

SPORTS CAR INTERNATIONAL



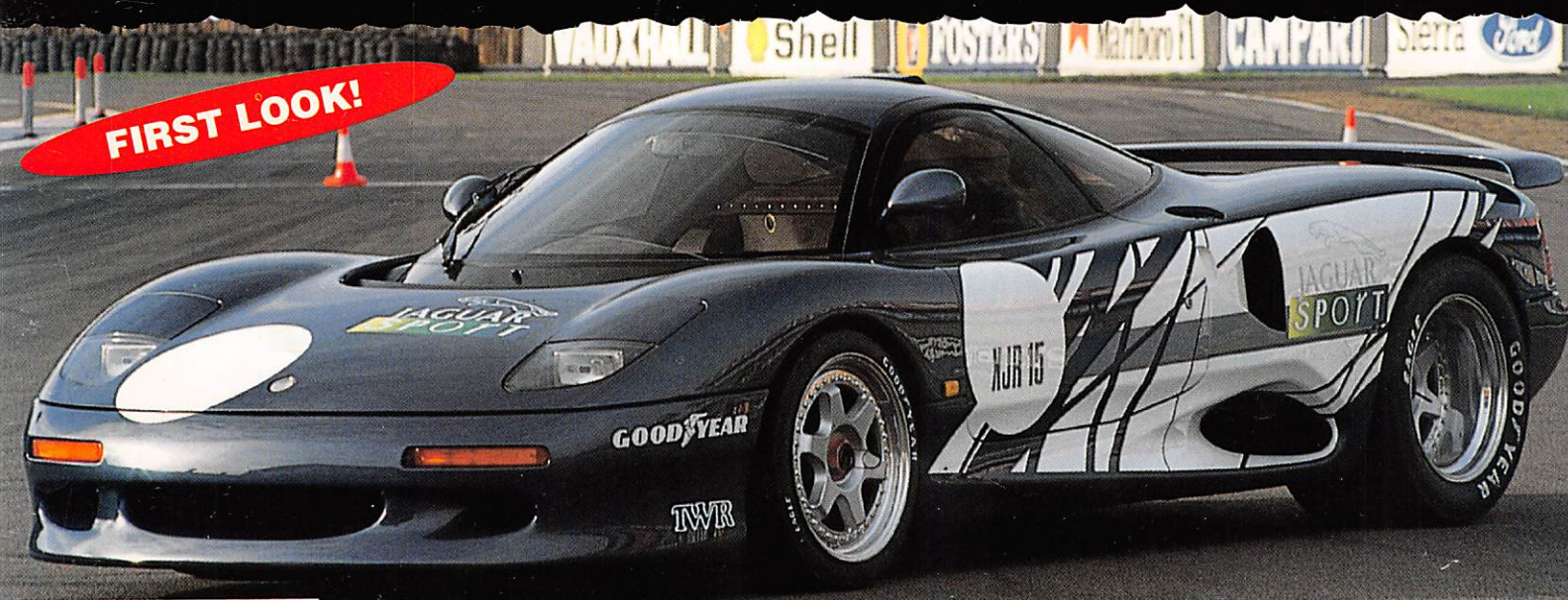
PORSCHE'S QUICKEST! THE TURBO RETURNS

PORSCHE TURBO POSTER INSIDE!



JAGUARSport XJR-15: \$1 MILLION 200MPH LEMANS SUPERCAR

FIRST LOOK!



PLUS: ALPINA'S FERRARI-BEATER: B10 BI-TURBO

ALSO: AUDI S2, FERRARI 275GTS, FORD RS200 GROUP B RALLY CAR, NEW MINI COOPERS, De La CHAPELLE T55, DODGE SPIRIT R/T, NISSAN SENTRA SE-R

MAXTON ROLLERSKATE



by **PETER ALBRECHT**
photos by John Crall

ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE, you'll find the story of the Ford RS200, a car brought into the US by Dan Ripley and partner Bob Sutherland. What do you do when you've just sold the last of these limited production, orphaned racers, you're a dedicated car guy, and want to stay in the interesting car business? If you're Dan Ripley, you go ahead and build your own interesting car.

