







# I want you back

Ever regret selling a car? Why not just buy it back, just like Kevin did with his 300E van.

Words: Ivan Ostroff Pics: Matt Richardson





"My wife thought I was mad, when I bought it the first time... but now I have gone and bought it again she reckons I'm nuts!"



When Kevin Kivlochan was a teenager he paid £30 for a rather rusty Ford Thames 300E van. It had the old side-valve engine, vacuum windscreen wipers, did a disco dance going down hills and almost stopped going back up them. His dad kept on at him to get rid of it but Kevin had great times with the old 300E. "I remember my mate and me went out drinking one night and I actually intended to drive the van home. Must have been nuts," he laughs. "I woke up the next day totally done in; when I looked outside I was utterly devastated – someone had stolen the van. I remember to this day thinking that of all the cars in the world why would someone want to steal that! I was just about to phone the police when I remembered we'd actually left the van in town. In my stupor I had convinced myself that I had driven the ruddy thing home!"

Kevin still has many sentimental memories of his old van, after all, it was his first car. Unfortunately though, because it was so full of rust, six months later he finally succumbed to his father's wishes and paid £10 to the local scrap man to take the 300E away.

Today, Kevin owns an FIA AC Cobra which, when he isn't racing, he uses as every day transport to and from work. But Kevin never forgot his old van and about eight years ago, sentimentality finally got the better of him. He decided to try and find a 300E to buy, justifying the idea by convincing himself

that as well as being a lot of fun to own, it would be a good vehicle to take to the Goodwood Revival.

Towards the end of 2001 Kevin saw a modified 300E advertised by a chap in Wallington for £5000. It had a rather tweaked 2.0-litre Pinto engine with four-speed transmission from an Escort RS2000 mated to an Anglia 105E rear axle, with a 3.54:1 Escort differential. The front suspension was changed to that of a 2.8i Capri and the front brakes came from a Sierra XR4. The old steering box was junked and uprated with the rack and pinion system from a Capri and a steering column from a Triumph Dolomite 1500. To make the car useable throughout the year, a heater from a Ford Anglia 100E was installed, as was the Capri wiper motor; thus eliminating the previously mentioned vacuum motor lag which would simply not have been good enough for a car with this sort of performance on tap, in today's road conditions.

Kevin wanted the van to appear almost standard, with the idea of it being something of a wolf in sheep's clothing. When he got the 300E home it wore a set of big Revolution alloy rims, which he felt were somewhat inappropriate, so he bought himself a set of genuine Lotus Cortina 5½ J steels to make the van look more period. Before putting them on, he also had the wheel's colour changed from silver to cream, which he felt looked far better with its grey body colour and kept the

van's appearance far more Fifties.

Kevin then began searching for an original steel sun-visor, which he eventually found with the help of the owners' club for a rather reasonable £150. The front bumper required re-chroming but Kevin experienced some difficulty in finding a suitable company to carry out the work, eventually getting the job done for about £180. In period, the bumpers probably would have been painted in grey to match the body colour but Kevin felt that chrome livened the car up a bit, and therefore fitted some chrome headlamp bezel trims. "I've actually got the original grey ones but to me, those chrome bumpers simply look great," he explains.

Turning to the interior, Kevin changed the dash and the gauges and fitted old-style switches and an extra aluminium panel between the seats on the transmission tunnel. He fitted a wood rim steering wheel with a Cobra logo and a Cobra gear knob to match. When it came to the logo, Kevin dug out some old books with photos of the van that AC Cars used to use at its factory in Thames Ditton. He then had the logo copied in stickers, in exactly the same way as AC Cars had its vans done. After offering up the stickers to the sides of the van to confirm that they had the right effect, Dick, at Abbotts Coach Works, in Abbotts Langley, set about sign writing the van by hand, just like it would have done in the 1950s.





In the summer of 2002, Kevin used the car for the Goodwood Revival for the first time. Then, about four years ago (for some strange reason, which he still cannot understand), he had a weak moment and resold it for £5000.

He regretted selling it very soon afterwards and within two months, tried to find it again to buy back. But it wasn't that easy, and Kevin only succeeded last summer when he saw it on eBay. He called the seller, and said that he would buy the van over the phone without even seeing it. The bloke asked whether he wanted to come and see if first, saying: "You can't buy it without seeing what it's like!" But Kevin replied: "Yes I can," and sent the guy £5000, balancing out what he had received for the van when he sold it himself.

"It's affectionately know as Barney," smiles Kevin. "My wife thought I was mad, when I bought it the first time, then when I sold it she was delighted, but now I have gone and bought it again she reckons I'm nuts! But it's all about good memories."

When Kevin got the van back home again, it was looking a little sad. Over the past few years the roof had become rather rusty and even though the last owner had said that it had been kept garaged in the dry, it had two whopping great mushrooms growing under the passenger seat!

Kevin always reckoned that it was built pretty well though, and the van was still very good underneath so there were no problems

