David Bunting's JBA Falcon Sports Build

With a little bit of luck, a decent dollop of creativity and a good methodical approach, first-time kit builder David Bunting built himself a very tidy roadster. Here's his story.

I FIRST CAME ACROSS THE COMPONENT car industry in September 1988 whilst browsing through the car magazine section of the local branch of W.H. Smiths. I have always had a strong interest in cars and car maintenance, and when I came across a copy of *Which Kit?*, I was intrigued.

I had previously assumed that the industry was limited to beach buggies or anything else that could be squeezed onto a Beetle floorpan. What a great surprise to find such a large and varied range. Anything from Lomax three-wheelers to Countach replicas were available. I was hooked!

I took the magazine for the next couple of months, having decided to build some type of thirties-style roadster. My shortlist was drawn up: either the Moss Roadster or the JBA Falcon Sports. I finally decided on the JBA, partly due to all the wonderful write-ups the car was receiving at the time, and partly because the Ford-based Moss was not quite ready for production. So off I went to the next JBA open day for a test drive. Once there, I placed my order, requesting delivery for the following May to give myself a couple of months to buy and strip a donor Cortina.

After receiving an insurance quote from Adrian Flux, I decided that I would use a 2-litre engine — the insurance being not a great deal more than for the 1.6-litre version. I also decided that I would buy a Mark IV donor, the mechanics being that bit newer than on a Mark III Cortina. So I set about scanning the local paper for a 2-litre Mark IV Cortina for about £50, as this was how much the magazines had said you should pay for your donor. There were none for under £300!

Next move? Off to the local used car auction one cold January night. There were five or six Cortinas waiting outside to come under the hammer, but most of them were too new or had long MOTs and so were liable to cost too much. However, there was one T reg. car with about three days MOT left which fitted the description perfectly. I decided to wait outside until the car was started up, and follow it into the auctioneer's ring to check it ran properly. It didn't! They had trouble starting it and it ran very poorly, but I put it down to it being cold. I decided to buy it, eventually for £160.

When it came to driving the thing home,



Handy tree was used as an engine hoist and worked very well. Just make sure it isn't dead before you start. David's son helped with much of the build. Once the engine and gearbox were removed it was time to overhaul them.



A good old wire brush will do an excellent job at getting off most of the dirt. Having thoroughly cleaned the rear axle it was repainted and bolted onto the Falcon chassis. An easy job that provided no problems



could I start the engine? Not on your life. I tried and tried until the battery was flat, and then tried push-starting it. Eventually, I just got it turning over, and it choked, wheezed and backfired all the way home. What had I bought!

Next morning, feeling quite depressed, I inspected under the bonnet. Everything seemed OK, but...wait a second... something wasn't quite right with the sparking-plug leads. Closer examination revealed that two of them had been swapped over! After reversing them, the car started first time and ran like a dream. How lucky can you get!

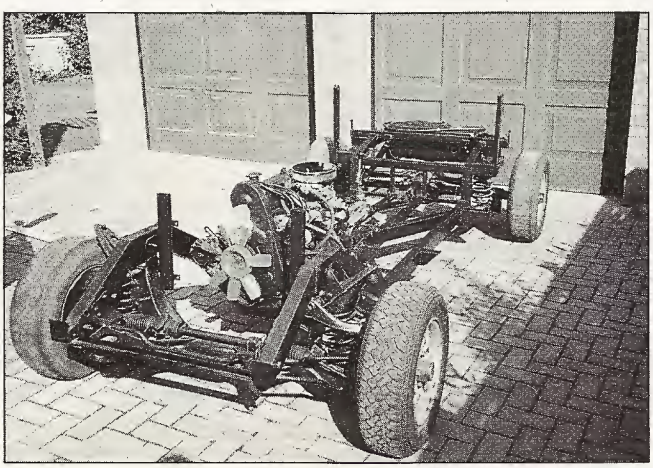
Now the serious reconditioning got under way: firstly dropping the gearbox out underneath whilst the car was raised on axle stands, then lifting the engine out by a hoist attached to a very convenient tree, and finally unbolting and removing the rolling gear. After having it tested, I gave the engine a minor overhaul, regrinding valves etc. Everything else was completely refurbished and painted, ready to bolt on to the chassis when it arrived. I was lucky in that I had enough space in my garden to keep the donor car throughout the build, in case there were still things to take off it.



