

Buyers Guide to the Standard Vanguard I, IA and II

This is one of a series of buyers guides on Standard cars

The intended audience is someone who is looking at a prospective purchase.

This guide does not cover looking for all the usual issues when buying any car such as oil pressure, lack of compression, oil in water, noises, rattles, do the electrics work etc, etc, since it assumes all those normal checks will also be done. The guide is intended to identify the good and bad points of the cars. This is issue 1, so may be updated over time.

1. Introduction:

The Vanguard saloon was based loosely on an American Plymouth, sketched by designer Walter Belgrove outside the American embassy in London towards the end of the Second World War. It was launched in July 1947 as a world car intended to replace the 8,12 and 14 models which were essentially revamped pre-war Flying Standards, which continued in production into 1948. Early production was largely for export and so any car dated prior to 1949 is unlikely to be found. In the UK

2. Chassis Numbers

Found on a large square plate on the drivers' side of the bulkhead, under the bonnet

V1-V20000 Known as 20S. Early cars from 1948 to early 1949 distinguishable by no separate sidelights, long doors covering the sills, no rear wheel spats, pull type door handles, no bonnet mascot, small rear screen and right-hand column gear change

V20001-V51000 Still 20S till mid 1949 but with separate sidelights

V51001-V150000 Phase 1-Mid 1949 till late 1951 with short doors, sills, chrome bonnet mascot and column change moved to left of steering wheel.

V150001-V184799 Phase 1A-Late 1951-Dec1952- Slatted grille discontinued for 3 bar grille, different bonnet mascot, push button door handles with door pressing no longer dished under handle, different bonnet profile, larger rear screen and bumpers changed from 3 piece to 1 piece of different profile and different over-riders

N.B. Some cars at the changeover had Phase 1 bodysHELLS with Phase 1A fittings and at the end of production some cars had Phase 2 bulkheads

V200001- V286070 Phase 2 Jan 1953-Aug 1955 Same chassis but bodyshell changed from bulkhead back with wider doors, wider rain gutters, different sill profile and most significantly the beetleback bodyshell has become booted. Bottom bar dropped from grille, chrome pieces between grille and sidelights and rocket bonnet mascot. Mechanically little change save for hydraulic clutch

DEC1-DEC1754 Phase 2 diesel-March 1954-Sep 1955-Britain's first diesel production car. As Phase 2 but chassis strengthened at front end to cope with a much heavier engine. Also distinguished externally by a protruding fuel filler cap whereas the petrol Phase 2 filler is under a flap.

N.B. Steer well clear of any petrol chassis fitted with a diesel engine. It will look front heavy and be dangerous to drive.

All saloon chassis have A DL or DLO suffix.

All left-hand drive chassis have an L after the suffix.

3. Non-saloon variants.

These appeared from about 1949 onwards and retained the Phase 1 or 1A bodyshell. There were no non-saloon Phase 2 bodyshells and if one appears with Phase 2 sills, as a pick-up did on the Heartbeat TV series, it will be a cut down saloon.

Non-saloons appear in the same chassis series as the saloons with differing suffixes. All saloon bodies were built by Fisher and Ludlow.

All other bodies were built by Mulliners of Bordesley Green, Birmingham, later bought out by Standard.

Plates for both can be found in the centre of the bulkhead though cars assembled by the Belgian Imperia plant have their plate there.

The following variants were built:

Pick-ups. Early pick-ups had short rounded back ends. Sometime during Phase 1A production a longer back end was introduced. The chassis number suffix is PU.

Vans. Early vans had a fabric centre roof panel whereas later models had an aluminium panel.

All vans and pick-ups had painted and not chrome trim (save perhaps by special order) and were normally delivered in primer.

Vans and pick-ups were built till April 1958.

Estate cars. Like vans these had an aluminium centre roof panel and the same cargo area doors as the van. They only appeared in 4 passenger door form till the Phase 2 was introduced when a 2 door version also appeared which was more basic with separate van type front seats in lieu of the saloon type bench seat in the 4 door. No 2 door estates are known to survive but 3 Imperia built vans with side windows to a configuration identical to the 2-door estate have recently appeared in Poland, France and Belgium. The former 2 were Phase 2s but the Belgian van was an oddity, a Phase 1 shell with some Phase 1A fittings and side windows with trim that appears to be factory fitted.

Convertibles. A handful were built of the various Phases and were built by Imperia in Belgium, but only 1, a Phase 1A is known to survive though a copy was once created.

Ambulances. 3 ambulances with Phase 1A front ends were built on modified Triumph Renown chassis. 2 are believed to survive but one has been missing for years so if offered check it out carefully.

4. Chassis

Apart from the ambulances and diesels as mentioned above, all Vanguard chassis are virtually the same. The essential structure rarely rots and is immensely strong but should of course be checked carefully. The only common rot spots are the outriggers which serve as jacking points.

