

ACH SO! WE MEET AGAIN

Marcos V6 versus TVR Tuscan



INSERTING Mr. Ford's three litre Zodiac V6 into a specially made body is now one of the established formulas to success for Britain's smaller car manufacturers: Reliant, Gilbern, a prototype Elva, Marcos and TVR. The last two are locked in real competition, for not only do they produce Zodiac powered GTs, but they also put into the same bodywork Cortina/Capri 1600 GT motors and are thus in rivalry at a lower price level as well.

The TVR Tuscan sells in kit form for £1492, undercutting the Marcos by £278. Unfortunately for the Blackpool based company this price advantage will not last much longer, probably by Motor Show time they will have increased the cost and added a few more goodies for the executive style customer. Looking at the standard equipment list for both cars it's easy to see how Jem Marsh and his Bradford-on-Avon Marcos factory have a more expensive product than Martin Lilley at TVR. The Marcos has electric windows, overdrive and a sunroof as standard equipment, while the Tuscan has O/D as an £85 option and neither of the other two items listed — though it's quite likely they will appear when the price goes up. In basic construction both cars use a fibreglass body. On the Marcos, it's "sprung" over the wooden chassis/cockpit construction and frontal tubular space frame. On the TVR the body is bolted over a tubular space frame chassis. The TVR's bodywork features a large rear shelf that can either be used to take small children or a small amount of baggage. The Marcos offers no compromise: it's a strict two seater with a reasonable boot, which offers roughly the same space as a Sprite's. The bonnets on both cars open forwards, so that it's easy to get at the engine and accessories, "ready for the road weights" are similar at 17½ cwt. for the Marcos and 18 cwt. for the Tuscan: the Marcos has a 10 gallon fuel tank, the Tuscan a whopping 15 gallon reservoir.

Both Marques use Standard Triumph based i.f.s. with unequal length wishbones and coil spring shocker units. But at the back end there's a sharp difference of thought: TVR have altered their basic independently sprung Vixen layout so that it now incorporates twin coil springs on both sides and they've fitted larger capacity dampers all round — while Marcos have continued with a live rear axle restrained by a Panhard Rod, twin radius arms on either side (linked to the rear of the car, as there wouldn't be space forward of the back axle) plus stiffer coil springs and dampers. Both firms have tried to even out the weight distribution as far as possible, in spite of which both feel nose heavy at slow speed; more about that later.

When it comes to slowing time, the TVR is well equipped with TR6 11 inch front discs and 9 in. rear drums; the Marcos has the same diameter rear drums but smaller front discs at 9⅝ in. The TVR has a servo while the Marcos does without. Scrutinising the lightweight wheels fitted to

both cars, we were surprised to find that this is where Marcos charge as an optional extra (£55), while TVR include the fancy rollers for free: both designs are exclusive to each marque. The wheel diameters are very important to both these cars when it comes to gearing. As the pair of them use a standard Zodiac gearbox there's no difference until you get to the final drive ratio which is 3.5 on the Marcos and 3.31 on the Tuscan, then for the Marcos we find wheel diameters of 13 in, while the TVR has almost tractor diameters at 15 inches. In theory this means that the wooden hearted GT is geared to accelerate while the TVR lopes up to a high cruising speed. This paper theory didn't prove itself to us, but it should be true for owners. Rim widths on the test cars were the same as were the tyres . 165 SR Avons on five inch rims.

Steering is by the same method too, rack and pinion. On the TVR range though it has the advantage of Triumph's "turn on a sixpence and disappear up your own orifice system." All the same, the Marcos with a similar rack is only slightly down on this performance with a turning circle of under 30 ft.

Before we settle the testing mob into their task, some final dimensions:— the Tuscan has a 3½ in. wider front track than the Marcos and two inches more at the rear, it's also 5½ inches taller and has a mere extra half inch wheelbase. Measuring the exteriors shows that the TVR is much shorter and 1½ inches wider. So there you are measurement phobes, go play with that lot!

To install the six cylinder 2994 c.c vee motor, both firms have found the need of a new exhaust system from top manifolds through to individual pair of pipes jutting up from the rear. This also means that the compound Weber carb has been adjusted to suit the new pipes and that peak power has been raised by approximately five horses bringing the claimed figure to 140+ b.h.p. Neither Marcos nor TVR publish torque performance, which is strange 'cos that's one of the best of the Zodiac unit's characteristics — in standard form there's a strong 182 lb. ft. at 3000 revs, so at least this much is available in these specialist cars.

