

The Specialty-Car Authority

KIT CAR BUILDER

ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL



Building a Short-Wheelbase Lambo

We Pick the TOP 19 Specialty Cars of the Last 4 Years

• COBRAS • SPEEDSTERS • EXOTICS •
• HOT RODS • TRUCKS • CLASSICS •



Porsche Supercar on a Porsche Donor Car



An Inside Look at Coast High's Small-Block 427

A Tale of 2 (Awesome!) Snakes and the Team That Built Them

- How to Install Posi in an 8.8" Rear
- How to Make Simple Fiberglass Molds
- Cobra Fun at the Reptile Roundup
- Very Hot Turbo GT Roadster



April 2006

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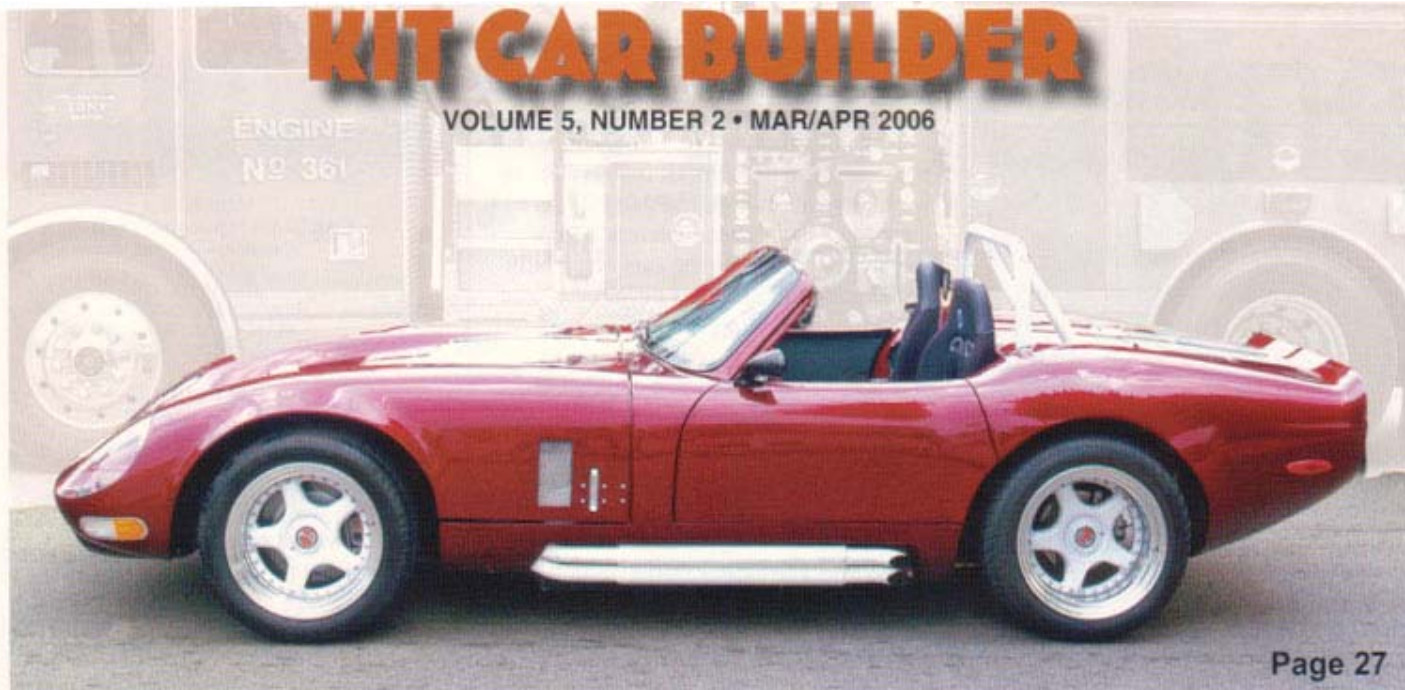
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4 years of colorful specialty-car coverage



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COVER SHOT: After spotting the awesome FFR Coupe at SEMA, we sent Joe Greeves to Virginia to take a closer look at 2 brother's cars. Joe also shot the Porsche GT on the run in Florida. Jim Youngs snapped Jeff Murray's Lambo in Salt Lake. And Steve Temple drove around the corner to capture the 427 in California.



