

TEST MATCH

Five readers drive each other's innovative early-Seventies saloons and tell Brian Palmer their conclusions

IF there's a certain depressing orthodoxy creeping into car design in the early Nineties, let us hark back 20 years to a golden age when designers rather than accountants ruled and when many of today's car manufacturers were out to dazzle us with their originality and flair. Take our forward-looking five from a notional shortlist in 1972. At first glance they might seem an odd selection but closer inspection reveals greater parity on performance than you might imagine. Original prices cover a broad spectrum but this question is addressed by our reader testers on a value-for-money basis. The one thing that all the cars in the group share is individuality.

Standing out from the crowd must be the sensational mould-breaking NSU Ro80; *Motor* magazine didn't mince its words when it captioned its road test: 'Car of the Year, or Decade?' Too easily dismissed as just a quirky oddball with a thirsty rotary engine that tended to self-destruct and which led to the demise of the company that made it, instead it should be regarded as a project that was way ahead of its time – and whose time may yet come.

Yet we must not think of the NSU Ro80 as simply a car with a rotary engine. Rather the Ro80 should be evaluated for its epoch-making statement, in far-off 1967, of what a truly-modern car should be all about. The real miracle is that its essential characteristics remain equally valid 25 years later.

So what were these? Smooth, near-silent power – reminiscent of steam engines – offering over 100mph from an under 2-litre nominal capacity, clever yet simple semi-automatic transmission, power steering as good if not better than you will find today, a long loping comfortable ride achieved without sacrifice of sporty handling via all-independent suspension, and an enormous cabin within a stylish and aerodynamically-efficient body.

Of course, our second contender, the legendary Citroën DS in one of its last manifestations, may be said to have been doing this already for nearly two decades. Eccentric or merely unashamedly individual; it depends on your point of view. Few could deny, though, Citroën's dominance in post-war automotive technology concerning front-wheel drive, aerodynamics, and

Below, on the test route Wolseley Six is followed by Jaguar XJ6 2.8, with our readers evaluating each

Right, the Seventies saloons with their owners: Citroën DS23, David Fader; Jaguar XJ6, David Blackburn; NSU Ro80, Andrew Kay; Wolseley Six, Trevor Woodford; Rover 2000TC, Clive Asquith



the supple ride achieved by its famed oleo-pneumatic suspension – with its special built-in ride height facility for rough terrain or for simply jacking-up the car to change a wheel. Yet there was a suspicion, by the late Sixties, that Citroën's huge advantage was being challenged by much simpler but no less effective suspension media.

That still left high-pressure-powered steering and brakes, unique self-levelling turn-with-the-wheels headlamps, and the option of a novel semi-automatic gearbox in the Citroën's impressive armoury of unorthodox design features. Offsetting this, or heavily underscoring it, were quirky detailing, avant-garde styling and a flagrant disregard for convention as exemplified by a rubber pad/button to work the brakes, and a single-spoke steering wheel which would writhe between your fingers when stationary until the road wheels were pointing dead ahead.

Perhaps the one area where Citroën





consistently lagged behind was in engine design. Its ancient, slogging fours were no match on paper for the space-age Ro80, nor anywhere in its class for refinement. Yet the raucous old lump was, for all that, determinedly reliable.

In September 1968 there stepped forward the Jaguar XJ6, which *Motor* once challengingly headlined in tabloid-newspaper style: 'Beat this, Europe.'

Unlike the Continental pair, the Jaguar was neither overly complex nor particularly revolutionary. Like all Jaguars before, it was essentially an evolutionary vehicle; a fine conventional design honed to 'purrfection'.

The biggest single aim of the designers of the XJ6 was chassis refinement, both in isolating noise and insulating it from passengers. Also the new car, though suspended conventionally without recourse to fancy air, oil or rubber suspension

media, was intended to provide the best handling/ride compromise in its class. A further refinement in the front suspension geometry allowed anti-dive properties.

So far as the engine was concerned, a 2.8- or 4.2-litre version of the six-cylinder DOHC XK unit sufficed, and if some commentators thought this somewhat 'old hat', it was only because they had inside information about the forthcoming V12.

The XJ6 certainly fulfilled its promise and, like the NSU Ro80 only 12 months previously, took the prestigious Car of the Year award. And like all Jaguars before, it was sold at a bargain price that left competitors floundering. Unfortunately by the time of our nominal date of 1972, new masters British Leyland bumped up the price to offset problems in other areas – which is why we plumped for the cheaper 2.8-litre automatic version.

If there was nothing revolutionary

about the Jaguar, the same cannot be said of the Rover 2000, which made ripples of seismic proportions when it was launched in 1964. Post-war Rovers until then had been sober old barges for retired Colonels but the 2000 was aimed at younger company executives. The Rover 2000 emerged like a beautiful butterfly from its chrysalis with a smart four-seater saloon of unusual distinction for a British car. Some saw Citroën DS elements in both its styling and use of panels bolted onto a rigid steel skeleton for easy accident repair.

