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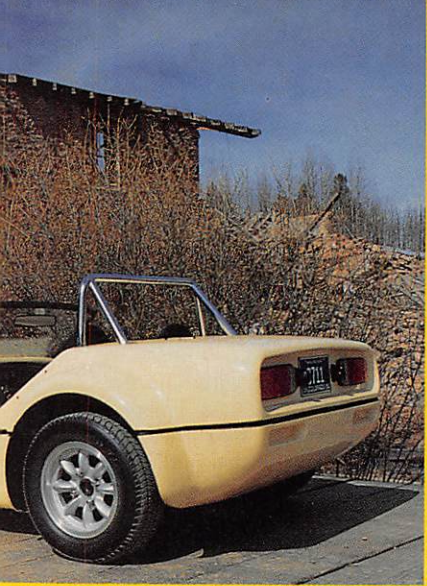
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Rocky Mountain Roadster



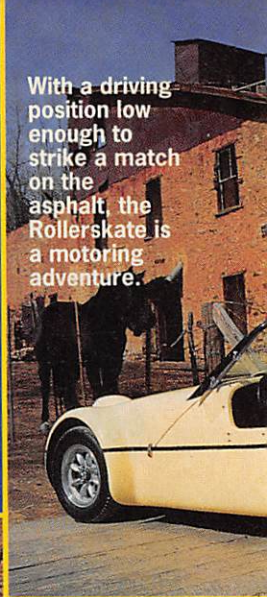
Restoring an old mining settlement back to its glory days requires more than finding precious metals. You'd also have to bring back the dance-hall girls and gambling to revive a ghost town. Well, Colorado's historic Central City will soon realize at least half of that equation when limited-stakes gambling begins this fall. It doesn't take that much of an excuse, though, to head for the mountains from Denver, whatever awaits you. You see, there was this little yellow roadster sitting in my driveway, pleading to be driven on some high-country hairpins and switchbacks worthy of its performance potential. And the rubber-neck reactions to the Maxton Rollerskate would make the springtime trip lots of fun.

TEXT & PHOTOS BY JIM YOUNGS

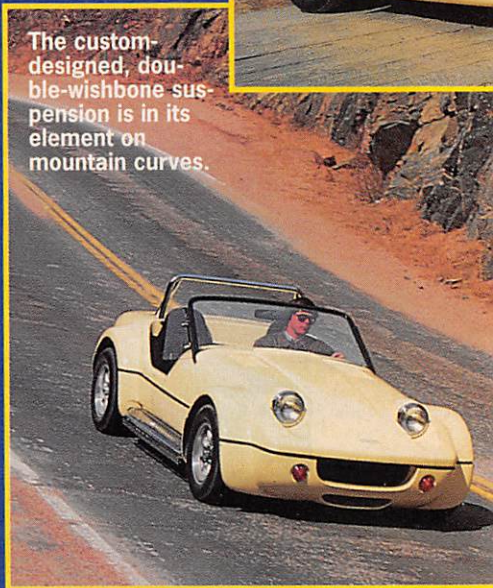
Although the lines suggest a nostalgic roadster, the Maxton's mechanicals are thoroughly modern.



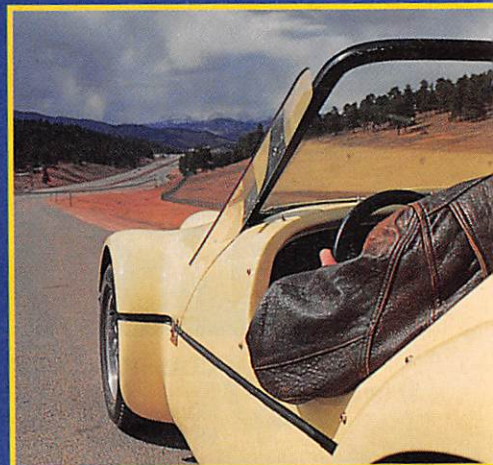
With a driving position low enough to strike a match on the asphalt, the Rollerskate is a motoring adventure.



