

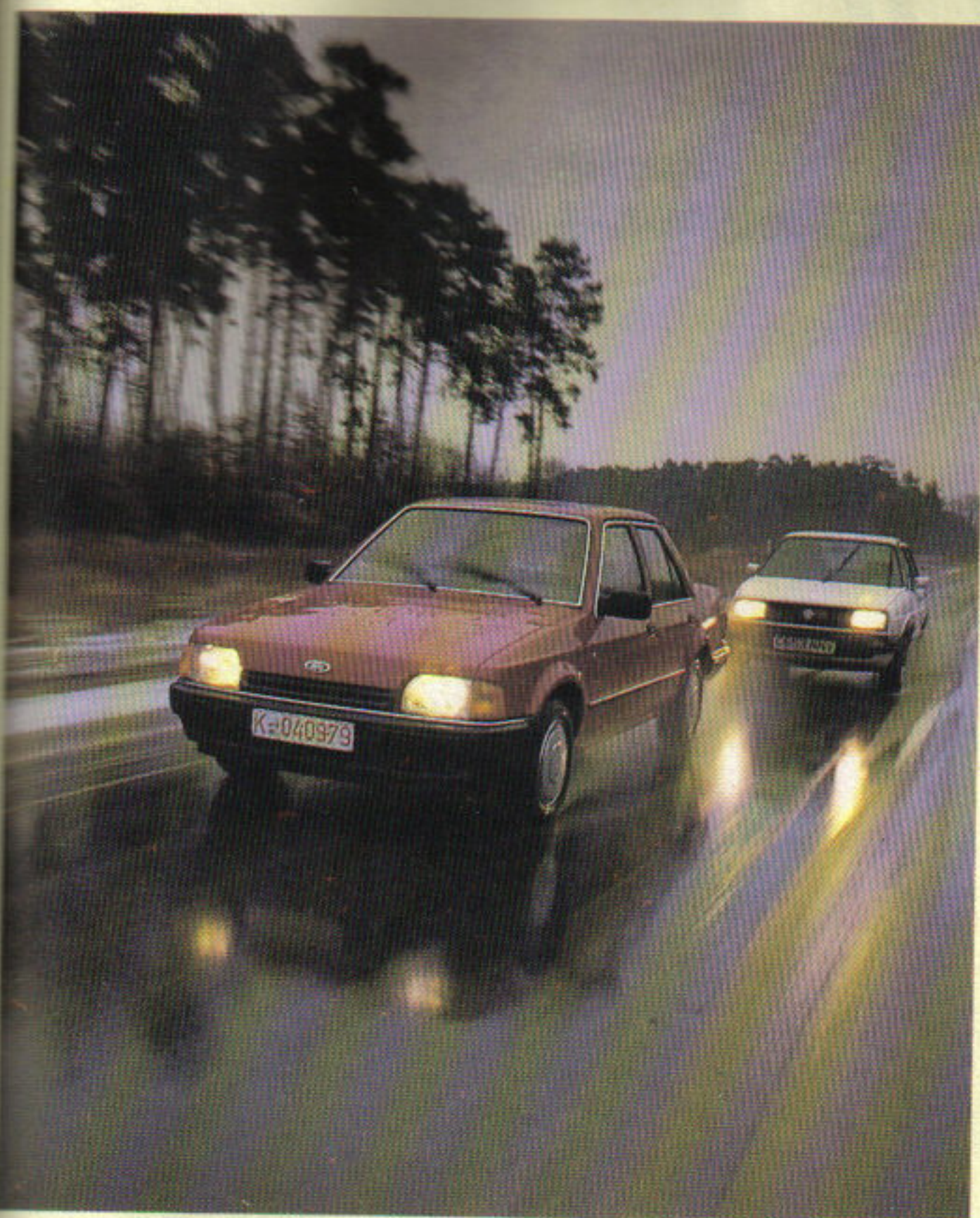
Escort MK 4

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Orion feels brisker than Jetta, and is better car for motorway runs



Three-box Ford lacks rear room of Jetta, but looks nicer inside



Orion has same dash as Escort. Thick steering wheel is good to use



Jetta's dash looks ugly but ergonomics are good. Note GTi-like wheel

Interior of the car feel as much like a Kent coalmine as a car's cockpit. The trim is far less attractive than the Escort's. For all the visual problems, though, the ergonomics of the Jetta's dash (identical to the Golf's) are good.