The Rover design team was keen from the outset to promote a number of safety features via good handling, first use of radial-ply tyres by Rover, and all-round disc brakes on the one hand and details like the padded drop-down oddments bins which protected front passengers' knees. As a result the car was awarded the AA's Gold Medal for safety in 1965.

Front suspension was unusual in

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that the coil springs were horizontally arranged, transferring stress backwards into the bulkhead, which was done to keep the engine bay unobstructed for Rover's pioneering gas turbine. At the rear a modified de Dion sliding tube gave many of the benefits of all-independent systems but without the complication.

Only the engine came in for criticism – though it was new and for Rover unusual in having a single overhead camshaft and being only a four. Its performance didn't exactly sparkle, so Rover responded in the spring of 1966 with a twin-carburettor (TC) model. This did the trick but at the further expense of refinement.

Our last contender, the Wolseley Six, may seem something of an odd fish but shows that British Leyland, too, was actively trying to provide something technically novel.

Alec Issigonis, its mercurial Turkish-born engineering guru, was at the height of his powers when the 1800 was launched in 1964. His master plan was to replace BMC's antediluvian Farina models with technically advanced cars employing transverse engines and front-wheel drive allied to clever Hydrolastic suspension units, which provided good ride and handling for the day, and spacious interiors. However, the 1800 was never the success he hoped for.

Part of the problem was peculiar styling and a stark cabin that would have made the ancient Spartans feel pretty miffed. A gruff engine and the familiar BMC transfer-gear whine offset the design's many advantages and the ride, while good on reasonable surfaces, went distinctly off from a passenger's point of view if the driver was pressing on.

The arrival of a 2.2-litre six-cylinder version in 1972 finally gave the model some couth and the Wolseley Six was in many ways the best version, even if its tacked-on trad features sat a little uneasily on the 'plain-Jane' 1800 shell. As a sub-limousine, however, it excelled and actually outsold the cheaper Austin/Morris versions.

The Test

Our five reader evaluators for the day drove each car around a 20-mile road course designed to provide a wide range of driving conditions. Riding in the back was *Classic Cars*' own Jonathan Empson. At the end of the day we asked each to vote for the car they would most like to take home, other than their own. So let's meet them, and their cars, and discover how they came to their conclusions.

1976 NSU Ro80

Engine:	Two co-axial oil-cooled rotors
Capacity:	nominally 1,990cc
Power:	113bhp at 5,000rpm
Top speed:	112.6mph
0-60mph:	14.2sec
Fuel consumption:	20mpg
Suspension:	F: ind. MacPherson struts/coil springs R: ind. semi-trailing arms/coil springs
Weight:	277cwt
Length:	15ft 8 1/2in
Price new:	£2,949 (1972)
Price now:	£8,000

Andrew Kay, a 32-year-old London dental surgeon, bought his Ro80 six years ago on impulse. He later discovered the car to be the last one imported into the UK and it may well have been the 1977 Earls Court Show car. Andrew has treated the car to new front wings and new rotor tips in the otherwise original engine. The car is not garaged and he passionately believes in using this automotive rarity, having run up 25,000 miles during his ownership. This example won Best Car Award at the 1988 rally of the Ro80 Club, of which he is an enthusiastic member.

1976 Citroën DS23 Pallas

Engine:	four-cylinder (pushrod, OHV)
Capacity:	2,347cc
Power:	115bhp
Top speed:	107mph
0-60mph:	12.3sec
Fuel consumption:	26mpg
Suspension:	F: ind. wishbone/oleo-pneumatic struts R: ind. trailing arms/oleo-pneumatic struts
Weight:	307cwt
Length:	15ft 11 1/2in
Price new:	£2,546
Price now:	£5,000

David Fader, aged 31, is a television cameraman from Teddington and a Citroën Car Club member. The car, which he has owned for four years, is believed to be the last DS officially imported into the UK (registered April 1976) and is the last registered with the club. The low mileage of 22,000 is known to be genuine as the car was owned by a friend of the family. No major mechanical work has been needed but the car was resprayed by a specialist two years ago in striking Darth Vader black.

1972 Jaguar XJ6 2.8 (auto)

Engine:	six-cylinder (DOHC)
Capacity:	2,792cc
Power:	140bhp at 5,150rpm
Top speed:	113mph
0-60mph:	12.6sec
Fuel consumption:	17mpg
Suspension:	F: ind. double wishbone/coil spring R: ind. wishbone/radius arm/coil springs
Weight:	327cwt
Length:	15ft 9 1/2in
Price new:	£2,875 (1972)
Price now:	£4,000

David Blackburn is the fourth owner of this car which has covered 54,000 miles. For the car's first four years it averaged just 4,000 miles per year. David, a 46-year-old civil servant from Bristol, had owned the car just three months when he found himself part of this test. This example of the comparatively rare 2.8-litre automatic has recently had its wings replaced and resprayed. David is a member of the Jaguar Enthusiasts Club.

