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Guide to the TVR Griffith

Even now, over twelve years since its first appearance at the 1990 Motor Show in Birmingham, the Griffith can make jaws drop and eyes stare in amazement and disbelief just by driving by.

The new Griffith was styled by the TVR team, in particular by John Ravenscroft and Peter Wheeler. It caused such a impact on the stand that everything else appeared to be out of date in comparison, including TVR's second version of the Speed Eight.

The original 1990 prototype was based on the S series chassis with the 4.0 litre V8 engine which was to form the basis of the V8S. The development and design work needed to turn a prototype into a production car took about 18 months and the first pre-production cars appeared in late 1991/early 1992. The Griffith entered production with two engine specifications: an entry level 4.0 litre 240 bhp engine and a more powerful 4.3 litre 280 bhp engine. The 4.3 litre engine quickly established itself as the engine to have, due to its smoother power delivery and higher output. The car used a Rover SD1 gearbox with all the 4.x engines.

TVR Power, TVR's engineering subsidiary, had been increasing the power of the V8 engine for many years, as specials for customers. It is no surprise that from the first production run some of the cars ended up with slightly tweaked engines. For the 4.0 litre engine, gas flowing the heads was an option that boosted power to 250 bhp. This was commonly done. However, for the really power crazy, one option was to upgrade the engine to the big valve (BV) specification and reach over 300 bhp! These Big Valve cars are rare and quite sort after and have been copied. Buyer beware! Check the provenance very carefully.

The press announcement of the Griffith 500 in August 1993 marked the return of the Griffith with a 5 litre 340 bhp 350lb/ft torque version of the Rover V8 engine. It took the big valve concept, increased the capacity and compression ratio and tweaked the engine even further. The early cars had the Rover gearbox(reverse upper left) but this was quickly replaced with the T5 box (reverse lower right)late 93/ early 94. The brakes were upgraded from 240 front to 260mm. The chassis and suspension were improved and, in general, this car is the pinnacle of the Griffith series. The front air intake was also widened on the Griffith 500.

In 2001, the unthinkable happened. TVR announced that Griffith production was to end and, to celebrate this, a special edition run of just 100 cars was to be built. These last cars had several differences from the 'standard' Griffith 500s in that they had a hybrid interior using the Chimaera dashboard and some external changes to the rear lights and wing mirrors (from the Cerbera and including the door button underneath the mirror housing). Each car is numbered and has a plaque in the glove compartment indicating its production build number.

The Griffith 500 used the same body style but, with a 340 BHP 5 litre V8 engine under the bonnet, it was the answer to demands for the return of the Griffith and for even more power. The only external sign of the bigger engine is the 500 under the Griffith badge at the back and on the steering wheel.

An early Griffith 500 with black heating controls and right-to-left speedometer and rev counter.

The Griffith 500 dashboard circa 1996/7. Later cars have silver surrounds for both the instruments and the LED indicators. (TVR Engineering)

For more detailed information – get *The TVR Griffith and Chimaera* by Steve Heath

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	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	Total
Griffith 4.x	602	114[1]	–	–	–	–	716
Chimaera	–	601[2]	675[4]	750[5]	850[6]	900[7]	3,776
Griffith 500	–	129[3]	225[4]	250[5]	275[6]	300[7]	1,179

Notes:

1 *The UK production finished in 1992 but some UK cars were delivered in 1993. The rest of the 1993 production was exported to Europe, the Middle East and the Far East.*

2 *This figure is based on 401 cars (Sept. 93) plus an estimated 200 cars for the last 4 months production.*

3 *This is based on 49 cars (Sept. 93) and an estimated 80 for the rest of the year.*

4 *This is based on a total production of 900 cars with a 3:1 split in favour of the Chimaera.*

5 *This is based on a total production of 1000 cars with a 3:1 split in favour of the Chimaera.*

6 *This is an average derived from the 1995 and 1997 figures.*

7 *This is based on a total production of 18 Chimaera and 6 Griffith 500 a week for a 50 week production period.*

Griffith and Chimaera production figures.

Model	Length	Wheel base	Height	Width	Front track	Rear track	Ground Clearance	Fuel Capacity	Weight
Griffith	3892mm	2282mm	1205mm	1943mm	1460mm	1470mm	146mm	57 l	1060kg
Chimaera	4015mm	2282mm	1215mm	1865mm	1460mm	1460mm	132mm	57 l	1060kg
Griffith 500	3892mm	2282mm	1205mm	1943mm	1460mm	1470mm	146mm	57 l	1060kg

Griffith and Chimaera dimensions. (Based on information from TVR Engineering)

	Griffith	Chimaera	Griffith 500
4 litre engine	92-93	93 onwards	–
4.3 litre engine	92-93	93-94	–
4.0 HC litre engine (i)	-	94-96	–
4.5 litre engine	–	96 onwards	–
5 litre engine	–	Late 94 onwards	Std
4.3BV engine (ii)	92-93	Optional	–
4.5BV engine (ii)	92-93	Optional	–
Leather steering wheel	Std	Std	Std
Wooden steering wheel	Optional	Optional	Optional
Power Steering	–	Optional	Optional
Air conditioning	–	Optional	Optional
Heated seats	–	Optional	Optional
Half hide	Std	Std	Std
Full hide	Optional	Optional	Optional
Roll bar	–	Optional from 1996	Optional
Limited Slip differential	Std	Std	Std
Hydratrak differential	–	Optional from 97	Optional from 97
Alloy wheels (iii)	Std	Std	Std
Second cold air blower (iv)	–	–	Std
Colour matched dials	–	Optional	Optional
Silver rimmed dials	–	From about 1994	From about 1994
Cerbera mirror catch	–	From late 1997	–
Spun aluminium dashboard	Optional	Optional	Optional
Alarm	Std	Std	Std
Electric mirrors	Std	Std	Std
Electric windows	Std	Std	Std
Catalytic converter	–	Std	Std

