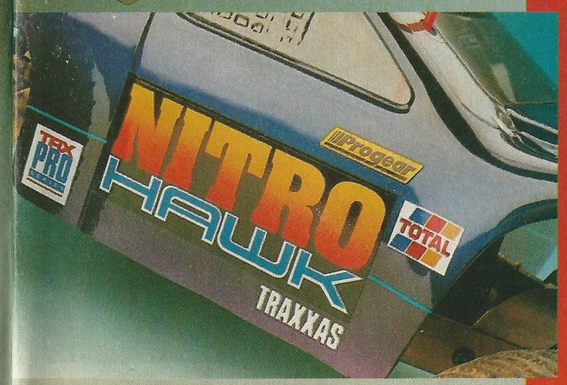
NITROMANIA

Traxxas seem to have found the perfect introduction into IC in the form of the Nitro Hawk **Marcus Nicholls** reviews the model from the beginner's viewpoint.



In countries throughout the world there is always a hip mode of transport adopted by the young native dudes.

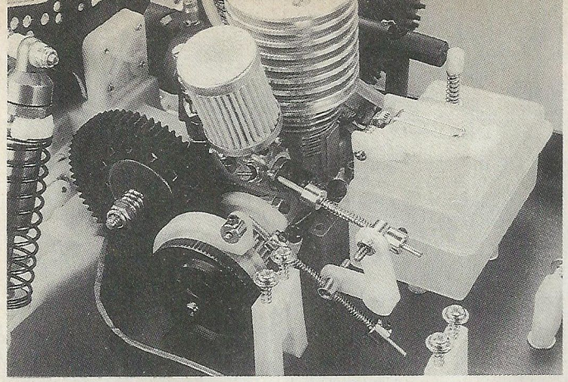
In the 60s' in the UK, the Mods rode around on Lambrettas and Vespas – the ubiquitous "hot hatch" – Ford XR2i, XR3i, Golf GTi, Peugeot 205 Gti, must be the scooter's contemporary replacement.

Miami bass

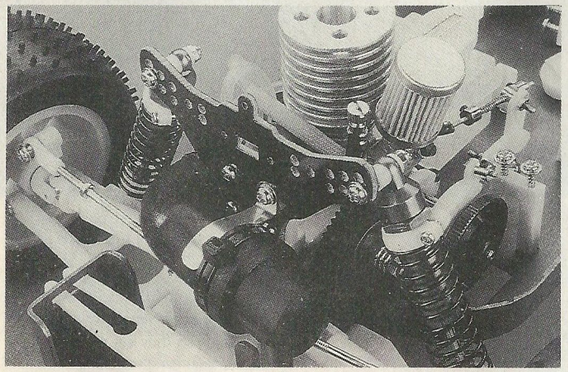
In the USA, the latest machines to pose in are pick-up trucks – not just any old utility, but one of the latest vehicles from GM, Ford or Toyota. Tweaked motors, underbody neon tubes and CD sound systems with 18 inch woofers mounted in the pick-up bed are some key features – in Miami the bass can be heard five blocks away!

Windows are tinted so heavily you can't tell were the body ends and the glass starts, and suspensions are lowered to the point were mounting a curb would remove the exhaust system.

With this popularity of trucks it is logical that models of them are available in all shapes and sizes, both RC and static. The new Traxxas Nitro Hawk is a good example of the RC variety, representing a special breed of this popular vehicle – in racing form. The Nitro Hawk is a 1:10 scale, two wheel drive glow plug powered car, available as a kit, or built up with or without radio. Included in all options is a .12, ABC "Image 12" engine – specially matched for the chassis, and in the built up version, set up for immediate running.



Paper air filter keeps the engine's air supply clean. Below; Suspension is amazingly smooth thanks to Traxxas shocks.

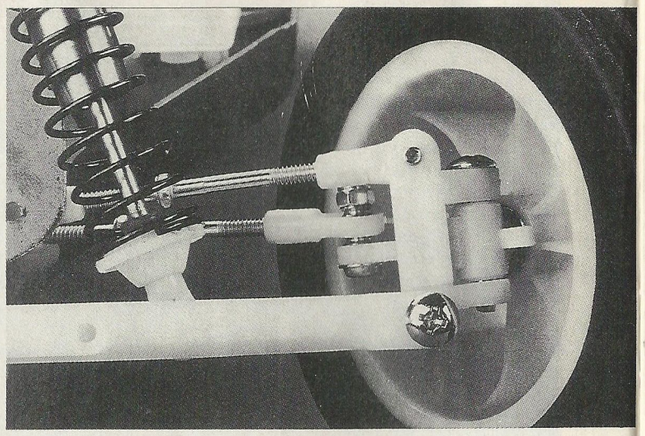


Start your engines!

