

Rarest Breeds Star At Panther's Stand at NEC Classic Motor Show



BIRMINGHAM – September 11, 2008: A stunning trio of cars which will have never been seen before in one place by many – if at all – will greet classic car enthusiasts when they visit the Panther Car Club stand at the Birmingham's NEC Classic Motor Show from 14th to 16th November. For the Club will be championing rarity in a big way with examples of the Triumph Dolomite-based Panther Rio, the fantastic six-wheeled Cadillac-engined P6, and the mid-engined Solo four-wheel-drive supercar.

They will form an extra attraction to the J72, Lima and De Ville models already destined for the stand, with the award-winning Kallista, appearing in the Meguiar's concours area, adding further to the Panther Car Club's show presence.

Panther cars, originally the Surrey-based, craftsman-built creations of fashion designer Bob Jankel from the early 70s onwards, and combining Thirties retro looks with modern Vauxhall, Ford and Jaguar mechanics, were never produced in vast numbers, although their several hundred Lima and Kallista models have always attracted a keen following.

In contrast, only two gloriously unenvironmental Super P6 six-wheeler cars were made between 1977-78, with 8.2-litre 600 bhp, twin-turbo Cadillac engines emptying their twin 30-gallon tanks at the rate of 4-5 mpg – enough to rate the model as the first road-going car to exceed 200 mph, although this was never substantiated. Costing nearly £40,000 each at 70s prices, one was sold to the Saudi Arabian royal family, while the other went to Canada. Following indifferent treatment in the USA and rat-infested storage in Greece, this is the car now undergoing the finishing touches of a restoration in time for the Classic Motor Show. The Panther 6 was last seen on public display at the Panther Car Club's NEC stand in 1992.

Also making an appearance is a black Panther Rio – Bob Jankel's inspired attempt, in an era of rising petrol prices, to attract large prestige-car owners with a downsized luxury model. The contemporary Triumph Dolomite 1850 – with the 16-valve Dolomite Sprint providing the higher-performance Especial version – seemed an ideal basis for substantial upgrading. But the £7993-£9445 price tag ensured that only 38 Rios were built between 1975-77.

Completing the special line-up will be a red Panther Solo. Registered 4403 UP, this was Autocar's actual 1989 road test vehicle, and is believed to be one of only 11 cars remaining from 14 sold to customers up to 1990. With a 204-bhp, Ford Cosworth mid-engined, four-wheel-drive spec, composite aluminium and carbon-fibre construction, cutting-edge looks and handling, the model should have gone places, but fell short with a high purchase price and lack of development. Now, two decades on, enthusiasts will get the chance to see – up close – what might have been.

"The three rare models we are showing took Panther's spirit of craftsman-built and highly individual motoring to new heights, but not, unfortunately, to commercial success", said Panther Car Club spokesperson, Val Bridges. "However, this makes them doubly fascinating today, and we feel sure show visitors will be sharing our great excitement at having located these rare beasts for an unforgettable display".