

CARS

and CAR CONVERSIONS

JULY 1979 45

**TIM BRISE -
BEST OF BOTH WORLDS**

**KIT CARS -
THE STATE OF THE ART**

**STAGECRAFT -
FIRST SESSION**



A RACER NAMED DESIRE

don't know about you, but I've got kind of a soft spot for our Mrs Thatcher. Yep, Mags and them old Cabinet boys of hers are sure going to get this country sorted out. Build a few more nuclear rockets to drop on the Reds . . . declare war on Social Security scroungers . . . give more power to the rozzers . . . scrap all taxes on writers and journalists . . . chuck out all those non-reflective people who slip in 'cos they're fifth cousins twice removed . . . and introduce a new TV channel exclusively for programmes like "Winner Takes All", "Blankety-Blank", "Crossroads" and "Coronation Street". All great stuff for sure.

I must admit, however, some surprise at her Transport Bill. Give up completely any hope of finishing M25—well, that's understandable. Allow complete freedom of speech and action when confronted by a Traffic Warden—that's fine. But arm Traffic Wardens to enable them to fight back? Now that could be dangerous. And refuse to sanction Government grants to all citizens wishing to build kit cars—that is just staggeringly short-sighted! Think of all the opportunities to conserve existing chassis that are going to be lost. Think of all the tons and tons of dirty, oily mechanical bits that still run sweetly but are going to grind to a permanent halt on the scrapheap. . . .

Take all those dear little Minis for a start. Not a lot of hope for their grotty tin bodies, but just look at the variety of new homes the Government could be subsidising on behalf of their engines and subframes. Most luxurious possibility is a superb little number called the Midas, as produced by a very professional and progressive concern from Oldham. D. & H. Fibreglass Techniques doesn't sound very glamorous, I know, but one thing these guys do have is technique. Neatly styled, thoroughly practical and beautifully finished both inside and out, the 2+2 Midas is, in my humble opinion, far and away the best kit car to have emerged since the Elan or Clan Crusader. Mind you, at well over £2000 for the fully finished glassfibre monocoque body/chassis unit, it's not cheap, so maybe you'd prefer something a mite more economical?

What about the Mini-Marcos, for instance? Same company, same glassfibre, same technique, same practicality; just not quite the same degree of style or specification, that's all. Much easier on the pocket, though, at anything from £645 upwards. And not so far above that, for starters at least, is a well-known kit car which has recently gone back into production after a long spell in the doldrums. It's the GTM, a tidy little device that uses a semi-monocoque chassis, front and rear spaceframes and an attractive "glass" body to house its mid-mounted Mini power unit. KMB Autosports is the name of the company, a name you'll be hearing a lot more of in the future.

But perhaps you're not into

small sporty coupés at all? So what about bolting that Mini lump into a tough little utility wagon? There are two choices in this bracket, the Mini-Scamp and the Jimini. The former has been around for years, and thus its aluminium-panelled space-frame chassis is a thoroughly tried and tested structure capable of yumping and bumping its way through a multitude of applications until the cows come home. And that's probably where the Scamp is most in its element—on the farm.

It's dirt cheap, too. Possessor of much the same sort of structure, except that it's all steel, the Jimini certainly has the edge on looks. It's still tough, of course, but combines the he-man look with an element of trendiness that grows even more desirable in six-wheel form. It'll cost you £595 for a sixer, £100 less for the four-some, and is one of the simplest build-up jobs around.

Talking of he-men instinctively makes me think of Spitfires and Spridgets. I mean, you don't see hunks of muscle driving them, do you? At least, not on the road, anyway (OK, John?). But hold on, there are ways in which a man need not lose his self-respect when his girlfriend/lover loans him her soft-centre sportster. It's simple really; just get the thing into a garage for a few days and bolt on a body conversion kit—Arkley SS for the Spridget, DSL Spyder for the Spitfire. Offered by famous Morgan purveyors, John Britten Garages, the Arkley is not surprisingly the more successful of the two conversions but then, with its funny waistline and high engine, the Spit-

fire's a more difficult subject to deal with. Check 'em out anyway; you can't go far wrong price-wise. They're both under £300.

