

POPULARITY CONTEST

*E-type and 911: so different yet each with one of the biggest fan-bases in the classic car world – and they were born within two years of each other. **Stephen Bayley** discusses style, **Glen Waddington** their concepts, **Robert Coucher** the driving: which one takes the crown?*

Photography Sam Chick





No-one ever thought the Porsche 911 'beautiful'. Yet it looks likely it will be a joy forever, as beautiful things are said to be. The end of production is not nearly in sight. On the contrary, the original design has shown itself capable of continuous evolution: proof of conceptual excellence.

The Jaguar E-type, however, has often been described as the most beautiful car ever made. Not least by Enzo Ferrari, never a designer himself, but an agitator of men and *padrone* of more mechanical beauty than anyone else.

There is an E-type in the permanent collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art. Meanwhile, there are waiting lists for the latest 992. Compared even with the contemporaneous Porsche, the Jaguar seems an antique, a museum-piece King's Road chariot of the 1960s for men with flares and women without bras. Yet its haunting loveliness has hobbled every subsequent Jaguar designer, none of whom has quite been able even to approximate such ineffable

beauty. I don't think you will find waiting lists for the F-type.

'Zeitgeist' is the term philosophers use to describe how contemporary products and events mystically share characteristics that bind them to their moment in history. But 'the spirit of the age' is not a useful device for explaining these different cars.

They leave any analytical methodology floundering because each was the result not of a dedicated research programme, but of a sequence of accidents and opportunities. And market research played no part. Instead, it was what the poet called 'the madness of art'.

Graf Albrecht von Goertz, a slightly dodgy 'Count' who had worked for the genius/charlatan/hustler Raymond Loewy in the US and, on the side, designed the BMW 507, is an important source of the 911. On his return to Europe, he worked as a consultant for Porsche on a replacement for the 356. His proposals were rejected as being too Goertz-bling and not enough Porsche-matter-of-fact.

But Goertz later persuaded young Ferdinand Alexander 'Butzi' Porsche to leave Ulm's Hochschule für Gestaltung, sacred source of 'systematic' design, and to join the

family business. The shape of the 911 is his work. Clearly, he acknowledged history because its lines reflect Erwin Komenda's original Volkswagen profile.

But it is a more athletic, racing beetle, even if photographs of the 1963 original sitting high on its thin tyres give more an impression of a family limousine than a racing car. Indeed, the original brief insisted the 911 should have space for a bag of golf clubs.

Artistically, the essence of Ferdinand-Alexander's design is geometry, a discipline revered at the Ulm school, which also produced Dieter Rams whose Braun electrical products later so inspired Apple's Jony Ive. Start doodling with overlapping ellipses for roof- and hip-lines and with semi-circles for the wheelarches and you will soon have your own drawing of a 911's profile.

There is a BMW connection for the Jaguar as well. The lines of the XK120, the car that established the firm's reputation for dangerous proto-MeToo! suavety, were borrowed from the pre-war BMW 328. And here we must ask where, in the case of the heroically opportunistic William Lyons, inspiration ends and plagiarism begins.

But when the aerodynamicist Malcom Sayer began to exert his influence in Jaguar, other factors became involved. And they were not all sourced in the wind tunnel. Sayer admired the 1952 Alfa Romeo Disco Volante by Carrozzeria Touring of Milan. This is another astonishing composition of segments and sections of circles. Indubitably it influenced the E-type.

The Porsche and Jaguar engines are, in aesthetic terms, both deeply revealing of contrasting national preoccupations. In the German car, the engine is as anonymous and as unobtrusively functional as a fridge motor, but the Jaguar's is theatre and the stage curtains

are that enormous, sculpted bonnet. Opening it is a process of concealment-and-display and, if that is sexually suggestive, then so much about the E-type's aesthetic is.

It was an engine designed to be admired: look upon those three SU carburettors, the polished cam boxes and the very self-conscious triangular air filter and don't despair, but thrill. The exhausts, like the power bulge, were artistically emphasised to create drama.

In plan form the Jaguar, so often described as 'phallic', is a flat rectangle. And it has not so much a very long bonnet as a very short cabin, an arrangement that creates startling

'The Jaguar E-type has often been described as the most beautiful car ever made'





'The Porsche and the Jaguar have much in common, aesthetically speaking'

proportions. From front three-quarters, it's evident that those voluptuous wings are nearly pure cylinders. Ian Callum once told me: 'Malcolm Sayer designed by geometry... It is not free expression.' In Callum's analysis, the trailing edge of the E-type bonnet is a pure radius with a known mathematical value.

