



Time to get the rot sorted



**1981 BMW 323i
TOP CABRIO**
SANJAY SEETANA

THE ORIGINAL pitch from the advertising agency that proposed BMW's now legendary slogan was made back in 1974 and was therefore used in the various campaigns for the launch of the new E21 in 1976. But is there any truth in it? Was it really the Ultimate Driving Machine?

The Baur is a fantastic little car and such great fun to drive, with oodles of power. I have enjoyed using it so much that it has become my everyday car; there is only one set of keys I look for whenever I go out (without being disloyal to the DB7, of course). It is so perfectly at home on modern roads and motorways that it is hard to believe that this is a car designed in the early '70s; it feels so comfortable in all conditions. The driving position is excellent with good visibility all-round, and on motorways the car is very quiet inside the cabin, unbelievably so for a convertible built 35 years ago. This car must have been so over-engineered in its day.

BMW even had an ad campaign claiming that, with the top down and driving in the rain, the design of the 'targa' roof meant that you would still stay dry inside the cabin, as the rain would be deflected away. I will put that to the test in due course.

As you can see, I am full of praise for the 323i and rightly so I think. What other five-seater convertibles were there in the early '80s that boasted disc brakes all-round (vented

at the front), a 143bhp six-cylinder engine with five-speed gearbox, 0-60mph in 8 seconds, a top speed of 120mph, and driver comforts such as central locking, electric mirrors, three-speed windscreen wipers and even headlight wipers. This car was so far ahead of its competitors that I think BMW had every right to use that 'Ultimate Driving Machine' slogan.

At £12,000 new it wasn't cheap but it meant you were driving what was probably one of the most well-engineered cars of its day. That price also meant that it appealed to owners who could afford to maintain them. I am lucky to have found one that I know has been very well looked after and garaged for much of its life.

That said, the model suffered from corrosion and, although mine looked OK, it was impossible to tell what was lurking beneath. There was superficial rust all over the bodywork, not terrible but I could see that some work

needed to be done. As winter approached I was faced with a dilemma: should I face up to it now or wait another year?

A chance meeting with Chedeen Battick, owner of Slough restoration company Automo (www.automo.co), set the cat among the pigeons. Chedeen and I met at the launch of a car he had designed for a Jaguar re-creation manufacturer. The work that he had engineered was impressive, so when he said that he had been let down on a job and could get my car in to take a closer look at the paintwork, I couldn't turn down the opportunity.

The plan is to strip it down to see what needs to be done. I'll report back next time but I am very excited about the prospect of getting the bodywork sorted out.

THANKS TO BMW Classic Group, www.realoem.com.



**MARTYN
GODDARD**

Photographer

1963 Triumph TR6SS Trophy
1965 Austin-Healey 3000 MkIII



**DELWYN
MALLET**

Contributor

1936 Cord 810 Beverly
1946 Tatra T87
1950 Ford Club Coupe
1952 Porsche 356
1955 Mercedes-Benz 300SL
1957 Porsche Speedster
1957 Fiat Abarth Sperimentale
1963 Abarth-Simca
1963 Tatra T603



**SARAH
BRADLEY**

Contributor

1929 Ford Model A hot rod
1952 Studebaker Champion
1956 Chevrolet 3100 pick-up
1969 Plymouth Roadrunner
Various motorbikes



**MASSIMO
DELBO**

Contributor

1967 Mercedes-Benz 230
1972 Fiat 500L
1980 Ferrari 308GTB
1982 Mercedes-Benz 500SL

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