

WK? Build Harlequin Jester

With our Harlequin Jester complete, somebody needed to road test it and give it the final *Which Kit?* seal of approval. It's a fun sports car for the young at heart, right? So who better for the job than old 'Fossil' Filby ...

THERE WERE THREE WORKING days to go before *Which Kit?*'s final deadline on a Friday evening. Some poor sucker had to get to Cornwall by the Wednesday lunchtime, go for a decent blast in the Jester, photograph it, travel back to Surrey and have the feature written by the Thursday evening. No wonder they sent me. After all, I'm just the boss. Who ever says anything about bosses' right, huh?

I was just about beginning to understand that I'd started a new day, and that I needed to be aware of other life around me, as I eased on to the M25 at 6.30am on the Wednesday. Cornwall, here I come. No problem. I'd be raring to go by the time I'd had two or three more coffees and crossed into the land of the eclipse.

Trouble is, as I crossed the border it started to rain. Indeed, it rained like heck all the way down through Cornwall to Truro, where 'our' Jester now resides with its new owner. Then, just as I and blue bolide struggled into Truro's horrendous holiday traffic, hopefully en route to some fast

country roads, it made a special effort to really piss down! Not the ideal start to my Jester baptism.

I hadn't seen the car before but there's something about the Jester's wacky shape that you just have to like. It's very different, it's a bit crazy, but it promises big fun. Great stuff for a young tearaway like me.

Not surprisingly, I left the hood up to start with. When you've got a super-agile, lean and flexible young frame like mine, getting seated is no problem. Right foot down into the footwell first, body diagonally across the interior next (with head up against far side of roll-over bar), left leg follows and then a final twist and sliding down of the whole lot to effect a driving position.

New owner Michelle laughed at my inelegant contortions. I don't know why, because I made a special effort not to curse, groan, wheeze or get the cramps. She sniggered even more when I showed how I got out again – backwards.

Our approach to the Jester interior had been to keep it simple and yet make it as



Above: Styling is certainly different, but it succeeds in its own strange way. Lift-off bonnet is located by two pins in nose.

comfortable as possible. With red carpet on the cockpit sides and black floor carpet covered by rubber mats, it seemed to me we'd succeeded. After all, when you're my age, you don't want to be too cosseted, do you?

Tell you what, that Cobra Roadster 7 seat is a super little job: very supportive and very comfortable. Adjustable too. The Jester's red-rimmed Mountney steering wheel is slightly offset to the right while all controls are pretty ideally placed. As they're in exactly the same positions as they were in the donor Fiesta, it's not surprising. Ford worked it all out to perfection.

You could trim a Jester's dashboard but it might not be in the true spirit of the car. In 'ours' the driver is faced with a curving, simple expanse of light blue coloured GRP relieved only by the instrument pods and two switches bottom right. Information

supplied by the dials concerns speed, revs, water temperature and fuel level, and there's also an unobtrusive row of warning lights. Finally, the usual Ford stalks control the lights, wipers and indicators.

Right, let's go. You know what it's like when you're young and everything is so urgent and vital. I twist the ignition key and the 1300cc Fiesta Supersport engine fires up. Some 66 brake horses wait impatiently to be unleashed. Running through a special exhaust pipe with MGB silencer, they sound nice and sporty. Slip the gearshift into first and apply foot to throttle ...

Hmm ... I'm immediately aware how pleasant to drive the Jester is. Operation of controls couldn't be easier. Steering feel is just right, the gearshift is light and reasonably quick and the pedals... well, they're so 'normal' you really don't have to think about them.





Above: Our use of the original Ford RS alloys, as fitted to the donor car, is open to question, but a set of trendy new wheels would have added significantly to a budget that was already over the top.

The car immediately provides the promise of an easy going, hassle-free, goodtime experience.

Backing that promise is the fact that this Jester has been well built. Structurally, it feels just right. You can tell immediately that there's a strong chassis down under and that the whole car has gone together solidly and without compromise. A typical John 'Lemonade' Watson job. Who? Ah, if you're a new reader, John is our Cornish workshop wizard. 'The wiz with the fizz', that's our man.

Once you know that a car feels right, you can begin to exploit it. The Jester is surprisingly sporty overall. It looks a bit like a modern buggy but it behaves like a sports car. Pushing the engine up to 5000rpm in each gear, I reckon 60mph came up in something like 8 seconds, maybe a bit less, giving the car pretty decent straight-line performance. After 5000, the Ford four-banger

gets a bit harsh, but Michelle's boyfriend, an experienced driver, has apparently used an extra 1000rpm on top of that and got the thing really buzzing.

Whatever, it's an extremely responsive little machine is the Jester. The steering's response is quick, the engine is eager and the result is that the car comes to life the moment you encourage it. Indeed, the chassis feels so good that I'm soon feeling very confident about heading down the lanes and extending it. I'll remain aware that though the brakes are well up to the job, they are a little spongy because they need bleeding.

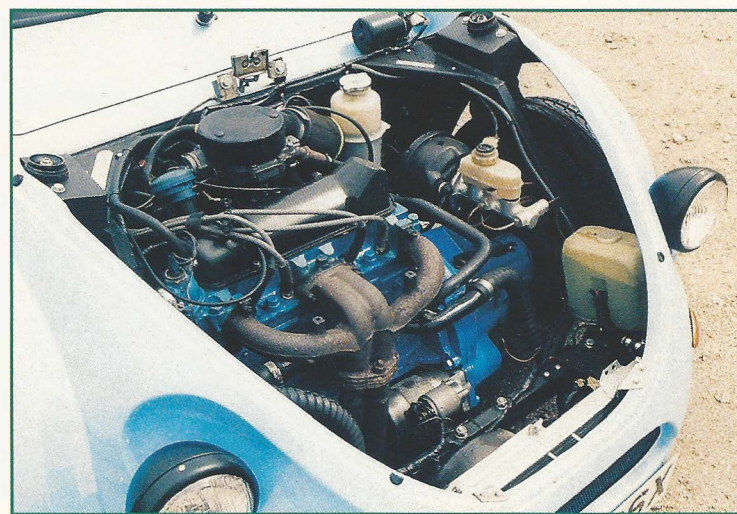
As I said earlier, the real problem is the rain. Having provided proof that, if you're young and trendy, you can cope happily with the small amount of rain the Jester's hood lets in during a torrential barrage of H2O, miraculously it stops. With the car still fairly clean, I get a

few photographs in the can and set off knowing that it's going to get really mucky down those lanes.

