

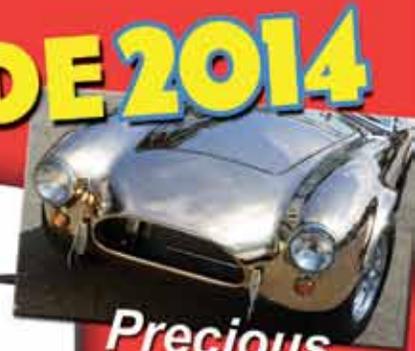
KIT CAR BUILDER

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SPECIAL SECTION

COBRA GUIDE 2014

KIT CAR BUILDER



Precious Metal

DO THE MATH

AMERICA'S FAVORITE

Sportscar vs. Muscle Car

Reptile Roundup Highlights



2014 Stingray



Backdraft's Trackday Terror



• Rethinking the Lotus 7

• What's New With Engines



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HAROLD PACE PHOTO



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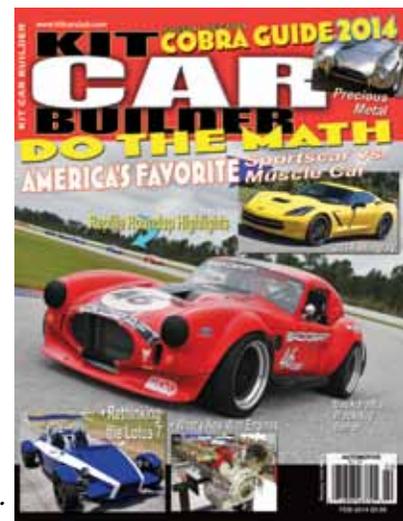
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COVER SHOT: To illustrate our cover story of which provides the best bang for the buck, a Cobra or a Corvette, we followed the new Backdraft Track Day car around the race course and inset a shot of the 2014 Stingray. Joe Greeves shot the Cobra and GM provided the Vette photo. Upper inset is Darren Freidman's gleaming bronze Kirkham 289. Steve Temple photo. For non-Cobra fans Harold Pace put the new Sonic 7 through its paces. Pace photo. And that Ferrari V-12 now graces the engine bay of Bailey Cars' P4 replica.



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SUPER SONIC

*MEV Brings the "7" Concept Up To Date
story & photos by Harold Pace*

The 1957-1973 Lotus 7 was a milestone design in the sportscar world for combining lightweight, great handling and simple construction in a very affordable package. And there was nothing in the concept that said those virtues couldn't evolve with the times. Donor cars can change, engine locations migrate and tire packages grow wider and stickier, but the idea that simple construction, featherweight materials and reasonable cost make ideal building blocks for great cars that go on forever.

The MEV Sonic 7 takes the "7" concept to places it has never gone before. I track-tested the MEV Rocket exoskeleton model for our April 2012 issue, and found it to be a lot of fun. It was quick, handled great and was as much fun as a superbike with two extra wheels. It was also about as practical as a bike, with minimal weather and wind protection. The Sonic 7 shares the same basic layout and mechanical package, but is wrapped in slightly more streetable bodywork. It may have cycle fenders at both ends and a low-cut windscreen, but this is not your father's old Lotus!

However, like the Lotus, the Sonic 7 kit comes from England, home of almost all Formula One cars and at least half the great sportscars ever built. With that tradition in mind, prolific designer Stuart Mills, of Road Track Race Ltd., penned the Sonic 7 to be both up-to-date and inexpensive to build, a hallmark of the 25 kit cars he has brought to life.

The Sonic is distributed and sold in the U.S. by Dove Racing (DRL) in Trenton, Texas, and when company president Pete Dove offered me a chance to drive a 240-hp Zetec-powered version I was ready to go! I met the boys at Eagles Canyon Raceway

in Decatur, Texas (just north of Fort Worth) to wring it out on the 2.5-mile, 11-turn road course that soars and dives through the rocky, undulating landscape. It's a challenging course and an ideal place to experience the Sonic 7.

The car is very similar to the Rocket, but not identical under the skin. The extra-rigid chassis shares the same basic layout, but is fabricated from square steel tubing instead of round. The fiberglass body wraps around the frame to provide some protection against the elements, yet doesn't interfere with the wind-in-the-face driving experience. Cycle fenders cover the Verde 17" X 7.5" wide wheels and Sumito HRZ111 205-40-ZR-17 tires, and the car I tested wore the standard double hoop roll bar and bracing, standard contoured front fenders and the optional rear wing.

