

▲ Seats on both models are similar, being rather old styling but quite comfortable. Both are covered in leather. The C-V6 (top) has just slightly more room in the rear, but neither car is a comfortable four-seater for average adults ▼



BRIAN SMITH REPORTS ON THESE HANDSOME HANDBUILTS

HOW TO AFFORD A JENSEN!

▶ IF YOU THINK of Jensens only in terms of the latest, modern, four-wheel drive, £8,000 plus cars, you're making a big mistake. It may surprise you to know that the firm has been making cars for over 35 (yes, thirty-five) years and you can now buy early models for as little as £100! All Jensens have been hand-built and have always been distinctive, individual cars. Models originally built in the early 50s can still be in good condition and provide a lot of car with excellent performance for ridiculously low prices, so let's look a little closer at the Jensen scene.

HISTORY

Jensen Motors Ltd was originally founded when the two engineer brothers, Richard and Alan Jensen acquired an old-established coach-building firm in the Midlands and designed and produced special bodies for the thoroughbred cars of that time—like Rolls Royce, Delage, MG and others.

The first actual Jensen car was the S series which was produced in saloon, tourer and drophead form with a Ford V8 engine and was the first production car to incorporate overdrive and automatic clutch. It was well styled, very comfortable and had a top speed of over 90 mph, which was good in pre-war days. In 1938 a Nash straight-8 engine was offered as an alternative, but then war came,

HOT CAR

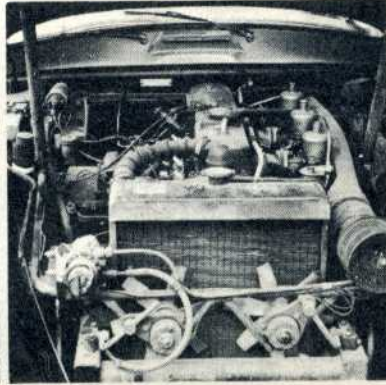


Dashboard is quite different though both models have the same instrumentation. The earlier 541 (bottom) has the better view from the driver's point of view with all instruments visible through the steering wheel and not masked as C-V8 ▼

▲ Engine compartments are similar with same sort of bonnet, but the works are completely different. The C-V8 (top) has the Chrysler V8 engine for more performance, whilst the 541 has the smaller Austin six-cylinder unit for better mpg ▼

▲ Boot space is limited on both models considering the car is designed for long distance touring, but the 541 (bottom) has easier access with the lid coming right down to the boot floor level. The C-V8 has more up-to-date rear lights layout ▼

▲ Front styling is completely different. The 541 (bottom) has a unique swivelling panel to control the amount of cooling air going into the grille and twin headlamps. The C-V8 has a shallow wide grille with rather ugly four-headlamp system ▼



production stopped and the Jensen brothers were involved in military operations, such as converting tanks for river crossings.

After the war a new model, the Interceptor was designed, having a tuned version of the 3993 cc straight 6 Austin lorry engine. Not too many of these were made and it wasn't until eight years later that the firm made it's next big step forward. In October 1953 Jensen introduced the two-door two plus two seater 541. This had a revolutionary glass-fibre body, with a triple SU carb, 125 bhp version of the Austin engine, giving a top speed of over 120 mph. It had an Austin gearbox, converted to central change and drum brakes were standard, although four-wheel discs were available as an optional extra.

From October 1954 a few 541 de luxe models were produced, having wire wheels, overdrive, special cylinder head and twin-exhausts as standard. In October 1956 the 541 de luxe became the first production car to have four-wheel disc brakes as standard and these also had servo assistance provided. Altogether 220 541s were produced. In October 1957 Jensen announced the 541R to replace the previous models. This had a Moss gearbox, overdrive, wire wheels, servo discs, and rack and pinion steering as standard. The first 57 models produced had a twin-carb version of the Austin engine with exhaust on the offside, but the rest of the R's produced had a triple-carb engine with nearside exhaust. In

October 1960 came the 541S which was wider, heavier and more comfortable, but slower than the R model. It had the Austin automatic gearbox and also limited slip diff as standard, but a few were produced with a manual box. With automatic box it didn't prove so popular and only 180 were made all told.

