



BABY BUGATTI

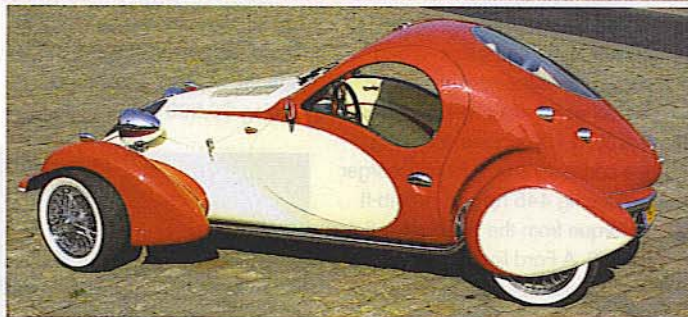
BULGARIAN BUILDER TAKES HIS RUMEN ON THE ROAD



THE FOUR STROKE Design Rumen looks a lot like a classic 1938 Bugatti 57SC Atlantic, just one that was left in the dryer for way too long. At only 137 inches, the duo-tone Rumen is roughly six inches shorter than a Mini Cooper.

The Rumen was initially conceived by Roumen Antonov, founder of Four Stroke Design, for his own personal enjoyment. Antonov, a Bulgarian-born automotive engineer and inventor, counts a compact CVT-like automatic transmission and a valveless four-stroke engine—hence the awkward-sounding Four Stroke moniker—among his creations.

Now based in Paris, Antonov admits he was stunned at the positive reception his car received when he brought it to the Paris auto show in 2002. After extensive modifications and refinements, the Rumen



■ Smarter than a Smart? The Four Stroke Design Rumen minicar borrows its powertrain from a present-day Peugeot and its styling from a 1938 Bugatti Atlantic. Price: \$69,000. See www.4stroke-design.com for more.

sparked another frenzy of media and customer interest at the 2006 Paris show last fall.

Whether you love or loathe the pocket-size retro design, there is no denying that the Rumen is full of clever details. Underneath the teardrop doors and swept-back fiberglass body is a tubular steel chassis, mated to running gear taken from the current Toyota Aygo/Citroën C1/Peugeot 107 family of city cars. The engine is a tiny 1.0-liter three-cylinder delivering 68 hp and 69 lb-ft of torque at 3600 rpm. Surprisingly, the engine is located behind the passenger compartment and is accessed by a small leather-covered opening in the trunk.

Power is sent to the rear wheels via a five-speed automatic gearbox, also borrowed from the Aygo/C1/107. There are plans for a turbocharged model with upward of 100 hp. Considering the Rumen weighs a scant 1200 pounds, performance with even the base engine is on par with mainstream Euro-hatchbacks. Four-wheel antilock disc brakes help bring the Rumen to quick, drama-free stops.

A drive on a test track, and later through the center of Paris, proved that the Rumen is incredibly solid for a prototype. The waves and thumbs up we received from camera-toting tourists—as well as the usually automotively blasé Parisians—hint that the styling strikes a balance between huggable and haute couture. Our biggest complaint: Engine noise at highway speeds is way too loud. Additional soundproofing is slated for production models.

At €55,000 (\$69,000), the Rumen isn't cheap, but production plans are modest. Ten cars will be completed this year, and sales of as many as 100 cars are planned for 2008.

—NICK KURCZEWSKI

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