

PH

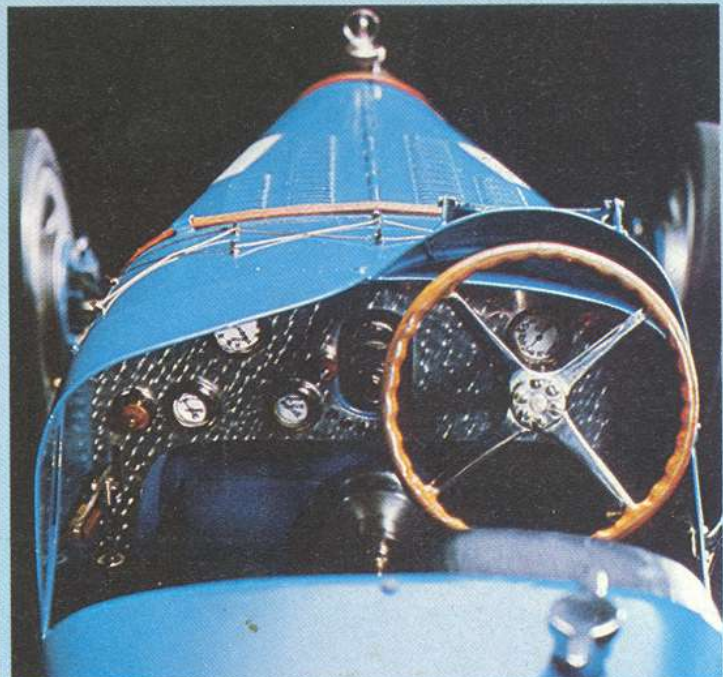
modern

MOTOR

INSIDE:

**Photoscoop:
New Fairlanes
Geneva's "brave
new thoughts"**

**A \$1600
Bugatti
Offroad
bliss**



Road test

EUROPE'S 'BEST' ON TEST

Europe, home of the light/medium four-seat, two-litre sedan continues to produce cars which offer sporting flair, impressive ride, safe handling and comfortable accommodation. Three such cars scored the top three places in this year's **Modern Motor Readers' Poll** in the Medium Sedan class. Alfaetta, Peugeot 504 and Triumph Dolomite Sprint are not new cars to Australians, but their respective concepts has captured the interest of many drivers who appreciate quality, flair, style and safety packaged into a compact and efficient design. The fact that this trio scored such a big percentage of reader voting told us they should be triple-tested in a direct comparison, but it wasn't easy . . .



While the Dolomite Sprint is essentially a performance package, its small boot area is a limiting factor to the family man.





The Alfetta provides a good example of maximum usage of minimal space while retaining that special Italian flair.



Peugeot's reliable workhorse makes up in comfort what it lacks in performance, and even that can be had for a price.



Actually the voting was so close (see chart) we could have almost made it a five-car test and included the Lancia Beta and BMW 2002. However the winning car, Alfetta, and the two placegetters, Peugeot 504 and Dolomite Sprint, commanded such a large slice of the voting we felt it more interesting if we restricted the test to those three cars.

Size-wise the packages are very close, performance-wise there are some differences, but in general terms — like ride/handling and comfort — the three cars clearly exhibit all the qualities for which European cars have become world famous. The combination of the best features of each of the cars makes for a formidable set of design/engineering standards, which clearly put this trio way ahead of most Australian and Japanese cars.

In their home markets these cars are, or have been, market leaders. In Australia the Peugeot 504 was first on the scene, and has established an impressive reputation for its comfort, handling and fast point-to-point times.

The Alfetta, clear winner in the class, was next on the scene and then Australia saw the Sprint — a 'new' old car. The Sprint has been winning hearts and races in Britain since late '73, and it was only because of Leyland Australia's massive restructuring of its product line that the car was introduced here at all. Of the three, the Peugeot might be said to be conventional; while both the Alfetta and Sprint feature some unique and individual specifications.

