

# R on the Road

## TVR Taimar

**S**TUDENTS of TVR history will have observed the steady rise in stature of both company and car. Line up one of each TVR model over their near 20-year span and it is a progression towards refinement both in character and overall performance; from 1965 the company has done much the same. TVR have weathered all the storms of anti-kit car VAT, fuel crisis and legislation and now turn out a quality two-seater GT with performance, general roadworthiness and practicality that compares very favourably with many more expensive two-seaters (mostly 2+2s) and the extra cost over cheaper sports cars is well justified. At £6,223 the hatch-back Taimar is cheaper than any Porsche or Lotus, losing out to Porsche perhaps on solidity and ultimate longevity and to Lotus on suspension behaviour, and to both on space as the TVR is strictly a two-seater with a limited luggage area.

For normal road use the TVR's performance is all you really need with a nice soft 3-litre Ford V-6 churning out 142bhp and masses of torque; anything faster adds more to exhilaration than practicality with TVR's own Turbo able to fulfill that need as well as any. With under a ton to propel and with an easy 21.6mph per 1,000rpm, the engine gives fairly economical performance, too, at 22.3mpg in our mixture of commuting and pleasure.

In its outward shape the Taimar is little

different from the ML but the whole rear window hinges upwards with the release button in the driver's door jamb. This opens to reveal a large flat area on top of the final drive, so the depth isn't very great and it is all exposed to the public gaze; however there is a covered recess under a lift-up flap that will take a modern document/brief case. Another covered recess can take cassettes/cigarette packs. Under the fascia there is a convenient tray for maps, instruction book etc. So there is plenty of oddment space and room for a useful amount of luggage; the spare wheel is under the bonnet these days.

The fascia itself is well laid out and the five switches on the console easily sorted with the washer/wiper ones nearest the driver. Most drivers will find that the gear-lever is still rather far back on the high central tunnel but you soon get used to it and the short precise movements are pleasant and complement the light and progressive clutch. Pedals are a little close together, so that proper heel-and-toe on brake and accelerator is almost impossible, as the side rail prevents much ankle movement so you have to use the side of the foot on the throttle.

The seating position is comfortable and adjustable for all sizes; the only complaint is the siting of the inertia-reel seat belt housings which requires the belt to swing through 90° axially via a single loop at 45°. The belt doesn't slide at all easily through

the loop which negates any advantages of the inertia reel and renders the belt all but useless.

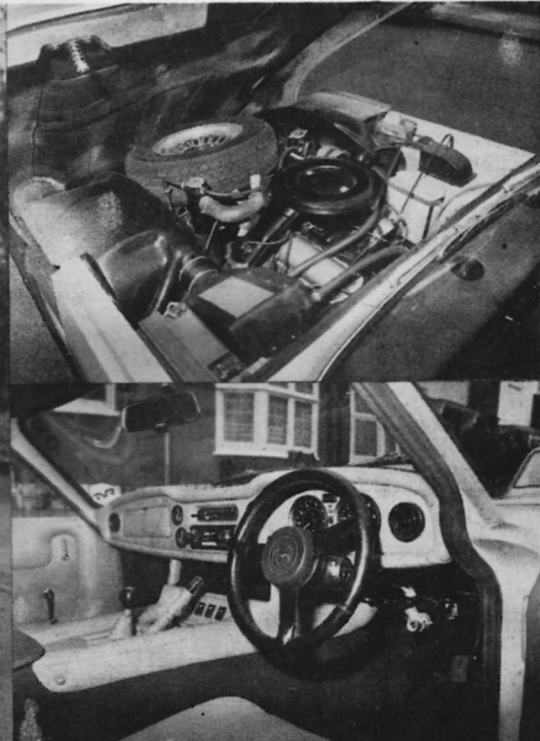
Many detail developments have taken place on the TVR and one of the biggest improvements is in heater throughput, thanks to large positive outlets in the rear panel; plenty of air comes through for warmth and demisting with fresh air and screen outlets of the adjustable eyeball type, which gives a total volume control from a simple two-lever heater system. A further advantage of improved air throughput is in the reduction of wind noise that used to occur at the top of the sidewindows as high pressure air tried to find its way out, breaking the seal in the process. Now, the car is pleasantly quiet at legal speeds with wind noise beginning to be audible beyond 70mph, but even 90mph cruising requires very little radio adjustment; engine noise is subdued with a nice mellow exhaust note.

