



SNAKE'S ALIVE!

> WE CHECK THE PROGRESS OF THE WILD AC COBRA REPLICA THAT SIDCHROME AND PYTHON VEHICLES AUSTRALIA ARE COOKING UP

THERE is a lot of history that comes with building a Cobra. The brawny AC Cobra we know today had its origins in an elegant British sports car known as the AC Ace. AC began producing cars as Autocars & Accessories in England way back in 1904. While the company built a reputation for sporting cars and had significant success in motorsport during the 1920s, it produced everything from golf buggies to trains. The pretty Ace entered the picture in 1953, with an aluminium body and powered by an

overhead-cam six-cylinder that was originally designed by company founder John Weller way back in 1919! This was replaced by the 135hp Bristol six-pot, before the car was significantly modified to accommodate the much-hotter Ford Zephyr six in 1961. Only 37 of the Zephyr-powered cars were produced, but they set the stage for Texan race driver Carroll Shelby to enter the picture.

Shelby needed a car to take on the Chev Corvette, and approached AC to see if they'd be up for fitting the new Ford Windsor V8 into

the Ace. The mods needed to fit the Zephyr six into the Ace meant that the 260ci Windsor was no big stretch, so in 1962, AC started exporting cars – now dubbed Cobras – to the US, painted and trimmed, but without engine or gearbox. The drivelines were fitted in Shelby's LA workshop, with a small number of cars also built by Ed Hugus in Pennsylvania. The Cobra soon evolved into the infamous 427, which featured the extra-macho styling that has been the basis of thousands of copies ever since, including those built by Python Vehicles Australia.

STEP 01

Obligatory grinding shot! Python has the basic chassis made off-site to their specs, based around 3in main tubes. From there, Joe gets busy getting the chassis ready to accept the suspension and driveline



STEP 02

The fibreglass body is also manufactured off-site, by Fran at Raceglass. Raceglass does everything from funny car bodies to pieces for historic circuit racing cars and parts for F-trucks. To make the complete body shell takes about a week and a half from start to finish. How cool is their delivery vehicle?



STEP 03

To set the Sidchrome spanners into each guard, Fran first made up some plastic replicas, inserted them into the mould and 'glassed around them. These were then replaced with the real spanners and urethane was added to give them their own little glass case



STEP 04

The body is made up of 17 separate pieces that will be bonded together prior to paint. Once the body is bonded to the chassis it would have to be cut off to remove it, which is why the boys are so fastidious during the build process



Python is one of the coolest workshops in town. Besides Cobras, the crew always have some cool stuff on the boil – hot rods, muscle cars, customs, classics and some serious bikes. George makes a pretty mean espresso, too!

STEP 05



STEP 06

Originally, Python Cobras ran Jaguar rear ends, but these days Joe fits a Ford 8.8in diff and bespoke IRS set-up, with outboard 2000-era Mustang Cobra stoppers. Joe fabricated the beefy cradle that supports the diff



STEP 07

The FIA or Halibrand-style knock-off rims are one of the stylistic highlights of the car. The rims are located to the hub with five pins, then the central spinner is tightened and knocked on. The theory is that the spinner tightens as the car rolls forward. Joe swears they haven't lost a rim yet!



STEP 12

The Coyote and the Tremec meet their new home for the first time. The 5.0-litre is a wide motor, so the boys will have to change a few things up from their normal practice, most notably with the steering



STEP 13

At this stage, the Sidchrome Cobra looks like the world's toughest billy cart, but there is a lot of work ahead for Joe. Space was tight for the alternator, so Joe's solution was to reverse it and make up brackets to mount in front of the driver's-side cylinder head



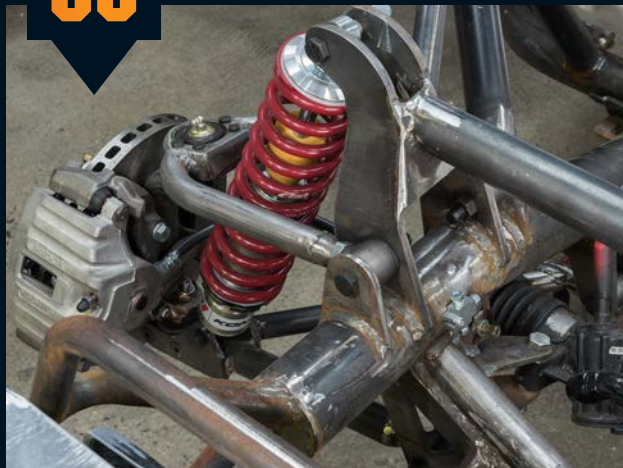
STEP 08

The Mustang driveshafts are way too wide for the relatively narrow Python Cobra, so Joe uses the CV joints and has shorter shafts made up to suit. The diff and rear end set-up in the Sidchrome car is identical to the set-up that George runs in his massively overpowered race car – so it ain't going to break!