The Jetta's steering wheel, the same as that used in the Golf GTi, has a pleasant feel and rim size, and suggests that there's a sporty heart lurking behind the dull exterior (and interior). The suggestion is partly correct. The Jetta has a fine chassis. The ride is as impressive as the handling, and the steering is sharp and responsive. The gearchange is quick and positive, with a short, racing car-like throw.

The single overhead cam engine delivers adequate rather than flashing performance. The figures will tell you that it won't run out of puff until 103mph, and it can sprint to 60mph from rest in only 12.4sec.

The Orion 1.6 is a brisker car, as its more powerful engine suggests. Ford claim a 111mph top speed, with 0-60mph in 9.9sec. The Ford feels quicker too, with noticeably better lugging ability from low revs.

Sprightly the revised 1.6 CVH may be; silent it is not. Although our test Orion was free of booms (unlike the Jetta), it partly let itself down by becoming inordinately thrashy at high revs.

At more than 4000rpm, the Orion engine sounds harsh and unhappy. For such a new engine design – it goes back only to 1980 – the CVH is disappointingly short of refinement. But at least it's flexible and quick, and a much leaner range of air-fuel ratios – introduced as an economy measure for '86 – haven't hurt the driveability.


The Orion has a softer, more compliant ride than the Escort – helped by its greater weight and rear overhang. But it lacks the chassis control of the three-box Volkswagen. The Jetta, which rides the more firmly at low speeds, enjoys closer conjunction with the tarmac when the road becomes difficult. Its handling, predictably, is a bit sharper than the Orion's. The VW gearchange is sharper, too, than the very light and rather vague Orion shift, whose fifth gear speed is also set too far away from the basic H-pattern and is slow to select. The Orion's clutch – which has been lightened in the new car – also lacks the feel and precision of the Jetta's firmer, but still easy to use, left pedal.

For pure driving pleasure it's hard to choose between the Ford and the Volkswagen. The Orion easily wins on performance, the Jetta wins on chassis and transmission refinement. Inside the Orion may score aesthetically – a handy tool for

the car salesman – but the Jetta is the most practical. Not only is there more room in the front, because of that extra elbow area, but there is substantially more room, particularly knee-room, in the rear. The Jetta also has a bigger boot. Mind you, you'd have to be one of those people who regularly double their luggage allowance on aeroplanes, and who still reckon there's no substitute for the Victorian travelling trunk, to tax the luggage capacity of the Ford.

You can add to the Orion's list of virtues, as you can with the Escort, its optional anti-lock brakes – a definite safety boon, and one for which Ford deserve to the roundly congratulated – and its more attractive styling.

And the '86 Orion has also been given (again, as the Escort has) a comprehensive spruce up, and some worthwhile mechanical improvements. The Jetta, though, is still a more capable all-rounder than the Orion – and so is an Escort or Golf.



IMPROVING THE ESCORT

BRITAIN'S BEST SELLING CAR, THE FORD ESCORT, HAS JUST BEEN REVAMPED, WITH A NEW NOSE AND TAIL, AND IMPORTANT MECHANICAL REVISIONS – LIKE OPTIONAL ANTI-LOCK BRAKES AND NEW LEAN BURN ENGINES. THE ESCORT'S SISTER, THE ORION, IS ALSO CHANGED/GAVIN GREEN



Photographs by Graham Harrison

THE FORD ESCORT MAY still win the monthly UK car sales war with the predictability of a West Indies victory in cricket. But Ford's high-ups, eagerly watching the performance of much newer Volkswagen Golfs, Vauxhall Astras and Peugeot 309s, know that the five-year-old hatchback is close to suffering the same automotive *coup de grace* that befell the Cortina. So, enter the new Escort.

The car isn't the clean-sheet model the Sierra was when it replaced the Cortina, or that the latest Granada is over its predecessor. It'll be another three years before the all-new Escort makes its bow. Instead, Ford have given their internationally biggest selling car a comprehensive facelift. More important, they have augmented the cosmetic surgery with a host of mechanical revisions. Externally, the new car gets a sloping bonnet, a smaller and lower grille opening, different rear tail lights and a raised lip incorporated in the tailgate's sheet-metal. New polycarbonate bumpers and revised wheel trims complete the picture. The result is a car that certainly looks different from its predecessor, and a car which dovetails with the new Ford family look (as do the Granada and the facelifted Fiesta). It doesn't look any better than the old Escort, though. There have already been murmurings that the car looks more bulbous than its predecessor, and is noticeably more nose heavy. There are fewer discontented mumblings from the

wind-tunnel, though, owing to the car's improved drag factor of 0.36 (lowered from the old Escort hatchback's 0.39 and the XR3i's 0.38). The Escort's duller and booted sister, the Orion, gets the Escort-like nose changes and new tail lights, and has a lower Cd, too, of 0.35 (improved from the old car's 0.37).

