

Motor

SPOTLIGHT ON OPEL

Datsun 240K GT tested • Car tent offer



TVR TURBO-FASTEST SOFT-TOP?

The FILBY

file *A further instalment of Peter Filby's occasional column on specialist manufacturers and their products*

THE WAY people are attracted to unusual vehicles has provided the inspiration for a new company offering purpose-designed promotional vehicles.

Replicars of 281 Farnham Road, Slough, Bucks, (tel: Slough 32233) has been set up to offer this specialised construction service based on the VW Beetle chassis, with the obvious advantages of completely standard running gear and cheap running costs.

It's quite staggering what has been done to the Beetle chassis over the years, but looking at the photograph of Replicars' Edwardian open tourer, who would guess that its base was a Beetle? Not the general public, that's for sure. There are no pictures available yet of Replicars' van derivative — which will be the best medium for promotional work — but the prototype is almost complete. Indeed, if you own or run a commercially-minded company, Replicars can construct almost any shape on top of the Wolfsburg chassis. And the firm thrives on a challenge.

The next print-out from my specialist car computer seems to have produced something very similar to the Replicars' product. The difference is cost and, to be fair, also quality. The Albany Motor Carriage Company of Groveley Rd., Christchurch, Dorset, has been producing limited numbers of beautifully finished modern "veteran" cars for some years now — handsome horseless conveyances with carefully hand-crafted aluminium bodywork neatly concealing Triumph Spitfire power and Morris 1000 suspension. The firm has done two-seaters, five-seaters, even a bus. Most recent is a superb new "old" van. The 'Twenties Van uses the same basic running gear as its earlier passenger-carrying sisters. The UK price is £7,776 including all extras. It's expensive but this delightful and practical carriage is a most exquisite piece of work.

After talking about superb hand-built vehicles, it might seem like plumbing the depths to go straight on to beach buggies, but the truth is that in limited numbers they're a fact of life. While the crazy buggy boom era faded away back in '72, those manufacturers able to diversify were still able to offer buggy bodies. And still do. Occasionally there's even a new name to add to the list. The newest is that of the Baja GT, a machine which gives the impression of a cross between a buggy and a sports car, and comes out as quite an attractive looking fun-mobile. What's

more, it's a relatively practical vehicle with two-plus-two seating and a neat removable roof panel.

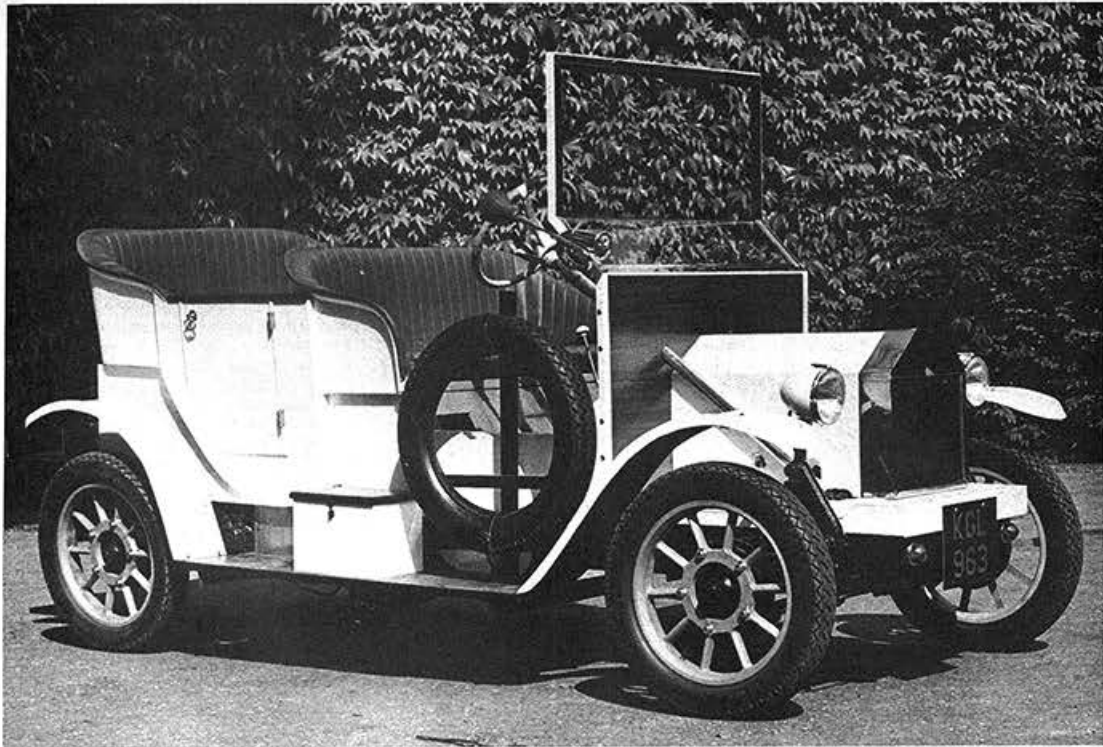
I somehow doubt that the Baja GT will ever seriously challenge the Fiat X1/9's market position, but then it will turn out cheaper to buy. Prices for the basic body kit should be in the region of £240. This will secure a tough one-piece glassfibre moulding complete with integral windscreen surround, dashboard and (probably) the rear Targa bar moulding. Thus the roof panel will be the one major extra. What's the mechanical basis? You guessed it, VW Beetle, and shortened by 16 in too (a job that is best done professionally). One thing that is already performed to a thoroughly professional standard is the Baja's moulding. The guys manufacturing this new body also make expensive luxury yachts, and having seen their prototype, I can vouch for the superb quality of their work. For further details of the Baja GT, send a 40p cheque/postal order to the sales agents, Special Car Consultants, 86 Hythe Rd, Brighton, Sussex.