1972 Rover 2000TC

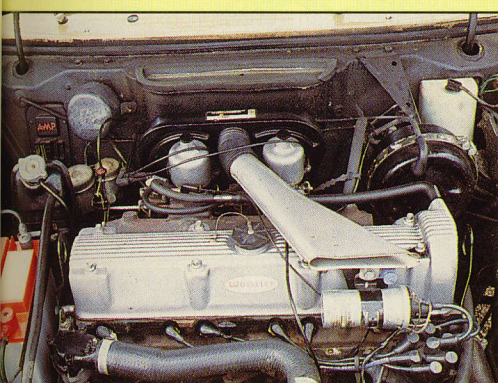
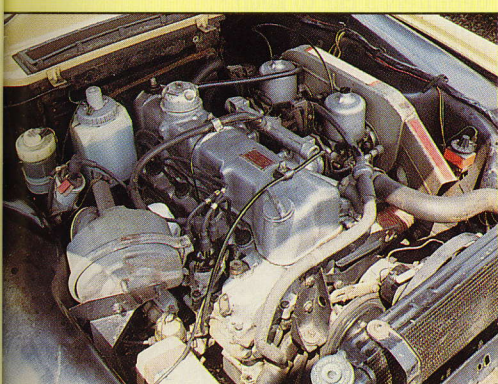
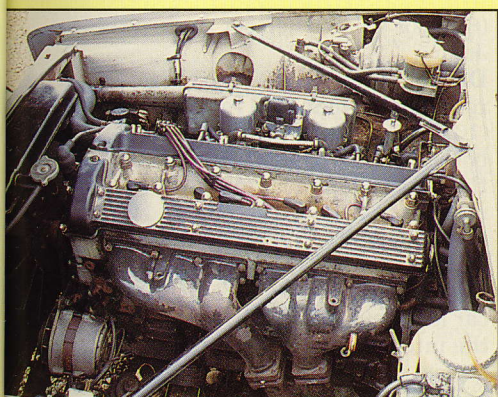
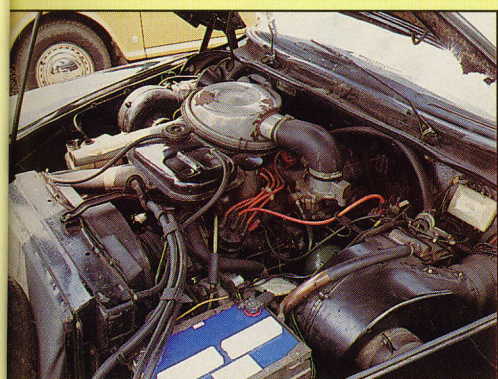
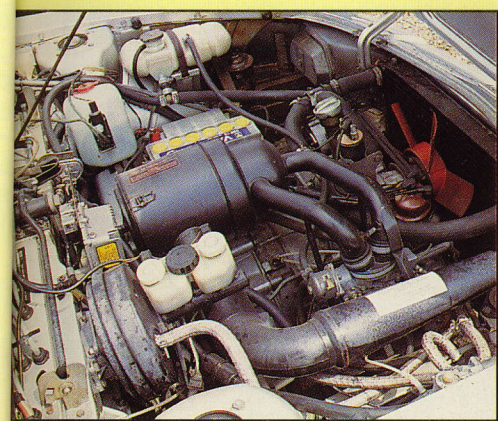
Engine:	four-cylinder (OHC)
Capacity:	1,978cc
Power:	114bhp at 5,500rpm
Top speed:	108mph
0-60mph:	11.9sec
Fuel consumption:	22.3mpg
Suspension:	F: ind. coil/top and bottom link R: coil/de Dion/Watts linkage
Weight:	287cwt
Length:	14ft 10 1/2in
Price new:	£1,983 (1972)
Price now:	£2,000

Clive Asquith bought his car when it was just four years old – so he knows a bit about its history! A 33-year-old electronics engineer from Luton, Clive used the Rover as daily transport until six years ago and has notched up over 80,000 miles out of a total of 113,000. He swears it has been reliable apart from the head being removed twice to sort out oil seal problems. He has replaced all four wings but otherwise panelwork and paint is original. Clive is a member of the P6 Rover Owners Club.

1973 Wolseley Six

Engine:	six-cylinder (OHC)
Capacity:	2,227cc
Power:	106bhp at 5,250rpm
Top speed:	101mph
0-60mph:	11.9sec
Fuel consumption:	17.6mpg
Suspension:	F/R: interconnected Hydrolastic units
Weight:	27cwt
Length:	13ft 11 1/2in
Price new:	£1,606
Price now:	£4,000

Trevor Woodford is a 43-year-old financial services manager from Southsea, Hampshire. He has owned his Wolseley for two years and is currently events secretary of the flourishing Landerab Owners Club. Up until 1989 the car had covered just 14,000 miles with its original owner and was kept in a heated garage, which explains its exceptional condition. Initially Trevor used the car daily bringing the mileage up to 23,000 but, commensurate with its condition, Trevor now intends to use this rarity more sparingly for shows and rallies.

