

Longest-running



A retired garage owner, 73-year-old Ted Parry, of Lowestoft, Suffolk, has bought a new Simca 1100 every year since it first came out: 'I was an agent for Hillman, Triumph and Fiat, but bought the Simca when I retired. I didn't like the look of it at first, but that back door and fold-over seat are amazing. I need a lot of space for lawnmowers and that sort of thing.'

His Simcas, he says, have always returned at least 33mpg, and 38mpg on a run. One of them was a 1301—the hotbed-up version—but he found that too powerful. He has had 'no big problems' with any of the cars, apart from a driveshaft out of line, which caused terrific vibrations. The fault was rectified under the manufacturer's guarantee.



Enid Garrett, a 54-year-old secretary from Overton, Hampshire, bought her first Mini—new—in 1966. In 1974 she switched to a 1968 Mk II, bought from a friend who had decided to give up motoring. She has never driven any other make.

'I love Minis,' says Enid. 'I wouldn't consider anything else. I'm a small person and they suit me. I use the car more or less just to drive to work—six miles—and at weekends. I have had hardly any trouble with either car, and no major repairs, but the gears are hard to change.'

'I didn't start learning to drive until I was in my forties, and I bought the Mini before I passed my test. I intend to change the car again soon, and it'll be for another Mini.'

the show on Broadway...



Retired financial association secretary William Gammell, 71, lives in Petersfield, Hampshire, and owns a four-year-old Hillman Hunter Estate—his second—which has done 40,000 miles. 'I'll change this one when I'm 90', he says.

'I have a country cottage in Dorset and we move the kitchen sink every time we go down there—furniture, golf clubs, dogs. We need space. We also do many long trips: Scotland every year.'

'The 1725cc engine has acceleration and flexibility. The roadholding was enormously improved when I fitted radial-ply tyres.'

He's had to buy a new clutch and starter motor for this Hunter—'like any car. But I wouldn't buy a foreign car if I could help it.'



Bill Carter

Butcher Lawrence Potter owns a new Rolls-Royce, but he likes to drive his NSU Ro80 on the country roads around Bristol, where he lives: 'Its front-wheel-drive cornering is out of this world. I drive it across fields. It'll go anywhere a Land-Rover will go.'

Potter has owned seven Ro80s since 1969, sometimes changing his car twice in one year. 'It's the best car on the road for performance, no matter what anyone else says. It does 25mpg at reasonable speeds, and about 20mpg on the motorway.'

He got a bargain with his latest—a 1971 model—buying it with 40,000 miles on the clock and a new engine. It cost £750. Today the mileage stands at 70,000 and there have been 'no repair bills'.

10th Anniversary

In 1967 the Wankel-engined NSU Ro80 was voted 'Car of the Year'; the public was also able to buy the Mini Mk II, the Hillman Hunter and the Simca 1100 for the first time. Dozens of new models have come and gone, but these four have soldiered on to become the grand old men of the motor industry. Despite detail improvements, they are still substantially the same cars, in production

in 1977, as they were 10 years ago. How have they stood up? Are they seriously to be considered, new, in 1977? Are they good secondhand buys?

Even in 1967 the Hillman Hunter was regarded as old-fashioned, compared to the Mk II Cortina that Ford was launching. With Ford now building the Mk IV Cortina, the Hunter lives on and on—albeit on borrowed time.

In 1967 the Hunter was busy laying

the foundations for its 10-year survival programme, appealing to fleet buyers with its £837 price (1977: £2342), and to traditionalists with its interior wood and sheer ordinariness. It inherited the Rootes reputation for solid manufacture, and it maintains it despite undeniably flimsy bodywork. Door sills flinch visibly under finger pressure; rust protection leaves much to be desired.

Engine oil leaks are a problem destined never to be cured, but, in

terms of burning the stuff, consumption is modest. Performance and mpg figures from the 1725cc engine were reasonable in 1967, and they are reasonable today. Gentle driving returns up to 35mpg; a heavy foot clocks 23mpg. A 0–60mph time of 15sec hardly makes it a ball of fire.

