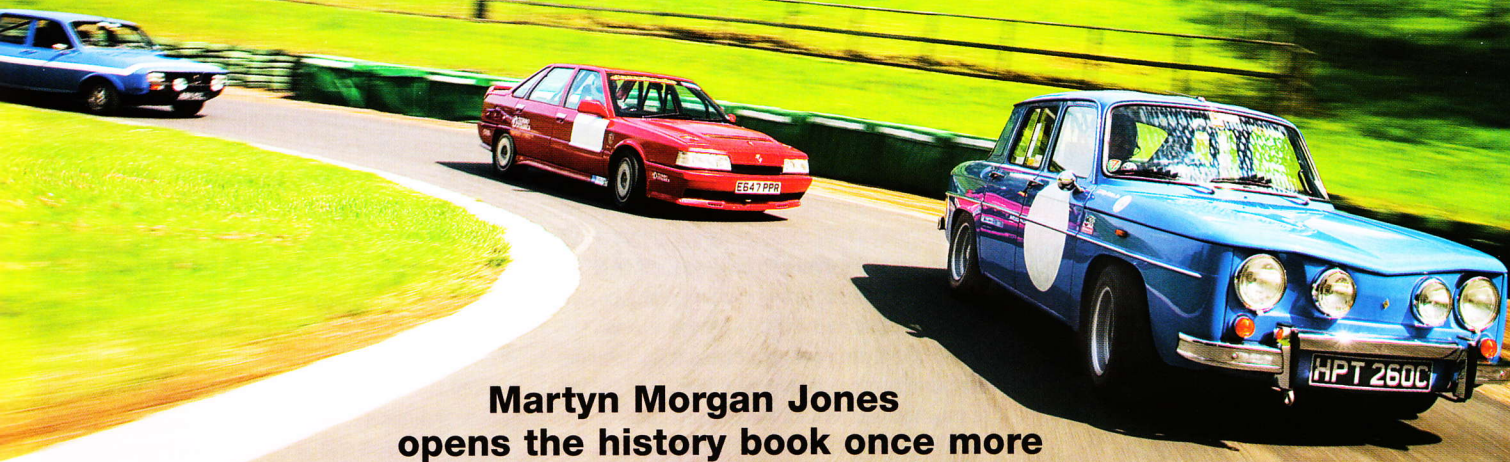


French Impressions



**Martyn Morgan Jones
opens the history book once more
to examine three classic, yet still very rapid Renaults.**

PHOTOGRAPHY: GARY HAWKINS

Renault has always been rather good at making high-performance versions of its everyday cars. In fact, since winning its class at Le Mans in 1951, it's been company policy to develop the potential of its mainstream cars by producing sporting versions. In recent years the various incarnations of the Clio, including 172, 182, Cup and Trophy models have wowed owners and road testers alike. The recently-announced Renaultsport 197 is the latest in a long line of hot production saloons that Renault has been making since the early 1950s, beginning with the rear-engined 4CV 1063.

8 Gordini – Sixties child

Although Renault began setting out its front-wheel drive stall in 1962 with the Renault 4, followed by the innovative R16 two years later, the company wasn't totally committed to 'traction avant.' Rear-engined cars continued to be an important part of its line-up until the end of the decade, none more so than the boxy Renault 8. Launched in 1962, the Eight was as square as its glamorous stablemate, the Dauphine was curvy, but it was a well-equipped, clean-cut, and thoroughly modern car that bristled with safety features. All-round disc brakes (a first for a mass-produced four-door saloon), independent

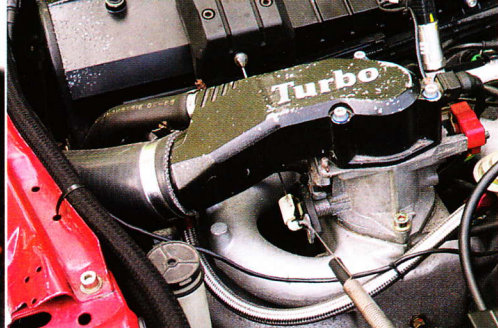
suspension and the 50bhp, 956cc five-bearing 'Sierra' engine made for a very desirable package. Here was a car with obvious competition potential, potential that tuning guru Amédée Gordini, who'd been working wonders with Renaults since 1957, was about to exploit.

