

# 289 + 3.9 = BRA



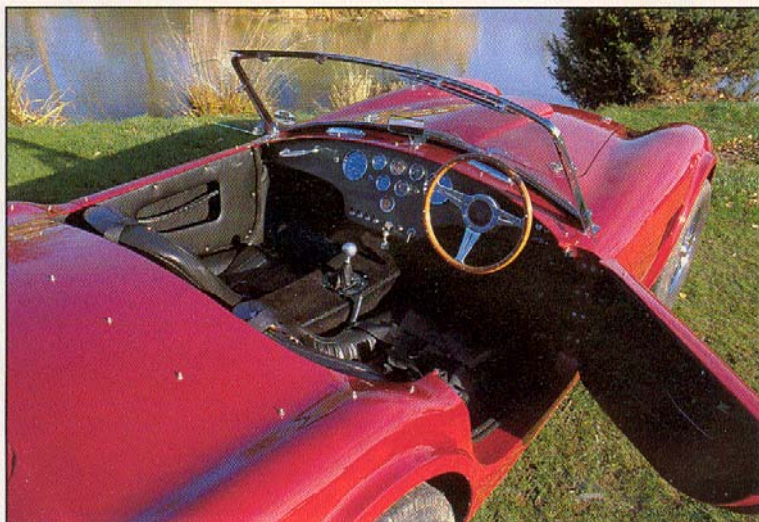
The BRA 289 has remained largely unchanged since it appeared in 1981. It was always good but now, new owners of the project, Tyler Mouldings, intend to make it even better with a stiffer chassis, more sophisticated suspension and engine options embracing American small blocks.



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When BRA's 289 Cobra replica hit the market back in 1981, it really was something special. It had class, looks and quality well ahead of its time and enthusiasts could build themselves a slice of motoring history for a very acceptable sum. The MGB mechanical base was a perfect choice and while the 1800 B series engine hardly provided heart stopping performance, the adoption of the Rover 3.5 litre V8 had the capacity to take you as close to cardiac arrest as you wanted to go.

The reason the car is still going strong over fifteen years later concerns the inexplicable and eternal lure of the Cobra. That said, even Cobra replicas change, evolve and improve and while there's nothing wrong with the BRA's current specification, the constant stream of ever more powerful, refined and sophisticated competing models, makes constant development a necessity for continued commercial



The interior is spartan and businesslike. It's also extremely comfortable with an excellent driving position and good control location. Standard B handbrake needs raising to be conveniently useable.



success. So what does that mean for the elder statesman of the Cobra replica world?

There's just something about the attraction of US muscle that the comparatively delicate all aluminium Rover lump just can't match. You can tune a Rover to the nines but it rapidly loses reliability if you try to match the sheer grunt of a pretty standard 302. So the first step is to enhance the car's authenticity by offering engine options embracing a Ford 289, 302 or any other low tech, small block powerhouse. In truth, I can't really see why it hasn't been done before as space doesn't seem to be a problem; a 302 is actually a bit smaller than the Rover.

Such engine options will be accompanied by potentially large increases in power output so the

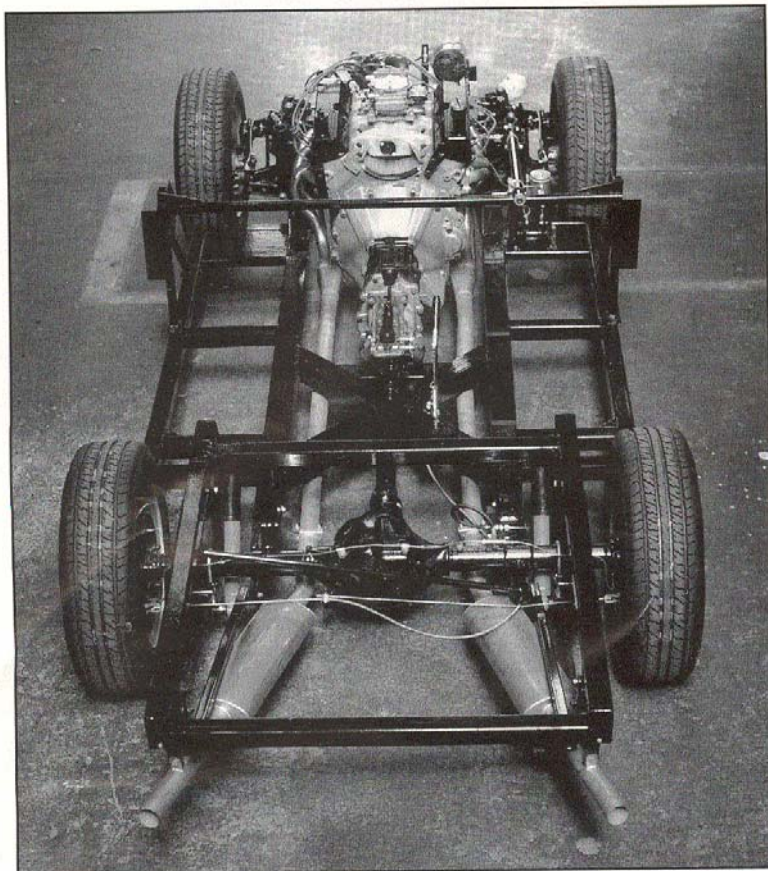
chassis has been subjected to scrutiny with a view to ensuring its ability to accept the increased strain.

