

Empire Estate

A humble estate isn't the first choice when it comes to building a competition Mk1, but for Chris Bailey, there was no better starting point.

Words and Photos Jon Cass



It's fair to say we come across modified Escorts at Classic Ford more than any other Blue Oval. As you'd expect, the majority of these are based on two-door saloons, but now and again the occasional Escort that breaks that mould in a major way comes along, and in the case of Chris Bailey's stunning Mk1 Estate, how could we not explore further?

You may be wondering why go to such lengths to base a major project such as this around an estate rather than a saloon, and Chris has the answer.

"The inspiration behind the idea came from the GT-spec estate prototypes back in the early '70s where just a handful were made," he explains. "They never entered production and I

just liked the idea of creating my own take on one in a competition-based form, but could also be used reliably every day if need be." The quality of Chris's workmanship is flawless wherever you look, not one aspect of the whole project has been left without detailed attention. But then, he's had plenty of practice restoring and creating competition-based Escorts over the years, so this was never bound to be a thrown together weekend build!

Dream job

After years of buying and modifying his own Escorts, Chris landed his dream job at XS Racing in Chesterfield, surrounded by GT40s, Group B rally cars and of course plenty

of Escorts. "I'd gone from workshop controller in a dealership to being immersed in this world of dream cars," he smiles, "it was while I was here I honed my skills and passion for creating stunning Escorts. Our team raised the bar in the UK at the time, as the race and rally cars that rolled out of our unit were built to show standard and many people thought they were too nice to thrash around country lanes!"

Chris then moved on to set up his own business, Retrotek carrying out a similar service, building rally cars to the same high standard. So really we shouldn't have been as shocked as we were to see this Escort put through its paces at a track day, merely hours after the last nuts and bolts had been tightened! →

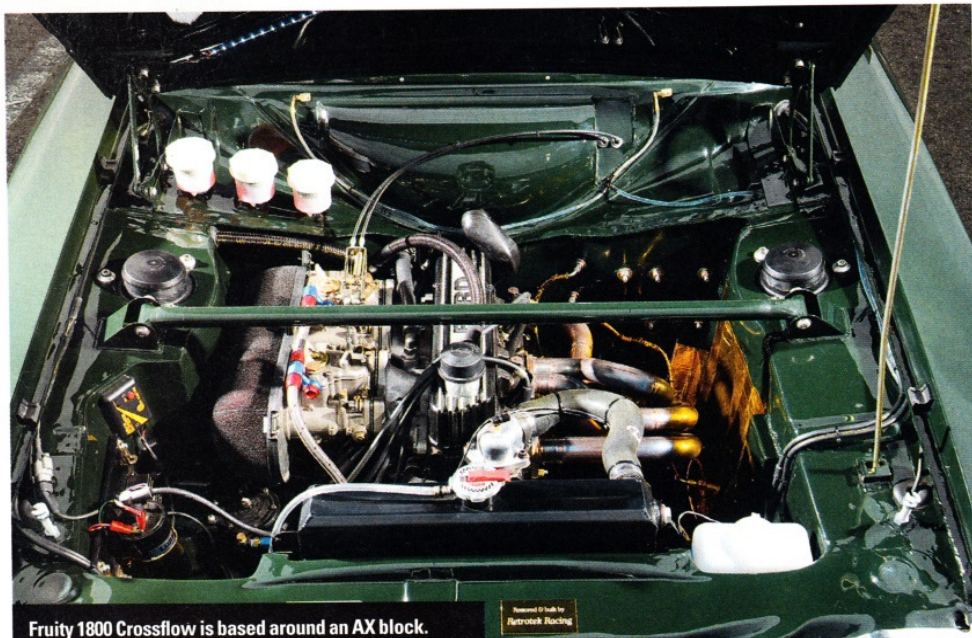


"I WANTED TO FUTUREPROOF IT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, SO ANY UPGRADES SUCH AS A BDA WOULD DROP STRAIGHT IN"



WHO ARE RETROTEK?

