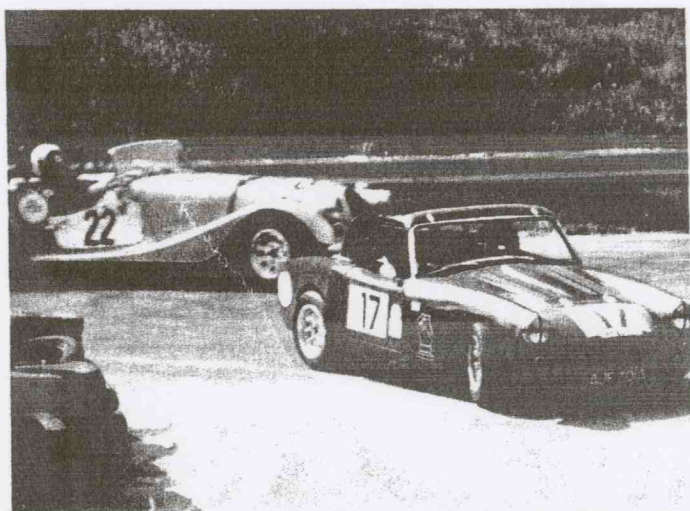


ACERS HIGH

Editorial wit notwithstanding, this pretty little refugee from the sixties is alive and well and living in Barnsley as Ian Hyne discovered



Robin Knight campaigns his Turner Mk2 in the GB road going sports car challenge at Cadwell Park. Opposition included Midgets, Sprites, Sevens, A TVR and a Morgan 4/4.

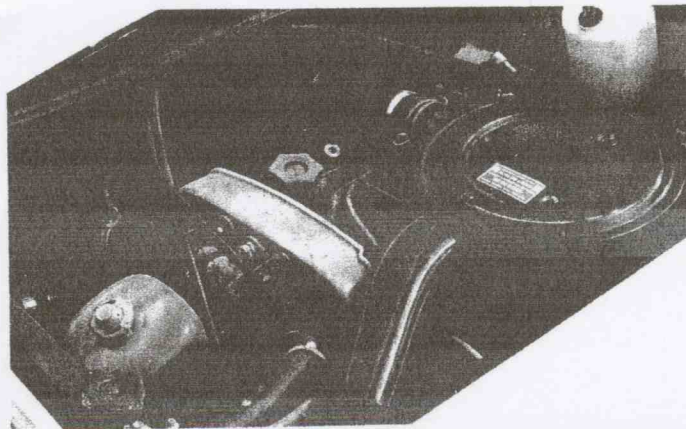
The Acer first appeared a couple of years back as a result of Mark Clarkson buying an original Turner sports car to restore. As anyone who has ever attempted a ground up rebuild will testify, it is a far from simple undertaking and, in the case of Mark, caused him to think that there

had to be an easier way to get a Turner on the road. There was! Like more than a few ambitious and imaginative men before him, he built his own but, for those to whom the name Turner does not strike a familiar chord, perhaps a potted history would not go amiss.

The Turner sports cars were the result of JH (Jack) Turner's direct involvement with a

string of specials in the years following the war. Success with his own chassis and engine conversions and modifications spurred the first car to bear his name to appear in 1955. This was designated the 803 and utilised com-

car offered a wider range of engines covering the 948cc BMC A series, Coventry Climax FWA 1098cc and FWE 1216 cc and three Ford engines being the Anglia 997 105E, Anglia Super 1198cc 123E and the Classic 1340cc 109E with the



Showing the effects of a hard life but there is bags of room for the 130 bhp, 2 litre Fiat twin cam. Again very simple but a bonnet stay would be a useful addition.

ponents culled from an Austin A30 to give 30 bhp at 4500 revs. A year later he seized upon the new A35 engine to boost this meagre output but not by much. However, they were solid little cars employing a very stiff ladder frame chassis, suspension being by A 30 coils and wishbones at the front and the rear axle being located by trailing arms and a panhard rod with a choice of coil springs or torsion bars to complement the telescopic dampers. Brakes were of course drums all round.

Interestingly, kits were supplied as a complete rolling chassis while the accompanying body was fitted with bonnet, boot, doors and as much as the factory could fit while final assembly with all necessary parts supplied took around 15 to 20 hours. Now where have we heard that recently?

It was the improved 950 sports that really put Turner on the map and with a specially prepared engine giving 60 bhp at 5800, Autosport used words including 'excellent' and 'sensational' to describe the performance of the 950cc bullet when they tested it in February 1959.