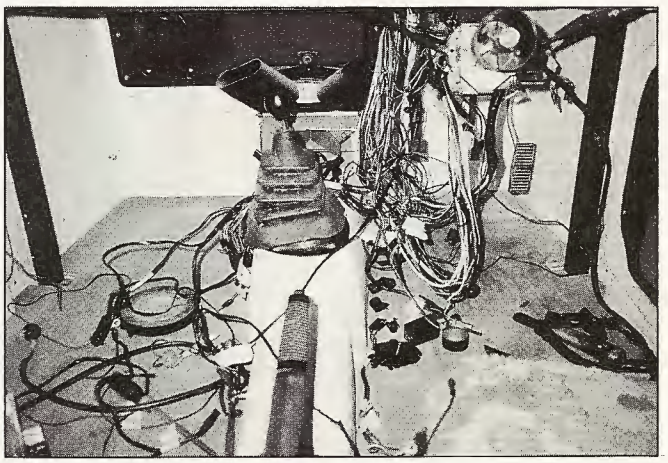
David's wife, Pam, downed the Hoover and donned garage overalls to get stuck into the engine bay of the old Cortina. The rolling chassis looks very smart.



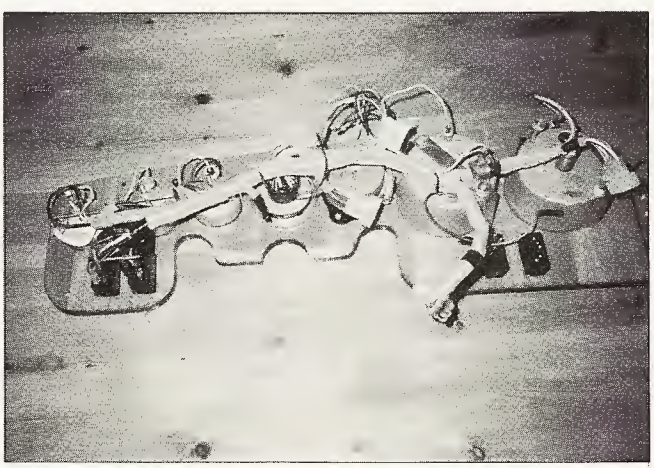
David overhauled the engine giving the valves a regrinding but otherwise little was required. The wiring certainly looks a daunting prospect but went together alright.



Chassis was painted with Hammerite and all the pieces bolted on without a hitch. Wiring of the instruments was meticulously finished and well worth the effort.



All of the above eventually had to join the below. A task that would stump many builders. The walnut dash looks fabulous with the chrome edged dials.

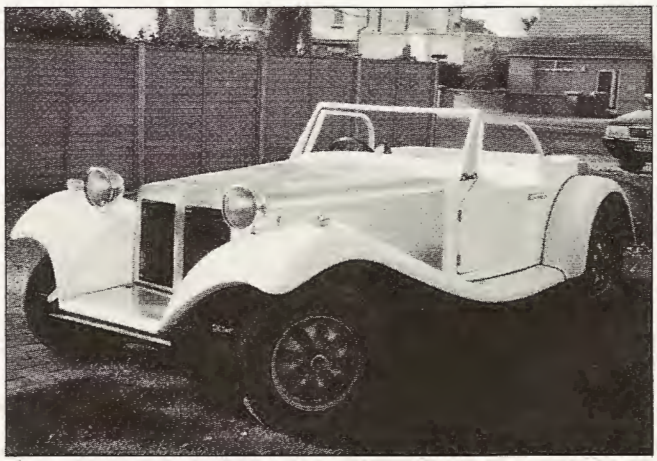




When the day arrived for me to collect my kit, I hired a large trailer and made the long drive to Wigan. Everything was loaded on without too much fuss, and once home again I unloaded it and arranged the panels in the shape of the car, and sat in it pretending to drive it. Everyone does the same!