Following the manual, the tank was filled, and high and low speed settings made to the carburetor. The priming pump was operated, feeding fuel to the engine, and the glow starter then attached. With trepidation I pulled the starter cord a few times and to my complete amazement, the engine fired, but quickly stalled. A quick consultation with the manual gave me the correct adjustment. The glow starter was re-attached, and the starter cord pulled the engine came to life and idled perfectly.

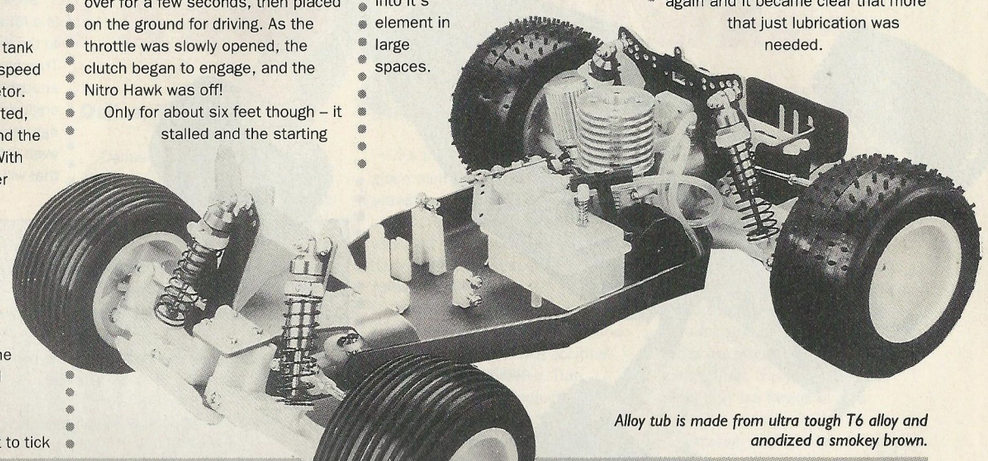
After the glow starter was removed, the engine was left to tick over for a few seconds, then placed on the ground for driving. As the throttle was slowly opened, the clutch began to engage, and the Nitro Hawk was off!

Only for about six feet though – it stalled and the starting procedure was repeated. This time the truck moved away leaving a healthy looking trail of bluey white smoke. Noise levels were acceptable (to me at least) but you will quickly make enemies of your neighbours if you run the truck in your back yard. Try to find somewhere such as an empty parking lot to practice – you will need quite a lot room to make full use of the Nitro Hawk's power and it really comes into it's element in large spaces.

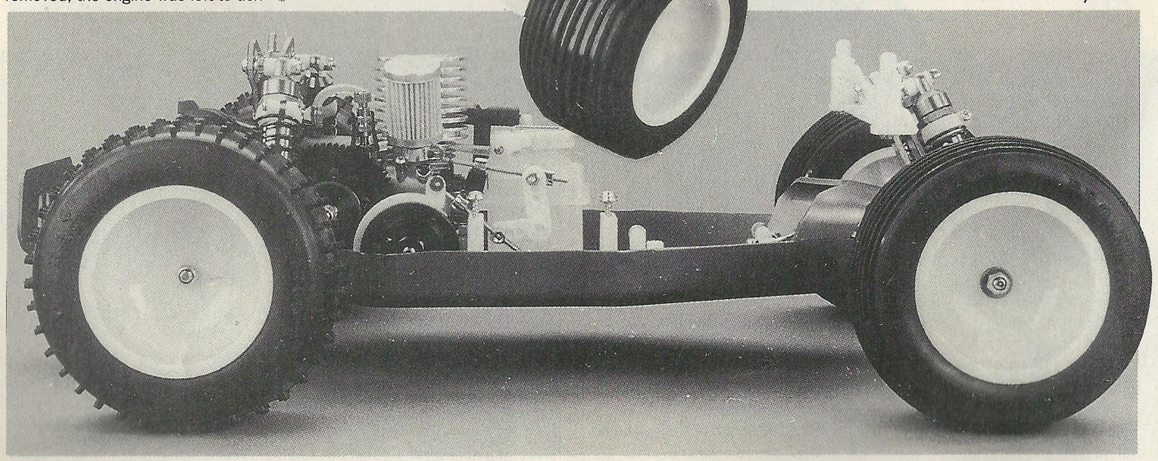


It is at this point the only real criticism must be made. As mentioned, the engine comes with a built-in pull starter, which worked perfectly for the first three or four runs. However, on one occasion it began to stick (if it does this do not pull harder as you will bend the con-rod).

After some squirts of WD40, the cord freed itself, but a few pulls later and the mechanism jammed again and it became clear that more that just lubrication was needed.



Alloy tub is made from ultra tough T6 alloy and anodized a smokey brown.



Spring has sprung!

Referring to the instructions, the starter was removed from the engine and the E clip slid off the starter shaft. After friends and on lookers stopped laughing hysterically (and I stopped swearing) I began to re-wind the miles of spring steel back into the casing, noting that the instructions warn you not to remove the E clip, unless you intend to change the spring... The moral here is; ALWAYS READ THE INSTRUCTIONS!