STEP 09

The front control arms are supplied with the chassis for each car. Springs and shocks of choice are Koni, brakes are essentially HZ Holden with 11in vented rotors. Steering rack is an unassisted GM unit



STEP 10

The Coyote is a essentially a replacement item for new Cobras, so came without an intake manifold, accessory drives or ECU



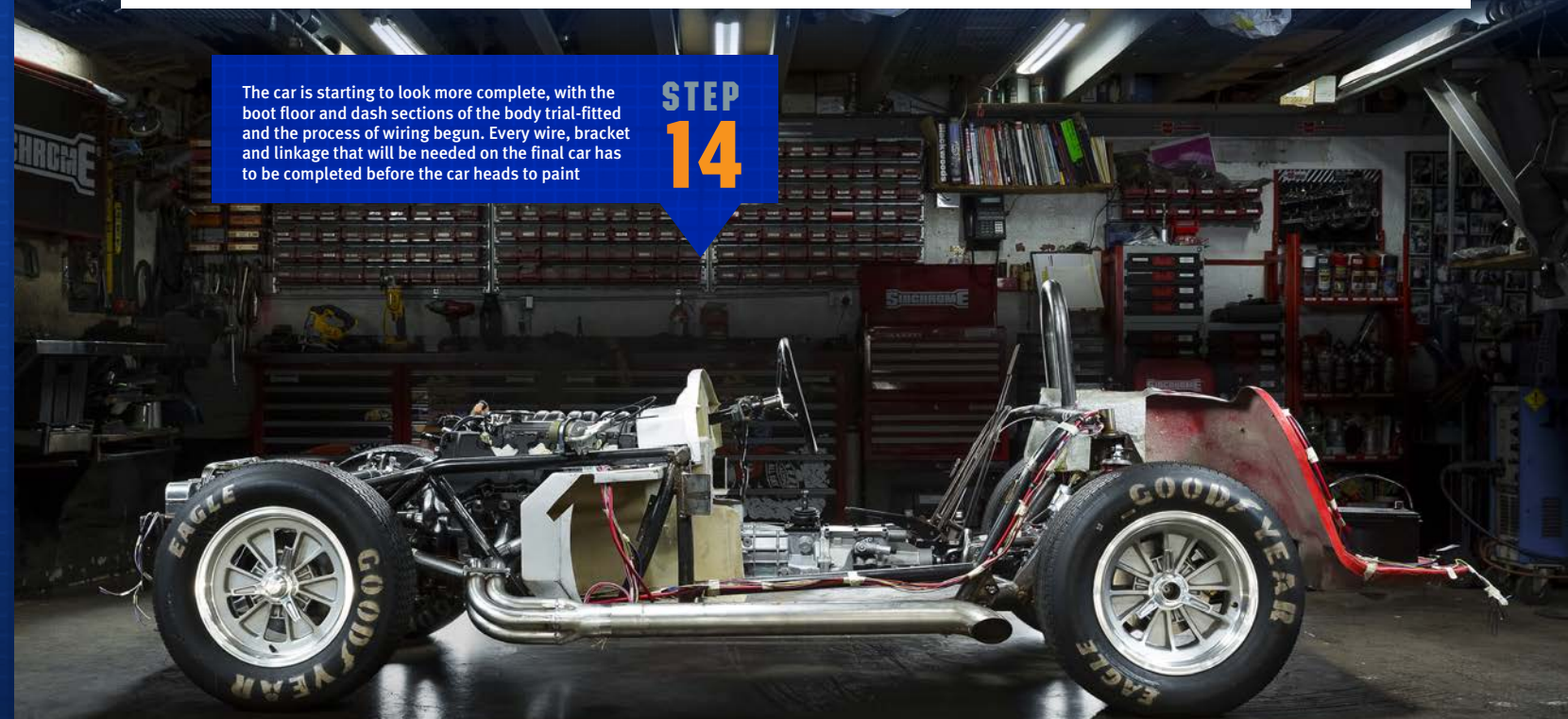
STEP 11

To mate the tough Tremec five-speed to the Coyote mill, Python used a bellhousing from Mal Wood Automotive, as well as one of Mal's shifter relocation kits to move the shifter position forward. The size of the 'box meant that Joe had to relocate the handbrake lever from its normal spot



The car is starting to look more complete, with the boot floor and dash sections of the body trial-fitted and the process of wiring begun. Every wire, bracket and linkage that will be needed on the final car has to be completed before the car heads to paint