The next major change came in October 1962 when Jensen introduced the C-V8 (Chrysler engined V8 model). This was a completely new tubular backbone chassis, new glass-fibre body with four-headlamp system standard, a 5.9 litre Chrysler V8 engine with automatic gearbox, four-wheel servo discs and limited-slip diff standard. Performance was at 0-60 mph in seven seconds and a maximum of over 135 mph.

In January 1964 the Mark II model was introduced with an overbored 6.2 litre version of the V8 engine and a twin-speaker radio fitted as standard. Otherwise there were only minor changes to trim and dashboard.

In July 1965 the Mark III was introduced with redesigned front, deeper windows all round, dual braking system, reclining seats, improved heating and ventilation and a wood veneer dashboard. This was certainly the best Jensen to date, and altogether 500 were produced. In October 1966 the model was replaced by the current Interceptor and FF which is where we are going to leave the story as these models cost a minimum of £2,500 secondhand.

MODEL TO BUY

We spoke to both Jensens themselves, London agents Charles Follet and private owners, and it seems that the best 541 model is the R, which would now cost you £300 to £500. However, the C-V8 is a much better, faster (and also thirstier!) model and the best one, the Mark III, would now cost you £1,250 to £1,500.

So really your choice is dictated by how much you have to spend. If you want a cheap model, we happen to know that the service manager at Jensens, Mr. Wintam, has a 1955 model for sale for about £200 at the time of writing. It's not an R model, but being who he is, it should be as reliable a buy as any Jensen you could get.

POINTS TO WATCH

You don't find many of the older Jensens up for sale actually, because owners tend to hang on to them for many years. So when they do come to sell them it may be because there's some large expense looming up, so do be careful! Jensens themselves at West Bromwich, will briefly check any used car if asked and Charles Follet's new service department at 6 Hall Road, NW8 will do a thorough test and check for about £5. This is probably a wise move in view of the cost of spares (see prices in our panel!) Jensens themselves also have a history of most 541 and C-V8 models on file, so you can find out something about a used model, just

by quoting the chassis number at them.

Firstly, let's take the 541. The model was really built to last with a vacuum sealed chassis and under-seal as standard, so rust shouldn't be a problem. However, you can find that the rear of the chassis is rusted and the best way is to jab a screw-driver into one of the tubes to find if it goes right in!

All models have a glass-fibre body so there's no rust problem there, but look for signs of repairs on the inside as well as outside and if there are signs, watch the car being driven down the road to see if a major accident has twisted the chassis and the car is running crabwise.

Be very wary of any car with play in the steering. These steering boxes are no longer available, so it's a question of getting someone (who would have to be a specialist) to overhaul the box. If it turns out to be too badly damaged to be repaired, you're in real trouble and will have to cobble up some other steering box to suit, if that's possible.

The 541F has a Moss gearbox which is like the Jaguar XK120 and some Morgan models, so spares for that shouldn't be any problem, but spares for the Austin boxes may be getting tricky. Jensens themselves have certain spares for the 541 range, but not everything. However, most mechanical parts are derived from some other model and if you can find out which, you can get parts direct from the manufacturer. For instance, the overdrive and rear axle are like



JENSEN CHECK POINTS

- **Rusting can start at the rear of the chassis—test by poking tubes with a screwdriver to get through underseal.**
- **Steering boxes or spares are no longer available, so don't buy if much play in the steering. C-V8**
- **Rocker covers leak oil if the cylinder bores are badly worn.**
- **Brakes are expensive to repair so check carefully.**
- **Automatic gearbox leaks are usually expensive to repair.**
- **Rear axle saddles tend to crack, but can be repaired.**
- **Armstrong Selectaride dampers fitted as standard to rear, so make sure they work.**

JENSEN PERFORMANCE

	C-V8	541S
0-60 mph acceleration.....	7 secs	12 secs
Maximum speed.....	135 mph	110 mph
Standing quarter mile.....	16 secs	19 secs
Average fuel consumption.....	16 mpg	16 mpg

JENSEN SPARES C-V8

Exchange engine.....£450	Brake pads (4).....£9
Exchange auto-trans.....£200	Rear damper.....£16
Exchange rear axle.....£100	Exhaust system complete..£70

the ones used on Jaguars of that time.

