

# ON THE RUN

Take a tuned, 230bhp, Rover V8, put it in a stiff steel chassis, add four large Goodrich Comp TAs and you get the UVA Fugitive III. Once **Laurie Caddell** got it up to 140mph he was convinced...

The UVA Fugitive III looks like nothing else on the road: it is ultra low, very wide, attractive in an eccentric sort of way and purposeful. That last term fits the car perfectly for the first thing you notice is the huge chassis-cum-roll cage. Most kit/component cars are designed for looks: only an engineer would normally find an exposed chassis attractive. The Fugitive does have a certain charm, however, and judging by the smiles we got as we motored along knee high to three-year-olds, many others thought so, too.

UVA are best known for their sand-rails, those buggy-like looking devices which sport huge tractor-like rear wheels, an excess of dampers at the rear and clackety-clack Beetle engines tacked on and tuned to the tenth degree. The Fugitive III uses the same basic chassis as those mud pluggers, it being of 1x1in square-section 14 gauge steel tube MIG welded together. With its high sides and integral upper frame tubes acting as the roll cage, the Fugitive chassis comes nearer than most to being a true space-frame and one which will never suffer from chassis flex.

Suspension all round is Volkswagen based, Beetle at the front and Variant based at the rear, while steering is by rack and pinion with a Triumph Dolomite column. The Fugitive can be as big or as small a kit as you want, with the basic chassis costing £635 or £835 if you want it ready welded. The III kit, however, comes in three stages. The first package consists of chassis, five-piece glassfibre body, aluminium floor, half-screen, adjustable spring plates and suspension bushes, copper brake pipes and hoses plus a few extras for £1904.75 + VAT. Stage Two consists of interior trim, seat belts, a dashboard with instruments, seats, seat belts, adjustable dampers, mid-engine adaptor and gearbox-adaptor kit plus uprated suspension parts for £1222.30 + VAT. Finally, stage three consists of an aluminium fuel tank, control cables, lights, clutch and brake assemblies for £565.75 + VAT. All that is then required is the engine (either Rover V8 or single-cam Ford 2-litre engine is recommended), transmission (Volkswagen), donor suspension parts, wheels and tyres, and radiators.

The biggest difference between the II and III Fugitives is that the latter features a mid-mounted engine which helps the car's handling no end. In the case of the car we drove, this was the venerable Rover V8, fully balanced, with polished and ported heads, a Holley four-barrel carburettor, beefier camshaft and a less restrictive exhaust system. It all added up to some 230bhp for



a car with an all-up weight of 11.5cwt, which works out at some 400bhp per ton....

The Fugitive III is being continually developed and the example seen in the pictures has already been modified. The half-screen which necessitates goggles or close fitting sun-glasses, at least, has been substituted by a full-height item, while there will be a Formula Ford-style rear engine cover to protect the motor from the vagaries

... the car is best kept as bare as possible ... dress the driver ... to cope with the elements

of the weather. The front is also due for a revamp, with the angular nose making way for a full-width item which will sweep up into front-wheel covers to replace the cycle-type wings. There will also be minor changes to the rear flanks to make them blend in better with the car's rear track which at the moment looks too narrow.

Standing just 41in high (and a lot of that made up by the roll cage) and with wide sills, the Fugitive isn't the easiest car to get into. However, the plan of attack is to throw caution to the wind, grab hold of the top of the frame and slip in legs first, twisting your

body as you go through. If all goes well, you will be upright and facing the front.

Indeed, so tight is the cockpit that everything is in very close proximity and we feel that, with the full screen in place, the glass will be quite close to your head, too. Foot space is also at a premium and there isn't really any spare room to place your left foot when the clutch isn't being worked. Looking down the footwell on the demo car to see if there was anywhere gave an answer in the negative and a good view of the road where a bulkhead ought to have been! Again, these points will be rectified on production cars.

There will be a hood option available for the III, but our feeling is that the car is best kept as bare as possible and to dress the driver rather than car to cope with the elements. Certainly your hard-earned cash ought not to be spent on suede seats and shag-pile carpet....

We were lucky on the day that we went to play with the Fugitive as the weather stayed dry. Even so, crossing a dampish field at no more than 1.3mph had the front wheels slurping up piles of mud and flinging them at the flanks of the car.