The Renault 8 Gordini (code named R1134), appeared in 1964 to rave reviews. Its 1108cc engine, an evolution of Gordini's brilliant twin-cam racing engine was a gem. Thanks to an ingeniously-designed cross-flow aluminium cylinder head, high-lift camshaft, twin side-draft carburettors and a special exhaust, the R8 Gordini had a class-leading 95bhp at its disposal. To cope with this power, a higher-ratio steering rack was fitted, as was lowered and uprated springs. At the business end no less than four shock absorbers ensured that the rear weight bias was kept in check!

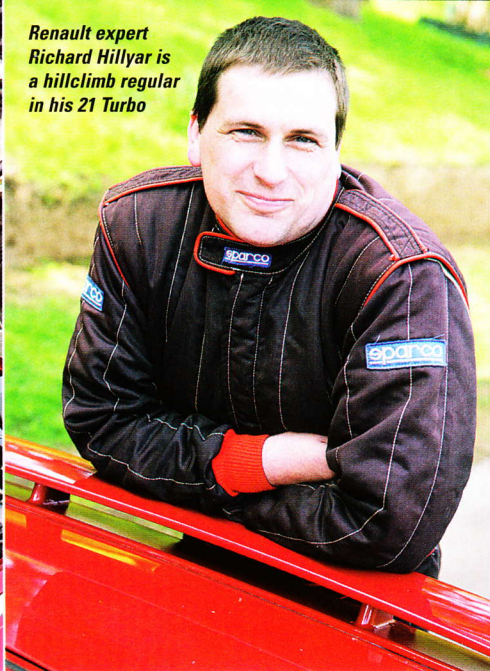
In 1965, a 1255cc (103bhp) Gordini engine arrived and this was fitted to the 8 Gordini in 1966. Bodysheet stiffening, a five-speed gearbox and twin fuel tanks accompanied the engine upgrade, and the new car (R1135) had evolved into a serious competition weapon indeed. Production of the 8 Gordini, the last 'proper' Gordini, ended in 1970, with 11,607 being made but thanks to innumerable race and rally wins, it left a tremendous legacy.

Our feature car started life as an 1108cc example and over the past 25 years has been restored, rallied and raced by its owner and 'Gord' enthusiast, Nigel Patten, who's a senior buyer in the military/aerospace electronics industry. Nigel has steadily upgraded the car to its current, and very desirable, works Group II specification. Equipped with the Gordini 'kit' of parts (bigger liners and pistons, modified cylinder head, exhaust manifold, special camshaft and new rods) the engine pumps out 120bhp and oodles of torque from its 1296cc powerplant. Although previously blessed with a five-speed gearbox, recent problems have necessitated a switch to a four-speeder. A 4.1 differential has been installed, which provides rapid acceleration in the lower ratios, for sprints and hill climbs, yet fourth is still good for 115mph.

The chassis is pure Gordini. Lowered and stiffened springs work in conjunction with the car's six-shock absorber setup and the all-disc system is boosted by a servo. Despite the absence of the optional white stripes, HPT 260C still looks the business, thanks to its low stance, negative camber, quad headlamps and the wide and chic-looking Avanti composite wheels. These are dressed with 70 series Michelins on the front and sticky Formula France 70 series Michelins on the rear. 'Merveilleux!'