The Jaguar has better details than the Porsche. There is that power bulge, a sculptural device that adds an irrational complexity to the geometry of the bonnet. The chrome bar splitting the perfectly proportioned air intake has nothing to do with aerodynamics and everything to do with a stylist's genius. Both Porsche and Jaguar have wrap-around rear bumpers, but the Jaguar's are somehow more lascivious. Callum said: 'It's all about putting just enough *style* into a car to make it fascinating.'

As we look at these old cars, it's impossible not to reflect on how little is ever truly new in matters of design. Some early 911s had engines related to Hitler's wheezing and puffing Volkswagen. And those distinctive horizontal rear lights on the E-type? They are similar in design to the Jaguar Mk10's, where they were deployed vertically.

Despite their differences, the Porsche and the Jaguar have much in common, aesthetically speaking. In each, the details are in harmony with the whole: you can instantly recognise a 911 or an E-type from a fragment alone. Rather like an organism, the entirety of each car evolves from its elementary parts.

'Classic' means the best of its kind, which is why major golf and tennis tournaments are

called classics. It takes time to become a classic. Anyone talking about an 'instant classic' has inhaled too much PR. It took the 911 and E-type decades.

I do not think the Porsche and Jaguar designers were aiming at timelessness, even if that is what each achieved. But time is a cruel mistress: the beautiful E-type is dead while the more matter-of-fact Porsche lives on.

Stephen Bayley

STEPHEN MENTIONED the 356. And the XK120. He didn't mention that they were both launched in the same year: 1948. Nor that, although there was a price disparity in the Jaguar's favour, the XK120 was powered by a 160bhp 3.4-litre straight-six that made it the fastest production car of its day, while the 356 puffed out its air-cooled pecs to summon 35bhp from 1131cc. Different beasts, though with similar enthusiast longevity, and both were initially built in tiny numbers in aluminium before serious production began.

Then it happened again. Not quite in the same year this time; these introductions, two years apart, were divided by the release of *Love Me Do*, The Beatles' first hit. That was in 1962; the E-type preceded it famously, thanks to Norman Dewis's flamboyant blast from Coventry to Geneva. All that raises an enthusiast eyebrow about the 911's carefully orchestrated presentation at the Frankfurt motor show in 1963 was that it narrowly missed being a 901. Peugeot had objected.

The Beatles set the new scene evolving. Rock 'n' roll was more than merely a blend

of jazz, gospel, blues and folk music: it had been influencing lifestyles, fashion, attitudes and language. Radio Caroline (from 1964; the same year Beatlemania went global) broadcast it straight into the hearth. And the E-type landed straight into Carnaby Street, at the heart of this swinging new world, swaggering with its 265bhp 3.8-litre triple-carb straight-six. Rock 'n' roll on wheels.

Amazing to think it did this after a gestation in Coventry, of all places. Led by Sir William Lyons too, a man already into his 60s, and in memoirs of whom I don't believe references to Chuck Berry are prevalent. But this wasn't fashion designed-in. This was a team of talented men seeking to build the best sports car Britain could offer. And you can forget any notions of a crude chassis and live axle wrapped in sexy tinsel. The E-type was prescient. And proper.

Its construction was clever, a mix of monocoque (body tub) and spaceframe (to carry engine and front suspension), with a sophisticated independent rear suspension assembly mounted on a subframe – the monocoque's construction technique owed more to aerospace technology than car-building. And as Jaguar's development engineer Brian Martin once told me: 'That suspension offered much better roadholding than anything we'd designed before. It was Jaguar's first in a production car and went on virtually unchanged to 1989 in the XJS.'

The E-type was an incredible achievement for a company run by only 15-20 senior people; the suspension alone took five years



Below
911 is an arresting shape, to such a degree that after 56 years the latest generation is merely an evolution of it. Same goes for that rear-mounted flat-six, now larger, turbocharged and water-cooled.



1973 Porsche 911 2.4S

Engine Rear-mounted 2341cc air-cooled flat-six, OHC per bank, dry sump, Bosch mechanical fuel injection **Power** 190bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 159lb ft @ 5200rpm **Transmission** Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **Steering** Rack and pinion **Suspension** Front: MacPherson struts, lower wishbones, torsion bars, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: semi-trailing arms, torsion bars, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **Brakes** Vented discs **Weight** 1075kg **Top speed** 145mph **0-60mph** 8.5sec

to develop and employed fixed-length halfshafts sprouting either side of the diff, sprung by paired coils and telescopic dampers.

