

Millionaire with yen for British cars



Mr Kohji Nakauchi, a Japanese millionaire with a love of British sports cars, and one of his new Middlebridge Scimitars.

A millionaire Japanese businessman is aiming to put the British sports car back on top of the motoring world.

Mr Kohji Nakauchi, a self-confessed anglophile with a love of everything British from Earl Grey tea to James Bond, has invested £2 million in the manufacture of British sports cars since establishing Middlebridge International, a British-based company, in 1986.

Mr Nakauchi, aged 40, said: "I knew I wanted a British sports car ever since I saw an Aston Martin DB6 in the film *Dr No*. I love them so much that I now own six (among a fleet of 40 classic cars). The British are best at making cars that are sporty, individual and full of character."

He made one of his most significant moves in 1987 when he bought the ailing Scimitar marque for £400,000 and has since revamped the model and promoted it worldwide.

Mr Dennis Nursey, a former mechanic

with Aston Martin who is now chief executive of Middlebridge Scimitar, said: "We both struck on the idea of renovating classic British sports cars for Japanese customers at the same time.

"With my knowledge of working as a mechanic with Aston Martin and Kohji's financial backing, Middlebridge International was born.

"Initially we are restoring sports cars for Japanese customers because they were not getting enough satisfaction from manufacturers once the cars were in Japan.

"But this scheme spawned the dream of building our own car aimed very much at wealthy customers in the Far East and at the moment a team of designers are working on the plans for a hand-built aluminium model."

Mr Nakauchi made his fortune as the publisher of Japan's leading horse racing newspaper, *First Horse*, and owns 29

thoroughbred race horses. He is also a director of a new town development outside Tokyo.

The Middlebridge International group now includes the Middlebridge Scimitar, which is built at Beeston in Nottingham, Middlebridge Engineering at Milton Keynes and Middlebridge Racing, which has two cars competing in the European F3000 championship.

Mr Nakauchi, who has spent £1.5 million trying to win the Formula 3000 title, said: "I want to concentrate on the European circuit and win it with an all-British team. We have the drivers, the car and a superb team of mechanics to put us on the right track."

Mark Blundell and Phil Andrews, two of Britain's top F3000 drivers, were signed up by Middlebridge Racing to drive its Ford DFV-powered Reynard 89D cars in an attempt to realise Mr Nakauchi's ambition.