particularly vulnerable; rot usually sets in around and over the headlamp area as well as the rearmost edge of the wing, running almost its entire height in line with the A-pillar. New-old stock Ford wings are very scarce, but Ex-Pressed Steel Panels can again come to the rescue – although they involve a hefty outlay of roughly £1260 each, with a manufacturing lead time of up to nine months. Wing repair sections are also available, with the complete headlamp area costing around £325 per side, but again with a long lead time, albeit slightly shorter with up to five months



being currently quoted.

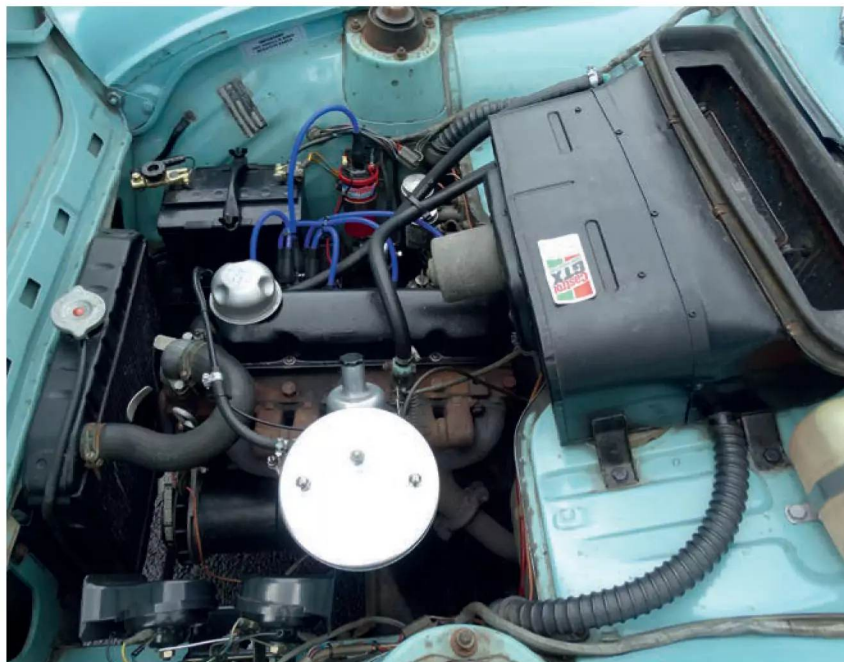
Door skins are also prone to rust, particularly around the centre (below the trim line) where there's a join between the skin and an inner steel section. Rear wheelarches can also rot through, as can the lower parts of the rear quarter panel – though once again, repair sections can be ordered. The rear valance (a purely cosmetic item) is rust-prone, and a new one will set you back around £220 – plus of course a lengthy wait if your timing is poor and current stocks have run out.

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

The 997cc Kent engine is known for being stronger than the 1198cc version, with the latter being prone to premature bearing wear. Having said that, either unit can show signs of wear, usually via a combination of a rumbling bottom end, high oil consumption and blue smoke. Both engines are also prone to rattling camshaft chains, as well as rotting out their core plugs and of leaking oil.

A professional engine rebuild is likely to cost you from around £2500-£3000. You may find it cheaper to buy a reconditioned one on an exchange basis, but then you will lose the original unit, which would be a shame on an otherwise original car. Most people get tempted into upgrades during a rebuild, including swapping the original 997 or 1198cc Kent for a bigger version originally destined for a Cortina 1500. That was a particularly popular conversion in the 1970s and '80s, and remains so today – although any increase in power may mean also looking at improvements to your Anglia's braking and suspension.

The gearboxes in both the 997cc



and 1198cc Anglias are robust, though crunching synchromesh on second gear (and first for the bigger-engined model) suggests excessive wear, as does gearbox whine. Jumping out of second is a sign of wear in the selector rods. Oil can leak from the back of the input shaft, and it can seep out of the diff's nose bearing, which has an often-perished integral oil seal in its casing. An Anglia underside that is completely free of oil and other leaks is likely to have been recently restored!

INTERIOR

The Anglia's interior is simple, with Standard and Deluxe models featuring rubber flooring and the Super having the

luxury of carpet. All models have vinyl upholstery, although the designs did change during the Anglia's lifespan, with early cars in particular often featuring two-tone trim. Front seats in the Super are thicker and more supportive than those in the Deluxe; the vinyl itself wears well, but it's not unusual to find springs poking through.

If your Anglia's interior is badly worn, Aldridge Trimming (aldridge.co.uk) offers a range of solutions, including new front and rear seat covers (starting from around £456 per pair up front and £504 in the back for basic vinyl including the VAT, but getting more expensive for Super and two-tone covers), as well



as brand new door cards and rear side panels. The same company also sells carpets sets and authentic looking headlining kits for the Anglia.

Front and rear screen seals often crack and perish (new ones are available), so it's important to look for signs of leaks. Check whether the interior smells damp, and have a poke around for any rot that may be hiding underneath the floor covering.

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

With MacPherson struts and coil springs at the front and leaf springs and lever-arm dampers bringing up the rear, the 105E's suspension layout is typical of this era of Ford. Parts are readily available, and it's certainly worth joining the Ford Anglia 105E Owners' Club (105eoc.com) to take advantage of its excellent spares scheme.

Aside from the usual checks for damper leaks, sagging rear leaf springs and worn front struts (which will be obvious if the handling feels unusually sloppy), it's vital to check the condition of the strut mounts in the engine bay, as it's common for the rubber to perish and weaken the whole mount. New strut mounts are available, with Newford Parts charging around £70 each. The same company will sell you a fully-rebuilt genuine front strut for just over £175 (although they were out of stock when we checked), with original-spec inserts priced at £120 each. New rear dampers are available from Small Ford Spares (smallfordspares.co.uk) for £150, although reconditioned may be found on an exchange basis for half the cost.

If the steering feels vague or there's a wobble at speed, it's likely to be caused by a worn idler joint on the drag link; the club's solution is to offer a remanufactured

replacement with a modified idler joint. Most steering parts are available from the club and independent specialists, and the car's basic steering-box set-up is simple enough to work on.

The all-drum, non-servo braking system in the Anglia could hardly be any simpler. It's easy to work on, and the good news is that parts are both reasonably priced and readily available. Newford Parts sells axle sets of new brake shoes for £50, while a new master cylinder will set you back around £90 and wheel cylinders start from just £20.

Should you wish to upgrade your Anglia's braking system, you'll find various specialists offering disc brakes conversions using modern components, although the most popular upgrade in the 1970s was to

fit Ford Classic front struts and discs – a route still favoured by some of today's traditionalists.

OUR VERDICT

The days of bargain-priced Anglias are long gone, as are the chances of being able to pick up a rolling project for a few hundred pounds. Values have been on the rise for a good number of years, but the last decade saw them escalate at a rapid rate. The Anglia remains a tempting choice of course, thanks to its 1960s-style head-turning looks, its simple engineering and its pleasing driving style. The relatively rare estate tends not to be worth any more than an equivalent saloon, but there's an argument that the 1200 Super saloon should be a little more expensive than the more spartan Deluxe. Either way, you'll not get any change from £6000 for anything presentable and on the road, while £7500 is a more common asking price and a really nice car will easily command £10,000 or even more. So while it is no longer the highly affordable starter classic that it once was, it is still a great choice. ●





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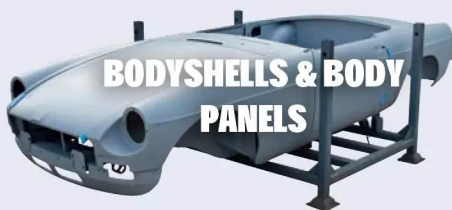


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PRACTICALLY PERFECT

The rugged *Volvo Amazon* is a practical choice, but it still needs the right care and maintenance to survive. Here's how to buy a great one.

WORDS: **PAUL WAGER**

With its mixture of 1960s style, solid build and rugged mechanical components, the Volvo Amazon – or 120-series to give its proper name – makes a very practical classic which is eminently capable of being pressed into daily service. That doesn't mean it won't need suitable care

and attention. After all, the design first saw the light of day in the 1950s and rugged though it may be, it's still a 1950s car underneath.

Launched in 1956 as the Volvo 120, the 'Amazon' tag was used only in Sweden after motorbike maker Kriedler objected to Volvo's original name 'Amason.' Elsewhere the car kicked off the three-digit naming convention used by Volvo

until the late 1990s. That doesn't stop most people referring the range in general as the Volvo Amazon, though. The 121 was a single-carb base model, the 122S a dual-carb performance version.

The 1.6-litre B16A engine was derived from the one that had been used in the Amazon's Volvo PV544 predecessor and the car was initially offered as just a four-door saloon. In 1958 the twin-carb



122S saloon was introduced, joined by 222 estates from 1962 and a two-door from 1963 that was known internally as the 132, but never badged as such. From 1959 the car had been offered with standard front seatbelts – the first production car to offer the feature. The two-door model was offered for 1962,

alongside a five-door estate that was known as either the 221 or the 121 Combi. Four-door saloon production finished in 1967, the same year that a 123GT was added to the mix. Amazon production finally ended in July 1970, when all models were finally replaced by the mechanically similar but squarer-looking 140 model.



The Volvo's engineering was conventional, with a longitudinal four-cylinder engine driving a coil-sprung live rear axle. Engine-wise, in 1958 the twin-carb B16B engine provided 85bhp, with the 1778cc B18 engine introduced in 1961 in 75bhp or 85bhp trim. At the same time the 122S model debuted the 90bhp B18D engine, subsequently uprated to 95bhp and then 100bhp. The 123GT was



introduced as a two-door only model in 1967 with the 115bhp 1778cc engine, while the engine was taken up to 1998cc in 1968 when it was good for 90bhp in the 121 or 118bhp in the 122S.

The Amazon was a big seller for Volvo around the world and was in production for 14 years – of the 667,323 examples produced between 1967 and 1970, over half were exported, which means there are plenty around. If you're going to use the car every day, then Amazon fans suggest a post-1968 car as the sensible choice, since they had the benefit of more power from the upgraded 118bhp B20 2-litre engine, plus dual-circuit braking and standard front headrests.

BODYWORK

It's something of a misconception that old Saab and Volvo models were built to withstand such extremes of climate that they simply shrug off the UK weather: in reality rust is just as relevant as any other steel-bodied car of the era. In the words of one Amazon owner we spoke to recently: 'They take longer to rust, but



when they start they really rot.'

One common cause is leaky front screen seals which tend to dry out and allow water down the A-pillars to rot out the floors. The rubbers are both sealed and glued in place and it pays to keep an eye on their condition, especially if the screens have been fitted by a generic fast-fit windscreen place more used to modern cars.

Elsewhere, the front wings can start to bubble from around the headlamp bowls, while the arches can look tatty and rotten inner wings can get costly to fix. The wings themselves are bolt-on items and are available new, while plastic headlamp bowls can also be fitted to prevent problems in the future. The bulkhead is

also worth checking from the engine bay for rust at the upper corners, and from inside at the lower corners of the footwell.

The boot floor can rot around the spare wheel well if the drain holes are blocked, while the sills and door bottoms can also be troublesome. Rust at the forward edge of the boot floor can indicate more serious problems in the rear suspension mounting area, while the boot lid itself can rust from inside its double-skinned section.

Neither complete doors or skins are available new for the four-door cars, although repair panels are available for the bottom section. New sills are available though, and they are of a conventional construction with an inner and outer section.



ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

The B16/18/20 engine is a rugged unit, but it does suffer a couple of issues related to the age of its design. The first is the felt rear crankshaft oil seal, which tends to allow oil onto the clutch. The problem can be solved by upgrading to a modern neoprene seal which is done on an exchange basis – you buy a new seal with the neoprene already fitted and return your old felt unit for reconditioning.

On older engines the fibre timing gear can also break up, but again a modern replacement will solve the problem and is available from specialists. Smoking on start-up can often be down to hardened valve stem seals, and erratic running is usually down to worn carburettors. Generally poor performance could be due to worn camshaft lobes on high-mileage engines, although this isn't an easy thing to check.

The direct-acting gearshift is normally a positive change despite the lever's long throw, but if it starts to feel awkward then suspect the gearbox mountings may have failed. This allows the 'box to physically drop in the chassis; the cure is to fit polyurethane replacements. The optional overdrive is the familiar Laycock type and there's plenty of expertise around for these, but do check that it engages and disengages smoothly.

Typically, you'll be looking at a fluid service every 3000 miles and a plugs and filters service every 6000, though if you're not planning to use the car that much we'd aim for at least one full service per year. Electronic ignition is a sensible upgrade, though not vital. The oil filter will need to be of a type fitted with a non-return valve; original Volvo units have this, but cheaper options may not. 40psi on the oil pressure gauge when warm is a good sign that all is well.

Upgrades including an electric power steering conversion are available, but we don't think they should be necessary. Likewise, five-speed conversions using Volvo 240 or Ford Sierra boxes might give you a taller top gear, but unless you're using the car on a daily basis then the hassle and cost will most likely outweigh the benefit.

Amazons are simple machines and working on them is easy with the right tools. You'll need a special hub puller for most axle jobs on pre-1968 examples, but barring this most things can be achieved with the sort of simple tools most home mechanics would have. Note too that B18 and B20 engines are more reliable than early 1.6s – they use a five-bearing crank



instead of the earlier three-bearing unit, making them stronger units.

STEERING, SUSPENSION & BRAKES

The saloons and estates used Girling front discs and rear drums and the system works well, but discs can be surprisingly expensive: £200 each brand new or £110 for the budget alternative, with an exchange price tending to vary. Essentially there's just a single Swedish supplier for the parts and the hub is built into the disc rotor which explains the cost. A conversion kit is available to convert to conventional hubs and separate discs, but it's around £1300.

Everything you might need is available, although a change in the design of the rear suspension from single to twin trailing arms in 1966 means you'll need

your chassis number to hand if yours was built in that year. Chances are you'll be replacing them at some point too, since they're simple pressed steel items. Up-rated bushes are widely available to firm it up, while several brands including Koni, Bilstein and GAZ can supply up-rated dampers, with a big choice of springs also available.

Tyre choice for the correct 165/80 rubber on the standard 4x15 wheels is limited, with the cheaper tyres not always well regarded. Suppliers like Longstone can supply the Michelin XZX and Pirelli Cinturato which are both good choices from £130-£200 a corner, while some owners move up to 5in wheels which allows a much wider and cheaper choice of 195-section tyres. And speaking of wheels, the PCD is the same as the Ford



Mustang which means there's a good choice of aftermarket styles available.

TRIM AND ELECTRICS

Most of the trim is available via specialist suppliers in the UK and Europe in the common colours, as are rolls of the correct vinyl and fabric. Dash tops tend to split and reproduction parts are available, but since they're glued and stapled in place it's not a five-minute job.

The front seats came with headrests from 1968, although all the cars will have the necessary fittings in the seat frame. The Amazon also came with standard-fit front seatbelts plus factory-fitted mounting points for rear belts.

The window winders use chains, and when they break you'll need a special tool to set it all up again. Many owners also remove the factory-fitted soundproofing from the cabin as it tends to absorb moisture and encourage rust, replacing it with a modern equivalent like Dynamat.

The electrical system on the Volvo Amazon is robust and you can expect it to be reliable. Many owners do tend to upgrade the standard tail light bulbs to brighter LEDs since the lamp units themselves are small by modern standards, but that is the kind of upgrade that is beneficial to most classics.

OUR VERDICT

The Volvo Amazon is widely seen as one of the sturdiest and most reliable 1960s classics on the market, a car which is still up to the rigours of everyday use and one which will remain rewarding to own regardless of what you throw at it. With two prominent Volvo clubs in the UK and a drivetrain backed up by P1800



specialists, it makes for a tempting and compelling regular use classic. Even safety is catered for with those pioneering three-point safety belts – from 1959 the Amazon had been offered with standard front seatbelts, the first production car to offer this feature.

You should be able to find a good car between £5000 and £10,000, and with two, four and five-door varieties on offer and performance models available should you wish, the range is complete enough to meet the needs of most people who might want a family-sized 1960s classic.

We'd be happy with a late four-door 121 from around 1966 – it's the best value model, and unless you're planning to drive hard you won't need the extra power of a 122S or a 123GT. ●



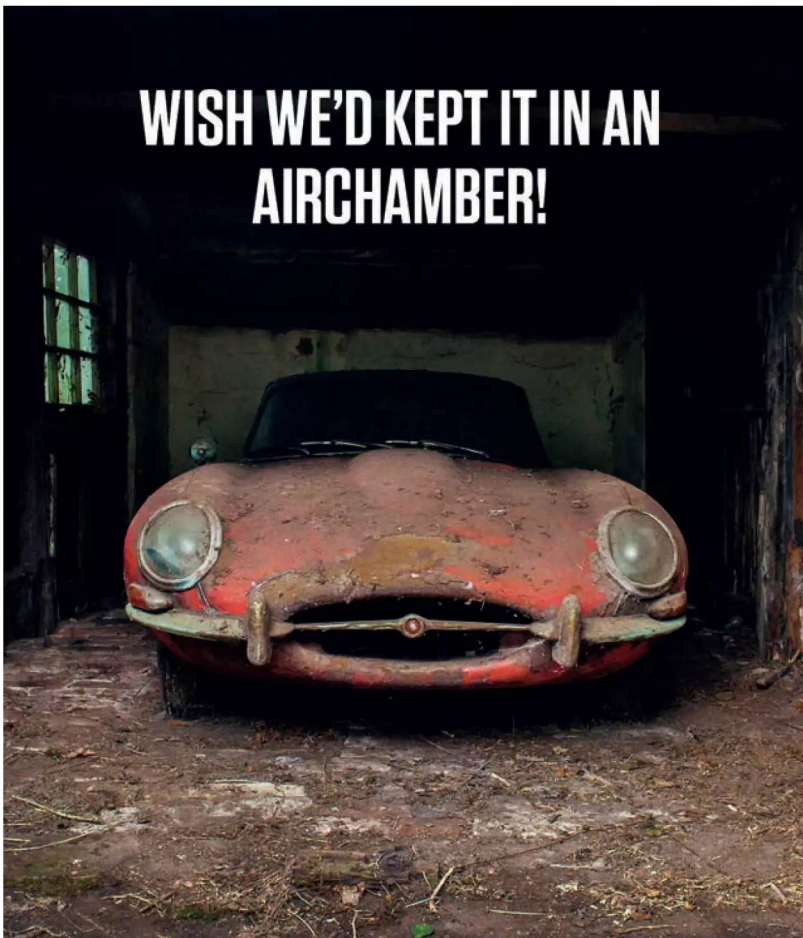


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EVERGREEN GT

Simon Goldsworthy revisits an old friend to see if this most versatile of classics sports cars has withstood the test of time.

WORDS: **SIMON GOLDSWORTHY**

I have had three MGBs over the years, all of them GTs. I did many thousands of miles behind their wheels, and thoroughly enjoyed every one. However, it came as something of a surprise to realise when thinking about this feature that the last of those was several years ago. A lot has happened over the intervening period, both to me and to the road network, so

I was keen to see whether the evergreen MGB GT still ticked all my boxes.

The example I drove will be familiar to many of you as it was a past CW project car. It is currently owned by my workshop buddy, Alan Denne, and in keeping with some other former project cars recently, we thought it made perfect sense to add a bookend to the technical reports by trying to put down in words just what the

finished article is like to drive.

So, approaching the car presents no surprises. Even if it had been a totally fresh example to us, the lines of the BGT are so well known and unmistakable that it would be all but impossible to approach it with fresh eyes and an open mind anyway – it is a bit like a Mini in that regard. The BGT presents the classic sports car stance with a long bonnet and



the driver positioned well back, in this case right in the middle of the car. The bonnet is not excessively long like an E-Type, but certainly lays down a marker to its sporting nature.

