

Your heart wants one classic. Your head demands another for everyday use. The answer? Satisfy both parts of your anatomy by buying them a car each. Our intrepid team make their choices from Grundy Mack.... Photos by Mike Bailie

Head & heart



DON'T let your heart rule your head! That horrible, hackneyed, depressing expression is supposedly never more appropriate than when you're choosing a classic car. A glimpse of sexy red paint or brilliant chrome bumper might set your emotions ablaze, but does the resulting purchase end up affecting the holiday arrangements of every RAC man within a 40-mile radius of your garage?

That wonderful, nostalgic, four-wheeled time capsule might be a great escape from Major and Maastricht, but provides about as much useful everyday transport as a packet of frozen peas.

So you give up, and look at something extremely practical and logical. Your shortlist is whittled down to a selection of staid old barges which may have good fuel and spares ability, but are lacking in excitement.



You deliberate... and deliberate, and deliberate. One car has this, but not that, and too many of those. It's too big, too small, too expensive, too thirsty, too slow. How about a 'modern classic'? Cavaliers have character, honestly!

Or there's another solution to the problem. Instead of spending all your cash on a single car, buy two less expensive ones.

Out come our imaginary chequebooks. Say we had (gulp!) up

to £5000 to spend on each car, but we had to make our choice quickly, from one source.

We didn't spare the horses, shooting straight up to Huddersfield to wreak havoc among the huge selection of reasonably-priced goodies at Grundy Mack.



Nick Larkin

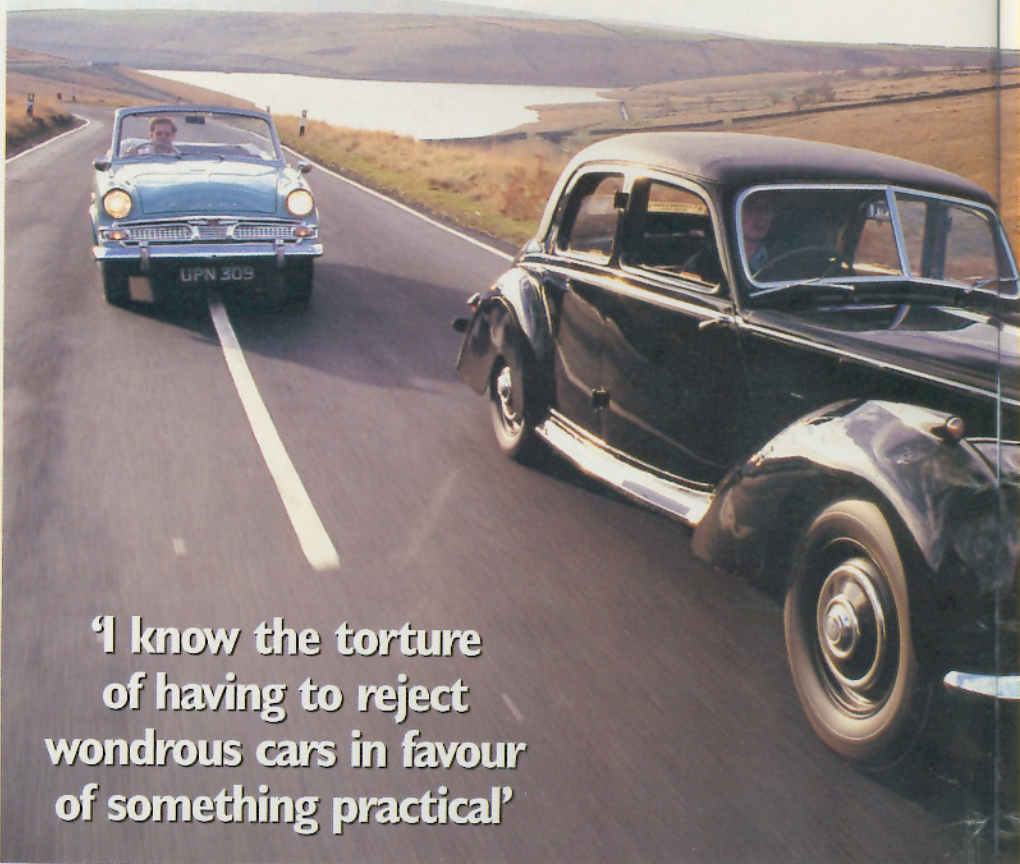
HEAD: 1961 HILLMAN MINX SERIES IIIA CONVERTIBLE, £2850

