

BUYER'S BRIEF

Austin A40

Stylish and simply built, it's an ideal first classic

Nice pair of pins

The A40 MkII got stronger Kingpins and it's worth upgrading a MkI to these. They're essential if you're converting to disc brakes.

Engine

A-series in 948cc, 1099cc or 1275cc capacities can be fitted, making power upgrades easy.

Little rotter

Corrosion is the killer. In serious cases, the A-post, boot floor and boot lid can rot, as can the grille support and front valance.

Interior

The Countryman hatchback versions paid the price for their versatility. A hard life leads to trashed interiors after being used as load-luggers.

Hanging out

The rear spring hangers are corrosion-prone, as are sills, wheelarches, door bottoms, headlight surrounds, rear valance, floorpans and lower wings.

Shafted

Half-shafts can break or twist. Listen out for whining indicating worn splines.

MARKET ANALYSIS

with expert Richard Dridge



Values of all A40s have risen, but it's the Countryman that is worth the most today, as so few survive; these were used as vans by most owners so they led a hard life. A Countryman can go for up to £6500, although asking prices can be significantly higher, so don't pay over the odds. Two-door cars have a ceiling of more like £3500, but runners can still be picked up for £2200-£2300; an equivalent Countryman is more like £1600-£2500. A40s are still being dragged from barns and garages and if these are worth reviving, they'll fetch £200-£500.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT RUNNER
£500-£600
£1200-£2500
GOOD
£3000-£5000

TECH SPEC

Engine 1098cc/4-cyl/OHV
Power 48bhp@3000rpm
Torque 60lb ft@2500rpm
Gearbox 4-spd manual
0-60mph 22.9sec
Top speed 79mph
Fuel consumption 38mpg
Length 3.8m
Width 1.5m

LIVING WITH... AUSTIN A40

How easy to work on
Parts availability
Running costs
Performance

Why you want one

The 1958 A40 Countryman was the first BMC model to be designed by Pininfarina, and was also the world's first mass-produced hatchback. It shares many mechanical components with the A30/A35, MG Midget/Sprite, and engines and gearboxes from the Morris Minor, so parts supply is plentiful.

What are the Achilles' heels?

Scrutinise the whole car, but focus on the sills, wheelarches and door bottoms, along with the headlight surrounds, rear valance, floorpans, lower wings and rear spring hangers. In extreme cases the A-posts, boot floor and boot lid can also rot, as can the grille support and front valance (they're bolt on so easily replaced). Check the front crossmember, as moisture gets trapped between it and the radiator above it – because it's hidden out of sight, the rot can really set in before it's spotted.

The A-series engine is famed for its durability, although after 100,120k miles the cylinder bores will be too worn to function efficiently. Run the engine with the oil filter cap removed – if any fumes are evident, a rebore is due soon.

Before the bores have worn, the big-end bearings can wear out, so listen for rumbling denoting their impending demise. A complete professional overhaul of the powerplant will cost around £1000. Half-shafts can break or bend, especially if the engine has been upgraded. A lack of soundproofing makes it easy to hear whines and knocks from the half-shaft splines once they begin to wear. The club seats replacement half-shafts for £28 apiece.

Which one is best for you?

Really good A40s are few and far between, although there's a reasonable supply of more average examples. Buying a project isn't a good idea unless

you're really good at fixing bodywork, although the A40 Farna Club can supply repair sections to fix most rust problems, including complete boot lids.

The A40 hatchback was sold as the Countryman and these are sought after as well as rare. It's worth tracking one down, especially if it's an A40 MkII. These arrived in September 1960 with a wheelbase stretched by 3½ inches for extra cabin space – the longer wheelbase also helps with ride comfort.

Post-September 1962 A40s are better again, as they feature a higher diff ratio along with a 1099cc

A-Series engine in place of the earlier 948cc unit, giving 48bhp instead of 37bhp (the A40 MkII got just 34bhp). The MkII got rod-operated brakes at the rear, but if correctly set up they will work just fine.

Most owners prefer the car as it left the factory, but some make improvements...

Can you make it better?

The engine is the same A-Series unit as the one in the A35 and Froggie Sprite. Thanks to the fitment of a scroll-type rear crank seal, there's almost

Lancaster Insurance

Over 30 years of experience
A40 valued at £2000
35-YEAR OLD MILE
3000 miles post code SP2, club member: £79.09 or £97.08 AN.
45-YEAR OLD MILE
3000 miles post code SP2, club member: £79.09 or £97.08 AN.

*Policy benefits, features and discounts subject to underwriting criteria. All additional charges may be payable.



