

THE FINE ART OF FALCONRY

Stealing the limelight amid a sea of automotive excellence is no mean feat, but is one frequently performed with consummate ease by the JBA Falcon, such is the air of exclusivity it exudes. Ian Hyne attempts to identify that certain je ne sais quoi:

The first task on such a bright and sunny morning was to take the hood down. That done, I encountered a problem . . . I already felt a little self conscious decked out in a morning suit complete with tails, and had no wish to compound the effect by donning my Biggles hat and goggles. So, in order to arrive at the church having retained some degree of sartorial elegance,I was forced to don my top hat which led me to discover a major design fault on the otherwise masterful product of JBA Engineering; it is impossible to drive whilst wearing such a common item of headgear! With the hood raised there is less than the necessary 9" of headroom, and with the hood down, the slipstream does its best to deposit the aforementioned hat some 50 yards in one's wake. Thus, if I appeared a little dishevelled whilst performing the duties of usher at my brother's wedding, we know who to blame!

Other than that the car proved a constant source of pleasure for both driver and passenger; the blue livery even matched young Angela's dress and hat! What higher praise could anyone bestow upon the JBA Falcon.

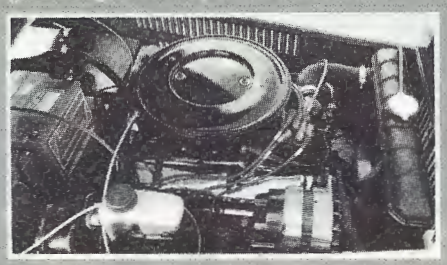
On arrival at the factory to collect the car I was met by Dave Ashley representing a third of the brains behind the car that bears his initial, and being his usual busy self, he invited me to wander round the place to get a 'behind the scenes' look at what goes into such a car. Strolling through the spacious, orderly workshops I came upon the main assembly area where a completed chassis, reposing on purpose made supports, provided a focal point for my attention. The basis of the structure is a twin rail frame with extensive cross bracing which, while it may be an excellent method of joining the mechanical parts to the rest of the car, is not sufficiently stiff to resist the flexing

induced by driving forces. However, it also incorporates a substantial backbone about 7½" square, formed from 14 gauge steel sheet to make the transmission tunnel, as well as a similarly constructed front bulkhead incorporating the footwells. These additions go a long way towards achieving the rigidity of the finished product, greatly assisted by the complete framework of 1" square section tubing running the length and breadth of the car to provide the mountings for the alloy sheet body panels.

The result of this apparently complex construction is a chassis that looks absolutely right and, being a believer in the old adage that if it looks right, it is right, I was filled with eager anticipation at the prospect of borrowing the car for a few days.

AWAY WE GO!

When the chassis is fully clothed the visual effect is very pleasing, but looking deeper one can appreciate the excellent fit of the panels, doors and hood, the high gloss of the paint, the tasteful contrast between the blue paint and light tan double duck hood and the overall sense of a robust but refined car. The doors open good and wide to facilitate entry, even with the hood raised, and having settled into the seat and pulled the door shut with a reassuring clunk, I was pleased to find a good degree of adjustment. With the seat adjusted I found plenty of room for my legs, elbows and head and the driving position was very comfortable with all controls easily to hand even if the gear lever could have been a little nearer; a little bending would easily sort that out.

