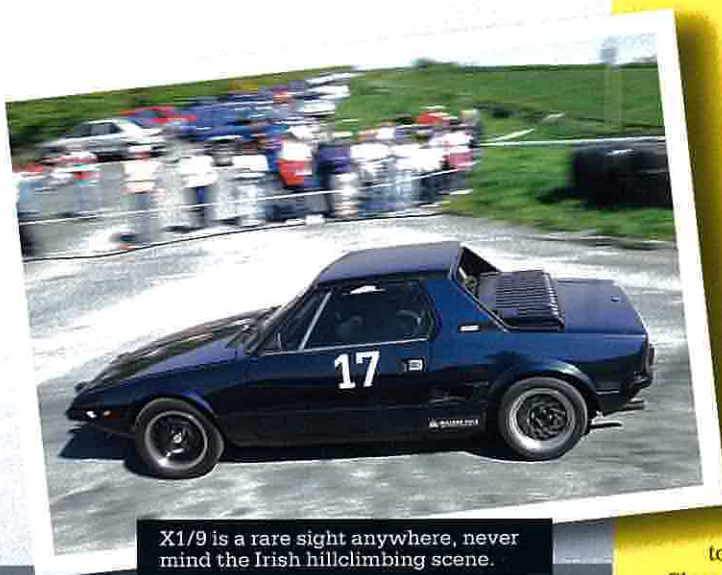




XTREME SPORTS

With his high-revving X1/9, Gordon Fogarty's launching a one man wedgy Italian assault on Ireland's hillclimbs.

Words Andrew Bushe
Photos Roy Dempster



X1/9 is a rare sight anywhere, never mind the Irish hillclimbing scene.



Front bonnet hides an aluminium fuel tank, with the engine mid-mounted.



Gordon Fogarty: long standing Fiat fanatic and X1/9 campaigner.



For most people the Fiat X1/9 is just a cheap two-seater sports car, ideal for a bit of summer fun, and that's what Gordon Fogarty from Belfast probably thought when he bought his 1988 example six years ago. Gordon's a fan of Italian cars, having owned Fiat 127s, 128s, Uno and Punto Turbos, Lancias and Alfas.

"The thing about the Fiats is that quite often they have great high revving engines, but the rest can fall to pieces," laughs Gordon. "But if you're prepared

to work at them they're cheap fun."

Cheap fun is exactly what the Fiat X1/9 has been providing and, as with many enthusiasts, Gordon wanted to make the little projectile go faster, and during 2001 he converted the car for use in the Northern Ireland Sprint and Hillclimb Championships. This probably isn't as easy as it sounds - there aren't many parts for an X1/9 available off the shelf.

Aside from a bit of stock rod racing in the mid '80s, this was Gordon's first foray into competitive motorsport, but before that he had the challenge of finding all the bits and pieces.

Fiat X1/9s are a rare tool nowadays, and part of that reason is that they are notorious rot boxes. Floorpans, inner sills, suspension top mounts and rear wheelarches are notorious things to look out for, but what makes Gordon's car so special is that it's mint.

Introduced in 1974, the X1/9 originally started life with a 1290cc unit, which was bored out to 1489cc after 1978. The unit in this X1/9 pumps out approximately 130 bhp, and features Twin 40 Webers, an Avanti Stage II head and cam and electronic

"Bring it up to 150 bhp and rev to 9000 rpm"

ignition. A baffled sump and lightened flywheel have been sourced from as far away as California, and the engine breathes through a four-branch CSC

manifold. But that engine has now been stripped and is being uprated to a 1610cc unit featuring a long stroke crank which came from Macedonia: "I'm told that the crank and new pistons should bring it up to 150 bhp and it will rev to 9000 rpm, but it awaits to be found out," says Gordon.

All this power will go to a close-ratio Alquati five-speed box which came from America, and the rest of the



drivetrain is standard, a factor which Gordon knows will require some testing as there will now be twice the power of a standard X1/9 running through the back drivshafts.

Stopping is taken care of with Fiat Uno Turbo front callipers and Fiat 132 rear callipers (which came from New Zealand) with vented discs and braided hoses. "The internet and eBay have been a fantastic source of parts," says Gordon.

The Fiat is held up by Leda racing struts and springs with a front strut brace incorporated to help stop the body flexing. With its rear engine it could have strange handling characteristics, but not at the Drumhore hillclimb where we watched it in action. "It's a surprisingly neutral car," explains Gordon. "If it gets too sideways in the wet you're not going to get it back, but the rear engine presents a good advantage off the start line: there's no wheelspin, giving us good times on the 60 ft timing beams."

