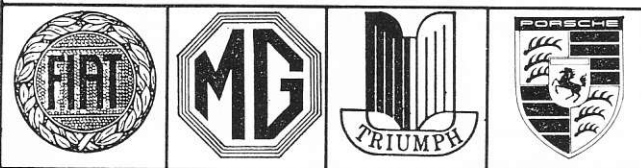




FOUR SPORTS CARS

How did the Fiat 124 Spider, MGB Mk II, Porsche 914 & Triumph TR-6 measure up on a 1250-mile run?

R&T Comparison Test



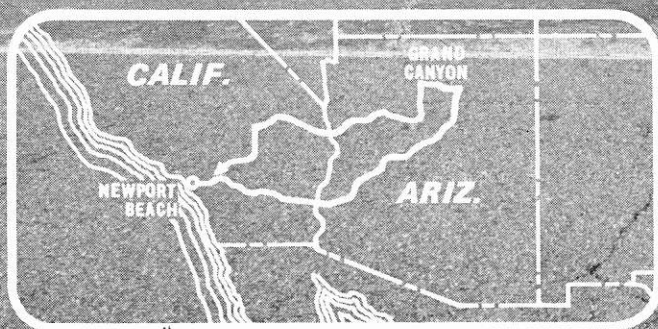
IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE for a regular reader of *Road & Track*, interested in buying an open sports car in the \$3000-4000 class, to rummage through his back issues for the appropriate road tests. He'd find prices, specifications and performance data, plus objective and subjective comment on the four cars which qualify: the Fiat 124 Spider, MGB, Porsche 914 and Triumph TR-6. In effect, this comparison test gathers together, updates and arranges all that material in convenient tables; more important, by driving

the four cars under identical conditions a combined total of 5000 miles, we've been able to make an accurate assessment of the practical, functional and aesthetic qualities of each and to arrive at an overall rating of preference.

Except for the fact that they are open sports cars within the specified price range, the four are surprisingly dissimilar. The Triumph has a generous 2.5-liter 6-cyl engine, while the three smaller 4-cyl units vary considerably: the Fiat makes up in part for its small displacement by having a modern belt-driven dohc system, the MG's older ohv engine has less peak horsepower but far greater torque, and the Porsche has a VW-built aircooled flat-4. In chassis design, the Fiat and MG have unit structures with live rear axles, the Triumph has a separate body and frame with independent rear suspension of limited effectiveness, and the Porsche is unique in having a mid-positioned engine, naturally with independent rear suspension. To transmit power the Triumph and MG, with the largest displacements and greatest torque, have 4-speed gearboxes, while the smaller-capacity Fiat and Porsche employ 5-speeds (even here notably different in design). In body configuration, the Fiat has a recent design of rather



BASIC SPECIFICATIONS: 4 SPORTS CARS



	Fiat 124 Spider	MGB Mk II	Porsche 914	Triumph TR-6
Curb weight, lb.	2090	2220	2085	2360
Test weight, lb.	2420	2590	2455	2680
Distribution f/r, %	55/45	54/46	46/54	51/49
Wheelbase, in.	89.8	91.0	96.4	88.0
Track, f/r	53.0/51.8	49.0/49.3	52.6/54.1	50.2/49.8
Length	156.3	152.7	156.9	156.0
Width	63.5	59.9	65.0	58.0
Height	49.2	49.4	48.0	50.0

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classic proportions and the only +2 seating in the group, the MG and Triumph are both very narrow with dated lines, and the Porsche is again unique in having a low nose, retractable headlights, an integral rollbar with removable roof panel and two luggage compartments. The greatest similarities among the four cars—besides their common purpose of providing open-air driving pleasure—are their weights and dimensions.

