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AUTOSPORT

BRITAIN'S MOTOR SPORTING WEEKLY

Brighton Run—JW's team—Turin Show—TVR test





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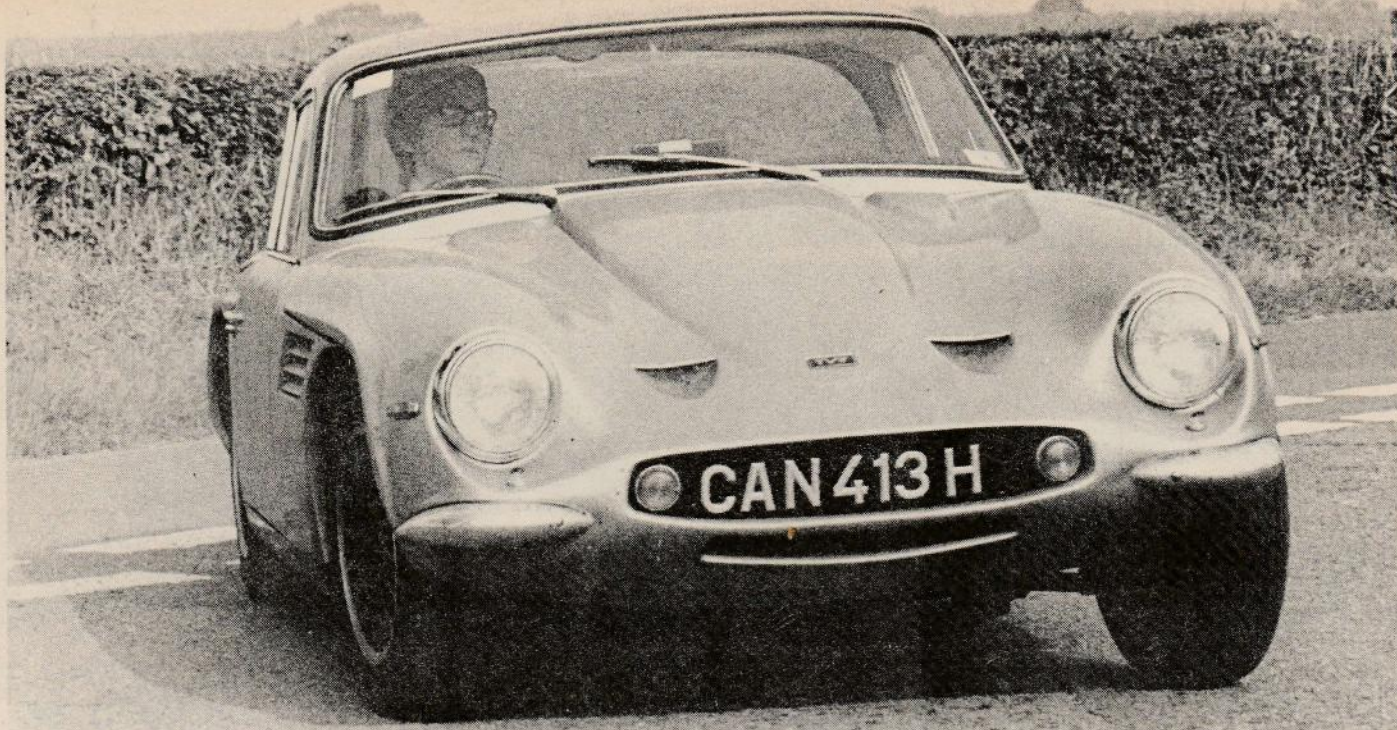
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39-19-11

Road test:

The TVR Tuscan V6

By SIMON TAYLOR

THE TVR has a history stretching back into the middle 1950s, when Trevor Wilkinson designed and built the first one, concocting its name from his own Christian name. It was a stubby little car with a tubular backbone chassis, all-independent suspension and a fibreglass body of rather abbreviated appearance because he used the same mould for the front and rear body sections.

