



# FAMILY FALCON



*JBA's popular roadster has joined the ranks of the family car. Franklin Woodcock reviews the new four seater model, the Falcon Plus 2.*

There is a definite trend gathering momentum among the component car manufacturers to add more passenger space to their erstwhile two-seaters. One of the latest to join that trend is JBA Engineering Ltd with their Falcon Plus 2. The Cortina engined two-seater version has been in production now for nearly four years and since then it has been decided that more sales could be generated by appealing to the potential owner with one or two young children. Although sales of the original version have been healthy, it is a poor business that doesn't seek to improve and develop its product to appeal to a wider market.

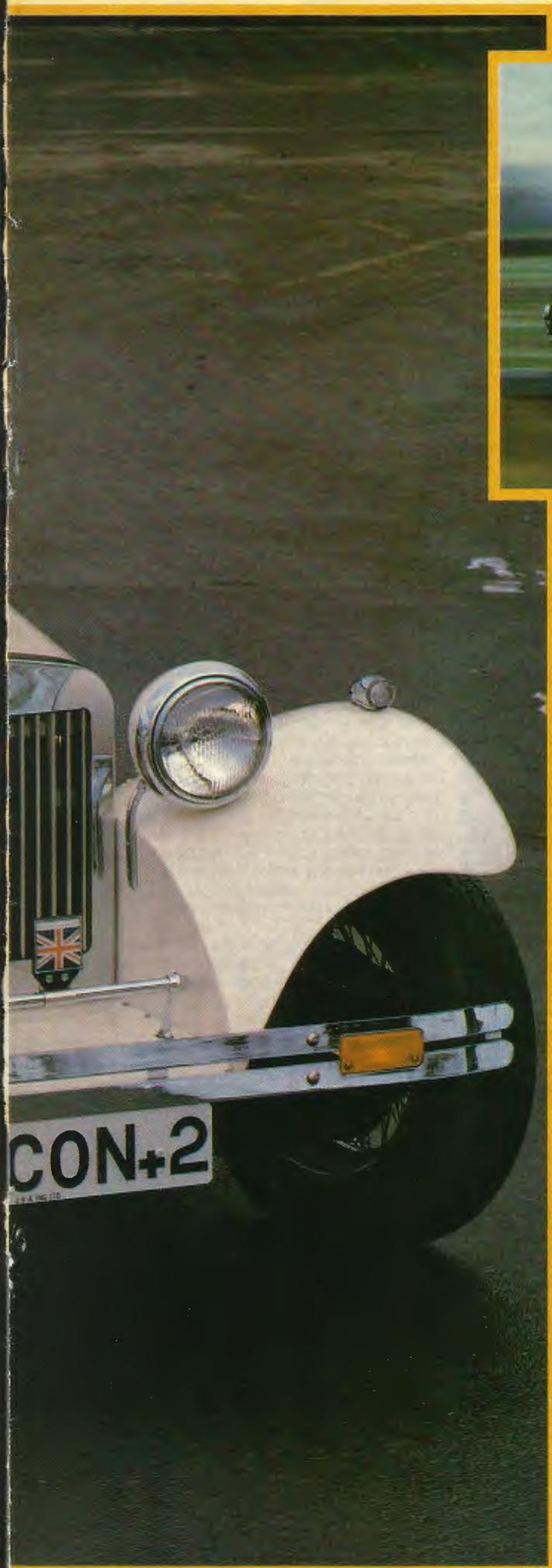
The family aspect and attraction of the new model was clearly put by Dave Ashley, one of the three directors of JBA Engineering Ltd, when he said that orders have been taken for the Plus 2 where wives have given the OK to husbands to go ahead in the knowledge that junior could then travel too. Prior to this, the market had been mainly open to chaps who would clear off with a pal for a day's fun while mum and the sprogs stayed home. It has now become a family car.

It's a personal opinion that previous examples of two-seater convertibles becoming four seaters have, in some cases tended to look a bit odd. Both the Morgan 4-seater and the Moss Maivern look somewhat gross with the extra hood length and all those side screens. There has to be some sort of compromise between extra space and looks, but in the case of the Falcon Plus 2 I feel the balance is about right. To me, the proof of this lies in the fact that when I first saw the demonstrator, it took a short while to decide whether this was the car I'd come to see — the difference between this and its little brother not being obvious at first glance. Only by seeing the pair side by side does it become apparent that the new model offers more accommodation space in the back along with additional comfort for the front occupants.

The model was conceived about two years ago but the priority and development of the Capri based Javelin (please Editor, can I have one of these?) meant that it was somewhat delayed. However, twelve months' development resulted in a very cosy, civilised motor car full of family appeal and potential.

Don't run away with the idea that adults can occupy the rear seats — they can't. It's strictly for the nippers and the manufacturers would not tell you otherwise. I'm no expert on kids, but I would have thought 10/12 years of age would be top whack. It also depends on journey length and number of offspring — one bigger child sitting across the seat may not gripe too much.

