

# GROUP TEST

No 25

Triumph Stag  
Scimitar GTE  
BMW 2002  
Alfa Romeo 1750  
Gilbern Invader

Motor's test team go driving in convoy to access competitive cars under identical conditions



In line astern in Snowdonia, one of our favourite group test haunts. Above left: the Alfa's boxy styling disguises a sporting character. Left: Scimitar GTE and Triumph Stag display high cornering powers



We didn't have much difficulty selecting some suitable glamour cars for our 25th group test as Triumph obligingly announced the Stag when we were planning it. The problem was to decide what cars to pit against this sporting 2+2 since there are few that can match its specification; those that do cost a lot more—like the Mercedes Benz 280SL at £4655.

So we chose four cars roughly in the Stag's £2000 price bracket that might be on the short list of an enthusiast after a car with a sporting character and the comfort and amenities of a saloon. We selected the Alfa Romeo 1750 because we rate it as one of the best sporting saloons on the market; the Gilbern Invader, flying the specialist banner, for its fierce straight-line performance in an attractive 2+2 shape (our test car was kindly loaned by Bridge Motors (Barking) of Braintree, Essex); the Reliant Scimitar GTE because it probably comes as

close as any car to the Stag's specification, though it obviously doesn't have the Triumph's versatile headgear; and the BMW 2002 saloon for its combination in one package of a city car, dragster and long-distance cruiser.

There's plenty of mechanical variety here: we have a 3-litre sohc V8 in the Stag; a brace of 3-litre pushrod V6s from Ford in the GTE and Gilbern; a sohc four of two litres in the BMW; and a double ohc four of the smallest displacement (but the highest state of tune) in the Alfa. Despite this variety all five cars have a similar performance, with maximum speeds in the 110 mph range and acceleration to 50 mph in around 7 sec.

In rear suspension design there are semi-trailing arms on the Stag and BMW, live axles on the other three. In the latter case, though, there are marked differences in results. At the front the BMW has

MacPherson struts, while the other four rely on double wishbones and coil springs, those on the Gilbern from the MG C.

For the penny conscious there's a big difference in running costs between the most economical and the most thirsty; prices also cover a fairly broad (£600) spectrum. The BMW is both the most economical and the cheapest; at £1776 we reckon it's good value by any yardstick. Next up the price scale is the slightly larger Alfa, at £1935, giving away little if anything in driver appeal to its more sporty-looking opponents. Both glass-fibre bodied cars, the Scimitar and the Invader, carry very nearly the same £2220 price tag, the former selling for £2217 the later for £2222 (or £1669 in component form with overdrive). And at the top there's the Stag which with full weather options and overdrive (as tested) costs £2320; without the hardtop and overdrive this is reduced to £2156.

### Performance and economy

Compared with most American V8s, invariably large in capacity, the Stag's engine doesn't offer quite the same silky smoothness or effortless urge. But with its extra two cylinders and over-square dimensions it is the smoothest and most flexible of the five here. From very low engine speeds it will pull with an even flow of power up to its 6500 rpm limit. We have never thought the insulation from engine vibration in the GTE as good as it might be, an impression borne out by the smoothness of Ford's V6 in the Gilbern which two drivers considered to be as smooth as the Stag's V8; we all agreed that the engine in the GTE was the least smooth, though very flexible. We liked the Stag's distinctive but muted exhaust beat, too, though some preferred the more raucous rasp from the Gilbern's low-slung twin tailpipes which "waffled" pleasantly on the overrun. As induction roar from the flat pancake air cleaner is also pronounced (particularly when the second choke opens) the Invader comes at the bottom of the quietness ratings; the GTE comes at the top.

The Alfa has some unmistakable camshaft noise, a fruity exhaust note and a taut and thoroughbred feel. It's also very smooth and winds round to 6000 rpm without showing any sign of stress. Up to 4000 rpm engine noise is well subdued. The other "four" (the BMW) was again very sweet up to its 6400 limit.

With gearing that gives 26.6 mph per 1000 rpm in overdrive top and very little wind noise up to 90 mph, the GTE is the best in the group for high-speed cruising. The Stag would run it very close, however, if Triumph could reduce the wind noise which at present detracts from its appeal as a Continental tourer. But the Stag does have the advantage of a removable hardtop which gives it a special attraction in sunny weather. With only four gears and lower ratios the BMW comes off less well on cruising at 70, but it's still very quiet and wind noise remains unobtrusive up to an indicated 100 mph.