5. Bodyshell

Sadly, Vanguard bodyshells can rot badly and the entire structure should be thoroughly checked. The front wings go along the beading along the top and if it is not present, filler will be. MGB rear wing beading can be used as a replacement. The bonnet rusts along its similar centre seam. N.B. The bonnet profile changed slightly between Phase 1 and 1A cars so beware in replacing with the wrong type as it won't fit properly. The floors can rot badly, especially the separate panel covering the gearbox. Inner box section and outer sills rot badly as do rear wheel arches. If the spats are not present on Phase 1s and 1As it probably means the studs supporting them have gone. The rear body corners of all types also rot as can rear bumpers around the boxed mounts. All pre-Phase 2 bodyshells, which includes Phase 2 estates and commercials can rot seriously around the narrow roof guttering (which was wider on Phase 2 saloons) and estates and vans also go around the aluminium roof centre panel. Look for a stained roof lining. All vehicles leak round the windscreen though the Standard Motor Club can supply new rubbers.

6. Engine

Prototype engines were 1800c.c. and production ones 2088cc. However as someone recently discovered when a car appeared sluggish an Ensign 1670cc. may have been fitted. The engine is a wetliner engine and new liners are readily available either to the original 2088cc or TR sizes of 1991 or 2138cc.

There are no serious engine problems to be expected unless the engine has been standing. Use 20/50 oil. The oil filter element can be bought at most auto factors. Ask for early Metro Automatic.

7. Clutch and gearbox

The Phase 2 has a hydraulic clutch and twin bore master cylinder the same as the TR2 mounted underfloor. The earlier cars have a mechanical clutch. All cars have a 3-speed column change box with synchro on all 3 speeds. The box is similar to the TR2 box. Phase 1s and earlier 1As had an optional mechanical overdrive on top and 2nd gears and later 1As and Phase 2s had an electrically operated system. The latter is again similar to that in early TRs. An overdrive makes a remarkable difference to the car turning it into a 65/70m.p.h. motorway cruiser that will achieve 25m.p.g. which is not bad for a car weighing nearly a ton and a half.

An overdrive can be fitted using fairly readily available TR parts but would be expensive.

8. Cooling system and heater

Only the Phase 2 system was pressurised but some earlier cars may have had a later rad fitted. If the car is prone to overheating it is unlikely a simple flushing will cure the problem and a re-core is recommended. The heater was an optional extra and even then, is quite small, occupying only half the available space in the centre of the bulkhead. A bigger export heater is fitted to some cars. Hoses are available through the Standard Motor Club.

9. Steering

The steering box is either Burman or Cam Gears. There are variations in the outer tie rod assemblies as between early cars, Phase 1A and Phase 2 but so long as all the parts are compatible there's no problem.

10. Brakes

As stated above, Phase 2s have a twin bore master cylinder which can sometimes be sourced reconditioned or even new at TR events. Earlier cars have a single bore cylinder similar to that in the Morris Minor, again mounted underfloor. Wheel cylinders sourced from Australia are available through the Standard Motor Club.

11. Wheels

All cars have 16" wheels and FX4 taxi radial tyres will fit and improve handling considerably. Phase 2 wheels are marginally wider but taxi tyres will still fit. Seek advice from a tyre specialist.

12. Interior

Phase 1As and 2s had vinyl headlining and earlier cars cloth. Interior trim was Vynide but leather was

an option. The rear of the front seat was a Furflex type of material and is invariably very faded if original. White dashboard knobs invariably crack and have just been remanufactured. Radio housings also crack. Instrument face colours vary for each type and can occasionally be found at autojumbles.

13. Paint

Phase 2 interior painted surfaces are body colour. Earlier cars are grey. Externally various colours were available including silver, gold and green metallic. Estate car colours had different part numbers to saloons and commercials were normally supplied in primer. Under bonnet Saloons were black painted but estates were body colour.

14. Chrome trim

The only chrome parts available new are remanufactured push button door handles for Phase 1As and 2s and the D pieces into which they fit. They can be obtained through the Standard Motor Club. The earlier pull type can occasionally be found at autojumbles. Take extreme care if replacing window glass as the fragile chrome strips over the rubbers are unrepairable and irreplaceable.

15. Prices

Prices of all types of saloon are much the same and will largely depend on condition rather than model. A couple of hundred pounds should buy a wreck, but it will cost a fortune to restore. A sound cosmetically challenged car with an MOT would fetch about £2000 and £4000 would buy a really good one. A concours Vanguard saloon would probably be worth about £6000. For estates and commercials if you could find a good one, add £2000/£3000 to saloon prices but rough ones would not have a differential of more than a couple of hundred.

16. Conclusion

Vanguards from 1947 to the end of Phase 2 production are becoming extremely rare cars. However, they are one of the few cars of their era that are still capable of running up high mileages between major engine repairs and with the overdrive with which many survivors are fitted are capable of maintaining motorway speeds without problems. Buy a good one and you will have a rewarding useable classic. It goes almost without saying that you should join the Standard Motor Club for their excellent spares scheme, monthly magazine, social events and rallies and access to knowledgeable fellow owners.

Please note that this buyer's guide only highlights certain facts and is not exhaustive. If you intend to buy a Standard car, whether as a running vehicle or a restoration project, always ensure that it is inspected by a qualified person before driving it on the road.

Issue 2 - February 2015