



# INTRODUCTION

Not many people can say that their life was changed by a visit to their local newsagents. Mine was!

One day in late 1996 I was flicking through the car magazines when a picture caught my eye. It was of a little green and yellow two-seater sports car of the type that I really wanted. I bought the magazine and headed home to read the article. It told of a new book claiming that

this handsome car could be built for as little as £250. The book, of course, was *Build Your Own Sports*

*Car* by Ron Champion. I was amazed that such a car could be built for so little money, but that wasn't the main attraction for me. Instead, I saw it as the ultimate car-building challenge – a car from the ground up.

Cars have always been my passion. I learnt to drive on a farm at the age of ten, on a tractor, scattering livestock in all directions! My first car was a Hillman Imp, which I bought for the grand sum of £20 (I was robbed). It was sky blue and always overheating, as they all did!

Since then I've had a vast selection of mostly impractical cars and motorcycles. Ones that spring to mind are the Chevrolet Camaro I purchased when I was 18, and sold two weeks later because I'd spent almost £500 on fuel; a Ford Popular hot-rod that parted



◀ A familiar shape, but under the skin lies a cutting-edge design. (John Colley)

▼ The prototype Haynes Roadster – a 'special' for the 21st century. (John Colley)



company with its V8 engine on the M1 motorway; and the Mazda MX-5 two-seater that I purchased just before my first daughter was born.

I've also had a succession of kit cars that either remained in bits, or regularly broke down on the highways and byways around my home. The local RAC man and I were on first-name terms!

My first restoration was a very rusty, yellow, Dolomite Sprint, which probably wasn't the best choice as a 'starter classic'. I had to take the engine out to change the starter motor! Many other restorations followed and I decided that some sort of proper training would be a good idea, so I enrolled on a two-year full time restoration course at the Leeds College of Technology. The course included panel beating (in the traditional sense, i.e. actually making and repairing panels) as well as mechanics, electrics, machining, paintwork, upholstery and much more. I gained a City and Guilds diploma qualification in Vehicle Restoration. It was among the best things I've ever done. I learned skills and know-how that would have taken a lifetime to acquire working alone in my garage, and I also gained some lifelong friends.

In late 1996 the restoration course was in the future, and I was reading with increasing excitement about the book. Being that time of year, I made it plain to everyone that the book would be a very welcome Christmas present – and my better half obliged.

Over the holiday I read the book three times, from cover to cover. The first thing to sort out was whether I could do it, as I didn't want it to end up as another unfinished project. I reviewed my strengths and weaknesses.

I was able to weld and I had a decent welding set, after the restoration work, but I needed to make sure my welding was of a sufficiently high standard. The mechanical work didn't look too taxing to me. I'd changed engines and gearboxes a few times on my various wrecks, so I felt reasonably confident about that. Other things – like the glass reinforced plastic (GRP) work, upholstery, painting and the electrics – were more of a worry, but I banked on getting help from my friends and relatives. As it turned out this was readily given. If you ask around, you're sure to find someone who can help. More of that later.