





Story: Tom Stewart

Photography: Philip Key Harvey

MANX POWER



Kippers, cats with **no tails**, mad **bikers**, a **Toyota Supra**, a **BMW M3** and a **TVR Cerbera**, sympathetic **coppers** and absolutely **no speed limits** whatsoever. The **Isle of Man** is the greatest place in the world



Cerberus is the mad three-headed dog that guards the gates to hell. Meet the missus, Cerbera. Woof, woof, growl, snarl, chomp



Even if not wholly original it was a terrific idea nonetheless, a real barnstormer in fact. Take some fast four-wheelers to the Isle of Man. Home of the (in)famous TT races, there's relatively light traffic, some truly superb roads and, not least, on the Isle of Man a white circular sign with a black diagonal really does mean unrestricted. In other words you can drive as nature intended.

OK, so we thought of doing it ages ago, but despite the numerous Ferraris, Porsches and other exotica to have graced the TG lock-up, the opportunity had never really presented itself until now. Spurring on our decision to ship almost a thousand horsepower and over a hundred grand's worth of motors to the island in springtime was the simultaneous arrival of two rather special new cars.

BMW's ultra-sporty M3 Coupe has seen a few changes over the years, but this year

heralds the introduction of the very latest, £37,000 Evolution model. With a bigger 3.2-litre engine producing significantly greater torque and power, a six-speed 'box with revised ratios and an upgraded chassis and brakes, the '96 M3 Evo is, on paper at least, capable of tackling all but the most expensive of supercars.

As luck would have it, there's another new £37,000 coupe fresh on the scene, the TVR Cerbera. Anoraks will be familiar with the Cerbera's gorgeous shape – it was first launched at Earls Court back in '93 – and Jeremy and Tiff both drove a very different pink prototype last year and reported back in issue 26. But, following further fettling, it's only now that the Blackpool firm is filtering customer-ready Cerberas through to its 24 UK dealers. So, why the lengthy wait? Well, you try developing your very

own all-alloy 4.2-litre V8 engine, steel-tube chassis and 2+2 body, make it legal, then make it work. See how long it takes you...

As the saying goes which I've just made up: if two is fun, then three's a fun crowd, so to complete the trio we also trundled up the M6 to the Steam Packet Company's ferry at Heysham in a Toyota Supra. With its high rear wing and warthog's teeth headlamp washers, the three-year-old Supra is dismissed by some – yes you, Clarkson – as little more than phallic jewellery for vacillating second division footballers. But remember, Toyota has decked out the Supra with twin-sequential turbos, three litres, 24 valves, a mighty 326 horsepower and all the chassis, brakes and tyres it could ever want.

The Supra, let's be clear, is serious metal. Unfortunately not so serious that some dimwit passenger couldn't inflict a small





scrape to the left front wing as we sailed to Douglas. Other people? Dontcha just hate 'em? But upon arrival in the late afternoon further predicaments beset us.

Firstly, Angus got lost within feet of the docks and, when we found him, he found that he couldn't get out of the Cerbera. It's difficult anyway because the doors don't open wide enough to allow your feet out comfortably, but now the driver's door wouldn't open at all; at least not using the electronic button release TVR has adopted. Fortunately there is a concealed cable release within reach - I'd been told about it upon delivery - but I failed to remember it until the following day.

Then I took the Supra through an automatic car wash. Vaguely suspecting trouble I noticed that the car's rear wing confused the rotating brushes on the first pass, so I

readied for a premature exit. Right on cue, the big bully threw a meaningful punch from behind and the Supra made off, thankfully undamaged, leaving the machine to flail about like a short-fused Dalek.

We also noticed that the petrol station we were visiting, although possibly the biggest on the Island, dispensed no 98 octane super unleaded - the recommended propellant for both the M3 and Cerbera. But with more than a few litres between us we nonchalantly joined the TT course at Quarterbridge and set off for Ballacraine Corner, several miles along the circuit.