On the road the Gilbern, with a weight of 21.2cwt. and a claimed 141 bhp, certainly felt the quickest, an impression confirmed by the performance tests. The margin isn't

| Acceleration (mph)     | 30-50 |       |              |
|------------------------|-------|-------|--------------|
|                        | 0-50  | 0-100 | in top       |
| Gilbern Invader        | 6.5   | 28.5  | 7.6          |
| BMW 2002               | 6.8   | 37.4  | 7.4          |
| Alfa Romeo 1750 Saloon | 7.1   | 31.1  | 7.3 (in 4th) |
| Triumph Stag           | 7.4   | 29.6  | 7.6          |
| Reliant Scimitar GTE*  | 7.7   | 33.5  | 7.9          |

great, though, as the BMW with 100 bhp in a car weighing only 18.3cwt. has a 0-50 mph time of 6.8sec.; only 0.3sec. slower. We suspect the impression of performance in the Gilbern is heightened by its roty engine note. Some drivers criticized the BMW's tendency to hesitate when accelerating hard after a spell on the overrun.

The Alfa is middling on acceleration to 50 mph at 7.1sec., the heavier Stag and GTE trailing at 7.4 and 7.7sec. respectively. But

| Maximum Speeds (mph)   | Intermediate rpm |       |     |     |     |      |
|------------------------|------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|------|
|                        | 5th              | 4th   | 3rd | 2nd | 1st | rpm  |
| Triumph Stag           | —                | 116.5 | 92  | 60  | 42  | 6500 |
| Reliant Scimitar GTE*  | —                | 113.2 | 85  | 54  | 38  | 5500 |
| Gilbern Invader        | —                | 111.1 | 89  | 56  | 40  | 5900 |
| Alfa Romeo 1750 Saloon | 110.0            | 99    | 73  | 50  | 30  | 6000 |
| BMW 2002               | —                | 107.4 | 93  | 61  | 33  | 6800 |

to 100 mph, perhaps a more realistic contest for this type of car, the Stag would only lose out to the quickest car, the Gilbern, by 1.1sec. with 29.6sec. For its modest capacity the twin cam Alfa engine pushes the boxy 1750 along at a remarkable rate; for such a highly tuned unit the torque curve is very flat. The Gilbern, however, felt subjectively the most "punchy" low down and would start from rest with ease in second gear.

On maximum speed the Stag comfortably leads, by a greater margin than our road test figure of 116.5 mph suggests; MIRA's banked circuit scrubs off a lot of speed above 100 mph so the GTE (which did 113 mph) would also probably be quicker on a flat straight road.

If you used the Gilbern's high performance all the time you'd run up some heavy fuel bills; our 18.8 mpg on the group test made it the thirstiest car by a fair margin. Despite the "handicap" of only four gears (the other cars either have overdrive or a fifth gear),

| Fuel Consumption (mpg) | Group |       | Road  |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
|                        | Test  | Test  |       |
| BMW 2002               | 26.4  | 24.0  | 27.5  |
| Alfa Romeo 1750 Saloon | 23.4  | 23.5  | 27.7  |
| Reliant Scimitar GTE   | 21.6  | 19.2* | 27.9* |
| Triumph Stag           | 21.0  | 20.9  | 25.5  |
| Gilbern Invader        | 18.8  | 19.6  | 27.6  |

| Annual Cost for 10,000 miles | Gallons   |      | £   |
|------------------------------|-----------|------|-----|
|                              | Test      | Test |     |
| BMW 2002                     | 379 @ 6/8 | —    | 126 |
| Alfa Romeo 1750 Saloon       | 428 @ 6/8 | —    | 143 |
| Reliant Scimitar GTE         | 462 @ 6/8 | —    | 154 |
| Triumph Stag                 | 476 @ 6/8 | —    | 159 |
| Gilbern Invader              | 531 @ 6/8 | —    | 177 |

\* Performance and fuel consumption figures taken from data for road test car with 3.58:1 final drive ratio; 3.31:1 ratio now fitted

the BMW was the most economical at 26.4 mpg, better than we recorded during our solo road test. The Alfa follows with 23.4 mpg. As all the cars run on 4-Star fuel the BMW would be the cheapest to run over 10,000 miles, and with its 17-gallon fuel tank the GTE would go the farthest between fill-ups (360 miles).

