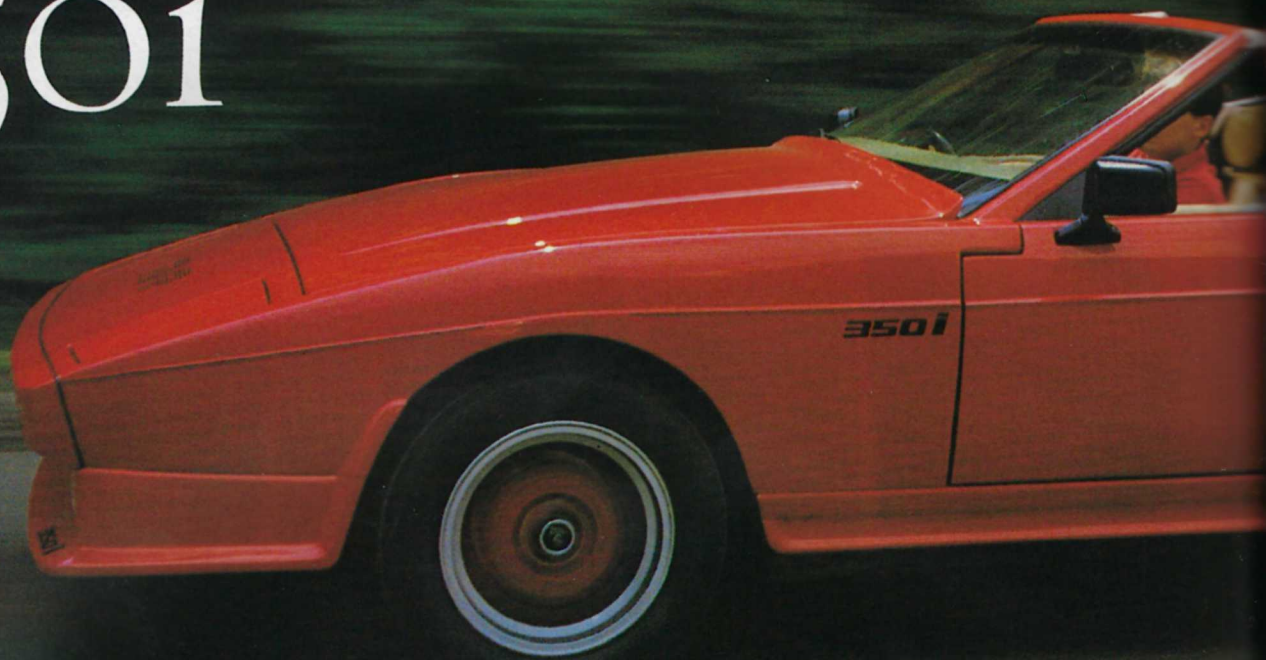


TVR 350i



For: performance, ride, user-friendly nature, V8 sound **Against:** looks, image, rarity

Unveiled at the Belgian Motor Show in January 1980, TVR's wedge-shaped Tasmin coupé marked a radical break away from the curvy-but-quirky Grantura-based 3000M and Taimar models from the previous decade.

Designed by former Lotus man Oliver Winterbottom, there was a hint of the Hethel firm's origami Eclat about its styling. The Tasmin's tubular steel backbone chassis was the work of another ex-Lotus designer, Ian Jones, with

front suspension via wishbones and coils, rear by trailing and transverse links and the drive-shafts. Power came from Ford's proven fuel-injected, 2.8-litre 'Cologne' V6 allied to a four-speed 'box. A convertible model followed in October 1980 along with a two-plus-two version.

Though never a huge hit – sales never came close to matching the previous M-series cars – the Tasmin did at least spawn a range of extraordinary supercars starting with the Lucas-injected Rover

Vitesse V8-powered 350i announced in August 1983. Major surgery was required before the existing chassis would accept its new heart. Because of the V8's larger girth, the frame around the engine had to be widened by 1½in and the front suspension was stiffened up.

Visually, the major differences between the 350i and its lesser sister was a front spoiler with integral driving lights, Rover SD1 rear clusters, twin exhaust pipes and attractive BBS 'lattice' wheels. Tacky 'Tasmin 350i' graphics were quickly dropped, the model henceforth being referred to only by its number.

