

wedges



sub-z

"So just what is so extra special about owning a SEAC?"

What's a SEAC?

The acronym stands for Special Equipment Aramid Composite and has nothing to do with assisting your digestive transit. It is a material which uses Kevlar to come out stronger than glassfibre of equivalent weight. It has some downsides, however. It is considerably more costly to produce, the process involving baking for some time rather than the wet lay-up procedures used for other TVR bodies.

Peter Wheeler, though, in his normal way, decided to do things slightly differently and any mention of ovens was ignored. The result was bodywork that was thinner and flimsier than other Wedges and with only a marginal saving in weight. There are stories of the flat door panels bending under finger pressure and of separation of laminates.

It evidently increased track performance to the extent that it was excluded from its class in motorsport. This is not as unusual an event as those on the receiving end tend to suggest as the intent of the sport organisers is to ensure competitiveness of a series (are you listening, FIA?). But what it does show is that it outclassed the opposition.

Other items were exclusive to SEACs: the tuneable suspension puts the car in a different league to the normal Wedges, or what passes for normal, and it was bespoke in other ways as well. However, the most noticeable thing was the engine. The original SEAC had a 4228cc engine delivering 300bhp, although you could get an extra 85bhp if you really wanted to dread rain.

*"a racing car for the road.
Now where have we
heard that before?"*

A number of Kevlar-bodied cars were returned to the Factory to be rebodied in glassfibre.

Mind you, there were other advantages to Kevlar. It was state-of-the-art in the black arts and a must-have if you wanted an in to the in-crowd. More importantly from PW's point of view, it reinforced TVR's reputation for innovation and experimentation. It had been some years since they produced the first turbo-charged production car in the country.

At nigh on £30,000 it needed to be a bit special when compared to a 390SE at £8000 less as you could only bring up the subject of gossamer panelling so many times at the pub.

What else could you talk about? Perhaps the restyled bodywork. The overhang at the front was shorted and rounded with great benefits to the overall appearance. There were styling bits along the side of the car between the wheels but what everyone notices is the great tea-tray on the back. Is it image or substance?

The SEAC 450, which replaced the 420 in 1988, came with 324bhp in standard form at a time when the 275bhp of the 400SE was still spoken of in hushed tones.

In a recent Sprint interview with Chris Shirle, TVR competitions manager at the time and generally regarded as father of the SEACs, he was asked for his opinion as to which material, Kevlar or glassfibre, made the best SEAC. Without hesitation he opted for the latter. As to whether they could be considered real SEACs, he was equally firm. 'Of course,' he said.

The cars have a strong following and prices have hardened over the last two or three years especially if compared to other Wedges. Rarity helps, of course, only 55 models of both types were produced, but their sheer presence, especially when the rear spoiler is in view, which is virtually always, puts them in a league of their own. A racing car for the road. Now where have we heard that before?

Not quite subLyme

It was our first TVR, a Chimaera, which put us on the slippery slope to ultimate Wedgedom. Back at 2001's Back Home we ended up parked behind a superb blue metallic 400SE at the pre-cruise line-up and, when its engine was started, my wife said, "Ooh, that sounds good." As a dutiful husband, I searched for a big bad Wedge and found H11 JMJ, a 400SE.

I had always been aware of the legendary SEAC and a colleague, who was more a car nut than a TVR enthusiast, owned D668 YLP and promised me first option if he ever thought of selling it.

My 400 was nearing the end of its body-off restoration when my Chimaera was found to have a bit of chassis rot. Not wanting to launch into another major rebuild project, I accepted Peninsular's offer for it and, as luck would have it, the SEAC became available. So we got one at last.

It was in need of a little TLC, including rear wheel bearings, new shocks and springs, polyflex bushes, new windscreen, recon gearbox, new clutch and stainless exhaust including manifolds. The car has a history. It is the first road car before the SEACs were productionalised, as Chris Schirle was happy to confirm and reminisce about at the BBWF last year, and was on the cover of the November '86 issue of Fast Lane so I wanted to keep the car as original as possible.

However, as we got used to the car, the need for more oomph was felt. Whilst the car was wickedly fast in its time, it is 19 years old and modern motors have come on in leaps and bounds. We would have liked to re-establish the gap between the SEAC and other cars so we invested in 'Superflare' trumpets, power boost valve and a few other bits but we still wanted more power.

So in early May we sold it but only to finance a Cerbera.

To sum up, the SEAC was totally off the wall. It sound and goes like the proverbial bat out of hell and turns heads and draws crowds wherever it goes. In the 21 months we owned just one of the 55 SEACs built, we put 15,000 miles on it, often in company with fellow Wedge lunatics. A totally fantastic car which, if we could afford it, we wouldn't hesitate to buy back.



*Lyme House as featured
in Pride and Prejudice*

