



Rightly or wrongly, Rolls-Royce is still thought of as "the world's best car". The fact is that their Gargantuan standing is in name alone: for all their reputation, Rolls-Royce sell only one of their cars for every 100 Mercedes-Benzes that burst from the manufacturing womb. In practical terms, Mercedes-Benzes are one of the industry's most important

members whilst Rolls-Royce are little more than a quaint curiosity riding on mankind's continuing weakness in searching for "status". they might do better to set their sights above the standards of Mercedes engineering and aim to **deserve** the title which is still tenuously theirs.

In the sports car world, much the same might be said of TVR and Porsche. Last year,

TVR sold less than 500 cars while Porsche continued their ascendancy with huge production volumes. There is a massive struggle ahead for a company of TVR's size to provide a car which can compete with the world's best. But as they have shown in their lifespan of less than thirty years so far, great technical advances are indeed possible for the Blackpool-



TREND- VETTING RACER

provide the road car development team with valuable research information before certain features are installed on production cars. This year the company has gone one stage further by racing a car which will resemble in quite close detail a brand new sports car that the firm will launch later this year. And it's very exciting new flagship for TVR.

So the racer pictured here will form the basis of TVR's new top-of-the-line sports car, the car with which they hope to beat the world's best on the roads of Las Vegas as well as Cadwell Park. The 420SEAC, as the racer is known, has already begun its competition career this year, building up to the launch of the road car this summer. Work had begun on the car's new TVR-built 4.2-litre engine last year but most of the development was undertaken early this year, and although the company claim that this is not how the car will finally appear, it does give an insight into both the cosmetic and technical specifications of TVR's newest baby.

Very obviously based on the current Tasmin range, the 420SEAC – standing for the material of its construction, Special Equipment Aramid Composite – benefits from a body redesign which includes a shorter and rounder front

based firm who, like Lotus, have risen from component car origins to their currently exalted heights.

Perhaps at the forefront of TVR's high-performance development programme is an increasing works involvement with motor sports. TVR are just beginning to taste success against Porsches, Lotuses and Ferraris in prod Sports competitions with cars which

are quite capable of taking pole position with consistency. They have also taken some lap records this year – knocking two seconds off the prod Sports record at donnington Park, for instance – and are becoming a much feared force on the circuits.

As has been the practice with TVR for some time, their racing cars are given extensive competition work in order to

This year TVR will launch their new 300bhp flagship which has been developed over the past few months on the race tracks. We take a look at the racing 420SEAC which is destined to become TVR's road-going Porsche-eater.

TREND- VETTING RACER



Above: Last minute instructions as the TVR 420 SEAC prepares to blast away from another pole position. Below: In full flight the 420 is both dramatic and masterful and, as rival teams are finding out, pretty hard to catch.

end (always a cause for complaint on existing Tasmins), neater detailing such as a glass cover for the lights and number plate, flared wings and wheel arches for much wider 16" wheels and 225/50 tyres, a deep front spoiler and distinctive rear spoiler which entirely occupies the boot deck. TVR are running two different design rear spoilers on their racer this season, said to help downforce to a great degree, but the production item is likely to be different again. The sills which tie in the wider

front and rear arches are, even on the racer, simply cosmetic. Perhaps the biggest change in the bodywork department is TVR's adoption of Kevlar as the basic material, much lighter and stronger than either steel or fibreglass. The completed car should in fact be 200 lbs lighter than the 290SE when all the chassis modifications are taken into account.

TVR have switched to a new stainless steel chassis for the 420 racer but the main importance of the chassis development work as far as

the road car goes is that new double wishbone rear suspension in place of the existing trailing arms will cope with the heavily increased power and torque outputs of the bigger engine, putting that formidable power down on the road much better and eliminating torque steer. The suitability of an adjustable anti-roll bar is now being tested on the circuits.

Of exactly the same bore as the 3.9-litre engine used in TVR's current top model, the 1986 4.2-litre unit has a longer stroke based around



