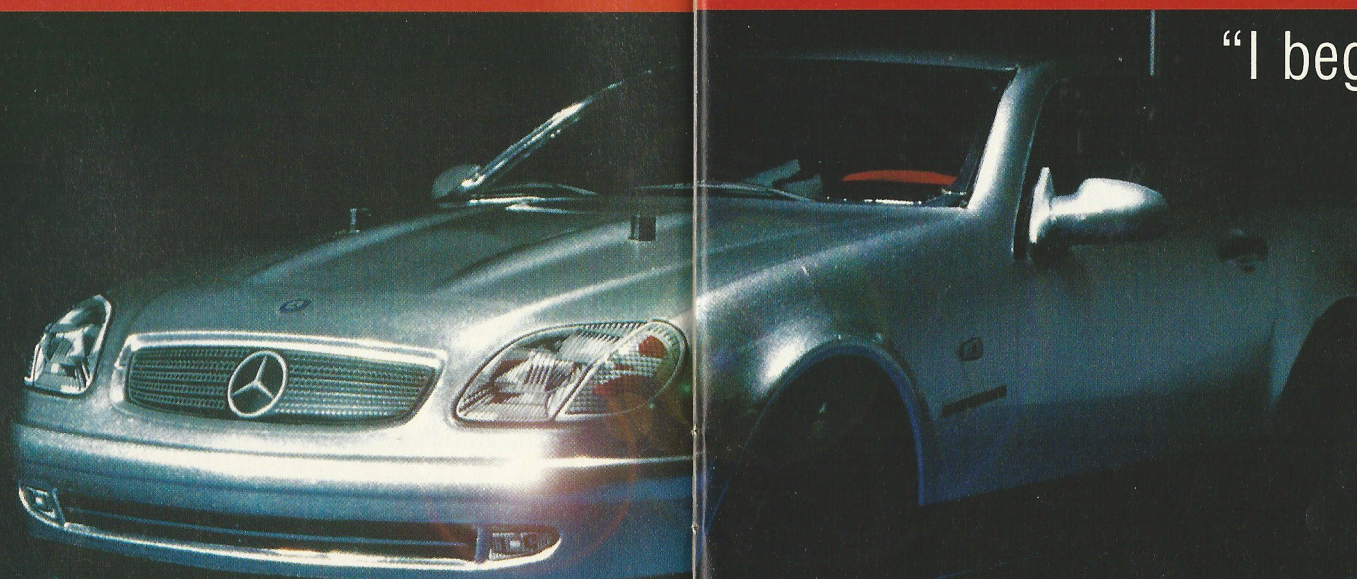


CLIVE STANLEY

FORMULA for fun

TAMIYA MERCEDES
SLK REVIEW



svelte SLK

Peter E is a dear mate of mine. He's a cracking bloke whose only failing is that he can talk for hours, non-stop, about model cars. I occasionally try to bring the conversation round to something different, perhaps sex or rock 'n' roll, but Pete has the uncanny knack of relating just about any subject to model cars.

It was during one such conversation over a bottle of red wine that he slipped in "You could do me a favour if you like.."

"Sure" said I without putting any thought into it.

Pete disappeared from the room to return again a few seconds later. "Build that for the magazine will you?" And he hands me a box.

"Mercedes SLK....." I replied....."They are beautiful...and it's a Tamiya..."

Now the last Tamiya kit I built was a Mitsubishi Pajero (not the current model, I hasten to add), more years ago than I choose to remember. My impression of Tamiya was always one of good quality and excellent build instructions. The Pajero, I remember, had a solid white plastic body and came in a box the size of a garage. Once completed, with its RS540 motor (stan-

dard or did I have to buy it? Can't remember), it wheeled off the mark and toppled over if you so much as took a fleeting glance at the right hand stick on your controller. The (now painted) plastic body accumulated grazes in the roof from day one. To get the Pajero round a circuit without inducing more roof damage took a great deal of finesse - and about half an hour.

The first thing that struck me about this SLK model was the size of the box. Smaller than I remember surely? I open the lid and there is the Lexan body shell, and all the bits and pieces in plastic bags and a box containing screws, bearings, linkages, etc. etc.