About 180 were built between 1956 and 1959 at which time the Mk 1 Sports made its appearance. This was the car that brought us the distinctive shape that is instantly recognised as Turner but it was only produced for a year before the Mk 2 succeeded it. Virtually identical to the Mk 1, the later

Ford engined models being fitted with Triumph Herald front suspension and steering.

In 1963, slight changes gave birth to the Mk 3 car which gave a choice of the 105E and the 1500cc Cortina Super 116E, the latter giving for the first time, 100 mph plus ability.

The Turners had always been respected for the manner in which they drove and handled; good power (for their day) excellent cornering and handling and while braking deficiencies plagued early cars, these were overcome and Turners made a fine reputation on the track while some are still earning laurels today. About 80 of the Mk 3 cars were built before production at the Wolverhampton factory was wound up in 1966 and a very civilised, capable and attractive two seater sports car came to the end of the road.....or did it?

Mark Clarkson's original Acer created a good deal of interest when it was shown at various kit car shows as much as five years ago but, being a bricklayer with enough work to keep him going till Doomsday, the car never really got the promotion and success it deserved. With a chassis originally made by John Foers of Nomad and now Ibex 4 x 4 fame, and a body made by Carlton Automotive at Barnsley, the project was too scattered round Yorkshire for anyone to really get a grip of it. However, Carlton Automotive are in the process of doing that and it was there that I journeyed to sample the

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hybrid that currently serves as their demonstrator.

The original car was based on standard Vauxhall Viva components and, while the current car has acquired a 2 litre Fiat twin cam engine and five speed box along with the Fiat live axle and a rocking arm front set up, the chassis is pretty much the same while it is envisaged that production cars will adhere to the original standard Vauxhall recipe.

The chassis is, like the originals, a hefty four rail ladder using 80 x 40 x 3 mm steel box sections and jiggged and bracketed to accept the Vauxhall front crossmember and rear axle complete with its effective four trailing arm location. It is not that long since HC Viva components were very popular as a kit base due to their great efficiency in endowing the chassis with good handling and roadholding properties.

With such a simple chassis design, engine and gearbox options will be many and varied which is useful since the limited range of Viva engines was a point against them from the kit builder's point of view; a giant void between 1256cc and the 1800 and 2.3 Magnum units, the latter two being rather difficult to acquire. Ford crossflows could be a popular choice but the compact, revvy and powerful Fiat units seem ideal while the disc braked back axle, having a similar means of attachment, is no great problem to fit.

The current car is a few years old now and bears the scars of

the development experiments that have been carried out upon it but, for all that, it performs well on the road and though not the most pristine example of the marque, I was there at my request rather than Carlton's and my encounter with the Acer was sufficient to see the potential it offers to fans of classic sixties sports cars while the new demonstrator Carlton will build to reflect the standard of the kit to be offered will attend to all the current shortcomings of the car I drove.

As I said, the ladder frame chassis is of very sturdy construction while transmission is up to the customer. Whilst on the subject, the current information available from Carlton contains the interesting snippet that the 1800 and 2.3 engines fitted to the Vauxhall Victor and VX 4/90 were available with an overdrive option but I think you would have to mount a very comprehensive search in order to turn one up.

The body has the same robust nature as the chassis that supports it. A minimum lay up of 4 1/2 ozs translates to a very thick skin with the strength such construction imparts. Styling is uniquely sixties and reeks of the simplicity embodied in all the designs of the time; simple square doors, bonnet and boot, equally simple external hinges and locks and a body line of seemingly unimaginative nature that somehow results in a very attractive overall impression.

