

Here's the bottom line:
owning an old convertible
is about having fun



BOB HORNE AND HIS 1966 FIAT 1500 CABRIOLET
"I like all old cars. This one was offered to a Fiat dealer I know as a trade-in. They didn't want it but thought I might be interested. We've put a lot of time and effort into it, but it's been worth it because it's stylish, unusual and pretty."

Corrosion is certainly the greatest enemy of steel-bodied classics but these pre-software cars are endlessly repairable and rebuildable, simple enough mechanically in some cases for even the novice buyer to learn to understand and work on them themselves. They are also easy to improve with modern seat belts, lead-free fuel conversions and much else.

Lack of parts should never keep your old convertible off the road. The more popular makes are as well supplied for spare parts as they ever were; owners' clubs, specialists and the resources of the Internet can uncover parts for even the most obscure cars in a way that was often not possible when they were brand new.

It's no use pretending that your classic soft-top, without airbags or side impact protection, will be as safe as its modern equivalent but it might make a smoother, more anticipatory driver out of you. Neither can the classic owner claim that their car is as green as a modern but isn't it better to run an old car than bring another throwaway modern one onto our already overcrowded roads?

Soft-top cars of the sixties, seventies and eighties embrace a vast range of makes and models, so there should be something to suit your taste and pocket. It's fun to research the car you want and then track it down in specialist magazines, where you'll usually find dozens of examples of the more common models for sale both privately and from dealers. Convertibles don't have to be red two-seater tearaways with raspy exhaust notes and only enough luggage space for a toothbrush. There are plenty of comfortable (and less selfish) four-seater ragtops you can enjoy with your family.

Here's the bottom line: owning an old convertible is about having fun while people in modern tin-top cars are merely getting from A to B in sterile anonymity. And as winter comes, warm yourself up with the knowledge that you're driving cheaper too: classics upwards of 20 years old qualify for cheap insurance, and if the car was registered before 1 January 1973, free road tax.▶



JAMES MANN AND HIS 1959 AUSTIN HEALEY 3000

"With the E-Type Jaguar and AC Cobra, the Austin Healey is one of the great British sports cars from the hero days of Le Mans in the fifties. But unlike them it's also affordable. I bought mine for £8,000, though they're usually between £10-15,000."



Did you know?

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