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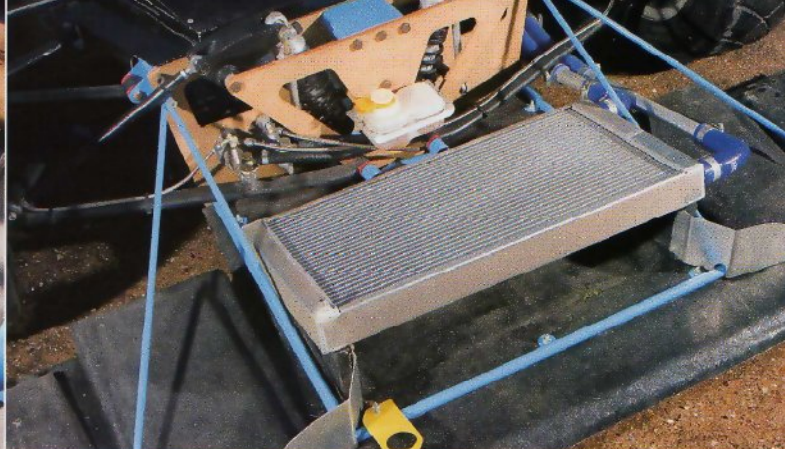


Micro Machine

Like a Group-C racer straight from the Eighties, the tiny Kellforms Retoga is coming to a track day near you. Keith Wood is charmed by its 150bhp and stunning good looks...

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREW BROWN





With the track day scene constantly evolving every year it was with no surprise when I got the phone call from Kevin Goater about his new project, a Group-C-styled kit car purposely built for track use. In my opinion it seems as if there's no end of crazy ideas when it comes to the creation of our track day toys from historic-styled retro racers, like the ERA30 (*TRC* 01/06), to spaceframed hot hatches, aka: Z-Cars Mini Monte Carlo (*TRC* 08/05).

In fact, when it comes to buying a track day car there's certainly no lack of projects for you to spend your money on. Every corner of the market is starting to be catered for and where once the only way to get close to a race car was to buy one, things have U-turned massively. Who needs to buy a race car to have track day fun? In fact the options list is so big that now you can buy a track day car and then convert it to race trim with little effort.

Which is exactly what Kellforms has done with its cleverly titled Retoga (an anagram of Kevin's surname), which runs its own Le Mans-inspired bodywork over a Loaded Gunn Racing-designed chassis which happily accepts and copes with the 150bhp Yamaha R1 engine. In fact virtually every component on the build is bespoke for Kellforms, give or take the engine, brakes, wheels and tyres.

