

TVR : makers of exciting sports cars

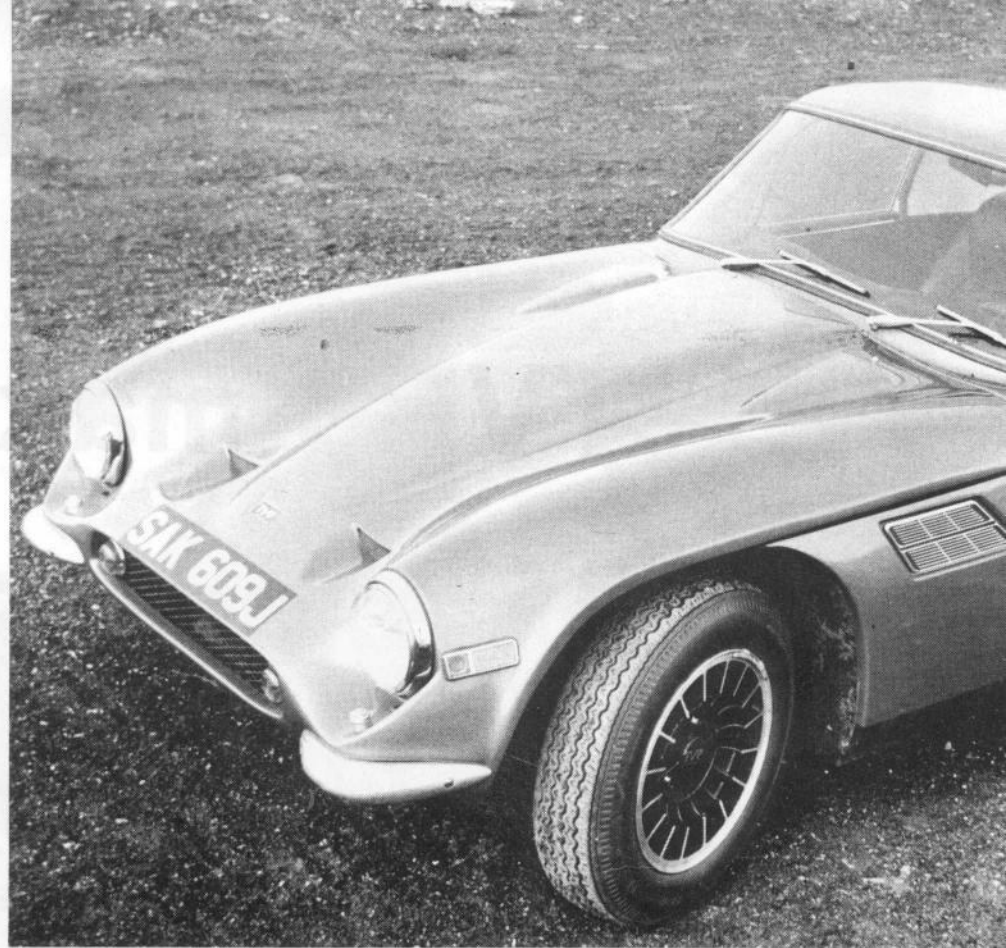
JOHN BOLSTER

TVR: makers of exciting sports cars

Though specialised sports cars come and go, the TVR has been a part of the motoring scene for a good many years. It has always featured a tubular space-frame in the form of a backbone, with strong tubular outriggers to carry the body and protect the occupants. The body is of glassfibre and, though the sharply cut-off rear of the earlier models has been replaced by a more attractive tail, the general shape is recognisably the same.

Perhaps the most important feature of the TVR is its independent four-wheel suspension. So many specialised sports cars have been spoilt by their live rear axles, which have been reluctantly adopted for cost reasons. A light car with a short wheelbase can have excellent roadholding with a rigid axle, provided that a very hard ride is tolerated. Now that everybody goes abroad, this solution is unacceptable, for no sports car owner wishes to be overtaken by those flying French saloons while he leaps in agony from bump to pothole.

