

# 13,000-

Mile appraisal: Long-term Triumph

# STAG

A likeable and lively car, unusually well equipped.

We have been putting in about 1,000 miles a month with our Stag and have now topped the 13,000 mark, so it is time to make a first "owner's" report. To the most pointed question "would you have bought a Stag in December, 1970 if you had known what you know now?", the answer, without hesitation, is "yes". To a further question, "has it turned out as expected?", the reply is, "not entirely".

By Maurice A. Smith DFC

THE Stag was bought more or less as a replacement for our Sunbeam Tiger II (two-and-a-bit seater), which itself followed a Tiger I and an E-type Jaguar (two-seater). It is at least a 10-year later design and had the Tiger been developed on, it would probably by now have cost much the same as the Stag, around £2,200 delivered. With hard top, hood and automatic transmission like ours, the cost is £2,350. One of the differences you really notice apart from the Stag being bigger, concerns the vee-8 engines in the two cars; the Tiger with 1.7 more litres and less weight, was always eager to go off like a rocket and it encouraged the driver to do so. The Stag is not particularly eager or rocket-like, but can readily be wound up to give a lively burst of acceleration. It will cruise continuously nearly as fast as a Tiger—say, 100 mph and is quieter, more comfortable, softer sprung and more spacious.

To live with then, the Stag is much more relaxed and relaxing in nature. Its 3-litre vee-8 engine gives a very smooth and gentle burble of power in traffic but gets surprisingly wound up and whirring if you kick down and use all it has got. From outside you can hear the vee-8 beat as a Stag accelerates away. Now the car is smooth, but originally there was considerable tremor from the front wheels and also vibration at high speed, owed to the Borg-Warner transmission according to Triumph and to the prop shaft according to B.W. This was finally corrected in April. How, we wonder, can you detect such transmission unbalance before delivery if it only starts to show up at 85 mph on its first trip abroad after running in?

That first foreign journey to Switzerland was great fun. Three of us went with plenty of luggage and the Stag was a pleasure to drive in the mountains. Light, power-assisted steering with quick response and good lock are just what

## PERFORMANCE CHECK

### Maximum speeds

Gear	mph		kph		rpm	
	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff
Top (mean)	116*	112	187	180	4,810	5,660
(best)	116*	113	187	182	4,810	5,710
3rd/Inter	92	89	148	143	6,500	6,500
2nd/Low	61	54	98	87	6,500	6,500
1st/—	42	—	68	—	6,500	—

### Standing ¼-mile

R/T:	17.1 sec	82 mph
Staff:	17.9 sec	78 mph
R/T:	31.3 sec	102 mph
Staff:	32.6 sec	98 mph

### Standing kilometre

R/T:	3.5	5.1	7.1	9.3	12.7	16.5	21.8	29.2
Staff:	4.1	5.8	7.9	10.4	14.2	18.6	24.9	34.5

### Acceleration

R/T:	3.5	5.1	7.1	9.3	12.7	16.5	21.8	29.2
Staff:	4.1	5.8	7.9	10.4	14.2	18.6	24.9	34.5

### Time in seconds

True speed mph		30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Indicated speed mph	R/T:	31	41	52	63	73	83	94	105
Indicated speed mph	Staff:	29	39	50	61	72	84	95	107

### Speed range, Gear Ratios and Time in seconds

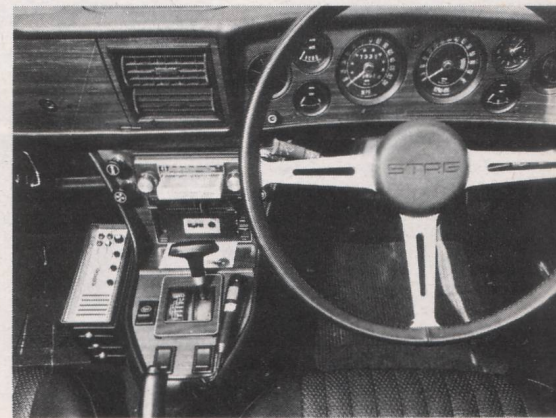
Mph	Top		3rd Inter		2nd Low	
	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff	R/T	Staff
0-20						
10-30	9.0	—	6.3	—	3.9	3.0
20-40	8.2	—	5.6	—	3.4	3.0
30-50	7.8	—	5.3	—	3.7	3.7
40-60	7.8	—	5.4	5.3	4.3	—
50-70	8.3	—	6.0	5.9	—	—
60-80	9.2	8.6	7.4	7.4	—	—
70-90	11.2	9.9	9.8	—	—	—
80-100	13.7	14.8	—	—	—	—