While so many specialist car companies are inevitably stuck with a backyard image, there are exceptions. Indeed, D & H Fibreglass Techniques of Heybottom Mill, Greenfield, Oldham, is almost at the other extreme: a highly professional concern operated by experts both managerially and on the shop floor. Perhaps most important of all, the company has ambition — and the lovely Mini-based Midas. First announced in this column late last year, the Midas has since been going through the trauma of getting into production. It's late doing so, of course, but that's hardly surprising when you begin to consider the huge task that this small but progressive company has faced.

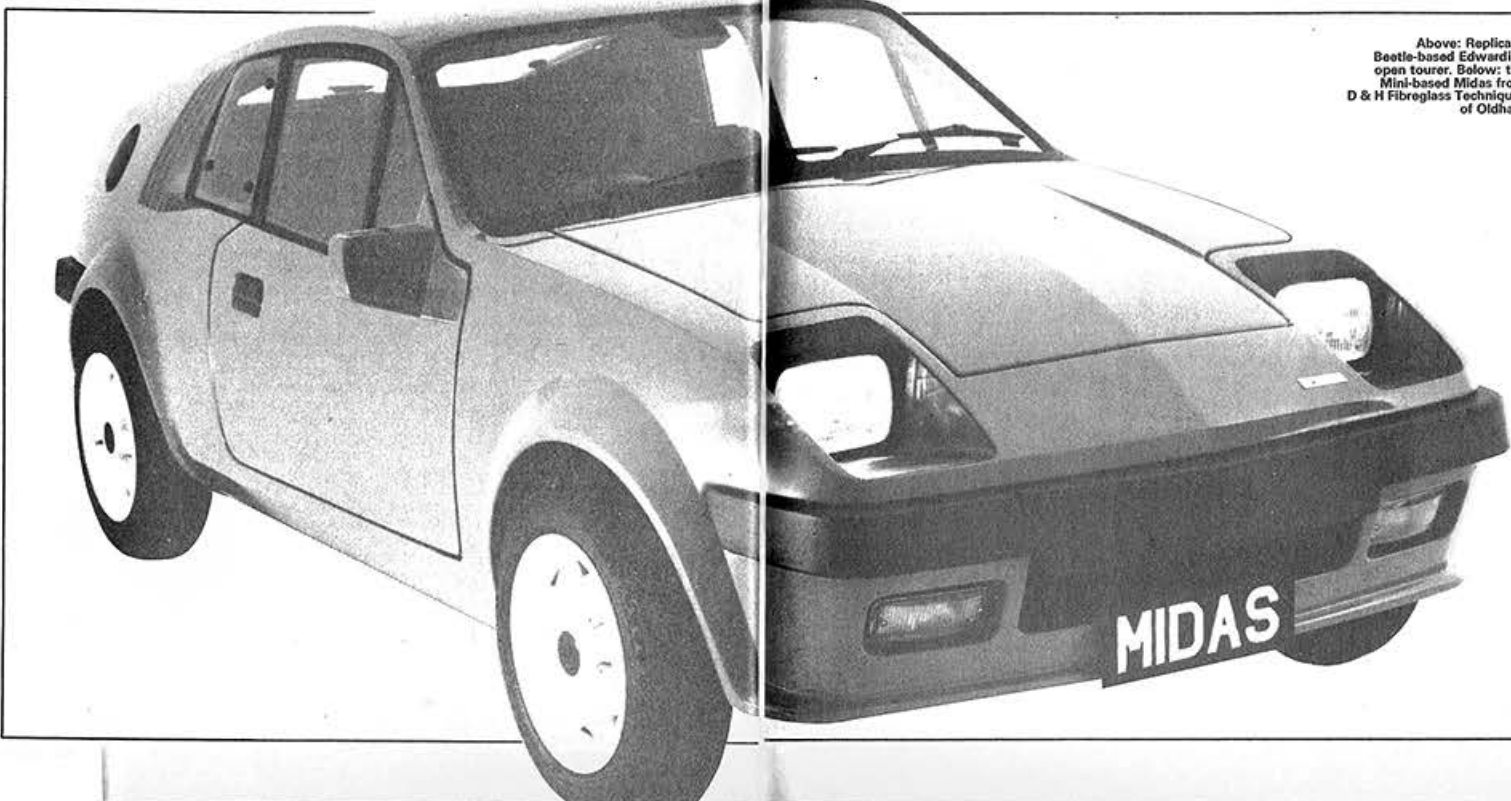


Albany's 'twenties van at '78 prices

Heart of the problem has been the fact that D & H are determinedly doing everything to standards way beyond those you'd normally expect from a specialist company. Since getting over the enormous investment of designing and building the prototype Midas in the first place, the company has had to sort out many development details on the car, buy large quantities of production components for stock and re-arrange the factory to allow increased production facilities. Needless to say, the recent lousy weather has hardly assisted the thorough test driving programme planned for the first two cars, particularly as boss Harold Dermott was adamant they should be right before production received the green light. But with £6,000 spent on rivising the



Above: Replicars' Beetle-based Edwardian open tourer. Below: the Mini-based Midas from D & H Fibreglass Techniques of Oldham