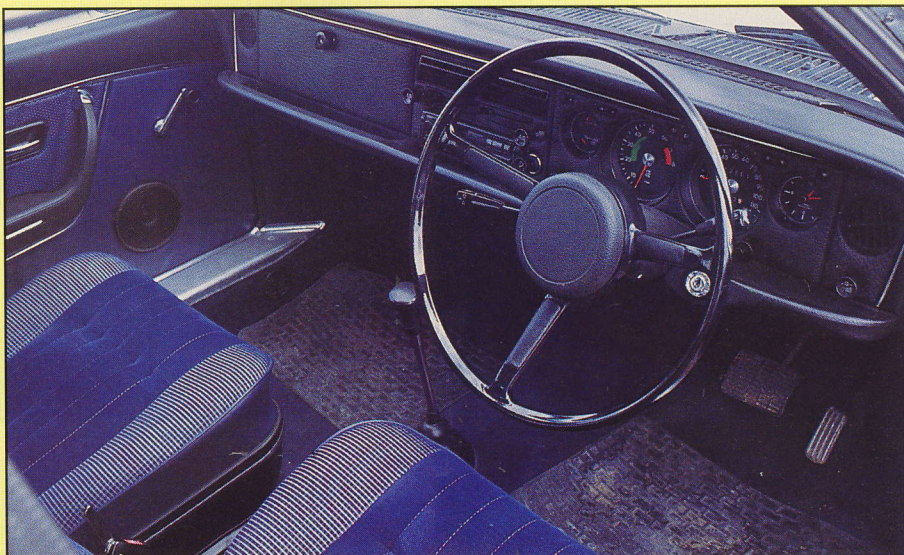


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NSU Ro80

David Fader – “The incredibly smooth delivery from the engine gave an impression of ‘nippy’ performance (8). The steering had a good level of assistance yet felt positive (8), the brakes were light yet progressive (9), and I loved the semi-auto box which was so easy to use. However I thought the lever ‘throw’ was far too long (7). The NSU felt very nimble and grippy through the corners (8). Ride was firm with some road thump – it was not so good at isolating these as the XJ6 (7). I loved the shape – better than a modern Audi – with its huge windscreen and glassy sides (9). The interior was somewhat sombre and spartan, however, with too much plastic (6). A winner, being so delicate and sensual to drive. A true classic; I’d love one. The engine makes for a totally different driving experience and what fun to be seen in such a pretty car!”

Trevor Woodford – “Good performance overall but you had to keep the revs above 4,000rpm to feel any real power (8). The steering was precise and the brakes excellent (9) but while the gearbox worked smoothly it took some getting used to (6). Handling had a real sporty feel that inspired confidence (8) but the ride was less good, transmitting a lot of thump on bad surfaces (5). The Ro80 has superb lines. A real classic for styling, ahead of its time (9). Apart from too much plastic in the interior, I found the seats supportive and comfortable, and the roominess praiseworthy (7). Good fun to drive; it felt like a modern car in every respect.”



Clive Asquith – “The performance was the best of the bunch in my view; the torque range was good and the gearing allowed easy overtaking. A lively and interesting performer (8). Steering input on bumpy roads required a fair degree of rotation of the steering wheel to correct (6), the brakes were very light and nice to use (7) but the semi-automatic gearchange seemed strange and I preferred the Citroën’s arrangement (5). The Ro80 cornered like a modern car (7) and the ride was firm but comfortable (6). The general style wasn’t impressive; it looked more like a modern car than a late Sixties design (6) and the interior was only average considering its high original price and did not have a quality feel; vision was good, however

NSU Ro80 was far from conventional. Clutch for semi-auto gearbox is operated by microswitch on gearlever



(6). Poor value when set against the Jaguar.”

David Blackburn – “Excellent all-round performance; a real driver’s car (10). The steering and brakes were both equally excellent (10) but I found the gearbox unusual and the movement between second and top overly long (8). The car cornered as if on rails (10) but the ride was rather bumpy and noisy and too firm (8). This car looks surprisingly modern (9) and the interior is basic but practical in a typical German manner (8). It was enjoyable to drive and felt very safe; definitely a car to keep.”

Jonathan Empson – “The best looking car here in my opinion. Headroom in the rear was rather limited; I got a crick in my neck. However vision was good and there was plenty of legroom even with the front seats fully back. Rather bouncy ride but little roll and quite good even by modern standards. Engine sounded like a large hairdryer!”