It is a tribute to the original design that, although both the car and its manufacturing company have gone through many changes—power units utilised have ranged from the 1172 cc side-valve Ford 10 to the 4.7-litre Cobra V8—the specification of the original car is still clearly recognisable in its current descendant, the V6 Tuscan. Even the body shape has not changed all that much, although the Tuscan is still an attractive, aggressive-looking machine that turns plenty of heads. The torsion bar suspension has gone, the wheelbase has been lengthened and the finish and interior equipment have improved enormously over the years. The brutally fast 4.7-litre V8 Tuscan is now available only to special order, but the V6, using the 3-litre Ford Zodiac engine, is an effortless long-distance tourer with very healthy performance, and with its wide use of reliable mass-produced components, 22 mpg fuel consumption and price tag of less than £1,500 in kit form, it rates as one of the best performance-per-pound propositions on the market.

The compact V6 power unit, also used by TVR's competitors Marcos, Reliant and Gilbern, has escaped modification, although the fabricated exhaust manifold and simpler air cleaner demanded by the close confines of the installation probably add 5 bhp or so to the standard 140 bhp output. It is this quiet, flexible engine which gives the car much of its charm; the gearbox is standard Ford, too, with occasionally rather obtrusive synchromesh and a rather low second ratio, but with 192 lbs/ft of torque to move only 17 cwt,

it needn't be used that often. The test car had the optional Laycock overdrive (wired up to work on all four gears because the switch was faulty—it normally operates only on third and top) and this, in conjunction with a 3.3 to 1 final drive, gives a fraction under 27 mph per 1,000 rpm. A lower final drive would certainly improve the acceleration figures and probably also the maximum speed, for a very long stretch is needed to approach 120 mph, but most drivers will feel it worth making these small sacrifices in speed to be able to cruise at the legal limit, for example, at a near silent 2,700 rpm. To prove the point about flexibility I drove up a steep Somerset hill at 1500 rpm in overdrive top, with no murmur of protest from the car at this unfair treatment.

The excellently-finished fibreglass body (ours was finished in a pleasant metallic green) is nowadays bolted rather than bonded to the tubular chassis, and the construction seems to work well, for despite the firm springing there are no rattles or creaks. The front suspension is conventional enough, with double wishbones and coil-damper units, while at the back there are twin coil-damper units each side, one behind the cast upright and one ahead of it à la E-type, location again being by wishbones. The very handsome cast alloy wheels carry 165-15 Avon radials as standard equipment.

Entry into sporting coupés is never easy (unless you call a Bentley Continental a sporting coupé) but once aboard the TVR's driver is very comfortable. The Ambler-trimmed bucket seats are small and simple, with rather flexible backs, but when seat belts are used they are unobtrusively comfortable, and their fore-and-aft adjustment would keep the longest and shortest drivers happy, although the former might be a little short of headroom and the latter might find the scuttle rather high. The broad, high transmission tunnel and dash are all neatly trimmed in black leathercloth, while behind is

the TVR's biggest disadvantage as a car for Grand Touring—the luggage compartment. This comprises a carpeted shelf under the big rear window, which incidentally is of attractively-tinted but vision distorting Perspex; the spare wheel also lives there in a leathercloth cover. If you choose the shape and squishiness of your luggage carefully, you can just get in a weekend's luggage for two, but it all has to be loaded in through the narrow doors (as does the spare wheel—one hopes that TVR owners don't get punctures on wet, muddy nights when they are carrying luggage).

The dash carries all the usual instruments, clearly laid out, and neat piano key switches to keep safety-conscious transatlantic markets happy. Along with its Triumph Herald rack and pinion steering assembly, the TVR gets the Herald's column-mounted lights and winker switches—and also its phenomenal lock, which together with an overall length of 12 ft 1 in (shorter than a Morris 1100) makes life in towns very easy, although the car is 5 ft 4 in wide. The steering wheel is leather-rimmed and only 13 ins in diameter, but the steering feels heavy only at low speeds. The switches for the wipers and washers are rather hidden behind the steering wheel, and the overdrive switch is inconveniently near that for the flashers. Equipment includes a cigar lighter, reversing lights and a handbrake warning light, which also indicates low brake fluid level; the two-speed wipers do a good job, but in so small a coupé interior ventilation is not surprisingly a problem. Despite cold air vents and a blower fan, the car mists up very quickly on a muggy day unless a window is opened about an inch. Minor irritations were the fiddly door handles and window winders, which are recessed into the door trim to increase elbow room but work very stiffly, and the position of the handbrake, which is so close to the gearlever that it helps to let it off before selecting a gear. Thanks to the use of an electric cooling fan for the radiator, the water temperature remained undisturbed on hot days in traffic jams.

