

Panther Six

Unicorn

This is real, not dreaming at all. Most of us saw it when we were kids in the magazines of the late seventies and never knew anything more about it. Only two were built, one is supposed to be owned by Saudi Arabian Royal Family and the other one, the one we have it right here and right now, has had a tough story that here we will tell you about.

Words: Gerard Farré

Pictures: Kidston

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Added headlines

Panther only built two units of the Six. The first one (RHD) and was bought by the Saudi Arabian Royal Family, the second (LHD) one is currently on sale at Kidston

Under its giant rear bonnet it has a huge 8.2 Litre V8 engine from Cadillac supercharged by two turbochargers that can produce nearly 600 hp and 600 lb/ft of torque

Photo text

The first Panther Six had an electronic dashboard that seemed to be part of one of George Lucas Star Wars space ships. Otherwise this the second Six has mechanical gauges in its dashboard. The car was finished without the help of Robert Jankel some years after the first one thanks to the help of the expert Bruno Einsmark.

Main text

Motoring fantasies from childhood have been represented by several sorts of types of automobiles. Lots of them have been related with the most radical concepts, nearly all on very spectacular sports cars. That focus on sports cars increased four decades ago when the staggering Lamborghini Miura introduced a new concept, the supercar. Recently the Bugatti Veyron 16.4 has entered a new territory, the hypercar. Two cars were the real stars of the seventies: the Lamborghini Countach and the Ferrari 512 BB. All changed after the London Motor Show held on Earls Court in 1977, at that venue Panther West Winds Ltd. presented its latest creation the Six. Everyone was shocked: six wheels, engine at the rear, Cadillac V8 8,2 litre, two turbos, 600 hp and 200 mph.

Car aficionados with enough budget to own one showed their interest on it. In its luxurious interior you could find a telephone integrated in the driver's door, a TV in the dashboard. But the hardest thing was its price tag you fixed at 39,950 Pounds, that was 40% over any Ferrari or Lamborghini you could buy at that time.

Only two units were built, the first one with RHD and the second one, here we have it, with LHD. In that very same 1977 Tyrrell was competing in Formula One with the P34 a six-wheeled single-seater that had been introduced in 1976.

Like nothing else before

The Panther Six was a revolutionary concept, never before we had seen a car like that. On a chassis designed and built by Robert Jankel –the founder of company– a 8,2 litre V8 from Cadillac was fitted. The engine chosen had the biggest capacity you could find

in a road car in 1977, the Six meant big boy toy and everything had to be exaggerated. That wasn't enough for Jankel and so he decided to install a pair of turbochargers to it in order to increase the power output to 600 hp. Cadillac mounted this engine in the front wheel drive Eldorado, the Six was a six-wheeled concept so it had been a mess to install it in the front axle such as in the Eldorado. The solution was to fix it at the rear, before the rear axle, this way Panther could also use the automatic transmission from Cadillac. The gearbox was a three speed one based on the original from Cadillac but modified to manage with the monstrous torque of 600 lb/ft at only 2.000 rpm.

The "front axle" was formed by two pairs of wheels, divided in two axles both of them steering ones and the rear axle was used where the transmission was fitted. The first idea was to use 10" wheels, but no one could build tires for that size and so Jankel decided to change into 13" ones. The front alloy wheels were 6 x 13" and were fitted with specially designed Pirelli P7 in a unique size of 205/40 VR 13. On the other hand the rear wheels mounted a pair of 9 x 16" alloys with a more current 265/50 VR 16. The two fuel tanks, 68 liters each one, are positioned at both sides of the spare wheels, both hanging after the rear axle. Yes that's true, the Six has two spare wheels one for each axle. The trunk is over the front axle, under the big bonnet with pop-up lights.

The convertible body was chosen to increase its attraction, today it's still hard to find a convertible capable of exceeding the figure of 200 mph. Panther West Winds Ltd announced that the car was capable of that. Now you can believe it or not because the company never did a record attempt with it and no magazine had the chance to test it that way. Only a few were the chosen to drive it, apart from their owners. The huge cabin and the rear engine did not help to install a convertible hood behind the seats. To solve this problem Jankel chose a hard-top for the first Six when needed. At the end a special hood was designed for it and only this second Panther Six –the one we have here– has it, right under a little trunk.

The aesthetics of the car are very special, the first car and the second Sixes have different finishing at the front end. The first one has a big chromed grill that covers the nose from left to right and this the second one as you can see has no chrome at all. The line is very low in order to reach a better Cx. From the side view we have to focus on the rear wheels partially covered –aerodynamics ruled– and the cooling vents in order to feed the engine with fresh air. To reduce the heat on the engine bay the rear bonnet has two big lines of vents, a V8 with 8,2 needs fresh air, tons of fresh air. The tail is very, very long, in fact, room was needed to house two spare wheels and two fuel tanks.

Telephone, TV,...

We are not talking about the latest version of the Merc S-Class, we are talking about a sports car from the seventies designed and built entirely in the United Kingdom. The first unit of the only two Sixes took no less than nine months to be built. Its construction began in Robert Jankel's own private garage to keep it as a secret to everyone. This very first Six was equipped with all the stuff that Jankel himself planned to. Its standard had nearly everything you could expect: electronic dashboard –at that time only the Aston Martin Lagonda had one–, telephone in the driver's door, power windows, steering column completely adjustable, power seats in six ways and many more. The thing was that such a unique car could be fitted with everything you could deserve. Having in mind the reach customers from Arabia Jankel chose the most powerful air-con, one that could be used under heavy sun even with the roof down. The system chosen came from

an American truck of that time. In this, the Panther Six number two, we can see that indicators from the dashboard are not electronic, in fact they are mechanical ones. Apart from this the second Six has no air-con, nor even telephone or TV. In the first Six you could find a double passenger second seat, which meant that it was a three seater and the gear lever was fixed in the steering column. All that you can't find it in this one, it has only two standard seats and a current gear lever between both of these.

