

anglia ace

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

Words and photos Simon Cooke

...With the sound of this tuned-up beast. Owner Simon Bridge lets CF in on a few secrets behind this storming slope-eating Anglia.

TO BE TOTALLY HONEST, even to the trained eye, this Anglia looks nothing special, albeit in pretty good nick for a car that's over 30 years old. However, it's the old 'don't judge a book by its cover' scenario as it currently holds the pre-1972 Classic Saloon Car record at no less than three Midlands Hillclimb venues: Shelsley Walsh, Prescott and Loton Park. And this year the car's owner also picked up the Prescott Gold Cup — awarded for the person who makes the season's most improvement on a class record, a record that he himself set!

Simon Bridge hails from Worcester, and reckons his string of achievements makes his Anglia arguably the most successful Hillclimb saloon over the past decade. Mind you, on closer inspection, some of the clues to this car's record-breaking activities are certainly evident.

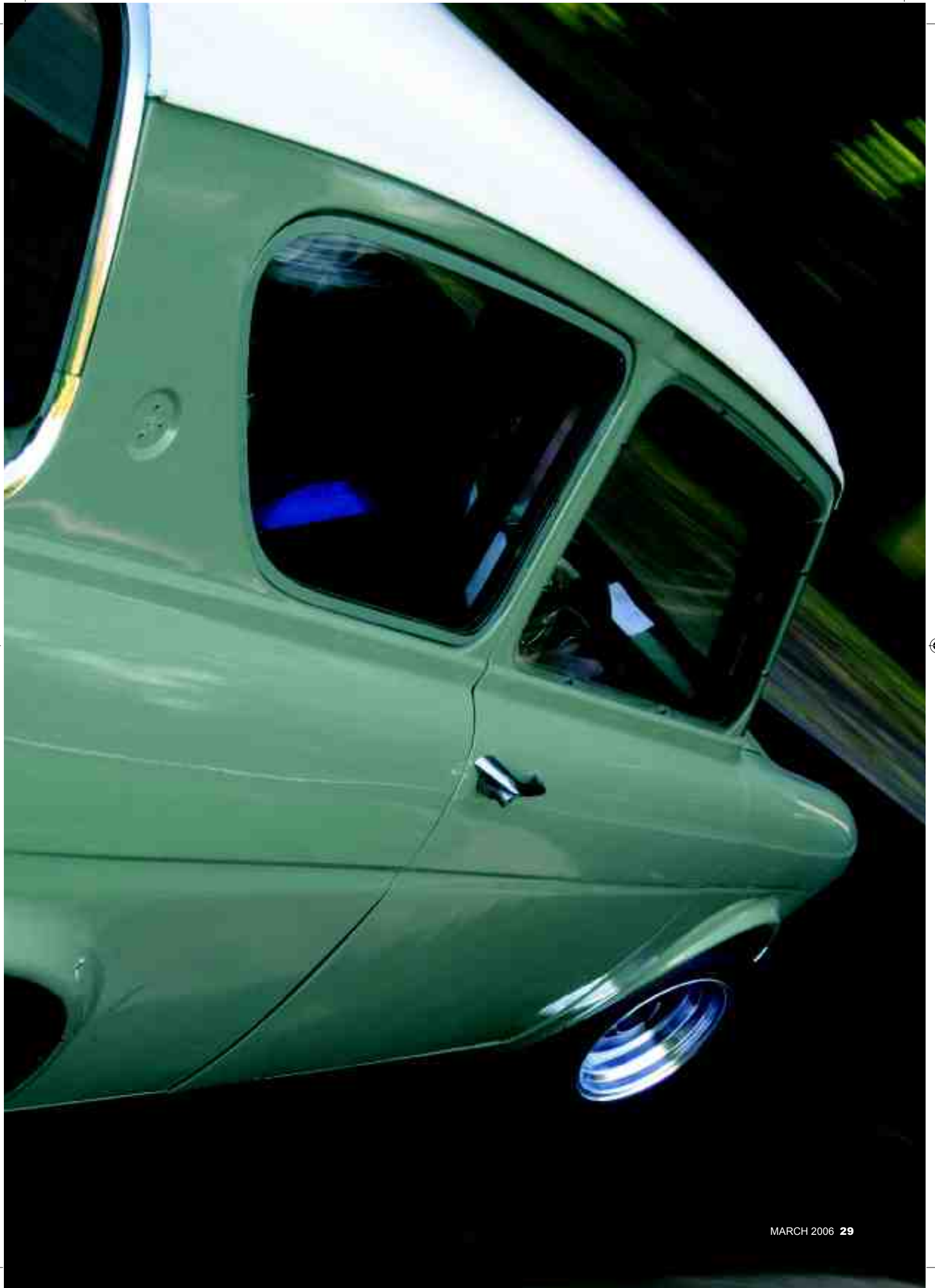
For starters the heavy steel doors, bonnet and boot have all been replaced with lightweight fibreglass, it doesn't have glass windows, and inside it's purely functional — basically a seat, roll cage and a steering wheel. This anorexic spec means the car weighs in at a mere 700 kg; in this business a mere kg here or there can make all the difference in the pursuit of the fastest time to the summit. And a nose under the removed bonnet is further confirmation that this car has been built with speed in mind.

