

SAFETY FIRST

PROJECT FIGARO PART 2

Last issue we explained how and why we have bought a Nissan Figaro as a project car. This issue we make a start on getting it ready for the road. REPORT: SIMON GOLDSWORTHY



This Figaro was something of a gamble, bought sight-unseen from Morris Leslie's auction up in Perth. As it turned out, we got lucky and when it arrived down south, our Figaro proved to be in much better shape than we had anticipated. Not that it was perfect of course, but it was very tidy, ran well and appeared to drive very nicely.

I say 'appeared' to drive nicely because our initial testing was severely limited. Whenever I get a new project car, I quickly compile a list of work to be done. This is generally separated into three categories: jobs that are essential before I feel happy that the car is safe to drive any appreciable distance, jobs which will make it more reliable or better to drive, and jobs which would be nice to do because they will improve the car overall.

The jobs are usually dealt with in that order too for fairly obvious reasons, and that meant the Figaro needed new tyres and a new exhaust right away. It has an MoT until the end of May 2020, but the exhaust was blowing, and although the tyres had plenty of tread, they were very old and the sidewalls had cracked. New

tyres were fitted by my local tyre specialist, while Danny Read at the nearby classic-friendly Hall's Garage fitted the exhaust for me – having just fitted new silencers to two of my own cars, my back was not up to crawling around under a car on axle stands for the third weekend in a row!

Prior to that, I did my usual fluid checks. The brake fluid looked clean and up to level, though not spotless and it could probably do with flushing through. Unfortunately the car came without a scrap of history, so I have no idea when this was last done. Nor do I know when the engine oil was last changed, but this was a pure gold in colour so I can't imagine it has done any miles, (though how long it has been in there is less certain).

I also have no idea what coolant is in the radiator, which could make topping up a little tricky. The coolant in there is green, but the boffins at Witham Oil and Paint told me that the colour of a coolant is purely cosmetic and no indication of the coolant technology, and that unfortunately there is no easy way to tell coolant technologies apart without laboratory analysis. Because different technologies can

sometimes react with one another and turn to a jelly, that means we will have to drain, flush and refill the coolant. However, after checking the condition of the radiator itself, this is going to be on the cards anyway.

The Figaro has a hydraulic power-assisted steering system, and this one seemed a bit noisy when moving the car around on my drive. That turned out to be because of a low fluid level. It takes ATF fluid, the same as the three-speed automatic gearbox. I could top up the PAS right away, but the gearbox has to be warmed up first so that had to wait until the car had been driven the few miles back from Hall's Garage. (As it turned out, the level was fine!)

As the picture sequence shows, we took the initial trips to and from the specialists carefully and they were completed without incident. That did give me a chance to assess a little more of the car's dynamic abilities, but I will come back to this topic later because my goal was to get the car running safely enough to take it to a couple of people with considerably more experience of the model than me. One of these is Simon Smith, who runs the technical forum on the Figaro Owners Club



1 You could hear that the exhaust was blowing, and one glance under the back of the car showed that the silencer was in poor shape, with the securing brackets pulling away from its body.



2 The exhaust is in two pieces after the manifold and cat, with an intermediate pipe joining the rear section here. This looks to have been welded in the past with a sleeve section.



3 Just ahead of this join, the exhaust is secured to rubber spring hangers bolted to each side of the transmission tunnel. Clearly these securing hangers were far from standard, which didn't bode well.



4 There was one further support just before the pipe curved up to meet the manifold. This was made up of a sheet steel clamp around the pipe that was secured to a single rubber bobbin.



5 Unfortunately, that steel clamp was well rotten, and would not have offered much in the way of support. A replacement for this was not in the fitting kit that came with our new exhaust.



6 And this was the full extent of the home-brew centre fixing bracket. Notice how the welds have produced rust-prone and potentially weakened points in an otherwise sound pipe.

website and had agreed to cast his eyes over our car. The other is Tobyn Brooks, owner of The Figaro Shop – Tobyn has kindly agreed to help us tackle some of the bigger jobs on our car just as soon as I could get it down to his premises in Didcot.

Before tackling a trip of that magnitude, I want to change the timing belt on our

car. These engines are an interference design, meaning that a snapped timing belt will lead to expensive and lengthy engine repairs, and as I said earlier, our car came with no history to say when it was last changed. The indicators had also decided to go on the blink (as it were!), and so we will report on those jobs next issue. 