"What you have now is a film that covers the outside of the body so you don't get over-spray....." Pete rabbitied on". You get different front and rear tyres because people race these, you know there's a class for them in the Tamiya Cup....." I began to wonder what on earth I'd let myself in for.

Putting it together

In fact the SLK didn't sit in my house untouched for long. Next day the box was opened and the

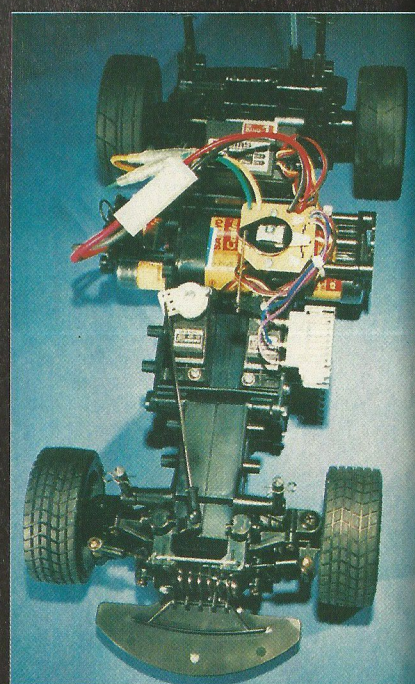
The completed chassis ready to roll

instructions were being scrutinised. In the back of the instruction book, and by the side of each instruction, are actual size diagrams of every component you are being asked to assemble, including the screw sizes. This is excellent and means you don't have to be a graduate in mechanical engineering to see how it all fits together.

The first hour saw the beginnings of the M-02L chassis assembly with the diff' and gearbox. It is fascinatingly simple. You are shown where to apply grease, how to fit the pieces together and very quickly things begin to take shape. The pieces that are screwed into the gearbox casing (mounts for the swing arms) are registered so that it's impossible to fit them the wrong way up, but you do need Arnold Schwarzenegger's right arm to tighten the screws.

Fitting the motor was easy, fitting first a protection plate which, if nothing else, prevents you from missing the screw holes in the windings. At this point the instructions notify you that you could use an 'optional high performance motor. Cool. Where's that then Pete?

The swinging arms fit easily onto



the gearbox but each side uses a different spring rate. To prevent you from getting this wrong, one spring is silver, the other black. So simple. After one hour, 9 steps of the instruction book had been completed.

Once you have completed the

"I began to wonder what on earth I'd let myself in for"

The body beautiful

The next step I took (whilst waiting for Pete to come up with the radio and bits) was to cut out the body. This should be done carefully as it can make or break the overall appearance of the model. Obviously the first thing to take care of is that you cut along the right lines, avoiding, for example, having a lovely SLK with no front bumper.

Using fairly large kitchen scissors, I cut a few millimetres outside of the lines, then went back and trimmed. Watch out for the small sharp pieces that fall off when you trim, as these could stick in small feet if left on the carpet. When the trimming is finished, have a break and get the Hoover out. Or get the wife to get the Hoover out. (!) The wheel arches are not so easy, and I resorted to not-too-course sandpaper and a file to get a nicer finish. Takes time to get them right though. When it comes to spraying, use the window masks (brilliant idea) and bear in mind that there are decals that pick out such details as window rubbers, etc. so don't spend all day trying to position them and trim them; there's no need. When applied it's time for the spray can. This is the first time I had painted a polycarbonate body on the inside and frankly, when I first saw the result, I was horrified. 'This is it' I thought 'I've

made a complete mess of this....' However, as it dried, the 'Indy Silver' finish got better and better, though still not as good as I'd like. A streak across the bonnet where it ran.....oh dear..I'm used to spraying the outside of plastic with paint you can see going on.....

Anyway, I had by now acquired an Acoms Techniplus radio, receiver, servos, and a Tamiya 1400 battery, so it was time to forget the paint job and crack on.