### Transmission

There's no doubt about the best gearbox: for both its change and its ratios the Alfa's clearly led the group. The well placed lever provided smooth knife-through-butter action every time; in contrast, the BMW's change varied. Sometimes it was as quick and precise as the Alfa's, at others it felt obstructive and notchy, a sensation heightened by the uncomfortable gearlever knob. It performed well enough to come second, though, and the Stag and Reliant tie for third place. The Stag's modified Triumph 2000 box works best when the changes are not hurried; if they are it becomes unpleasantly notchy. The GTE had one of the best Ford 3 litre gearboxes we have tried, with well-oiled, positive lever movements; but it gets black marks because the gate is wide and the lever too far back. Not as far back as that in the Gilbern, though, which in spite of a cranked lever is "round the corner"

With six speeds (overdrive on third and fourth) and a direct third that allows 90 mph, the Stag's ratios are good apart from the gap between second and third. It's nothing like as bad as that on both the Ford-powered cars, though; significantly the GTE with its higher final drive was reckoned to have better ratios than the Gilbern. All five cars can do at least 50 mph in second and a healthy 70 mph in third. On all five the synchromesh was unbeatable.

On clutch action the BMW just beat the Stag; both work more like a torque converter than a friction-plate, absorbing any mis-match in engine and gear speed without jarring, and making smooth starts child's play. The Alfa's clutch is not only the heaviest but its operation is also hindered by the rather awkward floor-pivoted pedal. The clutch on the GTE is fiercer than the others, but not excessively so.

The differential of the GTE, which had covered over 20,000 miles, was quiet—in contrast to that on the Gilbern which was very noisy, producing strident whines at light throttle openings; the gearbox was also noisy in second. These two factors downgraded our test Invader for transmission noise. The other four cars were fairly quiet, though the Stag box whined mildly in the indirects. The BMW's box was very quiet.

The Stag, Gilbern and GTE all have overdrive, that on the Triumph controlled by a switch in the gearlever knob: engagement is smooth but it's best to de-clutch when disengaging. The control switches on the Gilbern and Scimitar are fascia-mounted—awkward to find on the former, within fingertip reach of the right hand on the latter; it works well on both cars. After the GTE the Invader has the tallest gearing at 26.3 mph per 1000 rpm in o/d top, the Stag 24.1. The Alfa gives 20.8 per 1000 rpm, the BMW 18.5 mph.

### Handling and brakes

It's not until you start driving the Gilbern on winding bumpy roads that its specialist heritage becomes apparent. It handles well on smooth surfaces but when the going gets rough the rack and pinion steering becomes heavy and sticky, suggesting some conflict in the steering geometry and masking feel. There's also quite violent kickback over rough surfaces. However, the gearing is pleasantly high and the turning circle small. We think it's a pity the Stag is not available without power assisted steering. In such a sporting car there must be many owners who would willingly sacrifice a little arm effort for more feel. The steering is not hopelessly over-servoed and it's very highly geared so that on initial acquaintance one tends to turn the wheel too much. But it transmits very little sensation of front wheel adhesion. Perhaps it's significant, though, that the tester who drove the Stag most wasn't so critical, suggesting confidence increases with experience.

We didn't think the steering was outstanding on any of the cars. The BMW's and the GTE's were rated equal best but they both had faults. The BMW's was fairly accurate but a little rubbery, that on the

GTE was accurate but sticky at low speed. Both had about the same degree of feel. Like the BMW, but more so, the Alfa's recirculating ball steering was rubbery and heavy; some drivers didn't like the Alfa's smooth wood-rimmed steering wheel, either. The BMW's was better with a plastic coating, the others had leather-rimmed grips, that on the Stag being particularly pleasant.

We expect high performance cars to grip well and we were not disappointed with this quintet. The two cars with independent rear suspension, the Stag and the BMW (both shod with Michelin XAS tyres), clung tenaciously in the dry; unfortunately we were unable to assess wet road grip on our sunny trip to Wales. Because it is smaller the BMW was perhaps slightly quicker through tight bends, probably more a function of manoeuvrability than adhesion. On gently curving B roads both cars cornered flat with tremendous stability—ridges and pot-holes had little effect on adhesion or attitude.

