

THE COMPETITION



BMW 323i

2315cc straight six, 143 bhp
0-60 mph: 8.3 secs
Max Speed: 126 mph
Price: £6499 in 1977



ALFA ROMEO ALFASUD SPRINT

1490cc flat four, 95 bhp
0-60 mph: 10.0 secs
Max Speed: 107 mph
Price: £5165 in 1977

Whether you go for the two door-Sud TI, or the Coupé Sprint, what you get are fizzy little engines, fabulous styling and rampant rot. A joy to drive and look at, there was plenty of charisma but almost no build quality. Four headlamps just like a six-pot E21, but five speeds from day one.



FIAT 131 MIRAFIORI SPORT

1995cc four, 115 bhp
0-60 mph: 10.7 secs
Max Speed: 108 mph
Price: £4636 in 1974

At least the plastic trim around the wheelarches and grille didn't rust, because everything else did. Fun in its own way, this boxy two-door never had the street cred of an RS2000 or the sheer class of a 3-Series. A bit of a joke then, except for the 16-valve homologation-only Abarth Rallye. But there were only ever 400 of those.



SAAB 99 TURBO

1985cc four, 145 bhp
0-60 mph: 8.9 secs
Max Speed: 122 mph
Price: £7850 in 1977

Two doors and turbocharger were a recipe for fun. Many have been turbo-lagged into the ground by several careless owners. In its day it was smooth and civilised with a good turn of speed, just like a six-pot BMW. The softer Saab image was no match for the aggressive Bavarian.



FORD ESCORT RS 2000

1993cc four, 110 bhp
0-60 mph: 8.6 secs
Max Speed: 109 mph
Price: £2857 in 1976

The working class approach to the performance saloon market and successful it was too. The upmarket Custom model was preferred to the steel-wheeled basic version. With full Rallye Sport credentials it was at the opposite end of the styleometer to the Bimmer.



VOLKSWAGEN SCIROCCO

1588cc four, 110 bhp
0-60 mph: 8.8 secs
Max Speed: 115 mph
Price: £3665 in 1977

Upmarket Golf GTI as built by Karmann. It's a Coupé rather than a saloon, but was aimed at the same customers. The downmarket badge, front-end rot and the existence of the cheaper and more stylish Golf meant it rarely made the 3-Series playoffs at ordering time.

Fame

1983

The E21 era came to a close with the arrival of the revamped E30 3-Series. Although immediately recognisable as a development of the earlier car, the E30 was on a different level of sophistication and kicked off the junior executive segment which BMW was to make its own over the next few decades.

