

# MotoringPlus

## One of the last of the Kiwi car makers

An Upper Hutt workshop is putting out a car that's all about having fun driving.

ALEX MCDONALD is used to receiving blank looks when he tells people he makes cars for a living.

Speaking in his soft northern English accent he recalls, "they say, 'what do you mean you make cars - only Toyota and Ford do that!'"

"And then they say, 'do you mean little models?'"

Nope, it's not about toys. His fibreglass business Almac is one of only a handful of New Zealand companies manufacturing kit cars, ready for assembly by hobbyists all over the country.

After originally training as a fitter and turner with engineering firm Vickers-Armstrongs in Britain, McDonald moved to New Zealand with his Kiwi wife Diana in 1967.

He worked for a time in the drawing office at the Dunlop tyre factory in Upper Hutt before deciding he wanted to go out on his own, setting up Almac in 1971.

In the early days he made hard tops for MG Midgets, but most of his income came from the products he made for a number of Wellington garden centres.

"We used to make fish ponds. It is strange how things come and go. In the early 1970s everybody seemed to want a fish pond."

It wasn't long before his love of

motorcars drew him into designing and building kit cars. (His son Stuart shares his love of designing motorcars and now works alongside Alex in the Trentham workshop.)

Almac has produced several different kit cars over the years. One of the most popular was a replica of the high performance AC Cobra. The car, which was named the Almac 427sc, was built in association with Graham Berry Race Cars, with McDonald making the body and Berry the chassis.

Almac's current model is the Lotus 7-style Clubsprint, a lightweight performance-oriented car.

"It is like being on a motorbike without having to dress up with a crash helmet.

"It is a completely different feeling than you get driving a normal car.

"You can have quite a bit of fun with them."

Almac supplies the chassis and body, with the mechanical parts coming from a donor car, the Mazda MX-5, which clients source themselves.

"All the mechanicals you need, you get them off the MX-5, which is a really good car. It is virtually indestructible."

The kit is offered in instalments, providing clients with a pay-as-you-go build scheme which McDonald says gives people the flexibility to work within their budgets and the time and space they have.

"You are looking at about \$22,000 for all the parts we sell, but if they start off with \$5000 worth of kit, they can get quite a bit done on the car."

McDonald says he has had



Alex McDonald of Almac cars in Upper Hutt with the Clubsprint XL which can be bought as a kit to build at home or which Almac can supply in its finished form.

some clients build their dream machines within six months, but it is more common for people to take two years or more.

And while Almac can assemble the Clubsprints and supply them as finished products, customers invariably want to build the cars themselves. The kits come with a build manual and McDonald is available to provide help and advice by phone or email along the way.

"They spend a year or two years on a hobby and then at the end of the time they can say 'I

built that.'"

The company has customers all over the country, and even has one client building a Clubsprint in Melbourne.

McDonald says it's impossible to pigeon hole his customer base. Previous clients have included panel beaters, doctors, surgeons - and even journalists.

The road legal cars are popular as weekend racers, particularly for those who want to take part in track days.

"You can drive to the track and go in for a race and then

drive home again."

And they don't depreciate anywhere near as much as a model bought off a showroom floor.

"The beauty of it is that if you keep it for a few years and you want to sell, you don't lose that much money on it. On the Cobras and the Clubsprints, you can more or less get your money back. You don't get your labour back, but at least you get most of your money back," he says.

For more information visit: [www.almac.co.nz](http://www.almac.co.nz)



### EVENTS

September 27: Tararua Rodders are holding their two-yearly Chrome 'n Custom Auto Festival

Beissel for more information: [hayden@southwards.co.nz](mailto:hayden@southwards.co.nz)

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