

HE WHO DARES...

...Wins, as Jason Lepley knows only too well. After putting his Escy through its paces on the rally track with great success, the GRP4 motor is granted a deserved overhaul.

Words Andrew Everett
Photos Dave Woodall



WILL ESCORTS EVER DIE? We doubt it, especially in the company of Jason Lepley's Escort rally car. It has been a rally car for nearly 25 years and has just undergone a professional rebuild, courtesy of Prepfab Motorsport (run by Jason's brother) so it can do another quarter-of-a-century's-worth of racing.

The car in question, 'FFP', is a famous old rally car in its own right. It was originally built for international rallies in 1980, and was then successfully campaigned in the British Open Rally championship — sponsored by Silkolene Oils — and driven by Ian Tilke in the mid '80s. Owned and rallied by Jason for the last few years, it was decided to give it a well-deserved ground-up rebuild.

So, after campaigning for a full year in BTRDA rallies, with great success, Jason reflects, "She was getting a little tired and needed some attention, so in exchange for sponsorship my brother, Richard, agreed to help reshell the car." The idea was to rebuild the car as light as possible, with plenty of rear wheel/suspension travel while still retaining the traditional spec and layout of the original so Jason could use it in Historic rallies in the future.



Lots of little tricks were added along the way, which have come through the vast experience that both Jason and his brother Richard have picked up over the years of being involved with the sport. "When you have owned and seen as many Escorts as we have, you can't help but learn a little along the way," says Jason.

A perfect donor shell was sourced and given the Full Monty treatment at Prepfab: weld-in cage with detachable forward triangulation (for Historics), six-linked, large inner wheelarch tubs, big tunnels, various strengthening and gusseting, lowered boot floor (for carrying two spare wheels when Historic rallying) and shell lightening. This was all before the car was painted in the traditional 'Lepley Rally Red', which incidentally is a Ferrari Red.

A new lightweight loom was made, with minimal switchgear and gauges to save weight. Then the car was slowly rebuilt

taking lots of care using lightweight materials where possible and keeping everything to a minimum. Things like the heater motor was thrown away to save weight, the window wiper linkage was drilled to save ounces, bumper irons were replaced with alloy ones, and even the bonnet stay was replaced for an alloy version. "The only extravagance on the weight we retained was the glass rather than Perspex, as it is my pet hate."

The car has been cleverly built as a modern 2wd rally car but with Historic rallying in mind. "The way we have built the car, we could convert it to Historic spec in a couple of days and convert it back as required — it's a dual-purpose Escort," smiles Jason.

The engine was built and sponsored by Connaught Race Engines who now has the rights to Warrior engines. It was a special-build 2.4 Warrior using an ultra big-valve head running on fuel injection and a mapped ECU, in conjunction with the 88 mm crank, and the dyno figures are quite impressive. The other trick items on the car include state-of-the-art three-way Proflex suspension (the damper rebound and damping can be adjusted as well as the ride heights) which should help with traction/road handling and cut down on tyre-wear problems. Electric power steering with adjustable sensitivity, and some other 'trade secrets', which Jason didn't want to disclose, were also thrown into the mixer.

"The key to building a good car is to take your time," he reasons. "Taking care to drill and lock wire bolts, copper greasing, assembling with the correct-length bolts and giving everything lots of thought before you plough in is of the utmost importance. These cars can't be rushed — you have to put your heart and soul into them."

Jason assures us that this car wasn't built to pose in or be polished, though. It has been built for a purpose and will be →



