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Quick Spec

Total length: 442 mm
 Total width: 185 mm
 Total height: 120 mm
 Wheelbase: 257 mm
 Tread F/R: both 162 mm
 Chassis Material: ABS/Polycarbonate
 Chassis Shape: Double Deck Frame S
 Damper: F/R CVAMiniIII
 Transmission Type: 2 Belt Mid-ship Full-time 4WD
 Gear Ratio: 7.08:1 (kit standard)
 Diff. gear system: F/R 3-Bevel Diff R
 Fully Ballraced

Testers Kit

Acoms Radio Gear
 LRP Stick Packs
 MRT VX Sport speedo
 BRM 17T Spec Motor
 M1 T27 Tyres

'the brutal looking Nissan Skyline GTR body is a real favourite of mine'

Conventional Wisdom

Tamiya TA04S
 Calsonic GTR2001

sums up nicely why Tamiya build cars the way they do and no one can deny that over the years they have given us many fresh and radical ideas and designs that have popped up on many other manufacturer's cars. If you see something that looks brand new to you, its not that unlikely that it appeared on a Tamiya car first somewhere in the past. So what happened with this car? Did Tamiya get bored with coming out with new ideas? I think the best thing to do is a take a closer look and see if we can work out what Tamiya are playing at.

Is it real?

Conventional and Unconventional

This Tamiya is both conventional and unconventional. I am sure you would prefer me to make my mind up or at least explain what on earth I am talking about so I will try and make some sense of that statement.

This version of the TA04, and in fact that whole family of cars, is of a very conventional design; a twin belt, mid but rear biased engine location and a high layshaft with two pulleys. That is the conventional part of the deal; this is a well tried and tested and very successful layout for a race worthy touring car. What makes it unconventional is that Tamiya don't always do things just because it's proven or it's the easy or obvious way to do things.

If you will allow me to digress for just a second, recently another very well known Japanese company made the statement about their new full size racing bike, that they chose its engines unusual 5 cylinder layout, mainly for the reason that 'it was more interesting'. In many ways that

What do you get?

The basic layout of this car isn't new, as we already said, but it's also not new to Tamiya, we have seen this basic layout on the fantastic TRF414 cars and then the more accessible TA04 Pro cars. These have proven to be the class of the field in the Eurocup series and have shown themselves to be more than capable of getting results at any level of the sport. As is usual practice for Tamiya, the car has appeared in a number of versions from a fairly basic model right up to the more highly specced models with their composite chassis and ball diffs etc. This version, the S, seems to fall right in the middle of the existing versions, so what do you get?

The TA04S is based around the plastic tub chassis and top deck with gear diffs rather than the adjustable balldiff version, standard type dog-bone driveshafts but does come with a full set of ballraces. Tamiya's bodysells are always of the very highest quality and have unrivalled realism and ours comes with the brutal looking Nissan Skyline GTR body, a real favourite of mine and of many people if the full size car magazines on the shelf of my local newsagents are anything to go by.

Build

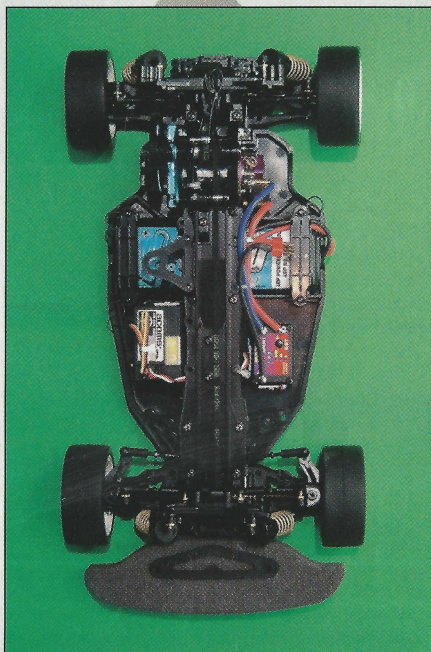
Tamiya cars are difficult when it comes to writing about building them and this is for a very simple reason; they are so easy to build! The quality of the mouldings and the perfectly written and well detailed manual means building a Tamiya is simply a case of screwing it together as described in the manual.

I hate clichés so I won't tell you that it 'falls together', but it does. The gear diffs use the usual bevel gears and every part you attach to your chassis during the build needs only tidying up where it is removed from its parts sprue. I think the only thing I can fault the car on is the omission of some threadlock for the grub screws on the layshaft pulley adapter that the manual suggests that you use. I wouldn't normally moan about such things as most manufacturers don't supply this either, but seeing as the car comes complete with shock oil, diff grease and even some excellent anti-wear grease for the driveshafts, this omission is all the more noticeable.

