

ROAD TRIPPER 1994 MG RV8



MG

ENTHUSIAST

THE WORLD'S BEST-SELLING MG MAGAZINE

www.mgentsusiast.com

February 2020 / No. 385



XPower SV-R track day car

A COOL CUSTOMER

Beautiful 1933 Midget J2 with fascinating historical letters from MG

**BUY AN MG
FOR-SALE
LISTINGS
INSIDE!**



RUST-BUSTING MG ZS PROJECT



FEBRUARY 2020 ISSUE NO. 385 £5.50
770950 330151

INDEPENDENT PUBLICATION

XPress power



MGs on Track regular, Dave Pearce, has a range of MGs at his disposal including this rather special XPower SV-R.

• WORDS AND PHOTOS: JIM JUPP



Never meet your heroes, they say, and I suppose the same goes for cars you've always hankered after. For me, the SV and SV-R have always been on the list. Whenever I see one at a show I will always be drawn to take a cheeky snap. There is something just so brutal about them. Having read about them in magazines like *Autocar*, when the original XPower SV and SV-R were launched, my first encounter with one was at an MG

Rover dealership, south of London, just as MG Rover started to wobble. The dealership was keen to shift the brute. Though I can't remember the discounted price I know it was well out of my price range.

Move on to 2019, and my first chance actually to sit in an SV, having attended an MGs on Track session at Snetterton, in Norfolk: Dave Pearce is a regular at these events and regular readers will know we're big fans of them. Dave's SV-R

can often be seen supporting MGs on Track at publicity events.

I don't think any SV could be accused of being an average car but the later 2004 SV-R model upped the game from its 2003 predecessor, with an 80bhp power hike thanks to a slightly larger 5.0-ltr Ford V8. Arguably, this particular car had something a bit extra as it was the SV-R press car, used by the likes of *Auto Express*, with all the bells and whistles which carried a supercar-

“ HE SUPERCHARGED THE ROUSH ENGINE ORIGINALLY AND GOT IT UP TO AROUND 600BHP. ”

level price tag: £1550 for SatNav and £2200 for climate control. The paint option on this car is reported to have been £1500. This is on top of the £17,200 increase from the SV, to £82,950, plus other extras.

After a year as a press car the factory sold BX04 on, still with low

mileage, to Brian Payne. Like Dave, he used the car for track days but he tuned it much further than its original XPower specification, as Dave explains: "Brian did all the modifications to it. He supercharged the Roush engine originally and got it up to around 600bhp. Then I think

he sold that engine on and bought the 5.0-ltr basic Ford Modular Cobra engine then fitted numerous tuning bits like crank and pistons and modified it to take it up to the 460bhp that it is today," which is a nice increase from the SV-R's original claimed output of 385bhp, »

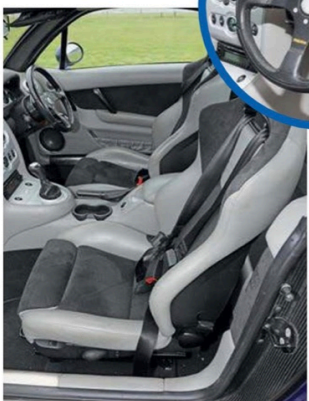


ABOVE: The centre console with its additional gauges blended in at the top, fitted by the previous owner.

« retaining the same displacement. Considering there was a factory-approved nitrous oxide injection kit, achieving a claimed 1000bhp, MG Rover must have felt the components very capable, so we wondered why Brian changed tack. "I don't know. I think he may have just wanted another challenge. I think it would have been quite interesting on the track with 600bhp. They did come with traction control but the technology was a bit copy in those days. But



ABOVE: MG Rover produced a very plush interior for its supercar.



ABOVE: Power seats, covered in both leather and Alcantara, are really rather luxurious and comfortable on the track.

that's been disabled. Problem was it would kick in, say if you go into a roundabout and start to slide, then turn off when you least expected it, bringing the power back on. I think your right foot is a better judge." Forced induction might make a return to this SV-R's engine bay. "I'll get round to it one day," laughs Dave.

Dave knew of the car before he bought it. "Bryan lived local and used to take it to Goodwood and Castle Combe sessions with MGs on Track. So I'd seen the car around and knew his engineering background and that the car had been looked after. I also got some

spare from him, like a front splitter and a set of doors, not a complete set, but some. It's not exactly easy to get an original set these days."

At last it was time to head out on-track and this was my first real chance to take in the very plush interior. It is very much of its age, with swathes of grey leather and Alcantara, all of which are immaculate. Are we really in a track toy? The SV-R has even got a Becker DTM, by Harman, stereo head unit, which is speed sensitive, and Infinity component speakers, but we're not here to listen to tunes. The car seems very bulky too so you'd expect it to be

incredibly heavy but a large proportion of the body is made of carbon fibre.

Centrally-mounted on top of the dash is an additional pod of three gauges, explains Dave: "Brian had those gauges put on and the pod was matched to the interior leather." They included a wide-band Lambda gauge, oil pressure and fuel pressure. "I think he put the Lambda on as he was

doing the mapping himself. The oil pressure gauge has been swapped with a combined oil pressure/temperature gauge from SPA."

