

You've Got To

No we're not mate. The voluptuous, Kermit-like form of the Sylva Jester may conceal nothing more intimidating than a set of nearly standard Mk1 Fiesta 1100cc components but this car will give many a 1600cc, rear-drive sports car a good run for its money in all departments. Ian Hyne hops aboard the born again buggy that's a serious proposition for a total build budget of only £3500.

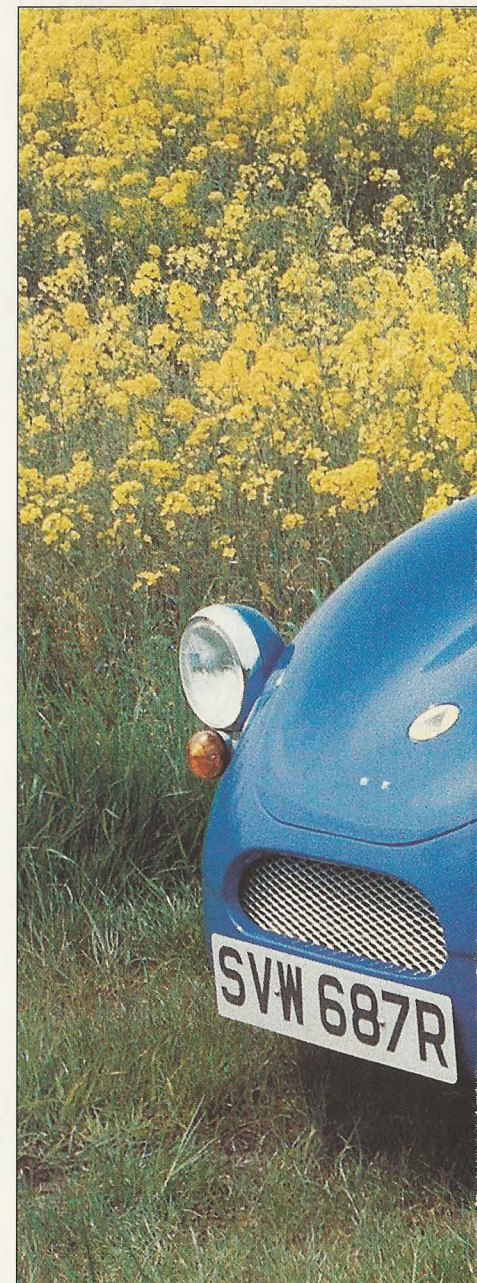
N... n... n.... nineteen. That's how old Sylva's Jeremy Phillips was when he succumbed to the irresistible allure of a GP Beach Buggy. £50 for the requisite Beetle, £140 for the kit, a bit of elbow grease, reverse the rear wheels for the Carlos Fandango look and he was away. Naturally it had a few shortcomings but the memories are of undiluted fun on a shoestring. Such scenarios are increasingly rare today at a time when dramatic improvements in manufacturing quality, engineering, safety, power and performance, though welcome, have pushed the price of kit car ownership beyond many a would-be customer who, like Jeremy, remains in a penurious state at that age.

It's a problem many other manufacturers have striven to overcome but their approach has seemingly been uniform in offering a budget version of an existing car. Although reductions in kit quality and content have tempted more than a few to take the initial plunge, the car still requires the same parts to achieve completion, so at best it's only a partial solution that spreads the cost rather than reduces it. But there is another answer: the Sylva Jester.

In creating what appears to be the complete antithesis of everything his company has so far produced, Jeremy Phillips has employed imagination, intelligence, ingenuity and his customary engineering flair to produce a car that can

genuinely be put on the road in a fully finished condition and to a high standard of finish for under £3500. True, there's a bit of difference between £190 and £3500 but Jeremy's about the same age as a Mk1 Fiesta now and inflation has been hard at work in the intervening years.

In putting affordability at the top of the list of design parameters, common sense pointed to the top selling and therefore most cheaply available family car. That car was the Ford Fiesta. As scrapyards supplies depend on recruits reaching mechanical dotage, the Mk1 crossflow powered model was selected. It also marked Jeremy's first design encounter with front-wheel drive but his chassis competence and experience



coped with all the subtleties of moving the drive from back to front.

To look at, the Jester chassis is simplicity itself, being neat, compact, light and seemingly frugal in its appetite for steel tube. However, in true Sylva style, it's very strong, extremely rigid and cleverly thought-out. It's not a spaceframe but employs spaceframe principles in creating two triangulated sides linked by a steel bulkhead and floors. Additional rigidity is

Be Joking...



provided by the folded steel backbone and the crosspiece which forms the front mounting for the seats. The scant componentry of the rear suspension is carried on a steel tube subframe hanging out the back with the fuel tank mounted amidships. The engine and transmission are carried in a second tubular enclosure at the front.

