



LIFESTYLE

TIM BARNES-CLAY

Motoring



Drive time



Cars don't tend to argue with us and they give us a sense of freedom. They also respond to our slightest touch and sometimes they seem the most alive non-living thing ever created. Even if you're feeling down, go for a drive and you'll discover a grin on your face in no time – as long as you don't set out at rush hour. *Sorted's* motoring editor, Tim Barnes-Clay, has been trying out some new, and not so new, cars since the last issue. No wonder he's always smiling...

New Range Rover Evoque Convertible

The all-new Range Rover Evoque Convertible takes some getting used to, but it grows on you. It has a fabric roof that can be activated on the move – as long as you're not doing over 30mph. The five-layer rag-top will drop in 18 seconds and raise in 21.

Inside, the massive 10.2in InControl Touch Pro nav is attractive – and, more importantly, it works really well. Truly, the pinch-to-zoom

function is as quick as an iPad's.

The car will seat four-up and, for a soft-top, it has a decent 251-litre boot, too. The other nice thing is that the roof opens and closes quietly and it folds away tidily, instead of stacking up on the tailgate.

You can choose either petrol or diesel, supported by turbo power. This is all hooked up to a slick nine-speed automatic gearbox, and all-wheel drive. The 2.0 oil-burner is the best for economy, managing 49.6mpg.

The diesel version does 0-62mph in 10.3 seconds, which is 1.3 seconds behind the Coupe, but both do 121mph. The 237bhp petrol is

quicker, sprinting from 0-62mph in 8.6 seconds.

On and off-road, it seems just as accomplished as its tin-top sibling – with identical clearances, and a shared 500mm wading depth. Indeed, on my off-piste saunter in France, the Evoque eased up and down – and through – everything requested of it.

I doubt many people going for a topless Evoque will bother with the off-roading bit – but it's nice to know it's able to do more than just look good in affluent British suburbs.

Prices begin at £47,500, which is £5,200 more than a comparable hard-top Evoque Coupe. →



2016 DS 3

The new DS 3 has been given a nip and tuck here and there for 2016, and there's better standard kit, too.

I drove the Puretech 130 hatch in mid-range Prestige trim, costing £18,795. I found the 1.2-litre turbo

petrol power unit energetic and cooperative on my trip from London to West Sussex. 0–62mph is achievable in 8.9 seconds and average fuel consumption is 62.8mpg.

The 130 hatch's engine is so on-the-ball to respond that your clutch

foot and left hand can rest, due to the lack of gear-shifting required. When a change of cogs is necessary, the gear shift provides a satisfying motion.

Step inside the DS 3 and you can't miss the up-to-the-minute central seven-inch touchscreen. The best thing about this is that it gets rid of many of the buttons. There are 20 less than the former model.

This supermini will seat five people and the boot holds a respectable 285 litres, ballooning to 980 with the rear seats folded over.

If you're tantalised by the DS 3's quality-brand values and natty looks, the avant-garde Puretech 130 is a must-have choice. It houses an exuberant engine that's enjoyable when you want it to be, and it sits back on its haunches obediently when you need a calmer pace.

There may be more down-to-earth small hatchback choices on the market, but with multi-personalisation options and a pick of both hatch and Cabrio body forms, the DS 3 is a wholesome car, brimming with vivacity.

2016 MINI Convertible

The MINI Convertible can now seat four. It has a larger boot; its electrically folding roof is better and it houses state-of-the-art tech.

Obtainable as a Cooper, Cooper D, Cooper S and John Cooper Works, the price tags commence at £18,475 and climb to £28,205. The Cooper S, driven at launch in sunny Portugal, is £22,430, or £24,055 with the smooth-shifting six-speed automatic gearbox.

The 2.0-litre turbocharged Cooper S delivers fistfuls of fun. Yes, it's speedy, but not manically so. 0-62mph is achieved in a smidgen more than seven seconds, which is rapid on one hand, but it's not the thrill-seeking projectile some auto aficionados will demand. Fuel economy is 46.3mpg, or 48.7 when mated to the automatic gearbox.

MINI's Cooper S is more inspiring when you become conscious of its pinpoint accurate steering and when you take advantage of its turbo-charging. This gives the in-gear pace a spicy shot in the arm. This model has a sports mode that makes the suspension stiffer and

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perks up throttle reaction, too.

As standard, there's now a reversing camera. This is in reply to the car's poor rear visibility with the roof raised or, indeed, with it lowered. And there's more space for belongings – up 25% – with some extra levers to flick up the back of the MINI's hood to gain better access to the boot.

The electrically operated roof now concludes its movements in 18 seconds, and it will go up or down when driving at sensibly restrained speeds, too.

The cost of going roofless with a MINI is expensive, compared with the hatch. For example, a Cooper S Convertible costs £3,590 more than its equivalent roofed sibling.



Vauxhall Astra

The latest Astra is even better for families. I managed to fit my nine-year-old, six-year-old and two-year-old children into the back seat, and the load area is bang on for a buggy and some shopping bags.

Compared with its predecessor, this new five-door Astra is shorter, yet it offers more rear legroom. It drives well on UK roads, too, and with its new 'whisper' 1.6 diesel engine, it has some nice low-down shove, with 0-62mph done in 9.1 seconds.

“TAKEN AS A WHOLE, THE NEW ASTRA IS A HIGHLY AFFABLE AND SPIRITED CAR.”

The fresh Astra doesn't have the 'wow-factor' looks of some rival hatchbacks, but it isn't ugly and is the first Vauxhall to feature OnStar. This groundbreaking connectivity technology includes a high-speed 4G LTE mobile network, emergency response notification and a stolen vehicle recovery alert.