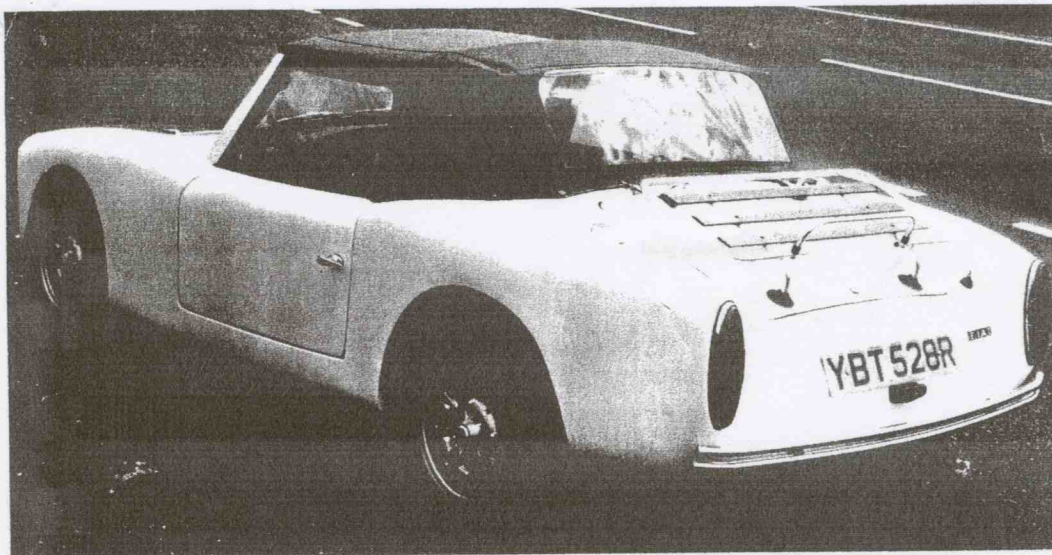
The period look is maintain-

ed through the use of rear light units from a Sunbeam Alpine, Singer Gazelle, Hillman Minx of around 1960-1965 vintage and again the search for these would have to be undertaken with real dedication while Carlton offer the suggestion of the major autojumbles as a reasonably probable source. When it comes to the screen, courtesy of a Volvo 122, it seems as if building one of these cars will be a life's mission but the good news is that screens and the chrome surrounds are available through either Auto Windscreens or Autoglass and thereafter, the list of necessary parts enters the realms of the not desperately challenging; Mini headlamps, indicators and heater unit, wiper motor and assembly from any BL model with a flexible drive mechanism as it is modified to a three wiper system and suitable seats (the car was fitted with a good set from a Spitfire) completes the requirements.

The bodywork of this car had weathered well but the suspension conversion and engine transplant had conspired to mar the appearance of the underbonnet area but the bay is big enough to offer a spacious home to either Fiat, Ford or Vauxhall engines while everything can be fitted neatly and logically. At the other end the boot is also quite spacious in spite of this car having a special alloy tank taking up a fair bit of the available space.

The Mk 3 Turner sports had a very well appointed and trimmed interior as a result of criticism of the spartan nature of earlier models and while the haphazard nature of this car might put you off, the scope is certainly there. The dash panel is a GRP blank so individual instruments are easily fitted, original cars having an MGB like speedo and rev counter either side of the wheel and four ancillaries mounted centrally interspersed with switches and the dash mounted ignition.

Ignoring the weatherbeaten appearance, the interior is spacious and comfortable with sufficient room behind the seats for a couple of small children or luggage or, as Carlton point out, the family pet! The hood fits well and complements the lines of the car while fixing is by 'lift the dot' fasteners around the back and by the simple expedient of three bolts securing the GRP

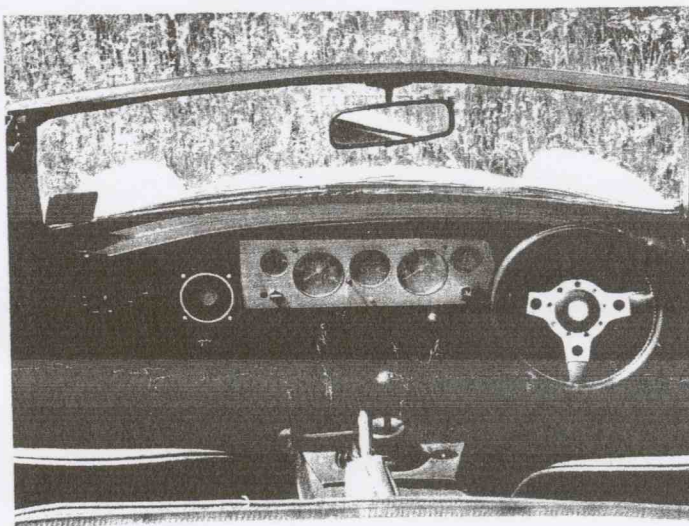


Styling is pure sixties; very simple indeed. The rear light units will involve a little hunting but a good autojumble should produce a set.

moulding in the leading edge of the hood to the upper screen rail and secured by butterfly nuts. Like the hood frame that quickly assembles from four parts, it's very simple and effective, adjectives that are equally applicable to the sidescreens. These are on a metal frame and bolt to the door while the upper corner of the leading edge is fitted with a small nylon catch that hooks into the screen pillar so they cannot balloon at speed.