Every mechanical component is used in totally standard Mk1 Fiesta fashion. The only slight

Latest version of the Jester is distinguished by a curved screen in GRP surround, a change that much improves looks.

deviation concerns the front coilsprings. Initially, Jeremy used rear springs with two coils chopped off. Since then, many customers have found lopping the coils off the front springs to be equally effective. In addition, it saves the cost of a second pair of rear springs and,



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Twist the key and there's a fruity rasp from the small bore tail pipe that sets the tone for the proceedings in perfect fashion. Slip the long throw lever into first and it's away like a whippet. Give it its head and the Jester impresses within 200 yards as the needle whips round the dial in hugely enthusiastic fashion. A Mk1 Fiesta isn't the sort of car you shove to 3500 through the gears and initial progress is characterised by short shifting and adjustment to the surprise of the 1100's punch. As the car infects you with its unique brand of automotive revelry, you enter into the spirit of the job and gradually increase the periods between gear changes. Suddenly you notice 6000 on the tacho, 80 on the speedo and the engine's spinning its heart out in third! Brilliant. Who needs a five-speed?

Boyish enjoyment aside, there are more scientific reasons to be impressed as the Jester entertains. The ride is terrific despite the potentially hit and miss method of spring shortening. The car is rock solid, it tracks arrow straight and it displays the hallmark of every Sylva we have ever tried in the form of perfect balance. There's Bravo Alpha of any significant weight at the back, giving rise to a weight split that's got to be close to 70/30 as the car stands. That said, the driver sits well back so one-up it will be nearer 60/40 and with a passenger it's going to be close to ideal. Even so, pop it into a bend and understeer is noticeably absent, while the opposite effect is far less evident than the figures would suggest. There's a reason for that.

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additional 1 ½ degrees of negative camber endow the front end with kart-like directional obedience that, on the right line through a bend, is hard to override. Also in typical Sylva fashion, the Jester puts its power down very well indeed. You've really got to pump the pedal to get wheelspin off the line and this quality enhances its cornering ability. And while its speed, impressive though it is for an 1100cc car, is not on a par with bigger engined competition, it's the Jester's cornering ability that really levels the performance scales. That and truly outstanding brakes that allow you to almost stand it on its flat nose at the drop of a hat. Who needs ABS? Sylva's right-hand man, Mark Ardern, is a regular racer in the company's Striker Mk4 Clubmans but earlier this year he took the Jester for its first track excursion at Lydden Hill. It was wet, the car was on totally unsuitable Yokohama 008s and the clutch was slipping. Even with that catalogue of woe, Mark qualified fifth on the grid. Sadly, clutch slip sidelined him for the race but the tale makes the point. The car's next race appearance will be at Mallory Park and we'll let you know how it went in next month's issue of KCI.

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The final accolade of which the Jester is more than worthy is that it's a brilliant kit car. Take a complete wreck of a Fiesta, overhaul the components in completely standard fashion, bolt them to a new chassis, tweak the settings, drop the body on top and go and embarrass a few Westfields or Sylva Strikers for that matter. And you really can do it for under £3500 and that's with the options of powder coated chassis, gel coat colour, hood and sidescreens, new seats, lights and even the trendy aircraft style fuel filler. We're not joking.

SPECIFICATION – SYLVA JESTER

Chassis	Semi-spaceframe in 1" square and 2" x 1" box section 16-gauge steel tube. 16-gauge sheet steel bulkhead, 18-gauge steel floors, folded tunnel section and seat mountings. Bolt-on roll-over bar.
Body	Unstressed single-piece GRP moulding with single skin, lift-off bonnet.
Steering Chassis Brakes	Rack and pinion. 3.4 turns lock to lock. Semi-spaceframe in 1" square and 2" x 1" box section 16-gauge steel tube. 16-gauge sheet steel bulkhead, 18-gauge steel floors, folded tunnel section and seat mountings. Bolt-on roll-over bar.
Body	Unstressed single-piece GRP moulding with single skin, lift-off bonnet.
Steering	Rack and pinion. 3.4 turns lock to lock.
Brakes	Disc front, drum rear. Dual circuit, servo assisted.
Engine options	Ford Fiesta four-cylinder OHV and CVH. 1100cc to 1600cc.
Transmission	Ford four or five-speed manual transverse gearbox.
Front suspension	McPherson struts, lower track control arms and tie bars. Sylva coil springs, standard, non-adjustable dampers. Sylva geometry.
Rear suspension	Dead axle located by twin trailing arms, Panhard rod, standard coil springs and telescopic dampers.
Wheels and tyres	6 x 13" TWS rims fitted with 175/60 x 13" radials.
Engine fitted	Ford crossflow OHV 1100cc. Approx 70bhp @ 5750rpm, 70ft lbs @ 2700rpm.
Dimensions	Overall length10ft 0ins Overall width4ft 9ins Overall height4ft 0ins Wheelbase7ft 2ins Weight990 lbs Weight split60/40
Prices	Chassis kit£660 plus VAT Body kit£780 plus VAT

Full details of kit contents, specifications, prices, options and extras are given in the information pack available from:



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When the Jester was in the design stage, Jeremy specifically intended it to use the Mk1 Fiesta 1100cc engine and components even down to the

pressed steel wheels shod with skinny 155/70 tyres. This was done as much to achieve the economy objectives as for performance reasons but, as ever, following its debut, many potential customers asked about larger engines. To Jeremy's designer's mind, such customer enquiries miss the point. It's power to weight that