The class winner has achieved popularity quickly because of its exceptional handling and fine balance. This is attributed to the transaxle arrangement — that is; engine up front, with clutch, gearbox and diff at the rear. The Alfetta also uses a De Dion rear axle setup which provides safe handling and very good axle location.

The Sprint, however, is also a well-balanced machine. Its unique character is personified by the clever design and engineering in the 16 valve cylinder head. It's a very 'Briddish' car, but obviously it can hold its own against some of Europe's top trackburners because of its good power to weight ratio and its good handling.



The personalities of the three might be best summed-up by saying that the Alfetta gives the impression of a sporty-flavoured family tourer, while the Peugeot comes on as a more conservative long distance family touring car and the Sprint is just plain aggressive fun. It's definitely a young man's car, with not quite the chassis refinement of the other two.

All three are theoretically five-seaters, but in practice the Pug is the only one to really fit the fifth man in the back. The other two are definitely four seaters, with the Dolomite being more of a squeeze job. Boot space among them is generally good, but the Italian and French cars are the clear leaders, the Sprint's boot is far too shallow.

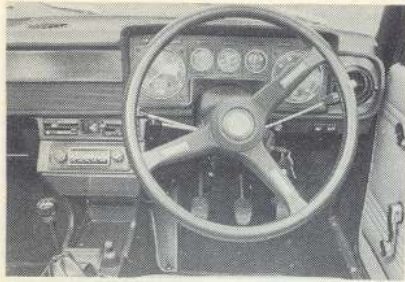
In price there isn't a lot between them, but there is a serious consideration to be made in the case of the Peugeot. Price-wise it's the Peugeot GL which best competes with the Alfa and the Sprint, but performance-wise one would have to choose the fuel-injected Ti, which is some \$1100 dearer.

Looking at the class results it's this type of vehicle (four-doors, two-litres, 4300mm long) which is definitely a European forte. They've come up with almost the perfect compromise. In size the cars carry four people in reasonable comfort, offer a relatively large boot, provide good ride and handling plus powerful, but economical engines.

By European standards these three are large sedans, by Australian/American standards they are too small — however it is this package size which the Japanese have decided is the right direction to pursue. The Japs have a long way to go to match the comfort, handling and performance of this trio, but in terms of body engineering, reliability and economy, the Japanese are well on the way to success.

In these terms alone it has been our experience that the Peugeot develops a strong bond of loyalty with its owner. Alfas attract committed enthusiasts and the Sprint looks like splitting the difference, but with the accent on performance.

To those who spurned the Alfetta originally as a delicate Italian beauty, we have been pleasantly surprised to see how well, on average, this spirited sedan has stood up to 'Australian' conditions. There's never been any



ALFETTA (left) has the best instrument layout, Sprint (centre) has the best control layout and Peugeot (right) has good dials, but confusing controls. Alfa and Sprint have adjustable steering wheels.

question about the Peugeot — in fact we think it would do wonders for the Australian family car, if local designers could experience some of that French thinking.

The Sprint comes here almost unknown — it seems tough, but we wonder if its designers had too much ribbon-smooth racing circuit on their minds instead of bumps and corrugations. We'll have another look at how the Sprint stands up in twelve months time.

ENGINES

THE PEUGEOT and the Alfa fight it out for the oldest engine honours. The Italian twin cam has powered, in one form or another a host of preceding Alfas (both sedans and coupes). The Peugeot powerplant bears many similarities to the old 203/403/404 engine. Both are extremely reliable and efficient.

The Sprint received its unique arrangement as a result of a marriage of convenience between Triumph and Saab. The basic engine was developed to power the Saab 99s, but later Saab developed their own version and the Poms, left with a perfectly good design, set about building a car to take it. They stretched the plain Toledo body into Dolomite shape, whacked the 1800cc version of the engine into it, and

then set about planning bigger and better things.