The straight-line performance of the Tuscan V6 is considerable, and all the more impressive because it feels so effortless. The straight-through exhaust pro-

duces an appealing boom at high revs, although from inside the car this is not loud enough to be tiring; in all other respects the car is very quiet, and feels much bigger than a 3-litre as it rushes forward in almost any gear. From a standing start it is easy to promote wheel-spin, but on all but bumpy roads the performance is no embarrassment. For fast main road work other road users are rapidly overtaken by flicking out of overdrive into direct top and prodding the throttle briefly. On narrower winding roads very high averages can be maintained by staying in third and using the overdrive switch to squirt up to 100 mph on short straights. The disc front/drum rear braking system of the Tuscan, aided by a servo, is very effective and the car pulls up straight and sure, although on the test car there was a very slight lag at the pedal which was a little disconcerting.

When hurrying along smooth, twisty roads the Tuscan is a delight. Although the Avons are not particularly wide by modern standards they have tremendous grip, and the car feels beautifully balanced and can be powered through corners with great confidence. The initial understeer eventually changes to oversteer and, although the tail can come round quite briskly as is to be expected with a wheelbase of only 7 ft 6 ins, it is all predictable and progressive. In the wet naturally the power-weight ratio demands sensible use of the throttle, but once again the car does not hide any nasty surprises.

On bumpy surfaces the driver does have his hands fairly full, mainly due to that ever-present TVR fault which has never been eradicated: severe kick-back through the steering. One soon learns to hold the wheel lightly and then the car will pursue a reasonably straight course. The suspension is quite firm, but not unfavourably so for a car of this sort; the main trouble seems to be the short travel, and it is not difficult to make the car leave the ground altogether over fairly minor humps.

Above 100 mph the acceleration naturally tails off quite sharply, and though given a long enough straight we have no doubt that the Tuscan V6 would attain 125 mph (still 5 mph short of the catalogued maximum), the very new test car, which had completed barely 1000 miles when we took it over, would not do more than 119 mph in overdrive top—although it would pull 5500 rpm in direct top, which is equivalent to 120 mph. We respected the red line on the



Smooth, winding country roads bring out the best in the Tuscan.

39.19.12

rev-counter at 5500 rpm when taking performance figures, although in the lower gears the engine seemed happy to rev that far and beyond. As a relaxed motorway car, with its quiet engine and high gearing, it is splendid, and some of the notes for this test were dictated to my passenger while cruising at 95-105 mph on a long early-morning motorway run.

The engine and ancillaries are easily accessible under the front-hinging nose section. The car was absolutely trouble-free throughout our 1200-mile test, apart from breaking a bracket in the exhaust system: this is another recurrent TVR fault, for with two people and their luggage on board it is easy for the tailpipes to bottom on bumps.

The Barnet Motor Co, the long-established London TVR dealers who supplied the test car, also lent us a Vixen for a day or two. This is the 1600 Cortina GT-engined version, and apart from its engine and gearbox is identical to its bigger sister, and provides brisk and economical performance at a saving of £350 (one or two of the Tuscan's features, like the alloy wheels, are optional extras on the Vixen). But it was the effortless torquey

go of the Tuscan that really appealed, and for the customer who wants a lot of performance and style for £1500 the Tuscan V6 merits very serious consideration.

SPECIFICATION AND PERFORMANCE DATA

Car tested: TVR Tuscan V6. Price in kit form £1,492. Overdrive £85 extra.

Engine: Ford Zodiac, six cylinders in 60-deg Vee, 93.7 mm x 72.4 mm, 2994 cc. Pushrod-operated overhead valves. Compression ratio 8.9 to 1. 147 bhp SAE at 4750 rpm. Weber 40DFA twin-choke down-draught carburettor.

Transmission: Single dry plate diaphragm spring clutch. Four-speed all-synchromesh gearbox with central lever, ratios 3.163, 2.214, 1.412 and 1.0 to 1. Laycock de Normanville overdrive, ratio 0.8205 to 1. Hypoid bevel final drive, ratio 3.31 to 1.