Having completed some laps as a biking TT punter many, many years ago, I found myself leading in the Supra followed by Angus in the Cerbera with Marcel, Phil the snapper and all their gear in the M3 at the rear. For a while we followed a locally regis-

tered Honda CRX. In common with all Manx traffic the CRX respectfully tooted through villages at 30mph, but when the derestricted sign appeared I had to call upon just a little of the Supra's monster grunt simply to keep its tiny Japanese cousin in view. This isn't particularly extraordinary in itself - nifty car, local knowledge and so on - but how refreshing it was to brake, power through corners and nudge an indicated 120 - on public roads and in Britain - without suffering the clammy-palmed apprehension of being Vascared, Gatsosed or otherwise nicked at any moment.

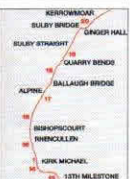
Better than that, well almost, was the weather. In my experience, the IoM is often wet, foggy, drizzly or worse. Squally showers were invented here. But this time God had no axe to grind, and so the warm evening sun filtered down through fresh green leaves

The Cerbera's doors aren't actually designed to let you in or out, but it's not a bad place to spend the rest of your life. Wheel-mounted dials are cute





Yes, it goes quick; yes, it handles well. But the M3 just doesn't look loopy enough for some. It could be any wide boy's 318 with some flash alloys



on to dry, grey tarmac and just took the edge off a cool breeze. In my book, that's Paradise with a capital P.

We drove to the small fishing port of Peel on the west coast and then headed south on deserted roads, with Ireland clearly in view to our right, towards Port Erin. Phil removed his lens cap and did his stuff. Then he and Marcel set off in search of super unleaded while, starting from Ballacrine, I led Angus on a swift but safe introductory lap of the 37.75 mile Mountain Circuit.

By the time we reached Ramsey, it was nearly dark and our hotel beckoned - we'd been up since six - but the Supra was lapping it up, so I turned right, still on the circuit, at Parliament Square and the Cerbera dutifully followed.

Coming up the M1 and M6 earlier in the day the big Toyota's seating and high-

spec interior had been supremely comfy but its suspension had given a harsh ride. Also, on concrete sections, there was quite deafening tyre noise to contend with which was compounded alarmingly by the hollow drumming of the big Michelins on car's eyes. More interesting were the extremely high-pitched whistles from the Toyota's turbos. I tried to tune in, but I'm sure only dogs or bats could fully appreciate them.

As we headed rapidly up the Mountain the Supra found its true vocation. Its steering is perfectly weighted, its chassis is as taut as a rottweiler's lead and the brakes can perform near miracles. It feels safe and almost totally bulletproof and you, the driver, are in control. But perhaps more impressive is the Supra's midrange power. Yes, at low revs there is a smidgen of turbo lag but, very soon after, there's just awesome

brawn. And, aided by an easy-action six-speed Getrag gearbox there's sufficient punch to overtake just about anything. Anything, that is, except another local in his badly smoking XR2i. He was swift for sure, but a bit too much of a loony, for even the Supra to safely deal with on these roads.

And where was Angus on his virgin lap in the Cerbera? Right up my chuff, every inch of the way.

Back at the Grand Island Hotel, our drinks were waiting at the bar and, while Marcel, Phil and I cheerfully imbibed, we were reminded by caring staff that we were supposed to be a party of four staying the night. Oh yes, so we were! Angus must still be in the car park in the dark, trapped inside the silent TVR. And so he was!

The evening went well. Some especially spicy office gossip kept us going until the





The M3's seats are very German. Solid, unyielding, difficult to adjust but satisfying in a bizarre sadomasochistic way. Whip me harder, Brunhilde



small hours and the morning came all too soon. Then I'm afraid it was scrambled eggs for me; Manx kippers may be the world's finest, but unfiltered they're labour-intensive and just too darn fishy for this time of day.

Next it was my turn in the TVR. I'd trickled through London in it the day before and cruised up the M1 to Newport Pagnell so I was reasonably familiar with the keyless starting procedure, the plethora of unlabelled switches, the indicators, the steering wheel buttons and other idiosyncrasies which typify TVR's approach. But such quirks pale into insignificance as soon as the Cerbera's fantastic AJP8 engine starts up.

