

KEEP ASTUTE

Just as expected the recent World Championships turned out to be a bit of a procession for the major competition car manufacturers. I say competition because quite a few companies simply do not bother with attempting to follow the trends of out and out racing since they are quite happy with providing cars for the mainstream.

In some respects Tamiya could be described just so. True they did dabble their big toe in the competition waters with the Avante, but withdrew it a bit sharpish when they found the temperature a mite hot. Since then they have taken that car and reverse developed it if you like for the mass market: in effect toning it down to make a traditional Tamiya car. Sure enough the Tamiya car presence at the World Championships was so low-key as to be almost under the track. But

To follow the Eggross, Tamiya have produced a full race version 2WD, Model Cars builds the Astute.

appearances can be deceptive. Down in the lower reaches of the two-wheel drive class, racing in relative obscurity was a new Tamiya car looking for the world, with a little competition tinkering and a bit of inspiration on the sticks, as if it could have challenged the might of Associated and Kyosho.

What a load

of old cobbles – is probably what you are thinking. But seriously, according to observers in Australia the new car looked well balanced on the track, rode the bumps well and showed potential to go faster. The general opinion was that with a decent driver the car could really have gone places. It wasn't until a few weeks after the Championships that RCMC was able to find out the name of the car and more importantly see one close up. Fortunately the first sample of the interestingly named Astute, pretty soon found its way to the editorial office for a long hard look.

The immediate impression is that the Astute has been designed as a racing car but without going over the top.

The Astute is fitted with black wheels all round – our example was fitted with optional wheels.

Unlike the Avante which developed backwards, it seems Tamiya have got it round the right way and produced a car which they can improve if it becomes popular, rather

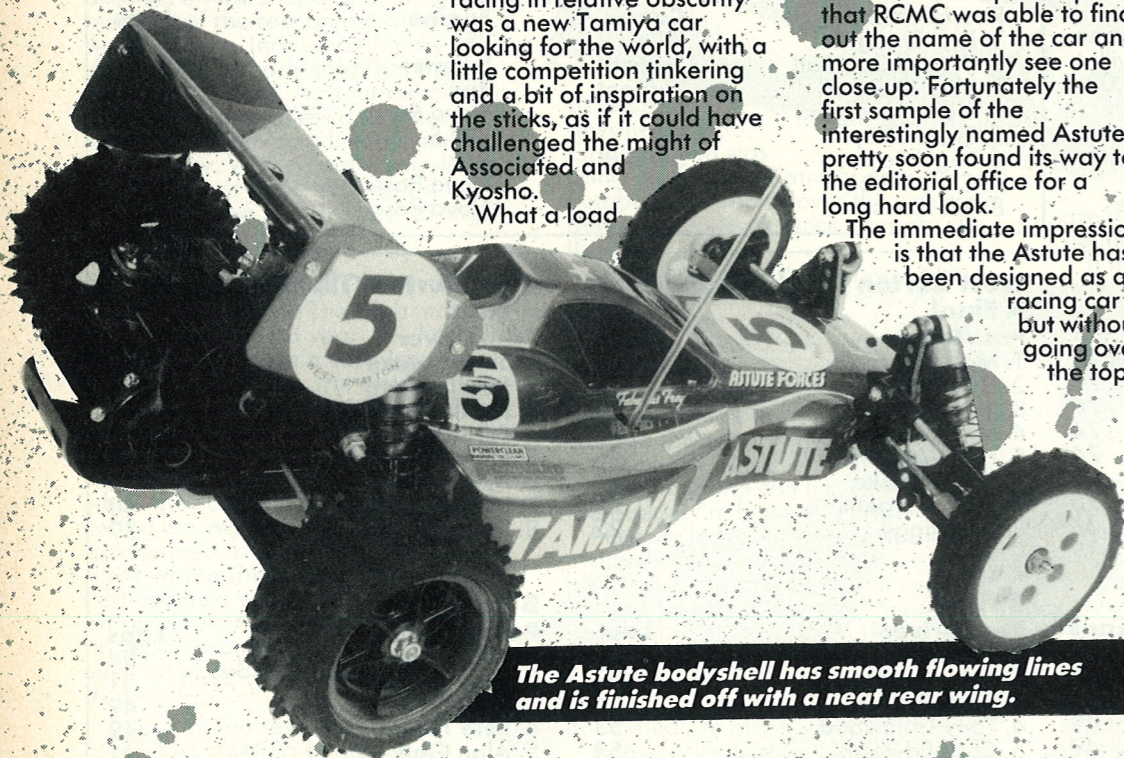
like Kyosho did with the Scorpion and then Ultima.

