

RoadTest



PORSCHE 911 SC SPORT CABRIOLET

A 911 with a canvas top? Don't worry, the first open Porsche in years offers a wind-in-the-hair experience you won't find anywhere else

A LONG time on the drawing board, the first truly convertible Porsche for nearly two decades is now on sale in the UK. The last Porsche to bear the "Cabriolet" tag was the 356, today a quaint and sought-after collector's piece. Rolling off the Stuttgart production line in strictly limited numbers, the 911 SC Cabrio we test here should attain classic status more rapidly, and for more than its mere rarity.

Admirers of the 911 — that unique and increasingly esoteric product of the inevitable conflict between tradition and technology — have, perhaps for too long, been offered only a scent of open-top motoring, courtesy of the Targa with its removable roof panel, a desirable but ultimately frustrating car. There were plenty of "Hallelujahs!", however, when the Cabrio finally appeared (albeit some six years after the idea had been first mooted) at the 1981 Frankfurt Show, sporting not only the 3.3-litre Turbo engine but Porsche's sensational four-wheel-drive system as well.

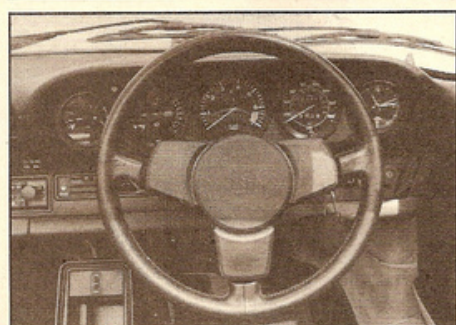
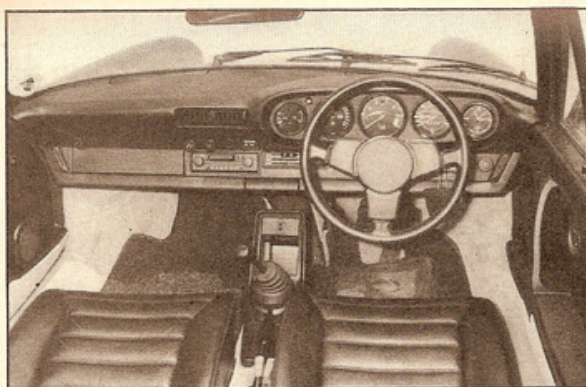
Unfortunately neither turbocharged nor 4WD, the production Cabrio is nevertheless the best news for the 911 range since the introduction of the fabulous Turbo. Always one of the quickest and most demanding of

supercars, the *soft top* 911 offers simply more sensations for your money without compromising the practicality synonymous with the model.

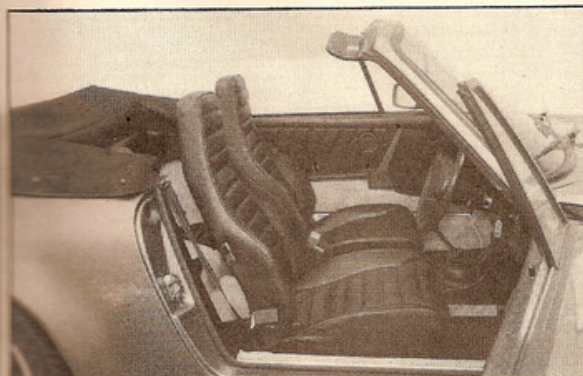
The Cabrio is based on the Targa shell, though the differences between the two cars are obvious: the Targa's roll "cage" is removed, the rear quarter panel modified to house the folded hood; there's a different mounting strip on top of the windscreen and the seat-belt anchor points are set further back. And because no structural reinforcement was deemed necessary by Porsche's engineers, the Cabrio is actually a little lighter than the Targa (the car it will eventually supplant), though somewhat heavier than the coupé.

Otherwise, the Porsche's mechanical layout makes familiar reading, changed only in minor detail from the 911 SC coupé we tested in 1980 and not at all in concept from the first 911 of 18 years ago. The all-alloy flat six overslung and driving the rear wheels through a five-speed gearbox/trans-axle, the MacPherson strut/semi-trailing arm torsion bar suspension, the large ventilated discs at each wheel — it's a specification from another era yet one which through constant and painstaking development still works.