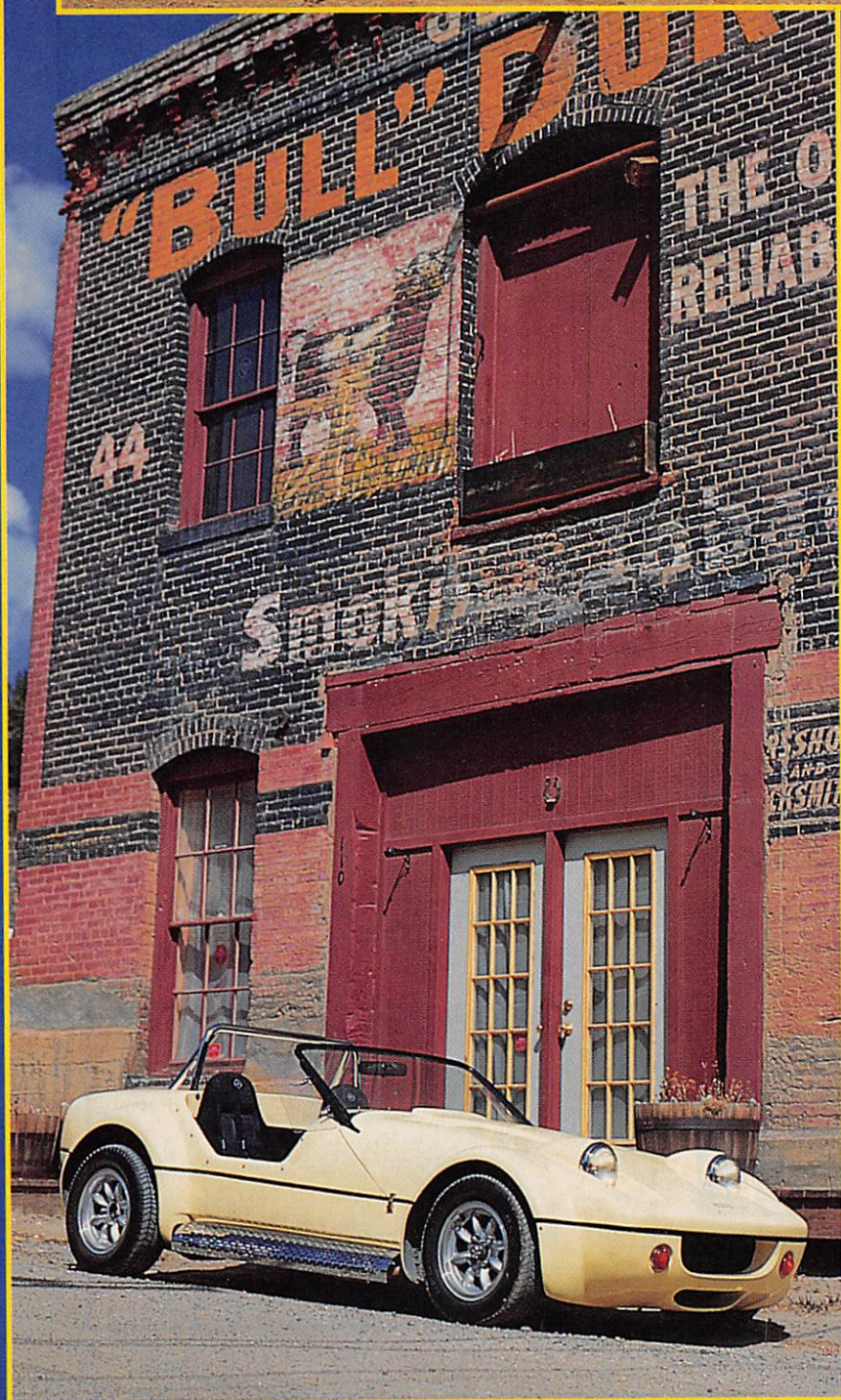
The custom-designed, double-wishbone suspension is in its element on mountain curves.



Maxton's New Rollerskate Is One Wild West Ride



Springtime in the Rocky Mountains means leather-jacket driving.



Central City is an ideal destination for high-country cruising in the Rollerskate.

Central City, 40 miles west of downtown Denver, is a motley collection of frontier buildings perched on Gregory Gulch more than 8500 feet above sea level. Here, in 1859, John Gregory discovered enough gold to peg this area "the richest square mile on earth." Even without gold fever, the town warrants a visit before the hordes of gamblers arrive, as it offers surprising diversions such as the Opera House where Lillian Gish appeared in *Camille* in 1932.