Inside, the linear theme continued, with several walnut boxes forming an amateur-looking dashboard with acres of sumptuous leather trim. If the styling and opulent cockpit didn't grab you, the performance would, the 0-60mph dash taking 6.7 secs and on to a 135mph top speed. Contemporary road tests praised the car's handling and enthused over the quality of its surprisingly supple

ride. Originally only available in open-top configuration, coupé and two-plus-two variants followed towards the end of 1983, but the droptop 350i was the dominant model. Sales were buoyant from the outset and, in the spring of 1985, a revised Series 2 model was introduced. The front end was noticeably more rounded with a revised bonnet design plus bumper and air dam arrangement. Sill extensions and Renault Fuego tail lights completed the makeover. A new rear suspension design arrived in mid-'86 with sturdy 'A-frame' lower wishbones and radius arms.

Production continued until August 1990 by which time 897 ragtops, 52 coupés and just six two-plus-twos had been made. Today, demand for these Blackpool bombers is slowly rising although cars can still be picked up for comfortably under £10,000 which, on a performance per pound basis, represents remarkable value for money. If you can live with the early-'80s looks, you'll have a ball.



350i is no curvy beauty, but it's a great car if you can live with its chiselled looks



Factfile

The club

TVR Car Club 01952 770635

Specialists

David Gerald TVR Sportscars Ltd
01386 793237

Christopher Neil Ltd 01606 41481

The TVR Centre 0181 440 6666

Steve Reid Classics 01928 719267

Team Central TVR 0121 344 3400

What to pay

Excellent	£11,000+
Good	£9-11,000
Fair	£5-7000

Parts prices (inc VAT)

Tail light (Fuego)	£36.30
Brake disc (front)	£44.58
Exhaust (stainless)	£289.67

Insurance

Classic 5000-mile policy for 30-year-old male, clean licence, with Firebond £194

10 point checklist

- 1 As with virtually all glassfibre-bodied cars, 350i shells can suffer stress cracks. Check top of bonnet and base of windscreen pillar in particular.
- 2 Pop-up headlights can drop in their housings – common but easily remedied.
- 3 Front spoiler susceptible to parking scrapes and grounding damage. Check for filler and/or cosmetic repair.
- 4 Typical of any low-volume specialist sports car, some 350is have been 'personalised'. It could reduce the asking price if done badly.
- 5 Rover V8 is tough but needs regular oil changes: tappet clatter could mean one or more hydraulic lifters need replacing.
- 6 Walnut veneer can flake and peel off. Expensive to repair. Some minor items of cockpit furniture could prove elusive so make sure everything's in place.
- 7 Carpets could be damp, as early cars were not watertight.
- 8 Wiring is a weak point, and electric windows are prone to jamming.
- 9 A damaged chassis can be replaced with a new one from the factory.
- 10 Talk to the ever-helpful TVR Car Club. It's a mine of information.

Market view

Marque expert Doug Elwood of David Gerald TVR Sportscars believes the 350i to be a sleeper in the market: "Prices are slowly beginning to appreciate, but wedge-shaped cars aren't as highly regarded as the M-series models. It's only a matter of time before people do finally cotton on to the fact that these are cracking cars which are very fast and user-friendly."

Doug's tip for those looking for cheap thrills is to search elsewhere: "Chances are really cheap cars will have led hard lives. To buy a nice example you are going to have to spend a high four-figure sum but you'll get a hell of a lot for your money."



Brochure shots of interior trim options. Fuel injected Rover V8 boasted 197bhp

For sale: £8995

Year of manufacture: 1989 Recorded mileage: 5600 (105,600)

Asking price: £8995 Vendor: AJ Greenwood, Pucklechurch, nr Bristol; tel: 0117 937 2288

For: healthy Against: weak brakes Verdict: on the money and in good nick

When it was new Price: £13,625 Top speed: 135mph 0-60mph: 6.7 secs



350is are getting hard to find – but AJG has two for sale. This car looks as if it has been cared for; the tyres are premium quality in matched pairs and the grey leather interior has survived well, apart from the ECU box cover being tied loosely in place, and

both the electric windows work. The chassis looks in good shape although there's paint missing, most notably from the tubes cradling the engine where the exhaust heat has burned it off. The only shabby part is the roof panel which has had a couple of chunks knocked out of it. Some clever fakery with glue and a few shavings of the right-coloured material would probably save it. This TVR performs well – vendor Simon Greenwood says it is one of the quicker 350is he's driven, and certainly acceleration is sparkling thanks to prodigious torque from the Rover V8. Tail-out antics are there for the asking, the power steering making it easy to catch. There's a sticky tappet, but oil pressure is 45psi at higher revs. The only weak part of the performance is the slightly spongy brakes.



Next month: Alfa Romeo GTV6