Renault expert Richard Hillyar is a hillclimb regular in his 21 Turbo



12 Gordini - Seventies flair

The clean cut, modern, FWD Renault 12 arrived in October 1969. The range-topping 12 Gordini, the replacement for the 8 Gordini, was introduced on 19 July, or 'Jour-G,' at Castellet Circuit. 10,000 enthusiasts ventured to Castellet to say their goodbyes to the 8 Gordini and welcome the new boy. The 12G was quite a departure and something of a culture shock for 'Gord' devotees. Indeed, such were the feelings of respect and loyalty for the outgoing model that it would be fair to say the reception for the 12G was lukewarm at best.

The 12G wouldn't hit the showrooms for another four months and there was a sound reason for the delay. The first 123 were allocated for the 'R12 Coupé Gordini,' a one-make series. Even though these were specially modified, competitors' antics behind the wheel threw up some anomalies with the handling. Apparently Alpine (pronounced 'Alpeen' and by this time Renault's competition arm) spent quite some time making the 12Gs handling somewhat more benign and user-friendly.

Despite the Gordini moniker, with the exception of its engine, the 12G's ties with Gordini were rather tenuous and it had been created for purely commercial reasons: to sell road cars. Nevertheless, it had some of the right genes and was quite an extrovert and

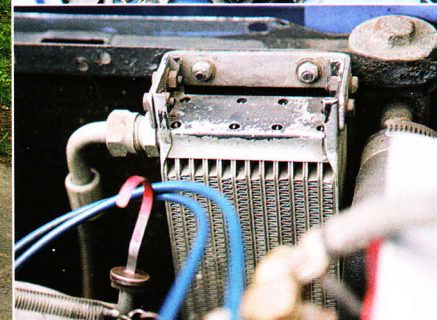
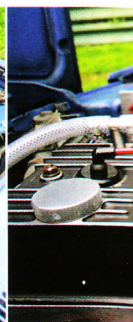
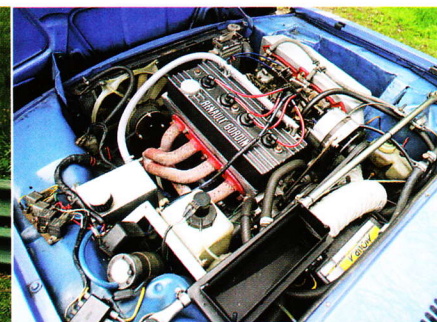
striking-looking machine. Initially only available in the classic 'blue de France,' and adorned with white stripes, it looked rather racy. Thankfully there was go to match the show. Under the bonnet was a tuned version of the all-aluminium 1565cc engine from the Renault 16TS. With modified head, bigger valves, special exhaust, twin Weber 45 DCOE carburetors and a stronger crank and rods; 115bhp was on tap. This lusty engine was mated to a five-speed gearbox and, to handle the performance, vented front discs, solid rears, modified suspension, anti-roll bars and wide Fergat steel wheels were standard.

In spite of its many assets, the 12G always lived in the shadow of the 8G, a car that 'Gordinistes,' feel with further development could have gone on to even greater things. However, the 8G was Renault past. Renault present was all about the delectable and hugely successful A110 Berlinette. Committed amongst other things to a full WRC programme with the A110, Alpine's heart was never really with the 12G and it showed. That said, the 12G's competition record in lesser rallies was good and it excelled on endurance events, where the tough mechanicals, robust bodywork, and secure handling came to the fore. Production lasted until July 1974 by which time 5,188 had been produced.