With 30 years experience in building and running cars from trackday specials through to historic stage rally cars and circuit racers, Retrotek Racing can offer anything from a simple service through to complete car builds. Chris can even support full season back up so you'd have little to worry about if you want to put your classic through its paces. Situated near Chesterfield in Derbyshire, Retrotek can be contacted on 01909 722954 or <http://retrotekracing.co.uk>.



Fruity 1800 Crossflow is based around an AX block.

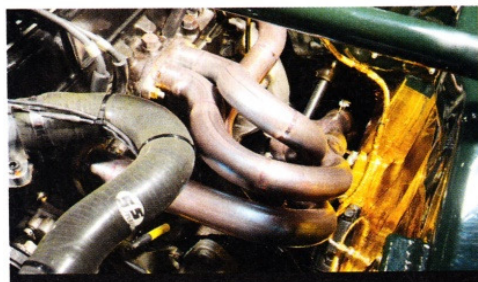
Powered by Retrotek Racing

Just a year earlier, the 1971 shell had been found in Germany where it had laid in a barn for many years untouched. "I had to base everything around a left-hand-drive shell as it was planned all along the car would be exported to a client also in Germany," explains Chris. "The shell was solid in all the right places and it was complete, the front wings were shot as were the rear arches and spare wheel well," Chris recalls, "but generally it was a good, honest shell."

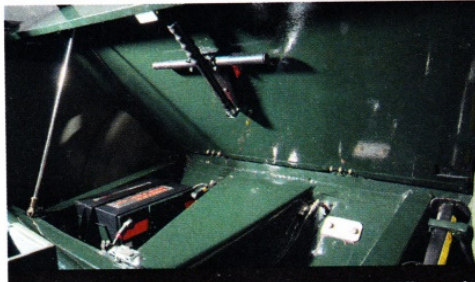
Blast first

With the interior and running gear removed once back in the UK, Chris's first major task was to shotblast all the areas that needed welding and once repaired all necessary Group 4 and AVO modified panels fitted into place.

