

It's **HOT** & it's **5EXi**.

### Marlin's Mid-Engined Blaster

#### Marlin

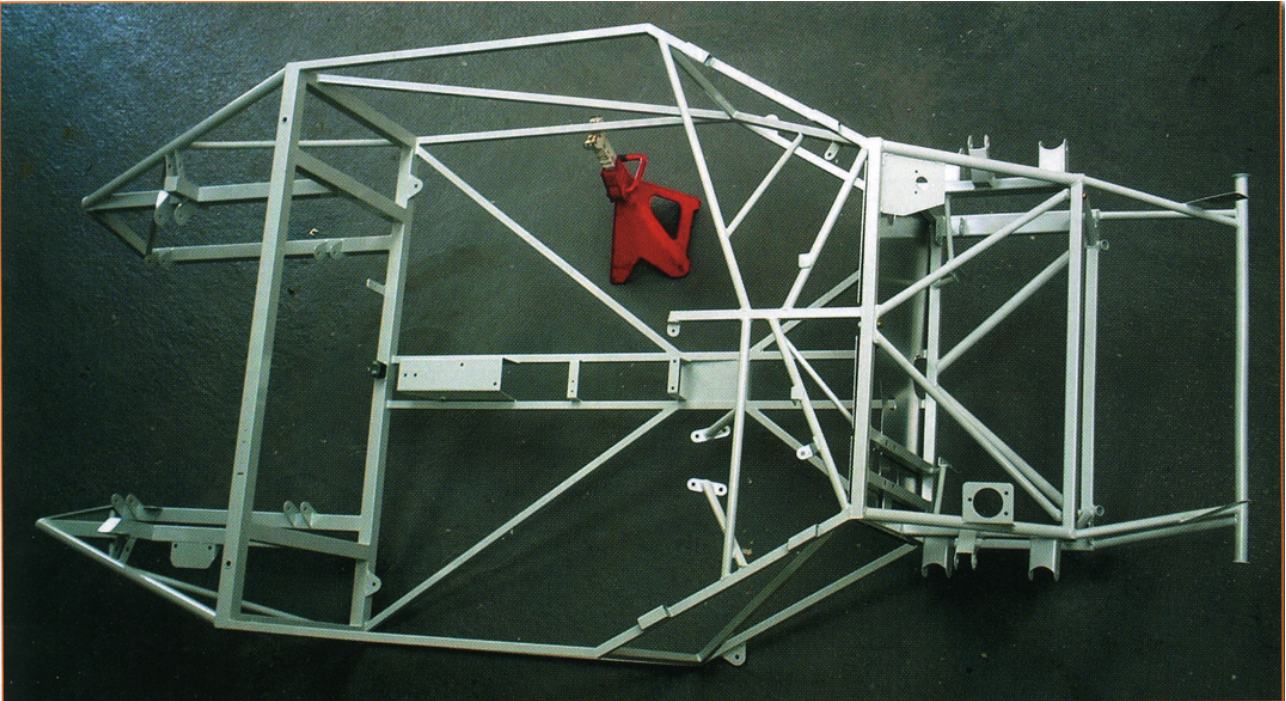
- High performance designed for road and track.
- Maintains Marlin's engineering expertise.
- Tubular spaceframe chassis. Full roll cage.
- Single donor – the 'K' series powered Rover 200 range.
- Build it for as little as £8000.



**ALTHOUGH MARLIN'S NEW** 5EXi mid-engined sport's racer debuted at the recent Stonleigh show, this *Which Kit?* exclusive sees this important model revealed in print for the first time. And important it most certainly is to the Marlin set-up at Crediton, Devon, where the feeling is that a more dynamic, street-wise product is needed to reach a younger, wider market. Without, of course, shedding any of the high standards for which the company is so well respected.

If the name 5EXi seems a little contrived, there is some method behind it, in that this is the fifth chassis type developed by Marlin. As for the EXi moniker, over to Marlin boss Mark Matthews: "It's no different to all the other badges on production cars. I choose EXi because it sounded OK!".

The car certainly looks sharp, exotic and focused. Styled by Mark himself, the dramatic shape is roughly Lotus Elise size, uses the windscreen and rear lights from the Elise and gets its state-of-the-art frontal aspect partly from those wicked looking Peugeot headlamps. Heart of the EXi is an all-new lightweight spaceframe chassis using both square and round tube and panelled in aluminium steel.



Suspension is independent all round using fabricated uprights, double wishbone and coil over shockers at each corner. It's at this point that the Rover 200 donor car comes into play as almost all remaining parts are sourced from it. Once we get past the Metro steering rack (that Marlin can supply) it's Rover 200 all the way: steering column and switchgear, all round disc brakes, pedal box, brake servo and master cylinder, radiator and fan, wipers and motor, instruments, heater system, direct-feed fresh air ventilation, handbrake lever, gearchange (with new cable linkage) etc; etc. Even the Rover's standard 15" x 6" alloy wheels are suitable and, indeed, are fitted to the prototype.

Not forgetting the engine: the Rover's 'K' series powerpack with 5-speed gearbox is already a very popular installation in cars like GTM Libra and Midas, it's sparkling combination of grunt, torque and high revs being ideal for a road racer like the 5EXi. 'K' series units weigh in with 1100, 1400, 1600 and 1800cc capacities, given enough options to suit everyone. Although a special exhaust system is needed for the 5EXi, the transversely mounted engine fits completely with its manifold, fuel injection system, air filter box, battery tray and driveshafts. There's a special aluminium fuel tank (circuit or road size) but even this suits the standard Rover fuel pump and sender unit.

All body work is moulded GRP finished in gel-coat colour and not requiring paint. For access to the fuel tank, suspension etc: the entire front end is a one-piece assembly which can be quickly removed by unscrewing its hinges and two mounting bolts. Same goes for the one-piece rear bodywork with the added bonus that the chassis's rear end also unbolts (four bolts), allowing very simple removal of the engine.

Moving into the cabin, things are kept simple and functional with aluminium panelling, an optional carpet set, after market or Marlin seats and a shaped GRP dashboard that can be sprayed or trimmed. For a modicum of practicality, storage is provided in the boxes created by the sills, behind the seats and under the bonnet, while a soft top will be available soon. For access to all the engine services and fluid lines which run along the centre of the car, the aluminium centre of the tunnel has been designed for easy removal.

To grab its intended market by the scruff of the neck, the 5EXi's pricing has been set competitively. Says Mark Matthews: "Although many of our Cabrio customers are getting the itch to build something else, we expect this car to appeal to a younger age group and have priced it accordingly and we reckon you could get a nicely built car on the road, complete with all the extras needed, for around £7500-£8000". This gets better still when you check out donor car prices. Made since the late 1980's, the front-wheel-drive Rover 200 is not worth much today, meaning that costs could be anything from zero to around £300. "At the top end" says Mark, "I've just acquired an excellent 200 Coupe with 36,000 miles showing and a bit of wing damage for only £600".

Although not a runner in its Stoneleigh show form, the 5EXi is expected to be fully road legal by early June. Production should be under way by then and the hope is that the first twelve months should see about 25 kits leaving the factory. For Marlin, much respected purveyors of superbly detailed classic style sports tourers, the 5EXi is a big break with tradition. But it enters the market at the right time – track days are booming – and there's little that immediately competes with it. With an all-up weight expected to be about 530kg, performance is certainly going at the top end of the table.

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