



Viper Bob - On the Job!

Some Cobra factories are huge, others are medium-sized, some are tiny. Cobretti is one of the longest established names in the replica Cobra industry and was very well known in the late 1980's and early 1990's. What isn't so well known is that it's still quietly producing a handful of Viper Cobras each year from its tiny south London factory. **Vince McGonigle** contacted the man behind the Cobretti marque, **Bob Busbridge**, and went to visit what must be one of the smallest Cobra factories in the country, if not the world. He loved the experience; didn't want to come home; and recommends Bob's services to anyone who has a mechanical challenge, particularly one involving an older Cobra kit. He says that Viper Bob is still very much on the job; is still servicing his old customers and looking for new ones. This is how he described the experience....

I was flicking through the pages of www.madaboutkitcars.com and decided to check out a database which allowed me to source Kit-Car firms local to me in Epsom. To my surprise the search came up with two companies, Parallel Designs, Mitcham (www.Paralldesigns.co.uk) and Cobretti Cobra, Morden (www.cobrettiviperv8.com). As a Cobra nut I decided to give the latter a call and met up with the most mild-mannered and laid back chap you could ever meet, Bob Busbridge. He showed me to his workshop which looks tiny from the outside, but stepping over the threshold I entered a time warped Aladdin's cave of memorabilia of yesteryear which made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. Looking straight in front of me was a brace of Cobras getting their just deserts. Bob explained "I'm finishing these for customer's". The one on the right was receiving a new engine and on the left some stainless steel was being fabricated in the engine bay. I was completely in awe of the surroundings, this was a hands-on working environment, it was lived in, it's the sort of place you dream about. You know, you shout down to the missus, "I'm going down to the shed I may be some time" and then from the outside all you here is bang crash wallop; you see the light fluctuating and wonder what's going on inside. This man lives, eats, sleeps Cobra and anything else mechanical that comes his way for a little TLC.

Bob will make you a turnkey Viper from £15,000 to £25,000 depending on what spec you want, his moulds are unique as they have a slightly wider wing to except a bigger wheel, he was showing me some

of the dash layouts and one that caught my eye was an aluminium one ready for burring; can't wait to see it finished.

As he was chatting away to me, I was thumbing through past magazine reports whilst sipping a cup of tea. I noticed one particular article, by Iain Ayre in an edition of Car Builder (sadly, no longer published), about a Viper V8 getting involved in a head-on altercation with a Land Rover. Guess which came off worst? You're correct; the Landy. All that was needed for the Cobra was a new body, the Landy was written off, the chassis of the Viper was only slightly damaged; surely a testimonial to the strength of these cars. The chassis structure is the same across the entire Viper range.

One question I had to ask was if there were any particular build problems. He answered, "door hanging", and went on "customers would fit the body onto the chassis first and then attempt to hang the doors, of course this leads to all sorts of



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This looks like the oil-lamp. Where's the genie?



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problems because the body may not be true and the doors won't line up – that's very hard to rectify, the best way is to line the doors onto the body when it's free of the chassis; then tape them into position and finally fit the body onto the frame - simple.” Bob tells me he can carry out this procedure in about two to three hours.

He got his inspiration from watching the real Cobras in Thames Ditton where he lived as a boy. He aspired to owning one, so he's applied his engineering talents. He knows a little bit more than your average “jo” about the inside leg measurements of a sheet of metal and certainly knows the difference between a spigot and a rivet. He's a true petrol head; his whole life is devoted to anything with an engine, whether it's a restoration project of a classic, the building of a kit or an average service of a modern car. When things get a “little bit woo a little bit way” he relaxes by turning engine parts into little men and moulds bearings and chains into sculptures depicting motorbikes, cars and all sorts of wild and wonderful things; they can be purchased from Craft Connection in Merton Abbey Mills.

With all this skill and enthusiasm, in the 80's, Bob took on his first Cobra build project; a Gravetti Cobra kit. From his love of the Cobra and his fond memories of his first build, the name “Cobr-etti” was conceived. Trading under the Cobretti name, in 1988 Bob became an agent for Brightwheel Replicas Ltd, after building one of their Viper kits. Everything was fine until 1989, the order book was full and fresh orders were still being taken right up to the point when, out of the blue, Ken Cook shut-down the Brightwheel works and cleared off to Switzerland with the company's assets.

Bob was left with a lot of angry customers but managed to keep his side of the business going through sheer determination and stubbornness. Since bodies and chassis were no longer available from the Brightwheel factory, Bob arranged alternative sources of supply. Cobretti thereby became the *de-facto* Viper producer in the UK and





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tirelessly helped many customers who'd been let down by Ken Cook. In 1992 Bob made an application to officially register the trademark "Viper". That led to a sad three-way battle in the courts between Bob, Ken Cook (who crawled back from the continent to stake his claim) and Chrysler, makers of the Dodge Viper.

You can understand Bob's point of view. He was merely seeking to protect the business he had built-up after the collapse of Brightwheel. However, the Trade Mark

Court sadly took a different view. They awarded the Viper name to Ken Cook in 1996 but Bob appealed that decision and so, to this day, the court battle is still ongoing. In 2000 Chrysler accepted that the Viper name wasn't going to be theirs, so Chrysler announced that their Viper will be re-named the Dodge SRT -10 when it's sold in this country.

To conclude; Bob is a brilliant engineer, who can finish any kit as well as supply any of his own Viper kits in various stages and is happy to answer or solve any problems involved with building any make of Cobra kit or any type of self build car. He's also restored classic cars and has been featured in numerous motoring magazines. He's a small operator, producing only a handful of kits each year, but the personal service and sheer enthusiasm he provides is a rare commodity.

Check out his website www.cobrettiviperv8.com
Or email him at bob@cobrettiviperv8.com

Also check out his ad below

"he was showing me some of the dash layouts and one that caught my eye was an aluminium one ready for burring; can't wait to see it finished"



One of these Vipers
is a supercharged 550-bhp six-litre factory-built £25,000 monster. The other is a budget two-litre Ford. Only their owners knows which is which.
Cobretti Viper - from £5,000 to 700 bhp




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