As a friend and I headed west on US6 from Denver—after paying obligatory homage to the Coors Brewery in Golden, Colorado—we entered scenic Clear Creek Canyon and finally, the 'Skate was in its element. Bundled in wool and leather against the spring chill, we guided the throaty roadster

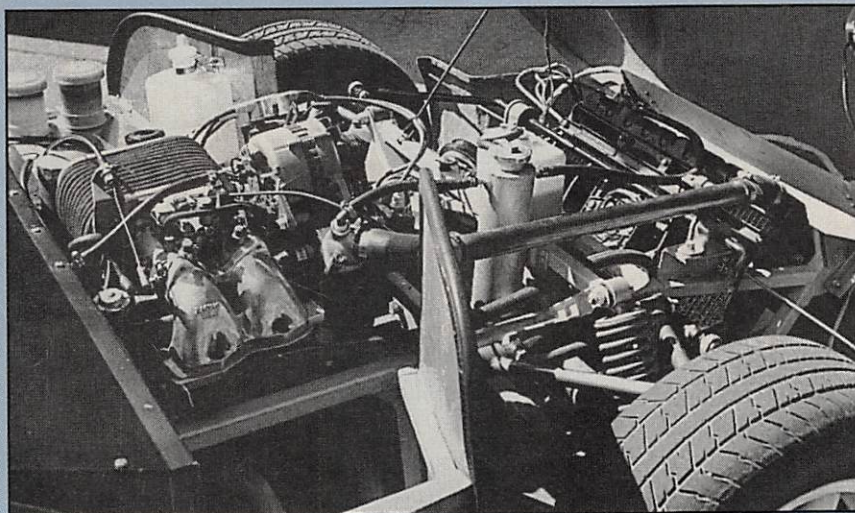
ishing touches are supplied by Maxton Components for you to bolt on. Installing the windshield, radiator, instrument panel, gearbox, seats, and plugging in the wiring harness is probably a weekend's worth of wrench turning for somebody with a big roll-away. Maxton figures the average person can put the Rollerskate together, less paint, in about 50 hours.

The 'Skate is more than a rolling chassis covered by a molded-fiberglass body. Ripley's time spent behind the wheel of racing vehicles and his dedication to no-compromise engineering have produced a solid performance car with balanced and agile handling characteristics. Under the distinctive fiberglass skins—which recall at least two important nostalgia cars, the Bugeye Sprite and Lotus 7—is a tuned space-

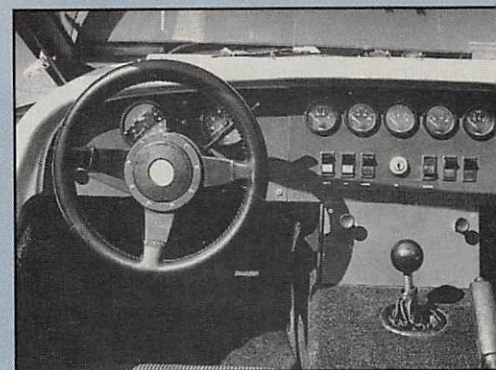
hard rod. Coil-over shocks and an antirollbar are also included. Mazda drum brakes are used in the rear; the brakes are not power assisted and thus require a firm push on the pedal. The prototype Rollerskate test car had a Racing Beat limited-slip differential, which has since been removed.

Maxton doesn't skimp on any components. The Panasport alloy wheels are shod with 205/60R13 Goodrich Comp T/As. The seats are supportive Corbeau buckets fitted with Simpson four-point racing harnesses. The pedal assembly is a heel-and-toe's delight made by Neal. VDO instruments monitor the vitals. And the list goes on. Ripley's concept was to put together a little car with a high fun-factor and quality components, and to deliver a rolling chassis for a retail price under \$20,000. He has succeeded on all counts, with the added bonus being the creation of an escape car with a nostalgic roadster quality.

From a comfort standpoint, the Rollerskate harks back to other roadsters of old where simplicity prevailed and the attraction was the experience of being low-slung enough to strike matches on the tarmac, along with



Access to the engine and running gear is excellent.



The short-throw shifter is well matched to the fast-revving engine.

through the rock-bordered curves along the still half-frozen Clear Creek. The sophisticated double-wishbone front suspension quickly communicated road conditions. The Mazda 13B engine seemingly had no cap to its wind-up, with the custom exhaust's tone announcing the power at each upshift. Barely taller than a clenched fist, the short-throw shifter atop the tall driveshaft tunnel allowed quick gear changes in concert with the fast-revving rotary.

