

barchetta



UK Owners Club

Newsletter

Issue 4

January 2001

In this Issue...

Welcome to the Newsletter
How Are We Doing?
Parts And Toys
Promotional Items
Engine Management
Barchetta at Anglesey
Handy Addresses
Peter Davis, A Year After FIAT
Upcoming Meetings
Club Addresses



Dutch Visitors @ UK International Meeting 1999.
Photo Simon Brown

President	Geoff Bowles
Editor	Ian Farquharson
Treasurer	Neal Harvey
Internet	Marc Kloosterman & Ian Farquharson

Welcome to the Newsletter

Welcome to issue number 4 of the UK barchetta Owners Club Newsletter. Well, it's taken nearly a year to get the material together for this newsletter, and I thank everyone in the club for their patience. Hope you enjoy this one.

— Ian Farquharson

How are we doing?

Well, despite the dreadful summer that the UK has had this year, the Owners club membership list is still growing strong. Geoff has spent a lot of the Summer away in Canada with his Cadet troupe, and been unable to devote a lot of time to planning meetings, we did have 2 very successful gatherings over the summer. The UK International meeting was held in the Peak District during the early months, and the AutoItalia Festival later on. Nature of course played tricks on the weekend you'd expect to have fine weather on, and whilst Saturday at AutoItalia was very hot, the main club day on Sunday hosted one of the now typical deluges that Britain is beginning to see quite often. Nevertheless, both meetings attracted between fifteen and twenty owners, and we got to meet quite a lot of new faces.

Looking forward to 2001, everyone seems to have a much clearer calendar for the New Year, and plans are being put in place to organise several large meetings. The details of which WILL be in the next newsletter I promise. In addition there are several International meetings being time-tabled, by the Club presidents. As soon as those dates are available, we'll add them to the newsletter, or mail them out separately if the newsletter is still waiting for articles.

So, what else has been happening?

Rumours still pass that the barchetta will cease production at the end of 2000. However at present this is definitely still a rumour. Importers such as DTR who easily sell more cars than FIAT UK in a year have not been able to confirm any of this with their source of cars.

The strong Pound has enabled importers to keep their prices at all time lows, with the cost of a new barchetta falling slightly over the last year. The good news is that the car is becoming slightly more popular, and it's now not so uncommon to see one as you drive about. (Certainly in London and other large cities).

Scotland too has embraced the barchetta, and there's even a dedicated local 'chapter' of the Owners Club operating there. Given the great roads, and reasonable lodging perhaps Scotland should be considered for a larger meeting in the this year.

The barchetta underwent another slight revision this year with EEC phase III emission regulations coming into force. The new management program and components drop the power back to the 130bhp but this is less than 4% and barely noticeable. What is quite obvious is the 'Cyclops Eye' on the trunk lid. To maintain EEC Homologation, FIAT were forced to add a third brake light to the barchetta. The design solution to this is a raised 'power bulge' about two inches high at the tallest point. Within the rear most part a lamp about the same size as the indicators sits. The lamp tapers to a point at the bottom. While it's been criticised by original owners, it certainly has not hurt sales. New buyers seeing it as a minor facelift.

And so, on to the oily bits...

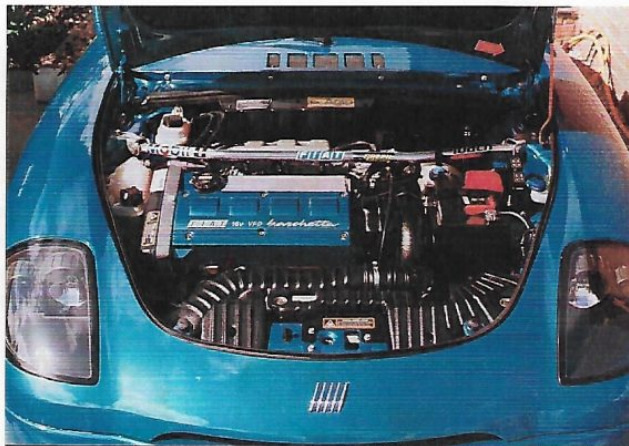
— Ian Farquharson

Engine Management

Throughout the summer I attended a number of meetings and have met many of you fellow barchetta owners, all of your cars look splendid, shining like new pins..... But there is a dark underside they are hiding... Lift most of your bonnets and you stare at dirt, oil, grease. There will be a degree of oxidation to the alloy rocker cover and the cadmium plated parts (gold coloured metal). Surely this area deserves a little attention, and it's so easy to do (it also makes your car more appealing to a prospective purchaser, giving it that well cared for look). Firstly get an open top container and an alloy wheel brush. This has soft bristles and a rubber coating on the handle, so as not to damage the paint. Fill the container some car wash shampoo, not wash and wax but the thin stuff like Autoglym. Using the brush coat the whole engine bay. Important! It should be cold. If your bay is heavily soiled use Gunk or Autoglym engine degreaser. Leave for a few minutes to work on the oil, then gently rinse. When rinsing the bay do not use a pressure washer or hose as you risk water ingress into the electrics. The best way is to use a watering can or a pouring jug. You should be extra careful with water on the plate bearing the barchetta logo. It hides the spark plug wells, which can fill up and damage the coils. If possible remove it first, then clean (and paint!) it. You can then remove water from the area below too.

