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T H E T H R I L L O F D R I V I N G

“Thrillingly fast, gloriously vocal
- a winning formula”



TVR TUSCAN **CONVERTIBLE**

The impressive new
Tuscan Convertible
represents a return
to the muscular TVR
roadsters of old ➔

B R A W N A G A I N





‘The Tuscan doesn’t need the light show to look sensational’



At home in Blackpool, the new Tuscan Convertible becomes the best entertainment on the promenade, particularly when you crank up its TVR-designed straight-six. The loss of the roof seems to suit the lines of the Tuscan well; TVR boss Nikolai Smolensky had considered a folding hard-top, but this was too complex and costly

Everything changes but stays the same. We’re standing on Blackpool seafront under a broily, admiring how the TVR’s curves contort the technicolour lights of the Golden Mile into swirling, galaxy-like patterns. It could be a dozen years ago, with the illuminations reflected in the body of a Griffith or Chimaera, but this is the new Tuscan Convertible, one of the first models to be launched under TVR’s new boss, the young Russian, Nikolai Smolensky.

The scene doesn’t evoke nostalgia, however, more the feeling that with this car TVR is rediscovering the formula that put it on the map under Peter Wheeler. While the Porsche Boxster has gained a roof, become the Cayman and as a result feels like a more serious driver’s car, the Tuscan has lost its hardtop and somehow seems more like a TVR should be.

The drizzle abates, out at sea the cloud cover fractures and the late evening sun suddenly bursts through, painting the promenade with a blaze of orange and red that puts the arcades in the shade. The Tuscan doesn’t need the light show to look sensational. You could park it anywhere – or next to any other car – and it would draw attention. And that’s before you’ve started it up...

Since it was first shown at the Birmingham show in 2004, the Convertible has been much reworked, particularly the shape of its roof. Smolensky was keen to employ a modish automatic vanishing hardtop but the cost and lengthy development time were prohibitive, so the engineers returned to the tried and tested TVR design of a targa panel and small folding rear window section.

On this blood-red car with its dark grey wheels, the roof looks right, to my eye giving the Convertible better balanced lines than the coupe. It seems to combine the pebble-smooth look of the Griff with the fuller shape of the Chimaera, and as if to reflect this melding of sports and sports tourer, the Tuscan Convertible is offered with two distinct chassis specifications: ‘sport’ and ‘comfort’. TVR normally develops its chassis in-house but Norfolk-based dynamics specialist Multimatic and German damper manufacturer Bilstein have been involved with the set-ups for the Convertible.

Under Smolensky, TVR has also adopted a pricing strategy along the lines of its rivals’. Instead of an all-in, take-it-or-leave-it price, there’s now a base cost to which options can be added. In the case of the Convertible that’s £39,950. Replace the standard 16in alloys with 18s (£1296), add air-conditioning (£1763), full leather (£1175) and ‘Formula Red’ pearlescent paint (£881), and you get a total of £45,061.

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Facia [above] is simpler compared with Tuscan coupe, yet still TVR-bold. Lines of Convertible evoke classic Griff

Another change, but one that has yet to officially filter down to the brochures, is what TVR describes as a 'more realistic approach' to quoted power figures. The stated output of the 3996cc straight-six in this car's 'softer' state of tune is 365bhp. Now that we have WRC Technologies' rolling road at our disposal, we'll later be able to determine the actual figure for ourselves...

Hood up, the Convertible feels much like the Tuscan coupe, though the view in the mirror is different, mainly because of the substantial roll-overs, which are bolted to the tubular steel chassis. In some modern performance cars there's a starter button to add a bit of interest to an otherwise ordinary interior. The Tuscan starts on a turn of the key and has a dramatic interior, though not the complex and rather fussy design seen in the Tuscan 2 coupe (evo 078). The main fascia is shaped like a wave, its swells and dips the opposite of those of the bonnet beyond. The switchgear is more user-friendly – the twin-dial instrument pack is that first seen in the Tamora – and neatly stitched leather is contrasted by flashes of aluminium and a rubberised carbonfibre-patterned material.

You'll discover that there's a procedure for

painless embarkation. Press the button under the door mirror, watch the window wind down and the door pop magically open, then climb in but don't close the door; the seat belt is drawn from over your left shoulder and the buckle it latches into is hard to get at with the door shut.

Twist the key and the needles of the clockwise speedo and anti-clockwise tacho make sequential test-sweeps. Turn a notch further and the 4-litre straight-six winds gently into life and assumes a gruff, slightly chuntery idle. The deep rumble from the bike-style carbon cans poking from beneath the rump hints that there will be no lack of aural entertainment on the move.

In fact, the straight-six dominates the experience. In some cars it's hard to resist winding down the windows through tunnels. There's no need in the Tuscan because it sounds that loud most of the time, hood up or down. Hauling from low revs in high gear is when it sounds best, the six delivering a deep, characterful howl reminiscent of a classic '60s British racer, only louder. There's plenty of torque low down but the TVR six thrives on revs too, revealing a reach that's as impressive as the BMW M3's. There's no red line painted onto the

rev-counter and because there's so much pace up to 5000rpm it's a while before you discover the three upshift lights embedded in the face of the dial. The last one lights up at 7500rpm, by which time the gritty cry of the six suggests that it's hell-bent on glorious self-destruction.

