

Matra Murena – Europe's cheapest sportscar

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1. The close to McLaren feeling

HAVE YOU EVER been sitting by your pc or with a colour car magazine dribbling over exotic mid engine sports cars like Ferrari, Lamborghini and Lotus - knowing they are a little too hard to your account. Not only are they expensive to buy, but say you actually had won a nice lotto price, you would still need money floating to your account to pay for insurance, fuel and maintenance. These cars are usually fragile pieces and are known to spend a lot of their time at the workshop. Some Ferraris need new timing belts every 20.000 km at a cost of 3200 ?. Whooha.

But we have found Europe's cheapest true sports car to you: French midengine sports car Talbot Matra Murena. Fancy with 3 seats abreast - close to the McLaren F1 street car.

4-5.000 ? will buy you a fine example.

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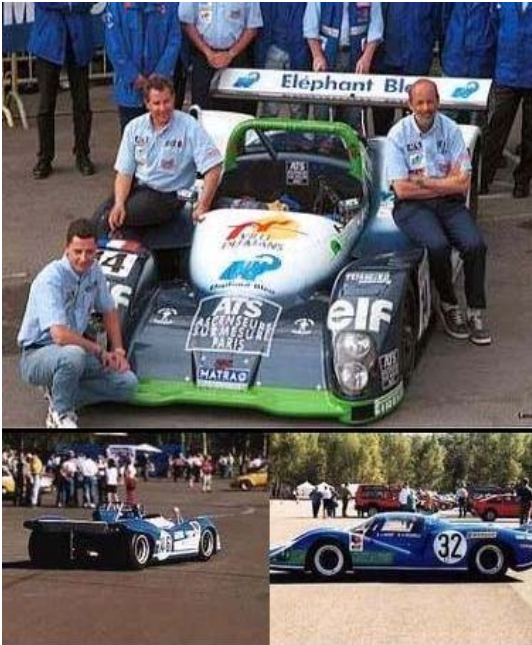


2. 3 seats ? this is McLaren style

DREAMING OF A true sports car. Midengine, rear wheel transmission, low suspension, coupe design. Actually, almost every wish is fulfilled, when you look at the Talbot Matra Murena.

It's practical with 3 seats abreast, - close to the McLaren F1 street car ? well, in the French car the drivers sits to the far left and not in the middle. The Murena has 300 litre of luggage room, it's rust proof, spares are available and cheap, it's comfortable, it's sufficient exotic to turn heads in the traffic, and it's to become a classic.

Yes, we can see the wrinkles on your nose. Talbot, wasn't that the brand with rust and all the quality problems? Matra had to use a global company to market their cars and some Simca/Talbot parts found their way into the cars, not compromising performance, but to lower the costs - at your benefit.



3. Jackie Stewart & Henri Pescarolo

THE MATRA NAME is not known to many people, but in 1969 Jackie Stewart took his first F1 World Championship in a Matra. In 1972, '73 & '74 the Frenchman Henri Pescarolo took 3 consecutive victories at Le Mans 24h.

After only 8 years in active motor sport Matra withdrew from all sport activities concentrating on production of cars.



4. Pure avant-garde

MATRA ENTERED THE automobile industry almost by chance. After the Second World War, Matra were among the first to exploit the new composite materials (plastics, polyester etc). In the early sixties, Matra delivered the fibreglass bodywork for the midengine René Bonnet "D'Jet".

However, as the economic talent of René Bonnet didn't match his engineering skills, he ended up with a sizeable debt to Matra, who in turn chose to simply take over the company, under the name Matra Bonnet. They redesigned the D'Jet in order to lower the production costs (the Jet-5).

On the racetrack, the little D'Jet was capable of over 220km/h powered only by a 1100 Gordini engine (!) - and won the "index of performance" at Le Mans several times.

The first genuine Matra was launched in 1967; the car was called 530 LX. It used a mid-engined concept but still a 2+2 cabin. The design was quite strange - I believe today it would be called ?New edge?. (or rather avant- garde?)

It was replaced in 1973 by the Bagheera, which introduced the 3-seat layout. The Bagheera was wide and low, looked like a true exotic sports car, but it lacked power using a small push rod 4-cylinder engine. Furthermore, they were prone to rust. Almost 50.000 Bagheeras were produced, when the Murena took over in 1980.



5. Murena ? midengine and 20 kg of zinc

THE MURENA WAS in many ways ahead of its time. For the first time a hot bath zinc protection was used - every Murena carries 20 kg of zinc to protect it from Ferro oxidation or just plain rust.

The body was designed to cut the wind with a sharp nose and a high stern - this resulted in low drag at 0,328 - a record only to be beaten by Audi 100 in 1983.

The first Murenas used a 1,6 Talbot unit tuned to 92 HP - which propelled it to 100 km/h in 11.8 sec. This was only a small improvement in relation to the Bagheera - but a 5-speed gearbox did its part to improve things.

However in 1981 they introduced the 2.2 unit from the Talbot Tagora. The 118 HP (and the 185 Nm torque) gave it a top speed of 200 km/h and a 0 - 100 in 9,3 sec. That put it ahead of competitors like Porsche 924, Mazda RX7 and VW Scirocco.

To satisfy more demanding customers Matra developed a tuning kit consisting of double carbs, high lift cam, lightened flywheel and a different distributor. This resulted in 142 HP. This was near Lotus Esprit performance at half the price.



6. Low centre of gravity, sharp turn-in

THE MURENA IS very simple indeed, - no power-steering required, only the brakes have a vacuum assist. Everything is easy to get to - even the engine, as you can simply jump into the boot, whereby you are better positioned for engine-work than on most cars.

Road holding is excellent - even by Today's standards, owners say. In 1980 when the car was introduced, it was phenomenal. The low centre of gravity and anti-roll bars calls for fast and precise cornering, and the still relative soft suspension makes it more comfortable than most of the (contemporary) competition.

In 1983 Matra presented Peugeot (Talbot) a new prototype. It was a totally new concept for family transportation. Peugeot did not see any perspective in the project, and Matra went to Renault. They saw the potential immediately and the Renault Espace was born. Unfortunately this meant killing the Murena, as Renault did not want another coupe next to Fuego and Alpine A310 - and also the assembly-line designed for the hot- dip galvanized Murena would have to be converted to accommodate the Espace (which is produced in the same way).

10.680 Murenas had been produced when the production seized in 1984. The last 480 were named Murena S and fitted with the tuning kit as standard.



7. Where to find a Murena

NOT MANY MURENAS are for sale, but a good place to look is in Germany, as new rules enforce catalytic converters even on old cars - and as these are almost as expensive as the cars themselves, many choose to sell the car all together (!)

There are no normal catalytic kits available, which makes it relative expensive to drive, if you live in this region.

4-5.000 ? will buy you a fine example. Rust is not a theme - except for the trailing-arms in the rear suspension, - replace these, and enjoy the car for the next 20 years, but beware of pre-crashed examples. Specialists in France, The Netherlands, Germany and England will provide you with spares. Tuning kits are still available. Therefore the Murena is the most overlooked and cost effective (exotic?) sports car money can buy.

Find out more about this car and Matra here:

<http://www.matrasport.dk>