



Eighties old school

Whether you wanted performance, practicality or cheap motoring, there was always a Sierra to fit the bill. And there still is.

FORD SIERRA: 1982-1993

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN COLLEY
WORDS: RICHARD DREDGE



PRICE CHECK:

Mint: £1000-£3000
Average: £200-£1000
Rough: free-£250

Be wary of any carburettor-equipped car fitted with the infamous automatic choke

FORD HAS always been good at bringing motoring to the masses using a simple formula of stacks of choice at ultra-low prices. So it was with the Sierra. With humble rep-specials at one end of the spectrum and the corking Cosworth at the other, there was a car for everyone. Engines ranged from a 1.3-litre four cylinder to a 2.9-litre V6, and body styles included everything from a two-door saloon to a five-door estate.

For those who craved ultimate power and speed there were also the turbocharged Cosworth models. While these remain very collectible and relatively expensive there are dozens of more affordable Sierras out there. We're going to concentrate on those.

BODYWORK

The Sierra was one of the last of the old-school Fords, built cheaply and sometimes quick to rust. Post-1987 cars are less prone to rot as Ford invested in better anti-corrosion. Panels are getting harder to find and, with values so low, it's not worth considering

any car that's really rusty.

Your first port of call when looking for rust is the rear wings around the wheelarches. Once rust starts here, it'll eat the surrounding panels and it's common for the rot to go through to the interior. When it's gone that far it's time to bin the car, as the panels aren't available to put it right. Also, once the car has got to that stage, the chances are that other parts of the car (which aren't so visible) will also be rosey.

Next stop is the doors, which rot along their bottom edges and round the windows. If the lower part of the doors hasn't been treated early on, there's a good chance the frames will have started to rot, and by this stage the best course of action is to fit a better secondhand item. If you can find one.

Sills can rot too, and as they're structural it's important that they haven't been bodged. As with the rear wheelarches, repair panels are available, but if corrosion is extensive just walk away and find a better example. Also look underneath the car, and especially around the box sections that strengthen the floorpan as they can rot badly.

Front wings don't usually give problems, but lift the bonnet and there might be one or two horrors beneath. The most obvious is a rotten slam panel, which corrodes where it meets the inner wings. Less obvious is the crossmember, which sits behind the bumper.

Generally, if the slam



It may get mucky, but it's robust enough to scrub up nicely, thank you.

panel is rotten the crossmember will be in a similar state.

Other rust traps include the sunroof surround, battery tray (which is fiddly to replace), the bulkhead and the suspension turrets. Replacing these is difficult, and probably the car will not be worth saving if the turrets have corroded significantly. Even if everything seems fine, take a good look behind any plastic body mouldings for evidence of rust.

If there's no major rot that you can see, there's the possibility of badly repaired accident damage. The Sierra was famed for its ripple

effect problems, which allowed a minor shunt from behind to twist the whole bodyshell. To make sure that you don't get caught out with a car affected by this, check that the floorpan isn't full of ripples.

ENGINES

The Sierra range is convoluted, with five main engines plus the twin-cam unit in the Cosworth. Along with the 2.3-litre diesel powerplant borrowed from Peugeot there was the Pinto unit that powered the four-cylinder cars, with capacities of 1.3, 1.6, 1.8 or 2.0 litres. There was a V6 unit

in 2.3, 2.8 and 2.9-litre sizes and then the CVH unit appeared in various forms. That leaves the 2.0-litre twin-cam that did such sterling service in the Cosworth and from 1989 there was a 2-litre eight-valve DOHC unit called the I4. Nothing is common between the I4 and Pinto/Cosworth engine.

Be wary of any carburettor-equipped car that's still fitted with one of Ford's infamous automatic chokes. These can cause over-fuelling which washes the oil down the bores causing premature wear. Check for oil being burned



