

Clever Trevor

TVR's decidedly mix 'n' match approach back in 1970 makes the Vixen an ideal candidate for a 150 bhp Pinto-powered project today.

Words Phil White

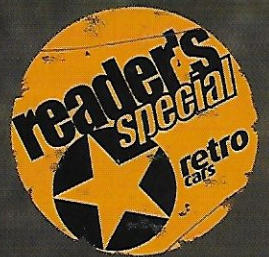
Photos Richard Parsons



At the 1970 Motor Show a man saw TVR's latest iteration of its pretty Vixen, bathed in lights and adorned with stunning girls. "I have to have that car," he thought. So he bought it the minute TVR had pulled the car off the stand. History doesn't record if he was happy with his purchase, but the fact that he kept it for 31 years suggests he was. By this time the car wanted restoration and his wife wanted him to sell it. So Simon Maynard

became the car's second owner and installed it in his parents' garage. "It was a bit unhappy," he reports. "Nothing terrible, but just the ravages of time. I took it apart and started working my way through it."

TVR's Vixen first appeared in 1967. It was a simple, fairly light car with a good-looking fibreglass body mounted on a tubular steel chassis. Initially, power came from the BMC B-series four-pot ➔

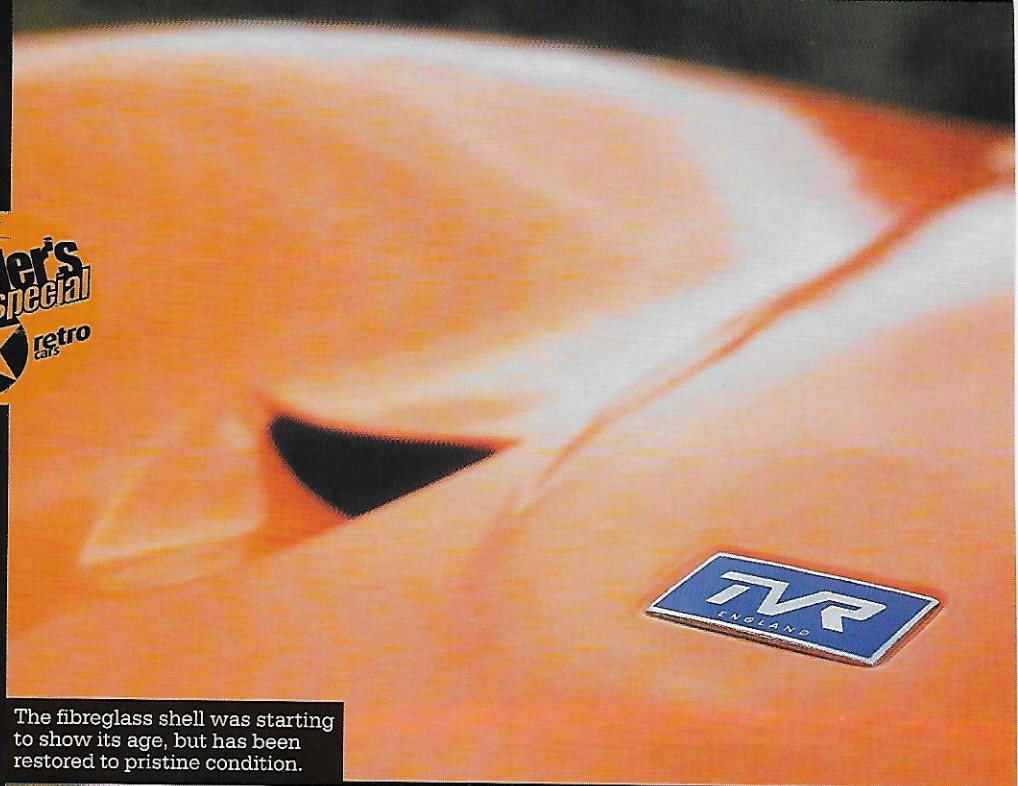


that usually propelled the MGB, but after just 12 cars TVR switched to the 1599cc Kent motor as used by Ford's Cortina GT. The Vixen was deservedly popular because it was huge fun to drive: with a wheelbase of 7.5 ft, rear-wheel drive and pretty good weight distribution it was a good sports car. Crucially, it could do more than 100 mph, which was still a benchmark for a sports car at the time. It was regularly revised and passed through four series before giving way to the new-generation M-series in 1972.

