

CHANGING UP!

When I was younger (in my twenties) I used to change my car more often than my underpants! There were 3 excuses that I used as to why I had to change “yet again” - the first being that the current car would cost too much to repair, the second that some external factor was involved (current car was too big/too small/too uneconomical etc.), and if all else failed, the third excuse was that the proposed new one was a better investment.

In practice, of course, every new car cost a great deal more than repairing the old one, the car I had was never really too big/too small or even too uneconomical - and I never, ever had a car that was a good investment! The reality is that I've always liked cars, and just got fed up with each one fairly quickly, and was attracted by another one!

It all started with a 1954 black Austin A30 - 803 c.c. and with a top speed of nearly 50 mph, downhill with a following wind. It had been upgraded to the latest technology (flashing indicators instead of its original indicator arms) and was equipped with real leather seats and opening quarter lights (not something you get on modern cars). The ICE (In Car Entertainment) consisted of an ariel cable coming out from under the dashboard which could be plugged into the latest transistor radio, which was then positioned on the passenger seat and worked (well sort of) until the batteries ran out.

But at the time, my brother in law (well - he wasn't then - but since has become) was into all sorts of motor sport. The latest was a cross between grass tracking and auto cross. He persuaded me to enter the old A30 into this event, at the same time he had entered his much more powerful Wolsley 1500. Having watched many of the competitors complete the large figure of eight track in quite respectable times, it was now my turn.

“Where's your crash helmet?” the marshal asked me at the start line.

“What crash helmet?” I innocently replied.

I think he then said something under his breath like “Bl**dy amateurs”, and fetched a spare skid lid from the back of his store room. It was far too small, but the only one he had, so by the time I had squeezed my head into it, my ears were folded in two and I couldn't hear a thing!

I got round the course without turning over or running off the track, but as I couldn't hear the engine, and certainly couldn't take my eyes off the road to look at the speedo (what do you mean, I should have looked at the rev counter – what rev counter?!), I had no idea whether I should have been changing up, down or sideways!

The outcome of all this was that I beat my (soon to be) brother in law (which I have never let him forget), was never asked to participate again, and blew up the engine of the A30!

So I had to change up, this time to an Austin Cambridge - a tank like vehicle, which I was very glad of when I had a slight argument with a VW Beetle, resulting in the demise of said Beetle, but with me having just a scratch on the bumper and some mud in the jacking point from where I cannoned into the bank!!

A couple of company cars later, I started on the aforementioned string of purchases and part exchanges that made car salesmen rub their hands with glee every time they saw me coming!

Now I know the 5 point theory of buying a car, which is:

1. Check everything - twice,
2. Test drive it at least once, and preferably in all sorts of environments,
3. Get a second opinion by someone who knows what they are doing,
4. Compare with other versions of the same model, and
5. Don't trust anyone wearing a sheepskin coat, or any salesman who says "Trust me! Would I sell you a dodgy motor, mate!".

But do I do it? Of course not! I bought a lovely (or so I thought) gold Capri in the mid seventies from the aforementioned "Trust me!" salesman, only to find that it had so much wrong with it, they would need to restock the parts department of the local Ford dealer to put it right. So I part exchanged it for a Cortina 2 litre GXL, which I never drove, sat in, heard start up or otherwise tested before signing on the dotted line. In fact when I saw it, it was up on 4 blocks of wood, but it did look nice, with its vinyl roof and twin head lamps!

In fact, I knew so little about the Cortina, that I didn't even know it was an automatic until I went to change gear, stamped on the brake pedal, and nearly ended up sitting on the bonnet!

By the time I came to look at the TVR range, I had spent the previous 16 years in company cars, and had only brought motors for my beloved and her beloved (the dogs!). But I still remembered those five golden rules about buying a car - so how did I go about sticking to them? Well I did test drive the very first S2 I saw - for about a mile and a half - then I bought it! No expert opinions, no comparison with other S models and I certainly didn't check everything once, let alone, twice!

See - an old sucker never dies!

But to be fair, I've been very happy with it as my introduction to the marque. It's been great fun, albeit lacking in the refinements that later Tiv's have enjoyed. And Doug (at David Gerald) didn't wear a sheepskin coat (mind you it was May!).

Now, every October, the West Midlands has its monthly meeting on a Saturday morning at David Gerald's garage in Inkberrow in Worcestershire. This is a very dangerous time

for Car Suckers like me - all those gleaming motor cars begging to be driven and given new homes. By October 2001, after only 18 months of ownership I was still able to withstand the temptation - but by October 2002, with a very attractive 1995 4 litre Chimaera in metallic Massala with grey trim and 37,000 on the clock, sitting with the keys in it, I couldn't resist. After a fast test drive I was hooked.

I went home and started a list of good excuses (sorry - reasons) why I should change up. The Chimaera was newer, had a much lower mileage, a better known history, was easier to get in and out of (important for us old gits), was in better condition, had PAS, was a better and smoother ride, had a bigger boot, and of course, more power. The only real downside was the cost and the sentimental value of my S2.

I even went on the www.pistonheads.com website and sought opinions from anyone else who had changed up from an S to a Chimaera. Apart from fuel costs and depreciation, the main complaint seemed to be that with the hood down, you can only see MPVs and low flying aircraft through the rear view mirror!

Now in my twenties, I would have signed the agreement before I had even thought about listing good and bad points or seeking other opinions - but now - well maybe I'm older and wiser (certainly older!). And maybe, because money has to be forcibly prised from my grasp these days, I couldn't quite bring myself to change up. So, in time, the Massala Chimaera went to someone else, and I stayed with my S2.

Indeed, I made a decision that I would keep my S2 for at least another 2 to 3 years. I didn't need to change up - the S was fine - needed a bit of work, yes - but, surely having the work done was cheaper than a new car (see, I have learnt!)

So why, then, 6 months later, did I find myself test driving a 4.3 litre Griff, along the same country roads that had seen me in the Chimaera and the S2? Well, my excuse was I liked the colour! Now some of you might say that was terribly "girly" - but I would never say such a thing (honest ladies!). But the truth of it was, I DID like the colour - it looked a really smart motor.

But there was more to it than that. For many, the Griff is the definitive TVR, and the Pre Cats are highly desirable, and so they should hold their value better than a '95 Chimaera or an '89 S2. At least, this was the argument that was put to me - alright, I'll be honest, this was the argument I put to myself! Perhaps I haven't learnt all that much after all.

The problem was, of course, I still fancied changing up. But the old excuses (reasons) didn't work any more, so I had to think of some more. So I came up with 3 brand new reasons:

- It looked great!
- It sounded wicked!
- I'm a flash geezer - so it would suit me!

Now, you can't argue against those, can you?!

So I bought it!

And what was the reaction of my beloved? "Don't like the colour - it's far too vulgar!"

Oh well, I can't please her all the time!

David (Still G10 TVR - but this time on a different car) Morgan