## TechSpec

**ENGINE:** 2.0-litre Pinto, unknown spec, twin Weber DCOE carbs, 4-2-1 manifold, custom system

**TRANSMISSION:** Type-E four-speed gearbox, Anglia 105E axle, 3.54:1 final drive

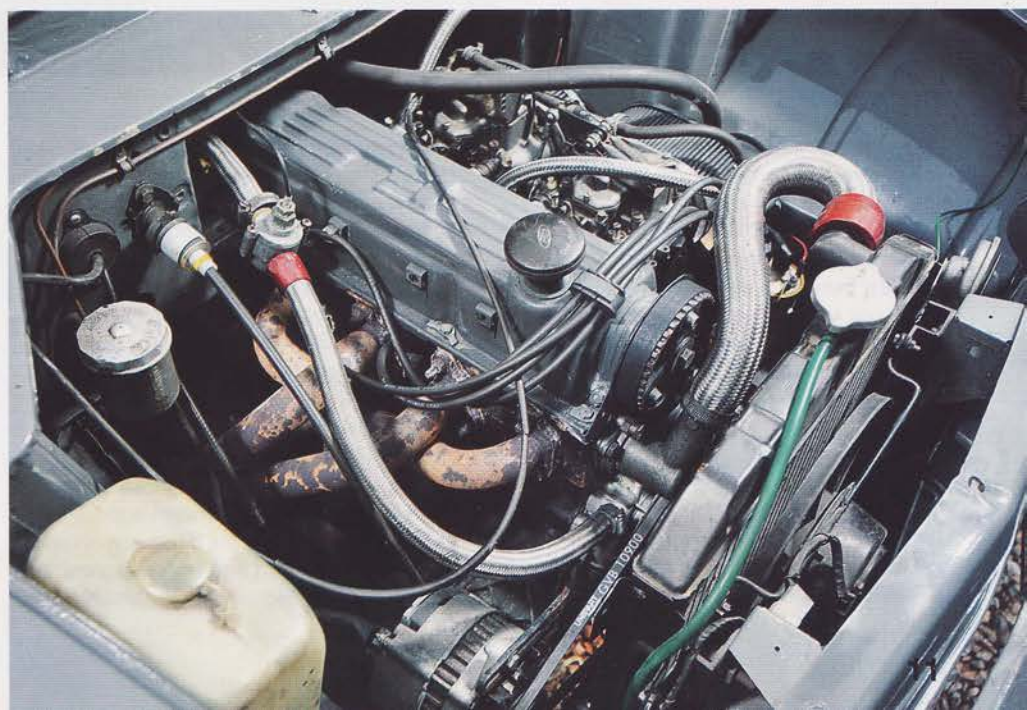
**SUSPENSION:** 2.8i Bilstein front struts, lowered springs, Capri steering rack, Triumph Dolomite steering column

**BRAKES:** Sierra XR4 front discs and calipers, standard rear drums

**WHEELS:** 5½ J 13" Lotus Cortina steels, 165/80 13" tyres

**INTERIOR:** Custom retrim, centre console, wood rim steering wheel, Cobra bezel

**EXTERIOR:** Re-chromed bumpers, period sign writing







there. However, the rot that had set into the top roof rails had rusted away the metal down the off-side. Kevin had to have that whole section re-fabricated. Now, on very close inspection, the driver's side is ever so slightly different from the passenger's side, where the repair has been carried out along the whole length of the gutter line. However, the job was done very well and the area very sensitively repainted so that none of the hand-painted sign work was disturbed. At first glance you would never realise any work had been done – since there was so little space to blend in and 'lose' the new paint without going into the AC logo – but the end result is superb.

Mechanically, only minor fettling was required. The car had come back to Kevin

with a receipt for £1600 for an engine rebuild. However, on closer inspection, Kevin feels fairly confident that the last owner was stung and not much was actually done to the engine. He could not get it to run smoothly at all, so he took it to a rolling road, where the timing of the 2.0-litre Pinto lump was found to be out by six degrees. Kevin also had a new exhaust system fabricated to replace the one on the van that was clearly getting past its sell-by date. And while the braking system appeared to be okay initially, the brakes kept seizing on intermittently, so that was also addressed by a total strip-down and meticulous rebuild.

Kevin likes the fact that, at first glance, the van appears pretty standard and that it's only

when you look at it more closely you begin to notice the work that's been done, which is when you realise there might be something a bit trick here. The interior is very nicely finished with red carpeting both in the front cab and throughout the rear carrying area. The smaller wood rim wheel, with its Cobra badge in the boss centre and the short gear lever that Kevin fitted, suit the 300E and work very well. More recently Kevin has toned the dash down, removing the previous owner's brushed aluminium work and taking it back, to age it as much as possible.

I was lucky enough to get a drive in Kevin's lovely van and so I'm able to give my thoughts on just how it drove. Apparently, in period, these vans used to be raced, as they





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were lighter than the 100E saloons. The suspension in Kevin's van would benefit from a little more time spent on it to make the handling better. At the moment it is somewhat nerve-wracking and it doesn't actually inspire much confidence!

With 150bhp from the 2.0-litre Pinto, there is loads of power on tap and masses of understeer. It's all manageable, but, in all honesty, the driving dynamics are just a tad too dynamic. Although the 300E has got acceleration and torque in bucket loads, it does not exactly fill the driver with confidence; it is almost like an American vehicle – it doesn't like doing bends very much. The brakes are very powerful although there seems to be rather too much front end bias. If

you were daft enough to hit a bend with a shade too much forward momentum, you certainly would not want to hit that centre pedal hard or the back would end up where the front should be in no time at all.

Having said all that, after half an hour in the 300E you start to get properly into it, and from that point on you begin to relax, which is when it becomes fun to drive. Flooring it in third out of fast sweeping bends you can hear those twin Webers gulping down air for all they are worth. You try to grab top in good time, or at least just before the valves start to bounce, but because of the axle ratio, the car keeps on going and it's generally the road conditions that have you backing off, well before the little 300E runs out of puff.

Barney has dragged the quarter-mile in 14 seconds, so you know it really doesn't hang around, and although it has not been properly timed from zero to 60mph, with current gearing it is estimated at below seven seconds, which, after driving the little 300E, I am sure must be pretty accurate.

Spinning the wheels from the off was no trouble and I could not help but get a massive buzz when the surrounding population looked down disdainfully as I dragged the van away from the lights. Smelling burning rubber, I suddenly realised that I was grinning from ear to ear, just like I used to in my own first car. Kevin Kivlochan's 300E is just great, and driving it is, just like he says: "all about memories." ♦



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