On the C-V8 the most important thing to check is the engine as an exchange unit costs £450! If oil is blowing out of the rocker covers the bores are worn. This may mean a re-bore, which in itself is expensive with eight cylinders, but the chances are that the bearings and other parts may need replacing also. So if there are rattles, knocks, or oil smoke, either steer clear or negotiate a price to include an overhaul.

Leaks from the automatic gearbox may be just a leaking gasket, but the chances are it's worse than that. Either way it costs quite a lot of money to remove the box and strip it and there aren't that many people who would take on the job on an old Chrysler box. A few C-V8s were fitted with a four-speed manual Chrysler box, but not many, and you aren't likely to come across one. If you do it will probably be an expensive cost, more than the automatic model, as the car was faster and more suited to enthusiastic driving with the manual box.

Another point with the C-V8 is that the rear axle saddles tend to crack with high mileage. This isn't all that serious, but should be repaired, which costs more money. Foillets fit extra plates to prevent this happening again.

Nearly all 541s and C-V8s have servo assisted four-wheel disc brakes and these are expensive to repair. If properly maintained they are reliable but if neglected you might have to spend money on having plungers freed and replacing discs and pads, and pads alone cost £18 for four wheels. So test the brakes well before buying and ask for bills if the owner claims an overhaul has been done. The chances are he'll have them, because Jensen owners generally tend to be enthusiastic and reliable about their servicing.

Listen for any rear axle whine

when you drive the car. A replacement is expensive. A knock from the rear on rough surfaces could be a dodgy damper. On the C-V8 Armstrong Selectarides are fitted as standard and a replacement for these is also expensive.

MAINTENANCE

Although there is nothing tricky about the chassis maintenance on these cars, you are best advised to leave all automatic gearbox work and all V8 engine work to a specialist. The triple carb Austin engines are hard to tune properly and again this is best left to the experts. However, normal routine servicing can be done by the private owner.

If you need to remove the gearbox, you can get it out from underneath the car on the 541 and 541R models but on the 541S and the C-V8 you have to take out the engine and box as a unit first.

TUNING

Basically tuning can be summed up in one word—don't. The Austin engine is already tuned to a fair extent, particularly the triple carb versions and the only way you might get any appreciable improvement is to get a camshaft made up by Pipers or someone. But this would be very expensive and really not worth it. If you want to go faster buy the C-V8!

There are very few people who would be prepared to tune the Chrysler V8 motor. You might find a firm such as John Woolfe Racing who have been racing V8s for some years who would provide cams or do modified heads, but really the standard engine provides such good performance with excellent flexibility (10 mph in top gear!) that few people would want to do anything with it.

All models from the 541S have had a limited slip diff as standard so getting the power to the road is no problem, but you should check the unit on a used car.

Like many other models in the fifties and early sixties the Jensens were designed for cross-ply tyres and in fact Dunlop RS5 or Avon Turbospeed give the best road holding and general handling. The only snag is that enthusiastic driving can wear them out in 10,000 miles and that's fairly expensive tyre consumption. Many owners fit radials, and whilst these make the steering heavier and spoil the handling somewhat, they do last considerably longer.

One thing you can say for sure about a Jensen is that it's an individual's car. You can't imagine any mere mundane motorist owning one. Let's face it you have to be a bit of an enthusiast (did I hear nut?) to put up with fuel consumption under 20 mpg in town or if driven hard, but if you're cruising along a main road at legal 70 mph with the tachometer showing a mere 2,500 rpm or so and there's virtually no noise, you can appreciate the joys of the Jensen. Give it a whirl and see!

