





SOMETIMES OFF-THE-PEG PERFORMANCE MODELS JUST AREN'T ENOUGH. ED HALL LOOKS AT FIVE AFTERMARKET CONVERSIONS THAT WERE SO GOOD EVEN THE MANUFACTURERS GAVE THEM THE THUMBS UP

Tuning companies and car manufacturers don't usually make happy bedfellows. The thought of a backstreet outfit interfering with the fruits of multi-million pound design departments sends shivers down their spines and warranties evaporating faster than you can say 'modified'. Conversely it's the lack of imagination, balls or penny-pinching displayed in factory performance models that gives tuners their blank canvas upon which to work their art. However, when their paths collide an interesting car is guaranteed.

Not the deliberate, mass-marketed collaborations, like Ford and Cosworth, but the smaller-scale affairs – bespoke performance cars for discerning customers, developed far from the doors of the factory, yet still within their umbrella of support. An accolade that only comes from complete confidence in the integrity of the tuner's work,

and not one that comes cheap; conversions like these often doubled the basic price.

Perhaps a part of their appeal is the mindset of their first owner, who could have any car but instead chose something different; price and production run always assures these cars are rare. Maybe it's the period appeal of the engine work, the bodykits or the history behind the outfit who made it. But let's be honest, it's the purported performance that really tickles every true petrolhead's nerve. Performance way beyond what the host manufacturer dare offer, taking the car to its ultimate potential. Whatever your interests, these are five cars that make you go 'oooh!'

Ford Cortina Mk2 3-litre Savage

Perhaps the originator of this genre, the Savage Cortina caused something of an anomaly in the accepted social pattern of car buying during the late 60s and early 70s. Men of business and private wealth started trading their Jags and Mercs in for, of all things, a Cortina. So how come?

First came the man behind the Savage, Jeff Uren. Uren was a racing driver who came up through the ranks of racing, mainly Fords, before becoming involved with the management side of Ford's racing in 1959 as the team manager of the →

EXTRA HOT

Photography: James Lipman



This image: Cortina and Manta both have 200 bhp at their disposal.

1: Plush 1600E interior separates the Savage from the sparse Lotus.

2: The Savage's extra tank comes in handy with a thirsty Essex V6.

3: Old fashioned yes, but performance and character in spades.

4: Race Proved plate is proof of the Savage's authenticity.

5: 200bhp Essex V6 gave the Savage Lotus beating performance.

Ford of Dagenham Rally team. Then went on to the States and when he returned, he and his company, Race Proved, turned their attentions to improving Ford's UK range, starting with a Lotus Cortina fitted with a tuned Essex V6.

On the surface of it, pitting the Savage Cortina against the existing Lotus Cortina would seem like madness. The Lotus was already a legend both on and off the race track. However, in realising that this first Lotus based, LSD equipped car would be far too expensive Uren changed tack and began basing his cars on the luxury, four door 1600E. And by doing this, found his niche.

Savage buyers didn't want a race car, they wanted a fast, luxurious car to cover distances with, but that's not to say a lot of modification didn't go into the finished product. The front chassis rails were seam welded, uprated dampers and revised spring rates dealt with the weight of the V6, and Ford supplied the front crossmembers undrilled so a little more negative camber could be introduced to make it handle. And it needed to handle because

delivered 138bhp, 33bhp more than the Lotus, but most came with one of the four Westlake conversions, giving you either 170, 180, 190 or 220bhp. Even the standard engine could rocket the one ton saloon to 60mph in 8.8 seconds and cover the standing quarter in 16.6 seconds, so it's easy to see why in the late 60s there wasn't a lot to touch it. Traditional sports cars certainly couldn't even come close. And as Dave Killen, owner of this example, quite rightly says, 'It was the Cosworth of its day.'

In keeping with its GT nature a Zodiac overdrive gearbox with tall 3.77:1 diff gears was fitted, though later models used the more modern 2000E box. And aside from the engine conversions, twin fuel tanks, uprated DS11 pads, a foot rest and head rests were part of the package and you could have Webasto sunroofs or electric windows too. At £1365 in 1967 it was comfortable £250 more than a Lotus, though that didn't stop a supposed 1500 people putting their hands in their pockets.

Jumping in the Savage today brings both feelings of excitement



6: IHI turbo boosts up to 15psi to give an extra 120bhp.

7: Irmischer kit and lattice wheels were part of the package.

