

HEALEY ECOSSE? OR BETTER?

David Finlay samples the Haldane, Scotland's only home-build sportscar. It may look like a Healey 100-4, but beneath the skin it is all Ford.



If you break it, don't come back," Brian Harrison told me as I left the factory. "Even if it's not your fault, just 'phone me and tell me where the bits are."

Well, now. You expect manufacturers who lend their cars out to the press to be quite keen on having them kept in one piece, but this was coming it a bit strong. It was easy to see Brian's point,

though. Whereas, say, a written-off press fleet Escort is just one Escort less, the car I was taking for a couple of days was the only existing Mk II version of the Haldane HD-100 and therefore



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also the only demonstrator. Any harm that came to it whilst in my hands would leave me as popular as a Jehovah's Witness at bathtime – *very* unpopular.

Blantyre-based Haldane – David Haldane, of bus company and car dealership Haldane's of Cathcart, is a part owner – is currently the only car manufacturer in Scotland, and was set up in the late 1980s.

“At that time the component car industry had matured to the point where we had become interested,” Brian explains. “We looked for a gap and found that there was no 1950s style car available, rather 1930s style cars with running boards.”

For the Haldane project they chose the Healey 100-4 shape

and created a replica, based on a simple platform chassis with a fibreglass body and using predominantly Vauxhall Chevette components.

The prototype car was taken round kitcar shows and was favourably received, including on one celebrated occasion by a Healey expert. There had not been time to sort out the door hinges properly, and on seeing the car side-on the expert was heard to exclaim: “My God, they've got the door misalignment right!”

With the doors mounted level (or, for purists, squint), the production kits sold well; “We sold thirty-odd cars, and it certainly established us in the market. The Chevette bits worked fairly well, as far as suspension not designed for that weight of car would work. But people were prejudiced against the Chevette – it had been six years out of production – and the

Haldane was perceived as a kitcar.”

The next move indicated a certain amount of bravery, what with the economic climate and all that. Haldane production was brought to a complete standstill in 1991, and Brian and co-director Alasdair Scott rethought the entire car from the tyre footprints upwards.

“Alasdair was responsible for the chassis, with me looking over his shoulder! We have quite complementary skills. I'm into composites – I'm used to them through working with aircraft and in motorsport. He can do the number-crunching – he's the one with letters before and after his name. We work quite well together because we're not standing on each other's toes.”

“The new car used a different shaped chassis, a backbone, and



all the suspension geometry was done at Geoscan. It was all worked out on the screen before we started cutting metal. I was quite sceptical about Geoscan at first, but I must admit the car does go round corners and over bumps quite well."