The XK twin-cam straight-six had been around since 1948 but was good for nearly three more decades. Eventually the V12 came along, an incredible engine that calls to mind the Supermarine Spitfire's Merlin in its character and scope – but Jaguar lengthened and rationalised the E-type around it, spoiling its purity and diluting its sporting nature.

Maybe that's what Stephen means when he says that time is a cruel mistress. But in terms of engineering rather than style, and with the *zeitgeist* in mind, the E-type was bang-on. On the 'b' of the bang, in fact. A shortlived explosion, but one from which the ripples are still felt. People want an E-type, nearly 60 years on. And the snarl of its engine and the way it flows down the road have defined the best of the marque ever since.

The initial impact of the 911 might have been less obvious, but its influence is greater. Any manufacturer that designs an upmarket sports car has the 911 in mind as its benchmark, and will have done so for years. While those other cars have come and gone – including the E-type – the 911 has evolved. It remains relevant, whether in original form (small, lightweight, practical, as well as thrilling) or as a new car, with styling, engineering and conceptual ethos that can all be traced linearly back to 1963. Only it's no longer a 2.0-litre straight-six with just over 100bhp. These days it's 3.0 litres, twin turbos, and 364bhp. In base trim. Not a world away from the techno-overload of the 959 in 1986.

And in these pictures, you're not looking at the earliest car. This is a 2.4S from 1973. Best of breed, if one turns away from the more hardcore, much more valuable Carrera RS 2.7. More of a match for the E-type in power,

not dissimilar in terms of market value. The one you'd hanker after, just as Mr Jag-Fan would want an early 3.8 fixed-head E-type.

So, that rear-engine thing. Keeps the steering light and pure, enables efficient packaging (so you get rear seats), makes for great traction. As for the handling... Well, all the greatest drivers love a 911. The challenge is to defeat understeer and master the transition to oversteer: few cars are as throttle-adjustable. The problem is that it takes skill and nerve to master. It's a car you can spend a long time learning to drive, but overconfidence could see you off in short order.

It's also famous for the wail of that air-cooled flat-six, itself a masterpiece, more advanced at launch than the Jaguar's bigger, brawnier straight-six. All-aluminium and with a dry sump to keep its mass closer to the ground, it featured overhead camshafts and hemispherical combustion chambers: the

kind of spec that would otherwise grace a racing car. And though it started with a 'mere' 130bhp (good for a 2.0-litre in the early 1960s), increases in capacity and changes in tech followed, so the 930 Turbo 3.3 offered 300bhp, and even the base 993 Carrera of the mid-1990s pumped out 272bhp.

But what really sets the 911 apart is its sheer non-conformity. There just isn't another sports car like it, nor has there ever been. It's the imposter here; the E-type is simply a superbly executed example of a comparatively conventional car.

But the passage of time is significant. The fact that the most sought-after E-type is the earliest is also important. It started at its best and went into gradual decline. The 911 began modestly – then developed. The basic original car underwent significant change only with the arrival of the 964 in 1989, and the original side glazing, doors and dash were still in place

when the water-cooled 996 finally took over from the 993 in the late 1990s. That's one hell of a lifespan. And it's perhaps why it seems strange that these two legends hail back to within two years of each other.

