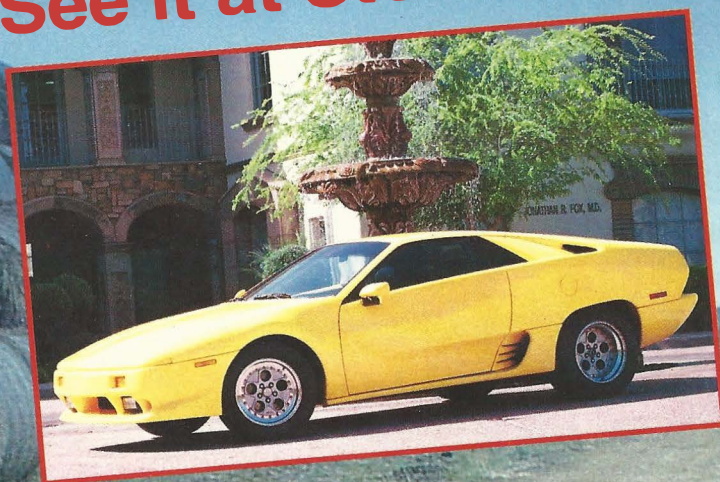


WHICH KIT?

MAY 1992 £2.50

Clive
SHOW STOPPER?
See it at Stoneleigh



FURY!

Sylva's great new roadster



EXCLUSIVE!



Sylva Fury: Pure Road Rocket

A Sylva with creature comforts? Once this was as inconceivable as a five-door Ferrari estate car but such an animal could well be here. Sylva's new Fury offers pure handling Nirvana and...a stereo? Monty Watkins reports.

'Looks like it's got a heater under the scuttle.'

'Er, yes...Mini heater.'

Was that a brief glance over his shoulder to see if any of the race fraternity might hear? A suppressed chuckle from a Nomex-clad character in the background? Raised eyebrows in the pit lane? The shame of it all.

A stereo, a heater and it's even getting a full soft top and upholstered seats, too. Is nothing sacred in this world? Next thing you know he'll be selling it as a full body/chassis kit only! From the look on Jeremy's face it seems that it *will* be a full body/chassis kit...Oh dear.

The Fury demo, which had covered a bit

over a hundred miles when we visited, also had lap/diagonal inertia reel belts, some carpet and, wait for it, doors. Could this be the fastest way to tow a caravan across Europe? Will the lateral G spill the champers in the fridge? Is there room for the five-link rear end next to the ABS and Active Suspension units? Where's the Connolly hide ashtray?

No, that's not fair really. Producing a Sylva for the practical-minded amateur kit builder, who is much more likely than the racer to demand a full nut 'n' bolt package deal, is no small step for the company which has been preoccupied with the rather unprofitable and time-consuming pastime of producing fast machines for a

IT'S INEVITABLE REALLY. JEREMY Phillips' Sylva Autokits has captured the imagination of hundreds of actual and would-be track racers over a decade. When the public at large gets wind of a successful track car, they'll want one for the road and with a tad more practicality.

With around a hundred Sylva kit cars currently involved in UK competition, many of them very successfully, the word has got round at long last. Some companies start with kits for the general public and then make an evolutionary model for the track. Sylva has started with the track and has been drawn, kicking and screaming, into a wider market.

