Finding Future Classics

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Conceived as innovative but economical, cheap to run, and space-effective family cars, BMC Minis (especially early versions) have attracted a cult following in recent years, with interest (and prices) continuing to increase. Who would have predicted this in the 1960s?!

When do the first indications appear that a car is turning into a classic and its value could start rising? The only real answer is eventually – maybe… but there are certain clues that, intelligently interpreted, can point thoughtful buyers in the right direction. Much depends here on your definition of a "classic," for many regard any car of a certain age in that light; others might give more weight to rising value and desirability than actual age – it all

depends on your particular interest, aims and ambitions. Some cars and some marques definitely have more chance of attaining classic status and increased value than others – and history shows some achieve this combination far more quickly than others. Advanced age, specialist vehicles and supercars apart, picking out likely candidates in the early stages isn't easy, for cars turn into classics – and gain value – for wildly different reasons.

There's a general consensus that performance, an open top and the manufacturer's name are key elements in moving towards valuable classic status, along with rarity caused by either modest original sales, or the disappearance of most examples through the ravages of time. Yet the relative importance of these elements varies in a unique mix model by model, with, of course, exceptions to every rule. When it was in the showrooms in its 1960s and 1970s heyday, would you have seen the Mini as a future classic? Original Mini Mokes, Coopers and Cooper 'S' models are all highly regarded today – so it's not performance alone that puts a potential classic on road to rising value, for the Moke had the standard Mini engine. Open air motoring is a feature of the Moke but not the Coopers – and with BMC marques such as Austin and Morris, its not about the cachet of the maker's badge.



History shows that any model bearing the 'Jaguar' name will eventually pass through the 'banger' stage to become regarded as a classic car worthy of preservation. These two beauties (a 'Mark 1' saloon and an E-Type) were at the 2013 Great Dorset Steam Fair.

Though these are primary aspects, a range of other elements also contribute to the rise and rise of an old but seemingly fairly ordinary car in both value and status – towards the time when it starts being perceived as a classic. Included here – again with varying amounts of influence – are wildly diverse matters, amongst them image, social standing in the public consciousness, rare offshoots of thoroughly mainstream cars (Rover 400 V6, 800 coupe…) and a vehicle's historical or technical significance, enjoyable driveability or particular or unusual mechanical sophistication.

It's this ever-varying, multi-dimensional mix of intangibles which makes predicting future classic status, potential rise in values and the timelines involved so unpredictable. Subjective interpretation of such things naturally also means its just as easy to be

hopelessly wrong as absolutely right – with the added disadvantage of having to invest cash and then wait quite a long time to find out either way. So, for your homework tonight, try evaluating the Singer Chamois, Austin Allegro, Fiat X1/9 and MGF against those benchmarks. All could reasonably be described as classics already, and with some investment and continued TLC would probably make practical runabouts for a classic car enthusiast not primarily concerned about value appreciation. The far more difficult question is: will any of them rise significantly in value in the next 20 years – and would you stake money on your assessment right now?



To many familiar with the wide range of three wheeler ‘economy’ cars of the 1950s/60s, when the models were in their heyday, it is a huge surprise to find that enthusiasts are now craving for these deliberately basic vehicles, and that asking prices have shot up in the past few years. These two Bond Minicars (early and late examples, both in excellent condition) are now rarely seen on the road.

Though we'd all love to own an historic Ferrari, and sports cars in general do seem to have a better than evens chance of long term value appreciation, classic vehicle events invariably demonstrate that cars don't need to be especially old, fast, exotic or achingly rare to slip into a classic role. If you're looking for something that hasn't yet started to climb the slope towards increased value, first narrow the field to cars you believe have genuine potential, then find one to snap up at the right price – likely to be almost as difficult. Price movements of similar, contemporary cars in the past can be quite revealing, and it's worth staying abreast of what's moving up in value in general through auction results and published material.

Ensure also you have a separate budget for sympathetic restoration costs, as many likely vehicles will be from the post War era – and only in the relatively recent past have monocoque bodyshells lost their long deserved reputation for rapidly returning to their natural state. Prepare a shortlist, research long, hard and carefully to see what's out there – and what it costs, prepare for the long haul, expect plenty of false starts – and stick at it. Maybe then, one day, your dream (NSU) Prinz will come!