

TALKINGSHOP

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Dragon Wheels

When it comes to horsepower per square foot of floor space, this muscle car specialist has a pretty high ratio

Not so scary monsters

Trained in the aircraft industry, and an ex-Aston Martin design and development engineer, Dragon Wheels boss Alan Faulkner-Stevens is undaunted by being surrounded by these American monsters after 30 years of owning and restoring Sixties and Seventies muscle cars. His Aston contacts have come in handy; there are many restoration body shops and trimmers in the Newport Pagnell area: 'Most of them are ex-Aston people and they help me produce cars to this level of workmanship,' he says.

Detail, detail, detail

This alloy-bodied Kirkham Cobra is more a vintage re-issue than a replica, with a 1966 427ci (6997cc) side-oiler V8 producing 476bhp. 'We aim to produce factory-authentic cars,' says Faulkner-Stevens. 'Parts are 90 per cent interchangeable with the original.' Less obvious are his own details: 'We re-engineer parts. For instance, these cars use bronze bushing in the suspension. There's no greasing facility, so we put grooves in the inner sleeve and greasing nipples in the suspension arms.' This car will have cost about £100k – but it will have that edge over most other Cobra copies.



Two-year labour of love

This 1989 AC MkIV Lightweight is getting the big-block treatment. Its engine will be an all-alloy 351ci (5752cc) Ford Windsor unit stroked to 427ci (6997cc) and built by Peter Knight at Knight Racing Services, who builds all Dragon Wheels' engines. The car has come in for full restoration: 'Everything is new,' says Faulkner-Stevens. 'The whole job can take two years.' Judging by this car, it will be worth the wait.

Wall of fame

Pictures on the wall remind you of what Dragon Wheels is most famous for: Shelby Mustangs. Many have passed through this workshop, including a one-owner 1967 GT500 ('the most authentic and original car I've ever worked on') and Carroll Shelby's pool car – a 1969 GT500. Faulkner-Stevens worked on every model year from stripped-out mid-Sixties GT350 racers to later and larger late-Sixties convertibles, and built several *Gone In 60 Seconds* Eleanor replicas.

Don't touch the paint

Dragon Wheels has looked after this 1963 Chevrolet Corvette Sting Ray for ten years. It's almost fully restored, with the chassis, engine, hood and interior done, but the owner wants the 20-year-old paintwork left alone. Dragon Wheels has amassed several Gold Awards from the UK Corvette Club and a National Corvette Restoration Society (USA) master champion – a '66 big block, which was the highest scoring car in Europe.

Small is beautiful

'The small block [five-litre] engine is quite underrated,' says Faulkner-Stevens. 'They're simple, reliable and give good horsepower for the money.' Anyone following that path would do well to look at one of Dragon Wheels' balanced and blueprinted engines. This 1966 GT 350 Hi-Po engine is correct in every detail but has been rebuilt with an updated crankshaft and bearings. One like this will cost about £10k.

Contact Dragon Wheels Restorations, Newport Pagnell, Bucks (01908 551131, www.dragonwheelsrestorations.co.uk)