This is not to say that the Astute is a basic car – there are enough features to make it interesting straight away, although the example made available to RCMC was not a standard machine.

Most obvious is the use of a carbon fibre chassis plate. With a Tamiya car you would more normally expect to see an injection moulded 'box' style chassis. The flat carbon fibre chassis plate does at least seem to be permanent and adds welcome stiffness.

The battery pack sits directly on top and it wouldn't require a genius to make provisions for a saddle pack layout if Tamiya haven't already done so. If that was to happen then I think I am right to say this would be a first for the world's largest manufacturer of radio control cars.

At the front of the chassis the necessary angle of rake has been built in to allow the front wheels to ride up and over the bumps. As usual with Tamiya the chassis is beautifully produced with neatly drilled and milled holes and cut-outs.



The Astute bodyshell has smooth flowing lines and is finished off with a neat rear wing.

If the chassis is something slightly different for Tamiya then the suspension is pretty typical – or if you like complicated. For a start the wishbones pivot on brass bearings, do doubt intended to minimise wear and slop in the pivots. Conceivably you could fit proper ballraces instead but this would be fearsomely expensive, particularly at Tamiya prices. The other thing to consider is what would happen to the handling of the car if one of them seized up? First you would have to find out which one it was then clean it – while you are it you might as well clean them all. At both ends of the car



The Astute's bodyshell really is low, only just missing all the internals. The undertray seals perfectly to the body and gives excellent protection.

the suspension layout is broadly similar and uses a single lower wishbone with an adjustable top link. At the rear though there is an additional track rod which can be adjusted to give toe-in and toe-out. Whether this is necessary is debatable since most drivers will probably set it and then forget about it. For those drivers however who take fine tuning to the absolute maximum the extra adjustment will be indispensable. I just hope they remember to make identical adjustments either side. It could be embarrassing.

