

ALONG CAME A SPYKER

It's fabulously expensive, exquisitely detailed... but how does the Spyker C8 actually go?

Even though we're on Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground's famous two-mile runway, and the only thing ahead is a shimmering heat haze, a stab at a top speed run isn't on the programme. This is Dutch company Spyker's sole development car and it's also a show car, due to attend a number of exclusive international concours events over the next few weeks; at the back of my mind is how unpopular I'd be if I introduced it to the scenery or blew the engine.

Besides, the mid-engined C8 Spyder is here in Leicestershire for low-speed testing, to check out that its engine cooling system is functioning properly. The Spyker's dynamics are a way off

being finished, and I've been allowed behind the alloy steering wheel (each of its spokes shaped like an aircraft's propeller blades) simply to get a feel for what it'll be like when it's done.

Which is why I've ambled onto the start of the straight, rather than blazed on with tyres smoking. It's also why I've quickly clicked the lever through to number four of the Spyker's six ratios, and changed up at 4000rpm rather than held on until the 7500rpm limiter. What a good boy I am.

But the engineer sitting alongside me, monitoring the behaviour of the Spyker's 4.2-litre Audi-sourced V8 engine on a laptop, is a bad boy. 'Let's see if we can hit 7000rpm in top,' he chides. So even though we're pootling in

fourth gear and have used up far more of our two miles than is wise for such an adventure, I nail it.

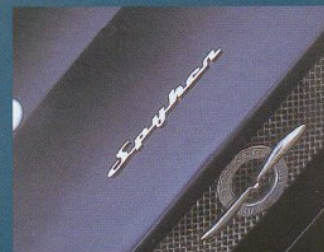
The largely aluminium alloy Spyker weighs only 1000kg, and its naturally-aspirated V8 (from the S8 Audi) produces 420bhp and 354lb ft of torque, so it's no surprise that it's quite eager; it's the degree of eagerness that is the revelation. The back end of the Spyker squats, the V8 booms out the mechanical equivalent of 'tally ho', and we're off in pursuit of the far horizon. The closer the revs climb towards 7000, the more the Spyker sounds as if it were bred for the track rather than the road, and the more sensational its acceleration.

We top out easily and rapidly in fourth, do the



[Spyker C8 Spyder]

Test session at Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground showed the C8 has plenty of straight-line speed, but chassis still needs development. Quality of construction and attention to detail are what buyers will get for their £150,000. Shell and spaceframe chassis are all aluminium. Engine is mildly reworked Audi V8, producing around 420bhp. Sounds good, too



Spyker – a brief history

Until resurrected by Muller and de Bruijn, the Spyker name had been dead since 1925 when the Dutch car maker went out of business. It had begun life in 1898, when Jacobus and Hendrik-Jan Spijker, Amsterdam-based coachbuilders, started installing Mercedes-Benz engines in cars of their own design. In 1903 Spyker (the 'y' was inserted to simplify pronunciation) created a 60hp grand prix car, which boasted the world's first six-cylinder engine as well as permanent four-wheel drive. During WW1 the company produced fighter planes, hence the propeller in the company's logo. The early '20s saw Spyker enter the luxury car market with its C4 model, affectionately known as the 'Rolls-Royce of the Continent' but the praise wasn't enough to prevent the company's closure by the middle of the decade.

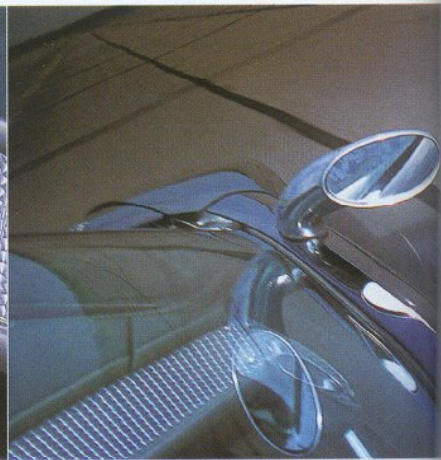
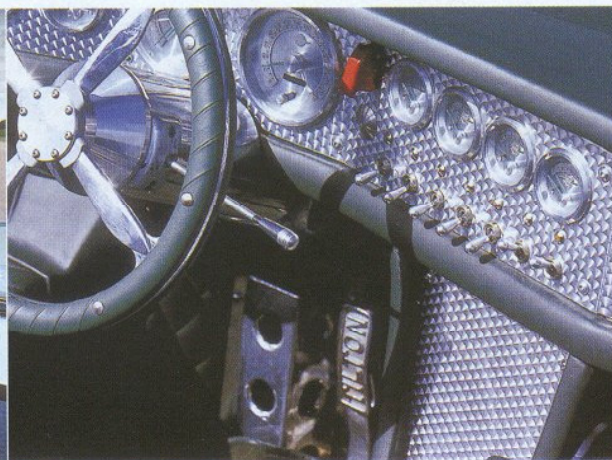
same again in fifth, and have the needle hovering at 6500rpm in sixth when a sudden puff of oil-smoke claws at our nostrils and declares it's time to slow down. (We later discover the smoke was caused by a split in a driveshaft gaiter spitting out grease onto the exhaust.) Shame, because we still had plenty of runway and revs in hand, so might have been able to verify the Spyder's claimed 186mph top speed. But as we later work out from the revs and gearing, we did reach 175mph, and did so with such spirited ease that the final 11 seem a foregone conclusion.