Which is which

- October 1982: Sierra launched with 1.3-, 1.6-, 2-litre petrol and 2.3-litre diesel engines. Three or five-door hatchbacks and estate offered. Auto option on 1.6 and 2-litre. Five-speed optional on all models apart from 1.3
- May 1983: Three-door XR4i arrives, with 150bhp 2.8-litre V6
- October 1984: Restyled front end and 1.8-litre engine on sale
- January 1985: Five-door 2.0S appears, along with XR4x4, a five-door four-wheel drive XR4i
- May 1986: Cosworth arrives as three-door only, with 204bhp 2-litre turbo petrol four cylinder engine
- March 1987: Facelift, with bigger glass area, revised nose, upgraded trim and quieter engines. Sapphire four-door saloon also arrives
- July 1987: Cosworth RS500 on sale, with more power due to revised fuelling. Features additional tailgate spoiler
- February 1988: Cosworth now available only with a four-door saloon bodyshell
- June 1988: New 1.8-litre petrol engine
- December 1988: XR4x4 gets a 2.9-litre unit
- March 1989: Basic models now called Classic (saloon) and Laser (hatch/estate). 2.0 DOHC replaces ageing Pinto
- February 1990: Facelift with smoked rear lenses, clear front indicators. 1.8-litre turbodiesel replaces 2.3, Cosworth gets four-wheel drive and more power (now 220bhp). 2-litre DOHC XR4i, 2.0 GT and XR4x4 appear, along with 2.0 Ghia 4x4 estate
- October 1991: Facelift; all models get colour-coded bumpers, revised interior with hooded dash, improved level of trim and equipment. 1.6 injected CVH engine replaces Pinto on most 1600 models apart from Azura
- August 1992: Catalytic converters fitted to all petrol-engined cars
- April 1993: Mondeo replaces Sierra



You have a good choice of engine in the Sierra, from a 1.3 to a 2.9 V6.

Check for oil being burned when the engine is revved. If there are clouds of smoke it's time for a replacement

when the engine is revved. If there are clouds of smoke from the exhaust, it's time for a replacement power plant.

The most common engine fitted to the Sierra is the overhead camshaft Pinto unit. Faults include camshafts and followers going west at the drop of a hat and the oil spray bar that feeds the followers getting blocked. Regular oil changes are essential to stop these problems occurring, so check the car's documentation for evidence of servicing.

The CVH that superseded the Pinto also needs regular oil changes to keep it in rude health. Poorly serviced engines end up with blocked oil pumps that starve the cylinder head of oil, and the hydraulic tappets need oil to work properly; the symptom is severe rattling from the top end. CVHs can also eat camshafts and quickly wear out valve stem seals. On the test drive, accelerate and then lift off the throttle, if the valve stem seals are shot there'll be clouds of blue oil smoke visible in the rear view mirror.

The I4 can have timing chain problems above 130,000 miles if

the wrong grade of oil has been used. Ford recommends 10W/30 but something heavier like 15W/50 can over-tension the chain and lead to premature breakage. A safe compromise is 10W/40 and the Ford Sierra Owners' Club (FSOC) recommends changing the

timing chain every 100,000 miles to minimise the risk of breakage. The I4 DOHC head gaskets also fail causing overheating. The cylinder head is particularly sensitive to this – it cracks readily if it's had a gasket blow or has been seriously overheated.

The V6 powerplants are understressed and long-lived. If properly serviced they'll last in excess of 200,000 miles, and once more the key is regular oil changes. The later 2.9-litre catalysed units have hydraulic tappets that can be adjusted as easily standard tappets.

TRANSMISSION

At first, all Sierras were fitted with four-speed manual gearboxes, although a three-speed automatic or five-speed gearbox were optional on the 1.6 or 2-litre models. Every XR4i had five gears and by the end of 1986 only cars with a 1.8-litre engine or smaller had a four-ratio gearbox as standard. By March 1987, only the basic 1.6 had a four-speeder.

The Sierra's manual gearchange could never be described as one of the most fluid, and when the transmission oil is cold it can be notchy. But the gearboxes themselves are pretty tough, and even once they've started to whine they'll keep going. The five-speed MT75 gearbox that appeared in 1989 is a much better unit; it's tougher and nicer to use.

Back axes will go on until the end of time and none of the transmissions are unreliable. But cars with 4WD are more complicated. If the car has been used with unmatched wheel and tyre sizes, or it's been towed on a dolly rather than trailered, the viscous coupling in the transfer gearbox may be seriously damaged. If it is, the damage will be obvious from the awful racket coming from the transmission when the car is driven. That means



a new transfer box at £600-plus for a reconditioned unit or £1500 for a new one.

STEERING AND SUSPENSION

Rack-and-pinion steering was fitted to all Sierras and gives no trouble as long as the gaiters are intact. A standard rack costs around £30, while power-assisted racks for V6 cars cost £100-plus.

