

The car's the star

Book telling the story of how the Roadster was born will leave you sidetracked

by Karen Steel

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THOSE of you with sharp memories may remember back in May of this year the Haverhill Echo ran a feature about the 'Haverhill Car' also known as the Roadster.

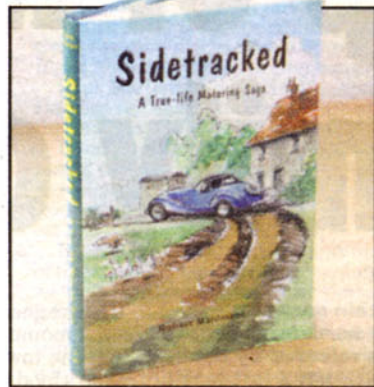
If you read the article you may also remember a promise by the Echo to write a review of the book by Robert Maidment – Sidetracked – which charts the development of the vehicle from 1978 Cadillac Seville to an altogether sleeker 1930s-style Roadster.

Well, six months on and, finally, here's the review.

But if you consider the car took two years to transform and Mr Maidment's book didn't appear for a further 15 years, then it seems only right a review of the book should also take some time.

After all, to have rushed the review would have been almost rude.

So I'm happy to say after all that time, Sidetracked is a most enjoyable book and one which I completed



more or less in a weekend – testament to the way it engages the reader.

It charts the whole project from that initial spark of inspiration through the highs and lows of the mechanical processes, test drives, races, praise and criticism.

As someone without any real mechanical knowledge but who can appreciate a beautiful car (which it is, I've been in it), I was a bit concerned the finer details of parts removed from the Seville and manipulated to fit a sleeker body might prove a little tiresome and, well, geeky, but at

no point did I find that the case.

Because in amongst that detail was a story about a group of men whose enthusiasm was contagious and that came across not only in their actions but in the narrative.

It was the struggle to find solutions for problems not considered, the setbacks and the triumphs, which I found the most interesting and engaging, which just goes to prove it's not only men who can be interested in a book about cars.

The second half of the book focuses more on the journey taken by the virtually completed Roadster and the series of coincidences (long lost relations, previously undiscovered information) uncovered during its creation, which I found more difficult to follow, but which, nevertheless, all adds to the emotional worth both of the car and the book.

But for the last word, the book has the ultimate motoring endorsement, by Sir Stirling Moss, who wrote: "Congratulations. I especially love the front cover; it instantly tells you about that book – that it will be great fun, which it is."

Sidetracked is available from Henderson's newsagent and bookshop in Haverhill High Street.



The original Cadillac Seville, top, and Sir Stirling Moss and Rob Maidment with the Roadster, above. Left: Rob Maidment's new book, which tells the story of the transformation. H05/12/50 Picture by Robert Parr www.photostoday.co.uk