

KitCars

International

JULY 1998 • £3.00

BLUE HEAVEN!



**Power, punch
and poise from
the new Stylus V8**



Exclusive! Volcanic!
Technic Coupé Lovel Trike

New model
Syla Jester Mk2

Evolution Specia

Although primarily designed to accept a four-cylinder engine capable of matching the power output of a Rover V8, the multi-cylinder motor still had attractions for one Stylus builder. With his immaculate Stylus V8 prototype, Steve Thompson has blazed a spectacular trail for other performance enthusiasts to follow.

Under the Sylva banner, the advent of the Stylus marked a change in direction for the evolution that started with the Striker Mk4 and its all-enveloping bodywork. Where the intermediate model in the form of the Fury (now produced by Fisher Sports Cars as the Fisher Fury) supposedly reached the limit of dynamic ability for a steel tube

spaceframe and a set of Escort Mk 2 mechanics, the Stylus was aimed at enhancing the civility and practicality of the base model with extra interior space, bigger, deeper doors and a separate boot. To do it meant a return to the drawing board and the design of a brand new chassis to compensate for the compromises imposed by the new body design. The result

was very different from the traditional spaceframe in the form of a semi-monocoque with torsionally stressed sheet steel side panels.

Having built the car and recorded yet another success in the company's star studded history, Sylva's Jeremy Phillips sold the project to Peter Powell of Specialist Sports Cars while Jeremy himself went off at the tangent that would result in the Sylva Jester (see page 36).

Very often when such projects are disposed of, the new company merely sells a tried and tested design, but SSC's Peter Powell is not short of a few original ideas himself and has continued with the successful development of the Stylus. This has resulted in a few improvements that have been resold to Sylva for the enhancement of the Striker Mk4 which Sylva continues to sell. Specialist Sports Cars has additionally produced a De Dion rear suspension set-up for the car.

Jeremy Phillips had often considered independent rear

suspension but generally dismissed the move as uneconomical for the advantages it would produce. He already had a brilliant handling and grippy car with a well developed suspension system delivering an excellent ride on a live axle installation. Given that the vast majority of customers would be running fast road four-cylinder engines with power outputs up to about 150bhp, he didn't feel the additional cost of around £700 would have many takers. He could well be right but his calculations hadn't anticipated builders like Steve Thompson.

Steve is a seasoned kit car builder whose list of accomplishments started with a Triking before moving on to a Marcos Mantula Coupe and then to a Ram Cobra. The latter two projects confirmed his affection for oodles of power and, in particular, Rover's silken V8. When he saw the Stylus, it was love at first sight but it had to have a V8. It doesn't matter that he could match the Rover's power output with a zippy Zetec; he likes the V8 rumble. He loves the noise when it's up on the cam. He loves the whoosh, the

Below: Stylus V8 number one looks almost too pretty for a car of huge performance. Below right: Smartly simple interior sports fine veneered wood dash.



1 - Very Special!

shove, the torque ... in short, he wanted a Rover V8. Ever one to oblige, Jeremy Phillips said OK and made the chassis with an independent back end. Shortly afterwards, the Stylus project passed to Peter Powell and Steve has liaised with Peter through the majority of the build.

Though Steve's is the first V8 to hit the road, other Stylus V8 kits have been sold but using the De Dion rear suspension. Steve's car uses a Jeremy Phillips designed system which features on only one other car. Naturally the V8 has necessitated a great deal of alteration and redesign work but Steve is more than happy with the result. Having driven it, albeit briefly, so am I - which came as a bit of a surprise. Why? Because just a few weeks ago I drove a V8 Fury which didn't feel nearly as good to me as its Zetec engined counterpart. True, it had a live axle as opposed to Steve's IRS but that wasn't the reason for my impressions behind the wheel. The Fury featured a beautiful installation but, to me, the chief problem was weight.

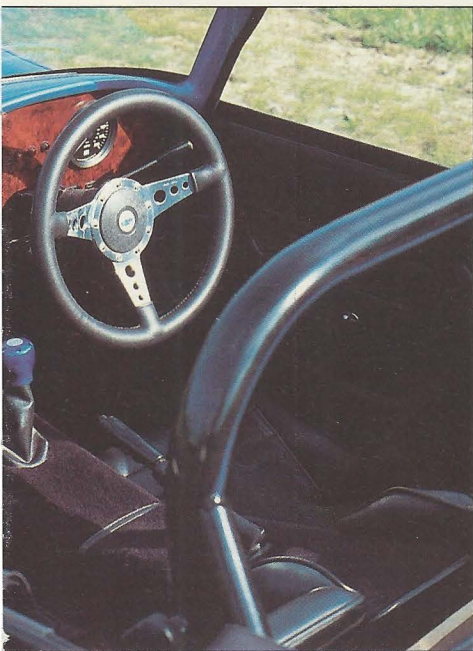
People say the Rover V8

engine is nice and light and yes it is. At 320lbs it's not much heavier than a Ford four-pot, but the ancillaries push the scales up and the SD1 box is no lightweight. It's also pretty big. The result is an engine sited further forward

than is ideal, which compromises the weight distribution, undermines the car's balance and consequently its cornering prowess, grip and general handling.

