



The TVR 3000M

Reprinted from

MOTORSPORT

Road Test

The TVR 3000 M

Latest and best individualistic, hand built, glass fibre Sports car from Blackpool

WE and others have often said that many modern cars are becoming too soft, spoiled by cocoons of padding, insulated from road feel by over-resilient springing and generally taking the enjoyment out of driving. Even mass-produced sports cars, once-upon-a-time an outlet for those who enjoyed cars for sheer driving pleasure, have fallen into the same trap. Fortunately a handful of small sports car manufacturers remain to keep driving the delight it should be. The Blackpool-based TVR Engineering Ltd. is one of the oldest of these (with obvious deference to the men of Malvern), albeit with a chequered career of bankruptcies before the company was taken over by the capable, knowledgeable and enthusiastic Martin Lilley and his father Arthur in 1965.

Today the offerings from these 'Exclusive Sportscar Manufacturers' follow much the same basic idea as the first TVR to stem from the handiwork of Trevor Wilkinson (TreVoR) in 1957: glass-fibre, tubular-chassised, two-seaters, employing engines from large manufacturers and always, above all, tremendous fun to drive.

In all other respects that very first 1,172 c.c. side-valve Ford engined model squatting on modified VW suspension and the latest products of the new 40,000 square feet Bristol Avenue factory are entirely dissimilar, as is the company's financial stability. A new, simpler and more rigid, backbone chassis designed by Michael Bigland TVR's Technical Director, carries the attractive



THE FRONTAL ASPECT of the latest TVR has been changed considerably in order to accept the spare-wheel forward of the radiator.

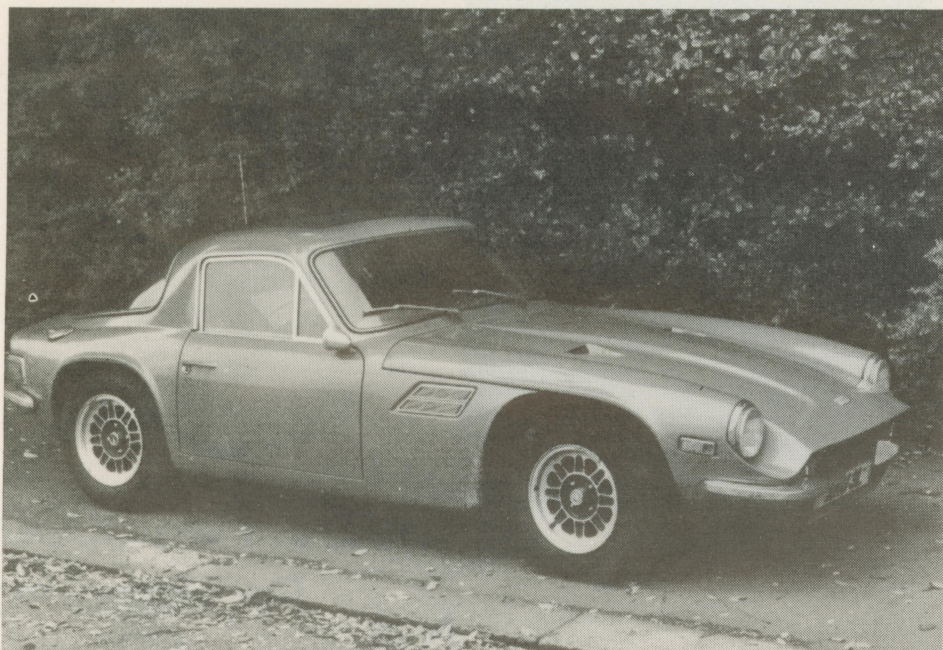
glass-fibre superstructure of the "M" models introduced last July. European buyers can purchase the 130 mph, 3000 M with 3-litre V6 Ford Capri power, while American customers must satisfy themselves with a twin-Stromberg carburetted exhaust-emission version of the in-line Triumph 2.5-litre straight-six, the V6 being unacceptable to the U.S. emission legislators. Other than engine and gearbox the two versions are identical. The 1600 M, fitted with the cross-flow Ford GT engine, has ceased production.

Demand for the cars is such from the States and Europe, particularly Holland, where a new Distributor has been appointed, that in true Morgan fashion every TVR is sold before it leaves the factory, an idyllic state for Martin Lilley, although perhaps not for customers, who must learn patience. Undoubtedly Lilley could make and sell many more cars than the current

nine a week (produced by a staff of 73, including office workers, making the Blackpool factory, so Lilley claims, the world's most efficient car plant), but he has no wish to sacrifice exclusivity and quality in the interests of expansion. The 3000 M is indeed a rarity in this country, the entire production for the first few months of this year being given over to meeting export demands.

