

# Alton Brown Shouldn't Have Sold His 2002



That's right, I drove TV Chef Alton Brown's old car. I even found Alton Brown's pencil in the glove box with Alton Brown's teeth marks. For real though, who cares about a TV chef when a 1972 BMW 2002 is in the picture? For me, this is a story of meeting a hero. They say to never do it. I did it and I'm glad I did.

After a typical morning internet hunt I found a rare creature for my neck of the woods: A Nevada Tan 1972 2002. Down in the south, it's all Camaro-this and GTO-that. Not a lot of love for little German boxes. Up to this point I'd only seen two in real life, which is why I decided to grab my current car's title and go see it in person.

The description boasted about the beefy shocks, a Webber carb, and that the previous owner was Alton Brown. The prestige of Chef Brown and that Nevada color didn't win me over, but I still found myself parked in front of the local classics shop. The guy selling the car opened the shop's showroom garage and there it sat.

No one can explain why one car grabs you more than any other, but amongst the 911s, M5s, and other heavy hitters, that little 2002 glowed. I couldn't focus on anything else. I walked up and pushed its door release and was greeted with a reassuring click of quality and a smell of vintage. I don't know what that smell is, gas, vinyl, a little BO..., I just know that's what heaven smells like. This was bucket-list stuff.

I've been to a million car shows and seen cars that I would love to have in my garage. But the 2002 is different. It's on my never changing short list of cars. Why the love for this 4 cylinder boxy German? I'll admit I've got a thing for the BMW roundel, but this car goes far beyond that. To me, it represents all a car needs to be and nothing else.

It's just a box with four wheels designed in a country full of perfectionists. Honestly, sitting behind the wheel you can feel that whoever put the car together really wanted to make the best they could. The cockpit is filled with just the right amount of buttons and knobs and each one clicks into place like the buttons on an old tape recorder. I got out and lifted the reverse clamshell hood. Seeing the engine I pictured the Germans leaving the factory in their matching overalls, heading to the beer garden to celebrate a job well done back in '72.

The seller who had generously left me alone to bask in my obsession came over with an amazing question: want to take it for a spin? I thought I'd yell, "yes!" and grab the keys but I paused. To the seller, this was just a car with some semi famous past owner. But I was about the grab the keys of a car that I'd been hyping in my mind since I first saw it in some obscure middle school library book. How could it live up to what I was expecting when I turned that key?

Of course I said screw that crap and got in the driver's seat. I moved the seat into the position with an instant satisfying click. No waiting while some tired motor moaned. I turned the key and the car awoke. It wasn't an event. It just did it like it was supposed to, like it had for 40 something years. I grabbed the wooden shifter and clicked it into reverse. We rolled back, I put it in first, and we were off.

I was all ready for disappointment. I was ready to realize that modern cars really were better than the classics. I was ready for vague boat steering and iffy brakes . I figured it'd be slow and quaint. I'd driven a few cars from the 60's and 70's and that's how they all were, like really good-looking tractors. This wasn't that. It had all the vintage you wanted with fake wood, quirky turn signals, and that great smell of fuel, but nothing to get in the way of driving.

The power was adequate - dare I say spirited. The steering was solid and connected. The brakes worked without fear. The shifter is right where you want it along with every other button and knob. I'd say about 5 minutes behind the wheel and I wasn't thinking about the car anymore. I was just enjoying driving. I could feel the road and my hands and feet were controlling the car in a way I'd never experienced. It was purely mechanical. This car lets you feel every single thing both you and it are doing. It's exactly what I imagined. It's a tool designed to make driving fun. It's steel, wood, and vinyl that wrap around you and let you know you're driving. Nothing's done for you, but nothing's difficult.



I piloted the car back to the shop and climbed out. The past 30 minutes had disappeared somewhere. Things like traffic, awkward small talk, and an asthmatic AC were of no bother behind that wooden Alpina wheel. I got out and just stared at the car. What did Alton Brown have going on that he no longer needed this in his life? After some pleasant day dreams, reality slowly started trickling back in.

I wasn't ready to sell my car, I had nowhere to park the 2002, and the longer I stared at that Nevada color, the more I hated it for muddling an otherwise perfect car. A handshake, some nice talk, and it was over. I was back in my modern car driving home.

They say never meet your heroes. I figured that's because they'll let you down. The truth is if your hero lives up to your hype, everything else will let you down. Why can't everything be that good? Yeah, it wasn't fast or overflowing with luxury like modern Beamers, but why should it be? Click it down a gear, hit the gas, find the apex and if you're not smiling... If you're reading this Alton, you made a mistake.