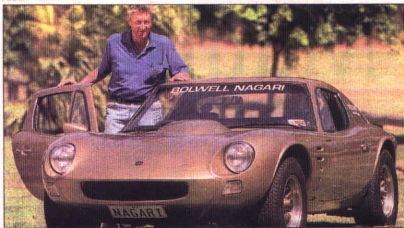


Ross Lowe's superbly restored Bolwell Nagari was the 100th built by the Australian car company.



Bolwell style lives on

CAMPBELL Bolwell was one of Australia's best known, and most successful, car builders. Yet few people are aware that Bolwell is an Australian car. In the 1970s, the name Bolwell was synonymous with high-speed street coupes and rubber-burning racers.

Killed off by continual changes to vehicle design rules, Bolwell the manufacturer became only a memory. But in the hands of collectors, the name lives on.

Despite its 1970s production, the sleek lines of the Bolwell Nagari are not out of character on 1990s streets.

The contours of its fiberglass body flare over the low bonnet, sweep up in an unusually exaggerated waist that flows over the bulging rear fenders and then exits over a long, low tail.

There are styling hints of European classics all over this car and even a touch of the Datsun 240/260Z series.

But on the road it is unmistakably Bolwell, from the aggressive squat profile to the burbling sound of a big capacity Ford V8.

The choice of engine made the Nagari a firm favourite on the track and street. Weighing only 927kg, the production Bolwell (others were kit cars) came standard with a 302 cubic inch (five-litre) 240hp Ford V8. That was good for 0-160km/h in a mere 17.9sec.

Get serious, like Perth panel and paint specialist Ross Lowe did, and fit a 351 cubic inch (5.7-litre) V8 for 0-160km/h in a blistering 14.8sec.

So powerful is Ross's superb gold-coloured Nagari — Number 100 — that he's fitted a smaller, two-barrel carburettor to tame the horses. He drove it to the eastern States, sitting on the legal limit and with the engine barely idling, and managed 24mpg and better.

Ten years ago an accident ripped the front end off this Bolwell, exposing its central backbone chassis, the Lotus-bred front wishbone suspension and the mounts where the V8 engine used to sit.

That's when Ross bought the car. He was impressed with the structural strength of the fiberglass body and the backbone chassis, again a concept borrowed from Lotus where founder Campbell Bolwell's brother, Graeme, once worked under Lotus's Colin Chapman.

On the road the Nagari is a potent piece of machinery. It sits low on the road, with its two occupants separated by a big central chassis spine.

The burble from the V8 — right between the occupants' legs — is ever-present.

The Mk7, the Nagari's forerunner, and the Nagari also suffer from hot cabins but who cares? It handles like it's on rails and has a comfortable ride despite the firm suspension.

Ross Lowe estimates his gold Nagari is worth about \$30,000, though the Mk7 kit car can be picked up for about \$15,000 in good condition.

FACT FILE

After building 650 cars, Campbell Bolwell's company has gone from strength to strength since he stopped building the Nagari in 1974.

The fiberglass acumen of Bolwell has expanded its horizons since its car business closed.

It has offices in Miami and Vietnam; makes the Aeroclass aerodynamic kits for commercial vehicles; makes body parts for truck makers International, Iveco and Kenworth; builds computer flight simulators and sells them internationally under its Futuristic label; and is trading with China.

Campbell is trying to find a convertible Nagari to buy but admits the price of these rare roadsters is high.

"I've still got the moulds," he said, "I might have to build myself one."