KOUPÉ REKREATION

With Nubodi Automotive acting as the official shop window for Tribute's range of body conversions, CKC took a closer look at the company's Moss-liveried Koupé.

Words and pictures: Ian Stent

You might have thought that the chances of two new replicas of Ferrari's 250 GT SWB Berlinetta being seen at the recent Stoneleigh show was slim. But the reality was exactly that, made even more confusing by both being in a Stirling Moss inspired Rob Walker Racing livery! We've already covered the launch of Mirage Automotive's Mirage 250 in these pages (April 2017 issue 125), and now it's the turn of Nubodi's Koupé. In reality, the Koupé has been around for a while and is actually manufactured by Tribute Automotive, with Nubodi acting as sole agent for domestic and worldwide sales.

It would be somewhat unfair on either product (and unrealistic) to compare the Nubodi and Mirage products, despite their similar livery and inspiration. One is a high end, ultra authentic lookalike with a bespoke chassis and suspension package, while the other is a bodykit (with the inevitable compromises that entails in terms of dimensions) with a more modest price point. We suspect that if you are considering one, you will not be considering the other… but both have their part to play in the kit car marketplace.

The Koupé is the brainchild of Chris Welch of Tribute Automotive and it's his company that actually manufactures kits. That said, it is Nubodi Automotive that markets the range of Tribute products and acts as the sole point of contact for customers. It's to Nubodi that you'll go in order to see a demo car, have a test ride and to whom you'll place an order. Nubodi is run by Richard Bird and he established the new company some three years ago. In addition to marketing and selling kits, the company will also undertake factory builds for customers.

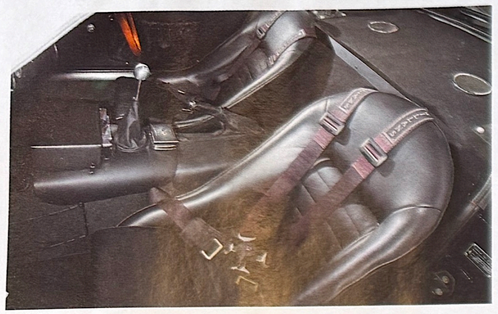
And by all accounts business is brisk. Kits are going out on a regular basis, not just within the UK, but recent export destinations have included France, Sweden, Australia and the US. And factory builds are in high demand, such that Nubodi cannot take another commission until after September 2018. To get over that problem, there are now four approved build agents it can direct customers to, one in northern Ireland and three in the UK.

Superb access to complete front end.

Front three quarter view almost certainly the car's strongest.

"Kits are going out on a regular basis, not just within the UK, but recent export destinations have included France, Sweden, Australia and the US"

New dash and tunnel top panels conceal Z3 origins convincingly.


Bucket seats a vital component in disguising the Z3.

Richard is upfront in focusing on the affordability of the model range and it's the company's BMW Z3 based Kobra (an AC Cobra inspired panel kit) that's currently taking the lion's share of sales. In contrast, the new Koupé is possibly the company's most expensive product, although still very much with an eye on budget… the main kit starts at just £4995 and Richard estimates that a well appointed DIY project could be done for just £15,000 (or less if the interior remain stock).

Like the Kobra, the Koupé uses BMW's Z3 as its foundation, with all the unboltable panels removed, and the new fibreglass replacements bolted and bonded into place. Having built a Z3 based Bertini as a CKC project car a few years ago, we know just how good the Z3 is, both in its suitability as a base vehicle for any panel kit, but also as a driver's car once a project is complete.

As if to prove the point, Richard explains that this 3.0-litre example of the breed yielded so many unwanted parts during the preparation for the new panels that he actually made a profit on the base vehicle once they'd been sold on, adding a useful £200 into the kitty for new parts.

And then there's the straight six engine which, after a cheap and quick remap delivers 265bhp in almost stock form… what's not to love about the Z3's suitability for projects like this?

The Koupé panel kit is extensive at some 25 pieces and despite the front and rear clams being large single items. Up front, the ingenuity of the design of both the kit and base vehicle come to the fore. While it's perfectly possible to pop the bonnet to gain access to the main engine components, you can also choose to lift the complete front end of the car, hingeing on the original Z3 hinges under the windscreen and lifting up to give unparalleled access to the complete front end of the car – a great feature for tweaking the fully adjustable coil-over struts on this car or checking the coolant pipes on the radiator etc.

Latched back in place, there's no question that this Koupé looks the part and has lots of nice detailing to catch your eye, from the original style bonnet catches and door handles to the lights for the racing roundels. And there's a sense of humour here too, with the leather boot strap showing its origins very clearly in the form of a Timberland leather belt!

"Impressions will be enhanced if they poke their nose in the interior. New door cards and, vitally, a completely new dash panel do much to conceal the Z3 origins which are further disguised by some aftermarket seats"

Big ticket items on this car include the Borrani replica knock-on wire wheels which in themselves also require knock-on hub adaptors… the complete set (including tyres and spinners) will set you back £2500. At the moment their inclusion in the build means the rear arches need extending from standard in order to cover the tyres, but some cunning reworking of the set-up should mean future cars won't need the modification.

