

Let's face it, we've been rather spoiled by car manufacturers over the past couple of decades. Compact saloons or hatches with punchy two-litre fours are no longer special but expected. In the early 1970s, though, it was an exciting new concept, credit for which should probably be shared between the Vauxhall Viva GT and BMW with the regular 2002, both of which were launched in 1968. Fine enough cars in their own way, but the hundred-or-so bhp they offered wasn't quite there yet.

The fire was really lit by Alfa Romeo and BMW in 1971 with this duo, each boasting 130bhp-plus of real performance. Both were built on the solid platform of established success. For Alfa the incentive was to boost sales because the excellent 1750 GTV was starting to flag after four years on the market, not helped in those fashion-conscious times by the body being four years older still. The jump to two litres gave its marketing bods another 10bhp to shout about.

BMW had already boosted the 2002 for some markets by bolting on twin Solexes to create the 2002ti, but this thrusting company was lured by the benefits of fuel injection, not least the addition of another 10bhp combined with better economy. Its advertising team had it even easier with messages such as that to put about.

These were everyday cars that had it all: they

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could go, stop and turn with the best of them, and that caught the public's imagination. Not that many could get their hands on one, for the 2002tii and 2000 GTV never plumbed the depths of 'affordable'. They were aspirational, a touch exotic even. Owning one set you apart from the crowd. In today's terms think M3 or Evo: shopping on Saturday, track day on Sunday, bragging rights for your kids all week.

These were cars for the salaried hedonist, portrayed at the time as drinking Martini, going to foreign restaurants, owning a new detached house and taking their holidays abroad – but not in Torremolinos. They were cool, admired and envied – and remain coveted today. The 2002 and GTV proved to be just the thing for competition use, too. It's a rare period shot of '70s saloon car racing that doesn't include at least one of them in the frame, more often than not in a prominent position in the field.

Almost miraculously, despite nearly 20 years of writing about old cars I have never driven either an Alfa 2000 GTV or a BMW 2002tii, though in both cases it's something I've long wanted to do. When I was a teenager during the '70s, the sighting of either in that suburban sea of Escorts, Cortinas, Vivas and Marinas would always catch the eye and lift the spirit.

In a way, I'm feeling rather nervous, because this could burst a few bubbles of long-held opinion. However surrogately formed they were, from myriad magazine articles, those are views I've become comfortable with. But it's time to put them to the test, along with the cars.

BMW 2002tii

VS



ALFA ROMEO 2000 GTV

Two cars arrived in 1971 to blur the line between coupé and sports saloon. Russ Smith tries to separate them

BY TONY BAKER



ULTIMATE SHOWDOWNS

BMW 2002tii vs ALFA ROMEO 2000 GTV

The owner

GARY CHRISTOPHI

What inspired you to buy a 2002tii? It's not a car I'd ever dreamed of owning, but after I sold my Merc Fintail and 1963 Cadillac I wanted something interesting that I could drive every day and not lose money on. Aha, a 2002! It made sense and ticked all of the right boxes, especially in retro-cool orange. With fuel injection, a tii looked as if it would be easier to live with.



'In two years, I have only had to replace the servos, indicator stalk and water pump'

How did you come by it? I did a lot of research so I knew what I wanted – a tii in Inka, with round tail-lights. I went to see a later blue car at Cooks Ferry Engineering, but it wasn't right. Then it turned out that Pat Gill at Cooks Ferry had the exact car I wanted and might be persuaded to sell. It took a while to bargain with him, but it was worth the effort – it's the right car, from the right home.

Have you had to do much to it? Very little, despite commuting in it every day for a while. In two years, apart from servicing, I've only had to replace the servos, indicator stalk and water pump (to cure an overheating problem).

Any memorable moments with the car? It has become my little boy Theo's "Orange Car". For ages he had to sit in it every day when I came home and pretend to drive.

What about the social side, do you belong to any clubs? I don't get a lot of time for shows, but I signed up for the bmw2002.co.uk e-mail group, which is very lively.

Has it changed your life at all? No, but I do love this car. I enjoy driving it every time.



Interior

Don't expect to gasp with delight when you open the door of the BMW. As a visual treat it offers only marginally more excitement than the Essen-Düsseldorf railway timetable. There's no real styling as such, nor much luxury, but neither is it offensive. Let's call it functional.

At least the cloth and vinyl seats are a lot more comfortable and supportive than they look, though tall adults will struggle in the back. It's a good driving position, too, with all of the controls exactly where you expect them. Only the height of the steering wheel might give cause to grumble, and then only if you're less than 5ft 8in tall.

Shiny vinyl, mostly of the black

variety, dominates the rest of the interior, with the only hint of sportiness in the short but chunky centre console. It looks like the model for those '70s accessories that people used to self-tap into their Anglias.

