

MIDDLEBRIDGE SCIMITAR GTE

20th Anniversary

The GTE, launched in 1968 was an important car. It broke a few rules: Gran Turismo cars had to have short greenhouses with lousy seating in the back; estate cars had a down market image (good for traveling salesmen and families with kids and dogs – not something that OK car makers would manufacture).

The GTE did both – it was a sporty 120mph estate type car that could seat four people comfortably and had loads of carrying capacity. But it offered more: the long roof was good aerodynamically (the GTE was faster than the Capri with the same engine), it was stable in cross winds and didn't have bothersome lift at speed (a Porsche needed a big aerodynamic device to stop it taking off).

An appealing feature was the flexibility of the interior: the GTE could be a four, three or two seater with a varying load space on a flat floor (the seats folded down flat). (A tradesman praised it because it was the only sports car he could get his ladder into). The deep, glass, rear hatch made it easy to park.

The body was a nice piece of sculpture with the rear quarter particularly pleasing and a 'flip' up at the end of the roof that found its way onto later cars. Very controversial was the waste line that went up and up all the way to the back – that really wasn't the done thing then and it took a while before virtually every car model adopted it.

At first some people didn't like the GTE while others loved it. It grew a strong following. From the SE5 it developed into the SE6 and when Reliant stopped making the car, it was still a very desirable vehicle and looked up to date. It was fortunate, therefore, that Middlebridge stepped in to introduce a lot of refinements and give the GTE another lease of life. Within the lively Reliant Sabre and Scimitar Owners Club there is a group of proud Middlebridge owners. They are now celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the car.

It is a shame that Reliant and Middlebridge are no more – gone like so many British carmakers. While there are any number of GTE like cars on the road today, it would be fun to leapfrog this style formula and show what a future generation of GTEs would look like. One can but dream.

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