



Jensen Car Club of Switzerland





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Uppercrust Bargains

There's never been a better time to buy a thirsty top-drawer classic. Prices are depressed, showrooms well stocked. Here *Roger Bell* compares five bargains on the road, starting with the Aston Martin DBSV8 made in 1971

Aston Martin DBSV8

Let's put this in perspective. For less than the price of a new Cortina 1.6GL, you can still buy one of the fastest production exotics ever made. True, the early Aston DBSV8s, fitted with troublesome Bosch mechanical fuel injection, have a poor service record, mainly because they're much more difficult to keep in tune than later Weber-carburetted cars. But when they're on song they really fly. *Autocar* got 162mph and 0-100mph in 14.7 seconds in 1971 — figures that *Motor* only slightly bettered with the latest Vantage last April, 10 years on. Then (as now) the V8 Aston was probably the swiftest road car made anywhere in the world.

According to Graig Hinton, a £500 overhaul of the electrics and injection system by Andy Chapman of Aston Martin specialists Chapman Spooner, had made a thousand pounds' worth of difference to this ex-Brian Redman car which, if not a concours winner, was in excellent shape bodily and mechanically. Despite the 60,000 miles on the clock, the engine was smooth and clean — it displayed none of the snatch or surge criticised in contemporary road tests — and very potent. Subjectively, it felt as fast at the top end as the current Vantage I tried a week later (see page 73), and I swear it was even stronger low down, judging by the way it lugged vigorously from 1500rpm. Apart from a slightly juddery clutch, the drivetrain was hard to fault and the gearchange good, despite the awkward first-to-second dogleg, and weak spring loading which made it quite easy to wrong slot. Chatter and whine from the beefy box were, I suspect, not so much signs of wear and tear as reminders of the innate lack of refinement of ZF's tough but noisy five-speeder: the current Vantage chatters and whines too. The heavy clutch and poor angle of attack on the floor-pivoted pedal are, like the gear-change flaws, also intrinsic drawbacks still evident on cars produced today.

The Advest power steering is perfectly weighted — even better than that of the latest Vantage which has to swivel whopping 255/60 low-profile tyres. On lesser 225/70 covers, the '71 DBS obviously doesn't have such high cornering powers, but it handles very well and can be hustled along twisty roads in a spirited way that belies its size. And it is a very big and heavy car, some 6ft wide, 15ft long and 35cwt in weight. By Mini standards, its girth/accommodation ratio is appalling.

Slightly wallowy float is typical of the model over fast undulations, but back-end clonks and thuds on the rough are not: no doubt the dampers had seen better days. The all-disc brakes worked well enough but the spongy pedal didn't inspire great confidence in them and I didn't put to the test, the maker's

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'69 claim of zero to 100mph to zero again in under 20 seconds.

With its lower dash and more discreet power bulge ahead you don't feel quite so dominated by the machine as in the latest car. But nor are you so well supported in slippery leather seats, though the driving position, awkward pedals apart, is fine. The cabin decor and finish is far less luxurious than it is now, and creature comforts poorer all round. Ventilation, for instance, is feeble by any standards.

There are drawbacks, of course, to running such a bespoke muscle car, not least the very high running costs. But what a machine! And what a stunner to look at — to my eyes far cleaner and purer in line than today's be-spoilered Vantage is far more luxurious, better made, corners a lot faster but has little in hand over a well-sorted DBSV8 like this one in a drag contest. My favourite of the five by a big margin.

BMW 3.0 CSL

The L stands for Lightweight, for which you can read homologation special, though the right-hand drive cars sold in Britain were a lot heavier than the stark boy racers sold in Germany. The importers here traded some raw performance for greater civility with equipment that included power steering, proper bumpers, electric windows, sound proofing and glass (rather than Perspex) all round, which added considerably to the weight. They were — are still are — terrific road cars.

Performance is not in the Aston class but it's still pretty quick. The engine (also Bosch injected) of the car we tried *did* surge and stall at idle, but otherwise it ran sweetly enough with that characteristic straight-six yowl as it wound up its high 6400 rpm limit. There was a little more mechanical thrash than when new and I suspect not quite so much vigour, but that's hardly surprising after 56,000 miles. Apart from a graunchy clutch action, which an oil can may have cured, the drivetrain felt good, the gear-change as slick and easy as it ever was.

