

Ian Bennett

Feature Sample

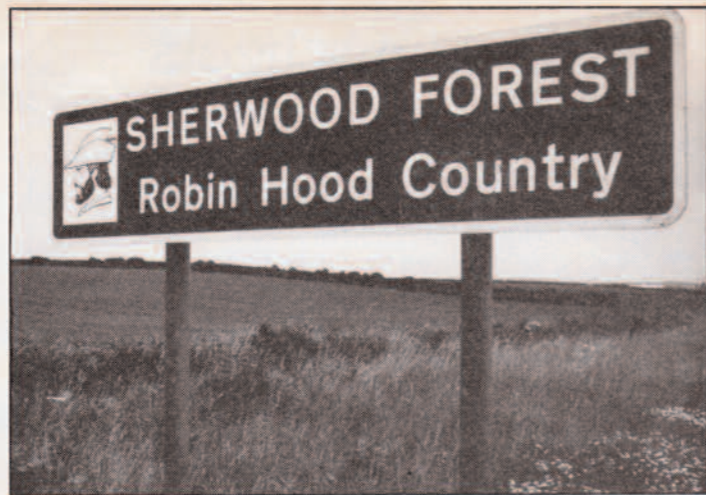
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NEWARK NEWS



If the sign hadn't been there, we wouldn't have guessed - there was not a tree to be seen

Vic Marelle visits the Newark Show and sees some nice cars, he also gets on his soap box. No, not so he can see over the heads of the crowd but rather, so that he can see his face in a rocker box cover. Pictures: Ian and Martin Bennett.

I knew I was getting near the show when I saw the sign welcoming me to 'Sherwood Forest, Robin Hood Country'. Mind you, without that sign I would have been none the wiser for there was not a tree to be seen.

There was no such confusion at the Newark showground - I was definitely in the right place. There were kitcars in the car park, in the arenas, in the exhibition halls and in the camping areas - kitcars were everywhere. Nevertheless, the wind of change is blowing pretty hard and with the 1987 show season well under way, several trends noticed at *Kitcars and Specials* Stoneleigh show were once again apparent at Newark.

The industry seems to be widening its appeal, with most of the new cars being extremely well designed and executed and subject to considerably more skilled development than has sometimes been the case in earlier years. Many of the well-known established, models however, have also been subject to extensive development, and on the evidence of this show at least, the industry has a secure future. It is not all that long ago that kitcars were all considered to be simple re-body exercises on tired mechanical components, often of very dubious standards and while the stigma has not yet been fully overcome, the industry has changed considerably.

There has been a definite move towards very high quality products, often built with brand new components throughout. This has, in effect, put some manufacturers in direct competition with the mainstream mass production industry. Such a widening of the kitcar market can only be to the good of the industry because those customers who would otherwise never have considered a kitcar are now becoming involved.

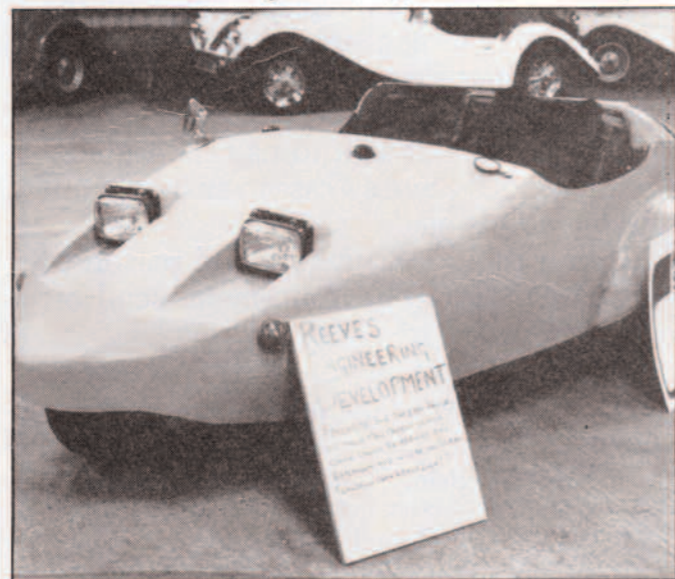
Les Hindley was exhibiting his stunning *Stimulator* for the first time. Although a new name to the kitcar world, this could hardly be called the birth of a new marque because no less than ten *Stimulators* have been built by Les at his Torquay garage.

The three cars on show demonstrated not only the high build quality but also the adaptability of the design with two body widths and many engine options. Les' own car, resplendent in brilliant red paintwork, was newly developed in the wide body option and fitted with the popular Rover 3.5 litre V8 engine. Alongside were two customer cars. These were both narrow body versions fitted with twin cam Fiat and turbocharged Alfa

engines respectively. At fully built prices of £7500 to £9000 I think we will be hearing much more of these cars which we hope to feature soon.

Another newcomer was the MG TF replica from the Cars Division of the *Machon Group*. Machon rescued the stricken Naylor concern from the liquidators and the car on display was developed as a Marina based kit from the type approved car. There are many differences between the two vehicles, mainly substitution of GRP mouldings for wings, radiator grille and so on, but once again the high quality is obvious. This is another car that should do well.

Maelstrom Lancaster were showing their *Maelstrom One Spyder* which is claimed by



The Reeves Matrix, with an offset front wheel and no damper on the front, to say nothing about the finish, did not impress too many people



A very well built and competitively priced car, the JPR Wildcat is selling steadily. It builds-up into a super road car and it should be selling in much greater numbers, maybe the public will recognise its qualities soon

manufacturer Mike Eidmann to be the only road car in production to feature a true rising rate suspension system. Although much praise has been lavished on the car for its handling, there has been some criticism for its lack of creature

comforts, particularly in the area of weather equipment.

