There’s just something about Labrador puppies that makes people want to smile, Austin’s peanut-shaped A30 and A35 range of saloons and commercials has the same effect. With those friendly rounded lines and loyal nature it’s easy to see why. Buy one of these affordable classics and even your bank manager will be smiling thanks to low prices and cheap running costs.

But as with any other car, owning these Austins won’t be such a happy experience if you buy a pup. The surest way to make sure you choose the right car is to take along an expert to point out any faults and work out how much they will cost to rectify. Our Austin A30-A35 expert is Mike Hopley, who supplies parts for these cars through his company Autofurbish.

**BODYWORK**

Mike reckons that most mechanical faults are simple and inexpensive to put right, but the bodies corrode like any other Fifties car. ‘A lot of A30s and A35s are being scrapped at the moment because most people would rather buy a replacement car than tackle a restoration,’ Mike confirms.

If you like the idea of rebuilding one of these cars with all new panels, you will be disappointed because few complete panels are available. It’s not a disaster though. As long as the car is rusty in all of the usual places it can be rebuilt using a combination of full panels, repair section and secondhand body sections.

The first thing to do when you arrive at the vendor’s driveway is get down on your knees at the front of the car. Not to beg him to sell it, but to check the lower part of the front panel next to the wing. Corrosion is caused by a closed-off section behind, which collects mud and water. Open the bonnet and put your hand down inside to check. From here rust will spread to the radiator support panel and front valance beneath.

Options are a reconditioned second-hand complete front end for £215 or repair sections for £23 a side. While you’re on your knees, check the wing edge adjacent to the front panel, particularly around the lights and the area below. This area suffers thanks to a mud-trapping cavity behind, which you can see from under the wheelarch. Wings bolt on so you can remove them to fit repair sections to these areas, and to the lower rear corner behind the wheel. If the wings are beyond saving, you can buy reconditioned or new ones for £250 and £349 respectively.

You need a solid bonnet surround panel to bolt those new wings to, so check for thin or bubbling metal next to the beading strip. Secondhand panels are usually available if the originals are beyond repair.

Look and feel under the arches for a rubber sealing strip between the inner wing/flitch panel and the outer wheel-arch. If it is falling apart or missing, muddy water will find its way onto the front of the sill, the door hinge support panels and the A-panel behind.

If door post corrosion is advanced, you will be able to see it with the door open. Repairs here must be accurate for good door fit but repair panels are available.

Door drop is usually caused by worn brass bushes in the external hinges, but they aren’t difficult to replace. Water tends to find its way past the weather seals into the doors, so you shouldn’t be surprised to find bubbles or worse along the bottom edge of the outer panel. Less expected is rust about half way up the panel, caused by water sitting on a horizontal ledge behind, where the window comes to rest. Repair sections are available for rear doors, but you will be limited to good secondhand panels for the fronts—unless you make your own outer skins, which is quite straightforward because they are flat metal.

When those door seals fail, water will also do its worst to the floor pans particularly where they join the inner...
sill, With the carpets up, check the toeboard area then the lift the rear seat base to look for corrosion around the damper filler apertures.

Peer underneath the car and grasp the sill to feel for tell-tale crunchiness along its length. The inner sill is usually repairable and you can buy jacking points and inner stiffener panels. Have a good look and poke about at the rear end of the sill and the nearby leaf spring hanger.

Now run your fingers around the inside of the wheelarch. If the rubber seal, which closes the gap between inner and outer arch, is failing, expect corrosion in the rear wing behind the wheelarch. It starts where mud is thrown into the bottom of a partially-closed section behind.

As well as looking from beneath the car, open the bootlid and put your hand down inside the aperture behind the rear lights. Be prepared for tricky repairs if your fingers touch crusty metal or filler, or poke through into daylight. The inner wing forms half of the spring hanger box section so rot in this area demands accurate repairs. Still peering into the boot area, look...
BUYING BABY AUSTINS

for rot at the rear of the floor where water ends up after finding its way past the bootlid seal. Repairs here can involve the floor, valance and even the rear panel. If the arch seal has been missing for long enough, water will have attacked the vertical join between the rear and front halves of the wing, so you will need to make full use of the repair panels. Bubbles along the bottom lip of the bootlid means you will have to make your own repair sections or fit a secondhand panel.

The only remaining area to worry about is the horizontal panel which the battery sits on. Split acid attacks the surrounding metal and has a good go at the nearby wiring, fuse box and voltage regulator.

The bonnet is less likely to be rotten, but it’s not a very rigid panel so creases and cracks along the flanges are common. When severe they will affect the curvature of the panel.

MECHANICAL

AFTER ALL of those rotten areas to check, it’s a relief to know that the mechanical parts hold few nasty surprises. Says Mike, ‘After the bodywork, one of the first things I would check is the braking system. The cylinders are prone to seizing if the cars aren’t used much and it can work out expensive if you have to replace everything.’

Take the car for a spin and try the brakes. There are drums all round and the rears are operated by a single hydraulic cylinder acting via mechanical linkages. There should be virtually no play at the pedal and you will need to give it a hefty shove. Even then retardation will be leisurely, but it should be adequate for the car. If the brakes pull to one side or do nothing at all, it’s worth checking further.

