

# WHICH KIT?

## Britain's Best Kitcar Magazine

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# Strong Scotch: Haldane's HD100

Classic replica might be hot

stuff these days but the

Haldane HD100 Healey

lookalike maintains a very

low-key existence. Graham

Nash got through the net to

bring you *Which Kit?*'s very

first report on Scotland's most

select sports car.

WHETHER IT BE BY THE FORCE OF magnetism, destiny or sheer bad luck, I am unable to speculate, but whenever I have to make my way to or through the southern side of Glasgow, without fail I end up in Motherwell. The place being sited in the somewhat decayed industrial heartland of Lanarkshire and being constituted of piles of twisted steel and pockets of barren, scrubby land, time spent in Motherwell is a few prayers short of a religious experience.

Blantyre, a little further to the west, is a marginally preferable destination but it is yet easy to understand why David Livingstone, the town's favourite son, sought to wander at an early age. The best thing about Blantyre is undoubtedly the Haldane 100, a Healey lookalike produced by Brian Harrison and Alisdair Scott, under the corporate auspices of Haldane Developments Ltd.

Prior to my late April visit I had been trying to arrange a test drive in the car for the greater part of six months, but, due to the demand for the HD100, a demonstrator model had not been available — or even in existence.

Six months is a long time to have to anticipate anything worthwhile, not least the appraisal of a car with a reputation to uphold, but the waiting was over. Alisdair Scott had invited me to accompany himself and partner, Brian Harrison, on a jaunt to Lochgilphead where the would-be owner of a Haldane was pacing up and down his driveway, drawing on a Marlborough and awaiting the delivery of his new baby.

The route would take us north past Loch Lomond, said Alisdair, west over Glen Croe, through Inveraray and alongside Loch Fyne; would I like to come? Would Beethoven have liked a hearing aid? Not

even the inevitable prospect of another Motherwellian excursion could have prevented me going.

The Haldane has been in production for some time now. The first example was sold in 1988 and the model has, since that time, and without recourse to the advertising columns, quietly been going about its business and establishing itself

at the forefront of the Scottish kit car industry.

Though based on the classic Austin Healey — first produced in 1953 — the HD100 is not a true replica. The original car provided transport in an era when the driver's arms served as indicators — the HD100 has a more mechanical arrangement. In addition, Healey

*Lovely setting for a lovely car — HD100 at rest in the peace of the Scottish Highlands. Roads here provide perfect driving environment.*



## IMPRESSIONS

enthusiasts would soon identify the imposter's non-original body-line running from behind the front wing to the rear wheel arch. However, the grille could be original Healey if the customer could find and afford one, and several other trim components are apparently still available 'off the shelf'.

All in all, then, the car retains much of the spirit and evocation of the Healey but does so without transgressing any of the strictures increasingly being applied to 'classic' car replication.

The basis of the HD100 is a sturdy ladder frame chassis, the rails of which are fabricated from 80 x 40mm, 3.2mm thick square-section steel. Once the beautifully cut and prepared chassis has been welded, it is fully galvanised and should give lengthy service before succumbing to the insatiable tin worm.

The adoption of suspension hardware from the Vauxhall Chevette has enabled the original Healey track to be retained. The front cross-member simply bolts into place without the need for any hacking or sawing but the spring rates are revised and adjustable shock absorbers fitted as part of the tuning process.

The standard rear axle is less obliging, however, and receives upper and lower trailing arms and coil-over shock suspension units. The resultant five-link set up has been designed to induce a touch of 'squat' in response to a moderate or more than moderate application of throttle. Certainly, the Haldane off-loads its power and torque through the rear wheels very effectively and tenaciously hangs on to the tarmac through the cambered dips and dives. But more of that anon.

The semi-monocoque bodyshell is extremely rigid — by virtue of its three bulkheads (two under the scuttle and the other aft of the seats) and the thirty-two mounting points that bind it to the chassis — and is delivered as a complete shell with its doors, bonnet and boot ready fitted. Sagging doors and mis-aligned

bonnets so detract from the perceived quality of a product of this nature that it is something of a wonder that more kits are not supplied in this form. Certainly, the panel fit on the test car was fine indeed, as was the paint finish, and neither would have disgraced a full-scale manufacturer.

Frequently, too little attention is paid to the interior design of kit cars; another mystery, this, since the owner should be spending more time driving the car than standing and admiring it. The lack of attention to detail is not a criticism that can be levelled at the men behind the Haldane.

The dashboard and its associated instrumentation illustrates the thoroughness of design and the production rewards of prior dissertations. Again, faithful to the character of the Healey, instrumentation is as comprehensive as was fashionable in the nineteen fifties, with plain, round, black-on-white dials set into a laser-cut and matt black-painted metal surround. Small, unfussily marked and mounted ahead of the driver, the instruments make their own contribution to that heady, if undefinable, cocktail that we variously describe as 'spirit' or 'character'. So, too, does the curving convergence between door and dash — so much more satisfying a feature with which to live than a flat old 'tin tray' door hung on a couple of exposed cupboard hinges.

Scottish roads, overlaid with Scottish tarmac, are, quite simply, the best in the business — being wide, abrasive, evenly cambered and largely free of grimy road deposits. That they scythe their way through some of the most magnificent wilderness scenery in Western Europe can be taken as read: that the sun was out for a Spring shakedown was a bonus of rare blessing. Serious roadwork beckoned, and who was I to refuse?