The only place we deviated from the standard build was the fitting of the lovely optional motor mount with its cooling fins (yes I am weak and fell for the looks of this item) and the fitting of an electronic speedo rather than the standard wiper type version that is included in the box, I intended to race the car at my local club and with their 17 turn control motor

Too good to race

'I was enjoying the car that I now had pigeon holed in the 'great' section'



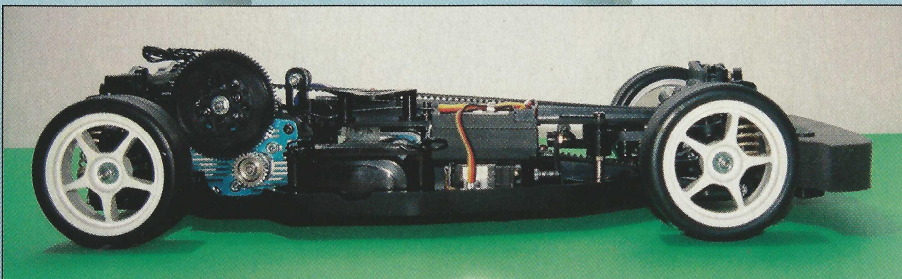
Tidy chassis layout

I felt an electronic speedo was better suited to that motor rather than the silver can Mabuchi motor that is included. The great thing about the standard speed controller is that it does allow you to get racing with your standard radio gear and the two servos that almost certainly came with it while you are saving for a 'pusher' speedo for when you think you need it.

I decided to use an Acorns radio set, as this seemed more appropriate for the car and the type of driver that I think will buy it. I found there was plenty of space for the radio gear but that the aerial needing careful routing around the spur and pinion gears but provided you follow the instructions everything will be fine and safe.

With the car being built very quickly and easily I decided to start on the bodyshell. I had decided to use the standard colour scheme of the Calsonic car that is depicted on the box and thought seeing as it was a single colour it would be a very speedy job, WRONG! While the crisp moulded cut lines and the overspray mask for the body made cutting it out and painting it a simple job, and the pre drilled bodypost holes meant it fitted perfectly with zero effort from me, what I hadn't taken into account was

Hop up motor mount keeps everything cool



how many decals are needed to replicate the real thing.

I wanted the car to look good for the photos so I took the time to use all the decals rather than skimp and this seemed to take forever. I did persevere though and I hope you would agree that the finished job makes all that effort more than worthwhile, it looks more like a static model than a model racing car and almost a shame to race it. NAH, let's go racing.

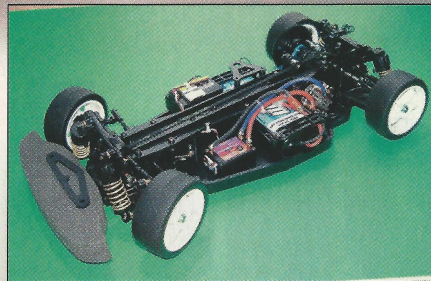
Racing it

I turned up at my local indoor club with the car shod in its club regulation T27 tyres and fitted with a stick pack pulled out of my nitro car's starter box because I didn't sort myself out in time and get any cells for the car. As I watched the track being laid out with part carpet and part polished wood sections I started to panic about the abilities of the gear diffs. As I watched the hairpins being laid down I started to worry when I realised that my Acorns handset didn't have all the knobs I was used to on a transmitter to deal with such situations. I saw the grins on the faces of my fellow racers when they realised I wasn't armed with my usual race car and I was beginning to think of a good excuse to leave and test the car somewhere a little less public.

I was asked if I minded being placed in a lower heat than usual, as I would be testing a car and not racing my usual one and agreed gladly and wandered off for a quick practise. A few tentative laps revealed the car to be incredibly well behaved and as quick as anything else on the track, only a proper race, oops; I mean qualifier would reveal its true potential.

I lined up on the grid safely at the back and waited for my turn to take off. As I picked my way through the usual first corner carnage and began to get used to the car I noticed that it was really wasn't bad, as I made my way into second place I changed my mind and decided that it was quite good, as I slipped into first place I was enjoying the car that I now had pigeon holed in the 'great' section!

I was really have a ball with the car, and by this time wasn't that surprised to be sitting on the back of the grid for the A final, I think there were a few people on that grid surprised to see the car there. As the warble went and we all dashed to the first corner the Acorns hand set that had worried me, and I had now become to like, let me pick a perfect line through the wreckage to move up to 3rd place. With the first place car a good distance ahead



Plenty of space for radio gear



Great budget radio gear

of me I relied on the sure footedness and grip that the chassis produced to nudge ever closer. After a lap or two I was using the freeness of the gear diffs that had me so needlessly panicked, to turn in tight around the hairpins to get the first place car within striking distance.

Another lap to work out where I was going to try and pass and I pulled up close behind him at my chosen point, pulled out and lined up for the inside line, where he had been wide on the previous lap, a spurt of throttle and nothing!

Post-mortem

The manual had been quite clear about the need for loctite on the grubscrew but I decided I would 'do it later' and of course I forgot! Who knows where I would have finished if it hadn't come loose and I had lost drive. Could I have made that pass? Would the pack who were chasing me hard have gotten past and relegated me back down the order? Who knows, but the point is that this car is extremely capable and at a much higher level than you might be led by others to expect.

The plastic chassis that seemed nothing more than a cost cutting exercise actually seems to make the car very forgiving, the gear diffs that seem a simple option actually work very well and past experience with them tells me that they will last for ages and the lack of adjustment may well be a blessing in disguise. I had forgotten how convenient stick pack cells are and I am in no doubt that a simple handset could do a lot to teach you how to be a better driver than letting a computerised handset do all the work for you.

I now know what Tamiya are playing at with this simple design, in fact they are not 'playing' at all, they are providing a basic, sturdy and very competent race car for the clubman and I suspect you could upset a few people in the Eurocup with one of these without bothering with the very tempting list of hop ups that are available. Of course if you are weak, like me, you could hop this up to be a very serious car indeed.

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