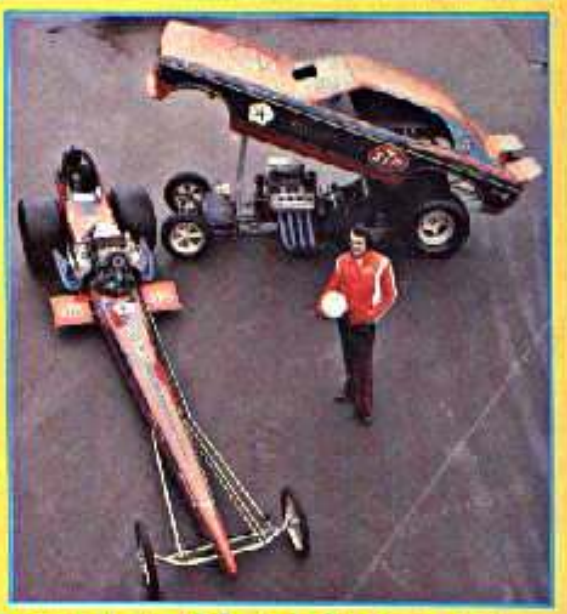
JUNE 74 20p

CUSTOM CAR



MR ED~BRITAIN'S BEST HOT ROD?

STP SPONSOR 2~CAR PRIDDLE DRAG TEAM

VIVAS~THE GENERAL'S BEEFY BABIES

BIKERS, IT'S HOT CHOPS TIME AGAIN!

ELI BUNGIT~STOCK CAR DRIVER EXTRAORDINARY

ISO LELE

A Bargain It Ain't

Listen. Once a year when we test a car that costs a big heap of coin and doesn't really look like it fits in with our editorial policy, I get this feeling you're all out there looking at us accusingly, like we're about to betray you and go all smooth and expensive. No. way, friends. The Iso? Well, it's only a sort of Mustang Mach One Coupe.

Right, that's got rid of the purists. Okay, truly faithful, let me lay a situation on you. Just suppose for a moment you're Editor of trendy Custom Car Magazine. You've driven plenty of very fast cars and plenty of very expensive ones, though only a couple over the ten grand mark. You don't rate yourself as the world's best driver by a long way, though you've only ever had one proper accident and reckon you're a pretty fair judge of what makes a good automobile and what doesn't. You've done a little competition work, and know how to handle a car at high speeds. Okay. One day, just because it's available, you talk someone into lending you one of the world's most expensive sports coupes for a road test in your magazine. In fact the price tag reads just £11,731.97 including the stereo. The make is one that's pretty damn much respected in the history of performance motor cars. You've already read a road test in one of the motoring journals, and in it the worst thing the well-known tester could find to say was that 'hump-back bridges can catch the suspension out.'

Upsetting incident the first. The morning after collecting the car, I get in and fire it up. Carefully I select first gear, which is left and back, almost opposite reverse. Move away and select second. Second gear will not engage. I am subsequently told that this is quite normal with ZF five-speeds, and that it's always okay after the first three miles, and that during this period one is supposed to select third gear after first. The Iso Lele Sport costs £11,731.97.

So, reader. What are you gonna do when you've driven the thing for a week and you've got this deep rooted suspicion that it's a bunch of ill-assembled, overpriced motorcar? I'll tell you what you do, you write an article that starts like this one did.

From the top, then. The Iso Lele is the latest in a line of high performance motorcars assembled in Italy and featuring medium capacity American V8 engines. They used to use Chevs in the Rivoltas, Grifos and Bizzarinis, and it's anybody's guess why they switched. The lump they use in the Lele is the Ford 351, but don't expect Nicholas Van Der Steen's men to be able to tell you if it's a Windsor or a Cleveland block—they only know it's something called a Cobra Jet. Hourly I await the letter that will tell me all Cobra Jet blocks come from Windsor. Gearbox is by ZF.