Our brace of test cars both belonged to the bosses of the respective firms, which means an insight into the management of both companies we suppose!

The Tuscan had really had a tough life just before its collection from a friendly rival's offices. That mag had put the car through its paces in a fortnight's really rugged motoring and we repeated the procedure for the following week. Poor Mr. Lilley he hadn't seen his car for nearly a month! In between acting as a demo machine this Tuscan acts as a prototype, so it has a pretty active life.

Jem Marsh's car was a different approach altogether

Continued on Page 896



being spotlessly clean and gleaming in the sunshine, although this V6 had also been run as a works' trial car we wouldn't have known from a driving or looks viewpoint.

Driving around in a Marcos you've got to be an extrovert with all those people staring and females swooning over the bonnet plus all the other happening that soon become mundane as you become familiar with the low beastly. Considering how long it is since the shape appeared the designer should get a medal for his imaginative forward thinking — Brigitte Bardot as nature intended would have a job diverting the mob's attention.

At first the car seems unnecessarily awkward to pilot; the tiny steering wheel, poor in town visibility and the occasional baulking on the all-synchro box combine to make life a trifle tedious. After three days of "ownership" we began to settle into the thing relaxing on the all enveloping and steeply reclined bucket seats, twiddling the wheel with joy at the instant response and completely hooked on the instant overtaking ability in any gear. At this stage of the love affair we were prepared to only wince slightly at bumpy roads and had the courage to plunge over hump back bridges while the enormous snout hid all from our sight.

Out on the test track the lie-back seating and thrust of Ford's docile cooking lump makes it feel as though one's sitting in a jet powered coffin with windows. Every post on the two mile lap towers over us, while passing a tank calls for supreme faith while the sunlight disappears. Another act that needs faith is continuously stopping the car from its 120+ m.p.h. top trot. Honestly we think they could take a tip from TVR on this point and fit larger front discs with a servo. It's not that the Marcos is unsafe at present, just that it could be even better.

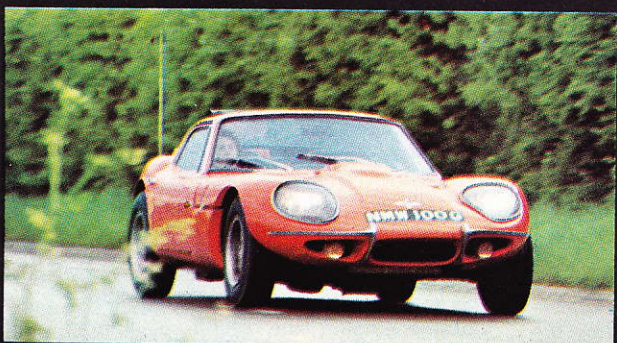
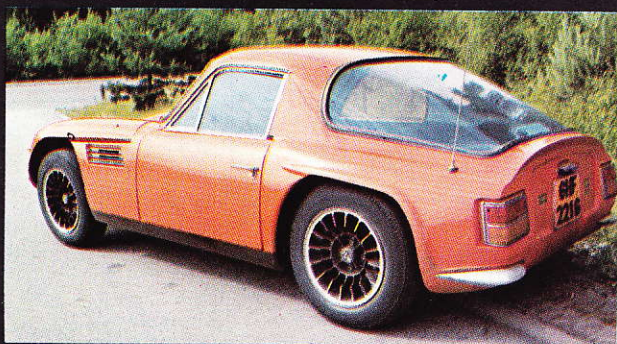
The ride and steering become progressively smoother and more responsive as the car wooshes forward from 30 m.p.h. At the legal limit you can think beautiful thoughts with the rev-counter less than halfway round the 6000 r.p.m. dial (red line begins at 5500 revs). The engine isn't doing any work with O/D engaged and the handling and braking still have an enormous safety margin. If it's a hot day you may sweat a little with the effort of pressing a

button to slightly lower an electric window, but in general the sun roof and two speed ventilation system provide plenty of air until the dreaded and traditional traffic jams of this Island.

