

# SALOON CAR TOP TEN

A 'Top Ten' of saloons – what a minefield. In the end we made life easier by deciding that the car had to have been available with four doors, so as to be uncompromised in its suitability for family use, and that technical excellence was more important than commercial success. The former criterion excluded the Mini and the Beetle, the latter allowed inclusion of the Jowett Javelin and the NSU Ro80.

There was no bickering over the choice of the two Citroëns. Both the *Traction Avant* and the DS were revolutionary cars in their day, so advanced that they redefined the technical boundaries of automotive design. As engineering and styling statements they are without parallel.

Nor was there dissent over the Rover and the Jaguar – although there was discussion of whether its superlative V12 engine made the XJ12 more worthy than the XJ6. Ultimately the lesser extravagance of the 'XK'-powered car won through. Driving it confirmed little can match its seductive package even today, and of our ten it was probably the favourite to drive back to London.

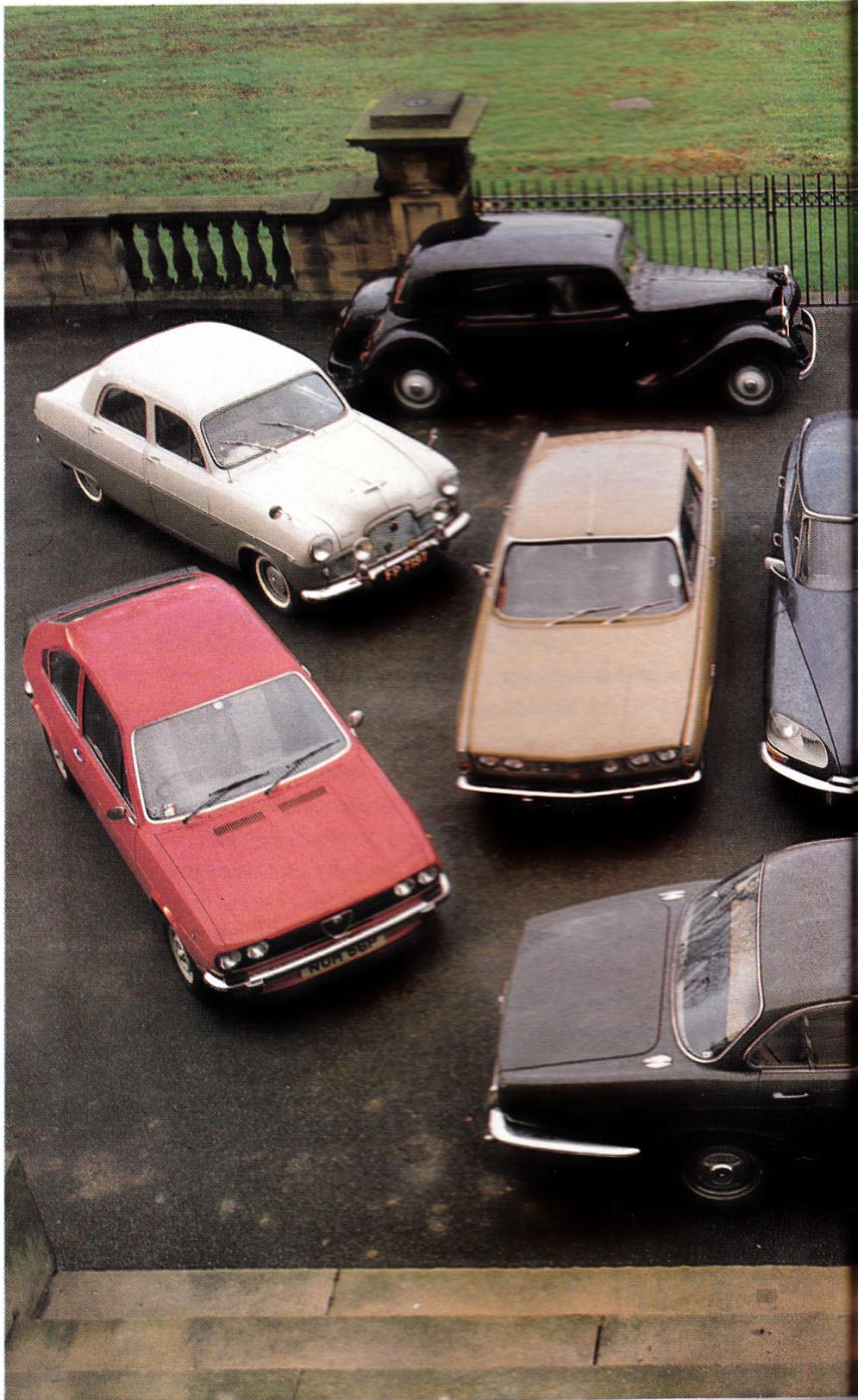
The 2000 was voted on board for how it combined the studied creativity so characteristic of Rover with a design that established a new genre of compact luxury car for the professional and business driver. Its amalgam of traditional quality, excellent road behaviour and realistic price, not to forget its raft of safety features, make it one of the most significant cars to emerge from the sixties.