Yet the prices of the three TVR models are very moderate by today's standards. With similar chassis and bodies, the cars are the Vixen S3, with a 1600 Capri engine, at £1,325 in kit form; the 2500, with a six-cylinder Triumph engine, at £1,500; and the Tuscan, with a V6 Zodiac engine, at £1,635. All the engines carry their own gearboxes, and there



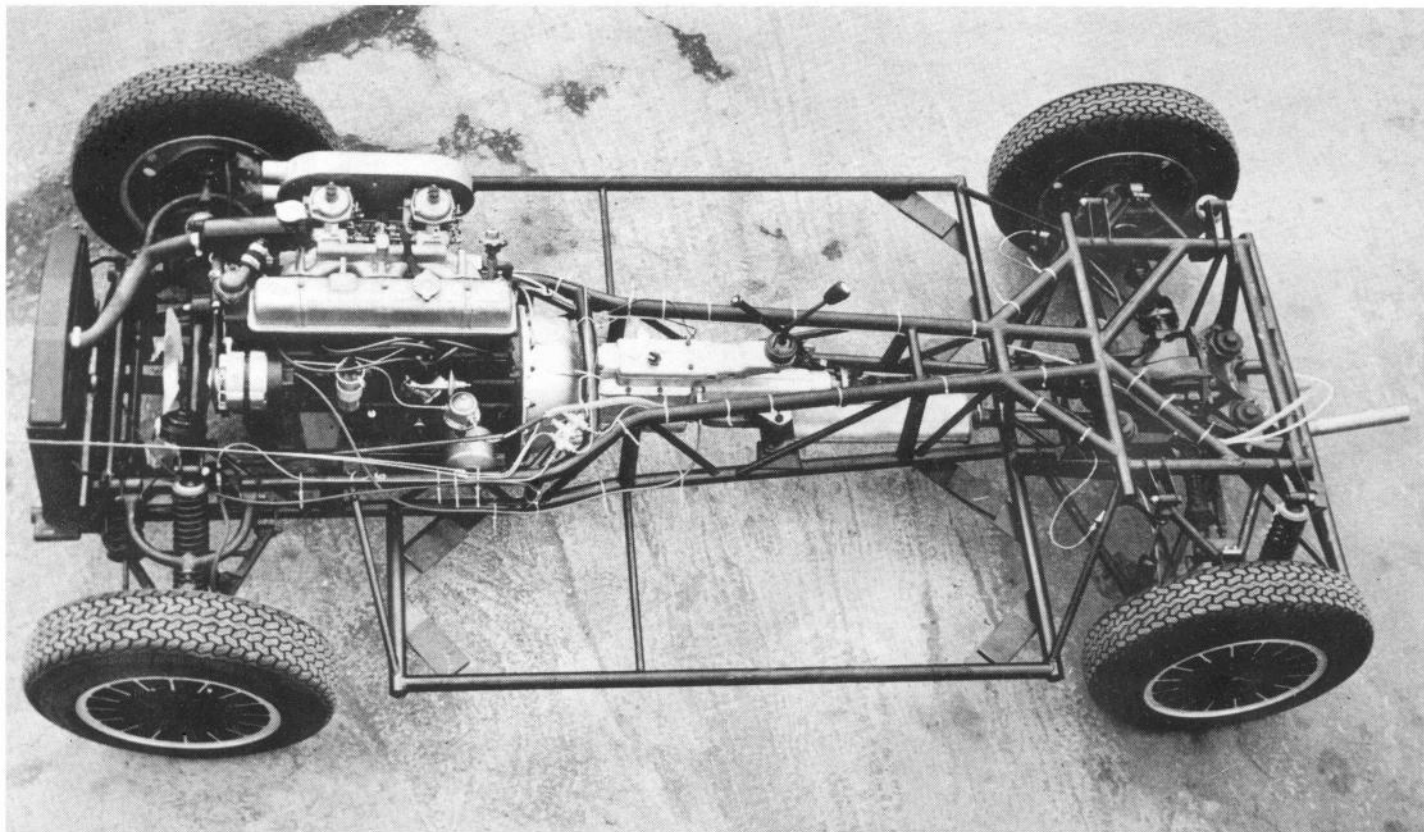
This is the aggressive-looking TVR shape which is available with 1.6-, 2.5- or 3.0-litre engines.

is plenty of space for an overdrive. The Vixen has the hypoid final drive unit of the Triumph Vitesse, the 2500 that of the TR6, and the Tuscan has the Salisbury unit as used on Jaguars.

The sturdy wishbone-type suspension, front and rear, is adjustable for tracking and camber. Girling brakes, with 11in discs in front and 10in drums behind, have dual hydraulic circuits and a vacuum servo is standard. The steering is by rack and pinion.