Simon has been into speed and Fords for as long as he cares to remember: "I had my first Ford when I was 21 and I've had loads since: RS2000s, Twin Cams, Lotus Cortinas, Savage Cortinas, 3L Capris, and Anglias — I've tried them all," explains Simon. His first competition car was a Mk1 Escort and he started his career in hillclimbs, rallies and sprints back in 1978. But hills remain his favourite: "A hillclimb tends to be the most challenging on the driver and vehicle, and usually lasts a bit longer."

So where does this Anglia fit into the story? "I saw the car advertised in the *Hereford Times* for £600," he replies. "I wasn't looking for a car at the time but I'm an habitual car buyer — I'd had almost 30 cars by the time I was 21 — and if I kept a car for three months, that was a long time. I went to have a look because this was in 1995 and you didn't often see an Anglia for sale. Apart from a knock on the wing it had never been welded, and it was structurally →

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very sound. The owner had bought the car from new and she even had the original bill of sale," he recalls.

Simon planned to make a quick profit — being such a good original car — and advertised it in the Anglia Owners' Club magazine but didn't get any takers. Their loss. Time to head for the hills then. "I noticed that the classic saloon hillclimb scene wasn't very developed and that the record at Shelsley had stood for the past seven years," remembers Simon. That was enough to inspire him.

Simon does the majority of the work on the cars himself, and this took six to nine months before it was ready to compete

and he had various parts kicking around his garage — the beauty of the interchangeability of Ford parts. The car originally ran with an 1800cc Crossflow, which he'd bought for just £1800 (with £6000-worth of bills for a recent re-build) and he ran with that for several seasons. "I was immediately competitive — in my first season I took the record at Shelsley and about the same time I was setting new records at other local hills, although I can't remember the exact dates," reveals a proud Simon.

He's been getting quicker each year as the car is developed and the driver gets faster. The car is now on its third engine —

not because there has been anything wrong with them, just because he needs more power to keep beating his own records. "I've been fortunate that I could engineer the car to this level without really paying other people to work on it," he points out. "I don't pay an engine builder to actually build or install the engine, I just get the machining done, which I don't have the facilities for. Then I take it to Aldon Automotive for the setting up on the dyno. Oh, and I don't do the painting either," Simon reveals.

Along the way the car's weight has also been reduced (fibreglass panels etc) from 825 kg down to 700, and that can mean a couple of seconds difference, and for significantly less money than a more powerful engine. For instance, he reckons sorting out the rear suspension and dumping what he didn't need saved him nearly 24 kg. He admits the Anglia could be lighter still — if he needed to go quicker to retain a record — and he could lose a further 20 kg by fitting aluminium gearbox and diff casings.

The car is obviously quick, the results speak from themselves, but how does Simon think it performs? "It used to be a favourite with the commentators because of the way it oversteered — it was once described as 'the amazing dancing Anglia,'" he explains with a grin. "But it's totally different since I fitted the Milton suspension and lowered the centre of gravity. Combined with my custom-made quick-ratio steering rack I've now got a set-up that goes exactly where I want it to. And even if it does step out of line, I can easily catch it."

