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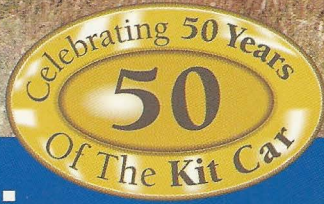
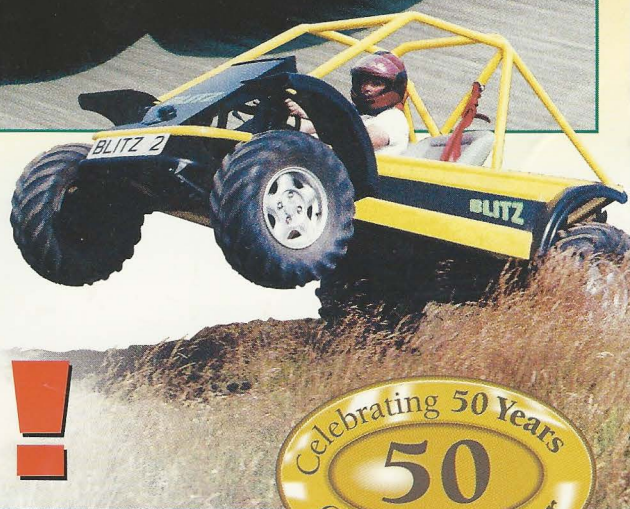
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PHOENIX Sylva's Best Yet?

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Our in-depth story of the Kit Car continues...

SYLVA PHOENIX

Drop Dead Gorgeous

Sylva's new Phoenix hots up the retro sports car market by bringing the concept back to basics. Ian Stent tries it for size.

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS safe and you'd finally got to grips with the differences between Fisher's Fury and Specialist Sports Cars' Stylus, the original instigator of both cars has come up with his latest interpretation of the theme, the new Sylva Phoenix. To confuse matters even further, the Sylva Phoenix is not only the latest version of the marque, but it could also be considered as the predecessor!

...a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...Sylva's Jeremy Phillips developed an all-enveloping body for his highly successful Mk2 Striker

kit. Originally called the Sylva Striker Mk4, and primarily aimed at track use, the cars have continued to prove themselves all-dominant out on the circuit even to this day. The Mk4 lacked any doors or windscreen and was, in essence, simply a rebodied Striker chassis. A redesign of the original concept resulted in the Sylva Fury, complete with new chassis, full windscreen and doors. Then there was the Sylva Stylus, with even bigger doors, redesigned bonnet area and opening boot. Whilst Jeremy held onto the original Mk4 Striker,

history clearly points out that both the Fury and Stylus have moved onto pastures new and proved themselves to be hot sellers with the kit buying public.

With the new SVA regulations, Jeremy was very aware that the Mk4 Striker would need a few subtle tweaks if builders wished to register their cars for the road. With new engine installations also in the back of his mind, as well as a seemingly endless desire to fettle what has always been a pretty shape, the new Phoenix was underway. However, unlike his

previous updates on the original concept, the new car would retain the original Striker chassis as well as the bare-bones nature of a car without doors, windscreen and other modern 'creature comforts'.

So, main changes to the original bodywork centre around the front and rear of the car. At the back, the Phoenix is a full 5" longer than its predecessor, allowing for a more streamlined look which includes frenched-in rear lights and a dedicated position for the legally required rear fog lamp. Up front the bonnet has also been lengthened,







although this time only subtly. Equally invisible is the narrowing of the bodywork over the front arches which helps to pull them more naturally over the front wheels.

But the most significant changes up here centre round the lights and bonnet. The position of the former have been lifted slightly and, when combined with a smaller lens, bring

the lamp positions well within SVA limits. A Perspex cover then continues the theme of smoothing out the whole design. As for the bonnet, the Phoenix retains the full tilt forward feature of the original car and the later Fury. To retain the streamlined side profile of the car yet raise the bonnet height to accommodate taller engines,

Above: Phoenix really looks the biz when it's out on the road. Below left: Interior typically spartan. Interior side panels could do with covering to hide underside of GRP lay-up. Driving position just about perfect despite lack of any easy seat adjustment.