The external differences are, however, a surprisingly unimportant part of the changes made to the revamped Escort. The car deserves to be praised – and Ford, who have increasingly become automotive innovators rather than just copiers admired only for their low prices, deserve commendation – for offering anti-lock brakes as an option (the first time a small family car has provided this feature). The move, which follows Ford's decision to fit Granadas with anti-lock brakes as standard, is likely to be copied in just over 12 months by a number of other manufacturers. The real significance of the Escort's system lies in its price: at a probable supplement of about only £300, the new Lucas Girling system is the first inexpensive anti-lock option ever offered on a production car. Ford have the exclusive use of it for the remainder of the year. 'We're certainly expecting other manufacturers to follow our lead,' says Ford's engineering director Ron Mellor. 'But we may be surprised. We thought many manufacturers would standardise anti-lock brakes on their big cars after we launched the Granada. But they didn't.'



Heftier front spring rates, repositioned sway bar should help handling

The Lucas Girling system is mechanically controlled – unlike the current electronic ABS systems used on luxury cars – and, as a further means of reducing costs, it senses only front wheel lock-up. Ford estimate that the front wheels do 90 percent of the work in the Escort. Even though it is possible to have one of the rear wheels lock, tests have shown that the car is still fully manoeuvrable under braking. At the heart of the system are two modulators (one driven by each front wheel) which house a wheel deceleration sensor and a pump. When the sensor detects a large deceleration in the wheel (such as would usually lead to brake lock), brake line pressure to that wheel is automatically released. As the car has the usual diagonally split Escort braking system, pressure is also released to the

diagonally opposed rear wheel. Thus the wheel that was on point of locking is allowed to accelerate, restoring traction. Firm pedal pressure is maintained by a cut-off valve which isolates the master cylinder from the brake line. Pressure is restored normally to the brake line when the speed of the accelerating wheel – that has been on the point of locking – matches that of the flywheel and the sensor.

Each modulator is connected to its individual front wheel by a toothed Kevlar-reinforced nylon-faced rubber belt – which is meshed with teeth machined on the constant-velocity drive shaft joint. Large plastic shrouds cover the two belts, protecting them from the salt and water which are sprayed over the front of the drivetrain in normal use. Our own tests, done on a frosty Swedish lake last winter (October 1985), proved the worth of the Lucas Girling SCS (Stop Control System). Fitted to last year's Escorts and Orion, the SCS greatly improved manoeuvrability while braking on treacherous surfaces (the single greatest boon of anti-lock brakes) and also reduced the stopping distance in slippery conditions. The system lacks the delicate wheel control of electronic ABS, its quick response and its all-weather capability, but Ford claim that none of these factors makes any difference in British driving conditions. There is never any intention of fitting the Lucas Girling system as standard. The Escort's class is too insensitive to absorb a feature as standard wear. Anti-lock brakes will be available only with CVH (Competition Valve - angle Hemispherical chamber) engines.

Ford have not only changed the stopping ability of their Escort; they have also



New Escort has similar body to old car, apart from new tail lights, nose. Tailgate has raised lip spoiler



Seats are more comfortable, trim materials are new and attractive



XR3i engine is largely unchanged, but carb-fed units run leaner



Nose of car is now more aerodynamic, and has Ford family look

stantially altered its go. Two new engines are offered: a 1.3litre version of the Valencia pushrod four-cylinder unit and a 1.4litre Bridgend CVH motor. In addition, the 1.6litre CVH unit is revised. The 1.3litre Spanish engine partly replaces the CVH 1.3litre (as used in the biggest selling single model in the old Escort range: the 1.3L). Based on the arthritic old Valencia 1.1litre (easily the least stimulating weapon in the old Escort's arsenal), it features new-for-the-Valencia ware of the main bearings (the 1.1litre has only three), breakerless ignition and changed inlet porting and pistons, to enable greater swirl and less friction. The result is 60bhp (9.0bhp less than the old 1.3 CVH) but, more important, supposedly excellent fuel economy. Ford say the 1.3 Escort will be the most fuel thrugal car in its class.