The tremendous performance announced by the company was never checked by any magazine. There was no time to do that because the first Six went directly to the private collection of the Saudi Arabian Royal Family and the second one after waiting three years for its final completion it was sent to its owner so no one had time to test the car enough to reveal if the figures expected were right or not.

Being such a special car its history could not be current at all. It must be special. This second Six with two-tone paint was not finished before Panther West Winds Ltd. changed hands in 1979. At first this car was painted in navy blue metallic and during its restoration it changed to black and white finish. Both Sixes were painted in several colours along their history, that made people think that there were more Sixes, but there only have been only two of them. Thanks to the help and great knowledge of historian Bruno Einsmark (worked more than 16 years at Panther) this second Six was finished. London shop Straight 8 had it on sale in 1985 for 150.000 £. The next garage it visited was in Canada, where it was restored for a second time. In its American stay it spend some time in a North American garage. After this it came back to Europe, this time to Greece. The second Six spent no less than 15 years in a Greece port stored while his owner was stuck in a Bulgarian jail. Its current British owner bought it from that unlucky man in Greece and restored it again because after its time at that harbour the car was in poor condition. Now Simon Kidston at Kidston has the right to sell it at its Geneva shop. A dream car that still today its available for only a few chosen.

The company said that they could not continue with the Six project because Pirelli left Panther without tires the 205/40 VR 13 to fit its tiny little 13" rims. The Italian tire manufacturer had an agreement with Panther as a tire supplier but Pirelli broke the contract and left Jankel's company with no tires at all. That left Panther unable to build no more Sixes, there were 15 orders placed before this and they never came to reality. Apart from the official information given by Jankel there is also thought that other reasons caused the cease of production. Panther tented to reach great figures selling the Rio, a conventional saloon, far away from the special sportscars that made the company famous around the globe. Even though, this project came out too late and the Midland Bank shut down Panther West Winds Ltd. credit line and that was the true reason why Robert Jankel was forced to sell his beloved car company to a Korean car manufacturer, Ssangyong. After this Jankel concentrated his efforts in Jankel Design, a company specialised in producing custom bodies for sports cars and luxury saloons, as well as armoured cars. This last division was emerged as the strongest one of the three of them and led the foundation of Jankel Armouring Group Ltd which today still builds armoured cars and light armoured military vehicles. Robert Jankel's son leads the company today as the founder of Panther West Winds Ltd. passed away in 2005.

Special feature 1

Simon Kidston and the Panther Six

Kidston himself remembers that when he was a child he saw the very first Panther Six – the RHD one–, then owned by the Saudi Arabian Royal Family. This very special supercar was parked in front of the main entrance of the Hotel Nova Park Palace at Paris. It was 1983 and all the weeks the Royal Family was at France capital the Six remained parked next to the other cars from the same owners: a Lincoln limousine, a Rolls-Royce and a Ferrari. The only one of these cars that didn't move in all those days from that parking lot was the Panther Six. A year before all that happened the same Kidston had the chance to see the other Six –the LHD one–. Simon Kidston visited the Panther West Winds Ltd. workshop in 1982 and the second Six was there. Next to this there was a De Ville being prepared for the Sultan of Brunei. Without being conscious of that fact, Simon Kidston had been able to see the whole Panther Six production in two consecutive years, the two only cars ever produced.

Special feature 2

Lady Penelope would have been pleased with it

Does anyone remember Thunderbirds Are Go! muffed TV Series from the sixties? One of its main characters was Lady Penelope and she was driven all way around in a very special Rolls-Royce, a six-wheeled one called the FAB 1. Maybe this TV fiction influenced Jankel in designing the six-wheeled Panther Six. Who knows?

Special feature 3

Picture given by Peo Quick

Special thanks to: The Ronnie Peterson Museum / www.ronniepetersonmuseum.com/ / Linda Persson

Tyrrell P34, the six-wheeled F1 car

In 1976 Tyrrell left everyone behind with its revolutionary six-wheeled single-seater, the P34. The South African racing driver Jody Scheckter (WC in 1979 with Ferrari) drove the Tyrrell P34 to victory in the Swedish Grand Prix of 1976 right in front of his team-mate Patrick Depailler. In the next season, the French Depailler remained in the British team while Scheckter was replaced by Swedish Ronnie Peterson (shown here). Peterson drifting with the six-wheeler unfortunately will never be seen again.

Special feature 4

Technical Specs

Panther Six

Engine

Type V8, SOHV, Biturbo

Capacity 8.193 c.c.

Bore x stroke 109,0 x 109,0 mm

Compression ratio 8,5:1

Power 600 hp at 5.500 rpm

Torque 600 lb/ft at 2.000 rpm

Carburetor 1 Holley

Transmission

Rear wheel drive

Gear box Three-speed automatic

Chassis

Type steal space frame

Dimensions

Length 4.877 mm

Width 2.029 mm
Height 1.219 mm
Wheelbase 2.667 mm
Track front / rear 1.562 / 1.638 mm
Weight 1.302 kilos
Top speed 200 mph
0-60 mph 5,0 seconds
Production figures 2