Prominent side pieces make the seats awkward, even painful, to get in to, but once you're installed they're superb — supportive hip-huggers that prevent any lolling about. Granny won't like them but keen drivers will. Although you sit well back from the distant dash behind a wood-rimmed steering wheel that protrudes on an unusually long column, the driving position is comfortable and commanding: despite the low seat, you get a splendid view out of the thin-pillared, deep-silled cabin that's pleasantly if not lavishly appointed. The timber-edged fascia still looked

particularly smart.

Steering is light and a little sharper than that of the Aston's and the handling first class, arguably better than that of most current BMWs (M1 apart) which are prone to oversteer quite suddenly if you lift off mid bend anywhere near the limit. The CSL doesn't, though it can still be cornered at outrageous angles on opposite lock; poise and balance were always strong suits. Like that of the Aston, the suspension was a little clonky on broken surfaces though the car rode well enough on most roads. Braking was true and powerful, by far the best of the five, and the pedal firm and reassuring.

There were no ripples on the alloy-panelled doors (easily dented) and only a couple of bubbles on the poorly protected thin-gauge steel wings (notoriously prone to rust), so the smart bodywork was not in need of urgent attention, as it is on so many CSLs. The car's biggest drawback on the road was ear-ringing wind noise from rattly windows that were no longer sealing properly. That apart, overall comfort gets a high rating — the seats, heating and ventilation were still outstanding by modern standards — and the CSL's appeal as a driving machine beyond doubt. Still a fine all-rounder.

Jaguar Mk 2 3.8

After the BMW, 12 years its junior, this fine Mk 2 felt positively vintage. Despite that — or perhaps because of it — the Jaguar's endearing character shone through within a few miles and it's hard to imagine any *interested* driver being unmoved by it. For a start, it's quick — surprisingly quick in a straight line. The engine, rebuilt only a thousand miles before, felt terrific, growling with vigour, bursting with torque, emphasising its energy with a rorty exhaust note that would still raise a few goosepimples. All out, a good 3.8 like this one will do the 0-60mph dash in 8.5 seconds, and top 120mph, which makes it almost as fast as the CSL, though the XK engine is nothing like so smooth as the BMW's at the top end; in fact it starts to sound rough at much above 4000rpm.

Changing gear calls for a decisive hand, but not an especially firm one as the incongruously delicate-looking gearlever moves easily and precisely through its very positive gate. But the synchromesh is weak so you need to double de-clutch, up and down, if the engine's extended in the lower ratios. Get it right, which isn't difficult, and it's a quick and rewarding change. The over-drive, operated by a column stalk, worked well too, and gave marvelously relaxed long-legged cruising. Again, it was excessive wind noise rather than mechanical strain that deterred sustained high speeds.

It's the handling and roadholding that betray the car's age. Steering is heavy, ponderous by modern standards, and tight turns call for energetic heaving on the thin



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Aston Martin DBS V8

A much maligned car that doesn't justify its poor reputation if well cared for, so look for a full service record, preferably with an Aston specialist. The notorious Bosch fuel injection doesn't hold its tune well and a full professional set-up can take up to a day; it's expensive to maintain but it gives a searing performance when on song. Surge at tickover is a sign of maladjustment. Oil pressure should be around 80psi at 3000rpm when hot but don't be alarmed by a very low reading at

idle. Don't be too concerned if expensive.

rattle from the gearbox when idling either: It's a quirk of the V8 engine is reliable if serviced well and regularly. Coughing and spluttering can often be cured by fitting suitable NGK plugs, but more serious problems might be encountered if the unit has covered more than 50,000 miles without a full top-end overhaul. The manual gearbox is very resilient and the automatic version should similarly give trouble-free service. Beware of a noisy differential as replacement parts are

The bodywork seems to suffer from small chips around the edges which look unsightly if left untreated. The bottoms of the aluminium wings tend to corrode, as do the inner sills which are difficult to inspect fully without removing the outer ones. Availability of parts, body panels included, is no problem so there are no worries on this score. Note that the DBS V8 became the AM V8 in 1972, and that fuel injection was abandoned for Weber carburation (much less troublesome) in late 1973.

