

Low Flyer

Words by Craig Watson.
Photos by various.



The Unipower GT is one of the least-known, and most desirable, Mini variants. Inset: Warwick Agustin rescued his from a paddock.

For many people in the know, Britain's Unipower GT was the ultimate Mini-based kit-car. For most others, it remains a complete mystery.

The Unipower GT is one of the great enigmas in the world of Minis. Talk to a lot of Mini enthusiasts about some of the more obscure variants, and the Unipower usually comes up in the conversation. Yet, few people can tell you much about them.

According to Unipower enthusiast, and owner of two of the cars, Mark Butler; "The Unipower's story really goes back to some time in early 1963, when racing enthusiast Ernie Unger had a chance encounter at a Goodwood Race meeting with an old acquaintance Val Dare-Bryan, and they began making plans to build a small GT car. Unger had already sketched a rough layout of the car on the back of an envelope."

After most of the development work was done at Roy Pierpoint's workshop, near Weybridge, Surrey, two bedstead chassis were produced. One was fitted with an 850 Mini Van engine and gearbox, and thrashed

around Brans Hatch (racing circuit) to within an inch of its life."

According to *British Car* magazine in August 1995, the prototype was completed by 1964 "with an aluminium body design by an unknown stylist who worked for Ford" (possibly Roy Lunn, but not confirmed - Ed)

Mark Butler continues; "In 1964 the second chassis was moved to Robert Peel & Co Coach Builders' workshop, in Kingston Upon Thames, where a wire frame was placed over the rolling chassis, to plot the lines and shape of the aluminium-body prototype."

"The prototype was then despatched to Specialised Mouldings, of Cristal Palace, for a glass-fibre body to be moulded."

Financial backing soon came from an unlikely source, in the form of power-boat racer Tim Powell. Powell ran a company located in Perivale, on the outskirts of London, called Universal Power Drives, which specialised in the manufacture of 4WD logging trucks and other forestry equipment.

Unger and Dare-Bryan had originally meant their car to be called the Hustler GT, but when it made its first public appearance, at the 1966 London Racing Car Show, it was called the Unipower GT.

The show car utilised a fibreglass body, moulded from the original aluminium prototype, bonded to a steel box-section spaceframe chassis. The cars were priced at £950 for a complete car with 998cc engine, and £1,150 with 1275cc.

At the time of the car's release the future looked very positive. The chassis were being built by Arch Motors in Northamptonshire, while the fibreglass bodies were being made by Specialised Mouldings, one of the few racecar body moulders of the day.

Mechanicals were basically Mini, with the engine/transmission assembly being mid-mounted directly in the chassis, behind the cockpit.

However, production quality problems meant there was a delay of around twelve months, and it was not until early-1967 that the first cars were supplied to customers. By this time, quite a number of people who had placed orders at the Racing Car Show had given up waiting and cancelled their orders.

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The bizarre Quasar-Unipower.