The chassis was painted with Hammerite and all the pieces bolted on easily. The engine was lowered back by the use of the same tree, and it too was bolted in. However, only a couple of days later it had to come out again when JBA sent a modification to put spacers on the engine mounts to give the sump more clearance over the chassis. The gearbox was bolted in from underneath, so it could be removed in future without having to remove the body. New brake and fuel pipes were used throughout.

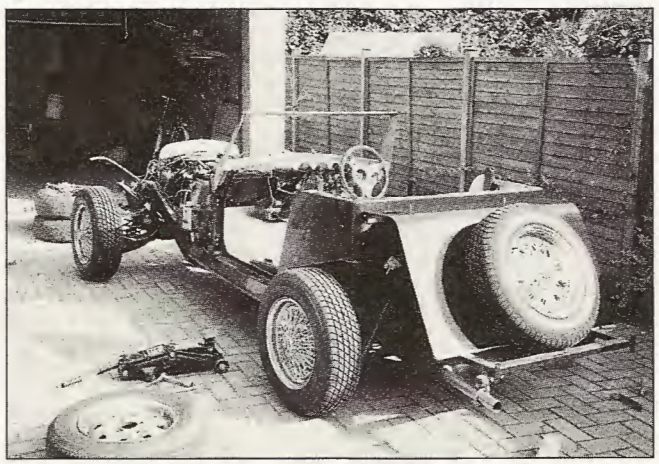
The next couple of weeks were spent fitting the heater, pedals and steering to the central body unit. Although I have never painted with a spraygun before, I borrowed a compressor from a friend, and proceeded to spray the bulkhead. I didn't do too badly once I had bought a new spraygun, as the old one was drawing in air with the paint and spraying unevenly.



Once the body panels were all fitted they then had to be taken off so the car could be sprayed. A time consuming job but the final result justified the effort.



David became quite proficient at spraying and the end result is certainly one to be proud of. Individual pieces were stored in the Buntings front hall!



Interior trim was reasonably straightforward — his son became a master on the sewing machine. Is that a copy of Which Kit? on the table?



The joys of kit car building — parts in the house and husband on the ground under the car. David putting things back together after spraying.





DAVID BUNTING'S JBA FALCON SPORTS



COST OF BUILD

JBA BODY/CHASSIS KIT	£2158.00
TRAILER HIRE	17.50
DONOR CAR	
Cortina 2.0GL	160.00
ENGINE/GEARBOX	
Engine Test	11.50
Engine Overhaul	158.02
Propshaft	64.74
Exhaust System	157.95
STEERING/SUSPENSION	
Total Overhaul	312.23
BRAKE SYSTEM	
Total Overhaul	157.00
FUEL SYSTEM	
Fuel Tank	25.00
Fuel Pipe etc.	55.12
PAINT ETC	265.48
WINDOWS	
Windscreens	34.39
Sidescreens	122.89
Wiper System	58.59
LIGHTS ETC	229.64
INTERIOR	
Dashboard	76.57
Trim	329.53
Seats	236.33
WHEELS & TYRES	439.53
HOOD FROM JBA	217.00
BUMPERS FROM JBA	108.00
MISCELLANEOUS	203.20
TOTAL (All prices inclusive of VAT)	£5598.21

BUILD TIME

	Hours
Remove/Overhaul Engine/Gearbox	68
Remove/Overhaul Steering/Suspension	69
Fit above to Chassis	23
Prepare Bulkhead	56
Overhaul/Fit Braking System	62
Fit CBU etc. to Chassis	42
Fit Doors & Locks	46
Fit Panels	136
Wiring	81
Prepare and Paint Car	194
Dashboard/Glovebox	63
Refit Panels & all exterior fitments	227
Trim	77
TOTAL HOURS	1144

After rubbing down, the finish was good.

I could now fit the remaining engine parts and the brake system. I manufactured a battery box by bending the one from the Cortina and bolting it onto the chassis. It's amazing what you can do without welding equipment. Next the doors went on, again cutting a large section from the donor to mount the internal handles.

Now it was the turn of the body panels to be fitted. All were carefully trimmed to size and bolted on. They were then all removed and painted in British Racing Green. By now I was becoming quite a proficient sprayer. I boxed-in the area around the fuel tank with plywood to provide a small boot and support for the spare wheel. Access to the boot is from the inside. The panels were then all refitted.

