



Alfa Romeo's reputation for fine, charismatic engines remains intact with 33's 1712cc 16-valve unit, which thrives at top end of rev band but is also surprisingly frugal. Peak power is 137bhp at 6500rpm. As well as improvements to the engine, the fascia has been revamped and the suspension relocated

DAVID BURGESS



STAN PAPIOR

**TEST  
EXTRA**

# Alfa Romeo 33 Boxer 16V

Engine, chassis and cosmetic changes have made the 33 a better car, but many of the old flaws remain

**Price** £11,790 **Top Speed** 128mph **0-60** 8.9secs **MPG** 29.7

**For** Fine engine, price, roomy interior, fuel economy

**Against** Driving position, vague handling, torque steer



THE ALFA ROMEO 33 ALWAYS looked good in the showroom. It was a roomy, attractive, five-door hatchback, powered by a charismatic engine for what appeared to be a bargain price.

But in the past it failed to fulfil this promise on the road. In its previous 1.7-litre form it torque-steered badly, making it hard to enjoy the engine's lively performance and characterful delivery. The cabin lacked ergonomic coherence and the driving position seemed more suited to primates than to humans.

All of which overshadowed that superb overhead-cam flat-four, first seen as far back as the 1971 Turin show in the much-missed Alfasud. The 33 was a poor replacement for the 'Sud. It had neither the handling finesse, nor the indomitable character which made the 'Sud a favourite among European enthusiasts.

Now, however, it has been given a long overdue rethink. To combat the torque-steer the suspension has been relocated front and

rear, the fascia has been revamped and the exterior restyled by Walter da Silva, creator of the SZ coupe's controversial shape.

Most importantly, though, the 1712cc engine has been given four camshafts and 16 valves, allowing it to develop 137bhp at 6500rpm and 119lb ft torque at 4600rpm. That's 19bhp and 10lb ft torque up on the old dual camshaft, eight-valve, carburettor-fed engine. That, too, has been given a new lease of life by Bosch fuel injection and lives on in the £10,550 33 1.7 IE.

The 33 16V is more powerful than any of its rivals, yet it costs just £11,790 and is undercut only by the £11,429 Volkswagen Golf GTi and the Ford Escort XR3i, the latter costing just £100 less than the Alfa. And these two are respectively 25bhp and 32bhp weaker than the Alfa. If you want to get even close to the new unit's output, it's going to cost you more. You can buy a spacious but ageing Citroen BX 19GTi with 125bhp for £12,623, or there is the

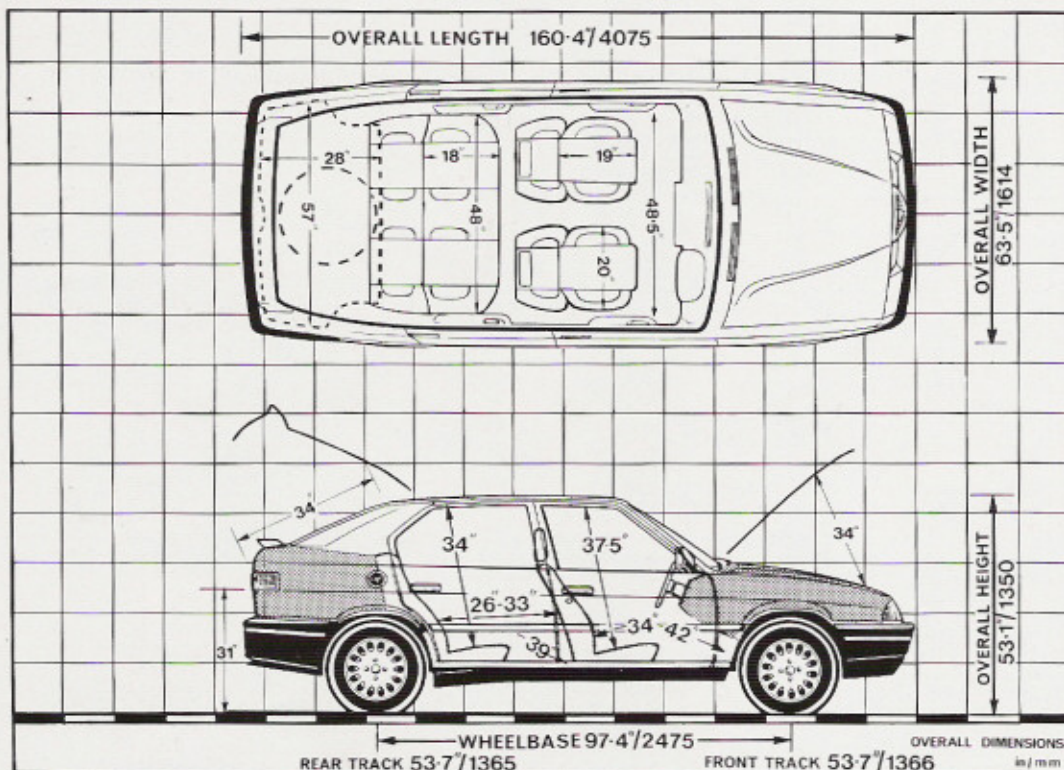
redoubtable Peugeot 309GTi, with five doors, at £12,995. Honda's Longbridge-built Concerto 1.6i-16 matches the Peugeot's 130bhp for £1000 less.

