

## THAT DAMN GOOD – Marlin Sportster

For nearly 25 years Marlin Cars have been producing nicely made cars that have sold to thousands of passionate enthusiasts, who love them. The Sportster was originally launched in 1996, based on Ford Sierra mechanicals, and with this car the company really started to gather serious momentum. Designed in-house by Mark Matthews, who is surely one of the most talented engineers in the industry, the Sportster benefited from some lateral thinking, as Mark could see that he could quite subtly blur the edges a little and produce an exciting car that would also appeal to customers in the market for a Lotus Seven-inspired roadster. Subsequently this car could be practical, having proper luggage carrying capability and 'real' doors.



The fact that the Sportster has achieved its aims and been well received is a testament to Mark's beliefs and vision, and a real bonus has come with his successes on the racetrack competing in the 750MC Kit Car Challenge. Meanwhile, they have also produced a new long wheelbase version of the Sportster, which gives it better proportions and although only 2" longer means that drivers over 6'6" can be accommodated with ease. Most notable though is the introduction of a BMW donor option that's based on 3-series components and can use either E30 or E36 derivatives.

When Terry Matthews asked if I wanted to do a feature on their first such demonstrator that just happened to be based on M3 running gear, including a 330bhp straight six I was at Marlin's Crediton town centre workshops before the receiver was down! At first glance the new Sportster is beautiful and is one of the best looking demonstrators I have ever seen. Top quality engineering is Mark's hallmark and he's the sort of guy who is far too modest in my view, but also single-minded about producing fine driving machines to the best of his considerable ability. The fact that it had covered just 80 miles put the pressure firmly on yours truly, but I've never been known to shirk a challenge and I wasn't going to start now.



The car is warmed up and sounds almost as sweet on tickover as she looks in the damp yet bright February sunshine. The doors operate like mainstream production car items and close with a

clunk and are an intrinsic part of the car's safety brief as they are made from 2mm aluminium with pin and striker both clearing the body and being mounted directly to the chassis as is the hinge itself. The long wheelbase adds even more comfort to an already spacious cockpit and there really is plenty of room inside. At 5'11" I couldn't get anywhere near the pedals with the seat pushed right back! Trim is not over the top but follows the usual Marlin trademark of being superbly finished, using quality materials and components. You will absolutely never find any bare edges or loose titan-fast in a Marlin demo car.

I gently nudge out of Marlin's car park into a bustling Crediton town centre and straight into a traffic-jam! The car never once misbehaves as we make slow stop/start progress and seems very happy to crawl along. How many other supercars packing 400 bhp per tonne could you say that about? With most bike engine cars you feel a nervous breakdown coming on after five minutes in a tailback. Not here, not in a Sportster you won't. This is one highly -strung individual you can definitely live with!



As we make our way to the lovely flowing A377 road, I just give the throttle a dab to sample response, and although I'm in 4th gear, I feel the distinctive instant pull of 330 of Bavaria's finest stallions and the acceleration is hugely impressive yet very controlled and well.....BMW-like I guess. I suppose that's what comes with quality? A glance at the speedo confirms what my senses are telling me, that I'm moving very swiftly indeed, and as a bend approaches I give the brakes a workout, and marvel at their stopping prowess, and proving that the standard system is more than up to the job, so there's absolutely no need for expensive upgrades, perhaps just a set of EBC

Green Stuff brake pads.

Cornering, as one would expect from a race proven package is first class and the Sportster is one of the finest handling kits out there, and there's not a squeak even during the hardest exercise, and indeed I'm surprised to find just how fast I'm tackling the twisty bits, such is the responsive nature of the car. Feedback through the steering wheel is sublime, and one gets the feeling that you know just what the front wheels are doing at all times. It's funny but this Sportster feels just like my BMW 535 SEi, which I suppose is the real proof of not only quality but also a vindication of using a Beemer basis in the first place. Just like my car feels rock solid and has impeccable road manners so to does the Marlin. I know that they are first-rate components but big respect is due to the Marlin team for carrying it over into their car, and giving it the same attributes.







Reluctantly I take the Sportster back to base, mainly because as yet there is no weather gear fitted and I don't like the look of those dark clouds, and I've had to wear a crash helmet because there isn't a windscreen either, but that doesn't matter to me as I love the shape of the scuttle panel that gives the car a real style in an area that can otherwise be bland.

Although yet to finalised, Terry reckons that a turnkey factory built Sportster with 2.5 litre BMW engine, might cost around £20,000, which would represent exceptional value for money. Whichever, option you choose you're going to end up with a car belonging right at the zenith of the industry and as a company Marlin are a shining example of everything that is good about our industry.

Link [www.marlincars.co.uk](http://www.marlincars.co.uk)

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