Once rinsed, dry the bay with some clean dry dusters then fire up the engine to drive off the remainder of the moisture. Your bay will look clean but the rubber will be white and dull and the plated parts tired and dull looking. For a finishing touch, take a can of WD-40 and remove the straw. Liberally spray all the surfaces. This gives the rubber a deep gloss black and brings some life back to the plated parts. Furthermore it protects the engine bay from further corrosion and disperses moisture from the electrics. Carry out this simple ten minute task once a month and you'll never be embarrassed to open your bonnet again.

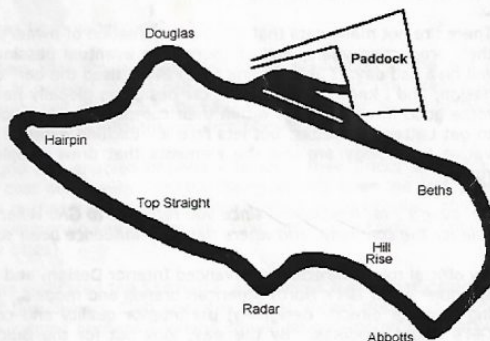
— This article was by our new resident expert in car care Bert Reid.



barchetta at Anglesey

We met up with Steve Jetley in Shrewsbury (ex-barchettisti). Left there with an Elise, Carrera 4, BMW ZM and an Escort. We stayed overnight in Bangor and went to a very cosy Greek bar / restaurant. We enjoyed the beer and garlic bread there. In the morning after being woken up by an impromptu false fire alarm, we headed over to the dining room for a large breakfast. We got to the track about 09:15 AM, there were about 10 Elises, three Porsches, a Skyline, an Evo, a couple of Ferraris, several single seaters and a few other assorted cars. There was only one other b, driven by Gary Finnerty from Stockport. The sky was overcast and threatened to chuck it down, but it held till late afternoon. With the briefing over and done with, I went in search of a helmet (a letter stating that one was needed for convertibles was sent on Friday, received on Saturday), for someone with a big head that wasn't using theirs...

One of the instructors took me round in his 4x4 truck! with 6 Elises in tow. With the ideal lines firmly etched in my head, I had a go in my b. After about 300m, the bonnet popped up. I was blacked flagged for the bonnet so pulled into the pit lane and slammed it bonnet shut again. Same thing happened three more times. I stopped for a break, and started looking at the bonnet catch. The Anglesey circuit is quite interesting, the first corner is a long right hand sweeper, tightening at first with a 30° incline. This opens up to a 90° corner, which leads into a left and right corner combo called radar... The track is quite basic, not many amenities, but the driving is good. The only thing I didn't like was the large amount of mud left around the radar corner, on the racing line...



So, how did the b perform?

Speed: Well it was the 2nd slowest car there. I managed to lap a midget and just about kept up with the slowest Elise and the other b. I still had about 20kg of luggage in the boot and a full tank of fuel. My wife too (but she doesn't weigh much). Majority of the track was taken in 2nd gear, with the straights taken in third. The maximum speed was around 85mph.

Handling: plenty of predictable under steer, although it held on the line well. With hindsight, I should have pumped up the tyres to normal levels. I use 2.3 and 2.0 bar on the road. The quickness of the steering was a boon, a dose of opposite lock quells the tail wagging (mostly). On occasions the pendulum effect crept in.

The Tyres: My Pirelli P6000's survived the abuse quite well, though they did squeal a lot. I know from experience that this decreases with more air on the tyres. The sides are feathered with a ridge on the leading edge of the tread blocks.

The Brakes: Well they didn't inspire much confidence, I started to get brake fade after a few laps, I only really used them at the end of the two straights so they had plenty of time to cool down, despite the number of corners. Though I started braking about 60m from the corner, the rate of retardation did not encourage late braking, as people know I brake pretty late on the road. With better brakes, I could have left it later. I don't know enough about the dynamics of a car's handling to pinpoint the exact problem, but my b doesn't seem to settle into the corner and dig it self in, instead it seems to be skimming around the corner. But this is at 10/10ths. It seems to lose fluidity. Maybe a strut brace would help.

So what to do next time ? 1) Increase tyre pressures 2) fit strut brace 3) remove luggage 4) Better air filter & exhaust.

— This article was by Chun Wong (our new resident racer...)

Parts and Toys

Hot news in this issue are two interesting new parts from DTR European Sportscars.