### Fuel Consumption

Overall mpg	R/T:	20.7 mpg (13.7 litres/100km)
	Staff:	19.2 mpg (14.6 litres/100km)

NOTE: "R/T" denotes performance figures for Stag manual tested in *Autocar* of 10 June 1971

\*Road Test maxima in overdrive top gear



A good layout. Ample and easily managed ventilation and heating, well positioned secondary controls, multiple steering wheel and seat adjustments. The warning lamp sector dial (left) is obscured as usual; the speedometer has kph markings as well as mph. Unfamiliar box is Readycall radio telephone, and microphone. Tape recorder selector switch replaces ashtray in centre

is needed. The engine has more torque for climbing than the normal acceleration would suggest, and it hangs on well at quite low rpm. The seats are sufficiently well shaped to give location and proper support. The vibration mentioned earlier spoiled the high-speed *auto-route* cruising but we were pleased with the mechanical quietness and relatively low wind noise.

If you get a really gusty day on a motorway, directional stability is not 100 per cent, as you might expect with that short rounded tail—those horrid fins of the 1960s had some uses—but the precise rack and pinion steering keeps you on course. It's not the smartest steering

wheel we have seen and it might be smaller.

Some early talk of Stags "jacking up" and twitching on corners, owing to the half-shaft splines sticking under heavy torque and then slipping suddenly, has not been supported by this automatic car, although another manual Stag we had on test once showed signs of this in pretty extreme conditions. We followed a Stag fairly fast round Stowe corner at Silverstone during a recent test day (in a Reliant GTE) and were interested to see the busy behaviour of the back wheels and the early lift-off of the inside front one. It goes to show that the ordinary

owner, even a fast driving one, gets nowhere near the limits to which cars are tested when their ultimate behaviour is being investigated.

We are reasonably satisfied with our Stag's road-holding, cornering and ride for all ordinary purposes. If we were asked what improvements might be made, the harshness felt on rippled surfaces and occasional thump back through the steering would be one of our first suggestions for attention. There are times on wet roads when back wheel adhesion is suspect. It is also very easy to spin the inside rear wheel when moving off on a curve.

This is the first time we have opted for automatic transmission on a sporting car. It is a sign of the changing times—British automatics changing for the better and traffic congestion for the worse. We do not regret the choice, but think it high time that a cruising over-drive were available with automatic. The automatic Jaguar XJ6 is another car that needs one. Motorways are here to stay.

In appearance the Stag is obviously of the Triumph family. One rival manufacturer remarked that it was so ugly you couldn't sell one on the Continent. We do not agree, nor would we hold it up as an example to all. With luck it will take the new mandatory front bumper heights in the USA without difficulty. Perhaps its looks are an acquired taste and after 13 months we have.

It is no good buying a Stag if you need limousine accommodation. This is a compact, convertible coupé, of the true plus two kind. Average grown-ups can sit comfortably in the back without much to spare. Tall people will find their heads touch the hard-top roof. Getting in and out of the back seats (front seat catches controlled by levers high in the seat backs) is easy enough. With the hood up, back passengers have as much space, but of course, feel a bit blinkered. Wind noise becomes considerable over 60 mph, though less than in most other open cars with hoods up.

Many owners will buy their Stags intending to keep the hard tops on all the year round. The folding hood, surprisingly, is an optional extra. Not so, us. Either you like an open car or you don't. There is something about that rush of air, even if Nader says it is polluted! Agreed, most people will not bother to wrap up like Eskimos to go motoring, so the days of the classic open tourer have passed. Despite this, a few of us still actually enjoy putting on our Jack Brabham rally jackets and going for a topless drive—so to speak. Of course, the weather has become much worse as a result of the Americans and Russians piercing the earth's atmospheric crust with their rockets, so we also feel the need of the hard top.

Lack of rigidity has been a criticism of many open-bodies, although we are now over the days of coach-built convertibles that shook like a railway carriage. It usually needs big boxy sills like those on the E-type Jaguar to keep an open car rigid. In the case of the Stag, which has wide doors, body stiffness is assisted by having a roll-over 'cage'. This is made up of a roll-over bar extending from the rear door pillars and joined to the top of the screen frame by a central ridge member. Padded and trimmed, this cage doesn't look untidy nor detract from the open car effect.

