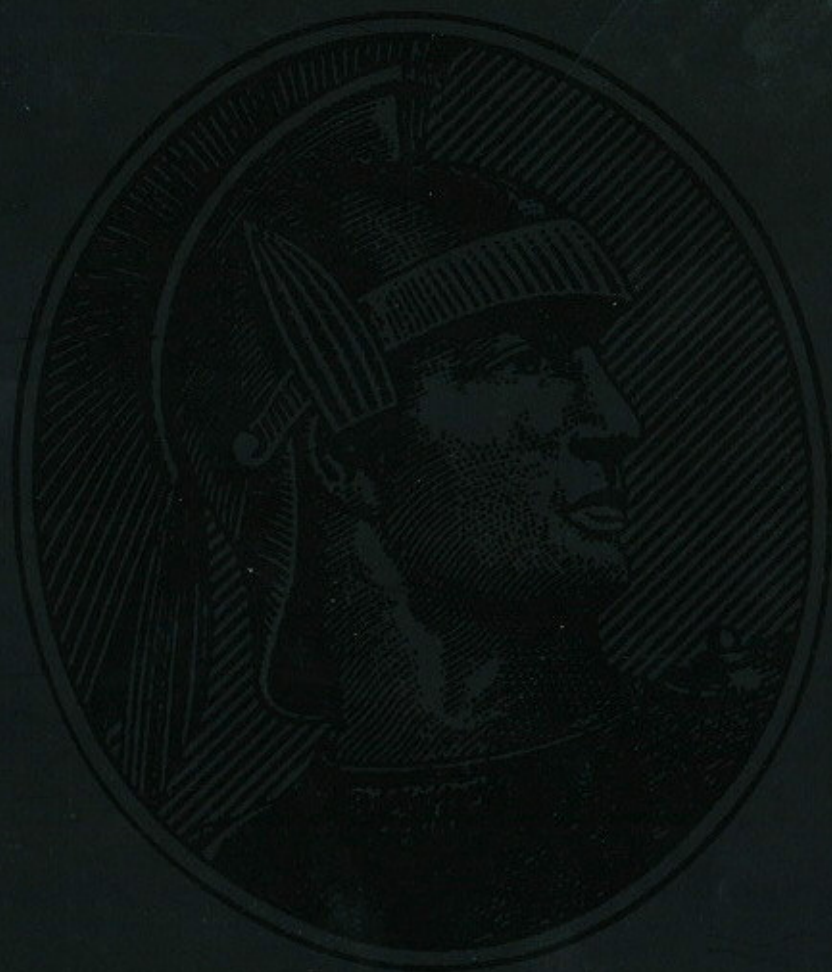


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# Centurion

THE AMERICAN EXPRESS CENTURION MAGAZINE



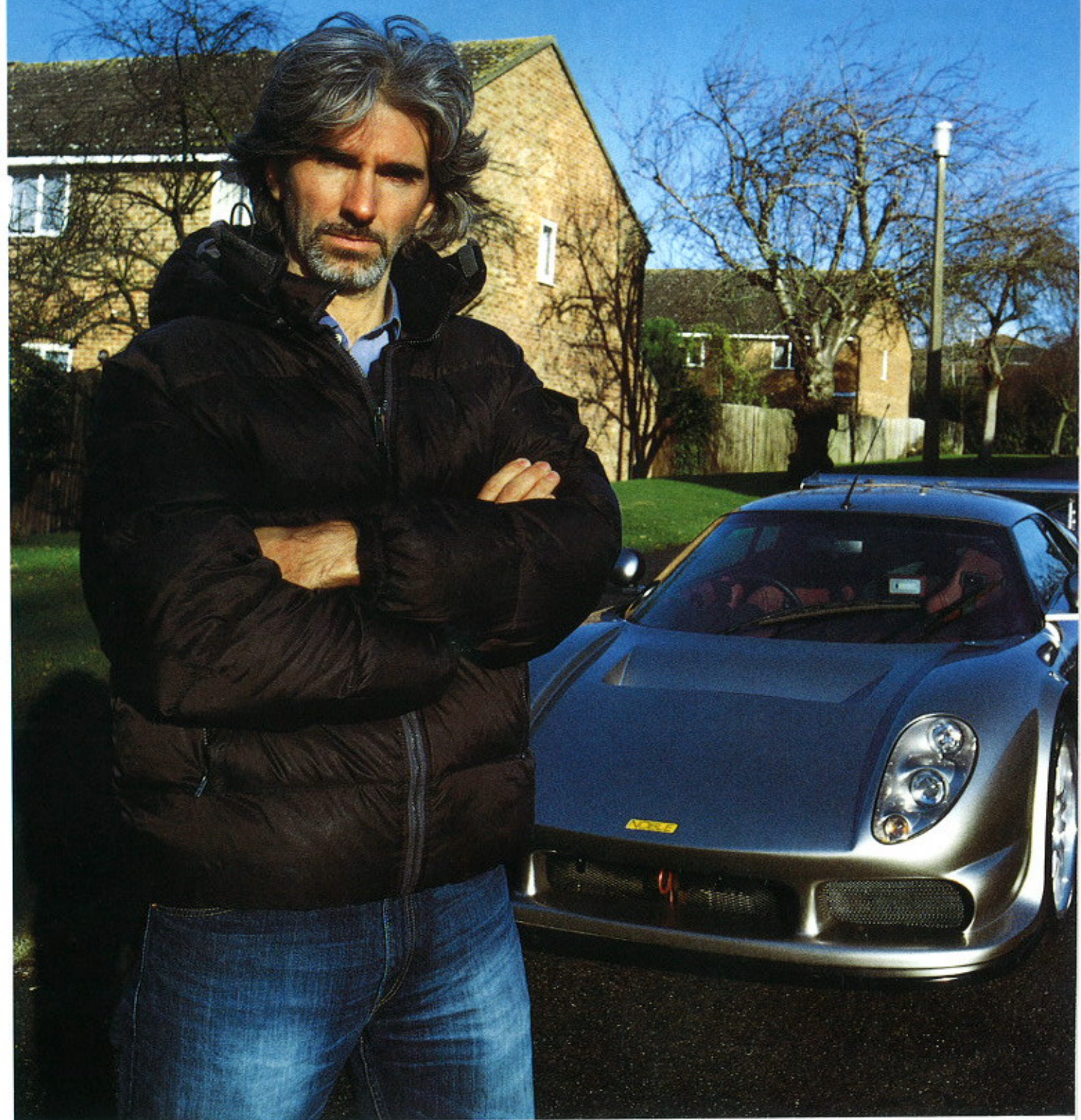
STYLE SPECIAL — GORGEOUS FLORAL FASHION

STAR QUALITY — FIVE MICHELIN-RATED UK RESTAURANTS

GOING HOT AND COLD — TRAVELLING IN THE ARCTIC AND INDIA

ROADWORTHY — TRULY GREAT CARS FROM MORGAN TO MASERATI

on the road





# Well-kept secrets

*We review five cars with three things in common: superb performance, great style, and the fact that not many people know about them – until now, that is*

## **Noble M12 GTO-3R**

Nobody would call the Noble M12 GTO-3R a practical car, but nearly everyone who sees one, or is lucky enough to drive one, all use the same expression; it's a lot of fun! More developed than the first Noble, the luxury touches, such as leather upholstery, air-conditioning and inertia seat belts, enhance the impression of progress without changing the essence of the product. It looks absolutely right, and somehow, because it is a small car too, it gives the impression of being a mere toy. Many people who see a Formula One car for the first time are shocked by how small they are, but their size, as with the Noble, is deceptive. Anyway, what's wrong with having toys?

Entering the low-slung cockpit, there is no doubt that this car will have fantastic performance; the larger 3-litre turbo V6 Ford engine emits a fabulous warm low frequency 'humble' (cross between a hum and a rumble) right behind your head, which rapidly winds up into a whooshing, torque-rich thrust in virtually any gear. Nimble and encouraging to drive, every corner becomes a massive temptation, and driving a familiar route takes on a totally new meaning. It has minimal comfort, but all the controls are beautifully located and thought out. At 6ft tall, with size 11s, I have no difficulties heeling and toeing through the down shifting, and my head does not smack the safety cage. The quality of build (bearing in mind that this is not a mass-produced jelly-mould car) is exceptional, so nobody should have the impression that a Noble is an enthusiast's dream. We [Damon Hill's private club] have added the Noble to our P1 fleet of exceptional cars because it is a fantastic experience for anyone who loves driving, and anyway, the members want one!