Above: perhaps the world's most recognisable facia isn't the last word in ergonomics. Left: pole position for the all-important rev counter but lesser dials are obscured by steering wheel rim



Front seats don't look much but are both comfortable and supportive. Right: "occasional" rear seats are best for extra luggage



Our 911 SC Cabrio test car boasted the "Sport Equipment" pack. This comprises a whale-tail spoiler/front air-dam combination and forged alloy wheels wearing 205/50 VR 16 Pirelli P7s on the front and 225s at the rear, which hikes the price of the straight SC by around £2,000 to £23,539. Even so, the Cabrio Sport sells for only a modest premium over its Targa equivalent (£21,894) and at least remains competitive with its major targa-top rivals from Ferrari (the 308 GTS Quattrovalvole, £26,001) and Lamborghini (the Jalpa, £26,423), if falling back a little in the value stakes against other supercar rivals like the Lotus Esprit Turbo (£18,596) and the Jaguar XJS HE (£20,639), though neither of these cars, of course, offers wind-in-the-hair motoring. The Morgan Plus 8 (£10,496), on the other hand, most certainly does, and is less than half the price of the Porsche — but while undoubtedly very fast for the money and a great deal of fun, we'd hesitate to

call it a supercar.

Porsche's magnificent 2994 cc all-alloy flat six has changed in no significant respect since we last described it in our 1980 road test. Thus, with its highish 9.8:1 compression ratio and Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection, it develops a more than respectable 204 bhp (DIN) at 5,900 rpm and 195 lb ft of torque at 4,300 rpm. So it's not a savagely powerful engine, but when you consider that the compact and slender-nosed 911 tips the scales at just 23.2 cwt (most of its similarly powerful rivals are around 2 cwt heavier), its performance potential becomes clear.

Although no one in his right mind would attempt to drive the Cabrio flat out with the hood down, it is a perfectly feasible exercise with it up; the hood is so well constructed and efficiently sealed that wind noise, while obtrusive above 100 mph, never becomes intolerable. Not even at 147.3 mph, the speed at which the Porsche

lapped Millbrook's high speed bowl and, incidentally, almost exactly what its makers claim. In fact, there's little doubt that the Cabrio would go even faster on the level, as our 148.4 mph best quarter suggests. That's fast enough: even the significantly more powerful Lamborghini Jalpa was only fractionally faster round Millbrook (147.6 mph) and, although we haven't put a stopwatch on them, it's unlikely that the Ferrari or Lotus would score much of an advantage, either. Of the Porsche's rivals we've "maxed", only the XJS HE (152.4 mph) has broken the magic 150 mph barrier, but the penalty of the Jaguar's 300 bhp V12 is felt in the wallet at the petrol pumps.

When it comes to sprinting ability, the Cabrio moves into the steam catapult class. Ignoring Porsche's curiously conservative "under 7 sec" claim, and making the best possible use of the traction afforded by its rear-mounted engine and those wide, grippy P7 tyres, the Cabrio snakes off the line in a plume of tyre smoke to reach 60 mph in just 5.8 sec, 100 mph

in 14.2 sec as it passes the 1-mile post, and 120 mph in 23.7 sec. Make no mistake, only the big league supercars are notably quicker, and while the Jalpa and Esprit Turbo might match or beat the Cabrio to 60 mph (5.8 and 5.6 sec respectively), neither car can stay with it to 100 mph (16.0/15.4 sec).

Without question, the Cabrio's 3-litre flat six is a marvellously potent and tractable engine. It will accept full throttle from under 1000 revs in fifth yet rush between 80 and 100 mph in less than 10 seconds in the same gear. Where the engine isn't quite so impressive, however, is in the lower part of its rev range. The fifth gear 30-50, 40-60 and 50-70 mph times of 8.2, 8.6 and 9.3 sec respectively, for instance, are respectable but no match for the 7.8/6.9/6.1 sec returned by the Lamborghini. Drop down to fourth and the action is quicker still with these particular 20 mph increments being disposed of in a brisk 6.0/5.9/5.2 sec. But the Jalpa is quicker again (4.3/4.2/4.3 sec) and, apart from the 30-50 mph time, so too is the Esprit Turbo (6.2/5.5/5.2 sec).

