

Buying a Porsche doesn't mean I'm having a midlife crisis

Why do people assume sports car purchases signify a struggle to find meaning in life? That's a myth I'm happy to debunk

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Writer James Foxall says that he has 'long hankered after' a Boxster CREDIT: Christopher Pledger

Are you having a midlife crisis? A full-on age-inappropriate-clothes, start-dating-someone-much-younger, buy-a-sports-car life event? I didn't think I was. Then I saw some research that suggested I had just bought a stereotypical "midlife crisis" car.

Apparently, the 11-year-old Porsche Boxster I took ownership of towards the end of last year is more than just a great sports car. Apparently it's also an indicator that as I approach the end of my 50s I could be going through some sort of watershed.

And don't you snigger, Mr "I've forked out for a 911". The larger, more famous Porsche model is considered the most typical car purchase for people having a midlife crisis, according to research by an insurer. The same company's Boxster is next, followed by the Aston Martin Vantage and Jaguar F-Type. The Audi TT and modern Ford Mustang placed equal fifth.

According to *Psychology Today*, a midlife crisis is "emotional turmoil marked by a strong desire for change". Psychologist Dr Julie Hannan, the author of *The Midlife Crisis Handbook*, added: "It is a crisis of identity when people question who they are, what they're doing and struggle to find purpose and meaning in their life. They feel lost."



James Foxall in his Porsche Boxster, which is considered the second most likely car purchase made by men having a midlife crisis, according to research | CREDIT: Christopher Pledger

So the midlife crisis is a "thing". And Dr Hannan told me it can be severe, too, disrupting the life of the person who's having the crisis as well as their partner and family.

As a male who could be undergoing a midlife crisis - but fingers crossed isn't - I find research seeking to reinforce stereotypes irritating on various levels.

I don't think people having any kind of life crisis is something to be joked about. Can you imagine any company doing "research" that sought cheap headlines from having a laugh at women going through the menopause? Thought not.

Psychologists such as Dr Hannan believe the midlife crisis to be a serious condition: "A lot of people take offence at using the word 'crisis'," she said. "But if I don't call it a crisis, I think it undermines the discomfort and anxiety that's associated with not knowing where you're going in life. You might have achieved all the things you wanted to but there's still a sense of dissatisfaction and actually people feel really lost."

Then there's the car itself. Why shouldn't I be able to buy a car I've wanted for years without people presuming I might also want to leave my wife for someone 20 years younger?

Actually, my reasons for buying the Boxster were pretty straightforward. I've long hankered after one and, crucially, can now finally afford one. And that's because after

23 years, our daughter is off the family payroll. It's like I've got round to mending that hole in my pocket that kept leaking cash.

So with my ducks firmly lined up, I didn't hesitate to say au revoir to my old Mazda MX-5 roadster; bonjour Boxster. As I see it, it's a perfectly logical upgrade, not something that should be a reason for others to mock and surreptitiously point.



James Foxall traded in his Mazda MX-5 for a Porsche Boxster | CREDIT: Christopher Pledger

Jim Pollard from the charity Men's Health Forum also thinks it's perfectly reasonable. He says: "We get to a point in life where we realise we won't live forever and we have to make some decisions, reassess things. Sometimes, if people don't reassess things in an adult way, they might make the wrong decision. The expression 'midlife crisis' has become a bit of a joke but it's not something we should be making fun of."

Dr Hannan agreed: "Who are we to judge any of these decisions? Why, if someone buys a fast car, do we think 'Maybe he's having an issue', rather than that he's simply treating himself? Why shouldn't you reward yourself if you've worked hard?"

And driving a Boxster is indeed a reward. Like the MX-5 (which is 17th in the list of midlife crisis cars list, incidentally), the Porsche is great to drive. Unlike the nimble Mazda, it has more than sufficient power, is more practical — with nearly twice as much luggage space - and generally feels more grown up.

But crucially, the 981 generation of Boxster I've bought has the grin-inducing, naturally aspirated, 2.7-litre flat-six engine rather than the newer, less sonorous four-cylinder

turbocharged unit. And although my car does have luxuries such as Bluetooth and satellite navigation, it still feels very analogue in a world of increasingly digitised electric vehicles.

These are distinctly practical reasons over emotional turmoil, yet Andy Moody, the founder of insurer GoShorty which carried out the research, seems determined to pigeonhole me. He claimed: "Our report showed that men over 50 seem to be sticking to the stereotype, with a desire to put flash ahead of sensible cash. It's a case of Instagram versus reality, but in real life, with cars being chosen for their appeal rather than operative value."



Then-Vice President Joe Biden films a scene in a sports car for television show 'Veep' with Julia Louis-Dreyfus | CREDIT: Alarny

I'm not sure what "operative value" means but I would suggest that the Boxster is a pretty shrewd investment as it's a model that retains its value well, as do Porsches in general. And it's remarkably usable for a two-seater convertible.

Whatever the car, the list of 20 is unsurprisingly crammed with sports models. Yet if it makes you happy - and I'm talking can't-wait-to-get-in-and-go-for-a-drive happy - what's the problem? Incidentally numbers 13 and 16 in the list (Range Rover Evoque and Land Rover Defender respectively) are outliers and I somehow don't see buyers of those being accused of a midlife crisis, but whatever.

Dr Hannan added: "Buying a fast car is absolutely fine as long as it isn't a distraction from other underlying worries. A midlife crisis doesn't discriminate between gender. It's all about your set of values and if you're not living your life according to values that have

updated with age, there's a misstep and that's the sense of 'Who am I, where am I heading?'"

I'm not suggesting that there aren't Porsches, Aston Martins and Jaguars plying our roads that are vehicles to disguise or distract from their owners' unaddressed feelings of lingering dissatisfaction. But perhaps we should recognise their crisis sympathetically rather than mocking them from behind so-called "research".

The meno-Porsche might be a thing for some. That's their choice. But don't assume every Boxster driven by someone in midlife is a panacea. There are plenty like me who are simply fulfilling an ambition. And there's nothing wrong with that.