I have gone on record many times as saying how much I love the lines of the hardtop BGT; the Roadster is wonderful with its top down, but I don't think the GT's lines can be bettered. To help in getting the lines and the balance of the car just right, they gave it a slightly deeper windscreen than the Roadster. Add that to the large opening tailgate and capacious (for a sports car) load bay and you get a car that is practical as well as beautiful, harmonious from any angle. This age of MGB had less chrome than the earlier ones did, but I don't mind the black recessed grille, which is set off nicely by the chrome surround and the big red MG badge in the middle. It still had chrome bumpers in 1973, which

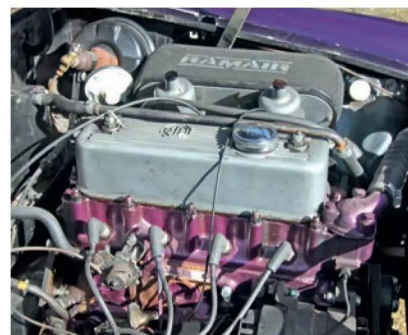


most (but by no means all) enthusiasts prefer to the later black rubber ones. These ones come with over-riders set at a rather odd angle to provide a little extra protection from attacks coming in from about 30 degrees off centre.

The pocketed lights are such an MGB trademark that anything else looks wrong, although Renault insist that MG cribbed them from their Caravelle. This one is painted in a lovely period shade of purple, which acts as the perfect backdrop to the chrome detailing down the sides. The side strip runs very close to the top of the front wheelarch, so close in fact that the body paint disappears entirely. You do wonder if MG couldn't have ended the chrome strips behind the arch. Indeed, I have seen a car modified in this way and it does look superb, but we have become so used to every detail of the standard MGB that any changes can also look slightly odd.

I say 'every detail of the standard MGB', but few people these days seem keen on refurbishing the original Rostyle wheels. Personally I think that is a shame, but like so many of its brothers, this one rides on non-standard rims that are inspired by the Minilite style of alloy. (The problem with originality is that it is often cheaper to buy new alloys than to have steel wheels professionally refinished.)

The back of the car is a little less polished than the profile, and arguably slightly bitty with the two reversing lights and the fuel filler set into the back panel, the bumper with its over-riders, the fog light hanging below and various badges and catches on the tailgate. It is of its era though, a time when not everything was faired-in and flush. Again I have seen



cars with these details smoothed off in a more modern style, but I am not sure I personally regard it as an improvement.

That tailgate is extremely practical. The luggage area is a little shallow because of the way the car's tail slopes down, but access is superb and you can fold the rear seat down flat if you need more space. A few bits and bobs can also be stored under the floor in and around the spare wheel.

The car looks long overall, but is low and very narrow. You do have to drop down quite a way to enter, but the cabin is reasonably spacious once you are in. The pedals are a bit offset to the right – the clutch pedal is the one dead ahead of the centre of the seat. That gives a little room on the left, but not really enough for a foot rest.

INSIDE JOB

Ergonomics did not play a major role when the MGB's dash was designed. The windscreen wiper switch is in the middle of the dash, for example. There are two speeds, but in all honesty an intermittent would be way more useful than the fast speed, which is so rarely of any use. The



indicator is a column stalk and easy to reach, but on the right rather than the left on this age of car, while the overdrive switch is positioned on the far right of the dash and the heater controls well over to the left – you do need to learn the dash layout so you can use the controls without taking your eyes off the road any more than necessary. This age of BGT is slightly better in that regard than earlier ones because you have legends on the rocker switches instead of unmarked toggles, but they are still scattered rather haphazardly about the car.

The seats are fairly well stuffed on this car, and when you first get in they do feel a little high. They seem to compress and settle though, so I find the eye height is good on the GT with its taller screen. (The Roadster with its shallow screen designed to comply with certain competition regulations of the day can be a different matter, and anybody contemplating one of those is well advised to try it out before setting their heart implacably on one, especially one with a well-padded seat – by which I mean the car rather than the driver, though both could have the same effect, I suppose.)

The view out the front is wonderful. You can see the wings curving down towards the lights and while you can't quite see the light rings themselves, you are pretty much there and can place the car accurately enough without any modern parking aids. Out the back, your rearward vision ends at the bottom of the tailgate screen, but again there is not a whole lot of car behind that. In fact, it can come as something of a surprise to realise just how small an MGB is, especially in terms of width. It doesn't

feel particularly narrow from the inside, but park it up besides just about any modern car and it looks positively tiny.

The windscreen is very close to you when compared to a modern design, so the A-pillars are close too. But they are not massively thick and it only takes a small move of the head to ensure that nothing is hidden behind it. There is a nice rest for your left elbow on the padded cubby lid between the seats.

The rear seat is something of a joke. Leg room back there is severely limited as it is in most 2+2s, but an even bigger problem on the BGT is the height of the seat which means that even a shortie will have their head up against the roof. It is really not a practical proposition for grown-ups, though you can get one person in there sideways for a short

journey. It is probably more sensible to view it as a decent and very well-padded parcel shelf. That is actually ideal for long journeys as it means you can store maps, snacks and other travel essentials within reach of the passenger.

Some people do away with the rear seat entirely and replace it either with a custom-built storage locker or simply extend the rear load bed forwards. That rear load bed with its high-opening tailgate makes the BGT incredibly versatile for a sports car. The only downside is that there is no cover to keep the car's contents away from prying eyes, although on two of my previous BGTs I did fashion a suitable security cover myself. That does give you quite a shallow storage area under the cover because the floor of the boot sits above the spare wheel, but you can



increase that depth if you are willing to do away with the spare wheel and carry a can of squirty instead.

This car has a thin wood-rimmed Mota Lita steering wheel. It is a bit smaller than the original one and people will complain about the steering being heavy on a B, although personally I have never found it to be a problem. Certainly manoeuvring at parking speed can be physical, but it is hardly the workout in the gym that some people will claim. It probably helps if you are not addicted to modern power steering, but as soon as you are rolling, the weight begins to lift. And the pronounced castor on the steering does contribute to a sense of direction at speed, the car tracking true with the lightest of touches and not requiring constant correction or a death grip on the wheel – the car doesn't get blown off course by side winds because it has a decently long wheelbase for the size of the car and enough weight up front from the heavy B-series to keep it tracking true.

ONE FOR THE ROAD

There is no spring-loading on the gears and quite a narrow movement across the gate, so this takes some getting used to. Reverse is hard left and back next to second, so there is no real danger of selecting that by mistake. All the ratios have synchromesh on this era MGB and it only needs a light hand to feel your way into mesh. The short travel fore-and-aft makes for quick changes when the need arises, and the synchromesh can generally cope fine with even fairly aggressive cog swapping.

Once you get up to speed, 55mph in OD fourth has the engine spinning around 2500rpm, 60mph sees 2750rpm on the tacho, 65mph records 3000rpm and at a



steady 70mph the needle points steady as a rock to 3250rpm. Since the orange warning segment on the rev counter doesn't start until 5500rpm and the red line only comes in at 6000rpm, the BGT clearly has long cruising legs. In fact it feels utterly relaxed and that you could sit there all day long without any stress on you or the car, only the pronounced wind noise starting to wear you down in time. Combine that with a throaty exhaust plus the general engine and gearbox noise and a radio is pretty much superfluous. Cars can be made a lot quieter with soundproofing, but there is not much you can do about the wind noise that comes from the shape of the car and the rain gutters down the screen pillars.

Going through towns and 30mph zones, you can put it in third and have a choice of with or without overdrive – it will cruise along quite happily in either and then pull strongly when you reach the derestricted zone. That overdrive is a real

bonus, giving you so many options in what is effectively a six-speed gearbox, but with closer spacing between the top four ratios (third with and without overdrive and fourth with and without it too). For casual overtaking it drops nearly 1000rpm when you flick OD out of fourth.

The brakes are big discs on the front and servo'd. They are perfectly good enough for the weight of the car up to and well beyond its performance envelope in standard trim. People do get all het up about uprated and upgrading them, but an uprate is not always as huge a step forward as you might think. I have fitted drilled and grooved discs with high-performance pads to an MGB in the past and didn't notice any real improvement in braking performance or feel in normal road use. I even tested them before and after on the brake rollers at my local MoT station and recorded very little difference, but I did notice such an increase in noise that I refitted the standard items.

This is a common theme I have found with MGB ownership – consider carefully what improvement you can expect from any change or upgrade, and don't get suckered into the belief that the more you spend on go-faster goodies, the happier you will be. It is a personal opinion, but in my experience it is far better to ensure first that all the standard-fit items are in excellent working order, and then you may well feel that it is perfect just as it is.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback is excellent from what is these days a rather primitive suspension – independent on the front, but with a live rear axle suspended on leaf springs and lever arm dampers all round. Again there are innumerable modifications you can make to the suspension, but if



it is well maintained, then the standard arrangement can be very flattering to a driver, allowing you to press on and really attack the bends without having to exceed any sensible limits. It won't bite you with unexpected snap oversteer, but will communicate back to the driver exactly what the wheels are doing and give plenty of warning if you are trying too hard or hit a bump mid-corner that causes the back to skitter or slide. I am not talking of racing on public roads here, simply of pressing on while keeping to safe and legal speeds. You don't need to risk your licence or other road users to have fun in an MGB, because it keeps you informed of its limits and delivers so much driving fun well within them as you work the gears and enjoy the gruff engine roar. If you do want to press on harder and explore the limits, then there are plenty of track days where that is both safe and legal.

It is also a great long-distance tourer. The seats are not massively sculpted, but that is a good thing in my eyes because if you get a seat that is too sporty, then it starts to pinch and get uncomfortable after a while. Ventilation is pretty versatile. The rear side windows are hinged along their front edge and can be held slightly open, though of course you need to sort this before setting off. From the front seats you have the option of opening front quarterlights and the wind-down windows, so along with the fresh air vents in the footwells you have quite a number of airflow permeations to choose from.

As well as being versatile, a BGT is a

THE FACTS

MODEL	1973 MGB GT
ENGINE	1798cc inline four-cylinder OHV
POWER	73bhp@5350rpm
TORQUE	127Nm/94lb.ft@3000rpm
GEARBOX	Four-speed manual plus overdrive
BRAKES	Discs (f)/Drums (R)
SUSPENSION	Coil spring independent (F) Live axle and leaf springs (R)
0-60MPH	14.6sec
TOP SPEED	96mph
LENGTH	3879mm/152.7in
WIDTH	1521mm/59.9in
HEIGHT	1255mm/49.4in
WEIGHT	1080.5kg/2380lb

rewarding and fun car to drive. It is not delicate in any way – the way it performs, the way it sounds or the feel of the controls – which does in some ways belie what are quite graceful and delicate lines, but they sit on running gear that is a tough and unsophisticated as old boots. Especially in GT form, it is a car that you could quite easily use as a daily driver even 60 years after its launch. That is something it shares with cars like the Morris Minor – the ergonomics are not the best, there are not loads of toys to play with, heating and demisting are probably not up to modern standards and (in the MGB's case) it is a little thirsty at around 30mpg, but those are all details around the margins. If you only

have room for one classic car and want to use it rather than simply polish it, then you can't go wrong with an MGB GT. ●

What to pay?

Realistically, chrome bumper GTs start at around £4000, though at this price you can expect rust in all the usual places – namely the sills, front scuttles, windscreen pillars, inner sills, rear wing tops and door bottoms. That said, £7000 should get you one that's had this work done. You still ground up restorations advertised at £15,000 but you honestly don't need to pay this much.



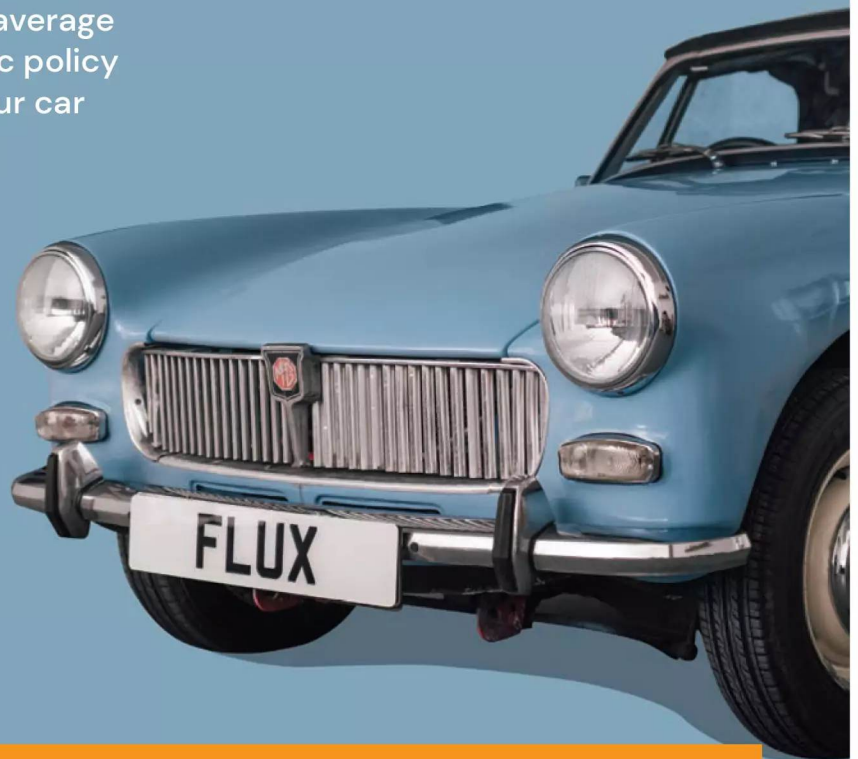
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AFFORDABLE LUXURY

Posh, great to own and now silly cheap – the X300 has lots going for it as a potential future classic purchase, not least the fact it's reliable and running costs aren't crippling expensive.

WORDS: **IAN CUSHWAY**



When it arrived in 1994, with Jaguar under Ford ownership, the X300 was seen as a heavily facelifted XJ40. A return, if you like, to a more curvier look and therefore more a progression from the much-loved Series 3, while at the same time dialling in improved build, better reliability and greater comfort. Perhaps the real headline story of the X300, therefore, was the arrival of the supercharged XJR – featuring the firm's first production supercharged engine along with lowered suspension and a sophisticated un-Jaguar like cabin, a move by the firm to shrug

off its Tartan slipper image in order to attract new, younger buyers.

Indeed, from a marketing perspective, the X300 catered for a wide range of age groups and tastes. There was the Sport, a standard range, and the Daimler. The Sport, which included the XJR, was more hip and used more modern finishes inside, while the Daimlers were the top drawer offering in terms of specification and price. The standard models – the XJ6 and Sovereign – were targeted at the Jaguar traditionalists.

Two all-alloy six cylinder engines were available, the 3.2 and a 4.0, with a supercharger optional on the latter for the XJR model. It was an updated version

of the old AJ6 engine and codenamed the AJ-16. Performance was impressive for such a big car – 0-60mph could be dispatched in under 8 seconds in the 4.0 – and, as you'd expect, power delivery was silky smooth.

There was also a 6.0-litre V12, which was even more potent, though still not as quick as the smaller engined XJR.

Considering it was such a big leap on, it's surprising that the X300 had such a short lifespan as, just three years after its introduction, it was replaced by the V8-powered X308, albeit with a virtually identical bodyshell.

A total of 92,038 X300s were built in this period and representing the last in the



line of user-friendly Jaguars, unsurprisingly the six-cylinder X300 has gained a pretty big fan base. Especially among those willing and able to do work on their own cars and the trade scared by complexities of the later XJ V8s. Of course, the fact that they're now so cheap and there's such a wide range of parts suppliers and independent specialists has also helped the X300 cause. In a nutshell, then, as a timeless and elegant looking luxury saloon it's definitely worth considering.

BUYING ONE

Those AJ-16 powerplants are pretty robust but head gasket woes have blotted some copybooks – so check coolant levels, look for signs of oil/water contamination and keep a beady eye on the temperature gauge on a testdrive. Incidentally, you can easily flood a X300. If the engine is stopped soon after starting for the first time, it can often be difficult to restart as a result of an engine management programming glitch. The remedy is to press the accelerator to the floor to initiate 'flood clear mode' which shuts down the injectors until the mixture is weak enough to ignite. If that fails, remove the fuel relay in the boot.

Timing chains can rattle a little on start up if the oil fed tensioners get clogged,



but replacing the chain and slippers means dropping the sump to get to the lower timing cover which is a time consuming affair, so either use it as a negotiating tool or simply live with it if you can. Meanwhile, any rough or erratic running on the otherwise silky smooth six will possibly be down to a duff Lucas air flow meter or iffy coil pack.

On high mileage examples, diffs have been known to fail – resulting in a subtle whine on acceleration from the front pinion or input shaft bearings. Exchange units are still available, as are secondhand diffs, but replacement is a tricky job because you need to slide the prop back to get to the 36mm nut which secures it.

There's a known weak spot on the exhaust where the two front downpipe sections go into one, behind the heat shield, so if you hear it blowing look here first. You'll need to replace the section of exhaust that includes the Cats but careful

welding costing a third of the price is a better solution on an older X300.

Door mirrors often get clouted and can be costly to replace – especially if you factor in having to respray the new one. A cheaper option might be to fit an all-chrome Daimler mirror instead.

As for interiors, most X300 have leather, although cloth did appear on some models. Air conditioning components are generally pretty good, but are expensive if they go wrong, especially if you end up having to replace the condenser or Nipponenso compressor.

Finally, rust can be a killer so inspect the wheelarch lips where mud collects, along with the metal above the windscreen and around the sunroof. A common problem concerns the bumper mountings, which have an aluminium insert which eventually corrodes and fractures on even the slightest shunt. A sure sign that this has happened is if the bumper doesn't sit square or moves on its mountings. As always, try to buy the best, looked-after car you can find. ●

What to pay?

Prices are all over the place, to be honest. Pristine, looked after cars might be £8000, while basket cases can sell for as little as £800, with lots of actually quite tidy looking examples advertised between £1200-£1500. For peace of mind we'd advise treading a middle ground and paying £5000-£6000 for a historied car at a dealer. Unadulterated XJRs with the right equipment from this era are now quite thin on the ground, but they're out there – and these will become the real collector's items.





CHIC AND CHEERFUL

One of Europe's longest-lived superminis and a bestseller for many years, the *Renault 5* range offers everything from runabout to hot hatch.

WORDS: **PAUL GUINNESS**

Launching in 1972 and surviving for 12 years, the first-generation Renault 5 proved to be a major success. Unlike the Fiat 127 and most later rivals, the Renault employed a longitudinally-mounted engine, but in every other respect was a genuine supermini, with neat looks, an entertaining driving style,

hatchback versatility and a wide range of derivatives to choose from.

Although the French-spec 782cc version was never imported, UK buyers would be offered 5s with 845, 956, 1108, 1289 and 1397cc engines over the years, as well as a wide range of trim levels and – in later life – a five-door version. It even helped to invent the hot hatch

segment thanks to the launch of the Gordini (known as the Alpine in France), featuring a tuned (93bhp) version of Renault's 1.4-litre motor; and there was more excitement in late 1981 when the Gordini Turbo was launched, its Garrett turbocharger boosting power to 110bhp.

The next-generation Renault 5 – known in its homeland as the Supercinq – arrived



in 1984, with its Marcello Gandini-penned styling deliberately paying homage to the Mk1. The three-door arrived first, followed by the five-door in May 1985. The platform was based on that of the larger Renault 9/11, making the new 5 wider and longer than the car it replaced, with more space inside. Perhaps the biggest change though was that the engine was now mounted transversely rather than north-south as in the Mk1.

Four trim levels were initially available (TC, TL, GTL and Automatic), with engines ranging from 956cc to 1397cc. Diesel versions followed in November 1985, while in '87 came a 1721cc petrol engine for the new GTX, GTE and Monaco. For hot hatch fans there was the 1985-on GT Turbo, its 1.4-litre (115bhp) engine boosted via a Garrett T2 turbocharger; the Phase 2 version of '87 brought 120bhp plus a new grille, wheels and colour-coded body kit.

The GT Turbo died in 1991, but the regular Supercinq lived on in basic Prima spec until 1996, despite the arrival of its successor, the Clio, as early as 1990.

BODYWORK

You won't be surprised to learn that the Renault 5's biggest enemy is rust – something that can apply as much to a late-model Mk2 as it can to an original

Mk1. Later cars were better protected against corrosion than the earliest models, but in reality any Renault 5 can rot alarmingly when neglected.

