

MAZDA'S SAVED THE ENGINE

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16 August 2017

DBX SCOOPED

ASTON'S NEW SUV

ON SALE 2019 Why it's the car
to save the company

Fear not: it's got a V12 and
will handle like a sports car...



NEW OR USED?

TVR's finest
vs Subaru's
handling hero



21 PAGES OF REVIEWS



RS3: AT LAST, A FUN FAST AUDI



SKODA'S FOCUS ST BEATER



WILD 800BHP FORD MUSTANG



£5K BUYING GUIDE
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ALSO INSIDE

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'You can enjoy the lazy novelty of sitting while cooking or washing up'



60

NEWS

Aston Martin DBX All-new luxury SUV due in 2019	6
Mazda engine tech New petros "cleaner than EVs"	10
Mercedes hybrids Petrol-electric CLS first to arrive	13
Audi Q2 e-tron Small electric SUV aimed at China	15
Range Rover PHEV Plug-in petrol-electric SUV	16
SVO vs Land Rover tuners Aftermarket hits back	19

TESTED

Audi RS3 Saloon More power, four-door bodystyle	24
Sutton CS800 Mustang 825bhp for blown coupé	28
Volkswagen Atlas Big seven-seat SUV for America	30
Honda Civic Type R Hardcore hot hatch thrills	31
Skoda Octavia vRS 245 Estate ROAD TEST	32

FEATURES

New vs used: Subaru or TVR? BRZ meets T350t	40
Down to the wire Benedict Radcliffe's sculptures	46
What makes a driver's car? Key aspects analysed	48
Bentley Bentayga Long-term luxury SUV signs off	54
Wheel alignment Specialists to the rescue	58
Camping in cars Mini and Mercedes under canvas	60

OUR CARS

BMW M135i Used hot hatch prepares to be fettered	68
Porsche 911 As if by magic, cruise control appears	70
Honda Civic Great car, rubbish multimedia set-up	71

EVERY WEEK

Steve Cropley Unfortunate names for fast cars	21
Subscribe Pay up front and get more for your money	22
Your views Why we owe the Japanese a debt	64
Matt Prior The future of internal combustion	90

DEALS

James Ruppert Cars that will survive until 2040	72
Used buying guide BMW 8 Series examined	74
Used car intelligence Audi Quattro revisited	77
Road test results Autocar's data archive	79
New cars A-Z All the latest models rated	82
Classifieds Cars, number plates and services	89



BMW 8 SERIES USED BUYING GUIDE 74

THIS WEEK



NEW SUBARU BRZ OR USED TVR T350 FOR AROUND £26K? 40



WIREFRAME CAR SCULPTURES 46



IN SEARCH OF THE IDEAL DRIVER'S CAR 48



“IT MIGHT BE A NO-BRAINER FOR ANYONE WHO HAS OUTGROWN A HOT HATCH”

NIC CACKETT ON THE SKODA OCTAVIA VRS 245 ESTATE 32



COVER STORY

FULL DETAILS ON ASTON MARTIN'S CRUCIAL NEW DBX SUV 6

AUTOCAR IMAGE



NOISE VERSUS POISE

Subaru's BRZ is revered for its accessible handling, but for the same price as a new one, you can pick up a used sports car with far more power and charisma: the TVR T350. **Richard Webber** decides which one he'd choose

PHOTOGRAPHY STAN PAPIOR



GOODWOOD REVIVAL

"A magical step back in time"



8 • 9 • 10 SEPTEMBER



“
The Subaru offers a balance of composure and agility that the TVR can't muster
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These things don't often end well. Two years ago, we pitched a new 266bhp Peugeot RCZ R against a used 503bhp Jaguar XKR – both worth about £30,000 at the time – and the Peugeot came away with a very bloody nose. It was a good car, but simply not good enough against a bristling super-coupé. Goliath flattened David and his little sling.

This time, our plucky underdog is the Subaru BRZ – the modestly powered but endlessly exploitable compact coupé, newly refreshed for 2017. Its opponent streaks in from left field in a cloud of combustive noise: it's one of Peter-Wheeler-era TVR's finest, the Tamora-derived T350t (the wee 't' denoting a targa-style top, as opposed to the T350c coupé). Fewer than 500 T350s were built, but there are a few in the classifieds, mostly priced at around the same £26,495 being asked for a new BRZ.