The great appeal of a car like the TVR is the way that its chassis can outperform the less specialised cars, that it can effortlessly outcorner any of the mass-production brigade; independent all-round suspension has been used since the beginning, although it wasn't until the arrival of the Mk III that the VW trailing arms were replaced by wishbones all round; the ride now is firm but well-rounded from well-damped short-travel movements. It doesn't jolt or jiggle, but it isn't soft. Thus one might expect the steering to be ultra-direct on the nice fat 185/70x14 tyres, but it isn't, nor has it ever been; the steering has always felt dead and low geared as if to damp out kick-back from curious geometry. This doesn't affect its ultimate roadholding, but you have to take a bigger bite at the wheel than you would expect and wet-road feel is hardly evident.

In every other respect there are no complaints about the TVR's behaviour and it is always fun to drive. One extra fitted to the test car was a folding roof which gives a nice feeling of fresh air without excessive draught or noise. The other extra was less satisfactory — a stereo radio/cassette player; somehow reception on glass-fibre bodied cars is always difficult to ensure and this set was very variable in its UHF recep-

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*TVR shape remains aggressively distinctive (left). Underbonnet access is limited, note sound-absorbent padding (below right). Trim cockpit design remains clean and tidy (bottom right)*



# On the Road

tion, when the stereo should have been working well. Perhaps I'm getting old too, as I no longer have the patience to dial the station I want, if I can remember its wavelength, which I can't since the Home Service became Radio 4; once invented selector buttons have become essential for car use.

But forgetting the niggles over stereo, seat-belt and steering, I always enjoy having a TVR and it is one of the cars that I would like to own at some stage – the problem is, at which age does one join the clan; the latest ones are so much more refined, look more attractive and generally go better. They have in fact moved into a different league, making a successful transition from an appeal to the dirty fingered enthusiast to the mature executive – or whoever wants to pay over £6,000 for a selfish but ever-useable transport for two.

**M.H.L.B.**

## Alfasud Sprint

WHEN we tried the Alfasud four years ago, we had just started *Classic Car* and the baby Alfa had just come out. We tentatively wrote about an ideal small car for the classic car owner. Somehow it is no longer a small car, but it is still an ideal for the classic owner. In dimensions it is similar to those of the Fiat 128 and there are two in the Fiat range that are smaller; the arrival of such cars as the Fiesta, Polo, Peugeot 104 with almost as much space but a foot less overall length, have pushed Alfa's baby into the Escort category rather than among the Super-minis. With the Giugiaro-styled Sprint it almost goes a stage further, as the overall length is up a further five inches, albeit on the same 8ft wheelbase; within Alfa's own range it is shorter than the Alfetta's but where it scores, is that its wheelbase is longer than that of the Alfetta GT. This wheel-at-each corner stance plus the low compact flat-four engine for the front-wheel-drive gives a lot of interior space. It is certainly more comfortable to sit behind an average driver in the Sud Sprint than in the Alfetta GT or the old GTV; behind myself I still have an inch to spare for kneeroom and headroom, while the standard Alfasud offers a spare two inches at knee and head.

The point is that it is an eminently practical four-seater with all the style and proportions of a GT, with only a little economy of scale. Alfas are always drivers' cars and the Sprint is typical of the modern variety; it is firm with no roll or lurch under hard cornering, but the ride is always pleasant with no jolts or jarring. It goes where you point it. Only occasionally can you get the odd front-end squeal if you press too hard; it is a satisfying car to sweep through a series of fast bends in effortless fashion – the suspension really works.

Despite its fast-back style the visibility is fairly good with the only blind-spot the result of the driver's headrest obscuring the right  $\frac{3}{4}$ -rear view; this angle is covered by the door mirror. Reversing is easy as the rear window descends most of the way down towards the Manx tail.

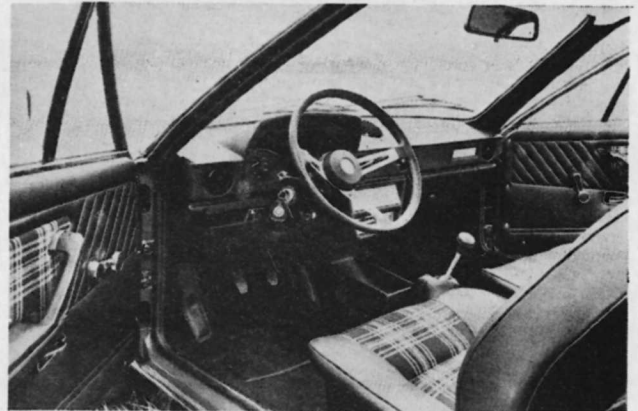


*Much easier than it used to be; access to the luggage space on the TVR Taimar is good*