The Jaguar scores above all for a chassis design of such supreme competence that critics put the Coventry saloon above Rolls-Royce in terms of suspension refinement.

The Jowett also made it into our lists with little dissent, although the reliability issue did occasion some questioning. But the advanced Gerald Palmer design was so fundamentally right in every aspect, and so far ahead of anything else offered at the time by the British industry, that ultimately we had no hesitation about its inclusion – especially as its problems were in the end resolved.

Rather more discussion revolved around the NSU Ro80. The bold aerodynamically-efficient wedge styling, the excellent chassis, the uncanny refinement of the rotary engine: these were not challenged, any more than the bravery of such a small firm as NSU in launching a package so technically advanced.

But the engine problems made it a failure as a consumer object, it was argued – the equivalent of a washing machine that leaves your kitchen in inches of water. In the end it



What are the top ten saloons of all time? We held an office poll to choose the most distinguished designs, and then assembled our ten cars for a weekend's driving in rural Yorkshire. Jon Pressnell explains how the choice was made, and the C&S team reveal how the ten contrasting cars lived up to their expectations. Photos: Julian Mackie



was decided that because these problems have now been licked, the NSU's still-modern design makes it worthy of a place.

The Alfasud also provoked argument, on account of its legendary lack of rust resistance. However excellent a car's engineering, can you call it a good vehicle if it disintegrates as rapidly as 'Suds have tended so to do? But this problem became less acute as the years passed, and it was readily agreed that the Alfasud was *the* benchmark front-wheel-drive medium-sized family car at its launch, and did much to raise the standards of design in this sector of the market.

On the surface a rather more contentious choice was the Guilia. The argument for its inclusion was that for a modestly-priced saloon (at least in its home market) it had a combination of virtues and an overwhelming competence that together with its undeniably sporting character made it one of the most appealing sports saloons you could buy.

Still on an Italian kick, the Aprilia's advanced engineering, the *brio* of its V4, and the wonderful Art Deco styling made it an easy choice.

Finally, the Ford. This was probably the car whose inclusion was most contested, but its pioneering of the MacPherson strut and the use of a new-generation 'over-square' engine are historically important, and for Ford it was a major break with the past.

The Morris Minor missed the list by a whisker. Despite the worldwide affection in which the Minor is held, and the accepted excellence of its chassis, it was felt that it was technically too conservative to deserve inclusion.

This accusation could hardly be levelled at another BMC nomination, the 1100, which in its day was the most advanced small car in the world – but familiarity seems to have bred a surely unmerited degree of disdain for one of Issigonis's most successful designs.

The Peugeot 203 was also up for consideration; its supple-riding chassis with coil-sprung rear and its sweet engine put it well ahead of its British competition, and its ruggedness has never been in doubt. But was it as clever a design as the Javelin?

The Citroën GS was another possibility, but the Alfasud was felt to achieve much the same goals with less complexity; also mentioned was the Renault 16, as the car that pioneered the family hatchback.

But hard decisions had to be made, and many worthy cars had inevitably to be discarded. All that remained was to drive our 'Top Ten'.

THANKS TO G. BAILEY FOR THE USE OF DENTON HALL, ILLKLEY

# CITROËN TRACTION AVANT

**T**he Citroën Traction, with its front-wheel drive, monocoque construction and all-torsion-bar springing, is a massive, towering reference point in the history of the mass-produced car.

The problem is, if you don't have any personal reference points to other 'ordinary' cars of the thirties, and if – like many of the C&S team – your driving experience is mostly confined to post-war cars, then the appeal of the Traction is difficult to grasp.

Yes, there's the whole hackneyed Maigret thing, the unmistakable shape, its utter *Frenchness* that most of us can relate to. It's just that, at first, it comes across as a rather noisy and agricultural old car to the uninitiated. Only when you stack it up directly against its competitors from the thirties, forties and fifties does the Traction Avant really begin to shine.

It is actually quite easy to drive, not demanding any real allowances for its age. The Traction Avant slips through its three gears with the smoothness and amiability of a design 20 years its junior, requiring just a natural pause between each gear to make engagement smooth. Even the cranked "mustard open" lever that sprouts out of the dash seems perfectly natural after a while.

Rugged is the adjective that springs to mind when describing the overhead valve 2-litre engine, but it was pretty much state of the art in the thirties and still capable even in the early fifties when any car that could show 80mph on the speedo was still classed as pretty quick.

This unrestored Traction, a French-built *Onze Normale* (Big 15) from the fifties, is still good for a relaxed 60mph, with useful flexibility from the slow-revving Wet-liner engine. Mind you, it's a tiring long-distance car on modern roads, being short of both gears and power for confident motorway work. That said, its owner, affable Tony Green, who has owned the car for about two years, is quite happy to tackle long trips in it.

