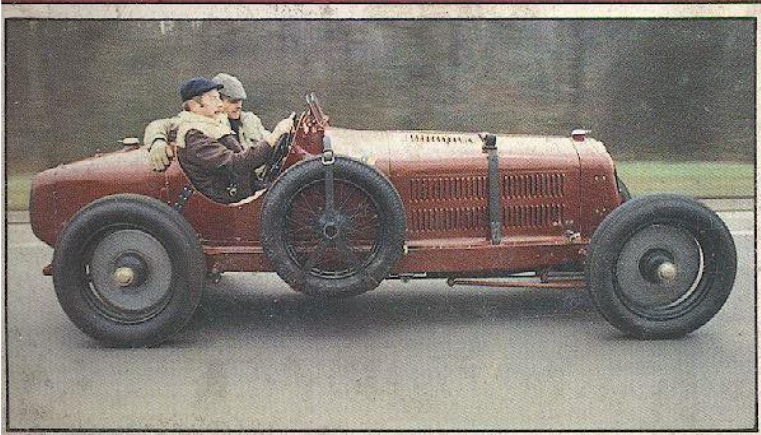


CLASSIC

AND SPORTSCAR

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MAY 1984 90p



BUY A BIG HEALEY

JAGUAR E-TYPE RACER

BERTONE'S BMW BEAUTY

GP ALFA ON THE ROAD

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The label GT or Grand Turismo has been much valued over the years. The traditional meaning is a rowback to the privileged style of motoring between wars, coined for a motor car designed for long, den journeys in style across the continent, with two adults or a young family. The term harks back to great marques such as Delahaye, Alvis, Invicta and Delage, now sadly lost causes.

During the late sixties and early seventies this area the market was no less competitive with cars such as the Reliant Scimitar GTE, Alfa Romeo GTV, Mercedes Benz 280SL and Ford Capri 3000GT all offering something a little more interesting.

Two relative newcomers to this exclusive group were Peugeot and Triumph. Both companies wanted up-market flagships to boost their images. Peugeot were renowned for producing conservative, well-engineered and immensely strong products, but they tended to be on the dull side, like Volvo or Rover. Triumph, however, had a more sporty image from the immortal TR range, but the 'sports car' concept was waning, and Triumph were anxious to keep pace. The saloon models (2000 and 2500 PI) were almost direct competitors to the Peugeot 504 range, though perhaps more exclusive and fitting somewhere between Jaguar and Saab.

It seemed, therefore, a simple solution that the new models should be direct developments of a successful saloon counterpart. With Peugeot that is basically how the story begins and ends, but with Triumph it is only the beginning of a very troubled and embarrassing production life.

Italian styling

Other parallels between Peugeot and Triumph were the liaison with two Italian styling studios, Pininfarina and Michelotti respectively. Initially the objectives of both companies were identical: to restyle the existing saloon as a convertible/coupé. In the case of Peugeot the result was exactly right, while Triumph had grander ideas, and the final production model bore little resemblance to the original prototype.

Peugeot is one of the oldest surviving marques, matched only by Daimler and Benz. Their illustrious history includes such outstanding designs as Zurelli's and Henry's twin cam engine and the pioneering of four wheel brakes for Grand Prix racing. At the advent of harder times saw a more conservative attitude for survival with the production of well-engineered and reliable mass market models. The 203 and 403 ranges after the war had lively handling and performance, and from these models the original 504 engine was developed. This simple four-cylinder unit, with five bearing crank, semi-head and inclined overhead valves operated by pushrods and rockers, was fitted with Kugelfischer fuel injection, possibly the most refined mechanical system available. With a capacity of 1798cc, it appeared in the sturdy 504 saloon range, and, as with the 404 range before, Peugeot approached Battistina Pininfarina to style a more elegant up-market model.

The result appeared at the Geneva Show in 1969 in convertible and coupé form, and in final production offered little mechanically from the 504 except for revised springing and stiffer dampers. The engine was redated to 1971cc a year later. The body was the crucial transformation, being not simply a drawing board exercise but actually built at Turin by Pininfarina. The bodies — with a 19cms shorter wheelbase and wider rear track — were then transported to Peugeot's Sochaux factory in Alsace for final assembly.