One vehicle which wouldn't cost old Maggie much to help us kit twits re-cycle is the Hillman/Chrysler Imp. I mean, there just aren't enough of them around. In any case, there are only two Imp-based kits available these days. Best known must surely be the amazing Davrian, a machine which has proved its all-glassfibre monocoque structure over and over again in racing, rallying and roading. There surely can't be many Triple C readers who aren't aware of this tough little machine and the consistent development it has received over the years. But there can't be so many who know about the Imp-based Pulsar. This car features another completely rust-free monocoque unit, the main difference being its futuristic shape—extravagant lines that date all the way back to the startling Probe 15 design exercise of 1969. The likeness isn't so easy to spot these days, however, developments to the 2+2 Pulsar 2 and the re-styled Pulsar 3 derivative having erased most of the original Probe shape. Still, if you want a wild Imp, the Pulsar's the way to go.

If you want a wild Ford, it really has to be a Geoff Jago Model-T street rod, though I suspect you cads reading this would be more likely to show a healthier interest in Geoff's more conservative line, the Geep. Even then, I guess the old war wagon is something of an acquired taste, so if you don't fancy shelling out about £500

on a Geep body/chassis unit to re-cycle your Escort, why not try a Dutton Phaeton assembly at around £100 less? It's the only other option for Ford dirty bits, though it can in fact be fitted with almost any engine you fancy. You'll have to stick to Triumph front suspension and steering whatever you do, but with care and patience you'll end up the proud possessor of a real four-wheeled motor-bike. Great fun—at least, so my Mum says.

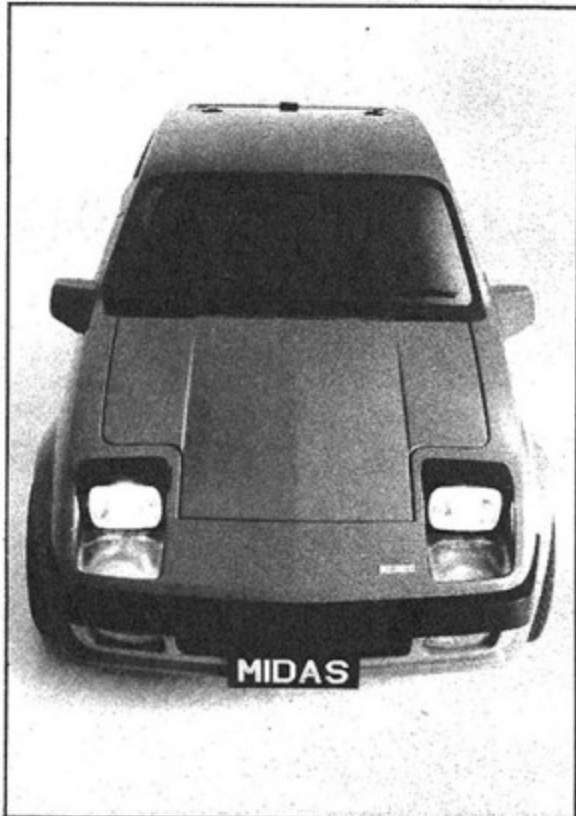
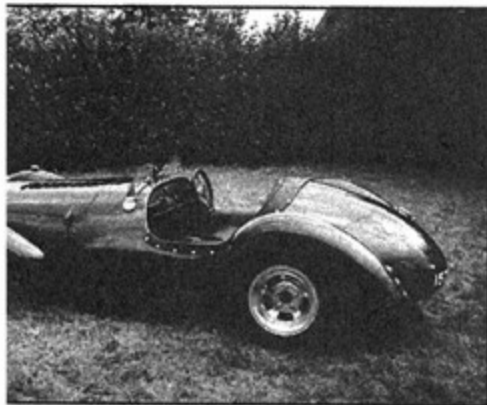
Churning out body/chassis units at the rate of around seven per week, the Dutton company is nowadays our most successful kit car manufacturer. Just shows the nostalgic mood we're all in. Go one stage further, though, into the realms of replicas, and we find a company that's just as successful in terms of demand, if not in supply. It's RMB Motors of Barwell, Leicestershire, who produce an excellent piece of automobile forgery called the RMB Gentry. Looks just like an MG TF, this one, the only obvious giveaway being the forward-mounted rad grille which hides a standard Triumph Herald or Vitesse core. Yep, TF or no, the Gentry is really a tubular framed bodyshell to reclothe the trusty Triumph. It'll