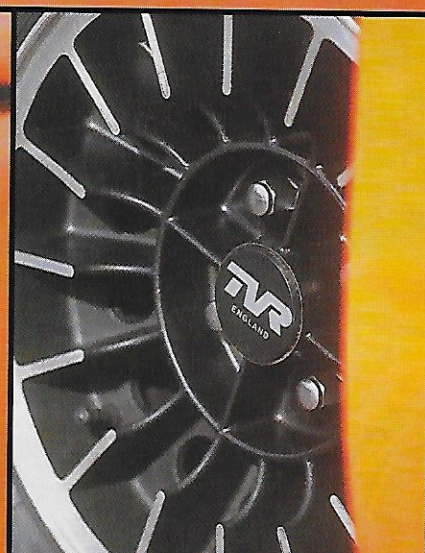
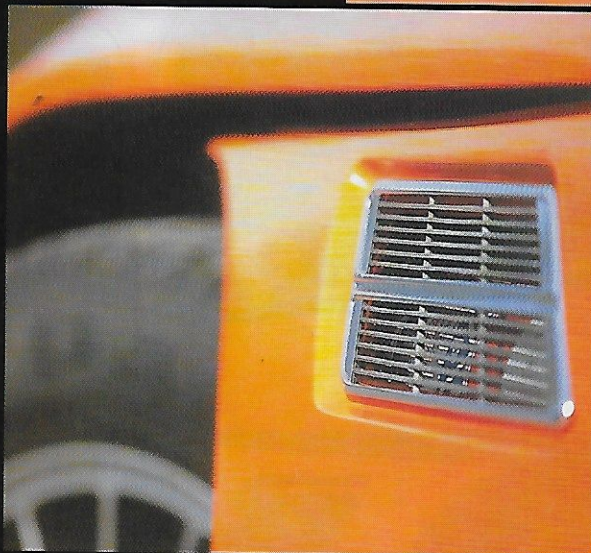
Thankfully the tubular chassis turned out to be in pretty good condition. "It was only really the outer rails that were badly rotten," Simon says. "Trouble is, I just couldn't find the right tubing anywhere. But then one day I was down at Tilbury Docks doing a job and found some old handrail in a skip. It was exactly the right diameter." The bodyshell was, like all old fibreglass hulls, a little crazed. So Simon, a civil engineer, took a pretty methodical approach to repair: "I glass matted the inside of the shell first," he says, "then cut the crazing out and filled it. Some weight was added by doing it this way, but it's made the shell stronger."

The Vixen's purposeful lines are brought out nicely by orange paint, which is a specially-mixed shade. TVR created a good-looking car enlivened by the odd touch of brightwork. The Vixen is a bizarre mix of parts from various sources, such as the wing side vents, which were originally intended for the C-pillar of a MkIV Ford Zodiac. Ford also provided the rear lamps, which will be recognised by fans of the MkII Cortina. These are naturally chrome-plated, but other components are polished alloy. Those strange, bulbous corner bumpers, for instance, are TVR parts. As are the fabricated door top frames.

Parts from a variety of sources have created this car: attached to the engine is Ford's Type 9 five-speed, all-synchromesh gearbox. The differential, on the



The fibreglass shell was starting to show its age, but has been restored to pristine condition.



other hand, is also seen in Triumph's Vitesse and GT6. The Vitesse lent its brakes to the project, although the master cylinder is a TR6 item. In fact, some sources claim the entire brake system is TR6-spec.