Motor (3.2.68) – “It is hard to see how anything else but the NSU Ro80 could have been nominated as Car of the Year . . . The enterprise and expertise alone behind the Ro80 project would almost have been sufficient to clinch the title; that the car has turned out to be so outstandingly good makes the decision inevitable . . . At first, you are aware of the engine only because it is a natural focal point for attention: later, it is the car as a whole that you realise is so impressive and that the Wankel is but an unobtrusive part of it. The steering, handling and roadholding are probably better individually and almost certainly collectively than those of any luxury car we have tried.”



Citroën DS23 Pallas

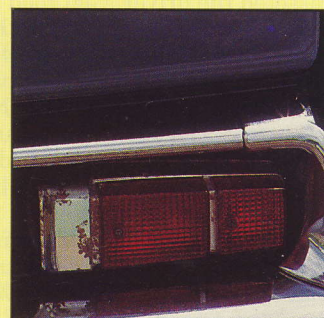
Andrew Kay – “Performance was sluggish but it didn’t matter. Helped by its excellent novel gearchange, which needed to be used a lot for swift travel (6). Positive steering, but the heaviest, so the car was difficult to park, partly due to unseen extremities. The brakes were powerful even when not used to the button control. The gearbox was wonderful offering quick, easy, smooth changes (8). The Citroën stuck to the tarmac well but one was not tempted to throw the car about because of its wide frontal area and excessive roll (6). Usual Citroën ride quality but could be wallowy – made worse by the soft armchair-like seats (8). Controls seemed very plastic with spindly stalks *à la* 2CV (6). I love the styling, though, full of character and yet still practical. Different and timeless (9). Once you acclimatise to this car, you’re hooked.”

Clive Asquith – “Performance was really quite lively when revved and you can be deceived into thinking the car is going slower than it is (7). The steering was light but would have been better with more feel (7), the brakes were good but I didn’t like the on/off response to the pressure pad (8). I really liked the gearbox, though (8). The DS had very secure handling at the expense of too much roll (6) but the ride was excellent, albeit that, like riding a boat, rear passengers could be made to feel queasy (9). The styling is distinctive, as you’d expect from Citroën, but interior styling and ergonomics could be improved and do not fit the quality-car image (8). I was very impressed; this car is unlike any other car I have driven.”

Trevor Woodford – “Only reasonable performance, not at all sporty and a bit underpowered. But with this car, who cares? (7). Steering wandered and needed to be kept in line (8), the brakes were very sharp (8) and I preferred



Citroën DS23 featured highly individual styling and an advanced technical specification. Interior combines Pallas luxury trim with Citroën idiosyncrasies of rubber-button brake pedal and single-spoke steering wheel



the gearbox arrangement to the NSU (7). The Citroën rolled on corners but you never lose confidence in its ability to follow the right line (8). The ride is very smooth, soft and ‘sexy’ (9). Very OTT styling but I loved it. Only the French could get away with this (10). The interior was spacious if a little cheap-looking (9). I felt at home immediately.”

David Blackburn – “A real surprise. Once I had mastered the gears this was a really nice car to drive (8). First impression was of driving a huge jelly

but I soon realised this was a very safe car to be in. The ride was truly excellent (10). In fact the seats were almost too comfortable – there was a real danger of nodding off. The styling is very futuristic and overall the Citroën was much better than I expected. Idiosyncratic and different.”

Jonathan Empson – “Spongy seats, armrests and even carpet.

Comfortable but rather like being in a padded cell! Low on noise and modern car ride, even though it seemed about to capsize on corners. Tyres squealed at fairly low cornering speeds. Rather cheap-looking dashboard.”

Motor (10.2.73) – “Considering that the design of Citroën’s luxurious DS range has survived almost 20 years without major change, there is remarkably little to date it. The car is aerodynamically superior to nearly all of its competitors, and with its new 2,300cc engine and five-speed gearbox it has exceptional performance for its capacity and it offers a degree of comfort that is not always evident in cars costing considerably more . . . Perhaps it is in terms of refinement that the car’s relative lack of development is most evident. The engine for instance, is and always was harsh and fussy when extended and the hydropneumatic suspension, which caused such a stir when it was introduced, is now rivalled and in some aspects surpassed by the springing of more conventional cars.”