I took a tape measure to the job which revealed that there were some 6" of 'kneeroom' behind the passenger seat which I had positioned to suit my six foot frame. This was a comfortable position for me though I could have gone further forward without discomfort or misting up the screen with breath. I noticed that,



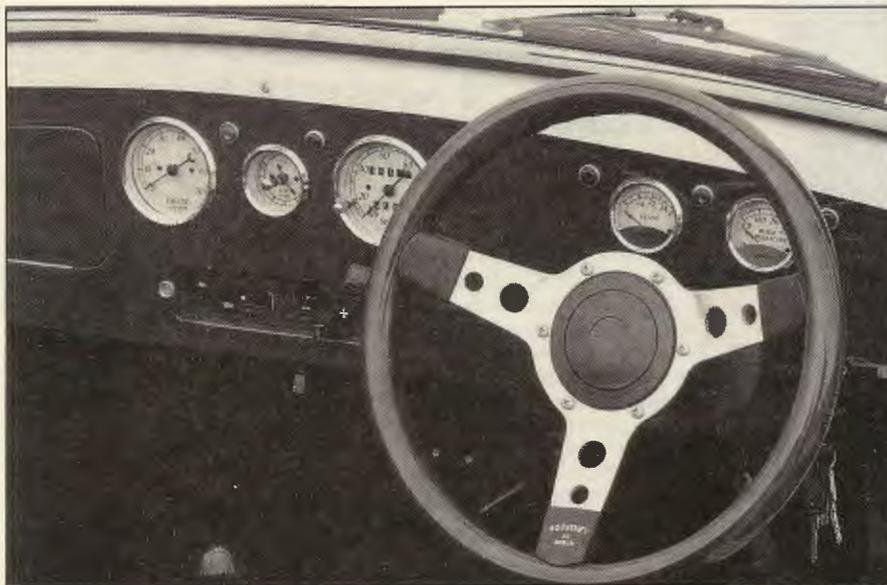


when Dave Ashley was driving, the room behind the driver's seat was about five to six inches. However, when I drove, and I like a seat well back, the driver's perch was touching the rear seat though without causing any loss of comfort or safety I could have gone about four inches further forward. With two front occupants of any-

thing up to 5'9" in height the rear knee-room would appear to be perfectly adequate for children, even on long trips.

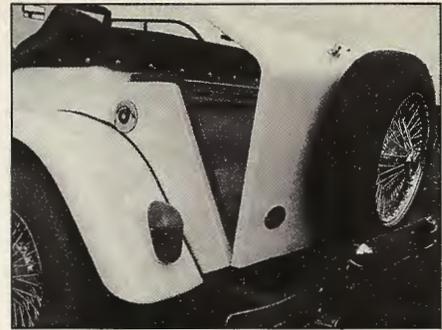
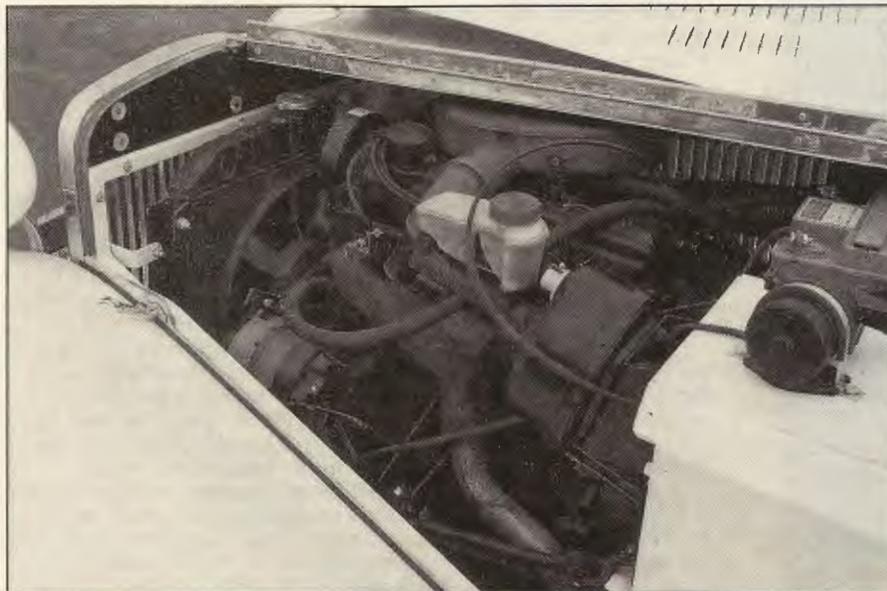
Incidentally, the front seats in the demo car came from a Triumph Spitfire. Anything more bulky would be unsatisfactory. The rear seat is a fibreglass moulding which one trims with foam rubber and leather or leather-cloth. It is wide enough for two but the front to back dimension is only nine inches.