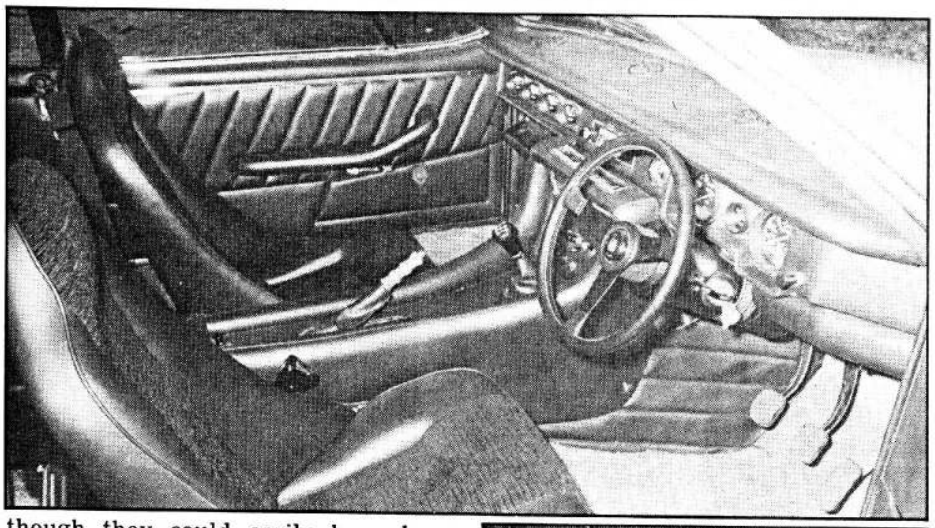
The suspension is what I'd call firm, and I liked it for that. A couple of passengers complained about the

downtown ride, but being fair, we have to remember that this car was designed for autostrada and smooth city street work, not our apologies for highways. As such the suspension does a fair job, except in one respect. Up front we found wishbones and coil springs, and in back there was a De Dion-style axle located by traction bars and a 'transversal anchorage rod' plus coil springs again. The front has an anti-roll bar, too, and there are telescopic shox all round.

We had noted what that other journalist had said about the humpbacked bridges, and were looking for one to try. In that we were unlucky, but discovered to our alarm that the same symptoms were very definitely present on corners that had even a slight adverse camber. If the road rose to the apex of the corner and then went down again, the floating effect produced was even more marked. All the weight seems to ride right up off the wheels and, well, floating round is the only way I can describe it, even if I did already use the word. Must say that although on occasion we were trying quite hard, it never gave us a really hard time. But neither did it instil much confidence.

Apart from that though, it was pretty much a peach. Good, smooth country roads with twisty bits it just adored, and it dealt with them as effectively as anything we've had lately, not counting Lotuses. It was fun on such roads, too. Nice to stick the right foot well in there in third, get the revs going, and wail it through the country. Yes, we certainly are an irresponsible bunch of people here on CC.

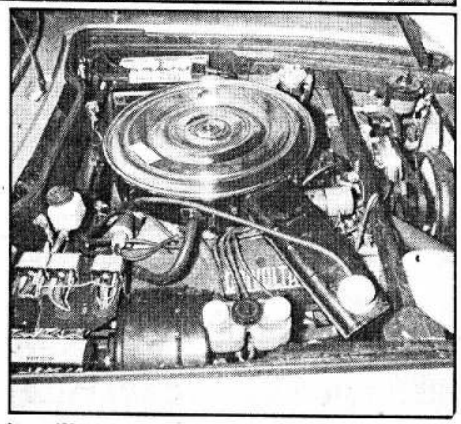
Bodywork is by Bert, and we don't reckon it's one of his best. The front's quite tidy, almost tough from some directions, but the back looks like any mid-range European coupe. The Campagnolo wheels are very tasty, and the flick-up eyelids are really trick,



though they could easily have been designed out. Paint quality is not particularly special.

Ford's 351 isn't actually as bad an engine as some people would have you believe. In the Lele Sport, it's rated at 360bhp SAE, though how many of those nags get through to the flywheel after some of them have been nobbled by the air conditioning and the power brakes and steering is not listed in the Iso brochure we were given. The torque is quite reasonable, and there's every chance the claimed top speed of 168mph is realistic. Now I just got my first endorsement and I'm not telling how fast I drove it, but I believe it will cruise down the M3 at 130-ish and not feel fussed.