Only it isn't that simple. In today's automotive landscape of emissions and crash safety regulations, it's just not possible for the little guy, the cottage industry, to produce and sell what might be a perfectly good design. Ripley estimates that emissions testing would cost about \$300,000 per year, per model. And in 12 months you have to do it all over again, even if nothing has changed. Crash testing comes on top of that. A little manufacturer who may make 100 cars in a good year can ill afford to write off 10 percent of production on testing.

Dan Ripley has a way around that.

He sells not a kit car, but what he calls a component car. Kit cars often have a rather undesirable cachet about them. Most are, frankly, pretty horrible little beasties. Most are begun by novices and never completed. Still, for kit cars, or component cars, most states have a way for homebuilders to register the fruits of their labors.

Ripley's firm is Maxton Components Ltd., 3774 S. Lipan St., Englewood, Colorado, 80110, 303-781-1945. Ripley and crew produce a little car called the Maxton Rollerskate. It will be available only through Maxton, not through local or national distributors. "I'm not willing to relinquish control. Licensed building is something I would possibly consider, but I'm not interested in a sales franchise. In this project, the buck stops right here. We designed it, set the company up, made the molds, jigs, testing, did everything, and don't have to make excuses for anybody. If there's something wrong, I'll take care of it. It doesn't have to go any further."

Why Rollerskate? Dan Ripley and some friends sat down to design themselves a car. Ben Vanderlinden,

experienced in the design of the SCCA Formula Renault and Shelby Can-Am, is Maxton's full-time engineer. He designed the chassis and suspension. Artist Mike May drafted the body. Somebody drove the skinless prototype and said something to the effect that "it goes like a rollerskate." The name stuck.

The Rollerskate is delivered in a crate in as near a completed form as

government regulations will allow. It has a completely finished, neatly welded square tube frame chassis, reminiscent perhaps of a larger, wider Formula Ford. Attached are part of the fiberglass bodywork, a wiring harness, steering rack, steering column, fuel tank, fuel lines, brake lines, and front suspension. Dan Ripley says, "We've put in all of the things we wanted to be sure of."



There's comfort in that we've done our own non-destructive testing." The Rollerskate comes with motor mounts for a Mazda 12A or 13B rotary engine, but no engine, nor will Ripley assist the owner in locating or putting one in. You're on your own there. That's his way of avoiding problems with the Feds. But if you can't locate a decent Mazda rotary out of a wreck, or even as a rebuilt, for about \$2,000-\$2,500, you probably shouldn't be in the wrench-turning hobby anyway. Ripley says, "I know guys here in town who build RX-7 engines with 200 horsepower for not much more than that." And then there's always Racing Beat in California.

What's left for the customer to do? Besides the engine, he'll have to install the seats, instrument panel, gearbox, hook up the wiring harness (which is already imprinted with labels; foolproof), put part of the bodywork on, and install the windshield. Ripley: "If a guy's got any moxie at all, he can build this car in a weekend."

The engine sits aft of the front axle, in a front mid-engine configuration. The front suspension consists of fabricated upper and lower A-arms carrying Ford Mustang II uprights and vented disc brakes. The steering rack is also from the Mustang II. Originally power assisted, it's converted to manual mode in the Maxton. At the rear, an old-style Mazda live axle and its drum brakes are located by a Panhard rod. "People have chided us for not using disc brakes at the rear, but the car is so good the way it is, why should we spend more money and have to charge more money? Our goal was to keep the price below \$20,000."

We drove the second Rollerskate prototype. This one has a quick flash-molded body, which Ripley tells us is not representative of the quality we'll see in the finished product.

If you enjoy a very basic, grassroots, wind-in-your-face kind of motoring, but want something perhaps a little more nostalgic than the current crop of highly refined convertibles, and don't want to spend lots of time tracing oil leaks or wiring on an old British roadster, the Rollerskate may just fill the bill. If you don't come prepared for battles with the weather, this is not your kind of car. Think leather jackets, kidskin gloves, and flying caps here. Ripley does point out that the heater will be improved for production, and there is a removable top and side curtains in the works. The car presently has a tonneau cover.

