



ROAD TEST by John Bolster

TVR Vixen 1600

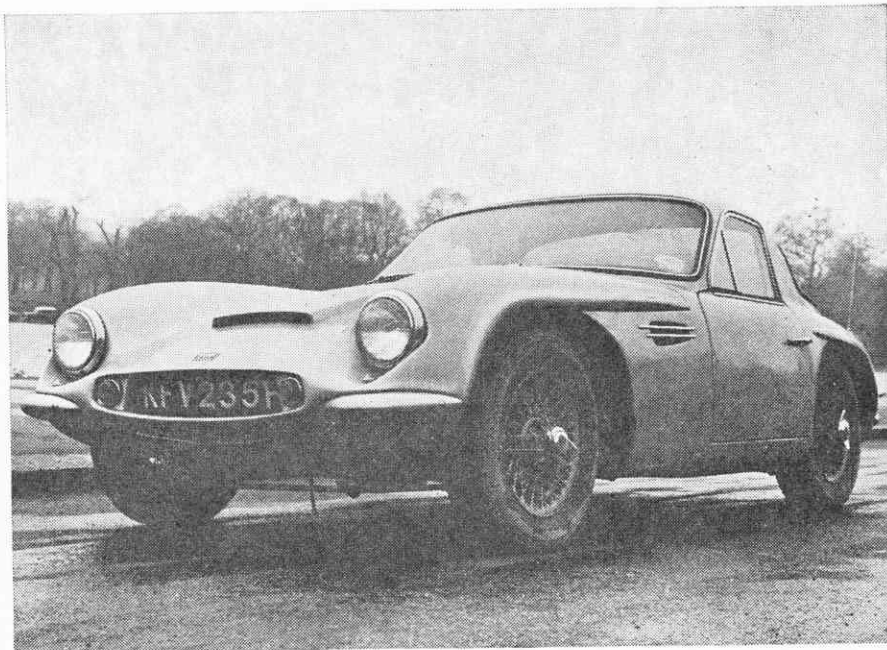
THE TVR has been around for a long time, and I have road tested several versions, from a little machine with a Coventry Climax engine to a highly dramatic vehicle with a potent Ford V8 engine that seemed likely to take off at any moment. The present test concerns a much more practical type of TVR, the Vixen 1600, which is a small and attractive GT coupé at a reasonable price. The power unit is the crossflow Ford Cortina GT engine.

A feature of the TVR has always been a multi-tubular central backbone. The driver and passenger sit on either side of this and there are outriggers to carry the glass-fibre body. The earlier models were Manx-tailed, which gave them an unusual appearance, but there is now a very pretty sloping tail that sets off the line of the bonnet with its low nose. The shape is easy on the eye and it is evidently efficient at penetrating the air, judging by the speed obtained from an ordinary production engine.

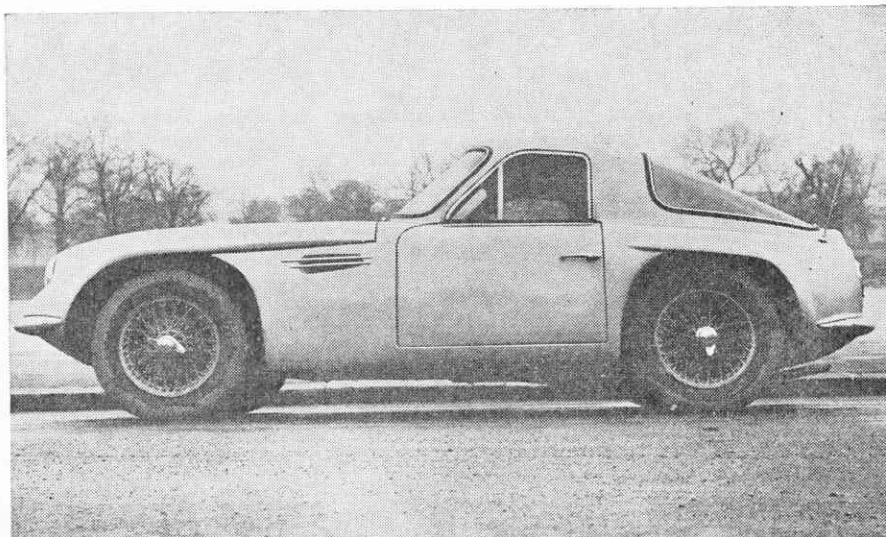
The choice of the Cortina GT engine is a good one. The saloon is a lively car, and when its engine is placed in a lighter, smaller, and more streamlined coupé, the extra performance adds up to something very useful. In standard form, the Ford engine is reliable and long-lasting, or it can easily be tuned for more bhp when one has the money to spare. It is mounted in unit with its own gearbox and drives a hypoid differential unit that is supported by the rear end of the spaceframe backbone.