The privately owned T350 we've generously been lent is worth a little more – about £32,500 – because it carries both Red Rose and Lightweight specification. Red Rose means its six hot Lancashire pots have been stroked, raising engine capacity from 3.6 to 4.0 litres and power from 350bhp to 380bhp, plus heftier brakes, a big-bore exhaust and a viscous limited-slip rear differential. The Lightweight spec means vinylester bodywork rather than the standard GRP, saving about 30kg. That leaves the 197bhp, 1242kg

Subaru 142kg heavier yet half as powerful. In starker terms, it's 159bhp per tonne versus 345bhp per tonne.

The BRZ is 266mm longer, too – mainly because it has two small rear seats – but both cars still look little and lithe, the Subaru's à-la-mode lumps, bumps and angles contrasting with the TVR's smooth yet aggressive, Kamm-tailed form.

Their interiors give the biggest clue to their original RRP: the TVR cost twice as much new. What isn't high-quality leather is Alcantara – there's even hide on the standard-fit roll cage – and surprise and delight are both delivered by the mostly unlabelled aluminium switchgear. Push this, turn that, watch the multi-coloured LEDs light up. It's a joy. The seats have been reupholstered, but the sterling condition of the entire cabin belies the odometer's 58,000 miles.

The Subaru's seats are leather and Alcantara, too, and of decent quality, but the rest is a medley of unattractive plastics – some softish but mostly brittle-feeling. The rock-hard, perforated leather-effect door inserts are a particular lowlight, while the mismatched switches range from rudimentary to passable. It's best to accept these economies and console yourself that fancier finishes would add weight. The BRZ's boot is smaller than the T350's fairly generous, glass-hatched space, but you can drop the Subaru's one-piece rear seatback panel for extra room.

The driving position is a bit better in the BRZ, going lower, but both →

Subaru's lower grip levels let you have more fun on B-roads



T350t is not only more powerful than BRZ but also lighter

Should the BRZ's sound symposer not be to your liking, aftermarket outfit Mishimoto sells a simple deletion kit for £13.



← have variable reach and rake for their well-sized and shaped steering wheels. The T350's seats push into the spine a little and its roll cage prevents tall drivers from craning right to see past the car ahead, while finding the right seatback angle can be tricky in the BRZ. Overall, both are comfortable, though.

Supplementing the conventional dials in the Subaru is a slick 4.2in display that includes real-time power, torque and g data, while its optional £1500 Alpine sat-nav and infotainment unit is basic and slow. The TVR's white-faced dials continue the unorthodoxy, with units of 10mph on the speedo, no redline on the tacho and a busy but informative monochromatic LCD display below.

The T350's stereo is unused by its owner – and the reason becomes clear when I fire the car up. We're parked inside Alconbury Weald's disused nuclear bunker and the reverberating cacophony from the TVR's big exhaust might fool you into thinking the Cold War had kicked off after all.

Out on the road, its swelling drone from low revs gives way to a loud, inductive fizz at 4000rpm, followed by a hellish rasp as the straight six

really hits its stride at 5000rpm. Such is the aural intensity that instinct urges you to back off before something breaks, but delve on into the zingy throttle's long travel and you've got another 2000rpm to explore before the green, amber, then red upshift lights finally call time on the madness. There are much easier ways to get 380bhp from an engine in 2017, but surely none as triumphant.

The T350's short-throw, five-speed gearbox has a tight, mechanical feel. Combine it with three offset aluminium pedals that – despite looking entirely crafted for form over function – are sweetly placed for heel-and-toeing and an overrung crackle fit to summon the Kraken and you have an addictive, heady formula that never gets old.

Although it's more interesting than many contemporaries, the Subaru's boxer four is predictably ordinary versus the TVR's in-line six – perhaps even hindered more than helped by its overtly manipulated engine note. Yet its six-speed manual gearbox also has a tidy, if less burly, shift action and there are blip-friendly pedals. And although figures show it takes almost twice as long as the TVR's 3.9sec to reach 60mph, you couldn't



Red Rose spec gives this TVR a 4.0-litre straight six with 380bhp



Subaru's 2.0-litre flat four has 197bhp; its sound can't match the TVR's, either



BRZ's leather and Alcantara seats are good, but patchy cabin plastics spoil the vibe



Material richness (leather, aluminium, Alcantara) oozes from the design-savvy TVR



say it feels slow. Provided you keep the revs up, that is. It's very reluctant below 2000rpm, and there's a torque trough between 3250rpm and 4000rpm. Upshift too soon and you'll wallow in that doldrum for a painful moment; better to keep it bubbling in its 4750rpm-7000rpm sweet spot.