Even though I drove Steve's car only briefly, I did give it a

decent whack and none of the Fury's symptoms were apparent. The IRS does make a contribution in softer springing and additional grip, especially out of the bends, and the Stylus chassis may well be better than the Fury's.

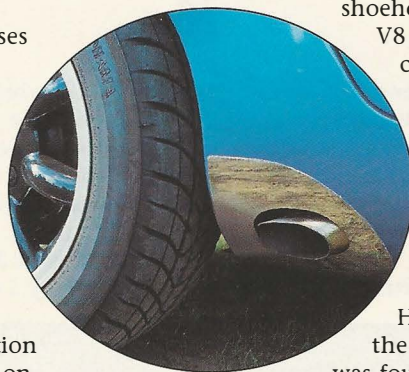


As a design penned with all the information gathered from the Fury project and many others before, it's logical to assume it should be, even though it's totally different. But all said, it was the car's balance that seemed right despite the forward location of the engine which, as in the Fury, has the crank pulley virtually between the inboard front dampers. It probably has something to do with the fact that, in order to provide the additional interior and luggage space, the Stylus chassis is both longer and wider than the Fury's. But what of the car itself?

Steve is a joiner by trade so he's good with his hands and not just in respect of wood. He's a demon metal worker with a well developed talent for design and problem solving. Initially the chassis was prepared by Sylva, the company fitting the rear suspension and carrying out

the alterations to the tunnel for the bulky SD1 box before creating the Rover engine mounts. Steve then took it all home and set to.

The front suspension uses Sylva's well proven rocking arm front end. SSC now has the rocker on needle roller bearings for additional positive location but Steve's is on standard bushes. Jeremy Phillips tried to get Steve to have the older, outboard suspension in order to create additional space ahead of the engine but Steve stuck with the inboard system. Having dropped the engine and box onto the chassis, Steve then had various problems to solve, every small alteration to the



design specification having a knock-on effect. First off was the radiator.

Cooling is very often the problematic result of shoehorning a big V8 into a confined space. Steve has used the SD1 radiator which necessitated a redesign of the front crossmember. He also found the crank pulley was fouling the front coil spring dampers so had a friend turn up an aluminium pulley with a 1/2" smaller diameter. Next came a problem with fitting the alternator - he couldn't as there just wasn't any space. The solution was to fit a much smaller unit, off a foreign car, right down low on the nearside. The next problem was getting a drive

belt to it. He has retained the standard fan belt for the crank and water pump pulleys tensioned by an idler pulley where the alternator would normally mount. The smaller alternator is now driven off the power steering pulley on the Rover engine.