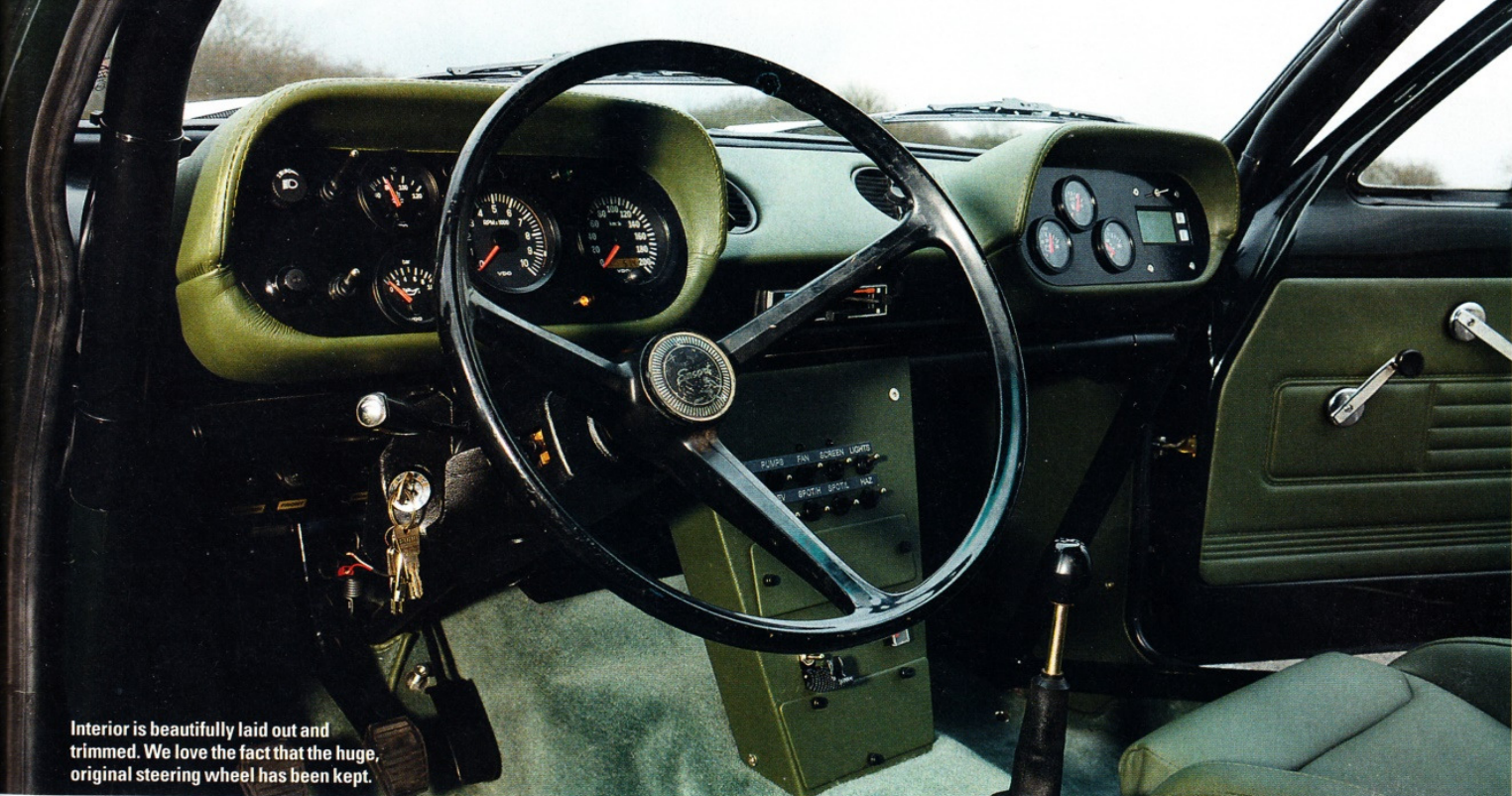
"I wanted to make it as futureproof as possible so any upgrades such as a BDA or bigger gearbox could be slotted straight in." An auto tunnel has been welded expertly in place to house the current Type-9 five speed along with a large diff tunnel to clear the Atlas axle.



Heat wrap protects paint from the stainless manifold.



Custom hatch in boot area reveals battery and diff tunnel.



Interior is beautifully laid out and trimmed. We love the fact that the huge, original steering wheel has been kept.



Retrim extends to the boot area, too. Floor nets help prevent stuff flying around when the Mk1 is being, erm, flung around.



Recaros nicely retrimmed in green Connolly leather.

The front bulkhead is double skinned and gusseted to accept a Gartrac (www.gartrac.com) pedal box and rear damper turrets fitted. All the usual AVO-spec chassis skids and jacking points add extra strength and authenticity and the shell has been fully seam welded.

"I've used long Mk2-style five-link boxes for axle pick-up points to locate the fully floating Baby Atlas because these are ultra-reliable and will accept ratio changes if later required," Chris adds. "It's also fitted with twin callipers, one set operating the hydraulic handbrake, the other the foot brake." Monte Carlo-spec callipers were sourced as Chris informs us you can't choose second best if you want to stop in a hurry!

"I used a Gartrac front crossmember as this locates a crossflow or BDA upgrade perfectly within the Mk1's engine bay" Chris continues, "though the current Crossflow is a bit special in itself."

Based around an AX-block, the 1800 runs a steel crank and forged pistons, and was originally built to compete in a rally in Mexico, so it was designed to perform well at altitude while

running on poor fuel! The dry sump has since been converted to wet and an uprated cam along with twin 45 carbs give it some extra grunt, the redline coming in at 7000 rpm!