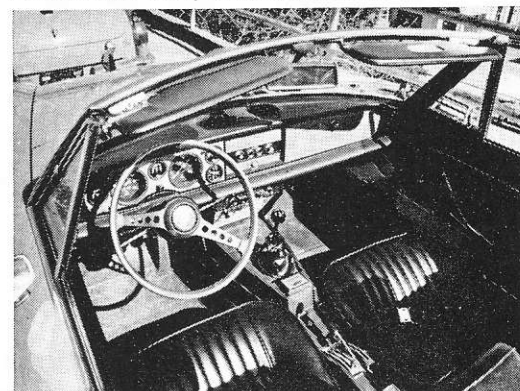
A test crew of six (including Editor-at-Large Henry Man-

ney, whose irreverence tempered the more routine approach of the others) took turns behind the steering wheels and in the passenger seats during the 3-day, 1250-mi run from Newport Beach to the Grand Canyon and back. The experience included altitudes from near-sea level to over 7000 feet; terrain from flat, featureless desert highway to narrow mountain hairpin turns; average speeds from 45 to 85 mph; and such misfortunes as two flat tires on the MG (from staples picked up during the skid-pad cornering test), locking ourselves out of the Triumph (solved without damage by a straightened coat hanger), electrical accessory maladies on the Fiat (the result of fording an axle-deep creek), and a still-unexplained engine failure in the Porsche (which quit

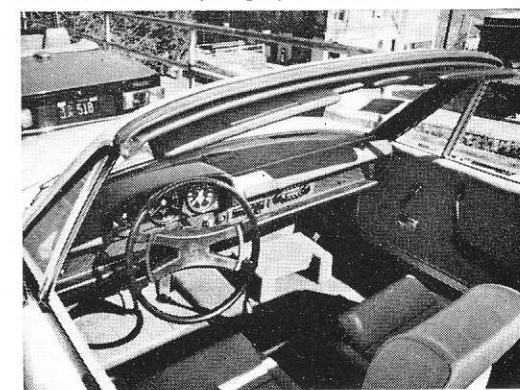
ENGINE & DRIVE TRAIN: 4 SPORTS CARS

	Fiat 124 Spider	MGB Mk II	Porsche 914	Triumph TR-6
Engine type	dohc 4	ohv 4	ohv flat-4	ohv 6
Bore x stroke, mm.	80.0 x 71.5	80.3 x 89.0	90.0 x 66.0	74.7 x 95.0
Displacement, cc.	1438	1798	1679	2498
Bhp @ rpm	96 @ 6500	92 @ 5400	85 @ 4900	104 @ 4500
Torque @ rpm	82.5 @ 4000	110 @ 3000	103 @ 2800	142 @ 3000
Transmission	5-speed	4-speed	5-speed	4-speed
Final drive ratio	4.10:1	3.91:1	4.43:1	3.70:1
Engine speed @ 70 mph	4000	3980	3120	3370

Fiat interior: wide, neat, comfortable.



Porsche's: modern, simple, no nonsense.





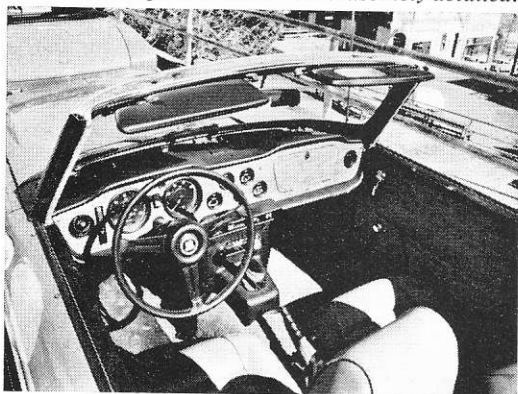
PHOTOS BY BILL MOTTA

without warning while cruising at 70 mph on the desert, showed no signs of faulty electrics or vapor lock, started up again without fuss and gave no further trouble). With the exception of finding a tire repair service that would work with wire wheels on a Sunday morning in Kingman, Arizona, none of these incidents required more than five minutes' concern.

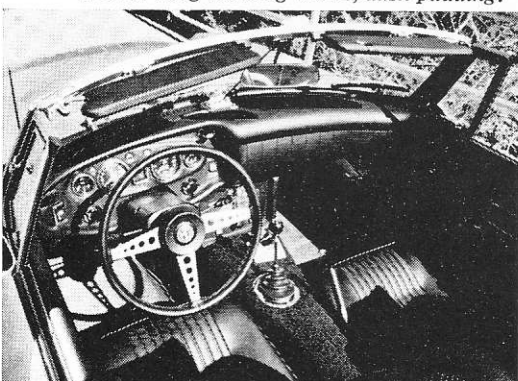
Every car performed satisfactorily on the trip, but in switching back and forth from car to car, we had established clear preferences at the end of it. Our score sheets compared the cars in 14 categories, with ratings of 1 (best) to 4 (worst) in each: engine, gearbox, steering, roadholding, ride, brakes, structural integrity, seating, interior fittings, exterior