At a time when everyone except the Japanese was going for rack-and-pinion steering, the Hunter's recirculating-ball mechanism showed there were two sides to every story. It

offered good road feel without kick-back, and lightness without too much wheel-twiddling on corners. But, 10 years on, the Hunter is somewhat broken-winded. The ride now seems jittery, and handling qualities are unlikely to excite an enthusiast; low speeds and bad roads prove an unhappy combination. Normal cornering produces little roll and gentle understeer, but on a wet day a Hunter can become distinctly tail-happy. Brakes are spongy, despite the addition of servo-assistance.

Reliability is what keeps the Hunter in demand on the secondhand scene. The works will certainly outlast the body, so the motto is: 'If it looks all right, it probably is all right'.

In 1967 this was the only car in its class to have the option of a factory-fitted overdrive, and it is worth searching for it on the secondhand market. Without it, you can expect an unfriendly growl at 60–65mph, and the engine becomes just plain fussy at the motorway maximum.

October 1967... and the **Mini Mk II** had arrived. The big news was the availability of the 998cc engine, previously fitted only to the now-long-gone Wolseley Hornet and Riley Elf, but the updated Mini also featured a short, upright, remote-control gear lever, a tighter turning circle and better brakes and seating.

The car was noisy, and ride-quality only average, but owners could forget the problems and talk instead of the car's already-legendary handling and its many sporting successes. The Mini was still a cult.

It was nice to tootle along, covering 40 miles for every gallon of 4-star

fuel (even press-on drivers could manage at least 35mpg). There were rust-trapping external door hinges, and overall protection against the rust-bug had made little progress since the Mini's launch in 1959. Cheap sliding windows were still the order of the day, but owners appreciated the roomy holdalls fitted into the doors. BMC was still struggling to sort out the car's Hydrolastic suspension, fitted with a blare of publicity in 1965.

Move on 10 years... and the Mini still looks much the same. With petrol heading for £1 a gallon, the consumption figures are more relevant than ever; but the eyebrows of 1967's customers, with the £603 purchase price, would certainly have shot up at the idea of paying nearly £2000 for a top-of-the-range 1275GT, as we must today.

In 1977 the car is certainly quieter and more comfortable, not to mention the sheer luxury of wind-up windows (which have banished those door holdalls) and syncromesh on first gear. The problem is that the Mini, once a cult, has become an institution. And, as the joke goes, who wants to live in an institution? The Ford and VW super-minis are now cleaning up.

Today's demand for economical transport (cheap spares; Group 1 insurance) has kept secondhand Mini prices buoyant, although well cared-for examples are hard to find. Rust remains a bogey, and it is worth running over the bodywork with a magnet to check for plastic filler: botched repairs are common.

Today's Mini has a reputation for reliability—learned the hard way by

the maker. But early models suffered problems with engine cooling, the fuel system and the driveshafts. Used automatics should prove cheaper than cars with manual changes, as the auto gearbox fitted (from 1969) was hardly smooth or refined.

The golden rule with the Mini is to spend every penny you can afford to buy a recent model that will incorporate the many modifications made over the years. A cheap Mini could prove expensive...

A hatchback with a transverse engine and front-wheel drive? It could be any one of the new breed of cars DRIVE tests on pages 16–25, and a few more besides. But in 1967 this was the **Simca 1100**, looking a very attractive buy indeed at £790.

Road testers praised the Simca's long-journey comfort which few small cars could then match and few can match even today. They were also impressed by its comprehensive equipment: it was fairly unusual, 10 years ago, to find a car of the Simca's price fitted with an alternator and a five-bearing crankshaft.

French roads are rough but straight, and there the Simca was in its element—a real smoothy that stayed level all the time and took everything in its stride. British drivers, however, were not so enthusiastic about the cornering roll and steering heaviness when the car was pressed hard; and despite having disc brakes at the front—again ahead of many rivals—it needed a hefty stomp to bring the anchors on.

