

TIED~UP in Notts

You could say that Ray and Mary Downes are somewhat fanatical when it comes to motorsport. The pattern of their married life was set when they decided that instead of tablecloths and tea sets as wedding presents they would prefer a motorcar. Consequently, of their wedding gift money was put toward the purchase of a DKW 1000S which they used both as transport and for racing and rallying.

It was a good decision as it happens. They had a lot of fun driving the car and they liked it so much that some years ago they bought and restored another just like it. It is still used regularly in events and remains one of their most prized possessions.

It is no surprise to learn then, that after service in the RAF — some of which was spent in Germany, where the DKW was acquired — the couple started a classic car restoration business, and racing and rallying continues to figure largely in their lives. As members of the Classic Saloon Car Club they are still active participants and, as they put it, they plough the profits from their business straight back into their hobby.

The Haldane 100 came to their attention when they were browsing around a component car show last year. For some while they had been on the lookout for a project which would compliment their existing business and, although they hadn't really considered building replicas before, this car seemed to slot in well with their plans.

The Downes hadn't read our report on the car in the Aug/Sept '88 issue of *Classic Replicas* so they had to find out for themselves that the Haldane HD 100 was the result of collaboration between two Scots, Brian Harris and Alasdair Maclean Scott.

Nottinghamshire-based R and M Downes have tidied-up a few loose ends since their appointment as agents for the Haldane 100 Healey replica

Based on a ladderframe chassis designed to take the running gear from a Vauxhall Chevette, the Haldane has a rot-proof glassfibre bodyshell. Some people may have reservations about using the uninspiring Chevette as a source of mechanical parts but, in fact, this little German-designed car has always been a competent performer. Haldane have altered the suspension components to suit the characteristics of a sports car by locating the rear axle with four links and a Panhard rod. Properly carried out, and in this case it is, this modification to a rear solid axle usually gives excellent results. The separate springs and shock absorbers have been replaced at the rear with specially rated coil/damper units.

At the front, things have been mainly left alone. The Chevette front suspension beam, with its anti-roll bar and adjustable castor and camber, is used in its entirety. This makes the car easier to build; an important point for a vehicle which was specifically designed for home completion.

However, not everything comes up smelling of roses. We didn't like the interior treatment of the company demo car, although we admit that this aspect is entirely down to the person who builds it; neither did we appreciate the lack of weather equipment.

To pick up the story of the Downes again, they liked what they saw.

They felt that the car had potential and that a replica would fit in nicely with their existing business, assembling cars for people who had neither the time or inclination to do so themselves.

Haldane liked the idea too. Being based in Glasgow, the company were feeling a little remote from the action further south. To cut a long story short, the deal was done and R&M Downes became agents for Haldane, and it was in this guise that we first met them at Castle Combe when we held our Driver's Day.

We renewed our acquaintance with the Haldane by taking the Downes demonstration car out on the track, and it became apparent that our previous criticisms concerning lack of performance had been answered. Fitted with a fast road cam and modified carburettor, but retaining the standard gearbox, the engine was a different beast altogether. It has lost none of its flexibility but it revved freely and had a wide power band. It was particularly willing in the mid-range and responded instantly to the throttle.

The car had been properly set-up and was nicely balanced with a touch of understeer apparent when we came on the throttle a bit quick coming out of a corner. Anyone familiar with Castle Combe will know there was ample chance for the rear suspension to display bad manners — it didn't.

All this and weather protection too. Not only was there a hood, but the car was fitted with sidescreens although these prototypes need further development. It has to be said that the car we drove at Castle Combe was built to a budget. The interior finish is best described as basic and some of the exterior detailing was not particularly well carried out. In fact, it was quite clear that most of the budget had gone into ensuring the mechanical side of things was right, with the overall finish taking second place.

Ray explained that the car had been built using as many parts from the Chevette as possible and the intention is to show the sort of car which can be produced for under £5000. He feels that to advertise a car for one price and have a demonstrator which cost two or three times as much is misleading, not down right dishonest. For those with deeper pockets, the sky is the limit: leather seats, period instruments, uprated engines and classic paint jobs are all available for those who want them.

R&M Downes offer a whole range of options and can supply anything from a basic kit of parts, for those who wish to build the car themselves, to a near complete car. We are aware of the British penchant for compromise, it is expected that the most popular requirement will be for a part, completed car — with the engine, gearbox, running gear and bodyshell fitted leaving the customer the satisfying task of putting in the trim and generally finishing the internal and exterior detailing.

For more information contact R&M Downes, Mansfield Road Service Station, Mansfield Road Skegby, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottingham NG17 3AQ. Tel: 0623 555290. ■



Above: the Downes-built Haldane is a neat, enjoyable sports car, but the replica enthusiast will want to come up with something more accurate



Left: the hood is another Downes modification, but needs some improvement over this prototype version