

Dyed-in-the-wool Seven owner Nick Henstock attempted an unbiased appraisal of our 'raison d'être' (an almost impossible task once you've driven one). His words were intended primarily as a call-to-arms for car enthusiasts of a different persuasion, but they are summary of 'why we do it' and a nudge to those who don't yet have a Seven of their own. Ownership is not a requirement in the Club—but it is certainly encouraged!

THE CASE FOR THE SEVEN?

SHEER ENJOYMENT!

THIS IS A tough call: how do you review something and at the same time remain objective when, let's face it, it's in the top three of the most important things in my life? No, I am not prepared to be anymore specific on the rankings than that...

I bought my first Seven back in 1991; it was a 1700 Supersprint cross-flow, the classic colours—British Racing Green with yellow nose—and I've owned a Seven ever since. I built my current Seven—a 1600 κ-series engined Supersport—ten years ago and have been taking bits off and adding bits every since.

You've all read the reports about the Seven being the four-wheeled motorbike, nothing gets you closer to a racecar on the road, goes like stink, blah blah... but the thing is, the Seven is all of these and more. In fact, it has taken over my life. My wardrobe is influenced by the car, what I spend on non-Seven things is set against 'possible Seven expenditure'. I get frustrated on holidays when I come across a great driving road but I'm in a tin-top; oh, the agony of a twisty road and a fully-laden family car. I suppose the easiest way to describe the Seven is this: if you like driving, this is the ultimate tool to achieve your kicks.

You don't need the latest 260 bhp CSR either: a more modest 1600 cc Seven will put you in touch with the driver in your soul and, to be quite honest, the illicit thrill you get from spanking some hot-hatch or supercar through the twisties is even better when you tell the owner "Oh, it's just a 1600...". It's not the speed that makes it so good—aerodynamics see to that; any modern hot-hatch will see it off much over 70. No, it's not speed, it's the feel, the totally-connected-to-what's-going-on feel; yes, the Lotus Elise may have slightly better steering but it's the overall sum of the inputs and feedback you receive that raises it to another place. Nothing, I mean nothing, makes you feel so 'wired' as a full-out, full-on blat in a Seven on a twisty, challenging road. The air rushing over you head, up your nose or into your mouth makes the smells and tastes so intense you tingle.

I know you're saying any convertible does that, but no—it's different in a Seven, you become hyper-alert. You move you hand, the car moves; you squeeze the throttle, it darts forward; brush the brake, you slow down instantly; you are part of the machine. If you love driving you'll love the Seven.

Yes, you have to make compromises: they seem tricky, at first, to get into even before you get the roof on; it may not seem so comfortable—even the larger SV is cramped by Fiesta standards. The same overload of sensations that make it fun can be wearing: it's very noisy and 200 miles in the Seven feels like 600 in my Audi. You should have a certain

amount of mechanical knowledge in order to keep it in fine fettle. MoTs can be tricky with a later car, as you may need to know your way through the regulations to get a pass. They can be tricky in the wet—it's not a case of if it slides, it's when: there's no traction control or ABS. They are cheap to run though: mpg with a Crossflow can be around 18, but a 1600κ like mine will return 30-plus; insurance for me (43 and 3 points) is £250.

It's a good time to buy—prices have dropped a little and now a good, sound Crossflow might put you back as little as £7500, and very very quick R400 can be found for around £18k. For that, you will get a car that will worry all but an Enzo, Veyron or the like in a straight line and embarrass them in a corner or on the track. There is another big upside to this car: people love Sevens, you can measure it in grins-per-mile; little kids to grandparents will smile and wave, older kids will beg you to 'give it some'. More motorists let you out at junctions, bikers nod their approval and owners of supercars (well, some at least) acknowledge you with a respectful raise of their hand.



The Seven: greater than the sum of its parts and somewhat baffling for those who haven't experienced it. Nick and Mike share a blat; now Mike understands...

I beg you to go out and try this drug whilst it's still legal, but I warn you—it's addictive. It will lead to sleepless nights brought on by working out how you can get one. It doesn't stop when you buy it: upgraditis (Up-grade disease) sets in—how do I make it quicker, handle better; you try to justify carbon fibre as a valid purchase. Oh, the list is endless. Don't prevaricate or procrastinate, you can't justify it as a rational purchase, just go and buy one. As my friend's wife says JFDI (Just — Do It). If you love driving, you will never regret it.

Nick's good friend Mike Howden relates his first drive at the wheel of a Seven: it gave him more understanding of our fascination with such a car, filled with him excitement and – inevitably – left him wanting one of his own. As ever, it's good to hear about first encounters and remind ourselves of that initial thrill we once experienced.

I am blessed with having a mate as trusting as Nick: I'm now named on his insurance and get to borrow the keys to his pride and joy whenever it's free. I'm not a natural disciple to this kind of car, but I can understand just how easily one's head is turned and fully expect to hear that many Seven owners got theirs after an introduction such as mine...

There is something you all should know first – this car would not make the perfect getaway car. Simply climbing in, strapping on the 5-point harness and firing her up is an event. In fact, the whole process adds to the delightful anticipation of a run out. And the sound generated by pushing the starter is the icing on an already sweet cake.

All your senses are engaged once you are within it's womb – seeing everything in sharp detail from very close to the tarmac; hearing the exhaust roaring beyond normally-acceptable limits; feeling the small, suede-rimmed wheel and the round pedal beneath your right foot; tasting the mix of exhaust and adrenaline; and smelling the fresh air – did I mention Nick's car was running with only an aeroscreen to make the flies swerve before impact?

So, rolling away at last and it's easy-does-it while I get a feel for response and grip. The clutch has a very short zone at the top of the pedal movement but the 'pixie boots' let me feel it all, so there are no embarrassing stalls or jolts. The steering does catch me out a little though, with the quickest rack available and such a small steering wheel the response is vicious. Add that to the low profile of the soft compound Yokohamas and I'm less than steadily away.

The gearbox is as satisfying as mechanical engineering can get with short, accurate travel and I can already see Nick laughing as he notices me fall for the same trick every other novice falls for – each gear change is joined by a slight turn of the steering wheel. Thanks for noticing!

It's a natural driving experience though and I'm into the flow within a few junctions; although I'm not sure I'll get used to being held so firmly in my seat by the harness, preventing the forward lean so useful for looking out of side roads.

I expect there is little difference between taking the Seven out and piloting a small plane. It must be the purest form of driving I have ever

experienced, every move and reaction happens the instant you command it, almost as though your synapses were linked to the car. I'm only sorry that the waving onlookers can't see my growing grin behind the face mask (the only barrier between my teeth and the occasional small rock playfully spun at me by the tyres).

After several acclimatising miles I feel confident enough to take the Seven up to its red line, and by coincidence we were at the start of a long, clear stretch of dual carriageway. Nick has fitted a little set of change-up lights for this purpose and I hadn't realised they were even on up to now, but again, physical instinct kicked in at the same time as they lit up for my first flooring from a rolling second-gear start.

So this is why he's got a Seven – it makes you feel like the Fifth Horseman. Of course, there is still a legal speed limit so the rush for glory only lasts a few seconds, but now I know and I've started saving up for my own Seven.

Mike Howden

This account originally appeared on Mike's motoring website www.driversanonymous.co.uk

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