On the Mk1 in particular, both inner and outer wings are vulnerable, as are the bottoms of the doors, the tailgate and the front edge of the bonnet. You should also carefully examine the rear wheelarches, the sills and both front and rear screen surrounds for signs of rot, bubbling and previous repairs. We still come across Renault 5s that have

had poor-quality work carried out in the past, so make sure you carefully inspect the entire underside for signs of rot and bad welding, especially around the rear suspension mounts. Bubbling under a vinyl roof or around the side plastic protectors is also a sign of hidden corrosion that's waiting to be exposed.

The same areas need inspecting on any Supercinq, while on a GT Turbo in particular you should be on the look-out for signs of accident repairs and previous damage. The most abused examples





have long since disappeared, killed off by boy racers in the '90s, but some dodgy ones still survive. Even on a tidy looking example, pay particular attention to any body sections hidden by plastic trim that can easily hide rot problems.

Genuine Renault body panels aren't easy to find, although Ex-Pressed Steel Panels (www.steelpanels.co.uk) does produce new front wings for both the Mk1 and Mk2, priced at around £190 and £216 each respectively. European suppliers tend to stock a wider range of reproduction panels, including Germany's Der Franzose (www.franzose.de) and Spain's Repuestos Classic (www.repuestosclassic.es), which between them can supply front wings, floorpans, rear wheelarches, sills and more. France will also be a useful source of Renault 5 panels, so keep your search international if you need any particular parts.

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

The first-gen Renault 5 boasted a spread of engines that (in UK spec) went from the 845cc 'Ventoux' through to the 1.4-litre 'Sierra' unit – and the good news is that they're all tough and reliable powerplants when maintained properly. Their use of alloy cylinder heads makes it essential to have the correct ratio of good-quality antifreeze in the coolant; it's not unknown for corrosion and leaks to lead to

overheating issues, which can mean head gasket failure. You should also listen out for rattling valve gear, while any excessive smoke on start-up might suggest perished valve stem oil seals.

You should carry out the same checks with the Mk2 as well, although any turbocharged Renault 5 brings its own complications. Many examples will have been previously uprated or modified, so make sure any such work has been done well. The GT Turbo's engine bay is tightly

packed full of tubing and vacuum hoses, with poor heat suppression on early examples; Phase 2 models have an 'anti-percolation' fan that helps to keep the Solex carb cool, though many owners have fitted extra heat shielding and stronger electric fuel pumps to keep fuel temperatures down.

Early Renault 5s came with four-speed manual transmission as standard, with a five-speed manual and three-speed automatic being added later. None of



the gearboxes are known for being troublesome, but it still pays to listen out for whining bearings and to check for worn synchromesh on first and second. If you're buying a very early car with a dash-mounted gearstick, difficulty in engaging gears will almost certainly be down to a worn linkage – and that's a fairly easy fix. Don't forget to check the state of the clutch, as replacement of this on a Mk1 involves removing both the gearbox and the steering rack.

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

Non-sporting Renault 5s are simple in spec, with nothing likely to scare away the DIY classic fan. Aside from the usual wear in bushes and joints that comes with age and mileage, the rack and pinion steering should be trouble-free, and the same goes for the suspension. All models feature a coil-sprung independent set-up with telescopic dampers up front, while at the rear there's a torsion bar arrangement. You should check for signs of wear, but bear in mind that a standard model has typically French suspension settings and can therefore feel 'soft' when cornering.

Upper and lower front ball joints often wear, and you'll need to check for rot in the torsion bar mounting points as well as the rear trailing arm mounts. Classic Renault specialists around Europe can help with suspension parts, with



Der Franzone selling new front shock absorbers from under €40 (£33) each.

Early Renault 5s came with all-drum brakes, though later models had front discs and the Gordini Turbo and subsequent GT Turbo had discs all round. Carry out the usual checks for brake wear, looking for leaking cylinders, scored discs, worn pads/shoes and general neglect. The brakes of the sportiest Renault 5s will have led a hard life, so make sure they've been well-maintained.

INTERIOR, TRIM AND ELECTRICS

The quality of its interior trim wasn't a Renault 5 strong point, so be extra careful when buying, particularly as original-spec new trim is all but impossible to find. Early basic cars with vinyl upholstery were fairly robust, but the cloth seats of more upmarket versions will show signs of wear on all but the lowest-mileage cars.

The Supercinq's upholstery tends to be slightly more hardwearing, but is still prone to wear. On a GT Turbo in



particular, the outer side bolsters of the front seats will wear through, while the hard plastic dashboard fitted to all Mk2 models is prone to cracks and damage; even by standards of the 1980s, it was a brittle affair and needs careful inspection now.

The later the car, the better equipped it will tend to be (except in the case of the run-out Prima model), so make sure the electrics are working as they should, as problems are commonplace. It's not unusual to find non-functioning electric windows, erratic lighting and dodgy dials, so it is important to be thorough when checking.

OUR VERDICT

The Renault 5 was an early pioneer of the supermini sector, a model that went on to enjoy a long career over two generations and via a multitude of different derivatives. It was a popular buy here in the UK when new, and still holds plenty of appeal today. Whether you're looking for a practical and economical small classic or a high-performance hot hatch, there's likely to be a Renault 5 that fits the bill.

It's not without its issues of course, and it won't necessarily be the easiest classic supermini to track down – particularly if your heart is set on an early Mk1. But with its combination of Gallic charm, an easy driving style, low running costs and decent value for money, any well-preserved survivor makes a tempting proposition.



With such a wide spread of models available, there's a Renault 5 to suit most budgets. Among the non-sporting versions, the Supercinq is the most affordable, with project cars available for less than £1000; a solid example that's MoT'd and ready for regular use might cost you £2000-£2500, while a superb car should top out at £4000 or so. Mk1s start at a higher level, with decent examples (solid but not immaculate) available for £3000-£3500, while around

£5000-£5500 should buy you an excellent survivor that's ready to show.

Sporting models are in another league though, with a low-mileage GT Turbo in exceptional condition likely to achieve £15,000-plus, although a good example with a lengthy MoT can often be found for £7000-£9000. Mk1 Gordinis achieve strong money too, with a sale price of up to £10,000 not unusual for a decent example, though a Gordini Turbo in very good order can make £12,000-plus. ●





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EUROVISION

The Consul and Granada of 1972 marked a new direction for Ford in Europe, combining the talents of their UK and German operations to create an executive car that set new levels of road-holding, handling and comfort.

WORDS: **SIMON GOLDSWORTHY**



As a company, Ford did drop many clangers. Given their excellent track record in designing and building cars that people wanted to buy, the Mk4 Zephyr and Zodiac of 1966 perhaps failed to live up to the same high standards. To be sure they had many good points, but they also had more than their fair share of negatives. So they really couldn't afford to fall short with its successor, the Consul and Granada range that took over from 1972.

History shows that this new car

marked a return to top form. Designed by both Ford of England and Germany, it was five inches shorter than the Zephyr and around 60kg lighter. It featured Cortina/Taunus style double wishbone front suspension, and a much-improved independent rear suspension when compared to the Zephyr MkIV's flawed design. Allied to rack and pinion steering plus careful attention to geometry and spring/damper rates, the result was a car that rode extremely well and had very good handling. The interior was also very roomy and well planned, with a crisp new

facia design and excellent seats.

The cheaper models were called Consuls initially (that name was dropped from October 1975), while the plusher versions were Granadas. The Consul had a choice of either the 2000 V4 or the 2500 Essex V6 in base or L trim, or with a 3000 V6 in the Consul GT. The Granada was available as a 2500 or 3000 in standard (renamed Granada XL from January 1974) or GXL trim, the latter having automatic transmission as standard, vinyl roof, twin speaker radio, steel sunroof and tinted glass. A 3000 Ghia was added in July





1974, but it is a 2.5-litre V6 Granada GXL from the first year of production that we have on test today, courtesy of the Drive Dad's Car fleet at the Great British Car Journey museum in Derbyshire.

The Granada was considered a large car in its time, but it really doesn't feel enormous these days. It is a little bit wider than you might expect for the era in a family car, but nothing else stands out at all, especially when compared to the preceding MkIV Zodiac and your typical SUV of today. And talking of the MkIV Zodiac, they were all square edges and relatively simplistic in styling terms, but the Granada is so well sculpted. At the front, basically the whole of the centre of the bonnet forms one bulge to give it some profile, but the way it drops down for the last 10 or 12 inches adds a delightful styling touch, very much in the mould of the Capris that were of the

same era. The square headlights, which can look odd or dull on a classic, suit the lines of the Granada perfectly, which is a little odd given that it is so curvaceous everywhere else.

There is plenty of decoration down the sides of this GXL with trim strips, big wheel covers, wraparound lights and bumpers, plus lots of brightwork on the doors and around the windows. There are prominent GXL badges too – Ford made

a lot of its money from upselling basic cars with option packages, and people liked to advertise what they had bought. Remember that even having an automatic gearbox at this time would be flagged up with a badge on the tail. The vinyl roof and airflow vents add a touch of class. The front and rear screens are quite steeply raked, but because it is such a big car, there is plenty of space between them and it promises to offer a spacious cabin.



The back edges of the rear doors begin a slight kick up that continues into the rear haunches, the last vestige of the Coke bottle styling and adding a lot to the overall impression. There is a curve right at the back to mirror the leading edge and soften the profile, but the real design genius is in rear panel, which is concave from side to side and looks superb. Overall I think it is something of a styling masterpiece and I might be slightly in love.

This is a four-door saloon. Open the door and the seats are just so wide! Vinyl rather than the cloth I might have expected and with some lift to the sides promising some trace of lateral support, but you can still fit quite a large posterier in the flat centre. I do just that and it is low and soft. On the passenger side there are acres of legroom, certainly I can't reach the toe-board comfortably from the seat. There is a parcel shelf and a clock just for the passenger, and an interesting little glovebox with the catch on the top of the dash – when you release it, the glovebox lid drops down.

BACK TO BASICS

You can't get away from the fact that there is an absence of toys by modern standards, certainly when talking about upmarket cars with luxury pretensions. Personally I consider that a bonus and it is partly a reflection of how tastes and amenities have changed, and partly because Ford were one of the most cost-conscious companies around, (which of course is one reason why they were so profitable for so long). In the Granada there are acres of plastic rather than anything more upmarket, and while it looks impressive at first glance, it does



feel rather cheap in use. The wood trim is obviously fake, but that is fair enough. The door cards are, to be fair, quite ornate, being padded at the top in the American style and then decorated with vinyl, chrome and colour changes. Even there Ford made cost savings though, such as the plastic chrome trim surrounding the interior door handles that looks great, but is somewhat lightweight and fragile.

This car has a sunroof, only manually-operated, but what else would you expect when all the windows are manually-operated too? It is things like that which remind you this is not a Jaguar, but back in 1972 few people would have expected anything more at this price. And they did get a lot of car for their money in a Granada because it was extremely well-priced at around £2000, just not overly endowed with gadgets and gizmos.

Trying out the back seat I find that it is soft, wallowy and wide. There is no problem at all sitting three abreast, though without a central arm rest to provide some support, two passengers might sway a bit from side to side if the driver gets too carried away with what's under the bonnet. I remember once driving from



the UK to Latvia in a 3.0 Granada V6 with three people on board, and I can confirm that it was both spacious and incredibly comfortable. And talking of driving, let's move round to that most important of seats – the one behind the wheel. The seat in this car has collapsed a bit so any impressions there are probably not giving the model a fair crack of the whip, but on the other hand it does sit me nice and low and leave a good six inches of headroom. There is a cubby between the front seats that doubles up as an arm rest. There is another rest on the driver's door, which initially seems too far away to be of much use, but once you realise how light the steering is, the spread-arm resting position is more viable.

TUNNEL VISION

The driver gets a much more dramatic dash than the passenger with a good selection of deep-set dials. Really deep – Ford claimed they reduced glare, but I am sure it was more about style and the result is that you are looking at individual dials down long tunnels. That does make it slightly more awkward to flick your eyes from one to the other than it need be, but overall I would say the inconvenience is worth it for the dramatic effect! There is FUEL top left and TEMPERATURE below that, then a rev counter beside them that redlines at 5500rpm and tops out at 7000rpm. Moving on over to the right there is a speedo that reads up to 140mph, then ammeter and oil pressure gauges to balance out the fuel and temp gauges, so pretty much everything that an enthusiastic driver would want to keep an eagle eye on.

There are sundry switches for lights and screen demisters, plus a manual choke (again, remember the vintage, and that an automatic choke was not always a plus point!). There is a cigarette lighter ahead of the gear selector on the floor, although in the Granada that is probably sold as a cigar lighter. There is also a little button with a music sign, which I am guessing is



for front/rear balance – even though there is only a push button MW/LW radio.

This car is a strange mixture, aiming at a market that I don't think really exists today. It is a little bit flash and it is a little bit luxurious, but it falls somewhere between the two. Perhaps we need to coin a new word such as fluxury... Perhaps Faux Luxury would be better, and it lacks the build quality of a contemporary Mercedes for example (as well as lacking a few of the noughts that would have accompanied the Mercedes' price tag). I mentioned earlier about the plastic chrome trim around the door handles, and it is actually missing on the driver's door on this car. The gear selector feels a little bit slack too, lacking some of the precision you might expect. This car only has 62,000 miles on the clock so I am sure things like this could be tightened up, but you have to bear in mind that this is not a factory fresh car and you can't expect it to be in perfect condition. For example, the headlining is sagging a little in the back (although with so much headroom that is not a problem), there is a crack on cubby and the driver's seat has dropped a little as I have said...



I mention all of this not to denigrate the model or this particular example in any way, but because the most fascinating thing to me is that none of it matters one jot. As I sit behind the wheel and fire up that big engine, I just love it. That V6 noise is perfect. Though I need another new word because 'noise' is wrong again, it is more of a background hum. There

is a big footbrake as you would expect on an automatic, so you hold the car steady on that and pull the rather vague selector back through R, N and into D. There is absolutely no clunk whatsoever and the engine note barely changes, only a slight squat at the back as you hold it on the brakes telling you that it is primed and ready to roll. Lift off the brake and



it glides forwards; tickle the throttle and there is a split second of hesitation as the carburettor sorts itself out and then the nose picks up. Get heavier with the right foot and the back end really squats down and the rear wheels spin as you set off in search of the horizon – this may 'only' have the 2500 engine rather than the three-litre, but it is a powerful motor in a car weighing around 1395kg/3073lb.

The power assisted steering is very light, not really transmitting too much feel back to the driver, but that is no doubt what Ford were aiming for – light and laid-back steering for the stressed executive. And it does make for gentle finger-and-thumb wheel action, although at 3.5 turns lock to lock there is quite a bit of twirling to be done when manoeuvring at low speeds. That said, it does stop the highly-assisted steering from becoming twitchy and even though it is not over-endowed with feel, nor does it transmit road shocks back to the driver. As for parking and town driving, the steering lock is good and the Granada does not feel an overly large car. You can see most of the bonnet from the driver's seat to aid with locating the car, just the front section where it drops



away remaining out of view. You can't see much of the boot from the driver's seat, but that doesn't extend too far behind the rear screen anyway and guesstimating where the corners are is not difficult.

On the move the car tracks nice and steady, with plenty of suspension movement and some big wheels to smooth out the bumps. Period road tests talked of an absence of body roll, and that is certainly true on sweeping curves. However, carry too much speed into a sharp corner and the nose can really dig in. This only happens if you are being silly or make a mistake though, because at anything approaching a safe and sensible speed on the road the Granada feels composed and secure. To my mind Ford got the compromise between comfort and handling pretty much spot on. It does not stay flat like a harsh-riding modern car, but nor does it wallow like a 1950s barge. Instead it feeds back all manner of information to the driver, the high-profile tyres and softish suspension encouraging you to dial back the speed to sensible levels while still allowing high average speeds to be maintained.

The brakes are servo-assisted, discs on the front and drums on the back. They require you to push a little further than you might initially expect (whether that is reflective of the model or just this particular car I don't know), but once they start to bite, they pull the car up sharply

and squarely. The GXL had an automatic gearbox by default, a three-speed C4 unit built by Ford. This is extremely smooth in normal use, getting predictably a little more clunky if you have a heavy right foot. It is very well suited to an engine that delivers its power smoothly across the rev range and settles down to an unobtrusive hum when cruising at 70mph.

Playing about with the gearbox at lower speeds, if you put it in first and floor the throttle then the engine will push you gently but firmly back into your seat as it starts to get serious from around 2500rpm, with the real character change kicking in from 3500rpm and beyond. That does suggest that you can drive it in two styles – gently below 3000rpm, or pushing on above that. I have to say that it tends to encourage the more relaxed style. It is an odd one because it was designed to be a more European car than what had gone before, but the driving




What to pay?

These cars come up for sale so seldom, it's tricky to accurately predict how much you'd have to spend. When we looked, even a rusty project was £5000. Put it this way, if you can find a complete running example for between £8000-£10,000 you probably ought to buy it.

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experience is very American in many ways. It floats a little, not in a vague way but in a soft, cossetting manner. It will obviously pick up from idle without issue being an automatic, but it will also tickle along at 1000rpm, and unless you are burying the throttle it will change up through the gears by 2750rpm.

Exact performance figures for the 2500 Granada are hard to come by because most magazine tests of the day were carried out on either the 2000 or 3000 cars and all I can offer today are seat-of-the-pants impressions, but for the record the 2-litre V4 Consul recorded 0-60mph in 14.1 seconds and a top speed of 98mph (with a manual gearbox) while the 3-litre GXL with an autobox recorded figures of 11.7 seconds and 110mph. It is reasonable to assume that our 2500 test car would record figures somewhere between those two, but such achievements are really rather academic. Not only do people generally treat cars with a little more respect when they are classics than magazine testers did when they were brand new, but the Granada really does not encourage the hooligan in you to come out and play. Certainly it will

THE FACTS

MODEL	1974 FORD GRANADA GXL
ENGINE	2994cc V6 OHV
POWER	138bhp@5000rpm
TORQUE	174lb.ft@3000rpm
GEARBOX	Three-speed automatic
BRAKES	Discs/drums
SUSPENSION	Independent all round
0-60MPH	11.7sec
TOP SPEED	110mph
LENGTH	4572mm/180in
WIDTH	1791mm/70.5in
HEIGHT	1369mm/53.9in
WEIGHT	1407kg/3100lb

post some decent A-to-B times if you are in a hurry, but calm down just a little and it becomes a stress-free environment in which to relax, one that will convey you to your destination safely and in comfort, but also in great style. If you could afford the

petrol, (don't expect more than the low twenties per gallon, but the best things in life are never free despite what some people claim,) it is a car you could drive every day and thoroughly enjoy. Given the chance, I'd love to do just that. ●



Our test car belongs to the Great British Car Journey in Ambergate, Derbyshire. This wonderful museum features over 130 classic cars, and takes you through the golden ages of British car design and manufacturing from the Austin Seven to the Ford Escort and covering everything in between. They also operate the Drive Dad's Car initiative that allows you to drive many of the cars from the collection, including this Ford Granada. Find full details at www.greatbritishcarjourney.com, or call them on 01773 317243.

LAND OF THE RISING FUN

There's long been a strong following for these sports cars, so if you fancy joining them and getting a Datsun 240Z or 260Z for yourself, here's how to secure yourself the best example.

WORDS: **CHRIS RANDALL**

Sleek styling aside, talk of the Datsun 240Z being a 'baby E-type' is probably stretching things a bit, but there's no doubt the arrival of the 240Z rather upset the established sports car market. The early-1970s offered a good choice of coupes in the UK – the likes of the MGB GT and Ford Capri being obvious ones – but the Japanese contender offered a tempting blend of performance, handling ability, comfort and reliability.

The 2.4-litre straight-six engine ensured it was no slouch, its 150bhp delivering 125mph and 0-60mph in 8.0 seconds, and while the 260Z that arrived in 1974 provided more torque, its longer stroke meant it wasn't quite as revvy as the earlier car. That said, either model provides plenty of entertainment today, so you won't be disappointed whichever you choose.