This unplanned performance test is useful for

establishing that the Spyker isn't just all mouth and attractive trousers. After all, the Dutch aren't exactly renowned for producing supercars, and unless you're a fan of ancient automotive history (see separate story, above), the Spyker name will mean diddly-squat to you. Then there are the two men behind the new Spyker company, managing director Maarten de Bruijn and chairman Victor Muller, neither of whom has a professional background in either the motor industry or engineering – de Bruijn studied city planning at university, while entrepreneur Muller started his career as a lawyer. Yet when

you see the C8 Spyder, revel in the depth of its detail design and marvel at the quality of its all-aluminium construction, you can't help but be struck by the confidence and professionalism of the whole enterprise.

The Spyker is de Bruijn's creation. In between his city planning studies he read everything he could on car design, construction and engineering. When he'd read enough, he designed and built himself a car, a 940kg steel-bodied, Audi V8-powered 250bhp coupe that was to become the basis for the C8. After he'd graduated from university in 1996, de Bruijn





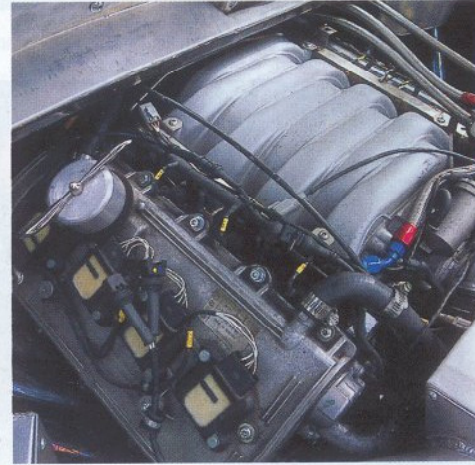
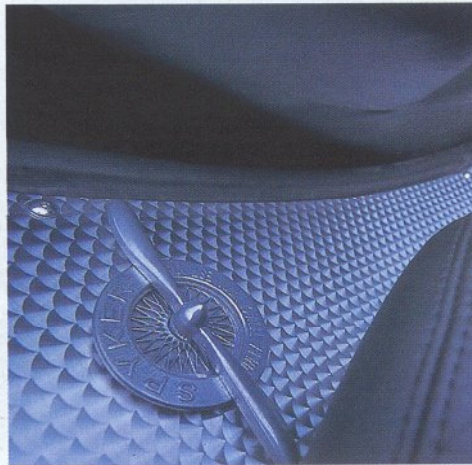
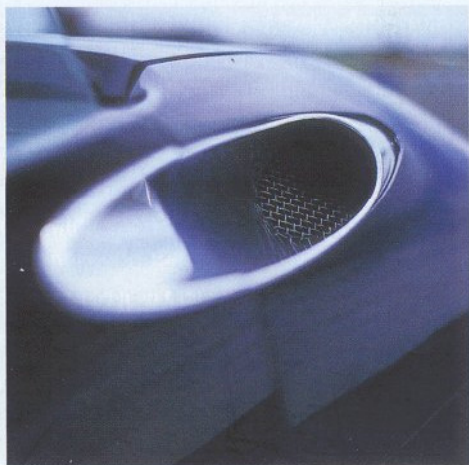
'The higher the revs climb, the more the Spyker sounds as if it were bred for the track'

fancied the idea of manufacturing the 'Silvestris' as he called it, and friend-of-the-family Muller was asked for some business advice. That advice soon turned into hard cash when Muller offered to bankroll the project and form the Spyker company.

Muller must have deep pockets, because 'cutting corners' is not an expression in his extensive English vocabulary. You only have to look at the prototypes (there's also a coupe version of the C8, called the Laviolette, which sadly wasn't ready to run when we visited) to realise the Dutchman isn't afraid to spend to get

results. The cars were built by Coventry Prototype Panels, which specialises in shaping aluminium parts for the automotive and aerospace industries. Other than the Audi engine, the rest of the Spyker's components are bespoke, right down to the aluminium-faced instruments. As Muller points out: 'When you spot, say, the plastic switchgear from a Fiat in your Ferrari, in a small way it affects your opinion of the whole car. You begin to wonder why Ferrari didn't try harder – it's not as if Ferrari customers will complain about a few quid more on the price.'

The Spyker's cabin is exquisite, all machine-turned alloy and quilted leather. You could spend hours in it not going anywhere, just looking and touching. Muller says you shouldn't think of it in terms of it being merely a car interior – 'it's jewellery,' he says. The same philosophy applies to the car as a whole; the Spyker is designed to be an heirloom, to be passed down through the generations much like you would a Patek Philippe watch or antique furniture. Both Muller and de Bruijn want the Spyker to be a collectible, a 'must-have' for any serious car collection.



