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# THE FORGE SQUAD

The appeal of modernised and upgraded classic motors is growing. **Richard Webber** assembles the best of the breed at Goodwood to find out why

PHOTOGRAPHY STAN PAPIOR

**N**o need to check the front cover; you haven't picked up an issue of Classic & Sports Car magazine. So why has Autocar lined up some of yesteryear's greatest cars on the home straight of the Goodwood circuit in West Sussex?

Well, like Goodwood's storied acres, these five iconic knee-weakeners have retained their evocative looks while being lovingly

enriched with modern-day convenience and technology. All are produced by British companies that are part of the growing market for modernised classics, born of buyers' indifference to the mass-produced white goods of today's showrooms.

But have their modifications diluted their spirit, and can they really cut it as regular transport in 2014? Let's find out. →



## JENSEN INTERCEPTOR R

PENNED BY CARROZZERIA Touring, the Interceptor presents an unmistakability that has only strengthened with age. But time has been less kind to its dynamics. A wheezing Chrysler V8 can be revived to some extent, but the wallowing chassis and overlight, time-lapse steering of West Brom's muscle car feel painfully outdated.

Jensen Motors of Banbury is a new business, but its owners have been making modernised Interceptors since 2007. This is their hottest: the 6.2-litre V8-powered Interceptor R. Created from a Mk3 car, its shell has been chemically stripped and rebuilt with much-improved fit, finish and sound deadening, while the cabin has been retrimmed with yards of luxuriously pungent leather. The rack and pinion steering and front double wishbones are reconditioned and the live rear axle has been replaced with Jaguar-sourced independent suspension. Adjustable coilovers complete the 30-40mm lowered set-up.

The starter button and modern shifter stand out in the otherwise period-perfect cabin. But does firing up the 429bhp GM LS3 lump shatter the illusion? Not a bit. The old-school, big-cube luxury GT traits remain; the engine's metallic churr, the loping gait, the 'slow in, fast out' methodology and the embarrassment of 424lb ft of torque are all in evidence. But the plane on which all this familiarity operates is that much higher. The

engine loves to streak beyond 4000rpm, its note rising from gentle rumble to heady scream. This is a seriously rapid car, and also one that's settled at a high-speed cruise.

The suspension shudders a bit over ridges, the four-speed automatic gearbox can be ponderous, wind noise is greater than you'll be used to and the upgraded brakes still aren't as well mannered as modern kit. But you could live with – and enjoy – this car every day. The Interceptor R strikes a sweet balance between throwback character and 21st century composure.

### ALSO CONSIDER



#### FERRARI FF £227,142

Maranello's 651bhp four-seat breadvan costs similar money to the Jensen from new but can shed up to £50,000 within a year.

### JENSEN INTERCEPTOR R

|             |                     |
|-------------|---------------------|
| Price       | £200,000            |
| Top speed   | Over 167mph         |
| 0-60mph     | 4.5sec              |
| Kerb weight | 1775kg (est)        |
| Engine      | V8, 6162cc, petrol  |
| Power       | 429bhp at 6600rpm   |
| Torque      | 424lb ft at 3800rpm |
| Gearbox     | 4-spd auto          |



## SPYDERCARS ZETEC ELAN

LOTUS'S FLYWEIGHT ELAN offers a sublime steer, but rust can ravage its steel backbone. That malaise has created a demand that Spydercars has served for 30 years with its replacement chassis. The Peterborough company's spaceframe adds about 40 per cent stiffness – plus better servicing accessibility, safety and repairability – without increasing weight.

To all of this, Spydercars adds performance, reliability and economy with its Zetec conversions, most of which are Elan +2s like this 76,000-mile development car. It doesn't represent a workshop-fresh finish but does, crucially, let us experience the car's dynamics.

The race-tuned 2.0-litre, 16-valve Ford Zetec four-pot echoes the Elan's original, Cortina-derived 1.6 twin-cam but increases power and torque by half. Rear struts are dropped in favour of custom all-round double wishbones, and CV joints replace the springy Rotoflex couplings.

Happily, the engine exhibits startling similarities to the original. Following a purposeful-sounding idle, it pulls from 2000rpm and hits its stride at 4000rpm, when an entertaining, raucous raspiness erupts. There are pops and bangs on the overrun and heel-and-toeing is a cinch. The five-speed Ford gearbox is almost as satisfying as the Elan's original click-clack four-speed unit and far slicker than the later five-speeder. Fifth provides easy high-speed cruising, when the exhaust hushes nicely.

The small, thick Moto-Lita steering wheel and 2.2-turn rack feel settled, while the ride is good

(some low-speed shudders aside) and the car feels planted in the dry. But the original's big-diameter, thin-rimmed helm, and the delicacy it transmitted, are missing. Spydercars reckons combining a slower rack and higher-profile tyres with a bigger wheel would recreate that lightness. It's also easy to overwhelm the 185mm-wide rear tyres in the wet, and the Wilwood brakes want for more feel.