The Rollerskate launches easily from about 3,500-4,000 rpm.

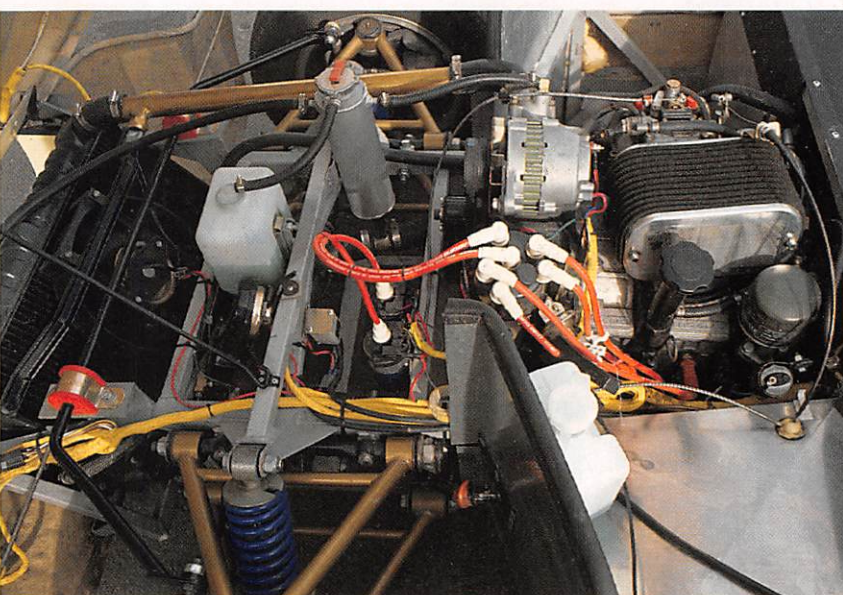
Although the tach is redlined at 6,000 rpm, the engine is perfectly capable of pulling to 7,000. Best drag strip runs were obtained with power shifts at 6,500. The car's light weight and high engine torque allow the tires to spin most of the way through first gear, and allow a slight chirp in third. The shortened, very direct shifter slides from first to second before you realize it; just yank back and the gear is in. We saw 0-60 mph in 6.28 seconds, and the quarter mile in 14.86 at 90.2 mph. At SCI, we don't apply an atmospheric correction, as it's not part of the Society of Automotive Engineers standard for vehicle testing, but it must be remembered that Bandimere Raceway, outside Denver, is at an altitude of nearly 6,000 feet. Offsetting that was the cool temperature. Expect 0-60 to fall below six seconds at sea level. Dan Ripley reports a maximum speed of 127 mph, which seems about right. The engine flexibility numbers indicate a broad, usable torque curve.

On the skidpad, we saw a maximum of 0.90 g going to the left, and a 0.88 g average. Stickier tires may help slightly. The car has enough power to throw the tail out, and that 0.90 g lap had opposite lock all the way around, steering rapidly with the throttle. The steering is quick and responsive. It corners like, well, a rollerskate. Our test car had a limited slip differential installed, which certainly helped both drag strip and skidpad runs. A light, high-powered car like this would otherwise waste lots of energy turning tires into smoke. The limited slip makes the car understeer a bit with power on, and tuck in when throttle is lifted.

The brakes, without power assist, have a hard pedal. You really have to lean on it. It's not at all bad, but could use a bit more modulation. Ripley says they are working on the pedal feel. We saw 60 mph stops in 130 feet, 80 mph stops in 239.

How would Ripley compare the Rollerskate to the Miata? After all, we just tested a Miata built by Cartech of Dallas (October, 1990) with similar performance numbers, at a similar price. "We'll never achieve the level of refinement built into the Miata, but the Rollerskate's performance is much better (than the stock Miata). I think this car will appeal to someone who doesn't want to see himself in the rear view mirror whenever he drives down the street.

