

MOTORING

By Colin Dryden

Try majoring on Minors

IF THERE is one thing that unites new young motorists and old drivers in the sunset of their years it is the need for a cheap, simple and long-lasting vehicle. All too often neither group is exactly overburdened with cash, and the need to spend it wisely is vital.

No one can advise the young because they know it all, but we motoring correspondents are often asked by those about to retire: "As it's probably the last car I shall buy, what should I get?"

I have long felt that far too many people spend too much on their cars anyway out of some strange compulsion to keep up with the Joneses. The young cannot afford to, and the old certainly do not need to. One of the compensations of senior citizenship must be the relief of being able to get off the expenditure treadmill and leave the rest of the world struggling in the rat race.

Everyone seems to be obsessed with the idea of buying something *new*. But why? Provided it is not bought from a private individual where the writ of the consumer protection law does not seem to run, there is a great deal to be said for buying a good used car when money is short, and even when it is not. The reputable dealer will guarantee his used cars, and motoring organisations can provide engineer's reports.

It is really only the high-mileage man who needs to be overly concerned with petrol consumption. The elderly motorist, pottering about, covering, say, 5,000 miles a year or less, could even afford to move up a class if the fancy takes him, provided he buys second-hand.

After years of driving cars in the middle of the Escort range, costing about £7,000 new and giving 35 mpg, he could think of something like a 200 Series Volvo. This costs over £9,000 new, but A-registration, four-year-old models are now available at half that price. Volvos are built like tanks and last well, so a good used one should suit a retired person who is status-conscious. The fact that

he will get 25 mpg instead of 35 mpg is neither here nor there on a pottering mileage.

But the driver who wants guaranteed longevity (for his car if not himself), low running costs and timeless style need look no further than a good refurbished Morris Minor. Such a car should provide what he wants far better than any up-to-the-minute, transverse-engined, fuel-injected, high-tech model. These are cars for pre-yuppies, not the elderlies who want durability rather than style, performance and the latest four-wheeled fashion. On a small income the last thing you need is to lose a few hundred pounds in depreciation as soon as a new car leaves the showroom.

Charles Ware, who runs the Morris Minor Centre at Lower Bristol Road, Bath, thinks so highly of the basic car's ability to provide sound transport even into the 21st century that he has virtually re-engineered it. For those who feel that the Minor might not be comfortable enough, Mr Ware has all the answers: new seats, trimmed in nylon, cloth or hide; revised suspension, brakes hydraulics, new engines; the lot.

Some Minor owners will spend up to £10,000 to have a durable car that keeps its value, but one of the car's great virtues is that it can be refurbished over the years, a bit at a time. The Marina was no great shakes as a concept, though there was nothing wrong with many of its components and some of them are being used to modernise the Minor which goes back to the 1949 model year. Spare parts are not a problem and, given sufficient demand, Charles Ware is prepared to go into production with a complete replacement body-shell for the Minor traveller at about £2,300.

There are not many cars, properly serviced and looked after, that lose no value over five years like a good Minor. None of us can motor for ever, and what more practical legacy to leave to a grandchild than a car to provide him with years of durable motoring?