Included in the fairly high price of the Stag are the exceptional number of desirable features which make up the value. Power-assisted steering is one of them. This gives unusually

quick, light response from straight ahead, which would be particularly valuable for emergency evasive action. It also makes the car very handy in traffic and for parking. Next, there is the two-axis adjustment on the steering column. It moves in and out and swings up or down when you release the clamping lever. This, together with the seat adjustments—back and forth, cushion tilt-up and back-rest angle, should allow anyone to get set. The low instrument panel and screen base with short, slope-away nose help to give a first class forward view. This is very much a girl's car as well as a man's.

Going on with the equipment, you get bright red lamps on the doors in the back ends of the arm rests. These are an obvious safety-feature and good courtesy lamps to help you step in and out at night—puddle lamps, Triumph call them. The hard top comes with built-in electrically heated rear window, arrangements reminiscent of those on the Mercedes 250-280 SL.

Electric operation of the windows is something we really appreciate and specially when driving solo. Opening quarter lights may not be necessary, but if you have them they should pivot open by twisting their knobs, as they do on the Stag. The hard top has extractor-type hinged side windows.

The driver's wiper arm has an articulated linkage which lines the blade up with the screen pillar, so eliminating a blind sector. Then there are the quartz halogen lamps, proper fuse panel, locking fuel filler (which like the cigarette lighter some of us would happily do without),

reostat for instrument lighting, electric wind-screen washer, boot interior lamp, map-reading lamp, twin reversing lamps, parking lamp switch, dual-intensity signal and brake lamps with signal repeaters on the sides of the wings, day-night dipping mirror, and viscous fan coupling to prevent whirr.

Some designers cut down on their bumpers. Those on the Stag are sturdy and wrap around—right round at the back—and the overriders have rubber inserts.

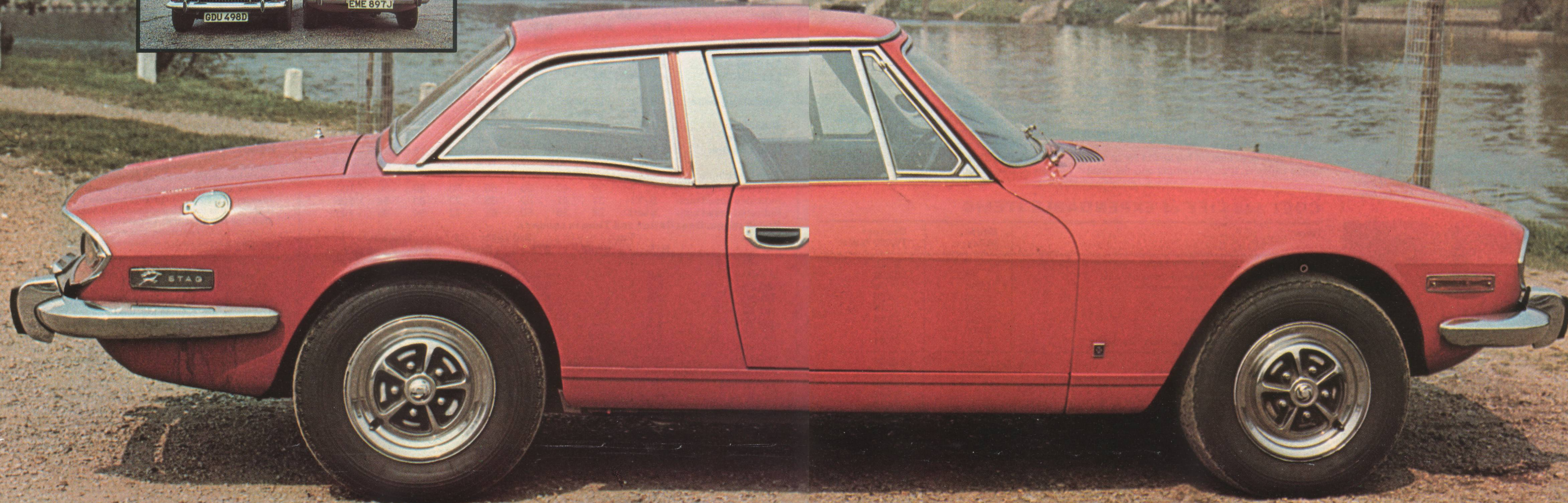
All the above should be standard equipment on good class cars, as they are on the Stag, yet it is surprising how few other cars have them all. We would certainly like to add the export options of fitted head-rests and hazard warning lamps. We do not like a toughened glass wind-screen, Zebrazone or not. Air-conditioning can be specified but cannot be added after the car has been assembled.