"We built this car as a fun, simple, open-air sports car. It does everything you wished a Sprite could do when you had one as a kid, but it does it better, with a lot more power."



Vehicle Type: Front mid-engine, rear-wheel drive two-seat roadster
Body/chassis: steel tube frame, fiberglass body

PRICES

Base Price: \$19,500 FOB Denver, engine not included

ENGINE

Configuration: Mazda rotary, owner installed (test car: 13B rotary)
Configuration: longitudinal mid-front mounted two-rotor, normally aspirated
Displacement: 1,308cc
Compression ratio: 9.7:1
Power output: 160 bhp @ 7,000
Torque: est. 140 lbs. ft. @ 4,000 rpm
Redline (est.): 7,000 rpm (marked 6,000)
Fuel delivery: single Dellorto DHLA 48 carburetor
Fuel requirement: premium
Valve train: none; ports controlled by rotors

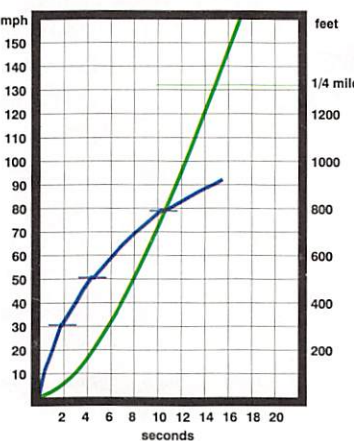
TRANSMISSION

Type: 5-speed manual
Gear Ratio Speeds in gears
1st: 3.67 32
2nd: 2.22 54
3rd: 1.43 83
4th: 1.00 119
5th: 0.83 127 @ 6,250
final drive: 3.91

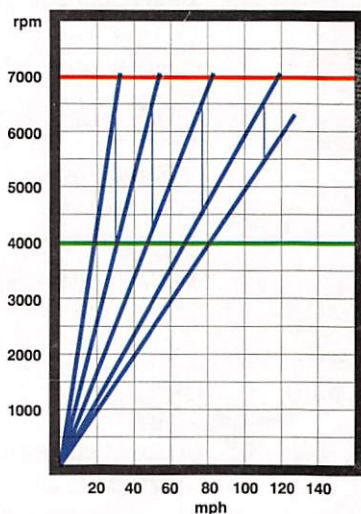
DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Curb weight: 1,680 lbs.
Weight distribution, f/r: 47/53
Wheelbase: 90.0 in.

MAXTON ROLLERSKATE



TIME TO SPEED
TIME TO DISTANCE



MAXIMUM POWER
MAXIMUM TORQUE
GEARS, 1-5

Track, f/r: 54.25/55.75 in.
Length: 142.5 in.
Width overall: 64.0 in.
Height: 41.5 in.
Fuel capacity: 11 gallons

STEERING, SUSPENSION, BRAKES

Steering type: Ford Mustang II rack & pinion, power assist disabled
Turns, lock-to-lock: 3.3
Front suspension: Ford uprights, fabricated upper and lower A-arms, coil springs over telescoping shock absorbers, 5/8 in. tubular anti-roll bar
Rear suspension: Mazda live axle w/Racing Beat limited slip, lower trailing links, upper semi-trailing links, Panhard rod, coil springs over telescoping shock absorbers, anti-roll bar
Wheels: Panasport 6 x 13 in. alloy wheels
Tires: BF Goodrich Comp T/A, 205/60VR-13
Brakes, front: 9.3 in. vented discs (Mustang II) rear: 7.9 x 1.3 in. finned drums (Mazda RX-7)

PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph: 6.28 sec.
1/4 mile: 14.86 sec. @ 90.2 mph
Top speed: 127 mph (est.) at 6,250 rpm
Braking from 60 mph: 130 ft.
Braking from 80 mph: 239 ft.
Skidpad: 0.88 g
Engine elasticity (time, seconds)
Gear 30-50 50-70
3 3.4 3.7
4 5.6 5.5
5 8.3 8.0