*Damon Hill*

*See p62 for more information on Damon's club, P1*

Photos Chris Tubbs

### **NOBLE M12 GTO-3R**

**Price** £52,500

**Engine** All alloy 3-litre V6

**Top speed** 280 km/h

**0-100km/h** 3.7 secs

**Economy** Unavailable



**MORGAN AERO8**

**Price from £55,500**  
**Engine 4.4-litre, V8 with 213kW and 440Nm**  
**Top speed 243 km/h**  
**0-100km/h 4.9 secs**  
**Economy (EU combined, litres/100km) 12.4**

**Morgan Aero8**

Creaking ash-wood body frames, hand-beaten aluminium coachwork, elbow cut-outs in the doors, and long louvered bonnets, that'll be a Morgan then – medieval sports cars from Malvern, as British as the weather and about as comfortable, too. So where does that leave Morgan's third all-new model in its 92-year history, the Aero8? Its looks are sort-of traditional sports car and the body is hand beaten, but under the skin is the most modern Alcan aluminium-alloy honeycomb chassis, which is glued and riveted together. Its 4.4-litre, V8 engine and six-speed gearbox come from Germany. The BMW engine was even specially tuned for Morgan at BMW's HQ in Munich. The suspension is all race car; rose-jointed, high-yield steel wishbones at both ends and there are no air bags, traction control, or anti-lock brakes.

Fire it up and the gently burbling exhaust belies astonishing performance. Six speeds are superfluous in this car, it accelerates hard in any gear and you don't need to wring the engine's neck either. Pulling power, or torque rather than screaming revs is what this car is all about. And it is seriously fast, eating miles in a lazy, unconcerned way, delivering surprisingly good fuel economy at the same time. The ride is wonderful, especially compared with the iron hard Plus 8

model and the handling is surefooted, with accurate and well-weighted steering. Practicality? There's some storage space at least in the boot, although the hood will drive you nuts, especially the finger-nail-ripping process of putting it up. So it's brilliant, and fast, without being terrifying. Well, except when you get round to the front and see those cross-eyed headlamps squinting at you. You need a lot of self confidence to drive a car that looks like the Morgan Aero8, the world's first strabismic sports car.

*Andrew English*

**Volkswagen Touareg V10**

It's the same price as a Range Rover and it has a VW badge on the front. Are they serious? Ostensibly there is loads of competition for Volkswagen's first foray into the luxury off-road market, but in truth there is nothing like the five-litre, V10 diesel Touareg – in fact there are trucks with less pulling power than this Leviathan.

Sure, there's no heritage to the Touareg, but that's part of its appeal. Massive power, humongous torque, Sybaritic superfluity and no responsibility – terrific! Hardly surprising, then, that Touareg is (almost) an anagram of 'Outrage'.



VW TOUAREG V10

Price from £50,455

Engine 5-litre, V10 with  
233kW and 750Nm

Top speed 228 km/h

0-100km/h 7.8 secs

Economy (EU combined,  
litres/100km) 12.2

Of course we know that just 10 per cent of these massive 4x4s do anything other than swan up and down the King's Road or take the kids to school, but when the going gets tough the Touareg is surprisingly good. Not quite as good as a Range Rover, true, but thanks to sophisticated electronics in the form of hill-descent control, traction control, brake intervention, roll-back protection and stability programmes, you can usually get within striking distance of the Solihull 4x4 if not quite on direct terms. Other German off-roaders are, of course, available (not least the VW's sister car, the Porsche Cayenne), but none have the stunning pulling power and just plain weirdness of this massive diesel 4x4. Air springing and massive brakes do their best to mitigate the 300kg extra weight of the engine, but on metalled roads the Touareg is Conan the Understeerer, preferring to go straight on at all times. It's comfortable yes, but not for whizzing round corners. Just use it as a point-and-squirt machine, or better still slot something outrageous into the stereo and enjoy the most powerful diesel fitted to any production car in the world. Even American Army Hummers shrink back when they see the Touareg with that V10 badge.

