

look is more harmonious. True, the appearance is still a little, shall we say, "different" (think of it as a race car for the street, rather than a street car for racing). But the looks grow on you, especially as you become familiar with the car's underlying personality. It is precisely this depth of character, this engineering excellence, that ultimately wins you over.

Even though the Consulier is not available in kit form, the specialty vehicle industry can learn much from its design and construction. This turn-key component car points the way for other manufacturers in showing just how much can be done with composite technology. In the past, kit cars earned a reputation for having flimsy fiberglass bodies mounted on only slightly more rigid chassis designs. Improvements have been made over the years, particularly by manufacturers of Cobra replicas, but the Consulier represents a quantum leap in construction. Its incredibly light, 275-pound, unitized frame-and-body is composed entirely of *fiberglass*.

Describing the car's innovative monocoque design, Consulier's Roy Chapin points out with disarming simplicity, "There's no metal between the front and rear wheels." Consulier achieves this engineering feat by using the best composite technology available (see sidebar). Aerospace and marine engineers have employed advanced composites for years, but automotive applications are rare except in racing cars and concept vehicles such as the Zender Fact 4 ("Zender Fact 4 Spider," March '92). Even the much touted Corvette's composite body is merely a polyester shell of chopped glass attached to a tubular chassis. Ditto for the Viper, whose clamshell front hood wobbles all over the place upon opening.

Contrast that with the Consulier's bulletproof Kevlar and carbon-fiber construction. Wack the body with a rubber mallet and it simply shrugs off the blows. And after several collisions on the race track with steel-body cars, time and again the Consulier has emerged virtually unscathed. In another incident, a BMW and a Consulier running side-by-side on a remote mountain road plowed into herd of

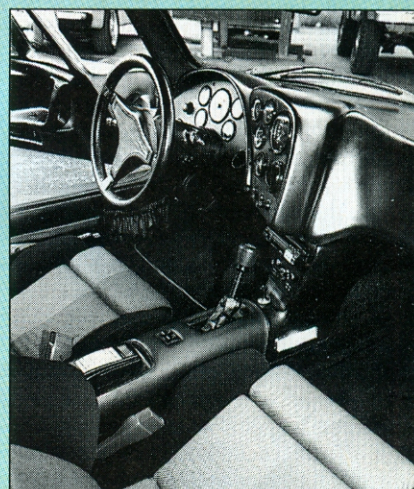
deer. The Beemer lost most of its front end, while the Consulier suffered only a small crack and a broken headlight. Moreover, the Consulier has passed the DOT's crash tests with flying colors. So much for the supposed drawbacks of a "plastic car."

Beyond its merits of structural integrity, the Consulier's construction offers numerous benefits for the performance enthusiast. Outfitted with merely a 2.2-liter Chrysler four-banger (albeit turbocharged to 200 hp), this featherweight street-fighter punches from 0 to 60 mph in less than five seconds, and knocks out the quarter-mile in 13.5 seconds. And believe it or not, it still gets 34 mpg on the highway.

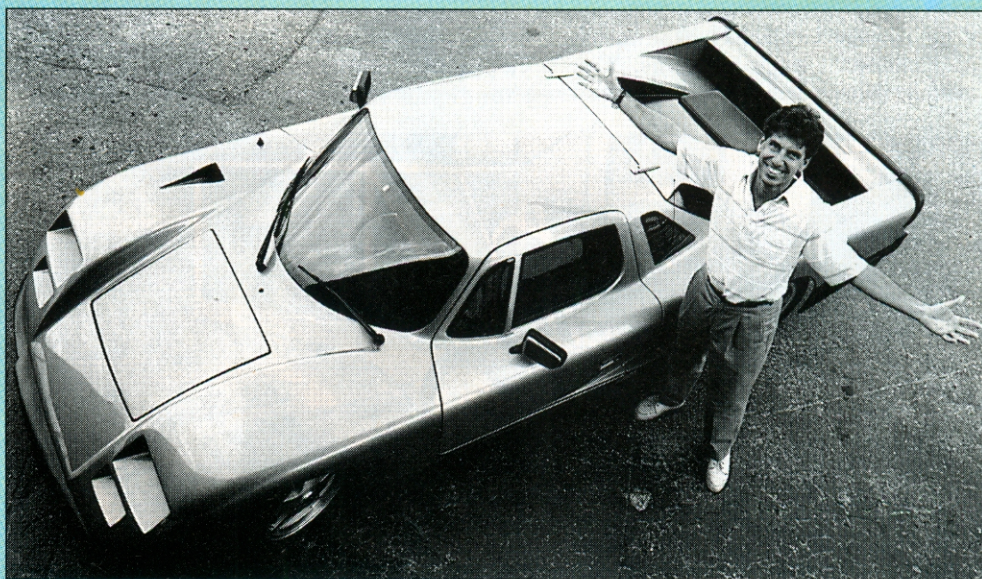
Even faster times are undoubtedly possible with the new 16-valve 224hp Turbo III. The Consulier armed with this new ammo is fittingly called the C-4 (after the plastic explosive). Both engines come from the skunkworks of none other than Carroll Shelby himself. The Turbo 2.2 engine is the same one that radically transformed the Dodge Omni GLH and GLHS (Shelby once quipped that the initials stood for "Goes Like Hell" and "Goes Like Hell Somemore").

As I discovered firsthand at Consulier's facility near West Palm Beach, Florida, these phrases are even more apt when the engines are mid-mounted in a car with a total weight of less than 2000 pounds. There's none of that annoying turbo-lag you'd expect in a conventional car, and when the blow-dryer does kick in, it feels like you're headed for

warp speed. The ringing of the turbo signals the imminent kick in the pants, and when it hits—*hang on*. Even in light traffic on the freeway, you have to ease off the throttle sooner than you'd expect to keep from riding up the bumpers of cars ahead. Upon lifting the gas pedal, the wastegate emits this weird ratcheting, sucking sound like some reptile from *Alien*. You've just struck with the speed of a rattlesnake, and there's no recovering from this bite. Indeed, Consulier is so confident of the superiority of its design, the firm has a standing offer of \$100,000 to anyone who can beat its times on a road course with a production-built sports car. Nobody's collected yet—though controversy has clouded some of the competitions held.



The revamped interior of the LX model is now in keeping with the Consulier's exotic image.



Warren Mosler has thrown up his arms to trying to understand the reactions to his Consulier.