Inside the cabin you are well cocooned and, although there is a low rumble when the 5ltr V8 is cranked over, it's not offensive, which is essential for many track day dB limits. Comfy in the plush seats, Dave

lines up with the rest of the MGoT pack before starting our session round Snetterton's complex and involving track. The morning sessions had been wet and the track was still slightly damp, but the levels of grip the SV-R gave felt superb, from the passenger seat at least, with a continual push into the seat as Dave worked through the 6-speed gearbox. »

“ THE MORNING SESSIONS HAD BEEN WET AND THE TRACK WAS STILL SLIGHTLY DAMP BUT THE LEVELS OF GRIP THE SV-R GAVE FELT SUPERB. ”



« For track sessions, Toyo Proxes R888 tyres are fitted to a set of OE alloys he recently purchased. "I've got another set of Michelin road tyres for it, on the original set of wheels. Another SV owner found a stash of wheels in a warehouse in Italy, for SVs and SV-Rs, about a year ago. They've been unavailable for years as they were made especially for the cars."

by standing the MG on its nose before the track's sharp corners. "I've got total confidence in them. They never fade or go spongy. The pistons have different diameters, which I found quite strange, on the same caliper. I don't see the logic but obviously Mr Brembo does." Dave has changed the discs and pads recently too, sourcing replacements from Maidstone Sports Cars, who have rebuilt an SV.

This session included Mark Wanstall's LS3-powered RV8, which was the only other MG around the circuit capable of getting past the SV-R. The acceleration just seems continuous. It's not quite as neck-snappingly brutal as the LS3 but still incredibly rapid. Dave is clearly a talented driver. The most formidable force is the car's stopping power, from its OE Brembo 4-pot calipers, front and rear, as Dave demonstrates



ABOVE: Lightweight, and rather complex, bonnet provides venting for the SV-R's large alloy radiator.

of spares, including a box of these bushes. I couldn't find anything like it as it's such a weird bush."

Dave also had a problem with the clutch, under quite strange circumstances, as he explains: "One

“ I SEE IT MORE AS A MUSCLE CAR RATHER THAN A SUPERCAR. ”



ABOVE: Naturally-aspirated 5.0-ltr Ford V8 was tuned by Brian Payne.

of the screws that holds clutch to the flywheel vibrated out, and got stuck in the rivet hole in the clutch." Considering the fast track session the car has just endured, with rapid gear changes, you might expect this coincided with track abuse but no. "I'd washed it and went to put it back in the garage, and couldn't dis-engage the clutch. Moving it 10 feet, it must have dropped in and jammed. We winched it onto a trailer and took the gearbox off."

The V8 also managed to break a valve spring. "I realised I was down to seven driving to Stoneleigh for the MG & Triumph Spares Day. It doesn't slow it down that much. Luckily the remains of the spring stopped the valve from hitting the top of the piston."

He found a replacement in the US but, frustratingly, the supplier wouldn't ship internationally so he ordered the parts via his daughter, who lives out there. He is happy to take on the majority of work required but, for this, he turned to his local garage. "The garage kept the valve raised by blowing compressed air into the plug hole, and made a little clamp



to compress the new spring to get the collets in, so they didn't have to take the head off, which is quite a major job. You have to take the clamshell off, which is about six bolts. Then, as the engine sits back almost under the dashboard, you can't get the head off without taking the engine out."

So does it get used much? "I do about four or five track sessions a year. I've got other MGs so I can mix and match. It's actually insured for up to five track days a year, via Footman James."

He isn't convinced MG Rover got its marketing right when this car was launched, as MG Rover aimed the SV at the supercar market. "I see it more as a muscle car rather than a supercar. So in 2004 it was up against the Ferrari 360." The SV doesn't have as refined an engine as the prancing horse but, it could be argued, the car itself is a lot more exclusive. "The suspension is quite



Side louvers are quite iconic.



Modified 2004 XPOWER SV-R



ABOVE: Carbon-fibre is visible in the door.



LEFT: Brembo 4-pot brake calipers are fitted at the front and rear.

« refined, with coil-overs all the way round. But it was the obvious way to go, as there were no leaf springs left in store,” laughs Dave.

We wondered if panel replacement could be an issue for such a rare car? “No, Retro Sports Cars can remake the panels in fibreglass or carbon-fibre. The panels aren’t structural, compared to something like the McLaren, as it has a steel box-section chassis, but it’s bonded into the carbon fibre to make the whole thing rigid. And it weighs about 1500kg, so it’s quite a heavy car, but it has carbon-fibre everywhere. It’s just painted, as it

looks nicer than carbon fibre. I just don’t get the obsession people have about carbon-fibre. I think it’s great as an engineering material but not the look.”

It’s an issue Dave isn’t fazed by, as he explains: “There are people about who still have spares. Some time ago the speedo became intermittent. I did find that the gauges were from Caerbont Automotive Instruments, in Wales [aka Smiths Gauges] but then realised the problem also affected the speed-related volume control on the radio so it must be the

control signal. I eventually tracked it down to the electronics box that compensates for the different gearbox speed sensor. One more job for my ‘buying agent’ in America.”

Are there any future plans? “Keep it going. I’ve been messing around with different coil-overs, to make the suspension work a little better, as the dampers are not adjustable. I bought a set but they were just too harsh.” We are hoping the supercharger will make a return but, even so, I’m pleased to say my experience in MG’s ‘supercar’ didn’t disappoint. 🏎️

MG Enthusiast would like to thank:
Snetterton Racing Circuit and MGs on Track (www.mgs-on-track.com).
See: www.snetterton.co.uk