The 16 valve head was developed by Leyland engineers using a very unusual principle which meant one single overhead camshaft could be utilised to operate four valves per cylinder. This was a particularly innovative development, as the only 16 valve engines around at the time were operated by double overhead cams.

With the engine capacity enlarged to two litres, this new and efficient cylinder head transformed the stodgy Dolomite into a real fire-breather. The resulting performance puts it way ahead of the other two cars, with no alarming fuel consumption increase.

The Alfetta has the sweetest engine, the Peugeot the least fussy, while the Sprint idles roughly and needs to be worked hard through the gears to make the most of the performance.

TRANSMISSIONS

NONE OF the three have particularly easy transmissions to use, that is they couldn't really be described as silky smooth. The Alfetta is in front of the Peugeot, with the Triumph running last. The Sprint does have a saving grace however, and that is the versatile and

slick overdrive which is available on third and top gears.

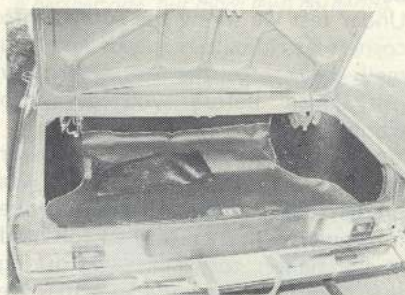
Peugeot offers either a four-speed manual, or the Borg Warner 35 auto, while Alfa stick with their famous five-speeder. In the UK, Leyland offers BW 35 auto transmission on the Sprint, but Australian cars come only as manuals.

The Sprint gearchange is notchy, and the gate is off-centre while the Peugeot shift is too heavily spring loaded across the gate. The Alfa is inclined to be a little stiff, with relatively long travel between the gears. All three transmissions have generally proved to be pretty trouble free however, and the ratio spread in each of the boxes is about as good as you'd want.

In basic terms the Peugeot is geared for easy, long distance touring with the minimum of fuss, while the Sprint is relatively high geared and the Alfa seems just right, although it can get a little noisy when rushing along at consistent high speeds.

BRAKES

THE PEUGEOT and Alfa feature four-wheel discs, while the Sprint relies on drums at the rear. All three cars pull up exceptionally well, and are stable during heavy braking applications. In fact they are completely smooth and undramatic



ALFETTA (left) has a fully-lined boot, the Sprint's area (centre) is too shallow, while the Peugeot (right) is biggest of the three. Alfa and Sprint spares hide under the mat, Peugeot stores its wheel in a sling under the car.



Alfetta — best overall braking.



Sprint — none of the race car problems.



Peugeot — least sensitive, but still good.

as our photo series shows. We pulled them up time after time from 100 km/h and there was no fade, nor lock-up.

The Alfa has possibly the best braking performance overall, but there isn't much to choose between them. The racing version of the Sprint has had some problems, but these have not reared their heads in road-going versions. It's interesting to note the different amounts of servo assistance which various manufacturers build into their braking systems.

We feel the Europeans have got the amount just right — the Alfa for example might be described as under-assisted, but you get just the right amount of feel, and just the right amount of assist — the Sprint is probably the most sensitive of the three test cars, but completely without worry in a panic situation.

SUSPENSION

RIDE QUALITY of the three is good, with the Peugeot first, Alfetta second and the Sprint third, mostly due to its stiffer settings and shorter wheelbase. In handling, it's a hard contest. First off we'd probably pick the Alfetta, if only for its balance and beautiful response. The Sprint would run a close second and just pip the Peugeot but only just.

The layouts are quite different — the Alfetta uses front torsion bars with coils and de Dion at the back. The Sprint uses front struts and rear coils with trailing arms and the Peugeot is similar to that except the French car has a completely independent rear end.

The Sprint is the compromise car, but Leyland engineers have developed an extremely supple suspension, a fact that's quite surprising in view of the tautness of the chassis for high speed handling.

HANDLING

THE ALFETTA and Peugeot have

reasonably long spring movement, while the Sprint doesn't have the same sort of bump-soaking qualities. The Peugeot has the best ground clearance of the three, and the Alfa and Triumph are right on the limit for our conditions.