TVR's familiar deep-throated, off-beat Rover V8 rumble is gone and, at low revs, there's a fair amount of mechanical clatter. The throttle response, either at standstill or on the move, is instantaneous. The revs rise

and fall stupendously quickly, directly in proportion to the movement of your right foot. This sounds like no other TVR; in fact it sounds like no other road car, except maybe just a bit like an F355. On the move, the Cerbera doesn't bellow like a Chimaera or Griffith; it barks all the way to 7,000rpm – and beyond if you wish.

Burying the throttle in the intermediate gears convinced me straight away that neither the Supra nor the M3 could hold a candle to a Cerbera in a straight-line dash. Come to that, nor could an F355. With power to all four wheels, a 911 Turbo could outstrip the Cerbera to 60mph but, from there on, the TVR will lead. If you want to overtake this car, you'll need a McLaren, a Diablo, an F50 or a pretty fast bike.

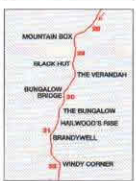
We spent the morning swapping vehicles on the course's Mountain section between

Waterworks and Creg-ny-Baa. Up here the road snakes, weaves and dives across the moors; some corners are wide open and terrifyingly quick, others are blind and much, much slower. To be quick here it's no use just being a good driver in a fast car, you have to know your way, and know it well. With one or two exceptions.

There's a left-hander called Bungalow Bridge. Lapping in a clockwise direction the approach is open, straight and fast. Very fast. Don't worry about the bridge bit – if there is a bridge it makes no difference. On your right is hillside and, on the left, a few feet of grass, followed by a steep drop. The apex, exit and several hundred yards beyond are all in clear view, so, if something's coming the other way, you can see it a mile off and take appropriate action. At Bungalow Bridge, there's nothing tricky, no funny



The Supra is, you must admit, gross; a barking mad thing covered in gratuitous vents, scoops, spoilers, wings and those silly headlamp washers



camber, no blind spots, no dodgy surface; it's just you and your machine versus the corner.

I've lost count of how many times I've been round here before but I certainly do know that on every previous occasion there'd been something to spoil the fun: an oncoming vehicle, a slower car ahead, fog, a stray sheep, an engine misfire; there was always something. But not this time.

Exiting the Verandah in the M3, there were a couple of cars following a Transit. I gunned it down a couple of gears to get past all three as quickly as possible and then I saw Bungalow Bridge, in all its glory, and there was nothing to impair the imminent pleasure. Nothing, that is, except a bit too much speed... I don't know what the speedo read before lifting off, dabbing the brakes and turning in under power, but Phil says it all happened at well over the ton. (And

remember, on the Island this sort of caper is legal!) Anyway, the M3 gripped like Velcro and, in no time, I was unwinding lock and wishing I'd pressed just that little bit harder because the car had used up no more than half of the oncoming lane on the exit. Drat. If I'd apexed at 110 then I maybe should've been doing 120. If I'd been doing 120 then I should've tried 125. It had been my first clear run through Bungalow Bridge ever, and I'd gone too slow. Still, at least you've got a story to read and pictures to look at.

At the time I decided to seek solitary consolation in the TVR. There's nowhere comfortable to rest your clutch foot but the Borg Warner, straight-into-the-box, five-speed gearchange is firm, reassuringly positive and it never balks. The brakes are firm too – ultimately not quite as powerful as some, and there's no anti-lock – but with

very little travel, feel at the pedal is terrific. No question, all brakes should be like this.

And the steering? The wheel rim is wonderfully contoured at the ten-to-two position and steering response matches throttle response. There's no vagueness or slop, just immediate and very direct action. It takes some getting used to, and it may be too direct for some, but we're not complaining.

On the TT course there's little or no margin for error, especially at speed, and thus smooth, considered driving is the order of the day. Enter a corner quickly in the Cerbera and you may feel some initial push at the front, followed by formidable grip mid-turn. Then, as you squeeze the throttle on exit, the tail may loosen but it shouldn't result in anything too dramatic or scary.