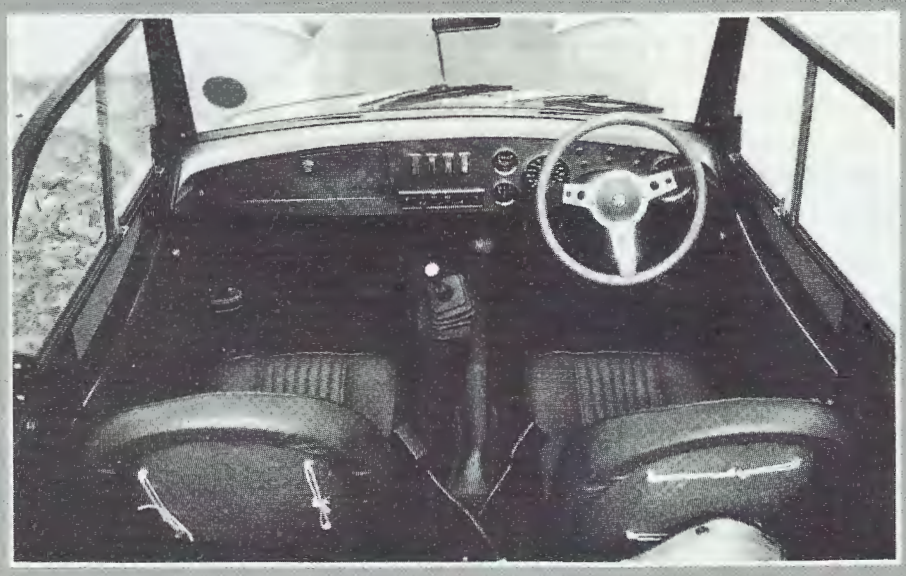


Capacious engine bay allows fine access to delightful Ford V6. Ventilation system needs refinement, however.

I now felt ready for the off and turned the key to fire up the newly installed, fully reconditioned V6 3 litre engine. It caught immediately but far from the expected sports car roar, my ears were treated to the soft purring of the twin exhausts. Letting in the clutch I moved off very smoothly and was immediately struck by the quality of the ride and the lack of vibration. This is achieved by a combination of soft springs, firm damping and the use of mastic between the body panels and the chassis to absorb vibration.

Being a newly rebuilt engine there were not many miles on the clock, so I was under instructions to take it easy. My task was simplified by the excellent torque of the V6 which allowed me to keep the revs down whilst rolling along at a moderate speed in top gear.

Reaching the M6 I settled down to enjoy life as I cruised at around 50-55 mph. An hour or so later, I was still comfortable but I could have done with a little more room around the clutch pedal in order to rest my left foot. However, paying strict attention to my speed and the engine revs caused me to note the odd positioning of the main instruments, both of which were obscured by my hands when holding the wheel in the 10 to 2 position. JBA were evidently aware of this as the steering wheel was off centre to allow them to be seen when driving straight with one hand on the wheel. This problem is not uncommon in roadsters with a limited depth to the dashboard but in this case they could not be accommodated centrally due to the heater control mechanism, but I'm sure an enterprising builder could design an alternative arrangement.



Cockpit is pleasantly trimmed, though footwell is rather narrow and test car's seats lacked lateral support.

Another small point I discovered whilst cruising down the motorway was that the interior door handle was ideally placed for resting my elbow on which could have unfortunate consequences if one happened to inadvertently open the door at the wrong moment! The only other little niggle was the rubber mounted rear view mirror which many manufacturers seem to favour; I don't know *why* as they never show anything other than a wildly vibrating scene from which it is impossible to estimate distance or speed of following vehicles.

On the plus side, I found the fit of the hood and especially the side screens to be outstanding, there being a perfect seal between the screens and the windscreen pillars. The high standard of the weather equipment coupled with the refined exhaust had the unusually pleasing effect of making the car quiet and I would have had no problem listening to a stereo had one been fitted, or talking to a passenger.

Having reached Toddington on the M1, I decided to turn off and take advantage of the late afternoon sunshine to complete the journey home to Hertfordshire across country. Pulling off the road I found the hood took about 30 seconds to lower and it also folded down to stow very neatly in the back. With a couple of hundred miles now recorded, I was able to allow around 3000 revs to register through the gears. This gave some very respectable speeds for country lanes, but there was absolutely no drama involved in cornering, other than me rolling all over my seat due to the almost total lack of lateral support. Again this is a fault acknowledged by JBA who upholster their own GRP seat shells. They are currently developing a much improved version, but a seat of excellent quality which will fit is the M66 unit. They are not difficult to obtain and the cost of recovering them should be around £30 each. As well as being extremely supportive and comfortable, they have the added refinement of rake adjustment, which should be better news for the passenger whose predicament is exacerbated by having nothing to hang on to as well as being unable to brace himself with his feet due to the generous depth of the footwells. To overcome, as far as possible, the seat problem I tightened my seat belt prior to continuing. That was much better and I was able to attack the bends to be rewarded with the light, precise steering, the excellent brakes and the effortless low down power of the V6, making driving this car an experience of which I would never tire. Although no great speeds were attained out of respect for the new power unit I was pushing the car and I felt its handling to be outstanding. With the tyre pressures adjusted to compensate for the extra weight of the V6, I never once felt the slightest trace of understeer but oversteer was easily induced and was delightfully simple to

correct. Thus I arrived home grinning from ear to ear.