Pics, from the right downwards, then up the middle and down the facing page: Jimini, Arkley SS, Jago Geep, Griffin, Kougat, RMB Gentry, Marcos Midas, Dutton Phaeton



KIT BIT

Peter Filby reviews the current kit car scene



cost you £435 plus VAT in kit form or £585 plus VAT in pre-assembled form. Worth every penny of it, too. Other worthwhile ways of re-cycling a Herald or Vitesse? Well, there's only one, and it's actually quite similar to the Gentry. It's the Spartan, a bodyshell assembly that's not so much intended as any kind of replica as merely a traditional-looking thingy.

So, like the Ford and the Imp, the trusty Triumph offers only two avenues to the kit car builder. If I was to say now that the kit car business is on the verge of a boom, then I guess you'd be quite right to question me. But it is, honest it is, even though the owner of a decaying BMC 1100/1300 is actually a stage worse off with only one option left open for his running gear. Yes, folks, it's the Magenta or the scrapheap; around £540 (for the basic body/chassis kit) and hours of fun in the garage or oblivion. Actually, converting it into a Magenta is a very kind thing to do to an 1100/1300,

'cos it transforms it from a boring old fart into a spirited fun car. Pay out a bit extra, and there's even a gullwing-doored hardtop to make it half practical. Go on, give it a whirl.

Right, now here comes the moment you've all been waiting for, the real biggie—how many ways can you go about transforming a VW Beetle? Well, the answer won't even take 5 per cent of the space it would need if I were writing this in the USA, but it's still by far the biggest category. Buggies, GTs, fun cars, sports cars—you got a Beetle, you got 'em all. Best known and oldest favourite of the lot must be the Nova. Originally introduced in 1972 and a real evergreen since then, the Nova still looks as good as it did the day the first prototype rolled out of the factory. It's also as awkward to get into through that amazing lifting cockpit canopy, and only fractionally more practical as regards creature comforts. But it has no equal; not yet, at least. Kits?

Well, they're available in basic and de-luxe forms (at £1250 and £1850 respectively) from Nova Cars Ltd up in Bradford.

Without the sheer style of a Nova, but still looking pretty dramatic just the same, is the Charger. Been doing nicely for quite a while, this one, thanks largely to its excellent finish and remarkably low price of £650 plus VAT for the basic bodyshell. Its pride could be dented a bit by the brand new VW-based Griffin, though—as developed from the earlier Morris Minor van/estate-based Griffin (which, incidentally, is still available). As a nicely styled, practical sports estate, this one will have wide appeal, I reckon. Worth checking out, for sure. Also showing the way for the next generation of VW-based kits is the interesting Pelland Sports, a fully developed glass monocoque structure which accepts its motor back to front—ie, ahead of the rear axle line, as in Formula "V" racers. Looks good, too, bit like a modern Super Seven. £785 plus VAT is the price.

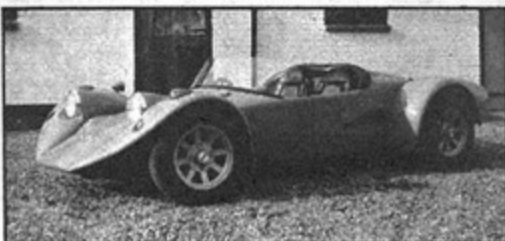
And now for the VW-based cars you all love to hate . . . beach buggies! You thought they'd died out years ago, didn't you? Well, you're wrong. They never did die out, they just hibernated for a while. And now they're back, to terrorise your neighbourhood with a vengeance. Most evil of them all must be the Rat, an old timer that knows all the tricks. Fibre-Fab of Wokingham is where you'll find it. Fastest breeder of them all has always been the GP bug, known in its latest form as the Alpine Buggy, and really quite a whizzeroo. It's for the full-length VW pan, and has very neat side panels, but I've decided against showing you a pic as I thought you'd pre-

KIT BIT

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Pics from the top: Charger; Pelland Sports; Pulsar and GP Ranchero



fer to see the lovely lady adorning GP's second model, the estate-style Ranchero. Also for a full-length job, and very practical, so they say—the bodyshell, that is, not the lady.

