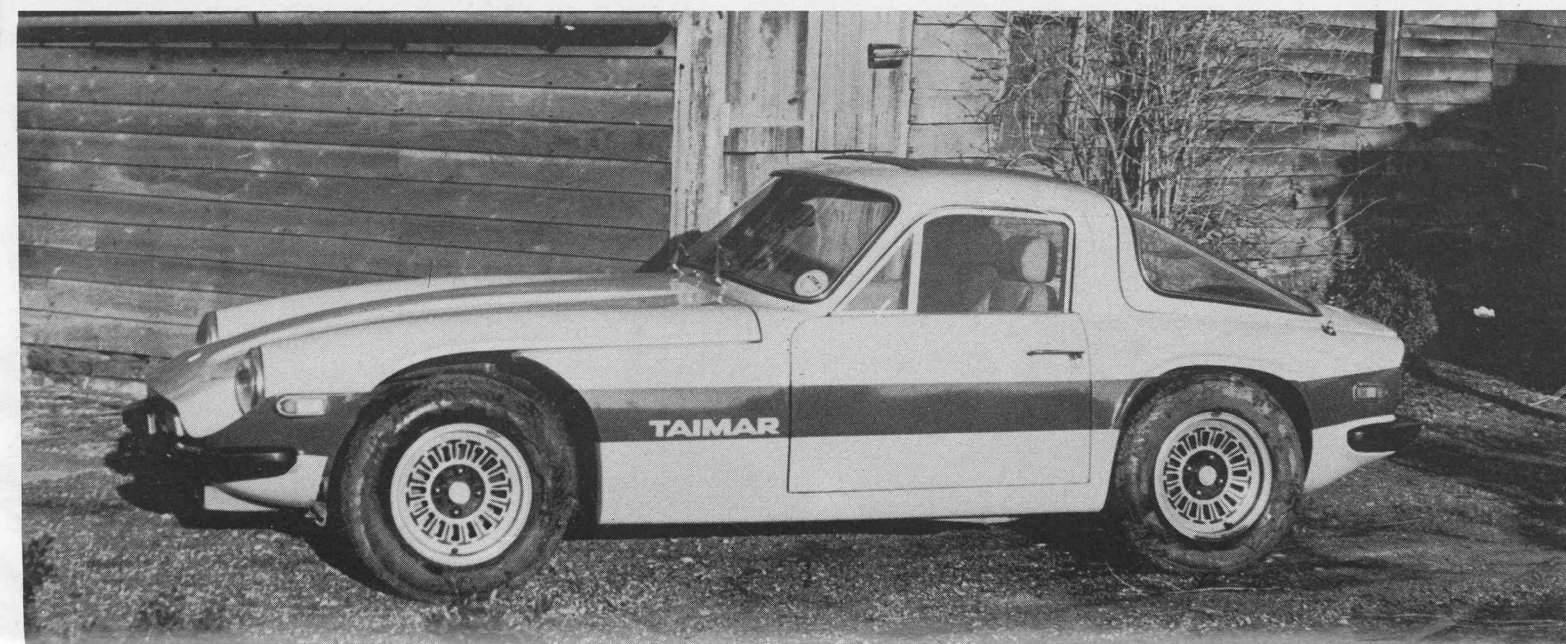


TVR





The individualist marches on

Not so long ago, there were quite a few specialist manufacturers who built high-performance cars in relatively small numbers. Increasingly severe regulations, grossly expensive crash testing, plus a host of ridiculous requirements, have killed off most of the fun cars. Our pestilential politicians, who have never snatched a handful of opposite lock in their lives, are determined that we shall only drive mass-production tin boxes, or else. Yet the TVR, that most individual of sports cars, still marches on.

The TVR has always had a central backbone which is, in effect, a tubular space frame. This construction is unique among production cars, though it has been used in racing—the Cooper-Jaguar was an example. The glassfibre body is carried on outriggers and was originally manx-tailed, but it was subsequently extended rearwards to provide a little luggage space. In the latest version, the Taimar, it has been found possible to convert the tail into a useful and fashionable hatchback. This has been very neatly done, with an electric latch to secure it, and a full-size spare wheel is still carried in the nose, ahead of the Ford V6 engine that sits well back, in traditional sports-car style.

Make no mistake, however, for the TVR has not become a sports-estate. With racing-type double-wishbone suspension, you don't get a vast luggage boot, though the space is adequate for a two-seater. The standard of construction is very high, with an excellent finish, while the interior is fully carpeted and the instruments are attractively laid out. Personally, I like the neat row of switches and I learnt their relative positions in the first few minutes of 'ownership'.

Although the TVR has an advanced specification, the clever use of many standard components ensures that spares will not be hard to come by, and even the most truly rural garage man will not be nonplussed. In the middle of the Sahara Desert, you might have to look around a bit to get the Ford V6 engine serviced, but nowhere else.

Though the body shape has been modernised as far as possible, and a high scuttle no longer obstructs the view of a driver of short stature, there is not the large area of glass that one finds on Italian-style designs. To incorporate that would alter the shape, thus incurring the vast expense of further crash-testing, no doubt. In any case, the slightly claustrophobic sensation soon passes and the all-round view is, in fact, perfectly adequate. I found the driving position comfortable and the re-arranged pedals give easy heel-and-toe operation by rolling the foot. The body is reasonably narrow, which is an advantage in traffic, and I found no shortage of elbow room, though I have broad shoulders.