There were numerous detail changes throughout production, including the introduction of a more practical 2+2,

but the fundamentals remained the same and that was no bad thing. It was finally replaced by the 280ZX in 1979, a model that dialled back the sportiness and became more of a relaxed cruiser. Fast forward the best part of five decades and enthusiasm for these sporting coupes is as strong as ever, and rightly so.

BODYWORK

Rust-proofing was pretty much non-existent when these cars were new, and the subsequent corrosion did for many examples. Condition is everything, so the mantra of 'buy the best you can afford' certainly applies here. They rust everywhere, so methodical checks are needed, starting at the front where you should examine the leading edge of the bonnet, the front panel and the crossmember beneath the radiator. And don't forget the battery tray.

The bolt-on front wings rot too, and you'll need to feel up under the wing to check the condition of the metalwork

there; there's a strengthening plate in the inner wings that can rust away too. Continuing towards the back, it's a case of examining the usual spots such as the door bottoms, sills and rear wheelarches. The edges of the tailgate is another trouble-spot.

You'll also want to ensure the underneath receives proper scrutiny, and as well as checking the state of the floors and footwells, it's important to establish the integrity of the chassis legs that run back from the front crossmember. Although some stuff is being re-made, finding original panels and repair sections won't be easy, so you'll probably have to rely on searching for secondhand items or on the skills of a fabricator. A full-on restoration will get expensive, so think long and hard before taking on a project. And there's also the matter of accident damage, bodes and previous restorations that may not have been done to the standard you'd expect, so be sure to establish the quality of any





previous work.

As for exterior trim parts, items such as the Lucas headlights should be easy enough to find, but clubs such as the Classic Z Register (S30.org) are an excellent source of help and advice when it comes to tracking down bits. Specialists can refurbish the bumpers assuming they haven't corroded beyond rescue, while pattern replacements are around £800 per pair.

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

The straight-six engine is easily capable of six-figure mileages with proper care, so it's worth quizzing the vendor about the previous maintenance regime. Oil leaks are rarely an issue, but you'll want to see at least 55psi oil pressure at normal road speeds; much less than that and you'll need to investigate further. Equally as important is regular oil and filter changes which will prevent

wear of the timing chain and camshaft, the latter a potential weak spot if servicing is neglected.

Also crucial is a healthy cooling system, so check for any signs of a unit getting hot and bothered and make sure that correct anti-freeze levels have been maintained to prevent corrosion within the alloy cylinder head. There's not a great deal to worry about with the fuel system, which employs a pair of Hitachi-SU carburettors, although it's worth noting that few parts are interchangeable with traditional SUs found on many British classics. The linkage is an arrangement of cables and rods, so a jerky throttle response could mean it needs an overhaul.

The ignition is trouble-free too, with the only potential issue being a sticking advance/retard mechanism within the distributor; you could swap to electronic ignition but it's not really necessary. Lastly, the engines respond well to tuning (sportier camshaft and the like) so ask about any modifications, one of which might be a stainless steel exhaust system – it's the best option as original systems are hard to find.





The only transmission for UK cars was a five-speed manual unit – four-speeders will be imports, as will automatics; don't dismiss the latter as it may suit you, but conversion to a manual 'box is possible, if a bit labour intensive. Noisy bearings and worn synchromesh are the main issues you'll encounter and the later unit (identified by a bent gear stick – early ones were straight) is considered stronger; it's possible to fit it to an earlier car, but some modification to the bodyshell are needed. Other than that, listen out for whines from the differential (although they rarely fail completely) and for clunks from worn universal joints.

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

The independent suspension employed MacPherson struts at the front and a strut-type set-up at the rear and it provided the Datsun 240Z and 260Z with secure and predictable handling allied to decent ride quality. The same should be true today, so anything else points to the likes of worn dampers and bushes that are ready for replacement.

Sourcing parts isn't particularly difficult, and there's scope for upgrades if you prefer something a little tauter, although it's worth talking to owners who've done this before taking the plunge as it is easy to spoil the standard set-up's well-rounded abilities. The only other thing to check for is corrosion around mounting points and strut tops.

And speaking of making changes, bear in mind that fitting wider tyres will make the accurate rack and pinion steering heavier. The Datsun 240Z was originally specified with 4.5J steel wheels – the trims are hard to find now and expensive when you do – but many now ride on alloys, with Minilite-style rims proving especially popular. Watch for excessive play in the steering though, as you may struggle to get the rack reconditioned. Which leaves us with the brakes, and while the disc front and drum rear set-up was decent enough for its time, they feel on the weak side today. They aren't problematic, so it's just a case of checking for wear, tear and neglect, but you might want to consider upgrading to larger discs and pads for more modern-day stopping power. Rear disc conversions can be found for around £1300, but unless you've substantially upped the performance you probably don't need to go that far.

INTERIOR, TRIM AND ELECTRICS

With a great driving position and ample space for a sports car, the cabin was a comfortable place to be, perhaps just marred by the acres of plastic typical of the time. You can find replacement bits of trim if you discover any damage, but they can be pricey. And you'll want to check the top of the dashboard for cracks – repairs may be possible assuming things haven't gone too far.

Later models got cloth inserts for the seats so these may be shabby by now, but otherwise it's going to be a case of examining the vinyl for the usual splits and tears. You can either turn to a specialist trimmer or look to source new seat covers from the US. Scruffy carpets are nothing to worry about as



Stars at the Show



Words by: Club Marketing Director
Satinder S. Grewal

Crowds were thrilled to see seven stunning Mercedes-Benz models on the Club display at the NEC for the Classic Motor Show. With thousands of Visitors across this 3-day event, a great opportunity for the oldest and only official Mercedes-Benz Club in the UK to share some interesting cars and information about what the Club offers.

In the centre was a wonderful white W121 (1969) 190SL surrounded by classics from yesteryear as well as 'young-timers' including a uniquely modified R129

(1998) SL320 with airlift suspension and handmade body kit by owner Harry Pippard. A very (very) rare right-hand drive 507bhp CLK 'Black Series' also impressed, alongside a huge 600 Grosser which was once used by the UN Secretary General and now comprehensively maintained by owner Jack Singh.

It was hard to imagine the transformation involved to restore the 1964 300SE coupe on display, although the photo album available from owner Paul O'Keeffe documented every detail involved. The seventies and

eighties were well represented with examples of the much loved W123 coupe and W126 S-Class models.


Everyone was welcomed to speak with Club volunteers and the technical support team, Members could also take a break in the 'Club Café'. Club Marketing Director Satinder S. Grewal summarised 'this event is great to bring together the classic car community from near and far, for everyone to be part of this passion under one huge roof'.



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replacement sets are available.

Turning to the electrics, there's nothing really complicated here so a prod of all the switches will soon reveal anything on the blink. Corroded fuse connections can cause a few gremlins although that's easily remedied, and it's worth installing a relay in the headlight wiring as it takes the load off the fuse box. Lastly, check for inoperative dials and for any modifications carried out by previous owners; whether you're happy with them depends on how you feel about originality, but you'll want to ensure they've been done properly.

OUR VERDICT

If you're hankering after a 1970s sports car that can entertain on the right road but also prove easy to live with, then these Datsuns really do merit serious consideration. The performance feels more than lively enough compared to period rivals, and it doesn't take long behind the wheel to realise how well-engineered they feel.

It makes for an enjoyable and worry-free ownership proposition, although as we mentioned earlier on it's important to buy the best example you can as the potential for major corrosion issues and big restoration bills will quickly spoil the experience. But with excellent clubs on hand to provide advice and support, there's no reason to land yourself with a bad one. If your heart's set on making your next classic a sporting one, then we very much recommend looking to the East.

As for values, these have long been sought-after and desirable classics, and that's reflected in prices that have risen notably in the last decade or so – the very best have pretty much doubled in value in that time. The Datsun 240Z leads the way with outstanding examples now around £50,000, while good ones can easily command £30,000 or more even if a

few jobs need doing.

Something scruffier in need of greater attention can still fetch somewhere in the mid-teens, although a little caution is needed before taking on one of those. You can probably knock around 25% off these figures for left-hand drive examples. As for the 260, you can expect to pay around £6000-£9000 less depending on condition, with 2+2s a little cheaper still.

As for finding one of these Zs, there's usually a decent number in the classifieds – there are more 240s to choose from – but a fair number sport modifications of one sort or another, which may or may not bother you. The market values originality though, so think hard before taking this route. ●





LASTING IMPRESSION

With healthy sales throughout its two-decade career, the 240 series was one of Volvo's most successful models. It is now a popular choice for anyone seeking a practical, well-built classic. We explain what to look for if you are tempted.

WORDS: **PAUL GUINNESS**

An executive-class model that remains in production for the best part of two decades is something of a rarity. The W124-series Mercedes-Benz E-Class, for example, stayed around for just over 11 years, the Rover SD1 charted up a decade-long career, and the longest-lived Ford Granada/Scorpio model managed barely nine years. The

Volvo 240, however, is in a league of its own, launching in 1974 and remaining on sale for the next 19 years. For a relatively upmarket range of saloons and estates, such longevity is very unusual. But as newer, more advanced rivals came and went, the good old Volvo 240 plodded on with only relatively minor updates throughout its career. A combination of toughness, strength, safety and dependability won

it many friends throughout its long run, ensuring that it became the proverbial classic in its own lifetime.

Based heavily on the already successful 140 series, the new 244 saloon of 1974 (plus the 245 estate that arrived the following year) featured more powerful overhead-cam engines in place of the old pushrod units, as well as mild restyling for the front and rear



ends. Plenty of updates arrived over the years, with headlamps changing shape, bumpers shrinking, interiors getting upgraded and exterior trim evolving over time. But while all these minor changes kept the 240 feeling reasonably fresh, its appeal went much deeper than mere cosmetics.

These days, the Volvo 240 series offers classic buyers the same attributes as it did when new, retaining its reputation for robustness and reliability. And with a reasonably wide range of different derivatives available, there should be a version to suit most potential buyers' needs. The early UK-spec range comprised the 244DL and better-equipped GL saloons, plus the 245E and DL estates – although a GL version of the 245 would arrive later.

Also available were the 264 and 265 models, sharing essentially the same styling but with 2664cc V6 power thanks to their use of the PRV engine co-developed with Peugeot



and Renault. The 260-series would be phased out by 1982 thanks to the arrival of Volvo's new 760 flagship, and nowadays any 264/265 is one of the rarer members of the 200-series family. Scarcer still is the 262C (pictured below), a two-door coupe version of the six-cylinder saloon (complete with lowered roofline for a more American look), of which just 6622 were built during its 1977-81 career.

Among the regular 240-series models, the estate is the most commonplace now, despite it being the real workhorse of the range. Its extra longevity is part of the reason (the saloon disappeared from Volvo's UK price lists in 1991, two years earlier than the estate), although its top-selling status also helps to make the estate the most ubiquitous of today's survivors. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, any antiques dealer or Labrador-owning country dweller wanting to look the part inevitably ended up with a Volvo 240 estate.

Derived from the old 140 range, the new 240-series featured revised styling touches and more modern

engines, as well as the extra modernity of MacPherson strut front suspension and rack and pinion steering. The all-new B19A engine (with 89bhp on tap) replaced the old B20A in 1977, while the following year's facelift saw the 240 saloons treated to a redesigned rear end, complete with wrap-around lights and a softer boot line. Flush-fitting square headlamps were fitted in place of the old recessed circular units, and a new 240 GLE flagship was also added.

A sportier version – the 240 GLT – went on sale in the UK in 1980, with the following year seeing the adoption of a new-look grille and wrap-around rear lights for the estate. A redesigned dashboard was introduced in 1981, with the B21A engine being boosted to 105bhp that same year. A new manual gearbox arrived for 1984, with a four-speed automatic option being introduced for the GL.

Further improvements were announced throughout the remaining years of 240 production, with the late 1980s seeing the range at its widest in the UK with the saloon available in GL and GLT guises, while the estate





could be had in DL, GL and GLT spec. The best-performing model was, of course, the GLT, which by then had an impressive 133bhp on tap. From then on the 240 range was gradually wound down, with the penultimate year of sales initially seeing only the 240GL estate available in Britain. For the 1993 model year, however, came the 240 Torslanda estate, a limited-edition run-out model that finally marked the end of Volvo's longest-running family.

Your choice nowadays will, of course, depend on whether you prefer a saloon or an estate, with the latter often commanding a premium thanks to its extra versatility and popularity. There are exceptions, however, as a GLT will generally attract a higher asking price thanks to its increased power and performance, while the 262C coupe is

generally seen as a more aspirational model thanks to its rarity. Whichever member of the 200-series Volvo family you choose, you'll be getting one of today's most durable classics – although that doesn't mean the buying process is automatically problem-free.

BODYWORK

The Volvo 240 was one of the best-built cars in its sector, with a reputation for outlasting many of its more rot-prone rivals. That doesn't mean, however, that rust isn't an issue all these years later, with even the latest cars now being over 25 years old. It's worth noting that 1988-on models offered the best anti-corrosion protection of all, with the use of partly galvanised bodywork also helping to keep rust at bay.

If you're buying an early car, you need to check the condition of the front wings thanks to Volvo not fitting plastic inner-wing liners until the 1977 model year, although even on later cars the areas around the indicators and between the wheelarch and door can rust badly. You also need to check the state of the engine bay, looking for general corrosion and paying particular attention to the front crossmember (which supports the radiator), the battery tray, the bulkhead (with rot around the base of the windscreen being not uncommon) and the front 'chassis' legs.

If the 240 you're inspecting shows signs of rot in its sills, it could be worse news than you think. The sill itself is made up of three parts (an outer and inner sill, with a central section





between them), which means that any bubbling paintwork on the outer sill will probably mean rot in the other two pieces as well. The entire underside of the car should be checked for corrosion and signs of previous welding, with any fresh-looking underseal around the floorpans and crossmembers being a cause for concern.

While you're inspecting the sills, you should also be paying attention to the doors, as these are prone to rot along their lower edges and underneath thanks to the common problem of blocked drain holes. The 240's outer rear wheelarches and inner rear wings can also rust badly, as can the spare wheel well. The boot floor of the saloon needs checking, as does the area below and between the back lights. When buying an estate, carry out similar checks but make sure you also examine the lower part of the tailgate, where rot and bubbling paintwork are common.

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

Most surviving 240s will be fitted with the B19 or later B21 four-cylinder engine, both of which are reliable units that can take high mileages in their stride. Because of their durability, however, it's not unusual for owners to be neglectful when it comes to maintenance and regular servicing.

Head gasket failure isn't unheard of, which means carrying out the usual checks for coolant in the oil and vice-versa. You should also check whether the oil is particularly dark, as this means that either an oil change is overdue or there are more serious problems inside

the engine. A quick look at the state of the air filter will also tell you something about when the car was last serviced.

When the engine is running, listen out for any knocking noises and check how smoothly it ticks over. The engine should run evenly when idling, with any drop in revs likely to be caused by a worn carburettor. If the tickover seems too high, however, it could be down to a vacuum issue or a problem with the automatic choke.

The 2.7-litre PRV engine fitted in the 260 models tends to suffer from a worn camshaft at around the 100,000-mile mark. You also need to check for signs of previous overheating with this six-cylinder unit, as it's a common problem. Making sure you bring it up to normal operating temperature is an essential

part of your inspection.

On 240s fitted with manual transmission, the rear oil seal often leaks, which can wreck the gearbox if ignored and the oil level is allowed to drop. Early cars can suffer from weak synchromesh on first and second gears, although this only usually becomes an issue with a six-figure mileage. The clutch is as tough and robust as the transmission, but if the clutch pedal seems unusually heavy it could be a sign of a stretched cable that's likely to snap at some point. If buying a 240 or 260 with automatic transmission, you need to carry out the normal checks for smooth changes, making sure there's no sign of slipping out of gear when under load.

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

Take a close look at the tie rods, steering rods and bushes, for example, as well as the support arms of the rear axle. The weakest part of the steering system is the rack itself, which can leak and wear on high-mileage cars.

During your test drive, you should check for any play in the steering wheel and column, as well as making sure the suspension feels smooth and is knock-free. The 240 was always a popular towing car (particularly in estate guise), so make sure it doesn't suffer from a sagging rear end. If the car doesn't sit level, you should assume that the rear springs are past their best.

The dual-circuit disc brake set-up is another strong point of the 240, endowing it with superb stopping powers. On your test drive, check that the car doesn't pull to one side when braking (a sure sign of a caliper





problem) and make sure that the brake pedal doesn't require excessive force. As on any older car, it's important to check the state of the Volvo's discs and pads, as well as all brake pipes and hoses; replacing the brakes isn't a particularly expensive or complex task, but you'll still need to budget for this when buying.

INTERIOR AND TRIM

The interior treatment of the 240 or 260 that you're buying will depend upon its age and spec, with both cloth and leather upholstery featuring within the range. Either way, the fabrics used were always of a high quality, enabling a 240's seats to remain in good condition even on high-mileage examples. Nevertheless, you should

still look for wear around the front seat side bolsters, as well as the base of the driver's seat in particular.

The 240's carpeting was also of a good quality and tended to last longer than that in many rivals, although you should check for signs of wear around the front floorpans. It also pays to have a feel around for signs of dampness, as any leaks from the windscreen (caused by a poor seal or perhaps rot around the pillars or bulkhead) can result in soggy carpets.

If you're buying a 240/260 estate, there's every chance it will have led a hard life – which means paying particular attention to the state of its working end, with damage to the load area carpets and side panels being common. This doesn't prevent the



car from being a useful workhorse, of course, but may be a problem depending on how fussy you are in terms of aesthetics.

OUR VERDICT

The days when a 240 could be picked up in perfect working order for just a few hundred pounds are now a distant memory. This archetypal Volvo now has a loyal following, with prices inevitably increasing in order to keep up with demand. You'll be able to find a project car for a three-figure sum, but it's likely to need a great deal of work – and probably won't be cost-effective as a result.

The price of a Volvo 240 saloon in good condition tends to start now at around £2000-£3500, though you can pay £4500 or so for one in excellent order. The equivalent estate will usually be pitched a little higher, with £2500-£4000 buying a good survivor – although you can pay £4500-£5500 for a superbly-presented example with a sensible mileage. Sale prices of £6000+ aren't unheard of, but at that level it needs to be a very special car, such as an exceptional example of the particularly sought after GLT derivative.

The 260 is a rarer option, which explains why values are again a little higher than for the equivalent 240. Find yourself a low-mileage 260 estate that's beautifully presented and you're likely to need £6500-£9000 in order to secure it. As for the now-scarce 262C coupe, asking prices of £10,000-plus are by no means unusual.

Whichever 240/260 you buy, you'll be getting a sturdy classic capable of providing you and your family with safe, durable transport for years to come. Keep on top of regular maintenance and it should even prove to be a reasonable long-term investment. If you've yet to take the plunge into Volvo 240-series ownership, it's something well worth considering. ●





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CHARISMATIC CLASSIC

The Morris Marina was a no-nonsense design for no-nonsense buyers. The Coupé added an extra dash of style to the basic mix, but what is it like to drive?

WORDS: **SIMON GOLDSWORTHY/ALEX PARROTT**

The Morris Marina was launched in 1971 with a choice of 1.3 A-series and 1.8 B-series engine, essentially replacing the Morris Minor and Morris Oxford respectively. Body options were a four-door saloon or two-door coupé initially, although in 1972 vans and estates were added to the mix. There were pick-ups too, though they were never big

sellers. The running gear was resolutely conventional, with an inline four-cylinder engine up front driving the rear wheels through a four-speed gearbox. The front suspension featured a development of the Morris Minor's layout with longitudinal torsion bars, lower arms pivoting on trunnions with upper ball joints and lever arm dampers, while at the back was a live rear axle suspended on leaf springs

and with telescopic dampers. Some early 1.3s had unservo'd drum brakes all round, but servo assistance and front discs were standard elsewhere and options on even the entry level cars.

Early 1.8 Marinas soon garnered a reputation for understeering in the hands of the press, and by the end of 1971 BL had made changes to the suspension geometry to address this. There were



further suspension improvements with the Mk2 facelift of 1976, while the Mk3 from September 1978 saw the Coupe restricted to the 1.3 engine and the B-series being dropped in favour of the 1.7 O-series. That too was revised in 1980 and the model rebadged as the Ital, now without the coupe body option and from 1982 with telescopic dampers instead of lever arms. The Ital bowed out in 1984, to be replaced by the Austin Montego.

