

The Marina 262 has good looks, sparkling performance, outstanding economy and handles like a drunken ballerina on rough surfaces. All in all...

# A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

LATE IN 1973 we drove a pre-release Marina 262 Coupe, as did many other motoring writers. Unlike most of our colleagues we were not commissioned to report on the car, so had the choice of avoiding the wrath of Leyland. And if we had reported our impressions of the Red Six honestly, which would have been our duty, then we certainly would have crossed swords with the British Giant.

However, our contemporaries had no choice but to release their findings and Leyland promptly withheld its test fleet until it could iron out the bugs and re-release the Marina as a better prepared unit.

After having driven the second car, a Super Sedan with Luxury Option Pack, we now feel more inclined to state our observations of the pre-release coupe. To be fair, we must say we were

unaware at the time of several ill-equipped areas on the first car; engine mounts and suspension bushes for instance, caused by shortages of the correct parts. But the coupe did ride roughly; handle indifferently; have mushy brakes, excessive steering feedback, gearknob frizzle, and a pronounced scuttle shake. And nobody was very happy with that lot.

The Super Sedan we tested was much







*Excessive nose dip accompanies hard braking. Brake fade became pronounced during tests. But despite all, rear wheels never lock.*

better prepared and properly representative of the Red Six range.

Better equipped in many ways, the sedan was shod with Dunlop Aquajet radials (optional) as against the standard crossplys that came with the coupes. They made a helluva difference, encouraging the car to be much more sure footed and generally quieter on the road without undue harshness or thump. So it would be worth a buyer's

while to fit radials straight off, as we are sure that sticking to crossplys would be a distinct disadvantage. Noise, road-holding and ride would be affected and to stay with crossplys would undoubtedly be false economy.

The sedan showed the same tremendous acceleration and flexibility as did the coupe and is outstandingly economical for its size and performance. While not precisely encouraging the

driver who wants to drive really hard, the car will run with silky ease, forever, at 112 kph (70 mph) and has the performance potential to well exceed that mark. Provided you have a good road it's a simple matter of sitting back and cruising in reasonable quiet and comfort.

However, rougher tar, with bumps or ripples or a corner with an undulating surface, will quickly unsettle your cool as the car often reacts to such conditions roughly and unpredictably. At quicker crushing speeds you simply cannot take the car for granted. Do so and you may well be caught out, especially on a road which is poorly surfaced and twisty. The car will skitter about in those conditions, breaking away in oversteer and ploughing about in understeer, calling for constant correcting.

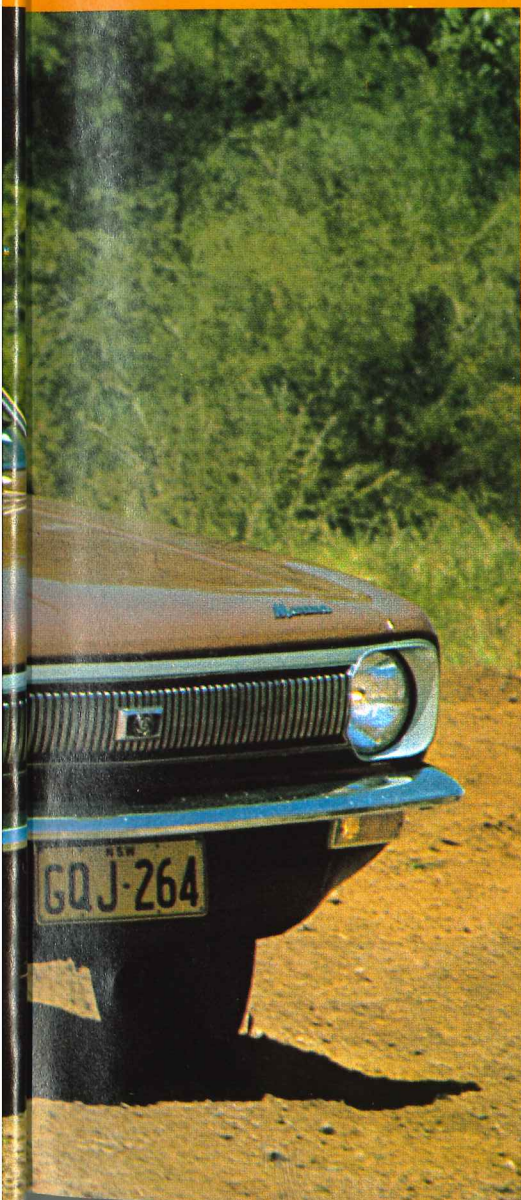
The problems will not occur at relatively "ordinary" speeds. But the car cannot be pushed without some trouble, so we must say there are undesirable traits in the handling department.