Inside line

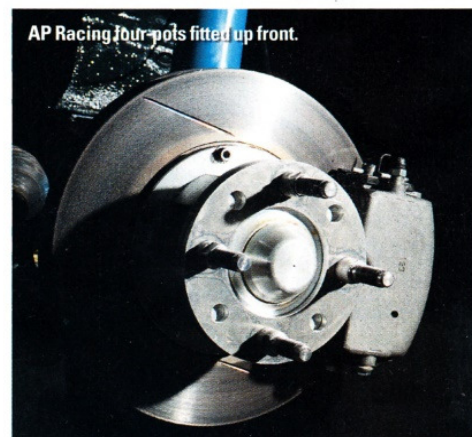
The very-period British Racing Green paintwork looks classy in the metal and the finish is perfect, but it's probably the interior that Chris is most proud of. Again everything is well thought out and functional. Centering around a welded in FIA-approved roll cage, Chris left just enough room for the roof lining to be fitted afterwards, not an enviable task I'm sure you'll agree! The door bars are low enough for ease of access and allow the Connolly leather-clad Recaros to still remove and recline.

Behind the front seats, the jack and battery have been hidden under a hinged floor constructed by Chris.

"This may look like a simple design, but it took hours to perfect, it's a shame it's now covered in carpet." While in what was



Navigator's pod features digital and analogue gauges.



AP Racing four-pots fitted up front.





"IT'S INCREDIBLE TO THINK THIS ESCORT HAS BEEN BUILT IN JUST A YEAR ALONGSIDE OTHER PROJECTS"



Back on track: it's fully road-legal but the Escort will see plenty of competition use next year.



Chris is chuffed with how the Estate has turned out. Sadly, he's now got to hand it over to the new owner.

previously the load area, is now mounted the 75-litre, custom-made alloy fuel tank, situated on a crash bar with Kevlar underneath for added protection.

The dash now features extra gauges and has been cut and altered to house the twin cowl style dash and centre console, like every other component it's been installed to be removed easily if necessary.

Finer points

We could continue with the finer details, but sadly space restricts us. It is incredible to think Chris has designed and built one of the finest period Mk1 Escorts we've seen for some time in just a year alongside other projects. Other than specialist areas such as the paint, wiring loom and seat material, he's completed the whole task himself and is quite rightly very proud of it.

In many ways it's too nice to be used in competition, but then as Chris points out, "it'd be just as at home as a daily or throw your bags in the back and go on holiday in it!" **CF**

Tech Spec

Body

1971 Mk1 Estate, Mexico front wings, rolled rear arches, fully seam welded, weld-in roll cage, AVO gusseting, 75-litre alloy fuel tank mounted on crash bar, underside in Kevlar carbon, Cibie spot lamps. **Paint:** British Racing Green

Engine

AX-block 1800 Crossflow, steel crank and rods, forged pistons, steel rocker shaft, Duplex timing gear, Kent 254 cam, twin 45 Webers, Pipercross air filter, Facet RedTop fuel pumps, high output alternator, Hyundai starter motor, stainless steel full custom exhaust system with removable catalyst, front sump guard with plastic side flaps, oil cooler mounted behind front grille

Transmission

Type-9 five-speed, AP Racing clutch, Baby Atlas axle

Suspension

Turreted, five-linked, Bilstein legs, Gartrac front crossmember, quickrack with roller top bearings, polybushed throughout

Brakes

Monte Carlo-spec with twin rear calliper system, hydraulic handbrake

Wheels And Tyres

6x13 Minilites, with Michelin 185/70R13 tyres

Interior

Recaro front seats finished in green Connolly leather mounted on welded-in subframes, custom-made dash console, all interior panels are custom made with removable floor carpets, luggage strap tie down eyes, VDO gauges, Monit tripmeter, Peltor intercom, LED lighting under bonnet and interior standard seat belts, jack and battery located under rear footwell hidden floor

Thanks

Normandale Refinishing for the paint (01327 871818), Aldridge Trimming for the retrim (01902 710805), JR Fabrications for the manifold and system (07811 355901), Vulcan Engines (01474 874689), Motorsport Electrical Products for the wiring loom (01246 465810) West Wales Rally Spares (01559 363731), Rally And Competition Equipment (01782 523664), and Geoff and Jean Martin