#### PERFORMANCE AND ECONOMY

Buy an Alfa and, if nothing else, it will have a first-rate engine. You know the 33 16V is a class act the moment you twist the key. Bosch Motronic fuel injection ensures it fires up immediately, with the same song the first Alfasud sang nearly 20 years ago. Then the engine had only 1186cc, breathed through a single Weber carburettor and developed just 63bhp. Now with well over twice as much power it is as unmistakable as ever. But its voice has broken now and, where it rasped before, it now roars. If anything, its charge for the 6750rpm red line is even more zestful.

The downside is that you now have to rev the engine past 4000rpm before the advantage of the new cylinder heads starts to tell. Couple ▶

# ALFA ROMEO 33 BOXER 16V



## PERFORMANCE

| MAXIMUM SPEEDS |     |      |      |
|----------------|-----|------|------|
| Gear           | mph | km/h | rpm  |
| Top (mean)     | 128 | 206  | 6450 |
| (best)         | 129 | 208  | 6500 |
| 4th (mean)     | 117 | 118  | 6750 |
| 3rd            | 86  | 138  | 6750 |
| 2nd            | 61  | 98   | 6750 |
| 1st            | 36  | 58   | 6750 |

### ACCELERATION FROM REST

| True mph | Time (secs) | Speedo mph |
|----------|-------------|------------|
| 30       | 3.3         | 35         |
| 40       | 4.8         | 45         |
| 50       | 6.8         | 56         |
| 60       | 8.9         | 66         |
| 70       | 11.8        | 77         |
| 80       | 15.0        | 88         |
| 90       | 19.3        | 99         |
| 100      | 25.0        | 109        |
| 110      | 33.5        | 119        |

**Standing 1/4-mile:** 16.7secs, 84mph

**Standing km:** 29.9secs, 108mph

**30-70mph thro' gears:** 8.5secs

### ACCELERATION IN EACH GEAR

| mph    | Top  | 4th  | 3rd | 2nd |
|--------|------|------|-----|-----|
| 10-30  | —    | —    | 7.6 | 4.8 |
| 20-40  | 12.8 | 9.7  | 6.2 | 4.3 |
| 30-50  | 11.1 | 8.4  | 6.0 | 4.0 |
| 40-60  | 11.2 | 8.7  | 5.9 | 4.0 |
| 50-70  | 11.6 | 8.7  | 5.9 | —   |
| 60-80  | 12.8 | 8.7  | 6.1 | —   |
| 70-90  | 14.3 | 9.2  | —   | —   |
| 80-100 | 15.3 | 10.5 | —   | —   |
| 90-110 | 18.4 | 13.0 | —   | —   |

### FUEL CONSUMPTION

**Overall mpg:** 29.7 (9.5 litres/100km)  
**Touring mpg\*:** 32.7 (8.6 litres/100km)  
**Govt tests mpg:** 27.2mpg (urban)

47.9mpg (steady 56mph)  
 35.8mpg (steady 75mph)

**Fuel grade:** Four star (97RM) or unleaded (95RM) or (98+RM)

**Tank capacity:** 10.9 gallons (50 litres)

**Max range\*:** 356 miles

\* Based on Government fuel economy figures: 50 per cent of urban cycle, 25 per cent each of 56/75mph consumptions.