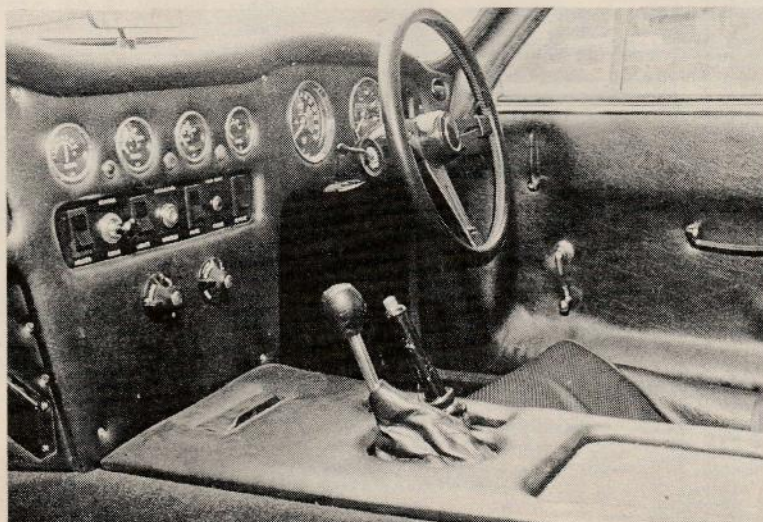
Chassis: Tubular steel backbone frame. Independent suspension by wishbones and coil-damper units (front), wishbones and double coil-damper units (rear). Rack and pinion steering. 10.85 ins diameter front disc brakes, 9 ins rear drum brakes, servo assistance. Bolt-on cast alloy wheels fitted 165 x 15 Avon radial tyres.

Equipment: 12-volt lighting and starting with 57 a/h battery. Speedometer, tachometer, oil pressure, fuel and water temperature gauges, ammeter. Heating, demisting and ventilation system. Flashing direction indicators with hazard warning. Two-speed windscreen wipers and washer.

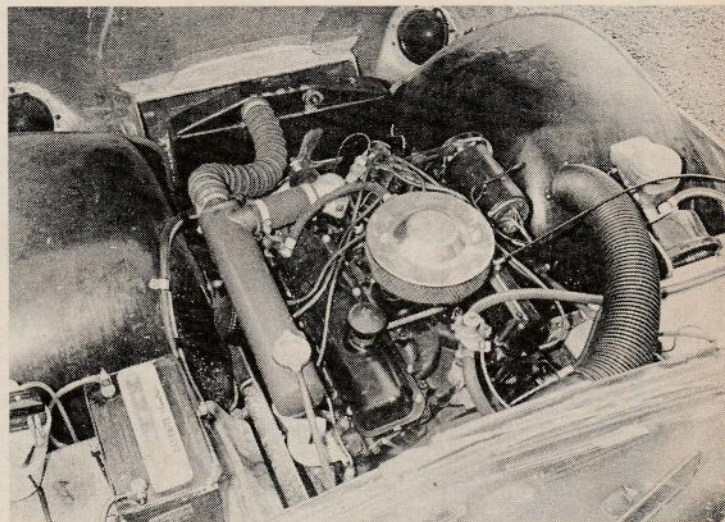
Dimensions: Wheelbase 7 ft 6 ins. Track (front), 4 ft 5 ins; (rear), 4 ft 6 ins. Overall length 12 ft 1 in. Overall width 5 ft 4 ins. Overall height 4 ft. Ground clearance 5 ins. Weight (wet): 17 cwt 3 qrs.

Performance: Maximum speed, 125 mph (see text). Speeds in gears: Direct top, 120 mph; overdrive third, 104 mph; direct third, 87 mph; second, 56 mph; first, 38 mph. Acceleration: 0-30: 2.7 s; 0-50, 5.9 s; 0-60, 8.2 s; 0-70, 11.3 s; 0-80, 14.3 s; 0-90, 18.5 s; 0-100, 24.2 s.

Fuel consumption: 19-23 mpg.



Interior trim in black leathercloth is neat, and instrumentation is comprehensive (left). The nose-section swings forward for excellent under-bonnet accessibility (right).



39.19-13, 39.19-14

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