
Chris Troop's fabulous Falcon is such a beautiful, classic style sports car, it is hard to believe it started out in kit form, let alone that it is the work of a first-time car builder. Story and photography by Nicky Wright.

There was a time, not so very long ago, when many kit cars were of questionable quality. There are still some falling in that category, ie: rippled mouldings, poor fit of panels and requiring a bit of surgery to make anything fit. Fortunately the aforesaid nightmares are no longer the majority. Far from it! In the last couple of years or so the kit car industry has grown up in the realisation that its customers are not all masochists and want easy to assemble, well designed kits that are not only attractive to look at but safe on the road as well.

Long have I blown the trumpet for Jago's Geep and the NG series because they are honest-to-goodness, well thought-out kits offering tremendous value for money. The Hensen, too, is in my opinion one of the best of the expensive offerings. But choices are getting harder all the time; recently I sampled the Madison, Marcos and the Dax Cobra, all very impressive alternative transportation. To weed out the very best kit car, regardless of cost, would prove a difficult job indeed and I humbly suggest a "Kit Car of the Year" award along the lines of the "Car of the Year" award but perhaps done with less cynicism and more honesty a la the American *Motor Trend* magazine's own "Car of the Year" award.

Before deciding which is top dog, *Motor Trend* really puts the cars through their paces, adding or subtracting points on areas like handling, workmanship, technical advancement, etc. So much prestige is attached to the award that winning it can be worth millions of dollars in extra sales. And an award like this for kit cars will encourage better products, increased sales and happy customers.

A recent addition to the kit car field is the Falcon. An impressive and good looking, roomy two-seater, the Falcon would be a strong contender for any "Kit Car of the Year" award. As regards price, it belongs in the upper stratosphere, costing £3000 for the standard kit which, as we shall see, is very comprehensive, nonetheless. A terrific bonus in my book is its use of aluminium. Apart from the rakish wings which are fibreglass, the entire kit is made from high quality aluminium and, like fibreglass, doesn't rust.

The Falcon comes from the North, its home being at Standish, near Manchester, and is produced by JBA Engineering to obviously very high standards. Its engine, drivetrain and suspension are Ford Cortina Mk III or Mk IV and can be bolted directly to the kit. That's the beauty of Cortina mechanicals, a maximum of twelve bolts

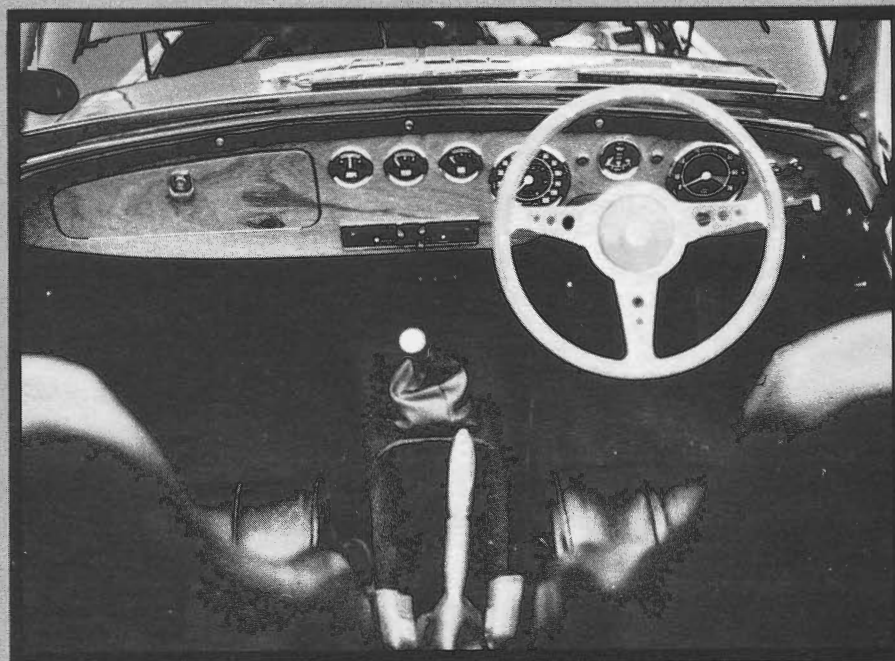
holds the whole shooting match together.

Chris Troop is in the RAF and has something to do with computers, radars and early warning systems, all highly technical stuff. His base is small and stuck deep in the Hampshire countryside, surrounded by fields, farms and cows. Not far from my home, in fact, an advantage worth exploiting because Chris Troop had assembled a Falcon kit.