### BRAKING

**Fade** (from 84mph in neutral)

**Pedal load (lb) for 0.5g stops**

| start/end | start/end |
|-----------|-----------|
| 1 40-25   | 6 45-50   |
| 2 40-35   | 7 50-50   |
| 3 45-25   | 8 60-50   |
| 4 40-25   | 9 65-50   |
| 5 55-40   | 10 75-55  |

**Response** (from 30mph in neutral)

| Load          | g    | Distance |
|---------------|------|----------|
| 10lb          | 0.10 | 300ft    |
| 30lb          | 0.55 | 55ft     |
| 50lb          | 0.70 | 44ft     |
| 70lb          | 0.85 | 35ft     |
| 90lb          | 1.00 | 30ft     |
| Parking brake | 0.30 | 100ft    |

### WEIGHT

**Kerb** 2225lb/1010kg

**Distribution** %F/R 61/39

**Test** 2655lb/1205kg

**Max payload** 914lb/415kg

**Max towing weight** 2425lb/1100kg

### TEST CONDITIONS

|                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Wind</b>          | 18-25mph             |
| <b>Temperature</b>   | 15deg C (56deg F)    |
| <b>Barometer</b>     | 1010mbar             |
| <b>Surface</b>       | dry asphalt/concrete |
| <b>Test distance</b> | 840 miles            |

Figures taken at 2900 miles by our own staff at the Lotus Group proving ground, Millbrook.

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## SPECIFICATION

### ENGINE

Transverse, front, front-wheel drive.  
**Capacity** 1712cc, 4 cylinders horizontally opposed.  
**Bore** 87mm, **stroke** 72mm.  
**Compression ratio** 9.5 to 1.  
**Head/block** al alloy/cast iron.  
**Valve gear** dohc, 4 valves per cylinder.  
**Ignition and fuel** Electronic ignition, Bosch Motronic ML 4.1 fuel injection.  
**Max power** 137bhp (PS-DIN) (102kW ISO) at 6500rpm. **Max torque** 119lb ft (161 Nm) at 4600rpm.

### TRANSMISSION

5-speed manual.

| Gear | Ratio | mph/1000rpm |
|------|-------|-------------|
| Top  | 0.85  | 19.9        |
| 4th  | 1.03  | 17.4        |
| 3rd  | 1.32  | 12.8        |
| 2nd  | 1.86  | 9.1         |
| 1st  | 3.14  | 5.4         |

Final drive ratio 3.89 to 1.

### SUSPENSION

**Front**, independent, MacPherson struts, lower wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.  
**Rear**, beam axle, trailing arms, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.

### STEERING

Rack and pinion, power assisted, 3.1 turns lock to lock.

### BRAKES

**Front** 9.4ins (239mm) dia ventilated disc.  
**Rear** 8.0ins (203mm) dia drums.

### WHEELS AND TYRES

Cast alloy 5.5 x 14ins rims. Pirelli P.4000 185/60VR14 tyres.

### SOLD IN THE UK BY

Alfa Romeo (GB) Ltd  
 Poulton Close  
 Dover, Kent  
 CT17 0HP  
 Tel: (0304) 212500

## COSTS

### Prices

|                                    |         |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| <b>Total</b> (in UK)               | £11,790 |
| <b>Delivery, road tax, plates</b>  | £185    |
| <b>On the road price</b>           | £11,975 |
| <b>Options fitted to test car:</b> | None    |
| <b>Total as tested</b>             | £11,975 |

### SERVICE

Major service 24,000 miles — service time 2.5 hrs. Intermediate service 12,000 miles — service time 0.9 hrs.

### PARTS COST (Inc VAT)

|                             |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Oil filter                  | £8.17   |
| Air filter                  | £13.86  |
| Spark plugs (set)           | £19.83  |
| Brake pads (2 wheels) front | £59.29  |
| Brake pads (2 wheels) rear  | £52.90  |
| Exhaust complete            | £259.38 |
| Tyre — each (typical)       | £78.20  |
| Windscreen                  | £111.72 |
| Headlamp unit               | £90.91  |
| Front wing                  | £94.01  |
| Rear bumper                 | £184.00 |