8: Water injection prevents detonation over 10psi of boost.

9: And is fully adjustable via this control box on the dashboard.

speeds, allowing the Cortina to overcome all aerodynamic obstacles and accelerate relentlessly over 70mph. Added to which, it's totally unfussed, the rev counter showing only 3000rpm at 70mph. Above all it's great fun, and that's really why it was a Cortina that became *the* car for the moneyed classes.

Opel Manta Courtenay Turbo

The late 80s was the end of an era. The days of the traditional performance car were over, now hot hatches were the new kids on the block. By then the Manta and Capri were hanging around like aging rockers at a techno night. They may

have been inefficient, aerodynamically challenged and technically neolithic, but they stayed in production long past their sell by date because people kept buying them. And why wasn't a mystery – they

were bloody good fun.

But by 1988 the Capri had slipped away, dressed in its Sunday Best as the 280 Brooklands, and the Manta

was next in line. But that didn't stop one final, little known swansong, orchestrated by the conversely well known Vauxhall tuners, Courtenay. The Manta had never really had an extra fast version but in conjunction with Courtenay's new range of turbocharged Vauxhalls, the Manta went out with a bang.

Back then, Courtenay were a GM dealership, but manager, Chris Courtenay, was a bona-fide petrolhead with a background in motorsport that included being the Competition Manager for the Luton Motors Group. And it was there that he worked with and became friends with David Lazenby, who was later to be the source of inspiration for Courtenay's turbocharged range. Courtenay was so impressed with Lazenby's Pace Products Turbo Astra GTE, he asked him whether he'd be interested in going into partnership to offer the whole Vauxhall range with a turbocharger.

By 87 that had happened and Vauxhall had so much trust in Courtenay's work they allowed the cars to be sold in their lot and covered them by the GM warranty. →

WHEN THE TURBO'S ON SONG THE MANTA COULD EASILY HOLD ITS OWN AGAINST TODAY'S BEST HOT HATCHES //

small car and standards have changed dramatically over the last 20 years, so I try and put myself in the mindset of a road-tester in 1987 rather than 2007. Moving off slowly and hitting the loud pedal quickly realise I needn't have worried and a smile spreads over my face. I've owned his Savage for 23 years now and it's rather special.

Originally bought by the managing director of GKN Forgings, it had some unique features, like a 1900cc with overdrive gearbox and GKN wheels of which only two sets were made. The V6 was originally Westlake converted to 2000cc then it's been built to a 2000cc. On the road it certainly feels fast when it comes round and the V6 makes a lovely noise. There's a fair degree of grip in the bends and the steering doesn't help but it's secure, doesn't give you that 'about to crash' feel that you get from driving many a modern car with any gusto.

Having an engine twice the size of the original with nearly twice the power and tall gearing really shows at high

Universal press acclaim ensured these Norfolk hot-rods trickled out of the dealership at a sufficient rate to justify their existence, though the rarest and lairiest was the blown Opel Manta. Unlike the rest of the range the Manta could only be purchased as a full 'bumper to bumper' conversion, which included that Irmscher 400-style (called the I-240 road kit) bodykit, quad lamps and 7x15 Compomotive CX lattice wheels. Well, the six people who spent £15,950, some £6,230 over the price of the standard Manta Exclusive, probably wanted everyone to know.

The kit hints at this car's intentions; Courtenay wanted the Manta to be fast, not just quick, so there was no holds barred when it came to adding the turbo. Starting with the basic cam-in-head 2-litre engine, well known to be bullet proof, a spacer plate was fitted between two head gaskets to drop the compression ratio. The turbo's an IHI unit that blows through an intercooler into the standard inlet plenum with a fifth injector for

added fuel when it comes on boost. And to deliver the 230bhp necessary for a real thump in the back, it boosts up to a heady 15psi by using water injection to kerb detonation – impressive stuff for 88.

There's only a 5-litre container of water but should that run out a buzzer sounds, and the ignition/boost control box ensures the ignition is retarded and the boost drops to 10psi. To keep all this power vaguely on the straight and narrow the suspension is tightened up with Bilstein dampers, harder springs and a lighter, straight anti-roll bar. While front vented discs attempt to bring it all to a halt.

Strapping into Chris Burt's 17k mile Manta is like stepping back in time; it's indistinguishable from new yet it's pure 70s. Figure hugging Recaros grip your arse, your hands land on the chunky metal and leather Irmscher steering wheel through which you can see the water injection control unit screwed haphazardly to the dash, looking like it was lifted straight out of Chernobyl's control room.