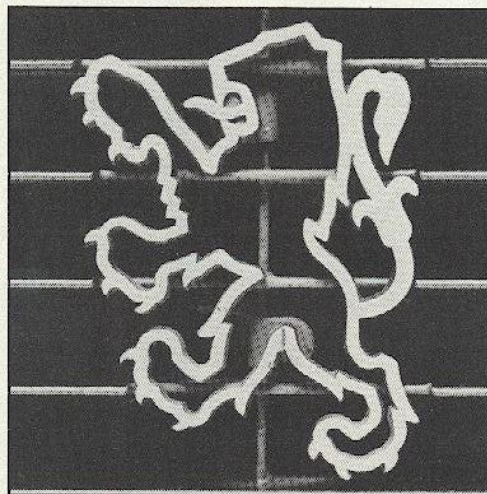
Although the car was desirable in appearance, performance never quite lived up to its image. The advent of the 604, however, saw a new 2.7-litre V6 engine and in the coupé this infused fresh life, making the fastest as well as the prettiest of Peugeots. The Coupé (as it was known) was produced with Renault and Volvo, and featured a V6 all-alloy block with single camshafts per bank, produced a healthy 166bhp and was fitted to the glamorous coupé and convertible from October 1974. However, in 1977 the oil crisis prompted the return to the 2-litre engine, though the Coupé could still be ordered with the V6, now with Bosch K-jetronic injection producing

BACK TO BACK



STAG V LION

The Triumph Stag and the Peugeot 504 coupé are Grand Turismo cars in the old style. Mike Walsh has been trying them out for size



144bhp (from the newly introduced 604TI). The car enjoyed basically an untroubled production run, because it was based on well-tryed components yet stood out from the crowd by grace and elegance alone. By 1977 production was nearly 27,000, but the tragedy is that it was never imported officially into England in right-hand drive form. Hodec Engineering of Byfleet provided the tidiest conversion for about £400 in 1971 and were recommended by Peugeot UK, but worked only on four cylinder models as the V6's dimensions make rhd conversion almost impossible, though one example of such handiwork has been seen.

To prove the model's competitive pedigree a works entered coupé won the Safari Rally in 1978, a feat Peugeot have achieved five times, breaking the German grip on this event.

The Stag story is not such a happy tale. It began when Giovanni Michelotti, having completed the Triumph 2000 and 1300 styling, asked Harry Webster, chief engineer at Triumph, for a 2000 chassis to create a one-off show special. The condition was that if Triumph liked the end result, they could take it back to Coventry. The smooth sleek convertible with a wide horizontal grille and concealed headlights (with electrically operated flaps) was liked and immediately taken back to England to examine its market potential.

At first, like the Peugeot 504, it was envisaged with a standard production engine, the 2.5 fuel injection straight-six from the TR and 2.5PI, but Triumph engineer Lewis Dawtrey had grander plans. He proposed a V8 using two banks of a slant four from the 1500cc range. As a consequence the body styling had to change to accommodate the new, wider V8. Eventually no original panels were common between Stag and big Triumph saloons, which all meant the car didn't see light of day till 1970. The final execution had the unmistakable stamp of Michelotti, but many found it fussy compared to the original 2000 cabriolet prototype. The T bar was not simply for roll over regulations or styling, but to prevent the enormous scuttle shake that the prototype suffered in testing.

On paper the ingredients looked very desirable, especially with its sophisticated 'head gear' — hard top and convertible in one — and 'healthy' V8 power. By all accounts it should have been a great success, and even today people have realised the gap it left. In reality it was a headache for Leyland and for many owners, simply because of impatient production schedules. Triumph mechanics readily agree the car needed another 18 months' development.

Engine problems

The engine, the source of much of the Stag's appeal, was in practice the cause of all its problems, though neither ambitious in design nor highly tuned. The 90 degree V8 featured single overhead camshafts on each bank, chain-driven from the five bearing crankshaft. Twin side-draught Stromberg carbs were used to produce 145bhp from 3-litres, quite modest compared to BMW's 2.8-litre six which developed some 170bhp.

The cooling system was the main problem, due to the single water pump mounted high between the cylinder banks; when the water level dropped below the pump, total loss of coolant occurred. The single roller chain camshaft drive wore out very rapidly, eventually causing embarrassing internal damage, something twin roller chains might have avoided. On top of this, the wrong surface finish on the main journals caused crankshaft bearings to wear out prematurely, while warped heads were caused by the effect of corrosive anti-freezes on gasket sealing and internal circulation.

