

Sourcing the Parts for my 'Bitsa' Mk3

by Chris Cole >>

My interest in the world of GT40s began in the 1970s, when a sort of 'look-a-like' car called a Seraph Bonito was being produced. I located an Alfa 1600 engine and VW Passat 'box, plus the £3,000 wanted, and made arrangements to collect the kit from Stroud, where the then-owners had a factory. When I rang to get exact directions to collect it in my Transit van, a strange voice suggested that I stay at home as he was the 'Official Receiver'. So that was a near thing, judging from other reports of fraudulent goings on.

Later, I spoke to Ken Attwell about a KVA GT40, but not having the funds needed, was advised to talk to an owner of a half-built kit in the West Country. I bought the car, a heap of junk powered by a V6 Essex, driving through a Citroen DS23 gearbox and spent 16 years converting it into a V8 Ford-powered heap of junk. Bringing up a family, going through the 70s and 80s credit crunches and running a business with those constraints left little hope of emulating my predecessors. It became just a dreamer's hobby and quite beyond my capabilities. Just when I had begun to achieve a recognisable GT40 Mk3, with an engine to be proud of and had converted the DS23 'box to SM internals with 3.88 final drive from a C35 diesel commercial to give it some legs, my dearly beloved wife died. At this point I lost interest in the car and sold it to a local man, Bill Hart, who converted it to what he wanted and is running it to this day. His story is in *Fortyfication* 85.



At some point during this period, Clive Halagan-Allen sold me a lightweight GTD40 chassis which he had bought as an investment. John Wisher hit a fox, destroying his front bodywork, releasing the Mk3 rear clip to me, converting to Mk1 in the process. Another reader had a rear shunt in his Mk3, releasing the front, he too converting to Mk1. The centre body, doors and tank covers came from a long-

stored body. Some wire wheels from a Cobra were exchanged for some Aston Martin wires, re-offset for the Mk3.



An old customer of my gearbox business sold his championship-winning Ultima to a Spanish gent, and we spent a year or two negotiating a price I could afford for the engine. Forward to 2008 and I still had unused parts from my previous build. Having the good fortune to know that Brian Magee was retiring from his business soon, I asked him if he would build me a car if I provided the parts - to which he agreed. I could never see myself able to do a respectable job half as good as Brian - he's that kind of guy. So I contented myself with doing what I can do - building gearboxes. He took some of my parts and made a start, improving and refining what I had passed to him. He made some changes and I delivered more bits - engine, loom, deep front nostril and spares, to build and improve on my former at-



<< Sourcing the Parts for my 'Bitsa' Mk3

tempt. A visit to a Mid-land Bus scrap yard provided the filler caps, a bit like the Mk1 type, but domed.



A reversed and cut down Renault gear selector went with my inverted Renault gearbox, with everything in it that I've been selling to members around the world for years - a Quaife gearset, Quaife differential and high ratio 5th. With Brian's engineering skill, we fitted an upside down bell-housing to join the engine to the box. It was necessary to lower the engine, to be able to close the rear clip on the original air filters and hopefully see out of the rear window. We designed a reverse lockout with the original Renault finger-operated lifter on the gearstick, under a Sierra gearknob with the Renault shift design on it. A neighbour scrapped a Mini with a Mounthey steering wheel, onto which we fitted an enamelled original badge that I'd picked up some years previously. Whilst chatting to him, I found he had worked in stainless steel, so we designed the side windows and had the frames laser cut. I dispensed with the washing machine drum idea for providing the exhaust guard as it's quite flimsy. Harry, my neighbour had an old workmate who cut a strong one instead. My opening side windows weren't very good, so Roy Snook moulded the quarter lights and curved opening parts, whilst Brian mitre-cut the glazed frames in aluminium. Stainless channel is difficult to curve accurately, and the ones I had attempted came from Mini Clubman rear side



windows and weren't up to standard. The dashboard that I'd bought didn't fit the internal cabin shape, so a correct one was made for me. (Tony, you did ask me for pitfalls as well!)

