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INSIDE: ALTERNATIVE CARS SUPPLEMENT

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WORLD NEWS



Ford's Turin show stunner, new Vauxhall Calibra Turbo 4x4, Bentley up for grabs, Maserati Shamal arrives, Audi Quattro Spyder green light?

10

MINUTES

7. STYLES' COUNSEL

The Editor on how a discount has been built into your car.

16. MOTOR SPORT

Formula One year so far.

RARE, BUT WELL DONE



How Munich's Koenig Specials can inject some of the extra spice the BMW 850i needs, but at a price.

46

23



Ford Escort RS Cosworth, Saab 9000 LPT, New Mobil 1.

ALL DRESSED UP...



54

Brian Laban cruises in an AMG Mercedes 190 2.6 dressed up to the nines, the car that is - not Brian.

31. BROADSIDE

The Peter Dron column.

32

GANG WARFARE



Nine contenders from Citroen, Fiat, Ford, Nissan, Peugeot, Renault, Rover, Vauxhall and Volkswagen battle for 'Best GTi' mantle.

75. BRIEF TEST

David Sumner Smith on improved MR2.

A bumper selection of all manner of kit cars and specials; this could be the start of that project you promised yourself...

19. INSIGHT

Jaguar XJ220 takes shape; we visit the Bloxham factory.