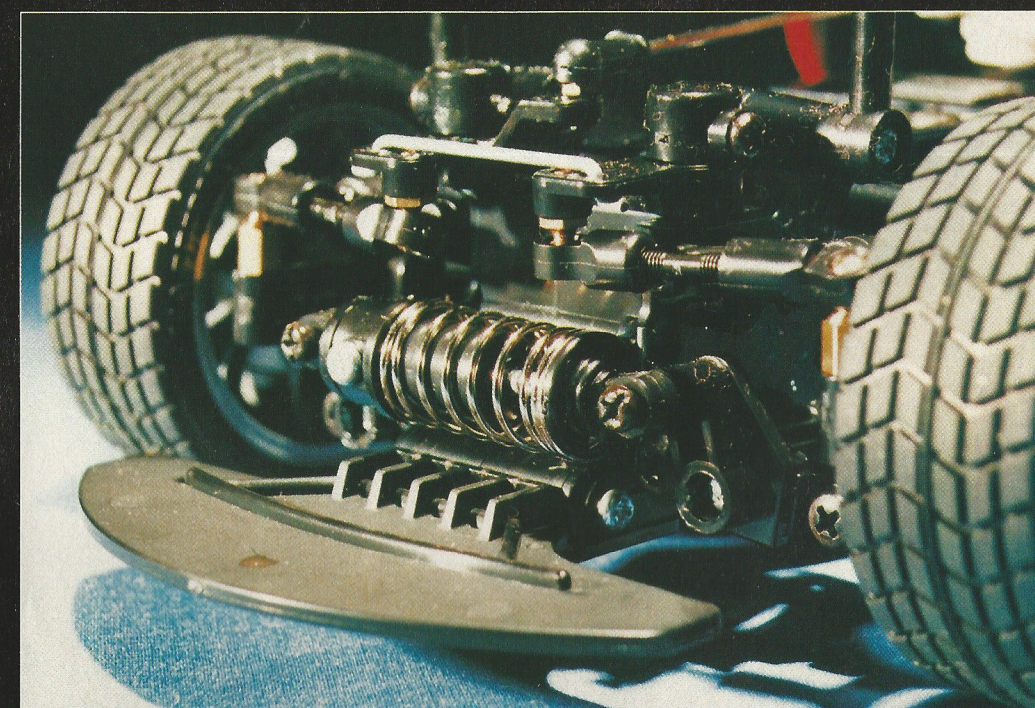
Fitting the radio

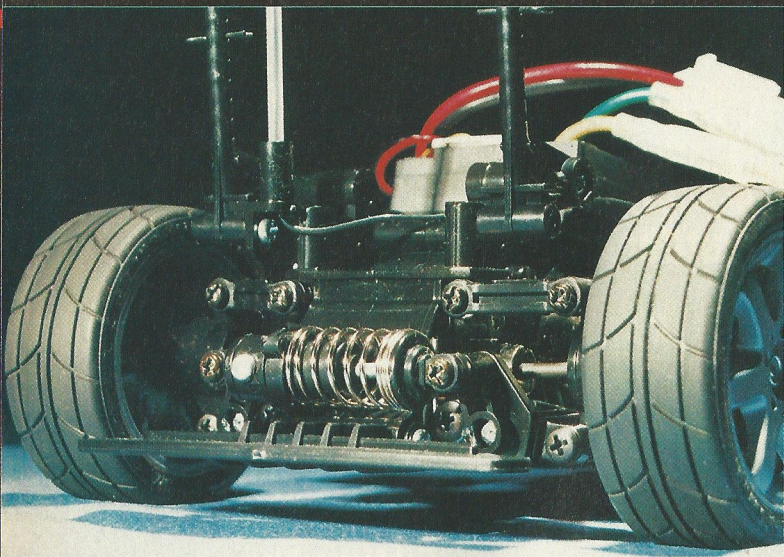
Now when you are fitting the radio gear you open the little bag containing the speed controller, and you have to flit between the instructions from this bag and the main instruction book itself. This is because a lot of owners will fit an Electronic Speed Controller at this time rather than the Kit mechanical item.

With the servos installed, the receiver fits neatly on the shelf created above the motor using thick double sided tape. Bolt the three sections of the chassis together, neaten up the wiring with tie-clips provided to secure wires to the battery mount and it all takes shape rather quickly from here.

In no time you've fitted the body

The Monoshock front end and bumper detail





The rear end, note the different tyres - New for the Boxster and SLK

mounts cut accordingly and bumpers both ends, inserted the foam strips into the tyres and, observing the rotation direction, put tyres on wheels and wheels on car. Connect the live battery now, switch it on and move the throttle servo and suddenly it sparks into life. No odd sounding noise from the back end, so you know you've built the diff' right!

