

Ford V6 engine, glassfibre body, separate chassis, low-slung build, lots of proprietary running gear – the TVR 3000M and Marcos 3-Litre share so much in terms of concept and building blocks that they promise to be essentially similar in driving personality. But they're not.

The contrast is revealed as soon as you settle behind their small three-spoke steering wheels. The Marcos places you like a racing driver, so low and stretched out that you're almost lying flat on your back, tightly confined by transmission tunnel, steering wheel and door. In any other company the TVR position would feel sporting and reclined, but after the Marcos it seems far closer to a normal car. The way you adjust driving position sums up the difference: the TVR seat has a lever for conventional fore/aft adjustment, but the Marcos seat is fixed and it's the pedal assembly that moves, by means of a knurled dashboard knob that gives a good 12in of travel.

This character distinction infuses much of the road behaviour of these cars. The TVR is very usable, with the blend of comfort and handling hitting just the right note for a sports car driver. The Marcos is altogether a more specialised machine, its race-orientated roots giving it great handling on a smooth road – but making it a handful on rougher surfaces. What they share is effortless power delivery from the Ford 'Essex' V6 engine.

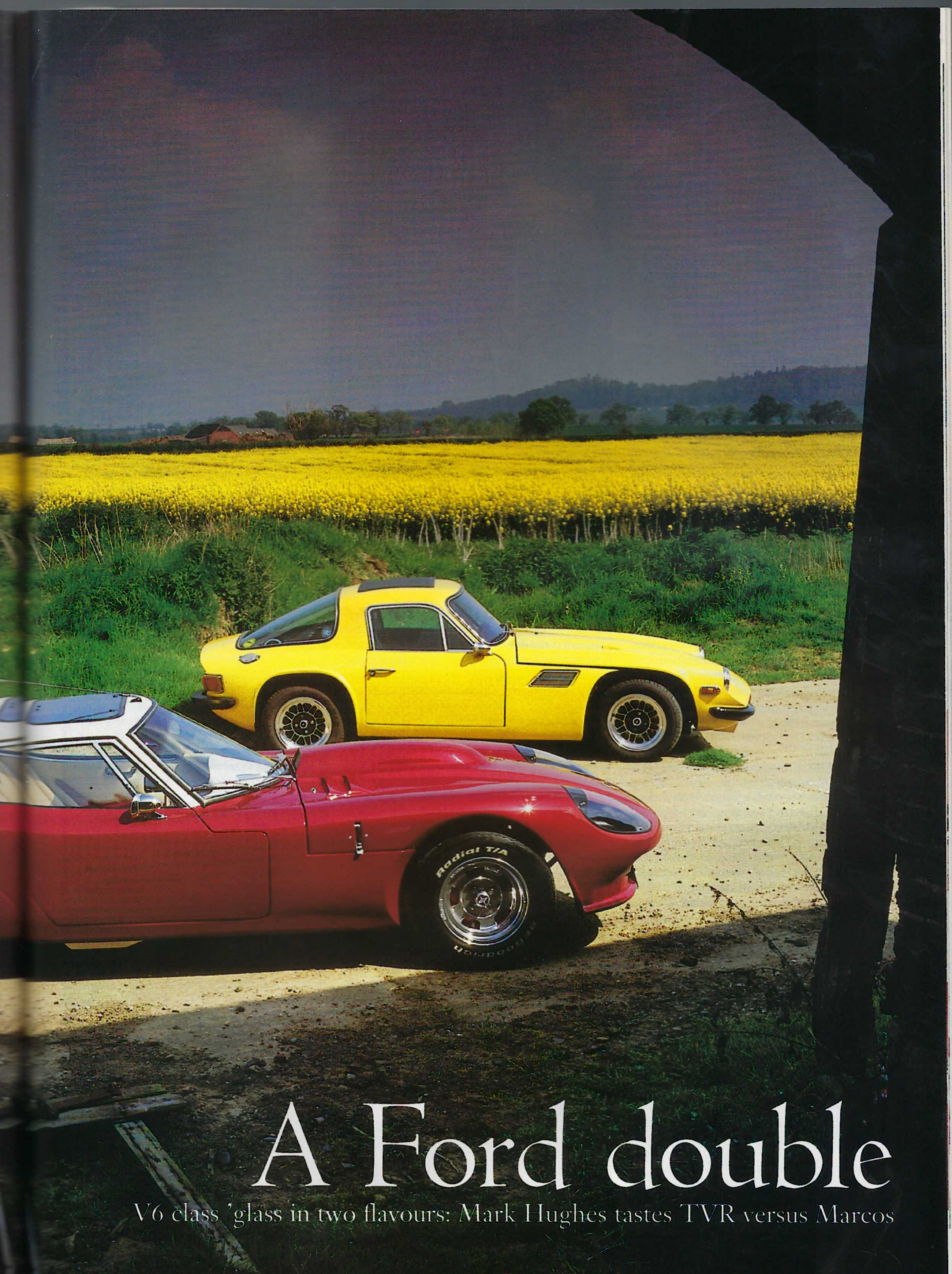
Rather like the Rover V8 of later years, use of this 2994cc V6 was widespread among specialist manufacturers, Reliant and Gilbern also choosing it at this time. Specification-wise, there's nothing special about this all-iron, single-cam, pushrod unit, which develops an unexceptional 138bhp at 5000rpm. Torque, though, is the V6's strength: the peak is 172lb ft at 3000rpm but there's a strong flow of pulling power from much lower. Through the mid-range this engine sounds as good as it feels, its mellow beat drowning the tappety noise that accompanies low-speed running. There's no point in stretching the engine too far because power trails off markedly towards the breathless 6000rpm maximum, which isn't indicated on the rev counter in either car.