Wishbone independent suspension, with helical springs and telescopic dampers, is used at both ends of the car, reinforced by an anti-roll torsion bar in front. The steering is by rack and pinion controlled, in the case of the test car, by a delightful little leather-covered wheel—a very worthwhile extra. There are disc brakes in front and drums behind, with a very powerful hand brake acting on the rear wheels. The backbone frame is attractively upholstered to form a central console, from which the short gear and brake levers project.

The car is not difficult to enter in spite of its low build. As would be expected, the seats are just right, of real bucket type with well-raked backs, and there is plenty of leg room for a tall driver. The interior treatment is reminiscent of very expensive GT cars, with plenty of padding,



A hand-made sports car at a reasonable price.



well-placed instruments with proper round dials, and well-spaced switches.

Obviously, the Vixen is very much a one-man car with many variations of equipment to suit the individual. However, I must report on the car as supplied to me and its equipment as listed in the data panel. It starts at once from cold, and as one moves off the driving position feels so right. The driver has a good view, unless he is short, when the rather high scuttle may prevent him from seeing his left wing.

The deep note of the exhaust is pleasant but perhaps a bit prominent. Some vibration is fed into the structure through the engine mountings, but this is not serious. At a gentle 70 mph cruising speed the car is both smooth and quiet. At higher speeds, however, there is a good deal of wind noise around the door windows, though there are no draughts inside the car.

A red mark on the rev counter dial starts at 6000 rpm. Experimentally, I tried going a little higher during the acceleration tests but I found that it paid to change up early rather than late. Above 6000 rpm, the unit does not become noisy but it simply produces less power. On top gear, the rev counter just about reaches the red sector, and this is equivalent to 110 mph, a very satisfactory maximum. Accurate timing was difficult during my test, due to adverse weather conditions, but I would say that almost exactly 110 mph is the genuine maximum speed.

The rather high gearing renders rapid getaways difficult to achieve. The clutch goes in at maximum revs but, after a few yards, it grips and the engine tends to fluff momentarily. Nevertheless, the acceleration figures are satisfactory, assisted by the rapid gearchange.

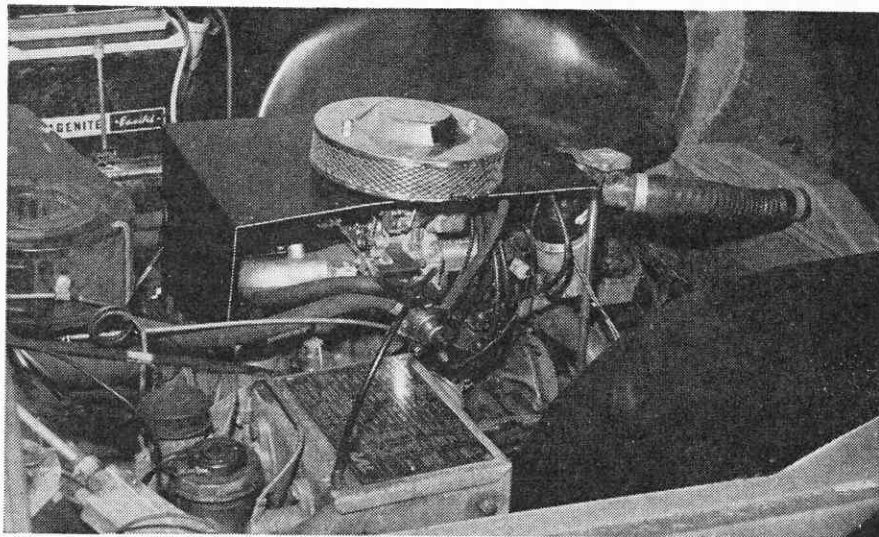
As would be expected, the suspension has a fairly short travel and the ride tends to be hard. It is quite comfortable on all but the rougher secondary roads. In spite of the short wheelbase, the car needs no holding at its maximum speed and is not deflected by moderate winds. Only very strong blasts cause a slight deviation. On wet and slippery roads, there sometimes seems to be a very slight wander at speeds over 100 mph, but this may be caused by gusts of wind.

The Vixen corners extremely well. There is no rolling and the car simply whistles round the bends. A great deal of trouble must have been taken to get it set up so well, and this car really does have a neutral characteristic, remaining finely balanced however hard it is driven. I would not presume to advise on the best method of driving it, but a fairly relaxed approach without too much elbow-waving seems to work well enough.

No tendency for the brakes to fade was ever noticed, and they are powerful without any proneness to lock the wheels. Uneven braking, causing a pull on the steering, may be noticed when the brakes are first applied after a run on wet roads.

The heater is effective and there is cold air ventilation through two very small butterflies, which are surprisingly powerful when turned full on. The noise level inside the car exceeds that of a saloon but it is not excessive by sports car standards. At easy cruising speeds, the Vixen is very quiet, but as the maximum is approached the wind and the exhaust combine to produce a high sound level.