BMW 3.0 CSL

A lightweight homologation special often run by people who drive hard so it's likely that a CSL will have had a tough life. They have strong mechanicals to ensure prolonged service, but must be maintained conscientiously. The Bosch fuel injection can be troublesome and needs accurate and careful setting. To maintain optimum performance, the valves must also be adjusted correctly. The rocker shafts and rockers can give trouble, meaning top-end work every 25,000 miles.

The bottom end is particularly strong and gives long service. Gearboxes have a bad reputation with some owners, and noises, especially in the lower gears, are not uncommon. The handbrake was never very good and the main brakes need regular attention.

The use of some light aluminium panels alleviates some of the worry of body rust but they are susceptible to dents and abrasions. New aluminium panels can be more difficult to obtain than steel ones. The inner bodyshell is the same as that of the standard 3-litre coupe and

the front section is very prone to rust at the inner wings and wheel arches. Rear-end rot at the underside and inner sections can also be a problem. Another common fault is a rotting fuel tank — a point to watch as a new tank is expensive. Window sealing in the pillarless coupe-styled body was never very good, even when new, and it gets worse with age. So wind noise can be oppressive at speed. The electrically operated windows need watching as the rear mechanism seldom work correctly and the fronts only if they are used regularly,

Jaguar Mk II 3.8

The rear spring hangers and panhard rod attachments are prone to rust. Both faults can lead to a mobile rear axle! The jacking points tend to be eaten away and the inner sills are vulnerable, as is the area around the front bumper cross braces. The brake servo reservoir is housed in the offside front wing and rot here will give vacuum loss and poor braking. The inner wheel arches, especially the back ones, the boot floor, and the main floor pan should all be checked carefully

for decay.

The front suspension is rubber mounted and the mounting blocks sometimes shear, giving rise to clunks and wayward handling. Wear in the upper and lower front ball joints affects the steering but spares are in good supply. The heavy XK engine puts a considerable load on the front springs which can sag, giving the car a nose-down attitude. The gearbox is noisy — it's a rather ancient unit with non-synchro first which calls for skilful footwork if noisy crunches are to be avoided. Expect some gearbox

noise but beware of an excessive amount, as parts can be hard to find and/or expensive. A secondhand replacement box from the less highly stressed 2.4-litre car is often the cheapest cure. Oil pressure — 40psi hot at 3000rpm is acceptable, but note that the pressure gauge is notoriously inaccurate. With the engine running, open the oil filler cap and look for a surge of lubricant when the throttle is blipped. Oil consumption is high, even on cars in good condition: 200 to 500mpg is the norm. Listen for timing chain noise; the lower chain in particular.

Jaguar XJC 4.2

Rust in the front wings is a common fault, especially along the upper edges. The sills also rot and general body tattiness is common. The rear axle location can weaken, and the radius arms and mountings can decay seriously. Accelerate to 60/70mph and then back off suddenly to test for axle mounting faults, which will be revealed as a tendency for the car to weave. Driving backwards and forwards gently will help show up UJ and diff wear as clunks and jerks. UJ, diff or rear

brake wear is not to be approached lightly, as all or part of the rear suspension assembly must be dropped to gain access.

The XJ power steering tends to develop leaks with age, as does the cooling system. Cooling leaks can be in the pipework or, more seriously, from the cylinder head or manifolds. A head leak may just be a damaged gasket or, more seriously, the head may have distorted due to overheating — so beware. Keep an eye on the temperature gauge when testing. Check the condition of the oil at the dipstick

when cold, looking for traces of water in the oil. Earlier Jags used smaller valve clearances so don't be alarmed when you raise the bonnet if you expect an utterly silent-running unit. Beware of timing chain rattles, as renewal calls for engine removal, for which a very hefty hoist is needed.

Check the electric window operation and note the amount of wind noise at speed — sealing can be a headache. Manual transmission will build up your left arm and leg muscles, so you might consider an automatic for ease.

Jensen CV8

A thick and strong glass-fibre body on a massive tubular chassis is a recipe for minimal rusting, so many CV8s are well preserved. The body can suffer some crazing, though, especially on the bonnet. The Jensen Owners Club can supply most body panels, produced using the original moulds which they hold. Although the chassis itself is long-lasting, the suspension pick-up points can weaken and even shear off, which is obviously dangerous, so check closely. The front suspen-

sion is damped by lever arms which weaken and leak and having them serviced can be difficult. You'll probably need to go to a Jensen specialist such as Cropredy Bridge Garage. The rear suspension has adjustable 'Selectaride' which also becomes inoperative and needs servicing or replacement. On a cursory check it's unlikely that you'll be able to tell whether it's working or not. Selectaride parts are hard to come by. The rear springs of the CV8 gradually 'sit down' and tail droop points to the need for replacements.

