

FORMER PRESIDENT ALAN DOMVILLE CONTINUES HIS REMINISCENCES AS A MOTORING WRITER & LIFELONG GROUP FRIEND.....

"What is the best car you have driven?" or "What is your favourite car?"

Two questions for which there can be no exact answer - and I if I could have a pound for each time I had been asked either of them I should be able to buy whatever vehicle it was that took my fancy.

As a child in the late 1940s and early 50s nothing, for me, could match the Borgward Isabella. Few readers will be old enough ever to have seen one but it was a classy car in today's BMW mould - but at that time there were few takers for anything German-built and presumably it guzzled petrol.

Later on in the 50s something totally wonderful came along: the little Austin Metropolitan sports car with a wheel slung on the back. So cute - but so yesterday! Pals would harp on about something called a Rolls-Royce, a car I had never seen, and when I was 17 and learned to drive my choice for my first car was another great "looker", the cigar-shaped Renault Dauphine - a design triumph in a relatively austere age. Yes it rusted and even Renault rarely mention it these days but for me it was magical.

Almost 50 years of working within the motor industry and having driven nearly 5,000 different cars it is not surprising that I am spoiled for choice regarding those questions. In the end, beauty - either skin deep or within the powerhouse - is in the eye of the beholder.

Just as the annual European Car of the Year award has become synonymous with the kiss of death I have to admit I have often been out of step with the general consensus. I considered the Pony to be remarkable value for money when it was introduced by the previously unknown Hyundai company but clearly few motorists agreed with me. In mitigation, 40 years on the Korean products sell like hot cakes. It was the same with their sister company's Rio. Other than me, there were few takers for the original 1.5 but it gave me 14 years of trouble-free motoring and Kia are now selling 90,000 cars in Britain annually. The Dodge Caliber I thought was a splendid looking car and gave it my own "Car of the Year" award back in the day. I think only half a dozen people shared that view and the car died the death.

Was there anything as retro-wonderful as the Chrysler Rancho? - surely a four wheel drive winner... if it had been given four wheel drive!

And talking of drive, I railed on for years about the advantages of rear wheel drive but was engulfed by a tide crashing over the front, so to speak.

Of diesel power I was similarly disenchanted, being influenced I suppose by some of the wretched stuff that was offered in the 1970s. Again, I was resisting a flow that became a flood.

Now, almost overnight, it has become accepted that diesel wasn't the answer after all. For many years I could see my wife and I tearing round the countryside in a Morgan when I retired from full-time working. Now it's happened I rather prefer considerably more sophistication!

And so, (a) I am no better than anyone else to answer those questions I mentioned earlier and (b) there are horses for courses.

"You pays your money and you takes your choice".