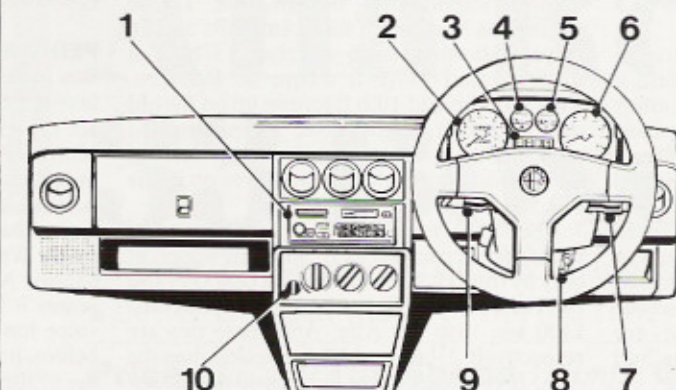
### WARRANTY

12 months/unlimited mileage, 6 years anti-corrosion, 12 months breakdown recovery.

### EQUIPMENT

- Anti-lock brakes
- Alloy wheels
- Auto gearbox
- Power assisted steering
- Steering rake adjustment
- Adjustable upper belt anchorage
- Seat tilt adjustment
- Lumbar adjustment
- Split rear seat
- Remote boot/hatch release
- Internal mirror adjustment
- Flick wipe
- Programmed wash wipe
- Revcounter
- Lockable glovebox
- Radio/cassette player
- Electrical aerial
- 4 speakers
- Electric windows F
- Central locking
- Tailgate wash wipe
- Driving lamps
- Tinted glass
- Sunroof
- Metallic paint

● Standard — Not available



1 Radio cassette 2 Speedometer 3 Warning lights 4 Temperature gauge 5 Fuel gauge 6 Revcounter 7 Windscreen wiper/washer and rear screen controls 8 Steering adjuster lever 9 Indicator/lights stalk 10 Heating & ventilation controls

DAVID BURGESS



◀ this with mediocre traction and it's understandably why the car is slower off the line than Alfa claims: 0-60mph in 8.9secs instead of 8secs dead. This represents a scant 0.2sec improvement over the time recorded by its predecessor.

An even bigger disappointment is the 33's overtaking power. You need 8.4secs to cover 30-50mph in fourth and 11.6secs for 50-70mph in fifth. The eight-valve version needed just 8.0secs and 10.8secs for the same increments.

The new engine really comes on song only at much higher speeds. It gets from 80-100mph in fifth in 15.3secs; over three seconds faster than of old. Top speed also rockets skywards, from a class-competitive 118mph to an all-conquering 128mph.

So if you are to reap the rewards of the new engine, you will really have to drive the car hard through the gears. Many would argue that's how it should be with an Alfa. Treat the car this way and the gearbox is a useful ally.

With perfect ratios allowing maximum speed to occur bang on the power peak, you can palm the lever around the gearbox gate as swiftly as you wish. If the action feels a little rubbery, it is only because Alfa has capped the gearstick with a soft rubber top which flexes unpleasantly in your hand as you change gear.

What comes as a complete surprise is the 33's economy. Running exclusively on unleaded, although it will take four star, it achieved a remarkable 29.7mpg during a week's hard testing. Of its rivals, only the least powerful XR3i did better, recording 30.8mpg overall. It is a testament to the sheer efficiency of the new engine that such a feat is possible. Considering its predilection for high revs and no-nonsense gearing, such a result is a real achievement.

#### HANDLING AND RIDE

Suspension changes have transformed the 33's handling. The MacPherson struts at the front have new mounting blocks and bearings while the rear beam axle gets a revised location for its struts. That's the good news. What Alfa will not want to hear is that the 33 still fails to apply its power properly.

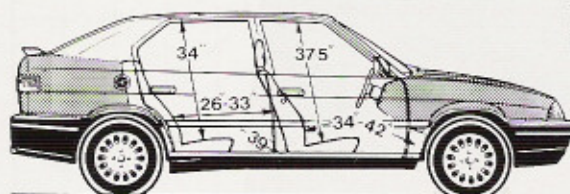
Floor the throttle in first or second and you can still feel the engine influencing the steering, even in a straight line. No, it won't ▶



**Panel fit on test 33 was even if not tight. Access to roomy boot is hindered by large sill and narrow opening**

# THE RIVALS

## ALFA ROMEO 33 BOXER 16V



Length 160.4ins. Width 63.5ins. Front track 53.8ins. Wt. dist F/R 61/39. Wheelbase 97.4ins. Height 53.1ins. Rear track 53.7ins.