The Marina was designed to be cheap to produce and sold in volume to buyers who valued practicality and value for money. In this regard it was very successful, with 1.2 million sold over a production life of 13 years (if you combine Marina and Ital sales). However, it is also one of those cars whose merits have often been buried under a deluge of ill-informed negativity, culminating in the bully-boy trolling by BBC's *Top Gear* some years back. Of course there were shortcomings in the design, just as there were in just about every car ever produced and especially by a company struggling with a lack of cash, but it has to be said that many people remember the model fondly, and today there is a thriving community based



around the Morris Marina Owners Club and Ital Register who cherish the survivors, of which there are pitifully few given the model's impressive sales success.

LATE EDITION

The car we have on test is from near the end of Marina production, meaning that it benefits from all of the suspension improvements made by BL. It is a 1979 1.3L Coupe in white – some people love white cars and others hate them, but with the lovely period brown vinyl roof this car really makes it work. There is also a surprising amount of bright trim, all around the front in particular. There is a chin spoiler and alloy wheels. When viewed from the side, it is surprisingly well-proportioned. I say surprisingly because BL cut costs by using the front doors from a four-door saloon on the Coupe without lengthening them for the two-door profile because moving the B-posts would have been too expensive. Having said that, there is a decent amount of bonnet to give it a purposeful air (and no hint of the modest 1.3 A-series engine lurking beneath), while a curving rather than sloping rear end does not start dropping until after the rear seat cushion, hinting at good interior space. All in all I would defy most people who hadn't been told that fact about the doors (and who weren't car designers) to peg it as a shortcoming on first sight. Only once you know does the long rear three-quarter flank push itself into your consciousness.



The Coupe looks for all the world like it should be a hatchback, but like so many BL designs that opportunity was missed, but the boot is wide, reasonably tall and goes back a very long way. The spare wheel is on the left and the fuel filler on the right, the latter being well protected from knocks, certainly better than in many cars I have driven.

There are Leyland plughole badges everywhere, proclaiming its heritage. Open the door using the classic BL handles that appeared on so many things and you enter a wonderful world of 1970s browns. The door cards are dark brown and quite nicely detailed, the seats are big, soft, squidgy dark chocolate nylon and actually firmer and more grippy than first impressions would suggest. Getting into the back is not as bad as you might expect given the small doors, but does require a degree of dexterity. Once in the back, my head is up by the headlining, but that seems to be down to the height of the seat rather than because the roof is dropping. The rear windows don't open, but they do allow rear seat passengers a decent view of the passing countryside. There is no springing to the rear seat, only foam, but I'd be perfectly happy going on holiday in this if I was a kid.

Since I am not a kid, I can try out the driver's seat and there we have a strange mixture of dash in that it is both futuristic and traditional. There is the usual array of dials and switches in front of the driver, then a curving sweep takes it away from





the passenger's knees and right up to the screen. That does mean that if a radio were fitted it would be angled towards the passenger rather than the driver. It also means that they have a tremendous feeling of space in front of them, so very different to something like a Golf of the same era with its high and straight dash. There is plenty of legroom, but space for size 12 feet is more limited as they are tucked up under the parcel shelf.

In this car there is a blanking plate rather than a radio, and that really seems to sum up the offering as you do not get a whole lot of extras. The binnacle in front of the driver is quite wide, but the two gauges are squeezed rather apologetically into the middle. There is a speedo on the left reading up to 110mph, then fuel and temperature on the left in a single round unit. There are four warning lights scattered quite widely, then large blank areas that on more upmarket models could presumably have been filled with other gauges. At least you get a perfect view of everything through the four-spoke wheel. The controls are completed by two stalks: wipers on the right, indicators, horn and headlight flash on the left. Everything can be reached without taking your hands off the steering wheel.

There are a few controls under the dash on the right, including the brake test light. On the left there is a heater control facing the driver in the same way as the radio faces the passenger. This is simplicity itself with a choice of ON/OFF, UP/DOWN and HOT/COLD. A fan switch and the classic choke knob completes this side of the controls. Eyeball ventilation at each end of the dash is classic for the era.

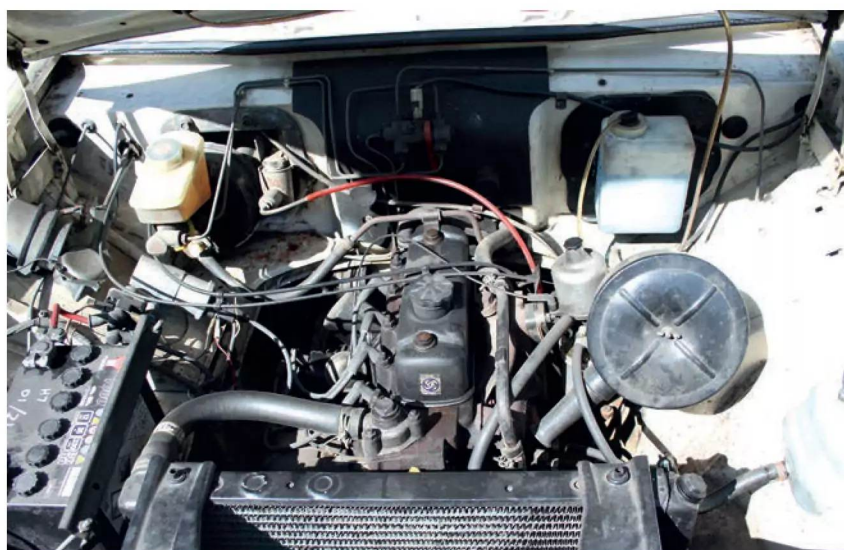
DIY FRIENDLY

Open the bonnet (rear-hinged) and the little A-series is set low down with plenty of space all around it for access. The filter is upwards facing, which can make changes messy but at least it is easy to reach. There is a single carb on this car, maybe surprising given the sporting lines of the coupe. There is a brake servo and dual line hydraulics but no electric fan – it is all very simple and basic, but also well-proven and reliable. Whether that floats your boat depends on whether you are a glass half full or a glass half empty kind of person.

Back behind the wheel and there is a very long gear stick, largely because the transmission tunnel is quite low and contributing to the feeling of space. The

smallish pedals are not offset, and there is a nice and light feel to them. Visibility out the front is excellent with thin screen pillars and a wide, flat bonnet. Sideways vision is good, as is the view from the rear-view mirror, but the C-pillars do restrict your over-the-shoulder vision a little. At least the external mirrors, though small, are well placed to help.

The four-speed all-synchromesh gearbox has a long travel forwards and back, but is relatively narrow across the gate. The clutch bites quite low on this 30,000 mile example, but is smooth and light. The long throw does not make for racing changes, but then again it is not a race car. There is no power steering, but even at low speeds the wheel feels nice and light. You might expect that a heavy B-series would require a lot more muscle





power unless the rack ratios were revised (this one is getting on for 3.5 turns lock to lock), but I was pleasantly surprised recently when I took a 1973 1.8 saloon on a lengthy journey, so don't believe all the stories you hear!

As it is, this 1979 1.3 Coupe feels light as a feather working our way through a slalom, and very agile and stable too despite what the critics will tell you. Even going over rough surfaces today the car feels comfortable and composed. The gearbox often comes in for general criticism, but the synchromesh on this one feels good; you can feel the gears meshing if you rush, but they slot in without complaint. The brakes are very good, being sharp and with a nice feel. They are not over-servo'd so you do have to apply a bit of pressure, but emergency stops are no worry.

There is no rev counter on this car, but moving up into third at 20mph is fine, and driving through towns can be dispatched without further changes up or down. The car will pootle along happily enough at 25-30mph in fourth, but if you then put your foot down the acceleration is leisurely. More rapid progress requires a little more stick work, but that is hardly a surprise.

Overall though, I feel that I could drive this car all day and thoroughly enjoy it. It is no rocket with four speeds and a 1.3 engine in what is quite a big car that falls somewhere between the Ford Escort and Cortina, but that is the point – it is a lot of car for the money. People say about the Morris-Minor derived front suspension not being up to the job, but this one seems perfectly balanced and fun to drive. It is a gentle, easy, effortless car to jump in and drive. If you tried souping it up, that might change it for the worse and could perhaps start to show up some of the weaknesses in design and quality that critics love to shout about. The truth is that these cars sold well, and not just because people still felt they should buy British cars and not just on price, they really did offer something that was different and really rather pleasant.

Those are my impressions from a short spell behind the wheel of this car. To make the feature more complete, we are also lucky to have interviewed Alex Parrott of the MMOC & IR. Alex is not your average Marina owner, being a comparative youngster in his early 20s. He is also the long-term owner of an early base-spec 1.3 Coupe, so he can add further flesh to the driving bones above. So without further ado I will hand over the keyboard to Alex.

ALEX PARROTT SAYS...

I first saw a Marina in 2014. I've always been into cars, especially classics, and wanted one as my first car. I was looking for a Capri, but nothing affordable was coming up local to me. So I was pretty much resigned to getting something modern like a Corsa when my Great Aunt offered me a Marina – I saw it and fell in love with it. I didn't know anything about Marinas, didn't even know that's what it



was, I just knew it was a classic. When dad told me it was a Marina I was a little deflated, but I must stress that I knew absolutely nothing about them other than what I'd heard from Top Gear.

This was a 1.3 Deluxe Coupe in Damask Red, so a base model and very faded, but it was a classic. Like every classic car it is hard to make a fair comparison with a modern car because they are from a different era. So the Marinas had four-speed gearboxes with no overdrive option, but I've always found that mine pulled well and kept up with modern traffic easily enough. I wish there was a fifth gear because it does get a bit revvy when sitting at 70mph on a motorway, but in terms of joining from slip roads and pulling away, I can't fault them. That is in fact one reason why I settled on this era of car – they have all the charm of a classic, but can cope with modern traffic. They are a bit more draughty than a modern car and generate more wind noise, but apart from that they are very pleasant to drive. It is easy to forget that you are driving a classic as you cruise along, then you look down and think: 'Oh yes, I'm in the Marina!'

They are big cars so offer a comfortable drive. The suspension is soft, not set up as a sports car but great at smoothing out our potholed roads. Mind you, the suspension is now over 50 years old so that might be a contributing factor when it comes to their softness. The Mk2 cars had discs on the front and a servo, but the earlier cars were drums all round and no servo. If they are set up right and regularly maintained, they are perfectly good. It can take a little time to adjust to them if you are used to driving a modern car though, and your initial impression is that there is not much there. However, as you get to know the car you learn to feel the pedal, how much travel there is, when the shoes start to contact the drums and how much pressure you need to apply. Get used to that and you may well bang your nose on the windscreen when you get in a modern car and press the brakes on that!



I do think that you have to drive within the limitations and the style of the car, but it is only about adjusting your inputs to suit, not really about making compromises. And it does make you a safer driver because you stay aware of what is happening around you, you don't just charge up to the next obstacle and then slam on the brakes. The steering is good, light as soon as you get some movement on and with a good lock. There is no power assistance, but it feels very easy to me. Again it comes down to maintenance because if you keep the swivels greased and oil in the rack, then it is smooth and light.

Visibility is good too, with lots of glass and a small dash. On modern cars you have so much dash to see over before you can even try to see past the thick screen pillars – I actually find the Marina easier to drive than my everyday Focus in that regard because the visibility is so much better. You may need to add an extra mirror because in this era the cars came with no external mirrors, or one at best. But if you turn your head to look over your shoulder, then it is no big deal. And you do have to stay aware of everything that's going on around you because sometimes other people are staring so hard at the Marina that they lose concentration and end up doing something silly themselves.

They are practical cars too, with a great boot. The Coupe is deceiving in that regard because the boot lid looks small, but the space extends a long way under the parcel shelf. Getting into the rear seat because of the short doors can be a little tricky, though.

THE FACTS

MODEL	1977 MARINA 1.3 SUPER COUPE
ENGINE	1275cc inline-four OHV
POWER	57bhp@5500rpm
TORQUE	69lb.ft@2450rpm
GEARBOX	Four-speed manual
BRAKES	Discs/drums
SUSPENSION	Independent front/live rear axle
0-60MPH	18.2 secs
TOP SPEED	88mph
LENGTH	4140mm/163in
WIDTH	1626mm/64in
HEIGHT	1397mm/55in
WEIGHT	889.8kg/1960lb

You don't get the full range of amenities in this era, but when I am driving it I do think less is more and the fewer things you have going on, the more connected you feel to the car and the driving experience. Yes you don't have intermittent wipers, the heater is not great, the radio doesn't work, but even if I am just pootling around, a Marina is a great place to be and the journey becomes an enjoyable part of the day. That is the whole reason for owning a classic – I have the choice of driving a modern car, but I choose not to.

As much as Top Gear might slate the Marina, you just have to remember that it is what it is. It is not a sports car, it is nothing like a modern car, and if you don't like that then there are plenty of other cars out there to choose from. I would just ask

that you don't ridicule people who have one. Instead ask them what they like about it, respect them for their views and don't start lecturing them on what is better. ●

With grateful thanks to Chris Weedon and Alex Parrott of the Morris Marina Owners Club & Ital Register (www.morrismarina.org.uk) for their help with this feature.

What to pay?

The Marina survival rate isn't great, so you might have to travel to find one for sale. Price-wise, expect to pay upwards of £6000 for a relatively tidy example, though a project will be significantly less.



Our test car belongs to the Great British Car Journey in Derbyshire. This wonderful museum features over 130 classic cars, and takes you through the golden ages of British car design and manufacturing from the Austin Seven to the Ford Escort and covering everything in between. They also operate the Drive Dad's Car initiative that allows you to drive many of the cars from the collection, including this Morris Marina. Find full details at www.greatbritishcarjourney.com, or call them on 01773 317243.



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FORM AND FUNCTION

The T-Type was born into troubled times at MG, and when it was first unveiled in 1936, few could have predicted the phenomenal success it would bring to the marque. Much sought-after today, T-Type prices have been rising steadily in recent years, so now more than ever it pays to do your homework carefully before buying.

MG started out as a private holding of William Morris (later Lord Nuffield), and MG's Managing Director Cecil Kimber enjoyed considerable freedom in how the company was run. As well as some seriously large and luxurious tourers, this helped create a bewildering flow of much smaller models with serious sporting credentials and revvy Wolseley-derived overhead cam four and six cylinder engines. MG also

carved out an enviable motorsport record with cars like the C and P-Type Midget and the K3 Magnette.

All of this came to an abrupt end in 1935 when Morris sold the MG Car Company into his Morris Motors empire. From then on Kimber's independence was severely curtailed, and MG was forced to rationalise in the pursuit of profits. In truth, this change probably saved the marque, but enthusiasts were not to know that in 1936 when they first saw the new TA and snorted with disgust at its OHV pushrod engine.

However, attitudes soon changed. This long-stroke 1292cc MPJG engine was not much good for competition, but power came in well down the rev





range and it had ample torque, making it far less stressful than the high-revving 939cc OHC unit of the earlier PB and better suited to regular road use. The TA had other advantages over the previous Midgets too – it was bigger all round, featured hydraulic brakes, a belt-driven pump for the coolant and Luvax lever arm dampers at each corner.

The TA (top left) sold steadily rather than spectacularly, a total of 3003 finding new homes between 1936 and 1939. It was replaced in May 1939 by the TB (above), which looked essentially the same but introduced the now legendary XPAG engine. At 1250cc this was slightly smaller than the MPJG unit had been, but with a shorter stroke it was more willing to rev and delivered more power. It was also far more durable, and responded well to tuning thanks to its stronger block, more efficient cylinder head and counterbalanced crank. However, the outbreak of WW2 ended TB production prematurely after a mere 379 cars had been built.

Five weeks after the end of hostilities, MG announced that T-Type production would recommence with the new TC (below). This was essentially an improved TB with, for example, rubber suspension bushes instead of sliding trunnions which

had been subject to failure owing to lack of maintenance. However, the biggest change was that four extra inches were added across the cabin, providing a little more elbow room for occupants. The TC kick-started MG's export drive to the USA, and by the time production had ended in 1949, no fewer than 10,000 of them had been built.

Next came the TD (the green car overleaf), a model that was developed on a shoestring budget but which still managed to offer a huge technical leap forwards. The styling was similar enough, but looks were deceiving because underneath was a brand-new chassis derived from the Y-Type saloon. This brought with it independent front suspension as well as rack and pinion steering, improving both comfort and handling. It also required the use of smaller 15in steel wheels, whereas all previous examples had come with big and skinny 19in wire wheels.

The body was new as well, still pre-war

in styling but now with yet more elbow room for the occupants (although no T-Type can ever be called spacious!), and LHD became an option for the first time. All of this came with a weight penalty though, and with the same XPAG engine, the new car was initially slower than the TC had been. That didn't hamper sales, and the TD was a runaway success with a whopping 29,664 examples being sold by the time production ended in 1953.

There was also a TD Mark II that gained more power and better handling at the expense of a stiffer ride, and this mechanical specification was carried over to the TF in 1953 – an example in red is pictured on p68. This was the model that MG never wanted to produce, because they were itching to introduce their EX182 prototype (which eventually became the MGA) to compete with the likes of Triumph's new TR2. However, Leonard Lord at new masters BMC did not want MG to compete with his new Austin-





Healey, so they had to make do and mend.

The TF received a more sloping front and a lower bonnet line, with the headlights being faired into the front wings. The rear was tidied up too, and the cockpit got individual adjustable seats instead of the previous bench, plus a centrally mounted instrument panel with new octagonal dials. In late summer of 1954 the TF was enlarged to 1466cc in an effort to keep the aging design at least within sight of the competition, the new engine being designated the XPEG and the body gaining 1500 badges. Some 6200 TF1250s and 3400 TF1500s had been sold by the time the MGA finally arrived in September 1955 and T-Type production ended.

BODYWORK

Any part of a T-Type can get expensive to repair, but a poor body can soak up a

frightening amount of money. There is an ash frame underneath that curvaceous steel exterior, and if the wood is rotten then everything has to come apart for repair. That takes either a lot of DIY skill or a lot of professional labour.

The wooden spars that run underneath the car from the A to the B-posts are exposed and often the first to rot, so check these carefully. If the doors rock on their hinges or need a hefty slam to shut, it could be that the B-post is rotten. And remember that these cars were assembled selectively at the factory, so both new and secondhand replacements will invariably need fettling to fit.

Panels and pieces of timber framing can be bought if damage is localised, but a full main body timber kit will cost £3900, while a built-up body tub with doors is £11,000. And if a metal panel has to come off to access the timber behind it, then

you'll usually need a new metal panel to go back on. A front wing will set you back £2380, but while these sums soon add up, the good news is that virtually everything you will need is available.

Poor chrome or rusty panels will also very quickly get expensive to put right. Hand made new radiator shells in brass, for example, are often available for the TA-TD, but they sell for £1650, and you'll have to have it chrome plated once it has been fettled to fit your car. TF radiator shells very rare and expensive to restore.

The chassis itself needs to be carefully inspected for damage, rust and previous repairs. TA-TC chassis were mostly open section and only boxed in alongside the engine. On the TD/TF the entire side rail was boxed in, and this is the most likely place to find rust. It can generally be patched easily enough though, and twisting or kinks from accident damage will be a bigger problem on all versions.

On late TDs and all TFs, some brightwork is made of Mazak; this can get pitted, but reproduction parts are available. Glass for the front screen is cheap, but the chrome frame can be difficult to disassemble and replacements are expensive – £2500 for a complete reconditioned windscreen assembly if you can find one, though a Brooklands aeroscreen will only cost £180...

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

Parts for the MPJG unit are not as plentiful as they are for the XPAG, but both units can be very expensive to rebuild so do not underestimate the potential costs of saving an engine whose bearings knock, which smokes





like a chimney or whose get-up-and-go has got up and gone. Experts will charge £5000 and upwards to rebuild an XPAG to standard spec, which sounds a lot but remember that a brand new crank alone will cost up to £3000. The TA's engine will cost even more thanks to the scarcity of parts.

