

WEEK ENDING MARCH 22 · 1980

Moto

TESTED: MAZDA MONTROSE COUPE



We take to the track again
WIN AN MG MIDGET

The FILBY

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



IN AN issue of Motor back in December 1978, I went out on a limb and suggested that the Midas promised to be "far and away the most important new car from a small manufacturer since the Clan Crusader". The following April I reported that the manufacturers, D. & H. Fibreglass Techniques Ltd., of Heybottom Mill, Greenfield, near Oldham, had experienced, predictably enough, several delays launching regular production of their new baby. Since then I could hardly blame you if the sheer lack of news has led you to believe the Midas project has become just another specialist failure. How nice, therefore, to be able to report that production is now rolling smoothly at the Saddleworth factory with the car showing all the signs of taking over where the Crusader left off.

The Midas's structure is an all-glassfibre monocoque, a development of the thoroughly proven layout used by D. & H.'s other model, the Mini-Marcos. The bodyshell is supplied self-coloured and finished to a high standard for a kit car. The outstanding feature of Richard Oakes' styling is an attention to detail

which is thoroughly professional and all the more impressive when you realise the limited resources which D. & H. have. What I'm talking about are features like the foam-filled bumpers, recessed fuel filler cap, recessed door handles and built-in roll-over protection. The mechanical basis is Mini, the complete engine/front subframe package being used. At the blunt end a specially fabricated subframe is fitted, with suspension via Mini trailing arms and coil spring/damper units.

I've recently driven only the second Midas off the line, essentially a production prototype, and I now stick more strongly than ever to my former view that this exciting small coupe gives the term "kit car" a whole new meaning.

The problem for D. & H. is going to be convincing people that a kit car can make real sense. Does the saving of a lot of money (maybe as much as £1,500-£2,000) really swing the balance? Maybe not, but try the offer of a fool-proof anti-rust guarantee for life and the promise of lively performance with 40 mpg levels of economy. There's also the practicality of an opening rear window

Above: Midas number one displays its wide track and low profile during pre-production testing

*continued
over*



and 2+2 accommodation, and the desirability of hand-built construction by a small team who believe totally in what they're doing. The balance begins to swing a little, does it not?

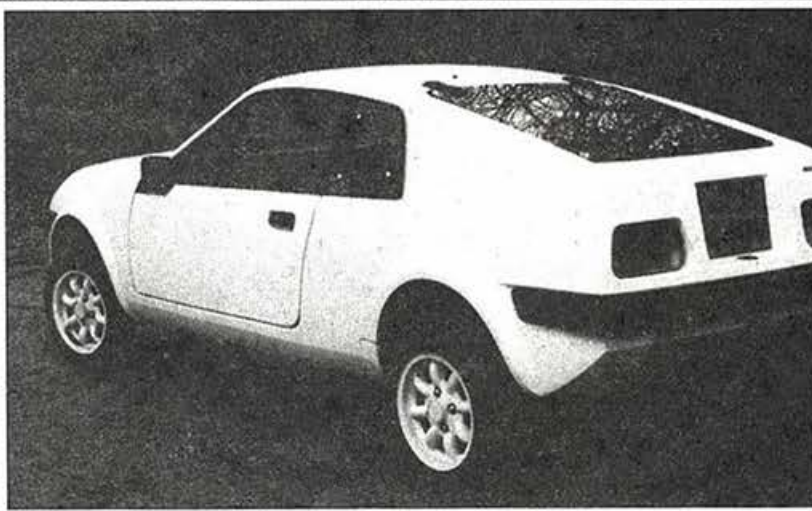
First impression of the Midas is its diminutive size. Once inside, though, you soon realise that within this attractive little package D. & H. have engineered an awful lot of space. There's plenty of elbow room for both driver and passenger, while the cockpit's rear half provides ample room for two average-size children or several suitcases' worth of luggage. Thanks to the long doors, fold-forward seats and all-glass gas-assisted hatchback, everyone and everything can be loaded with the minimum of fuss. Another practical feature is the provision of plenty of oddments stowage space, though I felt there was plenty of potential for even more.

For my average frame, the comfortable reclining seat, pedals, gearshift and 13 inch leather rim steering wheel all combined well to produce an ideal driving position. The black moulded dashboard could have looked a little more exclusive, but displayed all the right instruments and switches. Everything worked, too! As you'd expect, the interior is fully carpeted and trimmed, and though the detail fit and finish left something to be desired, this was after all only the second Midas built. Plenty of development work has been aimed at trim standards since my test, much of it handled by an ex-Lotus craftsman.

Performance of this car depends entirely on which engine is fitted. With a 1275 Cooper S under the front-hinged bonnet, you'd have a very fiery roadburner; with a standard 850 cc unit, you'd merely have a sprightly coupe. The test car was fitted with a brand new 1000 cc engine which was very tight and lumpy yet still produced enough power to provide above-average performance. Buzzing round the mercifully traffic-free country roads of Norfolk, I found the Midas an exceptionally quick A-B machine which only did itself justice in the occasional traffic lights grand prix. It proved a great fun car, too, with its superb standards of handling and roadholding immediately giving one the confidence to attack bends with relish.

Perhaps the most satisfying thing about

Above and right: Midas number two . . . 'above average performance with superb standards of handling and roadholding'



this kit car was the realisation that it was a "real" car. A great deal of work has gone into the ride standards with the result that the Midas rides smoothly and comfortably over all types of road surface. Indeed, a fine balance has been found between saloon comfort and sporting firmness. A high standard of sound-proofing has been achieved, too, this being an important factor for a specialist car trying to compete with the masses. And compete it does, for one never has the feeling that this is anything but a fully developed production car. Nothing much at all has been omitted in the area of driver satisfaction — the car has wind-down side windows, opening rear quarter-lights, an electrically heated rear window, an interior lamp, heater, two-speed wipers with flick-wipe facility, hazard warning lamps, reversing lamps, a full heater/demister system, inertia reel seat belts and external mirrors on both doors. Yes, it's all there.

If the Midas still doesn't make much sense to you, then the saving of a lot of money is the last carrot. You buy the car as a fully finished and trimmed bodyshell which only requires the fitting of the 12 inch alloy wheels and Mini front subframe assembly. This means that for £2,750 plus VAT you receive a complete car less only the engine, gearbox and front subframe. Rear subframe, rear suspension and brakes, handbrake, exhaust system, steering rack and column,

front mounted radiator, fuel tank and filler pipe and cap, pedal assembly, 11 cylinders and brake pipes — all are supplied and ready fitted. Thus the small amount of work required before the car is driven honestly be completed in a weekend. Instructions are of course supplied, and the whole package makes very sound economic sense when compared with the price of mass-production opposition. Indeed, the Midas becomes even cheaper if you do more of the assembly work yourself. You can opt for the basic kit at £1,750 plus VAT.

Harold Dermott, progressive and energetic managing director of D. & H., obviously realises the limitations that even a small amount of home assembly places on the appeal of his Midas. But I doubt whether it worries him too much, for production is always going to be sufficiently limited to keep the car most exclusive. In fact, you might worry Harold far more would be an absolute deluge of orders, something which remains a distinct possibility when prices are low and the promised economic recovery really tightens up and force people to buy more seriously a fully practical, largely rust-resistant and beautifully finished hand-built coupe which offers around the chance of an appreciably lower outlay. Now does that make sense or you rather buy a rusty depreciating mass-production car?