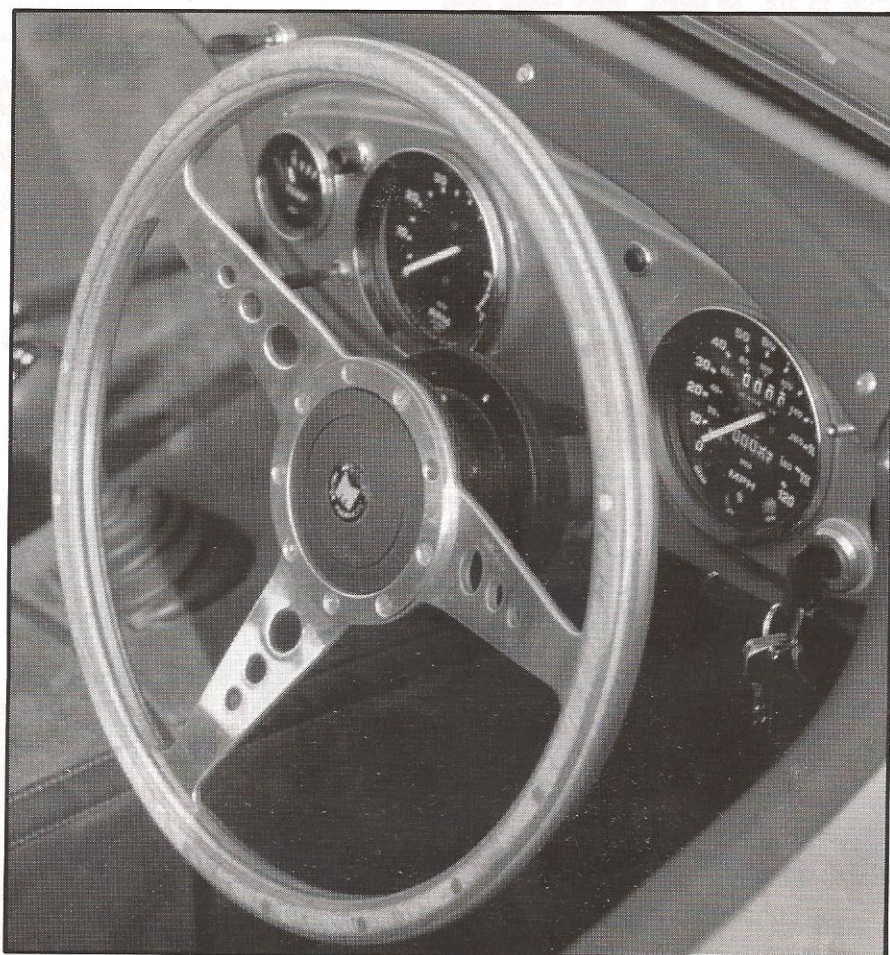
The new car would also use a large proportion of Ford Sierra components, principally the 2-litre fuel injected engine, the MT75 gearbox and the rear axle. The engine and gearbox, fully reconditioned, come from nearby Bellshill Engine Sales, while the axles are sourced separately.

The prototype was completed just in time for the Scottish Motor Show in Glasgow, and after considerable interest had been expressed production of kits went into action last September. At the time of writing sixteen had been sold, though none had yet been completed – hence the existence of only that single model.

How much you pay depends on how much work you want to do. The chassis, suspension and body modules will set you back in the region of £6,000, leaving you to source mechanical bits and to bolt everything together. What Brian describes as a "car in a box", requiring no sourcing but all the bolting, comes in at nearer £11,000.

Depending on the exact specification, a virtually complete car costs between £15,000 and £17,000. Because there is no economically viable Type Approval procedure for low volume production cars, a Haldane bought in this form would not be a runner, though there would be only minor jobs still to do.

However, it appears that fairly shortly there *will* be an economically viable Type Approval, etc., etc., and in that event you will be able to drive your brand spanking Haldane straight out of the factory, having paid very little extra. By the nature of the way these cars are built, all the above prices



are approximate and worth checking. And I'm afraid you have to add Very Annoying Tax to them all as well.

You can choose the level of authenticity you want from your Haldane. Looking at the thing soberly, I would prefer not to bother with the test car's wire wheels and go for the much lighter alloy alternatives. Unsprung weight, you know. And I'd really prefer a small leather-rimmed steering wheel to the wood-rimmed monstrosity which dominated the cockpit.

Ah. Yes. But. You don't have to take the Haldane very far before being drawn into the period aura. You find yourself accepting the car's idea of what motoring should be about rather than wanting it to accept yours.

The experience only truly makes sense when you are driving round quaint back roads with the roof off. There is no need to go quickly – simply conducting the car, steering, braking, changing gear, becomes the thing you most want to do at that moment.

Never mind that in the conditions

of a typical early Scottish spring the cold is so bad that your ears drop off. Ignore anyone who says that a silly smaller leather steering wheel would be better. Alloy wheels? How gauche.

According to Brian's breakdown of the car's market, though, I should not necessarily be too impressed. "We're not in the car industry, we're in the disposable income, toys for the boys, leisure industry. There's two sides to the market; we get either the young professional in his mid to late 30s who's well established in his trade and is looking for a second car, or – and I count myself in this category! – we get the menopausal maniac in his mid 50s who wanted this kind of car when he was young but couldn't afford one."

I don't come into either of these groups, thank you. All the same, I want a Haldane. Right now. Don't tell Brian, but I've always been a bit sniffy about replicas, yet this one was such a heap of fun that I'm prepared to suppress that prejudice. And the number of people who stared as I drove past them, wishing they were me, suggests that a lot of other people would be too.