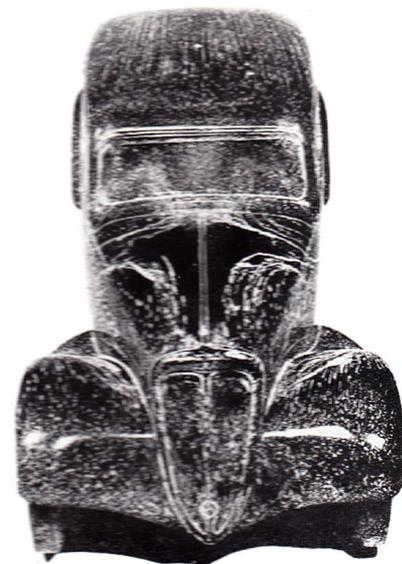
The chassis is what really sets this cliché on wheels apart from its contemporaries. In 1934 virtually nothing – except perhaps a Lancia Aprilia – could hold this car through the twists and turns of a cross-country dash, and even now it is noticeable how flatly it commits itself to a turn, how nicely weighted and precise the steering feels, notwithstanding the extreme low-speed heaviness and cross-Channel ferry-style lock.

There isn't enough power for anything that resembles understeer: the Traction just trundles round, with little roll, but at speeds that would leave most British cars of the period upturned on their roof. You can attribute that to the low build and stiffness of the monocoque hull as much as to the security of front-wheel drive. The supple, well-damped ride would make a mockery of many conventional so-called 'luxury cars' of the Traction's age too, thanks to the advanced torsion bar springing.

The looks are what attract most people to this car. The roomy cabin has a stark charm, as cold and uninviting as a French urinal with its barren tin dash and cheerless grey cloth seats. Lots of head and legroom for those in the back though and wonderfully uncluttered flat floors for all.

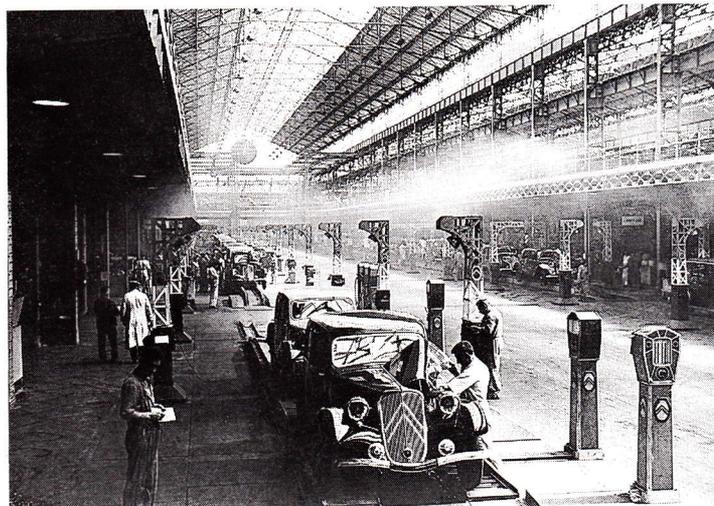
The Traction is an all-time great car, not just a great saloon, and in much of what it offered was 20 years ahead of the game. More than half a century on it still impresses as a driver's car: you just have to look at it from the right perspective.

Martin Buckley



**Above: car was surprisingly clean aerodynamically for a pre-war design**

**Below: Tractions coming to the end of the production line. Cars were also built in Slough, England**



Citroën Traction Avant. Built 1934-1957. Straight four, 1911cc, 60bhp, three-speed gearbox, torsion bar independent from suspension, rear beam axle with torsion bars, drum brakes, rack and pinion steering. Production 708, 399 (all four-cylinder Tractions). First use of front-wheel drive in a popular car, combined with very stiff unitary construction and all torsion bar springing. Usual structural rust problems, particularly with British-built Slough cars. Engine is strong but gearbox and differential unit a weak point. Spares supply good, particularly secondhand parts. Prices range from £3000 for a tatty but sound car, to around £11,000 for a Traction in really fine order. Expect to pay much more for a rare and desirable Cabriolet – up to £35,000.

**Left: Traction Avant in *Onze Normale* (big 15) form with bustle boot. Car has lower stance than most '30s designs, nothing else looks like it**



# JOWETT JAVELIN

**T**he Jowett Javelin seemed to have it all, at its launch in mid 1946. New overhead-valve 1½-litre flat-four engine; torsion-bar and twin-wishbone independent front suspension; rack-and-pinion steering; softly-sprung torsion-bar live rear axle; seating for six; an aerodynamically-efficient (Cd 0.39) streamlined integral-construction body with a low centre of gravity, a flat floor, good visibility, and suitably generous ground clearance for colonial use – how could the Javelin not be a success, even at its relatively high price?

But it wasn't until 1948 that production got underway... only for problems with crankshafts, bearings and head gaskets to emerge, along with cooling deficiencies. These were not fully resolved until 1951... by which time a new type of gearbox was resulting in widespread and well-publicised gearbox failures.

