



Classic Cars - July 1993

G SHARP by Jonathan Empson

Jonathan Empson risks a spin in Jensen's pointy prototype.

A junction appears on the distant horizon, so I start braking. The road sign reads "If you crash this car, the man in the seat next to you is going to kill you". No; optical illusion. It actually says 'Give way'.



I'm driving the one and only Jensen G-type. Melvin Floyd of Lynx Motors, sitting nervously alongside, has spent three years creating this car from a battered bare shell (see May's Classic Cars). No G-type was ever crash-tested. For all anyone knows, this car could have some innate structural flaw and be about to fold up like a takeaway carton, with me and Melvin squashed inside like old won-tons. The suspension is a mixed bag of componentry with guesswork geometry. To cap it all, the engine has done less than 100 miles from new. Nervous,

me?

Naturally I'm not driving this car very hard, but at least I'm driving it. That'll impress my grandchildren one day. The seats may be fitted (optimistically or pessimistically?) with four-point harnesses, but if the owner's got any sense he won't drive it very hard either. Spares, in the event of an accident, are going to be pretty hard to come by.

Before setting off I had to shut my passenger's door - both doors have reluctant (prototype) catches, and the passenger side in particular needs delicate external application of one's entire body weight to close it.

As the driver, meanwhile, I have discovered that if I fasten my harness I can't reach the gull wing door overhead, and if I shut the door first I can't get into the harness...

I'm slouched down in these rather nice Jensen GT seats but my head is still in firm contact with the door. Before the seats (the originals that came with the car) were retrimmed in leather, they gave quite reasonable headroom - the webbing had collapsed and you virtually sat on the floor.

As it is you still sit low down in this flat-looking car, but all-round visibility is pretty good (the car actually has quite reasonable ground clearance). The driving position for drivers with slightly lower roll centres (say 5ft 5in tall) would be perfect. One's left elbow collides with the armrest but wheel, gearstick and pedals are all nicely placed. Also easily to hand are releases for the rear Perspex hatch and the fuel filler, plus the switch which will slide the rear portion of the side window sedately forward for draught-free ventilation.

The instruments, however, are mostly invisible behind the Personal steering wheel - G-type designer William Towns had originally intended their pod to be height adjustable.

Acceleration up through the gears is accompanied by a resonating growl from the gearbox tunnel. The custom exhaust runs through there with little space left for sound insulation. I'm being very gentle with the engine - a brand-new unit in Lotus Excel SE tune mated to the usual Toyota 'box. When the engine loosens up it should provide reasonable performance, but this extensively lead-filled car is always going to be a bit, well, heavy. The front (the Escort at the back) are never troubled.



In corners the car feels reassuringly stable and bumps are absorbed well enough, as you'd expect with the well-proven Ford suspension components - albeit in a unique mix here. The front end is virtually a complete Granada set-up although the track is narrower.

The geometry will need some development. There isn't much castor action, and the virtually neutral camber on 205/55 VR 15 low-profile Pirelli P600s probably doesn't do the steering weight any favours - you have to haul the wheel around at low speeds,

Out of town, where the car has turned more than a few heads, my confidence grows. Roundabouts and turns taken with a little more pace don't seem to upset the car at all, although with most of the weight on the front, it would probably be ultimately tail-happy.



Onto a straight bit of A-road, and there's an ominous creak from the door beside me. At the next bump the door springs skyward, I instinctively grab for it and bring the car to a halt, my heart pounding. The G-type may well be quite happy motoring around with its doors open, looking predatory, but their self-opening trick is not to be recommended to anyone with a dicky ticker.

At the end of my 50 miles or so of town driving and fast pootling. I'm actually quite relieved to hand the car back to Lynx.

When I revisit the car a couple of weeks later, the owner has attached string to tie the two doors together inside! It's a dilemma as regards making the car practical: these catches are never going to hold the door closed indefinitely through the body's inevitable flexing, but a more





reliable fastening method would involve drilling more holes in the car. Now, some weeks on, the owner has finally chosen the latter course, and clever work by Lynx has rendered the changes invisible with the doors shut.

The owner does intend to put this unique piece of motoring history on display at various shows in the future, and it's not a shape you're likely to miss. I'm not the world's biggest wedge fan but this car certainly grew on me.

Would I like to own it? No. I'm paranoid enough about things breaking on my own Classics, and paranoia with a TR6 comes so much cheaper.