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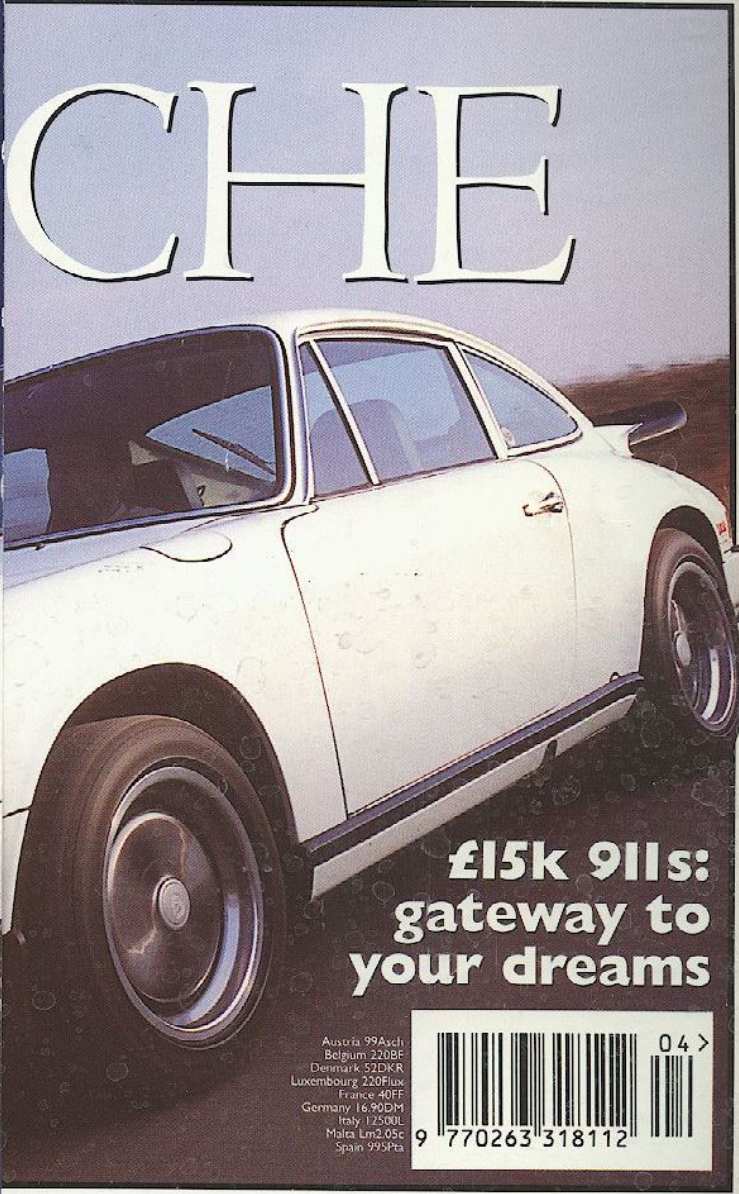
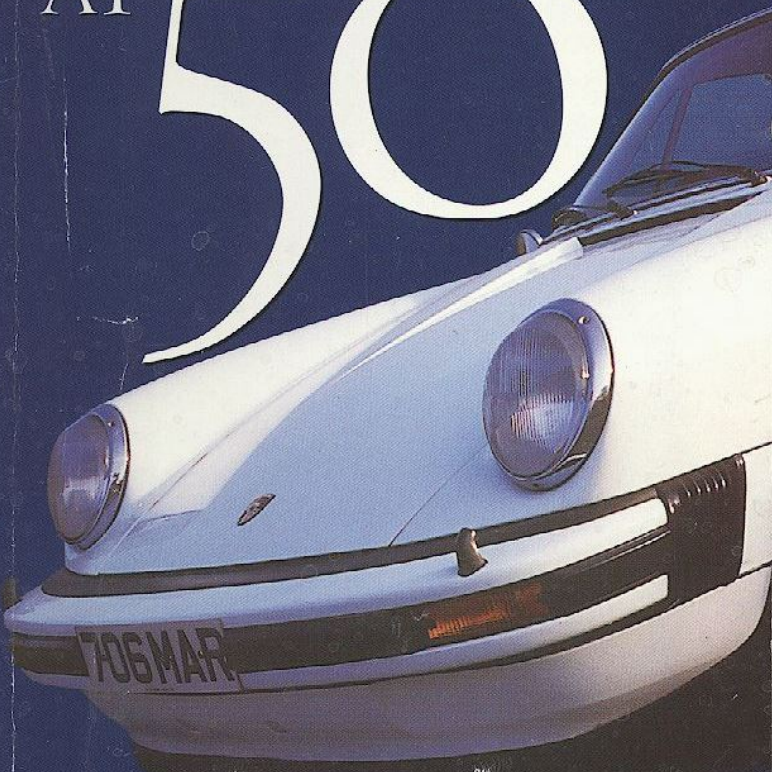
APRIL 1998

