
Ashes to ashes, rust to rust

Jon Garvey pursues the ultimate vehicle, but catches only intimations of mortality

Doctors seem to have a peculiar love affair with the motor car. As a student I was always struck by the neat row of little red sports cars parked outside Westminster Children's Hospital, the first fruits of the housemen's newly found economic independence. Now I work in an evangelical Christian practice, and we all run old saloon cars, presumably as a subconscious expression of puritanism, but it takes only a little scratching of the surface to discover the truth. One of us nurses a secret desire to blow his share of the profits on a Porsche. Another confesses to hankering after a large Volvo or, better still, two large Volvos (a frustrated Panzer commander if ever there was one). Our senior partner does not *seem* anything but utilitarian in his choice of cars, but his subscription to Motor magazine gives him away.

I have been thinking of getting a new car for practice work, and giving our Renault to my wife, because it is starting to fall to bits. The logical choice is obvious. It must be small, functional with low fuel consumption and service costs, and ideally British-made. But when I hired a Mini Metro while my car was in for servicing, only to become completely bored by it within two days, I realised that I too am a victim of physicians' motoring mania. And so I found myself test-driving a 1974, French blue, Triumph TR6. It was an amazing machine—two and a half litres of fuel-injected, six-cylinder power, attached to a steering wheel and



covered with a piece of canvas. A baritone roar, the whirring of a fuel pump somewhere behind your left ear, and a clutch so vicious that you either stall or leap forward at 60m.p.h. The blood pounds through your heart at about the same rate the petrol gushes into the engine, and if you get out of first you're in constant fear of being done for speeding.

At this point you realise the full lunacy of your addiction. For the sake of getting round your routine visits a bit more quickly than you could on the old bicycle, you fork out half as much as you would for a house on. . . on what? Your marvellous machine, leather seats, midengine, Macpherson struts and all, is going to be a pile of ferric oxide in fifteen years time.

Perhaps this explains the doctor's fascination for his mode of transport. Each time the mechanic tells me that the whole of the sub-frame is rusted through, and I resume my illusory quest for the ultimate vehicle, I am reminded that I'm fighting exactly the same losing battle with my patients, who can be relied on to snuff it ultimately despite the best medicine can offer. Ah, truly, moth

and rust doth corrupt! Now I wonder how much I'd have to pay for an old Marcos, with the *wooden* chassis...■