

DOCTOR ON THE ROAD: ALPINE A110

Blast from the past is a blast for today

Our motoring correspondent **Dr Tony Rimmer** (right) reached the height of satisfaction when driving the new Alpine – now he just cannot wait to get back in it



ALPINE A110

Body: Two-seat mid-engined coupé
Engine: 1.8litre four-cylinder turbo. Rear-wheel drive
Power: 252bhp
Torque: 320Nm
Top speed: 108mph
Acceleration: 0-62mph in 4.5 seconds
Claimed fuel consumption (WLTP): 34.5mpg
CO₂ emissions: 155g/km
On-the-road price: £49,990

IT IS a very common human trait to find comfort in positive elements of our past lives and then recreate them with modern updates to please us all over again.

As an example, there is something warmly reassuring about listening to a classic 1960s Roberts radio that has modern FM and DAB clarity.

Car manufacturers have tapped into this rich seam of nostalgia to great effect and produced excellent profits. BMW was the first with the new MINI which was launched in 2001 and went on to be – and continues to be – a huge success.

The giant FIAT corporation watched on with interest and, in 2007, replicated BMW's success with the new 500. These new models are hugely more sophisticated in engineering and safety terms than their predecessors.

However, although their physical size may have increased, they have been very successful at retaining the charm of the originals.

The MINI and FIAT 500 are both urban runabouts and, apart from the not-so-successful VW Beetle recreation, are almost alone in the world of modernised old favourites.

Mid-life update

There is one other car that has been reborn in modern form and comes from a very different background: the sports car sector. It is the Alpine, a recreation of the successful French rear-engined rally car of the 1970s.

Still under the umbrella of Renault, the new car was released in 2018 and has recently had a mid-life update. I have been trying these new versions to see just what is on offer.

There are three models to choose from. The entry-level A110 has

252bhp, the A110GT has 300bhp and the A110S has 300bhp and a sportier suspension which would suit the occasional track day outing.

The Alpine was designed as a pure back-to-basics sports car using the Lotus ethos of light weight and relatively small engine. At 1,100kg, it weighs roughly half of most electric cars and big SUVs and although power comes from a modest 1.8litre four-cylinder turbo engine, the power-to-weight ratio is impressive.

Alpine have focused on the driver and have built a chassis to satisfy us petrolheads who appreciate the tactile nature of a well sorted sports car that can be placed accurately on a windy 'B'-road and dole out plenty of fun while doing so.

Driver-focused environment

Having driven lots of electric cars of late, I approached my drive of the Alpine with barely hidden excitement. I slipped into the low driver's seat and was presented by, as expected, a very driver-focused environment.

The sports seats are really comfortable and supportive, and the steering wheel and pedals are perfectly placed. Ah yes, the pedals: there are just two because the Alpine is only available with a seven-speed automatic dual-clutch gearbox.

Unfortunately, Renault felt that it would be too expensive to develop a bespoke manual box, which is a great shame for enthusiasts such as myself.

The styling looks great. The blend of retro 1970s A110 with a modern twist works brilliantly. I think it looks at its best in classic French blue. This is a strictly two-seater car and, unfortunately, boot space is restricted.

You can pack a couple of large soft bags, but forget conventional

suitcases. The interior trim materials do not feel as premium as you would like and there is switchgear recognisable from lowly Renault models.

The latest revised models have a larger infotainment screen and better connectivity such as Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

Out on the road, it soon becomes apparent that the chassis set up is as impressive as hoped. There is a suppleness that is allied to playful control that allows all road types to be tackled with gusto.

The steering is sharp and accurate although not quite as communicative as found in the Alpine's greatest competitor, the Porsche Cayman 718. Performance is super quick even in the 252bhp entry model and the 300bhp A110GT that I tried felt barely quicker.

Sporty sound

Although the 1.8litre engine only has four cylinders, it has a great sporty sound – better than the Cayman's four-cylinder unit. The Alpine is physically a low and narrow car so is perfectly suited to tackle our narrow UK 'B'-roads.

It is a car that you just want to jump back into for another blast after arriving at your destination and that is a rare attribute nowadays. The fun factor has been dialed up to eleven.

So, would I recommend the Alpine to the enthusiastic petrol head Medic? Absolutely.

It looks stylish and is a fantastic sports car. As long as its certain limitations are acceptable, it would be a great car to use as a day-to-day commuter and then at weekends for a blast down favourite roads to blow away all the cobwebs of a busy week. ■

Dr Tony Rimmer is a former NHS GP practising in Guildford, Surrey



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