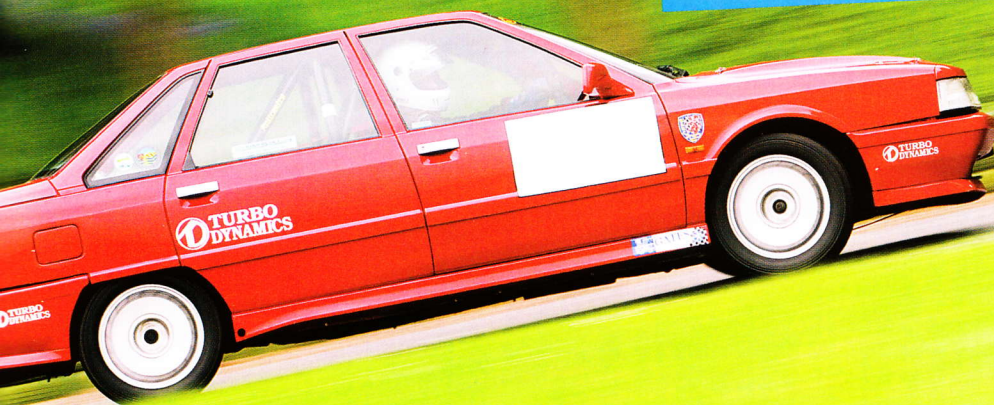
Mercedes F1 engineer Graham, a long-standing Renault enthusiast, has owned this 1972 12G for the last 21 years. He'd wanted a 12G for years and when this example came up for sale he persuaded his wife that the money they'd set aside for carpets, would be better spent on the oh-so-rare 12 Gordini. The 12 Gordini looks good. It's got history too, as it was rallied extensively in the UK. It's thought that following a major 'off' on the 1978 Manx, it was rebuilt into a RHD shell and painted in the then Renault F1 colours, white, yellow and black.

The 'new' shell was in excellent condition, although the rear floorpans needed repairing and the area around the roll-cage mounts were plated. Several layers of paint and underseal were then removed. The GRP wings were replaced with steel and the faded and scratched Perspex windows made way for glass. With the bodywork prepped, it was off to the paintshop for a few coats of 'blue de France,' and the all-important white stripes.

Body-wise it looks very good and mechanically it's in superb condition. The suspension and brakes have been completely refurbished and thanks to the addition of a Gordini Group II kit (which hikes the capacity to 1598cc) the engine delivers around 145bhp. The gearbox is standard 12G, but fitted with a



RENAULT HAS ALWAYS BEEN RATHER GOOD AT MAKING HIGH-PERFORMANCE VERSIONS OF ITS EVERYDAY CARS



Hewland pawl-type diff, and is as tough as the engine. Apart from a few modern instruments, some safety equipment and new rally seats, the interior is remarkably original.

To say that 12Gs are rare is something of an understatement. Even in their native France few are known to have survived, but in the UK only six are thought to exist. Graham's car, a genuine example, is the only RHD example currently on the road – anywhere. The 12G has lived in the shadows too long and Graham should be applauded for his efforts. 'Fantastique!'

21 Turbo - Eighties boost

In 1977, Renault introduced the first turbo engine to be regularly used in F1. When the rest of the grid was using naturally-aspirated engines, Renault changed the whole nature of F1 by powering its cars with turbocharged units. Despite being woefully unreliable at first, Renault persisted. Eventually the results began to arrive and by the 1980s there had been a distinct shift in power. Although Renault still owned the rights to the Gordini name (and still does), the name was soon to become more of an emotional rather than a physical attachment. The badge that enthusiastic drivers now coveted was turbo!

What was happening on the track became mirrored on the assembly line, as Renault

began to introduce turbocharged versions of its production cars. The tastefully body kitted and luxuriously appointed 21 Turbo, nicknamed the 'French Cosworth', was one such creation. In its day it was considered to be quite a machine and was in production from 1987 through to 1993. There was even an all-wheel drive Quadra version, although these grippy 21s are now exceedingly rare.

Powering the 21 Turbo was a 1995cc type-J engine, longitudinally mounted and heavily modified internally, which pumped out 175bhp and 199lb ft of torque. These were good figures, good enough for 140mph and 0-60 in 7.4sec and good enough to claim the title of the world's fastest two-litre production car from 0-60mph. To handle this pace a tough UN1 gearbox was fitted and the chassis benefited from a raft of improvements. The suspension was lowered and extensively modified, as were the brakes and the special wide alloys were kitted out with wide low-profile Michelins.