Having said that, neither the M3 or Supra behave too differently in a turn. They



may feel dissimilar from the driver's seat, but the net result is much the same. The M3 is certainly more prone to understeer than the Supra or Cerbera but, treated with respect, none are the lurid, oversteery beasts magazine photos depict because all have heaps of grip, both front and rear. After the Supra and especially the Cerbera, the M3 Coupe feels tall and more like an ordinary saloon. Subtle Q-car the baby M may be, but the steering wheel is too large and, despite power assistance, there's excess movement from lock to lock. The clutch action is long and unpredictable, so both take-off and gearchanges can be jerky. The handsome front seats take forever to adjust. And throttle action is sticky at low speeds – amazingly, the M3 feels underpowered.

The previous M3's motor has been extensively reworked in the new Evo with

VANOS (variable valve actuation on both cams) being just one of the sophisticated revisions. But despite a full 321bhp and improved torque its in-gear acceleration lags way behind the others here. On these roads the BMW could be left behind, unless you really birch it to 7,400rpm in all six gears, in which case the Evo will show a clean pair of stainless tailpipes to the significantly heavier Supra, from 20mph all the way to 160. No problem. Like the Supra, the M3 can also suffer from intrusive tyre drone, but of the three – and front seat comfort aside – the BMW ultimately delivers the supplest ride.

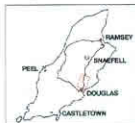
With 350bhp powering just 1,100kg (or 319bhp per tonne), there can be more urgent considerations than ride quality in the Cerbera. But though firm, it's rarely uncomfortable. Only on the bumpiest of the Island's tiny lanes did the suspension

settings intrude but, even then, nothing ever grounded out, which is more than can be said of the M3.

In fact our day was going well, aside from one or two little problems – we desperately needed to find a source of fuel and, ahem, we had to report to the police.

Visits to several petrol stations convinced us that the IoM has no facility for the storage or dispensation of super unleaded. Wealthy residents, we were told, were quite content to brim their Ferraris with ordinary unleaded. A gallon of 95 octane in the M3 seemed to cause no ill effects but the Cerbera was pinking loudly on a dose of the same. Dozens of calls from the TVR factory on the mainland had finally confirmed that super unleaded did exist, but that the pump was at the back of the TT paddock in Douglas, Oh, and the chap who had the key

The Toyota interior is a bit disappointing. You'd expect at least an ejector seat, or maybe some Kevlar and carbon fibre racing car nonsense

