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We have long been exponents of the belief that beauty is to be found in simplicity rather than complexity whether the object in question is a piece of engineering or car styling. In such terms, the Matra Murena is a strikingly good-looking car whose form and detail require but a few strokes of the artist's pen to emulate and whose mechanicals, while derived from a fairly mundane Talbot family car, seem none the less effective for the fact.

This suave GRP-bodied French seductress is the direct descendant of the neat little Matra Simca Bagheera, first in the line of compact sports cars that evolved from the concept of seating three adults abreast in comfort, solving in one fell swoop the eternal dilemma of the cramped two plus two compromise. Instead of generous space for two adults and a pair of midgets, Matra took the problem by the short and scruffies and provided what a well known tome in his infinite wisdom once observed as a 'typically Gallic solution to the transportation of a man, his wife and mistress. . .'. Whatever the implications of that may be, the result is equal comfort for three adults abreast, releasing cabin and stowage space and allowing full exploitation of the mid-engined concept while keeping the wheelbase and weight distribution of the vehicle within sensible parameters.

If balance is the name of the game, then the Murena certainly showed plenty of it as well as power in abundance over the standard cooking version as this turbocharged example which we were conducting down the A24 allowed us to open up an ever increasing gap with the hard-charging Metro Turbo that had been snapping at our heels. Some of the corners on this familiar road follow fairly blind crests, and it is a tribute to the ability of the little French sports car that it is capable of an instant and precise change of direction in spite of a steering box (in the course of the right-hand drive conversion, the car adopts the steering box from another member of the Talbot family) less responsive than that which it was born with.

It is one of the quirks of nature, or perhaps of manufacturing, that some vehicles like the Fiat 131 Sport and this Matra feel rather unwieldy around town, and yet come alive on the open road. The ventilation is imperfect, the steering rather heavy and overdamped for a car with so little weight over the front wheels. The steering wheel itself is of inconsistent circumference and its section unpleasant to the grip. If the weight of all the controls of a car should be nicely balanced to obtain a feeling of synergy that Lotus and Porsche, BMW and VW seem to be able to achieve

# MATRA AND MORE

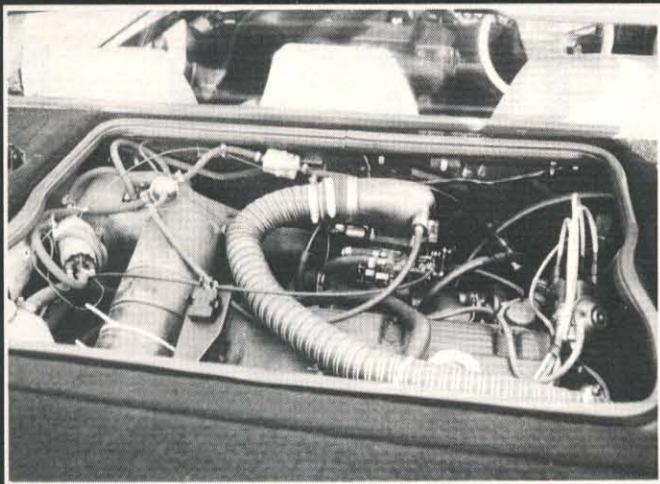
**Rare, exclusive and desirable enough in its own right, the mid-engined Matra Murena can be given even more sparkle by the addition of a turbocharger, as we recently discovered.**

with boring regularity, then the Matra will disappoint. Its gearchange is not the best in the world; nor are its clutch, accelerator, brakes or the sounds it makes anything to write home about, yet get this car really moving through the bends and a flowing rhythm can be set up, the P6 rubber that provides the grip can be felt gently breaking

away on the limit of adhesion, the sensation of sliding transmitted through the seat of the driver's pants in a most satisfying manner that allows and responds to instant correction at the helm.

Even with the 2.2 litre mill, the straight-line performance of the stock Murena is not in the GTi ball park, with





a 0-60 time of 9.5 seconds, although its top speed is higher at 120 mph. Drag coefficient though, is a low 0.328 and this certainly helps the car to respond well to a substantial increase in power. Our test car, which belongs to a businessman, Mr H M Morris, based in Wales, came from Designer Cars Ltd of 40 Vanston Place, just off Fulham Broadway. The car was converted to RHD by them and turbocharged with a system they market in the UK but developed in Holland by Mosselman Turbo Systems. The installation utilised a Garrett AiResearch T3 turbocharger which blows through an air-to-air intercooler and provides a fairly mild 5 psi of boost into the standard twin-choke Solex carburettor which is rejettted and modified by the removal of the cold start enrichment device. This £1,550 (plus VAT) installation produces a claimed 162 bhp shaving 1.5 seconds off the 0-60 time. Our previous experience with cars of similar bhp indicate that the test car was down on power as it did not feel anything like 162 bhp was present. Having said that, one of the gaskets in the exhaust was blowing and acting like a waste-gate and this was

obviously responsible for the power loss. When the pipes got very hot, the leak was plugged by the expanding metal and we had maximum boost. When this happened, the whole character of the car was transformed and the performance at last seemed comensurate with the looks and handling.