They say the original Cobra twin large diameter round tube chassis was extremely crude but having driven a couple of replicas on similar specification frames, I venture to suggest that it was a great deal stronger and more sophisticated than popular opinion would have you believe. The same can be said of BRA's four rail ladder frame. It doesn't look much but the central cruciform bracing and the A frame mounted scuttle hoop do much to enhance its rigidity. However, there's little that can't be improved and in respect of BRA's chassis, that means 18 gauge steel panelled footwells.

Similarly, the MGB live axle and its installation is about as good as it

can be. The axle itself is bulletproof and though some might feel cart springs belong in a time capsule, the addition of anti tramp bars to control axle wind up and a Panhard rod to control lateral axle movement create a feel that is both confidence inspiring and authentic. But that doesn't necessarily mean that it grips under all conditions; in fact the real beauty and driver enjoyment of big power, live axle cars is that they often prove very reluctant to do so. What you need is a bit of skill and that's what completes the formula for driver satisfaction. That said, independent rear suspension is a great aid to cornering grip in such machinery and the company are currently examining the means by which the car could incorporate IRS. The popular equipment is a Jaguar back end but if cart springs belong in





The BRA's chassis frame is simple, strong and effective. Development work is currently underway to create an IRS rear end using Sierra trailing arms and driveshafts while steel panelled footwells will soon enhance chassis rigidity.

a time capsule, Jaguar's heavy rear componentry might well belong with them. True, it's more than man enough for the job but current development demonstrates a preference for Sierra componentry with semi trailing arms and differential mounted directly to the chassis and connected by shortened driveshafts.

But all this is for the future. Normally, manufacturers are extremely guarded about revealing future plans for specification changes as, given the low volume of their production, they fear orders will dry up as potential customers wait to try the new car. It's probably true but in respect of the BRA 289, the current specification is terrific while chassis mods and engine options will very shortly be on line. IRS will take a bit longer but the live axle car remains an absolute cracker as is the case with Ian Kay's car which you see in the photographs accompanying this piece.

The chassis and suspension are standard, the MGB front end benefitting from a beefier anti roll bar and the back end suspended on telescopic dampers. Up front is a

Rover 3.9 litre V8 sucking through a Weber four pot carburettor and blowing through the company's own headers. Power output is around the 200 bhp mark. Particular aspects of Ian's car concern the lift off bonnet panel secured by four quick release pins and the manner in which the side vents have been sprayed. Glitter has been further reduced by the absence of nudge bars, bonnet twist locks and external boot hinges and the car looks more subtle for it.

Glance into the cockpit and the leather has that lived in look while the simple black trim, door pull straps suspended within the door pockets and the general lack of glitz makes it look far more authentic.

Slipping behind the wheel and sliding the straps of the four point harness over my shoulders, the car felt good too. I sunk into the stuffing of the traditional Cobra buckets and as a result, I was firmly held in the driver's seat. But I was also extremely comfortable and served by a great driving position. One of the modifications, now standard, on this car concerns the pedals. BRA always used the MGB pedal box floor

mounted with a pendulum throttle. Now the modified MGB pedals are all pendulum mounted and the necessary parts are supplied in the kit on an exchange basis. They've got the B's heater unit in there too. Other mods concern the fitment of the standard Rover SD1 radiator, the option of using the standard B tank, and a new gearbox mounting arrangement that makes it possible to remove the box without removing the engine. The new pedal arrangement creates welcome additional leg room (2 - 3") while everything else is well within reach. Actually the only criticism concerned the handbrake that just sprouted clear of the tunnel making operation a finger tip exercise. Easily remedied.

Acid test time. I love starter buttons. They're so much more purposeful than twisting a key. Psychologists probably have a theory about it but who gives a damn? In a car like this there's an irresistible urge to press it and the reward for lack of willpower is a beautifully subdued stereo burble from the underslung exhausts that blow through twin chrome tail pipes.

There must be thousands of blokes who dream of an open road, glorious autumn sunshine and a car with 250 bhp per ton. Having experienced it I can quite see what has sustained BRA 289 sales over fifteen years. It's addictive.

The exhaust note is great at tickover but get the thing up on the cam and it's just fantastic. It's a deep boom, boom, boom job that, no matter how long or hard you press the loud pedal, never merges its beats into a constant drone. With a note like



Recent developments have achieved extra leg room by using the MGB pedals in modified pendulum form rather than floor mounted. The MGB heater unit has also been installed.





