

CLASSIC DRIVER

Bristol 412 'Targa Zagato': A cabriolet like no other

Lead

If it feels cool and wintry on the Pacific coast and the sun is refusing to shine, perhaps it's time to head for the warmth of Palm Springs? But please - not in just any old cruiser...

The route from Los Angeles to Palm Springs on Interstate 10 is convenient, but offers no great scenery; so what car might you choose to liven up your trip to the desert? You could of course take the traditional classic approach in a quick and comfortable early Mercedes SL, or how about something a little more unusual? And a great deal more angular?

Extravagance meets extravagance



"The result of a clash of automotive eccentrics"

The 1978 Bristol 412 Zagato Targa SII has everything you need for a relaxed road trip, along with a stylishly extravagant appearance ideal for the streets of Palm Springs. Only around 30 examples of the Series II were assembled - by hand, at Bristol's Filton plant. With its targa roof, the car gives you the choice of leaving the hardtop at home or storing it in the boot, allowing up to four people to enjoy the blue sky. And as if the British manufacturer hadn't already produced something with sufficient rarity value, the 412 was helped along by Carrozzeria Zagato, known for its extravagant designs: in the seventies, the Bristol 412 Zagato was aptly described as "the result of a clash of automotive eccentrics".

Solid technology for everyday life



However, while the exterior of the Bristol is weird and wonderful, under the skin it harbours a touch of conservatism. The engine is a solid 5.9-litre Chrysler V8 with 225 horsepower, mated to three-speed automatic transmission, entirely sufficient to move the Bristol 412 SII swiftly up the San Bernardino Mountain. Inside the cabin of the fine specimen pictured, you'll find such amenities as a leather interior, air-conditioning, powered windows and a sound system. Incidentally, this Bristol was priced, in its day, just below a Rolls-Royce Corniche.

A little bit of courage might be needed to buy this strange British classic for everyday use; but those who dare will have a convertible like (almost) no other.

Photos: Jan Richter

Gallery

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