Next, we turn to some troubles and shortcomings. The Stag has never left us stranded or in fact, let us down at all, so that is a main point in its favour. The nearest it came to it was a rubbed through fuel pipe, attributable to stupid detail design or assembly (see picture and check your Stag). This also accounted for several days of untraced petrol smell and re-

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Alone and in company: above, with a manual-transmission Stag road test car, and below, with its predecessor, a much-loved Sunbeam Tiger. Below: In this side view, the Stag's short tail and limited keel surface is apparent



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duced mpg. In this context, the fuel filler is a constant source of irritation and waste. It blows back on every possible occasion and will never accept normal pump delivery.

The developers have managed to design reliability and most of the pinka-pinka out of the blinking units for the direction indicators. At each service they have been 'looked at', but have yet to work regularly or properly. The trouble is that you can be booked by the police for this. It's in the regulations.

The circle of warning lamps is carefully positioned on the panel behind the driver's left hand and forearm to make it hard to see. Triumph's service people hit on an effective way to cure a persistent wrong red warning of radiator overheating. They disconnected it. The fuel gauge continues to read  $\frac{3}{4}$  full when empty, but now we are used to this. An 8 per cent optimistic error on the speedo is too much. The odometer and trip mileage, on the other hand, are very accurate.

We are on our third Trico washer bottle. They keep splitting where the holding bracket cuts. Fortunately, it still leaves you with nearly half a bottle of liquid. We had exactly the same trouble in our Jensen FF last year. Must get around to designing a new bracket; filing the sharp edges of the one we have is not enough. The only other recurrent trouble has been with the doors and door-locks. They tend to drop, get loose, lock themselves when slammed, or catch their inside trim on the fixed rubbersealing strips.

Being a very early Stag from an unhappy production line, it is not surprising perhaps that there was a fair amount of work to be done or redone after running in and again after the Swiss journey. The biggest inconvenience was the time taken to deal with faults in body fittings, instruments and the transmission indicator which came off. The car went in for its first check on 10 February and came out on the 12th with just the mechanical bits attended to. It went in again on 16 February for "3 days" but was still waiting for parts on 26 February. Triumph's mechanical and body servicing people in London seem to be pleasant, over-worked and optimistic. When planning car

usage, it may be best to add a fair margin to their time estimates for completion of work.

Of the attention under warranty, the most serious trouble was a flooding carburettor, caused we were told by a punctured diaphragm. In the course of a short drive the air filter box slowly filled with petrol and made the mixture hopelessly rich. No-one likes to have hot petrol swilling around above the cylinder blocks but this was obviously an isolated fault in one of the pair of Strombergs. Otherwise the Stag engine has been very reliable and uses hardly any oil. It has been drained and refilled at 6,000 and 12,000-mile services and has otherwise taken only about 1 pint per 1,000 miles. It is a sure starter if you give it time. Both hot and cold, however, it needs several seconds of turning before it bites. It also needs half choke for two or three miles on a cold morning before it will pull and even then, it occasionally stalls. The radiator never seems to need topping up.

Fuel consumption is now consistent for given circumstances. Around cities it gives 18.5 mpg. Long, fast journeys go up to 19.5 mpg and the best leisurely journey average we recorded last summer was 23.0 mpg. The manual Stags seem to do about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  mpg better.

Michelin XAS handed tyres are fitted and these we changed round as recommended at 6,000 miles. Adhesion on wet roads became noticeably poor at 12,500 miles with between  $1\frac{1}{2}$  and 2 mm tread remaining, so at 13,000 we changed them for new ones. The spare has not been used. These new tyres have been the only sizeable expense in the first year.

Turning to practical aspects of design details, that battery mounting accessibility will have to be improved. Take the power steering pump off to lift out the battery? Inevitably there are shorts and sparks as you struggle to put a spanner on the terminal clamp bolts.

A forward-opening bonnet is right; a self-supporting one is best. If you must have a stay, we think it should be placed the same side as the dip-stick and washer-bottle.