Not so far behind came the Scimitar, sitting four-square on its fat Cinturatos and proving that a well located live rear axle doesn't lose out much to more sophisticated and costlier rivals. But the GTE's tail was upset a bit over bumps. With its higher centre of gravity the Cinturato-shod Alfa didn't feel quite so surefooted and its live axle hopped rather more than the GTE's; but it wasn't far behind. The Gilbern was in the front line on smooth surfaces but trailed behind on bumpy ones. Gilbern fit their own brand of 15in. alloy wheels shod on our car with Dunlop SP Sports tyres.

With its power-assisted steering we were a little cautious about exploring the limits of the Stag's adhesion as it is difficult to sense when the front end is sliding. Another factor which mars the Stag's manners when motoring quickly is spline lock-up in the rear drive-shafts; changing gear coming out of a full-power corner the tail executes a sideways shimmy—alarming at first even though it doesn't necessarily upset the line. Like the Stag, the GTE and the BMW both understeer mildly. Anti-roll bars front and rear on the 2002 contribute much to its taut roadholding. If you lift off in a corner the tail sways slightly out of line but it's soon caught and winding on more lock causes the 2002 to tighten its line—all very predictable. We thought the GTE's behaviour just as good, though its tail can be flicked out at will with a firm prod on the throttle. The Gilbern can be more tricky because, unlike the vast majority of modern cars, it oversteers quite strongly. Once acclimatized to this entirely predictable behaviour it can be fun and we used it to advantage on several occasions. If your line isn't tight enough a dab on the accelerator brings the tail further out, but bumps jolt the car off line and there are times when you need quick opposite lock to avoid a spin. We understand that since our test the geometry of the rear suspension has been modified to reduce the oversteer. With better steering as well the handling

| Braking                | 50lb on brakes |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Triumph Stag           | 0.90 g         |
| Alfa Romeo 1750 Saloon | 0.88 g         |
| Reliant Scimitar GTE   | 0.80 g         |
| BMW 2002               | 0.75 g         |
| Gilbern Invader        | 0.68 g         |



### Reliant Scimitar GTE

£2217  
Glass-fibre body on steel box frame chassis. 2994 cc front engine with 6 cyl. (in V) developing 128 bhp (DIN) at 4750 rpm running on 4-Star fuel, pushrod operated valves. Independent front suspension by coil springs and wishbones; anti-roll bar; live rear axle located by trailing arms and Watt linkage; coil springs; rack and pinion steering. 4 speed gearbox driving rear wheels giving 21.8 mph/1000 rpm in top (26.6 in overdrive). Disc/drum brakes with servo. 185 SR 14 tyres (Pirelli Cinturato on test) 22.7 cwt. kerb weight.

|                        | Turning Circle ft. | Steering Turns on 50 ft. Circle |
|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| BMW 2002               | 31                 | 1.00                            |
| Triumph Stag           | 32                 | 0.95                            |
| Gilbern Invader        | 32½                | 0.95                            |
| Reliant Scimitar GTE   | 35                 | 1.25                            |
| Alfa Romeo 1750 Saloon | 36½                | 1.10                            |

would be excellent.

With anti-roll bars front and rear and a 57/43 front/rear weight distribution the Alfa should display fairly neutral handling characteristics; certainly not the predominant understeer and associated front tyre squeal that marred its performance on the first day's run. Raising the front tyre pressures to 27 psi and lowering the back ones to 23 psi improved things on the second day and gave the car the responsive handling that so impressed us in an earlier test. Accelerating hard from right angle turns causes the inside rear wheel to lift (due to rear-end weight transfer) and spin.

Only the Alfa has disc brakes all round, with a system incorporating a pressure limiting device to those on the rear wheels. Even so, the inside back wheel tended to lock up too easily when braking in a turn. With this reservation they performed well and are certainly not as over-servoed as those on the 1750 GTV, so you can use the brake pedal as a pivot to heel and toe. Disc/drum systems are fitted to the other four cars. The Gilbern's are very heavy as our test figure of only 0.68 g for 50 lb. pedal pressure illustrates; compare with the Alfa's 0.88 g and the Stag's 0.90 g. Though this latter figure is the best of the five the Stag's otherwise excellent braking performance was marred by juddering when braking from high speed, which probably accounts for the BMW's top ratings from everyone here.