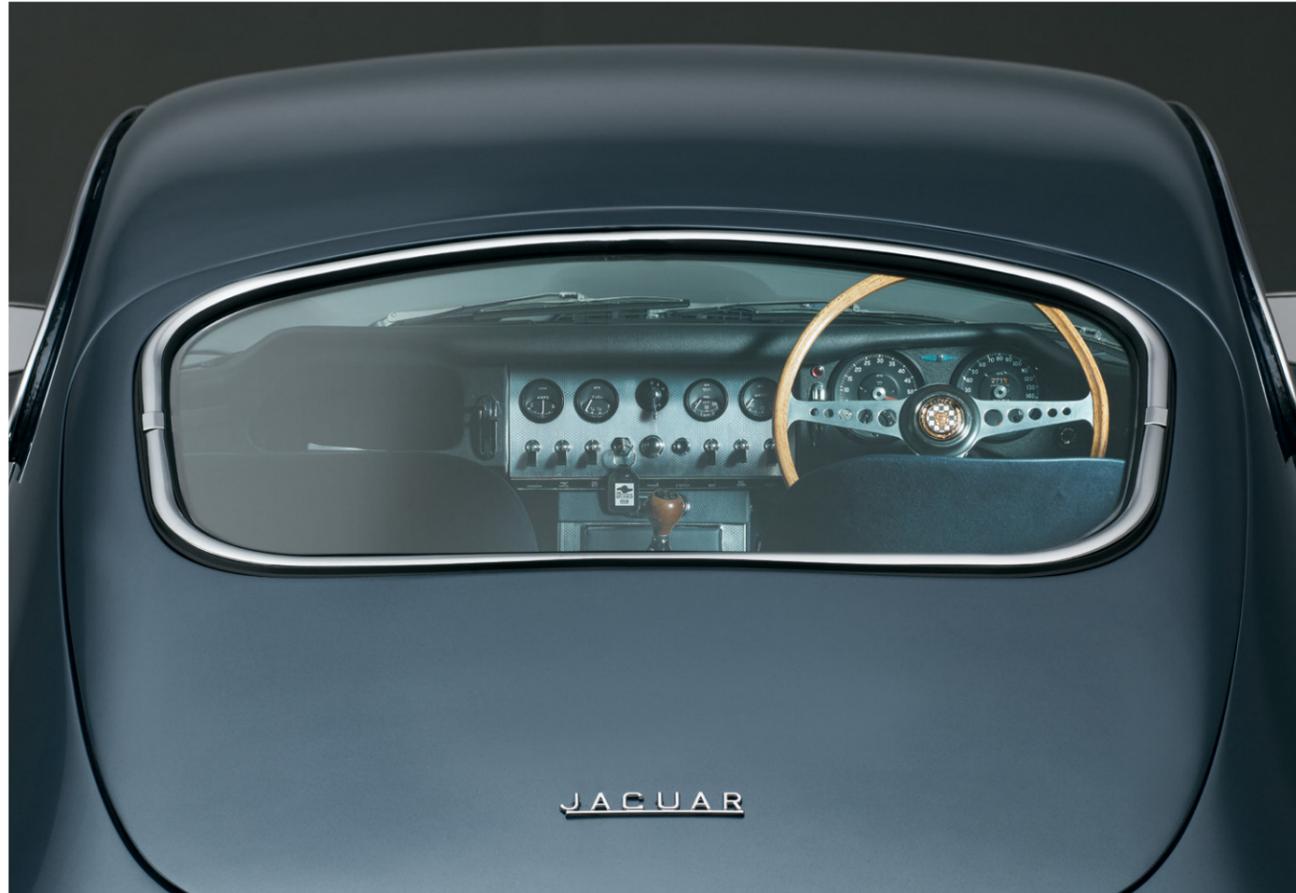
If the E-type embodies the shouty pout and swagger of Mick Jagger, then the 911 is the music of Paul McCartney: considered, studied, more intrinsic genius than showman chutzpah. Whether or not that makes it a better car is another story, surely one rooted in the way they drive. And now it's over to Robert Coucher for that. *Glen Waddington*

SOME MIGHT SAY that we are not comparing like with like here and, in this first sentence, I can tell you that the Porsche 911 2.4S is a more resolved proposition than the Jaguar E-type 3.8-litre FHC.

But that's not why we love and desire classic cars: we want ones that stir the soul, →

'While other cars have come and gone – including the E-type – the 911 has evolved'





and these two do exactly that. This E-type is an early and desirable 1962 example so it has the rev-happy 3.8-litre engine and rugged Moss gearbox as well as the rather frightening Kelsey-Hayes brake servo, which only really operates at high speeds. The straight-six was claimed to produce 256bhp in its day, but let's be kind and credit it with an honest 200bhp. That's still enough to propel the Jaguar to 145mph on period-correct skinny tyres; 60mph should be clipped in around 6.5 seconds, so plenty fast enough for a 59-year-old classic. The E-type evolved over the years into the 4.2-litre, with many improvements exacted, including more torque, better cooling, better brakes and greater reliability. Even so, this early 3.8-litre is the purest E-type iteration, so it's the most desirable and many of its foibles can be sympathetically engineered out these days.

This 1973 Porsche 911 2.4S swings the other way, if you know what I mean. It's the last of the line for the original-style 911, which ended with the limited-production homologation 2.7 RS in 1973 before the impact-bumper cars were introduced in 1974.

So the Porker has everything: a stroked, big-bore, 2.4-litre air-cooled flat-six with mechanical fuel injection, good for 190bhp, with a five-speed gearbox of conventional shift pattern, and disc brakes all-round. It too does 145mph and the 0-60mph dash in 6.5 seconds.