So, while very flexible, the Cabrio is more sprinter than slogger as defined by the figures. On the road, too, it's noticeable how the car quickens its step as the revs rise beyond 3,500. Keep your foot planted to the floor and the engine will hit the limiter (at 6,700 rpm, 450 into the "red") all too easily, so smoothly and freely does it spin. More impressive still, though, is the immaculate throttle response, the velvet glove docility around town. The "boxer" engine may lack the charisma of its quad-cam V8 contemporaries, but for precision, punch and lack of fuss, it's well nigh unbeatable. With the hood down, of course, its hard, overtly mechanical character intrudes as in no previous 911. At low revs, it's a rather flat, uninteresting sound which none of our testers found particularly alluring; under hard acceleration, however, it crescendos to a high-pitched wail which suggests a rare sense of urgency.

Quick though the Cabrio is, thirsty it is not. Conducted with unabashed enthusiasm, our test car returned a very creditable 20.1 mpg, a consumption only the slower and lighter Morgan Plus 8 (20.8 mpg) betters in our rivals section. Although our Transflo fuel metering equipment wasn't compatible with the Porsche's Bosch fuel injection system, we would estimate a touring consumption of over 24 mpg, allowing a range of around 420 miles on one 17.6 gallon tankful of 4-star.

With practice, the 911's short gearlever can be sliced through the narrow gate as fast as the hand can move, but none of our testers derived any pleasure from rushing it. For one thing, the action is both a shade rubbery and notchy and, for another, the 3/4 plane isn't particularly well-defined, which can make across-gate movements a little hit-and-miss. The clutch takes up the drive progressively, but its rather heavy, over-centre action can make smooth changes difficult to achieve consistently. At the 6,250 rpm red-line, the first four gears run to 36, 62, 90 and 114 mph and, with 23.2 mph per 1000 rpm gearing in top, 80 mph represents a relaxed 3,450 rpm.

The extent to which Porsche have turned chassis theory on its head with the latest 911s remains one of modern motoring's most notable achievements. Sixty-one per cent of the Cab-

continued over

rio's total weight is over the rear wheels which, in turn, are prone to undesirable camber changes under load due to their semi-trailing arm suspension. It shouldn't add up, and yet the Cabrio bears witness to a triumph of development over design — up to a point, at any rate.

Given the right conditions — a fast, open series of curves with a dry and not too bumpy surface — the Cabrio is nothing short of sensational. Its sheer speed, compact dimensions and ease of all-round vision make a powerful contribution to its swiftness. The penny-clipping precision and writhing feedback of the steering, the unrelenting purchase of the fat P7s on the tarmac and their unerring traction out of junctions and tight hairpins — it all makes the 911 almost paralytically rapid across the ground and a driving experience of unmatched satisfaction. In such circumstances, even the car's inherent tendency to oversteer if the throttle is shut mid-bend can be used to tighten a wide line should a corner be entered too fast: the resulting change in attitude is certainly abrupt but, by relaxing your grip on the wheel, steering castor action alone invariably applies just the right amount of corrective lock.

Roads which are characterised by more demanding bumps, dips and crests, however, soon begin to pick holes in the Porsche's handling, promoting a sometimes worrying lack of stability and disconcerting front-end lightness. The car can still be driven quicker than most, but the driver needs to have his wits about him. It's in the wet, however, that the Cabrio demands most respect. Here, even the most skilled and experienced 911 driver can find himself in a dangerous "Catch 22" situation: if he enters a greasy bend even a shade too fast the result can be massive understeer with the lightly-laden front wheels ploughing straight on, yet if he lifts off the tail will move out in a pendulous sweep that, unless extremely quick and positive steering action is taken, will spin the car. That's the extreme condition, but it's one that the 911 driver does well to remember.