appearance, weather protection, heating/ventilation, carrying capacity and accessibility/maintenance, plus a separate rating of overall preference. Totalling the 14 categories, the Fiat scored 48 "bests", the Porsche was next with 22, the Triumph third with 13 and the MG last with only one. The Fiat also got the least number of "worsts" with 6, the Triumph was next with 15, the Porsche third with 23 and the MG again last with 40. In the overall rating of preference the Fiat received five "best" votes and the Triumph one; the Porsche got two "worsts" and the MG four. So the Fiat was clearly the best overall car in the opinion of the test crew and the MG the worst. What about the Porsche and Triumph? The uncompromising Porsche, perhaps in a reflection

Triumph's: narrow but handsomely detailed.



MG's: snug with big wheel, dash padding.



GENERAL DATA: 4 SPORTS CARS

	Fiat 124 Spider	MGB Mk II	Porsche 914	Triumph TR-6
Base list price	\$3399*	\$3150	\$3695	\$3495†
Price as tested	\$3484	\$3361	\$3692	\$3650
As tested prices include: for Fiat, AM/FM radio; for MGB, tonneau cover, radial tires, delivery and handling; for Porsche, appearance group, AM/FM radio, local transportation, pre-delivery; for Triumph, tonneau cover, AM/FM radio. *Includes dealer preparation. †Preparation charge added by dealer.				
Chassis type	unit	unit	unit	separate
Brake type	disc	disc/drum	disc	disc/drum
Swept area, sq in./ton	245	239	383	248
Suspension type, f/r	ind/live	ind/live	ind/ind	ind/ind
Standard tires	165-13 rad	5.60-14 bias	165-15 rad	175-15 rad
Driver Comfort Rating:				
For driver 69-in. tall	85	80	85	72
For driver 72-in. tall	80	70	65	75
For driver 75-in. tall	75	65	60	75
Steering, lock-to-lock, turns	2.75	2.9	2.5	3.25
Steering Index	0.938	0.928	0.902	1.073
Usable trunk space, cu ft	6.2	2.9	9.9	4.3
Fuel tank capacity, gal	11.8	12.0	16.4	13.5

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of its uniqueness, elicited more extreme reactions (more "bests" and "worsts") but in the final tabulation just edged out the Triumph for second:

1 Fiat 124 Spider	139 points (low score best)
2 Porsche 914	207
3 Triumph TR-6	213
4 MGB Mk II	279

PERFORMANCE: 4 SPORTS CARS

	Fiat 124 Spider	MGB Mk II	Porsche 914	Triumph TR-6
Lb/hp (test weight).....	25.2	27.0	28.9	25.7
Top speed, mph.....	106	104	109	109
Standing 1/4 mi, sec.....	18.3	18.7	19.2	17.9
Speed at end of 1/4 mi, mph.....	76	73	70	77
0-60 mph, sec.....	11.9	12.1	13.9	10.7
0-90 mph, sec.....	31.0	32.8	37.8	28.2
Max. deceleration, % g:.....	81	72	84	78
Overall brake rating.....	very good	good	very good	good
Fuel consumption on trip, mpg.....	24.3	23.5	31.5	24.0
Normal cruising range, mi.....	290	280	510	320
Actual speed at ind. 60 mph.....	59.3	58.7	59.1	58.0

Fiat 124 Spider

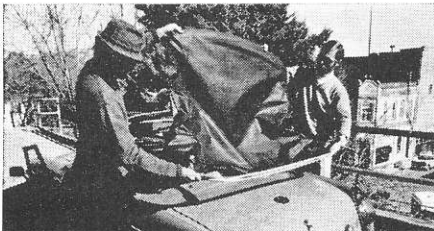
THE OVERWHELMING MARGIN of preference for the Fiat surprised everyone, including those who voted most strongly for it. The Fiat won by virtue of its overall balance. On the road its steering, roadholding and ride made an unbeatable combination; in pampering the occupants its seating, interior fittings and weather protection were most effective, approached only by the Porsche.