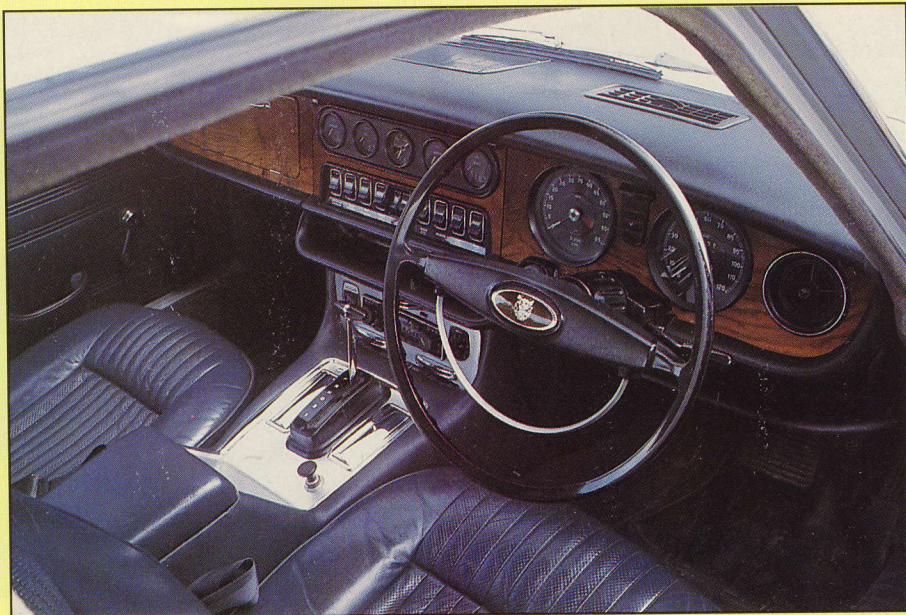


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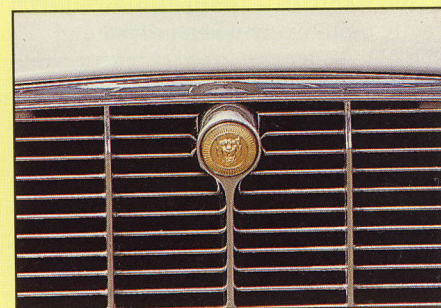
Jaguar XJ6 2.8 Auto

David Fader – “Capable cruising ability, with adequate acceleration available (6). The Jaguar’s steering was vague, over-assisted and did not feed any information back to the driver (6), the brakes were powerful and progressive (8) and the gearbox average (5). (*Some slippage was later traced to low fluid levels – Ed*). Handling was poised, confidence-building and really quite sporty for such a big car (8). The ride was comfortable and quiet; it insulated and cosseted the driver from road noise (8). I consider the frontal styling heavy (5), the seats were low with small backs and the interior felt claustrophobic with its small glass area (6). Not a fun car in my book but a great cruiser. Typically English comfort and feel.”

Trevor Woodford – “In 2.8-litre form this large car felt a little underpowered (6). The steering was very good and the brakes sharp (8) and a typical Jag in the handling department; it really inspired confidence round bends (8). Unfortunately the soft suspension tended to ‘bounce’ on large bumps (7). The styling is a classic; very seductive; ‘Big Cat’ class (9). Sadly it was disappointing to drive: I thought I would like it most but in the end I liked it least. While it is a car that would undoubtedly grow on one, I don’t think I would ever find it fun to drive.”



Jaguar XJ6 offered considerable refinement plus exemplary ride and handling for a large saloon. Classic Jaguar styling combines with traditional luxury interior with walnut facia and leather trim. Cheaper 2.8-litre version lacked performance of 4.2



Andrew Kay – “Smooth engine makes the other piston engines sound agricultural. Eerily quiet at low revs, delicious sounding when extended. Acceleration adequate even with 2.8 lump (8). The steering was the worst feature by far; it is so light you are frightened even to caress the wheel. Brakes great, gearbox changed

imperceptibly (6). Although a massive car it had good roadholding, was extremely able (7) and probably had the best ride of the lot (8). Classic Jaguar styling understated and bespoke, if dated, and obviously a Jaguar. Shame there was no mascot (8). The dashboard was very impressive with racing car undertones, though not highly ergonomic. Good quality materials (7). Lived up to my expectations. Luxurious, serene . . . but not a driver’s car.”

Clive Asquith – “I am in broad agreement with the others on most things except that I thought the steering was the best of all the cars tried, being light and very precise. Comfort was good except that for a big car you wouldn’t exactly call it roomy. Classic British looks even though it is not my favourite Jaguar design. This would probably be my favourite of the day given a gearbox that was 100%.”

Jonathan Empson – “The ride is as good as the Citroën’s but with usefully sporty cornering powers as well. So well insulated from noise, only the leather squeaking intruded! Low seats do not give much support but headroom adequate. Rear window extends over passengers heads; could get warm in summer.”

Road Test – Sadly the 2.8-litre Jaguar XJ6 was never tested by *Autocar* or *Motor*, so we cannot include period comments.



David Blackburn – “A good performer with a firm, rather traditional ride and a high-set driving position (7). The Rover felt heavy, especially on corners, but I liked the excellent gearbox which responded to movement with a positive ‘click’ into the slots (10). Very firm seats, well laid-out controls with different-shaped knobs indicating their function and, overall, the Rover is well styled and attractive; probably rather advanced for its age (9). Good old British engineering – built to last. Rather too serious a car to really call fun, though.”

