

# THIS Griffith made TVR



*With the Griffith, sexy curves replaced Eighties wedginess and TVR went Porsche-baiting. This particular car earned Blackpool a brand new reputation*

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**YOU'VE PROBABLY** seen this car before, though not as it is now. TVR fans will recognize the numberplate: J524 MHG starred on the covers of car magazines that celebrated the launch of the Griffith in 1992. 'Loud, proud and provocative, the Great British muscle car is back,' proclaimed *Car*. 'For lovers of raw, chic sports cars, the sort Ferrari used to make, the Griffith will exhilarate and satisfy. One blip of the throttle will bring out the big, grinning kid in you.'

It's one boisterously child-like grin that's splitting my face as the thunderous exhaust note of the gorgeously bad-looking Griff threatens to split my ears. But this car, like the company that created it, has

undergone a long and arduous journey since praise was first stacked upon it. Like TVR itself, it's lucky to be alive.

'TVR had a policy of leaving unused cars languishing outside in damp, salty Blackpool air,' says owner Steve Prevett. 'When I rescued this one, it had to spend six weeks drying out before it could be restored.'

That restoration is one you'll struggle to see. The bodywork is as it was, with a few battle scars here and there and the odd patch of newer paint applied at the factory, along with a new hood. The interior is gently scuffed in a homely way, lived-in >>>



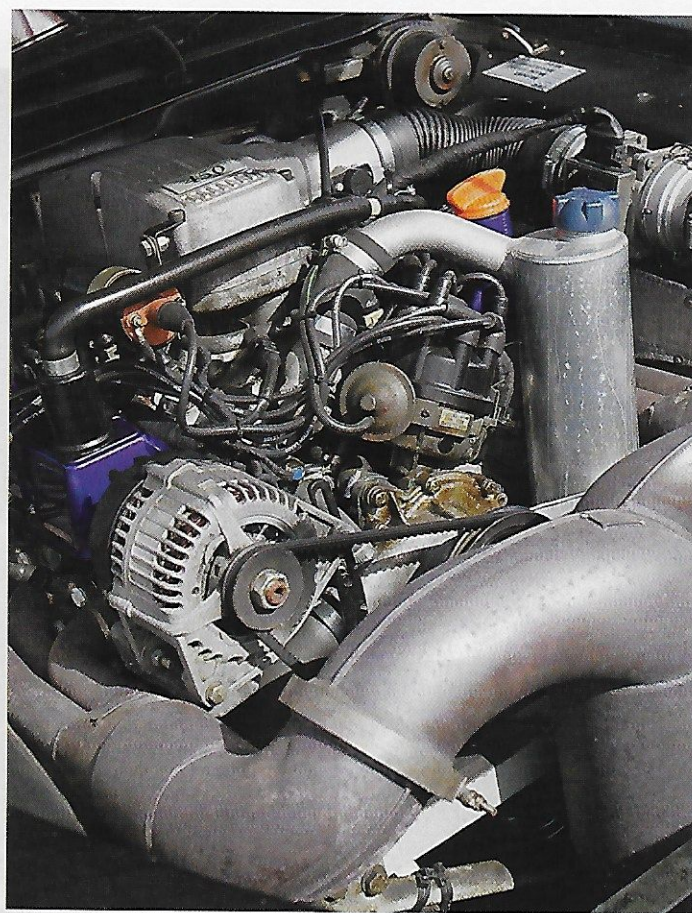


Curvaceous bodywork is more than just gorgeous cladding: it represented a serious hike in build quality for TVR





**Left: dashboard swoops around you, housing instruments from this car's experimental phase  
Right: 4.5-litre V8 is a legacy of its development car life**



rather than shiny and carrying non-standard instruments in the dashboard. The menacingly grey powder-coated wheels aren't original Griffith five-spoke fare: they're Cerbera wheels, running on five-stud, rather than four-stud hubs. And that's a clue to the secret life this Griffith led after the limelight of being the press demonstrator car was switched off.