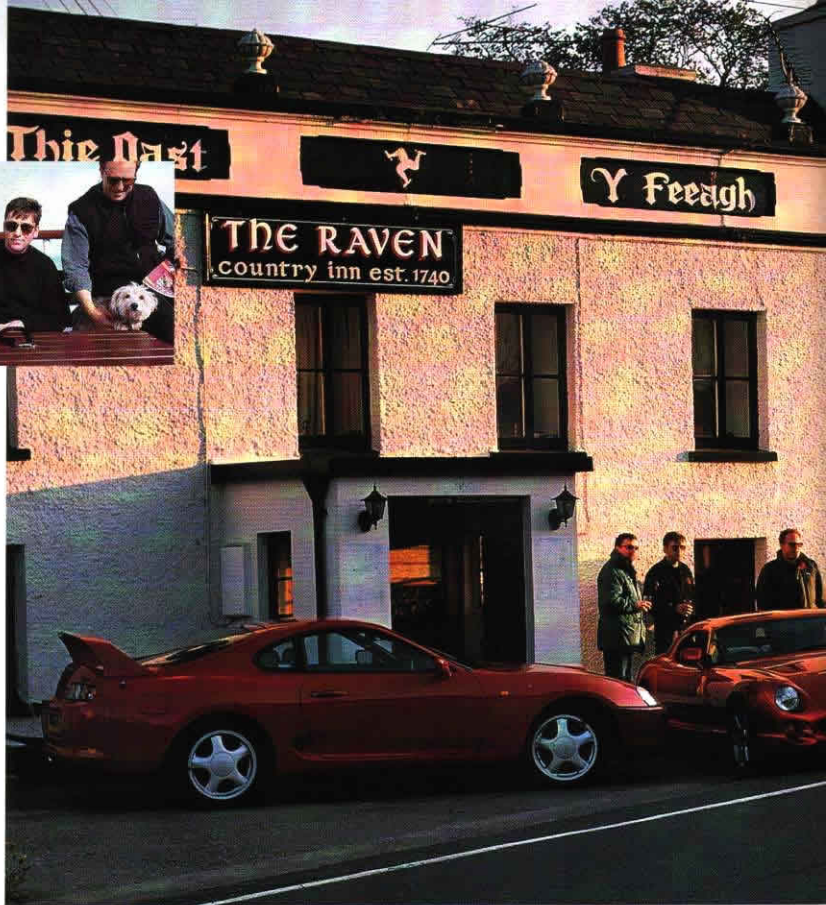




Some sort of canine theme appears to be developing here, though 'which ones are the dogs?' is not a line that goes down well in the test department. The bloke below hasn't got a tail either; it's the pump hose for the Island's only super unloaded supply



Kate's Cottage marks the beginning of the drop down to Creag-ny-Baa; Keppel Gate is a tricky bend. Rather silly names, absolutely superb places



was on holiday. This could have meant the final curtain but further calls uncovered Paul Moore, from the Manx government's tourism department. He had a spare key and, bless him, he was ready and waiting, with Avgas if needed, when we arrived.

As luck would have it the location of the Island's main police station was just a stone's throw from that solitary pump. Earlier in the day Angus has been driving on the wrong side of the road while Phil hung out of the window taking tracking shots. Trouble was, the one and only irate local we came across saw fit to inform the constabulary of this slightly unorthodox behaviour. The upshot was that a plod on a motorbike was scrambled to find us – not too tough an assignment with a pearlescent Tizer Cerbera in the group – and Angus was subsequently required to make a statement at the police

station. However, good sense prevailed because the Manx enforcement boys correctly differentiated Angus' story from an utter fabrication. Angus, in his own words, was once more "a free man!"

Not quite so straightforward was the Cerbera's security system. By now both electric windows had developed minds of their own, the driver's door still wouldn't open electrically, little red LED lights were flashing like Amazonian fireflies and the car's piercing alarm was sounding at frequent and random intervals. Frankly, it was driving us to distraction, and would continue to do so until we dropped it back at the factory in Blackpool the following afternoon.

But there we were reminded that this particular car was one of the first 20 built; that its doors, window mechanisms and seals, among other things which didn't

cause us any trouble, would all be changed on customer cars. Which leaves us in the awkward position of being unable to pass fair judgment at this stage.

Fortunately, we have no doubts about the engine's durability which, having provided the power for virtually all the '95/'96 Tuscan Challenge championship runners, has given virtually no trouble, even with the whopping 450bhp originally intended for it.

There's the rub; if TVR just concentrated on the basics, they wouldn't need to waste valuable time and money developing nonsensical electrical frippery; and their cars would surely sell without it.

But Peter Wheeler, TVR's chairman, explained. The company believes that locating the door locking mechanisms within the body, rather than inside the doors, improves the car's theft resistance considerably.



TC's fearless trio are brought to book by the IoM's finest (above). And about to be nicked under the Dogs With Ludicrous Ears act is Fido here, who is so old he has to be wheeled around in a child's pushchair. Sadly, this means the kid walks



Moreover, the Cerbera is capable of high speeds and, at those speeds, the windows are sucked outwards from the door frame, necessitating a stout physical location at the window's top leading edge. This in turn means the windows must automatically lower themselves – as they do on the M3 for example – when the door is opened. Assuming correct fit, there's no reason why it shouldn't all work perfectly.