Both cars are so light – under a tonne – that acceleration remains impressive even today. There's little to choose between them in standard form, 0-60mph coming up in 7.6 secs for the TVR (*Autocar*) and 7.8 secs in the Marcos (*Motor*), while top speeds are respectively 122mph and 125mph. The differences are explained by weight (the TVR is 100kg heavier) and gearing (the TVR uses a Triumph 3.45:1 final drive, the Marcos a 3.5:1 Salisbury unit), and probably aerodynamics too. This particular Marcos, it should be added, goes rather more quickly because it has been bored to 3.1 litres and breathes through triple Weber carburettors – tuning tweaks that could be applied just as readily to the TVR.

The gearchange is excellent on both cars, although different Ford four-speed gearboxes are fitted. This Marcos, a 1969 wooden-chassis car, is an older design and therefore uses a Zodiac 'box with Laycock overdrive on the top two ratios, whereas the 1973 TVR has a non-overdrive Capri unit. As Ford 'boxes were among the best in the business at this time, both cars give a smooth, accurate and reasonably light change through a short lever. With the TVR, the rearward mounting of the

DAVID SHEPHERD





A Ford double

V6 class 'glass in two flavours: Mark Hughes tastes TVR versus Marcos



Good grip in dry, apt to ground exhaust



Charlie Blow drives TVR hard every weekend

powertrain brings the lever too far back for comfort: changing gear requires such an awkward movement from your left shoulder that it's easy to grab the adjacent handbrake by mistake. In both cars close placing of the brake pedal and organ-type throttle allows heel-and-toe downchanges, although this isn't easy in the Marcos because the low steering wheel tends to lock your leg in one position.

The TVR's ride is decent for a sports car, firm but not harsh, especially when the suspension is well maintained and set-up, as on this example. There's enough spring compliance to prevent spine-jarring reactions over bumps, but a little body roll is a consequence. You have to avoid driving too briskly down a bumpy road because minimal ground clearance (barely 2in at the sump and exhaust) sometimes causes the resonator boxes to grind against the tarmac.

Charging down twisty roads in the TVR is fabulous fun because the handling is so assured. This car has classic rear-drive characteristics, diving into corners with a neutral stance that transfers progressively to mild oversteer as you

power through. The harder you try the more you can move the back end, although a bit of restraint is needed because mid-corner bumps hint that they could make the rear wheels snap suddenly – and these cars have a reputation for being easy to lose in the wet. Grip is very impressive on standard-sized 185/65 HR 14 tyres, Goodyear Eagle NCT in this case.

Trying the Marcos on a track might be another matter, but over public roads, with their varieties of surface and camber, this car's ride and handling are nowhere near as civilised. Basically the difference comes down to suspension stiffness, although the Marcos' live rear axle is unsophisticated compared with the TVR's double-wishbone independent rear end. These two factors make for much more wild progress, which is rewarding in some respects but ultimately limits commitment behind the wheel. Bumps throw the tail of the car all over the place and you find yourself working hard at the steering, sometimes even in a straight line. The plywood chassis used on pre-1970 Marcoses must be an exceptionally robust



AT A GLANCE

TVR 3000M

Engine capacity: 2994cc

Max power: 138bhp at 5000rpm

Max speed: 122mph

Restored value today: £7000

Great performance allied to civilised behaviour – composed through corners, rides well, pleasant steering. Easy to live with, not costly to own, pretty to behold – probably the best specialist sports car of the '70s.