On the road the suspension feels taught and firm but not uncompromising, thanks to the excellent gas dampers, and gives you the confidence to floor it. Not a wobble happens for the first few thousand revs, remember this is from the school of turbocharging, but as the revs come close to 3000rpm the car seems to lose the drag of the air and its tyres as a whistling heralds the turbo winding up. It doesn't feel quite the 230bhp claimed but not far short. And don't get me wrong, when the engine's on song it's bliss and could easily hold its own against some of today's best performance hatch backs.

Round the corners it grips well with a hint towards understeer though I'm sure it'd wag its tail faster than an overexcited Labrador with a sharp turn in and a heavy dose of right foot, but I didn't have the nerve to try. Where it really shows its age is in the tendon-busting steering – it really is a whole upper body ordeal to effect a change of direction quickly, but then this ain't no girls car.



AMG 190E 3.2

If you're a sleeper, call it what you will, they don't come much more low-key than this. Appearances can be deceiving and from the outside you'd think it was nothing more than a 1.8-litre 190E. With a complete lack of model designation this is a car for a man who wants discreet performance.

AMG are known to most as being Mercedes' tuning wing, though their relationship hasn't always been as close as today, where the AMG tag is awarded over every performance version. In fact this W201 3.2 is one of the first models given a Mercedes-Benz warranty.

Werner Aufrecht and Hans Melcher started their business in an old mill building near Grossaspach (Aufrecht, Melcher and Grossaspach make up the AMG name) but back then they had the snappy title of 'Engineering Office for the Design and Testing of Racing Engines'. They built high horsepower engines for owners of every Mercedes saloons from a tiny garage with a hand dug pit. Perhaps

their first renowned triumph was the 6.3-litre 300SEL of 1971. By 78 they relocated to Affalterbach, where they remain today, and in 88 they teamed up with Mercedes for their motor racing comeback. By 1999, the two companies merged.

It was on the basis of the newfound motorsport friendship that they were cosy enough to allow the AMG 190E 3.2 to be marketed with Mercedes approval rather than as an aftermarket conversion. Based on the standard 2.6-litre, manual 190E, AMG conversions covered as much or as little as you wanted, whether it was simply a flash bodykit or a full engine conversion. Mario Fernandes' 190E is the ultimate in subtlety having had every conversion possible bar the bodykit, so on the surface there's little to show for the AMG costing almost double what the standard 2.6 would have set you back.

At its heart is the 3.2-litre engine, made by replacing the 2.6-litre M103 with the larger 3-litre version and stroking it to 3.2. The end result is 234bhp, which is substantially

more than the 190E Cosworth. This could have been backed up by a four-speed auto, but Mario's car makes full use of that horsepower with a Getrag, dog-leg manual box and a limited slip diff.

The cockpit is uncompromisingly black and aside from being a left hooker looks as Stuttgart intended. But once you're acclimatised you notice the AMG speedo, the dog-leg box and the heavily

bolstered front and rear seats. Even through the AMG dual pipe exhaust system the six is hardly raucous, and it rides without crashing or any harshness, which is surprising when you consider how low the Bilstein suspension sets it and the minimal sidewalls of the 45-series 16in tyres. Once the dog-leg shift is mastered the box is incredibly easy to use – it's a bit rubbery but nowhere near as bad as manual Mercs' reputation would suggest, and allows you to really play with the engine. While

THE OBVIOUS COMPARISON IS WITH THE 190 COSWORTH AND IN ALMOST EVERY RESPECT THE AMG IS THE MORE DRIVEABLE CAR

1: Merc is a left-hooker because it was bought new in Germany.

2: M103 engine doesn't look much but AMG took it to 3.2.

3: Six-pot weighs a little more than the Cossy's four-pot.

4: All three bespoke uber saloons for the discerning enthusiast.





not being explosively powerful, the six has such a broad power band that acceleration isn't something that needs planning, it just happens.

The obvious comparison is with the 2.3-16 Cosworth, and in almost all situations the AMG emerges as the more drivable car. Yes, the extra weight of the six does slightly stunt the agility but it's not something you normally ever notice according to Mario, who's lucky enough to own a Cosworth as well. 'The Cosworth's terrific fun but to get the most out of its acceleration you really need to thrash it, whereas the AMG is faster even when you don't drive it so hard,' says Mario. 'Only under braking do you feel the extra weight

the AMG is the soft option over the Cosworth but in real life it's just as much of a driver's car.