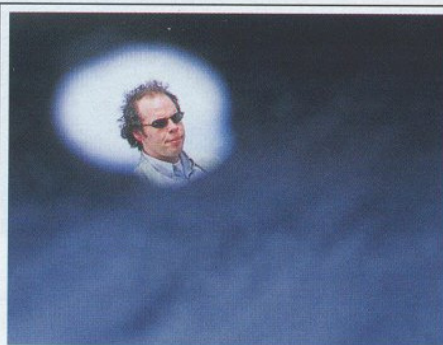
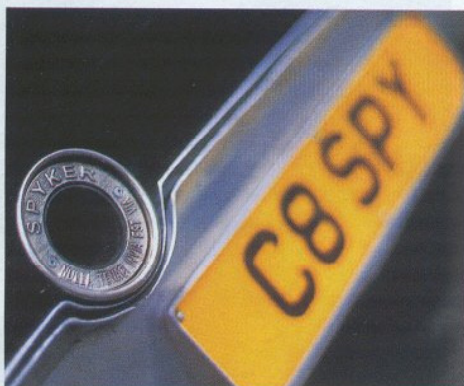
[Spyker C8 Spyder]

C8 is mid-engined/rear-wheel drive. This car has an Audi six-speed manual gearbox, but a sequential 'box is being developed. Customers will also be able to specify traction control, launch control and ABS, all switchable



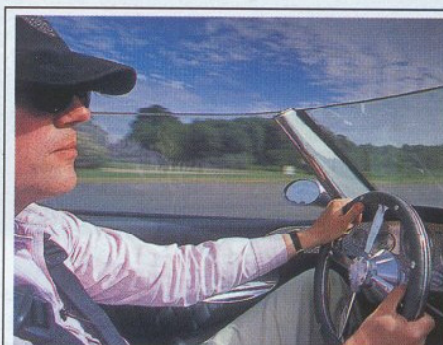
But before that can happen there are still things to sort out. The unassisted steering, for instance, is very heavy and suffers from aggressive kick-back through bumpy corners, of which Bruntingthorpe has several. Our flying Dutchmen reckon the set-up is superior to a Ferrari 360 Modena's in hard driving (Muller should know, he owns one), but in my humble opinion they need to find a half-way house between the two. Then there's the fearsome heat sucked into the cockpit from the engine bay behind, although just as I left the team after our photographic session, they were experimenting with some wind-jammer designs to alleviate the problem.

When Spyker gets its Dutch factory up and running in a couple of months' time, total annual production will be just 25. Muller and de Bruijn are happy with that, because in the niche they're after – the one above Ferrari and Lamborghini, where money is no object – what customers want as much as anything is exclusivity. To date 38 firm orders have been taken, one customer taking a Spyder, a Laviolette and the forthcoming Le Mans race car. The Dutch may have taken their time to break into the supercar scene, but they seem to be doing it with some style. ■



MAARTEN DE BRUIJN
managing director

Maarten de Bruijn's graduation present from his parents was a milling machine, and it was clear from that moment that he wouldn't be using his degree in city planning. Smart, passionate and intense, de Bruijn is a self-taught engineer, a fact he sees as an advantage not a handicap. 'Because I'm not wrapped up in the automotive engineering world, I'm not influenced by current trends and fashions, I have to work out the best solutions to problems on my own,' he explains. 'That's why we've gone with aluminium construction rather than carbonfibre and Kevlar. Used in the right way aluminium can be lighter than the composites, and it's easier to repair if you damage it.' De Bruijn's devotion to the Spyker project can be seen in the detail touches he designed the alloy instrument faces, the company logo, the engraved finishers around the exhaust's tailpipes, and even the door hinges. And he's always checking out new engineering reports to find ways of improving the car. If the Spyker is late into production, it will be because de Bruijn won't stop in his pursuit of perfection.



VICTOR MULLER
chairman

Suave and impeccably dressed, Victor Muller understands the market for the Spyker with absolute clarity – that's because he *is* the market. A car-mad entrepreneur, Muller has a large collection of vintage and classic cars, attends concours and classic race events around the world, and runs an Aston DB7 Volante and a Ferrari 360 as everyday transport. 'We're dealing with educated buyers,' says Muller, 'who have been through all the regular supercars and want something different. To some of these people the Spyker will be another elegant object to add to their collection of fine things, whether they be watches or jewellery or paintings – that's why the C8's design had to be timeless, and its finish to a much higher standard than is the norm in the car world.' Muller knows where these potential customers gather, which is why Spyker is attending all the major classic car concours events ('I could probably sell 35 cars just to my friends at Pebble Beach,' enthuses Muller), and why both the Spyder and Laviolette were cruising the streets of Monaco before and after the Grand Prix.