

on the Road

Porsche 924 Turbo is incredibly smooth and quick with little wind noise either. Press the throttle pedal and 110, 120 come up surprisingly quickly. You need a little more space to see 130mph (which was the best we saw) but there was certainly more to come and we know from experience that Porsche tend to be pessimistic about claimed speeds so 140mph seems entirely possible. It cannot be stressed too highly that this is quite remarkable performance from an engine of only two litres. And despite some fairly brisk mixed driving we still returned 26mpg overall.

As a passenger car is not a dragster, it must have other qualities beside "point and squirt" — ride, handling, brakes and steering are important features which must be in tune with such high performance. The Porsche rack and pinion steering does not disappoint and is as positive as you would expect from this system; yet there is a curious deadness about it — a shade more feel here would not go amiss. Whilst the lower gearing, now 3-8 turns lock to lock, makes for less nervous behaviour at speed, around town it becomes a little awkward for negotiating street corners, aggravated by an oval steering wheel and lack of castor return. The ride too is clearly tuned for speed for, while it is best at motorway speeds, around town it is decidedly wooden in feel and sound. Even on the motorway, when passing over those tarred joints in the surface, it sounded as if the car was being slapped with a large wet kipper. We feel a shade more suspension compliance ought to be possible. However there is no disputing that the handling and road adhesion is extraordinary. The car has fine balance and the rear wheels cling to the road like limpets — even mid corner bumps met at high speed hardly upset its poise. In the dry most drivers will never discover any alarming tendencies, nor are there any; in the wet a shade more caution is necessary at speed even in a car as fine as this. Pushed hard it will eventually understeer, lifting off mid corner, again at high speeds, may cause the back end to move out. But the fine balance ensures that such provocation is easily dealt with, and therefore enjoyed by the driver. The brakes seemed entirely capable of coping with the engine's very strong horses. The car, in spite of its shattering performance and fast cross country ability, engenders a feeling of security and stability born out of the combination of its road qualities and in the knowledge of its fine engineering. Only one other make of car gives me this feeling — and that's German too! Even a passenger who normally dislikes sports cars intensely and never feels happy in them commented how safe, enjoyable and comfortable this car was.

As one might expect for £13,629 the finish inside and out was first class, though this is not always the case even in this price bracket. British market cars come with "Lux" specification as standard which means tinted glass with electric window lifts, headlamp washers, heated rear screen and wiper, electric aerial, stereo/cassette and wider range of trim and exterior colour schemes. The Porsche 924 Turbo's character and abilities seemed to grow, along with my admiration, the more miles we covered together. Someone could have a very long and happy love affair with a car like that. ●

Brian Palmer

TVR Tasmin

WITH over 20 years behind it, the TVR arguably deserved a new concept even though the M-series were still selling in the car a day quantities that the 80-strong Blackpool workforce produce. The M-series had little in common with the original dumpy



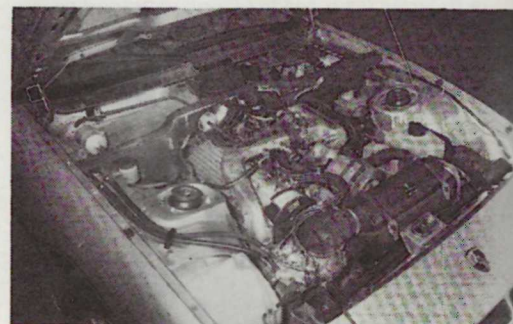
Above, only the small and agile will be happy in the rear seats.



Above left, a simple, ergonomic and well finished interior. Above right, injection equipment and turbo installation fill bay. Below, the Porsche 924 Turbo is distinctive but not flashy — note spoked alloy wheels and rear window spoiler.



Above, an adequate rather than generous boot — a pull-out blind hides luggage.