The Valencia 1.3's flaccidity will be partly compensated for by the introduction of the new 1.4 CVH, heavily based on the old 1.3 unit. The Escort's 1.4 capacity is ideally suited to new European taxation and emission requirements – although Ford concede this is more a happy

coincidence than a carefully laid plan – and helps boost the power of the CVH from 69 to 75bhp. The combustion chambers and piston crowns have

been redesigned for greater efficiency, there's a new Weber two-stage twin-venturi carburettor to help performance and improved low-friction oil and water pumps. The new CVH engine also features an outstanding lean burn ratio – of up to 18 to one on part throttle openings. The 1.1 and 1.3 Valencia engines also run much leaner than before, owing to far more efficient combustion.

The lean-burn technology also applies to the reworked 1.6 CVH, which now produces a healthy 90bhp – compared with the previous CVH 1.6's 79bhp. Incorporating most of the improvements effected on the 1.4, the new 1.6 is capable of accelerating the Escort from 0 to 60mph in only 9.7sec, and on to a claimed top speed of 111mph. These are excellent figures for a family hatchback –

and not far short of performance hatchback times. Because of the lean burning, Ford claim, the 1.6 models are more economical than any other cars in the class. Like all the new Escort engines, the 1.6 can run on 95RON unleaded fuel (an important consideration – especially in Germany). All that's needed is a minor retarding of the timing, with a consequent power loss of about 2.0percent.

The XR3i's engine still produces 105bhp. And that means the 1.6litre car will continue to be hopelessly outclassed in the fast hatchback stakes. There's a chance that a 1.9litre version of the CVH will be offered in the future (it's already available in America). Ford need it to enable the XR3i to compete with the likes of the Golf GTi. The unimpressive RS Turbo version of the Escort gets a few important



Interior of Escort is changed, with new facia, instruments, dash moulding, steering wheel and door casings

changes to its blown 1.6litre 132bhp engine, and is the only Escort model with the Lucas Girling brakes fitted as standard. Sales start three months after other new Escort and Orion models – that means at the end of spring.

Changes have also been made to the Escort's suspension – with stiffer front springs to improve handling sharpness – and to the engine mounts which, Ford have discovered, could be made to bounce vertically on the old model. Improved Chubb doorlocks (as fitted to the Granada) are also used, which should help keep new Escorts where their owners park them. These new locks are due to be fitted to the Sierra in a year's time, and to the Fiesta after that.

Although the exterior may not be greatly changed, the interior is all new. The seats are different, the dashboard is different and so are the door mouldings. There's also a Granada-like electric front window demister. Alas, though, there's no more room inside. In this way the Escort, and the Orion, betray their age.

The Orion has all the Escort's

mechanical improvements, plus the all-new interior. As before, the Orion is aimed at the lowest common denominator school of motoring: at the people who still mourn the passing of the Cortina and want a do-it-yourself alternative to a bus pass. As before, the only advantage it seems to offer over the Escort is a bigger boot.

Henry's Travelling Trunk is available with a wider choice of engines than before: it starts with the new Valencia 1.3litre unit and progresses through the 1.4 and 1.6 CVH units to the 105bhp XR3i-type engine. As it is with the Escort, the Dagenham diesel – fast gaining a reputation for being five years behind the competition even though it's only a couple of years old – is also available. Needless to say, it's best avoided. You can buy Orions outfitted in three trim levels: L, GL and Ghia. The Escort, once again available in three and five-door guises, comes in the same model designations, as well as the bread-and-butter Popular derivative – for the impecunious private buyer or the unimportant company person.

HANDY HATCHBACKS

WE PIT THE FORD ESCORT AGAINST THE BRAND NEW BRITISH-MADE PEUGEOT 309 AND FIND IT IMPROVED BUT WANTING

PEUGEOT'S 309 AND Ford's Escort are chasing each other hard. The Peugeot – British-built, and determined to find a much larger share of the UK market than any previous Peugeot product – must bite into the Escort's massive share of the lower-medium sector if it is to make the impact it hopes for. The Escort, on the other hand, is chasing the 309 in dynamic terms. Ford know that things have progressed a great deal since the front-drive Escort was unveiled, to a chorus of approval, in 1980. And the 309, the most modern of the new breed, shows how far. With the '86 Escort, Ford have had to catch up.

Let's make it clear, straight away, that the Escort hasn't caught up – even though it has substantially closed the gap, and in certain areas is unchallenged. It is still encumbered with a basic body style which, even though it is prob-

ably still the most attractive shape in the market segment, houses an interior which lacks the Peugeot's leg room. Jump from the back of the Escort into the back of the 309, and your knees will discover another couple of blissful inches of space. Your head will also be feeling pretty sanguine about things, as it easily clears the roof lining of the Peugeot after first brushing the lining of the Escort, and then banging against the rear of its roof when it slopes down to the tailgate.