HEART: 1954 RILEY 1 1/2 LITRE RME, £4995

I ALWAYS think you should have at least two classics; one to match your mood and one your motoring needs. Unfortunately, the bank does not, and well do I know the emotional torture of having to reject wondrous cars which set your juices fizzing in favour of something satisfying that holy grail of practicality, ie a car which does what's expected of it, does not break down, and doesn't commit you to a regular maintenance schedule more complex and exhaustive than NASA's space programme.

So 'young' Russ and I find ourselves gasping at the long rows of classics at Grundy Mack in Huddersfield. We can choose two, each up to £5000. Just reach in my back pocket. Damn, thought so, the money is imaginary.

We are a little spoiled for choice at Grundy Mack, where there are at least 30 cars that fit into our categories. I must admit that on my last visit to this firm's premises I very nearly purchased a 1946 Hillman Minx. Had the car still worn its original seat facing and had the money been sitting in my account, I'd have snapped it up.



'I know the torture of having to reject wondrous cars in favour of something practical'

Then there was Humphrey, a wondrous wartime Austin K2 breakdown truck. The K2 is one of my all-time favourite vehicles, and would have been a definite 'heart' choice, except it wasn't actually a car, Austin or not.

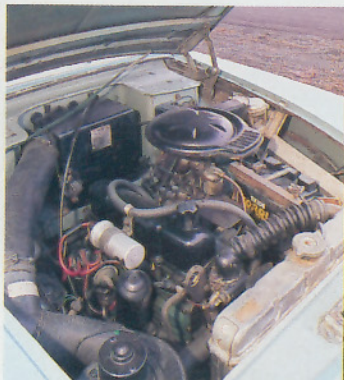
So, I kept looking. Russ had disappeared into the depths of Grundy Mack's other building. A very nice Austin 10, possibly. A Jowett Javelin. Interesting, but I think Russ was about to snap this up.

Right, choice time. The Morris Eight? A possible 'heart' but a bit slow; Austin 10, Yes, but... Rover P5 automatic? A possibility

for everyday use, at a push – not literally, I hope!

An NSU Ro80? A fascinating beast, but not heart-firing or, with its original Wankel engine, particularly practical. A black MGB roadster, rubber-bumpered. I fought to think up reasons against choosing this for practicality. Heh heh, of course: it's a two-seater. I couldn't carry both my friends at the same time in that!

There was an absence of Rover P4s, P6s or BMC Farinas ready for the road to help me make my choice. Though I did rather like, of all things, a slightly used 1980 Reliant



Series III Hillman Minx convertible has rare qualities of practicality, style and decent performance. And the heater works!





Main picture, Riley was sadly inferior to Hillman in terms of performance. But what a wonderful looking car!

Left, Riley interior was its strongest point – original to the carpets, and with a lovely period dashboard



Scimitar GTC, with drop-dead-awful period interior.

But my head finally fell on a lovely 1961 Hillman Minx IIC drophead at £2850, leaving a considerable amount of my £5000 budget untouched.

Poor old Rootes-mobiles are rather overlooked, but cars like this Hillman were stylish and probably better built than their BMC competitors. The more you drive them, the more you appreciate the cars' quality feel and rather nice aura of well-being, best described as 'Rootesiness'.

A full four-seater, this car is comfortable and, being a 1600, will offer a reasonable turn of speed. Fuel consumption will be wobbling around the 30mpg mark.