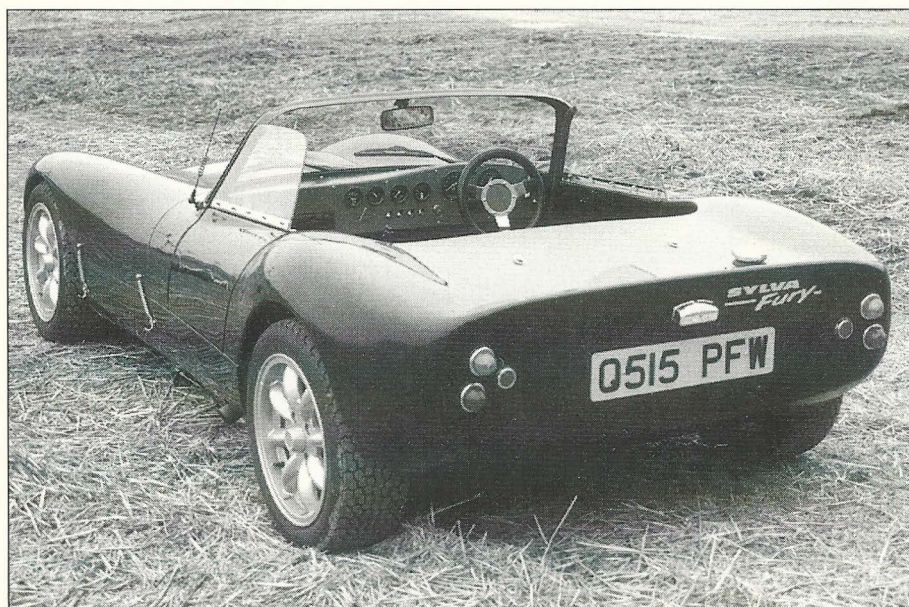
Over the past few years, the body design of the Sylva has adopted an aerodynamic and fully enclosed style. Track function dictates the change. As it happens, the car is very attractive and extremely well-liked by kit car enthusiasts who were nonplussed by earlier cycle-winged models. Enthusiasts who really haven't the least intention of putting the car on the track.

Jeremy, and most of his customers to date, are definitely track-minded people. He likes selling to enthusiasts who generally know what they want and how to build it. With a long list of successes in various classes of kit car racing, it seems that the chassis and body take on their tasks with a good degree of efficiency. The builder takes care of the rest.

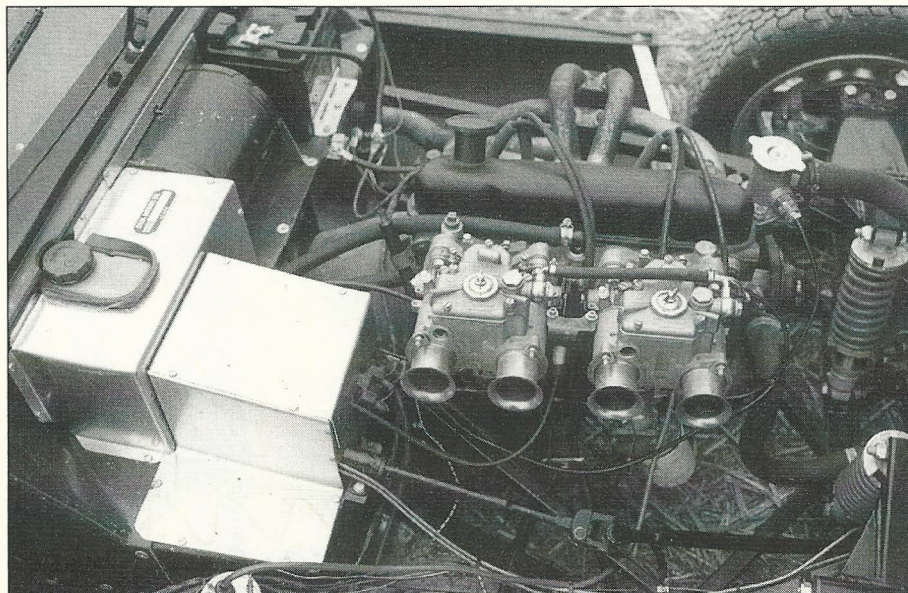
Invading this peaceful and undisturbed world of performance and handling specialists comes 'the kit-building public'. It happens everywhere. Even TAG McLaren is on the road to producing a production road car. Even Lotus did in the end. What's the problem?

'Is that a radio in the red vinyl-trimmed dash, Jeremy?'

'Well, er, I um, listen to Radio 1 on it...'



Above: Swooping lines of the Fury look fabulous. Quality of the paint finish is high and large 15" wheels really offset the car well. Below: Mildly tuned 1600cc cross-flow engine is super quick. Engine bay is neat. That Mini heater fits in quite well!



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small group of highly capable competition car preparers.