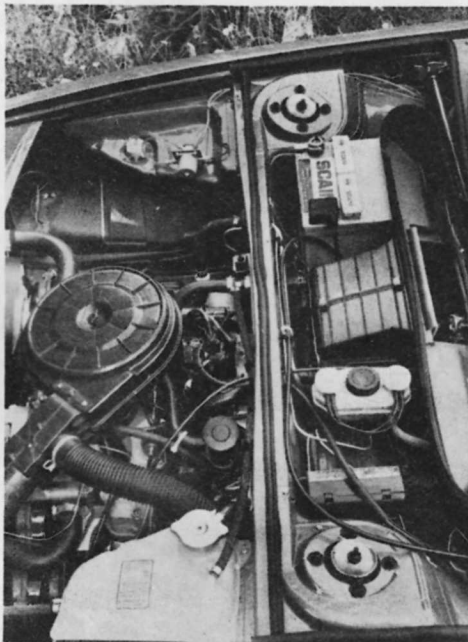


*Long low look for the Giugiaro Alfasud Sprint (above)*

*Flat four engine looks untidy but access is not bad (below)*



*Alfa instruments are heavily cowed, but clearly designed*



Despite the Alfasud's 1,286cc it has a useful output of 76bhp at 6,000rpm, which is enough to give it a maximum around 104mph and a comfortable cruising ability of a quiet 80mph in fifth gear. It is a very smooth little sewing machine of an engine with a red-line limit at 6,500rpm, yellow from 6,000rpm. It isn't the fastest but it is a lively performer for its engine size, happiest in the 3,000-5,500rpm range although it will pull from less albeit slowly.

The gear lever gate follows the old established Alfa pattern with fifth remote and forward opposite reverse. It isn't quite as slicy in its action as the conventional layout cars but just as usable; fifth is geared at 16.3mph per 1,000rpm so that 100mph is just over 6,000rpm, and fourth at 14.0mph. Despite such gearing the engine still sounds very unstrained when cruising and surprisingly quiet at speeds around 5,500rpm. Wind noise, too, is low.

For £4,000 you have a baby Alfa with all the Alfa Romeo pedigree and economy running – 40mpg at 60mph and the Alfa Plus service concessions. ● **M.H.L.B.**



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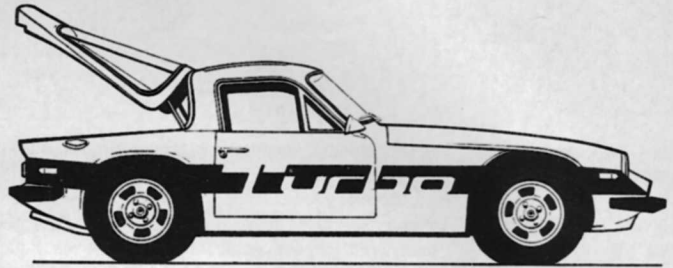
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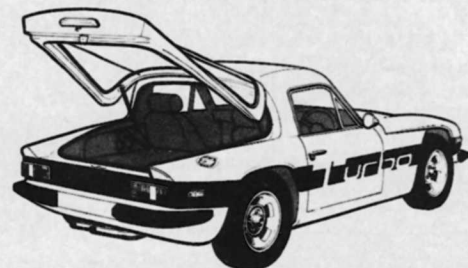
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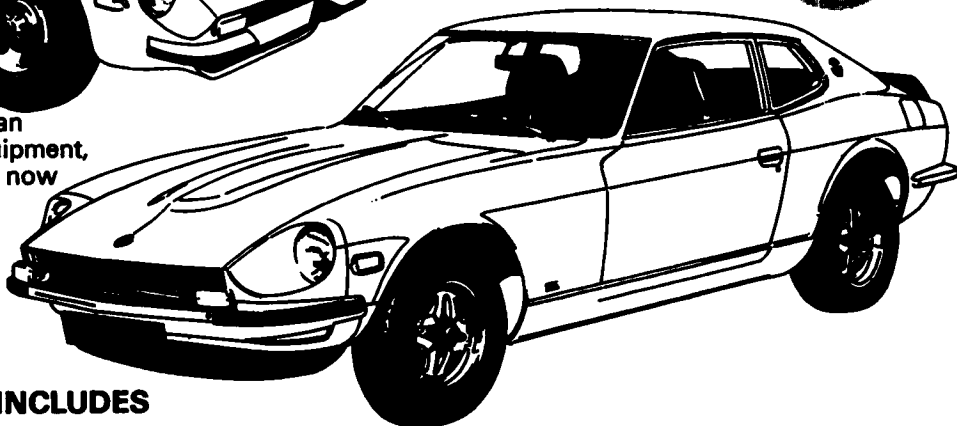
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