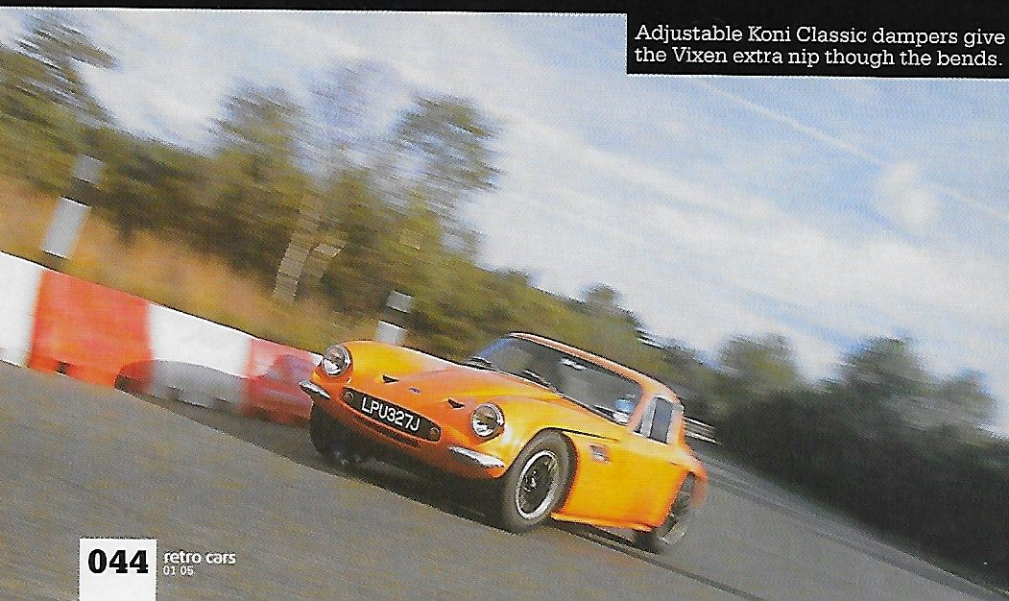
This is also where some of the suspension components were found, too. The front suspension, as with many British specialist cars from the '60s, centres on

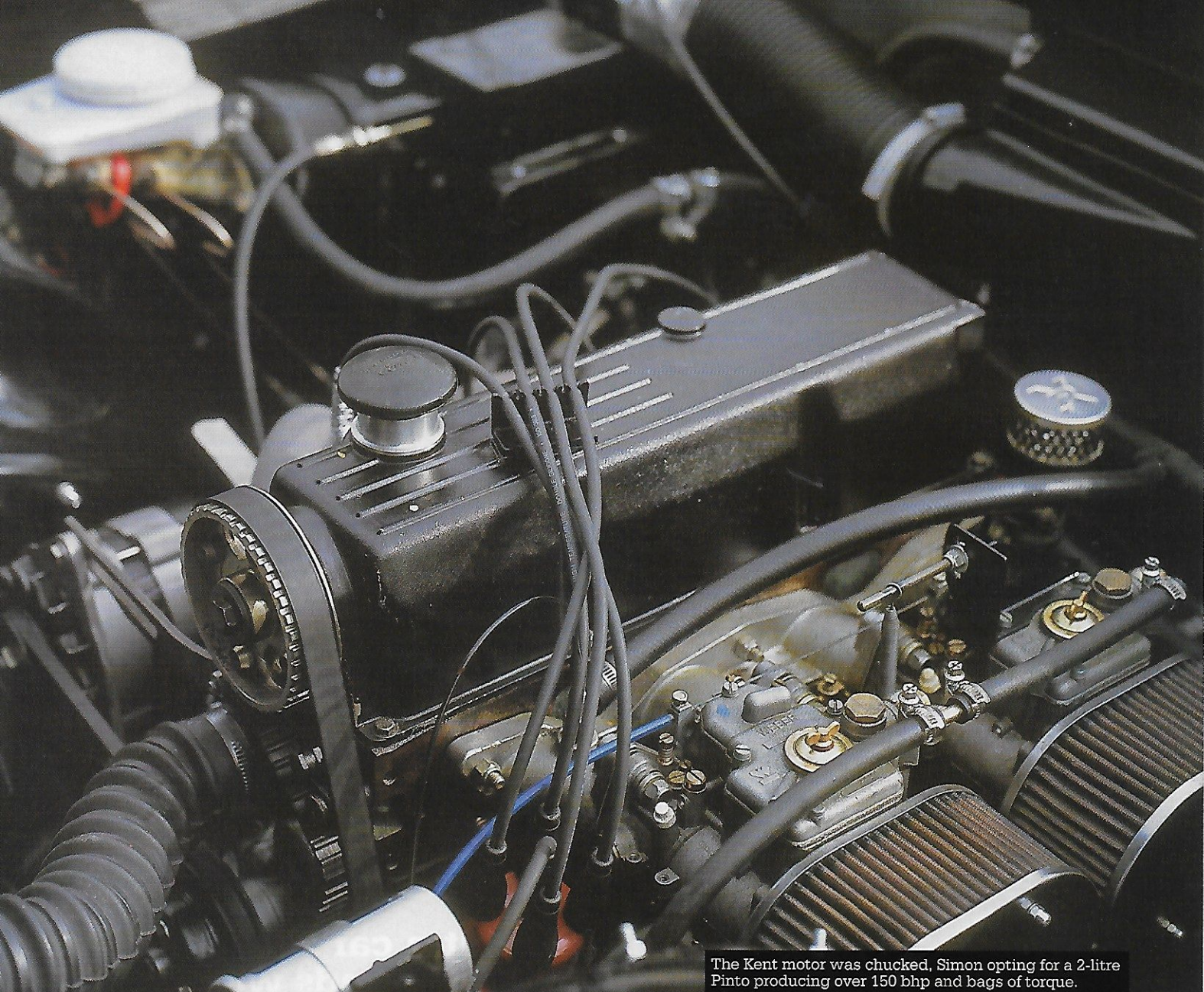
the uprights from Triumph's Herald. They're hung off natty wishbones made by TVR, which have a neat screw adjustment on the uppermost unit to allow camber adjustment.