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A cut

Richard Heseltine goes in search of childhood dreams with a quartet of '70s coupés

A Fiat 130 flanked by a Raleigh Chopper and Lady Penelope's pink Rolls-Royce six-wheeler would have been the contents of the Heseltine 'dream garage' when I was five. Twenty years on, I'm still smitten by the big Fiat's seductive charms but other '70s coupés are vying for my attention, not least those from Ford, Opel and Peugeot.

On paper, the Italian design icon has the legs on its rivals but the proof is in the driving.

Unveiled at the 1971 Geneva Motor Show, the 130 Coupé shared its underpinnings with the worthy but not overly attractive 130 saloon. This meant all-round independent suspension and a superb Lampredi designed, oversquare V6 motor enlarged to 3235cc for this application. Performance was leisurely rather than



above

electrifying, *Autocar* achieving 118mph overall and 0-60mph in 10.6 secs. Where Fiat's flagship really scored was in civility and practicality. It could seat four in absolute comfort unlike some of its rivals in which rear passengers were bent double by plunging rooflines.

But, it was the car's stunning visage that made it so memorable. *Style Auto* judged the 130 as being: 'The best compromise between

aesthetics and function, marque image and market demands, structural technology and safety.' Sadly, plaudits have never been a sure-fire guarantee of success and, for all its good looks, the big Fiat was a resounding dud sales-wise, with just 4491 finding homes before production ceased in 1977.

Always thirsty - expect as little as 12mpg, 20mpg at best - the 130 was an expensive car

to run during those fuel-conscious days while its reputation for rusting had foundation. For all its faults, the Fiat's stunning form ensured it of classic status from the outset.

When it comes to transforming a humdrum saloon into a handsome coupé, Pininfarina is a past master. The Turin styling house created some of the most graceful and understated examples of the art, not least those for Peugeot.





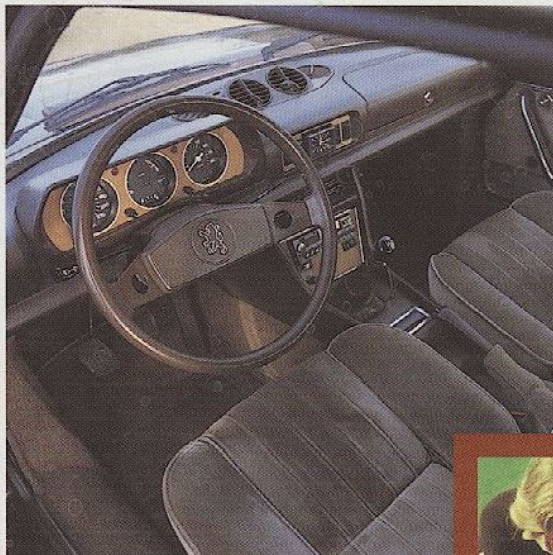
Side on, 504 is a study in artistry. Slim side pillars afford excellent all-round visibility

Elegant and supremely understated, the beguiling 504 Coupé of the '70s afforded rugged mechanical reliability fused with Italianate styling that still looks fresh. Beneath this delectable machine was nothing more exotic than a shortened 504 saloon floorpan complete with 1798cc fuel-injected four-pot. Later versions sported the same unit overbored to 2 litres or, from 1974, an excellent 2.7-litre V6 offered in carburetted and injected forms.



Peugeot

A Peugeot specialist since 1966, Geoffrey Sizzey is a dyed-in-the-wool fan of the marque. Since purchasing his 504 Coupé V6 Ti from a Parisian dealer back in December 1978, he's clocked up 212,000 kilometres with it. Since 1992, the car has been in mothballs, a Porsche 911 being his everyday wheels.