It's all very well to try cars carefully put together by the manufacturers, but necessary, too; one is able to drive demonstration cars in ways one wouldn't attempt with an enthusiast assembled kit, and there's a lot to be gained from talking to the people who produce the kits. But it's only half the story; manufacturers have the space and equipment the buyer couldn't hope to own, let alone rig up in his 15' x 17' garage. The mark of a good kit is its ease of assembly at home, and here, on my doorstep, was the perfect chance to assess a home-built kit and learn at first hand what problems, if any, the assembler had. A quick 'phone call to Chris Troop and an appointment was made.

As it turned out, three appointments had to be made; the first two were cancelled because of intemperate weather conditions, but third time lucky and Chris arrived on a day when the weather appeared reasonable. Well, if you can call reasonable a frosty looking sun peering down at us from the heavens and a chill in the air cold enough to encourage the use of thermal underwear,

Smart cockpit is typical traditional sports car style with woodrim wheel and polished wooden dashboard complete with locking glove box.



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The Falcon was a real eye catcher; it really looked the part. Painted a deep, dark blue beautifully applied by Chris himself, one could not help but be impressed. The more I went round it, the more unlike a kit car it became. Everything fitted just so, with not a ripple to be seen. Chrome work appeared to be high quality stuff and the interior looked expensive. Indeed, the car was so good it was hard to believe it had been built in a little lock-up garage instead of on a production line. I had a lot of questions to ask Chris but first we would get the driving and photographic side over before the weather turned nasty as the forecasters predicted.

For a car only fractionally longer than the famous MG TC, it was surprisingly roomy. It's a two-plus-two... Falcons are normally two seaters but Chris modified his to allow his dog to travel with his wife and himself when they went up north from time to time. Chris is a Lancashire lad, you see. So it's not really a two-plus-two; more a two-plus-dog! That he went to the trouble to modify his Falcon to accommodate his dog shows a character of true worth as far as I'm concerned. Pity there's not more like Chris.

I loaded the doggy seat with my camera gear and we set off in the direction of Portsmouth. Butser Hill had crossed my mind as a good location for pictures but I dispensed with the idea on the grounds that Butser is the highest point in Hampshire and also the chilliest, knowing how windy it can be up there.

As we drove beyond the Butser turn-off, a windmill came into view. It was also pretty high up but not as high as Butser. Turning off the A3 we headed up a fairly wide farm track towards our objective. We had been travelling the best part of twenty minutes, just long enough to gauge what the Falcon could,

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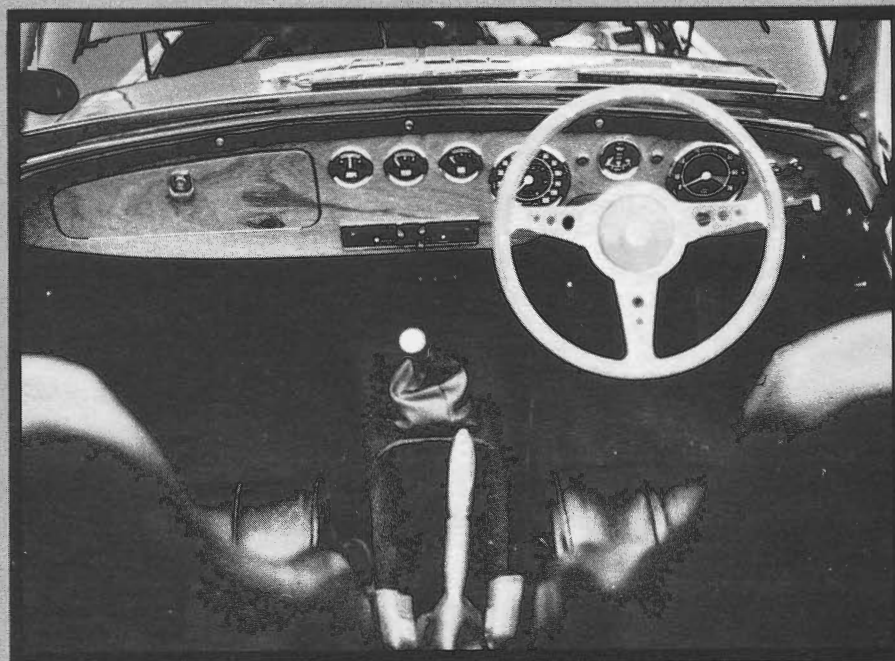
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or should, do. Impressively roomy even with the hood up, certainly comfortable, the suspension tight yet giving enough to soak up the bumps before they reach the passengers. The farm track was very rough but the Falcon took it in its stride without transmitting any shockwaves to us. Chris told me the trips he took to his Lancashire home always left his wife and himself . . . and the dog, no doubt . . . as fresh as when they had started out. There's very few cars you can say that about!