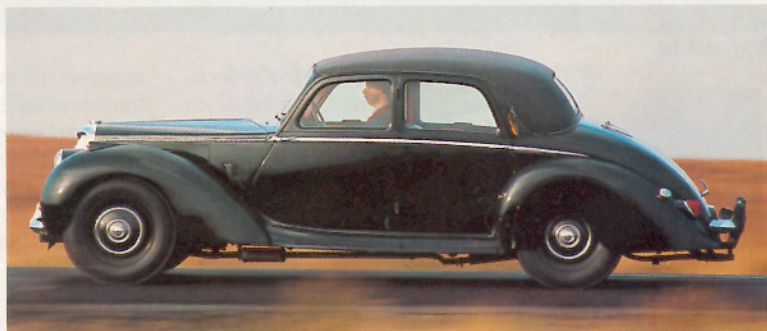
Mechanical spares aren't difficult to get and the car is straightforward and easy to work on, without too much refilling the grease gun during an average service.

Now to the heart. It had to be the extremely well looked-after 1954 Riley RME, with completely original interior right down to the carpets.

I love Riley RMs. They have almost everything you could possibly want in a classic: a unique combination of pre-war looks and, for their era, superb handling.

Long flowing wings, a split windscreen, super wooden dash with gold instruments, a fine looking and sounding ohc engine, light steering, good brakes and scarcely a squeak from its ash-framed body – this Riley had all these attributes.

On the road, the car impressed, except for one major factor – speed. A 1.5-litre engine



'A 1.5-litre engine strapped into this bodyshell isn't going to nudge Ferraris out of the way'

strapped into this heavy bodyshell isn't going to nudge Ferraris out of the way. Grinding up Pennine Hills isn't fun in this vehicle, either, but what a magnificent piece of engineering and design it is!

To the Hillman. Performance-wise, comparing this car to ye olde Riley is like lumping a Testarossa with a T-registered Datsun Sunny. Handling is also surprisingly good, and with the hood up and heater on, the Hillman is snug and cosy. The ride is commendable, too, the car stops well, has a light clutch and generally feels solid and cared for.

Right, let's have a look at Russ's choices. Well, I have my doubts that a Jaguar 420 would be a choice you'd make with your

head for everyday use. The 18mpg thirst for a start, and all those engine complexities.

Our test car was an extremely nice example, however. The old 420 is, like the Hillman, away from the limelight, but in theory at least it combines the best points of several other Jaguars. Inside is a generous helping of best wood and leather, with huge, superbly accommodating soft red seats.

The power steering is rather light and delicate, and there's a temptation to over-correct at first. Brakes are excellent, and power from the 4.2-litre unit is, as I'm sure you're astonished to hear, there in abundance.

Then there was the Jowett. Once I was in that car, they found it extremely difficult to get me out again. The high driving position, supremely comfortable, original interior, the wonderful sound this car made. I just wanted to sit there and savour it all. Russ must

have been wondering where he could get a smoke bomb from!

I'd never been in a Javelin, but What A Car! Truly individually styled in and out, and handling and ride totally outshining just about everything I've ever driven from this era. The flat-four engine and typical gear whine makes the car sound like a cross between a Morris Minor and a Beetle, and the column change is a sheer delight.

There are also lovely detail touches; for example, you can remove the rear parcel shelf and affix it to the back of the front seat as a mini-table.

They should have made more Javelins; people should have bought more of them, or someone should have bought Jowett. Is there ever justice in motor manufacturing?

To conclude, the 420 is wonderful value, and a traditional pre-XJ6 Jaguar in the finest sense of the word; the Hillman's fun, practical, and just think of using it in those long summer evenings. The Riley is lovely but like driving a 2 1/2 litre with the handbrake on.

The Jowett wins hands down, and thanks to a dedicated club you can even get the spares needed to use one every day. Jowett Javelin – the answer to all our prayers?



