

Colorado-bred sports car has road, curbside appeal

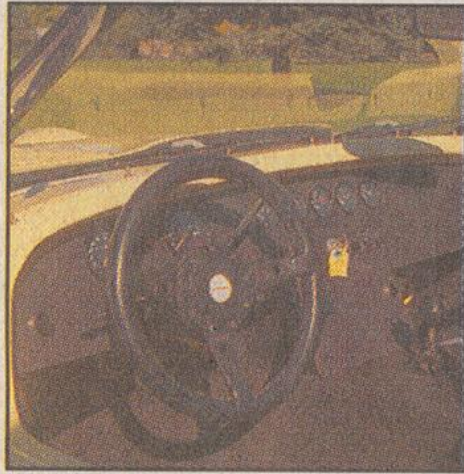
By John Eaton

Denver Post Automotive Writer

A sparkling clean, automotive shop in Englewood is giving birth to a new sports car that promises to tickle the fancy of drivers 15 to 75 who want fun, wind in the hair and acrobatic performance.

The car, the Maxton, is the brainchild of local car buff/collector Bob Sutherland and is being manufactured by Maxton Components Limited, 3774 S. Lipan St.

Dan Ripley, owner and president of the company, says his car is as exhilarating as a motorcycle, but lacks some of the dangers often associated with the two-wheeler. It's also affordable — at \$19,500 FOB Englewood.



The intent of the Maxton is to recreate the driving experience of cars produced during the heyday of the sports car era.

Curbside, the Maxton is slightly reminiscent of a Morgan because of its open-air, free-wheeling appearance. But

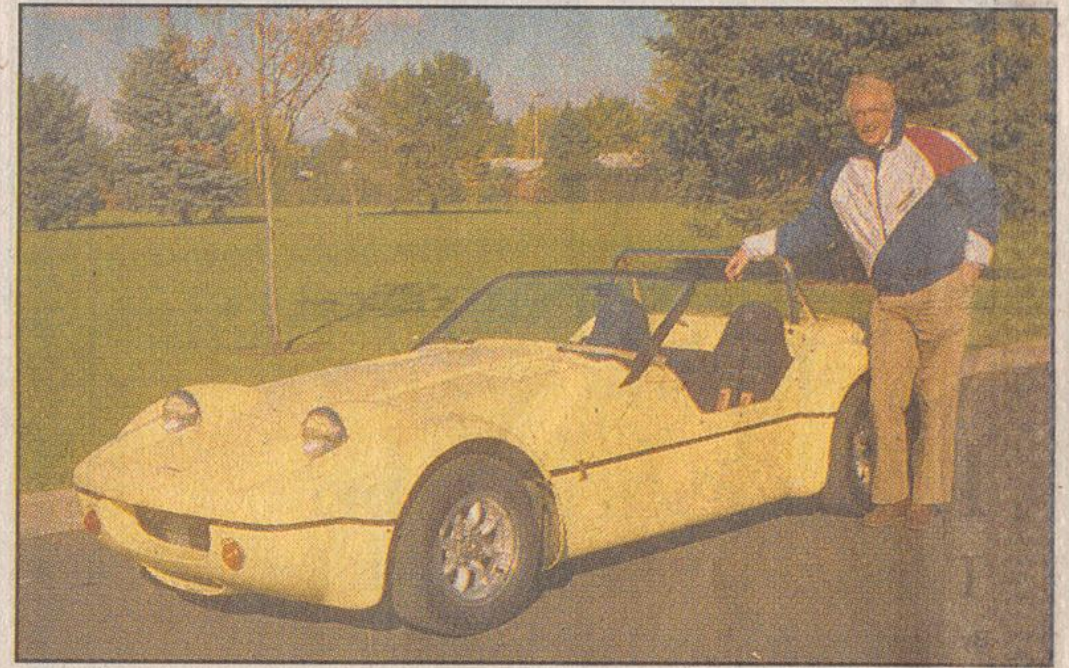
it's finished off with more sophistication and has appealing exterior lines, a rarity in the automotive world. The coachwork was designed by Denverite Michael Mate.

The Maxton is what Ripley calls a "component car." That means the company supplies and sells the complete car — with one notable exception: the buyer installs the engine.

Ripley emphasizes that the Maxton is not a "kit" car. Many kit cars earned questionable reputations. Many were aerodynamic shapes designed to utilize a Volkswagen frame and drive train but were difficult to assemble.

Ripley's car is designed to

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AFFORDABLE: Dan Ripley, owner and president of Maxton Components, shows off the Maxton. Interior pictured at left.

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make assembly easy because the only thing the owner does is drop in an engine and drive away. All electronics, fuel lines and other elements that cause knotty assembly problems with kit cars already are installed.

All that's required, Ripley says, are a few basic tools, an engine hoist (that can be rented) and about 50 hours of time. Two mechanics can install the engine in an 8-hour day. And maintenance and future repairs will be simplified because parts are readily available at auto parts stores.

Powerplant chosen for the Maxton is the Mazda rotary engine because it's a strong performer and used or reconditioned engines are readily available. Ripley says the lightweight, 1,680-pound car is capable of going from 0 to 60 mph in a tad over 5 seconds and is capable of 130 mph.

Ripley stresses that safety, in addition to performance and handling, also has been engineered into the Maxton. He claims the car's steel space-frame has eight times the torsional rigidity and strength of a standard production car, yet it weighs only 211 pounds. Another bragging point is that the car has a near-perfect front/rear balance ratio of 47 percent/53 percent.

Both the frame and the suspension — made and assembled in the Englewood plant — were designed by Ben Vanderlinden, an auto engineer associated with SCCA Enterprises. The suspension is double wishbone in front and a live axle in the rear. C.F. Maier Composites of Lamar made the fiberglass body.

"Everything possible I get through Colorado sources," Ripley says. "I feel strongly about that."

Marketing of the car, so far, has been casual, mostly by word of mouth. The prototype was driven

during the Colorado Grand Tour last month, a sports car tour of the Colorado high country that attracted drivers and collectors from the United States and a few foreign nations.

It was received with high interest, and word spread among auto aficionados. Already there have been inquiries from Japan, and the TV program "Motor Week" will assemble a Maxton in its studios and serialize the project on six segments of the show, beginning this spring. "Motor Week" is seen on 308 stations across the nation.

Obviously, this attention pleases Ripley. But, for now, Ripley sees the company staying small and growing carefully.