Jeremy's lateral thinking has allowed the whole upper bonnet area to become a bonnet bulge which, combined with a natty air outlet for the radiator, looks extremely neat

and tidy.

The end result tends to look far more impressive in the flesh than it does in photos. While the original could never be described as boxy, the new Phoenix certainly makes a play of its more delicate features - it's an extremely pretty car. If there's one area that I feel has been especially successful, then the back must come in for particular praise. It's a vast improvement over the original offering. If you're instantly wondering about full windscreens, doors and other paraphernalia, then Sylva admits that a full windscreen could well be an option developed for the Phoenix sometime next year, but don't hold your breath for doors, boot lids, full leather interiors, cd stackers and other luxuries - the Phoenix will remain a bare-bones kit car, and that's just the way we like it.

Under the new bodywork is, as we've already mentioned, the same Striker chassis that has served the racers so well over the years. It's a spaceframe affair with Sylva's trademark front end suspension utilising a modified Escort upright,



top rocking arm with inboard coil-over and conventional lower wishbone. The Escort also supplies the steering rack and column along with the rear live axle which is located via the company's tried and tested five-link arrangement. Shunning the temptation to go for a full IRS set-up, Sylva is adamant that the live-axle remains the best option, as well as the most cost effective. Equally, you won't find any rear disc conversions or other fancy tweaks since the company has always followed an understated philosophy that if something works perfectly well in standard form, there's no need to change it. Back that up with years of race winning cars delivering the goods in no uncertain terms and there's little more to be said.