Russ Smith

HEAD: 1968 JAGUAR 420, £4795
HEART: 1952 JOWETT JAVELIN, £4495

IT'S a game I often play, when I've run out of features to read in a magazine: what would I buy if I had 'x' amount of money to spend? Much dream time, or quite often bathtime, is then spent wading through the dealer ads, pretending I've won the lottery, or, slightly less likely, been given a large salary bonus...

Confronted by Grundy Mack's vast and tempting stock, and with a theoretical five grand in my back pocket, Nick and I spent a good hour deliberating over which would be sensible choices, and which cars did we feel a strange, unquestioning automotive lust for.

Using my head first, what would be the logical buy? It had to be something usable on a daily basis, with a reputation for reliability, and easy to get parts for. A Rover P5 at £3795 fitted the bill, but it was the base model 3-litre saloon in two-tone grey. Not quite there. Nor was an MGB roadster, looking nice in black; but rubber bumpers and the associated lacklustre handling of those models meant little more than a pause for consideration.

No, my Mr Sensible was going to be a 1967 Jaguar 420; any small doubts dispelled by the discovery that it was the manual version with overdrive and optional power



'Much time is spent wading through the dealer ads, pretending I've won the National Lottery'



steering. At £4795 you're looking, quite simply, at a lot of car for the money. Low-ish mileage, good respray in gold metallic and a pleasantly aged blood-red leather interior.

A car I have no problem at all about being seen in. Very Managing Director, or 'Sweeney' villain, the latter having a special nostalgic appeal to me. Hey, we could borrow a Mk I Granada and find an old industrial estate to play on...

'We're losing him, George, step on it!'

With that settled, I traded my sensible headgear for a happy hat and rose-tinted spectacles, and thought long and hard about an NSU Ro80, still with its original Wankel engine. These have always intrigued me, and they are said to be very good cars - while the

engine is still working. I've also long admired the beautiful lines of Riley RMEs, but Mr Larkin was already onto that one.

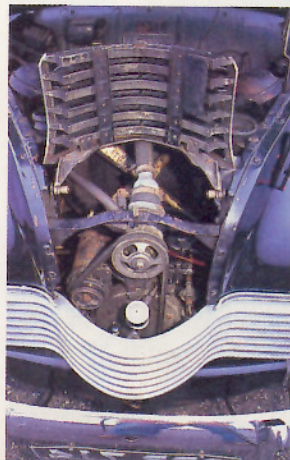
Really there could only be one choice, given that it was there, available and in the price range. Jowett Javelins have held a life-long fascination for me, but it was 35 years since I'd last ridden in one. In fact a bonnie, bouncing, week-old editor-to-be made his first automotive journey in one.

Smith senior still reminisces fondly about his old Javelin, coincidentally the same colour and about the same age as this one, and I think still harbours some regrets about trading it in for a new Austin Seven Mini soon after my arrival.

But after all those years of nostalgic recall and indoctrination, would it prove to be a monumental disappointment? I rather hoped not, both for reasons of family harmony and because it looked so good.



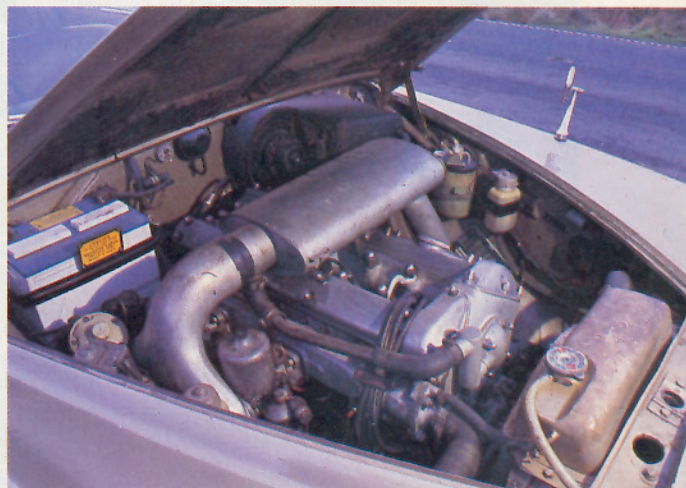
Jowett impressed our two testers by its sheer all-round competence. Add in the quirky looks and olde-world interior, and you have a winner