Snap the pedal to the floor and it feels like the engine has very little flywheel mass or internal inertia, and with only 1100kg of steel, glassfibre, leather and aluminium to move, acceleration is vivid. In the dry, traction is only an issue in first and occasionally second, the 255/35 ZR18 Goodyear Eagle F1s biting into the tarmac and shoving the Tuscan up the road.

This car, equipped with the firmer 'sport' set-up, proves supple at town speeds, pleasingly taut on smooth, fast roads and nicely rounded over the lumps and bumps of the lanes that thread through the Trough of Bowland on the opposite side of the M6 from Blackpool. It's not perfect, though – despite the switch to Bilstein dampers, at speed the Convertible shares the Tuscan 2 coupe's tendency to be a little distracted by undulations and cambers.

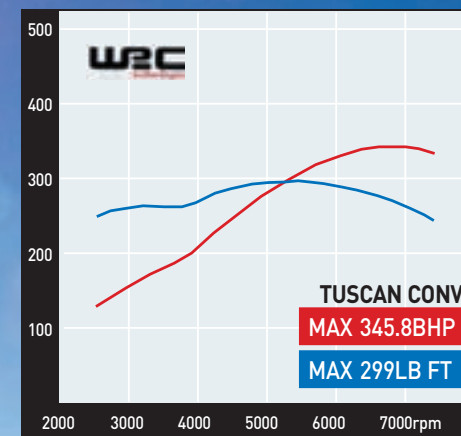
But while forays into the outer reaches of the rev-range are thrilling, the Tuscan feels fast and hugely satisfying on part-throttle, with the roof down and the all-enveloping straight-six's classy, guttural pulse echoing off the hills and swirling around the cockpit – you sit low and snug, hardly disturbed by the airflow even into three figures. The steering is comfortably weighted, feelsome and direct without being nervous, and the shift of the five-speed 'box is similarly hefty but has a wonderful oiled precision and is readily finessed with the progressive clutch action. The feel of the brake pedal has been fruitfully reworked, too, to be less resilient and more confidence-inspiring at the top of its travel while retaining its firmness and response when pushed hard. The floor-hinged pedals are well-spaced and matched for heel-and-toe downshifts.

Enhancing the Tuscan's tactile delights is probably the most obvious and welcome improvement to the driving enjoyment of a TVR in the last decade – seats that support your upper body effectively. Properly located, you have more confidence to exploit the keen turn-in and pick up the throttle early to explore the grip and traction at the rear, too. In the dry you have to be quite determined with the throttle to edge the Tuscan into oversteer – and quick and accurate with the steering to keep things neat when you do.

As well as enjoying ourselves on proper roads, a total of seven hours on the M1 and M6, from our offices up to Blackpool and back down to WRC's rolling road at Silverstone, showed that the Tuscan is plenty comfortable enough to be a fine long-distance companion. The roof generates a modest amount of wind noise, the ride and the seats isolate the road surface, and the straight-six settles to a loping, muted rumble.

On the rollers at WRC, the Tuscan didn't make 365bhp. The actual figures were 346bhp at 6800rpm and 299lb ft of torque at 5300rpm. On the face of it, disappointing. But to be honest, the Tuscan feels quite potent enough.

The bottom line is that the Tuscan Convertible is thrillingly fast, gloriously vocal, engaging and rewarding at a moderate pace and a challenge to drive hard. And just like the Griffith and Chimaera of a decade ago, it's handsome and versatile. Sounds like a winning formula to me. ■



[TVR Tuscan Convertible]

SPECIFICATION

TUSCAN CONV

■ Engine	In-line 6-cyl
■ Location	Front-mid, longitudinal
■ Displacement	3996cc
■ Cylinder block	Aluminium alloy, dry sumped
■ Cylinder head	Aluminium alloy, dohc, 4v per cyl
■ Fuel and ignition	Electronic engine management, sequential multi-point fuel injection
■ Max power	365bhp @ 6800rpm (claimed)
■ Max torque	315lb ft @ 6000rpm (claimed)
■ Transmission	Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
■ Front suspension	Double wishbones, coil-over gas dampers, anti-roll bar
■ Rear suspension	Double wishbones, coil-over gas dampers, anti-roll bar
■ Brakes	Vented discs all-round, 322mm front, 298mm rear
■ Wheels	18in diameter aluminium alloy
■ Tyres	255/35 ZR18 front and rear
■ Weight (kerb)	1100kg
■ Power-to-weight	337bhp per ton (mfr's figures)
■ 0-60mph	3.8sec (claimed)
■ 0-100mph	8.1sec (claimed)
■ Top speed	195mph+ (claimed)
■ Basic price	£39,950 (£45,061 as tested)
■ On sale	Now

EVO RATING ★★★★★1/2





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