As with most panel kits, catch it at the right angle and it'll look fabulous, where the compromise of its underpinnings may be exposed from other angles. But with the Koupé there are certainly enough good angles to ensure that, for the most part, it's a conversion that won't leave you embarrassed at a petrol station or supermarket car park. Indeed, we'd go further. Most people won't see its humble origins at all and will simply conclude it's a rather lovely classic car.

Those impressions will be enhanced if they poke their nose in the interior. New door cards and, vitally, a completely new dash panel do much to conceal the Z3 origins which are further disguised by some aftermarket seats. A new roll cage ties into the windscreen mounting points for the original Z3 soft-top, outer roll hoop mounts behind the occupants and on to the hard-top mounting points. While adding to the competition look of this particular example, Richard also feels there are structural advantages when it comes to reducing any flex in the Z3 monocoque.

Believe it or not, this is a genuine numberplate.

GRP filler cap covers the one below.

Period bonnet pins.

Timberland leather belt adds a sense of cheeky fun to this conversion.

Wing mirror and sliding windows all part of the conversion.

TECH SPEC

ENGINE AS TESTED: 3.0-litre BMW straight 6, remap. 265bhp.
ENGINE OPTIONS: The full range of Z3 options in pre and post facelift form. Typically, 2.0, 2.8 and 3-litre.
CHASSIS: Unmodified Z3 structure. Additional bolt-in roll cage.
SUSPENSION: Standard Z3 with adjustable coil-over strut conversion.
STEERING: Standard Z3 power-assisted steering rack and column.
BRAKES: Original Z3. Servo assisted.
PRICE: £4995.
CONTACT: Nubodi Automotive.
T: 0118 983 3709.
E: nubodi-autos@gmail.com
W: www.nubodi.co.uk

As you'd expect, the driving position is largely as per the BMW. The windscreen located rear view mirror now offers a view of the headlining and needs moving to the dash top, but otherwise it's all fine.

Fire up the 3.0-litre straight six and Richard's choice of exhaust isn't one we'd follow! His chosen fabricator offers three levels of silencing and Richard opted for the noisiest… it's ludicrously antisocial, popping and banging on the over-run and otherwise just *loud*.

Decibels aside, other driving impressions include a firm but acceptable ride (it's lowered from standard) and performance potential that will be entertaining if fully exploited. Braking, steering and other dynamics are largely unmolested from the original Z3 and none the worse for that.

And if you think it's a shame to have a convertible base vehicle and then permanently put a roof over the cabin, it's always worth remembering that Nubodi can also offer the California (featured September 2015 issue 106), which is effectively a Koupé without the roof. Although never a reality in terms of authentic replica, it obviously offers the wind in the hair experience which is otherwise lost.

As previously mentioned, the extensive kit package starts at £4995 (£3995 for the Kalifornia) and a decent homebuilt example should be possible for £15,000. If you want someone else to do the spannering, the factory built examples start at £28,000.

As with all proper panel kits, the unmodified nature of the donor means that the Koupé is exempt from the IVA test with which conventional kit cars must comply.

To see examples of other colour schemes, both race and road focused, head to the Nubodi website where you'll also find considerably more detail on the kit contents and the other models on offer. ■

Knock-on alloys expensive, but worthwhile.

Lots of period detailing to be found on Koupé.

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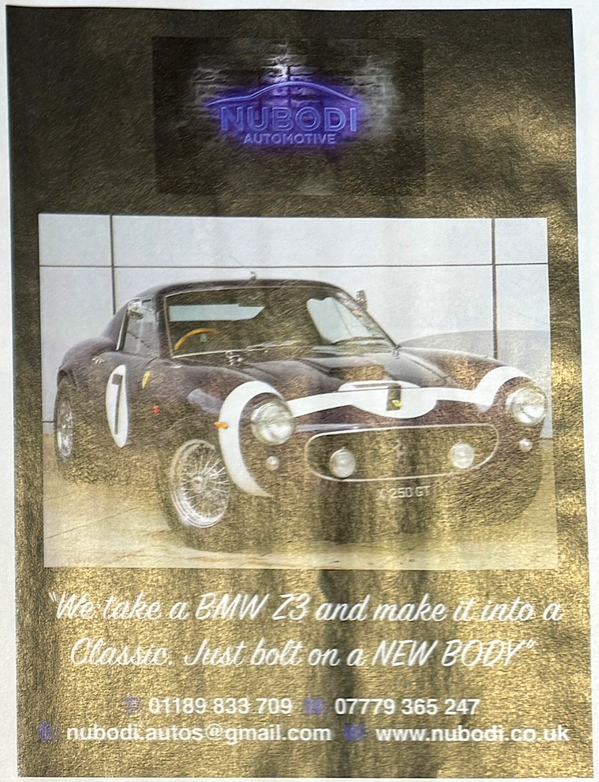

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