The front end of the Astute looks unbelievably wide – wider even than the

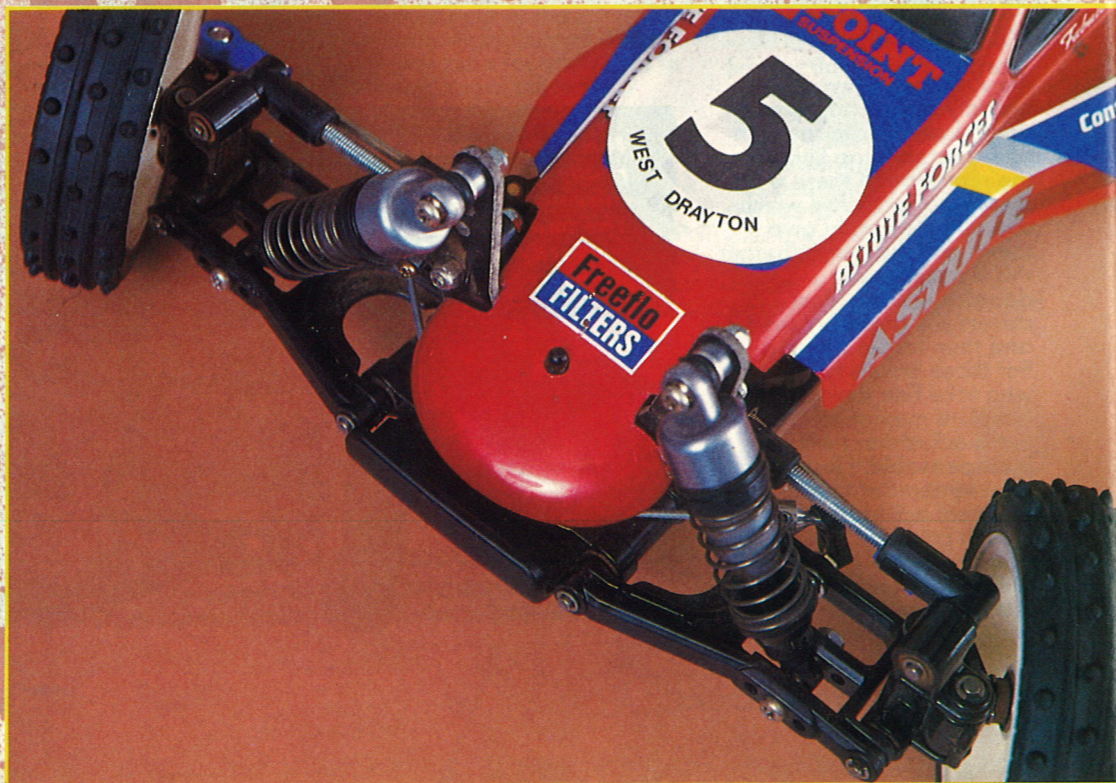


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rear. This is a highly desirable feature though as we all found out when the Associated RC10 first appeared and people started to fit extra long stub axles to force the front wheels wider apart. Now of course Associated too have built it in.

The front suspension also sports an anti-roll bar.

The RCMC Astute was supplied with some nifty looking shocks which we were quickly told were not standard. The normal kit will be supplied with Tamiya's instantly recognisable yellow plastic CVA shocks. The ones on the kit are known as Hop-Up shocks which are presumably Tamiya's answer to Option House.



The Astute's gearbox uses the limited slip differential out of the four-wheel drive Egress. All of the gears are the distinctive, beautifully moulded white plastic examples first seen on the Avante. The tooth size seems to be peculiar to Tamiya and doesn't fall neatly into either 32 or 48dp. Whatever the case, they work and the gearbox is mega-free.

Whether ballraces will be included in the kit is also open to question but we understand that at least two will be supplied for the main drive outputs of the gearbox.

And finally the Astute is supplied with Egress tyres although our example was supplied with larger wheels.