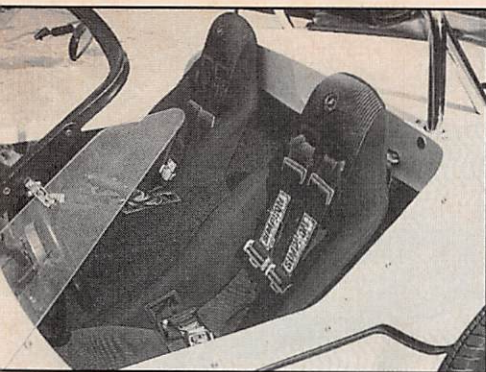
Dan Ripley, owner of Maxton Components, bristles at the mere mention of the word "kit," and rightly so. In keeping with the company name, he calls his little Rollerskate a component car, as it arrives with very little assembly required before the buyer can head out on his own wind-in-the-hair motor-ing adventure. The Rollerskate is delivered about 80 percent complete. All you have to add is a 12A or 13B Mazda rotary engine and some paint. The fin-

frame chassis made of square tubing that weighs in at a little over 200 pounds. The frame and suspension were designed by Ben Vanderlinden, who is credited with designs for SCCA Formula Renault and Shelby Can-Am race cars. Maxton achieved an almost perfect front-to-rear weight balance of 47 to 53 percent, with the engine sitting nearly mid-point, just forward of the firewall.

The suspension consists of a Maxton-designed double-wishbone with upper and lower A-arms carrying Mustang II uprights. Coil-over shocks and an antirollbar round out the front suspension. It also has vented disc brakes and a Ford Mustang II rack-and-pinion steering system. The Mustang steering was a power-assist unit in production form, but Maxton converts it to manual operation due to the light weight and short wheelbase of the car. A Mazda RX-7 live axle is used in the rear, located with trailing arms and a Pan-

being out in the open in tune with the outdoors—no top, no doors, no side-view mirrors. What more could a sports car deliver? People over six-feet tall can also enjoy the car, but the legroom could be a little better, especially for long trips. Underdressed folks won't be too uncomfortable if the weather turns cool, since the wind-screen and side wings keep the breezes off the torso, and the heater does an admirable job keeping the legs warm. There's nothing that will keep the breezes off your hair, short of an uncomfortable driving position, which would not allow forward vision. Just screw on your chapeau, give another wrap to your scarf, then mash the accelerator and enjoy.

The 'Skate's tidy engine bay is cov-



The seats are supportive Corbeau buckets fitted with Simpson four-point racing harnesses.

ered by a clamshell forward-opening hood. Access to the engine, running gear, and front suspension is excellent. Production versions will also have a small trunk which might be big enough for a woman's airline soft-sided make-up case. But hey, this baby is for blowing off steam on a sunny Saturday after a long week of corporate hassles. If overnighing is in the plan, there's plenty of room for your toothbrush in the glovebox.

Dan Ripley's Maxton Components, Ltd., is located at 3774 S. Lipan St., Dept. KC, Englewood, CO 80110; 303/781-1945. The Rollerskate's vital statistics are: 90-inch wheelbase, 142.5-inch overall length, 41.5-inch height to top of rollbar, 64-inch overall width, 55.75-inch rear track, 54.25-inch front track, and 1680 pounds curb weight. According to Ripley, our test car has a top speed of 127 mph and registered 6.28 seconds in 0 to 60 acceleration. The company proto loaned to us had been driven hard, and showed very few durability problems.

Additionally, it had an RX-7 engine that was perhaps a little healthier than one a prospective owner might find in the junkyard. Companies such as Racing Beat make a wealth of engine and drive components for Mazda so that drivetrains in the Maxton can be tailored to match any performance bent.

Arriving in Central City after a brisk drive up Clear Creek Canyon was actually somewhat anticlimactic to the drive itself. The Opera House, though picturesque, was still months from its summer season opening, and the rowdy saloons were preseason quiet without the melodramatic Wild West tourist shows and shootouts. And the gambling paraphernalia had yet to arrive. It was almost like, dare I say it, a ghost town. But soon all that will change, and then we'll have to find a less crowded canyon to blitz in this Rocky Mountain roadster.

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