Around town, the Cabrio rides very firmly indeed, though seldom to the point of being uncomfortable. As the speed rises, however, things smooth out considerably, the closely damped suspension exhibiting fine control and rounding off most bumps, even sharp-edged ones, with little vertical disturb-

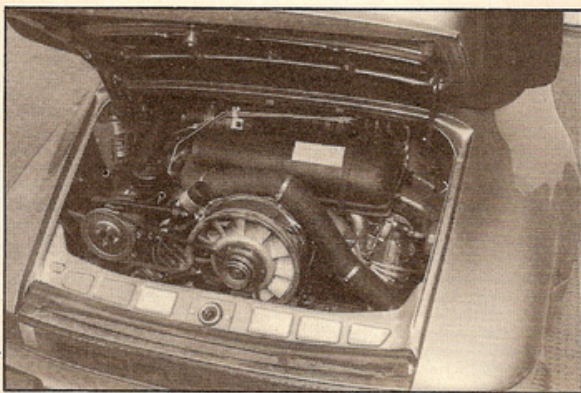
ance. And speed is certainly something the brakes kill most effectively, the four large ventilated discs hauling the comparatively light Cabrio down from even high three-figure velocities with almost ridiculous ease and authority. Full marks.

The Cabrio is really no more than a two-seater, but it is feasible to carry a child or small adult in one of the "occasional" rear seats over a short distance so long as the front seat passenger is willing to sacrifice some legroom. Otherwise, the space behind the front seats can be used to supplement the modest luggage space provided by the shallow boot up front. As with previous 911's, our testers complained that the long-travel clutch forced them to sit closer to the steering wheel than they might normally have done, though none voiced anything but praise for the comfortable, supportive seats.

The simple but carefully trimmed interior is no different from the SC coupé's below the waistline — mildly old-fashioned in style with uncertain ergonomics and instruments which, although large, plain and clear, sprawl across the shallow fascia in a way that renders the outer ones partially obscured by the steering wheel rim. With the hood erect, there's the usual rear three-quarter blind spot, but vision to the front and sides is excellent, and even the plastic rear screen is clearer than most of its kind.

As mentioned earlier, the hood in every way lives up to the Porsche name: it's extremely well made and completely leak and draught free. Taking it down is a simple three-stage operation. First, the front edge is detached from the top of the windscreen by means of latches from inside the car. Next, the rear screen is unzipped from the main hood and folded down behind the rear seats. And finally, from outside the car, the whole canopy is simply folded back and the matching tonneau cover attached by push studs and hook straps.

Thus the Cabrio is transformed into what many will regard as the ultimate rag top, a car which demands total commitment of some senses to be driven well — sight, touch, balance, co-ordination — and rewards others with the sounds, smells and sensations that enclosed 911 drivers will never experience. Even when the air is chill, the heater is powerful enough to keep the occupants comfortable. That, of course, is typical. Outside America, Britain is their biggest export market.



Not much to look at and not easy to work on, Porsche's 3-litre flat six is, nevertheless, a fabulous powerhouse

MOTOR ROAD TEST No 26/83 ●

PORSCHE 911 SPORT CABRIOLET

PERFORMANCE

WEATHER CONDITIONS	
Wind	0-3 mph
Temperature	61°F/16°C
Barometer	29.9 in Hg/1012 mbar
Surface	Dry tarmac/adam

MAXIMUM SPEEDS

	mph	kph
Banked circuit	147.3	237.0
Best 1/4 mile	148.4	238.8
Terminal Speeds:		
at 1 mile	100	161
at kilometre	124	200
Speeds in gears (at 6,250 rpm):		
1st	36	58
2nd	62	100
3rd	90	145
4th	114	183

ACCELERATION FROM REST

mph	sec	kph	sec
0-30	2.2	0-40	1.8
0-40	3.1	0-60	2.7
0-50	4.4	0-80	4.4
0-60	5.8	0-100	6.0
0-70	7.5	0-120	8.4
0-80	9.5	0-140	10.9
0-90	11.7	0-160	14.1
0-100	14.2	0-180	19.3
0-110	18.0	0-200	26.6
0-120	23.7		
Stand'g 1/4	14.2	Stand'g km	26.2

ACCELERATION IN TOP

mph	sec	kph	sec
20-40	9.0	40-60	6.4
30-50	8.2	60-80	5.4
40-60	8.6	80-100	5.4
50-70	9.3	100-120	5.4
60-80	9.5	120-140	5.9
70-80	9.5	140-160	5.9
80-100	9.5		
90-110	9.8		

