



MAN & MACHINE

Plastic fantastic

Former Goodwood track doctor Jonathan Botting's Scimitar

Photograph Julian Calder

AS A JUNIOR DOCTOR, I first came across a Reliant Scimitar while working at Hillingdon Hospital, near Heathrow. I visited a classic car showroom and fell for a burgundy Scimitar GTE, with its V6 engine and elegant Tom Karen design. That car, with tan leather trim and relaxed auto gearbox, transported me around a series of hospital posts until I made the mistake of trusting it to an 'expert'. They fitted a new (wrong spec) fuel pump, left it running outside, the pump spurted petrol over the engine bay and it caught fire!

I had to have another, and this 1978 Scimitar GTE SE6a has been my daily car for the past

30 years in and around my South London GP practice. It has always been garaged, is utterly reliable and has covered 130,000 miles.

The automatic gearbox is perfect around town. Being an enthusiast, I was the Trackside Medic at Goodwood for 20 years and the Scimitar was always a pleasure to drive down to Westhampnett, when I decided not to take my 1969 E-type Series II roadster. Its gearing is perfect for longer runs and its ample 192lb ft of torque is great on B-roads. Being relatively narrow is useful on country lanes, too.

The tan interior is cloth, not leather, so it's much cooler in summer. The front seats have

been retrimmed and I've fitted a new front carpet set. Thanks to the excellent Reliant Sabre and Scimitar Owners Club, of which I have been a member for more than 30 years, service items and parts are easily available, and it has been serviced over the years by most of the recommended specialists. Initially I used Graham Walker in Chester, but that was a four-hour journey each way, and then I discovered Thompson's of Slough, just an hour away. When owner Mike Thompson retired and closed his garage he kept on a few favourite cars, mine included, and I now drive to Wiltshire, where he and his lovely wife Angie treat me more as a friend than a customer. It's really an honour to have such a fastidious and gifted specialist look after the car.

The Scimitar has never overheated, thanks to an upgraded radiator and efficient electric fan, and I've also fitted a Kenlowe Hot-Start system to the heater circuit, which circulates warm fluid through the engine before you start it on cold mornings. My only ownership issue occurred when it turned into a lumpy V5 at about 100,000 miles, so I disconnected the offending cylinder's plug lead and drove it gently over to Mike's, where he discovered that one of the pistons had split in two. Total engine catastrophe had been averted by the piston rings keeping it all together. His challenge was finding a replacement set of six +0 pistons: a diet of regular Castrol Magnatec oil changes had resulted in zero bore wear.

Values are not high for what is a handbuilt and relatively rare car (there are 3877 SE6 GTEs) but fantastic specialists such as Queensberry Road Garage and Graham Walker, along with Ford running gear, mean these are amazingly practical four-seater cars that have impressive load capacity and excellent all-round visibility.

Along with my E-type, I also own a Porsche 997 Carrera S, which is a fabulous sports car, as well as having a part share in a vintage 1924 Type 22 Bugatti... but that's another story.