BACK TO 1992, and *Car* is celebrating TVR's new-found confidence. J524 MHG is the evidence that TVR is capable of chasing the established big-name sports car brands. More than that, TVR had no choice: when the Griffith was first shown as a concept car at the British Motor Show in 1990, its stunning looks generated interest from people with a Porsche on their shopping list. So, in just two years, TVR developed the production car around a modified version of the Tuscan racer's plastic-coated steel backbone chassis and rear suspension with 240bhp and 280bhp versions of the Rover V8, specially built to TVR's requirements. But it's the detail design that really displays TVR's progress: specially milled aluminium door releases, a dashboard that swoops organically around the driver rather than (literally) boxing him in, and a moulded glassfibre body with only four visible external joints that minimizes the amount of time-consuming and quality-compromising hand-finishing. Other joints are hidden behind the Griffith's characteristic and marque-defining disappearing panel edges. They make the shutlines easier to manage consistently too. In one move, the flakiness of the wedge era is gone and the old ballsiness is cranked up a notch or three.

Under J524's bonnet today is a 4.5-litre V8, related to the Tuscan racing engine but in a milder state of tune. 'It's one of about a dozen TVR built,' says Prevett. 'I haven't had it tested but it's not a racing engine. Its power is probably around the same as the standard 4.3-litre, but I reckon there's a lot more torque.'

Ironically, it was a TVR V8 engine without a home that led Prevett to this car. 'I'd been running a

Lichfield Range Rover with a TVR engine, which I'd had supercharged. The car died and the engine blew up, so I had it rebuilt and wanted a sports car to put it in, ideally a broken Griffith.' Prevett had been in regular contact with TVR's PR chief Ben Samuelson on a professional basis, who invited him to come and see the old press car. 'It was in a sorry state but the engine was fine, and it had a really interesting history. I just couldn't butcher it.' The supercharged engine is still in a crate.

When this car retired after a hard-working year as the press demonstrator, TVR's chief chassis engineer Neill Anderson took it over as his company car. 'The engine had been robbed and it just sat around,' he says. 'I threw it back together with another standard engine and ran it like that for a couple of years.'

That time coincided with the development of the Cerbera and Anderson began experimenting with the suspension. 'I fabricated new uprights and wishbones so I could play with the Cerbera set-up on a real car,' says Anderson. 'For a while it ran with five-stud wheels only at the front, then I designed a new disc and handbrake arrangement for the rear with new hubs too.'

TVR had also been working on a new 5.3-litre stretch for the Rover V8, and one of these found its way into the car for a couple of years. 'I competed in sprints and hill climbs with it and won the British Sprint Championship in 1995 and '96,' says Anderson. 'I'd turn up, put the numbers on, get the trophy and drive home again. I never put a scratch on it.'

The 5.3-litre engine ran a long-stroke cast crank, had masses of low-down torque but became harsh and ran out of power at high engine speeds. 'That crank was flexible and knocked out the bearings, so it didn't go far between rebuilds,' says Anderson.