MOTORS

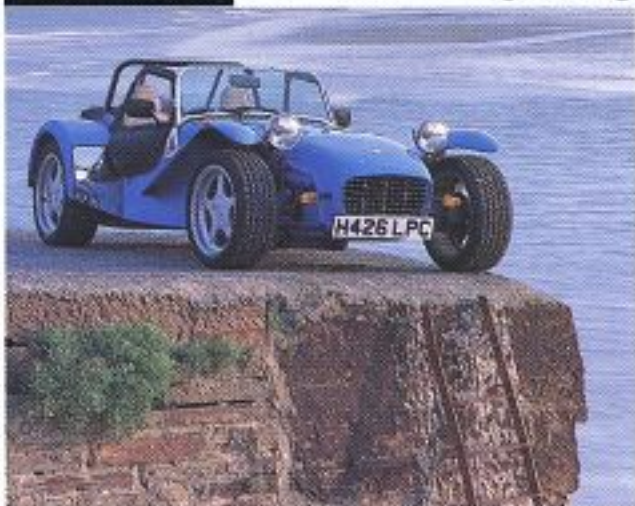
62

83

ALTERNATIVE CARS



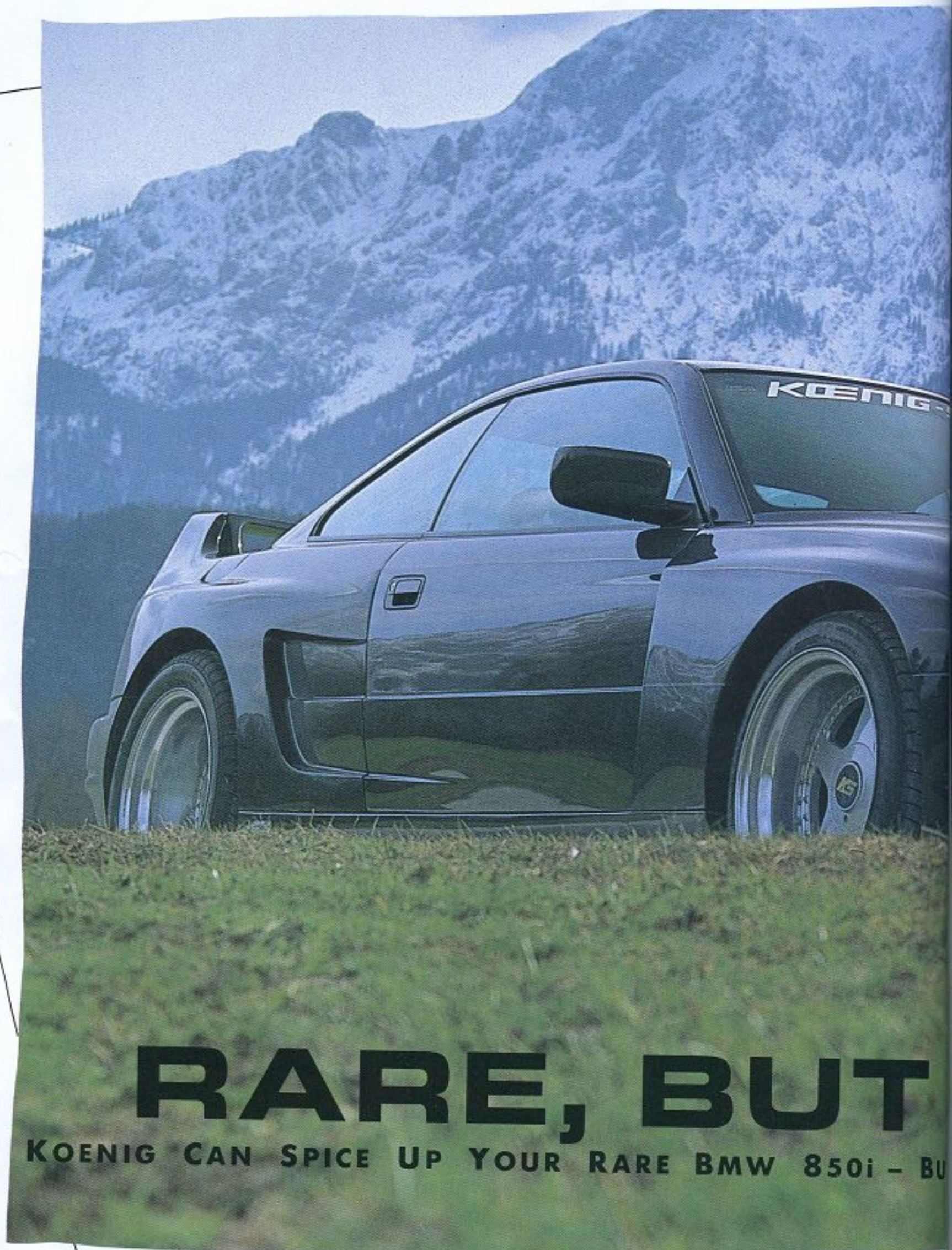
A two-wheeled diversion by way of the sensational Bimota Furano.



68. MINOPOLY

Circumventing London by fuel-injected Mini Cooper.

CONTENTS



RARE, BUT

KOENIG CAN SPICE UP YOUR RARE BMW 850i - BU



WELL DONE

IT DOESN'T COME CHEAP, IAN KUAH EXPLAINS.

Recent sales figures for the motor industry in Western Europe make depressing reading. New car sales in March, for instance, were estimated at 1.34 million; a fall of 1.7% from the same month last year.

Amidst the bad news there is good, however. Compare the first three months of 1992 with the same period last year and total demand in all seventeen markets rose by half of one per cent, buoyed most strongly by car sales growth in Spain of almost thirty per cent.

Few companies, though, can report any major growth in sales, so it is easy to understand the feeling of elation at BMW. The first quarter of 1992 saw BMW's sales exceeding those of their arch-rivals Mercedes-Benz for the first time ever. While Mercedes sales fell by 6.3% to 116,000 units, BMW's sales increased by a massive 19.6% to 118,000 cars between January and March.

But the garden is not entirely rosy even here, however. For BMW's flagship 850i coupe has yet to get anywhere remotely near the level of sales which had been forecast.

Production of its predecessor (the 6-Series coupe) at the company's Dingolfing plant had shrunk to a mere fifteen or twenty cars a day as the

elegantly proportioned four-seater neared the end of its model life. Project E31, the more curvaceous 850i, would be very much more popular the Bavarians suggested. Though production levels would start at a low level, they would rapidly grow to around fifty cars a day...

BMW certainly didn't want their new flagship to become a common sight on the roads; that would have spoiled its exclusive image. Little did they know, though, quite how rare it was to be. BMW had miscalculated the health of the economies in their intended primary markets of Germany, Japan and the USA. While even worse, in the eyes of some critics, was the decision to produce a heavy 2+2 with the characteristics of a grand tourer rather than a sports coupe.