On the XPAG, some tappet chatter is to be expected, but be wary if some are much noisier than others as the followers can suffer from wear. Expect 50psi of oil pressure from cold, 40psi on a hot engine when cruising and at least 20psi at idle. Some oil leaking past the rear crank scroll is to be expected, but it should be a drip and not a flood. You can buy a kit to convert this to a modern lip seal, but that costs £225, so you have to decide how many drips are too many drips. Also, be aware that XPAG/XPEG engines can leak oil from numerous places, including the rocker cover gasket and side plates. This will then drop down the side of the block, get blown to the back of the engine when driving and then drop to the floor from the bell housing. This makes it look as though the rear seal is the culprit, so before spending serious money, clean the engine thoroughly and determine exactly where the oil is escaping.

If the car appears to suffer from a juddering clutch when you move off, check the condition of the engine and gearbox mounts as these can deteriorate (especially if soaked in oil) or separate from their metal backings.

Wiring is one area where originality is definitely not good as it will be brittle and the insulation virtually non-existent. Brand new looms with a braided finish are available for under £300. These will take patience to fit, but for such a safety-critical component you really shouldn't

accept anything that has been butchered and spliced together.

Early TAs had no synchromesh, but it was soon added to third and top, then to second as well on the TB. It is not fast-acting though, so you will need to learn patience, and to blip the throttle when changing down. First gear will whine because it is straight cut, but listen for rattles or grating noises that suggest a worn layshaft. Make sure it doesn't jump out of gear on the over-run, as a rebuild will cost around £1500. Alternatively, a five-speed Type 9 conversion transforms a car's driveability, and many people regard that as £4000 well spent.

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

Checking for worn wheel bearings and play in joints is no different to any car, but if you are not familiar with lever arm shock absorbers, pay particular attention to where the arms join the body as leaks here will mean you'll need to exchange it

for a reconditioned unit at around £130 each. If there is no visible leak but the car feels poorly damped, there is probably no oil left in the unit!

TA-TC cars will have some play in the steering thanks to the steering box and may feel disconcertingly vague to a newbie until they relax into the ride, but the TD and TF should have sharp response from the rack. You can sharpen up the earlier cars with a conversion based around a brand new VW Beetle box for £1500. LHD cars can be converted to RHD easily enough, but perceived wisdom is that an original RHD car is worth more so you could save a little money by buying a reimport. If the Bakelite on the steering wheel rim is damaged enough to produce sharp edges, it is not safe to use and would fail an MoT.

On cars fitted with wire wheels, run a pencil around the spokes. If any of the spokes sound duller than the rest when the pencil pings them, then they are loose and the wheel will need repairing. While there, make sure that all tyres are the same (either original style crossplies or retro-fit radials), and also check their age; many cars that see little use will be riding on dangerously old rubber.

On TA-TC, the rear hubs can leak oil, but a kit that brings modern lip seals to both sides is available that requires no machining to fit.

If the brakes feel poor after your modern car, that does not mean anything is wrong – they are from a different era, and you will have to learn to anticipate a little more and press considerably harder on the pedal. Having said that, they should still pull the car up squarely and reasonably efficiently. If they don't, has the car been tested on brake rollers recently? All T-Types are now exempt from



the MoT test, and things may have seized up on a car that spends more time being stored than on the road. If everything is working as it should but still fails to inspire confidence, disc brake conversions are available for the TD/TF if you are not a stickler for originality; budget around £1000 for that.

And don't be fooled by the fly-off handbrake, which needs a special technique to operate properly. To set it, lift the handle without pressing the knob, then press the knob in and lower the handle slightly. To release the handbrake, simply lift the lever without pressing in the knob and then let go.

INTERIOR AND TRIM

Hoods were originally a fairly coarse twill on earlier models and a finer material on later ones, but Duck is a standard replacement, or Stayfast as a superior option. Prices range from £450-£650, but cheaper vinyl never looks right on a T-Type. The hood should fit well without any tears, with a rust-free frame and a rear window that is clear rather than cloudy. There should be four sidescreens that also need to offer clear vision, to fit the hood profile well and not restrict the door from opening.

The condition of the interior's soft furnishings will most likely be a bargaining point rather than a deal breaker. If the seat covers are worn, new ones are available for £900. If the seat itself is worn, then you can buy the bits you need to rebuild them, or get completed replacements for £2000 on the earlier bench seats, closer to £3500 for the TF with its individual seats.



OUR VERDICT

Nothing evokes quite as much vintage charm as the T. But there's a price to pay for such an iconic car.

Of the mainstream T-Type models, prices have gone up considerably in recent years, but perhaps settled slightly over the last 12 months. It used to be that TFs were the most expensive by some margin, but the gaps are no longer so pronounced, with condition and provenance playing the major role.

Asking prices of £30,000 or more are not uncommon for the best cars, but if you are not after a show winner and are prepared to buy privately, then you should be able to find one closer to the £20,000 mark. TDs at auction seem to be your best bet for a bargain – we've

seen decent cars selling there from £14,000, but also a number of good TFs under £20k.

TAs tend to appeal to a different clientele because of their more fragile engine and TBs were always rare, so prices of these are harder to predict. You'll probably need at least £20,000 in your pocket to get something nice that requires a little fettling rather than restoration, closer to £30,000 if you prefer wielding polishing cloths to spanners. Most people who want the early look with the big wheels will opt for a TC, and pay around £18,000 for a good car in usable but not perfect condition from a private sale or at auction, and up to £30,000 for some real eye candy. ●



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MATURING NICELY

The BMC range of mid-sized Farinas never had a sporting element, despite the presence of variants wearing Riley and MG badges. Instead it was about sharp styling and solid dependability allied to extreme comfort, a dash of luxury and a hefty dose of practicality. As such, the Wolseley 15/60 was arguably the pick of the bunch.

WORDS: **ANDY STARKEY**



Perhaps I shouldn't make this common knowledge, but my first real hands-on contact with the Farina-styled BMC range was when I dropped off or collected my father at his place of work. He worked for many years in the funeral industry, and amongst the big, black and shiny Daimler limousines and hearses was a diminutive yet achingly lovely 1963 Wolseley hearse. It is perhaps a little strange I suppose for a young lad of 17 to take a fancy to such a car, hence my being a little reticent about owning up to it. Still, as lovely as it was it was in such a dower guise, the gloss black coachwork with all that luxurious chrome embellishment looked very nice indeed. Perhaps my mind saw it with a sparkly set of alloy wheels and a chrome side-pipe exhaust? Well, it was the late 1970s after all.

To be fair, I had been aware of at least



some of the several models BMC had applied the Pininfarina-designed bodies to some years before meeting the hearse. I had noticed a neighbour's pride and joy in the shape of what I later found out was a Wolseley 15/60, way back when I'd be around eight years old. Even then I felt that they were a car for the more discerning motorist, although at that age I had no idea what discerning meant. It was just a much larger and more impressive-looking vehicle, certainly compared with the humble Austin 1100 my dear dad owned at the time. That appeal, along with those early assumptions, has made the Farinas something I've always admired, so you can imagine that there was more than a glimmer of excitement when I was asked not only to photograph one, but to have a drive too. I couldn't wait.

Barry Boyson is a chap who also appreciates the lines of a Farina-styled motor – it's his 1961 Wolseley 15/60 that graces these pages, and the one I finally get to drive. He's not owned it long, only since the summer of 2023 to be exact, but like me he's had more than a passing

admiration of these finned wonders for many years. Just like me, he encountered his first one at the tender age of 17. His was not a hearse though (which would have been eerily coincidental), but a 15/60 Wolseley saloon not unlike the one he eventually purchased. The other major difference between my first Farina experience and his was that he got to drive that one he met all those years ago, something I was soon to put right.

It is widely rumoured that the late Duke of Edinburgh was responsible for suggesting BMC bring in the Italian stylist house Batista Farina when he was reportedly disappointed and underwhelmed at what he encountered during a visit to Longbridge in 1955. Well, I've watched *The Crown* and there was certainly no mention of such a historic moment in that. However, BMC did turn to the Italians for some refreshing Mediterranean flair to invigorate their new post-war range and with what has been dubbed some clever 'badge engineering' to spread it across several models to create the Austin Cambridge, Morris Oxford, MG





Magnette Mk3, Riley 4/68 and of course the Wolseley 15/60.

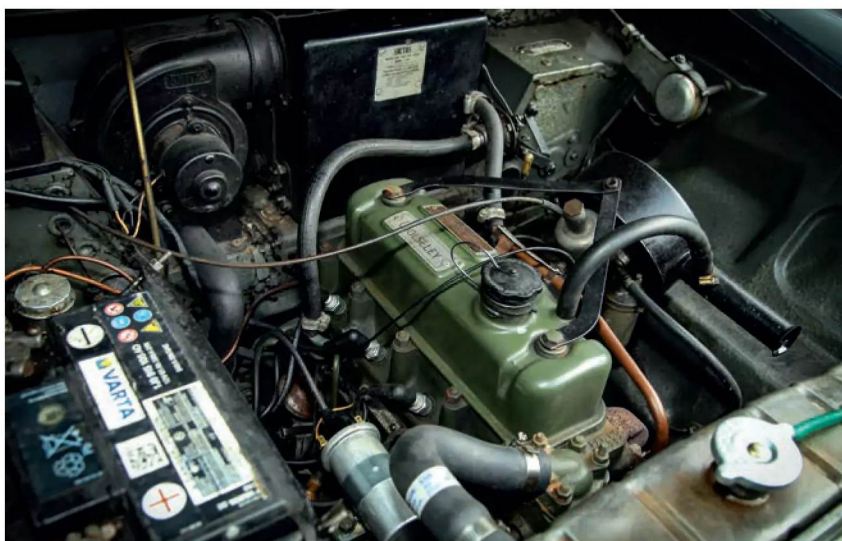
The range was to share a good deal of engineering with engines, transmissions and suspension components being essentially common to them all (give or take the odd carburettor or two). The big differences were in the plushness and comfort of the interiors, thus cleverly aiming each model at a slightly different demographic. The Wolseley 15/60 was the top of the range, with the Riley and MG models following close behind. All this cross-engineering and the numbers built can make the Farinas a great classic buy today. Engine parts and service items are readily available, as are suspension, brakes and steering, although when you start looking for model-specific trim, that can become a little more of a challenge but by no means impossible.

OK, so I've managed to finally get up close and personal with a Wolseley 15/60, and rather fittingly it was born the same year as me which immediately provides some affinity to the car. So what's it like to drive? Before I clamber in, it's time to get some photos and that always gives me the chance to really absorb the design cues and to make my own mind up as to whether I think it is pretty or not. My thoughts normally have no bearing on the feature, it's my job to make whatever car I'm charged to photograph look as good as I can even if I think it had been designed by a six-year-old wielding a pack of crayons. This time it's a little different as I've admired these cars from afar for such a long time – it's just like meeting your hero and I desperately don't want to be disappointed.

My mind is already made up with the exterior – those lines, two-tone paint and yards of shiny chrome were obviously the things that grabbed my attention as an eight-year-old, then later with the hearse. It's the fins at the rear that really do it for me, and probably for many fans of the range. Although the tail fins became slightly diminished on later models, they were a bold statement on the early Wolseleys. The requirement for any Wolseley over the years to have a large chrome grille has not been avoided with the 15/60. The grille overwhelms the front of the car and is most certainly its signature feature, along with the traditional illuminated Wolseley badge without which the car would be naked. The amount of chrome could be considered a little over-exuberant, particularly on a

single-coloured car, but on this two-tone vehicle it helps separate the upper and lower tones. As a point of interest on this particular car, Barry informs me that the upper grey paintwork is original, with only the lower half having received fresh paint.

When I was small and first admired these machines, they appeared enormous to me, and even now I'm grown up, (if only physically and not mentally,) they're not a small car by any means. Naturally, parked next to a modern Mondeo or Insignia the Wolseley could be overwhelmed, but not by much. The roof height of the older car is probably the most noticeable difference in scale compared to its modern counterparts – it is a tall car with plenty of headroom, yet still in a pleasingly balanced way overall. There is a lot more glass than in today's offerings, too.





It is also safe to say that streamlined efficiency wasn't a high priority when Farina penned the designs of these cars. The front is fairly slab-like, although helped aesthetically by the previously mentioned grille. The windscreen is upright, and the back end can't be described as particularly rounded. Perhaps Mr Farina had forgotten his set of French curves that day? After all that has been said, the car does have a level of grace and charm which is helped considerably by the two-tone paint, the finned rear and of course the chrome. Farina opted for the opulent look rather than low swoops and curves, which was perfectly in keeping with the times in which it was designed.

Venturing inside for the first time, it becomes obvious that this is the luxury version of the range as the waft of leather and timber still emanates from the spacious cabin. The hide-covered seats are large and armchair like, and surprisingly supportive seeing as how they are the originals and have not been renovated by Barry so far. The front seats, although separate, are positioned against each other to create a more bench-like arrangement, with enough room for a passenger to sit in the middle, even though the gear lever is floor mounted and may make shifting a little awkward should there be three people in occupancy.



Sitting in the plush driving seat, I find my view forward interrupted by the large bus-like steering wheel. Now, this is probably due to my diminutive stature just as much as the vehicle's design, but I spend the first few moments deciding whether to look over the rim or simply through it. Again it is typical of the era, and with the absence of any powered assistance to the cam-and-peg steering, the extra leverage offered by the size of the wheel is welcome.

A good deal of wood veneer also raises the bar in terms of luxury inside the Wolseley. The dash and door cappings all have the limousine-quality timber, and you certainly get the feeling you are in the top flight version of the range. There's a fair bit of varnish flaking off on Barry's car, which may in time require renovation. However, for now at least, Barry is leaving it as it is because it's all original and just like us as we age, it carries all the marks and wear of a life well lived. The rear seat is just as plush and cossetting as the front ones, and has the added sophistication of a large

folding armrest. There's plenty of legroom too along with excellent headroom, both of which seem to be compromised on many a family car of today.

The 1489cc B-series engine is both smooth and quiet, and fired up straight from the key. This engine was utilised across the range and with various states of tune. The Wolseley, however, was blessed with a lowly 52bhp and a top speed of around 76mph, so I wasn't expecting any great pace from the car. After being warned by Barry that the gearbox didn't possess any syncromesh between first and second gear, I nervously got under way, reaching for the handbrake that sits between the driver's seat and the driver's door. The last thing I wanted was the need to apologise repeatedly for crunching the gears, but I didn't need to. I was surprised that with some smooth and deliberate clutch and stick work, the gearbox was no trouble at all and I was soon changing up and down like I'd owned the car for years.

Another pleasant surprise was that the 52bhp seemed more than enough to allow me to mingle with everyday traffic. Naturally you are slower leaving junctions, and with 9in drum brakes all round a little extra forethought is required, but overall the brakes are more than adequate. (They have in fact been the main area of work for Barry since buying the car.) Driving anything of this vintage takes a little time to adjust to, but to be fair to the Wolseley



it is mild-mannered and easy to drive. It may not break any speed records, but this was never the point of such a car. I just wish I was a bit taller...

Modern cars are pretty taught suspension-wise and few have the roll characteristics of older machines, so I was expecting a fair bit of roll when it came to cornering the Wolseley. Of course it did wallow a little, but not as much as I had expected. Admittedly I wasn't driving it hard, and I don't think you really could because it just isn't that type of car. It was though much better behaved than I had expected with pretty positive steering, decent brake feel and an overall pleasurable ride. You can't really compare it to a modern car as that would be unfair, but as a 60 year old vehicle it was very pleasant indeed and instilled confidence after just a few minutes behind the wheel.

Unlike me, Barry's 15/60 Wolseley is wearing its 62 years well and he doesn't have a long repair list. (Also, unlike me.) It isn't quite a daily user, but he does prefer pottering around in the Wolseley more than anything else, and so far he has found it to be reliable and happy to burst into life whatever the weather. As I mentioned earlier, he has already done a fair bit of work on the brakes and is a firm believer that a disc conversion is something of a false economy when the original drum set-up is working properly.

As for the driving experience generally, Barry says: "The car is used regularly and is not cossetted, although it is very much a fair-weather driver. It starts and runs well

THE FACTS

MODEL	WOLSELEY 15/60
ENGINE	1489cc inline four-cylinder OHV
POWER	55bhp@4400rpm
TORQUE	111Nm/82lb.ft@2100rpm
GEARBOX	Four-speed manual
BRAKES	Drums all round
SUSPENSION	coil spring independent (F)/live axle and leaf springs (R)
0-60MPH	24.3sec
TOP SPEED	79mph
LENGTH	4521mm/178in
WIDTH	1613mm/63.5in
HEIGHT	1499mm/59in
WEIGHT	1080kg/2380lb

and returns around 30mpg. It is not a car to be pushed hard as it will roll somewhat at speed. When cruising, 50mph seems to be the engine's sweet spot as it gets a little noisier at higher speeds. Other motorists seem to appreciate and respect the car's lower speed, although it rarely sees anything more than an A road. It is a comfortable drive with adequate brakes, despite these still being the standard drums. The wing mirrors are all but useless, but the extra quarterlight mirrors are a big help. There is a standard heater which takes a little time to warm through, but it does the job."

Barry has no plans to part with the car anytime soon. He's in no hurry to restore

anything on the car either as in his words: "You can't beat a bit of originality." I tend to agree with him as his Wolseley has a lovely warm charm to its wear and tear, and has certainly grown old very gracefully. Once again, unlike me. ●

What to pay?

Very few 15/60s come on to the open market, so prices vary considerably. That said, generally speaking a budget of £5000 should be enough to secure a tidy example, though it's worth keeping an eye out at auctions where you might be able to pick one up for less.



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SUBTLY DIFFERENT

BMC's replacement for the Austin Healey 3000 might look like an MGB, but it's all very different under the skin. Here's what to look for.

At the risk of telling one truth too many, the one area where you might level criticism at the MGB is in the power department. A little bit more wouldn't have hurt, so the concept of one with two more cylinders and a 60% capacity boost has an undeniable appeal. That was the MGC, though its role from BMC's point of view was to replace the Austin-Healey 3000, with the MG being cheaper to build and not involving the extra cost of a licensing agreement.

The result was a lovely car, but it failed to gain the reputation it deserved. Road testers insisted on making direct and unfair comparisons with the Healey, which had always been an out-and-out sports car in the great weekend race and rally tradition. The MGC was and is more of a tourer; as quick as the Healey, but more laid-back about it, and lacking the older car's rough edges. Think of it as a cheap Aston Martin and you are closer to the mark.

Much criticism was also heaped on the weight of the engine, and yes, at

650lb it is a heavy old lump – nearly 300lb more than the B's four-pot. But it's set back quite far in the shell and the MGC's weight distribution of 53:47 is actually pretty good, even for a sports car, and it's well supported by torsion bar (think E-type Jag) rather than coil spring front suspension.

The MGC did also suffer in press and public perception by looking the same as the MGB (trademark bonnet bulge aside). Perhaps the most damning criticism though came from successive period road testers who commented



on the MGC's heavy steering and expressed their disappointment at the lack of grunt produced by the new MG's twin SU fuelled 2912cc straight-six. The complaint that the 'C' was cursed with significant understeer didn't help boost the car's appeal, though it transpired that this was caused to a large degree by the BMC team tasked with preparing the cars for the press launch underinflating the front tyres.

More might have been made of the MGC had it not been for the 1968 merger of BMC and Leyland. That brought Triumph and MG under the same wing, and it simply made no sense to have the already poor-selling MGC competing for buyers with the newer, more technically advanced TR6. So that was it, in 1969, after just two years in production, the MGC quietly made its bow and left the stage. All this meant that only 9000 MGC were built, with a roughly equal split between Roadsters and the more expensive GTs. As ever, a large proportion of those went to America, so while they are nothing like as rare as the MGB GT V8, that does render the MGC fairly exclusive in MG terms, and that contributes to their value today.