Sales evaporated, stocks of completed Javelins and of trimmed and painted body-shells piled up, production ground to a halt, and ultimately Jowett ran out of money, closing its doors in 1954 without ever re-starting the Javelin lines it had been obliged to halt in 1952. The car was quite simply seen as too expensive and too unreliable by the discriminating public for which it was intended.

Which is a shame, because the Javelin is a cracking little car, and a vastly superior device to the mediocrities peddled by certain larger manufacturers at the time.

John Taylor bought his Javelin three or so years ago:

"I wanted something that could carry myself, my wife, and my four children. We can all fit in the Jowett in reasonable comfort, unlike in my modern Volvo. The Jowett's appeal is that it has a style of its own. You can compare a Cresta with a Zephyr, and maybe a Zephyr with a Vanguard, but the Javelin is the Javelin – it's an individual car. It's reasonably reliable, too, and it's not hard work to drive."

First impressions are of the smartly trimmed, spacious, and well-appointed interior,

especially in the 'de luxe' version with its leather upholstery and veneer dashboard.

Mind you, this spaciousness is to a large degree achieved by having a driving position well forward in the car, as allowed by the compact engine, and this means that you sit quite close to the wheel, with wheelarch intrusion forcing the pedals inwards.

The engine is gruff almost to the point of coarseness, but this thrumminess becomes surprisingly endearing, as

it is accompanied by impressive pulling power, especially in second. Hills taken in top will shave the speed off, but the Javelin will haul itself up without the need for a down-change, and once on the level will quickly settle into a contented 60mph cruise.

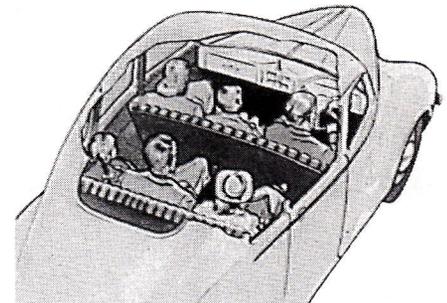
The column change is actuated by a charming little chromed lever, and operates smoothly and unobstructively, with good synchromesh, although on the third-to-fourth change you need to go slowly to allow the change mechanism to keep pace. The clutch is fine; so are the brakes.

You're always aware that the Javelin is a tall, narrow car, but it never feels topply, and adhesion seems good. The steering is direct and smooth, and you're soon hacking through the countryside at a respectable pace – thanks to its excellent power-to-weight ratio, the Jowett is not an under-powered car. There's none of the over-soft roly-poly handling of the Zephyr, either: the ride is absorbant but never soggy, although there's an initial phase of short-amplitude bounce before the dampers do their work.

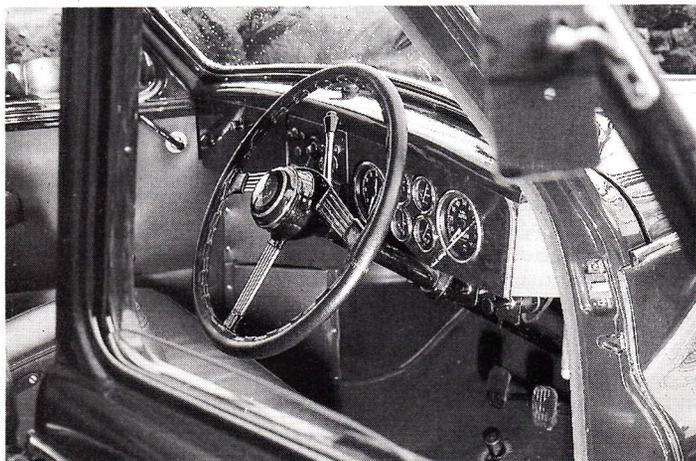
The overall feel of the Javelin is of a creatively-engineered, characterful and well-handling little saloon with a definite sporting touch – an English Lancia, perhaps?

**Jon Pressnell**

**Brochure shot shows one of the Javelin's fortes – the ability to seat six in reasonable comfort, as a result of the compact flat-four power unit. Car is packaged extremely well**



**Interior of de luxe is very pleasantly appointed; you sit well forward in car, and close to wheel. Steering-column change is easy to use, synchro good**



Water-cooled ohv flat-four, 1486cc, 50/52.5bhp; four-speed gearbox; front suspension by twin wishbones and longitudinal torsion bars; live rear axle with transverse torsion bars, located by twin arms and pair of radius rods, Panhard rod; telescopic dampers front and rear; rack-and-pinion steering; hydro-mechanical brakes until 1950, fully hydraulic thereafter; unitary body construction. Production: 23,307. Watch for rear-end rust. Supply of mechanical spares good. Restoration projects £800-£1000; sound runners £2500-£3000; best cars £5,500-£6000.