Wherever the fault might lie, the fact remains that BMW showrooms have been swamped by a tidal wave of indifference and one-handed applause. BMW's claim shortly after the model's launch that the entire production schedule of 10-12,000 cars was sold out until 1993 looks rather flimsy now: production has dropped to just eight cars a day.

Those who suggest that the 850i is too large, heavy, excessive and thirsty for its own good are perhaps

48



Photos: Ian Rusk



misreading the positioning of the car in the executive marketplace. But they are justified in pointing out that its pretensions as a 'Grand Touring' transcontinental express suffer from a very obvious shortcoming. Quite simply, the 850i cannot carry four adults unless the pair volunteering for back seat duties intend to leave their legs at home.

The BMW flagship, therefore, should never be seen as anything other than a 2+2 coupe. But unfortunately for the Bavarians, neither it is really fast enough to justify its cost, and lend credence to its aggressive appearance. In recognition of this problem BMW are said to be modifying the 5-litre V12 engine and add 40 more horses to the existing 300bhp, while also introducing a 5.4 litre version with 370bhp on tap. It can't arrive quick enough.

Whatever its dynamic and practical flaws, though, few would deny that the BMW 850i is a lovely looking car. Its shark-like nose and slim windscreen pillars have a timeless elegance about them, and the flared wheelarches – though arguably a little passe – hint at muscle and subtle aggression. It is almost inevitable, then, that various German

aftermarket companies should attempt to give the 850i the finishing touches. It has come as no surprise that the last few months have seen body, engine and suspension modifications for the 850i announced by companies such as Alpina, AC Schnitzer, Hamman, Hartge, MK Motorsport and Racing Dynamics. All of these have built upon the potential of the car and attempted to give it greater sporting appeal.

It is the Munich-based Koenig Specials that can always be relied upon to provide perhaps the most spectacular variations on a manufacturer's theme, however. Their usual method is to lower and widen to the borderline of sensible, and endow the car (whatever it may be) with enough spoilers for the 'pilot' to qualify for Top Gun school.

Willy Konig, of course, started his whole business as an offshoot of his weekend motorsport activities. When he modified his own Ferrari Boxer and won Ferrari Owners' Club events, friends asked him to work on their cars, too, and gradually his successful technical publications business receded into the background. Konig found himself concentrating more and more on his hobby and serving the desires of wealthy individuals the

V12 powerplant modified by Koenig sees output rise by 50% from 300bhp to 450bhp.

world over who wish to make a statement of their individuality.

Having started with Ferrari, Koenig (the company has an 'e' inserted into the German equivalent of king) soon embraced Mercedes-Benz, Jaguar and then BMW and Porsche within their programme. None are slow cars, but Koenig makes them go faster and look wilder.

BMW enthusiasts particularly have seen a succession of turbocharged wide-body 325i and M3s. While an even more serious driving machine produced by Koenig – in 1991 – was a supercharged BMW M5 with more than 400bhp ready for action. But the Koenig team were surprisingly hesitant to apply their skills to the one BMW that most needed a boost, the 850i. Koenig Specials Sales Manager, Thomas Dollner explains.

"We had some very extensive discussions on whether or not we would produce this car. We knew that the sales figures of the standard 850i were not good, so we were very reluctant to put it into our programme as development and type approval costs require a heavy investment."

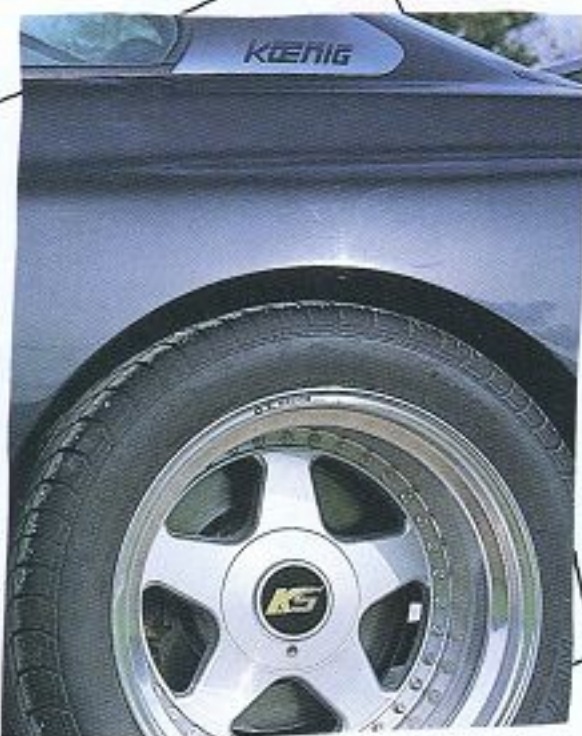
Nonetheless, design studies were done and potential clients liked the ideas very much. Indeed, the response was so favourable that Koenig judged there was enough positive response to justify going ahead.