The Figaro Owners Club website is at www.figaroownersclub.co.uk, and membership costs £24 in the first year, dropping to £15 per year after that.

The Figaro Shop are at Rich's Sidings, Lower Broadway, Didcot OX11 8AG. www.thenissanfigaroshop.co.uk



7 Talking of rust-prone, this was the top surface of the silencer. It had not been immediately obvious from underneath just how seriously corroded the silencer was. No wonder it was blowing.



8 Since we had the car up on a four-post ramp and so sitting on its wheels, we couldn't initially figure out how to get the old rear pipe out and the new one in as there was not enough room.



9 Then the penny dropped – with the car lifted up and supported on axle stands, the rear beam dropped down low enough to provide sufficient clearance for the pipe – just.



10 Thanks to careful use by Danny of penetrating spray, only one of the securing bolts snapped off rather than came undone, the outer one by the silencer.



11 After checking there was nothing in the boot which could be damaged by heat, a quick blast of the oxy-acetylene torch had the broken stub ready to be worked free with lock-grip pliers.



12 Danny made up a new bracket, but welded to an exhaust clamp rather than the pipe itself. Not only does this make adjustment possible, we can also replace it with the proper fitting in due course.



13 Similarly, we needed the car mobile, but to replace the front clamp we were keen to make up something which was reversible so that the correct item could be fitted later.



14 And this is the end result – the metal is a tight fit around the pipe because the requirement for some flex is taken care of by the bobbin to which it is attached.



15 The next job to get the Figaro safely mobile was to change the tyres. The ones on it were from 2006, 2007, 2010 and 2019, and all but the newest one had serious cracks in their sidewalls.



17 There is not a huge choice of tyres in the Figaro's size of 165/70-12. We ended up getting a set of Nankang Econex, which cost us £182.20 with fitting and disposal of the old rubber.



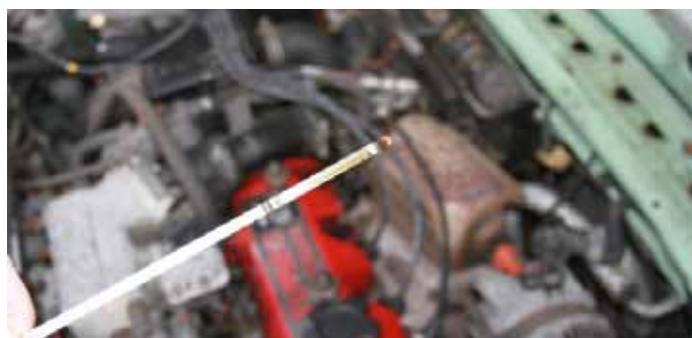
19 The power steering reservoir was just below its dipstick, though. Topping it up was simple, but where has the fluid been going? The rack gaiters looked suspiciously wet – we shall have to monitor that and see if the level drops again.



21 Unfortunately, the radiator itself is not in such great shape, with most of the cooling fins on its forward face having disintegrated. Some of the hose clamps were rusty and cutting into the hoses too, so they will be replaced.



16 Rather than buy just three tyres and have one of a different tread pattern, we opted for a set of four. My local tyre specialist – Bourne Auto Centre – did a thorough job, cleaning up the steel wheel rims to ensure an airtight seal.



18 As well as getting the tyres and exhaust sorted, we checked out some of the other pre-driving essentials. The engine oil was up to level, and had clearly been changed very recently.



20 The coolant was also very clean and up to the correct level. The coolant tester showed that its antifreeze protection was up to strength too, though we cannot be sure what type of fluid it is. This will be a problem when we next need to top it up.



22 Not something that would stop the Figaro being mobile, but the stowage compartment for the folding roof was wet (it should be no more than damp) and mouldy, needing a good scrub. »

«



23 It was like this because the drain holes had become blocked. Cleaning them out with a round brush and then an airline should stop the stowage compartment from holding water.



24 However, the drain holes feed into pipes that go through the boot proper, and which take the water out to exit under the car. Both of ours had become detached – perhaps knocked by unsecured luggage, or when we cleaned out the holes?



25 The pipes were easy enough to reattach, but this area of rust below the bootlid may be connected to the damp. It is the worst bit of rust on the car and the area will need tidying up.



26 Talking of tidying, not mechanically crucial but something we would like to sort out is this unsightly crack in the top of the dash, a big job we hope the Figaro Shop will help us fix.