Open the tailgates, and the Peugeot presents a more capacious – and less cluttered – cavity, owing to its 205-like rear suspension which is low and compact and does without space-intruding strut turrets.

This comparison pits a 1.3litre 309 GL Peugeot against the new 1.4litre CVH-engined Escort GL. Although Ford hadn't announced UK prices at the time we went to press, the Peugeot is

IN 1986 FORD ARE HEADING for car market leadership in Britain for the 10th year in succession. But all is not well. As Sam Toy, chairman of Ford of Britain, points out, the company have not been earning enough to cover their huge

company fleet buyers who purchase about half the new cars sold in Britain. They were happy to play off two big suppliers against each other, and GM persuaded fleets to buy other Vauxhall models.

GM's share of the UK market soared from 11.69percent in 1982 to 16.56percent last year and, in crude terms, their advance was almost entirely at Ford's expense (although there's no doubt Austin Rover would have made much more headway if the GM-Vauxhall recovery had not occurred when it did). But perhaps the worst news for Ford was that, although they still build Britain's best-selling car – the Escort – the Cavalier has quickly established itself as the favourite fleet model.

Ford hoped, even expected, the Sierra would match the Escort's sales performance in the UK, but the mediocre quality of early models and the much-publicised side wind stability problems damaged its chances, particularly as opinion was divided about the 'jelly-mould' styling. Even the Escort is not as successful in the UK as was the old Cortina. It takes under 9.0percent of total new car sales compared with the 11 to 12percent the Cortina regularly scored. The Cavalier now comes closest to the Escort with a 7.33

percent share last year, whereas the Sierra has settled into fifth position with a 5.5percent share of the 1985 market.

The Sierra's failure to live up to Ford's best expectations in Britain has had repercussions throughout Ford of Europe. The company closed their Cork plant, where £10m had been invested in Sierra assembly, and the Sierra lines at Genk, in Belgium, have had some short-time working – which helped send them into the red.

Bob Lutz, chairman of Ford of Europe, who was closely associated with the development of the Sierra, admits the company were wildly over-optimistic about the Sierra's potential sales. But he suggests in mitigation that the whole car demand pattern in Western Europe has changed. The emphatic shift to smaller cars has been helped by today's small cars being better designed and better equipped and, as a result, more acceptable to former 'big car' (Sierra) owners. And it is an old motor industry maxim that the smaller the car, the smaller the profit.

To some extent that explains why Ford of Britain have been struggling financially and in 1984 suffered a loss of £14m on their manufacturing and selling operations – the first operating

loss since 1971 and only the second in 50 years. The company managed to show a net profit of £37m, however, because the interest received on money in the bank and loaned to the parent in the States more than wiped out the operating deficit. But there are indications the Ford of Britain suffered another operating loss last year, none of which has escaped the notice of the American bosses.

During Ford's darkest hour in the early 1980s, after their world-wide losses reached record levels (over £1.0billion for 1980), executives at the company's embattled headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan, consoled themselves that, whatever else might be going wrong, they need not worry about their European operations. But no longer. In a dramatic reversal of fortune, it is now Ford of Europe (of which Ford of Britain are a key element) that have been a source of anxiety.

The strains within Ford of Europe were clear to see when, in the space of three months in 1984, two top managers, Ed Blanch, the chairman, and Jim Capolongo, president, resigned and moved out of the headquarters at Warley, Essex. Bob Lutz then found himself returning to Britain from Dearborn as chairman of Ford of Europe.

HENRY FORWARD

GORDON KENT LOOKS AT FORD'S DRAMATIC SALES SLIDE AND AT SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

investment in plant and equipment and product development. Ford's share of new car sales in the UK reached a record 30.94percent in 1981, but since then has fallen rapidly to 26.5 percent last year.

The reason is well known. In 1982 Ford stopped production of the Cortina, for many years Britain's best selling car, and replaced it with the Sierra. General Motors, the Vauxhall-Opel group, then seized their opportunity. They thrust the Vauxhall Cavalier in front of

likely to enjoy a £300-plus price advantage over the Escort. The Peugeot driver will also enjoy a better ride, for the 309 does absorb poor road surfaces with a wonderful surefootedness that the more jittery Escort – once again with revised suspension (how many times have Ford revised the suspension of this car?) – just can't match.