The big 6276cc Chrysler V8 engine is lightly stressed and with regular servicing, should be good for over 150,000 miles. The transmission is equally reliable and has no quirks other than those associated with extreme old age. A common CV8 fault is electrical; although the ancillary electrical units give good service, the wiring often decays or breaks. New trim and chrome parts are now unobtainable, so you may be landed with quite a bill for professional rechroming or refurbishment if you buy a ragged example. **J.J.C.**

plastic-rimmed wheel. Compared with the agile BMW, the Jaguar is sluggish in its steering response, and the cornering powers modest. Despite its great track record, the 3.8 is not a car you bomb through bends, though there's plenty of feedback to tell you when the skinny tyres start losing their grip. Push hard enough on the rather spongy brakes and the car stops all right, but they're not the sort of anchors you tax or exploit. The Jaguar's forte is straight-line performance, not deep braking or fierce cornering.

Slippery leather seats (in beautiful condition), with rather upright fixed backrests offering no side support whatsoever, don't encourage hard cornering anyway. Nor do the clutch and brake pedals, awkwardly high in relation to the throttle, inspire dextrous footwork. Apart from these gripes, the driving position behind the lovely (but unergonomic) dash is fine, though short people may find the scuttle too high. The Mk 2's instruments, especially the big rev counter and speedo, are still unsurpassed in calibration clarity. And how nice it was to fire the engine by pressing a button rather than turning a key.

Inside and out, this car was in very fine shape: it felt solid and taut and mechanically crisp and the clunk of the doors, the precise quick-action window winders and the narrowness of the shut lines were cogent reminders of the engineering quality that went into these great cars. A true classic of great character.

Jaguar XJC 4.2

Little more than a decade separates the two Jaguars yet they belong to two quite different eras and are poles apart in character and ability (performance excepted) even though powered by essentially the same engine. This XJC, the second handbuilt prototype made, is our own staff car and unusual (and rare) because it has a manual gearbox. Whereas the 3.8 Mk 2 is vintage in feel and gruff in sound, the XJ is incredibly smooth and suave. Comfort and refinement are its strong suits, reinforced by an outstanding ride that has not been achieved by sacrificing handling and roadholding, both of which are exceptional for a large saloon by any standards.

Ultra-light power steering, devoid of any feel, makes light work of town driving but is not in the Aston or BMW class for response, and the stiff gearchange of our car discourages frequent use. Fortunately, the engine's massive lugging torque — the 4.2 engine's only advantage over the otherwise superior 3.8 — will accelerate you swiftly and effortlessly without the need to change down. As a driving machine, quick and deceptively agile though it is, the XJC won't get the adrenalin flowing like the DBS will. But as a smooth and quiet express, it still has few peers, even among current luxury cars, and

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seems to me astonishing value for the £3000-£5000 outlay needed to buy an outstanding example. The quicker and even smoother V12 falls in the same price bracket, incidentally, but is very much heavier on fuel, and maintenance.

What sets the two-door Coupe apart from the commonplace XJ6 saloon is not so much innate superiority, other than in looks, but comparative scarcity. For that reason alone, they're much more desirable than the four-door cars. The design has its drawbacks, though. Wind noise generated by poor window sealing can be a problem (though it's not on this well sorted car), and the electric windows, especially the back ones, become scored if they're regularly used. The irony of the C is that with air conditioning you don't really need to open the windows at all.

Given a long main-road run, the XJ is the car I'd certainly choose to travel in out of this quintet, despite its infuriating ventilation system and the poor lumbar support of the otherwise excellent seats. Its long, loping stride in overdrive makes it a marvellously relaxing car, and its mechanical quietness borders on the uncanny. A connoisseur's car.