Chasseur Stealth Biturbo

'Maximum efficiency with the minimum advertisement,' was Chasseur's slogan. Well, efficiency is rather an understatement for 0-100mph in 15.5 seconds. There's always been a willing market for top-flight luxury saloons with supercar performance amongst the seriously wealthy. As the Chasseur brochure states, 'Typically, the Chasseur owner has a two-place supercar as his other car, but also owns a Stealth because of his seating requirements as a business

family.' But then in 1992 the cost of the full 340bhp conversion cost £17,825 (without VAT) plus the cost of the Jaguar or Daimler XJ40 4-litre. And at around £50k for the Daimler, the Chasseur was exclusively a rich man's toy. Prices today? About £2.5-6k – you want one now don't you?

Coming out in 86, the XJ40 was a huge leap forward for Jaguar, combining state of the art technology with all the classic Jaguar values. In fact it was so good it begged for much more power, yet Jaguar didn't provide it. The V12 was a lazy old thing and still trapped in the Series 3 body and the XJR was only mildly tweaked – something



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supercharged X300 XJR. Jag fans wanting the XJ40 with a more sporting edge were happy to turn to Chasseur, especially as Jaguar were happy to warranty all the unmodified bits while Chasseur and Turbo Technics covered the rest.

The nitty gritty is the twin turbo conversion developed by Turbo Technics. It used two water cooled Garrett T25 turbos boosting at just 9psi to turn 235bhp into 340bhp and 285lb/ft into 405lb/ft. Initially on the 3.6, low compression export pistons dropped the compression ratio but this necessitated dismantling the engine so later 4-litre models simply had their heads removed and the combustion chambers milled out to give the 8:1 compression ratio. A free flow exhaust dispensed with the gases, and if you were feeling guilty about all the fuel consumption you could always specify a cat.

If you didn't feel guilty in the slightest but wanted the fastest thing going then you'd have asked Chasseur to build you a Stealth 450, or SuperStealth. The bottom end was taken to 4.2-litres, the turbos swapped for two T27s with a K-gate, giving split/parallel turbo operation for maximum power and torque. The end result was a crushing 449bhp and 457lb/ft. 0-100mph was just 13 seconds but Chasseur's policy of 'Responsible Active Safety' policy meant the top speed was limited to just 170mph. Responsible stuff indeed.

Jordan Jukes' Chasseur looks particularly evil in black with its bonnet vents and wide wheels, and it's one of the most popular 4-litre 340 versions. 'You don't realise you're going fast because there's no lag and no fuss, it just makes you think everyone else on the road is driving really slowly.' He's right too, from the hot seat you could be driving any other XJ40 bar the

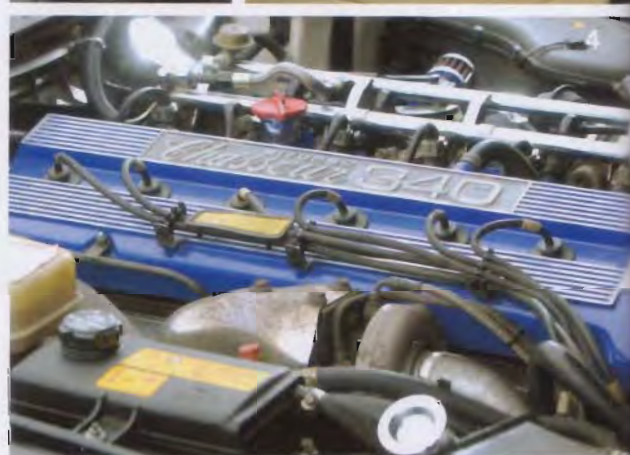
thick-rimmed, four-spoke Chasseur wheel and the numbered plaque on the dash. The interior is all standard XJR whereas some had the optional upgrades involving a complete retrim of the interior with heavily bolstered seats and Alpine sound systems. The ride height might be lower but the ride's still silky Jaguar smoothness, though the damper rebound can be manually adjusted to the driver's taste.