TVR also fabricated much of the rear suspension, although the occasional borrowed part can be found there too. The challenge of restoring a car like this is piecing together the jigsaw of parts, a challenge compounded when a component was modified by the factory for its own uses. The Vixen's track rods, for instance, started life in the '50s aboard the Standard Eight. This in itself makes them hard to get hold of half a century on, but the challenge is made greater by the fact that TVR bent them to fit the Vixen.

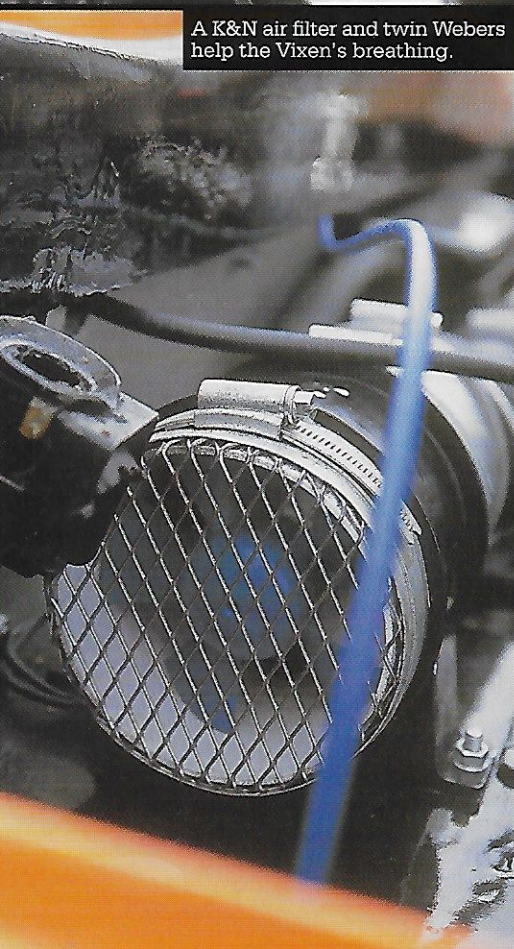
Simon's improved the suspension a little, with adjustable Koni Classic dampers. He sourced uprated springs from David Gerald in Worcestershire, which has been a TVR specialist since 1981. Polyurethane bushes all round also seemed like a good idea. The lovely original TVR alloys just needed blasting, painting and then the edges rubbing clean to look as good as new.

Adjustable Koni Classic dampers give the Vixen extra nip through the bends.

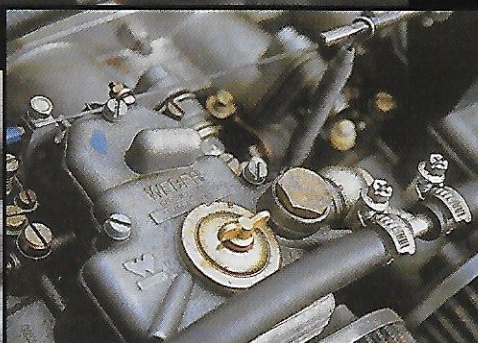




The Kent motor was chucked, Simon opting for a 2-litre Pinto producing over 150 bhp and bags of torque.