STEP 14



STEP 15

The car is nearly ready to be blown apart into a million pieces. Every component will then be bagged, tagged, photographed and noted down in a list, then sent off for powdercoating, zinc- or chrome-plating, depending on the component



STEP 16

Finally we have our intake manifold, so Joe can begin fabricating the cold-air intake, or as he calls it, 'the elephant's trunk'. The radiator is one of Aussie Desert Cooler's finest, naturally! The worm-drive wiper motor sits on top of the passenger footbox, out of harm's way

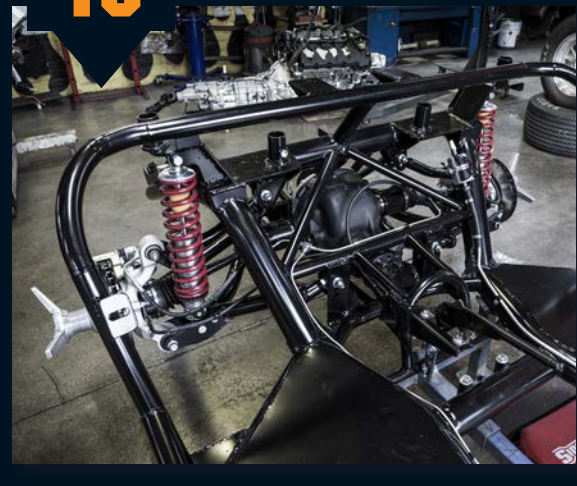
STEP 17

There is about four days' work in creating the complete exhaust system, including the baffles and mufflers hidden in the sidepipes. How gorgeous are those extractors? Joe reckons the car is going to sound great on the downshift through a tunnel!



STEP 19

How good does it look with everything coated and plated? Anything fabbed from steel, such as linkages and brackets, are zinc-plated for a neat appearance, as are all the bolts and retainer clips



STEP 18

The Coyote engine goes back in for the last time. Once the car is up and running, it will have to go for emissions testing to meet 2016 standards



STEP 20

Once everything arrived back at Python from the platers, it took Joe about a week to assemble the car again to a rolling stage, with everything plumbed up and ready to go. It was beautiful to watch!

WIN!

WANNA get your hands on this awesome Cobra? We don't blame you! Happily, one lucky Sidchrome customer is going to roar away in this thing early next year. For all the info you need to enter, visit www.winwithsidchrome.com.au.

steering set-up, which in turn meant tweaks to other components. It's a tight fit, but luckily Sidchrome opted to keep the Cobra on the pure sports car end of the scale and not fit too many luxuries. That means no power steering, no air conditioning and definitely no cup holders.

Yep, Project Cobra will be a serious driver's car, although they have opted to fit a hidden Clarion stereo, with up to six speakers tucked away wherever they can find space. The head unit will live in the boot, so the system will be controlled by a marine touch pad that will blend in nicely with the chrome-bezel gauges.

And while there are 21st-century horses under the bonnet, the styling is pure 60s, with Halibrand-style knock-off rims, white-letter Goodyear rubber,

chrome roll bar, jacking point and those sexy sidepipes. In short, a race car for the street.

With over 100 cars built, the Python crew have construction down to a fine art. George has the bare chassis prepared by an engineering firm, while the fibreglass body – made of 17 separate pieces – is made by Fran Cronie at Raceglass. From these beginnings, George orders everything else needed to build a complete, road-registered car and mechanic Joe Imperatori begins trial-fitting the suspension, brakes, steering and driveline components, before test-fitting the body multiple times to ensure everything fits and is going to be easily serviceable. This extends to the point of the car being completely plumbed and wired, and in some cases even started and taken

for – ahem – test drives, before the whole car is blown apart and every single piece is bagged and tagged. Joe takes hundreds of photos and draws multiple diagrams of how things fit together. This means that when the parts are sent off in various directions for different types of coatings, they all come back!

The chassis itself is powdercoated and when everything is safely back at the workshop, Joe rebuilds the car from scratch once more. It is a super-impressive thing to see, with the whole car basically rebuilt in a week. What most street machiners wouldn't give to be able to build a car with every single part easily to hand and clean as a whistle! As we speak, the Cobra has gone off to the students at Chisholm TAFE for paint,

and then it will head back to our old mates from Australian VW Performance Centre for trimming. Once that is done, we'll fire this baby up!

Now, I'm not saying it will be a bigger moment than when that very first AC Cobra was fired up inside Dean Moon's Santa Fe workshop in 1962, but I reckon everyone involved with this project will have a little insight into what old Carroll must have felt way back when he first saw his crazy idea of marrying an English sports car with cutting-edge Ford power roar into life. To see it happen, keep an eye on www.streetmachine.com.au. ■

THE Sidchrome/Python Cobra is being put together using Sidchrome tools, naturally!