The amazing point about driving the Jester down the twisty bits, with the road surface still soaking and looking slippery, is that the car just doesn't notice the difference. The chassis is so

well balanced, the Fiesta suspension so well recycled, that we charge through the bends as if they're not there. True, this is someone else's car, so I restrain myself a tad, but the grip in the wet is truly impressive. I'm amazed at such poise and finesse in such conditions. Heaven knows how good it must be in the dry.

Below: With bonnet off, access to 1300cc Fiesta Supersport engine is excellent. As with all our projects, engine was rebuilt.



Cut-down Fiesta springs, and thus a stiffer ride, must play their part in such brilliant handling. After sampling it, I'd stick with that set-up even though the downside is a slightly hard ride on all but the best surfaces. Fact is the Jester is not exactly intended as a refined, comfortable cruiser, although I might just see how it feels with the tyres set at 20psi instead of their current 22.

Despite my youth, I'm not sure I'd want to drive the Jester on a long journey, although there's no particular reason why it wouldn't be fine for up to 150 miles. Although it appears basic, the weather equipment works OK even in torrential rain (remember, I know that) and the car isn't too noisy at speed. At 70mph, the engine is doing just under 4500rpm, so everything is quite well under control for the longish trip. There's even a heater/demister system, its controls being tucked well under the dashboard moulding.

Not surprisingly, given my tender years, I have to say that the Jester is very much my bag, man. I mean it's on the same wavelength as any cool dude like me. It's really hip wheels.

Ah, someone said they didn't understand those terms. Must have been one of the older generation. Put simply, I mean it's just a damned good, modern fun car which is dead easy to feel at

home with and surprisingly quick when you encourage it. It also has a superb chassis that clearly thinks it's an out-an-out sports car. And the styling ... well, don't have a Jester if you don't want to be noticed.

All in all, another successful *Which Kit?* project vehicle. A natty, nifty fun machine that clearly knows how to make an old – no, I mean young – man very happy indeed. The thrash down to Cornwall and back? No worries. I'd do it anytime if the purpose was to drive a car as good as the Jester.

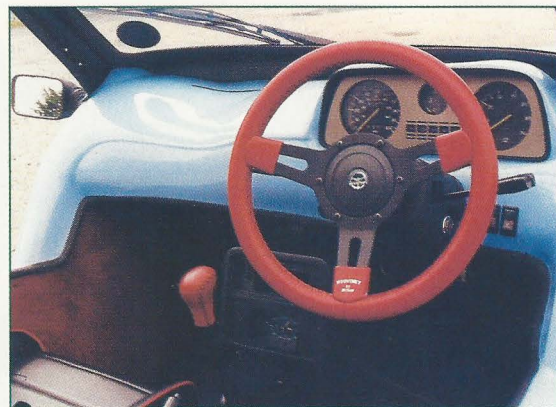
SVA PASSED

WITH JOHN COMPLETING THE build in last month's issue, all that remained between us and the road was overcoming the small matter of an SVA test. John's nearest station is at Exeter and the waiting time from first application to examination is just three weeks. At the time of the test John hadn't quite fitted all the weather gear so he decided to play it safe and trailer the Jester up to the test site.

As before with our other project cars, Single Vehicle Approval proved considerably less of a headache than we might have expected. In fact, the Jester test went extremely easily, with nothing even vaguely causing a problem. That is, until the

computer printed out the brake test results at the very end. Because the car hadn't really turned a wheel in anger and all the brakes were new, the performance front to back didn't match what the computer had expected to find. The inspector told John to drive the car around the test site for a few minutes to see whether that would bed the pads in a little better and, sure enough, after a few minutes of hard braking the retest showed everything to be OK.

This problem could easily occur with any kit where the brakes haven't really been used because



Above: Dashboard is extremely simple with a pod containing main instruments.

the car has been trailed to the test site. If you drive your car to the SVA test then you probably won't have the same problem. Still, the Jester then passed and the registration process followed without a hitch. We were on the road!

Below: Jester looks especially good from rear. Thanks to inclement Cornish weather, we proved conclusively that the weather equipment does a good job, with only few small leaks.



PROJECT SUMMARY

Builder John Watson's final views on assembling the *Which Kit?* Jester

Liked ...

- One-donor kit. Donor parts cheap to overhaul and fit straight on with no mods, keeping assembly as simple as possible.
- Powder-coated chassis is a well worthwhile option.
- One-piece body with no doors is a real plus for the first-time builder. Hence no panels to line up.
- Good quality GRP moulding.
- Easy pass through SVA test.

Not so happy about ...

- Build manual not detailed enough.
- Newest donor car (Fiesta Mk1) will be 18 years old, meaning major refurbishment of parts is almost always going to be necessary.
- Some fibreglassing required – basically to bond-in wheel arches and bond main bodyshell to inner section.

Verdict ...

The Jester is an ideal project for both the first-time and more advanced builder, and the subsequent development work carried out by Harlequin makes it even easier and quicker to build. The completed car performs and handles well and is great fun to drive.