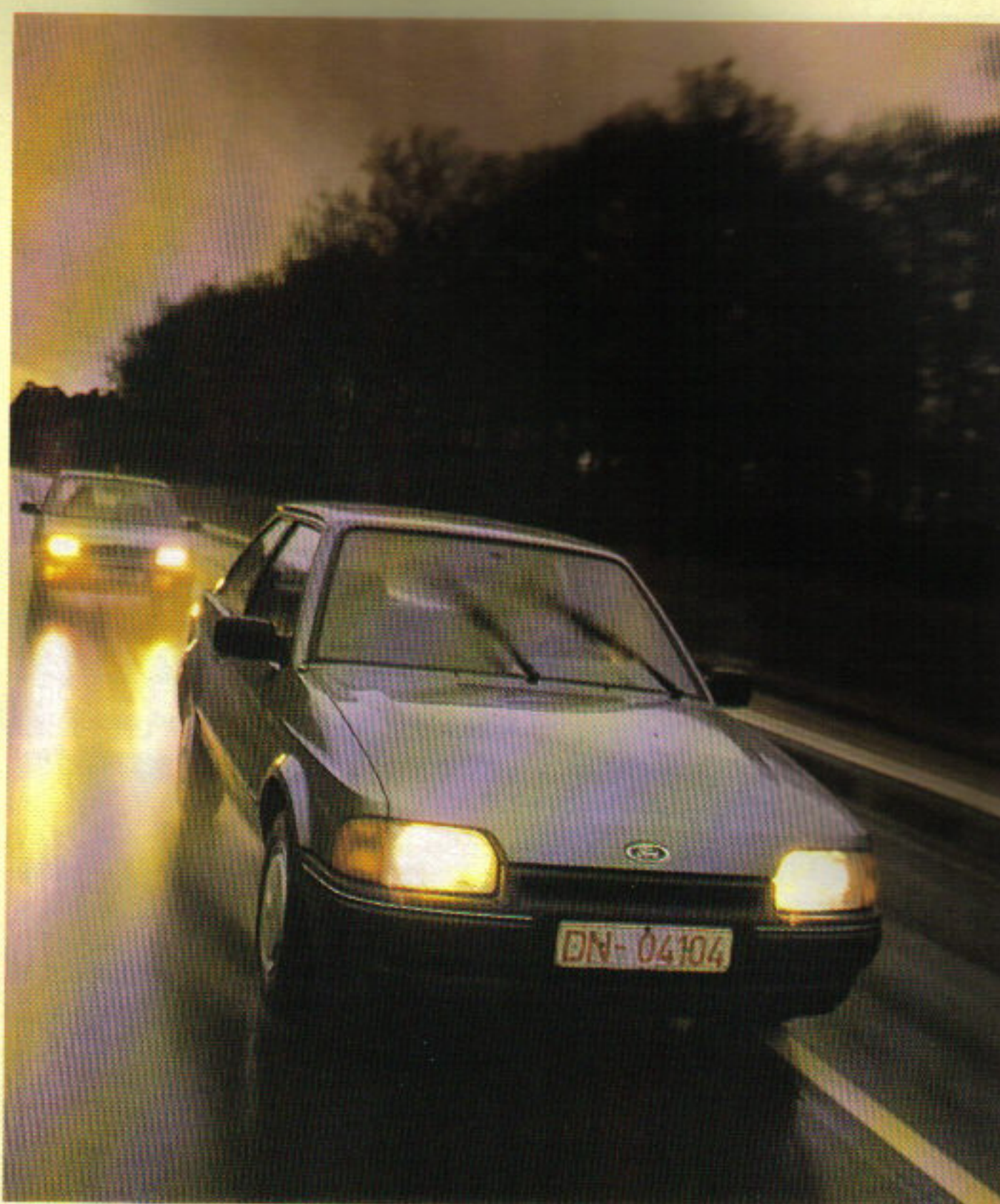
The interior has been completely redesigned on the Escort, and that is one of its most

attractive features. Whereas the 309 has a bland all-grey dashboard with lots of unattractive vent slats, the Escort's new dash moulding is tasteful.

The Escort trim colours are new – and pretty – while the seats are also different – and flawed. Although there's reasonable seating comfort on offer, try to go around a corner at any speed and you're likely to end up on fairly intimate terms with your front seat passenger: in



Escort's seats lack lateral support. Otherwise interior is good



New Ford beats Peugeot 309 in performance, but loses overall

Photographs by Ian Dawson

again, a position he had vacated only two years earlier.

Last year he and Vittorio Ghidella, the chief executive of Fiat's car business, hatched a scheme which would have rocketed Ford of Europe into the stratosphere and away from Earthly problems. The idea was to merge the two organisations into a group that would have over 20 percent of the European car market – well ahead of any rival – and enormous potential for economies of scale, savings in investment and pooling of research and technology. The merger plan did not work out. Unresolvable differences in corporate culture, legal difficulties and disputes over who would be top dog in the merged group, caused talks to break down. They also forced Ford to put on Lutz's other strategy.