As one who has driven the *Maelstrom* in a hailstorm, I can endorse those sentiments. Mike has lost no time in developing a smart full width windscreen with a

moulded frame and this was on display although not fitted to the car.

Yet another recent new model on show was the soft top version of the all metal *NCF Diamond*. With an additional roll over hoop fitted behind the normal bar there are no

doubts regarding the occupants' protection. Standing alongside was the immaculate long wheelbase estate car. This is the car we will be taking on our Heart of the Country Gold Run. Rumour has it that NCF would like to build a six wheeled, long wheelbase model with four wheel drive built on XR4 4x4 running gear.... watch this space! (would that be a Diamond 4 x 6 or a 4 x 4 + 2?).

Also making its first appearance in the north was the *Fergus Mosquito*. Nicely produced and with a new, authentic looking, external exhaust system, this car was being well received but was let down somewhat by its rather poor paint finish although the manufacturers are due to remedy this shortly.

The show was not just about new names. Many of the established kits were to be seen and it is here that the already mentioned widening of the industry was most obvious. At one end of the scale there were firms like *JBA*, *GTM* with both the *Coupe* and *Rossa*, *Pilgrim* with the new(ish) *Hawthorn* and, naturally, *Cobras* around every corner.

Even the *Allora Stratos* replica has undergone considerable further development and the next demonstrator is to feature a mid-mounted Rover V8 engine. Then in contrast there are those who haven't made much progress at all, either with their vehicles or in their presentation - like the *GT40* replica with flashlines visible under the paint, rusty wheels and overspray on the tyres.

But if we were to give a prize for the most extraordinary and doubtful newcomer then this would have to go to the *Reeves Matrix*. A strange three wheeled device with Mini



This NCF Diamond Estate is the very car in which we will be travelling the country in our Heart of the Country Gold Run

NEWARK (cont) NEWS



The most expensive car at the show was not a kitcar but it was based on a conversion of a real 911 Porsche by CAS Motorsport

engine, handlebar steering and an offset front wheel, the Reeves boasted a wierd bodysell best described as a cross between an upturned bath and a badly cracked eggshell. Constructed from very thin GRP, it was completely devoid of any gelcoat and the glassfibre texture was very evident. The designer of the Matrix, although declining to quote a price for kits, did seem serious about building more, even intending taking the car to our Mallory Action Day. We shall see, but with an admitted instability at anything over 45mph, an incredibly bad finish and dubious design I doubt if it will be around for long.

Back in hall four, the **Durrow**, complete with wedding silks and its stereo pumping out suitable music, was attracting the crowds as usual as were the **Cobras** of **Southern Roadcraft** and **DJ Sportscars**.

Although billed to make its public debut, the **Silhouette Countach** replica was again not ready and failed to appear. They were not alone in this respect, for the new drophead from Beauford, also expected to be launched at the show, was still incomplete.

Beauford in fact reported an enviable sales pattern because after a somewhat shaky start some thirty six cars have now been delivered.

Perhaps more significant than total sales however was that half of these have been completed right up to paint stage by the factory. Beauford have now embarked on an ambitious expansion programme, having increased their staff and with construction well in hand on a new building that will almost double the existing available floor area.

Moulded entirely in GRP, the new

drophead coachwork will dispense entirely with the existing Mini bodysell. Surely the logical conclusion is a fixed head version of this new car to banish those Mini lines for ever.

Yet another company previously outside the kitcar scene to have entered the market recently is **Rickman**, and although the Rickman Ranger was first seen at Stoneleigh, the Newark show was the first opportunity for northerners to see this already successful newcomer. Two fully built cars were on display flanked by a body/chassis kit and a rolling chassis boasting a four colour paint identification scheme.

Standard Rickman parts were painted red, Escort donor parts blue while BL donor components stood out in yellow. Optional extras were painted green. A novel idea, very simple and so obvious that we have

to ask why it has not been done before.

Sunday saw some outside events taking place but if there were some magnificent vehicles entered in the concours event, a few minutes spent watching cars arrive at the showground served only to reinforce our view that there is a widening gap between the good quality kits and the dubious ones.

Many of the cars arriving were superb. The top manufacturers are now producing more up-market cars, often built with entirely new components. Yet also to be seen, and in quite surprising numbers, were poorly finished cars which were no credit to the industry or their owners.

Which brings me neatly to a favourite hobby horse. With the best kitcars no longer just a simple re-body on tired old mechanical components, many 'on the road' prices are equal to, and often in excess of, brand new mass produced cars. Increasingly these cars are sold to buyers who have no intention of spending hours in the garage. They are attracted to such cars for their own sake and will pay for a professional build.

It is more than likely that such a purchaser will have visited his local new car showroom, sat in the demonstrators and perhaps also taken in the NEC Motor Show with its split level stands, pristine cars and huge video walls.

What does such a buyer find at a kitcar show? Often it is dirty engine compartments, hand written sign boards and poor promotion. Yet our top manufacturers, like it or not, are now in direct competition with mainstream industry. I am fully aware that specialist promotion is expensive, but let us be honest, if a demonstrator is driven to a show, is it too much to ask that it be cleaned before being put on display?

Manufacturers like **Spyder**, **Excalibur** and **Ginnetta** (who incidently took the best stand award), showed that immaculate presentation can be achieved - it takes just a little more trouble but the result can make the difference between an amateurish approach and a company that means business. ■



Courageously painted in black, a colour which shows every imperfection in the bodywork, the NCF Diamond Soft Top looked very good indeed