Next, a look at the sort of conveniences and comforts which you grow to appreciate, or otherwise, when you live with a car. We have approved seat comfort and forward view and now add the following plus points: all-round look-out with hard top fitted, good ventilation and heating, handy secondary controls—dipper, flasher, wiper, washer and horn on stalks round the steering wheel. The glove-locker is rather small but in compensation there are: a shelf, two small pockets in the doors and two more bigger ones at the back. There are also little trays in the scuttle-top on the passenger side and in front of the gear selector.

The boot is, at best, of big sports car or small coupé capacity. It's shallowness and the incur-

sion of the hinges are the points of criticism. You can carry two suitcases side by side and quite a lot of small and soft things around and on top.

The folding hood was fitted as an after-thought last summer and the "folding" was a misnomer to start with since it would not go down properly. Having been persuaded to do so, over a period of half an hour, it never rose again until seen to by the body service people. We hope to be able to report faultless folding next spring.

With the exception of the battery, everything is reasonably accessible for the help-yourself man. Replacing the dip stick, when you eventually find the hole, you have to take care to push it right home. Garage-men mostly don't, so you risk overfilling.

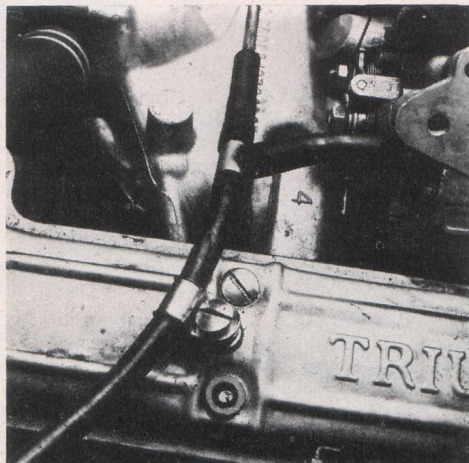
At night the Stag is pretty good; no nasty reflections, excellent full beams and clean, not too abrupt cut off. With a full load, the tail goes down and the lamp beams up, causing hard words and embarrassment. We have not felt the need for spot lamps, particularly since the not entirely good regulations forbid the use of a single offside lamp in fog. It is not easy to read the main instruments at night, but you soon learn that 30 mph is just past 9 o'clock, 70 mph at 12 and peak rpm at 3 o'clock.

At present we have a Smiths' radio and cart-ridge player fitted, with a pair of speakers tucked in above the rear pockets. This equipment gives adequate two-speaker stereo; two more speakers would be better. The standard single speaker for radio (central front and temporarily disconnected) gives good, clear volume. For comparison, we also have a portable Smiths' tape recorder-cassette player wired in. This gives facilities for alternative music, or for dictation, or will record direct from the radio. Finally, we have a Readycall FM radio-telephone, which at present gives us Greater London coverage only, and goes off at 8 pm. and weekends. You have your own call-up signal and there is private conversation both ways. Quality of reception is usually good and free from interference but there are a few areas of weak reception. No sound is heard when the set is on until you call, or are called.

As with all *Autocar's* long-term test cars, one man is in charge, but all drive the Stag from time to time. The consensus of opinion is definitely favourable. It is a nice car with a satisfying touch of elegance and spirit. Now that Triumph have been able to deliver some few thousands of them at home and abroad, we are beginning to hear from owners who agree.

Sometimes we are only too ready to sell our long-term test cars as soon as we can. We hope to keep the Stag for at least a second year. Draw your own conclusions. □

*Petrol pipe clamped in such a way that it rubs through on an adjacent bolt head. Here it has been twisted round to show the puncture. Air filter box has been removed*



## COST and LIFE of EXPENDABLE ITEMS

Item	Life in Miles	Cost per 10,000 Miles
One gallon of 4-star fuel average cost today 35p	19.2	£ 182.00
One pint of top-up oil, average cost today 17p	1,000	p 1.70
Front disc brake pads (set of 4)	6,500	8.00
Rear brake linings (set of 4)	15,000	4.10
Michelin XAS tyres (front pair)	12,000	23.50
Michelin XAS tyres (rear pair)	12,000	23.50
Service (main interval and actual costs incurred)	6,000	35.44
<b>Total</b>		<b>278.24</b>
<b>Approx. standing charges per year</b>		
Depreciation		150.00
Insurance		58.45
Tax		25.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>511.69</b>

Approx. cost per mile = 5.1p