Other bugs? Well, I won't bore you with them all—let's just say that two others worthy of consideration are the sooper-doooper Baja GT (complete with neat lift-off roof panel) for a chopped chassis, and the voluminous Volksrod in both swb and lwb form.

What I'd like to do now, to tie this article up in style, is go right back to the other end of the scale and leave you on a high note with two kit cars you'll probably never be able to afford. First, the S-type Jaguar saloon-based Kougar, sold as a beautifully finished complete body/chassis unit at £3150 plus VAT. Conservative Party policy here would simply have to be to increase the Car Improvement Grant to match the quality of the finished product. It would cost them a bit, but what a lovely way to spend money. Ditto any contributions towards the construction of a Super Seven, that very trifficest and ultimatest form of kit car. You're talking here of something like £4000 for the complete component form vehicle, though a mere £2700 or so will get you a great showpiece for the front drive—as long as you don't mind having no engine in it.

Well, there you have it, *mes enfants*, a very brief resumé of the beautiful, the good, the bad and the ugly. There's surely something for everyone in what is once again a thriving kit car scene. No? Oh, alright then, you'll just have to wait and see all the wonderful new models that will be announced during the summer. . . .

P.S. Hope you've read this, Maggie and will consider the suggested grant scheme. I'll never vote National Front again. Honest.

As true to form as ever, the kit car scene has changed fairly radically since we last covered it. Several well established names have gone to the great liquidator in the sky, several others are thriving and working

frantically on new models, and the usual crop of new and highly enthusiastic manufacturers has appeared. But over the last year or two, the scene has certainly settled into a steadier pattern than it has known for years—the stronger, more efficient companies growing steadily and only the amateur or part-time scratchers getting left by the wayside. Kit cars coming-of-age at last? Well, they just could be.

There has, of course, been one major scare for kit car manufacturers and enthusiasts over the last year or so, the dreaded Type Approval. So let's get the record straight right from the start—at the moment Type Approval remains nothing more than a scare, a distant possibility. Originally the pro-

posals were to have taken effect on cars registered as new (with new plates, etc) from April 1st this year. However, they've already been deferred for a year, and the Department of Transport has as good as admitted that annual deferment will continue for some time until it has the manpower and resources to get together some form of special test to OK the construction and roadworthiness of all kit cars. Like some form of stiffer MOT test in all probability. And when you think of some of the horrors seen on the road in the past, not really such a bad idea at all.

You'll have noticed that the above few lines refer to kit cars registered as new. But if you build a car on an existing

chassis, or use all the components of one car and merely re-body them (even if you use a new chassis), then it's a whole different ball game. The answer here is to retain the original registration. This way it's merely a re-bodied or modified version of the original car which in no way will come under any form of Type Approval jurisdiction. You probably won't have to do much more than obtain an engineer's report for your insurance company. You might not even have to do that.

So you see, if you keep the original plates you're not likely to have much hassle. If you insist on getting a new registration, well, even then the procedure's not really so daunting. It just involves several "official" inspections, a dollop of new car tax and one or two other similar delicacies. It would take much more space than we have here to explain all the ins and outs of the business, and the best advice is to contact your nearest local Vehicle Licensing Office for all the details . . . or maybe read the relevant info as contained in a new kit car publication by some chap called Peter Filby. Happy hunting!

The publication to which Mr Filby so coyly refers is called "Alternative Cars '79" and costs £1.25 from Special Car Consultants, 86 Hythe Road, Brighton, Sussex BN1 6JS. If you want to know more about the kit car scene, this book provides a complete guide to available kits, with each model described and illustrated. Features also cover registration, specialist car clubs and the newsy "Kit Snips" column. It contains 48 pages, and the first issue is out now, with a second revised issue out around October time. ■