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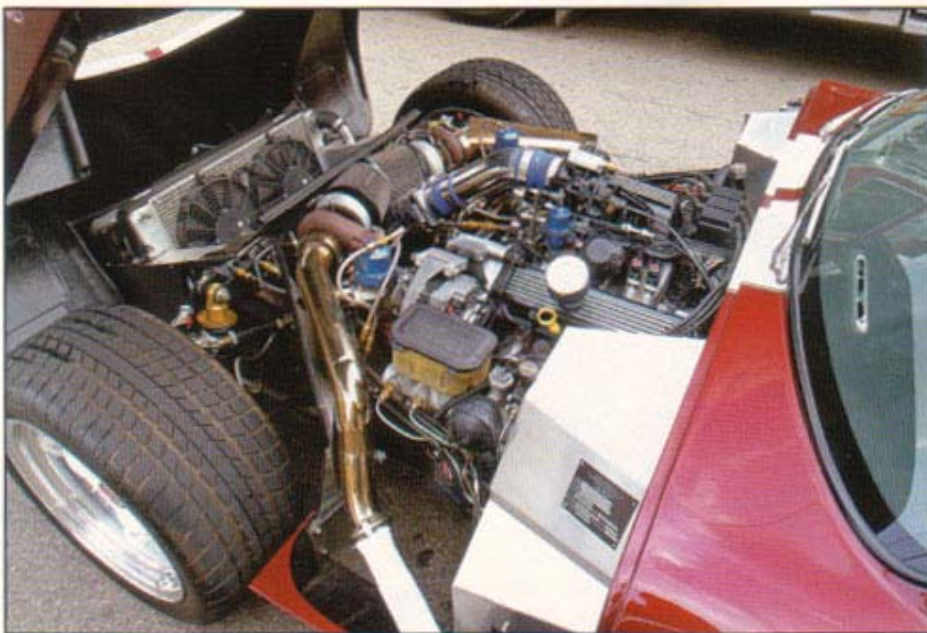
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Kit car oddities

6-Alarm Blaze



*John Spina
strikes again with
a Grand National-
powered FFR
Spyder GT*



story & photos by Harold Pace

Back in the '90s many a V-8 Cobra kit driver was surprised by John Spina's white Everett-Morrison 427SC replica with its turbocharged Buick Grand National V-6 engine. It ran the quarter in the mid-11-second range and with a single tail pipe it sounded like no other snake around. Spina is still a hard-core GN fan and runs a business called Casper's Electronics that sells chips and parts for GNs and other cars. But for his latest project, Spina wanted something a little different on the outside as well.

"I went to the SEMA show with cash in hand to order a new Superformance Brock Coupe, but they wouldn't sell me one if I was going to put a Buick engine in it," laughs Spina. He then walked over to the FFR exhibit and saw their prototype for the Spyder GT. FFR happily sold him the first production car, chassis number 001! "I like having a roadster better anyway," adds Spina.

Starting with the Factory Five Racing (FFR) Spyder GT kit, Spina again worked his V-6 magic. The Spyder GT is a "phantom" kit (not an exact replica of any car from the past) that asks what a Cobra Daytona roadster would have looked like, if one had been built. The Spyder GT combines Daytona Coupe and Ferrari 250 GTO styling elements into a distinctive street cruiser. The chassis assembly and bodywork were farmed out to Classics by Elite in Ohio, then owned by Ed Combs (creator of the "Double Venom" Viper-powered Cobra replicas and father of the Spring Fling events).

Spina took the concept one step further by customizing the kit with some unique details.

The taillights are borrowed from a BMW Z-4, an idea suggested by Spina's son Joe. Joe not only came up with the idea, he bought the taillight assemblies and donated them to the effort (Classics by Elite came up with the idea of mounting them upside down). VW New Beetle front marker lights and Corvette C5 rear markers are integrated into the styling, along with a GM van 3rd brake light. HID headlights and fog lamps light up the dark. The glistening finish is 2003 Corvette Anniversary Red, a candy apple 3-step paint. The stripes are Cadillac Escalade Diamond Pearl. The trunk, doors and tilt front end are all operated remotely by pushbuttons on the key fob.