2.7-litre V6 motor is a jewel and sounds superb. Interior is cosy but comfortable

Amazingly, Peugeot's range topper remained on sale as late as 1983 with the only visible change of any consequence being colour-coded bumpers. That the 504 Coupé could still cut the mustard after 14 years' production is a testimony to the integrity of the design. Not that Fiat and Peugeot were the only manufacturers to have a stab at producing coupés during the decade that taste forgot. Ford introduced a novel fastback interpretation of the Granada theme in the early '70s that was reasonably well balanced if no great vision of loveliness.

Mechanically identical to the four-door saloon, the rakish Granada employed the same 2-litre four and 2994cc V6 motors, automatic transmission and all-round independent suspension. Launched in the UK in July 1974 in luxury-laden Ghia form, the Granny Coupé came equipped with such niceties as power steering, tinted glass and a push-button radio. Only ever manufactured in Germany, unlike the saloons, production ceased in August 1977. Exports to Britain ended the previous year.

Germany's other big coupé of the era, the

FACTFILE

Peugeot V6 Coupé

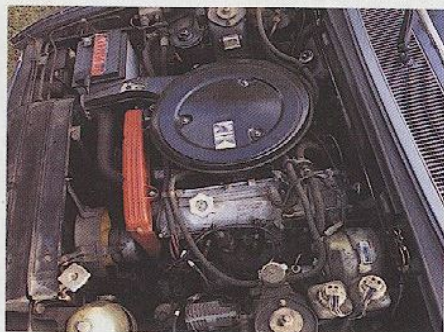
- ENGINE**
- 2664cc fuel-injected V6
- Max power:** 144bhp at 5200rpm
- Transmission:** five-speed manual
- SUSPENSION**
- Front:** wishbones and coil springs with anti-roll bar
- Rear:** semi-trailing arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar
- 0-60mph:** 9.7 secs
- Max speed:** 118mph
- Mpg:** 20-22
- Price new:** not sold in UK
- Price now:** £10-12,000



Opel Commodore Mk2 crept stealthily on to the UK market in May '72. Like the Granada, it shared the majority of its sheet metal with a saloon, the four-door Commodore. Power initially came from a 2.5-litre straight-six lump, providing enough poke to propel the Commodore to 115mph with the 0-60mph dash taking 11.4 secs. Suspension was fairly conventional, the independent front end using



Torquey 3-litre V6 offers plenty of grunt. Seats comfortable, 'wheel non-original



FACTFILE

Ford Granada V6

ENGINE

2994cc ohv V6

Max power: 157bhp at 5200rpm

Transmission: three-speed auto

SUSPENSION

Front: wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear:** semi-trailing arms, coil springs anti-roll bar

0-60mph: 10.7 secs

Max speed: 110mph

Mpg: 22-24

Price new: £3316

Price now: £4-6000

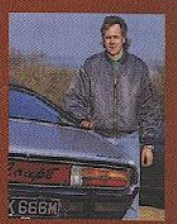
coil springs and wishbones, the live rear axle being suspended on coils and located by semi-trailing links with a Panhard rod.

Mark Eyre's '75 example is one of three in his keep and represents the fruit of 12 months labour. Built from a moth-eaten, bare shell, Mark's car is the rare GS/E model that was offered from October 1974. It features a fuel-injected 2.8-litre motor, disc brakes on each corner and sundries of a modern 'gentleman's express' such as sunroof, power steering, wind-screen enclosed radio aerial and tinted glass.

Of the four, the Opel feels far and away the most contemporary. On the move, it gathers momentum with the minimum of fuss, the auto 'box not feeling at all undergeared. While not a sports car, the Opel's handling prowess is a revelation. The front end tucks in nicely with just a hint of understeer, the tail being similarly obedient. Body roll is virtually absent while the

Granada

Terry Head has owned an astonishing 60-plus Granadas over the last two decades, although he does rather sheepishly admit that 20 of them were used for banger racing! Founder of the Ford Granada Drivers' Guild, Terry is utterly obsessed with the model and feels that they're grossly underrated.