The 21 Turbo was a great car on the road and it proved to be more than capable on the track. It was used, in 300bhp form, in the Renault Elf Europacup and in 457bhp and 4x4 form in the Superproduction series. In 1989 and 1990, the Renault 21 Turbo

SPECIFICATION 1989 RENAULT 21 TURBO

ENGINE

Power-unit: 1995cc, in-line four, ohc, fuel injection, twin intercoolers, Turbo Dynamics roller-bearing turbo, forged internals, tubular manifold, Grp A exhaust

Power: 265bhp @ 5000rpm

Torque: 293lb ft @ 3900rpm

Transmission: Front-wheel drive, five-speed gearbox

CHASSIS

Body: Unitary chassis

Weight: 1030kg

BRAKES

Front: 285mm vented discs, single-pot calipers

Rear: 255mm solid discs, single-pot calipers, Servo and ABS

SUSPENSION

Front: Modified McPherson strut, 375lb springs, 25mm anti-roll bar

Rear: 4-bar torsion bar rear axle, coil-assisted rear telescopic dampers

WHEELS

Front & rear: 6.5x15-inch alloys

TYRES

Front: 195/55/15 Yokohama A048R radials

Rear: 195/55/15 Yokohama A048R radials

ESSENTIALS

Top speed: 168mph @ 6700rpm

0-60: 5 seconds



SPECIFICATION 1965 RENAULT 8 GORDINI

ENGINE

Power-unit: 1296cc, in-line four, ohv, twin Weber 40DCOE, tubular manifold, straight-through exhaust

Power: 120bhp @ 7200rpm

Torque: Unknown

Transmission: Rear-wheel drive, four-speed gearbox

CHASSIS

Body: Unitary chassis

Weight: 795kg

BRAKES

Front: 255mm solid discs, Lockheed single-pot calipers

Rear: 255mm solid discs, Lockheed single-pot calipers, Bendix Servo

SUSPENSION

Front: Double wishbone independent front suspension, coil-springs and telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear: Swing axles, coil springs, four telescopic dampers

WHEELS

Front & rear: 5.5-inch Avanti composite

TYRES

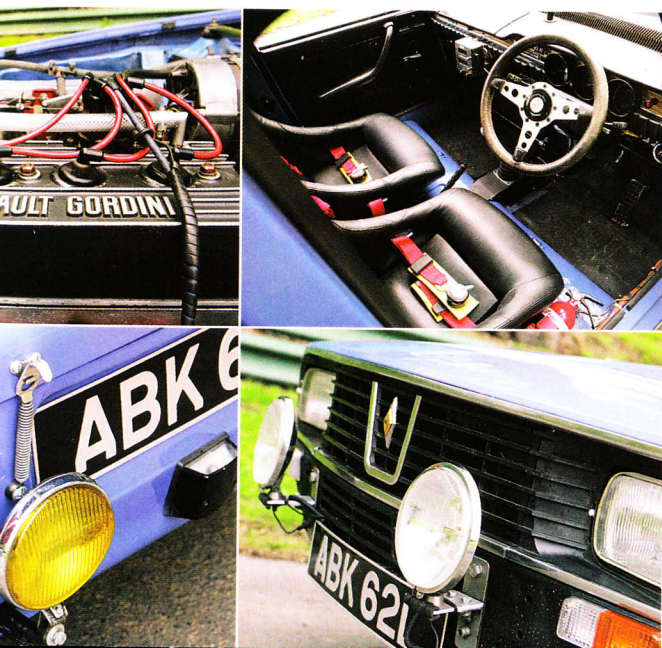
Front: 165/82/13 radials

Rear: 165/70/13 radials

ESSENTIALS

Top speed: 115 mph

0-60: 9.5 seconds



Graham is the proud owner of the only remaining roadworthy RHD 12



Europacup Championship preceded a number of European F1 races. Examples were also successful in Grp A and N rallying and rallycross. In 1998 Jean-Pierre Malcher took the World Speed Record on Ice in a relatively standard 21 Turbo, which reached 155mph on studded tyres!