Don't get us wrong. Jeremy is proud to assert that Sylva Autokits pays for itself very nicely and continually runs in the black. It looks like the reputation it has created, though, threatens to attract a relatively 'mass' market which wants to stuff notes in yer pocket if you can deliver the complete(ish) kit for the ordinary road user.

The Fury is Sylva Autokits' first proper attempt to fulfil this increasing demand and thus is a bit of a landmark for the company. Next thing you know, they'll have to have a secretary, a salesperson, a showroom, and an office with wall-to-wall carpet under an array of gleaming demonstrators.

A beautifully curved full windscreen, from the Lotus Elan, has been aesthetically blended with the body curves. Sylva's front-engine, rear-drive layout, with a proven live axle location

system and unique front suspension design, must be the best there is. At a good price, too.

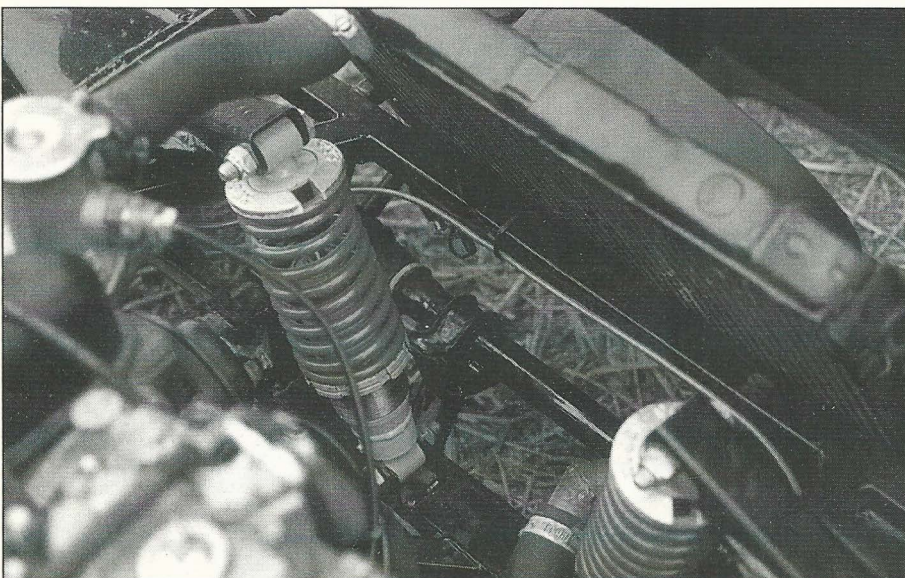
The chassis is all new but follows the general Sylva philosophy of a multi-tubular and semi-monocoque perimeter frame with backbone. The Escort Mk.2 live rear axle is coil-over-equipped and located with twin longitudinal Watt's linkages and a Panhard rod. Up front there are curious top rocker-arm wishbones operating inboard coil-over Spax and Escort-lower track control arms located by compression struts instead of the Escort anti-roll bar.

Rear brakes are Escort drums, and the Escort front uprights and discs are retained courtesy of cut down and modified strut tubes with special new balljoints. As ever, the engine, box and transmission tunnel are offset to the nearside to leave more room at the pedal end of the driver footwell.