Due to spring travel the Alfa and Peugeot have quite a lot of body roll, when compared to the flatter handling Sprint, but the roll is not alarming or uncomfortable and helps



THE test crew comparing notes.

secure high adhesion levels. All three are fairly neutral in the handling department, with the Alfa just pipping the other two.

The Sprint gets a bit tail-happy on broken surfaces, but the Peugeot is quite happy on any road condition and stays on line without trouble. The Alfa has extremely high safety limits, much in excess of what we believe are average driving talents. Under test we threw the Alfetta into corners at ridiculous speeds and you really have to get the car dangerously off-balance before you get into trouble.

Around Oran Park, the site of our three car test, the Sprint was predictable and smooth, but broke into oversteer when pushed too hard at the tighter corners. It was during this part of our comparison that we appreciated the excellently-spaced ratios offered by the overdrive.

The Peugeot is neutral all through

the corner, with just a hint of understeer to warn you when you're close to the limit. Summing up the three they are all safe handlers, with the Alfetta and Sprint tying for first.

PERFORMANCE

IN OUTRIGHT terms the Sprint has the edge, due to its highly efficient engine and low weight factor. The Alfetta comes second with the carburettor-fed Peugeot quite a way behind. The fuel-injected Peugeot is noticeably faster, but also more expensive to buy than either the Alfetta or Sprint.

The Alfetta runs up to its redline very quickly, due to its fairly low gearing, while the Sprint, with its taller gearing, winds out well. The carb. Peugeot runs out of breath quite quickly, but in this company it should be pointed out that the French engineers have gone for good point-to-point performance rather than outright acceleration.

In the higher gears the Peugeot is much closer in overtaking times to the Alfa than you might think. The Alfa Romeo engineers obviously intend the driver to stir the box up, while the Peugeot guys take advantage of the flat, healthy torque curve to obtain consistent third and top gear performance.

Maximum speeds in each of the three lower gears in the Alfa and Peugeot are quite close, whereas the Sprint runs away from the other two. Of the three engines, the Peugeot is probably the smoothest due to its torque characteristics, but the Sprint engine seems the most flexible. The Alfetta engine shows many traces of its fine breeding and continual refinement, it's very sporty but certainly not fussy.

ECONOMY

IN AVERAGE terms all three cars are capable of delivering reasonable fuel consumption figures when driven normally. Normal driving of

experience. The steering on all three was light and easy to live with, offering good feedback and positive control.

The Alfetta and Sprint share honours for the most comfortable steering wheel design. Pedal placement was best on the Sprint, with the Alfetta second followed closely by the Peugeot. We really did appreciate the driver's footrest on the Alfa — it's located right next to the clutch and almost in the same plane, and was very convenient.

Heel'n'toeing was easiest in the Alfetta, in fact for an Italian car the pedal layout was almost perfect. How many times have you jumped in a Turin special to find your left foot stabbing the clutch at the extremities of the footwell, while your right foot (resting on the accelerator) forces your right knee up under your chin?

SUMMARY

IF YOU'VE come this far in our story, then it's pretty obvious you don't aspire to the ownership of a locally-manufactured, boredom-inducing tin-top. Of course there's also the problem of service and maintenance, not an item to be forgotten if you're planted one hundred kilometres west of the black stump.

In terms of reliability and longevity, any of this trio will serve you well, providing you apply the necessary love and care. The Peugeot will probably be the best known of the three in terms of reputation as a durable workhorse.

The Alfetta and Sprint are definitely performance machines that like an open go, exhilarating over some of our average, charming country ruts (sorry, roads).

Are these cars good value for \$8000? Despite the inflated prices which apply to all three, they are, when looked at in terms of their ex-European factory price a damn good buy.