The abrupt and varied behavior of handling and roadholding when under duress indicates one of two things; the system is basically poor in design, or has not been thoroughly vetted to negate the remaining conflicts in the geometry springing, damping, axle location and other factors.

Adequate, it is, with the suggestion arising that the system's development may have been halted when "normal" requirements had been met.

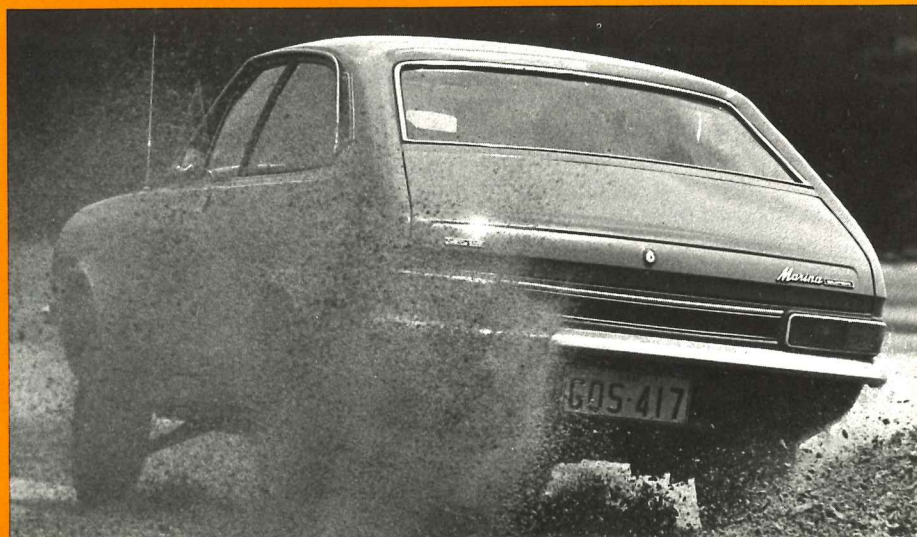
In complete discord is the car's performance, which is nothing short of outstanding.

At 2.6 litres this three-speed Marina will murder its nearest rivals — the four-speed 3.3-litre Torana and 4.1-litre Cortina — through all gears and in the speed ranges.



*Above: Easily read through the steering wheel, the three-dial instrumentation is fairly basic. Coupe version offers tachometer instead of clock.*

*The Marina hanging out. Happens a little too often for comfort.*





Marina will go through the gears to 94 kph (60 mph) in 9.5 seconds, where both the 202 Torana and Cortina 250 take 11.0 seconds to get there. The run to 129 kph (80 mph) will take the Red Six 17.7, while the Torana takes 19.4 and the Cortina 19.9. Top gear, pulling from 80 to 117 kph (50 to 70 mph), and the Marina shows 6.9 seconds, leaving the Torana behind on 7.2 and the Cortina buried at 7.5 seconds.

Consequently the Marina 262 is essentially a top gear car. Unless in a hurry, the driver can drop it into top and burble on as though he were in an automatic.

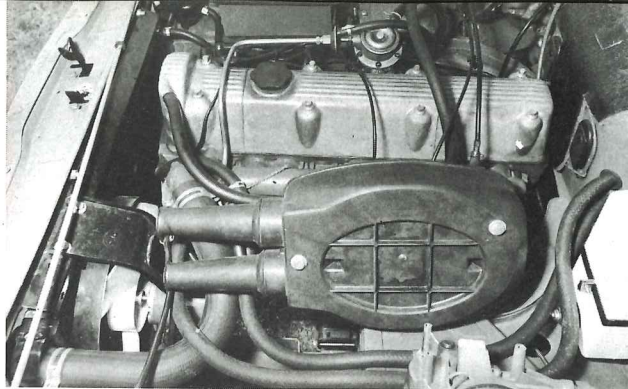
Apart from outperforming its rivals, the Marina also eats them over fuel consumption. Taking things easy over a measured 346 km (215 miles) cruising at 88/96 kph (55/60 mph), and taking along three of the kids, we attained 10.15 km/l (28.6 mpg). A pretty good effort in the fairly typical conditions.

