

NEWCOMER

HIGHLANDER RETURNS





Scotland's biggest car manufacturer, Haldane Motor Co, sadly went into receivership late last year but the company name and its pretty Austin Healey replica were soon snapped up by another replica maker, Pilgrim Cars. Now based at the other end of the country, what can we expect from the Haldane HD300?

SADLY FOR THE SCOTTISH BASED company, the cost of achieving full Low Volume Type Approval was simply too high and with resulting sales of fully built cars coming in at a trickle the sums simply didn't add up. All the hard work had been done, the development completed and the tests passed, but it wasn't to be. Once Haldane was in the hands of the receivers, budget Cobra replica manufacturer Dennis Tanner of Pilgrim



Cars took an interest in the project and bought the whole package. What can he do to revive the Scottish kit's flagging sales?

The car we had come to see was in fact Haldane's original Sierra based type approved demonstrator and it was quite immaculately presented in its metallic red and cream livery. Inside the cockpit the car had been trimmed in matching cream leather and red carpeting and the overall fit and finish was unquestionably up to spec.

It doesn't take too long before one begins to appreciate the development put into the HD300 to get it through Type Approval and ease large scale production. The neat seat belt installation exemplifies the Type Approval aspect while the dash layout is a good example of the careful thought put into easing production. Whilst it isn't a replica of the original car, the dashboard is exactly symmetrical right to left. The wooden insert in front of the passenger is a glove box while the identical reflection in front of the driver houses the gauges and warning lights. What's so clever about that? Well, for a left hand drive car you simply swop the glove box and instrument panel; no need for a second dash moulding. Simple yet highly effective.

The short doors make getting in and out of the Haldane, as with the original, a bit of a fiddle but once installed the seat is quickly adjustable for leg room. That said, I could have done with an inch or so more rearward adjustment as I found the steering wheel a tad too close for ultimate





Haldane's own double wishbone with coilover set-up. At the rear we change to the Sierra independent arrangement but once again rely on Haldane's own wishbones and coilovers. The result is a perfect balance of touring comfort and sporting agility. The Haldane rides the humps and bumps of most back lanes with a poise that would put many more expensive production machinery to shame, but the real surprise comes when you hit a corner. There's virtually no roll to speak of at all. The turn-in is impressively precise and responsive (modified Escort rack) and the HD300 remains level and in control. If we're being particularly finicky perhaps the back end was set-up a tad too softly, but we really are talking personal preference rather than requirement.

Slightly less pleasing was a nominal scuttle shake that would remain totally unnoticed on larger roads but become

comfort. With my arms more bent than I would have liked, one also notices that the car is quite narrow inside the cockpit with the door a little too close to my right arm.

The Ford pedals are well spaced; you could jump in wearing any type of shoe and not worry about putting your feet in the wrong place. The gearlever falls comfortably to hand and, apart from my slightly cramped arms, I found the HD300 extremely user-friendly. Small things such as the intermittent windscreen wiper mode and the neat column mounted switches all point to choosing a more modern Sierra donor.

In front of the driver there's an extremely posh steering wheel, behind which nestles the smart Ford switchgear in front of a rev counter and speedo. Dominating the dash is the warning light panel, while the round gauges are placed a little too far apart so that when your hands are on the steering wheel both dials are partially obscured. Something easily rectified by the home builder.

Twist the ignition key and the demo car's 2-litre DOHC injected engine snaps into life and settles immediately into a computer controlled idle. This is the engine from a late Ford Sierra just prior to the introduction of the Zetec unit, but the earlier Pinto lump could be fitted for economy if so desired. The advantages of going the DOHC route (apart from the obvious engine improvements) revolve around the increased single donor principle where the later car can provide things like the more modern column mounted switches, electric window motors etc.

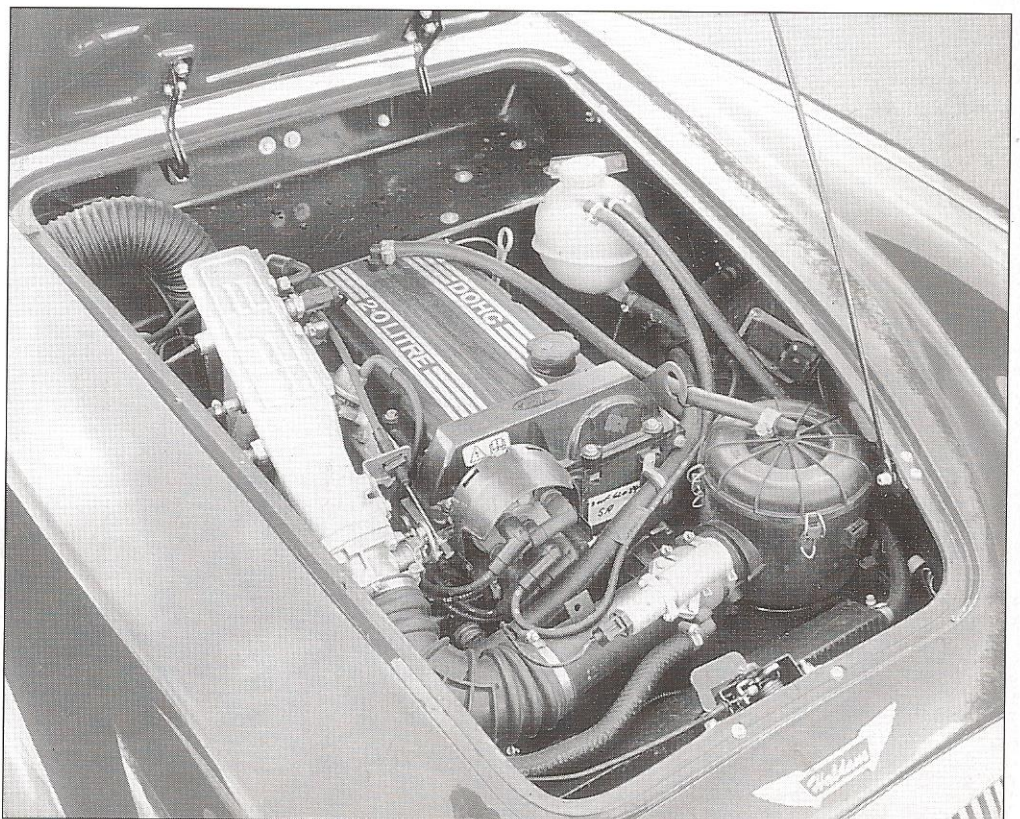
Driving the HD300 is much like driving any modern car. There's no fuss with the well