**Car's streamlined shape is work of Gerald Palmer in the main. Later tests proved it as aerodynamically efficient as it looks**



# CITROËN DS

**T**he Citroën DS cannot be ignored. Even though much of the technical ground it broke was never wholeheartedly taken up by other makers, despite the fact that the DS did not get the engine it deserved, it was, without doubt, still a truly great design.

It's difficult to imagine the impact it had in 1955, in fact it's difficult to get your head round the fact that it actually came out in 1955. That's 36 years ago. If the shape, an elegant exercise in sculptured aerodynamics, didn't bowl you over with its futuristic dynamism, what lurked underneath certainly would: brakes, steering, suspension, clutch and even the gearchange – all these were hydraulically or hydropneumatically driven off the engine.

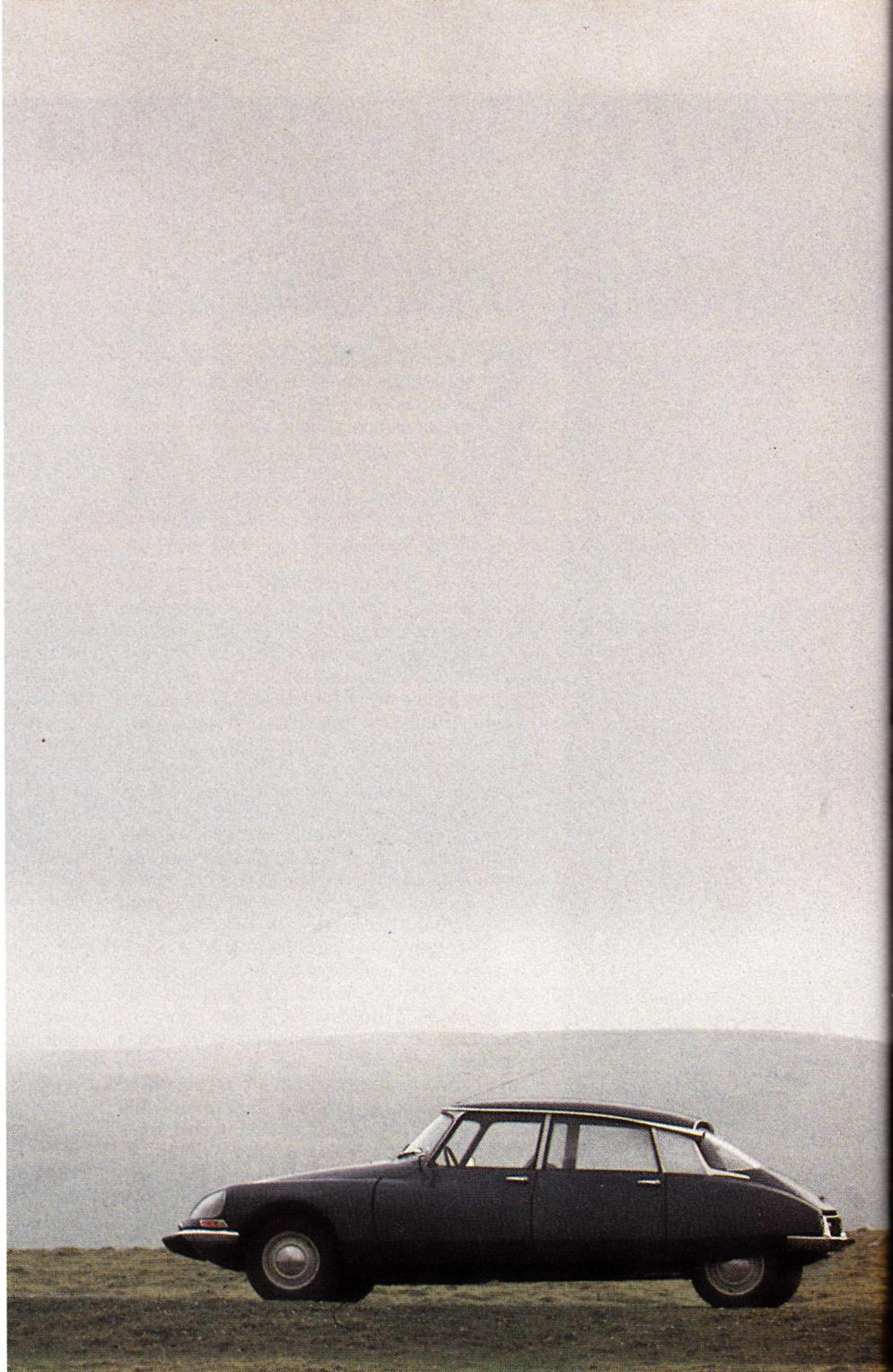
The front brakes – discs of course – were in-board and the self-levelling suspension used front wishbones and rear trailing arms with a gas-filled suspension sphere for each wheel, and an automatic height corrector to give a constant ground clearance at all times. To the Morris Oxford driving classes over in England all this must have seemed quite baffling.