The doors, which open by means of a cable-pull mounted inside the casing,

open wide and grant easy access to the interior. The seats fitted to the model tested were 'wraparound' in the literal sense. That they looked like upholstered interpretations of a favourite aunt's whicker chair (without the legs) mattered less than the fact that they provided great comfort and vice-like lateral support. They are mounted as close to the floor as makes no difference and that, and the straight-legged driving position, creates an 'in' rather than 'on' driving sensation. It caused me no problems with visibility but I imagine that the average Oriental gentleman might disappear without trace inside the cockpit.

I had taken on board warnings from Brian that the racing clutch was heavy in its action and all or nothing in its operation, and that the Ford Pinto, as modified, was impotent below about 2000 revolutions per minute. With my clutch foot suitably braced and neutral confirmed, I

*HD100 bodyshell is very close to original Healey 100/4 but differs by using bodyside styling line from later Healey 3000 model. 15 x 5 1/2 J KN alloy wheels are replica Minilite items, as used latterly on race version of 100/4.*



## IMPRESSIONS

turned the right hand side-mounted ignition key through half a turn and fired the engine on the button.

She was crisp and eager but needed a touch of throttle to maintain a clean idle. The first of the gearbox's four (Ford-sourced) speeds was selected and the clutch lifted with due respect and caution. Engagement was smooth and plenty of revs ensured a drama-free take-off. Having piloted a heavily laden Transit Luton for a thousand miles only days before, this clutch was a dolly; otherwise, the warning was well founded.

Quite why or how Ford manage to strangle the engines in their road cars into an asthmatic near-submission is quite beyond my comprehension, especially when transplants of the same iron lumps to kit and low-volume sports car manufacturers' products verge on the miraculous. The rough and barely ready Cologne 2.9 V6, for example, as fitted to



*Above: Haldane makes own screen surround to fit original 100/4 glass. Below: latest HD100 chassis boasts brand new Ford Sierra 2-litre twin-cam with 5-speed gearbox. Engine is fuel injected and has full management system.*



## IMPRESSIONS

Granadas and upper Sierras, is utterly transformed in the engine bay of a TVR S. So, too, is the 2.0 Pinto in the Haldane. Admittedly, the test engine had been tweaked — fitted with a Kent cam, bored out to 2.1-litres and producing a genuine 98bhp at the rear wheels (maybe 120bhp at the flywheel) — but the transformation was more than the sum of its modifications.

With something in the region of 150 horsepower per ton of mass, the HD100 scampered along, top down (weather gear and a hard top is available), with all the urge, grace and alacrity of an unbroken stallion — but with the added maturities of balance and control. Ample torque, intimate gear ratios and modest mass are the classic ingredients for satisfying on-road performance — at least, for straightline performance — and the Haldane rewards absolutely.

Given the dearth of devilment below about 2500rpm it is important to keep the

engine spinning towards the upper reaches of its range to ensure really swift progress. Fortunately, the sweet, free-revving nature of the power plant and those short gear ratios combine in such a manner as to produce cracking performance. Slowing down at the end of the road is consistent, too, courtesy of the Chevette braking system.



HD100 uses original equipment Healey 100/4 radiator grille, bumpers, badges, handles etc. These items are available off-the-shelf thanks to high demand from owners of rust-free original cars in Australia and USA.



The heavyish clutch, 'bottomless' engine and low seating position could make town driving more of a chore than one would wish but it is important to remember that the model tested was built to a customer's own specification. The more mundane, but torquier, standard Ford Pinto is the more usual engine but any number of interesting alternatives will fit the space beneath the louvred bonnet — Fiat, Alfa and Toyota twin-cams to name but an illustrious few.

Light weight, solid torque and short gearing are all very well on a straight and billiard table-smooth highway but the equation of driver satisfaction cannot be proved without including the input from the steering, chassis and suspension. Here, too, the Haldane performs with distinction.

Sitting low on her chassis, and exploiting a low centre of gravity plus half and half weight distribution, the car corners with minimal body roll and great stability. It is a car with which I became comfortable and confident within a very few miles — comfortable, that is, but for two 'discomforts', the first physical and the second psychological. The first resulted from a steering wheel that was too close to the top of the dash such that the knuckles on my right hand fouled the latter whenever the wheel was turned sharply to the left. The cure? Either a smaller steering wheel of some form or additional spacing in the steering column, perhaps.

My second, and only other, criticism relates to the indicators which operate not by a conventional stalk but by an up and down toggle switch on the dashboard. Despite Brian's explanation of their theoretical and apparently logical operation, not to mention the fifty/fifty chance of success offered by fate, I failed to work out whether left was up or down. Maybe this is why Healey drivers relied on arm signals.

The ride was taut and well controlled even with the customer's own choice of 185/60 section tyres on fifteen inch rims, but we agreed that there would have been rather more suppleness had the shoes been shod with taller rubber — standard fitments are 175/80 or 185/70 sections on fourteen inch rims.

Haldane's basic HD100 body/chassis kit rings up around £2600 on the till; the rest, as ever, is up to the customer. The company supplies a useful shopping list of parts indicating what is required and from where they can be obtained but they will also source most bits and pieces themselves for a moderate once-only fee. The subject HD100 was a £10,000 finished car but a tidy example could be put on the road for half that amount.

All in all, then, the Haldane is a very impressive, beautifully built, dynamically capable and aesthetically 'pure' sports car, and one which I thoroughly enjoyed. For more information, all you budding aesthetes should contact Brian Harrison or Alisdair Scott at *Haldane Developments*, 12 Delvin Road, Cathcart, Glasgow G44 3AA. Tel: 0698 826950.