



Head-turners, not cash-burners

PART TWO

WE PICK UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF LAST MONTH AND SHOWCASE SOME OF THE FINEST EXAMPLES OF AUTOMOTIVE GENIUS THAT ARE WELL WITHIN THE MEANS OF MERE MORTALS. ACQUIRING A CLASSIC CAR/OLD-TIMER IS A MATTER OF TASTE, JUDICIOUS TIMING, AND RELATIVELY MODEST FINANCIAL OUTLAYS.

Jaguar XJS Cabriolet Series III (1991-1996) - Target Price: \$A19,000-30,000

The Jaguar XJS 4.0 Cabriolet is one of the finest Jags ever designed. It is a worthy successor to the spirit of the fabled E-Type and delivers a combination of sleek styling and plenty of power. This iteration of the XJS series began rolling off the assembly line in 1991 and was offered with two different engines. Some convertibles were fitted with the smooth and powerful 4-litre, 6-cylinder engine which delivered a mere 245 bhp and left the XJS severely underpowered.

The most representative XJS model in this series was the 5.3-litre V12 powerplant that delivered 295 bhp at 5500 rpm. Driving along the German Autobahn, I would generally cruise along at 250 km/h in the left lane and stay there unmolested unless an impatient Porsche pulled up behind

to within 30 metres and its driver (in typical nasty German fashion) started flashing their high beams.

Usually, I would graciously pull into the middle lane and let such idiots pass. However, my XJS was a beast at high speed and unless the Porsche maintained its velocity, I could easily throttle up to 280 km/h and pass the enemy and see whether they were willing to follow suit (usually not).

Driving at more relaxed speeds with the top down on country roads, the XJS is a dream Grand Touring car. The ideal model for purchase is the 1994-1996 class, which offered an upgraded 5.3 12-cylinder engine and diamond-turned wheels, Jaguar monogrammed seats, and a traditional wooden steering wheel. The car comes with a 3-speed automatic transmission that offers smooth power delivery and effortless torque on the highway and otherwise purrs along in the city (without the exaggerated

growl of Porsches and Ferraris rattling along in traffic in second or third gear). The leather interior is exquisite, and the dashboard offers an elegant wood veneer finish.

There are two drawbacks to the XJS Cabriolet, however. The first is the antiquated retractable rag-top roof mechanism which requires one to manually fix the cover when the roof is retracted (via electronic push button on the dash). This is something of an annoyance when Mercedes and Porsche convertibles of the same era were already designed so that the roof would comfortably disappear into its own neat storage chamber without any further ado.

The other, far more legendary quibble with the XJS is the ugly original headlamp configuration which lends the car a frog-like appearance up front. Most Jag connoisseurs replace the original lights with a dual



Stylish exterior of the Jaguar XJS Cabriolet.



Jaguar XJS Cabriolet.

headlamp configuration on each side that offers an immediate improvement to the look of the car. Another suggested upgrade is adding BBS mags and a wooden Momo steering wheel and wooden gearbox knob if they are not already included with the model you are eyeing for purchase.

Normally one can find a 1994–1996 XJS V12 convertible in the \$30,000–60,000 price range depending on the mileage. But at that price, one will delight in the opulent interior, capacious boot, and rakish style that instantly draws jealous onlookers.

Porsche 996 Series (1997–2005) – Target Price: \$A20,000–40,000

The car that has defined the Porsche marque for forty years, the 911 brought race car performance to the autobahn, autostrada, and wherever else drivers chose to exceed the limits of their vehicular imagination. Right up to the present, the 911 design has remained spectacularly intact and thus commands our attention as one of the truly iconic automotive designs.

The 911 was the outgrowth of the Porsche 356 Speedster cabriolet, particularly the 1963 SC version. One of the purest, most basic and most beautiful of all auto designs, the Speedster was designed primarily as a California sports car to take advantage of the money of wealthy Hollywood stars and producers and the more convertible-friendly climate.

The 356 Speedster's famous race car sister, the 550 Spyder, was the Porsche in which James Dean was killed on 30 September 1955, forever immortalising that particular model, too.

First introduced in 1997, Porsche's 996-generation 911 was a bold new engineering leap for the brand that was ushered in by then-CEO Wendelin Wiedeking to bring Porsche more into the modern era. Having come to the conclusion that the marque (the company was on the verge of bankruptcy when Wiedeking took charge in 1993) was in dire need of a total makeover, the Porsche engineering and design teams gave the car a top-down, inside-out reboot. There was a new chassis, new and longer wheelbase, and upgraded interior.

The pink-walled Porsche Werk factory in Zuffenhausen (a northern suburb of Stuttgart) totally re-engineered the 911 so that the 996 version offered improved day-to-day driving comfort, superior handling, better brakes, and added interior room. Indeed, not a single major component from the preceding 993 series was retained for the 996.