*Andrew English*

### Honda NSX

Concorde flying overhead made people stop and stare. Even those with no interest in aeronautical design or technological genius would gawp open-mouthed at the sheer beauty and grace of the thing. The sleek Honda NSX, then, is the delta-winged plane's automotive equivalent.



Porsches and Mercedes barely muster a second glance these days, but drive an NSX down the street and the whole world stops to ogle. They can't help themselves. This is a car with the profile and engine growl of a Ferrari, but with a big H on the bonnet and a Honda price tag to match. It's a car that was voted, along with the Maserati 3200GT, The Most Manly of



**HONDA NSX**

**Price** £59,995

**Engine** 3.2i, 6 cylinders, 24 valves, DOHC, VTEC

**Top speed** 270km/h

**0-100km/h** 5.7 secs

**Economy** (EU combined, litres/100km) 12.4



**MASERATI COUPE**

**Price** from £61,000

**Engine** 4.2-litre, V8 with 291kW and 451Nm

**Top speed** 285km/h

**0-100km/h** 4.9 secs

**Economy** (EU combined, litres/100km) 18.6

All Cars by information group Experian. It's the car of choice for Jenson Button and Tara Palmer-Tomkinson. And yet – and this is perhaps its greatest asset – so rare is it on the streets that the driver gets to feel like a movie star every day. People point, chat to you at traffic lights, bombard you with questions. They even ask if they can have their photograph taken with it. In a world full of stunning automobiles, there aren't many that evoke such a response.

Around town, the NSX drives like one of Honda's more modest models. But open it up on a country road and there's no mistaking its true pedigree. It is frighteningly fast, but so well engineered that there's never a sense of loss of control.

If Honda has its way, the NSX is about to lose one of its prime assets. They've dropped the price by £10k to just under £60k in order to compete with the 911. Selling more cars may reduce the NSX's ability to stop people in their tracks, but nothing could ever diminish its beauty.

*Mike Carter*

The heart of any Maserati is its engine and the new 4.2-litre, Ferrari-derived V8 is simply wonderful, providing massive acceleration and a beguiling soundtrack, even if it is a trifle thirsty. The gearbox is much improved, too, although upward changes are occasionally slow and abrupt. The new steering provides a steady commentary of feedback and allows the driver to exploit more fully the handling than he ever could previously. Even the ride is revamped, being firm but supple and cossetting – you could travel all day in this car and not feel the miles. And that's partly to do with the unusually generous cabin, which can seat four adults in genuine comfort – although you'd never get their luggage in as well.

So suddenly, the Coupe's soft leather-lined cockpit is an altogether more promising place than merely a luxurious waiting room for the breakdown van. The Maser is now as much a purchase for your head as it is for your heart.

*Andrew English*

**Maserati Coupe**

No one ever doubted that the old Maserati 3200GT Coupe had a wonderful heritage, or that it was swift, good looking and luxurious. So why was it that no one wanted to buy it? Perhaps it was that the car was not the most reliable, or that owners hated the clunky old electro-hydraulic gearbox and the nervous-feeling steering system. Whatever, the old Maser Coupe had a reputation as a complete underachiever.

After a complete revamp by Maserati's owner Ferrari, the Coupe is still a bit of a dark horse, but it's a transformed and thoroughly reformed beast as well. Gone are the twin turbochargers that made the performance so exciting and occasionally unnerving, the steering is replaced, the coachwork style has been cleaned up and if reports are to be trusted, the reliability has improved as well.

Members of Damon Hill's private club, P1, can see if they agree with the former Formula One World Champion by driving the Noble M12 GTO-3R as part of the club's extensive fleet of supercars, which also includes amongst others the Lamborghini Gallardo, Aston Martin Vanquish and Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale. Members access the club's fleet using a points and mileage allowance that they receive in return for an annual membership fee, whilst P1 takes care of the usual anxieties of ownership such as depreciation, maintenance, storage and insurance. Members can also enjoy opportunities to take to the track with Damon Hill at exclusive P1 track days. Available by invitation for just 250 people, the two levels of P1 membership, Silverstone and Monaco, cost £12,500 and £15,000 respectively in the first year, and provide on average between 50 and 70 days driving in P1 cars. A limited number of memberships for overseas drivers wishing to access the fleet whilst in the UK are also available.

For further information visit [www.p1international.com](http://www.p1international.com)