The introduction of VAT and the consequent demise of the kit-form TVRs was another reason for the successful export concentration, although home market sales ought not to suffer from the tax imposition on the fully-built-up cars, at £2,464 the 3000 M offering excellent value for money in what is virtually a class of its own. Such a price seems a reasonable one to pay by current standards for such character and performance, even more so when the outstanding inclusive 'extras' are taken into account. Weathershield sunshine roof, heated rear screen, powerful Marchal headlights, alloy wheels, a "proper" leather-rimmed steering wheel, Sundym tinted glass, inertia reel seat belts, cigar lighter, two-speed wipers, electric screen washers and even a Philips push-button radio are in the impressive standard specification. Other than perhaps a tape-player it would be hard to find anything with which to boost the price. Nevertheless, TVR are prepared to tailor cars to customers' own desires, an added bonus of buying a hand-built car.

The 3000 M replaces the Tuscan V6, itself descended from the 4.7-litre Ford V6 powered car of the same name, a lamented beast of shattering performance — a real sports car indeed. Both the V8 and V6 Tuscan used a longer wheelbase version of earlier chassis with TVR's own fabricated wishbone suspension. The redesigned chassis uses similar suspension with revised wishbones and pick-up points. At the front, tubular wishbones are fitted in conjunction with coil springs and telescopic shock absorbers, the system being similar at the rear with minute adjustment of track and camber available by screw adjustment and shims. Alloy rear uprights are utilised. Steering is by an Alford and Alder rack mounted sturdily to the chassis ahead of the wheel centres, connected to the cockpit by a Triumph Herald column. Very effective Girling 11-in. front discs and 9-in. rear drums are also of



THE CENTRE BODY section has changed little since the first TVR, but the two stylish ends maintain up-to-date distinction. Alloy wheels and sun-roof are standard.

Triumph origin, from the TR6, as are the front uprights, modified to accept the tubular wishbones, but the remainder of the chassis suspension is pure TVR. The chassis itself has a multitubular backbone with square-section outriggers. A square-section box arrangement at the rear carries the top and bottom wishbone inner pick-up points and the hypoid differential unit, again borrowed from Triumph, with a 3.45:1 final drive ratio.

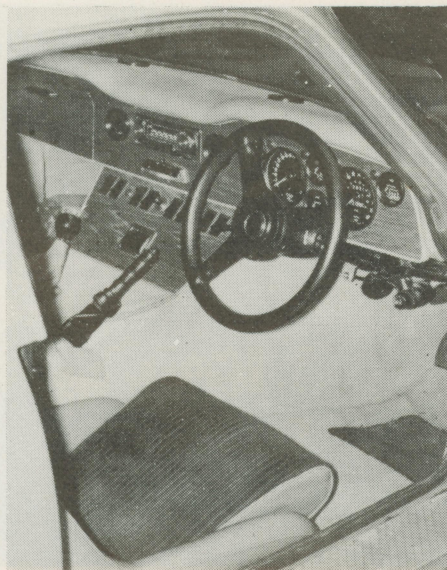
TVR craftsmen make the glass-fibre coupe body from scratch (fire-resistant resin is included) and not surprisingly, after so many years' experience, the quality is second-to-none: the well-used test car showed a complete absence of ripples, starrng or cracking. It is rubber mounted to the exceptionally rigid chassis so is not susceptible to abnormal stresses and strains. To complement the lack of corrosion afforded by the body, all chassis tubes are sealed with oil residue left inside them and rubberised underseal completes the infallible protection. Certainly the TVR doesn't cry out for a garage over its roof.

From the outset the major criticism of the TVR has been access to the luggage space, which has to be made over the seats, or in the case of the 3000 M's high-backed seats, between them. Luggage space is made much greater on this latest model, however, by virtue of a slightly extended tail and more important, moving the spare wheel, formerly occupying most of the available space, to the nose of the car where it also helps crash absorption (this model is the only car ever to remain steerable after a MIRA 30 mph impact test). Great care must be taken to avoid damaging the rear window heating elements when loading suitcases. Tools are carried in a shallow well underneath a flap in the fully-carpeted floor of the luggage compartment, below which lies the space-consuming box section chassis necessary for the wishbone suspension.

There is little point in dwelling on the deficiencies caused by the fixed rear bodywork for the very simple reason that they won't exist for much longer. A revised 3000 M scheduled for introduction in the next couple of months will have a lift-up rear tail gate similar to the Jensen. Exit criticism!