factory in preparation for the new baby, it looks now as though things are about ready to start. And start with a swing, too, as D & H has already forward sold all the cars until the autumn.

It seems a huge number of you were more than keen to take a closer look at the exciting new Leyland 1100/1300-based Eagle sports car described in the last File. And quite right you were, too, because this Fiat X1/9 lookalike had huge potential. Unfortunately, however, there's been a hitch. The Eagle has flown — back to South Africa along with one angry designer, Bill Badsey, who became very disenchanted with Britain in the short time he was here.

Apparently, in South Africa, if you've come up with a good idea, there's never any shortage at all of progressive companies willing to take it through to production in a constructive and professional manner. And with no wheeler-dealing, trickery or anything like that. Thus the Eagle (in revised Ford Fiesta-based form) is already close to full production over there, and furthermore is likely to be joined by a bigger sister powered by a Ford V6 driving through the rear wheels. The only hope for Britain is that batches of kit form body/chassis units will start to be shipped over later in the summer to a suitable importer. If one can be found...

Filby's flashes

● If you're a true kit car or Marcos enthusiast, don't forget to mark in your diary Sunday June 10. This is the year's big specialist car event, when the beautiful, the good, the bad and the plain ugly all turn out for the combined National Kit Car and International Marcos Rallies at Donington Park circuit in Derbyshire.

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