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latter do more miles to the gallon, your mother's mileage is so low the higher purchase price of diesels and the more expensive fuel make it uneconomic. Small cars also tend to feel more refined and quieter with petrol engines. **JD**

Q Good sense suggests it is time to replace my nine-year-old left-hand-drive Fiat Barchetta with a newer model. But I can't find anything to match it for holiday trips, especially on twisty mountain roads, around Europe. It has done 55,000 miles and is in good condition. I add about 4,000 miles a year and could budget £2,000 a year for maintenance — is it worth keeping?

DF, Congresbury, Somerset

A Your Fiat has lost the vast majority of its value, so depreciation is not a problem. On a good day, and presuming it is in good condition, it could be worth up to about £4,000 today and should drop no lower than about £2,500 in the next few years. If you hang on to it and keep it in good condition its value may then gradually begin to increase as Barchettas become rarer.

To keep ownership costs down, you could try to arrange limited-mileage, agreed-value insurance, which can cut premium costs considerably and is ideal for your situation and car. For this you will need to set a limit on your annual mileage. You then need to be careful not to exceed the limit, of course, or you may not be covered for any claim.

The "agreed value" part of the cover is useful for older, classic or specialist cars where the value may depend greatly on the condition of the car and where there may be no official guide price available to insurers. Essentially you and the insurer agree on a value you are both happy with.

The biggest enemy to your Barchetta will be lack of use rather than overuse. It is important that you store the car properly when it is not in use, ideally in a warm, dry garage, but if that is not possible, then think about a decent car cover that will protect the paintwork and seals. Maintain the tyre pressures, use a trickle charger for the battery and make sure you start the engine regularly. Ideally, drive the car a few miles once a week to warm up the engine and ensure the clutch and brake pads do not seize.

Your budget of £2,000 for maintenance is probably generous but

it is wise to put the money aside just in case. We suspect that on that perfect sunny day, as you tackle those twisty mountain roads, you will be unlikely to regret having kept the car or spent the money. **JD**

GOT A PROBLEM?

Email your question to carclinic@sunday-times.co.uk, or write to Car Clinic, InGear, The Sunday Times, 3 Thomas More Square, London E98 1ST, with a daytime phone number, your address and as much detail about your car as possible. We can't reply personally, so please don't send original documents or SAEs. Advice is offered without legal responsibility.

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