Like most Fords with track control arms, the bushes contained within aren't up to the job. They wear quickly, and replacing them is a pain so you end up having to change the whole arm at a typical cost of £17 per unit. If the bushes have worn out, there'll be vibration under braking and the steering will be vague. To put it right you're better off fitting polyurethane bushes to the existing arms, provided the balljoint isn't badly worn. Budget on £20-£50 for this. 2.8 units are not available.

If there's a screeching noise coming from the front suspension

it's probably the wheel bearings on their way out.

The last check to make

is that the front dampers are OK.

See if there

are any

leaks and

push the

car down

sharply at

each corner.

If it rises then

settles quickly, it's

fine; if it keeps

bouncing up and

down, the dampers need

replacing. The dampers are

sealed units, so cannot be

dismantled, so wholesale

replacement is the only solution.

That's not a major problem as

they're cheap at £30 a pair for the

rears and £60 a pair for the fronts.

The 4WD uses gas units at the rear

at £50 per side. On V6 cars with

power-assisted steering, check the

drive belts to the power-steering



In the Eighties, the car in front was a be-spoilered Sierra.



XR4i: 1982-1985	2.0i: 1985-1986	RS COSWORTH: 1986 - 1987	COSWORTH 4x4: 1988 - 1993	XR4i 2.8: 1988 - 1993
ENGINE 2792cc/6-cyl	ENGINE 1993cc/4-cyl	ENGINE 1993cc/4-cyl	ENGINE 1993cc/4-cyl	ENGINE 2933cc/6-cyl
POWER 150bhp/5700rpm	POWER 115bhp/5500rpm	POWER 204bhp/6000rpm	POWER 204bhp/6000rpm	POWER 150bhp/5700rpm
TORQUE 161lb ft/3800rpm	TORQUE 118lb ft/4000rpm	TORQUE 205lb ft/4500rpm	TORQUE 205lb ft/4500rpm	TORQUE 172lb ft/3000rpm
GEARBOX 5-sp man	GEARBOX 5-sp man	GEARBOX 5-sp man	GEARBOX 5-sp man	GEARBOX 5-sp man
TOP SPEED 129mph	TOP SPEED 118mph	TOP SPEED 149mph	TOP SPEED 150mph	TOP SPEED 129mph
0-60MPH 7.7sec	0-60MPH 9.5sec	0-60MPH 6.2sec	0-60MPH 6.1sec	0-60MPH 8.6sec
MPG 22mpg	MPG 24mpg	MPG 22mpg	MPG 20mpg	MPG 20mpg
LENGTH 14ft 8in (4.46m)	LENGTH 14ft 8in (4.46m)	LENGTH 14ft 8in (4.46m)	LENGTH 14ft 9in (4.49m)	LENGTH 14ft 8in (4.46m)
WIDTH 5ft 8in (1.73m)	WIDTH 5ft 8in (1.73m)	WIDTH 5ft 8in (1.73m)	WIDTH 5ft 7in (1.70m)	WIDTH 5ft 8in (1.73m)
WEIGHT 2656lb (1206kg)	WEIGHT 2141lb (971kg)	WEIGHT 2688lb (1216kg)	WEIGHT 2756lb (1250kg)	WEIGHT 2665lb (1210kg)



Check body panels carefully, especially the extent of rust around the rear arches.

pump. If they have perished they will cost £35 to replace.

WHEELS & BRAKES

Warped brake discs (indicated by juddering under braking) and seized wheel cylinders (which lead to rear brake imbalance under hard braking) are common; in the case of the latter it's best to fit complete new units. Rebuild kits rarely do the job, and it's the same with brake discs; replacement rather than skimming is best. A new pair of standard Girling discs typically cost £25. Caliper pistons can also cause problems, because they seize and reduce

braking power. New or rebuilt calipers are the fix, at £40-£80 depending on model.

On cars with rear disc brakes, the handbrake tends to seize on if it's not used regularly, leading to screeching from the rear as the car is driven. Replacing the rear calipers is often the only answer.

TRIM

Trim panels, seats and carpets are all unobtainable new so check that everything is complete and in decent condition. Luckily the trim is durable and even the dirtiest interior will respond well to a good clean.

ELECTRICS

The quality of the connectors used within the Sierra's wiring loom was patchy, so it's common for things to work intermittently.

Although the headlamps will keep working quite happily, the reflective coating behind the lens tends to corrode badly, meaning an MoT failure. Also check for stone-chipped lenses; replacing the whole unit is the only answer, at £10-£20 for a decent used one.

CONCLUSION

Mention the Sierra and be-spoilered Cosworths spring to mind. But there are so many other

models out there worth a look, and some are starting to get pretty rare, so while values are on the floor now is the time to wade in.