Griffith and Chimaera options

What to look for

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Chassis

The chassis can rot on the outriggers, behind the front wheels and in the wishbones. However, the earliest cars are now about 9 to 10 years old and the plastic coating may have come off in these key areas, revealing bare metal. If not treated, the potential for chassis problems to start occurring may well increase over the next few years. The wishbones in particular can be prone to this and may need replacing. The chassis tends to be low down the maintenance list and if it has been maintained well, the probability is that the rest of the car has been well looked after. However, do not rely on this — still carry out the checks. The chassis can be replaced if necessary but is expensive. Check the straightness of the chassis at the front and rear — it is easy to fit new bodywork and hide impact damage. This should also be revealed on a HPI check, but not always.

Cooling

The temperature should stay rock steady at 70-90∞C during normal running. The fan should cut in at 90 to 92∞C or lower. Make sure that the car's cooling system is working correctly. If you cannot take the car for a run, start it and leave it idling while watching the temperature gauge and note the temperature when the electric fan cuts in. Also make sure that this reduces the temperature. Check for any coolant leaks, especially in the corners of the radiators and around the hoses and water pump.

Bodywork

Stone chips on the bonnet and on the mirror pods are quite common and should be viewed as a normal consequence of driving. If the front of the car is perfect, it may have been resprayed either to cover the stone chips or as a consequence of some front end damage. If these chips are only cosmetic and have not resulted in any chassis damage, this is usually nothing to worry about. Again, use some common sense when judging whether the damage is cosmetic and liveable with — or a symptom of something more sinister and potentially expensive.

Steering

If this binds while the wheel is turned, it is a sign that one or both of the steering column universal joints are on their way out and will need replacing. The steering is actually quite difficult to test on the road. The normal test is to let go of the steering wheel and see if the car drifts to one side. If it does, the steering geometry or joints are suspect and need further investigation. Unfortunately, with the Griffith and Chimaera, this test is of limited use be-cause the steering is sensitive to the road camber and the car may drift to the nearside anyway, even if nothing is wrong! It is worth checking the geometry for problems or the chassis to see if there is any misalignment.

Engine

This should start and rev freely when warm. The exhaust should be smoke free, with no sign of burning oil. It should idle smoothly and not hunt. In terms of other features, check the engine does not overheat. 70-80∞C while moving and 90∞C only when stationary is a good sign. Check that the engine starts when hot. Stop at the dealer after the test drive and try restarting it — you don't want to get stranded. This fault is often due to a poor earth connection and is easy to fix. Check that the oil pressure is a good 25-30 lbs. Check that the engine idles smoothly at 1,000 revs and is free revving when accelerating.

Gearbox and clutch

Check that the gear change is smooth and positive. The Rover SD1 gearbox is a bit more notchy than the later Borg-Warner unit. Of the two, the later Borg-Warner gearbox is preferable and these cars tend to go for a higher price. Make sure the clutch works and that there is no fluid leak. This will involve removing the inspection hatch in the inner wing on the driver's side. The clutch should not slip.

Brakes

Make sure that the car brakes in a straight line and that there are no fluid leaks. Any judder when applying the brakes can mean that the discs need replacing.

Front suspension

This can take a hammering. Check the steer-ing rack, wheel bearings, and so on. (The car will need to be jacked up to do this.) Upper ball joint wear can be best detected by rocking the wheel with the car's weight on it. Look at the wear patterns on the front tyres to see if there is any uneven wear. If there is, this can be caused by a front suspension or steering prob-lem. It can also be caused by the wrong tyre pres-sures or too many track days.

Windscreen

There should be no milkiness around the edges. This is a sign of water ingress and de-lamina-tion and particularly affects early cars or ones that have had their windscreen replaced without ensur-ing the windscreen edge is bedded in with sealant. This problem can be hidden by black plastic or paint on the surface of the screen but it is not necessarily a major problem as the screen can be replaced rela-tively cheaply.

Exhaust system

They do tend to rust through, although the stainless steel ones have a very long life. Check the exhaust manifolds and gaskets for leaks

Leaks

Check for water and rust marks on the upholstery and interior. Check that the carpets are dry underneath as well as on top. Seized or rusty seat belts can be a sign of a leaking roof.

Springs and shock absorbers

The car should be level. The shock absorbers should be functional and not leaking. The springs should not be compacted. A simple test is to push down on each corner. If the car is pushed down and then released, it should simply move back into place in a single movement.

Electrics

Do they all work? In particular, the instrumentation, the electric windows and the alarm. Do not forget the ventilation system, radio, cigarette lighter and any extras, such as heated seats and electric mir-rors.

Body panel fit

After looking at a lot of cars, you can tell whether the panel fit is right. The styling makes the door fit less critical, compared to the lines on a Wedge or an S series car. The doors may start to sag with time but this can be corrected — a job best left to a specialist.

Warranty

Check for history. The car should have been regularly serviced. If not, be suspicious. Make sure that the service history complies with the servicing small print on the warranty. This usually means an approved dealer and within 21 days of the appropriate time or the warranty is invalid. Finally... if you haven't driven a really power-ful rear wheel drive car before, take it easy. If you have, still take it easy! A Griffith or Chimaera, especially the 5 litre versions, deserve some serious respect, especially on anything but warm, dry roads. This advice is also applicable when you pick the car up for the first time.