1976 READERS' POLL RESULTS

CLASS FOUR: MEDIUM SEDANS (over \$5000)

1. Alfa Romeo Alfetta . . .23.53%
2. Peugeot 50417.39%
3. Triumph Dolomite Sprint 15.93%
4. BMW 200210.35%
5. Lancia Beta 7.80%
6. Saab 99 6.71%
7. Datsun 240K 5.81%
8. Fiat 132 3.78%

COMPARISON CHART

	ALFETTA	SPRINT	PEUGEOT
ENGINE			
Capacity:	1779cc	1998cc	1971cc
Compression ratio:	9.5:1	9.5:1	8.35:1
Power:	90.2kW @ 5500	94.7kW @ 5700	69.4kW @ 5200
Torque:	167Nm @ 4400	168Nm @ 4500	157Nm @ 3000
Valve gear:	DOHC	SOHC	OHV
TRANSMISSION			
Type:	Five-speed manual	Four-speed manual with overdrive	Four-speed manual
Ratios — 1st:	3.300	2.999	3.558
2nd:	2.000	2.100	2.105
3rd:	1.370	1.390 (o/d 1.111)	1.366
4th:	1.040	1.000 (o/d 0.797)	1.000
5th:	0.830	—	—
Final drive:	4.1	3.45	3.88
SUSPENSION & BRAKES			
Front:	Independent by Torsion bars Power-assisted discs	Independent by struts. Power-assisted discs	Independent by struts. Power-assisted discs
Rear:	Independent by De Dion, coils and trailing arms, inboard discs	Trailing arms live axle with coils. Drum brakes	Independent by trailing arms and coils. Outboard disc brakes.
STEERING			
	Rack & pinion	Rack & pinion	Rack & pinion
PERFORMANCE			
0-100 km/h (in seconds)	11.4	8.8	14.0
60-100 km/h	11 (in 4th)	6.6	10.1
80-110 km/h	14.9 (in 5th)	6.9	10.8
Standing 400m	17.9	16.5	18.1
Maximum speeds in gears			
1st:	48	66	44
2nd:	79	95	75
3rd:	117	142 (o/d 178)	115
4th:	151	190 (o/d 180)	162
5th:	181	—	—
Fuel consumption (average) in mpg:	27.4	25.2	27.0
Fuel tank capacity (in litres):	49	57	56
Turning circle (in metres):	10.1	9.4	10.9
Turns, lock to lock:	3.5	3.7	4.5
CALCULATED DATA			
Power to weight (kg/kW):	10.19	10.24	17.7
Specific power output (kW/litre):	58.45	47.39	35.21
EXTERIOR DIMENSIONS (in mm)			
Wheelbase:	2510	2454	2740
Length:	4280	4115	4490
Width:	1620	1568	1690
Track, front:	1360	1356	1420
Track, rear:	1350	1290	1360
INTERIOR DIMENSIONS (in mm)			
Legroom, front	1080	1130	1120
Legroom, rear	970	870	930
Headroom, front	900	870	920
Headroom, rear	880	830	830
Wheel to seat	510	500	500
Hip room, front	1280	1080	1310
Hip room, rear	1275	1070	1290
Shoulder room, front	1340	1230	1330
Shoulder room, rear	1300	1200	1310
WEIGHT (in kg)			
	1060	970	1230
COST COMPARISON			
List price (as at 1/4/76):	\$7995	\$7710	\$7998 (carbs) (\$8948 Ti)
Spare parts:			
Disc pads	\$ 62.00	\$23.05	\$56.41
Muffler	\$174.80	\$55.00	\$69.91
Windscreen	\$272.80	\$51.40	\$35.98
Headlamp	\$ 40	\$38.78	\$68.98
Taillamp	\$ 67.28	\$45.60	\$25.41
Front guard	\$165.20	\$78.10	\$64.28
Water pump	\$ 79.20	\$79.75	\$69.80
SERVICE INTERVALS			
Oil change:	5000km	6000km	5000km
Mechanical inspection (major service)	5000km	6000km	5000km