David Fader – “Felt very lively and the most sporty of the bunch (8). The steering was heavy at low speeds, brakes firm but good, lovely short travel gearchange (7). This car inspired real confidence; tidy and competent on bends. Coped with different surfaces well (7), while the ride was smooth and comfortable (8). A classic shape – advanced for its years (8). But I found the controls a hotch-potch and hated the Formica grained ‘wood’ (7). I was pleasantly surprised by this car; much better than I expected. It competed well with the Jaguar in comfort terms at a much lower price. In fact, I didn’t want to give it back to its owner!”



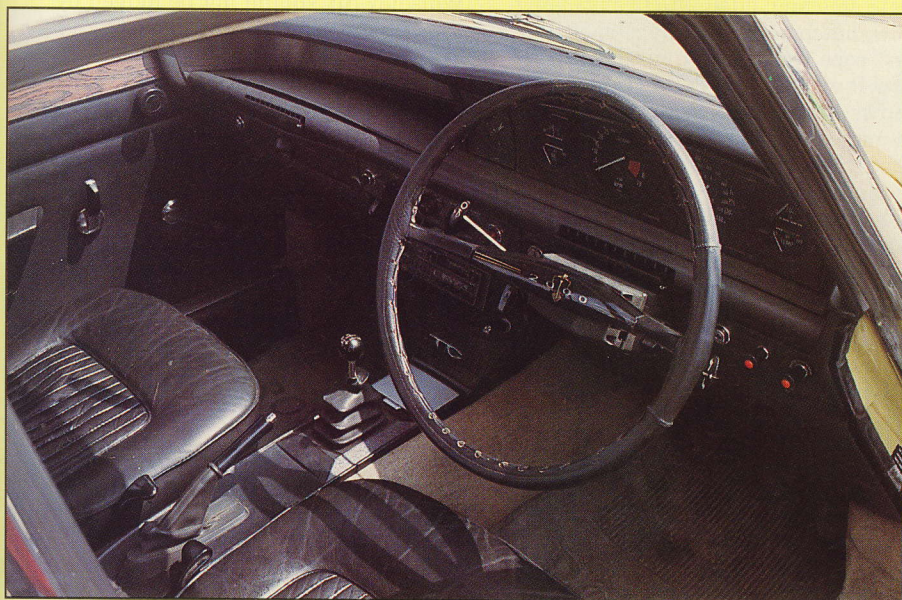
Andrew Kay – “Disappointing. Cries out for the V8 engine. Like the Wolseley the engine was rough, though its performance was more tempting (7). Though not power-assisted, the steering was good and responsive and the gearbox sporty, which it needed to be (6). A better car to handle than the Wolseley; you knew it was rear-wheel drive as the back end would skid on wet corners. Felt

weighty and slightly old-fashioned (6). The ride was surprisingly compliant, helped by classic Rover bucket seats (7). Individual, expensive-looking, classic shape (6). Cabin very narrow; you could hit your nose on the side window if you turned quickly. Excellent instrument binnacle – very modern (7). Well made and very British.”

Trevor Woodford – “Responsive engine aided by excellent short-throw gearchange (8). The Rover’s basically good roadholding and handling inspired confidence at speed, but it rolled somewhat on tight bends (8). You get a nice classy ride, well laid out controls, lovely leather trim on firm, supportive seats and real quality at a bargain price. The styling was modern and advanced while still retaining the essential Rover elegance and class. Pity they had to use that tacky plastic ‘wood’, though. This was very nostalgic for me as I used to own one back in 1972.”

Jonathan Empson – “My head bashed the roof again in the back and vision was the worst of the lot. Very black interior only relieved (?) by plastic ‘wood’. Good ride and cornering but engine and road noise intrusive – especially when you tried to talk!”

Motor (1.10.66) – “When we advertised a job on the editorial staff of *Motor* recently we might well have put candidates to the test by asking for a dispassionate report on the Rover 2000, a car of such extreme individuality that even the most experienced road tester can have difficulty in preserving his detachment . . . On very short acquaintance it becomes clear that the TC’s predominant characteristic is sporting . . . The Rover’s longest suit is comfort. Our 1963 report on the 2000 observed that for riding comfort it was then in the top three among European cars irrespective of price, and we still have no cause to modify our high opinion.”



Rover 2000TC combined modern styling and safety features with Rover quality. Compact body with bolt-on panels lacked passenger and luggage space and interior was mixture of modern and traditional. Four-cylinder OHC engine had twin carbs for performance