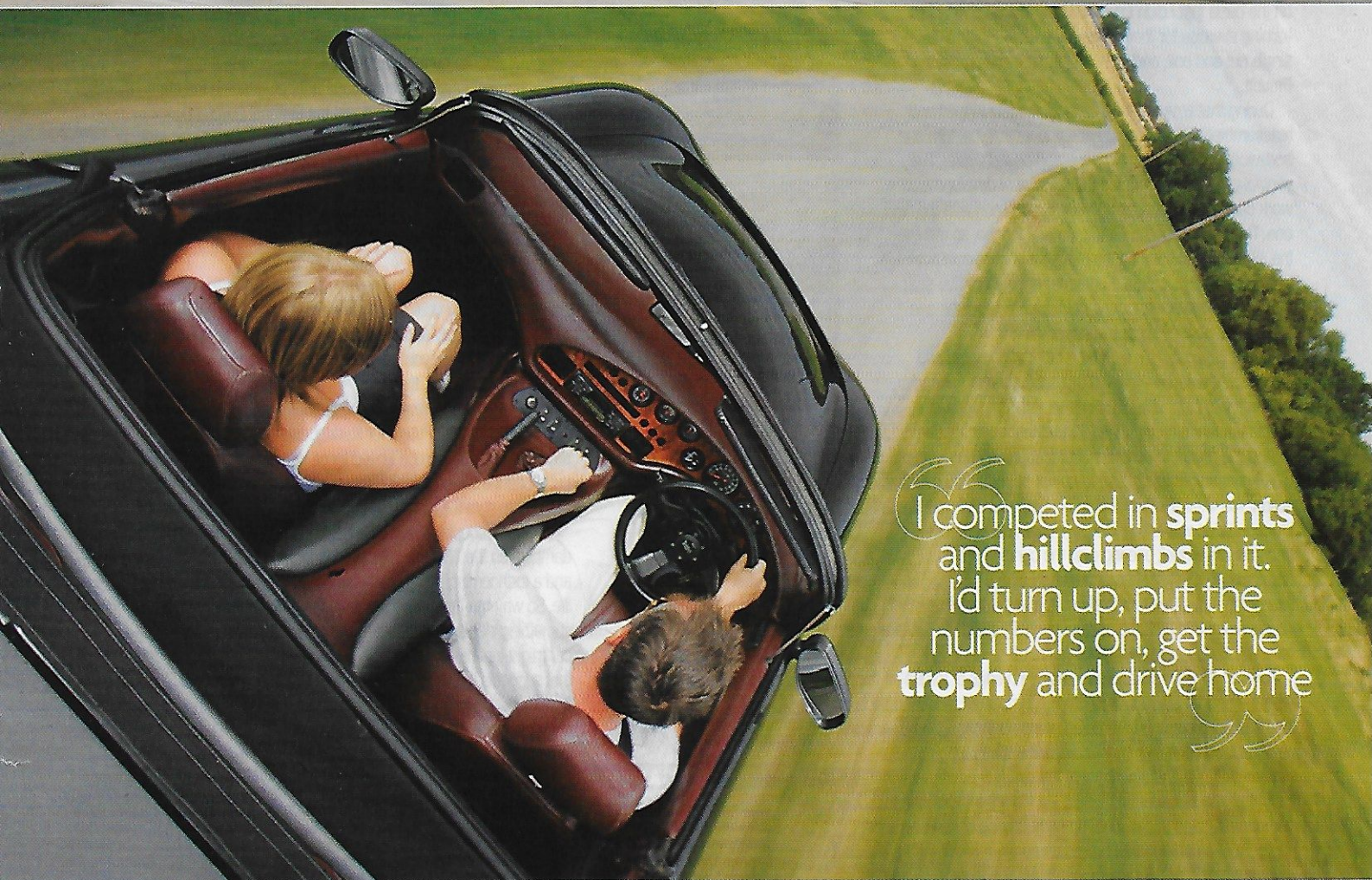
By 2001, tax laws meant the pre-catalyst Griffith became more expensive to run as a company car, a baby daughter arrived and Anderson had no time to develop the Griffith any further. Its time had run out — for a while.

Steve Prevett turned up in 2003. Part of the deal ➤➤

**Steve Prevett rescued this Griffith from the sea air of Blackpool. Good man**

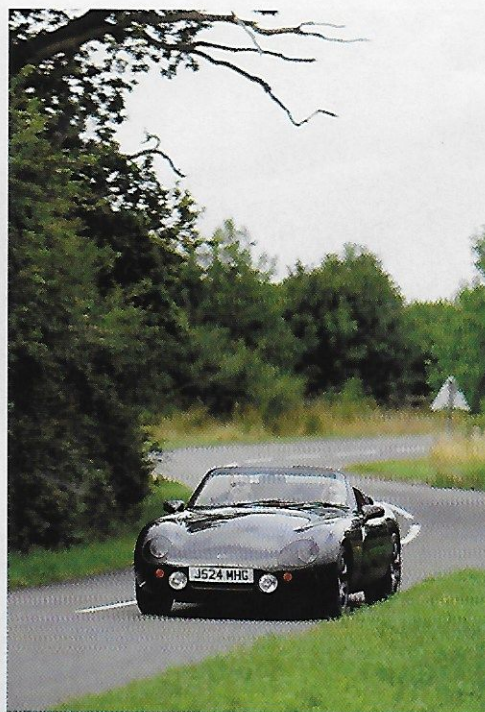






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he struck was that the car (engineless, but to be sold with the 4.5-litre engine) would be restored by newly appointed TVR dealer HL Gomer in Wigan. 'They did it for a fixed price, on the basis that I didn't need it ready in a hurry. It was a training exercise for their technicians. They replaced every single nut and bolt, and the job took 18 months,' says Prevett.