It was front-driven, of course, with Citroën's pre-historic four-cylinder overhead valve 1.9-litre thumper (a lightly disguised traction unit), but in that early guise it couldn't even reach 90mph. By the time the CX was taking over in 1975 the injected DS23 could top 117mph, and storm to 60 in 10 seconds. It had a front-mounted semi-automatic gearbox, operated by a column lever, which didn't find favour with everybody, but four- and five-speed manuals and conventional automatics came later.

We tried a '67 DS21, one of the rebuilt Morton Stockwell cars, with the restyled twin-light front end introduced that year and the shorter stroke 2175cc engine. Owner Knaresh Ramchandani bought the left-hand drive leather trimmed DS as an alternative to a company Sierra. He has no special interest in old cars but just "liked the shape" and treats the blue Citroën as if it was a new car, which is a refreshing attitude in some ways: – he even put it through a car wash during our weekend in Yorkshire.

One enters the DS through large frameless doors, climbing over quite a wide sill section. The floors, both front and rear, are mostly flat and there is masses of lounging room, befitting its image as a long-distance land-cruiser. This particular car has an incorrect dashboard, an early sixtymos confection with a strip speedo, and an anxious switches and knobs strewn everywhere. The classic single-spoke wheel is here though and a column shift, stirring a non-original five-gear box. (Knaresh rated relaxed motorway cruising above originality after a bad experience with an undergeared VW Polo.)

The DS isn't the kind of car one can truly get the measure of in an hour's drive but its



**Below: early car with single-light front end**

**Above: DS has one-of-a-kind shape, cleaves air efficiently**





Interior of rare 'Prestige' DS with division and, in this case, telephone – this could be a ministerial car. All DSs are comfortably furnished, though the outlandishness of the facia depends on how old the car is



fine qualities shone through even so. The ride is sublime; calmly smooth, restfully soft and cossetting over virtually every type of road surface. The big wheels transmit little in the way of tremors or banging to the cabin. The ostentatiously thick seats must help here.

But outstanding ride quality is the very least you can expect. What is truly surprising is the way you can throw the car around after very little acclimatisation. The power steering, hyper responsive and a little notchy when you are not used to it, will let a fast driver track round bends – power on – with amazingly sure-footed precision. Assistance masks much of the understeer, hydraulics adequately check roll, and the high, commanding driving position and good all-round vision impart even more confidence. The Citroën DS is a driver's car.

Shame about the engine though. It's one of the few aspects of the big Citroën that really shows its age, and to work it through the gears is not an experience to relish. It's amiable and torquey enough during normal driving but any hint of hard work gives the engine a coarse, noisy edge that sits uneasily with the car's refined character. One consolation is the heavy but accurate-feeling column shift, and those great stand-it-on-its-nose brakes.

On long journeys the DS must be in its element with that high-striding fifth ratio and lazy, relatively low-revving engine. The car's straightline stability is superb – it is unaffected by side gusts – and once things are rolling the cabin is reasonably quiet, despite the close proximity of the engine to the bulkhead, and wind noise is low, so sealing around those frameless side windows must be good.

Now, sadly, Citroën is moving away from the imaginative engineering ethic the DS established all those years ago. But the design was courageous in a way no maker could be today and Citroën made it *work*. It also set standards of ride refinement that are only now being decisively broken. And, for that, the DS should be eternally honoured.

**Martin Buckley**

Citroën DS 1955-1975. (Spec for DS21). In-line four, 2175cc, 100bhp, front-wheel drive, four/five-speed gearbox, all-independent hydropneumatic suspension, disc front, drum rear brakes, assisted rack and pinion steering. Total production 1,330,755. The technological 'tour de force' of the fifties, first car to use hydraulics on power steering, brakes, gear shift and suspension, plus outstanding aerodynamic styling. Hydraulics not the problem you might think, and engine is near indestructible, but watch for rot especially on the underpan. Parts around if you know where to look. Price guide: £2500-£3000 for a decent runner, £10,000 for concours.

# ROVER P6 2000

**T**he Rover 2000 upset convention. The first convention to bite the cut-pile was that of what a Rover should be: conservative to the point, almost, of stateliness, and furnished to the level of a London club. The new 2000 was lean and low outside, and sharply contemporary inside, with its open-plan plastic dashboard, its drop-down 'shin-bins', its instrument panel resembling the latest hi-fi set, and its Formica woodgrain trim.

Then there was the convention that an 'executive' car should have six cylinders: the Rover had an all-new overhead-cam 'four'.

Finally, a family car in this class should seat five – or six, even, if you had a front bench seat: the Rover, with its sculpted rear buckets, made a point of only seating four.

And all this is without discussing the engineering: the base-unit form of construction (giving easy accident repairs and a deformable safety cage), the de Dion rear axle (to reduce unsprung weight and to keep the rear wheels parallel to each other, as well as to offer ride and roadholding at least the equal of a good independent rear, at less cost), the extraordinary bulkhead-mounted front suspension (intended to allow room for a gas-turbine engine). Rivals looked very ordinary in comparison...

