

Title: Mean Flying Machine

Howard Walker travels to the TVR works to drive the impressive 155mph 450 SEAC.



BONDED BODY: The sleek TVR shell is composed of Kevlar and carbon fibre which is light, but very strong.



WALNUT WONDER: The TVR boasts an exotic wooden & leather interior.

You could launch a Harrier Jump jet from the rear spoiler. To say this aerodynamic appendage is big, ranks as one of life's great understatements. It wouldn't look out of place on the back end of an F1 McLaren. It resides however on the 450 SEAC - TVR's most potent offering - the road going version of the company's track racer.

SEAC stands for Special Equipment Aramid Composite and describes the car's space-age body construction. This involves bonding Kevlar and carbon fibre - both of which are stronger than steel - into the body shell to increase strength and reduce weight.

The 450 badge reflects the size of the 4.5 litre V8 engine beneath the bonnet. It's developed from the 3.5 litre V8 used in the Range Rover and arrives in a wooden box from Solihull.

Stripped Down

To increase the power, the engine is completely stripped down, the cylinders re-bored and a new crank-shaft and pistons fitted. Work is also carried out on the cylinder heads, the manifolds and valves to allow it to breathe easier and for greater amounts of fuel to be pumped in. In standard form, the injected Range Rover engine turns out a healthy 192 bhp; in the SEAC, this figure is bumped up to a staggering 320 bhp. By comparison, a Porsche 911 Turbo will produce just 300 bhp.

Stirring Stuff

Floor the throttle and this road rocket will hit 60mph from rest in around 4.8 seconds, touch 100mph in a shade over 12 seconds and blast its way to a top speed of over 155mph. Stirring stuff indeed.

We went to the TVR headquarters in Blackpool to try to tame this latest version of the SEAC. You sit low down in the car's cockpit, cossetted in a sea of soft creamy coloured hide. In front of you is a fascia packed with more burr walnut than the antiques pages of Country Life. Imagine a Rolls-Royce two seater and you will get a picture of the TVR's cabin.

Most drivers will find the seats comfortable and supportive, the steering wheel thick and macho. But the gear lever is set just a little too far back for comfort and there's no space in the footwell for you to rest your left foot - apart from on the clutch pedal.

Turn the key and the engine doesn't merely fire-up, it explodes. It's the most remarkable sound; deep throaty and raw. The noise is amplified by an exhaust system that appears to be nothing more than a chromium-plated drainpipe.

The sensation of speed is just phenomenal. As the V8 unleashes its power. Your whole body is compressed hard into the seat. And the noise is just mind blowing; not even a Le Mans Jaguar sounds so aggressive, so purposeful. You do need a firm hand to tame the Blackpool beast. The gear change is hardly in the Toyota Corolla class; the Range Rover box having a slightly slow ponderous action.

Also, at low speed the steering feels rather heavy, though the man from TVR felt some adjustment may have been needed. As speed rises, the wheel lightens and feeds back all the information from the wheels.

Driven quickly, the SEAC feels safe, predictable and well-balanced. There's certainly no shortage of grip; with 255/50 section tyres at each corner, the car takes bends as if on rails.

Wide Car

The only problem with hard driving on country roads is the car's width. Although it's only 68in wide - it's about the same width as a Toyota Supra - the TVR does feel a wide car. The ride - while firm - is far from uncomfortable, though a deep pothole will send a shudder through the body.

During our day on the road we didn't see another SEAC and the chances of seeing one are slim. What the asking price of £33,950 actually buys is exclusivity. So far only fifteen 450's have been built and with production running at only one car every three weeks, it's likely to remain exclusive.

A Porsche 911 might give you quality and reliability but a 450 SEAC will make you stand out in a crowd.

Model	TVR 450 SEAC
Engine	4.5 litre V8
Max Power	320bhp
Top Speed	155mph
0-60mph	4.8sec
0-100mph	12.1sec
Economy	20mpg
List Price	£33,950

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