Where BMW did attempt a splash of interest, you wish it hadn't. The three legible dials, flanked by two pairs of chunky push/pull switches, are set into what looks like an offcut of cheap laminate flooring (out of a later Lux model). That said, it's hard to mark it down because everything is so well laid out, and still functions perfectly. Why aren't more seat adjustment levers so well sited and easy to use?

★★★★★☆☆☆☆



Styling

There's an individuality and purpose to the BMW's boxy lines. It might not be as pretty as the Alfa, but that tall, slim-pillared glass-house offers a discreet elegance rather than showy curves. As a design it has aged well. The '02 has a great stance, with a surprisingly wide track for a car of this era – as anyone who's tried to fit wider wheels will have found out: there simply isn't any more room. The wheelbase is also long in relation to the body, and with that slight negative camber to the rear wheels you know it means business.

The bluff extremities and corporate reverse-rake nose manage to disguise the fact that the BMW is

5in longer than the GTV. What can't be hidden is the scant attention paid to aerodynamics, resulting in a speed-restricting Cd of 0.44.

The shape works best in bright colours such as yellow, green and the orange you see here, particularly with this early car's slimmer nostrils and shiny grille that looks like the otter's whiskers. The all-black nose introduced in '73 was a bit moustache-like. The round tail-lights were lost at the same time, and it's hard to care that the rectangular replacements were more efficient. Stainless-steel strips add interest, while that unbroken waistline draws your eye around the car.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆





The owner

PETER TIMOTHEOU

What inspired you to buy a GTV? I've always been an Alfa man and have had Alfasuds and others in the past. The GTV is a classy and unassuming car, but it had to be a really good example.

How did you come by it? It took a long time to find the right car, and I had convinced myself it had to be red or Dutch Blue. Then I was persuaded to go to the Ally Rally show in 2006 and this car was for sale on the AROC stand. At first I wasn't sure about the colour so I went back the next day with my wife. She loved it, so I bought it.



'It's a fantastic car that I can drive to work and park anywhere without feeling guilty'

Have you had to do much to it? Quite a lot, but most of it has been detailing – the car was let down by a few small things: I've replaced the horrid wheels it had with alloys, and all of the fixing screws are now stainless steel, not rusty. The engine and gearbox mounts needed changing, too.

Any memorable moments with the car? It took second prize in the 105 Series class at the Alfa Romeo Owners' Club National Concours in 2008. I'm determined to win that. I was also supposed to display it on the Alfaholics stand at another show, but it rained so much that the car got bogged down in a field and we didn't make it.

What about the social side, do you belong to any clubs? Joining the Alfa Romeo Owners' Club has been great – we go to a lot of shows.

Has it changed your life at all? I have a fantastic car that I can take to work and park anywhere without feeling guilty. It has also got under my skin. I'm not quite an anorak yet, but I'm moving in the right direction.

Interior

The Alfa's interior wouldn't look out of place in a Ferrari, which goes some way to justifying the car's high price when it was new. You find evidence of thought and dashes of exuberance in every aspect, and the overall effect is to make your heart beat that little bit faster.

Those sculpted rear seats may offer no more accommodation for grown-ups than the BMW, but they'll be more likely to want to give it a go. You have to love that thinly fluted and perforated vinyl. Even in brown it manages to look sporty, and will distract you from the fact that the Alfa's seats are actually a point behind the 2002's for support and comfort.

Patterns and chrome brighten the door panels, with black vinyl reduced to a supporting role except on the dashboard. There it is shaped into two large and two small binnacles for the instruments, with any slabbiness in the rest of the dash broken up by wood inserts and more chrome. The former might not look any more wooden than that in the BMW, but it is shinier.

It's the same deal with the centre console, which makes quite a drama about housing the gearlever, heater controls, ashtray and three switches. The large wooden gearknob neatly echoes this car's aftermarket Nardi wood-rim steering wheel.



Styling

For a real measure of the success of the GTV's styling, try to think of another coupé – apart from the Mercedes 300SL Gullwing – that is worth more than its soft-top equivalent (not counting the coachbuilt GTC, of course). Hard isn't it?

Giugiaro's design was allegedly a bit of a rush job, derived from his previous 2000/2600 Sprint. Perhaps he would have spoilt it if left to play for any longer, because the purity and delicacy of line is stunning – it looks good from any angle. Note that no one thought it necessary to adorn it with chrome strips. The shape becomes slightly pinched towards the tail, but that's all I could possibly fault. And it contributes to

the tail-down stance that makes the Alfa look ready to pounce.

In typically Italian fashion, there are plenty of stylish details to delight at, such as the finely ribbed, inset door handles. Heaps more effort has been made to produce the 2000 GTV's intricate grille, too. It's not hard to imagine there being one man at Alfa Romeo whose life and genius is dedicated to grille design.

The chromed mouth is flanked by the twin headlamps that set the GTV model apart from its smaller-engined Junior brethren – or at least did until Alfa spoiled the effect by also fitting them to Juniors for the last two years of production.