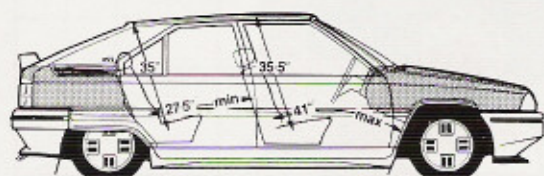
£11,790



With more power and less flaws than ever before, this latest 33 will appeal to those who need a good value, roomy five-door hatch and appreciate the responses of its characterful engine. However, its poor handling, awful driving position and fussy motorway ride are difficult to overlook. A car for those prepared to tolerate its faults for the sake of its individuality.

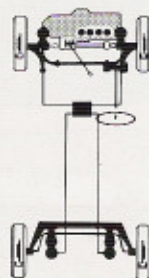
|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Capacity            | 1712cc              |
| Power               | 137bhp at 6500rpm   |
| Torque              | 119lb ft at 4600rpm |
| Max speed           | 128mph              |
| 0-60mph             | 8.9secs             |
| 30-70 through gears | 8.5secs             |
| ss ¼ mile           | 16.7secs/84mph      |
| 30-50 in fourth     | 8.4secs             |
| 50-70 in fifth      | 11.6secs            |
| MPG overall/touring | 29.7/32.7           |
| MPH/1000rpm in top  | 19.9                |
| Kerb weight         | 2225lb              |
| Date tested         | 11.7.90             |

## CITROEN BX 19GTi



Length 166.5ins. Width 65.3ins. Front track 55.5ins. Wt. dist F/R N/A. Wheelbase 104.5ins. Height 53.8ins. Rear track 55.5ins.

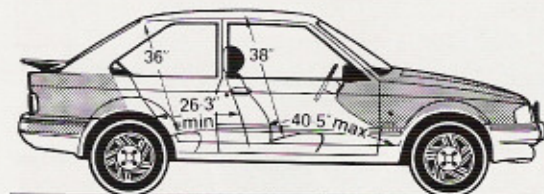
£12,623



The BX looks tempting, with its solid performance, extensive equipment and roomy cabin. It's also very reasonably priced. But it is getting a shade long in the tooth now and still fails to meet the construction standards achieved by many of its opponents. Thanks to hydropneumatic suspension, the BX is still the best riding and most comfortable car in its class.

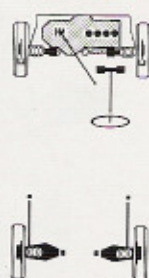
|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Capacity            | 1905cc              |
| Power               | 125bhp at 5500rpm   |
| Torque              | 128lb ft at 4500rpm |
| Max speed           | 120mph              |
| 0-60mph             | 9.0secs             |
| 30-70 through gears | 9.1secs             |
| ss ¼ mile           | 16.6secs/82mph      |
| 30-50 in fourth     | 7.4secs             |
| 50-70 in fifth      | 10.6secs            |
| MPG overall/touring | 27.1/33.8           |
| MPH/1000rpm in top  | 21.1                |
| Kerb weight         | 2265lb              |
| Date tested         | 13.8.86             |

## FORD ESCORT XR3i



Length 159.3ins. Width 62.5ins. Front track 54.5ins. Wt. dist F/R 60/40. Wheelbase 94.5ins. Height 53.1ins. Rear track 56.3ins.

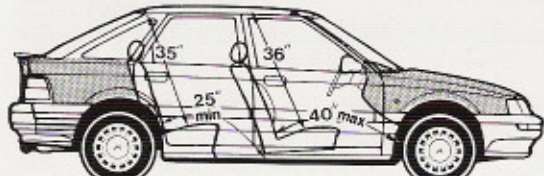
£11,690



Despite good looks, economy, grip and sales figures that are the envy of hot hatch manufacturers in this country, the XR3i lags far behind much of the opposition in many areas. Its coarse engine delivers too few horsepower and performance suffers as a result. It also has an unrefined and hard ride as a price to pay for the competent handling.

|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Capacity            | 1597cc              |
| Power               | 105bhp at 6000rpm   |
| Torque              | 104lb ft at 4800rpm |
| Max speed           | 116mph              |
| 0-60mph             | 9.6secs             |
| 30-70 through gears | 9.2secs             |
| ss ¼ mile           | 17.0secs/81mph      |
| 30-50 in fourth     | 7.3secs             |
| 50-70 in fifth      | 12.8secs            |
| MPG overall/touring | 30.8/34.6           |
| MPH/1000rpm in top  | 20.3                |
| Kerb weight         | 2133lb              |
| Date tested         | 8.10.86             |

## HONDA CONCERTO 1.6i-16



Length 167.9ins. Width 76.5ins. Front track 58.0ins. Wt. dist F/R 58/42. Wheelbase 100.4ins. Height 55.0ins. Rear track 57.9ins.