The Sonic 7 is designed to accept Ford Focus 2.0-liter Zetec engines with standard Focus transmissions. These engines put out 130 hp in standard tune, but this blue land shark has been fitted with a modified version sporting Omec Black Top quad-throttle-body fuel injection and larger injectors. The engine was built by Mark's Engine and Machine in Whitewright, Texas based on a .030 overbored Focus block. In went 11:1 forged slugs, billet rods and a steel crank. A Ford Racing Cosworth head tops it off, featuring larger valves, titanium retainers and Kent high lift cams with adjustable gears. An Omex ECU controls the spark and power is estimated at the 240 hp mark. Dove says it's an \$8,000 engine.

A stainless steel exhaust system from Road Track Race was installed, complete with headers and a muffler. Backing this up is a Focus SVT 6-speed manual gearbox with a lightweight fly-wheel and Hi-Po clutch.

Owner Lance Dunman loves the white powdercoated frame and suspension, which set off the blue-and-white gelcoat body panels. He also had Dove fabricate a custom 10-gallon fuel tank system for longer drives.

Getting into the Sonic 7 is easy. For starters, there are no doors so you just step over the low side panels and onto the floor. You can remove the tiny steering wheel for more room, but I didn't need to. Simply reach behind you and lower yourself down into the wrap-around bucket seat (with optional padded inserts) by holding onto the roll bar and seat wings. Strap on your helmet, and you're looking just over the racey Lexan windshield (a taller windshield is on the option list).

Once in, it's time to buckle up. This car had a 4-point street-car harness system that was clumsy to adjust. I would stick with racing-style latch-and-link or camlock belts, but that's what I'm used to. The only other thing I would change was the Danmoto 180-degree Digital Cockpit, which I found hard to read at a glance and some functions required clicking switches to access. Dove can supply a variety of instrument packages, including conventional AutoMeter gauges.

Once under way I was reminded of the virtues of the Rocket I tested here last year. The steering is quick and direct, but not as much as the Quickrack steering rack option on the Rocket. Although the faster rack would be useful in autocross or track events, the standard rack is less work on the street.

The chassis responds well to inputs. The suspension is fabricated, and mounts stock Focus 4-wheel discs as standard fare, but this car has an optional Wilwood adjustable pedal assembly and Power Lite calipers with 11" vented and slotted rotors in front. The Focus twin-pot calipers in back also grip 11" drilled and slotted rotors.

With 240 hp and only 1,250 pounds to carry around, this Sonic 7 has a power-to-weight ratio of 5.21 lb/hp, the same as a Corvette ZR1 and .1 better than a Ferrari 458 Italia. And it feels like it. We were sharing the track with a Viper, a McLaren MP4-12C and various hopped-up Corvettes, Mustangs and Camaros, and I felt that the little MEV could hold its own on the Eagles Canyon track if driven by an experienced pilot.

The brakes are very good and the transmission linkage well placed. It takes some time to find all the gears when you're in a hurry; third and fifth are very close together at the top right, and easy to select the wrong one until you've tried it for a while. The new engine should have been a killer, but didn't feel a lot quicker than the 210-hp version in the Rocket. I think it still needs some tinkering to produce max power, and Dove says it has a date with the dyno in the near future. I was sorry when it was time to head for the pits – the Sonic 7 is a lot of fun at track day events.

Overall it comes across more like a modern interpretation of a Caterham or Birkin than a pure racing car. While the Rocket felt like a racecar barely tamed for the street, the Sonic 7 seems more like a street machine that is also happy on track days. I think I would opt for a standard (or lightly modified) drivetrain and the optional taller laminated glass windshield so I could enjoy this one on winding back roads and on tours. Of course, there's still nothing to stop you from tearing up a road course or two on track days. Dove estimates this car would run about \$30,000, including the \$8,000 engine. However, a standard Sonic 7 can be built by the owner for \$16,000 to \$17,000, plus about 100 hours of labor. Think of it as a wise investment in pure driving fun! **KCB**



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