In the merger with Leyland, it was decided to continue development alongside the more conventional Rover 'Buick' V8. In retrospect, this seems a major mistake, especially in light of hasty pre-production development at Triumph. Of the 46,000 cars built, two thirds stayed in Great Britain. Lack of export success eventually killed the model; in America the V8's complexity and the poor reputation of Lucas wiring scared off many potential buyers.

The Stag, though undermined by tales of woe, is still one of Leyland's most endearing misfits. The

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design has now become a very attractive and appreciating classic, and with Stag ownership changing to more committed enthusiasts who cherish and maintain their cars properly, it is now regaining the respect lost during its production run.

We originally chose to match a Peugeot 504 convertible V6 against the Triumph Stag — two genuine four seater open tourers. We had to compromise as no 504 V6 convertible was available. A coupé took its place, thanks to Geoff Sizzey, a dealer in Peugeots since 1967 and a genuine enthusiast for the marque. He races a Lotus Europa and a Turner twin cam but prefers something more refined and elegant for the road. The model's classic looks instantly appealed to him and, having owned a 504 cabriolet, he felt the V6 was an absolute must. His car, registered GS300, was a personal import, and he collected it from the factory. At customs he hoped to import the Peugeot as a basic 504, but an enthusiastic official took too much interest in the shapely styling, and soon realised something was amiss when no two door model was listed in his books. The outcome was a hefty £1,100 import duty.

Tony Hart is well known as a Stag doctor, and was an obvious choice to provide a sorted example. His affection is a little different from Geoff's: in effect the Stag chose him through business interests, and over the years he has grown to like the car. He provided his personal Stag, production No 10, with automatic transmission. The car was restored from a burnt out insurance write-off, taking 18 months and £6000 in parts alone to rebuild to his exacting standards.

The physical presence of the two cars is quite different. The Peugeot's styling is almost dateless, achieving elegance through clean, uncluttered lines. Like many of Farina's designs, the styling outlives the mechanical specification. The Stag looks fussy, and, as with many of Michelotti's designs, it dated very quickly. The bonnet looks proportionally too short in comparison to the rest of the body, and is at its most

attractive fully open or with the hard top in position. The obvious advantage of the Stag over the Peugeot is that the closed and open variants are available as one car, a design feature never achieved quite so successfully in any other model.

The interiors are again very diverse. Here the Stag holds its own, with well-upholstered, comfortable seats, matt wood veneer dash, and a generous complement of instruments. The large steering wheel is adjustable both for rake and reach by a clamping lever under the dash. The heating and ventilation is efficient, but the seating in the back provides little knee room for anyone but children.

Taxi cab interior

The interior of the Peugeot, however, is a big disappointment, particularly after such seductive body styling. Its resemblance to a Paris taxi cab is notable, with very basic facia, instruments and lighting stalks, and an unfashionably large steering wheel, all seemingly production 504. Though the seats are plush cloth and comfortable, the chrome door trimming again cheapens the image. The temperature and heater controls are unpleasantly tinnny and unprogressive.

The boots also couldn't be more different. The Peugeot's is ideally spacious while many have said the Stag's boot is the car's only sports car feature — hopelessly small and inadequate for the purpose!

Once in the driving seat each car's character soon establishes itself. The Stag is clearly a descendant of the traditional sports car idiom, with its genuine walnut dash and long steering column, with the wheel not as vertical as we would like. The Peugeot's pretensions are much more sedate, with a very upright driving position — more of an executive express than a grown up sports car.

On the road these assumptions are further justified. The Stag engine produces that great V8 rumble, though good insulation prevents any annoyance to

non-enthusiasts. The ride is very smooth, with certain amount of body roll, but loud wind noise occurs at speed with the hood up. Thanks to compliant springs and independent rear end, the car grip is excellent, though hard cornering on uneven roads encourages 'clap hand' characteristics and tail leaps about unneringly. The Adwest power assisted steering is superb, almost as good as the German ZF in its day, and, compared to the Peugeot provides ample road feel — in fact Tony Hart's Stag races in such standard spec. The nose heavy design under hard cornering, produces understeer, while the brakes are a little disappointing for a car of such performance, giving a spongy feel and fading slightly under pressure.