Final bits

Now it's back to the dreaded body shell, now thoroughly dry and still a little streaky on the bonnet. Oh well. Time to peel off that protective layer and fit the decals

When I peeled off the layer, I realised that the creases, a circular one in the roof and a long, arched crease in the boot, were actually on the body itself, not just the peelable layer. A quick call to Tamiya and they confirm that this body shell is not right, it was a pre-production job and definitely not up to the normal Tamiya standard. A replacement is despatched and a second chance for me to do a decent paint job.

The decals are very detailed, but I bet you a tenner you can't get the headlights on

without creasing them. All right, you might be able to but I couldn't. If, like me, you aren't noted for your saint-like patience and get stressed easily, the long black decals that surround the car will see you hurtling toward an early grave. I stuck with it (no pun intended) but once photographed for this mag, they're coming off again in favour of my tin of gloss black. A better idea still would be to mask the whole of the rest of the body first and buy two cans of paint; spray black first around the bottom, then unmask and spray body colour.

Fit the mirrors using body mount clips, having painted them the appropriate body colour - and there you have it. A Mercedes SLK.

Play Time

First of all be aware that switching the 'on' switch may result in the car disappearing into the middle distance for an awesome crash if you haven't set up the servos

correctly. Believe me. So Radio first then car.

When you have finished with the inevitable running round and round the Lounge take it outside and burn some rubber. For those familiar with the words understeer and oversteer, this little Merc' has oodles of both.

My advice is find a large empty car-park and start right in the middle. And make sure it's bone dry. Pete and I did neither of these things, choosing a narrow tarmac area on an evening which was cold and damp. Oh dear.

The first thing you notice is, even with a standard motor and cheap battery, your SLK is quick. Damn quick! In damp conditions though, baby Merc' will spin more times than the washing machine. Under throttle, massive understeer ensues. Back off the throttle to correct this and the line tightens nicely. No problem. When the back lets go though, you have to have better reflexes than Schumacher himself to get it all together again. Try to resist the temptation to stab at full opposite lock. Be very gentle with the steering stick with only slight movement, and again, back off the throttle. This is how you stand the best chance of correcting it.

I very quickly learnt that polycarbonate body shells stand up to big impacts pretty well. However, clip the back end of the Merc' on a kerb, and your painstakingly positioned, crease-free rear light-cluster decal will be in tatters. I nearly cried.

You just get the hang of it when the battery dies. Use this time to get someone who loves you to buy you at least one more 7.2V battery and a mains quick charger. When you have these, you can play all day. I do.

Dry conditions do improve things, but there are some after-market products that I would

imagine will improve things further. A chassis stiffening device, electronic speed controller and different shocks will probably make the handling more precise and predictable.

Happy?

Let's assume that you have just been down to your local model shop and spent your hard earned cash on this SLK. Would you have any gripes? Well I did. Nothing serious, though.

The location of the front body mount holes in the bonnet of the shell were no quite central, but again this might have been a flaw in the pre-production job. This is annoying if you're an accuracy freak because the left hand side front wheel is deeper in the wheel arch than the right hand side. In terms of drivability, play in the steering makes tracking and trimming accurately a touch difficult. If you are going to race this beautiful SLK, you'll probably want some more after market bits to tighten it all up a bit.

Am I moaning too much? Overall I like it. It's a good model. I'm going to hop it up a bit and play till my heart's content. It was simple to build, goes along without any problems and is ideal for those who don't have years of R/C experience behind them.

Sum up

You'll have hours of fun, and endless hop-up mod's available if you're that way inclined. Can I build another one now please Pete? **RRGI**

Quick Spec

Tamiya Mercedes Benz SLK Lexan Body with decals. Rear engine M-02L Chassis. 540 Motor. Mechanical speed control. Single coil spring/damper 'monoshock' suspension system front and rear. Soft compound treaded tyres, different patterns for front and rear.

Testers Kit

RADIO: Acoms Techniplus Alpha including Acoms Servos and BEC receiver

CELL PACK: Tamiya 1400

Likes:

The looks
Ease of build
Overall quality of components
Fun factor

Dislikes:

Some of the decals
Driving around corners when it's damp!

“and there you have it.
A Mercedes SLK”