The Murena is a car that turns heads wherever it goes, not least because it is attractive, distinctive and rare. Such cars are the raison d'etre for the existence of Designer Cars which was founded in 1982 by John Brydon, the former sales director of Rapport, the firm you will no doubt remember specialised in retrimmed Range Rovers, stretched Mercedes limousines and modified and very plush Honda Accord Executive saloons.

The seed of an idea led to the formation of Designer Cars dedicated to offering individuality to its customers by way of body-styling packages, interior redesign and retrim together with engine, suspension and brake modifications. The company has its own design studios and the expertise to design a prototype to a customer's specification from the ground up or

simply to redesign an existing vehicle to meet its owners requirements.

While this may seem to be a privilege that the wealthy alone can afford, individuality can be had for much less in the form of standard production cars such as the Sierra which can be bought with styling packages adding a touch of exclusivity **for the same list price** as quoted by normal dealers. Needless to say, the same standard of craftsmanship applies in the preparation of these cars. A substantial part of new car sales involve low volume specialist cars such as the Matra Murena and the Renault Turbo 2 which we were also fortunate enough to drive, (more of which at a later date), and here Designer Cars is able to offer the choice of both left and right-hand drive vehicles.

The company is planning to extend their range of styling systems to encompass interesting new cars as they appear on the UK market. Latest addition to the range is a kit for the Ford Orion, and in the near future we will be describing their efforts to personalise the new Golf II GTi.





*Flat 6 Woodlands Court,  
Woodlands Road,  
Harrow. HA1 2RU  
Phone +44 (0)20 8861 1035*

*Email: [roy@matraclub.org.uk](mailto:roy@matraclub.org.uk)*

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These notes should be read in conjunction with the Gran Turismo article, since some of the criticisms described are nothing to do with the Matra Murena as designed, but are a consequence of the RHD and turbocharger conversions to the model in the review.

I bought my Matra Murena 2.2 new in 1983, and have used the car full time since buying it. It is a standard LHD 2.2 model and is my only car. I have covered over 15,000 miles in it so far. Furthermore, I work with cars; have driven many different models, including many fast cars; have had race driver training, and lots of fast track time in a variety of cars, which I believe gives me as much qualification to assess the Murena as most testers, probably more.

First it is useful to point out something that is usually overlooked, namely that unlike other cars, converting the Murena (or Bagheera) from left to right hand drive has the added complications caused by the asymmetric layout, and that most if not all conversions seen so far, are poor, as they are only partially converted. Since the drivers seat sits on runners to enable it to be slid back and forth to suit the height of the driver, and the floorpan is lowered under that seat to compensate, whilst the two passenger seats are fixed to a 'flat' floor; unless the floorpan is totally reversed, the drivers seat will sit too high on the right, reducing the headroom and drastically altering the driving position and complete nature of the drivers experience in the car. Again unlike a normal conversion, the gearlever and handbrake have to be moved from the left of the centre seat to the right, subtly altering their operation. Finally, since the driver also sits further from the centre-line of the car, the wiper pattern is more critical. The wipers were designed for LHD and clear the screen correctly for driving from the left hand side. So unless the wipers are converted, they will not clear the screen adequately for a RHD driver, leaving the view dangerously obscured in bad weather.

Regarding the magazine review, the acceleration time for a standard Murena 2.2 is 0-100kph (62.5mph) in 9.3 seconds which equates to a 0-60 mph of 9.0 seconds, not 9.5 seconds, and the top speed is 200kph (125mph) not 120mph. The car had an exhaust leak which would obviously affect the turbo efficiency and overall power, but a claimed 162bhp is suggested, compared to a standard 118bhp (and 142bhp from the 'S'). With that much extra power the car should have been really quick! The article states the steering is heavy and overdamped, and the car unwieldy around town. This car has an old fashioned steering box instead of the superb rack the car is fitted with in LHD form. Is it any wonder the car is not right? I can confirm that the normal steering is light, quick and precise, and the steering wheel is perfect for the car, with lovely feel and grip. The turbo conversion would have made the rear heavier, upsetting the front/rear balance which is critical in a mid-engined car. Also from experience I know many Murena are running incorrect tyre pressures, and these are very important on this car - much more than a normal car, so unless the pressures are stated in any review, any subjective comments regarding balance, steering, handling and road holding should be regarded as possibly flawed.

Roy K Gillard Matra Murena 2.2 owner and  
Technical Advisor, Matra Enthusiasts Club UK