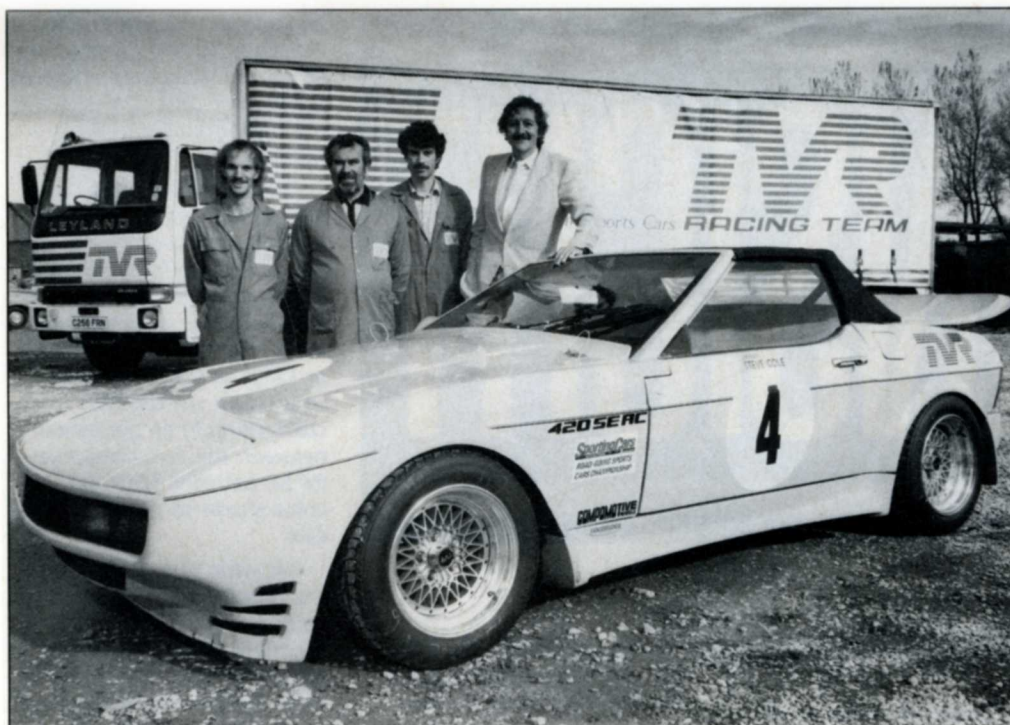
TVR's own long-throw crankshaft, endowing the engine with much enhanced power: 365 bhp is its dry-sump racing form but, for reasons of tractability, around 300 bhp in road-going spec. this compares with 279 bhp for the 390SE. Since the specification of the 420's mechanical changes from race to race, it is not yet possible to quote any performance figures, but a top speed of over 140 mph and a 0-60 time of around five seconds can be expected from what will be one of the fastest cars available anywhere in the world.

The new car - which has still to be named in its road form - will take its place alongside the existing range very much as the top-flight model. It will be available only in convertible form (only one in twenty TVR's sold today are the hard top model) and should sell in the UK for between £28,000 and £30,000 compared to £20,937 for the 390SE convertible. As such it will occupy all the all-important flagship position. In America, where over 60% of all production is directed at present, the 420 in its detoxed Federal form (producing around 80 bhp less at 220 bhp) is likely to weigh in at approaching \$40,000.

A spokesman for TVR commented: "We're very pleased with the way the racer has developed. there have been no major problems with the development so far and our appearances on the circuit this year have generated a lot of feedback. We're very confident about the ability of the SEAC and we think the buying public will be receptive towards it."

Once again, however, we feel TVR are going to let down by the final appearance of the road car which cannot compare with the cleanliness of line enjoyed by Porsche, Lotus et al. It may have been wiser to take the opportunity of restyling the whole body around the existing centre section but, with a development budget limited to £100,000 and a pressing race calendar to meet, the delay would have been intolerable on this particular project.

The 420's racing programme is now well underway. At its first outing at Oulton Park in May, the TVR took pole position in the 100-



Above: Proud team pose with the car that should see TVR safely into the 'nineties. Note slightly better treatment of the front end - gone is the 'broken nose' feeling. Left: Track success breeds road success, or so the theory goes, in which case the new road car will be a stormer.

mile endurance race against opposition which included a Ferrari Boxer and a Porsche 935. Later that month at a wet Cadwell Park, pole position was once again occupied by TVR and the car's first victory was in sight until the driver spun the car on the last lap and failed to restart in time to regain the lead. In breaking the Donnington Park lap record, TVR secure further successes, notably a class win at the BARC Sports/Saloon Challenge at Oulton Park against some formidable Modsports opponents. At the wheel of the 1986 TVR is Steve Cole, an ex-Morgan racer who has won the Prodsports and Donnington Series championships already

and who will be very much looking to regain his title this year.

Watch out for the TVR 420SEAC in the Prodsport race series which continues into October. But also keep an eye out for TVR's new supercar this summer: it'll be one of the fastest convertibles ever made and will be priced right into Ferrari Mondial and 911 Cabriolet territory. Whether or not Britain's home-bred fire-breather can begin the long struggle to make inroads in the international performance sports car market, currently more competitive than it has ever been, will be decided this summer. It'll be quite some contest.