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Wolseley Six

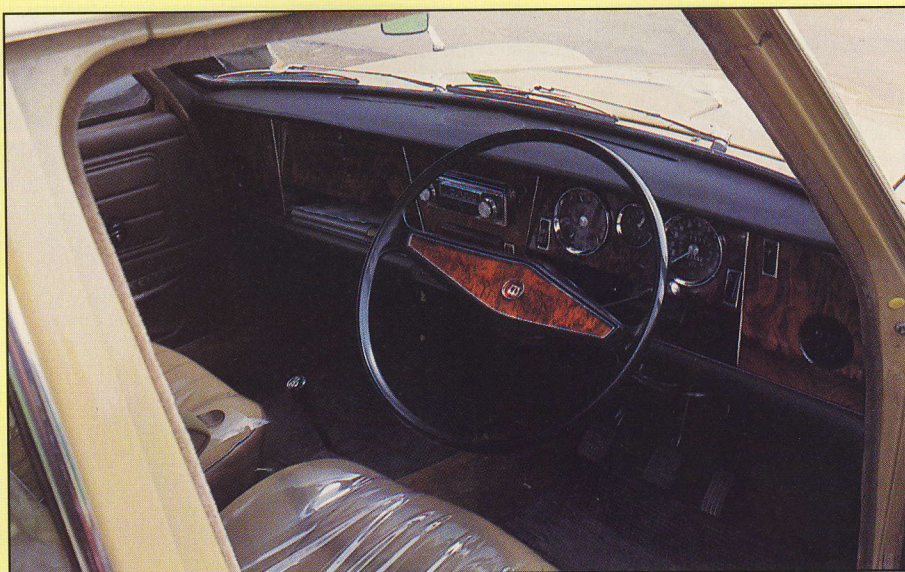
Clive Asquith – “For a 2,200cc six-cylinder engine, it didn’t seem very lively; straight-line acceleration wasn’t very impressive (5). That summed up my feelings in most other areas too. Cornering was an experience – a bad one, being very front-end biased on weight, and a terminal understeerer (2). Ride was quite reasonable, however, though I would have preferred it firmer (6). Comfort levels were high considering its low cost (6) but all the switches and controls were out of reach to a tall driver (4). The fascia was nicely presented, though (5). Typical BMC car offering roominess and good vision, allied to great practicality.”

Andrew Kay – “Lots of torque and reasonable acceleration but noisy with tractor-like transmission whine (6). Bus-like steering wheel is very light, good brakes and a surprisingly good gearbox given you hardly need to use it (6). Understeer by the bagful with no warning through the steering (3) – feels solid, though, and you’d never overturn this car! Jiggly ride even on smooth roads (3). Apart from ‘stuck-on’ Wolseley grille the styling is nothing more than a cover for the mechanical bits (2). Only the add-on wood dashboard prevents the interior looking cheap; roomy though. Turtle-like colour of door trim obscene! Minor controls sprayed across the dash (4). Probably best on a ‘most mass for your cash’ basis but hardly exciting. Great

for period costume picnics with granny and the vicar.”

David Blackburn – “Reasonable performer but not outstanding in any respect (6). Dynamically basic and simple – like a big Mini (6). Easy to drive and cornered well (8) but the ride very bumpy and noisy (5). Exterior styling rather bland but the interior was well kitted out (9). Too staid. Not really in contention with the others but undoubtedly good value for money.”

David Fader – “Disappointing for a six pot – didn’t like being revved (5). Vague steering, adequate brakes, long-throw, notchy box (5). The suspension didn’t cope well with bumps which threw it off course (4) and Hydrolastic ‘chop’ is rather unpleasant for passengers (4). Driving position was a disaster. Huge steering wheel and London bus angle. Seats comfortable, though, and dash looks good (4). Outside styling is awful. Looks like a pumped-up 1300 (3). Fun for shopping and driving to the golf club for a sherry.”



Jonathan Empson – “Let’s face it, it’s not the world’s best-looking car; I didn’t go much on the olive trim, either. Good headroom and limousine-like rear legroom but not a refined enough package overall.”

Motor (29.4.72) – “Many cars are bought for the wrong reasons in this age of the manipulated image. So although there’s a lot of good sense and value for money built into the metamorphic Austin/Morris/Wolseley Six models, we wonder whether the public will fully appreciate their fresh appeal . . . The Wolseley Six should not be judged by the standards of the enthusiast . . . The fact that its handling and cornering powers are adequate rather than inspiring is hardly going to sway the potential customer who wants an immensely tough and comfortable car, with plenty of interior space, plush fittings, and 10 to 100mph performance in top gear . . . On these counts, it is has no genuine rival to undercut its price and is more than a challenge for several cars costing a few hundred pounds more.”

Verdict

So there we are. Decision time again. What will it be? Will our jury be swayed by the technical wizardry as exemplified by the twin continental contenders: the esoteric yet charismatic Citroën and the fascinating yet flawed NSU Ro80? Or will Browns Lane’s all-round engineering competence lead Jaguar to the tape? Or maybe the agile and award-winning Rover may win them over. While the Wolseley Six, our bargain basement contender, might just spring a surprise.

We had an honourable draw this time but the shared prize of most desirable car in this group will be crossing the Channel on the next ferry. The NSU Ro80 and Citroën are convincing winners. Maybe there’s a lesson there, somewhere, for today’s car makers.



Wolseley Six offered six-cylinder refinement allied to the spacious interior of the BMC 1800 body with its wide track. Hydrolastic suspension and transverse six-cylinder OHC engine driving the front wheels were novel in its class