Jensen CV8

Having driven David Horton's famous concours-winning CV8, which is unquestionably the best of its kind in the world, anything else is bound to be a bit of a come-down. But then Horton's car would command a five-figure price (the south London fireman has already rejected an open-cheque offer from America) whereas the test car, sound in limb and body but not a concours showpiece, is yours for the price of a new Metro. Some difference. Rather than disguise the bizarre styling, a previous owner

had emphasised it with a whimsical paint job that did not, to my eyes, enhance the appearance. Jensen Car Club of Switzerland

Performance from the big, burly V8 was strong if not sensational, and the automatic transmission, which makes the car very easy to drive, worked well enough despite the odd kickdown jerk. Steering is heavy and ponderous, like that of the 3.8, but the CV8 corners pretty well with surprisingly little roll. In this department, I think it has the edge on the Jaguar. Even so, compared with the Aston, BMW and XJC, the Jensen is decidedly vintage — a feeling exacerbated by the high scuttle, huge steering wheel which transmits good feel (there's no power assistance), and rather puny flat-faced front seats that offer little side support. In its handling this massively-chassied car felt commendably taut, but the body betrayed its age with creaking joints and rough-road rattle. Wind noise, too, was very high.

CV8s were never particularly sumptuous inside — the mock-wood facia and simple decor seemed a little out of place in what was meant to be an uppercrust luxury car — and they're very short on back seat legroom considering their overall size. Despite all these obvious shortcomings and gruesome looks, the old Jensen has a curiously quaint charm which Anglo-American buffs will not dismiss lightly. And because of the rot-proof body, it's a more durable car than the more striking and glamorous Touring-styled Interceptor that supplanted it.

Aston Martin Owners Club, Gerry Hopkins, 293 Osbourne Road, Hornchurch, Essex.

Jaguar Drivers Club, Jaguar House, 18 Stuart Street, Luton LU1.

BMW Car Club, Peter Samuelson, The Old Cottage, Upper Green, St Helens, Isle of Wight.

Jensen Owners Club, Doug Mason, 'Glendale', Broad St., Heybridge, Nr Maldon, Essex.



Aston Martin DBS V8



BMW 3.0CSL



Jaguar 3.8 MkII



Jaguar XJ Coupe and below, Jensen CV8



	Aston Martin DBS V8	BMW 3.0CSL	Jaguar 3.8 Mk II	Jaguar 4.2 XJC	Jensen CV8
• not genuine ** approximate					
Buying					
Year/Mileage	1971/60,000	1973/65,000	1961/18,800*	1974/43,000	1964/81,500
Asking price	£5250	£4750	£3950	£3600	£3750
Price new	£7501	£6399	£1842	£4260	£3491
Condition	very good	good	very good	excellent	respectable
Specification					
Cylinders	90° V8	straight 6	straight 6	straight 6	90° V8
Capacity	5340cc	3003cc	3781cc	4253cc	6276cc
Valves	4ohc	sohc	2ohc	2ohc	ohv
bhp/rpm	350/6000**	200/5500	220/5500	245/5500	330/4600
Transmission	5-sp manual	4-sp manual	4-sp o/d	4-sp o/d	automatic
mph/1000rpm	26	22.1	26.4 (o/d)	(o/d)	26
Front sus.	ind coil and wishbone	MacPherson struts	ind coil and wishbone	ind coils and wishbones	ind wishbones
Rear sus.	de Dion	ind trailing arms	live axle, leafs, radius arms.	ind coils, wishbones	live axle, leaf springs
Tyres	GR70VR15	195/70VR14	6.40/15	E70VR15-SP	6.70/15
Brakes	disc/disc	disc/drum	disc/disc	disc/disc	disc/disc
Chassis	tub. steel	monocoque	monocoque	monocoque	tub. steel
Body	steel/ally	steel/ally	steel	steel	glass fibre
Weight (cwt)	34.5	29.1	29.9	33.2	29.7
Performance					
Max speed	160mph	135mph	126mph	124mph	129mph
0-60mph	5.9sec	7.0sec	8.5sec	8.8sec	6.7sec
mpg range	12-14	16-21	15-22	15-24	13-16

All the cars assessed here, with the exception of our own Jaguar XJC 4.2, were kindly lent to us by *Classic Cars of Coventry*. They were not specially picked for us: we were given a free hand to select what we wanted from the firm's very large stock of interesting machinery. For further details of these and other CCC classics, phone *Hinckley (0455) 613948*.