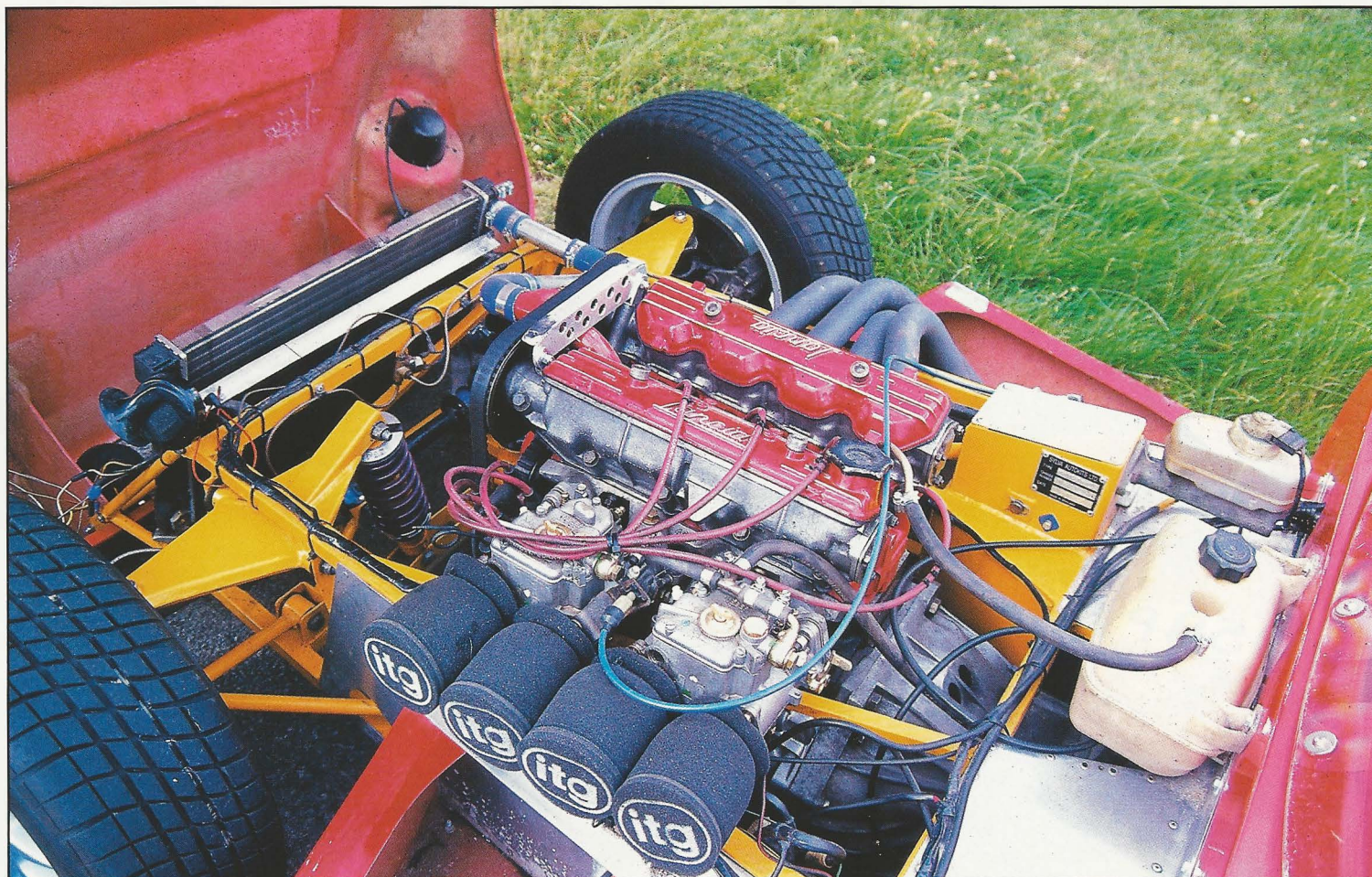
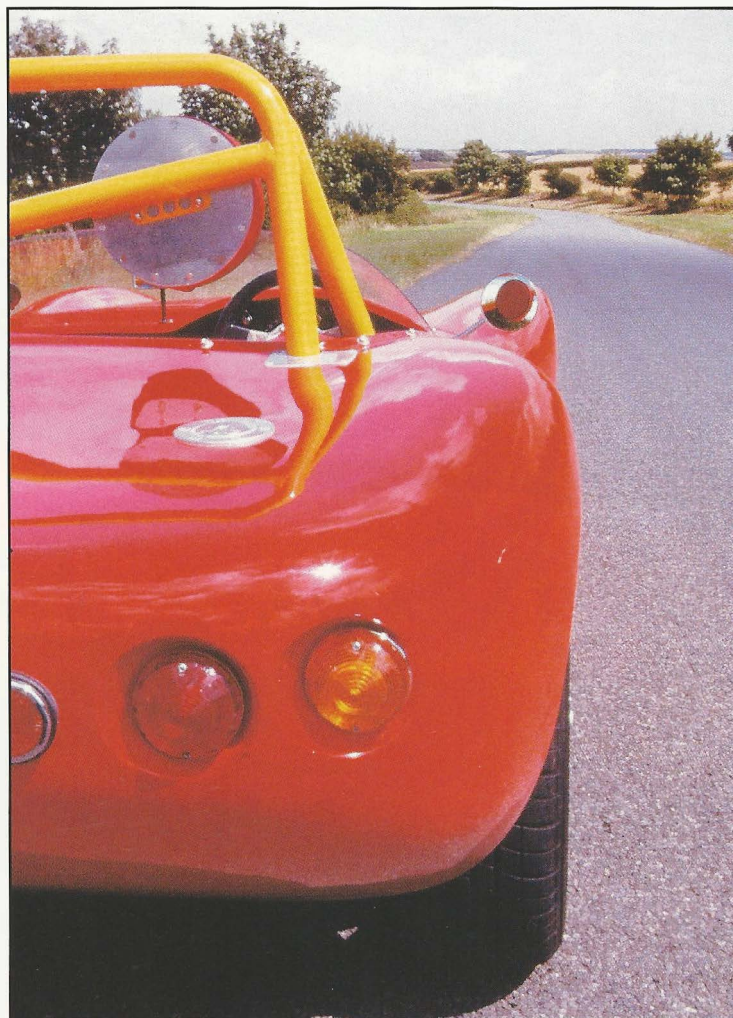
A simple bench-style seat looks the biz thanks to a neatly shaped backrest and contrasting piping. It's a £30 option over the more basic flat-backed seats and one we'd certainly go for. Apart from the seats, trim in the test car is typically minimal, centring around partially trimmed side panels in red vinyl. This limited trimming works well,

although the inside of the fibreglass side panels look pretty scruffy and would, in an ideal world, also be trimmed in matching vinyl (perhaps foam backed). A flat dash (with curved lower edge to meet SVA requirements) looks great, especially with a slightly raised area in front of the driver to accommodate the two main instruments.