"In a sense," Thomas continues, "it was only the bodywork that we had to do from scratch as we had been installing superchargers on customers' 750is and 850is since October '91."

The Koenig Specials 850i bearing the model designation KS8 was thus readied for the Geneva Show earlier this year where it made its international debut.

"The response to the car at the show was fantastic," Thomas remembers. Indeed, the number of deposits placed have prompted Koenig to now look upon the KS8 in a similar light to their 'bread and butter' Mercedes-Benz SEC conversion.

"We had been extremely lucky with the big Mercedes coupe. The fact that Sylvester Stallone bought a complete conversion from us seemed to trigger an avalanche of sales – we have sold around 100 complete cars to customers as well as supplying over 100 complete kits to export markets. When you think there are probably nearly 250 of these radical and expensive cars around the world, it is quite an achievement. Only now are sales slowing as the new SEC becomes available. We will, of course, do a



version of that in due course, but in the meantime perhaps the KS8 will fill the gap?"

So why have Koenig opted for a supercharger on the KS8, rather than twin turbos or even the quad turbo route that Hartge is exploring?

"It is a question of space," Thomas suggests. "The supercharger installation we use is more compact, and of course does not have the heat problems of a turbo. The other advantage, of course, is that the car has no lag whatsoever, the supercharger runs from the crank and so the extra power is there across the rev band."

Running at a fairly conservative boost pressure of 0.45 bar, the Albrecht blower kicks the power rating up by a dramatic 50% from 300bhp to 450bhp. It is a very neat installation with a large multi-row intercooler low down in the nose of the car, feeding each throttle body and plenum per cylinder bank via specially fabricated pipes. The extra fuelling is taken care of by a boost, with the programme allowing longer opening duration. The system provides just the right amount of fuel and the car still meets German emission regulations for which it has full TUV approval.

This modified brain also has the 155mph restrictor removed. The large twin exhaust catalyst system remains

in place, with change being restricted to the sections following the catalysts. These are replaced with a twin-pipe stainless steel system that exits from the rear silencers with four outlets, contributing to the liberation of an additional 10bhp.

The KS8 remains a very heavy car at 3960lbs, but 450bhp is sufficient to propel it to 60mph in 5.3 seconds. Despite the wide body and huge tyres, the car has an excellent 0.29 drag coefficient, with the extra power and discarded governor helping it to reach a maximum speed of 187mph if owners choose the tall final drive ratio. Whether you have the six-speed manual or five-speed auto box, you can also fit a lower final drive if you want to sacrifice top speed slightly in favour of acceleration.

Drivers who don't wish to shout about the extra power can opt for the narrow body version of the Koenig 850i, though – despite the name – even this involves a slight increase in the width of the standard car. Koenig's bodyshop slightly widens the rear wheelarches to cover 11J x 17" wheels with 315/35 ZR17 tyres. At the front, 9J x 17" alloys and 255/40 ZR17 rubber fill the arches right to the edge, but no body modification is required.

"We have to be very careful with the rolling radius," Thomas explains, "so we don't upset the ABS sensors.

Body modifications add substantial air of drama to the dart-like profile of 850i.



This combination puts the extra amount of rubber we need on the road, while maintaining a similar radius to the standard tyres."

Suspension components come from H&R, who do all of Koenig's chassis work, and there are two options available. Owners who do not have the highly recommended electronic damper control (EDC) can ask Koenig to change both springs and dampers. If EDC is specified, shorter uprated springs are the only suspension change required to lower the car by more than an inch.