On later runs the car — carrying four adults on a hard-going mountain trip, then workday commuting with driver only and performance testing with two aboard at Castlereagh strip (512 km [318 miles] all up) — returned 7.6 kpl (21.6 mpg). Having taken both Torana and Cortina over a similar course, we expected similar readings (6.4 kpl — 18 mpg). So our conclusion is — excellent.

The final 182 miles was a mixture of everyday driving mixed with consistent 112 kmh (70 mph) cruising on good roads and proved a return to 9.94 km/l (28 plus mpg). Economically driven the Marina would reach 10.6 km/l (30 mpg) and Mad Sam would get around 7.1 km/l (20 mpg).

It is debatable whether the fuel consumption could be more improved. My partner feels another gear in the box, along with a taller axle ratio, would provide the goods. Meanwhile, thanks to the engine's breadth and strength, the present three-speed box does an adequate job, pulling the car along in an effortless manner which few other six-cylinder cars can beat. I will, however, bow to my partner slightly, and say that on odd occasions the wish for that fourth cog came to my mind. I will also give him the fact that with the Cortina Six, the four-speed version outsells the standard three-speed manual by about two to one.

Apart from that the gearshift itself is not a gearlever thrower's delight — luckily, moderated by the engine's flexibility — as the distance between positions is long and loose. Now and



*Engine provides car with ripping performance — 0-95 kmh (0-60) in 9.5 — yet affords excellent economy. Overhead cam 2.6 is a neat fit in the bay and a remarkable revver.*

then second gear gives off a moderate growl which, combined with the engine's solid grunt when pulling hard, creates an industrial-like sound and atmosphere. Add that to the gearthrow and the whole thing could be taken as a little truck-like in feel.

The irritating gear knob frizzle experienced in our first test was found to be non-existent, and the push-down reverse gear lockout much more positive than before. But as before, we had the impression that given time for the gearbox to loosen up, a driver with heavy hands who leans, rather than grasps the gear knob could go into reverse (instead of neutral) from first. Needs a pull-up detent, we think.

Steering wheel feedback was another gripe with the earlier test, and Leyland has done much toward eliminating it. The sedan was not nearly as bad as the coupe, which reacted so violently that at times it was almost impossible to hold the wheel, but rough roads still moved the wheel about sharply and more often than is normal among modern cars.

Braking, too, has been markedly improved. The pedal was firmer, more progressive and wasted little distance before taking effect. Some fade did show itself when on mountain roads and became more pronounced during actual braking tests. We subjected the system to three everything-on stops from 70 mph and found the front pads were red hot and a heavier foot needed on a pedal which had greatly increased its travel.

Both of us found the driving position very good with the relativity of seat, wheel and pedals easily established with the reclining bucket seat. Easy to read through the three-spoked sports pack steering wheel, the three-dial instrumentation is simple and uncomplicated. The speedo takes up the left hand aspect while a tachometer is on the right — in the coupe, the sedan has a clock. Between the two lay fuel and temperature gauges. The steering wheel does, however, get in the way of the pull-out manual choke button and could easily be overlooked.

Often-used controls are well situated on the steering column stalk, which is excellently laid out, giving you horn, turn indicator, wash-wipe, headlight flasher and dip at your fingertips.

Another good idea has been applied to the front seat belts. Mounted on the centre tunnel, the non-retractable system allows easy one-handed fastening and must be one of the best around.

Accommodation inside is generally good with sufficient leg room in the back, a feature being the behind-the-driver passenger having plenty of room even if the driver has his seat well back on the runners.

Our sedan was fitted with the optional luxury pack, which is standard on the Super Coupe, but not so on the Deluxe Sedan and Coupe. It provides reclining front buckets, textile trim, sports steering wheel, console and wheel trim discs.

The Marina is well ventilated, having outlets on the dash as well as front flipper windows. In most conditions the system works very well, but if you want all the windows down be prepared to suffer much buffeting as wind beats about the cabin.

Room for luggage is very good. A reasonably large locking glove box is situated above a handy half-width shelf. The boot is larger than most cars in its class, despite having some of its space wasted by the spare wheel. We realised one no-no; the fender opposite the spare wheel is entirely exposed and therefore liable to fall foul of heavy objects moving about inside the boot.

After completion of the re-testing of the Marina, it is obvious the car is a competitive entry on the light six market. In terms of package size, accommodation, fuel economy, performance, and most importantly price, the Marina 262 shapes up well to its competition and must be regarded as a seller.

It would suit those people who are not particularly interested in haring about the place, but who do like the comfort of having the juice available when needed. Used thus, one would be satisfied.