However, despite the poor start the MGC has matured with age and like many BMH/BL products of the time, it's been down to enthusiasts to discover the lost potential in the standard car. Even when the MGC was in production, tuning firms such as Downton were providing kits to squeeze over 200 horsepower out of the C-Series power plant, turning a lazy cruiser into a real red-blooded sports car. Over the years, owners have experimented with various

makes of tyres inflated to different pressures and this together with modifications to the suspension and steering have helped to bring handling characteristics up to the level expected from a car graced with the marque's famous octagonal badge.

BODYWORK

The good news is that most of the MGC's visible panel work, with the exception of the car's lightweight alloy bonnet, is shared with the MGB. However, this similarity is only skin deep as the whole substructure from the front floorpans forward is very different. This difference is to accommodate the longer and heavier power unit, as well as the torsion bars used for the front suspension because that engine got in the way of the MGB's coil spring and wishbone arrangement. The torsion bars are anchored to a pair of triangular

box sections welded to the floorpans, and repair panels can be expensive. This means the area where the torsion bar mountings are located under the floor should be checked carefully, as dirt thrown up by the front wheels can collect there and rusted metal will be the result.

Other checks should take in the condition of the sills, which comprise of four panels: an outer and inner part sandwiching an internal membrane capped off with a full length 'castle' rail running underneath. Make sure the inevitable inner and outer sill repairs have been done properly, not using cover sills or patches. A dead giveaway as far as sill bodgery is concerned is the lack of a distinct vertical seam between the sill and rear wing below the rear edge of the door. And remember that the sills on the MGC terminate deep inside the front and





rear wings and this is where serious corrosion can hide out of sight.

Take the trouble to inspect the front inner wings from both sides, even if it is awkward to peer up behind the wheels. These panels are unique to the MGC and proper repair is tricky/expensive, so know what you're getting into. When inspecting underneath the front wings, make sure the vertical steel splash panels and rubber seals are still in place behind the wheels. If these are missing, dirt and water will have gained access to the sill ends as well as the inner wings and outer edges of the front bulkhead.

Points to check underneath the car are the security of the cages containing

the two six-volt batteries – corrosion is common here, and if it is still evident on an otherwise good looking car, that may tell you something about the depth and conscientiousness of other repair work – and the condition of the floorpans. Check too the chassis legs, especially around the rear spring hangers, as these come under greater stress than Bs due to the engine's torque. What you don't want to see are patch repairs or the disguise of thickly brushed underseal. The boot floor and the upper part of the fuel tank (which can rust out on the top) will also repay careful inspection.

Other favourite rust spots on these cars include the front and rear lower

valances behind the bumpers, the beaded seams running along the top of the rear wings and the ones where the front wings meet the windscreen scuttle – this is one of those iceberg tip things in that whatever you can see here, you can be sure it's ten times worse beneath the surface. GTs can suffer from corroded windscreen surrounds, and tailgates that rust badly at the base and around the rubber glazing seal. Pay attention to the bonnet as well. All but the later 1969 MGCs had aluminium rather than steel ones so they don't rust, but if they are damaged, repair can be a specialist task.

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

Though it shared the same bore, stroke and capacity as the C-series engine used in the Austin-Healey 3000, the MGC's 2.9-litre straight-six was a new design. For a start it has seven rather than four main bearings, and there's no siamesing of ports in the cylinder head, each valve having its own runner. The downside of this is that it was only shared with the Austin 3-Litre, of which fewer than 10,000 were built, so not all parts are as easy to find as MGB stuff and secondhand units are scarce.

That being the case, pay close attention to the engine's health. Listen for main bearing rumble, and check the crankshaft for end float by pulling on the crank pulley. It should only be a maximum of 0.003in. A bit of oil leakage is not unusual, but look for evidence of more significant escapes, especially





from the front and rear crank seals. And if there's not a bit of dirt in these areas, why has it been recently wiped down?

Check the condition of the coolant, as the radiator is a bit on the small size due to where it's located. The coolant should look fresh and have no mayonnaise style gloop floating around in the header tank. Some cars will have been fitted with an electric fan to aid cooling. While looking around the engine bay, consider it a bonus if the car being viewed has a triple SU set up, as the engine may have benefitted in the past from having the head ported and a different camshaft fitted to boost performance.

Talking of performance, unlike the MGB which can justify whole catalogues of tuning and improving gear, the much rarer MGC tends more to be the preserve of the polish and preserve brigade. Not completely though because there are Cs about with fire-breathing engines that sprout triple Webers, and there's nothing stopping you from going the same route, but having these engines built to a decent spec is expensive. For the milder mannered, you can release a bit of extra power (and a lovely sound) with a six-branch tubular exhaust manifold, a performance system and a pair of K&N air filters, so consider them a bonus.

The MGC uses a stronger Salisbury rear axle and manual gearbox to the ones fitted to the MGB, although the C's box was often criticised for having an awkward and baulky gear change. The original rear axle ratios of 3.31:1 for overdrive cars or 3.07:1 without it were changed in November 1968 to improve acceleration. New ratios were

3.7:1 with O/D or 3.31 without. There was no actual impact on the 0-60 times, but it does make the car feel livelier, though fuel consumption will be a little higher. Cars first sold without overdrive may have gained this desirable option over the years but have still retained the standard car's 3:3.1 rear axle. However, this isn't really an issue if a 3:3 differential has been retained, as it gives a converted car extra long legs! A three-speed automatic was also offered and providing the fluid looks clean, these seem to go on forever.

Driving the car out on the open road is the best way to check the transmission. Any whines, rumbles or unusual noises will indicate a problem with the bearings and synchromesh, while a slipping clutch while pulling away and jumping out gear on the overrun will be self-evident. If the car is fitted



with overdrive, make sure this desirable extra seamlessly slots in when third and fourth gear is selected. Most issues with this type of overdrive will be down to problematic electrics or a failed solenoid and can generally be quite straight forward to sort out.

STEERING, SUSPENSION & BRAKES

The MGC's front suspension comprises of long fore and aft torsion bars and a pair of kingpins sandwiched between upper and lower control arms kept under control by telescopic dampers. Apart from the usual wear and tear it's a completely trouble-free system, and all wearing parts are relatively cheap and easy to fit. There was no change from the B at the rear, so it's leaf springs and lever-arm dampers, again with no particular problems apart from wear, and the last MoT should have picked up any problems there.

Check for signs that the kingpins have been regularly greased and also inspect the condition of all the rubber bushes. The MGC is nose-heavy and this puts a lot of strain on the steering and suspension. Any worn joints or bushes will be easily detected by soggy handling, but unless it clonks and bangs badly over bumps, there are more



important things to worry about

Steering is by rack and pinion. Electrically operated aftermarket power steering will be a definite bonus, and some cars may have been fitted with an uprated anti-roll bar to improve handling. A decent set of tyres – preferably 185-section rather than the standard 165s – inflated to the correct pressure are the key to get the best out of a MGC's handling characteristics, and it's worth noting that the MGC was fitted with larger five-stud steel wheels than the MGB.

Most MGCs on the market today will be probably sitting on a set of sparkling chrome wires, which should be checked for any loose or damaged spokes. Although the MGC is equipped with a pair of disc brakes at the front and drums at the rear, the set-up is subtly different to the MGB's. The MGC uses a larger Girling system, while its four-cylinder sibling employs a Lockheed setup, while some C's reimported from the USA may still retain their two servos – one per side for the dual circuit braking system. UK spec cars were fitted with a single servo. Checks to the braking system should include looking out for worn discs, leaking calipers and wheel cylinders, damaged or corroded fixed brake lines and worn or perished flexible brake pipes.

INTERIOR AND TRIM

There's good news, at least from a replacement parts point of view in that the MGC's interior is practically identical to the MGB's. In fact the only real difference is in the rubber



floor mats, which are a slightly different shape to clear the torsion bar mountings, and also originally of a different grain, if such things matter to you. So all you really need do with interior trim is use its condition – if less than perfect – to haggle when it comes to price.

A scruffy or damaged hood on a Roadster may spoil the looks, but think of it as a bargaining point rather than a deal breaker if the rest of the car is good. New ones in vinyl start from around £400, though the fancy mohair one the C really deserves can start nudging as high as £1000. If viewing a GT, make sure the headlining is in good condition, and if a folding fabric sunroof is fitted to the car, ensure it's not ripped and remains watertight. Finding specialists with the knowledge to properly refurbish a tatty Webasto roof at a reasonable price these days

can be difficult and replacing a water stained or damaged headlining on the GT can be a major headache.

OUR VERDICT

A well set-up example of the MGC will provide a comfortable ride which, when combined with a straight-six delivering its power smoothly, makes for excellent grand touring cruising capabilities. Anyone used to an MGB will find the steering notably heavier for parking manoeuvres, but it lightens up OK at speed. B owners will also be astonished by the six-cylinder's torque; once underway there's rarely any need to drop out of fourth gear. That's the way to drive it too, as the engine is much less happy if asked to venture into the upper end of its rev range and the gear change is best described as deliberate. The ride is good, feeling somehow a little more grown up than the B, and the potent sound of the big six is the sort that always puts a grin on your face. The beefed-up brakes do their job as well as you can expect of a 1960s car.

Over half a century after its launch, enthusiasts who now understand the MGC are praising the car as a superb long-distance continent-crushing proposition. If you like your sports car with a bit of grunt, the MGC is a solid yet slightly left-field choice. With prices for excellent MGC Roadsters now beyond the £30,000 barrier, the model's shaky start has largely been forgotten. Prices for the desirable Roadster will always be slightly ahead of the GT, although automatic versions may be slightly cheaper. For all of them though, be very careful when buying what might be called Condition 2 cars because once you start digging, they can turn out to be borderline Condition 3 with a bit of shine left in the paint. ●



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LIKE ROYALTY

A bold design and a great car, British Leyland's Princess replaced the Landcrab with a car that was better suited to the executive car park of the day. Here's how to buy the best often overlooked, rare but very worthwhile classic.

WORDS: **SAM SKELTON**

With the benefit of hindsight, it is fair to say that the BMC Landcrab – the ADO17 known as the Austin 1800 – missed its mark. Originally intended as a replacement for the Farina series, it grew too big, lacked the sense of style that came

naturally to an Italian styled saloon, and unless your budget would stretch to the Wolseley 18/85 version, the interior was austere in the extreme. The designer, Alec Issigonis, felt that regardless of the size of a car there was no need for any sort of luxury aside from space – a view that was perhaps part of the car's downfall. Even when

the Landcrab gained a six-cylinder engine wearing Austin/Morris 2200 or Wolseley Six badges, it stole few sales from Ford or Vauxhall.

Ultimately the Landcrab would fracture Leyland's mid-range – there were two further efforts to replace the Farina in the form of the Maxi and the Morris Marina, and it was this range



confusion that in part led to Leyland's difficulties making a reasonable profit. The Landcrab's successor would need to be pitched at a definite market – and the executive fleet sector was a very image conscious market for the car to find itself in.



Leyland therefore went full throttle ahead with the new car, aiming high and creating something rather special. Harris Mann's angular wedge – while styled in Britain – could almost have come from the hand of Giugiaro. Inside was the same front-wheel drive and clever packaging as the Landcrab, helped by the high waist for a colossal boot – and an interior that was far more fitting for its target audience than the outgoing car had been. Launched in 1975 as the Austin, Morris and Wolseley 18-22 range with either an 1800 B-series four-pot or the 2200 SOHC E-series straight-six under the bonnet, later that year just before the London Motor Show in October 1975, the whole range would be rationalised into the Leyland Princess range and the marque names dropped – sadly in the case of Wolseley never to return. The base and HL models would be as before, while the new HLS would take

the place of the now defunct Wolseley brand as the most luxurious variant. In 1978, the range was overhauled and the Princess 2 was launched – the primary difference being the new overhead cam O-series in 1.7 and 2.0 form serving as replacements for the old B-series 1.8.

Princess production ceased in November 1981, but BL Cars hadn't quite finished with the concept. It received one of the world's most crestfallen facelifts (courtesy of Morris Ital headlamps which were arguably too narrow for the larger car's width), but it also finally gained the hatchback that many of its detractors argued it should have had from day one. Only ever built in right-hand drive, the resulting Austin Ambassador effectively held the fort until the new Austin Montego was launched in 1984.

A total of 224,942 Princesses were made, including the 18-22 series





cars at the beginning. Some 43,425 Ambassadors were also produced, but survivors are now few and far between. That does mean that you will not be swamped with choices if you are on the search for one, but nor does it mean you should neglect due diligence when inspecting a possible purchase. Here are the key points you need to know.

BODYWORK

Check the front air dam and air intake for rust – it shouldn't flex or crunch, but it's a prime spot for stone chips and subsequent corrosion. Lower front wing rust can be repaired, but if it's

gone into the arch then replacement might be easier, but only if you can find a wing. The disadvantage to such a rare car is that panels are equally scarce, and front-end panels can be the hardest and costliest to find. Ambassadors, however, have a better front-end design when it comes to rust resistance, and panel availability is far better too. Your only worry here will be an air dam.

The worst part of an Ambassador is the roof, especially above the quarter windows. Rot here can be hard to repair and is often a sign that the car is ready to be broken and scrapped. Door

bottoms can go on all models and door hinge pins can loosen, so check them by trying to lift the doors and seeing if there is any play. Sills are structural and so need checking carefully – make sure any work has been done properly by checking for the gap that should exist between the sill and the pivot arm mounting at the back. The floor can also rot out in the corners, so check that carefully too.

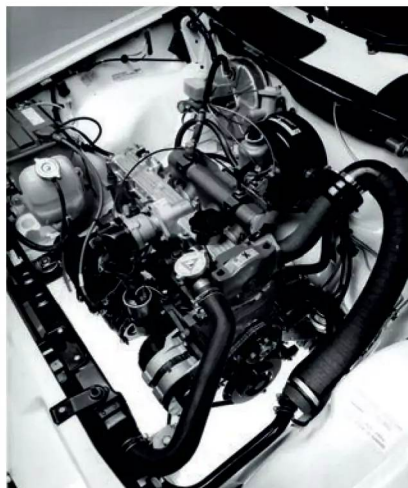
In terms of trim, the stainless wheelarch trims on Princesses are almost impossible to source, while bumpers – which get pockmarked with age – are easily found. However, Ambassador bumpers which are plastic and more prone to knocks are near impossible to source. The Princess drip-rail plastic trim is unique in profile, so check that it's intact. Alloy wheel centre caps are hard to find too.

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

Depending on the model the Princess used one of three engine families: the 1798cc B-series, the 2227cc E6, and the 1695cc/1994cc O-series pair. All are shared with other BL models, though the B-series and the 2.0 O-series are the most common and thus have the widest spares availability.

Before getting under the bonnet, check that the gas struts hold it – these are available if weak, but it's best to find that out before it lands on your head. Tappetty noises aren't good, and





only the 1800 has adjustable tappets. Check for regular servicing on the 2200. 1700 and 2000 models have timing belts – if it's not been done with documentary evidence in the last five years, it'll need doing – the factory interval is 48000 miles – but it is only a half hour job.

Some Ambassadors had an automatic starting unit – effectively an automatic choke – when fitted with twin carburettors. This can fail, causing starting and running issues. It can be mended, but it's time consuming to get right and many people prefer to fit the twin SUs from a 2.2 Princess with manual choke. This is a bolt-on arrangement (though the air filter housing needs modification to permit the cable routing) and shouldn't affect the value of the car as it's easy to revert if you prefer your car original.

All autos use the BW35 three-speed unit, which is reliable if maintained. Check the fluid, which should be red and not brown or smelling burnt. When engaging gear at a standstill, a slight jolt is normal, but changes on the move should be smooth, as should kickdown. Odd shift patterns can be caused by a poorly adjusted kickdown cable.

Four-speed manuals are strong, but have an awkward first gear and are generally notchy and whine a bit – it's a box-in-sump arrangement, so if you're familiar with the Mini none of this will be new. Worn clutches and slave cylinders can exacerbate the problems with first gear, so if it feels especially bad it may be worth haggling.

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

Big four-pot calipers are often robbed from a Princess to be fitted to other cars with performance upgrades, so there's



no reason therefore why you can't adapt new performance calipers to fit a Wedge should they fail. The pistons can seize, as can the rear wheel cylinders. Brake flexis can fail with age, the same as they can on any car, but can be made up by most competent hose companies. Repair kits for both front and rear brakes are easy to get.

A sagging Wedge will typically just need pumping up. Hydragas pumps are easily sourced (simple ones start from £60, while even more advanced tools can be found from just £100), though many village garages will still have them in the back if you ask – and if anybody there remembers how to use them! If the suspension is hard then it will need recharging – people like Ian and Dawn

Kennedy at Hydragas and Hydrolastic Solutions Ltd will gladly provide this service, which has increased the viability of all Hydragas equipped cars for several decades to come. If you need displacers Ian and Dawn are your best bet too, though replacements aren't easy to get hold of. Check the connecting hoses for any signs of perishing as they can leak, but as the fluid evaporates, there is rarely any trace of a leak even if there is one.

The Princess 2200 and posh Ambassador models got power steering as standard, and on many others it was an option. Non-assisted steering isn't bad by the standards of its era, but if you're used to modern cars you'll be surprised at the weight when parking.





All Princess models should wear 185/70/14 tyres, although many will now be sitting on more modern rubber sizes such as 195/60. These will have a negative effect upon steering weight.

INTERIOR AND TRIM

Sagging driver's seats and broken seat mechanisms are the biggest problems you'll find on most models, with the interior trim on Base and HLS models being fairly hardy. The nylon used on HLS isn't UV resistant though, and the top of the rear backrest can disintegrate in the sun. Lighter colours and later cars including Ambassadors are more prone than early models.

New door cards and seats are impossible to find, so buy the best interior you can find. Almost all dashboard mouldings will have cracks,

but these can be repaired by specialists. Wooden dash inserts are real, so check for chipped varnish. Finally, lift the carpets in the front footwells and check the sound insulation foam for water ingress. If it's wet, the odds are the windscreen rubber has failed and you'll need a new one. Fortunately these are available from the club, but removing and refitting a screen on any car can be



daunting if you've never done it before.

With just eight fuses on a Princess, the electrical system is simple in the extreme. Ambassadors have a more complex system, including central locking and electric windows on many models. Most problems you'll find will be related to fuses or corrosion on connections, so if changing the fuse doesn't work try some contact cleaner. Nothing here should cause concern.

OUR VERDICT

The Leyland Princess has long been forgotten by the classic car community, and we think that's more than a little unfair because what we have here is a spacious, comfortable five-seater with a massive boot, very 1970s styling, and because the market hasn't yet realised how great it is values are astoundingly low when compared to the equivalent Fords.

Add to this that the four-cylinder models use engines that are about as well-served as anything else in the old car movement and that the Hydragas suspension really doesn't pose any difficulties today, then it's a no brainer in our eyes. Whether you choose one of the original BL 18-22 branded models, a Princess or the final Austin Ambassadors, you'll have a classic that could conceivably be used every day and will turn heads on every journey.

