

Gauging the "M"arket

Dear X-perts: What are your thoughts about a 1995 BMW 850CSi with less than 30,000 miles, bone stock, never wrecked and in perfect condition? There were only 81 1995 850CSis made for the US market and none were produced after that. Total world production was 1,510 for all years. As you know, it was really the M8 but without the trunk lid badging. Even the VIN indicates it was built by BMW Sport.

Do you think there is any future for this car? And how much should I pay today?—Russ DeLuca, via e-mail

Steve Serio replies: Although a dynamic car to drive and commute in, and certainly one of BMW's finest offerings at that time, the chances are greater that Arthur Andersen will come back from the dead before BMW 8 Series cars are good investments.

BMW has raised the bar internally so many times that their new M3 will wipe the floor with the 850, and for far fewer Deutschmarks. Or is that Euros?

All "M" cars, with the exception of the M1, were mass produced, and are now, frankly, just old technology. Fixing one in ten years will be no cheap feat either, as parts prices on small-run cars within large manufacturers tend to be very expensive. If you doubt that, just look at the Porsche 928.

Much like any Bentley Turbo R, Ferrari Testarossa, Porsche 928, Jaguar XJS or Mercedes 600SL, these cars can be bought at a relative bargain (compared to their original MSRP) and if they are bought right, with low miles and impeccable service records, can provide a big bang for small bucks. But be aware that you are only one major repair away from fiscal self-immolation. Further, you'll be lucky to get most of your money back when you go to sell the car, as they are not destined to increase in value or popularity anytime before the year 3000.

I would pay \$40,000 to \$45,000 for a good car that you have had checked out, and then enjoy the ride.

Dear X-perts: I'm now getting the buying urge again, spurred by recent articles in your magazine. I sense the need to go to Europe (I've never been there) and buy a vintage convertible (preferably), use it on vacation, then ship it home. I called Martin Swig for advice, but (1) I usually end up buying something he owns, and (2) he's a little "out there" for me (with suggestions of Lancias and Citroëns). I think I'd really like to



All it needs is an M8 badge, and some buyers who care.

stay in the area of 1966-69 Alfa Spiders, and maybe even GTVs (especially the '69 mentioned in the February issue (Ask the X-perts, page 62). I might even be crazy enough to make this my primary driver, selling my '99 M3 convertible. Others that could be of interest are the 280SL, the 280SE 3.5 coupe or convertible, the Giulia GTC (I found one in France, but the guy won't return my e-mail), the Giulia TI Super, the 2600 Touring, etc.

You could be of great assistance by suggesting who I might contact in Europe from vendor to trusted agent/appraiser. Any help would be greatly appreciated.—Dave W. Sutch, San Francisco, CA

Steve Serio replies: Buying a vintage car in Europe and driving it over there is, in principle, a great idea. I am a skeptic (and I'll say why) about this in practice but don't want to completely discourage you from what could be a great vacation and life experience.

You need to narrow your vehicle search so that a true marque specialist can be recommended. You also need to pinpoint which country you'll be visiting. Much like the US, the trustworthy vendors are well known and would gladly help you sort out a vehicle. I personally know people in the UK, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden, but each vendor has his specialty and can only be of service once you decide upon what type of car you're looking for. For example, an Aston Martin specialist in London is not going to be much help finding an Alfa in Rome.

Do keep in mind that the costs of insurance, shipping, inspecting and a fair finder's fee may make your inexpensive idea quite costly. The percentage of added cost will increase greatly if

you're looking to buy a \$7,500 car with another \$5,000 of various fees. \$5,000 added to a \$100,000 car is a different consideration.

Unless what you desire can only be found in Europe (such as a fine Tatra—or hasn't Swig recently become the sole US distributor for them?), I'd buy a vintage car here in the States, sort it out mechanically (so that your risk of either mechanical malfeasance or any safety reliability would be lower), put a few miles on it, and then ship it over and use it with a higher level of confidence.

Nothing will ruin your dream European vacation more than arriving with your suitcases and significant other, only to find a car much worse than represented, which needs thousands of dollars of work to become reliable, safe transportation. Remember, as well, that Europeans tended to drive their sports cars far harder than we did in the US when they were new, and that European restorations of inexpensive cars can be of a far lower quality than what we've come to expect in the States.

The expense of shipping a US car abroad and then shipping it back may in fact be less costly than buying it abroad with all of the associated expenses and risks.

An alternative would be putting a "car wanted in Europe" notice in the SCM classifieds, with the hope of locating a car that is currently being loved by a European enthusiast and SCM reader. As with nearly any used car, you're really buying the care and feeding the previous owner has given the car as much as you're buying the car itself.

Fax your questions for the X-perts to 503/253-2234, or e-mail them to copied@sportscarmarket.com. ♦