



PHOENIX KNIGHTS

The Taimar and S breathed new life into TVR's M series: Richard Heseltine drives Ford-powered hatch and convertible from Blackpool's '70s era

PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER



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Offered in three configurations, baby of the family was the 1600M with a 1599cc Ford 'Kent' engine that proved a slow seller and was dropped the following year, only to be reintroduced in '75 and then canned again shortly thereafter. Then there was the 2500M with its 2498cc Triumph straight-six that proved a big hit overseas but whose emissions-emasculated performance kept it out of the UK line-up from 1973.

More resonant to the home market was the 3000M that was to become a mainstay throughout the '70s. Confined to Britain for much of its life as its 2994cc Ford V6 was 'dirty', it was essentially a virtuous machine but not without its flaws. *Motor* complimented the range topper's performance (121mph and 0-60mph in 7.8 secs) but judged that, with better accommodation and ventilation, 'this already desirable car would be very good indeed'.

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FACTFILE

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Engine front mounted 2994cc cast-iron ohv V6 fed by dual-choke Weber carburettor

Transmission four-speed all-synchro manual (in-house overdrive optional)

Construction tubular steel backbone with glassfibre body

Suspension: front and rear independent by double wishbones and coil springs, telescopic dampers

Brakes discs front, drums rear, servo-assisted

Steering rack and pinion

Max power 142bhp @ 5000rpm

Max torque 172lb ft @ 3000rpm

0-60mph 7.5 secs

Top speed 117mph (115mph)

Height 1143mm (1117mm)

Width 1625mm

Length 3937mm

Weight 2063lb (2000lb)

Track front: rear 1365mm: 1365mm

Price new £7886 (£7591) 1979

Price now £5-6000 (£8-9000)

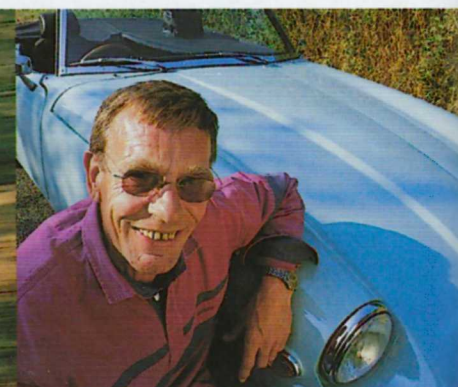
ever equipped with the blue oval V6. Though visually near identical to the M-series cars, save for minor badging, biggest change was the addition of a rear hatch. Boot space was virtually doubled to 6 cu ft with only a 20lb weight penalty, the tailgate operated by a neat button in the driver's door jamb. By merit of greatly enhanced practicality, and without any sacrifice to the M's attractive rear styling, the Taimar soon proved popular despite the hefty £585 premium over the 3000M.

But Lilley wasn't finished. Two years later he followed through with the Convertible (or 3000S as it's more commonly referred to) at a time when ragtops were all but extinct among the bigger players. Though underneath the same steel backbone chassis and all-round double wishbones and coils suspension stayed in place, this was much more than just a top chop conversion. Reworking the existing shell was greatly involved. The outline below the waist remained similar but the windscreen was changed from Mk1 Ford Consul (a long time TVR constant) to a cut-down Jensen-Healey item within a custom frame. At the rear was an entirely new tail section with a separate boot compartment for reasonable stowage space and doors with cut-down tops that, while slightly odd in appearance, made for ideal armrests when cruising.

Thanks to the new screen, the fascia had to be revised as there was no longer room above the steering column for the tachometer and speedo, these items being moved to the centre of the dash. Another snag was the lack of wind-down windows due to the reprofiling of the doors, detachable side screens being an anachronism during the late '70s.

So it continued until November 1979 when all models were dropped (despite remaining on the price list until spring of the following year) as TVR underwent a paradigm shift in ethos,

Convertible, more commonly referred to as the 3000S, is more than just a roof chop, with an entirely new rear end. Screen is a cut-down Jensen-Healey item. Dash' revised from Taimar



DÉPARTAMENT S

Clive Westmacott bought his delightful '79 3000S a year ago following a protracted bout of owning "boring cars": "All part of having a family I'm afraid. I grew up around proper cars: my dad was in the VSCC. In the past I had a Riley Nine Monaco and considered buying another before getting this but they're too pricey. I bought the TVR because it has character and a classic feel: there are no black boxes to get in the way."

