

# My First Car: MK1 Escort 1300XL

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The Mk1 Escort introduced PHer John Denny to RWD. He never looked back...



It's 1990 and as an excited teenager who had been watching rallying for the last 10 years I longed for an RS2000 – and I couldn't wait for my first car. As a surprise my parents bought me a 1971 Escort. Not quite an RS2000, but a 1300XL four-door. It was a wonderful brown colour with Beige 'pleather' seats, a wood dash surround, chrome wheel trims, and of course rear-wheel drive.

The car had no MOT and I had no driving license, so what is the best thing for a young lad to do? That's right; install the stereo and 100 watt speakers. My step dad did not quite understand the need for this as the car wasn't in a drivable state, but then again what did he know?

We then set about working on the car: welding, sorting the tyres, and completing various other tasks that as a car novice I didn't understand or car about as all I wanted to do was drive it. A few weeks later we had an MOT, tax, insurance and a red L-plate, and my mum promised to show me how to drive.

We started learning to drive, feeding the wheel, going up and down the gears nice and slow, going carefully around the bends, and getting more and more confident with every experience. Then one day, while going a little too fast round one of the tighter bends on our learning circuit, the rear end stepped out with a little tyre squeal and a big smile from me. Then I remember being slapped and reprimanded my mother.

I had learned what a rear-wheel drive car was all about, and it wasn't soon before my 21-year-old mate was 'teaching me' the art of driving a car sideways, while rolling cigarettes on his knee.



Unfortunately one late December evening whilst being 'taught' we were driving around our country lanes. It was a little icy but I knew what I was doing, after all I'd been learning for at least two weeks, and I attempted a 90 degree corner on iced cow crap. I dropped my little Escort into the ditch. I don't know who was more surprised, my cigarette rolling mate, or his dog that was asleep on the rear seat.

Four hours later I had a tricky conversation with my parents explaining how I had destroyed the car they'd bought and MOT'd for me. I was telling them how it needed to be scrapped (so I could buy my MK2 2-door) but alas they had other ideas, and lent me the money to fix it. The car was fixed, and had the complete front end repaired, and even came back with upgraded round heap lamps.

Though it was a great workhorse, and got me swiftly through my license and then on through college, as soon as I'd paid my mother back the little 1300 xl was swapped for a Mk2 Escort 1300 popular two-door. The weedy lump was swiftly replaced with a 1760 RS motor, and then the fun really started.

Since my first car I have always owned rear-wheel drive cars, from Escorts to Mantas, even an old 911, but currently run what I believe to be one of the best rear wheel drive cars: the E36 M3 Evo GT2.

Had it not been for the little Escort, I would have never wandered down a road that lead me to fall in love with rear-wheel drive, and for this fact the escort lives on in my memory as one of the greatest little cars of all time.