The starter seemed to work now, but after a few pulls the handle disintegrated, forcing me to use a suspension arm from an old Tamiya kit as a replacement.

I don't know if the starter breaking was the result of a design fault, weak materials or simply me being heavy handed, but it was unfortunate and inconvenient – perhaps a chunkier design using more metal might be the answer...

A fuel filter was added soon after the first few runs, but otherwise the truck needs no additions to run well straight from the box.

Performance was initially very sluggish, as the manual indicated. This was due to running the engine rich during breaking process, and after around the seventh or eighth tank of fuel, acceleration and overall power improved quite dramatically.

Great care must be taken to allow for cooling at all stages of running an IC powered model – overheating can happen rapidly and will destroy a motor faster than anything else. For this reason, the truck was driven without the body for the whole running in period, making sure plenty of air could disperse the often intense heat generated by the engine.

As a beginner to IC, I was surprised by the amount of power produced by the .12 engine. I am more accustomed to the immediate acceleration of electric cars, which reach their maximum speed almost instantly.

Traction control

The Nitro Hawk takes a couple of seconds to reach full power, but once the centrifugal clutch starts to engage it really takes off. The slipper clutch can be adjusted to reduce wheel spin and give a form of traction control, but for the purposes of this review, it was left on its factory setting.

Handling is immediate, almost twitchy – the steering is highly geared with only two thirds of the stick throw being needed to induce full lock. All testing took place on a slightly damp, gritty tarmac surface and in these conditions the truck understeered into every corner, biting in when easing off the power. By firming up the front suspension some oversteer could be induced, ultimately resulting in a lot of dodgy spin-outs, so I went back to the original settings.

Only one set of tyres was used during testing, so it is difficult to tell what effect a change of rubber would have on handling, although I suspect a pair of grippier fronts would improve control. Due to the highly geared steering, slight movements of the trim tab resulted in large changes in directional control, and so it took quite a time to arrive at the correct setting.

Conclusions...

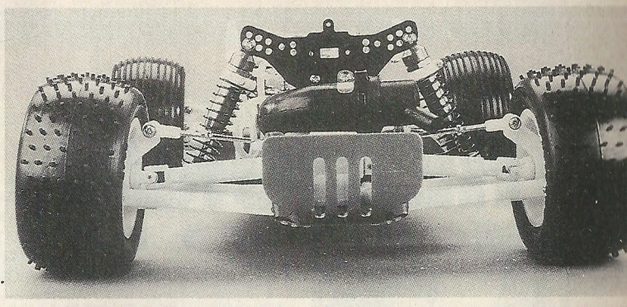
The truck is still going through testing, and the more it is run, the faster it gets!

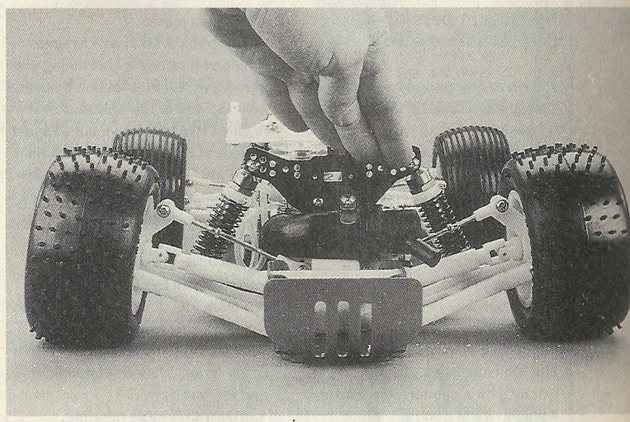
Traxxas have come up with an interesting concept here – a model that can be purchased fully built, even with a radio system installed. The level of equipment is high, featuring metal dampers, pro-style white nylon suspension, ball raced engine and ball races in key positions within the gearbox. Aimed at the relative newcomer to internal combustion powered RC cars, the box contains nearly all that you need to get started, including a very comprehensive instruction manual written in non-gibberish English with clear photographs that can be followed by anyone.

Sometimes an unfortunate result of models that are aimed at beginners is an initially interesting but ultimately non-competitive car that the owner will become bored with quickly.

Thankfully this is not the case with the Nitro Hawk. Once the basics of running the IC engine are mastered, the model will provide many hours of enjoyment. It's a pity about the weak pull start, hopefully its failure on our sample was a one off.

The Nitro Hawk represents possibly the ideal car for the modeller who wants to cross over from electric, or even a complete beginner to RC. The main advantage of IC over electric is obvious – to continue to run a glow engine all you need to do is top up the fuel tank, with no battery charging needed. The disadvantages are noise and mess, although these factors are really negligible once the truck is blasting around a track or parking lot.





The Traxxas Nitro Hawk comes thoroughly recommended, although with a warning – IC cars can become addictive!

Best feature? The suspension on the Nitro Hawk is extra smooth and with lots of ground clearance.