ACCELERATION IN 4TH

mph	sec	kph	sec
20-40	6.3	40-60	3.9
30-50	6.0	60-80	3.7
40-60	5.9	80-100	3.7

50-70	5.2	100-120	3.3
60-80	5.2	120-140	3.3
70-90	5.4	140-160	3.2
80-100	6.2	160-180	4.7
90-110	8.4		

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Overall	20.1 mpg
Govt tests	14.0 litres/100 km
	21.1 mpg (urban)
	38.7 mpg (56 mph)
	32.1 mpg (75 mph)
Fuel grade	97 octane
	4 star rating
Tank capacity	17.6 galls
	80 litres
Max range*	422 miles
	680 km
Test distance	1,133 miles
	1,823 km

*Based on 24 mpg touring consumption

NOISE	dBA	Motor's rating*
30 mph	69	15
50 mph	72	18
70 mph	77	26
Maximum†	84	41

*A rating where 1=30 dBA and 100=96 dBA, and where double the number means double the loudness

†Peak noise level under full-throttle acceleration in 2nd.

SPEEDOMETER (mph)

Speedo	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
True mph	28	38	47	57	66	75	85	94
Distance recorder: accurate								

Distance recorder: accurate

WEIGHT	cwt	kg
Unladen weight*	23.2	1,179
Weight as tested	26.9	1,366

*with fuel for approx 50 miles

Performance tests carried out by Motor's staff at the Motor Industry Research Association proving ground, Linsley.

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GENERAL SPECIFICATION

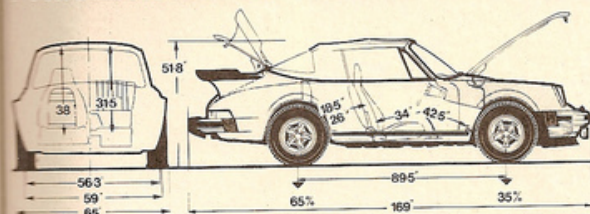
ENGINE		SUSPENSION	
Cylinders	6, horizontally opposed	Front	Independent by MacPherson struts, longitudinal torsion bars, anti-roll bar
Capacity	2,994cc (182.7 cu in)	Rear	Independent by semi-trailing arms, transverse torsion bars, anti-roll bar
Bore/stroke	95.0/70.4mm/ (3.74/2.77 in)		
Cooling	Air		
Block	Light alloy		
Head	Light alloy		
Valves	5ohc, per bank		
Cam drive	Chain		
Compression	9.8:1		
Fuel system	Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection		
Bearings	8 main		
Max power	204 bhp (DIN) at 5,900 rpm		
Max torque	195 lb ft (DIN) at 4,300 rpm		
TRANSMISSION		STEERING	
Type	5-speed manual	Type	Rack and pinion
Clutch dia	7.9 in.	Assistance	None
Actuation	Cable		
Internal ratios and mph/1000 rpm			
Top	0.785:1/23.2		
4th	1.000:1/18.2		
3rd	1.261:1/14.4		
2nd	1.833:1/9.3		
1st	3.182:1/5.7		
Rev	3.325:1		
Final drive	3.875:1		
BODY CHASSIS		BRAKES	
Construction	All steel unitary	Front	11.1 in ventilated discs
Protection	Floorpan, sills and wheel arches galvanised; PVC underseal; all cavities tectyl treated; 7-year warranty	Rear	11.4 in ventilated discs
		Park	On rear
		Servo	Yes
		Circuit	Split front/rear
		Rear valve	No
		Adjustment	Automatic
		WHEELS/TYRES	
		Type	Light alloy, front 6Jx16, rear 7Jx16
		Tyres	Front 205/55 VR 16, rear 225/50 VR 16
		Pressures	29/30 psi F/R
		ELECTRICAL	
		Battery	12V, 66 Ah
		Earth	Negative
		Generator	Alternator, 75 Amp
		Fuses	24
		Headlights	
		type	Halogen
		dip	110W total
		main	120W total