GT designed by Trevor Wilkinson but a recognisable thread has run all the way through the various models by way of steady development. For 15 years now Martin Lilley has husbanded the resources with only occasional diversions like the two Imp-powered Tinias or the one-off Zante; one excludes the Trident which left the floor of the old brickworks in the takeover turmoil of long ago. Now, after two years gestation, come the fruits of sound management and careful marketing of an inherited product, the Tasmin, new from stem to stern, the car that Martin always promised himself. It isn't that it has taken 15 years to design it, just 15 years for TVR to build up the resources necessary for a major redesign and all the consequent expense of satisfying varying legislation around the world. In between little Trevor had grown up and the Bristol Avenue site had expanded to 45,000 sq.ft. of factory space with latterly 8000 sq.ft. of additional Research and Development area acquired near Preston.

At the recent Brussels Show TVR had their best ever such exercise, taking 20 orders there. They are now well set up for export with importers in Austria (Max Bulla, Gudrunstrasse 121, A1100 Vienna), W. Germany (TVR Deutschland, 645 Hanau 9, BBC Strasse 23, Postfach 1230), USA (TVR Sportscars Inc., 5750 General Washington Drive, Alexandria, Virginia 22312), Australia (Calder Sportscars, Calder Highway,

Gisborne, Victoria 3437), Holland (Louwman Import BV, PO Box 6, Liedschendam, Veursstraatweg 280), Belgium (Jean-Pierre Yseboot, 215 Steenweg op Waver, 1900 Overijse), Switzerland (Automobile Heinz Kobel, 8102 Oberenensträngen, Eggstrasse 40, Zurich), and Canada (JAG Auto Enterprises, 1910 Eglington Avenue East, Scarborough, Ontario). Some of these have subsidiary dealers while at home there are now 20 UK dealers.

It was here that the Tasmin reached its working prototype stage a year ago, in turn a year after the basic cockpit requirements took shape in a wooden mock-up that was to become part of the final mould. It was the desire to eradicate all that was criticised in the earlier model that saw this mock-up with large doors for easy access, plenty of glass area for all-round visibility, ideal driving position and none of the slightly claustrophobic quality of previous interiors. Around this, Oliver Winterbottom (ex Jaguar, ex Lotus) created a body, no longer than the M-series but with a 4-inch greater wheel base and four inches of extra cockpit width. It is an attractive shape on a wedge basis but the bonnet remains visible from the driving seat, unlike some, and the box section foam-filled pillars are gracefully slender. It is aerodynamically sound too with CD of 0.36. Access to the 30 x 42in luggage platform is through the lift up rear screen whose heating

elements function as the radio aerial. Concealed headlights are brought up by electric motors. Inevitably it is made from glass fibre, in two moulds with superb finish, and metal bobbins bonded in for many ancillary mounting points. All the other mouldings required — headlights, heater boxes, bumpers etc. — are also built up on the premises. Hand finishing after baking and some 8-10 coats ensure a very high standard of final paintwork.

The body is attached to the chassis via 12 points and the bonded in door hinge and door lock metal posts become part of the chassis with the door a skin carried on a substantial side impact structure.

Superficially the chassis is similar to that of all TVRs, a backbone space frame of four basic tubes forking out at each end to carry suspensions with a sill level perimeter frame attached to it. But the detail design is excellent, making very good use of proprietary components. It is the work of Ian Jones, an ex-Lotus freelance designer. At the front, a combination of Granada uprights and brakes are mated to Cortina wishbone and track control arm with the leading lower link changed to a trailing one, well rubber insulated. And a Cortina rack is mounted on posts which actually pull the rack forward under impact. Long coil springs allow seven inches total travel, a considerable improvement over the earlier car's four inches, with periodicity around 87 cpm dry — quite soft in sports car terms and comparable to that of an Elan.