CLASSIC CAR INSURANCE
Up to 25% discount for car club members
01480 220 071



SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR AN A40 FARINA OWNER

Keith Bennett is still an A40 cheerleader after 350,000 miles behind the wheel

1 How long have you owned it?

'Only since July 1966, so not long! I learned to drive in an A40, and when I passed my test in 1965 I never thought of buying anything other than an A40. I snapped this one up from a local garage and paid the full asking price of £225. I've still got the receipt for it.'

2 What's it used for?

'Everything. This car has been my everyday transport since 1966. It took me on my honeymoon in 1972, it's taken us on family holidays, it's still used to go shopping – the car is completely useable, which is why it's used for everything.'

3 What upgrades has the car had?

'None. It's still got drum brakes all round and uses points for its ignition. When I got the 948cc engine rebuilt many years ago, I was offered the chance to upgrade to a 1098cc unit –

but I declined. My A40 still sits on cross-ply tyres and the extra power of the bigger engine would probably overwhelm them.'

4 How reliable has it been?

'Extremely. By keeping things standard, the car just purrs along. My A40 has clocked up well over 350,000 miles so far – it wasn't until 150,000 miles that the original engine and gearbox were rebuilt. Since then another exchange engine has been fitted, but the back axle is still the original unit. The coil failed a few years ago, but in all the years I've owned my A40, it has rarely failed to proceed.'

5 Have you had any other issues with it?

'Trust is the big problem and over the years various bits of remedial work have had to be carried out. In the late Eighties the car received a fairly extensive restoration. The specialist entrusted with



the work dismantled the car and then did a runner, so I had to retrieve the bits and get someone to put it all back together. The car went back on the road in 1992 and the paint it wears now is what was applied back then.'

6 How much do you do yourself?

'Nothing at all, other than put petrol in it. I'm not mechanically minded, but fellow club members tell me regularly how easy these

cars are to work on. Nowadays it rarely needs anything more than routine maintenance, but everything is done by Gary Hartwell near Banbury (01295 713113), who does a fantastic job.'

7 What's the appeal?

'Small and cheap to run, the A40 is also brilliantly practical. It'll happily sit with modern traffic, and even at low speeds you can have plenty of fun. These cars are incredibly under-rated.'

no chance of it being oil-tight, but for under £100 you can invest in a lip seal conversion, which makes a big difference to the engine's inconvenience levels.

Swapping the 948cc engine for a larger unit isn't hard, with a choice of 1098cc or 1275cc options. An A40 with a 1275cc engine fed by twin carbs will prove surprisingly peppy, without guzzling fuel. Expect tappet noise and a rattling timing chain (a quieter Duplex assembly can be fitted). The A40 Mk1 got stronger kingpins and it's worth upgrading a Mk1 to these; the bottom bush is more substantial, and you'll need to pay £50 for a pair of the later stub axles. This upgrade is essential if converting to disc brakes. All A40s got drum brakes all round, but it's possible to convert to Midget front discs; the A40 Mk1 featured the same uprated kingpins as the Midget, so it's easier to fit that car's suspension.

Specialist advice

Ed Davis is chairman of the A40 Farina Club. He told us: 'Low values and poor panel availability used to

lead to these cars being readily scrapped, but values have risen and the club has introduced a lot of well-made panels and repair sections, so more and more A40s are being returned to the road. You still need to be careful when buying though, as some A40s have been bodged to nurse them through MOTs, but the standard of survivors is rising. The A40's profile has been raised by a few people campaigning them in historic motorsport, the most famous of which is Doc Shepherd's car which was raced in period and which is now owned by a club member. That car is quite heavily modified. What's really encouraging is that we're seeing an increase in the number of younger members joining our ranks, as the A40 is an ideal first classic. It's charming, very usable, still affordable to buy, cheap to run and mechanically very simple. As a result it's easy to maintain on a DIY basis, but even if you're not minded to do that, any garage can look after an A40 very cheaply, with things helped by the ready availability of affordable parts.'

USEFUL CONTACTS

- ▶ Austin-Clyon, Lincs. 01509 240003
- ▶ austinclon.co.uk
- ▶ Bull Mot, Works. 01386 83776
- ▶ austin303sports.com
- ▶ Longbridge Motor Spares (was Eimpart). 01295 443549
- ▶ longbridgeautosports.co.uk
- ▶ Radford Panel Company, Works. radiopanel.co.uk
- ▶ A40 Farina Club, a40farinaclub.co.uk



CLASSIC CAR INSURANCE
Up to 25% discount for car club members
01480 220 071