During that time the 4.5-litre engine was stripped and reassembled – 'it was unworn' – and the original trim and bodywork was transferred to a brand new chassis. 'The original chassis was rotten and, because of development work carried out at TVR, it had little in common with the new one. The Cerbera had gone into production too, so many of the experimental parts on the old chassis were now available to bolt onto the new one.' So the car retained its five-stud hubs, Cerbera wheels, differential and racing brakes and became as new under its distinctly patinated skin.

'Some would say it's a bit tatty, but it's functional and that's how it was. I like cars to be usable; I don't go mad putting it in a paint shop to sort a scratch. I'm too busy driving it how it's meant to be driven.'

And it *is* meant to be driven. Hard. You can't help yourself really, not with that fabulously loud and truculent-sounding V8 goading you into action. You wear the Griff like an intimate piece of clothing: it slips around you as you're clamped low-down between door and transmission tunnel, peering over the curve of the dash, your feet disappearing straight ahead, the wheel where it should be in relation to everything else. It feels natural and exciting. Move that meaty alloy-capped lever into first and release the hefty clutch as you pile on some revs. Whoomph, grapple, shove: you're off.

Acceleration is rapid and effortless, with bags of torque all the way from the bottom of the tachometer, accompanied by a V8 rumble that's loud and deep enough to threaten nearby buildings. Some cars growl and snarl. This one sounds like a minor earthquake.

Changing gears enables you to feel metal against metal in a way no contemporary of the Griffith would – a Porsche 911's shift feels inert and plasticky by comparison. The same feeling of heft and effort applies to the non-servoed brakes and power-free steering. The Griff really is a modern rework of an old-fashioned ideal.



The Griffith received a full-on mechanical restoration but the bodywork wears its history with pride

But the more effort you put in, the greater is your reward. At low speeds, driving is pretty hard work and you feel the bumps filtering through the suspension and, ultimately, the driving seat. Turn up the wick and the ride smoothes out, the steering stops hurting your biceps and the brakes become reassuringly firm: stomp on them and they'll stop you, step more lightly and they'll wipe away excess speed without standing the car on its nose.

Turn in to a bend and the Griff will obediently follow its nose, though you know you can play the hooligan and slide the tail if you like. Just boot the throttle and release the rear tyres from their ample grip on the road. But if you drive with smooth efficiency, you'll just as likely be blown away by the Griffith's consistency of reaction. It's only mad and bad when you want it to be.

One thing you never get away from is the noise it makes, but you could hardly tire of that. And the same goes for the endlessly addictive acceleration. Now, just as when the Griffith was new, you'd have to pay a hell of a lot more for a car that feels faster than this.

Steve Prevett has been enjoying his Griffith for two years:

'I like to use it for touring, and I've done a couple of track days in it too. But you don't need those where I live.' Prevett's playground is Lancashire's West Pennine moors, 30 miles inland from TVR's Blackpool home. 'I'm sure they tested them round here. It really feels at home.'

Beyond a couple of suspension tweaks – 'I fitted Nitron adjustable dampers so the 18in wheels wouldn't foul the wheelarches in extremes' – and a forthcoming rolling road test, this Griff is all ready for its new lease of life. So why has Prevett bought a wedge-shaped TVR 350? 'I needed something else so I could get my spanners out,' he confesses. And this car might just be a bit special too. 'I found a tag under the steering column that suggests it was built for the 1984 Motor Show.' It seems that one famous car isn't enough for this man, even though it's the one that changed TVR's fortunes.

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#### 1992 TVR GRIFFITH

**Engine** 4441cc, V8, ohv, fuel injection **Power and torque** 280bhp @ 5500rpm; 305lb ft @ 4000rpm (standard 4.3-litre) **Transmission** Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Steering** Rack-and-pinion **Suspension** Front and rear: independent, wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **Brakes** Discs front and rear **Weight** 1045kg (2304lb) **Performance** Top speed: 161mph; 0-60mph: 4.7sec **Fuel consumption** 18-22mpg **Cost new** £28,295 **Value now** £20,000