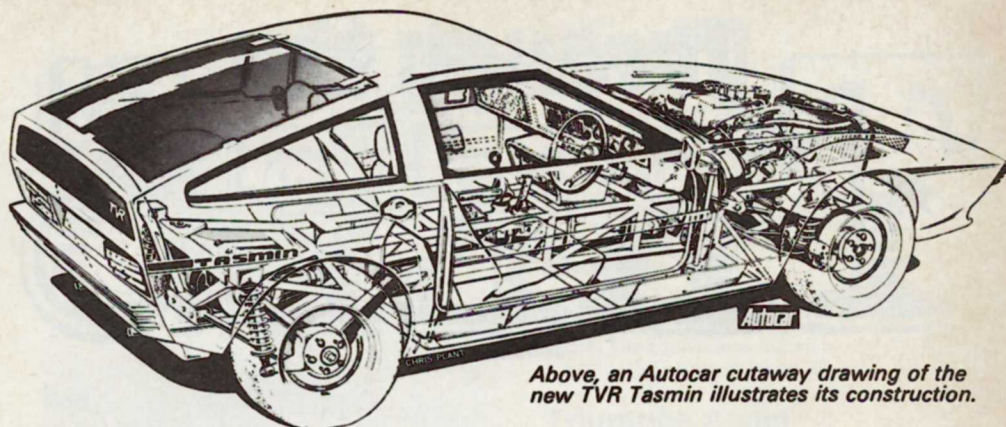
At the rear a Jaguar type Salisbury differential is used with inboard discs. The differential is fastened to the chassis via a widebased casting at the top with big Metalastik rubbers; below, it is fastened to a pair of fore and aft plates which pick up on a front rubber; at their rear they are welded to a cradle using more Metalastik to the chassis. So any axle whine is well attenuated, and since the TVR cast upright is directly attached to the final drive via the fixed length drive-shafts, road noise is also partially suppressed. The rest of the suspension uses a semi-trailing fabricated arm almost on the chassis centre line and fixed rigidly to the upright, while a rubber bushed link runs from the upright to the cradle behind the diff, again near the chassis centre line. Although this arrangement isn't geometrically quite perfect, this is absorbed in the rubber mountings and gives the effect of rising rate springing allowing relatively soft rates for level unladen driving. This is all cleverly thought out to provide good isolation from noise without loss of control of movement. Throughout their total seven inches travel, both front and rear wheels move to just over 3° negative on bump with less than a degree positive variation to full rebound. Tyres are Dunlops 205/60 VR14 on TVRs 7-inch alloy rims.

TVR retain the Ford connection in engine and gearbox using the 2.8-litre fuel injected Granada engine and gearbox; the V-6 produces 160bhp at 5700rpm on Bosch injection. The result is that it can pull maximum revs in top on 22.2mph/1000rpm, or around 130mph and accelerate well on 153bhp/ton.

I only had the chance to have a brief run in the first car off the production line — ML 100, which will be a test car — but it was enough to show the very real transformation from the old to the brand new. To start with it was easy to get into with a wide door; once in, the driving position was very comfortable — no pedal offset — and all round visibility good. Wedge cars often lose the bonnet below the sight line but this takes the view forward to within two feet of the front while the transparent tail panel is a useful reversing aid.

On the road the ride quality was immediately evident; the suspension has virtually completely suppressed road noise and the ride itself is comfortable and well damped while retaining a reasonably sporting firmness. On a new car the steering was understandably a little heavy but the response was far better than of yore.

The German V-6 is acknowledged as smoother than the 3-litre Essex unit but the absence of any feel of the engine was quite remarkable in view of the simple-looking engine mounts — in fact they were chosen



Above, an Autocar cutaway drawing of the new TVR Tasmin illustrates its construction.



Above, an aggressive front end with integral spoiler and flip-up headlamps.



Above, rear panel light aids reversing. Left, a well trimmed and attractive interior is a feature. Bottom, it is something like the Lotus Elite at the front.



from many different rubber specifications. A pleasant exhaust note on acceleration was the sole evidence.

Finish too was well up to the standard of the rest of the £12,800 car with a nice but functional interior, and fit and paintwork on the glass-fibre body excellent. TVR reckon to have expanded the market potential of their cars with the Tasmin. I saw enough to agree wholeheartedly and to look forward to trying a run-in ML 100.

However the introduction of an all-new model doesn't mean any loss of interest in the old ones; marque loyalty is highly regarded and parts will continue to be as available as they always have been, with old jigs and moulds being used when necessary. Martin Lilley is president of the TVR Car Club and fellow director Stewart Halstead — another ex-Jaguar man — is the technical query committee member; both are involved enthusiasts and they both drive each car that comes off the line. It's a car built by enthusiasts for enthusiasts but there are no longer the little foibles that you had to make allowances for on the old models. It now really is the car that Martin always promised himself. ● Michael Bowler