Mick Sollis has been a customer for some years, so he was able to help by supplying some awkward-to-get parts - seats, shorter drive shafts, rear anti-roll bar, wheel bearing carriers that allowed right-way-



up hand brake fitting etc. The twin headlights - one pair of 5½" come from a Triumph Vitesse, but could equally be from a BMW. The other pair of Hella 4" spots, I had to have some mounting rings made for to get to fit. I think they may have originally been 3",



I'm not sure. The nostril clips came from an old Club member, John Reynolds, but I had to have them cut down to size by quite a lot. I think they came from an aircraft engine cover; the front lock came from a hearse manufacturer.

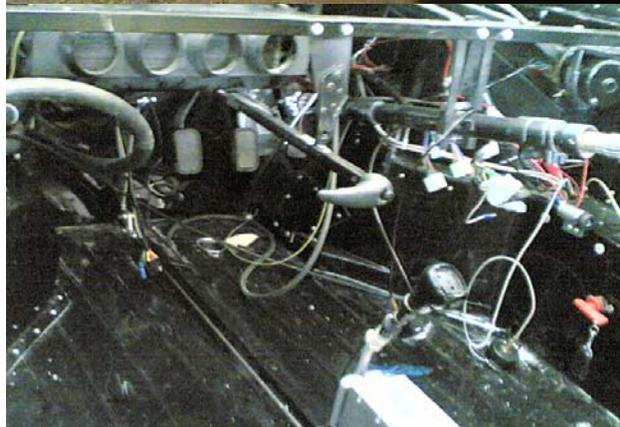
The rev counter is one with a limiter and change indicator light, variable to suit various engines; I bought it at a boot sale in America, a real Yankee Racer part. Indicator and dip switch from a Mini, two fuel gauge indicators, a combined oil temperature and oil pressure gauge, ammeter and electric speedo. I chose rocker switches, like the original Mk3.

You see it's a complete 'Bitsa', beautifully put together by Brian and his brother, Brian Sapsford and others, with a little help from us for parts, like Rich-



by Chris Cole

ard Guest for his spare radiator. He had lent it to someone, who had punctured it, so it had to be patched up. Being Richard, bless him, he no longer wanted it as it was not perfect.



Zephyr 6 front over-riders were on a bumper I saw lying on the ground between two rusty and forlorn XJ Jaguars in the middle of a garage in Bar-



mouth, North Wales whilst the family went shopping, but that was many years ago. The garage is a car park now I think. Humber over-riders for the rear, I bought in the stallholder's market at a Classic Car show 4 or 5 years ago with several other pairs, some of which I still have. My 2CV (allegedly) handbrake was designated for a kit car for a neighbour's son, nearly all of which went to the scrapyards when 'Dad' left home - permanently. It did actually look new to me, and I seem to remember the Attwell version was supposed to have that type-fitted 2CV handbrake. A website sale yielded an exhaust system and Escort Mk5 gearbox covers for the 'Ford' fuel tank access covers. I found the tailgate chrome lettering 'GT40 MkIII' in a parts shop.

There are of course, many other parts I've sourced from other members, scrap yards and retail outlets. There are too many to list or be of any interest to readers, but the paint job - wow. Honda Aquamarine Blue, seen on a Honda Jazz and now on the car.

The finished product is a real tribute to a very fine engineer, who is inventive, patient and extremely thorough.

I've bought so much over many years of unsuccessfully sourcing parts that don't fit! Perhaps that's why some people are interested in the finished item, because much of what is on it seems to be pretty well right for it, though done on a budget. It's not a true replica but perhaps a reasonable 'impressionist's view'.

I've spent the best part of 30 years buying and locating lots of assorted parts for 2 GT40s, and in many cases not used some of them - like other people still building cars. Regrettably many will in time be sold on as unfinished projects. My first was one such, admittedly for very obvious reasons, but a lot seem to weary of their dreams because money and luck run out. The difficulties in completing the job, to an unskilled person, can be enormous.