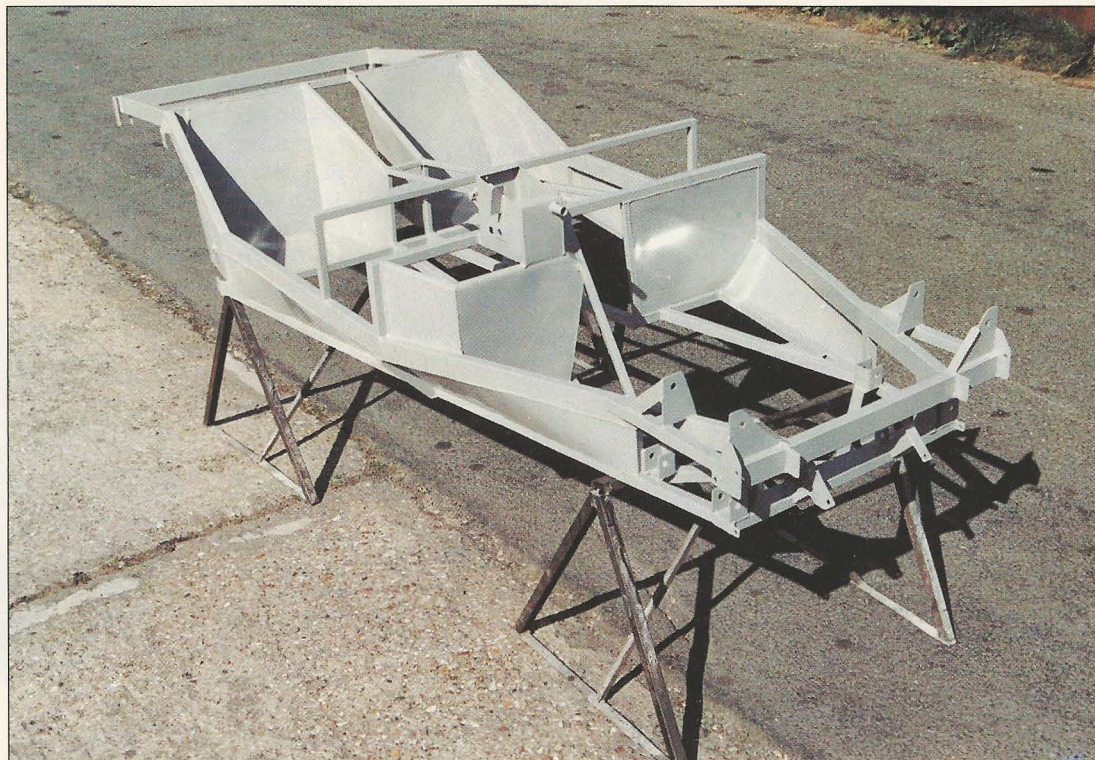
With that lot sorted, he addressed the problem of installing a pedal box, as the SD1 gearbox had robbed the driver's footwell of much of its space. Steve has made a very neat and suitably compact pedal box operating twin master cylinders and a hydraulic clutch. The fixings are very similar to the Sylvas of old, Steve having merely cut the pedals from 5/16" MDF and then had them cut from plate. The master cylinders operate a braking system comprising Willwood four-pot front calipers clamping solid Escort discs, with Sierra drums bringing up the rear.

The rear suspension of this



car is interesting and typical of Jeremy Phillips' mastery of the complex science of suspension engineering. The limited slip differential unit is from a Sierra 4x4 and is mounted to the chassis. As the 4x4 driveshafts differ from those of the standard car, Steve had special shafts made up with 4x4 fixings at the diff end and standard fixings at the hub end. Steel uprights have been made up to accept the standard Sierra hubs and bearings. Running forward from the upright is a trailing arm, while lateral location is controlled by a pair of links attaching the uprights to the centre of the chassis behind the differential.

In this way, as the trailing arm moves up and down in response to suspension deflections, it also moves through an arc, giving the required camber change to enhance grip. A system giving a very similar field of desirable movement is evident on the new GTM Libra where first sight of the rear twin trailing wishbone installation suggests there will be no camber change on deflection. They're damn clever, these Chinese, but it's been cleverly



worked out and implemented and, above all, the thing works and works well.

As for the engine itself, Steve built it to a formula worked out by Real Steel who also offered copious advice during the build. It's a 3.5-litre unit with a fast road

Above: Sylva founder, Jeremy Phillips, designed the Stylus chassis as a semi-monocoque with stressed steel sheet side panels.

camshaft, heavy duty lifters but standard springs, Vitesse pistons giving a 9.75:1 compression ratio, and a 390 cfm Holley carburettor. With Steve's specially made, sill-shrouded exhaust manifolds, the rolling road revealed 180bhp @ 5000rpm.

Below: Well modified Rover V8 pushes out 180bhp at 5000rpm and provides the lightweight Stylus with brilliant performance.



The body is completely standard save for the bonnet. Ironically one of the reasons for the deeper body at Jeremy's initial design stage was to allow the fitment of the tall Ford four-pots without any bulges to mar the car's fluid lines. However, Steve's power bulge is beautifully done. As one would expect of a master joiner, he made the buck in wood and it now forms an ornament somewhere around the house.