Make: Porsche
Model: 911 SC Sport Cabriolet
Maker: Dr Ing h.c. F. Porsche AG, Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, West Germany
UK Concessionaires: Porsche Cars Great Britain Ltd, Richfield Avenue, Reading, Berks RG1 8PH. Tel: (0734) 595411
Price: £18,894.00 plus £1,574.50 Car Tax and £3,070.28 VAT equals £23,538.78 total

The Rivals

Other possible rivals include the De Tomaso Pantera GTS (£17,940), the Mercedes 500SL (£22,850) and TVR's Tasmin 2.8 Turbo (£16,800)

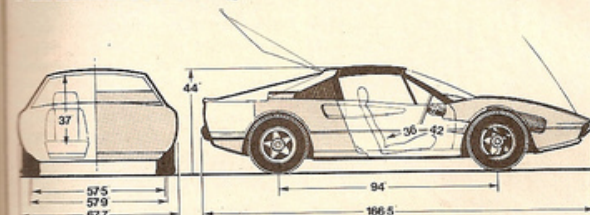
PORSCHE 911 SC SPORT CABRIOLET £23,539



Power, bhp/rpm	204/5,900
Torque, lb ft/rpm	195/4,300
Tyres	205/50 VR 16/225/50 VR 16
Weight, cwt	23.2
Max speed, mph	147.3
0-60 mph, sec	5.8
30-50 mph in 4th, sec	6.0
Overall mpg	20.1
Touring mpg	—
Fuel grade, stars	4
Boot capacity, cu ft	9.8
Test Date	June 4th, 1983

First soft-top Porsche for nearly two decades, the 911 SC Cabriolet ranks as one of the most impressive open cars ever made. Superb 3-litre flat six delivers storming acceleration and 147 mph top speed yet returns more than 20 mpg. Tremendous handling becomes tricky in the wet and ride is very firm around town, but as a practical day-to-day supercar, the Porsche has no peers. Hood is beautifully made (in keeping with the excellent general build), and easy to use.

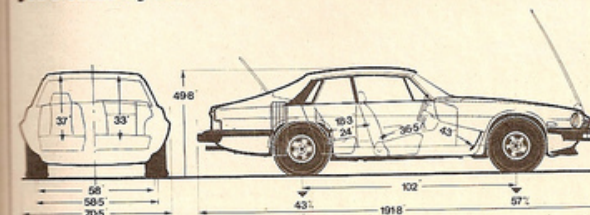
FERRARI 308 GTS QV £26,001



Power, bhp/rpm	240/7,000
Torque, lb ft/rpm	192/5,000
Tyres	205/55 VR 16/225/50 VR 16
Weight, cwt	26.0
Max speed, mph	150*
0-60 mph, sec	6.6
30-50 mph in 4th, sec	5.5
Overall mpg	13.8
Touring mpg	—
Fuel grade, stars	4
Boot capacity, cu ft	—
Test Date (Twin test)	August 26th, 1978
*estimate	

Arguably the most beautiful of modern supercars, the strictly two-seater mid-engined 308 GTS uses Ferrari's delectable four-cam 3-litre V8. Since our test, this has acquired fuel injection and a 4-valve-per-cylinder head, and should be, judging from our experience with the Mondial QV, even faster than the figures quoted here. It has the roadholding and handling of a true thoroughbred combined with a comfortable ride. Fuel consumption much improved in QV form.

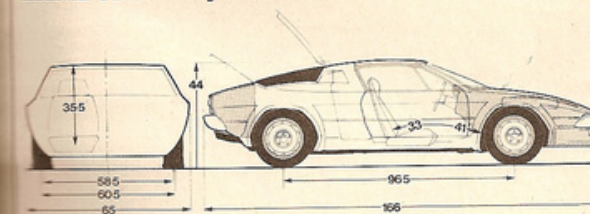
JAGUAR XJ-S H.E. £20,693



Power, bhp/rpm	299/5,500
Torque, lb ft/rpm	318/3,000
Tyres	215/70 VR 15
Weight, cwt	33.6
Max speed, mph	152.4
0-60 mph, sec	7.5
30-50 mph in 4th, sec	2.9
Overall mpg	16.3
Touring mpg	—
Fuel grade, stars	4
Boot capacity, cu ft	8.4
Test Date	October 17th, 1981

Soon to be available as a cabriolet and/or with manual transmission and a six-cylinder engine, Jaguar's magnificent V12 is currently offered only with an automatic gearbox, in which form it provides an unrivalled blend of performance and refinement with reasonable economy. Handling is less sporty than the Porsche's but ride is more supple. Not much room in the rear for so large a car, but still one of the most desirable high-speed expresses and beautifully finished.