Once again, this car emphasises the delights of having a big engine in a light vehicle. The TVR is no heavier than some 1600cc saloons, yet it has 3000cc to pull it. The result is that almost any gear suffices and a gentle touch on the accelerator gives one a reassuring push in the back, as the car rapidly picks up speed. It is, of course, possible to use the full power of the engine on the gears, for the independent rear suspension, coupled with the sensible weight distribution, almost eliminates wheelspin unless the road is very slippery. The gearchange is rapid and easy, with over 70 mph and 100 mph

available in second and third, though for maximum acceleration I changed up a little earlier than that.

Nevertheless, for nine-tenths of the time there is no need to use more than half-throttle to keep well ahead, and I usually changed from first to second after a couple of car's lengths, or even moved off in second. It's not the power that you use, but the power you have in reserve, that makes the TVR so untiring on a long journey. The test car had an occasional carburation hiccup at low speeds, which I'm sure the boys at Webers could soon cure.

If it were legal, you could cruise all day at 100 mph or more, with a feeling that the engine was doing no work at all. The car is mechanically quiet at such speeds and though wind noise begins to intrude, it has been greatly reduced since my last TVR road test. Curiously enough, the deep muttering of the exhaust is more noticeable at very low speeds. Many enthusiasts enjoy such vintage sounds, but it does cause a suspicion of body boom, which disappears as soon as the car gets into its stride.

Again, it is only at low speeds that the suspension feels hard, with an occasionally audible thump. At high speeds, the ride is truly excellent and the machine remains absolutely level, with no pitching or rocking from side to side. It proves, if proof were needed, that to obtain real comfort with a relatively short wheelbase, all four wheels must be independently sprung. Even though a sports car should feel firm, if it rides hard at high speed it will be tiring on long journeys. In setting up this suspension, the right compromise has been struck and the absence of tyre roar is another good feature.

With a rigid chassis and the wheels located by four pairs of wishbones, the fundamentals of roadholding are there. The car is stable on slippery roads and is not deflected by gusts of wind. Steering response is, to some extent, a matter of personal preference and some drivers will like the TVR set-up. For me, it's a bit dead, and I prefer to get just a little kick-back, so as to have the ultimate in sensitivity, but there are those who regard kick-back as a deadly sin. Anyway, it's pretty good as it is, although the turning circle seems unnecessarily large for so short a car. During fairly fast driving, the response is substantially neutral, though the rear end may break away on a slippery patch. As for an assessment of the ultimate cornering power, that will have to wait for another day, as the roads were never really dry during my test.

In spite of generally unfavourable conditions, I was able to drive hard enough to assure myself that the brakes are as free from fading as they are powerful. In the past, the TVR was short of ventilation, but now it has separate ducts for cool air, with universally adjustable eyeball-type inlets at each end of the instrument panel. This system is matched by efficient air extraction, with outlets in the tail. The heater is remarkable for having a fan that is really silent, even at its fastest speed, but as installed on the test car it took a long time to warm up, though it demisted the screen very quickly.

The windscreen wiper and washer are very effective, which is just as well because a certain amount of spray finds its way on to the screen during fast driving on dirty roads. There is

plenty of storage space for all sorts of odds and ends and a good deal of thought seems to have been given to the comfort of the occupants. The instruments are easy to read and I always feel reassured by an oil-pressure gauge, though I would also like a clock to save looking at my watch when driving.

The TVR Taimar is an exceptionally well made sports car that will still record a genuine 125 mph, even with the anti-pollution equipment that is now standard. It should be a good investment, for its body is immune from rust, and its fuel consumption is moderate for a high-performance, 3-litre car.

Specification and performance data

Car Tested: TVR Taimar 2-seater coupé, price £6,223.

Engine: V6 93.7 x 72.4mm (2994cc). Compression ratio 8.9 to 1. 135bhp DIN at 5000rpm. Pushrod-operated overhead valves. Weber twin-choke downdraught carburettor.

Transmission: Single dry-plate clutch. 4-speed synchromesh gearbox with central change, ratios 1.0, 1.41, 1.95, and 3.16 to 1. Hypoid final drive, ratio 3.31 to 1.

Chassis: Steel multi-tubular chassis, glassfibre body. Independent suspension of all four wheels by wishbones, coil springs, and telescopic dampers, with front anti-roll bar. Rack and pinion steering. Servo-assisted dual-circuit disc/drum brakes. Bolt-on light alloy wheels, fitted 185 HR 14 tyres.

Equipment: 12-volt lighting and starting. Speedometer. Rev-counter. Oil-pressure, water-temperature, and fuel gauges. Voltmeter. Heating, demisting, and ventilation system. 2-speed windscreen wipers and washers. Flashing direction indicators with hazard warning. Reversing lights. Heated rear window.

Dimensions: Wheelbase 7ft 6in. Track 4ft 5½in. Overall length 12ft 11in. Width 5ft 4in. Weight 19cwt.

Performance: Maximum speed 125mph. Speeds in gears: third 95mph, second 68mph, first 40mph. Standing quarter-mile 16.2s. Acceleration: 0-30mph 2.8s, 0-50mph 5.9s, 0-60mph 8.0s, 0-80mph 14.4s, 0-100mph 25.0s.

Fuel Consumption: 20 to 25mpg.