Because so many Sierras were used by fleets, low-mileage cars are hard to find. But they are out there. Late 4WD V6 cars are now starting to become prized, and because they're relatively modern they offer a good driving experience. But if you buy a Sierra to work on, remember that parts interchangeability is poor between the four-wheel drive and the rear-wheel drive cars, as it is between the four and six-cylinder models. **STOP**

PRACTICAL CLASSIC?

SO IS IT A PRACTICAL CLASSIC?

Definitely. These cars were built to be serviced quickly to minimise running costs. They're simply engineered and easy to get parts for.

HOTLINKS

- www.fordsierracub.co.uk
- www.xroc.co.uk

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE TO DRIVE?

Six-cylinder cars are the ones to go for if you want torque, but a 2.0 ER DOHC will give a V6 a run for its money thanks to the lower gearing.

WILL I FIT BEHIND THE WHEEL?

There's plenty of space front and rear, although access to the back of the three-door cars is tight. Even better, there's plenty of room for those samples and space to hang your jacket...

WHAT BODGES SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

- Wheelarches, door bottoms
- Badly repaired accident damage

WHAT SHOULD I PAY?

Banger status means running cars are being given away while a pint of beer will secure grotty but running examples with the odd pleasant surprise. Even the best four-cylinder Sierras (excluding Cosworths) are worth less than £1000. Exceptional six-cylinder cars can be worth

up to £4000 while tatty six-pots can be had for just £250.

WHAT WILL INSURANCE COST ME?

Comprehensive cover for a £3000 1984 Sierra XR4i in Peterborough:

- £489 for 25yo, two years' NCB, clean licence,

10,000 miles, only cat, kept on driveway, dub member.

- £173 for 42yo, full NCB, clean licence, 3000 miles, second cat, garaged, dub member.

Quotes from Firebond (08704 440 556)

WHO ARE THE SPECIALISTS?

Tuning

- Specialised Engines, Essex, 01375 378 606

Parts

- Ford dealers
- Ford Parts UK, Salisbury, www.fordpartsuk.com (online only)
- Mainly Fords, Glasgow, 0141 775 9146, www.mainlyfords.co.uk
- Mitchell Dismantling (Cheltenham),

01242 672 811, www.mitchell-dismantling.co.uk/ford-parts/

- XR4i Spares Centre, Essex, 01375 672 641

WHAT ABOUT SPARES PRICES?

With so many Sierra variants, these prices (from Mainly Fords) are only a guide to what you'll pay.

● Exhaust (mild steel)	£30
● Front wing (pattern)	£30
● Front wing (Ford)	£70
● Front bumper (used)	£20
● Front bumper (Ford)	£180
● Dampers (front)	£30 each
● Dampers (rear)	£15 each
● Clutch kit	£50
● Alternator	£50
● Starter Motor	£60 (exch)

Some models are getting rare, so while values are on the floor, now is the time to buy



ARE ANY PARTS HARD TO GET?

- Interior trim
- Timing wheels for 2.3 and 2.8 V6

CAN THEY COPE WITH UNLEADED?

Pre-1986 cars generally need additives or inserts. Electronically fuel-injected cars are OK while post-1986 carburetted cars need the ignition timing adjusted unless they are running on super unleaded.

WHERE ARE THE IDENTIFYING MARKS?

There are two plates on the slam panel: the VIN plate and the body plate. The chassis number is also stamped into the floorpan between the driver's seat and the sill. Lift the flap of carpet to see if this is intact.

WHICH OWNERS' CLUB SHOULD I JOIN?

- Sierra Owners' Club. More than 200 members, £12pa, or £18 for joint membership. Quarterly newsletter. Offers technical help, online forum, parts discounts, insurance scheme and national meetings.
- XR Owners' Club. 1400 members. £20pa plus £4.50 joining fee. Bi-monthly newsletter Xtra. Technical help, online forum, insurance scheme, XR4i register, parts discounts, merchandise, regional and national meets.

WHICH IS THE BEST BOOK?

- High Performance Sierras & Merkurs. Brooklands, ISBN 1-85520-0767
- The Sporting Fords, Vol 4: Sierras, by Graham Robson. MRP, ISBN 0-947981-55.

THANKS TO

Jim Christie of the Ford Sierra Owners' Club and John Harrison of the XR Owners' Club. Also Kenny

Easton, the owner of the XR4i photographed.