



Great Outdoors



John Muir Trust

Established in 1983, the John Muir Trust aims to promote awareness of the value of wild lands and protect them from development. The John Muir Award, open to all, recognises the conservation efforts of individuals and groups. Trust members receive updates on activities, get to attend events and participate in the election of trustees. Dues start from £24 for individuals and £36 for families to £550 for lifetime membership.

Lanre Akinola  
www.jmt.org



The Prize

\$35 and the  
Cucumber Rind Cup  
The Miss Crustacean  
Hermit-Crab  
Beauty Contest

Hermit Munster clinched this year's coveted Cucumber Rind Cup, proudly taking her place alongside such legends as Crabunzel, Crabopatra and Pirates of the Crabibbean. The annual event in Ocean City, New Jersey, attracts hermit beauties from far and wide and is followed by hermit-crab racing.



Road test  
Flight of fancy

Bristol Fighter S  
by John Griffiths



THE FACTORY IS REACHED THROUGH A LABYRINTH

OF NONDESCRIPT STREETS in a corner of Filton, on the outskirts of Bristol. A sign proclaiming "Bristol Cars" stands alongside gates of solid, blue-painted steel. Beyond them lies the production site of a car maker that is without doubt the industry's most mysterious.

I have no idea what goes on behind those gates; nor, so far as I am aware, has any other journalist. We have been barred from Bristol's factory from the beginning.

On this occasion, however, one gate has been left ajar. Peeking through, I can see two workshop buildings, each maybe 100ft long, two-dozen parked cars – everyday ones, presumably belonging to employees – and a couple of truck trailers with blue curtains hiding their wares. There is an air of 1960s

industrial Britain. The architectural élan of the headquarters of other "supercar" makers is entirely absent. Even the public face of Bristol Cars is low-key: a small showroom in London's West Kensington. The company sells directly to customers; there are no dealers.

No, says Richard Hackett, Bristol's de facto marketing chief, not even the FT can go inside the sanctum. When pressed, he cites confidential defence contracts linked to Bristol Cars' origins as an offshoot of the Bristol Aeroplane Company.

I should perhaps count myself lucky that Bristol has allowed me to drive one of its products at all. Anthony Crook, who owned the company until his retirement last year, refused journalists test drives, and not much has changed since his longtime associate, Toby Silverton, bought the company from him. As far as I am aware, Steve Cropley, the editor-in-chief of Autocar, is the only other journalist to have driven the Fighter – and only by borrowing one from a customer.

By the end of the test drive – shunning the M4 motorway and traversing instead such picturesque towns and villages as Marlborough and quaint Castle Combe along the old A4 trunk road – I find the Fighter as enigmatic as the



PHOTOGRAPHS: JAY WILLIAMS



## THE DETAILS

A "supercar" like no other from Britain's most eccentric car company

### HOW MUCH

£295,395

### HOW FAST

Top speed 210mph (claimed), 0-60, 4 secs (estimated)

### HOW THIRSTY

No data

### HOW GREEN

No CO<sub>2</sub> data

### ALSO CONSIDER

Bristol aficionados will consider nothing else

company. It is a car (with a price that ranges from £234,984 to £351,912 before options) in respect of which all conventional yardsticks of value must be set aside.

The Fighter was announced in 1999, with initial deliveries scheduled for 2001. But not until 2003 did Bristol show even a rolling chassis. Since then, Fighters have obviously been delivered to customers, as Croypley's drive proved, but how many is unclear. Bristol said it would build 20 Fighters a year. Surprisingly, given that FT readers are more likely than most to be able to afford one, the test Fighter is a 2005-registered model with substantial mileage.

Some might pay out what is an almighty sum for the Fighter's hand-crafted aluminium body alone. That its curves and precision of fit are the work of human hands, not computer-controlled machinery, is something to marvel at. Only the upward-opening gull-wing doors and the tailgate are made of carbon fibre.