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Although the OHV crossflow is available in 1300cc form, you'll have to look long and hard for one, so the next step is the CVH. To Jeremy, a 1400 wouldn't be worth the effort and the 1600 is too big and too heavy. It's also physically bigger than the OHV and has a larger, heavier gearbox with five speeds. The additional weight upsets the balance of the car and you then set off on the route of adjustable dampers, wider wheels and of course,

increasing cost. That said, Jeremy's an engineer but has to appreciate that other people see other things in his creation. Thus you can now fit a CVH with a five-speed box to the Jester and accommodating it wasn't the great problem Jeremy first thought it would be. But while the option is there, we strongly urge you to drive the car in its designed form before you commit yourself to an unnecessarily upmarket specification.

With the mechanics settled, a body was required and the Jester is the first non in-house design Sylva has produced. The accolades for the latest model to wear the Sylva emblem go to Huw McPherson, a design graduate who came up with a totally original shape that solved a good few problems. It may not be the most fluid of forms but it admirably reflects Jeremy's main objective in creating character.

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being much lighter, it reduces wind buffeting and it's available as a retro fit for existing cars although they will require a new, longer bonnet. Having made and fitted the screen, the next problem is the attachments for the weather equipment. Conversation at the time of our visit alluded to a possible Countach style vertically hinged solid sidescreen on a trendy designer bracket but it's one

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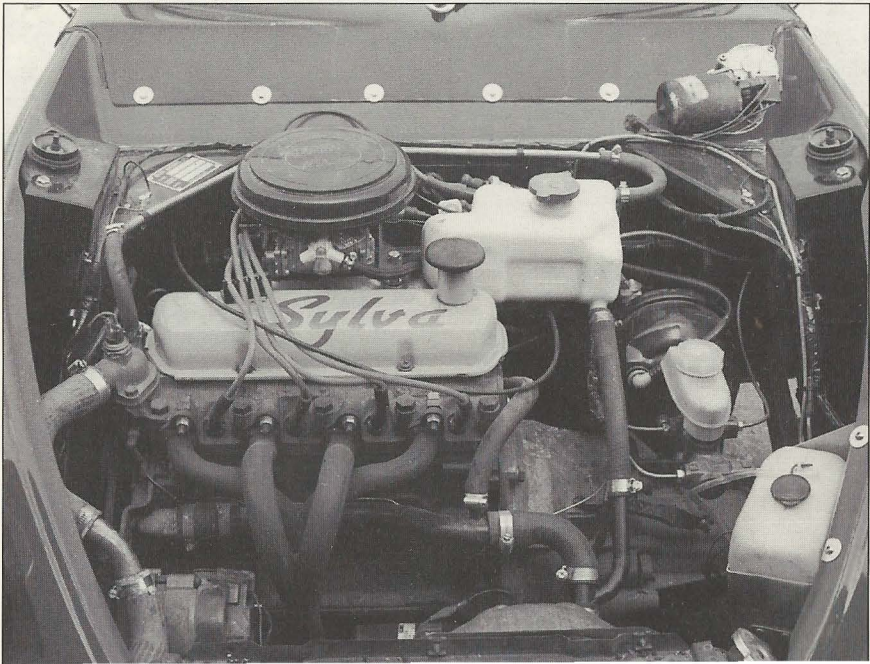
In its latest guise the car has charm, style, chic even, especially when luridly liveried, and a tangible personality that only really introduces itself when you get behind the wheel. Slip into the all-embracing caress of the Cobra Roadster 7 seats and the first surprise concerns the interior space of such a diminutive tub. Six footers, if you can't fit in a Seven inspired car, forget it and have a bash at a Jester: A, you'll fit in with room to spare, and B, you could well embarrass your first choice round the bends! We jest not!

Equipment is minimal. The Fiesta instrument cluster offers a speedometer, rev counter, fuel and water temperature gauges, all neatly housed in the purpose sculpted dashboard, while standard column stalk controls and two additional rockers for rear fog lights and the blower adorn the upper dash. That's it but what more do you need?

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This car is actually the original demonstrator with a new body on and a few other refinements. It retains the same 1100 engine first hauled out of the scrap donor, dusted off and dropped in. Then it's handled all the abuse of development testing as well as the 5000-mile Liege-Agadir-Liege International Endurance Trial. Since then it's acquired a new Weber twin choke carburettor and air filter which conspires with Sylva's own tubular exhaust manifold to create performance that's a real revelation. The standard 1100 OHV supposedly develops a puny 49bhp @ 5000rpm with an equally unspectacular 60ft lbs @ 2700. Of course, such figures fail to impress but the Mk1 Fiesta, for all its spartan simplicity, still had the best part of a ton to lug around; the Jester doesn't.

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Sylva Autokits, KCI, Unit A11, Downlands Business Park, Manby, Louth, Lincs LN11 8UX. Tel: 01507 328809.



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