

Hitter and Gale assumed that some U.S. company would want to see the Cobra story repeated

after, and was shown at Earls Court in 1973 with transverse-mounted Ford Essex V-6 3-liter engine, with chain drive to a 5-speed Hewland-designed gearbox mounted beneath.

It then took AC six years to begin even a piddling production, capped when Ford took the Essex V-6 out of production. The Hewland gearbox, always a bit uncivilized, would not fit the Cologne V-6 (the same 2.8-liter engine Ford has used in the U.S.). AC's forward motion, near imperceptible in good times, stopped altogether.

In 1980, Gale was in Belgium buying Pantera parts when the distributor gave him a ride in an AC3000ME (mid-engine). Impressed, he was enthusiastic enough to talk Hitter into making the next trip to Europe with him a few months later. They ordered AC3000 chassis No. 61, sans drivetrain. Back in the U.S., "panic set in—the Boy Blunders were in over their heads," says Hitter. He also admits to having first seen the AC in the dark—"the basic shape was nice." Art Center training.

The chassis arrived during the winter of '80-'81. Panther-Westwinds, which had been doing final assembly work for AC, was broke, leaving AC in even more desperate straits.

Tentative negotiations were started with Chevrolet for the then-new X-car V-6 engine and gearbox. No interest. Hitter and

Gale admit to being more than a little naive. They assumed that some American company wanted to see the Cobra story repeated. The contact with AC was the easy part—"our proposal was the best one they had all year," says Hitter. "The *only* one," says Gale. "We got further with them in a few hours than we had *ever* been able to get with De Tomaso."

The chassis was taken to Kas Kastner's (Arkay) shop—Hitter thinks of Kas as a friend and mentor. Kas thinks of Hitter as a kid who used to hang out in the old days.

Eventually a used Citation V-6 and 4-speed was bought. Preliminary measure-

ments showed that the engine-bearing subframe would have to be widened. The car—ahem—rested at Arkay for another year. Ford offered to sell Escort 1.6-liter engines. Not enough power. Chrysler, at the time, was interested only in survival.

Finally, Buick showed enough interest to send an early 3.0-liter (90°) V-6. Suddenly there was interest. Kastner struggled through the adaptation of the Buick to the Citation gearbox. Buick shrugged when asked about that installation. The chassis was packed off to Dan DuPont's shop to have the subframe widened and the engine/gearbox installed. Back to Arkay to have all the linkages made workable. There was talk of showing the car under Buick colors. A crash body redesign program ensued. Hitter had finally seen the car in the daylight.

The restyling was handled by Bob Marianich with assist from Hitter. Marianich learned fine arts and design in school, but has actually been shaping body metal since he was 14, an interesting guy. He worked on the Borg-Warner Centaur project, with Budd, building Corvette body pieces, was instrumental in setting up Caltty Design—Toyota's American design arm. Oh, yeah—the P-car. Marianich worked on feasibility studies. He dislikes the Detroit method of "packaging" projects but says it's getting more exciting.



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