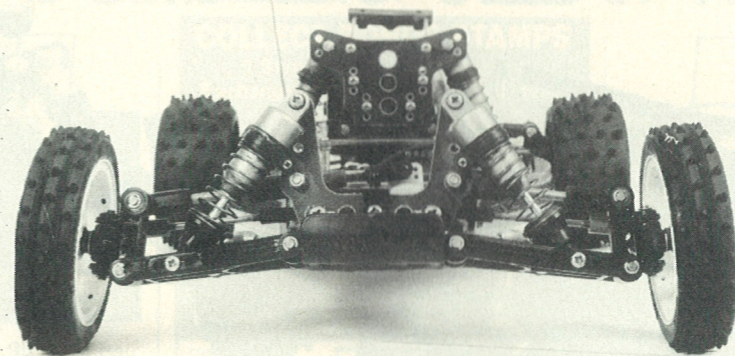
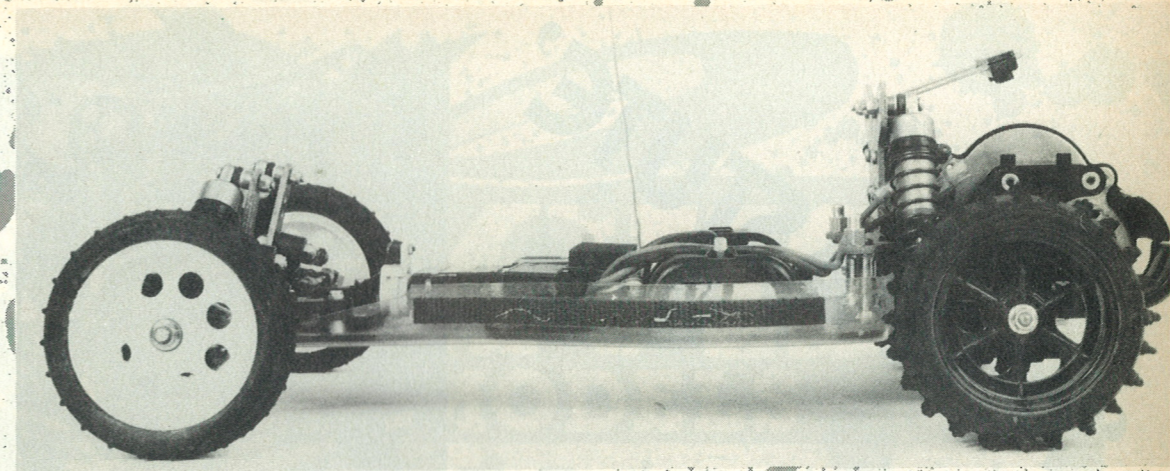
Proof that this is not a top of the range car is shown by the inclusion of a motor and speed controller in the kit. The speedo is the standard Tamiya resistor type but as yet we don't know what form the motor will take, either standard or some sort of modified. If the Astute is successful then no doubt future competition kits will not be supplied with either.

As usual I leave my comments on the bodyshell to last. Fortunately Tamiya are still one of those manufacturers who don't leave the design of the body till last, realise they haven't got one and then throw a sheet of lexan at a three bar electric fire and hope it will produce something they can wrap around their car.

Tamiya recognises the fashionable need for low-slung, sleek racing bodysells but haven't forgotten how to make them look nice. The Astute is an obvious example of this attitude. What's more the perfectly moulded undertray fits inside the body without hardly a gap between them. Lovely.

If the World Championships have proved that two-wheel drive racing is still an exciting and worthwhile racing class then there is a good future for it in this country. This will be particularly true if there are more than one or two manufacturers in competition with each other.

Associated and Kyosho have been tilting with each other for too long so now it is good to see Schumacher having a go. If Tamiya can