Soon after his return to the UK he was handing out warnings that Ford simply had to do something about excess production capacity – either cutting horizontally and closing some plants, or cutting vertically and working one shift. Sierra production lines at Ford's factory in Belgium, or the Escort assembly facility at Halewood on Merseyside, appeared to be under threat. Lutz says, however, that several things have happened recently to relieve the pressure.

The new big car, the Granada/Scorpio, launched last autumn, has had a better reception than Ford dared hope, while the Sierra made a recovery in some Continental markets. Ford also raised prices and unit profit margins last year, gritting their teeth at the need to sacrifice some market share. Lutz says that, to his surprise, the fall in Ford's European market share was less than expected – from 13 to 12 percent, which left the company in third place in the European manufacturers' table.

In 1984 Ford of Europe, once the jewel in the group's worldwide crown, made a marginal net profit of £105m, down from £200m in 1983 and the peak £714m achieved in the organisation's heyday six years ago.

Lutz still says that, in spite of the recent improvements, he cannot give a guarantee about plant closures. 'In the final analysis we have to be cost competitive with Japanese imports and with the Japanese factories in Europe (such as Nissan's in the UK), which might have an even greater cost advantage.' He points out that the Japanese can produce a car for about £715 less than the Europeans, but once freight and the 11 percent European Community tariff have been added, Ford's German factories

can be fully competitive.

Lutz insists: 'If we find we have major assembly facilities, regardless of the country involved, which for one reason or another are not competitive, we would not shy away from closing them.' Neither would the group resist importing more components or even built-up vehicles from outside Europe.

Whatever happens, Ford will continue to attack costs. Among other things, that means a gradual reduction in the workforce. The numbers employed by Ford of Britain have come down from 80,000 in 1979, to 55,000 at present.

Ford have also been trimming back operations to their core business – vehicle assembly. Already in Britain they have cut foundry operations, wheel manufacture, truck axle production and seem set to stop making spark plugs. On the other hand the UK seems likely to benefit from the rationalisation of Ford of Europe's engineering operations and the electrical and electronic operations have already been consolidated at Basildon, Essex.

Lutz claims: 'Our guiding principle is that we will not support anything that is inefficient by world standards. Quietly and calmly we will do what is necessary. If there is

the chance to become more efficient by buying a component from an outside supplier – which, after all, is the Japanese approach – we will do just that.'

At the very least Ford are likely to be involved in some major co-operative ventures. As Walter Hayes, vice-chairman of Ford of Europe, says, 'We used to say in Ford as we harnessed our world resources that it was not necessary for everybody to re-invent the wheel. It is not necessary, either, for every company to do everything.'

Whatever solution Ford attempt, Britain has a vested interest in it. Ford of Britain have 23 plants and are one of the top 30 employers in the UK. Since 1980 they have invested well over £1.0 billion in manufacturing facilities, and over half their £750m-a-year European product development budget is spent in Britain; and they spend more than £1.0 billion a year with British suppliers of materials, components and services. The UK is now the most important engine production centre in Europe for Ford, producing over 750,000 units a year.

In all, Ford support an estimated 100,000 jobs in British industry. So there is a great deal at stake for the UK, as Lutz and his team attempt to put Ford of Europe firmly back on their feet.

short, the lateral support is poor. The 309 not only offers rather better support, it also has seats which better stand the test of long runs. For comfort, the Escort just can't compete with the new British Peugeot. Owing partly to its new door mouldings, it can't compete with the 309 in driving comfort either: the elbow rests on the Escort are ridiculously high, which means there's just no room to flail the arms around when driving vigorously or taking avoiding action. Still on the interior: Ford's former reputation for being a company dominated by penny-pinching accountants is still not entirely dead, despite the elevation of the engineers to at least equal status. For proof, look at the awful trim hanging from the roof. The 309 has a properly moulded roof lining.

On the move, the Escort is a brisker travelling companion than the 309. Sixty mph from rest comes up in about 11.5sec; the Peugeot is a good 1.5sec slower. The Escort should also just crack the 100mph barrier, which the 309 won't quite reach. Mind you, in practical day-to-day motoring, there's not a great deal of difference. Both cars are brisk for their engine sizes, and both are capable of maintaining high speeds easily on motorways. At very high speeds – at licence-risking velocities of over 90mph – the 309 is actually the more composed, and less strained. The 1.3litre Simca-derived unit (only a humble pushrod) does suffer from a few annoying boom periods – there's a noticeable resonance at about 85 in fifth, and it does get thrashy at high crankshaft speeds. The Escort's new CVH unit has more thrash in the medium-high rev ranges, and when nearing its red line it sounds as though it's in real agony. The 1.4 CVH may give good performance, but you'll have a hard job convincing your ears that it's a refined engine. The official fuel figures suggest there should not be much difference at the pumps between the 309 and the Escort.