Finally we got through with the picture taking and headed homeward via Rogate, a twee West Sussex village. It was at Rogate Garage that owner Jim Gillespie gave Chris the use of his high pressure water hose to clean the Falcon (we'd got the car rather mucky during photography when we inadvertently moved it on to some soft chalk). Rogate Garage is part of Arena Motors . . . both at the same address . . . and Jim's stock-in-trade is the restoration of collector cars and selling up-market special interest autos. Whatever the problem, Jim'll fix it. Forgive the pun!

Back home, thawed out and feeling alive once more, I asked Chris why he chose the Falcon and how he went about building it. From now on, the stage belongs to Chris and I've let him tell it his way: "I had decided the type of car I wanted was an open roadster, so I set a limit of £2000 to spend and made a shortlist of the kits most suited to my needs. At first it was a toss-up between the NG . . . smashing car that . . . and the Spartan, but my wife saw an advertisement for the Falcon. I looked at the price and said no, it's too expensive, but she twisted my arm, insisting we should look at it. We were going up to Manchester, anyway, so I thought there's no harm in having a look.

"We went to look at the Falcon and I was much impressed, even more so when I took a test drive in one. That was it: I had to have it! The engineering was absolutely fantastic whereas the engineering on some of the other kit cars I looked at was a bit shoddy; they looked like kit cars. Before finally making up my mind I went back to look at the Spartan and, well . . . it certainly was spartan (laughter) in comparison to the Falcon".

Chris realised it was no contest when he saw a finished Spartan chassis laid out: "It had gaps in it which were water traps, and water traps spell eventual rust. Also the thickness of the metal in the Spartan chassis was half that of the Falcon, so there was no choice. It was a case of forking out more money and getting the proper car. My wife had made up her mind the Falcon was it, so the decision was mutual. When we returned home I immediately placed my order.

"As soon as I had a delivery date, I went out to find a suitable donor car. I was thinking of a 1600 but my wife, Martine, said it had to be a 2-litre or nothing". This last statement was accompanied by peels of laughter which continued as Chris and Martine chose the colour as well: "I decided on white but she said blue and blue it is. Martine's right, of course. The Falcon looks very elegant painted dark blue and I'm glad I listened to her when she first picked out the car. I thought it too expensive, but as it worked out, it would have cost me the same amount had I chosen one of the others and brought it up to Falcon specifications".

It was Martine who also found the right donor vehicle. Chris had looked at several examples, all in a sad state, particularly one which had been advertised as "sound but with a small dent". A price of £120 was quoted so

Chris went to look. "It was absolute rubbish", he grinned. "It was rust holding rust together and where it had been hit up the front, it was obviously a write-off and the steering was bent; it was evil so I gave it a miss".

"We were taking the dog for a walk and we saw this Cortina in a nearby car park. The owner was with the car and Martine said 'Go and ask him if it's for sale'. I said 'I can't do *that*' but as we passed by, Martine asked him! And he said he would, for £80. It had no MoT but we had a drive round the car park and it appeared alright, so I bought it".

The Cortina represented a good buy, thanks to his incredible wife. Once Chris had it back home he stripped it in a day and the hard work began. He said he wished he had saved time by having the parts steam cleaned; as it was he did each part by hand and replaced all the bushes. Then he hit a snag: "You have a pivot going through the top wishbone of the front suspension with two bushes either side. One side slipped out but the bolt on the other side wouldn't budge. I tried everything possible to remove it, all to no avail, so I was forced to buy another sub-frame from a nearby scrapyard". It cost Chris £20 but it was in far better condition and included perfect discs which would have had to be replaced on the original sub-frame anyway.

Chris replaced every bush and bearing with new ones, cleaned all the parts and gave them a liberal coating of Hammerite. The gearbox and differential were good but Chris bought a reconditioned engine rather than use the unit in the donor vehicle: "I wanted a new car, and while gearboxes can be changed, engines can be a major headache if they go wrong". The reconditioned engine cost £295 and came with a three year written guarantee.

It took Chris about five weeks to ready all the suspension and mechanical parts. That's not five weeks' solid work but during days off or in the evenings and weekends. With everything ready, he went back to JBA Engineering and picked up the kit. He was surprised to find the kit virtually assembled; all bolt holes were pre-drilled, windscreen surround was on, doors and trim were fitted, etc. This is done to ensure everything fits before delivery to the customer.

Once the whole assembly was back home, it was taken apart ready for final assembly. Martine, who was an invaluable helper as ever, Hammerited the interior panels while Chris jacked the Falcon chassis up onto stands, placed the Cortina suspension underneath, lowered the chassis and bolted it altogether. As simple as that, with no modifications whatsoever. Next came the engine and gearbox which dropped straight in, although Chris admits he used the RAF car club's hydraulic hoist at the base. Once he made sure everything was working (this consisted of driving the bare bones chassis round the yard!),

That's Chris Troop behind the wheel. In view of the car's superbly high overall quality and finish, it's hard to believe he was a first-time kit builder.