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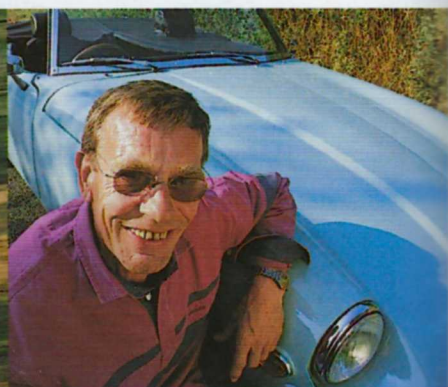
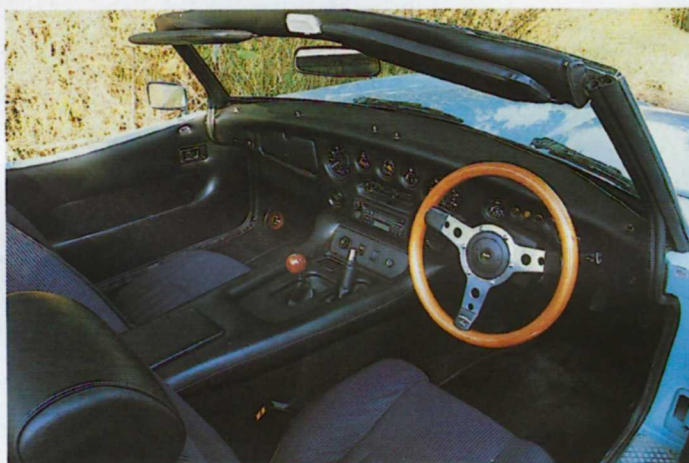
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THE MISSING LINK

TVR's all-consuming drive for greater power is nothing new. Witness the Griffith and Tuscan V8s during the '60s. But while the Blackpool firm was busy experimenting with forced induction in the '70s with Broadspeed-built V6s, it wasn't altogether out of choice. It wanted Rover's V8. It's just that Morgan had first – and exclusive – dibs on the all-alloy classic. However, that didn't stop as many as 12 M-series cars disappearing out the back door to the



closely affiliated Barnet Motor Company – less engine – for an 'aftermarket conversion'. This isn't one of them (none are known to survive) but a close facsimile. Belonging to TVR Car Club director Tony Connor, his metallic blue '72 example began life as a Triumph-engined 2500M: "I heard about the car last year after a guy wrote to me, suggesting an article about the conversion for the club magazine. I told him that if ever he sold the car, I'd love to have it. A few months later, he rang me up and said it was for sale – I bit his arm off."

With further suspension mods by Andy Larkins (Ford Focus WRC engineer), it's the handling that grabs you. Running on trick Leda spring/damper units, the ride is hard but the car turns in with real poise with

negligible oversteer on exit and acceleration from the mildly updated 3.5-litre V8 that's as immediate as it is vocal. Only the SD1-sourced gearbox, with its Sherpa van linkage extension, lets the side down, being difficult to engage in a hurry: a worry considering its future use in sprinting.

As a might-have-been, it's fascinating; that TVR could have been making good use of the Rover V8 a decade earlier than with the wedgy 350/390s. A pity, but not as much as the JAG of Ontario's Ford 302 V8-powered Taimar 5000. Again, just 12 were built – having earlier disappeared out the back door.



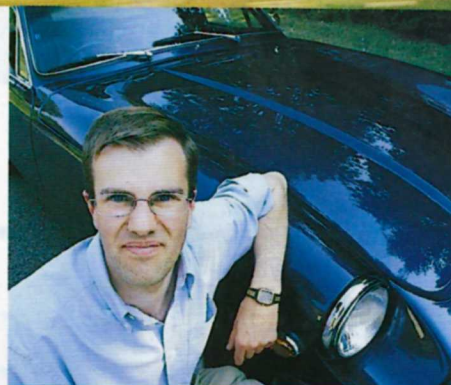
Taimar was ultimate incarnation of 30 years of chop-and-change TVR styling. Rear hatch added much-needed practicality but with only 20lb extra weight. Cabin roomier than you might expect

attempting to move further upmarket with the less lovely 280/Tasmin wedges. Around 395 Taimars had been made, along with 258 Convertibles.

Not surprisingly, it's the 3000S that retains the biggest retinue these days while the Taimar continues to be under-appreciated. Marque expert Doug Ellwood claims: "At the present time, the open top car is understandably the most desirable. There are some out there with their original owners as they like them so much. The thing is, there are probably short of 100 in the UK, of which few are on the road. Personally I think it's a tremendous-looking car, especially when naked with all the weather equipment off, but even a very good example will only go for £7-9000."

Ellwood says it's probably the best of that era of TVRs although you have to be wary of all the usual stuff: "Check that the chassis is sound. I always say that unless you can prove that the frame isn't rotten, it probably is. That's a relatively easy fix but of course it's going to cost quite a bit. More worrying are the pieces unique to the car. Windscreens aren't a problem but the chromed-steel surrounds are. If they're rusty, it's going to be expensive to replace. As with most cars of this type, electrics can be a worry, and the fuel tanks can rot out. Even when they were only a few years old, it was relatively commonplace to smell petrol in the boot."

Even Ellwood admits there's not a lot of demand for the Taimar: "A good, usable car can probably be picked up for around £5-6000 – it would have to be something pretty exceptional to go for more. Right now, Granturas and Vixens in particular are selling well but the '70s stuff isn't. The thing with the Taimar is that it isn't quite as stiff as the M-series cars because of the opening rear hatch and, even when they were new, it wasn't unusual for exhaust fumes to find their way into the cabin. As to what to



FORWOOD ENGINEERING

About as perfect a Taimar as you're ever likely to encounter, **Justin Forwood's** 1977 example currently lives with an early 'non-cat' Griffith: "I bought the car in 1991 and spent just over 2 1/2 years restoring it. Everything was stripped down and rebuilt apart from the gearbox which only needed new seals." Buying the car had such an effect he's now the Buckinghamshire area organiser for the TVR Car Club.



look out for, it pretty much mirrors the S. Really, people want open cars and, with more plentiful and newer models such as the V8S or early Griffiths getting cheaper, a lot of enthusiasts are holding out for those."