A K&N air filter and twin Webers help the Vixen's breathing.



The restoration of this car took several years: "Looking back," Simon says, "I did give up quite a lot of my social life. I used to force myself into the garage despite the fact that people were calling and inviting me out. That's not easy to do when it's winter and you know you're going to spend the whole evening lying on freezing-cold concrete handling icy metal parts."

Still, there are some very nice icy metal parts there, and now that he's free to go to the pub he gets there in much more style than many of his mates, and rather quicker. "I'm running the engine in," he says, "but from the way it pulls even in this limited use I've got the feeling this car is as quick as I could want it to be."

Propelled by its original Kent motor the Vixen could lope to 60 mph in about 10 seconds, and had a top speed of around 105 mph. But Simon decided to improve a little on this: "I thought long and hard about the engine," he says. "There's quite a lot of room in the engine bay and my options were fairly open." He decided eventually to stay with a Ford power unit, partly for the sake of continuity and partly because most Ford engines are readily tuneable. "I didn't want to go totally modern," he says, "so the obvious answer was a Pinto."

The 2-litre motor he sourced once lived in a 1973 MkIII Cortina. It's been treated to a few tried and tested improvements, which should produce power in excess of 150 bhp and plenty of torque. Deep breathing is done through K&N filters and twin Weber 45 DCOE carburetors on a Burton inlet manifold. The head has been ported and polished and now wears hard valve seats for unleaded fuel. Although the bottom end remains untouched the cam is a Piper profile designed to give high torque. So far Simon is highly pleased with this power unit, especially given the rich sound it ➤



TVR Vixen Tech Spec

BODY

1970 TVR Vixen fibreglass shell, fully restored and resprayed in bright orange.

ENGINE

1998cc Ford Pinto engine, K&N air filters, twin Weber 45 DCOE carburettors, Burton inlet manifold, ported and polished head, Piper high-torque cam, re-cored radiator, alloy header tank, bespoke tubular exhaust manifold and system by Cheeseman.

TRANSMISSION

Ford Type 9 five-speed gearbox, Cortina clutch.

SUSPENSION

Koni classic adjustable dampers, David Gerald uprated springs, polyurethane bushes all round.

BRAKES

TVR/Triumph disc and drum brake system.

WHEELS AND TYRES

5x15 TVR alloys, 205/70 Pirelli P4000 rubber.

INTERIOR

Astrali steering wheel, alloy gearknob, Caterham seats, Luke harnesses, embossed vinyl door trim, marine-spec waterproof carpet.

makes. Not surprisingly, the car sounds in action rather like a hot Escort RS2000, thanks in part to a bespoke exhaust manifold and system by Cheeseman in Woking. "It's very nice," he says with a slight grimace, "and very expensive."

If there's anything most people know about TVR, it's that the company has the unlikely-sounding home of Blackpool. Oh, and that it's famous for making cars with rather iffy electrics. Whether this is a deserved reputation or not is a matter of great debate among enthusiasts, but Simon found a way round this potential problem. "I had the wiring loom in a box," he recalls. "I pulled it out and looked at it, then thought 'nah'. So I bought all the things I needed and started from scratch."

Building your own wiring loom might seem rather a daunting prospect, but Simon claims it wasn't as tricky as it might seem. "I just built up each system logically," he says. "The great thing is that I was able to incorporate some useful stuff, like an eight-pin connector for the bonnet loom so the nose can be taken off." Impressive, although this does rather beg the question of why TVR didn't do this in the first place.

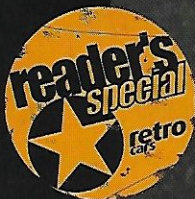
"I built a good ring earth system in to make sure there were none of those TVR electrical problems." He continues, "I got a bit paranoid, crimping and soldering the connections then using shrink wrap. But I think it'll pay off in the future."