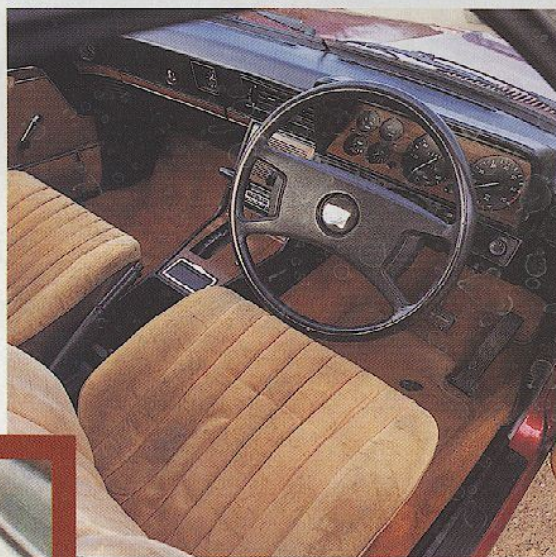
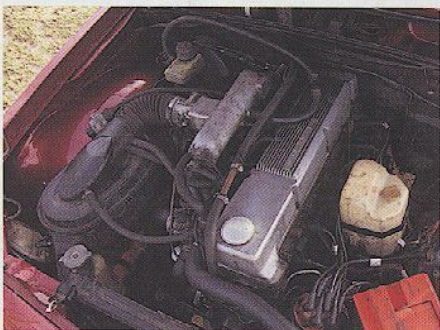


steering is nicely weighted. That the car proves to be such a proficient handler shouldn't come as much of a surprise; in the 1978 Shellsport Production Saloon Car series, Tony Lanfranchi took 12 wins to win his class and Alan Minshaw scored five wins, both in Commodore GS/Es.

The Opel's ride is a little hard, the resonance of each bump being communicated to the pilot's posterior with wearisome regularity. The cloth trimmed seats provide very little lower back support though the actual driving position is close to perfect. Passenger legroom is bounteous though one wouldn't be keen to

Granada's silhouette is pleasing enough. Doors are 8in longer than saloon's





Straight-six is silky-smooth. Seats lack support but driving position is excellent

Opel is handsome in profile and shares sheet metal with Commodore saloon

edition, a model never officially imported into the UK. Though outwardly well disguised, its origins are obvious once inside. The instruments, column stalks and assorted door furniture are sourced from the 504 saloon which cheapens things a little. The cockpit is sufficiently comfortable for those in the front but rear leg room is at a premium.

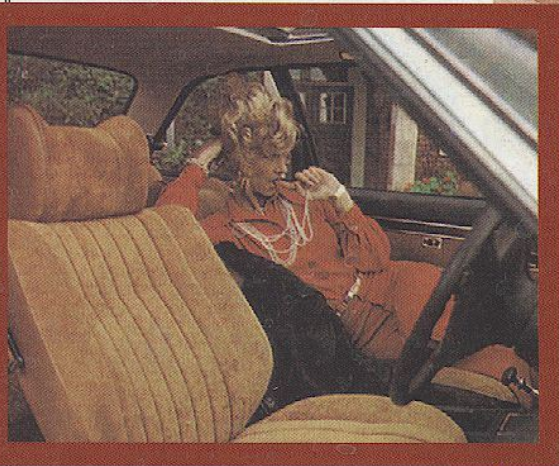
Power comes from the superb 2.7-litre V6 motor shared with the 604 saloon, mated to a five-speed 'box. Acceleration is instant with a sonorous bark. The gear change is notchy in operation but is progressive nonetheless. GS300 was tested by *Motor* back in August 1980 which recorded the

Opel

Mark Eyre has owned some 12

Commodore Mk2s, this being his latest example. A true

Opel junkie, he's also the proud custodian of a Monza but admits to being susceptible to the charms of Yankee muscle. If things go according to plan, a Dodge Charger could soon be nesting next to his GS/E.



travel long distances in the confined rear. Overall, there's plenty to commend, the Commodore being a car blessed with the poise and dynamics of something far more modern.

Privately imported in late 1978, Geoffrey Sizzey's Peugeot Coupé is an ultra rare V6 Ti

FACTFILE

Opel Commodore GS/E

ENGINE

2784cc fuel-injected straight-six

Max power: 175bhp at 5600rpm

Transmission: three-speed automatic

SUSPENSION

Front: unequal length wishbones and coil springs

Rear: live axle, trailing arms and coil springs, anti-roll bar

0-60mph: 10.7 secs

Max speed: 117mph

Mpg: 19-23

Price new: £3377 **Now:** £3-6000

0-60mph sprint at a believable 9.3 secs. There's a definite sense of urgency matched by ultra-direct steering which sends back all the right messages.

