

IMPRESSIONS



TVR 350i

Outside Broadcast

The current TVR drophead incorporates new rear suspension, generous Bridgestone tyres and stunning appearance, but, sadly, some bad old habits remain ...

I stood alongside the suburban Field End Road bus queue, awaiting a white two-seater, rather than a red double decker. I heard my convertible mount coming, about three stops away.

The TVR 350i broadcast its favourite over-run pops and bangs as a medley to announce its £17,865 presence. Mated to the October 1984 Series 2 styling update of Oliver Winterbottom's 1981 Tasmin lines, it was an aural and visual knock out.

The seductive roar of 190 Rover Vitesse horsepower receives a bonus 7bhp from TVR's Blackpool-manufactured light artillery battery. You can call it an exhaust system if you like. I know for certain that it slaughtered every sub-35-year-old

onlooker from Middlesex to Kent.

Clearly, the message that Porsches now start at £17,484 for 150bhp has been understood, and a substitute status symbol, particularly an all-British one providing 140 Northern jobs, becomes logical.

Treated purely as head-turning raw power with the bonus of the best in drop-top simplicity (marred only by fiddly ignition-key-plus-button boot operation), the TVR represents value. Even the £805 demanded for 'our' 350's leather trim and seats, was not unreasonable.

We did not put the re-engineered rear suspension and replacement uni-directional Bridgestone RE71s (205/60 on

7] x 15 Compomotives) through our performance procedures. Nevertheless, have no doubt the 350i has what sensitive testers term 'lots of grunt'.

TVR claim the 2469lb/0.37 Cd macho machine will gobble up 0-60mph in six seconds and run 'in excess of 145mph'. We would not contradict the acceleration claim, but blind terror set in with 140mph indicated in fifth.

The substitution of double arm lower wishbones and location rods in place of the original simple trailing arm was necessary owing to driveshaft coupling failures experienced by the first 350i models. We had no qualms on that score, or the smooth road adhesion of outstanding Japanese rubber and sensitive steering.

Full power in second or third would send the tail slithering, but with 3528cc kicking out 220lb ft of rear-drive torque,

we had expected such brutal manners.

Also anticipated was below 20mpg overall. We ranged from our hard man's 14.9mpg up to 18.7 and averaged 16.52mpg in the three non-leaking tankfuls covered.

What was unexpected, and unacceptable, was a petrol leak, from the sender unit beside the main tank, a problem that the company tackled prior to our test and which occurred twice more during seven days. The TVR Centre at Barnet provided superb service that we trust is customer experience. Even so, such problems should *not* occur in a 'Porsche Pretender'.

We said that the smooth road cornering and sheer speed were impressive. Against that the steering shakes as if *Poltergeist IV* were trapped in the column, and the B-road ride makes the original Ford Escort

feel like a Limo. This machine's B-road character is almost pure 1950s nostalgia, period scuttle shake, rattles, but no roll!

Traffic visibility with the hood erect is limited. Power steering is vital at £365 extra because even our toughened 6ft plus offroader found it the hardest car we have had to park in terms of effort at the attractive Personal leather rim.

Little needs spending to turn this under-developed character into a better sorted and stylish alternative to other marques.

TVR were not sending cars to the USA during the autumn, and the 2.8-litre Ford V6 version has been dropped in Britain (the £12,995 TVR S, update of the old 3000S, will replace it). *Now* would seem the moment to knock the lumpy bits from the performance of the 350i running gear to complement that suave exterior.

Jeremy Walton

MACHTECH GOLF GTI

Putting the fun back

If you bemoan the passing of the Golf GTi's sparkle and don't think the cost of the new 16-valve solves the problem, do not despair – Machtech Tuning can answer your prayers.

Since Volkswagen started the hot hatchback snowball rolling in the mid-1970s with the original Golf GTi, they have had to fight increasingly hard to maintain any vestige of the massive lead which that first car held onto for so long. In reality though, the GTi's performance lead has gradually been eroded by several newer pretenders.

Nowadays, the 1.8-litre 112bhp car's 115mph top speed and 8-second 0-60 time are shaded out by such rapid movers as the 125mph Renault 5GT Turbo, with a sub-7-second 0-60 dash, the 120mph Toyota Corolla GT and several others.

Admittedly, what the daddy of the GTis lacks in outright performance, it makes up in part through its undoubted chassis ability and general refinement, to the extent that in our original multiple hatchback test it lost out in the overall assessment only to the Toyota and the surprisingly capable MG Maestro 2.0 EFi.

Yet the most telling comments in that eight-car comparison were subjective: 'the Golf put up a good showing with few weak points but it worries us to discover that we didn't find it exciting or rewarding to drive. In this form the Golf has become a



bland, efficient, safe, quick touring machine . . .'

That was not an isolated opinion, and Volkswagen have responded with the GTi 16-valve, which we tested in full last month against another claimant to the top hatch title, the new 1.9-litre 130bhp Peugeot GTi. Just like the Peugeot, the new GTi managed a 128mph maximum to nudge it back towards the sharp end of the league – but performance apart there is still that lingering feeling that the Golf has lost its sense of fun and settled into a sort of middle-age.

There is also, you might note, a premium of nearly £2000 to step up from the £8999 GTi to the £10,894 16-valve,

which also buys a degree of uprating to its brakes, suspension and gearbox, plus a hefty equipment list. But there *are* other alternatives that fall well within that budget and it *is* still possible to put entertainment back into the GTi equation.

This conversion for the eight-valve GTi, from Machtech Tuning of Primrose Hill, Kings Langley, Herts (who specialise in both Porsches and VWs and race both to good effect) is one way. It uses a modified cylinder head, uprated injection and ignition systems and a different camshaft, to give 140bhp, with much improved mid-and high-range torque, while retaining, maybe even improving on, the engine's legendary civility.