Every car in the group has a serious flaw; the Fiat's is its small, low-torque engine. As the performance table shows, this fast-turning dohc unit was second only to the much bigger Triumph in through-the-gears acceleration, but on the uphill sections of the mountain roads we continually had to use the lower gears and listen to unpleasant engine racket to keep up. For a 5-speed, the gearbox is well designed though we were able to beat the synchromesh frequently. The basic understeer and low-speed steering heaviness were not appreciated at first; after miles of fast driving, the Fiat's excellent transient cornering characteristics and good absolute adhesion (a close second to the Porsche on the skid pad) made it the most enjoyable car. In steady high-speed cruising the Fiat surprised us by its low engine noise (despite the high engine speeds); it also had the least wind noise.

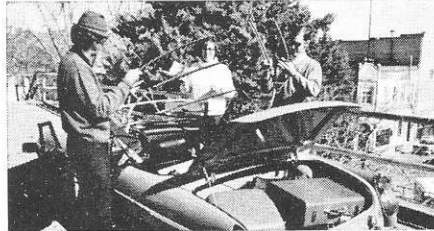
The Fiat's top was the best by far, giving almost closed-car protection when up and requiring only 10 sec of one man's time to put up or down: a model of functional design. If we were to characterize the Fiat with two words, we'd say **Modern** and **Civilized**. To keep its favorable position in the sports car market, the 124 Spider (and its GT sister, the Coupe) will need the promised 1608-cc engine. With 20 percent more power and 25 percent more torque, the car will have the mid-range performance which the rest of its modern specification cries for. Maybe in 1971 or even late 1970?

Porsche 914

AS WE'VE SAID, the 914's very unconventionality is responsible for both the high and low marks it re-



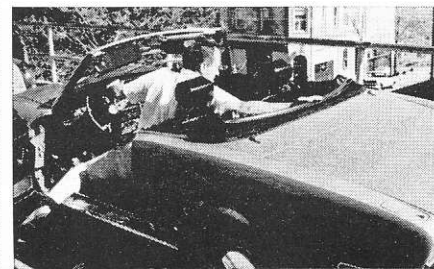
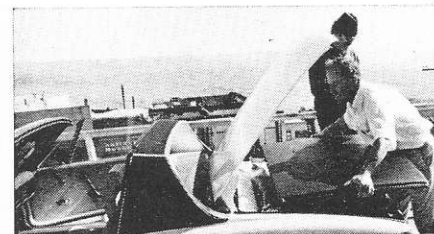
Taking down and putting away MG's many-piece top is a monumental exercise.



Lowering Triumph's top involves some folding but is easier than it looks.



Stowing Porsche's roof in trunk is easy but Fiat's top is model of simplicity.



ceived. Every feature was either praised or strongly disliked. Its awkward styling, noisy VW engine and cantankerous shift pattern put most drivers off at the start, but its excellent roadability, comfort and long-legged cruising qualities (both 4th and 5th ratios are below unity) found favor.

Like the Fiat, the Porsche does not pull well in the upper gears; in this case it is the tall gearing rather than lack of torque which is to blame. This would be less objectionable if the gears were easier to select; only our most experienced road tester found the gearbox acceptable after getting used to it. The straight-line performance of the Porsche is the lowest of the four though the 0.708:1 top gear gives it a maximum speed equal to the Triumph's. Its brakes are the best.

Though the styling of the Porsche (particularly the front) was unpopular, the body was found excellent in terms of function and convenience. The integral rollbar and lift-off, easily-storable roof panel have to be *the* design for the future, whether safety regulations demand it or not. The interior of the 914 is extremely handsome and, like the Fiat's, roomy. The mid-positioning of the engine gives the benefit of an extra trunk but hardly improves the handling (compared to a 911); this may be better as the car is developed. The 914's excellent fuel economy and large tank give an unprecedented cruising range of 500 miles!

In two words, the Porsche 914 is **Futuristic** but **Unresolved**. It has the ingredients of a fine sports car, but at present is not sophisticated enough for its high price. A handsomer nose, better shift linkage and minor suspension development would do the job.