The E-type coupé driver's door is small and you have to wriggle into the cockpit, but what a joy once you're ensconced. The dash is fabulous, with the big Smiths instruments and toggle switches. The original E-type steering wheel is one of the most emotive in the motoring universe and you sit low in the minimal early leather bucket seat, looking out over a bonnet that's long and curvaceous.

The 3.8-litre engine starts quietly on the button and the SU carbs afford a gentle idle. You ease away from rest as you'd expect with 260lb ft of torque from the long-stroke six, though it really deserves a five-speed gearbox, with synchromesh on first gear!

The controls are weightier than you might anticipate but the rack-and-pinion steering lightens up on the move, even if the iron-age Moss gearbox needs a good warming through before it starts to co-operate. The FHC



Above and right E-type's flight-deck dashboard is almost as sexy as that iconically curvaceous body, and the venerable XK straight-six offers power and vocal prowess to match.



**1961 Jaguar E-type
3.8 FHC**

Engine 3781cc DOHC straight-six, triple SU HD8 carburettors
Power 265bhp @ 5500rpm
Torque 260lb ft @ 4000rpm
Transmission Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive
Steering Rack and pinion
Suspension Front: double wishbones, torsion bars, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar. Rear: fixed-length driveshafts, radius arms, lower transverse links, twinned coil springs and telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes Discs **Weight** 1220kg
Top speed 145mph
0-60mph 6.5sec



THE EXPERTS' CHOICES

Time to get partisan. Who prefers which?



Peter Stevens, car designer

'It has to be the Porsche 911. It was a design that did not draw on anything except its own company's history, such a unique form that it has outlived all its competitors; not because Porsche dislikes change but because it was so immediately right. It's not a brilliant aerodynamic shape but it expresses its function with every carefully modelled surface. I never once looked at an early 911 and thought "I wouldn't have done that piece like that." On the other hand, when I look at an E-type I think "I wish the windscreen had a little more rake, I wish the tail-lights were better integrated, or the wheels were not buried within the wheel openings." As a form, the sight of a bodysheet just after having been painted is like looking at a beautiful piece of sculpture, but as the detail parts are added the magic is diluted. With a classic object we must love the whole – so for me the Porsche is the true classic.'



Jay Leno, TV legend and Octane columnist

'Which to choose? Difficult but not impossible. Let's start with the 911, a car that was evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Each version just a little bit better than the last. The fact that they do their job so well is what makes them desirable. Fast, efficient, reliable, equally at home at a track or on a soccer run, the 911 is the car you marry and remain happy with for life. The E-type is the lover you equally can't forget and, at the same time, wish you had never met. A 911 seduces you with its driving abilities, the E-type seduces you just sitting in your driveway. A car that is so achingly beautiful that, at least in my eyes, it was the first sports car where the coupé was more beautiful than the convertible. The E-type was a really good sports car, but as a classic it is unsurpassed.'



James Turner of 911 specialist Sports Purpose

'I am afraid that I will always come down in favour of the 911 – it's just a far better car. The E-type is exquisite and you feel a complete rock star driving one, but I just never think that a standard one works well enough – I'd want an Eagle and they are a bit dearer. I picked up the 911 in these pictures in London, slightly unexpectedly, on a wet Friday afternoon; drove it out in traffic and up the M40 – fast. It hadn't been out of town for a while yet just hummed along. So there is usability. Then there is the driving experience, which is always truly special. Finally, there is the fashion aspect – I really think Porsche moved with the times (and continues to) in a way that other manufacturers do not. My choice? The 2.4S is great but the original short-wheelbase 2.0S has still to be properly appreciated as one of the truly great 911s.'



Gregor Fisken, racer and historic car dealer

'If I had to choose between an early E-type or a 911 I would be happy with either, but on balance it would have to be the Series 1 E-type for me. The coupé would be my first choice. I remember the first time my father brought one home and I couldn't believe that we had this thing that looked as good as any Ferrari (possibly better!) – and we could afford it. Being something of a steam train enthusiast, which I also got from my father, I remember looking at the rear of it, which reminded me of the streamlined front of an LNER A4 Pacific, which for those that don't know is the model that holds the world steam speed record. The combination of that and the wonderful XK 3.8-litre engine left such an impression that I've never been without an E-type since, and I've even had the privilege of racing and selling almost every one of the 12 Lightweights.'