### Comfort and controls

That a well designed all-independent

### Gilbern Invader

£2222  
Glass-fibre body on steel chassis. 2994 cc front engine with 6 cyl. (in V) developing 141 bhp (DIN) at 4750 rpm running on 4-Star fuel; push rod operated valves. Independent front suspension by coil springs and wishbones with anti-roll bar; live rear axle located by trailing arms and Panhard rod; coil springs; rack and pinion steering. 4 speed gearbox driving rear wheels giving 21.1 mph/1000 rpm in top (26.3 in overdrive). Disc/drum brakes with servo. 165 HR 15 tyres (Dunlop SP Sport on test) 21.2 cwt. kerb weight. Servicing required every 3000 miles

suspension can give the best of both worlds in the ride/handling conflict is evidenced by the success of the front wishbone, rear semi-trailing set-up of the Stag. Pitch, bounce and roll are minimal and the car rides over all but the worst surface irregularities with consummate ease. The BMW also rides quite well but with its shorter wheelbase is more prone to pitch and with tauter suspension tends to bounce more on undulating roads. But the bounce is well damped (and therefore quickly subdued) and the body is never jarred.

The other three cars have live rear axles. The best is undoubtedly that on the GTE which, like the Stag, rides evenly but is more firmly sprung. The Alfa rolls a bit when cornering hard and tends to bounce on its firm springs, following the contours of the road surface rather than absorbing them. The Gilbern's ride is poor; to achieve the desired roadholding the suspension has been stiffened to such an extent that on all but the best surfaces the ride is restless and knobbly, accompanied on occasions by an overall body shake. This hard springing causes the axle to hop sideways all too readily on bumpy roads.

The Stag, Alfa and Reliant have excellent seats, with ample support all round and sufficient adjustment to cater for most sizes, those in the Alfa being particularly good under the often-neglected thighs. The BMW's seats are, in contrast, rather flat and springy (compared to the firm and "dead" feel of the best trio) and hold the driver in situ more by virtue of the perforated section in the backrest and squab than the basic shape. Some drivers also wanted more aft adjustment. The Gilbern has hard and rather short seat squabs, an impression exaggerated by a knees-up driving position which lifts your thighs

### Triumph Stag

£1935  
Integral steel chassis with rear subframe. 2997 cc front engine with 8 cyl. (in V) developing 145 bhp (net) at 5500 rpm running on 4-Star fuel, single ohc (to each bank) operated valves. Independent front suspension by coil springs and wishbones with anti-roll bar; independent rear suspension by coil springs and semi-trailing arms; power-assisted rack and pinion steering. 4-speed gearbox driving rear wheels giving 19.8 mph/1000 rpm in top (24.1 in overdrive). Disc/drum brakes with servo. 185 HR 14 tyres (Michelin XAS on test) 25.9 cwt. kerb weight. Servicing required every 6000 miles.

clear of the seat cushion. None of us could get far enough away from the Invader's steering wheel and there isn't sufficient space alongside the clutch to stow the idle left foot.

The Stag's driving position earned top marks from us although heel and toe changes need a defter foot than in the Gilbern where the brake and accelerator are ideally placed. The Reliant, with its footwell falling away from the driver, is also very comfortable, and though some drivers thought the Alfa was as good, others found the steering wheel too distant when their feet were right; the pedals require forward, rather than downward, movements.

With their larger glass areas the two saloons came off best on visibility, the BMW with its slim pillars taking the honours. The wiper pattern isn't too good, though, as it's set for left hand drive.

Warm weather gave us ample opportunity to assess ventilation, but not heating; in the light of this test we suspect that the days of the eyeball vent are numbered. The Stag's central grilles give a good flow of low velocity air (though vent and heater controls are rather hidden behind the gear-lever) and none of the other four could match it in this department. Neither the Alfa nor the BMW have any form of face-level ventilation (though they both have effective foot coolers) so we had to put up with wind noise from open quarterlights to keep cool.

The GTE and Invader have small eyeball vents at either side of the fascia, but neither was sufficient and what air they supplied is directed at your hand rather than face. The Triumph and the Gilbern both have electrically operated side windows, those on the Stag being infuriatingly slow.

### Alfa Romeo 1750 Saloon

£1935  
Integral steel chassis. 1779 cc front engine with 4-cyl. (in-line) developing 122 bhp (DIN) at 5500 rpm running on 4-Star fuel, twin ohc operated valves. Independent front suspension by coil springs and wishbones with anti-roll bar; live rear axle located by trailing arms and T bracket; coil springs; anti-roll bar; recirculating ball steering. 5-speed gearbox driving rear wheels giving 20.8 mph/1000 rpm in fifth (16.5 in fourth). All round disc brakes with servo. 165 SR 14 tyres (Pirelli Cinturato on test) 21.4 cwt. kerb weight. Servicing required every 3750 miles.