Main picture, Jowett was favourite overall but Jaguar was surely the biggest bargain at under five grand

Below, 4.2 litre straight six gives plenty of go, backed up by desirable manual gearbox and lovely interior



To my mind the styling is quite American, especially in the areas of the grille – don't even try to tell me the designer had never seen a 1940 Chevrolet – and the sloping back. But its narrowness, short bonnet and traditional wood and leather interior are very British.

Javelins are often said to have been way ahead of their time, and I've just said it again because it is absolutely true. They are also engineered way beyond the call of duty. Despite being due for a service this example was surprisingly lively, steered precisely and handled well on its all-torsion bar suspension; it even stopped quite acceptably.

Also most impressive was the column-mounted gear lever. I've encountered many of these in different cars, but most have cried out for the services of a Magic Circle member to wave the wand with any degree of gear-finding consistency. The Javelin's, despite its age, was a model of precision and a delight to use. Strange to relate, then, that the previous owner had traded it in because his wife couldn't get on with the gearchange.

Driving around at our photo location on the moors to the west of Huddersfield I became more and more attached to the Jowett, and to be honest lost interest in driving the other cars. But enough lyrical waxing: it wouldn't do to push the prices up when I can't afford one as it is. I'll keep schtum, start saving and tell you about the sensible Jaguar, which would be a much better buy for yourself.

The 420 is relatively unloved for a Jaguar, perhaps because it lacks identity, falling somewhere between the S-type and the Mk X and incorporating elements from both. But



it's no less a car for it, and low values caused by low demand make it quite a bargain.

As expected, that 4.2-litre engine pulled like a train, and the 420 rode and handled like only a Jaguar knows how. Somehow it also contrived to feel smaller from the driver's seat than it looks from the outside, making progress along the twisting, undulating moorland roads fun rather than fraught. Maybe my head was right for once after all.

Our next step in this exercise was to try each other's choices, to provoke some healthy debate if nothing else. So I zipped my jacket up tight and headed for the hills in the open-top Hillman.

To someone who has spent his life convinced that all Rootes cars apart from Imps

and Sunbeam Tigers are staid and boring, this came as a pleasant surprise. It was lovely to drive! Sufficient performance to keep me happy, a slick gear-shift and it felt pretty solid, too. The posing side of my nature also went for the turquoise paint, period white-walls and portholes. One good choice at least, Mr Larkin....

What I'm going to say next will probably get my picture pinned to a dartboard at the next Riley Owners Club meeting, but the RME disappointed to the point of distress. I wanted it to be good, but it was so lethargic I checked the handbrake three times, then felt the wheels for heat caused by a binding brake shoe. Sadly they were all cool.

It's a shame really, because there was so much I did like about it. Oh well, having the odd dream shattered is an inevitability of this job. As, fortunately, is the fulfilling of others, which brings us back to the Javelin.

That was the car we were fighting over the keys for to drive back to Grundy Mack. I've often said in the past that hobby cars should be bought with your heart and to hell with the consequences. Our trip to Huddersfield merely served to confirm that belief. **PC**

Many thanks to Nick Szkiller and everyone at Grundy Mack for all their assistance.

Grundy Mack began trading in 1992, and its policy is to buy and sell at sensible prices, passing cars on to customers for roughly what they'd expect to pay privately. All cars are sold with a new MoT and full service.

Grundy Mack are at Unit 3, Broadfield Industrial Estate, Albert Street, Lockwood, Huddersfield HD1 3QD, tel/fax 0484 450446.