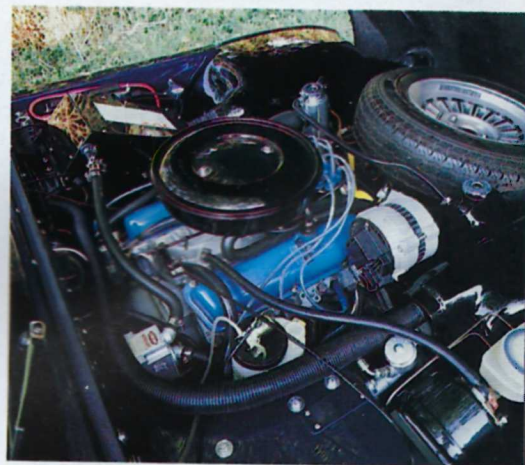
Not that you should be put off as these '70s throwbacks are huge fun, dispelling many, if not quite all, preconceptions of low-volume specialist sports cars. Until the arrival of the much-maligned wedges, TVR didn't so much style cars as leave them to evolve and the Taimar is easily the most cohesive of models made during the firm's first 30 years. And while the proportions aren't quite right – the centre section still looks a little lost thanks to those small doors – it remains a pretty car. Characterful, too.

Same too for the roadster which, in the right colour – here, a BMW Z3 pale blue – is quite charming. As with most creations of Britain's cottage industry of small scale car manufacturers, there lingers a slight air of budget-led expediency. Part of the fun, if only as an onlooker, is spotting which parts bin each component has been lifted from and TVR is a past master: door handles from a MkIV Cortina, tail lights from a Scimitar. The flip-forward front end is a boon for engine access but it scrapes on the ground when opened (after chipping paint the first time, most owners place a floor mat under the nose) and a puncture will only exacerbate the problem: the spare tyre lives



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Above: roof removal was a natural move for TVR – remarkable that it took so long to get around to it. Ford V6 was a specialist sports car staple during the '70s. Spare tyre in front of radiator



horizontally, high up in front of the radiator.

Having squeezed into the Taimar, it's nowhere near as cramped as you might expect. The transmission tunnel is wide, yet the seats are comfortable with enough lateral support. Pedals are slightly offset to the right but well spaced and the wheel (here a later Momo item) is well sited without obscuring the classic white-on-black Smiths instruments. Ventilation isn't its strong suit with only Triumph-sourced eyeball vents to keep you cool although the optional fold-back Webasto roof does a good job of dissipating heat.

The 3000S' cabin copies that of its fixed-lid brother even if the repositioning of the instruments isn't ideal as the primary gauges are out of natural line of sight. Without a roof, it feels markedly less claustrophobic and reasonably spacious, too. On the move, there's a little scuttle shake as you might expect but none of the crashing and banging that usually goes with it. And for all the talk of the Taimar being less rigid than the M-series coupés, you'd never know. This impeccably restored example feels remarkably tight and together.

On smooth roads, presuming you can find any in the UK, both cars display polished manners with a firm but not harsh ride thanks in part to compliant springing and the independent rear end. The mix of comfort and handling is near spot on for a sports car. It's only when you misjudge a pothole that you can feel the odd graunch. With the open car in particular, it's easy to ground the exhaust as there's barely 2in of clearance.

Twisty roads are a joy in either car with a neutral stance on entry into corners, gently shifting into mild oversteer on powering through. The rack-and-pinion steering is reasonably meaty and unswervingly accurate with a fluidity of attitude that isn't robbed by power assistance. Over heavily rutted roads, you can feel a little resonance through the wheel but nothing to spoil your enjoyment.

Best of all is the Ford V6. Though not an overtly sporting unit, the cast-iron ohv 'Essex' 3-litre unit offers a mellow backbeat and enough torque (172lb ft at 3000rpm) to pull you forwards regardless of gear from near walking pace, even if it does get a little breathless

towards the upper reaches of the rev range. On the debit side, the gearlever is positioned too far back to make comfortable use of the Capri four-speeder, with a massively tall lever on the Taimar. On the S, it's more stubby and changes are positive enough but on both you're forced to move your left shoulder back rather than simply flicking your wrist. The brakes too, could do with a little more initial bite.

TVRs from this period are far from perfect: you wouldn't expect them to be. Neither car does anything exceptionally well, just more than well enough. They're perhaps a little raw for some tastes but exhilarating with it being sports car in the truest sense. And while the '70s strain may lack the Technicolor dazzle of more recent editions, there's none of their crass detailing and rude boy posturing either. Just try to find something that offers as much amusement for the same money as a Taimar or 3000S. It might take a while. ♦

Thanks to TVR Car Club; tel: 01952 770635 or see www.tvrcc.com