Upsetting incident the second. I am driving to work in the Lele Sport. I reach a junction with red traffic lights, and stop. I smell hot electrical smells and blue smoke starts wafting out of the air conditioning vents. I get jolly excited and visualise one expensive item in my charge going crackle crackle and disappearing into the ionosphere. I run the redlight and turn left past the No Left Turn sign and switch off. Investigation reveals nothing so I start it gingerly and on observing no more inflammatory action, I drive it right back to Van Der Steen's and request an investigation. Two well-dressed men sniff and peer a bit, and then one of them tells me that a similar story has been told about a few other Leles. 'It doesn't usually do it again, but call us if you get any trouble." I later learn from Van der Steen's charming PR lady that it happened to her once and proved to be a small plastic nut falling into the heating matrix and frying. The Iso Lele Sport costs £11,731.97.



What it won't do with the gears they've put in it is haul freight off the line. It's plain not as gutsy as we'd like; no slam in the back, no rushing adrenalin. Downtown, you could probably have more fun with a Mach One.

That, though, is the Iso's big sell, I suppose. No fuss, no drama, just silk smooth, high speed cruising in comfort and what the NVDS man was pleased to describe as 'a certain exclusiveness.'

Exclusiveness. Well, there's a lot in a word like that. To me, though, it doesn't mean vinyl upholstery. Or ancient and badly marked Lucas-type toggle switches that I'd expect to find in a '69 MG Midget. Or non-reclining seats. Or an engine that's a dog to start when it's hot.

There are a few other things you should know about the Lele Sport. It's got two fans, one that cuts in automatically when the water gets warm, and another the driver can switch on if he thinks the water's cooking. They take good care of the cooling, but the plugs soot up if you spend too long in the urban sprawl.

Petrol, oil temperature, water temperature and ammeter dials are in front of the passenger, but angled towards the driver. A biggish neck twist is required to read them.

The power steering is not at all bad, although it does have a medium size dead-spot in the ahead position. Otherwise, it's sensitive and responsive. The brakes are absolutely terrific, progressive and sure, with little sign of fade.

Inside the Lele, we reckoned there was something of an ergonomics problem. Nice to find the steering wheel adjustable in and out and up and down, but how can anyone think that compensates for having fixed seatbacks? After all, the Lele does cost . . . well, I think you know.

The switchgear is extremely badly marked. For example, the symbol on the toggle switch for the rear screen demister is the same double propeller thing as on the auxiliary fan switch, except that it's in red. Would you guess a red propeller meant rear screen demister? The panel and interior light switches aren't clear either, and the air conditioning/heating system would tax the patience of a Chinaman. There are so many levers and switches, few of which have any markings at all, that it's quite a struggle to get the right combination. Normally, everything mists up as soon as you touch any of the controls. Owners would obviously get used to it quickly, though.

Now, a word or two of qualification. We are told that many things are being changed—the switchgear is to be improved, the carpet changed, some of the idiot lights dimmed, the windscreen wipers hinged the other way, and maybe a few more details attended to, though in our eyes that still won't make it noticeably a better deal in terms of value for money.

No, we'd describe the Iso Lele Sport as a £4000 motor car, and still complain about the finish. It may be that there is a band of men out here in punterland who reckon a car as rare as this is worth eleven big ones just for that certain exclusiveness. If you're one of them, you'll be buying your Lele Sport knowing that in the opinion of Custom Car Magazine, you've got more money than sense. **AA**

Iso Lele Sport

ENGINE
V8 Ford 351 (5762cc), 360bhp (SAE).
CARBURATION
Single four-barrel supplied by mechanical pump.
TRANSMISSION
Dry single-plate clutch, five-speed ZF gearbox.
SUSPENSION
Front: Independent, coil springs, anti-roll bar, telescopic shox.
Rear: De Dion-type axle, anti-tramp bars, coil springs, telescopic shox.
STEERING
Rack and pinion, power assistance optional.
BRAKES
Power assisted discs all round.
WHEELS
7L x 15 cast mag alloy.
PRICE
£11,731.97 as tested, plus £110 delivery charge.