In contrast to the tail the TVR's underbonnet accessibility has always been good via the front-hinged, one-piece front end, released by two cockpit catches, one under each side of the fascia. The spare wheel is difficult to retrieve from up-front, however, and doing so risks dirtying one's back on the bonnet catches. Ford's compact V6, surmounted by a chromed pancake air-cleaner, and all its ancillaries is easily worked upon.

While even a bashful Lethario would find little difficulty in finding girl-friends with the 3000 M, his subsequent style would be somewhat cramped (to say the least) by the massive backbone chassis effectively separating him from his quarry in the passenger seat. This wide, carpeted division helps, if anything, the other pleasurable pursuit for which the TVR is more specifically intended (i.e. driving), inasmuch as it gives an almost single-seater feeling of being held securely in the seat. Though this tunnel lies at elbow height, the 3000 M's ideal arms-outstretched driving position ensures that it isn't an impediment. The leather-gaitered lever controlling the latest-type, closer ratio Capri four-speed, all synchro gearbox with the improved top linkage lies in the centre of the tunnel, readily to hand, if set a little bit too far rearwards because the engine is mounted well behind the wheel-centres for good weight-distribution. The non-fly-off handbrake is conveniently placed in the top edge of the tunnel to



BEAUTIFULLY APPOINTED, right down to a Philips push-button radio and leather-rimmed wheel, the TVR cockpit affords an excellent driving position.

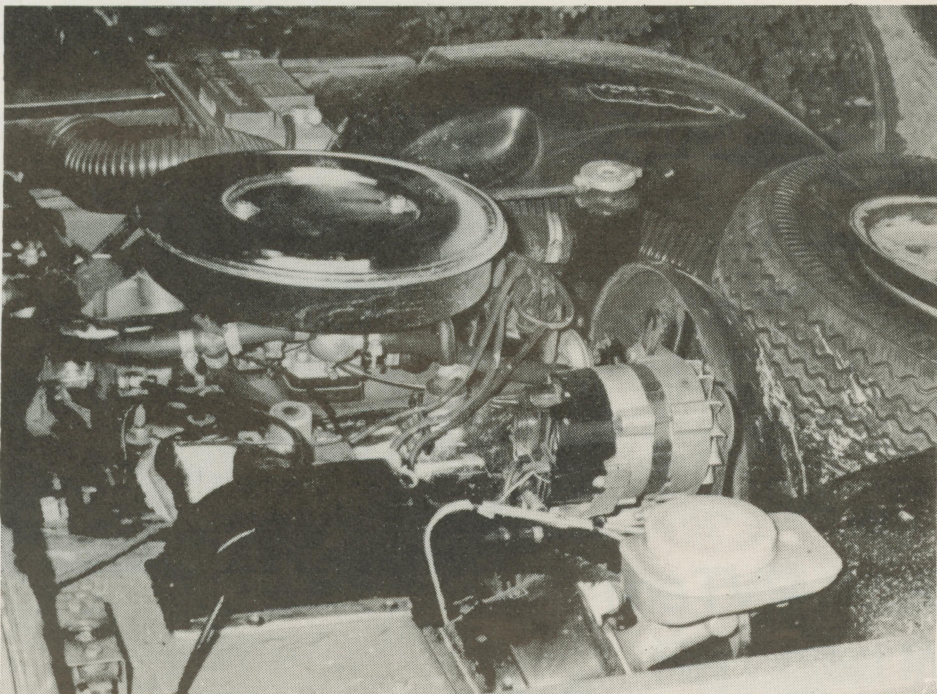
the right of the gearlever.

Excellent interior appointments have always been a hallmark of the TVR. The test car confused description somewhat by having a prototype wood dashboard and modified door trims — XKU 3L has to double up as a development car and a demonstrator, for which one can forgive a small company — though I understand the general layout is as production. Extensive carpeting is of first-class quality and the roof is lined with cloth, a touch of almost forgotten luxury. Instruments are grouped tidily in front of the driver, comprising speedometer with trip, tachometer, fuel gauge for the 12 gallon tank, oil pressure gauge, battery condition indicator and water temperature gauge, the last slightly

obstructed by the steering wheel boss. In the centre of the fascia the very good Philips radio is flanked by two eyeball vents (that for the driver unconnected on the test car because of work on a new wiring loom for the revamped fascia). Below it is the interior light with courtesy switch facilities and to the far left is a useful, lidded cubby-hole without a lock, while the passenger side also boasts a storage well at foot level in the nearside panel. Switches are mounted in a row on an angled panel, illuminated at night, on the tunnel below the fascia. They may look confusing, but the important switches — washers, wipers and lights — are nearest to the driver where they fall readily to hand. A left-hand steering column stalk controls dipping and flashing of the exceptionally powerful Marchal headlights (more than up to the 3000 M's maximum speed), and the right-hand stalk takes care of direction indicators. There's a conventional horn button in the steering-wheel boss, inoperative on the test car. Indicator warning lights are completely masked by the thick rim of the steering wheel.