Fine in theory, but even in the M3 the driver's window popped out of place a couple of times, once on the M1 and once at 140 at Millbrook a few days later. The Supra's stayed put during speed-testing. Well they would wouldn't they – it's a Toyota after all. Having been fixed back at the factory, the Cerbera's doors and glass behaved too, even at 170mph and climbing. But then a chance encounter with the same

car a fortnight later revealed that the windows had indeed developed a mind of their own once again. If TVR have an answer to this problem, they are keeping quiet about it.

But let's return to the Island. By evening we'd lapped some more, played silly buggers at Jurby airfield, stopped for a shandy at Ballaugh Bridge and later enjoyed the close attention of a tabby, a Russian Blue and a black Lab at dinner, during which we concocted a number of hypothetical questions:

"If you had to live, day in, day out, with just one of the three, which would it be?"

After some debate, a verdict followed. M3 Evo: one vote; Toyota Supra: two. The argument for the M3 is that it may not have the lazy midrange power of the other two but it's still very, very quick. And, apologies if this is a little obvious, but it's also the only one here with comfortable, adult-sized

rear seats and luggage space for four. The Supra scored because it looks beefy like a GT car should, and it goes like one too. It also has the most comfortable seats and driving position of the three.

"What if you had to lap the TT course in the least time and your life depended on it. Which would you choose?"

This time a two-to-one majority chose the Supra over the Cerbera, the argument being that, without an intimate knowledge of the circuit, the Toyota's midrange muscle would help on those occasions when you found yourself on the wrong line in the wrong gear. It's the least frenetic, has better steering than the other two and is arguably less intimidating.

"And if you really knew the circuit, like Joey Dunlop? A unanimous verdict: TVR, TVR, TVR. □



Drinking and driving; a bad idea. But doing one while talking about the other is one of the world's finest pastimes. 'I was just hitting 140 when...'

Performance

	BMW M3 Evolution Coupé	Toyota Supra manual	TVR Cerbera
0-30mph (secs)	2.21	2.53	2.14
0-40mph (secs)	3.21	3.64	2.73
0-50mph (secs)	4.31	4.72	3.77
0-60mph (secs)	5.43	5.85	4.57
0-70mph (secs)	7.11	7.75	5.49
0-80mph (secs)	8.72	9.31	6.95
0-90mph (secs)	10.48	11.52	8.24
0-100mph (secs)	12.87	13.70	9.68
0-110mph (secs)	15.50	16.34	11.34
0-120mph (secs)	18.36	20.42	13.67
0-130mph (secs)	21.78	24.45	15.90
0-140mph (secs)	26.86	29.61	18.71
0-150mph (secs)	n/a	n/a	23.78
Max speed, mph	158.4	155	170+
Standing 1/4 mile (secs)	13.97	14.43	12.8
Terminal speed (mph)	103.8	103.2	115.8
30-50mph in 3rd	3.18	2.92	2.90
30-60mph in 4th	5.01	3.91	4.26
50-70mph in 5th	5.32	5.08	5.47
50-70mph in 6th	8.28	7.23	n/a
30-70mph thru' gears	4.90	5.22	3.36
Braking 70-0mph (m/ft)	48.3/158.6	47.5/155.8	48.6/159.6

Costs

	£37,160	£43,023	£37,500
On the road price			
Test mpg	23.8	19.5	19.6
Official mpg	25.7 (EU Combined)	25.5 (EuroMid)	n/a
Insurance group	19	20	20
Service interval	8,000 miles approx	9,000 miles	6,000 miles
Warranty	3yrs/unltd. mileage	3yrs/60,000m	1yr/unltd. mileage

Equipment

	yes/option	yes/yes	yes/yes
Central locking/remote			
Radio cassette/CD	option/option	yes/yes	yes/option
Electric windows/sunroof	yes/no	yes/no	yes/no
Air-conditioning	option	yes	option
Alarm/immobiliser	option/yes	yes/yes	yes/yes
Driver/passenger airbags	yes/option	yes/yes	no/no
Full leather upholstery	option	yes	option
Trip computer	yes	no	no
Power steering/ABS	yes/yes	yes/yes	yes/no
Limited slip differential	yes	yes	yes (Hydrak option)
Traction control/cruise control	no/option	yes/yes	no/no