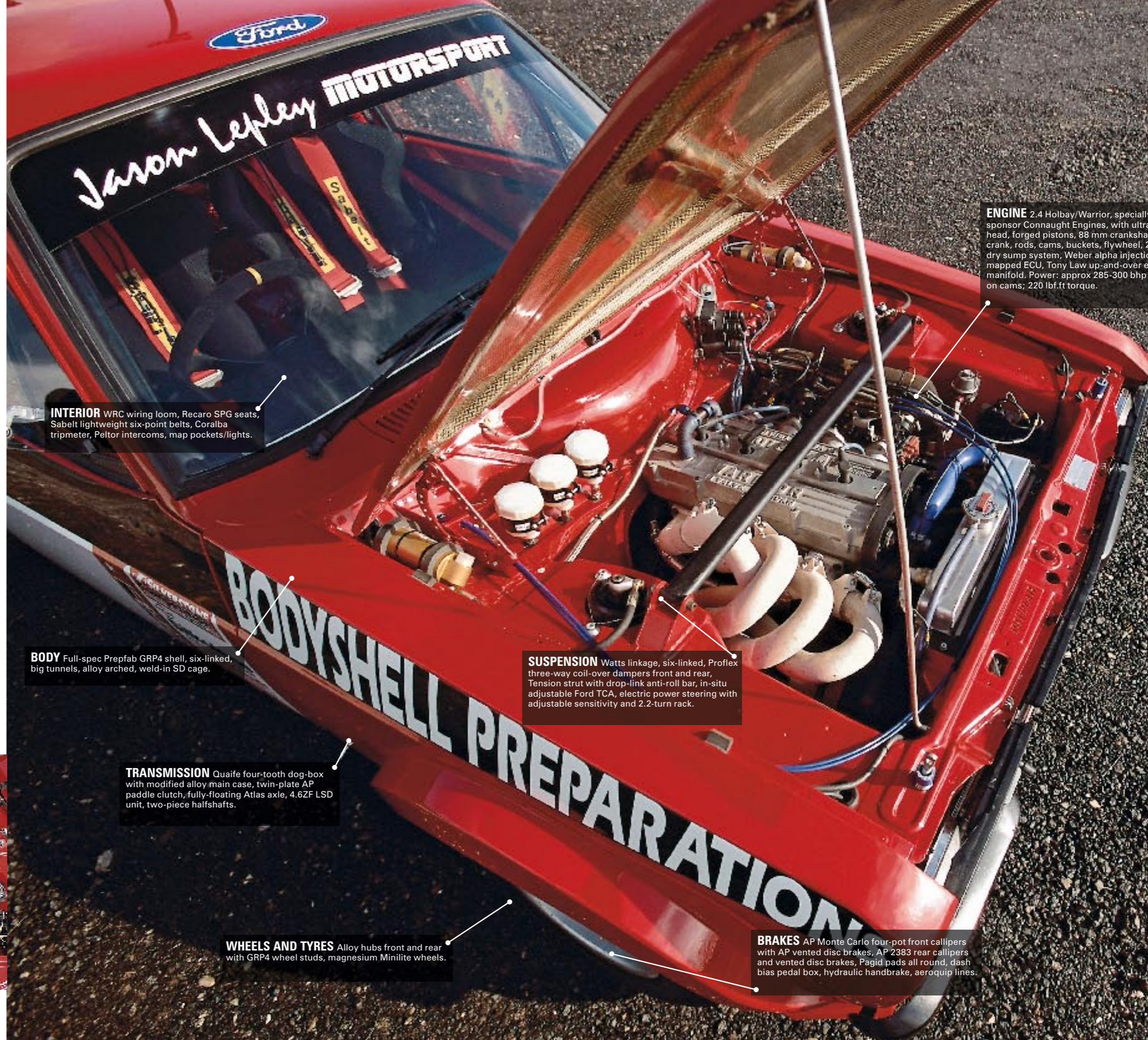
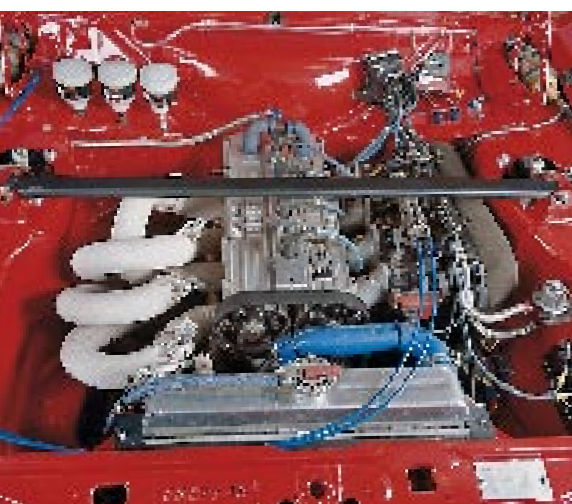
rally car rebuild

used in anger and thrown down the gravel forest roads as fast as he dares.

"Once we get the car dialled-in properly it'll be much quicker than its predecessor as it has all the right ingredients. Getting it all to work together as a package is the tricky bit — suspension, brakes, engine and gearing etc — but once it's been converted to Historic spec it should be very competitive. Every area of the car has been improved too and it's so light, which is important when you have less power to play with," emphasises Jason.

So with your previous rally successes, what are your predictions for the future? "Just wait and see really. It's going to take four or five rallies to get used to the new handling and engine. We hope to do some BTRDA/ANCRO rallies and perhaps the RAC Rally, and convert it to Historic spec, as that's where I see Escorts going in the future.

"It's a massive growth area in the sport and industry, which is taken very seriously. That's where I've got to be to promote my sponsors and my business." Jason needn't worry though, as thanks to him and Prepfab's impressive work, this Escort will be around for a long time to do just that. Escorts will never die! 🏎️



INTERIOR WRC wiring loom, Recaro SPG seats, Sabelt lightweight six-point belts, Coralba tripmeter, Peltor intercoms, map pockets/lights.

BODY Full-spec Prepfab GRP4 shell, six-linked, big tunnels, alloy arched, weld-in SD cage.

TRANSMISSION Quaife four-tooth dog-box with modified alloy main case, twin-plate AP paddle clutch, fully-floating Atlas axle, 4.6ZF LSD unit, two-piece halfshafts.

WHEELS AND TYRES Alloy hubs front and rear with GRP4 wheel studs, magnesium Minilite wheels.

SUSPENSION Watts linkage, six-linked, Proflex three-way coil-over dampers front and rear, Tension strut with drop-link anti-roll bar, in-situ adjustable Ford TCA, electric power steering with adjustable sensitivity and 2.2-turn rack.

BRAKES AP Monte Carlo four-pot front callipers with AP vented disc brakes, AP 2383 rear callipers and vented disc brakes, Pagid pads all round, dash bias pedal box, hydraulic handbrake, aeroquip lines.

ENGINE 2.4 Holbay/Warrior, specially built by sponsor Connaught Engines, with ultra big-valve head, forged pistons, 88 mm crankshaft, all steel crank, rods, cams, buckets, flywheel, 200 block, dry sump system, Weber alpha injection and mapped ECU, Tony Law up-and-over exhaust manifold. Power: approx 285-300 bhp depending on cams; 220 lbf.ft torque.



This is proper rally kit! Light, powerful and as stiff as they come. Between the 2.4 Holbay/Warrior is 300 brake horse and some of the trickiest suspension available. Jason's car will be a real force to be reckoned with on the stages.



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