The Peugeot V6 under hard acceleration is very smooth, with more of a roar than a rumble. The ride is firm yet supple, is hard to fault, while the handling seems softer than the Stag's, yet well-sorted and capable. The low profile Michelin TRX tyres (the first car to be fitted with these as standard) give much confidence in the handling, but the power assisted steering is soft and lacking in road feel. The brakes discs all round — are better than the Stag's, with lighter pedal.

There is little to choose between the two cars performance. The Peugeot's top speed is 117mph, the Stag's 116.5mph, while 0-60mph times (504, 9.3sec Stag, 9.7secs) give the Peugeot a slight edge.

In conclusion, though the two cars were almost identical at their inception in aims and image, in reality they could not have been more different. Although the Stag is a more sophisticated design, the end result is much harsher, leaning more to the sports car end of the sales spectrum. But it is at its best as an open sunshine tourer, and that alone is a rare breed. The Peugeot is obviously developed from its saloon counterpart, with all the charisma of an exotic car but not the prohibitive running costs. In hindsight, it is a much safer prospect . . .

SPECIFICATIONS	Triumph Stag	Peugeot 504 coupé
Engine	V8	V6
Bore x stroke	86x64.5mm	88x73mm
Capacity	2998cc	2664cc
Valves	Single ohc per bank	Single ohc per bank
Compression	8.8:1	8.65:1
Power	145bhp at 5500rpm	136bhp at 5750rpm
Torque	170lb ft at 3500rpm	152lb at 3500rpm
Transmission	Four speed manual with overdrive	Five speed manual
Final drive	3.7:1	3.7:1
Brakes	Discs/drums	Discs
Suspension front	Independent by Macpherson struts, coil springs and wishbones	Independent by Macpherson struts, coil springs, anti roll bar
Suspension rear	Independent, coil springs and semi-trailing wishbones	Independent, coil springs, semi-trailing arms, anti-roll bar
Steering	Rack & pinion, power assisted	Rack & pinion
Tyres	185—14	175—14
Body	Unitary, all steel	Unitary, all steel
DIMENSIONS		
Length	14ft 5.8ins	14ft 3.7ins
Width	5ft 3.5ins	5ft 6.9ins
Height	4ft 1.5ins	4ft 5.1ins
Wheelbase	8ft 4ins	8ft 4ins
Kerb weight	2810lb	Not available
PERFORMANCE		
Max speed	116mph	117mph
0-60mph	9.7secs	9.3secs
30-50mph in top	7.6secs	8.5secs
50-70mph in top	7.7secs	9.0secs
Standing ¼ mile	17.9secs	16.9secs
Average fuel con.	20mpg	18mpg
PRODUCTION		
Years Built	1970-77	1974-to date
Numbers built	26,000	6025 (26,629 including 4-cyl variants)
Price new (1974)	£2917	£3337 (4-cyl)



The Triumph Stag suffered from fussy looks . . .



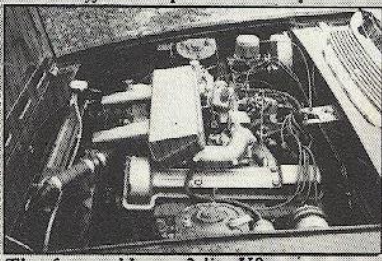
The Peugeot's styling is almost dateless



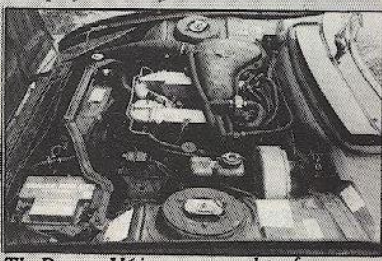
. . . but offered an open and closed option



Low profile TRX tyres came as standard



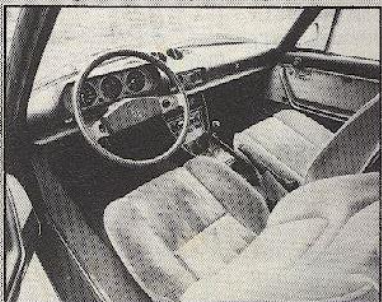
The often troublesome 3-litre V8 engine



The Peugeot V6 is a very smooth performer



Stag interior is traditional and comfortable



The interior of the 504 rather let it down