Look for signs of leaking cylinders and remove the front wheels and

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**SPECIFICATIONS**

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Check wheel cylinders work and don't leak

Make sure rear brakes work and mounting isn't rotten

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MISSING RUBBER WHEEL ARCH SEAL MEANS SEVERE ROT BEHIND

CORROSION AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS BOXED AREA AFFECTS REAR SPRING HANGER

WEAK CENTRE SECTION OF BONNET IS PRONE TO BUCKLING AND CRACKS

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Launches at the 1953 Motor Show as the A30 Seven, the blue door A30 was Austin's first unitary-construction model powered by a new overhead valve, four-cylinder, 850cc engine, which became known as the A-series. 1955 two-door, split van & countryman estate launched.

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BUYERS GUIDE

AUSTIN A30/A35

continued

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drums to check for piston movement while an assistant presses the pedal. Seal kits are cheap but most cylinders are beyond saving by now, so you may have to fit a new master cylinder at £175, or £80 to have one resleeved, and wheel cylinders costing £150 a pair, £75 a pair if reconditioned.

Peer under the sill on the driver’s side to examine the handbrake where it emerges beneath the floor. Both the lever and the cross tube it mounts on can rot until it breaks away from the sill. Check that the frame cylinder under the floor operates when the brake pedal is pressed. If not, budget on £85 for a replacement.

Inoperative rear brakes could be caused by worn linkages or a stretched Bowden cable.

Before you lower the front of the car from its axle stands, check the front...
AUSTIN A30/A35

It’s a different story if you want to buy a ready-built engine. Expect to pay around £1,000 for a quality lead-free one.

The A30 gearbox is not well-loved thanks to its widely spaced ratios and because it suffers worn synchromesh and jumping out of gear earlier in life than the ‘boxes fitted to the bigger engines. These eventually succumb to the same problems as well as noise in first and reverse. It’s hard to find a usable secondhand box, so it’s worth paying £150 for one which has been checked or £400 for a properly recon-conditioned one, Alternatively it is possible to repair a box using secondhand components.

There are plenty of good second-differentials and propshafts about, so don’t worry if these are a bit clunky on the test drive. You can check where the noise is coming from by raising

suspension for wear. Place a lever between the ground and the tyre and try to lever the tyre upwards. Movement should be negligible. If there is play, look to see if it is caused by the rubber bushes or the thrust washer at the top of the shock absorber cap, or by wear on the wishbone pan where the fulcrum pin passes through.

Grasp the tyre at 12 and six o’clock and try to rock the wheel vertically. Anything more than barely perceptible movement indicates wear in the kingpin bushes. Now move you hands to three and nine o’clock and try to rock the wheel from side to side. There are lots of steering linkages, so just perceptible movement and a gentle clunk is normal. Anything more means wear in the track rod ends, idler, drag links or steering box.

According to Mike, ‘The drivetrain is the least of your worries. The engine and gearbox are the same year-on-year as the Morris Minor, so parts are cheap and plentiful. The A30 gearbox is the only exception.’ That said, it’s better to discover faults before you agree on a price for the car rather than afterwards.

A-series engines have an endearing habit of continuing to run sweetly even when they are in an advanced state of wear. The 803cc engine in the A30 is ready for a rebuild by 45,000 miles but the larger units are good for 100,000.

Make the usual checks for blue exhaust smoke and oil around the filler neck and dipstick hole indicating worn piston rings and bores, and bearing knock or rumble when accelerating from low speed in top gear. Also listen for timing chain rattle from the front of the engine. Suspect burnt valves if the idle speed is uneven. Don’t let a worn engine put you of an otherwise good car, they are easy to rebuild and parts and machining should come to no more than £300.

Ian Gilbody, a joiner/builder from Warrington, bought his 1957 Palm Green A35 in 1990 and a Countryman in 1995. Says Ian: ‘I just wanted an old car for running around in to replace a Triumph Stag that had been stolen.

‘However, as soon as I got the A35 home I took an angle grinder to it — it was full of filler.’

Eighteen months of hard work later Ian had the car back on the road.

‘I really couldn’t fault the Austin. Okay they’re a bit of a drag on the motorway, but for everyday commuting I totally recommend these cars.’
one wheel and trying to rotate it, then attempting to rotate the prop while both rear wheels are on ramps.

**TRIM AND BRIGHTWORK**

**THERE** isn’t much brightwork on these cars and pretty much all of it is available either new or exchange-rechromed. Things start to get expensive if you have to replace all of it, particularly rechromed bumpers or grille at £90 each and £85 respectively or boot hinges costing £69 a pair.

Grille badges are unavailable, which not such a problem on an A35 because you can restore it by repainting the back. The one on the A30 is a transfer which is usually destroyed when you remove it. Jump inside the car and have a good look at the seats and headlining. It may not be lavishly furnished in here, but retrimming the whole lot will work out costly. The fixtures and fittings last well, but the vinyl coverings on the seats and door panels eventually split.

New trim available, but not in identical shades to the original. If there are just a few small areas needing repair, you may be able to use material from a secondhand seat. Otherwise you will have to spend £700 on a full set to keep the colours matching. Add £67 to your budget for a headlining if the old one is tatty or grubby because it probably won’t survive cleaning, and up to £120 for a new carpet set.

**INSURANCE**

£212.16 — 25yo, 2yrs NCB, “unlimited miles, only car, no garage clean licence. £93.68 42yo, full NCB, “3000 miles, second car, garaged, clean licence. Quoted from Firebond (01223 566020) “We normally quote for these limited mileages, but these prices include unlimited mileage, windscreen cover and £250 stereo cover.”

**THANKS TO**

Ian Gilbody, Peter Norbury and John Locke of the Austin A30-35 Owners Club and Mike Hopley of Autofurbish.