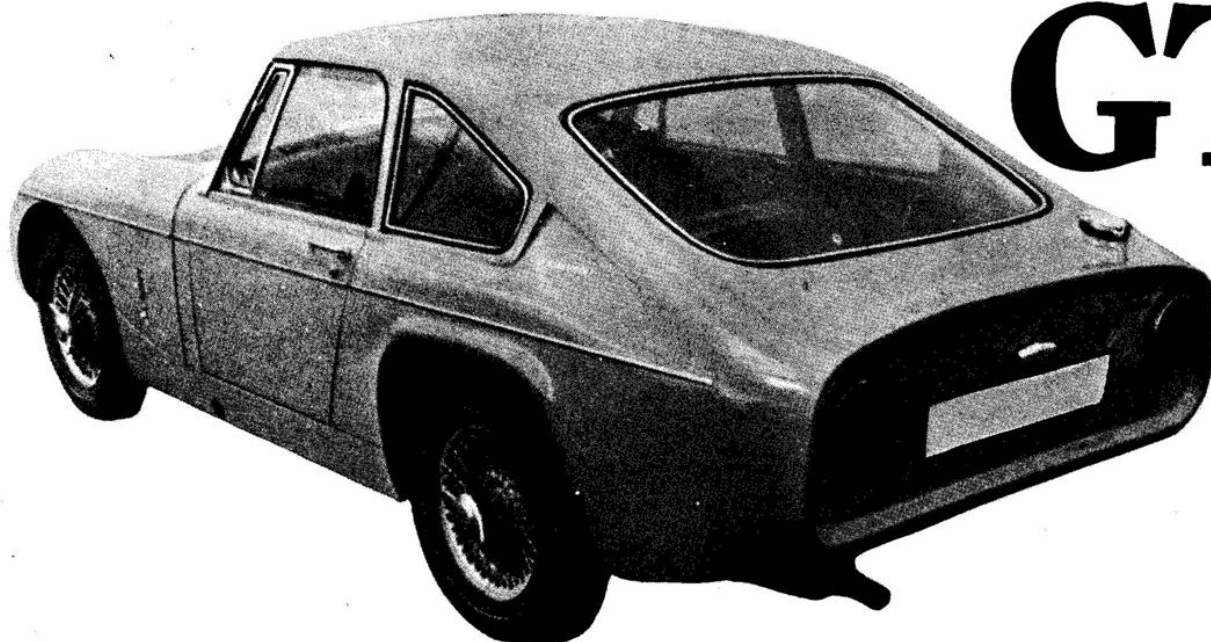


GT



LITTLE DID YOU KNOW — BUT AS far back as September a staggering combination of skill and talent was assembled to dream up an ideal, smooth road car. Not to go out and win fancy concours prizes, not to bolster that well known bunch of car breakers, the Triple C Racing Team, but to give away FREE. To you — if you're lucky.

And what's all this about talent? Well there was Paul Davies for a start (crawl, crawl — sign my expenses??), then there was a combination of Julian Kingsford Booty and David Miall-Smith whose names together spell Lenham (amazingly enough) and last but by no means least was David Oldham of Oselli, the tuning concern we told you all about last month.

Many minutes putting their heads and telephone lines together produced the plan. Triple C would buy a car — not any rotten old nail either — but a good, un-shunted 1275 Spridget, pack it off down to Lenham's at Harrietsham, Kent, where one of their super smooth Le Mans Coupé tops and matching noses would be fitted and somewhere along the line it would all meet up with the ultimate in road-going 1293 cc mills from Oselli.

The whole ensemble would be tastefully sprayed in red, and it would be finished right on time for the Racing Car Show to sit on our own stand, be gloated over AND WON!

The only panic was sorting out a car quickly enough and good enough on which to base the whole project. This was finally discovered by David Miall-Smith sitting in a tiny showroom somewhere in West Hampstead. Near to a very good Indian restaurant actually, but that's another story. Anyway there it was. A '67 Midget in dark blue. F-registered, soft top, three owners and a long MoT.

With a practised eye, Dave gave it the twice-over. Lenham's have just about lost count of the number of conversions they've done on these cars, using their two different designs of GT top for the sliding-window and wind-up Spridgets respectively, so they know what to look for when purchasing a likely candidate.