Once inside and strapped up tight, the engine was summoned into life. It rumbled contentedly at tickover and shook the whole car as the throttle was blipped. As the full power of the mighty engine behind made its



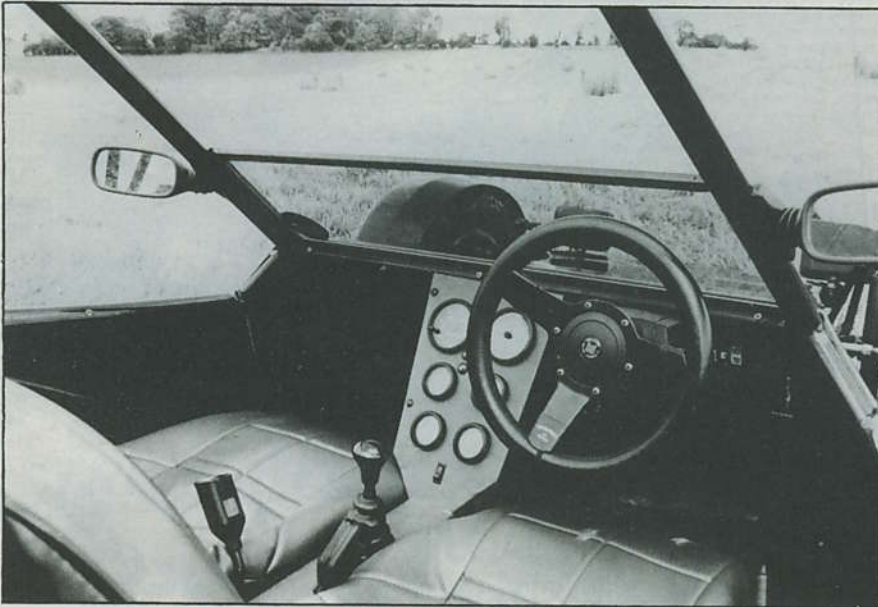
presence felt, so one's vulnerability became apparent. Your feet go some way forward in the chassis and there isn't a great deal of chassis to protect you in the event of a front-end prang.

Forget that, though, as such cars are for fun and the Fugitive is certainly a car to enjoy. The Volkswagen gearchange feels a little stiff, but it is certainly better than on some production cars we have tested and, apart from the tiny off-road-style throttle pedal, the controls work well. Another niggly criticism is the siting of the twin rear-view mirrors high up the front tubes, but these would be simple to locate in a better position when you are building the kit.

The Fugitive's steering is very direct and, with gumball BF Goodrich Comp TAs of 215 section at the front and 235 section at the rear, the whole plot felt very secure. There is plenty of punch in the engine to get those grippy rear wheels spinning at any opportunity, however, with a resultant slingshot up the street as they finally bite. A quick demonstration by UVA boss Alan Arnold left the world's most timid passenger in no doubt as to the car's potential and, even if the idea of all that power being



The heart of the matter (*above*); the Rover V8 with Holley four-barrel produces 230bhp. The interior (*below*) is not the last word in comfort



suspended on archaic VW-based running gear didn't inspire a great deal of confidence at first, the ride soon laid any doubts to rest.

For this tester, the sound and feel of a tuned V8 has always been off-putting, usually because one associates such motors with large wayward-handling American cars, but a short spurt of power in the Fugitive only demonstrated its fine manners. Within a few short miles of familiarisation the car could be pushed hard, red-lining in the lower gears and making a hefty impact on the long-striding fourth ratio.

Short of using excessive throttle in tight corners, the tail remained in line and the front end turned into those bends with precision. Once you are fully atuned to the Fugitive, the handling can be explored further and the car stayed neutral most of the way with understeer then steadily building up. Pressed harder the tail would step out of line, quite ferociously, too, calling for very quick reactions. Thankfully, the natural tendency of easing off the throttle helped rather than hindered the effect.

The brakes on the III worked well, with perhaps the rears locking up a little too early, although the front-to-rear bias can be easily adjusted. We didn't get to drive the car in the wet, but feel that very careful brake balancing is needed to prevent either premature front lock up and loss of most retardation or premature rear-end lock up and a spin. Overall, however, the UVA is a mightily impressive car with good manners and an infinite fun quota. Alan Arnold says that a reasonable Fugitive can be put on the road for £3500 and a couple of hundred hours of graft, while one similar to the demonstrator could be had for a few thousand pounds more which, when one considers that we managed the best part of 140mph in the car without much of a run up, makes for an impressive mph per £ value. It would take a lot of time and effort to build a Fugitive to rival the pace and comfort of a Ferrari Boxer, but that is not the point. Look at it as a Caterham 7-type device with the accent on speed and handling rather than luxury and style, and the UVA can be as fast as you dare build it. It takes a lot to put one on the road, but then it delivers a lot when it gets there. ■