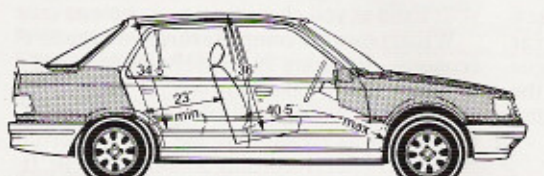
£11,998



This Honda ought to be substantially better than it is. Equipped with the screaming twin-cam engine from the CRX, performance is surprisingly sluggish and fuel economy poor. Handling is fine until you push it really hard, and then its responses degenerate towards the ragged. But it is beautifully built in and out, with good levels of comfort and equipment.

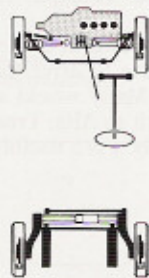
|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Capacity            | 1590cc              |
| Power               | 130bhp at 6800rpm   |
| Torque              | 105lb ft at 5700rpm |
| Max speed           | 120mph              |
| 0-60mph             | 9.3secs             |
| 30-70 through gears | 9.4secs             |
| ss ¼ mile           | 17.2secs/82mph      |
| 30-50 in fourth     | 8.2secs             |
| 50-70 in fifth      | 12.9secs            |
| MPG overall/touring | 25.7/32.5           |
| MPH/1000rpm in top  | 18.1                |
| Kerb weight         | 2511lb              |
| Date tested         | 3.1.90              |

## PEUGEOT 309GTi 5dr



Length 159.4ins. Width 64.0ins. Front track 55.4ins. Wt. dist F/R 60/40. Wheelbase 97.2ins. Height 54.3ins. Rear track 54.1ins.

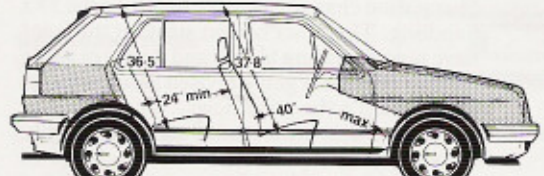
£12,995



The 309 is still the pick of the class for serious drivers. It combines strong performance with superlative grip in one of the best-balanced front-drive chassis in production. Now that the interior has been given a much needed rethink, it looks the part, too. It's not as refined or solidly built as some rivals, though, and equipment levels could be better.

|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Capacity            | 1905cc              |
| Power               | 130bhp at 6000rpm   |
| Torque              | 119lb ft at 4750rpm |
| Max speed           | 122mph              |
| 0-60mph             | 8.8secs             |
| 30-70 through gears | 8.7secs             |
| ss ¼ mile           | 16.5secs/83mph      |
| 30-50 in fourth     | 6.3secs             |
| 50-70 in fifth      | 9.9secs             |
| MPG overall/touring | 25.2/33.3           |
| MPH/1000rpm in top  | 20.9                |
| Kerb weight         | 2176lb              |
| Date tested         | 10.5.89             |

## VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTi



Length 156.9ins. Width 66.1ins. Front track 56.0ins. Wt. dist F/R N/A. Wheelbase 97.4ins. Height 55.3ins. Rear track 56.0ins.

£11,929



The Golf's alleged sovereignty over the hot-hatch kingdom looks increasingly tenuous as its 15th birthday looms near. Its performance is now off the pace and its secure handling lacks sparkle. Still, if you want that legendary dependability and build quality, the Golf can be very attractive, even if it is spartanly equipped and not as capacious as some rivals.

|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Capacity            | 1781cc              |
| Power               | 112bhp at 5400rpm   |
| Torque              | 117lb ft at 4000rpm |
| Max speed           | 115mph              |
| 0-60mph             | 9.2secs             |
| 30-70 through gears | 9.0secs             |
| ss ¼ mile           | 17.0secs/81mph      |
| 30-50 in fourth     | 6.5secs             |
| 50-70 in fifth      | 9.6secs             |
| MPG overall/touring | 26.7/35.7           |
| MPH/1000rpm in top  | 20.8                |
| Kerb weight         | 2225lb              |
| Date tested         | 9.5.90              |

throw you from side to side as before, but such bad manners will dissuade you from exploiting the performance to the full in lower gears.