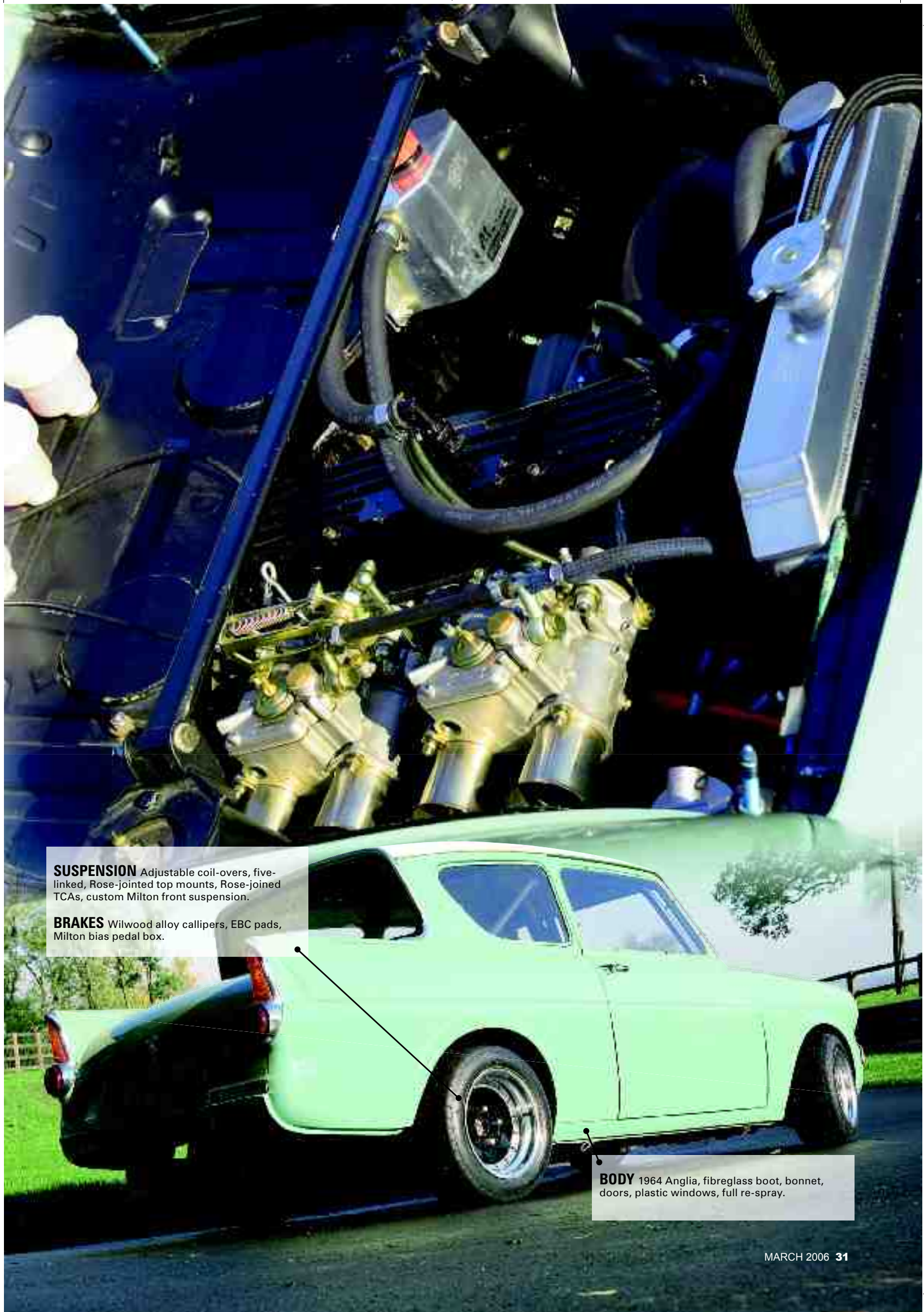
This suspension improvement and the latest 180 bhp engine were added for the 2001 season and he immediately saw the results — in the speed traps at Shelsley Walsh he was 10 mph quicker than with the previous engine. Inevitably he set a new record and maintained his advantage.

Now, you'd think that to consistently be breaking his own records Simon must be pushing himself and the car to the limit, and even beyond, but to be honest this isn't the case. He says that he's never gone home with a bent panel and claims that that car always feels under his control — despite how it might appear to the spectators on the outside.

The car has been very reliable over the years (well, now the clutch problem has been sorted) and on-event tweaking and →

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SUSPENSION Adjustable coil-overs, five-linked, Rose-jointed top mounts, Rose-joined TCAs, custom Milton front suspension.

BRAKES Wilwood alloy callipers, EBC pads, Milton bias pedal box.

BODY 1964 Anglia, fibreglass boot, bonnet, doors, plastic windows, full re-spray.

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TRANSMISSION Four-speed, close-ratio, straight-cut Tran-X gearbox, alloy bellhousing, Helix ceramic clutch, lightweight prop, 5.1 Tran-X LSD.



WHEELS AND TYRES 8x13 inch split-rim alloys, aluminium hubs, 225/45x13 Hoozier Autocross/Hillclimb tyres.

maintenance is kept to a bare minimum. About the only thing he's likely to change during an event is to drop the tyre pressures in an attempt to improve traction at the start, and just hope it won't effect the handling too much. "It's a question of getting enough warmth in the tyres so they get some grip off the line," explains Simon, "and it's never the same two starts in a row."

Having set an impressive number of records, and then broken them again, surely he must also be a champion? Apparently not, as according to Simon the points system doesn't actually work in his favour (it's too complicated to explain); not that he's bothered. In fact, he doesn't even register for championship points anymore.