And while it's possible now to get good examples for under £5000, we think that the time for the Princess has got to come sooner rather than later. If you hesitate, you may end up on the wrong side of a long-overdue appreciation curve. ●





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This low mileage 1982 Rolls-Royce Corniche featuring coachwork by Mulliner Park Ward with merely 27,742 miles on the odometer. Dressed in Nutmeg Brown, the exterior is beautifully contrasted by a tan interior. If you're in search of a classic car that combines elegance and opulence look no further than this British classic that is mechanically sound. For \$56,500



1959 Bentley S1 Long Wheelbase - Stock#17426

Introducing this left-hand-drive 1959 Bentley S1 Long Wheelbase that is finished in a two-tone color scheme of silver and black perfectly complemented by a luxurious red interior. With its timeless appeal and legendary craftsmanship, this classic is a true automotive masterpiece that will appreciate in value over time and is mechanically sound. For \$49,950



1948 Bentley Mark VI Right-Hand-Drive - Stock#17891

This exquisite 1948 Bentley Mark VI Right-Hand-Drive that is dressed in a captivating blue over silver exterior. Equipped with a 4-speed manual transmission, inline-six-cylinder engine, and SU dual carburetors. Look no further than this Mark VI that is mechanically sound. For \$24,750



2000 Bentley Arnage Red Label - Stock#17690

This 2000 Bentley Arnage Red Label featured with 65,617 miles on the odometer. Dressed in its factory color of Black. Equipped with an automatic transmission, 6.75/400 HP V-8 engine, and power steering. Do not miss your chance to own this Bentley Arnage that is mechanically sound. For \$19,950



2004 Bentley Continental GT - Stock#17421

This stunning 2004 Bentley Continental GT that is finished in its exquisite factory color Spruce complemented with a Saffron interior and Walnut veneers. Fully equipped with an automatic transmission, and a 6.0-liter 12-cylinder Twin-Turbocharged engine. Look no further than this Bentley Continental GT that is mechanically sound. For \$32,500



1982 Rolls-Royce Corniche - Stock#17535

This 1982 Rolls-Royce Corniche featuring coachwork by Mulliner Park Ward with only 39,588 miles on the odometer. Comes in Silver Sand Metallic and a Copper Brown interior. Equipped with an automatic transmission and a V8 engine. If you're in search of a classic Rolls-Royce then look no further than this British classic that is mechanically sound. For \$52,500



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1993 Bentley Continental R - Stock#17703

This 1993 Bentley Continental R featuring coachwork by Mulliner Park Ward. This rare gem is a true collector's dream, being one of only 235 examples produced for the year 1993. If you are in search of a truly luxury vehicle, look no further than this Bentley Continental R that is mechanically sound. For \$22,750



1986 Rolls-Royce Corniche II Convertible - Stock#17774

This 1986 Rolls-Royce Corniche II Convertible features coachwork by Mulliner Park Ward and finished in a color scheme of black combined with a beautiful tan interior. Equipped with an automatic transmission and a V8 engine. An elegant British classic that is ready to be enjoyed and is mechanically sound. For \$44,500



1960 Bentley S2 Saloon - Stock#17634

This 1960 Bentley S2 Saloon Right-Hand-Drive that is finished in white complemented with a grey interior. This 4-door Saloon is equipped with an automatic transmission with steering column control, and V8 engine. An extremely elegant British classic that is ready to be cherished and is mechanically sound. For \$18,750



1961 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud II Long-wheelbase Saloon - Stock#18249

This left-hand-drive 1961 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud II Long-wheelbase Saloon that is finished in a color scheme of black combined with a tan interior. This LWB is equipped with an automatic transmission and a V8 engine. A very presentable and prestigious Rolls-Royce that is mechanically sound. For \$46,500



1953 Bentley R-Type Left-Hand-Drive - Stock#15425

This 1953 Bentley R-Type Left-Hand-Drive that is finished in Silver combined with a Gray leather interior. Equipped with a column-mounted manual transmission, 4.5-liter straight six engine, and dual carburetors. An extremely elegant British classic that is ready to be enjoyed and is mechanically sound. For \$32,500



1962 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud II Left-Hand-Drive - Stock#17914

This 1962 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud II Left-Hand-Drive finished in an exquisite Midnight Blue complemented with an Oatmeal interior with a wood trim. If you're in search of a classic luxury vehicle look no further than this British classic that is mechanically sound. For \$39,950

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ALL ROUND PERFORMER

The first-generation Mazda RX-7 was one of the marque's – and hence the world's – most successful rotary-engined models. Here's our guide to buying a great example today.

WORDS: **PAUL GUINNESS**

When a car company describes its latest model as 'unique', there's usually a touch of poetic licence involved. But for the new Mazda RX-7 of 1978, the description was justifiable: this was the only rotary-engined sports car on the market with a specification that made conventionally powered rivals like

the Porsche 924 seem technologically dull by comparison.

Mazda had been producing Wankel-style rotary powerplants since 1961, but this latest 105bhp twin-rotor unit was completely new, giving the RX-7 decent enough performance (117mph flat out, 0-60 in 9.9 seconds) to match its svelte looks. Available in the USA as a two-seater and in other markets as a 2+2, the RX-7 proved to be a hit, with

more than 570,000 sold worldwide during its seven-year run.

The RX-7's MacPherson strut front suspension and live rear axle set-up was pretty conventional, but endowed the RX-7 with fine handling and roadholding, aided by almost 50/50 weight distribution thanks to the engine being mounted well back. UK-spec cars came with disc brakes front and rear and a five-speed manual



gearbox, but some markets were given rear drums and a four-speed gearbox, with automatic transmission optional in the USA – something to bear in mind if the car you're thinking of buying isn't an official import.

UK-spec cars gained some welcome extra power (115bhp) in 1981 via the latest 12A version of the rotary powerplant, pushing top speed to 125mph and knocking 0.4 seconds off the 0-60mph dash. Most exciting, however, were the 540 cars converted to Turbo spec by UK-based Elford, each one pumping out 165bhp and featuring prominent spoilers and side skirts for a more aggressive look.

On today's classic market, the first-generation RX-7 (often known by its SA22C or FB designations for early and late-model examples respectively) is a temptingly priced alternative to more mainstream coupes. Here's what needs checking before you take the plunge.

BODYWORK

Very few Japanese cars launched in the late 1970s are notably rust-resistant, so don't expect an RX-7 that's seen plenty of action to be free of issues. These cars can – and will – rust even when well looked after, so be extra vigilant when examining any example you spot for sale.

Wheelarches were traditionally the first area to show signs of rot, followed by the sills (inner and outer), floorpan and rear suspension mounts. The inner wings, windscreen surround and footwells are other key rust spots, and it pays to make sure the metal beneath the back seat is solid, as well as the boot floor. The bottom of each door can also rust from the inside, so check carefully for bubbling paintwork and signs of filler.

Replacement panels are very rare in the UK, which makes any car requiring bodywork restoration a



tricky prospect, despite the RX-7's monocoque bodyshell being no more complex in design than its rivals of the time. Be confident that you're capable of shaping your own metalwork or you have deep enough pockets to pay a professional before you take on any project. You're unlikely to come across a first-generation RX-7 that hasn't had some bodywork repairs in the past, so make sure you're happy with the standard of the work, particularly if you suspect it's a recent restoration.

ENGINE AND TRANSMISSION

A rotary engine works in a completely different way to a conventional piston engine. For the latter, the same volume of space (the cylinder) alternately does four different jobs: intake, compression, combustion and exhaust. But while a rotary engine does the same four jobs, each one happens in its own part of the housing. It's almost like having a dedicated cylinder for each of the four jobs, with the piston moving continually from one to the next.

With a rotary engine, the pressure of combustion is contained in a chamber formed by part of the housing and sealed in by one face of the triangular rotor, which is what the engine uses instead of pistons. The rotor follows a path which keeps each of the three peaks of the rotor in contact with the housing, therefore creating three separate volumes of gas. It might sound complex, but the principle of a rotary

engine is remarkably straightforward.

It's important that you buy an RX-7 with as comprehensive a history as possible, as these engines require an oil change every 3000 miles. When inspecting any example for sale, check

for white exhaust smoke on start-up – a sure sign that worn oil control rings are letting coolant in where it shouldn't be. Also look for oil leaks from the relevant pipework and oil cooler connections, and make sure there are no signs of overheating.

Even if all seems well, you might want to invest in a compression check, as anything much below 75psi points to major expense ahead. The front and rear crankshaft seals can also leak oil; sorting this requires an engine strip, at which point the rotor tip seals can be checked. Most of the parts required for engine work are inexpensive, but it's a labour-intensive process, with full engine rebuilds via a specialist costing £3500–£4000 on average.

The five-speed transmission fitted to UK-spec RX-7s should feel slick. It's a reliable unit, but make sure you keep an ear out for crunching gears, most likely caused by worn synchromesh. A clutch can last up to 100,000 miles, but you should still check for signs of any slip.

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

There's nothing complicated about the RX-7's running gear, which is great news for anyone planning their own maintenance. Parts availability





is reasonable too, thanks to the UK having a handful of independent specialists in rotary-engined Mazdas. You might even be pleasantly surprised by some of the current parts prices, particularly when it comes to service items. Essex Rotary, for example, sells a complete rear four-link control arm polybush kit for around £129, dampers from just £85 each, and refurbished brake calipers from £295 a pair. Even a BC Racing complete coilover kit – the ultimate when it comes to uprating your RX-7's handling – comes in at less than £1050.

When checking over an RX-7, worn lower balljoints can be an issue but standard-spec replacements are readily available, as are the polybush kits mentioned earlier – an upgrade that's well worth considering. RX-7 steering was by recirculating ball rather than rack-and-pinion, so it's not the most precise of its time; it's possible to adjust out excess play, although some owners overtighten the steering and cause further problems.

The all-disc set-up of UK-spec cars is as straightforward as it sounds, but you should still check for the usual signs of worn or warped discs, excessively worn pads, fluid leaks and so on.

INTERIOR, TRIM & ELECTRICS

The interior of any RX-7 you buy should ideally be in excellent condition, as new-old-stock trim is predictably rare. In fact, it's pretty much extinct, so check carefully the condition of the seats – particularly the outer side bolsters of the fronts,

which can wear through on any car that's seen plenty of action. Leather was an extra-cost option in the UK and is seen as a desirable bonus, but the chances of finding a car for sale with this aren't great.

If the upholstery is worn, the only practical option is to have your existing seats retrimmed – but professional services like this don't come cheap, so do your sums carefully before agreeing to buy an RX-7 in need of interior work. You might need to have the seats re-padded as well, as they can collapse on high-mileage RX-7s. Make sure the overall condition inside the car is in line with the claimed mileage, particularly if the service history isn't all there.

Unlike many of its contemporaries, an RX-7's dashboard will rarely crack but you'll need to check all the switches and dials work as it's not unknown for electric window switches, rear wipers and others to burn out.

OUR VERDICT

The late 1970s and early '80s saw a plethora of desirable coupes launched in the UK, but none of them offered the same kind of headline-grabbing powerplant as the super-smooth, high-revving, rotary-engined RX-7. In fact, so eager to rev was the RX-7, Mazda had to fit a warning buzzer for when the tachometer hit 7000rpm. Some other coupes were more powerful, some were quicker, but none offered that USP of rotary-engined smoothness.

Of course, one of the car's biggest attributes was also the thing that





deterred many buyers... and still does. It's not unusual to hear talk of rotary unreliability, as well as claims that these engines go 'bang' at relatively low mileages. However, the rotary fitted to the RX-7 is arguably one of the best you'll find, and with proper maintenance, regular oil changes and a caring owner, it's not unusual to see a car with a six-figure mileage that still

on its original powerplant (albeit with a likely rebuild).

History is key, of course, and the canny RX-7 buyer will reject any car that fails to come with comprehensive paperwork showing 3000-mile oil changes throughout its life. Buy the best that your budget will stretch to and not only will you get to enjoy one of the smoothest engines of all time,

you'll also benefit from one of the best-looking coupes of its era.

At its launch, the RX-7 cost around 30% more than the most expensive 3.0-litre Capri, and wasn't far off entry-level Porsche territory in terms of pricing, but these days it offers fine value for money. The dearest RX-7 to sell at a UK auction within the last year appears to be a superb 1985 example, which achieved £17,500 at a WB & Sons sale. We've found a couple of cars for sale with dealers at a similar level, including one benefiting from a full engine rebuild with the all-important new seals 5000 miles ago.

Two other auction cars in what appeared to be decent condition found new homes for around the £10,500 mark, while between £10,000 and £12,000 seems to be the going rate for an excellent (but obviously not concours-quality) car in a private sale. Projects start at around the £3000 mark, with running cars requiring work available from as little as £5000. But do you really want to undertake major work on a rotary-engined classic? Better instead to find the extra money at the outset, we'd say. ●



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HARD AS NAILS

The Land Rover Defender is a primitive yet usable off-roader and ever since production stopped, its status as a future classic has been assured. Here's how to sort the diamonds from the duffers.

WORDS: **IAN CUSHWAY**

Traditionally, classic 4x4s tend to enjoy something of a niche following. However, if you're after something more versatile with the same back-to-basics appeal, excellent off-road ability and real future classic potential, then look no further than the iconic Land Rover Defender. It

can go just about anywhere off-road, parts are easy and relatively cheap to get hold of and nothing mechanically should prove too much of a headache – especially if you do your homework and buy wisely in the first place.

Having morphed from the 110 (the 110 referring to the approximate wheelbase) and the 90 (from 1983

and '84 respectively) early Defenders made from September 1990 were offered with the first generation 2.5-litre diesel featuring an alloy cylinder head, mechanical direct injection and an intercooler. It was the same 200Tdi unit as in the Discovery.

The station wagon 'County' model was reintroduced in 1992 and the first



special edition – the 90SV – arrived with a revised soft top arrangement, metallic paint and alloys as well as the Range Rover's rear axle with disc brakes. The latter became standard with the arrival of the 300Tdi in 1993.

Despite offering similar performance to its predecessor the 300Tdi boasted reduced emissions, more torque, increased refinement and a new five-speed gearbox which replaced the old Leyland unit which first saw service back in 1983.

Both of these early model Defenders are good, but being under-geared aren't likely to be as comfortable as later Defenders on motorway journeys and their Spartan interiors and lack of sound deadening add to their austerity.

Moving on, the 300Tdi was replaced by the 122bhp Td5 in 1998; an all-new

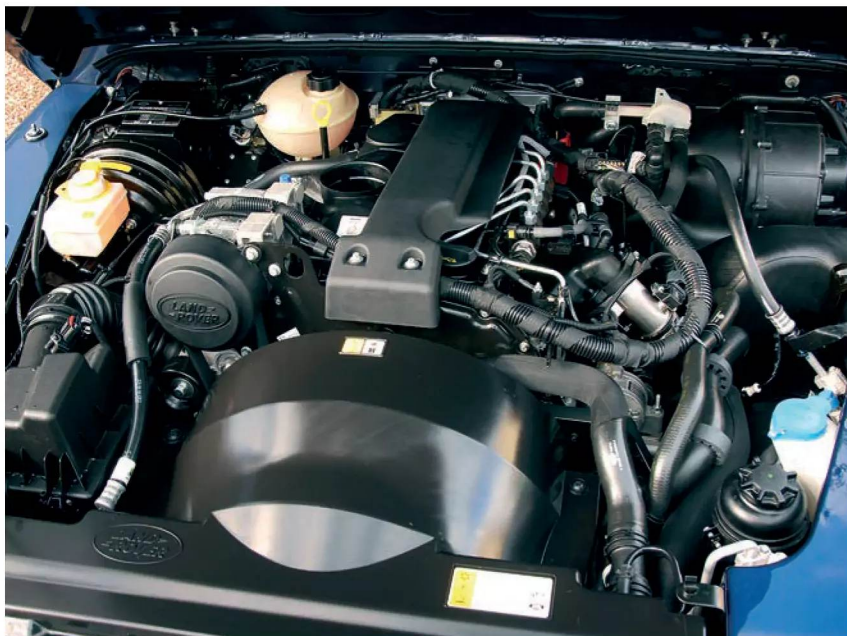


five-cylinder turbodiesel derived from the Rover L Series, it was the last Land Rover engine to power a Defender. Performance is superior to its Tdi predecessor, and overall it feels more refined. But here's the rub; it featured electronic ignition management as opposed to the 300's all-mechanical setup, thus marking the end of an era of unsophisticated bliss for those keen on doing everything themselves.

All but a few early models Td5s have the benefit of ABS brakes, traction control, alloy wheels and a much more sophisticated looking dash and interior.

The Defender continued to evolve, an update in 2007 including an extensive makeover inside and the replacement of the Td5 with a 2.4-litre four-cylinder TDCi DuraTorq turbodiesel taken from the Ford Transit. Defenders from this date





also had the benefit of forward facing rear seats and a much improved air conditioning and heating system. In 2012, the engine was replaced by a more efficient EU4 2.2 version and that's pretty much how it remained until it finally went out of production in 2016.

BODYWORK

Though Defenders are robust, some will have been heavily abused. Superficial damage won't be a problem, but rust might. It can get a hold in the front bulkhead, which can be tricky to repair, and also attack the chassis outriggers on which the body

is mounted. Other areas to check include the door pillars, the bottom of the windscreen and the bottom of the doors. The alloy panels don't rust but they do react where they meet steel, such as the door frames and hinges, and the material dents easily. Incidentally, on the Td5, the rear safari door is a one-piece steel affair, rather than an alloy skin over a steel frame as on the previous Tdi model. It's stronger, but the weight of the spare wheel can cause it to fracture immediately below the glass so check here carefully.

ENGINES AND TRANSMISSION

The 200Tdi is frugal, energetic and reasonably bulletproof – if a little harsh and noisy. Head gasket issues are common, though; it lets go between number four cylinder and one of the pushrod tubes at the back of the engine, a chuffing noise being the first sign of trouble. Other running issues such as misfires may be down to faulty injectors, dicky Bosch VE rotary injection pumps, incorrect pump timing, a faulty lift pump or poorly adjusted valve clearances.

Top end oil leaks caused by rubber seals hardening with age are also common, which is why you see so many





200Tdi engines smothered with oil. The Garrett T25 turbo is robust and long lasting, but can also eventually fail so listen for whistles; blue smoke on acceleration suggests oil is getting into the turbo.

The 300Tdi was more refined, a little faster and smoother but not quite as robust. This engine can suffer coolant leaks and overheating which can lead to warped heads. Cracks can also occur around the heater plugs and injectors, and worse still between the valves. The manifold gasket can also let go on this engine between the ports, allowing oil to plaster the side of the block. It's messy but not hard to fix.

The timing belt on both the 200 and 300Tdi should be replaced every 60,000 miles or five years (or half this if used intensively off road) and oil and filter changes carried out every 6000 miles using 10w40 – so check it's been done on the dot.



The Td5 is fast and more refined and specialists know its faults. It's chain driven, too, which makes life easier. Td5 maladies include leaky injector seals (which will cause poor starting), duff injector pumps and cracked cylinders (due to high fuel pressures and thin walls) which will allow diesel to drop

into the sump.

The 2007-on Ford engine is very different to what went before and can be long lasting. Some suffer injector and EGR valve issues as well as faulty fuel pressure sensor woes but otherwise, again, it's a strong unit – albeit one that's not as DIY friendly as its predecessors. Bear in mind, the 2012-on 2.2 has a diesel particulate filter, so watch for any dash warning lights pointing to DPF blockages. Ditto the catalytic converter.

STEERING, SUSPENSION & BRAKES

The Defender's coil spring suspension can take quite a hammering if used off road so look for broken springs, leaky shocks and worn bushes. A clunk at the rear can be a sign of wear in the rear A-frame balljoint.

Many Defenders go for a long time without proper maintenance, and if you're playing catch up things can get pricey so check there's grease in the swivel housing, there's no leaks from the seals and that the balls haven't become pitted. Also, check there aren't any leaks from the front diff input shaft seal and that the propshafts are properly greased (via nipples). The often leaky transfer box should have also been treated to regular fluid changes, so look for the relevant invoices. Climb underneath if you can and check too for split rubber steering balljoint boots.





Regarding brakes, while the 200Tdi uses a reliable vane type rotary pump driven off the end of the oil pump drive to power the brake servo, the 300 uses a Wabco plunger type pump driven off the camshaft and the end cover of

these can work loose causing it to leak oil. The internals can also wear, leading to a ticking sound and its eventual failure. ABS was fitted to some Td5s; it rarely gives any problems.

Finally, Defenders leak – and not

just via sunroofs when the drain holes block. Door seals fail (and often weren't much cop in the first place) and soft tops are never efficient at keeping out the elements. Seats and trim can quickly look very shabby, and although everything can be replaced fairly easily, don't buy one that looks totally ruined inside; a badly trashed driver's seat can make a Defender very uncomfortable to drive.

OUR VERDICT

It's undoubtedly an icon, and one that's likely to attract more enthusiast attention as the years pass by. Moreover, there's modern touches which make the Defender more user friendly than Land Rovers of old. A modern classic, no less.

Generally, it's the 90 that attracts the most attention, as well as the Station Wagons. An early, usable 90 with the 2.5 will set you back between £8000-10,000. The Wagon begins at the top end of this range and might be £15,000 for a tidy example, £18,000 being a benchmark price for a really nice 110 County, and £25,000-£30,000 for a mint runout model. ●



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