

Neet Bandana

**Shouldn't that be a yellow banana?
Could be but it's not. It's a yellow bandana.
Sounds like something Roy Rogers would wear.
Could be but in this case, it's a Midas Gold Convertible.
Ian Hyne tells the tale.**

Nigel and Trevor Coston are what can only be described as compulsive car constructors. Their growing list of alternative transport started with a Dutton Phaeton S4, followed by a Davrian Mk IV and another one with a targa roof, an Imp based Scorpion (a very rare one this and a car with a good tale of intrigue behind it. I'll tell you about it one day), a Seraph Bonito, Rickman Ranger Convertible, Lomax 223 and latterly the yellow Midas Gold Convertible. And even while this car sits completed in the garage awaiting its soft top, a CC Zero is clamouring to get in.

Although referred to as 'amateur built' for the purposes of trouble free registration, there is nothing amateur about either their approach or the result of their efforts. Trevor completed a Ford technician's apprenticeship as a design draughtsman which included courses in body and chassis design before leaving to design air conditioning systems for railway trains used in the UK and overseas. Nigel did a BEng honours degree (Special Engineering Programme) before working for GKN Vandervell. He now works as a technical sales engineer for Runtelrad who make the Rolls Royce of the radiator



On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair... Not quite Pitlochry but location suited well for Trevor's photographs.

world.

Their car building career began following Nigel's acquisition of a Mk IV Sprite which he used until university commitments meant he could no longer afford to run it. It was banished to the bottom of the garden until Trevor decided to take out a loan to restore it. However, by then, Nigel had amassed a decent collection of kit car magazines, and reading these decided Trevor to go for the Dutton. The rest is history although they don't reveal the fate of the Sprite.

In respect of the Midas, the motivation was similar to that which prompted the construction of the Rickman; namely that their parents (willing participants and the source

of much encouragement) were on the lookout for a car that would satisfy their requirements without the need to be replaced a few years down the line. Their requirements were for something in which it would be pleasurable to cruise the highways and byways of Pitlochry, where they had chosen to retire. It needed to be a convertible and have ample luggage capacity as well as being able to easily accommodate a set of golf clubs. Something sporty would also be nice. However, Mum didn't really like the Rickman so Trevor bought it off her and it now serves as excellent transport for regular camping and climbing trips north of the border.

But back to Mum and Dad's problem. They looked at production sports cars including Lotus Elans, Mazda MX5s and SS1s and even those they liked were too expensive. However, the kit market offered the GTM Coupe and Rossa which they examined in detail. It was at Sandown Park 1991 that they suddenly hit on the Midas Gold Convertible as GTM had rescued it from the ashes of Pastiche's demise and, with the enthusiastic agreement of their parents, an order was placed there and then.

As well as being a nippy sports car, the Gold drophead also incorporates a high degree of practicality with a very large boot and excellent weather equipment.



Third Time Lucky

It was the first order GTM had taken for the Midas but, due to a special order for the yellow pigment, it was the second car priced free of the moulds.

They searched long and hard for a suitable donor car and finally came across an E registered Metro Sport with minimal damage to both car and wallet and this was duly delivered to their workshop. The Metro Sport is another of the various Metro models that employed the MG Metro spec 72 bhp engine as opposed to the more usual 60 bhp output of the lesser 1275 cc motors.

When the kit was ready the Ranger towed the trailer on the 280 mile round trip to collect it after which there followed a nine month period of evening and weekend work that resulted in the car you see before you.

As with all their build projects, the brothers (and Dad) were aiming for a very smart and well built machine that was eminently suited to everyday use rather than a concours entrant. Nigel took responsibility for the bodywork and mechanics, Dad the electrics and Trevor the interior and it was here that the greatest deviation from the norm occurred. Rather than use the Rover 213 or 216 instrument cluster, Trevor elected to use the instrument cluster that came with the donor. It was a practical move since they had a fully compatible and comprehensive instrument cluster and the yellow metering on the sweeps matched the banana hue of the body. The installation was effected without too much trouble and they are very pleased with the result. GTM are also at work on such a kit option as they are firm believers in the 'one donor' principle and the Metro dash will save builders a further financial outlay on the Rover parts.

As the first customer built car from the new company, they kept in close touch with Peter Beck and Paddy Fitch as the latter were very keen to hear of any snags or suggested improvements that would A) confirm the buildability and quality of their new product and B) enhance its reputation and appeal.

As far as snags go, there were virtually none. The doors were a bit tricky to fit but this merely called for patience and perseverance. On the other hand they feel they did manage to improve on the rear suspension which they felt was over hard. They decided to try the Colin Chapman theory of soft springs and firm damping and to this end, fitted a pair of 75 lb springs supplied by Leda suspension on their Avo adjustable dampers. These have worked a treat and, having been impressed with driving the car, the manufacturers will probably adopt these springs as standard. They already supply Avo dampers.

Other fittings include a stainless steel exhaust obtained through the Midas Owner's Club, a smart Momo steering wheel and a CD player.

What's it like to drive? First drive went to Trevor who took it for its MOT and, as a sports car driver with more experience than many, he was immediately impressed with how taut the car felt and how easy it was just to hop in and drive away. No anticipation of odd behaviour or strange sensations; just a spot on little car that did his bidding and looked terrific into the bargain. It's no road burner but it is certainly acceptably quick and cruises very well. It rides perfectly due to their suspension modifications and on the handling front, Trevor says it compares very favourably with his Davrian, a car that is noted for its superlative handling having won many rallies in its native Wales. He

also likes the sort of two tier performance that sees it quite happily pottering around town on shopping trips where the revs are kept low while punting the tacho needle over 3000 and keeping it there unleashes a very gutsy performance from the A series lump that combines to perfection with its handling panache and outstanding grip from its Goodyear Eagle NCTs.

He was also very aware of the reaction of other road users and was forcefully reminded of the secondary pleasures of alternative motoring; people staring, pointing, giving way and being generally courteous.

Following that short excursion, he and Nigel drove up to GTM to give it a thorough work out. It was the 1st of August but they reckon they got more looks than any K reg car. Paddy Fitch drove it and pronounced himself impressed and Trevor's Mum and Dad are looking forward to many miles in the car during their retirement.

In total, Trevor reckons the car has cost around £7000 to build but they haven't skimped on anything so it could definitely be done for less. Even so, they regard it as excellent value for money, especially in view of its virtual immortality.

Anything more to do? Well, apart from fitting the soft top to allow it to come out of the garage and the CC Zero to go in, and the purchase of a hard top when they become available, they have thought of the possible employment of a two stroke engine which brings us back to the title of this piece.

Trevor has recently set up his own design business named the 'Neet Bandana Design Company' and is keen to take on commissions to design whatever you want. Thus far he has done work for Oyster GRP, manufacturers of the Dakar bodies, and Repicar but aside from cars, his design talents and graphic art ability qualify him to expand his horizons. If anybody reading this fancies a chat, they can contact Trevor on 01492 800000.

Finally, after the CC Zero, what will they go for? Trevor's answer is that, after so many miles in other people's creations, he feels it is about time he took to the road in something designed and produced by he and Nigel.

I wish them well.

Trevor didn't particularly like the 'bump backed' Gold Coupe but is highly appreciative of the Convertible's clean and rounded lines.