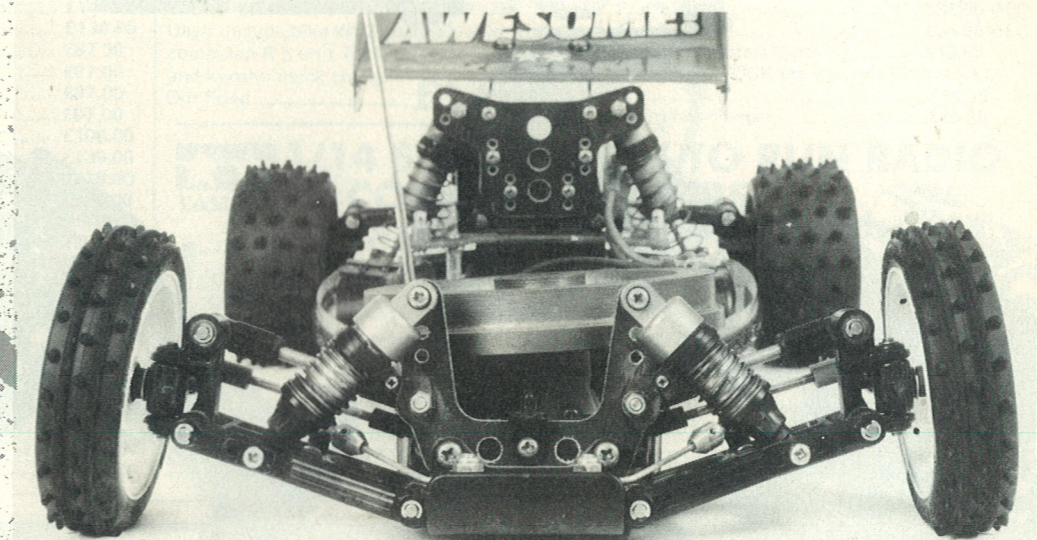
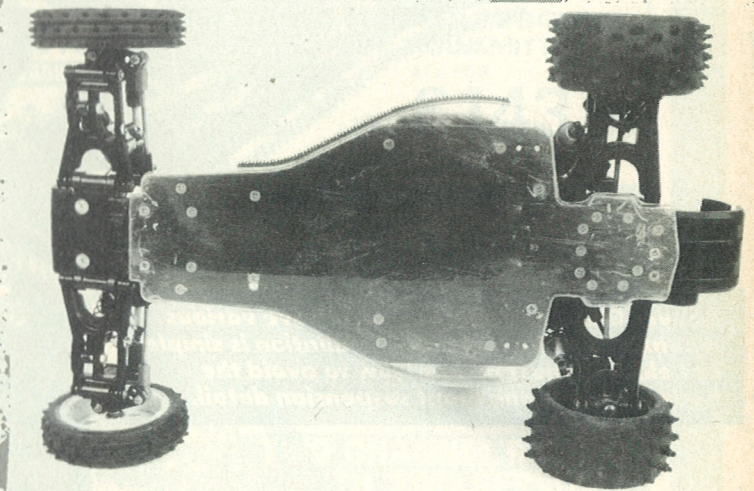
Egress rear tyres are included as standard. Left: Wide front end gives good stability. Also note the neat bumper. Below: Undertray fits well. Bottom: The Astute has a tough feel to it with its chunky suspension arms.

meantime take a trip down the model shop and see for yourself.