Under the tilt-up hood lives a twin-turbocharged Buick 3.8-liter Grand

National powerhouse with two small Schwitzer ball-bearing turbos breathing through an oversized custom intercooler fabricated by Jim Sheren. "I found the turbos surplus—I think they were for a John Deere application," explains Spina. He used a single turbo on his E-M Roadster and estimates the power output is about the same but the twin-turbos spin up faster and work better cosmetically as it allows twin functional side pipes.

The 442-hp (estimated) mill was built by Hartline Performance in Florida. It uses a stock GN block and crank, but with steel main bearing caps and Carillo rods. Forged J&E 7.5:1 pistons pump the mixture from ported and polished cast-iron GN heads. A mild street performance cam and oversized valves are fitted with stock GN rockers and valve train. Spina says he uses 16 pounds of boost on the street (up 1.3 pounds from stock GN) and 20 to 24 pounds on the track. "You gain about 16 horsepower for each pound of boost," he says.

Spina, an electrical engineer by trade, started with a stock ECM but switched to a TCI F.A.S.T. ECM that is laptop programmable. It uses a wideband O₂ sensor for precise tuning of the injection system. This trick mill drives through a 200-4R GM auto built by Jimmy's Performance Transmissions in Mundelein, Illinois. The heavy-duty tranny is controlled by a Moon Eyes digital, push-button shifter that needs no knob or handle. Spina says automatics are better for turbo motors since they keep the engine in total boost through the gears without the need to re-spool at each shift.

The chassis follows FFR practice with a 2003 Thunderbird independent rear suspension setup (3.55:1 final drive) and Ford 10.5" rear disc brakes. Spina had some extra tubing added under the hood and in the windshield cowl. Up front Baer 13" discs do the stopping, aided by a GM Powermaster electric power brake booster borrowed from a Buick GN. "The GN couldn't use a normal vacuum-operated brake booster since the intake manifold holds pressure, not vacuum," explains Spina, "so they developed an electrical booster that works great on turbo cars."

The PS Engineering 3-piece aluminum wheels initially mounted Sumitomo 285-40ZR17 rubber in front, and 315-35ZR17 in back. Spina quickly discovered the Sumi rubber lacked the grip for serious drag-race traction and he has since switched to Kuhmo 335-35s in back. A Flaming River power steering rack connects to a leather-wrapped steering wheel flanked by AutoMeter Pro Comp gauges.



The racing-style bucket seats are covered in black fabric.

The dashboard is an electrical engineer's dream. No toggle switches, in fact, nothing identifiable as a switch at all. A row of illuminated LED switches control all vehicle operations. When they are turned off they glow at half of their normal brightness, but when touched, they glow brighter so the driver can tell which ones are on. Since the LED switches lack the capacity to operate the electrical equipment themselves, they are wired to an armada of relays hidden in the console. Many parts from Casper's inventory were used in the custom wiring harness.

His Spyder GT ended up heavier than Spina thought it would. At 2,920 pounds (wet) it is no featherweight. Spina lays the blame on the IRS, stainless steel turbo plumbing and extra bracing in the chassis. Also, the motors and mechanisms for the remote doors, hood, etc add to the weight. Still, Spina loves the way his steed drives,

crediting the T-Bird rear end with a comfortable ride even over bumpy surfaces. His only complaint concerns heat buildup in the footboxes. Spina has been working on this by adding vents to the inner fender panel and a small crank-driven fan to move air out of the engine compartment.

The first time at the strip the new car ripped off a 11.99 second e.t. at 117 mph using only 18 pounds of boost before traction problems put a stop to testing. Once properly dialed in Spina is aiming for low elevens and maybe even high tens. Even with this much muscle he gets around 25 mpg on the highway and 18 in town (when he can keep his foot out of it). Try that with an FE!

KCB

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