Firstly, there have been a number of requests given to them via the club and through e-mail for them to consider commissioning a batch of replacement exhausts with a twin tailpipe to match the original. Many folks have already fitted the DTR oval exhaust featured in an earlier issue. Some purists maintained that only a twin would do. As you can see this one looks as good or better than the original, is lightweight, and carries a Lifetime warranty. The original FIAT exhaust rots in under 2 years in the U.K. and now there's a sensible alternative for all. This exhaust is louder than the original, or single oval pipe DTR component, and is not for the faint hearted.



Second new part is a replacement speedometer dial for imported cars. At MOT, it's illegal to have an un-illuminated speedometer. Prior overlays only have KMH visible at night (with stickers on the binnacle for day use.) While it's very marginally a different colour, the DTR overlay is 99% authentic.



Contact details for DTR are in the Suppliers section. A small discount will be given to club members requesting it.

In addition this year has seen some barchetta passing the five year old mark. The only real casualty on the cars seem to be the vinyl hoods. Unless carefully cleaned and treated, the vinyl does eventually lose some of it's flexibility, and can crack. Rather than pay FIAT for the list prices of a new hood, there are two other options in replacing it. Either a replacement vinyl one from DTR, or a Mohair replacement from DTR or HoodsGalore. Mohair hoods are the type often seen in place on BMW/MGF cars (usually erected in any temperature below 33°C). The difference with the barchetta versions are they are made to roughly the same thicknesses as the vinyl, retaining the 'tented' look when up, and still managing to fold away tidily. Ricky Reid, one of our members, persuaded HoodsGalore to incorporate extra material above the doors to act as rain gulleys, preventing runoff entering the car. Both companies charge equivalent prices, and the mohair also is available in blue, burgundy, and tan, as well as the original black.



Ricky Reid's Blue Mohair Roof.



The Tent Effect Remains.



Guttering to prevent runoff.

HoodsGalore are based in South London, but also have agents around the country. Their contact details are in the suppliers section, along with DTR.

Promotional Items

We still have some of the T-shirts from Last Year's UK International Meeting available. These are in Garden Green, with the barchetta Owners Club Logo on the front. They are high quality 'Fruit of the Loom Screen Stars' cotton, and are available in Large or Extra Large.

The shirts cost £6 and can be obtained by sending a cheque made payable to 'UK barchetta Owners Club' at the membership address at the back of the newsletter. Check availability first.

We are still working towards getting some polo shirts, wooly hats and baseball caps made for the new year. The design has been programmed, and it's now just a question of ordering them. Prices and details in the next newsletter...



AutoItalia @ Brooklands (On the Saturday)

In 2001 the festival will return to Brooklands in June. Keep watching the magazine for further details.

Peter Davis, A Year After FIAT

Shortly before leaving Turin to return back to America, and a job as a director at General Motors, Peter Davis, the man responsible for the barchetta interior, joined the internet mailing lists. He shared many interesting facts about the cars development. We caught up with him a year down the line and asked how things were going:

Despite all the leg-pulling that you had to leave FIAT after the Multipla, the car is an unbridled success in Europe. How do you feel that your bold push to break the mould of the MPV has been so successful?

The Multipla is a fringe vehicle hovering around the core of the MPV volume leaders; Renault Megané and Opel Zafira. The Multipla's styling doesn't and wasn't meant to appeal to everyone, and given the unique package, couldn't possibly have looked "normal". Companies will always aim for volume sales and Fiat should be applauded for their courage. The development team responsible is very talented and it was a joy to have taken part in such a historic vehicle.

The barchetta has been in production for five years now. Rumours speak of FIAT ceasing production soon. Would this be a sad moment, or an opportunity for some hope of moving forward the work already done with the barchetta and Coupé, in promoting interior design as strongly as the exterior and technical developments?

There are not many cars that inspire the creation of owner's clubs during their production years, and of course the eventual passing of the barchetta will be a sad day. I like to think that FIAT "raised the bar" on interior design, and I know that attentive car designers globally have used it to promote good interior design within their companies. Interiors are only going to get better and better, but lets face it. Exciting exterior design and innovative technology are still the elements that draw people into the showroom.

So, over a year has passed since you returned to GM. What's your official role for the company, and where has your influence been strongest?

My official role is Director of Advanced Interior Design, and my work straddles all of GM's North American brands and models. I will be influencing (but not directly designing) the interior quality and competitiveness of GM's future products. By the way, look out for the Buick "Bengal" 2+2 roadster at the Detroit show. Its very pretty.

— Ian Farquharson

Peter is going to stay in touch with the club via the Newsletter....

Upcoming Meetings

January	Pub 24th Three Horseshoes Laleham Surrey 7pm
February	AutoItalia Winter Meeting at Brooklands. Pub 20th Colney Fox London Colney 7pm
March	10/11th Mini Meeting Details t.b.a.
Pub	Wed 21st Details t.b.a
April	8th Mini Meeting. Epping in Essex.
May	12/13th UK International Meeting. (Large Weekend)

The details will be on the website or available from Geoff for these.



Top: Peter at work.

Bottom: One of the original interior proposals