spaced pedals, the clutch is light and the gearshift typically Ford. It's all simple stuff that instantly makes you feel at home. The 2-litre engine pulls strongly too, although is a fraction harsh at the top end, while the servo assisted brakes feel terrifically responsive and bring the Haldane to a positive and controlled halt. But the most impressive thing about the HD300 is the ride...

At the front we are looking at surprisingly mundane Cortina uprights, brakes and calipers, which are hung on

apparent on the smaller, more uneven back lanes. Whilst not enough to warrant any concern it was still just a little disappointing and quite surprising having seen the impressive semi-monocoque design of the fibreglass body. I also found the exhaust note pretty intrusive at times, even with the top down, as it causes a booming effect somewhere under the floor. The odd whiff of bad eggs from the catalytic converter could have been done without as well. It certainly makes you think twice about taking the top down on

Above: Classic lines of the Haldane are terrific, while metallic paint gives it a pleasantly modern feel. Below: Modern theme is certainly retained under the bonnet. 2-litre DOHC engine pulls well and should prove reliable.



a sunny day!

But in reality these are really pretty trifling concerns and the overriding impression is extremely impressive. The Haldane HD300 is a very competent car, offering all the advantages that come with a modern sports car but packaged in the classic lines of the Healey — an enviable combination. But how easy is it going to be for Pilgrim to offer a kit out of what is now essentially a fully built car?

According to Pilgrim's Dennis Tanner, the HD300 was still available in kit form when under its original owners, so the car can quite easily be broken down into a number of packages. The impressive chassis, predominantly a backbone with outriggers, is supplied bare along with all the in-house fabricated suspension components such as the wishbones. Powder-coating is a worthwhile option but the basic chassis pack retails at £1800 inclusive of VAT.

The semi-monocoque design of the main tub is equally impressive and this, complete with pre-hung doors, boot and bonnet is offered in a grey primer gel for £1900 (there is no coloured gelcoat option). From here the choice of donor may well make all the difference. Taking the more modern route and perhaps finding yourself a written-off F-reg Sierra has many other advantages other than those of a modern engine etc. Stripping down a comparatively new car is a far easier and enjoyable task than fighting with rusty old bolts which have welded themselves onto the underside of your twelve year old Sierra MoT failure. Sure, it may be cheaper initially, but always bear

Above: Interior is not only sumptuous but also sensibly laid out. Note the clever dash design suitable for either left or right hand drive. Below: Haldane's hardtop seems to work well and is easily operated and stowable in the boot.



in mind that you may be able to sell many of the newer parts that you don't need from the F-reg car to offset that initially higher purchase cost.

Apart from the obvious components such as the engine and gearbox, you'll also be nabbing the rear suspension and brakes, the steering column and stalks, the complete wiring loom, the electric window winding mechanism and possibly such things as the central locking. This will get you a long way towards completion before you need to think of things like paint and brightwork. A decent two-tone paint scheme may set you back between £1200-£1500 while Pilgrim reckons it will be able to source all the original

brightwork for around £1000. Then you'll be looking to one of the company's rather fancy trim kits, including dash panel and instruments, before heading off for an MoT and years of modern motoring with classic style.

Having never previously driven a Haldane, I have to say that I was really impressed with the HD300. It's an extremely well sorted car that deserved better success in the production car market. Whilst not ultimately up to production car standards it was certainly good enough to provide reliable open top fun at Mazda MX5 prices. I would have thought the combination of classic lines and modern running gear should have

made for a popular combination. How much effect the original company's geographical position had on sales we shall never know (or perhaps we have all the evidence we require).

Under the new ownership of Pilgrim Cars, who will continue to market the HD300 under its original Haldane name, the car has every opportunity of success. A home built kit could be on the road for as little as £6500-£7000 while we'd expect most customers to be spending under £10,000 to complete a really tidy example. If it drives in the same way as the demonstrator, I think that's terrific value for money.

For further information you should contact the Haldane Motor Company, Unit 12, Mackley Industrial Estate, Small Dole, Nr Henfield, Sussex BN5 9XJ. Tel: 01273 493860.