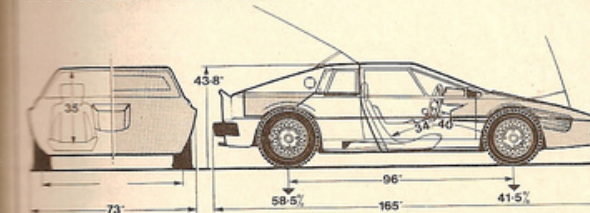
LAMBORGHINI JALPA 3.5 £26,423



Power, bhp/rpm	250/7,000
Torque, lb ft/rpm	235/3,250
Tyres	205/55 VR 16/225/50 VR 16
Weight, cwt	26.5
Max speed, mph	147.6
0-60 mph, sec	5.8
30-50 mph in 4th, sec	4.3
Overall mpg	15.6
Touring mpg	—
Fuel grade, stars	4
Boot capacity, cu ft	—
Test Date	Not published

"Baby" of the two car Lamborghini range, the targa-top Jalpa's ancestry runs back to the pretty mid-engined Urraco of the early '70s. Magnificently vocal 3.5-litre quad-cam V8 delivers stunning performance on a par with the Porsche's, albeit less economically (15.6 mpg). Very safe and ultimately forgiving handling married to reasonable ride. He-man gearchange and poor visibility not so impressive, but practicality and finish surprisingly good, if not to 911 standards.

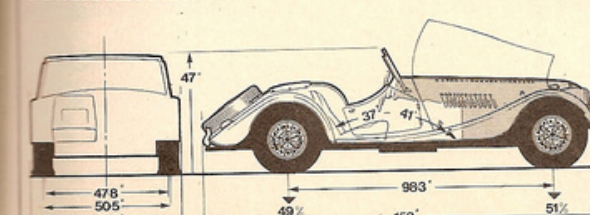
LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO £18,596



Power, bhp/rpm	210/6-6,500
Torque, lb ft/rpm	200/4-4,500
Tyres	195/60 VR 15/235/60 VR 15
Weight, cwt	22.6
Max speed, mph	152*
0-60 mph, sec	5.6
30-50 mph in 4th, sec	6.2
Overall mpg	18.5
Touring mpg	—
Fuel grade, stars	4
Boot capacity, cu ft	3.5
Test Date	March 28th, 1981
*estimate	

Turbo power promotes Lotus towards the top of the first division in the high-performance league. Stunning acceleration from smooth and viceless turbo-charged 'four', allied to perfect ratios, strong roadholding, superb handling and tireless braking, all add up to a driver's car *par excellence*, with good economy and a comfortable ride as icing on the cake. But some Esprit shortcomings remain: poor heating, awkward visibility, bad pedal layout and lack of space for tall drivers.

MORGAN PLUS 8 £10,496



Power, bhp/rpm	155/5,250
Torque, lb ft/rpm	198/2,500
Tyres	205/60 VR 15
Weight, cwt	17.8
Max speed, mph	125*
0-60 mph, sec	6.7
30-50 mph in 4th, sec	4.1
Overall mpg	20.8
Touring mpg	—
Fuel grade, stars	4
Boot capacity, cu ft	—
Test Date	May 15th, 1982
*estimate	

One of the last remaining examples of a traditional sports car, and certainly the only one to approach Porsche performance levels. Huge mid-range and low end punch from Rover V8 makes it quicker on the road than the 0-60 mph time suggests, with very respectable economy. Combination of vintage chassis and modern low profile tyres gives tremendous grip on smooth bends, but steering is heavy and bumps make life interesting. Five-speed gearbox is a joy, classic looks. Nothing like it in the right conditions.