Taken as a whole, the new Astra is a highly affable and spirited car. The VW Golf still leads the segment in terms of drivability and aesthetics, but the transformed Vauxhall works



for me, and in spite of its rather bland looks, it has very few failings.

It feels solid, it has airbags everywhere, it's comfortable, economical, spacious, has decent pulling power, and it even has a great-sounding music system. Undeniably, you get a lot of car for the dosh, with the SRI Nav 1.6CDTI 136PS version I drove costing £21,480 and returning an average of 72.4mpg. →





Toyota Auris

This a solid little Japanese car that drives better than it looks.

It may have had a facelift last year, but it's still deadly dull and you won't be dancing with pride to see it parked on your drive.

But if you're in the market for an Auris, the last thing you'll care about is how sexy its lines are. You'll buy it because you know Toyota makes ultra-reliable cars with near bullet-proof engines. In other words, you value peace of mind over anything else when it comes to motoring.

What's more, for its size, there's decent space for two adults in the back or three kids on booster seats. And, at 360 litres, the boot is



perfect for a buggy and some shopping bags.

But let's get back to the way it drives. In the new 1.2-litre petrol turbo, getting up to speed takes very little effort. The car's top lick of 124mph is not relevant in the UK – but it's fairly decent 0–62mph time of 10.1 seconds is. The efficiency of this version of the Auris is good, too, averaging 52.3mpg.

Handling-wise, the hatchback darts around town in a smooth, easy-steering and agile way, while

the aforementioned rapidity makes 70mph motorway driving a breeze. Indeed, on a 100-mile journey from Northamptonshire to Hampshire, I felt confident and relaxed as the Auris hoovered up the miles without a hiccup.

The car comes kitted out with lots of toys to keep you happy and informed, as well. In the £19,945 Auris Design model, driven here, you get a USB port, air conditioning, electric windows, and even a SatNav and a DAB digital radio.



Audi A5 Sportback

If you're after kudos in the executive car market, then four shiny silver circles should do it for you. The Audi logo of four interconnected rings will elevate your standing in the hierarchical world of enterprise in a heartbeat.

Get into any diesel or petrol-fuelled Audi and you'll soon see that the Bavarian-based firm's spotlight is on workmanship, fine quality and leading-edge technology. The A5 Sportback is no different.

It has four doors and looks very like the A4 saloon but, despite the A5 Sportback's sleek coupe exterior, it actually has a dose of practicality because it's a hatchback. It also has a solid and refined interior, making it the perfect place to be when traversing the UK's motorway network.

“THE BEST THING ABOUT THE WHOLE CAR IS ITS LOOKS.”



The £38,485.2.0 TFSI Quattro Black Edition Plus 225 PS S Tronic variant, driven here, offers impressive performance, although economy is only a combined 40.9mpg – dropping way below that if you're a heavy right-footer.

The ride quality is firm, but this adds to the fun you can have when you tire of the straights and push the car through the twisty

countryside. Indeed, it's easy to forget about mpg when you're grinning and applauding the A5 Sportback's awesome body control and alert steering.

But you don't even need to be in the A5 to appreciate it. The best thing about the whole car is its looks. You'll never tire of gazing at it, whether it's yours – or the company's.



Peugeot 508

The 508 has been around since 2011, but this saloon from Peugeot is still admirable and well-mannered.

The GT HDi 180 model, driven here, has all the latest equipment fitted. Gadgetry includes a touchscreen, reversing camera and blind spot sensors. Furthermore,

excellent leg and head room, both at the front and the rear, provide interior comfort and convenience of a very good level.

On British roads the steering is precise; the 0–62mph time of 8.9 seconds feels pleasing, and with a maximum speed of 130mph, this 2179cc diesel-powered, four-door car has plenty of verve.

The GT version of the 508 is pricey to buy new at £30,345, but Peugeots don't tend to hang on to their value, so thousands of pounds can be shaved off if you buy nearly new. It's also cost-effective to run, returning a claimed average of 67.3mpg.

The GT HDi 180 will serve a family well. The model also looks just the ticket for business.



Alfa Romeo Giulietta

According to a recent survey of British drivers, this five-door hatchback is one of the best motors in the UK. The well-dressed Giulietta seems to have caught the imagination of motorists with its mix of flair, drivability and handling. And, I have to say, I don't disagree.

In all honesty, the animated Alfa Romeo lives up to the spin and it deserves the praise heaped upon it. The very fact it's won over thousands of UK fans, shows "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". But you really need to get into the driver's seat and connect with this Italian-born beauty to see what she's all about.

I did just that with the 'old shape' Giulietta – the 1.6 JTDM-2 120bhp Business Edition. OK, the new Alfa Romeo Giulietta went on sale on 1



April 2016 and the Business Edition has now been replaced by the Tecnica trim, but that makes the 2015/16 model I drove a top bargain.

The 1.6 JTDM-2 turbo diesel engine has low CO₂ emissions of just 99g/km – and this means free road tax and reduced company car running costs. It will do a combined 74.3mpg, too. You'll also pay a lot less than the £19,080 price tag my test car had, now that the new model is here.

The car isn't sparing when it comes to performance, though. Top speed is 121mph and the Giulietta 1.6 JTDM-2 Business Edition feels even nippier than its on-paper figure of 0–62mph states. Lean into the corners and the car will tuck in and stick to the road like the wheels are on rails. But choose to drive as though you have all the time in the world and the Alfa will saunter along without any disinclination at all. ■

Tim is an experienced motoring writer with a background in radio and TV journalism. He puts his pedal to the metal each issue with his must-read car reviews. Visit carwriteups.co.uk.

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