There's no lag at all, just a seamless surge of torque that carries you forward like riding the crest of a wave. There's no explosion, only the sensation of moving very rapidly, autobox seamlessly shifting up as the rev counter hits the line. The handling complements this perfectly, allowing you very high corner entry speeds with no fuss and total confidence. It's one of those cars that in the real world would be very easy to cover a huge amount of ground in a very short space of time and not even realise you've been driving fast. Which is exactly what it was built for.

Alpina B10

Alpina need very little introduction. BMW may have an army of tuners following them; AC Schnitzer, Hartage and the like, but it's Alpina who've always been at the top of the tree, taking the basic model, carefully selecting components from BMW's parts bin, adding a sprinkling of their own magic to create an entirely more focused car.

Alpina began in 1963 when its founder, who's still Alpina's CEO, discovered a niche demand for uprating BMW 1500s with twin carbs to match the recently introduced 1800. BMW were so impressed with the kit they agreed to lend their support and even based the engine modifications of their 1800Ti on Alpina's work.



1: Arthur Daley express smokes its tyres with ease.

2: Chasseur's engines came with a plaque saying who built it.

3: Chasseur would redesign your interior to individual tastes.

4: Twin turbo'd AJ6 is a thing of beauty and utter brute force.

This partnership meant Alpina's modifications wouldn't invalidate BMW's warranty – an asset that would prove invaluable.

The company progressed from tuning kits to whole cars. It's 2002 had 165bhp putting it in the same league as the 2002 Turbo but it was far nicer to drive, used less petrol and was 1500DM cheaper. What's more, round the Vallelunga race track it was quicker than both a Porsche 911 and a Lamborghini Miura. And by 1983 Alpina became a registered car manufacturer.

Mark Blackburn's 1999 B10 3.2 isn't the most extreme model Alpina have ever made but it is a real driver's choice. The first E39-shaped car to come out of Buchloe's doors was the B10 V8, based on the 540i. It was very nearly as fast as the M5 with 347bhp yet cheaper, however, it only came with a five-speed automatic gearbox.



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The 3.2 B10 might have been considered lower down the pecking order but in many ways it made the most sense. Only available with a five-speed ZF manual, it was nearly as fast as a 540i, but cheaper, more fun to drive and more exclusive. Autocar certainly thought the B10 3.2 was better than the 540i.

Starting with a 528i, Alpina enlarged the engine to 3.2-litres, fitted lightweight Mahle pistons to hike the compression ratio, reworked the cylinder head and reprogrammed the ECU to make 260bhp. And that was enough to drag the 5-series to 60mph in 6.5seconds and on to 162mph.

Mechanically the rest of the car was very similar to the B10 V8, with Eibach springs and gas dampers front and rear, thicker anti-roll bars and vented discs all round, plus of course, those trademark 20-spoke

5: Green stitching and 200mph clocks tell you it's an real Alpina.

6: The V8 may be more powerful but the 3.2 is the drivers' choice.

7: 260bhp smokes the 20-spoke Alpinas with considerable ease.

8: The 2.8 is taken to 3.2 using high compression pistons.

alloys. Aside from the alloys there's not much to distinguish an Alpina. Older cars often wore rather garish side stripes, and though they're still an option, most people these days prefer the subtle look. Inside it's a similar story – green and blue stitching on the steering wheel and 200mph clocks are all that give the game away.

Looking at Alpinas objectively, it seems something of a mystery they sell at all. I mean BMW's standard range is hardly lacking in sporting versions, however Alpina's models just seem to knit into it covering every hole. Subjectively, from driving the car their appeal becomes far more obvious – it's as though Alpina have taken every aspect of the car and focused it toward the sporting driver.

It feels tighter, more alive and less of a compromise. The engine thrives on revs, howling as the rev counter

flies towards 7000rpm, where it really comes alive. The gearbox changes quickly and easily allowing you to keep it on the boil and snick down the ratios for a corner. As a modern car you expect it to be good, yet it's so flat, controlled and nimble round the bends you don't feel as though you'd ever be able to outwit it. The traction seems nigh on limitless.

Ultimately it might not be as fast as an M5 but it gives the driver just as much involvement and excitement in a way that a 540i would never be able to match. As it's cheaper too, the Alpina B10 really is the thinking man's BMW.

Thanks to :-

Dave Killen (Ford Cortina Savage), Mark Blackburn (Alpina B10), Jordan Jukes (Jag Chasseur Stealth), Chris Burt (Opel Manta Courtenay Turbo), Mario Fernandes (Mercedes AMG 190E 3.2) ♦