On wet roads we found the Marcos a very impressive road-hugger. The light body and large amounts of torque are tamed very effectively by the Avon tyres and Mr. Marsh's suspension system. First, second, and third gears (35, 50 and 75 m.p.h. max) are much too low but providing you don't stamp on the go pedal when you've selected these slots, the car will not spin. We tried unsticking the car on a notoriously greasy surface, but the only reaction was drift out slowly which the quick steering soon copes with. At over 60 m.p.h. on a bumpy curve the car bucks slightly but stays on course tending to steer wide when really hustled. The only criticism we can offer on the Marcos' high speed running is that bumpy roads provoke some shaking in the bonnet; noticeable but not serious.

Inside the car is well laid out except for two old snags that would be hard to rectify without meeting other problems; these are the location of the handbrake alongside the driver's thigh which is a bit fiddly and can be uncomfortable for fatties, and the uncomfortable layout of the foot controls, with no space for resting the clutch foot. Instruments cover the same ground as the TVR, but the minor ones are rather better looking. Speed and revs are displayed behind the steering wheel, amps, oil pressure, water temp, (it needs a good electric fan for traffic work, or at least the standard one) and naturally a small dial for fuel. The electric washers and wipers do good service and are vital on such a low machine. The O/D switch is mounted in the gearstick and is steel to protect it from clods like J.W. who broke the original plastic type.

The TVR takes some acclimatising to as well, though most of our staff felt confident in it pretty quickly. The bucket seats aren't as good as its rival's and they whip when the car is bend swinging on the limit; the seat belts on the prototype need another thought to fall in with the ideas used on the Vixen. The cockpit feels roomier than the Marcos (small clutch feet can be rested!) but the trim on our example was way below standard as were the door



Photos by Spencer Smith

locks which kept jamming, causing our rally Gnome to turn puce and hover. In fact while he was hovering he wrote us three foolscap pages about the happenings he'd had, the most serious of which were the battery bursting free, the exhaust falling off one side (That was gone by a 90 m.p.h. yump, but all the same this is always a problem to a TVR man; proper mounting helps a lot) and the bonnet "springing" the O/S catch on bumpy terrain.

The really good things about the Tuscan are the points that most hard drivers look for. It goes very impressively (in spite of the gearing performance is very close to that of the Marcos) it has supremely "chuckable handling", a very high cornering limit and superb brakes. The only moan about bend swinging was unanimous among our testers and that is the kickback and heaviness of the steering. Martin Lilley tells us that the latter point has now been attended to by altering the steering castor angles. Probably the only answer to the kickback would be to fit a steering damper, or just live with it and take the sensitivity as compensation.

Probably because of the "cruising" gearing we found the Tuscan used less fuel than its rival — when both were driven hard the Marcos managed 20.5 m.p.g. while the TVR did a consistent 23 m.p.g. Combined with the bigger fuel tank this means the TVR has a rather better range. Unfortunately because of the interior noise at a consistent 90+ m.p.h. none of us felt like utilising it! On this point TVR's boss says that later models have rather more insulation and other customers have told us the car is improved — certainly the engine has less work to do than the Marcos unit at any speed. One point that ought to be cured though is that maddening rattle from the long gearlever.

Two points that impressed us especially about the Tuscan were the ride and the gear ratios (40, 60, 90 and the ton in O/D third).

Based on the cars we tried here's our summary: *For looks*, high speed relaxation, superb seating and sophistication of standard fittings and trim, the Marcos is a winner. *For enjoyable handling* (with that earlier proviso about the steering), practicality in town, visibility, good ride, excellent braking and lower price then try a Tuscan.

*As we went to press we were told of the following

changes from Marcos: — from now on their car will have a steel chassis, 13 gallon fuel tank and "softer suspension." They are also dropping the 1600 GT and marketing a V4 powered version at £1590 in kit form. It's also likely that TVR will gradually drop the 1600 GT. More on this next month when we test a stage 3 Broadspeed converted Vixen.

The pictures are, in fact, for the TVR 1600 GT, which is fully covered next month. It is, however, outwardly identical to the Tuscan reported on these pages. **JW**

Performance

MPH	MARCOS V6 secs.	TVR TUSCAN secs.
0-50	6.3	6.0
0-60	8.4	8.3
0-70	11.4	11.4
0-80	14.9	14.3
0-90	18.7	18.7
0-100	23.2	24.9
Top speed (best)	123	122
(mean)	122.7	121.5
FLEXIBILITY		
in direct top		
20-40	7.0	6.7
40-60	5.7	6.3
50-70	5.4	6.1
70-90	6.9	7.9
Third		
20-40	4.2	5.5
40-60	4.4	4.3
50-70	4.8	4.2