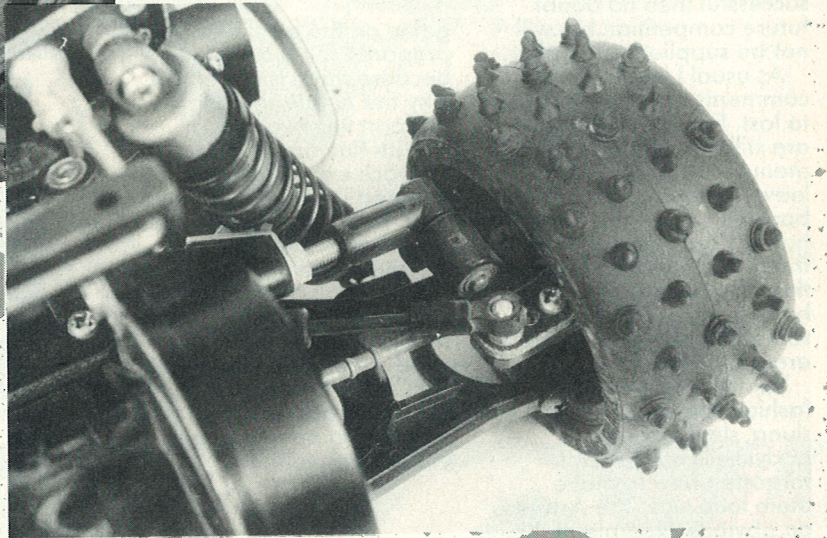
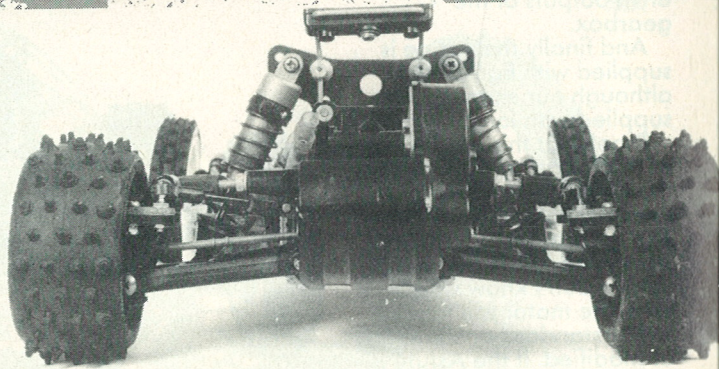
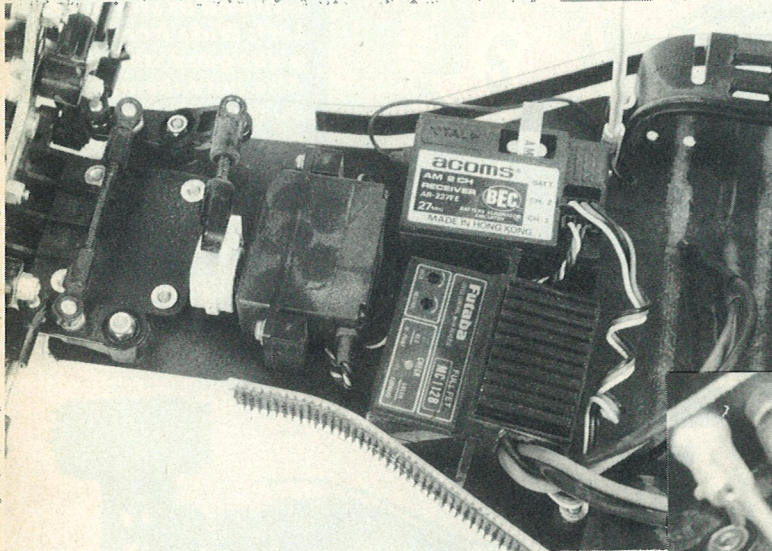
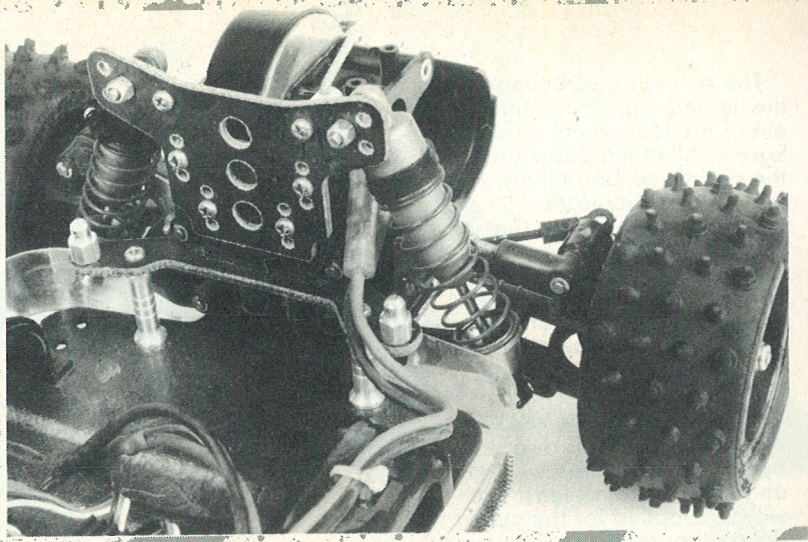
get in on the act then be prepared for sparks to fly because there is no reason why the Astute shouldn't perform very well.

With fine tuning and on-track experience a talented driver would make it go very well whilst at the other end of the spectrum the club driver looking for a car to race in the local two-wheel drive championship should consider this car carefully among the others.

RCMC will carry out a series of track tests with the Astute and bring you our conclusions. In the



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Above: Glassfibre shock mounts have various mounting positions. Radio installation is simple, but electrics must be kept low to avoid the bodyshell. Bottom: Front suspension detail.