But the Subaru offers a balance of composure and agility that the TVR can't muster. Its electric steering is more progressive than the T350's hydraulic set-up, which, beyond a central dead patch, is overly sharp, becomes very heavy with lots of lock and tramlines a bit with pace. The BRZ's helm is quick enough and plenty accurate but also much more settled, keeping its heading over uneven surfaces at speed.

Roll is swiftly curtailed by the T350, which has double wishbones all round and aftermarket adjustable Nitron shocks. The BRZ, with front MacPherson struts and rear double wishbones, rolls more, but although both cars avoid suspension harshness, the Subaru parries B-road imperfections more effectively.

With its wider tyres and tracks, the TVR grips better in corners. You can really lean on the front end on entry and keep good pace through

the apex, although 380bhp is plenty to overwhelm the rear tyres on exit, should you wish. Limits are more modest at both ends in the BRZ, but that means you can really engage with them at road-going speeds. On a twisty back road, it's like wrestling an excitable adolescent Labrador that you know isn't going to bite. The T350 is much more approachable than its raucous bark implies, but it's certainly harder to gain the same level of confidence with it.

Both cars handle urban trundles pretty well (one more inconspicuously than the other, it's true), but although at 70mph the BRZ sits at 3000rpm in sixth versus the TVR's 2500rpm in fifth, the T350's exhaust drone can be overwhelming at a cruise. In fact, its owner usually wears earplugs.

Most of the TVR's shortcomings would be irrelevant on track, and it's the car I'd rather drive out of the pit lane. But the Subaru has superior road-going dynamics, which is what matters most here. So, true to Biblical convention, David takes the win, but Goliath survives, wins the respect of the crowd for his flair on the field of combat and is welcome back in the Valley of Elah any time he likes. □

2nd

Rapid, charismatic, luxurious and surprisingly approachable but lacking in on-road sheen



Subaru BRZ 2.0i SE Lux		TVR T350t Red Rose Lightweight (2004)	
RATING	★★★★★	★★★★★	
Price new	£26,495	£54,000	
Price now	£26,495	£32,500	
Engine layout	4 cyls, 1998cc, petrol	6 cyls, 3996cc, petrol	
Power	197bhp at 7000rpm	380bhp at 7200rpm	
Torque	151lb ft at 6400-6600rpm	325lb ft at 5500rpm	
Gearbox	6-spd manual	5-spd manual	
Kerb weight	1242kg	1100kg	
0-62mph	7.6sec	3.9sec	
Top speed	140mph	175mph-plus	
Economy	36.2mpg	na	
CO₂/tax band	180g/km, 35%	na	



T350 BUYING TIPS

Jason Clegg built engines at TVR and now runs specialist Str8six in Lewknor, Oxfordshire. Of the T350, he says: "Due diligence is key. Most important is a good history, with plenty of work done on top of servicing, otherwise it's likely to be storing gremlins."

Engines improved on later cars, but the valvetrain can be an issue – "£6000 if it's not right" – and Clegg also recommends scouring the paintwork to spot poor body repairs beneath. Intervals are 6000 miles or annual, alternating between £390 and £790 at Str8six, although low-milers sometimes get away with a £210 oil service. At £156, Str8six's pre-sale inspection seems cracking value.

OTHER CHOICES



2008 PORSCHE 911 CARRERA

The Cayman is a more obvious BRZ rival, but if you want 2+2 seating, you'll need to upsize to a 997-series 911. The newest you'll find under £30,000 with moderate mileage is a pre-facelift 321bhp Carrera 3.6.



2013 AUDI TT RS

The 8.1-generation TT RS revived Audi's four-wheel-drive, turbo five-pot configuration of yesteryear with some success. It's short on handling delicacy but has a tractable engine and huge grip.



2015 NISSAN 370Z NISMO

Bigger and heavier than both our protagonists, this most potent of 370Zs was tweaked for improved quality and usability in 2015. It needs smooth, sweeping roads to thrive but is characterful, well equipped and enjoyably muscular.