### Stowage Space

|                        | cu.ft. |
|------------------------|--------|
| Alfa Romeo 1750 Saloon | 9.7    |
| BMW 2002               | 9.5    |
| Reliant Scimitar GTE   | 9.0†   |
| Gilbern Invader        | 5.7    |
| Triumph Stag           | 4.3**  |

\*\* Space assessed using Revelation suitcases, not test boxes as used for other four cars. 3.6 cu.ft. of suitcases is approximately equivalent to 4.3 cu.ft. of test boxes.  
† With car as four seater.

The Alfa is a four-door four-seater and has plenty of room in the back. The four two-door cars offer varying degrees of rear seat comfort. It's quite easy to get into the back of them all, the GTE being marginally the most difficult since if you don't want to disturb the rake of the front squabs you have to lift the complete seat. Of the two-door cars the BMW offers the most spacious accommodation (there's room for three at a pinch) with plenty of legroom but restricted headroom; the Stag is probably the most cramped with the worst visibility—the hardtop is shallow with small side windows and our 5ft. 10in. tester's head touched the roof. Likewise, many people would touch their head on the Gilbern's roof, but the seat is comfortable with a thick roll at the front of the squab to support thighs and give the required legroom. There's a bit more room in the GTE, though it's still rather cramped for adults; a central armrest, which is lacking in the BMW and the Gilbern, gives lateral support.

Appropriately, luggage space is related to interior accommodation; the Alfa has the largest boot, closely followed by the BMW. As a four-seater the GTE isn't so far behind, but the rear seats can be folded flat to give a loading platform of almost estate car proportions.

### Fittings and furniture

As you'd expect from a group of high

### BMW 2002

£1776  
Integral steel chassis. 1990 cc front engine with 4 cyl. (in-line) developing 100 bhp (DIN) at 5500 rpm running on 4-Star fuel, single ohc operated valves. Independent front suspension by MacPherson struts with anti-roll bar; independent rear suspension by semi trailing arms; coil springs with anti-roll bar; Worm and roller steering. 4-speed gearbox driving rear wheels giving 18.5 mph/1000 rpm in top. Disc/drum brakes with servo. 165 HR 13 tyres (Michelin XAS on test) 18.3 cwt. kerb weight. Servicing required every 4000 miles.

performance cars all have more than the usual array of instruments to keep the driver in touch, though the BMW doesn't have a battery condition indicator/ammeter or an oil pressure gauge. Triumph are undoubtedly leaders on interior layout; not only are the Stag's instruments all arrayed straight ahead (not spread across the fascia as they are on the Gilbern and Reliant, or mounted on a low central binnacle as in the Alfa), but the dials are angled towards the driver to minimize parallax errors.

And the Stag is an object lesson to others in how to arrange minor controls; all the often-used controls are around the steering column for fingertip operation. Although the Alfa's lights are operated by stalks and there is a wash/wipe button on the floor, the wiper switch is below the supplementary instruments on the central console. On the Stag and the Alfa all the controls are easy to reach when the driver is strapped in.

Not so good are the BMW's belts which tend to get lost beside the seats. And you can't easily reach the fascia mounted switches when belted up. Again, stalks are used for dip, flash and wash.

The Reliant and Gilbern fall down on minor control layout. On the GTE they're mounted on the central console where at times it is difficult to locate the correct knob; the Gilbern's switches are spread across a panel just to the left of the steering column. The GTE has the advantage that switches for lights and wipers (fitted front and rear) are a different shape, whereas on the Gilbern they are identical rockers.

We thought the Stag's finish and trim the most attractive, its tan upholstery blending well with the car's burnt ochre

paintwork. The BMW is every inch a Teuton and is a direct contrast; simply and tastefully furnished and very well finished. The Reliant's black interior decor is perhaps too sombre, which some people liked and others thought made the car feel claustrophobic (other lighter trim is now available). The Reliant's finish is characteristically good. The Gilbern's facia is trimmed in wood, which you either like or loathe. In general the car was not as well finished as the others—for example the bonnet on our car tended to shake clear of its retaining catch and daylight was showing around parts of the door seal.

