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Mr Toad's Motoring Questions - Spring 2006

You Ask, He Answers...



Maxey.co.uk is pleased to bring you the latest in our series of question and answer features from Maxey's own 'Mr. Toad'. For legal reasons (and his own safety!), Mr. Toad will remain anonymous for now.

You can contact him here: maxeytoad@aol.com
Don't be shy, send all your questions to the expert.

Dear Toad

Q. My boyfriend has just fitted wide alloy wheels and low profile tyres to my Vauxhall Astra and it looks very nice but the ride has changed and I can hear road noise all the time. He says the road holding has improved and it now corners a lot faster, is he telling me the truth?

Heidi, Deeping St James

A. Hello Heidi

What your boyfriend has done, in effect, is alter the geometry, or balance, of your car. To fit non-standard wheels and tyres to a family car, without further modification, will normally have a detrimental effect. In your case it has possibly changed the rolling radius (the distance the tyre moves along the road in a full turn) of the tyres by lowering their profile and very likely altered the gearing of the engine - revving higher at a given speed than when the standard wheels and tyres were fitted, probably actually reducing its potential top speed and certainly using more fuel. If the wheels are very wide he has also increased load on the wheel bearings. More concerning however is the likelihood of aquaplaning at high speed in the rain with a much wider tyre 'footprint' on the tarmac and loss of control especially under braking conditions. He has also lessened the unsprung weight of each corner of the car altering the suspension geometry.

I'm sure your car looks very nice Heidi but please have it checked by a competent auto technician as soon as you can dear just to make sure it's safe for you to drive.

Toad

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Hi Toad

Q. My mate Danny is a much faster driver than me. He always beats me to the pub and when we go into Peterborough even though I've got a faster car. How can I improve my driving to beat him sometimes?

Aidan, Tuckers Nook

A. Well Aidan, I remember when a good friend of mine, Todd (ratty) Roundend, thought he was a lot quicker than me. In truth, I chose to let him beat me on many occasions when we were 'pressing on' through the countryside along twisting lanes and b-roads of Berkshire, where I used to live. You see Aidan, it's not always clever or indeed wise to be the first round a particular bend or over a blind hill - let your friend Danny be the one to collect the slurry tanker in the middle of the road or the old-timer backing out of his driveway in his Austin Allegro! Let Danny go ahead, Aidan and stay safe on public roads.

If you really want to improve your roadcraft you can take advanced driving lessons and aim to pass the test to become an advanced motorist or enrol in one of the many racing

schools that ply their trade at various motor racing circuits around the country. The latter is certainly good fun and should make you a much smoother driver, probably quicker but most importantly - safer!

Toad

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Dear Toad

Q. Reading recently about the unfortunate closing of the Peugeot factory in the Midlands, and its history of car production I am reminded of some of the wonderful marques that are no longer on the roads today and wondered if you had a favourite car yourself or were particularly fond of any make from the past?

Claude, High Street

A. Well Claude, reminiscing about all things car is one of my favourite pastimes. Yes I have owned many very interesting cars over the years, from Fiat 500's to American Mercury Cougars and have had a certain affection for all of them - however unreliable or indeed however many times they've tried to introduce me to my maker! Nostalgia tends to blur the reality however of just how appalling some of the vehicles latterly produced by the British motor industry were. I remember in particular when the British Motor Corporation was absorbed by union-run British Leyland in the 70's and the famous Rootes Group merged into Chrysler, both launching some of the worst cars in the history of motorised transport!

Lost forever were the classic family saloons from Singer, Humber, Hillman, Sunbeam, Triumph, Austin, Morris, Riley, Wolsley et al, to be replaced by simply dreadful, unreliable and badly made cars like the Montego with its uncommunicative talking dashboard, the Allegro with the knee-bashing square steering wheel, the Maestro with its detachable bodywork, the Austin Maxi with the main selling feature being that the seats would turn into a double bed, the Ambassador with a tailgate too heavy for its gas struts - causing innumerable head injuries and the simply frightful Morris Ital. The only half-decent family car produced by Leyland in those days was the Austin Acclaim - a Honda partnership - unexciting but reliable.

So excuse me Claude if I don't get too misty-eyed about our recent motoring heritage other than for one particular car, the elegant Triumph Stag. A classic in the making, the Stag had an inauspicious start with Triumph management not communicating with Rover, although both part of the same company. Rather than install the ubiquitous Rover 3.5ltr V8 off the shelf, Triumph embarked upon a hugely expensive programme to develop their own unreliable 3.0ltr V8, fitted to the Stag with disastrous results. Once replaced aftermarket with the Rover engine (always in plentiful supply) the car was a delight - a high speed GT in the truest sense and reliable to boot.

Toot Toot

Toad

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Dear Toad

Q. I've just managed to secure, on ebay, a scruffy example of the Russian classic - the Trabant. I've been told that this model will be worth 10 times what I paid for it within 5 years - what's your expert opinion Toad?

Mike, West End Road

A. Well that would rather depend on what you paid for it Mike. The Trabant is a nasty little car. From its creaky, leaky plastic body, vague steering and smoky, noisy and underpowered 2-stroke engine to its unsafe handling and non-existent brakes - the car was actually built in pre-glasnost era East Germany to appease a population that had experienced no better at the time. The eastern bloc proletariat saved 10 years wages to buy a 2nd hand plastic Trabant while their 'some are more equal than others' masters motored around in 2 ½ ton, bullet-proof Zil limousines.

I can't imagine the Trabant will be anything other than a curio Mike, but I believe there is a sympathetic owner's club in existence somewhere....

Riddipp Toad

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Send your motoring conundrums to Toad at:- maxeytoad@aol.com

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