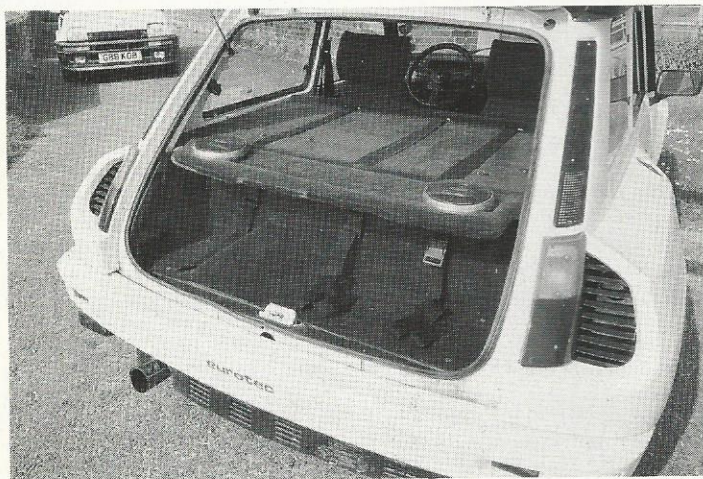
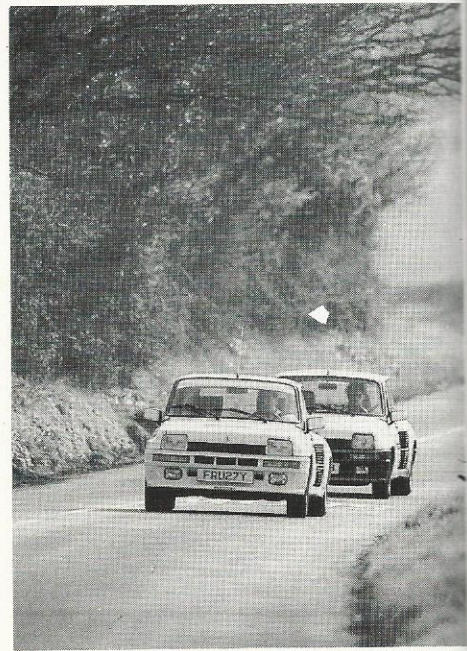




Cornering the Renault fast demands concentration and commitment



Right: cars are not fantastically fast – but they leave GTis for dead in corners. Left: minimal luggage space in tail. Above: all cars' body extensions, roof lip spoilers by Alpine – Turbo 1 has some alloy panels, too



wheel fighting and torque-steer we're used to in other hot Renault 5s. Instead the power is put down in a disciplined, refined fashion, those big rear covers providing enormous grip and stability.

You very rapidly learn a specific driving style with R5T, at least if you want to travel safely and quickly. I've read the books, I've heard the stories: these cars are lethal in the wet, and even in dry conditions oversteer is very easily provoked. You need very fast reactions to keep the over-tired, short-chassised moment-less tyke in a straight line. And so I discovered very quickly that R5T does handle very well, but it's such a bundle of trouble if you let it get away from you that you've got to concentrate on what you're doing. This is a car for the committed and once you've chosen your cornering line, and pitched into it at speed, don't start thinking twice. It's almost as if the car can tell you're doubting even before you twitch... and round and round and round it'll go.

It also demands work and forethought to drive fast fluidly. It has to be driven on the revs all the time, because if you let the needle drop below 3000rpm in a bend there's no pull to drive you out. Lots of cog-swapping through the tight rev range (the rev-limiter cuts in at 6500rpm) is therefore *de rigueur* but that, together with careful 'racing line' road usage, all adds to the enormous fun of keeping the Renault on song and on the road.

It's not actually a terribly fast car, at least not by modern standards. 0-60mph in 7sec is a realistic estimate, which from a 160bhp

1397cc engine is damned impressive. The 16V Golf GTi camera car that followed us for most of the day could keep up in a straight line without a problem, but in the corners the Golf wallowed hopelessly in the mirrors while R5T trounced it flat like a go-cart. Top speed is 125mph – aerodynamics are terrible – with 80mph cruising perfectly comfortable.

Despite the tremendous driver appeal, the aggressive crowd-stopping styling, the very real economy, the maintainability and reliability of the Renault – joint factors which set it apart from the competition – perhaps the most impressive quality about the car is its very great refinement. Although the test cars were fitted with unnecessarily noisy Devil exhausts (straight-through boy racer things which make the car highly anti-social), the overall levels of comfort from seat design to suspension set-up, and the insulation of mechanical noise and heat, are nothing short of extraordinary.

The differences between the Turbo and the Turbo 2 are basically restricted to build material and trim. Power output is identical but the Turbo is a lighter car than the Turbo 2 thanks to its aluminium doors, roof and tailgate (they're steel on the T2). The T2 sports the better quality, standard early eighties Renault 5 interior, though, and in that regard is a more comfortable car to live with. A total of 1830 Turbos were built, including the rally-prepared Tour de Corse versions, and 3167 Turbo 2s were made, including 100 early 'Evolution' models which incorporated features from both models.

All things to all men, the R5T is an essential, nice, sensible hatchback that will win favour in every household that doesn't want yet another new Renault 5 and can't quite stretch to a Porsche 911. It is truly a landmark classic automobile of the eighties, the only purpose-built race/rally car that adapted to the road with all-round excellence. Every happy home should have one.

WHAT TO PAY

Turbo 2s, being heavier and more numerous, are not worth as much as Turbo 1s. You can buy examples of either for a little over £8000, but over £10,000 should be paid for a good T2 with prices as high as £14,000 not uncommon from dealers. Equivalent Turbo 1s are usually around £2000 more expensive in each case. 'Evolution' T2s may command a small premium, and, 'Tour de Corses' and 'Maxi' modded cars are serious money in France, although English market prices are unknown. If you're going to buy, remember to join the Club Alpine Renault; £25 buys a year's membership and a lot of advice. It's at 57 Launceston Drive, Coalville, Leicester LB6 2HW.

Alan Matthews of Eurotec is probably the country's leading specialist in Turbos. His own class-winning rallying experience in a Turbo during the '84 Tarmac Championship makes him well qualified to advise on and supply a car. Contact him at Eurotec Classic Cars, Winfrith Newburgh, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8JL; tel: 0305 852896.