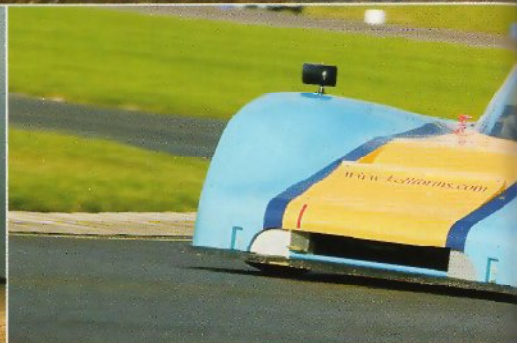
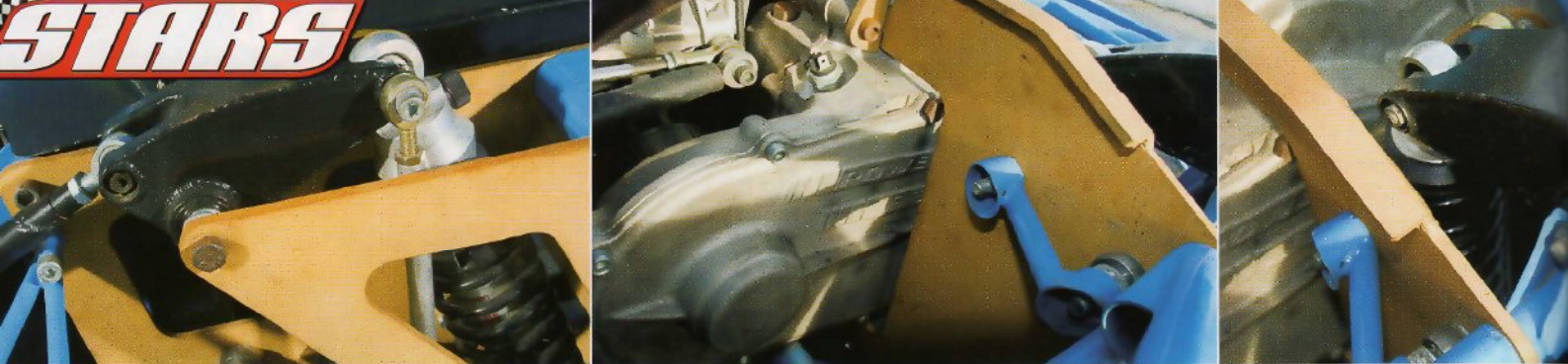
But I suppose you've never heard of Kellforms, so why should you take notice of the Retoga? Well for a start the company's full name is, in fact, Kellforms Woodmasters Ltd and as a company has 40 years of traditional pattern, gauge and model-making skills combined with the latest CAD/CAM technology. With this huge database of knowledge and expertise it provides some of the highest quality design, measurement and machining capabilities to the automotive and aerospace industries.

Having previously worked with big-name companies like Aston Martin (with such cars as the

DB6 and Virage) Kellforms has used its vast amounts of knowledgeable skills and developed the Retoga in such a way to capture the classic Le Mans styling of the 80s. With its classic fish-bowl enclosed cockpit not only does it look the part, it performs well too. Although after all these years of engineering other companies' cars, it's never actually designed and built its own chassis from scratch before.

Instead, at the beginning of this year, it drafted in Gary Gunn of Loaded Gunn Racing and commissioned him to manufacture and develop a prototype two-seater chassis and running gear to suit the dimensions of the Retoga body shape. The end product is what you're looking at right now. This CDS tubular steel spaceframe welcomed the R1 engine with open arms and Gary has developed the chassis around the engine with the future intentions of Kellforms in mind, which will allow the guys there to develop the





chassis further to accept the more conventional Ford Duratec powerplant.

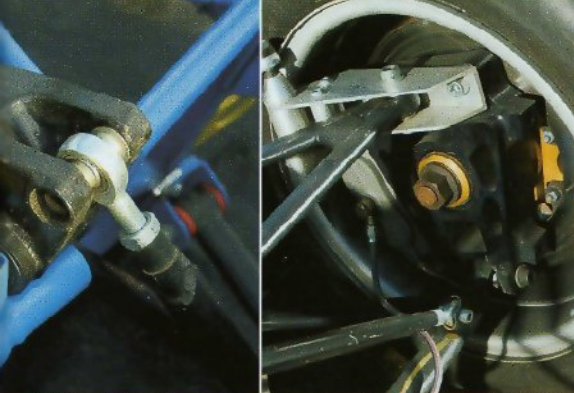
At the moment the 150bhp R1 engine is more than man enough for the job, making the driving experience behind the wheel very intense. However buzzy this atmosphere is inside the tiny cockpit, keeping the revs up high around the redline is vital in making sure the engine is running at its peak power – let it drop below that and you're left with a flat torque curve to contend with. So I was pleased to hear that the Retoga may one day make use of the fantastic Duratec engine because I'm really keen to see one of these small Radical-styled track day cars fitted with a real torquey engine, much like the biggest brother of them all, the Juno SSV6 (*TRC* 11/04).

For now though the Retoga is far from slow, especially if you can pedal, which is why on each corner of the chassis is a braking system fit for LMPs. AP Racing four-pot calipers sit snugly behind the tiny 13" Image splitties and, after my taster behind the wheel on the *TRC* Test Track, it was in my opinion one of the most impressive braking systems I'd sampled throughout 2005. However these caliper and disc combinations only work to these optimum levels of adhesion when the chassis they're fitted to is correctly built.

