



TARGA 4S FIRST DRIVE



merging into one and, from this angle, appearing to cascade down to the front deck lid. Although adhering to the same basic principles as the previous Targa's roof – a large glass panel that slides rearwards to lie beneath the rear window – several improvements have been made for the new car.

The 'Sundim' glass, for instance, now filters out two-thirds of the prevailing sunlight and lets only 17 per cent of the thermal energy get through – when the roof is closed, obviously. And the electrically-powered roller sunshade is of a new type of fabric that increases the shade protection from 50 to 96 per cent. New switches, located on the centre console between the front seats, control both the roof and the sunshade.

As before, the Targa is perfect for people who sort of fancy the idea of open-top motoring but really can't be bothered with having to brush their hair at the end of a drive or sweep dust and dead bugs from the footwells. In the Targa,

you're acutely aware of the gaping aperture above your head, but the only physical manifestation of the outside world that enters the cabin is a very light breeze that ruffles your hair with about as much vigour as an ancient aunt who's scared of kids. Even the cold is largely kept at bay – during a chilly night drive through the hills around Lake Garda, we were in rolled-up shirtsleeves with the roof open. The only real intruder is the wail of the engine, and its presence is always a welcome one. Roof shut and the sunshade unfurled, and it's just like being in a coupé.

The performance characteristics of the 997's 3.6-litre and 3.8-litre flat-six engines have been well documented in the pages of this magazine, so we won't dwell on them here, except to say – as you might expect – that they're fabulous. Punchy, sonorous and, for the levels of outright performance that they offer, remarkably economical and clean.

Our Targa 4 test car, optionally equipped with