

into life involves turning on an electrical master switch, the magnetos, a fuel pump, pressing a brass starter button, then advancing the timing (by a lever) as the beast explodes into life with a gruff roar.

Or take the pedal layout. Where you expect to find the brake pedal, there is a throttle. And where popular prejudice dictates the location of an accelerator, we find a brake. (This transposition of the 'go' and 'stop' pedals was in fact common in many pre-war cars.)

The steering wheel – Bakelite-rimmed, metal-spoked – is vast in size and astonishingly weighty to manoeuvre. The clutch, conventionally sited to the left, is thigh-bustingly meaty. Changing gear means double-declutching. You have to be precise, firm-but-delicate, and get the revs just-so.

Throttle response, thanks to the supercharger, is mighty and neck-jarringly instant, especially from low revs. The long-stroke engine is slow revving and torquey, like a big

diesel. The sweet spot is at about 2600rpm (85mph in top gear) although it will keep bellowing, coarsely, up to 4500.

Cornering involves a mighty stab on that brake pedal (on the right!) and then great arm and shoulder heft, as you manhandle the steering wheel. Enter the corner slow – otherwise the nose-heavy, top-heavy behemoth will plough off the road, snout first. Then accelerate strongly (centre pedal!), the four-pot growling and screaming, as it punches hard for an 86 year-old.

As we drive, there is a delightful cocktail of sensations: a slight whiff of oil and petrol and exhaust fumes; the bellowing exhaust behind and roar of the engine in front; the faint whistle and whine of the supercharger; and wind blasting your face from around the dainty little aero screens.

So behold the most celebrated of all pre-war Bentleys. Just 55 Blowers were built, five of them racing team cars. Ironically poor old WO, Bentley's founder, didn't like his masterpiece. He hated forced induction, far preferring the performance of big, naturally aspirated engines. **GG**

Produced 1929-1931 **Price at launch** £1720 **Value now** £15 million (Birkin car), £4-6 million (a 'normal' Blower) **Engine** 4398cc inline four-cylinder, supercharged, 240bhp (race cars), 221lb ft **Performance** 8.0sec 0-60mph, 125mph

To think this car came second in the French Grand Prix! Gavin employed DRS – by taking his flat cap off



Blower is full of unfamiliar instruments. Like air-pressure gauges for fuel tank. Clock (top left) including stopwatch had to be manually wound

Two little tubes at the bottom of the dash are to show, and adjust, the flow of oil to the big nose-mounted Roots supercharger

Brass lever on steering wheel advances and retards ignition timing. Note big tachometer (near Green's left hand) – redlined at 4500rpm

Remember when racing cars had manual lap counters? Thought not. That's what the little counter on top left of dash is for



MGB The people's sports car

THE MGB HAS become such a quintessential hobby classic it feels like you need to peel back layers of tweed – or should that be polyester? – in order to understand why. Bad treatment by British Leyland saw it become a joke even before it eventually staggered out of production. Still, with over half a million sold in roadster and GT form, the B brought the 'British sports car' to the masses on both sides of the Atlantic, and essentially defines a pre-hot-hatch era of affordable performance motoring.

Performance? 0-60mph in 12sec sounds like city car territory now, and though it will top a ton you have to work the B-series under the bonnet pretty hard. But the feeling of being alive as you push your little drop-top as fast as you dare in order to maintain maximum momentum is the very essence of the appeal here. And what the later rubber bumpers and raised ride height make it all too easy to forget is that a properly set-up MGB really handles.

Specialist tuners Frontline Developments take things a bit further these days. The Abingdon Edition (pictured) will give a 911 grief (at a 911 price) using a brand new seam-welded shell, 304bhp 2.5-litre Mazda engine running individual throttle bodies, and extensively developed suspension. 0-60mph in 3.8 seconds and a noise like rolling thunder, yet the same character and spirit thanks to the beautifully finished period interior and tastefully streamlined exterior. It doesn't just bring back the magic, it leaves shattered rose-tinted lenses in its wake. **Fantastic. CJH**

MBG (ORIGINAL)

Produced 1962-1980 **Price at launch** £690 (+£260 car tax) **Value now** £5000-£15,000 **Engine** 1798cc inline four-cylinder, 94bhp, 107lb ft (1962) **Performance** 12.1sec 0-62mph, 108mph (yeah, right...)

FRONTLINE MGB ABINGDON EDITION

Produced 2014-present **Price** £95,874 **Engine** 2497cc inline four-cylinder, 304bhp, 241lb ft **Performance** 3.8sec 0-62mph, 162mph (entirely believable...)



Jaguar XJ6 The ride of your life

SO YOU THINK you know about ride comfort? You've relaxed in the back of an S-class on that business trip to the Fatherland, stormed down a Welsh mountain trail on your fancy full-suspended 29er mountain bike, and you once bedded the principal's, ahem, ample niece after a 10-pint pub crawl back in college. But you've never driven an original XJ? Consider a key part of your automotive schooling absent.

Here's the Jag the current crop of cats desperately wants to emulate. Those tapering flanks, impossibly low roofline and gorgeously slim pillars look great today; half a century ago this was supercar style for the fortunate family man. And it was even better to drive. Most of the oily bits we'd seen before: the ohc XK engine, the independent rear suspension and front subframe. But get past steering that's lighter than a helium filled penny floater, and it all worked magnificently, '71's V12-powered XJ12 only adding to the refinement. Drive before you die? Put one on your drive, more like. The S1 XJ is one of our greatest cars, and right now it's a bygone bargain. **CC**

Produced 1968-1997 **Price at launch** £2253 **Value now** £3000-£12,000 **Engine** 4235cc 4-cyl, 245bhp, 280lb ft **Performance** 8.8sec 0-60mph, 124mph