Gordon Murray, road and racing car design engineer

'I love both the early 911 and the E-type for different reasons, and they both have their special place in sports car design history. The 911 is a mixture of good and bad: clean, iconic styling, small footprint, characterful engine and a truly engaging driver experience. But the engine hangs out behind the rear axle, placing the 911 on the "impure" side of the sports car engineering line, and it has taken years of development (and ESP) to make the on-limit handling acceptable. The E-type is also iconic, delivered with its sporty straight-six, and soon became the sports car to aspire to. Its construction was unique and advanced, and the driving experience matched its beauty even if it couldn't deliver the perfection of an early Lotus Elan. For me the E-type wins because it changed our automotive world forever and it didn't have the early 911's vices.'



Oliver Winbolt of Jaguar E-type restoration specialist The Splined Hub

'When we started our company, I had a clear mandate: decide on a marque and do the best job you can in accurately restoring your car of choice. Interestingly, my two options were the Porsche 911 and the Jaguar E-type. Both cars are iconic in their own way, and both cars had a very pure focus on their own brand of engineering. The thing I love about the E-type is that it evolved from some very obvious race pedigree, but essentially is very pure and simple. Most of the parts can be found on any number of more mundane Jaguars and yet the combination of a beautiful shape and a pile of off-the-shelf components has resulted in a car for all time. A freshly built E-type is a joy to behold and a joy to drive. So for me, taking everything into account, I have to choose the Jaguar E-type.'

‘The front of the 911 moves about and you guide it with your fingertips – and your bum, too’



remains quiet and refined throughout, while the engine is remote and muted on gentle throttle. But when the roads open up the big six takes a breath and the Jaguar lunges.

Being narrow and well-mannered, it is quick and corners with accuracy and assurance. The independent suspension is soft and long-travel by today's standards but it soaks up country roads with aplomb. The steering is accurate and, though you are aware of a heavy engine up front, the E tends towards polite understeer. Its twin-cam straight-six engine is superb, with a sweet and revvy nature aligned to creamy, ample torque. It's quiet and civilised when pottering, but takes off, snarling, when you depress the throttle.

In contrast, the 2.4S has a large German-sized door so ingress is saloon-car simple. Simply twist the ignition key and the mechanically fuel-injected flat-six starts instantly; you modulate the idle speed as it warms up via a lever located between the seats. It reacts with alacrity to the throttle thanks to its light flywheel, while the clutch pedal is soft and the gearshift slips about the gate with long movements. It has a normal H-pattern with fifth on a dogleg; the type-915 gearbox slots cleanly into first gear.

Pull away and the 911 instantly feels light, its engine eager and raspy – these early air-

cooled flat-sixes emit a wonderful cacophony of mechanical sound. The crankcase is made of exotic magnesium to keep the weight down, adding to the exciting resonances.

The next sensation to enjoy is the steering: the unassisted rack-and-pinion set-up is delightful, full of feel: the narrow six-inch front wheels are lightly loaded and the steering feels laser-accurate via the thin-rimmed wheel. With the engine located in the rear, the front of the car moves about and you guide it with your fingertips – and your bum, too. The short Porsche seems to swivel from the base of the seat. Its minimal weight is set low in the chassis and the mechanical grip available at the rear is great and allows you to slingshot the car deftly out of corners.

The hot S model has vented disc brakes but no need of a servo. So the brakes – again – feel mechanical and more than powerful enough and, with its uprated suspension, the S feels super-sharp and reactive. On the open road the little Porsche zips along with vigour, the lusty six providing more than enough power to go for any gap. No surprise because the 2.4 S is really the factory hot-rod.

Yet it does not behave errantly at all. The well-damped ride is superb and absorbs the worst of British roads. All the controls feel well-oiled and beautifully made, working

together in syncopation. Pulling easily and cleanly away from standstill, the car operates as one: clutch, gearshift, brakes and steering are light, balanced and in tune. There's no transmission snatch nor are there any rough edges in any of the dynamics, and it has a tight, muscular feel of deeply resolved quality thanks to its decade of 911 evolution and development. And that free-revving, yowling engine is one of the best-sounding ever.

There are deep reserves of concentrated German engineering and nous in the highly developed 911 2.4S. On a tight and tricky country road, the 11-years-older – and rather more *gran turismo* – Jaguar coupé would not keep up. But the 911 driver might have to be judicious in not overcooking things and letting the back end get away from him, while the Jaguar driver would be looking on from behind with amusement, in an albeit slightly less nimble motor car but one that remains a quick and on-side cohort.

So while I stand by everything in that first paragraph, force me to choose and I'll say that the E-type's effortless charm beats the 911's capable cool – though I could hardly blame you for disagreeing.

Robert Coucher

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