Triumph TR-6

THE STRONG, BEAUTIFUL-SOUNDING engine of the TR-6 makes it one of the easiest and most enjoyable cars to drive—on good roads—and on this basis alone it almost scored above the Porsche overall. Because of emission requirements, peak power of the 2.5-liter six is down to a moderate (for the group) 104 bhp but torque is so healthy

that the Triumph can move away from the other three cars at will and has the added advantage of relaxed gearing. Fuel consumption, seemingly a function of power output, is as low as for the smaller-displacement MG and Fiat. Roadholding and ride are fine until you encounter rough surfaces—then the car's extremely dated chassis and suspension make themselves known all too harshly.

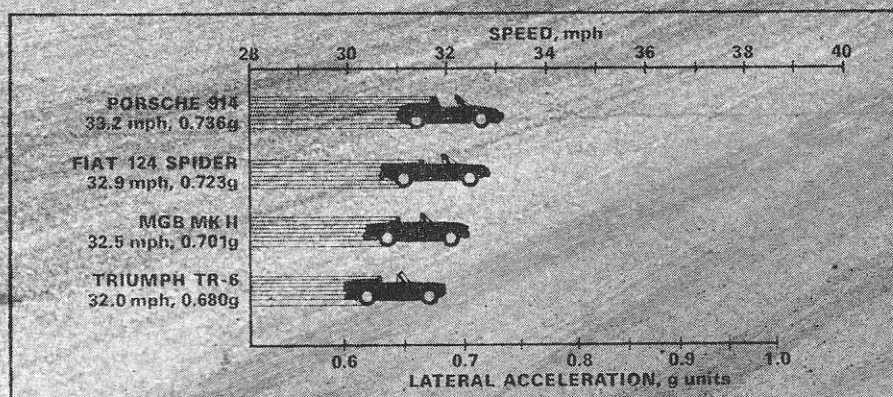
The dated character of the car also shows up in the styling and narrow cockpit, but in each case Triumph has done a better than fair job of improving a design that goes back to the TR-4 of late 1961. The ends of the TR-6 are quite successfully modernized and the interior is very handsome and well detailed (especially the dashboard), but nothing short of an all-new structure can cure the narrowness (not helped by the short wheelbase which forces the long engine to intrude on the occupants). The top is nowhere near as convenient to put up or down as on the Fiat or Porsche, requiring a lot of careful folding, but is still vastly better than the disassembled-reassemble affair of the MG.

Cornering is better than the skid-pad figures would indicate but becomes unpleasant on poor roads. The TR-6's handsome perforated disc wheels are fitted with very tall tires by current standards but the generous tread width makes a needed contribution to the car's handling. The low engine speed would make cruising very pleasant if wind noise (mostly from the top) were not so great.

The two words we'd choose for the Triumph are **Strong** but **Dated**. Despite the extremely intelligent modifications Leyland has made, the design needs to be replaced soon. The superb engine asks for a wider, unitized structure and improved suspension to go with it.

MGB Mk II

THE B-SERIES MG has had a long, successful life (since 1962) but—even more than for the Triumph—the end is in sight. Basically, the MGB Mk II (the new designation denoting minor styling changes) is a very good car. It has few serious faults but was consistently unimpressive compared



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to the outstanding qualities of one or more of the other cars in each category on our score sheets. The updating of the car—except for the much-needed all-synchro gearbox fitted two years ago—has been so stingy that it simply looks and feels old. Its price—lowest of the four cars—is therefore an important factor.

The MGB has enough power and torque to perform well in a straight line and it does much better than the Triumph on overall handling and ride though steering is notchy rather than progressive. Braking and fuel economy are below average for the group but still satisfactory. The new gearbox compared well with the others and earned the car a “best” vote from one scorer.

If the MG functions decently, it falls down on aesthetics and convenience. The styling has suffered rather than benefited from the recent modifications, while the interior is decidedly unattractive. In most cases, needed improvements have been made as cheaply as possible (for instance, the front of the hood still has the raised form for the MG badge which has been moved to the center of the grille, the rear bumper has been sliced apart to make room for a lower license plate mounting, the old dash structure has the new safety padding built on top of it, etc.). Carrying capacity is minimal, with the smallest trunk and only the tiniest pocket for incidental items in the cockpit. The fussy top design, requiring disassembly and separate storage, is Early-Masochistic.

Capable but Undistinguished would characterize the MGB. Its low price may keep it on the market for some time but it is badly in need of replacement. 