The type of suspension chosen takes up a good deal of space, so no attempt is made to fit bodies with more than two seats, but proper racing-type suspension is regarded as a more valuable feature than the usual token accommodation for legless dwarfs. The 165-15 tyres, HR on the V6, are generally Avons in England and Pirellis for export, on the attractive TVR light-alloy wheels. The radiator is by Auto Services, with a separate small header beside the engine.

A standard feature of all TVRs has been the tubular space-frame chassis in the form of a backbone.





Through the years there have been various changes of management at TVR, but the firm is now owned and run by Martin Lilley, with a total work force of 64 people. The main operation moved to a new factory at Blackpool in January. The bodies are still made at Marton Moss and transported to the new factory, but this is being enlarged so that the complete cars will eventually be built under one roof. A careful selection of dealers has been made, and there are 20 distributed throughout the country.

Martin Lilley does not wish to let the business expand, regarding the present production as ideal from many points of view, especially that of keeping the cars exclusive. He thinks that buying specialist sports cars is usually undertaken with the object of having something different, and the appeal is lost as soon as the machines are to be seen everywhere. The typical TVR owner goes for its advanced specification, its appearance and its rarity value, as well as its sports car handling. The cars are built to order, and so the buyer gets exactly what he wants.

The production is about 8 cars a week, of which 50 per cent go to the USA. The present proportion in a four-week period is 20 of the 2500, 10 of the Vixen, and 2 of the V6. The 2500 is the car for the American market because the engine is delivered with approved anti-pollution equipment. Incidentally, Martin Lilley was warm in his praise of Triumphs, who are an excellent firm to deal with and always send the engines when promised—an essential requirement for export orders.

As much of the car as possible is made by TVR, including the chassis, suspension parts and the whole of the body and trim, although the seats are exclusively supplied by Terry Hunter Ltd. The chassis frame is CO₂ welded on a jig and the body is not bonded to it but bolted on with rubber insulation. I was most impressed by the very great care which is taken in building up the glassfibre bodies, which pass through a curing oven. The men who do the paint job are real experts and obtain an excellent finish. An advantage of having the factory in Blackpool seems to be the availability of skilled men, for this is a hand-built car.

Variations to the specification can be incorporated when the production rate is not too high. For America a perspex rear window is not permitted and glass must be employed, while elaborate rear light clusters are essential. In the name of safety, the Americans go out of their way to make cars more dangerous! However, they are so taken with the sunshine roof that this is now standard on every TVR delivered to them.

Being completely independent of any other firm, TVR are able to reduce costs by their own efficiency. There is a pleasant atmosphere at the factory and one can sense that the men are real sports car enthusiasts. This is

understandable, for there is no comparison between working among a bunch of blokes that you know and being part of the vast anonymity of some great firm.

While I was at Blackpool, I took the opportunity of driving the new Triumph-engined 2500. The car I used was too new to be fully extended, but as I was not taking performance figures this did not really matter. I have driven many a TVR in the past, with Coventry Climax, BMC and Ford engines, including a hairy great V8. The straight-six is more refined than any of these, and the whole car had an air of quality which added to the pleasure of handling it.

The 2500 is still just as much a sports car as its predecessors, but the makers have realised that the sporting driver will no longer accept noise and discomfort. He knows that modern single-seaters have comfortable suspension, so why should he get a sore bottom from the springing of the horse-drawn era? The TVR is strictly a two-seater, but there is plenty of elbow room and shoulder space. The seats are comfortable and give good lateral location, while the driving position places all the controls within easy reach.

The rack and pinion steering is sufficiently quick for skid correction and gives a remarkably small turning circle, the brakes and gearchange also being pleasant to operate. I will leave talk of speed and acceleration until I have tested a fully run-in example, but I can say that the car rides and corners well, with good insulation of road noises from the occupants. The large doors give ease of entry, in spite of the low build, and the 2500 is a most practical everyday car as well as having a considerable performance potential.

The days of the rough, noisy sports car are done and a new generation of buyers is demanding something more than a motorcycle on four wheels. The TVR 2500 has the creature comforts of a saloon, but it also has that exclusive appeal that only a specialised sports car can give. A proved success on the American market, it is exported to other foreign countries, and two cars were just off to Greece when I was in the factory. Few specialised sports cars will survive when the kit car concession comes to an end, but there is no despondency in the factory at Blackpool.

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About eight completely hand-built cars are completed each week and much of the car is made by TVR themselves.



TVR

ENGINEERING

**Three reasons why you
should buy a TVR;**

VIXEN S3

2500

TUSCAN V6

TVR ENGINEERING LTD.

(SPORTSCAR DIVISION)

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