Technical

	in-line 6cyl, dohc, 24v, inj	in-line 6cyl, dohc, 24v, intercooled twin turbo, inj.	75deg V8cyl, 2xdohc, 16v, inj.
Engine			
Capacity (cc)	3,201	2,997	4,185
Max power (bhp @ rpm)	321 @ 7,000	326 @ 5,600	350 @ 6,500
Max torque (lb/ft @ rpm)	258 @ 3,250	325 @ 4,800	320 @ 4,500
Transmission	6sp manual, RWD	6sp manual, RWD	5sp manual, RWD
Suspension (f)	double joint struts, gas dampers, coils	Indep. d.w/bone, coils, gas dampers	Indep. d.w/bone, coils, gas dampers
Suspension (r)	multilink, coils, gas dampers	Indep. d.w/bone, coils, gas dampers	Indep. d.w/bone, coils, gas dampers
Ventilated disc brakes (f)	315mm floating, 4 p/caliper	323mm, 4 p/caliper	294mm, 4 p/caliper
Ventilated disc brakes (r)	312mm floating, 2 p/caliper	324mm, 2 p/caliper	294mm, 2 p/caliper
Alloy wheels	7.5J(1), 8.5J(1) x17"	8x17"	7.5x16"
Tyres (f)	225/45 R17	235/45 ZR17	225/45 ZR16
Tyres (r)	245/40 R17	255/40 ZR17	235/50 ZR16
Dimensions (L/W, mm)	4,433/1,710	4,515/1,810	4,280/1,865
Weight (kgs)	1,515	1,620	1,100
Fuel capacity (litres)	62	80	65



I'm torn between the M3 Evo and the Cerbera. The Supra might seem like the ideal compromise between the two, but ultimately it's not for me. Perhaps it's the wide-boy looks, or maybe the Corvette interior. Whatever, it doesn't cook my goose. Which I'd choose of the other two would depend entirely on circumstance. As an only car it would have to be the M3, with a better driver's seat. Frankly I wouldn't want any two-seater – and I consider both the Supra and Cerbera two-seaters – without having comfortable, adult-carrying capability. But if we're talking "second car" then I think I'd take the plunge and go for a Cerbera. For the money no other car comes even close in terms of performance and thrills. Yes, I suspect I'd be on first-name terms with my dealer before long, but I'd risk it. Who knows, he might even be a nice guy **TS**



Blah blah blah Bungalow, blah blah blah Goose Neck, blah blah blah Joey Dunlop. Motorcycle sadsters Tom and Marcel were boring me rigid for a whole week before we went, after all what could be so good about a poxy little island? Just about everything, that's what. To drive around without that horrible "there might be a Gatsco" feeling in the pit of your stomach is fantastic. The roads are stunning and so is the scenery. The people are ultra-relaxed and friendly, there's none of that "you can't photograph that car here" crap that we have to stomach almost every day in the South East and there's no soul-destroying M25 to contend with. The island also boasts one of the most forward-thinking and reasonable police forces in the world. There are no downslides to this place apart from too many cats. Oh and I'd have the Supra **AF**



Over a pint of finest Manx ale Tom posed two hypothetical questions: "Which car, if you had to live with it if day-in, day-out?" and "Which one if your life depended on a super-quick lap?" Question One: M3 – sensible rear seats, proper boot, cubby lockers – obvious choice. But no – ultra-conservative looks, uncomfortable front seats. Cerbera: quirky, infuriating, no door handles – unliveable! (is that a word? It is now). Supra – eighties styling, 2nd Div. footballers – I'll take it. Question Two (harder): BMW – gearing too low, steering too slow. TVR – exciting, looks great, and with Dunlopian knowledge, perfect. But too hot for me. Supra – quick, comfortable, relatively easy to drive – I'll take it again. Tom, predictably, goes for the TVR but I'll stake my house on being first back to Douglas if he'll agree to a Le Mans start **MA**