Loaded Gunn has designed a fine layout utilising a rocker suspension setup with anti-roll bars and tiny Protec coilovers. My only gripe would be if you're over 6ft tall the cockpit space could be a problem. At

the moment the doors resemble that of the DeLorean, but will soon be hinged like an Ultima after a few minor problems when at speed, so dropping into the chassis isn't a problem. However it's once you're sliding down into the seat and positioning your feet towards the pedal layout you notice how confined you actually are.

The cage seems to wrap around you like a spider's web and if you're claustrophobic you'd probably feel like getting out faster than the car actually goes. Saying that, once I manoeuvred myself into the horizontal seating position with the safety straps on and steering wheel connected back up it suddenly all made sense. The fish-bowl-style screen feeds you with acres of viewing space and once on



WITH ITS CLASSIC
FISH-BOWL COCKPIT
IT PERFORMS WELL
AND LOOKS THE PART



SPECIFICATION – KELLFORMS RETOGA

ENGINE

Power-unit: Yamaha R1 998cc, in-line four cylinder, liquid-cooled, DOHC, aluminium block, baffled wet sump, stainless steel equal-length manifold and re-packable silencer, Yamaha TCI engine management

Transmission: Six-speed Quaife/Powertec sequential with reverse, limited-slip differential, rear-wheel drive

Power: 150bhp at 10,000rpm

Torque: 79lb ft at 8500rpm

Weight: 400kg (dry)

BRAKES

Front & rear: AP Racing four-piston 10.5"

calipers with vented discs

SUSPENSION

Front & rear: Independent, bespoke T6 aluminium uprights, cast aluminium rocker assembly with single adjustment Protec coilover shocks and springs

WHEELS

Front: 7x13 Image HT split rims

Rear: 8x13 Image HT split rims

TYRES

Front & rear: 185/60 R13 Yokohama 032R Advans

ESSENTIALS

Price: From £11,995

Contact: www.kellforms.com or 01494 472233



track you almost feel as though there isn't a car around you.

A short clutch throw is tricky to master, as all bike engine cars are, and the gearshift, although drastically improved on the Retoga, is a bit of nightmare making it hard to actually tell what gear you're in. If you've never driven a sequential transmission then you'll struggle to understand but there is such a difference between a proper sequential 'box from Quaife, Hewland, X-Trac and Elite compared to the conventional bike systems. Both deliver the same clutchless upshifts but only the proper systems let you know once you're 'in' gear with a good strong, positive 'clunk'.

Around our test track the Retoga was soon up to pace with my laps getting quicker and quicker as I

searched for the limits. Corner speeds were stupidly fast and effortlessly controlled, even on the exit the tight Race Technology Turns with the revs nice and high. It was snappy because the circuit was wet but far from being uncontrollable. A short wheel base (2340mm), which is also fairly narrow (1600mm), is to thank for these progressive slides which were caught early and dealt with quickly.

Thanks to the screen I didn't have any air waves directed towards my head to contend with and was also far more comfortable, and in return I was rewarded with a pleasant drive. Sure it was bumpy on the not-so-flat airfield but it didn't change direction while in a straight line or even move around under braking. It somehow managed to keep its driving

attitude on track pretty comfortable, not as impressive as the Aeon GT3 (TRC 01/06) but more than enough for a number of different drivers to embrace.

Having a roof over your head really does count for a lot in the UK and it's a huge plus point, especially if you do want to take people out for passenger rides. It would make a cracking school car if there was anything like a Sportscar School of Excellence, for example, or even hot ride entertainment for track day companies. It's also pretty cheap with a rolling chassis kit price starting at £11,995 and turnkey examples just £24,995, both plus VAT. To me the track day market has certainly got another car worth investigating and for the money it's an attractive offer compared to the dated open-topped cars... ■