Open the square door and slide into the comfortable seat and, in keeping with the pre-inertia reel era, you have to wrestle with the seat belts to untangle them though inertia reels could be fitted. Once that is sorted out, the seat has bags of travel and drivers well over 6' tall will be accommodated. The wheel falls nicely to hand and, though offset to the right, the pedals are easily operated. Room round the clutch is characteristically scant but you can slip your foot behind it, extrication being simple and speedy. This particular car also benefited from the Fiat steering column complete with stalk controls for indicators, lights and wipers while all the instrumentation from the Fiat had been fitted centrally.

Turning the key had the engine singing a slightly faltering song and experience showed it to be reluctant to sing in key below 3000 revs while the gearchange had a mechanical precision and metallic click, click that I have never come across before in a Fiat. However, clicking into first and releasing the clutch had the Acer on the move displaying all the more unpleasant aspects



The dashboard isn't very pretty but there is bags of scope for duplicating original cars with individual, chrome bezelled instruments.

of severe indigestion but once on the open road 3000 revs indicated the arrival of the automotive Rennies and this little car really moved.

The suspension was very much on the hard side and over

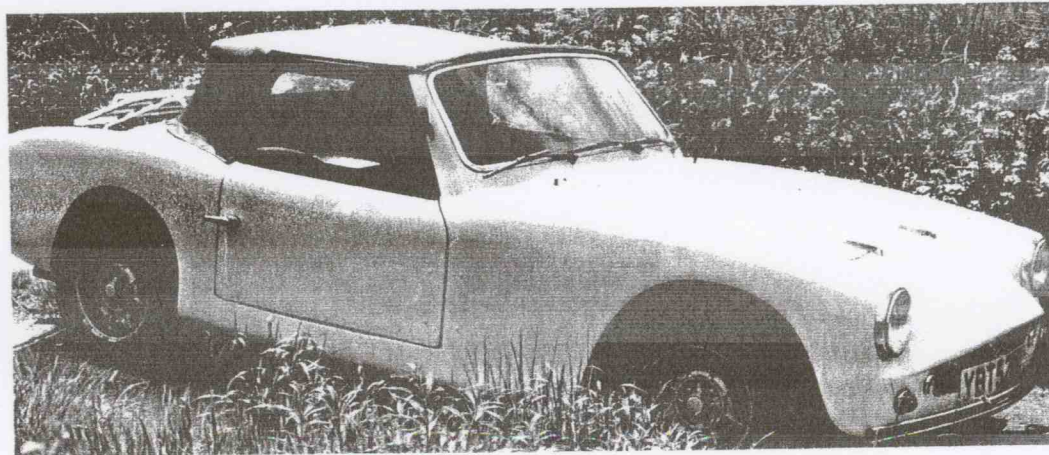
the rough undulations through the village of Royston, Yorks, if I'd had false teeth, I'd have swallowed them but reaching the smooth surface of the A 61 all this was suddenly behind me as the car found its strength in

legal limit although it was good third and the twin cam revved in its insatiable appetite for revs hitting 6000 in third and fourth before it clicked into fifth and paid its respects to the for a great deal more.

I loved the gearchange; that click, click really impressed me and you just can't go wrong with it; click, click with speed and precision. The top three ratios aren't all that far apart but you need to use them to push the car and when extended, it is very rewarding. Cornering is extremely competent with the back end letting go if provoked but, with practised use of the throttle the car can be cornered very hard whilst grip is maintained. Roll too was well controlled although that could be reduced by the unique front suspension fitted to this car while the Fiat mechanics also provide four wheel disc brakes so stopping this lightweight was no problem whatsoever.

Although a little tatty, the Carlton Acer offers a simple, open two seater with bags of scope for completion to a very high standard and once on the road, you will have a car that will afford a high degree of driver pleasure. Similarly pleasurable is the price which stands at a mere £1250 inc VAT for the chassis, body, doors, bonnet, boot and windscreen frame. On the extras list you will find the necessary shortened propshaft, weather equipment, bumpers, roll over bar and towing bracket while Carlton reckon you could build a budget car for around £2000 and a real gem for £3000. Interested?

Carlton Automotive are at **Midland Works, Filey Avenue, Royston, Barnsley, South Yorks. S71 4PZ. Tel 0226 722761.**



The Turner Mk 1 Sports introduced the shape that epitomises memories of the marque while the Acer reproduces it for fans of classic sixties sports cars.