After the marvellous start to the Saturday the skies clouded over and in order not to end up looking like a drowned usher, I raised the hood. Having already been impressed with its quality of material and fit, when the heavens opened I was able to experience its total effectiveness from the best possible position: inside. We arrived at the reception dry as a bone despite the monsoons and flash floods outside. It was on arrival at the reception that I parked amid a few Rolls Royces, Porsches, 'E' types and the like, and although no-one was sufficiently interested to get drenched in order to indulge their curiosity, when the weather cleared quite a few appreciative motorists ignored the competition to gaze upon it.

During the rest of the test period, as the miles mounted we were able to push it a little harder and faster but quite honestly there was nothing upon which we could fault the handling or road holding. No matter what the speed or the bend the car never once felt anywhere near its limits and never gave any cause for concern. However, another couple of points were that when travelling at speeds in excess of about 65 mph one could feel a slightly floating sensation from the rear end which an expert of our acquaintance assured us



Sliding perspex side windows are likely to deteriorate with age and modern handbrake looks slightly out of character.

could be overcome with fractionally firmer damping without detracting from the quality of the ride, and also there was quite a build-up of heat in the footwells even when the heater was off. I know V6 engines are always hot but the Falcon was even fitted with a Transit radiator! Perhaps a few more louvres in the bonnet?

Speaking of the bonnet, it opened in the conventional way and unlike quite a few traditional roadsters with centre hinged bonnets, routine servicing was easy and one didn't have to worry about water finding its way through the joins to soak any electrics mounted on the bulkhead below.

The engine bay had bags of room for the V6 and can even swallow the Rover V8 with ease, so there weren't any access problems either, especially as JBA had provided a proper bonnet stay to allow both hands to be free for under bonnet operations.

VERDICT

Having driven the car over quite a few hundred miles in all weathers, to say we were impressed would be an understatement! Everyone who saw it, and especially those who drove it were ecstatic in their praise, for this is a car with such refinement as to belie the fact that it is a kit or that it is Ford Cortina based.

Even with a 2-litre Cortina engine performance is good, but with the V6 it was excellent and the low down power was a real pleasure. With outstanding handling, excellent brakes and fast acceleration at top speed it is a real drivers' machine, but even crawling through traffic in the pouring rain we still thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Although we found a few faults with the Falcon, the fact that they are all pretty trivial, except for the seats merely serves to emphasise that this is a superb, desirable and enviable motor car for which the manufacturers are to be congratulated.

Further information and a full colour brochure can be obtained from **JBA Engineering, Unit 56b, Bradley Hall Trading Estate, Bradley Lane, Standish, Greater Manchester. Tel 0257 424549**

FRUGAL FALCON

The lovely JBA Falcon has already made itself a reputation as one of the best detailed and most professionally engineered kit cars in the business. Not unnaturally it has therefore been sold at a price beyond some people's pockets, so it must be good news to many that Falcon motoring has now come within closer reach thanks to the announcement of a new basic kit at £1950 plus VAT.

To all the same engineering and quality standards as before, the major part of the low-price Falcon kit is the integral chassis and body frame incorporating steel bulkhead, tunnel and floor, and ready fitted with all fixed aluminium body panels. Also included are the aluminium bonnet (with tubular steel frame pre-drilled for Ford hinges and bonnet catch), the aluminium doors (also on frames), a chromed radiator grille complete with JBA badge, and a chromed windscreen frame complete with bottom channel and weather strip. Glassfibre parts in the kit are the front and rear wings, scuttle and heater box while other items of hardware are the front trim panel, enamel Union Jack badges, aluminium trim strip and modified pedal assembly, the latter supplied on an exchange basis.

JBA's estimated building time for their new kit has risen to 180 hours but even this is a small price to pay for the creation of a truly desirable, classic-style roadster. If you're interested contact **JBA Engineering, Units 38/40a, Bradley Hall Trading Estate, Bradley Lane, Standish, Greater Manchester. Tel: 0257 424549.**