The steering, which has at last been given power assistance, lacks feel. It has positive gearing and a reassuring weightiness, but when you are really moving, it fails to relay road conditions to the driver.

This problem is accentuated in the wet when the 185/60 Pirelli P4000s lose grip easily, often with little warning. But should you get into such trouble, the chassis will faithfully adjust back onto line if you ease off the accelerator.

Similarly, the brakes inspire little confidence but, *in extremis*, they always deliver the goods in the end. Using ventilated discs up front and drums behind, you have to tread hard to achieve decent deceleration, up to 90lb of pressure for a full 1.0g stop.

The ride is flawed, too. Driving in town, the 33 absorbs potholes and bumps with impressive ease. Even on country roads, despite a slight shaking through the bodyshell on very rough B-roads, most ruts are diluted away to nothing by the long travel, relatively soft springing.

But its nervous behaviour on the motorway is a let-down. It fidgets incessantly on coarse tarmac and is a constant source of distraction.

#### AT THE WHEEL

Everyone who drives a 33 complains about the ludicrous driving position. Until the new bodyshell, loosely based on the Fiat Tipo's floorpan, appears in 1994 there is not a lot Alfa can do about it.

Essentially, the pedals are too close together, too near to the seat squab and badly offset to the left in right-hand-drive cars. This is compounded by a steering wheel which adjusts for rake but not reach, and is, itself, slightly offset to the left. Regardless of your size you find yourself sitting diagonally to the centre axis of the car. After a few hours of this, anyone remotely long in the leg is going to start aching.

A new, leather-rimmed wheel has also been fitted and behind it the instruments are easily read. But it is still unwise to trust the wildly fluctuating fuel gauge much below the quarter-full mark.

#### COMFORT AND SPACE

The amount of space inside the 33 seems at odds with its exterior dimensions. Passengers are well looked after and there is enough head and legroom to keep a couple of six-footers happy in the back. The boot will swallow most normal loads but it does have a high sill.

As a long-distance car, the 33's ride and cramped driving position compromise the comfort afforded by excellent seats and low noise levels. The engine is a shade intrusive, but at least the noise is pure-bred and pleasing.

#### FINISH AND EQUIPMENT

Although Alfa Romeo has been panned in the past for shoddy construction, recent experience of 164s and now this 33 proves how far it has come. Although its build quality will not worry Volkswagen, it has a solid feel which belies its trim 2225lb kerbweight. Panel fit is even, although it could be tighter, and the paint is deep and lustrous.

The 33 comes with alloy wheels, central locking and electric windows. One glaring omission is ABS, which you will not find even on the options sheet.



**Although 33's revised cabin gets few marks for its driving position, it has plenty of space, front and rear. Seats are excellent**

#### VERDICT

You will have realised by now that the Alfa 33 is still a severely flawed package. The handling, though much improved, prevents you from taking full advantage of its new-found power. The new engine, while improving top-end performance, suffers from low-down lethargy.

It is also far from perfect inside. The days when Italian cars required drivers with short legs and long arms should have passed.

Still, the engine is nothing less than a classic, capable of giving both exceptional throttle response and remarkable fuel economy. Many Alfa fans will buy it just for that. The 33 is also notably spacious and the improvements to the interior make it an acceptable touring car.

It's not going to be everybody's obvious choice, but then which Alfa ever was? What

matters are the improvements over the old model, because you can now concentrate more on what the 33 does right — and forgive its faults more easily, too. Best of all, the 33 16V is superb value for money and, if for no other reason than that, it deserves to succeed. ■

#### SUMMARY

|               |          |
|---------------|----------|
| Performance   | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Economy       | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Transmission  | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Handling      | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Ride comfort  | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Accommodation | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Boot/storage  | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| At the wheel  | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Visibility    | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Instruments   | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Heating       | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Ventilation   | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Noise         | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Finish        | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |
| Equipment     | ★★★★★☆☆☆ |

#### OUR RATING VALUERATING

★★★★★☆☆☆  
★★★★★☆☆☆