A full roll cage, Cobra bucket seats and a stripped out interior all add to the race feel of the car, while an alloy foam-filled fuel tank is another safety feature in the front of the car, but this second hand part almost caused a full scale disaster: "It was coming to Belfast through Parcel Force," recalls Gordon. "In the main Hastings sorting office they could smell the petrol from the

"They could smell the petrol in the package"

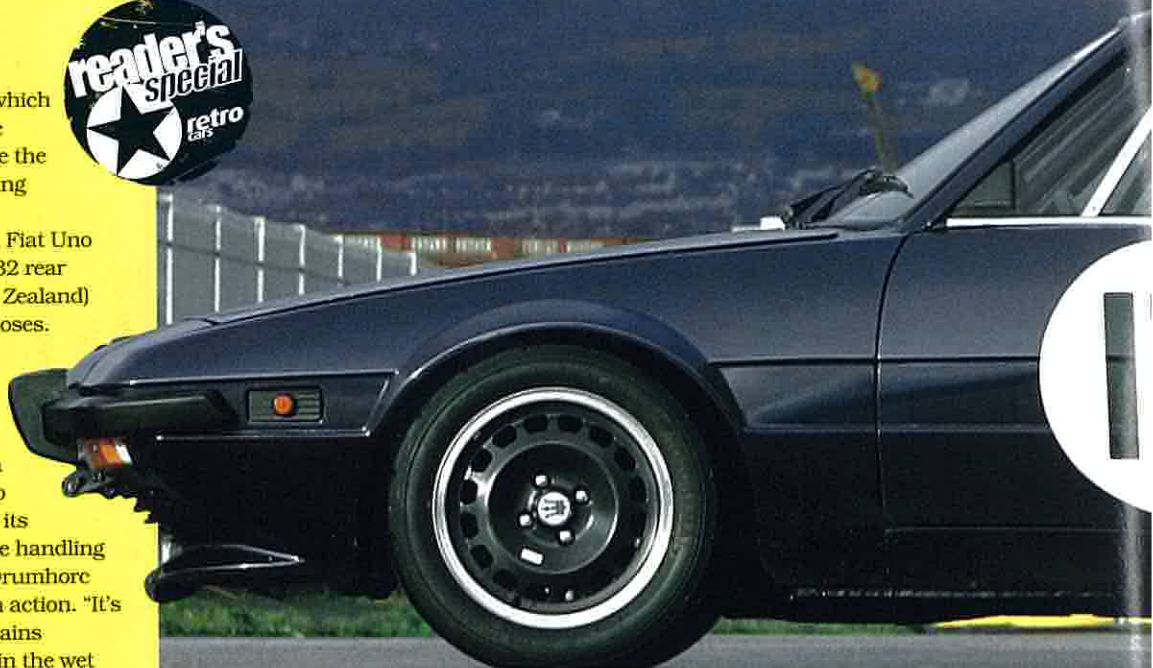
package, and with it being destined for Belfast, well... It turned out that the Hastings office was evacuated for two hours, the main road outside closed and the Police called in to deal with the package. It was all over the *Hastings Gazette* I believe."

Gathering all the bits and pieces could not have been easy, but it's a part of the challenge that Gordon enjoys. He must also enjoy working on the car, as he's sourced all the parts, prepared and maintained the car himself, giving him great satisfaction when attempting Ireland's fearsome hillclimbs.

Competing in the up-to-1700cc road-going class, it's fair to say the Fiat isn't the most powerful or lightest machine in the class, although at 830 kg it's far from heavy.

The rules for the road-going class are relatively simple: the car must not be modified externally from standard and must be presented in an MoT-passable condition. The engine must retain the standard block and head castings, but internal modifications are free, and the cars must run on road legal tyres - the X1/9 is running Yokohama O48s, mounted on Maserati wheels.

The class is a heavily subscribed one with up to 14 cars on events in the Association of Northern Ireland Car Club (ANICC) sprints



130 bhp 1489cc lump will soon be treated to a new crank and pistons, which should liberate 150 bhp.





Fiat's smooth Italian lines have, thankfully, been left unspoilt.



Interior's been stripped-out to achieve a lightweight 830 kg.



No rusting arches here.



Strut brace and aluminium fuel tank take residence in the front.



Maserati rims wear road-legal Yokohama 048 rubber, in line with regulations.



and hillclimbs. Nevertheless, the Fiat finished fifth in the series in 2005. Gordon also won the road-going sports car class in the Thoroughbred and Sportscar Club Championship (TSCC).

"We are not quite on the pace of the leading cars in the main ANICC series, but it's good to be in the better half of the pack, and with the engine modifications we'll see if we can progress up the field," says Gordon.

He's looking forward to the 2006 season, having received a little sponsorship over the past few seasons from D&J Group Wages, and this coming season the X1/9 could see service on some of the hillclimbs in the South of Ireland, perhaps including the famous Knockalla Climb in Donegal.

The first round of the ANICC series took place in March at Kirkistown and Gordon was unsure whether the engine would be back in time. But if you see the X1/9 on the hills this year, spare a thought for this very rare car, and the race before the start of any event to find all the parts and keep it running to make it into a competitive, fun and very cheap competition car. ★



X1/9 HILLCLIMBER TECH SPEC

BODY

Standard 1988 X1/9 shell.

ENGINE

Mid-mounted 1489cc, Avanti Stage 2 head and cam, electronic ignition, baffled sump, four-branch CSC manifold, twin 40 Weber carbs. Max power: 130 bhp.

TRANSMISSION

Close-ratio Alquati five-speed gearbox, lightened flywheel.

SUSPENSION

Leda racing struts and springs all round, front strut brace.

BRAKES

Front: Fiat Uno Turbo callipers. Rear: Fiat 132 callipers. Vented discs and braided hoses all round.

WHEELS AND TYRES

Yokohama 048 rubber on Maserati alloys.

INTERIOR

Full roll cage, Cobra bucket seats, alloy, foam-filled fuel tank.