So what about pressure to retain his records? Well, he says he's very relaxed about the whole matter and would welcome more competition, especially from Ford drivers, with open arms. That's the flame-proof gauntlet well and truly slapped down on the hill. So if you have got a suitable car sitting in the garage, then Simon says bring it on, if you're hard enough. And phone Roy Castle. 🏎️

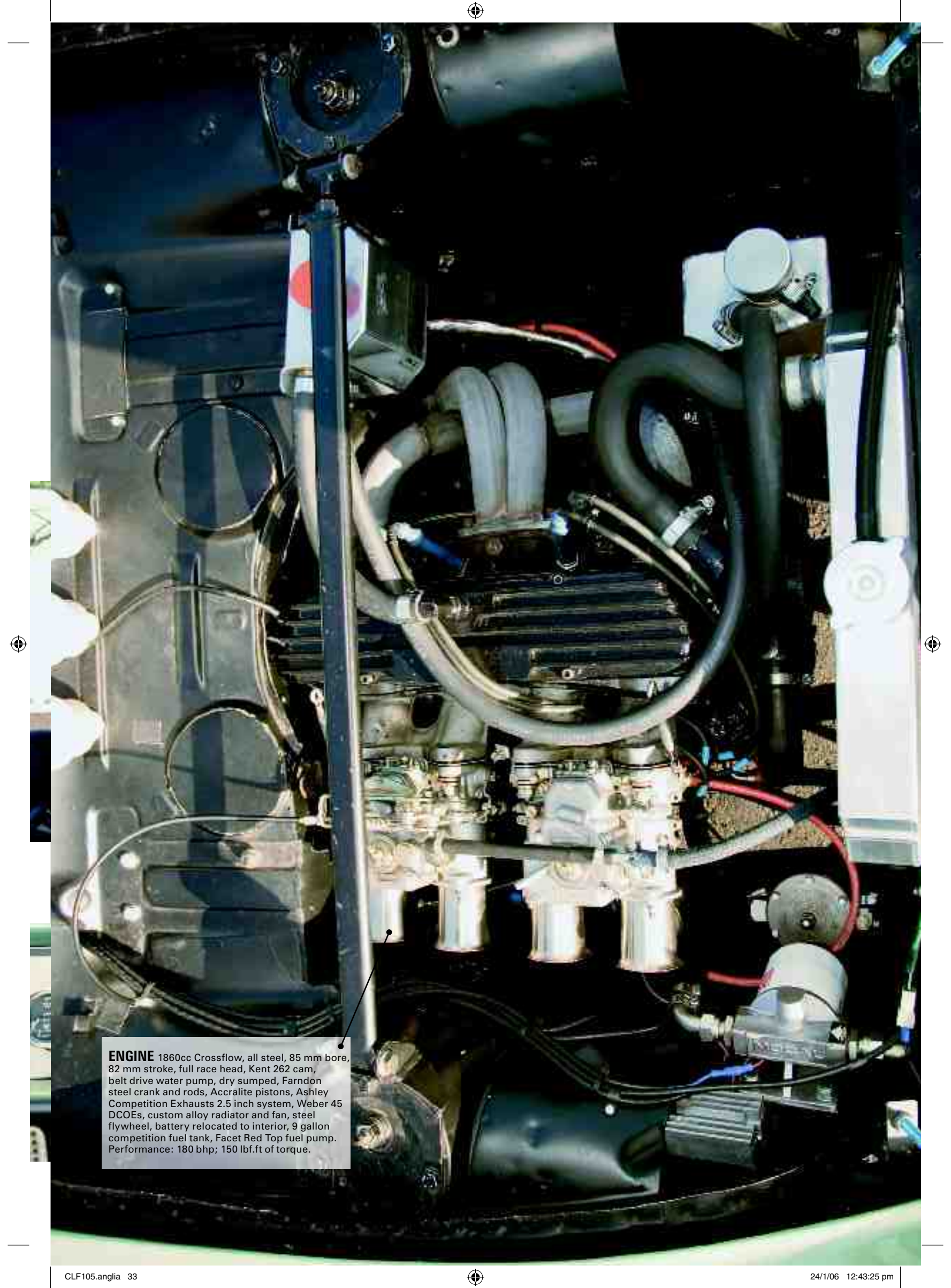


INTERIOR Totally stripped, Sparco 4 kg seat, Willans harnesses, alloy pedals, Mountney steering wheel, rev counter, roll cage — turreted for extra strength.

CONTACT

Prescott Hillclimb
Prescott Hill, between Cheltenham and Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire is owned and managed by the Bugatti Owners' Club and has been used as a hillclimb venue since the '30s. The track is 1127 yards long with a challenging mixture of fast and slow corners.
www.prescott-hillclimb.com





ENGINE 1860cc Crossflow, all steel, 85 mm bore, 82 mm stroke, full race head, Kent 262 cam, belt drive water pump, dry sumped, Farndon steel crank and rods, Accralite pistons, Ashley Competition Exhausts 2.5 inch system, Weber 45 DCOEs, custom alloy radiator and fan, steel flywheel, battery relocated to interior, 9 gallon competition fuel tank, Facet Red Top fuel pump. Performance: 180 bhp; 150 lbf.ft of torque.