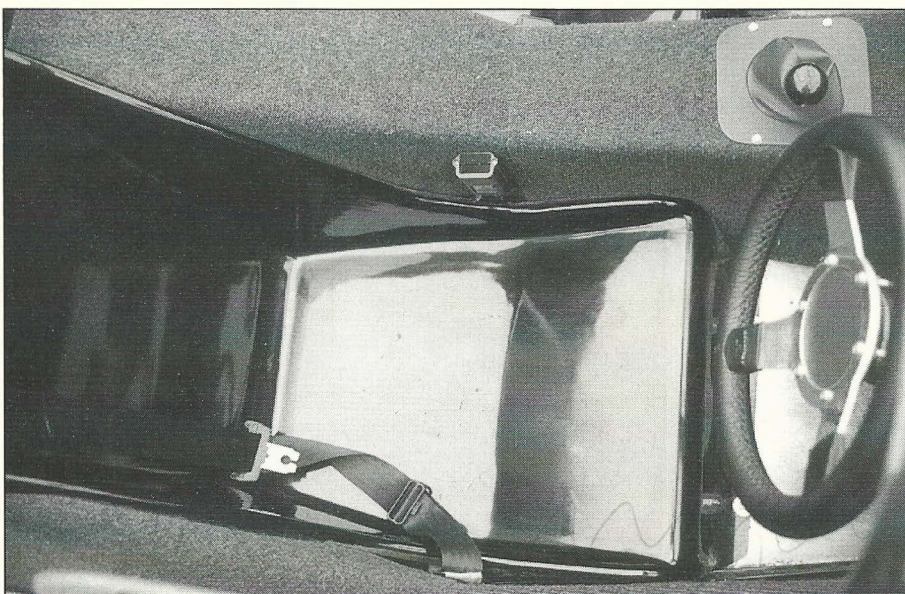
GRP bodywork is non-structural

(chassis don't tend to come much stiffer than Sylva's) and is 'dismountable' in sections for simpler access and crash repairs. For years, Sylvas have been regularly subjected to race damage and that leads to good forethought in that department. 'We must have repaired more cars than just about any other kit car company,' muses Jerry.

Main body sections are the forward-hinging bonnet section, mounted to a repairable tubular framework, the centre/rear perimeter shell, deep sill



Top right: Lotus Elan windscreen fits in well. Bolt on side screens make for wind free motoring. Is that really an aerial? Above: Inboard coil-over shocks work a real treat. Below: Uncovered GRP seats are quite comfortable and should look good when trimmed.



sections, one of which encloses the sidepipe, and the doors. Not only are the design and shape of the body slick, but the fine arch to tyre clearance looks very neat. We didn't get any wheel rub on the first drive of the Fury. Remarkable achievement that, with excellent visual reward.

Because we wanted to be first to the Fury, we got there early. No weather gear and no proprietary trim had been designed yet. These will be finished before this feature goes to press, so we'll tackle them when the car is comprehensively test-driven later on. Drive it we did, though. Having covered a few hundred miles in the *Which Kit?* Sylva Striker Mk.2, this driver wasn't overly impressed with its restriction in legroom and footwell width. Although the car was a pure road rocket, you can't reap the full reward unless you can operate all the controls smoothly.

It was a little surprising, therefore, to discover that the Fury chassis, same wheelbase and track as previous models, offered all that was needed for a six-foot and none-too-slim driver. In terms of footwell size, pedal spacing and cockpit width at arm level, it was excellent indeed. Once such ergonomic requirements have been fulfilled, then you can more confidently explore the car's abilities.

Apart from a few carpeted areas and that red-trimmed dash, there was precious little adornment in the Fury cockpit. Never mind, it'll be happening sooner or later but the starkness of the environment seems to underline the racer functionality and shows off some of the sheet steel and alloy areas of the car to good effect.

The line-of-sight tachometer and speedometer are easily read through the steering wheel and other ancillary gauges are in the dash centre. Excellent heel and toe positioning for the throttle and brake pedals is complemented by a clean sweep for the clutch. The pedals are modified Escort items. No column stalks but a selection of dash toggle switches neatly arrayed in the

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fascia and a pendulum-type, self-illuminating indicator switch as well. Stalks would be easier to operate.

After only a few miles, the Fury shows itself to be a very finely tuned car. Having stepped out of a hatchback, you'd be a little unnerved, perhaps, by its instant response to steering wheel movements. Seems jittery at first but it's really just evidence of a great chassis and refined steering geometry retained from the previous Striker models.

Ten miles of the country roads surrounding the Cadwell Park circuit will allow you to get in tune with the car and get smooth. Then you realise that the live axle set-up really is very good. Not a hint of that rear end bumpiness usually associated with the high unsprung weight of a live axle. It brings the universal acclaim for independent rear suspension into momentary doubt. Do you really need it?

Another immediate bonus of the Fury, only apparent after driving it, is the extra offside elbow room. For broad-shouldered drivers, wearing a coat, there's still plenty of space to manage the steering wheel without hanging your arm over the side. Just as well, really because the plastic side windows are fixed in position on the demo.