Obviously you can go much further down the price scale and pick one which has been shunted at front or rear — because you're

about to hack a lot of body off anyway. But to give a car away to a reader we obviously had to play it ultra-straight and this one had no signs of any accident damage whatever. Dave found a few little spots of ferrous oxide creeping down the front panel but that was all to be chucked away anyway. So far as the chassis rails, spring hangers and sills were concerned it was absolutely clean. In fact never rusted, rallied or raced — even at weekends.

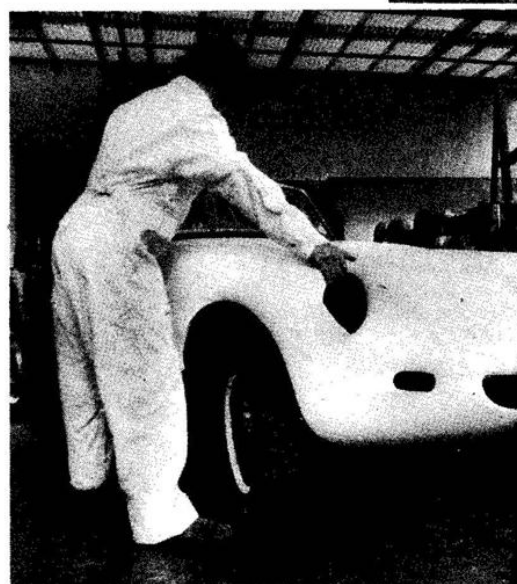
If you ever tackle a job like this yourself, remember that it's probably easier in the long run to straighten a cheap, bent car in order to fit glassfibre panels than it is to persevere with a badly rusting example.

So the loot was exchanged and Triple C became the proud owners of one absolutely standard Midge. But not standard for long. David drove it back to Harrietsham and was (almost) surprised to find how good the shockers were. Never mind, we said, we've already got some new ones in mind. Tyres were OK, too. Bit of a mixed bunch and standard width, mind you. Forget it we said. By the time it's done it will have alloy wheels and big fat French Klebers. 'Cos a smooth shape and a good mill was just the start. Every item on the car from seats to Revolution wheels and in-car entertainment has been hand-picked to give the best possible scene in road-going gear.

But on with the show. Lenham's kicked off by stripping out all the interior trim. Carefully, because some of it with a spot of re-vamping was due to go back at a later stage. All the carpets, padding etc, were chucked away because they were all due for replacement. The front wings were unbolted though you could expect older cars to need rusted bolts drilling out or a spot of aggro with an air chisel perhaps. Ours fortunately just needed Plusgas.

The front panel, grille, lights etc come away easily once the wings are off so it wasn't long before the Lenham lads were able to lift out the engine, place it in a large brown envelope and post it off to the Oselli den at Stanton Harcourt Road, Eynsham, Oxford. More of which anon.

This is where you've got to be a bit brave in the body department. Hacking off all the rear panelwork. As always there's very much

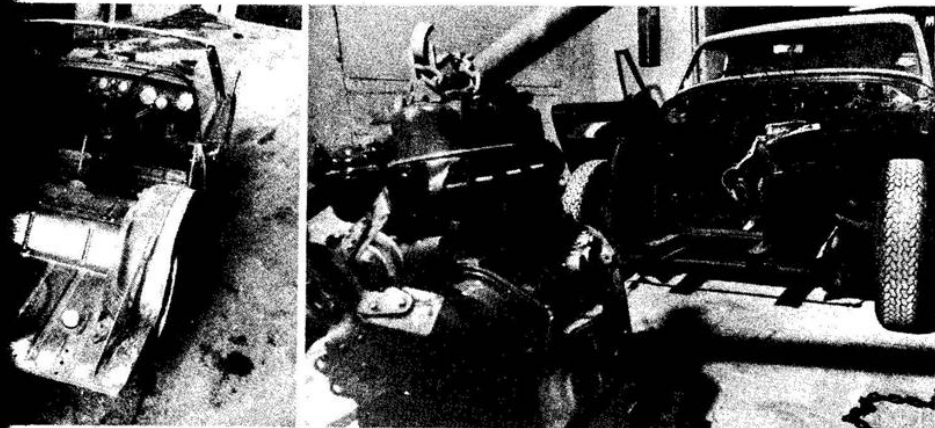


a right and a wrong way to do it. The right way is to leave a margin of 2in of metal up the trailing edge of the doors so the new glassfibre can be bonded successfully and you retain strength where strength counts. You leave the big, broad sill alone of course — unless you expect to fit really big rubber then you flatten the wheel arch edges back a little by gentle hammering and shave the glassfibre to match. But more of that later.