**Conclusions**

If you want outright performance with individuality the Gilbern deserves consideration. The co-operative manufacturers are, within limits, prepared to modify cars to customers' requirements; with personal tailoring the Invader could be an attractive luxury GT. In kit form it costs significantly less than the opposition in this quintet.

If you want a capacious family car, the Alfa fits the bill best. It loses very little to its visually more sporting competitors in performance or road manners, and it's the sort of car which inspires good driving.

The BMW 2002 doesn't have such a strong character as the Alfa but its responses are quick and positive and you instantly feel at home because it does everything so well. At £1,776 it is excellent value and ranks high on our short list.

We have always thought very highly of the Scimitar GTE; no matter what it is pitted against, it always performs with flying colours. Despite recent price increases to over £2,000 it is still remarkable value. A sensible car to live with for long periods, with very relaxed cruising.

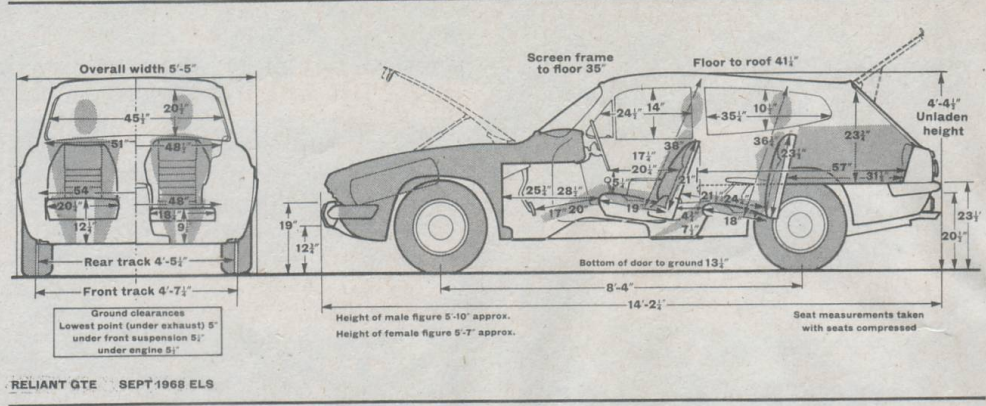
The Stag in many ways is an outstanding car and we should be proud that it's British. It is the most modern of this group, which shows in such details as control layout and a very high standard for ride and road-holding, with effortless performance to match its good looks.

Each group test driver completes a score sheet. Under 25 different headings—smoothness, gearchange, handling, ride, and so on—he places the five cars in order of merit. The results are then averaged out. Performance, economy and boot capacity ratings, measured objectively, have been added to the total of firsts, seconds, etc. shown in the table below:

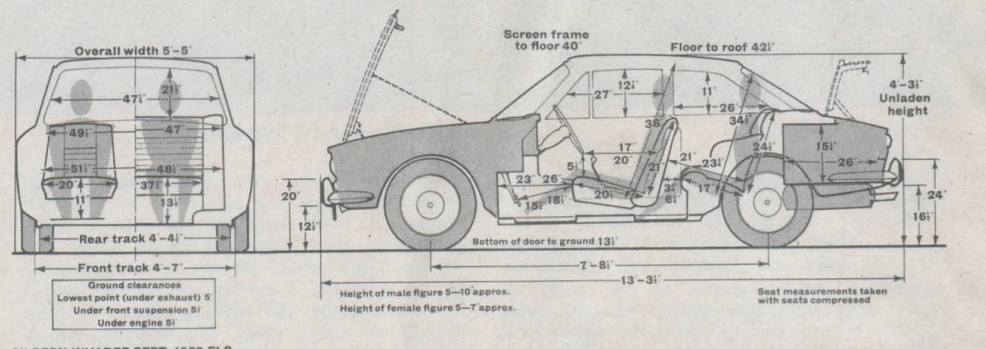
|         | 1sts | 2nds | 3rds | 4ths | 5ths |     |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| Stag    | 14   | 8    | 2    | 4    | 1    | 117 |
| 2002    | 7    | 9    | 5    | 3    | 5    | 97  |
| GTE     | 4    | 10   | 8    | 2    | 5    | 93  |
| 1750    | 3    | 4    | 9    | 10   | 3    | 81  |
| Invader | 2    | —    | 8    | 5    | 14   | 58  |

The final *Motor* score column on the right shows the result of scoring five points for a 1st, four for a 2nd, three for a 3rd and so on, giving a guide—and it is no more than a guide as in this empirical formula trivial matters rank equally with important ones—to overall merit.