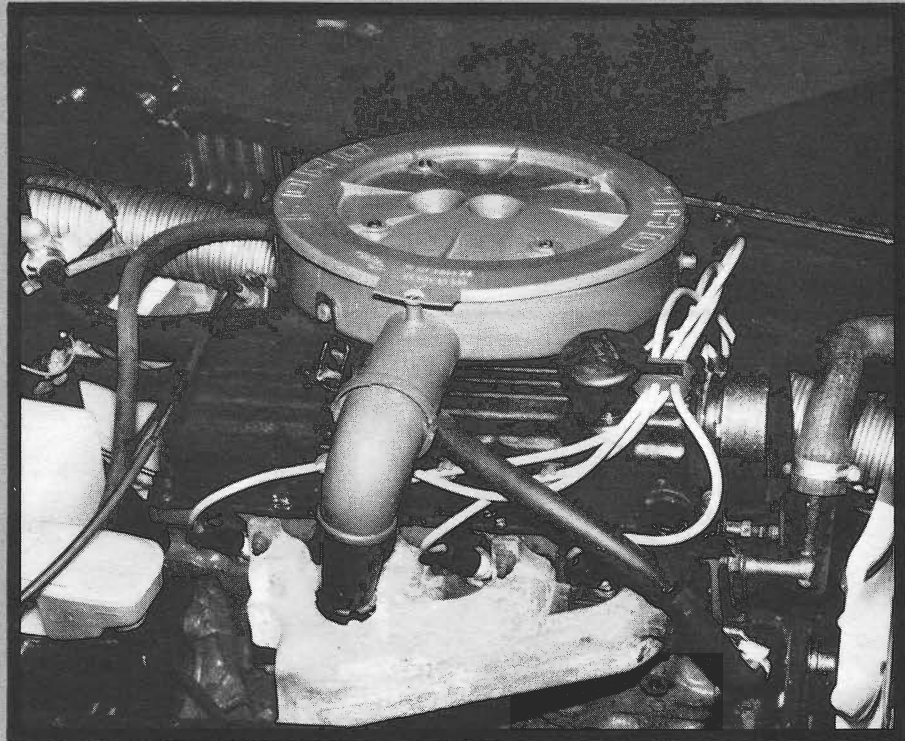
he set to work painting the body.

"Definitely the hardest job of the whole kit was the paint spraying, grimaced Chris. "I'd never done any spraying before and I bought one of those Jumbo paint spray kits. They're marvellous and really do the job well. All in all it took me a week to spray the car and a further week to ten days rubbing down . . . that really was the worst part!" The reward for Chris' labours is one of the finest paint finishes to be seen . . . the sheen is such you could shave in it. Another bonus was cost. He was quoted £400 by a professional paint shop but all it cost him was £60. And that included the Jumbo spray kit.

Any modifications . . . and they are few . . . are those which Chris elected to do himself. These include the aforementioned "doggy seat", a different and sportier steering wheel to replace the one from the Cortina, and a wooden handle for the glovebox. The handbrake handle Chris whittled out of a piece of wood.

As can be seen from the picture, Chris' Falcon is a work of art. He had never attempted anything like it before: "I'm just your average do-it-yourselfer and I

Ford Cortina OHC 2-litre power provides plenty of urge for the reasonably lightweight car.



Fuel tank is shrouded by aluminium rear body panelling.



could build this kit without any specialist knowledge. I'd buy another Falcon and I heartily recommend it to anyone". It took him a little over six weeks to build and that was going at it most of the time. Pretty good, eh?

The basic Falcon kit is very comprehensive and what you get for £2750 includes all aluminium panels ready fitted to the integral chassis/body frame, ready fitted bonnet and doors, ready to bolt-on GRP wings, chrome bumpers, fuel tank, radiator grille, windscreen frame plus glass and all rubber, mahogany dash and loads of other bits and pieces. Modified clutch, brake, and accelerator pedals, specially shortened propshaft and springs are offered on an exchange basis, as is the steering column extension. Chris again: "As I said earlier I'd definitely recommend the Falcon to anyone wanting to build a kit car. I've heard so many horror stories from people who have tried to make up cheap kits and what they've ended up with is cheap quality. The Falcon is a fabulous, fully engineered sports car."

One look at the Falcon tells you it's well worth the money. Beautifully shaped panels, proportions spot on, well built and finished, the Falcon has to be one of the best kits in Britain, if not the world. On the road the car feels utterly safe and is comfortable enough to take long journeys with its superior handling qualities. As kits go, it is hard to beat. Pop round to your friendly bank manager; even he could not help but be impressed . . .

Information and details of Falcon kits can be obtained from JBA Engineering (KCW), Unit 56B, Bradley Hill Trading Estate, Bradley Lane, Standish, Nr. Wigan, Greater Manchester. Tel: 0267 424549.