Although the BRA has traditionally used the Rover V8, development work currently centres on installing US small block alternatives. Even so, the 200 bhp 3.9 is a willing, revvy and entertaining unit to push.

that, who needs a stereo?

200 bhp is a lot of grunt and naturally the 289 is quick in a straight line. Bloody quick in fact but it doesn't come with the lazy urge of a Yank V8. This Rover 3.9 is very willing and free revving such that the needle flies round the rev counter and on a hard charge there are scant seconds between changes up the box. Much will be down to the Weber carburettor which the company greatly prefer to a Holley because A, they're cheaper and B, everything comes with it. Not the case with a Holley where buying the carb is your guarantee of spending a good deal more money.

One advantage of the IRS system previously mentioned will be the wide options of differential ratio but the combination of the SD1 box, MGB axle and 15" wheels has the formula pretty well perfect for a fast road car. It'll fly up to the ton and sit there all day long while there's still bags in hand and a lot of throttle travel to take up. What's more, the gearing, power and torque combine to create hugely satisfying mid range wallop that'll see you past anything that gets in your way.

Come the bends, the MGB's big disc drum braking system has no problems in arresting 1800 lbs of charging Cobra replica, the non servo pedal feeling firm and confidence inspiring as you shed speed. Personally I felt that the new pedal arrangement also made it easier to heel and toe and blipping down the box was a simple exercise that kept braking distances well down.

Into the turns the front end feels very firm. The B rack is fluid and acceptably quick with a 15" wheel but,

rather than being a chink in the car's handling armour, the back end demands respect. With the ever present potential for 200 bhp induced oversteer, fast cornering demands a combination of skill and finesse. Caveman tactics will merely result in your tyres wearing out across the

tread rather than along it. But that's not to say you have to pussyfoot. Indeed, the car can be pushed satisfyingly hard and fast through the turns but without the acres of rubber enjoyed by the 427 brigade you have to remain aware of the power and its effect on grip. That said, don't get the idea that the 289 is hopelessly tail happy because it isn't. Indeed, squirting round deserted roundabouts, I found its levels of cornering grip surprisingly high but it does have limits and the trick is to know where they are.

Great weather and great roads aside, I really enjoyed driving this car. It's beautiful to look at, stirring to sit in, fast and above all, challenging. To my mind it's a real sports car as opposed to an overpowered rocket. It responds to skill and precision rather than brute force and long may it remain as a more than worthy alternative to the burgeoning ranks of 427s. My thanks are due to Ian Kay for the opportunity to drive his car.

Finally, the company have been active on the building front and have produced a new 100 page, fully detailed build manual as an aid to construction and if you don't have time to mess about stripping an MGB, they can supply everything you need in a donor component pack at a more than reasonable £550 + vat.

## SPECIFICATION - BRA 289

<b>Chassis</b>	Four rail steel box section ladder frame with central cruciform bracing. Bolt on scuttle hoop carrying door hinges and steering support bracket. Choice of optional bolt on roll over protection.
<b>Body</b>	Spray laminated GRP one piece body tub. Separate double skinned doors and boot, single skin bonnet. 289 Cobra replica.
<b>Suspension, front</b>	MGB crossmember with standard wishbones, stub axles, coil springs and lever arm dampers. Up rated anti roll bar.
<b>Suspension, rear</b>	MGB live axle on standard leaf springs with one leaf removed. Adjustable coil spring damper units, Panhard rod. Anti tramp bars.
<b>Steering</b>	MGB rack and pinion. Modified column.
<b>Brakes</b>	MGB disc front, drum rear. Non servo.
<b>Pedals</b>	Modified MGB.
<b>Engine options</b>	MGB 1800 four cylinder or Rover 3.5 V8. US small block fittings currently under development.
<b>Engine fitted</b>	Rover 3.9 litre V8 breathing through a four pot Weber (Carter) carburettor. Approx 210 bhp @ 5200 rpm. 220 ft lbs @ 4000 rpm.
<b>Transmission</b>	Rover SD1 5 speed manual driving MGB 3.91:1 differential.
<b>Wheels and tyres</b>	6 x 15 centre lock wires fitted with 205/75 x 15 radials.
<b>Dimensions</b>	Overall length. 12 ft. 11 ins. Overall width. 5 ft. 2 ins. Overall height. 3 ft. 11 ins. Wheelbase. 7 ft. 6 ins. Ground clearance. 4 ins. Weight. Approx 1800 lbs. Weight split. 50/50.
<b>Kit prices</b>	Kit price. <b>£2950 + vat.</b> MGB donor component kit. <b>£550 + vat.</b>

Full details of kit prices, contents, specifications, options and extras are given in the colour brochure available from: Tyler Industrial Mouldings, The Shipyard, Vicarage Lane, Hoo, Rochester, Kent ME3 9LB. Tel. 01634 252709.