Behind the wheel, the Escort starts to score a few points. Its steering wheel – different from the old Escort's – is a small diameter device with a nice thick rim. The 309's steering is its greatest fault. The wheel is one of those nasty thin-rimmed affairs that is placed too low, so it easily fouls your knees. As with the 205, there is too much steering self-centring, so that muscle effort is needed to heave the car around bends. This also damages the fluency with which

the car can be driven when the going gets tight and you want to go hard. The Escort's steering doesn't win any prizes either – it's rather lifeless – but at least it can be wielded with some delicacy. However, despite that inferior steering, the 309 handles as well as the Escort.

The Peugeot does impress as the better car overall. But you can't help but respect the job Ford have done to upgrade their Escort. It's not far behind the 309 – probably now the best car in the class – and, in some respects, is substantially ahead. It offers anti-lock brakes as an option – which worked extremely well during our comparison, conducted on rain-drenched German roads. The brakes always worked just as competently – without any sign of lock up, and with fine manoeuvrability – as those on a luxury car with fully electronic ABS. In addition, the Ford looks more attractive than the 309, both inside and out. In short, it's easy enough to come away with the impression that the Escort is likely to stay on top of the British car sales league for quite a few more years yet.



New Ford facia has central speedo. Note Granada column stalks



Peugeot's dash is ugly. Greatest dynamic weakness is steering

POOR RELATIONS

THE FORD ORION DOES BATTLE WITH VW'S JETTA. THE JETTA'S BETTER, BUT IT'S HARD TO JUSTIFY EITHER OF THEM

PITY IS OWED THOSE who have to promote the Ford Orion. For that matter, pity is also owed the people who have to sell the Volkswagen Jetta, Vauxhall Belmont, Renault 9, and the other lower medium-sized notchback cars which were spawned by invariably superior hatchbacks. It's not that there's anything inherently bad about these four-door Johnny-come-latelys: it's just that there's nothing especially good about them, either. In every case they have little practical advantage over five-door hatchback equivalents, on which they are closely based. They mostly cost more, don't handle as well, usually don't have any more interior room, they look more staid, and are slower. The only *quid* you get for all these *quos* is – in every case – a gigantic boot. Although it's of dubious merit, you also get a bland sort of styling conservatism that appeals to those who still con-

sider a hatchback as something more relevant to Buck Rogers than Joe Average.

There's no ignoring the impressive size of the boots on these notchback-derived four-door hatchback cars. Volkswagen's Jetta, when launched in its current form in 1984, came with 'the biggest boot of any European saloon'. As if that wasn't enough, Vauxhall's just-released Belmont has the mother and father of all boots – big enough not only for a mother and father's luggage, but for the belongings of the rest of the family as well. It claims to be even bigger than the Jetta. How many owners will actually use this carpeted canyon – in a car that really only seats four people comfortably – is another matter. Some folk also point to the increased security aspect of a booted car: with an all-metal casing rather than one partly covered by glass, as is the case with a hatchback. This dubious advantage is being increasingly negated by the vogue for offering folding rear seats in these notches. That means you can get access to the boot from the interior.

Enough of criticism: our brief was to take a Volkswagen Jetta which, despite its general inferiority compared with the hatchback Golf on which it's based, is regarded as just about the best car in the class, and set it against Ford's new Orion. The test Orion had Ford's revised 1.6litre CVH engine, with 90bhp, and came in top-of-the-range Ghia trim. The Jetta had Volkswagen's 1.6litre engine – which produces 75bhp – but came in TX trim. At £6568, we estimated it should cost about £1400 less than the as yet unpriced new Ford. In top-of-the-range Jetta GL guise, the difference would still be about £800.

The new Orion looks quite similar to the revised Escort – apart from its aircraft carrier-like stern – and it gets all the Escort's interior revisions. The dash is simple and attractive, the thick-rimmed steering wheel is nice to use, and the seats are more comfortable, if lacking in sideways support. As with the Escort, elbow room is restricted by the attractively styled but poorly designed door casings. The Jetta's dashboard is much more fussy. It's done in sombre black which, when combined with the dark trim, makes the