I made the dashboard using Dolomite instruments on a walnut veneer. The glovebox from the Cortina fits nicely behind it, giving a neat illuminated glovebox. I sited the heater controls along with the radio, out of sight under the dashboard, so as not to detract from its old-fashioned style. I did not find the wiring too difficult, partly because I am an electrical engineer by trade.

The strip bumpers from JBA were only available in mild steel, and as I wanted stainless steel I attempted to have them fabricated locally. When I found they were going to cost £400 I soon changed my mind. However, at that time the new JBA Tourer came out, and it was fitted with stainless tubular bumpers costing £100. So I bought a pair, even though I would have to fabricate a bracket to allow for the different chassis dimensions.

I decided to register the car before trimming the interior, so with the addition of 14" Modular wheels and a pair of Cobra seats, the car was ready. The stainless bumpers had not arrived from JBA, so I put a large sheet of plywood across the front to which to fit the indicators. No problems with the MOT, and it was registered and given a Q plate.

Now came the first chance for a proper test drive. That weekend my wife and I made the three-hour journey to York to see our daughter. After a few miles we stopped to check everything was in order, only to find the central bar of the bonnet hinge sticking out about a foot. If we had not noticed, no doubt we could have lanced a motorcyclist on the A1! Inspection under the bonnet also revealed that the hot exhaust manifold had converted the windscreen washer water pipe into two loose ends!

On arrival in York, I got out of the car to find a pile of nuts, bolts and self-tapping screws around my feet, but this was soon remedied by gunging them back in. Apart from the gear lever breaking off in my hand (I'm told it's not uncommon on Cortinas) there were no other problems. As the hood was not yet fitted, I drove back wearing a woolly hat and industrial safety glasses to keep me warm. I can't understand why someone shouted "what a wally!" whilst stopped at some roadworks.

Trimming the car was fairly quick, using material matching the seats and a cheap end of roll for the carpet. On went the badge-bar and spotlights, and finally the car was finished. It was very satisfying, especially as I had done absolutely everything myself (well, with quite a bit of help from my wife and my son).

My son and I set off in high spirits for the Sandown Show in August, 1990. However, we became increasingly confused by a rattle that had appeared somewhere on the dashboard. After searching around in vain, tapping this and pulling that, we finally discovered it was my watch strap! Now that sounds like a good idea for a Volkswagen advert.

Once at the show we contemplated entering the concours competition, but were disappointed not to find a 'best green JBA Falcon from Norfolk' class. We thought we might have had a chance in that one. We met another Falcon Sports builder, but he had managed to keep his donor's registration number. We were most disappointed that our local vehicle licensing office would not allow us to do the same. However, it turned out he had used the same licensing office only two weeks after us! On returning home, I challenged the office about this. They have agreed it was wrong and I too should have kept my original number, and now they are in the process of transferring it back. Could I be the first person in history to lose my Q plate?

My major criticisms with the kit concern the standard of the JBA Build Manual. Many essential pieces are missed out; for example, cutting the flange off around the door. The kit itself could be better, as it does not contain any brackets or wing supports, as well as many other essentials to complete the car. The quality of the stainless steel radiator grille and windscreen was poor, requiring £70 extra to be spent polishing them to an adequate standard. The windscreen surround itself was bent, so that the windscreen broke on fitting it for the first time. Many other JBA builders have had the same problem.

I have kept a record of every penny and every minute taken on the car. The totals are £5598.21 and 1144 hours respectively. Surprisingly, the largest share of the money was not spent with JBA but with Europa spares, who were very helpful throughout.

For all the problems the build was still an enjoyable experience and in the end I have a vehicle that the whole family is proud of and one that doesn't look like a kit car. The Falcon is enjoyable to drive and although I do not thrash the car its roadholding and ride are excellent.

JBA was more than helpful when ever I phoned up with a problem and apart from the grille and windscreen surround the quality of components was first rate. Talking to people at shows is always fun and I have no hesitation in recommending the Falcon although inevitably it costs more and takes longer than you planned.

READER REPORT









