

## → WILLSON'S SMART BUYS

Now's the time to try a Fiat 131



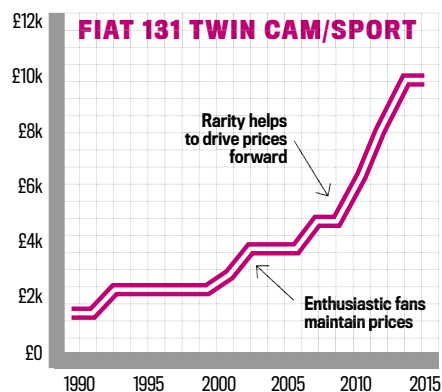
are still less than £12k. Built from 1978 to 1984 they had wheelarch extensions, bib spoiler, cheese-cutter grille, short-throw gearshift, alloys and air horns. The 114bhp 2.0-litre twin cam wasn't that quick at 110mph – but find one in bright orange and I guarantee you'll be properly captivated.

Contemporary road tests praised the £4636 Fiat and proclaimed that the RS2000 had finally met its match. Rust, of course, is the perennial enemy and survival rates in the UK are low but the salt-free roads and dry climate of southern Italy is a good source of decent examples.

In 1981 Fiat bolted on a supercharger, called it the Volumetrico and hiked the top speed up to 118mph. Only 200 were made – all left-hand drive for the Italian market. Classics Central in Bedfordshire has a 1983 example in silver with long history up for auction with a guide price of between £7k and £9k. Other dealers see even more future potential and Mr Speedlux in East Sussex has a gunmetal grey 1984 with a believed correct mileage of just 4500km at £24,995. The Volumetrico was Abarth-tuned with a big Weber, oil cooler, sport exhaust plus uprated brakes and suspension, and has to be one of the rarest Fiats ever made. Good survivors are definitely worth buying.

But so are the stock 131 Mirafioris, which you can still find for less than £7k. Classics and Cabriolets in Essex has a 1979 1600 TC in silver with 74km, two owners and five-speed 'box for £6495. Compared to the absurd prices of basic Escorts this is a much more alluring proposition.

Finding any 131 in the UK won't be easy, but I think they have masses of potential. Put them on your radar now before prices really start to climb.



Compared to Escorts, the Fiat 131 represents bargain fun

## CLASSIC ON THE CUSP

# Jaguar XJR

Big, brawny and British – the XJR is all the car you need and more



Cost new **£48,000** Value now **£8000**

I suppose it was inevitable that Jaguar's supercharged XJ would start to move up in value, but I didn't expect such wild price variations. The XJR is quick, disarming and more than worthy of classic status with a sixty dash in 5.6 seconds, limited top speed of 155mph and plenty of hide and timber.

But I'm seeing earliest XJ40 versions up at over £10k, like the 1990 car on offer by JRMD in Nuneaton for £11,495. With 39,000 miles and Jag history it may be one of the earliest XJRs and a lovely mileage but I reckon it doesn't compare well with the 2003-on alloy-bodied examples, which are more or less the same money.

Chris Denton Cars in Sheffield has a 2006 in silver with 104,000 miles for £9990 and that's a much lighter, smoother and more refined drive. Motonet in Coventry has a '95 XJR with 76k miles for £9555; but in the case of the XJR, older doesn't always mean better, especially with the Nikasil bore wear problems on the pre-2000 engines. By the time JLR had got to grips with build quality in 2003 the XJ was a fine super-saloon and while the last-of-the-line models don't feel especially traditional, they're the best of the breed.

We're seeing a lot of price aberrations in moderns with opportunistic sellers thinking they can get away with arbitrary, finger-in-the-air valuations. It pays to be really aware of the important technical differences between old and newer models.

The alloy XJs were 40 per cent lighter than the steel cars,

60 per cent stiffer, had air suspension and were the last to be made at the old Browns Lane factory. The aluminium bodyshell weighs less than a Mini One so they're much livelier in the handling department too. Compared to the Ford-era XJs you'll find them more sophisticated, rewarding and better-looking. The blown 390bhp 4.2-litre V8 is good for 160mph and the

ZF six-speed automatic is silky smooth (although regular fluid and filter changes are essential).

But if you want real value for money and the most handsome XJR of them all, I'd go for the 2007-on X358 facelift cars

with their fat wraparound bumpers and chrome side gills. Get one in black with the 20-inch Carelia alloys and it ranks as one of Jaguar designer Ian Callum's best pieces of work. All of the Eighties Pininfarina Series 3 XJ design cues are there but Callum's inspired refresh gave what was a 39-year-old silhouette a completely new aggression and presence.

These end-of-line XJRs are rare too with only a few hundred registered in the UK between 2007 and 2010 – and they still look and feel surprisingly upmarket. Other considerations could be the Super V8 and limited-edition XJR100, but if you want an older XJR find an early TWR version. In 2014 Historics of Brooklands sold a 1990 4.0-litre XJR with 90k miles but full history for £3360. At that price I can

see the attraction but don't pay much more. The XJR is definitely a classic on the cusp but with the oldest models it's also a classic case of too much hype too soon.

'The XJR is quick, disarming and more than worthy of classic status'

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