Typical of Sylva's careful layout, and despite no adjustment in the seats, the driving position is virtually perfect. As before, the cockpit is a snug one and that feature is exacerbated in this car thanks to a Lancia twin-cam engine installation which further limits legroom down in the footwell because of the larger gearbox bellhousing. The modified Escort pedals are themselves reasonably well spaced and, despite the steering wheel looking a little odd without any column mounted stalks, its length is just perfect. Those more ambitious amongst you will probably work out a way of modifying the column to take such mod-cons, but in reality you soon get used to dash mounted items.

As we've already mentioned,

Below: Over the years loads of different engines have been fitted to Strikers and the Fiat/Lancia option has always been a favourite. Ford X-flow will also be a popular installation, as well as more modern Zetec and K-series units. Sylva also feels the CVH is much underrated.





Above: New Phoenix is perhaps the most successful stylistic update of the original Mk4 Striker concept although lack of doors and other modern 'creature comforts' will always limit its ultimate appeal.

under the bonnet is a 2-litre Lancia twin-cam engine with 5-speed gearbox. Ford's ubiquitous X-flow would be another obvious choice while Sylva feels the CVH lump remains a much underrated option. Typical of the more modern units to have found favour are the Ford Zetec and Rover K-series twin-cams, both of which have been installed in various Strikers over the years. The Fiat/Lancia twin-cam fitted to this

car has always been a popular choice for Sylva, both in 1.6 and 2-litre forms. And then there are those other oddities that Jeremy Phillips won't thank me for suggesting, such as the Rover V8 and Ford V6 - both have seen service before, despite the company's protestations that the Striker should remain a lightweight blaster unencumbered by vast multi-cylinder installations.

In the test car, the addition of some twin 40 Webers and a few other tweaks mean the Lancia engine should be good for around 130+bhp and with an all-up weight of just 500kgs it means the Phoenix should hustle along very nicely indeed. Exiting through a single exhaust silencer positioned in the driver's side sill section, the Phoenix sounds promising...

What's more, as you put your foot down the better the noise gets, allied to some pretty fearsome acceleration. The gearing through the 5-speed box is good and the Lancia lump pulls hard and strong to

ensure cog-stirring remains fast and furious. Handling through the standard suspension is typically delicate and precise and the Phoenix soon becomes an absolute joy through the bends and tighter roundabouts. Accurate steering feel is vital to the equation and here the car delivers a well-weighted and balanced response. Grip through the 185x60x14" tyres is prodigious but there remains an easily achievable break-away point at which tail-out antics become a joy rather than peril.

In the interior there's a reasonable degree of buffeting but it is still less than one might expect from a typical Lotus Seven inspired kit car with its large flat screen. Obviously, if it's raining then you get wet while a tonneau can provide totally adequate overnight protection for a simple interior that won't mind a few drops of rain anyway. Behind the bench seat there's a surprisingly large storage area available above the modified Mini van fuel tank. That said, no one is trying to say that the Phoenix is practical - it ain't.

As for Single Vehicle Approval,

this car will shortly be presented for inspection, despite being original registered prior to the new tests coming into force. Some natty new bonnet catches are about to be fitted but in most other respects Sylva isn't expecting to make many other modifications. The wing mirrors may need attention, but that's about it.

As to the cost of Phoenix ownership, a chassis and suspension pack will set you back £1520 with the gelcoat coloured GRP bodywork a further £890. Head for a donor sourced engine in a car with alloy wheels and half decent tyres and Sylva estimates you'll be heading for around £5500 all-in.

All of which makes the Phoenix a devastatingly attractive option. This is just how a stripped out minimalistic sports car should be and with the revamped styling the new Phoenix is going to find quite a few new customers. We liked it a lot.

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