Self-employed builder David Thorp's one-owner-from-new 2000 has made him a confirmed P6 enthusiast – as well as leading him to play an active role in the thriving Rover P6 Owners' Club.

"If you compare it with the Triumph, it's in a different league, because the Rover's standards of refinement and quality are so high – the quality of the engineering is superb. By today's standards it needs more power, although I don't think it was underpowered when it came out in 1963. I think it upheld all the Rover traditions, despite it being such a break in design terms."

The 2000 is indeed a bit of a culture shock if you're used to P4s and the like. But you soon take on board the plastic interior, because the design is so sensible, and the

quality of materials so good... and because, above all, the interior has such a delightful, intimate ambiance, with its deep transmission tunnel and those superb rear buckets. Details such as the individual shaping of the switches, so they can be identified by touch, are typically Rover, and everything works with Rover-like precision. This car has quality.

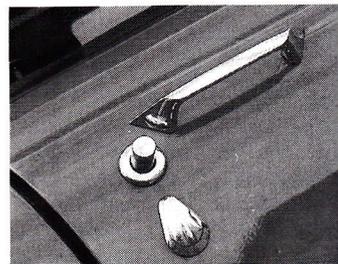
On the road, you're never in any doubt the engine is a big 'four'. Although never coarse, it's certainly not in any way sweet, and nor is it lazily torquy in the manner of the P4's creamy 'six': you need to use the gears. With the slightly notchy but enjoyable short-throw gearchange that's no hardship, especially as the 'box is allied to an undemandingly light clutch. Cruising at the legal limit is supremely relaxed, and there's an impressive lack of wind noise.

The 2000 has high levels of adhesion, thanks to that de Dion rear, and it has a supple, absorbant ride; the pay-off is a fair amount of lean on corners, accompanied by a degree of understeer. The steering isn't too low-g geared, and once you're on the move feels ideally weighted and nicely fluid; at low speeds it's a bit rubbery, and a tad on the heavy side. The brakes – all-disc, and inboard at the rear – have a delightful firm, short-travel progressive action, and pull the car up securely.

The 2000 engenders a sense of well-being that is pure Rover, and comes from a combination of thoughtful design and quality assembly. Add to this a degree of dynamic competence comfortably above that of its rivals, and you can understand the view of *Car and Driver*, when they tested the 2000TC.

"We believe that it is absolutely the best sedan that has ever been presented in the pages of this magazine. We think it's an automotive milestone," they wrote. After 25 years, that judgement still rings true.

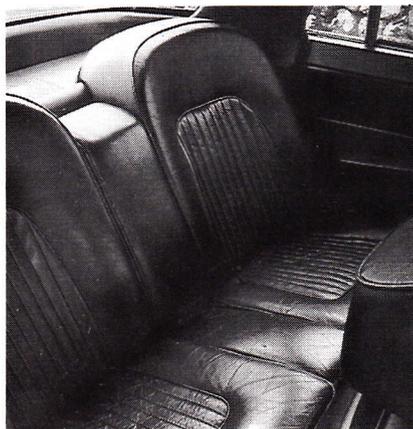
Jon Pressnell



**Distinctive design of Rover door handle; note the tumblehome of car's side panels**

**Rover interior is intimate and beautifully presented, with many typically Rover touches. Bucket rear seats are notable feature; leg-room is not brilliant, but is adequate. Simple, elegant dash has a real sixties flavour**

Overhead-cam Heron-head in-line 'four' with alloy head, 1978cc, 90bhp (114bhp for twin-carb TC); four-speed all-synchro gearbox (auto optional); front suspension by leading top links, transverse bottom links, bulkhead-mounted horizontal coil springs, with anti-roll bar standard; rear suspension by coil springs and de Dion axle, located by Watts linkage; all-round disc brakes, inboard at rear; worm-and-roller steering with high-mounted box; body/chassis base unit with bolt-on skin panels. Production: 248,959 minimum including 2200, plus minimum 80,107 of 3500 models. Base-unit vulnerable to rust. Prices from £400 to £4000.





# NSU RO80

If you take the hard, clinical view the NSU Ro80 shouldn't be included in our top 10 great saloons group. As a means of getting from A to B it was less of a success than the Morris Marina and, if a car can't function properly as a mere means of transport, what's the point? The car had major engine problems early in its life, initially with rotor-tip sealing and later with crankshaft bearing failure, so it's a problem that has to be addressed, no matter how good the car is as a design entity.

But lately, with the help of people like Wankel guru Simon Kramer, the car has redeemed itself with over 70,000 miles reliability from the original NSU Wankel engine, and piston engine levels of longevity for a Mazda-engined car. The rest of the Ro80 never gave much cause for worry anyway and people forget it's a 25-year-old design: slim the bumpers and flush fit the glass and it could be a nineties car, high-tailed, low-nosed, with a tall, delicately pillared six-light roof. And how many cars do you see these days with such a lavish expanse of glass? In 1967 it looked like something from outer space.