No extra body addenda is added to the narrow bodied Koenig 850i, but colour keying all of the black plastic along the bottom of the car makes a dramatic difference to the appearance. A customer's silver 850i was present during our visit and, with lowered suspension and wide wheels looked absolutely gorgeous. For owners who want something different but discreet, this car looks a million dollars.

52

By comparison, the full blown KS8 is thoroughly extrovert. In red, white or any bright metallic shade I am sure it would look completely tasteless, but in the blue-black metallic used for the first customer example the high quality glassfibre body additions come over as very tough and quite tasteful.

"We would have done it in Kevlar," Thomas concedes, "but the

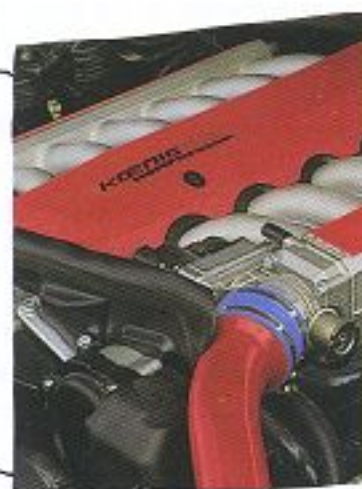
value of the basic car was not sufficient to use such a material." The conversion encompasses new front wings with wide arches which are joined by a deeper and more aggressive front airdam section. The wider wings produce a hard edge rebate where they meet the front doors, such as that on an F40, but the back edge is solid rather than open. This is then used as a continuity line low down, via the broader sill panels which visually tie the front and rear, to merge with the wide, wide rear arch flares that sweep up gracefully to end in a tall rear wing.

If you think the wheels and tyres on the narrow bodied car are wide, then the rubber on the KS8 will blow your mind. The fronts are 245/40 ZR17 wrapped around 10J x 17" wheels, while the rear arches are filled out by 12J x 17" alloys with 335/35 ZR17 wheels. These are F40 size and Koenig use Italian-made OZ Racing wheels in a five-spoke modular design.

On this specific car a three-spoke leather sports wheel was the only interior change, but Koenig can also perform radical surgery here with bespoke leather, burr walnut in any colour (including black Chinese lacquer) plus painted instrument faces. You pay your money and take your choice.

Settling into the comfortable BMW

With restrictor removed and supercharger in place, Koenig KS8 can run to 187mph.





sports seat and adjusting the rake and mirrors before starting the engine, one is reminded that the 850i is a large car with a long and wide bonnet but a reasonably short rear overhang. The large rear wing actually helps with reversing as one can now see the end of the car quite clearly, but at the same time it restricts rearward visibility in the lower third of the screen, obliging one to make greater use of the exterior mirrors.

The familiar 'whoof' as the smooth V12 bursts into life is even more subdued now thanks to the more muffled induction, but selecting 'D' on the five-speed auto and moving away, one feels that there is little difference from the standard 850i other than the distant whine of the supercharger as it picks up with crankshaft speed.

Around town the blower's effect is imperceptible, but show the KS8 a clear stretch of road and the story is very different. Pressure from one's right foot immediately prompts a more audible whine from the engine bay and a strong sense of being pushed hard in the back as the enhanced torque curve moves up an imaginary graph towards its plateau.

On the autobahn it is possible to

whistle along at 120mph on light throttle, the engine just a distant murmur from somewhere up front. Plant the foot hard down at this speed and one can continue to enjoy a very clear surge of acceleration. As the speed increases further, long sweeping bends can still be devoured with ease, a feeling of positive g force quite clear as one accelerates out of the curve, the screaming note of the supercharger rising above the deep bellow of the V12 motor. Ask for more power and the response is instantaneous – the proven advantage of supercharger over turbo.

For all its power and individual appeal, the Koenig Specials KS8 is unlikely to become a common sight. The modifications to the engine, suspension, wheels, tyres and bodywork cost some 140,000Dm, or about £49,000, on top of the £61,495 of the basic 850i.

If, on the other hand, you have been inspired by the computer-generated 'spy photographs' of BMW's stillborn 850i convertible, then it might come as a relief to know that a similar sum will see Koenig convert a mechanically unmodified 850i to soft-top status: more discreet and more exclusive still...

