

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...



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IMAGE

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
BMW's forgotten bargain

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



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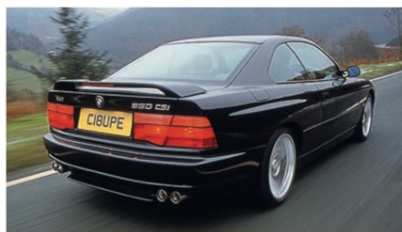
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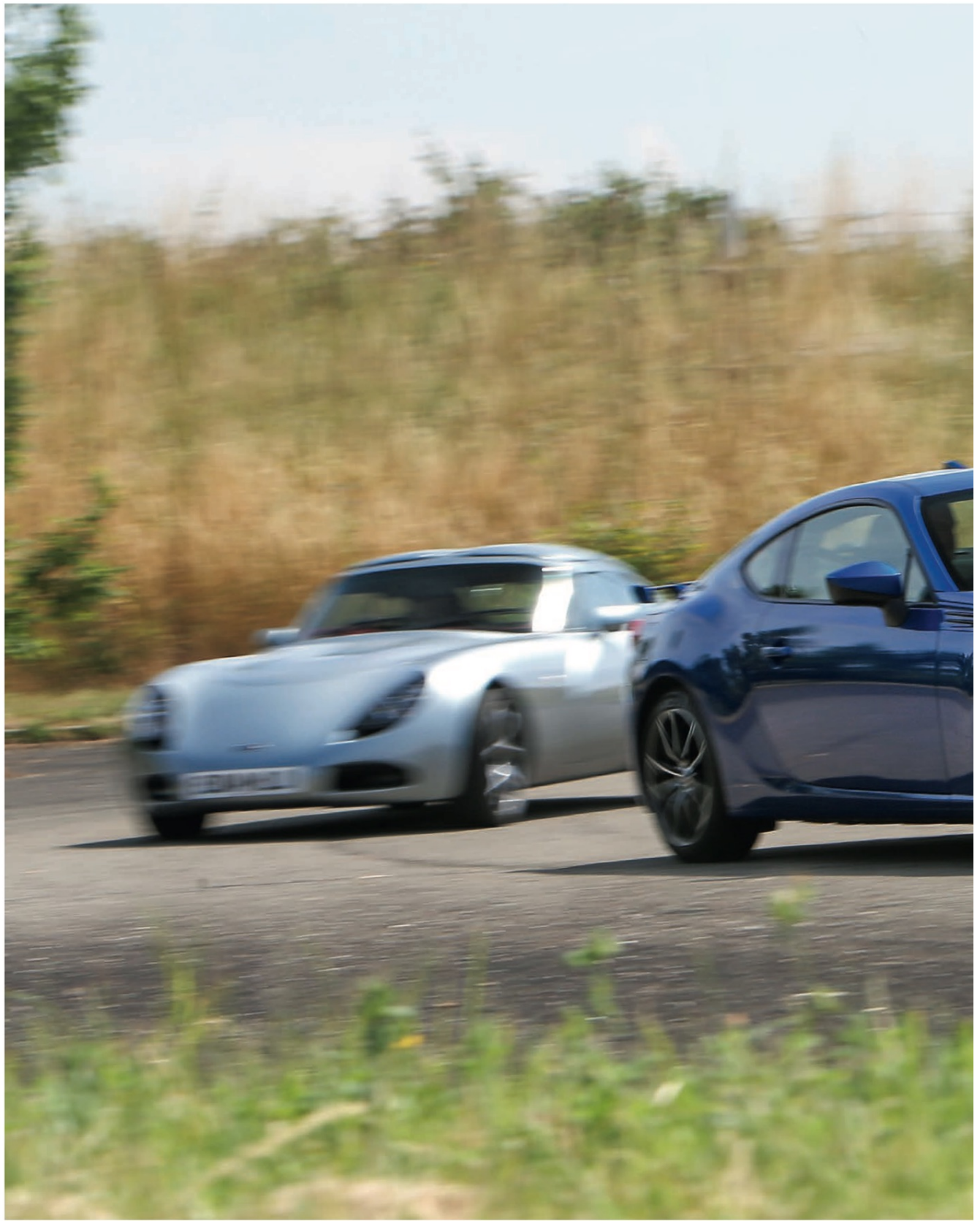
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NOISE VERSUS POISE

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”

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 combusive 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 vinylster 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 tach 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

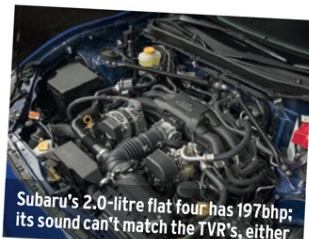
really hits its stride at 5000rpm. Such is the aural intensity that instinct urges you to back off before something breaks, but delve on into the zingy throttle's long travel and you've got another 2000rpm to explore before the green, amber, then red upshift lights finally call time on the madness. There 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 overrun 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 £216 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 8J-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.



The T350t's twin targa-style roof panels are made from carbonfibre, with a fully exposed weave on the underside.

Longer BRZ has two seats behind its driver; the T350 has a roll cage