Rather like the Jaguar XJ6 the NSU Ro80 earns its place as much for the dynamic excellence of the whole rather than any one single design feature, although the bravery of launching a radically new type of motor car engine into mass production was taken into consideration, as well as the fact that it set ground rules for today's generation of aerodynamic big Audis: did you know the third

generation Audi 100 saloon was set to use a fully-developed Wankel engine before nervy management pulled the plug?

Simon Kramer of Rotechnics (who brought this particular car along, the '77 Earls Court show machine and last Ro80 imported) doesn't like to talk about the engine problems, and lays much of the blame squarely at the door of the people who drove them: "You should keep the gearbox in first range in town but many drivers used the gearbox as a fully automatic and changed into top as soon as possible. The engine will pull away without jerkiness or hesitation, because the torque converter will take all the load, but it's not good for the engine."

Accidentally knocking the top of the touch-sensitive gearlever – thus disengaging the clutch – was a sure-fire way of popping an engine at high speed. Town-use Ro80s tended to eat engines like most cars used clutches but, in Germany, where the car's *autobahn* prowess could be used to full advantage, the Wankel had a longer life and the car was a relative success.

It's the *way* the Ro80 still excels as a refined, modern car out on the road that makes it so impressive. Inside it's big and airy – like an Audi 100 in fact – with broad, hard seats for fat German bottoms, ample knee and shoulder room for rear passengers and an almost flat floor. It's neat, still modern in feel and beautifully made, let down only by a black slab of a dashboard that must be the ultimate in Teutonic efficiency.

Weedy low-down torque and the five-seater body's corpulence mean that low speed pick-up is never going to strain your neck muscles but the big rev range is there to be exploited in every gear and once you get used to the idea of shifting without a clutch pedal everything just slips into place. The engine pulls with a whine like a washing machine on full spin at low speeds, smoothing out to an eerie whistle that's as relaxing as it is vibration-free.

It requires a different style of driving to get the best out of it, keeping the twin rotors spinning quickly, using the slightly notchy semi-automatic gearbox as a manual: second gear is the ideal ratio for fast-back double stuff, allowing 80mph at the 6600rpm redline.

The car's handling was a revelation. Although front-driven, with 60 per cent of its mass over the front wheels, there is no strong sensation of scrubby understeer and coming on or off the throttle doesn't affect the car's attitude either. The ZF power steering is equally unobtrusive: light for parking, perfectly weighted for fast driving.

The strut and trailing-arm suspension allows more roll, perhaps, than you might find in a car of this class today and maybe, just maybe, they don't isolate occupants from crashing into potholes as well as a current Golf. But even so you can't take anything away from the Ro80. As technical red herrings go, it's the greatest.

**Martin Buckley**

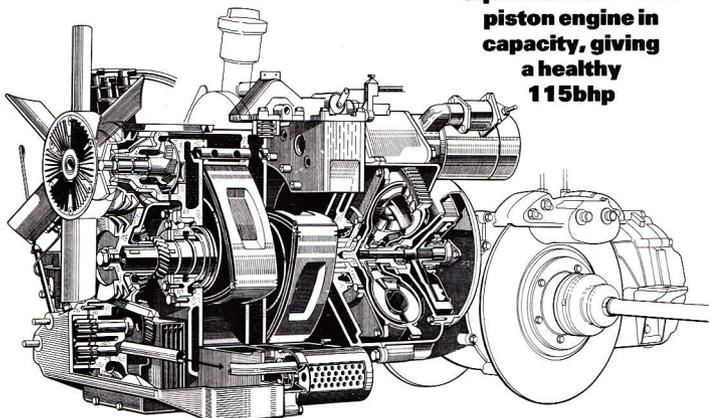
**Below: cabin is blandly efficient with vinyl-trimmed dash, big wheel, flat floor and typical German velour cloth-trimmed seats apeing BMW practice**



**Above: dramatic Ro80 shape dating from 1967 still looks up to date in the '90s, with massive glass area, low nose and high tail. Car is solidly put together, great to drive and handles beautifully. Production lasted 10 years. Right: optional forged alloy wheels**



**Below: Wankel engine is equivalent to 2-litre piston engine in capacity, giving a healthy 115bhp**



NSU Ro80 Built 1967-1977. Two-rotor Wankel engine, 1990cc (nominal), 3-speed semi-automatic gearbox, MacPherson Strut front, semi trailing arm and coil spring rear suspension, all round disc brakes, power-assisted rack and pinion steering. Total production 37,204. First production saloon car with the Wankel engine, acclaimed by many as world's best saloon when introduced in 1967. Wankel engine problems damaged car's reputation beyond repair and inspired awful Ford V4 conversions in the seventies. Many cars now going back to original NSU or Mazda RX7 as rotor tip technology is perfected. Relatively trouble-free, parts can be expensive.