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AUTO MANIA



by Dr. Iain Corness

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Waltzing around in a Westfield



Westfield has no doors

Be warned - there is an army of men in grey dustcoats trying to make sure that all fun has been taken out of driving a motor car. The Political Correctness Thought Police and the Health and Safety wallahs are padding the corners of the table, putting talcum powder on your willy and pulling up your pampers.



Westfield 2000 S

Face facts, today's motor car manufacturers have become so "safety conscious" and "green" they have produced cars that have

become interminably boring to drive. Electronic systems decide when you have to brake harder than you are doing with Brake Assist technology. Electronic systems decide that you don't know when your driven wheels are starting to spin so kick in with Anti Skid Control, rather than you lifting the right clog off the accelerator. Motor noters are clamoring for the whole alphabet soup of electronic controls to be applied to all vehicles, in the name of safety, to show just how responsible they are.

The 'real' story is that the chaps in the grey dustcoats don't trust you and, quite frankly, you are not clever enough to drive your own

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car. So here we are in the era of the grey, featureless motor car that will get you from A to B in total dullness. In the inevitable crashing, you will be saved from dying impaled by a steering column or mangled by the cream plastic dashboard. You will, instead, die from crashing boredom.



Julian towering over the Westfield

Against that depressing backdrop, comes Westfield. A company that dishes up a real motor car and

leaves you to work out how to deal with acceleration, braking, and cornering, as well as parking and pulling on the handbrake. Hallelujah! Some motor manufacturer has given the driver back his personal responsibility.

The Westfield tested is in reality a Lotus Super 7 clone. The 1957 design Super 7, from the fertile mind of the late Colin Chapman, was that of a tubular chassis with a front engine, with gearbox attached, with rear wheel drive through the proverbial (and cheap) cart axle. You could buy it as a turn-key vehicle, or assemble it yourself from a kit of parts. The Westfield follows the same basic concept.



Basic instrumentation

As an aside, one of the reasons why the Super 7 was offered in kit form was to avoid some of the crippling taxes on fully

assembled cars inflicted on the motorist by the British government. However, the sneaky British government said that assembly instructions were not allowed to be included. Mind you, Colin Chapman was even more devious and included dis-assembly instructions, which were not banned in the regulations. The DIY assembler then read them in reverse!

These days there are many Super7 clones, with Caterham and Westfield probably the best known. Some of the others include a Japanese clone called the "Rotus", which turns out to be a Lotus clone with a rotary engine up front. A wonderful play on words and pronunciations from a country not known for sophisticated humor. Another is the ESTfield which uses Lada parts - an oxymoron for a performance vehicle, if ever I heard it.

However, back to Westfield and this particular Westfield. In true S7 concept, it is very small and has a square tube frame, with alloy and

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fiberglass paneling. Front engined, with a 2 liter Ford Duratec, through the Ford five speed gearbox, to a limited slip diff, and this car has an independent rear suspension, though some can have the cart axle. Front suspension is double wishbone, with coil-over shock absorbers, though the inner ends are bushed, rather than rose-jointed (though rose-jointing can be ordered). This vehicle has also been fitted with a multi-tube roll cage and two four-point harnesses, as it is used for track days, and it was at the Prince Bira track that I tested the Westfield.

As opposed to the usual road tests where the tester writes, “The doors closed with a satisfying clunk,” this is not the case with the Westfield. It has no doors. You wriggle through the bars of the cage and slide down into the footwell. Explore with your feet and count the pedals and there is the full complement of three! The clutch has a long throw, but it is not heavy.

The dash is the usual flat piece with the instruments set in it. Oil pressure, water temperature and fuel gauge offset to the left and the tachometer and speedometer (optimistically graduated to 300 km/h) directly in front of the driver.

The engine fired straight off, and there is a musical burble from the driver's side mounted exhaust pipe. This changes to a raucous bark with the first blip on the throttle. A very satisfying raucous bark.

The gear lever, mounted on the top of the alloy paneled tunnel has a very positive throw and with first selected, the nose was pointed towards the racing surface of the Bira track, and the test began in earnest.

The acceleration is breathtaking, with the 190 bhp Ford engine propelling around 600 kg of car. This compares very well against cars such as the V12 Aston Martin Vantage, with its 517 bhp having to struggle with 1,680 kg of (albeit very beautiful) vehicle.

With the light weight, the brakes do not have to work hard, and the Westfield pulled up in a straight line every time, without any evidence of lock-up.

Again, with the light weight, the rack and pinion steering is not heavy, and is very precise. This is no sloppy sedan with fourteen turns lock to lock. The front end grip is excellent, and if anything, too good at times, as it was not too difficult to get the rear end to step out, though I feel this was a function of the IRS system. A tweak with the spring rates and some more castor at the front would change all that. But that is half the fun of owning something like a Westfield. With just the basic kit of tools, you can have fun and experiment. Something the other motor cars will not allow. Walk within 10 meters of an Aston Martin with a screwdriver in your hand and you will have nullified your warranty.

After several laps of Bira circuit it was very tempting to just stay out there, enjoying driving in its true sense. There was no electronic nanny to look after me, I had to do it all by myself, and it was Fun with the capital F. The feeling is much like it was after your Dad took off the trainer wheels and you managed to ride your bicycle all by yourself. Fun and satisfaction in just doing.

The Westfield is a very good example of a Super 7 clone. Wider in the body than the original means that normal-sized adults can get it, and the power plants these days are more tractable than those available from Lotus between 1957 and 1973, after which the production went to Caterham.

I drew an analogy between the Aston Martin V12 Vantage, which is

expected to go on sale in Thailand for around 22 million baht, and the little Westfield. The Westfield will set you back (depending upon the options you order) about 1.5 million baht and even cheaper if you want the kit to DIY. Let me assure you that the Aston isn't 15 times better than the Westfield, and as far as bang for your baht, give me the Westfield any time.

Westfield cars in Thailand are represented by Julian Dobrijevic, website www.westfield-sportscars-thailand.com. Starter kits begin at 360,000 baht, race cars from 600,000 and the fully built up road-going versions around 1.5 million. What are you waiting for?



Westfield at Bira

Robin Williams two point energy plan

There is just so much in the media these days about conserving the planet for our children (let 'em go and find their own, is my answer to all this global warming nonsense), so I was interested to read an item from Robin Williams. Here are the two points relating to energy in his proposals:

- 1) The US will make a strong effort to become self-sufficient energy wise. This will include developing nonpolluting sources of energy but will require a temporary drilling of oil in the Alaskan wilderness. The caribou will have to cope for a while.
- 2) Offer Saudi Arabia and other oil producing countries \$10 a barrel for their oil. If they don't like it, we go someplace else. They can go somewhere else to sell their production. (About a week of the wells filling up the storage sites would be enough.)

Autotrivia Quiz

Last week I mentioned the Gobron-Brillie and the Delaunay-Belleville, which had four pedals, instead of three. I asked what were the pedals for, and why did it need four? To make it easier, some Mercedes models also had the four pedal arrangement. The answer was that there were two separate foot brakes, one for the rear wheels and the other for the transmission. They were supposed to be used alternately, so they didn't overheat!

So to this week. I have written about Lotus S7's. When did Colin Chapman make the first Lotus?

For the Automania FREE beer this week, be the first correct answer to email viacars@gmail.com

Good luck!



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E-mail: ptymail@pattayamail.com

Pattaya Mail Publishing Co., Ltd.

370/7-8 Pattaya Second Road, Pattaya City, Chonburi 20260, Thailand

Tel.66-38 411 240-1, 413 240-1, Fax:66-38 427 596

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