



GERRY & THE PACEMAKERS

Who better to conduct a track test of a pair of burly TVRs, separated by 20 years, than burly Gerry Marshall, one-time TVR racer of note? Pictures by John Colley

Many years ago, as a mere babe in arms, a certain Martin Lilley invited me to manage a car concern called the Barnet Motor Co, which he owned. He also happened to own a little car making company called TVR which he'd bought in one of its umpteen liquidation sales so that he could get his car, a Griffith, back. It had been extensively damaged by Martin at Brands, when a wheel fell off, and was in the Blackpool workshops being mended when the company went broke.

Naturally the TVR was raced. After its repairs, which involved filling the sunroof and prototype opening boot with 1in thick glass-fibre – it was a very heavy car by then – we developed it and improved it over the 1966-67 seasons. Most of the development seemed to go into convincing the brakes to stop the thing, and also persuading the rear wheels to stay attached, but other than that it was dead reliable, with a near-standard 4.7-litre Ford engine which, in heavy duty, solid lifter form, gave about 270bhp. I'm told that my driving style back then was regarded as fairly spectacular, but it was an extremely effective class winner in marque sports car and GT events, not to mention sprints and hillclimbs, including Tholt-y-Will on the Isle of Man where, in 1966, I came fifth overall against all those hillclimb specials. That Griffith (which later became a Tuscan via a change of badge) was very much my sort of car.

And now it's 20 years on and I find myself at Mallory Park behind the wheel of a TVR – or a couple of TVRs, actually – for the first time in all those years. It's time-warp time ...

But first a word about the cars. The pretty (well, I





Opposite page: TVRs old and new – Paul Weldon’s blue Tuscan and TVR’s own 420SEAC have few similarities. This page: “Both are very neutral in corners,” claimed Mr Marshall. Here he is, demonstrating the fact, in the 420 (left) and the Tuscan (below). And we won’t go into the methods used to fit Mr Marshall into the driving seats (below left)!



think it's pretty) blue one you see here belongs to Paul Weldon of Church Green Engineering fame: it's a rolling example of his company's (and his) abilities, and looks it. To call it merely immaculate is an understatement ...

It's a 1967 long wheelbase Tuscan, one of the few right-hand drive examples built, which makes it 4ins longer in the wheelbase than the Griffith I used to chuck about. It was originally supplied to a Mr W. Yates, who had an electrical business up in Cannock. He kept it until 1977 when it passed via Chris Smith of Westfield to a lady, Frances de Soissant. When she took it to her local garage for an MoT test it was found that the chassis was rusted to hell, so it went back to Liverpool for a new one to be fitted which caused a lot of aggro, not to mention cost.

Paul was looking for a Tuscan because (a) they were a helluva lot cheaper to buy and run than a Cobra and (b) he could fit in it, which was more than he could in the SWB version. He happened to see this machine advertised in the pages of some rag called CLASSIC AND SPORTSCAR or something, took his mate David Barraclough along with him to have a look at it, they both decided it was far too dangerous,

so of course Paul bought it. It was not in what you would call immaculate condition, so a complete strip-down and rebuild was the order of the day. It's very much a road-goer except for the racing Michelins, and weighs 1120kgs (22cwt) – a fair amount of weight has been put into it via roll-over bars and such like – so it's no skinny little thing. The engine's a 4.7 Hi-Po Mustang unit prepared by Mathwall: it has been blue-printed and has a decent manifold fitted, but cranks, rods and heads are standard so it's by no means wild. Paul says it gives about 300bhp, and I'll take his word for it. The diff is a 4.07:1 Salisbury unit, and the 'box is a Borg-Warner T10 Top-Loader.

Paul started using it at the end of 1985, and has raced it constantly during 1986, during which he ran in 12 races (rarely out of the top three at that), won at Silverstone (with the lap record to go with it), Donington and Thruxton, finishing up the year as Class A winner in the Post-Historic Championship. He reckons it's great fun, and pretty quick on the road. I'm glad it was after I'd been bashing about in it that he told me of the time he was doing a genuine 158mph in it (the speedo showing 190mph or so!) when the windscreen popped out ... That's the sort

of distraction you can do without in a race.

The difference between Paul's Tuscan and TVR's own 420 is that Paul's has to be road legal, and is, if you like, mildly tweaked for a racing car, whereas the 420 makes no pretensions: it's a full-blooded racer. It's actually TVR's 1985 car rebuilt with added urge into a SEAC, the 'AC' standing for Aramid Compound (which means Kevlar to you and me, which TVR use for their production shells as well). The engine is a good old Rover V8, opened up with a bigger bore and a longer stroke, to give 4228cc. It was put together at NCK down in Coventry, and is also – oddly enough – giving about 300bhp.

TVR's Chris Schirle has put a lot of time and effort into the suspension geometry. When Chris joined TVR he received a Chairman's edict: kill the oversteer in the road cars and transform them into understeerers, which he has done by redesigning the geometry to the point where he reckons he now has a well-balanced car.

All the usual things have been done – brakes uprated, Konis all round, you know – and about the only thing which slightly embarrasses Chris is the weight, 1060kgs (21cwt). And, like Paul's car, this