Viewed from outside the Vixen is a very small car, but it shrinks still further when you ease yourself into the cabin. Simon isn't the shortest of people, so finding room for himself in there was something of a challenge. However, fortune was smiling on him when his brother came across a pair of superb, nearly-new, lightweight bucket seats from a Caterham. They mount low on

the floor and are fairly narrow, which meant that they fitted the Vixen a treat. As an added bonus they came complete with Luke harnesses.

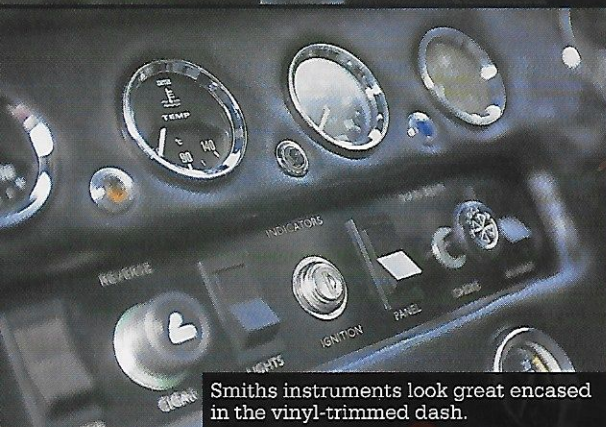
The cockpit, once you're in there, is filled with all the best things about British sports cars of this era: the Astrali steering wheel and alloy gearknob look brilliant, but it's the array of Smiths instruments on the vinyl-trimmed dash that set the tone. Simon has brilliantly

"He's built a car that looks fantastic and sounds wonderful!"

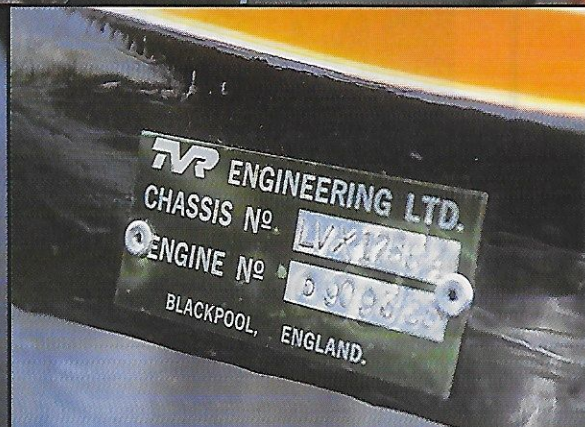
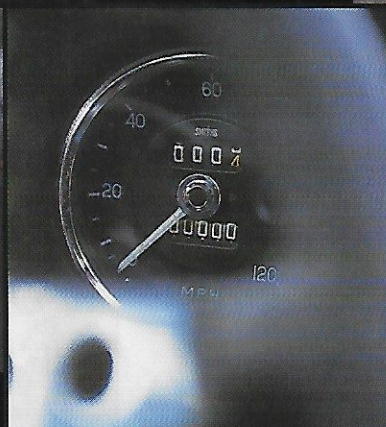




Hours were spent upside down with glue and stacks of waterproof carpet.



Smiths instruments look great encased in the vinyl-trimmed dash.



combined a selection of carefully-chosen materials, such as the alloy chequer plate used for the sill protectors and the textured vinyl that forms the door trims. He's put them together with workmanship and attention to detail that no Vixen left the Blackpool factory with originally.

This wasn't always terribly easy to achieve: "The carpeting has to be one of

the nastiest jobs I had," Simon recalls. "It's stuck to the fibreglass body, and I spent hours upside down in there, gluing it in place with contact adhesive. It should last though, as I went to a chandlers and got yacht-spec waterproof stuff."

The TVR Vixen has never looked so good. In fact, it's never been so well made either. Simon may have given up his social life to create it, but he's built a car that looks fantastic, sounds wonderful and is perfectly practical for use in 2004. "It's not totally perfect," he confesses, "but I wanted something I wouldn't be afraid to take out."

It may be reliable nowadays, but he does keep a few tools on board just in case. They live in a neat tin box on top of the spare wheel. "It's an old angle grinder box," he says. "I think it looks the part sprayed black." It does, too. Let's hope that in 31 years Simon will still have this remarkable car sitting in his garage. ★