The interior is very comfortable and very well trimmed. SSC's standard trim pack has been used but Steve has gone for black leather instead of vinyl. He's also gone for a walnut veneer dashboard to house the Stewart Warners. It really looks the part and everything is perfectly fitted, even to the complex tucks necessary to fit the black carpets to the angular bulge around the SD1 box. The final embellishment was the paint. The colour is Vauxhall Arden Blue chosen by Steve's girlfriend. He wasn't too sure about it at first but now reckon's she's a good taste guru! It

SPECIFICATION – STYLUS V8

Chassis	Semi-monocoque in 16-gauge, 2" x 1" and 1" square section steel tube and 18-gauge sheet steel. Optional bolt-on roll-over bar.
Body	GRP single-piece body tub in lightweight 4oz lay-up. Separate bonnet, boot and doors. Available in gel coat colour if required. Choice of front end body styles.
Steering	Ford Escort rack and pinion.
Brakes	Ford Escort front discs, rear drums. Non servo.
Engine options	Ford four-cylinder units up to Zetec DOHC, 16-valve EFI on choice of carburettors or injection. Various other four-cylinder units including Fiat DOHC. Rover V8.
Transmission	Rover SD1 five-speed manual gearbox driving Ford Sierra 4x4 limited slip differential.
Front suspension	Ford Escort stub axle, SSC lower wishbone and upper rocking arm on needle roller bearings, operating inboard adjustable coil spring damper unit.
Rear suspension	Live axle located by twin longitudinal Watts linkages and a Panhard rod, or SSC De Dion system.
Wheels and tyres	7 x 14" Minilite rims fitted with 185/60 x 14" Yokohama radials.
Engine fitted	Rover 3.5-litre V8. Fast road camshaft, heavy duty lifters, Rover Vitesse pistons, Holley 390 cfm carburettor, tubular exhaust manifolds. 180bhp @ 5000rpm.
Dimensions	Overall length11ft 2ins Overall width5ft 1ins Overall height3ft 4ins Wheelbase.....7ft 2ins WeightApprox 1400lbs
Prices	Basic body chassis kit with all special parts£2999 plus VAT Basic V8 body chassis kit with all special parts£3299 plus VAT De Dion IRS rear suspension..£700 plus VAT

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

Specialist Sports Cars, 10-14, Cherry Street, Woking, Surrey GU21 1EE. Tel: 01483 760605/506849.

complements the black hide interior and the polished perfection of the stainless steel lined engine bay.

However, of more importance is its ability of the road. As we gave it a quick blitz to 6000 in third, asking Steve how far round the tachometer he pushed it, he answered, "Not that far!" Whoops. You see, the car's only covered about 450 miles and Steve's

still feeling his way with a machine packing well over 250bhp per ton! He's also still ironing out a few bugs. One concerned heat surge where the water temperature would suddenly shoot up but he's cured that now. The other concerns the gearing. He's used a Sierra 4x4 differential but he doesn't know the ratio. There were two models of the 4x4 Sierra; a 2-litre and the

2.8 V6. Steve's probably got the 2-litre one and is currently investigating whether he can obtain the necessary gear sets to modify his LSD or whether he needs a complete swap. That and the searing waves of heat rolling into the cockpit via the currently unsealed top of the pedal box accounted for all current niggles.

On the performance front, all we can say is that it's as good as its pedigree would have you believe. Jeremy Phillips has done his usual sterling job on the rear suspension, which retains the talent for putting the power down in thoroughly capable form whilst firing you at the horizon on the cushioned epitome of suspension finesse. It's beautiful going up the box with the glorious rumble of the sill shrouded exhausts rising with the revs. But it's the corners that brought the greatest surprise for us, as the car felt so totally different to what we had come to expect. True, we didn't drive it like Colin McRae but you don't need to do that to know the car feels right.

Steve has fitted a nice big, thick, leather rimmed Moto Lita that's a joy to twirl as you nose the car into a turn. The front pushes round with

confidence and precision, generating suitably tenacious grip through the Yokohamas. Push her out under power and you can feel the rear suspension doing its stuff as it follows as if on rails. And it's not just round the long sweepers. Push it into a tight roundabout or flick it

through a sharp kink and, as well as balance, it exhibits fine precision that we felt would be absent. You have to push the middle pedal a bit to slow down but, with a mere 450 miles on

the clock, the pads are probably not yet bedded-in.

For our part we were full of admiration for the outstanding car Steve Thompson has put together. It displays quality, craftsmanship, ingenuity, thought and fine attention to detail, all conspiring to create something that will impress in any automotive company. But just as much as its looks, we were thoroughly impressed with a dynamic ability that will only improve as Steve overcomes the limitations of the current specification.

Steve's car aside, it is abundantly clear that Peter Powell's Specialist Sports Cars has had a significant input and has continued to develop the V8 model to the extent that

Jeremy Phillips' initial reservations have been disproved. The Stylus is a powerful car blessed with balance, handling and roadholding, while the addition of the V8 version brings real performance benefits with no discernible drawbacks. Finally, we reckon it's the prettiest car Jeremy Phillips has ever produced, and when Steve Thompson tours Europe this summer, he really will be travelling in style.