It's very quick indeed — and the handling and roadholding are exhilarating. There are only a few sports cars in the industry that are so well sorted that you can virtually forget mechanical operation and concentrate solely on the road. Point and shoot is the phrase which comes to mind. Unless you've had many track hours in something special, the road-going Fury will take you beyond your normal self-preservation limits and much further into unknown territory.

Excellent front to rear balance, negligible roll, a superb ability to drift and, believe it or not, considerable comfort as well. The Escort master cylinder, without servo, is still very efficient at stopping the car and a 1600GT Escort Kent motor, with A2 cam and twin 40 Webers, is as quick as most drivers would ever want. Even running in, with sensible rev limits, it'll whip you up to the legal limits without hesitation. When it's loosened up fully, it'll be staggering.

That combination of solid side windows and curved screen manage to keep the wind off to a large extent and the heater... What more could you want? Line-changing is a joy and the Fury will forgive the most outrageous abuses of indecisive driving on unknown territory. Limits of adhesion are very high. We'll be doing a full road test when the car is fully ready for it.

For now, we can report that it's the best Sylva we have yet driven. Can't think of a live-axled kit car that could catch it round the corners. Don't drive it while in possession of a cheque book and prepare to be disappointed with 99% of all other cars that you'll ever drive afterwards.

From the non-racing public's point of view, it will be a very good thing to have

the Sylva refined for road use. It's a small company compared to others in the industry, so you shouldn't expect massive warehouses, stores, numbers of staff and instant availability of everything you'll ever need. Somehow, Sylva Autokits doesn't seem to be a part of the kit car industry as such. They're out on the fringe somewhere.

Leafing through the specification of the Fury kit package, we don't find listings for exhausts, wiring looms, separate instruments etc. All these are pretty much up to the customer to sort out, especially if you choose an exotic engine. The management will tell you exactly what's needed and probably give you a list of places where things can be got.

Jeremy Phillips is a great one for levelling with his customers. His enthusiasm for the product doesn't extend to hiding facts and he has therefore built up a strong following over the years. His priorities have always been very clear, if a

little narrow: To produce a good-looking car that goes extremely quickly on road and track. Peripheral bolt-on refinements, which are certain to be demanded by the average kit builder, have had to wait.

Having said that, the kit price of £2567.37, inclusive of VAT, offers the buyer free modification of rear axle, front uprights and pedals. You should add the cost of a paint job, a windscreen supplied and professionally fitted, powder coating for the chassis and suspension, side windows, weather gear, trim kit, lights, seats brake pipe kit etc. Some of these prices weren't available at the time of our visit so we can only guess at a total outlay in the region of £4500 for a roadgoing Fury with a standard Escort engine and box. You don't need to have twin 40s, a single 45 or anything special, just the right bonnet bulge to match your carburettor and filter combination.

The demo had been fitted with a Cortina gearbox and aftermarket 15" x 6.5" alloys



Above: Cobra style door catches work quite well. There's a small amount of storage space within the door and wide sills give lots of arm room. Below: Imagine this zipping up behind you on a country lane. Certainly wouldn't take long before you were looking at the back end!



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with 195/50 tyres. You could use standard Escort wheels or 14" X 6" with 185/60s or 13" x 5" with 175/70s. The last combination, with higher profile tyres, will give a considerably smoother ride due to the extra sidewall compliance.

Sylva's laminator, Tony Janeway, has done an excellent job of producing moulds from Jeremy's Fury buck. Looking down the bonnet, through those tall and rounded wheel arches, is a lovely change from sausage and cycle wings. Symmetry is good and panel stiffness was also commendable, even in the large expanse of the bonnet section. Door fit wasn't brilliant and the car's interior still needed final sorting but the basis is there for some very pretty road cars. If you're one of the track fraternity, then you won't be happy without at least a small strip of gaffer tape somewhere on the shell. Not so the normal kit builder. The metallic paint job had been knocked about a bit but showed what could be done with the Fury.

Welders Mark and Charlie have seen to it that the chassis and other special fabrications look and operate well above the industry standard. The MIG-welding is very neat in the Fury structure and the factory fits the structural steel panels onto the chassis prior to delivery.