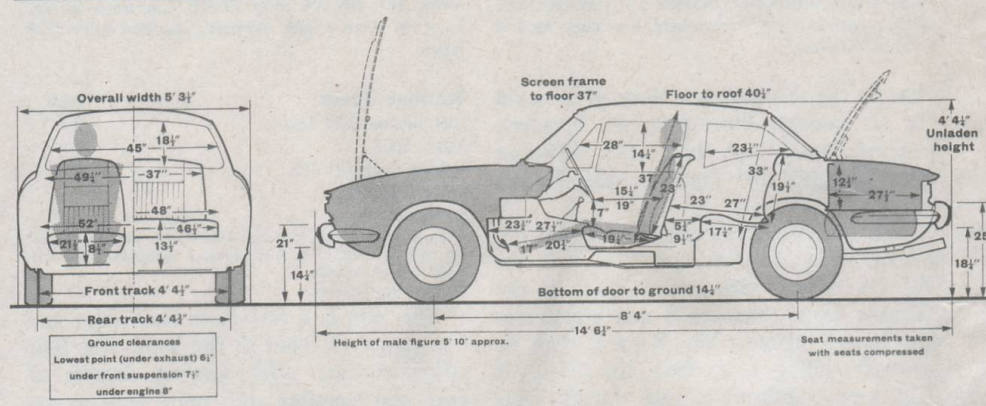
**Which would we buy?**  
 Read Personal Choice next week: each of our drivers picks his favourite



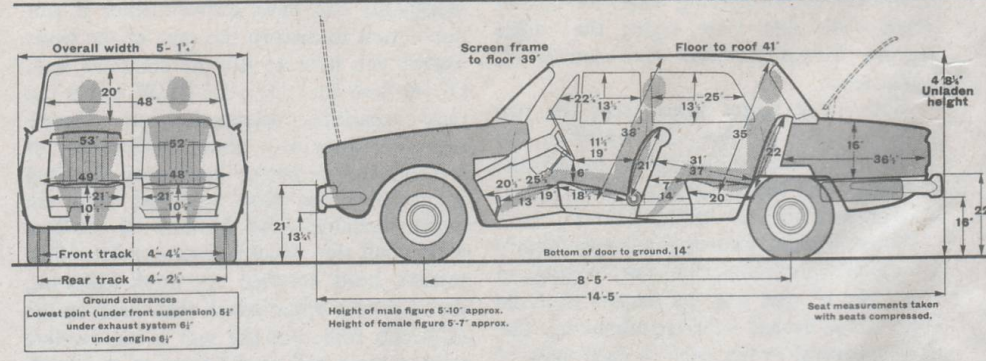
RELIANT GTE SEPT 1968 ELS



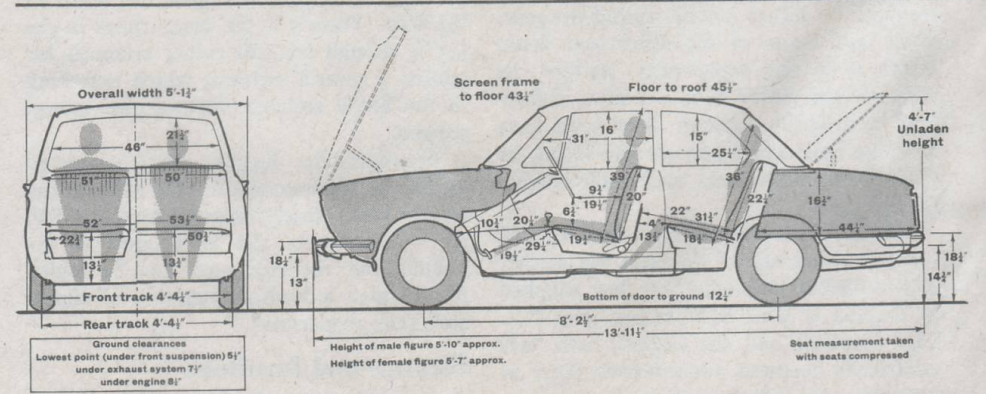
GILBERN INVADER SEPT. 1969 ELS.



TRIUMPH STAG AUG. 1970 ELS. (HARD TOP)



ALFA ROMEO 1750 AUG. 1968 DCC



BMW