USED - CAR PRICES

approximate retail prices for cars in average condition

MODEL	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	MODEL	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
AR Giul T1 Sal	—	300	335	410	500	670	765	950	Morgan Plus 4	360	415	475	560	655	760	—	—
AR Giul coupe	—	—	595	730	890	1025	1195	1375	Morris 1100	190	225	265	310	365	430	505	590
Austin A40	170	195	235	275	315	365	—	—	Morris Minor	210	235	270	310	360	415	480	550
Austin A60	225	270	320	380	450	530	620	725	Morris Oxford	225	270	320	380	450	530	620	725
Aus Heal Sprite	245	265	300	360	425	490	580	680	NSU Prinz 1000	—	175	210	260	315	410	465	535
Aus Heal 3000	390	460	565	670	810	965	1095	—	Peugeot 403	170	200	245	320	385	—	—	—
BMC Mini	150	190	230	265	310	370	430	500	Peugeot 404	205	270	340	430	525	635	—	—
BMC Cooper	180	220	265	310	365	425	485	570	Porsche 1600	515	595	800	925	—	—	—	—
BMC Cop SI071	—	225	265	—	—	—	—	—	Renault R4	155	180	215	260	310	365	410	475
BMC Cop 1275	—	—	290	335	395	465	535	625	Renault R8	—	150	195	245	295	350	480	570
Citroen DS	215	275	350	425	685	850	1020	1290	Riley Elf	175	200	260	310	370	420	495	580
Daimler Dart	345	420	500	—	—	—	—	—	Riley 1.5	175	210	250	295	—	—	—	—
Fiat 500	130	155	180	210	245	285	330	385	Rover 2000	—	455	510	615	745	905	1085	1240
Fiat 600	135	160	190	225	260	305	350	415	Rover 3 litre	255	335	410	485	775	920	—	—
Ford Anglia	140	170	200	230	265	305	355	—	Saab 96 & V4	135	165	200	235	435	500	585	680
Ford Escort 1300	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Simca 1000	150	170	210	250	305	365	435	515
Ford Escort GT	—	—	—	—	—	—	615	695	Singer Gazelle	175	220	285	380	420	540	635	730
Cor 12/1300	185	215	250	290	340	480	565	660	Singer Vogue	225	260	320	410	545	615	715	830
Ford Zeph 4, V4	250	300	355	420	450	515	625	735	Skoda 1000MB	—	—	—	210	260	315	375	440
Ford Cortina GT	—	270	325	370	430	570	660	770	Sunbeam Alpine	250	280	355	440	520	620	740	—
Ford Cort Lotus	—	320	380	455	540	670	785	915	Sunbeam Rapier	225	280	335	400	470	765	865	1005
Ford Zodiac	215	265	315	365	560	670	810	970	Tri Herald 12/50	—	235	275	320	370	425	—	—
Hillman Imp	—	185	220	285	325	380	440	510	Triumph 1200	200	230	270	310	360	415	485	560
Hillman Hus Est	—	120	145	175	210	350	430	515	Triumph Spitfire	240	280	315	375	550	620	720	840
Hillman Minx	150	200	270	340	390	495	580	675	Triumph 2000	—	—	460	555	660	770	905	1055
Jaguar 2.4 Mk2	285	350	425	515	635	800	995	1190	Tri TR4/TR4A	365	415	465	530	660	770	—	—
Jaguar 3.4 Mk2	295	365	455	550	675	880	1055	—	Triumph Vitesse	225	255	300	355	410	505	690	770
Jaguar E-Type	580	700	845	1020	1210	1430	1715	1880	Vauxhall Victor	180	210	245	310	360	420	600	710
Merc 190 & 200	350	430	520	625	735	880	—	—	Vauxhall Velox	165	210	260	310	—	—	—	—
MGB	360	410	470	555	650	755	870	985	Vauxhall Viva	—	185	220	255	300	435	505	585
MG Magnette	225	275	325	390	460	545	640	—	Vauxhall VX490	230	275	315	400	460	530	—	1020
MG 1100	215	250	300	355	415	500	615	—	Volks 1200/1300	245	275	320	370	420	480	555	635
MG Midget	250	270	300	365	430	495	585	690	Volvo 122	310	380	455	550	660	755	895	1065
Morgan 4/4	290	335	400	475	565	665	780	1025	Wartburg	—	—	135	165	190	230	315	—