The 504 doesn't have the Opel's composure when being hustled through the twisty bits and ultimately you'll lose the tail end. In fairness, the Peugeot isn't a sporting chariot and shouldn't be treated as such. Geoffrey reports that the car is most at home cruising the Continent at 100mph. The 504's best feature is its soporific ride. Hugely impressive.

Stepping out of the Peugeot into Terry Head's Granada Coupé, the two cars couldn't be more different. The Peugeot is lithesome, almost dainty, the Granny looks elephantine. Terry has owned it for 13 years, having rebuilt it on several occasions. Paint and wheels aside, the car is largely standard and about as immaculate an example as you're likely to find.

The big Ford's cavernous cockpit is inviting but '70s in flavour with wood-effect plastic and cloth trim. The seats are comfortable, if a little lacking in lumbar support. Up and running, the unstressed V6 provides plenty of urge although, with a kerb weight of 1382kgs, acceleration is steady rather than vivid. Terry's custom-made exhaust system emits a wonder-

FACTFILE

Fiat 130 Coupé v6

ENGINE 3235cc sohc V6, 165bhp at 5600rpm

Transmission: three-speed automatic or five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

SUSPENSION

Front: struts, torsion bars, anti-roll bar **Rear:** semi-trailing arms, coils, struts, anti-roll bar

0-60mph: 10.6 secs

Max speed: 118mph

Mpg: 12-20

Price new: £5821

Price now: £4-9000



ful growl unlike a V6 – more Le Mans Delahaye racer than Cologne cruiser.

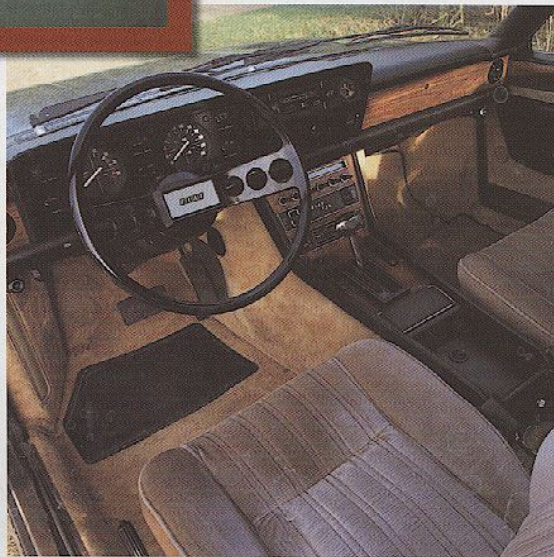
Period road tests suggest cataclysmic body roll but this isn't the case. There is a tendency to lurch ever so slightly through tighter bends but not excessively so. In looks and feel, the Ford is very American, much like a scaled down muscle car but without the guttural V8 bellow. One imagines that this big ol' bruiser would be more comfortable blasting along the autobaluns than the back roads of Buckinghamshire.

Photographs give no sense to the sheer scale of a Fiat 130 Coupé. Three inches longer than the saloon, the Coupé is vast, though its considerable bulk is masterfully disguised. Bob Woodward's recently imported example is lovely to look at but rather uninviting to drive. The ride is cossetting, the steering direct and the cabin a pleasant place from which to

Fiat 130 Coupé is a '70s design icon. Cockpit is airy and well thought out



3235cc V6 provides 165bhp but car still feels underpowered. Sounds good though



Fiat

A Fiat enthusiast of the first order, Bob Woodward has owned his remarkably rust free 130 Coupé since it was imported from Milan in 1997 and represents dream fulfilment. He's extended his garage to house the behemoth where it will join a Strada Abarth 130TC and 850 saloon.



conduct business, but there's no discernible spirit or character – it's almost painfully bland. Yet the car's stunning façade, airy cockpit and typically Italian details such as the dual-tone horn make one want to

forgive it anything.

An emotional and irrational choice, the Fiat is still tops although the virtuous Opel is an infinitely better all-rounder. The Peugeot's ride and responsive steering, and its handsome looks, endear enormously while the Ford's distinctive silhouette isn't without a certain charm. The Granada is the most affordable and, for this reason alone, is well worth a look. But, at the end of the day, it's a case of form over function, pose value over practicality and Italian cool over Teutonic efficiency and French chic. Each to their own. ♦