Somehow, British buyers failed to be wooed by the ease with which the Simca converted into a useful load

carrier (legroom for human cargo was less satisfactory). It was never to be a volume seller in the UK.

In 1977, the Simca 1100 is found to be remarkably unchanged, although the range has expanded to provide more up-market models with bigger engines and twin-choke Weber carburettors. And the price has moved up to £2122. Two extra doors were added in 1968, and these were needed: getting to the back seat was a job for an acrobat. A brake servo was added in 1971, but this made the brakes rather *too* light.

The standard 1118cc is quick for its class, reaching 60mph in 16.5sec and giving a top speed of 85mph. Consumption should average just under 35mpg.

Panelwork was thin in the early days, and it is worth checking pre-1973 models for paintwork problems. Chrysler's priming system seems to work, however.

Early models had electrical and general ignition troubles which could prove expensive to put right on a secondhand car, simply because the Simca is a foreigner. Buyers should also look out for problems with the final drive which is inevitably subject to wear.

If the **NSU Ro80** had been fitted with a conventional piston engine, instead of the twin-rotor Wankel unit, it might well be a car to rank alongside the Mercedes Benz 280SE or the Jaguar XJ6. But the Ro80 never recovered from an early reputation for needing new engines like other people's cars needed new oil filters—every 10,000 miles. The problem was caused by wear of the

rotor tips, and is still a worry today. But demand has dropped to the point where new Ro80s are only built for the UK to special order . . . and at £8000 a time (1967 price: £2249), there aren't many orders.

These days, the modest 20mpg that is the best any driver can hope for is very off-putting, and the effect of a heavy right foot is frightening to contemplate. But in 1967, when petrol cost only 28p (5s 8d) a gallon for the Ro80's 2-star, no one complained.

When it first appeared, the Ro80 was acclaimed for its smoothness and silence. Owners boasted that the car was as quiet at 90mph as it was at 30. It was true then, and it is now, but acceleration may these days be more important than the Ro80's 'illegal' top speed of 110mph. A 0-60mph time of 12.5sec may be acceptable, but the £8000 buyer can get more for his money. The 30-50 mph time of 9.3sec is better.

Technically, the Ro80 is a very advanced design—on paper, at any rate. With the engine reluctant to produce any sort of punch at low revs, the complex transmission

system maintains 3000rpm in any of the three gears. While gearbox and clutch remain conventional, the clutch is operated not by a foot pedal but by an electro-pneumatic sensor in the gear lever. It works admirably—once you get over the desire to stab the brake as you change gear.

Power steering is as good by modern standards as it was 10 years ago, and the NSU's set-up remains one of the few to offer real road feel. With progressive understeer on fast cornering, and a tail that cannot be unglued, handling is superb.

As a used-car buy today, the Ro80 offers quality motoring on the cheap . . . provided nothing goes drastically wrong. Its reputation for being expensive to own has sent secondhand prices crashing through the floor. Although most items under the bonnet are easy to find, the complexities of the engine will send owners scurrying to costly garages.

The modern Ro80 may be a reliable limousine, but it could be like living with a reformed husband-poisoner. Could you ever really trust it?

BOB OXFORD

Second-time-around Hunter, Mini, Simca 1100, Ro80 price guide

Model	HILLMAN Hunter Super	GLS 4-door	Estate DL	BLMC/LEYLAND Mini 850	Mini 1000	Mini 1000 automatic	SIMCA 1100 3-door	1100 5-door	1100 5-door Special	NSU Ro80
1971	760	—	870	555	620	660	595	700	—	1015
1972	805	970	1030	655	730	795	730	855	875	1440
1973	1065	1140	1230	770	860	950	880	1030	1060	1600
1974	1350	1455	1485	905	1005	1425	1050	1230	1265	1990
1975	1585	1705	1755	1050	1170	1330	1250	1460	1505	2440
1976	1865	2000	2050	1260	1380	1565	1575	1810	1880	?