At the back, you cut the body right down where it joins the boot floor panel, being careful to leave a neat trailing edge on that floor because again the bonding has to be done here. So far as those internal side bracing struts are concerned, you leave them alone for most of their length — but gently snip the end as shown in lovely Norman's happy snaps.

Lenham's supply 75% of their rear body sections in kit form, non self coloured, at £68, which includes glass windows (not plastic), rubber seals and more than enough matt and resin to do the job. As a very useful extra for those who don't fancy knocking up their own trim panels, they also sell a trim

Coupe for you?



Top left is how the completed top will look. But remember the car you can win will sit on wide alloys and fat rubber. Next along is the original Midge after chiselling and above — ready to have the Oselli mill installed. Front end uses original light fittings and careful work with glassfibre (left) ensures weatherproof arches. Below, the interior before trimming shows where original internal bracing is left in place.



kit comprising headlining, floor covering and side panels at £28. In the standard bundle, you also get a re-routed pipe for the fuel filler, which now sits up on top of the Kamm tail, by the way. And with the Triple C give-away car, you also get a Derrington racing-style flip up cap, already.

The design of the new rear wheel arches allows for bigger wheels heightwise, and if you have any shaving to do at all, it will only be a small amount down by the sills. For those concerned with power-to-weight ratio, it's also worth noting that the front and rear conversion saves you all of one hundred-weight.

Say you've cut away all the tin and left nice, clean, straight edges everywhere. Next job is to take the new rear body and line it up roughly in place — perhaps by standing it on a few old oil cans at the back. Now you line up the leading front edge over the top of the windscreen. That's right, there's a gap at the back between the old floor and the new tail isn't there? Don't panic, it's meant to be.

When you're satisfied the body is lined up properly, bolt up the front through the hood clips into the specially thickened sections in the leading edge of the roof. Rubber solution can be used later to weather-seal the top of the screen, though the glassfibre is a pretty close fit. A spirit level on the tail might be a good way to ensure the back is dead level before two big strips of matt are used to bond the back panel to the old boot floor,

bridging that $\frac{1}{2}$ in gap at the same time. The back's designed with a broad, flat, ledge anyway so the job really is made easy.

Side fixing down the original bit of body behind the doors is often done with screws or rivets by the DIY clients, but Lenham reckon you can seldom hide the heads — or the pinched in areas of the body — in the final finishing. So they bond the panel inside the body side, so to speak, which has to be done slowly as it's not all that easily accessible. You can also take this opportunity of doing any matting or filling necessary under the rear wheel arches where any of the original panel work might have corroded or got a bit tatty.

Because we have to cover the whole trimming and finishing bit next month we'll leave the back thus hung on but naked and turn to the sharp end.

By a spot of clever adaptation, Lenham really make the front end fitting a piece of cake. Triumph Herald rear bonnet clips are used and at the hingeing front end, special brackets bolt up to the original bumper mounting holes in the chassis.

These locate into a tube, rigidly bonded across the glassfibre nose and there you are — needing only a spot of adjustment. Lenham find that many used Spridgets are anything but square at the front and locating the nose so it fits the scuttle exactly could really be a problem — if it were not for the slides in the brackets which make it possible to adjust the front hinges up, down, forwards or backwards, until it all aligns.

To buy, the nose is £52 including fittings and the newly incorporated power bulge — popped in recently to clear air filters on the increasing numbers of Weber carbs found on Spridgets. Lenham no longer do headlamp cowls, since safety legislation started to frown on them for cutting down light intensity or whatever.

The original side and headlights are used on the new nose and a thermostatic fan is often a good idea. Julian KB made the point that although the nose has a smaller grille than the standard car (and you get a metal grille inclusive too) the air ducting is probably a little better, so it's only in traffic where the extra fan would be used.

Before we leave the glassfibre bit until next month, the spec for the technical is: gel coat with a 3oz laminate, using two thicknesses of $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz matt, going up to $4\frac{1}{2}$ oz on stressed parts for fixing bolts.

Needless to say, engine accessibility becomes superb with the new droop snoot, but we took the chance to install our new Oselli lump before the nose went on.

Next month we'll colour it all to you with super pix of the finished prize and complete engine spec, together with all the tasty fittings that have been gathered together.

If this isn't the most worthwhile machine to win since we gave away an autocross Escort and a racing Mini then we'll eat our Bellstars. Entry forms are included in every January issue and remember — from Jan 3rd to 13th you can gloat over it all, on our stand at the Racing Car Show, Olympia. Hope to see yer! ■