The TVR Vixen 1600 is well made and attractively finished. In its appearance, its driving position, and the way in which it handles, it is very much a sports car, but it also provides practical everyday transport and there is even a touch of luxury about it. This is a GT car for the not so affluent.



SPECIFICATION AND PERFORMANCE DATA

Car tested: TVR Vixen 1600 2-seater sports coupé, price £998 in kit form or £1216 2s 9d including PT. Extras on test car, all including PT: wire wheels, £36 17s 6d; laminated windscreen, £10 4s 4d; heater, £16 5s 6d; leather steering wheel, £9 16s 8d; radio.

Engine: Four cylinders 80.97 mm x 77.6 mm (1599 cc). Pushrod-operated overhead valves. Compression ratio 9:1. 92 bhp at 5500 rpm (gross). Twin-choke Weber compound down-draught carburettor. Lucas coil and distributor.

Transmission: Single dry plate clutch. 4-speed all synchromesh gearbox with short central lever, open propeller shaft and chassis-mounted hypoid final drive, overall ratios 3.9, 5.45, 7.839 and 11.59:1.

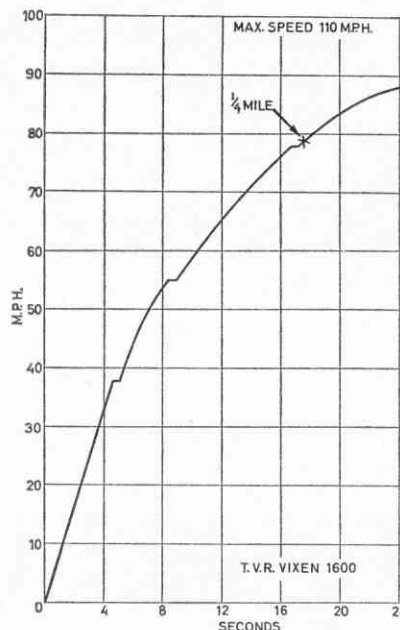
Chassis: Central multi-tubular backbone with outriggers, carrying reinforced polyester body. Independent suspension of all four wheels by helical spring-damper units and unequal length wishbones. Front anti-roll torsion bar. Rack and pinion steering. Disc front and drum rear brakes. Centre-locking wire wheels fitted 5.90 x 15 ins tyres.

Equipment: 12-volt lighting and starting, speedometer, rev counter, water temperature, oil pressure and fuel gauges, ammeter, heating and demisting, windscreen wipers and washers, flashing direction indicators. Radio.

Dimensions: Wheelbase 7 ft 1½ ins, track (front) 4 ft 4½ ins, (rear) 4 ft 5½ ins. Length 11 ft 6 ins, width 5 ft 4 ins, weight 16 cwt.

Performance: Maximum speed 110 mph. Speeds in gears: third 78 mph, second 55 mph, first 38 mph. Standing quarter-mile 17.5 s. Acceleration: 0-30 mph 3.8 s, 0-50 mph 6.8 s, 0-60 mph 11 s, 0-80 mph 18.2 s.

Fuel consumption: 24 to 28 mpg.

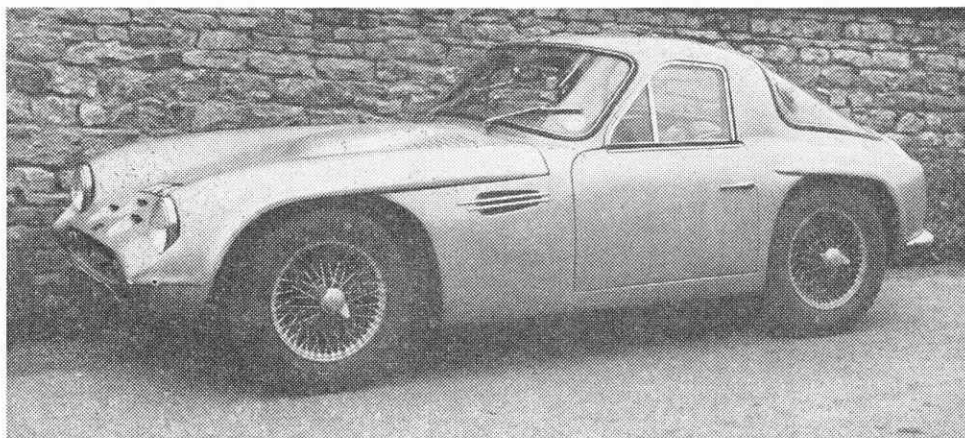


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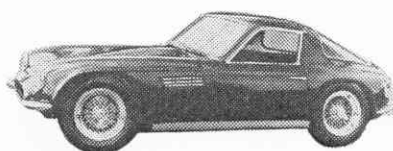
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