That leaves the customer to fit some of the non-structural alloy panels. Obviously, the factory offers a fitting service to your specification and this could also be done by Sylva main agents Phoenix Sports Cars of Woodford Halse, near Daventry.

The Mk.2 Escorts, from 1100cc to 1600cc with Kent engines or the 2.0-litre RS Pinto are suitable donors for the Fury. Engine choice is very wide indeed and the factory stocks a whole host of bonnet bulges to accept carburettor protrusions from just about anything. The standard bonnet will probably need a bulge of some kind with whatever engine/carburettor you use.

For the younger driver, the 1100 Kent will provide exciting handling and roadholding with acceptable insurance premiums while the more adventurous driver can go for Fiat twin-cam, Mazda rotary RX, A or B series, CVH, Pinto, Astra 16V, Cosworth or just about any four-cylinder engine you can think of. Even Lancia twin-cam on a Fiat box. Consult Jeremy Phillips who, more often than not, has to fit such things for the racers of this world. He'll recommend the preparation services of Paul and Steve at East Lincs. Motorsport, on 0790 53933, if you want

something rather quicker than standard.

By far the best advice we can give is not to expect the Fury to offer any more all-weather refinement than any other convertible sportster and perhaps a bit less. Where it scores is in pure driving reward, and that it provides with abundance, no matter how small an engine you might choose. We may yet be surprised, though. The soft top arrangement could be no less than

excellent. It might be the first ever waterproof hood...

Just when the Cortina donor looked set to conquer the live-axle kit car scene, enter the Sylva Fury which sweeps them all aside. It holds its own against IRS as well and it looks very special indeed. A driver's machine throughout. Now, if you could just squeeze in a graphic equaliser and frost detector, central-locking and heated seats...

SYLVA FURY - AT A GLANCE

KIT SPECIFICATION

Donor Vehicle: Ford Escort Mk.2, rear wheel drive, all models.

Chassis Type: MIG-welded multi-tubular perimeter and backbone on spaceframe principles but with semi-monocoque sheet steel bulkheads.

Front Suspension: Escort lower track control arms, special leading compression struts, top rocker-arm wishbones operating inboard Spax coil-overs.

Rear Suspension: Escort live axle with twin radius rods and twin leading links as longitudinal Watt's linkages. Panhard rod and Spax Coil-overs.

Brakes: Standard Escort front discs and rear drums. Escort dual-circuit master cylinder without servo.

Steering: Escort steering rack complete. Lengthened Escort column with modified upper crumple section.

Engine Options: You name it. If it's a four and can be attached to a rear drive box then Jeremy may well be able to fit it. Don't ask for a V8.

Body Construction: Composite GRP laminated body in demountable sections for access and damage repair. No final gel colour option as yet. Non-structural.

Kit Prices: £2567.37 inclusive of VAT. Various parts are needed from the optionals list and from other specialists.

Options Available: Not a great deal from Sylva Autokits other than flexible engine fitting arrangements and tuning. Bare essentials for efficient road use. No frills.

OTHER DETAILS

Estimated Build Time: Depends on choice of engine and level of prettiness required. Standard Escort-equipped version could be built up very quickly if you're not going for concours trim. 200 hours?

Ease Of Build: Good one for the first-time builder looking for extreme handling performance on a budget. You'll need practical dexterity as it's not a fully comprehensive kit on a plate. A breeze if a second build-up.

Estimated On-The-Road Cost: Probably in the region of £4,500 minimum for a standard set-up. Much money can be saved in you use standard wheels and can do your own paint job etc. Sky's the limit for engine tuning.

Build-Up Manual: None available at time of visit. Check with Jeremy for progress on that front. Manual.

Regulatory Approval: None.

General: A road rocket. Don't drive it with a heart condition. As close to perfect as a live-axled sportster can get and should be much more expensive for that alone. Demo vehicles available at Sylva and at Phoenix Sports Cars.

For further details contact:

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Phoenix Sports Cars Ltd., Unit 1, The Beaver Centre, Great Central Way Industrial Estate, Great Central Way, Woodford Halse, nr. Daventry, Northants NN11 6PZ. Tel: 0327 60057.