The most significant update that came with the 996 was Porsche's decision to abandon its traditional air-cooled engine in favour of a water-cooled flat-six that produced 296 bhp. A standard 1999 model, for example, could hit 60 mph in 4.6 seconds and reach the quarter mile in 13.2 seconds. In addition, the 996 was also offered in

a turbo (up to 450 horsepower) version as well as a GT2 supercar and GT3 race track model. The new series represented a top-down makeover of the 911 concept and was both lighter and faster than the preceding 993 model.

Unfortunately, many Porsche purists were upset over the switch from an air-cooled to a water-cooled engine, even though this was a technological necessity for all modern cars. But what truly enraged Porsche lovers and car magazine critics everywhere were the droopy, so-called "fried egg" headlights that gave the front an odd look. But this is precisely why the 996 generation is the most affordable classic Porsche on the market today as traditionalists have poured so much hate onto this variation of the 911 brand.

As a result, one can find a superb 2000 model Porsche 996 Carrera 4 Coupe with a Tiptronic gearbox for as little as \$20,000 today. Depending on the mileage, of course, the average price range for the 996 models runs between \$17,000 and \$28,000 based on a random survey of online used car sites. This represents outstanding value, although one should have a Porsche or European auto mechanic check out the engine first as some models carried rear main seal leaks and cylinder cracking, particularly in the earlier models.

Further, the admittedly ugly headlights can be replaced for between \$1,500 and \$2,000 (there are many such kits available for sale online that any mechanic can install) which



Porsche 996 Series.



Interior of the Porsche 996 Series.



decisively eliminates the griping. Although one could complain about altering the original car specs, which purists consider taboo, this is your opportunity to tell the 996 headlamp haters to stuff it. A tricked-out 996 will also command a higher price on the re-sale market so anyone who buys it would be well advised to proceed with the headlamp retrofit.

Bentley Azure Turbo (1995–2003) – Target Price: \$A60,000–110,000

The Bentley Azure was launched to considerable fanfare at the Geneva Motor Show in 1995. It was based on the Continental R and Pininfarina was brought in to collaborate on a two-year process of creating a sleek monster of a two-door, four-seater convertible. Pininfarina built the shell and soft-top at their factory in Florence, Italy and final assembly was then carried out at the Bentley factory in Crewe.

This magnificent beast of a luxury Grand Touring car immediately attracted the attention of celebrities including Mark Wahlberg and Simon Cowell, who soon delighted in cruising along in this gorgeous Brontosaurus of a motorcar which weighed nearly three tonnes and stretched over five metres long.

The Azure would quickly become a commonplace sight in Beverly Hills, the French Riviera, and the Amalfi Coast where oligarchs, aristocrats, and your average movie star didn't think twice about shelling out the original sticker price of £230,000 for a car that

matched up well with one's Riva speedboat in Capri or 20-metre yacht moored in Cannes on the occasion of the annual film festival.

What makes Bentley's then-flagship convertible such an attractive classic car today is its absurdly low market price. Due to its need of regular and often costly maintenance, the Azure lost its lustre in the eyes of the rich and spoiled class who quickly turned to the new 2000 Rolls Royce Corniche as an alternative statement car. A lack of marketing and indifferent customer service also deterred buyers from developing the kind of love the Azure needed in the face of its formidable cost.

The Azure comfortably sat four people and those in the rear had plenty of space to play backgammon and chill several bottles of Dom Perignon or Tattinger while trading gossip and insider trading tips. The Azure's optimal exterior was a combination of a stunning shade of gleaming "Metallic Peacock" blue (of course) and a sensationally contrasting ivory leather interior that was plush beyond belief. The steering wheel came in striking blue and beige leather with a wood-veneer dashboard and vintage-style instrument gauges that reeked of old-world charm.

The posh interior was so comfortable that you felt you could live inside the Azure should the taxman seize your Chateau. This Bentley could match all but elite Porsches, Mercedes, and Ferraris

for straight-line acceleration.

The powerplant was a turbocharged 6.75 litre V8 that produced a maximum of 385 bhp at 5000 rpm. What attracted the rich and famous beyond its gleaming facade was a 0–60 time of 6.3 seconds and a top speed of 150 mph, which was hardly of much use on the winding roads of Sunset Boulevard or scenic seaside or mountain routes along the coast of Cannes, Nice, and Monte Carlo.

The heavy sticker price and a hopeless marketing division served to undermine the Bentley Azure first generation's life span. But the model's commercial failure is what has allowed it to evolve into one of the most interesting, although only marginally affordable, classic cars on the market today.

In the American market, online sites list various pre-2000 Azure convertibles for under \$50,000, although the highly desirable metallic blue Azure model will be harder to find at that price. In Europe, the Bronto Bentley convertible will easily fetch \$60,000–70,000 depending on colour, condition, and mileage. But this is one divine Grand Touring beast that most experts believe will soar in value in the coming decade. Happy hunting!

Well, there it is. A selection of some of the world's most impressive, iconic and affordable cars of all time. Interested?

This article was written by Jan Janssen exclusively for the National Collision Repairer in Australia.



Bentley Azure Turbo.



Bentley Azure interior.