A choke-pull type knob below the steering column controls heater temperature, "heat" being a fairly loose term for a lukewarm draught. Eyeball vents in each footwell, the aforementioned two in the fascia and another two below the fascia for demisting, give individual, if complex, outlet control. Only one of the two heater blowers functioned on the test car. Cooling ventilation through the eyeball vents proved weak also, more than compensated for by the draught-free sunshine roof. However, it was a two-handed job to open the roof, which leaked in pouring rain at high speed, another criticism which will be eradicated by the fitment of a detachable flush-fitting panel in the forthcoming revised model.

A relaxed and well-nigh perfect driving position made an immediately good impression, confirmed by the lack of fatigue on long journeys. Nylon-cord panelled bucket seats seemed hard at first, extremely comfortable after a couple of hours' acquaintance, and the pedals reacted well



THOUGH THE COMPACT Ford V6 is buried deep in the substantial chassis, the one-piece nose gives excellent accessibility. The flat spare tyre was awaiting a suitable tourniquet to seat it on the rim, a new Avon being fitted after a puncture had destroyed the original.

to heel-and-toeing.

Without a doubt the 3-litre, 60 degree V6 Ford engine is one of the most useful workhorses of all time. Whatever vehicle it is in, the engine feels in its element, perhaps more so in the TVR with just one ton and a low frontal area to pull along. The beauty of the 3-litre's application in this attractive sports car isn't just its ability to reach 60 m.p.h. from a standing start in roughly 7.3sec. or 100 m.p.h. in 25sec., or even to cruise comfortably at 115-120 m.p.h. with almost 130 m.p.h. on tap; no, the extension of this high-performance delight comes at the opposite end of the scale where the 93.663 mm. bore, 72.415mm. stroke, 2,994 c.c., 140 b.h.p. unit's exceptional low speed torque makes the 3000 M extraordinarily easy and relaxing to drive away from the open road. It is quite happy to burble along at less than 1,000 r.p.m. in top gear and is entirely docile and temperament-free in city traffic. Clutch operation is less favourable, the 9.5-in., diaphragm spring plate not biting until the pedal is released to the end of its long travel. The torque shows again on the open road, where extremely high average speeds can be maintained without exerting the V6, which prefers not to be revved much beyond 5,500 r.p.m. in any case.

Ignoring all the other virtues, the 3000 M's most outstanding feature is its handling and roadholding. Cornering speeds are impressively high, roll almost non-existent and adhesion superb on the ER70 VR x 15 Avon tyres, mounted on 5½J rims, which are almost impossible to break away, from a neutral stance except by applying excess power round low-speed corners in the wet. Even then the tail is almost self-correcting. Steering too is a delight, accurate, relatively light and ensuring precision cornering: slightly higher gearing would lead to perfection.

Mild bump steer can be felt on really bad roads, and ruts can cause some deflection, but the Avons are not put off by white lines and cats-eyes. Scuttle shake is non-existent, though mild body movement on the chassis can be created by bad pot-holes, when some creaking



THE HEATED, panoramic rear screen gives good vision, though the quarter panels are awkward at road junctions. An impending new model will have a lift-up tail gate.

can also be heard, mainly from the seat mountings and sunshine roof. Unlike the softly-sprung Elan, Lilley and Bigland have chosen to achieve good roadholding by quite firm suspension, resulting in a firm ride which can become decidedly choppy on rough roads, the short (7ft. 6in.) wheelbase exaggerating the effect. To be fair, even the rough-road ride isn't too stomach-disturbing and the seats cushion most of the discomfort.

Well-subdued engine noise was spoilt by an excess of wind noise at high speed, emanating largely from a loose seal on the driver's door.

Since the death of the Elan a couple of months ago, the discerning sports car customer has been left with little choice in the £2,000 — £3,000

bracket other than the Datsun 240Z. For performance and sheer driving delight the mass-produced sports cars below £2,000, led by the TR6 and Jensen-Healey, do not deserve comparison with this delightful driver's car, while the 240Z, not too far behind on performance, lacks the road manners and the V6's splendid torque characteristics. As for the admirable Reliant Scimitar GTE, it is aimed at a different type of driver—indeed the two cars would complement each other ideally in the same manufacturer's range. The new MGB GT V8 is cheaper, but far from exclusive in body styling. No, the distinctive TVR 3000 M, capable of a thrifty 300 miles on its 12-gallon tank, represents one of the last remaining real sports cars and long may the Blackpool firm thrive.—C.R.