Renault technical expert, Richard Hillyar, owns the red 21 Turbo featured here and has done since 1997. Having tried his hand at Formula Ford, which proved to be too expensive, Richard thought that the 21 Turbo would be ideal for the Castle Combe Saloon Car Championship. However, further investigation showed just how fiscally challenging this would be, so Richard headed for the hills and converted his into a road-legal hill climb and sprint machine. Numerous class wins and good placings later he knows he's made the right decision. Even when up against Scoobies, Evos, Quattros and a WRC Escort Cosworth, thanks to Richard's committed driving style, plus consistent and carefully managed development, his 21 Turbo is up at the front.

It's a heavy car, big too, and it needs some serious power to attack those hills. Thanks to

Prima Racing, who built the engine, it has certainly got it. Forged pistons, fully lightened and balanced internals, Cosworth 803 injectors, Fastchip injection computer, a clever home-built water spray system for the intercoolers, and a Turbo Dynamics purpose-built turbo, makes this engine capable of handling up to 2bar. Believe it or not, the gearbox is original and untouched, despite having covered 230,000 miles!

The suspension has been lowered, stiffened and Richard has modified the McPherson strut system to his own design. Apart from a swap to Black Diamond grooved discs, the brakes are standard, although the ABS system can be overridden if needed. Originally fitted with a Rollcentre six-point cage, Triton Motorsport in Bournemouth has since upgraded this to a 12-point.

The interior has all the usual competition accoutrements and the dash sports SPA Design instruments that have proved to be very reliable. This is a very well prepared and neat car and it's believed to be the only 21 Turbo that is regularly used in competition in the UK. Magnifique! ■



Thanks to:

- Bugatti Owners' Club and Prescott Hill climb for the wonderful location (01242 673136)
- Renault Classic Car Club (RCCC Panthers Paw, Horney Common, Uckfield, TN22 3ED)
- Renault 21 Owners Club and 21 Turbo Owners Club (<http://www.renault21turbo.com> and 01792 864733/)

SPECIFICATION 1972 RENAULT 12 GORDINI

ENGINE

Power-unit: 1596cc, in-line four, ohv twin Weber 45DCOE, tubular manifold, straight-through exhaust

Power: 145bhp @ 6250rpm

Torque: 130lb ft @ 5000rpm

Transmission: Front-wheel drive, four-speed gearbox

CHASSIS

Body: Unitary chassis

Weight: 980kg

BRAKES

Front: 250mm vented discs, Bendix single-pot calipers

Rear: 225mm solid discs, Bendix single-pot calipers

SUSPENSION

Front: Independent double-wishbone front suspension, coil-springs and telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear: Beam axle, trailing arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar, telescopic dampers

WHEELS

Front & rear: 5.5-inch Fergat steels

TYRES

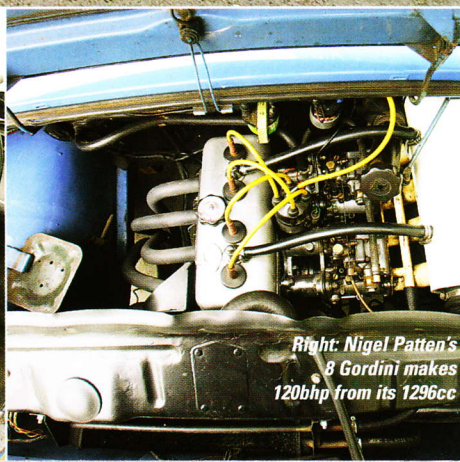
Front: 175/70/13 Dunlop radials

Rear: 175/70/13 Dunlop radials

ESSENTIALS

Top speed: 125 mph

0-60: 8 seconds



Right: Nigel Patten's 8 Gordini makes 120bhp from its 1296cc