MARCOS 3-LITRE

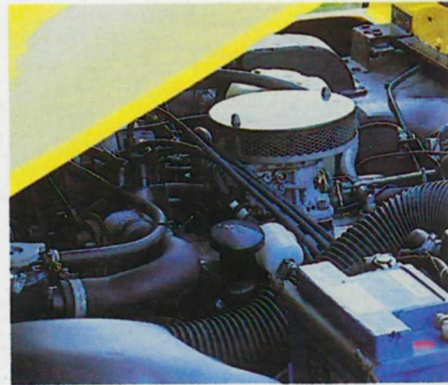
Engine capacity: 2994cc

Max power: 138bhp at 5000rpm

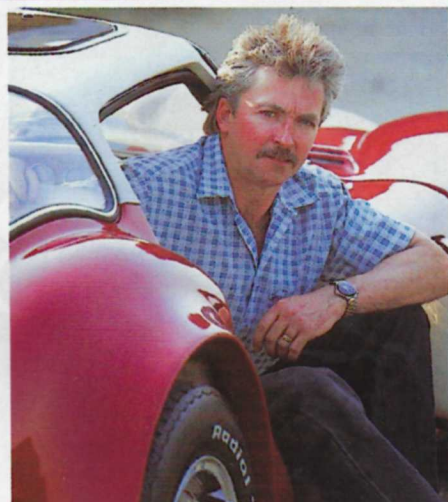
Max speed: 125mph

Restored value today: £10,000

An individualistic alternative, with rarity, extra technical novelty (plywood chassis) and lean looks on its side. Hairier than the TVR, and more flawed in dynamics and design detail – but it has a proper boot.



Trad '60s sports car cockpit in TVR – only gripe is that gearstick is too far back. M stands for Martin, as in Lilley. Robust 3-litre Ford V6



Modified Marcos man Mike McCullagh



More nervous ride from live-axle rear

THE MAIN RIVAL

RELIANT SCIMITAR GTE

Engine capacity: 2994cc

Max power: 138bhp at 5000rpm

Max speed: 125mph

Restored value today: £6000

Shares recipe of Ford V6 power and durable glassfibre body, but trades sporting sharpness for better practicality – a fast holdall with four seats, opening tailgate and versatile luggage space. Great value too.



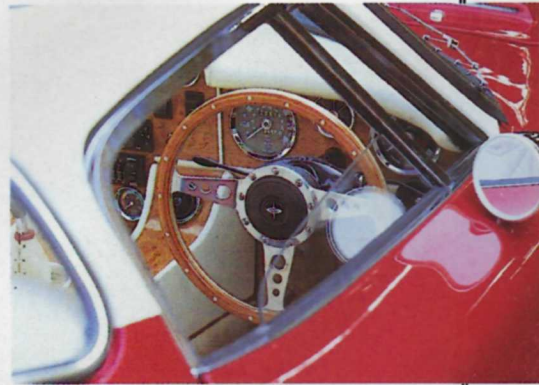
structure, for it accepts without complaint, other than the occasional creak or groan, all the stresses imposed by this harshness.

Steering, by rack and pinion, is light and accurate in both cars, but the feel is rather different. The Marcos' quick ratio and kick-back make the wheel very lively, although this car has an advantage in manoeuvrability – its turning circle is so much smaller (31ft against the TVR's 50ft). Otherwise the TVR's steering is superior, with a fluid action and a better ratio for road driving. Neither car has great brakes, their disc/drum set-ups lacking the bite and sustained stopping power of moderns.

To match the sense of occasion these gutsy cars bring to any drive, both have wonderfully purposeful interiors. The seats are deeply shaped, hugging you tightly, divided in both cars by a huge transmission tunnel, which adds to the feeling that you're shoehorned into a rocketship. Both dashboards display a fine array of instruments with the two big dials ahead of the driver and a row of minor gauges in the centre, rocker switches lined up below.

In terms of practicality – or lack of it – both cars have peculiarities. The 3000M's big disadvantage is the absence of an opening boot, although the luggage platform behind the seats provides plenty of space. With the Marcos poor forward visibility is a handicap, the high nose sometimes blocking too much of your sight from the ground-floor seating position – but the view down that long bonnet is fantastic. Ventilation is barely adequate in the TVR, but atrocious in the Marcos. Both have Triumph eyeball vents, but those in the Marcos can't overcome the engine heat that blasts upwards through the gearlever gaiter, sometimes making the knob uncomfortably hot to hold.

Such shortcomings, though, are a feature of most specialist sports cars, and part of their character. These machines are all about travelling fast in surroundings of exhilarating rawness, capturing the essentials of driving in a period when traffic was much less dense and in-car cupholders hadn't been thought about. They're both inspiring company, but the TVR is the better car. ♦



Marcos tweaked with overbore and three Webers; headlamp shields guard against reflections; deep cockpit hems in the driver tightly