

# FIGARO PROJECT PART 9 THE FINISHING TOUCHES?



We wrap up our Figaro adventure with a few final tasks, plus a summary of what it is like to own and drive such a distinctive car – a car which will soon be for sale with an asking price of £4000.

As we come to the end of our Figaro project, there are still a few jobs to be done and a couple of those are being shown here. However, on a car that is nearly 30 years old there will always be some additional fettling and repairs, and so I expect it will make a few more guest appearances in the Driver Diaries before it moves on to a new home, not least because its deferred MoT is now due at the end of November, and on a classic the first official inspection in your ownership is always a voyage of discovery.

Not that we are expecting any disasters. After all, the Figaro has been poked and prodded by a number of experts and specialists on our watch, and we tackled any issues that they have raised. From the very start it has proven to be a delightful car to drive, including one trip just last week that racked up eight hours on the road in total. If you fancy a slice of that for yourself, then we are asking £4000 for the Figaro, so please do get in touch.

That probably makes this an opportune moment to describe what a Figaro is like to own and run, and I'll start with stating the obvious – a Figaro is first and foremost about style. There are any number of sensible hatchbacks on the market and if you just want a shopping trolley then you should go and buy one of those instead, because at any stage in the Figaro's



**The interior of the Figaro is a visual and tactile delight, with pleasing design touches everywhere. The three speed autobox is very smooth, but does ask for plenty of revs.**

evolution process where the designers had to choose between form and function, they went decisively for form.

That is not to say that a Figaro is not a credible performer on the road and lovely to drive, but it does have practical limitations. Primarily these centre around the boot space, or rather a lack of it. The boot proper is extremely shallow, awkward to access and has such an uneven floor that

it is only really suitable for small, soft bags. What appears to be an upper storage area is actually the hood well – fold the roof back and this compartment is then full, and even if you leave the hood up, then the storage area is not designed as a dry compartment anyway so it is still unsuitable for luggage unless you wrap that in plastic. You can of course put bags on the rear seat if you do not have children in the back, but



**1** The sill that we repaired last issue had been protected from the outside, but we wanted to make sure that rust did not return to eat its way out from the inside.



**2** To do this, we wanted to make some access holes for wax injection. These yellow plugs will be used to close them up afterwards; they measure 12mm across.



**3** Having seen inside the panels, we had a good idea of where to drill the holes; two were required, one either side of the central membrane of the three part sill.



**4** This is the spray nozzle we would be using, connected to a flexible pipe. With a number of holes in the nozzle's sides, the wax will spray out in a fan pattern to ensure 100% coverage.



**5** With the spray gun hooked up to a container of cavity wax and the compressor cranked up, the flexible tube was inserted in both directions and pulled slowly back out while pulling the trigger.



**6** Finally, those yellow plugs closed off the holes. An extra dab of wax around the hole edges before they went in should help to stop rust from forming around the cut panel edges too.

it is awkward to heft them in and out, plus they will be on show if you do park up.

Sit behind the wheel though, and none of this practical nonsense matters one jot because everything you see in the cabin and everything you touch – every single switch, dial, seat and handle – is retro perfection. This is a car that totally banishes the mundane, that surrounds you with whimsy and an irrepressible *joie de vivre*. If you can sit in a Figaro and not at least crack a smile, then I would get somebody to check for a pulse because the chances are you are already dead.

And it is not just the lucky people on the inside whose day is brightened by the Figaro, because absolutely everybody who sees the car loves it too. Especially (but by no means exclusively) the ladies – my mother, my wife and my daughter all want to keep the Figaro. So if any of you gents are looking for the ideal gift for that special someone, then take note because a Figaro could very well earn you a jackpot bonanza of brownie points.

There is far more to the Figaro than just cuteness and retro charm, though. It is based on the original Nissan Micra, the angular K10 hatchback built from 1982-1992, and so the running gear is eminently practical. It is not entirely the mechanical package that we got in the

UK though, because the engine is a 987cc turbocharged four-cylinder unit that was never offered in Europe – UK buyers were offered the same MA10 unit in normally aspirated form at 987cc or the bigger MA12 at 1235cc. Power outputs on those ranged from 50PS to 60PS depending on year and model, which means that the Figaro does pretty well with 76PS to play with.

However, it is no race car. For one thing

there is a degree of turbo lag when you first put your foot down, a moment of hesitation before the turbo gets enough puff to really set things spinning. The Figaro will then pick up its skirts and hustle all the way round to an impressively high red line approaching 7000rpm, but it needs all those revs because it drives through a lazy three-speed automatic gearbox. This is commendably smooth in operation



The roof sides remain in place when the soft top is stowed. This limits buffeting while still offering open top motoring, but the thick panels do restrict rear three-quarter vision.



**7** Another task was to address this small area of stone damage to the windscreen. It was so small that it was not an MoT failure, but we wanted to make sure that had been stabilised.



**8** We bought a DIY repair kit that was very comprehensive, but cost less than a tenner. The idea is that you inject resin into the damaged area, which then hardens like glue.



**9** The resin is applied through this tube, then a plunger screwed down to force it in. The change was not massive and we suspect it had been done already, but at least we knew it would not get any worse.



**10** When we bought the Figaro, it came with headlight eyelids, but they were loose so we removed them. They should be held on by these C-clips, so now we removed the clips...



**11** ...before pushing the eyelid between the headlight itself and the stainless trim surrounding it. The key at this stage was to get the eyelid level.



**12** Finally the C-clips went back on to hold the eyelid and lamp to the body. Our thanks to the Figaro Shop for their online video explaining how these eyelids should be secured.

and worlds away from the awful jerky robotised manual gearboxes masquerading as automatics on cars like the new Fiat 500, but it is crying out for a fourth gear. At 60mph the engine is already spinning at 4000rpm, and while it will sit happily on a motorway at 70mph all day, if you are used to OHV classics from the 1960s then holding it calmly at those revs does take a shift in mental attitude. It also hits fuel

economy somewhat, and I reckon 35mpg is probably a decent all-round average.

As for the rest of the dynamics, the brakes are excellent, as is the power steering – anybody can jump out of a modern supermini and feel at home in the Figaro, and I mean that in a good way. The ride is surprisingly good in such a small car too, with comfort seemingly high on the design agenda. The compromise here

is that it doesn't feel razor sharp to rival a Lotus through the corners; it feels firmly planted and safe, but there is a degree of vagueness as the weight shifts and those tall 80 section tyres flex on the 12in rims. Of course you could no doubt dial that out, but at the end of the day this is more of a cruiser anyway, and at that it is perfect.

Visibility is pretty good in most directions, although those thick buttresses behind the B-posts do block out your over-the-shoulder view. Fortunately the mirrors are good, and you soon learn that being constantly aware of what is coming up from behind informs your own manoeuvres – good driving practice in any car, but essential in one where a glance over the shoulder could miss a sizeable object lurking in your blind spot.

With the roof up, there is a decent glass rear screen complete with heated element. Fold it down and you get something of the Morris Minor Tourer experience with fixed side panels, but since the roof on the Figaro folds away completely into the body, you get superb vision out the back. Wind buffeting from the sides is nonexistent, though there can be enough of a backdraft to make a scarf or a hat advisable as the temperatures drop. But that is no hardship, as it is the perfect excuse to indulge your retro fantasies further and pick out some 1950s fashions – they will fit right in with the Figaro aesthetic, and only add to the fun of ownership.

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Luggage space is accessed via the lifting panel that houses the rear number plate. The bigger panel on top flips up when you raise or lower the roof to provide stowage for that.