But value is on the Zetec Elan's side, with this example here on sale for £25,000. Prefer a 'new' one? Donors cost from just £2000 (you'll retain little more than the glassfibre shell), and Spydercars charges £45,240 for a scratch build, including a respray and new leather and walnut interior, making the evocative, charming little Elan easily our most affordable choice. →

### ALSO CONSIDER



#### LOTUS EVORA +2 £54,980

Like the original Elan +2, Hethel's latest 2+2 rides and handles beautifully. The Zetec Elan's drivetrain is more entertaining, though.



The rejuvenated Spydercars Elan gains strength and reliability; leather and walnut trim is the finishing touch

Jensen Motors' Interceptor R blends welcome modern underpinnings with the original car's classic look and feel

### SPYDERCARS ZETEC ELAN

|             |                                |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Price       | £47,240 (approx)               |
| Top speed   | 130mph                         |
| 0-60mph     | 6.0sec                         |
| Kerb weight | 950kg (est)                    |
| Engine      | 4 cyls in line, 1998cc, petrol |
| Power       | 190bhp                         |
| Torque      | 160lb ft                       |
| Gearbox     | 5-spd manual                   |



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SL63 AMG » 560+BHP (+DE-LIMIT)  
RE-MAP & LOWER ABC SUSPENSION)  
CL600 BI-TURBO » 580+BHP  
SLK55 AMG » 389 BHP (+DE-LIMIT)  
SLK 350 » 328 BHP  
220 CDI ALL MODELS » 210+ BHP  
250 CDI ALL MODELS » 259+ BHP  
320 CDI V6 » 274 BHP  
350 CDI V6 » 312 BHP  
420/450 CDI V8 » 358 BHP

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1M » 411+ BHP  
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M3 E46 » 370 BHP (+DE-LIMIT)  
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F10 530D » 294 BHP  
F10 535D » 358 BHP  
335i/135i/X6 » 370+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)  
123D » 252 BHP  
330D E90 » 296+ BHP  
320D E90 » 215 BHP  
730D » 290+ BHP  
X5 4.0D / 740D » 370 BHP  
X5 3.0D » 296 BHP  
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FRONTLINE DEVELOPMENTS  
MG ABINGDON EDITION

|             |                                   |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Price       | £95,874                           |
| Top speed   | 160mph (est)                      |
| 0-60mph     | 3.8sec                            |
| Kerb weight | 999kg                             |
| Engine      | 4 cyls in line,<br>2488cc, petrol |
| Power       | 304bhp at<br>6800rpm              |
| Torque      | 240lb ft at<br>4800rpm            |
| Gearbox     | 6-spd manual                      |

FRONTLINE DEVELOPMENTS MG ABINGDON EDITION

ONLY ONE CAR here goes for the baby-and-bathwater approach, adopting as it does a new bodyshell, chassis, engine and transmission. That it's the bechromed Mk1 MGB is a surprise. No less surprising is the shockingly stark disconnect between the aesthetics of Frontline's MG Abingdon Edition and its performance; the 999kg roadster is claimed to hit 60mph in 3.8sec.

This is done via the unlikely installation of the Mk2 Mazda 6's 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine, hiked from 167bhp to 304bhp via upgraded internals and management systems. The seam-welded steel monocoque body and chassis are new, produced for Abingdon-based Frontline by British Motor Heritage, the licensee for pre-1982 MG parts. That makes it OEM equipment, helping to meet the required provenance to make this, officially, a 1964 car. Front suspension is still by double wishbones, but the live rear axle has been replaced by a bespoke six-link set-up and there is an adjustable coilover at each corner.



Frontline MG's classic looks belie its rabid performance

The Abingdon Edition really looks the part. Its wheelbase matches that of the original and its extra 18mm of track isn't obvious. Given contemporary production processes, you'd hope for tighter panel fit – although this is the inaugural build – but the cabin's quality is more consistent, with tidy switchgear, ample soft leather and custom-fitted low-back seats.

The car tremors at idle like the mini-rod it is. Take-up is sometimes bitey, but there's a fantastic warbling howl as speed shoots up and an addictive bark when blipping, though heel-and-toeing isn't practicable. Tractability really impresses above 2000rpm, and six snickety gears allow quick shifts and a serene 2500rpm at 70mph on top.

Electric steering from EZ is a revelation. It is fluid, responsive, ideally weighted and feelsome and helps to exploit the little roadster's tight body control and keen turn-in. It would be a hoot on track, but with the current suspension settings it's too animated for subsiding A-roads.

At nearly £100k, this is one expensive MG, but Frontline's 2.0-litre, 238bhp 'LE50' MGB GT costs £78,000 on average, after options (many of which are standard fit here), although most of those are sold. Refine the ride and shore up the panel fit and there are many reasons to snare one of the 25 Abingdon Editions. →



ALSO CONSIDER



JAGUAR F-TYPE R COUPE £85,000

Frontline says its car is quicker to 60mph than the supercharged V8 Jag. It would be a hilarious drag race to watch.



## EAGLE E-TYPE SERIES 1 4.2 ROADSTER

|             |                                |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Price       | £245,000                       |
| Top speed   | 150mph                         |
| 0-60mph     | 6.5sec                         |
| Kerb weight | 1339kg                         |
| Engine      | 6 cyls in line, 4235cc, petrol |
| Power       | 265bhp at 5400rpm              |
| Torque      | 283lb ft at 3800rpm            |
| Gearbox     | 4-spd manual                   |