Right, having established that the visual differences are not all that great, let's look at the actual modifications which have been executed. The wheel-base has been increased by three inches but together with other alterations the usable interior body length has been increased by seven inches. A new fuel tank location has helped to give this extra space, plus a slight re-design of the rear bodywork. The scuttle has been raised slightly which has the effect of allowing a more comfortable driving



*The Falcon Plus cockpit demonstrates a subtle blend of old meeting the new. Brass rimmed VDO period style instruments compete for dashboard dominance with Ford heater controls, steering column and Mountney wood-rimmed wheel.*

*Cortina Mk3 ohc power unit is well accessible via centre hinged bonnet panels. Note simplistic tidy nature of demo car's engine bay plus wiper motor position.*



*Rearward opening boot appears to foul number plate though latter is hinged and spring loaded to facilitate access*

position when the seat is moved forward to give the rear passengers more leg room. By this, I mean that if the scuttle and therefore the steering wheel were lower, one's knees would touch the wheel (or dashboard) if the seat was moved forward. This improvement is aided by the widening of the front footwells. The wider doors, essential for access to the rear of the car, make entry very easy. They open to about 90° before being checked by a very beefy leather strap. A neat front seat tipping catch is featured to allow good access to the rear seats.

Whereas on the original two-seater model luggage was stored behind the seats, on the Plus 2 an opening boot has been incorporated. The siting of the Escort van (or estate) fuel tank in a low position means that 5.1 cu ft of boot space is available. The steel reinforced fibreglass boot lid is well supported on a long piano hinge at its bottom edge and also incorporates the spare wheel fixing. Boot space isn't vast and it's vertical space rather than horizontal but it's worth having and is well secured by a strong locking system. A tight fitting rubber seal prevents ingress of the weather.

The large windowed hood and frame are well designed and engineered: the generous dimensions permitting an easy entry and exit. When seated, there is an atmosphere of roominess with neither the hood nor frame hoops interfering with one's quiff or headgear. A leather-cloth covered hard top will be available shortly. Sidescreens, the bane of any open sportscar, are adequately constructed from Perspex sliding in steel channels with anti-draught and water strips assuring a most satisfactory system.

Turning to mechanical matters, it may be as well to outline the donor parts required to build the Falcon Plus 2. Any Ford Cortina Mk3 or 4 will suffice with most people opting for four cylinder power although a V6 option is also available. In fact, one or two Rover V8 engined versions have been built. However, after all the service parts have been reconditioned or replaced as and where necessary, they simply bolt on to the Falcon chassis. This includes the front and rear axle assemblies, engine, gearbox, pedal assemblies, radiator, heater, battery, handbrake, steering parts and wiring loom. The manufacturers supply a steering column extension, derated front springs and a shortened exchange propshaft. This is, of course, an oversimplification of the process but in current component car trends it is one of the easier build ups.

The chassis is a 75mm x 50mm x 2.5mm structure complete with a welded body frame of 25mm x 25mm x 2.5mm square section tube. This frame extends up round the radiator and along the top sides of the engine bay. Together with the 14 gauge steel bulkhead and backbone tunnel, the whole mass of steelwork is very impressive indeed. These chaps were chassis designers at Leyland Trucks prior to this enterprise, so they are well qualified for the task. The TUV inspectors were most impressed by this design and the safety consciousness of the team. One can be confident that this car is as strong as is practicably possible.

The kit content comprises: chassis, louvred bonnet, body panels and doors in aluminium, scuttle, wings, boot assembly, front tray, radiator shell and floors in fibreglass, windscreen complete with glass, rear seat shell, heater air box, headlight mouldings, rear light mouldings and lenses, dashboard, fastener pack, wing piping, hinges, aluminium trim strip, door locks, steering shaft extension, a JBA badge and set of building instructions.

The cost of this kit is £1875 plus VAT but you've got to throw another few hundred pounds at the job to cover such things as hood, sidescreens, wiper system, bumpers, instruments, wheels, tyres, exhaust, paint, trim, carpets, etc. But even so, £3000-£3500 should see a Plus 2 built to a good standard.

The works demonstrator with its leather seats, brass rimmed VDO instruments, mahogany dash and arm rests plus its chrome wire wheels, is an excellent example of how neat and comfortable this car can be made. It would not be difficult to emulate this standard either. The vehicle is fitted with 15" wheels with



*Overall shot of very tastefully executed interior trim highlights the amount of care and effort JBA put into their vehicles. Neat touches such as mahogany rear armrests and well positioned inertia belts make this a very civilised motor car.*

165 section tyres. However, JBA reckon 14" disc type wheels with 185 tyres give a better ride, albeit at the expense of the car's looks. Personally, I prefer the 15" wheels as it is quite a big car.

When driving the demonstrator it's hard to imagine you're in a low volume special. With its two-litre engine it pulls well from low down and feels solid on the road due to its wide track and long wheelbase. A standard Ford exhaust system is fitted as far as the axle, behind which is a 'Cherry Bomb' silencer. The exhaust note is mildly fruity with the hood down, but with it up an average-to-low amount of intrusive noise was apparent

though conversation continued unabated.

It's my opinion that this new model represents good value for money. It is well engineered by professionals, well built by skilled craftsmen and responds well to market demand. It deserves to maintain the good reputation of this sound little company and at the same time provide reliable, safe sports car motoring for the family man. Further details can be obtained by sending £1 for the full colour brochure to: **JBA Engineering Ltd, Unit 56B, Bradley Hall Trading Estate, Standish, Wigan, Greater Manchester. Tel: 0257 424549.**