The Fighter's design is like that of no other car. Its shape is unique, crafted to go very fast but eschewing all the conventions of current supercars. It is taller and narrower than rivals. It bears some resemblance to a land-bound aircraft, which is no accident:

Silverton puts great stress on Bristol's use of aerospace principles to create its low-drag designs. The claimed drag coefficient of 0.255 for the highest-specified Fighter T model is industry-leading.

The aerospace theme is echoed in the interior, with some instruments mounted in the roof. There is an extraordinary amount of room in the "cockpit". You also cannot help but love the clear glass section of the lower tailgate, providing rearward visibility a tail gunner would appreciate. The interior is beautifully trimmed in Wilton and the leather bucket seats will take their occupants across continents in comfort. The tight turning circle would do credit to some taxis.

And yet there is a feeling of the unfinished about the Bristol. There is a delightful (but £1,751 optional) engine-turned surface available for the flat metal dashboard, centre console and roof panel. But the panels are fastened by visible Allen screws and the dashboard appears covered with a lacquer that makes it seem slightly aged. The electric seat adjusters are in plain aluminium panels I could replicate in my workshop. Control knobs are hand-turned from aluminium, and look it. Maybe such an idiosyncratic approach is treasured by Bristol owners as part of the mystique, but it is well removed from the luxurious opulence of the similarly priced Rolls-Royce Phantom Coupé or the £137,500 Bentley Continental GT Speed.

The Bristol's ride, despite sophisticated double wishbone suspension all round, still feels under-developed.

Consider, also, the Chrysler-based drivetrains and some may struggle to see such high value in the car. But Bristol is in its 63rd year and presumably has a loyal following.

Even the "standard" Fighter, with its 525bhp and relatively lightweight 1,500kg, goes hard – Bristol claims 210mph. The £295,395 Fighter "S", with a claimed 628bhp, goes harder yet. Quite what is to be made of the new twin-turbocharged, £351,912 Fighter T, with a claimed 1,021bhp, must await serious test. Bristol claims a potential top speed of over 270 miles per hour but to have limited it to 225mph as being "more than sufficient".

An appropriate response is, perhaps: "Prove it." ■

## Try this Dog listening

By Claire Roberts



"Dogs can be confused by our world, and their place in it," says Rachael Messiter of Talking Paws.

Messiter makes the canine world more accessible to dog owners using the Amichien Bonding method, pioneered by dog behavioural expert Jan Fennell. "It's not about owners controlling their animal's behaviour, it's about creating an environment where dogs can think for themselves and operate self-control," she says.

### THE DETAILS

Dog listening with Rachael Messiter costs £200, including follow-up support. [www.talkingpaws.co.uk](http://www.talkingpaws.co.uk)

Messiter is working with Flynn, my five-year-old Dalmatian, who can be aggressive around other male dogs. She diagnoses that Flynn is assuming the role of pack leader, and is acting up to protect his pack – me. I must work with Flynn to reassert my alpha position and help him feel confident that I, not he, will deal with any danger.

Dog listening involves working with a dog's natural instinct, using non-verbal cues to mimic the "alpha" behaviour displayed by the pack leader. I am to demonstrate leadership in four key areas: 1) Eating. I must eat first (unless the alpha stays strong and healthy, the whole pack is at risk). 2) Hunting (our walks). I am to be in control at all times, with Flynn on the lead, released from the "stress" of leading the walk. 3) Protection. I assess potential threats and deal with them accordingly. 4) Status. On arriving home I am to ignore Flynn and greet him only when I'm ready. This is hard for me.

After three weeks, Flynn no longer launches himself at other larger, fiercer breeds. I sense he is happier and I feel that I have mastered the art of "talking" dog. It is, after all, easier for us to learn their language than for them to learn ours.

NEXT WEEK IN PURSUITS

➤ Angel Gurría-Quintana goes for a late-night stargazing picnic

➤ Rohit Jaggi roars off on the Buell 1125R

➤ Angus Watson tries ice climbing